

“Problems of Land Kill Men”. Access to Land, Conflicts and Chefferies in Southwestern Togo.

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In the past century the impact of the cocoa economy and of palm oil long distance trade led to radical changes in the way of managing the land in southwestern Togo, and led to the establishment of new modes of production which involved the deployment and massive settlement in the region of migrants from the North. New forms of agreement between Ewe and migrants around the management of the resources began to develop. Cocoa contributed to privatization of the land and to the emerging of a new class of small landowners who started to invest in the education of their children in the missionary schools and found themselves more and more connected to the uncertainties and oscillations of the world economy. Even if promoted by the colonial administration, private land ownership did not substitute previous forms of land management, but rather overlapped them in original ways.

Based on fieldwork carried out from 2006, this paper examines how access to land is still to great extent linked to the social relationships that people are able to activate. Examining the dynamics of conflict management in some villages of the region and the historicity of the different agreements that allow the access to land, it is possible to understand how new strategies of land appropriation come out. Moreover we witness to the revitalization and the production of histories about the first settlement in the area to legitimize the right of the member of the first installed lineages in opposition to the more recently settled groups. These histories become also one of the major discourses to contrast the attempts of speculation of multinationals interested in the bauxite in the area. At the same time, the management of the ownership conflicts allows the *chefferies* to play a vitally important role and to revitalize their position, which was in a crisis of legitimacy in front of the support given (under threat, in many cases) to Eyadema's dictatorship. Nowadays this role becomes more and more important considering the increase of social tensions about the ownership of the land in the region.