

Residential dynamics and the emergence of kinship structures –

The morphology of a matrilineal clan in a patrilocal framework (South-east Togo)

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Patrilateral cross-cousin (FZD) marriage is one of the rare instances of matrimonial preferences that has been reported for Ewe-speaking groups of southern Togo and Ghana (Verdon 1983, de Surgy 1988). This marriage type still remains an explicit, albeit mostly ideal, preference for the contemporary inhabitants of a large village community in south-east Togo (based on 2005 fieldwork data) whose actual marriage practices, however, are far from constituting anything like an “elementary” structure. Nevertheless, analysis of their kinship network still shows a significant inflexion towards marriages of the “FZD” type. More important, analysis of their *residential* network confirms the explanation given by informants for this marriage type: that is, the preference of “out-marrying” women to “return” to their mother’s residence, or, more generally, to seek the proximity of uterine relatives when marrying (post-marital residence being patri-virilocal).

This local behavioural pattern leads to the emergence of “attraction places” for matrilineal kin and apparent “exchange” relationships between the agnatic groups occupying these places. This process is demonstrated in detail at the example of the spatio-temporal dynamics of a matrilineal kin group over seven generations, and related to the social and cultural context (bilinear descent groups and parallel sex affiliation to religious worship communities). As a result, matrimonial practices appear as one (but not the only) variable in solving a conflict between the desire to diversify matrimonial alliances and the desire not to weaken uterine ties – other variables being postmarital residence, village architecture and visiting patterns. This might be the base for a generalized model which, by changing parameters (coherence of non-resident kin groups, alliance diversification and economic or environmental constraints on spatial organization and mobility), could explain the emergence of different “elementary” and “semi-complex” structures of kinship and residence (cf. Hamberger 2005).

Literature:

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