Migration and Tribal Identity among the Frafras of Ghana

KEITH HART

University of East Anglia, Norwich, England

The paper has two main parts: the first discusses the impact of increased labour migration, away from the traditional homeland, on one of Ghana's many tribes, the Frafras of the extreme North East; the second analyses the ways in which tribal identity has continued to have meaning for the members of the migrant community of Frafras in Accra. To justify one's field of study in definitional terms is often to make a virtue of necessity; I have chosen to treat the Frafras as a tribal enclave within the modern nation state and the term "tribe" is taken to apply to "...any group of people which is distinguished, by its members and by others, on the basis of cultural-regional criteria," (Gulliver 1969 : 24). Nevertheless it is necessary to explain who the Frafras are and how they came to occupy their present position as a subdivision of modern Ghanaian society, before discussing the substantive issues to be raised.

Migration and Frafra society

The Frafras form part of that amorphous cluster of politically acephalous peoples who inhabit the Voltaic area of what is now mostly Northern Ghana. The difficulty of demarcating distinct ethnic groups in this culturally homogeneous area has previously been pointed out by Fortes and Goody; and it is only since the imposition of colonial rule during the first years of this century that we find the genesis of the "tribal" names which are so common today—'Frafra', 'Dagarti', 'Kusasi' and so on. The Frafras are in some respects even less clearly identifiable than most of these so-called "tribes" and we could certainly do worse than follow Hill's conclusion that they are the "...principal inhabitants of the Frafra local council area", known formerly as the Zuwarungu district of the Northern Territories, (Hill 1966 : 88). The inhabitants of this area fall into three main groups—the Talledsi, the Nabdam and a third, known variously as 'Gurensi' (the name by which I shall refer to them), 'Nankansi', 'Frafra proper' and (occasionally by themselves) as 'Nyetiya'. The Tallensi and Nabdams are, allowing for blurred boundaries of the kind mentioned by Fortes, quite well-defined, but the Gurensi are more amorphous.

2 The last refers to the dialect form for "I said".
Though they have some cultural and linguistic means of differentiating themselves from their neighbours, historically they lacked any group identity beyond the clan settlement of an individual’s birth.

The term ‘Frafra’, along with several others, first crystallised out of early army and labour recruiting documents,¹ and it soon came to be adopted as a label by migrants of all three groups when away from home. Rouch has observed the tendency for migrants in what was then the Gold Coast to become joined together in more inclusive groups, a process which he calls “supertribalisation” (Rouch 1956 : 10); and, as we shall see, Frafra migrants came to share a common identity and organisation of sorts in relation to other tribal groupings represented in the towns of the South. But, if migration gave the Frafra tribe its impetus, the organisation of the home district into a single, discrete unit gave focus to the term in administrative practice. All group terminologies are situational, but these factors have combined to give the Frafra a unitary identity, one which is relevant both in the homeland and in the wider national context; and, despite their internal divisions, this unity is reinforced by cultural homogeneity, in patterns of settlement, lineage organisation etc., of a substantial nature. For the Frafra, therefore, the modern tribe has acquired a meaning which it historically lacked.

Having established who the Frafra are, any exposition of the modern situation must refer back to the picture of one part of Frafra society drawn by Fortes for the Tallensi of the 1930’s. He was able to say of that time that “...the Tallensi, in short, still preserve the culture bequeathed to them by their forefathers and the social structure of their own, homogeneous society. Their economy is a primitive, static, subsistence economy”, (Fortes 1945 : 12). The impact of a colonial administration of only thirty years standing and of recent developments in the region as a whole had not been great and Fortes found the continuity and stability of Tale life striking. He could point out that literacy and Christianity had barely touched the Tallensi and that the political innovations of British rule had not seriously undermined the vigour of native institutions. But in considering potential social change he singled out increased labour migration to the South as the most significant development in Tale society and much of his paper entitled “Culture contact as a dynamic process” (Fortes 1936) is given to discussion of this subject.

At that time the world of the migrant and that of his homeland were two distinctly separable spheres; for many Tallensi ‘Kumasi’ represented a mysterious, faraway idea, “...a symbol for everything south of the Black Volta [ferry at Yeji]”, (Fortes 1945 : 11). It is therefore legitimate to say that migration then involved “...a sharp leap from small village to distant urban centre”, (Epstein 1967 : 279). Fortes distinguished three types of migrant: long-term labour migrants to Ashanti and the Colony, dry season visitors and temporary employees in the South, and settlers in farming territories adjacent to Taleland, (Fortes 1936 : 40–42). The incidence of migration among the

¹ See Cardinall 1921: viii.
adult male population was estimated variously as 7% "away from home and 
not likely to return in the immediate future" over the period 1936–39 (Fortes 
1945 : 72n) and as 15% "away gaining their livelihood" in the dry season of 
1935 (Fortes 1936 : 39). But migration of all kinds involved minimal loss to 
Tale society since all the migrants returned to be reabsorbed into their home 
community with little cumulative effect on traditional institutions. The migrant 
"...learns the techniques, the manners and the skills of town life... but all this 
drops off like an old coat when he returns", (Fortes 1936: 51). Thus Tale society 
in the 1930's, though no longer as isolated as it had been, was still a homoge-
neous and fairly stable 'traditional society', far removed from the rapid develop-
ments affecting Ashanti and the Colony and little changed either by the 
temporary participation of some of its members in these developments or by 
the influence of 'contact agents' within the home area. The Gurensi were only 
slightly less backward—Bolgatanga was merely a trading hamlet at an under-
used road junction and Zuarungu a small administrative outpost; and most 
travellers to the south still walked. Fortes' analysis, therefore, may be taken as 
largely true of the Frafia area as a whole before the second world war—the 
division between their society and that of the south could not have been more 
clearcut.

Developments in the last thirty years, however, have been rapid and the 
picture in the late 1960's was much changed. Today, in contrast with the pre-
war situation, experience of urban conditions and migration are no longer 
synonymous for Frafias—the nature of their homeland has been transformed 
by the emergence of a booming entrepot and administrative centre in Bolgatanga. 
A town of some 10,000 people,¹ a marketing centre at one of West Africa's 
main crossroads, the capital since 1961 of Ghana's Upper Region, a centre for 
religious and educational institutions, a factory and a thriving public works 
industry—all this has sprung up within an hour's walking distance of Fortes' 
Tongo and less than twenty miles from the remotest Frafia village. So that it is 
no longer necessary to travel hundreds of miles to the nearest major town; the 
modern world is now on every Frafia's doorstep. Moreover, lorries and traders 
link Bolgatanga with all parts of the district; educational, social welfare and 
missionary services have permeated to most corners; scores of minor irrigation 
schemes, village co-operatives, new cash crops and other small-scale agricultur-
al innovations have been introduced to rural communities; a major dam scheme, 
factories for processing meat and tomatoes and increased employment in 
the public sector have all changed the pattern of local opportunities. Moderni-
isation is thus an all-pervasive factor in the Frafia homeland today; it is not 
possible now to treat such influences as essentially extrinsic phenomena, for 
they are part and parcel of internal social organisation.

The overall rate of migration, too, has undergone radical changes. Over-
population has long been a problem in N.E. Ghana and one which has in-
creasingly affected the Frafia district with the passage of time. The geographer

¹ My rough estimate; the 1960 Census figure, which excludes some suburbs, was only 5,515,
Hilton estimated actual population densities in the Frafra area in excess of 450 persons per square mile and remarked that, using the 1948 Census figures, "...163,000 people lived and were largely supported on 439 sq. miles of deteriorating land at an average density of 372 per sq. mile", (Hilton 1960: 430). His conclusion, based on an optimum farm size of 42 acres (i.e. 120 persons per sq. mile) was that "...as many as 80,000 people... need to be removed from the Frafra area", (ibid.: 438). But despite several attempts to encourage massive permanent resettlement, the pressing ecological problem of the Frafra homeland has not been seriously touched by any government scheme of colonial or post-independence times. Instead, the short-term solution of most Frafra families has been periodic labour migration by many of their adult male members.

Census figures are, in my opinion, unreliable, particularly in view of the ambiguities of definition which surround the Frafra tribe and its subgroups; but they present an overwhelmingly clear picture of the increased rate of migration among Frafras in recent years. In 1948 less than 5% of the total Frafra tribe (8,201 out of 175,000) was recorded away from home. Yet in Davison's survey of north-bound travellers at Yeji in the month of March 1954, Frafras far outnumbered any other group with 2,501 or 34% of all those originating from the Northern Territories (Davison 1954). And in 1960 the population of the Frafra local council area showed a change since 1948 of minus 8.2%, a figure unlike any other in the Ghana Census: out of 187,000 Frafras (including Tallensi and Nabdam), 42,000 were recorded “abroad”. Of these 23%, 11,000 were living in the Northern Region and 31,000 beyond in Southern Ghana; all but a fifth of the latter category were enumerated in the major towns and cities of the South, with large concentrations of Frafras in Kumasi, Accra, Takoradi and the mining areas. The age structure and sex ratios of the home area pointed out the disproportionate incidence of migration among Frafra males in the age range 20–45 years.

In many villages the number of men away from home exceeds those who remain, and a survey conducted in Tongo in 1967 presents a case which is by no means extreme and which may be compared interestingly with Fortes' 1934 data, (Fortes 1949: 64n). His sample showed a mean complement of 2.6 men over 18 years per family homestead, with the migration rate estimated at one man for every three homesteads. The number of compounds in 1967 was very slightly less, while the average complement of adult males had more than doubled to around six per homestead. But of these only half (i.e. about the same number as in 1934) were farming on and supported by Tongo land, the remainder having been drawn off by migration to the south. The proportion

---

1 The Damongo (Gonja) resettlement scheme of the 1950's succeeded in persuading some 400 families to emigrate, hardly enough to make any impact on the population problem in the Frafra area.

2 An attempt on the part of the Census enumerators to distinguish between 'Frafra', 'Tallensi' and 'Nabdam' was compounded by the introduction of a fourth category 'Nankansi Gurense', most of whom were enumerated in the Kassena-Nankanni area. Tallensi and Nabdams were usually enumerated in the south as Frafras.
of migrants in many areas was, by my estimate, even higher. If we add the information that all but a few Frafras in the 1960's had some experience of the south, even if only as visitors, it may be seen that in the last thirty years or so migration, of one kind or another, has come to be a universal phenomenon in Frafra life, leaving no family unaffected.

Not only has the diffusion of modern influences diminished the gap between North and South, but distances, too have been shortened by faster travel. The post-war boom in motorised communications has made it possible to travel by lorry in one day the 500 miles from Bolgatanga to Accra at a cost to the passenger of less than £2, often, if he is penniless, on a credit note. This is in marked contrast with earlier days, when the trip to Kumasi took 2–3 weeks on foot and lorries were few as the roads were often impassable. Migration is also now easier in another sense: gone are the days when to leave home was an act of rebellion against the head of the household and when most migrants left stealthily by night (Fortes 1936: 44). The elders now take a far more permissive attitude to migration, partly because it has become built into the economy of each household, partly because they no longer fear a loss of authority over those who go. For even today the vast majority of migrants eventually return and while they are away, they take advantage of the modern communications system to maintain relationships of mutual dependance with those at home. Though half the adult male population may be away at any given point in time, the circulation of personnel is constant¹—farmers migrate and migrants return to farm; elementary families are split between home compound and southern employment situation; a continuous exchange of visits, goods, services and news links migrants with their homeland. In this way, although a lineage's numbers may have expanded beyond the capacity of its land, the integration and eventual reassimilation of absentee members is virtually complete.

A countervailing tendency to the circulation of labour, however, has been increasing urban unemployment in recent years.² This has meant that today, of those who join the dry season exodus of men, women and children from the Frafra area to visit their relatives in the south, only a few return for the farming season with wages in their pockets and if, after weeks of trying, they manage to get a job, they are unlikely to relinquish their hard-won position so soon. The dry season labourer with a short-term objective in the south has largely been replaced by a member of the urban proletariat working towards a possible gratuity and pension from extended service, before taking up his expected place in the home community.

Permanent settlement in the south, on the other hand, is still rare and there are very few adult second-generation migrants among Frafras. But above all, as the next section will show, most Frafra migrants are articulated into the home system, not only by their contribution to the domestic economy but by commitment to and participation in the affairs of their natal community.

---

¹ For a recent discussion see Mitchell 1970.
² See Gugler 1970: 147 and elsewhere.
This expansion of the horizons of the community, in terms of the physical distribution of those who claim membership of a socially defined aggregate such as a lineage, makes it no longer easy to dichotomise, at least spatially, the traditional and the modern or even the rural and the urban in Frafra life today. The world of the migrant and that of his homeland are not separable entities—they are both part of a wider society, a society which has reached a high level of instant internal communications and is defined by nationwide institutions. The difficulty of separating the old and the new in the analysis of present-day Frafra society, either in the national context of modern Ghana or even in the local context of the home tribal area, is illustrated by the simultaneous participation by most Frafras in both cultures, the exchange of personnel on a reciprocal basis between home compound and southern city, the internal urbanisation of the Frafra district itself, the pervasiveness of the market economy and especially by the ease of communication between all parts of the country. When the discontinuities between town and village life become diminished, what meaning can we legitimately give to types such as “townsman” and “countryman”? In our concern with “institutions” and “structure” we should beware of putting too rigorous geographical limits to the units of our study or of identifying “where one lives” with “how one lives”. At this stage of the development of African sociology it is perhaps inappropriate to attack the ghost of Wirth, but in the analysis of any social situation we are always faced with problems of emphasis and approach in the way we define the population which is the subject of our research. It is my contention that in the Frafra case, the degree of intra-tribal interaction throughout Ghana and the importance of tribal identity in many spheres of life justify the retention of the ‘tribe’ as a valid framework for analysis of behaviour in any geographical location, be it rural or urban. The precise significance of “tribal identity” will emerge from the following discussion of migrant life in Accra.

The Accra community of Frafras and the persistence of tribal identity

Until the period following independence in 1957, Accra was not a major source of employment, but in the last decade the capital, along with the industrial complex at Tema, has become increasingly the target for a horde of migrants anxious to find jobs. The government’s response has been to meet this mushrooming demand, and Accra, with a population of some 400,000 and expanding fast, has come today to employ a sizeable part of Ghana’s non-agricultural labour force. Frafras, responsive to these changes, have recently settled in large numbers in Accra and the tribal community there is probably the biggest single aggregate of Frafras in the country outside their homeland.

---
1 Mitchell’s survey of Rhodesian Africans which involved asking them to place themselves on a scale ranging from “definitely a townsman” to “definitely a countryman” would be less appropriate in Ghana where rural-urban differences are not so clearcut. (Mitchell 1970: 176)
2 Wirth’s article “Urbanism as a way of life” was published in 1938.
In 1948 only 390 Frafras found their way into the Census records for Accra and the 1960 figure of 2,700 in the Accra Capital District is, I feel, an underestimate. My own surveys in 1966–67 suggested that the number of Frafras resident in Accra-Tema was at least 5,000 adult males and about the same number of women and children combined, i.e. 10,000. They are widely distributed throughout those areas of the city where rents are less than £5 per month or in servants’ quarters and army/police barracks. Although there is some clustering in residential terms, Frafras are often relatively isolated, living in houses which are heterogeneous in their ethnic composition. In the migrant-dominated slum belt of Accra the ratio of men to women among Frafras was 2.5:1 and there was one child for every two men; the average density of room sets rented by Frafras was three persons, approximately half of them men. These adult males were to be located overwhelmingly in the age range 20–45 years, but, despite the recent growth of Accra as an employment centre, many of them had spent periods of 5, 10 and 20 years in the south as a whole. Two-thirds of all Frafras in Accra were Gurensi, and Tallensi and Nabdamans accounted for approximately 20% and 12% respectively.

If not clustered residentially, Frafras from one section of a home settlement (yizug) were frequently clustered occupationally. Thus from the Aganabase section of Zuurungu, 20 out of 22 known Accra residents were cooks and stewards, while for sections such as Ba’ari Lakunyir and Sumbrungo Kulbia more than half were employed as general labourers. Frafras are very conservative in seeking employment and few will venture to apply for a job where they have no particularistic relationship such as a previously employed kinsman. Perhaps their view of the recruitment process is a realistic one. From the evidence at my disposal I would estimate the occupational distribution of Frafras in Accra as follows: 30% are domestic servants of some sort; 30% are employed as general labourers (i.e. cutters of grass, street cleaners and sanitary labourers rather than construction workers) and 10% in the lowest ranks of government and commercial service as watchmen, cleaners and garden boys; 10% are in the army, police force and Workers Brigade; a residual category of only 10% includes skilled workers and menial white-collar employees (drivers and messengers etc.) plus self-employed traders and artisans; at least 10% are unemployed, i.e. out-of-work servants and laid-off labourers as well as those who have not yet found a job. Only 1 in 100 Frafras, including children aged six and above, had any education whatsoever in 1960; the proportion of Frafras in elite positions or with a modicum of wealth is infinitesimal, but the few who lived in Accra were conspicuous and often acknowledged their place in the migrant community. Middle school education in any case offers little competitive advantage to those Frafra youths who have joined the employment race in Accra. In general, therefore, Frafra migrants may be characterised as predominantly male, poor and uneducated, firmly established in the lower ranks of the urban proletariat.

There are several senses in which one can look on the Frafras in Accra as a ‘community’, none of which has a spatial referent. Primarily, as an ethnic
group distinct from others in the city, all Frafas recognise their common identity and few make the effort to escape from the implications of this label. Secondly they have an organisational structure of which the apex (in the shape of an Accra Frafra chief) is recognised by the civic authorities and the authority of its group representatives acknowledged by all but a few of the tribe's members resident in Accra. The status of the chief has no explicit legal powers but his authority carries some weight in dispute settlement and in organising funerals. Under him are a number of positions commanding varying degrees of respect, elders representing the major subdivisions of the homeland, as well as a number of district leaders and heads of those who belong to particular villages in the Frafra area. It has been observed elsewhere that an agnatic lineage system may reproduce itself in migrant organization,¹ and certainly the segmentary structure of home society finds its counterpart in the towns of Southern Ghana. Groups of decreasing inclusiveness from the clan to minor lineage segments each have their heads and an internal structure relying on traditional notions of seniority within the kin group. The upper limit for recognition of 'brotherhood' in the town is a village, so that when a migrant says "I have no brother there" he usually means no co-villager. Away from the home village, the agnostic system becomes simplified into a single generation of brothers ranked according to age and the asymmetry of generational differences between extended kin drops out in the urban context. The behavioural model for co-villagers is that of a sibling group; it is headed by its oldest member, though seniority alone does not imply leadership, since village headmen in a town may be elected according to other criteria such as length of stay. The group has a corporate identity: a member's wife is spoken of as the wife of all, a member's misfortune is the responsibility of all. The same applies to smaller groups—sections, major lineages and "families"—with increasing weight given to the obligations of "brotherhood" as the size of the group diminishes. Though siblinghood has no fixed co-efficient in the migrant situation, it is far from undefined. While kin terms may be both more inclusive in terms of personnel and less specific in their attendant rights and obligations than at home, Frafas in Accra place great emphasis in the organisation of their social life on siblinghood of varying degree and on traditional segmentation processes. The system is maintained by a general respect for seniority, a traditional virtue without which most Frafas feel their society would disintegrate into anarchy.

Cross-cutting the segmentary system of village and section brothers is one of quasi client-groups formed around prominent migrant personalities like Mr. A. (see Prof. Fortes' paper in this issue). Frafra houseowners, foremen and other influential and wealthy men attract followers from among their fellow tribesmen and co-villagers; this patronage, however, wins them little prestige in the wider community—they are rarely 'city bosses' of the U.S.A. immigrant type—but rather arises from a desire to gain added status within the tribal reference group. Membership of such a clientele or of a close-knit group of

---

¹ See Lewis 1962; also Rouch 1956: 17.
siblings offers protection of the sort which justified lineage loyalty in the home context; the notion has its roots in traditional self-help, when people feared to attack a member of a strong family because of its power to take vengeance. In this way, by providing a means of ensuring against isolation, the system of quasi-patronage and that of extended siblinghood reinforce each other in strengthening the adherence of migrants to intraethnic bonds and to traditional normative expectations.

Given the strength of such groupings, it is perhaps not surprising that associational activity, of the kind stressed by Little and others for West Africa,¹ is peripheral in Frafra migrant social life. Nevertheless, the phenomenon known as a “meeting” is well-known to Frafra social life: it consists of a group of migrants, usually from one village or a similar area, getting together to form a contributions club. The structure of these associations is a familiar one: the meeting elects a number of officials including some who will control finance, its members make regular contributions of small amounts and accumulated funds are available to “help” any member in dire need. The pattern is inevitably completed by the dissolution of the club, after a period of between several weeks and a couple of years, amid charges of peculation and other misuse of joint funds. Frafra recognise that “meetings always break up”, but this does not prevent them from trying once again; the reason for this persistence is obvious—migrants feel the need for security away from the safety of home kin groups and they make repeated attempts to find substitutes.

The joint fund of a “meeting of brothers” expresses the corporate identity of the group; in short, it is insurance against “trouble”, that undefined menace which underlies all migrant insecurity; it can be drawn on by individuals to provide bail, the support of prisoners’ dependants, fares back home for widows and orphans, even bridewealth payments if a member’s father-in-law threatens the good name of the groups with his demands. Imbursements from the fund are, ideally, to be paid back in—individuals have no absolute rights over the contributions they have made. It is emphatically not a savings scheme of the kind well-known in West Africa as “esusu”;² funds cannot be withdrawn by anyone leaving the town—as one long-term resident put it, “we want the money to stay there; if you go home today, your brother will come tomorrow”. The parallel with ongoing lineage property at home is striking. But this is the ideal and rarely the practice; individuals do insist on withdrawing their contributions, and, if mistrust of the treasurer becomes widespread, a ‘run on the bank’ is inevitable. Club funds therefore only occasionally reach any substantial total and their existence is normally ephemeral. If one were to generalise from the relative success of a few meetings in Accra, it would be to suggest that it may be dependent on strong leadership and lack of amorphousness in membership, so that the contributors are not so many that they cannot take part in controlling the outflow of funds.

¹ See particularly Little 1965 and Banton 1957.
² One of the first references to this institution is Bascom 1952.
There are other voluntary associations to which Frafra migrants belong, some of them based on occupation rather than village, but more significant in migrant life is a phenomenon which could be looked upon as associational and which derives its nature from more traditional institutions, that is the celebration of funerals among migrants. On most weekends, especially soon after payday, there are one or two Frafra funeral celebrations somewhere in Accra for migrants to go to; in fact funerals are the most common reason for large tribal gatherings and an integral part of social life in the Frafra community. They usually commemorate a recent death in a migrant’s close family rather than an actual fatality in Accra. The pattern followed has little precedent in traditional ritual life, being shaped largely by the urban conditions in which they live, and in many respects customary migrant practice is borrowed from the more overt features of Akan funerals. Because of the five-day working week, these affairs always take place at weekends, with an informal gathering at the ‘funeral house’ on Saturday night to dance the wake into the small hours and drink gin in an atmosphere of traditional music and tribal bonhomme. This is followed on Sunday afternoon by a more elaborate performance involving the collection of money, some speech making and the pouring of a libation before the drinking and dancing is allowed to get underway again.

The fund-raising aspect of funerals is only secondary since, although the money collected (£20–40) is intended to offset fares home, it is usually frittered away. The ritual element too is minimised, since migrants are careful to eschew all traditional religious practices, especially sacrifice, which is the province of those at home. The migrant funeral is therefore primarily a social institution. It maintains links with home at times of death; it brings migrants together in an enactment of their most important rite de passage, however urbanised the version; it reinforces the order of seniority among migrants by emphasising rank (especially in the distribution of drinks); it is a source of funds for travelling home on bereavement; but perhaps, above all, it is an ephemeral association of migrants by means of which, in exchange for a contribution of a few shillings, they may drink and dance while affirming their ethnic identity in an alien environment. Moreover receipt of contributions sets up obligations to repay at other funerals, so that the whole community is linked by complex networks of reciprocity. The pressure to join in (“it may happen to you”) discourages isolationism and in this sense the system of migrant funeral giving acts to reinforce traditional values and the solidarity of the community.

Community life for Frafras in Accra is thus partly institutionalised through the authority structure, “meetings” and funerals; but much informal interaction also takes on a tribal flavour. Drinking is the preferred medium of social contact for Frafras, whose rowdiness and lack of sobriety are a by-word in Ghana, and considerable pressures are brought to bear on migrants to join in this form of reciprocal hospitality. At weekends they flock to their favourite haunts to consume pots of pito beer brewed from northern millet, while violin-and guitar-players sing the praises of the drinkers, of their ancestors and lineages at home, for which they are paid liberally by migrants only too willing to reward
anyone who reminds them favourably of their traditional roots. These preferred forms of entertainment and the high degree of intratribal social interaction among Frafras in Accra expresses a strong feeling of ethnic solidarity; so that theirs is a community in a very real sense, a community with its own established set of obligations incumbent on all who choose to be embraced by its framework. Faced with the impersonalism of urban life—their inadequacy before officialdom is a source of great anxiety to illiterate migrants—Frafras turn to the tribal community for some measure of security. Indeed the main function of such a community may be seen as its efficacy in mitigating social isolation and allowing a certain continuity of identity in unfamiliar surroundings. As Rouch has pointed out, solitary travellers who do not know where they are going are very rare in Ghana, (Rouch 1956: 19), and to the observer the self-assurance with which new arrivals in a city as big as Accra find their relatives is striking. Characteristic facial markings make it possible to pick out a Frafra in a crowd; certainly it is difficult to conceive of a Frafra being lost and alone in a big city.

Moreover, since most Frafra migrants are still brought up in their homeland it is not surprising that tribal affiliation should assume great significance for all but a few of them. They are particularly aware of the danger to their way of life of widespread socialisation outside the home community; and accordingly, when bringing up children in the city, they stress the traditional virtues of respect for parental authority, the co-operation of siblings, the proper role for a wife and so on. It may be this sense of a threat to their tribal identity which leads migrants to argue as vociferously as they do about correct grammatical usage in their vernacular and about the etymology of words in a language heavily infiltrated by English, Twi and Hausa. For their own speech patterns are the most distinctively ‘Frafra’ part of migrants’ make-up and it is in an attempt to ensure that their children stay Frafras that many send them home for schooling at some stage in their career. There they will not only become linguistically facile, but, through listening to stories and proverbs, submitting to the authority of a compound head and taking part in ritual life, they will acquire a working knowledge of traditional mores and values. Most Frafra women in Accra too are tied to their migrant husbands: apart from a few freelance traders and prostitutes, they gain little in the way of emancipation by movement to the town. By encouraging a strong orientation of women to their homeland, Frafras attempt to ensure that traditional values are transmitted to their offspring even in the city. The lack of adult second-generation Frafra migrants prevents any assessment of the longterm prospects for success of such a strategy.

This account is, of course, one sided, for, unlike the traditional lineage system, the tribe is in no way the matrix of all migrant life. Relations of kinship and tribe are crosscut by affective ties of friendship, work and co-residence which can be equally or more compelling on the individual. Moreover the migrant community is stratified by the divisions of the wider society, by external criteria of wealth, religion, social standing and educational attainment—all
of which affect the commitment of Frafras to the tribal reference group. At present, however, Frafra society is extremely homogeneous in this respect and very few migrants fall into those categories (such as "white collar worker", "Moslem" and the like) for whom the tribe may assume only partial significance, perhaps a minor part of their social life and personal identity. Analysis of the behaviour of this very small minority is beyond the scope of this paper; and for the vast majority of Frafra migrants it may be said that tribal affiliation is the essence of their existence; their willingness to turn to the migrant community in an urban context gives it a vitality which perhaps is lacking among migrant ethnic groups more heterogeneous in their social composition.

But how does this tribal emphasis relate to the economic conditions of migrant life? Most Frafras migrate in order to better their lot materially or merely to make the domestic unit of production and consumption more viable. Their job expectations are very low and few can look to a monthly wage of more than £15, a sum which is inadequate to deal with inflationary rents and living costs in addition to social expenditure. Budgeting in this situation becomes meaningless: every month's pay packet is dissipated quickly to meet a few of the migrant's many wants, so that debts soon build up in a spiral of unsatisfied needs. The majority never break out of this pattern of living; for them life is a hand-to-mouth existence, and any future security lies in hopes for a gratuity or pension, with the escape clause of a return to home farming where they will be buttressed by lineage and family loyalties. Yet most, before they become routinised in failure, aim for more than this—they hope not only to support themselves and any dependants but to save out of income with a view to profitable investment, a goal which is nurtured by the success of a few of their fellows in this field. But thrift and other qualities necessary for successful petty capitalism are characterised by Frafras as anti-social, and any individual who wishes to save via the expedient of avoiding the demands on his generosity made by the tribal community will become isolated from the mainstream of migrant life. Perhaps more than nexus of high living costs and low wages, this is the crux of the dilemma for a migrant who aspires to greater prosperity. The social obligations of migrants are a heavy drain on resources and these make themselves felt not only in the context of migrant interaction but also in their continued membership of the home lineage.

A migrant does not, by the mere act of moving out of the home environment, cease to be a member of his natal lineage; provided that he does not opt out of the system altogether, he is still the bearer of certain rights and duties, though he might be forgiven for feeling occasionally that the duties outweigh any rights. First, he is expected to be a source of cash for the lineage as a whole and, since his financial straits rarely permit him to make unsolicited remittances home, in the dry season there is a flood of visitors, many of whom expect to have both their lorry fares paid and free board and lodging before returning with the expected gifts for the family. Migrants must usually go into debt and endure great hardship to meet these obligations, but most eventually capitulate to the pressures of kinship brought to bear on them. There are other ways too
in which migrants and their home lineages are closely linked—the exchange of dependants, for example. A migrant's wives and children often live entirely or partly in the home compound, where his brothers and fathers look after them; or a brother's son may join him in the south to complete his education. The situation is extremely fluid and varies according to the age and status of the members of a sibling group. There is a limit to numbers maintainable by either the home farm or the migrant's wage, but within these constraints no particular family member is obliged or expected to stay in one place all the time. This interchange of lineage personnel between north and south could be described as approaching a state of symbiosis, more pronounced in some cases than in others. Migrants also keep up ties with home by making occasional return visits themselves; these 'tours of leave' allow Frafras to attend home festivals and rituals as well as to make more than normally substantial contributions to the domestic economy.

The flow of goods and services might seem to be asymmetrical in favour of those at home, but Frafras see the latter's principal function as taking responsibility for the ritual welfare of lineage members wherever they may be. This, in addition to other areas in which migrants are dependent on lineage seniors (e.g. in establishing marriage contracts), is a powerful reason for keeping up relations of good will with home. And apart from the calculus of costs and benefits, most Frafras simply see their long-term future as lying with the home community and naturally behave in a way conducive to their eventual reintegration as land-owners, elders and even office-holders in their natal settlement. The obligations of membership in the Accra tribal community too derive much of their force from these links between migrants and the home lineage; for while there is a qualitative difference between kinship obligations and the normative standards of the migrant community, the latter is an enclave of Frafra society in general and nonparticipation in community activities implies a rejection of the kinship norms on which tribal ties are based. It is thus difficult, if not impossible, to divorce the two—to be a good brother in the narrow lineage context and ignore relations of tribal brotherhood in the migrant community, since they form together a single ideological system, a unitary social field.

If the communalism and diffuse obligations of traditional values represent such major obstacles to saving and therefore to the migrant's prime objective, which is to improve his lot in a material sense, we must ask why so few Frafras take advantage of movement out of the home milieu to divest themselves of their tribal identity and renounce the encumbrances of a demanding kinship system. The answer lies in a number of sanctions, some not always manifest, which underpin the passivity of the majority in the face of the normative expectations and values of their tribe. We should keep in mind that most migrants are brought up in the traditional environment, a factor which makes it hard for them to reject the values inculcated at an early age. Perhaps it may be different for the next generation, but Frafras today do not become urbanised or westernised by the mere act of migration to an urban setting; the institutional environ-
ment of the city is not that of their homeland, but most migrants do not shake off the beliefs of their upbringing and this is a significant agent of continuity in alien surroundings. I would group the sanctions operating on migrants to maintain close ties with their kin at home and with other Frafras in the migrant community under four headings which, while they are not exhaustive, represent a combination of the reasons given by the actors themselves and of my own inferences as an observer.

First, without the active ritual and economic co-operation of his kin at home, a migrant can hardly hope to marry a Frafra girl and pay bridewealth of four cows; and women, as I have indicated, are scarce in the city. Thus the system of marriage and bridewealth is a powerful institutional force binding migrants to their home kin. Second, most migrants stress the importance of being given the appropriate mortuary and funeral rites in order to attain full ancestor status in the after life. They believe deeply in the axioms of their traditional religion, a religion of kinship in which death is the crux of the entire system: the deviant who rejects obligations of kinship and tribe runs the risk of losing the support of the very people who will see to his burial when he dies. Third, economic insecurity is a prominent feature of migrant life; tribal associations of the kind described above and, more informally, the willingness of Frafras to provide for the destitute and homeless make intratribal relations a form of social insurance in what often seems a menacing environment; migrants who cut off ties with their fellow Frafras risk being alone when disaster strikes. Moreover, the last resort of returning home to farm may be jeopardised by a denial of lineage duties. All of these reasons are frequently referred to by the actors, but the fourth is more latent.

Because of their lowly occupations and overwhelming illiteracy, the social mobility of Frafras is very low; their prestige as a group is perhaps the lowest of any tribe in Ghana. Yet in some ways they are a proud people, extremely conscious of the need to have a "good name". Denied equality in the wider society, they naturally turn into the tribal reference group to satisfy their status-consciousness; 'respect' and a following among Frafras are very much dependent on conformity to traditional norms of gentlemanly behaviour—hospitality, respect for kin ties and all the other virtues which we have already seen act as an obstacle to achieving prosperity. Moreover there are many chieftaincy and similar titles to be aspired to by those migrants who assiduously cultivate the support of their fellows when in the south. And most expect to return as an elder in the lineage and to acquire the kind of authority which is only given to those who themselves conform to normative expectations. The maximisation of social standing within the tribe is thus dependent on maintaining links with home.

These four sanctions on normative behaviour are summed up by a general concern of migrants not to lose their place in the traditional society; they are first and foremost citizens of their homeland and only secondly citizens of modern Ghana, and since they are looked down upon by other ethnic groups, most are unwilling to jeopardise this highly valued status in favour of seeking
recognition outside the tribe. There are a few, of course, who by the acquisition of wealth or conversion to Christianity or Islam, for example, achieve the element of social distance from the tribe which enables them to minimise emphasis on their tribal identity. But the place of tribal citizenship in the lives of most Frafas, even when they live in towns, touches on the most significant areas of human experience—marriage and procreation, death and ancestorhood, economic security, political office and social status. Migration does not itself change the attitudes of Frafas; in Accra too they are poor, and individuals feel that same need for the security of belonging to a corporate group; the imperatives of traditional obligations are not easily set aside by movement to an urban environment. Thus, it would be true to say at this point in time that these are the considerations which lie behind the conservatism of the majority of Frafas and their reluctance to break out of the system which is symbolised by tribal identity.

**Concluding remarks**

At the beginning of this century, when the imposition of colonial rule set in train the events which have led up to the modern situation, Frafra society was bounded by its geographical limits. In the mid-1930’s, although pressures on the land and other factors had caused some migration to the south, only two or three percent of the Frafra population lived outside the traditional homeland and most of these were young men whose absence was only temporary. By the late 1960’s a population growth rate which had then reached 5% per annum meant a doubling of the personnel who made up Frafra society; owing to the limited capacity of the homeland to support increased numbers, a quarter of all Frafra had come to be resident outside the Frafra area. But the circulation of personnel, especially of men in the age range 20–45 years, and inputs from improved technology and migrant remittances had allowed these migrants to conceive of their absence as temporary and to retain a stake in home society. By the end of this century, it is probable that three-quarters of those whose origins entitle them to call themselves Frafra will reside outside the Frafra area. Many of these will be second-, even third-generation migrants with little prospect of returning to the land of their forefathers; many of them, too, will be educated and aspirants to a wider range of occupations than is available to most Frafras today. The present nature of Frafra society is therefore no more permanent than it was thirty years ago, and any conclusion based on a comparison of my fieldwork with Fortes’ data must adopt a diachronic perspective which goes beyond the two points in time frozen by the anthropologist’s visit.

The main problem in analysing continuity and change over this period is to conceptualise the transformation of a spacebound social group into an ongoing network of persons sharing a label, a tribal enclave which has transcended the physical boundaries of the homeland which gives it its prime focus. If Frafra today seem to be largely committed to maintaining a high degree of
continuity with traditional institutions and values, we must ask how far this commitment is dependent on retention of a stake in part of the homeland and whether it will be reduced for the many whom future demographic pressures will deny such a stake. This paper has touched on some aspects of this development in Frafra society and its main concern has been to show how Frafra migrants interpret the meaning of tribal identity when living in another, more urban environment.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**