

THE LAND IS OURS: TEN LA A TAM DEN  
RESEARCH ON THE LAND USE SYSTEM AMONG THE TALLENSI  
IN NORTHERN GHANA<sup>1</sup>

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As an affiliated research student of the Department of Sociology, University of Ghana, Legon (Accra) I spent 13 months among the Tallensi in the Upper-East Region of Ghana. During this time, I lived in Tongo with members of a nuclear lineage in Tongo and took part in kinship, family, and farm life and, in a wider sense, in ritual and social life (e.g. traditional religion and politics). During this first part of the field research my aim was to experience an annual cycle in a traditional society with its various aspects of life. As a social anthropologist I put my emphasis on political and social changes concerning the distribution of political and ritual authority in a segmentary acephalous society - a stock taking of political life with reference to the influencing agents and factors (i.e. state, mission, etc.). In short, my aim was to investigate the political relation of the status of Tale-Society in 1986. The research stay is being continued from March 1986 to August 1989.

**Introduction and Methodological Procedure**

Since Meyer Fortes stayed nearly two and half years among the Tallensi (in the 1930s of this century) I have been the second anthropologist who lived more than one year in the same field. His former house (the colonial guest house) does not exist anymore. Tongo market now occupies his former site, a place full of life, communication and interaction. I think he would have approved - and he himself is still in the minds of the people of the area. Meyer Fortes has become a historical figure in the Tale-Society: he is alive in the thoughts of the Tallensi, not only of those who cooperated with him - his informants, friends and partners - but also young people know him from stories, and there are a lot of stories and legends about the - solmin talen - the White Tallensi, as he was called. Sometimes it was really curious for me to work in the "shadow" of a great social anthropologist. Especially at the beginning people compared the way I worked to his style and methods. And as a good son (very often I was regarded as his son) I followed his theoretical and practical footsteps. My compound was only some 400 meters northeast of Fortes' former residence.

I arrived in Talenland in January 1986 in the middle of the dry season. The first few months I went with my guides and

interpreters (mostly with the Tongo chief's (Tumama) senior son to nearly all the earthpriests, tumama, and chiefs, na'anam, to fulfil the procedure of introduction.

My fieldwork covered the same villages that Fortes' work had centred on: the villages south of Tongo, among and surrounding the Tongo Hills and the villages around Tongo itself<sup>2</sup>: Baari, Zubiungu, Geog, Tongo Naayiri, So, Wakii, Gorogo, Gbambee, Woog, Tenzugu, Sii, Degal, Yinduur, and Zandoya. I briefly visited nearly all the tumamas and chiefs of the entire Tale area. Moreover, I undertook the excursions by bicycle (where it was possible) or on foot. After approximately eight months I had achieved a command of the local language Taine to make interviews with my counterparts and informants by myself.<sup>3</sup> The openness and joking friendliness of the Tallensi made it very easy for me to take part in their life and to develop cooperative relationships and friendships. Their tendency to exaggerate was sometimes not easy to cope with.

I would define my status in the society as that of an associated member. Notwithstanding my colour and my occidental way of thinking and behaving I tried to share in the life of the people<sup>4</sup> as far as it was possible, necessary and convenient.

In the first place my methodological procedure in the field was that of participant observation - living in the society. However there was a basic difference between Fortes' research procedure and mine: the differences in life-style. Whereas he lived constantly separated from traditional family life because he and his family lived in the colonial guesthouse, I lived together with a local family. I conducted interviews and conversations with my informants through interpreters at the beginning and later on by myself. I used different sources for the data collection, for example mission records, unpublished census notes (1984) school records, etc.<sup>5</sup>

The impulse finally to start field research on a social anthropological basis came from the book by Christian Sigrist (1967): *Regulierte Anarchie*, subtitled "Researches on the absence and the evolution of political authority in segmentary societies in Africa". In this study he works out a theory of the continuity of segmentary acephalous societies in Africa by studying the different monographs on tribes, among them the Tallensi. His arguments culminate in the conclusion that the norms of equality are still alive and maintained in spite of centralized pressure of colonial rule and power. He published his book twenty years ago and this was thirty years after Fortes' first and longest stay among the Tallensi. I found it necessary to examine his and Fortes' arguments about the historical and present (dis)continuity of a segmentary acephalous society. Stagl (1979:6) points out that the theory of segmentary societies actually forms "the central part of social

anthropology". In this connection my research targets were to work out the effects on the political organization and social order of the Tallensi with respect to changing economic and social changes.

The main purpose of this article is to illustrate some general aspects of the Tale "law of the land" and "land use systems". The theme is restricted to non-ritual aspects, i.e. the effective influence on the Tale social structure and political system, to underline the significance of the "land" as an index of continuity of a segmentary acephalous society. I know very well that without investigating or at least touching on the mystical aspects concerning earth and land in general and its possible changes nowadays this article will be far less complete because changes in the non-ritual aspects of the earth of course have an instant effect on religious and ritual life. This matter merits closer and more extensive treatment, and will have to be postponed for the time being.

A change of the "social constitution" by which people have agreed to organize their lives has to go along with a change of agrarian means of production. For instance: the changing "command over the land" as an effect on the relation HUMAN BEING: LAND indicates a varied position towards agrarian division of labour according to sex and generation (age) or intra-ethnic relations. You have to relate conflicts concerning the land to the complex of conflicts in general. One methodological procedure is to follow the lines of conflict back to their starting point in order to differentiate between sources of social instability and disruption or simply personal misunderstanding (which in some cases has social significance as well). The starting point for this article was the conclusion of Karl Ernst Ringer (1963: 182). He gives special prominence to four basic principles of land use systems in West Africa. "Their magico-religious fundament, the right of the first occupant, the mentality of control and the right of utilizing the soil". I want to concentrate on the last two points: "the mentality of control" in the Tale case is the expressed authority of a lineage elder over all the lineage members. Is it possible for an educated, literate (mostly converted to Christianity) Tallensi man to disregard the ritual land-selling prohibitions for his own material benefits? Or is the (so to speak) "secularized"<sup>6</sup> land still under "supervision" of the elders of other segments which have a more extended range or are higher ranked? This problem comes close to the complex of "land as private property" (on the topic Christian mission in Taleland, v. Riehl 1988).

The other point is "the right to utilize the soil." To farm on somebody's land is one of the most frequent offences committed in Taleland and the beginning of many conflicts, (v. Riehl 1987)

especially when it is bordering two farms. Sometimes the reason for the argument is only about a couple of square feet but not less serious. On the other hand: to neglect cultivated farm land is no less socially sanctioned. The duty to farm is dictated by society. Nobody in Taleland has the right to occupy uncultivated land or bush-land. If he wants to, he has to fulfil certain ritual obligations in cooperation with the religious and ritual authorities, the responsible *tendaanas*.

Although this attempt represents only a small section of social life and changes in Tale land, it offers a view into a sociological determinant which is a cornerstone in the structure of Tale society.<sup>7</sup> Worsley (1956:45) has argued that the political life and structure, i.e. in this case the segmentary system, is a function of economic conditions: "The lineage-system has to be viewed in the light of the Tale land-usages and land-holding and not existing in a vacuum". Worsley's theoretical attempt underlines Fortes' neglect, misinterpretation or even disregard of the material aspects which have determining effects on social change in Tale economic life and therefore also on ritual practice and social order. In his opinion every traditional economy (unless there is no contact with "western" ideas or values) has to change its attitudes towards social and ritual life. Fortes (1969: 221) denied this vehemently and after his last research visit to Taleland in 1963 he asserted: "The demographic, economic, political and cultural changes of the past thirty years had had obvious and marked influences but had brought about no radical changes in the social structure or the religious system." Whether Fortes is right because of his overwhelming field experience and anthropological knowledge, or Worsley because of his dialectical ability, I agree with Hart's conclusion that "it is the question of the economic conditions of historical continuity and change that we must turn to if we are to make progress towards sorting out the reciprocal interaction between political economy and social ideology in the Tallensi case" (Hart 1978: 208). One must find out whether there are ways to cope with the establishment of endogenous or exogenous influences undermining the autochthonous-stability of the society.

#### **Some Details About Population Statistics**

Tale society is no longer separated from a wider economic or political environment. The mushrooming capital of the Upper East Region, Bolgatanga (population 1931: 12, 756; 1984: 31, 500)<sup>8</sup>, is only about ten miles northwest of Tongo. Especially on market days (every third day; Bolga and Tongo have the same market days) many lorries travel, loaded with people and all kinds of goods, to the biggest market in the region. At daybreak you see streams of people, mostly women, going to the market with

cereals, domestic animals etc., using the root-paths as "short cuts" to Bolga from remote places in Taleland their journey could be longer than 15 miles.

Taleland itself is part of the Frafra District (together with the Mabdam and the Gurensi areas). The Upper East Region is formed by the union of Bawku (mostly Kusase) and Navrongo Districts (mostly Kasena-Nankani) and the Frafra District. Therefore Taleland is interwoven into a relatively new political construction<sup>9</sup> (the effects on traditional political affairs and the segmentary system will be discussed at another time).

It is hard to give details about population statistics of the Tallensi. But regarding all the different censuses made from 1931 and considering the population growth rate and the huge number of migrants<sup>10</sup> going down south to work, I would say that Fortes' (1950: 239) estimate of 35,000 inhabitants can at least be doubled now (v. Central Bureau of Statistics, 1984). Fortes (1945: 18) noted already for the 1930's that Taleland "is thickly populated".

#### Land Alienation Nowadays: Three Examples

The Tallensi are farmers. Fortes (1945: 9) noticed 50 years ago "that not less than 95 per cent of the adult males are wholly dependent on agriculture for their livelihood, and all of the odd 5 per cent are partially dependent on the same source." The term land, *ten*, in its practical and ritual-religious aspects represents the focus of life and survival, physically and spiritually culminating in the two Great Festivals roughly at the beginning and at the end of the rainy season. Furthermore, a good harvest guarantees also the stability of the social order. "For the individual the physical wellbeing of himself and his dependents - sufficiency of food, good health, and the increase of offspring - is a sign that all is well with the social order" (Fortes 1945: 173). This is still true without reservation.

Landownership in this context reflects and corresponds directly to the reproductive unit i.e. the nuclear lineage. The elder is responsible for ritual and practical obligations concerning his house people and the farm land. He leads the sacrifices at the lineage shrine (*bogar*). In agreement with his brothers and sons comes the decision at what plots (*yak*, pl. *yahs*) the different varieties of crops are going to be sown. The nuclear lineage is the actual landowner in such a way that without its agreement nothing can be done or decided concerning farming, usufructuary rights, religious-ritual activities and, in this case, changing landownership. This includes the three different variations of farm land: the house farm, the farm close to the compound and the bush farm. "The landowning unit is a segment of a maximal lineage and its property rights are an

aspect of its corporate relationship to the maximal lineage and clan" (Fortes 1945: 180).

Landownership is necessarily combined with the uncestor and the earth cult finally focussing in the Great Festivals of all Tallensi where you see the social and ritual realization of the often mentioned phrase: *Ten la a tam den* "The land is ours". Moreover, the nuclear lineage is the place where land is being inherited, distributed and exchanged for farming purposes. The extension of houses or the building of new compounds happens on their ancestral land. Every male member of a nuclear lineage is aware of the boundaries of its farm land. This does not mean that landownership is a matter without or free of conflicts. They arise frequently between members of neighbouring lineages, especially when it comes to the problem of borrowed out farm land<sup>11</sup> which is demanded back by the actual owner. Most of these disputes are finally solved and settled by the elders of the lineages concerned or the *tendaanas* in charge of the land. But many cases are also transferred to the Tongo police-station, (most cases happen at the beginning of the farming season), an example of the extent of the inroads of modern juridical influence on traditional social and political administration.

In the politico-ritual aspect, landownership as such shows the social position and status of people in the segmentarily organized society. Landownership reflects the relationship of the landowner to his dependents in the nuclear lineage or (in a wider sense) in the clan and his status concerning worship and sacrificing to his ancestors. Whatever change in the hierarchical rank organization takes place (for example, the death of a lineage elder and the ascent into his office), it corresponds directly and has an immediate effect on the complicated system of land tenure. The continuity of the land tenure system is the mirror of stability and continuity of Tala social organization.

Fortes writes about the land-selling problem "In places like Tongo, land sales do occur, ( ... ). In the past hunger or pressing bride-price debt often left a man with no other resource than to sell his land". Fortes (1945: 178f). This phrase provokes further questions: What are "places like Tongo"? What does he mean by "land"? Direct compound farms, farms around the compound or outlying bush-farms? Is it only an occasional incident which occurs when unexpected absolute poverty threatens the potential land-seller or is it the result of a sneaking poverty over time. Fortes obviously does not mean that a man<sup>12</sup> gives up land to accumulate capital (although the number of wives a man has married, or course, is a function of capital).

When I asked my non-Namooos informants the question whether it is possible to buy and to sell land in the area, a stereotype answer was: "Not in our place, but the Namooos, they sell. They

are migrants from Mamprusi area, they were given land by us (i.e. the original landowner, the *tendaana*<sup>13</sup>) to build their houses, to settle and to farm. They didn't inherit the land. When you sell your land, you sell your gods. How can we do that?" Do the Namooos have an extra juridical right to commit that sacrilege which is accepted in the "Talis" and "real Talis"<sup>14</sup> populated areas? And does the "law of the land", whatever it is, not affect them? The land-selling process as a sociological phenomenon is indeed a significant factor to illustrate the main cleavage in Tale society: the Namooos introduced chieftancy to Taleland. The *Toumaana* is the religious and political focus for the Namooos. He and his elders of the four sections of Tongo are responsible for many duties and rights concerning ritual and chieftaincy work. The relationship to the *tendaanas* is marked by strict ritual ties especially during the Namoo festivals, the *Gingaan* and the *Da'a*, not to mention the important role of the *Gbizug-Tendaana* on the occasion of the death of a Tongo chief.<sup>15</sup> The Namoo sections are patched onto the old common pattern of politico-ritual organization. The sociological differences are still valid and at times more or less visible and obvious. They depend on the different ritual character and the clans' or sections' authenticity.

Taleland is not an area where immigration takes place. There is no profitable industry or commercial enterprise so that people can make money. The fertility of the land as well as the extreme unstable climate (only one rainy season; the frequency and intensity of the rains are not reliable) are far from guaranteeing a fruitful ground for profitable plantations. Hence the process of changing land-tenure is mostly an emic phenomenon. In practice it means that members of neighbouring ethnic units (*Gurensi* or *Nabdam*s) do not own land in Taleland, even no remote bush-farms.

#### Example One

A man of Tongo paid 60 cedis for the piece of land where he wanted to build the house for his family, plus a plot of approximately one acre for house gardening, *saman*. Apart from this small piece of land, there is no farm ground for him to farm nearby. He settled in Zubiungu, more precisely, in *zo-yiraun* land, a *yisug* in *Zoo* which is situated on Zubiungu land. Originally he was from the Tongo subsection *Gun* (his family-house, *daboog*, is in *Dekpien*, a subsection of *Gun*). Even at that time (eight years ago), 60 cedis was not a symbolic amount of money. It corresponds to the approximate material equivalent of a calf. He, as a Namoo, would have had no problems getting a portion of land near his *daboog* in his home section completely free of charge. For the future the land is separated from its former holder, materially and spiritually, and has

become part of the private property of the new owner. Although Zubiungu represents a Talis clan, it has close ties to the Namooos living a couple of 100 meters apart; they speak of each other as "kinsmen". He didn't settle on completely "strange" land (cf. Fortes 1945: 78ff, Kramer 1987: 20ff). He bought the land from a fellow Namoo who lived in Seug, a yizug of Tongo Naayiii.

There are different reasons why the man settled in Zubiungu and not near his family house. Over population could be one important factor (Zubiungu is less densely populated than Gun) but not necessarily convenient because even in the most populated areas you can find a portion of land to build your compound on, but not enough farmland to produce cereals to supply the family.

For educated Tallensi, like he is, infrastructural factors for the land-choice process are important: proximity to the school and health-post, etc. Ritual obligations, if not impossible to fulfil (as for Catholics), are at least very difficult to cope with (for example on becoming an elder, kpeem, he must return to his family house to take over the necessary rights and duties as patrimonial successor). So, in this case land selling because it was not only for a symbolic amount of money, underlines the social difference (not distance) which can arise between the members of the same group.

After the establishment of the newly built home, he wanted to start a bush-farm poog some five miles southeast from Tongo in the Woo area. He went to the responsible tendaana and offered him the necessary gifts (cola-nuts, tobacco) and animals (goat and fowls) for sacrificing to mark off the portion of land he wanted to cultivate (cf. Fortes 1945: 188). Nothing seems to have changed with respect to getting bush-farms. I have never heard of a tendaana receiving money for ceding bushland to a man willing to farm. From now on the land is free for the farmer to use, it is also inheritable and transferable to others, but only lineage members. If the farmer for any reason neglects the farm for a couple of years, it falls back into the custody of the original owner, the tendaana. Even for a huge amount of farmland (in this case about 20 acres) there is no evident problem in securing it when the man is willing to perform the necessary ritual obligations.

"Chiefs and tendaanaa (....) have no over-riding rights of ownership entitling them to rent, tax, or tribute for land. They have, indeed, no more land than they have acquired in the same way as any other elder" (Fortes 1950: 250). Nevertheless the tendaanas have the right to mark off and distribute land. Of course their "office-land" is much larger than the portion which they and their housepeople actually work on.



### Example Two

To illustrate this situation of a decision-making process, I might offer another example: a Protestant sect wanted to build a church in Baari, a Talis settlement, and went to the Sakpar Tendaana in Charge (cf. Figure). The tendaana asked them whether they needed land to farm or just to build a house on. If they wanted to start a farm they had to give a certain amount of fowl and flour to him for sacrificing. They just wanted a portion of land for the church, which lies in the Korug subsection. So the tendaana directed them (and their converted Baari agents) to the elders of Korug. In protracted discussions with the elders of the house that very portion actually belonged to, they got permission to build the church. They did not pay any compensation.

If only one of the three mentioned instances (section, subsection and house) does not give its permission to the purpose, it will not be accepted. Even the authority of a tendaana cannot force the people to divide the land. He has no exclusive command over the land. Decisions must come in agreement with the other elders of the other sections in line. A "solitary" decision without consulting them is out of the question. This is one of the *conditiones sine qua non* for the segmentarily organized society.<sup>16</sup>

### SAKPAR

maximal lineage and tendaanas

#### ten

Ritual view of the entire yizug - land. First to be consulted, the Tendaana directs the case to the elders of the subsection

DAZIUG      KORUG      DUN  
subsections

All the elders of Korug discuss the point (not necessarily in presence of the tendaana).

HOUSES    HOUSES    HOUSES

The elders of the house whose land is directly concerned debate. They do practical farming on that spot and are directly involved.

Figure: Decision-making process in the yizug Sakpar in Baari.

### Example Three

The only case of mineral resources exploitation took place in the Tali settlement Wakii south of Tongo. A European firm wanted to cut granite from different places in and around the settlement to export to Europe. At two places they installed their equipment (containers, engines, etc.) and started working. This happened around 1978.

For the firm things were clear. Wakii is the closest village with stones worth removing and exporting and close to the main road linking it to Tamale and the south. Transportation in this area does not depend on weather conditions.

Wakii for the Tallensi represents a place of social and ritual integration and cohesion. Not only its geographical location (between Tenzugu (real Talis) and Tongo (Namoos)), but also ritual places affecting all Tallensi especially at the Golib Festival are situated in Wakii (cf. Fortes 1936: 603). Drastic changes of that area must consequently affect the solidarity of the society. And how it did, we shall see.

In the initial process of negotiations the responsible tendaanas refused to let the land out of their hands. The rocks are holy they said, this will cause the gods to be angry and will bring misery over the land and the people.

Like the tendaanas, the chief of Wakii also refused to support the plans at the beginning. However, in the course of events, especially under the influence of the Tongo chief, who had the backing of the administrative authorities and of the young educated, mostly unemployed men, who set great hopes in getting jobs, the firm finally got permission to start work (for 99 years) with a couple of promises, for example, that they would build a good road to the Tamale junction and another one to Tenzugu in the Tongo hills (which you can only reach by footpath), a guest house in Tongo, and that they would guarantee employment for several willing workers in this rural area. A certain amount of money for every cubic yard of granite exported should be given to the Tongo chief.

We do not need a detailed explanation to show how the emic decision-making process is disrupted by external and strange forces. The above mentioned procedure reflects a process of getting hold of the land, in which internal discussions and reflections of representatives in the traditional institutions were simply forced to lapse. The final decision was made by the Tongo chief and administrative authorities.<sup>17</sup> During various interviews with tendaanas, elders and others from the area, I was still able to sense a sort of irritation about the procedure of the case. Nearly all of them justified their permission of the project on the grounds that the exploitation spots do not touch directly the sacred rocks and groves where they are used to gathering for sacrificing during the Great Festivals and

other ritual occasions.

During the Golib month the tense situation came to a crisis. Weeks before the actual ceremonies started, the Tenzugu elders, especially from the yizug Bunkiuk, informed the Wakii people that they were not welcome to the hills to perform the rites and to dance. The reason why they felt able to articulate this ban was their conviction (especially that of the Golibdaana yidem<sup>18</sup>) that the hills are "for them". No decision concerning the hills in general can be made without them. This position is vehemently denied by the Wakii people. It is their conviction that the hills surrounding their village are for Wakii, and any decision or action made which might affect "their" hills has nothing to do with Tenzugu. The atmosphere in those days was extremely tense and every side was prepared to fight rather than start negotiations with each other.

On that very day when all the Tallensi came together in Tenzugu, the Degal, Tamboog, Wakii Tendaanas and the Golibdaana met as usual before daybreak and held their successive prayers in front of a huge number of spectators. They put special emphasis on not shedding blood on the climax of the festival<sup>19</sup> and referred directly to the conflict. After the prayers ended the dances started and although a lot of provocative songs were chanted on both sides, no noteworthy quarrel happened. The "olympic peace" (Sigrist 1979: 76) was for the time being guaranteed. But the problem has not been solved, rather merely postponed.

I have brought three illustrations of changing land use and land tenure in the Mamoo, Talis and real Talis areas to show the effects and consequences on the society where they were noteworthy. It can be stated that in the Mamoo area land selling does not only occur rarely, it does happen currently but under special conditions:

1. land-selling is no more the extreme exception. Portes determined that drastic poverty is the primary reason. Poverty is one important factor but not the only one.
2. There must be kinship ties between the negotiating partners.
3. Even if they are complete strangers it is possible but under the condition that they are backed by local agents supporting them.

"You can sell a dead tree or the fruits of the fruits of a tree but how can you sell the land on which it stands?" one elder of Baari told me. Baari and Tongo are direct neighbours related by clanship and ritual ties and numerous affinal ties. Land-selling in Baari is a sacrilege and has not occurred up to now. Although Baari is surrounded by Tongo and Zuarungu (the former colonial administrative headquarters of the district) where land selling also takes place and is the closest

settlement to Bolgatanga<sup>20</sup> no influence concerning land-selling has effects on them. The important factor is the continuity and stability of tendaanship in the area (in the case of Baari, the seniority of the Lakum Tendaana and his five colleagues). Their authority is unbroken and still radiates over the social and ritual life of the village. In cooperation with the lineage and clan elders they regulate social, ritual and juridical affairs. The socio-political role of the headman of Baari has been by and large reduced to the position he normally holds by seniority in his kinship group in the segmentary system.<sup>21</sup> (Headmanship and subchiefdoms in Taleland were introduced by the colonial Administration in the 30's of this century along with the "indirect rule". The Tongo-chief was put in supervision and paramuncy to his new subchiefs.)

Another informant from Baari told me that "the earth is a living thing: *ten la bun vor*. And when one is given land by a tendaana to farm he must treat it as if he has married his daughter. He is an "in-law" now and "one of us". He has to fulfil his responsibilities during festivals, funerals and other occasions (mostly by contributing and by taking part at the assemblies). "Concubinative relations" to the land are excluded by the law of the land and the ritual ideology.

In general this is still contingent on the state of affairs in the Namoo settlements and villages where the role of the tendaanas is less distinct because of the ethnic history and the office of the Tongo chief itself. In contrast to the office of the headmen or chiefs in the Talis and real Talis areas his position is an emic institution and for that reason it can become (through his authority) a starting point for secularization. The preconditions for a spreading of centralized political influence on the Talis and real Talis settlements could be possible as the Wakii example shows.

For local or regional authorities chiefs and headmen are considered as counterparts. They are supposed to act as links to realize rural development in their area, and vice versa, to articulate public interests and needs to the administration. There are many cases where the authority of chiefs or headmen and tendaanas clashed with each other, especially when "the law of the land" was concerned. Conflicts like these sometimes ended up at public trials and were resolved for the time being.

Fortes stated that the political influence of the Tongo chief is *de facto* limited to his four "royal gates" (the sections of Tongo proper). The Tongo Chief in accordance to his office claims to be paramount to all the Tallensi. "The chief is for the people and the tendaanas are for the land". This often quoted phrase simplifies a matter which is too complicated to be summarized so simply, and there is no area in Taleland where this saying is effective in that sense. When the "law of the

land" continues to be in the hands of the tendaanas and their elders, it contributes to their authority over the people because any land-ceding procedure leads in the end to a social integration process which substantiates the stability of the entire society and guarantees its continuity.

To sum up, land ceding was and is a normal process in Tale society. But new procedures of land-ceding are occurring more and more in those areas of Taleland where the traditional political institutions do extend their authority over the people and increasingly dispose of the land as they see fit. In short: there has been a loss of command over the land by direct traditional religious authorities concerning land-earth "holdings" as such,<sup>22</sup> as example 3 shows. The effective strength of autochthonous authorities shows its real status in the society when external forces support decisions in a direction which is unacceptable for them.

Up to now, land-selling has not been aimed at accumulating resources. But for socio-political theory it is significant to point out initial social changes and the ritual-political equilibrium which regulates itself.

#### Notes

1. I wish here to acknowledge my indebtedness to Prof. Dr. Christian Sigrist (Muenster) for his critical assistance on the paper.
2. Cf. map in Fortes 1945: 14.
3. Of course, even after 13 months I was still far from being fluent in the language.
4. There were different phases of personal acceptance: the fact that I took part actively in the Great Festivals' rituals and dances, that I was able to communicate in their own language (there is a saying in Talne about English-speaking people whom they don't understand: "They are lying."). Another important factor was that I was working on the farm of my family.
5. In this context, I have to thank my corresponding Professor (from the Department of Sociology, University of Ghana, Legon (Accra), Dr. P.A. Twumasi very much. Especially through fruitful discussions concerning methodological problems in the field, he gave me a great deal of support.
6. "Secularized" as a term for land which is now owned by people who do not follow earth and ancestral cults, for example the land which was given to the Catholic Mission in Tongo.

7. It is surprising to me that apart from Fortes especially in his two monographs (1945, 1949) none of his successors put a special emphasis on this topic.
8. 50 years ago, Bolgatanga was nothing else than a village with a market place.
9. There were intensive discussions about founding a new district called "Tallensi-Nabdam" because of the administrative difficulties in governing the capital plus two complete rural areas, not to mention interethnic problems. The administrative headquarters would be in Tongo (if this should happen).
10. On the problem of migration see Fortes 1971, Franke 1982, Hart 1971, 1975, 1978.
11. Especially when the borrowing had taken place generations ago and the circumstances for the limited exchange are forgotten. Transfers of spots of farmland for only one season in return for food (in between minimal lineages) happen frequently and are mostly free of problems when the original owner claims back his land.
12. Women cannot become landowners because of the fact that they have no right to sacrifice to the ancestors or during the earth cult. They can get usufructuary rights over farmland of the lineage they have married in. Frequently land is given to widows or wives, in case their husbands are no more able to feed them and their children satisfactorily.
13. There are different versions about the land-acquisition of Mosour, the ancestral forefather of the Namoo, from the Tendaana Genet, the forefather of the Gbizug Tendaana (cf. Fortes 1945: 21 ff).
14. I have adopted the classification of the people of Taleland from Fortes 1954: 21.
15. The present Tongo chief lives only some 200 metres from the Gbizug Tendaana's house on Gbizug land. To make things clear it is necessary to explain that every Namoo section and settlement in Tongo is necessarily placed and situated on tendaana's land. Principally, the Gbizug Tendaana claims to have the ritual rights and duties to take care of all of Tongo, which is not quite correct because, for example, the Tongo section Kuoreg lies on Soo Tendaana's territory. Nevertheless, the Gbizug tendaana can be regarded as a senior one in the Tongo area. Together with the Lakun Tendaana (from Baari) he has to perform certain rituals during the Great Festivals. On the ritual cooperation between Tongo proper, Gbizug and Baari: cf. Fortes 1936.
16. Of course I witnessed quite a lot of decisions concerning land and other matters which didn't go so smoothly and

- in some cases they ended up in disharmony.
17. I have to put emphasis on the fact that this process is an exception. The normal way of making decisions is a traditional emic procedure.
  18. The Golibdaana yir has been, since the British introduced headmanship to the real Talis in the hills, also the house of the Tenzugu chief. On the special and outstanding role of the Golibdaana and his people, cf. Fortes 1945: 245 ff.
  19. "Bloodshed during the Golib is a dreadful sacrilege: bloodshed on Tenzugu on the day of the most important ceremonies and during the dancing is a religious enormity that cannot be compared to anything else in the Tale calendar of sins" (Fortes 1945: 241).
  20. For instance, the Bolgatanga chief has become a rich man because of land-selling in his area.
  21. It would lengthen this article too much to describe the changing of the political role of headmen and chiefs nowadays.
  22. Intentionally I do not concentrate on the changing social conditions in Togo, like developing agriculture, the Catholic mission, improving infrastructure, school and education systems and the establishing of an educated middle class (Riehl 1987, 1988).

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