

varying types changes in that the origins of the elements of the typology vary as products of apparent fission and segmentation. Unitary and compound clans result from "segmentation," the contrapuntal clan from "fission." In the latter instance clan and lineage seniority is negated as is the seniority of brothers. Succession and inheritance are negated momentarily. This point is contingent on who is speaking.

The Master of the Earth

Throughout, recourse has been made to four categories of person: master of the earth, owner of the people, owner's people, and earth's people. The latter is most expansive in West Africa and formulated as "sons of the earth," "children of the earth," "children of the master of the earth," "master of the earth's people." The processes by which these two gross categories, earth and owner, were generated have been presented in some detail. "Earth's people" were formed in the contraposed clan as by default in the history of succession.²⁰

"Master of the earth" may be approached as a kin role. It does, however, vary from that of "owner of the people." It is most likely a role which does not exist until it is transmitted for the first time. This role is often characterized as "ritual," "ritual status" or "mystical" (see Tait 1961: 41), focusing on control of the shrines (*nguwa*) and, in particular, the earth shrines and the subalterns and assistants. These shrines themselves are thought to govern fertility and productivity through sacrifice. The earth is thought of as the "earth deity."²¹

Tait, as noted earlier, insisted that the "master of the earth" was "sent by the earth." This indicated at least a different local conception of the kin role, on the one hand, while on the other it is quite certain that the earth did not send the "master of the earth."²² He clearly sees the unity of the contraposed "lineages" as "earth rites performed jointly by members of both groups" (1961: 228). This, one imagines, is not to the exclusion of formalized earth rites ascribed to by adjacent "clans" in the context of the unitary-compound "clan." The

relation of ritual is complicated by emphasis on the unifying force and belies real competition as noted in *tenkouri yil*, traditional knowledge, "associated with ceremonial contests" (Goody 1987: 165).

"Master of the earth" is a role and we accept that it is a role which constitutes an office. What seems to be at issue at first is that of succession to the office. It is as if the "earth's people" represented a contingent status. The relation between the paired roles of "master of the earth" and "owner of the people" is asymmetrical despite the difficulties presented by relational opposition. They are, however, asymmetrical in a particular sense. The office of "owner of the people," as much as it is subsumed or locally described, as a kinship role (the office) is not separable from the person – if not the kin category. The office of "owner of the people" is seen as separate from the incumbent. This separability is *achieved* by the control which others exert over the holder of the office, the "owner of the people." This is the demonstration of heterogeneous interest. This is also the principle of contraposition. Presented differently again, the "owner of the people" is a true leadership, not a function of descent. It is a leadership which is recruited and achieved, not automatic.

The "owner of the people" is also subject to the imposition of heterogeneous interest. Unlike the "owner of the people," the complementary office is not separable from the person, nor is it necessarily inherited as a kin role, or minor office, in the local model.

Relations of Identity

The basis of the emergence of the miniature office, a local emic model, a "strategy" (M. Strathern 1985: 199), in the old Northern Territories of Ghana is emphasized as the jural delineation of certain superordinate statuses. Both status and role are, barring anachronisms, synchronized. The contrapuntal clan marks a change in the relation of the role and concomitant status, relationally open or closed. In this manner, role, as office, characterizes a West African strategy.

A discursive code of conduct (local) is extended to the status of "owner of the earth," and other offices of the estate.²³ It is in the context of

20 This is obscured somewhat by Tait: "That is, there is a division of ritual and political roles between the elders of the two contraposed ... lineages. ... *Otindaa*, the Owner of the Earth, is ritually senior to the other who is called the *Onkpel*, or elder, and who is politically senior to the *Otindaa*" (1961: 228).

21 Perhaps "sent" by a shrine or the spirit of a "master of the earth" (Tait 1961: 228).

22 Tait's conception of the Konkomba God is sketchy at best.

23 The situation of the "master of the earth" is at variance with that of the "owner of the people," however, the fees demanded by him for ritual interventions are no less lucrative, nor is the well stocked larder any less attractive.