Chapter 1, Introduction

Ralph Harold Faulkingham

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umass.edu/anthro_res_rpt15
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Long ago, in the beginning of beginnings were Acama and Adamu. From these, Allah created everyone in the world, both human and spirit people. Then Allah said, "Adamu, you and Adama, bring to me what you have borne." As Adamu and Adama were doing it, she said, "We are not taking all our children, for he might keep some of them; let us keep some hidden." So they brought the remainder to Allah. When they reached Allah, he looked and said, "Well, is all that you have borne here before us, Adamu and Adama?" They said, "Yes." He said, "Well, there are others hidden over there. They are hidden people; they shall remain hidden people forever." Those are the spirits; they are people; they are our relatives. We have mutual obligations to the present day.

An important diviner in rural Niger told me this story when I asked him about the origins of the spirits. This standard exegetical tale of the spirits and their cousins, the Hausa people, stands at the apex of a whole pyramid of cosmological and social structural features that characterize the community of Tudu in rural Hausaphone Niger. From the perspective of the villagers, the major questions of life and death, of destiny, of misfortune and of human caprice—in short, the entire range of critical events whose space and time sources are indeterminate—become cognitively determinate and answerable by reference to a coherent world view that accords primary causal efficacy to various spirits.

In this essay I set forth some of the major aspects of belief and ritual that the residents of Tudu share, together with an examination of their social organizational implications. In the tradition of this monograph series, my goal is predominately descriptive, although there are pointers to theoretical issues that will be developed more thoroughly in subsequent publications.

The monograph is divided into four major sections. In the remainder of this chapter I sketch the ecological, historical, and political setting of Tudu. Then, in Chapter II, I detail the nature of the residents' belief in spirits. Chapters III, IV, and V are devoted to the description and analysis of public and private
rituals, while the final chapter represents a synthesis of the features of social organization, belief and ritual. Specifically, I shall indicate how various personal conflicts and contradictions in structural principles may be seen to be resolved in the dialectic between the social and symbolic orders.

The Setting

The village of Tudu is located about 75 miles northeast of Sokoto, Nigeria, and some 15 miles north of the Niger-Nigeria border. While living in that community, in the course of my investigations of political supports for the village headman (v. Faulkingham 1970), I frequently heard references to spirits, attended spirit association dances, and recorded accusations and tales of ensorceling, its divination, prosecution, and outcome. My data on this subject, then, are in the form of extensive observations of and participation in the social life of the village of Tudu over the course of eighteen months of research. I have checked and rechecked the assertions of many informants and collected several extended cases of public rituals and private grievances. Further, through the infinite patience, trust, and generosity of my hosts, I was able to census the entire community and derive the useful genealogical, demographic and social network data that served first as the foundation for the analysis of village politics and now as a basis for an examination of its religious life. I have not attempted a general area survey and, therefore, cannot compare the society and culture of Tudu with that of neighboring Hausa villages. Hence, I cannot regard the Tudu data as representative of Hausaland in general or of the rural non-Muslim Hausa (Maguzawa) in particular (v. Greenberg 1946 and Barkow 1973).

Environmental Constraints

Tudu lies in the ecologically fragile sahel zone just south of the Sahara desert, where periodic yet unpredictable droughts historically have exacted a high toll both in mortality and in disruption of the subsistence economy. As Figure 1 demonstrates, rainfall varies enormously from year to year, from a high of 825 mm. in 1950 to a low of 156 mm. in 1973 framing a mean of about 450 mm. for the past three decades. As the people of Tudu have depended nearly exclusively for their food supply on what millet and sorghum they can grow themselves through non-irrigated hoe cultivation, the vicissitudes of rainfall, both within a single year and from year to year, can spell a bountiful harvest in one October and threaten starvation the next. Table 1 depicts the relationship between rainfall and crop production for the years 1969 to 1974. In the past, droughts, and the famines, disease epidemics, and locust plagues which came in their wake yielded a high mortality experience. The populations of this region adapted to this
FIGURE 1

ANNUAL RAINFALL AT MADAOUA, 1944-1973

(16 km. NE of TUDU)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>152.0</th>
<th>4.5</th>
<th>50.3</th>
<th>78.9</th>
<th>79.4</th>
<th>162.4</th>
<th>1974</th>
<th>1973</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OCTOBER</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td></td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td></td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td></td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AND CROP YIELDS PER CAPITA, 1969-74
RAINFALL (IN MM) AT MAHOONAA PER TEN DAY PERIODS

TABLE 1
regime by sustaining a very high birth rate (for 1969-1974, this averaged about 50 births per thousand per year). While the most recent drought was by far the worst of this century, mortality was very low, thanks to various national and international programs of food distribution and of health improvement and pest eradication. As there has been little change in the birth rate, the populations of this area are growing quite rapidly (v. Faulkingham and Thorbahn 1975). Yet in Tudu, the year 1974 represented a dip in this growth as mortality topped fertility by a substantial margin (see Table 2), with most of the deaths occurring among the children born since the drought began locally in 1970.

Throughout the drought period, there has occurred a rapid and substantial shift in the local economy away from complete reliance on subsistence crops for survival. Increasingly (see Tables 3 and 4), men are seasonally migrating to the larger towns of West Africa to sell their labor as unskilled workers. The cash they have earned has enabled many of them to purchase the margin of food necessary for the survival of the members of their households.

The objective experience of the residents of Tudu is that rainfall is unreliable, droughts are inevitable but unforeseen, and death, especially of the young, is a recurrent, unpredictable, and unavoidable tragedy. It makes little sense to a farmer to increase his labor input in subsistence cropping, as all labor directed to crop production may be futile if the rains are too sporadic or insufficient. At the most rudimentary level, then, the people of Tudu experience the world of nature as disordered and physical efforts to order it unavailing. Yet, as I shall detail in the next chapter, the framework of spirit belief is a conceptual prism which first divides, then re-orders the experiences of life and of death in coherent and meaningful ways.

The Historical and Political Context

The region of Tudu is near the northwestern limits of the former Hausa state of Gobir (one of the original Hausa city states) and close to Adar, once a suzerainty of the Sultan of Agades. Since the fifteenth century the area has been successively controlled by the Gobir, Songhai, Kanem, and Sokoto empires, and within the last 100 years by the Kel Gress Tuareg and the French. For a short space of eight years (1898-1906) Tudu was nominally British territory. Both from ethnohistory and from relevant documentary sources, Tudu appears to have escaped a thoroughgoing integration into any of these state-level polities, except for some intermittent vassalage to the Tuareg for the 150 years prior to 1903. Tudu's marginality from the centripetal political forces of the state has continued to the present. During the colonial period (1903-1960), there were no substantial changes made in the way villages related to other polities, save one: where once residents had paid sporadic tribute in kind to various suzerains, during the colonial regime they paid a head tax in cash, collected by the village headman,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Population*</th>
<th>Births**</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-14</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-64</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-69</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-74</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75-79</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-84</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>788</td>
<td>794</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Census date is July 1, 1974

**Births are ordered according to age of mothers. The tabulations of births and deaths are based on the observed experience during calendar year 1974.
### TABLE 3

**MIGRATION OF MALES (15-44 YEARS) FOR SEASONAL EMPLOYMENT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>% of all males of this Age Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1969-70</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970-71</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971-72</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972-73</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973-74</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974-75</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 4

**PARTICIPATION IN SEASONAL EMPLOYMENT, BY LOCATION**

1972-73

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Distance from Tudu</th>
<th>Number of Men Participating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abidjan, Ivory Coast</td>
<td>1420 km.</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagos, Nigeria</td>
<td>910 km.</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niamey, Niger</td>
<td>400 km.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaduna, Niger</td>
<td>425 km</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kano, Nigeria</td>
<td>360 km.</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaura, Nigeria</td>
<td>175 km.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gidan Rumji, Niger</td>
<td>125 km.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangi, Niger</td>
<td>75 km.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Fifteen other locations)</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and forwarded to the administration through his traditional patron, the suzerain of Gobir at Madaoua.

However, during this period Niger went through several political organization: changes, whose effects have begun just recently to make their impact on the village level (v. Faulkingham 1975). Niger is organized into seven administrative departments, each of which is further subdivided into arrondissements; Tudu, in fact, is one of more than 100 villages in the arrondissement of Madaoua. After Niger obtained its political independence from France in 1960, several attempts were made by both government and party (PPN-RDA) to weld rural villages into the nation—in the ideological sense—of Niger. In Tudu, a mud-brick primary school was erected in 1960 and supplemented in 1967 by a new steel-framed structure. The men in the village were urged to vote in local (arrondissement) and national elections, although there was no campaigning by candidates nor discussion of local or national issues. The party cells have not been operative since their inception in 1960. The administrator of the arrondissement, the sub-prefect—notwithstanding the coup d'état in April 1974—has wielded considerable, albeit, remote, power in the area; in fact, his authority from 1960 to 1975, noticeably increased with the consequent decline in the official responsibilities of the traditional chef de canton, the sarki (Cf. Séré de Rivières 1965: 269 ff., Thompson 1966, and Faulkingham 1970: 52-76).

Tudu, in June 1975, contained 1576 residents in a nucleated settlement with extensive cultivated land up to about 6 kilometers in radius surrounding the residential area. About two-thirds of the villagers claim to be Gobirawa—descendants of inhabitants of traditional Gobir—while the remainder are the offspring of refugees from Adar who fled to Tudu during the Tuareg rebellions against the French at the beginning of this century (Séré de Rivières 1965: 224-233). For both groups, Hausa of the Gobir dialect is the only language in use; indeed both Gobirawa and Adarawa in Tudu claim that they are truly Hausa.

Within the village, there are some 109 households grouped into nine spatially distinct clusters (zari'a). The unity of each cluster is based both on a set of clearly articulated residential principles and on a common traditional craft specialty (e.g. smithing, tanning, weaving, and butchering) of the constituent adult males. Statistically and normatively men reside in father's household and import wives from other clusters or other villages. (Of all married men, 89% obtained their wives from other clusters in Tudu, and all the remainder married women who had been born in other villages.) When fathers die, households generally segment but remain adjacent. Not surprisingly, an agnatic principle is often adduced to express the solidarity of the cluster's household heads; but it is clear on analysis that agnation is not rigorously used to define clear descent groups. This may be gleaned from the relatively infrequent occurrence when sister's son or wife's brother joins the cluster when his fortunes—whether agricultural or otherwise—are not going well elsewhere. While he clearly has less prestige and fewer rights than the other adult males in the
cluster, his children assume prestige and rights equal to those of their residential peers. Subsequently their descendants' link to the founder of the cluster are expressed in agnatic terms.

One may also find in a cluster one or a few "client" households whose founders came to the area in the past, and lacking any local kin or affines, they attached themselves as clients to a household head. At the present, no explicit notions of servitude persist between members of "client" households and those in other residences in the cluster, nor on the other hand does any fictive kin link develop between the adults in "client" and "patron" households.

Historically, ostensibly as a consequence of political disputes, clusters have spatially segmented but retain common craft specialties. In five of the nine clusters, smithing is the traditional male occupation, and candidates for succession to the important and powerful office of village headman must be smiths. The present headman, Bubé, commands wide respect and compliance from all quarters. He is the village's only operative link with the national polity; he adjudicates all disputes, collects taxes, sponsors dances, and entertains passers-by.