Chapter 4, The social organization and ritual of sacrifice

Ralph Harold Faulkingham
CHAPTER IV

THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND RITUAL OF SACRIFICE

Overview

Previously (page 17) I indicated that the household head has the obligation to provide the appropriate animals for sacrifice to all the spirits "inherited" by the members born in his household. For those who have been recruited through other means to the household, such as adopted dependents, clients, and wives, this obligation falls on the shoulders of the head of the household where they were born. Now, who are these spirits, and how does one inherit an obligation to sacrifice to them? The people of Tudu distinguish two ways of acquiring obligations to sacrifice to spirits: (1) Those obligations inherited agnatically (wadanda anka yada wajen uba--"those one inherits from the father's direction"), hereafter referred to as father's spirits. Here, the household head ought to propitiate the same spirits that his father did. This is explicitly stated as a cultural norm. (2) All other obligations to sacrifice to spirits are said to be inherited from one's mother, i.e. the spirits that received sacrifices in one's mother's natal household (wadanda anka gada wajen uwa)--or mother's spirits. There is a difference of opinion about the meaning of sacrificing to mother's spirits, and we shall examine this below in conjunction with an analysis of the fissioning of households and clusters. However, all informants agreed that one does not want to sacrifice to mother's spirits, and it is done only after a diviner has designated a misfortune as caused by a particular mother's spirit to whom heretofore the individual had not rendered sacrifices. If this individual is male, his children will inherit an obligation to sacrifice to this spirit, but for them, of course, it will be a father's spirit.

The differential attitudes toward father's and mother's spirit sacrifices can be understood only if we first examine Tudu's residential clusters, their agnatic charters, their cleavages, and their respective relationships to those who actually perform the sacrificing of animals--the matsafa (s. matsafi). The actual sacrifice is performed matter-of-factly in the matsafi's household. Sometimes a few boys watch the event, but in terms of social role performances, this is not different from a butcher slaughtering animals in the market. In the sacrifice, the animal's throat is slit with a household knife, and the blood spurts out over three grapefruit-sized stones. The spirits are said to lick the essence of the blood off the stones. I was told that it is very important that the blood spill over these stones; if it falls directly onto the ground, the spirits will not consume it, and the
sacrifice would be void.

After the animal has stopped its quivering, the matsafi and the young boys resident in his household skin the animal. The matsafi then returns all of the animal except a leg to the one who has brought it to him. The part retained by the matsafi he gives to his wife who cooks it in a sauce as part of the daily household evening meal. For them, the meat is undifferentiated from the meat they buy at market. The bearer of the sacrifice, likewise, sells the animal hide—unless, of course, it was a rooster—to a tanner who treats it just like other hides he acquires from butchers. The remainder of the animal is consumed as meat in the household of the one who provided the sacrificial animal; again, this meat is undifferentiated from that purchased from a butcher.

Residence and Political Cleavages

To understand fully the significance of sacrifice—particularly the distinction between father's spirits and mother's spirits—we must consider the organization of residential clusters in Tudu. As I mentioned in passing in Chapter I, the village is divided into nine such groups. Along with clients and with women who have married into Tudu, these clusters contain the entire village population, and their charters are largely localized there. Each of these clusters is characterized by the public recognition of the principle of agnation as a prime criterion of core member unity, by the male occupational specialization that distinguished each cluster, and by the cluster's matsafi to whom the constituent household heads are said to bring their animals for sacrifice. Five of the nine clusters share both a common male occupation (blacksmithing) and a notion of agnation among the core members. As recently as the late 1920's, these five were just one cluster. It is this group of five residential clusters—the Makiri group or parent cluster—which most strikingly manifests the cleavages which mother's and father's spirits will be seen to represent. The Makiri group's apical ancestor is reckoned to be the founder of the village of Tudu, and thus the headship is the possession of his agnatic descendants. The residents of the remaining four clusters reckon their households' founding in Tudu from refugees who settled there as clients to members of what was the Makiri cluster. Yet today, I find no evidence that any hierarchy persists between households from the original patron-client relationship. The rules for succession to the village headship are the following: a candidate must be able to reckon patrilineal descent from the founder of the Makiri cluster and must demonstrate to the suzerain (sarki) that a majority of the villagers support his elevation to the office. Beyond these, the rules of succession are imprecise, indicating only preferences: the incumbent's sons according to birth order.

While my informants suggest that these rules were followed in
the past, they were put aside in 1926 when a French official appointed to the post the third eldest son (Kaka) of an aging headman (Jimrau), having wrung an endorsement for his precipitous action from the sarki at Madaoua. The competition for succession to the headship that this intrusion stimulated led to major political crises in Tudu in 1931 and 1958 and a segmenting of the parent cluster into its present five units. In the first crisis, Naruwa (see Figure 2) argued with the sarki that the French official's error should be rectified by the ouster of Kaka and by placing the headship in his own (i.e. Naruwa's) hands. In the second case, Alu made an ill-fated attempt to convince his fellow villagers that he should succeed Kaka rather than Nunu, as his father, Mai Waké, the eldest son of Jimrau, had been by-passed in the succession; both attempts failed.

For these two competitions, all the candidates had sought to insure that a majority of the villagers would support their claims to control the office of headship. Among their means of generating such support, each sought to ally various Makiri households to his cause by arranging patrilineal parallel cousin marriages. This is reflected in the census data: in 1968, 28% of all marriages by adult males of the Makiri parent cluster (N=145) were between them and their parallel cousins, while for other married males in Tudu, this ratio was 10% (N=109). Further, marriages were specifically arranged between Makiri daughters and non-Makiri sons, and the requisite bridewealth was either very low or periodically postponed as an exchange for support from the agnates of the Makiri daughters' husbands. In light of this competition then, it is quite understandable that Kaka would have asserted that all members of the Makiri cluster supported his control of the village headship; it was in his own interests to maintain and reinforce the solidarity of the parent Makiri cluster and the broad support he enjoyed in Tudu at large. On the other hand, the competitors of Kaka, Naruwa and later Alu advanced their interests either by identifying Kaka and his core supporters as but one segment of the parent cluster or by dissociating their residential areas and supporters from those backing Kaka. Yet an explicit and direct challenge to the solidarity of the Makiri parent cluster by any contestant for the headship likely would be politically counterproductive.

Analysis

Now, what have these facts of political competition and of cluster segmentation to do with rituals of sacrifice? I would argue that the commencing of rendering sacrifices to the spirits represents at a most fundamental level a declaration of a segment's independence from the parent cluster, without explicitly impugning parent cluster solidarity. And there is no hint of political intrigue to accomplish this fissioning; rather, it appears that the village's diviners precipitate the fissioning process when they diagnose misfortunes as having been caused by mother's spirits. While the diviners are acutely sensitive to social tensions,
MEMBERS OF THE MAKIRI CLUSTER MENTIONED IN THE TEXT
Time I

Here Ego (F) sends to the matsafi (B) animals for the same spirits that (C) had propitiated when he was alive. This is the cultural norm (father's spirits).

Time II

A diviner determines that a particular spirit plaguing (F) or one of his co-residents has come from (D). (F) asks his younger brother (E) to propitiate this spirit inherited from (D). This is a propitiation of mother's spirits. (F) still sends some animals to (B) for sacrifice.

Time III

(H) takes animals for sacrifice to (E), and is reckoned to be propitiating father's spirits, even though (F) regarded some of them as mother's spirits.

*...... indicates an unspecified agnatic link.

FIGURE 3
THE DEVELOPMENTAL CYCLE OF SPIRIT PROPITIATION
BY SACRIFICE
they are not explicitly aware of the implications of cluster segmentation that their divinations entail.

There are some 34 matsafa or sacrificers in Tudu, 15 of whom slaughter only animals brought to them to propitiate father's spirits; 16 sacrifice to the mother's spirits and the remaining three sacrifice in both "directions." But at the same time there is a process whereby mother's spirits in one generation become father's in the next (see Figure 3). This process has its inception when the agnatically related adult males in a household receive a divination that a series of misfortunes they have experienced is the result of their failure to propitiate some of their mother's spirits. The youngest adult male will then assume the role of household matsafi for the mother's spirits. The household may continue to take sacrificial animals to another matsafi to propitiate the father's spirits. However, villagers rarely sacrifice to any spirit until a misfortune is reckoned by divination to warrant such propitiation. Most divinations are statements that the one seeking the divination should propitiate his father's spirits. Yet once a household has begun propitiating mother's spirits, there is a measurable decline in the regularity with which it sends sacrifices to the father's matsafi. As the household, through time, segments into joint and then associated but independent households, the next generation of sons bears the responsibility as heads of these domestic units to provide and to convey to the appropriate matsafi the sacrificial animals. For them, this would remain the matsafi of the previous generation, until he is too old, when the duty then falls to his eldest son. These sacrifices then are reckoned to be propitiations to father's spirits.

What this process does, I believe, is to facilitate the actual fissioning of a cluster of households into segments while the norm of cluster solidarity remains unaffected. No one can be accused of deliberately subverting cluster unity; indeed it is the spirits who either demand or excuse propitiation who are reckoned to be the real causes of segmentation. Such a conclusion is warranted when we note the different opinions of Kaka and of others' descendants, concerning the meaning of sacrifice to mother's spirits. Kaka asserts that all members of the Makiri parent cluster ought to take their animals to Boy (see Figure 2): "those who sacrifice in their own households or take animals to other matsafa might become sorcerers (mayu)." Gadajé told me that his father Dallé used to take his sacrifices to Boy, but after several divinations began sacrificing to his mother's spirits. Dallé's classificatory eldest son, Dan Bakwai, now continues this matsafi role, but, of course, for him he is sacrificing to his father's spirits. Gadajé regarded the switch away from Boy, the propitiation of mother's spirits, then their transformation over a generation into father's spirits as strictly a matter of the spirits. My suggesting both to Kaka and to Gadajé that Dallé's "defection" from Boy might have been based on political rather than on spiritual factors generated from both quarters incredulous expressions about my own ignorance of spiritual matters.
There are other forces aside from political competitions that worked to segment clusters. The most obvious has been population pressure; as the available space to construct new households decreased and the distance that the farmers had to walk to their farms has increased, segments of the village moved a kilometer or two away from Tudu. Yet for the present, this process was stopped in 1966 by the sub-prefect who, for ease in administering the area, ordered the physical reunification of satellite hamlets with their parent villages.

However, I believe it is clear from these data that whatever ecological conditions may exist for cluster segmentation, the shared ideas about spirit propitiation at once provide a charter for the actual segmentation of clusters without assigning such splits to processes of political competition. It is the spirits, ultimately, who divide clusters, not people.