



University of
Massachusetts
Amherst

Chapter 6, An analysis of religious rituals and beliefs in Tudu

Item Type	article;article
Authors	Faulkingham, Ralph Harold
Download date	2026-03-11 16:12:07
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14394/2419

CHAPTER VI

AN ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS RITUALS AND BELIEFS IN TUDI

I have deliberately limited the discussion of Hausa cosmology to the two aspects of the community's religious life: belief and ritual. Even so, we have only scratched the surface of the totality of the Hausa symbol system, and thus a thoroughgoing structural analysis seems methodologically inappropriate. However, there are several themes that thread the labyrinth of Hausa religious belief, and when we consider the fleshing out of these beliefs in the dynamic language of ritual, these themes assume much sharper focus.

Whereas in the analysis of beliefs, it was apparent that a broad spectrum of spirits existed, from the divine to the quasi-human, the kinds of rituals performed in Tudu clearly amplify those findings. It is those spirits reckoned to be closest to humanity who occupy nearly the totality of Hausa religious concern. Allah, the prophets, the mala'iku, and the rafani have little relevance in ritual performances.

A theme repeated in several ritual seances is that order, in terms of social well-being and of individual psychophysiological health is obtainable through the careful maintenance of harmony with the spirits. Disorder, then, is often viewed as a function of human (mainly individual) failures to maintain this harmony. Yet there are other sources of disorder, and each disorder has a prescribed formula to reassert the harmonious relationship. Throughout, it is clear that the maintenance and/or restoration of order comes at a high price, either through the sacrifice of valuable animals, or through human suffering and its apotheosis.

This last point is clearly evidenced when we examine three important religious statuses--diviner, mushé devotee, and bori adept. Here we find that the prime criterion for admission to these statuses is severe physical suffering. For the diviner, it seems that he must experience the throes of suffering before he can guide others through it. For the mushé devotee who will go on to become a "soldier" to guard the overall spiritual well-being of the community, again a severe illness is the sine qua non criterion for admission to the 'yam mushé. Finally, the bori "child," to obtain personal relief of suffering must join the association of bori devotees. Here is a striking parallel to Ndembu notions of affliction, "...the spirit which has been persecuting him is converted into a helpful tutelary. When a man ceases to have, then he can begin to be, the ritual idiom seems to

suggest" (Turner 1968:22). For each status then, physical affliction is apotheosized, and the individual assumes a role in the development of harmony in society writ large, i.e. of the community of humanity and of spirits.

The diviner in his performance of divination rituals is a source in the community for innovation and adaptation of religious ideas within a generally agreed upon framework. Given the fact that human suffering is constantly pressing the bonds of control, the diviners develop the tragic solutions of determining the existence of heretofore unknown spirits and of still greater oblatory requirements.

At the same time that divination provides answers to these essentially metaphysical questions, the diviner's social role is fraught with power and danger (v. Douglas 1966:114-136). It is the diviner who through his acuity in assessing the undercurrents of social tension diagnoses a case of sorcery. Clearly, both he and his role acquire legitimacy when an unpopular fellow turns out to have been generally suspected of sorcery all along. Yet, the diviner risks his own monetary income and the respect of his trade if he too frequently makes a socially unacceptable determination of sorcery and finds himself regarded as a charlatan or an opportunist.

In this connection, sorcery belief can at one level of analysis be viewed as providing people with strong reason to be gregarious and to avoid quarrels. One is hesitant to be silent, alone, or bickering, lest he be accused or being a sorcerer. Further, people are reticent to exacerbate quarrels, for they may become ensorcelled themselves. While sorcery beliefs have these manifest social control functions, the villagers likely pay a high psychological price, since hostile emotions are relentlessly suppressed.

In looking at the rituals of sacrifice, we see the conceptual unity of obligation and well-being. When a diviner determines that a person's malady has been caused by failure to perform the proper obligations to the spirits, it is that individual's household head who through tapping the collective wealth of the entire household provides the propitiatory sacrifice through a kinsman, the matsafi. The proper performance of such social roles is thought to lead directly to individual well-being and social prosperity.

The father's and mother's spirit distinction suggests still another theme. Sacrifices made to father's spirits connote order, obligation, and hierarchy, whereas mother's spirit obligations imply the reverse. It is the wandering spirit, one with neither home nor kin--one out of order, out of hierarchy, out of obligation--who is classified as a mother's spirit. It is the younger brother rather than the older one who assumes the role of matsafi for the mother's spirits--and this in a society where the norm of role succession stresses age and agnation. Yet the two "directions" of sacrifice are not entirely contrastive, for it is the numberless mother's spirits who supply the metaphysical answers to the question of why misfortune

when the father's spirits have been propitiated.

In the role of spirit possession, both of the 'yam bori and of the 'yam mushé, the central message of the unity of society in human and spirit terms is conveyed, for here is public evidence--not merely a dramatization--of the spirit's presence and activity in and among humanity. In the spirit possession dances, there is a dialectic of role performances. Humans become transformed into spirits and vice versa. This is expressed in a Hausa metaphor as a rider mounting a horse; but one can with equal accuracy say the bori spirit mounts the adept or the adept mounts the bori spirit.

In the rituals and organization of the 'yam mushé and the 'yam bori, the divisions which customarily separate people are cross-cut and new solidarities are emphasized. To quote Victor Turner,

To complete a ritual ... is to overcome cleavages. It is collective man's conquest of himself. For in pursuit of personal and factional ends, men are divided, and in loyalty to their subgroups, men are set at odds, but before what they conceive to be the eternal or eternally recurrent, these divisions and animosities are annihilated (1968:269-270).

While on the whole they are similar, there is one major feature which distinguishes the 'yam mushé ritual from that of the 'yam bori, and that is the publicly acknowledged role which the 'yam mushé have to protect the entire community (both humans and their "cousins") from the caprice of these very same spirits. The 'yam bori are not accorded such a role, nor is their praise dancing reckoned to have any social efficacy.

Conclusion

In this essay I have traced in some detail the religious beliefs and ritual of the residents of Tudu, and in the process have indicated some of the major areas of articulation between this religious system and the social organization of the village. In conclusion, I would like to make explicit some of the ethnographic, methodological, and conceptual implications that thread my discussion.

As an ethnographic and general methodological note, I believe that the data that have been elucidated here, when compared with descriptions and analyses of Hausaphone communities and populations elsewhere, yield the conclusion that Hausaland cannot easily, if at all, be characterized as socially and culturally homogeneous. While the peoples of Hausaland are united by a common language and some common customs, they have experienced different economic and political pressures and have adapted to their natural environments in manifold ways. Consequently, we should not expect similar social and cultural features;

yet the ethnographic literature is filled with descriptions and analyses of the Hausa society and culture. All too often, of course, this has meant that the urbanized, Muslim Hausa is held to be the Hausa standard, whether understood in a linguistic, cultural, or social sense, while those in the rural areas are in some ways portrayed as non-standard, and thus an unnecessary domain for the description and analysis of "true" Hausa people. While the making of scientifically useful generalizations about the social life of people is the stock in trade of the anthropologist, this goal is hardly advanced when we assume social and cultural features to parallel linguistic isographs. I believe we should begin with an assumption of cultural and social heterogeneity in the Hausaphone zone, and then as more studies from the several Hausa-speaking areas of west Africa (e.g. Cohen 1969 and Hill 1972) are undertaken, we shall be in a position both to provide an adequate data base to generalize about what "Hausa" means and to suggest the lines of inquiry to such ethnological problems as how diffusion, innovation, and adaptation have been occurring in this area.

As a matter of both concept and method in social anthropology, it should be stressed that the religious life of a community cannot be adequately understood or analyzed apart from a concurrent examination of its social organization. The contrastive conceptions of mother's and father's spirits, especially the ambiguous nature of the first category, becomes partially intelligible when we examine the political and demographic process of cluster fissioning. Further, the aljanu and mushé spirits and their place in the religious life of Tudu is clear when we analyze the organization and recruitment of their devotees. Sorcery likewise can be understood both as providing an epistemological framework for explaining misfortunes--with its attendant psychological costs--and as an institution of social control.

Finally, in the analysis of the religious itself, the fundamental concerns of the people of Tudu emerge. And in those concerns--or religious themes--can be seen the complexity of conceptual and social relationships as well as a testimony to the psychic unity of mankind; the relentless quest to manage the unpredictable and to obviate misfortune.