

DAHOMEAN MARRIAGE: A REVALUATION

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WE are fortunate in possessing enough good ethnographic material on Dahomey to attempt a reassessment in the light of later theoretical developments of the very interesting types of marriage reported there.

Analysis shows that three criteria are involved in the thirteen 'types' of marriage as given by Herskovits's Dahomean informants:¹ (1) the method of arranging the marriage, including courtship and payment of the bride-wealth; (2) the status of the children; and (3) the relationship between man and wife—a constant which is, however, influenced by the distribution of rights and duties in regard to the children. The nature of the social groups concerned in the configuration of rights and duties connected with marriage is a point of great importance which does not appear in connexion with Herskovits's analysis of marriage; he divides these 'types' into a matrilineal and a patrilineal class on the basis of the status of the children. The starting-point of the following analysis is the transfer or non-transfer of *puissance*, or jural authority, through marriage—a criterion emphasized by Le Hérissé.²

MARRIAGE WITH TRANSFER OF JURAL AUTHORITY

There are, in the 'types' of marriage accompanied by a transfer of jural authority over the woman and her potential children, one variable—the preliminaries to marriage, courtship and the method of paying bride-wealth—and three constants: the nature of the marital relationship, the nature of the corporate groups involved, i.e. lineages,³ and the status of the children. The marriage is marked by the payment of the bride-wealth, which is in two portions: gifts and services usually directed towards the parents of the girl, which may or may not be given, and the ritual 'payment' made to the head of the girl's lineage, which must be given if the marriage is to be accompanied by a transfer of jural authority over the woman and her children.⁴

In 'money with woman' marriage⁵ the man selected as fiancé by the girl's father, accompanied by members of his lineage, calls on the girl's family. The customary gifts and services, the ritual payment, and the notification of the ancestors follow. Finally, the man and two men and two women of his lineage call for his wife. After a display of gifts from the bride, her parents, and the groom, an old woman of the girl's lineage blesses her in the name of her ancestors. The bride spends the first night at her husband's house with his mother or with his first wife. Though she may be rejected if, on the following evening, she should prove not to have been a virgin, generally she is forced instead to give the name of her seducer, who will be fined

¹ Herskovits, M. J., *Dahomey, An Ancient West African Kingdom*, 1938, i, 301-2.

² Le Hérissé, *L'Ancien Royaume du Dahomey*, 1911. I shall translate *puissance* as 'jural authority' rather than *potestas* to avoid confusion with the implications of the latter term in Roman Law.

³ I shall refer to Herskovits's term 'sib' as 'line-

age', and to the 'extended family' and the 'compound' as segments of the lineage. For definitions: Herskovits, 1938, i, pp. 137 ff.; Evans-Pritchard, E. E., *The Nuer*, 1940, pp. 6-7.

⁴ For full details: Le Hérissé, 1911, pp. 203-8; Herskovits, 1938, i, 303-8.

⁵ *Ibid.* i, 305-9; 335-7.

for adultery. The next morning the husband publicly and ceremonially gives his new wife the name by which she will thenceforth be known.¹

Another 'type', 'child ask ask', differs only in that it is the future husband who initiates courtship. If the girl should already be betrothed and her father favours the second suitor, it is the latter who repays the original fiancé.²

A third 'type', 'woman give back woman',³ brings out a very important aspect of the mechanism of the transfer of jural authority. If the betrothed girl elopes with another man, she and her seducer are brought by her parents before the chief.⁴ The chief requires the original fiancé to calculate the amount he expended in gifts and services. By repaying this sum, the seducer acquires jural authority over the girl and obtains her as his wife, for the lineage (here that of the original fiancé) which has acquired jural authority over a woman can retransfer it (here to the seducer's lineage). The seducer cannot make the payments to the girl's own lineage, which no longer holds the rights to be transferred. The girl's lineage retains only the apparently inalienable right to exercise the ritual power of her own ancestors over her. This right is exercised as a coercive measure in inter-lineage disputes. Thus in such a crisis, the head of the fiancé's lineage could recall in the name of their founding ancestor all the daughters of his lineage who had married men of the eloping girl's lineage. The girl's lineage could similarly recall all the daughters of that lineage who had married men of the seducer's lineage, and by that means attempt to ensure that the seducer is forthcoming with the girl, and if possible, with the bride-wealth.⁵

In exchange marriage ('wife by exchange', 'give us we give you') two men each take an eligible sister or daughter of the other as wife. The usual services are omitted, as they would cancel each other out, but in both cases the ritual payments are made and the ancestors are notified:⁶ both women are under the jural authority of their husbands' lineages. If one of them should leave her husband, 'this man will divorce his sister or daughter from the other in retaliation'—a 'retaliation' common whenever relations between lineages are strained.⁷

Exchange marriage may accompany cross-cousin marriage—especially when palm-trees are at stake. By the rules of inheritance for this very valuable portion of Dahomean wealth, the palm-trees planted by a man are on his death held in trust as 'lineage' property by his two oldest sons. On their death, the trees are divided equally between their surviving siblings. The trees inherited by a sister may be given by her to one of her daughters. To avoid the loss of these trees, this daughter is married to one of her mother's brother's sons. The son of this cross-cousin marriage will inherit the palm-trees; he is also the grandson of the man who planted them. However, the same problem will arise in the next generation, if the girl given in exchange should become heir to any palm-trees. Although it is difficult to see why

¹ In Dahomey a name, generally allusive, is given at the assumption of every new status. Herskovits, 1938, I, 263.

² Ibid. I, 311-13. If such repayment is necessary, the marriage becomes one of the 'woman give back woman' type, p. 312.

³ Ibid. I, 310-11.

⁴ The village or quarter chief, who serves in this case primarily as witness. Ibid. I, 7-16 and *passim*.

⁵ If he does not do so, the girl may be expelled from her lineage, especially if the original marriage

had been arranged to ease tense relations between the two lineages and the consequences of her elopement were serious. Ibid. I, 311.

⁶ Ibid. I, 215.

⁷ Despite Herskovits's use of the term 'divorce', there is under such circumstances no permanent dissolution of the marriage and the return of the bride-wealth is not an issue. This is implicit in Herskovits, I, 310, 349.

exchange marriage should be the preferred system in this connexion,¹ exchange marriage might be favoured to strengthen the marriage ties between two lineages. Cross-cousin marriage also, though nowhere singled out as a 'type', seems a favoured form of Dahomean marriage both because of its economic advantages and the stated desire to bring a woman's children's children back into the lineage.²

If the father provides the bride-wealth ('father my wife'),³ the son may not set up an independent household until the debt is repaid.⁴ In any case, the wife is under the direct jural authority of her husband only when he is at least the head of a minimal lineage.

If a man's best friend provides the bride-wealth, the resulting complex of events is called 'stomach empty' marriage.⁵ Throughout, the husband has jural authority and responsibility and the friend, a financial obligation: thus on the birth of a child, the husband consults the diviner and performs the sacrifice; the friend provides the necessary materials. The debt is cancelled when the husband gives his friend (as in exchange marriage) a daughter as wife. If there are only sons, or if the daughter dies before she is of marriageable age,⁶ the heir of the husband, as soon as possible, gives a girl from his compound to the heir of the best friend. The obligation is then cancelled. If that girl eloped, the mechanism of recalling wives described above was brought into play by the two lineages concerned. If the seducer refused to give her up, his lineage threatened to take away his wives, his fields, and his property. The girl was not to be given either to her original fiancé or to her seducer⁷ but to some man not affiliated with any of the three lineages involved. The friend's son was given the most eligible girl in his fiancé's lineage as wife; he had to accept her and notify the head of his lineage of the fact. Shortly thereafter, the wives recalled to their natal lineages were allowed to return to their husbands.

The jural and ritual aspects of the resulting marriage are unaffected (1) whether the girl's father initiated the proposal ('money with woman'), or the proposal first came from the suitor ('child ask ask'); (2) whether the suitor, his father ('father my wife'), or his best friend ('stomach empty') paid the bride-wealth; (3) whether the bride-wealth was repaid by a second suitor to the first ('woman give back woman')—the adjustments necessary under such circumstances are initiated by the action of the lineage units, and not by the three individuals most directly concerned; (4) or whether only the ritual payments are made in the case of a simple exchange of women ('give us we give you' or 'wife by exchange') or a marriage with the daughter or son's daughter which repays financial aid for the mother's bride-wealth.⁸

Whenever the ritual payments marking the transfer of jural authority have been made, the same constellation of rights and duties results:

1. There is a differential distribution of ritual authority over the wife. She remains under the power of her own ancestors: therefore the head of her natal lineage may

¹ Herskovits associates the two explicitly. *Ibid.* i. 93.

² Cf. the bride's blessing. *Ibid.* i. 307.

³ *Ibid.* i. 313.

⁴ *Ibid.* i. 138-42.

⁵ *Ibid.* i. 313-16.

⁶ In no other case is the bride-wealth returnable if the girl dies before consummation of the marriage. Le Hérisse, 1911, p. 207. Here, however, it is a matter of a heritable debt.

⁷ Both offenders might be expelled from their lineages and cut off from their ancestors to become wanderers in Dahomey. The breach of obligation here is much more serious than in an ordinary elopement. Herskovits, 1938, i. 314.

⁸ A creditor might claim a female pawn as wife if she were not redeemed in a reasonable time; the debt cancelled the bride-wealth. *Ibid.* i. 83. The ritual payments are not mentioned.

recall her in their name. However, as wife and mother, she falls under the ritual as well as the jural authority of her husband's lineage: she must observe the prohibitions of his lineage for pregnant woman;¹ it is to his ancestors that she must confess her adultery.² Although she will be an ancestress of her husband's lineage, by whom she must be buried, her own ancestors are those of her natal lineage: she is buried just outside the walls of her husband's compound.³

2. The wife must be provided with food and a house. What she earns or inherits herself is her personal property; she may become independently wealthy.

3. The wife may not be divorced for barrenness.⁴ The ritual 'payment' merely sealed the transfer of jural authority over her children when and if born; it did not guarantee her fertility.

4. The husband is the father of his wife's children. An impotent man tries to arrange that his wife shall have children by a member of his lineage, preferably one of his own brothers.⁵ If, in case of adultery, the husband demands the return of the bride-wealth, he forfeits all rights over mother and child. Otherwise, all her children are considered children of the husband, 'auquel l'enfant adultérin appartenait au même titre que les siens propres'.⁶

5. The children have jural and ritual status in the lineage which has jural authority over the mother at the time of their birth—in all these cases the lineage of the *pater*.⁷ They are full heirs to the *pater* and to any lineage office for which they possess the requisite age and capabilities.

6. If the wife gave grounds for divorce, the bride-wealth was returnable. If the husband offended the wife's lineage, she had to return but her children remained under the jural authority of the husband's lineage.⁸ If the wife was personally dissatisfied with her husband, the head of his lineage had the right to give her to another member of the lineage as wife.⁹

7. A widow is inherited by a member of her husband's lineage, a brother or a son by another marriage.¹⁰

It is clear from this description that jural authority over a woman ultimately vests in the husband's lineage; on the dissolution of her marriage, as a result of the death or personal default of her husband, she still remains under the jural authority of his lineage. Of the various rights held in her, the rights over the children she may bear are the most jealously guarded: these are retained even if she should insist on living with a man of another lineage in the case of her husband's death or impotence.¹¹ Because of this transfer of jural rights over a woman's potential children, a child in

¹ Herskovits, 1938, i, 162.

² Herskovits, M. J., 'Outline of Dahomean Religious Belief', *Memoirs of the A.A.A.*, No. 41, 1933, p. 28.

³ Le Hérisse, 1911, p. 205; Herskovits, 1938, i, 335.

⁴ *Ibid.* i, 337.

⁵ Le Hérisse, 1911, p. 208; Herskovits, 1938, i, 342.

⁶ Le Hérisse, 1911, p. 77.

⁷ For the use of *pater*, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, 'Social Organization of Australian Tribes', *Oceanic*, i, 1930-1, p. 42; E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Some Aspects of Marriage and the Family among the Nuer*, Rhodes-Livingstone Papers, No. 11, 1945.

⁸ Le Hérisse, 1911, pp. 204-5. Such offences are:

(1) grave injuries to her parents; (2) sexual relations of her husband with her sister or with a wife under the jural authority of her father, brother, or father's brother; (3) failure of her husband to participate in certain funeral ceremonies of her close relatives. Her lineage could then initiate divorce. Herskovits, 1938, i, 346.

⁹ Le Hérisse, 1911, pp. 204-5.

¹⁰ The inheritance of widows, 'dead man woman' marriage, appears in the class of marriages in which the children stay with the mother. Herskovits, 1938, i, 302. It is more correct to say that the dead husband's lineage retains jural authority over his widow and children.

¹¹ Le Hérisse, 1911, p. 204.

Dahomey falls under the same jural authority as did its mother at the time of its birth. The child has rights to the titles, lands, properties, and occupations which may vest in the lineage, by virtue of his status by birth in the lineage, i.e. by virtue of the fact that he is under the jural authority of that lineage. Nowhere, in a true lineage system, do two lineages have identical jural rights in one person; a man has jural rights only in that lineage which has jural rights in him. In Dahomey the transfer of these jural rights and duties as to a woman's children from one lineage to another may accompany her marriage and is marked by the ritual 'payments'. Except in her roles as wife and mother, however, a woman remains under the ritual authority of the ancestors of her natal lineage. This right is exercised when a woman's lineage wishes to bring pressure to bear on her husband's lineage. Also, the fact that a woman's lineage may, if offended by the husband or his lineage, sue for her divorce in court, is another means of bringing pressure: such a divorce case may be used as a threat to speed the collection of an outstanding debt.¹ Hence the importance of maintaining marriage ties between lineages, as by exchange marriage. In addition, then, to sealing a marriage between two individuals, with all that this implies in regard to sexual, domestic, and economic rights and duties, the full payment of the bride-wealth, with the ritual portion as the critical element, is also a mechanism for the transfer of jural authority over a woman and the children she may bear from one lineage to another; and, secondly, owing to the differential distribution of rights in the woman, the marriage is also an important mechanism for the regulation of inter-lineage relations.

MARRIAGE WITHOUT TRANSFER OF JURAL AUTHORITY

A consideration of two 'types' of marriage ('child stay father house' and 'prince child child') in which no transfer of jural authority over the children a woman may bear takes place, necessitates the division of the concept of 'jural authority' into rights over a woman as wife, the granting of which constitutes marriage, and rights over a woman as to her children.² This distinction is clearly articulated in Dahomean ritual and both illuminates and is confirmed by many aspects of Dahomean custom and social organization.

'Child stay father house' marriage occurs when a lineage, faced by a shortage of male heirs, seeks to increase its strength. The head of the lineage segment tells one of his daughters or brother's daughters to choose a husband. This man is presented to the household and the couple is blessed in the name of the girl's ancestors. The man furnishes all the bride-wealth, with one exception: he is expressly forbidden to give the ritual payments which would bring 'spiritual sanction from the ancestral founder for the children to belong to the father's sib'.³ The husband builds his wife a house in her father's compound; he contributes to the support of his wife and children. There exists between husband and wife a well-articulated and socially defined body of sexual, domestic, and economic, i.e. marital, rights and duties.

¹ Herskovits, 1938, i. 349.

² For the general importance of analysing the rights which together define a person's jural position, I am indebted to Radcliffe-Brown, 'Patrilineal and Matrilineal Succession', *Iowa Law Review*, xx, No. 2, 1935.

³ Herskovits, 1938, i. 346. Since the corollary of this statement—where the ritual payments are not

given, the children do not 'belong to the father's sib'—is supported by other evidence, I have used this assumption. However, Herskovits also states exactly the opposite (*ibid.* i. 356, 302): there can be little doubt that a child is in some special relation to the lineages of both parents, irrespective of which lineage has jural authority over him.

The mother's lineage is under a moral, but not legal, obligation to abandon its original rights over some of the children in favour of their father.¹ A son thus sent to his father cannot inherit from that father, whose heirs are those sons over whom he has jural authority by virtue of having given the ritual payments for their mother. A daughter sent to her father may be married with transfer of jural authority over herself and her children, whereas the daughters retained by the mother's lineage must marry as did their mother.² It is difficult to explain this variation in the daughters' marriages in terms of receipt of bride-wealth.

To assume that the reason for this variation lies in the possibility of giving the bride-wealth to the girl's father and his ancestors in one case, and its impossibility in the other, is to ignore the statement that 'spiritual sanction for the children to belong to the father's sib' is *not* given and that therefore the father's lineage could not receive the ritual payments, which must be presented to those ancestors who can spiritually sanction the transfer of jural authority. The marriage of a daughter retained by her mother's family must be regarded as a preferred type (discussed later) rather than a ritual dilemma. The children do not *ipso facto* have full status in their father's lineage; he has control of the daughters sent to him by virtue of a later transfer of rights over those individual children and not by default of such rights being vested in the mother's lineage. One must assume that the children not sent to the father have full jural and ritual status in the mother's lineage. Since the mother was specifically retained to provide her lineage with male heirs, one assumes that her sons are eligible to headship of that lineage segment at least. An important part of that office consists in the ritual duties connected with ancestor worship; the performance of these duties usually indicates full jural and ritual status in the lineage. It would rather seem to be the sons sent to the father who suffer jural disabilities.³

'Child stay father house' marriage shows a differential distribution of authority over a woman and her children. It has become evident that the full bride-wealth marks the transfer of ritual and jural authority over a woman as wife and mother: that is, there are transferred rights in a woman as wife, *uxor*, and as mother, *genetrix*, i.e. rights in her children once born are held by virtue of holding rights *in genetrixem*.⁴ In the first class of marriages discussed, these rights were transferred concomitantly to the husband, with the husband's lineage holding the over-right of retransfer on the death or default of the active holder. Thus on the husband's death, rights *in uxorem* are transferred to another individual, whereas rights *in genetrixem* are retained by the lineage, in which they ultimately vest. In 'child stay father house' marriage and in the marriage of women of the royal lineage ('prince child child') rights in a woman as wife, *uxor*, are transferred; rights in her as *genetrix* are retained. The transfer of rights *in uxorem* is 'paid for'; the marriage is celebrated and is a socially recognized

¹ Herskovits, 1938, I, 323. Of five or six children, two are sent to the father; of four, only one goes to the father. Also Le Hérisse, 1911, p. 210.

² Herskovits, 1938, I, 324.

³ *Ibid.*, I, 325. Dahomean marriage prohibitions corroborate this view: a man may not marry the daughter of a brother by a wife whom he may inherit, i.e. one for whom the ritual payments have been made; conversely, if he may not inherit his brother's widow, i.e. if she does not fall under the jural

authority of her dead husband's lineage, he may marry her daughter. Marriage prohibitions and widow inheritance are compatible with the distribution of jural authority and jural status. (However, in the royal lineage half-brother and sister may marry.) Le Hérisse, 1911, pp. 211-12.

⁴ I have coined the phrases 'rights *in uxorem*' and 'rights *in genetrixem*' both for convenience and to indicate that I am discussing both rights which may be held in the woman.

institution. The transfer of rights *in uxorem* constitutes marriage. Divorce is necessary to break the arrangement, though always somewhat easier where rights *in genetricem* are not also involved.

Rights *in genetricem* are held in the woman in reference to the children she may bear. If the husband made the ritual payments, he holds rights *in genetricem* in his wife, whether or not she is barren. Rights *in genetricem* in the mother give original jural and ritual authority over her children, once born. But rights in a child once born may be retained or transferred—a child may be pawned, adopted or married out—without prejudice to the rights held in its mother or its siblings.

In 'child stay father house' marriage, rights *in uxorem* were transferred to the husband; rights *in genetricem* in that same woman were not transferred, but were specifically retained by the original holder, here the head of the woman's lineage segment. The holder of rights *in genetricem* has original jural authority over the children, which can later be transferred without prejudice to the rights *in genetricem* in their mother or siblings. The children sent to the father thus remain under the jural and ritual authority of the mother's lineage and have jural status in the father's lineage only if the mother's lineage formally renounces its rights over them.¹ Thus a Dahomean child has jural and ritual rights and status in that lineage which held rights *in genetricem* in the mother at the time of its birth. This may or may not be the lineage of its socially recognized father,² i.e. the man who held rights *in uxorem* in the mother. Furthermore, whether or not these rights are held concomitantly in Dahomey is apparently determined by the operation of economic and political factors.

The royal lineage never transfers rights in a woman as *genetrix*, either acquired as in a wife, by payment of the ritual portions of the bride-wealth, or original as in the case of daughters of that lineage. Rights *in uxorem* are freely given, often for political purposes. In fact, the royal marriages represent special adaptations of marriage within a patrilineal descent system to other principles of the social structure.

Marriage with acquisition of rights *in genetricem* cannot occur between members of the same lineage: the ritual payments must be displayed to the ancestors of the two lineages. If a man or a woman of the royal lineage wishes to hold rights *in genetricem* in a wife, that wife must come from one of the commoner lineages. Since the heir to an office or title which runs in the male line from eldest son to eldest son, barring personal incompetents, must be the son of a woman whose husband held rights *in genetricem* in her, the kingship thus goes to the son of the King and a commoner wife. Since rights *in genetricem* are not transferred when a woman of the royal lineage is involved, the children of a princess have full jural and ritual status only

¹ 'Les enfants nés d'union libre ou de toute autre union qui les place sous la puissance maternelle ne peuvent hériter de leur père, à moins que la famille de leur mère n'ait formellement renoncé à ses droits sur eux.' Le Héritier, 1911, p. 232.

² In Evans-Pritchard's discussion of Nuer marriage *pater* refers either to cases in which both rights *in uxorem* and rights *in genetricem* are held concomitantly, or to the holder of rights *in genetricem* where they are not held concomitantly (op. cit. *passim*). In Dahomey rights *in genetricem* may be vested in an

office, title or estate as well as a lineage; it is difficult to reify these as *pater*. In Ashanti marriage as discussed by M. Fortes ('Kinship and Marriage among the Ashanti', *Kinship and Marriage in Africa*, in press), the term *pater* refers to the socially recognized father, the mother's husband. In Dahomey also the socially recognized father of the child is the mother's husband, i.e. the man who held rights *in uxorem* in the mother at the time of the child's birth. The distribution of rights *in genetricem* does not affect this status.

in the royal lineage.¹ However, women of the royal lineage were married off by the King to political favourites, e.g. chiefs, officials, and soldiers ('prince child child'). The formal transfer of rights *in nocorem* and the retention of rights *in genetricem* are ritually expressed in the formula pronounced to the husband at the wedding: 'You did not give the gifts that are customarily required of husbands. You did not perform the *xoggbé* [the ritual payments]. Therefore know that you have no rights over this girl. She is your wife and you are her husband, but the children born of your mating will be members of the royal family. Yours is not the right to ask of a diviner the name of the ancestral soul from which the soul of your children derives, for their souls are of the royal ancestors. You must not take her to your *tolwiyé* [lineage founding ancestor] to tell him you have made this marriage, for your *tolwiyé* has no rights over this girl. . . .'²

Such a formula is, probably, applicable in all cases in which the ritual payments are not made, and hence the children, being under the ritual authority of the mother's ancestors, are fully eligible for lineage office with its ritual duties connected with ancestor worship.³ One cannot speak here of conflicting theories of descent. In a matrilineal system jural authority over a woman's children cannot be acquired by entering into any kind of marital arrangement with her; there is no provision for the transfer of rights *in genetricem* by marriage. In a patrilineal society the transfer of jural authority and rights *in genetricem* through marriage is apparently preferred; we are told, for example, that 'Tallensi express contempt for the Garisi, who, it is notorious, often constrain a daughter to "sit at home and bear children" to augment her father's family',⁴ a custom allied to Dahomean 'child stay father house' marriage. In Dahomey the variation corresponds to political and economic variables.

JURAL AUTHORITY

That the transfer or non-transfer of rights *in genetricem* in Dahomey is determined not only by the functioning of the lineage and its segments but by economic and political factors which may be concentrated in an office, title, or estate is seen even more clearly in the remaining forms of Dahomean marriage and offers another basis for classification.

The political element is prominent in 'cloth with woman' marriage, a 'type' concerning the marriage of women who were attached to a political office (rather than to the office-holder as an individual).⁵ Although these women were free, as were all persons born on Dahomean soil, they were probably slaves, pawns or 'wives of the law'⁶ in origin. The data on 'cloth with woman' marriage show that the

¹ The Dahomeans give a political explanation: if the child of a princess were to become a commoner, that child, as a commoner, would be eligible for high political office and yet possibly have connections with other than the ruling branch of the royal lineage, which might make him disloyal. Le Hérisse, 1911, pp. 30-2.

² Herskovits, 1938, i, 330-1.

³ In his discussion of kinship groups Herskovits couples 'prince child child' marriage with 'child stay father house' as regards the position of the children (in this connexion compare the differential marriage of the daughters). Ibid. i, 156. He does

not do so elsewhere. Ibid. i, 302 and 346.

⁴ Fortes, M., *Web of Kinship*, 1949, p. 110.

⁵ Le Hérisse points out that they were neither slaves nor relatives of the office-holder (1911, p. 217). Herskovits's statement that they were young women sent from the country-side to the King's palace as attendants on the princesses (1938, i, 325-6) probably refers to the daughters of such women, who would be returned to the holder of rights *in genetricem* in their mother.

⁶ If the head of a 'family' committed a serious crime, his lands were confiscated and his wives and

right to give a woman in marriage, i.e. to transfer rights over her as wife, and in some cases, to recall those rights and dissolve the marriage, vests in the holder of original rights *in genetricem* in the mother—whether it was a lineage which acquired those rights in the mother through marriage or whether the status of the original mother was that of pawn or slave. Thus by 'cloth with woman' marriage the office-holder could reward a favourite by giving him a wife, often with substantial gifts, and at the same time benefit from the services which the husband was bound to render. The office-holder had to consent to divorce and could even force a divorce if, for example, the husband's services were not considered adequate.¹ Secondly, the right to give in marriage is but part of the original jural authority held in a woman's children by the holder of rights *in genetricem* in her. Herskovits says specifically that the office-holder had all the rights that a Dahomean man 'in ordinary life' held over his children.² These rights might be retained—the daughters returned to the office-holder and later married as their mothers had been—or waived. Generally the sons were left with the father.³

It is, therefore, important to consider in connexion with marriage the distribution of rights *in genetricem* and *in uxorem*, for the person in whom these rights are held often serves as a link between the parties in whom the rights are vested. Thus in the cases of marriage first discussed, a differential distribution of rights in the woman served as a mechanism for the regulation of inter-lineage relationships. In the present case, the distribution of rights indicates the political relationship of patron and client. The husbands perform economic services for the office-holder and swell the ranks of his clients and followers; they also benefit by the possession of a wife and any gifts given with her. Such a marriage is not the grant of a slave and her descendants. Its analogies are rather with the custom, found elsewhere in Africa, of giving the use, and sometimes, as a favour, a certain portion of the increase of a herd to the tender of the cattle, who, by his acceptance, enters into a relation of clientship.

The most complex instance of Dahomean marriage is that institution which Herskovits terms 'woman marriage' when he refers to the woman who institutes the proceedings by taking a 'wife' and 'giving the goat to the buck' when he refers to the relationship of that 'wife' with the father of her children.⁴ Herskovits connects this practice both with barrenness on the part of the female husband and with the existence of wealthy, economically independent women. A barren wife may marry a woman, never of her own family, whom she gives to her husband and whose children are known as 'her own'.⁵ In this case 'woman marriage' gives a barren wife children; it is not connected with the founding of a separate compound. However, as Herskovits notes specifically, when 'woman marriage' is associated with the founding of a compound, it is directly connected with women of wealth, who, having

children were given to the 'law' in the person of the King or certain of his chiefs. The position of the women, who were usually married out again, seems similar to that of pawns, except that they were apparently kinless. *Le Hérité*, 1911, pp. 78-9.

¹ Herskovits, 1938, I, 326.

² *Ibid.* I, 325.

³ The father could retain the sons only at the express wish of the office-holder, *Le Hérité*, 1911,

p. 211. If the office-holder relinquished these rights formally, the sons apparently had (as in 'child stay father house' marriage) full status in their father's home. *Ibid.*, p. 223.

⁴ Herskovits, M. J., 'A Note on "Woman Marriage" in Dahomey', *Africa*, x, No. 3, 1937, pp. 333-41.

⁵ Herskovits, 1938, I, 342.

acquired land and palm-trees, must acquire people to work these lands and palm-trees,¹ i.e. she founds a compound and marries wives whose children she and her heirs will control. There can be little doubt that the necessary corollary of the foundation of such a compound lies not in a woman's barrenness, but in her jural and economic position.

The female 'husband' chooses a man to live with her 'wife'—possibly, if the 'husband' is married, from men of her husband's lineage,² or the matter may be arranged with her 'wife's' family.³ The children's father is socially recognized as such. The 'female husband' has transferred to him rights *in uxorem* and as the active holder of these rights he is the true husband of the woman; it is to this relationship that the Dahomean phrase 'giving the goat to the buck' refers, and from this viewpoint that they call the marriage one 'in which the mother has control over the children'.⁴ In fact, it is the holder of rights *in genetricem* in the mother, the 'female husband', who has control of the children.

The woman founding such a compound takes as many wives as she can afford; as in 'cloth with woman' marriage, she retransfers rights *in uxorem* in them, but retains rights *in genetricem*, so that she and her heirs may control their children. On the founder's death, she becomes the main object of the ancestor cult of the descendants, for as the head of a compound, she had her 'Fate'.⁵ In the first generation, the eldest son takes charge of the women of the compound; the eldest daughter controls the men. 'These children must intermarry, and since they are the offspring of mothers and fathers of different sibs, this violates no rule of incest;⁶ that is, no kinship link is assumed merely because the 'female husband' retained rights *in genetricem* in the mothers. After the first generation, the eldest daughter of the eldest daughter inherits both the founder's name and the headship of the compound. Such heirs continue to marry wives; rights *in genetricem* in them and their female descendants are never transferred on their marriage. Whether these heirs are the founder's uterine daughters or the daughters of her 'wives' is not explicitly stated. Neither view is necessarily supported by the fact that the founder becomes an important ancestor and has her 'Fate': irrespective of the inheritance of the compound headship, she remains its founder. However, as the children of her 'wives' are not 'kin', they apparently do not consider her their 'pater' any more than in the case of 'cloth with woman' marriage the office-holder who retained rights *in genetricem* in the mother was considered the 'pater' of the children. It would seem, then, that in Dahomey it is not necessary to manufacture kinship ties to explain the possession of jural authority over children by virtue of retention of rights *in genetricem* in the mother: the rights may be attached to an office or title, and presumably also to an estate. To

¹ Herskovits, 1938, i. 319. A man, who is married or head of a lineage segment, has through his jural authority over his children and members of his lineage, a source of labour which a woman lacks.

² Ibid. i. 320.

³ Once the 'wife' has children, she may not easily 'divorce' their father, 'particularly when both her own family and the woman who has "married" her insist that she remain with him'. Ibid. i. 326.

⁴ Herskovits notes, 'every Dahomean with whom the matter of marriage types was discussed placed

this form ('giving the goat to the buck') in the second category rather than the one in which strictly and legally speaking it ('woman marriage') should belong'. Ibid. i. 337. That is, the Dahomeans consider the active holder of rights *in uxorem* as the woman's husband. Also cf. Le Hérisse, 1911, p. 210.

⁵ Herskovits, 1938, i. 53.

⁶ Ibid. i. 321. Apparently in non-lineage compounds marriage prohibitions are not coterminous with the distribution of jural authority. *Vide supra*, p. 278, footnote 3.

assume that the heirs are the eldest son and daughter of one of the founder's 'wives' rather than her own children is to assume that the founder creates an autonomous compound which is of no benefit to those who would otherwise be her heirs; whereas, if the uterine children inherit, then it can be seen that an 'estate' has been created which will benefit the founder's daughter and her daughter's daughters *ad infinitum*.¹

If in any generation there should be no daughters, the oldest son becomes head of the compound and assumes the name of the female founder; from that time the compound is inherited in the male line. If he has wives in whom he holds rights *in genetricem* but with whom he does not cohabit, he must give their daughters to his sons as wives; he may himself, however, marry these daughters if he wishes, since their fathers were 'always brought from outside the group'.²

As regards the relationship of such a compound to the lineage system, it is noteworthy that great precautions are taken to prevent the fission of the compound: members are not allowed to move outside, if it can be avoided; intermarriage is favoured. It is to remain a compact, self-contained unit subject to pressures from without rather than to the internal tensions leading to the growth and fission characteristic of the normal compound housing a lineage segment. Also, if the hypothesis is correct that such a compound is a heritable estate in a direct female descent line, then the position of the head within the lineage of her birth is of interest. The available data, however, warrant no more than the suggestion of some problems. Unless the founder were a member of the royal lineage, or rights *in genetricem* were not transferred at her marriage, the successive daughters and their wealth would pass out of the lineage—a situation which could only partially be remedied by repeated cross-cousin marriage.³ Even so, the founder and her descendants would form a direct descent line with certain privileges within the lineage. The possibilities of conflict between such a direct descent line and other collateral branches of the lineage are greater in the case of a male heir who, being a man, would be eligible for lineage office.⁴ Such a man would also be in the position of marrying wives as compound head and as potential ancestor of a lineage segment, with the result that two sons might have very different status. Given the variations in the distribution of rights *in uxorem* and *in genetricem* and the fact of favoured polygyny, a man might frequently be the *pater* of two children, but have jural authority only over one. But in none of these cases have both been under jural authority held by the same man in two capacities: it is doubtful whether such fine distinctions could work in practice.⁵ The various marriage regulations which come into effect on the accession of a male heir might be interpreted as an attempt to mitigate this conflict.

¹ A barren woman might, of course, found a compound, but I believe that in such a case further inquiry would reveal that the compound would be inherited by the woman's sisters or brothers, as is the case with other property. The population of the compound seems rather an asset attached to it than the beneficiary of its foundation.

² Herskovits, 1938 i. 321. Herskovits states that: (1) the daughters may not marry a man outside the family; (2) their husbands are always brought from outside the group; (3) their husbands are chosen from the lineage of the compound head's husband,

or (4) if the head is a man, his sons marry within the compound, (5) the population of the compound intermarries. *Ibid.* i. 319-46.

³ Cf. instance in connexion with palm-trees, *supra*, pp. 274-5.

⁴ Cf. Le Hérisse, 1911, pp. 210-12, 370, for overt manifestations of such conflict. Also *vide infra*, pp. 284-5.

⁵ Le Hérisse records a comparable confusion as to the status of the son of a free man and a female slave. *Ibid.*, pp. 34 ff.

In short, 'woman marriage' enables a woman with wealth in land and palm-trees to found a compound, acquire control of people—everywhere an essential to native wealth—and to establish an estate held in trust for the next heir by the person who inherits the founder's name. Control of people is acquired through marriage: rights *in uxorem* are retransferred ('giving the goat to the huck'); rights *in genetricem* are retained by the founder and her heirs *in perpetuum* in these 'wives' and their descendants. These rights, like the land and palm-trees, are a part of the property attached to the founder's name and inherited with it.

'Child father threshold over' marriage is also associated with the establishment of a compound headed by a woman who has control of the property attached to the compound and of the children born to her and to members of her compound and is also inherited in the direct female line. In this case, however, the head is in and of the group. The founder builds a compound and arranges her daughter's marriage;² this daughter is bound by solemn oath to rear children for her ancestors.³

Herskovits, without further comment, refers to this also as 'cousin marriage'. Now if the daughter's daughter of the founder marries her father's brother's son, apparently no advantages result. If she marries her mother's brother's son, she is marrying a person who falls under the same jural authority; such a marriage is said to be prohibited.⁴ Furthermore, since rights *in genetricem* may not be transferred at the marriage of this daughter, her children cannot inherit from their father; no economic advantages would then result. However, a reason for frequent 'cousin' marriage is indicated by a consideration of the structure of similar descent groups marked by the inheritance of 'titles'. A man always assumes a new name on taking political office. His eldest son will not necessarily succeed to that office; he will, however, inherit the name his father took on entering office, a stool, certain honours, and various lands, slaves, and palm-trees. This name, which I call a 'title' to differentiate it from the similarly inherited name of a founding ancestress, together with the honours and economic assets attached to it, goes from eldest son to eldest son. Often such an heir will retain rights *in genetricem* in his daughters when they marry, so that his group will grow rapidly.⁵

In the inheritance of names and of titles there is a direct line of descent from oldest child to oldest child of the same sex as the original holder, whereas lineage headship passes through all the collateral lines of the lineage segment under consideration and goes to the oldest male among them: the lineage headship may fall to a title-holder, but the title cannot pass to the other collateral lines of the lineage. The heir to a name or title retains rights *in genetricem* in the daughters and thus assures control of their descendants; the sons, however, can acquire rights *in genetricem* in their own wives and their sons tend to form collateral lines within the lineage system. Just as the collateral lines in the 'title' descent line remain outside the inheritance of the title honours but within the lineage system, so it is likely that in the case of a compound founded by a woman, the lines descending from the head's brothers would tend to separate

² The girl is not a pawn nor a 'wife' (Herskovits, 1938, i, 324). It is difficult to see how the mother would be in such a position unless she were either disinherited from her lineage or *de facto* independent through spatial separation. As a 'friend custody' wife (*vide infra*, p. 285) her husband might have given

her enough to build a compound.

³ *Ibid.* i, 347. Note that when rights *in genetricem* are not transferred, neither is ritual power over a woman as mother.

⁴ Le Hérisse, 1911, pp. 211-12.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 37 and 200.

and form a compound on the lineage system. For a woman in Dahomey cannot found a lineage: she may found a descent group, and the children of all her daughters will fall under the jural authority of the head of that group. But although the son himself, and therefore the children whom he controls, are under the jural authority of his mother, after the death of that mother and son, the son's descendants will have a male ancestor to whom they may establish a shrine and thus found an autonomous compound operating within the lineage system.

'Cousin' marriage cannot be satisfactorily explained on the basis of economic interest, owing to the operation of the rules of inheritance; nor, owing to marriage prohibitions, is it likely to occur with actual rather than classificatory cross-cousins. If, however, it is taken as an attempt to tie the male line back into the compound after it has separated, or, conversely, on the part of that male line to retain a connexion with the compound, it is in accordance with other principles observed in Dahomey: the attachment of rights and properties either to a lineage segment or to a name or title; the exclusion of collateral branches from the inheritance of such names or titles; the resort to marriage as a bond between groups and, conversely, the retention of rights *in genetricem* in order to obtain control over people. Thus the fact noted by Herskovits that daughters must marry as did their mothers, whereas sons are free to acquire wives with rights *in genetricem*, is not an arbitrary distribution of 'types' of marriage or a simple difficulty of bride-wealth payment, but the adjustment of jural rights in accordance with the operation of the lineage system opposed to the operation of special descent lines of heirs to titles or names with the properties and personnel attached to them.

'FRIEND CUSTODY'

It is not clear from the data whether all situations described as 'friend custody' are regarded as 'marriage' by the Dahomeans.¹ The term may refer to the interval between elopement and marriage, to the status of a woman living in her husband's compound with the knowledge of her parents (in such a case her natal lineage apparently accepts her children if she returns), or to a woman expelled from her lineage who is quite literally a 'free' woman. The children of a 'friend custody' wife may not inherit from their father, nor is she inherited by her husband's heirs; she may leave her husband when she wishes, apparently without formal divorce. However, a man devoted to such a wife may give her much wealth before his death in order to assure her future and that of her children.² 'Friend custody' is a disruptive event resented by those who held rights in the woman who ran off and flouted the vested interests of the lineage, estate or title-holder. In fact, the woman has asserted her status as a 'free woman'. Its increasing frequency is, according to Herskovits, due to the weakened jural authority of parents over children and to the ever-increasing tendency towards 'individualism' and independence under French rule.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The data on Dahomean marriage, when analysed as to the rights and duties of the contracting parties, have led to a necessary distinction between rights in a woman as

¹ Herskovits, 1939, i, 318-35.

² This is probably the origin of many female compounds of the 'child father threshold over' type;

the daughters of 'friend custody' wives are generally married without transfer of rights *in genetricem*. Ibid. i, 318.

wife—rights *in uxorem*—and rights in a woman as to the children she may bear, rights *in genetricem*. The fact that these rights are usually held concomitantly in Dahomey justifies a consideration of their distribution when they are not so coupled, as being of equal influence on the form and functions of the marriage—functions which are sociologically of a wider scope than the regulation of inter-personal relations between man and woman. It has been shown that in all the thirteen 'types' of marriage listed by Herskovits, with the possible exception of some instances of 'friend custody', rights *in uxorem* are recognized and that where they are recognized the status of the husband is regulated *vis-à-vis* his wife; he is also the socially recognized father of her children. Rights *in genetricem* may be vested (a) in the wife's or in the husband's lineage, (b) in an office, 'title', or 'name', and these rights give original jural authority over the woman's children—rights which may later be transferred without prejudice to the rights held in the mother and other children.

The differential distribution of rights in a given person, in these cases the woman (and her children), acts as a structural link between the persons or corporate groups concerned; marriage is a mechanism for the regulation of inter-lineage relations where there is a differential distribution of rights in the couple. Where the rights *in genetricem* do not vest ultimately in the husband's lineage, the husband's status is regulated *vis-à-vis* the person, 'office' or lineage in which these rights are vested.¹ The distribution of these rights varies not at random but with the needs and nature of the social units concerned. The differential distribution of these rights has in some cases been explicable in terms of the lineage system and inter-lineage relations, in others, of the tendency to perpetuate individual prerogatives by the formation of direct descent lines, and in still others the differential distribution of rights has served as a social link of a political or economic nature, without the assumption of kinship ties. It has also been seen that such recent tendencies as greater freedom from kinship controls are reflected in the marriage system, e.g. 'friend custody'.

In Dahomey the transferability of rights *in genetricem* ceases if that right becomes attached to an office, title, or name—as all 'property', i.e. rights in and over things and persons, is attached inalienably to such offices, titles, or names and held in trust by the holder for the next heir. The data suggest that once a lineage retains an original right *in genetricem* over a woman born into the lineage, it ceases to become transferable in her descendants. This would suggest that although 'patriliney' is correctly identifiable with the possibility of transferring rights *in genetricem* through marriage, other factors than 'matriliney' are connected with its non-transference. It is to be noted that the usual definitions of 'matriliney' and 'patriliney' consist in a distinction between the transferability and non-transferability of rights *in genetricem*, but that the variation in Dahomey is not to be ascribed to conflicting theories of descent but to the operation of economic and political factors as well as to the growth and inter-relations of kinship units. It is noteworthy that although rights *in genetricem* are to be acquired by marriage, the purpose of acquiring such rights is not necessarily the acquisition of a woman as wife; in 'woman marriage' rights in a woman as wife are held separately from rights *in genetricem*. Furthermore, the possession of original jural authority over children does not *ipso facto* postulate a kinship relationship with

¹ Even when they vest in his own lineage, the power of that lineage to deprive him of his wives (*uxores*, p. 276) is important.

those children either through the father or through the mother (e.g. 'woman marriage', 'cloth with woman'); it merely implies possession of rights *in genetricem* in the mother—within or without the field of kinship.

Résumé

LE MARIAGE DAHOMÉEN: UNE RÉESTIMATION

L'AUTEUR passe en revue divers types de mariage au Dahomey et les analyse sur la base du transfert ou non-transfert de la puissance. Elle fait une distinction entre des droits *in uxorem*, c'est-à-dire des droits sur une femme en tant qu'épouse, et des droits *in genetricem*, c'est-à-dire des droits sur les enfants auxquels la femme pourrait donner naissance. Malgré que dans certains types de mariage ces droits soient transférés concomitamment au mari ou à sa lignée, dans d'autres types ils sont partagés, de sorte que le mari acquiert des droits sur sa femme, mais les droits sur ses enfants sont retenus par la lignée de l'épouse, ou pourraient être dévolus à un office, un 'titre' ou un nom. Cette répartition différentielle varie d'après les besoins et les situations des divers groupes en question. Elle peut dépendre des considérations économiques ou politiques, ou résulter de la tendance d'établir des lignées de descendance directe, afin de perpétuer des prérogatives individuelles; dans certains cas, elle s'explique dans des termes de relations entre lignées.

La possession de l'autorité de droit sur des enfants n'implique pas nécessairement des relations de parenté avec ces enfants, mais simplement des droits *in genetricem* sur leur mère.

A F R I C A

JOURNAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL AFRICAN INSTITUTE

VOLUME XXII

OCTOBER 1952

NUMBER 4

A GENEALOGICAL CHARTER

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THE Tiv of Northern Nigeria,¹ who number some 800,000, believe that they are all descended from one man, 'Tiv, through some 14 to 17 generations of known ancestors (Fig. 1). These ancestors are constantly named in casual conversation and in discussion of serious affairs. To understand things Tiv one must know Tiv genealogies. By genealogical reference a Tiv traces ties of kinship and marriage, claims a place to live and farm, argues his case in a moot, conducts matters of magic and ritual, and decides against whom he will fight on any given occasion. Genealogies are the key to Tiv social organization. Tiv political structure is based on a lineage system:² a system of segmented groups in which each segment (save the maximal) is included in a segment of a higher order but of the same kind, and each segment (save the minimal) includes segments of a lower order but of the same kind. The Tiv system has an almost one to one correlation between lineage and territorial segments.³ Both are called 'those of X', the eponymous ancestor;⁴ thus Mbaduku (those of Aduku) describes both the lineage segment (*ipaven*, pl. *nipaven*) and the discrete territory which they inhabit (*tar*, pl. *utar*).

The eponymous ancestor of the segment (*ipaven*) associated with a minimal *tar* (that is, a *tar* which does not further segment into smaller *utar*) is usually from three to six generations removed from the oldest living people. Such a segment, including wives and children, may number from less than 200 to more than 1,300 people. It is a minimal segment; divisions within it may not be referred to as segments (*nipaven*) but are called 'segments-within-the-hut (*nipaven ken iyau*)' or by some other phrase which serves to distinguish them from segments (*nipaven*) proper. Such segments-within-the-hut are primarily of domestic rather than political significance.

¹ Field research among the Tiv from July 1949 to July 1950, and June 1951 to Jan. 1952 was made possible by grants from the Wenner Gren Foundation and from the Social Science Research Council made to my husband Paul Bohannan and myself.

² The term 'lineage system' is here used as defined in *African Political Systems* as 'a segmentary system of permanent, unilinear descent groups' which 'establishes corporate units with political functions' and 'which primarily regulates political relations between territorial segments'. Fortes and Evans-

Prichard, 1940, p. 6.

³ The male population of any territorial segment consists of over 80 per cent. agnatic members of the associated lineage segment.

⁴ Some segments are called 'those on the farm', 'the red ones', &c. The order of segmentation including these is called by Tiv 'segment by segment (*ipaven i ipaven*)' description; that including only the names of eponymous ancestors 'father by father (*tar a tar*)'.

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Among the Tiv the relationships between such groups and among individuals are genealogically defined. Consequently belief in a known and knowable genealogy is an important element of Tiv dogma. Yet seldom do two people agree on the substance of any given genealogy. Often one man cites on different occasions genealogies which may be contradictory, later either denying that he made the contradiction or saying that it was immaterial.

If genealogies were of less social importance or if variants were random, one might attribute such variants and contradictions to lapses of memory. However, variants and disputes are most common with regard to genealogies applying (1) to the eponymous ancestors of the segments-within-the-hut and their immediate descendants, and (2) to segments (*sipaven*) in which there is some discrepancy between span and depth, between size and order of segmentation. This observation first suggested that genealogical variants might be not haphazard but consistent with certain principles of Tiv social structure. Further field investigation into the context of genealogical variation indicated that Tiv criteria of genealogical truth lie in social consistency. The way Tiv learn genealogies, how they use genealogies, and the arguments they use in disputing the substance of a genealogy will make clear how they judge the validity of genealogies. On the basis of their criteria of genealogical validity one can discuss the implications of genealogical change among the Tiv.

I

An anthropologist learns genealogies systematically. A Tiv learns casually and in scraps. Such random learning increases the possibility of genealogical variants. It also explains the rather narrow range of the usual Tiv's genealogical knowledge—a knowledge limited to the relationships of his immediate kinsmen, of a rather larger group of agnates, and of the lineages to which he is affiliated. There are a very few Tiv—the politicians and a few scholars at heart—who learn genealogies and other matters to an extent beyond their immediate sphere of daily concerns. Their interest and facility is apart from the common Tiv interest in and use of genealogies. All Tiv live, breathe, and talk genealogies, but only in so far as they illustrate some point or relationship. Any distinction between the learning and the use of genealogies in Tiv is artificial.

Tiv learn genealogies as they need them. Consequently, beyond his *ityo* and *igba* a Tiv learns to place genealogically only those kinsmen with whom he has chanced to come into contact. Such ramifications of personal genealogical knowledge depend on accident and vary tremendously from one individual to another.

All Tiv know something of their various *igba*: their own (the mother's *ityo*), the mother's *igba* (the mother's mother's *ityo*), the father's *igba*, and generally the father's father's *igba*. A woman and her children are visited frequently by her own agnates and by her mother's agnates—if the mother is still alive. In the same way, during a man's father's lifetime, the father's mother's agnates frequently visit the father and his children (including ego). Similarly, the father keeps in touch with his own father's mother's agnates (ego's father's father's *igba*). A child whose father died early does not know as much of these *igba* as does one whose father lived into his maturity.

Even where personal contact is lacking, Tiv learn at least the *tar* and lineage of their various *igba*. A child readily learns his mother's father's name and lineage (and

often his father's mother's father's name and lineage if the father's mother is still alive) as a husband addresses his wife either as 'child of (her father)' or by the name of her lineage (generally at the level at which her lineage forms a corresponding segment to his own). A man can generally identify the lineage segment of his father's father's mother, though he often does not know her father's name. (Much depends on how old he was when his father died.)

The names of these women are important to an individual Tiv for they are passwords in his dealings with classes of relatives bound to give him certain kinds of assistance. Consequently, a Tiv under twenty is often more sure of the names of his father's mother and even of his father's father's mother than he is of the order of names in his agnatic line of ascent. Any of a Tiv's agnatic ascendants serve equally well to place him in terms of his agnatic lineage. Yet, for other reasons, the main body of a Tiv's genealogical knowledge concerns his patrilineage.

As a Tiv grows up, his genealogical knowledge is extended both in time and in space. A child of eight to ten has visited all the compounds within the minimal *tar* (he doesn't venture outside it alone) and knows that all the people within it are in some way or another 'children', 'wives', or *ijba* to the elders. A lad of fifteen to twenty knows what living people are included within his own segment-within-the-hut and the name of its eponymous ancestor. He is fairly sure of the connexion between the agnates living in his own compound. He can generally give the names of the men in his marriage ward group¹ and their common ancestor, though he (not indeed men some ten years older) seldom knows the descent of each man from that ancestor or the names and histories of the wards concerned.

A man over 25 feels that he ought to be able to place every adult male in his minimal lineage in terms of living fathers, in terms of compounds, and in terms of segments-within-the-hut. Within his own segment-within-the-hut he can give a fairly complete genealogy in the male line. He is most unlikely to know his father's father's sisters, their marriage guardians, marriage exchanges, and so forth. Many Tiv acquire no more genealogical knowledge. Old men who know no more than this are called 'those of little importance (*subakiriki*)'.

Generally old men act as genealogical experts, the elder advising the younger. Indeed, it is a breach of etiquette for a younger man to correct an older one on this subject. But none of the men who have genealogical knowledge has felt obliged to teach it to others systematically. In the same way, Tiv do not feel obliged to learn systematically all the genealogical knowledge which may be of concern to them some time; for all Tiv feel that there ought to be some old men who do have this knowledge at their finger tips, and that undoubtedly, somewhere, there are old men who have it and who can be asked in case of need.

An adult Tiv gains most of his additional genealogical information concerning his dead agnates from the discussions of elders at moots, inquests, and funerals held in his minimal *tar*. At such events ambitious men of early middle age sit in the background listening closely. The following day one may find them closeted with one of the more knowledgeable elders discussing the fine points of the case. This added

¹ A group of agnates, the men acting as marriage guardians to individual women assigned to them as marriage wards (and formerly exchanged for wives). See Akiga on *ingal* groups, *Akiga's Story*, 1939, pp. 106-8.

check is needed. Much is passed over during public discussion. If all the elders agree that such and such men are the descendants of Ihundu, no one interrupts to ascertain Ihundu's precise place in the genealogy. 'Those of little importance (*mbukiriki*)' never inquire further. Even for those who do, the added information is limited to that which is relevant to a case which happened to arise, and the field of increased knowledge is thus more or less accidental.

The acquisition of genealogies placing larger lineage segments is equally casual. Almost every male Tiv over 25 can name politically important lineage segments when (and because) they are inclusive of his minimal segment. He also knows their opposable and equivalent segments, but not the internal segmentation of these equivalent segments. Similarly a Tiv has a rough idea of the relative location of surrounding *star*. His knowledge is built up mainly from the references he has heard since childhood: the time 'when so-and-so fought the so-and-so with clubs'; the fact that 'he killed a cow for his wife from such-and-such a lineage'; or 'to get to that market one passes through such-and-such a *tar* where they used to steal us as slaves'. Through such comments he acquires a notion of the order of segmentation, of spatial position, and of the kind of relationships existing between the segments and the *star*: these one fights with arrows, those with clubs; these one marries; those one took as slaves.

The farther away the segments and *star* are in social and geographical space, the less sure a Tiv is of the order of segmentation between the large segments opposable to his own and the relatively small segments with which he has remote ties of kinship or in which he goes to market. Thus most Mbaduku Tiv go to Aichwa market in Mbagbera, a neighbouring *tar* and equivalent lineage to Mbaduku (Fig. 1). Many Mbaduku Tiv happen to know that the market is in Mbakande of Mbagbera; a few happen to know—thanks to other interests, such as close kinship ties—the segmentary place of Mbakande within Mbagbera. To most the precise order of such internal segmentation is irrelevant. The average Tiv is incurious about such matters. He knows that the genealogy giving the order of segmentation exists. Its existence is an article of faith. Meanwhile he gets along with a minimum of haphazardly acquired information, secure in the opinion that if he ever needs to know more detail he can ask 'someone who knows'.

Tiv who acquire fuller information do so because their range of interests and activities is wider. Thus one young man of 30 was sent by his father, a government chief, on an errand to a socially and spatially distant lineage, with private instructions to look into current intrigues. He returned with two variants of the internal segmentation of the lineage to which he had been sent—information needed for a thorough grasp of the current political situation, the main purpose of his visit. A close agnate of his went to the same large lineage for a different purpose; he returned with fairly intensive knowledge of the minimal lineage segment of his father's father's mother's people—whom he had gone to look up—and without any knowledge of the segmentation of the larger inclusive lineages.

A Tiv learns genealogies as these concern his daily life. Hence his knowledge concerns those people and places most important to him. An ambitious man or a chief's son will have a wider sphere both of interest and of knowledge. Among the Tiv the fields of knowledge and of practical interest tend to coincide. A Tiv does not learn

at once or from one person; there are no occasions on which he recites genealogies as wholes. None feels obliged to make his knowledge complete in any final sense; most Tiv fail to envisage a situation in which, if further knowledge is needed, there won't be some old man who can be asked. Tiv themselves expect individual variation in genealogical knowledge—with age and intelligence. The possibility that this or that man might not know this or that portion of a genealogy is readily admitted. That someone knows is a matter of faith. Yet it is obvious to us from the way Tiv learn genealogies, from their lack of systematization or recitation as wholes or apart from some practical issue, that many existing variants will go unnoticed and that much detail is inevitably lost.

II

Genealogical knowledge of some sort is involved in almost every aspect of Tiv life. His kinship links—and his knowledge of them—formerly determined where a Tiv could travel in safety. They still determine where he can marry, who will assist him in case of need, where he has a right to farm, who can bewitch him (his *itya*), and who will protect him from witchcraft (his *igba*). The names cited to prove one's title to such rights and privileges are generally those of parents and grandparents, seldom of ancestors more remote than the father's father's father.

More remote relatives, collaterals, and female agnates are less often relevant, though sometimes of great importance when they are. For example, on the death (from disease in fact) of one small boy by suspected witchcraft, the assembled elders argued for five hours to determine the lad's agnatic filiation and hence those who might possibly bewitch him; the argument concerned the marriages, remarriages, and adulteries of the child's mother, father's mother, and mother's mother and the marriage guardians, marriage wards, and exchanges of several generations. The elders were unable to agree on the genealogical facts. Hence the matter was postponed for further discussion until or if another member of that line got sick or died. Then something would have to be decided; if the matter ended with the death of one small boy it could be forgotten.

A practical compromise sometimes determines a genealogy. One man called a moot, complaining that his father Apebo¹ had been cheated of two marriage wards by his half-brother Torgindi (Fig. 2). Torgindi, the only man left living of his generation in his minimal *lar* and the most influential elder in the marriage ward group, refused to make good the two marriage wards to Apebo's son. The case of the first marriage ward was settled quickly as it hinged on an old scandal known to all the elders—the transmutation of slave into cow into marriage ward used to acquire a wife for the then compound head rather than for the inheritor (a minor) of the slave. The only way to discover whether or not Apebo had been entitled to the other marriage ward, however, was to establish the past membership of his marriage ward group and all its negotiations in the title of Nyianshima. The very old men agreed that at that time the marriage ward group had consisted of the descendants of Amena. 'But who', asked another elder, 'was Amena?' Out of the forty-odd assembled elders, only about ten said they had heard of Amena, and of these only three—all among Amena's descendants and including Torgindi—were able to place him. They

¹ The case is real, the names fictitious.

disagreed. One said Amena was Nyianshima's father and the son of Adoga (Fig. 2. I); another said, Certainly not, Amena was a woman, wife of Adoga (Fig. 2. II); the third said both were wrong, Adoga and Amena were the two names of one man (Fig. 2. III).

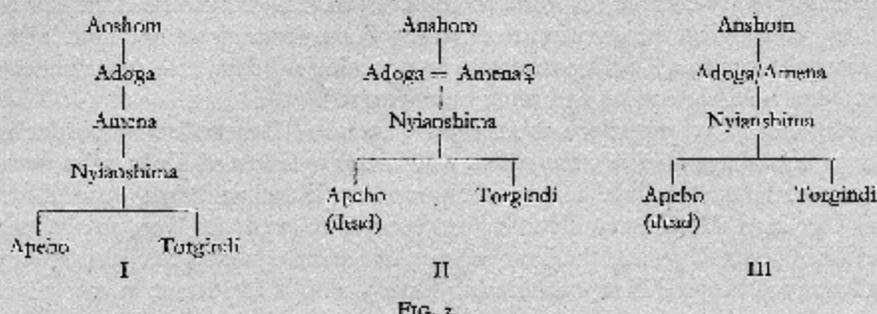


FIG. 2

The second version was dismissed, as the three eventually agreed that both Adoga and Amena had received marriage wards: a woman cannot receive a marriage ward, hence Amena was a man. If Adoga/Amena were one man, then Adoga/Amena got more than his share and the complainant deserved another marriage ward. If they were two men, the division had been fair. The elders were unable to agree on this point. However, they decided that the complainant should receive only one marriage ward (that one coming to him on the old slave deal) at the moment because there weren't enough wards currently available to give him two without causing hardship to others. Two days later the elders told me that Adoga and Amena were *two* men because only the one ward had been given to the complainant. The outcome of the case, based on a practical and equitable compromise, also fixed a disputed genealogy.

The existing state of affairs was taken as proof of a past state of affairs and of a genealogy. Tiv argue many cases on genealogical lines. Where the genealogical data cannot be agreed upon by the elders, the case may be postponed *sine die* and the genealogy may eventually lapse into obscurity or a practical compromise may determine it.

Such processes are particularly noticeable in those lineages in which, thanks to the absence of a single man of great influence, elders of equal standing argue to the uttermost 'It is', 'It isn't' of opinion. Where there is a man of great influence, appeal is usually made to him: his version is almost always the one accepted in moots or in other genealogical discussions. Among the Tiv it is the political leader who is credited with the greatest knowledge of genealogical data in all their ramifications. This opinion represents a twofold process. No man who hopes to attain political leadership can afford to be known as a man 'who doesn't know things'. The aspirant to such leadership makes a point of acquiring the knowledge cited at moots and handed on privately by the political leaders of that time. Secondly, whatever is cited by a man who has attained great political influence is accepted as valid and true. Where there is such a man—and only one—one finds a fairly standardized genealogy given throughout his sphere of influence, and there is little argument about the genealogy applied on any one occasion. But one will not find him consistent with himself from

time to time as we understand consistency. Indeed, to look for such consistency is to misunderstand the basis for variation in Tiv genealogies.

III

Genealogies are cited in response to an occasion. There is no need, in Tiv life, for relating genealogical information to anything but a given situation. That it does not necessarily occur to a Tiv to correlate new genealogical data with other genealogical knowledge is foreign to us and must be illustrated.

In response to my questions about the Uge, a non-Tiv people who border Iyon of Shangev mbashaya (Fig. 1), the elders told me that Uge and Kpar, who were both the sons of Ikor, had lived in one compound until their children quarrelled; since then, Uge and Kpar have lived apart. Ikor is relevant in Iyon as the common ancestor of Kpar, Uge, and the Utange,¹ and hence infrequently relevant. Most young men know nothing of Ikor, considering Kpar—who is important in many intra-Tiv relationships—the son of Ipusu.

In May of 1950 an affray occurred between Kunav Tiv and Udam across the border. To prevent the spread of hostilities and to keep excited young men away from the Uge border, the elders of Iyon told them, 'Let Kunav and the Udam fight. We shall not fight the Uge nor will they come to fight us, for we are both sons of Ikor.' The next morning young men assured me of their peaceable intentions by telling me this tale. But when I inquired further about Ikor, most said they didn't know whose son Ikor was or whether he was the father, grandfather, or remote ancestor of Kpar and Uge. Only one of the men I asked said he would ask the elders. A very few paused to think it out: the Uge are not Tiv, therefore if they and certain Tiv had a common ancestor Ikor, then Ikor must be the father of Tiv. These few felt this a satisfactory deduction: the remoteness of Ikor explained to them why they had heard nothing of him; most importantly it explained Ikor's position *vis-à-vis* Tiv in a way consistent with present-day Tiv-Uge relationships. It is most unlikely that any would have attempted such deductions if it had not been for my questioning. Only a fragmentary genealogy is cited in response to an event; without further pressure Tiv do not fit this genealogy into the rest of their genealogical information; with further pressure they deduce the place of that fragment by appeal to present features of the social relationships between the persons or groups concerned in the genealogy.

Genealogies are cited as evidence of the validity of a relationship and they vary, within certain limits, with the aspect of the relationship stressed. Kiagba on different occasions has expressed the composition of Mbanyam (Fig. 1) as follows:

1. Gor and Wandia are each segments (*siipaven*) with their own *utar* because they had one father but different mothers; therefore they must farm separately (cited in a land case and the most common version as it corresponds to *utar* segmentation).

2. In a speech made when Mbagor attended Mbawandia's big dance in honour of all wives taken by Mbanyam in the past few years, Kiagba said that Gor and Wandia do not intermarry because they had one father and one mother (a version always cited in this connexion).

¹ The Uge (Obudu Division, Ogoja Province) are also known as the Bisszi. The Utange 'at home' live in Obudu Division; 'those on the farm' live among the Tiv. Utange speech is a Tiv dialect.

3. On occasions when Sar (which is part of the *tar* of Mbawandia) was also relevant, Kiagba has said:

- (a) Sar joined Wandia rather than Gor because Sar and Wandia had one mother but Gor had a different mother (explanation made to anthropologist).
- (b) When certain powerful *akombo* (magical forces and their ritual emblems)¹ were being discussed at a meeting of Mbanyam, Kiagba said that these *akombo* had been equally divided by Nyam among his three sons Sar, Wandia, and Gor—each of whom had a different mother.
- (c) At the end of the same meeting, Kiagba urged the people of Mbanyam to co-operate as they ought because 'Gor, Sar, and Wandia had one mother and came from the same womb'.

Variations of this sort—made in terms of 'one father' and 'one mother'—serve to explain different degrees of identification as they are reflected in co-operation in various social activities.

The sex of the eponymous ancestor and the order of segmentation may also vary with the context. The lineage segments Ikakwer and Mause (Fig. 1) are generally given as equivalent sibling segments with one father and different mothers. On one occasion Ikakwer argued that it was senior to and more important than Mause; in support of this argument Ikakwer was said to be the wife of Tyou, and Use the son of Tyou—thus transforming sibling segments into segments of an unequal order. The elders of Mause smilingly agreed, commenting that Use also was a wife of Tyou. They thus restored the equivalence of the segments Mause and Ikakwer. Such variation is generally conscious and almost metaphorical. That Ikakwer appears sometimes as a woman (the wife of Tyou), sometimes as a man with two wives (Nyam and Ikaa), and sometimes as a man with two sons (Nyam and Ikaa) is, as the Tiv themselves explain, politically quite irrelevant, as long as the order of dependence and superiority between the segments is not changed. As wife or son Ikakwer is equally subordinate to Tyou. The order of equivalence between units changes only when the alteration is not symmetrical, as, for example, when Ikakwer, but not Use, was made a wife of Tyou. This flexibility is useful and used in political rhetoric and may, to a certain extent, be regarded as rhetorical device and metaphor rather than argument on genealogical substance.

IV

The changing political picture is reflected not only by contextual changes in level of segmentation but by more permanent variants both politically and genealogically. For example, Mbayar (Fig. 1) is in size equivalent to any of the component segments of Mbapwa, Mbayar's sibling segment. Most people cite Mbayar as a child of Pwa rather than as a sibling segment. Some say that the elders who in the past told the administration that Yar was Pwa's brother were mistaken, but that it isn't worth while doing anything about it. Other elders say that Yar was born the brother of Pwa but in size has 'become the child of Pwa (*lingir wan u Pwa*)'. Tiv feel that size and order of segmentation, depth and span of segments, ought to correspond and find difficulties in a genealogy which does not make them correspond.

¹ See Abraham 1940, pp. 84-101; Akiga 1939, pp. 176-234; Downes 1933, pp. 63-67.

Changes in affiliation rather than in order of segmentation are more unusual, or at least more difficult to illustrate. Shangev mbashaya (those at home) and Shangev mbashintiev (those on the farm) are an excellent example since some historical depth can be gained from the administrative files. In Tiv doctrine lineage ties and territorial distribution should be compatible. Their divergence in this case is explained by the Tiv story that long ago segments of Shangev moved out 'to the farm' and that before 'those at home' could join them, the Ugenyi¹ had come between. When the Ugenyi withdrew, the large lineage Jechira (Fig. 1) followed them immediately, preventing the reunion of Shangev at home with those on the farm.

Shangev's anomalous position is seen in the history of Shangev's genealogical ties.² The first administrative reports (from 1912) note that Shangev elders called themselves descendants of Jechira; but in later administrative practice Shangev at home 'worked with' and co-operated more closely with Kwande lineages, and Shangev on the farm 'worked with' Jechira lineages. Later, in a reorganization on a genealogical and territorial basis, larger blocs—called septs—were created, joining previously discrete units on a genealogical basis. Both Shangev wished to be united in the same sept, but couldn't agree on the genealogical basis for such a reunion. At a meeting in 1941 Shangev at home said they were children of Kwande, that is, they phrased their practical co-operation in genealogical terms; Shangev on the farm, however, insisted that all Shangev were descended from Jechira. Since they could not agree, Shangev on the farm were associated with Jechira, those at home with Kwande for administrative purposes. In 1943 they again met to discuss the position. Shangev on the farm still insisted that they were Jechira and convinced those at home to the point of going 'to make fresh inquiries from their oldest elders'. In May, however, Shangev at home decided they had 'only a practical affinity' with Kwande, but Jechira (Kunay and Gav) refused at this time to accept either Shangev on a genealogical basis.

In January 1950 we attended an informal gathering of chiefs and elders of Jechira and Shangev: Jechira agreed that Shangev really was a child of Jechira, but that there was nothing to be gained by mentioning it to the administration at the time.

I have gone into detail because this is one of the few cases for which some kind of historical check is possible. With very few exceptions, Tiv elders are unaware of the existence of this record; they know only that Shangev's ancestry is in dispute, and the grounds on which they argue 'the truth' of the matter are not the historian's.

It is the separation in space of the two Shangev—combined with the political vigour of Jechira—which allows the dispute. By Tiv dogma the children of one man should live next to each other. The arguments based on this spatial arrangement refer to general principles of Tiv life. Some say, 'We Shangev all have one father. If those on the farm are children of Jechira, then we too are children of Jechira. We are both adjacent to Jechira, but those on the farm are not adjacent to Kwande.'

¹ The Ugenyi invasion occurs in the traditions of Tiv and of peoples to their north and south. The Ugenyi are generally thought to have been Chamba. For the Chamba version see Meek 1931, 3, pp. 328-34. Some of the Tiv traditions are recorded by Downes (1933, pp. 4-5), Abraham (1940, pp. 10 ff.),

and Ašiga (1939, pp. 349, 363 and *passim*). Also see Koelle 1854, pp. 20-21.

² This paragraph is entirely based on data drawn from current provincial and divisional files and from early assessment reports; any quotations are from these files.

Hence we are Jechira.' In reply others cite the Ugenyi invasion to show that Shangev were separated by accident and may thus be Kwande by birth, those on the farm joining Jechira only because they are separated from Kwande. This last argument is not favoured. Most elders argue that once the Ugenyi had withdrawn, Jechira would not have been allowed to come between the two Shangev unless they were very close kinsmen; as proof they cite instances on a much smaller scale, often concerning the actions of individual kinsmen. Some counter the anomaly of the situation by suggesting an irregularity in the past: since Kwande was a woman, perhaps she was a ward of Jechira and through some irregularity in her marriage her children were also Jechira's. Usually all these speculations are shattered by someone who recalls that not over 20 years ago Shangev at home fought Ute: Jechira came to help Ute, Kwande came to help Shangev. Therefore Shangev must be Kwande and cannot be Jechira. The citation of this event always ends the discussion.

The implications of this dispute are obvious. When genealogies do not fit all the facts, alternate genealogies exist. Arguments about the substance of any portion of a genealogy do not invalidate the belief in its existence and provable truth. Tiv do not doubt that Shange had an ancestor who was either Jechira or Kwande. It is not the lineage system, but the place of a particular segment in it, that is under dispute. The 'facts' which must be fitted by the genealogy are thus the present-day relationships between the groups concerned. The genealogical dispute over Shangev corresponds to the political vacillation of Shangev at home between Jechira and Kwande lineages. Tiv genealogies do change and, indeed, they must if they are to remain compatible with the results both of the changes inherent in the social structure and of those apparently the consequence of historical accident.

V

Tiv criteria of genealogical validity are social relationships in space and in act between the groups or the people referred to by the genealogy. Relationships between large units are proved by the same kind of evidence that proves genealogies on a smaller scale. Genealogical deductions often proceed, 'A and B behave towards each other in X fashion. Those persons or groups standing towards each other in Y relationship behave in X fashion; therefore A and B stand in Y relationship.' If several relationships are characterized by much the same kind of behaviour, Tiv will even say that it is impossible to determine which of these relationships was the actual one.

To illustrate, Shar of Mbagor is said to have had four wives whose descendants are paired into two groups (Fig. 3a): those of Agishi and those of Adzu. One elder told me that Agishi was Agege's wife and the mother of Shar and Adzu. I asked him why, then, should Shar's descendants be grouped by Agishi and Adzu. He tried to explain the grouping by saying that Adzu had been sent as an exchange for Agishi. I pointed out that her relationship to Shar's wives was thus still unexplained. The elder said he'd never stopped to think about it, and we shelved the problem for the admitted expert, Klagba.

Klagba said that Agishi and Adzu were the senior wives of Shar, his father's father (Klagba was the oldest living man in Mbagor; he died in August 1951). Tem and the rest were junior wives who had been put in their huts and whose children might

A GENEALOGICAL CHARTER

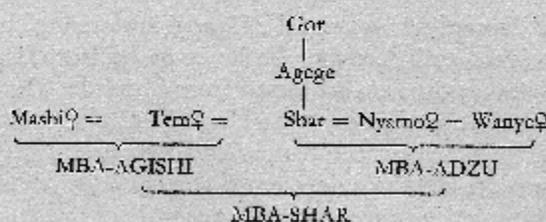


FIG. 3a

thus be called 'those of Agishi' and 'those of Adzu'. I was content until I heard Kiagba volunteer to some elders that Adzu and Agishi had been the wives of Shar, that Tem, &c., had been their daughters (Fig. 3b) who had borne children 'in their father's compound', that is, children whose pater (as opposed to genitor) was their mother's father. Reminded privately, after the elders had gone, that this version contradicted his previous story, Kiagba got understandably cross and said flatly that Adzu and Agishi had somehow been involved in the marriage exchanges which included Tem, &c. He refused to say any more on the subject.

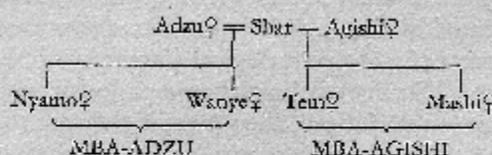


FIG. 3b

Some weeks later another and less patient elder disposed of my questions out of hand. The main point of his argument was that when one finds a man's sons divided into groups, those groups must refer either to their mothers or to their territorial distribution—that is, on the farm and at home. Grouping by mothers may be made on any basis on which one can group wives: by each wife individually, by senior and attached junior wives, or by women (marriage wards) exchanged for wives. Therefore, since Tem, &c., seemed to be the names of the mothers and wives (on the basis of present *igba* relationships of their descendants), Adzu and Agishi were either the senior wives or the women exchanged for senior wives. He concluded that it had all happened 'long ago (*agiso*)', that it didn't matter which way it had been; it was one of those ways, he assured me, for it was in one of those ways that his own sons would be grouped.

No clearer demonstration could have been given. Genealogies validate present relationships; these relationships prove the genealogies; and the form of the genealogy is modelled on the form of present relationships.

The kind of social relationship concerned influences the way in which genealogies change. There are, generally speaking, two areas of uncertainty in Tiv genealogical knowledge.

One area of genealogical difficulty comes at and above the level of the father's father of the oldest living men and below that of eponymous ancestors of the segments-within-the-hut. 'Three fathers' is the standard limit of individual genea-

logical memory of particular ancestors: there are, as has been seen, strong personal reasons for learning one's *igba* and one's three ascendants in the male line; here, too, there are possibilities of personal contact and of first-hand knowledge. From Tiv genealogical disputes and discussions it would seem that from the level at which women cease to be relevant, that is, at the father's father's mother, there also step-by-step agnatic genealogies cease to be relevant. From genealogical discussions at moots it would appear that old men, besides their own father's father's father, remember some names heard in their youth—perhaps from their father's fathers—and associate these names in a way made meaningful by present-day relationships between living people. I have no personal doubt that genealogical memory lapses between the level of the father's father's father of the oldest living man and the level of the eponymous ancestors of the segments-within-the-hut, which have a greater permanence and a wider relevance. In this sense one might echo the Tiv saying that every man has three fathers, adding in comment on the remaining ten or twelve ancestors who take his ancestry back to Tiv that they form but a genealogical charter.

The second great area of genealogical dispute refers to those genealogies explaining relationships between lineage segments and is associated with vacillation in political loyalties or with discrepancies of size and depth. Genealogies referring to lineage segments ratify relationships between large groups of people for political purposes. Genealogical disputes at this level are political disputes.

These different fields of application are to be correlated with the range within which a genealogy is known—a fact with important implications for genealogical stability. There are some 7,500 people living in Mbaduku who know that Mbaduku segments into Nyumamgbagh and Mbatyou. The proof of that segmentation is daily before their eyes in spatial distribution and is relevant in many daily activities. The segmentation of the descendants of Gor (a minimal segment (*ipavm*) associated with a minimal *tar*) is relevant to some 450 people. That of the descendants of Ken (one of the segments-within-the-hut of Mbagor) concerns primarily only some 30 people. The larger the group concerned, the broader the base of knowledge and memory of the genealogy.

By the very nature of the relationships referred to, genealogies validating lineage segmentation are much more stable than those referring to interpersonal relations. They classify large and relatively permanent groups. Although the genealogies referring to these large groups do change, the rate of change is comparatively slow, both because the factors with which the genealogies change—relative size, territorial distribution, power politics—are themselves of a nature to change slowly, and because the change affects many people. The base of memory is so broad that it seems, to Tiv, extremely reliable.

VI

The first article of Tiv belief is that there *is* a genealogy; that all Tiv are children of Tiv through a known and knowable line of descent. The substance of this genealogy is debatable and debated. What one may not question is its existence, its relevance to present life, and its nature—that is, as a record of the past existence of living human beings whose names are remembered in the genealogy. It is difficult—and in some cases impossible—for Tiv to comprehend that this belief *can* be questioned. Socially

and culturally, their concepts and values are based on this belief and permeated by it. One may question any given man's knowledge of the genealogy, or any part of it; one may not question that there is a *true* genealogy and that it is both known—by someone, somewhere—and knowable.

This latter article of faith is one shared by many Europeans, unfortunately in reference to a rather different standard of verifiability. Conceiving genealogics as data referring to events in time, criteria of historical validity have been mistakenly applied to them. Writing, the presence of genealogies in government files, a tendency on the part of the administration and of all Europeans to regard the earliest recorded genealogies as the 'true' ones (by an application of the historian's viewpoint), and a certain degree of literacy among the Tiv themselves all contribute towards a greater stability—even a rigidity—of genealogics. Few, either Tiv or European, seem to be aware of the implications of such rigidity; such awareness would be incompatible with their faith in the truth, historically speaking, of these genealogics and hence with their faith in the validity of these genealogics to sanction social relationships. For example, one man of great influence, a government chief, is dictating to his scribe the genealogy of the larger lineage segments of Tiv and that of the smaller segments which are under his influence. He believes sincerely that his genealogy is correct (*you*); his influence and his fame for knowing things is so great that few dispute it. He himself says that he wants it written down because his son—a man of less influence—may not be believed when, after the father's death, he quotes that same genealogy. Certainly during a recent illness of the old man, alternate genealogies favouring other lines sprang up overnight. With his recovery they disappeared. That written genealogy, however, will present a true genealogy in a sense of truth different from that possessed by Tiv genealogies previously. It appeals to a written past rather than to present society.

It may well follow that a lineage system can survive only in an illiterate society like that of the Tiv or, possibly, in one which avoids committing its constitution to paper. To place on record the genealogy which upholds the status quo is to strike a blow at the possibility of change without the accusation of forgery. To prefer one genealogy throughout time is to make rigid a charter which, if it is to work, must remain fluid—and to a certain extent is also to make rigid a fluid social system. The presentation to administrators of variant and validating genealogies accompanies requests for changes of chiefs or for permission for the fission or fusion of two governmentally relevant lineage segments; by European standards of validity such variant genealogies are false and have been termed 'cooked genealogies'. In the past, the *fait accompli* demonstrated the truth of the genealogy.

These different standards for judging the truth of genealogies, or their validity, mean that differences in opinion over the substance of any given genealogy are not fruitfully investigated, on the assumption that one is a known, the other a fictitious genealogy, the one true, the other false. The way in which Tiv learn genealogies and the lack of written record allow changes to occur through time without a general realization of the occurrence of that change; social change can exist with a doctrine of social permanence. Among the Tiv to synthesize alternative genealogies is to falsify their content and ignore their role. Malinowski has spoken of myth as a charter—thus turning attention from the substance of myth to its relation to culture

and society.' Tiv genealogies might similarly be termed a charter—at once a validation and a mnemonic device—for present social relationships.

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* Malinowski 1926, p. 120.

Résumé

UNE CHARTE GÉNÉALOGIQUE

Les généalogies sont d'une très grande importance sociale pour le peuple Tiv de la Nigérie du Nord, et font l'objet de nombreuses discussions. Chaque Tiv connaît les noms et les généalogies de ses proches parents, tant par la ligne paternelle que maternelle. En vieillissant, cette connaissance s'étend dans le temps et dans l'espace, au fur et à mesure que le cercle des personnes avec lesquelles il est en contact s'élargit. Un homme adulte sera en mesure de déterminer chaque mâle adulte de son lignage minimum, mais il n'est guère probable qu'il sache quoi que ce soit concernant les sœurs du père de son père. Ordinairement, les vieillards agissent comme experts en généalogie, et, dans les cas douteux, on espère que quelqu'un possèdera les connaissances nécessaires. Les généalogies fournies à la suite d'enquêtes par des anthropologues renferment de nombreuses variantes et désaccords, mais les Tiv n'attachent pas beaucoup d'importance à ces contradictions. Ils ne s'intéressent aucunement dans la connaissance systématique des généalogies, qui sont surtout appréciées comme moyen de validation des liens de parenté qui existent actuellement et pour établir l'authenticité de l'histoire et l'existence indépendante du peuple Tiv.