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Slave raiders and their 'people without history'

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When travelling through Baghuirmi (now Chad) in 1850-54, the famous explorer Barth recorded his deep astonishment at meeting an old blind Fulani who had read Plato and Aristotle, studied in Yemen and at Azhar University in Egypt, and was considered an expert in calculus.

I could scarcely have expected to find in this out-of-the-way place a man not only versed in all branches of Arabic literature, but who had even read (nay possessed a manuscript of) those portions of Aristotle and Plato which had been translated into ... Arabic, and who possessed the most intimate knowledge of the lands he had visited (Barth 1857, III: 373).

The German doctor, sounding out trade opportunities in West Africa, was impressed with the cosmopolitan character of the savanna states that hosted him. Travelling from emirate to emirate, from Bornu court to Fulani-ruled Sokoto, he was received as the emissary of a distant but equal, though infidel, sovereign. The general attitude of African rulers toward their European colleagues was one of mild condescension.

The empires that so impressed Barth, were formed in a series of expansionist waves through which Islam wrote much of the history of West Africa (Clarke 1982) from the ninth to the eighteenth century. Of course, as with European expansion, this history was written by the conquerors, the organized emirates resulting from the various holy wars. Yet the shock waves of these movements did reach far into their periphery, affecting 'people without history'. Following Wolf, I will sketch some effects of Islamic expansion in West Africa at the societies at their imperial fringe, indicating the impact that state formation had on these peoples. In doing so, I shall compare two marginalized peoples, assessing how their social organization and style of life may have been influenced by their involvement in and reaction to these large scale historical processes.

Such groups are mentioned in passing by Wolf as 'losers ... pushed into fringe areas' (Wolf 1982: 230), living in 'target zones of slave-raiders', which he calls 'shatter zones'. One example he describes is Central Nigeria, where the slave-raids from the south overlapped those of the northern emirates. For the most part, however, Wolf concentrates on areas closer to metropolitan centers, though his conclusions apply to more marginal peoples as well. In this article I shall take a close look at two such groups, each living in its own shatter zone. North Cameroon and the Niger bend in Central Mali, respectively the

Kapsiki/Higi¹ and the Dogon² (see map). My organizing question is: What aspects of their respective cultures might be traced back to their interaction with the Muslim emirates, their main struggle with 'history'? In the two areas this influence has been, first and foremost, that of slavery; both regions had a considerable importance for the realms in question as slave reserves. The pervasiveness of slave raiding on its 'host' culture will be traced by delineating the commonalities of the two cases, and pointing out the relevant differences. Finally, their divergent strategies for coping with outside threats will be linked to their specific place in history for a tentative explanation, leading to some refinements and modifications of Wolf's analysis for the study of other 'people without history'.

Commonalities

In both North Cameroon and Mali, people live in a dry savanna/sahelian environment, where sedentary cultivation of millet, sorgo and maize is supplemented with husbandry: sheep, goats and cattle. Both habitats are mountainous, relatively densely populated and quite intensively cultivated, to capacity. Cultivation technology is of the classical African iron type, working units are relatively small. Subsistence cultivation relies on a broad spectrum of food crops, with some cash crops of recent introduction supplementing the family budgets. Both groups have lived for a long time in their area, over four centuries probably, and in both instances their oral tradition is replete with tales of slave raids and wars. A continuous threat of war and enslavement is the constant background factor in all local village histories. These two areas, the Niger bend and North Cameroon, were situated at the margin of a number of Muslim empires, formed, dissolved and reconstituted in the course of West African history.

Like numerous other groups populating the Mandara mountains of North Cameroon, the Kapsiki had to cope with the great Kanem-Bornu empire, North of their territory. This emirate, with dynastic roots going back to the eighth century B.C. (Urvoy 1949), held sway over the region for more than a millennium, making it one of the stablest of African realms. To the east of the Mandara range, the Baghuirmi were active (Paques 1977), whereas the Mandara³ formed the nucleus of a smaller emirate just north of the mountains. The fourth enemy, the one the Kapsiki suffered most from, since the beginning of the nineteenth century, was the Fulani-dominated Sokoto empire (Van Beek 1988a). For all these empires, the Kapsiki, like other groups of the Mandara range, formed a fringe people, a reservoir for a slave hungry Muslim society, and as such was of crucial importance for these empires.

Far to the West, the Dogon had to cope with other emirates. The Bandiagara plateau, ending at the southeast in the so-called *falaise* (cliff) of Bandiagara

has been inhabited by the Dogon since the fifteenth century, as it was before their arrival by other groups. Cliff and scree have served, too, as a defensive setting against a series of enemies. For them, the empire of Mali or Mandé (Levtzion 1973) must have been crucial, as today they themselves still acknowledge. Whether the Dogon were already on the spot during the flowering of the Mali empire, or settled at the cliff during the death throes of that great realm, is uncertain (Dieterlen 1941). Also the Songhai empire, as well as the Mossi kingdom, threatened them in their habitat (Hunwick 1976). In the nineteenth century, roughly at the same time the Fulani founded their Sokoto empire in Nigeria, the Fulani of Masina (Ba and Daget 1962; Brown 1978) formed a major threat for the Dogon. After beating the Fulani, the Tucolor, led by El Hadj Umar, scourged the cliff, though in his case the Dogon of the plateau around Bandiagara were more or less integrated into his armies (Clarke 1982).

Local oral histories recount numerous slave raids, on a large or a small scale, skirmishes in which the bows and arrows of the cultivators were matched against the lances, shields and sometimes guns of a mounted cavalry. Still, though they were 'outgunned' in this preindustrial arms race, the cultivators sometimes scored astonishing victories. Glorifying in the losses they inflicted on the enemy, they still relish tales of old battles, counting their own losses, in slaves or dead, with an astonishing equanimity. So they were never an easy target, as exemplified by one of the most famous emirs of Bornu, who died during a slave raid in the Mandara area (Urvoy 1949: 243). The habitats of both the Dogon and the Kapsiki still echo the continuous threat of enslavement. The Kapsiki lived (and to some extent still live) on top of the volcanic outcroppings dotting their plateau, or on the steep slopes of their mountain ranges. For the Dogon defense depended on the *falaise* itself, with its numerous fissures cutting through the rim of this huge slab of sandstone on the one hand, and the boulder strewn scree draped like a long ribbon along the cliff side (see schematic cross-sections of both habitats). Both peoples lived at those places least accessible to horses; incidentally, in the vicinity of both habitats, a flood plain offered a similar refuge for other peoples. Finally, in both instances, threats originated not only from outside, but also from inside; internal war was a constant companion to slave raids. In this respect, though, a difference between the two cases must be noted, as in the Kapsiki case the intensity of internal war must have been much higher than in the Niger bend.

So for safety people built their houses only on defensible spots, and cleared their fields in the immediate vicinity. Kapsiki/Higi fields were situated around the outcroppings, or on the slopes themselves, whereas the Dogon cultivated primarily those fields in sight of the plateau rim (Van Beek 1982a). In both instances one can speak of closed resources during the era of the slave raids. This picture changes dramatically with the coming of colonization. The new

colonialis, German and British for the Kapsiki/Higi and French for the Dogon, opened up the plains and plateau as a cultivation area. After pacification both Kapsiki and Dogon rapidly dispersed themselves over the formerly dangerous out-fields, quickly covering up the newly available territory.

Both groups, each in its own fashion, are fairly clear examples of what Wolf calls 'kin ordered modes of production': reproduction, recruitment of labour and access to means of production are all articulated in terms of kinship. Coresidence, Wolf correctly indicates, is more important than actual kin relations, a principle that for each group has different consequences. As Wolf notes: 'access to resources is restricted and available only to claimants with a "kinship license"' (1982: 91). In this case, the social organization geared to this aspect of the mode of production, is quite similar in both cases.

The main, if not the only, sociopolitical unit is the village. Both the Kapsiki and Dogon villages – though their appearance is strikingly different – form the dominant contexts of social life. A few ritual obligations and historic ties may transcend the village and can be important in times of crisis like drought or locusts. The village communities have a high degree of political autonomy, as they have their own clearly defined borders and local histories, in which migration traditions predominate. Politics is not very centralized; village heads have just a few ritual obligations, as have clan and lineage elders, though their influence in daily life can be larger. Neither among the Dogon nor among the Kapsiki can headmanship serve as a power basis for the man in question; conflict resolution, for instance, is highly informal, not dependent on specific functionaries.

The way of choosing a headman is different for Kapsiki and Dogon. In the Cameroonian case a representative of one particular clan will be chosen, whereas in a Dogon village the oldest man automatically becomes the ritual leader, assisted by a younger kinsman, often a grandson⁴. The village itself, in both instances, is made up of several wards and has at its core a system of patrilineal clans and lineages, which may be associated with the wards. The clan system does not reach over the village border: another village, another set of patrilines. The system of adoption offers some flexibility for the agnatic system in Kapsiki, as does complementary filiation for the Dogon. Anyway, descent and identity are closely intertwined, while corporate characteristics may vary. The patrilines are, usually, exogamous, marriage residence being virilocal, with a tendency toward village endogamy (especially for the Dogon). Clans are grouped into two phratries, which the Dogon locate each in its own village half, while the Kapsiki intermingle them. In both cases, a minor ritual hierarchy typifies this dual division. Clan membership is crosscut by endogamous artisan groups. Blacksmiths (Kapsiki and Dogon) and leatherworkers (Dogon) form separate layers of society, associated with specific tasks as well as, for the Kapsiki, the notion of pollution (Van Beek 1987), though their religious function is more crystallized among the Kapsiki.

Both languages hardly give rise to a we-feeling beyond the village level. For the Kapsiki/Higi language at least eight major dialects can be discerned (Mohrlang 1972; Barreteau 1984). Dogon has a dozen dialects and is almost as fragmented (Calame-Griaule 1968) as Kapsiki.

For both groups, religion is relatively complex. A system of major cyclic rituals, more or less tied in to rites de passage (especially in the Kapsiki case), is supplemented by a sharply defined system of sacrifices, following the social echelons of the village: individual, household, ward, lineage, clan, village half and village. Sacrifice itself follows a strict order in both cases, with divination sometimes a steering mechanism. The pantheons of Kapsiki and Dogon, however, differ largely, though in both cases the role of ancestors is very limited.

Differences

Though more commonalities could be mentioned, this general picture indicates that we have two societies with a similar ecological situation, political history and social organization. Their differences, as we shall see, become apparent mostly on the level of ideology, and what one might call 'style of life', the specific mode of interaction between members of the same society.

Internal war between villages, as indicated, was much more intense in the case of the Kapsiki. The series of skirmishes between Kapsiki villages in fact formed both a continuous threat and a cherished male activity. With some regularity, villages warred with each other for numerous reasons, following a strict fighting code (Van Beek 1987). The use of weaponry escalated with the social distance between combatants, consonant with the classical segmentary lineage model. While fights within the clan could only be fought with wooden clubs, different clans armed their warriors with iron weapons. Only in battles between unrelated villages were bow and arrow, i.e. poison, allowed. The latter wars aimed at catching slaves as well, often to have them bought back by their kinsmen. War was a central aspect of social life, glory in battle a central focus of community values.

The Dogon, on the other hand, did have some internal skirmishes, but these were few and far less important. Their raids were limited to occasional groups of youngsters, avenging affronts by peers from a neighbouring village who had infringed on their territory, i.e. were after 'their girls'. No slaves were caught, and no cases of manslaughter are reported. Thus, the Kapsiki had many more domestic slaves than the Dogon, who hardly bought or sold any slaves. For them, paying ransom for a kinsman caught by a Muslim was the only slavery transaction, though they did use other kinsmen in the exchange. Consequently slavery was a normal institution in Kapsiki villages, an exception at the Bandiagara *falaise*.

The value systems vary accordingly. The Kapsiki strive for individual autonomy: a person should be free from restraining ties to his fellow men, be they kin or not. He or she may call upon clan members for help, but should beware that these kinsmen demand too much of one's property, time and labour. A definite work ethic, albeit an individual one, pervades the value system: any individual should work hard and be as autarkic as possible, economically as well as politically. In social interaction this implies an assertive attitude, protecting one's privacy, shielding the private sphere from the unwarranted intrusion of outsiders. Cunning, meaning to be smarter and trickier than the other, is thus a valued faculty (Van Beek 1982b).

By contrast, the Dogon have a strong orientation toward harmony and continuous communion with members of clan and village. Conflicts should be avoided, and differences of opinion should never be raised. Not only are they very much aware of their mutual interdependence, they cherish it too, accentuating it wherever they can. An individual Dogon easily gives expression to his or her dependency on and belonging to the larger group, which not only indicates a descent group or age set, also a category of persons. Thus, the old thank the young and vice versa, the collectivity of men praise the women (and vice versa) during one of the central rituals. Communal labour, collective action and group responsibility are characteristic of Dogon village life. Hospitality and openness are essential values: each Dogon should be accessible at all times to anyone. For instance, whereas the Dogon language knows many ways of welcoming a stranger, Kapsiki knows no equivalent for 'welcome'. For them strangers are enemies, without any rights, while the Dogon consider them as guests, from whom 'new words' can be heard and information from the outside world gleaned.

Property rights in fields, trees or houses show some variation between the two. Kapsiki rights are, in principle, individualized. Major property rights belong to those who claim and clear a field for the first time or plant a tree. With time these rights will be fragmented among their descendants, up to the level of a sub-lineage. Thus, the effective corporate group consists of men who are each other's potential heirs, a source of conflict. The Dogon situation is more complicated. Rights for the infields, i.e. those under permanent cultivation through manuring, are assigned on the basis of age: the oldest men of the village, ward and clan each have their fixed share of these coveted fields, the acreage increasing with increasing seniority. For the outfields the structure of the lineages is followed, which in itself is more corporate than is the case with the Kapsiki. Conflicts within the lineage are very rare indeed among the Dogon.

Marriages form an important link between the lineages. However, both marriage systems do differ considerably – even spectacularly – as does the concomitant relation between men and women. Kapsiki marriage is extremely

unstable. Among them, as in the whole of the Mandara area, secondary marriages are well institutionalized: after her first marriage each woman, almost without exception, leaves her husband sooner or later, in search of another, possibly better, partner. Thus, in the course of their marital career women tour some six spouses, each in another village (Van Beek 1987). The great frequency of this type of marriage means a divorce-ratio of 96 per cent (Van Beek 1986b). As a consequence of this extreme situation relatively little emotion is invested in husband-wife relationships; partners distrust each other and keep their lives quite separate. Brideprices, high despite the fragility of the marriage bonds, do form an important focus of men's lives. Claims for brideprice restitution form the single major case type for indigenous courts, as brideprices are strictly associated with rights over children. Polygyny, a very important structural feature of this marriage complex, implies that each husband strives for as many wives and children as he can get and keep in his compound.

Dogon marriage, on the contrary, shows a quite different face. Here, too, marriage is virilocal and at least potentially polygynous. However, theirs is a system of stable marriages⁵, characterized by a long, easygoing initial phase (Paulme 1940), during which partner switching is still possible. The tendency toward village endogamy is strong, exogamy rules are few, so husband and wife usually have plural kin relations with each other, much more than the Kapsiki would tolerate. Dogon marriage knows no brideprice or any form of major economic transaction; the groom just helps his future father in law out with the cultivation of his field together with his age set, with some symbolic presents portraying the son-in-law as an indefatigable worker. The real compensation for the wife-giving family occurs in the form of a child, who remains with the wife's parents after weaning. On the whole, the Dogon do not worry much about the child's whereabouts, as long as it is cared for. Consequently, paternity trials, so common in Kapsiki, never occur among the Dogon.

Age sets as mentioned above are absent among Kapsiki, save for a close friendship among boys initiated in the same year, with no structural arrangement in village social organization. Dogon, however, are very much into age and seniority, one of their major structural criteria. They know a quota system of age sets, each set being formed as enough young men have come of age. In the many forms of communal work these groups perform the most laborious tasks, and as such they are vital for the organization of the many 'public works' a Dogon village knows: repairing the stairs leading onto the *falaise*, roofing a men's hut, working on the housing of a project officer, etc. In these cases the old men of the village just cry out in the dark, requesting such and such age sets to be present on the morrow. These groups crosscut the lineage and ward organization of the village, but do not transcend the village level.

A correlated difference is the general view on age. For the Kapsiki age as such is not respected; they value the industrious, independent strong adult, who needs nobody, works hard and feeds himself and many others. Old age brings dependency, unproductivity and poverty, hence loss of status. Thus, old men gradually lose their wives, while old women are wholly dependent on their sons for their livelihood; in short, without a living son, old age is hard indeed. In village politics age is of no importance; there, the rich and strong are heard, i.e. those who have their compounds full of dependent people. For the Dogon, on the other hand, age is of crucial importance. Social hierarchy is based on seniority. Everything - the whole village, fields, crops, houses, lineages and people - is 'owned' by the oldest man of the village (the Hogon). Old age is considered an achievement and forms an important power base, even if old men are in fact quite dependent upon their younger kinfolk for any real labour and daily care. However, dependency on others is not viewed as a problem in Dogon society, but as a meaningful source of crucial relations.

Two strategies against history: towards an explanation

Both our examples of 'people without history' appear to be quite different. Still, their overall situation in history, politics and ecology is remarkably similar. Both live in the 'shatter zones' of imperial expansion in savannah Africa, whence they 'fed' slave-hungry empires with Africa's foremost commodity, people. From a materialist viewpoint, such as Wolf's, more similarities in life-styles would be expected, not just in infrastructure, but also in value system and ideology. And these differences are considerable; within the context of small-scale village societies, Dogon and Kapsiki seem to represent opposites in their styles of life. In order to explain this phenomenon, I shall use Wolf's approach and by adding some refinements to his concepts, try to pinpoint some specific historical processes that may have shaped these variations. My main argument is that there are different types of shatter zones as well as different reactions to 'history'; both ecology and the idiosyncrasy of history account for a possibly wide variety of cultural reactions.

The first factor to consider is the habitat. In their ecology both areas show some similarities, as we have seen. Yet, on closer inspection important differences show. The Kapsiki situation varies in some significant aspects from the Dogon. The Mandara mountains, where the Kapsiki live, is an old volcanic area, with a quite fertile plateau and slopes, where with little additional manuring and a simple crop rotation permanent cultivation is possible⁶. Water holes are not concentrated around the village, as water can be found all over the plateau and slopes. In contrast, the Dogon plateau consists of sandstone, giving off few minerals in erosion. The Dogon plains are, especially in the

immediate vicinity of the *falaise* and scree, almost pure sand; whatever minerals can be found are contained in the vegetation itself. The scree itself is somewhat more fertile, but the difference is not spectacular, and here, too, permanent cultivation is only possible through intensive manuring. Though the scree may contain the most coveted fields, it contains only a minute fraction of the total cultivable space. Access to water is easiest at the foot of the scree, close to the villages, where in the lowest part of the area a small rivulet streams alongside the scree in and after the rainy season.

A second ecological factor is the protection offered by the habitat against mounted slave raiders, or any cavalry. The Mandara mountains are much higher than the Bandiagara escarpment (resp. 1000 m and 500 m). The slopes of the Mandara mountains, where the Kapsiki live and cultivate, are long, steep and studded with rocks and boulders⁷. Thus, the Kapsiki could mount an adequate defense over a long stretch of terrain, which enabled them to live close to their fields and crops, at least a considerable part of them. In addition, the architecture of their houses offered possibilities for a spirited defense, while fields afforded some minor defense possibilities.

The Dogon area, on the other hand, consists of two flat parts with a cliff in between. The plateau of Bandiagara was fairly accessible from all directions save the southeast, whereas riding through the plains was very easy. It is just at both sides of the *falaise* that defense possibilities could be found. However, the scree does not reach more than 50 m in altitude, and is in fact a narrow long ribbon alongside the 150 km *falaise*. It was a long, drawn out defense zone. Most Dogon fields in the plains were unprotected, within easy reach of cavalry. Dogon defense had to concentrate on the village itself, making a dense settlement imperative. Consequently, Dogon villages arose on those parts of the *falaise* where caverns in the cliff and the possibility climbing it offered additional refuge for the population. On top of the cliff, at the rim of the plateau, the villages were located behind crevasses and fissures or on small elevations that offered protection. The Dogon had to cultivate in full view of the village as much as possible. At the foot of the cliff this shows in the location of the toguna, the men's houses, built on places with a good view of the plains. Old men of the village could perform an essential function in cultivation. When the young people moved to fields further out, some old men would climb the cliff, and from that vantage point 100 m above the village warned with a drum of eventual marauders.

In our second set of factors, the historical ones, the traditions of migration as well as military organization are relevant. We shall start with the military situation. Kapsiki as well as Dogon had to cope with slave raiding Muslim empires with a continuous hunger for slaves. However, in each case different empires were at work, with different organizations and ways of raiding. The Kapsiki confronted large empires whose geopolitical center was quite close to

their mountain fortress. The capitals of the Kanem/Bornu empire and of the Baghairmi realm were a few days' march. The Mandara sultanate, though smaller, was very close indeed, at the northern rim of the mountains. In addition, this sultanate was either a fief of larger empires like Bornu and Sokoto or subjected to them and had to pay an additional tribute in slaves to the imperial centers. Sokoto of course was much further away, far in the northwest of present day Nigeria. However, the emirs of Adamaoua, the easternmost Sokoto province, mounted their operations either from Yola or from Maroua, i.e. from centers close to the mountains. All these emirates had a densely populated area of potential slaves at their disposal within expedition distance. Consequently, their slave raids were usually organized as large scale expeditions, with a large mounted cavalry, aiming at capturing as many slaves as possible during one tryst, both for themselves and as tribute for their overlords. Most of the prisoners were not sold in the region (though Mora was an important slave market) but transported to centers of the realm. From there they were redistributed, often to plantation settlements to produce food for the realm (Lovejoy 1983). The raiders were not overly interested in having their captives bought back by the local population; anyway, if they wanted cattle (about the only currency for exchanging slaves), they captured them on their own⁸.

By contrast, the Dogon lived at a much greater geographical distance from the imperial centers. Whereas this is evident in the case of the empire of Mali, whose capital Kangaba was situated near the present-day border of Mali and Guinea, it also holds for the empires of Songhay and Tucolor. Emirates at a closer distance, such as Mossi and Masina Fulani had much smaller political systems, that, in contrast with the Cameroonian situation, paid no tribute to any overlord (Johnson 1976). The larger realms either were founded by a quick and superficial military conquest (like Tucolor which came closest to the Dogon area, in Bandiagara) or had the character of a trade state, like Songhai. A well organized empire with a more or less functioning administration and clerical institutions like Sokoto was absent in this part of West Africa. Consequently, the role of slaves was different in these emirates. Needed for neither feeding a court nor the production of weapons for the army (Smaldone 1977), slaves were mainly used for domestic purposes, assisting families in their productive activities. No plantation settlements are known from this area. For some realms guarding cattle was an important slave task, as transhumance was organized mainly through slave labour (Ba and Daget 1962). However, the number of slaves needed for this work, allowing for the safety of the flock, was quite small. Wherever more slaves were available, they tended to live in separate villages, like the Rimaibé, who as half-free clients had a tribute relationship with their Fulani lords.

The demographic density of the Dogon plateau and its adjoining Gourma plains, the Dogon habitat, probably never exceeded the 15/km², much lower

than that of the Mandara mountains in Cameroon, where densities over 100/km² are reported (Podlewski 1966). As a slave reserve the Bandiagara area was much less interesting, especially for large scale enterprises. Thus, the *falaise* was visited by small groups of mounted raiders, interested more in immediate gain than motivated by long-term tribute relations. In their hit-and-run raids they tried to surprise a few unsuspecting Dogon in the early morning, some women fetching water at the foot of the cliff, or some men venturing out into the fields on their own. After catching them, the raiders often seem to have negotiated with the village, either to have their captives ransomed for cattle or other valuables (clothes, cowries), or to have them exchanged for other prisoners more expendable in the eyes of the villages and more interesting for the raiders (young girls seem to have served as a ransom for adult men).

A historical factor of a different kind, which lies beyond the scope of Wolf's analysis, is the specific character of the migration histories of the peoples in question. In our two cases differences show in their own definition of their mytho-historical past. For the Kapsiki any notion of group identity beyond the village level is of recent origin (Van Beek 1986a). The various villages that make up the present-day Kapsiki/Higi conglomerate have their own particular point of origin and migration history. Yet, on the whole, the points of departure for the migrations are situated either in the mountain area itself or close to it. The history of this area seems to be replete with small-scale movements, migrations from one *massif* to the next, the migrants easily integrated into the loosely-structured local organization. One single cultic center, Gudur, is often mentioned as a point of origin, though it is also in the mountains; probably the ritual eminence of this place has engendered the migration tradition. The various groups, though subject to raids by a common enemy, never united against the marauders, but seem throughout to have followed a strategy of individual defense and withdrawal, dispersing over the least accessible niches of the mountains – a process that must have gone on long before the nineteenth century Fulani jihad (Van Beek 1988a).

By contrast, Dogon history has a much larger scale. Their traditions link them to the great Mali empire, with its center some 800 km to the southeast. If this has any historical relevance – as is generally supposed – by implication the Dogon would have migrated to their present habitat in about the fifteenth century. Though Dogon traditions differ considerably on the exact trail followed to arrive at the *falaise* (some traditions would have them rounding the whole Niger bend before arriving), one thing they concur on is the place of origin: Mandé (Mali). In clear contrast to the Kapsiki, the Dogon were recognizable as a distinct social group long before the arrival of the French. Consequently, they have a fairly clear sense of collective identity beyond the village level, much more pronounced than the Kapsiki. With great pride they

point out the ancient settlements on the scree, stressing their kinship with the royal Keita lineage of old Mandé. Their migration traditions, though varying from place to place, all stress one migration as the point of departure for Dogon history; in fact, the – mythical – order of arrival at the cliff still governs hierarchical relations in ritual. So, despite economic and political autonomy of the villages, some ‘tribal we-feeling’ is present.

From these two sets of factors, ecological and historical, two strategies for defense can be made plausible. The Kapsiki strategy aimed at being as inaccessible as possible for the cavalry, living and cultivating in remote, defensible places. Though some ramparts were built against horses in valleys narrow and steep enough to allow it, most often the Kapsiki relied on the natural defense opportunities of the terrain itself. Their first line of defense was the individual household, and only when confronted with a larger enemy force – which was often the case – the whole village united in the second line of defense, rallying as many able-bodied warriors as they could muster. So the main levels of defense organization were the individual household and the village as a whole. Clans or wards could not serve as viable war units. On the other hand the absence of a corporate middle level such as the ward or clan made individuals vulnerable to another type of threat, war between the villages. Single individuals or families working together on the fields could be targeted by groups raiding from neighbouring villages, seeking vengeance for previous killing or slaves to be ransomed for cattle. This threat was the main reason to live in a somewhat dense settlement. However, war implied not only danger and despair, it was a ‘sport’, a game, as well. In fact, this kind of war was one of the few things by which a man could distinguish himself from his kin and peers.

Dogon defense, on the other hand, was very much a group endeavour. Though their area as a whole was easily accessible for mounted raiders, a collective defense against a limited number of intruders was effective, whereas individual settlement was very risky indeed. The main problem was to see the marauders coming from a distance, so the Dogon relied on an early warning system. Whenever raiders were spotted, their chances were almost nil, as a few horsemen could easily be turned back by a whole village, even on foot. If numbers were less advantageous for the Dogon, they could flee into the village, where the narrow winding alleys and the closely packed huts offered an adequate protection. In the last resort, they could climb into the caverns of the cliff or – on the plateau – into the caves that dot the rugged landscape close to the plateau rim. Of course, this last line of defense offered shelter for just a few people, and probably was used very sparingly. The standard use for the caves was – and is – burial, which in itself demands for a safe place. Anyway, this general defense strategy favoured a division of labour based on age and

mobility: the large category of young people cultivated in the fields under the watchful eyes of the elders, seated high inside the village or on the plateau rim. So communal labour as well as mutual complementarity of different age sets fit in well with this war setting.

In contrast with the Kapsiki, the Dogon tried to adapt to their oppressors, whose cultures were more similar to them, than was the case for the Kapsiki. Though the Dogon never adopted or developed a real cavalry comparable to the Fulani or Mossi, the introduction of horses did have some impact on them, especially in those areas where the possibilities for defense were scarcer than at the cliffside. For instance, the Dogon living on the plateau farther from the rim did have a role in history in addition to being just potential slaves. In the wars between the Masina realm and the Tucolor, the Dogon of Bandiagara were actively involved, supporting the Tucolor against the Fulani of Masina and later against the Sonrai of Timbouctou. With the waning of the Tucolor empire, Bandiagara was its center; Umar is buried nearby. For the Dogon this implied that they had to supply slaves (Gallais 1984: 56) and serve in the Tucolor army, often as horsemen. They had, of course, to Islamize as well. For the *falaise*-dwelling Dogon, this had relatively little impact: the raids on their villages were executed by the Samo, another tribute paying group, or in some instances by plateau Dogon⁹.

All this history, evidently, occurred for both the Kapsiki and the Dogon before the arrival of the colonials. Their subsequent courses through history vary as well. For the Kapsiki actual colonization came late. The Mandara area had been traversed by one German column prior to World War I, and the first three decades of this century saw the most intense war between Fulani and ‘Kirdi’ in their history. Not before 1930 was any pacification attained, and only after the World War II could one speak of a *pax colonialis*, while skirmishes between Kapsiki villages persisted through the 50s, when actual penetration of the national state was under way. Thus, the Kapsiki area has gradually evolved from a socially splintered slave raiding reserve, to a marginal area in a nation-state, and thence into a tourist attraction (Van Beek 1986a) as well as a group of traders. In most of their history, no ethnic unity or ethnic we-feeling were discernible. As a – not overly cohesive – ethnic group, the Kapsiki as such were created in the colonial era, to be marginalized later. Their marginal position, one main attraction for tourism, has worked to their advantage in trade. Straddling the border with Nigeria at a spot with relatively good transport facilities, the Kapsiki succeed in dominating the trade – or smuggling – between the two countries for most of the Mandara region.

For the Dogon colonial history started much earlier. Already in 1896 they fought a more or less final battle against the French colonial army at Kassa, and before the turn of the century the area was considered ‘pacified’. Their inclusion into the French colony of French West Africa meant a massive

recruitment of soldiers for both world wars, as well as a gradual introduction of French colonial money, replacing cowries as the currency. In the interbellum, the system of labour migration, still *en vogue* today, developed; the able-bodied young men worked in the big cities like Abidjan, Accra or Kumasi, to reestablish themselves again at the *falaise* after either a season or some years. This system, which also exists on the Nigerian side of the Kapsiki/Higi area, quickly became crucial for the economic prosperity of the villages. In addition, the Dogon refined their agricultural system and became the main cultivators of onions for the entire region. As solid workers they gained a wide renown in the major cities, thus easily finding work whenever they set out to. At present, they are increasingly sought after by government and development organizations as cadre. So, on the whole their entry into the nation state has been much more gradual and, all things considered, more successful than the Kapsiki's, even though their access to the corridors of power is mostly blocked by Bambara political domination. Dogon agriculture is inherently expansionist, so after 'pacification' they rapidly swarmed out into the plains and plateau. There is an expanding population while the Kapsiki are static (Van Beek 1986b), so pressure on environmental resources is mounting. In the fragile ecology of the Sahelian plains this implies environmental degradation, worsened by the recent years of drought. Thus, the present Dogon ecological picture is that of a quite successful agricultural system, threatened by its own success.

Conclusion

Processes in these 'shatter zones' differ considerably, despite their similarities. Both societies have been marked by a particular interaction with 'history', each in its own fashion. Sociopolitical fragmentation is common to both. Neither the Kapsiki nor the Dogon ever aimed at meeting the Muslim empires on their own grounds: the pressure of slave raiding never led to some larger military organization, and there is no evidence of any tendency toward centralization of power, which would have facilitated a more effective defense and a possibly offensive action. Apparently, the external threat brought about a fragmented power system with very diffuse and reciprocal obligations. Some organization on the village level seems to be the most appropriate response to this kind of pressure. Why so, is not wholly clear. Other instances of group defense against Muslim expansion do show centralization of power: in some groups in the central Nigerian Plateau (Morrison 1982) and in the Cameroonian plains (Adler 1984) centralization under external threat can be seen. A wider comparison is called for, to explore these contrasting processes of social fragmentation and centralization in marginal areas. One factor that might be important, in addition to habitat situation, type of enemy and population

density, is the presence of buffer groups. In both our cases no other groups bear the brunt of first attack, as none lived between the Dogon and Kapsiki and their slave raiders. The central Nigerian plateau presents a different picture; there other non-Muslim groups lived between the potential slaves and their would-be masters (Morrison 1982), which might have dampened any fragmentation processes.

Another factor could be the availability of weaponry and horses. In our cases, weapon production was more or less equal, both having few horses and a simple iron technology, which might have been different in the Moundang case (Adler 1984). The same holds for the position of domestic slaves, who played little or no role in our cases, but may have been more important elsewhere. Finally, overarching ideologies must be taken into account. Maybe such a comparison could shed some light on the varying impact of different types of warfare; after all, slave raiding is just a slice of the total gamut of warlike relations characterizing much of Africa's history.

Both groups reacted in different ways to external pressure, but in both cases the strategies for defense could be rendered plausible from the variables described. Each of these variables – physical environment, organization of enemy forces, ethnic history – can be filled in differently from both our cases; we are not dealing with dichotomies here. So any overview of the total range of defensive reactions must await a larger comparative study. However, our small 'controlled comparison' appears to hint that just a few options are open for groups under these circumstances, which permeate the respective cultures deeply. In what way these strategies shape the societies is a hard question to solve. In the last instance, this is the quest for cultural integration. Wolf states:

... we can no longer think of societies as isolated and self-maintaining systems. Nor can we imagine cultures as integrated totalities in which each part contributes to the maintenance of an organized, autonomous and enduring whole. There are only cultural sets of practices and ideas, put into play by determinate human actors under determinate circumstances. In the course of action, these cultural sets are forever assembled, dismantled, and reassembled, conveying in variable accents the divergent paths of groups and classes (1982: 390-91).

The comparison of our two cases shows that both cultures can be profitably viewed in their interaction with Muslim expansion. However, the use of terms like 'strategy' and 'patterns of fragmentation' indicates that some coherence can be found within these cultures. However materially founded the formation of value systems and ideologies may be, produced and used in power play and domination, they still exhibit a certain degree of integration. In the two cases, Kapsiki as well as Dogon, the combination and recombination of social and ideological elements, however linked up the processes are shown to be with the idiosyncrasy of history and the vagaries of ecology, do result in coherent systems. From both the observer's and the emic participants' point of view, the

'determinate human actors' succeed in constructing meaningful cultural contexts. Kapsiki and Dogon, in the course of their interaction with 'history', managed to produce their own particular styles, formulated in their own special cultural idiom. The two ways of assigning meaning diverge, a difference that has to be rooted also in the system of cultural meaning in each of the groups. Neither the rugged individualism of the Kapsiki, nor the Dogon's addiction to harmony are necessary givens of ecology and external history. It seems however, that whenever a cultural strategy has been adopted, this 'choice' will serve as an integrative precept for the rest of the culture, and as such offers an important venue for cultural and historical analysis. Thus, at least in our two cases, Wolf's approach shows itself to be highly productive, both through the insights we gain into the respective societies, and through the possibilities to arrive at more focused theoretical questions and fruitful propositions.

* For comment on an earlier version, I am indebted to Bonno Thoden van Velzen, Murray Last and Philip Burnham.

Notes

1. The Kapsiki/Higi straddle the border between Nigeria and Cameroon; they are called Higi in Nigeria and Kapsiki in Cameroon. My research among them in 1971, 1972-73, 1979 and 1988, mainly on the Cameroonian side, was funded by grants from the University of Utrecht and the Dutch Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Research.
2. My anthropological research on the Dogon was part of a larger multidisciplinary project, and took place in 1978, 1979-80, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1986 and 1989, financed by two grants from the Dutch Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Research (WOTRO), the University of Utrecht, Time-Life and the Dapper Foundation.
3. The name 'Mandara' refers to both an ethnic group and the mountains. The Mandara group is a relatively small Islamic group, living at the Northern rim of the mountains. The Mandara mountains serve as a habitat for many other, non-Moslim groups, such as the Kapsiki.
4. This system is under pressure from the Malian government. In many villages chiefs or headmen are chosen among the 'younger old men', independent of their having an old surviving patriarch.
5. I have no figures on divorce frequency, as this issue is extremely sensitive for the Dogon and does not lend itself to a quantitative approach. However, the number of divorce cases known to me is very small.
6. This fertility is clearly illustrated in the much more densely populated part of the Mafa, North of the Kapsiki, who manage to retain food self sufficiency with a population density of over 100/km² (Podlewski 1966).
7. This holds somewhat less for the original Kapsiki settlements, which, like Mogodé, where much of the research was done, were installed on top of outcroppings in the undulating

plateau. However, the great majority of historical villages were all situated on top of the mountain slopes. These outcroppings, offering a defense possibility for only a small population, were deserted some three centuries ago, according to TL dating of shards.

8. Anyway, Kapsiki cattle were of a breed that does well in the mountains, but poorly in the plains, and as such were not much valued by the Fulani.
9. Still, the cliff Dogon may have developed the horse and cavalier motifs in their sculpture in this period; they still like to portray themselves mounted, even if the total number of horses is low and has never been high.

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Economy and society in southwest Ethiopia. The emergence of the 'Tishana'

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This article has two purposes. First, to provide a historical outline of the Tishana or Me'en, a small 'tribal' group living in Southwest Ethiopia and ethnographically as well as historically one of the least known populations in the area. Secondly, to illustrate the importance of a political economy approach in explaining such a process of tribal emergence. In writing this article I derived inspiration from Eric Wolf's seminal book *Europe and the people without history* (1982). In an historical-anthropological approach, as envisaged here, the interdependence of politico-economic factors on the one hand and social dynamics and cultural factors on the other, both placed in a 'global' perspective, is axiomatic. One of the merits of Wolf's book is to have demonstrated the need to rethink the explanatory framework for research and interpretation of traditional ethnography and anthropology on the basis of the idea of what he has called the 'global interconnection of human aggregates' (Wolf 1982: 385).

Also for the study of the 'periphery' of Ethiopia, an African state never really colonized and thus never as directly transformed by global, western politico-economic forces as other African countries, this approach is important. As I will demonstrate, wider processes of mercantile expansion and political entrepreneurship played a vital role in the emergence of tribal units in an obscure frontier area of Africa's oldest independent country. In outlining the history of the so-called 'Tishana' it will be shown - if it still needs showing - that the specific emergence and cultural form of a tribal ethnic group cannot be understood within a classic case-study approach focussing on the group itself. The Tishana social formation is the result of changing 'social alignments' (Wolf 1982: 386) and adaptive responses of certain human groups within this broader framework of historical and politico-economic forces. How this result came about is what constitutes the history of the Tishana.

The problem

'Tishana' is the tribal name which Northern Ethiopians (mostly Amhara from the Gojjam and Shewa regions in Central Ethiopia) gave to various groups of Surma-speaking semi-nomads, living in the areas they came to conquer after