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How to Explain Access to the Field

Lessons from Fieldwork among the Yedina (or Buduma) of Lake Chad

Jan Patrick Heiss

Abstract. – In their articles, researchers describe how the identity that is assigned to them by the social group they are studying is the key criterion for determining a researcher's ability to gain access to the field. They often explain this identity in relation to the historical external relations of the society being investigated. In this article, I will also attempt to portray the identity that the Yedina assigned to me during my field research, and which fundamentally determined my possibilities of gaining access to the field. However, at the same time, I wish to explain this identity not only in the context of the historical external relations but also in the light of the social, economic, and political structures of this ethnic group. In this way, I hope to show that the reasons for assigning identities to anthropologists require a much more in-depth discussion than has so far been the case in the aforementioned discourse. *[Chad, Yedina (Buduma), fieldwork, segmentary systems, state]*

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1 Introduction

In the discussion on anthropological methods, various analytical approaches can be discerned. Some authors focus on the relationship between the topic of anthropological research and the choice of methods (Spittler 2001). Others emphasize the relationship between the choice of methods and the theoretical assumptions of the researcher (Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 1997: 238). This article, however, will address the problem of field access that every researcher encounters when doing fieldwork. If one analyzes the texts of various anthropologists dealing with this subject,[1] one arrives at the following conclusion.

Empirical anthropologists are interested in certain aspects of social life of a specific social group. In order to pursue their interests, anthropologists need to be admitted to that part of social life which they wish to study. However, gaining access is not always that easy. The researcher may be denied access to the field right from the start (Lentz 1989). In other cases, a researcher may only be granted access to certain parts of social life, while other parts are screened from him (Berreman 1993). During the course of his field research, an anthropologist will attempt to gain access to further areas of social life. Hence, he will spend much of his time in the field to allow the social group he wishes to study to get to know him and to trust him. He will actively seek to build social relationships and will practise rigorous self-discipline, so as not to spoil his chances (Berreman 1993). He will only choose those methods of analysis that are accepted by the field (cf. Spittler 2001). If he is lucky, the anthropologist will be able to build trusting relationships and gain access to those areas of social life which were initially barred from him (cf. Fortes

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[1] This is exemplified, in this case, by Berreman (1993), Briggs (1970), Chagnon (1992), Evans-Pritchard (1978), Fortes (1975), Lentz (1989), Rivière (2000), and Spittler (2001).

1975: 250). However, this process can also take an unfortunate turn. The people among whom he is working may become suspicious of him, or disappointed, or even condemn his behaviour. As the social group increasingly distances itself from the anthropologist, he may be prevented from gaining further access to the group's social life and research may become much more difficult or perhaps even impossible (Briggs 1970).

Taking a closer look at the texts, it becomes apparent that the granting of access to the field is based on the following process, which, from an analytical standpoint,[2] can be broken down into two steps: The members of the investigated group first assign a particular identity to the researcher. Then they determine the relevance of the researcher for their own lives and act accordingly. At the beginning of his research, Rivière (2000: 32 f.) was, for instance, taken to be a magician by the Trio. Magic is relevant in the lives of the Trio. Initially, they were, therefore, only cautiously hospitable to him.

In the later stages of a research project, the identity initially assigned to the researcher may change, yet the interplay of assigning an identity and determining its relevance is maintained throughout. Thus, later during his field research, the Trio began to regard Rivière (2000: 33) as a "harmless idiot" rather than a magician. His relevance for the Trio changed. They then saw it as their duty to teach him. Both instances, identity allocation and the determination of relevance, can be broken down analytically even further.

With regard to identity allocation, (a), the members of the field assign particular "intentions" to the researcher. The inhabitants of Vicente de Gompuene, for example, assumed that Lentz (1989: 131 ff.) wished to gain access to land that belonged to the Indian community. (b), A researcher might also be assigned certain "skills." As we have seen, Rivière (2000: 33) was considered to be a magician for a time. As such, he possessed skills in the magical realm. (c), Likewise, the field subjects may believe that the researcher has certain "resources," which may consist of material goods or social relationships. The inhabitants of the village Shamanga, for example, hoped that Lentz (1989: 141) would be able to facilitate access to funding. (d), The research milieu may also define the researcher's "attitudes" and "character." The Eskimos who hosted Briggs, for instance, believed her to be rather irritable (1970: 259). Finally, the milieu may also ascribe certain "rights and responsibilities" to the researcher. Josten (1991: 7), for example, was assigned the role of a charge. As such, the field subjects entitled him to receive assistance from his hosts in being taught how to behave properly.

Three criteria play a prominent role in determining the researcher's relevance for the group under study. First, the members of the research milieu try to anticipate the behaviour of the researcher and define his "usefulness or harmfulness in relation to their own interests," and then act accordingly. Since the inhabitants of Vicente de Gompuene believed Carola Lentz to be a thief of land, they expected her to be harmful for them and expelled her from their village. Second, the members of the research group may also acknowledge the "rights and responsibilities" assigned to the researcher and this may guide their behaviour. This happened, e.g., with the Trio, when they decided to take care of Rivière. Furthermore, third, the field subjects relate the researcher's behaviour to their own "values." They question whether the researcher is able to perform his duties, whether his character lives up to their expectations, and whether he possesses the desired skills or sufficient property. The group will judge him according to these criteria and respect or reject him accordingly. Briggs' behaviour (1970: 250, 260), for instance, clashes with the behavioural standards of the Eskimos. Instead of remaining composed and calm, she is at times moody, obstinate, and irritable. The Eskimos turn away from her and no longer converse with her (285–291).

If one follows the arguments of the authors cited above, one will probably conclude that access to the field can be explained with reference to two factors: (a) the identity the field assigns to the researcher and (b) the criteria that determine his relevance to the field subjects. And yet how does one explain the different elements that make up a researcher's ascribed identity and the criteria on whose basis his relevance to the group is judged? The authors do not systematically pursue this line of thought. They primarily refer to the important historical dimensions of their role in the field. The inhabitants of Vicente de Gompuene, e.g., draw on their historical experiences with the white Ecuadorian upper class to deduce the intentions they assign to Lentz. The cowboys' rejection in the Brazilian province Roraima, which Rivière experienced (2000: 41) on another research trip, was the consequence of their experience of being looked down by other citizens. Other factors are only implicit in the authors' texts or treated as if they were of little significance for understanding the issue of obtaining field access.

However, interests, rights and responsibilities, and values are shaped by society and always stand in close relation to the social and economic structure of the society they are inherently part of. One could, therefore, expect to find a correlation between certain forms of social structure and certain interests and values. It seems to me that this point has not been given sufficient consideration in anthropological discussions on field access so far.

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[2] Both sides are analysed separately here. In reality they are, of course, mutually interdependent.

This is all the more astonishing, considering that this point is in fact addressed in anthropological discussions on the role of strangers. Hence, Elwert (2001) draws on conflict resolution mechanisms to analyse the role of strangers among the Byalebe in Benin. The Byalebe preferred to resolve a conflict by avoiding it altogether. Social tensions would thus lead to divisions among the social groups. By the same token, trouble or disturbances, which could be expected to arise from the behaviour of strangers, would translate into social divisions. Hence, unless they were completely assimilated, strangers were seen as a threat.

Drawing on my own research, conducted among the Yedina of Lake Chad, I hope to demonstrate the importance of explicitly taking into account, in discussions on the issue of obtaining field access, a society's economic and social structures. My argument runs as follows.

First, I will introduce the reader (section 2) to the Yedina's natural habitat at Lake Chad and to my field research. Then I will outline those elements of Yedina society that I consider to be particularly relevant for the discussion on obtaining access to that society. Among the most important factors are the social and economic structures of Yedina society (section 3), the role of the state in the settlement area of the Yedina (section 4) as well as the relationships between the Yedina and strangers at Lake Chad (section 5). Subsequently, I will attempt to describe the identity (section 6) that the Yedina assigned to me and the implications this had for my access to the field (section 7). In section 8, I will then draw on my analysis of points 3–5 to explain the features of my identity, as ascribed to me by the Yedina, and their reactions towards me, in order to finally return, in section 9, to my initial discussion on field access.

2 The Yedina: Settlement Area, Field Research, and Sources

Lake Chad is an inland water on the border between Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad.

The lake basin has numerous elevations to the east and north of the lake. When the water level is sufficiently high, water surrounds these elevations and they form an archipelago. When the water level falls, larger areas of the lake lie bare or become swampland. The archipelago and parts of the shores of Lake Chad form the settlement area of the Yedina. Their population was estimated by Bouquet (1990, vol. 1: 197–200) to be around 40,490. The majority of the Yedina live within the borders of Chad, a smaller number can be found in Niger, and only a few live in Nigeria and Cameroon.[3]

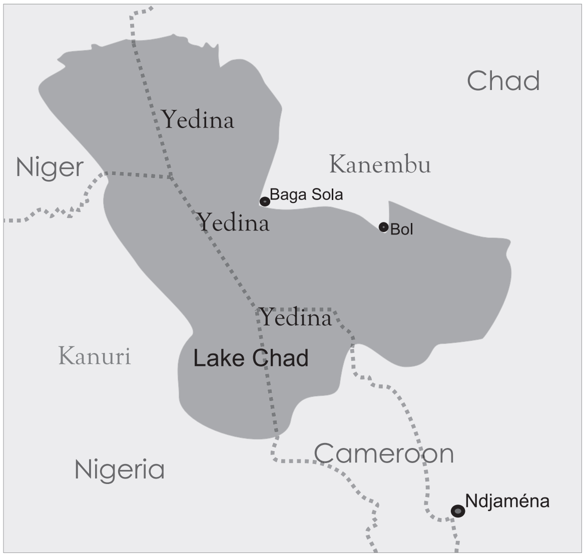

Fig. 1: Lake Chad (based on UN map: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Lakechad_map.png).

During the last few decades, numerous representatives of other ethnic groups have come to the islands of Lake Chad to trade or fish. They include Kanembu, Kanuri, Hausa, Jukun, Sara, Ngambay, and many others. The Chadian state is also represented at the lake and has established administrative units known as *cantons* there. In 1990, the most important cantons for the Yedina of the Chadian side were those of Tataverom, Limboi, and Bol (see Bouquet 1990, vol. 1: 18). These cantons are governed by intermediary canton chiefs (*chef de canton*), who in turn are subordinate to subprefects (*sous-préfet)* appointed by the central government. The Chadian state is also represented at Lake Chad by the military, police, customs, and the secret service. Its officials often belong to ethnic groups from North Chad, e.g., the Teda-Daza or the Zaghawa.

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[3] The Yedina should be differentiated from the Kuri. The latter are a small ethnic group who live in the southeastern part of Lake Chad. The Kuri speak the Yedina language, yet the Kuri and the Yedina consider themselves to be different ethnic groups.

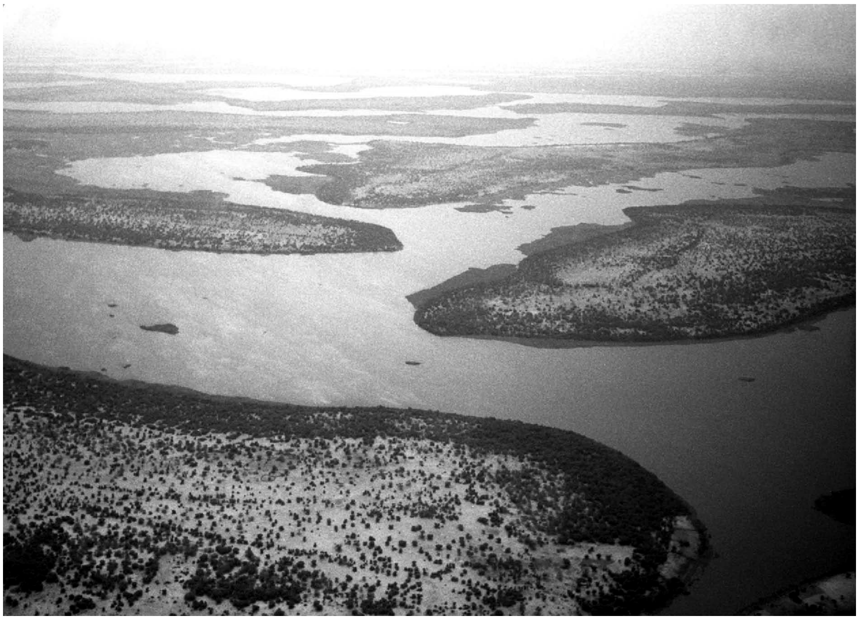


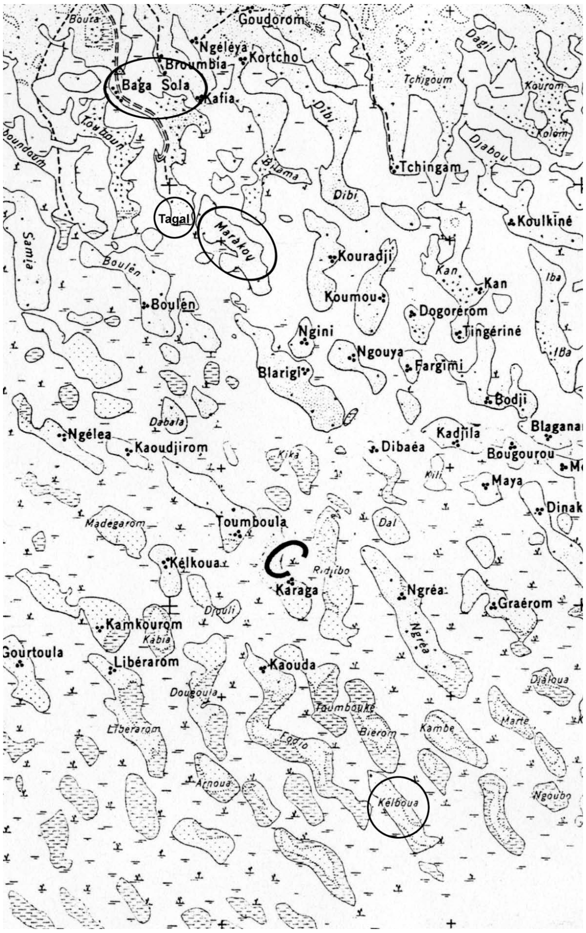
Fig. 2: Aerial photograph of the archipelago; photo by Barbara Dehnhard.

The data presented in this article on the Yedina was collected during two field trips which took place between May to August 2003 and between May and July 2004, respectively. Most of the research was conducted in the Yedina settlements of Maraku (with approximately 80 Yedina) and Kilbua (with roughly 140 Yedina and 300 immigrants) (Fig. 3). Both sites are in the Canton de Bol.

The Yedina of Maraku belong to the Bujia clan; the Yedina of Kilbua belong to the Majigojia clan. Most of the research data relates to the latter of the two clans, the Majigojia, as most of the research was conducted there.

My research among the Yedina aimed at writing the first monograph on them based on participant observation. There is no ethnography in the literature drawing on extensive field trips. Instead, there are sketches of short-term observations,[4] and accounts of travels around Lake Chad with short stays in Yedina villages (Overweg 1969). Some authors provide accounts based on secondhand information (Nachtigal 1967, vol. 2) and others seem to have relied mainly on information from the family of the *Chef de Canton* of Bol, as well as on interviews with single informants or on random observations.[5]

However, my fieldwork was a failure. This was due mainly to the fact that – and I would like to state this in advance – the Yedina clearly distanced


Goudorom
Ngéléya
Broumbia
Kortcho
Baga Sola
Kafia
Tchigoum
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Marakou
Koulkiné
Samia
Boulèn
Kouradji
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Koumou
Dogorérom
Tingériné
Iba
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Maya
Dinak
Madegarom
Toumboula
Dal
Kélkoua
Karaga
Ngréa
Graérom
Kamkourom
Kabia
Gourtoula
Libérarom
Kaouda
Dougoula
Toumbouké
Biérom
Kambé
Djaloua
Marte
Ngoubo
Arnoua
Kélboua

Fig. 3: The research locations (based on: Institut Géographique National, Paris, feuille ND-33-IX).

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[4] Denham in Schleucher (1969), Talbot (1911), Barth (1965), Alexander (1907).

[5] Bouquet (1990), Konrad (1955), Tilho (1910–1911).

themselves from me and, at times, even openly expressed their disdain towards me. I could have realized that I would have a hard time doing fieldwork among them right from the beginning, when I spoke to a young Yedina in Baga-Sola about my plans to stay on the islands and saw the unwillingness in his facial expression. Looking back, his facial expression foreshadowed what came later on. However, motivated by prior positive field experience among the Kanuri-Manga (Heiss 2003: 25–43) and keen on getting to know the Yedina, about whom so little was known in anthropology, I read his grimace as an expression of personal opinion. However, on the Chad islands I often encountered the above-mentioned distance and disdain. I could not always keep emotionally neutral in that situation. I felt frustrated and, at times, developed feelings of antipathy towards some Yedina. I hoped, that, as time went by, my situation would improve, and I clung to the little progress I made and to my contacts to some of the Yedina who turned out to be more open and friendly (see below). So I carried on. At the same time, I was constantly thinking about my own behaviour and trying to alter it. Did I understand that person properly? Did he really mock at me or was it rather a joke? Did I misunderstand him, or did he really put me on the wrong track? Am I a burden to them? Is behaving politely the wrong approach? Should I appear more self-assured? I took also measures to control my own emotional involvement. After having spent some time in Maraku, I moved to Kilbua to start afresh. And again, I spent some nine months in Europe after the first field trip and came back to Kilbua full of new hope. I have to add, however, that I hold no grudge against any Yedina, I kept in my mind the memory of Belama Chari and Mellem Gwoni, both of whom helped me a lot, and I did consider this field experience as an important step forward in the development of my own anthropological skills and knowledge.

By the same token, my possibilities of access were very limited. I resided in both villages and tried to participate in the villagers' daily life. I made observations, asked questions about what I had seen, had – to a limited extent – conversations, drew maps, and so on (see section 7). Given the situation in the field, the data I collected, however, were often more observational than discursive. Moreover, I primarily had contact with men and could only offer limited information on women (cf. Clifford 1986: 17). Besides doing research in the field, I was able to analyse the French colonial files in the Archives Nationales et du Patrimoine while I was in Ndjamena, the Chadian capital. I also drew on literary references on the Yedina.

Given this situation in the field, my line of reasoning will at times resemble the piecing together of a puzzle. The reader should keep this in mind and not be misled into assuming, based on his – hopefully – positive field experiences, that this piecemeal analysis is the result of a lack of anthropological assiduity. At the same time, I do fully acknowledge the provisional nature of my interpretations – they are mine and a product of a certain encounter between certain people shaped by their respective histories and personalities (cf. Crapanzano 1986: 51), and hinging on a lot of assumptions I (and possibly also the reader) might be unaware of.

3 Economic and Social Structures

The Majigojia pursue various economic activities. During the rainy season, they cultivate millet. They also make use of the annual water level fluctuations to cultivate maize and to garden. Their proximity to the water allows them to catch and smoke fish, which is then traded by some of them. The Majigojia also keep cattle on the rich pastures of the islands of Lake Chad. Some of them use pirogues to transport people and goods across the lake.

Every Majigojia is involved in one or several of these economic activities. Land cultivation, fishing, and cattle husbandry are, however, the most important activities. These are often combined in a meaningful manner. Land cultivation is mainly used for subsistence farming, fishing serves to generate cash, and cattle husbandry is the ultimate goal of all economic activities.

By their own self-definition, Majigojia are primarily cattle herders, who also cultivate land. They do not rely so much on fishing. In their opinion, fishing is something you do when you are young, or if there are no other available sources of income. Even if they fish, the Majigojia do not pursue this activity as assiduously as they could. Hence, there are no Majigojia who pursue large-scale fishing. The Majigojia also show a clear preference for large fish species; they are not interested in the smaller ones.

This apparent disinterest in fishing most probably has historical roots. Historical sources report that fishing was largely performed by slaves during the colonial period; the Yedina themselves stayed well away from it (Talbot 1911: 249). They only started fishing in recent times, when economic shortages, mainly brought on by drought, forced them to do so (Bouquet 1990, vol. 1: 398 f.).

Apart from cultivating the fields, the women do not pursue any of these economic activities. They

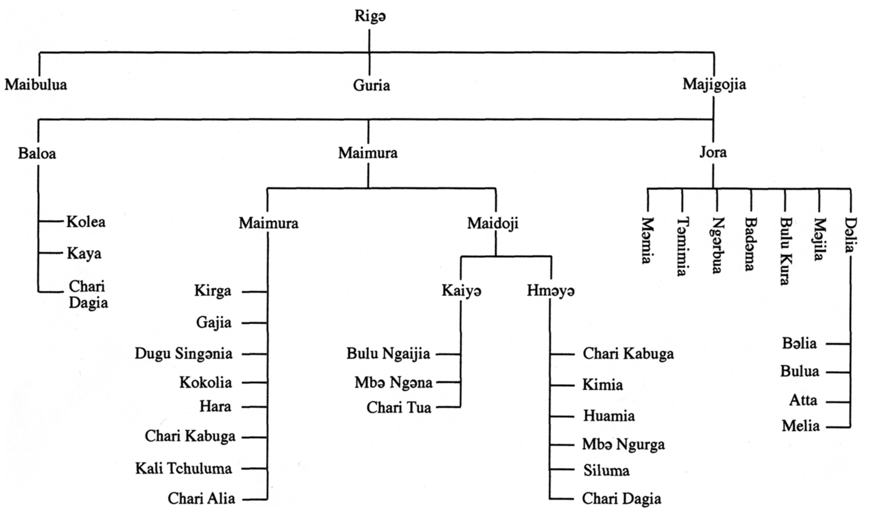

Fig. 4: Genealogy of the Majigojia.

are generally involved in raising children, cooking, keeping the farmstead clean, fetching water, chopping firewood, milking the cows, or building a new hut.

Upon marriage, a new family (*yal*) is founded. The Majigojia marry virilocally. Due to this virilocality, patrilineally related men usually settle together in one place. In accordance with the segmentary principle, these then form larger groups of relatives. Hence, the descendants of a common grandfather form a *yal nge mbe* (family of the grandfather). Members of a *yal nge mbe* sometimes work together. They will, for instance, drive their cattle together into herds. Several *yal nge mbe* together are headed by a *moroma*, who is responsible for settling disputes among his followers and collecting the state's taxes, most of which he passes on. Several of these *moroma*-led groups form a *fadow*. A *fadow* owns a common piece of land, on which its members can settle, cultivate land, and allow their cattle to graze. One of the *moroma* of the *fadow*, known as a *belama*, is in charge of managing the land. Several *fadow* in turn form a clan (*njili*). The clan sees the land of its constituent *fadow* as its "clan territory." All clan members are entitled to settle, cultivate the land, and let their cattle graze on it, but the *fadow* can also seal off their land from other *fadow* if problems arise. The clan has a common leader, the *mai*. The *mai* collects duties from the clan members, e.g., the tithes of the harvest. One of the *mai*'s functions within the clan is jurisdiction; and he also collects the state's taxes from his clan's *moroma* before passing most of it on to the state authorities. The post of the *mai* is not hereditary. The *mai* is elected at an assembly of all the clan's *moroma* and can also be removed from office at any time.

The members of a *fadow* or a *njili* have certain duties and responsibilities. When there are conflicts with other kinship groups of the same segmentary level, they are obliged to show solidarity with the members of their own group. They are obliged to collectively protect their lives as well as their properties. These groups also practise blood vengeance or payment of blood money. The clans of the Yedina as a whole make up the ethnic group of the Yedina. Yet as a group, they don't have a leader nor do they act as a corporate group.

Here is a short overview of the genealogy of the Majigojia clan for illustration purposes (Fig. 4).

The above illustration shows Rigə, the Yedina's ancestor, and also the three main clans of the Yedina: the Maibulua, the Guria, and the Majigojia.[6] As a group, the Majigojia share a clan territory. They also have a common leader, the *mai*. The territory of the Majigojia is divided up into parts that belong to its different *fadow*. One can, for instance, see the *fadow* of the Baloa on the left-hand side of the diagram. All Majigojia may, in principle, settle on the territory of the Baloa and use their pastures, but the Baloa may also seal off their territory. The Baloa are subdivided into three *moroma* groups. These groups do not possess any territory of their own, but owe allegiance to their *moroma*. They are subdivided into different *yal nge mbe* (families of the grandfather), each of which has its own *yal* (family). The kinship groups of the Maimura and the Jora have even more branches than the Baloa group, as a result of having a larger number of members. The smallest groups depicted on the right-hand side of the diagram (e.g., the Kimia and the Chari Kabuga) are not *moroma*-led groups but *fadow*. The superordinate names in the genealogy represent kinship links, which do not imply any territorial claims. The *mai* of the Majigojia stems from the *fadow* of the Kimia.

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[6] I do not know what the genealogical relations are between the clan that has settled in Maraku, i.e., the clan of the Bujia and the other Yedina clans. However, while I was on Kilbua, I was told that this is a rather complex matter.

As we know since Ladislav Holy's (1979) critique of Evans-Pritchard, genealogical relations do not always translate directly into social action. And yet conflicts arise among the Yedina that very much resemble or correspond to the segmentary model. Thus, according to the *mai* of the Majigojia, fighting about two islands broke out in 2004 between segments of the Maibulua and the Guria clans. Also before my arrival, armed conflict had occurred between different kinship groups. A boy had carried belligerent messages between two men of different *fadow* of the Majigojia. Later, both men fought and one of them was killed. The survivor and the boy were then arrested by the *gendarmerie*. Thereupon, the men of the boy's village attacked the other village with spears. During my field trip, the Kimia and the Chari Kabuga *fadow* on Kilbua also closed off their pastures to the cattle of the neighbouring island of Tchongolet, since the inhabitants of this island did not want to recognise the *mai* of the Majigojia as their *mai* anymore.

The segmentary system of the Majigojia is marked by a certain dynamic of its own. Kinship groups can be split and new, independent ones with new functions (*moroma*, *belama*, *mai*) can be created. At the same time, contenders can compete for existing functions. In this system, the desire to be distinct translates into fissions within the group or competition for different posts. Correspondingly, some Yedina expressed their wish to found their own village and thus become leaders of political groups.

4 The Yedina and the State

Nachtigal gives a detailed account of the clan structure of the Yedina in the 19th century (1967/2: 364) and mentions the central clan-bound post of the *kaschella* (367). In the "mission Tilho" (Tilho 1910–1911/2: 332) this post is also described. Within the group, the *kaschella* was a commander in war, an arbitrator, or judge; his authority was based on special abilities and his access to resources. At the time, the Yedina clans often raided each other (Konrad 1955: 37f.) as well as the shore regions of the lake (Barth 1965; Nachtigal 1967/2). As sources confirm, the Yedina were surrounded by states such as Borno and Wadai during this period, but these were not able to incorporate the Yedina into their territory.

Since that time, however, the Yedina have observed how state structures were gradually established in their settlement area. This process developed in four steps.

1. At first, the Guria clan subjugated the Yedina in the southern areas of Lake Chad and levied a compulsory tribute on them (Tilho 1910–1911/2: 316).[7] Then, Sultan Hachimi of Borno put the clan chief of the Guria in charge of the western banks of Lake Chad in return for peace and was thus able to integrate him into his kingdom. However, this incorporation into the state of Borno only lasted a year, as Rabeh destroyed the kingdom in 1894, without being able to extend his rule over the Yedina.

2. In 1900, the French incorporated Lake Chad into their colonial empire (Tilho 1910–1911/2: 318). The French colonial administration established cantons around the lake and appointed *chefs de canton* to rule over them. They tried to collect data on the population and livestock number, head and cattle taxes, administer justice, and impose penalties. However, until the 1950s, they were only able to accomplish their mission in a very incomplete manner. This was partly due to insufficient personnel. In 1932, only one French soldier, eleven African soldiers, and seven civil employees were based in Bol, in the southern half of the lake.[8] Furthermore, the records point to the limited mobility of the French colonial administration. In 1933, they still didn't own a boat[9] and, according to the route maps, only travelled through the hinterlands of Bol and some of the adjacent islands.[10] The Yedina also appear to have resisted at times the French colonial administration. A report from 1932 states that a village took up arms to prevent a colonial soldier from

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[7] These power relations have a historical continuity in that the clan of the Majigojia has its own clan chief but, in the context of the Chadian state structures, he is formally subordinate to the clan chief of the Guria and is only his representative in the clan region of the Majigojia.

[8] See A. E. F. (Afrique Equatoriale Française) / Colonie du Tchad / Circonscription du Kanem / Rapport trimestiel / Premier trimestre 1932 / Mao, le 27 avril 1932/Le Chef de Circonscription; A. E. F. / Colonie du Tchad / Circonscription du Kanem / Rapport trimestiel / Troisième trimestre 1932.

[9] A. E. F. / Colonie du Tchad / Inspection des affaires administratives / Rapport sur la situation du Kanem au début de l'année 1933: 17.

[10] A. E. F. / Colonie du Tchad / Circonscription du Kanem / Rapport trimestiel / Troisième trimestre 1930; Territoire du Tchad / Région du Kanem / P. C. A. de Bol / Rapport politique / 1er semestre 1950.

arresting one of its members.[11] Correspondingly, the French colonial government judged its leverage in the Chad region as low, as a report from 1933 confirms:[12]

> Il ne serait pas prudent de toucher sans avoir pris quelques précautions préliminaires, à l'organisation des Boudoumas. Leur dépendance est une concession volontaire qu'ils nous font et ils trouveraient à l'occasion un refuge assuré dans les îles lointaines, inaccessibles au chef de la Subdivision qui ne dispose même pas d'une baleinière.

It was not until the 1950s that the colonial administration took on a more active role in the region, by building polders and travelling more extensively throughout the lake region.[13] Yet this phase ended with Chad's independence in 1960.

In this second phase of establishing state structures on and around Lake Chad, the basic foundations of today's public administration system were set up. The French colonial government introduced a supraregional administration, including the intermediary office of the canton chief.[14] Yet the implementation of the French claim to power remained incomplete and was mainly focused on the towns of Bol in the south and Rig-Rig, to the north of the lake. Nevertheless, according to Konrad (1955), the French colonial administration did put an end to raids between the clans and forays on the shores of Lake Chad, and also abolished slavery. However, they were never able to establish themselves as a legitimate authority.

3. In 1960, Chad achieved political independence. After the fall of the first president, Tombalbaye, in 1975, civil war erupted in Chad, which ended in 1990, with Débys' seizure of power. As I hardly have any information for this period, I am not able to trace the development of state structures at the lake during this time.

4. Following Débys' seizure of power and the suppression of rebel groups at Lake Chad, the Chadian state continued its legacy from colonial times. (I omit the time after 2006 when the civil war flared up again, because I carried out my field-research prior to 2006.)

Firstly, the current government of Chad still administers the region through a system of "intermediary rulers." Thus, the *mai*, the head of the Majigojia clan, is subordinate to the *chef de canton* in Bol. The state collects taxes from the Majigojia via the *moroma* and the *mai*.[15] At the same time, state bodies that are superordinate to the *mai* can accept or deny claims to positions within the hierarchy of the Majigojia. If someone wishes to become a *mai*, *belama*, or *moroma*, he requires both the allegiance of his followers to support his claim and also the approval of the state authorities.

Here, it is important to note that by endowing the political offices of the Majigojia with the power to access financial resources, the government has intensified competition among the Yedina for these posts. As we have seen, the segmentary system of the Yedina has a dynamic of its own. Social distinction can be achieved by splitting kinship groups to create new political functions or by taking over an existing function. These two factors combined, i.e., the possibility of obtaining social distinction by achieving a political function, and the possibility that function entails of accessing financial resources appear to have led to intense competition among the Yedina for these posts. Thus, for instance, the inhabitants of Tchongolet Island not only revoked their allegiance to the *mai* of the Majigojia, but one of them also made a petition in Ndjaména to be recognised as a *mai* himself. Yet, the *mai* of the Majigojia had also filed a petition in Ndjaména for the clan territory of the Majigojia to be separated from the canton of Bol, so that he could then be promoted to canton chief of the independent canton himself. Three persons on Maraku, in turn, laid claim to the *belama* post. The *gendarmerie* of Baga-Sola had to settle all claims in court. A cousin of the *mai* of the Majigojia declared that the post of the *mai* actually belonged to his family and addressed his father as *chef de canton* in a letter.

Secondly, the French colonial rule was marked by its selective "presence." By contrast, the Chadian state today exerts a stronger presence at the lake through its agents and wields power more directly through them. Hence, the gendarmerie, customs, and the environmental police can be found in many trading spots. Military bases have been set up on the islands of Tetewa and Kinesserom. Mobile customs units guard the border with Nigeria. These state agents also administer justice and prosecute criminal offences. Thus, I was able to observe how one *gendarme* turned a dispute between a Yedina and a Jukun fisherman into a court case. According to the *mai* of Majigojia, the governmental authorities are always called upon in murder cases. Among other things, these state agents also ensure general civil order by preventing outbreaks of violence. For instance, with regard to the aforementioned conflict between the two men, who transmitted belligerent messages to each other via a boy, the gendarmerie prevented worse acts of violence from occurring. They also ended the fighting between sections of the Guria and the Maibulua, which were previously mentioned. Nonetheless, a certain continuity of colonial times can be observed here, as the difficult terrain still makes it difficult for state agents to show area-wide presence across the lake.[16]

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[11] A. E. F. / Colonie du Tchad / Circonscription du Kanem / Rapport trimestriel / 2ème trimestre 1932.

[12] A. E. F. / Colonie du Tchad / Inspection des affaires administratives / Rapport sur la situation du Kanem au début de l'année 1933.

[13] I refer to these five documents: Territoire du Tchad / Région du Kanem / Rapport politique / 2ème semestre 1950 / Chef de la Région; Bulletin politique mensuel / Mois de Juin 1956 / Bol, le 5. 7. 56 / Mosrin; Territoire du Tchad / Région du Kanem / P. C. A. de Bol / Rapport politique / 2ème semestre 1950; A. E. F. / Colonie du Tchad / Région du Kanem / District du Lac / Bulletin politique / Novembre 1956 / Bol, le 6. 12. 56 / Mosrin; A. E. F. / Colonie du Tchad / Région du Kanem / District du Lac / Bulletin politique / Mai 1956 / 8. 6. 56 / Mosrin.

[14] The records do not reveal which role the *chefs de canton* played in the cantons during this period.

[15] He does not possess a list of taxpayers. Rather, it is the *moroma* who states the number of people who are liable for taxation.

Thirdly, the Chadian state also appears to have inherited at least some aspects of the French colonial rule with regard to its "legitimacy." As the previous examples have shown, the Yedina still see violence between different kinship groups as a legitimate means of settling disputes. The assumption of the state's limited legitimacy is also confirmed by the *mai*'s statement that fighting between the Maibulua and the Guria about pastoral land would be resumed once a court decision had been taken and the soldiers had departed from the contested islands.

Overall, state structures have spread across Lake Chad over the past 100 years, even though this process remains incomplete. During this period, the Majigojia changed from an "independent segmentary tribe," with a segmentary lineage structure and weak central institutions (Salzman 2004: 64) in the precolonial period, to an "encapsulated tribe" (64) in our times, i.e., a tribe which is partly ruled by the state and which becomes more centralised in the process, but that also partly defies the state. Intermediary rule and strong competition for political posts among the Yedina, the at times massive but not area-wide presence of state agents, and the limited legitimacy of the state characterise the situation at present.

5 Strangers at Lake Chad

Different categories of strangers can be distinguished for the Yedina territory of the present. The state agents working on the islands fall into one category. Another category of strangers are petty tradesmen and fishermen, who have come to Lake Chad. Other categories include the Kanembu and the Fulbe, whom the Yedina encounter on migrations with their cattle herds north of the lake, or the fish wholesalers, to whom they sell their smoked fish.

There is not much I can say about the relationship between the Majigojia and the Chadian state officials, since I tried to shun contacts with the latter that would go beyond noncommittal friendliness. There were too many indications that more intense contact would create difficulties for me in the long run. Due to the nature of my fieldwork, I was not able to analyse the relations between the Yedina and the last two categories of strangers. This is a different case altogether with the second group of strangers, the fisherman and petty tradesmen. I had regular contacts and, in fact, a rather open relationship with them, so that I am in a position to make a statement about the reciprocal relations between the Majigojia and these strangers. The following accounts are based on this.

The presence of strangers on the islands, on which I conducted research, is a relatively new phenomenon, which the Yedina of Maraku and of Kilbua did not initially want. Hence, the Jukun fisherman, Salomon, recounted how the Yedina had tried to drive his father away with spears when he had first arrived on the island forty years ago. Finally, the Jukun could persuade the Yedina to tolerate their presence through gifts and money. In line with this argument, the Kanembu Isa on Kilbua told me that the Yedina at first fled when twenty years ago Kanembu tradesmen had arrived.

The gifts of the initial period have meanwhile evolved into an extensive system of tributes for strangers. On Kilbua, strangers have to pay special tributes for the land they use to build houses, for the fields they cultivate, or for smoking fish. They also have to pay one-tenth of their harvest and fees for exporting fish as well as for using market stalls. On Maraku, a Jukun Salomon pays about 6,000 Naira per month to Maraku, and on Kilbua, a Ngambay Elias payed 3,200 Naira for the right to use an area of 36 square metres.[17] The money is collected by the *belama*, and at least part of is distributed among the local Yedina.

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[16] As with the French colonial government, the Chadian state is hardly engaged in the provision of civilian services, health care, economic development, or education. There are no health care centres nor development projects on Maraku or on Kilbua. Only on Kilbua was a new primary school founded.

The initially very few strangers have turned into many. On Maraku and Kilbua, there are currently more strangers than Yedina. One can thus presume that there is a considerable redistribution of wealth from the strangers to the Yedina.

The presence of strangers is also beneficial to the Yedina because they bring goods to the island. I have not seen any Yedina trading on the market. Moreover, the foreign fishermen do not compete against the Yedina. As we have seen, the Yedina take a distanced attitude towards fishing. Hence, the economic activities of both parties compliment each other rather than precluding each other.

However, the relations between the Yedina and the strangers do not appear to have gone beyond the carrying out of everyday activities. A stranger will, for instance, ask a *mai* about something, rent a pirogue from a Yedina, or sell him fish. I have only heard of two cases of cross-ethnic friendship on Kilbua, and also of only two cross-ethnic marriages. Similarly, there were only two non-Yedina living in the settlement area of the Yedina on Kilbua.

Limited interaction, the lack of close relations, and separate settlement areas point to the fact that, generally, the two sides appear to go out of each other's way. This corresponds to the hierarchical stance that the Majigojia take up towards strangers. This became apparent to me whenever they described themselves. Some Yedina told me, for instance, that they were more trustworthy than any other ethnic group, and that they surpassed the Kanembu in patience and calmness. I was also told that the Kanembu get worked up much more quickly in conflict situations, and that they argue emotionally. Moreover, the Kanembu are seen to be more fearful and less manly. In conflict situations, they would not use a knife but would run away from the opponent's. Trustworthiness, patience, calmness, and courage appear to be attributes that make up some Majigojia's self-image – even though this observation was only made by inference. Furthermore, neediness appears to be another criterion, which the Majigojia associated with strangers. One Majigojia mentioned that the Kanembu had only come to the island because they did not possess anything of their own. The strangers' resources, so I understood, did not come anywhere close to those of cattle holders.

Since these positive self-evaluations go hand in hand with negative stereotypes about other groups, this at the same time implies a degradation of the others. Some *Majigojia* even clearly expressed this debasement in their direct interactions with strangers.

> Thus, a Majigojia came into the shop of a Nigerian shoe seller, placed his shod foot in front of his nose, and demanded that he should do his job. When the shoe seller protested, the Majigojia removed his foot and laughed, as if he had only been joking.
>
> A South Chadian told me about the following incident: As he was preparing to smoke fish, a Majigojia came to him, claiming to be the son of a *belama*. The Majigojia then demanded to be given a fish – a common and generally accepted demand for a *belama*. But since he had happened to want the biggest fish, the South Chadian told him that he could not give it to him, because otherwise he would lose all his income. So, he offered him a smaller one instead. The Majigojia then told him that he was a piece of dirt. In response, the South Chadian asked him whether he knew of even one Yedina who was not dirty. The Majigojia retorted that all Christians were animals. The South Chadian asked him whether he knew where the clothes had come from that he was wearing. The Majigojia responded that they were made by the Europeans. But they too are Christian, the South Chadian explained to him. The Majigojia then retaliated that his clothes came from Nigeria and threatened to banish him from the island.
>
> Another story, dating back to the early immigration period, clearly shows the Yedina's contempt for strangers. Hence, a Nigerian told me that a Majigojia had once bought a hat on credit from a Hausa. When the Hausa requested his money, the Majigojia asked him to come to his house to get it and there he slew him. After a while, the Hausa on Kilbua came looking for their associate and eventually found his corpse. Yet they had to let the matter rest.

Based on all these accounts, various clues can be deduced about the identity that the Majigojia assign to strangers.

From the exchange relationship between the fishermen and petty tradesmen, on the one hand, and the Majigojia, on the other, one can conclude that the Majigojia consider the immigrants' material resources to be of primary importance, and correspondingly incorporate the immigrants into a relationship of rights and duties based on this. Strangers are permitted to make a living at the lake, but they are obliged to pay for this privilege. The *belama* is the recipient of these tributes. However, as the subsequent distribution of tributes shows, all Yedina who belong to the group controlling the respective area lay claim to the strangers' resources.

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[17] 6,000 Naira is the equivalent of approximately 34 euros; 3,200 Naira is about 18 euros.

A stranger classed in the categories of "fishermen and petty tradesmen" is, therefore, seen by the Majigojia as someone who benefits from doing business at the lake, but also as someone on whom every Majigojia is entitled to make demands in return. Besides defining a stranger's rights and duties, the Majigojia also define his character and level of prosperity, thus taking an evaluative stance towards him. Yet strangers do not satisfy their set of evaluative criteria and end up being clearly disrespected by them, as interactive observations confirm.

6 Being a Field Researcher at Lake Chad

What does all this have to do with my position in the field and my access possibilities? Well, the behaviour of many Yedina towards me resembled their behaviour towards African strangers. Thus, I came to the conclusion that most Majigojia classed me into the same category as the fishermen and petty tradesmen.

On the one hand, the Yedina treated me with disdain, made fun of me, and tried to force me into their hierarchy on numerous occasions:

> Mellem Kime (roughly 23 years old) let me sit alone in a leaky hut while it rained and went somewhere else to wait until the rain had passed. On a different occasion, I had arranged to go fishing with him, but at a convenient moment he simply ran away.
>
> Mellem Kwole (roughly 38 years old) stood on the path outside "my" compound in Maraku and called out: "*Nahra kobe!*", an offensive epithet: *Nahra* is the word for white person, *kobe* is the name given to a small white animal living in the water, whose most distinct feature is that it serves no purpose.
>
> Mellem Cale (roughly 20 years old) once woke me up in the middle of the night and demanded that I should count to five in Yedina.
>
> At times, the Yedina openly demonstrated how amusing they thought I was. For instance, one youngster, whom I had watched while he was milking and whom I asked what the Yedina word for "udder" was, laughed out loud and frantically called out to his family: "He said udder!"
>
> During my second field trip, I shared my hut with Bukhar Cilem (name has been altered) for a time. I cooked myself and Bukhar Cilem regularly ate lunch with me. But then he gradually started to make use of me and to treat me like a servant. He left the scraps of food on the floor that he had dropped while he was eating, so that I had to clean up after him every day. It was also me who generally kept the hut clean. When I once pointed out that I had swept the hut, he merely replied in French: "That's absolutely normal!" When I tipped the rice water out next to the door of the hut one day and some of this flowed back to the front of the door, he got angry with me. He sternly instructed me to pour the rice water further away from the hut next time, otherwise visitors might think it was something disgusting, and this would bring us into disrepute.
>
> I spent many mornings alone in my hut. I washed, breakfasted, and sat there, without anyone dropping in to greet me.
>
> On one occasion, I wanted to spend the night on a cattle farm to watch the farmers work with their cattle. They kindly gave me a slightly derelict straw hut to sleep in. Later I found out that the hut was infested with fleas, so that I had to fight off quite a number of them, even inside my mosquito net.

On the other hand, the Yedina made it clear to me that they expected some financial benefits from me:

> Mellem Gwoni (roughly 38 years old) showed me his herd and let me write down all the names of his children. But when he realised that I had not written down any of them, in order to raise money for them, his interest in me declined rapidly. After that he pointed to some of his cows and named them, while lying listlessly on his mat.
>
> A Yedina from the island of Kolerom explained the marriage practices of the Yedina to me. I took a note of this. Later he gave me a notebook and told me to write down our marriage practices in Hausa for him. I replied that I could do this but asked him how he would benefit from this, considering he could not read or write. He insisted. Then he wanted to swap his cheap watch against my expensive one. I told him that my watch had been a present from my father, and that I could not give it to him. Then he asked me what I would do if I was not taught any Yedina words anymore. I answered that I would then simply move on. Generally, he seemed to be telling me that while I was here and benefiting from the Yedina, I should be offering him something in return.
>
> At the beginning, the *mai* appeared to be unconditionally open towards me. I could make appointments to see him and interview him. But then he increasingly spoke about my possibilities of getting him a scholarship or giving him money. In the course of time, I realised that this was one of the prime motifs for his contact with me.

Finally – and here I could find no parallel in the Majigojia's behaviour towards the fishermen and petty tradesmen – the behaviour of some of the younger men towards me appeared at times to be one of resistance or self-defence:

> There was often something threatening in the way younger Yedina greeted me. Adam Dogumi (roughly 20 years old), for instance, came up very close to me and bellowed "You!" (*Na!*). Then he planted himself in front of me and asked "Where have you come from?" (*Gwahi?*), "Where are you going?" (*Gwolhi?*), "What do you want here?" (*Gecebu meni?*). When I replied that

I wanted to learn the Yedina language, he asked "What will you give me for this?" (*Guni meni?*), and added "Take a photo of me!" (*Jugu hoto!*).

To a certain extent these experiences do, of course, correspond to the experiences made on any other field trip. You always meet people that insult you, there is always someone trying to give you orders. What does seem rather unusual here, however, is that I encountered this behaviour around every corner. So, I realised that this was the Yedinas' general attitude towards me, and that this behaviour was completely in keeping with the same behaviour they showed towards African strangers. Their behaviour towards me in these cases, therefore, appears to have been essentially shaped by their Yedina-specific categories of foreign fisherman and petty tradesmen, which legitimises degrading behaviour, on the one hand, and raises expectations of receiving benefits, on the other.

The insistent nature of the Majigojia's requests for financial tributes from me seemed to indicate that they perceived me in terms of the rights-duties relationship characteristic of the Yedina's relationship to strangers. I also experienced disdain: an indication that I, very much like the strangers, did not satisfy their evaluative criteria. Furthermore, the younger Majigojia saw in me a person who could cause them harm and who should, therefore, be warded off.

7 My Field Access

As should have become apparent by now, my possibilities of approaching the Yedina were very limited. Therefore, most of my efforts concentrated on repeated attempts to gain their trust. I wandered around and joined the groups of men. I responded to their questions, but also frequently asked some of my own.

If I wanted to observe something, e.g., the sowing of the fields, the feeling quickly overcame me that I should not stay too long. So I generally only came for a short while, answered some questions, asked some of my own, stayed a little to watch, and then left again.

At times, I also had more extensive conversations with the Yedina. But these conversations were never relaxed; the Yedina always kept a close watch over their behaviour. My conversation partners were hardly ever informative of their own accord, so that it was always a laborious exercise to find out anything at all. They seem to have little interest in delving on an issue or in entering into controversial debates. In two cases I realised in hindsight that they had simply lied to me throughout our lengthy conversation.

Under these circumstances, I dispensed with both tape recordings and the collection of statistical data. I merely conducted the beginnings of a census, which, to my surprise, did not encounter any reservations.[18]

All in all, I spent most of my time in my hut, staring into space and worrying increasingly about the little progress I had made with my research, which became a time-consuming venture with little room for manoeuvre. The result of this was that, although I was able to observe and investigate all kinds of processes, none of them could be systematically explored.[19]

8 Explaining the Identity Assigned to the Field Researcher

Now I wish to explain, step-by-step, the identity assigned to me and the subsequent reactions of the Majigojia. In doing so, I will refer to ethnographic elements I have already touched upon previously: the segmentary system of the Yedina, cattle herding, the role of the state, and historical influences.

Resistance to Strangers

As I have shown, younger men often behaved aggressively towards me in an attempt to inhibit my actions. This behaviour can be explained with reference to two factors: the segmentary system of Yedina society and the limited power of the Chadian state.

The Yedina require land for cultivation and keeping cattle. The territorial rights of use remain in the hands of segmentary kinship groups. Since these rights are not protected by the state's institutions, the segmentary groups protect their territory against strangers themselves, as well as their lives and the lives of their members (cf. Salzman 2004: 66). Strangers are a potential threat. Since it is the duty and responsibility of all members of the segmentary groups to protect their kinsmen

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[18] The French colonial government never recorded the names of those persons liable for taxation, neither had the Chadian government by the time I conducted my research. Until today, taxes are collected by the *moroma*, who indicate, how many people they represent and pass on their taxes to the *mai*.

[19] A summary of the results of this erratic study of various research topics can be found in Heiss (2006).

against these threats, it implies, naturally, a defensive "attitude towards strangers." Although the state is present at Lake Chad, it has not yet institutionalised or efficiently protected these rights, so that the task of fending off danger still rests until today, at least partially, with the members of segmentary groups.

Disdain

The Majigojia often treated me with disdain. This attitude indicates the application of value standards that I was unable to meet. These values can be explained by taking into account the segmentary structure, the role of the state, cattle herding, and the historical relations of the Yedina to other ethnic groups.

- Since a segmentary system envisages military tasks for its members, men are also normatively expected to have certain "personal attributes." Mutual reliability, a propensity to use violence,[20] courage in violent disputes, and self-discipline are among such personal attributes, and they are frequently heard in the Yedinas' own description of themselves as being reliable, courageous, calm, and patient. This also implies that the Yedina measure behaviour such as mine against these criteria. Since the Chadian state does not have a monopoly of violence at the lake, one can safely assume that the Majigojia's value orientation still largely conforms to that of segmentary groups.
- The potential for conflictive relationships between different kinship groups of a segmentary system naturally gives rise to the wish for a strong and powerful group. Distinction can be obtained in such a system by being in charge of a group that is as large, and therefore as strong, as possible. A senior political post, therefore, symbolises that the holder has "public support" and "power." This demonstrates how the use of social resources, "power," and "public support," as they are embodied in the holder of a political office, become "value criteria" for the Yedina. In the context of the state's incomplete assumption of power, prestige comes to him who commands a strong group. Also, as a stranger, I was measured against these value criteria.
- The Yedina primarily define themselves as cattle farmers. Some Yedina appear to even have quite large herds. This is what distinguishes them from the lake's immigrants and from the ethnic groups living on the lake's shores, who live off fishing, cultivating the fields or, to a lesser extent, from animal husbandry. Thus, the use of material "resources," i.e., affluence, becomes a key criterion for distinguishing between both sides and, it is also a "value criterion" for the Yedina, as was reflected in their own positive self-description. Strangers are, therefore, also measured against the criterion of how affluent they are.
- As previously discussed, historical sources confirm that the Yedina pillaged the shores of Lake Chad before the colonial period and also caught and enslaved people (Denham, cited in Konrad 1969: 210f.; Nachtigal 1967, vol. 2: 371). Fishing was largely left to the slaves at that time, while the Yedina themselves stayed well away from it (Talbot 1911: 249). As described previously, the Yedinas' limited interest in fishing appears to have historical roots that still influence the present. This, however, also means that the immigrants who devote themselves to fishing appear to some extent to represent historical continuity with the "fishing slaves" of the past and thus, in the eyes of the Yedina, to hold a subordinate position in their status system, "rights and duties." Many of the petty tradesmen also have a similar legacy. Several of the Kanembu tradesmen at the lake belong to the *dou* caste (Haddad). Konrad (1955) described their subordinate status. And, even today, the Yedina consider the members of the *dou* caste to be descendants of slaves, as one interlocutor told me, and, therefore, not of equal rank with the Yedina. A historical connection can thus be established between these two professional groups, fishermen and petty tradesmen, and groups in the past who had fewer "rights" and more "duties" than the Yedina. This assignment of a lower status, as is clearly demonstrated by the Yedina's avoidance of the fishermen's and petty tradesmen's professions, still appears to play a role today.

All this explains the Yedinas' disrespect towards me; for if I am measured against the value criteria identified so far, then it quickly becomes apparent that the Yedina could not have thought much of me. I did not exactly radiate much courage, nor show much propensity for violence but tended to behave rather prudently. To all outward appearances, I did not own much either. The few possessions I carried around with me came nowhere near to those of a standard Yedina household. And I was alone: neither did I belong to a powerful group, nor did I have a group of followers behind me. On the contrary, it was easy to equate me with the fishermen and petty traders. Like them, I entered into a relationship of dependency with the Yedina by the mere fact that whether I found what I was looking for depended very much on whether they were prepared to give it to me or not.[21]

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[20] The propensity or willingness to use violence as a characteristic in the Yedina's own self-description was not mentioned previously. Yet this was made clear to me, for instance, by their stating that they would use retaliatory violence if one of their clan members was killed by a member of another clan.

Financial Demands

As the section on the relationship between the Yedina and strangers illustrates, the first perceive it as their right to extract money from the latter on the grounds of a normative claim to the resources of foreign immigrants. This normative stance was also reflected in the financial demands that they placed on me, as I had also come to Lake Chad looking for something.

Hence, the financial tributes they demanded of me make sense in the light of the outsider's role that was assigned to me. However, I must confess that I can find no evidence in historical sources or sociostructural features of Yedina society to explain this attitude. Whether a historical parallel can be drawn with the fact that, in the past, the Yedina must have seen the predecessors of the current fishermen and petty tradesmen, i.e., the shore population of Lake Chad, as a source of booty, I cannot say. I simply invite the reader to give this some consideration.[22]

I hope, in this way, to have explained the Yedina's defensive attitude, their disrespect towards me, and perhaps the financial demands placed on me. This interpretation may appear a little surprising, considering the fact that the identity usually assigned to a field researcher is one that reflects colonial experience of European domination. Yet, as we have seen, the French colonial administration does not appear to have left much impression on the island inhabitants of Lake Chad. It was the independent Chadian state that first showed a powerful presence at the lake. Therefore, no view of "powerful white people" could have been formed, which might have altered the identity assigned to me. Neither could I be linked to any representatives of development organisations, as none of them so far have been seen in these parts of Lake Chad.

And yet, my analysis seems valid, as a comparison with Evans-Pritchards's research on the Nuer confirms. There are remarkable similarities between the social structures of the Nuer and those of the Yedina; there are also clear parallels between Evans-Pritchards' comments (1978) on his experiences with the Nuer and my own ones with the Yedina. For one thing, many of the Nuer were hostile towards Evans-Pritchard (1978: 12). Only after he had bought some cattle, the local way of acquiring prestige (13), he felt more accepted among them. His possibilities of access were also limited. The Nuer limited their conversations with him to meaningless subjects (12), and Evans-Pritchard found no one willing to cooperate with him (15). His limited possibilities of access are also reflected in his mosaic-like collection of data (15)[23]:

> Information was thus gathered in particles, each Nuer I met being used as a source of knowledge, and not, as it were, in chunks supplied by selected and trained informants.

I must emphasize here, though, that not all the Yedina are the same. There were also exceptions in the way I was treated. Some ignored me completely. Yet this behaviour is also consistent with the Yedina's behaviour vis-à-vis strangers. I met five Yedina who treated me with respect. I could not detect neither defensive behaviour nor disrespect towards me, nor did they make any financial demands. Four of the five had lived in Nigeria for an extensive period of time.[24] I presume that their prolonged stay abroad changed their perception of strangers. Unfortunately, four of these people were continuously on the move, so that I was not able to spend much time with them during my field trips. The fifth person was permanently in Kilbua, and I can only explain his behaviour towards me to be a result of his personality. Conversations I had with these five people also took a very different course. They were generally pleased to inform me and did so honestly as far as I could tell. Most of the data I collected were provided by them.

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[21] Napoleon Chagnon suffered from a similar problem when he did fieldwork among the Yąnomamö. He was considered subhuman (1992: 5). After a while, he understood their system of prestige and started behaving assertively and aggressively, thereby, building respect for his person: "It was sort of like a political, interpersonal game that everyone had to play, but one in which each individual sooner or later had to give evidence that his bluffs and implied threats could be backed up with a sanction … Whenever I defended myself in such ways I got along much better with the Yąnomamö and gradually acquired the respect of many of them" (1992: 6).

[22] It is true that every researcher, working in a field with people who are significantly poorer than himself, will be faced with financial expectations. These may be the result of disparities in wealth between the researcher and his research subjects or may have been evoked from the experience of having received generous development aid in the past. However, in all these cases, the demands and expectations placed on the researcher usually take the form of a plea or request. Yet, in the case described above, it is important to note that expectations took the form of a demand.

[23] When Renato Rosaldo tried to explain the difficulties Evans-Pritchard encountered, when collecting information among the Nuer, he had recourse to the colonial situation: "The narrator [i.e., Evans-Pritchard] finds that the fault in this unhappy encounter lies with Nuer character, rather than with historically specific circumstances. Yet the reader should consider that, just two pages before, Evans-Pritchard has described how a government force raided a Nuer camp, 'took hostages, and threatened to take many more' … Cuol [the interview partner] had, not a character disorder, but good reasons for resisting inquiry and asking who wanted to know his name and the name of his lineage" (1986: 91). Rosaldo's analysis, however, fails to see the encounter between Evans-Pritchard and Cuol in its different layers of complexity. The colonial situation and the power relations it entails do not necessarily rule out the possibility that Nuer act towards strangers in the way described by Evans-Pritchard independently of power relations.

Some may argue that the difficulties I encountered in the field are attributable to my personality or lack of experience. However, I do not think that my personality or working approach has changed much since I successfully conducted field research in Niger and Nigeria (see, e.g., Heiss 2003).

9 Back to the Initial Question

My line of approach corresponds to the analyses of those authors who studied the problem of field access. Like them I have used terms such as "intentions," "resources," "attitudes and character," "rights and duties," which helped to explain the assignment of identity. The Yedina assigned to me the intention of wanting to benefit from them, they discovered that I hardly possessed social or material resources, they found out that I was not very courageous, and they assigned to me the duty of permitting them to benefit from me. I have also applied the terms that are helpful in understanding a stranger's relevance to a certain social group. These include terms such as "usefulness or harmfulness in relation to one's own interests," and "value criteria." For instance, the young Yedina men saw me as a threat and applied their value criteria to me, hardly any of which I was able to meet. But this is where, I would like to contend, this text goes beyond the limits of previous literature. The aforementioned authors clearly referred to isolated, often historical, incidents that influenced the shaping of their identity. However, these authors have not explained the interests and values that come into play when a stranger's relevance is determined, and the social group he is studying decides how to treat him. Contrary to this approach, I have attempted to comprehend the Yedinas' interests, value criteria, and ideas about the rights and duties of strangers by analysing their history as well as the social structure of their society. By doing so, I hope to have shown that a more profound level of investigation is possible when analysing access possibilities in the field.

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[24] In general, the Yedina do not travel beyond the region of Lake Chad and do not participate in the Islamic peripatetic tradition either nor do they go to Nigeria in search of wage work.

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