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The Tiv and Their Economy

Tiv Country

THE COUNTRY INHABITED by the greater portion of the 800,000 people who call themselves Tiv is an undulating plain sweeping down from the peak of Koloishe, just south of Tiv country, through more than a hundred miles to the broad basin of the Benue: from wooded foothills whose summits exceed 4,000 feet in altitude to the bare flat sandbanks in the river, about 300 feet above sea level. North of the Benue, Tiv are well started on a creeping expansion up a hundred miles of a similar plain that ends at the abrupt escarpment of the Bauchi Plateau.

Tiv country today stretches from about $6^{\circ}30'N.$ to $8^{\circ}N.$ and from $8^{\circ}E.$ to $10^{\circ}E.$ Although Tiv settlements are found far beyond these meridians to the north and east, the Tiv Division of northern Nigeria, where over three-fourths of the Tiv live, is contained within them. The modern system of roads and railways, following the sweep of the two plains, forms a node where Makurdi, on the bluffs along the southernmost point of the

great Benue loop, overlooks the impressive railway bridge across "the Munshi narrows."¹

The southern and eastern portion of the country, which Tiv call the "top of the country" (*ityough ki taregh*), lies among the foothills of the Cameroon highlands and of the Sonkwalla Mountains of Obudu District (of which Koloishe is the highest peak). Here the hills are cut by swift-running streams with densely forested banks, where the light is always green. Even in the heaviest harmattan the air is soft and moist. The open park savannah on the rounded ridges between the streams is dotted with locust bean and silk cotton trees.

The ridges of southern Tivland form the divide between the drainages of the Aya River—one of the two main tributaries of the Cross River—and the Katsina Ala River and other tributaries of the Benue. The southern marches of Tiv country lie at the boundary between the Northern and Eastern Regions of Nigeria. In some places this boundary can actually be seen: the fertile soil of Uge and Udam country, to the south, supports a dense bush vegetation of high grass and small trees between the larger trees. On the Tiv side, the grass is short, and all the smaller trees have been cut down to make room for the fields where a population that rises in some areas to a density of over five hundred and fifty persons per square mile struggles to wrest food from an overcultivated, constantly deteriorating soil.

Farther to the east, where Tiv bound the Cameroon, the population density is as little as thirty or forty persons to the square mile, and there is (Tiv say) an abundance of farmland and game, firewood and water.

These south and southeastern areas of Tiv country also receive the heaviest annual rainfall: about sixty-five inches a year, most of it falling during the rainy season which lasts from late April to early October, with a short respite during August, the wettest month being September. November is usually cool, with morning mists, preceding the dust-bearing harmattan from the Sahara which arrives in late November or early December. In March and early April tornadoes and electrical storms herald the return of the rains.

As you "come down" (*sen*) toward the northwest, the ridges and hills become more rounded; the country changes to a rolling downland, some areas of which have been almost completely denuded of the original orchard bush. In these areas, Tiv say that people must cook over tiny

1. Munshi is the Hausa name for Tiv.

fires of guinea corn stalks and cannot build fires to warm themselves during the chilly nights of the harmattan. Although Tiv do not consider these areas overpopulated, the fertility of the soil is deteriorating, apparently because of Tiv methods of agriculture and their large-scale destruction of the bush. Schemes for at least partial reforestation have been thwarted by factors of climate and of Tiv social organization (McIntosh 1940; Briggs 1941; Betts 1941).

Outcroppings of large granite hills, singly or in threes and fours, break the monotony of the plain as the traveler proceeds north. Mkar Hill, one of the largest, is a huge, saddle-shaped hill beneath which Protestant mission headquarters are to be found. Nearby is the town of Gboko, the administrative center of Tiv Division. Here also is a large Roman Catholic mission. Gboko is on high ground where the temperature may be as much as 10° F. lower than in the south and perhaps as much as 15° lower than in Makurdi. At Yandev, the agricultural station five miles from Gboko, the average mean temperatures in 1950 varied between 76° in November and 85° in April, though diurnal variations of 40° are not uncommon.

The Benue River divides Tiv country, and the southern portion—by far the largest—is further bisected by the Katsina Ala River. Jukun have several riverside settlements in Tiv country (Abinsi is the largest). Both rivers flood during the rains and quite regularly inundate large territories along their banks. Although some Tiv in these areas have learned from Jukun and Chamba to make and use dugout canoes, Tiv are not at home on the water; where there are no large streams, as in the south, we estimate that over half the men cannot swim. Automobile ferries cross these rivers, but most Tiv cross in the canoes of Jukun and Chamba.

The country north of the Benue tends to be hilly, and is still covered for the most part with dense orchard bush in which antelope and other game are quite plentiful.

Tiv outside Tiv Division live intermingled with Hausa and pagan peoples in Nasarawa and Lafia divisions. Over half of the subjects of the Aka Uku of Wukari, the King of the Jukun to the east of Tiv country, are Tiv; Tiv are pressing in among and intermingling with the Chamba of Donga farther south and east. Tiv have settled as far north as Shendam Division. Many Tiv have migrated south into the Eastern Region and set up their homesteads among the various small tribes of Ogoja (known to Tiv collectively as the Udam), usually marrying Udam women, although they will not allow their women to marry Udam men. A

few Tiv settlements are found among the Idoma, to the west, and even beyond it in Igalla country. This expansion is one of the most notable features of Tiv society (see Chap. 7).

Tiv Economy

THE TIV ARE FARMERS. They produce and trade what they eat and wear; they build their own houses and make most of their own weapons, including guns, for which they import only the barrels. Thus, they practice what is commonly called a subsistence economy.

The plains of Tivland are comparatively fertile, and in most parts of the country about an acre per person yields adequate subsistence for the entire year. Their farms—cleared and tilled with the short hoe, the matchet, and the digging stick (see Chap. 8)—are in production for two or, in some areas, three years. The first year the fields are mounded to produce a crop of yams, with various side crops such as okra, corn, peanuts, and greens grown along the sides of the mounds. The second year the same field is leveled and produces a crop of early millet and another of sorghum. It may be planted to beniseed (*sesamum indicum*), the chief cash crop, in the early part of the third growing season, although the beniseed may be interplanted with millet, or even replace the millet in the second year. After such a rotation the land is allowed to lie fallow until the wild plant life and earthworms it sustains show that it is rejuvenated. In some areas, notably in the south, land shortage has made necessary an increase in the number of years of cropping and has reduced the number of years of fallow.

From 1949 to 1953, when the data for this study were gathered, Tiv were not dependent to any appreciable degree on foreign goods, although European cloth and crockery, kerosene and matches, "Essence de geranium, non-alcoholic, made in Hackney, England," and an occasional pencil and exercise book were fairly common luxuries. Tiv were, however, by that time thoroughly accustomed to money as a medium of exchange and as a standard of value even in market transactions in which it was not a medium of exchange. They paid their tax and their bridewealth in money. They expressed disquiet about general-purpose money in an unformulated distrust for money or men who sought money (see Chap. 16).

There are two important indicators of the differences between "modern" industrial economies and subsistence economies. First, even where

(as is the case with Tiv) there is an active output market, subsistence economies have no factor markets—that is to say, land, labor, capital, and entrepreneurial activity do not enter the market. Second, in subsistence economies, production is the task of the general institutions of the society, such as family and lineage, rather than of specialized organizations such as "firms."

The second point, despite its importance, requires only passing comment. To Tiv (and other peoples with subsistence economies) the activities which lead to production are part of the duties that form that complex network of rights and obligations which is the kinship, family, and sometimes the religious and political structure. The result is that the market place has the same immediacy to both producer and consumer that it has only to the ultimate consumer in our own system. Just as one goes to market to buy what one needs to use, so one goes oneself to market to sell what one has oneself produced.

It is, however, the lack of factor markets that is the more crucial point. Management is not an important factor. Tiv "capital" is meager. Producer's capital such as agricultural implements differs little from short-lived consumer goods. These implements may be made by the person who uses them (or by a kinsman), or they may be bought on the market from part-time blacksmiths. Tiv cannot amass consumer's capital because, given their climate and their technology, nothing lasts long enough. Prior to establishment of colonial government, Tiv had no coinage and no precise credit mechanism—let alone more elaborate financial institutions. Although they of course consider the natural increase of animals and plants important to livelihood, they do not invest any sort of capital in order to increase it, nor is there any institutionalized means by which they might do so.

Until the middle 1940's, after which a few Tiv became professional traders, there were no entrepreneurs. Economic activities, like any others, were organized by the father of the family, by the compound head, or in some cases by religious practitioners or men of political influence in the course of their familial and political duties. The institutionalization of land and labor was more highly developed.

Land

Tiv are primarily interested in land as the spatial dimension of social relationships; its part in any "property" system is secondary. Every Tiv has a right to a farm within the territory of his agnatic lineage, of what-

ever genealogical depth (see Chap. 6). This right is a condition of his agnation—a right of citizenship. The location of the farm is delimited not geographically, but socially.

Moreover, every man has a right not merely to a farm but to *sufficient* farmland. Every man has a responsibility to supply each of his wives with a farm; every compound head must see to it that each man of his compound can fulfill that obligation. In the Tiv form of rotational agriculture, a man does not always—or even often, except in areas of land shortage—put his farms in precisely the spot they occupied during a former rotation. Because of the short period during which a single farm is used, there is a constant shift in the actual position of a man's farms. His neighbors, however, do not change. As one man's family grows and another's shrinks, the plots are adjusted to fit the needs of each man. The actual mechanics of this adjustment do not always work smoothly; in areas in which there is even a slight land shortage, boundary litigation takes a disproportionate amount of time of both the farmers and the men who judge their disputes.

This system of land allotment might be summed up by saying that Tiv have "farm tenure" for the life of a single crop cycle, that is, for two or three years. They do not have "land tenure." Their "security of tenure" lies in the social organization, with its promise of sufficient "means of production."

Tiv land practice leads to a specific type of migration (see Chap. 7): as every small lineage area expands, so must each inclusive lineage area expand. Therefore, the whole of Tivland is expanding with every demand for more land. Toward the edges of the country, each small lineage not only expands but has a specific direction of migration. Until this system collided with enforceable British ideas of fixed boundaries, the lineages on the outside were proceeding four or five miles a generation against the Udam peoples in the south, and very much more rapidly than that in the north and east where little opposition confronted them. Tiv subdivide internally in a cell-like growth which necessarily pushes Tiv boundaries out in all directions. It is this outward spread which prevents the sort of land fragmentation so acute in some parts of Africa. While this practice solves the internal problem, on a wider canvas it leads to great disruption.

Land is not property among the Tiv. It cannot be sold—that would be tantamount to selling a genealogical position. It cannot be rented, for one's right to it depends on kinship status and residence. Tiv have

precise rules about inheritance of cloth, weapons, and wives; they do not need such rules for land because all have rights already.

Land is a factor of production in Tivland as it is everywhere else. But that is, for Tiv, not its most obvious characteristic. It is, for them, the dimensional aspect of social organization. Status gives the right to exploit the land on which one finds oneself, living in one's social group.

Labor

Labor, like land, is an aspect of social organization. Production of food is an activity in which the whole family takes part. The rights and duties involved in work relationships are seen in terms of family and lineage values, not, as in the West, in terms of "labor" values and sanctions.

Within the family, labor in farm tasks is assigned on the basis of sex, age, prestige, and other considerations. Tiv do not, as a matter of fact, have a word that can properly be translated as "labor." The word *tom*, usually rendered "work," actually applies to fulfilling the duties of one's role.

A labor market is an institution whose primary value system is in terms of production and of roles which are linked by rights and duties bearing on the production process, the *quid pro quo* usually being money. Tiv have no such institution; rather, production is carried out in institutions whose primary value system is that of family, kinship, and neighborhood. Tiv work hard because they work as fathers, sons, brothers, and husbands, and so retain a right of the reciprocal work of their families. Today some Tiv go south to work for wages for a few months, although Tiv do not have a serious "labor migration" problem and only a very few young men are gone from the community at any one time. They are thus entering the labor market of the wider economy, but they have no labor market among themselves.

Markets

The absence of a factor market, and hence of a "market economy," means only that in subsistence economies a major part of subsistence does not enter markets and that the market is not responsible for the allocation of factors of production. It certainly does not mean that market places are absent, or that exchange according to market principles is unknown.

Tiv support an active "peripheral market"—a term that is meant to imply that it is recognizably a market, with all the characteristics of a market, but one that is not central to either economic or social integrity and prosperity.

The Tiv market is called *kasua*,² a word derived ultimately from Arabic and immediately from Hausa *kasuwa* (although the Hausa accent the first syllable, Tiv accent the second). Hausa are important to Tiv markets today, and even in the last century sometimes traded in Tivland—apparently the only foreigners who did. Still it seems doubtful that Tiv imported the institution of the market from the Hausa, as organizational and ideational details of Tiv markets resemble those of their southern neighbors more than they resemble those of the Hausa.

Kasua in Tiv is a word with several meanings. *Market* in English also has several meanings. To eliminate some of the ambiguity of translation we shall place the meanings of the two words in parallel columns. The Tiv examples are all taken from our notes; the English examples are from dictionaries or from economics texts.

Kasua

1. A meeting of people in a place where goods are bought and sold. (*U za kasua?* "Are you going to market?" is a standard greeting on market day.)
2. The open space where goods are exposed for sale—the market place. (*Nyian m zende kasua tsegher*. "Today I am only walking about the market place" [instead of selling].)
3. A right—that can be owned and inherited—to establish and operate such a place or

Market

1. A meeting of people. (Sometimes expressed as a meeting of buyers and sellers.)
2. An open space or covered building in which cattle, provisions, and the like are exposed for sale.
3. "The privilege granted to the lord of the manor, municipality, or other body, to establish

2. We hear this word *kasua*, and have published it that way in all previous publications. However, D. W. Arnott of the School of Oriental and African Studies points out that to be in accordance with Tiv phonetic pattern, the *ua* is uniform whereas the *oa* would be unique. Since our clerks wrote *ua* almost as often as *oa*, and since the dictionaries write *ua*, we are falling into line.

Kasua

- hold such a meeting. (*Ka kasua u Kyagba*. "It is Kyagba's market.")
4. An act of exchange. (*Ka kasua ga*. "I am not selling it" [it is a gift].)
 5. Ability or luck in selling and bargaining. (*Kasua wam doo*. "My market [luck] was good.")
 6. An item for sale. (*M ngu a kasua*. "I have something to sell.")
 7. A day in the five-day "week" cycle, or the five-day period itself. (*Nyian ka kasua nana?* "What market is today?" *M ve kasua uhar*. "I came two markets ago.")
 8. Price or exchange value. (*Kasua na nana?* "What is its market price?")
 9. (No parallel meaning.)
 10. (No parallel meaning.)

Market

- a meeting of persons to buy and sell" (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*).
4. The action or business of buying and selling; a purchase or sale (SOED).
 5. A bargain. Obsolete except in some set phrases (SOED).
 6. (No parallel meaning.)
 7. (No parallel meaning.)
 8. Price in the market, market value (SOED).
 9. Sale as controlled by supply and demand; hence, demand (SOED).
 10. Opportunity of buying and selling.

In Western economics the term *market* has been given special meanings, illustrated by definitions 9 and 10 above. Or, more precisely, formal economics has discovered characteristics of markets which other peoples do not recognize. On the other hand, Tiv have extended their word *kasua* so that it plays an important part in their cosmological concepts (definition 7) and religious beliefs.

Whereas the price of foodstuffs and other subsistence (relatively little of which enters the market) follows familiar patterns, with a market-regulated price and a flow of goods from areas of low price to areas of high price, the absence of factor markets and the peripheral quality of output markets among Tiv is vividly demonstrated by the major

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importance in vast areas of their lives of non-market principles of exchange. Tiv exchange "prestige goods" and rights in women according to non-market principles. These two spheres of exchange were, in the traditional system, kept distinct from market-exchange of subsistence. The institutional overlapping which took place is analyzed in Chapters 11 and 12. Whereas most modern industrial economies are made "unicentric" by the presence of general-purpose money and the organizing force of the market, or a political equivalent thereof, Tiv economy is of a type that is manifestly "multicentric." The various spheres surrounding these multiple centers require a type of institutional correlation that can best be called "internal conversion": that is, within a single multicentric economy there is a type of activity which resembles conversion between two currency-defined economies in the Western world.

Economies based on conversion cannot be sufficiently described by mere negative definition. Their complexities require to be analyzed in their own terms.