Family Life in Bornu

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RÉSUMÉ

Cet article nous livre une description de la vie familiale des Kanuri, province de Bornu, Nigérie. On porte une attention spéciale sur les liens qui existent entre la vie familiale et l'organisation sociale, politique et économique.

When the anthropologist uses the word family, he is referring to a general category of which there are a number of important subtypes found in various parts of the world (c.f. Bohannan 1963: 100-112).[1] In this article I would like to discuss the Kanuri family whose particular form of organization is a widespread one in Northern Nigeria, and indeed in Africa as a whole.

THE CONTEXT

The Kanuri of Bornu Province in northeastern Nigeria have been organized as a feudal state in the Chad basin for approximately the last 800 to 1000 years according to their own traditions (Cohen 1964). Their language classifications by Greenberg (1954) and early Arabic sources support the notion of their continuity in the region, with possible origins somewhere to the northeast of their present habitat. The pre-colonial Emirate kept up continual trade and cultural contacts with the Maghreb during its long history as an organized state.

The population density is approximately sixty per square mile, there is no pressure for farmland which can be extended simply by clearing new bush areas farther away from settlements. The majority of the people are peasants who carry on three analytically separate economic activities. These consist of: (1) farming, primarily millet and guinea corn, supplemented by maize, beans, squashes,

[1] Fieldwork in Nigeria was carried out under the auspices of the Ford Foundation Area Training Program in 1956-7, and the National Institute of Mental Health, Bethesda, Maryland in 1964.

cucumbers, and groundnuts; (2) a dry season non-farming activity connected with the market. Market activities are in turn divided into craft work, sales of surplus agricultural products, and a complex middleman trade between markets. Except for a few full time specialists, almost everyone does some farming. There is, however, much variation in the ratio of market activities to subsistence agriculture in each person's annual income.

The society has a monarch, the Shehu, in his capital city of Maiduguri, and a courtly life with titled nobles, including *ajia* or district heads who live in their district capitals as sub-rulers of the twenty-one segments of the emirate under the Shehu.[2] They, in turn, have under their jurisdiction a group of contiguous village area units headed by *lawan*, or village area heads. Under these latter are hamlet heads, *bulama*, in charge of small settlements of contiguous households. Peasants call themselves the peasants of such and such a *lawan*. Today the native administration departments have their personnel stationed throughout the districts. Along with the district head and his chief followers they form an urban upper class living in the districts throughout the state.

The society is stratified, with status based on tribal membership, occupation, birth, age, wealth, and to some extent on urban residence identifications. The people recognize two major class divisions — the upper or ruling class *(kentuoma)*[3] and the broad base of the peasant class *(tala'a)* under the autocratic hegemony of the rulers. Upward mobility can be achieved by obtaining more wealth, a more highly ranked occupation, and by imitating the dress, manners, and behavior of the upper class.

Family life is played out in two organizations that are often quite similar in their make-up but which may also vary independently of one another. Each of these organizations, that of kinship, and that of the household are important ingredients in the society as a whole; both must be discussed before we can obtain an understanding of Kanuri family life.

2 Bornu Emirate is the largest sub-division of Bornu Province and Maiduguri is the capital of both the emirate and the province.

3 The "e" in *kentuoma* or *dekta* is pronounced like the "oo" in look or book.

KINSHIP

Kinship involves (a) genealogical relationship, (b) descent or the allocation of members in a genealogy to a group of socially and culturally recognized consanguine kin, and (c) marriage or the affinal relations established through the socially recognized union of husband and wife.

The Kanuri separate genealogical relations from those of descent just as we do, by speaking of distant relations. These distant kin who are not reckoned as part of the descent group are called *dekta derenji* and refer to distant members of an individual's genealogical network. These distant kin do not come to one's family ceremonies, or send gifts on important occasions. Indeed their whereabouts is often not very well known to the individual speaking of them. *Dekta derenji* is a vine that grows around a household wall often moving on to other walls, but all of the plant originates from one root. Like us as well, the Kanuri find it quite hard to remember relatives back beyond their grandparents, although they do have a special term for a great-grandparent. Again like us, people from aristocratic families can remember their ancestors back in time much farther than most of the people and the Kanuri royal genealogy or king list goes back through two dynasties for over 1000 years. However for the most part genealogies are shallow i.e. they do not go back very far in numbers of generations.

Descent reckoning among the Kanuri is cognatic with an agnatic emphasis. That is to say, they recognize consanguineal kinship through both their mothers and fathers, and claim to be related to all four of their grandparents. They do however have different words for mother's and father's descent groups. The father's cognatic kin are called *dur bube* or family of the blood, and the mother's are called *dur chambe*, or family of the milk. The cognatic quality can also be seen in the kinship terminology in which there is one term that can be applied to all persons of each of several of the generations. Thus all grandparents are called *kaka* as are all grandchildren, and all siblings and cousins can be referred to as *yanyiana* (although there are other terms for making finer distinctions of relative age). The agnatic emphasis (relationship through male descent) can be seen best in inheritance and litigation. The Kanuri follow Islamic inheritance law and thus it is twice as important

from this point of view to be related to your father as compared to your mother. Men receive two portions to every one given to a woman at the death of one of their relatives. More importantly, if a man is called upon to go to court, and the Kanuri are a very litigious people, he goes with his male agnates, his father, his brothers, his father's father, his father's brothers and so on. These agnates pay court fines for one another as a group, i.e. each one is legally responsible for the acts of the others, unless a crime against the state has been committed. In many cases, especially in rural hamlets, a group of agnates will share the same occupations and help one another on their farm plots so that they form an economically cooperating group as well.

Without matrilateral kin (those related to him through his mother) a man is considered to be unfortunate, for as the Kanuri say, these kin love you like a mother loves her child. You can feel at home in the households of your mother's kinsmen, and many informants claimed they would go first to these kin to borrow money. There is tension over property among the father's agnatic kin because it is the major inheritance group, and people say that if a man borrows from his father or his father's brothers that he is trying to get his inheritance before the proper time. However without agnates a man is not just unfortunate, he is damned. The Kanuri village chief and his advisers claimed that I could not hire a stranger in the village because they did not know his father or brothers, or indeed if he had any. In their eyes he was not a responsible person, and if he did anything wrong or reprehensible there was no group that could be called to account for his actions. This means that illegitimate children are abhorred in the society and every effort is made to get a young girl married should she be pregnant. If such efforts fail her child will be a pariah who can marry no one except another illegitimate or some other very low status person.

Kanuri marriage brings us much closer to what is commonly thought of as family life in our own society. In anthropological terms, Kanuri marriage is polygynous with virilocal residence patterns that have a patrilocal emphasis. That is to say Kanuri men can marry more than one wife, up to four by Islamic law, and the wife invariably leaves her home and goes to live with her husband, and this often, but not always, proves to be in the vicinity of, or even inside, the household of her husband's father.

MARRIAGE INCEPTION

In thinking about a marriage the first question that any Kanuri man asks himself is whether or not he can afford it. That is, can he and those people on whom he can count for financial aid take on the expense of a marriage ceremony and the bridewealth payments. A man who already has a spouse knows that he must also give a number of gifts to his present wife or she will be jealous of the finery being given to the new one. He knows that the pressures for expenditure for drummers, food, the transportation of the bride to his dwelling, and many other aspects of the ceremony will make him spend more than he can predict. Can the capital be raised for such an undertaking? Most men are helped by their friends, family, and their political superiors. In fact the Kanuri say that a man who is not in debt over a wedding is a man who has no friends.

Bridewealth payments vary in size and elaborateness with the status of the two family groups being joined through the marriage, the marital history of the girl, the previous relationship of the groom to the girl's family, the bargaining ability of each party to the marriage arrangements, and the time of year that the arrangements are taking place. The payments themselves can be divided into three categories. First there are one or more small gifts given to the girl and her relatives, usually her female relatives, in the name of the groom, these are called the *kwororam* or the asking-a-question payments. Secondly there are the formal payments, a large one called the *luwaliram* given to the *luwali* or dispenser of the girl's marriage rights, followed several weeks or months later by the *sada'a* a fee given to the family of the girl on the wedding day. And thirdly there are a number of small payments paid out to the girl and her young age-mate friends, to the relative who accompanied her to the husband's house, to any unmarried older sister she left behind. On the morning of the wedding when the *sada'a* fee is paid, the groom also receives a set of gifts from the girl's family.

If the status of the two families is similar and low, for example two farm families in a rural area joined in marriage through a son and daughter in each, then there is very little worry over the bridewealth. It is usually low and almost standardized for the locality. A high status man always pays more bridewealth which is one of the ways he must behave to validate his higher social rank. Simi-

larly a woman of high social rank usually commands a higher bridewealth. Not only is the status of the person getting married taken into account, but also of those he associates with. Thus in our little village many people tried to get their daughters married to members of my household because they knew that I, a comparatively wealthy man, would help with the marriage payments making them higher than normal.

No matter what the status of the groups involved, girls who have not been married before command a much higher set of bridewealth payments. Indeed the number of the payments is greater as is their total amount. Conversely, as a woman goes through one marriage after another, the bridewealth payments begin to decline. The Kanuri say that she has been used and is therefore not worth as much. However it is important to note that this factor itself varies with the duration of each marriage. Women who seem to stay with their husbands for several years or more can command higher bridewealth payments than women who have a record of leaving their husbands after a few months. In this latter case the payments are very low, since the man has no assurance that the woman will be his wife for very long. Similarly if the woman has never borne children she is considered less valuable. The reasons given in local gossip for her various marriage break-ups are also important. Was it because her husband beat her, or because she was a constant adulteress? Was it because her husband deserted her, or because she was a poor and inefficient housewife?

The previous relationship of the groom to the girl's family can vary the bridewealth enormously. The usual situation is that in which they are acquainted with one another as neighbours and friends, then other factors enter in to determine the bridewealth. However, in a number of situations the groom is released from the bulk of the bridewealth or it is substantially lowered. If the girl is his cousin he may find that only the third category of bridewealth payments are necessary, and even these are attenuated.[4] About

[4] The Kanuri practice preferential cross-cousin and patrilateral parallel cousin marriage but do not marry their matrilateral parallel cousins i.e. they marry their father's sister's daughter or their mother's brother's daughter (cross cousins) or their father's brother's daughter (patrilateral parallel cousin) but not their mother's sister's daughter. No one who had ever married a cousin took more than one for wife during his marriage career. Most people when asked thought such marriages were a good thing but claimed that they personally would not want to perform one because it is difficult to get a divorce

1/15th of all Kanuri marriages are of this kind, and of these about half involve unions in which the little cousin was promised to the boy as an infant when he was circumcised at puberty. At that time he became her *luwali*, the dispenser of her marriage rights and could give her away or marry her himself when the time came. In other cases, the groom is a dependant or client of the girl's *luwali* (usually her father) and the marriage tends to cement the relationship even further. Indeed many subordinates of "big men" in Bornu think of their superiors as being obliged to help them find a wife. In such cases, the groom assumes only a small portion of the expense. In a few cases girls are given to mallams (Koranic teacher-priests) and no bridewealth is required. Such marriages are called "marriages of charity" and the *luwali* who abrogates his rights to bridewealth in this fashion is considered to be a pious man. In actual practice it is not very common. This can be seen in the marriage histories of the mallams themselves. It is not uncommon to find that a mallam has been given one wife, but usually this is out of four to six marriages contracted, and a number of mallams have never been married in this way.

Bridewealth is very much determined by the bargaining ability of each party. The groom's representatives are always told by the girl's family, through her *luwali* that there will very likely be a large number of gifts given to the groom and if he sells some of them all of his outlay will be covered. The people representing the groom, speak of his lack of great wealth, his qualities as a husband, and citizen, and his connections through relatives and friends to important people. The girl's *luwali* also speaks of the benefits to be gained through marriage to this girl and slowly an amount emerges. The *luwaliram* is the payment most haggled over, although some bargaining takes place over the *sada'a* payment. The previously unmarried girl also bargains at great length the night of her wedding consummation for the consummation payment.

The Kanuri themselves think of marriage inception under a number of categories. First of all they divide all mate selection into first marriages (*fero kwojin*: he took a girl) and secondary marriages with divorced women (*kamu kwojin*: he took a woman). First

when your in-laws are also your own consanguines. Divorce is so common an outcome to marriage that people think that a potentially difficult divorce situation should be avoided.

marriages take place for a girl when she is about the age of puberty, often just before the onset of menstruation, while boys do not marry until they are in their late teens or early twenties, and young men of 28 and 29 who had not yet been married were not exceptional. On the other hand, I saw only two cases of young girls in their middle to late teens who had not yet been married. One was mentally deficient and the other was suspect of unchaste behavior with grown men. Both of these girls were in difficulty over their own identities and the older one had begun to take up the role of divorced woman by the time I was ready to leave the village. Most men desire some time in their lives to marry with a young previously unmarried girl. However because of the expense it is not possible for everyone. Only a few men ever marry in this way at their first weddings, and such cases are often cousin marriages that begin as an infant betrothal for the girl.

An interesting sidelight on "virgin" marriage is the ambivalence manifested by men in speaking about it.[5] There is much prestige accorded to a man for such a union. Indeed a particular ceremony indicating the final achievement of adulthood in men can be carried on only at such a marriage. However the cost of such marriage invariably puts a man into fearful debt, and more importantly, the marriage consummation is a semi-public affair in which old women sit outside the hut and whisper to the young bride to resist the advances of her new husband. Unfortunately standards of sexual attractiveness are centered on more sexually mature women, on the physical beauty of their hair, face, breasts, walk, and their skills at intercourse. Thus the men must control themselves and almost publicly proclaim their manhood and sexual prowess with a young girl who is not culturally defined as sexually exciting. This causes much anxiety and I have seen men praying continually for several weeks for the strength to carry out a consummation. It is significant that young western educated Kanuri feel that semi-public consummation is the part of the wedding ceremony with previously unmarried girls that must be dropped in the future.

[5] Informants often translated *nyia ferobe* as marriage with a virgin. Indeed men claim that the one of the main reasons that such marriages are valuable is the fact that the girl "has not been used (sexually) before." However this does not take into account the possibility of pre-pubescent sexual intercourse of which there is some evidence (although not conclusive). The phrase "previously unmarried" is probably the most correct description of this type of union since it refers to that which is known — the girl's marital status.

The most common Kanuri category for marriage is that of *kamu gwojin* or marriage with a divorced woman. It is carried out with much less ceremony than the virgin marriage and as the woman gets older and goes through more of them she takes over the initiations of such unions and the *luwali* role becomes a mere formality. This means she also tends to take over the bride-wealth for herself. Men strike up sexual liaisons with *zower* or divorced women who are usually living with a relative or a friend and after a few months the relationship may break off or lead to a marriage. Such extra-marital sexual relations are not considered in any way immoral for either party. Our entire village was awakened one night by a young man who was often spoken of as an adulterer. He wanted everyone to see that the girl he had brought to his compound (he already had one wife) was a divorced woman and not, as was rumoured, someone's wife.

Kanuri also characterize marriage as one of purdah *(kulle)* or non-purdah although it is more a matter of degree than of either/or. All women entering into a marriage are fairly certain how much constraint they will be subjected to. This usually follows class lines. All Kanuri men would like their wives to remain inside the compound but few can afford to insist. Such limitations require that there be a well inside the compound, enough wealth so that a man does not require his wife's help in the fields, and can send a male servant or client along with her whenever she goes out of the household. Women generally do not like such restrictions but accept them as the cost of marriage to a high status man.

Other forms of marriage recognized by the Kanuri themselves have for the most part already been mentioned. They think of cousin marriage, marriage with a religious practitioner, and marriage with a very wealthy or powerful person ("marriage of pleasure") as varieties of marital unions. They also know of the levirate and the sororate and claim that such marriages are possible. No one, however, knew of any cases, and I observed none. As a marriage form sororal polygyny is prohibited. Informants explain this by saying that the very thought of marrying your wife's sister implies the death of your wife, i.e. for the Kanuri, given the sororate then sororal polygyny has unpleasant connotations.

In a few upper class Kanuri households of persons who hold their rank through hereditary attachment to the politically powerful in the emirate, there are concubines. These are regarded as female slaves who must serve the women of the compound and can be extra sexual partners for the household heads. There is no rule about their relations to the household head. He does not have to treat them in any stipulated way, and they are of too low a status to be in competition with the wives of the household. In practice of course this can vary. A beautiful or very fruitful concubine can indeed become a favorite.

In speaking about the merits of married life the Kanuri men constantly reiterate cooking, food-producing, and child-bearing qualities of women — but cooking is almost always mentioned first. This is due to the fact that a man never cooks food and if he has no wife he must eat his food in the household of a relative or neighbour who does have a wife or wives. This produces obligation to the man with wives which must be repaid with some kind of subordination. Thus a man with a wife can create obligation among unmarried men and in so doing raise his status. Women are prized for their labor in the fields as well. The largest single reason given in a farm survey for estimate of crop decrease or increase was loss or gain of a wife (Cohen 1960).

MARRIED LIFE

Kanuri husbands are at home a great deal more than their western counterparts. The home is the center of activities and men take their leisure, visit their friends, and receive visitors all day long. They carry out their dry season non-farming occupation in the household if at all possible making it the central location for many of the activities of their daily lives. The constant contact of husbands and wives in such a situation is rather rare in our own society. Paradoxically, husbands and wives are far less intimate and friendly than their counterparts are in western society. In their daily lives women cook, nurse young children, bring water for the household if there is no well, help in the fields, grow garden crops and maize in the back of the compound, sell cooked and uncooked foods, make pots (a female craft specialty), trade, and visit one another to help with the preparations for ceremonies, for companionship, and for hair dressing. Men clear and plant crops, work at a large number

of crafts including modern ones such as truck-driving, or using a Singer sewing machine, they engage in religious activities as specialist practitioners, and also carry out specialized political, judicial, and medicinal roles. Traditionally men went to war as well.

In upper class families women are in purdah and live at the back of the compound farthest from the entrance. They leave the compound only on rare occasions and even then should seek the permission of their husbands. They are usually accompanied on such excursions by servants of the husband who might escort a woman half way across the emirate to visit her own family for a ceremony at which her presence is required. On the other hand peasant women must visit the well at least twice a day for water and in some villages this means a walk of several miles. They work on the farm plots of the household during the short growing season from June to September, and may sell cooked foods in the market. They visit friends and often attend public ceremonies and dances. Women use these occasions away from their husband's household to meet and talk freely with other women and sometimes with other men.

For the most part relations between husbands and wives are highly formalized. They avoid using one another's name in conversation and in public only the most necessary interaction takes place between them. Women walk generally behind their husbands if the two are going somewhere together and even in the household the women remains, or should remain inside the compound while the husband sits most often in the entrance hut, or outside and in front of his household when he is not working. A visit to a Kanuri household brings the husband to the entrance hut if he is inside and at the same time the wife retreats out of sight. Women remain mostly in the company of other women and men with men. Only in a few rare cases did I ever observe public friendliness between a husband and wife.

The culture ordains that men are the dominant members of society and women — more specifically wives — are to be submissive. "Men stand superior to women, in that God hath preferred the one over the other..." (Koran 4, quoted in Levy 1957: 98). It is good and seemly for a woman to obey her husband and to appear humble in his presence. Men decide where the family is to live, who a

daughter is to marry, and a multitude of day to day questions on every aspect of family life. Indeed for a wife or indeed any family member to make a decision without consulting the husband-father is asking for trouble. Disputes between a husband and wife in which a man can refer to a breach of his authority as the cause of the disagreement, are settled in his favor. This may even include physical punishment, if the wife is very young. Thus a district head ruled against the complainants in a case in which the husband had been accused by the wife's agnates of beating her. The district head stated that the girl had been disobedient and it was a husband's right to punish such acts.

One of every two Kanuri marriages is a polygynous one. Thus a woman is very likely some time during her life to be in a situation in which she is one of two or more co-wives. Relations between co-wives is governed by strict codes of procedure. Each wife has her own hut in the back area of the compound farthest from the entrance hut or gate. Each wife cooks her own food and raises her own children who as small children sleep in her hut. When they go abroad as a group, to the wells, or to a ceremony, the senior wife, i.e. the one married to the husband-in-common for the longest time, takes the lead in a single file with the other wives arranged in order of seniority behind her, then come the female children in terms of their own relative age seniority. During a family ceremony the senior wife is the authoritative head of the women's section and directs the work of the others. Relations with the husband are strictly regulated. Every wife takes her turn each day cooking the husband's food, and that night she visits him in his hut. He may or may not have intercourse with her, but must try to share this aspect as equally as possible or else word about it will spread around the family and cause or increase tension between wives. Usually men ration themselves in regard to sex so as to distribute their favours equally. However several informants admitted that they favoured one over the other; this led them to have sexual relations with the less favoured one more often than they really wanted in the interests of equal treatment. Although I observed very few cases of long-standing co-wife relations because of the high divorce frequency, Kanuri informants both men and women were strongly of the opinion that co-wives could become very good friends if they remained married to the same man for very long periods of time.

On the other hand it is fairly easy to observe co-wife interaction that is (a) rather stiff and etiquette-ridden and (b) tense and hostile. In this latter regard one woman actually badgered her husband into marrying a young girl. He finally acceded and chose a previously unmarried girl from a nearby village. The bridewealth and marriage expenses sent the man into great debt, but he decided that it was worth it because of the increased prestige and because he believed this wife would now stop agitating him about it. Only three weeks after the new wife settled into the compound, the senior wife began demanding that the husband get rid of her. The young one was not helpful she said, and also accused the husband of liking his new addition better than her. Finally she threatened to leave and the confused husband let her go rather than accede to her new and contradictory demands. In another case a man announced to his wife that he was going to marry a young girl and she flew into a towering rage which lasted for several days. She was only mildly contained during the wedding.

Although men are dominant by force of tradition, discrepancies are very common in everyday life. Many women were observed leaving their husband's compound against his wishes, many are said to be unfaithful sexually. Indeed this is a favorite topic of conversation with many jokes between men about who is having an affair with whose wife. Some women openly flaunt their husband's authority by threatening to leave him if he refuses to allow them their own way. In a great many cases, depending upon a number of factors, such inconsistency between what are the expected husband-wife relations and the realities of married life lead to divorce, which is very common.[6] Only rare Kanuri have not been divorced once or twice during a lifetime. When explaining their divorces, husbands complain of their wives cooking badly, or not on time, or not enough, of visits to relatives and friends that they felt were unnecessary, of attendance at public dances or ceremonies, of their being dirty, of adultery, but always they mention and stress some

[6] Elsewhere (Cohen 1961) I have noted that this subversion of the husband's dominant role varies with divorce which in turn varies with: (1) the youth of the wife: the younger the girl the more likely she is to obey her husband; (2) the length of marriage: the marriages that last a long time, indeed anything over two to three years are less fragile; (3) numbers of previous marriages for the woman: women with high divorce records cannot be counted on to obey their husbands or stay very long with them; (4) the socio-economic status of the husband.

activity that involved the wife's disobedience. Wives when speaking of their divorces complain of their husband's intolerance of their justifiable activities outside of the household, of his stinginess, of his lack of sexual attention, or extra-marital affairs, or more rarely of his excessive sexual demands, of co-wives, of his lack of appreciation for their cooking. No man or woman ever spoke of a divorce as if it had not been caused by the other party. In practice husbands formally initiate divorces occurring in the early stages of marriage — roughly the first two years — while after that, although men still seem to initiate most of the divorces it seems to matter less. This results from the fact that the bridewealth must be returned if the wife *officially* initiates a divorce. However after she has been with her husband for a year or two, i.e. after one or two harvests, she has contributed to his wealth by her labor and the amount returnable is negotiable. In the case of an early divorce, and many are of this kind, the woman can informally initiate proceedings by behaving so badly that her husband has no recourse but to send her packing thus forfeiting his bridewealth. In one case the mother and older brother of a young girl instructed her to behave badly because they disapproved of her husband's wish to take her to the city.

Divorce is for the most part an extremely simple affair. The husband simply tells her to go, or more rarely she just leaves. This is defined as a separation and intermediaries try to get the couple to patch up their difficulties. I observed only a few that were reconciled in this way but informants assured me that it was much more common than my observations would lead me to believe. After the third such separation it is customary that no attempts be made at reconciliation. Disputes over the return of marriage payments, adultery fines, beatings that seem beyond the husband's rights, and a host of other complaints do come to court, although these form only a minority of the divorce cases, most of which never get to any adjudication proceedings at all. Very young children, under eighteen months (the weaning period) go with their mothers. After this age young boys remain with their fathers and young girls go with their mothers. The boys are raised by their father's other wives which is considered unpleasant by most men who speak of it. One man said it was the worst thing that ever happened to him, which is surprising considering how common it is. Unless the

girl has been given away to a cousin at the latter's circumcision she should eventually return to her own father's household since he is the person who has final say over her first marriage. Conflicts sometimes arise because the girls do not return and the mother's agnates or subsequent husband might try to arrange the marriage without consulting the girl's own father. If such consultations take place no one feels put out and the man who arranged the marriage takes a portion of the *luwaliram* payment.

Because divorce is very common, each spouse in a marriage maintains close contacts with their own natal family and cognatic kindred. Presents are exchanged and visits back and forth between members of kin groups are very common. Children are named after relatives, especially grandparents, and in many cases go to live with them after weaning, or before the birth of a new baby in the family. Only in cases of long term marriage does a wife finally come to feel a part of, and fully accepted by her husband's family, especially his agnates. However when this does happen the wife can become a powerful voice whose long and intimate association with her husband often means that she is the vice-regent of the family compound. In one such case, that of a Village Area Head whose senior wife had never been married to any one else, and who had been married to him for thirty years, the man remarked that he made very few major decisions without consulting this woman. Such cases are, however, not common. Kanuri marriage involves a separation of the sexes not only by custom and tradition, but by the conflicts which produce tensions between husbands and wives and thus lead to frequent divorce. In such circumstances, a close intimate relationship between husband and wife is a victory of personality over social and cultural conditions.

OTHER FAMILY RELATIONS AND THE BEHAVIOR NORMS

To the Kanuri themselves, family relations, those between parents and children, between siblings, uncles and nephews, grandparent and grand-child and so on are part of a larger framework of behavior governing almost all the important behavior between persons and groups. It is believed that these behaviors stem from the family, where the person first learns them, and then they are

extended outwards to include all of the important social relations of adult life. From an outsider's view it is of course impossible to say which comes first. Do family relations create those social relations which best suit them, or does the society outside the family create the kind of family relations it requires or finds necessary? Probably the two are intertwined and the direction of causality differs from place to place and in different historical periods. The Kanuri are however quite clear on this point. They see society at large as separate from the family, but the family produces the social relations necessary for the operation of that society. Thus many social relations in Bornu have a kin-like quality even though they are non-kin relations.

The most important of these relations is the *berzum* or discipline-respect relationship closely modelled on, and usually spoken of in terms of, the father-son relationship. In this relationship a father gives his son protection, security, food and shelter, a place or a status in the community, an occupation, helps him to arrange a marriage, and represents him in the adjudication of disputes. In his turn the son must be completely loyal, obedient, and subservient to his father and work for him in whatever way the father feels is necessary. This respect is so demanding a mode of behavior in families that young children are often sent away to a relative's house, usually a grand-parent, and return as one informant put it "when they understand respect". When the father dies an older brother, or a paternal uncle may take the place of the father and receive the *berzum* from the dead man's children. Because this is so, and because they are older men, all senior relatives, older siblings, and paternal uncles receive some respect although it does not have the intense quality of the father-son relationship which ideally should involve *aman* or mutual trust (Cohen 1965). However a young child is taught that older relatives are to be respected no matter what their sex or degree of relationship to one's self. Other persons in society are indicated as being "like your father" or "greater than your father" (in the amount of discipline-respect they require). Older people in general, religious specialists, political leaders, and any compound head with whom a person is staying are all in this category. In other words, the father-son behavior norm is the model for all authority relations in the society.

Daughters are taught in the same way, but they must give great heed to their mothers who are in a day-to-day sense the authority figures in their lives. Although men will respond to a questionnaire by saying they have discipline-respect with both their father and mother, there is affective quality to the mother-son relationship which is almost wholly lacking in that between the father and his children. For many Kanuri men this is leavened by the high divorce rate which separates them from a long term association with their mother, but for those who have had a consistent long term association with their mothers this can be the strongest emotional relationship in an otherwise shallow emotional life. Most Kanuri relationships have a manipulative quality about them which tends to keep them from becoming very affective in any empathetic sense.

Most discipline-respect relationships are qualified in some way so that behavior between the persons is restricted. The Kanuri speak of such relations as shame-avoidance or *nungu*. A man not only gives his father respect but carries on very formalized and restricted conversations with him, all the while keeping his eyes cast down. There is less of this where the relations are between other men and the discipline-respect is not intense i.e. between a man and his older brother or his uncles. Strict *nungu* relations exist between a husband and wife on the one hand and their senior in-laws i.e. in-laws older than themselves. The strictest codes are found between a man and his mother-in-law and a woman and her father-in-law. In such cases these persons would never allow themselves to be alone together, they would avoid one another with eyes downcast and pass by each other quickly and wordlessly. Only the most necessary conversation would ever take place between them and they would never speak directly to one another. Because of the patterns of patrilocal marriage the burden of such avoidance falls on the daughter-in-law and her relation to her in-laws. Only when she and her husband have a compound of their own can some of the tension generated by such strict rules be alleviated. In the wider society the same rule applies. The greater the discipline-respect the more likely it is to be associated with *nungu* or shame-avoidance. Thus the relationship between a man and his direct superior in a political or economic organization has many elements of *nungu* connected with it. He rarely speaks directly to his superior, they do not have long conversations, he mutters "yes, yes, yes" while his superior is

talking but keeps his eyes cast downwards, and to very powerful superiors he must not talk directly at all but to an intermediary. Wives of such persons are treated like senior in-laws. Indeed given the traditional practice of giving wives to clients, often from among one's own daughters, it is quite possible that the wife of a superior will one day become the mother-in-law or co-wife of a mother-in-law to a subordinate.

As a person grows up in his family he also learns that there are some people with whom he can have very permissive relations. The ideal person is a grandparent, although a similar relation exists between a spouse and all the in-laws who are junior to their spouse in age, i.e. all of one's spouse's junior kinsmen. A young boy can go to his grandfather's house and take things, pull his grandfather's beard, and generally misbehave, all the while receiving only a pat on the head for such licentiousness. Sex differences do not count here although there is sexual joking especially in the joking relations between a person and their junior in-laws of the opposite sex. Later in life young boys and girls learn that such joking *(suli)* is a special form of interaction that can also be carried out between traditionally competitive occupational groups and traditionally hostile ethnic groups. On an individual basis one person in such a relationship calls the other grandson and the "grandson" being the younger calls the older man "*kaka*" or grandfather. The Kanuri explain that this helps to alleviate any tensions which may develop because the persons in such groups are naturally hostile to one another.

Finally, in the extended family or its equivalent a young person grows up with brothers, sisters, cousins (also called siblings). The closer the age and interests of "sibling" (including cousins) of the same sex, the greater the solidarity and friendship. During childhood a young person usually chooses a young age-mate from amongst his siblings or cousins as his *ashirmanze* or secrets man, the person who knows his most intimate thoughts, hopes, and fears. Later in life he chooses other *ashirmanze* from inside his kinship network and outside of it. He learns the faculty of intimacy however in his youth within the family among age-mates in his kinship groups.

The family then is an orbit in which ways of behaving are learned and these characteristic norms of behavior are used for wider scaled social relations throughout the individual's life. At the

core of these relations is *berzum* or discipline-respect. Bornu is a complex economic and political hierarchy and this relationship serves as a mechanism for the proper functioning of these complex hierarchical relations.

THE HOUSEHOLD

The high divorce frequency and the fact that young boys can move to other households for occupational training, as well as other factors, make it essential that we take a look at Kanuri households as social units. Indeed from the point of view of society as a whole, the household, or compound, is the basic unit of organization. Households are linked together through their headmen into wards and hamlets under a *bulama*, and these are in their turn linked through the household of each *bulama* to the household head of the Village Area Head's household and so on right up to the household of the Shehu or king. Households are the chief economic units and are recognized as such in that taxes are collected by the householder i.e. from household heads.

The personnel of a household is based on that of the family and generally moves through a cycle that may involve several alternatives to the usual pattern. Let us start with a couple. A young man marries for the first time and in about 60% of the peasant cases noted in three rural towns, he brings his wife to the vicinity of his father's compound or moves into a section of his father's compound. If the latter is the case he will move to his own compound, close by, after his own conjugal family increases in size either through the birth of children or the acquisition of another wife. When his own children grow up his daughters leave to marry, and return from time to time because of divorces or separations from their current spouses. Sons ideally bring their wives into the vicinity and the original father now finds himself the nominal head of a growing patrilocal extended family organization which in time can become a separate ward or sub-ward of a town. When the father dies, the oldest son, or the most capable or successful if all the sons are close to one another in age, takes over the compound of the dead father. Lands and goods are apportioned among the male heirs, although the person taking the father's role often takes two parts to each one to be divided among the remaining heirs. Thus in one case a man with three half brothers took his father's

fields and divided them in half. One half he kept for himself, and the other half he split among the three brothers.

A problem that frequently emerges at this time is that of the mothers of half-siblings, i.e. the wives of the dead man. The man who takes over his father's compound installs his mother there as a dependant. If she is a vigorous woman she can become a powerful person in the household. Indeed in the royal household she has a special title and was traditionally a noble woman of great power. The other wives of the dead man must go and live with their own kinsmen, which usually means one of their sons. In one case, this problem was intensified by the fact that the household head, a powerful political leader, had only one son, by a concubine. When the present head dies, his senior wife, a woman of very powerful upper class affiliations will have to leave and the concubine will be installed as a senior woman of the household. Thus such arrangements can cause tension between the co-wives of an old man since only one of them is going to remain in her dead husband's household.

Although no actual count was taken, the impression was gained that siblings tend to drift apart after the death of their father. Even though they live close by one another their unity and cooperation is not as great after the father's death as before. This can be ameliorated by social and economic factors. Thus if a senior brother takes over a powerful political role, or a lucrative economic one and uses it to benefit himself and his brothers, the organization tends to remain intact. The following excerpt from an informant reveals some of the forces at work in the continuity of a household organization that has gone on for more than one generation:

> I did not have a father and was now living in the house of my elder brother, who was head of the house — I therefore had to give my brother the same discipline-respect as a father and keep myself continually under his command. I wanted a wife (all my other brothers had married and moved out to form their own households by now), but my brother ordered me to wait patiently until I learned the occupation (butchering) properly. He said — continue to stay in my house and carry grass for my horse, and learn the butcher's trade and I will feed you and give you money for spending and buy your clothes. But I was not happy and saved my money in secret and saved enough to take a wife of my own — they were cheap in those days. My older brother was angry and did not agree to the marriage for he still wanted me to stay in his compound.

> But I did not wish to do that and so I moved away to a house that X the husband of my mother's sister in Maiduguri, owned here in the butcher's quarter.

The informant felt that his older brother was taking advantage of him and so he planned secretly to start up a household on his own. The brother might have kept him had he been more generous and supplied a wife to his younger brother as a really successful compound head would have done under similar circumstances.

In a survey of 75 peasant households in three towns of Maiduguri district in Bornu, 36% of these relatively poor units had one or two unmarried adult males living in the compound who were non-nuclear family members. Most of them were not kinsmen of any kind. They helped the household head on his farm plots, carried grass for his horse, took messages for him to friends and relatives, carried his goods to market, and learned his dry season non-farming occupation. In return, the household head fed them, clothed them, acted as their protector in any local disputes and might even help them with their bridewealth and marriage arrangements. These clients are called *tada njima* (sons of the house) and refer to the household head as *abba njima* (father of the house). They treat their *abba njima* with all the discipline-respect that they give their own father and expect from him the same kind of behavior that a son expects from a father. The only difference that I could discover was in the realm of sex. Several *tada njima* felt that there was not as much shame-avoidance or *nungu* about women in the *abba njima* compared with the real father.

The important point here is that Kanuri men feel that the *berzum* ingredients of the father-son relationship can be transferred. This does not mean that they forget their own fathers or biological kin. However it does mean that they use the norms of the father-son relationship for self-advancement. Kanuri were always coming up to me and calling me father, or asking for a small gift in the hope that they might repay me with some discipline-respect and begin initiating a *tada njima* role for themselves with me as the *abba njima.*

This means of adding to a household can produce very extensive organizations under proper conditions. If a man has a powerful political post, either in the traditional or modern post-colonial administration, his access to power over jobs or land or tax collec-

tions, or adjudication, means that he can use a large following of loyal and obedient clients. The transferability of the father-son relationship allows men to build up such organizations whenever they have the means to maintain them. Indeed Kanuri judge success in life, not by wealth or power per se, but by the size of a man's following, the best indication of which is the size of his household. Thus great households, the greatest of which is that of the Shehu or King, form the upper class group of Kanuri society. Wealthy traders have many *tada njima* who after their loyalty has been proven in the trader's household are given goods and/or money and sent out to markets all over Bornu to trade for their household head. Powerful political leaders need loyal followers who will do their bidding and profit not by their death, as might a kinsman, but by their success. In their turn such clients may rise to high political office in the administrative hierarchy of the emirate. Thus the household organization, although based as it is on Kanuri family organization and using behavioral norms stemming from family life serves a range of purposes in the society that are much more widely ramified in the political and economic organization than that of the family itself, and together family and household provide the behavior and the organization respectively that keeps the society in its present form.

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