

REFLECTIONS ON THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION ON FIELD CULTIVATION IN SOUTHERN CENTRAL NIGER

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ABSTRACT Anthropologists have addressed the question as to if and how religious beliefs and practices influence work processes and this has also been a persistent undercurrent in the ethnographic literature on Niger and on the Hausa people. In this article, I will review the contributions to this topic. Studies show that religion might influence other societal fields, among them work practices, in several ways. This provides the background for my own case study. I will discuss this topic with respect to field cultivation in southern central Niger. My case study suggests that religion indeed influences work processes in our region of interest, even though in subtle ways. My case study also makes the discussion of the influence of magic and religion on work processes more differentiated. As I will show, the peasants hold beliefs in the intervention of supernatural entities and forces, these beliefs provide them with a variety of perspectives onto the work process and we could expect each of these perspectives to have different consequences for the work process. This flexibility of perspectives, it seems to me, has not been addressed in earlier studies. At the same time, the way religion influences field cultivation in our region of interest proves to be very different from the way Luther and Calvin were thought to have shaped work processes in Western society.

Key Words: Field cultivation; Work; Religion; Hausa; Manga.

I. INTRODUCTION

Field cultivation is, first and foremost, a technical and social activity. Peasants sow and weed their fields in order to collect the harvest at a later point in time. They organise the work process within the family and might carry out work jointly. Yet, from a Hausa peasant's perspective, field cultivation comprises a religious element as well. Peasants believe that Allah interacts with them and influences their daily lives in important ways, and the same consideration holds true for field cultivation. Correspondingly, Hausa peasants pray to Allah for rain and are grateful for the harvest.

Many economic anthropologists mention or describe work processes. However, they rarely pay attention to the question as to if and how religious beliefs and practices influence work processes (e.g., Beynon, 2009 [1973]; Burawoy, 2009 [1979]; Mortimore, 1989: 101–102; Bouquet, 1990; Gudeman & Rivera, 1990). This situation, as I see it, reflects a certain degree of disinterest or even doubt in anthropology as to whether religion has a formative influence on work processes. A small number of anthropologists have addressed this topic (see Malinowski, 2002 [1935]; 1954 [1948]; Linares, 1992; Beck, 1996; Spittler, 1998; Coleman, 2005) and it has also been a persistent theme or undercurrent in the ethnographic

literature on Niger and on the Hausa people (Raynaut, 1972; Nicolas, 1975; Spittler, 1978; 1998; Clough, 2014; 2016). Among the latter authors, Raynaut, Spittler and Clough also lean towards the thesis that religion influences work processes. However, except for Malinowski (2002 [1935]), none of the anthropologists have systematically researched this question and we therefore only have at our disposal a fairly small number of contributions, fragmentary reflections and observations. The question as to whether and how religion influences work processes thus remains a rather unexplored area of anthropological literature as well as in the literature on our region of interest.

In my article, I wish to advance this discussion. I will proceed as follows. First, I will review the above-mentioned contributions, fragmentary reflections and insights. This will show that the authors who dealt with this issue have found a wide variety of ways in which religion might influence work processes. Second, I will present my own field data and try to assess whether and to what extent religion influences field cultivation in two villages of southern central Niger. I will argue that there is evidence for the thesis that religion influences work processes in these villages, albeit subtly and to a small degree. Third, my case study will also feed back into the theoretical debate and contribute towards differentiating the argumentation further. I will argue that beliefs in the intervention of supernatural entities and forces provide workers with a variety of perspectives on the work process and that the impact of these beliefs on the work process depends on the chosen perspective.

II. CLARIFICATION

Two remarks need to be made here. As the reflections of the above-mentioned authors show, it is difficult to find conclusive evidence for the thesis that religion influences work processes. Our reflections on this field are therefore often rather hypothetical. This is due to three factors. First, we lack extensive data. Second, we do not have a theoretical framework for the study of the influence of religion on work processes. Third, no comparative studies have been undertaken which would allow us to demonstrate and assess the impact of religious factors on work processes. In my view, it would, however, not be conducive to science if we concluded that we should cease to reflect on this topic until some future anthropologist studies it with sufficient means and manpower. We do not know if this day will come and, even if it does, he or she will benefit from what we think today. However, readers should bear in mind that I struggle with the same difficulties as the other authors. I will therefore not be able to provide a clear-cut demonstration of my thesis, but will rather engage in a puzzle-like investigation of the topic.

I would also like to make an additional remark. I will not confine myself to the work of anthropologists, but will also draw on Max Weber's *Protestant ethic*. I feel justified in doing this, as Weber—a major theoretical thinker in this field—has been very influential in the field of anthropology (cf. Geertz' definition of religion (Geertz, 1975: 87–125)) and studied societies to which he was separated by a historical and cultural gap—as anthropologists do.

III. THEORETICAL POSITIONS

As noted above, I will review the diverse contributions made by other anthropologists and by Max Weber. As far as I can see, they found nine ways in which religion might have an impact on the work process.

1. Religion Might Influence Work Processes Through the Temporal Order of Religious Practices

Malinowski (2002 [1935]: 66) found that rites determined the timing of agricultural work on the Trobriand islands. Each step in gardening was inaugurated by a magic ritual.

2. Religion Might Influence Work Through the Field Subjects' Beliefs in the Intervention of Supernatural Forces in the Observable World

Malinowski (2002 [1935]; 1954 [1948]), Raynaut (1972), Nicolas (1975), and Spittler (1998) agree that their field subjects believe in a religious sphere existing parallel to the observable world. In this sphere, there are supernatural beings or forces. Their field subjects' this-worldly actions thus often have a religious component. Regarding the *Anna* [non-Islamic Hausa], for instance, Nicolas (1975: 252) reported that they did not distinguish between rite and technique. Among them, each act comprised language, gesture, tools and the intervention by spiritual beings. Furthermore, field subjects believe that these spiritual beings and forces affect the observable world or intervene in it, thus partly or wholly determining men's success or failure. Spittler (1978: 125–126) finds that success was due to alliances between spirits (*iskoki*) and men among the *Anna*. According to Nicolas (1975: 251), the *Anna* consider good fortune (*arziki*) as a personal characteristic that finds expression in possessions. These authors also reported that their field subjects believe that they could influence these supernatural beings and forces that determined their success. With regard to the *Anna*, for instance, Nicolas (1975: 251) reported that good fortune could be enhanced by magic. Therefore, competition between cultivators who enjoyed good fortune was less of a competition between workers than a competition between magicians. The same observation held true for Malinowski's Trobriand islanders (Malinowski, 2002 [1935]):

The natives are deeply convinced that through his magic the *towosi* [the garden magician] controls the forces of fertility, ... (Malinowski, 2002 [1935]: 67). ... At the same time, they [the *Trobrianders*] attribute the supreme fertility of some districts, the prosperity which dwells there permanently and the beautiful expanse of successful gardens to the superiority of one magical system over another. (Malinowski, 2002 [1935]: 75)

Malinowski (1954 [1948]), Raynaut (1972), and Spittler (1998) tried to explore the exact nature of these beliefs and their practical consequences. Spittler (1998) worked among Tuareg herders. The Tuareg believed that good fortune was a personal characteristic and success depended on it. The herd of a man who has

good fortune with respect to his goats, for instance, will thrive. In contrast to what one might expect, the Tuareg do not, however, support the view that this means they can work less. Instead, they believed that they had to make efforts in order to allow good fortune to intervene in their lives (Spittler, 1998: 404–405).

A picture emerges from Spittler's descriptions according to which his field subjects differentiate between two different spheres. In the first sphere, they have control over their actions and action results. In the second sphere, they have control over their actions, but only partial control over the results. In this final sphere, the results of their actions depend on factors beyond their control and here supernatural forces, in this case good fortune, might intervene. This interpretation corresponds with Malinowski's findings in his essay *Magic, Science, and Religion*:

Whenever he [primitive man] has been taught by experience that effort guided by knowledge is of some avail, he never spares the one or ignores the other. He knows that a plant cannot grow by magic alone, or a canoe sail or float without being properly constructed and managed, or a fight be won without skill and daring. He never relies on magic alone, while, on the contrary, he sometimes dispenses with it, as in fire-making and in a number of crafts and pursuits. (Malinowski, 1954 [1948]: 32)

Malinowski's field subjects differentiate between the same two spheres. Although Spittler's Tuareg and Malinowski's *Trobrianders* share this view, their views nevertheless diverge in another area.

The former do not assume that they can rely on the efficacy of this kind of good fortune. This impression is evoked by another observation Spittler (1998: 152–155) makes. According to Spittler, Tuareg use religious techniques to protect camels that have gone astray. The technique of *tagenugey* ultimately prevents the camel from getting lost. *Tasanafalal* enables a Qur'anic scholar to locate a lost or stolen object. *Tasawalwal* makes the camel return home on its own. Spittler discusses these magical techniques with an informant. His interview partner expresses a firm belief in the reliability of these methods. In the course of the conversation, however, they also discuss his informant's case. The latter's camel has gone astray but his informant did not use magic. The field subject even shows signs of doubt in the efficacy of the magical techniques.

This is different for the *Trobrianders*:

It is most significant that in the lagoon fishing, where man can rely completely upon his knowledge and skill, magic does not exist, while in the open-sea fishing, full of danger and uncertainty, there is extensive magical ritual to secure safety and good results. ... But he clings to it [magic], whenever he has to recognize the impotence of his knowledge and of his rational technique. (Malinowski, 1954 [1948]: 31–32)

In this citation, Malinowski (1954 [1948]: 31–32) pointed again to the existence of two spheres. In the second sphere, action results do not solely depend on

actors' efforts. Malinowski added, however, that magic produces safety in the second sphere. Similarly, his field subjects resorted to magic in warfare to "master the elements of chance and luck" (Malinowski, 1954 [1948]: 31). In contrast to Spittler's herders, Malinowski's actors "cling to" magic, they "secure safety and good results" and they "master the elements of chance and luck." Malinowski's choice of words depicts a situation in which actors rely on supernatural forces to bring about a certain future. In a way, magic determines the future which is still open for the Tuareg herders.

Neither Spittler nor Malinowski followed up on this line of thought, but we would expect the influence on work processes to differ in both cases. Good fortune and magic are alike in bringing about a favourable future. However, Spittler's actors could not anticipate a favourable future with certainty and, as they themselves said, have to work and reflect just as hard as without supernatural assistance even when they possess good fortune as a personal characteristic or apply magic.

Malinowski's actors, however, would anticipate favourable action results beyond the sphere under their control. In this case, one might assume, actors would be inclined to count on supernatural assistance. It remains unclear, however, what the practical consequences of this view would be. Raynaut (1972: 52) identifies the practical consequences of this view. He finds evidence for the same attitude among the Hausa of Soumarana. They believe in good fortune or *arziki* as a personal characteristic (Nicolas 1975: 192, 250–251, 357) and assume that good fortune determines action results.

... le mot haoussa (*arziki*), ainsi qu'en français "fortune" possède les deux sens de "richesse" et de "chance." C'est moins par l'ardeur de son travail, l'intelligence de ses spéculations, qu'un homme peut acquérir la fortune que par le jeu de ses forces mythiques.

Raynaut's actors would prefer to hope for spiritual intervention than work hard. Good fortune allows them to reduce their efforts.

To sum up, religion might influence work processes through a belief in supernatural intervention. However, actors might distinguish between two spheres. In the first sphere, they control actions and action results. In the second sphere, they control actions, but have only partial control over the action results. In the second sphere, action results partly depend on factors beyond their control and supernatural forces might intervene, be it good fortune or magic. Two cases need to be distinguished. First, actors do think that they cannot rely on the supernatural forces' impact on their own future. In this case, they consider their future to be open and work as hard as they would without supernatural assistance. Second, actors think that they can rely on the supernatural forces' impact on their own future. For this case, Raynaut (1972: 52) proposed that they might reduce their efforts and count on the accuracy of their anticipations.

3. Religion Might Influence Work Through the Belief that Men's Actions are Completely Controlled by Supernatural Forces (Religious Determinism)

In the views discussed so far, the field subjects differentiate between the above-

mentioned two spheres. Beyond this, Clough (2016) argued that religion can also negate that actors have any control over their actions and the results of their actions. Among the Hausa of Northern Nigeria, he finds a belief in divine determination that denies human beings' control over their actions. However, he also pointed out that this belief in religious determination coexists with a belief in man's control over his actions. The same people hold these contradictory beliefs at different points in time.

Surely, however, there is a contradiction between their belief in divine determination and their attribution of responsibility to individuals for their goodness or badness. There is no doubt about the *blame* that they assigned to a person for his bad character. This logically implies a belief in self-conduction: the person could have done otherwise than he did. (Clough, 2016: 223–224)

It remains unknown what the practical implications of a belief in religious determinism might be. No field data is available on this. However, we can rule out that a belief in religious determinism will produce fatalism. None of the anthropologists report that their field subjects remained idle and would substantiate this with fatalistic arguments.⁽¹⁾

4. Religion Might Influence Work Processes by Defining the Limits of One's Influence on the World

In all of the above-mentioned interpretations of mankind and spiritual forces, men act upon the world. Religious determinism would only negate self-control but not that (divinely controlled) actors manipulate subjects and objects in the world or interact with them. Religion can, however, also define the identity of subjects and objects in the world and thus define the limits within which actors can act upon the world. Nicolas (1975: 251) refers to this. For the *Anna*, goods are not only material objects, but have a soul. Acting upon them thus has an interactive dimension. The objects can refuse or facilitate usage.

However, Nicolas does not provide us with data on the practical consequences of such religiously inspired views. We can of course imagine that believing in an object's resistance or immutability might constrain the actors' efforts, whereas the belief in the objects' willingness to be acted upon would make actors enhance their efforts (cf. Spittler, 1998: 402–404).

5. Religion Might Influence Work Processes by Interpreting Work as a Symbol of One's Future Salvation

Action builds on a means-end relationship. Christian doctrine prolongs means-end relations into the afterlife. Whoever behaves according to a specific set of standards, can determine his own situation after death. Calvinism modifies this view. It separates the afterlife from the actors' lives in the present and denies that actors have any control over their situation in the afterlife. The afterlife becomes a sphere that is completely determined by factors beyond their control.

No action and no magic can bring about the desired state of affairs. Calvinism declares, however, that hard, effective and productive work is a sign in the present of one's future status in the afterlife. Actors now work hard in order to ascertain that they will enjoy a favourable status in the afterlife. Although eternal life cannot be attained through work from a Calvinist point of view, the situation that ensues is similar to a situation in which actors try to save their lives through work (Weber, 1988 [1920]: 108–111). The Calvinist doctrine thus makes actors reflect intensively and work hard (Weber, 1988 [1920]: 160).

6. Religion Might Influence Work Processes by Reinforcing Social Obligations

Religion can reinforce social obligations that are constitutive of work processes. Thus, Linares (1992: 75) finds that spirit-shrines among the Jola “oversee production ... They supervise the labor force and compel cooperation between semi-agnates, ...” Clough (2014: 56–57) describes a similar case for Hausa farmer-traders in Northern Nigeria. Farmer-traders discuss success as a result of “generosity in providing commercial credit which would improve the life-chances of borrowers.” As Clough continued, “men gave commercial credit because they calculated that in the future borrowers would help them; and because they believed that their generosity would attract God's favour.” In Clough's example, farmer-traders follow a socio-economic norm that is constitutive of their work practices and endorsed by Allah. They help other farmer-traders by extending credit.

Religion can reinforce social obligations in two different ways. In Clough's description, farmer-traders adopt an instrumental perspective, they follow the norm because they expect to be rewarded for this. In another text, Clough (2016: 209, 218) speaks of these practices of help as ethical. This points to the fact that religion might also enhance the effect of the norm and influence the work process in this way. Since religion underpins the farmer-traders' ethical attitudes, they are convinced that offering help by giving credit is inherently good and this will presumably also stabilise or enhance this form of behaviour.

Furthermore, religion also defines and reinforces an actor's social obligations beyond the work process. It might therefore have an impact on the workers' material needs that they have to meet through labour. As Linares (1992: 28) shows for the Jola, “elders encourage production and enforce redistribution by constantly demanding offers of palm wine and animals to be sacrificed at the shrines” (cf. Wolf's notion of ceremonial fund (Wolf, 1966: 7–9)).

7. Religion Might Influence Work Processes by Declaring Work to Be a Divine Duty

Work can be a purely instrumental activity. Luther went beyond this and declared work to be a divine duty (Weber, 1988 [1920]: 69–74). To work was therefore inherently good. In this case, religion obliges people to work. It interprets this norm as inherently good and defines the positive and negative sanctions that protect the norm, God may be pleased or not.

In such a case, workers would be convinced that they did something inherently good when they worked. Furthermore, they would assume that their work would please God and they might be rewarded for this one day. This, Weber (1988

[1920]) appears to be saying, strengthens the workers' motivation and enhances their efforts.

8. Religion Might Influence Work Processes Through Its Influence on Character Traits

Action more generally and thus also work is partly shaped by the actor's character. Following up on this thought, Weber argued that the Anabaptists' practice of inward silence ("Harren") trained the Anabaptists to listen to their conscience. This made them become conscientious, diligent and reliable (cf. Geertz, 1975: 94–98) who incorporates this idea into his definition of religion). They transferred this characteristic to their life and work practices. As a consequence, they worked conscientiously, diligently and reliably (Weber, 1988 [1920]: 155–160).

9. Religion Might Influence Work Processes by Attributing Rights and Duties to Workers

Clough (2014) reported that islamisation has presumably changed the distribution of labour among the members of domestic groups in Hausaland. Clough worked in a region in northern Nigeria, which had not yet been fully islamised during his field research in the 1970s and 1980s. He could thus trace the changes induced by islamisation. According to him, Islamic households had a different order than *Maguzawa* [non-Islamic Hausa] households. In Islamic households, the household head would dispose of a large field [*gandu*-field] on which his dependents would work for four, five or six long mornings of the week during the farming season (Clough, 2014: 149). The field produce would be stored in his granary and he would feed the household members throughout the year. He would grant his wife and his children a small plot each to work on themselves. The field produce on these small plots would be theirs only (Clough, 2014: 149).

In *Maguzawa* households, however, the dependents enjoyed more freedom from the household head, had more economic means at their disposal and fed themselves independently for part of the year (Clough 2014: 156–157):

The first difference was the relative freedom of working dependents from the household head. *Maguzawa gandu* heads [household heads] used the labour of wives, male dependents and dependents' wives for only three long mornings of the week. ... The second difference was the special relationship linking wives of the *gandu* head with their married sons. They would often form a common granary from their *gayauni* [small fields at the disposal of wives and children]. ... The third difference was the close linkage between the household granary and family food provisioning. *Gandu* granaries were opened at the start of the farming period and closed between the millet and guineacorn harvests.

Similarly, for the region of Gobir in Niger, Spittler (1978: 103–104, 111) reported that women in Muslim households should not work in the fields. He added that the poorer rural households could not and did not fulfil these exigencies. For the village of Tibiri, he found that women did not normally work on the *gandu* fields

(Spittler, 1978: 119).

To sum up, a specific perspective on the relationship between religion and work evolves from these authors' contributions. The belief in other-worldly entities or forces is at the heart of people's religious beliefs (Tylor, 2008 [1871]: 25; Riesebrodt, 2007: 108). Societies elaborate this central belief into complex systems of beliefs and practices. These complex systems of beliefs and practices might influence societal fields other than religion, among them work practices, in several ways. According to the authors' findings and reflections, religion might influence work practices by prescribing a temporal order for working activities (see III-1. above), making men aware of how supernatural forces intervene in the world, allowing men to interact with these forces (see III-2.), defining their degree of control over their own actions (see III-3.) and over their environment (see III-4.), specifying their relationship with the after-life (see III-5.), reinforcing social obligations (see III-6.), declaring work a divine duty (see III-7.), shaping character traits (see III-8.) and by defining work-related gender and age roles (see III-9.).

Religion, it seems, is not only complex in itself, but its integration into the wider fabric of society allows for a wide array of ramifications in other areas of society. Correspondingly, the influence of religion on work processes is not necessarily straightforward and easy to discover. On the contrary, the observer can often expect these influences to be indirect and subtle.

I will now come to my case study. First, I will describe the field cultivation process in two villages in southern central Niger. Second, I will turn to the magico-religious beliefs and practices that accompany this process and reflect on the question of whether and how these magico-religious beliefs and practices might influence field cultivation. I will argue that religion does indeed influence work processes in these villages. As mentioned above, I do not claim to be providing clear-cut scientific proof in my line of argumentation. Instead, the demonstration of my thesis rests on the accumulation of reflections and evidence that make the idea plausible that religion influences work processes in our region of interest.

IV. RESEARCH AREA AND METHODS

The field site lies in central southern Niger, which belongs to the Sahel. The rainy season starts in June or July and lasts until September or October. There is a cold season roughly from November to February and a hot season from March to May. Rainfall in the rainy season permits field cultivation. Most of the population in the area live in villages, cultivate fields and frequently keep a small number of livestock. Many people raise additional income through other economic activities. They are artisans, petty traders, market brokers and/or labour migrants.

In central southern Niger, the population mainly belongs to one of three ethnic groups. They are either Hausa or Kanuri-Manga, who live to the east of the Hausa, or they are Fulbe, who are interspersed among the Hausa and Kanuri-Manga.

I carried out fieldwork in two villages in the region, both located to the east of the city of Zinder. One village is Munafuri, a Kanuri-Manga village, in which

I stayed for nine months in 1997 and 1998 (Heiss, 2003). The other village is Kimoram,⁽²⁾ a Hausa village where I stayed for nine months in 2006, 2007 and 2009. I also spent 1.5 months with peasants from Kimoram when they were in Nigeria between 2010 and 2011 (Heiss, 2015). While I did field research in Munafuri during the period of field cultivation, I closely accompanied the work processes of three households as a participant observer. In the evenings, I also met each of the three household heads at their homes to ask them the questions that had come up in the course of the day. Their names were Musa Kala, Abdu Tchilla and Yakuba Idi. When I had questions that demanded a more elaborate answer, I engaged in more formal interview-like conversations with them. I also conducted a village census. While I did research in Kimoram, I spent virtually the whole time with one single peasant, Musa Salifu,⁽³⁾ and tried to accompany him throughout the day in the different spheres of his life. My main method was participant observation in its intensified form of shadowing (Czarniawska, 2007). I should stress that the society in which I did my research observes strict gender separation in everyday life. Husbands and wives do not, for instance, eat together, nor do they go to the field together or converse in mixed-gender groups in public. As a male researcher, I therefore had to focus on men who are the main workers in the field.

The basic social structures, the economy and religion of both villages are nearly identical. Both villages are of similar size, their adult population ranges between 180 and 190 people. The villages lie on a huge sand dune. There are depressions between the waves of the sand dunes. In some of the deeper depressions, water formed ponds in the past, but these have now dried up leaving two small ponds in each village. In very few areas, the groundwater level of these formerly flooded depressions is still close enough to the surface to enable some villagers to do some gardening. The soil in these formerly flooded depressions is darker and more compact than the sandy soil surrounding them. Nevertheless, about 95% of the fields are located on sandy soil. Darker soil makes up about 5% of the fields. The areas with darker soil are cultivated in the same way as the sandy soil or may necessitate some minor adjustments. The landscape and soil are thus similar to those of other parts of southern Niger described in the literature (cf. Oyama, 2012; Kirikoshi, 2017).

In the rainy season, the villagers grow millet (*Pennisetum glaucum*, which I refer to as millet) and cowpeas on these fields. They intercrop these plants, i.e., they plant cowpeas in the same area as they plant the millet. They also grow sorghum, but to a much lesser extent. On sandy soil, they might plant sorghum later on during the rainy season if the millet has not grown, as sorghum still matures for a while after the rain has stopped at the end of the rainy season. Furthermore, they might plant sorghum on the compact soil of the dried-up depressions, as it does not spread its roots as widely as millet. There is also another factor for planting sorghum. Sorghum has larger and heavier heads than millet, so the peasants only plant it in areas protected from the wind.

Kimoram was probably founded in the 1940s. Some of the founders of Kimoram came from a Hausa settlement some 10 km further west, some from Manga-speaking settlements further south. The latter adopted the Hausa language. When the first settlers came to Kimoram, there was still plenty of land and they

appropriated large plots. As land was passed on from father to son, it was divided up in the course of time. At the time of research, there was no land without an owner around Kimoram and, except for some stretches that lay fallow, all the land was cultivated. A similar situation prevailed in Munafuri, although I do not know when exactly this village was founded. According to some villagers, the first settlers came from a settlement a few kilometres south-west of the village, situated at the foot of a rock. It seems likely, therefore, that it was established in colonial times when larger settlements dissolved and the settlers took possession of hitherto uncultivated land (cf. Spittler, 1977).

The villagers live in compounds, comprising one or several mud huts. There are a variety of household structures in Munafuri and Kimoram. In the simplest case, a household comprises a husband and wife and their children. The husband's duties are to build a hut, to feed his family, to provide clothing for the family members and to pay taxes. The husband's main economic activity is field cultivation. The man cultivates one or more plots of land on the sand dunes around his village. Before the rain starts to fall, he clears the fields. After the rainfall, he sows millet and cowpeas. Later on, he weeds and eventually he brings in the harvest and stores it in the family granary. The harvest serves to feed the family and to meet their other financial needs. The wife's main duties are to cook, clean the house and raise the children. While her husband is working on the fields, the wife does the cooking. She brings the food to her husband on the field. She and the children might help him cultivate the fields, although there is no formal obligation for the wife to participate in fieldwork. The man sets aside part of the field for his wife, where she can cultivate her own millet and cowpeas. The field produce of these plots is hers only. The same pertains to children who also receive a small plot of their own, which they can cultivate independently from their father. As time passes, the children grow older and marry. At the age of about 35, the sons become independent of their fathers. As land had become scarce over the past decades, the fathers divide up their fields. The sons receive a portion on which they build their own granaries. However, both households continue to be connected to each other through a variety of social obligations. In the event of food shortage, for instance, both households can claim the other household's help. In case of marriage, the father might still contribute to the marriage expenses when his son divorces his wife and wants to remarry. Social obligations to help each other also exist between uncles, nephews, cousins and in-laws. These are, however, far less strong than obligations between fathers and sons. In rare cases, brothers might jointly decide to break away from their father's household and cultivate their own fields collectively. I did not come across any household comprising three generations of adults (cf. Raynaut, 1972: 25).

The size of the fields varied, some peasants having more land and others less. Correspondingly, households differed in agricultural productivity. In most cases, however, field cultivation did not suffice to sustain the household for more than perhaps three, six or seven months a year, let alone to improve living standards or to accumulate wealth. In recent years, there have been field cultivation periods, which have resulted in the complete or nearly complete loss of harvests. The villagers therefore needed to raise additional income. As observed above, some villagers did gardening. Raising and fattening animals were important economic

strategies for the villagers. Some villagers kept cattle in the village throughout the year and others put their cattle into custody with the semi-nomadic Fulbe. Some farmers had ox-carts. They used them to bring manure to their fields and to provide transportation services for those who wanted to sell or buy goods on the nearby markets. However, for most households, locally raised income did not suffice to make ends meet. Household members would therefore go to Nigeria, roaming the streets to sell bread and tea to the local population and bring home their revenues (Heiss, 2015).

At first sight, it might be astonishing to read that although land is scarce, the field size of the four peasant households I worked with ranged between 7 and 10 hectares. However, the reader should bear in mind that the peasants plant the millet and the beans at a distance of 2 steps or 1.5 steps, respectively. Given the fact that the millet often does not grow well, this explains why a peasant who disposes of 10 hectares still lacks land and is unable to feed his family in most years.⁽⁴⁾

In other parts of Niger, land scarcity led to increasing economic and social stratification among the villagers. The size of farming plots varied significantly, “from several tens of hectares to less than one” (Raynaut, 1988: 234). One meets “employers of labour ..., as well as ... well-to-do merchants” (Raynaut, 1988: 235). Villagers might classify some of their kind as rich people and others as poorer peasants working on other peasants’ fields in order to repay their debts (Kirikoshi, 2017: 49). This degree of economic stratification had not been reached either in Munafuri nor in Kimoram, where the living conditions of villagers did not differ to such an extent. No household head provided paid farm labour for other households, none was a “well-to-do merchant.” Some were better off than others, but none was classified as rich (Hausa: *maikud’i*).

V. THE WORK PROCESS

A number of aspects have to be dealt with in order to elucidate the process of field cultivation. I will describe (1) the peasants’ working techniques, (2) their factual knowledge, (3) their experience-based approach towards field cultivation, (4) the thresholds of relevance that determine whether and when the peasants intervene in processes that are detrimental to plant growth, (5) the peasants’ states of mind during the work processes and (6) the relationship between household structures and the working processes.

1. Working Techniques

The peasants’ work on the fields comprises several steps. First, the peasants clear the fields. They dig up last year’s millet roots and cut down the shrubs that have grown on the field. Second, they rake together roots, branches, twigs and leaves and burn them. Third, they sow millet seeds and cowpeas on some parts of their fields before the rain sets in. These first three steps are performed at the end of the dry season between February and June. Fourth, they sow millet seeds and cowpeas after it has rained, in June or July. However, if the millet and the

cowpeas do not sprout, they might be forced to replant the fields several times. Fifth, they weed the fields for the first time and, in the process, also thin out the millet shoots that are growing too closely together. They carry out the weeding shortly after the first rain has fallen and the millet and the weeds have sprouted. Weeding the fields might take between 30 and 50 days. Sixth, they weed the fields for the second time immediately after having weeded the fields for the first time. This process might take about 30 days. Seventh, they reduce the number of millet shoots where too many seeds have germinated in the same spot and they have not been sufficiently thinned out during the previous weeding process. Eighth, they harvest millet and cowpeas between September and October. The peasants harvest on 10 to 40 days, as not all the field-produce ripens at the same time and the size of the harvest differs across fields and years. Finally, they store the millet in the granary and the cowpeas in the compound.

In order to give the reader an idea of what each of these steps implies, I will describe the fourth step, i.e., how the peasants sow after rainfall (Hausa: *shibka*, Manga: *nado*). The description refers to a monogamous household, as most households in the villages are monogamous.⁽⁵⁾

The rainfall period is very short. If the peasants sowed the millet later in the rainy period, they would run the risk of lacking sufficient rain to support the growth of the millet. It is thus important for them to sow the millet seeds and the cowpeas as early as possible in the rainy season. When rain has fallen, the peasants dig a hole into the ground to see how deep the rain has penetrated the soil in order to determine if sufficient rain has fallen to support the growth of the millet. If rain has fallen in sufficient quantities, they have about 2 or 2.5 days before the fields dry up again and they have to stop sowing.

In order to benefit most from the rain, however, they usually perform *binne* (in Hausa, Manga: *kui*), i.e., they sow millet seeds and cowpeas before the rain sets in to take immediate advantage of the rain. However, doing *binne*, they run the risk that insufficient rainfall might make the millet seeds and the cowpeas sprout, but not be sufficient to support their growth, leading to the loss of the seedlings. Therefore, they try to combine *binne* with *shibka* (Manga: *nado*), i.e., they sow part of the field before the rain sets in and part of the field after the rain sets in. I will now dwell on *shibka*.

For *shibka*, the peasant brings millet seed, the *sengumi* (Manga: *dabi*) or sowing hoe and a small *k'warya* (Manga: *kāmo*) or *calabash* to the field. The *sengumi* consists of a wooden pole, about 1.80 m long, with a lengthy, triangular metal blade. The *calabash* is small enough to be held in one hand.

Shibka comprises two coordinated activities. The peasant first takes the *sengumi*. He holds the pole with both hands, one hand beside the trunk and above the hip, the other hand beside the hip. The metal blade is positioned slightly behind the peasant's body. Then he walks across the field and lets the metal blade of the hoe sink into the ground at every second step before bringing it back to its original position. When the peasant has made a line of holes, he turns around and shifts the hoe to the other side of his body. He then walks in the opposite direction, strictly keeping the same distance of about two steps to the line of holes he made beforehand.

After a while, he interrupts his work, takes the *calabash* and fills millet seeds

into the *calabash* in order to sow the millet seeds. Holding the *calabash* in his left hand and following the lines of holes dug up with the *sengumi*, he takes about 20–40 millet seeds, using his thumb, index and middle finger, and places them into each hole. He uses his foot to push earth back into the hole in order to cover the seeds. The process of sowing sorghum and cowpeas is nearly the same as the process of sowing millet. When the peasants sow sorghum, they leave a distance of 1.5 steps between the holes and throw between seven and eleven sorghum seeds into the holes. When they plant cowpeas, they keep a distance of about five feet between the holes and place four to eight cowpeas into them. If the peasant works together with his wife or his children, he works with the *sengumi*, while they put the seeds in the holes. The peasants sow as much millet and cowpeas as possible within the first two or two-and-a-half days after it has rained. Some peasants even start sowing at 3:30 or 4 a.m. and continue to work until sunset. As noted above, the amount of rainwater might not be sufficient to support the growth of the millet, once it has sprouted, and the peasants might have to replant the field or parts of it several times over. In the village of Munafuri, each of the three households was therefore obliged to do *shibka* for about 14 days in the rainy season when I was there.

As the soil is heavy after the rainfall and the working day is so long, *shibka* is demanding and exhausting, and causes pain in the upper arms, elbows and parts of the back. Yet no rest can be taken until the work is done, since this work is so important.

2. Factual Knowledge

The peasants' work is based on extensive factual knowledge. They observe the millet from a practical perspective, examine it with their hands and eyes to become acquainted with the millet and its characteristics. Their observations enable them to acquire knowledge of the exact anatomy of the millet seed and the millet plant, and of its growth process. They know the interior of a seed, how it sprouts, how the roots grow, how the roots spread under the earth as well as all the stages of development of the stem axis, leaves, blossoms and fruits. Furthermore, they know how to evaluate the growth process of the millet. A millet shoot that grows well develops fast, produces many stems and has dark-green leaves that do not fold.

Beyond that, they know under what conditions the plants grow well. They therefore have an understanding of the relationship between the quantity of rain that has fallen and plant growth as well as between rainfall patterns and plant growth. They know that millet grows differently in compact soil than in loose soil. The temperature of the soil also plays a role in stimulating the growth of the millet. The seed sprouts better at the beginning of the rainy season when the sun has heated up the soil, but, once the millet has sprouted, it grows better if the soil's temperature has dropped. This knowledge is, of course, reflected in the working practices. For example, the peasants do not replant their fields with millet anymore when the temperature of the soil has dropped after the first rainfalls. Furthermore, they plant the seeds at a sufficient distance to prevent the roots of the plants from competing for water.

It should also be noted that the peasants perceive these natural phenomena in

ontological terms. For instance, they attribute feelings to the millet in a literal sense. When the millet grows well, for example, they think that it feels good. Millet germinates after the first rainfall because it feels uncomfortable and tries to escape from the heat of the soil. Whereas the smell of cattle dung is unpleasant for our human noses, it is a pleasant odour to the millet and enhances its growth (Heiss, 2001: 213–224).

3. The Experience-Based Approach to Field Cultivation

It is not factual knowledge alone on which field cultivation rests. As Dreyfus & Dreyfus (1987) have shown, it is rather the perception of situations that guides a competent actor through his field of activity. Competent actors perceive situations in terms of a situation they have already understood and are familiar with, immediately interpret them according to the familiar situation and, based on this experience, choose the action they believe to be most appropriate. The same observation holds true for the peasants in Niger. They are acquainted with the recurring situations that make up the process of field cultivation. When Abdu Tchilla cleared his field, he perceived the situation as follows: The millet stalks lay on the ground, but the worm that had appeared on the field last year and which may have survived the dry season on millet stalks threatened this year's harvest. The millet stalks would also be an obstacle when using the weeding tool. The burned millet stalks would enhance the growth of the millet. Having gone through many field periods, Abdu Tchilla understood and interpreted the situation in these terms and did not need much time to decide to burn the millet stalks on his field.

However, the peasants were also familiar with sequences of situations, which would typically follow each other. Yakuba, for instance, knew that when he weeded his fields, he would slowly be diminishing the space that still needed to be weeded. He also knew that he would then come to a point when a space would need to be carved out from the field that was suitable for being weeded by a day labourer. He would then look for someone to hire and weed the section he had in mind.

These specific sequences of situations were embedded in global expectations about the structure of the field cultivation. The peasants knew that the wind would change its direction at the end of the dry season and that the rainy season could then be expected to start. They knew that, by and large, the clearing of the field would be followed by *binne*, which would be followed by *shibka*, etc.

The fact that the peasants were acquainted with virtually all situations, sequences of situations and held global expectations about the structure of field cultivation, however, does not imply that field cultivation could be planned in detail. It was, of course, possible, to roughly extrapolate how the field period would develop, when the dry season would probably end, when the peasants would probably clear the fields and do *binne*, when rain might fall and when they would do *shibka*. Yet, what exactly would happen on the field was far too unpredictable. Any exact planning of the field cultivation process would have been futile, and so the peasants did not try to plan it in detail.

As the peasants were experienced and were acquainted with most situations,

they would instead see field cultivation as an open process most of the time. Field cultivation would thus not resemble the execution of a plan, but rather *an interaction with the field*, whereby the peasants would ascertain and evaluate the situation, do what had to be done, ascertain the next situation and again do what needed to be done. The peasants' vast knowledge of situations and their concatenations thus enabled them to actively respond to virtually any situation on the field and to carry out their work without much prior detailed planning.

Explicit planning would rather help to organise steps that were more complicated and required more reflection. To give an example, before the rain set in, Musa made a plan for his field and decided where to plant which crop. The greater sandy part of his field was suitable for the cultivation of millet and cowpeas, which he wanted to intercrop there. The smaller part, which disposed of a different kind of soil, was more suitable for the cultivation of sorghum, which he preferred to plant there. To cite another example, Musa had already sowed millet on his field, weeds began to sprout and the family had already begun to weed the herbs. However, the millet did not germinate well enough and Musa had to sow millet again. Sowing millet on the entire field would have interrupted the removal of the weeds, as one would have had to wait until the millet had germinated in order to be able to differentiate between the millet and the weeds. Musa thus decided to exclude a part of the field from sowing millet and to continue weeding there, while the newly sowed millet would germinate on other parts of the field.

4. Thresholds of Relevance

As we have seen, millet and cowpeas are subject to a variety of factors, which influence their growth. During the field cultivation period I observed in Munafuri in 1997, the rain made the seeds germinate, but did not support their growth. Locusts invaded the fields. A dry wind from an easterly direction temporarily threatened to dry up the leaves of the cowpea shoots. Towards the end of the field cultivation period, a parasite appeared who fed on the ripening cowpeas and, shortly before the harvest, an insect fed on the sorghum. Thus, the wind, the locusts, the cowpea and the sorghum parasites caused damage to the plants and fruits.

The peasants expect these conditions to occur every year, but they also expect them to vanish after a while. They know that the locusts come to their area after the millet has produced its shoots. Yet they also expect the locusts to feed on the millet only for a while and then to travel further north without causing too much damage. They also expect the insects that prevent the cowpeas from ripening to remain on their fields for a while, thereby reducing the amount of cowpeas that will eventually be harvested. However, they do not expect this insect to cause too much damage to the cowpeas. Heavy rainfall will destroy them. These factors and the corresponding partial loss of the harvest are anticipated by the peasants, yet they do not see the need to counteract these factors at an early stage. It is only when the damage becomes or threatens to become more severe that they contemplate taking countermeasures. Thus, the locusts appeared on the fields on June 2, 1998. They fed on the millet and the peasants argued that they would later disappear and that they could still plant sorghum at a later stage of the field

cultivation period, as the locusts would not feed on sorghum. By the end of June, however, it had become clear that the locusts had laid eggs in the fields, that new locusts had hatched which would remain on the fields until they would be able to travel further and that the locusts did actually also feed on the sorghum. It was only at this point in time that the peasants asked for insecticides from the *service technique*. Likewise, in 1997, the wind caused comparatively heavy damage to the cowpeas and it was only after these damages had occurred that Musa Kala and Yakuba Idi thought about taking preventive measures in the future. Yakuba Idi, for instance, spoke about leaving more shrubs on the field if he cleared the field in future in order to provide protection against the wind. In summary, the peasants expect a certain number of factors to do some temporary damage to the field produce. They tolerate these damages to a certain extent and think of taking countermeasures when the amount of damage exceeds a certain level. Their thresholds of relevance therefore appear to be comparatively high.

5. States of Mind

While working the fields, the peasants also adopt characteristic states of mind. If the process of field cultivation was a uniform and steady process, similar to the execution of a very promising plan, the peasants' states of mind might be expected to be rather stable throughout the working process. This, however, is not the case. Any person, who carries out an action and aims at a goal that is only partly within his control, needs good fortune to achieve his aim. If the course of the action evolves in such a way that his aim appears attainable, he will be optimistic, otherwise the course of action will cause him concern (cf. Tugendhat, 2006: 37, 49). When he finally achieves his aim, he will be satisfied. This also applies to the peasants. When the locusts and the wind prevented the millet and the cowpeas from growing, the peasants were concerned because they thought they might have to face famine. When they later saw that the field produce was growing unexpectedly well, they were relieved. When, at the end of the field cultivation period, Abdu Tchilla went across the field to assess the amount of millet he would later harvest, his satisfaction was tangible.

The peasants not only oscillated between hope, concern and satisfaction, but also between relaxation, concentration and determination. Sometimes, bottleneck situations occurred on the field. These situations demanded greater concentration and determination than others. When the rain came, the peasants only had a limited amount of time to sow the seeds and so they worked with full concentration. They were also highly concentrated when they had to harvest the cowpeas quickly at harvest time before the Fulbe and their cattle came to their area. This contrasted sharply with their more relaxed attitude while they made *binne*.

What struck me as peculiar, however, was the peasants' stance in the face of adversity. Although they felt concern and even some resignation when they repeatedly saw that the millet did not grow well on the field, they nevertheless accepted the situation as it was, remained confident and patiently continued with their work.

6. The Household

As we have seen before, the workforce is mainly made up of the members of one household. The husband, his wife or wives as well as their children share the work on the fields. The peasants do not therefore strictly differentiate between the family and the workforce or between the household and the enterprise. This is an example of a domestic economy.

In a domestic economy, therefore, the normative order that at least partly regulates the behaviour among the family members also comprises economically productive activities. As we have seen, the husband cultivates the field, brings in the harvest and stores it in the granary. The harvest is considered to be his property, and the wife is not allowed to ascertain how much millet is in the granary. The husband also sets aside a parcel of land on his field for his wife. She can work this plot herself and its produce belongs to her alone. A son is entitled to cultivate his own plot but he has to work on his father's fields as well and it is his father who has the final say in how field cultivation on the main plot is carried out.

This normative order does not, of course, directly translate into social practice. In some households, the members will place a premium on the husband's field, as they all depend on its produce. In Abdu Tchilla's household, for instance, all workers joined forces to sow the millet and cowpeas on all their fields. After that, they first worked together on the husband's field and only when that work had been completed did they start work on their own fields. In Musa Kala's household, husband, wife and children worked together in all family members' fields. Therefore, we can see how the family might act as a unit which cares for all its members equally, or as a unit which gives priority to the husband's field and thereby to its produce on which the entire household depends. Similarly, the women do not necessarily insist on their right to sell the field produce from their own fields, but might add some of their produce to the family supplies. Cooperation seems to be guided by an awareness of the fact that the household members jointly depend on the same harvest and that the joint efforts of the workforce are needed to sustain their lives. However, it is difficult to assess to what extent authority relations within the households play a role in creating a joint workforce. Yet, emotional harmony is also conducive to this practice of working together. In polygamous households, for instance, jealousy between the wives undermines their willingness to work together, and each wife insists on her right to be fed by her husband, to work her own field and to sell the produce from her field for her own benefit.

Yet, even though the working process shows such a degree of flexibility, the ultimate authority in the work process rests with the father or husband who can still command the workforce on the major field and determine how the field is to be cultivated. This became evident when a younger peasant complained about this and when Abdu Tchilla's wife Bintu let out a laugh when I suggested that this could be different.

To round up the picture, the working process is also part of kinship or affinal relations beyond the sphere of one's own family. Sons-in-law, for instance, regularly devote some days to their parents-in-law and work on their fields. This is part

of the marriage arrangement and a matter of showing appropriate respect to those who have entrusted their daughter. Friendship or gratitude can also be expressed by working on someone else's field, although this only rarely occurs. If the peasants want to increase their labour force, they might organise a *gayya* (Manga: *gaiya*), a working team. They would then provide food for the workers and be obliged to return the favour on the fields of those who participated in the *gayya*. However, this seldom occurs. Another way of expanding the labour force is to acquire another peasant's worker, usually a young man, for one or two days. However, the village community does not play an active role in organising or carrying out the work process.

VI. THE RELIGIOUS SIDE OF FIELD CULTIVATION

So far, I have characterised the process of field cultivation as if it was an entirely worldly affair in the course of which peasants would organise themselves, use tools, reflect, exert their strength and transform the environment. Field cultivation in the research area, however, also has a religious dimension. Before describing the religious side of field cultivation, I wish to provide a broad picture of the religious beliefs and practices in the two villages.

Both villages lie in the region of Damagaram, which is also the Hausa name for the city of Zinder. The region has been islamised for a long time. Islam began to penetrate Hausaland in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Adeleye, 1976: 577–623) and the process of islamisation has continued ever since. As Baier states (Baier, 1980: 25), Islam became officially established in Damagaram in 1870, and a more profound islamisation of Damagaram occurred under the reign of Tanimu D'an Suleiman (1854–1884) (Dunbar, 1971: 44). The Islamic faith spread significantly during the colonial period (Fuglestad, 1983: 116). These days, the *Anna* or *Maguzawa* are few in number and only live in small pockets in the region in which the villages lie.

In both villages, all the inhabitants were Muslims. They had received some basic Islamic education at the Qur'anic village schools. Whereas most students would only learn the basic practices and knowledge, a few would go further, participate in the peripatetic tradition and develop more skills in the field of Qur'anic scholarship. The erstwhile apex of this carrier would be the memorisation of the Qur'an, which is a prerequisite for becoming an imam. The village of Munafuri had three, the village of Kimoram had two imams. Both villages had two mosques, one in the northern and one in the southern part of the village areas.

In Kimoram, there was a conflict between the two imams. The younger imam had been the older imam's disciple and now challenged his superior status. He was more important in the northern part of the village where his kinship affiliations were closer. It was claimed that he belonged to the *Tijaniyya* brotherhood, as opposed to the *Kadiriyya*, to which the elder imam was said to belong. These affiliations did not imply deeper differences in beliefs or practices as both brotherhoods belong to the mainstream of Islam in the region, and the villagers were not aware of any differences in doctrine between the two brotherhoods (cf.

Launay, 1992: 182–195). I assume that a conflict of village leadership underpinned the conflict between the two imams, as the northern part of the village was populated by people who had their regional origins elsewhere than the southern part.

The villagers believed, of course, in the existence of God, or Allah, and they believed that humans had a soul. In their view, God required believers to fulfil a number of exigencies. Most basic were the five pillars of Islam. These duties were: the profession of faith, the performance of five prayers per day, fasting during the month of Ramadan, pilgrimage to Mecca and the paying of *zakat*—the tithe for the religious scholars, the poor and the needy.

The peasants strictly adhered to the rule of praying five times a day: in the morning after getting up, at about 2 p.m., 4 p.m., at sunset and at about 8 p.m. Most of the time, the peasants performed their prayers alone. However, sometimes they joined other believers at the mosque. They also strictly adhered to fasting in the month of Ramadan. Unlike the duties of professing Islam, praying and fasting, the four peasants at the centre of my interest were unable to perform the duty of pilgrimage, because they were too poor. I was also not present in the villages when it was time to pay *zakat*.

Furthermore, many social norms and values of everyday life also had a religious dimension. The peasants even saw their normative system as representing God's will. It pleased God when one greeted the sick in the morning or when children were obedient to their parents. Similarly, the virtue of patience was of religious significance. A patient person accepted the unpleasant aspects of his worldly existence without complaint, as he knew that God gave them to him. Patience thus implied awareness of and obedience towards God. These norms were protected through divine sanctions. The more important the rules were, the heavier the sanctions. In the peasants' thinking, theft and adultery were paradigmatic for what was forbidden and thus a transgressor would expect to be punished by God, be it during his lifetime or in the after-life. God was strict, but he was not merciless. According to Musa Salifu, God allowed religious injunctions to be disregarded if they could not be fulfilled because they required conditions that did not exist. God would also adopt a more lenient attitude when the religious rule broken was of minor importance.

When a person died, his soul would be judged by God. Those who had fulfilled the exigencies would be sent to paradise, those who had neglected them would either be temporarily purified by fire or sent to hell. Showing respect to God and obeying him were perhaps the most important factors for ensuring one's access to paradise. People could show respect to God through prayer, by following the religious rules and by obeying the social rules endorsed by God.

In the peasants' perspective, God did not only take an observing or passive stance towards the world. He owned it and directly intervened in the world. He gave life to the newborn, he took life from the dying. He commanded the wind and the rain. The peasants also attributed the harvest to him and a household's well-being. Especially unexpected events were attributed to him: scorpion bites, snakebites, lightning, unexpected guests. On closer inspection, so the peasants thought, everything depended on God and anything that occurred, only occurred because he had given his consent to it. At the same time, God did not need any

justification for whatever he did as he was the owner of the world. If he let a man suffer for many years, it was God's right to do so and nobody could accuse him of immorality. Correspondingly, men were obliged to accept this.

The peasants believed in the power of Qur'anic verses to trigger practical consequences. The imams and peasants who were advanced enough in Islamic studies would write verses of the Qur'an or specific religious formulae onto wooden plates. A certain verse or formula, for instance, would enhance the health of the body, another would protect it against madness, and so on. In order to be effective, some of these verses had to be written on a slate, washed off and drunk, others needed to be read aloud, and others were sewn into a leather bag to be used as a talisman. Certain plants or animal parts functioned in a way similar to the way Qur'anic potions worked. The peasants described these plants and animal parts using the term *magani* (medicine), the same term they used for Qur'anic potions. Like the potions, *magani* helped to provide protection against a variety of evils that might affect an individual and to obtain a wide array of goods a person might desire. There was *magani* to arouse a girl's interest in oneself, to achieve economic success or protect against snakebites. Spirits and witches were part of the peasants' world as well, but they constituted a rather diffuse danger.

Having said this, I will now turn to the magico-religious components of the field cultivation process. I will describe these components and reflect on their implications for the work process.

1. Rites and the Timing of Work (Compare III-1. Above)

As noted above, the peasants' religious practices have a temporal order. Two practices coincided with the field cultivation process: daily prayer and fasting during the month of Ramadan.

As we have seen, the peasants assigned utmost importance to their daily prayers. They diligently adhered to them, even during the working period on the fields. Prayers thus competed with field cultivation for time. However, only two of the daily prayers coincided with field cultivation and the peasants needed to take breaks anyway. Daily prayers, so we might conclude, hardly interfered with field cultivation.

This was different with respect to fasting. The peasants kept strictly to the rule of fasting during Ramadan and this did have a larger impact on the field cultivation process. When I was once in Kimoram, Ramadan began at the same time as the second weeding. As noted above, this is a step in field cultivation that is not particularly important. The peasants went to the field in the morning and worked for two hours before they came back into the village to rest for the remaining hours of the day. Yet, they reported that they would also fast during the initial steps of field cultivation, such as sowing or the first weeding. In this case, they said, they would also work for only two hours a day. As they usually worked a whole day when they sowed the fields after the first rainfall and did the first weeding, this would significantly reduce their presence on the field, severely diminish their ability to sow the fields, reduce the weeds and, so one might expect, drastically reduce the harvest. If Ramadan occurred in the periods of the

more important steps in field cultivation—as we might expect—fasting would have a greater impact on the field cultivation process.

I have to add, however, that this was not the local view. Some peasants claimed that fasting and the subsequent reduction in the work on the fields would not have such an impact, and they referred to years when they had nevertheless had an abundant harvest. In their eyes, this proved that God acknowledged the peasants' obedience and made up for their reduced efforts on the field by granting a good harvest.

2. God as a Major Actor in Field Cultivation and Religious Determinism (Compare III-2. and III-3. Above)

As noted above, the peasants believed that God created the universe. Instead of withdrawing from the world as a *deus otiosus*, however, he maintained an interest in the world and frequently intervened in it. The same holds true for field cultivation. The peasants perceived God as a major actor in field cultivation. In the peasants' view, God influences the field cultivation process in three ways.

First, God controls very important factors in field cultivation. He sends the rain or withholds it. He controls the wind, the insects, and he decides on the amount of field produce at the end of the field cultivation period. Second, God sometimes intervenes in unexpected ways in plant growth. When the peasants expected a very bad harvest in 1997, they suddenly and unexpectedly saw many millet plants grow well and could suddenly expect a decent harvest. This was due to God. There is a third way, in which God intervenes in field cultivation. If the peasants reflect on the role of God further, this even makes the human contribution to field produce largely disappear. They state that everything that occurs, only occurs because God approves it. Even water could not make a seed swell without God's approval.

In the peasants' view, God is thus a more important actor in field cultivation than the peasants are. Musa Kala expressed this idea explicitly when he confirmed that God's will is more important than men's efforts. God is big and mighty, the peasants small and weak. The harvest depends more on God than on men.

The argument that everything depends on God's approval is not identical with, but roughly corresponds to one of the views Clough (2016) encountered in the village of Marmara (see I. above). His farmer-traders believed in man's impact on the world, but they also held a view of religious determinism. It remained unclear, however, when his farmer-traders would hold one view and when they would hold the other. Furthermore, Clough did not spell out the practical implications of these views.

Although the four peasants expressed the view that everything depends on God, it appears to me that this view represents more a possible perspective on life than a deeply rooted conviction that would guide the peasants' thinking and behaviour throughout the day. Yakuba Idi made this explicit. He said that the peasants would commonly identify God as the source of all achievements because to do otherwise would create the impression of boastfulness. Among themselves, he said, they believed that greater success commonly originated in greater effort. At another instance, Musa Kala was shocked when I explained to him that the

statement that everything depended on God would imply that even murder was to be attributed to God. He immediately claimed that this was not possible. His reaction, as far as I could tell, showed that Musa Kala had not deeply integrated this belief into his thinking. Finally, I discussed these thoughts with Musa Salifu. In Musa Salifu's view, man was ultimately responsible for his evil deeds, even if these were imputed to him by the devil. As Musa explained to me, the devil might suggest evil ideas and intentions to a person and thus influence his behaviour in an immoral way. Nevertheless, the devil's influence on one's behaviour could, Musa believed, not exonerate a person from responsibility for his behaviour. Prayer could protect a person against these devilish plots. It was thus insufficient religious zeal that opened the door for the devil, and man was still responsible for what he did. He believed that man could still maintain his autonomy against the devil.

All this points to the fact that the belief in religious determinism (or its variants) was not well-established within the peasants' thinking. It seems to be more a possible perspective on life that peasants would resort to at different moments in time. Most of the time, however, the field subjects did believe men to be the origin of their own deeds. Religious determinism would thus probably not have any major practical implications or a larger impact on their work practices.

This leaves us with the first two ways in which God plays a role in field cultivation. God sends rain, wind, insects and determines the size of the harvest. Furthermore, he intervenes in unexpected ways. These ways of divine intervention correspond to the model of the two spheres that Spittler (1998) and Malinowski (1954 [1948]) found in their respective field sites. Men act and God intervenes in the sphere beyond men's control. In order to explore the question as to whether these ideas have practical consequences for field cultivation, we need to attend to the techniques of prayer and magic with which the peasants interact with God and try to entice him to grant them favours.

(1) Prayer

The village community does not work together in the field cultivation process. Its main role in the production process is in the organisation of collective prayers that are meant to entice God to send rain, control the wind, enhance plant growth and grant the peasants a good harvest. In the course of a field cultivation period, the villagers performed several prayers with these objectives in mind. These prayers are called *rok'o* in Hausa or *alankoro* in Manga (English: plea). When they perform *rok'o* or *alankoro*, all the villagers are supposed to come together in front of one of the village mosques and pray.

In order to give an example, I will describe a *rok'o* here. At the time of research, the villagers of Kimoram saw the need for such a prayer at the beginning of the rainy season when little rain had fallen and the scarcity of rain endangered the harvest. Some villagers came up with the idea of performing a prayer and seeking God's assistance. The villagers discussed the idea and later reached an informal consensus that such a prayer should be held. Next, someone collected money from the villagers. The money served to pay the imam, Musa Salifu's father, for leading the *rok'o* and was also distributed among the participants of the ritual. When enough money had been collected, the villagers bought a goat that would later be slaughtered and the meat would be distributed among the

participants. Then the male adult members of the village community, mainly those who were older than 35, gathered at one of the mosques. The imam sat in front of the mosque. The villagers who wanted to take part in the ritual sat down close to the imam, whereas those who only wanted to attend the ceremony without playing an active role stayed a little distance away. The imam praised the prophet and his friends, the *sahabai*. The community ratified this praise by uttering *amin*. The central part of the *rok'o* was a recitation. While performing *rok'o*, the villagers who participated actively would recite formulae, which the participants knew by heart and/or a section of the Qur'an. In the latter case, templates on which these sections were written were needed. The imam and those villagers who owned the templates would distribute them among the villagers who wanted to take an active part in the ritual. The sections and formulae chosen depended on the specific purpose of the ritual. In the case I observed, the participants recited each of the formulae '*Astagfirula* (We ask God for forgiveness),' '*Subhanallahi* (There is no might but him),' '*La-illaha-illallahu* (There is no God but Allah)' 99 times. After that, the community recited the formulae '*Yaladihu*' (one of the 99 names of God: 'the compassionate') 27,000 times. Each of the participants recited this formula and their recitations added up to the required number of 27,000 recitations. Then, the imam praised the prophet and his friends again. The imam said '*Awa annabi salati!* (Pray for the Prophet!)' and the community replied '*Allah musali, Allah saydena Muhammadu musali* (May God increase his trustworthiness).' Then, the imam urged the community to pray and each community member immediately prayed for parents, grandfathers and ancestors, for the sick and the healthy, for those without food and those with food, for protection against troublemakers and for those in need of God's help. Finally, the community collectively performed the *fatiha*. The *rok'o* was over then. In the meantime, a villager had slaughtered the goat and some women had cooked its meat. At the end of the ceremony, some villagers distributed the meat, kola nuts and money among the participants. The amount of money a participant received depended on his status. The imam received 100 Fcfa, an active participant 20 Fcfa and a passive participant 5 Fcfa.

In their view, the peasants arouse God's pity through these prayers, but the peasants do not consider these prayers as merely concomitant to the whole process of field cultivation. They explicitly confirm that they can rely on God to respond to these prayers and they see them as an important part of field cultivation. They say so, but these two observations also corroborate this. When the peasants in Munafuri feared drought or the insect that fed on the green beans, they swiftly reacted with prayers and they were highly concentrated when they performed the prayers. The whole atmosphere showed that the peasants were doing something highly important. But also in Kimoram, the peasants believed in the importance and effectiveness of these prayers. There was no doubt that God is an actor in the world and virtually the whole village participated in *rok'o*. There were two peasants who decided to work on their fields while the others were praying, and Musa Salifu was very critical of them as they had withdrawn from the joint initiative. The peasants thus consider solicitation through prayer as an effective means of field cultivation and believe it is very likely that God will respond to their prayers. However, at the same time, they cannot be entirely certain that God will respond to their pleas whenever they turn to him. God, as is evident in their

everyday lives, may also withhold his favours and they point out that God is free to do this and justified on every occasion.

(2) Magic

The peasants also applied Qur'anic potions or animal or vegetable substances (*magani*) to the seeds to support plant growth. I will describe an example. One morning, Abdu Tchilla went to the bush to search for the substances he would need to prepare *magani*. He came back with the dried skin of a hedgehog and with parts of *Loranthus pentagona* (Abr.)—a plant that resembles mistletoe. Back at the village, he put them into a mortar and crushed them into powder. He performed *alwala*, the Islamic rite of purification, and mixed water with the seeds. Then he mixed in the powder. Abdu Tchilla had kept silent throughout the process, but he now turned to God and pleaded for a good harvest. Later, he brought the seeds to the field. On his way, he had to make sure he did not drop any seeds on the ground and that he did not have to relieve himself. Otherwise he would have had to wash his hands to prevent the *magani* from losing its efficacy. On the field, he sowed the millet.

In the peasants' perspective, these substances produce their effect in two different ways. First, the substances influence the seeds through their material characteristics and the plants' sensitivity. Musa Kala argued that the rain washes the substances out, the liquid penetrates the roots of the millet and thus makes the millet feel good. Abdu Tchilla explained that the millet would smell the odour of the substances and the pleasant smell would incite the millet to grow better. Second, the application of the substances is a plea to God to make the plants grow in a certain way. By using the substances, the peasants are making a symbolic statement. The *L. pentagona* is extremely drought-resistant and the peasants apply it because they want the millet to be drought-resistant as well. Similarly, they use the skin of a hedgehog because they would like the millet to sprout like the spikes on the hedgehog's skin. Furthermore, they make verbal utterances with the same aim in mind. As we have seen, Abdu Tchilla asked God to grant him a good harvest. In the peasants' perspective, the application of magical substances thus is a way of asking God to make the millet grow abundantly 'in the image' of the applied substances.

At the same time, the peasants consider these substances and the corresponding plea towards God as an efficient means in field cultivation. This can be understood from the fact that all four peasants applied it to their seeds. At the same time, the caveat concerning the efficacy of prayer also pertains to medicine. God is likely to respond to the peasants' plea, but actors cannot count on it every time they apply the medicine.

(3) A short digression into the working principles of magic

Since the question of the working principles of magic is a contested field, I think a digression into this field might be in order before returning to the question of the practical consequences of prayer and magic for field cultivation. In the peasants' case, the mechanism of magic is different from the those described by Evans-Pritchard (2013 [1937]), Nicolas (1975), Tambiah (1985), Stroeken (2008), or Greenwood (2013). According to Evans-Pritchard, the Azande declare that they

do not know exactly how the mechanism works, but assume that their medicine contains a soul that will actively track a person and kill her (Evans-Pritchard, 2013 [1937]: 153). As can easily be seen, this magical mechanism does not correspond to the peasants' interpretation of their magic.

Tambiah's interpretation of magic comes closer to this, although it is not equivalent. Tambiah (1985: 60) sees a symbolic process at work:

Magical acts, usually compounded by verbal utterances and object manipulation, constitute performative acts by which a property is imperatively transferred to a recipient object or person on an analogical basis. (Tambiah, 1985: 60)

In Tambiah's view, the practitioners of magic handle substances to make symbolic acts that transfer characteristics from the manipulated objects onto the target objects. He sees a simple example of this in a magic ritual from Dobu. The magician verbally compares an octopus to yams. At the same time, she pours seawater over the yams, as the octopus lives in the sea. She thereby intends to transfer the characteristic of having many tentacles to the yams so that they develop a lot of sprouts (Tambiah, 1985: 77). This interpretation overlaps with the case from southern central Niger. Even though the peasants also perform a symbolic act and wish the properties of the medicine to be transferred onto the target objects, the transferral depends, however, on the material influence of the substances and on God's willingness to respond to the peasants' plea.

Stroeken (2008) also finds that magic formulas are used among the Sukuma in Kenya. In order to protect the maize from thieves, the practitioners of magic add a small piece of elephant's trunk, for instance, to their magical substances. As elephants destroy the fields, they thus refer to potential perpetrators. Stroeken (2008) thus proposes that magic works through communication with the environment. As he puts it, "the recipe talks to the environment" (Stroeken, 2008: 157) and represents a "command" and a "plea" to the environment (Stroeken, 2008: 151). This interpretation also overlaps with the case from southern central Niger. However, the peasants from Munafuri and Kimoram do not communicate with the environment, but with God.

Greenwood turns her attention to the experiential side of magic. She argues that magic presupposes or is accompanied by 'magical consciousness' (Greenwood, 2013). In magical consciousness, human imagination transcends sensually experienced reality. People experience themselves as meeting the minds of entities in 'wider consciousness' (Greenwood, 2013: 207) and they feel connected with 'spirit' (Greenwood, 2013: 203) or a 'universal energy' (Greenwood, 2013: 201). This connection involves imagination, emotion, intuition, and people process this experience through symbols and metaphors (Greenwood, 2013: 203). Although Greenwood does not continue to investigate the content of her article in this direction, the working mechanism of magic, so it seems, would rest on such an experience or, if people would not have this experience while they use magic, at least on its possibility. However, this does not correspond to my field data, which is that the peasants maintain a down-to-earth, everyday attitude and do not partake in magical consciousness. May it be noted that Greenwood develops her idea of

magical consciousness though introspection.

Nicolas has also interpreted the use of medicine among Hausa peasants in Niger. His interpretation comes indeed closer to my field data, although they do not exactly match them. Nicolas (1975) observes that there are *maîtres de cultures* among the *Anna*. These are knowledgeable in the field of magic and add medicine to the seeds to enhance millet growth. According to Nicolas (1975: 286–287), the magical rite works on two levels. First, the rite transfers the properties of the magical substances onto the target objects through “association.” The bark of the fast-growing *kanya* tree, for instance, renders the millet fertile. This interpretation is corroborated by a transcript of the rite the *maître de culture* carries out. The *maître de culture* uses the formula “You have many fruits, give me fruit! (Tu as beaucoup de fruits, donne-moi des fruits)” when he collects the bark of the *kanya* tree. This seems to point to a Tambiahian understanding of the working mechanism of the magical substances, whereby the actors try to transfer the properties of the substances used to the target objects through symbolic acts and verbal utterances. Second, the transcript shows that the *maître de culture* also addresses Allah. When he manipulates the skin of a serpent, the *maître de culture* utters “May Allah grant us millet and sorgho! (*Allah ya ba mu an samu hatsi da dawa*)” and thus asks Allah to provide millet and sorgho.⁽⁶⁾ In Nicolas’ analysis and description, the medicine thus works through “association,” i.e., symbolic acts and/or verbal utterances that transfer properties onto the target objects, and through pleas to Allah. This does not exactly correspond to the peasants’ interpretation of magical practices in Munafuri and Kimoram.

From the peasants’ perspective, the substances influence the seeds through their material characteristics and the plants’ sensitivity. At the same time, the application of magical substances is a way of asking Allah to make the millet grow abundantly “in the image” of the applied substances.

I will now come back to my main thread of thought following my digression on magic. As noted above, we can largely exclude religious determinism as a belief that guides the peasants’ behaviour while they are working and also expect this belief to have no or hardly any significance for their work. This leaves us with the first two ways in which Allah interferes in field cultivation. Allah sends rain, wind, insects, he determines the amount of harvest. Furthermore, he intervenes in unexpected ways. These two ways of divine interference correspond to the model of two spheres that we took from Spittler (1998) and Malinowski (1954 [1948]). According to this model, men act and God intervenes in areas beyond their control. We have also seen that the peasants use prayer and magic to interact with God and invite him to grant them these favours.

As we have seen above, this view is compatible with two ways of thinking about the future. First, as Spittler’s Tuareg argued, man has to work hard in order to provide favourable conditions for God and/or good fortune to intervene in his affairs. In this vision, the future remains open and divine intervention cannot be anticipated with certainty. As a corollary of this, men have to work as hard when they apply magic as they have to work without supernatural assistance. This view is also expressed by the peasants from Munafuri and Kimoram. The peasants state that God can only help a person when the latter has made an effort. This corresponds exactly to Spittler’s report on the Tuareg. Furthermore, it seems

plausible that the peasants hold this view, as they also state that God might grant but also withhold his favours. They can therefore not reliably anticipate the future and have to treat it as open.

Second, we have seen in Malinowski's contribution that field subjects can think of prayer, good fortune or magic as more reliable (Malinowski, 1954 [1948]). They can count on these mechanisms to determine the future and to bring about certain events. Raynaut (1972) proposed that this view would be held by the *Hausa* of Soumarana and make actors reduce their efforts. It seems plausible that the peasants should consider such a mechanism, as they argue that God makes up for their reduced efforts during the month of Ramadan. Furthermore, it seems to be fostered by the peasants' belief in the efficacy of prayer and magic.

My field data does not enable me to gauge which interpretation the peasants give preference to. Nevertheless, we can see that the peasants' perspective shifts. The same peasants argue that magic and prayer are efficient and, at other points in time, they argue that the results of pleas to God cannot be anticipated. As we have seen above, they sometimes also argue that everything depends on God's consent, whereas this idea loses validity and importance at other points of time. It therefore appears as if the peasants have different ways of interpreting the world and, depending on their interpretation, different practical consequences might ensue from this.

The following observations corroborate this idea and also demonstrate that there is yet one more perspective on prayer and magic that might have its own practical consequences. I discussed magic with Musa Salifu. He explained that *magani* made him less anxious. With respect to *magani* against snakes, he added that he was less cautious of snakes, since he had taken *magani* against them. As far as this is possible, I was able to confirm this statement through my own observations. When a snake once entered Kimoram at night, some villagers discovered it, but it escaped. Musa joined in the search for the snake. He took a wooden stick and borrowed my torch. He finally found it at the entrance of his compound. He blinded the snake with the torchlight and broke its backbone with the stick. I found him to be somewhat careless when searching for the snake, as he only wore his plastic sandals and moved around without using a light or paying heed. The snake might have been waiting in some dark space or on the path. In this case, *magani* determined the future, Musa could anticipate a favourable result and act with less diligence and reflection. This corroborates the above-mentioned interpretation according to which actors could reduce their efforts in response to magic.

At the same time, Musa explained that taking *magani* for economic success made him expect success. He contended that the practical consequence of this would be to increase his determination to work. Trusting in his own success would add to his zeal, he said, whereas rather dull prospects would demotivate him. In this case, the determination of the future would make an actor increase their efforts. The determination of the future through good fortune and magic might thus have opposite consequences. The actor might work less or step up his efforts. The same holds true for the opposite case. If the actor expects to have bad fortune or adverse action results, he might react by stepping up his efforts or by making less of an effort. Correspondingly, the Tuareg argue that a person

who lacks good fortune will become sluggish (Spittler, 1998: 405).

Hence, the fact that prayer and magic might determine the future might not only have the effect Raynaut (1972) indicated, but also the opposite effect. Actors anticipating a certain future might reduce their efforts because they are counting on certain action results, as in Raynaut's case or Musa's snake hunt. However, they might also increase their efforts as they have their end already in view. Musa's remark on magic for successful action hints at this possibility.

This leaves us with the following interpretation of prayer and magic among the peasants from Munafuri and Kimoram. Field subjects might have different perspectives onto prayer and magic. In the first case, field subjects consider the future as open. Even though they might pray for beneficial action results, know about good fortune as a personal characteristic or apply magic, they consider their actions as preconditions for supernatural intervention and thus have to work as hard as they would without supernatural assistance. In the second case, actors consider the future to be partly determined. They anticipate a certain future. They can respond to this, however, in two opposite ways. They might reduce their efforts or increase them. This gives rise to the impression that it might be wrong to ask about *the* perspective on prayer and magic and about *the* practical consequence of their use in field cultivation. It seems as if magic and prayer hold the possibilities open for the actors to respond in different ways.

3. Social Obligations (Compare III-6. Above)

The peasants are, of course, related to each other through norms. Children are expected to be obedient to their parents, women to fulfil their roles as wives and men to sustain their families and to provide help to their kinsmen in need. These norms have, as we have seen before, a religious dimension. It is not only the villagers who expect children to be obedient and men to help their kinsmen, God does this as well. At the same time, God places a strong emphasis on socially appropriate behaviour and social virtues. The peasants thus often explicitly referred to God when they spoke of requests, presents and mutual help. From the peasants' perspective, God especially emphasises the importance of social behaviour.

As the purpose of field cultivation mainly lies in feeding one's family, we might thus expect God's emphasis on social obligations to add to the importance of field cultivation. This thesis would be corroborated by the fact that the obligation to feed one's family was deeply felt by the peasants and by the fact that the peasants felt the weight of God's expectation to abide by social norms. Direct evidence for this thesis is, however, scarce. One peasant explicitly stated that God wanted man to cultivate the fields and to sustain the family.

4. Patience and Confidence as Formative Elements in Field Cultivation-Period (Compare III-7. Above)

When I described the work practices, I pointed out that the peasants carried out their work patiently and confidently, even when the prospects for a good harvest were grim. As noted above, this behaviour or virtues do also have a religious dimension. Confidence and patience figure as important values in the

peasants' thinking and behaviour. I had already mentioned that their importance is often stressed in everyday discourse. Furthermore, the peasants believe their important values are endorsed by God, and so are patience and confidence. Musa Salifu elaborated on this when he explicitly stated that God wanted people to be patient. He argued that God bestowed a destiny upon people, so accepting one's destiny, i.e., accepting God, implied being patient and was at the same time prescribed by their religion. Similarly, he explained that being confident about one's future is an indication of one's faith in God. According to him, the believer could count on God's assistance. Faith in God was the equivalent of trusting in God. Conversely, being sceptical about the future meant that one did not have sufficient faith in God. In this peasant's view, God provides the people with what they need. Accepting God thus implied being confident about one's future and was a religious prerequisite.

We can take this argument a step further, as patience and confidence also appear in religious sermons. I studied an audio cassette with religious sermons, which the above-mentioned peasant knew and approved of.⁽⁷⁾ Listen to how the Islamic scholar, Malam Yakuba, admonished his audience to be patient and also to be optimistic about their future.

Thus, Malam Yakuba supports the view that the believer can turn to God in prayer and expect his prayers to be answered⁽⁸⁾:

"The prophet said ... if you prostrate, if you relentlessly keep on praying, your prayers will be answered. This is the reason why, even if it is an obligatory prayer ... mention God obstinately, ask him about whatsoever obstinately, even if you ask him to give you money ... God will answer your prayers."

Furthermore, Malam Yakuba also explicitly mentions patience many times:

"[The prophet is] a man who made people relate to each other in *zumunci* [trust and benevolence as it is ideally expected to exist between kinsmen] ... Muslim brethren! We should emulate that. We should keep on being patient, we are exerting *zumunci* ... your kinsmen, they should continuously feel well when being with you, yes, keep on being *patient* ... in all ways you can think of."

One could argue here that patience and confidence are not so much the result of religious influence, but rather the result of continuous hardship in life, which would create patience and confidence as the preconditions for survival in a hostile and volatile environment. At the same time, we have to acknowledge the fact that the peasants do not develop their attitude only with reference to the "realities of life" but also with explicit reference to God. A religious component thus plays a role in the formation of this attitude. One might thus conclude that the peasants' confidence and patience during the process of field cultivation might have become a value for the peasants and might have guided their behaviour partly as a result of religious thinking and teaching.

The practical consequence of patience and confidence in our case is to make

the peasants endure dire circumstances. Confidence gives them hope that things will end well and patience makes them work steadily towards the desired end.

5. The Normative Order of the Family and the Workforce (Compare III-8. Above)

As we have seen in the introductory part, islamisation can be assumed to have influenced the distribution of work among the members of the domestic groups. The evidence for this was retrieved from Clough (2014). There is no need, therefore, to repeat the argument here again (For a similar argument for the Jola of Senegal, see Linares (1992: 172–203)).

VII. CONCLUSION

In this article, I discussed the religious dimension of field cultivation in two villages in southern central Niger. The evidence from the literature has shown that religion, as a complex system of beliefs and practices, can influence other sectors of society in several ways. In some instances, this influence might easily be discerned, in other instances it might be rather subtle. This defines the problems for empirical research on this issue. Any empirical research into this topic needs extensive data that would also allow for comparison across cases. To my knowledge, no study that satisfies these conditions has, so far, been carried out. However, some authors have collected data on the issue and this also holds true for our region of interest where the question of whether and how religion influences work processes has been a persistent theme over the last few decades. We therefore have at our disposal a mosaic of observations and reflections on this issue. I have reviewed these contributions and presented my own field data.

My case study suggests that religion indeed influences work processes in our region of interest. Practices of veneration interfere with the work process. God's endorsement of social obligations towards family members adds to the weight of work in peasants' eyes. Religious determinism does not seem to be a tenet that guides much of the peasants' behaviour. At the same time, God is perceived as the major actor in field cultivation, and prayer and magic provide the peasants with opportunities to invite him to intervene in their favour. Yet, the peasants carry out prayer and magic from different perspectives. They take the stance that the future is nevertheless open and we could expect them to keep on working irrespectively of supernatural intervention. At other moments in time, they see the future as being predetermined by prayer and magic and then we could expect them to respond either by increasing or reducing their efforts. Furthermore, religion also affected the work process through the formation of virtues or values. Finally, we have seen that religion had an impact on the distribution of gender and age-related roles in the households.

Religion thus proves to be a subtle factor in the formation of field cultivation in our region of interest. However, the way religion influences field cultivation has proven to be very different from the way Luther and Calvin were thought to have shaped work processes in Western society. In contrast to the Lutheran interpretation of work, the peasants did not point out that Allah wants people to

work for the sake of working. The peasants did consider work and industriousness as praiseworthy, but they never mentioned that God considered work as a godly virtue. Similarly, they did not consider work and success as a sign of their position in the afterlife, as the Calvinist doctrine claims. However, my study could also make the discussion of the influence of magic and religion on work processes more differentiated. The peasants' beliefs in the intervention of supernatural entities and forces provided them with a variety of perspectives onto the work process and we could expect each of these perspectives to have different consequences for the work process. This flexibility of perspectives, it seems to me, has not been addressed in earlier studies.

NOTES

- (1) Plekhanov (1898) even argued that deterministic beliefs can make actors act with even more conviction, since they see their actions as being indispensable for the course of history.
- (2) The name of the village, Kimoram, is anonymised.
- (3) This name has been anonymised.
- (4) One household disposed of a field of 10.59 ha which the household members, the husband, his wife and their two younger children worked collectively. Another household cultivated a field of 7.8 ha the major part of which the household members, the father, his wife, their son and his wife, worked collectively, a part of which they worked individually. The fields of the third household had a size of 8.28 ha which the male household-head worked alone. The sole worker of the fourth household weeded his field for the first time over a period of about 40 days, which would have equalled a field size of approximately 7 or 8 ha.
- (5) For a more detailed description of all working techniques (in German), see Heiss (2003: 44–81).
- (6) May it be noted that the use of the word “Allah” does not indicate that the *maître de culture* is a Muslim. Nicolas (1975: 309–310) explains: “Les *Anna* eux-mêmes l’admettent: ils connaissent et invoquent Allah, et chacun sait que celui-ci « attache » (*darme*) les *iskoki* [spirits] durant la période annuelle du jeûne coranique (*azumi*). Toutefois, ces derniers coexistent avec lui. Loin d’être un Dieu unique, en effet, Allah apparaît comme le chef d’un panthéon très complexe et nombreux, l’homologue du *Sarki* [king] dans la société « dynastique » : il est le fondateur, le créateur du monde, le Tout-puissant. Le reste de l’Univers lui est soumis. Mais il s’entoure d’autres êtres surnaturels, intermédiaires entre lui et les hommes, et qui forment avec lui une sorte de *sarauta* [kingdom] divine.”
- (7) Malam Yakuba. Sermon on cassette. Purchased on Sabon Gari market in Kano in 2005.
- (8) Own translations.

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