

FACETTES OF TERRACE-BUILDING IN THE CULTURE OF THE PERO, LONGUDA AND TULA PEOPLE IN NORTH-EASTERN NIGERIA

Thomas Gebauer

In the culture of the Pero, Longuda and Tula People in the south-eastern part of Bauchi State, north-eastern Nigeria, terraces are found as traditional means to improve the environmental condition and to secure the survival of the people. To classify those terraces according to their form and function, the techniques and customs of their building and the traditional structures of their development they have to be compared in the context of their own culture.

On the one hand such a comparison has to focus on the meaning of soil and stones as the essential material to build terraces. On the other hand it is necessary to investigate oral traditions, social and religious customs and the structures of belief and explanation which define terraces as a cultural element. Furthermore we have to analyse and to understand their variations and their importance within the religious and historic concepts of those three ethnic groups.

According to oral traditions of the Pero their ancestors, the Andeng of Gundale - which means the owner of the mountain - were called by their God Yamba to live up in the Muri mountains. Yet the decision to settle there was also due to attacks from the Tangale and the Loh and to the Fulani Jihad, as those oral sources explain.

The word for those huge settlement terraces of the Pero is *cheda*. They were built by men, who were organized in age groups also called *cheda*, when they were to achieve this hard work of terrace-building. It was a fixed part of the dowry that the proposed husband had to build additional terraces for his father in law.

Old Pero people still living in the mountain range believe, that the spirits of their ancestors, whose graves and sacred locations on top of the mountain they are taking care of, watch over the Muri mountains. According to their beliefs those ancestor-spirits for example would retaliate any attempt to move a stone from its original place on the mountain. Those beliefs further explain that during times of attack and war the mountain would open and provide a place of refuge for the Pero to hide. If those enemies should try to climb behind the Pero, the mountain would grow in height and thus protect the Pero from their attackers.

In contrary to the Pero, the Longuda build primarily farming terraces which may extend into settlement terraces. They are built and taken care of by the entire family. Oral traditions point to the individual founders of the major

settlements as the ones who first started terrace-building. The word for "terrace" among the Longuda of Nyuwar is *kangaraha*.

Kangaraha is also the word for piles of stones which are annually collected around the two major ancestor-shrines of Nyuwar and covered with grass. The caretakers of these ancestor-shrines do this in order to be prepared for the celebration of *chichibio*. On the one hand *chichibio* means stubble, that part of the cornstock, which remains in the ground after the fruit and the upper part of the stock was cut during the harvest. On the other hand *chichibio* is the name for the new year's celebration and means "now is the time". This imperative is a demand for the Longuda to prepare their farms for the next planting season.

In his speech during the *chichibio* celebration, the caretaker of the smaller ancestor-shrine repeats this imperative and points out, that there will not be hunger and death once the Longuda act accordingly. Standing near the smaller ancestor-shrine, he holds a hoe and a corn-stock in his hands while he continues to call for guidance of the Longuda people during the coming planting season, for rain in abundance, for a good harvest and the avoidance of plagues. After he has finished his speech he does the work of clearing farmland symbolically by burning those *kangaraha*. *Chichibio* marks the end of the old and the beginning of the new year; without celebrating *chichibio* the Longuda are not allowed to repair or build new terraces and cultivate new farms.

Furthermore, without the celebration of *chichibio* the Longuda have no permission to roof their houses, to go on hunting expeditions and to store firewood on their compounds as well as they are asked to stop the burning of bushland. Before the celebration of *chichibio* takes place, all matters of conflict, fault and bloodshed among the Longuda have to be settled. The Longuda believe that the soil has to be purified and that the land has to be reconciled through rituals of sacrifice in order to avoid that the bloodshed will continue and increase throughout the new year.

The origin of the impressive farming and settlement terraces in the culture of the Tula oral traditions trace back to a woman called Kwanlere. Until today stories about Kwanlere reflect the fact that women are the caretakers for terrace-building in Tula. They know that their terraces protect the soil from erosion. Furthermore they believe that terraces make the soil growing in height, keeping it cool and fertile in addition. By keeping the moisture in the soil terraces help to store water, they hold the manure on the farms and thus create an atmosphere of "cool weather" which - according to the believes of the Tula women - the crops enjoy most. In their understanding terraces not only serve as the essential means of creating new space, they also provide the condition for a good variety of crops.

Once a young girl starts growing breasts, she will be introduced into the art of terrace-building by her grandmother or mother. Besides their hoes Tula women use a strong woven basket to carry manure, waste and grass to their farms but also to collect the stones needed for terrace-building. Although the time for cultivating new farms, repairing and building new terraces lasts from

February to April, throughout the year Tula women gather piles of stones nearby their farms to be used once it is time. To organize the hard work of terrace-building Tula women know several concepts to develop their working-force most efficiently, whether they work in age groups of friends and neighbours or they understand their help as an social contribution which they can expect of others as well.

Yet there is one farm in Tula on which a man is the builder and caretaker of terraces. This farm is called Kudi, it is a sacred farm. Only the Mai Shame, the chief of the crops is allowed to plant and to harvest on Kudi. When the Mai Shame works on Kudi, he is not allowed to eat and to drink or to talk to anybody. He is also the first one to harvest late millet from Kudi, before anybody else is permitted to harvest and to eat Guineacorn and millet. By burning Kudi the Mai Shame, who is at the same time the Mai Kuram, gives the sign, that Kuram, the new year's celebration of the Tula, has started.

Like the Longuda with their *chichibio* the Tula celebrate Kuram to remember the ways and achievements of their ancestors, to show, that they are still living together in peace, to give thanks for the past year, to exercise warfare and to articulate their hopes and wishes for the coming year. During Kuram the Mai Shame divides a millet-fruit into four parts, three of which he distributes to three other religious leaders. The fourth part he takes to Kudi where he plants it. He does so by performing all necessary activities of preparing farmland for the next planting season - including the repair and arrangement of terraces - and thus gives the permission for the Tula People to do accordingly.

These are only a few examples out of many showing that the importance of terraces for the historic and religious concepts of the Pero, Longuda and Tula People is expressed through a tight network of oral traditions, social and religious customs and structures of belief and explanation, which, once they were woven together, eventually build what a *malam* from Tula called a glue of inheritance, identity, integrity, continuity and security.

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