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Hommes du Sahel: espaces-temps et pouvoirs. *Jean Gallais.*

Paris : Flammarion, 1984. 289 pp., maps, diags., tables, biblio., and index. Fr 120 cloth (ISBN 2-08 212800-8).

Life Before the Drought. *Earl Scott, ed.*

Winchester, Mass. : Allen and Unwin, 1984. x and 196 pp., maps, diags., biog. of contributors, and index. \$24.95 cloth (ISBN 0-04-910076-9).

Drought in Africa has become one of the staple topics of our time. Ever since it was « officially » declared to be the culprit of famine in the Sahel during the early 1970s, it has given rise to a steady stream of news reports, including TV specials that dwell on straggling livestock and emaciated children set in barren landscapes. Drought also has provided international donors with a chance to try out their latest technological and institutional remedies and has given academics career opportunities in the attempt to explain its causes and consequences. It is one of those few easily defined « bad guys » that can be attacked by everyone, regardless of political or ideological affiliation.

Hommes du Sahel is more than a book designed to cash in on the drought-famine theme. It takes us to one part of the Sahel, the Inland Delta of the Niger River and its hinterland, for a close look at the people and the place. Gallais starts by weaving together the ethnic fabric and shows how this has arranged itself traditionally according to subsistence activities - Bozo fisherfolk, Peul (Fulani) herders, Nono rice cultivators, Bambara millet farmers, and so on. We see how each of these societies has developed

varying views of space and place in the Inland Delta and how time is a function of contrasting seasonal rhythms of activity. Times of work, celebration, socializing, stress, and conflict repeat themselves each year, leading to a cyclical rather than linear sense of history. Especially notable is the attention Gallais gives to the roles of women.

What emerges from this discussion is a view of the Inland Delta as a place of separate but coexisting lifestyles, where the environment is viewed and structured by differing subsistence demands. Nevertheless, Gallais also shows how the Inland Delta has achieved a broader regional integration and identity - what he refers to as *Sociétés Globales*. This happened under the Empire of Mali in the fourteenth century, when commerce was the integrating theme, and again under the Dina led by Sheikh Ahmadou beginning in the early nineteenth century. The latter brought the Fulani to prominence, primarily in the form of Islamic marabouts, and the religious and social changes that were instituted were important in shaping the region as it became known during the period of French colonialism. They achieved an ordering of the different parts.

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All of this is designed to create a picture of the Inland Delta as it had come to be in 1960, the time at which the independent state of Mali was created. Following is a consideration of changes from 1960 to 1980, with the Sahel drought of 1969-74 as the crucial event around which to tell the story. Gallais's initial research during 1956-58 gave him the impression of a generous environment, one laden with potential and certainly the garden spot of the Sahel. This was to contrast strikingly with his post-1974 observations of denudation, degradation, and poverty. He analyzes these sudden changes with chapters on development trends, on the process of underdevelopment, and on the increasing regional dominance of urban centers and classes; he ends with his own opinions and recommendations. We have a telling portrayal of those preconditions that make drought more than a disaster of nature.

This is a brilliantly crafted book, one that deserves translation into English. But translated or not, it should be looked at by those who are Africanists, by those who practice the art of regional geography, by those who are interested in cultural ecology, and by those who are struggling to create time geography.

Life Before Drought also wants to go beyond the recent famine. It is designed as an examination of pre-existing resource management strategies in the Savanna-Sahel of West Africa with a view to assessing how these are relevant for present and future development planning. According to Scott, the book aims to be « more about famine than drought ... and about rural economic development

and the role of folk knowledge (practices) in land use and increased productivity » (p. 3).

An attractive idea, but unfortunately one that is largely unrealized. The seven case studies (four by geographers and one each by a historian, political scientist, and anthropologist) go their own separate ways. In addition, place and time are elusive and out of focus. Much of the discussion refers to northern Nigeria, specifically Hausaland, an area that is hardly representative of the Savanna-Sahel, but there are also side trips to Kenya and the Sudan. No specific time for life before the drought emerges. One chapter treats a span from 1464 to 1591, whereas the others variously intermix the pre-colonial, colonial, and present periods.

The two best chapters, and the ones that are structurally the most similar, are those by Marilyn Silberfein and Michael Watts. Silberfein follows « Differential Development in Machakos District, Kenya » as it has evolved over the course of the last 100 years or so. This essentially means comparing the better-watered uplands of Machakos with the drought-prone lowlands. She shows how initial environmental inequality was intensified by government policies which put all developmental efforts into the uplands while ignoring the plight of those living in the lowlands where agricultural techniques were assumed to be primitive and land use destructive. According to Silberfein, a change occurred in 1974-75 when it was recognized that such policies and thinking were making matters worse and that neglect was as much of a problem as environmental handicap for the people in the lowlands. Of special note has

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been the attempt since then to incorporate into rural development plans traditional practices of mixed farming and intercropping along with local styles of community participation.

Watts describes a precolonial « subsistence ethic » for rural Hausaland, an ethic rooted in technological adaptations designed to cope with a high risk environment. Special attention is given to the roles of gifts and redistribution. Through taxation, export-oriented production, and monetization, this ethic was eroded during colonial times, but society was only partially transformed and therefore left vulnerable to environmental adversity. One particularly critical result was the intensification of seasonal hunger into famine on several occasions. Following this general discussion is a more detailed analysis of one village, with attention directed to the worsening plight of the poor. Watts documents a growing peasant differentiation based on « hiring labor, usury interest, and ... ante-diluvian capital » (p. 145). The old mechanisms of sharing wealth are gone, leaving those on the bottom in an ever more precarious position.

At the other extreme, the weakest chapter is the one by the editor, which deals with Hausa-Fulani interrelationships. Scott brings no new information to bear on the subject, but instead under the headings of environmental, social, political, economic, and other exchange relationships, he essentially summarizes material presented in two anthropological monographs by Hopen (1958) and Stenning (1959). Ostensibly this is done to re-examine the concept of cultural symbiosis; only the most rudimentary thinking on

the subject is presented, however. The one source for the theoretical discussion is Odum's *Ecology* (1963).

Making the chapter even weaker is Scott's occasional lapses into outdated ideas. At one point he refers to Islam as the « Muhammadan religion » and pastoralists are called « foot-loose ». He resurrects the theory that the Fulani originated in Asia, became part of the « red hamitic race » of East Africa, migrated west to the Atlantic, and then returned to the east. Such bizarre and improbable history, born of colonialist imaginings that anything not holding to the Africa stereotype must inevitably have come from somewhere else, was put to rest several decades ago by cultural and linguistic research, and it is a shame to see it reappear in the 1980s.

The remaining chapters all have their interesting moments but fail to find any common ground. Lansiné Kaba discusses dynastic change in Songhai from 1464 to 1591, showing in particular how slavery became increasingly more central to the nature of the state. Andrew Shepard's contribution on nomads, farmers, and merchants in the Sudan is a tour de force of the country's social, economic, and environmental problems. It takes the reader through a range of issues, including, for example, the effects of wage labor, the structure of class formation, land pressure, bureaucratic conflict, and the isolation of development projects. Beryl Turner provides a fairly straightforward description of the use of *fadama*, or seasonally waterlogged sites, in northern Nigeria. These are important agricultural resources in the area and she is primarily

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interested in their distribution and how technological changes can make them more productive. Paul Riesman ends the volume with a rather rambling overview of the Fulani and how certain aspects of their culture such as conservatism and aloofness pertain to development. The most useful part is an appendix that presents brief synopses of various projects tried among the Fulani and the reasons that they failed to accomplish their objectives.

In sum, this is another collection that should not have been produced in book form. Simply put, it fails to go anywhere: no framework or consistent set of themes link the chapters together. In the preface Scott states, « I am especially grateful to the authors for their patience when unforeseen events diverted my attention from this book » (ix). Apparently the diversions were too numerous for him to overcome.

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