

## ΜΩΜΟΣ ΙΧ.

A RITUÁLÉ RÉGÉSZETE  
Őskoros Kutatók IX. Összejövetelének  
konferenciakötete

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF RITUAL  
Proceedings of the IXth conference  
of researcher of prehistory



DISSERTATIONES ARCHAEOLOGICAE  
ex Instituto Archaeologico  
Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae  
*Supplementum 3.*

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Miskolc, 2015. október 14–16.

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Proceedings of the IX<sup>TH</sup> conference  
of researchers of prehistory  
14–16 October 2015, Miskolc

edited by

Piroska CSENGERI – András KALLI – Ágnes KIRÁLY – Judit KOÓS



Budapest 2020

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# Boys Becoming Men

## Male initiation rites in a North-Eastern Nigerian village

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### **Abstract**

*The Chadic-speaking Fali of the southern Mandara Mountains live in well-organised, compact villages of thousands on both sides of the Nigeria-Cameroon border. They are subsistence sorghum farmers whose communal and personal existence depends on having several children and a good annual harvest. Unsurprisingly, these two existential facts determine both the fundamental values and much of the daily life of the Fali. An examination of the biennial initiation cycle and its main rites also reveals that, at the ritual level, these manifest a symbolic equivalence to the developmental cycle of their staple crop, sorghum, and are attuned in time to the agricultural cycle.*

*In my presentation at the IX. ΜΩΜΟΣ conference (Miskolc, 2015) I described in detail, and showed pictures of the 2007 Fimbidi rite (Figs 6–13), the greatest of the initiation rituals of the Jilvu Fali. In this short paper I intend to overview the main characteristics of the whole of the Jilvu male initiation cycle, drawing attention to the complicated web of social relationships, underlying beliefs, personal and communal ambitions behind the rites. Although this picture cannot be but sketchy, I hope it will nonetheless be of interest to archaeologists. This presentation is derived from my husband's, anthropologist James H. Wade's early work among the Fali from the 1970's onwards, and our joint fieldwork from the 1990's to 2010. The accompanying pictures, like those of my 2015 presentation, were taken by him.*

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### **Fali society and culture**

The Mandara Mountains are a low-lying chain of granitic hills (Fig. 1) along the Nigeria–Cameroon border. These hills are home to more than sixty distinct ethnicities with similar but not identical cultures, some with smaller, dispersed, hamlet-like settlements, with others featuring bigger compact villages of several thousands. The Fali<sup>1</sup> of the southern Mandaras belong to this latter group, forming about a dozen settlements among the hills, near the town of Mubi. Some of them are on the Cameroon side of the border.<sup>2</sup>

- 1 The name 'Fali' in this paper refers to the group speaking a Chadic language (of the Afroasiatic family of languages). However, this name designates a few other ethnic groups in the wider region as well. These speak languages belonging to the Niger-Congo family of languages, and their culture differs from that of the Chadic-speaking Fali.
- 2 Throughout our fieldwork years we have witnessed the erosion and disappearance of Fali traditional culture. Part of what I describe here, as in the case of our other publications, was very much still alive in the 1970's, although even then some of it was only preserved in the memories of old people. Thanks to its inner resilience much of Fali culture has managed to survive into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, as a strong, coherent working system, changing dynamically along internal trajectories, it has gradually ceased to exist, being undermined by the aggressive converting efforts of Christian and Muslim religions, by relentless absorption within the nation state, and global 'modernity'. The final blow to the Fali villages came in the form of sporadic Boko Haram attacks from 2014 onwards, which were less severe than to their north in the Gwoza area, but still created serious insecurity. All this, coupled with climate change, overpopulation and an AIDS epidemic, is leading to the inevitable disappearance of their unique culture.



Fig. 1. The Mandara Mountains.  
1. kép. A Mandara-hegység.

The large, nucleated settlements had populations ranging from five thousand plus to seven thousand plus.<sup>3</sup> Each named community had its own dialect, although people of the different villages generally understood one-another. Each was an autonomous polity headed by a chief, and was based on subsistence agriculture. Their cultures, though similar, differed significantly enough to constitute sub-cultures.

As with other montagnard communities of the region the basic economic unit of the Fali is the nuclear family, consisting of the husband, his wife/wives and their children. They are subsistence agriculturalists, the main produce being the cereal sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor*), a relative of broomcorn. Their agricultural system is well-adapted to the terrain and climate, using terrace farming, rotation, intercropping and organic fertilisers.

Apart from sorghum they also grow some millet, and maize, which ripens earlier than the sorghum and thus helps to bridge the yearly period of 'hunger' preceding the main harvest. Beans, Bambara nuts, leaf-vegetables, pumpkins, cucumbers, also eggplants, the oil crops peanut and beniseed, as-well-as coco-yam and cassava are also cultivated, contributing to a rich and healthy diet. Chicken, goats and sheep provide the occasional meat meal to the households. Cows are kept by a few, mainly as an 'investment', slaughtered only at some funerals and their main community rite, *Fimbidi*. Tobacco, cotton and gourds are also grown.

Sorghum, however, is their iconic crop and apart from being their staple, they brew two types of beer out of it, which play significant roles both in their social life and, as offerings, during their various rituals. People see themselves primarily as sorghum farmers and 'people of the rocks'.

3 The 1952 colonial census gave these figures for four of the Fali cluster: Bahuli - 5354; Jilvu - 4328; Mijilu - 7384; Muchalla - 5629. (According to the Directorate for Overseas Survey (1969), the Fali and Higi areas had the highest population densities in North-Eastern Nigeria, 250 to 600 per square mile.)

The economic autonomy of the villages extended to craftsmanship and other forms of expertise as well. The *mihin*, the specialists of the Fali communities provided people with tools, equipment and services vital to everyday life.<sup>4</sup>

In parts of Africa, including the Mandara Mountains, some societies are caste-based. Compared to India, a major difference is that while in India castes are numerous and hierarchically perceived, in the Mandara mountains there are only two castes: the majority caste of the farmers, the Fali *muyin*, and the minority caste of the ‘specialists’, whom the Fali call *mihin*, and who constitute about 6–9% of the whole community. The relationship between the two castes is more complementary than hierarchical, even though there is a marked pollution concept separating the *mihin* from the *muyin* farmers, and their standing in different situations is ambivalent.<sup>5</sup>

*Mihin* men serve the community as smiths, carpenters, woodcarvers, weavers, tanners, copper-smiths, mat makers, etc., usually each person mastering more than one skill. The majority of diviners, hunters, herbalists, medicine men, some of whom are also said to be dealing with sorcery, are also *mihin*. Crucially, *mihin* are the ritual specialists, the officiants at different rites, the performers of offerings in the name of individuals or communities. A subgroup of them conducts the funerals. *Mihin* women are the potters; each and every one of them is expected to pot. They are the midwives of the community, also the cicatrisers and barbers, and there are many reputed diviners and healers among them. As the wives of ritual officiants, they also have prescribed responsibilities as such during some of the rituals.

As diviners, ritual specialists, undertakers, *mihin* are capable of mediating between the people and the transcendent forces, and at the same time, keeping away the dangers inherent in such transactions. As many of their occupations are also associated with things dangerous and polluted, in the eyes of the farmers, the person of the *mihin* is also perceived as dangerous and polluted. However, the two castes have a symbiotic relationship; *mihin* provide the tools for the farmers to cultivate their land while receiving agricultural produce and a generous share of meat from the sacrificed animals in exchange for their services. On the other hand, *mihin* also produce some food. The identity of the *mihin* as valued and full members of their community is never questioned. Because of the lack of visual clues an outsider cannot differentiate between members of the two castes.

The *mihin* have their own chiefs, the *mom mihin*, who are partially subordinate to the overall chief of the village, the *mom muyin*, but as main ritual officiants they are crucial and influential agents of the community.

Each Fali village community is constituted by five or six named clans, each containing several patrilineages and perhaps a fictive *mihin* lineage as well. One of the *muyin* clans provides the person of the chief out of competing lineages. The chief in his person transcends caste and kinship divisions and symbolically unites the whole community. The chief however, has very little power in the normal (Weberian) sense. He lives like the other elders and neither

4 Fali languages do not as yet have official orthography. Fali words in this paper are transcribed in the text approximating pronunciation. For a closer transcription see *Table 1*, where special sounds that have no obvious equivalent in written English are marked by IPA characters. The exceptions are the names of the villages, and the name of the sacred mountain where I use the English transcription of the names, as this is how they appear on maps. Vernacular words – with the exception of settlement and ethnic names – are marked by *italics*.

5 WADE 2012.



is he particularly 'rich'. 'Power' as such is divided among the village chief, the chiefs of the *mihin*, and the guardians of the different community shrines, which positions are inherited, and more or less evenly distributed among the clans.

Fali society is strongly ego-centric, complex, but not hierarchically structured. The small chiefdoms have never united into a higher political unit joining all, or even just a few of the communities together. Despite their material culture being remarkably uniform, their similar languages and strong marital and other personal connections, the villages have retained their independence. Their characteristic compact settlements, their well-organised society based on cross-cutting ego-centric networks suggest a proto-urban trajectory<sup>6</sup> thwarted by recent 'modernisation'.



Fig. 2. A traditional Jilvu compound.  
2. kép. Hagyományos porta Jilvuban.

## Jilvu today

The original settlement had consisted of four named but contiguous segments on a small, high plateau at the foot of the sacred hill of Mulala, above the present settlement. Because of the pressure of the increasing population and to be closer to water, people gradually, in the course of half a century, have left this site, and settled on a more extensive, fertile plateau further down, where the segment settlements are separated from each other by fields.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> WADE 2012; WADE 2019.

<sup>7</sup> This move was encouraged by the more peaceful (i.e. free from slave raids) times of the late colonial and post-colonial era.

The four new segments continued to be referred to by the common name, Jilvu, and they remained under the common chief. With the growing population however, two of the segments, Madivi and Muhura show signs of seeking independence. We don't have exact numbers, but the joint number of inhabitants of Tumbicha and Grünava, the two other segments that are by now almost contiguous, is close to three thousand.<sup>8</sup>

The first households of the newly-settled village were built in the traditional way (*Fig. 2*) following a strictly compact order, with very narrow passages between the individual walled compounds. The single entrances of these households opened onto smaller, or more spacious, little 'squares' with stone-built circular seatings for neighbours to socialise with each-other, and to bigger section 'squares', suitable for social events, rituals and dances (*Fig. 3*). In recent years this traditional settlement structure, together with the old architecture, has all but disappeared, and nowadays the settlement is spread out in a more haphazard manner. As most of their shrines have remained within the higher, original settlement, some of their community rites are still performed at the abandoned village.

### Religion, sacred places, shrines, spirit vessels

The majority of the inhabitants of Jilvu were until recently followers of the traditional, animist religion. The name of the otiose high god is evoked at religious ceremonies; however, their everyday life is believed to be influenced by numerous transcendent powers representing natural and other forces that populate their world, also the spirits of the recently dead.<sup>9</sup>



*Fig. 3.* The main 'square' of Grünava.  
3. kép. Grünava „főtere”.

8 The 1952 colonial census gave the number 4328 for the whole of Jilvu.

9 For a comparative study of shrines and spirit pots among three other Mandara Mountains communities see: STERNER – DAVID 2009.

When someone dies, a spirit vessel is created to house his or her 'soul'. These are honoured, and placated by regular offerings usually by the oldest family member of the same sex of the next generation. There are other spirit vessels connected to the household or family members. These are also looked after by the head of the family. The simplest of these spirit vessels are narrow-necked, globular beer jars covered by small, semi-spherical eating bowls (*Fig. 4*).

The guardian spirit of a lineage lives in a bigger spherical pot with characteristic decoration and a short, slightly curved narrow neck, which always protrudes horizontally when in place in the designated sacred area of the upper, male section in the compound of the senior lineage elder. These powerful spirit pots, objects of awe and respect, are very much feared. The well-being of an entire lineage depends on them, and their benignity has to be assured by regular offerings and occasional sacrifices (*Fig. 5*).

The major transcendental forces that affect the whole of the community usually manifest themselves at well-defined physical places like mountains, unusual rock-formations, caves, springs, wells, etc., also frequently trees. Pots have often been placed there as well, providing the spirit with shelter, and serving as a focal point for the administration of sacrifices or offerings. Some of these have become of outstanding importance to the community. These are the community shrines, the guardianships of which are distributed among the clans, and inherited in particular lineages.

In one of their dimensions, Fali religious beliefs and acts are aimed at making sense of the perceptible world around them, the ups-and-downs in their personal, and the communities' life. In addition, prayers, offerings, sacrifices, and rituals provide means to influence that world.

From the point of view of Fali personal existence and the survival of the whole community, having several children and a good annual harvest are the two most important factors that realise their fundamental values and determine much of daily life. It is no coincidence therefore, that the biennial



*Fig. 4.* A Fali spirit vessel.  
4. kép. Fáli lélekedény.



*Fig. 5.* The spirit vessel of a lineage.  
5. kép. Az egyik leszármazási ágazat lélekedénye.

(two-yearly) rites of the boy-initiation cycle manifest symbolic equivalence to the developmental cycle of their staple crop, sorghum, and are attuned in time to the agricultural cycle.

### Initiation cycle – agricultural cycle

The Fali year starts with a new moon sometime around May, at the start of the wet season,<sup>10</sup> when rainfall becomes regular. The year consists of thirteen lunar months, mostly known by their numbers. The start of the year also signals the start of sowing the fields.

Boys are initiated every second year by a series of rites on specific days of the lunar calendar. These rites involve a number of community shrines, visiting places of the sacred landscape, and ‘learning’ about the history of the settlement. Traditionally boys were initiated at 16–18+ years of age, but in recent times this has been brought forward, in some cases to 13–14 years.

In Jilvu the initiation cycle consists of six rites, some lasting just a day, others several days. Out of these only one smaller rite falls on the non-initiation year. Three smaller rites are less important from the point of view of the community, as they concentrate primarily on the families of the initiates (*Davgini I.*, *Davgini II.*, *Küs mazhin*). The remaining three to some extent involve the whole of the community, and each has a different community shrine as its focus. The main officiant at these rites is always the chief of the *mihin*, who is assisted by the guardian of the shrine. The *mom mihin* is the orator of the prayers and the blessings; he administers the offerings, and instructs the initiates at these rites. During the major ritual episodes some of the usual social constraints and rules of the community are suspended, even the very strong separation rules for the two castes can be bridged; *mihin* and *muyin* initiates are allowed to eat together at particular ritual events.

Out of the major rites, two (*Buk mandizhin*, *Sa makavakün*) concentrate upon the emerging community of initiates, their identity as an age set, solidarity with each-other, also competition within the group to establish a ‘pecking order’, where everyone finds his place. The greatest of the six rites, *Fimbidi* unites and activates the whole community. In addition to being one of the initiation rites *Fimbidi* is perceived as the necessary rite to ensure a good harvest, numerous children, and the continuance and unity of the community.

All six rites, the three major ones especially, have ritual episodes, more or less emphasised, that are parts of the ritualised (primary) marriage<sup>11</sup> proceedings, or constitute a stage in the girls’ life-cycle rituals. Here, however, we concentrate on the boys.

#### *Davgini*

The initiation cycle’s first, preparatory rite takes place soon after the concluding rites of the previous age set’s initiation, still in the same initiation year, some two months before the end of the Fali lunar year. In the agricultural calendar this is also the time to start preparing the fields for next year’s sowing. Called *Davgini*, it is celebrated with a feast by the immediate family of the initiate and invited guests: relatives, neighbours and friends. The name *Davgini* refers to the type of sauce, *kwuitibi*, prepared for the feast of this rite, one ingredient in it

10 The Mandara Mountains are situated in the wooded savanna belt where eight months of dry season is followed by four months of wet season when agricultural production is possible.

11 Besides the primary, ritualised marriage there is a secondary marriage system, giving women the possibility and power to easily leave an unsatisfactory marriage and enter a new one overnight.

being small birds, *avginan*. This sauce usually is given as offering to malignant spirits to placate them, so at this occasion it serves as a deterrent against affliction, protecting the initiates from the danger inherent within liminality during the whole of the initiation period.

The four segment settlements organise their own rites in a specific order: Madivi starts it in the tenth month, followed by Tumbicha and Muhura, with Grünava finishing the sequence in the eleventh month. This arrangement enables friends and relatives from different segments to participate at each-others' celebrations. In this way, although the rite itself is family-centred, it contributes to the strengthening of the common identity of the village. Within a particular segment all the families concerned agree among themselves as to the exact date.

From the point of view of the initiates, the *mandizhin*, the first *Davgini* (and indeed, later, the second *Davgini* rite) means the first endurance tests. They have to prove their physical maturity and preparedness by a race, and jumping over a stream. This is also the first indicator of their relative standing within their group.

The first *Davgini* also signals the preparedness of the parents. It shows that they are willing and able to take upon themselves the ritual constraints of the whole initiation year, and are ready to face the material burdens it entails. Following the first *Davgini* rite they have a whole year to prepare themselves, the next year being a non-initiation year. During this time, using their social connections and networks, they invite the 'helpers' of their sons:<sup>12</sup> the older 'mentors', young men, who have already been initiated; younger boys, who might be initiated during the next initiation cycle further two years down the line; and young girls. They will act as the initiate's 'family' during the liminal period that starts with the second *Davgini* rite which is similar to the first, and is held as a sort of reaffirmation of the first in the same month in the following – non-initiation – year. From that time on the boys are referred to as *mandizhin*, marking them off as initiates.

### ***Fimbidi***

The second *Davgini* is followed by four months of hard work on the fields, the greater part of which falls within the initiation year. When the fields have been prepared and the rains have arrived the time comes for sowing, and later, for weeding. By the beginning of the fourth



Fig. 6. The *mandizhin* crossing a field of sorghum at one preliminary ritual episode of the *Fimbidi* rite.

6. kép. A *mandizhinek* keresztülvágnak egy cirköles (tarka cirok, *Sorghum bicolor*) földön a *Fimbidi* ünnep egyik előkészítő rítusa során.

12 There are three mentors, from the three age sets above the initiate, one among them being his effective main instructor. In addition to them, two younger boy helpers, and two adolescent girls make up the full set.

month of the year, which coincides with the height of the rains, the sorghum<sup>13</sup> is about waist high, and although it has not flowered yet, the promise of the harvest is already there (*Fig. 6*). This is the time of the *Fimbidi* rite, which is the greatest community rite of the Jilvu people.<sup>14</sup>

*Fimbidi* is primarily a rite of passage and a fertility rite. At the same time it is intended to secure a rich harvest, and also to strengthen and demonstrate the unity of the community. In a strict sense, the main rite and celebration lasts but two days, the high point being the dance in front of the *Fimbidi* shrine (*Fig. 7*) in the afternoon of the first day. However, these two climactic days are preceded by several days of preparations and minor ritual episodes (*Fig. 8*), and followed by a further week, on the last day of which the initiates of the four segment settlements dance together in Muhura.



*Fig. 7.* The foreground of the *Fimbidi* shrine in the dry season. This is where the main ritual takes place at the height of the wet season.

*7. kép.* A *Fimbidi* szentély előtere a száraz évszakban. Itt játszódnak a *Fimbidi* ritus fő epizódjai az esős évszak csúcspontján.

The *Fimbidi* shrine is ‘open’ from the day before the first main day and remains open until the day after the Muhura dance. During this period nobody is allowed to farm on pain of getting a poor harvest. On the day the officiants ritually ‘close down’ the shrine, every family is obliged to work on their farms to ensure a good harvest.

The rite of *Fimbidi* closes down the preparatory stage of the boys’ initiation and signals the beginning of the main period of liminality marked also by their costume (*Figs 8–9*). This is the

13 Two main types of sorghum are cultivated, the late-ripening, traditional type being the one that has ritual connections, and the developmental cycle of which we follow in this paper.

14 *Fimbidi* is celebrated by Tumbicha and Grünava together at the original shrine of the abandoned settlement. Muhura and Madivi celebrate separately at their own shrines (derived from the original shrine) on the hill-sides, near their own settlements.



Fig. 8. One ritual episode at the *Fimbidi* shrine, a few days before the main rite: the *mandizhin* are dancing in front of the shrine, blowing their flutes.

8. kép. A *Fimbidi*t bevezető egyik rituális epizód, pár nappal a fő rítus előtt: a *mandizhinek* a szentély előtt táncolnak, sípjukat fújva.



Fig. 9. A group of *mandizhin* blocking a path on the morning of the main *Fimbidi* rite.

9. kép. A *mandizhinek* egy csoportja lezár egy ösvényt a fő *Fimbidi* rítus napjának reggelén.

first appearance of the initiates as a group – the future age set – in front of the whole of the community. This is also the one ritual, when the name ‘*mandizhin*’ is extended to the group of the newly-wed girls, who also have a central role during this rite, with which they complete their marriage process. The ritual beer given to the two sets of *mandizhin*<sup>15</sup> and the blessing uttered by the *mom mihin* ensure the fertility of the newly-wed girls and the initiates (Figs 10–11), and the necessary rainfall for a rich harvest. The entire community celebrates the fact that their sons and daughters have lived to see this day (Figs 12–13) and that in their persons they demonstrate the promise of the next generation, and the survival and flourishing of the community. Here we may start to sense more clearly a manifest parallel between the developmental stage of the life-giving, all-important sorghum and this stage of the initiation rites.

The unity and strength of the community is also celebrated on the second day by a dance in front of the shrine, this time with the chief taking part. It is also fitting that the whole ritual period is closed by the joint dance of the *mandizhin* from all four segments.

In the non-initiation years there is no communal dance, only the officiants perform a short rite in the *Fimbidi* shrine to ensure a good harvest.

### ***Buk mandizhin***

The next rite of the initiation cycle is performed almost two months later, in the middle of the sixth month, during October–November, the beginning of the dry season. The second, last weeding of the sorghum has finished by then, the seed heads of the plant only needing to grow and ripen.

The rite of *Buk mandizhin* is a community rite with a shrine at its centre, but the six days following the offering at the shrine are all about the liminality of the *mandizhin* and the change that happens to their status during this period of separation.

The boys are separated from their home environment, moving into a specially built ‘house’ outside the compound of the boy’s father, together with their mentors



Fig. 10. A group of newly-wed girls at the *Fimbidi* rite.

10. kép. Az újasszonyok egy csoportja táncol a *Fimbidi* ritus tetőpontján.

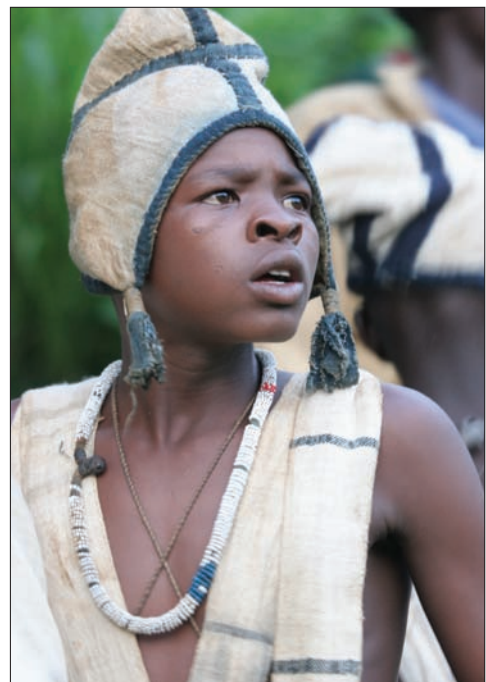


Fig. 11. The costume of the *mandizhin*, specific to the first day of the *Fimbidi* rite.

11. kép. A *mandizhin*nek különleges öltözte a *Fimbidi* ritus tetőpontjának számító első napon.

15 The boys are offered the beer to drink, while the girls are sprayed with it.





Fig. 12. The dance in front of the *Fimbidi* shrine on the climactic first day.

12. kép. A *Fimbidi* szentély előtti közösségi tánc a rítus csúcspontját jelentő első napon.

and helpers, as a ‘family’. The boys are forbidden to even talk to their parents, and they are encouraged to break some of the usual rules of the community; they are allowed to lash out at children or members of their own parents’ age sets with their slender, flexible switches if they don’t give way to them on a path. Their days are spent in the ‘bush’, on the hillside, outside the settled area. Their upper torsos are smeared with mahogany oil and red ochre<sup>16</sup> and they engage in mock-fighting with their switches to determine the ‘pecking order’ among themselves. They also elect the group’s own ‘chief’.

In the course of the six consecutive nights, taking advantage of the bright moonlight around the full moon, equipped with special, heavy iron anklets and knives, used only on these occasions, they practice a very demanding, virile dance that would prepare them for their role as warriors and hunters. On the seventh day, during the day, they perform this dance once in front of the community.<sup>17</sup> That night, following this performance, they visit the houses of friends and relatives, singing, and humbly ‘begging’, to familiarize themselves with the feeling of being down and out. This period teaches them to be independent, helps to develop their character and self-confidence while also strengthening their group solidarity. In one word, just like the sorghum, they mature.

16 Red ochre symbolises (re)birth.

17 For this occasion the boys’ torsos and faces are decorated with red, white and blue colours by their mentors, ‘to look like leopards’.

### *Sa makavakün – Offering beer at the Makavakün shrine*

Two weeks after *Buk mandizhin* has finished, at the beginning of the seventh Fali month, sometime in November, beginning of December, not long before the sorghum is ready to be harvested, it is time for the next community rite at the *Makavakün* shrine. The night before is spent by the initiates as a group at the oldest compound in the abandoned settlement.<sup>18</sup> Some of the community's elders spend the night there with them, including one of the *mom mihin*, who prepares their meal there. In the afternoon of the next day, at the shrine, in the presence of the village chief, the senior *mom mihin* administers the offering. The boys, one-by-one, drink from the ritual beer, by which act the community re-admits them into its fold as grown-up men. The dance of the new men closes this episode of the rite, and the members of the community choose the best dancer from among them. As a final act of the initiates as a group and the closing down episode of the communal cycle, the newly initiated men that night dance in front of the village chief's house, honouring the chief and the assembled elders, using, for the first time, the dance-axe that is the iconic possession of an adult man.

### *Küs mazhin*

This rite is again focused on the family of the initiate. It happens a few days after *Sa makavakün*, on a day chosen by the family. A feast is organized to honour the age set of the father of the initiate. Before the meal commences the initiated boy and an initiation mate, both perceived by this time as adult men, dance with the dance-axe of men in front of the assembled guests. This rite signifies the end of separation from the family. The young man is again part of his father's household.

With this last rite the year's initiation cycle is completed. The boys have become men, and it would even be possible for them to get married straight away. A whole new age set has matured to adulthood, with the promise of future generations. However, the community during the following two, two-and-a-half months must focus on the conclusion of the other great cycle of life, the harvest of the sorghum.

### **The harvest metaphor**

It is not accidental that the rituals of the male initiation cycle manifest a symbolic equivalence to the developmental cycle of their staple crop, sorghum, and that the Fali conceive the turning



Fig. 13. Fathers of the *mandizhin* dancing on the hillside near the *Fimbidi* shrine on the first, climactic day of the ritual.

13. kép. A beavatandó fiúk és újasszonyok apáinak tánca a *Fimbidi* szentély melletti hegyoldalon.

18 This compound was among the last abandoned ones, partly because of its historic significance. Its owner moved down to the new settlement in the early years of the 2000's.

of boys to men, as a sort of harvest. This symbolic equation manifests itself in the alternative name of the non-initiation year as well.

The name of the initiation year is *wany mandizhin*, which can be translated as ‘The time/year of the initiates’. It is also called *wany pötib*, ‘Year of play, of (ritual) dance’. The non-initiation year also has two alternative names. One is the direct antonym of *wany pötib*: *wany kwuitibi*, meaning ‘quiet, peaceful, normal time/year’, that is not interrupted by the initiation rituals. *Kwuitibi* is the name of the sauce to be offered to placate angry spirits who might have caused illness in the family. This is also the sauce to be served at the two *Davgini* rituals, with the intent of protecting the initiates from affliction. The name might also refer to the fact that the only initiation-related ritual to take place in this year is the second *Davgini* (with the *kwuitibi* sauce).

The other name of the non-initiation year is of more interest to us: *fwati*. Fali people refer to poor, unsatisfactory yield with this word that is usually caused by insufficient rain. When they use it to refer to the non-initiation year, they, by association, refer to the absence of initiation as ‘harvest’.<sup>19</sup> In this way *mandizhin* can be equated with ‘harvest’.

The initiation cycle of the Fali therefore can be understood as the symbolic equivalent of the developmental cycle of their staple crop, sorghum, joining together the two existential prerequisites of the community’s survival, a healthy next generation and a rich harvest.

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19 It is also said that during non-initiation years the yield is less because people are taking less in the way of gifts to the rainmaker than in initiation years, when it is important to secure plenty of rain for the duration of the *Fimbidi* rite.

20 For the References I have selected primarily from our publications and from major works of others who have done research among peoples of the Mandara Mountains. The bibliographies of these works and web pages are a starting point for further reading.

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## A fiúkból férfiak lesznek Beavatási rítusok egy északkelet-nigériai faluban

A nagyrészt még ma is önellátásra berendezkedett, elsősorban földművelő, csádi nyelvet beszélő fali népcsoport többezres, jól szervezett, koncentrált hegyi falvakban él Nigéria és Kamerun határán. A két legnagyobb érték az egyén és a közösség fennmaradása szempontjából a gazdag termés és a szapora gyermekáldás. Nem véletlen tehát, hogy a kétévenkénti fiú beavatási ciklus rítusai időben a szorgum érési ciklusához vannak hangolva, és azzal szimbolikus párhuzamot mutatnak.

Míg a IX. ΜΩΜΟΣ konferencián (Miskolc, 2015) előadott prezentáció képekkel, részleteiben mutatta be a legnagyobb beavatási rítust, a *Fimbidi* 2007-es ünnepét (6–13. kép), itt most nagy vonalakban összefoglalom a jilvu fálík egész beavatási ciklusának főbb jellemzőit, hangsúlyozva a társadalmi struktúrákat, folyamatokat, egyéni és közösségi ambíciókat és hiedelmeket, melyek a beavatási ciklus és egy-egy rítus háttérében meghúzódnak. Bár az itt megrajzolt kép csak vázlatos lehet, remélem, érdeklődésre tarthat számot régészek körében is.

Jelen publikációmban felhasználtam férjemmel, James H. Wade antropológussal 1990 és 2010 között végzett terepmunkánk eredményeit, valamint az ő korábbi kutatásait, amik egészen az 1970-es évekig nyúlnak vissza. A képeket is ő készítette.

## List of Fali words

<i>In the text</i>	<i>Approximate pronunciation IPA: in [ ] brackets</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
<i>avginan</i>	[ə]vgin[ə]n	Small bird.
<i>Buk mandizhin</i>	Buk mandi[ɜ]in	Name of initiation ritual.
<i>Davgini</i>		Name of initiation ritual.
<i>Fimbidi</i>		Name of initiation ritual.
<i>fwati</i>		Poor harvest. / Non-initiation year.
<i>Grünava</i>	Gr[ʁ]nava	Name of segment settlement of Jilvu.
<i>Jilvu</i>	[ɕ]ilvu	Name of the village.
<i>Küs mazhin</i>	K[ʁs] ma[ɜ]in	Name of initiation ritual ('jumping/ dancing' <i>mandizhin</i> ).
<i>kwuitibi</i>		Name of sauce.
<i>Madivi</i>		Name of segment settlement of Jilvu.
<i>mandizhin</i>	mandi[ɜ]in	Initiate.
<i>mihin</i>		Member of the 'specialist' caste.
<i>Muhura</i>		Name of segment settlement of Jilvu.
<i>Mulala</i>		Name of Jilvu's sacred mountain.
<i>muyin</i>	mu[j]in	Member of the farmer caste.
<i>Sa makavakün</i>	Sa makavak[ʁ]n	Name of initiation ritual.
<i>Tumbicha</i>	Tumbi[tʃ]a	Name of segment settlement of Jilvu.
<i>wany kwuitibi</i>	wa[n] kwuitibi	Non-initiation year.
<i>wany mandizhin</i>	wa[n] mandi[ɜ]in	Initiation year. (Year of the <i>mandizhin</i> ).
<i>wany pötib</i>	wa[n] p[ə]tib	Initiation year. (Year of 'play'/ritual).

Table 1. List of Fali Words. Simplified transcriptions, approximating pronunciation. Length and tones of the sounds are not marked.

1. táblázat. A cikkben használt fáli szavak egyszerűsített átírással, hozzávetőleges kiejtéssel. A hangok hosszúságát és a tonalitást nem jelöltük.