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# Dogon Restudied

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## A Field Evaluation of the Work of Marcel Griaule

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by Walter E. A. van Beek

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This restudy of the Dogon of Mali asks whether the texts produced by Marcel Griaule depict a society that is recognizable to the researcher and to the Dogon today and answers the question more or less in the negative. The picture of Dogon religion presented in *Dieu d'eau* and *Le renard pâle* proved impossible to replicate in the field, even as the shadowy remnant of a largely forgotten past. The reasons for this, it is suggested, lie in the particular field situation of Griaule's research, including features of the ethnographer's approach, the political setting, the experience and predilections of the informants, and the values of Dogon culture.

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It has become a commonplace that ethnographies are "doubly mediated," shaped by the ideas and preconceptions of both ethnographer and informants. They are "a tale of two cultures—the fieldworker's and the other's" (van Maanen 1988:138). Restudies, however, represent a more complex case. They comment explicitly upon an existing account and probably enrich the corpus of data. A restudy may give a different general impression of a culture—opening a new vista, allowing for a plural and more balanced interpretation. ("Societies are so complex that more than one model of analysis is needed to reveal all these intricacies" [Beidelman 1989:215].) But a restudy may also show that an earlier study was flawed. Though this latter possibility is more or less ruled out by the extremes of the postmodernist approach, I am persuaded that some views on a culture can indeed be more productive, insightful, or plausible, in short, "truer," than others. Roth (1989:567) has argued for a distinction between rhetorical devices and epistemological significance: "no one perspective is privileged, even

though some are demonstrably better or worse." In a similar vein, Beidelman (1989:265) concludes in his review of Clifford's (1988) *The Predicament of Culture*, "Some accounts are of less value than others, either because the data are unreliable or thin or because the analyses are inept." I will argue here that all three kinds of fault can be identified in the classic studies of the Dogon.

It is a restudy of the Dogon of Mali that I present here, setting off my data against one particular (and quite well-known) other view, that of Marcel Griaule. Given the constructed nature of culture, the field critique of the data has to be performed in terms of recognizability and productivity: Do the texts produced by Griaule depict a society that is recognizable to the researcher, offer productive insights into Dogon thinking, or provide useful guidance for the reproduction of Dogon culture? Are Griaule's cultural constructs recognizable in the field, either to the anthropologist or to the Dogon? Do the Dogon, when presented with (elements of) the Griaule texts, recognize them as a meaningful part of their thinking and way of life?

My answers to these questions will be more or less in the negative, depending on what part of Griaule's work is in question. I will first present a short synopsis of Griaule's ethnography and some of the problems it poses; then I shall present some of my own findings, analyse their differences from Griaule's, and finally construct a model of how the Griaulean ethnography was generated.

### Griaule's Dogon Ethnography

Griaule published on the Dogon from the early thirties (the Dakar-Djibouti expedition of 1931–33 [Griaule 1933]) until his death in 1956, and a major work co-authored by Germaine Dieterlen appeared posthumously in 1965. For present purposes, his Dogon ethnography may be divided into three major periods. From 1931 till 1948 he published descriptive accounts of Dogon life, concentrating on material culture. His *thèse d'état, Masques dogons* (Griaule 1938, hereafter *MD*), is the high point of this period, which Clifford (1983:138) calls Griaule's "documentary phase." My critique is not directed at his works of this period or those of his many collaborators; indeed, their vision of Dogon culture coincides to a significant degree with mine. It is the later presentation of Dogon culture with which it is concerned.

The second period is dominated by a book that sparked tremendous interest in many circles, not only among anthropologists, and made Griaule world-famous. In *Dieu d'eau: Entretiens avec Ogotemmêli* (Griaule 1948, hereafter *DE*) Griaule uncovered a Dogon world view, cosmology, and philosophical system of a completeness and sophistication unparalleled in any other ethnography. The old man Ogotemmêli, who is the pivot of this book, initiated Griaule into a Dogon world dominated by a splendid creation myth, showing

the "Nazarene"—as Griaule liked to call himself as a white man—how in Dogon culture the story of creation served as a blueprint for all facets of society, from the way to cultivate a field and build a house to weaving, pottery making, drumming, and smithing. In this elegantly written account of 32 initiatory sessions, Griaule described an intricate philosophical network linking the outside world with Dogon society and thought.

A short summary: In the beginning Amma took a lump of clay, squeezed it in his hand, and flung it from him. The clay spread out over the north (the top) and then the south (the bottom) of the world. This flat earth was a female body, with an ants' nest<sup>1</sup> as its sexual organ, its clitoris a termite hill. Amma tried to have intercourse with her but was thwarted by the termite hill. He excised it, thus creating the fox.<sup>2</sup> Subsequent intercourse produced the original Nommo<sup>3</sup> twins from the first water. They gave their mother, the earth, fibres for clothing, thus creating the eightfold spirals of the sun, a vehicle for moisture, wind, and tornadoes. The fox, being the only non-twin, succeeded in having (incestuous) intercourse with the earth, resulting in the flow of menstrual blood. He was given the power of speech and prediction. Amma then created human beings from clay with the help of the Nommo, male and female; they begat the first eight ancestors of the Dogon, who were still bisexual.

The Nommo proceeded to create weaving, cultivated grains, and a complicated stairway for descending to the earth, which was represented by the granary (*guyo ya*) and the basket. The ancestors, trees, wild and domestic animals, reptiles and rodents, birds and fish descended to the earth. Then the ancestral smith, with anvil, bellows, and hammer, reshaped the granary into a spindle whorl and stole fire from the first Nommo. The latter's retribution, a thunderbolt, set the granary sliding down the rainbow. Its collision with the earth broke the ancestor's flexible limbs into human joints. A later infraction against the order of the first eight ancestors produced the cereal grains, the chthonic serpent, agriculture, and the smithy.

From there on, in a convoluted and sometimes internally contradictory discourse in which Ogotemmêli and Griaule were equal partners, the structuring of the human body, totemic priests, the cult of Lèbè (the earth), the making of drums, weaving, land cultivation, clothing and finery, the architecture of the house and the totemic shrine and the layout of the village, the cult of the *binu*, the intricacies of sacrifice, circumcision,

excision, and the appearance of death, all are linked with the creation myth. Griaule, who, judging from the text alone, exerted considerable influence on the content of the talks and on the structuring of the images into a coherent system, speculatively linked the Ogotemmêli explanations to the signs of the zodiac.

Though portrayed at the time as the ultimate insight from the Dogon elders, Ogotemmêli's revelations were not to be the final word on Dogon thought. A new and quite different corpus of myth and cultural explanations was offered to Griaule and his close collaborator Germaine Dieterlen in subsequent years. The first major indications were publications on Sirius, symbolism, and the harp-lute (Griaule and Dieterlen 1950a, b; 1951) and an attempt at synthesis (Griaule and Dieterlen 1954). However, it is *Le renard pâle* (Griaule and Dieterlen 1965, hereafter *RP*) that provides the crucial information. Here another, even more elaborate and intricate view of Dogon cultural thought, based on a different creation myth, is offered. A cosmological story is given in which Amma (God) through a series of minutely described acts and movements creates the universe, stars, moons, and planets, and all aspects of Dogon culture. This account, even more than Ogotemmêli's, conjures up a vision of the Dogon as great philosophers living and reliving their own creation, at ease in a world in which the warp of daily life is interwoven with the woof of mythical creation into a marvellous tapestry of cosmic proportions.

The text itself starts with an indigenous theory of signs (pp. 61–87) differentiating various levels of visual representation of mythical reality. This theory is highly significant for the book for two reasons: (1) The story in fact hinges upon visual representations, a fact acknowledged by the authors (p. 110). (2) Their account operates from an extreme "cryptological" view of the nature of symbols (Sperber 1975) claiming the identity of *signifiant* and *signifié*; for example, Amma, retreating to his heaven after his creative work, retains the signs of the creation, and as long as he can destroy the signs, he can destroy the earth (p. 507).

The story is hard to summarize, for it is highly detailed and lacks any ongoing story line. The creation in this account proceeds, again, in stages and levels. After a first creation centering on the acacia tree has been destroyed, Amma creates the universe from a primordial egg, in which the first eight vibrations or creative movements occur. The resulting spiral movement in the egg will come to represent the seven (plus one) fundamental seeds of cultivation and, later, the organization of man and of society. Central to this account is the notion of involuted doubleness—each being twin, each pair counterbalanced by half a placenta. In heaven the first Nommos are created (Nommo is the Dogon water spirit [see below]) in the form of or with the double of a catfish. A single Nommo of the original four pairs revolts and escapes from heaven, creating space and time (p. 175). His placenta becomes the earth, which is thereby defiled. This wayward Nommo, called Ogo, is punished by Amma with the loss of speech. He tries to create life

1. In the English translation of *DE*, *key* (*termitière*) has inevitably become "termite mound." This particular ant, however, makes its nest in a hole in the ground, which is crucial to the sexual metaphor Ogotemmêli uses. According to the Dogon, under these holes water can always be found.

2. The *yurugu* is still called "jackal" in *DE*, to be corrected in *RP* to "pale fox" (*Vulpes pallida*).

3. In spelling I shall conform to Griaule and Dieterlen's, though a phonologically more correct spelling is available through the work of Calame-Griaule (1965, 1968).

through intercourse with his placenta—an incestuous act that spawns bush spirits. He ascends to heaven again, steals grains (including the all-important *pô* [*Digitaria exilis*]), a piece of the sun that Amma created as a defence (formerly Ogo's placenta), the teeth of his catfish double, and a piece of the placenta, which becomes the moon. Amma appoints the ant, the termite, and the spider as guards for Ogo, grinds his placenta, circumcises him, and reduces him to a fox (*renard pâle*), henceforth dumb but with knowledge of the future.

The highlight of the creation story, as well as the focus of Dogon ritual according to this account, is the sacrifice and subsequent resurrection of one particular Nommo, meant to be Ogo's twin, in order to purify the earth and redeem the wrongs of Ogo. It is this heavenly sacrifice that creates the central star system around Sirius (Griaule and Dieterlen 1950b) of which *pô tolo*, identified as Sirius B, is central. Through the stream of blood and the dismemberment of the corpse, this sacrifice generates the blacksmith, numerous altars, a multitude of stars, divination, the main ritual trees, rain clouds, birds, the griots (bards), the *walu* (antelope), etc. The totemic shrines testify to Amma's feat of reassembling and reviving the Nommo, as do the ancestral houses, the Dogon statues, and indeed most visual representations (again according to Griaule).

Finally, an ark carrying the first eight ancestors, generated by the Nommo, descends from heaven and colonizes the now purified earth, bearing the pure seeds of food plants and trees as well as domesticated animals. Still, the wrongs wrought by Ogo have rendered them mortal, and the complex work of Dogon rituals and ceremonies is required both to commemorate the creative and redeeming sacrifice and to prolong their short life on earth.

Through a transposition of this (much more complicated) myth the human body itself becomes an image not only of the creation but also of the existing universe, containing all cultivated seeds, mirroring in its development the development of the Nommo. Social organization follows the original, mythical dividing lines of the four elements. The same holds, Griaule and Dieterlen argue, for relations between kin, the territorial organization of village, ward, and homestead, etc. As in *DE*, these happenings are said to reverberate in every nook and cranny of Dogon culture—in architecture, agriculture, the main communal rituals, divination, sacrifice, lineage organization, the division of labour among blacksmiths and griots, etc.

A short overview such as this can never do justice to the richness and versatility of the myth corpus (but see Palau-Marti 1957, Lettens 1971, Pelton 1980, de Heusch 1985), but it must be evident that the text of *RP* presents a wholly new paradigm of Dogon thinking. Clearly envisaged as the first of a long series (the second volume was to deal with the first 66 days of human existence on earth), this has been the only volume to appear thus far. Although later publications drew upon this corpus (e.g., Dieterlen 1959, 1962, 1989), the second volume has not yet come out.

## Griaule's Ethnography as a Problem

Griaule's publications, especially *DE*, by far the most captivating account, had an impact far beyond the borders of anthropology. Art historians (and art dealers), architects, philosophers, and historians of religion used these insights in their work. The general public, especially the French intelligentsia, eagerly availed itself of this rich treasure of profound African thought. Psychologists became interested in the stirring of Dogon souls and undertook thorough in-depth interviews (e.g., Parin, Morgenthaler, and Parin-Matthey 1963). The book was translated into many languages, including Russian and Japanese. Among other things it stimulated tourism to the Dogon habitat, the Bandiagara escarpment. Added to a visually captivating culture and a stunning environment, this engaging account of Dogon philosophy resulted in a continuous stream of "Nazarene" (white) visitors to Sanga.

*RP* also became a source of inspiration for many other disciplines and professions. A much less accessible text, it has had a relatively restricted readership, and there have been few foreign translations. Nevertheless, this highly esoteric tale has had its own attraction and fascination, and the later revelations have been popularized by others who have tried their hand at a general "description" of Dogon culture from Griaulean sources (e.g., Saccone 1984, Beaudouin 1984, Palau-Marti 1957). Art historians have drawn on it to interpret Dogon material culture and by their voluminous writings enhanced the market value of the already much coveted Dogon sculptures. The interpretation of Dogon architecture spurred by Ogotemmêli was stimulated anew (N'diaye 1972). There has been a Freudian reinterpretation of Dogon mythology (Michel-Jones 1978). Artists of various persuasions have sought and found inspiration in these Dogon chronicles, among them writers (Schierbeek), sculptors (Moore), architects (van Eyck, Haan), and painters. Numerous films have been made, among which the many productions of Rouch stand out. The weirdest connection is with the extraterrestrial addicts of "cosmonautology," who have found especially in the Sirius tales and the account of the ark some of their "definite proofs" of alien visits to this planet (Von Däniken has drawn regularly upon Guerrier [1975] or Temple [1976]). Tourism received a fresh stimulus.

Historians of religion have often drawn the Dogon into their comparative endeavours (e.g., Pelton 1980). Most of them have taken the texts produced by Griaule at face value, reveling in the intricacies of mythology and creation. In their hands, the Dogon have begun to exemplify the quintessential West African or Sudanic religion, preserved better on the Bandiagara escarpment than anywhere else—a notion which echoes Griaule and Dieterlen.

Anthropologists have reacted more cautiously to this continuing series of Griaule-Dogon revelations, though many have cited the material. A special conference on this type of world view resulted in *African Worlds* (Forde 1954), which contains an article by Griaule and

Dieterlen (1954), the first attempt at a synopsis of the "new Dogon cosmogony" and still one of the most easily accessible. Reviews were cautious (Goody 1967, Jackson 1984), attempting to maintain an academic balance between acceptance at face value and suspicion.

The general ethnographic problem posed by the Dogon publications was already becoming clear. As described in the two central publications, *DE* and *RP*, the Dogon bear very little resemblance either to surrounding ethnic groups or to any other culture in Africa. No comparable set of myths, no such intricate web of associations between myth and institutions, has ever been found. The main body of anthropological monographs, predominantly British at that time and "Atlantic" in later years, had revealed a huge number of local cultures apparently operating on quite different premises. Sociological, political, and historical factors were emphasized in these accounts, ideology and especially mythology being granted a comparatively modest role. Several commentators criticized the absence of a "material grounding" for the description of Dogon culture, the lack of socioeconomic data, and the absence of any link between ideology and social structure (Tait 1950). Douglas (1967, 1968) analysed this glaring gap between French (read: Dogon) and English anthropology in terms of a difference in academic culture. When direct confrontations were arranged between French and English anthropologists, each party showed clear lack of appreciation of the other's position.<sup>4</sup> The most thorough criticism was formulated by Lettens (1971), who evaluated Griaule's work under the telling title *Mystagogie et mystification*. Clifford (1983) has analysed the fieldwork methodology and theoretical assumptions from a deconstructivist perspective, producing a more sympathetic and sophisticated critique.

All in all, what has emerged from the critical reading of colleagues is an enigma. The Dogon as depicted in Griaule's publications are an anomaly in African ethnography, even among the other products of French anthropology. Griaule's many collaborators also concentrated on religion as a crucial explanatory variable. Apart from Dieterlen, who had a special working relationship with Griaule and carried the torch, Zahan, Ligers, Lebeuf, de Ganay, Rouch, Paulme, Lifchitz, Leiris, and Pâques made their careers in African ethnography and linguistics. Most of them participated in the earlier expeditions, before World War II. Their ethnographic work often agreed with that of Griaule in granting symbolism and ideology a dominant place in cultural explanation, but most of them moved in quite different directions later. The main point here is that Griaule's initiatory trajectory, as Clifford calls it, has never been paralleled or even approximated by any of his students—not even, as we shall see, by Dieterlen. Notwithstanding Griaule's

considerable influence, the revelations of Dogon myth have remained sui generis.

Griaule often asserted that Dogon culture exemplified a general "Sudanic" culture and predicted that variants of Dogon beliefs would be found among other groups. However, the Bambara (e.g., as described by Zahan [1974] and Dieterlen [1957]) never produced an Ogotemmêli to reveal the deeper meanings and correlations beneath the surface of public culture. The same holds for the work of other Griaule students (e.g., Leiris 1948, Paulme 1986, Pâques 1964). Nor were these deep insights ever reproduced in any other part of Africa; African ethnography knows only one Ogotemmêli, only one *Renard pâle*.

Dogon ethnography is anomalous not only in respect of other cultures but also internally. Though each of the publications discussed is reasonably coherent, the three levels of Dogon ethnography—the publications up till 1947, Ogotemmêli, and the *Renard pâle*—are quite inconsistent with each other. Palau-Marti (1957) addresses this problem but clearly does not succeed in reconciling the three versions. Dieterlen (1989) uses the initiation paradigm to explain this conflict: the different myths represent various levels of interpretation of and initiation into Dogon "secrets." Still, even though some thematic continuities are discernible, two qualitatively different sets of myths do operate.<sup>5</sup> Thus even if we restrict ourselves to Griaule's work, we have not one Dogon ethnography but three.

## The Setting of the Restudy

Dogon ethnography offers one of the clearest examples anthropology has to offer of a paradigm anomaly. It confounds even the highly ambiguous models anthropology has developed for West African societies; the difference between Griaule's construction(s) of Dogon culture and the ones made in adjoining parts of Africa by his colleagues is simply too great. A restudy in the field, then, may yield more than just another view by "other scribes."

A few caveats and considerations are in order: Any comparison over time within one culture starts from the assumptions of recognizability and continuity; cultures are assumed to be recognizable by different researchers and participants as intersubjectively valid constructs. Produced in the triangular interaction among participants and between them and the interpreting researcher, cultures will be recognizable to a limited extent only—the stance of postmodernism—but still recognizable. This is most apparent when institutional accounts rather than general interpretations, hermeneutics, or feelings are at issue (cf. Gartrell 1979), and Griaule does write about institutions.

4. The proceedings of the conference on Voltaic cultures (Dieterlen 1967) offer a splendid example of this paradigmatic tower of Babel, the English delegates speaking about totally different issues from the French.

5. Only on a very general level can the two accounts be considered transformations of one another, as de Heusch (1985) has shown. A structural analysis such as his can, however, link any number of myths from any region.

Cultural constructs will change over time but will retain certain features either as such or in the shaping of the transformation process. If the flow of time has changed society, some aspects will have changed more than others, while in various ways the "same culture" may be rediscovered in new settings and forms. A description of Dogon culture from before World War II should ring some bells in 1989 (or 1979, the year I started my field research). The Trobriands are still recognizable from Malinowski's publications, as are other cultures that have been restudied. As we shall see, the same holds for the Dogon. Descriptions dating from before World War II still offer a valuable—if dated—introduction to Dogon culture.

There is, however, the complication that some of the crucial information was secret. Griaule emphatically stated that, though the knowledge revealed was not purely personal—it was deemed to be at the core of Dogon public culture—it was known only to a few initiates. It represented background knowledge that only some should know and but a few needed to know. This was the knowledge of the initiated and formed part of the fabric of Dogon thought as a system of secrets. Rediscovering this knowledge will not be easy; yet it must be possible.

The problem of secrecy in culture is a complex one that has as yet received little theoretical attention (cf. Bellman 1984). Of course, cultures do contain elements that are not readily disclosed to outsiders. Details of initiation and rituals are often not fully public knowledge; in addition to these "official" secrets, the ubiquitous "skeletons in the cupboard"—the shameful secrets of the past and present—are kept hidden from the outsider. Griaule states clearly that the deeper Dogon knowledge belongs to the first class of secrets, hidden not only from outsiders but also from the majority of the population. Only a small portion of the population—Griaule (1952:32–33) estimates 15%, Lettens (1971:551) from Griaule's text suggests 5%—has these deeper insights. The question then is how secret secrets can be and yet be part and parcel of a culture. As shared meaning is a crucial aspect of any definition of culture, a secret not shared is not cultural, while one shared by very few is by definition marginal.

More important still, the question of secrets raises the issue of cultural integration. Though aspects of culture could well be at variance with each other, in a small-scale society such as a Dogon village some integration of culture can be expected. In Griaule's texts, Dogon culture is represented as fully coherent and integrated. Moreover, cultural secrets may correspond to elements of public culture, sharing ways of reasoning and methods of classification. More often than not, the revelation of the secret is the revelation of a symbol—of the way in which esoteric concepts are materially represented (van Baal and van Beek 1985). Thus, if the secrets revealed to Griaule are part of Dogon culture, one should be able to retrace them to some extent. Of course, secret knowledge is vulnerable, as its repositories (in this case old Dogon men) have short life expectancies. However,

this kind of knowledge, linked in form and content to ongoing public knowledge, should still be recognizable in its cultural format even if it is no longer being transmitted.

My field study of the Dogon<sup>6</sup> was part of a multidisciplinary cluster of researches on the theme of human ecology in the Sahel. Carried out by members of various disciplines (geography, physical anthropology, social anthropology, archaeology), research was concentrated on two zones: the floodplains of the Niger Delta, with the old city of Djenné as the focus, and the Bandiagara escarpment. My own research had as its central theme a cultural ecological concern, the relation between religion and the survival strategies of the Dogon. For this theme, an evaluation of the work of Griaule was a necessity. As it developed, it increasingly became an integrated restudy of the Dogon.

The location was selected accordingly. Griaule and his collaborators worked mainly in Sanga, a conglomerate of ten Dogon villages built close together. An important market as well as administrative centre for the Dogon area, Sanga is in several ways atypical. Its total population is quite large (over 6,500 at the moment), and the earliest Christian and Muslim influence radiated from it. Thus, it offers at once a concentration of Dogon culture and a peculiar variant of it. Further, Sanga has been influenced by tourism and in a lesser way by the tradition of Griaule research. I chose a village of 1,800 people (fig. 1) close enough to Sanga (9 km) to share its cultural variant to a significant degree and far enough from it to avoid excessive tourism (and research influence). Part of the research, of course, had to be carried out in Sanga, working with informants from both within and beyond Griaule's circle. The research started with a reconnaissance trip in January 1978 followed by fieldwork from April 1979 to July 1980. I then made eight return visits, each lasting from one to three months, over the next ten years.<sup>7</sup> Though I worked in the field with geographers, prehistorians, photographers, film makers, and writers, the data presented here derive from my own research.

My personal views on African society, as well as my expectations on coming into the field, are apposite here. Cultural ecology was my central interest, and my general view of traditional culture and religion was (and is) characterized by a moderate materialism. I expected Dogon society and religion to be shaped to a significant degree by the exigencies of survival in a harsh natural environment, in which droughts and locusts figured, as well as historical processes such as war, slave raiding, colonization, and state penetration. I expected a small-scale village society such as the Dogon to show some integration of material basis, social organization, and religion. To a certain extent, I found what I expected. His-

6. For stimulating comments on earlier versions of the text I thank my graduate students as well as Kees Op 't Land, Peter Staples, and several French colleagues.

7. The research was financed by two grants from the Netherlands Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Research (WOTRO) and by the University of Utrecht, the Foundation Dapper, Agence Aigle, and Time-Life.



FIG. 1. *The scree village of Tireli, setting for the restudy.*

torical processes and ecological pressures do influence Dogon society and culture. However, I found Dogon religion much less focused on environmental issues than I had expected, much more a repository of historical incidents than a response to historical processes. Also, the integration of Dogon culture turned out to be less than complete; one example is the loose integration of the mask complex into the main body of ritual associated with sacrifice.<sup>8</sup>

8. In other respects, too, my findings did not corroborate my expectations. For instance, relations between villages and ethnic groups occurred on a much larger scale than I had expected. My first research experience had been in the Mandara Mountains of northern Cameroon, among the Kapsiki/Higi (van Beek 1987). There, historical and social relations hardly ever extended beyond the small mountain area. Though in many ways the two societies are comparable (van Beek 1990b), and though having lived in another millet-growing area facilitated my personal rapport with the Dogon way of life, I had to grow accustomed to the overt harmony of intervillage relations and to the great distances covered in migratory traditions. Dogon culture proved to be much more open than I had expected, eager to incorporate new techniques and to establish relations with centers of power far away.

I also expected to find that Griaule's creation myths were highly constructed but not directly relevant to Dogon daily life. However, realizing that this expectation would be shared by the majority of the profession, I was also aware that finding the mythical and ideological corpus in the field would be a greater coup than "disproving" Griaule, and I certainly expected to find at least some bits and pieces of the myths. On the whole, I was able to find much less concrete material even than I had expected. The ideas with which Griaule and his informants worked surfaced only as allusions, fragments of ritual expression.

Working so close to and in Sanga was in a way a haunting experience. Griaule is still "present" in Sanga, though mainly as the initiator of the first dam. Research is considered normal but superfluous: "Why write this down? All the books have already been written about us!" Dieterlen's continued research, of course, keeps the memory of Griaule fresh. In the CNRS research house, situated between the village and a hotel, remnants of Griaule's equipment are still stored.

## Restudy of the Dogon: Some Results

In order to set off my findings against those of Griaule, I shall concentrate, as he did, on Dogon religion. Issues of social organization were on the whole not problematic. Paulme (1940) presents a picture of Dogon social organization that for the most part can still be found. She depicts a deeply rooted, lineage-based patrilineal, virilocal society in which seniority, sexual division of labour, and a strong work ethic hold sway. Though some changes have occurred in ceremonies and rituals, they too are still there. Bouju (1984) could refer to de Ganay (1937) for her description of the enthroning of the *hogon*; after 43 years, and even in a quite different village, there was no need for a new account. The same holds for most of the marriage observances that Paulme noted in 1940, though some details have changed and individual deviance from the norms has increased. Most of the descriptions of the *bulu* festival in Sanga (Paulme and Lifchitz 1936) are still valid, as are the standard accounts of the honorific titles (de Ganay 1941), fox divination (Paulme 1937), joking relationships (Paulme 1939), and relations between the sexes (Paulme 1940, 1948).

In my research, Dogon religion emerged as elusive and complicated but within the range of known African religions. It has limited relevance for everyday life: for example, much of agriculture is conducted without any reference to it. Rituals may be grouped into two major types: sacrifice, personal or communal, and the complex of death, mask, and *sigu* rituals, which I shall call the mask complex. The two complexes are partially integrated. The myths of mask and *sigu* origins suggest that the mask complex is more recent; it does ignore some distinctions governing Dogon social life such as seniority (esp. the *sigu*) and lineage organization, but of course there may be other explanations for this.

Sacrifice (fig. 2) is performed at all levels of social organization: individual, family, lineage, clan, ward, village, and even cluster of villages with a tradition of common descent (e.g., in the village of Arou [Dieterlen 1982]). It follows a pattern of invocation, immolation, and communal consumption (van Beek 1983*b*) familiar from other parts of Africa. All kinds of sacrifices may also be made by special-interest groups such as blacksmiths, weavers, and goatherds. In principle each type of sacrifice has its own altar, called *Amma* after the Dogon high god. *Ammayèwè* is a lineage altar, a clan altar is called *wagèu*, an age-group altar *munò*, and a village altar *lèbè* (Dieterlen 1941). An important distinction obtains between individual or group altars and village altars. The latter, entrusted to the care of specific clans, serve specific goals and purposes: they guard against intrusions from the bush, promote the general health and fertility of the village, heal, and solemnize oaths. Some altars have gained regional renown and are visited by people from other villages. On the whole, the system of altars is a very open one; new forms of altars and sacrifices have been introduced regularly throughout Dogon history. Thus in a village such as Tireli at least 40 different types of altars can be found.

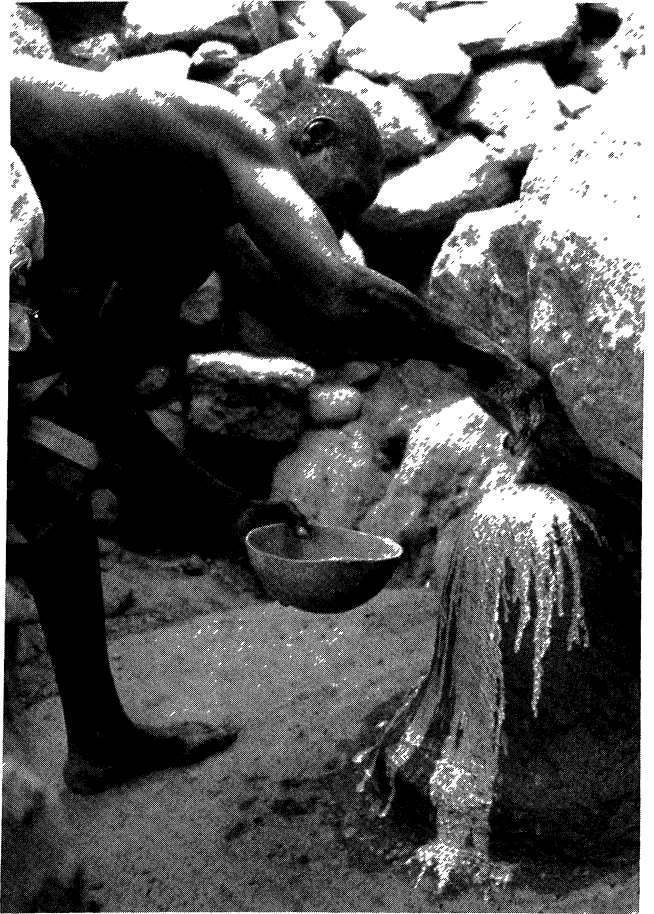


FIG. 2. *Sacrifice, a core rite in Dogon religion.*

The timing of sacrifices is determined primarily by the yearly calendar, though divination may indicate additional offerings. The sacrificial calendar is governed by the onset of the rains and the subsequent counting of moons. The main sacrificial event is the great annual festival, the *burò* (fig. 3), held just before the onset of the rains (Pern, Alexander, and van Beek 1982, Paulme and Lifchitz 1936); a smaller one is held after the harvest. In these communal festivals the various categories within the village population—old and young, men and women, caste and non-caste—reinforce their mutual dependency and complementarity.

Closely linked to the use of individual altars are the notions of sorcery and witchcraft. The general value of overt harmony prevents manifestations of this kind from erupting publicly, as any accusation shames both parties and an unfounded one results in serious loss of face (van Beek 1983*a*). Nevertheless, both altars and specially made objects may be used for anti-social private rituals, and witchcraft, in its specific Dogon definition as the use of real or supernatural “poison,” is a considerable counterpoint in Dogon culture (van Beek 1990*b*).<sup>9</sup>

9. The absence of any reference to witchcraft in the writings of Griaule and Dieterlen is therefore not due to any peculiarity of Dogon culture.



FIG. 3. Two shamans in front of the ward's binu shrine during the annual ceremony just before the rains.

Witches are people—men or women—with innate tendencies to poison other people. Preventive measures against witches are common and easy to obtain. Still, the importance of overt harmony and the notion of shame preclude the voicing of suspicions. As a counterpoint witchcraft is well hidden—one of the real secrets of Dogon society.

The mask complex, with its grand rituals of first burial (*nyû yana*), mask festivals (*dama*), and the 60-year festival *sigu*, has been widely reported (Griaule 1938, Dieterlen and Rouch 1971). It centres around questions of death, fertility, and complementarity. Mask festivals (figs. 4, 5) function as second burials resituating the deceased as ancestors. At the same time they offer a venue for theatrical performances during which the village youth can compete (in dancing) with their peers—behaviour normally frowned upon.

The symbolic interpretation of the masks has shifted through the various revelatory stages of Dogon ethnography. My interpretation of these rituals, especially the *dama* and the *sigu*, draws on various oppositions apparent in Dogon thought. The village/bush opposition is fundamental. The bush (*olu*) is the source of all strength and wisdom, feared for its unpredictability but needed

for a constant flow of energy and knowledge into the village (van Beek and Banga 1990). Masks may be viewed as elements of the bush introduced into the village. In the *sigu*, the men of the village return to it from the bush with additional wisdom and fertility (van Beek 1991).

The conceptual world of the Dogon is complicated, inhabited by many beings. Amma, the high god, called the maker of the earth, is the most important, giving life, fertility, and rain. Invocations address him first of all, along with his "emissaries," the stars and the birds. His counterpart, the chthonic Lèbè, is often represented as a serpent and is closely linked with the gerontocracy in the village. In addition to these two gods, conceived as individuals, there are collective spirits of great ritual and cognitive importance. The first of these is the water spirit Nommo, often represented as one but then as an example of his kind: many Nommo people the waters. Nommo is feared as none other, commanding open water (not rain) and lightning with his following of familiars—crocodiles, turtles, water serpents, and sheatfish. Less personalized and also less visualized are a number of collective spirits, never named individually: *yenèû*, *yèbâ*, *atûwûnû* (in the literature Andoumboulou), *binu*, and *jinu*. None of these collective spirits are ancestors.



FIG. 4. A mask festival: arrival of the masks.

They represent various aspects of the bush and ecological features (e.g., the scree), and the main characteristics of the mask complex are thought to be derived from them: the masks from the *yenèû*, the ritual language (*sigu sò*) from the *jinu*.

The oldest man in the village serves as *hogon*, ritual officiant (Dieterlen 1941, Paulme 1940, Bouju 1984). Each clan has a similar figure (fig. 6). The ward, containing two or three clans, may have a shamanic priest (in the literature “totemic priest” [de Ganay 1942]), who officiates at a *binu* shrine on behalf of members. The function of healer or herbalist (*jòjòngûnu*) depends on knowledge only. The mask complex has its own specialists, among whom the *olubaru* are the most important. They are the ones who know the traditions and texts in the ritual language better than anybody else, having learned them during a three-month-long initiation at the time of the *sigu* festival. It is their duty to recite them at the funerals of old men. Women born during the *sigu* have a special function as “sisters of the masks” (*yasigine*), and in contrast with the other women they are not supposed to fear the masks. Finally, the castes of Dogon society—the two groups of blacksmiths, the leatherworkers, the drummers, and the *segèù* (makers of serv-

ing bowls for food)—have special niches in Dogon religion, such as the making and preserving of public peace. The same holds in a different way for the many collective joking relations that characterize intervillage and interethnic relations in the region (Paulme 1940).

Summing up, Dogon religion is moderately intertwined with the ecological situation and changes in the social and physical environment, as it is with the social structure of Dogon villages and its changes. In general it has proved to be highly adaptable—incorporating new elements, addressing new problems and changes in status. The historical element is pertinent, as changes in the recent as well as in the remote past have found their way into ritual, but considerable cultural integration is evident in both the public and the malign, more secret, aspects of Dogon religion.

This, of course, is just a sketch and does not do justice to the great internal variation within Dogon religion (a full-scale description is in preparation). It is obvious, however, that although much of the old ethnography is clearly still valid, there is a gap between my results and Griaule’s. The differences between his (later) data and mine entail a great number of ethnographic details, which may be subsumed in five statements summing up

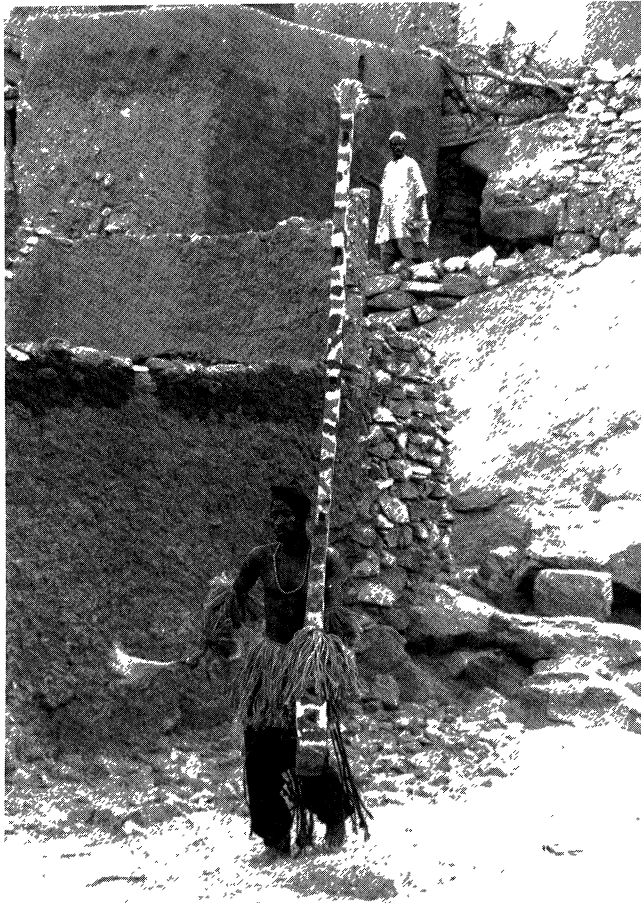


FIG. 5. The "grand mask," the central object of mask ritual.

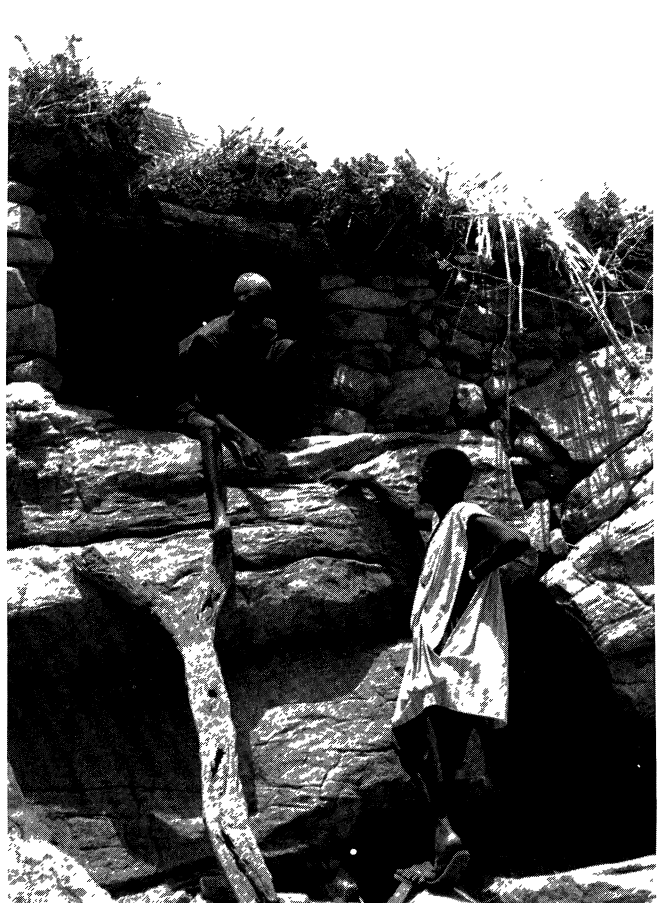


FIG. 6. A lineage elder conferring with his clan eldest at the ward's central men's house.

what Griaule asserted but I could not replicate despite systematic attempts to do so.

1. The Dogon know no proper creation myth; neither the version of Ogotemmêli nor that of the *Renard pâle* is recognizable to informants. The figure of Ogo (*RP*) is unknown; the fox as a divining animal has no privileged position in mythology. That Sirius is a double star is unknown; astronomy is of very little importance in religion. Dogon society has no initiatory secrets beyond the complete mastery of publicly known texts.

2. The "supernatural" world of the Dogon is more diverse and much more vague, ambivalent, and capricious than represented in *DE* or *RP*. The role of ancestors in Dogon religion is limited; they are not identified with the other "supernatural" beings. The *binu* cannot be considered ancestors and do not occupy a central position in mythology or ritual. The water spirit Nommo is not a central figure in Dogon thought and has none of the characteristics of a creator or a redeemer.

3. Symbolism in Dogon religion is restricted and fragmented, carried by ideas and objects sometimes quite different from the ones mentioned in Griaule's writings. Body symbolism is not the basis of house plans or of the layout of fields or villages. Cosmological symbolism is

not the basis of any Dogon cultural institution. Numerical symbolism is present in a very limited form (three for male, four for female, and eight for the *binu*), mainly confined to medico/magical rituals. Classification of objects, animals, and plants does not follow fixed numerical categories. No sign system or hierarchical ordering of different *paroles* (*sò*) or levels of knowledge can be found.

4. The crucial concept of *nyama*, allegedly "vital force," is irrelevant to Dogon religion. The etymologies given in *DE* and *RP* are not retraceable and seem highly idiosyncratic.

5. Dogon society is not pervaded by religion; in fact, much of Dogon social life bears little reference to religious matters. Twins have limited ritual importance and are not central in Dogon thought or ritual. Blacksmiths do not function as culture heroes, and neither do griots/leatherworkers.

The first point, of course, subsumes most of the others. Confronted with parts of the stories provided by Ogotemmêli or given in the *Renard pâle*, my informants emphatically state that they have never heard of them; they are not part of their *tèm* ("found"), their collective customs. This holds for the creation as such and also for



FIG. 7. Tracks of the pale fox in divination plots.

its parts, such as the “egg of the world” (*RP*), the Sirius tale (*RP*), the original granary (*DE*), the creative roles of the *binu*, Nommo, and Amma, and numerous other details. With the demise of the creation myth the whole structure of explanation and correlation in the two texts dissolves.

The same holds for the pair constituted by fox and Ogo, the principal actors in the cosmological *RP*. Not only are the myths totally unknown to Dogon informants, but so is the figure of Ogo as a supernatural being. The term *ogo* is very important in Dogon, implying wealth, seniority, and power (Paulme 1940, Calame-Griaule 1968). The oldest man in the village is the *ogo* (in the literature *hogon*) of that village, the ritual intermediary between the village and the supernatural world. Traces of sacred kingship linger round his person (de Heusch 1985), but he is never conceived to be in any way related to a supernatural being of that name. The old man is in fact closely related to another spirit that is of far more importance to the Dogon, Lèbè, the chthonic earth spirit (who does not feature at all in *RP* and *DE*). The fox, as a divining animal, is not considered the incarnation of some other primal being. A myth explaining his divinatory powers refers simply to a long-drawn-out wager between him and Amma, never to any form of preexistence of the fox as such. For the Dogon, the divin-

atory powers of the fox are not all that remarkable: in their view any animal of the bush knows the future. The fox is only one of these, and not even the “strongest.” If anything, the *key* (black ant, with whom the masks originated [Griaule 1938]), and the *ta* (hyena) “know more”; the ant, however, is too small for its tracks to be interpreted, and the hyena lacks “governability” (van Beek and Banga 1990). Moreover, historically conscious as the Dogon are, they insist that divination with the fox (fig. 7) is a relatively recent practice, having reached the area by way of the village of Ireli in the second half of the 19th century. Cowry-shell divination, still routinely practised, is considered the older form. The general term for divination (*armanga*) primarily indicates cowry shells, not the fox.

Is Sirius a double star? The ethnographic facts are quite straightforward. The Dogon, of course, know Sirius as a star (it is after all the brightest in the sky), calling it *dana tolo*, the hunter’s star (the game and the dogs are represented by Orion’s belt). Knowledge of the stars is not important either in daily life or in ritual. The position of the sun and the phases of the moon are more pertinent for Dogon reckoning. No Dogon outside the circle of Griaule’s informants had ever heard of *sigu tolo* or *pô tolo*, nor had any Dogon even heard of *èmè ya tolo* (according to Griaule in *RP* Dogon names for

Sirius and its star companions). Most important, no one, even within the circle of Griaule informants, had ever heard or understood that Sirius was a double star (or, according to *RP*, even a triple one, with B and C orbiting A). Consequently, the purported knowledge of the mass of Sirius B or the orbiting time was absent. The scheduling of the *sigu* ritual is done in several ways in Yugo Doguru, none of which has to do with the stars.<sup>10</sup>

Of course, the Dogon do have myths. These were reported in the pre-1947 publications and consist of the Dogon variant of the Mandé myth (Dieterlen 1941), relating the trek from Mandé to the escarpment, the division of authority among the different Dogon groups, the primacy of Arou, the order of seniority in their arrival on the escarpment, and their later dispersal. Another corpus of myth explains the separation of rainy and dry seasons (as the outcome of a struggle between Amma and Lèbè [Griaule 1938]) and other specific features of the physical environment such as rocks, springs, and specific cliff formations. The most important myth corpus consists of those connected with the masks and the *sigu*; the versions that can be heard nowadays form a variant of the ones recorded in *MD*, with some omissions and additions. They tell how the masks were found (by a woman) and became an integral part of (male) Dogon life. The story of the first *sigu* initiate is important and is retold on ritual occasions in the ritual language (*sigu sò*) that is part of this complex.<sup>11</sup>

By far the largest corpus of tradition, however, consists of song texts, especially the song cycles that form part of funerals. The *baja ni* and *sèmbèle ni*, which make for ten solid hours of continuous singing, form a splendid example. This collection of texts is attributed to a blind itinerant singer who roamed the area in the second half of the 19th century. The texts may be semi-mythical or quite down-to-earth, and singing is an integral part of ritual.<sup>12</sup>

Neither the myths nor the song texts—though they are sacred—are secret. In fact, the *tèm* is public knowledge. When confronted with Griaule's tales, Dogon elders remarked, "We have seen the *sigu*, and would we not know it?" or, facetiously, "The people who said that, were they by any chance present at the creation, or did they come before it?" Every Dogon knows the myths and parts of the songs, though not everyone can tell or sing them in full. In any case, not every Dogon is entitled to tell myths, as this may be reserved either to the old men of the lineage or to a special initiate of the *sigu* (*olubalu*) (for details, see Griaule 1938, Dieterlen and Rouch 1971). As boys, these initiates are instructed over

a period of three months not in secrets but in traditions everybody knows. Their task is to recite the relevant myths in the ritual language on special occasions (mainly the funerals of lineage elders). Their knowledge does not go beyond public knowledge. As informants stated, "If it is in the *tèm*, everybody knows it." However, these specialists know the corpus of public knowledge verbatim, by heart, more "correctly" and completely than other people, and can recite the myths without fault or hesitation. They receive their instruction not from their predecessors (who, being 60 years older, are either dead or too old to give any instruction) but from those elders who because of their own interest and motivation excel in mastering both the ritual language and the relevant texts.

Thus, the secrets of Dogon society are not at all of the initiatory kind. The knowledge defined by the Dogon as secret is, in fact, of the "skeleton in the cupboard" variety. The best-guarded secrets in Dogon society pertain to facts that shame them as members of their families or lineages, such as divisive past quarrels, or to the mechanisms and trappings of witchcraft and sorcery. Shame (*dogo*) being a crucial concept (neglected by Griaule), the less wholesome aspects of Dogon culture are continually swept under the carpet in dealings with foreigners. Even among themselves the Dogon hardly talk about past quarrels or present suspicions of witchcraft. It would be shameful both for them and for any audience to talk about undesirable things (van Beek 1983a). As the paramount vice in Dogon culture is false accusation, causing undeserved loss of face for the wrongfully accused (van Beek 1990b), people are very careful with spoken words.

If there are no creation myths, a different view of the supernatural beings is required. In the *DE* the *binu* and *Nommo*, in the *RP* Amma, Ogo, *Nommo*, and the fox are the central players in the creation drama. The absence of some important figures, especially the *yenèù*, *atùwùnù*, *yèbà*, and *jìnu* (the various sorts of collective spirits), is remarkable. The *binu* in Dogon religion are spirits that are referred to only as a collective (the number eight is indeed associated with them; in their honorific title they are said to come and drink in groups of eight), and they are highly ambiguous in nature. They can possess people (the shaman is *binugèju*) but cannot be seen, only heard, and have no other relation with the living than through trance. They are definitely not considered ancestors. Nor are the *babinu*, the totems of villages, wards, or castes, and in fact these are not even spirits but animals forbidden as food. The most immediately relevant aspect of these highly ambivalent "beings" is that nobody traces descent from them. Moreover, they are fairly marginal in ritual and in daily life. The shamans, their representatives, have a similarly marginal status in village society; they are neither feared nor sought after and are subject to subtle ridicule. Ancestors are indeed of some importance but do not share their identity with any of the other spirit beings.

*Nommo*, the water spirit, does have some association with the *binu* but is a far more formidable character.

10. In Yugo Doguru a trace of Griaule's star hunting still lingers. Informants say that in olden times people knew about a star that appeared during the year of the *sigu*, but further inquiry again leads to Griaule.

11. These myths emphatically state that this mask-*sigu* complex is derived from Yugo Doguru. There is no reason to reject this tradition as does Griaule (1938), who insists on tracing it to Mandé.

12. Griaule's tendency to restrict his information on masks and funerals to the mythical texts or expressions in *sigu sò* may have prevented him from seeing the relevance of this—as he called it—"Dogon amusement."

Each body of surface water has its Nommo, often a pair, male and female, and they are feared as is no other supernatural being. For a Sahelian people the Dogon have a remarkable fear of drowning, and tales of "the Nommo who grabs people" abound. Yet it is Nommo who figures as the central character in *DE*, where—as twins—he creates most of Dogon culture. In *RP* his role, though quite different, is at least as important. There he is a redeemer, a prime mover who through his deliberate sacrifice redeems the sins and transgressions of Ogo, the first created being. After his immolation, Nommo, resurrected, serves as a culture hero. These two aspects of the Griaulean Nommo—the creator and the redeemer—are nowhere to be found. What can be found is a fascination with danger embodied in the Nommo. It may be that this fascination gave rise to the elaboration of this figure in creative and redeeming moulds, but in present-day Dogon culture around Sanga, the notion of the Nommo as the key to creation is totally absent.

Symbols are the hallmark of both creation texts. Griaule evokes a picture of a people surrounding themselves with the symbols of their mythology, reliving their mythical past through almost every object they fabricate or use. This is incorrect. The Dogon tend to make single-purpose artifacts, and this results in an elaborate array of household objects; ethnoarchaeological research has uncovered more than 1,000 (Lane 1986, Bedaux 1987). The symbolic content of these artifacts varies, and only a minority are used in ritual. Moreover, the specific objects described in the Griaule texts as symbolic containers are often quite different from those actually used in ritual. A number of symbolic objects are missing from the texts, and some items crucial to his symbolic analysis have no symbolic value whatsoever. Items missing from the texts include cotton, the plants *pèdinge* and *sadélé*, specific pottery, and clothing, especially men's trousers. The reportedly huge symbolic content of the basket (*taju*), the loom, one type of granary (*guyo ya*), and the split drum/wooden trough (*kôrò*) is absent in my data, despite my prodding of informants. What is evident in both *RP* and *DE* and indeed can be found in the field is the general fascination of the Dogon with things—a trait Griaule comments upon in *DE* but does not consider in his analysis. (Of course, the same holds for Griaule, a museum anthropologist himself.) Similarly, the body or its parts may be invoked in some instances in reference to objects, e.g., the locks on granary doors are said to have "arms." However, this is not a pervasive source of metaphor. On the whole, body symbolism plays a very limited part in Dogon religion compared with many other African religions.

Drawings and diagrams, so prominent in the *RP* text, are in fact of limited importance in Dogon religion. When drawing, the Dogon primarily picture masks, supplemented by drawings of animals or—sometimes—crops, while some decorations have no recognizable signification whatsoever. Drawings of masks are often highly stylized. Reptiles and amphibians that belong to the Nommo are frequently drawn but are not represented in masks. Griaule writes that the Dogon discern

various levels of pictorial representation, consonant with the various levels of initiation. As I have argued, these levels cannot be retraced, nor can the different levels of initiation be found in the different diagrams. The terms Griaule uses for them simply mean different things. In his view *bumò*, *yala*, *tônu*, and *tòy* represent stages of deeper knowledge; for my informants *bumò* is a continuous track in the sand (made by a serpent), *yala* the intermittent track of a bird, fox, or ant, and *tônu* a drawn picture, while *tòy* means "truth." As with his notions of different *paroles*, Griaule, with his informants, constructed a hierarchy of significations that have no hierarchical relationship to one another.

The same can be shown with respect to numbers. Griaule's texts are replete with numbers, as if the Dogon were thoroughly cabalistic, calculating every move. Some numbers do function as symbols, the principal ones being 3 (male) and 4 (female). Other numbers are relevant, too, in their contexts, 8 and 12 among them. However, the 22 + 2 symbolism that Griaule posits as crucial is not retracable, nor is the 66 of *RP*. In short, no "system" of correlated number symbolism can be found. The scope of the number symbolism present is very limited, evident in only personal and "magical" ritual. Finally, cosmology does not serve as a symbolic referent either. In fact, the cardinal directions have been de-cosmologized: "East" and "West" refer not to the directions of sunrise and sunset but to the orientation of the escarpment (in fact north-east/south-west).

Among the analytical concepts used by Griaule, the term *nyama* is a special case. According to Griaule it means "vital force," parallel to the Melanesian *mana*. His earliest writings express his conviction that a *mana*-like concept will be relevant. It surfaces in *MD* and becomes more substantial in later writings (1940, 1952) as well as in *DE* and *RP*. The problematic character of the term is noted by Calame-Griaule in her Dogon-French dictionary (1965). Morphologically the word does not belong to the Dogon lexicon and may be Bambara in origin. Dogon language does have a similar word, *ngawa*, meaning "polluted," "rotten," or "spoilt," implying danger and decay. Though Griaule's definition of *nyama* does include an aspect of danger, it is supposed to be positive, something sought after, a life-giving force. My Dogon informants do not recognize it in the form or definition given in the texts. For them a parallel concept would be *panga* (force), a word also used for physical and especially muscular force. However, as an analytical concept the notion of *panga* is not important for Dogon religion. Altars, when used for a long time, do gather some *panga*, but that is not the goal of sacrifice. Rather, it is an annoyance, even a reason to abandon a particular altar (van Beek 1988).

*DE* and *RP* are replete with etymologies of Dogon lexemes. Associations such as the ones in *DE* of "four" with "sun" and "lizard" or "big" with "mother" and "cow" or "seven" with "cloth" and "the word" are not retracable at all. Throughout, my Dogon informants were very reluctant to reduce Dogon words to anything other than their habitual meanings; in fact, these Dogon

explanations tend towards precise and individual lexemic identification, not fuzzy etymologies. Moreover, most Griaulean etymologies result from a thorough negation of the tonal system, which on the contrary is a crucial lexemic and syntactic constituent.

Dogon religion is not all-pervasive. Most of agriculture, most of daily interaction between people, be it at the family level or elsewhere, is lived out without any reference whatsoever to religious matters. There is a tendency to define religious issues as an occupation for old men: they take care of the relationship between the living and the other world, and both other categories of adults, women and young men, simply depend on them for that function. Furthermore, religion is very much an open option for those who are interested in it and can be relatively neglected by those who choose to do so. The same sort of "secularization" pertains to the two categories Griaule deems of crucial importance, twins and blacksmiths.

Of course, as in any African religion, twins are considered special, but they are not the essence of human existence Griaule makes them out to be or the original form of creation. Twin festivals are held and twins are respected, but after the festivities no unusual attention is bestowed upon them. No myth of their origin has been found. They do function, however, in several folk stories, one of which has mythical qualities (the one explaining the origin of thunder). Characteristically, the twins in that tale exhibit monumental stupidity, highly amusing for the Dogon, who, indeed, consider twins to be intellectually slightly inferior since the same intelligence has to be divided between two.

Blacksmiths, along with the other castes, do have a specific social niche. They are charged with dampening conflicts, helping to maintain at least overt harmony. They also have specific ritual functions in the case of stillbirths and on some other occasions, but their ritual role is restricted. In no way do they function as the culture heroes of *RP* and *DE*.

## The Origin of the Dogon Myths: An Attempt at Reconstruction

Though the principal elements of the Griaule texts are not to be discovered among the present-day Dogon, even as shadowy remnants of a largely forgotten past, nevertheless Griaule and Dieterlen did gather some confirmatory data during their field research in the Dogon area, mainly in Sanga. My exposé by no means implies that the texts are to be regarded as forgeries; nor are they the result of an overly active imagination on the part of the author. The data as recorded in both texts did stem from a particular field situation. The question is how these texts were produced. In this tentative reconstruction, I accept that an anthropological account is a story, a tale about tales, constructed by the anthropologist and his collaborators—the product of a bicultural interaction. The quest for the origin of this particular tale about tales, then, falls into two parts: What is spe-

cific about the field situation of Griaule's research among the Dogon, and where, if not from Dogon knowledge, do the elements of the tales come from?

The fieldwork situation of Griaule's research has been analysed by several authors: Lettens (1971), Clifford (1983), and Saccone (1984), to name just a few. Though they disagree on some fundamental issues, all are more or less critical of Griaule, pointing at some easily observed characteristics of his work. What is lacking is an examination of the interaction of these characteristics with Dogon norms and values.

As hinted above, Dogon culture is oriented towards overt harmony. People may debate with great passion but have to reach consensus in the end; a lasting difference is intolerable. Dogon are very slow to correct each other, leaving the other to his opinions rather than furnishing the correct information. Their internal social structure is hierarchical, based on seniority; the old men are the ones who know and consequently should not be contradicted. Respect for age and for relatively small age differences such as those between consecutive siblings is essential in social interaction. This respect for seniority combined with the tendency towards harmony results in a "courtesy bias" towards high-ranking people and a tendency to restrict the flow of information to the lower echelons. Inferiors are denied information; the apparent wishes of a superior constrain the information given to him.

A second pertinent aspect of Dogon culture is its historical punctuation. A new item, be it a new agricultural invention or a new explanation of a hitherto unexplained phenomenon, is easily accepted and integrated into the preexisting mould. New agricultural techniques are quickly adopted (van Beek 1990a), new tools appropriated eagerly by the local blacksmiths, while new etiological tales find their way into accepted lore. For example, in explaining the differences between white people and Dogon the following tale was told:

A father, ancestor of us all, once drank too much beer, and in his intoxication, slept with his genitals exposed. Of his two sons, the younger one ridiculed him, while the older one, walking backwards, covered his father. As a blessing the older, respectful, son became white and rich, the younger poor and Dogon.

Thus the story of the drunken Noah (Genesis 9:21–27) has found its way into the stories of these Dogon, who emphatically denied that this was a "white" story. Traditionalists and Christians unanimously declared it to be Dogon: it belonged to the *tèm*. In many other instances the same process was discernible: foreign elements were adopted and in a single generation became "traditional." Thus the alms festival of the Muslims has been adapted to Dogon culture, resulting in the "purely" Dogon ritual of *sadaka*, in which almsgiving has been changed into the distribution of beer, kola nuts, and blessings. The Dogon are quite aware of the gaps in their etiological tales, eager to fill them with new stories, and see no particular reason for any fundamental distinction between things learned from their Dogon forefathers and

from newcomers. In their view, hierarchy and seniority are based not upon the content of the tales or upon the amount of knowledge but upon the history of settlement. Consequently the arrival of new techniques and tales can in no way upset the fundamental relations on the escarpment.

To this culture came Marcel Griaule, and after extensive surveys he settled in Sanga. A museum anthropologist, he was oriented to the study of material culture, though his real fascination was with religion. One of his goals, already stated in his earlier works, was to show that African cultures, contrary to current European (and especially French) opinion, enshrined philosophies equal to the best found in classical Greece or India: "this conceptual structure . . . reveals an internal coherence, a secret wisdom, and an apprehension of ultimate realities equal to that which we Europeans conceive ourselves to have attained" (Griaule and Dieterlen 1954:83).

Other preconceptions were part of his baggage, too. One had to do with the intercultural validity of the notion of *mana*, which among the Dogon he identified in the notion of *nyama*. *Mana* was an important topic of discussion in French anthropology when Griaule set out for the field. Mauss, his teacher, used it as a ubiquitous explanatory concept, and Griaule expected to find it. He was convinced that there was a coherent and deep explanation for sacrifice, and he did not content himself with the explanations given by his informants. (The process of probing can be illustrated by his battering question, "Who comes to drink the blood of the sacrifice?", one of his crucial leading questions in the interviews with Ogotemmêli.) His interpretation of sacrifice hinges on the notion of *nyama*. The use of this concept enabled him to develop a pseudo-emic theory in which sacrifice was hardly linked with social structure or interpersonal conflict, let alone with change, but directed to the accumulation of a supernatural principle, Mauss's *mana*. Another leading idea was his view of a culture as a cryptological system. Surface phenomena had to be interpreted, made to yield ever-deeper levels of understanding. Symbols were signs of a hidden language open only to the initiate (Sperber 1975), and he evolved a multilayered theory of symbolism to accommodate the awkward fact that there were several "ultimate" revelations. In Griaule's view, any culture harbours secrets that may not be revealed directly to an observer; cultural defences have to be breached.

One consequence of these assumptions is that Griaule perceived fieldwork as a military operation (Clifford 1983:132) with the explicit goal of "penetrating" cultural defences, forcing the revelation of mysteries and the unraveling of the codes of the adversary. Like any assault, fieldwork has to be total, involving many individual attacks on the cultural stronghold. His *DE* is quite clear on this: in the opening chapters he describes the fieldwork setting as a military camp where his various subalterns engage the "enemy" each in his or her fashion and with appropriate tactics. Griaule's dealings with the Dogon of Ogol (not with Ogotemmêli) sound high-handed today—correcting informants on mistakes,

supplementing their information with data from his own notebooks, dismissing them when they failed to complete their tasks. Of course, much of this is more idiom than field reality. Though Griaule described his dealings with the Dogon in this way, this does not preclude his having had relations of a different kind with some of them, notably with Ogotemmêli. In *DE* the anthropologist is the student, to be taught by the master. Yet even in the "series of meandering talks" that make up the core of *DE*, Griaule is very much present as an active agent.

Clifford cogently argues that for Griaule both these roles are part of an encompassing definition of the field situation, that of the theatre (Clifford 1983:139). The notions of inequality of roles, of forced interaction between partners, and of concealment of true selves and purposes lie at the very core of Griaule's fieldwork paradigm. Here, Clifford's argument can be supplemented. The Dogon, too, have a greater than average sense of theatre. Their culture, especially in the mask complex, is very much a performative one, in which the public persona dominates the private one and the main source of social recognition is a splendid performance in rhetoric or dance. So, for their part, the Dogon blend well into this definition of the fieldwork encounter, playing their part with creative intelligence.

In those days, inevitably, Griaule was part of a colonial presence, and the white man, endowed with power and prestige, ranked high in Dogon eyes. In contrast to many colonial anthropologists Griaule in no way tried to diminish this ascribed status but rather capitalized on it. Collecting masks and other objects was easy: the objections of their owners could be overridden. His view of the white man's *mission civilisatrice*, which provoked a conflict with Leiris (Leiris 1934), must have served as a rationale for both his fieldwork and his collecting practice. His position of power was complemented by a strong personality, with firm convictions and clear preferences; Lebeuf, though hardly critical, mentions "son opiniâtreté au travail" (Lebeuf 1987:xxiii). Dogon who worked with him (or should one say "for" him?) still comment on his impatience: "Griaule was always in a hurry, allowing neither himself nor us any time." Though the stories that circulate in Sanga of Griaule's hitting an informant are probably apocryphal, they do characterize the way many Dogon see him even now: as a forceful personality, in a situation of undisputed power, with a clearly expressed preference for specific information and his own ways of getting at it.

Griaule's fieldwork organization was characterized by a long series of short field trips, intensive use of a limited number of informants and one "*informateur principal*," limited command of the Dogon language, and a multidisciplinary or at least multiperson approach. His research was a matter of "expeditions," focused field stays with teams, each lasting up to three months. He explicitly defends this practice (Griaule 1957) as a means of catching one's breath for the informants as well as the ethnographer. Dieterlen has followed the same prac-

tice to this day. Informants were usually paid, and therefore they gained not only prestige from close association with the white man but also a sizable income in the slack season. The research team operated from a venue close to the tourist hotel of Sanga, formerly a government rest house, later a research house owned by the CNRS, and now the home of Madame Dieterlen. Its situation outside the village perimeters of Ogol (one of the largest villages of the Sanga complex) does allow for interviewing informants but is not well suited to participation in village life.

But then participation was not the model of Griaule's field approach. His confrontational style, evident in both *DE* and his fieldwork manual (1957), not only probably better suited his personality and the colonial situation but also was an integral part of his definition of this form of cultural contact: a mutual theatrical performance, with inevitable backstage manoeuvres and hidden agendas. Clifford's analysis is confirmed by the information I received from members of his Dogon crew of long standing. For them Griaule was—and still is—a figure of slightly more than human proportions, with an uncanny insight into the hidden thoughts and motives of people and—especially—the whereabouts of caverns, masks, and statues. "Like a *binugèjini* (shaman) he went through the mountains straight to the place where it was hidden," a Sanga informant told me.

This confrontational style, on a more epistemological level, rendered his approach more "etic" than "emic." He confronted his informants with items, be they artifacts, plants, animals, or stars, and expected them to provide adequate information immediately. For instance, in his research into insect classification, insects were collected and presented to his informants with the explicit expectation that they would have a different name for each and every species. One of his informants told me, "He thought each *kèkè* (cricket) had its own Dogon name, and he did not stop." And that is what he got, one name for each and every insect: not just a *bòjò kèkè* (dung beetle), with two varieties, red and black (these are indeed differentiated by the Dogon), but a "horse dung beetle," a "donkey dung beetle," and different beetles for the dung of black monkeys, elephants, hyenas, turtles, and—closer to home—chickens and goats. Creativity cannot be denied to these informants, as they distinguished between a "beetle for the dung of bulls" (*na jinu bòjò kèkè*), a "big horse dung beetle," and a beetle wallowing only in the dung of grey horses (*sò purugu bòjò kèkè*) (Griaule 1961:22–23).<sup>13</sup>

This kind of overdifferentiation—and naming 24 different species of dung beetles can surely be called overdifferentiation—can only be produced (and believed) if there is a strong conviction on the part of the researcher that Dogon culture is virtually limitless and disposes of universal knowledge. Of course, it is also the product of the inability to take no for an answer and, for that matter, an unwillingness on the part of the infor-

ants to disappoint the researcher. Something similar happened to me when I was looking into colour terms. Using a standard colour chart, I had my informants name the various colours. Though I pointed out to them that I was looking for single lexemes, "simple colour terms," they regarded it as their duty to name each and every one of the 400-odd colours on the chart. This insistence stemmed from two sources. Given their general fascination with objects, there is a Dogon conviction that they should in fact be able to name and classify anything that comes their way, a kind of mild cultural hubris that may lure them into ridiculously detailed descriptions. The other reason is that naming becomes a game: it is fun to try to find ingenious—and sometimes correct—names for new objects. Afterwards they acknowledged to me that it was not at all necessary, but they did have a good time doing it.

Such a game must have been especially interesting when it became a secret language among informants versus the foreign researcher. Here the informants' theatrical definition of fieldwork, as of Dogon culture itself, reveals itself. Judging from the reactions of the old Griaule informants, such a situation, in which they eventually gained the upper hand, had a strong appeal for them. In the days of colonial supremacy, the chance to control the information flow balanced the scales of power.

Using performance to ridicule the white man, by the way, is not at all uncommon in Dogon culture. For example, there is a mask representing the white man, clothed in pantaloons and shirt, the head covered by a huge wooden mask painted a fiery red with long wavy hair, a wild flowing beard, and a hooked nose. In the dance in Griaule's day a colonial officer was imitated writing small money notes for the audience and saluting when he received his "taxes." In our postcolonial days the tourist is imitated; the same mask operates with a wooden "camera," forcing its way through crowds in order to get a good shot. Especially interesting is the Sanga variant (*MD*, p. 583): here the white person sits on a chair, with two Dogon sitting on the floor; waving a notebook, the "Nazarene" asks the silliest questions: the mask of the anthropologist!

This is not to say that—in the case of the insects—the Dogon informants willfully misled Griaule, just that they could engage in harmless games in which information was produced that did not exist beforehand, all the while clearly conforming to the white man's wishes. His list of insect names, I cannot help feeling, should have alerted Griaule to what was happening; in fact, he himself in his manual assumes that informants are habitually lying and that the researcher has to break through this resistance (Griaule 1957). Yet, not a shadow of doubt clouds his pages either about the validity of the information or about his own interpretations and cabalistic arrangements. This field technique—presenting informants with as complete an array as possible of etic data in order to elicit a presumably endlessly detailed cultural response—was also used to investigate Dogon knowledge about astronomy and human anatomy, Griaule deploying star maps and anatomical models.

13. In a semantic analysis of this very article Calame-Griaule (1987:9) calls it a "forme de composée extrêmement productive."

Griaule's critical information, including all of *DE* and *RP*, came from a few informants with whom he had worked intensively and for a long time. For Ambara, with Yébéné the main source of *RP*, this is clear enough: he was first recruited in 1931 (*RP*, p. 209), worked with Paulme (1940:13) and for Leiris (1948:ix), and continued to work for Griaule. Ogotemmêli seems to be an exception, as according to *DE* it seems as if he invited Griaule to come to him without any previous contact between the two. However, according to Kogèm, his interpreter at that time, Griaule had worked with Ogotemmêli for three consecutive stays (over three years) before the war, long before the famous conversations took place. Other informants are reported to have consulted with Ogotemmêli in their dealings with Griaule. As a consequence, Ogotemmêli knew very well what Griaule wanted to hear. Lebeuf (1987:xxv) as a consequence, compares Ogotemmêli to Hesiod. As Lettens has suggested, the intermission of World War II, which imposed a six-year hiatus for the researchers, might have heightened the tension when they returned to the same informants after all that time, expecting to find new riches.

The combination of the Dogon orientation to providing information and Griaule's research organization, approach, and personality created a fieldwork culture of the "initiated," both Dogon and "Nazarene." The product was a Dogon culture geared to the expectations of the principal researcher, a culture governed by myth and cabbala, whose "real secrets" were known only to the very few. The result is neither Dogon nor "Nazarene" but a curious mixture of the two, bearing the imprint of a European view of African culture while at the same time testifying to the creativity of the African experience. It is definitely not an individual fraud. Most of the people concerned—Griaule himself, Dieterlen, and at least to a considerable extent his close informants—believed in it more or less implicitly.

The interpreters were crucial in this process, as Griaule continued to work through them. Kogèm and Amadingué were in the course of the inquiries transformed from translators into informants. Kogèm, a young boy at the time of the Ogotemmêli talks, did not remain an interpreter but with the help of Griaule entered the army and eventually attained the rank of captain. In the latter part of his life he presented himself as an initiate in Dogon thought, considering Ogotemmêli's revelations sacred truth. He liked to view and present himself as one of the old men of the Dogon, one of the very few wholly initiated (he died in Bamako in 1987). Thus, he never felt at ease with the cosmological myths recorded in *RP*, which stemmed mainly from or through Ambara. Short of condemning them as a construct, he expressly considered them peripheral at best. After all, they did undermine his expertise. Amadingué, serving as a young interpreter before Ambara, became *informateur principal* and gradually also developed into an initiate; he used his considerable intelligence and knowledge to help Calame-Griaule with her dictionary (1968) and sociolinguistic research (1965) as a full-blown informant, albeit with a superior command of the French language

(a situation facilitated by his status as a lineage elder of Ogol). Some of the most recent interpretations (de Heusch 1987) stem from him; his death in 1987 was a severe blow to the ongoing research. Ambara, the central figure in the *RP* as both informant and interpreter, is another story. Paulme mentions his ingenuity and descriptive acumen and marvels at his capacity for creative invention. "Ambara's information on customs was precise, but the interpretation he spontaneously provided of these customs hardly ever found confirmation from the other inhabitants of the village" (Paulme 1940:566, my translation).<sup>14</sup> At the time of the *RP* information, 1950–55, Ambara was established as a mature Dogon elder, whose French, though far from perfect, did allow him to work with Griaule as an interpreter. According to a later interpreter, as an adult Ambara was unwilling to share access to the Nazarene with other Dogon, refusing also any translation help from the—younger—Amadingué.

Despite the collective aspects of this creation of a mystagogical Dogon culture by the interaction of researcher, informants, and interpreters, Griaule himself is very much present in the analysis too. The closing chapter of *DE*, where Griaule—unaided by any informant—links the cosmological system produced by Ogotemmêli with the zodiacal signs of Western astrology (Griaule 1948), may serve as an example. Dieterlen's informants and interpreters today say that Griaule exaggerated, even though they are on the whole not overly aware of the publications in question. It would be highly improbable that Griaule, armed with strong convictions as he was, would refrain from stressing his own interpretation in his publications, which is, after all, the right of any anthropologist. But this aggravated the fundamental problem that even the people most intimately associated with him often do not recognize these writings as valid or as relevant descriptions of parts of Dogon culture.

Griaule died in 1956. Since then no new revelations have been forthcoming, though Germaine Dieterlen has continued yearly research trips to the area. The promise of the title page of *RP* ("Tome I, fascicule 1") has never been fulfilled. Dieterlen as co-author published *RP* after Griaule's death. Her influence on the book must have been considerable. She sought new revelations but could not find anyone with the same "cosmological expertise." Just before his death, Amadingué confided to me that it was impossible to find anyone who knew a creation myth. Discussing the situation with Dieterlen, he had remarked that good informants could not be found but had to be trained (*élève*). He was quite right. But with the death of both the main sources of myth construction and Griaule, the prime mover, the corpus of myth remained largely as it was in 1956, though not all the Ambara tales were included in *RP*. Dieterlen is still

14. "Les informations d'Ambara concernant les coutumes étaient assez exactes, mais l'interprétation qu'il fournissait spontanément des ces coutumes ne trouvait presque jamais confirmation auprès des autres habitants du village."

working on the second volume, in which the contributions of Amadingué are added to the corpus. The main publications from the Griaule team since 1956 have been either elaborations on the existing myths (Dieterlen 1962), attempts to integrate *DE* and *RP* (Palau-Marti 1957, Dieterlen 1989), or additional ethnography (Dieterlen 1982). It is worth remarking that in the latter book Dieterlen has returned to the pre-Ogotemméli mode of ethnography, describing a facet of Dogon culture not fully recorded before. This book resembles her early writings (up to 1951) much more than her handling of Griaule's revelations and is a solid piece of ethnographic description.

### The Myths as Bricolage

Clearly the myths in the two texts do not stem from an endogenous Dogon tradition. Yet, even if they have been constructed in a peculiar interaction between the parties in the research, the question of where the tales come from remains. Whence did the creators of the texts derive at least the elements of the myths? In answering this type of question, I have to speculate.

First of all, neither *DE* or *RP* contains a real text. This fact, little appreciated in the commentaries, is of crucial importance. Myths throughout the world are stories told to an audience. Not so here. *DE* is a discourse, an interchange, not a mythical creation story. Similarly, *RP* is not a text at all—my account of it has simply made it look like one. In fact, it consists of a sustained ethnographic commentary on signs, symbols, and drawings interspersed with isolated statements from informants and borrowings from folktales. The authors themselves acknowledge the absence of a story line (*RP*, p. 15) but do not seem to realize its implications: without a story there is no myth.

In any case, as both *DE* and *RP* must have emerged from sustained bicultural interaction, several ways of constructing them and various sources must be considered. On the whole the later revelations (*RP*) seem to contain fewer Dogon and more foreign elements than the earlier Ogotemméli ones. *DE* is mainly constructed out of scraps of diverse origin. Some elements are clearly traditional Dogon: the ants' nests, the central role of the *key* (ant), twins as a special category (though not that special), the association of *binu* with the number eight, the numbers three and four as symbols for male and female, etc. More generally, the preoccupation with sexuality and the fascination with objects are genuinely Dogon, as is the importance of speech and the metaphoric usage of "the word." Though the gap between *DE* and *RP* is very large, the method of reasoning is much the same. A continued fascination with twins, an elaboration of number systems, and the free-floating association with any object in the Dogon sphere that characterize *DE* are found throughout *RP* as well. It is significant that the style of "bricolage" is very much the same but the net result, the "message," entirely different. The cultural interaction of Griaule and his informants con-

tinued to produce totally new tales. One clear instance is the Sirius story. The 1950 article is significantly different from the later *RP* version. One major change is in the drawings: very few of the drawings in the article, though crucial for the understanding of Sirius, recur in *RP*. Furthermore, when comparable drawings do reappear they receive very different explanations.<sup>15</sup> It seems that remembering a story (and elaborating upon it) is much easier for informants in an oral culture than recalling a drawing with captions.

An important source for Ogotemméli's bricolage seems to have been the Dogon *êwênê* (traditional stories). Dogon know hundreds of these stories (Calame-Griaule 1987a), which are either cited in public speeches or related in their own right. Among the many Dogon stories that may have inspired Ogotemméli are the tales of the twins that generated the rainbow, the miraculous tree, and many others. A clear case is the story of Ogo hiding in a woven (Mossi!) basket (*RP*, pp. 178, 179), which is a well-known *êwênê* told by the Dogon with the rabbit instead of Ogo as its hero. As these stories are usually distributed far beyond any ethnic borders, tales from other groups (Bambara, Sonray, Bozo, Mossi) have contributed, too. A few items may be derived from song texts.

With Ambara, new sources and inspirations surfaced. First of all, his knowledge of other Malian cultures, notably the Bambara and the Sonray, was important. He spent considerable time outside Dogon country, partly in Bamako, the capital of Mali, and used some models that may be traced to these cultures. Indeed, Griaule and Dieterlen used the self-same Dogon informants and interpreters in their researches in these neighbouring cultures (*RP*, p. 9). Ambara's French education—his study abroad as well as his schooling in Sanga—furnished him with yet further cultural models.

One major source for the *RP*, however, is not African at all. An important part of it, as well as crucial concepts used in the text, stems from the Bible. The concept of a creation *ab nihilo*, the creative word, the two creations, the rebellion of Ogo, the concept of atonement (by Nommo), the crucifixion (of Nommo), the eight people saved in an ark are just the beginning. The story of the redeeming sacrifice of Nommo is even closer to the Bible: Nommo is sacrificed standing upright, arms outstretched, tied to a tree (with horizontal branches) with iron: during his suffering he thirsts and is offered a cup of water, which he spits out. After his death (and dismemberment) he is resurrected by Amma and as a resurrected being leads the continuing creation of mankind (*RP*, pp. 183–90). It is astonishing that the biblical origin of these tales has never been noted either by Griaule<sup>16</sup>

15. For instance, fig. v of 1950a resembles fig. 86 of *RP*, p. 252, where it signifies something totally different ("separation of the twins"), while fig. xii of 1950b more or less reappears in *RP*, p. 63, fig. 2, as "the table of Amma," as well as in *RP*, p. 127, fig. 28, as "hibiscus."

16. For the Bambara myths recorded by Dieterlen the Near Eastern origin has been commented upon by de Heusch (1985:168).

or by Dieterlen, who is well-versed in Protestantism. The influence of Bible stories can also be traced in the earlier works. In *MD* Griaule notes the names of the first Dogon, recording in a footnote that alternatives were "Adama" and "Hawa" (p. 46). He gives this information without any comment, seemingly taking no notice of the biblical (or in this case quite possibly Islamic) connection.<sup>17</sup> Some biblical motifs may be discerned in *DE*, too, but they are few and their ancestry is more tentative. In any case the Dogon have had ample exposure to the tales of the scriptural religions. Islam has been an important influence for centuries in the surroundings of the Bandiagara escarpment—as an enemy but still as a source of knowledge. In addition to Islam, the Dogon of Sanga have had first-hand contact with Christian missionaries since the early 1930s, in fact the same stretch of time in which the anthropologists were present (and much less intermittently). Ambara had frequented the Protestant mission (Sudan Evangelical Mission, predominantly Baptist) since his early youth (though he was never converted) and knew these stories quite well. Some of his kinsmen nowadays remember the vivid way in which he could tell them.

Yet, despite all the odds and ends picked up from the "trésor" of Dogon culture, from neighbouring civilizations, and from Christianity and Islam, much of the myths consisted of new, innovative creations by remarkable people combining great intelligence with a creative imagination. They managed to create fascinating and coherent mythical accounts, thus conveying their own world view, stressing those aspects that interested the researcher, and casting off the shackles of social reality. Besides new story elements their principal and quite astonishing achievement is the construction of a system—a close integration of elements hitherto unrelated. As Father Kerdran, a French Catholic missionary who has lived most of his long life in Dogon country, marvelled, "C'est étonnant comment ils toujours rejoignent leur pieds."

Finally, despite the genius of the Dogon in building a mythical edifice with bricks of very different origins, the influence of Griaule himself in the representation of Dogon mythology cannot be overlooked. His influence in both the production of data and their interpretation is of foremost importance. The most haunting and elusive of all Griaulean statements will serve as a final example: the Sirius double-star system, often called the Sirius mystery (Temple 1976). How could the Dogon impart such detailed astronomical knowledge to Griaule? Some astronomers (Pesch and Pesch 1977, Ovenden 1976) have commented upon it, stressing the fact that these revelations closely corresponded with the knowledge available at that time in astronomy. It has been suggested that an occasional astronomer touring the area furnished the Dogon with this knowledge (Sagan

1979). Though this is possible, I think something quite different happened. According to Amadingué, who worked with the team at the time of the revelations by Ambara and Yébéné and consulted with Ambara as much as the latter would allow, Ambara never spoke in terms of a double-star system. What he did speak about always, according to Amadingué, were stars of different "generations"<sup>18</sup> (*toгу*; the French translation is his), meaning (and pointing out) two adjacent stars in the sky, which were to be considered as father and son to Sirius as a "grandfather." These stars, as Amadingué pointed them out to me, were the two other stars of the Dog constellation. If this is so, then Griaule must have interpreted the information given by Ambara and Yébéné in a different fashion, as a system of double and triple stars. The point is that Griaule himself was very much aware of the astronomical specificities of Sirius, having read astronomy during his studies in Paris. Sure enough, his references in the *RP* to the Sirius system all date from these years. Just as he linked Ogotemmêli with the zodiacal signs, so it was Griaule himself, driven by his own convictions, who transformed *pô tolo* and *sigu tolo* into a mystery, linking the astronomical data he helped to produce with current astronomical knowledge. In that light it is interesting to see the way in which the remainder of the Griaule circle of informants interpreted these stars after his death. Though they do speak about *sigu tolo*, they disagree completely with each other as to which star is meant; for some it is an invisible star that should rise to announce the *sigu*, for another it is Venus that through a different position appears as *sigu tolo*. All agree, however, that they learned about the star from Griaule.

Summing up, the Dogon ethnography produced by Griaule after World War II cannot be taken at face value. It is the product of a complex interaction between a strong-willed researcher, a colonial situation, an intelligent and creative body of informants, and a culture with a courtesy bias and a strong tendency to incorporate foreign elements. The tendency towards the creation of increasingly "deep knowledge" shows itself much more towards the end of Griaule's life, with a decreasing amount of "Dogon-ness" marking the texts. Four ethnographic periods can be discerned: pre-Ogotemmêli, *DE*, *RP*, and post-Griaule. The first period is characterized by valid description, the second and the third by the creation of a culture that creates culture, and the fourth by a return to descriptive validity, partly through a re-hash of the revelations, and, we may hope, by the publication of *RP*'s second volume.

The final question, however, must be to what extent Griaule managed to remain unaware of the problems outlined here. It is hard to understand how someone who warned so eloquently against inventive informants remained naive about what was happening between him and his informants. The other ethnographers who

17. Goody (1987:129) does acknowledge this aspect of Dogon culture, but he attributes it to the influence of literate cultures, the long-established Islamic centers of Djenné (instead of Mopti) and Timbuctu.

18. John Hawkins of Brigham Young University ingeniously suggests that the French words *génération* and *giration* (orbit) may have been confused.

worked among the Dogon, such as Leiris, de Ganay, and Paulme, must be reckoned better ethnographers than Griaule; their contributions still stand.

It is possible to judge from his own writings that Griaule might have preferred to be evaluated as a creative writer rather than as a painstaking and patient scientist. After all, he did choose a format for the *DE* (the *RP* format is not specifically his) quite different from that of the usual ethnography, adopting a literary form that had already brought him some success through his Abyssinian novel *Les flambeurs d'hommes*. His was a sympathetic project, aiming at the vindication of the African in the eyes of the European. His primary goal was never just to understand Dogon behaviour but to prove a point about African thought. And so he did, though in a different way than he thought; claiming to write ethnography he offered anthropology a glimpse into the highly intriguing territory between fact and fiction, the realm of created cultures, European as well as African. At the rim of the science of man, he embarked upon a veritable journey into the realm of intercultural fiction. Though the *DE* and *RP* revelations may not be regarded as *documents Dogons*, they are outstanding as *documents humaines*, tributes to the convictions of a European and to the ingenious creativity of an African people.

## Comments

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Following on the success of Freeman's attack on the classic studies of Margaret Mead, van Beek presents the professional anthropological community with yet another attack by a second-generation ethnologist upon the original and classic work of a first-generation one, conducted some 50 years ago and at a very different stage of development of the discipline. Hindsight is of course 20/20, but fault finding and blame fixing a posteriori are not the same as substantively increasing the breadth, scope, and depth of extant ethnographies.

In assessing van Beek's article we have to ask whether it enriches the corpus of data or expands our insights into the functioning of Dogon culture or whether, in contrast, it merely reflects unrecognized changes in Dogon society as a result of intensive acculturation and perhaps bias in the choice of informants knowledgeable in the subject of interest. That van Beek failed to obtain information confirming that obtained by Griaule 50 years ago does not a priori mean that Griaule's information did not obtain at that time.

His article is not scientific, because he does not provide us the information we need to evaluate his statements; the reader simply has to believe them or not.

A clear explanation of why Tireli is so typical a Dogon village that there was no need to study the range of intracultural variation is missing, as are detailed life-histories of his key Dogon informants and a discussion of his own biases. This is especially strange because he himself raises the issue of anthropological constructs and informant accuracy. It looks as if no improvements have been made in anthropological fieldwork procedures over the last 50 years. Only when we have the monograph on the Dogon that he has promised will we be in a position to judge who is right about what.

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Ethnography and collage have much in common. Both are constituted of fragments or pieces of a whole that, when assembled anew, have decidedly varying affinities to the original. Furthermore, as with artists, significant events in ethnographers' lives often influence their oeuvres, giving rise to major changes in style, subject, and point of view. As van Beek points out, the changes in Griaule's publications from the early, generally empirical works such as *Masques dogons* (1938) to the later and far more abstract philosophical tracts such as *Dieu d'eau* (1948) and *Renard pâle* (1965) are very striking. Van Beek's analysis touches on a number of critical themes in Griaule's work, most important the presence or absence of comparable contemporary traditions and the unique insights offered by Griaule's "informants." My own recent research (1987) on a linguistically related culture, the Batammaliba ("Somba") of Togo/Benin, and inquiries into the field methodologies of Melville J. Herskovits (Blieer 1988a, 1989) suggest that such investigations often offer key insights into fieldwork perspectives and methodologies. Several factors arising as much from Griaule's life history as from his field methods (the focus of the van Beek essay) or literary orientations (an important theme of Clifford's work [1988]) strike me as germane to the discussion.

Youthful ambition and early rewards clearly have significant impacts on life histories. Critical for Griaule's choice of direction in his Dogon work, in my view, was his early idolization of explorers. We know of this interest from both his 1945 book *Les grands explorateurs* (which proved popular enough to be reissued in 1948) and his eulogy of Victor Schoelcher (1948:32) comparing him to Alexander the Great, who "had the dream of mingling East and West and realized it for himself." Griaule's fascination with explorers, it might be argued, led him to chart an explorer's life for himself. Accordingly, he participated in the greatest French exploratory endeavor of the century, the Mission Dakar-Djibouti, receiving in the end the Legion of Honor. It is interesting in this light that his early book *Les flambeurs d'hommes* (1934), at once travelog, fantasy, and popular account of a trip to Ethiopia and winner of the Prix Gringoire, ap-

pears to have served as a model for *Dieu d'eau*. It is similar in style, syntax (including the distinctive third-person reference to himself as "the European" or "the Whiteman"), and subject, although it traces a track through mythical time rather than geographical space. Griaule's comments in the introduction to *Flambeurs* are of considerable interest in situating both this work and *Dieu d'eau* (1935:xi–xii):

scientific publications are generally intended for specialists who are the only ones to profit from them, if I may say so; scholars rarely consent—moreover they do not always have the time or the material means—to write for a general public; . . . as far as ethnography is concerned, a science that is above all living and as the public subsidizes directly official missions, it has seemed to me possible, even necessary, to descend the proud slopes of erudition and to present to a greater number of readers a readable work.

A second important factor was the Second World War. While Lebeuf (1987:xxi) discusses Griaule's participation in World War I in considerable detail, he never explores his political concerns or activities during the period of the Vichy government. Whatever these were, Griaule appears to have been sufficiently affected by them that his subsequent writings are strikingly different from the prewar ones. The postwar material displays a near obsession with rationality, order, intellectualization, and pacifistic values. Whether this change was grounded in feelings about his role vis-à-vis the Vichy government or anger and frustration at a world gone awry is not clear. Some insight into this issue can be gained from Lebeuf's commentary on *Dieu d'eau's* comparison of the Dogon to the civilization most clearly identified with the ideals of democracy, peace, and order, namely, ancient Greece (1987:xxv, my translation):<sup>1</sup>

the Dogon "live within a cosmogony, metaphysic, and religion which puts them at the level of ancient people and which Christology itself would profit by studying." This work was furthermore written with the aim of "putting before the eyes of the nonspecialist public, and without the usual scientific apparel, a work that ordinarily is reserved only for scholars; it moreover pays homage to the first black of the Western Federation to reveal to the white world a cosmology as rich as that of Hesiod."

A third factor is the influence of Germaine Dieterlen, beginning with *Masques dogons* but especially pronounced in *Dieu d'eau* and later collaborative works (of which there are many in the 1950s) focused on Dogon and other Sudanese abstract systems of thought. Interestingly, these works are more similar in style and syntax to Dieterlen's earlier writing (1941) than to *Masques*

*dogons*. Dieterlen's life and intellectual history will undoubtedly need to be examined more thoroughly with respect to Griaule in the future.

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This is certainly not the first critical analysis of Griaule's works, but what is entirely new, important, and remarkable about it is that it comes from a field ethnologist and is the product of 11 years of research among the Dogon thus "revisited" in depth. Having myself spent 10 years working among the Dogon,<sup>1</sup> I am struck by the degree to which van Beek's analyses coincide with those that I have gradually arrived at. Given the shortage of space, I will orient my comment around several issues raised by his text that seem to me quite essential.

The diversity of Griaule's oeuvre calls for a division of it into three periods. The first of these, represented by the works prior to 1948, is characterized by descriptive ethnography (in particular *Masques dogons*) whose data remain valid today. The second corresponds to *Dieu d'eau*, and here van Beek analyzes very well the conditions of development of a body of knowledge of which, alone among Dogon, Ogotemméli seems to have been the repository—since neither van Beek nor I nor anyone else has ever found anything like it. The third period is represented by the *Renard pâle*, which remains altogether strange and entirely unverifiable in the field,<sup>2</sup> whatever the Dogon region investigated.

Of van Beek's 19 points of difference between his data and those of Griaule I can confirm the validity of all but 2—those on the role of the ancestors and the position of the *binu*, for which my findings contrast with his.

Among the important cultural traits identified by van Beek but largely ignored by Griaule I would underline the obvious desire of the Dogon for collective harmony and consensus that is striking to the participant observer. This fundamental social value is directly linked to secrecy and to shame. The domain of secrecy is indeed not that of esoteric knowledge revealed only to a few great initiates but that of historical or current events that are considered shameful—instances of conflict, past (serious transgressions, betrayals, wars, massacres) or

1. The quotations that appear in this citation seem to derive from the early French introduction to *Dieu d'eau*. I was not able to get a copy of this version, and the English translation published by Oxford University Press for the International African Institute in 1965 does not carry this introduction.

1. I have worked with the Kolum Karambé Dogon of the Bandiagara division since October 1979. For the past three years I have also worked, in collaboration with Bruno Martinelli, among the Gyesum Dogon and the Sigué Tellem of Yatenga (Burkina Faso) and the Gurum Dogon of the Koro circle. This latter research deals with settlement history and local group formation.

2. I too have several times attempted a test at Kolountanga, where the old priest of the *babinu*, accompanied by several old men, hunters, willingly lent himself to the tedious verification of facts that evoked nothing at all for him or the others present. What is more, the origin or founding myths that I have been able to gather up to now contain nothing even remotely resembling the central events and personages of the *Renard pâle*.

present (over land, women, or sorcery). Competition and rivalry are perceived as threatening the ideology of consensus and are usually criticized. Indeed, they can only become manifest on certain special occasions—at the time of masked or festive dances (on the plateau and the Bandiagara escarpment) or traditional wrestling matches (on the Séno-Gondo plain). As van Beek has seen, what is secret is essentially anything capable of tarnishing the image of unity and consensus that, above all, the Dogon attempt to impose on themselves and others. Thus shame, one of the most important mechanisms of social control, is attached to the name of anyone who deviates from this norm—who “has a thoughtless mouth” or “says things bigger than his mouth,” as the Dogon say. Many customs and institutions, among them the joking relationships among clans and the conciliatory function conferred on the four caste groups, give ample testimony to the existence, past or present, of serious conflicts that no one has forgotten, but Dogon society is “acquainted with shame” and attempts to conceal from the visitor anything that runs counter to its unitary and consensual discourse. This notion of shame, though not specific to Dogon culture, constitutes an essential element of its etiquette that must be recognized as seriously complicating ethnographic study, especially of settlement history.

Van Beek attempts a reconstruction of the conditions under which *Dieu d'eau* and the *Renard pâle* were generated and the bricolage of which they are the product. Very fairly, he shows that this is not a matter of any individual fraud on Griaule's part, and his well-argued demonstration is convincing. But he also shows that, in terms of its assumptions, method, and techniques, Griaule's research can no longer be considered ethnography, for they contradict point for point the methods and techniques of ethnographic research today. In this connection, it would be illuminating to have the testimony of French ethnologists who were present in the field with Griaule at the time.

Finally, I have no objection to van Beek's view that *Dieu d'eau* and the *Renard pâle* are “intercultural fictions”—a matter of literature rather than of ethnology.

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Chasms have always existed, for different reasons and in different historical contexts, between French *ethnologie* and British social anthropology. The British reaction to the work of the so-called Griaule school in general and the study of the cosmology of the Dogon in particular is no exception. One need only invoke Douglas's (1968) review of Griaule and Dieterlen's *Le renard pâle* (1965) and Calame-Griaule's *Ethnologie et langage* (1965) to underline what is at stake: “If only the high metaphysical subtlety of the French could be allied with the low sociological cunning of the Anglo-Saxon” (p. 23), she writes, pinpointing the problem in a very straightfor-

ward (and subtle) way. Douglas continues: “I have said that the two works under review are based on the Dogon official view of themselves. But they do not seek to relate informants' statements to practice. Thus they fail to observe any contradiction between *ideal* and *actual*” (p. 23, my emphasis). Is this, however, really what is at stake in van Beek's endeavour? I cannot tell.

My immediate reaction to his “restudy” was to recall the Mead/Freeman controversy or the debate over the different outcomes of various substantial and solid studies of the Yanomamö. These debates took place in the context of a critique of positivist anthropology's conception of truth. The theoretical attention to objectivity, authenticity, and representation exemplified by the work of Clifford has helped us to treat “truth” as a critical Western notion that became the focal point of a modern science demarcated by Cartesian logic. By emphasizing that “some views on a culture can indeed be . . . ‘truer’ than others”—which could be read “my view is ‘truer’ than others”—van Beek appears to ignore these recent debates while demonstrating his awareness of them. Apparently they are the result of the “postmodernist approach” that in his terms is a disqualification in itself; unfortunately, we are not given any definition of this approach or any reference to the “extremes” of it that he rejects. Additional readings of the article persuaded me that van Beek has serious problems with the notion of “truth” in general and with the critical achievements of a so-called postmodernist approach in particular. Why is the Griaule school wrong? Because the Dogon say so? Or because van Beek says the Dogon say so?

My second comment is more particular in nature. I do not and cannot question the integrity and precision of van Beek's account of Dogon ethnography. However, in an article the intention of which is both to present Dogon ethnography and to use this presentation to criticize and oppose work done by others, one would expect to find reference to and analysis of most of the ethnographic work on the Dogon. The vast amount of visual documentation concerning the Dogon, especially that produced by members of the Griaule school, is for some reason or other ignored in spite of van Beek's awareness of its existence. Why? Griaule himself made two 35mm films in 1938 (*Au pays dogon* and *Sous les masques noirs*). Not having seen either of these myself, I will concentrate on the many films of Jean Rouch, the majority of which were made in collaboration with Germaine Dieterlen and document the Sigui ceremonies. This work constitutes one of the most remarkable achievements of visual anthropology. It not only contributes to Dogon ethnography but implicitly raises some of the questions raised above—questions concerning truth, authenticity, objectivity, and reality. Rouch himself is perfectly aware of some of the problems that van Beek apparently ignores when he says, “The fundamental problem in all social science is that facts are always distorted by the presence of the person who asks questions. You distort the answer simply by posing the question” (Rouch 1978:22). The major problem in van Beek's article is that he is looking for the same answer to two

fundamentally different questions. My problem is that it becomes a question of trust rather than a question of truth. In whom should I trust, van Beek or Griaule/Dieterlen/Rouch? Van Beek's arguments lead me to think that Griaule and he are posing the same questions and that the differences in answers imply that one of them is wrong. It might prove fruitful to reread both Griaule and van Beek to determine—to paraphrase Strathern (1987)—to whom we should attribute the honour of having produced the more persuasive fiction.

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In CA a well-known anthropologist agrees to be put in the dock, with a right of reply to criticisms that are formally levelled against his work. In this case Marcel Griaule has been dead and most of his students retired for a rather long time. As it stands the review proposes nothing new: the allegation that the Dogon and the famous French anthropologist colluded to invent an extraordinary mythology that had more in common with ancient Greek than with African civilization is very old and, in the nature of the case, unanswerable. Anthropologists have a hundred ways of misrepresenting—deliberately, unconsciously, a lot, a little. The deviation from strict standards of field reporting by the Griaule team had always been excused or explained by Griaule's passionate desire to redress the balance of Western judgement against African civilization by unearthing a philosophical system as poetically rich and complex as those of the classics. An earlier decade saw English-speaking anthropologists fired by similar concerns about reversing the popular judgement against "savages"—Malinowski to demonstrate that in obeying custom they were not automatons, Firth that they were capable of economic calculation, Evans-Pritchard that religious beliefs were not irrational.

The charge against Griaule is too much creative invention. But, as van Beek says, it would have been a considerable scoop for the young fieldworker to have been able to have demonstrate that his illustrious predecessor was right after all. Nobody needs to be told of the shortcomings of the Griaule-Dogon world view, but he would indeed be saying something new and surprising in CA if he were offering to validate it. Who can read *Dieu d'eau* and not recognize it for the individual ratiocinations of a brilliant, thoughtful Dogon conversing with an eager, unsophisticated museum curator? Van Beek's wish to justify it would require considerable philosophical ingenuity on his part. No plodding, item-by-item checklist would do the trick, as he recognizes when he talks about ways in which the surface manifestation of a myth might be anchored in fundamental classifications.

The argument and style of van Beek's review recall the attacks on Margaret Mead and Carlos Castaneda. All three writers gained worldwide popularity and exerted tremendous influence. Mead was charged specifically with inadequate fieldwork, Castaneda with presenting

fiction as ethnography. For there to be any case against Griaule the attack has to allege that his creative inventions in some way bamboozled the anthropologists. The article describes how *Dieu d'eau* dazzled the French intelligentsia, psychologists, art historians, writers, and film makers and virtually created an industry and a tourist trade around the idea of Dogon culture. Such attainment of high fashion is not something that professional anthropologists would normally envy or admire. If that was all that happened, there would be little to write about in CA. For Griaule to need to be debunked there has to be evidence of mistaken professional support of his views. All that can be mustered on this score is "Anthropologists have reacted more cautiously to this continuing series of Griaule-Dogon revelations, though many have cited the material. A special conference on this type of world view resulted in *African Worlds* (Forde 1954), which contains an article by Griaule and Dieterlen (1954), the first attempt at a synopsis of the new 'Dogon cosmogony.'" What conference? *African Worlds* was planned without any conference as a third volume in a series with *African Political Systems* and *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage* published by the International African Institute. Forde as director made it his business to encourage scholars from very different traditions of research to communicate with each other.

Because it is laughable to imply that the witty, irreverent, and very empirical Daryll Forde should have been one of those swept off his feet by Dogon or any other cosmogony, the rest of van Beek's argument invites criticism. It is such an odd idea to put Griaule's very personal oeuvre to the test of fieldwork that one has to think hard about how it could be disproved in the field. As van Beek is critical of Griaule's question-and-answer methods, he would surely have to think up some other way of finding out whether the Dogon have been as totally misrepresented as he now feels obliged to assert. As far as we can see it seems that he was reduced to reading out large portions of the Griaule-Dieterlen reported mythology to representative Dogon listeners. From their replies he concludes that the Dogon do not know the creation myth of *Dieu d'eau* or of *Le renard pâle*, that the water god Nommo is not a central figure in their thought, that the fox is only one among many divining animals and has no privileged position in their myths. Since he is very familiar with Dogon, having done regular fieldwork among them for many years, there is no doubt that he can substantiate these and other statements. Moreover, he has already published on their language and religion and a major study of religion is in preparation.

The complaint is not that he might be wrong but that he did not think an account of his own field methods necessary for a field evaluation for CA. This problem of a method of disproving a set of personal Dogon interpretations should have earned most of his attention. For example, he ought also to have reported here on whom he consulted. His discussion of the place of secrecy in culture is wanting in several respects. Bellman's book to which he refers is more comprehensive. Apart from

secrets of initiation and secrets of shame, there is esoteric knowledge reserved to professions and esoteric knowledge that is not reserved but that is not generally shared. The readers of CA would surely like to know if he was careful to reach into the appropriate specialised areas of knowledge, such as medicine, sorcery, and anti-sorcery. When Victor Turner needed instruction in Ndembu ritual he found skilled teachers with special professional knowledge. Van Beek would have to convince us that he had sought these in vain. That would be a very interesting discovery, not immediately credible. Does he not know that in other parts of Africa gnostic inner circles of knowledge are protected? It is more generally plausible that some Dogon should have esoteric occult knowledge than that they should not. So his visiting list is crucial.

One of the points of contention is that Griaule's version of a prototypical West African culture is not found even by Griaule's students in other parts of the Sudan: it is not Sudanese, it is not even African. To accept this would be to denigrate some other well-known work. Calame-Griaule's report on speech categories cannot be so summarily dismissed. It is not true that body-house microcosms have not been found elsewhere: Le Boeuf's *Habitation fali* exemplifies just that. It is good that van Beek approves of Denise Paulme's remarkably modern ethnography, well ahead of its time. But there is a worrying sense that he does not know how important are some of his assertions. For example, if the Dogon really do not have the concept of *nyama* (impersonal force) or any equivalent, how do they talk about the efficacy of magic and prayer? He should at least tell us what circumlocutions they are driven to use in default. Case histories of disputes settled by recourse to divination were missing in all the Griaule corpus. This British anthropologist would be impressed if he could indicate that case histories form the basis of the interpretation of the Dogon religion that his book will reveal.

Finally, the interesting question arises whether all the work on African cosmology has been tainted by being influenced by the Griaule team. This would write off not just the French Africanists but the extremely empirical work of young American anthropologists and art historians such as Suzanne Blier. At this point the tables are almost turned. Van Beek has written what he thinks is a definitively negative verdict on something that no one thought capable of proof or disproof, but the weaknesses of his report raise the question whether perhaps his first wish might not be fulfilled: perhaps one could devise a better test that would vindicate Ogotomméli and his European friend, for, after all, more than two reputations are at stake.

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This is an important paper that, as well as adding to our understanding of the Dogon, raises a number of issues

of relevance to the history of the discipline and the nature of anthropological praxis. Despite the scepticism voiced by various anthropologists and others, the models of Dogon society expounded in *Dieu d'eau* and, to a lesser extent, *Le renard pâle* have predetermined much of what has been written subsequently. Many of van Beek's substantive claims come to me as no surprise. Thus, for instance, although the objectives of my research in the Sanga region in the early 1980s were quite different, along with van Beek I found little evidence for the complex but nonetheless allegedly unified symbolic ordering of daily life described by Griaule. Also, I found no evidence for a concept of *nyama* or the use of any numerical system for categorising objects and little indication that body symbolism is relevant to the interpretation of the spatial layout of houses, compounds, or villages. I am also inclined to agree with van Beek that the "supernatural" world of the Dogon is far more diverse than Griaule suggested. Van Beek's description of the objectives of sacrifice is virtually identical to the accounts provided by my own informants.

While the substantive content of the paper is clearly important, far more significant is van Beek's explanation of the lack of correspondence between Dogon beliefs and practices as portrayed in the later writings of Griaule and those encountered in the 1980s. His is the first critique to consider fully the role of the Dogon themselves in the process of text creation. His argument here has some interesting implications that are touched upon only marginally, and drawing attention to them may help to set the agenda for future Dogon studies. In the first place, it is not entirely clear whether the type of bricolage that van Beek describes arises from the specific situation in which Griaule's informants found themselves or is much more widespread. If the latter, then it would be interesting to know in what other sorts of contexts it appears and what its broader significance might be. My own feeling is that while the term "bricolage" correctly conveys a sense of the eclecticism involved in the choice of sources, van Beek's argument would have been strengthened had he examined the power relationships involved in the production of competing interpretations.

A feature of contemporary Dogon rituals is the recurrent invocation of a concept of "tradition" to legitimate particular routine practices and existing imbalances between elders and juniors, men and women. It is precisely because of their collective nature that these contexts provide lineage elders with opportunities to construct "public personas" for themselves and other members of the lineage. The latter, because of their more restricted access to ritual knowledge, are not well placed to challenge the forms these constructs take. Nevertheless, in other contexts both younger men and women are able to negotiate aspects of their social identities to their advantage. Thus, for instance, women employ material culture and the organisation of household space to construct individual identities that contrast with the images of uniformity presented in the more "public" arenas under male control (Lane 1986). Again, young men,

through their increasing participation in tourism, have become responsible for presenting Dogon society to the outside world and thus acquired a means to present their own reading of Dogon culture (Lane 1988).

It is possible, therefore, that there was a similar edge to the actions of some of Griaule's informants that motivated their prolonged involvement with him and influenced the specific form of their world view. Without a fuller discussion of the social positions of these individuals, how these may have changed through their association with Griaule, and some indication of the broader struggles for authority within their communities at the time, one can do no more than speculate. With the passage of time and the death of the major protagonists, this opportunity has probably been lost. Similar processes can, however, be observed today that could provide us with insights into the ways in which strategies that vary with the audience may generate alternative readings of Dogon culture. In this regard, van Beek's account of the active role of the Dogon in the creation of Griaule's commentaries has not only broken the hegemony of these texts but also laid the foundations for future work.

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Van Beek's article raises a serious problem in French anthropology: is it capable of self-criticism? That a discussion of the work of the Griaule school should once again be brought up by one of our foreign colleagues is highly significant. I can see several reasons for this: some are due to the well-known centralizing academic and university structures we have in France, but this is not what I intend to discuss here. What I wish to emphasize is that the debate is paralyzed by a subjectivization of scientific thought.

The work of Griaule and his school since *Dieu d'eau* is based on a field approach that fails to meet all the requirements that he himself formulated in his *Méthode de l'ethnographie* (1957). Working on Mali, I was assigned for a number of years to the CNRS research group covering the country, where I chose to study the Soninke people. I was also in charge of administrative tasks, and I had nothing but pleasant relationships with my colleagues: my criticisms, therefore, have nothing to do with the way I feel about them.

At a scientific level, however, the research group often seemed to me to be more an initiatory school than a research laboratory. Access to native mythology or religious knowledge, one learnt, could only be gained by assiduously following the teachings of specific local masters, who possessed a secret knowledge that they would divulge with great reluctance only to those who had earned their trust. Thus knowledge of the Dogon religion came to be "confessed" by a very limited set of select informants through whom a corpus was constructed that seems, on examination, not so much a source of discovery to the researchers as one of surprise to the investigated.

How can texts collected in such a manner be subjected to critique? Could the informants, insufficiently literate in French, evaluate the published proceedings of these cenacles? Even in the best of cases, could they propose corrections without seeming discourteous or incurring the loss of their interlocutors' generous friendship? As for the anthropologists, they are obliged to trust the texts. On returning to the field, some of us have had doubts: why do these mythological treasures always fall on the same ears? Have we been unable to locate the right sources? Have we somehow by-passed all this knowledge? How are we to account for our findings if they do not come from the "patented" informants? How could we possibly subject our colleagues' informants to cross-examination without offending either of them? What is more, the published materials cannot be subjected to a critical reading. Far from taking the form of verbatim transcriptions in the native language, they combine translations of brief quotations with paraphrases, interpretations, and commentaries unaccompanied by the critical apparatus that would permit an understanding of the circumstances of their collection. Given that we are dealing with expressions of belief, mythic narratives, or descriptions of rites rather than the explanation of such and such an institution, a corpus of data as precise and faithful as possible should, I think, be a requirement; but it is practically impossible to distinguish between what originates from the informants and what comes from the anthropologist. For my part, I have given up using such materials, even when they provide information that conform to my own theses.

If the material is not presented in its original form, I think it is because one would see that, as in most societies of this region, the myths and beliefs do not constitute a coherent whole. The coherence given to them should only be considered a hypothesis, but in this case we have an unformulated a priori, an unquestioned absolute, whereby only those elements considered relevant are retained, adjusted, and organized.

When information is treated as quasi-initiatory, out of reach of the profane, criticism can only turn short or be judged as a personal attack. Even today one hesitates to raise the issue, knowing that it will damage the good relations one enjoys with colleagues. One can therefore only welcome the publication of van Beek's work, which seems to me to fulfill the critical requirements of research and which publicly invites a long-needed debate that too many apprehensions and susceptibilities have dismissed from our chapels.

## Reply

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The comments indicate that the problem of Dogon ethnography is still important in Africanist anthropology,

representing as they do a wide array of opinions. Given a subject as delicate as an attack upon an established reputation and the emotions generated in response to it, several types of reaction are to be expected. One is the indignant reaction, aiming at preserving the reputation of the attacked master. This reaction is absent here but probably will be heard later. A second is the uneasy reaction, pointing out that with one major pillar of the ethnographic building gone, others are in danger of crumbling as well—one of the arguments Douglas uses. Another is the reaction focused on theory, style, and presentation more than the argument itself. Crawford, Douglas, and Bedaux write along this line. Finally, there is acceptance of the article's conclusions and expansion upon its theoretical and methodological implications; the comments of Blier, Lane, Meillassoux, and Bouju fall into this category, and I will begin with them.

Blier brings an interesting thought to the discussion: the idea of using biographical analysis to establish how significant events in ethnographers' lives may explain changes in their work. She points to three such influences on Griaule, and this amounts to a welcome biographical addition to my argument. Griaule did indeed see himself as an explorer, and several of the field approaches mentioned fit in well with this self-definition, for example, the view of the other culture as a bastion and the use of aerial photography. Still, there have been explorers with a less militaristic vision, and Griaule's favorable comparison of a colleague to Alexander the Great is revealing. As for Blier's second point, I agree that the Second World War may have been a turning point for Griaule. Yet, despite the evident change in the ethnography after the war, many of Griaule's convictions and drives can be found before that time, for example, his insistence on myth as an explanation for ritual and his conviction that African societies engaged in "deep thought." In any case, the comment calls for a more general study of the rifts in academia in wartime France and one in which the position of scholars such as Leiris would be important as well. Blier's last remark, on the influence of Dieterlen, was also made by reviewers of earlier versions of the article, and I may indeed have underplayed her importance in the construction of Dogon culture. Of course, the last period of revelations, that of the *Renard pâle*, was in fact strongly influenced by her, as most of the works of that era are coauthored. One can but wonder whether Griaule would have published the *Renard pâle* in the same form, given his proclivity for writing for a more general public. But even if Dieterlen was and still is the systematizer, Griaule was the motor that generated new revelations.

The comments of Lane and Bouju are of special relevance, as they also have done research in Dogon culture recently and in the same region. For them the lack of fit between the Griaule writings and empirical data from the field comes as no surprise, and for them too the difference is more than one of style. Lane raises the question whether the bricolage that generated many of the Griaule "data" resulted from the specific field situation at the time and then argues that it may be part

of a more general arena for construction of individual identities. I think he is right. For the informants their close association with the powerful Frenchman must have been an important asset in the village arena and changed their self-images. One can, indeed, perceive just this with the second-generation informants working now with Dieterlen, though I think the effect is tapering off.

Bouju in a way offers a venue for this type of study when he concentrates on the twin values of shame and secrecy in Dogon culture. His analysis of these themes is a welcome elaboration of my argument. The only possible point of disagreement between us might be in ethnographic details (*binu* and ancestors), though I think that internal cultural variation among the Dogon might be one factor aside from the inevitable personal styles and interpretations.

Meillassoux, another anthropologist quite familiar with the larger cultural region, agrees with my analysis and uses the conclusions to illuminate an internal French academic problem, the absence of self-criticism. His description of the internal dynamics of research groups as initiatory schools is fascinating and revealing. As he is the first to admit, such self-criticism as he delivers raises the question of power in the French academic structure. Both the tendency toward person-oriented schools and the hierarchies inherent in the French academic system would be fascinating objects for further study.

Crawford raises two problems, my position in the postmodernist debate—the question of "truth"—and the relevance of visual documentation. As for the latter issue, the Dogon are indeed one of the most extensively filmed groups in Africa, and I fully agree with Crawford that Rouch's films, made with the collaboration of Dieterlen, constitute one of the high points in visual anthropology. For me, as for any anthropologist working on Dogon culture, these films—especially the *sigui* documentation—constitute a crucial source of information. However, the same problem confronted by any anthropological research is evident in visual anthropology—the interaction between two cultures. Judging from my own experience with filming and from the literature, this may be even more poignant in visual anthropology, as the presence of impressive hardware and the strict exigencies of filming impose a considerable amount of Western culture on—in this case—Dogon proceedings. Moreover, the selectivity of the camera, the cutting, and the commentary highlight the interactive character of the documentation. This holds for any film. In any case, the quality of Rouch's films is in my view not dependent on his incidental use of mythopoetical commentary.

The first point Crawford raises is more complicated and quite germane to the general framework. My critique of Griaule's work cannot be reduced to a gap between the ideal and the actual, which might have been a critique of the Dogon ethnography up to the Second World War. It is the untraceable ideal that bothers me, and here the notion of relativism comes in. Crawford

rightly reads my argument as—also—a partial critique of postmodernism. Indeed, I do have problems with the notion of “truth.” Who does not? While recognizing the merits of the postmodernist debate, I do not think that the notion can be done away with by a relativist stance. Therefore I have translated it in terms of recognizability; in principle this implies a search not so much for truth as for untruth, and my essential claim is that Griaule’s Dogon tales are unrecognizable in the field. That is indeed a question of trust, but that Crawford feels the need to choose between the two “tales” is at least an indication that the differences between our two “intercultural fictions” are too large to be comfortable with.

Douglas raises a number of interesting issues that for a valid answer would take up much more space than is allowed here. One of her points is that the anthropological community was not bamboozled by Griaule’s revelations though other professions were. This is correct in the sense that anthropologists have reacted to them much more cautiously. Among them (to correct an obvious misunderstanding), Daryll Forde was in no way swept off his feet despite his personal friendship with Dieterlen; Douglas probably is correct in assuming that he might be the last to be dazzled by these constructions. I just wanted to point out the great distance between the two discourses, Griaule’s and the British, and one example of that distance can be found in the proceedings of the Sonchamp conference. Douglas’s argument essentially reads that in criticizing Griaule I am flogging a dead horse. For the anthropological profession, especially the British, this may be so, but I doubt it. Griaule’s Dogon material is still used as an example of intricate mythological reasoning and classification, even in anthropological texts, whereas, as I tried to show, its epistemological status cannot be equated with that of ethnographic records.

Douglas raises a fundamental issue when she discusses the logic and methodology of disconfirmation. The problems of secrecy are apposite here. I limited myself to those two of Bellman’s four types of secrecy that are relevant to this discussion. Indeed, the Dogon do have knowledge reserved for the professions—such as the artisan groups—as well as secrets of medicine, sorcery, and anti-sorcery, which indeed I did explore during my research. Of these the first is neither very secret nor very esoteric, in fact being part of the public domain. The second genre is more interesting and more difficult to gain access to. In Dogon culture medicine and anti-sorcery are part of the dark side of life, out of tune with the ideal of social harmony that Bouju elaborates on in his comment. Griaule and Dieterlen completely ignored this domain, and these secrets are definitely not the kind Griaule meant. Also, as can be seen from my account (van Beek 1990b), the notions and symbols used in it do not fit into the Griaulean schemes at all. Whether one could call this knowledge a gnostic inner circle is highly questionable. A detailed account of these problems, as well as the case histories for the interpretation of ritual and symbolism, should, as Douglas suggests, and will be included in the religion monograph.

One of Bedaux’s arguments runs along similar lines; for him as for all of us the proof of the pudding is in the eating. There is, however, no reason to reserve the label “scientific” (whatever that means) only for extensive presentations of data. In fact more than half of the article is data, and I also pointed out what part of the literature could be considered valid ethnography—which, as he is well aware, already constitutes massive documentation. With appropriate references to such a body of literature a discussion is not at all un-“scientific.” If this were not so, most discussions in our journals would be out of bounds. While I accept the position that only a full tale can be fully convincing, the details requested by Douglas and Bedaux can only be presented in the context of a monograph.

How many people are implicated with Griaule? Not as many as Douglas thinks. Of course, empirical research into symbolic and cosmological interpretations is possible and can yield fascinating results; for example, I fully share Douglas’s appreciation of Blier’s work. Still, it is a far cry from an African cosmology to a triple Sirius system. The whole point is that this research is empirical and, like any such work (granted the limitations of the ethnographical account), is capable of “disproof”—that is, should be recognizable. Surveying the implications of my tempered disproof of Griaule’s work is not an undertaking I choose to burden this article with and would call for further evaluation. In any case, I see no reason whatever to write off all work on African cosmology and hope to continue working in that field myself for many years to come.

A last point on the references to the other debates, especially Mead/Freeman: I chose the CA☆ format in order to open a discussion; that is what the journal stands for. While Griaule cannot respond, his scholarly heirs can. From the start I recognized the personal feelings involved, and for this reason I presented the article in person in Paris and prepared a French translation for Dieterlen’s benefit. Whereas none of the commentators so far have contradicted field data and therefore most have accepted the gist of the argument, defenses of the “data” are still to be expected and are said to be under way. This is what I hoped for, and it is here that comparison to the way other debates have been conducted falls short.

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