MOOSE SOCIO-COSMIC DUALISM: THE LOGIC OF THE VILLAGE AND THE LOGIC OF THE STATE IN BURKINA FASO

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Abstract: In the contemporary socio-economic and political order of Moose society in Burkina Faso and elsewhere in Africa so-called "traditional" witchcraft still plays an important role. But how, in modern Moose society, must the occult, the flipside of things, be understood? In what cultural scheme or discourse does it fit and operate? How do the "real" and the "supernatural," the visible and the invisible, the "dayside" and the "nightside" of things, relate to each other in notions of political power, "development," law, economy? In other words, what is the ambiguous, cross-fertilising relation between what is often called "tradition" and "modernity" in modern rural and urban Burkina Faso?

Keywords: *cosmic order, witchcraft, tradition, modernity, power, development, cultural ambiguity*

Introduction

In May 2021, a YouTube filmfragment,[1] obviously registered by mobile phone, appeared on social media. The recording concerned the confession by a Mossi woman from Burkina Faso who claimed to be a witch. This is remarkable: while witchcraft rumours and accusations abound in many places in the world, confessions are rare, let alone voluntary and filmed ones.

The scene of action on the short film is an urban private clinic run by a roman-catholic nurse. The woman who has entered the clinic is in a state of agitation, she adresses the nurse in an excited screaming manner. The athmosphere is tense. The nurse tries to calm her down, with little success.

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In the course of action, the following becomes clear. The woman says that she is extremely jealous of her daughter-in-law Ami, the wife of her son Moussa. She is utterly disturbed by the fact that her son dearly loves his wife, gives her "gold" and tries to arrange her travel to the United States where he works. The woman has done everything to separate the couple and to have them divorced, but in vain. Ami should not give birth to a child by Moussa, for she is afraid that Moussa's children may become "better" – that is, more successful and wealthier – than her own children. Ami has already had three miscarriages. Apparently, she has come to the nurse's clinic to be treated for failed pregnancies. But Ami's mother-in-law cries out: "Ami is not ill. I am the reason. I am a witch (*sonya*). I have entered the body of Ami. I have already eaten all three small foetuses. Moussa is in America. I have done everything to prevent Ami to join him, I have spoiled her work, spoiled her household, I have made her daughter cripple, I have even tried to kill Ami."

The nurse and other people present are shocked, they cross themselves, invoke Jesus and Mary. Yet the nurse succeeds in letting the woman go on talking. Still worked up, the woman explains that she is neither Christian nor Muslim, but she "works through *tengkuga*." *Tengkuga* (singular *tengkugri*) are traditional earth shrines (litt. "earth stones") of which every *buudu* (lineage, clan, family) possesses one. They are also described as altars on which blood sacrifices are made when consulting the family's ancestors situated "in the earth."

After some repetitions and additional information, the film ends here. What became of the "witch"s' visit to the nurse and her confessions remains obscure.

In recent years many anthropologists have discussed the prevalence of occult phenomena, and African witchcraft in particular, in the "modern" urban world often referred to as "modernity." Thus, Harri Englund writes in *Critique of Anthropology* (1996) that witchcraft appears to thrive as a means of rural and urban Africans alike to confront contemporary problems. In many cases witchcraft is shown to be an integral part of local struggles over state legitimacy, the support for political parties, changing gender relations, and so on. More recently, Kroesberger-Kamps (2020) refers to "new directions in the study of witchcraft in Africa." The diversity of arguments put forward is matched by the diversity of contexts in which withcraft is encountered, such as party politics, judicature, markets, accumulation of wealth, or football. Prominently concerned with the subject of the occult, rituals and power in contemporary Africa are Jean and John Comaroff who edited a number

of readers about the occult (1993-2018). Englund refers to publications in the 1980s and 1990s, citing above all books by Peter Geschiere (1995, 1997). In *The Modernity of Witchcraft* (1997) Geschiere focusses especially on politics, as is evident from *Sorcellerie et Politique* (1995) – the title of the French edition of the book. More particularly, the book deals with the question how the "modern" discourses on witchcraft – their continuities and transformations in new contexts – influence political developments. New forms of power and wealth rupture old domestic solidarities and evoke strong sentiments of jealousy and, therefore, hidden agression and occult intervention. According to Geschiere these developments have two sides: a "leveling" side being the desire to undo inequalities, and a "cumulative" side, the ambition to accumulate power and wealth. The latter he calls witchcraft's "ambiguity" (Geschiere 1997:10). Elsewhere he perceives the ambivalence of the occult force of witchcraft in its "disturbing" as well as "constructive" effects – the latter following from efforts to protect oneself or, more generally, to succeed in life. "It is precisely through this ambivalence that discourses on the occult incorporate modern changes so easily" (p. 13). Thus, "ambivalence" and "ambiguity" are the central themes on which Geschiere builds his arguments (see also Musah 2020). Geschiere's approach is to compare witchcraft phenomena affecting politics in various regions in Cameroon. Differences and similarities are observed and analysed with reference to characteristics of the political systems of the researched societies. This analysis is based on solid fieldwork, taking the local people's view as a point of departure of what he calls an approach "from below."

In the present article, inspired by Geschiere's work, I intend to take the concept of ambiguity one step further. I shall analyse it as an inclusive, integral part of a cultural system of thought and practice that – cognitively and organisationally – determines daily life. The case studied is that of the *Moose* (Mossi) of Burkina Faso, whose "ambiguities," whether prevailing in "traditional" or "modern" discourses, form part of the dynamics on which the continuation of society depends. Transgressions of categorical boundaries are threatening a normatively desired stable equilibrium and create ambiguity. That very ambiguity, however, is a condition *sine qua non* for the reproduction and survival of society. The powers aiming at the restoration of this equilibrium may result in cultural and social adaptations and innovations. These occur in various socio-political domains, all of them being subject to specific contrasts. The one between the village and the city marks new social environments; traditional versus "foreign" powers operate in the political field; the contrast between "subsistence systems" versus "the

market" pervades the economic domain; the one between village reciprocity versus state welfare that of social security; the difference between customary and western law – testimonies of a "logic of the village" versus a "logic of the state" – affect socio-political life as a whole. All these contrasts cause the situations of ambiguity that people have to cope with in daily life. They also gradually create a "modernity" that is quite distinct from the western notion of a uniform "global village."

This text does not intend to theorise on cultural and social theories of African modernity in general, which has been undertaken by many scholars including Achille Mbembe, Homi K. Bhaba, and Olufemi Taiwo, to mention only a few African authors. Rather, I try to follow as closely as possible local *Moose* "theories" with which I became acquainted during a long period of studying *Moose* rural and urban culture. In dealing with *Moose* society, I therefore put the words "tradition" and "modernity" between quotation marks as, in the case presented here, they are not mutually exclusive concepts in their reference to social phenomena. *Moose* rather apply them in a reciprocal manner, as is shown by the way they consider "modern" life as being determined by the interplay of "traditional" "things of us" (*mo tedo*) and "modern" "things of foreigners" (*nasara tedo*). Against this background the following questions are pertinent: Where does the *Moose* occult praxis come from, in what cultural scheme or discourse is it embedded? What is the significance of the "earth shrines"? How do the "real" and the "occult," the visible and invisible, the "dayside and nightside" relate to each other?

The following text deals with the *Moose* of Kaya, Burkina Faso's centre-nord region. There the first part of my fieldwork was conducted in the 1970s-1980s, when I worked and lived there for six years. It was the time of revolution and its aftermath. It was also the beginning of what is now sometimes called "modernity," built upon – or constructed from – a "traditional" system of thought, which is still very much alive in the countryside and the urban environments alike, as we shall observe. The latter part of my research was not only conducted during regular visits to Burkina Faso, but also facilitated by improved telephone and digital communications between my Dutch residence and that of my family-in-law in Ouagadougou. This enabled me to collect on a weekly basis detailed information from key informants about the life of a *Moose* extended family in an urban context, the events in their residential urban neighbourhood, and the continuing contacts with their rural villages of origin. Thus, I have been able to follow closely the development of a fixed group of people during almost forty years.

The text will contain a number of "binary oppositions." Certain authors are wary of the use of imposed or imagined oppositions, which historians may have borrowed from "structural" anthropology. I maintain, however, that the binary oppositions mentioned in the following exposition – fluid as they may be – are all part of the "participant's view" (Josselin de Jong 1967) as recorded in the field "from below," so to speak. *Moose* appear to be fond of thinking, talking, and playing with such oppositions in their daily conversations, proverbs, stories, jokes, and public speeches. They practice a discourse of paired oppositions between day and night, male and female, right and left, village and bush, cool and hot, water and fire, white and red sorghum, millet porridge (*sagbo*) and beer (*raam*), or *Moose* and Peulh. They may compare the modes of conduct of sheep and goats and apply these to the different characteristics of political chiefs and earthpriests. Likewise, they compare the character of chickens and guinea fowls to the contrasting behaviour of faithful and adulturous women. Often, one needs knowledge of local phenomena such as the flora, fauna, and the codes of social behaviour, in short, *la science du concret*, to understand the proverbs and their various associations.

Equilibrium and Transgression: Ambiguities as Cultural Dynamics

"The logic of the village" is anchored in the *Moose* system of thought (*roogm miki,* "born-found," "tradition"), which is characterised by a discourse of oppositions, of dualism and mediation, transgression and restoration. Processes of division or separation are connected with the notion of creation. Conceptually, this notion is operative on a cosmic level in the division between heaven and earth and in the distinction between the God of Creation *Wende* and human beings. On a biological level it pertains to the division between man and woman, male and female, whereas on the level of social reproduction it is manifest in the visible world of the living versus the invisible world of spirits and the dead. On a spatial level the village contrasts with the "brousse,"[2] while on the socio-historical level, the distinction is that between the "people of power" (*na-biise*, mythically descended from heaven) and "people of the earth" (*nioniose*, *teng biise*, mythically emerging from the earth). These levels are indissolubly connected and form a logical whole.

2 "Brousse" refers to a peripheral or outer space reckoned from the centre of the courtyard or the village centre; it may concern the washing place/toilet near the porch, refer to fields beyond "village fields," to wilderness, forest and barren hills, but also to other villages, countries and in general "unknown" or "uncivilised" places or "other world."

The dynamic interaction between oppositional pairs is brought about by mediations from the "other world." As such qualifies the ancestral legitimation of marriage through the acceptance of a bloodsacrifice by the ancestors. So does the intervention of a *kinkirga* spirit from the "brousse" in the process of reproduction (in the village).

A focal mode of mediation forms the basis of the agricultural praxis. In the sacred relation connecting heaven and earth the rain represents the "sperm," from which the grain, the "life-force" of which originates in the "other" world, grows. Therefore, harvesting requires a separation from this cosmic source of fertility. This is achieved by performing a desacralisation ritual.

The paramount *Moose* relationship is that connecting the sovereign (*rima, naaba*) with his subjects. This is a methaphor of the well-being including the "fertility" of the kingdom (*ringu*) – the world extending from sunrise to sunset. This methaphor reflects the annual rituals preceding and relating to the agricultural season, through which the pact between the – originally immigrant – king and the autochtonous earth priests (*tengsobramba*) of the kingdom is annually reconfirmed. In the course of the *bega* ritual (as performed in Yatenga province, see Izard 1985) or the *napussum* ritual (conducted in the regions of Boussouma and Maane, see Luning 1997) the heavenly power (*naam*) descends on the "naked" king, seated on the earth and deprived of his regalia. It represents a "fertile," reciprocal relationship between the ruler and his subjects; the latter are sometimes addressed as his "spouses."

As a relation between the ruler and his subjects the kingdom is represented in the chiefly power (*naam*), the right to rule being provided by God (*Wende*). The territory (*tempelem*), on the other hand, encompassing the relation between village and the bush, is the domain of the ancestors (*kiimse*) in their connection to the earth (*tenga*). Heaven and Earth (*Wende* and *Tenga*) provide for a fertile relationship, modelled on a marriage relationship in which the chief (*naaba*) and the earthpriest (*tengsoba*) represent a "fertile" maternal kin-relationship (Zahan 1961).

The opposition between Heaven and the king and his subjects, on the one hand, and the one between Earth and the village and *brousse*, on the other, are in equilibrium (see Figure 1):

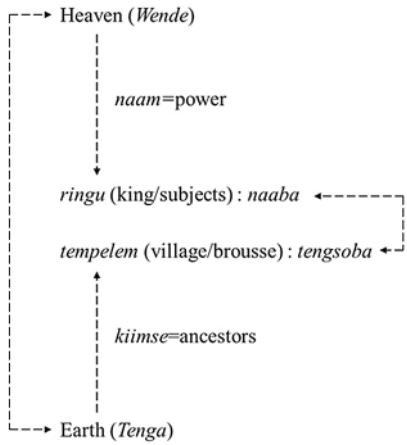

Figure 1. Equilibrium Model of the Moose Cosmic Order (Zanen 1996: 125).

An internal disturbance of harmony of each of these relations has repercussions for the equilibrium on which the social-cosmic order as a whole rests. From these relations the *Moose* system of thought is constructed. All relations of opposition, acts of transgression, phenomena of ambiguity and modes of mediation, whether occurring in the past or in the present, in various contexts and in rapidly changing environments are all related to and derive their significance from this socio-cosmological system of meaning.

The conception of *naam*, the power derived from God/*Wende*, is the basis of *Moose* social hierarchy. Both *naam* and *Wende* have a static, unaffectable character. God legitimises the totality of the world and the equilibrium in the order of people and things. God is difficult to approach directly. He cannot be manipulated individually and one cannot meddle with his power. The earth, on the other hand, "speaks": through ancestors and spirits people enter into contact with the earth and vice versa. It is a very dynamic relationship. Therefore, the central relationship in daily life is the one between the human community and the earth. In this relation the cycle of life and death is enacted. At every social level – from the individual, the family, the lineage, all the way to the village as a whole – ritual contact with the brousse (*weogo*) and/or the earth is maintained on individual or communal occasions, either through divination, sacrifices to the ancestors, or contact with spirits. The well-being of all and sundry is dependent on this "vertical" equilibrium, as are the harmonious

"horizontal" relations between individuals, lineages, neighbourhoods, and villages. Both types of relations are interdependent, for if those between communities within the kingdom are distorted, the cosmic relations between the community and the earth, hence between earth and heaven, are affected as well. Not seldom do people explain the lack of rain in crucial periods by referring to a disturbed relation between heaven and earth, caused by human actions such as a disrespect of the ancestors or transgressions of social, ritual or moral codes.[3] Therefore, in times of drought even government authorities urge people to solve social conflicts. Damaging the bush, being the domain of spirits, for instance by erosion-control activities, well-drilling, road-building, or forestry may create havoc. It may cause drought, accidents, wells running dry, and leakage of dams, unless the "chef de terre" (*tengsoba*) is consulted for his mediation with these spirits. If the ritual codes are not respected these spirits may disappear or intrude into human society. The latter would confuse the distinction between the "double" worlds of village and "brousse."

The notion of duality, encountered in many societies in West and Central Africa, is usually explained with the notion of "*doubles*" being manifestations of similar but contrasting phenomena in two mirrored worlds: the visual world (*nen neere*) and the invisible world (*nen lebende*), literally "the reversed face" ("like in tissues," the *Moose* explain) being the world before birth and after death. A series of oppositional categories is related to these two worlds: right-left, before-behind, male-female, day-night, village-bush, social ordening-undifferentiated chaos, life-death. In daily life these oppositions are symbolically expressed in situations associated with crossing the border between the two worlds, in particular in situations facing death: decease and deliverance (considered by *Moose* as "opened to death"). Pregnancy is caused by a *kinkirga* (spirit, lit. twin) from the *brousse* entering a woman's womb, leaving the twin brother or sister behind in the invisible world *nen lebende*.[4] A deceased is washed and offered a last meal with a left hand. While normally one sleeps with one's head towards the door, now the corpse is laid upon the bier with the feet in that direction. One says that the deceased has "gone back" to the other side.[5] At the *funéraille* (when the deceased is supposed

3 Informant: "the customs are no longer respected … sexual intercourse was forbidden in the bush, and if it did happen, one had to make sacrifices of penance to ask excuse to the spirits. But we note that today this practice is current, and nothing is done to correct these abnormal practices ... that is the reason for all these problems …" (Zanen 1996: 115).

4 The afterbirth or placenta (naaba) is also returned to nen lebende, by burrying it in the earth.

5 In the 1980s, in Kaya, a man called "Apollo" had left home and stayed away so long that his family assumed he had died; they organised his "funéraille," distributed his properties, and his wife married another man. When he reappeared one day, his family considered him a ghost,

to leave definitively this world) of a family head, the latter is represented by a small girl, and a deceased monarch by a chief-woman (*na poka*). A victim of an accident on the road or in the bush (becoming a *kumiri*, or "red dead man") is not taken home, but buried at the spot. He does not become an ancestor but a roaming spirit in the bush**,** etc**.**

The mirrored, "opposite," invisible world of *nen lebende* is imagined as a dry, undivided, sterile, androgyne environment without social connections. There, everything is fleeting and quickly evaporates; beings may walk upside down or backwards and are associated with madness. Such mental disturbances are also often ascribed to persons acting as mediums. These include healers and diviners (*bagba*), consulters of *kinkirsi* spirits (*kinkir bagba*), sorcerers and witches (*sonyeba*), and earth priests (*tengsobramba*). Roaming through the wild nature "in search of water" they imitate the "thirsty" ancestors in need of libation offerings (cf. Zanen 1996, chapter 4).

The "other side" may appear in daily life, too. Ordinary or sexually oriented dreams, dreaming of having intercourse with a ghost (*génie, zina*)**,** telepathy etc. are manifestations of the invisible world *nen lebende*. So is the custom of administering an enema (*yaamde*) in the anus of a baby with ingredients from the "brousse" to transfer to it the properties of strong, agressive or clever animals such as elephants, lions or foxes.

The *cyclical movement* of passing from the one world into the other and back is the condition for human reproduction and food security, hence for the continuation of society. The so-called occult represents half of the human condition, as it were.

The separate but interconnected mirrored worlds existing side by side – the one visible and differentiated, the other invisible and undifferentiated – is the most pronounced expression of duality in *Moose* culture. On second thought, every phenomenon in one of the worlds appears to have a parallel or *double* in the other world. An individual has a *kinkirga* spirit who remains his companion on the "other" side; a person has his own star in the sky which can be caught; and every person has his *siiga* (plural *siise*) – his double or life force, which he carries along and which determines his vitality. This force may sometimes weaken and must then be reinforced with "medicines" (*tiim*).

belonging to "the other side," a living dead, a zombie. Thereupon Apollo became mad and went about through life naked and unshaved, his lair being on a rubble heap near the fuel station at the fringe of town. He was called Apollo, after an American space-rocket lauched in that period. Unlike Apollo, a real dead person may be reincarnated in his or her offspring (segde, lit. meeting, namely between the (dead) person parting and the (living) one arriving).

If the *siiga* leaves the body of a sleeping person and comes into conflict with other wandering *siise* this person runs the risk to die. Sorcerers and witches "steal" and "eat" *siise* of children after having transformed them into meat, whereupon the children may die as well.

Thinking in dualistic structures implies the importance of equilibrium or stability. When borders are crossed, or dual categories are mixed, such an equilibrium threatens to get lost or the borders between the categories become blurred. At that moment an ambiguous, anomalous and potentially dangerous situation emerges. The society will develop counterforces in order to redress such an anomalous state, thereby neutralising danger. To that end the conceptual order may be repaired by social control, by ritual procedures with which ancestors are usually concerned, or by magic and secret ritual. Magic (*wak*, *tiim*) is applied to reveal anomalous or ambiguous situations, on the one hand, and to protect persons who find themselves in or bring themselves into such situations, on the other. A *tiim soba* is a "healer," in every sense of the word. One such corrective mechanism, called *yu'nnigri* ("to administer, to let drink"), is applied during a public happening after many children in the village have died. The suspected culprits, usually women, are made to drink a certain potion (*korbo, tinssé, zanguéogo*) to let them confess having "eaten" the children by means of witchcraft (*soinyan*). During such occasions, after having drunk the potion certain women indeed begin to confess the deed and even mention the names of the children they have "eaten." Such "guilty" women may be chased from the village – and sometimes even from their father's *buudu*-lineage. Certain drinks may also be used to neutralise or remove people's witchcraft power. In the case of serious crimes suspects may be brought before an earthshrine (*tengkugri*) where they are made to drink a beverage to find the culprit. If the guilty person still denies having committed the crime he or she is expected to die very soon, whereas the innocent suspect will survive (see also Mutaru 2019).

In states of transgression or mixture of categories the dynamics of society reveal themselves. Some people find themselves temporarily in a more or less delicate, potential state of transgression (soldiers, hunters, gold- and grave diggers, honey gatherers, travellors, residing in the domain of *brousse* or earth spirits),[6] and some institutional actions are conditioned by transgression. Although the society is dependent on these people or actions, people remain uneasy and wary, thus expressing, intuitively, a cultural value. It will always be tried to fit in the existing order all changes from "outside," such as the physical

6 Birds are sometimes also suspect and distrusted as they cross the borders between *brousse* and village and may carry things from "there" to the village.

consequences of climate change, macro economic or political changes, the state in general, contact with other cultures, technical, organisational or social innovations, and those from "inside" the society, such as the changing behaviour of youths as a consequence of modern education.

It is not surprising that agriculture, which implies climate (rain, wind), sky and earth, human agency, fertility, food and drink, survival and death etc. is anchored in a complex socio-political, worldly and other-worldly, physical and metaphysical, and magical complex of procedures and actions, expression of the dualistic *roogm miki* or "tradition" (see Zahan 1975; Zanen 1996; and particularly Luning 1997).[7]

Conceptions of Development[8]

According to the "logic of the village," "development" is perceived by rural Moose as an idea (a top-down idea, as it may appear) "coming from outside." In this context a conceptual opposition is relevant, namely that between "things of the *Moose*" (*mo tedo*), and "things of foreigners, strangers, whites" (*nasara tedo*). *Nasara tedo* is associated with everything which is not originally *Moose* and which is therefore not intelligible and controllable in accordance to the *Moose* system of thought; it is potentially threatening and should be approached carefully. It is not necessarily bad or disapprovable, but it remains to be seen how it may be matched with *mo tedo*. Thus, certain wells are *mo tedo* as special sacrifices were performed for them. In these wells no rubber buckets (being made from lorry tyres typically *nasar tedo*) may be used. In marriage transactions all money (*nasara tedo*) must be replaced by cowries (*mo tedo*), the traditional means of transaction.[9] The chieftaincy's village quarter being the "village of power" (*na tenga*) and as such *mo tedo par excellence* should not host the village development association, as "a thing of the whites," quite *nasara tedo*.

What one observes is not so much a prevailing conservatism or a rejection of modern elements as such, but rather a fear of losing one's "traditional" way of life following a mixing with or contamination by new foreign

7 This is the reason why agricultual development agents are often confronted with unwillingness or reserve when they advise or propose to "improve" agricultural techniques.

8 See also Zanen (2016).

9 Locally dug up gold, or money derived from the sale of gold (originally the ownership of chthonic powers), being without generative power, bring bad luck without the proper sacrifices, and no marriage should be contracted with such money (see Luning 2009: 118 who cites Katja Werthmann 2003).

elements. A typical example is described in *Things Fall Apart*, a novel by the Nigerian Noble Price winner Chinua Achebe (1958) about what happened in his village after the arrival of a colonial administration and Christian missionaries. At first, the chief manages to resist these forces successfully, but then he notices that his children become influenced by them. What then happens is that the traditional system no longer seems to work, the hidden forces, patriarchal authority, all "things fall apart." A local system of values and its logic cannot be changed easily: the mixing of local and foreign elements leads to ambiguity, a non-desirable and potentially dangerous, "infertile" situation.

In politics nowadays, there are also two forms of power: the traditional power reserved for "the people of power" (*mo naam*), and the foreign "power of strangers" (*nasar naam*). The latter does not stem from God and can be acquired by anybody. During Burkina Faso's revolution (1983-1987), in many villages the "people of the earth" (*niononse*) obtained modern power through the CDR (*Comité de Défence de la Révolution*). This created power conflicts in villages, where "development" activities came to a standstill. This situation was aggravated since official government slogans advocated "down with feodalism," claiming that "chiefs don't exist."

With foreign forms of power, the traditional ruling elite maintains an ambivalent relationship. On the one hand, these forms are a threat to them, but on the other, they represent a reality that can no longer be denied. Only a compromise might turn such a situation into an advantage. This is the reason why traditional chiefs nowadays venture into national politics, and why educated civil servants are elected as village chiefs, since they know the functioning of an administration that can be rendered in favour of the village. Such cases show how the village, in a careful way, begins to interact with elements from outside, thereby accommodating two systems of meaning (Zanen 1996, 2016).[10]

In this perspective, "development" as the totality of ideas and measures introduced by the outside world concerns the interaction between what is their "own" (*mo tedo*) and what is "foreign" (*nasara tedo*) – a less top-down, more realistic conception of "development" (Zanen 1996). If proven advantageous, foreign elements such as innovations in the form of techniques,

10 National politics (the republican, presidential system) in Burkina Faso of course do not follow the Moose procedures in presidential succession. However, in times of trouble, Moose presidents seek the consent of the Mooro Naba, the supreme Moose sovereign, in an effort to "reconcile" nasar naam and mo naam. This relationship deserves further study.

ways of acting, and new forms of organisation may be incorporated in the society – if necessary, in an adapted form or with another significance (Boiral et al. 1985; Olivier de Sardan 1995). During such processes adaptations will take place in social life. Certain innovations will be valued by one network of actors, others by other networks. The outcome of the process of "development" is therefore dependent on the power struggle dealing with conflicting interpretations in the socio-political "arena" of the rural areas. The local assessment of foreign elements, the attribution of meaning to them, and their possible adoption, is determined by the impact they have on the social and cosmic orders and their interrelations.

The spoils of "development" usually go to the dominant elite, unless a real power struggle results into a "revolutionary" outcome. In such processes of political reinterpretation, the actors are players in a social-hierarchical field. Here the visible social world interacts with the invisible world. The latter is controlled by the Divine power from above and the ancestral powers from below (ancestors), and influenced by the powers of spirits and sorcerers from "the other side." The field is preserved and controlled by a rural gerontocracy acting as the defenders of tradition. For an individual, operating in such an environment is not a relaxed affair. One has to be careful in what one undertakes, one is suspicious, always reckoning with danger, since, as a saying goes, "in confidence treason is born." Danger may come from many sides, even from one's own family. To become a witch means that a family member or beloved one has to die. The action of a witch always costs a human life.

Rather than due to coincidence or bad luck, set-backs or misfortune are always suspected to result from malign forces at work, from conspiring "enemies" or plotting jealous family members. Unexplained deaths always need a cause, and the cause may be detected in the social environment of the deceased, to be discovered by consulting "those who can see."

For this system to function, its inherent oppositions, duality and ambiguity require mediation. Side by side with earth priests, ancestors, maternal uncles, a *yanenga* ("grandchild of the lineage") – all being mediators in traditional contexts – shrewd individuals emerge as mediators in the new, non-traditional contexts of colonialism and development cooperation (Olivier de Sardan 1995; Bierschenk et al. 2000).

If there had been no "translators" to mediate between the reality, the language, and the logic of foreigners and those of local people, communication between the two interest groups would lead nowhere. Both parties having different cultural backgrounds, interests and intentions, hence not knowing exactly

each other's strategy, act according to different systems of meaning. These semantic differences informing their thoughts and actions open the way to ruse and cunning (*silim*). In misty, ambiguous fields of action, these lead to informal communications facilitating treachery and corruption. The ruse is mastered by people who "own cunning" (*silim soba*) that is traditionally used as conflict management in the community – good chiefs dispose of *silim*. Such a mediator or trickster acts in situations of ambiguity. He may profit from his acts of manipulating adversaries or opposing parties; he may be a crook who escapes with the booty, but he is not considered wicket or a thief (Laurent 1998). The most famous trickster known in West Africa is Wangrin, who figures in a novel by Amadou Hampate Bâh (1973). He acts as an interpretor for colonial French district commissioners and local subjects (thereby cheating both parties). Another trickster is the West African culture hero Leuk-le-Lièvre (Senghor and Sadji 1953).

In development cooperation the ruse or the trick often plays a role in the communication between western-oriented donor agencies and local communities or even governments. In order to receive the maximal fruits of development the beneficiaries tend to keep up the façade that they respect the donor's rules but meanwhile pursue quite different goals and hidden agendas (cf. Laurent 1998; Zanen 2016). Many recipients of aid (not all, of course) do not attach a moral value to funds as gifts, neither do they feel bound by such standards as "good governance," "democracy," "transparency" or "accountability." Ultimately, these norms and values are "things of the whites," théir reality, language and logic, *nasara tedo*, something to do with the white's *mission civilisatrice* for which many rural *Moose* do not feel accountable. They are expressions in the donor language, frequently invoked as mantras that are devoid of meaning. In many areas of rural Africa such is the attitude toward the public sphere or public goods and means in general.

Penetration of the "Village" into the "City"

Especially youths have reasons to try to escape from "tradition" (*roogm miki*), to run away from the power of chiefs, from sorcery and the wrath of ancestors, from forced conformation to village laws[11] and the lack of freedom. This is often linked to economic pursuits. A distinction must be made between a "wealthy person" (*ra kaagre*) in the village context and an "owner of money" (*ligdi soba*) or "big man" (*nim bedre*). The wealthy

11 Kaboré (1985:16) refers to a *Moose* song expressing *roogm miki* principles: "celui qui provoque, celui qui provoque (…) aura de nos nouvelles, Piuu Piuu" (will be killed by gun shots).

person has obtained his riches from within the Moose value system. He is considered a wise person, respected by people, who has obtained his wealth thanks to God. He is also feared by chiefs since he himself is called chief by the people. An "owner of money," on the other hand, is a "nouveau riche." He is materially rich but not necessarily respected. The term *ligdi soba* refers to the material side alone, with the unspoken thought that this form of affluence may turn out to be volatile.[12] The only way to legitimise the riches he obtained is in rendering them social by distributing them to lineage members and supporting networks so as to show his generosity. If he does not act in this way, he will become the object of sorcery, practiced by order of jealous supporters among his kin, neighbours, friends. As Geschiere (1997) repeatedly writes: sorcery is the night-side of kinship. That is one of the reasons, by the way, why *Moose* have more confidence in friends than in brothers.

The force of tradition, and the danger of death or insanity from sorcery and witchcraft,[13] lead people to distance themselves from their village and even from their relatives. This may be achieved by converting to another religion, especially Pentecostal religion, in order to escape from the wrath of one's ancestors and evil spirits. It may also be done by migrating to destinations far away from one's kin. Such destinations are for instance the cocoa plantations in Ivory Coast (where *Moose* are the main labour force) or to other African countries, Europe, the United States or China. Many inhabitants of Burkina Faso (*Burkinabè*) who began a promising enterprise at home eventually moved away in such a manner. During the period of my fieldwork at least two very successful businessmen who had stayed "at home" went broke because of "unexplainable" reasons.

The ideal of ambitious villagers, especially educated youths, is to become "urban" or "global," and to transcend the images of "farmer" and "villager" which in every respect contrast with "modernity," obstructing both individual accumulation and personal development. But adoption of "modernity" does not automatically bring freedom in the course of personal development. Even if a certain degree of affluence has been attained, the social security of the lineage is not easily replaced by the certainty of "modernity." The latter would imply that the state creates anonymous chances for individuals. But the

12 Like wealth obtained from the sale of gold, see Luning (2009).

13 *Nionionce* or *tengbiise* ("people of the earth") distinguish two kinds of "witches" – *sada* and *soinyan:* both kill but only *soinyan* also "eats" (although this may differ per region). Inevitably, becoming a witch involves the death of a beloved person or a family member. To retract from witchcraft may result in madness.

state, in spite of pretending to be modern, hardly meets the expectations of being the carrier of such "modernity." Instead, with continuing liberalisation, the erstwhile state-functions were replaced in education and healthcare by paid services, either officially established as such or through corruption by government employees. This has resulted in the so-called *state cannibalism* of a state that illegally exploits citizens (Bayart 1989; Geschiere 1997).

The "privatisation of the state," as experienced by the poor in the rural, the semi-urban, and urban areas, has prevented the building up of a sense of security, needed by individuals in order to invest in socio-economic development. Most poor immigrants trudge ahead in the informal sector, "fending for themselves" (*ils se débrouillent*) on subsistence or survival level, living in unsurveyed (*non lotis*) areas which can be expropriated by the state at any moment. Among many of the immigrants, ambitions have dried up and frustrations have led to feelings of despair, fear, suspicion and jealousy – if not to drug addiction and criminality. This has brought people who have not found security with the state (which seems to be reserved for the rich and mighty) to look for the protection that is within everyone's reach: their urban relatives and Big Men. Consequently, this has led to a farewell to the "modern" logic so dearly hoped for. Instead, one returns to magical thinking, to the reality, language, and logic of the village, and to the dependence on the very symbolic system maintained by gifts, debts, and manipulation, from which one wanted to escape. This return to the logic of the village in cities, whether or not in combination with the "modern" one, is a typical characteristic of the contempory "modernity" of the urban poor. It means a return to traditional certainties where "development" has provided none. Once this phase has become reality, socio-economic accumulation is realised by an "economy of envy," in which the success of the one is considered as a loss or a defeat of the other. Henceforward, there is a competition between jealous fellowmen in accumulating riches *through* competition or secret warfare, based on the accumulation of magical strength and power. Let us recall the case of an interweaving of the traditional and modern world in urban sorcery as cited at the beginning of this text. Then the woman explained that she invokes chthonic forces through so-called earthshrines (*tengkuga*), which are the gateway to the world of ancestors, death and bloodsacrifice, and – in the case of witches – even human "sacrifice."[13]

In witchcraft a transformation takes place whereby the eating of meat (*nen neere*) is replaced by the eating of souls or life forces (*nen lebende*). Therefore, "state cannibalism" does not merely refer to an economic exploitation of the poor by state elites, but to the devouring of the "life force" (*siiga*) of society.

Sorcery and the protection against it create vicious circles of fear, distrust, suspicion, revenge, rumours, and accusations. It leads to a social crisis whereby social relations are guided by secret, silent, magical warfare, and the risk of agression and violence. A balance or reciprocity is sought in the hope of one's own sorcery harming the other in occult battles.

In this way the entrepreneurial climate is poisoned. Economic risers, ideally assumed to be the driving forces of the economy, may become hostages in networks of competitors and dependents who are often kin. They do everything to make their successful relatives respect their lineage obligations, and thus to redistribute their "foreign" wealth, a forceful levelling mechanism.[14] Those who manage to survive such a competition become Big Men, the "nouveaux riches" of the country. And the higher one rises economically, the more one manages to profit from what the state has to offer, such as well-paid jobs, political positions and tax and energy bill exemptions. Such successful people seem to privatise the state and its laws. In this climate one observes that professional mediators or middlemen in the service sector such as police, judges, lawyers, house agents, insurance brokers, and even bankpersonnel may form cliques who protect one another in exploiting the less educated who seek their help. In this way brokers become tricksters. And where do the victims seek refuge to level their misery? In urban lottery, and in a return to the logic of the village. But in cities the sense of "community" is lost, and so are the corrective mechanisms or "checks and balances." Individualism is on the rise, as is evident from the efforts of accumulating wealth and becoming powerful, whereby sorcery and witchcraft are often deemed indispensable.

In times of trouble, salaried people may spend a substantial part of their income on occult practices. Jealousy among collegues, public rumours or accusations of corruption, rivalry in love affairs, or ineffective modern medicines can all be a reason to consult a diviner (*bagba*). This may require making regular trips to one's village of origin. It is said that in these rural areas live the real *Moose*. They still live in equilibrium with "nature" in its transcendent meaning, and they derive their strength from *roogm miki*. Detecting business profits, such diviners (*charlatans*, or *gri-gri-tiers* as they are called by educated people), or similar agents of magic have come to the cities to be "consulted." Here the markets with natural ingredients used for all kinds of magic are expanding – one can earn a good income with this business. Spirits and *génies, djinns* or *fantômes* roaming the dark places at

14 For the terms "levelling," "accumulation" and "circularity" in this respect, see Geschiere (1997, chapter 1).

night have also installed themselves in the city. In this way, too, the "village" has penetrated the city. The borders between the two have faded, and the "village versus brousse" and *nen neere – nen lebende* opposition likewise.

The urban socio-economic dualism of Burkina Faso, with its extreme contrasts of rich versus poor, has transformed itself into a new, national, dualistic "culture of modernity," of interacting visible and invisible worlds, in which politicians, even high officials in the administration like ministers and presidents, regularly visit their "marabout" for spiritual support and physical protection (Kourouma 1998).[15] It is not surprising that sorcery and witchcraft have become part of the political economy of the "western-style" state, for the traditional political system is closely linked with the occult world, the chiefly power (*naam*) being of heavenly origin and its execution legitimised by the powers of the earth. To obtain and to maintain power and wealth needs the constant crossing of metaphysical borders. In this imagery witchcraft and sorcery fit well.

Nen neere and *nen lebende* have merged. The correcting mechanisms that should serve to separate the two spheres appear to have weakened in the urban environment. This kind of societal evolution has inspired the Booker Price winning Nigerian author Ben Okri, in his novel *The Famished Road* (1991), and its successive books *Songs of Enchantment* (1993) and *Infinite Riches* (1998), to evocate an imaginary African urban world where the unleashed forces of the mirrored shadow-world have penetrated and mixed with urban life, and the anomalies and ambiguities this has created.[16]

Ambiguous Africa

At first, in the West, "the whites" thought that with the dawn of "modern times," independence, Christianity, development cooperation, modernisation, and globalisation so-called "primitive" customs such as the belief in fetishes, magic, divination, witchcraft, and sorcery would stop or at least diminish, just as happened in the case of local superstitions in

15 After one of the recent *coups d'état* in Burkina Faso (2022), when Paul Henri Bamiba ousted Roc Marc Kabore, all ministers were dismissed, charged of corruption, and forbidden to leave the country. Commenting on these measures people said: "les poches des marabouts se rempliront d'argent" referring to Big Men trying to save their skin.

16 In cities in Burkina Faso, occasionally, all of a sudden, there are waves of rumours of occult happenings causing general panic: people being decapitated or human skulls dug up from graves as rumours go that *gri-gri-tiers* can fill cranes with gold; or penises all of a sudden shrinking or disappearing altogether (so-called "penis snatching"). These phenomena are known in many regions in Africa (Bonhomme 2012).

Europe. One also expected that "primitive" beliefs would be replaced by western rationality, logic, values and morality. However, in contrast with such western expectations, these customs and beliefs do not disappear.[17] On the contrary, with modernisation and globalisation this mechanism becomes stronger (Geschiere 1997; Ellis 2011; Zanen 2018).[18] Even African expatriates abroad in Europe and the United States are in frequent contact with "marabouts" (residing in Nigeria, Cameroon, New York, Paris, Brussels or Amsterdam) who can be easily reached through modern media. They also consult immigrant spiritual secret societies or spiritual "healers" (*guérisseurs*) who may help in times of trouble, secretly slaugtering sacrificial chickens in parks, polders or behind apartment buildings.

Africa lives in two worlds in which "the things of us" and "the things of foreigners" have gradually merged into a hybrid whole. As such we may qualify the ambiguity that emanates from two contrasting logics, or systems of thought that exist side by side while overlapping and merging at the same time. Modern, "western" power relations, western law and juridical procedures, accessibility to modern media, infinite riches and political power of origins often nebulous to the public, lifestyles of the privileged elite (which match the whites/*nasara* worlds viewed on TV and videos), and modern means of communication intermingle in the cities with an undercurrent of "tradition" and customary law (*roogm miki*). The relation between countryside and city thus acquires a new dimension. The mechanisms of the village – the "things of us" – are mobilised to stand up against the new urban reality. In the countryside contestant parties in cases of succession, land ownership, or inheritance play off national law against customary law. In connection with the preservation of *Moose* values in times of change, Pacere (1984: 41) remarks that "even when the woman stumbles she will never fall on her genitals" (*paag lakr kon lub a kinde*). One also says: "the medicine bag will ever remain to contain a medicine." In other words, "modernity" implies "tradition." On the other hand, *roogm miki* is not invariable either. The *Moose* "tradition" is not uniform, it varies from place to place under the influence of diverging local histories and experiences.

17 The standard theme of novels written by African authors in the 1960s-1970s concerns African students who, in Europe, have tasted Western values, return to their motherland full of ideals, but who are "at home" gradually corrupted and sucked back into a parallel system of secret powers, corruption and nepotism.

18 With Burkina Faso on the brink of political collaps in 2023 (one third of the territory being presently controlled by "jihadists"), and social and economic tensions rising, it can be expected that the influence of the occult on daily life has increased.

This article was meant to show how the relation of *cross-fertilisation* between "tradition" and "modernity" works out in rapidly changing Burkina Faso, and how from this relationship new meanings emerge, giving direction to cultural and social development.

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