In this contribution we want to assess the symbolic space in two horticultural societies, Dogon¹ (Mali) and Kapsiki² (North-Cameroon). The subsistence activities of both groups are geared to survival in harsh environments, both physical and social. In both cases the other domains of culture are well integrated with the exigencies of subsistence, as the result of a long interaction between the villages, their natural milieu and the outside politico-economic world. This is the materialistic basis from which we shall start. In both instances, however, the environment is met in an indirect way, through the views and ideas of the people concerned, through a cultural screen that regulates, focuses and maybe distorts their perceptions, conceptions and definitions of the situation. This cultural dimension thus has a twofold character: on the one hand it is a reflection of the materially based survival strategies that have been worked out in the course of history, while on the other hand it shapes the form and focus of man’s dealings with his survival. For the sake of this article we shall focus on symbolism, and more generally religion, in relation to subsistence. Though this is but one aspect of the cultural interface between man and survival, it is a crucial one as well as an expedient angle; it both directs interaction with the environment and functions as a sensitive recording instrument, monitoring pressures and changes in the relation with the milieu while retaining the vestiges of former struggles with survival at the same time. Therefore, in order to gain a proper perspective of both symbolic systems, we shall present a quick overview of their ecological history, and then proceed to the symbolic representations embedded in subsistence activities.
A history of Dogon subsistence

The Dogon area has been settled for a long time, as archeological research has shown (Bedaux 1983). Long before the Dogon arrived on the scene, similar groups occupied the strange and beautiful location the Dogon hold now. The result of the turbulent history of the region can be seen nowadays in the Dogon villages: huddled on the inhospitable scree of the majestic Bandiagara escarpment, they present both a striking sight (and a substantial income for the Malian state through tourism) and a perennial question: how do the Dogon manage to survive in such a seemingly inhospitable environment and why did they choose such a site? Two sets of factors have shaped the Dogon predilection for their “falaise”, historical and geographical. The first was slave raiding. The Niger bend, where the Dogon area is situated, has been scourged by continuous slave raiding. The empires of Ghana, Mali, Sonrai, the chiefs and kings of the Mossi, Sao and Fulani had a perennial hunger for slaves. For them all non-Muslims were potential slaves. Slave raiding was usually carried out by merchants in small commercial raids of a hit-and-run type. Against this threat the Bandiagara escarpment offered a fair defense. On top of the plateau the villages were built behind diaclase gorges, only accessible on foot, and at the foot of the cliff the scree offered some protection against mounted attacks as well as an opportunity to spot raider parties from afar. If the pressure was too great, the Dogon could flee into the caverns inside the sandstone cliff.

The second factor was water. The water situation at the plateau rim as well as at the foot is slightly better than either on the plateau or in the sandy dunes of the plains (see map). The sandstone rock holds a considerable amount of water throughout the dry season, while the foot of the scree is the lowest part of the area; a rivulet runs parallel to the falaise in the wet season.

Consequently, the rim and foot of the plateau offered a fair prospect for horticulturalists. As we noted above, the Dogon were by no means the first to settle the falaise area. Other, now prehistoric, groups preceded them, known as the Tellem and the Toloy (Bedaux 1983). Their ecological situation, as far as can be gleaned from the scant data, must have been quite similar. The Dogon arrived at the falaise in the waning of the Mali empire, somewhere around the 15th century. They chased out the Tellem and settled in their ecological niche, cultivating millet and sorghum. Periodic droughts must have been part of their collective experience. The 16th through 18th centuries have seen at least three drought periods per century, while the 19th century seemed to have been more generous with rain (Walker 1978). Though some rituals may have been generated in these periods that bear a close association with drought (van Beek 1990), oral tradition does not reach beyond the 19th century (with the possible exception of the order of arrival at the escarpment, Dieterlen 1942).

The safety of the escarpment was a relative one for the Dogon, a possibility for defense but by no means a guarantee for safety. The Dogon lost many of
their numbers to the slaveraiders, though the amount is very hard to estimate. They coped with the perennial threat in several ways. First of all, they cultivated fields as close to the village and the falaise as possible, using a system of intensive horticulture in the fields within viewing distance of the village. Manuring the fields, according to local tradition, was developed at the falaise.

The social adaptation to the combined need for food production and defense was an insistence on communality. Work was organized as often as possible in large groups, able to defend themselves against the small pockets of horsemen roaming the countryside. Groups of 10–20 men were large enough, and the farther the fields were from the village, the larger the groups. Recruitment to these groups followed two lines, first that of the extended families, and secondly that of the age classes. For the close fields an extended family was usually able to furnish the labour—cum-defense, though a combination of two to four extended families, often forming the smallest gina, patrilineal segment, was a normal working unit. The old men of the lineage in question coordinated the work, either having their people work together on one large field, or arranging the families to work on adjoining fields. For the larger fields, especially those further removed from the village, a larger group of workers was recruited from the age groups. The old men served as lookouts from the toguna, the men's hut built high up against the mountain with an unrestricted view of the plains and/or the plateau. If an age class (kadaga) worked out in the fields, several old kinsmen served as lookouts in the highest toguna or—for the villages at the foot of the escarpment—on top of the plateau rim. Drums then served as a means of communication.

The coordinating task of the old men was facilitated by their general position of authority; they had (and still have) a key position in the mode of production, just as they have control over all in-fields, i.e. all fields within view of the village. All fields where permanent cultivation was possible, that is close enough to manure, were assigned to the oldest men of the village, ward, clan and lineages. The complicated system of land rotation meant that a specific set of fields was assigned to the oldest in the village, another set to the next in line and so on, for each section of the village as well as for the whole village. Thus the old men were in a position to coordinate while they also had a definite interest in the cultivation of their fields.

The advent of the colonizer brought about some fundamental changes that transformed Dogon adaptation at an increasing pace. The pax gallica cut short the slave raiding in the area as well as the—few—skirmishes between Dogon settlements themselves. This meant that the plateau as well as the plains became available for cultivation. At an increasing pace the Dogon swarmed out into the newly opened up resources, building new farms and founding new villages. The plains and the plateau were not exactly empty, as some villages had already been established on the plains. However, in the first decennia of the century the Dogon quickly filled in the empty spots on the map, first next to the present border with Burkina Faso with its better soils,
then in the sandy plains closer to the escarpment. On the plateau the Dogon drifted northwest. For the villages at the falaise, which we concentrate upon, this meant diminishing population pressure at first, owing to both the out-migration and to the cultivation of those fields which were still considered to be village territory. In the falaise villages new fields at 5–10 kilometers from the rim were brought into cultivation. The control of those fields fell unto the families that ventured out, first collectively as agnatic lineages but also individually. Thus, in contrast to the gerontocratic structure of the in-field control, these out-fields were owned by the lineages.

At the same time new crops were being introduced. Tobacco had been cultivated for a long time, but onions came to be cultivated on a rapidly increasing scale. Thus, a dry season cultivation developed, in which onions (and tobacco) were cultivated in the riverbed, irrigated with hand-carried pots and calabashes. Waterholes were dug in several places in the sand, to follow the receding water table during the three months of onion cultivation (December through February). Villages on the plateau cultivated the borders of waterpools. This production was the first real cash crop for the Dogon, triggered by the need for money (taxation and the purchase of commodities) and the presence and development of food markets. The onions found an easy acceptance in the region. Onion farming became more important on the plateau, when after a successful start in 1938 an increasing number of small “barrages” were built. Dozens of small man-made lakes enabled the plateau Dogon to concentrate on onion farming in an environment where formerly no cultivation—not even grazing—had been possible.

Ecologically this has aggravated the desertification of the plains. The sandy dunes adjoining the escarpment began to be overcultivated, beyond their carrying capacity. The shifting cycle of the outfields was gradually foreshortened and the supply of firewood and construction wood became scarce. Dogon agriculture intensified, concentrating on three focal points, the falaise rim and the out-fields in the wet season, and the waterholes in the dry season. This intensification, combined with the filling up of all the ecological niches in the area, put the ecosystem under a severe strain. As the resources were beginning to fail, new kinds of limitations appeared. Fertilization of the soils became more problematic, as the onion and tobacco farming demanded ever more manure. The traditional ways of manuring relied on the residue of the subsistence farming on the one hand and on animal husbandry on the other. Thus an increase in cattle can be noticed in this period, which in turn put the ecology of the area as a whole under pressure and endangered the natural refertilization within the jachère system of the out-fields.
Dogon subsistence and its symbolism

The symbolic and religious dimensions of Dogon subsistence show a definite cultural lag after the more recent changes in the political and ecological situation. As we shall see, Dogon subsistence is still based upon a notion of expansion, growth and defense; where these factors vanish, Dogon subsistence becomes "secularized" to a notable degree. In our discussion, we shall focus on the escarpment villages, where the bulk of Dogon history was located and where the preconditions for a viable interface with survival strategies still exist. In order to grasp the symbolic dimensions of subsistence, we shall browse through several major aspects of agriculture consecutively.

The first and foremost asset is land. Dogon fields can be separated into four categories: the fields on the scree, the in-fields at the foot of the scree—on both sides of the riverbed—, the out-fields and the unusable bush. The situation is illustrated in the diagram below.

As a general rule distance from the falaise means a decrease in ritual value: most sanctuaries are located just at the plateau rim or underneath. Thus, fields and places away from the defensive shelter of the Dogon have less symbolic value. The same pattern holds for the village as such: the center is ritually important, the fringes are not. The habitation pattern of the Dogon villages shows a flow from the periphery towards the center: old men—the ritual nexus of the village—live in the clan and lineage houses (gina) in the high middle parts of the settlement. Young men setting up their houses may find a place in the heart of the village, but only if old people have left or died; normally youngsters have to build their first house at the village rim. Growing older, after the death of some patrilineal relatives, they move into older houses, e.g. their father's or father's brother's houses. Eventually, if they grow old enough, they move right into the symbolic center of their clan and the village. Thus, an outward flow of young men is counterbalanced by a gradual inward flow of aging men.

The same pattern, though slightly modified, holds for the fields. An old/young gradient can be seen from scree fields to out-fields. The oldest
men, living at the symbolic center of the village, control by virtue of their age the highest and most fertile lands, close to their homes. The age group directly behind them is in charge of the arable in-fields on the valley floor, and generally the younger men have to risk a longer walk (and formerly their lives) to reach and cultivate the out-fields. Thus, in the fields too, an outflow of youngsters is followed by a step-by-step inflow of aging men. However, this situation is more complicated, as the rights to land are—as usual—quite complex. Firstly, lands are allotted to the seniors of lineages and clans, not on the basis of comparative age in the village, but just within a lineage and a clan. Thus, a very old man can be out of land, if some clansmen happen to be still older. Secondly, allotment of land means control, not always usufruct. Old men have their sons and (classificatory) grandsons use the land, often letting other people (especially sisters’ sons) cultivate them as well. So the main factor for resource accessibility is a close relation to male old age.

Characteristically, in the out-fields age does not function as a key to resources any longer; the fields are controlled by (sub)lineages and allotted through inheritance. Some premium on age, however, remains through the specific rules of patrilineal inheritance (from older to younger brother, then to the oldest male of the next generation).

At the same time an inverse gradient of individualization of the cultivation activities can be seen. The out-fields, as we have glimpsed in the historical overview, tended to be cultivated by large work parties, the in-fields (both those close to the river and the scree) by extended and nuclear families, and sometimes by individuals. The main difference is the reliance on age-mates for the larger parties and the linear kinship relations in the in-field cultivation.

Thus we see an association age / location / linearity at the basis of subsistence organization:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old</th>
<th>young</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>close fields</td>
<td>distant fields</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>linear relationships</td>
<td>lateral relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>center</td>
<td>periphery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>permanent cultivation</td>
<td>intermittent cultivation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Crops form the second resource, and the value and division of crops is an important cultural focus. Cultivation of the various crops is not a neutral matter. The main staple is millet (*Pennisetum*), supplemented by sorghum and maize. However, the most important crop from the point of view of ritual is fonio (*Digitaria exilis*), with millet, rice and sesame trailing behind. The most common food taboo centers around fonio: old men (in Dogon definition: the oldest men of a lineage) are forbidden to eat fonio (though it is a relished food). Other food taboos focus on animals, usually non-edible ones, and apply either to a lineage or an individual.

Fonio as a crop distinguishes itself in several ways: it is sown late and harvested early; in fact it is the first harvest after the rains. It is sown *à la volée*, throwing it with the wind, which is done with no other crop. Harvesting
has to be done quickly as the grains easily fall from the ears; so it is harvested collectively, by men, women and children together. This characteristic of fonio is the reason why it is said to “sow itself”: any field where fonio has grown will show a crop the next year without sowing. Fonio harvest is the time of rejoicing, of relaxing of morals, singing lewd songs, with bawdy interchanges between the groups of men and women. Thus, fonio is a very suitable symbol for collectivity, fertility, youth and the public realm.

These associations offer some insight into why fonio is forbidden for the old men heading the lineages: they are associated with the opposites: privacy, danger, permanency and individuality. The ritual food they use most is *punu*, millet gruel. As a simple dilution of some millet in water, seasoned for human consumption with baobab fruit fibres, but for supernatural consumption not seasoned at all, it serves in any sacrifice or offering. It is the staple food, but not the main course on the Dogon menu (which is *dya*, millet mush). *Punu* is not eaten, it is—according to the Dogon—drunk, though many Dogon relish it, often using it as an in-between snack. A true meal, however, is eating mush, not drinking *punu*.

The other foodstuffs used in rituals are sesame and rice, both used in sacrifices just before the killing of the animal. Rice is then consumed in small cakes, and sesame in oily balls, and both are considered a delicacy, and therefore offered in sacrifice. These crops form but a minute fraction of the diet. Both sowing and harvesting come after the millet and sorghum. Beans, the last ritual food to be mentioned here, are used in ritual in the form of small cakes; in daily practice beans are used to season fonio and millet mush. Beer, *konyo*, is of supreme importance in Dogon daily life. Though not dominant, it is present in sacrifices, often in an “older”, less labour-intensive form (*pipiri*). So, on the whole, the ritual foodstuffs are those in the periphery of the daily diet, the culinary fringes of Dogon food.

This cultural definition of food leads us to another dichotomy in crops, that between men and women. Generally the staple crops are the man’s crops while the small crops are cultivated by the women. Thus, men cultivate millet, sorghum, maize, rice and fonio, which they may intersperse with beans; the women take care of the gombo (*Hibiscus*, both fruits and leaves), groundnuts, sorrel and couch. Onions and tobacco, two dry season crops dependent upon irrigation, have their own rules. Onions may either be male or female crops, or open to both, depending on circumstances and local history. Tobacco is a male crop. Age matters in the choice of cultivation, young men tending to cultivate more sesame than old people, especially when some rituals (e.g. the *dama / dô*, the mask festival) demand it. Calabashes (gourds) form another example, as these are almost exclusively cultivated by old men. This crop needs constant supervision and care (turning the fruits regularly in order to avoid rot); the calabashes are cut and prepared for sale by the old men.

Subsistence agriculture depends on a third factor, that of time. Few activities tend to regulate and dictate the annual rhythm as thoroughly as
agriculture. The Dogon—of course—have a definite calendar for sowing, weeding and harvesting:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Calendar</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kari ('cold')</td>
<td>December</td>
<td>start onion farming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>January</td>
<td>onion farming, second burial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>February</td>
<td>onion farming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Udye ('hot')</td>
<td>March</td>
<td>onion harvest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April</td>
<td>mask festival (if convenient)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May</td>
<td>id.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budò (between)</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>clearing, buro, first sowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyinè ('wet')</td>
<td>July</td>
<td>sowing, re-sowing millet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>August</td>
<td>weeding millet, peanuts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>September</td>
<td>weeding, fonio harvest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bagò (harvest)</td>
<td>October</td>
<td>harvest, bagò di</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>November</td>
<td>transport of harvest.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Viewing the agricultural calendar, the Dogon divide the year not so much into climatic seasons, but into periods of work: their division of the year reflects what they themselves should and can do. There is a sowing and weeding season, a harvesting season, an onion season, a season without work and an intermediate season in which the preparations for the new cultivation starts. Rituals follow this division: in the sowing/weeding season a few rituals for the protection of the crops are performed; the harvesting season starts with the ritual use of the first millet (bagò di, the first punul) and marks the closing ritual of that year’s second burial (nyû yana), and the dry season gives ample time for the large rites de passage of mask festivals and (very seldom) sigui. The most important yearly rite, the buro, which is done in the season-in-between, in fact constitutes its high point as well as the start of the next cultivation.

Agricultural exigencies may be important, but they are not the only ones to be reckoned with. The yearly rhythm of sowing and planting is more than an expediency, it is the only way to ensure a good crop. After the first rains everybody has to sow millet, and nothing else. Sowing sorghum first, or maize, would endanger the millet’s yield. For the Dogon, whatever other crops may be cultivated, real food is millet, so it has to be “greeted” first. In a similar vein, beans are planted together with millet, but not only to enhance fertilization. Often beans are planted in a row surrounding the millet field; the object then is to protect the millet against diseases and jealousy.

Gourds (calabashes) not only are an old man’s crop, they also serve to indicate oncoming famines and the timing of the sigui ritual. According to the Dogon, whenever calabashes grow spontaneously from the sandy soils of the pool sides, a famine is to be expected. Similarly, in certain fields these plants indicate that the time for the 60-year sigui ritual is near.
History of Kapsiki Subsistence

Like the Dogon habitat, the Mandara mountains, where the Kapsiki live, have long served as a slave reserve for the Muslim empires of the Sudan. Among these, the empire of Kanem-Bornu, the sultanate of Mandara and the Fulani Sokoto empire are the most important. Slave raids in the Mandara area figure in the very first information on Kanem-Bornu enterprises and when, in the sixteenth century, the Mandara living at the northern end of the Mandara range were islamized, they eagerly participated in raiding the so-called Kirdi (heathen) mountain populations. At the start of the eighteenth century the Mandara were subjugated by Bornu and through the two following centuries the Sultans of Mandara paid about a hundred slaves a year as a tribute to Bornu (Le Moigne 1918: 132). In the eighteenth century the Fulani, originally a nomadic people devoted to their cattle, erupted in holy war (jihad) subjugating almost the whole of Northern Nigeria and Northern Cameroon (Kirk-Greene & Hogbin 1969). The difference for the Kirdi was only slight. It simply meant a new enemy and a new threat. The basic relationship remained the same, because they remained a hunting area for slaves.

This was the situation encountered by the first Europeans to arrive. As a matter of fact, the first contact of European explorers with the mountain tribes took place during a slave raid. Barth, a famous explorer of Africa's interior, reported a Bornu slave raid on the mountains of the Mandara in 1852 in which 500 slaves were captured (Barth 1857: 195).

Of course the Kirdi did not succumb to these raids without a struggle. In fact, they fought the muslim cavalry fiercely whenever it penetrated the mountains. The steeper the hillsides, the more successful was the defense. In the southern part of the Mandara region, where the slopes are gentle and the hills low, the Kirdi had a very hard time. The Goudé and Njeign tribes, who now inhabit this area, were eventually subdued and islamized. Up north, where steep rocky slopes dominate the scene, no mounted invader ever succeeded in subjugating Kirdi tribes like the Kapsiki. Though the small plateau which forms the center of the Kapsiki territory is a suitable battleground for horses, the Kapsiki withdrew to the volcanic outcroppings that are dispersed over the undulating plain. In the narrow valleys surrounding this plateau they built ramparts of earth as a defense against surprise raids. Though the enemy had superior weaponry, this bow-and-arrow defense against a mounted adversary could be effective. The Fulani met some bloody defeats, and around 1600 one of the most famous emirs of Bornu fell during a slave raid in the Mandara region.

Despite this spirited defense the pressure must have been great. Slaves were captured in considerable numbers, raids could be expected at any time and place. As a result the Mandara Kirdi developed a high resistance to outside influences. They resisted Islam as the religion of their enemies. On the other hand they never developed a centralized political authority. Kirdi tribes never became strong homogeneous units, authority hardly ever transcending village
or 'massif' level. The Mandara mountains, still today, are an area of ethnic fragmentation. This small mountain region harbours more than 30 different ethnic units. Most of them do not exceed 10,000 people but a few, like the Kapsiki, number more than 100,000. The internal organization of each unit remained fragmented. A few villages might join their forces for an occasional fight, but after the battle cooperation ended.

Slave raids from outside were never an isolated phenomenon. Villages also fought each other. One of the two aims of these internal battles was: the capture of slaves (killing enemies was the other one). Any enemy man, woman or child could be taken. A child might be adopted by the family of the captor, a woman could be married, but a captured man did not stay in the village.

The Kirdi in the Mandara mountains thus remained marginal to the great Muslim empires of the Sudan. From the southward expansion of Kanem in the twelfth century, resulting in the empire of Bornu, to the military domination by the Fulani in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the political situation of the Kirdi remained the same: marginal to the main political events, a slave reserve for the group in power.

At the start of the twentieth century the Fulani were defeated by the Germans and the English. The Kirdi, however, could never take advantage of this defeat, as the Europeans set up the Fulani Lamibé (chiefs) as local administrators. The colonizers had no choice in this. The Kirdi were so fragmented that direct rule was out of the question. This indirect rule, however, was clearly in favour of the Fulani. In fact, only after the Second World War did the Europeans themselves succeed in the pacification of the area.

It is hard to discern tribal units in the Mandara mountains before European contact. It is improbable that the Kapsiki lived all those centuries on the same spot. Oral history reveals a constant flux of populations; village histories (tribal histories do not exist) are effectively histories of migration, tales about the places the ancestors came from. It is a small scale migration most of the time. Villages are founded by a few people coming from a place some kilometers away. The ancestral village is often situated within the Mandara region itself.

Even today a tribal unit is difficult to define. The language is almost as fragmented into local dialects as the political situation; in any case, the tribe as a whole has no great significance for the Kapsiki; a sense of ethnic unity is absent and ethnic loyalty unknown.

The Kapsiki cultivate their crops with great care and diligence in the mountain savannah environment. The hillsides have to be terraced with low stone-walls to prevent water erosion and to get rid of the stones. During the short rainy season people are extremely busy. Sorghum and corn are sown as soon as the first rains appear, or even long before. The following month, in July, peanuts, tobacco, sweet potatoes and sesame are sown or planted. The fields have to be weeded at regular intervals in the months of July and August. At the close of August rations grow short, while the nights are cold and wet and much work remains to be done. It is a hard time for the people.
September brings the first harvest, maize, followed by the fast growing varieties of sorghum. The remainder is harvested in October. After the harvest people stay busy building new huts, plaiting straw and threshing the sorghum. After December less water is available and most work has been done, and in the following months the main festivals and rituals are held.

Of all the crops sorghum is the most important by far. This staple crop is for the greater part consumed as dafa, mush, the main Kapsiki food. A fair part of it is used for beer, another important item in the Kapsiki diet. In fact, the name Kapsiki, or kapsékè, means to sprout. They let the sorghum grains sprout and make beer from the young tendrils, so ‘Kapsiki’ means ‘Brewers’.

Other crops may be seen as complementary. Maize is the first harvested crop and so serves as food in the period of scarcity. Peanuts are important in sauces and dressings; in the fields they serve as a rotation crop with sorghum and millet. In the few low-lying places where water is abundant, cassava and yam are grown, which may serve as a replacement for sorghum mush. Sesame, beans, sorrel, couch, hibiscus and cucumbers are cultivated for use in sauce. Tobacco is grown near the houses and used as snuff.

Most fields are situated on the mountain slopes; in former days this was not only safer against surprise attacks, but it had one additional advantage. The mountainsides are easier to clear, as fewer weeds grow on them. The innumerable stones had to be arranged in little contour terraces, but once that had been done, the little patches of cultivable land could be used without too much trouble. The other point is water supply; rains and water supply are more dependable and stable in the mountains than in the lower-lying Nigerian plain.

In recent times, after the pacification, the Kapsiki, or Higi, as they are called in Nigeria, have progressed to the plains to the west. The produce of these fields fluctuates more than that of the mountain plots, but in favorable years they may yield three to five times as much. In cash crop production this advantage overrides the greater security of the hill farms. Onions, potatoes, pepper and garlic have recently become important as cash crops, substituting peanut cultivation, which has long been the only source of cash income. The fast developing tourist trade has made little swamp areas near water holes important, where vegetables can be grown.

Cultivable land is not scarce, due to several factors. Firstly, Kapsiki population, whose density of about 40 per km\(^2\) permits extensive cultivation, is static and the pressure on land is not increasing. However, formerly land was scarce. When only mountainsides could be cultivated because of slave raiding, good plots with adequate defense possibilities were in great demand. After the pacification the Kapsiki plateau and the Nigerian plains were opened up for cultivation and land became an open resource.

In principle, land is owned individually. Whoever delimits, claims and uses a new plot in the gamba, bush, for the first time, owns it. To claim a plot one has to sink rows of long stones to stake the field on one side, and a riverbed usually forms the other boundary; nowadays almost all cultivable land has
been claimed: "there is no more real gamba" our informants emphasize. Today's farmers cultivate fields they have inherited or borrowed. Land is inherited patrilinearly: after the death of the owner it is divided between the brothers or sons of the owner. These same inheritance rules set certain limits to individual ownership. As a number of kinsmen have claims on fields, one should not sell one's fields. Many fields are loaned on a semi-permanent basis. Several people have inherited far more land than they can ever cultivate and about 50% of all Kapsiki cultivate on loaned fields. Close patrilineal kin can cultivate each other's fields without any compensation, but borrowers from other lineages or clans "pay" for the transaction with a jar of beer or with a service in return: they may herd some goats or cattle for the owner. This loan relationship implies no dependency nor inequality and loans often occur between friends. Loans are inherited and may last for generations, resulting in great uncertainty as to actual ownership. However, the number of conflicts over land is low as fields are not scarce.

Ownership of land does not automatically imply ownership of the vegetation on it. Trees, a rare and valuable asset in this savannah country, are owned separately and individually, and are not included in loans of land. The owner usually comes down to cut the branches for his own use. Places with water are not owned, but are common property. Access to them can never be owned or barred. When a water hole dries up during a season of drought the new plot may be claimed. This gives rise to several conflicts, as some people may still consider it a well, and so common property.

Livestock is also important in Kapsiki society and includes poultry, goats and sheep, as well as cattle. The Kapsiki take pride in their own breed of short-horned, black-patched cattle, which contrast sharply with the long-horned, hump-backed stock of the Fulani. Cows are not milked by the Kapsiki, in fact most owners do not even tend their own cattle. The Kapsiki entrust either a friend or someone among the nomadic Mbororo Fulani with the care of their beasts. When these cows are milked, part of the milk is given to the owner. Goats and sheep are herded by small boys, often sons of the owners. The two main functions of husbandry are meat production and capital accumulation. For a horticultural society the Kapsiki own a considerable amount of livestock. About one third of all adult men have one or more cows, a small minority possessing more than five. An average Kapsiki household owns four goats and sheep, the distribution of this type of wealth being more even.

Compared to horticulture and husbandry, hunting and gathering account for but a tiny fraction of the diet. Women gather firewood in the bush, pick some leaves for the mush sauce or for salt (from the juniper tree), or they dig up some roots, to be used as shortening. Many other edible fruits and roots are known, but people use them only in times of crop failure and hunger. The indigenous medicinal system, however, is largely dependent on gathered specimens, but usually not on edible species. Hunting is of no great importance in the Kapsiki diet. Traditional oral history tells about elephants,
leopards and buffaloes, but the present Kapsiki hunter encounters only small
game like rabbits, guinea fowl, rats, mice and an occasional small antelope.
In January and February each year collective hunts are organized, but the
yield is low. In fact these hunting parties fulfill a ritual function rather than
an economic one.

Division of labour in Kapsiki society follows the traditional lines of sex and
age, the first being the most important. For instance, men and women have
separate tasks in agriculture. Men clear the fields, arrange and repair stone
terraces, grow maize, tobacco, garlic and onions while women tend such crops
as peanuts, couch, red sorrel, beans and groundnuts. Sesamum is a crop for
young boys, associated with initiation. Sorghum and millet, the staple crops
of the Kapsiki, are cultivated as a family enterprise by men and women; they
are considered the husband’s crops but his wives fully share the workload.
Threshing is a women’s prerogative: with big wooden flails the women beat the
sorghum ears and winnow in the steady January wind, while the husbands
transport the grains in big baskets to their granaries, singing songs of pride
and happiness.

In other activities too labour is arranged according to sex:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crops</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sorghum and millet</td>
<td>maize</td>
<td>sorghum and millet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maize</td>
<td>tobacco</td>
<td>(weeding, sowing and threshing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sesame (young boys)</td>
<td>sweet potatoes</td>
<td>corn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sweet potatoes</td>
<td>onions</td>
<td>sesame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>onions</td>
<td>garlic</td>
<td>sweet potatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>garlic</td>
<td>construction of huts</td>
<td>peanuts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cutting and plaiting of straw</td>
<td>couch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>brewing red beer</td>
<td>red sorrel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>hunting</td>
<td>beans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>herding cattle</td>
<td>groundnuts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>war</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>other activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cooking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>woodcutting and cleaning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fetching water</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>brewing white beer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The great majority of tasks inside or outside agriculture are performed by the
individual family or its individual members. A man grows some tobacco on
his own, just as his wife has her plot of couch. Both join forces in sorghum
cultivation, which has absolute priority over any other crop. For a few agri-
cultural tasks a bigger group is recruited. Clearing the fields, terracing the
hillsides and the difficult job of digging beds for sweet potatoes are performed
by meshike, work parties. Whoever wants to have such a job done picks a day,
has his wife brew huge quantities of white beer, and recruits as many laborers
as he can, calling in his neighbours, wardmembers, clansmen and friends. The
total labor force he can command depends on several factors: his diligence in
dworking for others, his stature as an important man in the ward and the
village, his network of friends, the fame of his women as brewers etc. Women
have their own *meshike* for clearing couch fields, and for harvesting beans,
couch and peanuts. They follow the same procedure, though the men take no
part in it.

### Symbolism in Kapsiki subsistence

Time is the most striking interface between subsistence and symbolism in Kap-
siki culture. The ritual calendar dominates the seasons: all agricultural rites
(associated with sowing, harvesting, storing), as well as almost all "rites de
passage" are fitted into the yearly rhythm of agriculture. The Kapsiki discern
two seasons, "wet" and "dry". The "wet" one numbers nine months (lunar
moons) and covers all activities concerning food production. The "dry"
season of three months (moons) is free from agricultural labor and harbors
the main "rites de passage": second burial, initiation and marriage. The ac-
tual climate is just the reverse: three months rain, and nine months dry season.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Agricultural activity</th>
<th>Ritual activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 1</td>
<td>Clearing, sowing sorghum, millet, maize and beans.</td>
<td>Rain rituals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2</td>
<td>Weeding sorghum, planting peanuts, sowing tobacco.</td>
<td>Chasing death: ritual against epidemics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 3</td>
<td>Weeding peanuts, sorghum, planting sweet potatoes.</td>
<td>Ritual start of house-building.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 4</td>
<td>Harvest of maize, weeding peanuts, sesame, planting tobacco seedlings.</td>
<td>Great year-festival.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 5</td>
<td>Harvest of red sorghum, peanuts.</td>
<td>Village sacrifice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 6</td>
<td>Harvest of white sorghum, millet, beans and sesame.</td>
<td>Village sacrifice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 7</td>
<td>Harvest of sweet potatoes.</td>
<td>Ritual hunt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 8</td>
<td>Threshing, storage in granaries.</td>
<td>Second burial.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 9</td>
<td>Storage.</td>
<td>Marriage rites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1</td>
<td>First clearing and sowing.</td>
<td>Boys' initiation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The steering mechanism of the time division is the agricultural season. Still,
the way in which the year is divided is characteristic of Kapsiki culture: a
season of nine months in which survival of the individuals and the families
is aimed at, and a three months season that should guarantee the continued
existence of the main relevant collectivity, the village. This conforms with the
individualistic tendencies in Kapsiki culture, in which the tension between individual and community tends to be resolved in the direction of the individual (van Beek 1987). Though ritual does follow agriculture in its general setting, the enactment of ritual does not allow concurrent agricultural activities. Specific ritual time precludes agriculture: a family at sacrifice will not enter their fields; at burial—an activity involving the whole village—people are admonished not "to touch a hoe’s handle".

Agricultural activities themselves show a gradual increase in ritualization as harvest time approaches. Clearing the fields and sowing are done with a minimal amount of ritual attention. When the crop ripens and the sorghum grows taller, the tension increases. One clear reflection of this ritual involvement is the tabooring of certain musical instruments during the ripening season; flutes are associated with winds which may threaten the growing stalks. Rain rituals and the ritual to chase away epidemics are protective rites aiming at safeguarding the general environment. The start of the harvest is ritualized in the main yearly festival of la, a huge festive occasion that unites the village after the family-oriented cultivation season. Ritual is at its most intense in January, when threshing and storage are accompanied by strong taboos on sexuality, explicit rules on social conduct (no quarrels, no verbal exchanges) and individual ritual. For the Kapsiki the crucial issue determining the real harvest is not so much the field as the granary. A field produces more or less according to the sowing (provided the rains are reasonable and some protection is given); a good granary, however, is filled quickly with a few baskets of sorghum and then lasts throughout the next cultivation season, while a bad granary "eats" the harvest itself. The Kapsiki know some miracle objects which can bring about a super-harvest. Most of these objects (special stones or crystals) are directed at the granary (van Beek 1978:403); whoever owns it, will not see that granary empty. The first tasting of the new harvest, thus, is less ritualized than the first use of a filled granary. Both the construction of a granary (especially a plaited straw granary) and the first usufruct call for elaborate rituals, involving the individual’s entire network of social relations within the village.

The main crop is sorghum (ha). For the Kapsiki no other crop is nearly as crucial, though maize and peanuts are important as additions to the menu. However, in symbolism sorghum as such is not dominant. It does receive some ritual attention, but mainly at storage. Other crops, that are far less important, are ritualized more. Cultivation of sweet potatoes (Ipomea batatas L.), though a minor crop on the menu, is heavily loaded with ritual protection and taboos. Sorghum appears in rituals mainly in the form of beer or mixed with other crops (peanuts, beans, couch). The main symbols in Kapsiki religion are either the ingredients of the sauces, wild plants and grasses or cattle. Peanuts or groundnuts (Arachis hypogea) have an important symbolic function, which does not in any way detract from the role of peanuts as a cash crop. Several other ingredients for the mush sauce are indispensable in sacrifices and offerings. Sorghum beer, however, is both food and drink at
rituals, important in those instances when the individualistic ritual transcends the level of the family. Beer (the red variety) is the means to link the individual family to the community at large.

The most important symbols stem from cattle. The skins, tails, and horns of cattle and goats serve in burial, initiation, marriage and grain storage, symbolizing wealth, new life and status as well as unity with a culture hero. In the mythology too, cattle play a major role, whereas sorghum cultivation is never explained, nor mythically introduced. So—again—the symbols do not stem from the core of subsistence, but from its periphery: though cattle are an important focus in Kapsiki society, they are not crucial for survival; food symbols stem from the culinary fringe of the Kapsiki menu; some important symbols stem from the bush.

Space has no central ritualization in Kapsiki culture. The fields as such have no ritual core, nor has the village. Within the village almost all ritual places are inside compounds, either functioning or deserted ones. In the bush some places rich in water with stands of trees are associated with the supernatural world, called shala (god). They are not important in ritual, but are dangerous through the presence of spirits (gutulï). These dispersed taboo places include the grave of the founding hero of the village, as well as some other spots visited during the rain ritual. A few fields have the reputation of being close to the underworld. People cultivating them avoid digging deep, lest they look directly into the realm of spirits below.

The main spatial distinction is between meleme (village) and gamba (bush). Anything outside the village perimeter is bush, and as such open territory. The Kapsiki sometimes distinguish between the real bush (unclaimed area) and the other bush (area that has been claimed for cultivation). After the pacification the plateau lands and the plains were considered “real bush” but at present all cultivable land is claimed: “there is no gamba any more”.

Ownership is an important issue in Kapsiki society, and is expressed clearly in symbolic terms. Stones, specially fabricated paraphernalia, iron objects and cattle horns may all serve as ownership markers. Ownership and debt are focal points in the ritual means to regulate interpersonal relations. In all this the individualistic tendencies in Kapsiki culture show clearly.

One other pervasive social dichotomy is the opposition between man and woman. As has been shown, this division of labour runs through the whole of agriculture. The crops are neatly divided between men and women, and so are almost all other activities. This has a profound influence on agriculture: the definition of crops as either male or female means a different approach to the cultivation task at hand. Whereas in the male cases much of the work is done with the nuclear or extended families that make up most of the domestic units in Kapsiki society, the female cultivation tends to be performed individually, with an incidental working party of women as a moderate exception. The woman’s fields are usually closer to the compound, but that distinction is gradually fading. Her fields are smaller and sown with a greater variety of small crops, on the whole, but on the other hand she “commands” the
main cash crop, peanuts. Historically, women cultivated the indigenous
groundnuts; when peanuts came to replace them and turned into a valuable
cash crop, the female definition of the crop persisted: the women grew the
cash crop. This has important consequences for the monetary situation within
the household, as the woman commands a considerable amount of cash, often
more than her husband (van Beek 1987). The relative autonomy of women has
been enhanced by this symbolic definition of crops, bringing the existing
separation between male and female worlds into sharper focus.

The most general aspect of Kapsiki culture, the tendency towards individual
autonomy and privacy (van Beek 1982), pervades the entire subsistence
strategy. Cultivation is performed as much as possible on a family basis, with
the nuclear family (monogamous or polygynous) as the main labor unit.
Clearing new fields, though, is often done in a major work party, just as the
women organize work parties for their small crop and peanut harvests. Even
if the collectivization of agricultural work is always applauded in Kapsiki
speeches and songs, it is not a dominant strategy. The rituals accompanying
food production, as far as the nine months “wet” season is concerned, are
usually performed on an individual basis. Divination techniques offer
guidelines for individuals, and most protective rituals are performed per field.
A few rituals are performed collectively, but then mostly by the blacksmiths
on behalf of the whole village, without any non-blacksmith being present. The
village sacrifices, indicated on the year calendar, are in fact family sacrifices
made by representatives of the primordial family of the village-founder; just
a few actually participate. The rules of property, too, focus on the individual,
though the passage of generations may widen the circle of interested people.

A final issue in symbolic interference with survival is that of the black-
smiths. Their caste-like position and broad spectrum of specializations (van
Beek 1982) put them in the center of a network of subsistence-oriented rela-
tions. Their status as “non-persons” in the village makes it easy for their melu
(non-smith) clients to remain aloof from their fellow Kapsik, while being de-
pendent on the lower “caste” for all kinds of material and symbolic services.

Comparison and conclusion

Dogon and Kapsiki in many ways present similar societies, offering the possibil-
ity of a controlled comparison (van Beek 1986, 1987). Both societies arose out
of the need to survive in a dry savannah/sahelian environment, under the con-
tinual threat of slave raiding. Kapsiki as well as Dogon rely on millet and
sorghum as their staple crops, complemented by a number of small crops, and
both practise mixed husbandry, raising goats and sheep as well as cattle, inter-
acting with the nomadic Fulani in this latter respect. Both relied on mountain-
sides for their defense against slave raiders, even if the sites themselves are quite
different, (which, by the way, in both cases attract tourists).
On this basis of ecological similarity, the comparison between the symbolic interfaces of the two societies yields some differences, as well as some—perhaps fundamental—themes common to both of them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Dogon</th>
<th>Kapsiki</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ritualization of time</td>
<td>incidental sowing</td>
<td>dominant harvest/storage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>focus on:</td>
<td>food production</td>
<td>human resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>staple crops</td>
<td>cattle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacralization of space:</td>
<td>harmony fixed in geography</td>
<td>autonomy movable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>center-periphery</td>
<td>dispersed, per compound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division of labour</td>
<td>seniority</td>
<td>strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>age</td>
<td>sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>communal labour</td>
<td>individual labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View of crops, new crops</td>
<td>flexible acc. labour demands</td>
<td>inflexible acc. sexual division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaction to change:</td>
<td>broadening of ecological niche</td>
<td>specialization: narrowing of ecological niche</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Dogon subsistence the survival of the collectivity has priority over the individual (not counting famine situations). Their year is ritualized to some extent, focusing on the start of the cultivation season. The main cycles are much longer than one year and are not tied to agriculture. In the symbolic system food production and the "production of harmony" are viewed as major issues, linked to a considerable degree. The symbolic space has a concentric structure, emanating from a central ritual place towards ever wider environments. Sacrality is closely linked with seniority, and conforms with the historic character of ethnic we-feeling.

The Kapsiki individual holds priority over his social environment. The ritualization of the year cycle is intense, and no cycle longer than a year exists. In the symbolic system, the "production of people" holds eminence over food production, with a clear focus on riches (both in goods and in people) and strength (to some degree identical). The symbolic space is dispersed, tied in to individual compounds. Sacrality is linked with sex/gender and ecological peculiarities, has few historical connotations, and conforms with the a-historic character of group identity.

Thus, the Dogon symbolic structure interacts with the economy in a very broad, general way. It enables a flexible response to environmental stimuli. Whenever problems arise, Dogon religion and symbolism serve as an adaptive instrument, legitimating new vistas of development, opening new niches in the ecosystem. New possibilities for gaining a livelihood are quickly explored, implemented and integrated in the village society: wage labor in the Ivorian cities, onion farming and commerce or the tourist trade. A careful balance is kept in this. The age group structure, with its focus on seniority, is balanced by the reciprocal dependency of the old men on the labour force of the young ones, a mutual dependency that is highlighted in the buro festival. This
Agricultural fertility among the Dogon and the Kapsiki

balance finds expression in many ways. In fact, one of the major characteristics of the Dogon symbolic system is exactly this mutual communal dependency. The symbols of subsistence as well as those of the life cycle express the irreplaceability of each social category: (men and women, old and young, artisan and cultivator, Fulani and Dogon necessity). This communality makes for a flexible ecological response, where the group as a whole manages to maximize its survival potential through, amongst other things, its symbolic system. This kind of communal coherence may be seen as the result of a long and successful interaction with a severe ecological and social environment. Viewed from the angle of Laughlin’s and Brady’s “harmonica model” (Laughlin & Brady 1978), the Dogon may have crystallized in their value system and symbolism the contraction phase. External threats (hunger, slave raiding) have resulted in a village based coherence fixated by symbolism. In some periods in their history the symbolic system could not cope any longer with the pressures (the “disintegration” phase of the model). With a characteristic horror the Dogon tell about the great famine of about 1914, when everybody was everybody’s competitor and enemy. “People slept on their grain stocks” is the telling expression.

This balanced dependency has its costs. A symbolic system has to have some stronghold, some “orthodoxy”, in order to serve as an integrative basis in society. It is precisely this communality that is the “orthodox” side of Dogon symbolic structures; people had to fit into the pattern; if not, little leeway for individual expression was available. Another cost is the cultural lag that develops in times of rapid change. The village based survival strategy, crystallized as it is in symbolism, has been the result of a hectic and turbulent situation which in itself did not change very rapidly. With colonization, decolonization and rapid population increase the communal values and symbols no longer seem to be the most viable survival strategy. The resulting individualization of society finds little grounding in the symbolic system. Burdened by its long standing success story, Dogon symbolic structure stands in danger of losing its stimulating influence and flexibility for adaptation.

The Kapsiki symbolic response has been quite different. Their history has never been very successful as a coherent society; their villages developed in a state of constant flux and change among major powers. Their subsistence never developed a similar close relation to a symbolic structure; the focus, as we have seen, is on people, not on food production. The main dividing lines in Kapsiki society do not stop at the frontier of the village, but run through the village community. Their option is not that of communality but strength; their favorite tales are about battles and skirmishes, ignoring famines and hunger. Thus, Kapsiki symbols express the deep cleavages in society, between men and women, between old and young, and the symbolic system reinforces the continuity of these social categories in new developments. The Kapsiki “orthodoxy” is, one might say, one of “stable inequality”. Consequently, the symbolic system has a more variegated function. The agricultural rituals reinforce the individualism rampant in Kapsiki society, underscoring the main
operative values of this culture. However, the communal rituals, performed in consonance with the agricultural cycle, express a set of values that run counter to daily life. In these rituals the symbols express a unity that is an ideal, never to be reached, only to be aspired to. So here the *communitas* in symbols is a clear counterpoint to *structure*, whereas in Dogon society the symbolic and the societal *communitas* run parallel.

New options in Kapsiki society can be fitted in easily as long as they can be explored individually. Characteristically, the major option is commerce: individual, yet with the full benefit of any network of relations one happens to have. On the whole these attitudes fit in easily with modernization, both the individualistic aspect and the relative secularization of traditional food production. The costs, however, are clear too. When strength is no longer of prime importance, and the village as such no longer has to define itself—at least periodically—as a unit, then the major stronghold for the symbolic system disappears. This in fact, happens. The secularized traditional situation transforms itself into a new society in which religion plays a very minor role. Modernizing Kapsiki easily leave their culture, sometimes to embrace a new religion, though most of the time no new religion or symbolic system is attained. Thus, the cost is loss of culture, of ethnic identity. On the other hand, the increased confrontation of the Kapsiki with competing groups in Cameroon and Nigeria, has led to an increased ethnic definition, as “Kapsiki”; their cultural unity with the Nigerian Higi thus is ruptured. Those festivals expressing unity of the village most strongly, like the *la*-rites, are being stressed as a means to their emerging group identity. But then, this is a new identity, not a continuation of the traditional situation.

In terms of Laughlin and Brady one might postulate that Kapsiki society never was in a situation to experience the kind of “contraction” mentioned above. Viewing their local histories, one is struck by the constant flux and change, the continuous migrations and endless wars; any sense of ethnic identity beyond the village level did not develop until after colonization (van Beek 1986); and now incorporation into the national states of Cameroon and Nigeria precludes any such development. On the other hand, the differences between the two courses that the Dogon and the Kapsiki have taken are too great to be accounted for by the small differences in political history; after all, we started out from a similar socio-ecological situation. Thus, the two contrasting cases of the Kapsiki and the Dogon represent two opposite options open for a society under duress. The choice of a particular course cannot be reduced to environmental history and materialistic factors. The structure of the value systems, the focus of the symbolic systems have to be taken into account. Though we did not mention any regional resemblances in our comparison, the similarity between neighbouring cultures is evident in both cases. The Dogon easily conform to a more general cultural model in the region they live in or stem from. One might postulate a substrate Mande culture—whence the Dogon trace their cultural roots—in which the “choices” exemplified above had already been made. The Dogon, in a cultural historical perspective,
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are part of some large scale West-African traditions, of which they in fact form a prime example. In contrast, the Kapsiki live in a frontier area between great traditions and were never part of a coherent socio-political body. Anyway, whatever the regional connections, one of the important operative factors has to be the symbolic structure of the society, which—once set on a certain course—tends to maximize the survival potential of the society within the chosen parameters.

Notes

1. Research on the Dogon has been carried out from 1978 to 1989, with several fieldstays, financed i.a. by the University of Utrecht and by two grants from WOTRO (Foundations for the advancement of tropical research).
2. Research on the Kapsiki has been carried out from 1971 to 1989 with several fieldstays, financed by the University of Utrecht and a grant from WOTRO.
3. The age class system of the Dogon had (and has) the regulation of labour as its main goal and "raison d'être". One age class of a typical Dogon village consisted of a fixed amount of able bodied males, around 50 in many cases, who gathered whenever there was a communal job to be done. Clearing and weeding bush-fields were among the most important ones. As each group was formed at the age of marriage of the boys, these communal jobs also served as a bride service, an important aspect of the marriage proceedings (Paulme 1948).

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    Bestandsnaam: ASC-1241507-167

    Titel: "Slave raiders and their 'people without history'"
    Bestandsnaam: ASC-1241507-156

    Titel: "Becoming human in Dogon, Mali"
    Bestandsnaam: ASC-1241507-163

22. Auteur(s): Beek, W. E. A. v.
    Titel: "Processes and limitations of Dogon agricultural knowledge"
    Bestandsnaam: ASC-1241507-164

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    Titel: "Culture and Development: problems and recommendations"
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    Titel: "Raad in orale tradities"
    Bestandsnaam: ASC-1241507-80

    Titel: "Van Baal, de etnografie en het mysterie"
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Bestandsnaam: ASC-1241507-30

Titel: "De Dogonreligie"
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30. Auteur(s): Beek, W. E. A. v.
Titel: "De Dogon en hun toeristen"
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Titel: "Meeting culture in meetings. Experiences from an international sports arena"
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32. Auteur(s): Beek, W. E. A. v.
Titel: "De Dogondivinatie"
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35. Auteur(s): Beek, W. E. A. v. & Avontuur, S.
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42. Auteur(s): Beek, W. E. A. v.
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51. Auteur(s): Beek, W. E. A. v.
    Titel: De grillige god: Ama, de vos en de Dogon
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52. Auteur(s): Beek, W. E. A. v.
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    Titel: Haunting Griaule: experiences from the restudy of the Dogon
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55. Auteur(s): Beek, W. E. A. v.
    Titel: Mormon Europeans or European Mormons? An "Afro-European" View on Religious Colonization
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ANITA JACOBSON-WIDDING and WALTER VAN BEEK

Chaos, Order and Communion
in African Models of Fertility

INTRODUCTION

The theme that is developed in this book is African folk models of fertility. Yet, in most African languages there is no such word, nor any concept articulating fertility or creativity as abstract notions. Instead we find a rich symbolic language expressing the characteristics and location of those forces or powers that men are supposed to exploit whenever they want to create something new—be it in human lives, new crops, new strength, or new products.

As a general rule, this symbolic language also denotes the conditions necessary for human beings to make use of these powers. The conditions thus defined tend to be articulated in culturally constructed models of the relationship between crucial symbols. We have chosen the concept of “folk models” to define these culturally constructed models constituted by internally related symbols depicting the creative process.

First of all some definitions and disclaimers. By fertility we mean in this volume the whole scope of the perpetuation of life, i.e. human fertility as well as the agricultural variety: of crops and animals. Some of the articles deal with the symbolism of sex and reproduction, others with models for subsistence and survival, but in all cases the focus is on fertility, which for the purpose of this volume might be defined as “the perpetuation of meaningful life”. The focus on meaning and existential values of life permeates the contributions.

The word “meaning” carries a lot of weight here. This book is about folk models of life and fertility; it deals with variation in symbols, models and value patterns developed by Africans struggling in their own inimitable way to stay alive, to perpetuate their existence and to make ends meet. The general orientation is definitely “emic”, as authors try to access the ways of thinking and symbolizing of the peoples they have studied.

The heuristics of folk models

Emic analyses do not necessarily represent informants’ statements or formulations of their own view of life and fertility. As Pike pointed out in his original definition of the concept (Pike 1954), it was meant to be a systems description,
an approach which tried to discern the logic, criteria and distinctions needed to describe the cultural aspect studied as a coherent system. Language was his subject matter; in fact, language has remained the dominant paradigm for the majority of emic studies (Murray 1982); however, the shift in subject matter from linguistic data to the less precise ones of other parts of culture entailed a shifting focus for the notion of emic too: from a strictly diacritical meaning (a descriptive operator within a system) it became the informant's point of view. The use of pretentious expressions, such as "the aim of emic anthropology is to get inside the informant's head" (Goodenough 1970:14) has not helped either, and has triggered a furious debate on the issues of cognitive reality and relevance.

In our view an emic analysis is, as Tyler (1969) calls it, "a theory of a particular culture", a heuristic device for the understanding and interpretation of that culture. Such theories cannot be grounded in a purely inductive field approach as, for instance, ethnoscience has tried (Fournier 1971), but on the other hand they are more than structurations of an inventive analyst. The "local theories" in this volume result from intensive interactions between the ethnographer and his or her informants, resulting in a converging sophistication of both parties in each other's ways of thinking. The main field test of a "local theory's" fit is usually to feed it back to those informants sharing some of the researcher's culture, usually the field assistants. A certain "Aha Erlebnis", the recognition of the aptness of the model to their knowledge of their own culture, constitutes some validation of the "theory".

A folk model, which may be considered as a building block of the "local theories", is defined by Holy & Stuchlik (1980:4) as "... a structured set of ideas about actions, external states of affairs, etc". This definition is too wide for our purposes, as it also includes ideologies for intentional action and descriptive models. We would like to narrow it down to those "structured sets of ideas" that serve as models and metaphors within the given culture, i.e. cognitive and affective maps of culture operative for its participants. Folk models are the ways cultures speak about themselves, their internal paradigms, metaphors and metonyms that both clarify and conceal crucial relations and values within that culture. They usually consist of specific cultural concepts that are generalized into other existential fields: "by the use of signs and symbols we can project mentally generated concepts into things and actions in the outer world" (Leach 1976:19). For example, a tripartite perception of colour may be used for the classification of time, space and social relationships (Jacobson-Widding 1979), or—as is central in this volume—the concepts of human fertility may be extrapolated into agriculture and religion.

Not only is this process of metaphorical extension a cultural phenomenon, but so is perception itself (Douglas 1982). Yet, the relationship of the perceptions on the one hand and of the symbols on the other with the existential world differs: the perceptions result from direct interaction with the environment, while the metaphors using them have a far wider scope and a greater internal autonomy. Metaphorical use of concepts is bounded only by rules of
internal logic, and by the values and borderlines drawn by culture itself. This absence of external constraints in folk models makes them vehicles for the values and fascinations of that particular society; thus, folk models reflect the relations within society and culture, as models of relationships (Geertz 1966).

Of course, the system or folk models may inspire judgement and action, and as such exert some influence on action. This is most clear when exploring, ordering or mapping new cultural grounds or adapting to new existential circumstances (Leach 1969). Thus, Riesman (this volume) shows how the Fulbe model of evaluating relations between themselves and their former slaves keeps on structuring these relations under wholly different circumstances and results in a new way of evaluating the "reality" of life. So, even as models of relations, these metaphors tend to become models for classification and evaluation (Jacobson-Widding 1984:30). In this view, a model is more than just a map; it is a series of instruments needed to chart new country.

Folk models as symbolic systems

Symbols are the building blocks of folk models, which can be considered to be structured agglomerates of a limited number of symbols. In African cultures we often find that folk models are formed by oppositional pairs like hot-cool, high-low, right-left, and so on. Or they may consist of a triadic system of symbols (red-white-black), a quadripartite classification (the four cardinal points), of symbols representing a comparison between container-contained, bigger than-smaller than, wild-domesticated, and so on.

In all these cases we are dealing with models for classification of abstract phenomena according to some fundamental values in the cultures concerned. A classificatory model of this kind may be called the "general folk model" of a particular culture (cf. Jacobson-Widding 1984). The identification of such a general model does not exclude the possibility of several co-existing folk models with more restricted references. Nor does the prevalence of a more or less stereotypic symbolic model prevent people from exchanging old symbolic forms for new ones. A splendid example of this is the Zulu use of plastic sacks in their fertility symbolism (Berglund, this volume). Further, the systemic features of a folk model may be open towards new, additional significations and private interpretations. In his contribution to this volume, Hultin shows how new spheres of action may be covered by existing symbolic oppositions, when he demonstrates how Oromo virility symbolism operates in expansionist politics. Similarly, more or less recently introduced crops can be included in the older folk model, as van Beek shows to be the case with peanuts, maize, onions and cotton with regard to both the Kapisiki and the Dogon.

If the symbols of a folk model may be exchanged, and if additional significations may be attached to established models, it is warranted to ask
how it is possible to identify any consistent folk models in a culture.

In our view, the answer to this question must refer to two basic features of a folk model. One is its systemic nature. That is, it is by virtue of the syntagmatic relationships between the symbolic constituents of a folk model that it is imbued with consistency and meaning. Thus, the symbols connoting "wilderness" derive their meaning only by way of an assumed comparison with symbols connoting whatever is defined as domesticated by the social order of human beings.

The other basic feature of a folk model is that it expresses some of the fundamental values by which people may classify their experiences if they choose to apply the value system established by their culture. The consistency of a folk model is thus proportionate to the consistency with which most people in a given society recognize the fundamental classificatory values of their culture. We may refer to these basic values of a cultural system in terms of paradigms. Thus, a general folk model of any given culture may be assumed to derive its consistency by virtue of its paradigmatic relevancy and the syntagmatic relationships between the values implied in the symbols that are used to express the basic paradigms.

Regional variation of African fertility models

In the domain of fertility symbolism, the African folk models appear to show a remarkable degree of consistency within each culture. As a general rule, it is possible to identify a basic "paradigm" concerning the conceptualization of the general conditions for the regeneration and continuity of life. The paradigms and their symbolic expressions may differ from one culture to the next, but these variations are not endless. It is possible to discern certain common features in the fertility models of neighbouring ethnic groups, and even with respect to large regions of culturally related ethnic groups south of the Sahara.

Since the papers in this volume represent 16 different ethnic groups scattered over the eastern, western, central and southern parts of Africa, we will try to discern some typical similarities between neighbouring groups, and some distinctive features of regional variation as well. The identification of these similarities and differences has incited us to divide the papers so as to form three separate sections in this book.

The first focuses on the location of the creative forces, and on the characteristics of these in relation to each other and to the structure of man's mundane world. In this section, the sacred associations of the sources of fertility are prevalent in their character of "gifts" from the above or the below. As will be found, the sacred notions of fertility are intrinsically connected with the agricultural societies of Africa.

The second section of this book focuses on the domestication of fertility.
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In this section we have collected those papers that display a more or less antagonistic opposition between the "wild" sources of fertility, on the one hand, and the neatly structured order of man's social world, on the other. These papers refer mainly to the pastoral, or agro-pastoral societies of East Africa. In most societies belonging to this cultural region, it is possible to discern the theme of "domestication" of the "wild" sources of fertility, as a precondition for these ambiguous powers to be exploited by man. Thus, in this case, the sources of fertility are associated with danger rather than with sacrality and miracles. The wild, liminal powers of fertility have to be conquered, killed and subjected to a neat structure, in order to be of any benefit to man.

In the third section, we have collected those papers in which the continued renewal of the sources of fertility is highlighted as a matter of social communion between those who feel that they belong together as a collective unit. Although this theme is valid for most societies in Africa, and for all kinds of rituals where creative forces are conjured, the emphasis is here on culturally constructed ideas about the continuity and regeneration of the resources from which men draw their livelihood.

The primordial union

The theme of "communion" has been chosen as the leitmotif of this volume. This concept may refer to the harmony and unity between relatives that is regarded as essential to the continuity of life in any African village. Communion in this sense does not necessarily imply "communitas", such as defined by Turner (1969:96). When the harmony between relatives and neighbours is referred to in connection with fertility rituals in Africa, the implied message has to do with order and structure, rather than with "anti-structure".

However, the concept of communion can also be taken to refer to the symbiotic relationship between two or more human beings who have dispensed with hierarchical or otherwise distinguishing boundaries between self and other, man and woman, or any other separating labels. Communion in this sense refers to an unstructured symbiosis, a lack of "order", or simply "chaos".

In African folk models of fertility we often find that the very source of life is referred to by symbols denoting some kind of chaos. In particular, the symbols of creative forces and potential fertility are associated with non-structure, non-form, wilderness, or with the complete fusion of otherwise separate entities, such as male and female, right and left, high and low. What is there before structure and form is the chaos of boundless potentialities.

Chaos in the sense of an antipole to structure and form is regarded as an essential element in any creative process, not only in African cosmologies. We may recognize corresponding ideas in Western notions about artistic or in-
intellectual creativity. Even the current research on chaos in the life sciences appears to approach conclusions very similar to those arrived at in African cultures since time immemorial: “Life draws order from a sea of disorder” (Gleick 1987).

In analogy with the current hypotheses advanced in the research on chaos in the life sciences, the African folk models of fertility tend to define chaos as the first step of a process leading to structure and order. In order for form to be properly shaped, the pre-existence of non-form must be recognized, according to the logic of these models.

The non-form may be perceived as a lump of clay at the bottom of the rivers, or as the fusion of iron in the melting-furnace, while the products of these materials are treated as ritual instruments for the re-enactment of the original process of creation. The ritual attention paid to earthenware pots and to tools and weapons made of iron provides typical examples of the fertility symbolism connected to the creative processes of pottery making and forging in African cultures (Berglund, Dahl, Jacobson-Widding, Udvardy). The non-form may also be conceived of as a fusion of separate abstract elements, which are normally kept apart. These elements are usually symbolized in terms of male/female, or heaven/earth, high/low. Examples of how the fusion of such elements is ritually exploited as symbols of fertility are primarily found in the agricultural societies of the savannah north and south of the tropical belt in Africa (cf. Jacob, Zwernemann, Jacobson-Widding). However, also in the pastoral and agro-pastoral societies of eastern and southern Africa, we find that the idea of a fusion between heaven and earth may be connected with the creative process. In this case, it is the original creation which is symbolized by a connection between heaven and earth (cf. Arhem). The unity of heaven and earth is, however, not referred to as part of the process of the domestication of fertility in these cultures. Rather, this connection represents the primordial unity preceding the original creation.

In some instances, then, the notion of fertility should be kept apart from that of creation, or creativity. However, there is a common feature characteristic of both these notions, as far as they may be identified in African symbolic systems. This common feature is that the source of life, whether perceived as “fertility”, “creativity”, or “regeneration”, is intimately associated with the idea of a non-structured unity. The result of creation, however, is structure and order. And, for life to go on as a social enterprise, it has to continue to oscillate between structure and non-structure, order and chaos. The original process of creation has to be repeated over and over again.

Fertility from the above

The idea of fusion presupposes that there are separate elements to be fused. In the agricultural societies of Africa that have not been too much influenced
by pastoral ideologies, the cultural models of fertility tend to locate these elements vertically. The sources of fertility are found in the sky, in the earth, or in a fusion of heaven and earth. All over sub-Saharan Africa, the sky is connected with male powers of creativity, while the earth is perceived as a female source of fertility. Thus, when the powers “high up” are ritually fused with those “low down”, this creative process is simultaneously perceived as an amalgamation of male and female. The merging of the two elements will erase the hierarchical distinction between man and woman, and between whatever social or conceptual categories that are classified as “high” versus “low”, superior versus inferior. To transcend duality and hierarchy by merging opposed categories seems to be at the heart of African notions of fertility.

However, there is not always an equal attribution of fertile capacity to male and female powers. On the level of “unofficial”, or “muted” cultural discourse, we may find a more or less equal recognition of the male and the female contribution to the creation of new life. In some cultural regions, though, we find that on the “official” or public arena of symbolic discourse, the male powers in the sky may be given precedence over the female powers in the earth. Correspondingly, there are some other cultural regions where the female powers in the earth are given precedence over any other possible source of fertility.

In the cultural region extending south of the tropical forest belt, we can perceive a male bias regarding the location of the sources of human and agricultural fertility. The first paper in this collection of essays (Jacobson-Widding) shows the dominance of male powers in the sky over female powers in the earth, and how this male power from above is conjured in the public rituals constituted by the official rain ceremonies. In these ceremonies, which are initiated by the sacred kings and chiefs in the Shona cultural region of Zimbabwe, the male ancestors in the sky are enticed to fertilize the earth by releasing their water from heaven. These rituals are publicly recognized, and may be regarded as enactments of an official, patrilineal ideology of how male powers of fertility relate to those considered female.

However, on the level of implicit notions about the regeneration of life, people give much attention to female spirits living deep down in the water of the earth. Also, in the context of everyday life, we find here as elsewhere in Africa that the containers made from the clay deriving from the low and moist parts of the earth are treated as more private symbols of female creativity. Clay pots are treated as “wombs”, among the Manyika and other agricultural, or semi-agricultural ethnic groups as well (cf. Dahl, Häkansson, Udvardy). In patrilineal societies, they tend to be ritually attended to by way of semi-secret symbolic discourse, which is primarily enacted by “the muted sex” (Ardener 1975).

The official attention paid to the male source of fertility in the sky, which is encountered in the savannah area south of the tropical rain belt, corresponds to an official ideology that depicts men as “high” and superior in relation to women. Where this ideology is made explicit, the spatial distinction
of the two categories is regarded as essential to keeping the social and political order established in everyday life. However, in any process of creation, these elements are fused in a ritual enacting physical love between man and woman. This symbolic act of creation is carried out whenever something new is to be shaped—a new tool, a new agricultural season, a new child, a new pot, a new meal. The crucial symbol of fusion is fire. Fire melts away all form and distinction. The melting of iron in the female furnace is the most conspicuous ritual illustration of this ancient African folk model of fertility.

Androgynous fusion

The fusion of male and female elements is prevalent as a symbolic prerequisite for the creation of new life in all kinds of creative processes in the agricultural societies of Africa. However, it is possible to discern a difference of emphasis on the importance of male and female principles, respectively, if one compares the different cultural regions. Whereas the patrilineal cultures south of the tropical, matrilineal belt display a male bias in this respect, the savannah cultivators north of the tropical forest tend to give more equal attention to the male powers of the sky and the female springs of fertility in the earth. In the prayers and rituals preceding a new agricultural season, the fertile powers in the sky should be conjured, as well as those connected to the earth-shrine (Zwernemann, this volume; cf. Dittmer 1979:530). This balanced attribution of the powers of fertility to both heaven and earth might be regarded in the light of the cognition of kinship and affinity in the agricultural societies in this area. Particularly in West Africa, it is possible to discern complementary matri- or patri-filiation, besides more or less distinct preferences for unilateral descent. Systems of double descent, found here (i.e. the Ashanti, the Yakô, the Lo-Willi, etc.) exemplify this principle in the social sphere. Without resorting to socio-structural determinism one may thus note that the definition of the relative importance of male and female contributions to fertility (human, agricultural, or otherwise) seems to correspond to the cognition of principles of descent.

However, while noting this correspondence, it is important that we also recognize that, regardless of principles of social structure, this whole region is clearly marked by cosmologies where androgynous deities are connected with creation and fertility (Baumann 1955:202 ff.), in particular in agricultural societies in Niger and Burkina Faso. As a general rule, the androgynous creative powers are conceived of as primordial units, which represent the fusion of heaven and earth, male and female, and whose unity must be recreated each time that life is to be regenerated.

This androgynous cosmology is also reflected in the notions of the soul, or in the ideas about how a human being is constituted. Baumann asserts that
the idea of an originally androgynous soul in every human being is represented by the conception of twins. Twins are in West Africa regarded as a "bisexual" unit (Baumann 1955:88). To this we may add that in this cultural region, twins incarnate fertility, or rather "an excess of fertility" (Adler 1979:202), which is constituted by their allegedly androgynous character.

These ideas are well illustrated in the paper by Jean-Pierre Jacob, who demonstrates how, among the Winne-Gurunsi, the birth of twins is regarded as a repetition of the original creation process (cf. Brandstrom). Twins make the creation start all over again and for this reason their symbolic collaboration is essential when a couple is about to begin the creation of a new generation, that is, at their marriage. The man and woman who are about to marry are symbolically transformed into twins. This androgynous unit will be capable of procreation: this kind of "chaos by fusion" is the germ of a new order. The new order implies that the young couple is separated from their previous family units. Twinship engenders a new, independent generation. The creative power constituted by the "chaotic" androgyny represented in twinship is thus a power of fertility, regeneration, and transformation into a new order as well.

In parts of Africa where twins are abhorred as representing a dangerous magic power, we find that twinship is substituted by "ordinary" siblingship in the rituals connected to marriage. The papers on the Manyika (Jacobson-Widding), the Gusii (Håkansson) and the Oromo (Hultin) illustrate how the symbolic siblingship of husband and wife is enacted in order to make a marriage fertile. Siblings of different sex form an indivisible unit in the cognition of social relationships in most unilineal, exogamic societies in Africa. Thus the relationship sister/brother can be used to symbolize androgyny, and thereby the potential of fertility.

Fertility from the below

If we turn to the agricultural societies of the tropical forest belt, and its adjoining, basically matrilineal cultural regions immediately south of the forest, we will find a cosmology that is more oriented towards the earth and the underground than to the sky, or whatever is connected with "above". In this cultural region, where the women till the soil and feature as founding ancestresses of matri-clans, the ideas of the divine are mainly connected with the undergroundland. This place, which in the dialects of southern Congo and Zaire is referred to as *mpemba*, is thought to be the abode of the ancestors (Jacobson-Widding 1979; Laman 1962; van Wing 1959).

The same word, *mpemba*, is used for the clay found at the bottom of ponds, small lakes and rivers. This clay, which is white, is used to mould earthenware pots. It is the clay, at the bottom of the rivers, that is perceived as the material of which new persons are "moulded". Every initiation ritual
in Congo and Zaire is ended by the smearing of the bodies of the "new born" novices with *mpemba*.

Some of the features of the matrilineally biased cosmology may also be traced in many patrilineal or bilineal societies in Central Africa. One of these is constituted by the Yaka, who form a patrilineal enclave (with traces of double descent) in a predominantly matrilineal region of Zaire. It is from this region, in the heart of the tropical agricultural (and hunting) zone, that René Devisch presents the cosmological context of a healing cult connected to the fertile clay at the bottom of the rivers. In this cult, the patients suffering from impotency, or from difficulties in standing up firmly on their legs, will develop an erect posture and "a perfect body". The ritual focus is a series of statuettes representing a transition from formlessness to form, and the increasingly well-shaped specimens are bathed in water from the river. The connection with the clay at the bottom of the river is represented by the association of the *mbwoolu* statuette with the catfish, which dwells at the bottom of the river, and places its eggs in the clay down there.

The "new person" (the novice being initiated in the *mbwoolu* cult) identifies with the *mbwoolu* figure who gradually emerges from the clay at the bottom of the river, while being "moulded" in a basin. The clay from which this new person emerges is associated with maternal ancestors, yet he has to be "cared for" by the spirit of the catfish, which is a "formless" creature with androgynous reproductive behaviour: a male taking care of the eggs laid by the female.

What is worth noting in this context is that the catfish will help the young man to stand up erect, not only in terms of male potency, but in other respects as well. Thus, the "formless" catfish will contribute to the creation of a new kind of person, who is capable of standing on his own legs, rather than being crippled (by a maternal symbiosis? Cf. Mahler 1970). Anyway, the creative act seems to derive its power from an original *absence* of form and distinctions, which is associated with maternity and rivers.

**Wombs as clay pots**

The association of clay and clay pots with female fertility may be perceived as a leitmotif in agricultural and semi-agricultural societies all over sub-Saharan Africa. In some cultural regions this leitmotif is explicitly displayed in the rituals of fertility. This is the case in the most strongly matrilineal societies of Central Africa, such as the Bemba. In her famous monograph on the female initiation ceremony of the Bemba, Audrey Richards tells us how the clay pot is used in connection with marriage, and how the art of making a pot constitutes the crucial feature of the initiation rites, through which the young girls are supposed to acquire the skills of fertility. "At marriage each
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girl is presented by her paternal aunt with a miniature pot... which must be guarded with the utmost secrecy.” “It is filled with water and placed on the fire, man and wife each holding the rim” (Richards 1956/1982:31). In the course of the initiation rituals, the art of making pots is attended to repeatedly, besides some other fertility rites, such as the painting of fertility symbols on the walls of the round hut. Although Richards does not explicitly connect the clay pot with the female womb, this association may be read into the combination of some different factors. On the one hand, there is the marked attention to clay pots and the making of pots in connection with marriage and female fertility rituals. On the other hand, there is the culturally established assumption that “... women provide all the physical substance from which the foetus is formed” (ibid:160).

The idea that women themselves provide all the substance of the foetus is closely associated with the notion of women as potters. They themselves are in possession of the lump of clay that is being moulded into a pot. As a general rule, men are strictly forbidden to be present when the women collect their clay before they start to mould the pots. “If the men would know about it, we would not be able to produce children”, is what the women say about their secret collection of pottery clay in Zimbabwe.

However, not only the unmoulded clay, but also the end product is associated with the female source of fertility. That the female womb is symbolized by a clay pot is apparent, and not only in the matrilineal cultures of Central Africa. Elsewhere, we may find examples of this association. For instance, the Shona of Zimbabwe use the clay pot to symbolize the bride's womb at a particular moment in connection with the conclusion of the marriage contract. After having checked the girl's virginity, her paternal aunt gives her a clay pot filled to the brim with water. If she is a virgin, the bride should hand over this pot to her husband, without spilling any water. If she is not a virgin though, she is supposed to spill out some water from the pot, before presenting it to her husband (Aschwanden 1982:189 ff.). Correspondingly, the stirring in a clay pot at cooking, is associated with love-making (cf. Håkansson, Udvardy).

Being a crucial metaphor of the creative power of the adult woman, the clay pot may also feature as a fundamental symbol of female identity and the sense of worth accompanying a clearly established identity. The assertiveness with which the Giriama women of Kenya cherish and guard their clay pots as symbols of their fertility and womanhood is an unusually clear case in point (Udvardy). However, in this patrilineal society, the creative power of the women is challenged by the official ideology of male dominance, and of the dominance of agnatic filiation. Thus, the creative and regenerative power of women that is represented in their clay pots is not publicly recognized at the level of official discourse. The pots are secretly attended to in the context of the kifudu cult, where only those who belong to the "muted sex" may be initiated. The regenerative power of women is not officially acknowledged. Rather, this power is recognized as a "muted folk model" of fertility. It may
be added that the implicit association of clay with a smothering maternal symbiosis might possibly be experienced as a threat to *male* identity and independence (cf. Mahler 1970).

**Day talk and night talk**

In Gudrun Dahl’s paper on female fertility symbols among the Boran, we are faced with an equally muted, or implicit, model of fertility. Being part of the cultural universe of pastoral ideologies, the Borana do not recognize the power of female regeneration on the level of publicly established models of fertility. Yet, the house of the Borana woman seems to embody her identity as a mother, at the same time as this womb-shaped hut is the container of household equipment which is intimately linked to her reproductive role as a woman. The clay pots representing the woman as mother and creator have their ritually assigned place at the very back of the cooking hut, where they provide a silent message about who it is, in actual practice, that gives birth, provides food for the young children, and gives shelter to them and to the adult men. In the dark of the hut, this symbolic discourse is accepted by everybody, even though there may be a distinct male bias in the official discourse on fertility that is presented publicly, in the daylight. In this context, it should be noted that the cooking hut is a maternal symbol in most cultures of eastern and southern Africa, whereas in West Africa the house may represent the man (Pern, Alexander & van Beek 1986).

The difference between the discourse of the darkness on the one hand, and the discourse of the daylight on the other, may be noted in all kinds of societies, whether it is a matter of discourse on fertility, power or personhood (cf. Jacobson-Widding 1990). Besides a more or less “official” public discourse one may sometimes identify symbolic expressions of a widely accepted “unofficial” set of ideas, representing implicit notions of deeply emotional experiences.

For this reason it may be warranted to make a distinction between official folk models and unofficial folk models, or between the public symbolism pertaining to “day talk”, and the semi-secret, tacit symbolism pertaining to “night talk”. Sometimes, the night talk may belong to a muted group, like the women. Sometimes, however, it may constitute the symbolic expression of “muted” feelings that anybody may harbour behind the mask of acceptance of the publicly recognized models.

When in a male-dominated, strongly patrilineal society we find traces of a female-oriented fertility cult connected to the semi-secret attention to clay pots and other female fertility symbols, we have reason to make such a distinction between official and unofficial folk models of fertility. The official view of the location of the sources of fertility may denote the male as the place where fertility comes from. Or it may denote the wild bush as the source of
fertility (see below, next section). Yet we may find, behind this official cosmology, a more or less muted folk model, where fertility is connected with female powers in the earth. The clay pots made from the maternal earth provide the crucial symbols used in the silent discourse expressing this muted model.

Fertility from the wilderness

In anthropological discourse, it has become commonplace to discern a structural dichotomy of nature versus culture. However, this dichotomy does not seem to be the most adequate analytical model to depict the folk models of fertility and creation in the agricultural societies of Africa. Rather than locating the sources of fertility in wild nature, or the bush, these folk models tend to locate the sources of life in these divine domains that are beyond the surface of the earth, either above or below.

Against this “vertical” location of the sources of life, the “horizontality” of the pastoral folk models of fertility stand out in marked contrast. Among the pastoral Fulani of West Africa we find that a dichotomy corresponding to the nature/culture model is amply displayed in folk models connected to fertility and the regeneration of life. The social order of the organized community is contrasted with the unstructured chaos of the wilderness, where the fertile powers dwell. The Fulani phrase this contrast in terms of the “village” (wuro) and the “bush” (ladde), while understanding by the latter concept “... those parts of the world that are uninhabited or untransformed by man” (Riesman, this volume; cf. Riesman 1977). To them the bush represents the unknown and mysterious source of fertility, and the growth of crops. Man has no control over this process, and the Fulani consider that “the bush can surprise them at any moment”. The close association between the mysterious bush and fertility is evident in the proverb “the bush gives birth without being pregnant” (Riesman, this volume)

Much of the same view may be recognized in the folk models of fertility cherished by the pastoralists of East Africa, and in some of the agro-pastoral cultures of the same area. Although there is an acknowledgment of a male sky god, who originally created the world, the continuous regeneration of life on the earth is seen as dependent upon man's tapping of the sources of fertility provided by the wild bush. The sources of life that are available to man are thus located in this world, rather than in some other world above or below the surface of the earth.

This view on the location of the sources of life is in accordance with the basic features of, for instance, religion. The Nuer religion was defined by Evans-Pritchard as a “this-worldly religion” (1956: 154). Here sacrifices to the divinity (kwoth = God, Spirit, spirits) “are concerned with relations within the social order and not between men and their natural environment”
A. Jacobson-Widding and W. van Beek

In Nuer religion, as in the religions of the other Nilotic peoples, neither God nor any ancestral spirits provide a power to reckon with for the fertility of man and his crops, or for the regeneration of life: "... there is no idea of an impersonal force, a dynamism or vital force, which we are told is characteristic of some African religions" (ibid. 317). Consequently, no rite of any kind is performed in connection with "weather, rain, fertility of the soil, seed-time, fructification, harvest" (ibid. 199). Expansion outwards rather than recycling is the pastoral answer to ecological threats to life.

Hence, instead of turning to divine powers of the above, or of the below, these pastoral peoples tend to turn to this-worldly sources of fertility, located in the ecological and conceptual wilderness of undomesticated nature. That is where the young men acquire their virility, and that is also where the mythical female powers of untamed fertility dwell (Hultin, Århem). In addition, the acquisition of virgin, "wild" land is regarded as necessary for survival, and for the regeneration of the resources that men live from. Regeneration by recycling is as foreign to the true pastoral ideology as agriculture itself used to be, in former times.

Much of this ideology may also be noticed in other societies of East Africa. This can be noted in three of the essays in the second section (Hultin, Brandstrom, Häkansson), although in Hultin’s essay on the Oromo, the pastoral ideology is distinctly present. In these papers as in the one referring to true pastoralists (Århem), the relationship between society and wilderness is depicted in terms of an antagonistic opposition between a neatly structured order on the one hand, and a potentially fertile chaos on the other. The sources of fertility “out there” in the wilderness are associated with danger, aggressiveness, killing, war. They constitute a power for ill or for worse, that has to be captured, domesticated and organized, in order to serve man and society. Once this power has been conquered and subjected to a social and conceptual structure, however, it is associated with life and peace.

Killing as a source of fertility

The fertility of the wilderness has a dual connotation in the pastoral models of the sources of life. One is its association with male potency, while the other is its association with undomesticated female fertility. This dual association is evident in the animal symbolism of the pastoral societies of East Africa. Thus, for instance, the Maasai distinguish between two kinds of wild animals. On the one hand there are the ferocious ones, who kill, and who are symbolically associated with male aggressiveness and potency. On the other hand, there are the wild animals who are the prey of these beasts. The “victims” are associated with undomesticated female fertility (Århem).

The most obvious association between male potency and wild nature is to be found in connection with the age-grade system of the pastoralists of East
Africa. The young warriors are supposed to acquire potency while leading an unstructured, "wild life" outside society. The most conspicuous feature of their ascribed behaviour is aggressiveness, although they are supposed to form an unstructured "communitas" among themselves at the same time. As is amply illustrated in Århem's paper, the Maasai warriors are associated with death and killing, which is considered a precondition for the acquisition of the procreative powers pertaining to men (cf. Hultin). Thus, it is the warriors who should slaughter the livestock for food, just as they also are the ones who are supposed to eat large quantities of meat, in order to acquire male power. The killing of an animal for a sacrificial meal is considered to be an act of creation. However, while the killing itself constitutes the very procreative act, the partition and allocation of meat to the other members of society is a way of recreating order and structure, and thus of giving life. Or, it "... communicates a definite message about social order, a message about equality and hierarchy, unity and differentiation, which contextually identifies and separates social categories in terms of age and sex" (Århem).

Thus, from a male point of view, the killing of an animal is a symbolic manifestation of the essential procreative power of men, while the eating of its meat seems to carry the "creative" act a step further toward a social sharing. The peaceful order of social life is reestablished by this sharing, which is combined with structuration.

While the capacity to kill is regarded as an instance of male procreative power, the victim to be killed is vaguely associated with female fertility, that is, as far as this "wild sexuality" of women has not yet been domesticated. In one of the myths referred to by Hultin, the young woman on her way to her marriage stops at a river in the wilderness. There she gets pregnant all by herself, or with the collaboration of a python in the river. This wild, procreative power of the unmarried woman seems to represent the threat of a female capacity for regeneration of life without male control. It carries connotations of "auto-fertilization". In a strongly patrilineal society, female fertility must be conquered and domesticated by men, in order to be of any use for the regeneration of life (= social life). Once domesticated, female procreative power is considered as a life-giving source of blessing, just as the domesticated cow in a pastoral society is contrasted to the undomesticated game, in terms of two different kinds of fertility. Thus, domestication by marriage may transform dangerous female sexuality into blessed fertility, just as killing may transform an animal into socially consumed meat.
Domestication of female land

The pastoral association of potential female fertility with the uninhabited and untransformed bush assumes a particular significance in those societies of East Africa, where the cultivation of land is a supplementary source of subsistence. In these societies, we find folk models of fertility where the conquest of virgin land for cultivation is compared to the conquest of female fertility.

This line of thought is particularly evident in the Oromo cosmology depicted by Hultin (this volume). While retaining the basic ideology connected to the age class system, the Oromo of the Macha region in Ethiopia consider this basically pastoral system of social regeneration also to be concerned with "the fertility of the land, with the reproduction of livestock and crops and with the regeneration of life in a general sense" (Hultin). By being initiated as the class of warriors in the age-grade system, the men may first conquer their own virility and subsequently the women, whose "wild fertility" is regarded as parallel to that of untransformed land. Thus, war-raids and ritualized aggression preceded the conquest of land, as long as the traditional age-grade system was still at work.

In the Oromo case, the conquest of the wild fertility of foreign women, and of the land outside society, is given a mythical articulation by the attribution of female, wild fertility to the autochthonous inhabitants, who were conquered by the Oromo. In some other agro-pastoral societies of East Africa, where the elements of a pastoral ideology are less dominant, the element of opposition between a male dominated society, and a female, potentially fertile wilderness may be perceived as a paradox inherent in the conditions of life, regardless of latent oppositions between ethnic groups, or between the autochthonous cultivators and the conquering pastoralists.

Thus, among the Gusii of Kenya, it is the foreign clans that are regarded as belonging to the wilderness and to the realm of animals (Håkansson). At marriage, the woman is ritually separated from her own clan, and "merged" with that of her husband, to the point that she will not distinguish terminologically between her own parents and those of her husband. At that time, the bride and the groom are ritually transformed into siblings (cf. Jacobson-Widding, Hultin). By reviewing the Gusii folklore connected to marriage, Håkansson shows how the ritual adoption of the "foreign" woman enacts a domestication of her "wild fertility", in that her procreative powers are transformed into a male dominated fertility. Thus, her offspring may be subjected to agnation, by her symbolic transformation into an agnate. In this transformation, the cattle given in bride wealth are the crucial mediators (cf. Riesmam, this volume).

In the symbolic idioms of the Sukuma of Tanzania, the male/female polarity in terms of village/bush, domesticating/domesticated, and active/passive, is explicitly expressed as a model of how the wild bush is transformed into cultivated land (Brandström). The woman outside the marital control of her husband is wilderness, while as a wife she is likened to the sorghum field.
which is cultivated by the man. Thus the man plants his seeds in the soil, just as he begets children inside marriage. However, in order to establish himself as a regenerator of his own lineage, thus demonstrating his personal capacity for procreation and regeneration, every adult man has the ambition to go out into the wilderness and transform the bush into cultivated land—even if there is no shortage of land. The continuous territorial expansion of the Sukuma may thus be seen in the light of a folk model of fertility, according to which the transformation of uninhabited land is felt to be the most efficient way for a man to establish himself as a creator, a regenerator, a father of sons, who will subsequently make him an ancestor.

Fertility and the ancestors

Leaving the more or less true pastoralists, we may find that ancestors are considered to be crucially involved in the fertility of human beings and agricultural land, and in the continuation of life beyond death as well. That ancestorhood is an articulation of a faith in a continued life after death goes without saying. However, what is typical of the cultural world view of those African peoples who stick to their traditional agriculture, and to their ideology of unilineal clan-ship as well, is that the ancestors are responsible for the regeneration of life among human beings, and also for that of their cultivated land.

On a philosophical level, the involvement of the ancestors with the continuity of life may be expressed in the terms used by Brandström, referring to the Sukuma of Tanzania: “The ancestors are the mediators between the past and the present, between what is near and what is far, between what is visible and invisible...”. On the level of a more immediate concern for the fertility of human beings, it is the spirits of the dead members of the lineage of a married couple who care for their capacity to procreate. As Brandström points out for the Sukuma, the ancestors of the family have the power to provide or withhold the power of fertility. In the Shona cultural setting in Zimbabwe, we find the life-giving power of the ancestral spirits expressed in the idea of their “collaboration” with the married couple in connection with intercourse (Jacobson-Widding). That is the reason why husband and wife must be transformed into symbolic siblings. Otherwise their respective lineage ancestors would not collaborate peacefully, but fight a “war” against each other (cf. Håkansson). However, the ancestral contribution to procreation is not only a matter of marital harmony, expressed in symbolic siblingship. The potency and fertility of the individual person is also intimately linked with his or her ancestors, who may block the procreative capacity of their descendants, either by “closing” the womb of a female descendant, or by afflicting the male descendant with impotency. This applies equally to patrilineal and matrilineal cultures of the agricultural regions of Africa.

The personal relationship between an individual and his immediate
Ancestors in the realm of fertility may also work the other way round. Thus, the Manyika regard virility as a precondition for a man to become an ancestor. If he dies without children, or if he dies in a state of waning virility, he will not continue to live beyond death. This idea may be expressed in more general terms: to be “really alive” while living on this earth, and to be leading “a full life” at the moment of death, is to be regarded as having a soul that survives physical death.

However, in the world view of the agricultural societies of Africa, the ancestors are not only concerned with their descendants’ personal creativity, and capacity of procreation. They are also concerned with the fertility of the land from which their descendants obtain their subsistence. The intimate association of ancestors with agricultural fertility is shown in most papers in this book that refer to crop cultivating societies in Africa (see, for instance, Zwernemann, Berglund, Brydon, Brandström, Jacobson-Widding, van Beek, Whyte, Hultin). The propitiation of ancestors initiating each new agricultural season is basically a prayer for rain, to be released by the male ancestors in heaven. Their virility is part and parcel of their capacity to affect the fertility of the land (see especially Jacobson-Widding).

It is in this perspective that we should regard the role of the sacred king or chief. Being a representative of potent ancestors in heaven, and a mediator between these ancestors and the people he governs, the sacred chief must himself be potent in order to guarantee the continued fertility of the land (Brandström, Jacobson-Widding, Whyte). The ancestors to whom the king has a particular relationship are primarily those of his own royal clan. They are regarded as the real owners of the land, which is occupied and cultivated by people belonging to many different clans. Thus the rituals and prayers inaugurating each new agricultural season become the collective concern of a community that transcends the boundaries of clans and lineages. While the ancestors of ordinary people are felt to preoccupy themselves with the familial problems and procreative powers of their own descendants, the ancestors of a ruling clan are seen as the basic fertility resource that everybody depends upon. Among the predominantly agricultural peoples, these resources are constituted by the recycled agricultural land. Hence the agricultural fertility rites tend to involve the entire collectivity of people living in a society, and the ancestral spirits to whom the prayers are directed tend to assume a higher dignity, and a more general divine character, than the more “private” ancestral spirits of the particular lineages. In some parts of Africa, namely the coastal regions of West Africa, the more general and elevated character of the divinities responsible for the fertility of the land has attained the character of “gods” (cf. Brydon).
The fertility of social communion

We have seen how the fertility of the renewable subsistence resources may be considered to depend upon the collective ritual efforts of everybody, regardless of their cognitive affiliation to particular clans or lineages. Thus it may be argued that the prerequisite for a continued good life on this earth is felt to be dependent upon the ritual enactment of a social communion that transcends the boundaries of particular social categories such as clans and lineages.

However, the idea that social communion is a prerequisite for fertility, and for the continuous renewal of the resources of a good life, is not only expressed in connection with agricultural rituals, or in the prayers for a good harvest. The same ideas are manifested in many rules for social interaction in everyday life, maybe in particular in connection with the elaborate greeting ceremonies that are typical of so many African societies.

To greet somebody is to transcend the social boundary distinguishing the self from the other. It is thus an initiation into some kind of social communion. The importance of doing this in a proper way is particularly well described by Baxter, who illustrates the intimate connection between proper greeting, feelings of commensality, and the concern for fertility and well-being. While referring to the Oromo of Ethiopia, Baxter presents us with the fertility symbolism inherent in standardized greetings and blessings. To greet somebody by presenting him with coffee berries or cowrie shells is to bless him with a wish for the kind of fertility that these symbols refer to (both having metonymic links to the vagina). Correspondingly, to greet somebody referring to milk is to evoke the blessing of fertility.

In these instances, we may note that the main reference is to female fertility, which is associated with peace. While sustaining a pastoral ideology, by which male fertility is associated with aggressiveness and war, the Oromo, like other pastoral societies in Africa, seem to supplement an official model of fertility, expressing aggressiveness as a prerequisite for male creativity, with a subsidiary model of fertility, where “female peacefulness” is presented as the other side of the coin. Just as “the male aggressiveness” (of the warriors) marks out boundaries between “us” and “them”, and defines the distinction between self and other as opposed units, “the female peacefulness” (of life in the homestead) erases the boundaries between individuals and distinct categories of persons. The social communion that is regarded as a blessing for fertility and life is considered to be attained by references to women as life-givers and care-takers.

However, “the female peacefulness” is not only regarded as significative of women, as persons or gender. Rather, as Århem shows in his paper on the Maasai, the pastoral ideology holds that “the female peace” is what belongs to the homestead, and to women and elders alike, in contradistinction to the young men raiding in the bush, where their main concern is to acquire a wild and youthful virility.
In a similar vein of thought, we may note that the notions of fertility among the Zulu of South Africa have a remarkably female orientation, in spite of the fact that the Zulu have a history and an ideological tradition of being warriors. As Berglund shows, some of the most fundamental symbols of fertility in this strongly patrilineal ethnic group of former warriors are connected with the most peaceful sources of fertility: the bashful heavenly princess, and the milk-giving cows. In fact, these substitute maidens and mothers are seen as mediators between the people on this earth, on the one hand, and the divine powers that are associated with a male heaven on the other. Thus, peaceful symbols of female virtues mediate between predominantly male sources of creativity in order to bestow human beings with the blessing of fertility. Cattle are the prime phenomenological expression of these "female" values, which connote a message of peace, reconciliation, blessing, and fecundity.

Clanship and fertility

The theme of social communion as conducive to fertility may seem to be intrinsically connected to the suspension of clan boundaries. The distinctive boundaries of particular categories like clan and lineage are ritually erased in collective, agricultural fertility rites. Yet, the very notion of a "collective soul", or a "collective self", is substantiated by the cognition of unilineal clanship in those African societies where belonging to an ancestral clan constitutes the ideological basis of notions of personhood and identity (cf. Riesman 1986; Jacobson-Widding 1990).

In the majority of African cultures, the social communion of those who recognize common descent (actual or fictive) from the ancestors of a named clan may be considered an "official model" of social relationships. The idea implicit in this model is that "we are all one" (Riesman 1990), and share a common "self" (Riesman 1983). At the heart of this notion of a collective self we may trace an ideal of absence of boundaries between the particular individual selves, or between the particular social categories constituting a lineage.

In most African societies, the ancestors of the clan, or the spirits of the dead, provide a focus for this social communion. By invoking the presence of the spirits of the dead, one may get connected to the dead, and to the living as well. Hence, the spirits of dead clan fellows attain the character of mediators between the bereaved, who still live on this earth.

Where ancestor worship prevails, the links between the living may be strengthened through their common attachment to ancestral symbols, such as shrines, particular houses for the dead, or special meeting places. Even special features of the landscape may render the remote past tangible in the immediate present, and serve as a means to unite the living with the dead, and with each other as well. Thus, the feeling of continuity between past and present may create a sense of communion between the living, when this feeling
is mediated by common attachment to the spirits of the dead.

The feeling of continuity and communion appears to work the other way round as well. Harmony between the living is considered to be a prerequisite for an undisturbed relationship between the living and the dead. These ideas may be traced behind the intimate connection between social harmony among lineage fellows, on the one hand, and ancestral blessings of fertility on the other. All over central Africa, we find, for instance, that a woman in labour will have her vagina "blocked" by the ancestors if she has been involved in fights with her lineage fellows. The ancestors will not release her fertility until she has confessed any evil thought that she may have harboured in relation to brothers, sisters, or other close lineage members.

However, everybody knows that the social communion between different individuals who belong to the same clan has the character of an ideal model for connectedness and belonging, rather than that of a model of social behaviour in everyday life. When people of different generations interact, or even when elder and younger siblings are together, a demonstration of some kind of boundless "communitas" is out of the question. On the contrary, the interaction between different members of the same lineage is governed by a strict hierarchy, that marks the boundaries of separate categories of age and sex in a distinct way (Jacobson-Widding 1983).

Nevertheless, on the level of existential philosophy, the sense of having a social communion without internal boundaries is seen as a prerequisite for fertility on this earth, and for a sense of continuity between the past, the present and the future, or between the dead, the living and the as yet unborn. As we shall see in the next section, this philosophy is extended from the fertility of Man to the fertility of the resources from which he lives.

Collectivism, subsistence and wealth

In the papers dealing with the fertility of the basic subsistence resources, we find that collectivist notions permeate the attitudes to ownership and rights of use, as they do the rituals connected with the regeneration of resources. In so far as these resources consist of land, the collectivist attitudes tend to transcend the boundaries of particular clans or lineages in three particular sociocultural contexts. One is the context of those primarily West African agricultural societies where the boundaries of clans and lineages are not supposed to be congruent with territorial boundaries to the same extent as, for instance, in Central Africa. Another context is that of sacred kingdoms, where the royal clan has a superior title to the land cultivated by everybody. This political pattern is found particularly in some of the aristocratic societies of West Africa (cf. Baumann 1940), in the interlacustrine area, and among the crop cultivating peoples of the savannah areas in southern Africa. A third context in which we find that collectivist attitudes to subsistence resources dominate
on a level transcending clan boundaries is that of pastoral societies. In this kind of society, we find that grazing land is regarded as common to everybody, irrespective of clan affiliation, whereas the collective rights to cattle follow a more narrow social identification.

In accordance with these ideas about man's relationship to land, we find that rain ceremonies and other rituals connected with the fertility of the land assume a clan-transcending, territorial character in most societies in West Africa (cf. Brydon and Zwernemann), in the interlacustrine and neighbouring regions (Brandstrom, Whyte), and in southern Africa (Berglund, Jacobson-Widding). The all-embracing character of the agricultural renewal rites is particularly well described by Brydon. However, where territorial rights are defined in terms of clan rights, there are no clan-transcending rituals to ensure the regeneration of the fertility of the land.

Whether rights to land are defined in terms of the boundaries of clans or lineages, or whether they are defined in some other collectivist terms that transcend such boundaries, it seems as if the very notion of a collectively based relationship between man and land is basic to the religious connection between social communion and the fertility of the land. In those African societies where the collectivist ideology prevails, the regeneration of subsistence resources is a matter of collective ceremony and ritual, where the social communion of fellow human beings is stressed. In those African societies where no collectivist ideology persists, the regeneration of subsistence resources tend to become a matter of rational, individual planning and entrepreneurial, hard work.

This difference between collectivist, ritual attitudes to the fertility of subsistence resources, on the one hand, and individualist, rational attitudes to the regeneration of land, crops and wealth, on the other hand, is demonstrated in the three last contributions to this book. Each in their own way, and with reference to differently generated forms of "individualism", all the three authors of these last essays (van Beek, Whyte and Riesman) demonstrate how the presence or absence of a collectivist social ideology seems to be intrinsically connected with ritual versus rational attitudes to the handling of renewable resources of subsistence and wealth.

In Walter van Beek's controlled comparison of the subsistence systems of the Dogon of Mali and the Kapsiki of North-Cameroon, a clear pattern of differences emerges between the ritual handling of the subsistence cultivation of the Dogon, and the rationally planned cultivation techniques of the Kapsiki. The Dogon display a religious attitude to their subsistence crops, of which the most important is treated as a symbol of "collectivity, fertility, youth and the realm of that which is public” (van Beek).

Opposed to this religious attitude to the basic subsistence resources, we find an apparently more matter-of-fact oriented conception of the prerequisites of crop fertility among the Kapsiki, who are subjected to comparable ecological conditions. What is interesting in this comparative setting is the fact that the Dogon form a distinct ethnic unit with a marked sense of cultural and
historical tradition, a concern for their ancestral heritage and lineage structure, and a true sense of collectivity, which is displayed in some of the agricultural rituals. The Kapsiki, on the other hand, show a history of "a constant flux of populations", and even to day "a tribal unit is difficult to define" (van Beek). Their land is owned individually, and the tendency towards individual autonomy pervades the entire subsistence strategy. In accordance with this difference between the "collectivistic" attitudes to subsistence among the Dogon, and the "individualistic" attitudes among the Kapsiki, the Dogon give priority to the collectivity over the individual in their subsistence rituals, while the Kapsiki give ritual priority to the "production of people" over the ritualization of food production. To the Dogon it is the continuity of the collectively shared sources of livelihood that is attended to in agricultural fertility rites, while the symbolic system of the Kapsiki focuses on strength and on riches in goods and people.

Rational cultivation and individualism

A similar difference of attitudes to subsistence and wealth may be discerned in the context of two different systems for the cultivation of cash crops among the Nyole of Eastern Uganda. Before the political crisis in the 1970s, the long-established pattern of subsistence was based upon a distinction between cotton as a cash crop, and the rest of production as a matter of subsistence cultivation. As a result of the collapse of the established political and economic system, there was no longer any market for cotton, while people had to sell their subsistence crops. When this happened, subsistence production became a matter of rational, individual strategy, rather than a matter of symbolic expression of social interdependence and commensality. At the same time, the integrating ritual power of the traditional rulers and the fertility symbols associated with leadership vanished, or lost their importance. The distintegration of the larger social community, whose unity was epitomized in the mythical association of rulers with ritual objects and fertility, thus went hand in hand with the decline of the traditional subsistence cultivation.

The production of subsistence crops had become a matter of individual, rational enterprise, and with this, the religious and symbolic aspects of the fertility of the land as a collective concern disappeared. Since the production of cotton had over the years become established as a well-integrated supplement to the traditional subsistence cultivation, cotton as a source of wealth was regarded as a symbol of a traditional way of life. Thus, when the individual Banyole comment upon their lost sense of culturally meaningful connectedness to a wider social universe within the Bunyole kingdom, they express this loss in terms of the loss of cotton as a source of wealth: "We have no cash crops any more".

The sense of social connectedness within a culturally defined collectivity
that the sense of relatedness is greatly expanded for the FulBe while it is greatly curtailed for the RimaayBe" (ibid).

To the FulBe, then, the concern for continuity of life is an expression of selfhood—an "expanded selfhood"—, just as much as it may be seen as an expression of the priority of the group over the individual. The "expanded self" that is symbolized in the preservation of collective resources of subsistence and wealth is to a large extent a cultural construction, or a widely accepted folk model of identity. However, this culturally constructed model of how the individual self relates to the other carries a message about some universally shared experiences too. This general message has to do with the emotional implications of a genuine sense of communion and sharing. One of these implications may be that special spark of life that may be experienced as a sense of creativity.

From chaos to harmony

A genuine sense of connectedness between human beings not only expands the sense of self. It may also heighten the zest for life and thus the feeling of being close to the profound sources of creativity. In the various papers presented in this book we can see the association of communion and creativity as a recurrent theme. It applies to the "communitas" that is connected with the increased virility of the Maasai warriors, just as we may perceive the corresponding association of connectedness and creativity in the clay-symbolism that evokes the symbiotic relationship between mother and child. In particular, we can clearly see the idea of the creative communion displayed in the androgynous fertility symbolism of the agricultural cosmologies and cosmogonies in Africa. The very source of life is portrayed as a primordial union—a lack of distinction between heaven and earth, high and low, man and woman, me and you. The distinctions emerge as a result of the creative act.

Whether this symbolism is expressed in the communitas of the young warriors, or in the symbiosis between mother and child, or in the fusion of lovers, melted iron, fire, or twins, the folk models of fertility and creativity have one thing in common: They all communicate the idea of a conceptual or social chaos perceived as the very source of life, until structure and form have taken over. However, in the African models of the creative chaos, we can trace a fine distinction between two different modes of creativity implied in chaos. One refers to the very potential for creativity as such. This kind of chaos is primarily expressed in the idioms of wilderness, potency, undomesticated sexuality, aggressiveness, and fire. However, in order for this creative power to be transformed into fertility, it has to become domesticated by way of agreements pertaining to social relatedness. In the domain of human fertility,
these agreements are attained by way of bridewealth. In pastoral or agro-pastoral societies, cattle serve as mediators in this transformation. In the tropical areas of central Africa, we find that iron rods, or other artifacts deriving from the blacksmith used to serve as such mediators, before the introduction of substitute metal objects (= money) (Jacobson 1967). These mediators carry the message of peace and social connectedness. Only a social communion imbued with peace, love and mutual respect can transform the ambiguous power of creation into fertility.

In a similar vein, we find that the fertility of the land depends on the coming together of people from different clans and families, to celebrate the agricultural renewal rituals in a social communion that transcends the boundaries of the separate social categories that people belong to. Thus a universal message is implied in marital and subsistence rituals as well. This is that the continuation of life depends upon love—love between man and woman, and love between fellow human beings.

Our fascination with African symbols of fertility may be seen in this perspective, whether we are anthropologists, or represent some other professional interests. Insofar it is a universal human feature to experience love and communion as the most creative forces in existence, our interest in culturally constructed notions of fertility is understandable. But there are some special reasons to highlight the folk models of fertility in the traditional cultures of the African continent south of the Sahara. These reasons have to do with the articulateness of the African folk models of fertility. We feel that the African cultures have developed an especially rich symbolic language to express human concerns for love, fertility and creativity, in comparison with other cultures in the world. We hope that the readers of the essays presented in this volume shall discover for themselves the force of expression inherent in the African symbolism of fertility. Maybe they will also find that those folk models that seem to be culturally specific and naively concrete may tell us more about universal experiences than those theoretical models that are articulated in abstract, general terms.

Notes

1. The melting furnace and the blacksmith are prominent symbols of creation in those agricultural societies in Africa that have not been subjected to a strong influence of pastoral ideologies. Their creative capacity is particularly related to fertility rituals in connection with the enthronement of new dynasties and sacred chiefs. Being the prime guarantor of the fertility in his territory, the sacred king may be enthroned by the blacksmith, as in the Lower Congo-Zaire region (Mertens 1942), and thereby blessed with the power of fertility attributed to the blacksmith. Or, the king himself may be a blacksmith, and thus a "creator" who controls the fertilizing act of forging new form out of melted iron (cf.
A. Jacobson-Widding and W. van Beek


2. Fire is a favourite theme of African myths about the origin of social institutions, like the family, or the foundation of a chiefly dynasty. As a general rule, the conqueror and first king is portrayed as a culture hero, who brought fire to the autochthonous people. At each new enthronement, a new fire must be lit, just as a new fire is lit when a new agricultural season is about to begin (cf. Baumann 1936:99 ff., 382 f.; Frobenius 1921–28). In eastern and southern Africa we find that a fire has to be burning in the house where a child is supposed to be conceived. The African methods of fire-making in general are a symbolic enactment of physical love between man and woman.

3. Further associations of “bush” and fertility in West Africa are found in connection with the location of twins. Twins, originate from the “bush” (Cartry 1979:274).

References


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