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NAAM: POLITICAL HISTORY AS STATE IDEOLOGY

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History, can we still draw on that obsolete authority?
Milan Kundera. *Testaments Betrayed*, 1995

[...] so he first tried the history books. It had seemed to him that history should provide the key to the present, that a study of history should help us to answer certain questions: where are we now? How did we come to be where we are?

Ngugi wa Thiongo, *Petals of Blood* 1977: 237

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Abstract

This thesis argues that the ideology of *Naam* (principle of power) is an essential and overlooked component in explaining both the logic of state formation, as well as the institutional continuities evident within the Mossi-Mamprusi-Dagomba states system. With reference to Igor Kopytoff's Internal African Frontier Thesis, it understands this logic as a single, continuous historical process whereby states were formed and dismantled, broken in autonomous entities and (re)created as clones of a constitutive *Naam* 'model'. This model also was negatively responsible for the genesis of acephalous non-state formations, composed of frontier men and women who escaped the stifling grip of the state.

Specifically, the thesis argues that the ideology of *Naam* was the overarching principle that not only informed the expansion of the Mossi-Mamprusi-Dagomba-system, but also enabled the construction of a *Mossi identity*. *Naam* was 'proposed' in some places, and 'imposed' in others, through rituals, family-like associations, and the integration of indigenous groups into the sphere of political rule.

Naam ideology was confronted with a fundamental contradiction: the Mossi ruled (over) people but had no control over the territorial basis of their rule. This contradiction was partly resolved through the extension of the discourse of power to the realm of *Tenga* (the sphere of rituals and earth-custody), by uniting the Mossi divinity (*Wende*) to the earth divinity (*Tenga*) and by tapping into the possibilities of a common belief, in order to buttress state legitimacy but also to articulate 'Mossi' culture on the basis of a shared idiom that transcended the dichotomy *Naam* /*Tenga*.

This contradiction cannot be explained with reference to the materiality of conquest alone, as most accounts of state formation, within and beyond Africa, have suggested. Yet the process was informed throughout by violence of a different kind. The deployment of *Naam* in the realm of rituals served to mediate the gap between power and legitimacy; but at the same time, state power as discourse and representation concealed the ontological violence inherent in the Mossi state. It also concealed the limits of discourse in making valid statements on historical experience. In the Mossi case, *pânga* (a form of travesty/violent version of *Naam*), intervenes in the disarticulation of power from kinship by isolating the *Naaba* (king) from all forms of loyalties.

An extended analysis of the consolidation of the Mossi state in the eighteenth century demonstrates how centralisation centred on the twin conditions of the necessary separation between kinship and kingship, and the integration of the stranger-kin as mediating agent at the junction of this divorce. The thesis will contribute to a better understanding of the role of ideology in state formation and society-making in the Voltaic region and West Africa more generally.

Declaration:

I hereby declare that, except where otherwise indicated, that this thesis is entirely my own work, and that no part of it has been submitted for any other degree or qualification.

Amy.Niang

Appendix 1: Glossary of Mooré terms

The transcription of Mooré terms follows the dispositions of the 69/012 /PRES decree of the government of Upper Volta (17 January, 1969) as set out by the National Commission on Voltaic Languages. The generic term used is Mossi/Moose (plural), Mooga or moaga (singular); Mooré is the language spoken by the Mossi and Moogo refers to the territory that comprised all Mossi states. It must be pointed that the translation provided here is merely an approximate rendering of the meaning of Mooré words. Many Mooré terms and expressions can only be understood in their context. The reader is referred to Alexandre (1953) for alternative and additional meanings for terms used in the present work.

Balum (from balemde, form of greeting): one of the main dignitaries (high ranking officials) of the Naaba; chief of Balôngo (place name); he is in charge of the internal matters of the court, he mediates relations between the Naaba and the community of Yarsé traders)

Basga: thanksgiving ritual, held after millet harvest and marking the New Year

Bega: ritual ceremonies annually held to honour tênga (lasting five lunar months throughout Moogo and starting around January, right after the napusûm ceremonies). Contrary to the napusûm however -held between the Naaba and different chieftaincies and royal administrators- the Bega celebrates the relationship between the Naaba and the earthpriests; essentially a ritual celebration dedicated to thanking tênga and to invoking for good harvests

Bendre: instrument, drum, half-spherical calabash

Bîn (or Rasam) Naaba: name given to the head of Bîngo (of captive origin); Bîn is used the Yatênga Naaba's residences (except in Ouahigouya, the main one)

Bîngo (from bingi, to gather, keep in reserve, maintain with care): section of the royal town adjacent to the royal residence and exclusively inhabited by families of captives; heads of Biisigi, Ziya and Sisamba also have the title of bîn naaba. The bingdemba also comprised groups of foreign origin such as the Dogon, San, and also Mossi who were reprieved after having been condemned to death.

Bingdemba (sing. bingneda): residents of Bîngo, royal captives

Bûudu: patrilineal descent group (see Moos buudu)

Bugo (plu. buguba): fertility priest; 'sacred' chief of pre-moaga society, most probably of kibga (dogon) origin; his ritual control is over the mystical power is the 'bugudo'; oral tradition gives example of nakombsé that were possessed by the bugudo and gained entry in the ranks of buguba, thus becoming 'autochthons' through this spiritual transformation

Burkina: free man, was generally distinguished from the yamba, captive

Fulse (sing. fulga) or kurumba are indigenous to Moogo, they speak alrumfe; they make up most of the tengbiisi

Gângaogo (gângaago; in Nakombgângaodo): brigand, a strong man that takes part in political rebellions and illegal raiding and looting; he is sometimes admired for his bravery and impudence

Kabsgo: drummed (only) or drummed and oral recitation of royal genealogy of royal dynasties; It literally means “permission” for the narrator has to request permission (to certain people and objects) to say the name of the ancestors

Kambose (kambonsi in Dagomba; sing. kanbonga): heterogeneous group comprising Marka from Bay (Sourou valley), Bambara from segu and Djula from Kong; they are associated, in Mamprusi, Dagomba, Nanumba and Moogo, to military activities and the use of firearms. In Yatenga, they were mostly armed bodyguards

Kibse (sing. kibga): refer to Dogons; indigenous, pre-moaga people part of which fled to the cliffs of Bandiagara at the time of Mossi conquest

Kiims roogo: sacred house (altar) dedicated to the ancestors

Kiimstênga (kiimstese): ancient royal residence, also the “place of the ancestors”

Kînkirga (pl. Kînkirse]: (bush) spirit

Kombere (plu. kombemba), vassal/provincial chief (Ouagadougou); appointed by the Naaba, he can nominate local chiefs

Koom filiga (from koom: water or millet beer, and filiga: to thank): first harvest celebration to mark the consumption of new millet

Kurita (opposite of Narita, also called reigning-dead): negative double of the king; generally a young son of a naaba, he is sent away to ‘eat death’, following a naaba’s death, and was supposed to never see again the (new) naaba during his lifetime and could not become himself a naaba; the kurita is then the living-representative of a dead naaba

Marãse (sing. marânga): traders and artisans said to have come from Songhay and have established themselves in Yatênga for centuries

Moaga: singular of Mossi or Moosé; it can also mean “someone who is uncircumcised”, a man from the savannah

Moogo: literally the “bush” or savannah; the territorial basis of the Mossi states system; Moogo comprised, at the end of the nineteenth century, four main states (Ouagaadougou, Yatênga, Tenkodogo, Fada N’Gourma) and a number of satellite states such as Yako, Mané, Tatênga, Zitênga, Téma, Conquitênga, etc.

Mooré: language spoken by the Mossi; part of the gur-voltaic cluster of languages; it is also ‘the manner of being’ of the Mossi, a code of comportment and self-presentation

Moos bûudu (see bûudu): made of members of patrilineal descendants of a given agnatic group, bigger than the saka (made of descendants of an agnatic core) and more generally descendants of Ouedraogo

Moosê: section of the royal compound where royal servants of non-captive origin (Nakombsé and Talsé); conceptually opposed to Bîngo Mossi (Mosi, Moose, Mole, Moshi): generic name for the descendants of Naaba Ouedraogo and more generally to the “ethnic” group whose members identify themselves as descendants of immigrants and rulers of Moogo

Na: masculine response to a call (present!) opposite of t’ma for women; it is also the invariable response of obedience given to the Naaba. The suffix m, which denotes power and strength, distinguishes Na from Naam which is rather abstract

Naaba (pl. nanamse): chief, head, normally used for royal chiefs but also extended to the heads of different functions (saa-naaba, fulga-naaba; etc)

Naam (authority, power, might, prerogative of the nakombsé): evokes the idea of a (aptness, aptitude) power that emanates from the divine and which allows a man to rule another

Naam kugri: the 'stone of power' is a vestige from the time of Naaba Yadega, located in Tangazugu; the newly enthroned Naaba is made to sit on the stone under the sun, in humility before the tengbissi in order to receive their blessing (agreement)

Naam Wúbri (Wúbri naafo): altar upon which the Naba makes annual sacrifices
Narita: reigning king; opposite of kurita

Napoko: first daughter of a Naaba, she assumes the interregnum upon her father's death, to ensure there is institutional vacancy in between two administrations; also called woman-chief

Naaba (plu. nanamsé) chief, secular office holder

Nakombgandaogo (see Gandaogo)

Nakombga (pl. Nakombsé) descendants of migrants from Mamprusi-Dagomba and elsewhere (Moose, Mossi), in the strict sense a son of a Nabiiga (prince) that did not become Naaba

Napusûm (from pusûm, prosternation): annual greeting ceremony to the Naaba; it essentially gathers the three orders of political authority that make up the Naam order (Nakombsé, Tāsobnamba and Nayiirdemba); the napusûm serves to re-enact the alliance between Naam and tênga (although tengbiise take marginal part in it) and the Mossi's allegiance to their sovereign; Nakombsé, Nesômba and other dignitaries offer bunches of new ears of millet to the Naaba during the napusûm

Nayiridemba (sing. nayirineda): courtiers, royal dignitaries and servants.

Nesômde (plu. Nesômba): literally good, trustworthy people, state dignitaries who comprise the Electoral College; they are the Naaba's ministers, their number and titles vary according to the state (for instance Ouidi in Ouagadougou is Werânga Naaba in Yatênga) and most of them have authority over territorial divisions

Nesômcourse: literally 'little Nesômba' low-rank royal officials/dignitaries, generally under the authority of Nesômba

Nîniga (samo): population indigenous to Moogo

Nyonyoose (niniusé): see Yônyôose

Ouahigouya (wa(a) yugi-o): literally means "venez prendre la terre", in other words 'come and submit to my rule' ; main city of Yatenga, made capital under Naaba Kango (1757-1787). It is said that the greeting which consists of prostrating oneself before the Naaba, and covering oneself with dust (*tom*) comes from this injunction

Oubri (Wubri): founder of Wubritênga Ouagadougou, descendant of Ouedraogo

Ouedraogo (litt. stallion): putative ancestor of all Mossi

Pânga: pang, pas, pasé (plu.), generally translated as "power" but pânga has more to do with the violent manifestations of power, individual and state; it refers to the physical power of state "enforcers" such as royal servants, etc

Pângsoba: holder of pânga

Pogshiure (pogsyre, napogsyure for the royal version): system of delayed exchange of women, *siure* is a mutually binding juridic term referring to the chiefly right over the first daughter of a woman given in marriage, who is then incorporated into the chief's 'reserve'

Ri: literally to "eat", in the sense of "to appropriate the substance of", it is the radical for ringu and rima

Riallé (Riyaaré or Diiyaaré): Yennenga's husband, thus ancestor of the Mossi

Rîmbio: close relatives of the Naaba

Rog-miki: custom, tradition, "what one found when one was born"

Rumnamba: The Naaba's first wife

Saka (pl. sakse): settlement of related members, gathered around an agnatic core (buudu); its size is generally smaller than a village, very similar to the 'clan'; zaka (pl. zakse) on the other hand refers to the 'inner' courtyard of a house (as opposed to samânde, the 'outer' courtyard. It is generally rendered as 'quartier' in French. The saka is divided in yiya (sing. yiri) which are intermediary kin groups (translated as household). Saka is a unit of a yiri; saka, yiri and zaka all constitute segmentary divisions of the buudu, headed respectively by a (bud kasma) sak kasma, yir kasma and zak kasma

Samând naaba: dignitary under the supervision of the togo naaba; also adjutant to the tâpsoba. In war time, he leads the infantry to the fight, riding a donkey; a small trench is dug for him and he is buried up in it up to the waist, head of archers, he gives the signal to his men in this position. In case of defeat, he is killed on the spot

Saaba (sing. seya): blacksmiths

Silmîise (sing. silmîiga): Peul

So (to hold, to possess): soba= master -> sobnamba

Soba: master, possessor; ex: teng-soba, tapsoba, pângsoba

Sondre (plu. sonda): 'family' or patronymic name, in opposition to *yure*, individual name; more specifically classificatory name for an extended agnatic group or socio-economic category; for instance, Ouedraogo for 'Mossi', Sawadogo for tengbiisse, Kindo and Zalle for blacksmiths, Sore for Yarse, etc.

Tâpo: war as social phenomenon and institution (see zabre below)

Talga (plu. talsé): commoner, non-royal

Tâ-soba, tâpsoba (wogdogo) or tasoba (Yatenga): from tâpo and so: to possess; plu. tâsobdamba, commonly translated as 'chief warrior' but the tâpsoba was not always a military chief; he could be of captive origin or recruited from the ranks of Nakombsé who had lost territorial command but were still influential in villages formerly ruled

Tengpeelem (literally, "white earth"): "bare ground", area/territory over which an earth priest has ritual authority; it also refers to the place where ancestors are buried)

Tênga (têse): the earth, land, soil, settled, cultivated or uncultivated land, territorial expanse, earth cult (Napagha tênga as 'wife' of Naaba Wende), or village; tênga also refers to the 'earth altar' to which the tengsoba makes sacrifices

Tengsoba (plu. tengsobdamba): literally custodian of the earth, earth priest (master)

Tengdemba: literally 'people of the earth' is generally opposed to Nakombsé, holders of political power, and it is closer in meaning to tengbiisse (sons of the

earth); the term refer to people indigenous to Moogo

Tengbîiga: son of the earth; refers to members of indigenous groups of Moogo

Tengbîise: plural of tengbîiga: literally 'son of the earth' or indigenous person

Têngsobongo (or têngandě, area around altar): territory, area under the ritual control of the tengsoba

Tinsé: annual festival during which sacrifices are offered to the mother of the first Wubritênga (Ouagadougou) Naaba who was a daughter of an indigenous Nyonyoga

Togo Naaba (from toogě, to say): the first in hierarchical order, of the Naaba's dignitaries (mistakenly translated as "ministers"); chief of Toogě (place name), spokesperson of the Naaba, he is the mediator between the Naaba and earth custodians

Tulubere wefo: royal horse put to death when the Naaba dies, it can only be mounted by the Naaba. Tulubere also designates the horse's forehead ornament

Ula (province of Yatênga); the chief of Ula is an important military personality

Wedraogo (Ouedraogo): founder of the Moos buusu, ancestor of all Mossi

Wedkin Naaba: head groom, adjutant to the Wiidi Naaba

Wende (cause finale du monde/ultimate cause of life) designates the chaotic nature of time and space that has no beginning or end [wende and basga are temporal indication for Mossi who have a particular perception of time: past and future in the present, frequently enacted in ceremonies and rituals]

Weogo: bush, refers to space beyond permanent fields, and uncultivated or fallow areas, outside the village proper

Werânga (wedranga) Naaba (Widi/Ouidi Naaba in Ouagadougou): one of the four royal dignitaries; chief of Werâsě or Wedrâsê (place name); amongst other functions, he controlled access to the Naaba; he acted as a mediator between the Naaba and the Nakombsé

Wogdgo Naaba: represents the Ninisi and is in charge of installing a new Mogho Naaba (plu. nanamse): chief, king, head,holder of Naam e.g. Mogho Naaba, Yatênga Naaba, Yako Naaba; tittle also given to non-naam holders with specific forms of authority such as saab-naaba (chief blacksmith), fulga naaba (chief of the Fulsé)

Yamba (plu. Yemsé): slave, captive, generally opposed to the Burkina, free man

yaralentîise (sing. yaralentîiga): literally 'those that are hanged on trees', people accused of having sexual relations with animals, generally a female donkey (jenny); the crime of zoophilia in Moogo could both be metaphorical or real and it was a social transgression harshly punished by society; one could 'become' yaralentîiga through sexual relations with somebody accused of being one or through undifferentiated filiation. In Yatênga, yaralentîise were not given proper burial but dumped 'outside' Mossi society, in the village of Renea, in the north-west of the kingdom

Yarsé (sing. yarga): Sarakole traders and artisans established in Moogo for centuries; they introduced Islam in it and have contributed to its economic development

Yimkemde: literally 'old house', ancient (abandoned) royal palace, occupied by a

eunuch with the title of Yiirsoba (head of household); could also be occupied by a Naaba's wife in the royal residences where the Naaba did not stay

Yônyôose (sing. yônyôoga): indigenous people of Moogo

Zabre: squabble, dispute, a more casual version of tâpo (war); see zab yuure or zabre yuure; the Mossi use 'zabre' to describe dynastical struggle for Naam

Zab yuure (plu. zab-yuuya): tentatively translated as 'nom de guerre', it is both a motto (shibboleth-name) and a (self) praise-name which a newly nominated Naaba chooses for himself. The zab-yuure generally reflects the particular circumstances that saw the advent of a new administration; it also expounds the guiding principles and values held by the new Naaba

Zom-bika: rite performed to sanction 30 years of reign of a Naaba; it is a form of symbolic re-investiture

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1. 1. Objectives and Arguments

1. 1. 1. The past in the present

For the Mossi, the past lives in the present. Past and present interact in ways more enduring than discourses on accelerated ‘modernisation’ would allow to understand; the past flows in the present and it is revived as an endless source of reference and a resource for today’s Mossi. The relevance of the Mossi state for political history has been acutely raised in recent debates in Burkina Faso, on the place of ‘traditional authority’ in the emergence of a civil society, and the realignment of competing legitimacies in the post-colonial state within a decentralised, *democratic* system.¹ Despite the damaging consequences, on their legitimacy, of traditional rulers’ involvement in the colonial project, and despite their exclusion from Burkinabé politics by successive administrations, Mossi

¹ See for instance discussions amongst Burkinabé intellectuals; M. Savadogo and H. Ouedraogo. 2010 ‘Cohabitation des Légimitités’ and ‘Les Autorités Traditionnelles à l’Epreuve de la Démocratie Locale,’ *Hakili: Esprit, Intelligence*, 11: 3-23.

rulers have never been completely absent from the political life of Burkina.² Whilst some of the issues facing contemporary Burkina Faso and West Africa more generally are novel, an analysis of Mossi state process shows that these problems are interstitial to structural institutional inadequacies that ignore the relevance of history on social reality.

For a long time, scholars of pre-colonial African states were not looking for states or state systems per se in Africa; they were convinced there were none to look for. Theirs was an attempt to understand, instead, specific aspects of *social and political organisations*, rather than institutional models on a comparative basis. Some of these scholars, trained to see the state within the dynamics of population densities, land and resources scarcity, and territorial control, could not see recognisable states in Africa as long as the characteristics of the European model of nation-state were missing. Robert H. Jackson is a case in point, who argued that “Africa was a continental archipelago of loosely defined political systems: a world of societies rather than states and far more recognizable to anthropology than to international relations.”³ Such a position, not only

² French administrative strategies in the colony of Upper-Volta were a combination of elements of indirect rule and the assimilationist model, but they were to become more firmly ‘associationist’ in the 1920s as they made Mossi rulers ‘chiefs’ whose task it was to enforce stringent colonial policies (forced labour, head taxation, conscription); if some rulers profited from this system (commission levied on taxes, extended administrative responsibilities), the ‘productive relationship’ between Mossi aristocracy and the colonial regime was paid a high price. The dismantling of the chiefly structure in post-colonial Burkina reflected the desire of its governants to confine ‘traditional’ forces to symbolic roles.

³ R. H. Jackson. 1990. *Quasi States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 67. Hobsbawm argues along the same lines in E. J. Hobsbawm. 1987. *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914*. 1. London: Weidenfeld and

demonstrates a basic lack of imagination, but also plain ignorance of the ways in which communities all over the world have creatively organised themselves for centuries.

In the history of West Africa, colonialism is conceptualised as a watershed; its legacy compounds the theoretical problem of the 'traditional state'; this has variously influenced the writing of African history, in particular African political history. As much as the present work is an attempt to analyse the state within the dynamics of African agency, the theme of Africa's contact with the rest of the world, in particular Europe, is an inescapable underlying institution. Even when one recognises this, Nkrumah's hope for an African history that reflects Africa's organic experience, one which treats Africa's contact with Europe only through Africans' experience, is almost chimerical⁴ Other attempts to provide an 'African' account of the African experience have resulted in an apologia of the 'traditional'; others deny any particular relevance to African history.⁵ The study of the so-called traditional institutions is crucial to a real understanding of state and social processes in Africa today, for these institutions embody the subjective consciousness of many Africans living in post-colonial states and republics often

Nicolson, p. 3. In J. I. Herbst. 2000. *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 36-7. If Herbsts makes a cogent critique of Jackson's theses, his own arguments on the 'pathology' of the African state as unable to extend authority beyond political centres and therefore unviable partly fails to tackle the paradoxes social and institutional configurations of the African state from African perspectives. He reifies a certain type of state but leaves untreated the issue of African agency in dealing with particular geographical, historical and social conditions.

⁴ See K. Nkrumah. 1965. *Le Consciencisme*. Paris: Payot, p. 99.

⁵ B. Barry. 1985. *Le Royaume du Waalo: Le Sénégal avant la Conquête*. Paris: Karthala, p. 35.

torn between the requirements of competing notions of social organisation, legitimacy and citizenship.⁶ The UNESCO collection on the general history of Africa has tremendously contributed to the writing of the first pages of an African history whereby African perspectives on the continent's cultures and traditions, the historical connections of its peoples, and Africa's contribution to world history sustain a critical analysis of the past of the continent.

1. 1. 2. Objectives and arguments:

The thesis endeavours to demonstrate that *Naam* was the most potent concept in the political history of the Mossi states. It also shows that the historical deployment of *Naam* throughout the Mossi states in constructing 'societies for the state' shows that there is no such fully-fledged conceptual distinction between state and society that is relevant for the Mossi. In fact, our use of the master distinction between state and society (*Gesellschaft*) rests upon a Hegelian tradition as represented in Max Weber. Weber defines society as a distinct category that does not have a direct bearing on state functioning and in terms of a strict separation between public and private spheres, within a conception of the state as a structurally and historically specific entity of political rule.⁷ Until the post-colonial period, Mossi society did not exist in the form of a large and horizontally stratified, legally constructed and territorially defined

⁶ My first question to Mossi I spoke to was about the things the traditional system evoked in their minds. Most interviewees mentioned the relevance of the traditional system in their everyday life although they felt elements of it did not quite fit with the structure of the Burkinabé state.

⁷ See M. Weber. 1978. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Berkeley: UCP, pp. 995-8; 1968. *Economy and Society*. New York: Bedminster, pp. 901-2, 1142.

group.⁸ Society in Moogo cannot be appropriately apprehended outside the object of political rule. The Mossi version of society challenges many orthodoxies that consider it [society] as a given, unproblematic entity. However, for lack of a better term, I use society for what is a loose hierarchical and flexible political community over which *Naam* held some sway.

The fundamental rationale of the thesis is thus to investigate the ways in which *Naam* defined and shaped a particular state and society in Moogo⁹, in the pursuit of three central objectives: the establishment and reproduction of the *Naam*-state model, the construction of a socio-political community that serves and fits into this model and the pursuit of social integration in the form of assimilation of non-Mossi groups through state membership and other means. The thesis is not so much a study of the state in itself, but of the relationship between *Naam* and state and between *Naam* and the political community it created. As such, it aims to apply theory to history—that of the state—in other words, to access history through theory, and it is articulated around two key arguments:¹⁰

The pre-colonial state—in the Mossi experience at least—is best

⁸ Anthropologists have uncritically used the term society for this type of organisation

⁹ If Moogo is the territorial basis of the Mossi states system; moaga is singular of Moose/Mossi; see Glossary of Mooré terms on page

¹⁰ This approach does pose a number of problems and these are dealt with in chapter 3 and 4 within the treatment of historical data in the reconstruction of the state along with migratory trends around the Volta Basin. The difficulty is in the hazardous endeavour involved in (really) understanding and explicating the ideational framework that went hand in hand with the material construction of state and communities. Scattered historical sources are sometimes reticent about Moose reflections on Moose identity, the meaning of ideology in social stratification and the constitution of citizenship.

understood as the result of the introduction of a state-making 'technique' mastered by a number of groups. Thus, war and conquest may be important but they only tell a partial story. Migrationism¹¹ on the other hand better accounts for the long and uneven process spread over three to four centuries and articulated in the foundation of branches with one claim to a common ancestor and one common aspiration, which is the continuation of a specified tradition of political rulership. In this scenario, conquest represented only the concluding catalyst of a slow and painstaking process. The idea of groups of mounted warriors subduing 'native' populations with no prior coherent organisation is rather misleading. The dialectic of *Naam* (variously translated as power, authority, political office, polity) vs. *Tênga* (Earth, land, earth-custody, earth-cult, locality), the basis of the principle of dualism in the socio-political organisation of Mossi societies, points to two views of society, in the maintenance of the status-quo (*Tênga*) and that of intervention (*Naam* and its coercive corollary, *Pângá*¹²) for the same purpose of social order. The dichotomy *Naam/Tênga* is not a rigid phenomenon, nor is it an antagonism between two unitary systems that represent separate structures, respectively *state* and *society*. In the pursuit of consent and consensus through incorporation of non-mossi segments and structures, the processes of *Naam* transform *Tênga* from a timeless source of social order to a set of precarious ritual alliances which earthpriests build according to political demand.

¹¹ As a theory of social organisations as resulting from the transfer of ideas through the movement of people

¹² The French translation of *naam* and *pângá* as respectively 'pouvoir' and 'force' gives a better idea of the nuance between the two

Integrally related to the idea of *Naam* as a technique of governance, *Naam* can be conceived as the conceptual framework that best explains the emergence and subsequent development of the Mossi state. The understanding of *Naam* in Mossi political philosophy is that of an *ideal* leap; it represents a major revolution in political ideology and state power. In that sense, *Naam* negates evolutionary arguments of state formation although this does not presuppose that the state's comprehensive phylogenesis was a 'given' of state formation.¹³ The idea of the specificity of African political equilibrium (arguments of 'divine' or 'sacred' kingship, the socio-political coherence of the institutional arrangements of 'stateless' societies, amongst other things) and contentions on the universal nature of the nation-state miss out on the significance and possibilities of *Naam* as a founding political principle. It constitutes, in our analysis of the state process in Moogo (territorial basis of the Mossi states), the master idea, the horizon from which history is apprehended, the "the *Alpha and Omega* of all public life in the early Voltaic states".¹⁴ The thesis thus attempts to show that in the context of the Voltaic history of the state, *Naam* had the ideological reach and the transformative effects of great ideological revolutions such as Christianity, Islam or Marxism. The thesis examines the conceptual and institutional development of *Naam* in the Voltaic states, specifically in the Mossi states of Ouagadougou and Yatênga. It does not delve into the chronological history of the Mossi states but instead uses historical processes and events to illustrate key arguments; namely

¹³ S. Mahir. 2007. "Méthodes en Histoire Orale Genèse de l'Autorité Politique au Moogo," *l'Homme*, 2(182): 215-232.

¹⁴ P. Skalník. 1978. "Early States in the Voltaic Basin," In *The Early State*. H. J. M. Claessen and P. Skalník (eds.). The Hague, Mouton: 469-94, p. 484.

that *Naam* shifted from a context of socio-professional differentiation whereby power-holding was a professional category on a par with land-tilling or blacksmithing, to a full-fledged organising principle that redefined the contours of a *moaga* identity.

1. 1. 3. Naam, conceptual and historical

The legacy of the Mossi *Naam* raises the importance of conceptual history for political history.¹⁵ It reveals that the historical process of the Mossi state has a specific temporality which, regardless of the dramatic transformations that led to the demise of the Mossi structure, has had a determining impact on social reality. Koselleck goes further when he argues that social reality is historical reality, an internally differentiated structure of functional relationships in which the ideals and interests of different groups collide.¹⁶ Mossi arguments and ideas could however prevail over potentially rival ideas and arguments in so far as the Mossi state monopolised the settings, semantic (Moore), rhetorical (virtues of *Naam*), spatial (something called the Mossi state), within which such ideas and arguments could thrive and remain unchallenged. Thus the space of experience of the Mossi state constituted enduring, historically accessible structures which maintained the constitutive nature of (its) historical discourse in parallel to claims to literal truth. On the other hand, Appadurai contends that “the past is an intrinsically alternative mode of discourse to those other modes of

¹⁵ As Koselleck put it, the past is accessible to us, not through ‘traces’ in the various source, “but rather in our theories”; see R. Koselleck. 2002. *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing, History, Spacing Concepts*. Stanford: SUP, pp-39-40.

¹⁶ R. Koselleck. 2004. *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 270.

communication which can, and often do, assume an eternal present. Such norms do, therefore, constitute an aspect of culture in which concessions to change are built in, and division and debates are recognised. As a result, such norms permit new forms of action, at the same time as they allow cultures to regulate social change.”¹⁷

If, as some have argued, part of the mind-sets formed over the centuries, in pre-colonial and colonial times, “for better or worse, survived the vicissitudes of the twentieth century,”¹⁸ we need to recognise the extent to which subjective consciousness, practices, beliefs, procedures and processes still continue to mediate and transact mentalities and practices, procedures and processes rooted in local and foreign histories and sensitivities. The thesis contends that Mossiness was achieved through a juxtaposition of *Naam* ideology to existing social structures whilst keeping distinct the contradistinction between *Naam* and *Tênga*. The *Naam/Tênga* duality is a central trope that provides the reference and the ideological basis for the deployment of *Naam* in social organisation. This dichotomy is thus an organising principle that does much more than provide the institutional mainstay of the social formation. The Mossi example demonstrates that the invention of the ‘political’ was correlative to the creation of the *moaga* as social and political actor.

Furthermore, the logic of *Naam* ideology in many ways determined the

¹⁷ A. Appadurai. 1981. “The Past as a Scarce Resource,” *Man*, 6 (2): 201-19. p. 218

¹⁸ I. Wilks. 1993. *Forests of Gold: Essays on the Akan and the Kingdom of Asante*. Athens: Ohio University Press.

conditions of social integration, the construction of Mossi identity, hence the making of Mossi society through the deployment of ideology into structures of authority. In seeking to mediate the gap between state power and legitimacy, *Naam* also intervened in the construction of a model of society. Using Wilks' perspective on bureaucratisation and McCaskie's analysis of hegemony in the construction of ideology in Asante as foil, I intend to show that state ideology was not so much imposed than it was disseminated amongst non-Mossi groups. Interestingly, the very configuration of *Naam* that rigidly structured state working, office and succession also 'created' the conditions for the embeddedness of the *Naam* order in the construction of Mossi identity.

The sociology of *Naam* reveals a very Mossi obsession with political leadership throughout the pre-colonial, the colonial and into post-colonial history. Mossi *Nanamse* (sing. *naaba*) were provided, at a young age with thorough training in the technologies of leading, designed to enhance their 'predisposition' for leadership.¹⁹ Mossi enthrallment with things political contrasts, elsewhere, with other forms of obsession that did not necessarily derive from local ecological and environmental dynamics. Thus, if in one region the minds and imaginations of the inhabitants were mesmerised by a cult of cattle, "in another

¹⁹ If, in pre-colonial times, future chiefs were given appropriate training within the structure of chiefly compounds and on the basis of existing methods of ruling, in colonial and postcolonial times, Mossi chiefs re-appropriated instruments of 'modernity' in subscribing to technologies of ruling that tapped into formal competence derived from a western tradition of political administration; see B. Beucher. 2008. "Une Royauté Africaine à l'Heure de la Mondialisation : le Royaume de Ouagadougou et la Question du Développement au Burkina Faso." *Fasopo, Revue Européenne d'Analyse des Sociétés Politiques*, 6: 1-104, p. 44.

they focused on initiations and social position,” and in yet another, “everyone dreamed of the splendours of sacralised leaders and the possibilities of participating in such splendours.”²⁰ Although the thesis does not pretend to present an exhaustive account of power, a main thread runs throughout the analysis that posits that *Naam* is something that serves to conceptualise and enhance at the same time a particular view of state and society. The third point therefore relates to a definition/interpretation of *society* according to the Mossi model. *Naam* (re)defines the concept of society not according to territorial boundaries, or according to the dichotomy between state/society, and not even in terms of networks of relationships (political, ideological, economic and political sources as Mann conceptualises them) between groups that recognise the authority of a given government; the Mossi instead conceptualise society as that which is concerned with the deployment of *Naam*. In other words, society was that portion of social life that was politically relevant from the perspective of *Naam*.

The *original encounter of Naam*, an imported concept, with that of *Tênga*, indigenously conceptualised, creates a dichotomic opposition, violent at places, but which was over time transformed into a ‘dual unity’ consolidated by an ideology wrought in a specific political thinking and system.²¹ The origin of the state was a mythical moment variously interpreted. The Mossi state as a

²⁰ Vansina looks at the collective imaginations of the inhabitants of West Central Africa, during the tenth century, and how these shaped their choice of socio-political institution and governance, in spite of the environmental constraints; see J. Vansina. 2004. *How Societies are Born*, pp. 101-2.

²¹ Wilks 1971: 350 in Skalník 1978: 472.

sociological reality, however, was formed through a painstaking process, with doses of violence and an elevated level of commitment and transformations, between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. *Naam* is the fundament of the state architecture, the overarching historical and conceptual phenomenon that defines social identity according to people's distance from it. *Naam* also regulates inter-group relationships on the basis of groups' *de jure* or *de facto* access to it, which in turn is a function of office devolution. The existence of the state—and the articulation of state power—is thus essentially based on that of *Naam*, not on territory or on 'ethnicity'; nor is it on other criteria recognised as primary to the constitution of a state. *Naam* needs to also be understood as 'polity', the ideological locus of which is the unifying principle that brings the state into the incumbency of power holders. I use fundamental dualities *Naam/ Pânga*, *Naam/Tênga*, ideological constructions of binaries, complex territorial division (Moose/Bingo), belief and rituals (*Wende* vs. *Tênga*), as historical references and concepts of political/social imagination, war/trade and the institutional lexicon, as various lenses through which to apprehend the Mossi state.

Efforts to rationalise state conduct and the internal relations of state power to system evolution, have diversely led to sweeping theorisation: "the quasi-logic underpinning this polarisation [unexplained, far-fetchedly rationalised practices] is a major reason why [scholars of Africa] consign to silence any direct discussion of [...] cultural practice-belief, religion, knowledge, custom and habit, and patterns of thought".²² It is important, when we recognise

²² See T. C. McCaskie. 1995. *State and Society in Precolonial Asante*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 17-8.

the significance of belief for state ideology, to also emphasise that it has an impact beyond the institutions of the state; an implicit form of sociological determinism papers over fundamental gaps in assuming that belief and rituals are there, simply to justify and legitimise the position of a 'ruling class'. Whereas anthropologists have been criticised for failing to distinguish the political from the rest, such as systems of belief, myths and other intangible elements, Southall considers that what has been seen by political scientists as a vice is a great virtue and perhaps one of the greatest contributions of anthropology to political science.²³

I argue that the Mossi ideology of power did not necessarily rest on the state's use of physical violence in order for it to perform the range of roles—political, economic, social and cultural expected from it. The conventional view, therefore, of the state as the institution par excellence invested with a legitimate use of violence, may not consistently and evenly apply to some forms of pre-colonial polities. The Mossi state offers an alternative model of state and political culture to the western-centred state concept whose structure, history, use and understanding are of little use if we are to account for the nature of political institutions in pre-colonial Africa. The introduction of different contemporary perspectives on state power, legitimacy and sovereignty will shed light on the diverse nature of state formation. We retain the appellation of 'state' as a generic term for what has elsewhere been referred to as kingdom, chiefdom, or 'early

²³ A. Southall. 1974. "State Formation in Africa." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 3: 153-165, p. 156.

state'.²⁴

Moogo presents one of the most interesting examples of pre-colonial political structures where theories of the 'early state' come against original concepts and arrangements that make the former inadequate in attempting to grasp the emergence and subsequent development of the state as model of socio-political organisation. The longstanding political stability of the Mossi states has carried through colonial Upper Volta and some aspects survived into contemporary, post-colonial Burkina Faso.²⁵ The cluster of Mossi states that covered 65 to 100 000 square kilometres, extending from the Ghanaian-Burkinabé border (11th parallel) in the south to Malian-Burkinabé border at the end of the 19th century would disintegrate under colonial occupation and subsequent practices that diverted Mossi political authority toward the fulfilment of the colonial project.²⁶

²⁴ Horton notes that even the specific category of 'chiefdom' does not account for their diverse types and characteristics; see R. Horton. 1971 "Stateless societies in the History of West Africa", in J.P.A. Ajayi and M. Crowder, eds., *History of West Africa*, vol. 1, London: Longman.

²⁵ However, like many other postcolonial states, Burkina Faso " (...) has paid a high price in terms of foregone growth by failing in the early 1960s to question the state structures it inherited from colonialism...", see Pierre Englebert. 2000. "Pre-colonial Institutions, Post-Colonial States, and Economic Development in Tropical Africa" *Political Research Quarterly*, 53 (1): 7-36, p. 29.

²⁶ As Carolyn Warner has argued, Europeans dismantled viable African polities in the process of realising the colonial project: "through treaty violations, military conquest and occupations, and alliances with disaffected groups, Europeans chipped away at the integrity of African political systems"; C. Warner. 1999. "The Political Economy of 'Quasi-Statehood' and the Demise of 19th Century African Politics," *Review of International Studies* 25(2): 233-55, p. 254.

1. 2. Mossi Historiography and the Pre-colonial State

1. 2.1. The limits of theoretical assumptions

The debate on state formation in pre-colonial Africa falls roughly in two categories: the evolutionary perspective and variations of the mode of production perspective as expounded by as Yves Person, Claude Meillassoux and Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch.²⁷ These scholars conceptualised state formation on the basis of control of surplus realised upon long-distance trade by warrior aristocracies, within more or less autonomous peasant societies. Terray on the other hand looks at the economic and social role played by captives in state-making; he explained Ashanti and Gyaman social formations as constituted by the conjunction of a kin-based tributary mode of production based on the exploitation of slave labour which in turn consolidated the state's capability to control trade flows and draw benefits from it. Terray extends this logic as the basis of *most* African political formations.²⁸ If Terray's description of the formation of Gyaman is at times similar to the Mossi state process—ruling Abron were a minority that moved in small groups in the end of the seventeenth century; they combined diplomacy and force to subdue indigenous populations—this approach does not satisfactorily explore the ideological elaborations that crystallised the state in Moogo.

²⁷ See Y. Person. 1968. *Samori: Une Révolution Dyula*. Dakar: IFAN; C. Coquery-Vidrovitch. 1969. "Recherches sur un Mode de Production Africain," *La Pensée*, 114: 61-78; C. Meillassoux. 1964. *Anthropologie Economique des Gouro de Cote d'Ivoire*. Paris: Mouton.

²⁸ E. Terray. 1974. "Long-distance Exchange and the Formation of the State: the Case of the Abron kingdom of Gyaman," *Economy and Society*, 3: 315-45.

Theories of political philosophy provide little light in terms of an understanding of the constitution and the conduct of pre-colonial states and societies, especially in Africa. Political philosophy tends to concern itself with issues of how men 'ought to live' and within what sort of government but then provide little in terms of the political, social and cultural habits of institutions and societies of the past. History and political anthropology have been more useful in accounting for how states sprung from societies at stages of political development different from more typical state models. Political philosophers therefore tend to tap into known forms of state organisation to explain processes that lead rudimentary types into more sophisticated forms of socio-political organisations.²⁹ Issues of the origins of African states are closely related to the

²⁹ M. Fortes and E.E. Pritchard, *African Political Systems*, 1940: 4. Some of the works of (colonial) social anthropologists, their sources and rationale affected the image and more importantly the emphasis of social anthropologist as a discipline. An enduring critique of colonial ethnographers has revealed the pathologies of colonial ethnography "from naiveté in the creation of the primitive 'other' to active complicity with the project of colonial domination." J. Allman and J. Parker, *Tongnaab*, 2005: 15 and V. Y. Mudimbe. 1988. *The Invention of Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. My use of these scholars is selectively limited to those arguments relevant to the understanding of the circumstances of state formation in West Africa. For a critique of British social anthropology, see A. Barnard. 2001. "Review: Africa and the Anthropologist," *Africa* 71(1): 162-170; J. R. Hooker. 1963. "The Anthropologist's Frontier: the Last Phase of African *Exploitation*," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 1: 455-459. The use of 'ethnicity' as a colonial instrument is an illustrative case: whilst recognizing the need to move away from some of its connotations, some Africanists still stress its past role in providing 'a dignity to marginalised and ignored peoples.' The Mossi exemple indicates that a conception of 'ethnicity' as that comforting construction of anthropological discourse would be misleading. De Heusch therefore rightly questions: 'Shouldn't we, then, be more consistent and decide whether or not anthropology has been a colonial science?' in Luc de Heusch. 2000. "L'Ethnie. The Vicissitudes of a Concept," *Social Anthropology*, 8 (2): 99-115, p. 101.

difficulty to theorise the state in Africa.³⁰ The concept of the state, its nature, its manifestations throughout history, and its roots, have for very long been a subject of contentious debate in historiography, politics, anthropology, sociological theory, to name only these. Scholars have long been concerned with the conditions of the emergence of the state on the one hand and the feature characteristics of states as they 'occurred' against a widespread system of stateless societies or 'less sophisticated' forms of sociopolitical organisations.³¹ The state was theorised as the most essential juncture in the development of a society. Structural differentiation was the grid against which the evolutionary process of the state was measured by evolutionary theorists.³² These strands of the dynamics of state formation were taken up by a number of scholars in Fortes and Evans-Pritchard's 1940 collection on African political systems. However, the early state of Tenkodogo bore little resemblance to the Hausa city-states especially in their developmental trajectories and institutional outcome. **Some of**

³⁰ H. Lewis. 1966 "The Origins of African Kingdoms," *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 6(23): 402-407 p. 402.

³¹ The distinction between state and stateless structures on the basis of the centralisation of authority is has not always been the most apt; Terray's argument that the state emerges when a 'qualitative' difference is stated and can be recognised between a ruling group and a ruled group seems a good starting point, see E. Terray. 1985. "Sociétés Segmentaires, Chefferies, Etats: Acquis et Problèmes," *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 19(1): 106-115, p. 112.

³² For a review HJM. Claessen, P. Skalník. 1978. *The Early State*. Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter; S.N Eisenstadt; M. Abitbol; N. Chazan. 1988. *The Early State in African Perspective*, Leiden, New York: Kobenhavn; R. H. Lowie (1922, 1947) *Primitive Society*. New York: Liveright; also R. H. Lowie "Origin of the State", 1927. Einsenstad evaluates different approaches of evolution theory in S. N. Eisenstadt. 1964. "Social Change, Differentiation and Evolution," *American Sociological Review*, 29(3): 375-386.

these issues are discussed in the introductory chapter, with reference to the limits of evolutionary theories.

The problem with many state theories lies in a systemic view of society through the prism of the division of labour—thus structural differentiation—and the attendant political manifestations, thus minimising the contribution of culture and belief to institutional building, social order and meaning-making, the institutionalisation of trust and its relation to power. Eighteenth and nineteenth century European perceptions of the state have become universal norm. Anachronistic postulates have elevated the European specific experience of the state as the most valid and most viable model of social organisation.³³ European state was historically specific, unique perhaps, and that the model which derives from it is unlikely to be appropriate to state processes in Africa. Crucially important however is, in Mossi political history, a view of state-formation as a form of skill, a technology of leadership introduced around the Volta Rivers and South of the Niger bend by way of migration from the political formations of Mamprusi and Dagomba. State-formation in Moogo was very much the result of a breakthrough in what followed the ‘export’ of an existing practice, that of state-making. Lonsdale for instance dismisses Fage and Oliver’s attempts to demonstrate the importance of the transfer of ideas within Sudanic states; for him “the deployment of a considerable fund of common political ideas” as the basis for state-building is was not backed by sufficient data at the time Fage and Oliver were writing. We now however have the data to support the same assumptions

³³ See for instance, D. Tull. 2005. *The Reconfiguration of Political Order in Africa* Hamburg: Institute of African Affairs, pp. 21-34.

thanks to the works of Michel Izard, Junzo Kawada, and Elliot Skinner, amongst others.

If issues of the origins of the pre-colonial state have generally become a less central topic since Eisenstad et al., more recent writers have tried to get at African political logics on their own terms. Apart from McCaskie's important contribution on Ashanti, Medard, Wrigley and Reid on Buganda, also the literature on the Senegambia, for instance Hawthorne's work, shows how in the context of the slave trade societies adapted non-state forms. In Terray's conceptualisation of state formation for instance, 'freedom' becomes a defining concept. He associates state formation to transgression and the action of 'marginals' who initiated historical ruptures. Beyond dichotomic interpretations between indigenous dynamics and conquests, he shows that the development of trade freed the energies of men—whose birth social status or professional activity places at the margins of society—from the stifling obligations of 'traditional' society³⁴ These men would fit the definition of 'frontiermen' in the sense that they were usually social misfits, outcasts, offspring of forbidden unions, unsuccessful candidates in political competitions, hunters and other wanderers.

The pesky problem with the literature of the African state is that evocations of the 'early' state rely upon a confident and widespread view of the pre-colonial African state as anything but typical—*earliness* being such an undefined quality. The concept of 'early state' is as unfitting as the previous epithets (see below) that have been affixed to the African state. Although it is

³⁴ E. Terray. 1984. *Une Histoire du Royaume Abon du Gyaman des Origines à la Conquête Coloniale*. Paris, Paris V-René Descartes. Thèse de Doctorat, pp. 334-5.

understood in terms of developmental rather than chronological terms, the various epithets which have been used with regards to it, *primitive*;³⁵ *inchoate* or *incipient*, *immature*, *tribal*,³⁶ *archaic*,³⁷ *traditional*,³⁸ or *early*,³⁹ reflect strands of evolutionistic thinking that see the modern, post-industrial state as the apex of institutional development.⁴⁰ The *primitive society* as theorised by early anthropologists was the result of gaps and deficiencies in the analysis of atypical social organisations. Different conceptual frameworks, from the Social Contract to more recent socio-economic explanations based on a division of labour or a vision of society as made of corporations of conflicting interests have also been formulated. What has been overlooked in these approaches, beyond the ‘unique’ quality that non-conventional state building trajectory confers, was that pre-colonial African states “developed as logical responses to their physical environments, most notably the cost of extending power over distance, much like European states developed characteristics in response to the overwhelming characteristic of their political environment: war for territory.”⁴¹

Moogo was however never a primitive state, it was a state-making process marked by challenges and complexity and which underwent changes even when

³⁵ Lowie 1927; Redfield 1957; Kaberry 1957; Mair 1962; Claessen 1979.

³⁶ Malinowski 1944; Gluckman 1940, 1963, 1965; Schapera 1956; Sahlins 1958; Service 1971; Korana-Shvili 1979.

³⁷ Polanyi 1966, Yoffee 2005.

³⁸ Balandier 1972: 123-157, Ecsedy 1972.

³⁹ Claessen and Skalník 1978.

⁴⁰ P. Skalník. 2002. “Chiefdoms and Kingdoms in Africa: Why they are neither States nor Empires” Paper presented at the African Studies Centre, Leiden. p. 1.

⁴¹ Herbst, *States and Power*, 2000: 51; Chapter 4 expands on some of these themes with reference to Moogo as a cultural area.

its structures were most firmly established. The example of the reign of Naaba Kango (1757-1787) best shows the contradictions of state formation trajectories when pinned against the realities of empirical practice. A vision of Moogo from a *longue durée* perspective allows a conceptualisation of the state as essentially a process of negotiations. In parallel with evolutionary theories, the principle of the Social Contract has been linked to a view of a state as necessarily emerging from a situation of conflict.⁴² The conquest theory has also been the subject of an enduring debate between adherents and opponents; ‘association’, the latter argued, renders well the peaceful process which enabled ‘subjection’ of one people by another.⁴³ Claessen however rightly points to its limits as it eventually applies only to particular circumstances. Whilst appreciating the breadth of different theories expounded over the years, one must bear in mind that these could in no way have nomothetic application.⁴⁴

What is however clear is that, when it comes to theorizing the African state, the Mossi state in the present case, it is clearly essential to emphasise that the above theories do paper over the originality of African indigenous systems

⁴² Weaknesses of this strand of theorising with regards to limited empirical data and the self-conceived future schemas have been pointed by many scholars. Hobbes’s *Leviathan* (1642) opened up a long-standing debate over claims of legitimacy of absolute power, the idea of *jure divino* were largely refuted by Locke in *Two Treatises on government* (1690). Machiavelli’s *Il Principe* (1532), Montesquieu’s *Lettres Persanes* (1721) as well as *De l’Esprit des Lois* (1748), Vico’s *Principi di una Scienza Nuova* (1744) were contributions to possibilities for social organization in what was largely perceived as a state of disorder

⁴³ M. G. Smith 1974, Lewis 1966, Cohen 1974; in Carneiro 1973; Harris 1968; see also See R. Oliver and J. D. Fage. 1962. *A Short History of Africa*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, pp. 46-7 for an extensive exposition of this position.

⁴⁴ Steward 1957: 18, 22; Claessen and Skalník 1978: 11.

where they were *suis generis* and therefore resistant to classificatory systems. Although conquest was partially the reason for the emergence of political formations that consolidated into states, the extension and enduring character of political dominance was made possible, by a politico-ritual agreement between immigrants and autochthons, especially in places where resistance was opposed to conquest. The institution of *Naam* was established on the basis that it was to be periodically renewed by custodians of the earth.⁴⁵ An extension of the conquest theory relevant to our analysis is the 'secondary state-formation' perspective which sought to explain the recurrence of state formation on the basis of an existing 'primary' state. Its contribution partly highlighted the fact that "organisational, ideological, and ritual innovations were of greater significance" in shaping state and society in pre-colonial Africa.⁴⁶

In any case, it is clear that we are dealing here with a specific notion of the state, that of the nation-state which is a specific European creation and historical feature.⁴⁷ The seeds of a fruitless endeavour lay in using the European state as the model par excellence against which political formations outside Europe are

⁴⁵ See Skalník. 1978. "On the Inadequacy of the Concept of the Traditional State" *Journal of Legal Pluralism* 25-26: 309.

⁴⁶ This theory was mainly explored by Southall (1956), Feirerman (1974), Miller (1976) and Vansina (1978); see N. J. Fairley. 1989. "Ideology and State Formation: The Ekie of Southern Zaire," in I. Kopytoff. *The African Frontier*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, p. 91.

⁴⁷ Tilly contends that European wars from which nation-states emerged were largely territorial. They extended the territorial control of the state over its neighbours or protected it from the latter; see C. Tilly. 1975. *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 42 and .1985. *War Making and State Making as Organized Crime*. In *Bringing the State Back In*. P. Evans et al. (eds.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 170.

assessed in their degree of centralisation (hence the distinction between state and stateless societies), their executive apparatus, social stratification, and mode of production. This conceptual leap is executed with total disregard of the existing differences, the socio-structural characteristics and potentially the different ontological commitments that prevail in these societies. As a result, we are at pains to fit (to force) theories of the nation-state model onto non-European, specifically African societies.

1. 2. 2. Mossi historiography: the empire that never was

The colonial historiography of the Mossi states is replete with references to their 'feudal' character.⁴⁸ Equally prominent were observations on their phenomenal stability at a time when Europe was busy 'pacifying' a continent steeped in bloody wars as people were busy massacring and devouring each other. The following observation is quite characteristic of prevailing views amongst many anthropologists and colonial administrators:

What made the strength of the Mossi Empire [was] its political organization, a feudal organisation which in many ways reminds of France during the Middle Ages. At the top of the country [reigns] the Mogh'Naaba, a sovereign whose power [is] universal and uncontested. Then there [are] the Great Vassals, chiefs of province all originating from the same family, below them are canton and village chiefs. Some of the territories were directly under the supervision of the Mogh'Naaba who entrusted them to his ministers to administer... all this

⁴⁸ G. V. Kaboré. 1962. "Caractère « Féodal » du Système Politique Mossi," *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 2: 609-623; A. Beauminy 1925. "Une Féodalité en Afrique Occidentale Française: Les Mossi." *Bulletin de l'Afrique Française* I; Delobsom 1928, 1932; Tauxier 1912, 1917.

enabled a cohesion so strong, and which maintained itself throughout centuries...⁴⁹

Baudu was obviously looking, in the Mossi states, for patterns that would fit a classificatory view that relegates pre-colonial African political formations to versions of the European Middle Ages. Colonial scholars and administrators were looking for a 'Mossi Empire'; they created that empire as an interlocutor and a strategic instrument in the colonial enterprise. These early observations have had, more often than not, an enduring influence on the historiography of Moogo.

In Mossi narratives, *nakombsé* conquest strategies were emphasised in royal versions whilst in *talsé* versions of history, social integration was emphasised. This type of account was adopted as historical account by early Mossi scholars such as Louis Tauxier, Delafosse, Elliot Skinner, Dim Delobson, and contemporary writers, some of them members of the *Nakombsé* group (Tiendrebeogo, the Lahar'le Naaba).⁵⁰ The role of oral history in perpetuating *nakombsé* myths is therefore important, hence the appropriation of some of its aspects as official history. Yarse (traders) myths on the other hand emphasise the absence of any original social stratification in the sense that some of them were integrated, very early on, within the Mossi. However, the lack of rival versions of

⁴⁹ Père Paul Baudu. 1957. *Vieil Empire, Jeune Eglise*. Paris: Édition La Savane [my translation] In Kaboré, 'Caractère Féodal,' 1962: 609-623.

⁵⁰ For the history and chronology of Mossi states, see Tauxier 1912, 1917; Delafosse 1911, 1912, 1913; Izard 1980, 1981, 1985, 1987, 1990, 1992, 2000, 2003; Skinner, 1960, 1964, 1965, 1975, 1978, 1986; Kaboré 1961, 1962, 1966; Tiendrebeogo 1963, 1964, 1965, 1975, 1980; Delobson 1926, 1928, 1929, 1932, 1933, 1934; Nacanabo 1982, 1999; Badini 1983, 1993; Kawada 1967, 1971, 1975, 1979, 1981, 1985, 1993, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2002; Hammond 1966; Kethiéga 1994; Zahan, 1967; Ki-Zerbo 1978; Illiasu 1971.

history at the ruling level points to a monopoly of history and the means for the ruling Mossi to draw on it for political legitimacy at the expense of non-Mossi communities.⁵¹

Some of the misleading tendencies in Mossi scholarship, amongst early scholars, were symptomatic of a lack of engaged understanding of the societies researched, combined with the effects of an intellectual undertaking that accompanied processes of domination, implementation and justification inherent to the colonial endeavour. Thus, references to Moogo as *empire*, of which Ouagadougou was the 'capital', and the *Mogho Naaba* the 'emperor' had much to do with a certain keenness to see in Moogo the quintessential model of timeless centralised polity whose unique political structure made it a stable society and its leaders ideal interlocutors to colonial administrators. A number of Burkinabé, in particular Mossi scholars, have undertaken the task of rewriting and rectifying the history of their past for they do not recognise their cultural specificity in some of these earlier writings. Notable amongst these are Dominique Nacanabo, Jean-Baptiste Kethéga, George Madiéga, Vincent Sedogo, Samuel P. Salo, Poussi Sawadogo, Lassina Simporé, to name a few.⁵² These have contributed to

⁵¹ . Ralph Austen found the existence of rival lineage genealogies and segmentary accounts to be of importance in instances of rival claims on power from different groups. His study of the Bell and Akwa of Cameroon reveals that "the genealogy of heads includes no mythologized culture heroes and is subject to mutual checking by the very segmentary rivalry that it recounts."; R. A. Austen. 2001. "The Slave Trade as History and Memory: Confrontations of Slaving Voyage Documents and Communal Traditions," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 58(1): 229–244.

⁵² See Nacanabo (1982, 2003); Sedogo (2004); Madiéga (1982, 2003); Kethiéga (1993; 1994); Simporé (2004); Madiéga (2003) introduces some of the works that have attempted to grapple with the many issues raised with regards to the writing on Burkinabé history by

amending and complementing earlier writings, and more importantly have sought to deepen the knowledge production on the socio-political structure, on the historical development and the dynamics of the Mossi states by looking into less known social organisations such as Lalgay, Wargay, Yako, Balsa, Bussuma, Risiam (Tatenga), Ratenga, Zitenga, Mané etc. One of the important findings repeatedly emphasised is the refutation of an understanding of Moogo as 'empire' or 'feudal' organisation. Moogo is better understood as a system of more or less autonomous states which share strong cultural and socio-political traits. This particular point is crucial to my argument about *Naam* as a *frontier concept* and framework as explained below. These scholars instigated both an epistemological turn and an intellectual shift that disclosed the need for a scrutiny of the transformations of historical-oriented analyses of colonialism: on the one hand, the production of colonial historiography was part of the development of the European colonial empires themselves on the other hand, the writing and re-writing of colonial history still remains pivotal to our assessment of these state-building processes. The reconsideration of trajectories of historical knowledge in the long run is, thus, crucial to our understanding of colonial dynamics and their impact, not only on institutional processes in former colonies, but also on European cultures and conceptions of other societies which are yet to be decolonised. This approach also helps historians gain awareness in their attempts to cope with the legacies of colonial history. This is not the place to discuss these wider issues. The point of the above discussion is to stress the following. Early writings on the Mossi and other societies reflect a very particular

earlier historians and anthropologists.

colonial legacy; their reading thus requires taking into account perspectives, goals and tendencies inherent to that legacy.

Until Izard published his *Archives Orales*, the establishment of the proper chronology and the dynastical lists of Mossi states was one of the main focuses of Mossi studies. Izard's careful distinction between proto-Mossi and Mossi provided the basis for a compelling re-evaluation of Mossi chronological history. He convincingly argued that the 'Mossi' who raided Timbuktu in 1337—as the Tarikhs, Tauxier, Delafosse and others had contended—could in no way be the same Mossi who erected states around the Volta Basin in the 16th century. Since then however, Mossi scholars have tended to accept Izard views as norm and have little questioned his interpretations. One of Izard's most crucial contributions to the understanding of the state process might well be his analysis of a particular Mossi conception of time and space through *Naam's* territoriality. *Naam's* territoriality rests upon ancestral (dynastic) history which has no single territorial anchorage but a multiplicity of places, actions and events partly reconnected through every enthronement voyage (*ringu*) that re-enacts and reconstruct state creation. Despite the breadth and depth of Izard's political history of Yatenga, there is a marked tendency, in his analysis, towards a certain structural determinism that tends to impose constructs upon historical experience. Izard's treatment of Mossi history at time overwhelms concepts and practices in philosophical speculations. Moreover, the application of mathematical reasoning in his analysis of the family and social phenomena (an influence of Levi-Strauss) gives pride of place to the social as system of connections and equivalences. My contribution to this body of work is to re-

conceptualise the Mossi *Naam* as the thread that runs through the conceptual history of the Mamprusi-Dagomba-Mossi states as an overarching, constant principle and structure. The conceptual structure of *Naam* is a static, stable and timeless framework that posits that political rule is fundamentally bound to the possession of *Naam* and that *mossiness* was an intrinsic quality that described *the way of the moaga*. Yet the history of state formation in Moogo and state-society relations reveal that *Naam* could acquire a number of attributes and did change in meaning, usage and practice according to socio-political circumstances and under the imperative of social integration. A reinterpretation of *Naam's* influence on aspects of Mossi politics, society and cultural practice will allow apprehending its determining influence on Mossi political history.

1. 3. Methodology and its Challenges: on Sources and a Reading Framework

Anthropologists have amassed a considerable amount of data that is of potentially crucial value to political science. The present work does not intend to supplant the existing scholarship, but rather to build upon it, and offer alternative interpretations on political ideology. Whilst the ethnographic method prioritises attention to details and an accurate transcription of facts, political science, in particular political theory, makes use of these details to formulate universal explanatory principles, it therefore attempts to apply the requirement of intelligibility to ethnographic detail. It is however open to question whether contemporary perspectives on state and power can be reasonably extrapolated back into the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The ambivalence of the exercise is best exemplified by the use of terms that have

specific reference to contemporary contexts, such as 'centralisation', 'administration', and 'citizenship'.⁵³ The term 'centralisation' for instance is taken, in discussions of African political systems, as a given whilst it says very little about the working of the political structure and its hierarchical deployment. So it is never clear whether formality and form overpowered the analysis of other elements of the political structure, for instance ritual relations over the relations between military and local political units; effectiveness of tribute-collection over the effects of exploitative structures of the peasantry.⁵⁴ In the Mossi case, the term is used to describe a gradual divorce of kingship from kinship and the subsequent concentration of political resources in the hands of the *Naaba* and his immediate entourage. Centralisation also reveals one of the most intricate issues in Mossi politics, that of competition between a 'blood nobility' and what one could be called a 'court nobility'.

The interpretation of historical accounts raises a number of methodological questions. What claims can we validly make about the past, especially in terms of theoretical understanding of social and political practices? How would these claims be different from statements about social and political practices in societies about which we know a little bit more, namely post-colonial states? When a great deal of contemporary understanding is injected in history, there is the risk of producing a literary project that delves into elaborate

⁵³ Issues of definition raised by these are discussed in chapter 4 and 5

⁵⁴ See Lloyd for an incisive critique of the indiscriminate use of 'centralisation' in P. C. Lloyd. 1965. "The Political Structure of African Kingdoms: An Exploratory Model." In *Political Systems and the Distribution of Power*, ed., Michael Banton, pp. 63-112. London: Tavistock, pp. 81-2.

interpretations. However, there does not seem to be much way round this issue; subjective interpretation is at the heart of the present work but it is an interpretation that has been informed by and has confronted the narratives given by the very people investigated. In this particular case, an interdisciplinary approach, from ethnohistory, the history of ideas to political theory, is utilised to reinterpret the centrality of one concept (*Naam*) in the political history of a society.

The fact that the Mossi states have been relatively under-researched, compared to neighbouring Ashanti and Dahomey to name only these, has long constituted a barrier in Mossi studies. However, the paucity of evidence does not preclude an in-depth and critical look at migratory trends and the ways in which they can be connected to state formation around the Volta Basin, south of the Niger Bend. Ethnographic evidence offers sufficient material to work with. The present work expands on themes dealt with in various ways by earlier scholars. What has been overlooked in the literature is the subtler texture of the historical bond exposed by anthropologists: between the Mossi and the Mamprusi-Dagomba systems on the one hand and what this bond reveals with regards to our understanding of the state endeavour by Mossi state-builders. Evidence of the *institutional past*, more abundant than any other type of history, points to the unique ways in which the Mossi grappled with the paradox of an alien idea-system (*Naam*) as the organising principle of an indigenous society, and the necessity of building a coherent, yet diverse, society.

In so far as the transfer of ideas is advanced as an explanatory pattern for state formation, migrationism offers a useful conceptual framework.

Migrationism, as is explained in chapter 2, sees migrants as agents of change, cultural, linguistic, and institutional.⁵⁵ Political history has generally shown little interest in addressing the movement of people as a subject for study in its own right: "On the contrary, there has been an almost perverse refusal [...] to consider the social technological and logistical mechanics of human movement."⁵⁶ Yet, migrationism reveals the central significance of migration theory in political and social theories. Moreover, as a predominantly archaeological mode of enquiry, it has a pragmatic quality far removed from the heroic generalisations of nineteenth century ethnology and offers valuable insights over the interpretation of ethnographic data, beyond the barren battle between evolutionism and diffusionism that raged in the early twentieth century.⁵⁷ When it is combined with the Internal Frontier thesis, what is revealed is a particular but widespread form of state-making, namely, the branching-out of a core, a master example into similar but autonomous entities.

The settlement history of West Africa is replete with concepts of autochthony/indigenoussness and *foreignness*/alienness. This pertains to a long-standing history of migrations which have informed and defined the cultural and institutional make-up of societies throughout the region. The Mossi state is a paradigmatic example of a pre-colonial political organisation founded around an idea of political rule as a form of 'craft' or 'skill' that can be likened to land-tilling,

⁵⁵ See H. Kleinschmidt. 2003. *People on the Move: Attitudes toward and Perceptions of Migration in Medieval and Modern Europe*. Westport, Conn, Praeger, pp. 13, 23-26.

⁵⁶ Adams, Van Gergen and Levy. 1978. "The retreat from Migrationism," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 7: 483-532, p. 523.

⁵⁷ Adams, Van Gergen and Levy "The retreat," 1978: 487.

blacksmithing or herding. *Naam* was a technology of government that spread, through migration and conquest, throughout the Voltaic region and it shaped the societies that were to be organised under its sway.

1. 3. 1. Theoretical framework: migrants as frontiersmen, frontiersmen as state-builders

Three theoretical formulations inform this thesis: Kopytoff's Frontier Thesis to explain state formation as a process of fission and cloning of the *Naam* model, whereas migrationism serves to highlight the importance of migrants' subjective understanding of their historicity and how this relates to their place and role in new societies, and finally the relevance of ideology (*Naam*) in shaping a specific territoriality without actively seeking to impose its requirements upon society.

The formation, and later expansion of the Voltaic state makes more sense when one reads anthropological and historical accounts from the perspective of Kopytoff's Internal African Frontier thesis. The Frontier Thesis postulates that the formation of many, if not most, African societies can be explained as a process of fission and replication from a political core. The model of ethnogenesis presupposes the existence of the 'tribe' as a prehistoric embryo that evolved through history whilst preserving its essence and attracting the "the ethnic and cultural detritus produced by the routine workings of other societies".⁵⁸ The Frontier thesis rejects the conceptualisation of African history in time-less immobility, and explores it from the perspective of a continuous flux

⁵⁸ I. Kopytoff, "The Internal African Frontier," 1989: 7.

amongst its populations. As a 'frontier continent', Africa has been the theatre for various population movements, "of many kinds and dimensions, ranging from such sub-continental proto-historic dispersions as that of the Bantu or the Nilotes to the local movements preceding the colonial era."⁵⁹

Instances of population movements created the necessity for displaced Africans to craft new social orders in order to engage institutional vacuums, actual and imagined. In a midst of an incessant flux of groups to 'local frontiers', any scale of displacement or migration, from the unsuccessful candidate to office to the ostracised 'witch', could have systemic repercussions in determining the contours of African political, social and cultural history.

The frontier is first of all the result of the subjective definition of frontiersmen. It emerges at the juncture of the existence of interstitial space with weakly articulated political organisation and the frontiersmen's purposeful definition of anything lying outside core polities as 'unorganised' and therefore susceptible to political design. In fact, migrants would deny pre-existing societies any legitimate political institutions even in areas with recognisable organised polities.⁶⁰ Thus, the institutional vacuum upon which frontiersmen were to build a political model was an ideological construct that justified their enterprise, rather than a necessarily accurate depiction of the socio-political reality of the frontier. Such a model could only be an ideal reproduction of the mental representation of political order from the perspective of the frontiersmen, an extension of their

⁵⁹Kopytoff, "The Internal African Frontier," 1989: 7.

⁶⁰ Kopytoff, "The Internal African Frontier," 1989: 11.

cultural experience, constructed at the centre.

The remarkably repetitive pattern, throughout West and Central Africa, which attributes transformative capacities to migrants, is not a matter of a common foundational myth. On the contrary, documented examples abound, that account for recent and older socio-political formations whose structures were fundamentally disrupted, more often dismantled by colonial transactions. Migrations are conceptualised as the core explanatory factor in social transformations, whether they are discussed as taking place in the context of succession struggles or as a result of the ejection of members of a particular society for reasons ranging from social justice (violation of social norms, witchcraft accusation) to injustice (unfair trial), etc. The strength of the Frontier thesis lies in the dynamic process which a constant movement of people evokes. However, Kopytoff can be criticised for relying on a systematic model that reproduces itself across most of the continent, over and over again, thus disregarding historical contexts that may alter the model and giving it that same static character he criticises. Chapter 4 discusses further the relevance of the Frontier thesis for the Mossi example. The Mossi experience is the archetype of a frontier process that evolved into a system of similar political formations, autonomous from one another.

1. 3. 2. Sources and references:

My research draws extensively on previous anthropological and historical studies on the Mossi states, society and peoples, particularly by Michel Izard whose contribution to our understanding of the history of Mossi states is yet to be matched, Elliot Skinner, Junzo Kawada, J. D. Fage, Dominique Nacanabo and

Joseph Ki-Zerbo, whose substantial study of Mossi socio-political history are largely based on oral tradition and unpublished contemporary documentation. Archival materials from National archives in Ouagadougou and Dakar, the regional archive in Ouahigouya, the CVRS and INSS in Ouagadougou, the University of Ouagadougou (Central Library; Library of the History and Archaeology Department), the French National Archives (ANFCAOM), Social and Political Anthropology Library, College de France, the Public Record Office and the British Museum in London, and the IFAN institute in Dakar have also been extensively consulted.

Oral traditions were collected mainly from customary chiefs and ordinary Mossi, at the royal courts of Ouagadougou and Ouahigouya, in the dignitaries' compounds and under the shade of trees around main arteries of former royal quarters. I visited the Togo, Gounghouin, Babum and La'harlé Naaba's residences in Ouagadougou and Ouahigouya as well as the Mogho Naaba's court in Ouagadougou and the Yatênga Naaba's court in Ouahigouya, between March-April 2006, November 2008-January 2009 and March-April 2010. Sustained communications with scholars with much experience, namely, Michel Izard, Joseph Ki-zerbo, Dominique Nacanabo, Maurice Bazemo, Vincent Sedgo, Amade Badini, Ali Ouedraogo, to name a few, provided valuable pointers in the treatment of oral traditions collected during these visits.

1. 3. 3. Oral tradition:

Mossi oral historians tend to overlook, deliberately or unconsciously, the diachronic elements that exist in Mossi history and its sociopolitical structure; *nakombsé* in particular have a ready tendency to glorify their role and place in

Mossi society. Their representations of Mossi state amalgamate history and perception with normative perspectives, in other words (Mossi) state arguments with statements on the nature of state and society. Challenges pertaining to the collection of oral history relate to wariness of informants towards certain types of questions, and withholding of information, either because of fear of distortion or because they were related to specific rituals and practices. In addition, certain topics could not be fully explored where they clearly had current resonance and implications in the politics of succession and the authenticity of knowledge in contemporary Yatênga and Ouagadougou. This was the case for 'reversed' cases of succession whereby uncles had usurped power and thus derailed the normal process of succession. It was also the case for instances of *nakombsé* who had been denied the right to compete for office because their mother had failed to shave her head or refused to comply with other rites royal women were subjected to, in order to ensure that they were "pure and adequate as mothers of future kings".⁶¹ However, the now familiar versions of the foundation of Ouagadougou and Yatênga and the recitation of the genealogical history did often yield a more complex overview that has so far been recognised to political formations such as Moogo, whose oral sources rely heavily on dynastical accounts. As historians have remarked, many forms of oral traditions reflect the sociological models of the societies they describe. If oral history is always history, it is sometimes more than just history as it carries essential elements of culture and morsels of other stories. Oral tradition combines social artefacts, myths and history in narrative tropes that are first and foremost particular tools of self-

⁶¹ Maliki Ouedraogo Interview, Ouahigouya, April 15 2010

expression; the quest for a 'bloodless objectivity' in oral narratives is thus as futile as it is an inappropriate mode of enquiry.

On the other hand, oral traditions amongst the Mossi, as in other places, are susceptible to feedback⁶² with regards to the body of written sources which Mossi intellectuals and a number of customary chiefs are well aware of, and which might be summoned to buttress the kind of history they want to tell. *Established* accounts of a legendary political stability and sophisticated system of centralised rule, in Mossi political history constitute, for customary chiefs, a reference that lends credit to the celebrated *political genius* of Mossi rulers. However, if genealogy-bound history primarily tells the history of rulers, it has also something to say about the contradictions of political power, palpable in its resounding silences, and in the history it does not tell. In that sense, the sketchy nature of historical production in Moogo has its own rationality and the imprecision of the historical discourse—what some might discount as scoria of history—its own coherence most explicitly demonstrated by the *sense of historicity* which Mossi rulers and non-rulers alike have carried to the present.

A word needs to be said about the use of tenses in the present work. Although the Mossi system as it existed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had ceased to be when Moogo was annexed by the French at the end of the nineteenth century, Moogo continues to exist, through various forms, in the post-colonial Republic of Burkina Faso. As such, part of the pre-colonial

⁶² On 'feedback' in oral tradition, see D. Henige. 1974. *The Chronology of Oral Tradition: Quest for a Chimera*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 95-120.

configuration has survived in the succession model, the enthronement voyage, sacrificial rituals to ancestors, and a number of beliefs and practices are still held as 'tradition'. Some of the things I describe, thus, when they have been carried into present day's 'customary circles', tend to be so in the present; for instance the description of the enthronement ritual, the *ringu*. In addition, it might sometimes be difficult to disentangle the chronological sequence in the descriptive and analytical evidence gleaned from oral traditions. Meaning and intention were also difficult to establish from narrative clues and utterances even when present stakes were not readily apparent. The question is then pertinent as to *which* Mossi states are we talking about, that of the past, the present or a combination of both? It addresses the understanding of political history as both resource and reference. As a reconstructive endeavour, the account we are giving does not purport to establish precise historical boundaries as it is mainly based on quite recent documents, the earliest written documents on Moogo date from the late nineteenth century. The project however attempts to reconstitute the Mossi state from the time of its inception to that of its institutional apogee, when the state as political institution achieved a certain institutional 'maturity' even as it was an ongoing process.

1. 4. Thesis Structure

Chapter 2 explores the possibilities of the migrationist argument in explaining the persistence of *Naam* ideology as a defining principle, in both centralised and the so-called acephalous social organisations that make up the Mossi-Dagomba-Mamprusi system. This chapter explains the expansion of the Mossi-Dagomba-Mamprusi in terms of a long and uneven process of cloning of

the same *Naam* model, based on the Mamprugu polity. It conceptualises statelessness as a strategy to escape the stifling grip of centralisation.

Chapter 3 examines the ideology of *Naam*, its many facets, its role in shaping the political system, the social structure, and the conditions of social integration and in shaping forms of public morality. A comparative overview between a Weberian conception of power, around the two themes of capacity and right on the one hand, and the conception of Mossi *Naam*, allows us to explore the potential contribution of the latter to our understanding of power. If *Naam* is 'that which allows someone to rule', it has more to do with the sources of political legitimacy in a context of social constraints which apply to everybody, including the ruler. If *Naam* also points to a conception of power as capacity, the distinction between *Naam stricto sensu* from its violent corollary (*pânga*) reveals other aspects of power, including the role of perception and rituals, in the manufacture of consent between power holders and those over which power is exercised.

Chapter 4 argues that migration is the most important and most determining factor in processes of state and society formation in Moogo. The migration in question is one of a concept, and a model of social organisation. The segmentary logic established a proliferation of power(s) in the form of the foundation of local chieftaincies that enabled the expansion, in space, of the Mossi state, according to a frontier process in the reproduction of the same political structure.

In chapter 5, I demonstrate that both the principles of the migrationist account and the frontier model linger and persist into the stages of political

centralisation, albeit in less decisive ways. The (*na*) *pügsiwre*, the system of delayed exchange of women, was an important element in the centralisation process. Its self-perpetuating nature was crucial to consolidating the leverage of the *Naaba* in drawing alliances from outside Mossi nobility and in personalising political rule. First of all, a process of de-segmentation, in other words the 'liberation' of the state from the kin order, took place which sought to 'free' *Naam* from the intricacies of the kin system, to differentiate structure from function even whilst retaining the model of succession prevalent in the lineal system. Centralisation was marked by the integration in the royal service, of groups without historical or social links in Moogo, namely captives as the stranger-kin, and the creation of specific offices in which individuals were recruited by the *Naaba* on an individual basis. At the same time, *têngbiise* were recruited in the administration at the local level. I use many examples from Yatênga in this section as it is relatively more interesting than other Mossi states in its population diversity which today, reflects the negotiated integration of strangers from neighbouring polities and from outside Yatênga.

The *moaga* political system rested upon two fundamental contradictions. On the one hand, there was the necessary divorce between the practice of the state and the requirements of segmentarity, even when office succession was still embedded in the kin order. On the other hand, the Mossi state ruled over people, but did not have *a priori* rights upon given territories.⁶³ A *Naaba* was king even before having a kingdom. Attempts to overcome such contradictions have

⁶³ The distinction between rule over 'people' and over 'territory' can be conceived as the legal outcome of the distinction *Naam/ Tênga*

consisted in drawing non-Mossi segments into the realm of *Naam* and thus in redefining *moaga* identity as the framework used to reorganize Mossi society as a more or less homogenous unit. The paradox of the socially weak yet politically empowered captive or stranger points to important institutional elaborations which underlied the centralisation process. In each chapter, the dichotomy *Naam/Tênga* is systematically explored and their implications for state formation, the deployment of *Naam* ideology, the mediation of autonomy-centralisation, the practice of belief, examined. In all this, the core argument is that the fundamental and principled dichotomy is a matter of representations of power and social order. However, in the practice, the argument of interpenetration of the two spheres gives a more complex picture of how identities were negotiated.

Chapter 6 explores the role of belief in relation to state ideology and social integration. For the *Naaba*, to assume power was first of all to identify his kingdom which had no greater expression than the journey that took him to all major villages, historical and symbolical monuments. The *ringu* (enthronement voyage) was first and foremost the adjustment of the essence of sovereignty—embodied in each and every place visited/identified—to the requirement of effective rule on each and all components that make up the kingdom. These components were not necessarily villages or given administrative units, but vestiges of traditions and rituals associated with the very places that supported their processes; their retrieval was tantamount to the ancestors' benediction for the new office. The *ringu* was hence a delimitation of the possibilities of *naam* over a given or imagined territory, the triumphant posture of the return of the

'prodigy' *Naaba* to the royal residence points to a beginning of an understanding of what those possibilities just were.⁶⁴ The chapter explores the relation between belief and state ideology and tries to argue beyond the reductionist tendency to see belief as systematically used to support and justify state ideology. Instead, it demonstrates that, in the absence of an explicit theological body, the Mossi state attempted to integrate Mossi conception of the person and the divine in order to *inscribe* political power over the territory of *tênga*. This approach has translated in the syncretic union between the Mossi high god (*Wende*) and the earth divinity (*Tênga*). If the Mossi state's theological investigation into belief was limited and less elaborate than indigenous systems—and precisely because of this—it sought to structure belief by juxtaposing its high god to the earth divinity without entirely overriding the indigenous system.

In the conclusion, I offer a summing up of the main findings with respect to the ideology of *Naam* as it initiated state-building, defined state/society relations in Moogo and articulated Mossi identity. I also offer a few reflections on the limits of dynastical history and the possible contribution of a social and cultural history of Moogo for a better understanding of its history and the history of West Africa more generally.

⁶⁴ M. Izard. 1986. "La Scène de la Mémoire" Colloque sur *Les Aspects Linguistiques et Anthropologiques de la Transmission du Savoir*, Rome, La Sapienza (8-9 Dec), p. 5; *Gens du Pouvoir*, 1985: 150-168.

CHAPTER TWO

The Trail of the Horse: the Mossi-Mamprusi-Dagomba System as a Culture-historical Area

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the common origin of the Mossi-Mamprusi-Dagomba states system. The latter comprised a southern group which include Mamprusi (Mamprugu), Dagbon (Dagomba/Dagbamba) and Nanumba (Nandom), and a northern group that included Ouagadougou, Yatênga, Tenkodogo (Tãnküdgo) and a number of smaller states such as Balsa, Busu, Boussouma, Fada N'gurma, Ratênga, Tatênga, Zitênga and Yako.¹ The rise of the Akan states, especially the emergence and expansion of Asante were the result of the expansion of European trading activities on the West African coast. In contrast, the emergence of the Mossi states was somewhat linked to the expansion of Songhay hegemony in Western Sudan.² Toward the middle of the

¹ Variations of the ethnonym Mossi range from Moose, Moshi, Musi, Mossah, Mousi, Mossi-be; the singular is moaga (a moaga, moaga society), and the plural is Moose

² See I. Wilks. 1985. The Mossi and the Akan States, 1400 to 1800. *History of West Africa*. J. F. Ajayi and M. Crowder, eds., Harlow, Longman. I: 465-502, p. 465; 1985. *Asante in the Nineteenth Century: the Structure and Evolution of a Political Order*. London: Cambridge University Press.

sixteenth century, the emergence of the Gonja kingdom was the result of similar dynamics that brought a Malian cavalry force into the interstitial zone lying between the emerging Mossi states and the Akan kingdoms.³ In any case, the rise of what was to become the Mossi-Mamprusi-Dagomba states system took place in a context of mounting socio-political effervescence partly due to the decline of the greatest empire around the Niger Bend, the Songhai Empire on the one hand, and Portuguese commercial contact with West Africa on the other. At the same time, the Fulbe expansion reorganised trading structures and networks in West Africa, the consequences for emerging Mossi states were to do, from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards, with the growing importance of trade centres such as Ouagadougou, Bobo-Dioulasso and Ouroukoÿ and later Salaga and with a number of socio-political transformations.⁴

Although the establishment of European trading posts on the Gold Coast did not at first have direct and major consequences, the intensification of trade and trade-related activities (slave-hunting for instance) between forest and

³ Wilks notes that as wars of expansion over Gonja, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, “extended the sway of its rulers as far east as the Oti river, effectively isolating the Akan from the Mossi [...], in the mid-eighteenth century, Asante armies were to thrust deeply into the savannah country and reduce both Gonja and Dagomba to tributary status”; I. Wilks “The Mossi and the Akan States,” 1985: 466.

⁴ See R. Mauny. 1961. *Tableau Géographique de L'Ouest-africain au Moyen Age d'après les Sources Ecrites, la Tradition et l'Archéologie*. Dakar: IFAN. Mémoire, 61, pp. 447-8, 514; see also Ghislaine Lydon. 2009. *Trans-Saharan Trails: Islamic Law, Trade Networks and Cross-Cultural Exchange in Nineteenth-Century Western Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Paul E. Lovejoy. 1980. *Caravans of Kola: The Hausa Kola Trade 1700-1900*. Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press.

savannah was to give a boost to junction-cities such as Kumasi, Djenne, later Salaga, Ouagadougou, etc. This in turn can be thought to have had some influence on the development of the Mamprusi-Dagomba-Mossi states. In particular, the presence and the activities of the Yarsé traders of Mande origin, and later Hausa traders, were to become important elements in the formation and consolidation of Mamprusi-Dagomba and Mossi states, at different periods.⁵

Fission, Expansion, Domination

The process of fission, spread and replication of political systems was neither new, nor unique to the history of West Africa. Central polities would fragment, with chiefly domains breaking up and re-forming, in a continuing process of fission and new alliances. Thus, Dagomba traditions have something to say about the creation of Nanumba as much as Mamprussi ones give an explanation for the foundation of the Mossi states from the Mamprugu core. According to Dagomba traditions for instance, Nmantambo, one of Sitobu's (ruler of Dagbon) brothers, went "away from his anger" to establish the autonomous state of Nanumba,⁶ much in the same way that the formation of the cluster of Mossi states was explained. On the foundation of Yako, Ratênga,

⁵ See N. Levtzion. 1968. *Muslims and chiefs in West Africa: a study of Islam in the Middle Volta Basin in the pre-colonial period*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 8; P. Ferguson. 1973. *Islamisation in Dagbon: A Study of the Alfanema of Yendi*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge. PhD Thesis; M. Izard. 1969. *Les Yarsé et le Commerce dans le Yatenga Pre-colonial*. Ouagadougou: CVRS; A. M. Duperray. 1985. "Les Yarse du royaume de Ouagadougou : l'écrit et l'Oral." *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 25(98): 179-212.

⁶ Tamakloe, "A Brief History," 1931: 14.

Tatênga, Zitênga, Busu, and other satellite states that emerged from the Yatênga cluster, one informant explained:

There was a hierarchy of status between Mossi rulers: first came the Yatênga Naaba (rîma, sovereign), then came the *nabîise* (princes), then *komberé* (provincial chiefs) and then the *tansobnanamse*, etc. In the authenticity of things, the chiefs of Ratênga, Tatênga, Busu, etc, are *komberé* who depended on the Yatênga Naaba. They could be his sons or brothers of men he trusted which he appointed at the various frontiers and corners. Nowadays, they are more or less independent. They can come to pay respect to the Naaba or can also choose not to come and greet. But if they do come to pay respect, then they have to doff their hat. Even if these states were independent, if there arose an issue which they felt were beyond their capacity to solve, they would come and consult the Naaba. In this way, there were still certain relations.⁷

This is the sort of common narrative trope that explains the foundation of virtually all Voltaic states: “It is axiomatic in this system; as Mamprusi say, that ‘two chiefs cannot reside in a single place. If they do, one must be stronger’. Thus, the king who embodies *naam* directly received from Na Gbewa is stronger. But if he is to bring forth other chiefs, these must exercise *naam* at a distance. In order for *naam* to be effective it must be spatially distributed.”⁸ It would then seem that the principle of fission was inbuilt in the very structure of *naam*; it ensured the preservation of the original structure whilst providing particular *naam* for the many contenders.

Although many divergences remain with regards to processes of formation of satellite states, in particular their fissionary sequence, most

⁷ Interview, Ila Ouedraogo, Ouahigouya, April 14 2010

⁸ S. Drucker-Brown. 1981. “The Structure of the Mamprusi Kingdom and the Cult of Naam,” *The Study of the State*. H. Claessen and P. Skalník. The Hague, Mouton: 115-131, p. 118.

sources agree on the precedence of Mamprugu. Its immediate offshoots were Dagomba and Tenkodogo (Tenkdugu) from which sprang Ouagadougou, Yatênga and Fada N’Gourma. Mossi conquerors operated as non-pastoral-nomads who held *the technological* advantage of the horse, relative easiness of mobility, the impact of sudden emergence, a novel conception of social organisation (*naam*) and a new god (*Wende*). More importantly, the waves of disparate horse-riding groups that entered Moogo from the Mamprusi-Dagomba states could be brought together on the basis of the common genealogical charter of *Naam* and the appeal of a particular sense of mission to lead. A belief is widespread, that if state –making was a craft, it was an imported technology introduced on horseback. The literature of Mossi political history certainly suggests that the power of the early Mossi was enhanced, if not based upon the possession of horses; the Mossi command of techniques of warfare using cavalry is also widely attested.⁹

The people indigenous to what was to become Moogo were *Lobi-Dagari*, *Gurunsi*, *Samo* (*Ninise*), *Nyonyose*, *Kibsi* (Dogon), etc. These societies spoke languages that mostly belong to the Gur-family, in particular the Lobi-Dogon, Gurma, Grusi, and Mole-Dagbane clusters.¹⁰ Gomkoudougou Kabore reports

⁹ See M. J. Echenberg. 1971. “Late Nineteenth-Century Military Technology in Upper Volta,” *The Journal of African History*, 12(2): 241-254, pp. 241-3; Wilks “The Mossi,” 1985: 470; for a detailed study of the role of the horse in the political and military history of West Africa more generally, see R. Law. 1980. *The Horse in West African History : the Role of the Horse in the Societies of Pre-colonial West Africa*. Oxford: OUP. It is not however clear what role horse-riding effectively played in facilitating the expansion and consolidation of Mossi-Mamprusi-Dagomba states.

¹⁰ For a study of Gur languages, see D. Westermann. and M. A. Bryan. 1952. Languages of

accounts from his informants of the state of 'insecurity' that prevailed amongst the *Ninissi* and which led them to request protection from Mossi against 'barbarian' Gurunsi and Kibsi.¹¹ During what Kabore calls "the first century of the Empire", the *Ninissi* of Guillougou, unable to cope with the frequent raids of *Gurunsi* and *Kibsi*, would have asked Naaba Ouedraogo, Mossi founder, to help them get rid of their turbulent neighbours.¹² The same theme is discussed by Junzo Kawada who relates Ouagadougou legends on the origin of the Mossi domination. According to these, indigenous *Yōyōose* (*nyonyose*) formulated the wish to be ruled by *nakombsé* migrants. Dagomba traditions in contrast recount the violence that characterised the encounter between autochthons and immigrants. The latter's approach to indigenous *tēngbîise* was extermination and total control.¹³ What is implied is that the contrast between the relatively peaceful and extended expansion of the Mossi and the relatively limited and at times violent expansion of the Mamprusi Dagomba states is the result of different settlement histories. In any case, the particular circumstances that oversaw the encounter between migrants-frontiermen and indigenous groups,

West Africa. Oxford: Oxford University Press; W. Arens and I. Karp. 1985. *The Creativity of Power*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, in I. Wilks "The Mossi and the Akan States," 1985: 469.

¹¹ On pre-moaga groups, see J. P. Kiethéga et al. 1994. *Trame Historique de l'Épopée Moosé*. Ouagadougou.

¹² G. V. Kabore, "Caractère Féodal du Système Politique Mossi," 1962: 612.

¹³ J. Kawada. 2002. *Genèse et Dynamique de la Royauté: Les Mosi Méridionaux (Burkina Faso)*. Paris, L'Harmattan, pp. 32-3.

in terms of violence and negotiation, cooperation and flight, are still not well-known.¹⁴

Wedraogo, the putative ancestor of all Mossi, is believed to have been born from the union of a Mamprusi chief daughter, a woman-chief (*na poko*) and a hunter. Because of the uterine origin of Wedraogo, the political links to Mamprusi have been severed to enable the *Moos bûudu* to set up its own branch of the Mamprusi model whilst maintaining some ritual link to it.¹⁵ It is easy to see in this the continuation of a political model from Mamprusi-Dagomba. There was less a break in the transmission of *Naam* than in its mode of transmission, from a male chief to another male, through a female (Yennega) agency. The dialectic between continuity and break, early on, was manifest in the institutional transmission of *Naam* from centre to the periphery. Both forms of *Naam* proceed from *Wennam* (*Wende* + *Naam*), which symbolises the high divinity common to both Mamprusi and Moose societies. Interestingly, *Wennam* was 'personalised' so to speak in the Mossi context and adapted to the institutional hierarchy whose essence it epitomised: *Wennam* becomes Naaba Wende.¹⁶ Wedraogo is the first Moose and the first chief; from then on Moose

¹⁴ J.-M. Kohler. 1971. *Activités Agricoles et Changements Sociaux dans l'Ouest-Mossi*. Paris: ORSTOM p. 25; R. Pageard. 1963. "Recherches sur les Niniossé," *Etudes Voltaïques*, 4: 45-6.

¹⁵ See Frobenius, Leo 1986 [1912, 1922] *Histoire et Contes des Mossi*. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner. The metaphorical existence of Ouedraogo, ancestor of all Mossi is crucial to Mossi political structure and Mossi identity, the *moos bûudu* comprises all patrilineal descendants of the agnatic group members of which claim to be descendants of Ouedraogo

¹⁶ M. Izard. 1987. "le Royaume Mossi du Yatenga," In *Princes et Serviteurs du Royaume, cinq Etudes de Monarchies Africaines*. C. Tardits. Paris: Société D'Ethnographie, Sociétés Africaines, 7: 59-106, pp. 63-4.

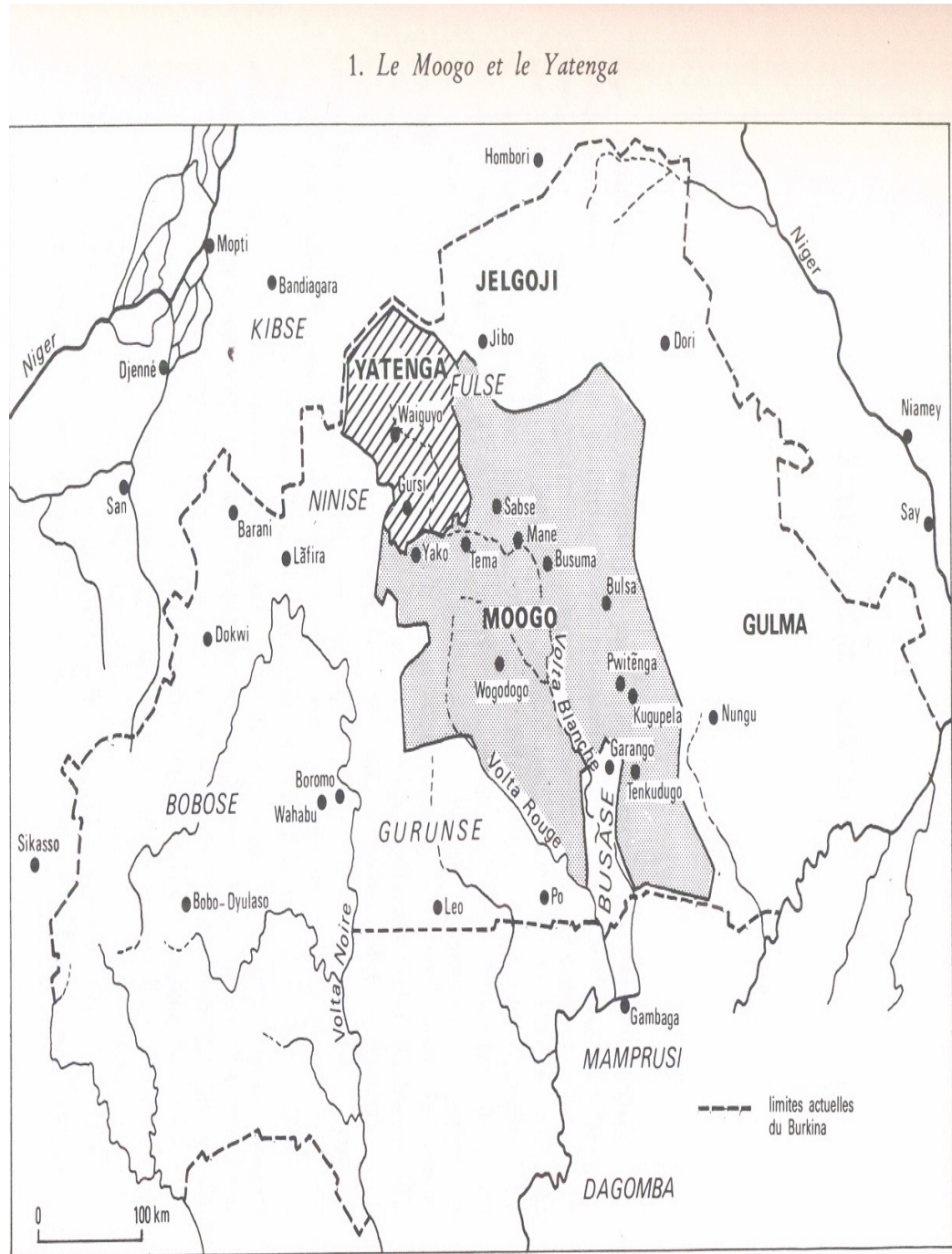
identity was to be defined on the basis of the possession of *naam*; the intricacies of office transfer were to be treated as the part of an ambiguity that ensured the continuity of *naam* despite the changing nature of transmission mechanisms. This is more fully explored below.

This chapter argues that whilst the *Naam* order was the common basis of the political system, the nature of the encounter between immigrants and indigenous groups, whether peaceful, violent or accommodating, shaped the form of political organisation that ensued. It also explores how the absence of emphasis on the *Naam* order has given rise to 'stateless' societies amongst, within and around Mossi-Mamprusi-Dagomba polities. The argument here is that statelessness was not always *what the state was built against*,¹⁷ but (also) a form of resistance from the oppressive grip of political centralisation. This issue is explored below in relation to James Scott's revaluation of statelessness as resistance and escape from the state.

What a migrationist perspective allows us to demonstrate is that, even though migration might have taken place within given economic structures, the fact that migrations were conceptualised, in the subjective consciousness of the Mossi, as the ideological reasoning and a justification for their right, their vocation for political rule, made the economic imperative less important. In this sense, migration memories do not necessarily have to derive from migration that actually took place. Where migration and the condition of *stranger* could

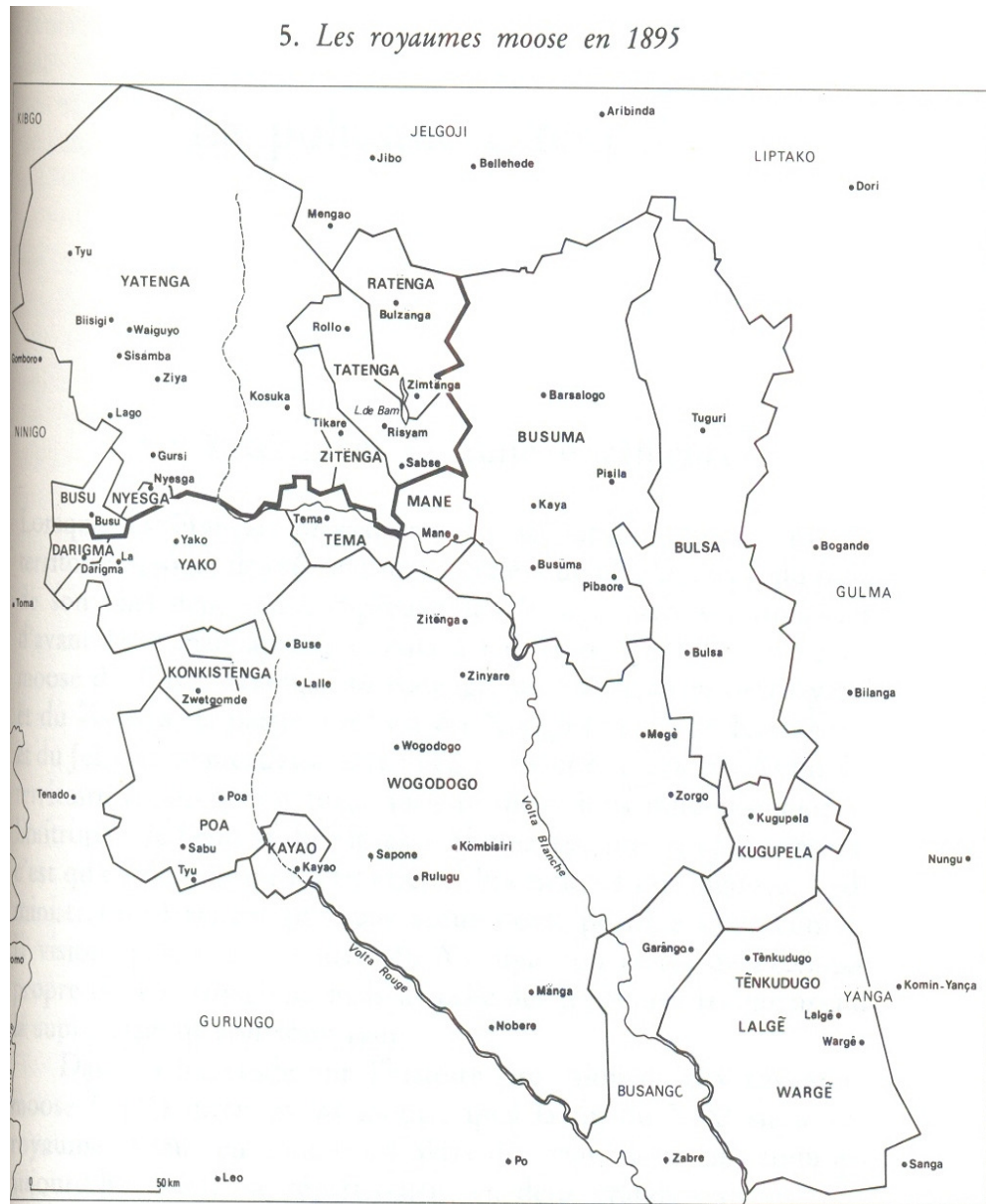
¹⁷ The existence of centralised polities did not always and necessarily affect stateless societies

Map 1- Yatenga and Ouagadougou in the 16th century



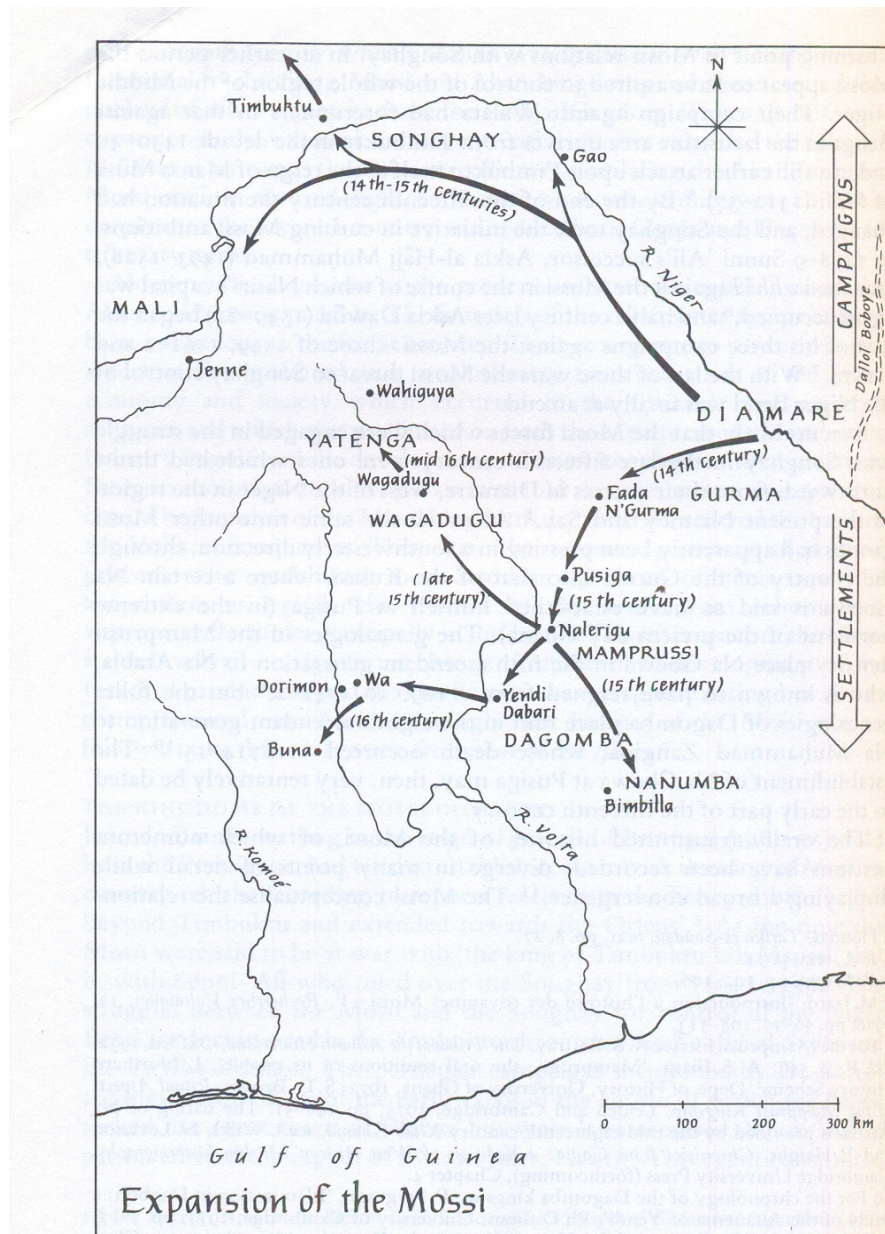
(Izard, 1985: 1)

Map2: Moogo at the end of the 19th century



(Izard 1985: IX)

Map 3: Mossi Expansion



(Wilks, 1985: 468)

have constituted a disadvantage, in the Mossi case, such an origin and its attending memories constituted the ideological foundation of their social organisation.

2. 1. In the Beginning was *Naam*: Common Origin, Common Principles, Familiar Tales

2. 1. 1. Chronology: the official version

Whether it was Mamprugu or Dagomba that produced the Mossi states, the three centres share common constitutive characteristics. Meyer Fortes for instance described the amalgamation of autochthonous and immigrant peoples as typical of the Voltaic states:

On the one side are those that claim to be descendants of immigrants from parts of the country other than their present habitats. On the other side are communities that claim to be autochthonous inhabitants. The two groups are found in every tribe, including the Mossi, Mamprusi and Dagomba, living side by side and indistinguishable from one another by broad cultural or linguistic criteria. Many of the immigrant communities claim descent from forbears of the Mamprugu ruling stock. Though now wholly amalgamated with the alleged aboriginal inhabitants, they have certain ritual observances and a system of chieftainship similar to those of the Mamprusi... the institution distinctive of the indigenous communities is the office of 'earth custodian.' This ritual office, involving priestly functions in connection with the cult of the Earth, is found among many West African peoples from the Senegal to the mouth of the Niger. In the Voltaic region it is the exclusive prerogative of autochthonous communities.¹⁸

¹⁸ M. Fortes. 1945. *The Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi*. London: OUP, pp 6-7; whereas the *Namoos* claim descent from Mamprugu, autochthonous *Tales* claim the right of first-settlers, 1945: 39. One could however point that the political vocabulary used by Mossi immigrants is predominantly a result of their different 'socialisation' from autochthonous *Nyonyose*.

The elaboration of Mossi chronology has been the object of major controversies.¹⁹ These were introduced by references to unidentified and non-localised Mossi peoples in the *Tarikh al-Sudan*, and the *Tarikh al-fattash*. Successive attempts by Delafosse, Tauxier, Delobsom, and Frobenius—except for minor differences in the establishment of genealogical lists—to establish chronology were to be challenged by Fage on the Ghanaian side and Izard on the Burkinabé side. Izard in particular attempted to re-adjust Mossi chronology by breaking away from former, uniform accounts. For facing a possibility to collate references in the *Ta'rikh* with dynastical traditions collected in Yatênga, Izard made an informed move to break from the *continuity thesis* so far accepted as consensus.²⁰ Yatênga emerged from generation V whilst Ouagadougou emerged in generation III whilst earlier generations are traced around Tenkodogo and the southern limits of Burkina (generation I), in present day Ghana. Using Frobenius' master genealogy, Izard has reworked the genealogy of Yatênga rulers in a matrix that reveals a tremendous amount of information on dynastic history and the intricacies of power, office and history. In any case, early writings on the Mossi therefore gave a pride of place to Mossi history and chronology and fed into the Mossi sense of superiority. This was not lost on Mossi intelligentsia, including the customary chiefs, well aware of these writings (some of which were incorporated in school textbooks).

¹⁹ See M. Saul. 2007. "Méthodes en Histoire Orale Genèse de l'Autorité Politique au Moogo." *L'Homme* 2(182): 215-232, p. 15.

²⁰ Izard, *Introduction*, 1970, I: 35-54, 56-78 Saul, "Methode en Histoire," 2007: 15.

The so-called *Dagomba horsemen* were in fact seceding groups from Mamprugu, and the famous Naaba Nedega, the “Dagomba chief at Gambaga” was a Mamprusi prince who broke away from the political core. The confusion on the name of the place of origin may have arisen from the fact that Mamprusi call themselves *dagbamba* (anglicised into Dagomba) whilst outsiders refer to them as Mamprusi and their kingdom as Mamprugu. The Mamprusi on the other hand refer to people in Dagomba as *yoba* (or *yooba*, literally bush people). If the term Dagbamba was once used in reference to Fada N’Gurma, inhabitants of the latter had also formerly used it for the peoples living south of their territory, those very ones later conquered by migrants from Mamprugu and Dagomba. A number of Mossi scholars have looked into the linguistic elements in order to trace the origins of the Mossi-Mamprusi-Dagomba even further afield, in Chad, Nigeria, Niger, Mali and even Egypt.²¹ The effect of these competing theses has partly been the incorporation of a number of versions in the oral history of the Mossi. For instance, a former Mogho Naaba, Naaba Tigré would say, with regards to the origin of the Mossi: “when I was in Bordeaux, I read documents according to which the Moose came from Egypt and they transited through Chad; from there on they moved to Ghana and finally to Burkina”.²² Thus, the

²¹ See L. Simporé. 2005. *Eléments du Patrimoine Culturel Physique du Riungu de Wogdogo: Approche Archéologique et Historique*. Université de Ouagadougou, PHD Thesis, pp. 561-71; Simporé extensively quotes J. Ki-Zerbo. 1978. *Histoire de l’Afrique Noire, d’Hier a Demain*. Paris: Presence Africaine, EDICEF/UNESCO, pp. 82-3; Kawada also discusses the confusion around references to Mamprusi and Dagomba, as well as the thesis of the Nigerian link, Kano in particular; in Kawada, *Genèse et Evolution du Système Politique des Mossi*, 1979: 288.

²² B. Diallo. 1996. “Et si les Moose Venaient D’Egypte” *L’Observateur-Dimanche*, 36, 26

absorption of written elements—some of which fraught with a number of misinterpretations—, makes it difficult to re-construct the trajectory of Mossi migrants into what was to become Moogo.

If names such as Sitobu, Gbewa are familiar in the traditional histories of northern Ghana, on the Burkinabé side names such as Zungrana, Bawa, and more commonly Ouedraogo are often mentioned as early ancestors and founders in stories of origin. Iazard surmises that these differences eventually point to similar but unrelated lines that were later integrated (with Gbewa, Zungrana and Ouegraogo as the most salient ones) in consolidated dynastical histories whose reconstruction and consolidation into master-traditions reflected a growing confidence of the Mossi, in their capacity to control the flow of their history.

2. 1. 2. Origins of Mossi expansion: the Mamprusi-Dagomba-Nanumba link

Archaeologists and historians have used the term ‘interaction areas’ to describe interconnections amongst different cultural regions, particularly regions that exhibit varying levels of internal resemblances. They contend that “the side diffusion of similar tools, architectural forms and art styles within the areas are probable indicators of contact, and hence of social relationships.”²³ The same could be said of socio-political forms that extend and develop beyond the confines of a given region, encompassing political structures incorporating groups linked by ceremonial allegiance and kinship ties.

July–1 August, quoted in Simporé, *Elements du Patrimoine*, 2004: 565; such common evocations could be a result of a reworking of the colonial Hamitic hypothesis.

²³ Wolf, *Europe and the People*, 1982: 58.

Thus, “[...] populations impinged upon other populations through permeable social boundaries, creating intergrading, interwoven cultural and social boundaries.”²⁴ The ‘discovery’ of unknown and isolated societies, a consequence of European exploration of parts of the Old World in Africa and Asia, occludes the history of these interconnections that are a testimony to the extended networks of interaction and the continued flow of exchange happening then all over the world. Wolf succinctly describes academia’s failure to adequately acknowledge this phenomenon:

thus, the social scientist model of distinct and separate systems, and of a timeless precontact ethnographic present, does not adequately depict the situation before European expansion; much less can it comprehend the world wide system of links that would be created by that expansion²⁵

Archaeological findings in places around Burkina support the assumption of an early occupation of Moogo from around 400 000 years ago, during the period of the polished stone. The so-called ‘people of the stone’ are the autochthonous populations later subjected to Mossi political rule. These were identified as the Dogon (*kibsi*), *Ninsi*, and *Yoyonse (tengbiisi)* by a team of archaeologists from the University of Ouagadougou that has also unearthed remains of this period in the form stone and granite tools (chopper, chopping tools, blades, swords, adzes, grindstones, etc).²⁶ These remains were discovered

²⁴ Wolf, *Europe and the People*, 1982: 71.

²⁵ Wolf, *Europe and the People*, 1982: 71.

²⁶ See J. B. Kiethéga et al. 1994. *Trame Historique de l’Epopée des Mossi*. Ouagadougou, pp. 12-13; K. A. Milogo and L. Kote. 2000. “Archéologie du Burkina Faso” In *Archéologie en Afrique de l’Ouest (Sahara et Sahel)*, Robert Vernet (ed.), Nouakchott and Paris: CRIAA and SEPIA, 7-59, pp. 10, 11, 38; L. Simporé. 2004. *Eléments du Patrimoine Culturel*, pp. 535-7,

in places as diverse as Maadaga, Pentênga, and Yobri in the South East and Gargassa, Dori Rim Markoye, Sassabango and Tin Edia in towards the north and Absouya, Nemdin, Nobere, Yagma, Laongo, Zeguedinghin, Boassa, MankougDougou, and Tanghin-Dassouri in the middle belt of present Burkina Faso.

Evidence also suggests that the Dogon (indigenous *kibsi*), who mostly inhabited the north of Moogo, around Yatênga, used iron and pottery tools, as well as mortuary earthenware, for as long as they have lived in the area. Kéthéga dates their settlement in Moogo back to the thirteenth century and contends that they probably hailed from the cliffs of Bandiagara. They preceded the *Kurumba* and the *Yônyôose* in the middle belt of Moogo and the *Fulse* and *Kurumba* in Yatênga.²⁷ *Ninsi* would mean, from a Mossi perspective, 'those that were found there' (ceux qu'on est venu trouver sur place), in other words firstcomers (*sên wa miki*) according to Mossi accounts. The *Ninsi* were mostly concentrated in the central part of Moogo, particularly around Ouagadougou²⁸ The distribution of the population of *Yoyonse* and *Ninsi*, as well as Dogon confirm, in addition to the disposition of the archaeological remains, the gradual

553-4.

²⁷ See J.B. Kéthéga. 1993. "La Mise en Place des Peuples du Burkina Faso,". In *Découverte du Burkina*. T.I. Paris, SEPIA-A.D.D.B. Ouagadougou, pp. 9-29; also J. Y. Marshall. 1978. "Vestiges d'Occupation Ancienne au Yatenga; Une Reconnaissance en Pays Kibga,". In *Cahiers de l'ORSTOM*, 15(4): 449-484, p. 122.

²⁸ Barthelemy Bouda. 1986. *L'Exploitation Traditionnelle du Fer dans la Région de Pabré*. Mémoire de Maîtrise, Université de Ouagadougou, p. 52; Simporé, *Elements du Patrimoine*, 2004: 544.

displacement of autochthons towards the north as Mossi 'conquerors' annexed populations from a south-north route.²⁹

The advent of the state was a revolution in an institutional sense, as much as it conceptualised society in a new way. State-forming was a new skill that was being exported from the Mamprusi-Dagomba's institutional experience and was established as new *modus operandi* in the cohabitation arrangements between indigenous and conquerors. It is therefore not surprising if ruling dynasties of the Mamprusi-Dagomba-Mossi groups share similar stories of origin. Their traditional accounts point towards the East of Lake Chad, the point of departure of their migration, the land of Tohazie the 'red hunter', the intrepid ancestor. According to oral accounts, Kpogonumbo was son of Tohazie's; he married Sohiyini, the daughter of Abdul Rahamani, king of Grumah. The most famous issue of this union, Gbewa, is said to be the ancestor of all Mossi-Mamprusi-Dagomba peoples. The saga of Tohazie with Gur-speaking peoples and the Mande south of the Niger bend seems to have inspired Gbewa in his long peregrinations from Grumah to Pusiga. If Mamprusi traditions tend to omit their ancestral history prior to Gbewa, both Dagomba and Mamprusi oral traditions recognise Gbewa to be the legendary founder of the oldest of the Mossi-Dagomba states: Mamprugo (Mamprugu, Mamprusi). A tendency therefore consisted, in Mamprusi traditions, to equate Gbewa to "the *Fons et Origo* (source and origin) in Mamprusi oral tradition".³⁰ The ideology of *Naam* is

²⁹ Simporé, *Eléments du Patrimoine*, 2004: 556.

³⁰ See Iliasu, "Origins," 1970: 96 ; Susan Drucker-Brown. 1981 "The Structure of the Mamprusi Kingdom and the Cult of Naam" In Claessen and Skalník, *The Study of the State*. The Hague: Mouton, p. 117

therefore crucial to the ritual processes that associate Mamprusi to Voltaic states as “congregations to the cult of *Naam*”. Through a replication system and a process of saturation, “*Naam* is continuously allocated, ‘returned’ and reallocated to be embodied in successive kings and chiefs”.³¹ If any difference in terms of status existed between offshoots of the Mamprusi state, it was that determined by the social and historical distance from Mamprusi, the original blueprint and master-system. Although the Mossi retained full autonomy, they yet occupied a precise position in a hierarchy expressed in a shared genealogy. Cognitive distinction between ‘parent’ and ‘branch’, or ‘children’ states did not however correspond to physical superiority or inferiority between the Mossi on the one hand and Mamprusi-Dagomba states on the other.

Were the Mossi, as contends Tauxier, “propelled by a powerful drive of expanding conquest” northwards?³² Were they driven by the desire to control the kola nut trade? Were they looking for more resources, more raiding routes? According to Fage and Skinner, the restoration of imperial power in the Niger valley removed an important source of profit for the slave-raiding Mossi whilst putting effective limits to their expansion northwards.³³ The Mossi therefore needed to seek new sources of slave providing areas further south. This interpretation of the origins of the Mossi states appears to be very similar to

³¹ Drucker-Brown “The Structure of the Mamprusi Kingdom,” 1981: 117; see also Fortes 1969

³² L. Tauxier 1912: 459.

³³ See E. P. Skinner. 1964. *The Mossi of the Upper Volta*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 9.

Fage's own view of Asante wars of conquest (c. 1700-1824) as mere slave-raiding expeditions designed to fructify their trade whilst clearing the way for further European expansion along the coast.³⁴ There are problems with this interpretation in light of Mossi-Dagomba migratory history as expounded by Iliasu. The traditions of migration point to crucial elements in the state-building processes which were initiated as a consequence of succession disputes amongst power contenders, generally brothers and their allies. Population movements which ensued were at the roots of political formations either as extension of existing states or as new political foundations. Thus, Gbewa migrated from Grumah territory to Pusiga following the death of his maternal grandfather, which triggered subsequent succession struggles. In spite of his relative strength in the succession dispute, he led a considerable following to Sana (Sanga), south of Fada N'Grumah and then effectively conquered the *Busansi* and *Kusasi*. Gbewa's sons later expanded the core in subsequent struggles. Tohugu migrated from Pusiga to Mamprugu and Sitobu from Pusiga to Yendl Dabari whilst Nmantambo moved from Bagale to Bimbila. The common denominator of these migrations is that they all resulted in the foundation of new states. It is also said that later on in the 18th century, the foundation of

³⁴ J.D. Fage. 1959. *Ghana: A Historical Interpretation*. Madison: University of Wisconsin, p.55 and 1962. *Introduction to the History of West Africa*. London: Cambridge University Press, p 97 in Iliasu 1970: 105; See also Ivor Wilks for detailed exposition of trading links between the Ashanti and the Mossi, Asante in the Nineteenth Century 1975, specially chapter 7.

Janga and Tongo amongst other new formations, was the result of the added action of unsuccessful candidates and their supporters.³⁵

On the other side of the border, in Moogo, the emergence of the Mossi principalities of Boulsa, Boussouma, Conquiztênga, and Yako was the result of the same migratory and political processes.³⁶ Rattray conceptualised these elements as “the dynamics of constant movement” which reflected a strong propensity for population movements which resulted from internal divides to ease political tensions by allowing historical continuation of the political structure in newly conquered lands. It is of course a historical pattern that is reminiscent of the history of immigrant nations, formed at the fringes of existing societies. The Voltaic pattern

was built into Mossi-Dagomba social structure and that its *raison-d'être* at the political level was to drive away from the seat of government certain sections of the population, e.g. supporters of possible competitors, or rejected candidates for chiefship. The immediate result of these expulsions was the reduction of tension and therefore the maintenance of political stability in the state.³⁷

There were therefore clear elements of these state-building processes that resulted from succession disputes in Mossi migration. The most consistent

³⁵ R. S. Rattray. 1932. *The Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, I: 340-1; a full version of Tohugu's peregrinations in Mamprugu and the founding of the Dagomba state is given by Tamakloe in E. F. Tamakloe. 1931. *A Brief History of the Dagomba People*. Accra: Gov Printers, pp. 11-17 in Iliasu, “The Origins,” 1970: 105; see also Benzing, *Geschichte und Herrschaftssystem*, 1971: 40-54; Cardinall, 1920, 1931.

³⁶ Skinner, *The Mossi*, 1964: 10 and L. Tauxier, 1917, pp. 55-75 in Iliasu, “The Origins,” 1970: 105.

³⁷ Iliasu, “The Origins,” 1970: 105.

pattern among state-forming Mossi was the desire to implement, in fact to realise, political orders in line with the Mamprusi model. New states were not just dismemberments of ruling lineages. They were also the making of unsuccessful candidates removed from the competition for power, marginalised brothers prone to exile, in order for them to realise their 'political call', that of state-making wherever possible. This element was so strongly and so deeply built into the Mossi-Dagomba social structure that it would be misleading to focus on economics or more appealing war and conquest strategies to explain migration movements. There might have been economic aspirations for some of the groups that migrated to secure profits of sorts but it remains that splinter groups that left their political centres did create states and maintained a ritual relationship with the parent-state whose primacy they recognised³⁸. The exportation of the art of governing does therefore appear to be a strong explanatory factor of Mossi-Dagomba migrations, eclipsing other possible explanatory mechanisms. That said, the economic context within which Mossi migrations took place contributed to creating trading routes, and to orienting and accompanying these migrations.

The Dyula trade of kola in northern Ghana has been extensively documented by Delafosse, Fage and Oliver whilst Lovejoy had retraced the kola trading networks from Kano to Salaga and other parts of northern Ghana. The Kano chronicler also makes mention of the pre-eminent control of the trade by

³⁸ In Moogo proper, Ouagadougou constitutes the *ba* (classificatory father) and Tenkodogo the *yaba* (grand-father) .

the Dyula. According to this source, the nuts were already being traded in Hausaland during the reign of Dauda (C.1421-1438). Although the dates given could not be corroborated by archaeological findings, it seems likely that the kola trade was introduced during the 14th and the possibly the 13th century.³⁹ The kola nut was picked up from wild trees that grew in the tropical forest, from Sierra Leone to Ghana. Mande-speaking peoples in the south of Jenne and towards the east of Hausaland, most likely Busa and Samo, are believed to have provided a stepping-stone to Dyula traders whose habit it was to establish settlements near those of the more important political rulers. Bobo-Dioulasso was thus the first (meaning “Dyula settlement in Bobo country”, i.e Muslim merchant quarters) one in the area, followed by Kong ‘from which a number of trade routes radiated out towards the forest lands of the Ivory Coast and Eastern Liberia.⁴⁰

By 1300, the Dyula were already settled in Begho in south-east of Kong, at Bono-Mansu 70 miles away.⁴¹ It is not however clear when the trade began although Delafosse links the introduction of Islam in Ghana in the eleventh

³⁹ Iliasu mentions excavations done in Kisara and Mpama which suggest that they have been directly and for a long time linked to the expanding north-east trade route to the Hausa states. See Iliasu 1970: 105-6; he draws on R. D. Mathewson. 1965. “Kisare: a preliminary report” *West African Archaeology Newsletter*, 3: 22-25 and R. N. York. 1967. Archaeology in the Volta Basin, 1963-66. Legon, pp. 37-45; see also L. Lugard, F. S. Lugard, F. L. Shaw 1906 *A Tropical Dependency*, Blackwell Classic Press.

⁴⁰ J. D. Fage and W. Tordoff. 2001. *A History of Africa*. London: Routledge, p 90; See also Binger.

⁴¹ J. D. Fage and W. Tordoff *A History of Africa*, 2001: 91; see also R. Grey , eds. 1975 *The Cambridge History of Africa Vol.4 1600-1790* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

century to that of the kola trade in northern Ghana long before that.⁴² It is clear that the development of the kola nut trade did impact the socio-political as well as religious dynamics of the region but a question needs to be asked as to the extent to which the desire to control the trade explained the evolution of Mossi-Dagomba states on the Upper-Volta basin. Trade did help the circulation of wealth and skills, the development of communications and the burgeoning of politics in particular around and through trading towns. But then the very nature of commercial exchange and the controversial political action and positions of its actors make trade theory a rather unconvincing one. If trade could explain the concentration of power, it did not explain the differentiated access to power with regards to the inequalities exposed, which accounted for unequal access to resources. Trade acted merely as a stimulus. Moreover, as it turned out, trade could not be that 'exceptional' insight that logically linked concentration of power to the state.⁴³ Furthermore, instances of drought and other ecological crises, frequent in the West African savannahs, pose a challenge to trade as an explanation of state-formation.⁴⁴ In order to make sense of all this, it is interesting to examine foundational stories which the Mossi hold to establish the links between the Mossi-Mamprusi-Dagomba states. If economic elements were important in the movement of people, traditions have mostly retained the political and power imperative as driving forces.

⁴² A. Boahen. 1961 "The Ghana Kola Trade," *Ghana Notes and Queries* 1: 8-14 in A.A Iliasu, "The Origins," 1970: 106.

⁴³ Lonsdale "States and Social Processes," 1981: 171-2.

⁴⁴ See Webster 1979; Steinhart 1981 in Lonsdale 1981: 175.

Mamprusi traditions of Gambaga and Nalerigu recount the story of the daughter of a Mamprusi chief, her peculiar encounter and subsequent marriage to a hunter. They also recount the story of the issue of that union who went back to Mamprusi, with little details however on dates and places. In many versions, Zambalga, and later on Kinzim and more plausibly Pusiga, appear to be the historical link between Mamprusi and the Mossi states; the Ouagadougou genealogy is in fact relates to the one recited in Gambaga. A comparative study of different genealogies, both in Mamprusi-Dagomba traditions and in Mossi courts, demonstrates the historical basis of the connections between Mamprusi-Dagomba and Mossi ruling segments, whilst elements of common ritual and social organisation also abound. Junzo Kawada gives the example of the name Zungrana found in its many variations north and south of the Burkina-Ghana border. He surmises that Zungraana may not be a name but rather a title (appellation) for a chief. In Lalgaye and Ouargaye for instance, the *Naaba* is referred to as 'Zungaana'. Prost on the other hand reports the confidences of the Bendnaaba who affirms that Zungraana is a family name common to all Mossi. Oral traditions in Tenkodogo give a slightly different account in the sense that Zoungraana appears to be a legendary ancestor. Yet another possibility advanced by Kawada is a Mampelle's (language of Mamprusi) combination of 'zug' (from zongo, a Hausa term meaning caravan camp) and 'rana' (or daana, meaning owner). However, he also point that 'zug-raana' is not used to mean 'chief' in Mamprusi, which is nayiri (*Na*=chief and *yiri*=house) but zongo-raana

rather refers to village chiefs of Kunkwa as well as a certain Zongo-naba in the Walwale and Bunkpurugu Districts.⁴⁵

On the other hand, a curious legendary figure shows interesting connections between the Mossi states. Nyingnemdo (literally, 'flesh of my body' or 'me and my blood' according to different perspectives), because of a peculiar origin—allegedly the issue of an incestuous union between a Mogho-Naaba and his sister—has a history buried in memories like a shameful burden. He is believed to have been buried in Zambalga where Wedraogo, Zungraana, Wubri, Sukeelem, Zambalga and many other common ancestors are also said to have been buried. Lambert has an interesting take on the origin of Nyingnemdo. He believes that in order not to alter the royal blood through an exogamous union, Wedraogo and Wedaogo, respectively son and daughter of Rialé and Pogotoenga, were married to each other by their parents and from their union were born Zunghrana and Yuganemdo. The latter perpetuated the same tradition in order to preserve the royal blood. He had three sons: Oubri, Oubrogo and Yampango: Oubri founded the Mossi state of Ouagadougou and Oubrogo that of Tenkodogo whilst Zunghrama died in Kotoega. A slightly different version of this story, in Lalgaye, makes Pugtoenga the wife of Zungraana and therefore the mother of Oubri.⁴⁶ According to Ouagadougou

⁴⁵ Kawada, *Genèse et Dynamique*, 2002: 802; See Also A. Prost.1953: "Notes sur l'Origine des Mossi." *Bulletin de l'IFAN* 15(3): 1333-1338, pp. 1337, 1335.

⁴⁶ See Tiendrebeogo and Pageard 1963: 14; Pageard. 1965. *Une Enquête Historique en Pays Mossi*, Paris, p. 23; Lambert 1907 in Tauxier 1924: 7-8; Delobson 1933: 287. Kawada makes extensive reference to these authors, Kawada 1978: 82-84. traditions in

traditions, the *tengsobadamba* of Guilinghou married their daughter Pougtoenga to Zungrnaa, by virtue of which they became Oubri's *yesramba* or maternal grandparents—by the same token a ritual relationship is created between *nakombsé* and indigenous *Nioniosse*. The pact between *nakombsé* and *nioniosse* was not only political; it was a pact of blood that implied an unbreakable tie between them.

Pre-state Moogo was inhabited by two categories of people. On the one hand, *Ninissi*, warriors, blacksmiths and young people were grouped in one category. On the other hand, *tengbissi* (sons of the earth) were essentially an agricultural community.⁴⁷ The relationship between the two categories was one

Ouagadougou and Tenkodogo-Lalgaye place the graves of their ancestors from Gambaga respectively around Ouagadougou-Komtoega and Zambalga-Komtoega.

⁴⁷ The distinction between 'people of power' and 'earth custodians' is a close but inappropriate translation; it is discussed in the history of many African societies. The translation of *tengsoba* in 'earthpriest' can be misleading, earth custodians were believed to be individuals who were granted insights into the workings of nature; these insights were unavailable to ordinary individuals who thus needed the mediation of earthpriests for sacrifices and prayers dedicated to nature and the earth divinity. Although a 'chief of the earth'/earthpriest is generally opposed to the 'political chief'; the same person may be earthpriest and village leader, sometimes the earthpriest is the only authority; he thus cumulates many capacities; any case, there is a conceptual separation between the two functions (thus duality and structural dichotomy). However, even in instances where the same person plays both roles, the two functions are fundamentally distinct from each other. The major distinction is the fact that political power is hereditary/ lineage-based or gained through elections; it is given by men whereas spiritual power was given by the earth (god). Amongst the Tallensi, the differentiation between the two offices of the *tengdana* expressed the two complementary aspects of authority exercised on men and on the earth (also a ritual link between the local community and the material earth). The term *ténga* designates the earth, the territory, the powerful divine benediction, etc; see R. S. Rattray. 1932. *The tribes of the Ashanti*

of tutelage of the former over the latter. The *tengbissi* themselves were divided into two distinct groups of *nioniosse* that provided, and still do, the earthpriests invested with the ability to *communicate* with the forces of the earth (hence their practice of agricultural activities) and *Sikomceor Sirkomce* or masks bearers whose realm is that of artistic creation and performance.⁴⁸ These latter groups are connected to two common ancestors Tengin-Poussoumdé (that which comes from the earth) and Bassi (*leave him*) who had three sons: Kellé-Tinga and Boud'yaré, the twins, are the ancestors of the *nioniossé* whilst Zoalga, the artist-master trained amongst the *kinkirsi* (bush spirits), was the ancestor of the Sirkomcé.

Considering all the above, a central point needs to be stressed. Traditions from all sides of the Voltaic states concur in giving credence to the common origin and common sources of political rulership and they situate their common origin somewhere in what became Mamprugu.

2. 1. 3. Migrationism: the movement of ideas as mechanism of socio-political transformations

The Mossi states display a combination of migratory dynamics, conquest as consolidation of the political apparatus of the state, as well as

Hinterland. Oxford : OUP, pp. 339-44 ; also R. Verdier. 1965., 'Chef de Terre et Chef de lignage' in Jean Poirier, *Etudes de Droit Africain et Malgache*, Paris: Cujas, 333-359.

⁴⁸ R. Pageard. 1965 "Une Enquête Historique en Pays Mossi," *Journal de la Société des Africanistes*, 35(1): 11 – 66, p 16. it's important to note that the distinction between *ninisse* and *nioniosse* is not clearly made by the *tengbissi* who tend to use their generic appellation

revolutionary patterns in the sociocultural integration of composite groups.⁴⁹ In so far as it explains how the history and patterns of migration informed state formation and the subsequent integration of divergent groups and interests, migrationism best accounts for the political and sociocultural processes in Moogo. As an explanatory paradigm, migrationism allows to differentiate between migrations as process and thought patterns related to migration. When articulated as a general principle of historical explanation, migrationism accounts for cultural, linguistic and institutional change. The settlement history of West Africa is replete with concepts of autochthony and foreignness, evocations of indigenusness and alienness; it pertains to a long-standing history of migrations which have informed and defined the cultural and institutional make-up of societies throughout the region. In the Voltaic area, specifically, this bipolarity has crucial importance in the construction and justification of the institutional structure and that of social relations. Danuta Liberski aptly points out that the bipolarity is “so to say, theatrilised in as much as a series of rituals are staging the opposition and complementarity of these two figures of power”.⁵⁰

Migrationism is a useful conceptual tool in apprehending the explanatory links between migrations, perceptions, memories and historical change. Kleinschmidt defines migrationism as ‘all memories of migration that have been adduced as factors of change in historical explanations. Migrationisms thus are

⁴⁹ See G. Remy.1973. *Les Migrations de Travail et les Mouvements de Colonisation Mossi: Recueil Bibliographique*. Paris: ORSTOM, 20. p. 87.

⁵⁰ D. Liberski. 1991. *Les Dieux du Territoire. Unité et Morcellement de l'Espace en Pays Kasena (Burkina Faso)*. Paris: EPHE, p.72.

perceptions belonging to the cognitive environment of groups that transmit memories or migrations. They necessarily belong to the space of communication, of retrospectively commemorating groups, and have nothing in common with the attitudes and perceptions of migrants.’⁵¹

Political history has shown little interest in addressing the movement of people as a subject for study in its own right.’ On the contrary, there has been an almost perverse refusal [...] to consider the social technological and logistical mechanics of human movement.’⁵² Yet, migrationism reveals the central significance of migration theory in political and social theories. Moreover, as a predominantly archaeological mode of enquiry, it has a pragmatic quality far removed from the heroic generalisations of nineteenth century ethnology and offers valuable insights into the interpretation of ethnographic data, beyond the barren battle between evolutionism and diffusionism that raged in the early twentieth century.⁵³

Migrationism describes and analyses change, it explores the subjective consciousness of migrants and their memories of migrations. It is based on the premise that migration memories do not necessarily have to derive from migration that actually took place. In other words, perceptions of migration

⁵¹ Kleinschmidt *People on the Move* 2003:26-7; Adams et al. talk of a ‘simultaneous and permanent movement of substantial numbers of people... which might be expected to leave measurable traces in the cultural, linguistic and skeletal record’ Adams, Van Gergen and Levy 1978 “The Retreat from Migrationism”, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 7: 483-532, p. 486; see also J. Monson. 2000. “Memory, Migration and the Authority of History in Southern Tanzania, 1860-1960,” *The Journal of African History*, 41(3): 347-372 on the Bena of the Rivers.

⁵² Adams et al., *The Retreat from Migrationism*, 1978: 523.

⁵³ Adams et al., *The Retreat from Migrationism*, 1978: 487.

associated with the memories and/or experiences of previous generations are, for later generations, a valid source of historical knowledge even in places where corroborating dates are lacking. Alongside instances of migration memories historically and empirically supported by existing records, there exists migration memories rooted in the collective imagination, acquired through flimsy historical connections, they may even be mere figment of longing imaginations. Migration memories are also often the object of deliberate and informed deletions within collective pursuit of given identities.⁵⁴

The transaction of memories and the imprint of identity in the collective psyche appeal to exploratory research into the cognitive make up of a group and society. It is the task of historical migration research to investigate the validity of claims and links between representations of memories and factual migratory trends in order to establish an identifiable grid of reading. Equally, it must be attempted to establish areas of correspondence between migration stories of a given society and various features of its cognitive environment. The main feature is an iterative movement 'between attitudes and perceptions of

⁵⁴ See Kleinschmidt *People on the Move* 2003:23, for examples of factual migration disappearing from collective memories there needs to be evidence of actual archaeological or external sources which disprove the claims of non-memories. In archaeology, the politicisation of migration-oriented explanations in the 1960s were reminiscent of explicit nationalistic assumptions and were therefore discarded in favour of 'forward-looking' evolutionist explanations; see Clark 1994; Silberman 1995; Trigger, 1989: 294-302; Finneran 2003: 22-3. Vansina describes how the spread of the Njila set of Bantu languages in West Central Africa introduced tremendous socio-political change in the region; see J. Vansina. 2004. *How Societies are Born*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press.

⁵⁴ Kleinschmidt *People on the Move* 2003: 23-4.

migrants and the memories, attitudes, and perceptions of subsequent generations.⁵⁵ Migration stories, settlement histories, stories of origin, etc, form the basis for the critical understanding of the subjective consciousness of migrants and descendant communities.

The history of the Mossi state formation shows that aspects of centre-formation were crucial to institutional building, and the crystallisation of models of cultural units in contrasting roles within political and social spheres. The articulation of the structural distinction of political functions from other roles highlights the importance of the political practice as specific technique in state formation. This points to a divergence with standard modes of enquiry into African political systems. The too conventional distinction between chiefdoms, segmentary and centralised states has proved its limits. Following D. Apter and L. Fallers, my approach of the Mossi state combines the “delegation of authority, modes of succession to office, spheres of central control, guiding institutional values, and organisational complexity.”⁵⁶

When all of the above is combined to account for the creation of states according to an existing master-model, political authority was spread and its establishment justified on the primacy of the ‘common fund of political ideas’

⁵⁵ Kleinschmidt *People on the Move* 2003: 23-4.

⁵⁶ Eisenstadt, Abitol and Chazan 1988: 18-19; these points are aptly analysed in P. Brown.1951. “Patterns of Authority in West Africa”, *Africa*, 21(4): 261-278 and J. Vansina. 1962. “A Comparison of African Kingdoms”, *Africa*, 32(4): 324-35.

through the movement of ideas and through a mechanism of *saturation*.⁵⁷ Structural-functional anthropology may have overemphasised the revolutionary nature of the political changes brought about by Mossi migration. It is however clear that, although the Mossi adapted existing structures, the innovative character of *Naam* at all levels of political practice is undeniable. On the other hand, economic perspectives, such as Fage's emphasis on Mossi quest for 'profit' as the driving force behind the emergence of Mossi states, crucially ignore the significance of traditions of migration in the creation and consolidation of political formations.⁵⁸ Although there still are conflicting versions of the sequence of fission of Mossi states, the essential element here is that each of the movements above resulted in the foundation of new political formations, generally autonomous states that may maintain some form of relations with the parent state. The same process applies to the foundation of the Mossi states of Bussuma and Balsa, Conquiztênga and Yako, Tatênga and Ratênga, etc, as discussed above.⁵⁹ Drucker-Brown describes this process, in the Mamprusi case, in terms a continuous link "fashioned on the model of a filial tie, replicated in multiple courts, which is characteristic of the Mamprusi polity."⁶⁰ However, her

⁵⁷ See Curtin et al. 1978. *African History*. London: Longmann.

⁵⁸ Gbewa migrated from Grumah to Pusiga, Tohugu and Sitobu from Pusiga to Mamprugu and Yendi Dabari, Nmamtambo from Bagale to Bimbila, Ouedraogo from Mamprugu to Tenkodogo (Busanga), Rawa and Diaba Lompo from Tenkodogo to Yatênga and Fada N'Gurma and Oubri (Wubri) from Tenkodogo to Ouagadougou

⁵⁹ See Skinner, *The Mossi*, 1964: 10; L. Tauxier. 1917. *Le Noir du Yatenga; Mossis, Nioniossés, Samos, Yarsés, Silmi-Mossis, Peuls*. Paris: Larose, pp. 55-75; Izard, *Gens du Pouvoir*, 1985: 529-35.

⁶⁰ S. Drucker-Brown. 1989. "Mamprusi Installation Ritual and Centralisation: A Convection Model," *Man* 24(3): 485-501.

analysis of the replication and transmission of *Naam* as a convection model that stresses its circulatory movement within the polity is too narrow to capture the process of expansion of *Naam* beyond the confines of Mamprugu. In fact, when local chieftaincies stop returning *Naam back* to the centre, the circulatory movement is broken and the trajectory so to speak diverted.

The articulation of a relation of equilibrium between the realm of political power and that of ritual (the earth) comes up against divergent visions of historicity, space and temporality. On the one hand, the creation of local segments provides support for the social reproduction of ritual sanctuaries, familial burial places, in other words the material support of specific settlement groups. That is to say, in the non-political realm, memory and identity were very much engraved on the land, the territorial and material support of the community.⁶¹ The Moaga on the contrary has no such attachment to the land; claims of the political power to 'land' embrace a multitude of pieces of land brought together into a unitary/national territory. The political power's claim to historicity entirely lays in genealogical history and migratory trajectories.

2. 2. The Mutation of *Naam*: the One that Confers to the One that Diverges

In Moogo, *Naam* makes the state, differentiates it from society and elevates it as the source of normative conduct, and thus reproduces itself whilst reproducing the state model. The centralised nature of the Mossi states is a striking contrast to non-centralised, diffuse authority state systems of northern Ghana and southern Burkina Faso. It is thus important to examine the shifting

⁶¹ A distinction is made between land/space as the territorial basis of political power and land/space as 'earth' in an abstract and ritual sense.

dynamics of *Naam* as an organising state principle.

As it moved away from its origins in Mamprugu and across the Voltaic region, *Naam* transformed into a distinctive, purposeful, form of social organisation and ideology; it pursued a multiplicity of ends, cutting across the reach of the 'secular' and material (legitimation of political authority; economic, military power, etc), as well as ideal in its attempt to provide answers to human quest for meaning through a syncretic union between migrants' divinity, Wende and the earth divinity. In all this, one constant was, for the large numbers of Mossi migrants, the desire to hold a particular *Naam*, to deploy its possibilities and exercise it for themselves and for the good of the people who knew no 'organised' form of social organisation. That desire was the fuel that fed competition for power, which is perceived as constituting an essential aspect of the *Naam* system. As Skalnik put it: "the spirit of competition for *naam* is an integral part of Nanumba political culture".⁶² The ruling dynasty was every once in a while fused by 'crown revolutions' perpetrated by members of *nakombsé* segments which represented a constant threat to control of the ruling dynasty.⁶³ This constant source of tension was the drive of political competition and prospects for wandering *nakombsé*.

Similar practices linked the tradition of Mamprusi-Dagomba to those of the Mossi, suggesting that Mossi immigrants conquered the earlier settlers. What archaeological and linguistic evidence makes clear is that, conquerors or not, the Mossi adopted the material culture of the aboriginal population.

⁶² Skalník, "On the Inadequacy," 1987: 313.

⁶³ Lonsdale speaks of 'revolutions in government'

Cultural similarities have been held as not only the consequence of the diffusion of ideas and cultural traits, but also the result of *common origins*. Mossi migrants were already equipped with the political know-how; they adapted their institutions according to encounters and the vagaries of migration. It would however seem that institutions assume a structure closer to the ideal model when they are transplanted. It is interesting that the *Naam* model assumed a more centralised, rigidly structured strand in Ouagadougou and Yatênga rather than in Mamprugu where a weaker form of centralisation process was assumed.⁶⁴ Thus, as the *Naam* model was reproduced in places far-flung from its place of birth, a more literal and blunt version prevailed, which stuck much closely to the ideological construct of *Naam*.

Even as it travelled across regions and mutated into a number of versions, the *Naam* model remained an ideological force that informed the cultural transformation of the societies it encountered. For if interactions were limited between metropole and peripheries of *Naam*—ritual relations between Mamprusi and Moogo were discontinued in the 19th—the continuous reproduction of the *Naam* model embedded and validated a broad regional cultural experience. Its characteristics became, over time, part of the conservative force that delineated and defined the region.

Despite the common origin of the Mossi-Mamprusi-Dagomba states and the similarity of their socio-political organisations, there are notable discontinuities between them for one has to bear in mind that the Mamprusi reference was more conceptual than historical. These discontinuities have to do,

⁶⁴ See Drucker-Brown, "The Structure of the Mamprusi Kingdom," 1981.

in part, with differences in foundational histories. Whilst, on the one hand, in the history of northern Mossi states a detailed account is given of the princess Yennenga, progenitrix of the Mossi, very little is known about her husband Rialé, the hunter. Kawada ventured the interpretation according to which the unknown hunter might well be a member of the 'proto-Mossi—son of a ming of Mali. On the other hand, other traditions make of Rialé a Busanga.⁶⁵ In any case, the silence of oral traditions on Rialé contrasts with the various versions of the story of Yennenga as recounted in Mossi traditions. The difference is all the more striking considering that the Mossi have prioritized a patrilineal system of succession. In adopting the continuity thesis, Kawada sees, following Izard, in the dynamics of formation and decline of a proto-Mossi group, the roots of the divergent trajectories between the Mamprusi-Dagomba and the Mossi groups. Kawada contends that the different foundational histories explain the centralised nature of the state in Mossi experience, as opposed to a set of more diffuse forms of social organisation in Mamprusi-Dagomba whereby strategies were devised to accommodate indigenous groups—more so in Mamprugu than in Dagbon.⁶⁶

The group that Izard calls the *proto-Mossi*, namely those very ones mentioned in the Tarikhs, are encountered in historical accounts across the Voltaic states, without clear or precise indication as to where they originated and who exactly they were.⁶⁷ Although we are still unclear, as to the relationship

⁶⁵ See Skinner for a cogent review of the different versions of foundational traditions, Skinner, *The Mossi*, 1964: 7-12, 205.

⁶⁶ Kawada, *Genèse et Dynamique*, 2002: 32-3.

⁶⁷ Wilks "The Mossi and the Akan States," 1985: 469.

between the Mossi founders of the Voltaic states and those, mounted raiders who warred against and sacked Songhay, the Dagomba drum traditions provide some indications. According to these, Toha Zie, the red hunter, led his people from Tunga (somewhere east of Lake Chad), to Zamfara and Mali. The red hunter was also an intrepid warrior who married Paba Wabaga, the daughter of a Malian king, in recognition to services rendered. From this union was born Kpogonumbo who migrated South to Gurma, after training in the Malian service. History repeating itself in striking ways, Kpogonumbo was given a royal daughter (Suhuyini) as wife, by the Gurma ruler, Daramani. From this point on emerges Na Gbewa, the ancestor of the Mossi states, as the son of Kpogonumbo and Suhuyini.⁶⁸ When this account is replaced in a historical context whereby Songhay and Mali were engaged, in the course of the fourteenth century, in violent competitions for regional power, during which the hegemony of Mali was considerably diminished, the suggestion that Toha Zie, along with others, migrated down south following Mali's declining power, whilst other stayed to continue to curb the rise of Songhay, does sound all the more plausible.⁶⁹

2. 2. 1. Basic structure: dichotomy Naam/Tênga

A basic common feature of the Mossi states is the fundamental dyad between *Naam* (Nam) and *Tênga*, in other words between those who possess political authority and those who possess *tengsobondo* or ritual control over the land. Whilst, in Dagomba for instance, the new Mossi polity 'invited' some of the

⁶⁸ Izard, Introduction, 1970: 120-2; Benzing, Geschichte und Herrschaftssystem, 1971: 40-54
Wilks, "The Mossi," 1985: 469-470 and Ferguson, "Islamisation in Dagbon," 1973.

⁶⁹ Wilks, "The Mossi," 1985: 470.

earth custodians to join the army as bowmen, there was a less pronounced keenness, on the part of the Yatênga Nanamse (sing. Naaba) to incorporate indigenous groups in the state structure. In central Moogo and in Yatênga however, an opposite trend consisted for the commoner groups to 'recruit' from the ranks of the ruling nobility. For it was the case that *nakombsé* who lost their entitlement to compete for office 'fell' into the ranks of commoners (see chapter 3).

For the Mossi, a common approach to consolidating their gains consisted in adopting the pre-existing indigenous models.⁷⁰ Yet a common tale is widespread amongst conquering groups: the nomad conqueror civilised the 'uncouth and boorish autochthon' and he borrowed the autochthon's practices only in so far as these were also the means to penetrate autochthony in order to better control it. The autochthonous character of indigenous societies is crystallised by the political will of the conqueror. For power needs a division of labour, a social differentiation in order to assert a social ideology based on socio-professional particularities. This division was integrated into a political discourse that needed to be fitted into reality and a historical project that asserted the evidence of political power.

Whilst the Mossi adopted pre-existing arrangements by juxtaposing the *Naam/Tênga* binary upon the Fulbé binary chiefs/gravediggers, they rested the legitimacy of their newly constituted states on far-away socio-political

⁷⁰ Wolf, *Europe and the People*, 1982: 33.

constellations with which they shared a common memory of political leadership.

Firstly, Tenkudugu constitutes a *hybrid* example of political traditions in the Voltaic states in terms of variations of *Naam* on the Ghanaian and Burkinabé sides. As the central Mossi states emerged from around the Tenkodogo area, the latter “provid(ed) a bridge to the patent political formations in present day northern Ghana; therefore its traditions possess critical importance for interpreting the rest.”⁷¹ According to Tauxier, Boussanga autochthons occupied the entire area that constituted Tenkodogo, they were forced to seek refuge outside their residences, reluctant towards any form of collaboration with the invader.⁷² If Tenkodogo is recognised as the link between the Mossi states and the Mamprusi-Dagomba system, Mamprugu (Mamprusi) is unanimously recognised as its core and ‘parent-state’. However, Mamprugu was to become weakly centralised because of the limited intervention of the state in the realm of earth custody; earth custodians thus had a degree of control over the central government. Even as senior-state or precisely because it was the first attempt to deploy *Naam* ideology over a given place, Mamprusi was never able to entirely subdue indigenous Tallensi and Kussasi. As the Mamprusi state drew these into its orbit of influence, it could nevertheless not incorporate them in the encompassing realm of *Naam*.⁷³ The core political authority (*Nam*) in Mamprugu was supplemented by the *nam yella*, a form of cult of the ancestors

⁷¹ Saul, “Méthode en Histoire,” 2007: 4.

⁷² L. Tauxier. 1924. *Nouvelles notes sur le Mossi et le Gourounsi*. Paris: Larose, p. 7.

⁷³ See J. D. Fage and R. Oliver. 1975. *The Cambridge History of Africa, IV*. Cambridge: Cambridge University press, p. 187.

which is extended by the *nayiri* and his councillors (*nayirii kpaamba*) to lineage elders and village chiefs. Political rule in Mamprugu was thus more narrowly determined by both reverence to the ancestors/earth rituals (three *tendanas* (earth-custodians) were for instance involved in the appointment of a *nayiri*) and the requirements of the management of everyday affairs, than it was in Dagomba and Moogo.⁷⁴ In any case, Mamprusi established the basic *Naam* (*Nam*) framework that was to inform political rule, the structure of office, in particular the rules of office succession, either on the basis of gates (Mamprusi), village-gates (Dagbon) or eligible dynasties (Moogo). Other areas of common practice would include the Mossi-Mamprusi-Dagomba states' reliance, to varying degrees, on captives and eunuchs as administrative categories, foreign mercenaries as well as Muslim advisers as the state sought to disentangle kinship from political rule. These issues are more fully examined in chapters 4 and 5.

Secondly, the history of Dagbon (Dagomba) was marked by a policy of systematic extermination of indigenous groups. According to Dagomba traditions, when Na Nyagsi, son of Sitobu, left Mamprugu following succession disputes over paramouncy, he headed towards Dagomba and founded political centres in western Dagomba, he proceeded to massacring the indigenous earth

⁷⁴ See S. Drucker-Brown. 1989. "Mamprusi Installation Ritual and Centralisation: A Convection Model," *Man* 24(3): 485-501, p. 385; "The Structure of the Mamprusi Kingdom," 1981: 115-131; D. C. Davis. 1987. "Then the White Man Came with his Whitish Ideas: the British and the Evolution of Traditional Government in Mampurugu." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 20(4): 627-646, pp. 629, 633.

custodians. Mossi strategies towards the priests whose life they spared were to grant minimal authority; their political power was only a matter of token.⁷⁵ In some places, indigenous groups, such as the Konkomba, fled before Dagomba horsemen.⁷⁶ Yendi-Dabari, or 'ruined Yendi' was established as capital, along the White Volta in the middle of major trade routes that connected the Akan forests to northern markets, towards Jenne, also along the Hausa routes towards Katsina.⁷⁷

The common trend was for conquering Mossi to incorporate the indigenous groups as *têngdamba* or *tengbiisi*, into their new polities, regardless of their status in pre-existing structures, and whether these were acephalous or organised with some degree of hierarchy. The constitution of these convenient alliances was to have lasting effects on the collective identities of 'conquered' groups. An effort to contain the fissionary tendency of the Mossi states led, in Dagomba, to new rules that limited office succession to the sons of previous rulers, a further requirement was that a candidate-son had to have held at least one of the three gate-skins of Karaga, Mion or Savelugu.⁷⁸ The restricted

⁷⁵ D. Zahan. 1967. "The Mossi Kingdoms," *West African Kingdoms in the Nineteenth Century*. D. Forde and P. Kaberry. London: OUP: 152-178, p. 157; E. P. Skinner, *The Mossi*, 1964: 17, 26.

⁷⁶ D. Tait. 1955. "History and Social Organisation" *Transactions of the Historical Society of the Gold Coast and Togoland* 1(5): 193-210, p. 201; Tait contends that some of the Konkomba who chose to remain were "rewarded" with positions of bowmen within the Mossi army

⁷⁷ See Oliver and Fage. *The Cambridge History of Africa, IV*, 1975: 187-8.

⁷⁸ A. Duncan-Johnstone and H. Blair. 1932. *Enquiry into the Constitution and Organisation of the Dagbon Kingdom*. Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation; P. Ferguson and I. Wilks. 1970. Chiefs, Constitutions and the British in Northern Ghana. In *West African Chiefs, their*

polydynastic system has been associated with the resolution of protracted internecine succession struggles following the death of Na Gungobile (ca. 1700), with the arbitration of Na Atabia (c.1690-1740) of Mamprussi.⁷⁹ Such instances of reference to the Mamprussi core was not infrequent; in fact it maintained, in many ways, a mechanism of standardisation of basic rules of succession which, although increasingly altered in newly formed polities, maintained the relevance of royal dynasties as the primary pool of recruitment of political rulers.

The recognition of the primacy of Mamprugu went hand in hand with an effort to endow Dagomba history with an autonomous voice that equally marked the independent character of Dagbon. If, in Mamprugu, oral traditions are relatively sketchy on a number of important aspects of Mamprusi society, in Dagbon, there was a distinct keenness to record and recount history, and to formalise and *streamline* the recording and recounting of history. This was achieved through the establishment of a corporate group of court historians or state drummers (*lunsi*) who were members of the nobility hierarchically organised as titled officers under the supervision of the *Namoo Na*. The *lunsi* underwent painstaking years of training at the end of which they became highly specialised and were generally handsomely paid and highly respected. The Dagomba thus developed particularly elaborate and efficient technologies of

Changing Status under Colonial Rule and Independence. M. Crowder and O. Ikime (eds.). Ife: University of Ife Press: 340-52; in Wilks, "The Mossi," 1985: 472.

⁷⁹ Ferguson, "Islamization in Dagbon," 1973: 92-3; P. Ferguson and I. Wilks, "Chiefs, Constitutions and the British," 1970: 352-63.

preserving and communicating the past, of relaying the exploits of the 'high class' and of preserving the memory of constitutional practices and the sources of belief.⁸⁰ The quality of the scale of the Dagomba oral traditions machinery, visible at every unit of the state, was an important element in assessing the authority of sources of knowledge and traditions often employed in sanctioning political and social practices.

In any case, the history of the formation of the Mossi states of Ouagadougou and Yatênga is better known in Moogo. According to Yatênga traditions, Rawa, one of Ouedraogo's sons, established in Zandoma, toward the north of Tenkodogo and which later became Yatênga under the rule of Yadega, a classificatory brother to Rawa.⁸¹ The creation of Yatênga caused flight and migration northward, as Dogon fled the conquering group towards the cliffs of Bandiagara whilst some of them remained under Mossi rule.⁸² The Samo on the other hand opposed a more explicit resistance to Mossi ambitions but were to be eventually annexed and more or less incorporated in the Yatênga polity.

The development of *Naam*, on the other hand, can be retraced, albeit not in a uni-linear manner, as the particular/regional circumstances allowed or disallowed convergence. Izard recognised a more or less common structure of political rule to Mossi residing beyond Bisa country; in northern Ghana, this line would run through the Dagomba/ Dagara border, in other words at the margins

⁸⁰ Illiasu. 1970. "Origins of Mossi-Dagomba," *Research Review*, 7(2): 95-113, pp. 96-7.

⁸¹ Illiasu, "Origins of Mossi-Dagomba," 1971: 100.

⁸² Skinner, *The Mossi*, 1964: 8; Tait, "History and Social Organisation," 1955: 201.

of the extended rule of the centralised system. Thus, the distinct forms of *Naam* that prevailed in pre-colonial Ghana and Burkina can be explained in terms of different approaches to *Tênga* (from extermination to cooptation or juxtaposition), but also the ‘compatibility’ of the *Naam* order to pre-existing social organisations.

Ila Ouedraogo is the descendant of a Rasam Naaba (one of the four main ‘ministers’ of the Yatênga Naaba). Like his father and grandfather, he is a guardian of the memory of the *Nakombsé* and an enthusiastic expert of moaga history. He narrates the foundation of Yatênga along the familiar lines of the first great fission of the Mossi kingdom of Wubritênga:

We are the Yadsé, the inhabitants of Yatênga, and we are descendants of Yadega. He is our ancestor. Naaba Yadega was a great-grandson of Ouedraogo and a grandson of Wubri, founder of Oubritênga [Wogdgo, Ouagadougou]. Naaba Yadega was son of Naaba Nasbiire. For many years, he was in training under Naaba Swida in Minima and was therefore away when his father died. Unfortunately, Naaba Swida hid the news of his father’s death from him despite Yadega being the legitimate successor. In his absence, one of his cousins, Naaba Kumdumye usurped power. One day, Yadega was riding in the country, he came close to a well and he decided to fetch water for his horse. Yadega was a strong and harsh man. They say he bullied a woman he found also fetching water at the well. She said to him: “you are indeed a wicked and unworthy man; no wonder why you are here whilst your father is being buried!!” On hearing this, Yadega became very angry and rode hastily towards Ouagadougou. Upon arriving in Ouagadougou, he found, with a bitter sense of regret that Naaba Kumdumye had already been made king. He avowed to regain power by all means. Yadega had a sister, Pabré, who was fond of him. Pabré was intent on correcting the injustice done her brother so she promised to steal the royal regalia for him. She waited the middle of the night to steal the regalia. Since she acted as the *napoko* throughout the interregnum, she knew where the regalia was kept and could easily take them. They both ran towards Yatênga and that

was the beginning of the history of the foundation of Yatênga. The Mogho Naaba tried to chase Yadega but then he realised that his troops were not ready so the postponed the pursuit for the following week, on the Friday. Eventually, he never made it to Yatênga. That is the reason why every Friday, if you go to the Mogho Naaba's court, he performs the (fake) departure ceremony [cérémonie du faux départ de LA]; it is symbolic for that event.⁸³

However, people interviewed in Ouagadougou would retort that the regalia never left Ouagadougou; for if they did, how could it be explained that chiefs were still being enthroned in due form in Ouagadougou, on the ritual basis of these regalia, as they have always been. As the residence of the regalia remains an acutely contested issue, even today, the common explanation found in Yatênga can be understood as a retrospective justification/explanation of the autonomy of Yatênga vis-à-vis Ouagadougou. But then, all major and satellite Mossi states perform nominations in more or less the same way. Thus, it might be helpful to take the Yatênga foundation myth as part of the legitimising strategies which make it a full-fledged, autonomous Mossi state. In any case, a personalised view of history—such as shown above—points to the enduring effect of historical content on the everyday perception of ordinary people.

Something needs to be said about socio-political formations within and around the Mossi-Mamprusi-Dagomba system whose historical trajectory did not lead to political centralisation.

⁸³ Ila Ouedraogo, Interview, Ouahigouya, April, 14, 2010; most of my other interviewees in Yatenga tell the foundational story along similar lines

2. 2. Naam in Non-centralised Polities: Statelessness as Escape

Interestingly, the Dagara, made prominent anthropologists such as Goody and more recently Lentz and Kuba, is one of those West African societies, like the Tallensi, made prominent by Fortes, notoriously known to be 'stateless'. Despite opting for a non-centralised social organisation, the Dagara share with the Mossi the same fundamental distinction between the realm of politics and that of rituals, but unlike the Mossi pay greater attention to rituals. Traditions of origin and settlement histories therefore assume the pride of place in Dagara history; however, the *Naam* aspect remains relatively unexplored.⁸⁴ It is my view that societies such as the Dagara have, so to speak, opted out of the centralising tendency of the Mamprusi-Mossi *Naam* in an attempt to consolidate what they believed to be a distinct Dagara identity. Lentz documents the institutional flexibility that characterised the Dagara; their institutional arrangements constituted, in contrast to the rigidly stratified Dagomba society, a model of *Naam/Tênga* dichotomy that did not prioritise the 'needs of *Naam*' but rather focused on the dynamics of land, ritual and history.⁸⁵ Both Tallensi and Dagara are, in Kopytoff-speak, 'frontier societies' best understood from the perspective of forms of equilibrium between the political, the economic and the ritual rather than taking the trajectory of gradual and cumulative political centralisation.

⁸⁴ Lentz 1994, 2000; Lentz and Kuba 2002; Both Dagara and Lobi trace their origins to the Mamprusi; see J. Hebert et al. 1976. *Esquisse d'Une Monographie Historique du Pays Dagara*, unpublished manuscript.

⁸⁵ Lentz 1994; continuity and changed are conceptualised on the basis of the critical interaction of economic, political, identity and territorial dynamics

It is striking that in a regional context marked by the emergence of strong and highly centralised polities, a considerable number of non-centralised formations should prevail, which sought to keep governance essentially collective and celebrated all the social statuses represented. In fact, it would seem that the relative flexibility that characterised stateless societies was a result of “a collective imagination that envisioned society as an ever-changing interplay of statuses and roles”.⁸⁶ It would seem that there was little cultural affinity between Mossi conquerors and indigenous Ninisi, Fulsi, Tallensi, Kipirsi, Kassena, Nunuma, Kuasi, Konkomba, Birifor, Walla, Dagara, Nankansi and other indigenous groups. They shared linguistic and historical links as part of the loose Gur/Voltaic linguistic families.⁸⁷ The Oti-Volta-Group (formerly Mole-Dagbani) comprises Mooré, Frafra, Mampruli, Dagara, Dagbani, etc, as part of the Gur-languages.

What is interesting in the common argument about these societies is the fact they were not centralised states but rather organised according to a system of ritual jurisdiction: *tengdana* for southern Voltaic states and *tengsoba* for northern Mossi, with an authority over the custody of earth shrines.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Vansina also finds similar governance patterns in interstitial areas between centralised polities in Central Africa, around the Rund Kingdom; see J. Vansina. 2004. *How societies are Born. Governance in West Central Africa Before 1600*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, p. 259.

⁸⁷ Little research has been carried on the pre-colonial history of groups conquered by the Mossi, except for the short studies of J. Kawada. 1967. *Le Zitenga: Rapport de Mission dans le Cercle de Ziniar*. Recherches Voltaïques 6. Paris, Ouagadougou: CNRS, CVRS; and Sœur Jean Bernard. 1966. *Les Bisa du Cercle de Garango*. Recherches Voltaïques 2. Paris, Ouagadougou: CNRS, CVRS.

⁸⁸ See J. Goody. 1971. *Technology, Tradition, and the State in Africa*. Oxford: Oxford

Meillassoux has pointedly argued that such characterisations as *acephalous*, *stateless*, or *classless* that denote an absence of features, tell us nothing about what these formations actually *are*.⁸⁹ Stateless societies were characterised by “mobility, overlapping networks, multiple group membership and flexible, context-dependent boundaries.”⁹⁰ Their organising structures can offer key insights into the processes of sociopolitical genesis for the underlying socio-historical moments, the “events that shaped them were not rare” and were very much embedded in the organising principles of everyday life, in two ways: “in the everyday flow of African social life and in the traditions of origins of established (...) African societies and polities.”⁹¹ Stateless societies could thus adapt to the dynamics of change, particularly within expansionist tendencies of centralised polities, by creating nominal political functions for immigrants. Kaboré relates Nuna and Kasena traditions that explain the establishment of political institutions in terms of autochthons groups inviting hunters or dejected chiefs from neighbouring centralised polities. In doing so, autochthons ‘lent’ some of their amulets (*kwere*) to the new comers who thus used them as regalia.

University Press, Ch. 4; I. Wilks, “The Mossi,” 1985: 470; and especially Law, *The Horse in West African History*, 1980: 13-5.

⁸⁹ Wolf, *Europe and the People*, 1982: 88-89.

⁹⁰ Lentz. “A Dagara Rebellion,” 1994: 459; for analyses of the internal workings of non-centralised societies and their mechanisms of social control in the Voltaic region, as well as varied accounts on their nature in pre-colonial times, Lentz cites J. Goody. 1957. “Social Organisation, and Fields of social control among the LoDagaba,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 87: 75-104; B. Der, ‘The “Stateless Peoples” of North-West Ghana: A Reappraisal of the Case of the Dagara of Nandom’, University of Cape Coast, Dept. of History, unpublished ms.; K. Yelapaala. 1983. “Circular arguments and self-fulfilling definitions: “statelessness” and the Dagaaba,” *History in Africa*, 10: 349-85.

⁹¹ Kopytoff, *The African Frontier*, 1989: 5.

By keeping the secret of the fabrication of regalia, autochthons were able to control political power and make sure it did not encroach upon ritual authority.⁹²

The historiography of acephalous societies is very much steeped in narratives of state formation of centralised polities. Contrary to indigenous narratives, the colonial accounts tapped into foundational myths, legends and tropes of centralised polities, as well as classical European and British history. In this perspective, stateless societies were merely a *residue*, an aborted result of frequent movements of people, of the activities of conquering immigrants, better armed, better equipped and more cunning. They were *prestate* people unable to approximate the ways of people organised in centralised, more sophisticated polities. Thus, the too common narrative goes: “conquerors expelled indigenes, who in turn became invaders elsewhere, displacing other natives and so forth, until the colonial powers finally pacified the region.”⁹³ But statelessness was always a social construction that acted as the negative reflection of order—epitomised by a centralised system—and/or a justification for invasion. Kopytoff remarks that “[societies] often define neighbouring areas as lacking any legitimate political institutions and as being open to legitimate

⁹² M. Gomgnimbou. 2009. ‘Les Chefferies «sans Etats» chez les Populations Dites «Gurunsi»,’ *Histoire des Royaumes et Chefferies au Burkina Faso Précolonial*. P. C. Hien and M. Gomgnimbou. Ouagadougou, DIST(CNRST): 329-331, p. 338.

⁹³Lentz, “A Dagomba Rebellion,” 1994: 476. Traditions of origin in Balsa recount the foundation of Balsa (using the story of the ‘disembowled woman’) by a Mamprusi ancestor following a royal scandal and in order to escape murder, see R. Scholt. 1993. “Le Caillou et la Boue. Les Traditions Orales en tant que Legitimation des Autorites Traditionnelles chez les Balsa (Ghana) et Lyela (Burkina Faso).” *Paideuma* 39: 145-162, pp. 146-7, 150.

intrusion and settlement; this was the case even for areas which were in fact already occupied by organised polities. [The] frontier is above all a political fact“,⁹⁴ it was a social construction of state-builders. Gomgnimbou relates traditions in Pô, in southern Burkina, of the ‘founder’ of the principality, Naaba Bilgo, an unsuccessful contender to political competition, found refuge in Pô which was at the time already occupied by Tamona and Zénian groups; he negotiated a form of collaborative rule with the local ritual authority. On the other hand, Mossi inhabitants of Pô, particularly those of the village of Assio (Bilgo) are adamant that Mossi rule in the principality was established on an ‘empty’ area.⁹⁵

The recent revalorisation of *statelessness*, as escape from the stifling and constraining forces of centralised polities, offers alternative accounts to a rigid but still lingering historical dichotomy (state vs. prestate). James Scott uses, for instance, public and hidden transcripts in gauging apparent and more subtle ways in which people and communities resist(ed) power in South East Asia. In Scott’s account of statelessness from the perspective of stateless people, state-making appears as a form of ‘internal colonialism’. This account offers new, challenging insight and as well as a fresh understanding of what ‘civilisation’ is and what ‘primitivism’ is not. It also affords a better understanding of organisational options within and outside forms of centralising political bodies. The concept of ‘primitivism’ is in fact analytically problematic “since it refers to

⁹⁴ “ Kopyoff, “the Internal African Frontier,” 1987: 11.

⁹⁵ M. Gomgnimbou. 2003 “Toponymie et Histoire Nationale: Le Cas de la Ville de Pô au Burkina Faso,” *Science et Technique*, 24(1): 79-88, p. 84.

a beginning which it does nothing to portray.”⁹⁶ In contrast to the Mossi project to construct a ‘society for a state’,⁹⁷ stateless groups constructed societies ‘against’ the state. In fact, Tallensi, Builsa, Kusase, Dagara, Lobi, and other *stateless* societies trace their descent from Mamprusi and other Mossi founders, but opted out of the model that crystallised political centralisation in these polities.⁹⁸ They were able to maintain the primacy of ritual rule over political power. Gomgnimbou contends that amongst the Kasena and the Nuna of southern Burkina, the political chief, *pê* or *pio*, was essentially perceived and treated like a stranger and as such was expected to follow the rules of the land. In Kasena country, a proverb goes that “the chief governs the country, but the land does not belong to him [*pê ti lugu mo si o bitega ti*].”⁹⁹ Amongst Nuna and Kasena, political power is relatively a much ‘milder’ version of the Mossi-Mamprusi model of centralised power, as chiefship is essentially given substance by the ritual. Nonetheless, influences from these persist for instance in the devolution of power, which is hereditary and confined to sons of chiefs.

The colonial administrative tendency to accompany ‘the natural course of evolution’ of stateless societies by fostering the consolidation of powerful

⁹⁶ Wolf, *Europe and the People without History*, 1982: 88; see J. Scott. 2009. *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

⁹⁷ The expression is from Michel Izard

⁹⁸ See Drucker-Brown, “Mamprusi Installation,” 1989: 500; Rattray 1932; Fortes 1945.

⁹⁹ M. Gomgnimbou. 2009 “Les Chefferies «sans Etats» chez les Populations Dites «Gurunsi»” In P. C. Hien and M. Gomgnimbou. *Histoire des Royaumes et Chefferies au Burkina Faso Précolonial*. Ouagadougou: DIST(CNRST), p. 329-331.

groups organised into 'native states' was a logical acceleration of a process that was to fuse families into lineages and clans then 'tribes' and nations.¹⁰⁰ This followed colonial officials' will to extract from 'history' the justification for their policies towards merging or separating societies. Colonial obsession with centralised polities as instances of 'civilised' and advanced social structures informed their treatment of different groups. Thus the Lobi for instance provided colonial administrators with such a baffling case of 'primitivism' which represented the quintessential example of the pre-state society:

(...) from an anthropological standpoint the Lobi are very interesting and important, as they represent the most primitive stage in the evolution found among the whole of the tribes falling into what I have termed the Mole (Mossi) group..., a stage moreover through which all the other tribes have probably passed.¹⁰¹

Luckily, we now know a little bit more about stateless societies, and not just as the slightly corrected perspective of 'communalism' or 'tribal democracy', or the limited perspective of their integration into the global political economy of the slave trade as outlying slave-hunting grounds for centralised societies. Until the 1960s little historical research was conducted on the Black Volta region, this compared to the relative attention that was being devoted to the Voltaic states of Mamprusi, Wa, Dagomba, Gonja, and the Mossi.¹⁰² Moreover, in colonial and post-colonial Burkina Faso, some of the

¹⁰⁰ See Lentz, "A Dagara Rebellion," 1994: 469.

¹⁰¹ R. S. Rattray, 1932. *The Tribes of Ashanti Hinterland*, 2 vols. Oxford: OUP, pp. ii, 425.

¹⁰² E.E.Pritchard and Fortes (1940: 1-23) most explicitly conceptualised the dichotomy 'state' and 'stateless' societies whilst Sharpe provided a pertinent critique of what became held as conventional knowledge on stateless societies, see B. Sharpe. 1986. "Ethnography and a Regional System: Mental Maps and the Myth of States and Tribes in North-central Nigeria,"

characteristics of statelessness described by Scott, namely resistance against the repressive policies of the centralised state, such as forced labour, head taxes, conscription, were responsible for mass migration towards Cote d'Ivoire and the Gold Coast, and mass flight into the *aires-refuges*, outlying areas outside the control and the exactions of the Mossi kingdoms and later the colonial administration and national governments.¹⁰³ Asiwaji notes that flight from colonial oppression was merely "a continuation of the tradition of politically motivated migrations of the preceding epochs"¹⁰⁴ through which ordinary people expressed dissatisfaction towards oppressive authorities.

Already during colonial times, the view was widespread that the non-centralised nature of stateless societies could partly be explained by the oppressive nature of centralisation, the victims of which were too happy to 'escape'. S. D. Nash, the well informed District Commissioner of northern Ghana in the early period of colonisation, explained Tallensi resistance to colonial efforts to 'bring them in' as a result of the centralised states' rapacity towards them during that period. He reported that "The whole of the Grunshi towns formed, in former times, the happy hunting ground for the Moshi, Mamprusi and

Critique of Anthropology, VI: 33-65.

¹⁰³ See M. Breusers. 1999. "The Making of History in Colonial Haute Volta: Border Conflicts Between Two Moose Chieftaincies, 1900-1940," *Journal of African History*, 40: 447-467 and M. J. Echenberg. 1975. "Paying the Blood Tax: Military Conscription in French West Africa, 1914-19," *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 9: 171-192.

¹⁰⁴ A. I. Asiwaju. 1976. "Migrations as Revolt: The Example of the Ivory Coast and the Upper Volta before 1945," *The Journal of African History*, 17(4): 577-594, p. 579.

Dagomba when in search of slaves. [...] and so fresh is this in the memory of the people... that they run away on the approach of strangers.”¹⁰⁵

CONCLUSION

The migrationist perspective demonstrates that, although there might have been ecological, economic or social or territorial motives to population movements in the Voltaic region, the ideological imperative, more specifically memories of migration played a far more important role in shaping the political and social structures of Mossi states. Even in places where the encounter migrant/firstcomer did not lead to a form of centralised polity, the ideology of *Naam* still served to conceptualise and demarcate areas of competence and intervention in ways similar to those prevailing in centralised structures.

When the assumption of Mossi as a foreign category is accepted, the treatment of the Voltaic state-builders, of indigenous Ninisi, Fulsi, Kipirsi, Kassena, Nunuma, Sissala, Ko, Kuasi, Konkomba and other native groups generally accounts for the type of social formation later adopted. If the Mossi combined force and negotiation, the Dagomba are said to have been more radical towards indigenous peoples, hence the limited role accorded to earth priests in decision making.

The Mossi-Mamprusi-Dagomba link is undeniable; as the Mamprusi see it: '*ti zaa nyela yimu* (we are all one)'.¹⁰⁶ Yet, the intricate web of connections, at

¹⁰⁵ NAG ADM 56/1/61, Report on the Navarro District, Jan.-June 1911, by SD Nash in Allman and Parker, *Tongnaab*, 2005: 32.

the linguistic, cultural, and ritual levels are blurred by different strategies adopted in coping with the first/latecomer dichotomy. In all this, the historical linkages between these societies are still a matter of conjectural discussion; the contribution of firmer archaeological findings should help provide more precise dates and historical indications.

The model of state formation through the process of fission of a central nucleus and spread of the ruling aristocracy is in no sense unique to the Voltaic states. However one will not easily find a more frontier-like process than that which gave birth to the Mossi-Mamprusi-Dagomba state system. The trope of the adventurous hunter in search for game is quite a common account of origin amongst the Voltaic peoples. The encounter with first settlers (earth spirits/priests) lead to ritual agreement between the two groups; the new comers paying respect to the earth divinity through sacrifices in order to 'pacify' it. In the Mossi case, collaboration hinged upon an attempt to deploy *Naam* over a territory which the state did not control.

¹⁰⁶ D. C. Davis. 1987. "Then the White Man Came with his Whitish Ideas: the British and the Evolution of Traditional Government in Mampurugu." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 20(4): 627-646.

CHAPTER THREE

Ideology of Power and Social Authority: Naam or that which Reordered the World

INTRODUCTION

Power is a multi-valued ideology in the sense that it implies a multi-layered value system, a combination of ideologies and appeals to a variety of interpretations. When we discuss it in the context of Moogo, there are aspects of it that challenge our understanding of it in western traditional discourses. It is thus important to apprehend *Naam* also from a comparative perspective. If the Weberian conception of power, in its basics and more sophisticated strands, points to a capacity to effect an outcome, *Naam* implies a definition of power that owes much to both the actual and perceived might of political authority, but even more to a number of diffuse elements having to do with *rog-n-miki* (customs, cultural heritage) and the nature of Mossi society whereby social action is performed in the context of binding forms of interdependency between members of collective units.¹ According to Maurice Bazemo, *rog-n-miki* is “(...)

¹ *Rog-n-miki* is difficult to translate. Informants explain it as the system of values and

that force that perpetuates the past. It enacts history. Through [*rog-n-miki*], the past and the future are lived in the present. It is a force that creates durability in favour of a socio-political order the biggest beneficiary of which was the royal [family].”² The crucial question becomes: what does *Naam* tell us about power, in Mossi society, pre-colonial and present?

In its deployment as principle of authority and political strategy in Moogo, *Naam*'s role was to restructure the social order and by extension the whole world (Moogo). In the context of the *emergence* of the state in the Voltaic region, the mechanisms of *Naam* are crucial to a better understanding of the making of state and society in pre-colonial West Africa. The extent of *Naam*'s institutional reach, its institutional arrangements, its normative consensus, its structural coherence and transgenerational continuity are usually recognised as its key characteristics. I do not however treat these as intrinsic properties of *Naam*. The interplay of the mechanisms of rule is used to treat *Naam as fundamentally problematic*. The conditions for the consolidation of these characteristics are thus important, historically, for a better understanding of the multiple connections in historically changing and unevenly bounded social alignments.

traditions that their ancestors had transmitted to later generations. They translate it as “je suis né trouver; “for example in my family, we cannot eat the heart of animals or kill a lizard because it is our totem. We don't eat the heart of animals because we have to be strong in order to serve the Naaba as warriors. Our ancestor in the past ate the heart of an animal in order to become a strong warrior.” [Ila Ouedraogo, Interview, Ouahigouya, April 16, 2010].

² M. Bazemo. 1993 “Captivité et Pouvoirs dans l'Ancien Royaume de Ouagadougou à la Fin du XIXe Siècle,” *Dialogues d'Histoire Ancienne*, 19(1): 191-204, pp. 199-200.

More importantly for the history of state formation in the Voltaic region, *Naam* was a reordering principle that crystallised the state around its ideology. *Naam* made the state and determined its historical trajectory. It validated the state's capacity to intervene beyond its conventional remit. It constructed a model which, from its Mamprusi blueprint, took on a number of local specificities, but maintained the defining dichotomy between *Naam* and *Tênga* on the one hand and the principle of expansion through fission of political authority on the other. Thus, the overall political system was unified by derivation of *Naam* and its periodic return to the place of origin, Mamprusi, either metaphorically or ritually. In all this, *Naam* ideology was deployed to maintain the proper orchestration between *Naam* and *Tênga*, between political authority³ and the *land* over which it presided. So much so that, in the greater scheme of things, *Tênga* appears as a subaltern institution. If technological change was partly the impetus that precipitated state formation, *Naam* was such a novelty, and Mossi migrations the forward drive that provided the dynamism for the reproduction of a model of political authority.

This conceptual chapter is concerned with the examination of the theoretical fundamentals of power in Moogo. It presents a configuration of power according to the principles of its creation, exercise and devolution both within royal and dynastical kin groups and vis-à-vis the political community. In a social structure hinging upon the distinction between the realm of political power

³ As discussed in this chapter, it would seem that the Mossi *Naam* encompasses both meanings of capacity (power) and right (authority), hence the interchangeable use of the two terms throughout the thesis.

(over people) and that of the ritual control (over land), the articulation of identity was also an attempt to assign social roles to groups according to settlement histories, patterns of migration but most importantly people's lineal affiliation.⁴ The chapter demonstrates that overlapping areas between the ideal (theoretical construct) and the historical (power politics and territorial expansion) constitute the moments of tension; they reveal the contradictory nature of political authority caught between purpose (realising the state project) and disengagement (*Naam's* universalising discourse applies to a minority only).

The ideological basis of the political system rested on the exclusive character of *Naam* and the idea that *nakombsé* (sing. *nakombga*, member of the extended royal lineage) were born with an intrinsic right to rule people, in other words to possess *naam*. *Naam* presents a conceptual construction which acknowledges, at the expense of history, the importance of blood affiliation as the basis for the structuration of the state. The chapter introduces the notion of *Naam* as initially envisaged as the theoretical foundation of a nascent and expanding state. The Mossi state was devised so as to establish a strict congruence between dynastical history and territorial expansion at the junction of which a mechanism of power devolution, a system of social categorisation as well as the consolidation of the state's moral orientation would be established. This however remains a purely theoretical framework whose purpose is to

⁴ V. Vinel. 2000. "Etre et devenir 'Sikoomsé': Identité et Initiation en Pays Moaaga," *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 40(158): 257-279.

inform initial attempts at state theorising in a given society. Whilst the guiding principles of *Naam system* points to an abstract model—it maintained that its principles and arrangements were static—the reality was that a great amount of flexibility and institutional movement were possible, and did occur in the course of territorial expansion and political centralisation. Some of the consequences of changing trends over the course of Mossi history will be explored in subsequent chapters. *Naam* ideology adapted through historical changes through a continuous elaboration of the principles of political rule and the imperatives of social identity vis-à-vis its (*Naam*) workings.

This chapter is organised in four sections. First, it briefly explores the origins and conceptual foundation of *Naam*. It then attempts to draw a comparative overview between a Weberian understanding of power as capacity and right and the contribution of *Naam* to the debate of power. It argues that *Naam* (literally: that which allows someone to lead) has more to do with the sources of power than the capacity to influence specific outcomes. *Naam* does not necessarily stress capacity but the dynamics, perceived and lived, that underlie and enable that capacity. *Naam* introduces elements of perception in the interaction of power holders and those over which power is exercised. The chapter then looks at the implications of the contradistinction between *Naam* and *Tênga*, the political versus the ritual, it demonstrates that this demarcation had to bear degrees of flexibility in order to effect and support the process of assimilation that required interpenetration for the expansion of the *Moos bûudu* (comprising all descendants of the founding ancestor, Ouedraogo). The *Naam/Tênga* antagonism was a construct that derived from *Naam*'s own logic of

state formation, office formation and transmission, and does therefore not reflect *Tênga's* assumptions upon Mossi view of social structure. It is this construct that the last section tries to analyse in light of its implications in terms of social categorisation, political hierarchy, social integration and also in relation to notions of ethnicity.

3. 1. Conceptualising *Naam*: Origins of a Peculiar Concept

Izard places the 'invention' of *Naam* in Pusga, in southern Burkina. *Naam's* invention amounted to a conceptual big-bang, an absolute theoretical beginning that gave impetus to a particular worldview, from which derived a collective destiny articulated around a unique form of social organisation. *Naam* from its source flowed to the diverse places that later made up its polities, in other words, the Mossi-Mamprussi-Dagomba system. Various translated in English as 'power' or political authority, *Naam* is best understood as referring to the nature and sources of power and political authority. Depending on the context, it can take meanings as varied as 'principle of authority', 'that which allows a man to rule people', and 'domination'. *Naam* is put forth as a construct, a framework with which to envisage the strategic relationships and the networks of interaction it enables or justifies, and that shape the terms under which the Mossi state was experienced by its different social components. *Naam* transacts the exercise of authority and power in an ahistorical thrust.⁵ It is the object and the subject of the fact of the state, the foundational basis as much as the element of completeness of the Mossi state project. In this respect, reference

⁵ Izard, *Moogo*, 2003.

to its historicity poses the issue of the institutional formation of the state and of society. The latter did not generate the former, as is commonly the case in most contemporary models of political formation. In fact, the Mossi as peoples are a product of Moogo, as well as a by-product of its formation. State formation preceded social formation in many meaningful ways. Mossi society emerged out of a series of mutations that shuffled the configuration of social categories in an iterative way. The state itself existed in a condition of project and was subject to alterations across generations; its boundaries were never completely sealed, its objectives never totally fulfilled and its features never totally established at the time of colonial conquest.⁶ *Naam* is thus, in essence, a project unfolding in time and space that models an ever perfectible institution. However, *Naam* as ideology of governance is a multivalent idea; it appeals to a variety of interpretations on the basis of a particular rulers or ruling segments.

The meticulous formulations and elaborations of *Naam* denote one of two things: either the Mossi did have a serious concern for social order(ing) or they had an immoderate taste for power.⁷ The large number of *Naam* holders and the position of *Naam* as an incontrovertible element of the state have generated and developed political skills amongst communities of power holders and aspirants. For the *nakombsé*, as one informant contends, “*Naam* has to be fought for. *Naam* is not *Naam* if it is just given (...). The *nakombga* lives for *Naam*, he exists

⁶ M. Izard. 1992. *L'Odyssée du Pouvoir. Un Royaume Africain: Etat, Société, Destin Individuel*. Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, pp. 7-9.

⁷ The issue of 'order' seems to be a prominent preoccupation in the way *Naam* relates to its sites of interventions; this issue is developed more fully below.

because of *Naam*.”⁸ The Mossi also say: *Naam ya pu wèga* or *Naam ya pug neéré* (*Naam* is an unoccupied field (awaiting occupation): it has to be conquered’ or that ‘*Naam* is a beautiful young woman, it is only the most skilful, the most deserving who will conquer it. The *zab-yuuya* (sing. *zab-yuure*, shibboleth-title) illustrate particularly well the difficult circumstances that preside over competition for power. For instance, Naaba Nabigswěndé, founder of Busma and son of a Ouagadougou chief, Mogho Naaba Kumdumyé, took the following *zab-yuure*. *sugr belem moog-dam bugum kon damb sege* (tolerance wins people; it toys with fire but cannot circle around it). In other words, no man can handle fire with his bare hands without hurting himself, an evocation of the particularly difficult circumstances that presided over his election.⁹ On the other hand, the *nakombga*’s life is a relentless quest for a particular *Naam*; his very *raison d’être* is to hold *a naam*. Every fibre of his being longs after power. The saying goes that the *nakombga* does not relinquish the pursuit of *Naam*, until seven days after death; some even say seven years.¹⁰

For the *nakombga*, death is a better prospect than being or becoming a *talga* (pl. *talsé*) or commoner: “If you ask a *nakombga*, he would say he would rather die. Because the *nakombga* needs *Naam*; and he does not have it, he has to be a *Naaba* of something, for example a Saab-Naaba (master blacksmith) or even

⁸ Ila Ouedraogo, Interview, Ouahigouya April 15 2010

⁹ D. S. Sawadogo. 1994. *Recherches sur l’Histoire de l’Etat Moaga de Busma*. Mémoire de DEA, Université de Paris I -Panthéon-Sorbonne, Centre de Recherches Africaines, UFR Histoire, p. 60.

¹⁰ Ousmane Ouedraogo, Interview, Ouahigouya, April 14, 2010

tengsoba but never *talga*.”¹¹ The succession structure of office suggests that a great number of claimants to office eventually get ‘downgraded’ into the category of *talsé*, the implication being that mossiness was disseminated through a form of ‘colonisation’ of the commoners’ (*talsé*) space, social and political, by the *nakombsé*. This is very much the implication drawn in the writings of Iazard, Nacanabo and other Mossi scholars. However, when one discusses with the Mossi, in particular the *nakombsé*, they are adamant that the *nakombsé* never falls into the category of *talsé*.¹² Now, it is possible to see, in contemporary *nakombsé*’s position, a late nineteenth century ‘radicalisation’, one affecting in particular those of Ouagadougou whereby increased centralisation may have raised the stakes of office competition and idealised the qualities of *naam*? For if the *nakombga* could become a *tengbîiga* (autochthon), a chief blacksmith or a fulga-naaba (chief of Fulsé autochthons)—in other words, a *naaba of something*—in order to avoid becoming a *talga*, because that would effectively undermine future political career, he effectively switched socio-professional categories, hence lineal identity. He becomes a ‘nominal noble’ with no political prospects.

For political rulers, *Naam* provides a form of territoriality defined by ancestral history and migration. The connections that link *Naam*’s peripheral boundaries do not define the centre of the kingdom as its political core. Rather, ancestral references to lineage and origin define kingship (not kingdom) and kinship. Ancestral history and conventions—whether specific episodes

¹¹ Noufou Ouedraogo, Interview, Ouagadougou, December 6, 2009

¹² Ali Ouedraogo Interview, Ouagadougou April 12 2010

referring to pacts concluded with *têngabiïse*, or the consecration of regalia—give spatial meaning to the territoriality of *Naam*: “territory as related to the *Naam* is the spatial support of words, gestures and acts performed in contexts of the historical project of creation [of the state]”¹³ In other words, as one informant puts it, “le *Naam* peut tout approprier, les personnes et les biens, mais il n’approprié pas le territoire. Il s’ajuste au territoire.” [*Naam* can appropriate everything, people and things but it does not own the territory. It adjusts to it].¹⁴ Political power radiates outward from a given base; it is necessarily centralised when it is concerned with territorial control. The royal court was always a temporary source of political authority since every new *Naaba* tended to build a new residence which could become permanent ceremonial centre, ritualised and institutionalised in its ability to edict normative references.

On the other hand, the necessary preservation of spiritual boundaries distinguishes territoriality as defined by the *Naam* from its conceptualisation according to *Tênga*. The latter is the realm of moral control of social behaviour, sacrifices and “magic wars [meant] to capture the souls of the millet.”¹⁵ It is an area of spiritual contemplation removed from concerns over territorial expansion or politics and rather devoted to the preservation of its own condition. As one informant put it:

¹³ Luning, *Izard Review*, 1992; 515.

¹⁴ Noufou Ouedraogo, Interview, Ouagadougou, December 6, 2009

¹⁵ M. Izard, *L’Odyssée*, 1992: 133.

The kibsi, the Nyonyonse, and the gurunshi have their own thinking; they have their own culture, their sacrifices, their festivals, etc, but they don't have *naam*, the *naam-tibo*, *naam-gango* [regalia], the moon retreat, the *ringu* (enthronement voyage), etc. some people sacrifice dogs, cats and donkeys; we sacrifice sheep, cows, and chickens. Everybody has their own ways.¹⁶

And so the realm of *Naam* rests on cultural references different from those of *Tênga*. In reality, the realm of rituals imposes an ideological limit which translates into a territorial limit to the expansion of the Mossi state.¹⁷ The two realms coexist in mutual acceptance of differentiated realities: belief and rituals on the one hand and politics on the other. A Weberian appreciation of such distinction could be 'politics as vocation' versus 'belief as vocation'. Such a dichotomic conception of society is however not unique to the Mossi; it at works in other societies in West and Central Africa, whether or not these were centralised states. Harms studied the social organisation of the Nunu in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo; he found that "the political theory of the Nunu, like that of peoples in many parts of Africa, had long distinguished between guardians of the land and guardians of the people [political rulers]. According to this theory, strangers who settled in an unoccupied part of a guardian's territory could continue to be governed by their own headmen provided they recognised the ritual control of the original guardian over the land."¹⁸ Occupation did not therefore necessarily entail ownership, as was

¹⁶ Mouni Ouedraogo, Interview, Ouagadougou, 7 December, 2009

¹⁷ M. Izard. 1973. "La Lance et les Guenilles." *l'Homme* 13: 139-149, p. 140.

¹⁸ R. W. Harms. 1987. *Games against Nature: an Eco-cultural History of the Nunu of Equatorial Africa*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

believed by first European settlers in many parts of Africa during colonial expansion.¹⁹

The Mossi state was then enclosed, from the 16th century onwards, within ritual boundaries that gave it a physical existence. A double obstacle thwarted the state's territorial project: the ambivalent relationship that prevailed between earthpriests and Mossi chiefs and the limits this imposed on Mossi control over actual villages and territorial divisions. In Moogo as in many other pre-colonial states, the pressure to differentiate land and political control was almost inexistent; the low density of population and the large amounts of open land were a contrast to the history of state formation in Europe whereby high population densities, combined with limited land meant there could be little ambiguity in the demarcation of control over territory. Thus, Herbst would remark, "the development of particular notions of sovereignty is highly dependent on a particular political geography and is not simply the culmination of a particular line of legal thinking."²⁰ One could additionally argue that particular notions of sovereignty also reflect particular ontological commitments which have proved effective as contributory explanations of social structures amongst certain societies. Some of these issues are further discussed below.

¹⁹ See B. Webb and J. B. Wright. 1978. *A Zulu king speaks. Statements made by Cetshwayo kaMpande on the history and customs of his people*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, p. 1. In Herbst, *States and Power*, 2000: 40 on the case of the Zulu and their conflicts with white settlers.

²⁰ Herbst, *Sates and Power*, 2000: 41.

3. 2. Two Conceptions of Power

If it seems easy to demonstrate how the conception of power in the *Naam* model is different from more conventional, for instance Weberian conception of power, it is not so easy to envisage the contribution of the practice of *Naam* to our understanding of power generally speaking. For the *Naam* model created and sustained a form of society that also escapes common definitions of society. The type of society created by the *Naam* ideology was one defined from the perspective of the *Naam* structure. In other words, were relevant to Mossi society only those social segments whose socio-professional activities related—one way or another—to the practice of *Naam*. For *Naam*, the social is also, or strictly, the political. And the political is thought around the exercise of power by a few. Society cannot therefore be appropriately apprehended outside the object of political rule. This vision of society challenges many orthodoxies that consider it [society] as a given, unproblematic entity. It is true that the state endeavoured to demarcate itself from 'society' through rituals and pomp and all the royal trappings. At the same time however, it strove to imbue society with a *sense of the state* as necessary and inevitable, and this was achieved through the agency of *Naam*. The point of this is that a general theory of power would be unfruitful and unhelpful as it cannot account for historical change. Power is best understood when analysed as history, after it has been exercised.²¹ Power in the Mossi experience is defined as the element of completion which concludes the construction of society once 'work' has

²¹ For overviews of analyses of power, see Lukes 1978, Hindess 1996, Mann 1986, Giddens 1984.

transformed the world.²² There is more to so-called passage from nature to culture than a mere injection of civilisational conscience. In that sense, power was never fully defined nor fully integrated to ongoing social processes its advent had disrupted.

The concept of society with the nation-state system is ultimately bound to Weber's ideas on social action and the separation between public and private spheres. This concept of society might be revisited in the light of the Mossi example. It would seem that society in the Mossi context was a political community of loose hierarchical units over which *Naam* held sway. Society cannot therefore be always understood as a recognisable population within a given territory but as in this case a historical community created around a given ideology. Latin usage of the word *societas* for instance had a limited political meaning in so far as it pointed to forms of alliance between people for a specific purpose or task, "as when men organise in order to rule others or to commit a crime." In that sense, the substitution of the political for the social betrays a recent understanding of society.²³

In any case, it is useful to draw a comparative overview between Weberian perspectives and Mossi perspectives on power. This is not the place to explore the full range of versions of Weberian perspectives on power but a few remarks could be made. In western political philosophy, there are two main conceptions of power.²⁴ On one hand, power is viewed, in *quantitative* terms, as

²² Izard, *Gens du Pouvoir*, 1985: 16.

²³ H. Arendt. 1958. *The Human Condition*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 34-5.

²⁴ Although there is a tendency to bundle the diverse trends into a generalising, 'western

the capacity to act and effect a desired outcome. On the other hand, power is a capacity and right to act, generated by the people over whom it is exercised, regardless of whether this right is acquired through coercion or consent. The second conception of power, put simply, is a matter of unequal relationship characterized by domination between two or more actors. Weber's definition of power, widely endorsed in western political thought, aptly captures this phenomenon. For Weber, power has to do with "the chance of a man or a number or men to realise their own will even against the resistance of others who are participating in this action."²⁵ Moreover, Hindess rightly notes that even Giddens's important corrective to a widespread tendency to concentrate over those who hold power through his analysis of the structured properties of power, individual, collective in social system, does not detract from the same model of power as domination/influence. In fact Giddens defines power as "the capability of individual to make a difference" to a pre-existing state of affairs."²⁶ Having said that, a conception of power as capacity does not necessarily exclude the possibility—also widely debated—of the existence of consent of those over whom power is being exercised, even though this was not explicitly included in Weber's concept.

As capacity to act, *Naam* is much like the conception of power in western philosophical thought; it is however in the implications of the second postulate

thought', the different strands would tend to fall into these two trends.

²⁵ M. Weber. 1978. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

²⁶ A. Giddens. 1984: *The Constitution of Society*. Oxford: Polity, p. 14 in B. Hindess. 1996. *Discourses of Power: from Hobbes to Foucault*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, p. 97.

that its practice poses a challenge to common understandings. *Naam* literally means ‘that which allows someone to rule people’. It is a quality woven in an intricate set of beliefs that attach divine attributes to its acquisition. One informant explains the nuances which a distinction between *Naam* and its violent manifestation (*pānga*) reveal: “Now, there are two ways to understand *Naam*. *Pānga* is the physical force, it is violence but *Naam* is also customary power and it is contained in many things, not just physical violence, for example the *naam-tiibo*, the *naam-gango* (royal regalia), etc. and that is the reason why the Yatenga Naaba is called *pāsé*, it is because of the *naam-tiibo*, the *naam-gango*, the *naam* muburi, etc. we say here, “the power is in Ouahigouya” and that is because we have the regalia here from Ouagadougou.”²⁷

In order to understand what that particular quality refers to, it is helpful to use the example of Naaba Kango (1757-1787), one of the most famous Yatenga *nanamse*, remembered for his determination to expand the territorial limits of Yatenga. Naaba Kango went on exile to Kong and Segou for years, after being overthrown in the 1750s, and came back strong and triumphant and ruled with an iron fist; he spurned a number of royal rituals, including the *ringu*, the enthronement voyage. Because of this, Kango was not a *dima* (*rima*) a sovereign whose descendants were *nabîise* or *dimbio* entitled to compete as Yatenga Naaba.²⁸ Naaba Kango’s rule is said to have been based on violence and oppression. Kango was a *pāngsoba* (holder of *pānga*) rather than a *rima* since he did not receive part of the regalia that are given during the enthronement

²⁷ Ila Ouedraogo, Interview, April 16, 2010

²⁸ See figure 1, chapter 2.

voyage (*ringu*) which he shunned, the elders consider his rule to have been vitiated by a lack of *legitimacy*; it lacked that *quality* which naked violence could not achieve. The point of all this is to highlight a dimension of Mossi *Naam*, that stresses that very quality that makes *Naam* acceptable. This has to do with legitimacy as envisaged within the limits of *rog-n-miki* ('tradition', custom). *Rog-n-miki* points to the requirement of conformity to collective morality. Contrary to jural custom that presided over everyday conflicts, *rog-n-miki* was not subject to change for it had to preserve the integrity of jural corporateness.²⁹ In this sense, power, in the *Naam* model, is right and capacity to act within the confines of *rog-n-miki*; the latter would then be that which mediates and defines state intervention. In other words, *Naam* is undistinguishable from the sources of its own legitimacy and this is where it fundamentally differs from Weberian notions of power as capacity and right. Interestingly, *Naam's* legitimacy was forged upon the guiding principles of *Tênga's* and *rog-n-miki* was a concept stranger to realm of the political.

Michael Mann offers a relatively more sophisticated analysis of power, in particular his treatment of 'social power' as a form of domination strategy that takes place between social categories but also as a result of collective action to

²⁹ Rog-n-miki is that source of knowledge which has theoretically recorded the entire body of knowledge and law of society, once and for all; it was thus at the heart of the exegetics of 'tradition' in Moogo. A similar distinction exists in Asante law, between *aman mmu* ('immemorial custom that ordered a community') and *aman bre* (jural custom subject to legislative change); see McCaskie, *State and Society*, 1991: 87-90.

dominate *and* organise.³⁰ Mann combines Marxist and Weberian traditions of social theory on the production and distribution of social inequality. Here is not the place for an extensive discussion of the implications of Mann's invaluable analysis of the constitutive aspect of social power, namely from an economic, political, cultural and ideological perspectives, on the institutional development of the state and the dynamics of state/society relations. What however is worthy of attention is that despite the relatively sophisticated level of analysis, Mann does not depart much from the fundamental view of power as capacity: capacity to yield greater economic resources, capacity to exert greater political power, capacity to deploy enduring cultural influence and capacity to impose particular ideological references over people.

In Mann's approach to society as "constituted of multiple overlapping and intersecting sociospatial networks of power," society is not a bounded reality, in social and geographical space. It is therefore not dominated by any single source of power. Neither is it a closed cultural unit that interacts with other closed units by 'diffusing' aspects of its social organisation.³¹ Even if one agrees with Mann's view on networks of power, the extent and impact of *Naam* in reorganising state and society—not at one particular moment, but throughout the history of the Mossi state—comes as a contradiction to his dismissal of a power as having that 'systemic property' that encompasses the social project. *Naam* is that *systemic property* that bounds society within a

³⁰ Mann, *Sources of Social Power I*, 1986: 6.

³¹ Mann, *Sources of Social Power*, I, 1986: 1-2.

frame/framework made of two realities, endogenous and exogenous. It positions itself as the single most important element in society and thus its core organising principle.

Naam possesses both the transcendent and immanent qualities Mann attributes to his type of ideological power. On the one hand, it is a transcendent view of social authority, it unites people around ultimately meaningful—and divinely granted—common qualities; these qualities are presented as the essence of people and groups divided according to their social activity: the practice of politics, blacksmithing, farming, land-tilling, singing, trading, etc. This is essentially a definition of population groups in terms of the rule they accept for themselves. On the other hand, ideological power is immanent in the sense that it gives “a sense of ultimate significance and meaning in the cosmos” to particular groups, thus strengthening its internal morale. It structures and it strengthens its normative solidarity and gives it common rituals and aesthetic practices.³² Where Mossi notions of power however differ from Mann’s view of the ideological as transcendental is in enabling a reorganising spurt by rallying forces and power configurations as laid in its conceptualisation, with no clear separation between political and economic roles.

A central claim of this thesis, then, is that the view of power not only from a perception of its might/capacity but also a social understanding of it as the sum of its many facets—including its ritual aspect—can and does generate consent in many ways. Although there is a religious dimension to this argument—the idea that *Naam* is something bestowed by *Wende* the Mossi high

³² Mann, *Sources of Social Power*, I, 1986: 519.

divinity—the point is not so much to say that because people were subjects of a divinity, they therefore consented to state power as an act of carrying the will of the divine. As opposed to ‘modern’ tendencies that view individuals as fundamentally free, the Mossi structure sees individuals—including the ruler—as fundamentally constrained, in a way condemned to exist by and for the collectivity.³³ Consent to power in these conditions was wrought in the system of obligations brought to bear on the individual within collective units. The same obligations governed the interactions between individuals and groups, and between these and the ruling structure. This is cogently expressed in the conventions upon individual conduct (taboos, ritual violations), the limits of conformity (choice of patronym and residence), in modes of succession in the political realm (importance of birth and morality), and the modes of interaction between socio-professional groups. I discuss these ideas more fully in subsequent chapters.

Whilst *Naam* stabilises and patterns social relations within the boundaries of its framework, it also establishes an interaction cleavage between it [*Naam* framework] and *the outside*. The Mossi for instance viewed the Gurunsi—because they evolved on the fringes of the *Naam* order—as ‘uncivilised’, outside society itself, and for that reason they could legitimately be raided and captured as ‘slaves’. Equally, Mamprusi looked down upon their

³³ The family, the corporate kin group, the socio-professional category, the age-group, the village, and so on

'acephalous' neighbours as "people (who) do not know how to honour a chief".³⁴ Here, it is easy to see that relations between civilisation and 'non-civilisation' varied according to the point of the cycle reached by the latter at the time of encounter with the former. For when *Naam* named things, it had to maintain the meanings generated and was thus required to deploy discourse and ideology to keep the categories in place.

The following discussion on the politics of office succession, the implications of the duality between *Naam/Tênga*, on segmentation and the progressive divorce between state power and kinship, etc, is an indirect way of making the following crucial points. Firstly, *Naam* ideology encapsulates notions of power as capacity and right, and more crucially the sources of its legitimacy. Secondly, power in the Mossi state was a system of relations that sought to inject the properties of *Naam* in common perception of what could be termed 'citizenship'; it did so using a process of consent-weaving through social integration and ritual ruling.

3. 3. Naam, State and Society-building: Ritual Versus Political Realms

3. 3. 1. Conceptualising a society for a state

The initial 'pact' concluded between autochthonous (future earth priests) and migrant-conquerors (future chiefs), at least in Mossi accounts, seems to give the pride of place to the latter. However, the literature suggests that Mossi state building was a shared initiative and a common project in the course of which the contribution of both sides—and that of peripheral and non-state political

³⁴ Drucker-Brown. *Ritual Aspects*, 1975: 25.

entities such as the blacksmiths, indigenous *Nininsi* and the *Fulse*—were to yield an even outcome. On the one hand, the future earthpriests had the advantage of “the number, the territorial and the institutional anchorage” all crucial elements which could have prompted a social revolution—one of non-state formations—the effect of which would certainly not match that of the *nakomsé*. On the other hand, the future chiefs could count on material advantages and a past experience of the practice of the state, both necessary elements for a political revolution, they: *‘disposent de la capacité d’assujettir à la conduite d’un projet dont ils ont une claire représentation l’emploi des moyens modernes de la guerre.’*³⁵. The joint initiative was therefore to result in a socio-political revolution of an internal kind.

The *nakomsé* might have thought of themselves as the inventors and exclusive holders of the idea of power as epitomised by *Naam*. The development of the Mossi state does in fact belie the very principle of a single-handed and unilateral establishment bearing the initial characteristics of its foundation. As we will later see, there is not one single idea of *Naam* but ideas of it, moulded and imposed on its holders by the reality of the state. As theoretical foundation of state authority as well as political legitimisation of collective history, *Naam* rests upon the necessary assumptions of the following structure.

The vocation of every Moaga is to exercise power, in other words to hold a *Naam*, therefore to become a naaba and rule over (the radical *so* means to

³⁵ Izard, *Moogo*, 2003: 140-1 [they had the capacity to subdue (other groups) to an endeavour of which they had a clear representation, and the use of modern means of war].

possess) people; which entails having a rule (*solem* or command, also that which is possessed such as territory). Mossi traditions recount a migration trajectory that traces a Mossi vocation for leadership to the very beginning of history. The name of the common ancestor of all Mossi, Ouedraogo, in Mooré (wed-raogo) means stallion: the symbolism is a strong connection to a Mossi initial desire for expansion and territorial conquest led by the dynastic precursor, for “governing, like smithing, herding, or trading, is seen a vocation” by Mossi conquerors.³⁶ On the other hand, the patrilineal descendants of Ouedraogo and his companions were to form the group of royal Mossi. At this point of history, two trends are observed within Mossi royalty. On the one hand, lineal descendants of Ouedraogo became *nanamse*, their sons (*dimbissi*) had access to power. On the other hand, the collateral descendants of Ouedraogo became *komberé* or provincial rulers (in Ouagadougou). Claim of lineal descent to a hereditary chief himself claiming descent from Ouedraogo defines a *nabîga* (pl. *nabissi*) whilst claim to distant lineage somehow traceable to Ouedraogo defines the royal *nakombsé*.

The origins of the Mosi are buried in myths which find their historical relevance in two important aspects: they sanction the legitimacy of the power of the *nanamse*, and provide historical support to the Mossi political system through the consolidation of a body of traditions and migrations. The nature of the socio-historical structure in which Mossi migrants operated to negotiate political incorporation established the parameters for subsequent settlements

³⁶ Schildkrout, *People of the Zongo* 1978: 23.

and patterns of incorporation, of new migrants, in host communities. If internal rules of lineage were not so much stressed, affiliation to ruling segments within the royal dynasty was of political importance as it determined one of two possible trajectories: corporate possession or access to *Naam* was granted to the descent of *rimnamba* (sing. *rima* or sovereign) or *nabiise* (sing. *nabîga* or son of a *rima*); inversely a great number without such immediate affiliation fell into the extended group of *nakombsé* and a greater portion of these further down into the group of *talsé* commoners.

Thus, founding members of new lineage branches, kingdoms, and provinces had claims based on 'historicity' to back up their legitimacy. *Nakombsé* founding dismemberments aspired to the title of *dimdamba*; they were also *kyedouende*, in other words, those who 'submit to god only'. These *Naam* holders considered themselves equal to the *Naaba*: "[T]hus, they took the title of *Dim*. By so doing, they dramatised their claim to equality of status, if not of power, with the *Mogho Naaba*, and their determination to 'submit only to god'".³⁷ The *dimdamba* maintained a peculiar relationship with the *Mogho Naaba*; they acted at variance and with defiance toward him.³⁸ The *dimdamba* controlled their territories with little or no intervention from the father figure (the *Naaba*) even

³⁷ Skinner, *The Mossi*, 1964: 14; *dimdamba* were provincial chiefs more or less independent from the authority of the *Mogho Naaba*

³⁸ The *nayasese* (sons of the sister of a *Naaba*) were equally allowed to be at variance with their 'uncle' by virtue of a special status within the royal court although they had no pretension to power

when they had usurped power.³⁹ There were nevertheless recurring tendencies and attempts on the part of the *Naaba* “to strengthen the authority of the central government against tendencies of independence amongst the *nakombsé* of the royal family.”⁴⁰ *Naaba* and *dimdamba* were equally protective of brothers and sons who were potential rivals whose autonomous tendencies needed to be contained. However, obedience to the principle of the corporate access to *Naam* was intended to balance kingly claims to status or authority with the rules of corporate subordination and generational change. Privileges accrued to members of a ruling lineage; this group of aristocrats enjoyed a number of benefits even when they had no control over particular territories. Political downfall was therefore a hard blow to the entire lineage of a deposed ruler as it faced the bleak prospect of becoming an ordinary local group with only an ancient link to royalty and its splendour. What is apparent here is that state authority was very much enmeshed in segmentarity and was never totally liberated from its grip, even when it endeavoured to alienate the king’s kin.

3. 3. 2. Naam and the tapestry of kinship

In Moogo, sovereignty and kinship interacted in peculiar ways. Blood affiliation to the king, at the same time that it conferred a ‘noble’ status, also insured material and social privileges. For instance, uterine descent from a *Naaba*’s sister (*nayasese* or royal nephew), if it did not systematically ensure

³⁹ Skinner, *The Mossi*, 1961:55-60; 1964: 14-15.

⁴⁰ N. Levtzion. 1971. “The Early States of the Western Sudan to 1500,” In *History of West Africa*. J. F. A. Ajayi and M. Crowder. London: Longman, p. 497.

access to nobility, guaranteed a fertile alliance with the *Naaba*, hence honour, privilege, reputation, wives, and other benefits.

The Mossi principle of generational change established a clear distinction between sovereignty and kinship in the exercise of power. Although kinship and more extensively membership to the royal lineage constituted the basis upon which the ruling segment was defined and formed, sovereignty acquired meaning and was more firmly articulated outside a purely blood-based definition. If kinship was a convenient basis for political devolution, sovereignty needed to escape the constraints of 'blood' and circumvent the intricacies of kinship politics even when *Naam* was the common reference that held the different components of the royal kin together. However, the loss of prestige and privilege subsequent to the loss of *Naam* starkly revealed the fragility of kinship as the building block of the socio-political structure. When the bounds of power are torn apart, nobility and blood affiliation have no more meaning than the fugacious remnants of ancient glory. Thus, the relationship between kinship and sovereignty in the Mossi system oscillated according to a logic of social mobility occurring along generational change. Such was the case when a lineage of old stock handed over power to a younger one, either at the village or central level. The issue of kinship and sovereignty is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Leadership without nobility was not the exclusive characteristic of deposed chiefs; it also applied to those who acquired *Naam* not through lineal or collateral relations to the royal group, but through their affiliation to the royal court. It was common for sons and brothers of a *Naaba* sent to rule a local

chieftaincy to be accompanied by the sons of dignitaries (*nesomba*) serving the *Naaba* in Ouagadougou or Ouahigouya. The *nesomba* combined significant political power and influence with lowly, non-noble origins. An administrative tradition was thus instituted which carried through the reproduction of government structures at the state level in local contexts. Consequently, sons and members of the retinue of *nesomba* were liable to lose their administrative responsibilities with the downfall of the chief they served unless newly nominated chiefs deemed it appropriate to retain them in their service on the basis of merit.

It is clear that in this context too, kinship did play a role in enabling access to power to administrative servants, yet the principle of differentiation between sovereignty and kinship disallowed the establishment of a predictable succession pattern within the administrative service. Privileges enjoyed by administrators at the service of local rulers equally faded into non-systematically allocated, non-due benefits with the downfall of their *nakombsé* protectors. Although a purely Mossi construct, the title *naaba* (derived from *naam*, thus power holder) was also borne by a number of people in positions of authority. These included heads of villages with foreign populations, Gurunsi, Busansi, Yarsé (muslim traders) and occasionally Fulani, often rulers of 'alien' groups, and also descendants of indigenous groups (*Ninissi* and the *Yôyôose's* authority rested upon their capacity to control the rain and the wind) and predictably the leaders of Mossi refugee groups who fled or were expelled from

a chieftaincy over a *Naam* dispute. The earth priest was equally a '*naaba*' of a given *tênga*, its guardian and protector and his position was hereditary.

In all this, the point to be made was that there were different levels of *naam*, but only one attached to sovereignty. The latter could not be derivative from other levels. The *naam* held by the sovereign, the *rîma*, was, in its essence, constitutive; it could delegate forms of authority to different state entities, central and local. This derivative type of *naam* was always granted by a higher *naam*. In addition, there was a third type of *naam* that resulted from practice—royal servants acquiring the title *naaba* which they passed on to their descendents; particular heads of professions or guilds such as the *saab-naaba* (blacksmith) or the *fulga-naaba* (chief trader) also bore the title.

The configuration of Mossi villages placed commoners and 'slave' dwellings at the outskirts of villages, local chiefs assigned these geographical units to the responsibility of the lowest category of chiefs. The political value of patronage relationships between 'slave' chiefs and district chiefs could be fully exploited in instances of political rebellion whereby a local chief needed to demonstrate proof of his political and military support in reliance over an extended network of dependable allies. The importance of the distinction made between *Naam* and kinship was stressed in this last category of *Naam* holders. *Nakombsé* who reluctantly responded to the authority of 'slave' chiefs, for instance the Dapore Naaba, Ula Naaba and the Baglere Naaba, were ordered to toe the line of *Naam* supremacy over considerations of birth or nobility: in any instance of "conflict

between the *Naam* and the kin group, the supremacy of the *Naam* was always maintained.”⁴¹

The structure of the Mossi *naam* and by extension the Mossi state structure suggests an initial intent to re-create history, a comprehensive thrust in historical perspective, what Izard referred as a *totalisation* process.⁴² *Naam* projects even and uniform characteristics of power, even in its most local and decentralised manifestation. In other words, it conveys, regardless of the spatial and temporal circumstances, an idea of a well-devised and completed system-government, modelled upon an original format, then refined, exported and standardised across local territories. *Naam* thus assumes a comprehensive approach to state-building and society-making geared towards the accomplishment of a community of purpose and destiny. How it achieved this goal is a long process of historical initiatives and a combination of circumstances wherein lineage politics and the resistance of social forces played an important role.

People’s subscription to state power was enabled in a rather open system of government; the despotic tendencies of some of the power holders did not seem to discourage participation to the logic of power in its most oppressing embodiments. In fact, the creation of a new political structure required the incorporation of aspects of state ideological structure in the collective articulation of customs and beliefs (chapter 6). This stretched the possibilities of

⁴¹ Skinner, *The Mossi*, 1964: 18.

⁴² Izard, *Gens du Pouvoir*, 1985: 20.

state discourse beyond rhetoric and propaganda. It also grounded state sovereignty as an adequate basis for social organisation. This could only be achieved through a decentralisation of state authority which translated in the application of a segmentary system across territorial, political and social entities.

The exercise of sovereign authority was compatible with the existence of some level of warfare. But 'warfare' in Moogo was primarily about struggles between rival dynasties vying for office, for the spirit of competition was an important part of the realisation of *Naam*. In that sense, succession struggles were never really an aberration nor were they negatively perceived. On the other hand, the sovereign 'allowed' the waging of warfare by *nakombsé* in the form of external expeditions into Gurunsi country. The *Naaba* was duly given a portion of the looting, in the form of slaves and cattle (see chapter 5).

3. 3. 3. Political segmentation and the creation of social categories

The logic of segmentation was wrapped in historical process: the institution of a new *naam* instituted the establishment of a dynastical order under a common ancestor. The earthpriests extended their ritual control over geographical subdivisions that more or less matched the boundaries of villages to which Mossi rule was juxtaposed. From the smallest village to the highest level of territorial division was operated, little by little and according to an articulation of segmentation within dynasties and across territories, a 'grafting' process much less designed to subdue earthpriests than to carry territorial expansion without upsetting original structures. Ultimately, if the Mossi did not

entirely mould their political structure in the pre-existing one, they adopted the principle of territorial authority as the basis for political authority on the one hand, and the village as the unit of political application on the other. From there on was implemented a system of political hierarchy, applicable both to the political space and the political lineage (politically useful segments). Lineal history—which defined the parameters of devolution—and territorial history were imbricated so as to thrust *Naam* into historical perspective, thus making political segmentation a requirement for both state expansion and state consolidation.

Segmentation enabled an extension of power across the state. A ruling dynasty capitalised on its close offspring in order to both maintain power within the ruling lineage and preserve some stability across the state. But segmentation was also the state's clay feet: historical developments would introduce in the system the seeds of political subversion by the very checks designed to mitigate state power. The confrontation of *Naam* with history was an ineluctable process; political and territorial saturation meant that *Naam* holders were bound to engage in a never-ending struggle for power in a context of limited chieftaincies to be provided. History thus undermined the fundamental aspirations of *Naam* holders, in other words the fulfilment of *Naam*.

The dynamics of segmentation show the Mossi attempt at organising social life even before they had the technological means to ensure general subsistence. The construction of the political space was enabled by exchange processes in goods, slaves and women, in practices and services but most

importantly in a process of construction of the self vis-à-vis the others. The latter aspect instituted a foundational mode of *alterity*—in the construction of cultural others—which is at the very basis of segmentation. But in this process of differentiation, as in that of state expansion, segmentation was only a stage, a way of consolidating difference in order to better incorporate it into the state's ultimate design, namely social the centralisation state authority.⁴³ The Mossi process of expansion was thus understood within a frame of reference that was sociological, rather than purely political and military, for expansion also meant the spread of particular ways of being, here 'the way of being Mossi'. The apparent (ethnic) unity of Moogo was thus "the result of a long and complex process of incorporation which has been characteristic of Mossi society since its beginning in the fourteenth and fifteenth century."⁴⁴ The framework of *alterity* was as much an instrument of differentiation as a tool to mitigate differentiation. And when the means for a historical construct of identity (tales of origin, migration traditions) lacked the persuasive force capable of enthralling collective imaginations, the state resorted to ideological resources such as the assertion of *a historical right to rule and govern* over indigenous populations. The Mossi relied on the possibilities of genealogical construct to control political consolidation and the social reproduction of its model society.

The Mossi instituted patrifiliation as mode of differentiation both in defining 'Mossi ethnicity' and access to office. Schildkrout states that "the

⁴³ Savonnet-Guyot, *Etat*, 1986: 10.

⁴⁴ E. Schildkrout, *People of the Zongo* 1978: 18; also see Fage 1964, Illiasu 1971.

principle [of patrification] generates an ideology of ethnicity which divides the population into communities which are differentiated according to the social roles they perform, their political status, and various attributes which confer a differential prestige upon their members.” Societies which have adopted, in certain contexts, the principle of unilineal descent would tend to assign complementary ritual, political and economic roles to different groups or communities on the basis of this principle.⁴⁵ Patrification was equally a recruitment strategy for political office. The principle of unilineal descent was associated with myths of origin amongst Mossi communities; these myths symbolised aspects of the socio-political structure, they defined boundaries between different social categories, not on the basis of linguistic or cultural difference but of places of origin of one’s ancestors. It is interesting to see how ethnicity and ethnic identity came to be constructed in relation to this principle. In Mossi myths of origin, the foundational enterprise was most often non-Mossi although, according to the same myths, the state was a *Mossi idea*, a historical conviction turned into an elaborate political body built through interactions “between individuals and groups described in the myths which create Mossi society, a new polity which then incorporates them all.”⁴⁶

For the Mossi to be able to legitimise a distinction between ‘real Mossi’ and non-Mossi in a culturally integrated society, they had to invoke cultural specificity as the element of differentiation in often conflicting myths of origin.

⁴⁵ Schildkrout, *People of the Zongo*, 1978: 18.

⁴⁶ Schildkrout, *People of the Zongo*, 1978: 20.

This 'ethnic' distinction was equally crucial in the political project, as a basis for stratification and as a criterion for exclusion from the ruling segment. In this sense, Mossi society can be conceptualised as a historical encounter of different ethnic groups whose different origins and statuses predisposed each to fit into specific levels of the socio-political hierarchy. Whilst myths and historical accounts trace the origin of the royal *nakombsé* to migration trajectories stemming from the south, they also place non-Mossi groups, *talsé* and indigenous communities in various historical trajectories which differed from those of the *nakombsé*.

We have referred, above, to a deliberate intervention of the state in this process of exclusion. However, state intervention was more complex than that. Whilst the state did play an active role in thwarting the political ambitions of prominent *nakombsé*, there were also at play, at the same time, processes of generational take-over acting as a mode of selection. Within any given territorial entity where *nakombsé* segments ruled territorial divisions, the arrival of a new generation of *nakombsé* created a situation of saturation whereby access to chieftaincy had to be regulated by the principle of generational change. Deposed *nakombsé* chiefs became *kasemnamba* (lineage heads) with nominal political power but still able to capitalise on networks of alliances woven over time. The permanent struggle between *nanamse* and *kasemnamba* was not lost on the state; the latter exploited these dissensions to its own advantage by consolidating its 'decentralised' authority with the complicity of its local agents. Territorial saturation has to be understood as a point of conjunction between the limited nature of governable territories and the practical limit imposed by

the ritual authority of earthpriests; geographical imperatives and the added challenge of competition of *tasobnamba* (state officials of non-noble origin) further compounded the issue. However, in the practice of decentralisation, state intervention remained a key element of institutional regulation.

Nakombga rule tended to be geographically situated in the centre of the kingdom; the state's distrust of and desire to maintain close scrutiny over the *nakombsé* was manifests in the geographical and not least strategic contrast between *nakombsé* at the centre and warriors and servants at the periphery of the kingdom. The logic of the state's territorial organisation was that aspirations for autonomy would be less pronounced at the centre in contrast to the periphery, and attempts towards rebellion less practical at the centre. The state was even more distrustful towards former unsuccessful *Naam* aspirants; porous borders made it easy for embittered *rimbio* (princes) to recruit mercenaries to fight in their cause in neighbouring territories.⁴⁷

The project of homogenising *Naam* was essentially an issue of allocating bits of authority to social categories amongst which the hierarchical division was ver tenuous. This resulted from a second concern to promote a horizontal devolution of power which would later relate to the consolidation of ethnicity within Mossi society and the differentiation of ruling categories at once. The argument of collective identity is articulated by Izard in a triad of terms power/autochthony/ancestry which he connects and juxtaposes to a triad of individual identity person/bush-spirit/ancestor. Here were at works the state's

⁴⁷ Izard, *Gens du Pouvoir*, 1985: 222.

attempts at social engineering, in articulating identity around the exercise of power, in defining social categories according to their distance to power and their potential interest in it. Concretely, two broad categories were put in presence and assigned roles within the broad state building project: *nakombsé* or 'noble' extract and *talsé* or commoners.

3. 5. Social Categorising: the Creation of Nakombsé and Talsé

The social cleavage between *nakombsé* and *talsé* is determinant in the sense that not only do the two groups have differential prospects and terms of access to power, they also kept apart from each other. *Nakombsé* and *talsé* also had different matrimonial prospects: if the former needed to have remained close to the court in order to benefit from the *poshsyure* system (customary exchange of women as gifts, discussed in chapter 5), *talsé* had better marriage prospects with other groups. They were reluctant to marry their daughters to *nakombsé* whom they viewed as arrogant and lazy in the sense that they rejected any form of work. As a result, there was a strong tendency amongst *nakombsé* to engage in unconventional marriages or contract mutually agreed marriages, unbeknownst of the fiancée's parents. They also exchanged wives with captives and married daughters of blacksmiths, both were highly marginal practices amongst ordinary Mossi.

The *nakombsé* constituted in themselves a separate *bûudu*, organised and ranked according to the rules that governed access to and competition for power. Thus, *nakombsé* situated too far away in the lineage branches and who therefore could no longer claim right of admission into the group of 'eligible'

ones were systematically pushed aside. This process of social relegation and *decadence* was neither well received nor easily accepted by the *nakombsé*. For "tout *Nakombga* aspire à gouverner; c'est comme les politiciens d'aujourd'hui" [every *Nakombga* aspires to rule; they are like politicians of today].⁴⁸ The *nakombga's* imagination and motivations, in fact his emotions were entirely enwrapped with *Naam* and in strategies to acquire it, to the point of lacking any abiding interest in other avenues of socio-professional engagement such as land-tilling, blacksmithing, herding, or trading.

The fall of a *Nakombga*, although part of the normal procedure of power devolution through dynastical change, was perceived by most *nakombsé* as a fall from grace, in other words a form of a de-socialisation from one (higher) category into a lower one. If the initiative (to relegate *nakombsé*) was a state one, state agents often procrastinated in implementing the decision, in order not to offend, as if the state did not really mean to intervene. In many instances therefore, the state found itself involved in plots and manoeuvrings behind scenes. Relegation was thus neither straightforward nor systematic. A *nakombga's* downwards mobility was also triggered by the violation of taboos and the breach of rules of the collective community.⁴⁹ The *nakombga* was not an anarchist, but he rejected the stability of a settled life and the fulfilment others might find in a professional activity; he engaged instead in various forms of emphatic display of 'noble' pretensions recognised to power aspirants.

⁴⁸ Goungha Naaba, Interview, Ouagadougou, 13 April 2006

⁴⁹ These involved sexual taboos and *lèse-majesté*; see G. V. Kabore. 1966. *Organisation politique traditionnelle et évolution politique des Mossi de Ouagadougou*. Paris and Ouagadougou: CNRS and CVRS, p. 123.

According to the principle of generational change, *nakombsé* of old stock periodically had to vacate power in favour of members of younger generations. The ensuing marginalisation of former *nakombsé* consolidated the state's control over social mobility whilst potentially fostering the seeds of discontent amongst deposed *nakombsé*. Although the passage was an ineluctable one, much weight was given to the *rapport de forces* in presence, through painstaking procedures and negotiated moves. As Izard aptly puts it: "il n'y a pas brusque et complète dépossession mais mise en œuvre d'une politique de longue haleine, conduite au coup par coup, avec des accélérations et des ralentissements, des réussites et des échecs."⁵⁰

In fact, as an old generation of *nakombsé* was long established in a given area, local alliances would play in favour of ruling *nakombsé* even in the presence of a new generation ready to take the reins. Reluctance to change was thus not only typical of *nakombsé*, but also village populations who may value the stability that comes from a long interaction with a particular dynasty. If integration was always for a newly appointed chief a painstaking process, the harshest and most intractable of chiefs was eventually 'socialised' into the ways of a village through processes of conceded favours, exchanged gifs and goods, and matrimonial ties.⁵¹

⁵⁰ 'There is no sudden and full dispossession but a long-term process, on an ad hoc basis, with accelerations and delays, successes and failures' Izard, *Gens du Pouvoir* 1985: 225.

⁵¹ According to Ila Ouedraogo, as a chief depended on the 'references' of local dignitaries, his attitude towards people more often bore the mark of attention to preserving good relations with people generally ; interview, Ouahigouya, April 17, 2010

If *nakombsé* chiefs were constantly relegated to irrelevance in the game of politics, the thorny issue of the *passage* from *nakomga* to *talga* is quite contested amongst Mossi. To the question whether a *nakombga* could become a *talga* following the logic of *demotion* that applied to *nakombsé* whose fathers were not *rima* or *nabiisi*, the answer is always an adamant “no, never”. The notion of being a *talga*, because it bears a certain stigma in mossi society, is rejected by a majority of *nakombsé*. However, as it is socially constructed by the ruling portion that opposes civilisation (state-making) to un-civilisation (lack of recognised institution), in other words the *moaga* against the *gurunga* or *fulga*, once the criteria that determined the definition of a *nakombga* were removed, the *nakombga* structurally becomes *talga* or at least an ordinary mossi.

The condition of *nakombga* establishes the *ipso facto* loss of the *Naam* for a chief. In exceptional cases where a deposed *nakombga* was maintained in state service, he no longer bore the title *naaba* but became a *kasma* or lineage head. The two parallel processes thus lead to marginalisation in both ways: *nakombga*->*talga* and *naaba*->*kasma*. Marginalisation could also lead to a re-evaluation in status for some *nakombsé* who were reintegrated in the ruling system as royal servants or warriors, thus second order *naam* holders. The state’s intervention in the process of power devolution at this local level, in implementing the passage from *nakombga* to *talga*, was designed to effect control over the territorialisation of the *nakombsé*. The state was in fact keen to thwart the establishment of local dynasties prone to flout the rules of devolution by fomenting rebellion against the state and by promoting social unrest.

One objective of *Naam* was to emphasise the cruel aspect of power vis-à-vis the state's 'citizens'⁵² and equally imprint in the *nakombsé*'s consciousness the *evidence of power* as it eluded their capacity, and by the same token to reassert the idea that *Naam* could not and should not be weakened, especially by members of the royal lineage who had a stake in its preservation. Consequently, the discourse of *Naam* was a harsh one, it tapped into a register of violent references even when its pre-eminence suffered no immediate opposition: "celui qui a le *naam* prend ce qu'il veut, il n'a pas a demander" [he who holds *Naam* does not have to ask, he takes what he wants] and similar expressions were recurrent.⁵³

Despised but also feared by ordinary people, the *nakombsé* lived in reality in a state of poverty and social limbo. The Mossi say that "if his (*nakombga*) trousers are not ragged, then his gown is torn".⁵⁴ *Nakombsé* engaged in larceny (predation) but refused handouts; they dragged along their arrogance and their rags. Their attire was made of spears and bows, and face scarification and the bonnet (*nakomb pugla*) distinguished them from the crowd.⁵⁵ At the junction of power and continuity, the state devised ways in which participation to the exercise of power by *nakombsé* was subjected to stringent limitations; access to power was restrained by another exclusionary pattern, that which placed the

⁵² In chapters 4 and 5, a distinction is made between 'citizens' (*nakombsé*, *nayiridamba* and *tasombnamba*), *subjects* (*talsé*) and 'others' (such as *yarsé* traders who merely lived in Moogo but evolved *outside* Mossi society).

⁵³ Balum Naaba's assistant, Interview, Ouagadougou, March 14, 2006

⁵⁴ In M. Izard. 1975. 'Le Royaume du Yatenga,' in R. Cresswell. *Eléments d'Ethnologie 1. Huit Terrains*. Paris: Armand Colin, 216-248, p. 232.

⁵⁵ M. Izard, 'La Lance,' 1973: 144-145.

yarasé (*nakombsé* under the authority of a non-*nakombga* chief) in a situation of social parasitism whereby aspiration to the *Naam* was an ever elusive exercise the pursuit and the [re]possession of which *yarasé* could only devote unavailable resources. Arguably, the territorial limitation imposed by the ideological division sacred land/social land meant that there was antagonism between governable territory and horizontal devolution of power through its segmentation. In practice, the principle of hereditary claims to political office was counterbalanced by a number of measures designed to prevent the 'capture' of kingship by any particular lineage. The *nakombsé* had no particular territorial ties; they lived at the outskirts of villages and awaited opportunities for engagement: war commission, calls for nomination, and looting.

Interestingly, the state, distrustful of the growing importance of *nakombsé* presence, did not favour their settlement within the close neighbourhood of the royal centres. In fact, those *nakombsé* elected as heads of villages were constantly subjected to intense control and spying, frequent transfers to remote villages or replacement by counterparts friendlier to the state. Besides, direct competition was never in short supply as a league of power aspirers was constantly fomenting ways of ousting rulers. Iazard's description of the condition of the *nakombsé* is a bleak portrayal of a social group evolving *outside time and space*. On the one hand, belonging in the royal lineage did not systematically open avenues to territorial leadership. *Nakombsé's* understanding of historical change was in many ways an anachronistic view of territorial conquest by the spear; their nostalgia for a pre-moaga state was linked to the fact that they lived a wandering life, foreigners in the territories conquered by their ancestors. Once

the state was built, they became inoperative warriors with no other skill, whether this is cultivating the land or making it otherwise productive. On the other hand, residential villages were off limits to *nakombsé* on the backbench. They were equally unwelcome in the royal courts where power-aspirants were legion. Contrary to *nakombsé*; princes or *rimbio* lived off the *Nabaa*'s generosity; they were given authority over territories and villages, and consequently a source of wealth, material resources, power, and people over whom to exercise authority.

One of the means of incorporation of various groups into Mossi society was the distribution of office amongst members of non-Mossi groups. These office holders were entitled to the same rights as *nakombsé* for they enjoyed privileges associated with the *nakombsé* status, their sons could inherit office but they were not entitled to succeed *nabissi*, just as "*nakombsé* whose immediate forebears had not held office."⁵⁶ Most provincial chiefs (*kombere*) were non-*nakombsé* high officials attached to the court by virtue of patronage relationships with the *Naaba*. The *kombere* controlled territories contiguous to political centres; they were the entry point to the court for district chiefs in their provinces who sought access to the Mogho Naaba. In any case, the distinction between *nakombsé* and *talsé* proceeded from a deliberate intervention of the state, and not from ordinary dynastical structure. In fact, the *talsé*, whilst fully recognising the group of *nakombsé* as such, also identify themselves as *nakombsé*.

⁵⁶ Schildkrout, *People of the Zongo*, 1978: 26.

Office Devolution

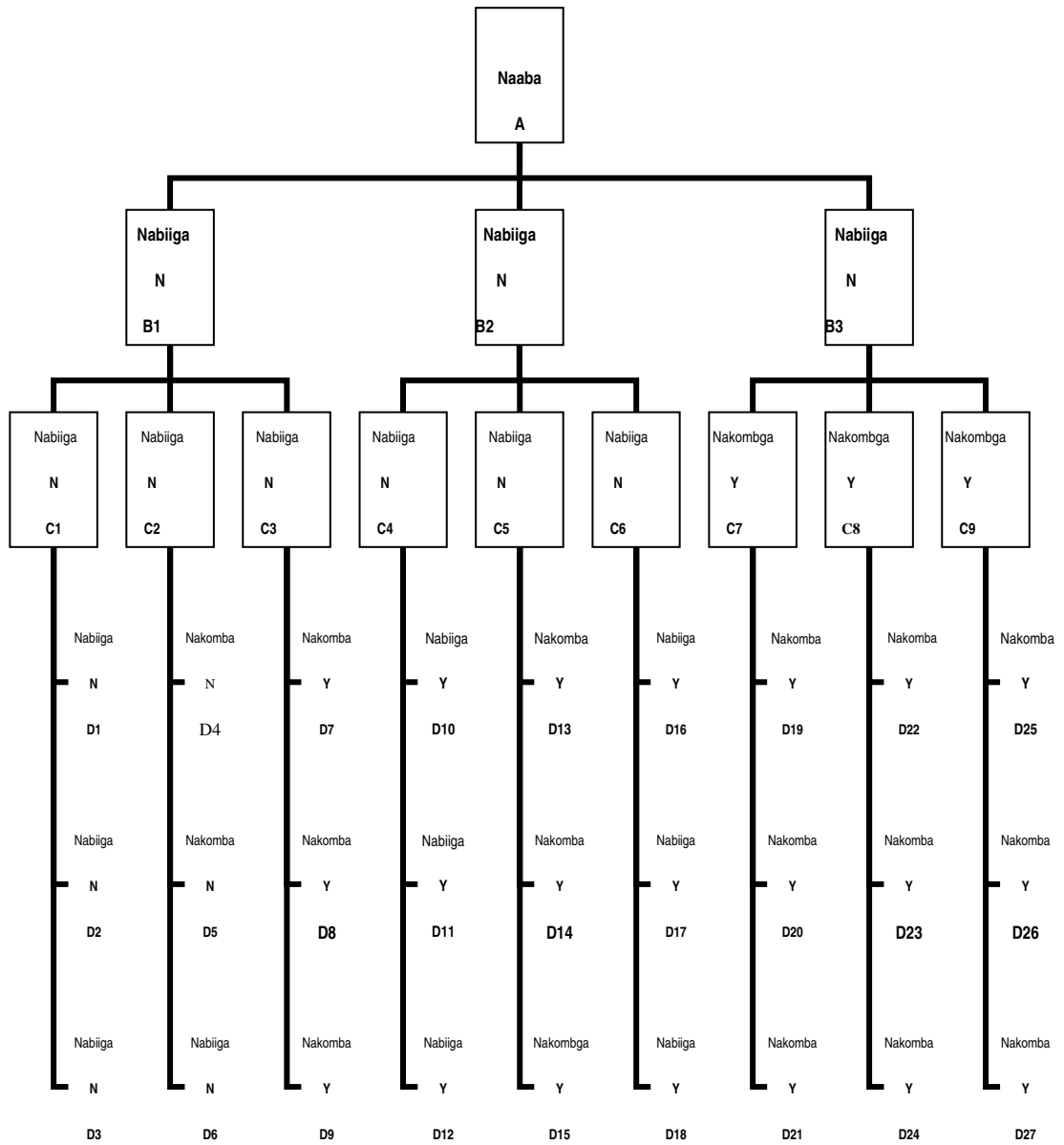


Figure 1

Office devolution matrix

N=*nabîiga* (prince, son of a Naaba who had completed the *ringu* enthronement rituals)

NA=*nakombga* (member of royal lineage not eligible to compete for power, more generally descendants of Naaba Ouadraogo)

Y=*yaranga* (pl. *yarase*) or agnatic descendant of Ouedraogo

3. 5. Devolving Power, Shaping Society

The model above presents the transfer of authority from one generation of rulers to the next.⁵⁷ According to the model of segmentation, the creation of a new territorial rule established a (new) ruling autonomy. Every subsequent rule created under this branch was subordinated to it. The death of the first superior chief for instance marked the end of a generation; *naam* went to the second generation of chiefs, inaugurated by the first male born,⁵⁸ then it was successively transmitted to the other sons by birth order until there was none left in that generation. If the village had to be taken as the model of political application, every new superior chief was succeeded by his son; the latter inherited the entirety of his father's political authority whilst the other sons were given control over villages created to accommodate their particular *naam*. It is not difficult to see how this mechanism could be distorted by disloyal competition amongst potential claimants and by land scarcity. If, in theory, Moose *stricto sensu* were holders of *Naam*—by virtue of their agnatic relationship to Naaba Wedraogo—very few of them were meant to effectively exercise a particular *naam*, and therefore to become *Naaba*. In addition, exercise of a particular *naam* implied potential transfer, loss or modification of its modalities.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Adapted from Izard's framework in *Gens du Pouvoir* 1985.

⁵⁸ The principle of primogeniture was never the rule both in Yatenga and Ouagadougou; however, centralising patterns that emerged in the middle of the 18th century were to mean, in Ouagadougou in particular, a preference for the restriction of office transmission to the first male born

⁵⁹ Izard, 'Le Royaume Mossi du Yatenga' 1987: 64.

The very notion that sons of a superior chief were to be allocated particular territorial authority seems too idealistic, almost aberrant. In every generation of chiefs, a majority of the sons (*nabîise*) of a reigning *Naaba* did not have access to any *naam*, territorial or otherwise. *Naamless* sons became de facto *nakombsé* in the following generation; in other words, they ceased to be part of ‘usable descent’, the politically relevant portion of the *moos bûudu*. The model presents two groups of *nakombsé*: sons or descendants of *nabîise* eligible for *Naam* and thus still part of the competition and those *nakombsé* whose chances to compete had been entirely annihilated, in most circumstances because their closest agnatic ascendant lost access to *Naam* and more generally because they were excluded from political activities.

In all this the correct genealogical pedigree was crucial to the structure of transmission. And this was the case both in Mamprusi and in Mossi states: “[genealogical pedigree] depends on patrification within the royal descent group; not on membership by birth in the corporate group.”⁶⁰ The idiom of kingship may be used as a reference to the political relationship between courts, between court officials or *naam* aspirants; rather than genealogical relationships. In Mamprugu more so than in Moogo, it was seniority elements that were stressed with regard to the installation of chiefs.

Every group of *nakombsé* defined its identity, and was defined, by the status of the superior chief from whom it sprang. Organised according to their agnatic distance from the ruling superior chief, *yarasé* groups were patterned into a progressive hierarchisation. A further differentiation between *nakomsé*

⁶⁰ Drucker-Brown, “The Structure of the Mamprusi Kingdom,” 1981: 118.

and *nabûise* was introduced by reference to descent: *nabûise* were patrilineal descendants of Mamprusi migrants whilst *nakombsé* were the offspring of intermarriages between these migrants and indigenous populations of conquered territories, such as the *nininsi*.⁶¹ It is not however clear whether this latter differentiation resulted from political centralisation in the eighteenth century. As *eligible* dynasties were limited to a few families in Ouagadougou and to dynastical clusters in Yatenga (Saaga and Tuguri factions), the exclusion of families of *nakombsé* had to be justified on grounds of descent and collaterality. The matrix of succession presented above thus serves as the format against which *mossiness* and mossi identity was to be defined. When disaffected *nakombsé* joined the ranks of *talsé* commoners, not as commoners per se but as ordinary subjects with no political roles, they carried with them those values that distinguished *moose* from *talsé*. On the other hand, *talsé* who joined the ranks of the administrative apparatus became, so to speak, sucked into the *naam* system and were more easily assimilated into its structure; they 'became' Mossi.

If access to *naam* was solely regulated by genealogical affiliation, particularly one's position in the genealogical tree, access itself did not necessarily derive from a father-son type of devolution. In addition, political mobility enabled change of status from *naaba* to *nabûiga* to *nakombga* or following an inverse direction. In all this, a general point needs to be stressed. In principle, every new generation of *rimnamba* is a reference in itself as it creates

⁶¹ Schildkrout, *People of the Zongo*, 1978: 21.

a new dynastic branch, thus a new group of (na)yarasé.⁶² Every new branch is comprised of descendants of the first *rima* in a given generation, excluding the descendants of the son that becomes the first *rima* of the next generation. This schema is however a theoretical outline; it was to be taken to task by historical processes that introduced many distortions. If all the sons of a living king were indistinctly *rimbio*, the dynamics of power are such that in subsequent generations, the sons of former *rimbio* could either become *rimnamba* or fall into the broad category of *nakombsé*. In any case, identity was here defined according to one's distance from an ancestor and whether the later was a *rima* or not.

If the structure of office devolution was not much affected by occasional power struggles, it was not resistant to historical erosion. It was affected by subversion as much as the sheer number of candidates to office.⁶³ The processes of *Naam* are conceptually important in understanding the working of the Mossi socio-political structure. It is equally important to look at political incorporation as it gradually altered the rules of office. The next chapter delves into some of these issues.

CONCLUSION

Economic power (class dynamics) has not always been, as Marx liked to argue, the 'motor of history', as other sources of power were sometimes more

⁶² Izard, *Gens du Pouvoir*, 1985: 214.

⁶³ D. Zahan 1967: "The Mossi Kingdoms" In D. Forde and P. Kaberry (eds.) *West African Kingdoms in the Nineteenth Century*, London: OUP, 152-178, p. 156.

essential in shaping, and reshaping state and society. The structure of *Naam* demonstrates the possibilities of political ideology—where the economic imperative was of limited importance—in shaping state and society, political power and the construction of social consensus, social categorisation and the meaning of identity, as a condition for the deployment of state ideology over a conceptual void. The Mossi *Naam*, like other state ideologies elsewhere, also served to mediate the gap between state power and legitimacy by intervening in society beyond the realm of the political.

As much as it is problematic, *Naam* breeds contradictions, and like many other ideologies, it attempts to “(...) mediate contradictions, but it cannot resolve them.”⁶⁴ For the *Naam* order, the world is a disorderly place that needs organising. Thus, *Naam* in the Mossi state was not just an ideology of power. Beyond the establishment of a system of acquisition of power, office devolution and power reproduction, the professionalisation of the political service went hand in hand with a classification of social categories according to their social distance, their interest in *Naam* as well as their contribution to the state. Some of these issues are more fully discussed in chapter 4 and 5. The structure and procedures of acquisition of *Naam* created an impulse, within the state and its tenants, to develop redundancy in the inculcation of its primary proposition: it was a continuous repetition of the dialectical relation between *Naam* and *Tênga*. The state used various instrumental registers to renew and reinforce the principles of its constructed reality.

⁶⁴ Wolf., *Europe and the People*, 1982: 390.

The ultimate issue posed by the historical structure of *Naam* in Mossi society is the fundamental interrelationship between power, ethnicity and social integration. Mossi foundational narratives drew a clear distinction between rulers and ruled on the basis of histories of origin, migration and settlement patterns. These elements were crucial to the hierarchisation of society and the ascription of status accordingly. Whether this stratification was sociologically or historically justified is something that calls into question the validity of myths of origin and historical accounts which are themselves varied and disparate across communities. Ultimately, political and social roles were ascribed to 'ethnic' categories. From the ideology of power an ideology of ethnic identity underlined the binary construct *ruler* and *subject*, and the variations between 'citizen', 'subject' and those who lived 'outside' society.

Segmentation on the other hand went hand in hand with the assertion of *alterity* through the creation of ethnic and cultural identities within Mossi society. Identity however bore an intangible character most visible in the possibility for socio-political mobility across professional categories.

An examination of the historical evolution of the Mossi state will show that because of its ideological charge, *Naam* would progressively become invalidated, over time, as the primary element of political authority and as justification of the state structure. For this reason, *Naam* ideology is significant as much for what it hides than for what it reveals. The ideology of *Naam* poses a fundamental contradiction that lies in the original claim over the practice of the state as strictly a Mossi endeavour and the attempt, for the sake of its preservation, to decentralise power by associating non-Mossi segments to it

whilst marginalising *nakombsé*. But *Naam* tells the history of power as it has always been: for a particular society and place, a particular set of historical circumstances gave rise to state and centralised power; human capacities to respond to a number of earthly needs produced lineages, villages and other forms of social organisations but not necessarily ones whereby power needed to be centralised.

Since *Naam* ideology stemmed from the divine source of Wende, it did not always have and it did not reflect real-life experience, especially when assessed from the perspective of non-Mossi groups. As an ideology of power, *Naam* configured itself as an autonomous *source* and it explained and reflected aspects of social life that the simplistic dichotomy between the reality of the ruling Mossi and the subject situation of the indigenous groups would not have explained, nor organised effectively. The articulation of *Naam* was therefore essentially that of an autonomous and powerful ideology that “(...) put together in a single explanation and organisation a number of aspects of existence that have hitherto been marginal, interstitial to the dominant institutions of power.”⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Mann concedes that few such examples, at the exception of Islam, Christianity or Marxism, have been accounted in world history; see Mann, *Sources of Social Power*, I, 1986: 21.

CHAPTER FOUR

Making the State from the Margins: Frontiersmen as State-builders

INTRODUCTION

I discovered Kopytoff's thesis of the Internal African Frontier half-way into theorising about the Mossi state formation, and realised this was the sort of argument I have been attempting to formulate all along. The idea of frontier as conceptualised by Kopytoff lies at the fringes of 'mature', established societies. It "posits a process in which incipient small polities are produced by other similar and usually more complex societies."¹ The frontier thesis is, unarguably, a blow to evolutionary theories that conceptualise states as stemming from hypothetical archaic bands evolving into small polities to centralised states. The process of fission and spread conceptualised in the frontier thesis resonates with Sahlins' 'heroic mode' that explains territorial expansion of core polities as a consolidation of the influence of ruling dynasties as they deploy power and cultural practices across outlying territories, in other words physical and socio-cultural frontiers.² In Moogo—territorial basis of the Mossi states—

¹ Kopytoff, *the African Frontier*, 1989: 3.

² See M. D. Sahlins. 1983. "Other Times, Other Customs: the Anthropology of History," *American Anthropologist*, 85(3): 517-544, p. 522.

expansionism was not necessarily carried for its own sake. Instead, it was (also) a strategy designed to make room for countless contenders to a *naam*.

The notion of state in Moogo is characterised by a structure of authority which projects power as a tool of diffusion of state authority whether internally to effect a homogeneous political system, replicated at all levels of authority, or externally to endow the state with greater territorial and political resources. At the core of the chapter is the widely perceived problem of *how* complex political systems, i.e the state, emerged in West African societies. The chapter therefore addresses the question of how political science may lay claim to the pre-colonial past and also how thorough theoretical engagement with oral histories can account for the nature of continuity, change, diversity, and divergence and can cut through platitudes about the configuration of the contemporary state in Africa. It does so using the political/ideological logic of *naam* as core principle of state formation in Moogo.

Naam is an approach to social integration in addition to being a modality of power. When emigrant *nakombsé* first laid foot on Moogo, they projected a revolutionary idea of social relations essentially based on power, not in the sense of a rapport de force but as a source of definition of social categories depending on their distance from central power. In so far as the ideology of power is exempt of any reference to land', it is important to look at the significance of ideology (belief, rituals in religion) over its institutionalisation; these issues are touched upon in chapter 3, 5 and particularly 6.

This historicity of *naam* in turn informs identity and the assimilation process of non-Mossi groups into the wider Mossi group. Wilks explained the

expansion of *Asanteness* in terms of bureaucratisation. McCaskie on the other hand sees the consolidation of the Ashanti state through the dissemination of state-ideology. Using Wilks and McCaskie's perspectives on the construction of Asante identity as foil, I explain the making of Mossiness (homogeneisation and assimilation) not through bureaucratisation or pure state-led ideology but through the penetration of the realm of *tênga* by that of *Naam*. In other words, Mossi ideology—in the absence of technologies of effective enforcement—spread into the pre-existing society, progressively and gradually. The development of Mossi ideology was a combination of intentionality and propagation through the interpenetration of different groups.

The first section demonstrates the relevance of the Frontier thesis, in conceptualising the cultural-framework as socio-cultural area subject to constant reconstruction and change, and the frontier condition as fitting the process of fission and spread, both characterised state formation in Moogo. The second section shows how social integration, along with the consolidation of state legitimacy and state apparatus, was a function of ritual, blood, and political alliances within a historically diverse society. It also shows how the state negotiated territoriality, ethnicity and social differentiation in its attempts to consolidate and stabilise the state apparatus through the elaboration of new rules and the implantation of new capital cities, towards the end of the eighteenth century. The last section explores the making of identity. *Naam*'s confinement into things political does not prevent state ideology from 'spilling over' into the realm of *Tênga*. In fact, the very logic of political competition,

office succession and the need for *Naam* to claim some attachment to the land converged, and these drew *Tênga* into the realm of *Naam* and vice-versa.

4. 1. The Internal Frontier Model

4. 1. 1. Mossi-Mamprusi-Dagomba as culture-historical area

Kopytoff contends that most sub-Saharan Africa has been inhabited and culturally dominated by populations that derive from the Saharan-Saharan cultural hub or ecumene, different from the mosaics of cultures and ethnic identities characteristic of regions with comparatively longer and deeper histories of occupation (e.g. Middle East, India) .³ As a result of these differences, he argues, African frontiersmen were bringing with them conceptual, cultural and ideological resources similar to those of pre-existing societies. This would be the fundamental explanation for high degree of ‘cultural uniformity’ Africa exhibits in its stories of state formation. Frontier societies, like long-established ones, were highly flexible in the way they formed and reformed, expanded and shrank, and in the way they excluded or integrated/reintegrated and redistributed segments of frontier people.⁴

Any account which treats the Mossi, the Wolof, the Igbo, the Asante or the Kru as separate, and distinct groups having nothing to do with each other, overlooks many important aspects of West African history. The interconnections that link West African societies to each other and to the rest of

³ Kopytoff, “The Internal African Frontier,” 1989: 10.

⁴ Kopytoff, “The Internal African Frontier,” 1989: 12.

the world make a presentation of history and cultures as static and disconnected things historically inadequate.⁵

The 'cultural area' thesis rests on a reconstruction of the demographic distribution of societies ancestral to present day societies of Sub-Saharan Africa. The combined reconstruction of linguistic and archaeological evidence, and culture-historical data suggest a concentration of population, in the north-half of the continent, in the then fertile Sahara-Sahelian band spanning the continent from east to west around 5000 B.C. These populations lived in contact with one another and developed cultural syntheses and patterns that forged a pan-african culture sets developed in contact with pre-Islamic Near-East. The population tides that crept southwards around 2500 out of the expanding Sahara desert gave birth to societies of Sub-Saharan Africa while a second spurt from the pressure of the desertic belt on the forest zone led to the spread, around 1000 B.C., of Bantu speaking societies throughout the then thinly populated southern part of the continent.⁶

Most African societies formed around a core-group, itself developed through processes of the local frontier. Kopytoff's depiction of pre-colonial Africa is one of ceaseless population flux, a disparate and untamed movement that has never really stopped or changed, it merely slowed under the constraints of postcolonial formal boundaries, the structures of industrial economies and the

⁵ Wolf, *Europe and the People*, 1982: 4.

⁶ For a sketch of population interactions in pre-colonial Africa, see Kopytoff's description of the 'ecumene', a region of "persistent cultural interaction and exchange", in *The African Frontier*, 1989: 9-10; also see Vansina, *How Societies are Born*, 2004.

requirements of urban designs on cultures and communities. whilst mass displacements of people, such as those taking place in times of war, famine, extreme violence and other natural disasters, take a more salient and dramatic form, less visible and smaller movements constantly and continuously take place in the midst of systemic change that shape and inform socio-political cultures in Africa. “As a result, the formation of new social groups as offshoots of old ones has been a constant theme in the histories of African societies— histories filled with the movement of the disgruntled, the victimised, the exiled, the refugees, the losers in internecine struggles, the adventurous, and the ambitious.”⁷ At work in these processes were cultural forces (e.g. violation of a taboo, desecration of rituals) and social mechanisms (succession rules, principles of social justice); they were the centrifugal forces that reproduced similar processes across societies.

The frontier model is recognisable in the existence of many local frontiers; it is reproduced in frontier polities around and within core (what Kopytoff calls mature) states. Thus, the continuous reproduction of the frontier, throughout history, has created and maintained a ‘frontier-conditioned ideology’ in the political consciousness of African societies, old and new, whilst shaping African political cultures. The greatest relevance of the frontier model resides in the insight it affords in solving part of a very African puzzle: namely, the similarity of the political cultures of societies sometimes rather distant from each other. In our region of interest, the frontier model confirms a number of intuitions about processes of state formation in the Voltaic region. The frontier

⁷ Kopytoff, “The Internal African Frontier,” 1989: 18.

consists of politically open areas nestling between organised societies but 'internal' to the larger regions in which there are found- what might be called an 'internal' or 'interstitial frontier.'⁸ The Mossi-Mamprusi-Dagomba system has produced frontier societies shaped by the particular circumstances that determined the encounter between migrants (frontiermen) and indigenous groups. The Mossi example in particular displays dynamics of social change which were not always well captured by the frontier framework which has a tendency to underrate the endogenous potential for change where this potential may be used to fend off impacts from the outside.

4. 1. 2. The process of fission and replication as normative principle

All the Voltaic societies, whether organised as centralised states or acephalous societies, relate to Na Gbewa through his descendants. The principle of fission as normative application is crucial to the reproduction of *Naam*. It was therefore natural that the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries saw the proliferation of established, and a number of petty states around political nucleuses.⁹ State formation in Moogo spanned over three centuries, between the beginning of the sixteenth to the middle, and towards the end of the eighteenth century. The formative period was transitional in the sense that coercion was little used in establishing structures of political diffusion. The means of coercion would be evolved much later along with more

⁸ Kopytoff, "The Internal African Frontier," 1989: 8.

⁹ See Hammond, *Technology*, 1966: 158-8 and Izard, "Introduction," 1970: 217-73 for a survey of the petty states; note the differences.

clear-cut social stratification; during the consolidation of state formation towards the end of the eighteenth century. Political competition was the only area within social relations where the use of *pânga* was permitted. The spirit of competition was, amongst *nakombsé*, an integral part of their political culture, and all available means were used to effect devolution wherever rival lineal branches were in competition. It is interesting that almost all those excluded from the competition for power from the political cores of Dagomba, Mamprusi, and Tenkudugu, would found their own ruling clans; our framework of state formation as the result of the transfer of ideas through migration is best illustrated by this process. If for those *nakombsé* temporarily disqualified from political struggle, the creation of new political entities could be a way to retreat for a stronger come-back, for those permanently disqualified the foundation of new states was a matter of survival through what they knew best: political rulership. Delegation of power was additionally used as a mode of political and territorial expansion of legitimately established states.

When one ties in various existing versions, what emerges is a set of social formations genealogically related and which resulted from the fission of existing formations into more or less autonomous entities:

- Na Gbewa, ancestor of Mossi-Dagomba-Mamprussi groups, founded Mamprugo
- Sitobu, his son, founded Dagomba (although Na Nyagse is considered the real founder); from Dagomba would be founded the kingdoms of Wa and Buna

- Nanumba was in turn created by Nmantambo (Ngmantambu) in Bimbila, a son of Sitobu's brother
- Tenkodogo (Tankdugu) is generally recognised to be the first important Mossi formation that emerged from the Dagomba-Mamprusi system; it would emerge from the principalities of Zambalga and/or Kinzam
- Lalgay and Wargay were founded, around the southeast of Tenkodogo, by Naaba Loko and Bondaoogo
- Naaba Gigma is said to have sent a conquering army that founded Gorgo and Tuguri, towards the south and the northeast
- Naaba Rawa, founded Zandoma and Ratênga
- On the other hand, Naaba Zida, son of Naaba Züngrāna, founded the Zitênga
- Around the middle belt, Oubri (Wubri), son of Züngrāna, founded the Oubr-tênga which was to become Ouagadougou
- Naaba Wumtanango founded Guitê

Then comes the second generation, marked by the influence of Naaba Oubri (Wubri); three of his sons went about founding autonomous states.

- Naaba Namende founded Balsa
- Naaba Kurita founded Kuri-tênga (koupela)
- Naaba Sandbondo founded Salmatênga (Kaya)

In Wubri-tênga, four sons of Wubri succeeded their father –successively Naaba Soarba, Naaba Naskêmdé, Naaba Nasbire and Naaba Yingnemdo-, whilst the third generation was marked by the rule of sons, brothers and nephews of Naaba Kumd'mye, son of Naaba Yingnemdo, listed at the sixth position of the

genealogy of Moogo nanamse. Descendants of these rulers were responsible for the expansion of Moogo in all directions:

- Yadega, son of Naaba Nasbire, founded Yatênga
- A son of Naaba Nasbire founded Kaïbo
- Yelkuni, son of Kumd'mye, founded Yako
- Konkise, another son of Kumdmye, founded Konkis-tênga
- Yilem, another son of Kumd'mye, founded Téma
- Nyaseme, another son of Kumd'mye, founded Mané
- Naaba Tiraogo, also son of Kumd'mye, founded Bussuma
- Naaba Yalilumfaaoghoma succeeded Yadega and founded Pissila, etc.

The list could go on.¹⁰ It is noteworthy that the contribution of Naaba Kumd'mye and his descendants in the process of fission and spread was quite considerable. Nacanabo notes that under the rule of Kumd'mye was operated "the most important scission[s] in the history of Moogo."¹¹ The proliferation of petty states gave rise, in the northern Mossi region of Kupela alone, to the kingdoms of Balsa, Kayao, Yako, Risiam, Mane, or Tema. One informant explains the formation of these satellite states:

There was a hierarchy of status: first came the Yatênga Naaba (rima), then came the nabiise (princes), then komberé (provincial chiefs) and then the tansobnanamse, etc. In the authenticity of things, the chiefs of Ratênga, Tatênga, and Busu are komberé or Naabiise who depended on the Yatênga Naaba. They could be his sons or brothers of men he trusted which he appointed at the various frontiers and corners. Nowadays, they are more or less independent. They can come pay respect to the Naaba or can also choose not to come and

¹⁰ See also V. Sedogo. 2010. "Projet de création d'un "Empire Moaaga", Capitale Sabsé," CNRST/INSS, unpublished Manuscript.

¹¹ D. Nacanabo, *Le Moogo au XIXe siècle*, 2003: 346.

greet. But if they do come to pay respect, then they have to doff their hat. Even if these states were independent, if they arose an issue which they felt were beyond their capacity to solve, they would come and consult the Naaba. In this way, there were still relations between them.¹²

This was a common account that explained the formation and autonomy of satellite states which emerged from pre-existing formations, namely Ouagadougou and Yatenga.

4. 1. 3. State formation: political interpenetration as shaping sovereignty

During the formative period, a marked centralisation by expansion and fission in the political and segmentary realms and peasantisation in the social realm were characteristic elements. The possibility of concentrating power could fully blossom when initiated in concert with a number of institutional innovations. No true capital city during the formative period was established as successive rulers sought to mark their imprint by founding new capital cities and in order to keep an eye on the activities of officeless nobility. As a result, the graves of Mogho and Yatênga *nanamse* are scattered all over Moogo. The circulation of *naam* prevented the possibility for it to be tied to any particular office, hence the absence of an elaborate exploitative economic system or a feudal system of land ownership. The (single) most elaborate sphere was ideological whereby belief permeated all aspects of state dealings with local unities in a supra-institutional unity. Nanumba was the most striking example of such a rotation system between ruling dynasties. In Yatênga, five main dynasties came to control political office from the beginning of the eighteenth century onwards. In Ouagadougou, however, a strong tendency towards greater centralisation was manifest in the preference for a unilineal succession, “more

¹² Ila Ouedraogo, Interview, Ouahigouya, April 16, 2010

conducive to the exercise of continuous central authority”¹³ and which replaced the prevailing polydynastic system.

During this period, power delegation initiated a form of decentralisation, which had the opposite effect of reinforcing the central government for the *Naaba* would place his men in chieftaincies and capitalise upon the rivalries that arose between *nakombsé* of old and young stock and against non-*nakombsé* administrators and officials. Captives and non-*nakombsé* retainers were a critical force in the active political struggles within and amongst competing dynasties and segments. In the transfer of power from old to new dynasties, heads of lineage could be played against each other, lineage against lineage. The central government could thus find itself strengthened by the decentralised, multilayered struggle. Equally, local chiefs could build on this very process. They appropriated the advantage of centralisation and therefore needed to be constantly held in check by the centre. Whilst the creation of new political authorities in certain villages by members of the ruling dynasty worked as a strategy meant to preserve control of power within the ruling group, it also crystallised the contradistinction between *nakombsé* and *talsé* as two antithetical socio-political categories.¹⁴ This had the effect of denying any claim, on the part of the *talsé*, to high political offices and left them with limited possibilities towards administrative responsibilities at the local level. As one informant put it, “a *talga* could not become *naaba* but he could have low

¹³ Wilks, “The Mossi,” 1985: 472.

¹⁴ Skalník, *Early States in the Voltaic Basin*, 1978: 475.

administrative functions, such as control over markets or over strangers' quarters."¹⁵ This tendency was however mitigated by the institutional incorporation of captives, strangers and other social categories outside nobility into the central ruling structure.

On the other hand, the symbolical marriage of *Wende* and (*Apagha*) *Napaga Tênga* created a conceptual interpenetration through the creation of ritual ties between *nakombsé* and *têngbîise*, *naam* and *tênga*.¹⁶ This ritual fusion of the two conceptual groups was overarched by the state, from there on gradually defined and outlined within a mythical narrative that presented a particular view of the Voltaic state and an overreaching view of the state in general conceptualised as a function of the mechanism of *naam*. One does wonder why the ideology of power was free from any reference to *tênga* despite the fact it draws its most fundamental legitimacy from it.¹⁷ The answer lies in the Mossi state's social approach to integration in terms of the treatment of existing ritual and productive structures. The ritualisation of social relations extends to other components of an otherwise eclectic Mossi society; captives were integrated into the realm of *Naam* in a closer sense than their status would a priori suggest at the same time that *naam* incumbents were pushed to the fringes of state and society. In fact, competitive *naam holdings* had to be directed, and kept at bay whilst captives, slaves and strangers were accorded various palatine privileges. In order to guard against usurpers—always a

¹⁵ Noufou Ouedraogo, interview, Ouagadougou, December 6, 2009

¹⁶ Izard, *Gens du Pouvoir*, 1985; Skalník, *Early States*, 1978: 472.

¹⁷ Izard. 1983. "Engrammes du Pouvoir: l'Autochtonie et l'Ancestralité" *Le Temps de la Réflexion* 4: 229-323, p. 299.

lingering possibility for a ruling *Naaba*—court followers were expected to exercise some form of superintendence, especially where they were entrusted with the administration of a village in which were living destitute *nakombsé*, over the latter and thwart the building up of prostrate forces.

Equally, strangers were ritually integrated in the social project of a unifying Mossi identity: a plot and wife, as well as a promise of social inclusion against a pledge of loyalty. As the Mossi adage goes “the stranger is [symbolises] water”. The very sacrality of water in an environment in constant need of it meant that the stranger was to be taken care of with particular care. Social integration went as far as the nomination of Mossi immigrants as earthpriests where this function had been the exclusive sphere of autochthons. But then the function of earthpriest afforded the power to legitimatise new *naam* through ritual sanction. In Yatênga, by the 19th century, the Mossi immigrants, once a ruling minority, became the most important population group in numerical terms. Iazard contends that in Yatênga “the Mossi are more numerous than the *têngbîisi*, contrary to the expected tendency, whereby the descendants of the conquerors would form a minority dominating over a majority of the autochthonous.” Equally, social stratification was later elucidated in ritual justification. Assimilation was effected in the extension of matrimonial ties to captives and strangers. In autochthons/immigrants relations, marriages allowed an expansion of the politically useful group, that of the Mossi. The steep increase of the Mossi population was made possible by intermarriage, with autochthonous *têngbîisi* as well as Fulbe and other groups. Also politically significant was the group of captives and strangers; the former formed the

strongest faction in the capital city of Ouahigouya, their political strength reinforced by numerical importance.¹⁸ The strategy of ritual integration of various groups is extensively discussed in Chapter 5. Bloch speaks of this process as an *etatisation* process, which articulated relations of inequality in a complex ritual structure that presented inequality in a veneer of ritual correctness.¹⁹ What ritual does is to blur the differences brought about by social categorisation along a gradual professionalisation of political practice. Etatisation was strengthened by a body of traditions ‘produced’ was critical to the construction of political stability of the state.

In effect, sociocultural assimilation seems to have been a founding element of state building, which predates the formation of Mossi states of Ouagadougou and Ouahigouya, and endured within these as part of their socio-political development. Tiendrebeogo relates the legend according to which *guilingu tengsoba* made a request for protection to Zungrana who then founded Moogo. Zungrana’s marriage to the daughter of a local earthpriest consolidated this relationship, and was the basis for the ritual family tie between holders of power (through Zungrana) and people of the earth. Wubri, the first ruler of the Mossi state of Ouagadougou, is the product of this union and the very symbol of this symbiosis. Similar traditions are recounted in Tenkodogo.²⁰ There seems to have been, at the onset, scope for commoners’ political participation, experimentation and innovation within limits of the cultural expansion of the Mossi. Kawada gives the example of Yargo and Tanlili (predominantly *nakomsɛ*)

¹⁸ Alonso, “The Politics of Space,” 1994: 389.

¹⁹ M. Bloch. 1983. *Les Rois Thaumaturges*, Paris: Gallimard, 1983, pp.381-385.

²⁰ J. Kawada, 2002; 1970: 39; also Skalník, “Early States,” 1978: 474.

villages in the Ouagadougou state, which was the prototype of the heteroclite and mixed Mossi state capital. Alongside compounds of *têngbîise* (autochthons) were *Yarse* (Mande traders), *nioniosse*, *silmimoose* (born from Mossi-Fulbe unions), *nayiridamba* (royal servants), *bendré* (chroniclers, drummers, griots and keepers of royal genealogies) as well as *saaba* (blacksmiths). Yarsé men intermarried with *nakombsé* women as well as women from other social groups, but they practised a strict endogamy when it came to 'non-believer' Mossi men.²¹ If institutionally they did not fit in the taxonomic grid of Mossi state organisation, they contributed to the legitimising process of the *Naaba* by providing the woven cotton clothes as well as the hat that officially crowned a chief *rima* (sovereign).²²

There were elements of congruence in the way elite functions and structural differentiation operated in Moogo. Traders and other guilds were to an extent subordinated to kinship, hence to segmentary heads. There was congruence also in the professionalisation of political practice with the use of royal captives in different offices, along with the constitution of a military body. However, there was incongruence in the sense that although the earthpriests did play an integrating and restorative roles during key historical moments, the absence of an elitist structure or elite spirit as well as that of functional solidarity within an organised clergy points to a clear structural differentiation without the attendant elitisation observed in many other societies. In fact,

²¹J. Kawada. 1967: *Le Zitenga: Rapport de Mission dans le Cercle de Ziniare*. Paris, Ouagadougou, CNRS, CVRS, pp. 38, 56, 65.

²² M. Izard. 1985. "Des Sociétés pour l'Etat," *Çah, ORSTOM*, 21(1): 15-33, p. 30; these garments are made in secret and according to a number of rituals.

power and solidarity were in no way reflective of the structural division of society; hence the existence of congruence but also incongruence in social categorisation. It is quite intriguing that earthpriests ‘accepted’ the rule of *nakombsé* and did not interfere with political power throughout Mossi history. But earthpriests could escape Mossi attempts at defining identity in so far as their ritual function did not always overlap with the political realm. Their disengagement from the political and their retreat into things ceremonial can be interpreted as acting as a shield against the alienating action of state power in its capacity to shaping identities.

Kinship tropes—the idea the *têngbîise* were ‘cousins’ to *nakombsé* and the use of metonymy to express family and fraternal relations between different social categories—imbue the structure of mutual exchange between belief and power with historicity and morality. They provided to Mossi rulers the idiom as well as the metaphors for conceptualising *naam/tênga* relations, and social and political relations more generally. At the same time that they sacralise the relations between the state and the belief system, they emphasise the extension of the state in the realm of belief. This resulted in the acceptability of the system of rules and regulations, in the patterns of social relations its rule established and thus in the acceptability of the state itself, Temporal categories were valorised, creating a hierarchy among past, present and future in which the past becomes “the single source and beginning of everything good for all later timers”;²³ national tradition here mediating the distance between present and

²³ See M. M. Bakhtin.1981.*The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: the University of Texas Press, pp. 13-4.

past. If the *nininse* and *yôyônse* past offers elements of legitimacy to indigenoussness, it does not provide anchors to the political structure; the past of the Mossi states takes reference in the alliance that made the political structure possible.

In essence, where *nakombsé* were referred to as ‘holders of the spear’ in contradistinction to ‘people of the land’, a cultural continuum was marked, along a historical—as well as mythical link to the neighbouring Dagari and Lobi in the South and the Kasena, in the North—with reference in particular to the ‘mastery of the land’ as a structural similarity. Still, as Liberski correctly points out, in the Voltaïc area, the bipolarity is, “so to say, theatralised in as much as a series of rituals are staging the opposition and complementarity of these two figures of power”.²⁴ References to the masters of the land vs. political chiefs are “inscribed within a genuine continuum encompassing all forms of combination”.²⁵ For instance, the term *Naam* is emptied of its political reference amongst the *Tallensi* in favour of an exclusive ritual content.

The ritual interdependence between different groups might have been a *nakômbga* creation, in other words it was defined and constructed from the particular perspective of the political centre. However, the commitment to ritual obligation and the willingness of the state, to adhere to a set of conventional acts meant that the ideological burden was collectively shared. Ideology

²⁴ D. Liberski, “Les Dieux du Territoire,” 1991: 72, in Luc de Heusch. 2000. “l’Ethnie. The Vicissitudes of a Concept”, *Social Anthropology* 8(2): 108; also see M. Saul. 2007. “Méthodes en Histoire Orale. Genèse de l’Autorité Politique au Moogo,” *L’Homme*, 2 (182): 215 à 232, p. 216.

²⁵ De Heusch “l’Ethnie. The Vicissitudes of a Concept” 2000: 109-110.

substantialised this society-building process; through various means, the state promoted and acted out cultural unity by means of a symbolised centre. Here the capacity of the state and its autonomy are not necessarily vectors of social control but can be subordinated to the state's project to create the sociocultural context within which a certain idea of (collectively agreed) religious and cultural practices are embedded, a context amenable to the kind of social cohesion needed to bolster state legitimacy. Like in "[...] Negara, ceremony makes the state, differentiates it from society, exemplifies rule to society and thus reproduces itself";²⁶ all is done however in a manner that conveys a semblance of cultural cohesion. The uncertainties of political rule meant that consensus was an acute concern of ruling segments, more so than 'consent' was sought after among ruled communities; the most crucial elements were directed toward the maintenance of certain patterns of power, a certain idea of leadership, rather than collective support for reformulations of political responsibilities.²⁷ The expression of governance in the enunciation of the *zabyuyya* (mottos of individual rulers), in ritual performance, emblems, etiquette and ceremonials generally speaking might be more exuberant than the reality of political rule, which depended on the willing cooperation of non-ruling segments: the make-believe world of majestic power had to rest upon real constraints.

²⁶ See C. Geertz's description of the Negara state of Bali during the 19th century, Geertz 1980

²⁷ See Therborn 1980: 109 in Lonsdale, "State and Social Processes," 1981: 160.

Ideology here acts as the technique of closure which mediates the gap that exists between state power and legitimacy in the representation of political systems. As ideology is fostered in people's subjective experience, it tends to adopt and reflect changes in social conditions in the legitimizing notions advanced to buttressed state ideology.²⁸ It serves to "dramatise the core values of society (...) so that one set of possible social relations is elevated to a universal standard of civilisation."²⁹ In Moogo, the very succession of *nanamse*, in a continuous thrust, hardly disrupted by the death of an incumbent—the *napoko*'s interregnum is combined with the expulsion of the *kurita* to mark institutional continuity and at the same time the 'cleansing' of state institution from a previous administration, see chapter 6—points to the way in which one of the fundamental contradictions of sovereignty (same institution, different rulers) is resolved.

If Mossi identity was conceptualised in relation to royal descent, the elastic boundaries of royal lineage and the fact that people outside of the royal lineage can in fact be holders of *naam* or *pânga* make Mossi identity something that was socially constructed. On the other hand, *nakombsé* who have lost tenure of office could become *talsé* commoners, blacksmiths or earthpriests in a mutation that was less a marginalisation than an autochthonisation process that transformed the pursuit of *Naam* to a devotion to the *tengsobondo* (ritual control over *tênga*)

²⁸ Classens and Van de Velde.1987: *Early State Dynamics*, Leiden: Brill, pp.15-16. For a cogent exposition of the relations between state and ideology in an African polity, see McCaskie, *State and Society*, 1995: 264-6.

²⁹ See Lonsdale "States and Social Processes," 1981: 160; he makes reference to Corrigan et al., 1980: 15.

and a reference to ancestrality (migration) to that of territoriality (sedentarity).³⁰

The process of cultural assimilation, as explained above, had many implications for the configuration of authority and state sovereignty vis-à-vis pre-Mossi groups. In Moogo, the *Naaba* was the ultimate fount of all political authority, but political authority was delegated through parallel structures. Perry Anderson speaks of ‘*parcelized sovereignty*’ to describe such devolutionary system.³¹ Structures at the provincial and local levels replicated those of the central government, with an equal number of *nesômba* assigned to each royal residence.

However, the Mossi state was quite different from the feudal society conceptualised by Anderson despite notable structural similarities. Contrary to the feudal lord, the Mossi ruler—be it the wandering *nakombsé* awaiting an uncertain nomination or the firmly established territorial ruler—was in no real need to require surplus from *talsé* agricultural producers either through rents or other form of land servility. The argument that the Mossi state, as a version of the Sudanic model, was “a parasitic growth, fastening itself upon the economic base of pre-existing agricultural societies,”³² overlooks modes of collaboration that enabled Mossi conquerors to ‘fit’ into a structured agricultural society. The Mossi had little interest in agriculture, they related to it mainly as dependent

³⁰ M. Izard. 1976. “Changements d’identité Lignagère dans le Yatenga,” *Journal des Africanistes*, 46(1-2): 69-81, p. 73

³¹ P. Anderson. 1974. *Lineages of the Absolutist State*. London: NLB, p. 19.

³² Fage and Oliver 1962: 44-52 in Lonsdale “States and Social Processes,” 1981: 171.

consumers. On the other hand, the emergence of a growing pool of consumers contributed to the crystallisation of sedentary villages, and, more generally, in reshaping local perceptions of the landscape. Certainly, different forms of labour service were required at times from captives and other social categories, especially by local chiefs. When it comes to farmers and artisan workers however, levels of alienation vis-à-vis the product of their labour were quite low throughout Moogo. Apical to the system were Ouagadougou and Ouahigouya, capital cities from the middle of the 18th century onwards from which radiated central authority and that epitomised in many ways the parcellisation of sovereignty as it was reflected in the territorial parcellisation. Chieftains for instance collected the mainstay that maintained the *Naaba*, and his retinue and servants. Gifts and tribute (at times the same thing) thus furnished the sinews of the state whilst the state's incapacity to project effective authority outside the core afforded degrees of autonomy to chieftaincies.

One becomes *naaba* by virtue of the 'taking of *tom*' or *tom yugri* in a ceremony presided over by the *tom naaba*; the tom-taking marks a central step in the nomination of a chief, from the Mogho *Naaba* to the most low-level one. The tom's made from the ashes of a millet stem finely sieved; the new chief use his two hands to put some of it to his forehead whilst kneeling in a way that marks symbolical allegiance to the *Naaba* and the *nesômba* for an ordinary chief and to the *nesômba* in the case of the Mogho or Yatênga *Naaba*. Tom-taking points to the political credence of the college of court dignitaries, the *nesômba* at the same time that it marks the 'rupture' of kinship ties between the *Naaba* and his lineage. The symbolical outcome is the 'abduction' of the *Naaba* which

results from a coherent adjustment to one of the core principles of Mossi political thought: that the *Naaba* or any chief for that matter can never adequately exercise political power unless he's free from all forms of lineal tutelage; in other words the *tom yugri* marks the break between a particular existence permeated with lineal obligations to one dictated by the exclusive principles of the *naam*.³³ Divorcing the king from the kin group is the condition for the passage from an ordinary royal to the sacred institution of kingship. As one *nabiiga* points out:

Everything is sacred about the kingship. If it did not rain, people would call the king to do something about it. There are sacrifices and rites that we, sons of *nabiise*, do not know. There are places that we are not supposed to see.³⁴

The title of *Naaba*, in other words the quality of *naam* is conferred to a chief by way of direct nomination by the Yatênga/Mogho Naaba, this nominative authority was not delegated to provincial chiefs who therefore could make *nanamse* but could only appoint *kasemnamba* (lineage elders). This, again, is a crucial element of state dynamics in so far as it points to the origins of centralisation in Yatênga and equally marks a differentiated institutional orientation with Ouagadougou whereby the intermediary institution of the *kombéré* allowed the latter—himself nominated by the Mogho Naaba—to make chiefs *nanamse*. As mentioned earlier, the Yatênga Naaba is, amongst all the *nanamse*, the only one entitled to the status of *rima* by virtue of having performed the *ringu*. In consequence, the formal equivalence between all *naams* is re-contextualised by the introduction of the *ringu* as an enthronement

³³ See Izard 'Une Trifonctionnalité africaine?' 1995: 415; *Archives Orales* 1980: 768.

³⁴ Maliki Ouedraogo, Interview, Ouahigouya, April 15, 2010

procedure with no particular consequence for ordinary chiefs-other than the repetition of the *tom yugri* along the way to or in their assigned village but with tremendous consequence for the Yatênga Naaba: we have seen that only the descent of a *rima* is politically relevant as far as succession is concerned.

One could therefore be led to see in segmentarity the single most important element in the transmission of political office. In reality, segmentarity comes into play in the politics of the corporate kin group, at the level of local authority and in religious matters whereby reference to *naam* is not an issue. In a sense, the introduction of ideology in the political practice creates an antagonistic as well as a negating element in the contradistinction between *naam* and *kasma*, that is to say political versus lineal authority. The ideology of *naam* is articulated around the possibility for ideological shift, hence the scope for manipulation of the terms of transmission. The predictability of segmentary succession is contrasted to the opacity of the political order, geared towards a greater society project that encompasses the exercise of political authority in the strict sense.

4. 2. Consolidating the State, Specialising Political Practice

Ouagadougou and Ouahigouya constituted the political nucleuses of Yatênga and Ouagadougou respectively; they were also a structural reflection of the demographics of these states. During the 18th century, the state expanded whilst adopting a peculiar zigzag technique between lineage and bureaucratisation. The gradual incorporation of captives and indigenous segments within states offices and services points both to political strategies

designed to circumscribe those born with a distinct affiliation to power (*nakombsé*) and by the same token associate those whose birth placed at a considerable social distance from it (*têngbîise*, strangers). The distinction between citizens, royal subjects, inhabitants of the kingdom and possible interlopers was not necessarily based on blood and lineage but rather on a process of general social integration of various groups comprising the new Mossi society. As Axtmann puts it,

the state pulled society into its political space, at the same time as it was trying to shape society according to its own objectives. In this process, state-society relations were tightened and social relations were 'caged' within the national rather than the local or regional or transnational terrain. The state could no longer be evaded. It became imperative for the state's subjects to gain rights as citizens in order to be better able to control its activities, share in the benefits it could bring, and lessen the negative effects of its policies on the life of individuals, families, and communities.³⁵

Social integration, together with the emergence of Mooré as the *lingua franca* was part and parcel of this process. Citizenship was forged through the dissemination of state ideology which acted as a socialising mechanism. Ideology in Moogo was methodically wrought in the collective belief system; it was never clear that it was something *intentionally* imposed upon society but rather ritualised and inculcated in people in ways that fostered in them a sense of loyalty towards the state and the sovereign.³⁶ The 'ritual pact' for the Mossi state meant adopting aspects of pre-existing beliefs, and through the union

³⁵ See R. Axtmann. 2004 "The State of the State: The Model of the Modern State and Its Contemporary Transformation," *International Political Science Review* 25(3): 259-279, p. 261; also see Mann 1993: 61.

³⁶ See Skalník, *The Early State*, 1978: 607.

Wende-tênga (see chapter 6), appropriated for itself the means to consolidate the sovereign's divine attributes in the context of a political rule that had no real control over its territorial support. Issues of citizenship and social integration are further discussed in chapter 5.

The state apparatus comprised the entirety of state functionaries whose political activities had the effect of reproducing the monarchical system *per se*—independently from the person of the monarch—and hence the permanence of the state.³⁷ The monarchical principle was the basis for the distinction between the exercise of *naam* at the summit of politics and control over local *naams* or local varieties of *naam*. Its principle was preserved, beyond the person (ality) of the *Naaba*, by the combined effect of state functions and the dynamics of the royal lineage. The *nesômba* play a crucial role in the greater scheme of things; the continuity of the state's control apparatus is vested in dialectics of continuity and adjustment. They embody stability within a reproductive system that pits old dynastic branches against new ones. Consequently, the *naam* order (political order) fundamentally negates the *kasma* order (segmentary order) as it introduces political ideology, which is likely to obscure the successoral order in its very logic. The absence of ambiguity in the transmission of segmentary order was an element that stood in marked contrast with the manipulative possibilities of political ideology. With the introduction of *naam*, the chain of transmission of authority was heavily disrupted. Memory of course was a key principle as well as an asset in deciding

³⁷ See Izard, *Archives Orales* 1980: 789-792.

between members of entangled lineages, segments with generational pedigree rooted in the far past having the upper hand in the definition of status through use of memory.

If for functions vested in particular lineages, the order of transmission was more or less linear, *naam* creates breaks in the chain of transmission. Thus, new branches of an existing lineage could and often replaced old ones during these junctures. This was true for both maximal (tracing ascendance back to Naaba Ouedraogo, the great founder) and minimal ends of the genealogical continuum. In practice, the *Naaba* did not intervene in the devolution of office at the local level, he merely ratified what was generally a concerted decision between *nesômba* unless there was an open conflict, in which case he adjudicated in the last resort on the basis of *nesômba's* recommendations. More delicate were cases which concerned old and young *nakombsé* branches, the *Naaba* was particularly keen on following movements of change in power relations within them as they were likely to affect the equilibrium of power (and distribution of sources of political legitimacy), within the lineal body generally speaking and eventually royal legitimacy.

Nevertheless, when *naam* is introduced, authority and office transmission are given a new impetus in the requirements that *Naam* be strongly desired and sought after, in life and beyond death. And it is this relentless quest for *Naam* that confers meaning to the life and action of a *nakombga* and informs his wanderings from village to village, his forbearance before poverty and idleness. Two categories of chiefs and two categories of *Naam* are here to be distinguished on the basis of the above elements: on the one hand *nakombsé* or

members of the royal nobility and on the other hand the group of non-royal chiefs including military commanders, captives and other commoners (*tâsomnamba, nayiirdamba*) engaged in state administration, at the central and local (territorial) levels. The former's hold over local entities precludes 'dynastisation' of office, i.e the cooptation of given territorial units by specific lineal segments as this would directly threaten the cohesion of office transmission. The second category, in so far as it holds *pânga*, has a form of legitimacy that the central power cannot question once it had appointed its members. It is not necessarily a genealogical but territorial form of legitimacy.³⁸ From the perspective of the central power, the extension of the right to rule territorial entities to non-*nakombsé* officials was a marked victory of the state in its struggle to keep kinship at bay. Administrative transformations in Moogo indicate that centralisation emerged when political institutions and social relationships were gradually disembodied from the kinship networks that had subtended them.

The eclectic group of royal servants and court attendants gradually became transformed, starting from the end of the seventeenth century, into an administrative category, both in Yatênga and Ouagadougou. I am not wedded to the use of term 'class', at least not for the early period of the centralisation process. This group reproduced itself as a professional group by way of specialisation in the provision of certain services, thus institutionalising a system of rewards (such as *poghsiure*, a mutually binding system of distribution of women between lineages and between the *Naaba* and his retinue) for their

³⁸ Izard, *Traditions Orales* 1980: 771.

services but it is not clear this created any form of class consciousness in them. The political direction imparted to their services would not become formally structured up until the middle of the eighteenth century.

Three figures bore the title of *soba*: the *pângsoba* (holder of force); the *têngsoba* (earth custodian); and the *tâsoba* (war chief). The ultimate *pângsoba* was however the *Naaba*, the sovereign (*rima*). The translation of *tâsoba* as ‘warrior’ can be misleading in the sense that it was attributed to first generations of *nakombsé* who fought or contributed in other ways to establishing Mossi rule. Most of these ‘warriors’ were no longer active militarily but endeavoured to preserving the gains of past military campaigns through peaceful strategies. Although *tâsomnamba* and *nakombsé* had the same origin, they had different social roles and political sensitivities: whilst the *tâsoba* was a dignitary settled in the place his ancestors had helped secure, the *nakombga* is a wandering office-aspirer, always ready and eager to do the dirty job of the state in order to gain the trust of the *Naaba* with the view of securing, someday, some form of authority over some village. To this cluster of *tâsomnamba* of *nakombga* origin was added another type of *tâsomnamba* of captive origin who had effective military functions. These warriors made up the majority population of a town like Ouahigouya, particularly in its *Bîngo* section. It might not be altogether incorrect to argue that the organisation of *Bîngo* constitutes, in a way, the ideal model of political order which the *naam* order envisaged to establish, and the *Bîngo* captive the ideal type of citizen, entirely devoted to serving the *Naaba* and transcending kinship and other forms of loyalty such as ethnicity or faith.

Centralisation in Moogo was most pronounced in Yatênga in the sense that captives were accorded unprecedented levels of political authority. Whereas in other areas of Moogo, captives could be *bin tâsomnamba* (chief warriors), in Yatênga, they were also *bin nanamse* (territorial chiefs), especially in areas most susceptible to experiencing open rebellion against the state, mostly from the Kurumba (Fulse) in Fulgo in the north and northeast. Bangbateebo's rise under Naaba' Kango's rule epitomised the centrality of *Bîngo* in state politics. Naaba Kango created the office of Rasam (Bîn) Naaba for Bangbateebo, a captive who grew up in Gourcy under a mentor named Bangba. Bangbateebo played a crucial role in Yatênga politics, his service spanned four administrations (Kango, Piiga, Saaga and Tuguri) and his many descendants held the highest offices in the kingdom. His daughters would become the mothers of Yatênga nanamse (Naaba Bulli, Naaba Ligidi) and prominent figures such as the cheik of ramatulaay.³⁹ More spectacularly, in Yatênga, *tâsomnamba* came to be nominated head of chieftaincies traditionally reserved to sons and brothers of a ruling Naaba, thus gaining access to a *naam* over a particular territory, as opposed to just being a high official in the service of the *Naaba*. Thus, the chiefs of Ula, Lago, Kosuka, Gurcy and Kalo came to gain tremendous power, in effect close to that of the *nesomba*. If there was a hierarchy in terms of ceremonial order—*bin tâsomnamba* have to greet the *Naaba* from the east gate of the court whilst the moos *tâsomnamba* greet him from the western gate—in reality these five chiefs as well as number of less prominent *tâsomnamba* enjoyed the same status as the most respected moos *tâsomnamba*, so much so that the differentiation between

³⁹ Kariim Ouedraogo, interview, Ouahigouya, April 16, 2010

moos tâsomnamba (which have called *nakombsé tâsomnamba*) and *bin tâsomnamba* became almost meaningless.

In Yatenga, the chief of Ula (the equivalent of the *tâpsoba* in Ouagadougou) was a particularly interesting personage; he was the first warrior of the kingdom and as such had an institutional importance in the state apparatus. During the annual *napusum* (greeting) ceremony, he asks the *Naaba* “where to take the war”. The chief of Ula was the only one in the kingdom who could apostrophise the *Naaba* in times of crisis (war especially) without needing introduction from the *togo naaba*. Unlike some of the other *tâsomnamba*, the chief of Ula was not a dynastical chief; at the time of death, his residence was burnt and his family sent to exile. Some scholars have even argued that the chief of Ula was the ritual double of the *Naaba* in the sense that he was put to death after 7 years of office or after a defeat.⁴⁰ However, traditions differ on this point.

Whilst centralisation was forcefully supported by the *nayiridamba* and the *tâsomnamba*, *nakombsé* fought to keep afloat by promoting the interests of *nanamse* favourable to promoting a more significant role for them in state politics. The nineteenth century was marked, both in Ouagadougou and Yatenga, by fierce struggles between the two main political ‘families’ of the kingdom, namely state officials on the one hand (*nayirdemba* and the *tâsomnamba*) and clusters of *nakombsé* on the other. The arm-wrestling between the two factions

⁴⁰ See M. Izard. 1986. ‘Le Thème de la Mise a Mort Rituelle chez les Moose,’ *Afrique Plurielle. Hommage a Georges Balandier*. Paris, Karthala: 181-189, pp. 184-5.

was most glaring during times of succession, *nakombsé* engaged in wheeling and dealing for the future allocation of local chieftaincies; at the same time, 'people of the royal household' (*nayirdemba* and the *tâsomnamba*) engaged in active lobbying for opposite demands: the extension of royal prerogatives and an increasing role for court officials at the expense of *nakombsé*. The accumulation of these tensions would eventually lead, in the case of Yatênga, to a civil war following the nomination of Naaba Baogo (1885-1895) by the *nesomba* of Sisamba. The *nakombsé* reacted violently to the defeat of their candidate. The following ten years would be the most tumultuous in Yatênga political history. From 1890 onwards, the French would take advantage of the situation to play rival *nakombsé* branches against each other and against *nesômba* and court dignitaries; the latter would eventually become the strong men of colonial Yatênga as the French nominated them chiefs of province with extensive powers.

Syncretism was an important element of state mechanism and guided the wider state-building project. The state represented and integrated ideological and political, economic and kinship-related elements as these were interwoven in the formal and informal structures that moved Mossi society. The 'professionalisation' of state practice into an elaborate organisation in the middle of the eighteenth century reflected this syncretism as it attempted to address it, to regulate the relations of different social categories through institutions that cut across conventional cleavages. Marginal groups such as blacksmiths and griots can also be envisaged as agents of socialization of state apparatus; their status rested upon an ambivalent combination of necessity and

dependence, in the services they provided the other groups, such as the fabrication of iron tools and cooking utensils. Political equilibrium resulted from the recognition of the contribution of each category to state construction and the functioning of institutions, be they concerted or controlled by a specific professional category. Spatial distances between these categories were defined and delimited in an ideological attempt to create areas of countering effects to sources of social tension.

On the other hand, the military sphere epitomised the dual nature of the state. Internal security enabled a certain sense of stability as it allowed the redistribution of the limited economic surplus and wealth. In Moogo, instances of secession and breaks of autonomy existed which were made possible by the weakness of infrastructure and logistics of the centre. Provincial chiefs made use of their *de jure* power to found new states without the state intervening. In fact, as long as the pact that made these microstates extensions of the central government was respected (allegiance and gift-giving), the central government did not see this as fission or separation. Skalnić speaks of an 'unbalanced reciprocal system' in the sense that contributions given to the state in terms of levies, tribute, labour, were use 'for the common good' in public works and administrative matters; the ruling category did not gain many material benefits from this. Which is why it is difficult to speak about coercion (other than ideological), but rather a sort of a covert exploitation built upon a 'common' ideology of reciprocity and mutual aid'.

The absence of a standing army meant that the army was an ad hoc formation. The army was in fact led by persons also in charge of other spheres of decision-making hence the interrelation of the military with other spheres of state activity.⁴¹ The strengthening of royal power in the middle of the eighteenth century went hand in hand with implicit and explicit transformations both in Ouagadougou and Yatênga. Mogho Naaba Warga (c.1737-1744) inaugurated an era of centralisation in Ouagadougou marked by the specialisation of state structures whilst Ouagadougou came to be consolidated as state capital and political centre. The constitution of the *Kamboinsé* corps—the residential guards of the Mogho Naaba—is said to have been an influence from the Ashante court, most probably during the reign of Osei Tutu (1695-1731).⁴² The introduction of Islam during this period—attributed to Naaba Dulugu (c.1796-c.1825)—along with gradual internal stabilisation, is believed to have been a determinant element in these transformations.⁴³ The rather artificial conversion of the ruling *nakombsé* did not however affect much the structure or modify the ritual basis that legitimated political power.

Mossi oral traditions are intriguingly silent when it comes to the world outside Moogo. The Mossi state structure was a close system, turned inwards, it related to the outside through the filtered lens of autochthony and foreignness.

⁴¹ See Skalník, *the Early State* 1978: 609.

⁴² Pageard, “*Une Enquête Historique*,” 1965: 58.

⁴³ Skinner 1966; Levtzion 1968; Breusers 2003; the intertwining of *naam* and its ritual legitimisation are believed to be the factors that accounted for the Mossi’s withstanding the penetration of Islam and Christianity. Several Mogho Naaba are believed to have converted to Islam during the 1700s but they nonetheless abided by the ritual foundation that held *naam* in place.

Through Yarse and Hausa traders, mainly, the Mossi were in contact with Asante and the Mande of upper Niger as well as other neighbouring polities such as Songhay. Mossi cosmogony views Moogo encompassing the limits of the 'world' (Moogo itself has the meaning of 'the world' at large), that is the *civilised* space over which *Naam* held control. In other words, the Mossi's apparent withdrawal into their own world can be understood as being the outcome of the particular way they perceive themselves and the way they relate to the world lying outside Moogo.

Internally, the middle and end of the nineteenth century was a period of uncertainties with a devastating famine falling on the region (the Zogoré Famine) and from 1877, in the aftermath of Naba Yemde's death, a series of convulsions shook the aristocracy fighting a fierce *bataille-rangée* over rules of succession. In fact, a succession of short-lived terms triggered protests and members of collateral branches of royal dynasties called into question the legitimacy of prevailing rules; a portion of the dissenters strove for a discontinuity of these rules. Members of the young generations split up into two rigid camps of classificatory brothers. On the one hand, the 'sons of Tuguri', descendants of Naaba Tuguri (1822-1834) ganged against the 'sons of Saaga', descendants of the young brothers of Naaba Saaga (1787-1803). When Naaba Baogo, elder son of Naaba Yemde (1850-1877), is crowned Yatênga Naaba in 1885, as the head of the 'sons of Saaga' branch, he had to contend with an intractable revolt from the 'sons of Tuguri' led by Bagara, son of Naaba Tuguri. With the help of the Peul and their firearms, the Tuguri branch defeated Naaba Baogo in the battle of Tiou. However, Yatênga's independence was to come to an

end with Naaba Baogo's successor as Naaba Bulli signed a protectorate treaty with the French in 1895. As the French sought to 'pacify' Mossi dynasties by supporting given candidates and by attempting to eliminate political struggles altogether, they undermined an essential principle of the Mossi political system which sanctioned and encouraged competition for *Naam* as something fundamentally good.

Externally, Mossi states enjoyed relative stability until around the 1820 with the emergence of Cheiku Amadu's Macina whose wish it was to federate all Peul under an Islamic Empire. Yatênga extended into Jelgoji in the northeast predominantly inhabited by Peul, and the Gondo plains in the north which was an area of pasture under very loose of Yatênga.⁴⁴ The strategies of Naaba Totebaldo (1834-1850) and his brother Naaba Yemba (1850-1877) were to use a combination of war and diplomacy, shrewdly manipulating rivalries between Jelgoji chieftaincies. After half a century of struggle, Yatênga was able to effectively extend authority over the Jelkgoji, thus giving free rein to Mossi influence, at the expense of the Kurumba and neighbouring Risyam.⁴⁵

4. 3. State Sovereignty and the Construction of Identity in Moogo

The four groups that comprised Mossi population were formal subjects of the state (*nakombsé, nayiridemba, tâsomnamba*), *relative* subjects (indigenous groups) or *peripheral* subjects (strangers, traders) or mere inhabitants who had limited or no relation with the formal state (blacksmiths, *silmiise* pastoralist and

⁴⁴ The Peul had pushed north indigenous Kurumba and Sonray in the early period of Mossi expansion.

⁴⁵ Izard, "Histoire d'un Empire," 1978: 38.

silmimoose) outside the provision of certain services.⁴⁶ Depending on their lineal distance to the ruling *Naaba*, a small portion of *nakombsé* had *de jure* access to *naam* whilst the bulk of them were excluded from political competition. Inversely, a large portion of captives and slaves had *de facto* access to *naam*. The differentiated access to *naam* impacted the distribution of economic resources as well as the repartition of religious functions. The *Balum* and *Togo Nanamse*, two of the four chiefs that headed the different branches of the royal residence (*Toogse*, *Balôngo*, *Werâsê* and *Bîngo* or *Rasam*), looked after royal regalia; they controlled access to the Naaba and thus yielded tremendous power and leverage in swinging the course of things and the fortune of people, including local chiefs and *nakombsé*. The foreign population were of Mande, Hausa, Songhai or Ashante origin. A good part of these strangers were affiliated to royal administrative and functions as assistants of all sorts. Most of them were craftsmen, traders, warriors or armourers, and Muslim advisors at various chiefs' courts.⁴⁷

This section explores *mossiness* based on previous explorations of the manufacture of *asanteness*.⁴⁸ Wilks analyses the process of *asanteness* as a result of bureaucratisation during the 17-18th centuries. He sketched what he saw as a process of bureaucratisation in the centralisation of the administrative

⁴⁶ *Silmiise* were nomadic herders and *silmimoose* herders-cultivators (offspring of mossi/silmiise union); they merely lived in Mossi society but were not taken into account in the state's definition of 'citizen' and 'subject'.

⁴⁷ See Skalník 1978: 479; Levtzion 1968.

⁴⁸ These are brief summaries intended to present an overview of the two perspectives, for a better understanding, see Wilks 1975 McCaskie 1995.

apparatus of the state, in terms of the routinisation and specialisation of different administrative tasks assigned to individuals, not as ascribed status, but as recognition of professional talents, as it became important for Asante to reform, in the beginning of the nineteenth century, its administration, in order to expand and rationalise it. These reforms “required the services of functionaries skilled in transacting business and arbitrating disputes with foreign merchants at distant markets; of others able to maintain the physical conditions of roads and to monitor the movement of both people and commodities along them; of others to attend to the complex operations of the treasury; and so forth.”⁴⁹ An important element of bureaucratisation in Ashanti laid in the profitability of trade, and wealth accrued to the treasury by taxation and by manipulation of the terms of the market by state agencies, through the proprietary control exercised by particular skills of an expanding administration. To this was added the increased consciousness of the category of functionaries or *asomfo* as constituting a collective unit because of their distinctive relationship to the means of production; they gradually took the characteristics of an administrative ‘class’, recruited upon merits and enjoying a system of promotional hierarchies.

McCaskie on the other hand seeks to integrate the materialist perspective with cultural specificities by incorporating insights from Gramsci's work on hegemony, and the interdisciplinary approach of the *Annalistes* with their

⁴⁹ Wilks, *Forests of Gold*, 1993: 295; Wilks expounds the process of bureaucratisation in Ashanti elsewhere, see I. Wilks. 1966 “Aspects of Bureaucratisation in Ashanti in the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of African History* 7(2) and *Asante in the Nineteenth Century*, 1975: 414-76.

emphasis on cultural practice. Building on Gramsci's insights on classes and hegemony, and the need for the state to balance coercion and consent in its relationship to civil society, McCaskie presents a complex and rich study of the ideological structurations of the Asante state, and the forging of hegemonic consent rooted in the deep structures of Asante belief and knowledge. Coercive power, whether military or legal, was limited and insufficient in ensuring the “structural complic[ity] in, or consenting to, its subjection to the state’s interventions.”⁵⁰ The state needed to rest upon ideological legitimation, and it needed to organise the consent of the governed, more than the pure exercise of coercive power. It did so through a conscious (re)construction of Asante historical experience, emphasising its cultural specificity. The state was able to formulate a purposefully authoritative reading of Asante experience and history by subsuming the “epistemological distinctions between knowledge and belief” in a unitary hermeneutical experience. For McCaskie, consent was not achieved through coercion but hegemony, whereby the (all-powerful) state constructs, manages, manipulates, controls and disseminates ideas. In fact, the state espoused the role of the *hermeneus* in its attempts to make valid statements on the historical experience of Asante society whilst also defining the basis of Asante identity.

the Asante state constantly sought to arrogate to itself the role of the ultimate *hermeneus*. The state tried to subordinate and shape the possibilities in the spectrum of knowledge and belief, just as it attempted to convert representations from arguments to statements.⁵¹

⁵⁰ McCaskie, *State and Society*, 1995: 86.

⁵¹ McCaskie, *State and Society*, 1995: 23.

The annual celebration of the Odwira provided a key opportunity for the state to deploy its ideological project:

[At] the level of both society and the individual, it [the odwira] was dedicated to the sustenance and continuity of the indispensable historical, cognitive and ethical relationship that was held to exist between all presently living Asante, their deceased ancestors, and their unborn descendants.⁵²

In constructing a notion of Asante identity, the state defined *asante-ness* and presided over Asante ‘personhood’ in the ‘bodies’ of state agents, in their conduct, their speech, in etiquette that served to exemplify the way of the Asante as conceptualised by the state.

In many ways, the Mossi experience presents similarities to McCaskie’s perspective on Asante. The difference with the Mossi was that, although the state acted as a purposeful actor in the deployment of *naam*, when it comes to the process of assimilation, it was not clear that it had a conscious design to disseminate *naam* ideology. It was never clear that the state was endowed with the *conscious* design that McCaskie attributes to the Asante state. It was rather the very logic of *naam*—in producing a number of officeless *nakombsé* and in recruiting *naam*-holders from outside nobility—that disseminated state ideology. In that sense, the Mossi method was a *combination of design and social procedurest*. I argue that Mossiness was achieved through a particular paradox inherent in *naam* ideology. The emergence and expansion of the administrative category went hand in hand with a ‘diffusion’ of *naam*-derived values and norms which were thus far confined to the *moos būudu* stricto sensu. In theory and practice however, *naam* values could be disseminated through the deployment

⁵² McCaskie, *State and Society*, 1995: 144.

of state institutions and practices. In other words, although state practice was bound to rule and rulers, its values “showed a tendency to become generalised throughout society.”⁵³ Historically thus, the direction of change could be identified as a top-down approach which espoused ways so subtle that one is hard pressed to show how exactly this took place, to an extent that at the end ideology appeared as something that was accepted, rather than imposed. The administrative category emerged and it reproduced itself as an institutional category with a life of its own, exercising much weight, if not a certain monopoly, over the provision of crucial services and thus the direction of change in social activities. The traditions of the founding lineages became those of the entire state, *Mooré* (Mossi language) became the language of the state and of wider society, and members of other groups, indigenous and migrants, became, so to speak, *mossified*. As the same time as it served to exemplify civilisation—the Mossi language was opposed to the language of *Silmiise* and other ‘uncouth’ strangers whose mode of communication was likened to *gangemde*, the language of animals. *Mooré* also expressed the conceptual sense of being Mossi, the Mossi sense of decorum and conduct; it was then the site that embodied the essence of Mossi identity although it was never an explicit dimension of the state project.

Once the Mossi state was in place, strategies had to be devised to provide the state apparatus with the practical means of preserving and consolidating itself. In achieving this aim, the kin group model, because of the constraints it

⁵³ In Wilks, *Forests of Gold*, 1993: 305.

laid upon the *Naaba*, proved impractical in many ways. If, at the beginning, emphasis was placed on formal channels of descent, particularly on the preponderance of a perceived or demonstrated link to founder Ouedraogo (Wedraogo), the state sought, in the interdependence between *Naam* and *Tênga* on the one hand, and in the possibility of recruiting members outside the *Moos bûudu*, the means to building a society that fitted the ideological design of *naam*. The divorce of office succession from the corporate kin model did not however remove, nor was it intended to do so, the patrimonial aspect of the state. If anything, the rules of succession kept political leadership within the *naam* model, more particularly; it limited succession to descendants of *nanamse* who had effectively held office. In other words, political centralisation confined power to a limited number of contenders, in reality to a limited number of dynasties that competed to capture the means of political power. Towards the middle of eighteenth century, the group of eligible candidates for office was gradually 'thinned', eliminating in the process collateral lines from amongst the royal dynasties in favour of the eldest son.⁵⁴

The ideology of *naam*, by demarcating the *moos bûudu* as the group par excellence endowed with the unique properties of political leadership, in a way 'overwrote' existing ideology of *Tênga* confined to earth rituals. Oral traditions of indigenous groups are replete with references to a form of 'contract' whereby a first comer 'allowed' an immigrant to exercise political rule whilst he provided the material and economic resources needed for the preservation of such rule.

⁵⁴ Skinner, *the Mossi*, 1964: 36; J. Goody. 1966. *Succession to High Office*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, introduction.

In many parts of West and Central Africa, The juxtaposition of these two ideologies gave birth to variations of the divine kingship/sacred chieftaincy model; this topic is fully explored in chapter 6. Royal rituals, particularly enthronement ceremonies and funerals, were the place this interdependence was most explicitly enacted in an integrated symbolism that also served to mask the imperious nature of political rule vis-à-vis state subjects. It seems that as the Mossi state drew upon the traditions of *Tênga*, it did so within legitimising themes that ensured the acquiescence of firstcomers to Mossi rule.

At the same time, *mossiness* was constructed as an extension of the *naam* model, in an effort to render *Tênga* and periphery 'amenable' to state rule. However, because the earth custodian had authority over land and the elements, political authority had to solicit his active cooperation in the form of the performance or rituals which were necessary for settlement.⁵⁵ If in other Mossi states, the role of the *têngsoba* was generally limited to conducting propitiatory sacrifices, in Busma for instance, the *têngsoaba* of Tâng-pooré was in addition to his rituals duties a member of the Electoral College and thus had deliberative voice on the choice of a new Busma naaba.⁵⁶ The complementary nature of *naam* and *tênga* was very much what enabled *naam* to assimilate part

⁵⁵ Hampate Bâ discussed the importance of the provision of the right of use by autochthons to migrant groups throughout West Africa in A.H. BA. 1994. *Oui Mon Commandant! Mémoires II, Actes Sud*, p. 57.

⁵⁶ See P. Sawadogo. 2009. 'Etat des Connaissances sur le Riungu de Busma: Regard sur les Origines, les Fondements, l'Organisation du Pouvoir, les Grandes Figures et les Relations Interétatiques à l'Epoque Précoloniale.' In P. C. Hien and M. Gomgnimbou. 2009. *Histoire des Royaumes et Chefferies au Burkina Faso Précolonial*, 205-231. Ouagadougou: DIST/CNRST p. 215.

of indigenous groups as *mossi*.⁵⁷ The category of *têngbîise moose*—in itself a contradiction since *moose* could not be autochthons—was proof that socio-ethnic identity was not strictly determined by historical or geographical references. The Mutation of *moose* into *têngbîise* was either an instance of autochthonisation following a change of guard from an old to a new generation of *nakombsé* at a given locality or a ‘de-territorialisation’ of *têngbîise* who followed Mossi conquerors from the south.⁵⁸

To the question “how did most people become Mossi?” one informant explained the following:

The most common Mossi names in Yatênga are Ouedraogo (agnatic descendants of founding ancestor Ouedraogo) and Sawadogo. But you also find names such as Sogoba, Gondé, etc. normally, all the Ouedraogo come from the same ancestor. The Sawadogo say that they come from the entrails of the earth, so there is noone more Mossi than them; they are authentic Mossi. Others say that they fell from the sky. And that is to say that there is no truer moaga than them. After all, what is moaga and what is moogo? Moogo is the bush. And the Sawadogo come from the bush.⁵⁹

Could a contradiction be read in the quote above? It is possible that this kind of explanation is a retrospective, late nineteenth century rationalisation of the Sawadogo’s (originally earth custodians) assimilation as Mossi? The example of the Sawadogo—and many other similar stories that explicate how different groups came to become *mossi*—shows that many groups were turned Mossi without them necessarily having to be *naam* holders. The *moaga* from this on is

⁵⁷ In present Burkina Faso being Mossi is to be part of the Mossi ethnic group but in the past Mossiness had more to do with social activity and it was conceived in relation to the practice of power and it applied to those people who evolved within the realm of *Naam*.

⁵⁸ On mutations of identity in Yatenga, see Izard, “Changements d’Identité,” 1976: 71-3.

⁵⁹ Karim Ouedraogo and Ila Ouedraogo, Interview, Ouahigouya, April 16, 2010.

no longer (strictly) the descendant of Ouedraogo, the conquering ancestor. He is also that one which comes from 'moogo', in other words an autochthon. This interpretation explicates rather plausibly the *mossification* of formerly non-Mossi groups and their gradual integration in the larger *moos bûudu*. In the case of non-autochthonous and non-Mossi, other strategies of assimilation were deployed: captives becoming stranger-kin and Dogon (Kibsi) and Bambara adopting the name Ouedraogo. Furthermore, the Sawadogo, the Gondé, the Sogoba and others tapped into the amended virtues of autochthony as marker of historic identity (see chapter 5). The process of assimilation, of mossification, could be best understood if one looks deeper into the origin and history of patronymics.⁶⁰ However, because these very patronymics reveal aspects of family history still relevant to social status and the nature of interactions between families and groups, it remains a delicate area to research. It becomes even more problematic when people deny their ancestor changed names even when everything in the history of the settlement of that family points to the opposite.

The change of name in to 'Ouedraogo' was typical but not always a marker of change of identity: "Some Fulsé, Yarsé, and Maransé for example still speak Peul or Yaalam today and have kept part of their culture. You find in the Yatênga people with names such as Ouattara or Traoré (originally from Mali) or Barry (Guinea). But the rest have assimilated and have become Mossi."⁶¹ If, for

⁶⁰ Ali Ouedraogo (University of Ouagadougou) is preparing a thesis on the connection between patronymics, place names and 'mossi' identity; his might be an invaluable contribution to our understanding of this very process.

⁶¹ Karim Ouedraogo, Interview, Ouahigouya, April 16, 2010.

various reasons, some of the Mossi of Yatênga and Ouagadougou were not open about the reasons for the non-universality of the name 'Ouedraogo' for all those who consider themselves Mossi, there were clear instances whereby political alliance, spatial contiguity or social integration had facilitated a change of identity for non-Mossi. For instance, the current chiefs of Ula and Sugunaam are not Ouedraogo, but rather Touré (Malian origin) and Kondé (Guinean origin), respectively.

It is easy to understand the interconnections sketched above by interpreting figure 2 which shows the directions of possible change of 'identity'.

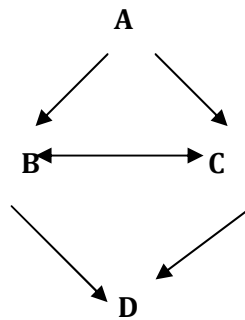


Figure 2: identity change

The AB arrow describes the marginalisation of a *nakombga* into an autochthon or blacksmith whilst AC indicates his choice to engage freely in trading activities, thus becoming *yarga*. The core of social activity is contained at the junction BC (agriculture and trade); BC is also a zone of transition for marginal groups as they gain access to the realm of power even though the

schema denies the possibility for non-*nakombsé* to join A.⁶² Both *nakombsé* and indigenous (AB) could become blacksmiths (D).

The state's attempt to construct a common framework was at the same time an endeavour to provide the moral and material basis for self-understanding through referentials capable of informing responses to challenges. As such, it ran against currents of thought and ideas developed independently from state impulsion and therefore from other sets of moralities and historical experience. If one were to look at the state as both an agent and a political community, one would see two distinctive sets of features. On the one hand the state represented the administrative and the political, in other words, a body of rules that rested on the administration of *pânga* (coercion) as its prerogative. On the other hand, the state's attempt to define identity, in other words to translate Mossi representations of themselves and their history into valid historical statements, did not remain unchallenged. Non-Mossi groups were able to amend or reinterpret the meaning of Mossiness and contribute to its continuing elaboration. This entailed (re)constructing and re-appropriating foundational and settlement stories and myths in ways that better fitted the new discourses, as shown above in the interpretation of the term *moogo*.

The state is also in parallel a political community that rests less on the coercive capacity of the government than on the linkages that create mutual workings between the ruling segment, and lineage sections, the group of royal captives and provincial rulers, who may have a vested interest in state

⁶² From Izard, "Changements d'Identité," 1976: 79.

structure, and therefore seek to affect it at the same that they are affected by it. Captives and royal attendants had an interest in preserving their privileged relationship with the *Naaba*. This special relationship secured status and material benefits to the *Naaba's* loyal allies. As one informant explained it:

Here in Bingo, there are families linked to traditional chiefs. If a *pângsoba* had to pick up bundles of firewood, take one or two sheep, instead of taking what he needs for the *Naaba*, he would also help himself; he would take many more sheep and many bundles and he would keep some for himself. You see, he was also working for himself. Families of captives were in charge of many tasks. They would execute tasks that *nakombsé* or chiefs could not do. They would do things that chiefs would refrain from doing. They were the right hand of chiefs. They would do things that could not be done by families of chiefs. The captives therefore were the enforcers of decisions made by chiefs. Their loyalty to the *Yatênga Naaba* was absolute. They had a close relationship with the *Naaba*.⁶³

This political society is both a regulative body and a site of production of political values. Shifts in ideological tendencies amongst groups of the political society tend to trigger modifications in processes of thinking within state.

A plurality of actors meant multiple and differentiated forms of control over social resources. At the same time, there was a multiplicity of principles inherent in the differentiated usage of these social resources which resulted in the institutionalisation of specific interests and cultural orientations. In Moogo, a basic distinction between the political and religious spheres at time resulted in the crystallisation of opposing orientations. These disparate dynamics created systemic contradictions articulated in the distribution of values and political authority. The two adages, namely that “the king is naked if not

⁶³ Ila Ouedraogo, Interview, Ouahigouya, April 16, 2010.

wrapped/clothed in *naam*" and *neb la naam* (literally the presence of people justify *naam* aptly convey this contradiction.

It is interesting to see how these dynamics translate in terms of conceptions of space. The tension prevailing between space and place is inherent in the widespread conception of a state as territorially bound. The subjection of space into territory as a constitutive criterion to state formation undermines relativising views on space on the one hand and reaffirmation of people and spatial identities in differentiated ways.

The state conception of space was different from *tênga*'s perspective of space as an organic unit, space was land for living; space was the bush where the earth mediates between human activities and the forces of nature, the sacrality of the earth; in other words the permanent tension between nature and culture. *Naam*'s action was to appropriate space as land, in other words aspects of *tênga* without encroaching upon the sacred elements that safeguarded the integrity of the 'earth'. In doing so, *naam* reduced 'space' to the territorial support to a strategy of demographic occupation. As one interviewee put it "we govern people but we do not actually control *tênga*, we live on the land but we do not own it. You and I are sitting on the earth and we need to ask the permission to disturb it and to use it."⁶⁴ In other words, by removing the substantial link between earth, sacrality and natural forces, *naam* is able to deploy a political strategy made of fission and expansion across the realm of

⁶⁴ Noufou Ouedraogo, Interview, Ouagadougou, December 5, 2009.

tênga without fundamentally changing the configuration of the latter.⁶⁵ In separating the organic connection man experiences with space/earth, *naam* is able to establish, from the perspective of the operation of the state at least, the administrative basis for the rule of *naam*. Whilst facilitating the ‘implementation’ of the state in their local areas by performing the necessary propitiatory sacrifices for new chiefs, ‘people of the earth’ are however weary of the invasive attention of the state and its local agents. If their world was a closed entity that lacked readability for the state, they also saw the state and politics as a separate world altogether and administrative agents as the embodiment of the state’s potential for coercion and brutality.

CONCLUSION

The frontier model is recognisable in the existence of many local frontiers; it is reproduced in frontier polities around and within core or—in Kopytoff’s terminology—mature states. Thus, the continuous reproduction of the frontier, throughout history, has created and maintained a ‘frontier-conditioned ideology’ in the political consciousness of African societies, old and new, whilst shaping African political cultures. The greatest usefulness of the frontier model resides in the insight it affords in solving part of a *very African puzzle*: namely, the similarity of the political cultures of societies sometimes rather distant from each other. In our region of interest, the frontier model confirms a number of intuitions about processes of state formation in the Voltaic region.

⁶⁵ See on this, M. Izard. 1993. “Centralisation du Pouvoir: La Preuve par la Toponymie,” *Journal des Africanistes* 63(2): 5-24, p. 23-4.

There is no single element that can account for the formation of the African state. Although conquest did play a non-negligible role in erecting political formations, a multiplicity of factors, namely the long-term effects of the migration of ideas and people, concurred to account for its emergence and its enduring existence at least around the Volta Rivers, south of the Niger Bend. What propelled Mossi migrants was the capacity for imagination, of opportunities that laid in the 'frontier' whether this was real or constructed; the territorial limits of Mossi expansion were in that respect irrelevant in their adventure-framework. On the other hand, the fact that indigenous populations 'accepted' the rule of strangers with an apparent easiness needs to be replaced in the context of socio-economic differentiations whereby doing politics was a 'craft' on a par with blacksmithing or land-tilling. The idea of 'class', here, is rather unhelpful; in the absence of class-consciousness and any explicit attempt by state apparatus, at least during the formative period, to bring about a 'class society'.⁶⁶

Expansion in *Moogo* essentially meant 'resettlement' for excluded *nakombsé* from the competition for *naam*. A process of systematic replication thus enabled a gradual 'expansion' both by appointed administrators and by disgruntled segment heads looking to create personal territorial niches; this perpetuated a migration model from the Mamprusi-Dagomba states system.

⁶⁶ The issue of the appellation of 'class' has been debated in the context of other African societies; Arhin for instance suggests the use of 'status group' in the case of Asante whose stratification system he conceives in terms of 'ranks' rather 'classes', see K. Arhin. 1983. "Rank and Class among the Asante and the Fante in the Nineteenth Century," *Africa*, 53(1): 2-22, pp. 3-4.

Central to this process, of state formation, of later political centralisation was the constant circulation of *naam* from the core to the periphery and back to the core. Political direction was thus imparted, from the very beginning, to migratory movements of these populations around the Volta Basin from the middle of the sixteenth century. The legitimacy of political power has to be understood as deriving from this specific history.

Whilst the pre-colonial state has been conceptualised on the basis of material from societies across Africa, the conquest theory, cultural subjugation and subsequent social stratification theories give an oversimplified account of the pre-colonial state and leave untreated the crucial role played by migration, memories and self-perceptions in shaping state and society, and therefore do not allow a deeper exploration of alternative theories of the state. Evidence from Moogo would point to a theory of state formation—and social integration—as essentially the same process, of settlement, and subsequent fusion of a never-ending movement of peoples.

As far as the deployment of state ideology was concerned, the *naam* order did attempt to introduce ‘Mossi culture’ and forms of public morality to existing groups. My argument has been that although there was a *design* to enforce *naam* ideology, the latter spread as a result of its very logic and the structure of political succession rather than through blunt coercion.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Paradox of Marginality: Political Centralisation and the Incorporation of the Stranger-kin

INTRODUCTION

The political practices of pre-colonial African states have for long been very little analysed in the literature of African politics. They were seen as “too exotic to be relevant”¹ or feature in European writings on African politics. Our knowledge of the modus operandi of various aspects of political practices in pre-colonial Africa remains inadequate. Recently, however, over the past three decades, an interdisciplinary body of works has been growing, and we now know a little more about the state and societies of Ashanti, Dahomey, Buganda, Oyo, to name a few.²

¹ Herbst, *States and Power*, 2000: 36; with the exception of Ashanti, the Yoruba and the Hausa, few studies have methodically looked at these practices in West Africa, see also G. Balandier. 1964. ‘Réflexions sur le Fait Politique: Le Cas des Sociétés Africaines,’ *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie* 37: 23-50, pp. 24.

² See McCaskie, *State and Society*, 1995; 2000. *Asante Identities: History and Modernity in an African Village, 1850-1950*. Edinburgh: EUP; R. J. Reid. 2002. *Political Power in Pre-Colonial Buganda: Economy, Society and Warfare in the Nineteenth Century*. Oxford: James

Miers and Kopytoff's edited work on 'Africa slavery' for instance provides original analyses on institutions of 'slavery' in a number of pre-colonial African states and societies and argue a 'slavery-to-kinship continuum' using a number of empirical cases.³

In Moogo, an administrative system developed over two centuries from the end of the seventeenth century towards the middle of the nineteenth century, which completely changed the pattern of political practice in the Voltaic states. The institution of the royal service and the constitution of a body of royal servants were fundamental to the creation of state machinery in Moogo. This apparatus, made essentially of *nayiridemba* (court dignitaries or *nesômba* and local/village chiefs or *tasobanamba*) emerged, along with the ritual sanction of the earthpriesthood at every level of political office, as the institutional network that enabled the king, the sovereign, to lead autonomously from members of the royal lineage system, that of *nabiise* and *nakombsé*.

The *Naaba* had at his disposal a body of administrators, servants and armed retainers to assist in the exercise of *naam*. In addition to administering people and various social and political matters, the king's service supervised domestic matters of the royal court. Royal captives seem to have come late in the game and their political importance was only, at first, second to the importance of royal servants of Mossi origin. 'Slaves' and captives might have

Currey; I. Wilks, 1975. *Asante in the Nineteenth Century: the Structure and Evolution of a Political Order*. London: CUP; S. Miers and I. Kopytoff. 1977. *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*. Madison and London, University of Wisconsin Press; R. Law. 1977. *The Oyo Empire c. 1600–1836: West African Imperialism in the era of the Atlantic Trade*. Oxford: OUP.

³ Miers and Kopytoff , *Slavery in Africa*, 1977: 3-24.

been unconstitutional citizens but they had greater political power and leverage than ordinary citizens. In fact, in the course of centralisation that dominated state-building from the eighteenth century onwards, with gradual gain in power within the administration and the military, the royal retinue buttressed the court as the apex of power from which radiated the *naam order*.

The development and expansion of the *moos bûudu*—at first exclusively made of Wedraogo’s descendants—was made possible through the incorporation of ‘external’ elements, foreign to the Mossi system of kinship. The modified membership criteria were the basis of social differentiation that contributed to shaping state institutions. The creation of a royal service made of captives and free men were to redefine the projection of state power both at the central and local level and in opposition to a logic of segmentation or kinship-based office transmission. The Mossi demonstrated a great level of social industriousness in attracting adherents to the *naam* project. This meant recruiting kin members outside the traditional kin group and integrating them in a way that they could become reproducers and consolidators of the *naam* system.

As a ‘product’ of the Mossi state and a result—indeed the synthesis—of the state’s design for a cohesive community, one congruent with the state structure,⁴ Mossi society presented all the signs of a political compromise between the assertion of a new and comprehensive form of power and the requirement of a territorial definition of the social. The successive elaborations

⁴ Part of the state design was to re-conceptualise social categorisation not on the basis of kinship or ethnicity but rather around *Naam*, the political relevance of groups and individual was to be measured from their relative distance to it.

which lead to a centralised form of political rule in the eighteenth century yielded another outcome: a “society for the state”, one with a configurational structure fitting the state’s idea of its social reflection.⁵ Along with a continuing philosophy of power embodied in a state building process centred on the idea of *naam*, Mossi society underwent successive transformations over two centuries during which state revolutions and social overhaul spurred distinct but overlapping phases of slow maturation. Mossi society was thus as much the institutional translation as it was a result of the deployment of *Naam*. The latter initiated a revolutionary process whereby historical, linguistic and socio-cultural identities and ethnic referents were to be obliterated in favour of a socio-professional categorisation as the new reading grid.⁶ Mossi horizontal taxonomy has been interpreted in terms of social hierarchy when relative deprivation should be interpreted in terms of marginality that derived from internal aspects of a given group without this exclusion encroaching on the working principles of other groups. Thus, blacksmiths in Moogo were a marginal group, *on the fringes of mossiness*, but nonetheless respected for being the technicians of Mossi society.⁷

⁵ M. Izard. 2003. *Moogo: l'Emergence d'un Espace Etatique Ouest-africain au XVIe Siècle*. Paris: Karthala, p. 115.

⁶ M. Breusers. 2006. 'Moogo: l'Emergence d'un Espace Etatique Ouest-africain au XVIe Siècle (review),' *Africa* 76(2) : 280-282, p. 281.

⁷ As Ila Ouedraogo explains it, blacksmiths were not at the bottom of society but were a 'different' group with customs and mores different from those of the Mossi; Interview, Ouahigouya, April 15, 2010.

The process of homogenisation did however require a segmentation of the transmission of knowledge and belief at the same time that an opposite process of de-segmentation was attempting to free political reference from kinship. This was achieved through a “gestion collective de la parole”⁸ (a collective claim to social construct) that presupposes the admission of the diversity of identities and hence the diversity of ideological perspectives as a crucial step in the society-building process. Ideological dissension to state representations was thus an issue of social participation and a provision of alternative readings of state arguments. In the admission of a diversity of discourses, space was given to the potential implications of a politically oriented *tênga*. Throughout Mossi history however, there has been little attempt on the part of earthpriests to assume political ambitions going in the direction of control or exercise of a portion of secular power.⁹

An analysis of Mossi society, drawn mainly from the example of Yatênga, will show that socio-ethnic references had less value than the political relevance of groups, with regards to specific historical or geographical origin.¹⁰ The role of royal captives in the state apparatus, emphasised in this chapter, was to mediate the *Naaba*'s position at the juncture between the realm of power and the realm of earth-custody and to ensure that the *Naaba* was the only *pangsoba*, the absolute holder of *pânga* (coercive power). The role of the royal service was therefore to mediate the estrangement of the *Naaba* as a condition for royal

⁸ Izard. 2003. *Moogo*, 2003: 125.

⁹ C. Savonnet-Guyot, *Etats et Sociétés*, 1986 : 86.

¹⁰ Izard, *Gens du Pouvoir*, 1985: 311.

sovereignty as emerging from a particular kind of citizenship divorced from original values and concerns inherent to blood and lineage.

This chapter is structured around three main parts that explore the ways in which *naam* was not only the organising principle, but also the key ideological framework that guided social differentiation, the consolidation of the state's administrative apparatus and progressive *disassociation* of politics from lineage. It seeks to answer the following questions. What were the constitutive groups of Mossi society? How did social differentiation gradually catalyse the collective identity of various groups? In the Mossi political organisation, specifically, how did the original dichotomy *Naam* versus *Tênga*' evolve along changing policies of differentiation and homogenisation?

5. Naam and Tênga: Political Economy of a Principled Dichotomy

5. 1. Ideological differentiation Naam and Tênga: two world-views

Naam's perspective on state and society, from the standpoint of the binary division *naam/tênga* is at once "historical, ideological and functional".¹¹ What has been overlooked or insufficiently analysed in the broader Mossi literature is the vision of power from the perspective of *tênga*. In other words, whether *tênga*'s apparent indifference towards *naam* hid more animosity or resigned acceptance is a varied response to the rule of *naam* which cannot be

¹¹ Izard. 1983. "Engrammes du Pouvoir: l'Autochtonie et l'Ancestralité," in *Le Temps de la Réflexion*, IV: 299-323.

easily picked up from bits of data on *tênga*, pre-colonial. *Tênga* and *naam* are articulated in a symbolical symbiosis whereby the monarch embodies the bridge, the link that ties two asymmetrical spheres of intervention. If *naam* actively constructs an identity for itself that ties to the deployment of *tênga* as a potentially competing realm of *tênga*—whereby belief plays a crucial role in individual and collective approaches to power and social organisation—*tênga* on the other hand does not (in equal measure with *naam*) need *naam* for the continuing effective application, as it were, in social life.¹²

When institutions are put in place, there always remains the crucial question of how to render social groups' adhesion to the political project not only fully possible but also desirable.¹³ Mossi ideology faces a major contradiction when it attempts to 'bring in' *tênga* to embrace its totalising project. If 'people of the earth' are not politically relevant to *nakombsé*, *naam* fundamentally needs legitimation from *tênga* and this poses an obstacle to the overall *naam* project. In empirical practice, the Mossi state circumvents and overcomes this challenge by creating its own *têngbîise* (earth custodians). This strategy was however neither consistent nor fully structured.

Tênga mediates and articulates a form of balance between man and nature, as the former performs a work of transformation on the latter, through agriculture, the institution of rites and rituals are thus part of the system of equilibrium which ensures that the earth is assuaged for being 'transformed', and in a way de-sacralised. In this sense, *tênga* is the ritual core that articulates

¹² Izard, "Engrammes du Pouvoir", 1983: 301

¹³ Savonnet-Guyot, *Etats et Sociétés*, 1986: 64.

“sociality and sociability”, not only for sedentary agriculturalist but also and more importantly in the context of political domination by a nomadic minority only artificially embedded in the indigenous socio-cultural fabric.¹⁴ *Tênga*’s provision of sociality is moreover a practical response to *nakombsé*’s aversion for any productive work. *Tênga*’s conception of space, its effective organisation of it contrasts and complements the territorial organisation of space by *naam*. *tênga* in that sense is a reference for space management and provides the conditions for its ‘localisation’ in the political terrain.

One would expect the village chief (the *tênga naaba*) to reside at the heart of the local polity, in the centre of the village. However, his residence is generally isolated from the bulk of residences. *Naam* at the local level is established as an ‘interstitial’ phenomenon that does not espouse the contours of existing *tênga* units. In that sense, by not modelling its structure exactly upon that of *tênga*, *naam* ideology attempts to deconstruct, in many ways, the historical and practical grip of *Tênga* on local conceptions of space and residency. Political rhetoric appears limited a device to counter the configuration of social functions from the perspective of *tênga*: if *tênga* sees pure virtue in the strict separation between economic, political and religious activities, *Naam*’s ideological commitment to the political only pervades its (self-assigned) areas of intervention. Both at the local and central levels, but more necessarily at the local one, *naam* tends to resort to the dissuasive power of *pânga* (violence), its alter ego, to level or pre-empt dissent. *Tênga* however rests on a firm rootedness in fundamental ‘right’ ritually sanctioned by the earth

¹⁴ Izard, “Engrammes du Pouvoir”, 1983: 304.

divinities. Its stoic resignation, its silence vis-à-vis Mossi rule should not be read as easy acceptance as has often been assumed in the literature.¹⁵ The particular configuration of rights in fact opposes *tênga* ethics to the violence of *pânga*; it opposes different views of time and temporality, space and historicity.¹⁶ In other words, if *tênga* derives fundamental local embeddedness from a particular conception of space/land, *naam* derives legitimacy from its own historicity. The social reproduction of *tesé*, earth sanctuaries (ancestor worship), graves, sacred places, the material support of the memory of individuals and families, if it required continued transmission within segments, from one elder of a sub-segment to another, did not preclude the taking of office of people of foreign extraction into the community in question.

Although the territorial reference to the village does not always reflect the fact, the office of *Tênga naaba* is fundamental to *naam*. Izard interprets the office as a form of autochthonisation of “power within the realm of power” as it reflects a form of autochthony not attached to the earth as territory but to the ancestors and by extension to the history of first moose settlements that preceded the formation of Yatênga (these were *nakombsé* who took part in the conquest wars). The loose translation of *tênga naaba* into ‘village chief’ (a colonial designation) hides the fact that the *naam/tênga* differentiation is essentially ideological. Interconnections of the two are multiple and varied. The title of *tênga naaba* therefore does not, either necessarily or exclusively, apply

¹⁵ Delobsom, 1932, Kawada 1993.

¹⁶ Izard, “Engrammes du Pouvoir”, 1983: 305.

to the earthpriest or the village chief but could apply to either or both, sometimes to the same person. A village chief may be given the title *tênga naaba* as a generic explicative designation of his territorial authority but his real title would be the name of the village under his authority followed by the suffix *naaba*, for instance *Kunduba naaba*, *Bentige naaba*, *Tebla naaba*, etc.¹⁷

There is however a consubstantial bond that connects blood (consanguinity) to historicity (ancestrality) and therefore lineage segments to particular land, soil, hence the importance of the indigenous components of *tênga* structure. Thus, in the realm of *tênga*, the memory of people is inscribed on the very land, the soil upon which it rests. On the other hand, if there is no such a thing as a 'memory' for *naam*, the latter derives part of its legitimising support upon a genealogical framework that goes back generations, all the way back to Ouedraogo and Gweba, and therefore pervades the entire Moogo from Mamprugo to Yatênga. The established rule of *naam* in turn inscribes a form of memory, not along the contours of spatial limits of *tênga* but according to a novel *conception of the territorial* defined as the limits of the kingdom.¹⁸ The plurality of spaces that emerges from this, ties local unit to local unit according to processes of expansion that first consolidated the territorial basis of the Mossi state. In such a configuration, the political centre is only a beginning, a departing point where a founding individual literally moves the systematising capacity of the state beyond the confines of the political centre, to the periphery

¹⁷ Izard, *Gens du Pouvoir*, 1985: 329-330.

¹⁸ Izard, "Engrammes du Pouvoir", 1983: 305.

and by the same token invests the double movement of lineal reproduction and territorial expansion to the service of state-building across protracted boundaries.

5.1. 2. A principle of dichotomy

Naam is the core, the constant principle upon which the political system was organised in Moogo. *naam* was also the basis of differentiation and source of reference for state and society relations; it stood, in theory at least, in sharp contrast to the concept of *tênga* which belonged to and defined the realm of ritual, earth-custody, which sanctions political power but does not really mix with it. The Mossi *nanamse*, by specialising in the exercise of political authority, institute a dualist hierarchy, which is very imperfectly reflected in the *abstract* separation between the political and the religious realms,¹⁹ an otherwise common model to West African societies.²⁰ The differentiation presumes the exercise of *naam* and its peripheries (*naams of togo, balum, and weranga*) by the Moose whilst the children of the earth exercise control over the

¹⁹ J. B. Zoanga. 1978. "The Traditional Power of the Mosi Nanamse of Upper Volta," in W. Weissleder, ed., *the Nomadic Alternative*. Hague: Mouton, p. 215. *nakombsé* excluded from political competition on the basis of the genealogical and generational primacy logic, do not generally engage or recycle themselves in another 'professional' activity, preferring to wander about, and hoping for an hypothetical nomination from the *Naaba*.

²⁰ See S. Luning. 2007. "Ritual Territories as Local Heritage? Discourse on Disruptions in Society and Nature in Maane, Burkina Faso," *Africa* 77-1: 86-103; P. Hammond. 1966. *Yatenga: Technology and Culture of a West African Kingdom*. New York: The Free Press; J. Capron. 1973. *Communautés Villageoises Bwa: Mali, Haute Volta*. Paris: Institut d'Ethnologie.

*têngsobondo*²¹ and its peripheral functions, such as that of the *tilimbuguri naam*.²²

However, group membership was far from being rigid and Moose could become earth custodians or blacksmiths through a process that affected the very definition of who was a Moose and who was not (see chapter 4). Social assimilation through long-term physical proximity made it possible for members of the diverse group of autochthons to become Moose while Moose, historically descendants of conquerors, could become autochthons when they ceased to be *nakombsé* and thus fell in the category of *talsé* (commoners). The very understanding of autochthony is in fact altered by these movements. Once rooted in historicity, the notion of autochthony gradually became ideologically constructed. On the one hand, there was a clear distinction between the political function invested in the possession of *naam* and the economic-ritual function implied in the possession of rights on the earth. On the other hand, the relative fluidity of movement between these two juxtaposed groups somehow blurs the historical references for political rule and ritual rights.²³

²¹ The earth priest exercises ritual authority over the *tengpeelem*; he is also the “village chief” for autochthons (*tengande*, *engsobongo*, and sometimes *teng soba yiiri*) although this has no political implication.

²² A secondary altar subordinated to *tênga* and which protects the welfare of ‘wild nature’, specifically trees; the *tilimbuguri naaba* assists the *tengsoba*; see Izard Gens du Pouvoir, 1985: 326; also W. Pfluger. 1987. *Tilimbuguri: présentation de la fête de fécondité des autochtones de Ronga*. Bobo-Dioulasso, Thesis; Izard. 1993. “Centralisation du Pouvoir: Preuve par la Toponymie,” *Journal des Africanistes* 63 (63-2): 5-24.

²³ A process of marginalisation ‘downgraded’ *nakombsé* into *talsé* and into children of the earth while an inverse process of integration enable, for children of the earth, a passage into the realm of power.

Tênga essentially mediates the interactions between nature and culture and it does so independently from the intervention of *naam*. The question about the role, place and status of *Tênga* in the Mossi administrative apparatus is an important one. Here, we need to look at *tengbîise* under the political rule of particular *naam*(s) as well as those *tengbîise* under the supervision of *tênga* (ship) adjacent to a *naam* rule. To consign, however, *tengbîise* to the strict aspect of ritual and rites is to underestimate the role of belief in shaping and moulding ideas of rule and power. By and large, the realm of belief becomes captured by *naam* through a strategy that consisted in gnawing away *tênga* offices by *nakombsé* turned *talsé* (commoners).

Every *tênga* depends on another *tênga* who is anterior to it. In other words, the *têngsoba* is the hierarchical inferior/superior of another one. This relationship is formalised in a nomination ritual that consists in the handing of the hat (bonnet), characteristic symbol of *tengsobondo* to a new *têngsoba* by the one that comes directly above him. A new *tênga* is furthermore a spatial continuum of an existing one in the sense that it derives from a spatial (territorial) division of the existing one and is not a duplication of it. This is the typical process of *tênga* creation, in theory. In reality however, many atypical cases can be pointed to. A lot of *têngsoba* (*têngsobanamba*) would claim that their custody was autonomous and did not derive from superior/anterior one:

the *têngsoba* would appear as an imaginary man who emerged from the depths of the earth with his phenomenal hat (bonnet) and sacrificial hoe.²⁴

Nevertheless, the main characteristic of the *tênga* structure is that it is a closed system with an endogenous structure of transmission. The *têngsoba* either inherits the *têngsobondo* from the local lineage to which he belongs, or the transmission features the centrality of a figure different from the *têngsoba* but the two instances point to an endogenous character. However, a wave of *tensé* migrations as a result of the autochthonisation of *nakombsé* introduces major disruptions. Following the process of elimination of old lineages from the competition for power, disaffected *nakombsé* recycle themselves into earth custodians, thus eclipsing 'legitimate' earth-custodians and effectively taking over *tênga's* realm.²⁵

5. 3. 'Autochthonisation' of Naam as Foundational Requirement

The autochthonisation of *naam* was made possible, on the one hand, through its gradual weakening as it 'settled' across Moogo, and on the other hand through the creation of a specific *naam oder* institutionalised as *The Mossi* political order. The historicist binary *naam/tênga*; conquerors/conquered, poses the idea of complementarity in rhetorical terms. In reality, *tênga* had little political relevance from the perspective of *naam*. *tênga* ritual units are therefore administratively an impossible situation. The complementarity between *naam* and *tênga* was in fact essentially ideological. Although it was thoroughly and

²⁴ Izard, *Archives Orales*, 1980: 864.

²⁵ Izard, *Archives Orales*, 1980: 866.

frequently enacted in the ritual terrain, *naam/tênga* compementarity eschewed all institutional connection between the two spheres. The Mossi state has therefore to be gauged from the angle of a deployment of power within the *moaga* world, that which is defined as the basis according to its abstract distance to *naam*. The fundamental binary *tênga/naam*, in so far as it is conceptual presents a number of limits and constraints in its empirical application, does not and should not obscure the necessity to apprehend *tênga* from the perspective of *naam*: the gradual *incursion* of *naam* into the realm of *tênga* contributes to blurring the lines. In so far as the *têngsoba*'s ritual work was woven throughout the social fabric, his action was necessarily undermined by the integration of *nkombsé* into the ranks of *tênga*-ship.

The dichotomy *naam/tênga* was further attenuated by the possibility for *tengbîïise* to be incorporated into the service of local chiefs and into the royal service. One has to see, in these subtle incorporations and cross-transfers that blur the lines of conventional social differentiation, *and* hierarchisation ordinarily observed, state strategies of social engineering designed to expand, in demographic importance, the group of Moose, to widen the field of definition, in order to better associate non-moose groups into its project to homogenise society. This is Michel Izard's perspective:

Pour faire retour à une position grossièrement historiciste, à l'équivalence des rapports gens du pouvoir/gens de la terre et conquérants/conquis, on doit bien voir que le système politique et administratif moaga se déploie seulement à l'intérieur du monde moaga: les gens de la terre, versés hors de l'histoire d'avoir été vaincus et dépossédés de leur pouvoir, d'avoir eu leur territoire

conquis, n'ont pas eu *a priori* [emphasis in text] d'existence politique aux yeux des Moose.²⁶

This is to say, essentially, that the Mossi political system makes sense only when deployed within the *naam* realm. The royal service (essentially made of captives and Moose, which comprised the offices of the *togo/toge*, *balum/balongo*, and *weranga/werese* or *wiidi*) was the place par excellence where the *naam* project was tested and put into practice.²⁷ Here, a different kind of rapport to power existed, whereby individuals' allegiance was paid to the king alone—to the monarch as institution and not the state as institution—sometimes against the particular interests of existing and rigidly defined categories. But captives were also a group, amongst others, who were interested in “defining the body of the king for their own purposes”; the king being that one who “epitomises and stands outside and against society.”²⁸ Thus in reality, both the *Naaba* and the captive escaped and transformed the social order originally based on lineal order and segmentarity. Captives articulated the

²⁶ M. Izard, *Archives Orales*, 1980: 857. [if one goes back to a rough historicist position, on the binary between ‘people of power’ and ‘people of the earth’, one realises that the moaga political and administrative system is deployed only within the moaga world: people of the earth, ejected outside history for having been conquered and dispossessed of their power, for having their territory conquered, do no a priori have a political existence from the perspective of the Mossi.

²⁷ See on this, Izard, “Centralisation du Pouvoir,” 1993: 7. in Ouagadougou, the number and functions of dignitaries were a bit different : administrative, political, military and ritual functions were shared amongst the Widi (*weranga* in Yatenga) *Naaba*, the *Goungha Naaba* (military), the *Tansoba* (general of army), *teh Larlé Naaba* (military and rituals), the *Bâlum Naaba* and the *Kamsaogho-Naba* (enuch chief); see J. Ki-Zerbo, *Histoire de l’Afrique Noire*, 1978: 256.

²⁸ Feeley-Harnik, ‘The King’s Men,’ 1985: 281.

qualities of sovereignty and citizenship in an ambiguous manner. Their kinless status and their strategic position within the court and royal service provided also an advantage they were not shy to exploit at times. It was never clear who, between them and the *Naaba*, was really pulling the strings. In the name of the king, captives 'captured' kingship and reformulated it to their own advantage. In fact, state centralisation was firmly set in motion by the combined action of captives as armed retainers and local chiefs loyal to the state project. Captives rose from humble servants to exalted courtiers in the administrative apparatus and in the ranks of the military. Captives dealt with the grinding reality of power and left to the *Naaba* the pomp of ceremonies and rituals. The palace was the multifaceted core that Wolf describes as "at once the apex of power and the symbolic core of the universe."²⁹ Beyond the court's confines, a world of chieftaincies extended the chain of *naam*, allies and local chiefs contributed the resources that allowed the centre to reward its retainers and sustain the centralisation process.

Considering the above, ethnic mobility was a fluid process in Yatênga.³⁰ In fact, speaking of 'ethnicity' in Moogo is somewhat superfluous. The state's homogenisation project was geared towards creating a community in which techno-economic attributes had a greater bearing on identity than 'ethnicity' per se. It would not be wrong to think of the making of 'Mossi ethnicity' as tantamount to the making of a Mossi political community whereby membership was open to those were not originally 'Mossi'. Political centralisation went hand

²⁹ Wolf, *Europe and the People*, 1982: 56.

³⁰ See M. Izard 1976. "Changements d'Identité Lignagère dans le Yatenga," *Journal des Africanistes* 46(1-2): 69-81; *Gens du Pouvoir*, 1985: 309-349.

in hand with homogenisation and along attempts to *remove* ethnic references through a redistribution of differences from historical and geographical on the one hand, and 'ethnic' definitions on the other, towards one devised along the lines of the state homogenisation project.³¹ In any case, the undifferentiated exercise of political and ritual functions by members of both systems of hierarchy, especially at the margins of systemic restrictions, was a counter-argument to discourses of control, differentiation and territorial partition.

5. 1. 4. Authochthonisation and social differentiation: ethnicity, class and power

Social interaction alone is not sufficient in explaining the formation of identities along restricted boundaries. Group formation, as an active self-elaboration, of professional bodies or political entities, catalyses identities along a historical process of imagined, and enacted possibilities. Identities are therefore, as, Comaroff aptly argues, 'not "things" but relations; their content is wrought in the particularities of their ongoing historical construction'³² but there they are also a process of demarcation of interest groups within diverse societies. There is no denying that ethnic identity was a determinant factor in social differentiation in Moogo. However, in attempting to shape a 'society for a state', the Mossi state shifted the emphasis from ethnic membership to socio-

³¹ Izard *Gens du Pouvoir* 1985: 320 ; Kohler, *Activites Agricoles*, 1971 : 24-5; F. Imbs, *Kumtaaba*, 1987: 26-7.

³² J. Comaroff. 1996. "Ethnicity, Nationalism, and the Politics of Difference in an Age of Revolution," *The Politics of Difference*. E. Wilmsen and P. McAllister (eds.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 162–184, p. 165.

economic membership as the single most important criteria of social differentiation.

Whilst there was no ambiguity in the ethnic denominations of different groups, whether self-denominated or ascribed to groups, lines of membership could be blurred by the change of membership (both ethnic and socio-economic) incurred by geographical proximity, immigration, political demise that turned *nakombsé* into *institutional talsé*, see chapter 4 for a discussion of change of identity.³³ For instance, 'slaves' in Moogo could freely marry into their masters' lineage. In fact, descendants of captives, especially amongst Yarsé and blacksmiths, lost connection and memories to their 'slave' origin.³⁴ This chapter is concerned with the category of royal captives which form the most important group of captives, in demographic terms. In Yatênga, captive quarters, Bingo, give their name to the captives, *bingdemba* (people of *Bingo*).

5. 2. Between Power and Politics: Pânga or the Conceptualisation of a Third Moment

If descendants of Pabré, sister of *Naaba* Yadega, founder of Yatênga, were associated with the 'good' aspects of power/*naam* (*noma*) in its highest embodiment in the person of the sovereign, the *rima*, the holders of *Pânga*

³³ The condition of blacksmiths was an ambiguous one, on the one hand, they were integrated in the Mossi group but some of them were subjected to the harshest treatment of quasi-servitude, at the lowest rank of captives without the attending benefits of participation in the pogsyure, the delayed system of exchange of women prevalent throughout Moogo; see Izard, *Gens du Pouvoir*, 1985: 310; *Archives Orales*, 1980: 916-7.

³⁴ Izard. 1975. 'Les Captifs Royaux dans l'Ancien Yatenga', 1975: 281.

(*pâsdemba*) were, on the contrary, associated with its perverse, harsh aspects (toaga), also embodied in the person of the sovereign, the *pângsoba*, the supreme holder of *pânga*. The motto of *pâsdemba* was: “piller la maison, ne laisser que les pierres du foyer” [to loot the house and spare the hearth only].³⁵ The royal service derived from strategies of governance which sought to free political rule from the influence of both the royal dynasty and the control of earth custodians, to break the dynamic relationship between kinship structure and state function. If the distinction between *naam* and *tênga* emphasises the particular realms associated respectively to political rule and institutions of the sacred, *pânga* constitutes a third moment which attributes legal violence to a state institution freed from the constraints of the above two. At the very centre of *pânga* is a conception of power as a particular mechanism articulated around the personality of the king and his entourage: Kingship is something that could also be conceptualised as alien to and negating the authority of either *naam* and *tênga*; its historicity is forged and inscribed in the necessary divorced between power from everything that is likely to hinder the *Naaba*'s prerogative over its exercise.

The royal captive, in essence a figure with no history or social identity, is the holder of *pânga* par excellence. The donning of the bludgeon, which was prohibited to free men, essentialised the captive's intrinsic relation to state violence.³⁶ Thus means and instruments of the uninhibited expression of state

³⁵ M. Izard. 1985. “Des Sociétés pour l'Etat,” *Cahiers ORSTOM*, 21(1): 15-33, p. 30.

³⁶ A. Kompaoré. 1986. *Approche de l'Emergence des Énuques et la Cour Royale dans le Royaume de Ouagadougou*. Mémoire de Maitrise. Université de Ouagadougou, p. 82, in M. Bazemo. 1993. “Captivité et Pouvoirs dans l'Ancien Royaume de Ouagadougou à la Fin du

violence, the captive was also its headman and scapegoat in the preservation of the monarchical order.³⁷ For the ultimate possessor of *naam* (*naaba*), *tênga* (*têngsoba*) and *pânga* (*pangsobá*) was the Yatênga/ Mogho Naaba, the one who transcends dynastical intricacies, the constraints of ritual and, eventually, the requirement of historicity. This personalisation of authority does not necessarily lead to an interpretation of the Mossi state as patrimonial; the tendency of the *Naaba* to rule the state similarly to the way in which a head of household manages a house, if patriarchal in form, is more properly understood as an attempt at state centralisation achieved through a process of unity around the person of the *Naaba*. *Naaba* becomes *pângsoba* because of the activity of the *pâsdemba* (people of force) serving him. In many ways, *pânga* was a subversion of *naam*. If *naam*'s legitimacy partly rested on the ritual sanction of *tênga*, there was no such requirement with regards to the deployment of *pânga*. The latter deviated from the principle of *naam*, and it introduced violence as part of the state apparatus, no longer drawing from the consensual basis of cooperation with the ritual realm. The Mossi say "quand *pânga* suit le chemin, bûum (right path, at once justice and truth) coupe a travers la brousse" [the virtuous avoids the path taken by *pânga*]. The *pâsdemba* do the 'dirty job' of the state. Their activity helps preserve the public image of the *Naaba* as compassionate and providential. The *pâsdemba* have in common with wandering *nakombsé* a total disregard for the ethics of legality. They engaged in stealing, pillaging, killing in

XIXe Siècle," *Dialogue D'Histoire Ancienne*, 19(1): 191-204, p. 199.

³⁷ Kompaoré, *Approche de l'Emergence des Enuques*, 1986: 82.

the name of the *Naaba*, as well as a number of other activities of questionable legality.³⁸

During the formative period, the state was conceived as “a larger version of the family, with the king standing in the same relation to his subjects as a father to his children.”³⁹ Abandoning the corporate kin group as the basis of political structure in favour of the institution of a de-dynastised *naam* was going to have tremendous consequences for the social structure itself as it redefined social relationships according to the demands of political centralisation. Central authority crystallised around the elaboration and manipulation of the traditions of dynastic legitimacy.

5. 2. 1. The Institution of royal captives

In Yatênga, the *burkina* (free man) was distinguished from the *yamba* (captive, pl. *yemsé*).⁴⁰ The captive was not a ‘slave’ per se. He was not an alienable object whose body and mind were subject to the absolute authority of a master. His was rather a situation of member of household under the authority of a head of household.⁴¹ The ‘slave’ was, in many ways, an extension of his owner’s personality, thus not transferable. This was to change under forms of economy, whereby the ‘slave’ would become divorced from personal

³⁸ Izard, “Transgression,” 1979: 304-5.

³⁹ Akinjogbin describes a familiar patriarchal structure pertaining to nineteenth century Dahomey; I. A. Akinjogbin. 1967. *Dahomey and its Neighbours, 1708-1818*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 14.

⁴⁰ Izard. 1975. “Les Captifs Royaux dans l’Ancien Yatênga,” In *L’Esclavage en Afrique précoloniale*. Paris: François Maspero.

⁴¹ M. Bazémo. 2007. *Esclaves et Esclavage dans les Anciens Pays du Burkina Faso*. Paris: Harmattan, p. 131.

use and could be, as a commodity, transferred to another person for a fee. 'Private' captives were few in Moogo. Yarsé traders bought captives in markets of the Niger Bend. Blacksmiths on the other hand bought women to become their wives in a context of polygyny as a common practice.⁴² Prisoners of war were taken as captives; judicial enslavement enabled someone to escape from prosecution, social justice or injustice. The price for protection was thus submission to the authority of a powerful person, be it the king of a powerful chief.⁴³

Institutions of servitude existed in Moogo but they were different from the familiar understanding of the 'slave' as commodity in the context of the Atlantic slave trade. As said of many other African societies, no one was really 'free' or 'independent' in a family, lineage of the society at large. For "all men are slaves to the king;"⁴⁴ the king himself was dependent on the ancestors and on his kin group. This form of "servitude' could only be different from slavery as it was practised in the context of the Trans-Atlantic trade from the fifteenth to the

⁴² See J. D. Fage. 1980. "Slaves and Society in Western Africa, c. 1445-c. 1700," *The Journal of African History*, 21(3): 289-310; certain taboos were attached to unions involving a blacksmith and a Yarsé or Yiyoose, see A. P. Fiske, *Totems, Sacrificial Taboos, and Fear of Witches Among the Moose: Variations on the Same Triadic Relational Structure*, unpublished manuscript, p. 8.

⁴³ Fage, "Slaves and Society," 1980: 307.

⁴⁴ See Filippo Pigafetta et Duarte Lopes. 1965. *Description du Royaume de Congo*. Louvain and Paris, 2nd rev. ed. 1965, trans. By Willy Bal. in J. D. Fage, "Slaves and Society," 1980: 289-310. If we now know a little more about modes of servitude in Africa, it is still the case that we know more about the economic, commercial and social aspects of chattel slavery than on indigenous understandings of servitude as it relates to kin, interpersonal and affective relationships, social status, as well as representations of systems of dependency within specific African cultures.

twentieth centuries, and in Europe in the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. European observers have for long misinterpreted systems of servitude Africa when these were varied and more complex than the simplistic 'slave as commodity' system of the transatlantic trade. The use of 'slave' as interchangeable with servant was not a reference to a 'class' division, although social dependents could and were disposed when the occasion to do so arose, in the same terms as kin members were exchanged, for instance, to compensate for a crime. The system of servitude amongst the Mossi has to be apprehended through the 'slavery to kinship continuum.' Freedom amounted to attachment to a kin group or patron and its opposite was alienation from any form of belonging and social death.

Despite the individual basis of the political appointment of captives, families of professional servants were formed, within the court, which sought to preserve the continuation of certain political duties within specific families.⁴⁵ For a royal captive, the highest form of career advancement was to be made *nesômde* (plu. *nesômba*), a court dignitary (literary 'good' person, inappropriately translated as minister) and member of the Electoral College that chooses the *Naaba*). The *nesômba* were of non-royal origin, mostly *talsé*. However the institutional integration of captives did not entail their corollary acceptance as full-fledged members within Mossi society. In fact, fear and violence, both deriving from devotion to the cause of kingship were the basis of

⁴⁵ See J. F. Ade Ajayi. 1998. *Africa in The Nineteenth Century until the 1880s*. London: James Currey, p. 783-5.

their continued relative authority within Mossi society;⁴⁶ their marginality has lingered in many subtle ways, even today.

In the *natênga* or royal locality, *nakombsé* and *tengbîiise* could not reside on a permanent basis; on the other hand, fulbe traders did not live within its borders. The main residents of the *natênga* were royal servants (*nayiridemba*) and warriors (*pasdemba*), they occupied half of the Moose or the western wing of the *natênga* and the other half, Bingo, the eastern section was occupied by captive servants. Both Moose servants and royal captives escape, in my ways, the dichotomy 'power holders' and 'earth custodians' in the sense that this differentiation has historical roots and it is articulated along the lines of dominants/subordinated, conquerors/conquered. Moose servants came from both groups whilst royal captives were in essence strangers to internal social differentiation.

A form of dynastisation of the royal captives took place through access to Rasam or Bingo *naam*, which, in essence, is the basis for the foundation of family of captives, contrary to the Moose for whom political nomination was linked to membership in one of the politically useful royal lineages.⁴⁷ According to Sawadogo, the role of these dynasties was "to protect *naam*. They looked after the preservation of the essence of *naam*, of the symbolism of *moaga* power. They came from diverse origins and had no close relations with the ruling family. They had no ambition to take the place of the supreme chief."⁴⁸ They had

⁴⁶ M. Bazémo. 2007. *Esclaves et Esclavage dans les Anciens Pays du Burkina Faso*_Paris: Harmattan, p. 131.

⁴⁷ Izard, *Gens du Pouvoir*, 1985: 298-9.

⁴⁸ Sawadogo, "Etat des Connaissances," 2009: 215.

the trust of the *rīma* (sovereign) and accordingly enjoyed status prerogatives and privileges accrued to membership in the state.

Royal servants are made of a group of lineages that operate on and are reproduced through the system of *napogsyüre* whereby the *Naaba* gives young girls—given to him as gifts and residing in the royal compound—as consorts to his servants for the double purpose of retaining their service and for aggrandising the royal service.⁴⁹ The *napogsyüre* became the dominant form of marriage for court servants and other state servants; delayed exchange of women meant that the *Naaba* had matrimonial compensation and had preferential rights over future marriages and women, generally the first one born from these unions. The *Naaba's* capacity to intervene in matrimonial matters allowed him to strengthen his alliances and capitalise on a network of people indebted to him. Servants were crucial to the normal running of the *nayiri* and the *natênga* as labour for the royal fields which were normally run by the *zabiise* and the *napugubio* as well as reserves of warriors.⁵⁰ The *napogsyüre*

⁴⁹ For detailed treatment of the (*na*)*pūgsiwre*, see E. P. Skinner. 1960. "The Mossi Pogsioure." *Man* 60: 20-23; A. De Beauminy. 1925. "Une Féodalité en Afrique Occidentale Française. Les Etats Mossi " *Bulletin de l'Afrique Française- Renseignements Coloniaux* 35(1): 24-36, p. 33; Skinner, *The Mossi*, 1964: 23, 115; Y. Tiendrebeogo. 1963. "Histoire Traditionnelle des Mossi de Ouagadougou." *JSA* 33(1): 7-46, p. 21; Izard, *Gens du Pouvoir*, 1985: 510-28; J.L. Boutillier et al. 1977. "Systèmes socio-économiques Mossi et migrations," *Cahiers ORSTOM*, 15(4): 561-581 for relevance in economic production.

⁵⁰ Izard, *Gens du Pouvoir*, 1985: 305; it's important to note that royal fields, as well as royal residences and certain captive villages, escape the 'jurisdiction' of the *tesé* supervised by earthpriests. In fact, it is unusual to find 'earth custodians' living on these grounds. The economic factor is also important as these are relatively densely populated areas where land for cultivation and pasture are crucial to the proper running of the royal service and the kingdom at large. The system of land tenure, generally regulated within a dichotomy of the

was key to the strengthening of the central authority, marriages organised within its system were equally important to social production. In this system, women were the currency of political transactions, whether as gift to fellow rulers or as reward to loyal retainers and subordinates or as tribute to a *Naaba*.

The matrimonial transactions were an asset for the *Naaba* to attract young men and expand his clientele. It was also a crucial element of political centralisation one of the primary purposes of which was therefore to organise labour. The structure of state administration in Mossi was an expression of changing ideologies between hierarchy and social equality.⁵¹ However in reality, the system of privileges and status shared by the royal aristocracy contrasted with state discourse of inclusion and social integration. In a system whereby labour was crucial to the expansion of resources within networks of kin, its disarticulation, from the plane of kinship to that of kingship and the modalities of its maintenance, necessarily had consequences for the development of hierarchy, when and if constructed from the political centre. As will be seen below, the exercise of authority in a centralised system reveals structural ambiguities between kinship, kingship and citizenship.

The *napogsyüre* was an institution which created a sort of esprit de corps with mutual benefits for the king and members of his retinue. It wove 'blood' relationships between the *Naaba* and the royal servants. These ties were regularly revisited, and they re-enacted the unique status/role that was that of the royal servants, both as consolidators of the palace (which was both political

type village chief/earthpriest, does not exist in the geographical space comprising the royal residence and the capital city. Royal fields are therefore exempt from such supervision.

⁵¹ Ki-Zerbo, *Histoire*, 1978: 249.

epicentre and redoubt) and as buffer between the *Naaba* and his patrilineal kin group which exerted constant pressure upon the *Naaba*. The *napogsyüre* was an instance of the creation of a custom of 'blood-brotherhood', the incorporation of a new structure within a kinship terminology which made this structure 'kinship' and 'traditional'. The *napogsyüre* therefore illustrates the centrality of the *Naaba* but it also shows the ways in which loyalty and devotion were strictly nurtured and reproduced, over generations, as the condition for status and identity given the captives through their integration in the royal service, as into the *Naaba*'s 'family'. It crystallised the mutual expectations of the *Naaba* and his captive retinue. On the one hand, in the possibility for him to have at his disposal a source for court and administrative functions, the *Naaba* contributes to the reproduction of administrators as an institutional category. On the other hand, court servitors and administrators strived to maintain their offices through the constitution of office 'dynasties' that introduced hereditary rights in office succession.⁵² As one informant put it, "because it is him [the *Naaba*] who gives you the power and he can take it away from you anytime, you had to respect him and be loyal to him."⁵³

State ideology created a 'fictitious' family within which undifferentiated rights were to be recognised.⁵⁴ Moreover royal captives played a crucial

⁵² Izard notes that in Ouahigouya, throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, *nesômba* ad *Nesomkurse* (low-rank officials) were recruited from 11 main families.

⁵³ Kariim Ouedraogo, Ouahigouya 14 April 2010.

⁵⁴ In anthropological parlance, the incorporation of strangers as members of the family created a bilateral group whose unity is maintained by recognition of and submission to the

humanising role vis-à-vis the *Naaba*. The latter does not have a family in the sense of a tight social net that provides company, comfort and a support network. He only has familial obligations. The captives introduced, in the *Naaba's* life, a sense of *transversality* in his contacts with people. In other words, a transformation of formal relationships takes place, from a framework of formal court etiquette to interpersonal forms of relationships.⁵⁵ The *Naaba's* relative isolation is all the more poignant that only his *rumnamba* (first wife) can interact with him without formalities.

All this points to a logical process put in motion by the *Naaba's* symbolical exclusion from kinship and society, and hence his relative to absolute isolation from society (but not social processes). The Mossi king is not a monarch placed—or reigning—at the summit of a pyramidal structure; he is rather the symbolic centre of a loosely woven asymmetrical system.⁵⁶ The *Naaba* recruits amongst captives for members of a new conceptual family, extended beyond the constraints of blood and kinship. He therefore becomes the mythical and symbolical founder of a structure that negates tradition and dogma. As in other aspects where the extension of the state lends to mild and profound transformations of the 'old' very much attached to the principles of kinship; the new structure/order negates these principles seen as constraining the very advance of the state project.⁵⁷

head and father figure; see J. Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforest*, 1990: 75.

⁵⁵ Izard, *Archives Orales*, 1980: 789.

⁵⁶ Hammond, *Yatenga*, 1966: 156.

⁵⁷ De Heusch explains royal incest as one foundational act in similar vein to a new social structure that breaks 'traditional' fundamentals such as family and lineage even when it has to

The transformations mentioned above in turn transform the *Naaba* from an ordinary person to a detached figure who, because he is infused with a particular kind of authority (*naam*), evolves outside structures governed by principles other than *naam*. Thus, if the *Naaba* is above society and all—a position maintained by ritual structures that govern every aspect of his existence—he must be conceptualised outside lineage, kin and family systems, at a distance from everything, unique, but absolutely isolated.⁵⁸ Essentially then, the universe of the *Naaba* is best conceptualised as belonging to the realm of myth, rather than that of the socially experienced. The architecture of the royal compound itself reflects this isolation. Moreover, the possession of the royal paraphernalia, the system of rites and rituals overseeing the *Naaba's* person, prohibitions and ceremonials, especially attached to enthronement and funeral ceremonies, point to a vision of kingship as something that is on the margin of society and the king as somebody who is symbolically excluded from the rules of social interactions and descent although, paradoxically, he is the responsible for the safeguarding of these.⁵⁹

The rule of transmission of power from elder to younger, in addition to the tendency of the central power to gnaw away old branches of *nakombsé*

preserve these; see L. de Heusch. 1958. *Essais sur le Symbolisme de l'Inceste Royal en Afrique*. Bruxelles: Institut de Sociologie, *Etudes Ethnologiques*, I.

⁵⁸ G. Balandier. 1964. 'Réflexions sur le Fait Politique: Le Cas des Sociétés Africaines,' *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie* 37: 23-50, p. 36.

⁵⁹ Balandier, "Réflexions," 1964: 36.

generationally most distant from the ruling lineage, helps keep at bay potential dissidence or resistance among disaffected *nakombsé*. The institutional model sketched in the model of transmission of *naam* (chapter 3) is only what it is: a model that does not necessarily stand the test of history, or the reality of political practice. In the empirical reality of political power, a combination of resentful resistance from the *Naaba's* younger brothers and their sons—advancing a logic of strategic positioning—implicit and explicit pressure from groups within the royal service and outside the court, namely chiefs of local units keen to delay transfer of power to members of younger generations, constitute constant pressure on the *Naaba's* rule.⁶⁰

How did the central power project authority over political units 'captured' by founding lineages, especially those outside the physical reach of state administrators? The consolidation of both Ouagadougou and Yatênga proceeded along the lines of a gradual annexation of small villages and political formations loosely connected to the centre the two capitals constituted; these political entities were controlled by *nakombsé* that assisted in the conquest campaigns but were never stripped of their authority, even after political centralisation was consolidated. They formed the oldest *Moose* dynasties and had the title of '*tasobnamba* (sing. *tâsoba*) loosely translated as 'warrior'.⁶¹ The rule of the dynastical transfer of office, from old generations to new ones, was

⁶⁰ Izard, 'Le Royaume Mossi du Yatenga', 1987: 66-8.

⁶¹ The radical 'so' from the substantive 'soba' means 'to possess' or 'to detain' as an inherent right; the confrontation of the nouns *naaba* and *soba* implies forms of legitimate control, material or spiritual. *Soba* is associated with three main terms: *pangsoba*, holder of power, *tasoba*, chief of war, and *tengsoba*, earthpriest, as well as a few other terms. See M. Izard 'Le Royaume Mossi du Yatenga' 1987: 72-3.

such that these former *nakombsé* were 'demoted' into institutional commoners or *talsé*. The *tasobnamba* played an important role in the state's extension of authority in a context of rudimentary transportation means that did not allow the rapid connection of the centre to outlying areas. The *tasobnamba* were the infrastructure, the local network used by the state to extend political authority. The political centre acknowledged, through this indirect system, the difficulty posed by the geography in the extension of political power. Wilks' description of one common conception of power in pre-colonial Africa, as radiating from the centre of the polity in concentric circles, can be applied to Mossi patterns of power projection through local dynasties allied to the core.⁶² A chief, by becoming a pivot of the power of a particular kinship, is at once an incarnation and prisoner of the kin order. Breaking through the limitations of kinship for a chief requires autonomy in laying hold of the mechanisms of control over resources. Autonomy in turn requires novel political instruments of domination, whether exercised directly or indirectly applied by others on the chief's behalf. The stranger-kin is exactly that agent and he does a good job of mobilising resources for the chief.⁶³

Heads of villages were also part of the royal service and this has significant implications for the state centralisation process and the gradual de-segmentation of political office. In fact, where the limited military means of the central power, combined to low population densities and time-consuming

⁶² See I. Wilks. 1992. "On Mentally Mapping Greater Asante: A Study of Time and Motion." *The Journal of African History* 33(2): 175-190.

⁶³ Wolf, *Europe and the People*, 1982: 99.

transportation system, the central power could not and did not always attempt to suppress claims towards greater or total local autonomy; dissident ideology could arise from competing lineages and youngsters.⁶⁴ The state therefore relied on local allies to act on its behalf. Thus, captives nominated at the head or in the service of local entities fattened and extended royalty, they provided the solution to the issue of centralisation in what was a 'pedestrian state'.⁶⁵ In addition, where the military once could abet the state in containing the production of alternative ideologies, an administrative service emerged, at the end of the eighteenth century, and provided the state with the means to articulate, in theory and practice, the set of values advanced by *naam* ideology. There was a sense in which the administrative category acted like a hegemonic entity: with a line of sight primarily political, its values nevertheless rubbed off onto the wider society, through the power of everyday practice.

The designation 'warrior' can be misleading in many senses. Whilst the *nakombsé* evolve in a context of constant and intense political competition which exposes them to various forms of political violence, the *tâsobnaamba* have the permanence and stability of their offices to preserve and are therefore relatively less prone to engaging in political violence.⁶⁶ Thus, they tend to be opposed to *nakombsé*; their *naams*, unlike the *nakombsé*'s turbulent one, is

⁶⁴ The Mossi did not have a centralised and hierarchised military service. In times of war, the *tâpsoba* (war chief) informed chieftaincies and instructed them to gather all valid men and cavalry in their areas of control; villages contributed by providing food for the military.

⁶⁵ A. I. Richards. 1961. 'African Kings and their Royal Relatives', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 91: 135-50, p. 143 in Feeley-Harnik, "The King's Men," 1982: 45.

⁶⁶ Izard "Le Royaume Mossi du Yatenga," 1987: 73.

settled naam. The *tasomnaamba*'s rapport to power was not tinged by the fierce violence inherent in political competition for office amongst deprived *nakombsé*.

Inversely, the *tâsoba*'s social role was quite similar to the ritual function of the *têngsoba*. On the one hand, the earth custodian carried propitiatory rites towards the preservation of the sacrality of the earth without which political rule would not be 'accepted'. On the other hand, the *tâsoba* performed rituals to the ancestors on behalf of the state. The *têngsoba* is the ritual mediator between political power and the divinities of the earth and as such holds a key ritual function, his activities and support were crucial to state legitimacy. Issues of witchcraft and familial disputes were his prerogatives. The first juridical recourse, beyond the heads of *yiri*, *saka* or *bûudu* and then earthpriest would be the village chief or the *Naaba* closest to the local chief if the latter is also the *kasma* (lineage head). In general however, ordinary people chose to resolve disputes internally and this was more true of blacksmiths, *tengbîise* and Yarsé traders for conflicts were never an individual's matter but rather a *yiri* (family), a *saka* (district), a *bûudu* (lineage) or a *tênga* (village) affair and as such required a collective effort to address their resolution: an isolated individual was always vulnerable, and was treated as an oddity by the adjudicating authority.⁶⁷ In any case, the introduction of *pânga* in the above dynamics displaced the dichotomy *naam/tênga* and introduced tensions over legitimacy between *naam* and *pânga*.

⁶⁷ Izard, *Archives Orales*, 1980: 893-4.

5. 2. 3. Nakombsé vs. captives (naam vs. pânga)

The institutionalisation of social differentiation in Moogo was not aimed at pinning particular interests against each other but rather at instituting an unequal yet stabilised political community. The different social categories were, so to speak, locked in an incontrovertible interdependence whereby they were *condemned* to cooperate. In such a structuration, power was in the hands of the state but it was exercised by the social body as it could not be detached from the very people upon which it was exercised. Power could not be if it was not allowed to be fully deployed upon the political community and that is one of the core principles of Mossi ideology. It said that to exercise power was to fully and extensively dominate those upon which it was being exercised.⁶⁸

Captives were a social category that included a variety of persons. They were prisoners of war, or 'slaves' taken during raids, primarily,⁶⁹ but they could

⁶⁸ C. B. Kone. 2005. "La Personnalité Moaga face à l'Option Démocratique " *Synergies Afrique Australe, Recherches francophones en Afrique*(1): 160-174, p. 164. in his words : "Exercer le pouvoir c'est dominer ceux sur qui il s'exerce. Voilà très précisément pourquoi les chefs ont le pouvoir, et pourquoi le pouvoir ne se détache pas du corps de la société qui ne peut être que sous l'égide du roi, du chef, à savoir celui qui commande."

⁶⁹ Opuku mentions the involvement of Mossi in the slave trade in Salaga. He notes that 'the Mossi people, who play the main part in the slave trade and slave capture, are always armed with heavy cudgels to carry out some arbitrary act on the way such as carrying off people, or to defend themselves when attacked.'; see Theophil Opuku. 1877. "An African Pastor's preaching journey... 'BM, EMM, 1885", in M. Johnson. 1986. 'The Slave of Salaga', *the Journal of African History*, 27 (2): 341-362. The supply of slaves to Europe created, in the 19th century, a cohort of monarchs who were European king's men. In Asante, Buganda, Nigerian states, partially in Moogo, state consolidation went hand in hand with consolidated enslavement, bureaucratisation and militarization. The main victims of Mossi raids were neighbouring Gurunsi whom the Mossi perceived as "barbarians" who did not elaborate any centralised political system. Like many centralised polities, the Mossi viewed "stateless"

also be persons who fell into disgrace, formerly convicted criminals who became *downgraded* into 'slaves'. They were also people who voluntarily submitted themselves to servitude to escape social injustice or poverty, they could also be persons given as pawns or paid to atone for the death of others, and other forms of dependents. Pawnship/'slavery' could have benign consequences for people who were subjected to it in the sense that "a pawn or 'slave' could become a functioning member of the domestic group, even if denied linkage with the owner's lineage." In this respect, domestic 'slavery' did not often have the debilitating attribute of chattel 'slavery', more characteristic of the Trans-Atlantic slavery.⁷⁰

In any case, theirs was a status of 'foreigners' in a foreign or familiar land and this somehow was a trait they shared with the *Naaba* who was in many ways foreign to the land he reigned upon (one of the ringu's function was to familiarise him with his territory) but then unlike the *Naaba*, and commoners at large, the captive had no ancestors, and no kin.⁷¹ His only kin was, in a fundamental and ritual sense, the living ruler, the *Naaba*. The latter gave wives to captives through the *poghshiure* system. Mossi captives fit the description Arens makes of *Sambariv* of pre-colonial Madagascar: "the *Sambarivo* were so totally subject to the royal will that they were, in a sense, his very limbs, a

societies as operating at the fringes of civilisation: "[societies] often define neighbouring areas as lacking any legitimate political institutions and as being open to legitimate intrusion and settlement - this even if the areas are in fact occupied by organized polities. [The] frontier is above all a political fact', in I. Kopyoff, *The African Frontier*, 1989: 11.

⁷⁰ Wolf, *Europe and the People*, 1982: 207.

⁷¹ On this, see Feeley-Harnik, 'The King's Men', 1982: 37.

second skin... They took the same taboos in royal rites of passage. They died [at least some of them] when he died.”⁷²

The economic context of Moogo was that of an agricultural society which, until the middle of the eighteenth century, produced millet and other cereals for subsistence. A nineteenth century visitor noted that “The Moose take rests, they cultivate what they need to live but nothing more...”⁷³ The relative isolation of Moogo and the centralised nature of its political organisation did act as a barrier—at least for a while—against the demographic haemorrhage that was being experienced by a number of societies closer to the Atlantic coast.⁷⁴ Both the trans-Saharan and the trans-Atlantic slave trade however affected trade-circuits and socio-political organisation in Moogo, from trading networks between the Hausa to the east and the Dyula (Juula) to the west, the nature of goods traded affected migratory tendencies, social, economic and cultural processes.⁷⁵ One informant noted that “At first, the Atlantic slave trade did not

⁷² Feeley-Harnik, “The King’s Men,” 1982: 37.

⁷³ Binger, *Du Niger au Golfe de Guinée*, 1892: 501; observation that clearly reflects Binger’s view of the Mossi as uninterested in economic development beyond subsistence.

⁷⁴ French explorers of late 19th and early 20th centuries (Binger, Crozat, Monteil, Tauxier, etc) noted the ‘relative security’ of Moogo; the centralised political system was responsible for most of the apparent security and order observed by visitors of the time.

⁷⁵ On this subject, see S. Amin. 1971. “The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa,” In Claude Meillassoux, *I.A.I.* Oxford: OUP; 1985. “Preface” to Boubacar Barry. *Le Royaume du Waalo: Le Sénégal avant la Conquête*. Paris: Karthala; E. J. Berg. 1965. “The Economics of the Migrant Labour System,” In H. Kuper, ed., *Urbanisation and Migration in West Africa*, Berkeley: University of California Press; Wilks, “The Mossi,” 1985: 473; M. Fortes et al. 1967. “Colloque sur les Cultures Voltaïques,” *Recherches Voltaïques*, 8, p. 174; R. D. Mathewson. 1965. “Kisare: A Preliminary Report,” *West African Archaeological Newsletter*, 3: 22-25.

come directly here. But it is true that people hunted slaves in Dogon, Gurunsi and Samo countries.”⁷⁶

The development of the trade in slaves in seventeenth and eighteenth century Moogo has been associated with the growing presence of Yarsé traders. The Mossi state saw the advantages that could be drawn from the activities of Muslim traders and the dynamisms of a non-proselitist Islam.⁷⁷ The attitude of the Mossi state towards Islam and Muslim traders was one of tolerance even when they were reluctant towards forms of belief—here the rigid doctrinal orthodoxy of Islam—that could potentially undermine the very ideological structure upon which their authority rested. The role of the Yarsé traders in the political economy of the slave trade was determinant. A. M. Duperray and Assimi Kouanda have extensively studied the role and position of the Yarsé in the economic and political development of Ouagadougou and Yatênga.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Noufou Ouedraogo, Interview, Ouagadougou, December 5, 2009.

⁷⁷ If ordinary Mossi remained for a long time reluctant to embrace Islam, Mossi rulers welcomed traders and imams and tapped into the mystical resources of the latter even whilst filtering the introduction of alien ideas to ordinary Mossi. Mossi rulers demanded that its practices be syncretically incorporated in Mossi beliefs; at the same time they instrumentalised Islamic belief in order to buttress their rule. In Ouagadougou, Naaba Dulugu (c.1796-1825) set up the first mosque and created an imamate at the court; Naaba Sawadogo (c.1825-1842) adopted a mild approach to Islam whilst Naaba Kutu is said to be the first Mogho Naaba who openly embraced Islam and engaged in theological learning; the Imamate became “dynastised” and held by the Bagayugu family, probable descendants of Shaykh Sulayman Bagayugu; see Tiendrebeogo, *Histoire et Coutumes*, 1964: 111; Izard, *Introduction*, I, 1970: 169; Ferguson, “Islamisation in Dagbon,” 1973: 69.

⁷⁸ A. M. Duperray. 1985. “Les Yarsé du Royaume de Ouagadougou : l'Écrit et l'Oral,” *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 25(98): 179-212; Assimi Kouanda. 1984. *Les Yarsé: Fonction*

Established in Moogo in the sixteenth century, the Yarsé were to open the Mossi states to the trans-Saharan networks in the North and the forest routes of the south, towards Ashanti; captives were traded in both directions as a much sought-after product.⁷⁹ The Yarsé traded in slaves in the Voltaic region, exchanged them for Kola nuts and cowries in Ashanti where they bought Hausa cloth which the Mossi were very fond of. With the Kola nuts, slaves and gold obtained in the south, they headed north for salt, pearls, copper, Arab manuscripts, etc. Yatênga on the other hand was a producer and exporter of tools and weapons made of steel, cotton, horses and donkeys; its strategic position at the heart of the North-South trading route made it an important economic, social and political junction within the Voltaic system of states. The markets of Bobo-Dioulasso and Ouroukoÿ were particularly thriving trading centres; they were “real warehouses for goods in transit”.⁸⁰ The market of Pwitênga, close to Koupela, towards the east of central Moogo thrived on metalworking and weaving and achieved the level of an international trading hub at the junction of a north-south and an east-west (Hausa-kong) routes.

In a study on the role of eunuchs in the Ouagadougou court, Armand Kompaoré notes that captives came fourth in the list of goods exchanged in the

Commerciale, Religieuse et Légitimité Culturelle dans le Pays Moaga (Evolution Historique). Paris, Paris I. Thèse de 3ième Cycle; also M. Izard. 1965. *Traditions historiques des villages du Yatenga. I, Cercle de Gourcy*. Paris, CNRS, p. 129.

⁷⁹ Kouanda, *Les Yarsé*, 1984: 125.

⁸⁰ Dr Crozat. 1891. "Rapport sur une Mission au Mossi (1890)." *Journal de la République Française* 5(9): 4797-4801, 4806-4809, 4820-4823, 4835-4837, 4847-4850, p. 4848; see also L. Marc. 1909. *Le Pays Mossi*. Paris, Larose, p. 169.

Ouagadougou market in the middle of the nineteenth century. However, because they were exchanged for salt and Kola, slaves were in fact the first product of export for the Mossi.⁸¹ Their economic importance in Moogo can therefore not be underestimated. The Mossi were famed for their effective skills in castration, they recorded a relatively low rate of mortality.⁸² Marc contends that Mossi eunuchs could be found in places as far as Constantinople.⁸³ Skinner on the other hand goes as far as stating that “one of the fundamentals of the Mossi empires, [particularly] that of the Morho Naba of Ouagadougou, was the sale of captives.”⁸⁴ If in many West African societies, social upheavals brought on by the slave trade saw the emergence of warrior elites “that had grown powerful and wealthy through the pursuit of slaving”,⁸⁵ in Moogo, they encouraged patent banditry amongst disaffected *nakombsé* for whom raiding became a professional activity.

The *Naaba's* involvement in the trade of captives is well documented. In exchange for ‘concessions’ to a number of *nakombsé* for unhindered movement and raiding into the outlying areas inhabited by Gurunsi and Bissa.⁸⁶ Ki-Zerbo notes that the Mogho *Naaba* received 1000 cowries of the tax levied by the

⁸¹ A. Kompaoré. 1986. *Approche de l'Emergence des Enuques et la Cour Royale dans le Royaume de Ouagadougou*. Université de Ouagadougou: Mémoire de Maitrise, p. 52.

⁸² Dr Ruelle. 1904. "Notes Anthropologiques, Ethnographiques et Sociologiques sur Quelques Populations Noires du Deuxième Territoire d'Afrique-Occidentale Française." *l'Anthropologie* 15: 519-561 et 657-703, pp. 679-681.

⁸³ Marc, *Le Pays Mossi*, 1909: 171

⁸⁴ Skinner, *Les Mossi*, 1972: 257.

⁸⁵ Wolf., *Europe and the People*, 1982: 330.

⁸⁶ See Salo 1975; Binger 1892; Ki-Zerbo 1978 and Ouedraogo 1975.

market-master, the *rag-naaba*, on every head sold in the Ouagadougou market.⁸⁷ With the intensification of the demand in slaves towards the end of the nineteenth century, markets expanded to meet the rising supply of Gurunsi turned slaves by raiding Zaberma.⁸⁸ The Zaberma were to later gain economic importance in the slave trade circuits as successive Mogho Nanamse, Naaba Kutu (1860-1881), Naaba Sanem (1881-1889), and Naaba Wobogo (1889-1897) found a sustained source of profit in their incursions into Gurunsi country.⁸⁹ Zaberma raiding activities were even more tolerated, if not encouraged as the in the context of political upheaval whereby attempt at greater autonomy of a number of chieftaincies deprived the central power of a valuable source of funding (rents).⁹⁰ In reality, a form of implicit agreement had long been established between ruling *Nanamse* and Zaberma mercenaries. Salo notes that Naaba Baongo (1852-1860) recognised the benefit of using captives as objects of exchange as early as the 1850s. Cowries, which were used as monetary unit throughout the region, were notably rare in Moogo. Zaberma mercenaries paid their food supplied with slaves. The surplus labour force (to cultivate the royal fields) thus constituted was diverted into stock for trading.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Ki-Zerbo, *Histoire*, 1978: 170.

⁸⁸ S. Salo. 1975. *Recherches sur l'Originalité de la Resistance des Mossi aux Agressions Extérieures, 1885-1904*. Montpellier, p. 16.

⁸⁹ Zaberma raids targeted young men and women; if adult captives were traded for 50 to 65 000 cowries in Ouagadougou, young men were sold 100 000 and women the double of this price. See L. G. Binger, *Du Niger au Golfe de Guinée*, 1892: 483; E. P. Skinner, *Les Mossi de Haute-Volta*, 1972: 257.

⁹⁰ Binger, *Du Niger au Golfe de Guinée*, 1892: 502-4.

⁹¹ Samuel Salo, *Recherches sur l'Originalité de la Resistance des Mossi*, 1975: 16. Francois Renault and Serge Daget developed the theory that in the places where cowries and other

In any case, the trade in slaves played important economic but also political and social roles in Mossi societies whilst consolidating their conceptual and physical boundaries against Gurunsi, Bissa, Samo and other outlying societies.⁹² If socio-political changes may at first have owed little to external influence, they were to become enmeshed in processes that linked to the expansion of the slave trade, both trans-Saharan and trans-Atlantic. Qualitatively, captives remained the first product of exportation for a landlocked kingdom wholly dependent on trading networks for everything but food for subsistence.⁹³ The same networks were to prove important in the introduction and spread of Islam in Moogo, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but also the tremendous resistance of Gurunsi and Bissa towards Islam then strongly associated with slave-raiding. The Gurunsi, like so many outlying societies that resisted centralised forms of institutional organisation, were common prey to slave-hunting squads. Whilst specialised slave hunting organisations were given rise to, they affected societies notorious in

monetary units were rare, captives were usually used as objects of exchange that played the same role as money, cited in Bazemo, "Captivité et Pouvoir," 1993: 202.

⁹² The landlocked nature of Moogo meant that it was affected by the trading networks, transatlantic in particular, much later than coastal areas. Once it was thrust into the dynamics of the slave trade, economic and socio-political transformations were to become increasingly apparent. J. D. Fage noted that in 1500, the Casa da Mina was the only known permanent European trading station on the coast. Following the Portuguese, four additional posts were established in 1600, 35 by 1700, and 45 by 1800, by the Dutch, French, Danish, English, Brandenburg and Swedish merchants, all equally embroiled in the same drive to secure strategic positions on the West African littoral. See J. D. Fage. (ed.). 1959. "A New Check list of the Forts and Castles of Ghana", *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, IV (I).

⁹³ Bazemo, "Captivité et Pouvoirs," 1993: 202.

anthropological writing as ‘acephalous’ or ‘segmented’ into the predilect of target populations of slaves.”⁹⁴

Captives were part of the ‘people of the *Naaba*’s household’ (the *nayiridemba*); theirs was a condition of servility *rather than* ‘slavery’. They formed, with traders, a cluster of *stranger-subjects* and they played an important role in the conceptual and social transformation of the ‘stranger-kin’ into royal ally. Feeley-Harnik for instance investigates the role of royal ‘slaves’ as strangers in transforming kin into subjects of monarchy among the Sakalava of northern Madagascar.⁹⁵ She contends that their status as participants in political practice and the relations of production, was articulated by a situation of conflict, if not consensus at every level, hence the usefulness to capture it in a systematic way.⁹⁶ Politics was a struggle represented at the extremes by royalty and the ‘slave’ status; the various groups included *nakombsé* rulers, royal relatives (*nakombsé* aristocrats, with or without access to office), commoners and ‘slaves’, they had different political and ritual relationship to kingship.

On the two extremes of a long and uneven spectrum, *nakombsé* and captives occupy two different ethics, they are socialised on different terms and principles, they look onto different perspectives of connection and attachment to royalty and the court in their interaction with the latter and society at large. They have different lineage affiliation—in fact the captives have none—and therefore different claims to land. With regards to the latter, a *nakombga*

⁹⁴ Wolf, *Europe and the People*, 1982: 230.

⁹⁵ Feeley-Harnik, “The King’s Men,” 1982: 34-5; also see W. Arens and I. Karp, (eds). 1985. *The Creativity of Power*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

⁹⁶ Feeley-Harnick, ‘The King’s Men’, 1982: 34.

without a nomination, thus authority over a territory, is not very different from the captive as they both have no claim to land either for personal use or territorial political exercise.

The captive on the other hand, because he underwent a process of de-socialisation following his capture—in wars and pillage raids—designed to erase every memory of a prior political and social self for a better insertion in a new category of a court servant, did not entertain perceptible aspiration to a specific social status. In as much as all captives had their head shaven⁹⁷ and were given the name Wedraogo, their de-socialisation process was first of all a symbolic enactment of the social, as well as historical uprooting and identity negation—but not one that equated the ahistorical condition of a ‘slave’ as ‘slavery’ per se did not exist in the Mossi system-⁹⁸ Naming and shaving were part of a rite of passage that encompassed severance, purification then integration. One suspects, that the argument that outsiders were easily made into ‘slaves’, with less persuasion and force than was available to leaders, also

⁹⁷ For the Mossi, the head was the site where impurities, defilement and bad luck congealed; they say, of a person stricken with bad luck, that “his head is not good”. The shaving of the captive was therefore a less radical cleansing solution than beheading; this practise thus meant rebirth for the captive, but also for the new born and for the spouse of a deceased see M. Bazemo. 1989. “Rites de Passage et d'Intégration des Captifs dans l'Ancien Royaume du Yatenga. Essai d'Approche Comparative,” *Dialogues d'Histoire Ancienne* 15(2): 375-398, p. 388.

⁹⁸ At least not chattel slavery; the adoption for *tengbiise* of the *sondre* (clan name) Wedraogo, or its re-adoption for *nakombsé* who had moved into the category of *talsé*, may sound like an infringement of the social code but it makes sense from the point of view of the centralisation project

applied to the Mossi.⁹⁹ 'Slaves' and captives were (re)inserted in the Mossi system as *particular Mossi*, descendants of the common ancestor, Wedraogo. As main servants of the *naaba*, they cultivated his lands and provided for his security and his every need. As holders of *pânga*, they raided and plundered, inflicted physical violence and imprisoned, they arrested and killed people in the name of the *Naaba*.¹⁰⁰ They were the face of *state violence* and they served to express it through their various political functions.¹⁰¹ In fact, those who could claim membership in state apparatus, no matter how tenuous or relevant this was, often used the coercive power of the state to intimidate and take advantage of people, all in the name of the *Naaba*. But captives were merely a means to a greater design to subordinate the wider society in a way that perverted and travestied the original *naam* model. The incorporation of captives in the royal service effectively amounted to a rejection of dynastic legitimacy for captives had no control or rights over their genealogical future; coercion was adopted as an important element of political authority from this point on and it was to become one of the core elements of the state apparatus.

The *nakombsé* see the design of the political system as undermining the revalorisation of their social standing whilst at the same time holding the promises of their self-actualisation.¹⁰² The formation of the *nakombsé*, as a

⁹⁹F. Cooper. 1979. "The Problem of Slavery in African Studies," *Journal of African History* 20: 103-25, p. 105.

¹⁰⁰ Izard, "La lance et la Guenilles," 1973: 146.

¹⁰¹ In the words of Maurice Bazemo: "Les captifs ont servi à exprimer la force du pouvoir et ce, par les différentes fonctions qui leur étaient confiées. Ainsi, la garde royale était-elle constituée pour l'essentiel de captifs" in Bazemo, "Captivité et Pouvoirs," 1993: 198.

¹⁰² The assumption is that their subordinate condition prevents the full fulfilment of their

social category, was a process whereby the individual ‘aspirer’ interlocked with the social in a marginalisation process which constituted, at the same time, an enactment of identification. It was therefore a process of identity-construction. In the state’s historical construction of subjects, the *nakombsé* created for themselves the possibility to construct a social reality on their own by virtue of their very marginalisation.¹⁰³ It is useful to look at the situation of the *nakombsé* from the perspective of individual action as constrained by the requirements of the “presentation of the self” in society; in other words, it is important to look at collective definitions of the self in social settings.¹⁰⁴ The individual is a rational being who “[...] performs roles in interaction with each other”. Lindgren, for instance contends that identity is a product of social relations between people, thus dismissing specific cultural traits *of* people as most determinant.¹⁰⁵ In the sense that they perpetuate the fundamentals and conditions of the political order and social stability—on the basis of the ‘initial contract’ that established the *nakombsé* as political leaders—*nakombsé* could be validly expected to be shown deference and respect. It was however the case that captives, by virtue of their complete devotion to the *Naaba*, were the beneficiaries of the latter’s generosity which translated into wealth, women, privilege, power, and other prerogatives.

potential needs as citizens and social beings

¹⁰³ See Lindgren, *The Politics of Ndebele Ethnicity*, 2002: 23; Lindgren analyses Foucault’s (1979) concept of historical construction of subject by coercive or dominant entities whilst balancing the argument with Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) view on individual and group agency in constructing their own social reality despite institution design. Groups negotiate and change identities.

¹⁰⁴ E. Goffman, 1956. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Edinburgh: The University of Edinburgh.

¹⁰⁵ Lindgren, *Politics of Ndebele Ethnicity*, 2002: 43.

5. 3. Citizenship and Sovereignty in Moogo

Identities in Moogo and elsewhere were both spatial and defined by descent; one's belonging was subject to lineal affiliation. In contrast, *foreignness* in Moogo, even for people of foreign extraction, was difficult to define, not least because royal affiliation (becoming a member of the royal retinue or state administration) was also a process duly negotiated within certain parameters; hence the need to define *citizenship* in the Mossi context. How was citizenship conceived in Moogo? Did individual political positioning hinge on a perception of citizenship as actual practice or limited to membership to kin/lineage, group/guild? Definitions of citizens and subjects emerged along struggles for power, land ownership, and issues of social inclusion/exclusion, whilst the term 'citizenship' did not clearly fit into cluster of meanings in ways which defined 'ethnicity' as the single criterion.

Cruickshank points to the concerns of the *Asantehene* with regard to the constant menace emanating from the royal lineage to 'capture' power. He contends that

[...] the king was not content to leave the government entirely in the hands of the native chiefs, who might possibly in the course of time rally the prostrate energies of the country, and combine to throw off his yoke. In consequence of this suspicion, which ever haunts the minds of usurpers, he appointed pro-consuls of the Ashante race, men of trust and confidence, to reside with the fallen chiefs, to notify them of the royal will, to exercise a general superintendence over them, and especially to guard against and to spy out any conspiracies that might be formed to recover their independence.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Cruickshank, 1853, I, 340 in Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century*, 1975: 130.

Equally in Moogo, the state sought to contain the ambitions of *nakombsé* even when they had no apparent design to usurp power for their own interest. Mossi definition of citizenship was to be decidedly affected by the ways in which the state endeavoured to draw people into its orbit. The state undertook the task of redefining jural corporateness, the terms of membership in the *moos bûudu* which in turn guaranteed to non-mossi and non-citizens the legal rights of a citizen whilst conferring to them a framework of identity.

5. 4. Captives: Marginal and Citizens

Characteristically, captives and prisoners of war appeared as individuals who have been alienated or made to become alienated from their own communities, people with no history and as such incorporated with greater ease into the socio-cultural fabric of their societies of adoption. They were equally devoted to the sovereign and to his service. Unsurprisingly then, in Moogo, theirs was a status of kinless outsiders incorporated into the realm of *pânga* as “crucial additional supporters, free from the constitutional restraints in established modes of authority”.¹⁰⁷ Uprooted from and shaken out of their original societies, they were given a new identity and status in their new one. They were the “gens sans feu ni lieu”¹⁰⁸ whose loyalty was an absolute form of

¹⁰⁷ Lonsdale, “State and Social Processes,” 1981: 169. There were nuances in the meaning attached to a ‘slave’ in the service of the king; *tyeddo* in Senegambia were a particularly powerful group which contributed to the differentiation between noble and a warrior elite from the mass of ordinary peasants; they also produced kings in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; see for instance B. Barry, *Le Royaume*, 1972: 102-3.

¹⁰⁸ J. Bazin. 1975. “Guerre et Servitude à Ségou,” In *L'Esclavage en Période Précoloniale*, C. Meillassoux (ed.), Paris: Maspéro, pp. 135-181.

gratitude to their saviour. Lonsdale argues that these captives, *tonjon* or *tyeddo* elsewhere, “become one of the actual classes in society, indeed, the most powerful”.¹⁰⁹ In Moogo, Waalo, Madagascar and elsewhere, their contribution to the internal organisation of kingdoms and empires cannot be underestimated.¹¹⁰ The appointment of these low-born, history-less, identity-less captives and ‘slaves’ served to break aristocratic privileges and to curtail their access to power, but it also laid the bases of a permanent source of threat to politics. Sovereignty might not always have been a principle of opposition between state and kin-dynasty, but it required a certain amount of representation, therefore opposition, to unitary courses of transmission. Regardless whether the appellation ‘citizen’ is fitting, captives constituted a special category solely definable in terms of their political relevance in extending and maintaining state authority, their allegiance precluded the emergence of competing loyalties that could cut across the state machinery.

The concept of social reproduction is crucial to the emergence of this social category as a result of state action. If in Segou for instance, ‘slaves’ were not permitted to engage in raiding on their own account, in Moogo theirs was a status of political actors, but also instruments in the service of state centralisation. Hammond however argues that citizenship in Yatênga did not derive from a sense of participating in the same and single political system; it was rather conceptualised in terms of one’s membership to the overarching descent group of the moose, and this was a typical consequence of the *naam*

¹⁰⁹ Lonsdale “States and Social Processes,” 1981: 169.

¹¹⁰ Alexandre notes their strategic importance in a number of case studies of African kingdoms and empires; see Alexandre, *Les Africains*, 1981: 465.

framework. The genealogical tie ran like a conceptual framework in the interaction amongst members of the same descent group, be they Mossi of Yatênga or from Ouagadougou and other Voltaic states.¹¹¹ Although state 'professionalisation' of political practice was pursued along the lines of a de-segmented principle, what de-segmentation (divorce of politics from kinship) did not achieve was the creation of kin-like sense of belonging within a politically oriented identity. The elements of violence that pervaded the actions of captives, for instance—as they went about abusing in the name of the *Naaba*—can be conceptualised as a result of the absence of those principles that govern the conduct of members of a kin group: no threat of punishment from revered ancestors or established custom of comportment could deter them. The captives thus provided the structure for changing and fragmentary transactions between the ruler, the royal dynasty and the wider society, in which they could extend state rule through various mechanisms. Their role points to the functionality of 'kinlessness' in a system widely based on a corporate kinship, hereditary rule. By serving the ruler, the captive served the state.¹¹² Furthermore, the assimilation of captives to jural corporateness had significant

¹¹¹ Hammond, *Yatenga*, 1966.

¹¹² In Ouagadougou, Yatenga, Dagomba and Mamprusi, the strengthening of the power of the portion of the administration recruited from outside the nobility was part of a series of innovations associated with the rule of kings remembered in oral traditions as particularly committed to centralisation such as Na Atabia of Mamprusi (c. 1690-1741), Na Muhammad Zangina of Dagomba (c. 1700-1714), Naaba Warga of Ouagadougou (c. 1737-1744), Naaba Kango of Yatenga (1757-1787); see Davis, "Continuity and Change," 1984: 214-16; Zahan, "Mossi Kingdoms," 1967: 164; Izard, "Introduction-I," 1970: 163-5, 316-9; Illiasu, "Mamprugu," 1972: 43-5; Ferguson, "Islamisation in Dagbon," 1973: 18-39, 85-97; Tiendrebeogo, *Histoire et Coutumes*, 1964: 163-5; Wilks, "The Mossi," 1985: 73.

implications for the definition of 'citizenship' in moogo. Whereas until the middle of the eighteenth century were considered citizens only members of the extended *moos bûudu* whilst the bulk of the population were 'subjects' of the *Naaba (talsé)*, the incorporation of non-mossi segments in the state extended citizenship to former captives and to those *talsé* and *têngbîiise* who served the state both at the local and central levels. However this type of mobility in political identity did not have much bearing on a third category that lived in Mossi society along citizens and subjects but did not exercise rights attached to these. They were *yarsé* traders, blacksmiths and *silmiise* herders.

At the beginning of state centralisation in the eighteenth century, it was common for the *Naaba* to place his sons, future contenders to kingship, at the head of local offices, partly to attenuate agitation and plots that characterised their activities. This strategy of expansion went hand in hand with strategies to undermine and stifle any attempt at rebellion by too autonomous *nakombsé*, hence the practice of moving them around villages and local offices. The territorial assignments of *nakombsé*, relative to those of holders of *pânga*, reflected the balance needed to be worked between political expansion and territorial expansion of the centre. Typically, holders of *pânga* tended to live at the periphery and the *nakombsé* around the central area of the kingdom whereas the centre of the kingdom—the equivalent of its capital—was predominantly inhabited by royal servants and captives, men and women not related by blood to the *Naaba*. This way, *nakombsé* were kept away from the centre of high politics; they were also kept away from sensitive border areas. In

the nineteenth century, these were the north-east border, point of contact with the Fulani of Yatênga and the Gondo plains on the one hand and the Dogon on the other.¹¹³

Around royal residences, the *nanamse* planted captives and warrior villages. At the same time, court dignitaries, the *nesômba*, were given territorial control of a number of villages which they ruled with the help of royal servants, whilst war-chiefs were nominated at non-hereditary positions by the *Naaba*. Thus, Naaba Warga (c.1737-1744) established captives-villages around Ouagadougou and strengthened the power of the central government by strengthening that of royal attendants. He manipulated and capitalised on rivalries prevailing between ‘people of the royal household’, the *nayiridamba*, and against contenders to power, the *nakombsé*. More specifically, the *Naaba* relied upon the conflicting purposes of *nakombsé* (to secure immediate control over a local *naam*) and *tâsobnamba* (to preserve their influence in local chieftaincies) to maintain the status quo. These categories engaged in often violent court intrigue in jostling for power and privileges.

The argument of the marginalised aliens used as instrument of power is nothing new in the study of monarchies.¹¹⁴ In fact, if centralisation required, in essence, the insulation of kingship from society, it also required a parallel

¹¹³ Izard, “Le Royaume Mossi,” 1987: 76-7.

¹¹⁴ Coser for instance describes the role of renegade Christians during the apex of the Ottoman Empire; Jews in 17th-18th century German court; the place of eunuchs in the empires of Han and Ming China and various other instances in West Africa and the Middle East; L. A. Coser. 1974. *Greedy Institutions*. New York: Free Press, in Feeley-Harnik, “The King’s Men,” 1982: 46.

process of estrangement of strangers from their origins (and claims attached to origins). This dual process spoke to sovereignty and citizenship as conditions of abstraction: on the one hand royal sovereignty had to be freed from the constraints of kinship, but it also had to recruit 'citizens' from outside kinship.

CONCLUSIONS

When all has been said, captives were a familiar figure in the practices of many African states: Feeley-Harnik describes the incorporation of the 'slave' as kin in pre-colonial Madagascar, in ways very similar to that of the Mossi. Boubacar Barry and Klein also explain how political centralisation in pre-colonial Waalo and Kayoor built upon the industriousness of zealous captives or *tyeedo*. Terray explores the implications of the integration of captives in extensive kinship networks in the Abron kingdom of Gyaman. Also, Ann Walthall explains the relative power of palace women in history in terms of the privileged relationships they were able to build with ruling individuals and classes. In the Voltaic state of Dagomba, the Zohe Na was elevated *namawgeleba kpamba*, head of the eunuch chiefs who counselled the Na and oversaw the day to day affairs of the palace and state and even conducted judicial proceedings.¹¹⁵ Similar examples abound elsewhere. The paradox of the weak captive, the marginalised outsider turned political actor is thus not epiphenomenal to these states and certainly not peculiar to Mossi; in most examples, the outsider's devotion to the king is based on the fact that his social existence depends on his patron.

¹¹⁵ Ferguson, "Islamisation in Dagbon," 1973: 39, 278-80.

The contextual evolution of *naam* presents a combination of political design and the historical requirements that political rule be 'freed' from the maze of lineage and blood relationship through the creation of new social categories that owe their existence to their distance from *naam*. Political power can consequently be envisaged as a phenomenon inherently linked to the characteristics of social structures, in their potential to establish variable levels of inequality. Social structures reveal, in ways similar to the mutual rapport of politics and the sacred, aspects of the fundamental attributes of power.¹¹⁶ The Mossi political system presents us, in the configuration of its centralised structures, with an opportunity to understand the nature of politics whereby neither 'unquestioning obedience' nor political revolution—as an expression of discontent or an intent to remove kingship in favour of a different form of political power—really captures the intricacy of power, hierarchy, kinship and kingship.

Holders of *pânga*, in other words *pasdamba*, namely royal captives in the service of the *Naaba*, have differing views on power and political practice. Although they can intermarry with the *Naaba*, the royal family and in fact all the *nakombsé*, they are situated at the remotest—in terms of their generational distance—within the *moos bûudu*, from the royal dynasty and the *Naaba*. As a consequence, they do not position themselves as potential contenders to kingship. Equally, there are not necessarily a party to the political and dynastical turbulences that intersperse the lives of *nakombsé* in expectation of an uncertain nomination. *Pasdamba* are however keen on maintaining a status

¹¹⁶ See Balandier. 1964. "Réflexions," 1964: 33-4.

quo for the survival of the very offices they run, to preserve privileges attached to their office, and consensus around the *Naaba*, the royal court and themselves as an institutional unit that has both a legal and a political interest to keep any attempt at usurpation at bay.¹¹⁷ They derive power from the political sphere which they have every interest to protect:

The *tansobnanamse* would assemble young people from togo, balum and rasam and a number of *nakombsé*, sometimes under instruction of the *Naaba*. When they came back (from slave-hunting), the *Naaba* could authorise them to take some. Here, in Bingo and Balum were the places where the slaves, yembese (sing. yamba), were concentrated.”¹¹⁸

In so far as they insulate kingship from interference from the royal dynasty as well the realm of *tênga*, royal servants keep, to use Richards' words, 'the king divine'.¹¹⁹

'Slaves' and captives were the instruments of a process of de-segmentation of political power; in other words, their absorption into the government structure went hand in hand with the 'estrangement' of the king from his lineage. The aim was to divest royalty of the requirement of lineage membership which normally served to define the position of individuals within the political apparatus. However, the paradox of the Mossi state was that it never really broke the intimate link between state and the segmentary lineage system.

Royal servants had a close affective relationship to the *Naaba*, in addition to being the loyal guardians of his sovereignty on the one hand and the avatars of state coercion on the other. In so far as their relation to kingship was

¹¹⁷ Izard, "Le Royaume Mossi du Yatenga," 1987: 76-

¹¹⁸ Mamadou Ouedraogo, Interview, Ouahigouya, April 14, 2010.

¹¹⁹ A. I. Richards. 1968. "Keeping the King Divine," *Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute for 1968*: 23-35.

articulated through convention, rather than descent from Wedraogo, the exercise of *pânga* allowed them to transcend the royal institution as well as the dynastical reference which the *nakombsé* laid claim upon, and consequently, the ethics of conduct that regulated the conduct of *nakombsé*. Consequently, creative reformulations gave shape to the overhaul of state service and to historical change. If, as our reading of institutional change in Moogo would imply, a great deal of freedom was conceded, a great amount of it landed in the hands of a historically and conceptually weak, identity-less social category. The latter was not sparing in their use of their authority to effect institutional change towards more pronounced differentiation between kinship and kingship. This produced an advantage from the perspective of the *Naaba*, in terms of accrued personal clout. By serving at the behest of *Naaba*, captives and royal servants were discouraged from consolidating any power that could countervail that of the sovereign. The very bases of consensus thus lingered, not so much in the bewildered conscience of the collective will than within ruling segments that appeared to hold higher stakes in their maintenance.



Figure 3: Memorial Monument of Naaba Kango (1757-1787), in Ouahigouya, Burkina Faso; also believed to be his actual tomb. According to oral traditions, the Naaba Kango was so powerful than at death, his body was so rigid that it could not be laid to rest in a normal grave. Instead, it was set upright and cast in clay.

CHAPTER SIX

Bidding Adieu to the Hills: Rituals as Historical References

“Le sacré a besoin de distance pour survivre”

Mudimbe, *Entre les Eaux: Dieu, un prêtre, la révolution*

INTRODUCTION

In the absence of an explicit theological body in traditional Moogo, the Mossi state was a willing interpreter and regulator of faith. The state's ideological structuration shaped belief and transformed its values as imperatives that underlined and moulded the historical experience of the political, primarily, but also the social and cultural. The ideology of *naam* enabled the state's translation of ideas on society and culture into historical realisation. The state thus 'occupied', so to speak, the space left vacant by a withdrawn divinity (*Wende*). The Mossi state's alliance with the guardians of *Tênga* was a logic of ideological displacement whereby the faltering of public justice called a form of private morality that stressed the right of the royal segment to assert the claims over alternate contenders of power. Such argument centred upon the nature of the imaginary tie between the present and the supernatural, not necessarily upon the nature of domination anchored in

state/subject relations. In fact, according to the assistant of the *togo naaba*, “the ritual practices undertaken by given chiefs are not binding for other chiefs. It is up to him and his descendants. For example, in the current *Naaba*’s (Naaba Kiiba) palace, you will notice an altar there on the corner called *Bulli tênga* and established by *Naaba* Tuguri who was a nephew of Naaba Bulli. In Mooré, we say *ari kama na-tênga, wana adore* so this sort of practice does not commit other chiefs. The Yatênga Naaba respects all religions. In fact, we can say that the Yatênga is a secular kingdom (*un royaume laïque*).”¹

The understanding of belief is a prerequisite to the study of state and society in Moogo. Belief was inseparable from almost all aspects of social and political life; it was ‘the lens’ that brought into focus the conditions and changing circumstances of the preponderance of the state outside the realm of power. It was the fulcrum of the state’s legitimation process. If the Mossi state’s theological investigation into belief was limited and less elaborate than indigenous systems—and precisely because of this—it sought to structure belief by juxtaposing its high god to the earth divinity without explicitly trying to override the indigenous belief system.

The *ringu* or voyage of enthronement is central in defining, and mediating the relations between state and belief. The *ringu* essentially enacted the constitutive submission of power to the earth (divinity) to seal the peculiar encounter of a ‘son of the earth’ to a warrior, at a particular historical moment. In doing so, it contributed to ‘making’ the *Naaba*, to turning him into a *rima*

¹ Interview sg togo naaba, Ouahigouya, March 2010

(sovereign) in his cosmic, ritual and ceremonial capabilities. The directional hierarchy between east and west gates, followed during the royal ceremonies, the balance of opposing functions between *Moose* and *Bîngo*, between *Narita* (reigning king) and *Kurita* (king's scapegoat), demonstrated the principles that sited the king, the sovereign, between the divine and the immediate. His role was to crystallise the fundamentals of a new belief made of two religious systems—syncretic union between *Naaba Wende* and *Napagha Tênga*—into adequate representations invested in the construction of Mossi identity.

The divine kingship framework—here used to examine the essential role of the king—is not meant to suggest that the king was divine because he was inherently so, but because the continuous existence of the state was hinged upon the necessary but complex duality between *Naam/Tênga* and that for the king to transcend such duality, he must be a hieratic figure steeped in divine essence even though in reality he might be a much more mundane figure, an everyday ruler with all the human limitations. The *Naaba* was an ordinary man, yet he was the ultimate symbol of harmony and order; the site where history and myth, power and identity, meaning and becoming coalesced.

Mossi belief reveals a set of human anxieties in grappling with 'meaning' and 'becoming' in this world and in the hereafter. However, in its concrete manifestations and practices, it was mostly concerned with the balance of a given duality that took a life of its own. The following set of questions will shape the structure of the present chapter. What to make of the absence of an explicit and extensive exegetics in Moogo? If belief is part and parcel of historical

experience, a historical phenomenon rather than a mere rigid ritual structure, how did it inform the state-building process and, by extension, the social project from a state's perspective? How does the *ringu* fit into the state's enactment of belief as crucial to its experience?

6. 1. Of the High God and Low Divinities

6. 1. 1. Withdrawal of the high god as disengagement

Belief and deference to a High God or Sky God are a religious particularity the Mossi share with other West and central African societies.² The Sky God (*Deus Otiosus*) is an exalted spirit withdrawn from worldly concerns; he is not always worshipped but imagined and narrated in mythological terms.³ As the creator of all things material, of man and nature, the one that organised and reordered a chaotic world, the High God is yet strangely distant from its creations. This distance creates a contradiction in human approaches and understanding of the divinity as an intimate presence represented and conceivable in every element of his enduring creation. The withdrawal of

² Association with the Sun are quite common in Central Africa, see A Kagame. 1976. *La Philosophie Bantu Comparée*. Paris: Presence Africaine, pp. 149-50; J. Ferguson. 1982. *Gods Many and Lords Many: A Study in Primal Religions*. Guildford, Surrey: Lutterworth Educational; E. Andersson. 1953. *Contribution à l'Ethnographie des Kuta*. Uppsala: Studia ethnographica upsaliensa, 2:23-31; E. Ardener. 1956. *Coastal Bantu of the Cameroons*. London: McMillan, p. 92, in J. Vansina, *Paths*, 1990: 95-99. J. Allman and J. Parker also touch upon the importance of Onyame, the Akan Supreme divinity, a hazy figure that withdrew once his work of creation was completed, see J. M. Allman. and J. Parker. 2005. *Tongnaab: the History of a West African God*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p. 122.

³ Le Herissé notes that in Dahomian mythology, the sky-god was held to be the creator of the world and progenitor of the other gods; A. Le Herissé .1911. *l'Ancien Royaume du Dahomey*. Paris: Larose, p. 127.

Wennam/Wende (Mossi high divinity)⁴ seems to inhibit therefore a (common) pressing need for explanation and representation of the absolute and its embodiments. On the other hand, the proliferation of lesser divinities provides clues to processes of socialisation of the divine that responded to the more immediate demands of human anxieties.

In other places, the 'aloofness' of the high god has given birth to many forms of worship, sacral places and spiritual endeavours which established direct forms of communication to spiritual figures. Shrines are built in a sense to make the High God more accessible through the agency of shrine spirits.⁵ The sacrality with which mundane objects are infused is a manifestation of man's desire to operate systems of spiritual rapport which make it possible for humans to engage with the withdrawn god through them, thus imparting upon them a religious dimension. Through the process of 'progressive descent of the sacred into the concrete', the high god is metaphorically brought back to the level of the tangible and the 'worshippable' as it were. Man changes the original structure of religion by transforming abstract ideas to a plethora of objects that then take on value as they respond in time of need. The divinities 'created' extend and preserve the work of the high god, pushed to the boundaries of the horizon. However, the withdrawal of the high god is only partial as the work of creation is never totally complete; lesser divinities also need a hand in dealing

⁴ The name *Wende* has the same root as *windiga* (sun), which does not however make *Wende* a sun-god; it is rather a sky-god. In Mossi understanding, the Naaba's position on earth is likened to the zenithal position of the sun in the sky, and his power is believed to be derived from or is an extension of the power of *Wendnaam*

⁵ An appropriate and improper translation of *kinkirga* which is an invisible being with presupposed good and evil powers

with situations of extreme distress and exigency. Lesser divinities help capture the all-elusive nature of the high god whose might is mostly assumed; they humanise it in objects that bear the emotions and imperfections of human beings and with whom people are able to identify.

6. 1. 2. Withdrawal of high god as process of socialisation of belief

To say that the West African high god is a withdrawn divinity is however to misread his presence in the life of ordinary people. The Mossi understand *Wende* as a being that infuses every action of man although he is little involved in the nitty-gritty of his ordinary life. Although the high god does not manifest himself in explicit ways, he is very much part and parcel of the social experience of man. Humans relentlessly seek to establish certain promiscuity with the sacred. But this alone cannot account for the movement away from the 'passivity' of the high god. Two basic problems are posed here. First, the assumption that the act of creation is complete is not founded on strong conceptual ground. It is rather plausible to think of the act of creation as a work (of art) in perpetual need for betterment. Secondly, the idea of creation as an endeavour with a beginning and an end is very much a product of monotheist religions. In Judaism, Islam and the Christian religions, god's creational activity is said to have lasted 6 days after which he retired and never again 'resumed' or modified fundamental creation.

Withdrawal of the high god has been linked with neglect in ritual. In this, two strands of thinking stand out. Eliade conceptualised the high god as too abstract and remote, which leads to a lack of accessibility experienced by human

beings in their attempt to communicate with the divine. He imputes the emergence of many religious forms to the transcendent and passive nature of the sky god. Eliade depicts a battleground between the transcendent high god and the immanent divinities, his substitutes on earth equipped with the same sacred dimension (the difference being rather on intensity than in kind). In this struggle between the sky and the earth, the latter comes out victorious and the former is, at it were, and pushed to the periphery of the religious realm even though he still occupies the background of religious life.⁶ It is therefore not surprising if the socio-political differentiation between rulers and ruled is a chief manifestation of the mythical differentiation between sky and earth. Pettazoni on the other hand conceptualised the withdrawal of the high god on the very nature of its omnipotence. According to him, the creator retires to the realm of the abstract once his work of creation is complete. “[T]he world once made and the cosmos established, the Creator’s work is as good as done. Any further intervention on his part would be not only superfluous but possibly dangerous, since any change in the cosmos might allow it to fall back into chaos.”⁷ The creator must ensue that his work of creation remains eternally stable and unchanged. And so, if there is anything left to his creative work, it is something like the work of a herder who must exercise vigilance in order to keep his herd together.⁸ In O’Connell’s view of complete withdrawal, the latter is

⁶ M. Eliade *Patterns of Comparative Religion* 1958: 52, 43; in O’Connell, “The Withdrawal of the High God,” 1962: 67-69.

⁷ R. Pettazoni *Essay on the history of religion*, p. 32 in O’Connell, “The Withdrawal of the High God,” 1962: 68.

⁸ Pettazoni, *Essay on the History of Religion*, 1954: 32.

countered in at least three occasions, namely the ultimate restoration of ethical order, the provision of help in extreme situations of distress and also the fact that lesser divinities are expressions of facets of the high god's power. The indiscernability of the high god creates a sentiment of weariness in people who also 'resent' his all-purity; withdrawal is often said to have occurred subsequent to human (generally a woman) spoiling of his work. God's code of justice might therefore be best served under the supervision of the lesser divinities likely to overlook man's lack of knowledge and virtue.

Although the idea of a complementarity between high and low divinities is attractive, I would argue that the withdrawal of the high god—at least in the Mossi context—is a necessary *socialisation process*, first operated through the representation of the Sun as a fecundator but more so through the attribution of sacred qualities to elements and places of social interaction that bear the mark of state, for instance the different stops of the *ringu* as discussed below. The transfer of sacral attributes from high to lower divinities is a prerequisite to social action in what is essentially a framework of religious symbiosis. Low divinities in turn define the direction of social action, thus creating a dynamic relation with religious consumers who experience the divine through historical change. The notion of sacred places as bargaining sites attributes consequential qualities to human interaction with the divine. In Moogo, historically, the socialisation process of the high god bears the strong imprint of human agency with a purposeful intent to change the course of history. It was assumed by a category of conquerors that presumably imposed, or rather 'sold' the idea of

power (*naam*) to autochthonous groups. Before the arrival of the Mossi, *Tênga* was most probably the superior divinity of the indigenous groups. The sacred marriage of *Wennam* and *Tênga* can therefore be conceptualised in terms of an association between political power and production (land, territory) as they form the basis of a Mossi pantheon.

Wende and divinities effect change and are apprehended at two different levels. Lower divinities are associated with events taking place at the community level and *Wende* with wider issues of origin, life and death. In other words, divinities set the 'event (s) within a relatively limited causal context' whilst *Wende* sets events "within the widest possible context".⁹ Community life does furthermore tend to be so intensely experienced, its structure too rigidly and too narrowly configured, allowing little conversation in the larger context with a removed god. Though removed in a hierarchical sense, *Wende* is brought back into the realm of the concrete through its association with the earth divinity, *Tênga*. Contrary to *Wennam*, *Tênga* is the object of an active and intense worship. Sacrifices are offered to *Tênga* for abundance and fecundity, before, during and after harvest; the most solemn of these is the *tinsé*, celebrated close to the beginning of the rainy season. Traditions place the origin of the *tinsé* back to Naaba Oubri, the founder of Wogodogo; it was then celebrated in commemoration of the funerals of Oubri's mother. Earthpriests play a central role in the conduct of ceremonies, including the *tinsé*; they ensure the proper conduct of rituals and offerings in order to keep calamities away.¹⁰ In

⁹ Horton, "African Traditional thought I," 1967: 62.

¹⁰ Ilboudo, *Croyances*, 1966: 65-66.

all this, they seek to restore the social balance where it has been violated. As old Kariim explained, “the *tengpeelem* punishes you if you commit an offence. The *tengsoba* will make you drink a potion to determine your culpability and if you are found to have violated the rules, the earth will kill you.”¹¹ The earthpriest thus corrects wrongs done to the earth; he initiates propitiatory sacrifices to assuage the earth. The state and its agents could neither stage-manage these sacrifices nor otherwise interfere with the conduct of other rituals.

6. 2. Propositions of Power and Principles

6. 2. 1. The duality principle

There seems to be a close relation between the relative transfer of divine attributes from the high god to earth divinities and the ‘solarisation’ of the former. The devolution of political power as an act of generative structure is seen to be an enactment of this very solarisation. When asked about the origins of the ritual union between *Wende* and *Tênga*, this is what one informant had to say:

At the beginning, the sky was so high and the earth so far away from it. *Yôyônsé* and *Ninsi* had the power to blow the wind but they also needed *Wende* up there in the sky to pour the rain. That is why they decided to unite *Tênga* to *Wende* in order to have abundant rain.¹²

¹¹ Karim Ouedraogo, Interview, Ouahigouya, April 16, 2010

¹² Kamsaogho Naaba, Interview, Ouagadougou, April 30, 2010

Another explanation was given to me along these lines: “the Mossi say that *Naaba Wende* does not drink *dolo* (rice beer) but his wife *Napaga tênga* does. So if you want to make sacrifices to *Wende*, for example blood or *dolo*, you have to give it to the earth.”¹³ In any case, the syncretic union between Mossi and indigenous beliefs was explained in terms of complementarity and necessity; it was an innovation meant to ensure the smooth ritual integration of Mossi migrants in a context whereby they controlled political power but had no control over the forces of nature and no acquaintance with the divinities of the soil. In the Mossi case as in others, “ideological innovations of a religious nature were tools of change in their own right rather than merely means of maintaining existing political stability.”¹⁴ They merely buttressed *tênga’s* ability to enforce social conformity in a context whereby conflicts were mostly resolved without recourse to political government, whether central or local.

The divine couple (*Naaba Wende* and *Napaaga Tênga*) is a rather original conception amongst voltaic groups.¹⁵ In an agricultural society, the divine couple points to fertility both in agriculture and in people. The couple has contrasting attributes and constitutes the central ideological unity of Mossi

¹³ Mamadou Ouedraogo, Interview, Ouahigouya, April 16, 2010

¹⁴ N. J. Fairley, “Ideology and State Formation,” in Kopytoff, *The African Frontier*, 1989: 92

¹⁵ This syncretic association between naam and tênga does not however mean fusion of the realm of power to that of the earth; the ideology of power, based on the patrilineal system, associates tengdemba (people of the earth) to Apaagha (Napagha) Tenga as her sons, tengbîise whilst Nakombsé, as sons of Naaba Wende, are considered the legitimate and exclusive holders of power. See M. Izard. 1983. “Engrammes du Pouvoir: l’Autochtonie et l’Ancestralité,” *Le Temps de la Réflexion*, 4: 299-323, p. 230.

belief. Yet, this dual cult was not a structured religion, adhered to and practiced in a systematic manner by the general population as some scholars have mistakenly inferred. Delafosse for instance saw in this cult the basis of a 'national religion'. He notes "(...) the existence of a religion truly national, powerfully organised, carefully regimenting all private and public actions, mostly based on the cult of ancestors".¹⁶ As many other African 'traditional' beliefs, Mossi religion displays a dual nature. Where gods are theoretical entities, rituals and religious practices are intended to apply theory to the control of the world. Moreover, rituals are seen to be made of the same stuff as human social relationships; they are an extension of social relationships and gods are people who apply meaning to social encounters.¹⁷ In this model, man's encounter with god is conceptualised as being the ultimate and archetypical social relationship.

6. 2. 2. The dual principle structured

There existed, within the structure of the royal service, specialised attributes that represented modes of interaction between state and belief. Yet, the distinction *Naam/Tênga* was theatralised in representations meant to impress the distinct nature of state power from everything else. The position of different *nesômba* reflected this contradiction as they played crucial roles within and outside the royal court. In the performance of their political and social

¹⁶ M. Delafosse. 1972. *Haut-Senegal-Niger*, new edition, II. Paris: Maisonneuve and Larose, p. 122.

¹⁷ Horton, "African conversion," 1967: 96-7.

actions, the *nesômba* (*togo, balum, weranga and bing*) depended on the ritual collaboration of *têngbiise*. The contraposition of political authority and ritual over land, if rigid in principle, implied and effectuated overlapping rule over *tempeelem*, territory over which an earth priest exercised ritual authority.¹⁸ The link between the institutional set-up of the royal service, through the action of its representatives (*nesômba*) and state intervention in the area of belief, beyond representations of sovereignty, was never straightforward. The *balum naaba* of Ouagadougou describes the responsibilities of the *nesômba* in the following manner. As first royal servants, they ensure the proper running of the royal service on aspects that touched upon the *Naaba's* public and private life; they supervise the organisation of rituals and sacrifices according to the ritual calendar; they also facilitate access of ordinary citizens to the person of the *Naaba*; the *nesômba* mediated every audience and visit to the *Naaba*, thus exercising effective administrative control over territorial chiefs as well as courtiers and a very large portion of the general population.¹⁹ Their role was thus central in the state's strategy to invest the area of belief through administrative arrangements.

It is important to note that one crucial endeavour of the *nesômba* was to maintain the continuity of the royal institution; this was achieved at times against the royal lineage in instances where the latter was perceived to be undermining the *Naaba's* action. The *nesômba*, nominated for life by a former *Naaba*, constituted the Electoral College that appointed a new *Naaba*; they

¹⁸ J.-Y. Marchal. 1983. *Yateng: la Dynamique d'un Espace Rural Soudano-Sahélien*. Paris: ORSTOM, p. 700; M. Breusers, "The Making of History," 1999: 450-1.

¹⁹ Balum Naaba, Interview, Ouagadougou, March 14, 2006

oversaw the interregnum during which the deceased's eldest daughter (*napoko*) was in charge. The interregnum marked by the same token a rupture, an antagonism between the rule of the deceased and that of the living.²⁰ The office of the *Naaba* was an embodiment of the state, and the role of the *napoko* was to prolong the existence of the deceased *Naaba*, temporal and tenured ruler beyond whom the continuity of the state, timeless and transcendental, had to be maintained. In that sense, every *Naaba* was both a discrete entity and a continuity of his predecessors (ancestors), the temporary incumbent as well as the embodiment of a permanent historical institution.

The term *togo* is semantically linked to the idea of oral transmission or the transmission of the 'verb' (word), *balum* to the idea of 'cajoling', hence the translation into 'courtesan' and *werânga* refers to the horse shed; the *werânga naaba* was the head of the royal cavalry.²¹ From the professional attributes of the *nesômba* were envisaged two conceptions of space, internal and external. The former was the realm of the *balum naaba* who supervised the internal affairs of the court (he was likened to a *rumde* or first wife of the *Naaba*) whereas the *togo* and *werânga naaba* provided the link between the *Naaba* and the external world: "we can say that the *balum naaba* is the ministry of interior. I say this because he is at once the chief of protocol, he checks whether the *Naaba* is appropriately dressed; he is also in charge of foreign affairs, he

²⁰ Izard, "Engrammes du Pouvoir," 1983: 321.

²¹ Togo comes from *togsé*: 'to repeat somebody's words, to tell, to tattle on'; R. P. Alexandre. 1953. *La Langue Mooré*. Dakar: IFAN. Mémoire 34, Vol. 2. p. 402.

mediates relations between the *naaba* and foreign visitors and guests.”²² The *balum naaba* mediated and controlled access to the *Naaba* and constituted his ‘working memory’. On the other hand the *wedranga (ouidi) naaba* was the link between the *Naaba* and the *nakombsé*: “if a *nakombga* needs to see the *Naaba* for any kind of matter, he needs to see the *ouidi naaba* first. The *ouidi naaba* also takes care of family matters of *nakombsé*”²³ whilst the *Rasam Naaba (Yatênga)* “runs finances cumulatively with his responsibilities as minister for the youth. He is the one who keeps the cowries and other wealth material on behalf of the *Naaba*. He detains the royal fetishes and the regalia. He stores the proceeds of war and looting: gold, women, cattle and all this is centralised in *Bingo (Rasam)*. When some of this is needed for rituals or for the *Naaba*’s use, then the *rasam naaba* gives him.”²⁴.

The *togo naaba* assisted the *Naaba* in his ritual obligations and was his mediator with the *têngbîisi* who supervised rituals (social equilibrium) and the use of land (social welfare). If many local traditions explain the institution of *naam* (as idea-system) upon indigenous groups throughout Moogo as a violent process, state discourse explains it as something that was established, ‘negotiated’ through the power of the ‘word’. The word was thus a founding principle of power and a means to perpetuate it. The word sealed the alliance between ‘power’ and the ‘earth’ and was the binding tenet of creation on the one hand and the fundamental ‘pact’ on the other. The archetypical image of the verb ‘penetrating’ the earth is re-enacted in agricultural practices and ritual

²² Balum Naaba’s assistant, Interview, Ouagadougou, March 14, 2006

²³ Weranga Naaba, Interview, Ouahigouya, March 15, 2010

²⁴ Balum Naaba, Interview, Ouagadougou, March 14, 2006

celebrations whereby culture introduces the ‘verb of ancestors’ into the earth (an otherwise uncultivated, untamed space). The humanisation of man and the socialisation of space is here re-enacted through the symbolism of the humanising spiritual agent.

On the other hand, the *têngbiise*'s role was one of social regulation, essentially in the protection of social integrity provided that observance of customs was not violated. The earth punishes perjury, incest, adultery, theft and murder, and it ensures productive harvest to peasants and to chiefs the means of their rule.²⁵ The *têngsoba*'s role lies in reinstating ritual equilibrium where human action has violated the sacrality of the earth. As one informant puts it:

The *tengsobnanamse* are guardians of the rites and secrets of the kingdom. The *tengsoba*: he preserves the authenticity of the first men. He is the one who determines, for example in the case of accusation of adultery, theft and other forms of violation of the earth such as, pardon me for saying this, people who go outside and have relations on the ground or even worse, some people who would go and have relations with animals, that also exists. We call them *yaralentîise* (sing. *yaralentîiga*). So when there is such violation, the *tengsoba* will determine the truth, he makes the accused drink a potion and if one is guilty, that person will certainly die.²⁶

The alliance between indigenous/conquerors, power/production/earth creates a symbolic family relationship between the two whereby the ‘people of the earth’ are, as it were, the maternal parents of the *nakombsé*. The Mossi say:

²⁵ M. Izard. 1986. “La Scène de la Mémoire” Colloque sur *Les Aspects Linguistiques et Anthropologiques de la Transmission du Savoir*, Rome, La Sapienza (8-9 Dec), p. 5.

²⁶ Ila Ouedraogo, Interview, Ouahigouya, April 17, 2010

“le roi est nu quand il est revetu du seul *naam*”²⁷[the king is naked when only clothed with *naam*], he thus needs to make alliances with *tênga* and *tengbîise* to give ‘meat’ to his power. State intervention in the realm of belief is thus inaugurated through the establishment of symbolic blood ties which re-enact the mythical and original encounter of earth and power, a first inhabitant and a wandering warrior, hence the acknowledgement of this sacred link in the consolidation of state authority.²⁸ The chief priest is the prominent figure in ritual ceremonies and was officially given ritual precedence and spiritual authority over the Mogho/Yatênga *Naaba*; he was given a number of royal prerogatives in these occasions.

6. 3. Ringu: History Enacted

If the complex socio-political structure makes it difficult to envisage the nature of state’s peculiar relationship with belief, the *ringu* peregrination provides elements of the historical underpinnings of an uneasy cohabitation of power and belief. The *ringu* re-enacts the conceptual link between power and belief at different levels. It is the ideological unity between antagonising yet complementary forces, earth and power. A newly elected *Naaba* does not become a full-fledged *Naaba* before accomplishing the *ringu* which makes him *rîma* (sovereign) neither will he be buried in the royal pantheon of Somnyaaga: “only the Rîma who have accomplished the *ringu* are buried in the royal

²⁷ Togo naaba’s assistant, interview, Ouahigouya, March 15, 2010

²⁸ The Tinsé is a solemn cult celebrated before the break of the first rains of the year in the honour of *tênga* the earth divinity (fertility and abundance); it dates back to the reign of Naaba Oubri when it was then a commemoration of the funerals of his mother, a strong reference to the family ties referred above.

mausoleum in Somniaga. You can be brothers from the same father but if the father did not accomplish the *ringu* in order to become a *rima*, you cannot become *Naaba* one day. You can be from the same grand-father, but then not all of you will become *nabiise* unless there is that condition.”²⁹ The *Naaba* that acquires sovereignty thus acquires the means to rule independently from religious impediments through a religious ceremony that ‘frees’ him from the shackles of the religious institution.

One has to view the *ringu* as a legitimising process without which a Mogho or Yatênga *Naaba* has no real control over the territorial foundation of his rule. Through the *ringu*, the new *Naaba* identifies with and gets a feel of the territory over which he looks to lay his authority hence the term *ringu* (or *riungu*, kingdom). He traces the symbolical contours of his future kingdom in what is both a closed course, for the *Naaba* departs from his *natênga* and comes back to it at the end of the journey, and a circular itinerary in the sense that his is a west-to-east circuit. The first phase of the ritual enthronement shows a would-be *rima* in a weak position, having to “beg for the kingship” and eagerly seeking the alliance of the autochthonous priests.³⁰ His large generosity meant to persuade the priests is contemptuously slighted and his attempts to befriend many times ignored. He pledges allegiance to the ‘earth’, prostrates before the earth priest and submits to his ritual authority. This constitutes a strong statement of symbolic hierarchy as well as a balance of power sought and

²⁹ Maliki Ouedraogo, Interview, Ouahigouya, April 15, 2010

³⁰ De Heusch, “The Symbolic Mechanism,” 1997: 221-2.

carefully projected by the state itself, “thus equilibrium, a counterweight, was established and continually strived for at the very heart of the [state’s] conception of power.”³¹ It is however important to point that from a state’s point of view, a public perception of flexibility and respect of particular prerogatives was essential.

The culmination of the *ringu* ceremonial is when the *Naaba* is ritually ‘captured’ by the inhabitants of Tangazugu who order him to get down from his pedestal; he is made to dismount his stallion, symbol of the Mossi, of conquest, and attributes of power, and to exchange it with a donkey, symbol of the gritty life of ordinary peasants. He is made to sit on the ‘stone of power’ (*naam kugri*) from morning to evening, under the sun and the humiliating taunting of a throng who points at every physical characteristic. A series of rituals, from the *natênga* to Gursi, lead to the effective enthronement of *Naaba* into *rîma*; the triumphant return back to the *natênga* is a stark opposition to the posture of humility and submission of a less-than-assured king dependent on the good will of the ‘people of the earth’.³² Today, the *ringu* peregrination lasts about a month, but during the sixteenth until the nineteenth century, it could last up to many years, some say seven. According to Mamouni Ouedraogo, who tends the royal cemetery (*nayaado*) in Somnyaaga, the *ringu* itinerary was different from one *Naaba* to another, but a normal one was

[F]rom Peela to Gondologo to Gourcy and a number of villages before returning to Ouahigouya through Somniaaga. You know, every village has its own history and so the *Naaba* stops there to make sacrifices. On the way back, passes

³¹ M. Glele. 1974. *Le Danxome*. Paris: Nubia, p. 100 in Bay, ‘Belief, Legitimacy,’ 1995: 4.

³² Izard *Gens du pouvoir* 1985: 150.

through Somniaga where all *rimmamba* are buried. The royal cemetery is in Somniaga. In Gourcy, the *Naaba* then turns his head towards the right and bids goodbye (Adieu!) to the hills which he will never again see in his lifetime.³³

As the rulers of Ouagadougou and Yatênga devoted a great amount of energies expanding the extent of the applicability of *naam*, even the sites where conquering ancestors are buried constitute as many symbolical and ritual monuments that tell the history of the state. As an informant put it

[...] here, everything is important for history, Gourcy, Somniaga, Gondologo, all these villages play an important role, the place where the *Naaba's* horse has rested, villages around royal residences, the hearths of autochthons, the place where our ancestors (autochthons) met with the first immigrant, etc.³⁴

In the choice of the historical sites as in the variations of rites were dramatised or minimised the pertinence of particular historical references. At the end of the voyage, the *Naaba* is stricken by a form of temporary sterility. The end of the investiture reveals the dual fundament of the Mossi monarchy as enacted by the symbolic and evocative 'alliance' formed by the *Naaba* and his stallion: on the one hand *naam*, the founding principle of authoritative rule associated with the royal lineage and hereditarily held within it, as Izard affirms, "the *naam* is purely moaga".³⁵ At the same time, the *ringu* conferred to the *Naaba* the right to use *pânga*, thus sanctioning the predatory practices of the state and by extension the contours of a particular state.³⁶

³³ Mamouni Ouedraogo, Interview, Somniaga, April 17, 2010

³⁴ Ousseyni Ouedraogo, Interview, Ouahigouya, April 16 2010

³⁵ Izard, *Gens du pouvoir* 1985: 150-3.

³⁶ In other words, the state emerges with the completion of the *ringu*

In pre-colonial Yatênga, the apogee of the *ringu* took place in Gursi-Tangazugu although different *nanamse* expressed a preference for a particular place (for example their father's royal residence) over another. The *ringu* is a highly complex process and a long procedure sprinkled with symbolisms; it is for a *Naaba* a quest for a path and an identity, it is a quest for meaning and direction. But the *ringu* is also and essentially a process of re-memorisation of the fundamental encounter of power and earth, a symbolic voyage back into the past for a *Naaba* looking to adopt/engage the future according to the state's first principles. It is a renewal of that founding pact that is also an emblematical re-enactment of the birth of history: the state reconstructs its history on earth; and it renews the original alliance between a mossi heritage and a *yôyôonse* heritage,³⁷ a need to reassert in both *moaga* and *nyonyosé* conscience that state power derived from an ancient power it supplanted by re-appropriating its essence:

Le *ringu* réactualise, intègre et dépasse. L'histoire naît ici: dans la nécessité, pour tout pouvoir, de rappeler qu'il est issu d'un pouvoir antérieur qu'il a supplanté en s'en appropriant la substance, c'est à dire en le reconnaissant dans le moment même de sa négation.³⁸

The *Naaba* re-enacts the history of the Mossi state and stands at its source. The circumstances which brought the Mossi to political authority, whether through conquest, marriage or other forms of alliance, were juxtaposed to those

³⁷ This alliance is periodically renewed during the (annual) agrarian ritual

³⁸ Izard, *Gens du Pouvoir*, 1985: 151 [the *ringu* re-enacts, integrates and transcends. History begins here: in the necessity, for any power, to acknowledge that it is derived from an anterior power it has supplanted by appropriating its substance, In other words in acknowledging it in its very negation].

of existing territorial authority.³⁹ Belief was an important part of the existing structure, and the *tengsobdamba* an important element of the Mossi sociological structure. The *ringu* is in many ways a recognition of the distinct nature of belief and its necessary autonomy vis-à-vis the political sphere. It is also a renewal of the ideological deployment of *naam* over a territory it commands but does not exactly possess. At the same time, it makes the *Naaba* the institution that straddles both worlds; it makes him the lynchpin of a (new) socio-political framework whereby sun and earth, the alien and the autochthon, the sacred and the political, the present, the past and the future share the same aspirational references. At the same time however, belief was “a crucial motivating factor that affected the office within the context of the political history of the kingdom.”⁴⁰ As *tênga* becomes part of the legitimising structure of *naam*, it is transformed from a timeless source of social equilibrium to an institution with which earthpriests build precarious alliances on the basis of socio-political struggles.

In addition to the *ringu*, the *bega* fertility rituals are the opportunity to make propitiatory sacrifices to *tênga* for productive harvest and general well being. Although the Mossi have a solar cycle, the calendar is determined on the basis of lunar months; they double the length of a lunar month every three years in order to make the two cycles coincide. The winter solstice announces the

³⁹ On this, see J. B. Zoanga. 1978. “The Traditional Power of the Mossi Nanamse of Upper Volta,” in W. Weissleder, ed., *The Nomadic Alternative*. Hague: Mouton, pp. 215-6.

⁴⁰ E. G. Bay. 1995. “Belief, Legitimacy and the Kpojito: An Institutional History of the ‘Queen Mother’ in Precolonial Dahomey.” *The Journal of African History* 36(1): 1-27.

beginning of the solar year, the second month of the year marks the beginning of the five-month *bega* celebrations which are significant for transacting the relationship between the sun and the moon, the sky and the earth, *naam* and *tênga*, and ultimately between politico-ideological order and the socio-ritual order. The five months of celebration relate to the division of the kingdom in five 'dominions' that represent five points of a circle, each under the ritual supervision of a *têngsoba*. The centres of these dominions are the altar, the heart of earth-mastery and they each bear the name of a month. Although the *tengsobnamba* were not organised in a clergy with a system of hierarchies; the five earth priests are the most prominent in the sense that they launch the ritual celebrations which are repeated, throughout the kingdom, by every earth priest and according to the same modalities.

The celebration follow a centre-periphery movement; the *Naaba* signalling the beginning of the celebrations to earthpriests. It is as if the *Naaba* was symbolically organising agricultural production. On the other hand, a periphery-centre movement points to a political organisation of production, from local chiefs towards the *Naaba*. Of the five main earth-masters, a 'senior' one sends two messengers to the *Naaba* and they give the latter a 'motto' for the year in exchange with salt slabs and condiments to be shared amongst the five priests, the salt is in turn shared amongst the priests under the authority of the leading priests. Two weeks after the appearance of the moon, rituals and celebrations are performed throughout the kingdom according to a specific order that takes them from one point of the circle to the next. The fifth phase of celebrations marks the beginning of the crop-growing season and then another

cycle, completed by another celebration which this time only involves ‘people of power’: namely royal servants, *tasobnamba* and *Nakombsé*.⁴¹

According to Izard’s reading, the articulation *napusûm-bega* follows the fundamental distinction *tênga-naam*. In all this, the *Naaba* appears at that one who resides at the junction of *naam- tênga*, power and ritual; he sits between sky and earth; he unites the opposite realms by positioning himself as the *projector* of beginnings (*bega*) and the *receptor* of the products of technical (farming) activity (millet from *napusûm*).⁴² The ritual ceremonies of *bega-napusûm* carried the same concerns as the *ringu* in seeking to ‘familiarise’ the *Naaba* with, and to ‘attach’ him to his kingdom. The spatial area they covered ran opposite ways and retraced in a way the direction of political rule, but also indicated its necessary collaboration with *tênga* for a full appropriation of the fundamentals of power: first historicity, then in terms of the resources of ritual. In contrast, the payment of *mudri* (tax in the form of bags of millet) bore the impersonal, unsolicited and exploitative mark of *pânga*. Whereas the bundles of millet point to the symbolic duality between *naam-tênga*, the levying of taxes bore the overwhelming unicity—or rather, attempt at unicity/ uniformisation/ homogeneity—of abstract sovereignty.⁴³ In fact, *mudri* had a very scant symbolical dimension; it was essentially ‘moaga’ in the sense that it was a state initiative imposed on people and thus alien to processes identified with *tênga*.

⁴¹ See Izard, “Space, Power,” 1991: 103-7 for a detailed explanation of the *bega-napusum* system of symbolisms and representations.

⁴² Izard, *Archives Orales*, 1980: 930-1.

⁴³ Izard, *Archives Orales*, 1980: 932.

Where *bega-napusûm* denoted a personal relation to the *Naaba*, *mudri* stressed the distant nature of state power, instead of bunches, bags of millet (about 5kg) were, so to speak, heaved to state coffers.

The idea of the sacred kingship in Moogo has to be apprehended within the constitutive context of the hierarchical division and correspondences between 'earth custody' and the political order. If, at the village level, the *tênga naaba* (village chief) was the counterpart of the *têngsoba* (earthpriest), the *Naaba* became his own counterpart in the clergy; in the absence of a first clergyman, he was the embodiment of a dual representation. By becoming *rima* thus, the *Naaba* became a sacred person who was protected by his very sacrality.⁴⁴ At the same time, he mediated the contradiction inherent in the division *naam/tênga*, which essentially made political power *over people* incompatible with ritual power *over land*. The person of the *Naaba* was the site whereby the multi-dimensional representations of state ideology, cultural foundation and territorial grounding through *cultural* engagement were made to cohere. As site of representations, subscription to the person of the *Naaba* has to be understood as the convergence of differentiated expectations placed upon the ruler by different segments of society. At the same time, the *Naaba*, made *rima* through the *ringu*, escaped the habitual norms of society and kinship; he no longer had brothers and sisters, his family and kinship ceased to be his and the rules and obligations of kin solidarity no longer applied to him. In fact, when

⁴⁴ Iazard, *Gens du Pouvoir*, 1985: 153.

the *Naaba* 'ate *naam*'⁴⁵, he physically integrated that substance that linked him, consubstantially, to the ancestors. His was already the status of a 'living' ancestor able to communicate with the departed ancestors.

Furthermore, the last night of the *ringu* reveals a particular aspect of the ethics of the sacred kingship; the *Naaba* spends the night with his *rimpoko* (wife of childbearing age) but is not allowed to make her pregnant. This element of symbolic sterility is forcefully brought out by the treatment of the king's stallion, the *tuluburu weefo*, the double of the sovereign: enthroned along with the *Naaba*, he is sacrificed (curiously in the very place where coronation took place) as a ritual substitute to the *Naaba* at his death (physical demise).⁴⁶ For nobody but the *Naaba* was allowed to mount the royal horse. The *tuluburu weefo* accompanies the *Naaba* during his most important journeys, during a war, or when going to the moon retreat. As already noted in chapter 3, ritual regicide is fiction but it is mostly an ideological discourse articulated around the double personality of the king as individual and institution.⁴⁷ Many anthropologists such as Evans-Pritchard could be criticised for seeing in belief and sacrality the mere ritualisation of political authority whilst in fact belief constitutes a pervasive order on its own.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ In Mamprugu, the newly enskined *nayiri* also became an ancestor (*badima*) as he 'ate' and thus 'owned' *Nam*; see Davis, "Then the White Man," 1987: 629.

⁴⁶ L. de Heusch. 1997. "The Symbolic Mechanisms of Sacred Kingship: Rediscovering Frazer." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 3(2): 213-23; also, Izard 1987: 84

⁴⁷ On this particular point, see Adler, 'Le Pouvoir et l'Interdit' 1978: 27.

⁴⁸ See Michael Young on divine kingship among the Jukun of Nigeria; he criticises Evans-Pritchard for 'removing' ritual regicide altogether, along with its inventor. M. Young 1966. 'The

It appears in all this that the essence of the royal power is ritual function. In Ouagadougou, the *Naaba* did not always go to war, the war chief, the *samand naaba* did. On the other hand, a new *Naaba*'s young son, (*kurita*, literally 'reigning dead') is sent to live in a remote village and was never to see the *Naaba* face to face:

Before, in the old days, one of the princes, a *nabiiga*, was taken by force to become a *kurita* because nobody wants to be a *kurita*. If you are *kurita*, then you can never come back and become *Naaba*⁴⁹

The *kurita*—constructed on the model of *Narita* (reigning king)—is conceived as the negative double of the king in the sense that he 'eats' death:

The *kurita* is chosen to 'eat' death [*ku*=eat] at the death of the *naaba*. He can ask whatever he wants to be given, if he points to a sheep or a goat or a horse, it has to be given to him. We say that the *kurita* 'eats' the *ku-ure* (funerals).⁵⁰

The *kurita* and the war chief constitute the king's ritual scapegoats, the former during the *Naaba*'s term in office and the latter for his lifetime.⁵¹ Whilst the *kurita* exits the palace through its east gate, that of women and captives, the *Naaba* leaves it through the west gate, that of the Moose; the new *Naaba* is 'reborn' from the savannah that received the soul of the deceased *Naaba*, doubly

Divine Kingship of the Jukun', *Africa* 36(2): 135-152.

⁴⁹ Ila Ouedraogo, Interview, Ouahigouya, April 17, 2010

⁵⁰ Goungha Naaba's assistant, Interview, Ouagadougou, March 12, 2006

⁵¹ See Izard "Une Trifonctionnalité Africaine?" 1995: 416; "Engrammes du Pouvoir," 1983: 321; see also De Heusch, 'The Symbolic Mechanisms,' 1997: 221. The Samand Naaba is the first archer who exposes the upper part of his body to the enemies arrows, he kills himself in cases of defeat; the symbolism of the negative is even stronger if one believes that the donkey, ridden by the Samand Naaba has a symbolical value opposite to that of the horse.

embodied in the *kurita* and the royal horse (he is the last one to mount it before it is put to death), both destined to fulfil the closure of a term, the institutional rupture that confirms the end of rule for a given administration whilst the *napoko's* 'interregnum' ensures office continuity beyond the individual holders of *naam*.⁵² Goody aptly pointed to the ritual opposition which existed, in precolonial Sudanic pluralism, between the *horse* and the *earth*, the one pointing to bearers of force, and the other to cult shrines as well as agricultural activities. He drew attention to the fact that whilst this division marks a clear separation between the concentration of state power and the social cluster over which it was to be exercised, power was not regularly exercised within the same realm, state practice therefore displayed a certain disinterest vis-à-vis local production.⁵³

Feeley-Harnik on the other hand has an interesting take on the role of multivocality of political expression related to patterns of change in political practice. The idea of the king's many bodies may be rooted in forms of direct and indirect modes and strategies of communication involving the living and the dead, men of power, commoners and slaves, as well as kings.⁵⁴ It would therefore seem that royal killing and efforts of the royal court to work on maintaining the status quo would both translate in the persistence but also change of kingship, and political ideas/ideology and practices over time.

⁵² Izard "Trois Figures Féminines Moose," 1989: 451-2.

⁵³ See Goody 1971: 57-72 in Lonsdale "States and Social Processes," 1981: 170.

⁵⁴ Feeley-Harnik., "Issues in Divine Kingship," 1985: 300.

For the Mossi, the ancestors constitute an intrinsic part of the kinship system—historically and contemporaneously—hence an intrinsic part of the political system. The patterns for right conduct were long established by them and revisited during the many rituals that celebrate their continuing benevolence. In all aspects of social life, they were the final extension “into the supernatural, of the durable protective canopy of kinship relations which from birth to death and after provides for the Mossi’s well being;”⁵⁵ they provided the basis for kinship legitimacy and enduring effectiveness. The founding village of a new territorial unit constituted an important place as it hosted the sanctuary of the ancestors and as such marked a territoriality of lineages whose monuments become part of the historical heritage of the kingdom and thus part of the *ringu*. The head of the founding lineage became the officiating priest of the new sanctuary.⁵⁶ All these transactions point to the fact that belief was more than just a matter of justification of state ideology. It explained *how* the Mossi conceived themselves—as migrants, theirs was a high god associated with the sky and thus constant presence—their state, their society, and the others. Like *tênga* for indigenous groups, belief in *Wende* constituted for the Mossi the idiom in which they expressed and grappled with their existential concerns.

⁵⁵ Hammond, *Yatenga*, 1966: 179.

⁵⁶ Izard, “La Scène de la Mémoire,” 1986: 6.

6. 4. Sacred Kingship: the Political in the Ritual

Fraser's concept of the sacred kingship⁵⁷ is relevant to our understanding of *Wende* as highest divinity in the Mossi belief system on the one hand and the spiritual and sacred dimension of the *Naaba* on the other hand.⁵⁸ The *Naaba's* morning appearance inspired the expression 'the sun's

⁵⁷ Many anthropologists have abandoned the notion of 'divine kingship' as most empirical evidence in many societies in Africa has demonstrated the tenuous link between the vitality of the king and the fertility of the land and people; the classificatory category of 'sacred kingship' has instead been the analytical tool which has served to conceptualise kingship in Sakalava, amongst the Jukun, in Moogo and elsewhere. Izard notes that, in relation to the conception of the 'persona' of the *Naaba* amongst the Mossi: "Le roi—le Yatênga Naaba—règne sur le royaume, que celui-ci soit en paix ou en guerre, mais la figure du souverain et l'idée de la souveraineté n'en sont pas moins exclusivement associées à la paix, plus généralement à la prospérité du royaume et au bien-être de ses habitants. Le roi ne porte pas d'arme, il ne doit ni verser le sang, ni le voir verser." Izard. 1986. 'Le Thème de la Mise à Mort Rituelle chez les Moose,' *Afrique Plurielle, Afrique Actuelle. Hommage à Georges Balandier*. Paris: Karthala, 181-189. p.186. Recent reassessments of the divine kingship model—beyond issues of sacrality as merely one resource amongst others that preserve the continuity of the state—can be found in Young, "The Divine Kinship," 1966: 135-152; B. Ray. 1991. *Myth, Ritual and Kingship in Buganda*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press; J. H. Vaughan. 1987. "A Reconsideration of Divine Kingship. *Explorations in African Systems of Thought*. I. Karp and C. S. Bird. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 120-42; Feeley-Harnik, "Issues in Divine Kingship," 1985: 273-313; A. Adler. 1982. *La Mort est le Masque du Roi. La Royauté Sacrée des Moundang du Tchad*. Paris: Payot.

⁵⁸ Adler notes the attributes of the divine/sacred king, following Evans-Pritchard's revision of the Frazerian model using the Shilluk of Nilotic Sudan, in three main points: (1) the divine king is believed to possess an intrinsic power over nature, exercised voluntarily or involuntarily; (2) as the dynamic centre of the universe, his acts and his very existence have a bearing on the universe and its equilibrium, hence the need to control them carefully; (3) the divine king must finally be put to death, in a way or another, when his strength dwindles in order to avoid the negative effects on the course of the universe. Signs of decline differ from culture to culture, from senescence to defeats or natural disasters. Some cultures assign a given number of years (7, 10,). See A. Adler. 1978. 'Le Pouvoir et l'Interdit: Aspects

shining'; the sun was a positive association to the *Naaba*, his sacred quality infused the heavens in a transcendental ascension. This interjection has historical roots in the wandering days of Mossi-Mamprusi-Dagomba conquerors. It is no surprise then that the celestial god is most commonly found amongst and worshipped by nomadic societies. There is a basic intuition of religion in the impressive, immovable and transcendent nature of the sky. The sun equally elicits a sense of religious reality, it is the divine sphere and the fundament of aspects of human experience imprecisely captured. In the same sense that the sun dissipated fear and anxiety for Mossi-Mamprusi-Dagomba migrants in their expansionist endeavour northward from Mamprusi, the appearance of the *Naaba* conjured a sense of protection and guidance to the kingdom. It would however be misleading to see, in the cult of the sun, a religion for a 'class' (Mossi aristocracy) as it was merely an ideational representation of political leadership. The *Naaba* in the Mossi political tradition impersonated the divine; his *was* the sun-god in political outfit and therefore the vital centre around which socio-political life was made sense of.⁵⁹The sun as a creative

de la Royauté Sacrée chez les Moundang du Tchad' in *Systèmes de Signes. Textes Réunis en Hommage à Germain Dieterlen*. Paris: Hermann, p. 25.

⁵⁹ The complex of political justification and legitimising articulated around belief and ritual, the varieties of symbols as well as modes of etiquette associated with ideologies of political leadership points to a common tradition labelled 'divine kingship' but which should more adequately be called 'sacred kingship'; see T. Irstam. 1944. *The King of Ganda: Studies in the Institutes of Sacral Kingship in Africa*. Lund: Hakan Ohlssons Boktryckeri; J. Vansina. 1964. *Le Royaume Kuba*. Tervuren: Musée royal de l'Afrique Centrale, pp. 98-103 for characteristics of a sacred kingship; F. Hagenbucher-Sacripanti. 1973. *Les Fondements spirituels du pouvoir au royaume de Loango, RPC*. Paris: ORSTOM, pp. 78-87; A. Aymemi. 1942. *Les Bubis en Fernando Poo*. Madrid: Galo Saez, pp. 57-69, In Vansina, *Paths*, 1990:

being symbolised in an abstract representation the transfer of power and transcendence through dynastic and lineage-based principles. The *Naaba* was thus the starting point, and the dynastical reference in mapping political power from its sources in the common ancestor.

The Mossi religious experience however needs to be analysed in relation to its particular history. Existential anxiety pits man against the experience of transcendental power at particular historical times. The particular response to sacred beings is therefore a function of as well as a consequence of the socio-political structures which bear the enduring print of the religious dimension and uphold its principles in its working structures. Charles Longs contends that “the modalities through which the sacred is mediated to us are products of history, but we must ask whether the reality to which we respond through the various modalities is also just a symbolisation of historical conditions.”⁶⁰ A second framework is thus needed to characterise the social stratification of Mossi society between autochthons and strangers. Notions of *dougeutigui* (political chief) and *dougeukouletegui* (economic or agricultural chief), amongst neighbouring Mandé, are rooted in differentiated spheres of the political and the religious as coexisting in relative autonomy to each other. This framework is provided by the structure of belief, in the ritual practices that foster and preserve social order, and in representations of power and political rule as they are ritually embedded in the workings of *Tênga*. Belief is a founding principle of the Mossi state, and it is at the heart of state formation and expansion both in

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⁶⁰ Long, “The West African High God,” 1964: 338.

time and space. Lassina Simporé has discovered the vestiges of different forms of cult that attest to the different origins of ancient inhabitants in the Mossi state of Ouagadougou. If earthenware coffins, rock graving and a number of anthropic mounds are found in Gurunsi settlements, the yao-bulga or Mossi hypogea are arranged in a form particular to royalty; findings in Tanghin Dassouri, in Ouagadougou, allow a better understanding of the funerary practices of the *Mogho nanamse*, the presence of cowries and a number of objects indicate both the status of the deceased and the sort of concerns they had towards life after death:

You may think that our ancestors did not think about what becomes of the soul when we die but they have. We are linked to our ancestors and they are linked to us. That is why we can invoke their blessing. We are sitting in chairs right now but we are sitting on the earth and we communicate with it. We are connected to the past and to the future at the same time. (...) there is a small village not too far from Ouagadougou called Pilimpikou where the souls of our ancestors dwell. It is a sacred and mystical place.⁶¹

Social stratification in Moogo would then be a reflection of these two contrasting tendencies. Earth priests in Moogo are found amongst the indigenous Yônyoôsé; they are devoted to agriculture and to protecting the sacrality of the land through sacrifices, rituals and the supervision of delimited territorial boundaries that mark the physical frontier between the social and spiritual worlds. Earthpriests could converse with the invisible world although the extent of their powers was never too clear to the ordinary Mossi. They calmed anxiety, illuminated the obscure, cast dangers away and very

⁶¹ Noufou Ouedraogo, Interview, Ouagadougou, December 5, 2009; see also Ilboudo, *Croyances et Pratiques*, 1990: 117; Simporé, *Elements du Patrimoine*, 2004 : 346-60.

importantly, requested and often successfully obtained from the spirits that inhabited those clues to the solutions to human difficulties. In effect, in a system of belief that sought to apply theory to the control (time-space control) of the world through rituals, the supreme divinity was also a theoretical entity.

That said, belief in the Mossi experience was not a private affair entirely left to individual initiative. Neither was it purely a matter of individual aspirations to an ethics of life. Where earth priesthood was the emphasis of analysis, belief tended to be described as something epiphenomenal to the reality of power but the fact is that there was a strong element of the latter in it. Power on the other hand was not entirely devoid of a religious dimension; it had a strong impress of belief which wrapped political action. The lack of an interrogative dialogue with the divine meant that the hereafter was a world constructed in tentative and temporary terms in the sense that different administrations could introduce novelties of belief elements. It was, in the ordinary mind, a vacated area where imagination was limited and where state projection could essentially thrive.

6. 5. Divine Attributes and Historical Perspectives

The above discussion allows apprehending the historical dimension of religious experience in Moogo. Abstract concepts, in their attempt to elucidate the world on the basis of its observable and hidden levels of understanding, are an incomplete tool in apprehending the state's endeavour to apply theory to social space and its attempts to use belief for ideological ends. Religious practice in its various forms as text, idea, belief, ritual, and social experience, is best

made sense of when apprehended within and in relation to historical experience at the individual, society and state levels:

The *koom filiga* (*koom* is water or millet beer, *filiga* means 'to thank') is a first fruits sacrament or harvest ritual; it offers a strategic opportunity for reading aspects of the historical enactment of social order. Ancestors are induced to attend and bestow benediction and blessings, for it would be impious and of portentous consequences for any ruler to inaugurate the new season/year without their blessings. It is an opportunity for the *Naaba* to gain occult ascendancy (over enemies) during the ceremony and self-fortification against evil influences. In Yatenga, the beginning of the *koom filiga* is announced in the old Mossi village of Rom; the chief of Rom is a ritual father of the *Naaba*, he grows red millet for ritual use in a small piece of land; he sends a few bundles to the *Naaba* who then consumes the new millet in a drink mixture prepared with new and old millet by the *rimpoko*, one of his wives.⁶² Part of the mixture is offered to royal ancestors at their sanctuary, the *kiims roogo*. The ancestors are asked to protect the *Naaba*, to bless him and thus eh kingdom.

The *tinsé* celebration is at the same time a harvests sacrament, a military celebration (display of military might), a historical enactment of the state, and a glorification of the legitimacy of power. It is also meant to be "an economic institution of unique proportions," the centre of the redistributive state sphere whereby received gifts are redistributed to the general citizenry.⁶³ There is a clear ordering as to the way the first mouthful is to be taken: the king follows

⁶² Izard, "Le Royaume du Yatenga," 1975: 240-1.

⁶³ K. Polanyi, Dahomey and the Slave Trade 1966: 33 in E. G. Bay, 1977: 4.

the ancestors, and then come close kinsmen. The order of precedence in the consumption of the products of the soil responds to the priority of filiation to a far-off ancestor (Oubri, founder of Moogo). The festival is therefore essentially a historical enactment of the state and society in their intricate interactions. It re-establishes national unity whilst celebrating the political, social, economic precedence of power and its bearers (royal lineage).

The crops festival is the greatest gathering of all other times in the year. It is the occasion that gathers the entire nation, alive and dead towards common purposes, the ancestors and forefathers foregather with their descendants in physical and spiritual sense. The absence of the ancestors would be an act of grave distortion of the letter (word) of traditions and would invite misfortune of all sorts to the community and the nation. The ritual hence allows for the (collective) purification of the people for the transition into a new cycle of routine and expectation. It is also the place where law is promulgated and edicts made public, and most importantly, ancestors are thanked for their generosity towards and protection of the nation at large. The festival serves to vitalise the Mossi milieu and also reify Mossi relations to social and supernatural forces.

In practical terms, it also marks the (temporal) passage from an old to a new year, old crops to new crops; it marks the sloughing of the old year and its host of ills, misfortunes and unfulfilled expectations. It also marks the symbolic (re) emergence of the King after a retreat of communion. As Max Gluckmann points out with regards to the social context of the first fruits ceremony (*umkosi*) amongst the Zulu 'From the earth and seed, fertilized with medicines,

protected by the ancestors, have come the crops, filled with a power inherent in themselves and derived from 'spirits'. The long and arduous round of hoe-culture is almost over, dearth is ended, and plenty is to begin.'⁶⁴

The ceremony is also seen to exercise a form of control by balancing tendencies for thriftless attitudes with moderation (because of the taboo on early eating). Control is exercised in four ways. First, the presence of the ancestors requires consideration and deference to them. A number of social codes and decorum are observed on the occasion, quarrelling would amount to an act of desecration towards the ancestors and their living representative (the king) and towards the sacred regalia. Secondly, rules of hierarchy and order in the consumption of the fruits meant that the social order was ritually re-enacted and, by the same token, granted collective consensus; breach of this rule was sanctioned by secular rule in the absence of ancestral punishment, the social order governed legal deterrents against transgression. Prescribed roles may express social statuses and control over social behaviour in ritualised manners. During the festival, the rules that govern socially approved emotions and etiquette are renewed. Thirdly, the festival is being a once in a harvest year moment, exaltation and excessive expectations thrive under the compassionate approval of the *Naaba* and the ancestors. Outbursts of physical involvement alternate with self-imposed restraint and self-control, along with a range of self-display ordinarily restrained. Fourthly, the first fruit festival is generally spread over days. Every village takes great care in having a well thought out plan over the prescribed days during which the observance of taboos and the

⁶⁴ Gluckman, "Social Aspects," 1938: 34.

performance of rites are designed to engrain a collective sense of belonging in the collective psyche and the fostering of people's common destiny. Bonds of kingship and lineage, of peaceful neighbourliness and renewed allegiance accompany the festivities and these unique moments are revelled in years on as marking a significant social and historical moment.

6. 5. The Essence of Mossi Belief

6. 5. 1. Belief as Element of Categorical Distinctions

Belief in Moogo cannot be satisfactorily understood without analysing it through the parameters of differentiation entailed in the contradistinction between *Naam* and *Tênga*. Belief is part of the historical experience and it is at the heart of the epistemological and ideological fundamentals of the Mossi state. It placed the individual, society and the state at historical junctions mediated by a set of precepts constructed upon a (changing) understanding of the mutual workings of nature on culture. The fundamental principle points to differentiated categories that encapsulate the range of tensions that mark the interactions between the world of nature on the one hand and that of culture on the other. Forces on both sides are mutually attractive and resistant to each other.⁶⁵

⁶⁵B. B. Somé. 1970. " La Religion Traditionnelle des Mossi comme Source de Valeurs de Civilisation Politique," *Notes et Documents Voltaïques* 4: 3-31.

In the particularly arid and infertile land of Moogo, fatalism and pessimism towards the action of divinities has a particular poignancy to it. The distinction between bad and evil is a function of the erratic nature of the climatic factor. Drought and food scarcity materialise the pessimistic vision grounded in an ever resigned reception. However, reducing religion to an ethics of existence would be a gross misreading of Mossi belief and risks leading to an ahistorical representation of it.

The essence of Mossi religious philosophy, according to Ilboudo, is that man is born to suffer; he is born to work hard, to do chores, unpleasant and burdensome tasks. The internalisation of this principle forms the basis of a nature of resignation and certain resilience among the Mossi towards the vicissitudes of existence. Man's 'disposition for suffering' is repeated like a mantra, it is skin-wrapped to the psyche of ordinary Mossi and to considerable degrees rouses the Moaga's pluck in the face of difficulties. Man's existence, the Mossi say, is a long painful moment. Man suffers in his flesh from physical pains and moral imperfections, impotence before his sufferings, sickness and death; he is overwhelmed by the extent of his impotence.⁶⁶

Evil, in the Mossi understanding, is conceptualised along the lines of a manifestation of a system of evil spells with competing forces acting at variant degrees. The universe is the field of a perpetual battle between good and evil, in other words between the Supreme Creator, *Wende* and lesser gods, the *Kinkirwese*. The cult of *Wende* is therefore essentially a cult of invocation; it is a strategy to conjure the spells by eroding or reversing the action of their agents.

⁶⁶ Ilboudo, *Croyances et Pratiques*, 1966: 53- 55.

Ironically, a good of part of these invocations, because they are through indirect means, do borrow the channels of the *kinkirwese* (spirits), hence frequent clashes of opposing forces.

There is a basic assumption that lesser divinities do have the capacity to question and tamper with the 'work' of the high god. The latter leaves it to the *kinkirsi* the latitude to change his creations in ways that may even be harmful to human beings. Man lives in a perpetual anxiety to not offend these lesser divinities, capable of the same feelings of merciless anger and enduring grudge as in human beings. Lesser divinities bearing the human attributes are capable of responding to the needs of human beings as much as show revenge and spite when offended. These tutelary gods, characterised by an interventionist nature, often meddle in the life of people in many ways.

'Spirits' (*kinkirse*) fit into a general spectrum of *in*-definition and unpredictability. They mediate and construct meaning between the realm of nature and culture. Their space straddles over the corporeal (sur-natural) and the real (spirit and corporeality). Their activity spans areas of human life and culture vulnerable to alteration, as almost all areas of human life. Offerings and invocations directed towards these spirits displayed forms of cajoling and coaxing; the fickle nature of the spirits meant that they could be as helpful as they could be tetchy for reasons that were bound to elude human comprehension. Human agency was limited, if not entirely meaningless in any attempt to 'tame' the spirits or reverse their fatal caprices against them.

The coexistence of the High God with lesser divinities shows a situation of complementarity (in people's framework of thinking) whereby the spirits are at the same time independent beings and at the same time dependent on the Supreme Being. Ideas about the One as Many and many as the One does not necessarily point to a clear demarcation between monotheistic or polytheistic choices but rather to the idea that the two categories of theoretical reference can coexist without contradiction. The *têngabiise* are, by vocation, the designed agents of the spirits' will. The translation into 'earthpriest' is a cultural import which is unsatisfactory and misleading on many accounts, not least the social place, the role and the expectations attached to the function. The earthpriests were the receptacle and the willing mouthpieces of the spirits. Their talent resided in their trained 'disposition' to penetrate the workings of nature in both its vicious and gentle manifestations. In other words, their posture merely displayed the inflections of a changing nature. They articulated in that sense the undulations and constant movement of nature into culture.

The absence of a corpus of dogmata is emphasised in the Mossi religious structure and contrasted to a system of communal obligations which outlines the ethical structure of human activity; the latter would draw legitimacy from ancestral prescriptions. According to Skinner, because of the divine origin of his rule, the Mogho *Naaba* is in fact, in popular belief, the living representation of the divine and as a result, his rule is more often than not, unquestioned.

Les Mossi de Ouagadougou croyaient que leur Morho *Naaba* était supérieur à tous les autres rois. Ils pensaient que son royaume était le plus vaste du monde et qu'aucun autre souverain n'était aussi riche, ni puissant. Il inspirait une

crainte telle (...) que personne n'osait le regarder en face. Il était interdit de le toucher de la main ou de lui parler autrement que prosterné, le front touchant le sol.⁶⁷

Belief in part derives from man's perspective on the universe. Man and the universe, both as creations of *Wende* or *Wennam* live and thrive among other forces, whose realities are juxtaposed to their. Man seems to be, in the midst of these dynamisms, at the mercy of uncertainty and has to fend his way through strategies to access and enter in the favour of unknown forces.

The Mossi belief system is not a formalised religion in the sense that it is not organised around a rigid corpus of dogmata. Practices are viewed as both a collective social enactment and an individual's attempt to establish rapport with the spiritual. In the semantic realm, religion is an area that escapes an accurate rendering in terms that point to a clear linguistic structure of the religious experience. In fact, Mossi religion is denied ontological depth on the same basis. *Wennam* is conceptualised in parsimonious terms as if to emphasise the absence of an intimate sense of his presence in the human mind. Ilboudo on the other hand, speaks of Mossi belief in terms of invocation, request, prayer, protection, resignation, and fatalism. In doing so, he reduces belief, its practices and experience, its purpose and reach to an 'ethics of existence.'⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Skinner. 1972. *Les Mossi de Haute Volta*. Paris: Nouveaux Horizons, p. 84 [The Mossi of Ouagadougou believed that their Mogho Naaba was superior to all other kings. They believed that his realm was the largest in the world, and that no other king was so rich and powerful. He was so awe-inspiring (...) that noone dared to look upon his face. It was forbidden to touch his hand, or speak to him from any but a kneeling position with the forehead touching the ground.]

⁶⁸ Ilboudo *Croyances et Pratiques*, 1966: 54- 55.

6. 5. 2. Spirits as agents of change

The universe is conceived as a field replete with invisible spirits and forces, with beneficial and maleficent characters, and whose encounters, alliances, clashes and collision set the stage for human trials and tribulations as well as fortune on earth. Every man and woman has had the experience of an encounter with these forces before birth and this encounter will have a bearing both on the constitution of his moral character as well as determine the conditions of his destiny. Whilst belief in the predetermined nature of the person develops a certain fatalism vis-à-vis one's destiny, the possibility of change and betterment through the medium of rites and invocations questions the very predestination of the human destiny. The aforementioned elements of Mossi beliefs point to an epistemology of survival that denies theological speculation and high religious reflection of any form. It confines Mossi belief to a commonplace understanding of the spiritual devoid of any attempt to theorise it in an abstract manner. According to this view, not only is Mooré linguistically and semantically too poor to allow a clear abstract articulation or construction of the experience of *Wende*, it cannot and does not build a discourse of the subjective experience neither does it categorise experience itself in an identifiable manner.

What were the epistemological and ontological bases of Mossi beliefs? If colonial and post-colonial treatments reduce the multiplicity of divinities to incoherence and a free-for-all disorganisation, it remains that the traditional system sustained regularity no less valid than the clarity and orderliness conceded to modern monotheistic faiths. In fact, what appears as a welter of

spirits and spiritual embodiments is the expression of the ordered occupation of areas of influence allocated to different expertises. In this model, Spirits as theoretical entities are forces of nature, concerned with the non-human environment that is with 'nature' in opposition to 'culture' and its social elements (man).

One essential problem with the traditional belief is its closed nature; the lack of awareness of people of alternative modes of thought/belief to established conceptual principles means that individual actions hang together in a body of collective religious knowledge. As a consequence of this, 'in this web of belief, every strand depends upon every other strand and a [believer] cannot get out of its meshes because it is the only world he knows. The web is not an extended structure in which he is enclosed. It is the texture of his thought and he cannot think that his thought is wrong.'⁶⁹ The believer's critical intelligence, if exercised in this context, merely operates within the confines of ritual (ised) behaviour and understanding. In other words, the believer can't extract himself out of the patterns of thinking or reasoning outside those confines for the existing belief system is the only idiom in which he can express himself. The theoretical underpinnings of Mossi religion are better understood in the exposition of the historical experience of belief.

⁶⁹ Evans-Pritchard' in Horton "Western science," II, pp. 156-7.

6. 5. 3. Rituals, state theory, power: belief as historical experience

The conceptual framework of Mossi religion can be juxtaposed to a more explicit historical reality that pits belief against state design at times and against its pervasive character vis-à-vis individual agency. Belief and other forms of subjective experience are conceptualised at two levels. It can be viewed as an independent social framework of its own at the same time that it is a framework enmeshed in the trammel of historical revolutions, social change, migration, and state building. The religious terminology of the Mossi is replete with *Wennam* bynames celebrating his omniscience. However, worship techniques to *Wennam* are not as effectively articulated as ritual and sacrificial practices dedicated to *tênga*. The latter are relatively predictable and therefore relatively subject to interpretive action. Peel, in *Aladura*, discusses the ways in which cosmological beliefs, as a product (dependent variable) of a given social situation, “go on to acquire an institutional framework which transforms them into independent variables with their own power to bring about ideological and social change.”⁷⁰ One has to bear in mind that the degree of integration between religion and social (infra) structure may be indicative of the extent of state design and actual involvement of the religious orientation and/or the practices of people.

In Moogo, priests were perceived to have access to hidden reality and the keys that decoded the language of divinities. This constituted a threat to state power. The state’s reformulation of the principles of belief very much challenged and discouraged the interpretation of historical experience by the

⁷⁰ J. D. Y. Peel. 1968. *Aladura: A Religious Movement among the Yoruba*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. In Horton, “African Conversion,” 1967: 94-5.

earthpriests. And when they did formulate interpretations, these either reflected popular beliefs or were anchored in state narrative. The latter however had to 'insert' its ideology into a pre-existing context of knowledge which had already assigned *references of identity* to people. For this reason, *naam's* ubiquity in the area of belief was only superficial and it informed the experiential reality of different groups only at the level of discourse and representation.

Priests and diviners on the other hand evolved in a specific political economy of divination, what McCaskie calls a "pluralist political economy of belief" whereby individuals in a pursuit of answers or remedy to their anxiety could take their queries from diviner to diviner and from priest to priest until they were satisfied with the work done. The secular influence of spirits was limited by this very structure. The priest, in mediating the pervasive nature and manifestations of spirits, was involved in a field of uncertain realisation whereby interpretation of an event was only one priest's version that needed to be met by the active faith of the individual applicant.⁷¹

Divination's role is at the junction of spiritual mediation and social analysis; it exposes tensions inherent to groups' dynamics and interpersonal/intergroup interactions. The healing of bodies, through ritual treatment and adjustment, is therefore akin to the restoration of social order as disease and physical ailments are part of disturbances that affect the social

⁷¹ On the issue of the competitive ritual marketplace in West African history of religions, also see Alman and Parker, *Tongnaab*, 2005.

order and cohesion. The pursuit of social equilibrium is thus at the root of the healing process initiated by the diviner. The state's attempt to discourage the consolidation of an explicit hierarchy of priesthood was a means of sabotage geared against collective action and any sign of unity of purpose amongst practitioners. This was most apparent in instances of conflict over interpretation between legal and religious outlooks, more generally speaking of matters requiring either belief or legal adjudication. Here, the state's ideological project laid in attempts to define the possibilities and conditions of belief. The state's approach to belief could therefore be viewed as a desire to act at the very roots of religious experience. The absence of an explicit exegesis or structured theological body in Moogo meant that the state could play the role of the interpreter of the sacred.⁷² This consisted in subsuming belief in the historical reading and recording process:

There were clear openings here that the state filled by forging a purposefully authoritative reading of [...] historical experience. In this ideological structuration, belief was annexed and absorbed into the state's promulgation of the historical record.⁷³

McCaskie contends that in the Asante case, the state did attempt and succeeded in subsuming the epistemological distinctions between knowledge and belief in various ways and this was made possible by the state's perception of history (and culture) as "a matrix of highly self-conscious acts of insertion."⁷⁴ In this schema, the state monopolised the reading of knowledge and belief,

⁷² McCaskie, *State and Society*, 1995: 123-4.

⁷³ McCaskie, *State and Society*, 1995: 126-7.

⁷⁴ McCaskie, *State and Society*, 1995: 126.

authored the historical experience of society and peoples and grounded its hermeneutical understanding in existing contradictions. In doing so, it attributed spiritual and therefore historical competence to belief items whilst incorporating it into the historical record.

The Mossi state did also attempt to monopolise the discourse on belief to a certain extent with mitigated success. The reformulation and re-exposition of fundamental actions of revelation in the course of re-reading or reviewing of the historical process came up against histories of origin and foundational myths firmly engrained amongst 'indigenous' communities. For the state, to violate prescribed rules and codes was to transgress at the same time (1) the supernatural order and (2) the socio-political disposition. In other words, questioning the ordained conditions constituted a subversive act against the established social and political orders. The two elements—supernatural and mediated social order—were both governed by the state. The difference therefore between violation of belief and civil disobedience becomes fuzzy. The effectiveness of *Naam* lied in its translation of a *Mossi identity*—the one it formulated for itself—into structures of authority that extended beyond the political and weaved into structures of belief and social identity. However, in reality, *Naam's* own internal discourse is far from being coherent. Neither is it always consistent with its stated goals. *Naam* does not 'evolve', so to speak, in its natural milieu: it has to break the temporal barriers of history and the spatial bounds of *pre-civilisation* (made of spirits and disorderly elements). By abolishing *Tênga's* prerogatives over the orientation of its own history, *Naam*

introduces a conceptual rupture that was never to be entirely 'patched-up' by the uniformising effects of a thorough ideology.

The state put forward an idea of the land of ancestors and spirits as exactly mirroring that of the visible world. The implications for social hierarchy are no less important than those of the political system. The royal lineage draws legitimacy for political rule in the invisible world in the same way that it does in the visible one. Whilst death and birth constituted 'passage points' between the two realms, divination, sacrifice and departed ancestors living in new-borns enabled and maintained communication between them. Blessings and calamities were the consequences of ancestors' pleasure or wrath towards kinsmen and people generally in the visible world.⁷⁵

A newly enthroned Mogho *Naaba* has to make allegiance to the earthpriest, the master of land and guardian of the sacred places. However, considering the pervasive nature of *naam*, it is difficult to explain the easy acceptance of earth priests of the rule of *nakombsé*. State intervention in the realm of belief could take the form of favouritism towards specific priests whilst denigration campaigns were initiated to discredit the expertise of priests not particularly acquiescent to the *Naaba's* ways. Equally, priests (and gods) could be played against each other in order to alter power relationships. These strategies reflected the changing ideas on power as much as they suggest the capacity of belief, when taken up by the state, to integrate external concepts and practices as new issues arose and challenged pre-existing frameworks. Beyond the perversion of existing structures for political capital, state discourse of

⁷⁵ See Bay, "Legitimacy and the Kpojito," 1995: 3.

morality adopted a universalising character that could transcend the initial binary *naam/ tênga*. Such a unifying discourse sought to rise above its own internal contradictions (*nakombsé's* immoral behaviour, their raiding activities and other social infringements violate the 'ethics' of *naam*). In doing so, the crowned *Naaba*, armed with the ritual recognition of *tênga*, becomes the ultimate symbol of collective morality and the essence of (Mossi) ethics. In Izard's words: "dans le souverain sont totalisées la moralité des sujets et l'ethicité des chefs, la référence à *Tênga* et à *Wende*."⁷⁶

CONCLUSION

Like other aspects of Mossi society, belief proceeded from and refracted the fundamental binary that distinguished *Naam* from *Tênga*, 'people of power' associated with the state/power/war and the 'people of the earth' associated with belief/rituals/agriculture, a model somewhat widespread in West African societies. This dual pattern was a ubiquitous feature as well as an important grid of reading of state ideology on the one hand, and state and society relations in Moogo on the other. However, the importance of belief in state ideology was more than just another strategy that served to buttress ideology. In the ritual union between *Wennam* and *Tênga* laid the bases of a hybrid religion made of two belief systems, which became—just like the negotiated process of state formation—monopolised and owned by the Mossi.

⁷⁶ Izard, "Transgression, Transversalité" 1979: 305 [in (the person of) the sovereign are sited the morality of subjects and the sense of ethics of chiefs, [and] references to *Tênga* and *Wende*]

The terms of this culture were to be constantly renegotiated, as *têngbîise* and *nakombsé* engaged in roles outside their traditional remit and as people with 'no history or culture' were ritually made members of the state and thus socialised to the mores of *Mossi culture*. In that sense, belief served to crystallise the conditions for the construction of a new identity, that of the *moaga*.

Perceptions of sacredness of state institutions in Moogo point to the ritual function as underlying principle of the political function of royalty, in de Heusch's words, "the symbolic complex surrounding sacred kingship is the kernel of the state."⁷⁷ The Mossi model posited a balance of power between two alternative sources of ideological construct whereby priests, diviners and a host of figures claiming an ancestral link to the land mediated communication with ancestors and spirits through rituals and provided moral legitimation to social and political experience. On the other hand, the state, in the absence of an explicit theological elaboration, engaged in epistemological reconstruction by treating the register of belief as part and parcel of the collective historical experience. This was made possible by the differentiated structures of kingship/state and earth priesthood, which forbade a pyramidal development of the latter. As a result, the *Naaba* was not only the first chief but also the first priest of the state, endowed with the sacred quality of a living god.

The functions of divinities may have been manipulated; they were in fact manipulated by political incumbents. But these manipulations also reflected ideological turns and changing conceptions of the nature of power and leadership. For instance, the office of the *togo naaba* points to an important

⁷⁷ De Heusch, "The Symbolic Mechanisms," 1997: 213.

orientation of power which promoted and emphasised the political centrality of non-royal elements within the state apparatus. However, state intervention in the area of belief was not always straightforward; it was sometimes the by-product of the structure of political offices, it was perceptible in the distribution of offices and the attribution of political responsibilities—in the *togo naaba's* role in transacting the 'familial' alliance between the royal dynasty and the *têngbîisi*, in the establishment of villages of captives and disaffected *nakombsé*, in the remains of a (non-formal) military organisation devoted to the expansion of the polity (this radiating back in the popular psyche as an expression of the physical might of the state), in an effective taxation and gift-giving system organising its collection, accumulation and redistribution, and in the consolidation of alliances through the institutionalised exchange of women.⁷⁸ These last points have been adduced in previous chapters.

It is tempting to interpret belief as being essentially in the service of state ideology. However, what the juxtaposition of Mossi and indigenous belief reveal was a further concern to adjust the detached nature of a 'nomadic' belief to the requirements of an all too present yet 'disorderly' earth. Religious ideology in Moogo was concerned, as has been instanced elsewhere in history, a wide-range of aspects of social life. It was concerned with the history of blood and kinship, in genealogy, and the origins of society. It was concerned with seasons and life-cycles and the transitions—such as rituals and rites of passage—that interspersed them and which were ritualised and institutionalised as markers of social encounters. Religious ideology was concerned with the fertility of nature

⁷⁸ See S. Drucker-Brown, reviewed work, *Gens du pouvoir*, 1986: 371.

and people. It produced, yet justified, and regulated violence (ideologically legitimate violence) as Mossi state needed to rely on something more nuanced than pure violence. Importantly for political organisation, it established recognisable sources of legitimate power and authority that could transcend on the one hand the complexities of kinship, and on the other the inconsistencies of state power; these different concerns were in turn 'inculcated' in the collective experience of diverse groups that made up 'society'.

It remains that the issue of the symbolical equivalence between kingship and its religious counterpart is a difficult issue to which there is no definite answer. Both are manifestations of sovereignty that do not necessarily clash, in the field of political practice at least. Through the structure of the sacred, the state enacted social unity as an idealised reflection of tradition and transcendent law; through the *ringu*, the state gave expression to itself by bringing a (virtual) nation together in a collective celebration of the past and the future in the present. It therefore became possible to justify social structures as translating the essential constraints attached to the permanence of collective order. That said, in the reality of political practice, the problem of ideology had to do with rule; it had to do with the rulers' dilemma to preserve deference for what was essentially a contested phenomenon (state power), it therefore was about the negotiation of acceptance of a certain view of power.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusions

After Ideology: State and Politics

7.1. Memory as Historicity, Fission as State Process

The historical trajectory of *naam*, I argue, is crucial to the political history of the Voltaic region and to a better understanding of processes of state formation, generally, in West Africa. Beyond historical narratives, *naam* is used as a prism through which to refract and reflect upon the theme of social transformation in the aftermath of Mossi migration from Mamprusi, and beyond, reflect upon related themes in state-formation such as the meaning of sovereignty, perspectives on territory, the making of multiethnic societies, etc. *Naam* constitutes a form of ideological, identity charter for the Mossi-Mamprusi-Dagomba states system. As far state formation is concerned, the ideological imperative has proved to be more important than the economic, social, and territorial imperatives. In fact, the whole Mossi system rested upon the genealogical framework and perceptions of identity linked to memories of migration. When *Naam* is deployed in the process of state expansion, it is this

genealogical framework that is deployed, at the central, the regional and local levels.

State power in Moogo is first of all, and fundamentally, discourse and representation. It is the production of discourse and the elaboration of representations of power: that of genealogy as historical and conceptual reference. As such, the conception of state as 'territorial unit' comes only second, once, and as the state has tied the ritual relationship to the earth, first as sacred land then as territory. In effect, the detention of the royal regalia makes one a *Naaba* before one even has knowledge of the extent of the territory to rule.

One of the arguments of this thesis has been that Mossi political systems in their historic form did not evolve-gradually from less sophisticated to more sophisticated forms of organisation. The Mossi-Dagomba-Mamprusi system is best understood as a process of cloning that reproduced a model of political structure—the *Naam* order—across the Voltaic region, and following a number of variations that gave birth to highly centralised states such as Dagomba, Ouagadougou and Yatênga, to 'flexible' states such as Mamprusi and Nanumba, and to a parallel systems of non-centralised social formations such as the Dagara, all built around the same fundamental, and defining, distinction between the realm of political authority over people (*Naam*) and that of ritual authority over land (*tênga*).

The distinctive contribution of Voltaic states to the variety of world political organisations lies in the particular arrangements that enabled strong local autonomy while preserving the centre as the political core. The political processes in Moogo prove, once again, that “the inexorable march forward from local community to chiefdom, to principality, to kingdom or state, proposed by unilineal social evolutionists was not the only possible option.”¹ In fact, this is not a viable explanation when it comes to explicating how West Africa in many ways is a culture-historical area that experienced the same state-formation procedures over and over again across the regional space.

History-making is, in Mossi understanding, the responsibility of a particular man, the moaga—the metaphorical reference to the divine action is not lost here—who uses the ‘craft’ of *naam* as the technological know-how that gives him, as it were, a *comparative advantage* over indigenous populations. The moaga rejects pre-moaga history altogether in his thrust. In so far as the earth is the legitimating spring, it has no history and is pure of any reference to the history of the peoples it supports. The Mossi of course are not unaware of the history or the possibility for the existence of a history for these peoples. However, the state-building project requires they deny any reference to the historicity of pre-moaga peoples. *Naam* constructs an institutional void as a

¹ J. Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforests*, 1990: 253; T. K. Earle gives a perceptive survey of social evolutionary theory in T. K. Earle. 1987. ‘Chiefdoms in Archaeological and Ethnohistorical Perspective,’ *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 16: 279-308; he notes that innovations did not always, nor necessarily point to more complexity and growth of scale. I. Kopytoff further notes Africanists’ long standing reluctance towards social evolutionary theories in ‘The African Frontier,’ 1987: 77-78.

basis of the deployment of its ideal model. The Mossi thus introduced the technological ‘innovation’ of horse-riding, the revolutionary social order (*Naam*) and a new god (*Wende*); the combination of these provided a recipe for a new form of social organisation. The assumption of a historical continuity between pre-moaga and *moaga* society cannot, and does not make sense from a point of view of *Naam*. The whole point of the *Naam* discourse is to replace the Mossi state at a historical junction; it assumes a complete beginning whilst rejecting pre-moaga history and it replaces it with a new set of ideologies that embrace the totality of human experience.

The immigrant, conquering stranger as civilising agent using superior technological know-how to govern ‘uncouth simpletons’ with no experience of the state can be read as a narrative trope along the lines of the Hare/Lion/Hyena tales so widespread in West African literary traditions. The *Naam* model was a self-sustaining system, through its replication across time and space, through the reach of an ideology that defined a particular type of society. It was a conservative ideological force that informed the cultural experience of the entire Voltaic region. The way it did so was in enabling a continuous, albeit uneven, process of interaction of Voltaic societies through participation—one way or another—in a common historical-ideological model.

Mossi institutional history provided, where needed, additional evidence to the diversity of political institutions and forms of political organisation in the world. It refutes views on institutional continuity—change was inbuilt in the requirements faced by Mossi society to adapt to socio-economic, cultural and environmental dynamics—and the lack of sophistication of pre-colonial

societies. Dynamics at work necessitated a working balance between local autonomy and centralisation, which led to an iterative system of centralisation and decentralisation, in ways that enabled the extension of state power to outlying areas as a form of territorial expansion. Integrally related to this point is the definition of the pre-colonial state: whilst the most common definition focuses on the distinction of a recognisable authority over a given territory, the territorial element in the Mossi, in so far as it was not the direct object of state power, poses fundamental differences with contemporary definitions of the state. A distinction is to be made between an idea of the state as structure governing over a people (the subjects of the Naaba) and the population living in the territory—made of the subjects of the Naaba and of non-Mossi such as the blacksmiths, *Simimoose* and the *Silmiise*.² From the perspective of *naam*, the state, in reality, is limited to the sphere of applicability of the ideology of *naam*.

There was no single political history but a variety of political histories, most however were buried under the overwhelming voices that gave life and promoted the Mossi master-narrative. These encapsulate the journey of ideology, the one that makes society but also shrouds alternative ideologies and reduce them to silent echoes of domineering voices. Thus, Mossi accounts of state and social processes no doubt obscure part of the processes of social transformation, and they also point to areas where further research could

² The *Silmimoose*, contrary to the *Silmiise*, were organised in small villages and lived in interstitial zones as interstitial communities with no formal attachment to *tesé* sing. *tênga*) and of little relevance to *naam*. The *Silmiise* are a group that does not belong to the kingdom but live in it whereas the *Fulse* are taken into account by *naam* and are therefore part of the kingdom.

potentially explore alternative narratives, such as those of indigenous *Kibsi*, *Yôyôose*, *Samo* and other peoples whose histories overlap and complement the master narrative. For this, Mossi history, in fact any history of pre-colonial Africa has to be understood as ‘conjectural history’ in Peel’s understanding.

The requirement for a political theory based on historical depth: the claim is that some of the characteristics of contemporary Burkina Faso and other West African states can be more persuasively appreciated by historical comparison. If some of the problems of contemporary states are novel, the development of history, rather than confirming repetitions in history—though these might occur—show that some of these problems are interstitial to structural ‘inadequacies’ having to do with institutional solutions that deal with ‘wrong issues’. These novel institutions, in post-colonial West Africa, were sometimes applied to people still steeped in social and societal frameworks that had ceased to exist. The economic element was always important but what the thesis has argued is that the ideological imperative, more than anything else, was the most determinant element in shaping the course of history.

7. 2. Naam/Tênga: The Unsettled Encounter

The moaga political system rested upon a fundamental contradiction. It was the necessary divorce between the practice of the state and the requirements of segmentarity, even when office succession was still embedded in the kin order. Attempts to overcome such a contradiction have consisted in drawing non-Mossi segments into the realm of *Naam* and thus in redefining *moaga* identity as the framework used to reorganize a more or less uniform unit. However, in doing so, the Mossi state endeavoured to construct the state as

en extended *moos bûudu* without ever succeeding in resolving the primary contradiction *naam/tênga*, conquerors/autochthons, or transcending the kin order as structure of reference. The analysis of such a process outlines the institutional development of the Mossi state, characterised by a gradual spread of what could be termed *naam* ethics.

The Mossi ruling stratum—in contrast for instance to Ashanti, where the chiefly class, entrepreneurial and purposeful, thrived to transform economy and society through the development of extractive industry in gold as well as that of innovative agricultural practices aimed at better productivity—adopted the posture of the conqueror, reluctant to settling an agricultural lifestyle. The ruling *nakombsé*, as ‘possessors of power’ established their rule over autochthonous *tengbissi* from whom they extracted foodstuffs and tribute. As a result, there were limited transformations in terms of forces and technologies of production throughout the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. This situation can also be understood within a *Naam* framework that clearly demarcates *political* and *economic* realms as it predisposes *nakombsé* to one thing only: the pursuit and exercise of political power.

Moogo was, in many aspects of its political organisation, not least the all-pervading ideology of *naam*, a revolutionary polity, with innovations extending to the very structure of belief. One could be tempted to say that the Mossi attempted to instil a new ‘commonsense’—just as Izard and others have implied. However, one should not lose sight of the *imperial* nature of *Naam* even when it sought to organise society along the lines of a system of more or less

independent states. The Mossi state sought to focus the collective imagination of its inhabitants on the greatness of political rule through pomp and highly sophisticated rituals, even when indigenous groups hung on to their autonomous condition.

In so far as the ideology of power set the parameters for social categorisation, pre-existing social arrangements did not constitute enough resistance to the revolutionary character of the Mossi state project. The fundamental contraposition between indigeneous and migrants had implications beyond the established separation between the political and the ritual realms; it served as an excuse for the deployment of state ideology in ways that circumvented territorial control whilst infringing upon the prerogatives of *tênga*. However this master-schema adapted differently to local conditions. If in Mamprugo, some form of autonomy was preserved, thus allowing a more or less flexible system, in Dagbon, the violent encounter between immigrants and autochthons was the basis for a highly centralised political system. In Moogo proper, centralisation was a main feature, along processes of assimilation that sought to tap into the resources of *tênga* to support the state project. However, over three centuries after Yatênga and Ouagadougou were formed, tensions still prevailed, between segmentarity and centralisation. The resistance of corporate kin groups to the state project was a serious impediment to its complete realisation. Neither was the issue of origins that underlined the dichotomy *naam/tênga* ever resolved. As the state sought to centralise its power by divorcing its sources, means, and possibilities from the royal corporate kin system, lineage elders, the *kasemnâmba*, were pushed aside

of a shifting *naam* order effectively ‘high-jacked’ by the state. They no longer had a place and could no longer lay claim to their authority as elders. Ironically, the same process would later isolate Mossi chiefs in the post-colonial republic of Burkina Faso as they could not invoke any legitimate claim to authority on the basis of the *Naam* order.

7. 3. History as Politics: Creative Migrants as State-builders

Chapter 2 demonstrates the common ecological origin and the institutional continuity between the polities of the Mossi-Mamprussi-Dagomba-Nanumba. This common origin is more salient and more significant at the level of ruling dynasties. Voltaic connections are apparent in the use of common kinship terms, in the ‘family’ relations between states—Mamprusi as ‘grandparent’ of other Mossi states—in the institutional terminology and the political structure, and in many other aspects of the political and social practice. A vast cultural area was thus created through what Wolf would conceptualise as a “continuous process of building up and tearing down.”³ Until the end of the nineteenth century, ritual co-participations were one of the links that kept the historical interconnection between the Mossi states across the northern borders of Ghana and Burkina alive. The Tenkodogo Naaba for instance performs a commemorative ritual in Gambaga after 33 years of reign. Beyond this, considerations having to do with ethnic and territorial affiliations, to the extent that they feed into ongoing political transactions on both sides of the Burkinabé and Ghanaian borders, are of a sensitive nature. Contemporary political

³ Wolf, *Europe and the People*, 1982: 38.

considerations are such that invoking these historical connections would create immediate tensions.

The use of migrationism reveals a particular form of thinking that refuses to confine human experience to a particular place, nation, or continent, namely, that human experience around the world displays great diversity in practice that has more to do with different ontological commitments. However, and it is here that migrationism is the most compelling, there are underlying elements, fundamental to processes of interactions, that point to the importance of subjective consciousness and experience beyond more pragmatic considerations, such as economic and environmental imperatives. Thus, political thinking and modes of governance are also shaped by the imagination and the memories of peoples keen on reproducing practices and procedures prevalent in places of origin.

State-formation through processes of budding-off, fission and spread is not unique to the Mossi experience. We are told of similar processes amongst other societies in West and Central Africa, and they conceivably happened either peacefully or were ridden with violence. In Southall's account of the history of the Alur, non-Alur groups 'invited' members of Alur chiefly lineages to settle amongst them as rulers so that they could benefit from their conflict-resolution and rain-making powers.⁴ Elsewhere, migratory aristocracies, invoking supernatural and/or divine entitlements, have imposed their models using violence, for instance the Luanda and Luba elites. The Luba and the

⁴ A. W. Southall. 1953. *Alur Society: A Study in Processes and Types of Domination*. Cambridge: W. Heffer.

Luanda kingdoms emerged from the radiations of political-military ruling aristocracies whose roots would go back to Lake Kisale. Dominating states of Luba patrilineages became elites of invaders, the *balopwe*, that ruled over a large number of local groups. The king was invested with the principle of *balopwe*, conceptualised as a source of political rule and transmitted through the male line. Whilst the elite provided the chiefs that ruled over conquered groups, the latter were recognised a form of conceptual authority invested in native chiefs who were the 'owners of the land'. A process of fission allowed the centre to expand authority by sending colonies of chiefs to conquer further territories and settle amongst the native populations. Unlike the Mossi *Naam*, the *balopwe* ideology did not attempt to draw the native structure into its sphere and therefore kept distinct ruling and non-ruling, local, categories. Native chiefs were merely used as tribute collectors and their activities faced various forms of dissidence. As a result, Luba sovereignty was limited; it was further hindered, we are told, by the power of kinship that checked the centre through networks of support: provision of wives to royalty, control of potential heirs, etc. Unlike the Luba *balopwe* who were distinct from the native groups, the Luanda weaved networks similar to those of the Mossi. Their model maintained kinship ties amongst the Luanda elite while incorporating non-Luanda through kinship fictions, by appointing them village headmen and recognised social identities within the scheme of Luanda 'perpetual kinship'.⁵ All this sounds strikingly familiar to Mossi processes and procedures of state

⁵ J. Vansina. 1968. *Kingdoms of the Savanna*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, pp. 80-83.

formation. If the Luba *balopwe* and the Luanda elite strategies lacked *Naam*'s procedural coherence, the similar mechanisms of 'double-inscription'⁶ does constitute, in west and central Africa, foundational frameworks that are more symbolical than historical but whose implications for state formation confirm, once again, inevitable similarities in the different political histories.

Chapter 3 demonstrates that the Mossi ideology of power cannot be solely examined in terms of capacity and right, and it cannot be understood outside the sources of its own legitimacy. *Naam* is an ideology of power that weaves consent through a process of ritual integration and social assimilation that injects—under the guise of kin-relations—elements of Mossi cultural practices, into existing cultures. State power has always been a concept at once too abstract and too pervasive to grapple with but a comparative overview of Weberian and Mossi perspectives reveal key differences. The chapter also shows that overlapping areas between the ideal (theoretical construct) and the historical (power politics and territorial expansion) constitute the moments of tension which reveal the contradictory nature of political authority caught between purpose (realising the state project) and disengagement (defining and containing non-*Naam* categories). A central claim of the thesis, then, has been that a view of power not only as capacity but also as the sum of its many facets, including the ritual aspect, gives a more complete picture. The *Naam* structure creates an impulse, within the state and its allies, to develop redundancy in the inculcation of its primary proposition: it is a continuous repetition of the

⁶ See Aboubacar Barry. 2004. *La Double Inscription: Anthropologie et Psychanalyse : Réflexions*. Paris: Harmattan.

dichotomic relation between *Naam* and *Tênga*, replicated over and over again across time and space. The state uses various instrumental registers to renew and reinforce the principles of its constructed reality. Power in Moogo was thus formed out of syncretic resources; enmeshed in the political, the economic, in kinship and belief. The political was indiscriminately integrated with the ritual so much so that it would be misleading to assume that belief was epiphenomenal to power. Historical innovations in the area of belief were tools of social change in their own right, beyond their role in consolidating political legitimacy. The interpenetration of power with the ritual and the sacred created a form of consubstantiality whereby the ritual appeared as merely a settled form of power: power was therefore plural; it was plural authority stemming from a variety of sources (*naam* as much as *tênga*).

Chapter 4 analyses state formation in Moogo as a sustained but uneven frontier process. One could conceive of technological change as the drive that precipitated the formation of centralised social organisation. The Mossi *naam* was such a technological change and the Mossi conquest such population pressure that combined to effect transformations from a society whereby a low degree of political authority prevailed in a centralised state. *Naam* was the forward drive that provided the dynamism for conquest for the building of centralised polities structured around the same model. For a very long time, the Mossi states, particularly the centralised states of Yatênga and Ouagadougou, enjoyed relative stability interspersed by dynastic struggles which, from the perspective of *Naam*, were an essential part of its reproduction and deployment. For the Mossi, political competition, in other words the longing and complete

devotion and aspiration for *Naam*, is a healthy manifestation of what they are about.

As our model implies, state formation in later stages of institutional consolidation did carry elements of dissemination of values 'nurtured' by the centre; peripheral states were microcosms of the central state, they were equally the foci of socio-political tensions prevalent throughout Moogo at large. However, the dissemination of these values was not always nor necessarily an active and conscious state endeavour. The very logic of the deployment and transmission of *Naam* was such that it was inevitable that these values diffused into public morality and shaped identity and aspiration amongst *Mossified* populations. An illustration of this argument is in the definition of *who* was moaga. If, at first, moaga identity was restricted to descent from the founding ancestor Ouedraogo, Mossi statements about this identity were to be challenged by a novel reading of Mossiness as also defined by one's origin from moogo; in this case indigenous ideas were juxtaposed to state arguments.

Throughout the history of the Mossi states, external interference to the development of the state was limited. The subsequent transformations of *naam* towards the middle of the eighteenth century, some of which find no parallels in any other political system, were the result of local creativity and adaptation. The slave trade did have indirect but determinant effects in the sense that the use of captives as commodities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, especially in Ouagadougou, contributed to expanding and increasing raiding campaigns into *Gurunsi*, *Samo* and *Bissa* countries. The slave trade exerted its own enduring influences on local institutions. *Zaberma* mercenaries rose to

prominence in providing slaves in exchange for food; they supplied the *Naaba's* surplus in slaves which in turn served to support his retinue and to fund, so to speak, political centralisation.

Chapter 6 shows the crucial role of belief in shaping the state, in magnifying it through ceremonials and rituals, in consolidating the unifying themes between *Naam* and *tênga* through the ritual union between *Naaba Wende*, the Mossi High God and *Napagha Tênga*, the earth divinity. Historical processes of state and society in Moogo reflect a number of particular ontological commitments, to the extent that any discussion of these processes should take into account perception, belief and experience as bounded by the requirements of what the Mossi collectively refer to as *rog-n-miki*, in other words, the set of traditions, values and practices one carries as subjective and intangible identifiers that shape and inform individual and collective action. There were both change and continuity in the structure of belief and ritual practices as far as it took into account the 'existence' of a Mossi High God and what it meant for the dynamics of belief in Moogo. Politics in Moose were intimately linked with Mossi conception of the person. Cosmogonic considerations and conceptions of the individual amongst the Mossi inform political philosophy within broader parameters of time and space, historicity and local identities, which in turn forge the personality and destiny of *nanamse* and their entourage. The implicit reference to a divine *trait*—that of wholeness and totality—is present in the self-conception of *Naam* as *sui generis*, *Naam* holds a meta-discourse that embraces human experience on the basis of its own *will*, which is present, whole, effective and forward. The institution of sacred

kingship, which elsewhere has contributed to nation-building through the transformed celebration of the sovereign as the embodiment of the entire nation, also contributed to consolidating the Mossi king's ritual power through *Wende*. However, *Naam's* universalising discourse never really concealed the fact that it was essentially an ideology of domination; it at once defined and set its own limits. What Izard argues as a form of resignation of indigenous groups towards Mossi domination can be conceived of as *a coming-to-terms* of these groups with Mossi rule through a re-appropriation of the universalising discourse of *naam* for their own benefit: *Naam* is accepted not because of its overwhelming presence but because it points to a particular social activity that is no more, or no less valuable than farming, herding or land-tilling.

Mossi achievements were heightened by “their ability to equate ultimate definitions of ‘civilisation’.”⁷ The Mossi achieved normative pacification through the transcendent norms of *Naam* as an ideological movement, just the same way that salvation religions, namely Christianity and Islam, provided normative pacification in other places. The formation of the public morality of the Mossi, the *nakombga* in particular, is much a product of *Naam*. Moreover, the formation of the morality of non-Mossi groups does not escape the same mechanisms that enabled effective forms of assimilation. The thesis demonstrates that the process of assimilation in Moogo was intimately linked to the ideology of *naam*: “so, I’m a yadga, of the clan of Yadeega. The Mossi from Ouagadougou are different from those of Yatênga. [...] in any case now almost

⁷ Mann, *Sources of Social Power*, I, 1986: 519.

everybody is Mossi. In Yatênga, I can say that today over 80% are Mossi. Before, there were Kibsi, Fulse, Samo, etc. But eventually most people assimilated. Some have kept their family names but most have become Ouedraogo... ”⁸ The assimilation of non-Mossi segments as Mossi was a methodical and incremental process. Mossi-ness was partly ‘secreted’ into indigenous cultures through a system of rituals and ceremonies that magnified the unifying quality of the state. The Naaba symbolised the extension of the political into the social; he transcended the *Naam/tênga* and earth/territory dichotomies, and thus became the lynchpin of a new structure. From a king ruling over social segments with no *a priori* rights over the territorial unit, the *Naaba* became the king of a society governed by *Naam*, on the basis of forms of legitimacy partly provided by *tênga*. On the other hand, what seems like a retrospective understanding of assimilation—most probably a reinterpretation of late eighteenth century vintage—now makes it possible to incorporate *nakombsé* and *têngbîise* in the same historical narrative. According to this amended version, if moogo means ‘bush’ or ‘savannah’, this must mean that the ‘authentic’, the real Mossi are those ones who inhabited the land before it was conquered by horse-riding migrants. The argument is therefore that, far from being stuck in a state of timeless and unchanging ‘tradition’, Mossi society (or what later became Mossi society) underwent important and profound historical changes. More importantly, once *têngbîise* were incorporated in Mossi society as *mossi*, they stopped being autochthons and they engaged in the same migratory processes that would be the basis for new Mossi states.

⁸ Interview Mamadou Ouedraogo, Ouahigouya, 16 April 2010.

On the other hand, the cultural continuity of the Voltaic states from Mamprusi-Dagomba-Nanumba forces us to reevaluate the concept of culture, to reassess cultural continuity even when groups have crystallised into socio-political organisations with ascribed and promoted particular identities. The Voltaic region is one huge socio-cultural area whereby definitions of ethnicity were bound to be a contested field. One would presume that the colonial borders undermined the project that would have consolidated the region as one. What undermined the project was also the confinement of power amongst the agnatic descendants of Naaba Ouedraogo; identity thus crystallised instead of diluting into existing elements; and when it did, it was in the form of 'annexation' rather than pronounced integration of the various cultures.

7.4. The Limits of History:

When everything has been said on the political structure of Mossi states, the origin of oral sources, mostly limited to dynastical sources, does not allow a comprehensive history of Moogo, one that integrates the sociological dimension of Mossi societies and which would have allowed one to capture its disparate voices. If, as Ki-Zerbo so aptly put it: "man has made historic everything he has touched with his creative hand: the stone as much as the paper, cloth as much as metal, wood and precious jewel",⁹ then the study of Mossi states should take into account the contribution of these less visible areas of human life that are

⁹ Ki-Zerbo, *Histoire de l'Afrique*, 1978: 6.

not always 'political' in the strict sense. The important point here is that until a cultural and social history of Moogo is written, the history of the Mossi states will always be about high politics and state power even when the latter cannot be dis-embedded from society. For now, the triumphalist and 'master history' mode still prevails.

The fundamentally unequal conditions of men in given societies has provided the impetus for the analysis of social organisation, the state, asymmetrical social relations; it has pushed for the recognition of power as a device, but also an explanatory element, at a critical junction between symmetrical fundamentals (intention/ideals) between power-holders (or potential holders), which produce asymmetrical consequences between them and various social clusters. The structure of power in Moogo invites a deeper analysis of the sociology of power rather than its politics, its underlying process rather than, to borrow Lonsdale's words, the 'periodic uproars' that punctuate its history.

The Mossi elders I spoke to tended not to use arguments of expansion—chieftaincies in pursuit of expansion, struggles for power internal to chieftaincies—to explain processes of fission and replication of *Naam*. On the contrary, the strict autonomy of the different states and the prevalent awareness of zones of influences, borders, etc, were discussed in relation to the practicalities of enthronement. For instance, Noufou Ouedraogo noted that since the inception of the principality of Busma, the Busma Naaba was traditionally enthroned by an envoy of the Mogho Naaba. However, because of

the difficulty of crossing the White Volta (Nakābe) during a good part of the year, the Mogho Naaba authorised neighbouring Risiam Naaba to conduct the enthronement in his stead, this constituting the first step towards Busma's autonomy vis-à-vis Ouagadougou, then Risiam.¹⁰

In any case, most Mossi, *nakombsé* in particular, tend to hang onto a version of history that gives the pride of place to their rights and privileges, and they do not seem to be quite receptive to the diachronic elements persistent in the moaga political history. *Nakombsé* informants were for instance reluctant to admit to instances of identity change, for such references would compromise the canonised narrative of a pure line of descendants entitled to rule. Yet, the toponymical configuration of a city like Ouahigouya attests to changes of identity, to a 'switching of boxes' from one social category to the other. However, *nakombsé* do not see this as a contradiction in itself, for one could remain a *nakombga* even when one was institutionally removed from the group of *nakombsé*.

The historicity of Mossi political structure—and by extension its model of society—if accepted in principle as a legitimate basis for a possible integrated community, has been the subject of contested claims in post-colonial Burkina Faso. The customary structure has proved quite resourceful in adjusting to complex imperatives under colonial rule, as a crucial mechanism in the

¹⁰ Noufou Ouedraogo, Interview, December 6, 2009; also see P. Sawadogo.2009. "Etat des Connaissances sur le Riungu de Busma: Regard sur les Origines, les Fondements, l'Organisation du Pouvoir, les Grandes Figures et les Relations Interétatiques à l'Epoque Précoloniale," In Kethiéga, *Histoire des Royaumes*, pp. 206-7.

decolonising struggle and the territorial unification process.¹¹ But as former chiefs have been relegated to a nominal category, without the sort of consensus that held the Mossi state together for centuries, the association of the *Naam* order to modern politics has inevitably lead to distorted practices whereby historicity can no longer be plausibly invoked.

In Burkina Faso, current debates about social inclusion and political unity have revived controversies around a Mossi *hegemony* that would need to be *broken*. Many see the legacy of Mossi states as a long history of domination and oppression of indigenous groups. Others view the same legacy as a remarkable contribution and a lesson of social organisation for Burkina Faso and West Africa more generally. Whether either of these views captures the extent of purpose and motivation in Mossi history, the claim of Mossi historical discourse to 'truth' has compounded the metaphorical ubiquity of references to *Naam*. As history proves limited as guarantor of cultural 'authenticity', the Mossi confront their loss of political autonomy in the invocation of (Mossi) integrity through the *performance* of a culture which has lost its historical foundation but inevitably rests upon a form of historical imagination.

¹¹ Upper-Volta (Burkina Faso from 1984) was dismantled in 1919 and 1932 and its different regions attached to the Upper-Senegal-Niger colony, Ivory Coast and Mali; it was reunited in 1947.

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Appendix : List of Interviewees

Goungha Naaba, Ouagadougou, 12 March 2006

Customary chief, one of the 'ministers' of the Mogho Naaba and chief of the locality of Goungha. He plays the role of tapsoba or chief warrior.

Balum Naaba, Ouagadougou, 16 March 2006

Customary chief, one of the 'ministers' of the Mogho Naaba in charge of the regalia, certain rituals and relations with certain communities; chief of the locality of Balum.

Goungha Naaba's assistant, Ouagadougou, 12 March 2006

Court servant that oversees the naaba's morning visits; also serves as an adviser.

Baloum Naaba's assistant, Ouagadougou, 14 March 2006

Court servant in the service of the Balum naaba; he presides over the nomination of low-level chiefs; he is a nayirineda, a member of the royal household.

La'arllé Naaba Tigré, Ouagadougou, 18 March 2006

The second 'ministers' of the Naaba. Active in contemporary Burkinabè politics, he symbolises the slow transformation of the chiefly structure into ambiguous contender for public authority in a democratic system.

Naaba Kiiba (49th Yatenga Naaba, 2001-) retired civil servant, March, 15-16 April 2010

King of Yatenga since March 10th, 2001; he is the moral and customary authority of this ancient region of the Mossi state structure.

Kamsogho (or Kamsoro) Naaba, Ouagadougou, November 30, 2008

One of the 'ministers' of the Naaba; chief of the locality of Kamsongouin. In the past, the Kamsosho naaba was the chief eunuch in charge of the royal harem. He also is in charge of the upkeep of the royal residence.

Ila Ouedraogo, 60, councillor, Ouahigouya, 14-18 April 2010

A descendant of a Rasam Naaba (one of the four main 'ministers' of the Yatenga Naaba); like his father and grandfather, he is a guardian of the memory of the *Nakombsé* and an enthusiastic expert of moaga history.

Ali Ouedraogo, historian, researcher, Ouagadougou, 11-30 April 2010

His research investigates the history of patronymics and how migration and power struggles can be used to explain patronymic differentiation and the change of place and people names across localities in Yatenga.

Noufou Ouedraogo, driver, 45, Ouagadougou, 28030 November 2008

He is from a family of oral historians who transmit their knowledge and narrative skills from generation to generation. His grandfathers were initiated, at a very early age, to the *noug baila* (literally musical bow) that used to accompany the public performance of oral historians.

Dr Vincent Sedogo, historian, Ouagadougou 12 April 2010

His research on Boulsa highlights the permanent tensions that pervaded relations between central and southern Mossi states and the marginality of satellite state on the southern side. He shows how the formation of Boulsa fits into a framework of dynastic conflicts as structural basis for territorial expansion.

Prof. Dominique Nacanabo, historian, Ouagadougou, 12 April 2010

He has conducted extensive research on Yako as a buffer state between Yatenga and Ouagadougou which played an important role consolidating the autonomous character of satellite states around these two main ones.

Yacouba Ouedraogo, agronomist, Ouahigouya, 15 April 2010

He is from a family of blacksmiths from Zoromé; his father changed their name into Ouedraogo in order to 'better integrate'; although not affiliated with the court, his family provides ustensils and cooking material to the Naaba's wives.

Prof. Maurice Bazemo, historian, University of Ouagadougou, 29 April 2010

He has done extensive research on the history of captives in Yatenga and Ouagadougou. His research demonstrates how captives were essential actors in the centralisation processes of these states and how the growing importance of trade resulted in territorial expansion as nakombse went about raiding for slaves further outside the borders of Moogo.

Dr Lassina Simporé, archaeologist, University of Ouagadougou, 19 April 2010

His findings in the middle belt of Moogo shed new light on funeral rituals and the culinary traditions of both Mossi and indigenous ninisse.

Osiris Sawadogo, Journalist, Ouagadougou 6-8 December 2008

He compiled thematic interviews with a number of customary chiefs both in Ouagadougou and Yatenga. His radio broadcasts on Mossi history and culture are intended to encourage public debate on different groups' understanding of Burkinabè history.

Adama (Vieux) Ouedraogo, hotel manager, Ouahigouya 14-16 April 2010

His family is related to the royal family, his knowledge of royal history is thus intricately linked to his family history.

Adama Ouedraogo, Ouahigouya, 14-16 April 2010

He is a bin nayirineda, in other words a member of the royal household from Bingo. His great-grand-parent was a rsam nab or 'youth minister'.

Ousseyni Sogoba, head of school, Ouahigouya, 14-15 April 2010

Non-royal whose perspective on Naam/Tenga distinction is a fresh contrast to royal versions on social hierarchy and on relationship between nakombse and tengbiise.

Karim Ouedraogo, 75, retired school teacher, Ouahigouya, 14-17 April 2010

A Bingo dignitary who no longer participates in court rituals but knows their structure in detail.

Francis Ouedraogo, civil servant, Ouahigouya, 17-18 April 2010

His family is from Nobéré and his father is a tengsoba (an earth-priest) and his ancestor a founder of the village of Saya. Francis' family are tenga-providers in the sense that they grant ritual blessings to new-comers in the locality.

Mme Barry, housewife, Ouahigouya, 16 April 2010

Her family has assimilated into Mossi society whilst keeping the original name from Guinea.

Maliki Ouedraogo, Ouahigouya, 16-7 April 2010

He is a prince competing for a local *naam* to control; internal conflicts within his family are closely linked to dynastic struggle, in present day Yatenga, around legitimacy and entitlement.

Togo Naaba, Ouahigouya, March 2010

He is one of the Yatenga Naaba's main ministers; his spokesperson and the intermediary between the Naaba and the group of nakombse. He heads the locality of togse.

Togo Naaba, 's assistant Ouahigouya, 10 December 2009

He helps the togo naaba in the administration of rituals and the enthronisation of low-level chiefs. His

Wedranga Naaba, Ouahigouya, 13 December 2009

He is one of the three main court dignitaries (*wiidi naaba* in Ouagadougou); he is a *nayirineda* in charge of the royal cavalry and a military chief. He also intervenes in the mediation of the relations between the Naaba and the group of nakombse.

Souley Ouedraogo, Ouahigouya, 13 December, 2009

He is a diviner initiated to the world of *kinkirse*; insights from his esoteric knowledge served to shed light on a number of elements of Mossi conceptions of belief, the individual, and his relationship with nature and the *kinkirse*.

Ousmane Ouedraogo, retired coranic teacher, 73, Ouahigouya, 14-17 April, 2010

Of peul origin, his family migrated to Yatenga at the end of the 19th century during the second big famine. His family contributed to the consolidation of Islam in Yatenga.

Mamouny Sawadogo, tender of the royal cemetery, 78, Somniaga, April 17, 2010

He is the guardian of the royal cemetery in Somniaga and such is initiated into the rituals of burial; he also participates in the *ringu* ceremony during the Naaba's stop at Somniaga.

Abdoulaye Sawadogo, retired civil servant, 62, Somniaga, April 17, 2010

He is from a *tenmgbiise* (autochthonous) family whose ancestors requested the 'protection' of Mossi chiefs against the oppression of a cruel rule.

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