Fulbe in Mossi history: towards a translocal perspective for understanding the constitution of a West African society

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Introduction

Travel for long has been and still is thought of as a constitutive feature of the Sahelian zone (Masquelier 2002:837), not in the least because it is seen as a defining aspect of the ways of life of the region's pastoral groups, which usually are represented as more mobile than whatever farmer groups among which they happen to live. Such is also the case for the Fulbe who form an important fraction of the population of the Mossi region in Burkina Faso since several centuries, but nevertheless are portrayed firstly as 'only passing by', as 'not belonging' to the place where they happen to be and bound to move on one day or another – in short, as travellers. In this paper, I explore how the continuous presence of these Fulbe travellers is dealt with in historiography and ethnography of the Mossi region. The texts I analysed stage the Fulbe as a group whose presence ultimately has been superfluous, did not make any significant difference for the course of history and the kind and structure of the society that resulted, or else conveniently disregard them as an entity alien to Mossi society.

Considering the Mossi kingdoms' success in accommodating several other likewise translocal and mobile groups such as, for instance, blacksmiths and Yarse and Marase traders and craftsmen, the institutional barrenness of the Fulbe's encounter with the region's other population groups should strike one as a disturbing anomaly. Are the Fulbe somehow more 'other' than others? Are we to interpret their presence in the Mossi kingdoms in terms of a distinct translocal social and political practice that allowed them to link up with the various other spaces of the Fulbe's pastoral and Islamic diaspora (Kopytoff 1987:6; Botte *et al.* 1999:25), without significantly affecting the social, political and cultural realities of the kingdoms in whose interstices they penetrated – kingdoms reputed, in precolonial times, for their unassailability and intransigence especially to Islam?

Or are we to look for an alternative perspective, capable of accounting for the numerous ambiguities and paradoxes that emerge from a close reading of Mossi historiography and ethnography? Below, I show that this historiography and ethnography fell victim to a reductive gaze that, because of its premises, couldn't but time and again reassert the Fulbe as eternal strangers and outsiders. I argue that, while the impossibility of retrieving Fulbe's 'true' role in the region's history must be acknowledged, a critical reconsideration of modernist concepts of society and culture opens the way for recognising how the translocal Fulbe-Mossi encounters were them as well productive of history and socio-political institutions – history and institutions systematically discarded in received historiography and ethnography.

I argue that the representation of Fulbe and several sub-groups of Mossi society in received ethnography are the product of repeated naming and rooting by various authoratitive actors (narrators of dynastic oral traditions, colonial administrators-ethnographers, authors of the region's canonical ethnographies). Whatever 'nomadic' processes have been at work were doubly written over by the disciplining institutions and narratives of Mossi and colonial states and academic schools, which resulted in allowing Fulbe to escape codification. My main argument is that not 'Mossi society' but rather a 'sedentary' way of rendering the region's history and society by rulers and ethnographers was incapable and/or unwilling of accommodating the kingdoms' Fulbe. Furthermore, I argue that an alternative perspective of the constitution of this region's society must avoid to simply try writing Fulbe into Mossi historiography and ethnography, thus adding yet another essentialised category, and redrawing rather than subverting or transcending the boundaries established in earlier work. Instead, historiography and ethnography are to be reinterpreted in terms of emerging variety and multiplicity, by understanding society and culture in terms not solely of closure and sedentarism, but openness and nomadism as well.

I start by briefly summarising received Mossi historiography and highlighting some ambiguities and puzzling aspects regarding Fulbe's role in the region's past. Next, I present a rough sketch of ethnographic work carried out in the Mossi region since the early 20th century. I show that this work systematically ousted Fulbe from Mossi society. Izard's work on Yatenga is dwelled upon to some extent because of its considerable influence on subsequent ethnographic studies in the area. I go on to argue that several factors combined to write the Fulbe's translocal encounter with the Mossi, as well as the resulting institutions, out of the region's historiography and ethnography: the unwarranted extrapolation of Izard's contentions regarding Yatenga to other kingdoms, anthropology's early invention of the Fulbe as a distinct people and its restricted concept of society in general, colonial administrators' attempts to sever Mossi-Fulbe political relations and the dominance of dynastic oral historiography. A last section, finally, suggests that Fulbe can take their place in the region's historiography and ethnography if only one abandons the premise of discontinuity between Mossi and Fulbe, and, instead privileges interconnectedness and relations by focusing on borderline issues such as, for instance, friendship, misfortune and this world/other world interaction, and humanisation of space.

Such an alternative perspective has profound implications. Received historiography and ethnography suggested that Fulbe penetrated the Mossi region without engaging in significant social and political relations with other population groups, but instead established a separate cultural, social and political space evolving side by side – parallel, complementary, in symbiosis or in competition – but always separate from a Mossi space and governed by distinct institutions and value systems. The alternative perspective allows seeing beyond the usually emphasised pragmatic relations of resource sharing or competition and economic exchange. The translocal 'travelling' practices in which especially Fulbe tend to be involved produce variegated relations, not only between different physical spaces, but also, and importantly, between people, between people and their physical environment, and between the world of the living and the world of the death and the yet unborn. These relations, which are institutionally captured or 'rooted' to various degrees, are significantly involved in the continuous becoming of this region's society.

A brief review of received historiography

In accounts of the emergence of the Mossi kingdoms from the 15th century[1] onwards, primary importance is accorded to encounters between, on the one hand, 'conquering' *nakombse* who left the Dagomba-Mamprusi region of present-day northern Ghana, and, on the other hand, 'autochthon' populations already present in the basins of the Volta rivers. Ouédraogo, son of a Dagomba-Mamprusi princess and a hunter, left Gambaga for the north to found Tenkodogo, from which the expansion of the Mossi kingdoms took off. Ouédraogo's son, Rawa, treaded a large part of the Volta basin, imposing kinsmen and warriors as chiefs on local village populations (Izard 1985a:20). He epitomised the phase of Mossi conquest, which was not immediately conducive to stable polities. Powerful political formations were built in a second phase, notably by Ouédraogo's grandson Oubri and Oubri's grandson Yadega, founders of respectively Oubritenga (which later was to become the kingdom of Ouagadougou) and Yatenga.

Wherever they arrived, the *nakombse* 'conquerors' met with local, 'autochthonous' *tengbiise* (lit. 'children of the earth') populations with whom they concluded a pact, following which the 'autochthons' kept religious authority and custody over land and the 'conquerors' assumed political power.[2] Zahan (1961:15-20) argued that one was not to accord historicity to these foundational pacts and, therefore, could not distinguish historically between 'autochthons' and 'conquerors'. Rather these were to be understood as functional categories constitutive of society, not as originally different population groups.[3] Since several other societies in the area were characterised by a similar constitutive model, it was likely that not a people – the *nakombse* – but rather a concept – 'power' or '*naam*' – had travelled, possibly from Gambaga to the north. Hence, the distinction between *naam* (power) and *tenga* (earth) is relational, one not existing prior to or without the other (Luning 1997:76-7).[4] Regardless of the accounts' factuality, however, it were such pacts that made the Mossi chieftaincies and kingdoms possible to begin with, the *tengbiise* providing the *nakombse* with the religious legitimacy for their power and the territorial fixity they needed for their ancestors not to err eternally (Bonnet 1988:60).

The histories of the Mossi kingdoms, subsequent to the foundational encounter between *nakombse* and *tengbiise*, is most often reduced to a kind of genealogical chart of rulers, compounded by an account of their major accomplishments and of the most striking events in which they were involved. Hence, we learn about strife between royal factions and about how rulers nominated sons at a large distance from central power. Both such strife and

[1] If not mentioned otherwise, I follow Izard (1970) with regard to dates and duration of reigns of Mossi rulers.

[2] Such pacts could be preceded by marriage alliances, with typically the 'autochthons' asking the *nakombse* who had married their daughter to send them their sister's son to rule them. Otherwise, marriage exchanges between *nakombse* and 'autochthons' furthered integration or alliance following the creation of the chieftaincy (Pageard 1963:33).

[3] Izard found Zahan's position too radical. Though agreeing oral traditions were not to be accepted literally, he thought it possible to distinguish between 'events' and 'structure': certain elements referred to historical events (e.g. Yatenga's foundation by Yadega), whereas others were to be interpreted symbolically by means of a structuralist analysis (Izard 1970:30). Izard succeeded in dissolving the tension between the 'chronological' and the 'unitary' thesis regarding the Mossi kingdoms' history by arguing that any superposition of population groups that occurred in the past was anyhow transformed into an a-historical order by the unifying ideology of a state in development.

[4] Pageard (1965:54-5) maintained that the Mossi's founding fathers were not historical figures, but rather mythical heroes from a non-identified 'south'. For instance, Oubri was not a historical figure but the embodiment of the institution of Moogo *naaba*. Izard (2003) suggests in his latest book that differences between oral traditions and royal genealogies from one kingdom to another can be explained by assuming that not one but several *nakombse* chiefs initiated the carving out of kingdoms, starting both from south-eastern Tenkodogo and from the north-west, thus allowing for several poles of power centralisation to emerge simultaneously.

nominations at the margins of the kingdom entailed the emergence of initially peripheral polities, such as, for instance Yatenga, Mané, Téma and Boussouma, which subsequently developed structures similar though usually less elaborated than those of the Ouagadougou kingdom from which they split off in the second half of the 16th century (Izard 1970:143-148,156; Pageard 1965:55; Tiendrébéogo 1963:15; see also Chéron 1924; Kawada 1969; Tauxier 1924). The resulting picture is one of kingdoms essentially turned into themselves, often afflicted by intestine wars, or else involved in inter-kingdom fratricidal struggle, with the *nakombse* or 'people of power' being the single decisive actors.[5]

This is not to say that other population groups were completely absent from historiography or were not accorded a role in the kingdoms' further development. Especially from Izard's work on Yatenga (1985a; 1985b) one learns that following the pact between 'people of power' and 'people of the land' that initiated the kingdom's birth, the development of the state of Yatenga would never have been possible if not blacksmiths and traders were either present or integrated into Mossi society. In order to maintain and extend control of trade and trade routes, *nakombse* undertook to integrate Yarse and Marase artisan-traders.[6] This integration was institutionalised by having specific royal dignitaries, respectively the *Balum naaba* and the *Bin naaba*, mediate between them and the king. Blacksmiths as well were associated, sometimes by force, to the royal court; besides being manufacturers of agricultural tools and therefore indispensable for the kingdom's agricultural production, they were of particular importance for the production of weaponry (Izard 1985a:56; 1970:298; 1975:286).

Izard (1970:31) recognised the limitations of the dynastic histories as rendered especially by court dignitaries. His work on Yatenga intended, among other things, to provide not only a history of the state of Yatenga but of its population as well, thus acknowledging the inseparability of the histories of state and society:

> 'It will appear that systematic investigations involving the *totality of groups constitutive of Mossi society* and the *totality of local groups* that form each of these larger groups, supply the material that, when processed, allow […] to reconstitute with precision the stages in the formation of the society and the state [...]' (Izard 1970:394; my translation, my emphasis).

Crucial, then, is who gets to be included in 'the totality of groups constitutive of Mossi society'. In Izard's understanding Yarse, Marase and blacksmiths were obviously counted in. His correction of previously dominant dynastic histories consisted mostly of complementing them with a history of population as well as of industry and trade, embodied by blacksmiths and Yarse and Marase and considered indispensable to come to grips with the development of the state and its apparatus (Izard 1985a; 1985b). Fulbe, however, were a priori excluded from this effort to add a sociological dimension to Yatenga's history. Izard considered them to have a socio-political organisation separate from the Mossi's and found no institutionalised relations to exist between them and the royal court (see below). As a consequence – and despite acknowledging that Fulbe were the undisputed custodians of cattle, allowing one to speculate about their economic and social importance, since cattle constituted the major depository of wealth and figured in several rituals – they were not included in historiography as a group necessary for the kingdom's development in the way blacksmiths and Yarse were.

[5] Only with regard to Yatenga, substantial attention has been devoted to the history of its external relations with non-Mossi polities such as Ségou, Maasina and Djelgodji, although there as well the focus was more on power relations with other Mossi chieftaincies (see Izard 1982; Tauxier 1924).
[6] Yarse and Marase are most often held to be of respectively Mande and Songhaï origin.

Historiography of the Mossi kingdoms briefly mentions the arrival and origin of various Fulbe groups.[7] In this, Fulbe are not dealt with differently than other 'international' groups such as Yarse and Marase. But, despite that Yatenga's Fulbe are said to have subjected to the Mossi chiefs' tutelage, each is understood to have been his own master, Fulbe being concerned only with Fulbe's business and Mossi's affairs being incompatible with Fulbe involvement (Izard 1982:367-8). While it is acknowledged that Fulbe were generally on good terms with Mossi chiefs (Marc 1909; Tauxier 1917:621-9), relations between both groups are portrayed as 'purely practical', based upon a 'community of interests', allowing for cattle entrustment, grain-milk exchanges and also complementary partnerships in wars and pillages for which Fulbe supplied Mossi chiefs with mercenaries (Fulbe horsemen and *riimaybe* footmen). Raids on cattle were, for that matter, considered legitimate only if aimed at Fulbe living in other Mossi kingdoms or in non-Mossi polities (Izard 1982:367-72; 1985a:102-3).

In Izard's historical work, Fulbe's otherness stands out not only in terms of the inexistant institutionalised political relations, but also because Yatenga's hostile relations with neighbouring Fulbe polities (Maasina, Djelgodji, Liptako, Dokwi, Barani), by which this Mossi kingdom became almost encircled in the first half of the 19th century, are especially emphasised, leading Izard (1982:381-2) to conclude that the Fulbe were 'the Mossi's principal enemies'. Thus it is suggested that Fulbe were regarded with great suspicion – as an untrustworthy population requiring special surveillance and to be kept at a distance from Mossi institutions – because of Yatenga's particular geo-political situation, which made the kingdom aim its foreign policy, as early as from the mid-17th century, besides at keeping an eye on neighbouring Mossi polities, at containing the Fulbe to its north (Izard 1982:367-9). The Mossi rulers' greatest fear - a *jihad* federating the various Fulbe polities and entailing a domino effect taking along Fulbe living within Yatenga's borders[8] – never materialised. What is more, Fulbe chieftaincies proved to cherish their relative indepedence and Yatenga in practice even engaged in shifting alliances and sometimes even friendly relations with them.[9]

In historiographies of Mossi kingdoms other than Yatenga, Fulbe's presence and involvement in events is either implicitly or explicitly understood to have been ephemeral and circumstantial: Fulbe were either free to come and go as they pleased or regarded with more or less suspicion from one kingdom to another. Fulbe were – or so it seems – inconsequential.

Inconsequential yet puzzling appearances

However inconsequential in institutional terms, Fulbe make some puzzling appearances in historiographies, sometimes at hinge moments of a kingdom's history. To begin with, according to Kabore (1966:23), they safeguarded Oubri's expedition that started off from Tenkodogo and was to result ultimately in the creation of Oubritenga, the later kingdom of

[7] For instance, in Tauxier (1917:621-9; 1937:385) it is told that various Fulbe groups arrived in Yatenga from the mid-17th century onwards, after several wanderings had brought them from the Futa-Toro or Futa-Djallon to places such as Douentza, Bandiagara, Liptako or Sokoto.Tauxier's most important source was the *Monographie du Cercle de Ouahigouya* of 1904. Izard (1985a:68-70) reproduced Tauxier's account of Fulbe settlement history without adding new information. See also Chéron (1924:647,668) and Pageard (1965:26-9).

[8] An immediate consequence for Yatenga of such a *jihad* would have been the cutting off of salt routes and the running dry of the supply of captives (Izard 1985a:71).

[9] If Yatenga's relations with Djelgodji were volatile, those with Dokwi and Barani tended to be – at least from about 1830 onwards – friendly and involving commercial and diplomatic exchange (Izard 1982:379; Diallo 1997:174-5,189). Some other northern Mossi chieftaincies and kingdoms also allied with Fulbe from Djelgodji or Liptako in conflicts that opposed them to other Mossi polities (see Chéron 1924).

Ouagadougou from which all the other kingdoms, Tenkodogo excepted, were to spring: the expedition was rescued thanks to the information given by a Fulbe about an ambush that hostile autochthons had prepared. Later, in the early 18th century, two Fulbe together with a Yarse - 'apparently people of primary importance' – were sent by the king of Ouagadougou to the royal court of Yatenga on a diplomatic mission, the sole of its kind in the kingdoms' independent history (Izard 1985a:66; 1982:384).

Still more enigmatic is the figuring in the dynasty of Ouagadougou of *naaba* Motiba, who reigned from 1729 to 1737 and who according to some accounts was a Fulbe. Izard (1970:92) thought it plausible that, after *naaba* Oubi's death, Motiba, having been Oubi's confidant and supported by the high dignitaries of the court, held the regency over the kingdom during the youth of Oubi's eldest son Warga.[10] Of interest is that this episode provides a possible explanation for the fact that certain Fulbe chiefs are nominated and receive *naam* from the king of Ouagadougou in a way similar to Mossi chiefs. Indeed, according to an account I came across during my own fieldwork, in which Motiba figures as a Fulbe usurper, he was deposed and killed, but his sons were nominated Fulbe chiefs by his successor Warga.[11] The use of 'warrior names' by the Fulbe chiefs of Barkoundouba in the Ouagadougou kingdom would, then, not be simply an imitation of Mossi chiefs' practices, as it was suggested by Pageard (1965:26-9), but rather an indication of their integration in the kingdom's political organisation.[12]

In historiographies of other kingdoms, Fulbe figure sporadically as well, notably as accomplices of *nakombse* kings or chiefs in the settlement of conflicts with other kingdoms or with rivals for power internal to a kingdom.[13] Striking in this regard is Fulbe's crucial role in

[10] In Ouagadougou's history as narrated by Izard (1970), Motiba's 'reign' constituted the very first mention of Fulbe's presence. In only one of the four versions of Ouagadougou's dynasty, considered by Izard, was Motiba put on as a Fulbe usurper. In the other three he was said to be son of his predecessor Oubi and elder brother of his successor Warga. In a personal communication to Izard, Nehima Levtzion, referring to a recent Arabic chronicle of Mossi origin on Ouagadougou's history written by El-Hadj Moussa Kongo, affirmed that Motiba was indeed Fulbe (see also Levtzion 1968:169). In his latest book, Izard (2003:306) revises his earlier thesis arguing that usurpation by a Fulbe must be considered highly unlikely, and if having occurred would have figured, because of its extraordinarity, in all four oral traditions. However, wouldn't it have been more likely for such usurpers to have been left out of dynastic oral traditions and genealogies altogether, as, for that matter, Izard suggests himself as well earlier in the same book (*ibid.*: 17)?

[11] 'The Fulbe does not have a village of his own where he can say: "this is a Fulbe village", except for Barkoundouba. The chief of Barkoundouba is nominated by the Moogo *naaba*. The Diallobe of Barkoundouba belong to the family of the Moogo *naaba*. You know, the seventh [*sic*] Moogo *naaba*, Modibo, was a Fulbe. He followed the Moogo *naaba*, deceived him and, then, following the king's death, was nominated his successor. However, when the former king's own child had grown up, he told Modibo this was not his place. Modibo was deposed and killed. The new Moogo *naaba* nominated Modibo's sons as Fulbe chiefs, to compensate for the supreme power they were supposed to inherit. That is why Barkoundouba is a village belonging to the family of the Moogo *naaba*'; interview with Luc Ouédraogo, royal lineage of Piugtenga *kombere*, Boussouma kingdom, July 2002.

[12] Pageard's observation that the important *tangaana* ritual required the sacrifice of a bull to be taken obligatorily from the herd of Barkoundouba Fulbe further suggests the existence of an institutionalised relation between these Fulbe and the royal court.

[13] For instance, towards the end of the 19th century, the Téma *naaba* contested the Yako *naaba's* supremacy. Persisting in this attitude after colonial conquest, he was denounced as an enemy of the French by the Yako *naaba*, who sent 'his Fulbe' to capture him (by that time, the French as well requested his arrest). The Téma *naaba* attempted to escape, but, in the end, in 1900, he was killed by a Fulbe 'hired' by the Yako *naaba* (Chéron 1924:686-8). Similarly, in a conflict between Ouagadougou *naaba* Karfo (1834-1842) and two of his court dignitaries, the *Widi naaba* and the *Lallé naaba*, Karfo sent a Fulbe to kill the *Widi naaba* (Tiendrébéogo 1963:32; Izard 1970:171-2). Interestingly, with regard to the conflict between Téma and Yako, Izard (1970:272) cited Chéron erroneously when he wrote that the Yako *naaba* sent 'his *Fulse*'.

the dénouement of Yatenga's independent history at the end of the 19th century, when the Diallobe of Tyu first allied with *naaba* Baogo but later joined the rebel prince Bagare. Bagare defeated his opponent thanks to these Fulbe's military force and became the first king of Yatenga under French rule (Izard 1985a:127-44; 1970:353-8).[14]

One other aspect of the silencing of Fulbe concerns their role as Muslim scholars and confidants at the Mossi courts and their part in the spread of Islam in the region. Motiba, and even more Modibo as he is called as well, is reminiscent of the Fulfulde word *moodibbo*, which means 'man of God'. It can be speculated that Motiba was not an arbitrary confidant but associated to *naaba* Oubi's court because of his religiousness, and that following Oubi's death he was not only a regent but also responsible for the religious education of the future *naaba* Warga when he was still a minor. This possibility is supported by Pageard's (1965:37) observation that Warga, one of the greater kings of Ouagadougou, was considered a *wali*, a 'great Muslim' or 'Muslim saint'. This possible involvement of Fulbe as Muslim confidants in court life stands almost alone in Mossi historiography.[15] Muslim advisors and magicians are generally held to have been Yarse, and, likewise, Yarse, and to a lesser extent Marase and Hausa, are usually pointed out as having been involved in Muslim proselytism (Duperray 1985; Ilboudo 1990; Kouanda 1988, 1995). What is more, whereas Yarse come to the fore as esteemed because of their religion, Fulbe are portrayed as dangerous for the very same reason.[16] There is a paradox, then, between, on the one hand, the fear for the Fulbe's susceptibility to calls for a *jihad*, and, on the other hand, their complete absence from the historiography of the development of Islam in the Mossi kingdoms.

These puzzling appearances, ambiguities and paradoxes raise questions about what the relations were between Fulbe and different other groups within the kingdoms, and about how these Fulbe related to Fulbe polities or Fulbe living outside the kingdoms. Who were these Fulbe, appearing sporadically in historiography of the Mossi region as often disloyal, capricious and dissembling people, as dubious mercenaries or allies, as not having affected significantly the course of Mossi history and state formation, but nevertheless having succeeded, as a Muslim people, to intrude in the interstices of a block of polities that generally is characterised by the cohesion of its institutions and portrayed as extraordinarily stable and particularly resistant to Muslim influences?

Little progress seems to have been made since Lieutenant Marc (1909:143-4) wrote that everything related to the Fulbe in Mossi country had something enigmatic. He found it difficult 'to conceive the exact situation of the Fulbe with regard to the Mossi', and he wondered what might have been the reasons for 'those nomads who were so different from the Mossi, to settle in large numbers in [this] country'. Almost one hundred years later the mystery surrounding the Fulbe's role in Mossi history remains entirely.

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[14] The Diallobe's decisive role may have been related to the fact that they possessed some hundred rifles. Late in the 19th century, firearms were frequently used in the wider region's warfare (e.g. by the armies of Ségou, Kong and Samory), for hunting and by Fulbe raiders operating from the fringes of Maasina, but they were not plentiful in Yatenga or in the other Mossi kingdoms (Echenberg 1971:250-1; Tamari 1997:54).

[15] Only in Izard (1985a:90) another trace can be found, when it is noted that, although no Muslims were present in his immediate surroundings, *naaba* Kango (about 1757-1787) used to consult Muslim *marabouts* in both Fulbe and Yarse villages.

[16] This sometimes leads to contradictory contentions, as, for instance, when Diallo (1997:175), referring to Izard's work, claims that 'les Yarse, de par leurs activités de commerce et *la particularité de leur statut de musulmans*, avaient non seulement la considération des rois du Yatenga, mais [...] bénéficiaient aussi de leur protection', whereas, likewise based on Izard, he observed with regard to Fulbe (*ibid.*: 87) that they became 'des hôtes sous surveillance *en raison de leur statut de musulmans*' (my emphasis).

Fulbe's ousting from Mossi society in received ethnography

At the advent of French colonial rule, at the end of the 19th century, nineteen Mossi kingdoms existed, founded by descendants of the mythical ancestor, *naaba* Ouédraogo, among whom genealogical relations are assumed to exist, with at least twelve and maybe sixteen founders issuing from the Ouagadougou genealogy (Izard 1970:85-6). Systematic ethnographic studies were first carried out when in 1904 the administrators of the *Afrique Occidental Française* were ordered to gather information on a wide variety of issues regarding the regions and populations they were to administer (Wooten 1993:430-4). These resulted in a number of *Monographies de Cercle*, which became the starting point of the canonical texts in Mossi historiography and ethnography.[17]

Noiré, *Commandant* of Yatenga in 1903/1904, distinguished within the population of his *Cercle* five 'races', which he divided into two categories: those who till the land ('autochthons', Mossi, Samo and Dioula/Yarse) and those who engage only in herding having their fields worked upon by men of the other 'races' (Fulbe).[18] Tauxier (1917:332-7) as well considered 'autochthons', Yarse and Fulbe as 'races' different from the Mossi, but whereas he took the former two to be integrally part of Mossi society – disregarding them would 'disfigure' Mossi society since they were the Mossi's farmers and traders – Fulbe could be easily discarded:

> '[On] pourrait les supprimer que la société mossi resterait absolument la même ; [...] Peuls du Yatenga, élément adventice qui a pu entrer jusqu'à un certain point [...] sous la domination mossi, mais qui n'a jamais fait partie de la société dont nous parlons' (Tauxier 1917:333-4).

Instead of a constituent of Mossi society, Tauxier described Fulbe as having a separate social hierarchy of castes, *riimaybe* cultivators-serfs, captives, and noblemen or Fulbe as such. He characterised the latter as wealthy, individualised and transhumant pastoralists, and furthermore as lazy, cunning and dishonest people, though more intelligent and nearer to the white colonisers than their neighbours.[19] He then also compared Fulbe firstly with all other population groups confounded, that is, with a single contrasting category – '*les nègres*', whereas Yarse, Fulse and Mossi were compared firstly among one another (Tauxier 1917:629-33, 641-4; 1937:390). Pastoral Fulfulde speaking people were living among sedentary farmer populations throughout large parts of West Africa, and authors such as Tauxier saw the Fulbe in the Mossi kingdoms firstly as belonging to a geographically widely spread population group rather than to Mossi society. Tauxier (1937:7) opened his study

[17] Not only did Delafosse (1912) draw upon them in his *Haut-Sénégal Niger* and were they extensively quoted by Tauxier (1912; 1917), but they continued to be referred to by historians throughout the 20th century, especially because of the records of oral accounts of dynastic histories they comprised (Izard 1970:21-7). Note that the first French ethnographers were administrators, some of whom came to greatly influence subsequent scholars and administrators if only because they taught at institutions such as the *Ecole coloniale* and the *Ecole des langues orientales* in Paris (Wooten 1993:433).

[18] Etude sur le Yatenga, établie suivant les instructions de M. le Gouverneur Général de l'AOF, Commandant du Cercle Capitaine Noiré de l'Infanterie Coloniale, 1903/1904; ANSOM 14MIOM/690 (1G326).

[19] 'La mémoire est développée, l'imagination bien supérieure à celle des nègres [...], la sensibilité plus développée aussi. […] Beaucoup plus familiers avec l'Européen et se sentant plus de pair avec lui, ils ne le craignent pas bêtement […], mais ils viennent au contraire le voir pour lui faire des salutations, pour le flatter et aussi pour se faire voir, pour se donner de l'importance [...]. Bref, le Peul est intelligent, dissimulé, rusé, sournois' (Tauxier 1917:661).

'*Moeurs et histoire des Peuls*', which includes an appendix on Yatenga's Fulbe, with the question 'What [*sic*] are the Fulbe?', to conclude a few pages later:

> '[Le] Peuhl est multiforme: C'est en principe un pasteur vacher nomade [...]. Voilà le Peul à l'état naturel [...]. Ce Peuhl n'est pas méchant. Il paye aux chefs nègres ce qu'il faut pour avoir droit de faire paître ses troupeaux […]. Mais attendez! il va bientôt se transformer. En effet il se multiplie et bientôt il trouve dur d'obéir à de petits chefs nègres [...]. Travaillé par l'Islam, le Peul devient un *croyant* et méprise le païen qui le commande. Un beau jour on se révolte, on fait la guerre aux nègres, on les soumet et voilà un état fondé. Les Peuls deviennent alors une aristocratie de pasteurs […] et de guerriers. Les nègres soumis deviennent des serfs cultivateurs, des *Rimaibe* [...].En résumé le Peul n'est pas un: aux débuts c'est un pasteur vacher nomade, à l'aboutissement c'est un éleveur de bétail conquérant qui caste les nègres […]' (Tauxier 1937:8-10).

Hence, Tauxier explained Fulbe's heterogeneity in terms of an evolutionary scale proper to the Fulbe. The populations among which they happened to live were reduced to an amorphous environment in which Fulbe – all assumed to have a common origin in the Futa-Toro and Senegal – evolved from subordinate nomads to ruling aristocracies. A clustering of characteristics was effectuated, with ascendancy and Islamic faith associated with sedentary life and long-term presence, and subordination and paganism with mobility and short-term presence. Tauxier (1937:155) thought that understanding of the Fulbe could best be furthered by studying them comparatively in their different evolutionary stages. The Fulbe in the Mossi kingdoms were inscribed into this communality, ascribed all stereotypical Fulbe connotations and situated on the Fulbe-related evolutionary scale.[20]

Tauxier's work set the scene. Later authors never questioned that Fulbe, although often recognised to be 'subordinated' and 'paying tribute' to Mossi leaders, constituted a politically autonomous group and a separate society. Izard (1970:20), as well, when introducing a distinction between 'inhabitants of the Mossi kingdoms' and 'Mossi society', emphasised Fulbe's otherness as compared to other groups:

> 'La société "mossi" [...] ne regroupe évidemment pas tous les habitants du "royaume mossi". A côté des "Mossi", le roi a autorité sur des groupes d'origine étrangère qui se sont installés en pays mossi après la conquête nakomsé: Yarsé [...], Maransé [...] et Kambwêsé [...]. Ces groupes sont, par rapport au roi, en relation de subordination directe, même si l'autorité du roi est déléguée à un chef local. Le statut des Peul est différent: ils ne participent pas de façon institutionnalisée au fonctionnement du système mossi [...]'.

The power (*naam*) held by the *nakombse* rulers had the quality to unite people of different origin. This was reflected in court organisation, where four high dignitaries – the *togo naaba*, the *balum naaba*, the *weranga naaba* and the *rasam naaba* – were charged with the administration of respectively *tengbiise*, Yarse, *nakombse* and royal captives, that is, the groups constitutive of the kingdom. Not entertaining with the king institutionalised, hierarchical relations inscribed in the realm of *naam* and not formally represented in court organisation, Fulbe were held not to belong to Mossi society (Izard 1982:370; 1985b:466-7).[21] Language and marriage were other criteria of inclusion. Members of Mossi society were assumed to be speakers of Moore, connoting not only a common language but also a way of

[20] Hence, Fulbe in the southern kingdoms (e.g. Ouagadougou) were relatively mobile and living in isolated households and in a subordinate position, whereas the Yatenga Fulbe had evolved on the evolutionary scale towards Fulbe supremacy, being more sedentarised and having their own chiefs, albeit still subordinated to the Mossi chiefs (Tauxier 1937:154).

[21] In practice, relations between Fulbe and central authority were mediated by the *weranga naaba* and the *rasam naaba*, who were, besides for relations with *nakombse* and captives, responsible as well for the kingdom's northern and eastern territorial sectors. Izard (1985b:466-7) suggested that, since most Fulbe lived in these two sectors, pragmatic considerations made that these officials came to take care of relations with Fulbe.

acting (Luning 1997:80; Izard 1985b:68).[22] Fulbe, despite being most often bilingual, have Fulfulde and not Moore as their mother tongue. Inclusion was further fostered by participating in the *napogsyuure*, a system of marriage exchanges through which a network of alliances was established between chiefs and the various member groups of society, from which Fulbe were excluded because of their pastoralism and religion (Izard 1982:368; Kabore 1966:27).

Finally, and crucially, in his major work, *Gens du pouvoir, gens de la terre*, Izard (1985b:5-6) *starts* by positing that Yatenga's inhabitants can be 'phenotypically' divided into two groups: sedentary farmers, comprising 'autochthons', *nakombse*, Yarse, Marase and captives, and Fulbe cattle herdsmen with their *riimaybe*.[23] Each group corresponded to a separate society, assumed to be linguistically and socio-culturally homogeneous despite internal heterogeneities. The Silmi-mossi sedentary agro-pastoralists, presumably having issued from a marriage of a Fulbe man with a Mossi woman, were considered yet another 'society' apart.[24] Izard's analysis included a total of 476 Mossi villages, but Yatenga's 146 Fulbe settlements and 64 Silmi-mossi wards were explicitly left out. By thus establishing the kingdom a priori as a society without Fulbe, Fulbe and their relations with Mossi simply did not have to be explained.

Izard was neither the first nor the only to propose a restricted understanding of Mossi society, but he sanctioned it with an intricate and refined model of Yatenga centred on the king and his court. The model was constructed, first, from the opposition between 'strangers-conquerors' and 'autochthons', which followed from the initial pact assigning political power to the first and control of the earth and atmospheric forces to the latter. A second opposition, cross-cutting the first, consisted of blacksmiths, who are present among both *tengbiise* and *nakombse*, and non-blacksmiths (Izard 1970:16-7; 1976:71). This double opposition implied a tripartite system in which ethnic heterogeneity was resolved into a functional arrangement of a limited number of categories or social statuses, and which constituted the skeleton on which the Mossi society was built.[25] Yarse and Marase 'Muslim artisan-traders' (respectively cotton weavers and indigo dyers) were alien to these oppositions (Izard 1976:69; 1983:255). Nevertheless, although not considered elements constitutive of the social, political and ideological Mossi system, they were part of the population submitted to the king's authority. Representing trade, they even formed, together with the 'people of the land' who represented the activity of farming, the kingdom's social body (Izard 1976:79).[26]

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[22] Similarly, Fulfulde designates the language and a range of rights and duties (Stenning in Boesen 1999:85).

[23] Note how this distinction is reminescent of the one made by Noiré some eighty years earlier.

[24] '*Silmiiga*' (pl. *Silmiise*) is the Mossi term for 'Fulbe'.

[25] To each of the various *tengbiise* groups, blacksmiths or *saaba* were attached. Due to status and identity changes, the *nakombse* came to comprise categories of blacksmiths and *tengbiise* as well, implying that the three-functionality *nakombse*/*tengbiise*/*saaba* became characteristic not only of Mossi society but also of each of its major groups. Hence, from the point of view held by the *nakombse* – understood in the limited sense of 'strangers-conquerors' still sufficiently closely related to the ruling kin groups – a general distinction between *tengbiise* and *saaba* was established within the heterogeneity of the 'autochthonous' population. This distinction is to be understood within the framework of the project of the unification of society as pursued by the ruling groups (Izard 1976:71; 1983:257). 'Blacksmiths' thus emerged as a status category in both *tengbiise* and *nakombse* groups. In earlier work, Izard hesitated about how blacksmiths were inscribed into Mossi society. At the time, he merely considered them a 'neutral' constituent, affiliated either to the *nakombse* or to the *tengbiise* and recuperating their cohesion at another, *international* level (Izard 1970:18-20).

[26] Later, Izard (1995) elaborated an alternative trifunctional representation of the Mossi social universe from an analysis of the system of titles and the distribution of tasks of Yatenga's royal court dignitaries, which accommodates 'autochthons', *nakombse* and Yarse. Taken together, Izard's writings point to a 'quadripartite' model of society based upon a socio-functional 'quadri-categorisation' ('autochthons', *nakombse*, blacksmiths and Yarse) (Izard 2003:152).

Yarse and Marase were thus in their turn inscribed in the matrix of functional groups that was conceived within the framework of the by Mossi *nakombse* dominated ideology of the centralised state. In the process, the 'integrated' groups were at least partly robbed of their ethnic identity. The unifying ideology of the state denied the multiple histories of its subjects, who became part of an order that was a-historical except for the *nakombse's* dynastic history (Izard 1976:81). Hence, Marase and Yarse identities cannot be reduced to solely an ethnic belonging. They both define in an inseparable way an 'ethnic status' and a position in society, based on technical-economic criteria (trade, weaving and dyework) (*ibid.*:76; Izard 1985a:61).[27]

With Fulbe a priori excluded from Mossi society, their relations with other groups could not be conceived of but as intrinsically different from the relations between 'integrated' groups. In contrast to intra-society relations, these inter-society relations were depoliticised and 'de-affected'. They were phrased in terms of 'contract' (Izard 1983:256) and, more generally, 'common interest'.[28] Above, it was already mentioned that Izard saw Mossi-Fulbe relations as purely practical. He furthermore minimised their economic importance, stressing that cattle tended to be owned, besides by Fulbe, only by Mossi chiefs. The principal if not single large cattle owner in Yatenga was the king, and his animals were kept not by free Fulbe but by royal captives of Fulbe origin (*bagrse*) (Izard 1982:368; 1970:384).

Izard's findings and propositions regarding Yatenga were sometimes too easily transposed to and essentialised for other Mossi kingdoms. For instance, in Savonnet-Guyot (1986:87, 90-1) the Moogo was represented as a world with a single myth of origin, a single founding ancestor and principle of power (*naam*), and in which a single language is spoken: '[The] Mossi dynasties engender kingdoms all identical among each other, that produce new dynasties, which all claim [to descent] from Wedraogo' (*ibid.*:88).[29] The *nakombse* needed *tengbiise* farmers to produce food, blacksmiths to produce weapons and artisan-traders to meet the obligations of multiplying exchanges (*ibid.*:106). The prosperity of the state depended on the presence and activities of these socio-professional groups, and conversely, which groups came to belong to Mossi society and how they were categorised was dictated by the logic of state development. If Izard mentioned the Fulbe as a category of people living within the boundaries of Yatenga – albeit not belonging to Mossi society – Savonnet-Guyot's reinterpretation of Izard's work mentioned them not even once.[30]

Critique of received historiography and ethnography

From the above reviewed historiographies and ethnographies, Mossi society appears as characterised by and based upon heterogeneity and accommodation of difference. 'Autochthons', conquerors, Yarse, blacksmiths, Marase: each group is acknowledged to be different in origin, occupation and/or religion. Their mutual differences did not hamper their membership of society, but, rather, were reproduced to serve their integration into the

[27] Especially the Yarse have proved to be an easily accessible group; becoming a trader, converting to Islam and changing one's identity to 'Yarse' all came to one and the same thing.

[28] This 'de-affectedness' and 'depoliticisation' of Mossi-Fulbe relations is mirrored in more development-oriented, applied work, where they are portrayed in terms of contract and economic and ecological complementarity or competition.

[29] Savonnet-Guyot (1986:112-3) nevertheless acknowledged that the initial model tended to be adapted somewhat in each kingdom (e.g. Yatenga's centralised organisation *versus* Ouagadougou's looser structure).

[30] Izard (2003:12) recognised the danger of his vision becoming all too easily accepted as orthodoxy.

kingdoms' political, economic and administrative system. Fulbe, however, were understood to be more different than others, to such an extent that their difference could not be accommodated for.

Still, some of the royal courts are known to have had a specific dignitary responsible for 'Fulbe affairs', implying an institutionalisation of Fulbe's presence in the kingdoms concerned. Also, marriage between Fulbe and *nakombse* has been reported not always to be exceptional (for instance, in the kingdom of Ratenga) (see Chéron 1924; Kabore 1966).[31] Other often cited criteria for membership of Mossi society, such as religion and language, did not preclude the inclusion of groups such as Yarse and *bagrse*.[32] Furthermore, one comes across legendary myths narrating about the beginning of time or of society, in which Fulbe figure side by side with *nakombse*, *tengbiise*, Yarse and/or blacksmiths. Such myths not only legitimise a particular labour division among various groups, but can also be understood to justify a group's position in society, in particular vis-à-vis the ruling nakombse.[33] Finally, if especially blacksmiths and Yarse were accorded a prominent place in Mossi society because of their economic indispensability as professional groups, one would have expected the same for Fulbe because of their quasi-monopolisation of cattle herding. That this did not happen is all the more striking if one takes into account that, in terms of commercial activity, the Mossi kingdoms were considered insignificant, whereas their regional importance for cattle production and export was substantial (Izard 1970:385-7). If 'objective' reasons for *a priori* denying Fulbe membership of Mossi society can be refuted not too difficultly, then what factors have been at play? No one single cause can be isolated. Rather several factors were involved both simultaneously and successively, ranging from the legacy of racial theories, over ethnographic traditions and authority, to closure of anthropological concepts of society and culture.

First, Izard's work acquired authoritative force, circumscribing theorising and dominating the definition of 'the quintessential and dominant questions' of anthropological interest in the region (see Appadurai 1986:357) and, hence, empirical findings as well. Subsequent researchers tended to address Izard and often assumed his contentions as premises for their own work (e.g. Bonnet 1988; Luning 1997). Izard's predominance in the study of the Mossi kingdoms, and the extrapolation without proper verification of findings concerning Yatenga to other kingdoms, may help explaining Fulbe's marginalisation in social research on the region. However, Izard wrote his founding work on the Mossi kingdoms relatively late, and questions remain as to why he left Fulbe so radically out of his model in the first place.

For Izard did not start from scratch. His work is based, besides on his own extensive field research, on investigations and reports by early colonial administrators-ethnographers of which Tauxier was the most important. That Tauxier found that Fulbe constituted a separate society must not surprise. In France, at the time, so-called 'scientific racism', which argued not only that variability could be ranked, but also that race was biologically determined and

[31] Izard (1970:401) relegated the observation that the 'solidarity between Fulbe and Mossi is particularly strong in Ratenga where matrimonial exchanges exist between the families of Fulbe chiefs and the royal family' to a footnote in the account of a conflict between Ratenga and Sanmatenga.

[32] As mentioned above, Yarse are generally Muslims and used to be polyglot; *bagrse* often have Fulfulde as their mother tongue and are Muslims as well.

[33] In this manner, Duperray (1985:189), interprets a lengthy myth reproduced in Dim Delobsom (1932:118-32) as justifying the privileged place of the Yarse among the *nakombse's* subjects. The myth referred to, in which God orders the ancestors of blacksmiths, Fulbe, Yarse and *nakombse* to go and build their house in the world – by which is meant the Moogo or the 'Mossi world' – thus legitimises Fulbe's membership of society just as much as Yarse's.

that therefore different races had different development potential, had gained the upper hand of a social evolutionary school, which underscored humanity's universal nature and left more room for social and cultural change and progress.[34] Populations could thus be categorised into an 'innate hierarchy of races' for which a rigid taxonomy based upon biological characteristics was elaborated. From these characteristics, among which skin colour was prominent, moral virtues and intellectual capacities were derived, and in their search to bring order to the diversity of the colonised peoples, administrators-ethnographers generally found Fulbe closer to themselves and consequently higher on the 'evolutionary ladder' than the populations among which they lived. This difference based upon biological characteristics was compounded by the colonial propensity to overdetermine the opposition between sedentary people and nomads, a tendency that lasts to this very day (Boëtch & Ferrié 1999:73-6; Wooten 1993:422-6; see also Babiker 2006).[35]

European travellers' fascination by Fulbe's dispersion over thousands of kilometres and their unity of language, together with the dictums of racial theory, coalesced to favour their early invention as a distinct people (Boëtsch & Ferrié 1999:78; Botte *et al.* 1999:19-20). Fulbe were firmly established as intrinsically different and as an object for anthropological enquiry distinct from the various populations among which they lived, well before the Mossi kingdoms were brought under colonial rule and studied by administrators-ethnographers.

Hence, in the early 20th century, colonial administrators-ethnographers understood Fulbe living within the Mossi kingdoms as belonging firstly to the larger, widely dispersed Fulbe entity.[36] Moreover, they understood the 'white' or 'whiter' populations as predestined founders of states (Botte *et al.* 1999: 20-1). Therefore to find the 'very intelligent' Fulbe, 'civilising elements' among the colonised population, subordinated to the 'lazy', 'quarrelsome', 'improvident' Mossi was found an anomaly that was to be corrected for wherever possible.[37] In 1905, the then administrator of the *Cercle de Ouagadougou*, commented on a measure taken a few years earlier, which deprived the king of Ouagadougou of his authority over three Fulbe groups:

> '[En] 1901, le capitaine Ruef […] aborde une des plus fécondes réformes réalisées au Mossi: il enlève au Moro *naba* le commandement, et conséquemment l'exploitation éhontée, des groupes peulhs importants de son territoire'.[38]

Dubreuil called for a continuation of the policy started by Ruef, especially in the kingdoms of Boussouma and Boulsa, where Fulbe population density was particularly high, but also pointed out that reforms had become less urgent because, following Ruef's first measures,

[34] Scientific racism militated against assimilation of indigenous peoples. The choice for an associationist policy, implying the governing of colonial subjects according to their own customs, institutions and laws, made ethnographic research by administrators-ethnographers all the more necessary (Wooten 1993:424).

[35] Note that in Izard (1985b:5) as well the contrast between 'sedentary farmers' and 'semi-nomadic herdsmen' was advanced to underscore the irreducible, 'phenotypical' difference between Mossi and Fulbe societies.

[36] For instance: 'Les Foulbés du Mossi ont les caractères généraux de leurs cogénères éparpillés dans le Soudan'; Notice sur le Mossi rédigée par le Capitaine Pinchon, Résident de France au Mossi, 1903; ANSOM 14MIOM/689 (1G316).

[37] Notice sur le Mossi rédigée par le Capitaine Pinchon, Résident de France au Mossi, 1903; ANSOM 14MIOM/689 (1G316); Monographie du Cercle du Mossi, Gouvernement Général de l'AOF, Colonie de la Haute Volta, 1920 (ANCI Monographies de Cercle).

[38] Rapport du Capitaine Dubreuil, Commandant le Cercle de Ouagadougou sur la nécessité de diviser le Cercle actuel de Ouagadougou en deux cercles, sur les conditions dans lesquelles pourra s'effectuer cette division, et Note sur l'Administration du Mossi, AOF, Haut Sénégal Niger, Cercle de Ouagadougou, février 1905 (ANCI Monographies de Cercle).

Mossi chiefs had decided 'de s'abstenir de faire subir aux Peulhs […] les vexations qu'ils avaient l'habitude de leur infliger'. When, a few years later, the French shifted in the administration of their West African territories from direct rule to a pragmatic form of indirect rule, 'liberating' the Fulbe from their ties with the Mossi courts became even less a preoccupation.[39] Hence, if colonial authorities succeeded in severing political ties between Fulbe and the Mossi courts, one can expect this to have happened especially before World War I and in the kingdoms were colonial administration was first established (Ouagadougou and Yatenga).[40]

The important point is that in the kingdoms of Ouagadougou, Boussouma and Boulsa institutionalised relations of subordination of Fulbe to Mossi existed, which the French initially attempted to break so as to make the customary political hierarchy more in line with prevailing colonial perceptions and expectations.[41] Still, in their indignation about the subordination of the in their eyes superior Fulbe, early administrators seem to have grossly exaggerated the Fulbe's exploitation by Mossi rulers. Indeed, the presumably heavily exploited Fulbe proved to be at the same time the wealthiest inhabitants of the region:

> 'En principe, [les peulhs] devaient le tiers de leurs bénéfices au naba sur le territoire duquel ils se fixaient, mais souvent ils étaient complètement dépouillés et mis en prison. Malgré ces persécutions ils surent, par leur esprit d'économie, leur finesse, j'allais dire leur duplicité, dans leurs transactions avec les Mossis, acquérir une aisance très supérieure à celle des Mossis, et ils ont aujourd'hui entre leurs mains une part importante des richesses du pays'.[42]

The paradox posited here of Fulbe subordinated and exploited by Mossi chiefs yet being the wealthiest of the region, can be resolved if one understands Fulbe as part of the region's society and engaged in socio-political institutions of the kingdoms, allowing for a diversity of relations between Mossi chiefs and Fulbe subjects regulated by norms and principles having at least a minimal legitimacy in the eyes of both Mossi and Fulbe.

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[39] Dubreuil did not foresee a role for Fulbe in the administration of the population – a role for which they were 'naturally' predestined according to prevailing racial theory: '[Nous] n'arriverons pas à donner un ideal politique commun aux groupes peulhs, ceux-ci étant trop dispersés […]. Du reste, étant donné le caractère du Mossi, son esprit politique très satisfaisant [meant is here the Mossi's presumed docility], il n'est point nécessaire […] d'appeler le peulh à jouer un role politique, qui étant inutile à notre action ne pouvait qu'être nuisible à la tranquilité générale'. After World War I, administrators were expected to maintain indigenous office holders in their authority, prestige and power, albeit within the limits of French sovereignty (Dimier 2003:87).

[40] Only in 1914, a *Subdivision de Kaya* (comprising a.o. the kingdoms of Boussouma and Boulsa) was carved out within the *Cercle du Mossi* (previously *Cercle de Ouagadougou*), to become the *Cercle deKaya* in 1923.

[41] One way the French wanted to achieve this was by privileging the *kombere* level ('chefs de canton' in the French administrative terminology) at the expense of the kings ('chefs de province'): '[Une] oeuvre qui […] s'impose comme nécessaire c'est d'écarter définitivement les chefs de provinces des affaires administratives et de faire l'éducation des chefs de canton […]' which would have the advantage 'à preserver les Peulhs et les Ouangharbés [Yarse] des exactions des nabas […]'; Rapport du Capitaine Dubreuil, Commandant le Cercle de Ouagadougou sur la nécessité de diviser le Cercle actuel de Ouagadougou en deux cercles, sur les conditions dans lesquelles pourra s'effectuer cette division, et Note sur l'Administration du Mossi, AOF, Haut Sénégal Niger, Cercle de Ouagadougou, février 1905 (ANCI Monographies de Cercle). Nana (1994:16-7) shows how the early colonial adminsitration attempted to undermine the Bossuouma king's authority by intervening in the nomination of the *kombemba* depending on Boussouma, i.e. by bringing the *kombemba* under colonial control while bypassing the king.

[42] Rapport du Capitaine Dubreuil, Commandant le Cercle de Ouagadougou sur la nécessité de diviser le Cercle actuel de Ouagadougou en deux cercles, sur les conditions dans lesquelles pourra s'effectuer cette division, et Note sur l'Administration du Mossi, AOF, Haut Sénégal Niger, Cercle de Ouagadougou, février 1905 (ANCI Monographies de Cercle). Fulbe's relative wealth was reflected in taxation levels, which took into account the material situation of each 'race'; for instance, for the year 1906 the head tax was set at 0.25 francs for Mossi, 0.75 francs for Yarse and 1.00 francs for Fulbe.

Early colonial administrators, then, attempted to 'invent' a tradition according to which there was no institutionalised relation of subordination of Fulbe to royal courts and which contributed to the representation of Fulbe in the *Monographies de Cercle* as more distinct than other groups. As soon as in the work of Tauxier (1917; 1924), they were considered to constitute society apart and as belonging firstly to a widely dispersed essentialised Fulbe category. In the pragmatics of colonial administration, however, the ideal of freeing the Fulbe from what was perceived to be the Mossi's yoke, was soon abandoned. In Boussouma, royal and *kombere* court organisation continued to comprise institutionalised arrangements for the management of relations with the kingdom's Fulbe.[43]

Fulbe studies as a separate field of research survived racial theories as cultural specificity, expressed in *pulaaku* – a social institution or behavioural code particular to the Fulbe – came to substitute racial specificity (Boesen 1999:84-5). Geographically dispersed Fulbe were subjected to comparative studies (in linguistics, sociology and technical-economic fields), which abstracted to a large extent from the most often sedentary population groups among which they lived (Botte *et al.* 1999:20-3). As a consequence, stereotypical visions of Fulbe were reproduced, which influenced also the way Fulbe were perceived in studies of populations among which they were present as a minority. This persistent reification of Fulbe in abstraction from the populations among which they happened to live is what allowed, in one study after the other, to a priori consider Fulbe living in the Mossi region as more different than other population groups and thus to oust them from Mossi society.

Izard (1976:69; 1983:255) argued that within the mosaic of groups constitutive of Mossi society, it is generally the 'other' that is pointed out as being Mossi, the 'self' being identified with a title or status group label (*nayiirdamba*, *tasobdamba*, blacksmiths, *nakombse*, *tengbiise*, etc.). Only those who are contemptuously designated as *talse*, commoners, may identify themselves as Mossi. 'Mossi' thus designates a negative, residual category of identification, and 'being a Mossi, is being nothing' (Izard 1985b:68). Izard (1976) also stressed the relativity of socio-ethnic statuses and the frequency of identity changes (e.g. for instance from *nakombse* to *tengbiise*, blacksmiths or Yarse, from *tengbiise* to blacksmiths or Yarse, or from Yarse to *tengbiise*). However, by interpreting this fluidity firstly in terms of Mossi central power's success in transforming a matrix of ethnic groups with a history into a a-historical matrix of functional groups from which Fulbe and Silmi-Mossi were excluded, he nevertheless entrenched an essentialised, restricted understanding of 'the' Mossi and Mossi society. So, despite efforts not to relinquish dynamics and change and despite the fact that 'naked' ethnicity – that is the 'Mossi category' – was little valued or even non-existent in this heterogeneous and open society, 'the Mossi' emerged as an ethnic label, as a bounded entity – and concomitantly Mossi society as an entity endowed with structural coherence and functional purpose – especially *vis-à-vis* Fulbe, and to a lesser extent *vis-à-vis* Silmi-mossi.

[43] Much later, in 1953, the issue was raked up by the then *Commandant* of Kaya in a manner underscoring the economic interests involved: '[Prenant] exemple de ce qui existe à Tougan, Dédougou, Ouahigouya, où il y a également d'importantes fractions nomades, j'ai l'intention de créer une chefferie peulh autonome, dont le Chef, assimilé à Chef de canton, […] dépendra directement de moi. […] Les affaires marcheront beaucoup mieux et la dépense sera largement compensée par [le] meilleur rendement de la taxe sur le bétail'. Some time later, following a dismissive response by an inspection mission, the *Commandant* backed off : 'D'accord sur chefferie peul = impossible à établir. La solution est dans une meilleure organisation de la chefferie moro'; Rapport sur la situation politique dans le Cercle de Kaya, 1953, and Explications et observations sur le rapport d'inspection générale du Cercle de Kaya, Kaya, le 30 décembre 1953; unclassified archives of the Haut Commissariat of the province of Sanmatenga.

The representation of a society as consisting of a distinct people, speaking a same language, having a particular culture and living in accordance with specific institutions, dominated anthropology for the larger part of the 20th century.[44] The concept of society as a bounded and self-contained entity, distinct from other similar entities, implied finitude, break, rupture, disjunction (Gupta & Ferguson 1992:6). Historiography and ethnography of the Mossi region likewise sought for social equilibrium and harmony in society as demanded by the anthroplogical canon. Therefore, the region's population was classified in categories predicated on presuppositions of unitary identities, implying that individuals are to be understood as members of bounded groups. Especially between Mossi and Fulbe, a boundary impermeable to sustained socio-political intercourse was imagined, even if therefore it had to be implicitly assumed that this boundary extended *ad infinitum* into the interstices of the kingdoms (see Alvarez 1995:454; Kearney 2004:228). Including Fulbe in Mossi society would – given the prevailing understanding of the Fulbe category as distinct albeit deterritorialised – have jeopardised the finitude of Mossi society.

Hence, several converging processes combined to create Fulbe and Mossi as essentialised categories. First, from the above, it appears that the production of the first historiographies and ethnographies of the Mossi kingdoms by French administrators-ethnographers, which laid the groundwork for all subsequent studies, must be understood taking into account not only prevailing racial theories but also colonial administration's concern to govern and dominate colonised populations and to penetrate them economically. Data collection methods were suspect in their objectivity and analysis flawed because administrators tended to be concerned more with directives from their superiors than by realities in the field (Abega 2006:115-8).[45] However, categories were not created *ex nihilo*. The administrators-ethnographers' sources were closely associated to the royal courts of the major kingdoms (Ouagadougou, Yatenga, Boussouma). They rendered the Mossi kingdoms' past as dynastic histories of kings, chiefs and *nakombse* warriors, reducing others to passive playthings of these actors' ambitions and frustrations. Rulers and leading court dignitaries succeeded in monopolising creative historical agency and in claiming a selection of actual or asserted historical events as their exclusive cultural property (see Wilmsen 2002:841). Later anthropologists, concerned with structuring society, can be said to have focused disproportionately on systematisable features, often literally articulated by their informants, making their models and theories at least partly a response to indigenous representations, their notions of significant features and ideologies (Tonkin 1990:141-2).

'Invention of tradition', then, is not a colonial prerogative. Representations of Mossi and Fulbe as they prevail today are the result of several processes of invention, having occurred subsequently and simultaneously. At every instance, one or several presents were involved in the creation of 'society', its past and its categories, and all actors involved – whether precolonial praise singers, Arabic *tarikh* authors, royal court dignitaries, administrators-ethnographers, etc. – can be shown to have been selective in their treatment of the past by social, moral and political considerations. Closures – mute and multiple, unintelligible and

[44] The pertinence of this concept of society was, however, called into question relatively early on, as, for instance, by Fortes (1945:231, quoted in Chalfin 2001:202), who argued that: 'For the concept of society as a closed unit, a sort of thing distinguishable from like things in the same way as one house from another or one animal from another, we must substitute […] a relative and dynamic concept […]. If we look at the area of Voltaic culture as a whole, we can imagine innumerable currents of social life flowing through it in all directions. […] They intersect in all sorts of ways'.

[45] See also Van Hoven (1990:179-80) who points out that enquiries by administrators-ethnographers such as Monteil and Delafosse, were characterised by the 'silent' interaction with local informants, their use of authority and the process of essentialisation of culture.

undecipherable – can be assumed to have been all around in a dialectic of intertextuality, among others between 'western' models of historical discourse and indigenous traditions of narrative (Chapman *et al.* 1989:5-7; Spear 2003:8). As argued by Spear (2003:23), colonialism and its representations led out of earlier eras and representations and into later ones in an endless process of becoming. With regard to Fulbe in the Mossi region, this resulted in their 'not belonging' to mainstream society. It can be speculated that, today, partitive development efforts based upon stereotypic understandings of 'pastoralists' and 'farmers' continue to further the separation of Mossi and Fulbe (Breusers *et al.* 1998).[46]

Hence, texts regarding past and tradition are multilayered, and continuously contested and reproduced in complex interactive processes in which subalternate voices tend to be muffled, but nevertheless can be heard if only one cares to listen. My own fieldwork among Mossi and Fulbe suggests that subalternate histories, contesting Mossi rulers' exclusive cultutral property of historical events, continue to flourish.

> 'When the first *naaba* [Nabigeswende, founder of Boussouma] left Ouagadougou to come to Boussouma, he was accompanied by a Fulbe, who [upon arrival] was nominated *jooro* of Baskouda. He came to Boussouma together with the earth priest of Tangpoore, […] the Yar-*naaba* [Yarse chief], his *tasoba* [war chief] and the *Bagre naaba* as well. […] Since he followed the *naaba* from Ouagadougou to Boussouma, he is considered the most important of the Boussouma *joorobe* […]. This is what we learned and this is also what we have seen, since when we go to see the Boussouma *naaba*, the *jooro* of Baskouda is the first to greet him. Only thereafter the other *joorobe* can greet the king'.[47]

> '[The force of] Boussouma was the force of [its] Fulbe. Boussouma relied on its Fulbe. […] Whenever the *nakombse* went to battle, the Fulbe were there as well. They were even first. It was they who had the good horses, who had the good armour, it was they who were reckless and had a strong heart. […] No pillagers entered Boussouma. Thanks to the Fulbe, they didn't dare. The Fulbe were Boussouma's fortress'.[48]

> 'There were no *bagrse* before the Fulbe's arrival. It was only after Fulbe came [to Boussouma] that the king designated one of his captives as chief of his cattle enclosure, simply because it was only then that he started to receive cattle and captives. By giving the king cattle, Fulbe were at the origin of *Bagre*' [the suggestion is that it was thanks to raids and pillages by Fulbe, who handed over part of their booty in cattle and captives to the king, that the *bagrse* category came into being; Mossi accounts stress that the *bagrse* are captives without mentioning the Fulbe's role in capturing them].[49]

These fragments suggest that Fulbe credit themselves with more agency than they are granted in received historiography. The latter, by a priori considering Fulbe as essentially different, omitted asking certain questions regarding Fulbe and their relations with other groups in the Mossi region, and is likely to have ignored or dismissed as invalid certain types of evidence, thus giving rise to the kind of paradoxes and contradictions mentioned earlier on in this paper.

Similarly, one can retrieve from received ethnography fragments demonstrating that the translocal encounter between Mossi and Fulbe did result in institutionalised socio-political arrangements. For instance, Kabore (1966:57) maintained that at the court of Ouagadougou a 'secondary' dignitary, the *Silmi naaba* (lit. Fulbe chief), mediated between the king and the

[46] See also Babiker (2006:180) who observes that '[the] "herder/farmer" dichotomy is an example of oppositions that reflect the general tendency to convert differences of degree into differences of kind'.
[47] Interview with the Balbou *jooro*, August 2002. Similar to the Fulbe chiefs of Barkoudouba in Ouagadougou, the Baskouda Fulbe are considered *nabiise*, that is, close relatives of the king. Such accounts of how founders of kingdoms arrived in a region accompanied by the representatives of the population groups that were to come to constitute the society are widespread (see also Izard 2003:342).
[48] Interview with Amado Bande, Louda *jooro*, July 2002.
[49] Interview with Amado Bande, Louda *jooro*, March 2002.

kingdom's Fulbe, and suggested that Fulbe were similarly subjected to the Mossi chiefs as other groups.[50] At the court of Boussouma, a *Bagre naaba*, chief of the *bagrse* captives, mediated between king and Fulbe; in case of war, the kingdom's Fulbe marched under his command (Chéron 1925:309-10). Without great difficulty, such instances can be compounded with findings from my fieldwork in the Boussouma kingdom. The *Bagre naaba* continues to be the intermediary between the kingdom's Fulbe and the king.[51] Furthermore, Boussouma numbers twelve *joorobe* who are inaugurated as chiefs and receive *naam* directly from the king, from which it can be inferred that the authority of the *jooro* does exist not parallel to or outside the Mossi political organisation, but rather integrated within it (see Breusers 2002).[52]

Hence, it seems possible to attempt to write Fulbe into the historiography and ethnography of the Mossi region. However, can this be done in a satisfactory way; should we aim to achieve it, and, if so, how? The fact that alternative Fulbe versions of the past are signalled by paradoxes, ambiguities and contradictions in received historiography and that fragments of these versions can be retrieved, does not imply that Fulbe history – no more than the history of any other minority or underprivileged group – is 'really' there, waiting to be rediscovered and expressed; independent history for such groups is in important senses missing (Chapman *et al.* 1989:8). Such an attempt, then, however well-intended, risks producing yet another invented, truncated history. Fulbe will be inscribed as another sub-category of Mossi society, yet this is likely to be an essentialised sub-category fitting the inexorably unfolding logic of the development of the Mossi state. Such a historiography will be as much as previous ones incapable of rendering the heterogeneity beneath the cover label 'Fulbe' (Fulbe noblemen, *riimaybe*, cattle herdsmen, agropastoralists, *bagrse* – and what about the Silmi-mossi?) as well as unable to account for the Fulbe's variegated relations with the kingdoms' other groups. Moreover, a new closure is likely to be created between the Mossi region's Fulbe and the Fulbe from neighbouring societies. Instead of addressing the more fundamental issues, these will only be displaced. What is needed, is not to shift somewhat the external boundary of the society studied or to reshuffle its internal boundaries by adding new bounded sub-categories, but rather the questioning of the modernist concept of society.

How to proceed from here?

Obviously, one has to resign oneself to the impossibility of retrieving the 'true' history of the Fulbe in the Mossi region and, hence, to the insurmountability of uncovering the multiple paths that resulted in variegated relations and institutions linking Fulbe with other groups. Also, one is to abstain from adding yet another subcategory to the functionally coherent amalgam of groups constitutive of a self-contained Mossi society. But, then what? How to proceed with the socio-cultural study of this region while doing justice to the Fulbe's presence

[50] 'Yarsé et Peul ne sont pas tenus de se découvrir devant le roi, ce sont des hôtes de marque et comme tels, le Mogh'Naba et les chefs ont coutume de leur réserver une audience exceptionnelle. Malgré tout, ils n'échappent pas aux obligations auxquelles sont soumis les Mossi à l'égard de la royauté. L'autorité des chefs s'exerce aussi sur eux' (Kabore 1966:57).

[51] 'The *Bagre naaba* is the unique path by which the Fulbe have access to the king'; interview with the Boussouma *naaba*, July 2002. 'We cannot approach the king without first passing by the *Bagre naaba*. […] If you are involved in a dispute, then you go and see the *Bagre naaba* who accompanies you to the king and, then, you submit your problem'; interview with the Balbou *jooro*, August 2002.

[52] 'There is no difference with regard to [the] power [of Mossi and Fulbe chiefs]. What differs is the way in which subjects follow their chief. A chief must settle problems between people. If he does not succeed, he submits the problem to the […] *naaba*, whether he is a Fulbe or a Mossi chief'; interview with Jobo Sonde, son of the *jooro* of Bandega, July 2002.

and their part in both past and present-day processes of change? How are we to render the paradox produced by, on the one hand Fulbe's emic and etic representation as 'only passing by', as 'travellers' and 'strangers' par excellence, and, on the other hand, their centuries-long presence and involvement in socio-political and economic relations and institutions?

A way out is suggested by Gupta and Ferguson (1992:16), who argue that the starting point must be altered: not a pre-given world of separate peoples and cultures, but rather a difference-producing set of *relations*. Instead of starting from the premise of discontinuity to theorise contact, conflict and contradiction between Mossi and Fulbe, understanding each to be 'rooted' in its proper space – however 'diasporic' this space may be – and each to be an autonomous continuation of an imagined primeval society, one is to examine how society in this region is formed out of the interconnected spaces that always already existed. This implies privileging interconnectedness instead of assuming natural disconnectedness, and understanding cultural difference as 'a product of a *shared* historical process that differentiates the world as it connects it' (*ibid.*:7-8, 16; emphasis added).

Indeed, as argued by Gupta and Ferguson (1992:17), the separateness of separate places is not a natural given but an anthropological problem, and so is the separateness of separate identitary categories. How was separateness constructed and how is it maintained as a reality, but, just the same, how is connectedness a reality as well thanks to the ways in which people succeed in confounding established spatial and conceptual orders, either through physical movement or through their own conceptual and political acts of re-imagination? Claims to authenticity or purity, forms of essentialism are to be related to acts of power or 'rooting', against which, or in in simultaneity with which, subalternate acts of confounding, subverting or 'rhizoming' continuously take place. The former were disproportionately emphasised in modernist epistemology, of which Mossi historiography and ethnography are manifestations. What is needed now are concepts and approaches redirecting attention to the latter, that is, to qualities of reality such as change, interconnectedness, heterogeneous becoming and transformation, that have been substantially marginalised by a focus on permanence, discreteness, linear progress and equilibrium (Styhre 2001).[53]

As argued by Wilmsen (2002:841), a successful approach would be one that dissolves the surface appearance of disconnectedness and fragmentation and re-establishes historic connections. A first step would be to probe for contradictions the discourses that brought about these surface appearances. Furthermore, it is recommendable to focus in ethnographic research on 'boundaries', 'borderlands' and 'borderlines', both spatial and conceptual, and not only on how these are defined and established, but no less on how they are transcended and denied, on how categories are mixed up destabilising the fixity of what is 'ourselves' and 'others', of what is 'inside' and 'outside'. In this regard, Gupta and Ferguson (1992:19) call for focusing on the borderline of ourselves-as-others, others-as-ourselves. Thus, ethnography today will be able to challenge modernist ethnography and historiography without resorting itself to yet another (re)construction and essentialisation of identities, that is, without resorting

[53] Amselle (1998) argued that corporate groups' identities have never been fixed but have been constructed and reconstructed over time. He maintained that, in West Africa, these identities were characterised by fluidity until 19th century colonial administrators-ethnographers invented more rigid ethnic identities for administrative convenience. Nevertheless it can be hypothised that, even if group identities were more fluid and malleable in pre-colonial times, then as well naming and categorising occurred and boundaries however permeable were drawn. Conversely, the extent to which colonial administrators-ethnographers were successful in inventing rigid ethnic identities is likely to have been limited as well.

to the binary logic of either-or categories, by allowing instead for a logic of 'both-and-and-…' (Kearney 2004:228-9).

What are these borderlands and borderlines in the Mossi region? Where can we expect the notions of ourselves-as-others and others-as-ourselves to be expressed? Obviously, some issues and processes are more than others likely to reveal interconnectedness and heterogeneous becoming. Hence, for instance, rather than on marriage and kinship, which tend to be structured and rule-governed, one may focus on friendship, characterised by individual freedom and emotion, defying established boundaries and expressing social life's contingency. Mossi friendship can be understood as a prelude to marriage and, then, exemplifies the dialectics of rhizoming and rooting, rhizome/friendship operating by variation, expansion, conquest and being acentred and non-hierarchical, i.e. in every aspect unlike root/kinship (Deleuze & Guattari 1988:7-17).[54] Friendship between Mossi and Fulbe does usually not culminate in marriage exchanges, and, hence tends to remain a less 'captured' social force (see Breusers forthcoming).

Another borderline, crucial in explanations of and coping with illness, infecundity and misfortune in general, is to be found in between the world of the living and the world of the death and the yet unborn. During sexual intercourse, when a *kinkirga* spirit is assumed to enter the woman's womb (conception), the world of the living opens up to the other world, thus becoming vulnerable to transgression which, if it occurs, must be accommodated for. Hence, it happens that a Mossi woman's womb is entered by a Fulbe *kinkirga*, which at birth must be recognised as Fulbe to prevent it to return to the other world. Fulbe are to be involved in the name giving of the child, which is to grow up in a symbolically created Fulbe environment. Afterwards as well such persons' destiny remains linked to Fulbe, with whom connections are to be established to safeguard health, fecundity and good fortune (e.g. through spiritual parenthood; see Breusers fc.). Concepts and practices involved in such cases of Fulbe ascendancy among Mossi exemplify the possibility of 'ourselves-as-others, others-as-ourselves'.

I suggested above that it is possible to write a historiography and ethnography of the Mossi region representing the Fulbe as incorporated, or in other words 'rooted', into the Mossi socio-political institutions, for instance through royal court organisation and Fulbe chiefs' incorporation in the realm of *naam*. Another way in which Fulbe were incorporated was as royal captives. In contrast to other categories of royal captives, who were completely robbed of whatever historical and social identity they might have possessed as free men[55], Fulbe captives were classified into a separate category of *bagrse*. Whereas other captives' identity makes sense only within the realm of Mossi *naam*, the *bagrse's* claim to a Fulbe-related identity, which they express by speaking Fulfulde, maintaining or adopting a Fulbe patronymic and/or a preference for cattle herding[56], allows for a connection with a history of their own prior to captivity and with a world outside Mossi *naam*.[57]

[54] Martinelli (1999:382-3) observed with regard to Mossi friendship: 'L'amitié est l'expression d'une liberté […]. Si teintées qu'elles soient initialement d'individualisme et d'aventure personnelle, les amitiés masculines trouvent une organisation lignagère idéologiquement prête à les absorber', and: 'L'amitié *zoodo* […] endosse […] ouverture et élargissement du champ des relations matrimoniales' (*ibid.*:371).

[55] 'Les captifs sont des gens sans histoire et sans terre, qui dépendent entièrement du roi, et l'histoire des familles a pour seul cadre l'univers des captifs' (Izard 1975:285).

[56] At the court of Sanmatenga, *kombere* of Boussouma, the *bagrse* claim a Fulbe origin, which they express by speaking Fulfulde (interview with the *Bagre naaba* of Sanmatenga, January 2002). The *bagrse* in the kingdom of Mané likewise claim a Fulbe identity and have Fulfulde as their mother tongue. They see themselves as sedentarised Fulbe. Mossi, however, consider this faked and stress the *bagrse's* captive origin (Luning 1997:81-

A final category of borderlines that I want to suggest as a site of investigation is probably the most obvious one, namely the physical borderlines such as no-man's land between different polities and 'unsocialised' spaces in between the domesticated places of villages and fields, where Fulbe tend to be prominently present. Fulbe often claim to have initiated the humanisation of space. In their search for pastures, they tore open the bush and confronted and chased wild animals, thus facilitating the subsequent arrival of Mossi farmers: 'All Mossi fear the frontier […]. The Fulbe tore the bush apart, killed the wild animals and chased others away. Only thereafter the Mossi come and claim the land is theirs'.[58]

Interestingly, Luning (1997:226) describes how in a final phase of the inauguration of the king of Maane, Fulbe are to build a Fulbe hut in the royal court. The new king is to reside in this hut during a few weeks before he is allowed to occupy a 'normal' house. Luning's explanation of this practice remarkably resonates the Fulbe's arguments regarding their role in opening up the bush: when a new settlement is established, one must first find out if place and new occupants match, and therefore the construction of a temporary hut is to accompany the foundation of a house…[59]

Fulbe, then, are likely to be present in between and in the interstices of kingdoms, chieftaincies and villages, and they can to a certain extend be understood as a kind of vanguard of Mossi society. In this regard, it can be noted that in the sporadic appearances of Fulbe in Mossi oral traditions their capacity to go unnoticed is a recurrent theme. Hence, for instance, when *naaba* Karfo, king of Ouagadougou from 1834 to 1842, had sent a Fulbe to kill a court dignitary with whom he was in conflict, the perpetrator was actively sought for but 'personne ne songea à inquiéter le Peulh pauvrement habillé qui se reposait, étendu sur le sol aux environs du village' (Tiendrébéogo 1963:32; see also Izard 1970:171-2). When, later in the 19th century, Boussouma was in conflict with Ouagadougou, the king of Boussouma armed some hundred horsemen to arrive before the gates of Ouagadougou:

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2). Luning (1997:81-2) argues that with this 'almost-Fulbe identification' *bagrse* attempt escaping from the negative, unfavourable status of captives. By distancing themselves from the the 'Mossi'-category they at the same time distance themselves from their low position within that Mossi whole. However, other *bagrse*, such as, for instance, those associated to the court of Boussouma, took their masters' patronymic (Ouédraogo), and thus can be said to have distanced themselves from their Fulbe-relatedness and captive descent.

[57] The presence of *bagrse* did not remain restricted to the royal courts. They settled throughout the kingdoms' territories, often in separate wards or villages (see, for instance, Tiendrébéogo 1963:20-2).

[58] Interview with Amado Bande, Louda *jooro*, July 2002. Regarding a contested tract of land astride the kingdoms of Boussouma and Rissiam, for instance, argued: 'It was really a bush, no Mossi dared to go there. [By going there on *transhumance* with their cattle], Fulbe made the place inhabitable. There were many lions and hyenas and only herdsmen ventured there. It was only after one of us decided to stay there permanently that the Mossi started to invade the place'; interview with Ado Barry, June 2002. Note that one reason for Mossi to entrust their cattle to Fulbe herdsmen is their capacity to reach out: 'Yes, we could keep cattle ourselves and produce manure, but if you have many animals it is better to entrust them [to Fulbe] […] who take them to drink. […] Cattle herding on a large scale will not pose much of a problem here, since there is always bush land with few fields somewhere, and there are Fulbe who go there'; interview with Kuka and Saalfo Sawadogo, December 2001.

[59] Luning (1997:226) observes that Mossi used to have their own style to construct temporary dwellings, but today opt for imitating the easier Fulbe type of construction, thus suggesting that what is significant in this practice is the temporariness of the hut, not the fact that it is Fulbe. I would argue, on the contrary, that one needs to account for the fact that not only it is a Fulbe *type* of hut, but that it is also Fulbe *who come to build it* in the royal court. If Fulbeness were not significant, Mossi could have built it themselves just as they do when they need a temporary shelter near their fields.

> 'Cette avance fut facilitée par le fait que les habitants de la région de Boussouma s'habillaient comme les Peuls [this detail was omitted by Izard 1970:178, 250]. Leur approche ne fut pas signalée à Ouagadougou et les notables de la capitale furent surpris sans armes' (Tiendrébéogo 1963: 36).

Their presence in the uncultivated and 'unsocialised' interstices and no-man's land combined with their capacity to go unnoticed to make Fulbe into excellent scouts[60] in pillaging operations and into otherwise precious 'intelligence officers':

> 'The Fulbe chiefs receive more information than the Mossi. We settle them somewhere so that they listen and come and tell us. A Mossi speaks as he speaks, but a Fulbe acts as if he comes to talk, to ask a question. He hears what is said, leaves and goes and tell the *kombere*: "Watch out, in that or that village they talk about this or that". […] [The Fulbe] settle on the frontiers to listen what people say. […] If there is going to be a war, he goes to inform the chief: "Watch out, that day there will be a war"'.[61]

> 'When two Mossi speak with each other and there is a Fulbe at their side, the Mossi consider there nobody present, and so the Fulbe can listen and inform us'.[62]

Whether as Mossi's friends escaping kinship, as *kinkirse* mixing up Mossi filiation, as captives claiming a Fulbe identity or as vanguards and informants operating on the fringes and in the interstices of Mossi polities, Fulbe emerge as actors being astride. Mobile pastoralists always and necessarily exploring the bush for new pastures and water sources, eyes and ears of the kingdom, friends not easily turned into kinsmen, capricious *kinkirse* spirits, they allow for new connections to be established, new relations, whether human-human, human-physical environment, or human-spiritual world.

Conclusion

In order to grasp Fulbe's presence in the Mossi region one is not to reject en bloc 'modernist' understandings in terms of rules, traditions, unified identities, etc. (Styhre 2001). Fulbe can, like other population groups in the region, be understood as incorporated and subordinated within the Mossi whole through categorisation under the totalising umbrella of *naam* (court organisation, *bagrse* royal captives, Fulbe chiefs inaugurated by king or *kombere*). In other words, I showed that the translocal Mossi-Fulbe encounter was institutionally productive. This is relevant especially in the light of previous work that emphasised the pragmatics and contractual aspects of relations between Mossi and Fulbe, thus suggesting that the basis for their collaboration is not inscribed in previously institutionalised social relations. Taking such a suggestion for reality can be expected to have implications for the way in which groups and their relations are perceived, conceptualised and approached in, for instance, development.

Yet, this 'rooting' and 'sedentary' perspective does not tell us the whole story – in fact, such a perspective can *never* do that since wherever one finds naming, codification, the inscription of boundaries, one simultaneously finds meanings and substances shifting, escaping from names given; one finds decodification, and the slipping out from structures and boundaries (see Rice 1990:156). Thus, I argued that in order not to be trapped again in essentialised categories and a renewed albeit shifted closure, one is to focus explicitly on interconnectedness and on multiple differences in terms of continuous becoming instead of pre-established discontinuity. Consequently, Fulbe are to be understood not in *or* out of the region's society, but rather in

[60] '[Surtout] dans des opérations de pillage, les Fulbe [étaient] [...] d'excellents éclaireurs pour des cavaliers moose à la recherche de troupeaux à razzier...' (Izard 1982: 367-8).
[61] Interview with Luc Ouédraogo, royal lineage of Piugtenga *kombere*, Boussouma kingdom, July 2002.
[62] Interview with the king of Boussouma, July 2002.

and out.[63] Analysis of social and political life in this region is to start not from the assumption that Fulbe and Mossi constitute separate societies, nor that Fulbe are a category integrated into a bounded, by Mossi dominated, society.

It is not my intention to single out Fulbe as a solely meandering, rhizoming force in this region's society, in contrast with 'rooted' categories of, for instance, *nakombse* or 'autochthons'. As much as any other group 'constitutive' of society, Fulbe are involved and captured in processes of both 'rhizoming' and 'rooting'. Their pastoralism, their settlement in the interstices and on the fringes of polities, their being the embodiment of otherness within self for other groups, makes them, however, into privileged agents of transgression and creative interconnections. As such, they constitute a particularly interesting point of entry for grasping this society's openness and for studying change in terms of multiplicity and becoming, that is, for doing ethnography without resorting to essentialised categorisations.

It is such a perspective that may help to resolve the mystery of Fulbe's presence in the Mossi region. The Fulbe are involved in translocal encounters with other groups, sometimes giving rise to institutionalised socio-political relations, at other times, however, allowing themselves – and others – to slip out from under established institutional arrangements. Both kinds of encounters can be expressed in terms of travel. The first concerns travelling with a distinct beginning and end (places of departure outside the kingdoms and of settlement within the kingdoms, from transhumant nomads to a category captured within the society's socio-political system). The second is better conceived as travelling without beginning or end – as 'coming and going rather than starting and finishing' (Deleuze & Guatttari 1988:27-8) – which resonates remarkably with representations of Fulbe in village contexts, as people that are passing by, without anyone being able to say where they came from or where they might be heading, that is, having no 'origin' nor 'point of arrival', yet always there and to be accounted for if one is to understand this society and its dynamics of change.[64]

[63] 'The Fulbe always speaks two languages. He speaks Fulfulde, but he speaks Moore just as well as we do. The Fulbe are nomads, but, even if they go as far as Ghana where they can stay for years they continue to claim to be of Boussouma'; interview with the king of Boussouma, July 2002.

[64] 'We don't know where the Fulbe came from. […] They came just like that, and we see them since a long time. We are together. […] The Fulbe has no point of departure, he has no other basis than where he happens to be at the moment. Wherever he is, he is at home. […] But, sooner or later he will leave […]'; inteview with the Nessemtenga *tengsoba*, February 2002.

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