

LA DYNAMIQUE DES MASQUES
EN AFRIQUE OCCIDENTALE

DYNAMICS OF MASKS
IN WEST AFRICA

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ROYAL MUSEUM FOR CENTRAL AFRICA - TERVUREN



La dynamique des masques est celle que l'on rencontre lorsqu'ils sont actifs et vivants dans leur milieu d'origine par opposition au statisme mortifère que leur impose le milieu muséal. Incarnés par un être humain qui leur infuse son énergie, les masques deviennent ces puissances performantes dont la communauté qui les « met en scène » attend beaucoup de bienfaits et craint le courroux. En Afrique occidentale, leurs sorties font encore partie du quotidien de nombreuses populations ; quelques cas particuliers sont analysés dans cet ouvrage.

The dynamics of masks come into full view when they are vibrant and alive in their place of origin, rather than drained of life and movement when confined inside museum walls. Incarnated by human beings that infuse them with their energy, masks become potent powers: the communities 'presenting' them hope to receive many blessings, yet also fear their wrath.

In West Africa, their appearances are still part of the daily life of many populations. Several distinctive examples are analysed in this book.

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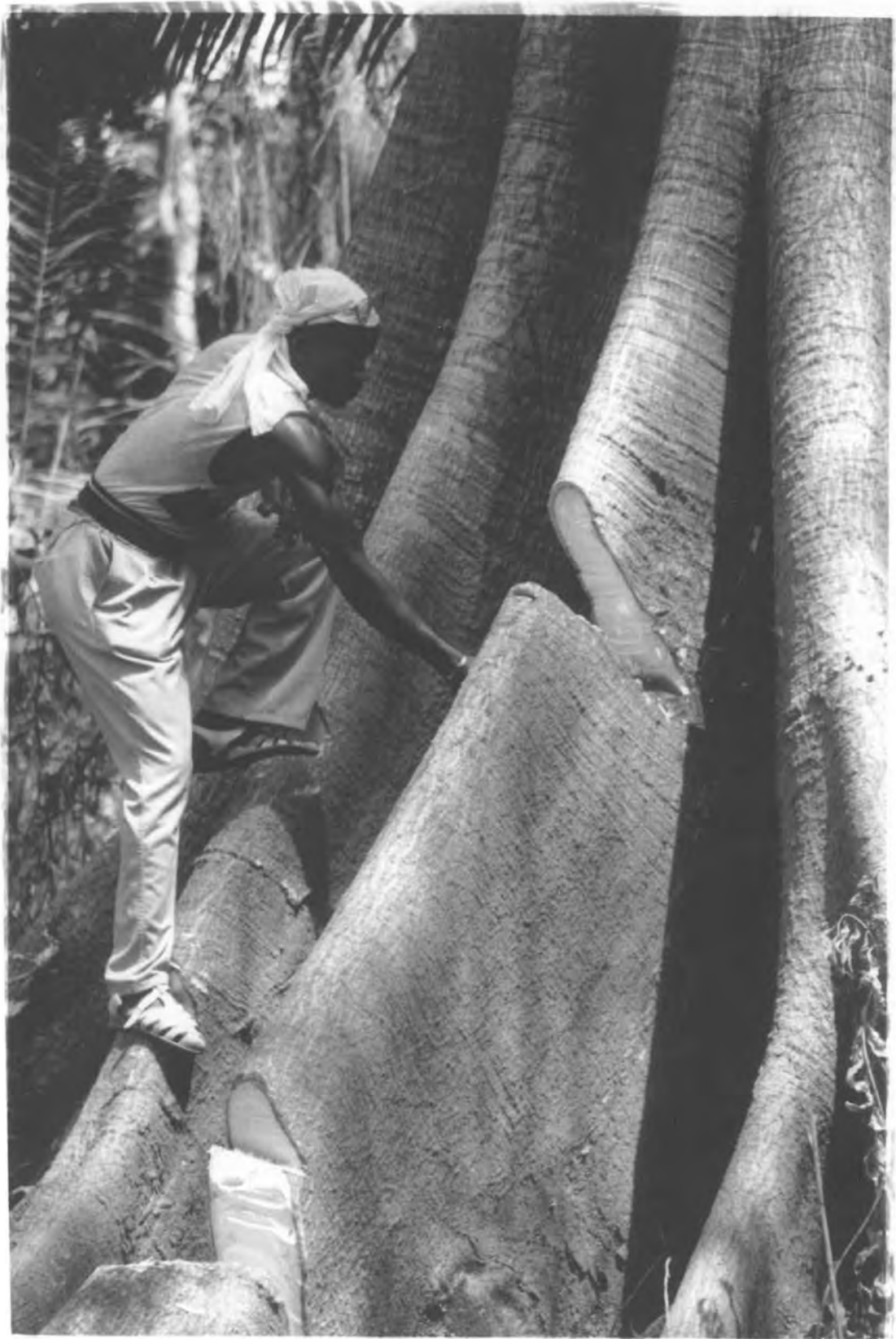


Photo 1. The *Bedu* mask is cut out from the lower parts of the Kapok tree. *Lepongokato* 1995. Photo © K. Arnaut.

On multiplicity and performance

The complexities of *Bedu* mask dances in the Bondoukou region (Côte d'Ivoire)

Karel ARNAUT

'And the point is this: that the spatial is, among other things, the sphere of the existence of multiplicity. One result of spatializing time (thinking in terms of space-time) is thus also to propose a genuine multiplicity of trajectories.' (Massey 2001: 259)

This chapter sets out to explore the multiplicity hiding behind the monolithic face of the communal masquerade known as *Bedu*. Taking its lead from the research programme of René Bravmann and from an emerging materialist perspective on ritual and cultural expression, this chapter explores the diversity of *Bedu* in its nomenclatura, its physiognomy, and its idiomatic context, as well as in its transformative performances. The ethnographic focus is double. In the first part on diversity of labelling, morphology and idiom of *Bedu*, the focus is on the songs that accompany all genres of activity related to the *Bedu* mask and express, illustrate, and reflect upon these activities. In the second part, the focus is equally divided between the many peripheral, semi-public, and dispersed ritual acts of the preparatory phases and the grand, public moments of denouement, in order to grasp the many and complex trajectories that eventually merge into the central stages of collective vibrancy. In conclusion I argue that the *Bedu* performances bring together what they separate; stated otherwise, *Bedu* performances unpick the community whose unity and collective strength they commemorate and celebrate. In that respect *Bedu* events qualify as 'rites of convergence' 'where heterogeneous elements are thrown into one compositional assemblage over a specific duration' (Chau 2012).

Bedu, the early Bravmann and the issue of diversity

Like so many mask traditions in Africa, the *Bedu* masquerade is rather poorly documented. During the 1960s and 1970s it received some interest from art

historians, historians, and anthropologists (Williams 1968; Fagg 1969; Bravmann 1974; Terray 1979) but since then further research has been scarce (Silverman 1996) or scantily published (Arnaut 2000; 2001; 2004a). Related to this is the fact that most of the literature on *Bedu* is to be found in exhibition, collection, and sales catalogues. As I have tried to show elsewhere, this dispersed but highly self-referential corpus of catalogue entries has come to form a 'text tradition' in its own right.² The latter is an art historical ensemble of texts and what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1991: 388) calls 'excerpted objects', selected, situated and signified by more or less authoritative voices in the field of 'tribal arts' (Arnaut 2004b). Although this delocalised text/image tradition of the *Bedu* masquerade to a large extent leads its own existence – a jet-set lifestyle based on the global circulation of objects and texts (See Wastiau 2000) – it gained credibility by receiving occasional input from the 'real' *Bedu* mask tradition back in the Bondoukou region.³

Among the most prominent and influential of the expert voices on *Bedu* are those of René Bravmann and to a lesser extent Drid Williams, largely on account of the fact that they conducted proper fieldwork (see Arnaut 2004b: 72–78). Three empirical findings of Williams and/or Bravmann had a considerable impact on the way *Bedu* was presented in the exhibition literature. First, the two authors firmly established that '*Bedu*' was the only exact name of the plank masquerade, and, second, they found out that the Nafana ethnic group was the cradle of the *Bedu* mask after which it spread to other surrounding groups. Thirdly, Bravmann was responsible for identifying the *Bedu* mask as a multi-ethnic, or perhaps more correctly, a cross-ethnic artistic phenomenon.⁴ However, since the time Bravmann launched this idea in the early 1970s, the authors of the catalogue entries gradually demoted the cross-ethnic character of the masquerade. Over the years *Bedu* masks in collections have increasingly been identified as originating from the Nafana – the *Bedu* inventors.⁵

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² This is one of the arguments developed in chapter one of my PhD dissertation: 'Formulating the Sakrobundi and *Bedu* masquerades: labels, artefacts, and authorities' (Arnaut 2004b).

³ In the chapter referred to above (Arnaut 2004b) I argue that there is also an impact in reverse: at critical instances the 'museum tradition' of *Bedu* influences or guides the field research and the findings of the researchers concerning the Bondoukou *Bedu* tradition.

⁴ In his first ever published entry of a *Bedu* mask for an exhibition catalogue, Bravmann (1970) put 'para-tribal' as its 'ethnic origin'.

⁵ It should be clear that this narrowing of ethnic attribution took place in a context of the 'tribal art' sector's ongoing

Nevertheless, Bravmann's observations about the cross-ethnic mobility of the *Bedu* masks remain important. In retrospect, they withstand recent scrutiny far better than his and Williams' other findings with respect to the name and ethnic origin of the *Bedu* mask although these have been more avidly embraced. Above all, Bravmann's convincing contribution to the contestation of the 'one tribe, one style' paradigm invites us to work further in the spirit of his early publications. More broadly, his transethnic perspective on *Bedu* (Bravmann 1970: 44, pl. 87; Bravmann 1972: 10–12; Bravmann 1973: 18, pl. 20) was part of a threefold programme which consisted in demonstrating (a) the transethnic mobility of African art and material culture (Bravmann 1970: 1973), (b) the participation of Muslims in, and the contribution of Islam to, African 'pagan' art and ritual (Bravmann 1972), and (c) the study of these two phenomena through combined anthropological and historical research (Bravmann 1970: Introduction; Bravmann 1973: 9–10).

Partly because the pertinent insights and innovative publications of Bravmann have been unduly neglected, this chapter attempts to reconnect with the legacy of Bravmann's early research programme while reframing its focus on artistic mobility, processes of identification, and Muslim participation in an alternative manner.⁶ This alternative framework is based on concepts of motricity, materiality, and governmentality, which in themselves are not the main focus of this article but are briefly explicated below (and see Arnaut In press). The data presented here come from field research which I conducted in the first half of the 1990s in different villages of the region around the city of Bondoukou in north-eastern Côte d'Ivoire. The objectives of this research project consisted principally of documenting the *Bedu* ceremonial complex, comprising the societal, political, and religious institutions, the historical imagination, the events or performances, as well as the material culture practices and traditions which relate directly or indirectly to the *Bedu* masquerade. This multi-sited and multimodal study of the *Bedu* masquerade first of all revealed the sheer variety of performative contexts in which one or more *Bedu* masks feature. Apart from the typical public masked dances and the initiations into the mask cult, these contexts include public or semi-public events such as ad hoc purification rituals, festivals, commemoration services, and new year feasts and contests, some of which will be described in more detail presently. Of equal importance are the different capacities in which the mask can perform both within one village and across geographic, linguistic, and ethnic boundaries.

Tellingly, one of the classic *Bedu* songs says (about the masked figure): 'He knows how to walk but not how to dance', thereby finishing off all stereotypes about (African) masked dances, by stating that for all its performative multiplicity *Bedu* is incapable of dancing – it can merely walk around, incite, or inspect its dancing audience. More than simply referring to a local perception of *Bedu*'s locomotive style, this 'walking' can be taken as a trope of the mobility and the mobilising power of the *Bedu* masquerade. On different local and regional levels the latter divides and connects groups of people, transects and circumvents their social and ritual terrains, and in the process remaps and recomposes its converging publics. In order to introduce this exploration of *Bedu*'s mobility, the following section addresses three aspects of the masquerade's inherent flexibility and multiplicity: its multiple 'identities' or personae, its morphological diversity, and its multilingual performances.

Bedu is many

One of the more striking aspects when familiarizing oneself with the *Bedu* masquerade is the gradual realization of the diversity of its names. To be sure, '*Bedu*' is but one of its many names and not even the most frequently used one. The naming/labelling of '*Bedu*' often differs from one village to the next and from one ritual setting to the other. Moreover, the performances of the *Bedu* mask differ as much as the broader ritual settings (communal dances, processions, annual feasts, game or sport contests) in which they take place. Generally speaking the name of '*Bedu*' occurs in rather formal settings such as solemn songs or interviews. In everyday language one may prefer to speak of the 'animal' (k.zɔnɔ̃, n.wɔɔ), the 'wild animal' (k.zɔɔrɔ̃n) to designate the *Bedu* mask in general, or refer to its formal characteristics such as sɔsɔrɔ̃p (the long one) or jadjɛ (the short/young one) to differentiate between two masks of the same village (in this case *Daribin*).⁷ Finally, in many masquerade songs the mask/masker is addressed directly either in a casual way as, for instance, 'Dabila' or 'Kwame' which are common proper names for male persons, or more formally by using one of the many secret names of *Bedu* such as sɔnɔ, sɔrɔ, sɔnɔmɛ, lulumɛ, dʒɔmɛ, or buʒiɔ to list only these, which feature in the *Bedu* special language. This so-called secret language is referred to as zɔɔɔɔ (hereafter Zorogo) in Kulango and Degha-speaking contexts, zɔrɛ (hereafter Zore) in Nafana contexts, and is called moridʒɔ in the secret language itself. The Zorogo/Zore special language, far from being a language understood as a whole, bounded system (Heller 2008: 505), is rather a composite rural patois containing lexical incorporations

obsession with authenticity (Kasfir 1992).

⁶ In contrast, Bravmann's book (1974) and his article in the leading journal *African Arts* (1979) are often mentioned in catalogue entries or in the museum literature on *Bedu* and had a much bigger impact on the 'invention' of the *Bedu* masquerade than anything the author wrote before.

⁷ The letter codes for the different languages are: k = Kulango, n = Nafana, d = Dyula, z = Abon, and z = Zorogo/Zore. Terms in the vernacular are rendered in simplified phonetic script (see <http://www.langsci.ucl.ac.uk/ipa/ipachart.html>).



Photo 2. Sculptor Adjima Koffi working on a new *Bedu* mask for the village of *Lepongkato* 1995. Photo © K. Arnaut.

from nearby and far away (such as Arabic and Moore). Zorogo/Zore is spoken in endless local varieties and dialects, at different levels of competence throughout the *Bedu* region, and in very divergent ritual settings. The latter range from secluded Zorogo/Zore session among elder men and women that consist of story-telling and singing, to public *Bedu* masquerade performances in which Zorogo/Zore names and short statements are interjected in songs, in exclamations of joy or in half-hidden instructions to the masker. I will come back to the latter aspect at the end of this section. First, it is important to observe how Zorogo/Zore names add to the other, more commonplace names and together form a multifaceted nomenclature.

The song below illustrates the many names of *Bedu* well. It was sung in 1995 near the village of *Lepongokato** during a public ceremony preceding the cutting of a piece of wood out of a Kapok tree that was about to serve to make a *Bedu* mask (Photos 1 & 2).⁸

(1) *Bo Dje* Song

Lead singer (k): bo dʒi-e, o jorjana, bo dʒe (They will know, o Yangana, they will know)
 Chorus (k): bo dʒi-e (They will know)
 Lead singer (k): bo dʒi-e, o saname, bo dʒi-e (They will know, o Saname, they will know)
 Chorus (k): bo dʒi-e, a bo bo kuru ye, bo dʒi-e, o bo dʒi-e da (They will know, if they did not know, they will know, they will know today)
 Lead singer: saname

(In the stanzas that follow, saname is successively replaced by: *dabila*, *sonilw*, *bifio me*, and *femina*)

In the song above, there is a sharp sense of irony in the contradiction between knowing and naming. While it is announced that the people/audience will know '*Bedu*' today, the song 'forgets' to mention the latter's proper name, but launches instead a puzzling series of soubriquets including a string of Zorogo/Zore names such as 'saname' (elder) or 'bifio me' (child), male proper names like '*dabila*', and archaic names like '*femina*'. One could ask which of the many *Bedus* the public will know in the end. Or is it just the different persona of *Bedu* that are being invoked here? I think we do not need to choose. This list of names simultaneously enumerates and amasses the different personae of *Bedu* and acknowledges that in the course of a masquerade different people, dancers, singers, and other ritual constituencies may address *Bedu* in different ways, styles and with divergent messages and expectations. Such openness and ritual adaptability

of *Bedu* seems among other things to be related to its geographical mobility and dispersal.

The sometimes bewildering diversity of *Bedu* mask names and masquerade practices matches the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the region in which they occur (see Map 1). *Bedu* masks have been observed or reported in the north-east region of Côte d'Ivoire bordering the Banda region of Ghana, between the town of *Dapaville* in the south and the villages within a range of about 70 km to the northwest (Pétéye) and to the northeast (Kamala). In this relatively small and thinly populated area of ca. 2,500 km² at least six major ethnic factions share the city of *Dapaville* and the dozens of villages and village quarters: Kulango, Nafana, Abron, Degha, Dyula, and Lobi. While French, Kulango, Abron (Twi) and Dyula (Bambara) are regional and (trans)national lingua francas, Nafana and Degha are small languages that are spoken in the '*Bedu* region'. This linguistic mixture is equally well-represented in the *Bedu* masquerades. Apart from Lobi and Abron, the songs that form part of the *Bedu* performance can be in any of the four other languages, although they are predominantly in Kulango. Moreover, as said, there is also a 'secret' or special language being used in some of the songs as well as in the direct communication with the masker.

The following song simultaneously illustrates the regional mobility of the *Bedu* masquerade and indicates that like in everyday communication throughout the region, Kulango is also the preferential idiom in *Bedu* ceremonial contexts; if Kulango is not *Bedu*'s vernacular then at least it is its vehicular language.

(2) *Sekere* Song

Lead singer (z): a e lulume, lulume ja (a e Lulume, Lulume ya)
 Chorus (k): bi ya la wele'ri (We went playing in it)
 Lead singer (k): sekere bi ja jereki (The day we went to *Daribin*)
 Chorus (k): bi ya la wele'ri (We went playing in it)
 Lead singer (k): narɲɲɔ bɪ mōm sukpo (We have chewn meat like toothpicks)
 Lead singer (k): dix'e're bi su mōm pɛrɛkɔ (We have walked on the food as if in the mud)...
 Chorus (k): ja e, mɪsa welego, mɪsa welego

The above song was performed in the village of *Bourinjungo* in August 1993 during the painting of the *Bedu* mask by a group of elder women (Photo 3).⁹ Although the majority language of *Bourinjungo* is Nafana, this song (like the previous one) is mainly in Kulango but contains some snippets of Zorogo/Zore,

* Village and town names in italics are pseudonyms. It was agreed with the *Bedu* custodians that I would not reveal the names of the villages or town where *Bedu* masks were present or active during the time of my field research.

⁸ The ceremony took place on 1/2/1995 and most of it was performed in the vicinity of a Kapok tree growing in marshlands near the Manti river bypassing *Lepongokato*. The lead singer was Adja Kra who is also the female chief ('queen') of the village of *Lepongokato*.

⁹ The painting performance took place in the bush adjacent to the Taping village quarter of *Bourinjungo* on 20/08/1993. The songs were sung by Abena Kabusé, Kowsia Bié, Akua Kra, Abena Kuman, Jamo Pédicé, Afua Kupo, and Kofia Dongo. They were accompanied by the two male custodians of the *Bedu* mask of Taping: Donko Bouri and Pégine Sagabile.



Photo 3. Women painting a newly sculpted mask at *Bourinjungo* (1993). Photo © K. Arnaut.



Map 1. *Bedu* masks have been observed or reported in the north-east region of Côte d'Ivoire. Map © K. Arnaut.

Photo 4.
A classic pair of newly sculpted *Bedu* masks
waiting to be painted (*Lepongokato* 1995).
Photo © K. Arnaut.





Photo 5. A pair of *Bedu* masks from the Trasko village quarter of *Bourinjungo* staged during a political rally for the 1995 presidential elections. Photo © K. Arnaut.

for instance the *Bedu* name *lulume* and the phrase 'misa welego'. The latter expression is sometimes also rendered as 'mina so wirigo' (Kamala, 10/2/1994) and may be a transformation of the Kulango expression 'mi ya weler's' ('I make fun of you').¹⁰ The more tragic versions of this song tell the story of a child that lost both its parents. Here it is incorporated in the joyous and very popular *Sekere* Song above which recounts a festive excursion to a nearby village, in this case the important, predominantly Kulango-speaking village of *Yérékaye* (at about 20 km distance from *Bourinjungo*).

According to several people the *Sekere* Song refers to the now-abandoned practice of village fraternization over a *Bedu* masquerade: a delegation of one village would visit the other taking with it its *Bedu* mask(s) and would be received well, with abundant food, drinks, etc. Whether this was an important factor in the spread of the *Bedu* mask is now difficult to say, but this story somehow indicates *Bedu*'s popular appeal across ethnic or linguistic boundaries.

Finally, the multilinguality which suffuses the *Bedu* masquerades of the Bondoukou region corresponds to the morphological diversity of the masks themselves. It is fair to say that this aspect of the richness and

dynamics of *Bedu* cultures has also been largely neglected. More or less in the same way that – in the aftermath of Bravmann (1974) and Williams (1968) – the wealth of names of *Bedu* was largely reduced to one and the idiomatic diversity of its ritual and social *umwelt* was underestimated in favour of Nafana, a similar reduction took place with regard to morphology. By and large, the *Bedu* literature and its public of experts and collectors now agree that there are only two types of *Bedu*, a male and a female.¹¹ The least one can say is that this categorisation is too restrictive: not all masks are necessarily gendered, and, even if they are, that does not determine their general morphology.

The morphological diversity and artistic creativity in the genre of *Bedu* sculpting and painting is considerable. In a classic *Bedu* couple (see Photo 4) the shorter type with horns is the male and the other with a disc-like superstructure the female. The reason they are unpainted is that the masks were photographed just when they were brought into the village of *Lepongokato* from the bush where they had been sculpted (Photo 2). Following the wood-cut ceremony during which the *Bo Dje* song (see above) was performed, the two masks were sculpted by Adjima Koffi who modelled them after the two *Bedu* masks of the neighbouring village of

¹⁰ References to field recordings and interviews are put between brackets in the following format: ([if applicable] name(s) of interviewee(s), place of recording/interview, date of recording/interview [dd/mm/yyyy]).

¹¹ Apart from Nafana, Williams (1968: 21) hints at the existence of the Zorogo special language when she reports that the *Bedu* mask also used 'a language which no one understands'.



Photo 6. *Jadjé*, the small 'male' *Bedu* mask of the village of *Daribin* (1993). Photo © K. Arnaut.

Bourinjungo (Photo 5).¹² The modelling bears out the strong historical and ethnic (Nafana) ties that connect *Lepongokato* and *Bourinjungo*, and therefore strongly resembles the style of male and female *Bedu* masks which Williams (1968) identified as that of '*Bourinjungo*'. But *Bedu* masks, even if they fall largely within the male-female scheme, need not follow the general morphological matrices. The 'male' mask of the village of *Daribin*, for example, does not carry horns (Photo 6), while the 'female' mask of the town of *Dapaville* lacks the disc-like superstructure (Photo 7). Another variation consists in combining horns and discs such as in the case of certain *Bedu* masks from the Degha village of *Zitokro* (Photo 8). In the latter case, the morphological originality matches that of the decoration. The *Zitokro* masks modify and multiply the standard triangular and semicircular patterns of the *Dapaville* and *Daribin* masks. Although the painters in all three villages stick to the three standard colours of black, white and red/ochre, in the case of the 'male' *Bedu* of *Bourinjungo* (of the Trasko village quarter), one has taken the liberty of adding light blue and yellow (Photo 5).

Having observed that the 'multiplicity' of the *Bedu* masquerade is deeply inscribed in its nomenclatura, its physiognomy, and its idiomatic context, the question remains whether this is also the case in its performances. In the remainder of this article, I will try to demonstrate that this is the case. Hence, the ultimate question towards which this article is working is: to what extent does this multiplicity-in-performance tally with the *Bedu* masquerade as a communal performance? Put otherwise, for analytical guidance: what kind of 'community' can such a *Bedu* masquerade build or at least help to manufacture? This paper does not aspire to answer these questions in any definite way, but merely explores ways towards such an answer, by beginning to take apart the dense performative structure in terms of publics and their ritual trajectories. In order to launch this enquiry, it is important to realise how *Bedu* moves around and how this performative mobility is perceived.

¹² One of them, the 'female' one of the Tapang village quarter was painted during the ceremony when song two above was performed.



Photo 7.
The 'female' mask of *Dapaville* (1992)
with its atypical superstructure.
Photo © E. Keustermans (with courtesy).

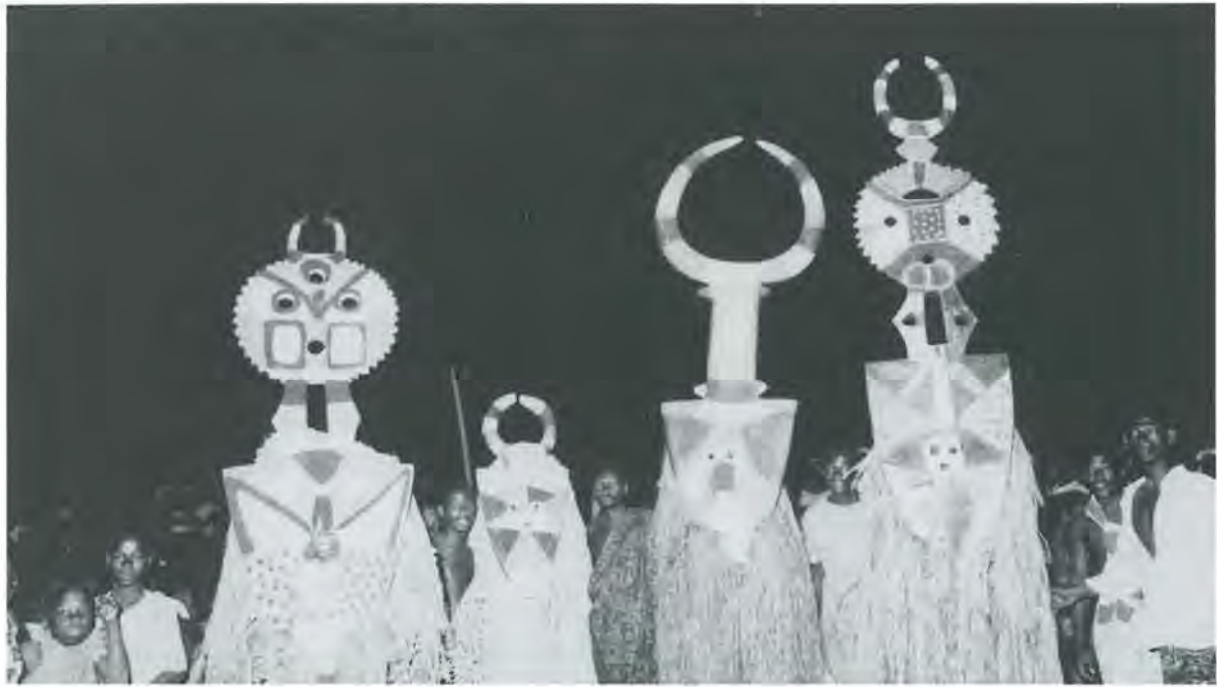


Photo 8. Four very different *Bedu* masks from the village of *Zitokro* (1994). Photo © K. Arnaut.

Regional connections and variations

Williams and Bravmann, the two classic authors on *Bedu* mentioned above, rightly stress the inclusive, communal character of the *Bedu* masquerade as one of its most outstanding features. In keeping with his research programme (presented above), for Bravmann the communal character of *Bedu* is exemplarily brought out by the fact that it transcends religious barriers. 'Muslim involvement in the *Bedu* masquerade is easily understood'; Bravmann (1974: 117–118) argues. 'Those interviewed claim that its public nature, its lack of esoteric ritual, and its concerns for the health and prosperity of all mean that the tradition should be neither decried nor ignored' and wins them over to participate in the masquerade alongside their pagan and Christian neighbours.¹³ After all, Williams (1968: 20) explains: 'the *Bedu* rites are a communal purification phenomenon. No one remains uninvolved! However, as I tried to argue elsewhere (Arnaut 2004a), this communal character does not warrant any form of homogenization or simple-minded holism. Together with Goldstein (2004: 18) I would argue that what characterizes public performances is 'their availability to differentially empowered groups, operating with vastly different agendas, to produce alternative

visions of the social world! This programmatic point can be further spelled out in terms laid down by the post-Durkheimian debate on ritual and society – although, as I will briefly indicate at the end, it articulates well with new insights into ritual or religious reflexivity (Højbjerg 2002; Højbjerg 2007: 306–309; Houseman 2002).

In a seminal paper, Baumann (1992) – later followed by others (Gellner 1999; Mitchell 2004; Platvoet 1995) – demonstrated that any analysis of public rituals profits a great deal from distinguishing different ritual constituencies (Baumann 1992) or participant (production/reception) roles (Levinson 1988). This seems to be all the more pertinent in the case of masquerades which revolve heavily around the transformation of identities and the play of division and unification of the audience (Werbner 1984; Argenti 1997; Shulman 2006; Højbjerg 2007). Moreover, these performative identities are not 'prediscursive', nor even sociologically 'given', but are creatively realised in the course of any performance (Bauman & Briggs 1990; Erlmann 1996; Bauman 2011). In order to grasp more fully this process of realisation, it does not suffice to look into the discursive – say, oral/textual – achievements alone; one also needs to take into account other aspects of the materiality of masquerades

¹³ In one village (Sorobango), Bravmann did not only find Muslims actively participating in the nightly masquerade dances, but also met an elder Muslim artist who happened to be one of the main sculptors of *Bedu* masks in the region.

and public rituals: their spatial formulation (Parkin 1992) and motricity (Warnier 2001), the materiality of their signification processes (Keane 2003) as well as their composite and polytropic nature (Chau 2011; Latour 2010). Taken together this may offer us some insight into the power-laden praxeology of circulating bodies and objects which must be situated, according to Rowlands (2004) and Warnier (2001), within ever emergent governmentalities 'from below' (Li 2007; Appadurai 2002), both regional and local.

In the remainder of this section, we will look into the regional dimension of *Bedu* performances, more particularly how the parallel or otherwise overlapping ritual calendars which determine the *Bedu* performances bring out a complex structure of interrelationships between the seemingly sovereign villages. Therefore, I think it makes sense to speak of a '*Bedu* region', not only to refer to the sum of the different localities where *Bedu* is performed, but also to the fact that *Bedu* masquerade performances are part and parcel of ritual calendars which structure intraregional exchanges and enable translocal interdependencies and convergences. As these interrelationships follow the lines of so-called traditional authority structures, *Bedu* can be considered as reactivating or at least exhibiting the latter. In the following section our analysis will scale down to the local level, looking into the kind of differentiation and power structures that are present or represented in the *Bedu* performance. The main case is that of the village of *Daribin*, and to a lesser extent that of the provincial town of *Dapaville*. The general focus is the same when looking into the local and regional dimensions of *Bedu* masquerading: the differential inclusion of people and groups of people, the different 'publics' that are (re)constituted in the *Bedu* performances and the festivals of which they form part.

The '*Bedu* region' is located in the north-eastern part of the Bondoukou region (French: *préfecture*) and comprises two districts (French: *sous-préfectures*): Bondoukou and Sorobango.¹⁴ The Bondoukou and Sorobango districts include a number of traditional authority structures which crosscut the administrative and modern state borders that separate them. By and large one can distinguish between two types of structures: (a) the small chiefdoms consisting of villages that are ethnically very diverse but are ruled by a chief who identifies himself as Nafana, and (b) autonomously operating villages which identify as Kulango. Both the Nafana and the Kulango,

which form the large majority of the population of the Bondoukou region, arrived there in the course of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th century: the Nafana from the Banda area and beyond (in present-day Ghana) and the Kulango from the Bouna region about 200 km to the north of Bondoukou. In the Bondoukou area they found small groups of Mande (Hwela, Ligbi) as well as various autochthonous groups whose descendants are now called Gben/Gbin and Goro (Terry 1995: 301-318). Soon after their arrival, Mande Dyula groups from the merchant town of Beghu and Abron groups from the Akan heartland – thus both from present-day Ghana – entered the Bondoukou region. The Dyula settled almost exclusively in Bondoukou city, turning it into an important trade centre, while the Abron mainly settled in villages to the south of the city and founded the Gyaman kingdom in which the Abron imposed themselves as overlords over the Nafana and Kulango authorities in the entire Bondoukou region (Terry 1995: 331-340).

In all, the *Bedu* region counts three Nafana chiefdoms each of which consists of not more than a handful of villages and whose chiefs (*k:ɪsɛ,n.nana*) reside in Bondoukou, Kanguélé, and Tambi. There is a general consensus about the fact that the Nafana of Bondoukou and Kanguélé belong to the same lineage and that the chief of Bondoukou is senior to the one of Kanguélé (Kofi Amoha and Oba Joseph, Bondoukou, 15/12/1992). Although the Nafana of Tambi claim that those of Bondoukou are their descendants, the latter oppose such a claim. In the stand-off situation between both chiefdoms, the Tambi Nafana stress their ancestral kinship ties with the Banda area of present-day Ghana (Sanguine Moni, Tambi, 12/05/94).

Without going as far as to say – following Geertz's idea of a 'theatre state' (Geertz 1980)¹⁵ – that the Nafana chiefdoms are somehow mini *Bedu* states, it is important to note that the relationships of relative autonomy and hierarchy described above are reactivated in the *Bedu* masquerade performances, more particularly in the structure of the ritual agenda in which they feature. Generally speaking, the Nafana villages perform the *Bedu* masquerade in the first half of the dry season which in the Bondoukou region stretches from October/November to March/April. To determine the date of the dances, they make use of a hybrid ritual calendar which combines elements of the Gregorian calendar and the regional moon calendar which is based on 6-day weeks.¹⁶ The *Bedu* dancing takes place in the first

¹⁴ To be complete, the district of Sapli should be added to the list of two. In the latter, I did a systematic screening of *Bedu* activity, while in Sapli I conducted a random sample survey which established the feeble occurrence of the *Bedu* masquerade. Outside the three districts only the village of Sapia is in the district of Gouméré, about 25 km to the west of Bondoukou. Sapia is a special case because its entire Kulango population was forced to move south from their original location between Sorobango, Boroponko and Siawodi, in the heart of the '*Bedu* region' sometime in the 18th century after a conflict with the Abron overlords (Ouattara Moro *et al.*, Sapia, 22/02/1994).

¹⁵ Geertz developed this concept in a book on precolonial Balinese state describing it as a form of display; a spectacle that illustrated Balinese ruling systems in dramatic forms and rituals.

¹⁶ The six days of the Bondoukou regional (Kulango) calendar are: Ginisango, Giningo, Zobo, Tainbigo, Sopésango, Sopè.



Photo 9. *Bedu* parade during the yearly bush fire ceremonies (*Dafiago*) at *Aliango* (1993). Photo © K. Arnaut.

half of the last full moon cycle of the Gregorian year. This month is sometimes referred to as the month of *zorogo* whereby *Zorogo* can refer to the special language (see above) as well as to one type of particularly scabrous *Bedu* dancing, and above all, singing, which are performed during the opening phase of the *Bedu* month and in some places during the whole period. Whatever the case may be, in the Bondoukou-Kanguélé zone, the last day of the *Bedu/Zorogo* moon cycle must fall on or before the 31st December. In practice this means that *Bedu* dancing takes place in the second half of November or the first half of December. Although the dancing may occasionally spill over into the second half of the 'month' it ends invariably on the last *Sopè* day of that month when the concluding feast called *Dafiago* (k. *dogo fiago*, litt. 'burning the fire') is held.

Dafiago is a very important seasonal *rite de passage* which marks the first (controlled) bush-fire of the dry season after which individuals are free to make bush fires (Kofi Amoha & Oba Joseph, Bondoukou, 15/12/1992).¹⁷ It is celebrated in all of the three Nafana chiefdoms. For the chiefdoms of Bondoukou and Kanguélé, it is the Nafana chief of Bondoukou who determines the date

(who officialises the calculations), while the chief of *Tambi* takes this decision independently. Within each chiefdom the villages can have their own *Dafiago* only after this has been launched in the chiefdom's 'capital'. Apart from a series of sacrifices performed by the regional or local chiefs, the main public event of *Dafiago* consists of igniting bush fires around the village and launching a communal drive hunt. In some places the *Bedu* mask may either witness ('inspect') the ignition of the bush fires or even perform in the communal feast that ensues (after the hunt). This is the case for instance in the village of *Aliango* (Photo 9). There, the high profile and often solemn *Bedu* performances of *Dafiago* are distinguished from the more impish, often scabrous '*Zorogo*' dances mentioned earlier. More importantly for our argument here is that *Aliango* is a large village and, since a couple of years now, also a district centre. However, it forms part of the Kanguélé chiefdom and must schedule one of its most important annual festivals in accordance with the ritual calendar of Kanguélé/Bondoukou.

Outside the zone covered by the Nafana chiefdoms, the *Dafiago* scheme is optional rather than obligatory. The

¹⁷ *Dafiago* is mostly referred to as *Niansoro* in Nafana.

Kulango villages can either opt to follow the 'Dafiago' scheme whereby *Bedu* masks dance at the beginning of the dry season or rather have it at the very end of the dry season in order to announce the beginning of the wet season in March/April. The latter is the case, for instance, in Sianwodi (Kouadjo Kouman, Sianwodi, 20/01/1994) and in *Daribin* where, as we will soon see, *Bedu* performances are embedded in a communal end-of-the-year festival which commemorates the foundation of the village and important ancestral figures (Abu Draman, *Daribin*, 26/03/1995). In villages such as Kamala there is also such a commemorative feast (i.e. the feast of Lagoua) at the end of the dry season, but *Bedu* masquerading is reserved for the beginning of it (Kofi Mouroufié, Kamala, 11/02/1994). In any case, both the communal feasts and the *Bedu* performances have extra-local importance in that they attract participants from other villages in the region as well as offering the occasion for people who have migrated to other places in Côte d'Ivoire (generally in the south) or in neighbouring Ghana, to spend some time in their native village.

The general picture that arises from this brief survey of ritual calendars, *Bedu* performances, and traditional authority structures in the north-eastern Bondoukou region, is that *Bedu* has its place in a system of governance. Even if the latter nowadays does not represent much in terms of real power distribution, the above description clearly brings out Bravmann's point that *Bedu* is a festive locus of cross-ethnic and cross-religious interaction and collaboration, say, of region building, even if it implies that villages or chiefdoms affirm their sovereignty and distinction. The remaining question is: is this also the case on the level of village communities? The tentative answer is as affirmative as it is ambivalent: it is crucial to look at what *Bedu* brings together or reintegrates – the local community – as well as to observe what kind of divisions, incompatibilities and hierarchies among its local 'publics' the *Bedu* performance produces in the process. In the following section, this process of fission and fusion will be illustrated in the village of *Daribin* where the *Bedu* masquerade is part of the annual commemorative new year festival 'Feast of Fanlo'. In this three-day feast one central dichotomy seems to structure the *Bedu* performance: like in most rural *Bedu* performances, the male-female divide is radically amplified. However, this requires further unpicking in terms of publics and their ritual trajectories. As such, we can get a glimpse of the finer divisions/partitions of the *Bedu*-performing community, and the differential inclusion which constitutes the performance-based governmentality in the sense of self-governance and self-surveying (Warnier 2001: 10–11; Appadurai 2002: 35).

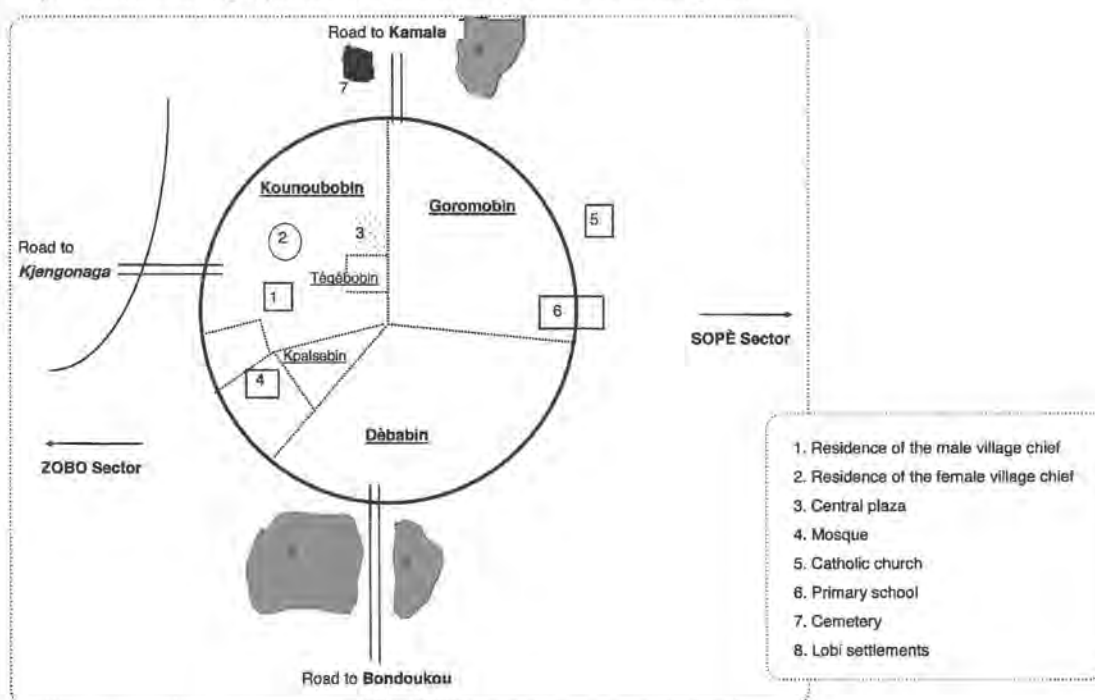
Bedu's publics at Daribin from dichotomy to multiplicity

As stated, the *Bedu* masquerade in *Daribin* is part of the Feast of Fanlo, a complex communal ritual involving dozens of individuals, larger and smaller groups who intervene in the different episodes of this month-long public ritual of which 3 days (Zobo, Tainbigo, Sopésango) are particularly intensive. From the earliest dramatic public moments on the first day of this 3-day period until the whirling finale at the end, the male-female opposition stands out as central to the entire festival. However, this gendered ritual artery is provisioned by a capillary system of ritual acts and side-acts which activate other societal divisions, along lines of kinship, generation, and historical alliances. Thus, in the course of the feast, the finer web of Fanlo's festive community is rendered public, visible and held up for scrutiny by a community that seems to be assessing both its (ritual) know-how and its wealth-in-people.

Daribin, together with Kamala, Yézimala and Laoudiba, is one of the bigger Kulango villages of the northern Bondoukou region, counting about 800 inhabitants including several small communities of Lobi migrants who live outside the village (see Map 1). Like their Lobi guests, the Kulango villagers live off subsistence farming, cultivating mainly the staple food yams and manioc, raising cattle, and increasingly also growing cash-crops such as cashew nuts.

In the terminology of Horton (1971), *Daribin* can be labelled a large, compact village, in this case made up of several groups of different provenance, assembled under the guidance of a central political authority represented by a male and a female village chief (resp. *k.ongo ise, isejere*). For Horton, a crucial element of the large, compact village is that it is horizontally integrated by cross-cutting organisations such as cults or associations. The annual Fanlo festival and the *Bedu* performance can be considered as such a cross-cutting institution. Given the fact that, as we saw above, *Bedu* performances travelled and *Bedu* expertise (sculpting, special language command) was exchanged, in the past, the *Bedu* cult could even have been an element of regional integration and political complexity (see McIntosh 1999) more or less in the way we saw in the case of the Nafana chiefdoms above. Nowadays, beyond the local level, the Kulango villages of the northern Bondoukou region also operate largely autonomously in ritual matters and although one may discern certain differences in status between different villages, there is none in the sense of political control or subordination. Over the centuries, this regional complex of more or less egalitarian villages has been altered through incorporation in more hierarchical political systems such as the Gyaman (Abron/Akan) kingdom (18–19th c.), the French colonial system (1893–1960), and the independent Ivoirian state, but as far as ceremonial life and local politics are concerned the village remains a relevant level of organisation, identification, and exchange.

Map 2. *Daribin* - village quarters, main buildings and surrounding sites



Map 2. The village of *Daribin* and its nearby offshoot of *Kjongonaga* accommodate three important matrilineal kingroups. Map © K. Arnaut.

The village of *Daribin* and its nearby offshoot of *Kjongonaga* accommodate three important matrilineal kingroups (*k. logo*) located in three corresponding residential units (*k. bin*): Kounoubobin, Dèbabbin, and Goromobin (see Map 2). All three groups now consider themselves to be proper Kulango – descendants of the ones who migrated south in the 17th century – although the Goromo seem to claim a more autochthonous status. In the same way that one finds Goromo and Gbin in several villages of the Bondoukou region, one can find fractions of the Dèba lineage in village quarters throughout the region. This is not the case of the Kounoubo who distinguish themselves as descendants of the erstwhile village chief Fanlo, or rather his categorical sister Sanro. The dramatic story which the Feast of Fanlo commemorates is that the village was mistakenly holding the funeral rites for both when they failed to return to the village after having left to wage war. When Fanlo and Sanro, on their approach to the village, found out that their funeral was being prepared they felt betrayed and sank into the ground in a place about 3 km to the east of the village, a place now called Fanlo's Forest (*k. fanlo trugo*) (see Map 3, no. 1). This and other stories very much portray the Kounoubo as a village-based kingroup from which both the male and female village chief are chosen.

The two other matrilineages correspondingly position themselves by claiming others special powers or capacities,

Not unlike the Goro in other villages, Goromobin claims the ownership of 'the earth' (*k. saako*), executed by the 'custodian of the earth' (*k. saakotese*) who is chosen from among the Goromo fraction called Tègèbobin. The fact that the political power over the village and the moral power over the earth on which the village was founded are separate domains is strengthened by the fact that the Goromo and the Kounoubo do not intermarry. Their partnership is said to be based on mutual respect and longstanding intimate collaboration, as is recounted in a touching story about the deep friendship between chief Fanlo (Kounoubo) and a Goromo elder named Andi who, when hearing that Fanlo had vanished into the earth, decided to do the same. In contrast, the third important matrilineage, Dèba, intermarries with both other groups, although there are small fractions which are excluded from this. In the same register of folklore about the creation and the early history of the village in which Fanlo, Sanro, and Andi feature, the Dèba typify themselves along economic rather than political or moral lines. An often heard story goes that the Dèba had been involved in gold mining before they joined *Daribin* from the east (present-day Ghana) and continued to do so in a site called Gbataago at about 5 km east of the village (see Map 3, no. 2). Overall, Gbataago and Fanlo Trugo respectively form the eastern and western extremes of the ritual terrain within which the village of *Daribin* recounts that its origin and basic constitution



Photo 10. Women and men engaging in ritual insult during Zorogo performances at *Daribin* (1994). Photo © K. Arnaut.

rely on a power-sharing deal between the *Dèba* and the *Kounoubo*. But much more than that, during the Feast of *Fanlo*, the finer details of the mythical charter of the village and its constituent larger and smaller kingroups are also played out, rehearsed, and adapted to the present predicament.

Fanlo's Feast is held near the end of the dry season (March–April) and lasts about one month. Three weeks after the initial announcement come three days of intensive ritual activity. This peak phase begins by sending a delegation of male and female children to fetch the red and white pigments which are used to paint a series of monuments and objects (among which the *Bedu* masks) that form the ritual infrastructure of the entire feast. The three-day period ends in a communal *Bedu* masquerade which begins with a session of *Zorogo* scabrous dancing and singing in which the male and female groups insult each other and ends in a more solemn tone when the healing and consoling force of *Bedu* is acclaimed. Similar nightly *Bedu* dances are held in the concluding 6 days of the feast of *Fanlo*.

Because of space limitations I can merely indicate the overall dynamics of the gender play in *Zorogo* and *Bedu* dances. *Zorogo* dances and songs generally thematise

sex in all of its aspects. In it a female group of singers confronts a male group and most commonly one group names and maligns the sexual organs or acts of the other. Such is the case in the following song recorded in *Daribin* in the evening of the last day of the intensive 3-day phase (5/3/1994).

(3) *Gbajo* Song (k)

Female singers: *gbajø ku kørise bø bī* (The penis has killed the child that goes for a walk)

Male singers: *ʃirakø wile, hø bī* (The dripping vagina, its child [=clitoris])

Female singers: *aile o gu lei, gbaj leleŋoro* (Ailé where do you come from, half-erect penis)
aile ø gu lei, gbaj wārāmāgø (... bent penis)
aile ø gu lei, gbaj kpokpologo (... long penis)
aile ø gu lei, gbaj mumuŋo (... enormous penis)

Male singers: *ā ē ʃirakø g'eg'leŋoro* (Ae swollen vagina)

Although the lyrics in themselves are clear enough, the entire scabrous sphere is further propped up by the boisterous style of singing, by explicit gestures, and the use of stage props such as a pestle and a mortar, representing the penis and the vagina. During the *Zorogo* performances in *Daribin*, the only *Bedu* mask present is the short one



Photo 11.
The tall *Bedu* mask (*Bedu Sosoonro*) enacts the types of movements which the instructor conveys in the special language *Zorogo*. *Daribin*, 1994.
Photo © K. Arnaut.

(*adjé*) who does not so much dance as run around nervously, observing the dancing and singing people, and occasionally intervening if the confrontations become too violent (Photo 10). When, later in the evening, the tall *Bedu* mask (*Sosoonro*) makes its appearance, the tone of the performance changes altogether, and becomes more solemn, even gloomy at times (Photo 11). This is the case in the following song where the same theme of a dead child gives way to sad musings, sung together by male and female participants. Such is the conciliatory tone of the 'serious' (some say, 'the real') *Bedu* songs that take place in the vicinity of the tall *Bedu* mask. As said, neither in this case does the mask 'dance', but rather it walks around the dancing space in a stately and graceful manner.

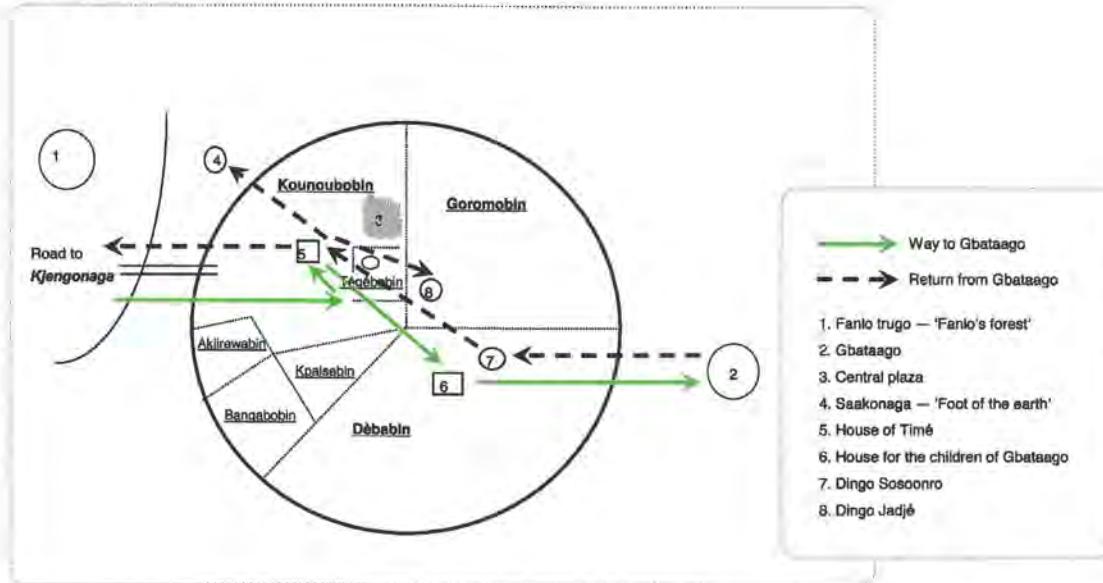
(4) *Mi bi Song* (k)

Chorus: mi bī ō, jā ē ja (My child, ya e ya)

Lead singer: mi bī mī baj lā wī (My child that I don't see, and I cry)
miā jīī, mī zē wīŋo (If I see it, I will stop crying)
mi ka lā wī (Because of it I cry)
bia le wā ji, bō ji le baj bi, dēle (We came together. If it comes and it does not see us, it is a dishonour)

Overall, the play of gender group opposition and complementarity is an important one, but is, on closer

Map 3. Way of the Paint



Map 3. The Way of the Paint. Map © K. Arnaut.

inspection, constantly crosscut by other divisions along kinship and generational lines. It is beyond the purpose of this paper to describe all aspects of this immensely complex process of fission and fusion of ritual publics or constituencies that takes place during the Feast of Fanlo. This double process can only be grasped by looking beyond the communal dance moments described above and by following two trajectories of people and objects that traverse the entire Feast of Fanlo: the trajectory of the paint (Map 3) and the trajectory of Fanlo (see Map 4). Hereunder I present them in narrative form in italicised paragraphs which are based on observations of Fanlo's Feast in 1994 (3-5 March) and 1995 (28-30 March).

The Way of the Paint (Map 3)

The Way of the Paint starts on the evening of Zobo which heralds the intensive three-day phase of the Feast of Fanlo. Then a group of four children arrive from the neighbouring village of Kjongonaga and join the seven others from Daribin who, during the coming night, will fetch the red and white pigment from Gbataago [2].¹⁸ On arrival in Daribin the children are first welcomed at Tégebobin by the custodian of the earth and the female village chief who at that moment have just finished blessing the ritual brewing of the sorghum beer which will be used later as an exclusive sacrifice for Fanlo and Sanro. Afterwards, the eleven children are put under the care of the custodian of the Bedu masks (*k. bedutese*) who takes them to Dèbabin [6], the village quarter

which administers the Bedu masks as well as the site of Gbataago [2]. Early next morning, the children return from Gbataago, their bodies painted with the pigment they are carrying in small pots on their heads: the girls are painted white, the boys red (Photo 12). They deposit their precious goods in two places, one situated in Dèbabin, the other in Kounoubobin. The former is a memorial monument in the form of a mound referred to as the 'bed' (*k. dijo*) of unnamed ancestors. The 'dingo' at Dèbabin is about one meter tall and named after the large Bedu mask, *sosörön* (the long one) [7] (Photo 13). The next day a group of elder women from Dèbabin will paint both the mound and the mask using the pigment brought by the children – adding black pigment which children are not allowed to touch. The second cargo of red and white pigment is then discharged in Kounoubobin, in front of the 'House of Timé' [5] (Photo 14). Koffi Timé is remembered as someone who refused to be buried properly in the communal burial ground and who is lying dead in his house which no one can enter with the exception of the female village chief. The house of Timé is a dispatching point on Kounoukou territory for paint that is taken back to Kjongonaga (for painting its 'dingos') and further used to paint two more ritual monuments outside Kounoubobin. The first is another somewhat smaller 'dingo' put up in Goromobin and named after the short Bedu mask, *jadje* [8] (Photo 15). This shorter 'dingo' will later be painted by women not from Goromobin but from the small village quarter of Kpalsebin. The latter is said to accommodate the descendants of Longolomor who is known as Fanlo's army leader, was sent forward by

¹⁸ The numbers refer to the ones on Map 3.



the Kounoubo to negotiate the foundation of the village Daribin with the Dèba. The second ritual monument on the further 'way of the paint' is called saako naga (foot of the earth) or saako walogo (big earth) (hereafter Saakonaga) [4] (Photo 16), an elaborate and decorated version of the Saako where the custodian of the earth performs his sacrifices. Saakonaga is a circular flat mound of about 10 m in diameter decorated with half-relief images of animals, mostly reptiles with the

exception of the leopard who is, however, not represented by its image but by its skin: splashes of white and red paint. Both the building and the painting of Saakonaga is done by girls and elder women from all village quarters except from Dèbabin, under the guidance of the female village chief. There ends the Way of the Paint, along which an important part of the ritual infrastructure of Fanlo's Feast is decorated and activated.



Photo 12. Children returning from a sacred place in the forest (Gbataago), their bodies painted with the pigment they are carrying in small pots on their heads: the girls are painted white, the boys red. Daribin, 1994. Photo © K. Arnaut.

The central element of analysis concerns the way in which the overall gender division remains very important in the allocation of ritual tasks (painting, sacrifices), but is crosscut by the 'ethnic' division between Dèba and the Kounoubo. This partition is sharp but also mediated and softened by other groups such as Goromobin and Kpalsebin. Where these kin and gender divisions blend together the outcome is most intricate. Without going into detail, the contacts between the Dèba and

the Kounoubo are limited and mediated by women, personified by the female village chief. Analogously, the paint of the Dèba (Gbataago) seems to have the potential of feminizing the Kounoubo monuments. Hence, the Saakonaga is sometimes called the 'women's saako', to distinguish it from the other 'dingo' which, as we will see, are left unpainted, and which more exclusively belong to the Kounoubo. This becomes all the more clear in the second trajectory.

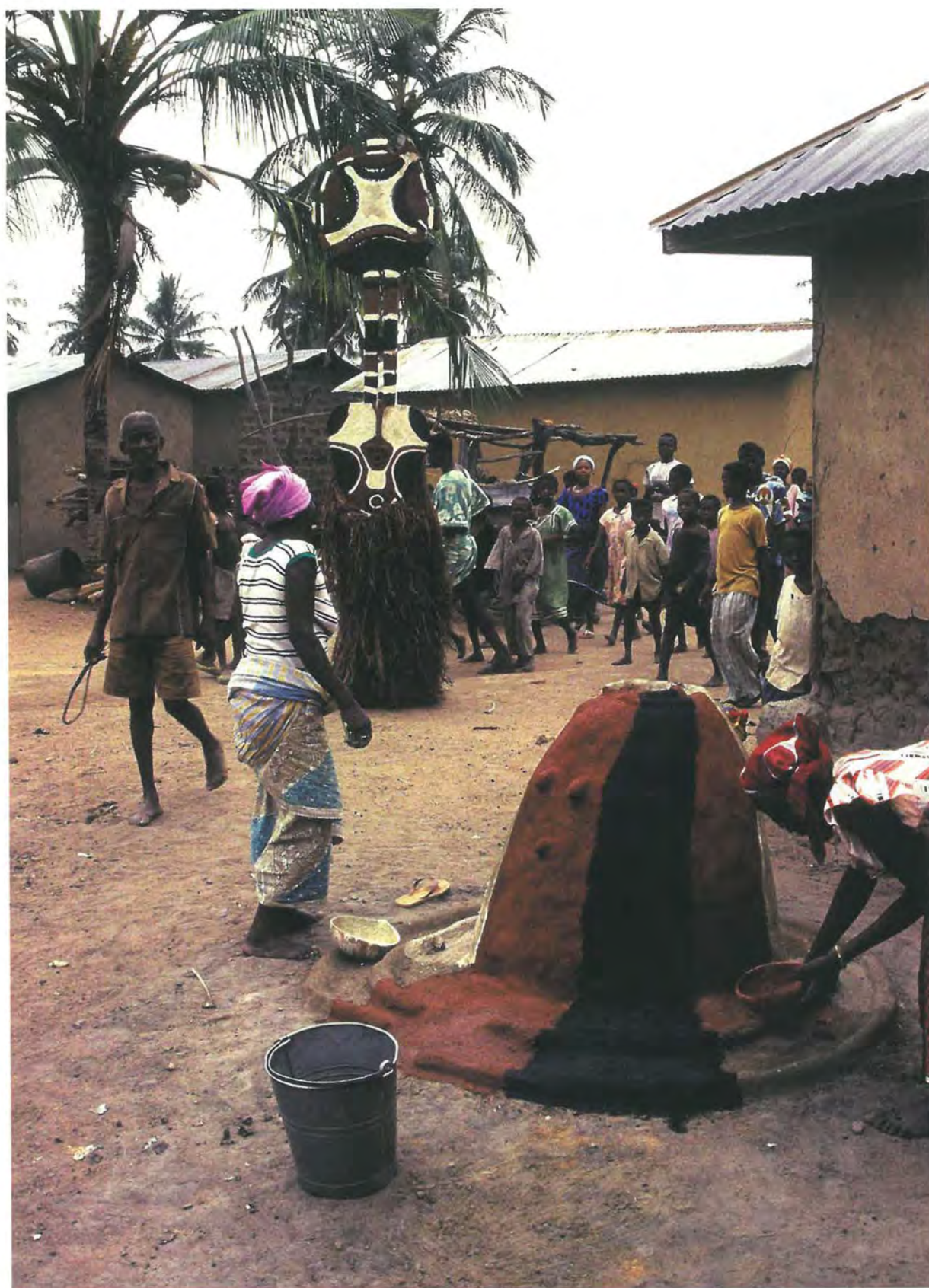


Photo 13. Preceded by the *Bedu* mask custodian of the village and followed by its supporters, the *Bedu Sosoonro* masker visits the mound (*dingo*) with which it is associated and whose name (*Sosoonro*) it carries. *Daribin*, 1995. Photo © K. Arnaut.



Photo 14. A cargo of red and white pigment from Gbataago is deposited in front of the House of Timé from where it is dispatched for painting ritual monuments. *Daribin*, 1994. Photo © K. Arnaut.

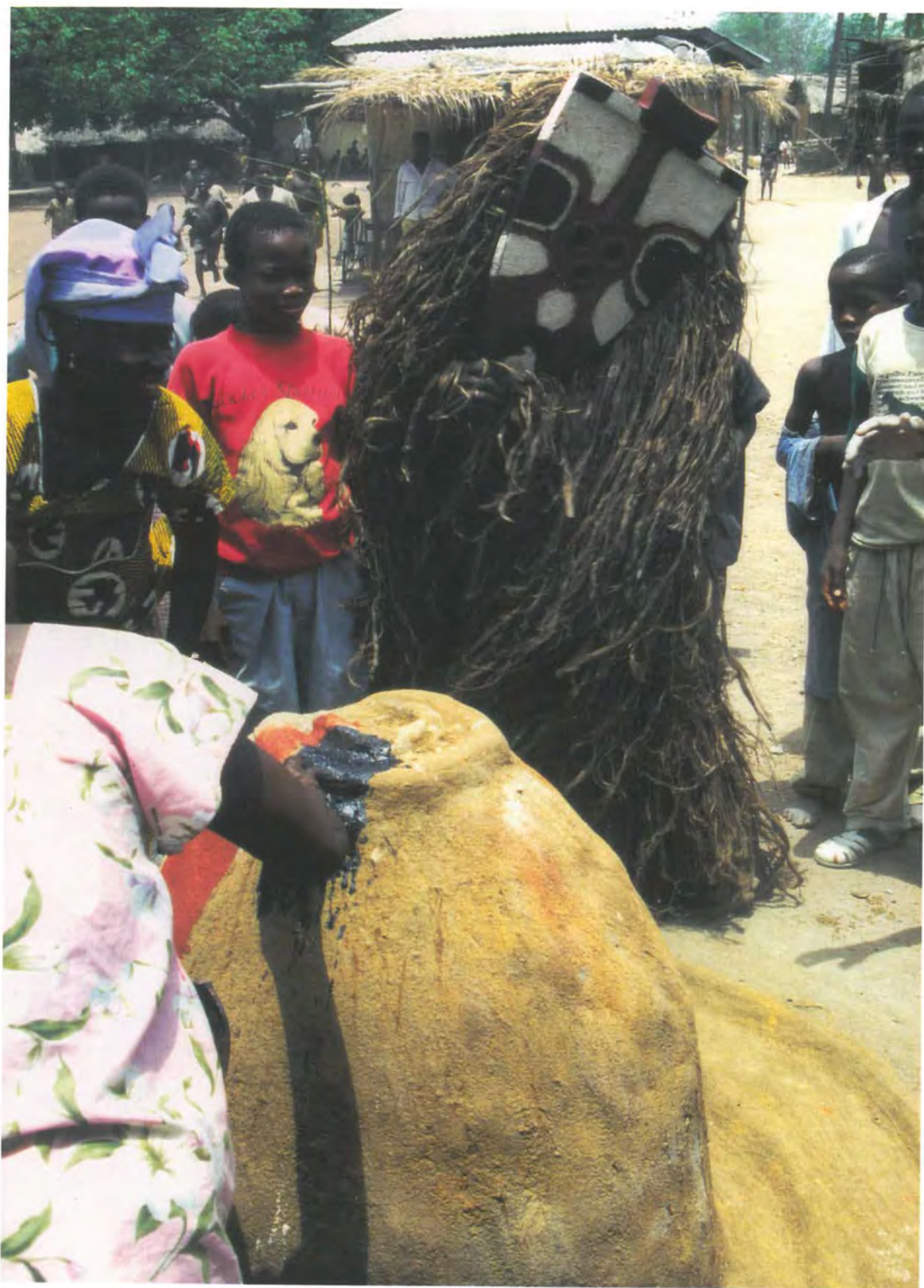
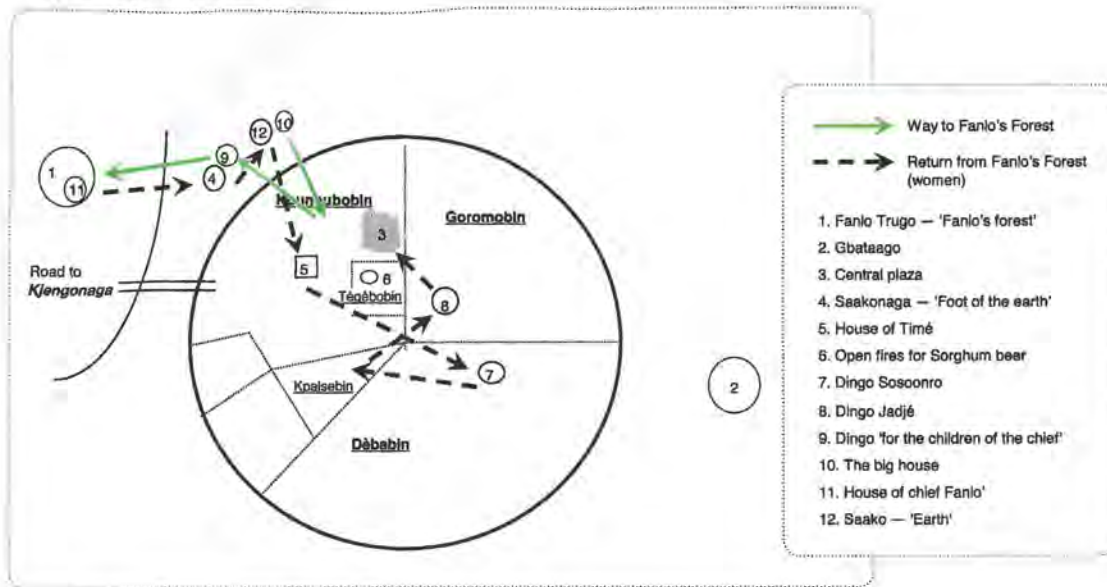


Photo 15. *Jadjé*, the short *Bedu* masker, visits the mound (*dingo*) with which it is associated and whose name (*Jadjé*) it carries. Daribin, 1995. Photo © K. Arnaut.



Photo 16. The 'foot of the earth' (Saakonaga) is moulded, painted and 'performed' exclusively by women and girls headed by the 'queen' of the village. *Daribin*, 1994. Photo © K. Arnaut.

Map 4. Way of the Fanlo



Map 4. The way of Fanlo. Map © K. Arnaut.

The Way of Fanlo (Map 4)

The 'Way of Fanlo' starts in the late morning of the last day of the intensive three-day phase and begins in the vicinity of the House of Timé [5] from where a handful of top ritual experts and authorities of the Kounoubo set out to perform a series of sacrifices for their ancestors who are buried under unpainted 'dingo', which are mostly called 'houses' (*k. jogo*) [9 & 10] (photo 17).¹⁹ These sacrifices prolong a series of sacrifices for the ancestors which have been taking place all over the village at the level of the compound and of the village quarters. Finally, these sacrifices precede the penultimate one made by the male and female village chief in the early afternoon at Fanlo's Forest [1], more precisely at the foot of an unpainted 'dingo' called 'the house of chief Fanlo' [11]. To this end, the Kounoubo chiefs walk to Fanlo's Forest accompanied by a large crowd of people from all over the village. When approaching its destination, the crowd splits up into a male and a female group. With the use of machetes the two groups clear the forest in a circle around Fanlo's Forest, each proceeding in another direction until they meet again at the other end. Once the male and female village chiefs have performed the sacrifice of cola and the sorghum beer (brewed two days before) to Fanlo and Sanro, the two groups return to

the village in two different ways. The boys and men set out on a communal drive hunt while the female group, including the female village chief, returns more or less straight back to the village. In this they are preceded by the unmarried/virgin girls who at Fanlo's Forest undress and start running back wearing only a loincloth attached to the abdomen by a string of beads – an outfit that is perceived as 'traditional' and associated with 'coming of age' rites (initiation and occasionally excision). Before reaching the village, the junior female group visits a number of ritual monuments – not the sinister, black 'dingo' of the royal Kounoubo which are beyond their reach – but Saakonaga [4], and its small unpainted version, Saako [12] which belongs to the custodian of Tégebobin. Once back in the village and when seeing the smoke in the far distance produced by the men's bush fire, the girls proceed into the village by visiting the House of Timé [5], the dingo Sosoonro [7], the people of Kpalsebin and, finally, the dingo which they painted: the dingo Jadjé of Goromobin [8]. After that women and girls join each other at the central plaza (*k. welebin*) [3] where they dance (Photo 18) and play games before the men come back from the forest in time for the evening meal and festivities. Soon after sunset a Zorogo and Bedu performance conclude the intensive three-day phase and announce six nights of dancing.

¹⁹ The numbers refer to the ones on Map 4.

More still than the trajectory of the paint, the trajectories leading to and from Fanlo's Forest thematise the large-scale gender opposition, to the extent of multiplying the trajectories of the gendered publics. Also, the kingroup divisions are accentuated, clearly showing differential access to the most sacred sites of the Kounoubo on a continuum from Saakonaga to 'the house of chief Fanlo'. Finally, in terms of generational differentiation, the three-day period ends as it began: by singling out children as ritual constituencies. In the same way that the 'children of Gbataago' fetch the vital ingredients for the visual revitalisation of the village mythical charter in the form of ritual monuments and objects, including the *Bedu* masks, the 'girls of Fanlo' revitalise the whole village in outfits and festive gestures that evoke imminent fertility and reproduction. In terms of general themes, this dovetails with the *Zorogo* and *Bedu* dances which, as we have seen above, strongly thematise the issue of children, either in an idiom of male-female sexual intercourse (*Zorogo*) or in the idiom of commemoration and loss (*Bedu*). In more than one sense, children represent a critical ritual constituency in Fanlo's Feast and the *Bedu* performances that are so central to it. Not only do children embody the (ability) of the village community to reproduce itself, by calling attention to intermarriage rules and prohibitions for instance, they also indicate the finer divisions – along lines of kinship and/or (economic, political, moral)

powers and capacities – that underlie the multifaceted and delicate construction that a village community is. Stated otherwise, in terms of the problematic of this section: children are as much a product of gender division and complementarity as of the myriad other partitions and transgressions that they embody and expose in the course of their village's annual feast.



Photo 17.

Several mounds (*dingo*), both unpainted and painted, constitute the material infrastructure of the Feast of Fanlo. Daribin, 1994. Photo © K. Arnaut.



Photo 18. Unmarried girls dance around one of the mounds (here *dingo Sosocro*) during the closing phases of the Feast of Fanlo. Daribin, 1995. Photo © K. Arnaut.

By way of conclusion

This article set out to explore the multiplicity hiding behind the monolithic face of a communal masquerade such as *Bedu*. Following the research programme of René Bravmann and an emerging materialist perspective on cultural expression, I argue that the *Bedu* performance brings together what it separates, or the other way around, unpicks the community whose unity and collective strength it commemorates and celebrates. This makes the process of fission and fusion a creative exercise whose reflexivity is not located in contemplative speculation but in ritual labour and festive action. In order to value the multiplicity – that is, the heterogeneity and the magnitude – within which (his creative activity is deployed, this article focuses on often combined if not intertwined trajectories of people and objects in diverse forms and states of being: living and deceased children, adolescents, adults, elders and ancestors; ritual, political and administrative authorities; male and female constituencies either neatly separated or crossing into each other's spaces, speech and comportment; clay, oil, egg yolk, dung, cola nuts, sorghum and sorghum beer, water, and yam dough, as offering, paint, or food for the living, the dead or their commemorative monuments. All this and so many more morphing actants, I presented as circulating in and thereby reconstituting ritual landscapes-in-the-making. Taking my lead from the local statement that in actual fact the *Bedu* masks do not dance but walk – and as we have seen, either run, stride or stroll – I set out to explore how people, in variable constellations, constitute this ritual space by moving and labouring in it. Although I believe that such an approach can yield important insights into signification processes and advance the reconstruction of the symbolic content of key-objects such as the *Bedu* masks, the different types of 'dingos', etc. the objective of this article lay elsewhere: in the potential of a public ritual for signifying in indexical ways the participants' creativity and vitality. Put in terms of governmentality, – drawing on Foucault, but made operational by Warnier (2001) and Appadurai (2002) – the challenge is to explore in what ways a public ritual is a concerted but nonetheless fragmented, collective but decentralised, exercise in subjectification and self-governance through the performance of self-enumeration and self-surveying.

Looking into the *Bedu* performance as part of a larger village festival broadly situated in a '*Bedu* region', we have seen how Fanlo's Feast breaks up its community or public into smaller and larger groups or constituencies who possess responsibility and the entitlement for delivering specific ritual tasks. The self-surveying of people and expertise is not a post-factum undertaking but is realised in the execution of these ritual tasks themselves. What is most revealing in that respect – but rather elusive as fieldwork data – is that besides the central channels of ritual communication (of consecrating, orating, singing, shouting, etc.) there is an almost incessant substream of informal conversations and peripheral, often solitary remarks that are part and parcel of the on-going self-survey: questions about who is showing up and who is not, as well as about the reasons for the absence of some (travelling, illness, migration, marriage, death, etc.); and remarks about who is replacing the absent, and to what extent this substitution is an improvement or not. Taken together, in the course of multiple public rituals such as Fanlo's Feast or *Bedu* events in general, communities are engaging in a process of taking stock of their people and what they represent in terms of expertise, energy, and imagination. As 'rites of convergence' (Chau forthcoming) they move beyond separating and measuring their know-how and their wealth in people (or the absence thereof), and even move beyond seasonal and geographical transitions, by enacting and acclaiming the potential – the 'potenza' (see Negri 2008) – of their amassed multiplicity.

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