THE MANDE MAGICAL MYSTERY TOUR - THE MISSION GRIAULE IN KANGABA (MALI)[1]

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Outside of a small group of regional specialists, there has been little interest in a critical re-evaluation of the Mande ethnography of the Griaule school, in contrast to the attention paid to Griaule's work on the Dogon, despite its perhaps more pervasive influence in African studies. This article is intended to show how the researchers influenced by Griaule's methods decontextualized and then recontextualized the information they collected in the Manden within the framework of Griaule's research agenda. The argument is based on four strands: verifiability of the ethnographic information, the organization of ethnographic research, the contextualization of the findings within a broader project, and the accuracy of translations, with some question of their validity.

The ethnographic data discussed here are related to the septennial ceremonial restoration of the Kamabolon sanctuary in Kangaba. Although septennial rituals have been quite common in Mande—mostly in order to delimit age groups—the Kamabolon ceremony is a special case because of its complexity and because of the special position of Kangaba in the precolonial and colonial political landscape. Kangaba was a major place of resistance to French colonial rule (Leynaud and Cissé 1978, Green 1991), as well a place where authentic oral narratives about the past were supposed to be transmitted, in particular by the Kela griots who are attached to the Keita kings of Kangaba (Vidal 1924, Mauny 1973, Camara 1990).

In 1954, Marcel Griaule attended the Kamabolon ceremony in the company of his colleagues Germaine Dieterlen and Solange de Ganay. Dieterlen and De Ganay also attended later Kamabolon ceremonies (Dieterlen in 1968, De Ganay in 1975), apparently in the company of Youssouf Tata Cissé, whose work must be considered part of the same, large Griaulian intellectual tradition. Griaule never published on this mission to Kangaba (he only took the pictures for Dieterlen), but he clearly was in charge (De Ganay 1995, p. 149). The research on the ceremony resulted in some detailed descriptions of the ceremonies of 1954 and 1968 by Dieterlen (1955, 1959, and 1968) and by De Ganay (1995). While Dieterlen's articles in particular have been widely read and are often cited, neither Meillassoux's political interpretation (1968) nor Camara's unpublished thesis (1990) seem to have attracted attention. However, except for Austen's examination of Dieterlen's text of the Mande creation myth (Austen 1996), the works by Dieterlen and De Ganay have not been subject to a critical, historiographical analysis. In the essay that follows, I will argue four things:

i. Information collected in the field by De Ganay and Dieterlen is nowadays often

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recognizable, and sometimes even replicable. Because of its replicability, from a modernist point of view, this research can be considered as 'reliable' to a certain extent–in contrast to the work produced by Griaule in the 1950s.

ii. The 'touring' aspect–the use of cars to transport informants and assistants, thus decontextualizing knowledge–resulted in research that focused on texts and individuals' knowledge, at the expense of social organization and interaction. This approach was combined with a still widespread research fallacy of misinterpreting 'secrets' as concealed knowledge, thus amplifying the mystification produced by the translations.

iii. The translation of crucial concepts was heavily influenced by the research agenda. The translations obscure the material, and call into question the (external) validity of the research, since the original texts don't demonstrate what the researcher aimed to demonstrate.

iv. The researchers exclude alternatives and variants, and recontextualize their data in 'scholastic' coherent systems of thought that do not take into account semantic problems and the diversity of practice. The creation of systems of thought was typical of Griaule's research agenda.

Taking the all these dimensions into account, and bearing in mind the long term effects of this research project, one might metaphorically characterize the 1954 'Mission Griaule' to Kangaba as a 'Magical Mystery Tour' undertaken long before the Beatles' song.

Reliability: the verifiability of the ethnographic information

The reliability of Griaule's work from the 1950s has provoked much scholarly debate, since this work is considered to be a 'paradigm anomaly' in African ethnography (see for instance the discussions in Austen 1990, Van Beek 1991 and Herbert 1994). The discussion concerns the reliability of Griaule's material (and to what extent Griaule's text is the product of the dialogue between himself and one key informant). Van Beek does not accept Griaule's 1950s material as reliable, because this material–in contrast to Griaule's previous research–appears to be unreplicable. (Reliability is generally defined as the capacity to be replicated; validity depends to what extent the data prove what the researcher aims to prove). Some have dismissed or questioned Van Beek's critique, since it presupposes the modernist idea that reality can be known or for other reasons (cf. the critiques following Van Beek 1991; Belcher 1998), and since it simplifies or even denies the context in which ethnographic knowledge is produced. Some critics say that any researcher produces 'persuasive fiction' (e.g. Crawford in Van Beek 1991). Moreover, it was argued that the fact that Van Beek's failure to find corroborrating data in the field did not necessarily prove that these data had never existed (Bedaux in Van Beek 1991). However, others welcomed Van Beek's critique. Meillassoux, for instance, who himself was assigned to Griaule's CNRS research group, wrote:

> Van Beek's article raises a serious problem in French anthropology: is it capable of self-criticism? (...) The work of Griaule and his school since *Dieu d'eau* is based on a field approach that fails to meet all the requirements that he himself formulated in his *Méthode de l'ethnographie* (1957). (...) At a scientific level ... the research group often seemed to me more an initiatory school than a research laboratory. Access to native mythology or religious knowledge, one learnt, could be gained by assidiously following the teachings of specific local masters, who possessed a secret knowledge that they would divulge with great reluctance only to those who had earned their trust. (Van Beek 1991: 163)

The issues raised in relation to Griaule's work on Dogon mythology, published as his *Conversations with Ogotommêli* [*Dieu d'eau*], also apply to the 1954 research in Kangaba. Kangaba was 'reluctant', too. Recordings of any part of the Kamabolon ceremony have always been impeded, or at least made very difficult, by the local population. Nowadays it is completely impossible to record anything (see Jansen 1998). The 'authorized' recitation of the Sunjata epic has always taken place within the Kamabolon, and during the performance no outsiders are allowed to attend or to approach the sanctuary, and therefore this recitation cannot be heard. Yet, despite all the barriers that have existed, Dieterlen and De Ganay have published texts which they claim were recited or sung during the 1954 ceremony, when conditions maybe were less severe (for a critical analysis, see Van Beek and Jansen 2000).

Up to now, of all the material collected by Dieterlen and De Ganay during the 1954 ceremony, the account of the Mande creation myths has provoked the most discussion among academics (Austen 1996). I have found these accounts more reliable than Griaule's Dogon material collected in the 1950s. Whether or not the texts are the result of single performances or whether they are highly reconstructed texts or not, and whether or not the genre of the creation myth exists in Mande cultures, it must be admitted that the information they represent still is found in the field, albeit piecemeal. For instance, eggs feature in discussions on creation and are sometimes used in sacrifices and sand divination, and during my fieldwork while observing divination practices, I occasionally encountered the symbolic use of numbers identified in Dieterlen's work. Thus, while I may have reservations about De Ganay's 1954 recordings (for reasons given in Van Beek and Jansen 2000), I would not critique the reliability on these texts to the same extent as Van Beek has done with Griaule's *Conversations with Ogotemmêli*. Researchers and Malinke informants recognize the material. This degree of reliability of the material, however, does not justify (yet) its use in analyses of Mande cosmology and knowledge systems.

The organization of the research: on cars and imagined communities

The first critique of the text addresses the manner in which they were produced. Some elements of Griaule's fieldwork practice are well-known: no participatory field-

work, heavy trust in key informants (cf. Meillassoux, supra), annual visits, an agenda aimed at the collection of evidence for an African philosophical system which might compete with the great European traditions, and a close collaboration with the colonial government (cf. Clifford 1983). In this section, I will articulate these themes around the impact of a relatively new technology used by the Griaule team: the car. I will argue that Griaule's 'exploitation' of the car resulted in a new way of imagining Mande culture.

Clifford has argued that Griaule's approach ressembled a military campaign, with different tasks for different professional specialists and the communal attempt to conquer the fortress which is the other civilization (1983). This is well illustrated by Griaule's attempt to record the 1954 Kamabolon ceremony (De Ganay 1995, p. 149).

> Vers 20 heures, le Commandant de Subdivision fait demander Marcel Griaule "pour une affaire très grave". Les griots ont prévenu le patriarche de Kéla qu'on voulait "prendre leur parole", autrement dit l'enregistrer sur bande magnétique et que, si cela se faisait, ils retourneraient à Kéla. Le Commandant de Subdivision a donné sa parole d'honneur que rien n'avait été pris et nous décidions de partir avec les voitures et de ne pas revenir avant le lendemain matin.

De Ganay added the following note:

> Notre équipe, qui entendait étudier en profondeur une cérémonie dont on parlait tant (cf. supra, p. 7 et 23) mais qu'aucun chercheur n'avait jusqu-là observée, s'était offert les moyens de "fixer" sur bandes magnétiques les chants et récits des griots, ce qu'elle fit pour l'essentiel.

The material impact of the 'mission Griaule' during their encounter with local people must have been enormous. While I have been unable to locate an inventory for the 1954 mission to Kangaba, a 1935 document from the National Archives of Mali at Koulouba, Bamako (see Appendix), illustrates the material involved in Griaule's attack on the 'fortress.' The document is a list of goods Griaule had to submit to the customs-authorities before he could start his famous research among the Dogon. Although such expeditions may still be common among archeaologists, I suspect that most social scientists will raise their eyebrows as they read the list.

The car must be considered a methodological tool. Sudanese culture was created by Griaule's research team, and the car was a catalyst in this process, since cars served as a means of transport of researchers, informants, and assistants across the Sudan. So far as I know, no one has yet argued that the car made possible a sort of research which had before been impossible, and that it constituted a methodological instrument with a huge potential impact, since it denied, or even overruled, characteristics of local and regional knowledge. The car made possible a new kind of

geographical logic, by allowing research covering all of French West Africa.[2] Cars and the notion of a pan-Sudanic system of thought are related to each other; in the process of searching, the notion creates the object it seeks to identify. Of course, this process was stimulated/facilitated by the fact that the cultures nowadays labeled as 'Mande' form an ideal study field for comparative research.

Nowadays, through the technologies of the www-age and through the western ideal of the open society, much information–such as scientific knowledge–is destined to be evenly and immediately allocated among the world's population. These changes have led to scholarly discussions of the dynamics of identities. It must be kept in mind that the information collected by the 'mission Griaule' had a speed of its own, since it traveled faster and further along the Niger than had been possible before. This resulted in an information clash that could only be solved by consulting the 'local masters' (see Meillassoux, supra) whose knowledge was 'restyled' into a pan-Sudanic 'system of thought' or 'identity'. Given the impact of the 'mobile laboratory' on the local population, its labor differentation, and its goal of finding a coherent Sudanic culture, the comparison with 'imagined communities' comes to mind, since these communities are also characterized by a group of influential people that live (partially) outside the community they help to construct and to maintain.

The car made it possible for researchers to cover a wider area as well as to introduce new dimensions to the practice of comparative analysis. The Griaulians used cars to realize their academic entreprise to find 'Sudanic knowledge'. The use of non-local assistants (see infra) and the mobility of informants were crucial in this process of creating Sudanic culture. An illustrative example of this practice is De Ganay's decision (1995, p. 8) to invite Jemusa Sumano from Bamako in 1982 to her home in France to study the 1954 Kamabolon ceremony. In the 1980s and the early 1990s, Jemusa was the president of a griots' association in Bamako, but in 1954 he certainly was not the important figure depicted in De Ganay's book, in which he claims that the Kela griots presented themselves to him before they undertook their recitation of the Sunjata epic (ibid. p. 150).

In their quest for Sudanic culture, the 'Griaulians' linked the Kamabolon to a set of sanctuaries expressing a religion or a shared system of belief of the peoples who inhabit the Niger bend. According to them, good harvest, good fishing, and well-being of social life, are all points of concern during the Kamabolon ceremony. Moreover, images of the world's creation are said to be expressed in actions in relations to the water goddess Faro, and her earthly twin brother, the first blacksmith Ndoma Dyiri who is the 'owner' of the Kamabolon.[3] This last part especially, dealing with the 'gods,' has been subject to some critique, since it seems to have been mainly a research premise, or even a popular myth (cf. Austen 1996). The references to water gods or first blacksmiths come from the Dogon area or from Ségou. De Ganay's translation of *mansa* as 'god' (see below) may result from this transposition. It is also clear that the Griaulians made connections between paintings and symbols across the Sudan purely on the basis of visual similarity, and without considering contextual information or historical connections.

The particular characteristics of the Griaulians' material and the (alleged) coherency in Sudanic culture certainly were increased, or maybe even produced, by the organizational characteristics of the 'mission'; there was a labour differentiation and an 'initiation' was necessary to become a member of the team (Meillassoux, supra). Thus, the research premises structured the research, and this helped to construct a philosophical system for the Sudan, since observations on social organization were excluded from the analysis.

On secrets and secrecy: How the object of research was created within the Griaule project

Griaule focused on texts and individuals, the 'local masters.' Information was presumed to be concealed, or at least possessed by only a small number of individuals. Griaule estimated the number of people whom he presumed had a 'connaissance totale': 8-10% of the adult male Dogon had total knowledge, 5-7% of the Bambara, and 1-6% of women.[4]

Thus, for Griaule stamina during interviews with key informants would result to a total knowledge of the other civilization (cf. Van Beek 1991: 143). This highly intellectual approach, focussing on texts and individuals, ignores social and cultural contexts. Griaule's presumption was that people concealed information as 'secrets;' in this way he committed a 'classical' methodological mistake regarding 'secrecy.' When secrets are described as concealed information, the sociological dimensions of 'secrecy' are excluded and overlooked. Bellman refers to the work of the German sociologist Georg Simmel, writing about the fallacy committed by those who relate 'secrecy' to concealed knowledge (see also Gottlieb, in this volume):

> Simmel emphasizes that content is independent of the methods used to conceal information. Most social scientists have, nevertheless, examined secrecy by making typologies based on either content or the consequences that result from the exposure of concealed information. This has resulted in a general confusion over the definition of secrecy and the criteria used to describe it. (...)
>
> It is best to consider secrecy, not as a power struggle between those who know and those who want to know, but according to the ways concealed information is revealed. (Bellman 1984, pp. 3 and 5).

Secrecy is a social phenonemon. Information must not necessarily to be first concealed before it can acquire the status of a 'secret:' 'new' information–and here I am thinking of griots' narratives– may be classified as 'secret' as soon as the sender of the information is able to convince receiver that he (the sender) is in the process of revealing concealed information. Thus impression management becomes a crucial issue. Indeed, as Bellman continues:

> The content is virtually inconsequential to the process. (...) When in-

> formation is present as a secret, there is much more to the message than the content Goffman speaks of secrets as information about information (ibid , p 5)

The power of the secret lies in the way it creates the idea that there is a world beyond the visible world (Simmel) Bellman's reference to Goffman–the Chicago School sociologist of the 'sociology of everyday life'–raises the importance of 'appearances' in interaction The appearance of having secrets can be carried off successfully, when it is related to shared knowledge A secret can be convincing when told by someone with dramaturgical qualities who articulates wellknown themes to each other A person's appearances and impression management come before the study of the content of the secrets, which acquire a function through social skills The texts are the tools, not the product the articulation of texts demonstrates the skills, and the product is a social relationship which is framed In the case of Griaule, the framed social relationship is that of the researcher's dependence on his brilliant, secrets-producing local master

The tendency to relate secrets (*gundow* or *daliluw*) to the knowledge of an individual or a group is still present in Mande studies, in particular in current American studies of Mande culture (for instance, Bird and Kendall 1980, p 17, McNaughton 1988, pp 43 ss , Hoffman 1998, p 99) [5] While I view secrets as the product of social, rhetorical, and performative skills, the opinion that they represent knowledge does not necessarily lead to the idea that there is a world beyond the visible, and to a process of obscuring knowledge However, through their strong focus on the texts of 'local masters' the Griaule group has gone beyond this point, and thus has come on a road to a mystification of Mande culture (probably as part of a process to contain the African occult within imperial and colonial discourses, see Pels 1998)

The quest for secrets fits perfectly into the research goal of systematizing Sudanic thought Tables produced by the Griaule school represent what I would call 'scholastic exegeses of worldviews The tendency to produce coherent systems is well illustrated by Dieterlen's 'complete' list of the original families of Mande (Dieterlen 1955, see also note 2), but it is also visible is all kind of calculations related to objects and numbers of people De Ganay, for instance, speculates several times, about the number '28', because 28 griots from Kela performed during the Kamabolon ceremony (1995, p 137) and a month has 28 days This amount has been changing ever since (in 1997, 50 of them were selected, see Jansen 1998), but De Ganay considers 28 to be the official number in a custom that has since been forgotten

The question whether this interest in numerological symbolism and a 'cryptological' frame of mind derives from Islamic mysticism or from Judeo-Christian traditions needs to be investigated Probably, both strands of thought have been influential on informants and researchers alike However, this interest may also be the product of the researcher's desire to master the complexities of the experiences in the field

In the reports of the Mission Griaule on Kangaba, the scholastic exegesis of certain elements of the Kamabolon ceremony demands special attention The interpretations of the paintings on the external walls of the Kamabolon illustrate a cryptological accuracy that presupposes access to deep Mande knowledge, the Griaule team searched for codes with which to decipher the culture (Sperber 1975) Dieterlen is convinced that the 1954 paintings refer to ancient traditional religious knowledge However, reporting on the 1961 and 1968 ceremonies, she wrote that the paintings expressed national pride (Dieterlen 1968) Thus, some knowledge seems to have been lost or concealed in 1961 and after

More recently, Cissé and De Ganay have made the claim that the Kamabolon paintings change every seven years because they represent predictions related to contemporary topics of discussion (De Ganay 1995, p 201-203) Cissé and De Ganay attended the 1975 performance, and they analyze the 1975 paintings as predictions of drought and food scarcity (Cissé 1994, p 302, De Ganay 1995) In the 1980s the paintings on the Kamabolon changed again The flags disappeared, and hunters' signs, such as bows and arrows, and wild animals, prevailed, and there was also room for a sun and a face All this is believed to have a complex and deep meaning

The idea that the paintings might be 'only' decorations with an aesthethic function is not considered, although we have no evidence that the young girls who make the paintings are supposed to consult the people who make the predictions Young girls themselves are, of course, considered to be incapable of 'deep' knowledge, both by the Malinke and the Griaule team [6]

The prevailing image is holistic, no account is taken of the fact that that some activities are gendered or that some activities may be only relevant to particular groups But everything does not necessarily have to have a 'deep' meaning and belong to a coherent system The holistic character of the research premises of the Griaule group are also visible in the way the Kamabolon sanctuary has been connected to other sites in Kangaba (Dieterlen 1955, De Ganay 1995, chapter 4), despite the absence of structural or ritual connection between these sites and between the people who perform the Kamabolon ceremony and those who perform other rituals in Kangaba (Jansen 1998)

On validity: the accuracy of the translations

The Griaule's school style of translation is marked by the detailed exegesis of a small selection of concepts that are considered to represent one particular meaning Although the texts collected by Dieterlen and De Ganay are to a great extent reliable (see above), the way these texts have been published must be criticized The translations often are highly inaccurate, either misleading or obscure Thus, the apparent validity of the material must be questioned, the material does not demonstrate what the researcher aimed to demonstrate This becomes very problematic when their material is used in translation by others, for instance researchers on African religions or comparative literature

Dieterlen, De Ganay and Cissé tend to produce abstract translations and

etymologies of terms that are also used in everyday language without considering alternatives or variants and without justifying their decision to translate these terms as philosophical concepts. Further they seem to play with tones (Maninka/Bamana is a tonal language) in order to produce a 'deeper' meaning. As Johnson has demonstrated (1976), people in Mande cultures love to use wordplay to produce etymologies and they consider this to be an art. Meanings are often produced in complex social processes (cf. Hoffman 1998). The French authors disregard this creative aspect of Mande culture, which is ever-present in the communication between rsearchers and informants.

Of course, a translation is a matter of taste; translations answer to different aims, sometimes 'scientific', sometimes 'literary' (and the boundaries between them are by no means straightforward). A literary translation may create an equivalent in the target language, but this should be done with caution. Things can go wrong when the translation acquires a life of its own and becomes the basis for analysis; the translation should then be considered misleading and the conclusions based upon it inaccurate. The Griaulians abuse their translations by using them as 'bricks' in complex arguments on cosmology and philosophy without more careful semantic analysis. This can have dramatic consequences. Cissé's work, for instance, is nowadays taught in French in psychology and psychiatry courses at the Université du Mali in Bamako as representing the philosophical system of the Bambara.[7]

Let me give a few examples of what I consider to be key words for the analysis of the Kamabolon ceremony and the understanding of cosmological issues. I will discuss three terms: *mansa*, *bara*, and *gundo*,[8] and then I shall show how some literary translations, by using elevated language, become misleading as a basis for further analysis.

mansa

Mansa is generally translated as 'king', 'chief' 'something big' or 'ancestor' (cf. Bailleul 1996, p. 270). The Griaulians, however, often translate *mansa* as 'God', 'the divine principle' or 'priest-king', although they never justify this translation. De Ganay provides the examples:[9] de Ganay translated *mansa* as 'Dieu' in the term *mansa jigin* (1995, p. 114; Bailleul gives 'généalogie royale,' p. 270), as 'divine' and 'suprême' (p. 74), and on p. 140 (note 143), as 'prêtre-roi' (see also ibid. note 47). Bailleul, who is a Roman Catholic priest, does not translate *mansa* as deity or God in his dictionary (1996). How wrong it would be to translate *mansa* by God is demonstrated by the often-heard term *Mansa Alla* which means 'Lord Allah' or 'King Allah.' If it were possible to translate *mansa* as 'God', *Mansa Alla* would be a pleonasm. There are other examples of questionable translations for *mansa*. See, for instance, de Ganay on *sansaran mansa* (1995, p. 74), which is a central bamboo element in the roof of a mud hut (Jansen et al. 1995, p. 79) as well as on *santòròko* or *santoroko* (a bambou element at the top inside a traditional hut—a typically Malinke word that people in Kela loved to teach me). De Ganay translated these terms as 'puissants et lumineux rayons célestes s'infiltrant (dans le sanctuaire)' and 'chose

(culte, valeurs inhérentes au) figuier céleste'. Thus, *san* has been interpreted here without argumentation as 'heaven' and not as 'sky' and *mansa* has been 'upgraded' to a divine status.

bara

The space on which the Kamabolon sanctuary stands is surrounded by a hedge during the ceremony. This space within the hedge is called *bara*. Bailleul's dictionary offers 'dancing place' as the translation of *bara* (1996, p. 25), and since much dancing occurs during the ceremony, in this context 'dancing place' seems the most plausible translation. However, the Griaulians use the words *bara* and *bàra* (two words with different tones) for the space on which the ceremony is performed. They use various, changing, and secondary significations of both terms (cf. Index in De Ganay 1995). According to Bailleul (ib.), *bàra* means, among other things, 'calabash', 'a kind of fetish', and 'umbilicus'. This conflation of words in translation produces remarkable interpretations: a dancing place becomes similar to a calebash, an object related to sacrifices for the water deity Faro (cf. Dieterlen 1988, Plate II.b; Zahan 1974, Plate III.2), which becomes similar to umbilicus. Thus the Kamabolon becomes the umbilical cord of the world, and the first place created. We have already pointed out the Mande love of word-games; it is also crucial to note that the Griaule team worked with interpreters from regions north and east of Bamako, and that they brought these assistants with them to Kangaba (Van Beek and Jansen 2000). The interpreters may not always have been sensitive to the regionally dominant pronunciation of tones[10] and may not have known the local practice of intellectual word games (cf. Johnson 1976 and Hoffman 1998).

Such a play on words and alleged homonymy is a perfect illustration of the quest for hidden, esoteric meanings, privileged over common sense renderings. It is impossible to retrieve the steps by which such interpretations were negotiated and what role the interpreters played in the process, but this example well represents the decontextualization of knowledge that characterized the Griaulian enterprise.

gundo

Gundo is the third notion to be discussed. The word undoubtedly means 'secret'. However, one must also observe how 'secrecy' is structured, thus questioning if a 'secret' is concealed or hidden information (see discussion above). The concept of *gundo* refers to 'information about information.' It is knowledge shared by many people, but which should not be stated in public; to do so will lead to sanctions. This is somewhat different from the Griaulian translation of *gundo* as 'mystery'. This translation (for instance De Ganay 1995, p. 68) mystifies the object of study, which is turned into a religious phenonemon that can only be revealed to the researchers by informants with a lot of allegedly esoteric knowledge.

Concepts are not the only victims of remarkable translations. We can observe a a tendency, particularly in Cissé's work, to produce poetic, literary translations in el-

evated language. This practice offers the major advantage of attracting the reader's attention to the richness of Mande cultures, but at the same time it creates the danger that the translation may be used out of context in combination with other data, for instance by students of comparative literature. It should also be observed that, contrary to expectations, Cissé is by birth a Bamana from San (Cissé 1988, p. 10), and not a Malinke from the region of Kangaba, although this region is the subject of almost all his publications. Cissé is not an indigenous speaker of the regional Maninka language, and this is a methodological aspect that has to be taken into account when discussing his work. Let me provide a few examples from the many that might be taken from Cissé's work. Cissé's approach deserves special attention, since he has produced many bilingual texts (Bamanakan/Maninkakan-French).[11] Other members of the Griaule have not published bilingual text editions. The following examples illustrates Cissé's style; the words are those of a hunters' bard calling on the famous griot from Krina, Wa Kamissoko:

Tyee Krina lolo,
a fò naamu.
Naamu!

Cissé translates:

Hé! Wâ Kamissoko, l'étoile de Krina,
Fais écho à mes récits en disant 'oui!'
Oui! je suis tout oreilles'.
(taken from Cissé and Kamissoko 1991, p. 141):

However, a different and more literal (or common sense) rendering of these words is:

Hé man, star of Krina.
Say 'naamu'.
'Naamu'.

Krina is Kamissoko's native village. 'Naamu' is a wellknown word which means 'yes' or 'indeed', as a clear answer to a call, as well as to a storyteller as an invitation to continue the recitation (Bailleul 1996, p. 285). 'Tyee' is 'man', and I have always been taught that it is impolite to call someone by this term; it is appropriate to call someone 'father' or 'older brother' or 'brother-in-law'. Hence, it would be justifiable to choose an 'impolite' translation 'Hey, man' or 'Hey, you.' When Cissé's translation is taken as a point of departure for further analysis. it gives misleading tropes for analysis of topics such as personhood and communication in 'oral societies'. For instance, a *naamu*-sayer often accompanies a bard to give rhythm to his performance; however, this does not mean that he is listening to the bard's narration–something suggested in Cissé's translation.

De Ganay translated along similar lines, possibly because she was assisted by Cissé An example taken from her work illustrates the translation practices and also the variations in orthography of the Griaule school For instance, one well-known praise-line used by Mande griots in almost any praise song referring to the Keita lineage runs *Sogo sogo Simbo* De Ganay (p 146-147) offers this translation 'Héros de chasse (qui a abattu de nombreuses) bêtes' In the next sentence, she writes *sinbo*, which suggests a different meaning for 'Simbo' (which is a well-known honorary title for a great hunter) [12] But other authors choose not to translate the praise-line *Sogo Sogo Sinbon* (Ly-Tall et al 1987 67, and Jansen et al 1995, p 44), although it is known that *sogo* means 'game ' Perhaps the choice to translate or not is a matter of taste, but the difference in practice deserves to be mentioned

Although much of the Mande material collected by the Griaule team is to a certain extent reliable, the translations show far-reaching differences in interpretation Faced with ordinary concepts, the Griaule school will often stretch the terms to their limits, inventing new and often mystifying meanings in their quest for a holistic philosophical system They produce coherent systems often by excluding variance and contextual data, consequently, the systems, while attractive, do not possess sufficient validity for further analysis (cf Van Beek 1991, p 140)

Concluding remarks

This article investigates the Griaule heritage in Mande studies Because of the anomalous character of Griaule's Dogon research and publications of the 1950s, it is a historiographic duty to analyze the contemporary Mande research he supervised I have argued first of all that the Griaule approach involved an often-recurring research fallacy although the collected material is, generally speaking, reliable, the sociological dimensions of 'secrecy' are excluded or denied in favor of the idea that there does exist an invisible world of secrets and deeper meanings This fallacy is the consequence of the goal of identifying (constructing?) a Sudanic system of thought Secondly, I pointed to the importance of the car in their research method I have argued that the way they used the car to transport informants and assistants outside their home territories served to create, by decontextualizing and recontextualizing, the conceptual framework for the Sudanic culture they were seeking This search for a Sudanic culture was not only a quest for a philosophical system, at the same time it created a culture/community that was delimited by the political-geographical boundaries of the French Sudan Thirdly, I argued that many interpretations can be subjected to discussion by looking close at translations of key concepts, although the data are reliable, their validity is undermined by wishfull translations that exclude variance and that select particular meanings

In spite of the fact that the Mande research by the Griaulians in the 1950s is more reliable (or at least less contested) than Griaule's work produced at the same period, the combination of translation techniques, the quest for a concealed but coherent philosophical system by invalid translations, and the 'dynamic' use of informants and interpreters by transporting them, justifies labeling the 'mission Griaule'

to Kangaba as the 'Mande magical mystery tour'

NOTES

[1] This article is the heavily revised text of a paper presented at the 41st Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, Chicago, October 29-November 1, 1998 Since 1988, I have conducted two years of field research in the region south of Bamako (in particular Kela) My earlier research, conducted in 1991-1995 and 1996-1998 was financed by the Netherlands Organization for Tropical Research WOTRO, since 1999, finances have been provided by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences KNAW

[2] Although it is generally stressed that they were seeking African knowledge, a report from the Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer in Aix-en-Provence suggests that the mission had a political agenda (ANSOM, FM 64 *Affaires Politiques, Rapports Politiques* Soudan carton 2198, dossier 11, Administration generale 1947-1957) This document is a 4 page report which is more or less a summary of Dieterlen (1955) Dieterlen presented here her research as a serious contribution for the French colonial government. It is hard to imagine what use an administrator might have made of her research on the Kamabolon, but perhaps at that time the information was considered valuable Dieterlen writes on the first page " De plus, nous avons assiste en avril 1954 a la ceremonie septennale de Kangaba qui reunit Keita et apparentes pour la refection du *KAMÃ BLÕ*, sanctuaire erige dans cette agglomeration par Mansasema, descendant de Soundiata." In a note to this sentence she adds "Le ministre de la France d'Outre-Mer s'est interesse a ce probleme et nous a permis lors de ce deplacement effectue a un moment tres important de la vie publique des Keita de jeter les bases de futures enquêtes C'est ainsi qu'en decembre 1954 janvier 1955 nous avons etabli un contact fructueux avec les notables assumant la responsabilite de ces institutions " Dieterlen explains that in 1953 she had informed the 'Pouvoirs publics' that many peoples "se declaraient toutes issues d'une souche commune situee au Mande " Then she adds that "'parente" est *politiquement sentie comme telle* par tous les authochtones ( ) Elle manifeste une *tendance traditionelle* a temoigner de l'*unite des populations noires* sur une vaste espace ' Dieterlen ends her report with "Nous souhaitons que ce temoignage, qui a une *valeur politique* indeniable retienne l'attention des Pouvoirs publics " In an accompanying letter she writes about her findings, and expresses her dedication to the French cause "Ces faits m'ont paru dignes de retenir l'attention de vos services et pouvoir être utiles a notre position dans l'(- unreadable, even by other people in the archives - JJ) Française " (emphasis in original) It has been noted before that Griaule worked in close contact with the French colonial system, but so far as I know such an overtly pro-French statement as Dieterlen's has not yet been published. However, as several people remarked to me after I had presented this paper in Chicago, it is quite possible that this was only 'grant talk', that is friendly words to please the colonial administration Although it is an important aspect of the work by Griaule and others, and it certainly structured the communication between the researchers and their informants, an evaluation of the colonial setting in itself (cf Clifford 1983, Apter 1999) is beyond the scope of this article, I restrict myself to critique related to research technologies and methods

[3] Although Dieterlen's material on the role of the blacksmith has not been corroborated by other researchers, I would agree with Herbert (1994, p 104) 'that it is not inherently improbable'

[4] Griaule 1952, p 566, see also Van Beek 1991, p 143 This peculiar estimate might be read skeptically as follows male Dogon are the smartest people of the Soudan, but women in general might be smarter than male Bambara

[5] Regarding the discussion on secrecy in Mande, I am puzzled by Hoffman's point of view (1998), which seems to me paradoxical On the one hand she expresses an extreme constructionist's point of view, by stressing as much as possible the impact of the researcher and the context on the process of construction of ethnographic data On the other hand, she advocates that anthropologists explore the linguistic dimensions in order to demonstrate that texts are 'heteroglossic' and 'multi-layered' Thus, she combines a postmodernist approach to social aspects with a traditional and modernist approach to linguistic aspects Thus, she avoids the discussion on the reliability of her material (and the possibility that she was cheated by informants or confronted with lies), because every information is a product of the communication between a particular researcher and a particular informant

[6] The 1997 paintings were more or less similar to those made in 1989 A minor difference was the picture of a leopard Seydou Camara (ISH, Bamako) told me that this picture was originally a hippopotamus, but after a disapproval by the old men spots had been added in order to make it look like a leopard The characteristics of a hippopotamus were yet clearly visible (see Jansen 1998)

[7] Personal communication with Saskia Brand, January 1999

[8] It would be interesting to study the differences in Dieterlen's description of Mande world-view in 1951 (published in Dieterlen 1988) and the one she constructed after having attended the 1954 Kamabolon ceremony

[9] It is remarkable that the concept of *mansa* is not mentioned at all in Dieterlen's 1951 description of Bambara religion (Dieterlen 1988)

[10] Alou Keita, linguist at the University of Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), informs me that in Dyula the words for dancing place and umbilicus are the same (personal communication, Leiden, July 24, 1997) This shows how careful one must be when translating and interpreting texts in Mande languages, since prescriptions for prononciations may be overruled by local bound linguistic particularities

[11] Cisse may also be responsable for translations in Leynaud and Cisse 1978 For instance, p 150, note 41 translates *mara* as 'autorite divine', while Bailleul's definition (1996, p 269) makes no mention of the divine character of the leadership

[12] Dieterlen claims that she made phonetic transcriptions (1988, p 26), but this is exactly the problem, since phonetic descriptions may be confusing when the region of origin is not mentioned. It is also possible that she confused similar words

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APPENDIX

Published with permission from the 'Archives Nationales du Mali a Koulouba', Bamako, Dossier 'Mission 1935' in 1-D-70 Mission Griaule (Ethnographie) 1930-1935

D G T
Colonie
du
Soudan Français

INVENTAIRE
DU MATERIEL DE LA MISSION GRIAULE

Cercle de Gao

Satisfaction a bordereau A 257 transmettant T L

No 34 SE/7

du 5 Janvier 1935

- - - - - - - - - - -

Materiel transporte par camionette
Voiture Renaud [sic JJ] SC 671488, No 945- AL- 13 -
Voiture Renaud SC 671487, No 946- AL- 13 -
Un appareil de cinema du service geographique de l'Armee -
Debrie interview objectif Tessar Zeiss 13-9124 -

Un appareil de cinema Kynamo objectif Zeiss 987571 -
Un appareil de cinema Bell and Howell 35 m/m No NB 2508 -
Objectif Cook 100 m/m No 200-175 -
Objectif 47 No 149583 -
Une caisse contenant 3 000 metres de film Gevaert du service geographique de l'Armee -
Un appareil photo 9x12 marque IK objectif Zeiss 677456 -
Un appareil photo 6x13 Verascope Richard No 10028 -
Un appareil photo 3,5x2,4 No 56 478 -
Un appareil photo Leyca 3,5x2,4 No 32 175 -
Un appareil photo Contessa Nettel 9x12 No 258646 -
Une caisse de produits photographiques -
Un fusil de chasse 2 coups calibre 12 Robust St Etienne No 30 -
250 cartouches de chasse calibre 12 -
Une carabine Winchester modele 1894 No 297512 -
26 cartouches pour carabine Winchester -
Une carabine Grasset calibre 7,5 -
50 cartouches pour carabine Grasset -
Une caisse materiel d'entomologie et herbier -
Une trousse d'antropometrie -
Une cantine pharmacie -
6 lits de camp -
2 lits-tables -
8 chaises pliantes -
Une tente toilette -
3 tentes coniques -
Une table pliante -
Une caisse bureau -
Une caisse materiel de cuisine -
Une caisse vaisselle -
2 caisses de conserves -
1 caisse de pates alimentaires -
1 toque de pain concentre -
2 caisses popotes -

2o

Materiel arrive par Car Transsaharien

Une phonographe enregistreur -
Une caisse de cylindres pour phonographes enregistreurs -
Une caisse de film Gevaert (complement des 3 000 metres portes plus haut) -
Un appareil Leyca 3,5x2,4 objectif Zeiss No 1929 -
Une caisse de pharmacie et papeterie -
Un lit table -
Deux caisses materiel de bureau -

Une caisse de cordage pour escalade -

- - - -

Fait à Gao, le 30 Janvier 1935
Le Commandant de Cercle,

Signé TOBY

VU et approuvé
Le Chef de la Mission

Signé GRIAULE

Pour copie conformé
Le Chef du Bureau Politique,

de BELLEROCHE, Adolphe, Administrateur des Colonies