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Birds of the Bush: Wodaabe Distinctions of Society and Nature

KRISTÍN LOFTSDÓTTIR
University of Iceland
(kristinl@hi.is)

ABSTRACT

WoDaaBe Fulani pastoral nomads in the Sahel base their ethnic identity and economic livelihood largely on cattle herding. This discussion, based upon fieldwork conducted in Niger from August 1996 to June 1998, sees nature - human relationship as an issue of a general identity formation, maintaining that the issue of context is crucial to understand WoDaaBe Fulani in Niger's conceptualization of their relationship with nature. The discussion also emphasizes that not only can it be useful to use theories of identity construction to understand conceptualizations of environment, but looking at people's connection with their environment indicates ethnicity not only being instrumental but involving embodied experiences.

Keywords: Wodaabe, pastoralism, Niger, nature, culture

INTRODUCTION

Studies on environmental issues have increased considerably during the last decades, being concerned with the various intersections of social, symbolic, and economic dimensions and conceptualizations of the environment. In a review of past and present approaches to ecology and the environment, James Greenberg points out that what can be labeled as the new ecologies – an umbrella term covering various ranges of new approaches towards these issues – have two basic characteristics differentiating them from older approaches. On one hand, the definition of nature is problematized, where basic distinctions of society and nature are questioned, and on the other, the relations between power and meaning are examined. Thus, nature is seen as "shaped by human activities and human societies are transformed by humanized nature" (Greenberg forthcoming: 8). Similarly, claimed by Eliot Fratkin, studies on pastoral people have moved from an emphasis on cultural ecology, i.e. culture as an adaptive system, to a more political ecology, focusing on power and meanings embodied in social-nature relations (Fratkin 1997: 236). Another fruitful development in anthropology has taken place in the field of identity formation, especially since

Fredrik Barth's important essay on ethnic boundaries (1969) and Ronald Cohen's view of multiple identities (Cohen 1978).

WoDaaBe[1] Fulani pastoral nomads in Niger live in mobile cattle-camps, their ethnic identity and economic subsistence based on cattle herding. WoDaaBe often refer to themselves as the birds of the bush (*solli ladde*) or as the people of the bush *(taguu ladde*), thus associating their ethnic identity strongly with their natural environment, recognizing the economic and symbolic association of humans and environment. In other contexts, however, WoDaaBe characterize themselves as separate from their physical environment, posing the home (*wuro*) and bush (*ladde*) as structural oppositions. Cows are described as domesticated and "wild," indicating their role in mediating between nature and people - between a social and non-socialized space.

My discussion focuses on WoDaaBe conceptualization of their relationship with nature, exploring how distinctions of society and nature are problematized and understood, and their connections to general formations of WoDaaBe ethnic identity.[2] WoDaaBe organize, as other human beings, their physical surrounding in a way that renders it meaningful, in addition to placing themselves and other peoples in relation and context with this environment (Loftsdóttir 1997). My approach emphasizes that understandings of one's relation to nature constitute an important part of a general identity formation. The recent insights, developed in terms of theorizing on ethnicity, as well as by feminist scholars, have emphasized identity formation as fluid and contextual, thus also as contradictory and inconsistent (Moore 1994; Alonso 1994; Rosander 1997). In my discussion, I emphasize that this issue of "context" is also crucial in relation to society and nature, necessary to understand the conflicting understandings of human – environment relations in WoDaaBe culture. I suggest that even though WoDaaBe world-view is dualistic to a certain extent, this dualism is highly contextual, i.e., in a certain social context WoDaaBe maintain a relative dualistic distinction of human-environment while in another context they tend to emphasize themselves as being creatures of bush.

Theories on ethnic identity formation have furthermore stresses ethnic identities as "imaginary," often emphasizing an instrumental angle of ethnicity as colonial constructions (Amaselle [1990] 1998) or as tools of exploitations (Wilmsen 1989). Despite my agreement with such political definitions of ethnicity in certain ethnographic cases and acknowledging their importance in

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[1] In transcription I have tried to follow the recommendations made by the experts of the Congress for the Unification of Alphabets of the National Languages of West Africa in 1966, organized by UNESCO. The capitalized B and D refer to the glottalized consonants in the Fulfulde language (see Pelletier and Skinner 1981:3). Riesman calls these sounds "injective" consonants (Riesman 1977:xxi). The glottal stop is indicated by apostrophe.

[2] The WoDaaBe are characterized by great diversity. The research that this discussion is based on was conducted in the Tahoua area among a lineage group referred to as Godjanko'en. People from a greater number of lineages were interviewed in Niamey, but the majority of those interviewed were still from the Godjanko'en lineage group. Similar themes as these topics were discussed in my dissertation (Loftsdóttir 2000).

emphasizing history instead of primordialism (Englund 2001), I find focus on "imagined" realities and discourse often tending to disregard the embodied experience of cultural understandings of the world, which inform and give meaning to a belonging in a specific cultural group. My discussion suggests that WoDaaBe conceptualization and utilization of their environment, being linked with their ethnicity, grounds their own understanding of identity in a concrete and physical experience. The discussion is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted from August 1996 till June 1998, among WoDaaBe nomadic pastoralists in the northwest part of Niger and WoDaaBe migrant workers in Niamey.

1. Physical Environment and Ethnic Identification

The Sahel climate is characterized by dry heat and fluctuating rain that varies between 100-350 mm per year in the northern part of the Sahel in Niger (Beaumont 1989: 202). Rainfall in the area also has high inter-annual variability in addition to being unequally distributed in space and time (Nicholson 1984: 73). The Tchin-Tabaraden[3] area, where the research took place, consists of a series of plateau and dry valleys and the soil is classified as sub-arid and as not very fertile in addition to being prone to wind erosion (Beaumont 1989: 202; Michel 1980: 18). The sparsely distributed tree cover is important in preventing erosion in addition to providing forage for animals (Franke and Chasin 1980: 30). The population in the Tchin-Tabaraden area has diverse ethnic identities, a majority being Tuaregs, with a smaller population of individuals identified as Arabs, WoDaaBe and Fulani (Mabbutt and Floret 1980: 126). WoDaaBe are in most scholarly works characterized as a subgroup of the Fulani ethnic group, even though relations between these groups seem to be arbitrary and problematic (see Loftsdóttir 2000).[4] WoDaaBe have a high degree of mobility, moving on average every three days, making use of the scattered distributed resources and fitting their mode of production into the pulsating environment of their arid habitat (see Johnson 1993: 27; Glantz 1987: 51). Material culture is well adapted to this mobility; belongings few and thus easily transported to a new location. During the rainy season, the different patrilocal lineage groups stay close together making social activities more intense. During the dry season, however, camps are spread out over a large area, making social interaction minimal due to the long distance between the different camps. A council of men

[3] The name Tchin-Tabaraden refers both to the market town Tchin-Tabaraden, populated by around 2,000 inhabitants and the Tchin-Tabaraden district. The markets at Kaou and Abalak are also regularly visited by nomads living in the area, selling livestock and milk and buying corn and other necessities. The district population was estimated as being 103,790 in 1977, the majority of people being engaged in pastoral production (Loutan 1982:4-5).

[4] Studies on Fulani identity have claimed Fulani identity being problematic as well (Amaselle [1990] 1998).

(*suura*) discusses and decides movements within the lineage group, even though each head of the household, always a male, is free to move when and where he wants.

Ethnic identities have, as previously argued, increasingly been seen as relational, fluid and historically constituted. As argued by Clifford, ethnic identities are "an ongoing process, politically contested and historically unfinished" (1988: 9). New configurations can surface with increased contact with others or difficult political circumstances, placing increased stress on cultural differences, thus underlining the distinction of "us" and "others" (see discussion in Werbner 2001: 135). WoDaaBe history has always involved close interaction with other ethnic groups because their subsistence economy is based on trading with sedentary groups in addition to the need to negotiate with others for rights to land and water. It can be suggested that this symbiotic relationship with other ethnicities, in addition to the increased marginalization within the nation state, supports WoDaaBe need to emphasize their difference from other ethnic groups (Loftsdóttir 2001).

WoDaaBe expression of their ethnic identity is thus often explained by juxtaposing themselves in relation to other ethnic groups, especially in contrast to the sedentary Hausa.[5] Fulani ethnic identity, as discussed by Burnham and Last among others, was in the 19th century articulated through a contrast with the Hausa, associating their distinctiveness with *pulaaku*, values which were seen as unique to themselves (Burnham and Last 1994). WoDaaBe similarly emphasize *mbodagansi* as their distinctive ethnic values. *Pulaaku* is derived from the same root as the concept Fulani (or Fulbe as they call themselves (sing. Pullo) (Riesman 1977: 131), but the *mbodagansi* derives from the term *mboda*, meaning taboo or avoidance in English. The name "WoDaaBe" is derived from the same root (Tylor 1932: 424). WoDaaBe can be said to emphasize *mbodagansi* as "qualities appropriate to WoDaaBe," similarly to *pulaaku* meaning "qualities appropriate to the Fulani." (Riesman 1977: 131). This moral behavior, *mbodagansi*, and other qualities WoDaaBe associate with themselves (such as patience, *munyal*), are often characterized as derived and understood from values and practices associated with herding (VerEecke 1991: 189).

WoDaaBe binary opposition in relation to themselves and Hausa marks a clear division between sedentary life and pastoral life, constructing the world into coherent spheres of activities: WoDaaBe live in the bush, Hausa in the towns or villages; WoDaaBe are herders, Hausa cultivate; WoDaaBe migrate,

[5] Considering that Tuaregs are much more numerous in Tchin-Tabaraden than Hausa, it is interesting that WoDaaBe were in my interviews more likely to explain their ethnic identity by referring to Hausa ethnicity. That could be due to that WoDaaBe were not long ago in Hausaland and thus involved in a much more extensive interaction with people of Hausa ethnicity. Burnham and Last have pointed out that Fulani ethnicity took place by contrasting themselves with Hausa (Burnham and Last 1994). When contrasting themselves and Tuaregs, however, my informants tended to emphasize that Tuaregs lacked moral qualities which were part of their WoDaaBe ethnic identity.

Hausa are fixed in one place. Being WoDaaBe and Hausa is thus strongly associated with localization within different spaces that are appropriate by humans in different way.[6] The town and the bush are in various other senses seen as oppositions. WoDaaBe describe the town as smelling (*kassedum*), having people crowded together, unlike the bush where conditions are seen being more sanitary. Agriculture is characterized as drudgery, and during interviews WoDaaBe often state that they are herders, never cultivate. In more informal discussions, however, people assert that agriculture has been one of WoDaaBe subsistence methods during difficult times (Bonfiglioli 1988; Stenning 1959; Dupire 1962).

2. WODAABE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE AREA OF ATTACHMENT

As my previous discussion indicated, WoDaaBe ethnic identification, identifying Hausa with the town and themselves with the bush, coexist with a dualistic view of the bush as an opposition to the town. When discussing, however, WoDaaBe settlement in the bush in a more detailed way, then in the context of their migration patterns and land utilization, WoDaaBe tend to draw a very different picture of their relationship with the bush, not emphasizing binary qualities but rather coexistence.

WoDaaBe have several kinds of migrations, which can be divided into short movements aiming at finding nourishment for animals, and a transhumance movement between rainy season and dry season pasture.[7] In spite of a high degree of mobility, WoDaaBe tend to use the same general areas year after year. WoDaaBe refer to the dry season pasture or the area around the most frequently used wells as an "area of attachment" by the concepts *gari* or *ngenndi*.[8] More

[6] As demonstrated by Mette Bovin in relation to WoDaaBe in the eastern part of Niger, WoDaaBe use also various material markers to distinguish themselves from their neighbors, specific types of tattoos, jewelry and clothing in addition to domestic objects (Bovin 1985:64; 1979:63-67).

[7] WoDaaBe generally have a high degree of mobility as previously discussed and in order to understand the meaning of WoDaaBe area of attachment, it is necessary to look at their conceptualization of mobility. WoDaaBe have an extensive vocabulary referring to migration movements, and different groups have to some extent different usage (Loftsdóttir 2000). The different movements can be classified according to the length of movement they refer to and the season which migration takes place, in addition to referring to various special distances such as the length from well, the closeness to the previous occupation spot (see also Loftsdóttir 1997). In addition, more important for our discussion here, WoDaaBe identify a historical migration called *perol*. The term refers to a migration out of the ordinary, often a temporarily exploitation of new and foreign spaces, thus not only taking the group from its area of attachment but to an alien territory. *Perol* is thus an adaptive strategy used in difficult ecological and political situations. The movement can be permanent, even though probably in most cases people wish to return to their *gari*.

[8] The meaning of these two terms is basically the same, the selection of term used depending on lineage groups and linguistic influences in the area occupied. The concept *gari* will be

specifically, *gari* refers to an area that has either a town or a water-hole place, because "that is the place where people sit down." Thus, the idea and utilization of *gari* involves coexistence of human beings with an environment. Even though the rainy season pasture is often in the same area year after year, the rainy season pasture is normally not referred to as *gari*.[9]

Pastoral societies generally subsist on millet consumption, which provides higher caloric values. In order for a complete dependency on milk to be possible the animal human ratio must be extremely high (Gefu 1992: 20). The association of an "area of attachment" and settlement underlines the importance of millet for pastoral societies, and thus the affiliation with agricultural societies, which constitute a part of WoDaaBe social structure and history (See Dupire 1972: 12). The bush in the context of their area of attachment is thus a highly socialized space, involving the presence and relationship of people of different ethnicities having important trading relationships. In this context, the town[10] is also clearly not an opposition to the bush (*ladde*) in which they live, but a part of it.

It should be underlined that *gari* does not refer to a populated area. Images awakened when discussing *ladde* (and thus *gari*) destruction shows this clearly, phrasing it as *ladde wati*, translated literally as the "bush has died." *Ladde wati* is described as an area that wild animals have left, where trees have been cut down, fields are extensive and population high. As explained to me: "That is no longer a bush."

WoDaaBe have another concept, *ladde hurram*, which refers to a more "wild" bush. This concept is used regarding space lacking human settlement, i.e., people, waterholes, and towns are absent. When people explained this concept to me, they emphasized that not only does it refer to a space without human beings but is occupied by thieves and evil spirits *ginni* (sing. *ginnol*), making it inherently dangerous. The problem of thieves and spirits also exists in *ladde* but becomes more acute in *ladde hurram*, because the presence of people and the intimate knowledge people have of *ladde* makes the *ladde* more secure. When these concepts, *si'ire* (town), *ladde* (bush), *ladde hurram* ("wild" bush) are placed in connection with each other, it can be suggested that they existing on a scale moving from a dense human population to the lack of it.[11]

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used in this discussion. It descends from the Hausa language, but was used among the lineage groups where my research took place. As with all concepts, the meaning of these two terms differs to some extent according to context. The term *lehidi* is also commonly used to refer to area of attachment but that concept is used much broader and generally and I will thus not focus on it here. It is used to refer to earth, an area of a country, or the country itself.

[9] WoDaaBe attachment to a specific area is well documented in various researches (see Bonfiglioli 1981:72-73), their area of attachment usually being referred to as *gari*, *lehidi*, or *ngendi*.

[10] The WoDaaBe classify towns into several categories, more elaborated than demonstrated here.

[11] This is still somewhat of a simplification, while the term *ladde* is a general term, it often also incorporates *ladde huuram.* It is, however, important to realize that WoDaaBe make a distinction between more "wild bush" and a bush that has people.

3. WODAABE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE HOME

The WoDaaBe home *wuro* (pl. *gure*) is composed by several smaller units called *cuudi* (sing. *suudu*).[12] Riesman points out in relation to Jelgobe Fulani in Burkina Faso, that the concept *wuro* goes beyond referring simply to a "house," but describes a sociographic unit, headed by a man, which usually is tied together by kinship (Riesman 1977: 31). The *suudu* is composed by a bed (*leso*) and table (*saga*) which are marked from their surroundings by a half circle of branches placed on the earth. Each *suudu* belongs to one wife of the household and it is almost exclusively a woman's space. She spends most of her time in or around it, all her belongings are usually there, and she invites her friends and family into this space (see also Sa'ad 1991: 212; Bovin 2001: 62-64). The *wuro*, however, is seen as belonging to the husband; he takes decisions where to make it, how often and with whom. The mobile characteristics of the *wuro* means that it is not a structure rooted in a place but characterized by its objects, in addition to referring to highly regulated spaces.

These various organization aspects of the *wuro*, such as who makes it, where, with whom and when, as well as its spatial organizations, are understood not only in gendered terms but also to some extent in ethnic terms. Even though the term *wuro* is used over the homes of other ethnicities as well, its main organizational characteristics are linked with WoDaaBe social and political organizations. The *wuro* (and the *suudu*) constitute points of reference in relation to the WoDaaBe lineage systems and are often conceptualized as the smallest units of the lineage structure (see also Bonfiglioli 1988). The mobility, crucial to the form and existence of the *wuro*, is also seen, as previously discussed, as an integrated part of WoDaaBe ethnicity.

In a similar fashion to the area of attachment, the *wuro* is conceptualized as a space of human coexistence, of solidarity and safety. The further away one is from the home or from a human settlement in general, the greater the danger may be waiting in the bush. These dangers are partly derived from the physical characteristics of the bush, where people can get lost and die of thirst but also dangers of being attacked by thieves, *ginnol*, or in the past, wild animals. I find it important to emphasize in this context that WoDaaBe survival strategy depends on co-operation and closeness to other human beings, rather than the exclusion of them. The WoDaaBe cattle-loans[13] demonstrate that WoDaaBe relationships are strategies for a safer survival. These strategies of increasing safety in an unpredictable environment are informed and understood with reference to WoDaaBe ethnicity, because, as one person explained to me, "someone who does not want to engage in cattle loans is not a WoDaaBe."

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[12] In the Fulfulde language, the concept *wuro* has several meanings, sometimes used to describe a single hut, compound, village or town (see Sa'ad 1991:207). *Suudu* refers also to rooms in certain contexts.

[13] Cattle-loans (*habana'i*) are a social institution among the WoDaaBe which redistributes wealth. Individuals can invest in social relationships by lending out their cattle.

A WoDaaBe informant used the herd as a metaphor for the importance of social relationships for survival, pointing out that the herd is safe and strong as long as its animals keep together and do not move too far from each other. Individuals are also safe as long as they stay within the human settlement, i.e. the home, and the home is safer when not too far from other camps. The camp is, as this man stated, not only a place of safety for human beings but also for the domesticated animals. The cows graze at night in a group (*sogal*), but smaller animals depend on the safety of the house to avoid being eaten by wild animals. In the dry season when the camps are far from each other, the camps are more vulnerable. The rainy season is the time of prosperity and safety which is to some extent due to the short distance of the houses from each other. In the dry season, the bush is considered to be dangerous (*kalledum*) because the other camps are far away and crimes occur frequently, partly because people are more vulnerable due to their isolation, but also because of an increased shortage of food. People feared, for example, more for my safety during the dry season in the bush than during the rainy season. My movements were much less restricted when it started to rain, simply because the bush was safer then.

The home in context of the bush draws thus further attention to the somewhat contradictory problamatizing of boundaries between humans and nature. Even though WoDaaBe conceptualize themselves as a part of the bush in the context of other ethnicities, they also make a contrast between the bush and the "house", which can be seen as a contrast between space which has not been socialized and socialized space. WoDaaBe conceptualize their *wuro* as a safe area that is, on some level, a part of the bush but also as distinguished by the bush around it. As stated by Riesman, “the bush is at once near and far” (Riesman 1977: 251).

4. CATTLE

As David Turton has pointed out, Melvin Herskovits never intended the concept “cattle complex” to be used in a “Freudian sense,” as referring to a “sentimental and obsessive attachment to cattle.” Herskovits was using the term to refer to various collective cultural traits (Turton 1988: 138), being influenced by the German “Kulturkreis” theories (Barnard 2000). The binary opposition of herders holding their animals either because they were economically attached to them or because it was economically fruitful was resistant to change, especially in discourses outside anthropology (see criticism in Grayzel 1990: 35-36; VerEecke 1991: 185-186).

Animals in WoDaaBe society have an interconnected symbolic, social and economic meaning. This applied especially to cattle whose multiple roles in WoDaaBe society cannot be reduced to a single meaning or purpose. Livestock can be seen as a medium in transforming the shrubs and annual grasses into products that can be used by humans (Johnson 1993: 26). Cows provide people with milk and meat to sell at the market for millet. Not only do cattle carry an

important production role, they are also especially important for the reproduction of the social system. All major life transitions, such as birth, marriage and death take place with the assistance of cattle. In addition to their role in life transitions, cattle form the basis for the important gift distribution system, *habana'i*, which both establishes social relationship within and outside the lineage group, leading to the reduction of risk within the pastoral economy. Goats and sheep are a relatively recent addition to WoDaaBe economy, serving as a mobile reserve to sell at the market, in addition to sheep serving ceremonial purposes as in other Islamic communities. Donkeys have largely replaced the package-ox in transporting people and belongings and camels, which are used to scout the area and for transportation purposes.

The WoDaaBe distinguish the *Bororo Zebu* breed of cows from other breeds of cattle, identifying it as a "true" cow (*na'i gonga*). When discussing livestock, people often use the unmarked category "cows" to refer to the Bororo Zebu but specify when referring to other breeds of cattle. The conceptualizations of cattle seem to have some relevance to ethnicity, because other breeds of cattle are seen as belonging to other ethnicities, while the Bororo cow is a WoDaaBe cow (there are of course still many WoDaaBe who have Azawak cows).

The Bororo cow is characterized by a special attachment to its owner, being extremely obeying and responding well to commands given by people, in addition to knowing their names. They get used to specific people handling them, refusing cooperating with strangers, such as in terms of milking and watering. WoDaaBe sees this attachment to the owner as serving practical purposes because, as they frequently emphasize, it is almost impossible to steal a Bororo cow. They run away from a stranger, refusing cooperation. The Bororo cows are also characterized as fiercely independent and can in some situations be dangerous to people. Dupire points out that they can merely be seen as partly domesticated animals, referring to their characteristic as "semi-sauvage" (Dupire 1962: 95). WoDaaBe describe Bororo cattle as having *djikku* (character), which is the same term as used in relation to people. To have *djikku* is usually characterized negatively by WoDaaBe in relation to people, then as referring to loss of self-control, but the use of such a term in relation to cows can be seen as placing them on the same level as people, conceptualizing them as animals with temper and independent personalities. The Azawak breed of cows, on the other hand, is seen as lacking character and not forming ties with people. The Azawak cows are docile animals, making them more suitable as pack-oxen in the past, even though some Bororo cows also took this role.[14]

[14] Cattle have individual names. Each animal carries the same name as the animal that gave birth to it, which is curious considering that the WoDaaBe are a patrilineal society. This naming tradition is interesting because it appears almost as if the same cow is being born again and again, thus creating continuity with the past. People know that an animal with the same name also belonged to their forefathers. Other kinds of animals occasionally have names, but not as uniformly as cattle. The names of specific cattle are not only used within the family but are often well known outside the family, even among members of distant families.

The various taboos associated with objects having to do with cattle show the importance of cows, both in terms of subsistence and symbolism. The calf rope (*dangul*) has several taboos, one of its most important being that it should not be stepped on or over. The milking bowl (*birdude*) also has various taboos associated with it and should not be used for any other activity than milking, but calabashes used to eat from generally do not have taboos associated with them. A woman with unbraided hair cannot enter the *dudal* (the cattle area of the camp). The breaking of these taboos will usually cause misfortune to the herd, a calf dying or a cow getting lost or ill.

Unlike the Western intellectual tradition, which has tended to pose emotional and rational aspects as binary oppositions, WoDaBe see these as coexisting. When people discuss their affection for cows vis-à-vis other animals, the pragmatic element of nourishment is often placed as a central component of affection.[15] "I don't really care about camels, because the camel will not feed me," is a sentence I heard describing the attitude of many people[16] (see also Loftsdóttir 1997). WoDaaBe underline that the well-being of the cows is the pre-condition of the well-being of human beings (Dupire 1962: 53). One informant tells me that "WoDaaBe put their strength to the cow, because WoDaaBe have to take care of their cows, just as the cows take care of WoDaaBe." As a result of this personal and intimate relationship, the cows are given names while most other animals are not given names. People did not seem to view their relationship with cows as one of dominance and use, but more in terms of equality and reciprocity. This conceptualization is reflected in a statement made by one herder,

> My people are as *masube* (slaves) of cows, all you do is for your cows. If it is the dry season, you want to go and get water for your cows. Your cows only wait, observing you working. You have to do all the work, you have to think about how to get the water (Akali; from notebook 10.3.1998).

The term *sibiiru* is also a powerful source of information regarding the ties between WoDaaBe, land and cattle. It literally refers to the navel and the umbilical cord, but also to one's place of origin as a part of a social group. At the birth of a WoDaaBe child, the cord is cut and then buried close to the wood sticks (*kopeeje*) that hold the calf rope in place. It is quite interesting that the cord should be buried close to the calf rope, where the calves are tied during milking.

The symbolic meaning of the association of land with birth and the act of digging the cord next to the calf-rope is extensive. The calf-rope's extensive

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[15] WoDaaBe say that they never stop breast-feeding (*muusini*) because they continue feeding from their cows' milk. The dependency on milk becomes so intense that during the droughts of 1968-1974 and 1984, many young WoDaaBe attributed the death of elderly people to the fact that they did not get any milk to drink for the first time in their lives.

[16] The WoDaaBe do not consume milk of camels nor would they eat its meat. This is due to, according to themselves, their adherence to Islam.

taboos, which if broken lead to the herd's misfortune, indicate the strong bonds placed between the calf-rope and cattle. As previously discussed, cattle are characterized by WoDaaBe as semi-wild, but given rather human characteristics unlike other animals (such as names and personality). It seems thus to be highly symbolic and meaningful that the cord is placed in the earth next to an item (the calf-rope) symbolizing the herd. It ties people, land and cattle in a close unity. It could also be significant that the concept *sibiiru* is used both over the umbilical cord and the navel, stressing the *sibiiru* as not only a cord which can be cut away, as the English term implies, but continues to be a part of a person.

Furthermore, whereas the nourishing cord places an association between birth and the land, cattle can in a sense been seen as rematerializing in the cord, being essential for subsistence as the cord itself, being the medium that allows people to subsist within this environment, transforming grasses into products that can be consumed by humans. The cattle and the cord both constitute nourishing ties between humans and their surroundings. The term *sibiiru* can thus been seen as referring to a symbolic association of the womb and the land where one originated, united in a nourishing cord, the cattle.

WoDaaBe thus see their relationship with cattle as one of protection and reciprocity. As stated by Riesman in his ethnography on the Jelgobe Fulani, cattle can be seen as mediators of bush and human settlement (Riesman 1977: 255). Cattle are crucial economic and symbolic components of their society, making the production in the Sahel environment possible as well as being integrated into the reproduction of their social system. Cattle take some of the similar characteristics as people, having character and personal names, but are at the same time still conceptualized as less domesticated than other animals.

5. *GINNOL* AND THE SOCIAL SPACE

The *ginnol* is interesting in the context of the conceptualization of human - environment relations because it indicates a further conceptualization of the bush as a non-socialized space. The *ginnol* is probably known to most Fulani groups,[17] the concept has been translated as "devil" or "spirit." (CRDTO 1971). In the dictionary by Osborn *et al*., the concepts *ginnaary*, *jinni*, or *ginnawol* are seen as referring to spirits (Osborn et al 1993). *Ginnol* is characterized as a creature of the bush, fearing the WoDaaBe home (*wuro*) and generally not coming close to it, only making its appearance known in the bush. The most frequent encounters of *ginnol* are the sights of its fire from a distance, which appears as a distant camp. Usually this happens to someone traveling alone at night perhaps with his herd. The fire disappears and then reappears in a different place, only to disappear once again. Sometimes voices accompany this vision as people gather around the fire. Even though in most cases *ginnol* only exposes

[17] Riesman (1977) provides, for example, an excellent discussion of *ginnol*.

itself in the dark, it also happens to make appearances in daylight, thus indicating the *ladde* (even though within the area of attachment) as a dangerous place for someone alone. The *ginnol* hesitates to enter the *wuro*, which is an assembly of objects and relationships, even though not tied down to a specific place in the area.

Ginnol sometimes kills people but more frequently is said to render people mad or to disfigure them in one way or another. Human beings are not able to see the *ginnol*, but only what is called *busaka* or a *mbelu*,[18] which is the reflection or a shadow of the *ginnol*. The *ginnol* is also a shape-shifter and can take the appearance of both humans and animals. It usually attacks only a single individual and is thus considered dangerous to someone travelling alone, even though there are cases it making itself known to two or three people. As pointed out by Riesman in relation to the Jelgobe Fulani, the *ginnol* attacks people who are in state of vulnerability (Riesman 1997: 220). My interest in the *ginnol* in this context is how it reflects an interesting dichotomy between the *wuro* and the bush. The *wuro* is a moveable space of order and safety while its surrounding areas can be dangerous and unpredictable. The fact that the *ginnol* generally attacks someone alone re-emphasizes the importance of social networking and solidarity. In contexts of narratives of the *ginnol*, a binary opposition can almost be drawn between the *wuro* and the *ladde*; the former characterized by solidarity but the latter by isolation; the former safety and regulations but the latter danger and chaos.

6. CATTLE AND *GINNOL*

Further information about WoDaaBe's conceptualization of their relationship with the bush is observed in the relationship of *ginnol* and animals. I previously suggested that the WoDaaBe do not conceptualize their relationship with their cows as being hierarchical as much as a symbiotic reciprocity, where humans take care of their cows and vice versa.[19] WoDaaBe origin myths emphasize that cows came to live with humans by their own will, and they are seen as always maintaining their independent character. I have pointed out that the *wuro* involves the coexistence of humans and animals, and that the cows mediate between the bush and the home.[20]

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[18] I could not find the term *busaka* in any of the dictionaries available to me. However, the term *mbelu* is defined as a "personal shadow, spirit" (Tylor [1932] 1995;14) and as "shadow, reflection, ghost, wandering shadow" (CRDTO 1971:42), or "shadow" (Osborn et al., 1993: (499).

[19] WoDaaBe realize, of course, that it is not an equal relationship because they slaughter animals and sell them if necessary.

[20] Riesman also sees cows as an animal of the bush and of the *wuro*, thus asserting the cow as a "relation…. between man and the bush" (Riesman 1977: 255-256).

Cows see the *ginnol*, which is attached to the herd and often stays close to it. At night, some people are afraid to enter their cattle herd because the *ginnol* may be there. The *ginnol* will not enter the cattle area if the cattle coral fire (*duDal*) is burning, because it fears fire, but waits until it eventually dies out. The relationship of cows and *ginnol* is also expressed in some cows being considered to have *ginnol*. These are cows that do not have an uniform rope, but a mixture of many colors, especially if the animal is an ox (*budjeri*) or bull (*kalhaldi)*. WoDaaBe see mixture of different elements as inherently bad, expressed in that the mixing of different food being dangerous for people's health, and a person of mixed ancestry is considered to be more dangerous than one who is of "pure" ancestry. Cattle with *ginnol* are thus especially dangerous to people.

Another association between *ginnol*, cows and people has to do with the moral conduct of WoDaaBe, which requires the person to share his or her resources with other WoDaaBe. It should be noted, however, that the following information depends on very few sources and I have also heard the same story without the association with the *ginnol.* According to these informants, a person who has a great deal of cows, and is not generous in giving or loaning them in *habana'i* may suffer great misfortune from the hand of the *ginnol*. When that happens, a strange sound is suddenly heard from the herd, like someone is beating a drum or a calabash (*tumBal*). The herd becomes restless, but the beating continues and there is no one to be seen. If the person who owns the cows does not start immediately to kill his own cows, he will surely die. In order to save his life, he should call people and ask them to help him. He should start killing his animals, by slashing their foot by the sword in order to be able to kill them more easily. Many cows have to be killed (between ten or twenty according to one informant) and afterwards the meat is cooked and distributed. I was told that this was "work *ginnol*" because someone's cows are too numerous and he is not willing to share them with others. What is of special interest here is that the *ginnol* seems to serve as a moral reminder of one fellow WoDaaBe against another, using the herd as a mediator.

7. Concluding Remarks

Writings of more recent ecological anthropology, "the new ecologies," have emphasized the importance of emphasizing human beings and culture as a part of the environment, not as oppositions to it, in addition to analyzing local conceptions of how meaning is articulate through and within ecological contexts (see for example Ingold 2000; Descola and Pálsson 1996).

I have here emphasized that WoDaaBe conceptualization of themselves in relation to their environments differs according to the context in which the conceptualization takes place. Within the context of bush and animals, WoDaaBe see themselves as separated from their natural surroundings, differentiating their camp from the bush as a social space characterized by order

and social relationships. Within the context of other people, WoDaaBe also draw up a dualistic relationship of the bush and the "artificial", but locate themselves as a part of the bush, reflected for example in them referring to themselves as the “birds of the bush” (*solli ladde*) or "people of the bush" (*tagu ladde*).

In the context of resource management, WoDaaBe stress, however, their symbiotic relationship with the city and with the bush, underlining with their concept *gari* (area of attachment) that human settlement is a part of the bush. Cows, the primary animals for WoDaaBe both in economic and social terms, are important mediators of WoDaaBe relationship with bush, seen as belonging within the bush and within the WoDaaBe home. They transform grasses, which cannot be consumed by humans, into products, consumable for human beings. As pointed out by Willis, probably all human cultures recognize duality and communality or continuity between opposed constituents (Willis 1990: 7). People’s conceptualization of themselves and the environment are, however, complex and often even contradictory, involving relationships that are viewed differently from various social locations.

Furthermore, connecting ethnicity with conceptualization of human - environment relations, points towards ethnicity involving certain organization of the world, which becomes meaningful in everyday context. WoDaaBe utilization and conceptualization of environments and animals are to some extent explained and understood from ethnicity: the understanding of *wuro* as an assembly of highly regulated relationships and spaces takes place with reference to their ethnicity, as does WoDaaBe understanding of their involvement with their animals. It is in fact interesting that the association of Bororo cattle with nomadism and WoDaaBe ethnicity and the association of Azawak cattle with sedentarization and other ethnicities explains both ethnic relations by referring to the natural world and division in the natural world by referring to the social world.

I am here not implying ethnicity being primordial or unchanging, conceptualization of human-animal relations change historically as other social constructions, but simply that ethnicity becomes meaningful by its integration into tapestry of larger issues of meaning and identity, in this case involving embodied experience with nature and animals. The bush itself does not only shaped human subsistence in the area but is itself shaped by human activities, memories and social history becoming part of the socialized landscape. It can be suggested that because the bush is contextualized within ethnicity, ethnicity becomes affirmed and experienced on daily basis in relation to the bush. Ethnicity is thus tied to a certain organization of the world, which comes meaningful in everyday context.

Table 1. *wuro* and *ladde* as binary oppositions

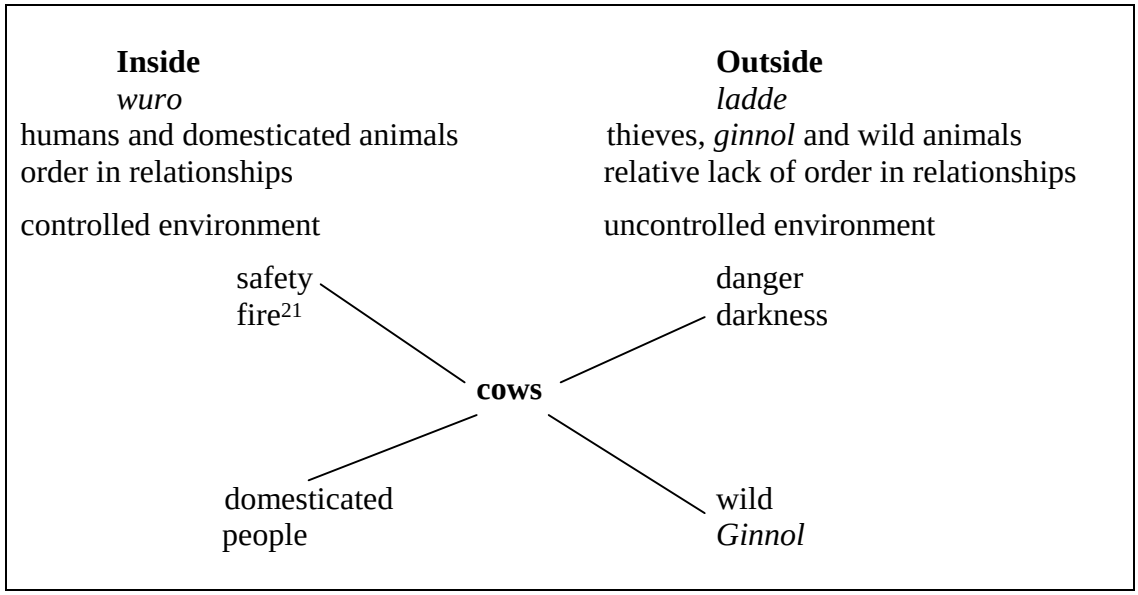
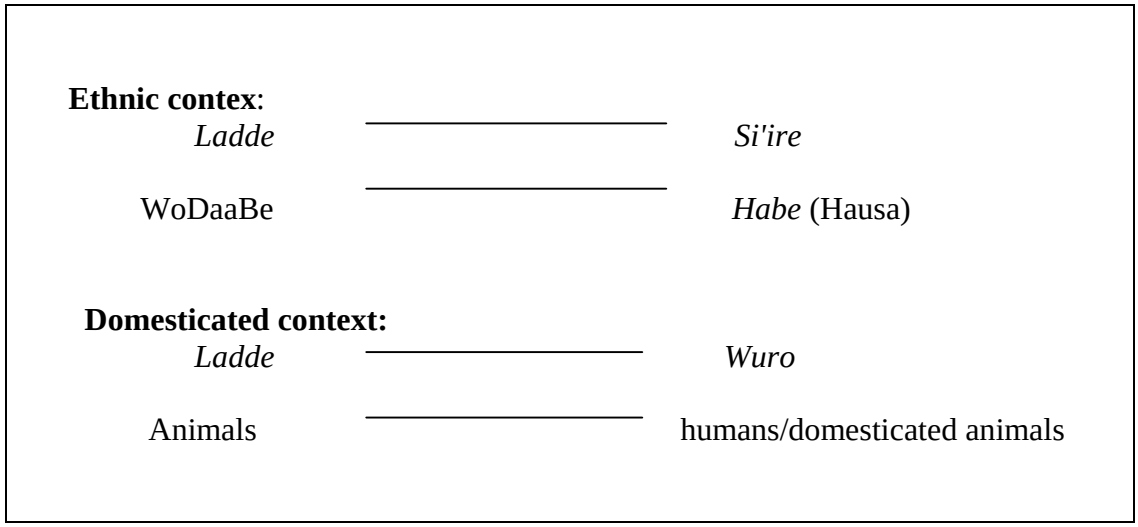


Table 2. Different contexts of identification



[21] Fire is an interesting element in this relationship. Some WoDaaBe origin myths state that cows were lured to join humans with the element of fire. Cows, just as humans, seem to like fire. *Ginnol*, however, does not enter the cattle coral when a fire is burning. However, the *ginnol* uses fire to try to lure and confuse people in the bush, or at least to make it presence known.

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