AFRICAN BELIEFS IN THE PSYCHIC MANIPULATION OF MATERIAL PHENOMENA: THE TENGSOBA IN MOSSI SOCIETY

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The structure of a society's attitudes toward parapsychological or supernatural phenomena is a function of its technical system, its social organization, its ideology and corresponding ecological conditions. [1,2,3] This is equally true of a society's attitudes toward psychological and natural (or normal) phenomena. The difference, of course, is that whereas these latter phenomena are frequently encountered, people become quite upset when confronted with what they consider to be the unusual or the uncanny. Yet, the fact remains that both contrasting types of phenomena belong to the same universe—the world of man. The problem for most people has been to decide what to do about episodic and uncanny events. Only a few people in all the societies through space and time have been content to ascribe these phenomena to coincidence or chance. Most have attempted to explain them by employing "scientific" but more usually "nonscientific" concepts, that is, by using magic or religion as explanatory devices.

A number of anthropologists have pointed out that the people who have customarily used nonempirical or nonscientific means to explain uncanny phenomena are "no more nor less interested in the natural causes of things that is the theoretical thought of the sciences." [4,5,6] Moreover, many of the postulates of their "nonempirical" explanations are related to their experiences. The question as to whether these postulates are the correct ones is normally a source of contention. However, all postulates about the relationship between cause and effect change over time, and reflect not only the technical system being employed by people, but the nature of their social organization, the ecological factors of their existence and often the politico-ideological issues that are of great importance to them.

There is widespread belief in many African societies that human beings can control the forces of nature, especially rain, but often thunder, lightning, growing crops, and so on. Mbiti declares that "Rainmakers are reported in all parts of the continent." [7] The reason being that "In African societies rain is regarded as a great blessing, and whenever it rains people rejoice (unless

excessive rain damages crops or causes harmful flooding). Whether they are farmers or pastoralists, the entire livelihood of the people depends upon rain. Near the Equator there are generally two rainy periods and two dry ones in the year. Further away from the Equator these two sets of seasons tend to merge and produce one long period of rain and one long dry season. In either situation, if the rain is delayed it means that for that season there will either be insufficient harvest or none at all, and this causes a lot of anxiety to everyone." [8] The result, according to Mbiti, is that regardless of what their specific function is with respect to rain, the "rainmakers are some of the most important individuals in almost all African societies." [9,10]

Given the importance of rain in most regions of Africa, with the resulting anxieties, it is quite understandable why the people are interested in the phenomenon itself, and in those persons who can control it. By keen observation of the natural signs such as the position of the stars, the behavior of vegetation, and the periodicity and strength of the prevailing winds, most people in these societies have a fair knowledge of the nature of the rainfall in their region. Nevertheless, there are certain circumstances in which their knowledge of the natural order is insufficient to deal with untoward events such as unusually heavy or unseasonal rains, and the absence of rain, or the localization of rain in one part of the country and not in the others. These circumstances "can only be coped with in terms of wider causal vision than common sense provides. And in these circumstances there is a jump to theoretical thinking." [11] Nevertheless, the type of theoretical thinking that the people resort to, does not exist in a vacuum. It is related to their knowledge of their local eco-systems, their technical system, their sociopolitical system, and their ideology. Moreover, their theoretical assumptions, whether "true" or "false," provide an explanation which is usually satisfying since it harmonizes with most aspects of their society.

The belief of the Mossi of the Upper Volta that a group of specialists, the *Tengsobadamba* (sing. Tengsoba = master of the earth) have the ability to control rain and lightning, and can teleport these phenomena and also growing crops from one region to another, reveals their concern about the vagaries of their sources of food, the problem of morality, and their social and political organization. Writing about the Mossi, Mangin states: "Water in general and rain in particular are a blessing in this sun-scorched land. . . . If rain is too long delayed, the crop will not have time to ripen; if it falls too heavily, especially at the beginning and at the end of the winter (rainy) season, weeds will choke the millet, or flowers will fall before the fruit is formed. . . . Rain is, therefore, desired or feared according to the circumstances and the power to makè rain and to ward it off devolves upon the naba who rules on the life and death of his subjects." [12]

Mossi society itself arose in a strategic but rather difficult ecological zone in the Sahel-Sudan region of West Africa. Situated between 9:30 degrees and 15 degrees north latitude and between 2 degrees east and 5 degrees west longitude, Mogho (land of the Mossi) covers an area of some 30,000 square miles and is inhabited by about four million people. Geographically, the country is a huge plateau, lying from 1,000 to 1,600 feet above sea level, and broken by three low mountain ranges and numerous small hills. Its climate is typical of the Sudanic zone. There are two main seasons: one cold and dry, the other hot and wet. The first begins in November with the coming of the harmattan and ends in January, the coolest month, when the average temperature is about 70° F. and the humidity about 12 per cent. The hot season extends from March to October. In July, the warmest month, the temperature reaches a high of 88° F. and the humidity 78 per cent. Violent dust storms herald the rains, which begin late in May and end in September. The rain falls almost entirely in heavy showers and thunderstorms, and the average annual fall is between 30 and 40 inches. In those years when the rainfall is about 40 inches and is regularly spaced, the Mossi can look forward to a good harvest. When the rainfall is below 30 inches and is spaced irregularly during the planting season, the threat of famine is serious. Almost every year, there is a difficult "hungry period" (the time between the exhaustion of one year's crops and the maturity of the next).

Traditionally, the Mossi did not practice irrigation. The country is drained by only three rivers: the Black Volta, the Red, and the White Voltas with their numerous small tributaries. Only the Black Volta flows all year round. The Red and White Voltas dwindle to a string of small stagnant pools in the dry season. In some low-lying areas near the main watercourses, trapped waters provide the moisture for dank riverine vegetation, but are useless for irrigating the soil. These soils are typical of the Sudanic and Sahel areas. Red argils and pure silicates of aluminum predominate in the northern regions, and those soils in the south are thin and sandy. They are eroded by torrential rains, the scouring action of the harmattan, and the incendiary action of man and nature. Even where the soils are reasonably fertile, the nature of the underlying rocks precludes important deposits of ground water. Wells yield very little water at any depth.

During the dry season, Mossi country presents a picture of such utter aridity that one wonders whether it is possible for such parched red soils to produce plant life. Yet, after the first drops of rain, the entire plain quickly becomes covered with grasses which sometimes reach heights of five or six feet. The most characteristic and valuable trees in the region are the baobab, the locust-bean, the shea butter, the tamarind, the kapok (*Bombax*

costatum), and a wide variety of silk-cotton trees. The cultivated plants include numerous varieties of cereals, roots, and legumes. Sorghums and millets constitute the staple crops of the Mossi, but maize is extremely important because it is one of the first crops to be harvested after the difficult hungry period. Peanuts, onions, rice, beans, okra, fonio, manioc, tobacco, indigo and sweet potatoes form the bulk of the other cultivated crops. The Mossi exploit such wild fauna of their environment as elephants, varieties of antelope and the fish in the various pools. They keep chickens, ducks and guinea fowls, and herd cattle, sheep and goats. These animals, plus their vegetable products and manufactured goods such as cloth, are traded in local markets and prior to European contact were exported both north to the desert area and down into the forest zone.[13]

Geography, trade and politics all played key roles in the development of Mossi society. The society falls within the northern quadrant of the Voltaic area, a region extending from Salaga (Ghana) in the south to Ouahigouya (Upper Volta) in the north, and inhabited by Moré-Dagbane-speaking peoples known throughout the history of West Africa for their extensive trade between the forest and the desert. Oral traditions suggest that Mossi society developed as a result of the expansion of the Dagomba people of the Gold Coast (modern Ghana) into the Volta region.[14,15] Here they conquered and partially assimilated the autochthonous peoples such as the Ninisi (Nyonyonse), Foulsé, and Habé. The resulting population, the Mossi, developed four important kingdoms and lesser principalities under rulers called *Naba* (pl. Nanamse), who, claiming divine right to rule because they possessed the *nam* (that force of God which permits one man to rule another) arrogated all political power or sovereignty to themselves. They also developed complex hierarchial administrative structures which extended the power of the Mogho Naba (king of the world) down through the districts into the smallest villages and funnelled goods and services back to them. Nevertheless, the ruling lineage left ritual control of their territories to the Tengsobadamba (earth priests) as the leaders of the defeated people were called.

Most of the institutions of Mossi society reflect the history of this conquest state. Mossi village populations are divided into noble, commoner, serf and slave, segmentary patrilineal groups living in polygymous extended family households. These social groups are linked together through a system of reciprocal exchanges of goods, services and women who serve as wives.[16] Lineage heads not only control the social and economic activities of their corporate groups, but act as the important intermediaries between their people and the supernatural. The main religious referent of these lineages are their lineal ancestors, but the Mossi believed in a diety known as

Winnam, Winde, or Naba Zid'Winde. Associated with Winnam is a female deity referred to as Tenga whose local manifestations and propitiatory agencies are known as Tengkouga (sing. Tengkougre). These Tengkouga which exist in the form of clumps of trees, mountains, rocks, rivers and sometimes animals, are associated with spirits known as Kinkirse. Serving Tenga, officiating at Tenkouga and acting as custodian of the land and all that dwelt on it are the *Tengsobadamba* or earth priests.[17,18]

The Mossi describe their Tengsoba as "The Master of all that touch the earth: the mountains, the hills, the plains, the rivers, the forests, the trees, the entire landscape, and everything that is within its limits and domains. His power extends equally up to the sky: the clouds, the rain, the thunder, the thunder-bolt, the lightning and so on." [19] Thus the Tengsoba is linked both to the earth and to the sky. Indeed, a number of oral traditions recall how in the dawn of time the ancestors of the Tengsobadamba lived in the sky and used to visit the earth using a cotton rope. One day some people cut the rope and their ancestors were forced to remain on earth and became known as Teng'bissi or children of the earth or Nyonyose (to walk without making a noise, like the wind). In some traditions the persons who cut the rope were local people already living in the country, but in others, the culprits were the children of the Dagomba invaders. The latter allegedly took the chiefs of the Teng'bissi to Naba Oubri, the head of the conquerors, who constrained them to make sacrifices to the earth deity in his name and in the name of his descendants who later ruled Mossi country.[20]

The traditions giving supernatural origin to the Tengsobadamba place these ritual figures in direct opposition to the political officials. In some traditions the first local political chiefs allegedly had to hunt down the Tengsobadamba who had fled to the woods and forcibly return them to the districts in order that they may continue to make the propitiary sacrifices to the earth on behalf of the rulers.[21] Thus in matters relating to man's quest for food, and his relationship with the natural environment, the Tengsobadamba play a preeminent role. Land and all of its attributes belong to the realm of the Masters of the Earth. It is the Tengsobadamba who give people permission to occupy the land; give them the right to dig graves in the earth; and make the necessary sacrifices to propitiate the earth through its agencies, the *Tengkouga* (sing. Tengkougre) or earth shrines.[22]

In contrast to the Tengsobadamba, the political rulers of the Mossi, the *Nanamse* (sing. naba) do not control land; they control people. Their possession of the *nam* means that God gave them sovereignty over other men. But, all the rulers of Mossi society, from the Mogho Nanamse (sing. Mogho Naba or "king of the world") to the simplest village chief, need the Tengsobadamba to make sacrifices to the earth shrines before they can take office or

rule in peace. In the case of the Mogho Naba, each year, surrounded by a large entourage he reportedly visits a large earth shrine called Tantibo in the vicinity of Sabatenga to offer propitiatory sacrifices in the name of all the people. When the country is plagued by drought, the ruler goes to an earth shrine in Ouagadougou itself, called "Kom be paspanga" (literally, "water is strong there"), for a sacrifice. Moreover, he might order all his district and village chiefs to perform similar sacrifices to the earth shrines within their territories. In Nobéré district, where I conducted field work, the district chief goes to the village called Barkago, where, standing barefoot and bareheaded on the hilly shrine known as Bêta, he orders the local village chief and the Tengsoba to offer sacrifices for rain and good health.

Cooperation between the Tengsobadamba and the political hierarchy in the interest of the people used to be highlighted each year throughout Mossi country by a number of important rituals. Until banned by the French conquerors, the Mossi of the Ouagadougou kingdom collectively celebrated a feast known as the *Tensé* (from Tenga, "earth") just before the crops are sown. At a prearranged date, all the Tengsobadamba and all the heads of families throughout the land made sacrifices to the earth and to their collective ancestors for good health, bounteous crops and many children. This ceremony was so important that even when it could not be celebrated collectively, the people in the districts and villages continued to make these sacrifices in secret. As far as they were concerned, they could not permit either the chiefs or the French conquerors to interfere with their relations with the fructifying earth.

The Tengsobadamba in many parts of Mossi country also make propitiatory sacrifices to the earth after the harvest. This ritual, called *kiugu* or *filiga*, is associated with the moon. For five days preceding the appearance of the moon, the Tengsobadamba (and often the chiefs) hide themselves from their ancestors by frequently changing their place of residence. The night that the new moon appears, the Tengsobadamba return home, prepare millet-flour water from the new millet of their own fields and pour libations on the earth of their houses as offerings to their ancestors, and drink the rest.

Although the Tengsobadamba cooperate with the political authorities in Mossi society, their major concern is with the earth and the life-giving or life-destroying rain. They are moreover, quite knowledgeable about nature and perceptive about the seasons. In the world of one Moaga (pl. Mossi): "A great astronomer, the Tengsoba observes celestial phenomena, the events of nature, compares them one with another, follows closely the flows of the seasons, draws from them conclusions upon which he establishes his calendar, and, to reinforce his authority, pronounces judgments which are followed by concrete facts." [23]

Tengsobadamba possess special tools, attire, potions, and practices that help them in their task of dealing with nature. Their most important instrument is a ritual axe called the *toabgha* which they always carry on their left shoulder. This axe, made of iron and having three holes on its blade, is said to represent the wind which blows the clouds and causes rain. This axe is the most powerful instrument the Tengsobadamba have and they use it against all danger, and in particular, against evil occult forces. The Tengsobadamba also carry a hoe-like instrument called the *boudoubkoukouri* which, incidentally, is the Mossi's name for the constellation Pleiades whose position in the sky regulates the beginning of the planting season in all parts of the West African savanna region.[24] Their forked iron stick called the *dá-yagre* is not only used during the major sacrifices intended to precipitate rain, but like the axe, can be used to support occult forces that combat malevolent forces. In addition to these instruments, the Tengsobadamba have bells (*loamba*) of different kinds that can either awaken the winds that bring rains, or frighted away the winds when rains are not desired; iron lances, special garments, hats and headdresses, and the very important rain medicines, or *teeme.*

The teeme generally possessed by the Tengsobadamba consists of a mixture of plant, mineral and animal substances. Sometimes these substances are used as they are; at other times they are placed in water; and at still other times they are mixed into a paste. Tauxier states that the teeme used by one Tengsoba consisted of "a cow's tail at the tip of a wooden handle." [25] Mangin states that in addition to the cow's or horse's tail the rain teeme consist of certain roots and pits of fruits which the Tengsobadamba keep in a jar, and certain roots which are burnt as desired.[26]

Teeme is an important tool of the Tengsobadamba because the Mossi believe in its efficacy, and it is an important ingredient in their sacrifices. These sacrifices, designed to ensure rain during the planting season, are performed at the various Tengkouga or earth shrines in the woods, fields or villages. They may also be performed at special altars called "Tenga" located either in the courtyards in the compounds of the Tengsobadamba or in special sacrificial houses called *Kimsérogo* (houses of the dead). The Tenga itself usually consists of a large jar containing a large stone, different iron objects, copper and bronze bracelets and rings of different sizes. The jar sits on a log of wood, and the entire complex is usually red with the blood and feathers of sacrificial chickens, and white with traces of millet water.[27]

The sacrifices which take place at the eve of the planting season are as much propitiatory rituals for the earth deity as they are communal rites in which the villagers, with the aid of their Tengsobadamba, prepare for the most important activity of their lives—the cultivation of the earth. It is at

these sacrifices that one witnesses the role of the Tengsobadamba, and sees the significance of all of their instruments: the toabgha that manipulates the rain-producing winds; the boudoubkoukouri representing the Pleiades and the time for sowing; the da-yagre which precipitates the rain; the loamba which awakens or frightens away the life-giving rains; and the teeme, which when used episodically can control the rain, lightning and crops. The sacrifices of animals on the Tense, and the toabgha, are designed to encourage the earth to bring forth much grain, and to strengthen the axe so that it could cleave the clouds. The ancestors, too, are presented with their share of the sacrificial victims, and people are pleased when these spirits show acceptance of the offering by the animals dying on their backs. But all participants in the sacrifices are aware that the earth, the winds, the rain, and the power of the Tengsobadamba can also punish evil, and withhold from the malefactors the life-giving rain and bounteous crops.

As long as the rains appear on time, and fall according to a rhythm which permits the Mossi farmers to sow their grain; cultivate the growing crops without too much difficulty due to excessive rain and weeds; and obtain enough moisture so that their grain matures until it is harvested, everyone, especially the Tengsobadamba, is content. This the Mossi would like to believe, is the normal state of affairs, and they take it in stride. The problem is that nature is not often so kind. Mangin who lived for many years in Mossi country remarked that the onset of the rainy season is marked by violent thunderstorms; every storm is accompanied by lightning; and lightning often kills people. Some years are characterized by both violent rainstorms separated by dry periods so that the grain sown does not germinate; or grain germinates, but does not grow. The situation is often further complicated by the vagaries of the rainfall. One district or even one village may get sufficient rain for its crops, while neighboring districts and villages experience drought. Sometimes highly localized storms would lay flat the millet, maize and sorghum in one village or district while sparing neighboring ones.

It is during these periods of disaster that the Mossi turn to their Tengsobadamba; for many of them are firmly convinced that these specialists have the power to influence the winds, rains, lightning and growth of crops. The Tengsobadamba also believe in their power, but also view their role in a wider context, namely, in the total nexus of relationship between man and man, and man and the supernatural. In many cases, these natural disasters are preceded by social and political ones, and the Tengsobadamba attempt to deal with the human problems as well as the uncanny and supernatural ones. These specialists often view the two as linked together.

The Mossi often attribute the fatal effects of the lightning of violent thunderstorms "to an evil spirit, to an enemy who can send lightning if he

knows the proper teeme or to God Himself. Lightning strikes thieves and murderers; it is a punishment. If it does not kill the thief himself, it kills the proceeds of the theft, the stolen horse or sheep. It never kills a person without reason." [28] But since the Tengsobadamba are known to be the persons who possess the rain teeme, they are immediately called upon to deal with the problem. According to Ouedraogo,

> When a thunderbolt falls somewhere, in a compound for example, one must refer the matter to the Tengsoba. A sin has been committed in that place, and no one can approach it. As soon as he is alerted, the Tengsoba arrives bringing with him a new calabash, and a new broom in his hand. At a few paces from the disaster he stops and softly recites some prayers. He praises the heavens, invokes its power, its help; for while personally he is nothing in its sight, yet he permits himself to intercede on behalf of his brothers. . .He fills his calabash with water, puts some black powder in it, and with the aid of his broom, sprinkles the water from right to left. After a while, a whitish smoke arises from a spot on the earth. He orders a hole to be dug there and after a few strokes of the pick, a triangular-formed slippery flint stone is found. He takes it, rolls it between his fingers, observes it, and gives the reason why the thunderbolt fell where it did. The frightened people back away trembling. They declare: "Who ever wishes to live long must exercise care with respect to the Tengsoba." [29]

The critical role of the Tengsobadamba as a mediator with the supernatural in its relationship to people often rekindles or heightens their conflict with the political authorities, because the chiefs and members of the royal family are often the cause of many problems in Mossi society. Moreover, the Tengsobadamba have never forgotten nor forgiven the Nanamse for usurping their power and subjecting the inhabitants of Mossi country to sometimes intolerable exactions. Possessing no military power to sanction the kings, princes and nobles, the Tengsoba have had to rely on the supernatural.

Thus in Nobéré district, south of Ouagadougou, the people of a resident Ninisi family became enraged when a relative of the district chief impregnated one of their wives before she had weaned her child. The nobleman not only encouraged the woman to violate the lactation sexual taboo, but by so doing, endangered the life of the child. When they could get no satisfaction from the district chief, the Tengsoba, known as the Nimpwenaba and a member of the Ninisi lineage, asked all his family members to contribute white chickens for a great sacrifice. He threatened to flatten all the roofs in Nobéré in order to show the people that he was still a Tengsoba and that they could not molest a wife of his lineage and threaten the life of its child. This controversy lasted through that planting season, and the district did exper-

ience strong winds, and some roofs were indeed flattened. There was also a great deal of anxiety about the size of the harvest in the district.

So great is the Tengsobadamba's reputation for manipulating rain that they are severely criticized when rain does not fall. Robert Pageard, who served as a French judge in Mossi country, declared: "Rain does honor to the Tengsoba. First of all during the sowing season, but also during the course of the rainy season: a drought of more than fifteen days risks to be disastrous to millet. The same thing is true later on, for the last rains are very important for developing the ears of millet. We saw the case of an eighty-year-old Tengsoba named Sawadogo, who tried to assassinate his half-brother, who was seventy years old, because he suspected that the latter accused him of preventing the rain from falling. Fortunately, the strength of this honorable old man betrayed him, and the whole affair ended with a few scratches." [30] Many district and village chiefs in Mossi society have been known to threaten the lives of Tengsobadamba who they feared were endangering the lives of their subjects by withholding rain. That these people were seldom if ever killed is due to the fear of the chiefs that such an act would result in uncontrollable disaster.

While the Tengsobadamba are held generally responsible for rainfall in their areas, they often manipulate rain for highly personal reasons. Tauxier states that when the Tengsobadamba were travelling and wanted to ward off a threatened storm, they "need only wave the cow's tail and the storm does not burst. Once in the village, one stops waving it and the rain comes." [31] Mangin also reported that all a Tengsoba needs do "when a storm threatens is to take from his hut a certain jar full of certain roots and fill it with water to overflowing. On the other hand, if he wished to ward off rain, he burns another kind of root, and the wind carries the smoke in the direction where the naba wishes to send the clouds; or else he hangs a cow's or horses's tail to a stick by a thread, and the wind tosses it, thus driving the clouds away." [32]

It is this power of the Tengsobadamba to direct rain into certain specific areas that enhance their power and poses problems for the Mossi peasants; for they have *no* way of ascertaining whether nature or the Tengsobadamba are responsible for the rain or for the state of their harvests. As stated above, there are so many micro-ecological zones in Mossi society, and the climatic factors in those zones are so changeable, that ordinary people have few empirical means for dealing with them. The sight of a heavy rain falling in a neighboring village or district while where one is standing is bone dry, is often unnerving, especially when one's livelihood depends upon it. And given the ideology that the Tengsobadamba can be the agency for such

"capriciousness," one can readily understand why the peasants respect or fear them and are anxious about them. Similarly, the belief that the Tengsobadamba can transport growing cereals from one field to another is linked to the fact that due to winds and rain, crops in some of these micro zones do quite well, while those in others fail badly. Moreover, the Tengsobadamba claim that they are responsible for such events. Given these uncertainties, and the Mossi's belief in the Tengsobadamba's power, it is understandable why these specialists flourished. Of course, there were and are sceptics among the Mossi but even these sceptics often wondered whether the Tengsobadamba indeed had the power to influence nature.[33]

Contemporary Mossi students and intellectuals are sceptical about the alleged powers of the Tengsobadamba, but this scepticism is now being challenged by a new interest in, and respect for, traditional aspects of African culture. Whereas, in the past, educated Africans echoed the beliefs of the missionaries that their priests and doctors were "charlatans," they are ready to challenge the paternalism of people like Father Eugène Mangin, who cautioned his European colleagues "not to laugh at their [Mossi] ideas, no matter how childish they may seem to us. To laugh at them is the surest way of hurting their feelings and of making them hopelessly secretive. In any case, is not sincere belief worthy of some respect, even if this respect is mixed with a certain amount of pity?" [34] Mossi who were educated by the Catholics and who have heard about the miracle of the saints and have been to Lourdes, have some of the same questions about Catholicism as did Father Mangin about their Tengsobadamba. Pierre Ilboudou has declared: "In fact, observing the seriousness of the sacrificer and his assistant, I several times asked myself the question that, seen from the outside, what is the real difference between the Tengsoba who makes the sacrifice and the priest who officiates at the Mass. My intuition has always brought me back to the conclusion that the only difference exists exclusively in the intention and the signification of their acts—in a word, in the value of the symbol." [35]

Those Mossi who have looked into their traditional beliefs have discovered unexplainable phenomena which, in spite of their new religious beliefs and Western education, they still find mystifying and intriguing. In fact, it is difficult to find Mossi who do not believe that there are parapsychological phenomena in Africa which need further investigation. Laurent Ghilat states that the intellectuals of Mossi society must admit "that there are troubling positive facts that are inexplicable at the present state of human knowledge. But that on the other hand, it belongs to this generation [of intellectuals] to try everything to pierce their secrets and not content themselves with a puerile and systematic denial of them." [36] Kimbila Ouedraogo who has made a brief study of the Tengsobadamba's ability to

control the weather and teleport crops, declared: "I do not think that the Tengsoba should be neglected or entirely rejected. . . .He is a diplomat and an accomplished psychologist. . . .The Tengsoba possessed a science that is inadequately explained and whose secret he does not wish to confide to anyone. His ability to send or to harness that force of the thunderbolt is known to every Moaga. Who knows, whether in the end, the Tengsoba, as in the case of [Benjamin] Franklin, may not have found a lightning-conductor in another form? With progress, I believe that we will find this to be so." [37]

It is quite possible that the Mossi of the Upper Volta, and the other Africans, will subject the activities of the Tengsobadamba to a more rigorous study in an effort to determine their parapsychological dimensions. The questions they will ask may indeed be different from those of their ancestors. Their technical system will condition the nature of their inquiry and the structure of their society may condition who asks these questions. The ideology of negritude certainly will play a role in this enterprise; for Africans can no longer accept the notion that they are not the equals of other men. By looking again at the Tengsobadamba, they will join the growing ranks of those who have fundamental questions about the nature of man, and his relationship to the cosmos.

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DISCUSSION

Ioan Lewis: Thank you very much indeed. I'm sure, if I may say so, you have amply demonstrated that you are both a diplomat and a very accomplished anthropologist. Yes, Benson Herbert.

Herbert: I would like to ask you a few questions on your very interesting paper. First of all, you mentioned the expression "teleport crops." Have I got that right?

SKINNER: Yes, that's right.

HERBERT: Could you clarify that?

SKINNER: Yes: the ability to send crops from one field to another. In other words, the Tengsoba could transport (teleport) the grains of millet or maize from one field into another. The result of this is after this has been done, one looks at maize and finds there are no grains inside, or looks at millet and finds only husk.

HERBERT: Is there objective evidence of this?

SKINNER: Objective in the sense that this has been systematically studied? No. However, there is belief that this happens.

HERBERT: One more question, if I may. You said something about the control of lightning. Has anybody studied or has anybody said, "I will make this house be struck by lightning," and has the house then been struck by lightning?

SKINNER: I can only say in terms of my own experience that I had a long discussion with my assistants when I found out about the threat, and one night the roofs were shaking. The next morning my assistant came and we talked about it and he laughed. He said, "Here is another man who didn't believe." Now I can only cite this personal observation, but I can assure you that this is believed by most people in Mossi society, even the skeptical intellectuals.

HERBERT: Thank you.

SKINNER: I should say this: that most of the Catholic priests of the White Father Mission, Le Père Blanc, believe this. Apparently if you live in Mossi society for a few years, you end up believing. Now they have cited numerous examples. I remember my first arrival, being intrigued that many of these Europeans had in fact become African. This was before I got into my own study.

LEWIS: Dr. Dingwall.

DINGWALL: This paper has interested me enormously because at one time I paid a good deal of attention to rain makers in Africa and elsewhere. My attention was directed mainly by my old friend Geoffrey Gorer, in one of his books you'll probably remember, wherein he described some extremely puzzling cases of rain making. Since then I've gone into the literature rather considerably and of course, we know that rain makers have extended right into the nineteenth century in Europe,

and I describe one of them in my book, *Abnormal Hypnotic Phenomena.* Now, I'm inclined to think and I ought to say that it never enters my head that there is anything psychic about it, that it can be compared in a sense with water divining. Water divining is still a mystery just as rain making is. I am inclined to think that you can compare the two and that there is something to it, that some people are able to ascertain in a way which we have not yet described fully in scientific language, where water is and why rain is coming. Geoffrey Gorer found that he was utterly unable to think of anything that in any way explains some of the feats that he saw, and I admit that it is very puzzling and I am very glad you have brought this forward this afternoon.

LEWIS: You said privately that you had just been back recently from Mossi in what we all know is a time of terrible drought in the western Sahara, in fact, it's really a time of terrible starvation and hunger and famine—did you find any striking activity corresponding to this time of tremendous stress and difficulty?

SKINNER: Yes, as a matter of fact, I spoke to the Mogho Naba who is the Emperor of the Mossi at Ouagadougou, and he has started, as of two years ago, the traditional yearly sacrifices to the Earth shrines. He has been visited by people from the rural areas who are concerned that something is wrong in their society: morality, the political problems, etc.

LEWIS: Like the Americans.

SKINNER: Right. Of interest to me, and I have a great many problems dealing with what people consider the primitive mentality, because at the same time he was telling me this we were talking about the possibility of linking the Niger river system with the voltage system. He was talking about building dams; he was talking about political action in the Common Market, in the United Nations and in Washington. The same man within the same time frame and the same context was talking about parapsychological phenomena, religious phenomena or magical phenomena at the same time that he was talking about the ability of the Russians to reverse whole river systems and whether it would be possible for the Western countries to help and train his young people to do the same. In other words, the problem for the anthropologist confronting parapsychological phenomena, is to try first of all to recognize it for what it is; to try to understand from the perspective of the local population what they think these phenomena are, but more than that, to see these phenomena within the context of an ongoing social and cultural system. Whether or not we should be blamed for not believing, is a problem. Some of us do believe. Of course a

convention exists so that these things do not even get footnotes in our monographs. But good anthropologists ought to report, investigate, and try to deal with these phenomena, recognizing tht perhaps our techniques are not yet sharp enough to understand them, or the possibility that our techniques may never be able to deal with phenomena of this kind. Perhaps, due to our being part of a Western system, we might never be able to deal with these ideas well enough to satisfy people from other cultural systems until a point has come in the evolution of man when we approach each other using the same linguistic symbols where there is such a complete interpenetration of culture that we can come together systematically and systematically look and investigate these problems. I think the next issue is to get Africans to talk—Africans who are anthropologists, who are Western trained, but in the face of the experience of their ancestors would have no problems with the nature of their biology, and would recognize culture for what it is. And that, I think, would be arranged in dialogue, because unless we can start doing that, I think we will be separated by linguistic conventions, cultural biases or what have you.

Lewis: Thank you very much. I think actually, Elliott, that you would probably agree that you would find many people at this meeting who share the same cognitive dissonance that you have so eloquently described, not least myself.

Johnson: Could I ask, do the Tengsobas manifest any other psychic abilities such as precognition or clairvoyance?

Skinner: Oh yes. Clairvoyance, precognition, interpretation of dreams and divination, except that the diviners in Mossi society are called Baga, and they are the ones to whom you go for divination, and their system is not too dissimilar from what has been reported in Madagascar or in South Africa. It belongs to the same class of divination processes.

Johnson: Thank you very much.

Boshier: Just to confirm what Professor Elliott has said. I don't think that many of the African leaders further south consider it any slight on their own status that they too maintain their own rain doctors, and this exists through the Republic and southwest Africa and quite far north from there. These are educated men and they will sit down and discuss the current topics of today while their rain doctor is sitting just across the way. This is considered by university graduates to be ridiculous, but of course, it is very important apart from bringing rain, whether we like to accept it or not; it is a very important way of keeping harmony in their nation.

SKINNER: I think one of the things that struck me this morning during Professor Dingwall's talk is the question of fear and its relationship to parapsychological beliefs, etc. As Frazier and others have pointed out in the past: yes, anxiety does play a role in the attempt of the people to cogitate, to understand the world around them, but one wonders whether or not fear is itself an adequate explanation. As you pointed out this morning, again, curiosity is certainly an important factor. Again, there are people who are natural philosophers. They speculate. They're not content. You find them in all sorts of places. They're the ones who refuse to accept. They seek to penetrate, they seek to understand. These speculators are driven by more than fear it seems to me, but by a curiosity, an unwillingness to accept the world as given.

WEINER: There have been several statements made in the past few days about how it is impossible to make a bridge of communication between a world which has the kind of system of belief which you have just described, and the Western world which listens to them and hears descriptions and will even accept the possibility or even tend to believe that these things happen; and yet there is no bridge of understanding. You see something and say, 'Well, I just can't understand it. I'm Western," or I'm this or I'm that, and we have two points of view here. One is that indeed all we can do is describe from the outside, and the bridge of understanding is impossible. You just ended your paper saying that maybe there could be some kind of understanding evoked if the Africans would speak more. I'm wondering, are you able, coming from the West and trying yourself to merge with this, have you been able to work out any kind of understanding which you can communicate to your students, to your children?

SKINNER: No, I wasn't implying that the Africans who would investigate these phenomena would be able to make the linkage. What I am suggesting is that their explanation would be perhaps different from ours. For example, their terminology whould be different. Their way of looking at the practitioners would be quite different. They will be viewing their phenomena, their parapsychological phenomena, more naturally than we would be dealing with it, and I am suggesting that once they begin to deal with these issues, then there will be another basis for dialogue. These men may have the same problems. What many of them believe or hope is that indeed their ancestors might turn out to have discovered certain techniques or certain practices which could be verified. We don't know. Many of them would have the same problems. Because they are coming out of a different sociocultural system, they would ask the same questions except that their linguistic ability would be different; their insights might be

different. They would sense things or have a capacity for belief which is greater than ours even though we try to empathize, etc. They would respect their ancestors hopefully.

KREITLER: For the sake of the very important problem you raised, Dr. Skinner, I want to correct a term I used this morning. I used it only to avoid going too deep into the theory of curiosity. In fact, I should have said that the basic need of humans is cognitive orientation, the striving to be cognitively oriented. Now these people face, on the one hand, the modern techniques of changing rivers, and on the other hand, the tradition of supernatural beliefs. They face this problem driven by a need for orientation, and it is my opinion that the major task of parapsychological research would be to help to create a theoretical system which could function as a cognitive bridge between the supernatural and our Western science. I doubt if this could be done by assuming another reality, but perhaps it can be done by bringing more of parapsychology into our reality.

SKINNER: When I was a graduate student, one of the things that always struck me forcibly was the juxtaposition among my African colleagues of parapsychological phenomena and Western science. You're having lunch with a young man and someone else talks about an experiment in class —Western Electric, I remember, making rain. And the young man would say, "That's no problem; there's a guy in my village who makes rain." Silence around the table. Well, what has happened is that in the structure, what he has done is to encapsulate in one universe things which many of us who come out of the West, unless we make this fantastic leap of faith, might not be able to do. But in Africa, people almost do it naturally; so that it might be that the African, because of historical factors, might be able to utilize parapsychological mechanisms or processes to accomplish certain things that we Westerners cannot. I should remark to you, many of you who are not Americans, that we have been shaken by the Chinese, in reference to our experiments with acupuncture. We can't really deal with it. Some of our colleagues are trying to experiment with it. There are problems with acupuncture. The point is, it works. At least, some people believe that it works; and if it continues to work, it will mean then that if our techniques for investigation of these pehnomena are inadequate, then we have got to go back to the drawing boards. This might be a real problem, but we've lived with Heisenberg's principle; perhaps we can live with these contradictions.

LEWIS: Thank you very much indeed. I think that Professor Elliott

Skinner has very nicely made a bridgehead for us towards the next speaker, and I would just like to say that I don't personally feel that the bridge which Dr. Weiner referred to is quite as wide and yawning as he seemed to imply. I would have thought, for instance, that the recourse to mystical explanations which many Americans appear to rely on to explain the failure of their campaign in North Vietnam, was a very good example of the same kind of mystical explanations of misfortunes which Dr. Skinner was recounting among the Mossi, and I could give other examples of the same kind which abound in modern society.