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## Bodilessness and Incongruity : Body Image and Its Social Dynamics among the Fulbe of Senegal

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## **“Bodilessness” and Incongruity: Body Image and Its Social Dynamics among the Fulbe of Senegal**

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“Illness is the night-side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use only the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place.”

Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*

### **WORLD VIEW AND BODY IMAGE**

At first glance, our everyday life seems to be a repetition of successive minor occurrences that happen in an apparently incoherent manner. However, we rarely perceive this situation as being in any way chaotic. By giving meaning to such occurrences through connecting them in some way, day to day life attains stability. Thus we place our everyday life and the people and events that surround our lives and chronological progress within a framework that can be called a world view. In other words, a world view is something that exists within a social and cultural system, that is not readily defined and which is given meaning and structure on a conscious level. Geertz refers to such a world view as “the assumed structure of reality” [GEERTZ 1973: 129].

To assume that at the core there is a world view and that culture then forms around it is a misconception. Culture is not just the mental dimension of people’s attitudes. Elements that influence ways of thought such as environment, way of living, tools necessary for living and also institutions which provide an order for the conduct of life are a part of culture. It is from this composite whole, that is culture, and a particular way of life, that a world view is created.

In this way, a world view gives our lives a certain meaning but, normally, people are not necessarily aware of their own world view. Only when given some opportunity, or in some given situation, does the world view become consciously experienced and, in this sense, it can be said that it acts as a guiding principle for behaviour. Geertz uses the term “ethos” to describe this principle, but as a view of the world and ethos are in fact two sides of the same coin, it is difficult to separate the two concepts.

In both the sense of time and space, the "world view" held by those of us who live in today's complicated society is indeed difficult to grasp. The Japanese saying, "just as each individual's view of life differs, so too do views of the world" can be understood as an expression of this situation. It may be contended that a world view is created by a certain culture, but in the complex society of today the world view of different individuals can hardly be considered uniform. But when the size of a certain society is relatively small, and that society conducts relations with only a limited number of other groups, members of that society tend to possess a similar world view. This is even truer when the size of the society is very small, thus creating such conditions as the bulk of the members belonging to the same religion and having the same way of living. Sol Tax, taking a leaf out of Franz Boas' book, wrote that the world of a primitive society has an anthropomorphic character, which is in fact the comparison of all things to humans. Members of a primitive society generally believe that animals can speak, plants have feelings and that looks possess a certain power. However, in attempting to characterise the world view of primitive societies in this way, one can sense an attempt to separate "civilized thought" from "primitive thought", an endeavour which to me is unnatural. Can such kinds of thinking as "animals speak", "plants have sentiment", "a stare harms" really be considered as exclusive attributes of primitive society? Do not we, the masters of "civilized thought", also normally follow this type of anthropomorphism in our everyday life? In order to interpret the appearance of the world in a vivacious manner, this way of thought is probably one that is held by people universally and not at all something which distinguishes the "primitive" from the "civilized".

The concept of anthropomorphism that I use here, in relation to a view of the world, is not that which Tax has described. The anthropomorphism that I wish to employ here is a concept which encompasses world systems and others, and very often systems related to the human body and their order. The spatial structure of the world is not something that is to be compared *only* to the structure of the human body.

The healthy conduct of the order of the world and the universe and the health of the human body can be understood as existing on parallel planes. Conversely, the ill health of the king, who oversees peace and order in a society, creates a fear that perhaps there may be a resulting disruption of the cosmological order. It is in this sense that the world view of the people of a certain "primitive" society can be understood anthropomorphologically.

I mentioned that the human body can be understood as a condensation of a world view. I do not think this is applicable to all societies, but yet I do believe that a set relation exists between the view of the body and the view of the world. For the pastoralist Fulbe people of West Africa, the body seems to be a burden to be born by each individual. In other words, ideally for them, the body's "non-existence" is preferred, and often this ideal can be heard expressed verbally as a policy. The Fulbe live as though they are "bodiless." Their aesthetic outlook is concretely in-

tegrated into their behavioural or moral norms, called *pulaagu*. However, the body as a burden derives from the fact that the body, as a living small scale cosmos, makes particular demands. The fact that it is living means there is the need to eat and drink. On top of that, the body also has hedonistic needs. The Fulbe, while living as though "bodiless", do in fact properly fulfill these needs.

When a person is in a healthy state, there is little need to be cognizant of the body, and thus it is possible to live in a "bodiless" state. However, once illness strikes, the body becomes the subject of self assertion, thus forcing the individual to be conscious of his "bodiness". People become aware of themselves as they are confronted by what is supposed not to exist.

The Fulbe who suffer from illness turn first and foremost to a "slave" medicine man, a person of lower social ranking, for medical attention. In semiotic terms, within Fulbe society the slaves represent a "marked" existence compared to the "non-marked" existence of the Fulbe themselves and in this way it is possible to gain a clearer picture of the makeup of the world and the view of the body as it is experienced by the Fulbe. I shall elaborate on this subject in the next section.

## THE FULBE AND THEIR ETHNIC IDENTITY

The Fulbe are a people who subsist principally by depending on animal husbandry (pastoralism), a way of living which is in no way rare in Africa. The animal herding peoples are more attached to their mobile estate of animals (camels, cows, sheep and goats) than to the land. Consequently, they are far more inclined than agriculturists to change their living places. However, in the case of the Fulbe, the area over which they have spread, across the Sahelian region of West Africa, is particularly vast. The Fulbe are to be found in many of the countries of West Africa; from Mauritania, Senegal, through Mali, Niger and Cameroon up to Sudan. This geographical expansion of the Fulbe could be attributed, on the one hand, to their mode of life, i.e. pastoralism, but, on the other hand and perhaps more importantly, to their eagerness, since the 18th century, to spread the word of Islam.

If such a wide geographical distribution is one notable characteristic of the Fulbe, another is that they have been able, in spite of this fact, to maintain a strong and unified ethnic identity. The elements which have contributed to the maintenance of this identity may be divided into three categories: physical particularities, language uniformity and a code of conduct.

### Physical Particularities

The Fulbe are highly conscious of the physical particularities which differentiate them from the neighbouring Black peoples. The Fulbe say that they are not black but red skinned, and their physical traits do, in fact, differ from those of the other negroid peoples. Their hair is quite straight, their lips are thin and their noses are relatively narrow. The Fulbe themselves are fully aware of these features

and thus use them to distinguish themselves from other Black peoples.

### Linguistic Uniformity

In spite of their wide geographic distribution, the Fulbe speak fundamentally the same language, and this language is quite different from the languages of the neighbouring Black peoples. The Fulbe language, called *pulaar* in Senegal and Guinea, *fulfulde* in other regions, shows, of course, some dialectic differences. But these differences are essentially limited to vocabulary. If their language shares any similarities with the languages of other Black peoples, it is with the Wolof and Serer languages, both of which are spoken in Senegal. These three languages (Fulbe, Wolof, Serer) belong to one group, the "West Atlantic," so called by Joseph Greenberg [GREENBERG 1949]. This fact suggests that the Fulbe were, in ancient times, in contact for a long time with the Wolof and Serer peoples before spreading eastward.

### Code of Conduct

It is reported in many groups of Fulbe that they all share a common moral code or code of conduct, called *pulaagu* or *pulaaku* according to the region.

If the concern of the Fulbe with their physical particularities represents an identity at the biological level, and the uniformity of their language represents this identity at the cultural level, the fact that they are aware of a shared code of conduct is, one could say, the consciousness of this identity expressed at the ethical level. While biological and cultural particularities are important in maintaining an ethnic identity, a shared ethical code is no less fundamental. Moreover, this code of conduct is not something abstract or something vaguely expressed, but a clearly conceived set of notions which possess a particular name in the Fulbe language (*pulaagu* or *pulaaku*). Many ethnographers who have stayed among different groups of Fulbe have noted the existence of this code [REED 1932; VIEILLARD 1932; STENNING 1959; DUPIRE 1962, 1981; RIESMAN 1974]. At the most fundamental level, *pulaagu* defines what it means to be a Fulbe. Riesman, for instance, says of the Fulbe living in Haute-Volta (now Burkina Faso) that *pulaagu* is a kind of "Fulanicity defined in comparison with the other Black peoples of Africa" [RIESMAN 1974: 118-119].

Many concrete aspects of Fulbe life are expressed by *pulaagu*. Stenning, in his study of the Fulbe of Northern Nigeria, divides these aspects into three categories (excepting the primary fact that one must, of course, speak the Fulbe language to share *pulaagu*); modesty and reserve (*semteende*), patience and fortitude (*munyaal*), and care and forethought (*hakkiilo*) [STENNING 1959: 55]. Dupire, on the other hand, divides the components of *pulaagu* into four groups; patience or resignation (*muñal*), intelligence (*hakkiilo*), courage (*cuusal*) and, most important, reserve (*semteende*) [DUPIRE 1981: 169].<sup>1)</sup>

Before moving onto the main theme with which I will be concerned, a brief description of the society of the Fulbe-Jenngelbe, the main focus of this paper, is in

order.

### THE FULBE-JENNGELBE: THE COMPOSITION OF THEIR SOCIETY

As previously mentioned, the Fulbe's mode of life can be defined as principally dependent upon animal husbandry. However, with so many widely dispersed groups, the Fulbe maintain a number of different modes of subsistence. There are some groups of Fulbe, called Bororo, that live mainly in Niger and northern Cameroon and even in Sudan, who are solely nomadic pastoralists, and are not involved in agriculture. On the other hand, one encounters in Guinea, for example, Fulbe people who are completely settled and who cultivate more than they herd. There are even urban Fulbe living in many of the towns in West Africa who are small scale tradesmen.

The Fulbe-Jenngelbe, who live in the Djolof region of Senegal, and who are the main focus of this paper, occupy a middle position in this range of lifestyles. The Jenngelbe live throughout the year by herding animals (cows, sheep and goats) and cultivate millet in the rainy season. During the dry season of each year, many of the Jenngelbe leave their usual living place together with their animals in search of water and fodder. It is thus appropriate to define the Jenngelbe as a transhumant pastoral people. They are estimated to be about fifteen thousand in number.

The Djolof region (corresponding, administratively, to the Department of Linguere) is not inhabited only by the Fulbe-Jenngelbe, but also by the agricultural Wolof people. Statistically the latter are slightly more numerous in population (Wolof: 50%, Fulbe: 46%, others: 4%). In a sense, the Djolof constitutes a border region between the pastoral Fulbe-Jenngelbe and the agricultural Wolof peoples. These two peoples, who live in a single region and whose modes of life are quite different, can be at times in competitive or even in contentious relations. This can occur especially in the rainy season when the cattle of the Fulbe damage the Wolof's crops. But the Fulbe-Jenngelbe and the Wolof peoples are also in a symbiotic relation. This symbiosis can be observed mainly in the dry season, when crops are exchanged for milk and the remnants of crops (to be used as fodder) are exchanged for manure (to be used as fertilizer).

These relations between the two peoples—contentious in one aspect, symbiotic in another—give rise to some ambiguous feelings that each has for the other. For

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1) The fact that a people have a special code of conduct which distinguishes them from other peoples is not peculiar to the Fulbe. For example, the Samburu people who live in Kenya and are also pastoralists, are reported to have notions similar to the Fulbe code of conduct. Among the Samburu, the code is called *nkanyit* and comprises the notions of respect, a sense of shame, honour, duty, politeness, avoidance and decency [Spencer 1965: Intro. xxii].

Among the Songhay-Zarma of western Niger and eastern Mali, there are also "slaves" from whom the Songhay-Zarma distinguish themselves by a similar code of conduct. [Olivier de Sardan 1983: 136].

the Fulbe-Jenngelbe, the Wolof are poor cultivators who are obliged to stay in one place and who might be left without crops if a drought were to occur. On the other hand, the Wolof see the Fulbe-Jenngelbe as a people who are quick to start a fight and proud of having cattle, but nothing else. They criticize each other and yet they know very well that they need each other in order to maintain their respective life styles.

The Serer are another agricultural people who live near the Fulbe-Jenngelbe. The Serer and the Jenngelbe, however, maintain friendly and joking relations and have neither a contentious nor a symbiotic relation at the level of subsistence.

It must be added here that Jenngelbe society is hierarchically organized. The Jenngelbe themselves live only by herding animals and by modest cultivation; they do no other work. Iron, wood, cloth or hide products are furnished by professional specialists who are organized in caste-like corporations. Among these specialists, the most important to the Fulbe-Jenngelbe are wood-workers (*lawbe*) who supply wooden receptacles for milk, and the traditionalists (*wambaabe*) who maintain and transmit history (mainly in the form of genealogies) from generation to generation.

There are also, in the Jenngelbe society, a category of people designated as "slaves" (*maccube*). These "slaves" are the descendants of former slaves who were captured by the Fulbe or bought by them. The "slaves" were emancipated under the colonial French government in the mid-19th century and they are, from an economic point of view, completely independent and autonomous. But, socially, the distinction between the Fulbe-Jenngelbe and the "slaves" remains clear-cut. For the Fulbe, the "slaves" remain "slaves". They do not intermarry, and their residence quarters are also separate, even within a common single village. The fact that the word which means "slave" (*maccube*) not only remains in the Fulbe vocabulary but is also used often in daily life shows that the "slaves" are people who, even if not forced to work for the Fulbe, have not been fully integrated into Fulbe society and remain always at its periphery.

### FULBE-JENNGELBE: THE "BODILESS" PEOPLE

In the second section of this chapter, an explanation of the Fulbe's characteristic code of conduct was undertaken, followed by a sketch of the composition of the Fulbe-Jenngelbe society in the third. The issue that I would now like to explore is what the Jenngelbe themselves have to say about *pulaagu*, the Fulbe way of life. I myself, after having stayed among the Fulbe, understand *pulaagu* as follows.

— The belief that only the Fulbe have this code is firm and fast among the Fulbe. To share *pulaagu*, one must have been born of free Fulbe parents (i.e. not be of slave origin) and one must speak the Fulbe language (*pulaar*).

— Importance is also attached to their mode of living: animal husbandry. One informant told me in concrete terms that "a Fulbe must follow the cattle and should

do no other work. Even if the profession of an auto-mechanic is highly esteemed nowadays, a Fulbe should not care about it. The way of a Fulbe is with the cattle. You go to the bush with cows and protect them from hyenas. If you kill a cow, you should not cut up meat yourself, the cutting up of meat is the work of slaves. A Fulbe should only do a Fulbe's work."

— Concrete rules are expressed concerning the act of eating. It seems that, in a word, Fulbe people consider the act of eating as something shameful. One should not be seen when eating, as one should not be seen when defecating. It is said, for example, that a Fulbe must not go around to someone else's hut at mealtime; one should also never show that one is hungry when in someone else's hut.

— Importance is attached to reserved behaviour in general. For example, a certain modesty is desired in conversation; one should not speak in a loud voice or with exaggerated gestures. One should also be discreet in openly expressing one's emotions or feelings, such as sadness or joy.

The Fulbe-Jenngelbe say also that it is not aesthetically pleasing, indeed it is almost contemptible, to be fat. They say, with a laugh, that the agricultural Wolof people with whom they are in a symbiotic relation, are very fat because "they give free reign to their appetite." It seems that the Fulbe conceive of obesity and excessive eating as being directly connected. As one can see, the teachings of *pulaagu* contain not only a code of comportment or ethics, but also a code of physical fitness.<sup>2)</sup>

It is not surprising that the Jenngelbe show much reserve in sexual matters too. Sexual activities must be done in absolute privacy, and should definitely not be mentioned in public. The same sense of decorum extends to defecation. It is shameful, for example, to mention that one is suffering from diarrhea (*reedu dogi*=the stomach runs) because it necessarily suggests the scene of defecation.

Similarly, the Fulbe seriously fear breaking wind in public. The act of breaking wind is not simply to become an object of jest or ridicule; it is a serious disgrace. The Fulbe consider that, in spite of oneself, the breaking of wind is an exhibition

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2) It should be noted here that it is not at all a universally accepted aesthetic value to be thin. As mentioned in the text, to be fat is a sign of well-being and consequently well regarded by the Wolof.

Similarly, Geoffroy de Villeneuve describes the herding Moor people who live north of the Senegal river in Mauritania, with exaggeration, as follows.

"Chaque peuple a ses gouts, chaque pays a ses modes. Une peau huileuse, des dents longues sortant de la bouche, des chairs pendantes aux bras, des ongles d'un pouce de long et taillés en pointe, une corpulence telle que deux esclaves puissent à peine embrasser une femme en se touchant réciproquement à l'extrémité de leurs doigts, voilà la beauté parfaite chez les Maures" [Geoffroy de Villeneuve 1814, Vol. 2, p. 85]. Geoffroy de Villeneuve also wrote the following of the Fulbe. "Leur constitution est faible: ils ne manquent pas d'intelligence, mais ils sont paresseux à l'excès" [Geoffroy de Villeneuve 1814, Vol. 3, p. 190].



of the animality of the human body. One can easily hide oneself when eating or defecating, but the breaking of wind can be an involuntary act. In short, it is not something that is easily controlled. The Jenngelbe joke about this with the Serer people (with whom they maintain friendly relations) or with Fulbe who belong to other clans. When they are conversing together in a friendly manner, a Fulbe will say to the Serer or to the Fulbe of some other clan, "you are the people who are fond of beans and eat much of them." The meaning of this expression is that people who like and eat a lot of beans break wind "like a donkey" without concern for decency. The breaking of wind is also treated in some folk-tales. One tale tells of an old man who was finally obliged to leave his village because he could not overcome the shame of breaking wind in public. Adult men will severely scold a child, of five or six years old who breaks wind, as if their act were a challenge to the moral order of the adults. They will say to the child, "you, a dog, don't know *pulaagu*." As can be seen the Fulbe often use the comparison of donkey or dog when they joke about or scold a person's incongruous acts. This suggests, I think, that the breaking of wind is considered to be something more shameful than defecation by the Fulbe because it directly reveals the animality of the human body.

Let us consider another example of the negation of the body among the Fulbe. The Jenngelbe people of Senegal could well be called a people who do not dance. Dance seems to be disdained as something directly related to the animality of the human body, or at least as an easy outlet for it. For instance, they disdain the Wolof, who dance quite often, saying that they "dance each time their stomach is satisfied." It is not exactly true to say that the Jenngelbe never dance, but it is true that the Jenngelbe adult men do not. Although considered indecent in the light of *pulaagu*, it is possible to witness some Jenngelbe dancing in their villages. Young or unmarried girls dance on some rare occasions. These girls imitate Wolof women's dances, but their movements are influenced by Fulbe aesthetics.

The Wolof women dance in a rather violent manner, bending their upper body and thrusting their buttocks outward. They thrust their hips back and forth violently, and spread their thighs while raising their skirts, or they jump high in the air bending and spreading their knees. In short, eroticism is an important aspect of their dance. Although Fulbe girls imitate the Wolof women's dance, the thrusting of their hips is of a much lesser degree and their overall movements are much slower. L'abbé David Boilat, who described the peoples and customs of Senegal in the 19th century, mentions the differences between the Fulbe and the Wolof dances. He states that he is unable to describe the dance of the Wolof, as a matter of decency, but does say that it is nothing other than the representation of the brutest passion [BOILAT 1984 (1853): 324]. He also deplores the languor of Fulbe music and dance, but for other reasons [BOILAT 1984 (1853): 386].

It is well known that the young men of the Fulbe-Bororo in Niger dance. The Bororo are considered a people who have retained the "pure" Fulbe life of nomadic pastoralism. While it is true that Bororo young men dance, body movement is far less important than facial expressions. The wide open eyes and mouths of the

Bororo dancers, accentuated by bright makeup, are by far the most dramatic elements of the dance. The body itself is held straight, moving very slowly up and down. In fact, the dance itself is rather monotonous. Dupire, for example, mentions the "extreme sobriety, the slowness and the gracefulness of the movements" of the dance of the young Bororo men. She contrasts the extremely limited movement of the feet and arms of their dance with the violent and contorted dances of the Hausa or the Buzu [DUPIRE 1962: 222].

If one were to consider the fact that the Fulbe:

- abhor corpulence,
- avoid and dislike loud talk and exaggerated gestures,
- consider the act of eating shameful,
- hide themselves in the bush when they defecate,
- are seriously afraid of breaking wind in public,
- carefully avoid matters concerning sex in conversation, and
- shun and admonish the public admission of hunger or physical sufferings,

then one could say that the Fulbe consider the human body to be something inevitably necessary and yet ultimately bestial. As we have seen already, incongruous behaviour (such as breaking wind) is often compared to that of donkeys or dogs. The Fulbe say that "animals (cows and others) are animals; they know no shame and they copulate freely without concern for time or place, in the village or in the bush." The human body is itself capable of all these incongruities; the body itself has something bestial in it. If a human being gives rein to his body, it will behave exactly like that of an animal. If a human does not then want to be like an animal, he must to some extent, "negate" his body. In his study of the Fulbe of Haute-Volta (now Burkina Faso), Paul Riesman has written that "the image of an ideal human for the Fulbe seems to be someone who does not drink, eat or defecate" [RIESMAN 1974: 128].

Consequently, the Fulbe tend not to articulate physical pleasure. Not only do they not articulate, for instance, the pleasure of eating or the pleasure of sex, but they seem to take no pleasure in the display of physical strength either.

Eating is done in complete privacy, so as not to be seen by persons other than intimates. Breakfast and lunch are taken in the hut with the door shut. Dinner is usually taken outside, near the entrance of the hut, to avoid the heat, but it is always taken long after the sun has set, under the veil of darkness. If it rains, or if the moon offers too much light, dinner is taken in the hut. In a crowded or public place, for example in the market, not even a child would dare to eat.

On some ritual occasions, such as wedding or name-giving ceremonies, feasts are given. This, however, does not mean that people unite for a communal meal. Many people may gather at the ceremony, but when they eat they will divide themselves into small groups and each group will enter a hut to eat. Communal feasting simply does not occur. Moreover, while eating, people make no comments about the food, even if they find it very appetizing; they keep silent and when they finish they leave the hut as if they had not eaten. It should also be noted that

because of their religion (Islam), they consume no alcohol on these occasions.

The Fulbe also have no competitions that involve displays of physical strength. Wrestling<sup>3)</sup> is very popular, especially in the large towns of Senegal, and champion wrestlers are much admired. Wrestling is said to be the "national sport" of the Senegalese, but the athletes are all from Wolof, Serer, Joola or other agricultural peoples; i.e. none are of Fulbe origin. Although wrestling has become a favorite sport of the urban Senegalese, its origins are to be found in the traditional wrestling that took place in the agricultural villages during the dry season. It may still be seen in the above mentioned peoples' villages, but the Fulbe have never taken part in such displays of physical force. The fact that the Fulbe do not wrestle is most probably related to their abhorrence of corpulence and to the anxiety they feel in relation to the physicality of the body. It is, of course, a physical pleasure to throw one's opponent in wrestling, using one's physical force and techniques learned, but it is just this kind of pleasure that the Fulbe avoid.

The Fulbe's attitude toward dance also reflects their attitude toward the body. I do not consider that the movements of dance are completely removed from the movements of daily work, such as the pounding of grain, taking water from a well or the various types of work conducted in the field. Dance movements are both related to, and based on, work movements. In dance, the daily movements are stressed and given rhythm and then expressed aesthetically, erotically, religiously, etc. to take the form of dance. In this sense, dance is an artistic expression by the body of the movements observed in daily work. The physical pleasure in this expression of and by the body is experienced in dance. The Fulbe also refrain from this type of pleasure.

Man does not live by reason alone. Geertz saw in the Balinese cockfight an expression or an explosion of the passions suppressed in daily Balinese life [GEERTZ 1973]. The Balinese, according to Geertz, are also a people who are uncomfortable with the animality of the human body. Geertz writes that "not only defecation but eating is regarded as a disgusting, almost obscene activity, to be conducted hurriedly and privately because of its association with animality" [GEERTZ 1973: 420]. One can not help but notice the similarity here with the Fulbe conception of life.

The Fulbe-Jenngelbe do not seem to have an organised or systemised occasion, like the cockfights of the Balinese, to serve as an outlet for their suppressed passions. One can see, however, the manifestation of their hidden desires in their frequent search for illicit sexual relations and in the drinking of alcohol. Another example of the manifestation of such pent up desires is also displayed in the act of a shepherd who secretly kills a sheep or goat (which usually belongs to his father) in the bush and consumes it alone.

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3) I employ here the word "wrestling" since I can find no other suitable term. I have in mind Japanese "*sumo*" wrestling when I use this term. The fundamental difference between Japanese *sumo* wrestling and Western wrestling consists of the fact that the latter admits laying down positions whereas the former does not. In this sense, Senegalese wrestling belongs to the *sumo* type.

To go to a woman at night, with special intention, is expressed very elegantly in the Fulbe language as "*hiirtoyde*," which means "to go somewhere to pass the evening." It is not rare for one to see or hear of some young man going out to court.

In Jenngelbe society girls generally marry between the ages of ten and fifteen and the boys usually get married from the age of eighteen up to twenty-five. A girl when married so young does not begin to live with her husband immediately after marriage, but lives rather in the same hut with the mother of her husband. This situation continues for some years until she reaches the age of fifteen or so. In other words, the marriage of the young couple takes place only in a social context, and is not consummated (at least officially) until some years after the wedding.

Boys of seventeen or eighteen years, as well as young men already married, often go 'a courting.' The women courted are not unmarried maidens (who are too young) but married women whose husbands are away from the village on a journey to another village or town, or divorced women (usually in their twenties or thirties) who have their own hut. It should be noted that sex conducted in this type of courting is usually accompanied by a monetary transaction. A man will hand the woman a sum of 1,000 to 5,000 francs CFA per visit. I was also often told that a man also gives money to the mother (who lives nearby) of the girl-concerned so that she remains discreet about the meeting. In other words, this practice can be considered a kind of prostitution by the woman with the connivance of her mother. Men take advantage of the darkness of night to vent their private desires; the women share with the men this sexual pleasure, as well as the clandestine thrill of receiving money. This kind of courting-prostitution is in no sense publicly admitted, in spite of its frequency. It is always surrounded by a cloak of secrecy, thus serving all the more as an outlet for the hidden passions of the Fulbe.

Drinking is also something that is conducted in secret. Young men often go to town with the intention of having a clandestine drink. In town there are some bars where one can drink beer or cheap wine and it is in these places that young Fulbe men sometimes get quite drunk and end up involved in fights. In such a situation, they are quick to use their knives which they always carry concealed beneath their clothing. As we have already seen, Fulbe men do not wrestle and are not good fighters if unarmed. In a fight, they resort immediately to the use of weapons with which they are relatively handy. The Wolof men's criticism and fear of Fulbe men, concerned with their all too hasty use of weapons, is not without grounds.

The Fulbe young men say that although their elders pretend not to drink, they are actually quite fond of it and often pass the evening drinking secretly in their huts. I myself have not been able to confirm this charge but, considering how easily obtainable alcoholic drinks are in town, the young men's contention could very well be true.

Courting women and drinking can each be very costly. It is thus common for a Fulbe man to sell his sheep or goats for such funds, and on occasion he may even sell a cow which he is caring for but which, in fact, actually belongs to someone else.

As I have stressed, the Fulbe seem to consider the human body, at least in principle, to be a troublesome burden. Ideally speaking, they consider themselves a "bodiless" people. It is to this topic that I should now like to turn.

### INCONGRUITIES AND THEIR EFFECTS

There are occasions when the Fulbe-Jenngelbe are obliged to view the very expression of the animality of the human body which they take so much care to conceal in daily life. Such an occasion is the marriage ceremony.

The marriage ceremony of the Fulbe-Jenngelbe (they are patrilineal and virilocal) lasts, if it follows the normal pattern, for two nights and three days. The parents, relatives and friends of the bridegroom go to the bride's village at sunset and feast throughout the first night. The next day the parents, relatives and friends of both bridegroom and bride transfer themselves to the bridegroom's village and a second feast is offered to all the participants throughout the second night. On the third day, there is a small rite which consists of the newly married couple entering their hut<sup>4)</sup>. This rite closes the Fulbe-Jenngelbe's marriage ceremony.

It should be noted that not only Fulbe free people, but also many "slaves" (*mac-cube*) and professional specialists attend the ceremonies. Of the specialists, the presence of the *wambaabe* (professional tellers of genealogies—the traditionalists—) is indispensable to the marriage ceremony.

In Fulbe-Jenngelbe society, the ceremony concerned with the engagement of the couple (usually one to three years before the marriage ceremony) is held in the presence of an Islamic preacher. The union is thus religiously recognised at the time of the engagement. The presence of a religious authority is not necessary at the marriage ceremony itself, but the presence of the *wambaabe* (traditionalists) is absolutely mandatory. The *wambaabe* are always on the cart which transports the participants in the wedding between the villages of the bride and the bridegroom. During the ride they beat a small drum held under the armpit. At the ceremony they sing in a loud voice proclaiming the genealogies of the bridegroom and the bride. Without this proclamation, a marriage ceremony is not sanctioned. The role of the *wambaabe* is to insure the social and public recognition of the marriage.

During the two nights of the ceremony, another category of men also attend, unless their attendance is prohibited by the groom's family<sup>5)</sup>. These are young men, called *jabbaaji*, who are entertainers and musicians. They are usually of slave origin, but are proud of their youth and good looks. They dress well and often complete their outfit with a pair of sunglasses.

4) When the newly married couple enter the hut, a "slave" woman dances with erotic movement of the hips in a crowded circle formed by the parents and relatives of the couple. This is one of the rare occasions when one can see dancing in a Jenngelbe village.

5) If, for example, a person dies in the village a few days before a marriage ceremony, it can be prohibited for these young men to come.

As I have mentioned, the Fulbe marriage ceremony is held at night. An ox is killed, by people of slave descent, at about eight o'clock in the evening, and then cut up for cooking. The meal, usually of rice with some meat, is served at two or three o'clock in the morning. People who have gathered for the feast are seated on mats spread out in the courtyard of the bridegroom's hut. They chat and pass the time by making and drinking tea all the time waiting patiently.

Young *jabbaaji* men entertain the people during this rather monotonous time in wait for the meal. These well-dressed, handsome and talented orators make speeches continually in loud voices, with a special intonation of the voice. When one tires of speaking, others take over and play on their mono-cord fiddle, called a *ñañañooru*. Full of vivid images and metaphors, and recited in a particular intonation, the speeches capture and maintain their audience's attention. I would like to relate here some of the speeches of the *jabbaaji* given at the marriage ceremony of a man named Ceerno A. H.

Let us give thanks to Allah and to the prophet Muhammad. It is by the blessing and grace of Allah that we are all gathered at the house of the free Fulbe man called Ceerno A. H. This young Fulbe free man, Ceerno A. H., is a happy young man who has already made his pilgrimage to Mecca. But every one should know that it was not because he was given the money to go by some politician for having flattered him or because he won money in a lottery. If he was able to go to Mecca, it was because he sold his own cows to raise the necessary funds.

Each time the *jabbaaji* make a brief pause, the other men (or women) of slave origin will exclaim "*Wallaahi* (True it is!)" to encourage him to continue his speech.

Ceerno A. H., you are a Fulbe free man! You never make an irresponsible promise, you don't know how to lie, you never say anything which is not true, you know neither trouble nor sorrow. You never unreasonably reproach someone who has not stolen, and you yourself wisely avoid any behavior that may incur undue suspicion. A Fulbe does not drink, does not eat, does not lie and does not know how to be a coward.

The *jabbaaji* continue to flatter the Fulbe in this manner for quite some time. One often hears the words "a Fulbe free person (*Pullo dimo*)" and "we, the people of slave origin (*minen dagganaabe*)"<sup>6</sup>. The young *jabbaaji* men feign humility and intentionally lower their own social position in order to heighten that of the free Fulbe. Having incessantly received such praise, the Fulbe are quite naturally pleased, and their faces cannot hide their satisfaction.

The *jabbaaji* continue:

We, the *jabbaaji*, are young men full of strength. Our necks are planted firmly on our shoulders, the scruffs of our necks are clean, our backs and feet are also strong. As you see, we all have bodies which can do any kind of work. But we are like the

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6) *dagganaabe* is an euphemistic term for the *maccube* (slaves).

dark clouds which appear in the sky and disappear without rainfall. We, the *jabbaaji*, are like these clouds. It might be difficult for you to understand our position. It can be understood only if you ask God. It is God alone who has taught everyone of us how to make our life in this world.

If the *jabbaaji* become tired of speaking, they will play music on their mono-cord fiddles and sing. And so the night goes on.

Then, at about one or two o'clock in the morning, events of great significance occur. The *jabbaaji* begin to make vulgar comments or even begin to perform coarse and indecent acts. They act out the very things that the free Fulbe try so hard to avoid in daily life, things that are clearly "forbidden" by their code of conduct, the *pulaagu*. The *jabbaaji* young men will mention sexual matters (e.g. "I hope your sex is not asleep!") or will call loudly for tea or food, (e.g. "How hungry I am! When is the meal coming? Please prepare the tea.") The incongruous behaviour of the *jabbaaji* goes even further. One of them approaches a gathering of Fulbe men and asks, "Do you know what a monkey is?" and then goes on to imitate the monkey by placing one hand on his head and the other on his buttocks. Or, he enunciates the word "fart," much to the abashment of the Fulbe, and thrusts his buttocks in front of a Fulbe man's face as if he is going to break wind. Fulbe children will laugh at this, but the adult Fulbe who cannot laugh so innocently, instead cast looks of disgust at the *jabbaaji*.

Late at night, feeling the effect of the tea on their empty stomachs, the flattery of the *jabbaaji* on their egos, and hearing and seeing the incongruities performed, the Fulbe people (especially the men) start to become excited. At this juncture, the *jabbaaji*, as if taking advantage of the excitement, begin to ask for money. They will say:

This young, newly formed couple and their parents and friends are the people who organised this feast tonight. Every young Fulbe free man who is gathered here must have money from selling his or his father's cow. They will give the money to the person of their choice. Slave people, listen to me well. The lucky ones will be given money. If some of us, some of you, are not given money, do not blame the Fulbe men but know rather that your amulet does not work well. But, don't be anxious! All of us who are here will be given gifts since Fulbe free men are proud and generous. Everyone of us will receive money. Let us now play the *ñaañooru* (fiddle) and let us sing!

This claim for money is made in a very timely fashion. The Fulbe men are already quite excited. Someone will hand a bill to a *jabbaaji*<sup>7)</sup> man. Then at once the *jabbaaji* man raises the bill high and, showing it to everyone, declares, "this bill of 500 francs has been given to me by a free Fulbe man named so and so who lives in

7) Here I note for convenience a "*jabbaaji*" man, but in the Fulbe language the singular form of *jabbaaji* is *jabbaabu*.

the village of so and so. Look at it. This is proof of the Fulbe men's generosity." Seeing this, the other Fulbe men begin to give bills to the *jabbaaji* men, who, each time they receive money, show the bill to the people collected there and identify the donor. Thus praise for the generosity of the Fulbe continues incessantly.

By giving money in this fashion, the Fulbe men feel superior to the *jabbaaji* and also experience the satisfaction of having their names pronounced in public. Much money changes hands and the excitement reaches its peak. The Fulbe men, without being conscious of it, seem to be made sport of.

The excitement finally dissipates at dawn when people begin to doze off, here and there on the mats, with the music of the *ñaañooru* now only heard intermittently.

## CONCLUSION

The Fulbe-Jenngelbe of Senegal tend to hold their marriage ceremonies between the period that is marked by the end of the rainy season, in October, and the time when they move out in search of fodder and water for their animals, in December. The *jabbaaji* make their way from one village to the next in conjunction with the occurrence of weddings. During the dry season, when weddings are rarely held, the *jabbaaji*, free from work, pass their time in the towns, occasionally indulging in alcohol.

To the Fulbe the *jabbaaji* constitute an object of contempt and they are thought of as no better than leeches. For the young *jabbaaji*, of an age when they should normally be working, there is no work. However, despite this, probably due to the fact that they are handsome in appearance and have a little money in their pockets, they tend to be popular with the girls. If the *jabbaaji* come to a wedding, it is a certainty that the expenses of the Fulbe people are going to be high. For appearance's sake, one can simply *not* hand over money to the *jabbaaji* and be done with. Instead people go as far as selling sheep and goats in order to get the necessary money. There follows such comments as "because of them (*jabbaaji*) a wedding is really 'tiresome': "tiresome" in the sense that it is "no light matter to obtain the provisions" for a wedding that the *jabbaaji* are to attend.

However, there are the occasional weddings that are conducted without the attendance of the *jabbaaji*. For example, in the case of a death in the village just before the wedding, or in the case of the head of the household where the wedding is to be held being extremely strict, the attendance of the *jabbaaji* is not permitted. In such cases the result is a very "quiet wedding." After such a "quiet wedding," when those in attendance have returned to their home village the following morning, comments such as "that wedding was pretty boring" and "it was no fun" tend to circulate. These comments are comments that do indeed provide us with food for thought. Considering that the *jabbaaji* are looked down upon and then blamed for making the preparations for the wedding "tiresome," why should their absence from a wedding then make it uninteresting?



The following may provide an explanation for this situation.

The *jabbaaji* are not only vulgar and make discourteous remarks, but also by behaving imprudently they perform in a manner that can be considered to be completely opposite to the norms extolled in *pulaagu*, the code of conduct that is carefully followed by the Fulbe. According to the Fulbe, the free Fulbe people are wise, brave, proud, stoic and, above all, a prudent people. Are not the excesses and rudeness displayed by the *jabbaaji* at weddings the very opposite of *pulaagu*? Moreover, the *jabbaaji* themselves tend to emphasise the purity of blood of the free Fulbe people, their superiority, nobility and generosity, contrasting it with that of the "slaves".

The Fulbe free people, by observing the above vulgarities and indiscretions, are able to comprehend, in a concrete manner, what it is that is prohibited by the *pulaagu* code. In other words, the Fulbe are able to learn from the bad examples that the *jabbaaji* set.

I hardly think that the *jabbaaji* consciously set out to fulfil this particular role that they act out. To say that they set out to profit as much as possible from behaving in a manner which directly contrasts to the Fulbe's nobility and pride is probably more to the point. However, the *jabbaaji* are fully aware that they play a necessary part in preserving and maintaining the character and pride of the Fulbe free people.

The vulgar behaviour of the *jabbaaji* at the ritual setting of a wedding could be said to be a "contrived confusion" or an "institutionalised chaos," and this illustration serves to make the Fulbe all the more conscious of the consistency of their own culture. The *jabbaaji* thus act as an activator, or regenerator, of order for Fulbe society.

As I have already mentioned, the ideal of the Fulbe free people is the state of "bodilessness" which can be understood as the construction of a certain order by pretending that that which exists does not. Yet, denying that which is, tends to result in an accumulation of energy (stress) and this energy, in turn, must be diffused by some method. On an individual level, the young men release their energy by their frequent courting of women, and the elderly find an outlet in drinking. The women also diffuse their energy by accepting the advances made by the men who come to court them under the veil of darkness.

On the social level, the "constructed confusion" to be found at a wedding is the way that an excessive accumulation of stress is avoided by the group as a whole. However, this "confusion" is not a product of the Fulbe free people but, instead, constructed by those who are normally an object of contempt, the *jabbaaji*. Thus it can be said that the *jabbaaji*'s performance acts as a catalyzer.

I should like to make one more point that is of great interest. In semiotic terms the Fulbe free people and the "slaves" are engaged in a non-marked/marked relationship. I also mentioned before that, in comparison with other neighbouring peoples, *pulaagu* is distinguished as a unique attribute of the Fulbe. This is particularly true of the Jenngelbe of Senegal when they are contrasted with the "slaves"

and the agricultural Wolof people. The "slaves" being, of course, the descendants of people who have either been captured from another tribe, or bought and, therefore, considered to be "outsiders" by the Fulbe. Contrary to the "bodiless" Fulbe who "do not drink, do not eat, do not defecate," the Wolof people and the "slaves" are peoples who are "gluttons and loud mouths who even dare to defecate in front of everyone. Each time they fill their bellies they start to dance, and all in all have no modesty whatsoever." Thus, the "slaves," as people who shamelessly make a public display of all those negative aspects of the body, definitely fall into the category of "marked."

When the Fulbe fall ill, and here I don't mean illness such as the fever from malaria that they are relatively "used" to, or a transient stomach ache, but a fever or pain that makes them suffer in an unusual way, they seek medical help not from the Fulbe medicine man but from one of slave origin.<sup>8)</sup> Of course consulting such a doctor depends a great deal upon circumstances, but in the event of consultation the fee can be very high. There are a number of people (of slave origin) who have established reputations for themselves as good doctors. Such a phenomenon can probably be explained in the following way.

On an individual level, illness represents a state of physical disorder, and as such, a state in which a "bodiless" Fulbe is forced to face the reality of his own body. When the body surfaces to the conscious in the form of illness (i.e. a physical "disorder"), it is not the Fulbe, but rather a doctor of slave origin who cures the disorder and once again renders the body "bodiless." Thus, in the event that an "non-marked" person, in spite of himself, is forced into a "marked" state, that person is returned to an "non-marked" state by a "marked" person.

I defined the incongruous acts of the *jabbaaji* at the Fulbe marriage ceremony as an "institutionalised chaos." This "chaos" is something that occurs at a social level, and if we were to employ the metaphor of illness that I previously mentioned, such "chaos" can be understood as a sudden explosive release of all the negative energy and stress that has accumulated within the society of the Fulbe. In other words, the *jabbaaji* dramatize the fact that just as the human body is comprised of a number of "inconvenient" elements, so too is the society of the Fulbe made up of "bodies of burden," and thus not a society that runs in an exclusively orderly manner. The *jabbaaji*, by taking advantage of the "marked" sign with which they have been attributed, are able to reap economic profits from the Fulbe whilst at the same time providing that society with a regenerating power. Why? Because through this dramatized "chaos" the Fulbe are able to paradoxically regain and reactivate a vivid image of their own "bodilessness."

The Fulbe, who attempt to ignore and reject the inconveniences presented by the human body, versus the *jabbaaji* of slave origin, who flaunt the gamut of inconvenient elements that the body represents: here we see two mutually opposing

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8) Medicine men of free Fulbe origin are rather uncommon, and they are solicited by the urban Wolof.

characters that are in fact, at a profound level, mutually very complementary. This is not an argument that is exclusively applicable to the relationship of the Fulbe and *jabbaaji*. It is also applicable to the relationship that exists between the pastoral Fulbe people and the agricultural Wolof people, a relationship which includes elements that are diametrically opposed, yet functions in a manner that is in reality complementary; a relationship that implies concurrence and co-existence.

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