The Innocent Sorcerer:
Coping with Evil in Two African Societies (Kapsiki & Dogon)

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CASE 1: THE INFERTILE WIFE (KAPSIKI)

Teri Kwatcha explains his problems to his friend, the blacksmith/diviner Cewuwe. “You know my second wife, Kwaberhe Kwampa, the one from Rhumsu (a neighboring village). I married her some ten years ago, as a kwatevume [run-away-wife] and gave a lot for the bridewealth already, as the first husband claimed his original bridewealth. She is a good wife; she ran away to another village only once, and she returned after two weeks. She finds no rest here, as she is still not pregnant, and never has been. We have consulted the crab [divination] many times and got various answers. Can you tell us why her belly stays empty?” Cewuwe puts the crabfish in the pot, inside the neat arrangement of straws and calabash sherds, and asks the little animal: “Crab from the pot, crab from the pot, do tell us why this woman is sterile; tell the truth”. The answer is distilled from the havoc wrought by the animal in the small confines of the pot. Several sessions are needed to come to a more or less clear answer, and finally the smith concludes: “Maybe they told you that someone near her was responsible, a woman [mete, “witch”] blocking her fertility or so, or that the jealousy was the cause. Not so. Your wife is ndegema [not in harmony with the supernatural world]. It is not a person who harmed her nor a ndebehengu [sorcerer]; it is ndirimike [badness]. Her shala [personal god] has done it, so a sacrifice is called for. Take a black male goat, and have her leave for the bush with a blacksmith. Out in the bush the blacksmith breaks the legs of the goat and leaves it there. Then she returns home. You may hold a house sacrifice then [a ritual in which red beer is brewed, a goat slaughtered, and a meal held with the neighbors and clansmen]”.²

Teri Kwatcha goes home in a pensive mood. Usually Cewuwe shows himself a very cautious diviner, quite pessimistic in his outlook and his forecasting. He always predicts bad things to happen, and that is good. Bad things not only do happen, they are the only real things, the real events. This cautious optimism gives food for thought.
Teri decides to see Kweji Xake, one of the principal healers of the village. Kweji agrees with the crab (of course) that shala may be the cause but suggests another possible explanation. “Maybe, Teri, not your wife but you are ndegema. A long time ago you came to my father (Vanda, now deceased) for rhwē [medicine, magic] to marry a wife. He gave you the one to “catch” a wife, and the manner to keep that wife at home. But he never gave you the rhwē that comes with it. For anyone who marries his wife with “means” runs the risk of making her sterile. So you come with me and I will give you rhwē to heal that sterility”. Teri accepts Kweji’s medicine, which he must apply to his wife without her knowledge. The small bundle of grasses has to be buried at the doorstep of her hut, as well as under the spot she puts her jars.

Back home Teri ponders his own protective rhwē: his protection in war, against burglary in the compound (the thief will forget to steal once he is in the house)—and most important of all—his sekwa [a ritual means of enforcing the payment of debts]. All these “means” of protection may “attack” the people in the house, and his second wife’s sterility may stem from the dangers inherent in sekwa, too. Teri decides to remove his sekwa, as the most potent of all rhwē, from the house. After putting Kweji’s medicine on the spots indicated by the specialist, he leaves the house with his sekwa bundle of medicine under his clothes and hides it somewhere in the bush.

When his wife returns home (she had been to the market of Rhumsu, her native village, to sell some beans), he tells her about his visit to the diviner Cewve, promising her a black billy goat for the sacrifice and a house sacrifice later on.

Teri’s wife, after all these attentions, in fact did get pregnant. About a year later she gave birth to twins, one of which died.

**Case 2: Protecting the House (Dogon)**

In the village of Tiere, at the foot of the Bandiagara escarpment, Dogolu Say pays a visit to Méninu, his father-in-law. Leaving his shoes outside the gate, Dogolu cautiously enters the compound; Méninu not only is the father of his second wife, but also a renowned ritual specialist. After the lengthy salutation, Dogolu waits till Méninu has finished a chiropractic session on a neighbor who just had a nasty fall, all the while chatting with the patient. When alone with Méninu and following the usual small talk, Dogolu comes to the point. He is building a new house for Atimè, his friend from abroad who has come to live in the village. “You know, people will come and look in the house, maybe will dream about it. They will speak about him and me. Words will be there, words will rise, and as you know the words of the mouth [anga it] you may help me”. Of course, Méninu knows exactly what Dogolo means: people will be jealous and even give vent to their jealousy, so the harmony between Dogolu and his clanbrothers will be disrupted. “I will give you some ginu dom [means to protect the house],” he assures Dogolu, “but be sure that you and your guest do the “guard the head” [ku domono, sacrifice for protection] later at my altar”. Dogolu agrees and asks also for special protection for the open space of the compound; for many visitors will come there, and many words will be spoken in the open air.

A few days later after sunset Dogolu buries the protection of the house at the spot where the threshold will be. It is a piece of cord with three strands, white, blue and black, with twenty-eight knots, for which he will give Méninu a gift of 3,000 CFA (about $12) later on. He knows Méninu well enough to be sure nobody in Tiere will be aware of the proceedings. If not, he would have gone to another village. In fact, he does have a second protection, bought in Nakomo (a neighboring village), which will be put just above the door inside the main hut. It has cost him 10,000 CFA, money he considers well spent. He knows how to make some protection himself, but only against a specific threat: against a special kind of dugononu [sorcerer]. What he needed here is a more general protection that also works against Christians and Muslims. The various diviners he consulted did agree on the villages where he could find materials to protect his house: Tiere and Nakomo.

When Atimè arrives, Dogolu takes to Méninu a cooek, a hen, some other foodstuffs, and seasoning. On Amagoro, a powerful altar that has been served by the lineage of Méninu since times of old, the father-in-law of Dogolu then performs the sacrifice “to guard the head”. This specific sacrifice is not eaten: after being grilled and seasoned, the meat is stacked away under a heap of stones. If anyone should even taste it, he or she would drop dead instantly. Méninu tells Atimè of a Fulani herdsman who did not believe this taboo. He partook of the meat, started down for the valley, and died within the perimeter of the village. Méninu also explains that the secret of the magical means does not reside in the things one uses—like the three-stranded string—but in the words spoken into it. One has to know the anga it’ [words of the mouth] in order to be effective. Anyone who knows the words can perform it.

Now the house is well protected against intruders, against a great variety of dangers: witches [yadononu], who will put poison [dugo] in the water; sorcerers

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**Plate 11–2. Sacrificial jars, center of rituals for Kapsiki who live in northern Cameroon.**
Plate 11–3. Mëningu, the Dogon father-in-law in “Case 2”, invokes the supernatural world to “protect the house”. He strikes a small iron adze on the rock and intones the long ritual text that exorts the gods, spirits, and ancestors to care for and look after the owner of the altar.

Plate 11–4. Yëngulu, a friend of Mëningu, following the intoned text (Plate 11–3), performs the sacrifice with the blood of a chicken.
Apart from shala, some other dangers lurk in the “other side of the world”. Death and some illnesses (measles and smallpox) are conceived of as persons. However, against these, practically no rhwè exists. Some specialists claim rhwè against smallpox or measles, but no one can resist Mte[death]. In fact, the futile fight against Mte and the failure of the many ruses to escape from him form the backbone of Kapsiki mythology. Just as the people of old tried in vain to escape or conquer death, no contemporary Kapsiki can hope to put it off. And so against these three no real protection exists, only acceptance.

A second category of mishaps coming from outside bears no close relationship to shala. Included here are the many epidemics, which are not personified, such as malaria, meningitis, or dysentery. Against these, various rhwè exist, some of them well known, others secret knowledge for the specialists. Sometimes women’s sterility is considered among these epidemics, but more often this has other origins (as in Case 1). Usually the symptoms are clear and well known. In addition, the many ways in which rhwè and other ritually important objects can attack people are considered a threat from beyond, like the threat the sekwa posed for the people in Teri’s compound. These objects, like neolithic remains of former populations, may be used in a variety of ways for the well-being of the owner. All of them, however, may present some danger to the owners. In Kapsiki, no blessing is ever free; what one gains in a special way beyond the average situation will have to be paid for elsewhere. Usually these “blessings” shorten one’s life span.

Far more important as a focus of ritual attention are the many ways evil can stem from human beings. No clear distinction can be made between natural and supernatural threats, but three human sources of evil can be discerned: bad characters, people with the “evil eye”, and “spirit walkers”.

First, there are people who have a bad or special mehele [character or spirit]. The witches [mete] are the clearest example. A witch is someone (male or female) who inherits a special deviant type of shimpanke [shadow]. At night it leaves the sleeping body through the anus and roams in the bush, red like fire, as a kind of wild cat. It eats the shadows of sleeping children’s hearts. The victims, when waking up, feel weak and become ill. Unless the mete drops the shadow of the heart, the victim will die.

Witchcraft is deemed to be inherited matrilineally (in a strictly patrilineal kinship system). The Kapsiki on the whole are well aware of who are mete. Most witches, however, are not “active”; jealousy, ire, or lust for vengeance set the involuntary processes of the witchcraft in motion. So witches are more or less responsible for their vile acts; it is their fete [fault]. However, not every witch is known as such. One major risk for the village resides in strangers coming. These strangers, because of virilocal residence, tend to be women. Often, in marrying women are hardly known at all, so it is possible for a witch to be among them. This is probably one reason that women are deemed to be witches more often than men. Many folktales warn the young and eager man against the dangers of the beautiful but unknown wife coming into the village for marriage.

Kapsiki divination may indicate that a certain illness is the result of mete activities but cannot indicate which activity. There are no high-status diviners in
Kapsiki society, as there are elsewhere in Africa. This lack of pronounced hierarchy among diviners ties in with the acephalous juro-political organization of the Kapsiki, in which pronouncing a judgment over other people is very difficult to do. The usual reaction, after the crab has indicated witchcraft, is to cry into the dark of the night, “Let go, let the heart go”. It is hoped that the witch will then fear detection and return the shadow of the heart.

Essential in these matters is that the mete in question be someone close, either a close kinsman, a wife, or co-wife. Witchcraft, as nearly always is the case in Africa, is the “enemy within the gates”. If someone, either a known witch or a newly arrived wife, is suspected of taking the shadow of a child’s heart, the sick child is put before her in the full presence of as many people as possible, saying: “Here it is. Do eat the rest now”. Formerly, if the child died, the witch was chased from the village and her ears were cut off. Since colonial days, the government no longer allows this, and so the witches proliferate. (In recent years, however, accusations of witchcraft have regained acceptance to the Cameroonian courts.)

Although treatment of mete infliction may be limited, protection is normal and easy to obtain. Everybody knows some protective medicine, and each blacksmith can furnish the nihé needed for a newborn baby.

Kapsiki society is not a witch-ridden society; the number of accusations is very small and relatively few illnesses are attributed to witches. Children are deemed to be about the only possible victims for mete, and of children’s plights only the combination of diarrhea without blood, fever, and much urinating (more or less the symptoms for a Western medical diagnosis of bacterial dysentery) point to mete influence.

Another kind of harmful people are the men or women with the “evil eye” [hweteru]. Their spirits roam the village at night—in no specified form—and suck blood from people and animals. These victims do not die, but become unproductive. These hweteru act so from sheer spite and jealousy; they are deemed to be in command of their bad shadow, inherited matrilineally. In this case, people generally do not know who is hweteru in the village. There is no known cure, only protection against them, that is very easy to obtain: a common plant species gives fair protection. However, it remains important not to foster jealousy: anything nice or beautiful must be hidden from view.

A third kind of special people, though much less harmful, are the “spirit walkers” [keléngu]. Their shadow leaves them at night, in their own image, and joins colleagues in the village. Together, their shadows are believed to go on noble exploits like stealing sorghum in enemy fields or waging war against the spirit walkers of neighboring villages. When they steal the shadow of the harvest, they put it with their own crops; as a result their supply of grains seems interminable. Their main thrust is against other villages, so people do not consider the keléngu as shameful or evil and therefore freely speak about them. This mehele [character] is inherited from father to only one son, and the spirit walkers can be recognized by their thin linear somatic type; they explain their own thinness by their overdose of activity: “We are never at rest; we work during the day and steal at night”. As protection, one must shield one’s fields from the keléngu of other villages. Some medicinal plants offer this protection, as does a thorn hedge or a row of a black sorghum variety around the field. The keléngu sometimes are aware of future events, a domain in which their authority is uncontested, which is one reason they are sometimes dubbed “clairvoyants” in the literature. Whatever they see happen in the spirit world will happen shortly after in the daily world. When they kill people among themselves in their battles, that spirit walker will die within a few days. No medicine will help. Women may be walkers too, for any war has to have its spectators.

Special circumstances at birth may indicate a threat too, usually not for any specific individual, but for the whole community. Twins, breech birth, a child born with the caul, or one conceived without preceding menstruation, all imply their specific threat for either the parents or the whole village, ranging from drought to the death of the father before the child’s initiation. In all these cases a small ritual is indicated to take away the bad luck or danger; though all these rites are different, they all are well known and relatively simple.

It is not only people who are inherently different that pose a threat to the individual. A large danger comes from overt actions of people, whether they are specialists or not. The most harmful people are those who practice beshéngu ("black magic"), the epitome of evil in Kapsiki society. This magic is practiced by someone who aims at harming others, killing, or rendering infertile. It is evil because it harms and because it intrudes. The term beshéngu denotes not a specific object or combination of things, but a great number of different ways of harming other people. Some of those are well known (for example, the whiskers of the leopard); others are very secret and known to the specialist.

Besheungu is a specialist’s job, done professionally by blacksmiths mainly, the ritual intermediaries par excellence in Kapsiki culture. A number of ways to make the beshéngu itself are recounted by the Kapsiki, all in the most general terms, because everybody emphatically wants to disclaim having any such knowledge. The main fascination centers on the distribution of beshéngu: sorcerers are reputed to train flies to bring the beshéngu over to their victims, they bury it in the footsteps, or they change themselves into flying creatures in order to administer their wares. The Kapsiki are sure that all “important” men do have such a beshéngu bought from a specialist in another village. However, it is not the possession of beshéngu that is evil, but its use. One may defend oneself against possible attack; some kinds of beshéngu can be used for protection. In many ritual texts and public discussions, curses are formulated against the users: “Anyone who walks with beshéngu [i.e., who carries it with him in order to use it], let him drop dead in his tracks”. Still, according to some informants, those curses were often mouthed by the very people who at least owned the stuff.

The threat of use does not come from inside the compound, as does witchcraft; people think of this kind of sorcery as coming from outside; however, it does not really come from far away either. Beshéngu is, in the ideas of the Kapsiki, sought after by people who are kinsmen, probably agnates, who are jealous of their clan- and lineage-brothers or interested in their misfortune. A large inheritance may trigger the use or accusations of beshéngu, usually between the agnates competing for the inheritance.
Treating the resulting illness is difficult and must be done by the same type of specialist who can perform the harmful magic. These rites are very secret. The information available on this protection indicates that the content of the rites is highly idiosyncratic, varying from specialist to specialist. It also is independent of tribal identity: knowledge of magic easily transcends the tribal boundaries; in fact, specialists far away always are deemed more powerful and potent than those nearby.

Protection against *beshêngu* is more important than treatment, and it constitutes an important focus of daily Kapsiki religion. One must live carefully, especially when one has gained some social prominence, in order to minimize the dangers. Protection against this threat, which is difficult to realize in any way, focuses on the protection against infection: how to keep the trained flies away, how to protect the compound against flying creatures. Constant vigilance is needed, and the protection against *beshêngu* must be kept in good shape.

As with any activity aimed at the supernatural, the use of *beshêngu* carries a risk. When an untimely death occurs, people may suspect a sorcerer, in which case the *wuta*-ritual is performed, a complicated affair that takes one of the relatives of the deceased to a village far away. The culprit is ritually killed in a large pot [*wuta*]. Afterwards the relative lets the village know that he has “gone to *wuta*” and waits for the culprit to die. The next death is interpreted as the result of this ritual. The culprit then is buried without any public mourning. However, there is danger of contamination. Close kin of the culprit are considered in danger too, for the death by revenge resembles an epidemic, which will attack them also. A special ritual is performed to protect the culprit’s kin from the rightful vengeance.

This epidemic nature of death by revenge, or death by one’s own fete [fault], is central in another ritual, the *sekwa* mentioned in the example. In principle, *sekwa* is a means to ensure the repayment of debts: when someone refuses to repay a debt, the creditor may put his *sekwa* in the debtor’s compound. Then death will strike that compound like an epidemic, wiping out the debtor’s household as well as anyone who has ever eaten there. This *sekwa* is often used as a threat, but the threat is seldom carried out. It is considered a perfectly legitimate means for enforcing repayment, and neither its manufacture nor its possession or use bears any social stigma. *Sekwa* consists of a bundle of objects; its composition is well known to everyone. There is no remedy against its use except to pay the debts immediately. When *sekwa* is applied, it is put in the middle of the courtyard, visible to everyone. But things rarely go that far.

Another threat that has its origin in one’s guilt is the curse *bedla*. When a close kinsman or kinswoman does not behave according to the rules of conduct—for example, does not show the proper respect for a mother’s brother or a father— one may resort to a formal curse. This curse does not entail a great deal of ritual but is simply spoken: “If such and so has misbehaved against me in that manner, then she may not get pregnant anymore”. A wide variety of afflictions can be administered in this way, and the closer the relationship between the parties, the more dangerous the curse is, the most feared curses coming from the mother and her brother. As the formula indicates, the curse is only effective in cases of factual and serious misbehavior. It can be eradicated by a simple ritual of blessing.

A final type of danger from people is the threat of war and theft. Both were rampant before the colonial pacification of the area, and protections against them are still important today. Magic for war, a prized possession of a few, is made by some specialist blacksmiths and has had to prove itself in battle. It usually consists of horns or an iron receptacle filled with an assortment of magic odds and ends, and it must be kept active by sacrifices. Famous war protection is known throughout the village.

Magic against theft is much more widespread and varied. Some plants offer protection, but sometimes complicated ritual patterns are needed. Here protection means attacking the culprit. A normal protection makes the thief forget his thieving intentions when he enters the compound; a better and more expensive one ruins the “head” of the thief, making him lose his way completely inside the house. The strongest medicine, however, kills the thief once he enters the house, especially if he climbs over the wall instead of entering through the only gate. After a theft, the thief may be cursed, and a fair number of afflictions are attributed to this retaliation. However, such curses may prove dangerous, as some close kinsmen may have appropriated the object in question and will be attacked by the curse.

**DOGON: EVIL UNDERGROUND**

Compared with the Kapsiki, the Dogon face a nameless, anonymous evil that has neither face nor familiarity⁴. Their supernatural world is populated by capricious
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voque and diffus in Dogon society. A general uneasiness characterizes Dogon interaction with strangers, though this uneasiness may never show through the outward veneer of hospitality and cordiality. There is a harmony-oriented society, and any obvious breach of harmony is a serious problem. A central theme is the need to avoid conflict, to not act out in anger or frustration, but to seek reconciliation through dialogue and compromise. This is evident in the way Dogon handle disputes and conflicts, where mediation and negotiation are emphasized over direct confrontation.

The Dogon also have a strong sense of personal honor and reputation. Matters of honor are taken very seriously, and actions that could reflect negatively on an individual's honor are avoided. This is reflected in the way they dress, with their traditional garments often being a symbol of social status and respectability.

The Dogon also have a strong sense of community and the collective good. This is evident in their agricultural practices, where fields are often shared among members of the community, and in their social organization, where decision-making is often done through communal discussion and consensus-building.

In recent years, the Dogon have been facing external pressures, including modernization and development projects, which threaten their traditional way of life. However, they have been able to maintain much of their cultural identity and way of life, despite these challenges.
community, are words spoken over an altar (the word ama means both "altar" and "god"). Protection against evil, as in our example, consists of words spoken over a pot with objects or over a slaughtered chicken. The general term for the objects used in this kind of private ritual, and in fact a central term in Dogon religion, is òmònò. It has a wide range of meanings, from simply a sacrifice (also a communal one) to an object or bundle of objects used in private rituals and sacrifices. It is neither good nor bad. The òmònò can be a thing (e.g., a statue) sacrificed together with the regular ama altar or an object sacrificed separately to harm other people.

The rites in question are almost identical to the regular sacrifices: the òmònò is used together with the altar. Sometimes the actual òmònò is buried in the mud cone that forms the altar. The private rites among the Dogon do form a continuum with the communal ones. Likewise, òmònò that has been given much ritual attention becomes more potent, thus making the termination of its use difficult. The constant combination of words and objects, plus a long history of sacrifices, multiplies the efficacy of these procedures.

Evil also multiplies this way. The general Dogon term for an evil object, dugo, often translated as “poison”, but without words it would be powerless. Dugo is private, secret, and bad, aimed at killing people. Of what objects it consists is quite unclear. In fact, it is so evil that nobody can claim knowledge of it—it is of no use for protection. Two kinds of people use it, the male dudugóna (“sorcerers”) and the female yadugóna, which we will translate as “witches”.

Sorcerers [dudugóna] are manipulators of evil. They have their òmònò objects on which they sacrifice often. Applying the “poison” to a chain with a set of pincers (see Plate 11–6), they send the appliance away with their “words”. This chain proceeds on its own force and nips the victim, who then dies. Sometimes footpaths are infected with dugo, but this is not a threat that is widely felt. Another way of administering dugo is putting it under one’s thumb nail, which can be put in the beer just before offering the calabash to some stranger.

Some protection against dugo is offered in politeness or in ritual. When offered a drink, one always lets the offerer drink first, a rule that is explained to outsiders as politeness but that has a protective value as well. Further protection is offered by special objects in which the words of the mouth are knotted, like bracelets made of plaited cord. This kind of protection, again, is produced by specialists. In Dogon society these specialists are not the blacksmiths, but the ritual elders who are responsible for the regular religious practices. Among them, the shamanic binu priest can offer some protection through his sacrifices.

Dugo can be bought, though it is expensive (prices of 20,000 CFA [$40] are mentioned). According to informants, it is not even hard to obtain, but it must be bought in another village. Against dugo no treatment is known; a few medicines may give some initial relief, but eventually the victim will die. The main symptoms are a swollen abdomen and high fever.

Witches [yadugóna] work with dugo too, but in a wholly different way. They do not manipulate evil objects with words and other conscious acts; they are less than consciously subject to the evil when they do evil deeds. Witchcraft in Dogon could be partly defined as a proclivity to poison other people; a yadugóna feels compelled to put poison in other people’s drinks or food. She thus presents a constant danger to strangers, kith and kin. According to the Dogon, children are the victims of witches’ poisoning; child-rich mothers are very careful with their less fortunate sisters and, consequently, older childless women may be viewed suspiciously when they give attention to another woman’s children.

Witches are ascribed another bewildering trait. Besides administering poison, they roam at night in the bush and jump on people who inadvertently come their way. Flying through the air with burning sticks in their hands, they land on the victim’s head, sometimes urinate on him, paralyzing him for some hours, and rendering him incapable of speech (most victims are thought to be male). It is not the shadow of the witch that does this, but the witch herself. After a victim consults the shamanic priest, a ritual is performed as a remedy, of which an emetic is the central part. The patient then vomits a hairy worm, an act that immediately loosens up his tongue. Some people are reputed to be stronger than those flying witches and can stay on top of them for the whole night. In such cases the witches remain their friend. As witches, however, they may pass on his name to their colleagues who might try him out.

Dogon do not discuss or speak aloud the names of dudugóna or yadugóna, though some people may be suspected. Accusations are not voiced, nor does any kind of divination reveal their identity. According to the Dogon, the fox (the main intermediary for divination) would be afraid to do so lest the diviner be killed. The male sorcerers, who aim mostly at enemies, teach their trade to their sons, selecting the one who “knows his words”. Female witchcraft is passed matrilineally from one yadugóna to her daughter or younger sister—not at birth but at the death of the old witch—and may lead to an unbroken chain of ten generations of witches. If another seeks to end her witchcraft, her daughters become infertile. Tales are told about rituals by witch collectives, similar to the communal sacrifices done by a family, in which both the witches and the sorcerers participate. The passing on of the witchcraft, consequently, is not deemed to be wholly involuntary; witches have to wish to become so. Once they have chosen the path of poison, and once the dugo resides in their granaries, the way back is very difficult.

Plate 11–6. The “creeping evil”: iron pincer and chain used in sending “poison”. Collection: Herman Haan. A sorcerer, Dogon say, puts some of his strongest stuff on the pincer and then speaks the “anga ti” [words of the mouth]. Propelled by the power of the words, the pincer and chain are believed to creep through the bush towards the victim.
COMMUNAL RITES AND THE NEGATION OF EVIL

Our case study, the Dogon, is a people who have developed a complex system of religious beliefs and practices. They believe in a supreme being, or deity, who created the world and all its inhabitants. The deity is known as Kono and is believed to be both benevolent and wrathful. The Dogon believe in a number of spirits, or gods, who can influence human affairs. These spirits are thought to be either good or evil and can be approached through rituals and sacrifices.

The Dogon society is organized into clans, which are based on descent from a common ancestor. Each clan has a totem animal and is associated with a particular direction. The Dogon believe that the directions are of great importance, and that each has its own spiritual power.

The Dogon believe that the world is divided into two realms: the visible world and the invisible world. The visible world includes all that is tangible and real, while the invisible world includes all that is spiritual and supernatural. The Dogon believe that the invisible world is filled with spirits, or gods, who can influence human affairs.

The Dogon believe that the deity, Kono, is the ultimate source of all power and authority. They believe that Kono created the world and all its inhabitants, and that He is the ultimate judge of all actions. The Dogon believe that Kono is both benevolent and wrathful, and that He will reward those who are good and punish those who are evil.

The Dogon believe that the spirits, or gods, are powerful beings who can influence human affairs. These spirits are thought to be either good or evil, and can be approached through rituals and sacrifices. The Dogon believe that the spirits are responsible for a number of natural phenomena, such as disease and drought.

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it is almost totally suppressed. The wicked people and the evil emanations are not mentioned, nor are any countermeasures against them indicated or ritually reinforced. It is as if evil does not exist, as if neither Dogon nor Kapsiki believes in anything evil. Evil is a kind of double negation, where a part of the supernatural world is denied presence as well as existence.

**Contrasts of "Evil"**

The societies of the Kapsiki and Dogon are comparable in ecological setting, social and territorial organization, and historical experiences; yet, they differ considerably in the way they cope with evil. In earlier sections, I reviewed evil and threatening influences, and in the preceding section, I sketched some commonalities of the major rituals in the shadow of which these involvements in and with evil take place; I also discussed systematic differences between the two cases. I will do the same now with the protective ritual and the notions of evil, moving from the contrasts between the two religions to the resemblances.

The threats the Kapsiki perceive stem from an ambiguous supernatural world that can have positive or negative import but is in the last instance dependable; people can in the long run rely on the gods, who behave in a more or less orderly fashion. Problems stemming from the supernatural world arise mainly in the form of illness (van Beek 1992a) or infertility and are couched in terms of guilt. A vague and general "badness," mainly nonobjectified and nonpersonalized, is brought about through specific individuals or personified illnesses. Evil, or "badness," is part of everyday village life and must be chased away periodically. Despite its vague nature it does have a precise location (even Death or Epidemic has its proper, well-known village; see van Beek 1978:293). If evil attacks, treatment is possible.

The same holds for evil of human origin: some specific people may be bad, but they are predictable and the problems they inflict can be treated by their equals. Witches are born with a deviant shadow (the manner of birth is important for the ritual status of the individual) and are fairly well known; they can deactivate their own inborn proclivities if they wish to, without harm to themselves. Witchcraft is limited to "normal people", that is, to those who are not differentiated by birth (like blacksmiths or twins), and it is not thought to have any collective aspect. The types of witchcraft vary in range, badness, and importance, but all are relatively easy to ward off. Witches and sorcerers are clearly differentiated, and sorcerers have a protective as well as an aggressive aspect. Knowledge of objects, mainly not human-made, is crucial; spells are not very important. Blacksmiths form an important segment of society in this respect. Divination is specific, indicating precise sources of suffering and very precise ritual treatments, though some loopholes are preserved in the divinatory process; specific accusations about individual people are not voiced.

Guilt between individuals is an important source of problems too. Misdemeanor between kin, refusal to repay debts, or suspicion of black magic can lead to several ways of cursing; guilt leads to revenge, often with the explicit aim to kill the culprit. These deaths-by-guilt are contagious for co-residents and close agnates. Apart from

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Plate 11-7. Teri, the mother's brother of the newly initiated Tizhe, spits some beer on his nephew's shoulder to bless him at the end of his seclusion period. As part of Kapsiki boys' initiation, Tizhe has not been out of his hut for eight days. As a new adult, he is vulnerable to evil influences, so he must be protected against them.
the evil of sorcery, the epitome of interhuman badness is theft, because it encroaches on the cherished twin values of property and privacy.

In contrast, the Dogon supernatural world is not dependable, but highly capricious. In the relationship between humans and gods, transgressions against the supernatural world are not important to explain misfortune; the taboos that exist are few and easy to comply with. The essence of evil is precisely identified (poison), but imprecisely localized, and illnesses are not personalized. This vague evil, which is predominantly of human origin, is not thrown out in rituals, but immobilized and suppressed, mainly by negating its existence and stressing the harmonious side of life. Evil is not a part of normal village life, but something of the night and the bush. Once evil is inflicted, treatment is virtually impossible; whatever efficient treatment is given is meted out by a specialist who is not associated with evil.

Ritual—and evil—power lies in the knowledge of words, backed up by objects that are usually human-made. Spells are the most important part of the procedure. Objects can be bought, and they derive their power from constant use. Once one is on the road to ritual use of objects, it is difficult and dangerous to turn back and to stop it, both for the regular altars and for the strictly private ones.

With witches, it is not the shadow but the whole personality that is important, and among the several types of witchcraft one is paramount. Characteristics of birth are relatively unimportant (the castes have no specific function in this). Neither is the proclivity of evil inherited at birth: inheritance occurs at death. The identity of poison people is unknown, and they may operate in groups. Divination is unspecified and general, never clear about causes or treatment. Accusations, specific or general, are never voiced.

Shame—not guilt—is the main focus of ritual, and revenge killings are not allowed and are practically unknown. Between humans one should bless, not curse, avoiding the degradation of the fellow Dogon. In relation to evil, these blessings aim not at harming or killing culprits, but at strengthening the social bond, in fact at immobilizing evil—it should be suppressed. Between equals, the epitome of evil—apart from poison—is lying and false accusation. Protection against this is difficult and can be done only by strong affirmation of the value of sociability and constant accessibility. Loss of face affects kith and kin too and easily involves the whole community.

Table 11.1, an overview of the complex differences in these societies shows important characteristics of Kapsiki and Dogon notions of evil and their context. The commonalities resulting from these differences (the right-hand column) are treated in the next section.

### The Nature of Evil

The supernatural world for both the Kapsiki and the Dogon is not trustworthy in the short run, which may threaten the individual but in itself is not a source of evil. Water plays an interesting part in both instances: places with permanent water feature prominently as the danger spots, yet water is also crucial for life. Water seems to share the life-giving as well as the dangerous sides of the gods. Still, though the gods can be quite unreasonable, their inflections can and must be

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kapsiki</th>
<th>Dogon</th>
<th>resemblance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;supernatural world&quot;</td>
<td>ambiguous, + or – but eventually dependable</td>
<td>capricious and not dependable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supernatural threat</td>
<td>guilt punished by one's personal god [shala]</td>
<td>punishment for neglect of altar to Ama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>theory of normal humans</td>
<td>one-dimensional</td>
<td>dependable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>origin of evil</td>
<td>special persons (deviant shadow)</td>
<td>unspecified persons (whole personality)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>known persons?</td>
<td>mostly, but the way they harm is vague</td>
<td>identity is vague, but means are known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inheritance of evil</td>
<td>at birth</td>
<td>at death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relation with ego</td>
<td>close, lineage based</td>
<td>vague but close</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>specialization</td>
<td>protective and aggressive</td>
<td>protective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>definition of evil action</td>
<td>theft (encroaches on property and privacy)</td>
<td>false accusation (causes loss of face)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evil essence</td>
<td>object</td>
<td>poison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>locomotion</td>
<td>evil flies</td>
<td>evil crawls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contagion</td>
<td>epidemic</td>
<td>taints person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diagnosis/divination</td>
<td>specific sources and treatments</td>
<td>unclear on causes or treatments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>treatment?</td>
<td>yes; + protection and revenge</td>
<td>no; protection and oaths; not revenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prevention</td>
<td>careful behavior</td>
<td>careful speech</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11.1. A comparison of Kapsiki and Dogon notions of Evil
endured. If the gods are reasonable, the problems they send are one’s own fault. In both societies, the supernatural world should be kept at a distance and not mingled too closely with human affairs. In neither Kapsiki nor Dogon are ancestors of prime importance in the religion. This in fact offers the possibility of keeping the other world at arm’s length.

Evil originates mainly from fellow humans, and it carries a limited identification. If evil humans can be pointed out, the way they harm is vague; or if a specific poison is the main instrument, then the identity of the culprit is vague. There is a dialectical relationship with evil: it should be known somewhat, but without an overly close association. If the bad individuals are vague, illnesses will probably not be personified. In ritual, evil is partly—but never completely—overcome or suppressed; it stays just inside or beyond the perimeter of the village. The individualized Kapsiki culture associates evil more easily with particular beings, makes a sharper distinction between involuntary and self-willed evil, and tolerates the background presence of evil more easily than the Dogon culture, which is more oriented toward communal harmony. For Dogon, evil has to be defined outside the boundary of human existence and is always somewhat voluntary. An impersonal evil renders treatment very difficult and does not specify a section of the human being most vulnerable to the absorption of evil. Manifest differences between people, like manner of birth, then, are not used to implicate the persons in question.

In either case, once evil is started, it is hard to stop. It proceeds at its own force and impetus, whether it is guilt-triggered or stems from the object. The objects used in the protective rituals become tainted with the enemy. In both cases, Kapsiki as well as Dogon, human-made artifacts are professed to be used, and eventually they all must be discarded, lest they grow too strong. This may take one or several generations, but eventually one has to get rid of protective magic.

The definition of what is the most evident evil in society is consonant with the (inverted) main values of each society. In fact, the concept of what constitutes the main internal threat to society is much more clear than the positive values themselves. The Kapsiki abhorrence of theft and the morbid fascination of the Dogon with false accusations and lies are manifest in many ways. Consequently, one can more easily characterize these cultures by their chosen evils than by their definitions of good. One reason for this may be that much evil is considered to be of human origin, coming from the people very close at hand. Afflictions coming from abroad, be they from outside enemies or from environmental risks, are not evil; they are just there. No one argues with the climate. Instead, a quiet and dignified suffering is called for (similar to when evil for which there is no protection comes from the gods)—a kind of suffering that is most clear in the Kapsiki culture, where showing affliction does not elicit help. But when evil comes from nearby, the culture in question offers a frame for selecting what aspect of possible interaction is defined as evil. The societies concur that killing within the group is always evil. The life of the individual is considered vulnerable, and a sharp focus on health is discernible in both cultures. The other aspects in which a human being is deemed vulnerable vary much more. The privacy and autonomy of the Kapsiki is vulnerable to theft, just as the integration into society of the Dogon is vulnerable to loss of face and credibility.

A second reason that cultures may be characterized by their chosen evils is more dialectic. The notions of evil for the Kapsiki and the Dogon carry some independence. Evil is defined as a substance and as an artifact; “the absence of good” would never do as a definition of evil. The notion of good is more dependent on the notion of evil than vice versa. A good person usually is defined as someone who follows the rules of his society. Following the rules implies for a Dogon different things than it does for a Kapsiki, as the positive values vary. But in both cases following the rules primarily means not trespassing them, abstaining from faults and mistakes—in short, the absence of evil. Of course, positive values can be defined—sociability or autonomy—and strived for in an active, positive way. Still, being sociable means never refusing someone, and autonomy or relying on oneself means not leaning on another person. The proof of good is abstention from evil. There may be a sound reason for the inequality of good and evil. Evil is within reach. Good is not. Both cultures harbor an ideal for human beings that cannot be reached. The “white belly and liver” of the Dogon is a good example: everyone should be open toward the other as well as ready for inspection at any time—a goal very imperfectly realized in everyday life. The vaunted autonomy of the Kapsiki is both a psychic and an economic impossibility also. So, good as such is definitely out of reach in practice and is best defined as the relative absence of evil.

**PRIVATE RITUAL: THE INNOCENT APPRENTICE**

The private rituals that protect against evil (or generate it) are markedly different from the communal ones discussed earlier. These rituals do not rally scores of people, nor do they occupy a special place on the ritual calendar. Performed alone, with a minimum of publicity, sometimes even furtively, they seek to protect against evil influences, aiming at isolating the person in question from the dealings of his fellow humans, instead of participating in group identity. Here the individual shields himself or herself against certain elements or aspects of the society at large, putting individual interests before those of the group. In these rituals the individual is on the defensive: he or she inevitably faces a whole society of people with conflicting ambitions and unknown but large reservoirs of knowledge and power. It is, in a sense, the down-to-earth part of religion that fits in with the lowest echelons in social organization, the (nuclear or extended) family and the individual. After the dialectic euphoria of the great community rituals, this is the complementary, sobering alienation inherent in daily existence. “The religion of Monday” I have called it elsewhere (van Beek 1975:60), but maybe the term “rites of Monday” is more apt. After all, both aspects are part of one religion.

In these “rites of Monday” the focus, as mentioned above, is on the individual. What picture of the individual emerges from these rites? In the Kapsiki case, the individual is a self-evident social entity, connected with the immediate family (most often the nuclear one) but in fact alone. This aloneness is clear in divination in which the individual faces the whole village and any other group relevant to the problem in question as opposites, not as fellows. Fundamentally, a Kapsiki has to rely on
himself or herself, on his or her own resources and characteristics. Most of these
cannot be changed; one has to live with oneself. Thus, the general social situation of
a man or woman is accepted as given, and only minute details can be changed. In
ritual and divination those problems are addressed that may stand between an
individual and his or her potential existences. The sterility of a woman, illness, or
an overdose of bad luck are problems that can be actively addressed and are situations
one can change. The same holds true for any supernatural or other aggression
directed against the individual; active protection is called for. But on the whole the
individual is accepted as he or she appears to be; a rich man will always be rich, a
poor man poor: his personal god [shala] has made him so. A dangerous man or
woman, a known witch or harmful sorcerer, will be expelled from the village, since
in no way can one change such a fundamental trait of personality. If it is their
character, they will remain so. That implies that in daily life Kapsiki make a clear
distinction between those wrongs, mishaps, or transgressions that are one’s fault and
those that are not (one’s shala did it). In the first case, it may be possible to repress
the wrong, such as in those cases in which the individual is himself responsible for
being ndege ma. This term implies the vertical relationship between the individual
and the supernatural world: if a taboo has been broken, or if sacrifices have been
neglected, then one is out of harmony with shala. The relationship between ego and
shala is quite independent from the one between the individual and the rest of the
village. If the individual is not responsible, then a quiet acceptance [kaneve le mtsu,
literally “to look with the eyes”, meaning a quiet resignation of suffering] behooves
a truly mature person.

The Dogon have a more active theory of personality. In their view the individual
is not a self-evident social unit but exists mainly in relation to kinsmen and peers—in
social context. This shows in divination, where the individual is symbolized as
surrounded with his or her equals vis-à-vis the opposite entities, the supernatural
world—god, the grave, and the relevant problem. In general, their relationship with
the community at large is less problematic than for the Kapsiki, so their defenses
against their fellow human beings are less specific than in our first example. What
they want to protect themselves against is being talked about, the “words”, which
implies a falling-out with the community and being out of harmony with other
people. So the Dogon “rites of Monday” convey the impression of the individual
as a part of a larger whole, in one of its many social echelons.

Given the existing and reinforcing social context of the individual, a Dogon
feels sure that he or she can change some aspects of his or her personality. The
environment is considered “manageable” (van Beek 1992b) and personal riches a
result of conscious and deliberate efforts. Of course, a lot of things are beyond con-
trol, like fertility, illness, and death. But since these are completely beyond control,
they are left to Ama [God] (van Beek 1988b). The Dogon term for personal mistake,
liri, reflects this emphasis. The term refers to the relation between humans, not
between a person and Ama. Redress of wrongs must be sought in interpersonal
relationships, by asking forgiveness and by trying to forget the existence of friction.
People who are bad have chosen to be so; they are not born that way. So they must
be changed, mainly through public exposure and loss of face.

Despite these obvious differences, some resemblances between the two societies’
“rites of Monday” can be discerned. The individual is portrayed as a vulnerable
being who is a obvious prey for the (supernatural) predators at large in the more
or less direct environment. Still, that same individual has his or her defenses and
can rely on outsiders; many of these private rituals do involve asking for
professional assistance, an aspect notably absent in the great community rituals.
In our examples, a diviner/blacksmith (Kapsiki) and a general ritual specialist
(Dogon) are consulted. Individual rites also often call for divination, a professional
service only a few qualified people can offer (Plate 11–8). The rites performed
may be simple, but often are not, and in any case their application calls for
specialized and secret knowledge. Even if the rites are simple, it may be much
safer to have a specialist perform them.

Thus, the moves to establish oneself as an individual and the processes involved
in maintaining the boundary between ego and community reinforce the social ties
of the individual, making him or her more dependent on others. These social
relationships are not to the same persons the individual seeks protection for or
against (kith and kin or outsiders); on the other hand, the specialists are the same
that may help threaten the individual supernaturally. A specialist in protection is
also a specialist in aggression. To guard oneself, one must deliver part of the
independence to those people who may be most dangerous to one’s very existence.

In the protective ritual the individual works in a state of partial knowledge, both
in the diagnosis of the problem and in its treatment. Divination does not offer a clear
answer to one’s questions—at least not as clear as many clients wish (van Beek

Plate 11–8. Adiyë, a Dogon of the village of Amani, consults the cowrie shells in order to
know what dangers the future holds for him. He is one of the few who “really knows the
words” [angu] both to protect from and to inflict evil. Cowrie shell divination is widespread
in West Africa.
it in the bush, meaning that he once spotted an enemy who wore it; after a long vigil Zera’s father stole it when the other took a bath. It is a potent rhew that offers a secure protection against the intrusion of iron: no iron object can ever pierce your flesh when you wear it. But it might have lost its strength, so Zera tests it. He takes a huge melon, puts the rhew around it and thrusts a knife into it, burying it to the hilt, the juice splashing him in the face. Zera, his face glowing with confidence, tells his friend: “You see, it does not work any longer. But if it would have had its berete [force], the blade would have broken off immediately; not even the tip would have entered the melon” (personal communication: Mogodéd, 23 August 1973).

This confidence in part is trust in the specialist, or in the case of Zera, in the powers of the people of the past. And the unshaken belief people show after disconfirmation is even more astonishing than the confidence people exude after performance of any magical rite. Failure of magic strengthens belief in it. The reason for the failure always lies within the sphere of magic itself: the powers have leaked away, elsewhere people have even stronger powers, or rites have not been performed properly. Magical ritual is a closed system in which the observable has no bearing on the belief in efficacy. Of course, the tenacious belief often is a strong factor in helping make a ritual procedure efficacious, as has been demonstrated and argued convincingly (Tennekes 1982).

A final picture emerging from the private rituals of our two cases is one of feigned innocence. All people seeking protection against evil seem to approach the field not only as apprentices but also as people for whom working with evil is an alien occupation. When they come to the specialists to search for supernatural

Plate 11-9. In some Dogon villages, terracotta figurines [toô] are fabricated that represent illnesses and deformations. Though the people making them claim that they help in healing, many other Dogon are convinced that they are harmful and represent evil. (H. 18 cm.; terracotta. Collection: Herman Haan.)
protection, they tend to suggest that they do so for the first time (this is one reason the Kapsiki tend to switch specialists after consultation), that they do not know the character of evil. They pretend to be unaware of the enemy, having gathered only recently some vague rumors about its threat. The language used is vague and full of evasions. One central reason for this approach is to disclaim any knowledge of harmful magic and—even more emphatically—to deny that one would ever use it against a fellow being. The clients appear to be free of all evil, full of benevolent innocence, and reticent to learn anything specific about this dark side of the world.

Thus, in these “rites of Monday” another pious lie is performed: the adults act as if they are children. With just a glimmer of knowledge, they act as if they believe unquestioningly, fully accepting the authority of their specialist, while they themselves are innocent of all evil. As the group in the great communal rituals disclaimed even the existence of evil, the individual having these magical rites performed disclaims any identification with evil, even when dabbling in it. In both instances, Dogon and Kapsiki, the execution of these magical rites runs counter to some central values in society. Kapsiki society is pervaded by a strong sense of privacy and respect for the autonomy of the other (van Beek 1982a); for them rhwe is essentially an intolerable intrusion into the private lives of other people. For the Dogon, with their highly valued harmony, the very notion of malevolent people is an affront, which can be tolerated if these people are far removed and anonymous. The negation of individual association with evil helps to reproduce a society in which evil “knows its place” and is kept in check, reinforcing the priority of social values over individual interests, helping to reproduce an evil-free society of fully socialized adults.

**SYMBOLS OF EVIL**

So far, our analysis has proceeded along more or less structural lines, aiming at the systematic oppositions on the basis of a joint frame of reference. The content of the belief about evil, the collective suppositions accompanying the systematic choices highlighted above, is also worth examining.

The images evoked by Kapsiki and Dogon show a similar systematic contrast. Evil in Kapsiki culture is stable and unchangeable. It is associated with carrion and dung, and the Kapsiki suppositions about evil show a definite anal side: the witch’s shadow leaves and reenters the body through the anus, while in stories Death is mastered by poking a hot iron into his anus. The spirit when descending from on high wait on the dung heap of the house for a suitable time to enter a woman’s womb. So a certain association can be found between the aggressive spirit and human excrement. The mouth is the antithesis of the anus for the Kapsiki: from the mouth blessings emanate, either by talking or by spitting (see Plate 11—7, p. 214). Evil resides in the heart or the shadow, good in the mouth and the head.

Protection focuses either on the wall of the house or on the skin of the body; the two are homologous for Kapsiki (van Beek 1986): what the skin is to the body, the wall is to the house. Danger should not enter past the compound wall at all lest it attack the family and should not enter the skin either, the last protective barrier.
dangerous, they do not form a group on their own as such. The personified dangers (Death and some epidemics) share that aspect. They are in some ways subhuman (half a body, one leg and one arm, etc.) and in some ways quite human. They can be tricked and led astray, even if only for a short time. These abnormal people, however, do form an integral part of society, like the foreign wives who cannot be trusted, but are indispensable.

The Dogon notion of evil is more capricious and changeable. Though some scatological aspects are discernible (the witch urinating on her victim), the Dogon focus is more oral: the main gate of evil is the mouth. The evil is produced by the mouth (triggered by the condition of the liver) and enters it too. Purification is done in the mouth, either in the absolute form of an emetic or by chewing some special roots and barks. In this case, both blessing and evil stem from the mouth. Protection and attempts at treatment are delivered in the mouth; medicine has to be chewed, often without ingesting it. Protection has to be given in the vicinity of the body, before evil actually touches or enters, and the protection does not aim at killing but at immobilizing evil. “Poison people” cannot enter or are attacked by an irresistible itch; witches remain outdoors, scratching.

Evil creeps, crawling around the perimeters of the living space, either in the form of objects or in the form of people, and may jump on others when they are close by. In the form of words, evil is omnipresent and can be generated at any time from the liver, but in its artifact shape it encircles the village and then suddenly attacks. Its color, if any, is black. Red is associated with capriciousness, such as with the gods—not with evil.

There is somewhat of an organized-group side to Dogon evil; a sense of a countergroup, a secret society of “poison people”, keeping the normal society under a limited siege. The norms and values in that counter society are inverted: women are more dangerous (stronger) than men, and normal society’s main values (harmony and accessibility) are transformed into random killing and secrecy. The strong sense of identity from group membership in normal life is negated by a total anonymity, a nonidentity of bad people.

Consequently, evil does not stem from abnormal or subnormal people, but from very normal ones, who cannot be discerned as being evil but who secretly gather together to do it. The harmful spirits are the ones that most closely resemble the Dogon themselves, while the tree spirits, or the spirits with a half body, have been helpful in the past.

The symbols used for evil and the collective representations shaping these symbols show the systematic contrast between the two cultures discussed earlier. Evil in both cases is localized within the human body (cf. Douglas 1966, 1973), and in a specific part of it. The Kapsiki body symbols—anus, heart, and skin—and the Dogon ones—mouth and liver—in themselves are not symbols of evil alone, but of beneficial action as well. Also, the mouth, heart, and liver are the central seats of emotion in the respective cultures. In the Dogon case, blessing and evil stem from the same source, while among the Kapsiki, defensive symbols are different from offensive ones. This is consonant with the anonymity versus the specificity of the definition of evil in both cultures; in these respects the symbolism of evil is simply a part of the general symbolic system. The Kapsiki do not have notions of a community of sorcerers; this fits in with their general tendency toward individualism, like the social interaction among “poison people” fits in with the community-oriented Dogon.

In some other ways, however, the body symbolism presents the diametrically opposite focus compared to daily behavior: the Dogon, who are very tactile in daily interaction, easily and frequently touching each others’ bodies, have a magical defense that does not center on the skin, while the much less tactile Kapsiki do concentrate protection on the individual’s skin. The evil coming from outside the Dogon community is not brought about by abnormal persons, but by unidentified normal people, while in the Kapsiki case the supernatural danger comes from abnormal people who are fairly well known. In the great rituals as well as in daily life the reverse holds: danger comes for the Kapsiki from the normal strangers outside the community, and for the Dogon from the “abnormal” ones who are well known. So the notion of evil, while firmly entrenched in the whole of the culture’s symbolic universe, is an important part of a transformation of norms and values of the “normal” society. This systematic difference is shown in Table 11.2.

In both cases evil has a sufficient degree of vagueness. One who becomes too involved in it can be caught in its web and perish. So the individual, who has his social identity and the models of his culture imprinted and reinforced in daily life and in the great rituals, has to chart a cautious course between good and bad, between the unattainable ideal of good and the prison of evil (cf. Ricoeur 1969). However, the very vagueness of these concepts associated with evil enables one to cope with it. Evil fits in with the rest of religion, and its definition allows for a substantive middle ground between extremes. The definitions of both good and evil imply that in any phase and aspect of life, one must always live with both of them; coping with evil implies coping with good too (Willis 1985). The show of innocence, mentioned above, is a viable solution. The model of the child in the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kapsiki</th>
<th>proceeds from</th>
<th>resides in</th>
<th>characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“evil”</td>
<td>anus</td>
<td>heart</td>
<td>flies, floats, darts; red; not created; individual subhuman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kapsiki</td>
<td>mouth/head</td>
<td>skin</td>
<td>protection can also kill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dogon</td>
<td>“evil”</td>
<td>mouth</td>
<td>creeps; black; created; humans in group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dogon</td>
<td>“good”</td>
<td>mouth</td>
<td>liver and intestines; protection immobilizes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11.2. Contrasts of Evil and Good among the Kapsiki and the Dogon.
face of good and evil keeps the options open both to make mistakes and to use the power of evil to avoid their consequences. The possibility of this charade may be essential for living in any culture. If the space between good and evil is reduced, one tends towards a puritan system (Thoden van Velzen and van Beek 1988), in which the slightest slip from the ideal is considered a grave sin and where innocence is no longer possible. Kapsiki and Dogon cultures allow ample room for individual maneuvering between the two poles of good and evil, and each in its own way manages to shape not an easy way of life but a life that is feasible.

NOTES
1. Research among the Kapsiki of northern Cameroon and the Higi of Nigeria; carried out in 1971, 1972–73, 1979, 1984, and 1988; was made possible by grants from the Netherlands Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Studies (WOTRO) and the University of Utrecht.

2. Orthography of Kapsiki and Dogon words
   h.............. voiceless velar fricative
   c.............. voiceless alveo-palatal affricate
   t.............. voiced alveo-palatal affricate
   j.............. Church
   y.............. voiced alveo-palatal half-vocal
   d.............. Young
   dl.............. voiced alveolateral fricative
   rh.............. voiced labial fricative
   i.............. nasalized
   ù.............. nasalized u
   o............................... god
   e............................... the
   e............................... that

   No tones are indicated.


4. On the Dogon a considerable body of ethnographic literature has been produced by the French ethnographer Marcel Griaule and his collaborators (Griaule 1938, 1948; Dieterlen 1941, 1982; Griaule and Dieterlen 1965; Calame-Griaule 1965). The data as presented here do not stem from this literature for two reasons: first, almost no reference to any religious expression that could be dubbed "witchcraft" or "sorcery", let alone "evil", has been made by the Griaule school. Second, a large part of that literature has come under severe ethnographical criticism by the present author (van Beek 1991a).

Myth & Epic in Central Africa

Luc de Heusch

From the Atlantic coast to the mountainous areas of the African Great Lakes, marvelous fictional narrations have been passed on from generation to generation. My intent is to analyze how these epics are related to the processes that have taken shape in the accounts of the deeds of the heroes who founded states among the Luba in Zaïre or among the peoples of Rwanda. In two books devoted to Bantu myths and rituals, I have tried to show that these tales—although they do have historical pretensions since their function is to lay the foundations for sacred kingship and to legitimize this key institution in the social and cosmic order—nonetheless have to be treated throughout as myths (de Heusch 1972, 1982). Under this assumption and in the light of this previous research, I would now like to examine the series of epics about Lianja, the legendary hero of the Zaïrean Nkundo, who form an acausal society organized in lineages without any kind of sacred chiefaincy.

Like many of the Central African epic heroes, Lianja had a very unusual, indeed fabulous, birth: he sprang, fully armed and accompanied by a twin sister, from the lower leg of his mother, whose pregnancy had been prolonged. Having pointed out this essential characteristic, Pierre Smith (1979) has qualified these exceptional heroes who spring out of the same imaginative pattern as "overconceived" [surconçue].

Specialists in full costume sing the epic of Lianja around a fire; their faces and bodies are painted with asymmetrical drawings; they wear feather headdresses and hold spears. The performance lasts several successive nights. This prose epic has several variants. I refer to the version collected by Edmond Boelaert (1949). For the sake of clarity, I have divided it into seven sequences.

1. All the wives of the ancestor Wai were pregnant and gave birth except for one, whose pregnancy drew out so long that everyone made fun of her. In secret, an old woman took an egg out of this wife's womb; and the next day, a handsome boy hatched from it. Bokele, this son, managed to be accepted by his father Wai. To bring the sun nearer to the village, which had always been plunged in darkness,