

# Ritual Territories and Dynamics in the annual Bush Fire Practices of Maane, Burkina Faso

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## I Introduction

This paper is primarily concerned with the timing and places for ritual bush fires in Maane, Burkina Faso<sup>1</sup>. Among the Moose of this region, these fires take place in October-November, that is, at the end of the rainy season. They may be categorised as early bush fires; the herbs to be burned are not as yet completely dry. These fires take place at particular times and places. The timing is related to the cycles of agricultural crops as well as natural vegetation; the places are part of a wider range of meaningful sites in the landscape that together constitute ritual territories.

In this paper, I am primarily interested in the specific details of determining the appropriate time and place for annual bush fires in the Moose chiefdom of Maane. The annual bush fires must first be located within the ritual calendar, and in the wider set of “sacred” sites that

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1. The data presented are based on research within the Unité de Recherches, UR 026 *Patrimoines et territoires*. The research fits into the subgroup « Comparaison des pratiques rituelles et des représentations liées à la constitution des territoires ». The comparative research evolves around two axes : the notions of territory and ritual bush fires. In the societies involved – the Bassar, the Bwaba, the Bobo and the Moose – ritual bush fires are performed in the context of the ritual annual cycle.

together constitute the ritual territory for which an earthpriest (*teng-soba*) is responsible.

However, this discussion will not be confined to the domain of ritual. Features of ritual practices and territories are interconnected with what may be loosely called “the daily”. In Maane, daily activities and the economic usage of particular places are indistinguishable from ritual practices. As we will see, ritual work at “sacred” sites in the ritual territory aims to assure people of a proper livelihood in the locality in which they reside and work the land.

The topic of the proper time and place for annual bushfires leads to the question of how social groups in Maane appropriate space, space being seen as a multitude of occupied locations; sites for the performance of rituals, for the building of houses and cultivation of lands. In order to highlight the intricate connections between ritual and daily affairs, I will turn to a particular spatial setting and the groups of people that live and work there. My methodology in this regard has been to construct a map based on discussions of an aerial photograph with people familiar with the actual sites on the photograph. This allows us to determine the features of a social settlement that can be called a village (*tenga*). We can then elaborate on the different types of places that are constitutive of the territory of an earthpriest; “sacred” sites that come into play both in ritual contexts as well as the contexts of human settlement and agriculture.

In order to understand the interplay between ritual and daily activities, I am particularly interested in the dynamics of the annual bush fire. I have been able to witness this ritual in the years 1991, 1992 and again in 2001. The changes in discourse and practices that I observed over this period reflect the assessments people are continually making about their means of gaining a livelihood. Gaining a livelihood in Maane is far from being easy. Climatic and ecological circumstances are regarded as having become more and more haphazard. This raises questions as to the present efficacy of ritual practices and to the level of dependence of the majority of inhabitants on working the land to the exclusion of other economic activities. Consequently, people may choose to relocate their activities; places that were originally destined for annual bushfires may thenceforth be utilised for economic purposes. Moreover, their dependence on agriculture may be lessened as they take up animal husbandry.

Knowledge of the efficacy of ritual and the difficulties of the present inform this process of adapting concurrently ritual and daily practices. Attempts to combine economic exploitation of particular places in the present with the preservation of crucial features of ritual territories so as to safeguard future yields require juggling ritual and daily activities in intriguing ways. In portraying the dynamics of ritual and the arguments involved in its change, this paper shows how ritual territories in Maane are subject to concerns and strategies that can be considered “patrimonial”. In their adaptations of ritual and economic practices, people refer constantly to forms of knowledge about ritual territories that are transmitted from the past and that aim to obtain yields from the land in the present as well as in the future.

## I The “département” of Maane and “villages”

The chiefdom of Maane is one of more than twenty Moose chiefdoms in Burkina Faso. In colonial and postcolonial times these chiefdoms were utilised and bolstered for administrative purposes. At present, the chiefdom of Maane has the administrative status of *département*. The distinction between strangers and autochthones is central in the oral histories of the Moose chiefdoms. Immigrant Moose obtained political rule over autochthones of different ethnic origins, a process that started in the mid-15th century (Izard, 1970). The subjected autochthonous population came to identify themselves as Moose, yet within every Moose chiefdom the distinction between immigrant-rulers and autochthones has remained important. Even at present, only those who can claim to be patrilineally related to the immigrant-chiefs – so called *nakombse* – can obtain political titles, both at the highest levels of the chiefdoms as well as at village level. Hence, they obtained the label *gens du pouvoir* in the Francophone literature (Izard, 1985). Moreover, in these books, the *tengabiise*, literally “children of the earth”, are referred to as autochthones. The status of autochthones is also linked to patrilineal group membership, and is often associated with the ritual office of earthpriests.

In this paper I want to show how the distinction between political rulers (people of *naam*) and autochthonous earthpriests (people of *tenga*) is present at what may be called “village”-level. In all, Maane contains 33 ritual territories of earthpriests, and 44 village-units are distinguished by the national administration. The way in which specific earthpriests and village chiefs are connected in “village communities” is neither simple nor one-dimensional.

In anthropology, the term village has often been used without much scrutiny. It is one of those terms that have permitted researchers to dismiss the complex question of the relationship between space and social groupings. People inhabiting homesteads in each other’s proximity were supposed to belong together and to share aspects of their social life. Specific social institutions that create forms of collective doing and/or belonging, and cultural notions of locality have seldom been topics for explicit investigation (Saül, 1988; Bassett & Crummey, 1993). Recent critiques in anthropology have pointed to the political agendas served by these conventions (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997). The discipline of anthropology has primarily been defined by its core method; fieldwork. This method implied a typology of the societies an anthropologist is particularly interested in; a local society in which the central aspects of social life are constructed in face-to-face relationships. Terms like village, village life, and villagers have helped to create and sustain these implicit assumptions. At present, authors are pointing to the outdatedness of these assumptions, in particular in the light of present day forms of mobility.

These are important trends in anthropology, and they are certainly relevant for my current research. In Burkina, these lines of enquiry can build upon a long tradition of research. In a recent book, Danouta Liberski-Bagnoud (2002) correctly reminds us of the meticulous research practices of former administrators and anthropologists, such as Rattray and Fortes. Rattray, for instance, “avait déjà nettement souligné que la notion de *tenga* (“terre”), utilisée par les populations *mole-dagbane* pour parler d’une communauté localisée nous empêchait d’appréhender celle-ci- en terme de *town*.” (Liberski-Bagnoud, 2002: 140-141). One reason for this is that the notion *teng* or *tenga* inherently invokes religious practices. Cartry points out that in many Voltaic languages *ten*, or *teng*, can also have the meaning of: “celui de lieu ‘sacré’ déterminé du territoire villageois, celui d’une étendue de terre

conçue comme le domaine sur lequel s'étend la juridiction d'un seul 'maître de la Terre', celui, enfin de Terre dans son aspect de puissance mystique unique et universelle dont tous les hommes dépendent." (Cartry, 1996: 258)

For these reasons, Liberski-Bagnoud entitles her book *Les Dieux du Territoire*, and chooses to speak of *géographie religieuse*.

These remarks are highly relevant for investigating the concepts and features involved in constructing a "local community", or a "village", in Maane. The local word that is usually translated as village is *tenga*. The notion refers to the central social distinction localized Moose society depends upon; the distinction between immigrant-rulers and autochthonous earthpriests. Michel Izard specifies *tenga* as follows:

"Le terme *tenga* désigne entre autres l'espace villageois (la 'terre' du village) et le village comme communautaire humaine (les habitants du village), or à ces deux registres sémantiques du même terme correspondent deux personnages: le *tengsoba* ou 'maître de la terre' et le *teng naaba* ou 'chef du village'." (Izard, 1992: 123 )

In Moore, the notion *tenga* has a wide semantic field. Depending on the context, it can be translated as "village", "earth", "the ground", or "land". As a prefix, *ten(g)* appears in words such as, *tengkugri* and *tengana*; the first literally means "stone" (*kugri*) of the "earth" (*tenga*), and refers to earthshrines, the second is the plural of *tengaongo*, literally skin (*gaongo*) of the earth. This plural, "skins of the earth", is used for the annual ritual during which the earthpriests perform sacrifices to all the sacred places, namely the stones of the earth, in their ritual territory. Clearly, in Maane the notion of *tenga* refers both to a local community based on the distinction between immigrant-chiefs and autochthonous earthpriests, and to ritual practices related to spatial divisions in the local environment.

In order to observe how a multitude of homesteads constitutes a *tenga*, a local social community, and what places and distinctive features are constitutive of a ritual territory, I will turn to a concrete and visible example. I will do so with the aid of a map based on an aerial photograph. The photo includes the homesteads of Silmidoukou, the village where the palace of the chief of Maane is located. When I displayed this photo, it triggered many comments and narratives about specific places, their features, their agricultural potential, and the ritual relations engaged in with some of these sites. Even though the photo-



## The village of Silmidougou; houses and agricultural fields

The village of Silmidougou is made up of twenty-three residential units, one of which is the palace of the paramount chief (fig. 1). On the map, the palace can be found in the curb beneath the hill called *natanga*. This curb on the map is filled with circular and oval forms, indicating separate homesteads. The homesteads surrounding the palace are inhabited by people with status positions that are linked to the court organization. The vast majority of homesteads of Silmidougou are located near the hill *natanga*, around the hill called *tangsobdoogotanga*, and close to the hill *sulatanga*. The inhabitants of these homesteads recognize the paramount chief of Maane as their particular village chief. Upon arrival, they or their ancestors came to serve the chief, or asked his permission to settle there. Subsequently, every newcomer solicited an earthpriest to determine the site for building a house.

On the map, the various agricultural zones, such as *Bambare*, have been marked with the sign of an ear of corn. All these zones have names, often indicating a type of soil; *baongo* (*Nazumabaongo*) means clay ground, *bisegen* is used to refer to sandy soils. Together, the zones called *Nazumabaongo* and *Bambare* constitute the deep waterway into which branches flow from higher grounds, closer to the hills. *Nazumabaongo* consists of heavy clay soil, whereas *Bambare* contains clay as well as sandy soils. This zone is very suitable for agriculture, and the good fields here are mainly in the hands of families implicated in the system of the palace organization – one barely functioning today – who have obtained their fields from the chief.

Earthpriests are also major providers of agricultural fields. Six earthpriests have (part of) their ritual territory within the boundaries of the aerial photograph that served to make the map. The earthpriest of Silmidougou; the earthpriest of Koulgo; the earthpriest of Lengtenga; the earthpriest of Sula; the earthpriest of Bendgo and the earthpriest of Nungu. Only the earthpriest of Silmidougou belongs to the village of Silmidougou, since the paramount chief is his village chief. The others have the chief of Koulgo as their village chief (the earthpriests of Koulgo, Lengtenga and Sula), or the chief of Bendgo or Nungu. The homesteads of the last two lie beyond the area of the photograph.

All but two of the residential units of Silmidougou are situated on the ritual territory of the earthpriest of Silmidougou. Only one is located on the territory of the earthpriest of Koulgo and one on the territory of the earthpriest of Sula. The status of these two groups (one are blacksmiths, the others *bagrse*, slaves of Fulani origin), however, ties them to the chief of Silmidougou rather than to the village chief nearby, the chief of Koulgo. We may conclude that every residential unit is connected to a village chief and an earthpriest, however the two do not always correspond neatly. The situation becomes even more complex if we take into account the location of the agricultural lands.

Many homesteads are engaged in relationships with different earthpriests; one through the location of their house, and another or more through the placement of their agricultural fields. The earthpriest who has provided the site of the residential settlement is crucial; this is the earthpriest who has tasks in the funerals of members of the house, and on whose annual rituals the house depends.

For their daily economic life, homesteads have little reliance upon earthpriests or upon their village chief. The organization of agricultural activities is the internal affair of houses. The homesteads shown on the map are primarily inhabited by patrilineal kin and unmarried wives. Agricultural work and land entitlements are organized within such units, called *yiiri*, "house". In Maane, no wage labour is found in agricultural contexts, nor can lands be sold or rented. At times work parties with food and beer may be organized so that friends and affines will attend to complete a particular task in the field.

The main crops are red and white sorghum (*Sorghum vulgares*), millet (*Pennisetum spicatum*), maize (*Zea mays*) and peanuts (*Arachis hypogea*). The two types of sorghum are cultivated on clay soils. Millet does not need a lot of humidity and is mainly cultivated on the higher sandy grounds. Peanuts require much heavy labour and their cultivation is restricted to light sand grounds. Maize cultivation is demanding, and it can only be sown close to the house where additional manure in the form of domestic garbage can be added.

The year is divided into a dry season (*sipalgo*), and a wet season (*seongo*). The rainy season runs from May till the end of October. Sowing generally starts at the beginning of June, and harvesting may take place from mid October till mid November.

Fields are worked either collectively or individually. Everybody is obliged to work part of the day (approximately 8.00 till 15.00) on the collective field of a senior male of their house; the rest of the day can be spent on the individual plot. The collective fields yield the staple crop, which nourishes those who have worked the field as well as their children. Young men, girls and wives have individual fields on which peanuts (cash crop) and vegetables (for domestic use) will be grown. The harvest belongs to the owner of the plot.

Uncertainties in rainfall give rise to risk-spreading strategies. Members of a house prefer to cultivate different plots in the same year; some high sandy patches are worked along with a field in the clay zones. The first fields give a good yield in a year of abundant rainfall; the second may provide a harvest even when rainfall is poor. This strategy is called; “One leg is in the water, the other outside” (“*naore yembre be koom, ti naore yembre be yinga*”). This strategy requires that people obtain different fields. For instance, most of the wives of the chief have fields close to home (clay grounds of *Bambare*) as well as further away (sandy grounds of *Tuitui*). Others combine the clay grounds of *Bambare*, with sandy fields located at *Bagliu*. The agricultural zone of *Bambare* belongs to the earthpriest of Sula, *Tuitui* to the earthpriest of Silmidougou, *Bagliu* to the earthpriest of Nungu. This shows the distances people have to walk between their houses and the fields, as well as their dependence on different earthpriests for use of these.

## ■ The spatial divisions of the local environment of Silmidougou; the map’s ritual territories

The map shows different types of places; hills, small bushes, as well as agricultural zones. Many of these places have names, which refer to distinctive features attributed to them. The word for hill in Moore is *tanga*, so many of the names contain this referent (e.g. *Na-tanga*, *Tengsobdoogo-tanga*, *Sula-tanga*, *Salam-tanga*). Other hills bear individual names such as *Sisanga*, *Yingabora*. The word for small bush

is *kaongo*; a place that contains this term is *Kinkirs-kaongo*. Other small bushes are *Kiimdoogo*, *Toemiugu* and *Giefure*. On top of the hills are found plateaux; these are covered with grasses and as such are typical sites for the annual bushfires. The Moore word for these places is *rasmpioogo*. The map contains the following places of this type: *Na-tanga*, *rasmpioogo Alas*, *Guya rasmpioogo*, and *Nungu rasmpioogo*.

The names often refer to other than physical features. They may, for instance, give an indication of which earthpriest is responsible for it, e.g. *Sula-tanga*, *Tengsobdoogo-tanga*, and *Nungu-rasmpioogo*. It is also possible for the names to refer to the beings that are supposed to reside there. A good example is *Kinkirskaongo*. *Kinkirse* are one of two types of bushbeings; *kinkirse* and *ziindamba*. The *kinkirse* are considered to be important in the context of pregnancy. A pregnancy starts with a *kinkirga* settling in the womb of a woman. In Moose perception, children come from the bush and settle in the house. Places where *kinkirse* are supposed to reside may be solicited in ritual acts in order to increase the pregnancies in houses nearby (see e.g. Luning 1997, Bonnet 1988, and Izard 1992). The placename *Kiimdoogo* means 'house of the deceased'; *Yingabora*, 'friend at the outside'; *Na-tanga*, 'hill of the *naam*', that is of the chief.

Places implicated in the ritual practices of an earthpriest belong to one of two types of ritual sites; earthshrines and sites for annual bushfires. The name for earthshrine is, as we have seen, *tengkugri*, literally 'stone of the earth'. Ancestors of the present earthpriest are supposed to have made these 'shrines' by the act of placing/planting (*lugli*) something. Stones of the earth are always piles of stones, or claypots that have been placed (by ancestors) under a tree, in a cave, at the foot of a hill, in a dense bush, and/or near the bedding of a river, etc. Once planted, the shrine will be associated with a larger whole, a particular natural site such as a small bush, a hill, etc., each bearing an individual name. The territory of an earthpriest contains a multitude of these earthshrines. The earthpriest of the village of Silmidougou is engaged in annual sacrifices at the earthshrines called; *Saaben-tanga*, *Tengsobdoogo-tanga*, *Rimyanem*, *Tangongo*, and *Toemiugu*. The earthpriest of Sula sacrifices annually at *Sisanga*, *Yingabora*, *Sula-tanga*, and *Rawidenpanga*. The earthpriest of Koulgo sacrifices at *Kogmagdo* and *Garba-tanga*.

The annual sacrifices are called *tengana*. Every earthshrine has its individual preference for sacrificial food; the earthpriest exclaims “*Yingabora* take your red rooster; *Rimyanen*, here is your goat”, etc. Elsewhere I have dealt extensively with the *tengana* (Luning 1997). Here it is important to recall two goals of the *tengana*; firstly, the sacrifices provide the residents of the ritual territory with a safe place to settle. This is expressed in the phrase; “either you feed the earthshrines (by means of sacrifice), or they feed on you (humans)”. The expression indicates that the earth may swallow its inhabitants; the sacrifices of the earthpriest seek to prevent this. Secondly, the annual sacrifices of the earthpriest aim to unlock the earthshrines so as to make the souls of the millet available to the crops grown in the ritual territory.

The sites where the annual bushfires take place do not fall into the category of earthshrines. Significantly, the places are completely ‘natural’, in the sense that nothing is placed or fabricated so as to make it into a ritual site. And whereas an earthshrine may be linked to a variety of natural sites (hills, bushes, water beddings, trees etc), sites for annual bushfires are all identical in terms of their natural features.

The natural site featuring in the description of the annual bushfires below is *Na-tanga*, for which the earthpriest of Koulgo is responsible.

We have seen so far that many places on the map have individual names and belong to one of two categories; earthshrines and sites for annual bushfires. Basically, the ritual territory of an earthpriest can be seen as a grouping of such places. The particularities of these places are expressed in their name, their supposed inhabitants (*kinkirse*, *ziindamba*), ritual prescriptions, but also in specific narratives. I confine myself to one narrative related to sites for the annual bushfires, notably the *rasmpioogo Alas* (see map). Whereas earthshrines are often considered to be inhabited by bushbeings called *kinkirse*, the sites for annual bushfires are, more often than not, inhabited by *ziindamba*. The *Kinkirse* of earthshrines are associated with birth and settling in the house. The *ziindamba* (singular, *ziini*, the term is connected to the Arabic word for spirit/ghost, *Jinn*) residing at sites for bushfires are, on the other hand, best avoided. These *ziindamba* are explicitly qualified as anti-social. They are beings of the bush and they should not interfere with social life of humans. They are best left alone. *Kinkirse* may also reside on a *rasmpioogo*, but again those *kinkirse* are not suitable for settling in the house as human beings, and should there-

fore also be avoided. An admonition about the notorious *ziindamba* and *kinkirse* residing at *rasmpioogo Alas* explains why passing this plateau is risky, particularly on Fridays. A woman in Sula told me:

“If, on a Friday night, a person does walk on the top of the hill, *rasmpioogo Alas*, he will hear his name being called out time and again. But when the person looks in the direction of the sound, nothing can be seen. The calling comes from the *ziindamba* and *kinkirse* of this place. They can grab you and force you to stay the night. They offer food. If you want to prolong your life, you better refuse it. Acceptance would mean that you are one of them; you are a *weogokinkirga*, a *kinkirga* of the bush. You will soon return to them, that is to say you will die. Not all *kinkirse* are made to reside in houses of people, sometimes a *kinkirga* belonging to the bush settles in the house accidentally. These will return when they get in contact with their fellow bushbeings at *rasmpioogo Alas*.”

## ■ The distinctive features of ritual territories : the contrast between home and the bush

After this description of specific places and their features as they are represented on the map, let me address a more general question: What is a territory of an earthpriest? How is it delimited, and what does it contain?

First, there is the question of borders. If an earthpriest is invited to talk about the limits of his territory, he will first of all list the names of the places that constitute his territory. These watercourses, hills, bushes, and plateaux – some of them cultivated lands, others earthshrines or sites for annual bushfires – do not necessarily belong to one earthpriest alone. Often natural features of the landscape may serve to mark the border with a neighbouring earthpriest; a group of trees in the middle of a watercourse, a big stone on the plateau of the hill, or the start of a downhill slope may be one of many physical traits used to indicate the start of a neighbouring ritual territory.

An issue then arises as to the correct terminology for this ritual unit. The term used to indicate a ritual territory of an earthpriest is *weogo*, often translated as bush, *brousse*. The word *weogo* can be employed in different ways with various meanings:

- If someone lives and works in Ivory Coast, people say, “*a be weogo*”, “he is in the bush”, he is elsewhere, far away from home;
- If someone is at work on the fields, people say, “*a be weogo*”, “he is in the bush”.

It seems that the concept of earthpriest territories implicitly refers to that which is outside the social habitat, to a space where one is not “at home”. Moreover, in the constitutive contrasts of places that make up a territory, the interplay between residential locations and places that lack a social presence is important. This is clearly expressed in the distinction between *weogo*, and *tempeelem*, literally “bush” and “white earth”. The notion “white earth” has two meanings. In the first, “white earth” is a place characterized by the presence of houses. As such it contrasts with the bush as a place where people do not reside. Hence, building new houses in a zone not yet inhabited by people requires the intervention of an earthpriest. A major reason for this is that places where people are absent may be residential sites for *kinkirse* and *ziindamba*. In a sacrifice, the earthpriest talks to the place (*ziiga*) and a request is formulated to the beings of the place (*ziindamba* and *kinkirse*). The bushbeings are asked to grant the newcomers permission to settle and to agree to become their hosts (*gaangsoba*). Subsequent building of houses turns the place into “white earth”, *tempeelem*.

Secondly, the *tempeelem* is also a type of earthshrine; an earthpriest will sacrifice in the proximity of his own house to his earthshrine called the *tempeelem*. Only after this has been done can he perform sacrifices to his earthshrines in the bush, *weogotengkuga*. The earthshrines in the bush are the places we have been able to discuss on the basis of the map.

Two aspects of the distinctive features of ritual territories we have mapped out so far need to be underscored. First of all, the contrast between *tempeelem* and *weogo* shows that spatial distinctions go beyond the tangibility of “real” places. The contrast is not to be identified with geographical space; types of spaces can be converted into one or the other, and what is considered bush in one context may be

home territory in another. The notion of bush is a projected space in the sense that it constitutes the place that is not home (Malamoud, 1976; Cartry, 1979). Secondly, the distinctive features refer to beings and aspects that cannot always be seen. For instance, the story of the *ziindamba* at *rasmpioogo Alas*; the fact that they are anti-social is signified by their invisibility; one can hear, but not see them. The intangibility and invisibility of the spatial features may be crucial attributes of the contrasts that are played upon. This confirms Liberski's statement that these spatial distinctions are best studied by detour, in particular through the study of ritual practices.

Importantly, the distinction between earthshrines and sites for the annual bushfires can be grasped only by referring to the zones that are marked by social presence; the house and the "white earth". The contrasts between these two categories of ritual places in the bush (*weogo*, a ritual territory) are shaped in their different relations to the residential zones. On the basis of what has been presented so far, we can describe the contrast as follows.

The relationship between the earthshrines in the bush and the house are clearly articulated in several ways:

- A major earthshrine of the earthpriest is associated with the location of residential sites, the so-called *tempeelem*;
- Earthshrines are populated by bushbeings, *kinkirse*, who are considered to be important in the context of pregnancy. Pregnancies imply the movement of bushbeings from these places in the bush into the house. Earthshrines also contain the souls of the millet that have to be brought to the fields. Characteristically, an earthshrine is a locus for life resources of people as well as crops. These resources – *kinkirse* of people, souls of the sorghum – have to be moved from these places in the bush to places marked by social presence; houses and agricultural fields;
- Earthshrines are always man-made in some way. They require a social act of fabrication; by the planting of an object they become a place of sacrifice.

Sites for the annual bushfire, on the other hand, are kept strictly apart from places of social presence:

- Within the residential area, no equivalent is to be found for annual bushfire sites, the *rasempioogo*;

- The places for annual bushfires are not associated with movements of bringing life into the zones of social presence; on the contrary they are sites to be avoided, and contact with the beings residing there may lead to wrong births in the houses;
- These sites are natural, in the sense that they are not fashioned by social acts. They lack the shrine element of social fabrication.

Now that the sites for the annual bushfires have been situated in their spatial setting, I will place the annual bushfires in the time frame of the ritual calendar. Then the contrasts between earthshrines and sites for annual bushfires become even more pronounced.

## ■ The annual ritual cycle; the place and time of the annual bushfires in the early nineties

The sacrifices to the earthshrines during the *tengana* clearly contrast with the rituals that I will for convenience call the “first fruit” ceremonies. The *tengana* provides the crops with souls; the rituals enacted in the period of ripening and harvest aim to aid the sorghum in the fields in the latter stages of growth and to subsequently make the new crops available to the members of the houses. At the centre of the ‘first fruit’ ceremonies are the chief of Maane, his predecessors and his palace. The annual rituals of the chief coincide with specific stages in the growth of sorghum. Starting in September, when the sorghum “becomes pregnant”, the chief performs the first of three rituals, scheduled for three consecutive appearances of the new moon. These rituals are considered to help the sorghum in its “birth”. Over various moon appearances, the wives of the chief in the palace, but also women in ordinary houses have to prepare and make libations of substances such as millet flower water, various meals such as sorghum porridge, beans, and last but not least beer. Only after new-harvest beer has finally been brewed and libated can the new crops be sold at the market and used for funerary rituals. These libations are made for the ancestors, since these are considered to be the owners of the crops.

The name for the annual bushfire is *rasmpeyoogre*, literally the “burning of the *rasmpioogo*”. Every earthpriest has a particular site for this event; a plateau on top of a hill, by definition located well beyond the zone of possible cultivation. How do the annual bush fires fit within the ritual cycle? The annual bushfires are clearly intertwined with the “first fruit” ceremonies. Not all 33 earthpriests perform the annual bushfires at the same time. In particular, major earthpriests link their annual bushfire to the second of the three ripening/harvest rituals of the chief of Maane, his so-called *bararengnoogo*. Other earthpriests perform the annual bushfire one month later, coinciding with the new harvest beer brewing. For all earthpriests, the annual bushfire is, in one way or another, connected to the first fruit libations they perform in the house. I will give the example of the house of the earthpriest of Sondo (not included in the area covered by the map). Their annual bushfire is fitted into the sequence of libations spread out over three months (moon appearances) in the following manner. In September they begin with the so-called *karaagbasga*; the libations (*basga*) using flower water made from red sorghum (*zoomkoom*). A month later, the annual bushfire takes place together with libations; the senior wife of the earthpriest cooks beans, prepares karite oil, and prepares flower water from millet. A month later, new harvest beer will again be brewed. All libations take place in the hut in which is located the senior ancestor shrine of the house, the *kiimsroogo*.

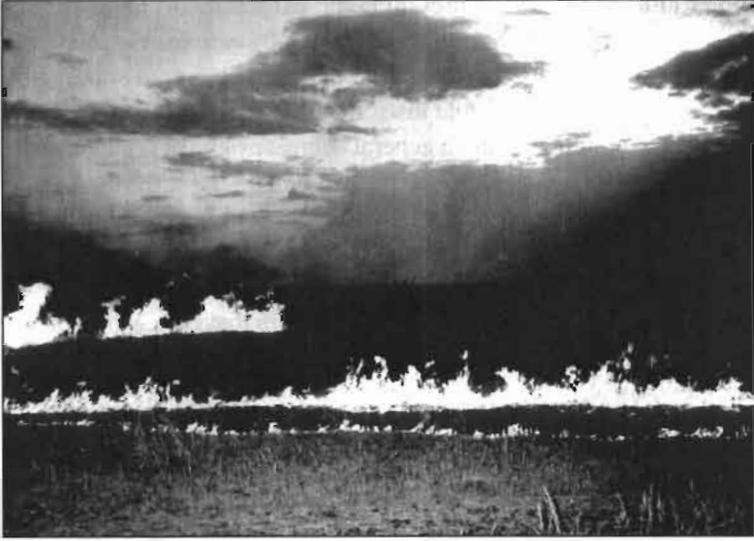
Significantly, the annual bushfire in Sondo is associated with a first fruit libation of a non-cultivated bush product, karité. This linkage to products that are gathered in the bush is even stronger when people talk about past performances of annual bushfires. All informants refer to a past in which the annual bushfires comprised more extensive acts than the present versions. The discourse on the past stresses, in particular, what used to happen in the bush near and on the site that was the object of burning. A typical representation of past performances may run something like this:

The site for the annual burning is always situated in the bush, beyond places of residence and cultivation. All the high, dry grasses on the plateau used to be burned. The next day people would come back to the place to “harvest” animals, such as rabbits and grasshoppers that had been killed by the fire. The dead animals would be grilled once more, part of the animal would be dropped on the ground – as a liba-

tion to the earth – those present could eat the rest. This sacrificial event would mark the beginning of the hunting season. I was told that some earthpriests still perform these acts, but I have never been able to witness this. Most people insist that this practice is a thing of the past. Lack of animals, and a general decrease of bush products, have caused the annual bushfire to be stripped of its “first bush fruit” elements. The only remaining “bush fruit” element is oil of karité. However, karité-oil, flavouring a meal of beans, is part of the libations to the ancestors in the space of the house. Moreover, at present the karité found in the bush is insufficient. In that case, karité oil has to be bought at the market, since libations of beans without karité oil are impossible.

Which features of the annual bushfires have I been able to personally attend? In the early nineties the actual practice of burning an entire *rasmpioogo* had been under pressure for some time. Due to ecological changes, the government choose to intervene in these practices. If not forbidden entirely, the government advised performers to restrict the bushfire to a symbolic scale, preferably not extending more than 100 square meters (10 by 10). The state has applied various strategies ranging from coercion to the more persuasive line of “*sensibilisation*”. The Sankara period of the late eighties was characterized by stiff law enforcements by foresters. After Compaore came to power, policies have relaxed, as we will see. In terms of scale, only a few earthpriests in Maane were still holding a fully-fledged annual bushfire in the early nineties. Among these was the earthpriest of Koulgo, who burns the *rasmpioogo* called *Na-tanga* (fig. 1).

In the early nineties, the annual bushfire at the *Na-tanga* was still a public event, attracting over 50 people, particularly women and children (photo 1). In Koulgo, the event is linked to the “first fruit” ceremony of the chief normally taking place in October, the so-called *bararengnoogo*. A meeting in the palace during which the chief requests the invited ritual officiants to set a date for the annual bushfire marks the end of his *bararengnoogo*. The following Saturday is chosen. On the two occasions I attended this event I overheard a similar conversation. The chief or one of the palace officials would jokingly warn the earthpriest and his relatives to be careful with the fire. They were urged to make sure that houses in the proximity would not catch fire. Indeed, to that effect young male relatives of the earthpriest cut



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■ Photo 1  
Annual bushfire on the hill natanga;  
full fledged performance in 1991.

a corridor all around the *rasmpioogo*. The grass was cut away in a circular form so as to insure that the fire would stop once it arrived at the edges of the grass. On the Saturday, just before sunset the earthpriest and the village chief of Koulgo were both present at the site. Women and children had gathered as well, most of them with a bucket of water. The village chief authorised the earthpriest to light the fire (with flints, not matches). While the fire spread over the *rasmpioogo*, the women started washing their children with the water. They cried out, “may the fire take illnesses in its wake”. They threw the used washing water in the same direction as the way taken by the fire. The ritual is supposed to rid the earth as well as the villagers of polluting elements. The larger the fire, the better the effect. So, people would also shout at the fire, “*wo, wo, bugemyande*”. The cry “*wo, wo*” is used to stimulate others to do their very best. *Yande* means “shame”. People explained that failing to perform at the top of one’s ability causes shame. The sentence is employed to force the fire to burn at its maximum capacity. The event clearly had a festive element.



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Photo 2  
Annual bushfire  
on the fringe  
of the hill natanga:  
small scale  
performance  
in 2001.

In my research during the early nineties, the focus was on rituals directly related to agricultural practices. Since the annual bushfire took place beyond the agricultural zones, and its goals seemed only marginally related to obtaining a proper harvest, I did not give it the attention it might have deserved. Later I realised that the *rasmpy-oogre* merited more profound research. First of all, the sites for the annual bushfires do have an interesting position within the larger whole of constitutive sites making up the territory of an earthpriest. Secondly, the “first bush fruit” elements did contrast in an interesting way with other “first fruit” libations connected to the house and the ancestors. Thirdly, the expulsion of polluted elements described above made a significant contrast to the bringing of souls and *kinkirse* into the zones of social presence achieved by the *tengana* and the earthshrines. Consequently, in 2001 I did fieldwork in Maane again. This time the annual bushfires were at the heart of my research activities (photo 2).

## Maane revisited: Dynamics in the practice of annual bushfires

The annual bushfires in the region of Maane have been implicated in a long process of change. Many old people do not remember the ritual acts by which this ritual is associated with the start of the hunting season, the “first bush fruit” elements. Furthermore, since the mid-eighties, the annual bushfires have been reduced to a symbolic scale. A question I addressed in my research in the early nineties was whether people were happy to accept this redefinition of bushfires. At that time, the smaller scale adopted under pressure was contested by a large majority of informants. In the past, the high, dry grasses were burned with the specific aim of cleaning the entire earth. People explain this idea with verbal image: one has to remove the old clothes of the earth in order to force it to renew its cover. For many people, the symbolic burning of small patches of *rasmpioogo* is not sufficient to achieve this end. It would make the earth lazy; when the earth is allowed to keep its rags on, it is not forced to work for the growth of a new cover.

In the 2001 fieldwork it was very clear that, in this respect, public opinion had changed. I encountered hardly anyone who insisted that fully-fledged annual bushfires were an imperative. On the contrary, informants agreed that it sufficed to perform a symbolic performance within their own ritual territory. What had changed? For one, there was no more pressure from law enforcers. In contrast with the Sankara period, the current foresters and administrative officials have little interest in the issue, as we will see. Presently, people voluntarily refrain from extensive burning. The reason became clear when I attended the annual bushfire of the earthpriest of Koulgo. Again, the annual bushfire followed immediately after the *bararengnoogo* of the chief. On Tuesday November 21, a delegation of the earthpriest of Koulgo came to the palace to set the date for the annual bushfire on the *Na-tanga* for the following Saturday, November 24. The chief asked the family members of the earthpriest to be very careful not to burn the whole *Na-tanga* plateau, since he had a substantial amount of cattle that needed to be fed. It would be very nice if the grass on the plateau could be saved for that purpose. The visitors assured the

chief that they knew how to do their job; they would only burn a small patch of the plateau.

The next Saturday, at about 17.00 pm the earthpriest waited impatiently at the *rasmpioogo Na-tanga* for the arrival of the village chief of Koulgo. He wanted to have the whole burning business behind him as soon as possible; he was old and wanted to go home. Indeed, the village chief joined him soon enough. Even though I knew that the scale of the annual bushfire would be reduced in comparison to previous performances I had attended, I was still shocked when I discovered the drastic reduction in scale. The night before I had asked the village chief of Koulgo if a corridor around the site on the plateau had been cut. I was informed that this had not been necessary, since the fire would be limited to a small patch, disconnected from the larger grass field on the plateau. I witnessed that the fire was set on this little patch with matches by the earthpriest. In addition to the ritual officiants, an odd twenty young boys were present; there were no adult males, and no women with their young children. About ten young boys had come with buckets and washed themselves. The village chief of Koulgo did his best to give the event some *grandeur*; on his own he cried, “*wo wo bugem yande*” and he overacted when wishing the earthpriest happy new year (a wish expressed at every annual ritual).

It turned out that this was the third time that the chief had opted for a reduced performance of the annual bushfire. During the first years after his nomination in 1995 the new chief had kept to a fully-fledged annual bush burning. The growth of his cattle herd at the palace had been a major factor in changes to the annual bushfire at the *Na-tanga*. As a cattle-keeper, the present chief of Maane is not unique. Since the mid-nineties, many Moose keep cattle near their compounds. Previously Moose would ask Peul to keep their cattle for them. Distrust of the Peul and, more importantly, recent setbacks in agricultural yields, are forcing Moose to reorganise their livelihood strategies. For a number of years the Moose cattle keepers have actively sought to nourish their animals in their residential area. As a consequence, harvest practices have changed. In the past, when sorghum ears were cut, the plants were left on the field as fertilizer (if they were not eaten by the cattle herded by trespassing Peul). Today these cut plants are taken to the house, where they are stored on top of hangars. The

grasses on the sites for annual bushfires also have nutritional value for cattle. Hence, the shared opinion at present is that symbolic, small-scale annual bushfires do suffice. This does not diminish the effects the annual bush burnings aim for, so it is argued.

Interestingly, there was a further dimension to this opinion. The symbolic annual bushfire is considered to suffice for one's own ritual territory on condition that one particular earthpriest in the chiefdom of Maane does not reduce his annual bushfire; the earthpriest of Tanlalle. His annual bushfire is called *Soamba*, literally this means "rabbits", the name of the *rasmpioogo* on which the annual bushfire is performed. People insisted that a reduction of this particular annual bushfire would have disastrous effects for the overall success of future rainy seasons and harvest yields in Maane.

The central position of this earthpriest in the context of the annual bushfires in Maane had already been apparent in my previous research. This particular earthpriest is the first to perform the annual bushfire in the whole of Maane. Several specific features of his annual bushfire had been evoked to stress the unique position of this ritual officiant. I was told that for this earthpriest the burden of the annual bushfire is heavier than for any other. At the occasion of the annual bushfire the body of the earthpriest is washed and his hair shaved. From then on, he is not allowed to wash himself again until the start of the next rainy season. Nor can he shave his head until next year's annual bushfire. His body is clearly associated with the earth as a whole; the growth of his hair is equated with the growth of grass on sites for annual bushfires, the water used to wash his body is associated with the rainwater that falls on the earth.

Moreover, the *Soamba*, the annual bushfire of the earthpriest of Tanlalle, is highly valued for it is considered to trigger the start of the next rainy season. Time and again, people explained that exactly seven moons after the performance of the *Soamba*, the first new rains would inevitably fall. Clearly, this annual bushfire is not only effective in closing the rainy season, with the accompanying first fruits element and the expulsion of pollution. It also facilitates the coming of the next season. Actually, some people insist that the *Soamba* of the earthpriest of Tanlalle marks the opening of the new season to come more than the closure of the current season. This ritual, in which burning is central, is supposed to trigger water.

Clearly, in the fieldwork of 2001 I had to pursue enquiries into the special position of the earthpriest of Tanlalle. I had to create working relations with this particular family of autochthones, since I had never visited them before. Attempts to obtain information from this family failed dramatically. The earthpriest had died a few months earlier, and his relatives were preparing his mortuary rituals. In this intermediate period, the special qualities of this earthpriest were clearly marked. Normally, the sacrificial tasks of a deceased earthpriest are taken over by a sister's son. To that effect, some sacrificial objects are moved to the latter's house. In Tanlalle, however, his eldest daughter impersonated the earthpriest. She resided in the house of her deceased father and took to carrying his ritual objects while wearing men's clothing. When I visited her, she was friendly but shy, and I was kindly requested to come back some other day. In the meantime my request for interviews would be discussed among the relatives. I could have anticipated what happened at my second visit. Politely, I was given to understand that until a new earthpriest had been nominated, I could not be given any information. Everyone in the house was too 'small' (too inexperienced) to be able to speak "big" words about the tradition. During the visits I could not help noticing the special location of the large beer brewing jars. Never before had I seen a beer-brewing site similar to the one in Tanlalle; the beer-brewing site was explicitly situated outside the courtyard, outside the domain of the compound. There were no beer brewing places in the inner courtyards.

Despite this failed attempt at gaining the acquaintance of the family of the earthpriest of Tanlalle, I was provided with interesting information. A kinsman of the chief of the village of Tanlalle turned out to be particularly helpful. The family of the village chief of Tanlalle had mediated in my attempts to get into contact with the family of the earthpriest. The man who had taken up this task first of all asked me to understand the reluctance of the family of the earthpriest to talk to me. A family with such difficult ritual work runs great risks. If one of the young relatives were to inform me wrongly, the ancestors might kill that person. The ritual tasks of this family have proven to be a risky burden. These days the earthpriests in this family die rapidly, so he informed me, and this was connected to their heavy burden. They have to respect, for instance, the rule of not washing and shaving the head during a large part of the year. At present, an

earthpriest does not want to refrain from cleaning himself, but if he ignores the rules he may die. This special earthpriest is not to be envied. Nor are his family members, so the informant continued. Take for instance the rules surrounding beer brewing. This family is only allowed one beer-brewing place outside the courtyard. Only the wife of the earthpriest brews at this brewing place for ritual purposes, such as the new harvest beer. Consequently, the rest of the family cannot brew the “happy new year” beer, nor can the wives brew beer for the market. Some time ago, a family member transgressed this rule, and ordered his wife to brew for the New Year. He died shortly after. The stronger a ritual officiant, the more difficult it is to live up to the task at hand. No wonder, so the informant exclaimed, that people are not happy to carry these burdens of tradition on their shoulders.

The man also told an interesting story about the past. In the time of Sankara, the end of the eighties, the informant had been a member of the *Comité de Défense de la Révolution* (CDR) of this village. CDR’s were committees established by Sankara’s administration in order to bypass the traditional political powerholders. As is to be expected, however, in Tanlalle, as elsewhere, traditional village chiefs almost always obtained these positions.

At the time, so I was told, neighbouring Peul paid a visit to the earthpriest of Tanlalle, threatening to inform on him if he performed his annual bushfire, the *Soamba*. They clearly wanted to have the grass of this ritual site for their cattle. The earthpriest was afraid and, despite warnings of relatives, he decided to skip his annual bushfire. Consequently, many people died in his house and the next harvest failed. Some major earthpriests discussed the issue together and decided that the annual bushfire at the *Soamba* had to be continued at any cost. The earthpriest of Tanlalle, together with the member of the CDR, went to see the prefect and explained what had happened. The prefect understood the situation and gave permission to continue to perform the annual bushfire. He asked them to do this as moderately as possible. He would calm down the aggressive Peul. Everyone realized that the annual bushfire of the earthpriest of Tanlalle could not be dropped. In the past a very precise calculation would be made; exactly seven months after the annual bushfire sufficient rains would fall to allow sowing. If these rains were delayed only a bit, everybody knew straight away that the entire season would be bad, and that the harvest would fail. In fact, since the intervention of the prefect,

the performance of the annual bushfire of the earthpriest of Tanlalle has been reduced, not so much in the size of the surface to be burned, but as a social event. It used to be a big feast; large groups of men and women would attend and dance all night at the *Soamba* site itself. That does not happen anymore, but the bushfire continues.

In order to obtain the present official policy, I visited the current prefect in Maane. Clearly, the old tough line with farmers of the Sankara period had been abandoned. Sankara's successor, President Compaore, has explicitly sought to disassociate himself from certain political choices of the Sankara period. Particularly since elections became important in the early nineties, Compaore has styled himself as a modern man, yet one with great respect for tradition. In fact, as the prefect insisted, administrators are well aware that traditions and customs constitute a source of cultural wealth. Tradition should be respected, hence the choice to convince people by reason rather than force them with coercion.

To that effect, social scientists had been invited to advise on the matter. In 1993 a conference was organized in Ouagadougou. The conference document indicates the different forms of *feu de brousse* in Burkina Faso. The authors insist on a pertinent difference between what they call early and late annual bushfires. Early bushfires, such as the ones performed in Maane, are less destructive. The grasses are not as yet completely dry, and they cannot as yet act as a trigger for the extensive fires late bush fires may cause. The report concludes that in Sanmatenga (the Province in which Maane is located), the population is clearly aware of the dangers of bush fires, and in some villages protective measures have already been taken. The overall advice of social scientists is to refrain from force (see the conference document: *Pour une nouvelle approche des feux au Burkina Faso, décembre 1993*).

In Maane, indeed, I think that the outright prohibition of bush fires may have actually backfired. Forbidding customary practices tends to make people feel they have just cause to be recalcitrant. At present, we observe that the lack of coercion occurs simultaneously with a clear shift evident in both the practices and assessments of these changes. For economic reasons, large groups of people in Maane nowadays opt for symbolic annual bushfires. In my conclusion, I want to understand these developments by asking how the daily and the ritual domains of social life are intertwined in Maane.

## Conclusion

This paper started with the distinctions evident in the formation of village communities and ritual territories of earthpriests. The map helped to distinguish different types and categories of “sacred” sites and to describe the areas suitable for cultivation and daily life at the house. Daily and ritual activities are clearly intertwined and even causally connected. We have seen that “sacred” sites are the subjects of ritual work that aims to make the locality suitable for a prosperous life; the house will be filled with children, the fields with an abundant harvest.

The causal connection between ritual and daily affairs comes to the fore in the distinction between bush and home, a distinction that depends upon a structure of places that are acted upon in ritual and in daily life. This structure features in all the ritual territories of earthpriests. On the one hand we find places characterized by social presence, on the other we identified types of sacred places in the bush; the first are residential sites and agricultural fields, the latter are earthshrines and places for annual bush fires.

The places of daily social presence are dependent on the sacred places in the bush for obtaining harvests and children, as well as for expulsion of illnesses and for people to be able to move into the bush in order to obtain bush fruits. The process of bringing in is associated with earthshrines; the process of moving out with the sites of annual bush fires. Moreover, the first is associated with domesticated crops, the second with natural products to be hunted and gathered.

In this respect the details of the beer brewing in the house of the earthpriest of Tanlalle are significant. This earthpriest is at the centre of the outward-directed annual bushfires. Beer brewing is a most significant act in its counterpart, the process of bringing the harvest in (Luning, 1997). This family, however, has to brew beer outside of its usual place, the house. Even in their ritual processes of bringing the harvest into the house, they have to insert a configuration of an outside. This way of marking the special position of this earthpriest underscores the interplay of the various processes that articulate the ritual and the daily.

However, this articulation of the daily and the ritual is critically engaged with processes of change in two forms. Firstly, there are shifts in usages of different places. For instance, we have seen a competition over the grasses on the plateau; are they burned for ritual purposes or are they used to feed cattle? Secondly, and this is connected to the first, we observed shifts in activities; some ritual activities are diminished, whereas economic activities such as cattle raising continue to become more prominent. These shifts are connected to people's assessment of the efficacy of the ritual and economic activities they engage in.

In order to appreciate these assessments, it is important to acknowledge that in Maane, ritual practices are just as goal oriented as daily activities. People perform rituals with the clear aim of achieving a result in the future. Therefore, students of ritual should not approach them as forms of tradition in the sense of conservative practices that have been inherited from the past and are simply repeated in an identical manner.

On the contrary, and despite the reality that knowledge about rituals is transmitted over time, for people in Maane rituals are not “copy-cat” practices. Far from it, changes as such are not devalued. As long as people are convinced or can manage to convince themselves and others that the efficacy of the ritual is not at risk, many changes can be accommodated or accepted. Rituals are first of all valued for their effects in the future, not for their identical transmission of something from the past (Luning, in press a).

Elsewhere I have dealt with the discourse on rituals of earthpriests (Luning, in press b). People in Maane explicitly express a sense of loss of control in securing their livelihood. The loss of efficacy of ritual practices plays a major part in the explanations given for the present situation. Two factors are at work. Firstly, the duties of earthpriests are inherently difficult to fulfil. Ritual officiants are less knowledgeable than their predecessors in the past, and they carry a burden that is intrinsically too heavy. They can barely live up to their tasks, and as a consequence, rituals are said to become less effective and calamities may occur. The information on the situation of the family of the earthpriest of Tanlalle is emblematic for this discourse. Their special position requires restrictions that are presently too difficult to meet. Prohibitions on shaving and washing, prohibitions on the joyous

activity of brewing beer, mistakes that may be punished heavily by the ancestors, are all considered to put those concerned in an awkward situation. The more important a ritual officiant, including the chief of Maane himself, the more reason to feel sorry for his predicament. Only “ordinary” people are considered to be free of such concerns. This discourse justifies attempts to get rid of ritual obligations that are too much of a burden. Converting to Islam or fleeing the region altogether are recurring reactions of people facing the possibility of having to accept ritual office. All this, so the general opinion runs, weakens the quality of ritual knowledge and hence the efficacy of ritual practices.

Secondly, rituals are considered to be less effective due to bad social behaviour. At present transgression of rules is more prominent than in the past. The difficult times contribute even more. In particular, rules that stipulate behaviour towards the surrounding bush are disrespected. People cut sacred bushes to obtain firewood, they destroy earthshrines to cultivate, and their cattle are left astray. In the past, these transgressions were not necessary, but when they occurred they were heavily sanctioned. Transgression was punished by the bush and the beings residing there; *kinkirse*, *ziindamba*, but also lions and serpents. These days, however, the bush and its residents lack the strength – the wild animals have disappeared altogether – to force people to respect the rules.

To sum up, both the ritual officiants and the earth itself seem to have lost the necessary capacities and qualities to maintain the bush as a resource that can be regenerated over time. The disappearance of the bush is the cause as well as the effect of changes in ritual knowledge and practices. The logic shows a form of circular reasoning; the bush disappears due to weakening of the enforcement of ritual and religious rules. On the other hand, rituals change due to changes in the landscape of the bush. The disappearance of first bush fruit elements in the annual bush fire is a case in point. These acts aim to help the bush to regenerate, but lack of game makes them redundant.

People indicate that no one can stop or master this process; even earth-priests are incapable of helping the bush recover. In their limited options, people do try to assure a balance in the economic exploitation and ritual safeguarding of the bush. Hence the complex juggling of different types of uses, and of judgements of new types of behaviour

of others as well as of oneself. It is intriguing to see that in a period of only ten years, the negative judgement of symbolic annual bushfires has transformed into a positive one. Ten years ago, the negative judgement always implied an accusation directed at others. People who were still involved in fully-fledged annual bushfires reproached others for abandoning it, and those who performed it in a symbolic manner insisted that they had been forced to change by others, namely foresters. At present, everyone has voluntarily made the choice to change this ritual practice. Of course, we might say that they have given in to the pressing needs of daily subsistence. They can legitimate this shift, however, on condition that they can point to others once more; the earthpriest of Tanlalle must not abandon full-fledged annual bushfires.

This shift testifies to a healthy sense of opportunism, but more importantly, I think, the argument shows a specific feature of the reasoning on efficacy of annual bushfires in Maane. We have seen that the annual bushfires occur at particular sites within the ritual territory of an earthpriest. However, the effects implicate the territory and its residents as a whole. The ideas on efficacy of the ritual are based on a part-whole logic. This form of reasoning recurs in justifying the shift to a general practice of symbolic annual bush fires, with one exception. Apparently, the fully-fledged annual bushfire of the earthpriest of Tanlalle can produce efficacy for the whole of the ritual territories in Maane.

The study of the dynamics and the logics of ritual practices are closely connected. Discourses on admissible changes show the interplay between the daily and the ritual. At present, assuring a livelihood at particular localities in Maane is far from easy. Social and ecological circumstances require innovative strategies, both in the field of economic and ritual activities. Both types of activities aim to contribute to a prosperous local life. Hence, in their solutions to problems and their grasping of opportunities, people in Maane take into consideration the different goals at stake. Making the best choices for sustaining a livelihood depends on a proper juggling of daily and ritual practices, both on the level of their predicaments as well as on the level of their intended effects.

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