

Article

Setting up the first components of the person and its anchoring to the territory among the Seme of Burkina Faso: “services rendered by ecosystems”?

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Abstract

This article illustrates the need for studies on “cultural ecosystem services” to be based on ethnographic studies. It presents research conducted among a small, little-known population of savannah farmers, the Seme people of Burkina Faso (in West Africa). According to their concepts, sacred sites of hills and water bodies harbour genies. These genies play a major role in setting in place the essential components of the person during conception and birth and then they watch over the new human being until death. In addition, a flexible form of territorial and social anchoring of individuals and groups as well as the integration of outsiders, are achieved through this category of sites. These sites are related to two other broad categories of sacred sites which together make up a system, the first dedicated to male initiation and the others to agricultural activities. This relationship between Water Bodies and Hills and these other sites appears during a great collective ritual which is held every 40 years or so and which results in a major renewal of society. This is the last stage of male initiation during which the genies, who are initiated with the humans, shift to other categories of sites. These genies, which act as a sort of double, as guardians and censors of humans, thus they accompany or control biological and social reproduction and agricultural production activities.

Ad hoc conservation measures of sites located among the Seme which overlook the existence of this relationship among categories of sites are inadequate. They could be useless, or worse, could serve to endorse the destruction of other sites and thus of the entire system. As analogous concepts are found widely throughout West Africa, the lessons learned from these case studies have more than local value.

Keywords cultural ecosystem services; natural sacred sites; birth; genies; components of the person; societies of the savannah.

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1 Introduction on Cultural Ecosystem Services

What use are ecosystems to humans? It is in asking this question that certain biologists have attempted for several decades to draw attention to the importance of the natural environment and to devise negotiation tools to protect it (Holdren and Ehrlich, 1974; Westman, 1977; Randall, 1988; Pearce et Moran, 1994, etc.). The idea of “ecosystem services” that appeared in this context was only a metaphor at the time, but it was later provided with an economic and even a monetary meaning (Bingham et al, 1995; Perrings, 1995). Although it was heavily criticised (for example, Sullivan 2009, 2014; Maris, 2014), it became so popular that today it is virtually part of the tool box of any development or conservation project, particularly in Africa. Ecosystem services, defined as all the advantages drawn from biological processes by humans, are broken down into four major categories that are assumed to be universal: services for provisioning, regulating, supporting and cultural services (MEA, 2005). This last includes “non-material benefits people obtain from ecosystems through spiritual enrichment, cognitive development, reflection, recreation and differentiating cultural services which are related to spiritual values, cultural identity, social cohesion and transmission” (Chan et al., 2012a). The field of research on cultural services is recent and the Social Sciences have not dedicated much effort to them (see a brief history of the idea in Chan et al. 2015) such that the category of cultural services remains the least well documented and the most sensitive to deal with (Barnaud and Antona, 2014; Oseï Tutu et al, 2014; Hicks et al 2015). The discussion on the general theoretical and practical difficulties presented by cultural services has been engaged (notably Wallace, 2007, Daniel et al., 2012 and Milcu, 2013).

Our objective is not to repeat a general discussion on the idea, but to underline that one of its shortcomings is related to its appearance in industrialized countries. Thus, when Chopra (2015) underlines that the contributions of many disciplines may be necessary to provide content to cultural ecosystem services, he surprisingly omits to cite the ethnography. The data relating to the Seme in western Burkina Faso presented in this article illustrate what cultural services provided by ecosystems in a rural society in West Africa could be and what ethnography can bring to their understanding. Even though they are the unique expression of a particular society, the concepts presented here nevertheless form a cultural foundation that is widely shared in West Africa; to show this, short bibliographic details with references which do not claim to be exhaustive are listed in Table 1 (end of text). This article shows how “things that watch over us”, in particular sacred hills and water courses, watch over humans during their lives after playing a major role in setting in place the essential components of the person during the conception and birth of the new human being. When we consider the legacy of affiliation to the sacred sites, another service is revealed, that of anchoring individuals and groups in their territories and in their societies. In addition, an important result is that the “services” attached to Water Bodies and Hills depend on other sacred sites which a priori play very different roles, but which however make up a system with them, which is important to consider from the perspective of conservation. In order not to weigh down the text with phonetics, we will use a simplified Latin italicized script in the text for Seme terms, but phonetics are given at the end of the main text (Table 2).

2 The Seme and Field Research

2.1 Origin and language

The Seme are one of the small, poorly known groups of the South-West half of Burkina Faso, a rather substantial presentation on which is useful. Numbering a total of 40 000 speakers (20 000 in Burkina Faso), the Seme live in the province of Kéné Dougou and the department of Orodara (10° 55' to 11° 00' N, 4° 50' to 5° 00' W) (Fig. 1). They compose 6 % of the population of Kéné Dougou, 50 % of that of Orodara and up to 80 % of that of six villages of this department (Boyd et al, 2014). They are the majority of seven districts of the town of Orodara which had 31,600 inhabitants in 2006 (MEF, 2008: 22 and 48). Their language, the *seme-jen*

(Ethnologue ISO 639), is very different from those spoken by neighbouring societies (Toussian, Turka, Gwin and Senufo) which are attached to the Gur and Mande groups. In effect, they are related to the Kru languages which are spoken in the Wobe bloc in Côte-d'Ivoire nearly 500 km away (Person, 1966; Marchese, 1989). KotalamaTraoré (1984, 1985) was the first and only Seme researcher to work on this language. The origin of the Seme is not well known, but a rather solid hypothesis is that they are descendants of a small group of hunters descended from the Sémien, the northern-most group of the Wobe. Even though today the Seme seem to have lost all memory of this subject, the first linguist to work among them over fifty years ago noted that: "their traditions say they came from central Côte d'Ivoire" (Prost, 1964: 345). The historian Yves Person (1966), having noted the proximity of the *seme-jen* to the Kru languages, indicated that "for centuries and doubtless for thousands of years, the Kru withdrew under pressure from the Mande". He reported that, around 1600, the Wobé who lived around the area of Séguéla in Côte d'Ivoire were pushed South by the Mandé to beyond the Sassandra River. A small group then apparently separated from the Northern-most part of the Wobé bloc, migrated and finally settled 450 km further North around Orodara in the area that is today Burkina Faso (Schwartz, 1993:119). Yves Person adds that neither their journey nor the influences that they underwent are known, but if the hypothesis is right, their route must have passed through Korhogo. A little later, Alfred Schwartz (1971: 20; 1994: 116) noted that the name of the northern-most Wobé people, the Sémien, greatly resemble that of the Seme, and hypothesized that it may have been their group of origin. It was around the first people to arrive, described by the Seme today as a small group of hunters, that their society was constituted little by little through the incorporation of outsiders, the installation and integration of whom was deliberately favoured. According to the accounts that we heard in the region of Orodara, some of these foreigners were integrated as friends or refugees after the destruction of their village while others were integrated as captives, especially after the wars of Samory Touré at the end of the XIX century. Even though Orodara was never conquered, these conflicts ravaged the region (Person, 1966 et 1975, Colin, 2004: 77-105) and left the memory of a period of terror that is still very much alive in the accounts that we collected. In the middle of the XIX century, the region of Orodara came under the domination of a lineage of the Traoré clan, originating from the Mandé but who came through Kong in Côte-d'Ivoire, then through the village of Kangoura in the region of Sindou in Burkina (Traoré, 2007).



Fig. 1 Location of the study area (Source: Institut Géographique du Burkina, BNDT 1/200 000).

2.2 Culture and religion

According to Jean Hébert (1961) and on the basis of information we gathered during field work, on their arrival the Seme adopted broad sections of the culture of their neighbours the Tussian, with which they share many cultural characteristics. The Seme today are proud of their identity and very anxious to preserve it and they insist on their distinctive characteristics, that is, their language and their special form of the cult of *dwo* which they describe as “masculine” in contrast to that of the Tussian which is “feminine”. Owing to the studies of Franz Trost (1999a and b), Suzan Elisabeth Cooksey (2004) and Daniela Bognolo (2009), the Tussian are a bit better known than the Seme. Toussian society was made up of farmers from Guinea who crossed the Mandé (Kiethega, 2009) and this group which speaks a Gur language arrived in the region before the Seme whom they welcomed. Jean Hébert (1961) places the migration of the Tussian and the Seme in the middle of the XVII century (Person, 1966). Seme society does not recognize any other authority than the chief of each village, the *dye-ron* who exercises authority that is mostly political, and the *naan-ton*, a sort of earth-priest with a role that is mostly religious and largely subordinate to that of the village chief. The organisation of Seme society is gerontocratic and the village chief, far from being all-powerful, is surrounded and controlled by a council of elders. In addition, among the Seme, the family is patrilineal and residence is virilocal.

The Seme view is that the world was created by a unique God (*Djonoso*) who continues to direct the world, but many other entities, among which are the genies, help him to pilot. The genies, well known in West African ethnography (Hamberger, 2012), are invisible beings who people the bush; they are mortal, endowed with corporeality and an individual character. We will designate this God by the term of Creator, on the clear understanding that it is different from the Christian God. If Christianity and especially Islam are today widely practised among the Seme, the “traditional” animist religion which is organised around the cult of *dwo* remains very much alive. The last initiation of boys at Orodara in 2015 gathered together around 600 novices (our data gathered from the traditional authorities), which corresponds to over one third of the adolescents of initiation age in Orodara. Those who had converted to Islam and Christianity continue discreetly to perform the animist practises of their ancestors, a fact which is well-known, notably in Burkina (Langewiesche, 2003) and in this region (Trost, 1999a). Entry by initiation into the *dwo* assigns each individual a place in groups established according to gender and age, but the final ritual which takes place every 40 years gathers together people of very different ages. The cult of *dwo* is complex and initiates are required to maintain the strictest secrecy on most of its rituals; the information that we provide here in this article relate to the aspects that are accessible to all. The *dwo* came from the bush and was revealed by the genies to help humans to obtain rain, which enables them to farm, but also to establish order in their society. The *dwo* is celebrated every year and it is described as being “closed” during the period dedicated to agricultural activities and “open” during the rest of the year, the period when ritual activities involving it are held. The *dwo* organises the society, district by district, under the guidance of the “*dwo* elders”, who are the seven oldest initiates. Other than the rite of passage for adolescents, the cult includes the great collective ritual *donoble* which is held every 40 years, it is prepared during three continuously open years of the *dwo*. Those who witness a second *donoble* after their initiation receive the title of *kpan* (grandfather: father of the father) and are deeply revered.

2.3 Field research

In the framework of interdisciplinary programmes (RADICEL-K Programme financed by the Région Centre (France) <http://radicel-k.huma-num.fr/> and “Patrimoine culturel, langue et biodiversité végétale” of the UMR PaLoc of IRD) which associate studies in ecology (Bene et Fournier 2014, Fournier et al., 2014) and linguistics (Boyd et al., 2014), a study on sacred groves was conducted beginning in 2009. Its objective was not to identify ecosystem services in the region, which were the subject of another general study beginning in April 2012 (Bene and Fournier, 2015), but aimed at describing the vegetation and identifying the mode of

management of the sacred groves. It quickly appeared that the foundation of these enclaves of vegetation was essentially religious in nature and in particular, that the category “sacred groves” which had been defined *a priori* was inadequate to account for what was observed. In effect, hills and water courses play a primary role in the birth of the Seme and in the progress of their lives. The initial questioning was thus reoriented to include these areas and the representations that are associated with them.

The data were collected in the area of Orodara with around 8 months of field work between 2009 and 2015 during over one hundred interviews with 30 people and the observation of certain rituals. Almost all of the people interviewed were men over 50 years old: custodians of sacred sites, diviners, family heads. The interviews, relatively long (often over 2 h), were conducted in the Seme language, with the translation into French (the language of the government and of schooling in Burkina Faso) provided by a native speaker. With informants who were most inclined to share their knowledge and were very competent on the subjects dealt with, these interviews sometimes took the form of follow-up conversations (around 10 or 15).

3 Coming into the World with the Help of Water Bodies and Hills

3.1 Hills and water bodies where offerings are given for being born

The Seme must give offerings to certain sacred sites at hills and rivers because they are involved in human procreation, these landscape elements being used metonymically, the sign being employed for the thing, as we will see later. Some sites, where both of these landscape elements are side by side, are considered to be both Hills (*kel*) and Water Bodies (*nu*). When they refer to all these sites, they sometimes call them groves (*montu*). In the case of Water Bodies, this denomination is explained because the genies they harbour are never found in the water itself, but in the trees that border it. In the case of Hills, it may happen that, for reasons of convenience, a place that is closer may be chosen as a proxy for a distant sacred site where a sacrifice may be made; this place may not be a hill but it is often covered with trees.

With each of the Hills and Water Bodies is associated one animal species and one only, the form taken by the genies of the place when they wish to show themselves to humans; these are the animals of the water for Water Bodies, the animals of the bush for Hills and some animals, such as the python, enter into both categories.

To understand how Hills and Water Bodies intervene in birth, we must first consider the components of the human being and what becomes of them after death.

3.2 The “soul” and the concept of the *nima*

The Seme say that the individual is composed of a body (*gbe*), of breath (*mar*) and a permanent principle called *nwoon*. The primary meaning of *mar* is the nose, but it also means breathing. The *nwoon* is supposed to have reincarnated itself (*sebe-kwon*, literally, return to be born) in humans since the beginning of the world. In order not to weigh down the text with too many vernacular terms, we will use the term “soul”, on the understanding that it is not strictly equivalent to the soul in the Christian sense. At the time of death, breathing stops and the “soul” leaves the body forever. This body, which is described as being made of clay, the same clay that is used to make bricks and pottery (*tel*), will be buried according to the rituals required and then it will rot and disappear. Temporary journeys of the “soul” outside the body are normal and usual, notably at night; dreams relate its excursions and, even if the body remains immobile while sleeping, the adventures it experienced may even leave scratches on the body... However, a prolonged state of dissociation announces a natural death or could cause premature death when it is the effect of an attack by witches (who act at night) who have succeeded in capturing the “soul”.

From one cycle of existence to the next, the “soul” multiplies: it reincarnates in three individuals if the person was male, in four if the person was female. In this region of Africa, the figures 3 and 4 are recurrently

associated with masculinity and femininity, while in other regions the association is inverted or other figures are used (see Fainzang, 1985). The concept of reincarnation is sufficiently important that the *seme-jen* uses a special term to describe the link that exists between the incarnation of a “soul” and the incarnations of this same “soul” in the following cycle: they say that it is their *nima*.

3.3 Incorporation of the dead among the ancestors

Before it can come and reincarnate, the “soul” should first conduct a journey which leads it first to the sacred Water Body (*kwon ngmil klan nu* /to give birth objective water/, literally where offerings are given for the birth of a child) which was worshipped by its *nima* when it was alive. Depending on whether this *nima* was a man or a woman, it may stay there for at least three or four months. It will then present itself to the ancestors of the compound in which its *nima* lived. This stage coincides with the funerary ritual of “placing the ancestor” (*kono-nyee* /ancestor to place/) which conditions its reincarnation. It consists essentially of adding another stone to a pile of stones placed outside in the compound which constitutes the altar of the ancestors (*kpre*). It is *kono-nyee* which makes the *kpre*, according to the Seme. By this act, the dead person is incorporated into the group of ancestors of this compound. In the time between its exit from the body at death and this ritual, the “soul” can also be called *kono bin*, which means literally “little ancestor”, but once the *kono-nyee* ritual has been performed, it must be called *kono* (ancestor). The stone that is deposited represents the dead person, but especially the commitment made (the “word” of the ancestor) to take care of the household as an ancestor. However, it is not in the pile of stones that the ancestors reside, but with the Creator in *da-bur* (/beyond fatigue/, literally the hereafter). When the living “sit down” beside the altar of the ancestors to pray and make their sacrifices, their ancestors come to listen to them. After transmitting to the Creator the requests expressed and obtaining the Creator’s agreement, the ancestors try in general to answer these requests. To thank the ancestors for their services, their children or other members of the family sacrifice regularly on the altar of the ancestors. However, the ritual of “placing the ancestor” is reserved for those who have had children and/or have gone through the *dwo* initiation stage called *du tyengbe* (see the section devoted to initiation below).

3.4 The concept of Luck and individual destiny

The “soul” then comes to the Creator to deposit the Luck (*bono*) that accompanied it during the life that has just ended. Luck is what is responsible when one escapes an accident, when good opportunities are presented in life, etc., but it is also a supernatural entity which has its own altar. The Luck of each of the adults living in a compound (the dwelling of the extended family) is thus represented individually by a small clay pot normally used for sauce, that is upturned on the ground along the wall of a house and on which each adult regularly makes offerings. On the death of its owner, this pot is no longer subject to any ritual and can be withdrawn and thrown away or left in place: in any case, it will eventually disappear.

Before each of the new “souls” stemming from a *nima* takes the road which will lead it to a new birth, the Creator draws up a sort of a programme for it that is called *bye-myal* (arrival, voice) and which constitutes its personal destiny. The length of life granted to the new person is an essential element, called *wodelshi* (/outside duration age/, literally, number of years to spend outside). The *wodelshi* has an inexorable character, which clearly appears when a *nima* dies before its fixed term, as a result of, for example, suicide. In such a case, the Creator will attribute the number of days that have not been used up to one of the new “souls” originating from this *nima*. Certain lives thus seem to constitute a sort of adjustment variable for the individual destiny of their *nima*; individuals born to carry out this kind of clearing service would not return to reincarnate.

3.5 Individual liberty and the future person

The implacability of the *wodelshi* is counterbalanced by a certain liberty as it is for the “soul” to make certain choices concerning its new life. However, the words spoken by a *nima* are binding: the decisions that it will make will weigh on the following life cycles. With this proviso, it is for the “soul” and not the Creator to

choose the gender of the new individual, its occupation (farmer, trader...) and, especially, the compound in which it wants to be born. In effect, it is said that it is “for someone” that a “soul” chooses to be born somewhere, that is, for a person that it loved during its preceding existence. Thus it is common for a grandmother to say affectionately to her grandson or granddaughter “Ah, I will return to be reborn in your home!”. Someone who was not happy in the family is in contrast supposed to prefer to be born in another compound; if it returns to the same family, it is thought that it is often with the intention of taking revenge on them... After a birth, a divination is performed rapidly in order to know “who” has returned and “for whom” this has been done. Then a sacrifice is offered on the altar of the ancestors of the *nima* that has been identified, which constitutes homage to it, but above all, it cuts the links with the preceding existence forever. They explain that it is essential to do this so that the new individual does not run the risk of being treated as a usurper by its *nima*; in effect, if its name were spoken in front of the child, this could lead to the child’s death.

3.6 Control of the programme by the Creator and the journey to the ancestors

The Creator then indicates to the “soul” the road that it must take to “go down again” (*a sekyal-bla*/he goes down again/, literally, arrives) or (*sebe-kwon*, literally, returns to be born), but this is done only after checking the coherence of the wishes expressed by the “soul” and helping it to adjust them. In effect, it cannot choose to return to be born in a family of farmers to “beat iron”: to practice this trade it should go to a family of blacksmiths. When everything is in order, the Creator gives the “soul” its new Luck for the life that is beginning; holding its luck in both hands, it then presents itself to the ancestors of the compound where it chose to be born. The Seme explain that it is as if they had asked the purpose of its visit and that the “soul” had explained to them its programme. The future child is then placed under the guardianship of this group of ancestors, who may be different from those it had during its previous life.

When the programme of the “soul” has been approved by the Creator and the ancestors have been duly informed, the fertile sexual relationship of the parents places the future child in belly of its mother. This relationship is stimulated by a genie (*ngmil ta kol*/head on genie/ literally “genie on the head”), which arranges things in such a way that the parents love each other, the condition for the birth of a “good child”, that is, a child on which one can rely, who will become a responsible person. Notably this refers to a forced sexual relationship, resulting in a difficult child, a “scoundrel”, a “vagrant”. This personal genie, very close to the new person — which is what “on the head” means— will watch over this person all its life. Even though they speak of this genie in the singular, in reality it is a pair of genies, a male and a female, which have emerged from a Hill and Water Body, who will take care of the person as if they were its father and mother. In *seme-jen*, the male or female gender is indicated by different terms (see Table 2) depending on whether they are speaking about beings of the village, or humans and domestic animals (in which case they say *jen* and *mel*) or beings of the bush, or genies and wild animals (in which case they say *tii* and *nye*). As soon as the future child begins to form in the belly of its mother, the genie begins to watch over it, together with Luck. This personal genie will notably serve as an intermediary for all the “fetishes” (*twenl*) with which the person will have to deal during life; the Seme say *twenl* to refer to any invisible powers and any sacrificial altar. At the end of the period set by the *wodelshi*, this genie will leave on its own and the person will die. They usually speak of this genie as being the Hill (*kel*) of the person. In view of the ways of looking at things and the speech habits of the Seme, speaking as though there were only one male genie is not unusual; when they speak of someone’s father, it is very often implicitly obvious that they are also speaking of the mother. In effect, the Hill which harbours the male genie plays a paternal role, while the Water Body, which harbours the female genie, plays a maternal role.

3.7 Respective roles of hills and water bodies

When it follows the road that enables it to acquire its genie, the “soul” must first go to its sacred Water Body: it is said that it “drinks” there (*a la*/it drinks/). In common usage, saying that one has drunk at someone’s home

means only that they went to see this person and that they presented themselves at this person's home, without meaning that they really drank "the stranger's water" which is offered when they arrive at someone's home. In the past, a stranger who came to see someone in the village first greeted the village chief: it was said that he had "drunk water at the chief's house", which was a way of saying that he had greeted the chief and placed himself under his protection. However, the metaphor has another aspect for the Seme. They comment that water is the basis of everything and that everything depends on it: "You already drink the water in your mother's womb before your birth and you continue to drink water all your life, you can go for a day without eating but not without drinking", they say.

In most cases, the Water Body to which the "soul" goes is the same as that of its father; more rarely it may be the same as that of its mother, even more rarely any other Water Body. Someone's Water Body is thus often different from that which his *nima* had. The role of this Water Body is to see that the Luck of the person for which this Water Body is responsible is efficient. To draw a parallel with daily life, providing blessings encouragement and wishes for good luck to someone to support them in their activities is, according to the Seme, a role that is eminently maternal. Afterwards, the "soul" goes to the Hill (*kel*) which, in all cases, is the same as that of the father of the future child. The role of the Hill is to watch over the health and the length of life of the person; this is what is expected of a human father, who is responsible for the health problems of his children and, in so doing, to ensure a long life for them.

In the cases where the sacred place is both a Water Body and a Hill (see above), no extra trip being necessary for the "soul" to go to the Hill, they say that the person "has no Hill". However, it is only a manner of speaking, meaning that all the offerings destined for both sites are given to the Water Body, as they continue in this case to speak of the *kel* of the person. The Seme comment on this, saying that "for some the path goes through the Water Body, for others it goes through the Hill". As has already been said, animals are associated with all Hills and Water Bodies. These animals are from then on considered and treated as "totems" for the person, which does not have the same implication in both cases as will be seen below. It should be remembered that in West Africa, the French term of "totem" translates various expressions in local languages which express the prohibition of wounding, killing and consuming a particular animal species (more rarely vegetal species).

Sacrificial debts and prenatal promises to "things that watch over us"

Even before their birth, all children are placed under the protection of what the Seme call "the things that watch over them" (*myen me/guardian, shepherd things/, literally, the things that watch over them*). This protection implies that they should offer sacrifices to them all their lives. As long as a child cannot perform these obligations itself, its parents undertake them. Through regular sacrifices to its Water Body, a sacred site that is common to many people, the effectiveness of its Luck is maintained. This does not however dispense with sacrifices to the individual representation of Luck, the little clay pot placed in the family compound already referred to. By making sacrifices to their Hill or to the Water Body that substitutes for it, they "buy" (*son*) the length of their lives (*wodelshi*). If the payment is duly made, death will in theory be natural and will comply with the Creator's design, but on the other hand, negligence in this regard may lead to problems, and even premature death.

Apart from this type of debt, which is the common lot of everyone and for which no-one has a choice, there are also prenatal debts which are the result of a personal choice. During its journey towards birth, the "soul" will in effect freely make at least one promise to one of the "places where we sacrifice" (*kla fon*) which are involved in its birth, that is, Water Body, Hill, the altar for the ancestors and Luck, and only these. It not only undertakes to make a precise offering (fresh water as a sign of respect, a blood sacrifice, etc.) but also sets the due date. The "soul" can, if it wishes, address such promises to one or several places, but this commitment,

called *wu-ta-gbo* (/to say, matter/), must be maintained, as any default could lead to problems, misfortunes, or even premature death. As the new person is unaware of these debts, they are identified by divination.

The journey of the “soul” is then complete and the child comes into the world. Like all newborns, they hold their fists closed and the Seme explain smilingly that this is because they are holding their Luck firmly in both hands. The child lets go only when the father places a temporary representation of it on the wall of a house, which is done when the baby begins to recognize those around him. The permanent representation, the small clay pot already referred to, will not be placed until marriage.

4 Becoming an Adult and Agricultural Producer: A Detour By Other Sacred Sites

The “service” that Hills and Water Bodies offer by creating and protecting humans is not independent of what happens at other sacred sites. The latter are, however, *a priori* devoted mostly to other roles which we will now explore: they are initiation sites and agricultural sites. These sites are distributed throughout the village and cultivated lands; they usually consist of small thickets (in general less than half a hectare) but may show only one single tree or even be entirely bare. On all these sites, what is important is never the vegetation, which we will not discuss further, but the sacrificial altar (for this discussion regarding another West-African society, see Fournier, 2011).

4.1 The two major stages of initiation to the *dwo*

The *tyal* initiation, which used to be held every year (every 2 to 3 years, today), marks the transition between childhood and adulthood and consecrates a sort of first stage of the social majority. The ceremonies take place separately for boys and girls at the age of about 15 years.

For girls, this ritual used to include excision which is today prohibited by law, but other aspects of it are maintained. Following this initiation, the girls went to the homes of the husbands who had been chosen by their parents; girls were betrothed at around the age of 8 years and boys at around the age of 17 years. Today the choice of partner is free, the age difference is lower and the ritual does not have the same constraining character regarding marriage. The women then undergo several other initiation stages which bring about their increasingly complete insertion into the family of their husbands. It is to these customs that the Seme refer when they say that “for girls, initiation is marriage”.

Young boys are firstly non-initiates, the *bajen*, then, at the age of about 15 years, they undergo as a group the initiation stage *tyal*. The latter used to include circumcision which is today performed at the clinic when they are babies, but all the other elements of the ritual are still in effect. Afterwards there are two other stages called *nya fla* (/eye split open/, literally, split open the eye) and *du tyengbe* (*dwo*, pour, place) which provides them with knowledge of sacred and secret objects. During the *donoble* ritual, which is held every 40 years, they receive their *dwo* names and become *donoe*, which means full members of the *dwo*. At the end of a seclusion of about a month and a half in a “bush camp”, the new initiates come out, wearing animal masks and dance for several days and they are then called *donoble*. By bringing a new generation to full social maturity, this ritual begins a general renewal of society. In particular, the seven elders who are responsible for the *dwo* cede their positions to the seven oldest initiates after them. Between two *donoble*, the latter had been the “commissioners” (*twon lo ton*) of the former and, in case of death, had replaced them as “*dwo* elders”.

The various stages of initiation to the *dwo* are based on sacred sites, in particular the sacred groves.

4.2 The groves of the *dwo*

Each district of Orodara has a specific category of little village grove dedicated to the *dwo*. These groves are placed in the middle of residences, their centre is cleared, a clay hut with a thatched roof, the *dwo-fwo*, is constructed there and a hearth is built for cooking sacrificial offerings. The hut shelters sacred objects that only initiates can see and handle during certain rituals about which absolute secrecy is maintained. These modified

groves serve as a meeting place for the dignitaries of the cult and every year blood sacrifices are made there during the period of the *dwo*. Only initiates can decide to cut the branches or entire trees in these groves, but the prohibition of access is very strict only during meetings and ceremonies.

Every district also has a second kind of grove which has neither a generic name, nor its own name known to everyone. Even though, as a result of the expansion of the town, some of them may today be located in the middle of a built-up area, groves of this kind were originally located in the bush. These groves, which host genies, are considered to be very dangerous places and no-one goes into them, except for certain initiates during very rare ritual occasions. These groves also play a role in certain initiation stages that are kept entirely secret. Prohibitions relating to trees are much stricter than in the modified groves: dead wood accumulates there and is highly visible.

Lastly, there is another type of *dwo* sacred grove that is common to all the districts of Orodara, the location of which in the bush remains a secret and which also has no name. It is also considered to be extremely dangerous and is maintained intact. It is used for certain ceremonies included in *donoble*.

4.3 Sacred sites dedicated to agricultural production

Every year, about a month after the closure of the *dwo*, the Earth Priest (*naan-ton/earth owner/*) must make a sacrifice on behalf of the farmers of Orodara in a “place where we give to the earth” (*naan kla fon*). The precise moment is determined according to the moon’s phases; but another specific calendar for sacrifices is adopted during the three years of permanent opening of the *dwo* which precedes the *donoble*. There used to be one Earth Priest for the entire community who sacrificed goats and chickens brought by family heads on one altar made of stone located in a grove; as a result of the extension of the built-up area, today it is located in town. With the steady growth of the population, the cultivated areas were subdivided at a date which was not specified for us. Each subdivision was provided with its own *naan kla fon* grove—the location of which was determined by divination—and its own Earth Priest, always a member of the founding family of the village. In each subdivision, the cult remains collective and the household heads bring their sacrificial victims to the Earth Priest of the area where they cultivate their fields. All these groves, the generic name of which is *naan klan fon* (/earth give place/, literally, the place where we give to the earth), are left intact; they are considered to be almost as dangerous as groves of the *dwo* that are left intact.

There are also other sacred groves (*klon twenl/field fetishes/*, literally, fetish of the fields) dedicated to agricultural activities which are also located in the cultivated area, but which are more personal in nature. Because he felt sympathy for him, the genie that is located there one day showed himself to a farmer who was working nearby. In exchange for sacrifices of goats and fowl, the calendar for which is not necessarily the same as for the “places where we give to the earth”, the genie provides individual help to this person. Any issue relating to groves of the “fetishes of the fields” is settled by divination as for *naan kla fon* groves.

The main task of the genies of the collective groves “where we give to the earth” is the regulation of the rains, but the abundance of the harvest and the smooth operation of agricultural activities (no injuries or snake bites) is the responsibility of the genies of both types of groves.

If they remain invisible, the genies of these groves are however very present in the minds of the farmers who know that their requirements are not limited to sacrifices. Thus, whoever may bring a snack seasoned with onions or who may come to the fields with heavy perfume should beware because the genies detest these odours: those who dare to impose them expose themselves to diseases and various problems. According to the more or less strict special rules that are dictated by each genie according to its temperament, access to the grove of the “fetish of the field” is open to everyone or only to the person responsible for making sacrifices there. In contrast, a prohibition on the removal of plants applies to all the groves of fields. It could possibly be lifted in the case of a medicinal plant that cannot be found anywhere else; however it should be done discretely

and without speaking to anyone... Hunting an animal which seeks refuge in one of these groves is also out of the question.

After this detour, the importance of which will soon appear, it is time to return to Water Body and Hills.

5 Anchoring Oneself Socially and Territorially Through Hills and Water Bodies

Services offered by Hills and Water Bodies are not limited to the creation of people. Through these sites the territorial and social anchoring of groups and people is also brought about. The geographical position of these sacred sites in relation to the village sheds some light on this role.

5.1 The organisation of the area of the village

Like other societies of this region of Africa, the Seme strongly contrast the village area (*du-kpra*) which contains dwellings, with cultivated fields and natural vegetation (*klon se*); a strip called *mlan kwose* (/red millet gleaned at the place of/, literally, where red millet is gleaned) marks the transition between the two.

The *du-kpra* area of the town of Orodara is subdivided into several districts which, at the beginning, each housed *grosso modo* the descendants of a common ancestor. This design is today a bit confused because the development and growth of the community brought these clans to mix with one another and with the members of other societies, especially in the areas of the town that are newly built. However, the subdivisions of the districts each have a name and this constitutes the visible trace of separations and segmentations which occurred within the clans and the incorporation of outsider groups who were assimilated. Over this organisation is superimposed today an administrative system of "sectors" that does not coincide with the old districts.

In the territory organised in this way, the village is perceived as the domain of humans and their domestic animals, whereas the bush, cultivated or not, is that of genies and wild animals.

5.2 Hills and water bodies and social identity

Hills and Water Bodies differ in their number, their location and their mode of transmission. According to data being collected, there are fewer than 10 Hills compared with 30 Water Bodies in total, 5 of them being both Hills and Water Bodies. Hills are found in the bush, whereas Water Bodies locate in the village area (*du-kpra*). In effect, owing to the many severe prohibitions which the male genies of Hills impose, humans cannot live too close to them. These genies can, in effect, hurt those who consume one of their totem animals, menstruating women as well as those who have not washed after sexual relations. In contrast, female genies who live in the Water Bodies are not very demanding, notably on the subject of their animal totems which one does not really need to observe; humans may thus live near a Water Body without running any risks. The transmission of Hills and Water Bodies from one generation to another is done in a way that is a little different and it seems not to have the same significance for identity.

The Hill is transmitted patrilineally through male parallel cousins from a common ancestor: patrilineages or clans are thus under the guardianship of the same Hill. However, as Hills are common to all the Seme people, lineage groups who live in different villages are attached to the same Hill. In addition, according to the Seme, Hills are shared with neighbouring societies (the Toussian and the Turka) who share some of the same beliefs with them, but additional field research on this subject will be necessary.

According to the same pattern, Water Body is most often transmitted through the paternal line, such that a large number of members of a district or a patrilineal group share the same one. This Water Body, considered to be the place where the ancestors (founders of the district or the patrilineal family) took their drinking water, apart from exceptions explained by a move, is located right next to the group in question. As a result of this mode of transmission the main Water Bodies of a family that has recently moved to the village is always located somewhere else. However, there are other circuits of transmission, as a certain number of individuals

receive their Water Body from the maternal line or beyond any kinship. It seems that this flexibility in the transmission of Water Bodies facilitates the assimilation of outsiders. Some children of newly arrived outsiders would of course receive their Water Body from the place of origin of their father, but the Seme emphasise that the “souls” of the following generations will necessarily also originate from a Water Body which is close by.

This invites us to consider Water Bodies as vectors of assimilation whereas Hills are rather position markers between distinct groups.

5.3 The round of the genies among the sacred sites: the pairing of the lives of humans and genies

Let us now come to explain why Hills, Waters Bodies, groves for the *dwo* and groves for the fields all make up a system.

As has been explained, the ritual of *donoble*, which takes place about every 40 years, brings about a renewal of human society. It is thus the same among the genies who also hold their *donoble* initiation for full integration in the *dwo*. The young genies must first spend 40 years in a grove “where we give to the earth” (managed by an Earth Priest), then they must spend another period of 40 years in a “fetish for the field” grove (managed individually by a farmer). It is only when they have seen two *donoble* that they come to the stage of maturity which would enable them to supervise the initiation of younger genies in a grove “where we give to the earth” and bring about the birth of humans and accompany them during their lives. The genies, who live much longer than humans, also develop more slowly, which explains the long cycle of the *donoble*. Some genies then change residence among the sacred sites of Hills and Water Bodies, the seats of families of genies, to the groves dedicated to agriculture. Thus, an individual grove dedicated to the “fetish of the field” may be left, whereas another may serve as a new habitation for a genie; however, the groves “where we give to the earth” as well as the sites of Hills and Water Bodies remain occupied permanently.

The “service” concerning birth is thus related to the accession of the genies to adult status and it is by accomplishing their initiation in the groves dedicated to agriculture that they can reach this stage of maturity.

6 Conclusion: Cultural Ecosystem Services and Sacred Sites

Like other rural societies of West Africa, the Seme of Burkina Faso provide a sense to the way the world works and they deploy their views on the basis of sacred natural sites, the presence of which they have recognized in the ecosystems around them. In a very elaborate system constructed around the arrival of child in the world, landscape elements (hills and water courses) manifest the presence of invisible entities which support the Creator to “create” humans from the “souls” of ancestors. The association of the “soul” or the double with a water course or a pond is widespread in Africa (Table 1). The idea of a principle that reincarnates and associates with other components to constitute a human person is attached to a set of beliefs that are frequently encountered in West Africa and beyond; they have been the subject of comparative studies published long ago (Fortes, 1959; Horton, 1959; various texts already cited from “La notion de personne en Afrique noire”, 1973). The Seme offer a version which involves an unusual genealogical depth, as, in contrast to other societies, they believe in perpetual reincarnation. Onto the idea of the return of the ancestors is grafted among the Seme that of a prenatal word spoken before a God by the human being under creation. This word defines a personal destiny, a portrayal which is particularly well developed in the societies of the area called “Voltaic” to which the Seme belong (see the syntheses of Fortes, 1959: 19-26 and Cartry, 2010). The “Voltaic societies” extends approximately from South of Bondoukou in Côte-d’Ivoire to South of Gossi in Mali and from Sikasso in Mali to Nikki in Benin (see map in Hazard, 1997: 114). Among the Seme, the affiliation with sacred water bodies and hills also assigns a social identity to the individuals and patrilineal groups to which they are symbolically associated. It situates the clans which make up Seme society not only with regards to one another, but also with regards to neighbouring societies with which they share the hills. The role of sacred sites

in territorial anchorage is a banal ethnographic fact, but the importance of water bodies as a common reference for lineages is less common; it is found among the immediate neighbours of the Seme (the Toussian and the Turka; our unpublished research) and among the Kotokoli of central Togo (Lallemand, 1995) and the Kabyè (Daugey, 2016) of Togo. It is even less common that these sacred water bodies also participate in the assimilation of new arrivals.

Among the results of the study, one will be of special interest to those who support ecosystem services; this is the pairing of sacred Hills and Water Bodies with other categories of sites, because it has concrete implications about which we will comment further on. The many rituals which mark the stages of individual lives and which punctuate the collective life of the Seme involve various types of sacred sites. It seems that the great collective ritual held around every 40 years or so may be understood as the pivot of a pairing between sacred sites dedicated to the “creation” of the person and the clan on the one hand and initiation and activities of agricultural production on the other hand. This ritual, which is the last stage of masculine initiation for humans and for genies as well, brings about a general renewal of human society and results for the genies in the changing of residence from one category of sacred sites to another. In so doing, they seem to activate, according to a rhythm which matches the slow speed of their development, the workings of a vast system in which humans participate, and whose shorter lives are nevertheless intertwined with theirs. These genies are very important in the Seme system of thought. The Seme describe them as sorts of doubles, as guardians and also as censors of humans, they accompany or control their biological and social reproduction as well as their activities of agricultural production and they are also territorial divinities. These various roles of the genies are well known in West African ethnography —Hamberger (2012) recently produced a synthesis— but among the Seme they take an unusual and very elaborate form.

These data illustrate how important the ethnographic approach is to establish any conservation operations on a solid base. In a configuration such as the one found among the Seme, conservation limited to certain sites could be useless or, worse, serve to endorse the destruction of other sites, which could ruin the whole system. As a jest, we could say that in such a case, to be efficient, conservation should target its efforts on the genies and their sites... By proposing to take into account “relational values”, that is, the way in which people “relate with nature and with others, including the actions and habits conducive to a good life, both meaningful and satisfying”, certain recent approaches in conservation seem to be on the right path (Chan et al, 2012b). Such an approach echoes the new anthropological framework which does not separate humans from non-humans into two distinct ontological areas, but explores the relations between them (Descola, 2005).

Ethnographic studies thus appear to be of primary importance to understand the relationship that societies maintain with their environment and thus to identify cultural ecosystem services. In preceding publications we have already emphasised the high risk of misunderstanding in the absence of such studies (Liberiski-Bagnoud et al., 2010; Fournier, 2011; Bene and Fournier, 2015). It is to be hoped that the identification of perceptions that are proper to each society would help to prevent conservation and development programmes from inflicting on them, sometimes out of pure ignorance, a certain symbolic violence or actions that are simply useless.

Table 1 Short bibliographic details with references showing that the concepts presented in this paper are widely shared in West Africa (non-exhaustive data).

Subject	Indication
Human procreation and water bodies	The involvement of rivers or lakes in human procreation is shared, notably by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Kabye (Verdier, 1995: 207), • the Kotokoli (Lallemand, 1995: 278 sqq), • the Bassar (Dugast, 2009, 2010) of Togo.
Reincarnation	The idea that the “soul” of an ancestor returns to be born or that an ancestor can “create” a child is also found among: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Mossi, for example (Bonnet, 1988: 88), • the Bambara of Mali (Dieterlen, 1988: 74-75), • the Senoufo of Mali (Dembélé, 1992: 76), • the Kabye of Togo (Verdier, 1995: 206), • the Kotokoli (Frobenius, 1924 quoted by Barbier, 1993), • the Ouatchi of Togo (Hamberger, 2011: 328-329), • the Bwaba of Burkina Faso (our unpublished field research)
Body made of clay or earth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Dogon of Mali (Griaule, 1975: 25), • the Bobo of Burkina Faso (Le Moal, 1973: 193), • the Yoruba of Benin (Verger, 1973: 60), • the Ouatchi (Hamberger, 2011: 134) and Kabyè (Daugey, 2016: 75) of Togo.
Mobility of the “soul”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Dogon (Dieterlen, 1973) of Mali, • the Samo (Héritier-Izard, 1973: 245), • the Bwaba of Burkina Faso (our own unpublished research).
Multiplication of the “soul” when reincarnating	Among the Mossi of Burkina Faso, the soul “of one of the ancestors fragments and a part is given to the future new-born” (Lallemand, 1978)
Link between successive reincarnations	Among the Mossi of Burkina Faso, the relationship is thought of in the opposite direction than among the Seme: the new individual is called the <i>segre</i> of the deceased (Lallemand, 1978).
Token of the passing of a deceased	Among the Bambara, at death, the soul of the deceased is captured by the head of the family and taken to an altar where it leaves behind “a sort of exuvia, <i>mana</i> or <i>folo</i> , a token of the passing of the deceased” (Dieterlen 1988: 95). Among the Seme, a diviner gravedigger spoke of the ritual of <i>kono-nie</i> in terms that are very close to these.
Reincarnation in the same family	Among the Kabyè also, the old may “bring out” a child, but this can happen even when they are still alive and it would not really be a reincarnation (Daugey, 2016: 57).
Guardian spirits	Among the Nakanse of Ghana, the individual guardian spirits are often ancestral spittits (Rattray, 1969: 237)
Altars for the Luck	Altars of this type are found among: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Nakanse of Ghana (Rattray, 1969: 145) • the Mwaba-Gurma of Togo, but it is to the personal genie of Luck, the <i>cabl</i>, that they are dedicated (de Surgy, 1983: 96 note 37), • the Tallensi (Fortes 1959: 20), • the Bwaba of Burkina (our unpublished research), • Among the Mwaba-Gourma of Togo, the <i>cabl</i> has the double aspect of a personification of destiny and a genie of luck (de Surgy, 1983: 91)
Association of a genie with head and Luck	The association of a genie or a couple of genies or luck with the head is known in other societies of West Africa, notably: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Yoruba of Benin (Verger, 1973: 63), • the Tallensi of Ghana (Fortes, 1979: 69).
Link of destinies in a descent line	Among the Tallensi of Ghana, the destinies of a first-born son and his father are linked in an antagonistic relationship (Fortes, 1978).
Danger of the referral to a name	The careless referral to a name can also bring death among the Sabé of Benin (Palau Marti 1973: 325)
Association between a river of origin and a genie	In Togo the genie takes the form of a prenatal aquatic spouse among: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Bassar (Dugast, 2009) of Togo, • the Kabyè (Daugey, 2016: 76) of Togo.
Transmission of an “original water body”	Among the Kabyè of Togo (Daugey, 2016: 76), it is carried out according to the same principal than among the Seme
Prenatal speech	The idea is also present for example among: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Nakanse of North Ghana (Rattray 1969: 136, 165, 181, 288...) • the Tallensi and the Ashanti of Ghana, (Horton, 1959: 47, 55) • the Kalabari of the Niger Delta, (Horton, 1959: 61) • the Yoruba of Nigeria (Horton, 1959: 70), • the Samo of Burkina Faso (Héritier-Izard, 1973: 247),

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the Mwaba-Gurma (de Surgy, 1983: 72-73) of Togo, the Bassar (Dugast, 2009, 2010) of Togo, the Ouatchi of Togo (Hamberger, 2011: 252-253)
Sensitivity of genies to perfumes	This sensitivity is quite broadly shared by the genies of West African societies: however, they may detest perfume as among the Seme and the Bwaba of Burkina Faso (my unpublished research) or, in contrast, they may really like it (Hamberger, 2012).
Drinking water and ancestors of a group	Among the Kabyè of Togo, the sacred groves of the clans often harbour the source where the ancestor of the group came to drink (Verdier, 1995: 208)
Totems inherited in female line less demanding than those inherited in male line	Among the Nakanse of Ghana matrilineal clans do not have totems, the totem of the patrilineal clan is inherited by children (Rattray, 1969: 233, 237)

Table 2 Seme vocabulary: simplified Latin italicized script as given in the main text, phonetics and meaning.

	Phonetics	Meaning
<i>People, language, social and religious office-holders, diverse areas of the village territory</i>		
<i>Seme</i>	Sɛmɛ	Name of the society studied
<i>seme-jen</i>	sɛmɛ jɛɛn	Language of the Seme
<i>dye-ron</i>	dʏɛ-rɔŋ	/village owner/; traditional village chief (political and religious ministry)
<i>naan-ton</i>	ɲáán-tɔŋ	/earth owner/; kind of Earth Priest (religious ministry)
<i>twon lo ton</i>	twɔŋ lɔ tɔŋ	"Commissioners" of the <i>dwo</i> -elders /commission, to tell, owner)
<i>du-kpra</i>	dú-kprá	Area of the village which contains dwellings
<i>klon-se</i>	klɔ̃ sɛ	Lands of the village covered with cultivated fields and natural vegetation
<i>mlan kwose</i>	mlɔ̃ kwɔsɛ	/red millet gleaned at the place of/, literally, where red millet is gleaned; name of a strip of land which marks the transition between <i>du-kpra</i> and <i>klon-se</i>
<i>Main cult (dwo) and initiation</i>		
<i>dwo</i>	dʷɔ	Name of the main cult of Seme society
<i>ba-jen</i>	bá-jɛɛn	Young boys and girls, non-initiates
<i>tyal</i>	tyál	The initiation ritual which marks the transition between childhood and adulthood (around the age of 15) and consecrates a sort of first stage of the social majority
<i>nya fla</i>	ɲáá fláá	/eye split open/, literally, split open the eye; stage of the ritual that provides males with knowledge of sacred and secret objects
<i>du tyengbe</i>	dú tyɛngbɛ	/dwo, pour, place/; stage of the rituals that provides males with knowledge of sacred and secret objects
<i>donoble</i>	dɔnɔblɛ	Initiation ritual held every 40 years: males receive their <i>dwo</i> names and become full members of the <i>dwo</i> Name of the initiates when they emerge wearing animal masks at the end of a reclusion of about a month and a half in a "bush camp"
<i>dono, donoe</i>	dɔnɔ́ (plural dɔnɔ́ɛ)	Full members of the <i>dwo</i>
<i>kpan</i>	kpá	(Paternal) grandfather (father of the father); title received by those who witness a second <i>donoble</i> after their initiation
	Phonetics	Meaning
<i>Sacred sites, genies, sacred objects</i>		
<i>montu</i>	mɔ̃ntú	A grove (not necessarily a sacred place)
<i>kel</i>	kɛ́lɛ́l	A hill and the male component of the personal tutelary genie
<i>nu</i>	nú	A water body and the female component of the personal tutelary genie
<i>dwo-fwo</i>	dʷɔ-fʷɔ́	Sacred grove with a clay hut covered with a thatched roof in the centre
<i>kwon ngmil klan nu</i>	kwɔ̃ ɲmíl kláá nū	/to give birth objective water/, literally where offerings are given for the birth of a child; refers to the Water sacred site
<i>bono</i>	bɔ̃nɔ̃	Luck; the supernatural entity represented by a small clay pot
<i>te</i>	tɛ	Clay (material used to make bricks and pottery)
<i>ngmil ta kol</i>	ɲmíl tá kóól	/head on genie/, literally "genie on the head"; the personal genie of each person
<i>myen me</i>	myɛn méɛ	/guardian, shepherd things/, literally, the things that watch over them; "fetishes" (see further) that protect the person
<i>kla fon</i> (f. e. <i>naan kla fon</i>)	kláá fɔ̃n, f. e. ɲáán kláá fɔ̃n	/to give place/, literally "places where we sacrifice"; general word, for example "place where we give to the earth"
<i>klon twenl</i>	klɔ̃ twɛ́l	/field fetishes/, literally, fetish of the fields; a sacred grove
<i>twenl</i>	twɛ́l	"Fetish"; the term used by the Seme to refer to any invisible powers and any sacrificial altar The polysemic and thus contested idea of the fetish has been discussed in detail in two special issues of the journal "Systèmes de Pensée en Afrique Noire" (de Surgy, 1983, 1993)
<i>Diverse</i>		
<i>jen, mel</i>	jɛ́n, mél	/male, female/; for humans and domestic animals, which are beings of the village
<i>ti, nye</i>	tɛ́l, ɲɛ́lɛ́	/male, female/; for genies and wild animals, which are beings of the bush

	Phonetics	Meaning
<i>Religion and reincarnation</i>		
<i>Djonoso</i>	ʒɔnɔsɔ	Name of the Creator
<i>da-bur</i>	dā būr	/beyond fatigue/, literally, the hereafter
<i>gbe</i>	gbéɛ	Body
<i>mar</i>	mār	Breath
<i>nwoon</i> (pl. <i>nuwe</i>)	nwɔʒɔn (plural núwɛ)	“Soul”
<i>kpre</i>	kpréɛ	Pile of stones which is placed outside in the compound and which constitutes the altar of the ancestors. The term is a plural, collective term for which no singular form exists
<i>kono</i>	kɔnɔʒɔ	Ancestor
<i>kono-nyee</i>	kɔnɔʒɔ-nyéɛ	/ancestor to place/, literally placing the ancestor; the ritual which conditions its reincarnation.
<i>kono-bin</i>	kɔnɔʒɔ bɪ̃	Literally, little ancestor; name of the “soul” between its exit from the body at death and the <i>kono nyee</i> ritual
<i>sebe-kwon</i>	sɛbɛ-kwɔ̃	Literally, returns to be born
<i>a sekyal-bla</i>	à sɛkyāl blāā	/he goes down again/, literally, arrives
<i>nima</i>	nímlá	The man or woman who was the incarnation of the soul presently incarnated in several other living persons
<i>bye-myal</i>	byé-myāl	/arrival, voice/; words spoken before birth in front of the Creator or the Ancestors, they constitute one part of the personal destiny
<i>myen me</i>	myɛn méɛ	/guardian, shepherd thing/, literally, the things that watch over them; supernatural entities, that watch over a person even before it is born
<i>wo delshi</i>	wɔ dɛʃɪ	/outside duration age/ literally, number of years to spend outside; they are one of the components of personal destiny
<i>son</i>	sɔn	Regarding <i>wo delshi</i> , literally, to buy (the length of their lives); refers to regular sacrifices
<i>wu-ta-gbo</i>	wú-tá-gbɔ	/to say, matter/; a commitment made by the “soul” before birth
<i>a la</i>	à lāā	/it drinks/; refers to the journey of the soul before birth

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