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## ***When Nomads Lose Cattle: Wodaabe Negotiations of Ethnicity***

### **Abstract**

*Scholars have increasingly focused on travel and translocation, as simultaneously they have deconstructed essentialised notions of cultures and ethnicities. WoDaaBe pastoral nomads in Niger base their ethnic identity strongly on reference to cattle and a nomadic lifestyle but many have since the 1980s become migrant workers in cities. The discussion explores how these migrant workers renegotiate their own cultural traditions and identities, thus emphasising how cultural traditions are constantly articulated within social processes of flow and translocation. The discussion demonstrates how even typological notions of ethnicity, such as shame and taboos, are renegotiated within new contexts, suggesting that migrant work is no longer seen as shameful by the WoDaaBe migrant workers in that it prevents them from behaving as WoDaaBe herders. Migrant work is emphasised as a part of the mobility and flexibility which is so crucial to pastoralists' survival.*

### **Introduction**

I feel ashamed of having nothing. Sometimes, I want to go into the bush and disappear (Ali, WoDaaBe migrant labourer).

Ali, the young man sitting in front of me, looks away and we are silent. His clothing is torn and worn and he has lost one of his front teeth because he fell while trying to escape the police when smuggling petroleum between the borders of Niger and Nigeria. His original goal by going to the city was to earn enough money to allow him to return to his extended family in the pastoral area of Tchín-Tabaraden in Niger. His reference to shame refers to his failure to be able to do so, that is, his inability in gaining income through his work.

In recent years anthropology's focus has increasingly shifted toward travel and translocation (Clifford 1998), deconstructing the hard-edged notions of culture (Abu-Lughod 1991) and ethnicities (Clifford 1988) as belonging to spatially localised people; notions which were for a long period part of anthropology's attempts to grasp the flows of diversities. Theorising about ethnicity has thus generally, since Fredrik Barth's important essay on ethnic boundaries (1969), seen ethnic identities as relational, fluid and historically constituted. The strong theoretical emphasis on ethnicity has to some extent replaced earlier

emphases on culture – anthropology's guiding concept – even though developments in regard to the culture concept have simultaneously (and often quite similarly to the ethnicity concept) emphasised flows and the politics of culture (Abu-Lughod 1991; Wright 1998). Theories of globalisation have in a similar vein, and despite a much shorter lifespan, moved from an emphasis on globalisation as the creator of homogenisation toward a celebration of the various ways in which dominant cultural forms are picked up, used and transformed (Appadurai 1996; Gupta and Ferguson 1997:5). Simultaneously and somewhat contradictorily, some of social sciences' popular present day concepts, such as hybridisation and creolisation, can be seen as implying the existence of culture/ethnicity as *a priori* pure, which is further intensified by how the flows of people and cultures under the label globalisation are often theorised as a recent phenomenon.

WoDaaBe<sup>1</sup> pastoral nomads in Niger base their ethnic identity strongly on livestock holdings and the mobility intrinsic to their economy. Having experienced an increasingly marginalised position, with reduced areas of land and consequent difficulties in maintaining livable herds, a number of young WoDaaBe went to cities in the middle of the 1980s in search for work (White 1990:248). My discussion explores how WoDaaBe migrant workers negotiate their ethnic identity in the context of their work in the city, which can in my view be a useful contribution to reevaluating recent theorising on ethnic identity, mobility and globalisation.<sup>2</sup> The theorising of globalisation often tends, as argued by James Clifford, to cluster around the lines of simplistic representations of modern rootless Westerners versus the traditional, rooted 'natives' (1998:84-85; see also Freeman 2001), ignoring the long tradition of migration in West Africa.

Interestingly, mobility is often seen as one of the destructive forces of modernity, while for pastoralists it constitutes a constant and important feature of their lives (Agrawal 1999:25). It is necessary to 'ethnographise' mobility by exploring its meaning as it is conceptualised and experienced by actual people in different parts of the world. This discussion thus explores how people who have always characterised themselves as mobile render meaningful the process of urban migration. I place a special emphasis on how WoDaaBe articulate and renegotiate their own cultural traditions and identities within these recent conditions, rather than focusing on their use and transformation of forms of dominant culture, as often is done by theorists (see Gupta and Ferguson 1997).

I limit the discussion to ideas of shame and taboos – seen by WoDaaBe as some of their key ethnic identity markers – and focus on how these typological ideas of WoDaaBe-ness are negotiated in these current circumstances. What happens when those who define their ethnicity from involvement with animals lose their animals and/or their ability to be engaged in the pastoral economy? In what ways is ethnicity renegotiated within the contexts of pre-existing categories and meanings? I have elsewhere pointed out, congruent with Arun

Agrawal's observation that 'mobility is the most evident feature of the lives of migrant pastoralists' (1999:7), that many WoDaaBe migrant workers emphasise migrant work as a part of the mobility and flexibility that is so crucial to pastoralists' survival, as a form of diversification, instead of focusing on the sedentary aspects of their occupation in the city and their non-involvement with animals (Loftsdóttir 2002). I continue to stress this here and claim that even though individuals may feel shame in their inability to reconstruct their herds, ideas of shame and taboos are still renegotiated within the context of new diversification strategies. I will, however, also point out counter-discursive notions of migrant work, where it is seen as constituting a possible degradation and dissolving of the WoDaaBe community.

Even though turning away from reifying categories of the pastoralist and the agriculturalist – emphasising, as Johnson (1969), these as two ends of the same pole – studies on pastoral identity have not focused much on the fluidity and negotiation of these boundaries. Most pastoral studies seem to assume that people are either sedentary or mobile, either having an identity as pastoral nomads or losing it through a process of sedentarisation. This is, for example, reflected in that most theorists separate WoDaaBe from Fulani by referring to the former as being more nomadic. Perhaps due to this rather dualistic theoretical focus, not much attention has been paid to migrant work among pastoral nomads which seems, as pointed out by Mohamed Salih, increasingly important in many pastoral societies (1995:183).

Similar to these earlier perspectives on globalisation and studies of pastoralists' sedentarisation, studies on immigration often assume, as claimed by Anne-Marie Fortier, that immigrants are moving from one culture into another, being subject to acculturation and assimilation (2000:19). In line with this tradition, mobility is often seen as a sign of degradation, even though constituting a traditional economic strategy with a long history in West Africa (Rain 1999:8). WoDaaBe migrant work can be seen as 'circulatory movements' (Rain's phrase), a term used to describe when people move from their places of residence for periods of time, even though ideally returning home finally. WoDaaBe places of residence are, of course, not so much localised as the participation in livelihood is related to a particular social-economic group of people and animals. Fortier's comment that migrant belongings are constituted through both movement and attachment is useful in order to understand the fluid characteristics of WoDaaBe migrant work (2000:2).

This discussion is based on two years of ethnographic fieldwork that took place in the pastoral area of Tchín-Tabaraden<sup>3</sup> in Niger, as well as in its capital Niamey, engaging there with many people from the same families I had previously worked with in the pastoral setting.<sup>4</sup> My discussion starts by identifying the WoDaaBe conceptualisation of ethnicity and how characteristics important to their ethnic identity are explained and negotiated within the context of the city.<sup>5</sup> The discussion then looks briefly at the relationship between

sedentarisation and pastoralism and analyses some of the strategies that WoDaaBe have historically used to respond to the loss of livestock, demonstrating that some WoDaaBe migrant workers place temporary retreats from the pastoral economy as a 'traditional' way of herd reconstruction. My discussion on WoDaaBe strategies of survival benefits from theories on risk management in arid land, focusing on how adaptation to the insecure circumstances is based on a dynamic flexibility, where various kinds of resources are exploited (see Bruijn and Dijk 1999; Park 1993b). Contrary to past associations of migrant work with shame and thus failure of being WoDaaBe, the discussion suggests that mobility has among some migrant workers presently become a dominant symbol. Even though shame – a notion strongly linked with WoDaaBe ethnicity – is in some cases experienced by the migrant workers, it is more associated with the failure to earn income, rather than with migrant work in general.

### WoDaaBe Ethnic Identity

When God created WoDaaBe, God gave them migration movements (*gonsul*) as their tradition. Thus, when WoDaaBe came into existence they had migration movement. That is to be WoDaaBe. We are WoDaaBe because of migration. All of us migrate. WoDaaBe leave a place, we find grass, call our cows, take them there (Tape transcript, 02.1997:2).

These words, from an elderly WoDaaBe herder in Tchín-Tabaraden, express clearly the intrinsic value of mobility, as integrated with pleasure, meaning and a sense of an ethnic identity. Scholars of pastoral communities have emphasised animals as source of symbols and social connections as well as reproducing the social system through creating and maintaining social relations (Galaty and Johnson 1990; Brandstrom et al. 1979). WoDaaBe engagement with cattle thus creates certain embodied experience that cannot be simplified into either economic or symbolic terms (see also Loftsdóttir 2001a). WoDaaBe identification with cattle and mobility is a strong theme in the various origin myths collected by scholars at different times, generally stating that the WoDaaBe as an ethnic group and cattle came to existence at the same time. In many such stories, WoDaaBe, cattle and migration movements are seen as an integrated part of each other (for example Adebayo 1991; Dupire 1962; 29-33; De St. Croix 1972 [1945]:8; Stenning 1959:20). WoDaaBe have an extensive vocabulary to refer to migration movements, classifying for example movements according to the length being covered, or the season during which migration takes place. The importance of cattle and mobility for WoDaaBe self-image and subsistence is also expressed in the extensive taboos associated with these spheres of life.<sup>6</sup>

WoDaaBe often explain their ethnic identity by directly juxtaposing themselves in relation to other ethnic groups; the sedentary Hausa frequently constituting a major sign of counter-identification, which is interesting when considered that a majority of the population in the Tchín-Tabaraden area is

composed of Tuaregs with a smaller population of individuals identified as Arabs, WoDaaBe and Fulani (Mabbutt and Floret 1980:126). This could be explained by the fact that Fulani ethnic identity, as Burnham and Last have pointed out, was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century much articulated through a contrast with Hausa (Burnham and Last 1994). This conceptualisation of WoDaaBe in relation to other ethnic groups draws a strong binary polarisation of the bush and the city/villages, of purity and dirt, identifying the former with WoDaaBe, the latter with other ethnic groups.<sup>7</sup> WoDaaBe furthermore characterise agriculture as drudgery, and generally state that they as WoDaaBe never engage in it. In more informal interviews people, however, assert that agriculture has constituted an important fall back activity for WoDaaBe during difficult times (see discussion in Loftsdóttir 2001b). WoDaaBe views of the bush (*ladde*) are contradictory, in some contexts drawing such binary oppositions of the city and the bush, while in other contexts towns are conceptualised as a part of the bush, and agriculture and pastoralism as integrated spheres of activities (see Loftsdóttir 2001a).

Most classical scholarly works characterise WoDaaBe as a part of the Fulani,<sup>7</sup> speaking the same language and sharing many similar traditions (Dupire 1962; Stenning 1959). Fulani groups also place strong emphasis on pastoralism as an aspect to their ethnic identity (for example: Azarya 1993:38; Guichard 1990; VerEecke 1989; Adamu and Kirk-Greene 1986). In spite of sharing the same language and many cultural traditions, the relationship of Fulani and WoDaaBe is entangled in various ambiguities and contemporary WoDaaBe generally do not identify themselves as belonging to the Fulani ethnic group. This relationship of WoDaaBe to wider Fulani society is a good indication of the ambiguities and fluidity of WoDaaBe ethnicity. While Fulani also draw up typologies when characterising their ethnicity (see Burnham 1999:271), studies have shown that Fulani ethnicity is in practice quite fluid, having changed in various ways. Some Fulani groups have emphasised pastoralism as important to their ethnicity even in cases where they have become fully sedentary (Waldie 1990), while other Fulani groups have emphasised aspects not related to pastoralism in new conditions (Shimada 1993). Different Fulani groups, furthermore, classify their boundaries with other groups and within themselves in various ways depending on various historical factors (Schultz 1980; Frantz 1986; Adamu and Kirk-Greene 1986).

In addition to associating their ethnicity with herding life, WoDaaBe base their identity as a group on certain typological moral rules that they perceive as unique to themselves. *MboDangaaku*, *semteDum* and *munyal* are key concepts in this context. The idea of *mboDangaaku* is particularly important because many WoDaaBe use it to differentiate themselves from other ethnic groups, including the Fulani. Fulani, however, express the core of their ethnic identity in the idea of *pulaaku*, seen (as WoDaaBe's *mbodagansi*) as separating themselves from other ethnicities (see for example: VerEecke 1993; 4;

Stenning 1959:55). Dupire uses, in her study on WoDaaBe in Niger, the concept *mboDangaaku* to refer to key components of WoDaaBe identity (1962), while Stenning's research conducted among WoDaaBe groups in Nigeria at a similar time uses the term *pulaaku* (1959). According to Bonfiglioli's research, WoDaaBe abandoned the term *pulaaku* in favour of the term *mboDangaaku* in order to reaffirm their separation from the Fulani which, Bonfiglioli claims, WoDaaBe felt had become too absorbed in values they associated with the Hausa (1988:63).<sup>8</sup> I will not attempt here to define the difference between these two terms or the complex relationship between the Fulani and WoDaaBe, but focus on *mboDangaaku* in relation to WoDaaBe. It is, however, clear that the boundaries between these two groups are not easily defined and that these two concepts share in many respects similar general meanings even though being probably interpreted differently by individuals and groups.

The concept *mboDangaaku* is composed of the concept *mboda*, meaning taboo or avoidance in English. The name 'WoDaaBe' is derived from the same root (Reed 1932:424), and was, according to Dupire (1962:32), coined by more orthodox Muslim Fulani to refer to those who had been banned by the prophet due to their pagan beliefs. WoDaaBe themselves usually explain their ethnic label as referring to those who respect taboos.<sup>9</sup> Even though presumably deriving from the same root, the contemporary meaning of *mboDangaaku* and *mboDa* differs somewhat. If asked to describe *mboDangaaku*, most individuals mention rather formal acts. These acts include those that can be characterised as *mboDa* but are not exclusive of it. Included are expressions of respect to parents-in-law; inclusion of a mother after the pregnancy of her first child (*bofido*), in addition to a stress on obeying general rules of hospitality, and generosity with one's kind. The strong association of *MboDangaaku* with hospitality is demonstrated in an elderly man's expression that someone with a *mboDangaaku* is generous in giving cattle-loans (*habana'i*) (Tape transcript [3]September 1997). Reed correctly points out that many Fulani groups have *mboDa*, these thus not being exclusive to the WoDaaBe (Reed 1932:431).

WoDaaBe themselves generally explained *mboDangaaku* as deriving from *mboDa* (as the term itself implies) but here I want to suggest that it is very possible that it derives more from the name WoDaaBe, than from taboos per se. I am by this not disclaiming the importance of *mboDa* for WoDaaBe ethnicity, because following taboos is an important aspect of WoDaaBe everyday actions in all spheres of society, as I have discussed in relation to cattle and migration.<sup>10</sup> The concept *pulaaku* derives from the same root as FulBe (singular Pullo), the Fulani term for themselves (Riesman 1977:131), and it is, in my opinion, thus possible that the concept *mboDangaaku* is simply derived from the name WoDaaBe (singular Bodaado) and points more to 'qualities appropriate to WoDaaBe', than taboos per se (similarly to *pulaaku* meaning 'qualities appropriate to the Fulani') (Riesman 1977:131). Referring back to Bonfiglioli's

comment that WoDaaBe abandoned *pulaaku* in separating themselves from Fulani, this could mean that the WoDaaBe coining of a specific ethnic code for themselves was built on references to qualities appropriate to them rather than to taboos per se. *MboDangaaku* is thus associated with rather formal rules of conduct, some based on accepted taboos, others associated with general respect towards others, but in short, it can be seen as referring to an adherence to WoDaaBe values.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to *mboDangaaku*, WoDaaBe mention *semteDum* (shame) and *munya* (patience) as central to their ethnic identity.<sup>11</sup> To have *semteDum* is to know the correct moral behaviour in certain situations, such as how to interact with one's parents in law and those who are older. There are several ways in which a person can behave shamefully, all involving that the person has in one way or another lost his or her self-control. Usually such situations involve the persons showing that they are not in control of their emotions or that they have some primordial needs, such as eating, defecating and/or need for other people. The need for self-control becomes more crucial when in certain culturally defined relationships, such as in interaction with one's parents and parents in law (see discussion Riesman 1977). Again, we can benefit from Riesman's insights in terms of *pulaaku*, but he points out that people are said to lack *semteDum* if they perform those actions that indicate lack of *pulaaku*. The concept *semteDum* can thus, according to Riesman, be translated as the lack of *pulaaku* (Riesman 1977:131). Assuming that the meaning of *pulaaku* and *mboDangaaku* is closely related (if not the same), it can thus be suggested that *semteDum* in relation to WoDaaBe refers to a lack of *mboDangaaku*.

### **Diversification strategies**

Recent perspectives on pastoral nomadism emphasise boundaries between agriculture and pastoralism as fluid and constantly changing (see for example: Johnson 1969:12; Swift 1979:1-2), making it common for groups to shift from one occupation to another as a response to environmental fluctuations or a changing social-political environment (Horowitz and Little 1987:72). An exchange relationship with agricultural communities has not only been important to WoDaaBe pastoralism but WoDaaBe have historically retreated temporarily to agriculture to reconstruct their herds during difficult times (Dupire 1962).

However, while heavy fluctuations in the availability of natural resources often characterise the daily lives of inhabitants of arid environments, policy making has often been biased toward emphasising stability and normal situations (Bruijn and Dijk 1999:116). It can thus be stated that production in arid lands takes forms that seek to adapt to situations where 'drought is, to a degree, a normal condition rather than an aberration' (Park 1993a:8; see also Burnham 1980:167-168), in addition to responding to various political factors and instabilities (Park 1993b:329). The sedentary sector is capable in absorbing excess

labour from the pastoral society, providing various diversified occupations and thus minimising risk in pastoral societies (Park 1993b:310). Sedentarisation can thus be seen as a constant feature of pastoral societies as demonstrated in Barth's classic ethnography of the Basseri; nomadic populations both temporarily retreating to occupations associated with sedentary life but in some cases becoming integrated with sedentary populations (Barth 1961:118-120; Burnham 1980:163; see also review article on sedentarisation in Fratkin 1997).

WoDaaBe have historically used mobility extensively as a way of responding to changing conditions, then for seasonal, personal and political variability (Bonfiglioli 1991). WoDaaBe move camp on average every three days, thus making use as with other pastoral nomads of the scattered resources, fitting their mode of production into the pulsating environment of their arid habitat (see Johnson 1993:27; Glantz 1987:51). The WoDaaBe home (*wuro*)<sup>12</sup> is highly adapted to this extensive mobility, being composed of relatively few items that can rather easily be transported, in addition to being composed of several smaller units, which are flexible to cattle ownership and the need for labour, which is important to respond to changing ecological and social environments.

WoDaaBe economic activities have also, as previously mentioned, fluctuated across a spectrum of various engagements in farming and pastoralism (Bonfiglioli 1988:96; Dupire 1972:44-55; Dupire 1962:340; Dupire 1962b:339; Stenning 1959:8). Other diversification strategies have existed as well as a response to marginal situations. WoDaaBe women have during difficult times gone to the market towns and received payment for repairing calabashes, pounding millet, and braiding other women's hair (Dupire 1962:127; also Wilson 1992:21). WoDaaBe also became hired herders (*jokkere*), taking care of other people's animals (Dupire 1962:126-127; also Dupire 1962b: 336).

Even though people have to some extent always retreated to cities and towns, extensive migrant labour among WoDaaBe started only in the aftermath of the drought of 1968-74. This drought period and the consequent WoDaaBe livestock loss have to be seen as due to various political and historical reasons which will not be discussed in any detail here, even though several interacting factors will be mentioned that led to this change from agriculture to migrant labour as a way of herd reconstruction. Global policies during the colonial and post-colonial period emphasised agricultural production at the expense of herding populations, thus reducing the general area of land for pastoral livelihoods, making their herding economy less able to respond to environmental fluctuations (see for example Breman et al 1986; White 1997). The availability of good agricultural land also reduced considerably due to Niger's growing population. This increase in population cannot be seen as taking place independently from various polities of the colonial and post-colonial state (see Bonfiglioli 1988). In any case, the population pressures in the south led many



people to cultivate in the pastoral area and some herders to take up agricultural activities. Out-migration and the hired-herder-work increased thus considerably as fallback activities among WoDaaBe in the 1970s, when access to good agricultural land was more limited (see also Swift et al. 1984:489).

### **Migrant Workers and the Pastoral Economy**

It is difficult to estimate the extent of WoDaaBe migrant work in the present due to the lack of statistical data, even though some indication is given in a research report by Jeremy Swift et al. conducted in relation to the Niger Range and Livestock project published in 1984. The various lineages are diversely engaged in migrant work, but the report estimates that the group studied most extensively by me is in the middle range when compared with other WoDaaBe lineages. The report states that for a 12 month period, about a quarter of the adult population left the pastoral economy at least once for migrant work, and furthermore estimates that 65 percent of households in Tchin-Tabaraden have household members who are migrant labourers (Swift et al, 1984:493). The majority of Niger's migrant workers are males (Masquelier 2000:100), and even though this is the case, WoDaaBe women also actively engage in migrant work.<sup>13</sup> The occupations migrant workers engage in are diverse and differ somewhat according to gender. While men work as security guards, labourers, sell tea and ropes, women often engage in hair styling of other women, as well as various kind of manual work. Both men and women engage in craft production, making jewelry and embroidering clothing. As discussed by Sheila S. Walker, Fulani women often become more secluded with increased urbanisation, especially those of high status (1980:57-58).

WoDaaBe migrant workers visit their extended family in the bush at least once a year, even several times per year, usually at the end of the rainy season. In some cases, parents leave their young children who are no longer breast-feeding with their grandparents in the bush. Women, accompanied by their children, also often stay for a few weeks or months among their natal family. In the city, several WoDaaBe families usually live in the same area and despite interacting with members of other ethnic groups, they associate mostly with other WoDaaBe families, preferably those from the same lineage group. A single homestead in the city thus usually incorporates individuals from the same lineage group, even though not necessarily from the same extended family.

WoDaaBe migrant workers generally state that they are engaged in migrant work due to necessity, expressing the desire to rebuild their herds. Many men claim that they intend to send money to their extended families in the bush, for corn and other necessities. Most have, however, hardly enough to feed themselves, and thus in fact only occasionally send cash. In addition, many migrant labourers become used to different consumption patterns during their stay in the city, making the cost of living somewhat high. Studies have conse-

quently shown that migrant work is in the long term not an efficient way of reconstructing herds (Swift et al. 1984:489; White 1997:99).<sup>14</sup> Migrant workers are generally absent from the bush during the dry season when labour requirements are most intense and their labour is in fact most needed. C. White suggests that this contradiction can be seen as due the acute food shortage in the dry season. Even though a small herd requires similar labour as a large herd, it is not able to feed the same number of people (1990:99 and 1986). As other studies have shown, the draining of the most valuable working force from the pastoral society can be seen as a constant feature of migrant work (Arnould 1990:341; White 1990:99). It can however be suggested that the relative flexible household organisation, where one camp (*wuro*) can be constituted and reconstituted by different families, is able, to some extent, to respond to these labour shortages which occur when the most valuable part of the labour force leaves for migrant work. In such situations, a few households will form one camp allowing cooperation. The benefits of migrant labour can thus be seen as primarily being the reduction of cereal consumption in the household and the occasional earnings, both leading to reduction of animal sales during the dry season. The migrant worker, even though not earning enough to rebuild his herd, is at least able to refrain from selling the animals he already has.<sup>15</sup> Even though not all WoDaaBe migrant workers will necessarily return to the bush for a permanent stay, they see themselves as only staying in the city for limited time, and return regularly to the pastoral economy for a few months or weeks every year to engage with their larger lineage group and the herding community. It is somewhat ironic that the migrant workers flock to the bush during the end of the rainy season, i.e. at time of prosperity and low labour requirements, when food and milk is abundant and social activities are at their peak.

### **Ethnic Boundaries in the City**

Processes of globalisation have in many cases intensified borders and also the markers of inequality, even though not acting on passive subjects (Cooper 2001). In a way, global processes of colonial policies and post-colonial development strategies have contributed toward WoDaaBe marginalisation and loss of self determination, simultaneously as WoDaaBe use windows of opportunities opened up by processes also identified with globalisation. WoDaaBe have tapped into a global imagery of indigenous people and thus increased commercial interest of Westerners in 'authentic' indigenous objects, by making and selling craft objects (Loftsdóttir 2002). People's ways of resisting thus not only involve the appropriation and transformation of new elements as theorists have importantly emphasised, but also the constant negotiation and new ways of understanding their own cultural traditions.

WoDaaBe have, naturally, always related to other ethnic groups, negotiating rights to pasture and water, in addition to engagement in various trading activ-

ities. The WoDaaBe in the Tchín-Tabaraden area who share the same general area as Tuareg herders and cultivators are probably more influenced by Tuareg culture than WoDaaBe groups in differently composed areas, often speaking Tamasheq fluently and adopting Tuareg cultural artifacts. The relations between these groups are characterised by cooperation, such as well-digging, but also by conflict especially over the use of natural resources (Swift et al. 1984:342). In the city, WoDaaBe interact with various other ethnic groups. Many migrant workers are familiar with the Hausa language, and able to speak it fluently.

As discussed by Mette Bovin in relation to WoDaaBe in the eastern part of Niger, WoDaaBe use various other markers to distinguish themselves from their neighbours, for example through tattoos, jewelry and clothing in addition to domestic objects (Bovin 1985:64). Cultural performances are also important in affirming their ethnic identity in contrast with other groups (Bovin 2001). In a city context, such markers of identity gain intensified meaning in distinguishing the WoDaaBe from other populations. WoDaaBe migrant workers openly state that their special kind of jewelry, clothing and bodily decorations mark them as different from other populations in the city. One WoDaaBe informant remarked that these visual symbols (*Jelgol*) were in a way similar to the earmarking of animals, both affirming a belonging to a specific group. Once a year, at the end of the Ramadan, WoDaaBe conduct a large dance festival (*Juulde*) in Niamey, displaying some key markers of their ethnic identity (Loftsdóttir 2000:322-342). With increased contact with others or in difficult political circumstances, increased stress can be placed on cultural differences, thus underlining the distinction of 'us' and 'others' (see discussion in Werbner 2001:135). It could be claimed that this symbiotic relationship with others, in addition to increased marginality, stresses the WoDaaBe need to emphasise their difference from other ethnic groups. The emphasis WoDaaBe place on wearing clothing and jewelry seen as distinctively WoDaaBe, in addition to previously described behaviour, shows a strong affirmation of ethnic boundaries. It is generally an insult to say to another WoDaaBe that he or she looked or behaved like a member of another ethnic group. Young men, for example, who stand in a culturally defined joking-relationships (either in the same age group or cross-cousins) often refer to one other as Hausa or Tuaregs, intended as a friendly insult. Too much association with members of other ethnic groups in the city is generally criticised and mocked.

Even though WoDaaBe have various interactions with other ethnic groups in the city context, just as in the bush, these relations are mostly relations of trading or business associations. WoDaaBe generally choose to interact on a day-to-day basis with other WoDaaBe, usually from the same lineage group. Artisanry makers, for example, often gather at the homestead of a WoDaaBe kin, spending the day together while making jewelry (similarly to various craft making in the bush). Women similarly gather at someone's homestead to make

embroidery for garments sold to tourists, and often assemble together in groups to dress the hair of women from other ethnic groups. WoDaaBe endogamous practices, the preferable form of marriage being between the children of brothers, show in themselves the strong emphasis on maintaining separation from those defined as ethnic-others. Sexual relationships or marriages with members of other ethnic groups are considered highly undesirable, if not impossible.

Ethnicity is, however, not the only marker of boundaries; bonds and boundaries being constituted in various ways. WoDaaBe have, as previously mentioned, a reputation among other ethnicities of being marginally engaged in Islam. Scholarly references have in line with this point often de-emphasised WoDaaBe involvement in Islam. WoDaaBe, however, have defined themselves as Muslims for a very long time. Here it has to be kept in mind that the definition of a 'Muslim' has always been a politically contested issue, linked with claims to 'authentic' Islam. WoDaaBe migrant workers still interact with the larger Islamic community more often than in the bush, thus experiencing themselves in a sense as a part of a broader religious community. Many migrant workers thus adhere more closely to formalised Muslim practices, sharing these with their extended family while in the bush.

### **Shame and Migrant Work**

In her writings, Dupire indicates an element of shame associated with being engaged in occupations other than herding animals (Dupire 1962: 126-127). As my discussion has demonstrated, contemporary WoDaaBe not only work as hired herders but engage in various activities that have no relation to herding or to life in the bush. More recently, some authors emphasise shame as experienced by WoDaaBe migrant labourers due to their work in the city (Swift et al. 1984:492; White 1997:100; Bovin 1990:38). After the drought period 1968-74, WoDaaBe migrant workers preferred work in far away cities in neighbouring countries, involving high transportation costs, as opposed to finding work in Niger's cities, a trend that Swift et al. suggest that could be due to feelings of shame at being engaged in city work (Swift et al. 1984:492). One informant confirmed this point by telling me that when the artisanry work<sup>16</sup> was initially starting, people felt shameful (*Be nani semteDum*) selling items in the city. When taking the finished products to the market, they would hide them inside their clothing so other people could neither see nor guess that they were going to sell them.

In my own research, I did not find WoDaaBe migrant workers generally shameful of their work in the city. Some individuals were on the contrary relatively proud of urban work, emphasising their importance in providing a security net for those in the bush. Those who expressed shame in relation to their work were not shameful of having an occupation outside the pastoral economy but more of their inability to rebuild their herd or in sending money to

their extended family in the bush. I think that the difference between my results and previous studies can be sought in several interacting factors. As my preceding discussion demonstrated *semteDum* must be understood as a part of a larger system of WoDaaBe identity. Shame in WoDaaBe society is associated with the lack of following the values of *mboDangaaku*, which most WoDaaBe see as embodying the essence of being WoDaaBe. Association with migrant work can thus have been conceptualised as shameful because it was seen as marking a step away from being and behaving as WoDaaBe. It is not surprising that new ways of subsistence, especially when taking place in cities, appear deviant. This can be further intensified by the fact that in the Sahel area various occupations are often strongly associated with certain ethnicities (Horowitz 1972). Most everyday craft objects used by WoDaaBe in the Tchín-Tabaraden area, such as shoes, spoons, saddles, beds, are bought from special sections or castes within Tuareg society.

But other factors can also be mentioned relating to notions of shame and dependability. Generosity is highly valued in WoDaaBe society as a moral obligation and as intrinsic to someone's identity as WoDaaBe (to *mboDangaaku*), emphasising generosity to one's lineage group, and hospitality to others from distant lineage groups and ethnicities.<sup>17</sup> The strong emphasis on *semteDum* and egalitarianism is manifested in it being considered shameful for the family if some of its members are much poorer than others. I observed, however, that in practice some individuals who owned a reasonable number of animals were not considered shameful, even though their close kin may have possessed very few animals. This can be attributed to these affluent individuals being generous toward others, giving a great deal of cattle loans in addition to 'helping' with small gifts of necessary things.<sup>18</sup> Even though WoDaaBe society and its Islamic values place a strong value on generosity, a poor person within a lineage group will still feel shame if constantly accepting from others. A poor brother will thus in the long run experience a sense of shame if he always has to be dependent on the household of a more affluent brother. Some people told me that they generally experienced a sense of shame when having to ask for help with food or other necessities. I heard of two cases where individuals (both males) left their community and family because they felt shame in this regard.

Thus even though I did not find that shame was associated with migrant work per se, I saw it associated with the failure to earn enough in the city. One elderly migrant worker directly stated that the artisanry work is not shameful, but rather the work in relation to selling tea, rope or water carrying. WoDaaBe generally state that these occupations do not provide a great deal of income, that those engaged in these tasks usually only make enough to eat and would prefer other kinds of occupations. The artisanry work and the selling of turbans carry, however, the possibility and hopes of gaining some income but both these occupations require start-up capital. Some occupations, such as tea selling,

rope making and water carrying are associated with failure, and may thus be considered shameful.

The feeling of shame for not having anything is clearly expressed in the speech of Ali, the migrant labourer I quoted at the beginning of my discussion:

There are people who are able to stay in the bush, but I don't have a chance, because I don't have anything, only those who have animals can stay in the bush. I have close to nothing. I want to sit down in the bush with my family, all my people are in the bush, but I do not have the opportunity of staying there. I am sad and I feel shameful to my people because I have nothing.

It is possible that in the past, migrant labour was considered shameful because migrant work was associated with the failure to adhere to the right way of being WoDaaBe, in addition to being associated with the inability of providing for oneself. Today, the migrant workers associate shame not as much with their work as with their inability to fulfill their goals in the city and thus potentially becoming more economically dependent on others. The migrant workers themselves, furthermore, emphasise their work as important in creating new diversification strategies. This need for diversification is not only an individual strategy but is, as indicated, conceptualised by the migrant workers as a strategy of reducing risk for the family or lineage group as a whole, and in a way creating continuity with other strategies of risk management, such as agriculture. The emphasis on risk management is clear in the following quotation from a man who has worked as a migrant worker since the middle of the 1980s:

If there is another drought, another time that majority of the cows will die, I will have some skills to help my family in the bush. I know different types of work, I know different languages, and I know what to do in the city. What does my brother who always stays in the bush want to do then? (Notebook 18.01.1997).

Several migrant labourers tell me that the WoDaaBe need to know new skills to make a living, in order to survive during difficult periods. 'Now all WoDaaBe are engaged in commercialism', an elderly migrant worker told me. He continued:

Those WoDaaBe who have foresight are engaged in commercialism, even though they also keep cows. If you see someone who is only thinking about his cows and has no other way of gaining an income, he is not very aware of the present situation (Tape transcript October 15, 1997).

WoDaaBe conceptions of migrant work are obviously not uniform. During an interview with a small group of elderly men, many who have sons and daughters engaged in migrant work, one man (who has never been engaged in migrant work himself) said that migrant work involved the 'herding' of clothing (*ngaynaaka koltal*), commenting on the colourful garments which many male migrant laborers wear, and the stress these young men place on their outer appearance. This comment in my view was clearly intended at criticising the higher consumption standards of some migrant workers, especially the men

who often arrive in the bush well dressed, carrying radios and other consumption items when returning for an occasional stay with their extended family. Migrant work itself is also seen in conflicting ways by the migrant workers themselves, work in the city creating new ways of belonging, through new ways of being and learning. Even though speaking nostalgically about the bush while in the city, as a site of pleasure and fulfilment, the same people tended to speak very differently while in the bush, emphasising the harshness and difficulties of herding life. Both migrant women and men complained to me during their periodical stay in the bush that the work there was difficult and there was little to eat, thus in some ways contradicting their own descriptions of the bush while in the city. The identity of migrant workers, as others, is thus not constructed by singular, unified subjects but generated through practices and experiences that are highly dispersed (see Fortier 2000:10).

Attachment and movement (Fortier 2000) are useful in understanding migrant workers' sense of belonging and identity; a stay in the city being understood by referring to attachment to the herding life while an extensive sojourn in the city creates a new sense of belonging and attachment. The constant travelling back and forth between city and bush results furthermore in constant interactions between these spheres of activity and living. Younger brothers see their older brother return with desired goods, and observe these differently and more positively than the father who used the term 'herding of clothing'. One man who has worked as a migrant worker since the middle of the 1980s told me that originally he went to Nigeria contrary to his father's wishes because he saw his brother return back to the bush with a lot of valuable goods. More than a decade later, I observed his younger brother in his early twenties doing the same, leaving his father's household for a while, confiding in me that he wanted to 'do' as his brother. He added that he was 'tired' of the bush, almost as if forgetting his older brother's desire to return to the herding life. Interviews with women who do occasional travelling in groups to remote places, to sell medicines or craft items, similarly indicated that migrant work is not only a result of necessity but also of the desire of experiencing something new and gaining of independent income.

Another contested issue involves the growing concern about WoDaaBe children being brought up in the city, not learning the 'correct' WoDaaBe behaviour (*mboDangaaku*) as well as being unfamiliar with the life of the pastoralist. One lineage chief stated directly to me during his short visit to Niamey: 'When a young man and woman have children here [in the city] they [the children] do not know WoDaaBe, they don't know herding' (tape transcript 0.03.1997). Migrant workers, men and women, expressed such concerns as well, fearing that their children would associate too much with members of other ethnic groups and thus learn behaviour that they considered inappropriate. When two teenage brothers were caught stealing from individuals from their own lineage group, my male and female friends quietly

explained their actions by telling me that the children had no shame (*be semtada*), associating the notion of shame with having abandoned the values of WoDaaBe. These children's behaviour showed that they were lost (*be halki*) to the path of being WoDaaBe.

### **The Ongoing Travel**

The WoDaaBe social system and culture have undergone constant changes as far as their written history shows, having responded to changing political conditions and physical environments. It would thus be a misleading simplification to view their exposure to the city in a binary opposition to their lives in the bush. Their arrival in the city has to be placed in a context of their economic strategies that involve a constant interacting with members of other ethnicities. The city, as with other new conditions previously, creates situations where the 'normal' codes of behaviour are often not possible. On various occasions, I noticed migrant workers acting and behaving differently in the city than I had previously observed in the bush, not observing the various taboos as carefully. When asked, several individuals told me that this is due to it being almost impossible to preserve certain taboos in a correct way in the city. Simply speaking: life in the city is different, giving rise to situations that would never arise in the bush. Unclean water is everywhere on the streets but it is a taboo for WoDaaBe to step into or over water that has been used for washing or bathing. In the city, furthermore, meat is bought and thus there is an uncertainty whether the killing was conducted the right way. Even though attempting to follow taboos as strictly as they could, migrant workers seemed more ready to bend these rules than in the bush. Only the fact that they associate day to day much with other WoDaaBe, having the same social rules, makes it easier to adhere to taboos.

On a certain level, I suspect that many WoDaaBe consider the rules of conduct in the city different from the rules of conduct in the bush. The city can be defined as more of a neutral zone. Although people do not generally put their taboos aside, some rules are not as strictly followed in the city. Space for different kinds of behaviour increases in the city, interactions with various people and everyday rules do not have to be as strictly observed as in the bush. The migrant workers sometimes explained this to me by referring to their stay in the city as an ongoing travel. Even though this explanation was posed in a casual way and they probably did not place as strong a meaning on this metaphor as I do here, I think that it shows an interesting reflection of their relations to the city. Some things, not permitted within the everyday social space in the bush can be done in the city. Within camps, men and women do not eat together, but do so sometimes while traveling and occasionally in the city. Interaction between different lineage groups is, furthermore, different in the city. Individuals interact much more with those from other WoDaaBe lineages than they would in the bush, which is not surprising when it is considered that



there are not many WoDaaBe in the city. Conflicts from the bush are also put aside in the city. Members from lineages that have had an unsettled dispute do not confront each other about it in the city. During the *juulde* dance performances in the city, which involves various lineage groups, the elderly men strongly emphasise to the younger ones that conflicts must not break out. When asked, both young and older men pointed out to me that it would reflect badly on WoDaaBe as a group to express hostility towards each other in such a context. Thus, even though WoDaaBe try to maintain the same taboos and rules as in the bush, they still accept more flexibility in the city, creating a neutral space that is defined as 'travel'.

The tendency to reduce the importance of coded behaviour during travelling makes it possible to respond to new situations where normal behaviour is not appropriate or possible. Travelling is the state of being between different social locations and even the stay in the marketplace itself is often defined as a part of the travel.

## Final Remarks

WoDaaBe lives in the past and the present have been integrated with mobility, in one form or another – travel, migration movement, migrant work – all constituting different ways of being mobile. WoDaaBe vocabulary, involving a great number of terms referring to mobility, furthermore underlines its importance. As discussed in the introduction, recent advances in theorising have in a somewhat contradictory way emphasised flows as associated with ethnic identities, while at the same time implying movements of people as being a recent phenomenon in a solid, bounded world. From these contradictions in theorising, I have focused on people whose lives have always been characterised by mobility but have turned to new ways of being mobile, and thus to some extent renegotiating key notions of their ethnic identity. My discussion has thus looked at some of these theoretical contradictions from the lives of WoDaaBe pastoral nomads, for whom mobility and flow have been key issues in relation to their own ethnicity and identity, simultaneously as their ethnicity has been based on a strong notion of inclusiveness and purity. Turning the theoretical gaze toward pastoral people in the context of mobility can thus underline the importance of acknowledging flows as predating current debates in relation to globalisation. From these contradictions in theorising – the contradiction of theorising culture as always fluid and contextual while simultaneously theorising the increased flow of people as recent – it becomes particularly important to emphasise flow and movements as an old part of the human condition, as well as to analyse how mobility is conceptualised and understood in different cultural contexts. My discussion has indicated that the WoDaaBe migrant workers use mobility to characterise themselves, even in situations where they would be defined as sedentary by a larger world.

Within pastoral societies, flexibility regarding new circumstances and mobility have been some of the main features of adaptability to conditions that are risky due to their variability. WoDaaBe have through their history used various means to respond to changed circumstances, but have continued to characterise themselves in relation to pastoralism. My discussion has mostly focused on how the key ideas of shame and *mboDangaaku* are negotiated by migrant workers in the context of the city, indicating that even though WoDaaBe migrant workers used to see their occupations in the city as shameful, many migrant workers today see their occupation as new subsistence strategies, as a part of mobility, and thus aiming at reducing risk during times of difficulty in the pastoral economy. By associating migrant work with risk management, WoDaaBe migrant workers situate their work within traditional ways of reducing risk, creating a continuous thread from past to present in addition to adapting the ideas of shame and *mboDangaaku* to changed circumstances.

I find it particularly interesting that a stay in the city is sometimes identified as a long ongoing travel, and thus situated within general ideas of known and accepted ways of mobility. As with travelling, some taboos and norms can be broken if necessary. This metaphor in association with other aspects discussed implies that instead of WoDaaBe seeing the stay in the city as an aspect of sedentarisation, of abandoning mobility and fixity in one place, they view it as the opposite, i.e., as an ongoing journey that will eventually lead them back to the bush.

## Notes

1. The capitalised B and D refer to the glottalised consonants in the Fulfulde language (see Pelletier and Skinner 1981:3). Riesman calls these sounds 'injective' consonants (Riesman 1977:xxi). The glottal stop is indicated by an apostrophe. The singular for WoDaaBe is BoDaaDo, however, in order to make the text less confusing for non-Fulfulde speakers, I use the term WoDaaBe both in the singular and plural sense.
2. WoDaaBe are characterised by great diversity, being divided into different lineages with to some extent different cultural traditions, in addition to groups of WoDaaBe located in different ecological zones of variously composed populations. WoDaaBe themselves emphasise this diversity in various contexts (see Loftsdóttir 2000). The research that this discussion is based on was conducted in the area of Tahoua, in the surroundings of Tchín-Tabaraden, in the north-western part of Niger. The research was mostly among a particular lineage group within the WoDaaBe patrilineal society, even though people from a greater number of lineages were interviewed in Niamey. Due to the need to protect the identity of those sharing their life-stories with me, I see no need in this paper of detailing further the specific lineage groups in question. My dissertation research focused mostly on migrant workers involved in the tourist related activities in Niamey, and thus my data take more account of their conceptualisation of their occupations than

among those in other occupations. It should be noted that my study did not involve fully sedentarised WoDaaBe. Even though there are without doubt WoDaaBe families who have become absorbed in the broader sedentary population, these individuals would probably not be recognised by most other WoDaaBe as enjoying a WoDaaBe identity. A WoDaaBe woman who lived in a small town, married to a Fulani man, was never referred to me or generally talked about as being WoDaaBe. Other WoDaaBe would confide to me that she was actually WoDaaBe.

3. The name Tchin-Tabaraden refers both to the market town Tchin-Tabaraden, populated by around 2,000 inhabitants and the Tchin-Tabaraden district. The markets at Kao and Abalak are also regularly visited by nomads living in the area, selling livestock and milk and buying corn and other necessities. The district population was estimated as being 103,790 in 1977, a majority being engaged in pastoral production (Loutan 1982:4-5).
4. My ethnographic research was conducted from August 1996 to June 1998. I also conducted shorter research in Niger in 1999.
5. Studies on identity have increasingly emphasised the various dimensions of individuals' personal identity, ethnicity interacting with other aspects such as gender, skin colour and class (see Moore 1994:9). My discussion here will be limited to ethnic identity without diminishing the importance of other aspects of identity.
6. Taboos vary with regard to differing spheres of society, even though being especially associated with cattle.
7. Fulani refer to themselves as Fulbe. Many texts use the term Fulbe to refer to them even though they are also referred to texts in English as Fulani.
8. An excellent review of the use of the term *pulaaku* in various scholarly texts is given by Anneke Breedveld and Mirjam de Bruijn (1996).
9. WoDaaBe generally also point out the association between *moDa* and *mbodangaaku*. One individual stated, 'WoDaaBe have taboo (*mboDa*), because they follow taboo [...] WoDaaBe have *mboDangaaku* and Fulfulde' (Tape transcript 2, Feb. 1997:1).
10. Some rules associated with *mboDangaaku* are also referred to as *mboDa* (such as not saying the name of the first child), but they are *mboda* more for ethical reasons than because of people's fear misfortune if broken. Even though WoDaaBe see *mboDangaaku* as unique to themselves, they often use traditions existing among Fulani as well (which the Fulani call *pulaaku*) when giving examples of *mboDangaaku*.
11. Stenning states that Fulani identity is composed of several components, the most important being: *semteende* (*semteDum*), *hakkiilo* (which can be translated as care, forethought), and *munyal* (Stenning 1959:55). The WoDaaBe among whom I conducted my study generally did not mention *hakkiilo* as a central feature of their identity, but placed a strong emphasis on *munyal*. The concept *munyal* has many interrelated meanings and it is used in various contexts. I do not discuss it in the text since it is not much explored in relation to the theme of the paper. As *semteDum*,

- the idea of *munyal* (roughly translated it means patience) is associated with having control over one's feelings. Persons with *munyal* wait for something they want, even though it may never come. Children are said not to have *semteDum*, because they act on their feelings and do and say what they like. Someone with *semteDum* is thus generally reserved and respectful toward other people, not showing feelings or emotions (VerEecke 1989).
12. The WoDaaBe home, or *wuro* (plural *gure*), is composed by several smaller units called *cuudi* (singular *suudu*). In the Fulfulde language, the concept *wuro* has several meanings, sometimes used to describe a single hut, compound, village or town (see Sa'ad 1991:207). Riesman points out in relation to the Fulani in Burkina Faso that the concept *wuro* goes beyond referring simply to a 'house', but describes a sociographic unit, headed by a man, which usually is tied together by kinship (Riesman 1977:31).
  13. Most WoDaaBe women in the lineage group I worked with, do not have cattle but sometimes own goats, sheep or donkeys. Women owning cattle tend to leave them with their father's household several years after their marriage. This is due to women fearing their husbands selling their animals, or that they would have difficulties in claiming the animals in case of divorce. Loofboro points out in regard to the Fulani in Dallal Bosso, that during difficult times when there is not enough to eat, women's animals are the first ones to be sold (Loofboro 1993:32).
  14. The survey by Swift et al. indicates that there are somewhat fewer women migrant workers than men, or 8 women out of sample of 37 and 8 men out of 32. My own rough counting (assisted by WoDaaBe from several lineage groups) of the number of people engaged in migrant work in Niamey always indicated that women were somewhat fewer than men. My survey of 37 males in Niamey 1998 furthermore indicated that 10 of those 20 men who defined themselves as being married were not accompanied by their wives.
  15. WoDaaBe males obtain their first animals as young boys from their father. This animal constitutes their future herd, which if they become migrant workers, is usually left in the hands of the father of the household. Even though animals continue to belong to the son, the father can do with them what he finds necessary, being able to sell them in times of scarcity (to buy grain for the family or fodder for the other animals).
  16. WoDaaBe often use the term *artisana* to refer to their work. The term is probably adopted from French.
  17. WoDaaBe, for example, extensively participate in a gift system that they call *habana'i* (cattle loans). *Habana'i* involves a loan of animals between two individuals. The animal is returned to its owner when it has had two (sometimes three) offspring, which belong to the person borrowing the animal. Both men and women engage in cattle loans, even though the meagre women's ownership of animals limits their possibilities of 'loaning' their animals. These cattle loans are important both to establish oneself as a generous 'true' WoDaaBe, and in order to gain respect and good-will from others. Thus, cattle loans can be seen as a form of risk management, involving the transformation of cattle into social relationships that can be very important if the herder himself suffers the loss of his own herd.

18. It can also be suggested that *habana'i* makes it in some respects possible for persons to 'hide' how many cattle they own. The WoDaaBe emphasis on generosity is not only a conceptualisation important for *mboDangaaku* but also supported with references to Islamic values.

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