A Scrapbook of Children's Songs & Sayings to Birds in West Africa

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"Eneke the bird was asked why he was always on the wing. "Men have learned to shoot without missing their mark and I have learned to fly without perching on a twig."

Chinua Achebe (1958: 187) *Things Fall Apart*

Introduction

Knowing birds is a lifelong journey braided with personal audio and visual experiences as well as strands[1] encoded by the individual's socio-cultural setting and infused with their own imagination. How this knowing commences in the early years is shaped by social constructs of childhood. The types of interactions children have with birds are sometimes considered inappropriate for adults to engage in and consequently, it is easy for them to go unnoticed and unmentioned. Thought-provoking questions thus arise about the breadth of ethno-ornithology outsiders strive to document. Could we inadvertently be decoupling avian experiences in the early years from later adult bird knowledge? Are childhood bird experiences unique? Do early experiences inform later knowledge and perspectives on the avian world? How does knowing birds change when the life worlds of children change? The study of childhood bird interactions in West Africa is a wide open field yet to be examined in enough detail to formulate adequate responses for the different cultural settings that would need to be considered.

The subject can be approached in a number of ways. One angle is to look at the specific activities children engage in that bring them either into direct contact with birds, or encourage them to learn and think about birds. For direct contact, the following could be examined:

- Trapping and bird-liming[2]
- Hunting, especially with catapults
- Bird-nesting/dénichage[4]
- Playing with captured birds
- Imitating bird calls[3]
- Bird-scaring from crops
- Enticing wild birds to nest[5]
- Tending domestic birds[6]

For activities that encourage children to learn and think about birds, many bird-themed examples can be found in songs, rhymes, games and drawings but it is vital to contextualise these. Oger Kaboré's beautifully written book *Les Oiseaux s'Ébattent: Chansons Enfantines au Burkina-Faso*[7] is a rare, in-depth ethno-linguistic examination of the context and meaning of children's songs that lays bare their great depth of meaning—and two of his bird related examples will be presented in due course. In terms of contextualising children's play, we are

1 The diversity of these strands is important to stress: a child in West Africa may acquire knowledge of particular birds from folklore, local belief systems, imported religions (Christianity or Islam), traditional zootherapies, formal schooling, books, advertising, radio, television, internet etc.

2 For more details on this activity in the region see Manvell, (2025). This includes a discussion (pp.12-13) on the common practise of children cooking and eating birds, as well other animals, in the bush to supplement meat shortages at home which is highly relevant to contextualise the bird capturing activities listed here.

3 Kaboré (1985) gives some wonderful examples e.g. pp. 185-186 and 190—see also his second 'song' later.

4 To give the smallest of insights into this activity, Bargery (1934) provides the following definition for the Hausa word *danshini*: "The first espying a bird's nest and thereby establishing a prior claim to the young."

5 Though I do not have direct evidence of children providing nesting sites, it is most likely they do as they have been reported in linked activities e.g. removing the eggs of Speckled Pigeons from old enamel basins and clay pots to brood them under domestic pigeons in central Niger for later sale (Manvell, 2010: 57) and capturing for eating Little Swifts at the nests which are often provided for them in small calabashes in central Mali (Griaule, 1938: 110).

6 Certain chores in looking after poultry may be a particular responsibility of children. For example, Kuit *et al.* (1986) note that in central Mali the care of pigeons, and often their marketing, was the domain of young boys.

7 The author on page 15 explains his choice of title (The Birds are Frolicking) not only as a literal translation of an extract of one of the songs he examines, but also in a more figurative sense to describe the grace and unity of a group of children assembled dancing and singing as well as the wider symbolism of birds as children.

also fortunate to have from the region the work of one of the leading lights in the anthropology of childhood. David Lancy's doctoral research among the Kpelle in Liberia was later turned into a compelling work on the context and role of children's play (Lancy, 1996) that includes information on bird-naming games.

Assembled here are some snippets for those curious about this topic. The common thread binding the material is that they are records of the songs and sayings children have been observed to address to birds in their visual presence. They are thus distinct from songs and sayings[8] simply about birds. Without delving into a deep study of childhood bird interactions, anyone examining bird knowledge at the most elementary level through exploring bird names, can easily detour slightly and enquire after these childhood practises. As a corpus of study they provoke some fascinating questions, such as:

- Do children alone talk and sing to birds?
- How formulaic are verbalisations to them?
- What are the meanings behind them?
- How are they transmitted?
- Are they widely practised today?

It is not my intention to answer these questions, but by pulling them together I hope others will look further into them.

It is important to caution beforehand that all of the material bar that from Kaboré, was recorded by outsiders and may therefore bear some inaccuracies. Again apart from Kaboré's contribution, none of them come with any specific contextualisation, though two are derived from works looking at children's play more widely. In the absence of this, I have attempted to add some details that may help, but I too am an outsider and unfamiliar with these settings.

Finally, it is important to put the material in historical context as these songs and sayings were gleaned between the 1920s and the beginning of the 1980s. The lifeworlds of rural children in West Africa have changed significantly in the intervening years and indeed the author of the most recent material, Kaboré, at the end of his work expressed his apprehension about the increasing erosion of the whole genre of oral literature. Could Chinua Achebe's wise bird Eneke, whose quote opens this scrapbook, one day ask, “have children learnt to ignore birds?” Whilst I share Kaboré's optimism in the creative potential of children and believe birds will remain a source of inspiration to them, the subject still requires examination in their contemporary lifeworlds. The snippets gathered here give a glimpse of some of their past interactions with birds and hopefully opportunities for comparative reflection.

The material has been arranged into three thematic groups based on the settings in which they were described (Bird Scaring, Trap Driving and Bird Encounters) as this may help in finding wider patterns.

8 Though I refer to this material as songs and sayings, some might be better described as rhymes or spontaneous routine utterances and any singing or saying element downplayed: I will leave that quibble for those better qualified to decide.

Bird-scaring

Many long hours are spent scaring birds away from crops around the world but this particular realm of man-bird interaction appears to have garnered little interest so far within ethno-ornithology. In singing or talking with birds injurious to crops, the words uttered might be expected to convey a simple range of emotions from chagrin to entreatment, yet closer examination can be rather revealing about wider social relationships and values.[9] Alas we only have one of Kaboré's songs accompanied with this type of analysis, but useful lines of enquiry can still be picked up from the four songs in this genre recorded decades earlier by Marcel Griaule that we will consider first.

The information within Griaule's book *Jeux dogons* (1938) was collected during two research expeditions, the long Mission Dakar-Djibouti (May 1931 to January 1933) and the shorter Mission Sahara-Soudan (January to April, 1935). Griaule's fascination with children's games and songs in this period is explored in detail by Jolly (2009), who also makes the important note (p. 169) about how he purposefully presents his data in this publication in a raw format to avoid any systematization or synthesis. Though Griaule had this justification, it shouldn't be overlooked that during his time among the Dogon (two months in the first expedition and despite the name, most of the second—see Jolly, 2014 for details), his research interests were much wider and he was known for his fast and furious methods of collecting data (and artefacts) which were a source of friction with some of his colleagues (Griffiths, 2017: 531).

Griaule's four bird-scaring songs (1938: 219-221[10]) are prefaced with the note that children chase away the birds with a sling loaded with very small stones to avoid breaking the millet and that the songs are also supposed to discourage the birds from their plunder. This is the first song, said to be sung by boys at the beginning of the dry season at Kaça (Kassa):

sada dyawuwoy [2]	Oiseau, sors !
goro jawuwuy [2]	goro [1] sors !
bādey jawuwuy	bandey [2] sors !
eweba yu ireri	Pour vous le mil n'est pas mûr.
yudoy dogo inyen dori	Il n'est pas l'heure de manger le mil vert [3]
koro sariei	Dyarrhée du ventre.
koro sarey jōṇuno yabayay	Où est parti le guérisseur de la diarrhée ?
banā yay	Il est parti à Banan [4]
banā gwa yerin dori	Il est parti à Banan ; ce n'est pas le moment de venir.
sada dyawuwoy	Oiseau sors !
perege dyawuwoy	Tourterelle [5] sors !
gurumba dyawuwoy.	Pigeon [6] sors [7].

9 Porter's examination of some English bird-scaring songs finds for example (2011: 151): "The songs give many indications that the assumption that the birds must be driven away or killed was not accepted, and that it was resisted not only because birdscaring was thankless work but because the young scarers sympathized with the birds and in many cases identified with them."

10 In the original, the French translations are presented after the 'Dogon' text but I have taken the liberty of re-arranging them here with the translation opposite.

Footnotes in the above: 2 (italicised): The exact phonetic notation was conserved. It concerns the same word. 1: This bird is called *dorye*(*h*) at Sanga. 2: This bird, with red plumage is called *banamadey* at Sanga. 3: *yo doy* refers to a millet panicle with a growth defect that isn't harvested. 4: Peul (Fulɓe) village on the plain not far from Kaça. 5: *perege* at Kaça ; *pelegele* at Sanga. 6: *gurumba* at Kaça ; *gummò* at Sanga. 7: This song was recorded on cylinders V and XVI.

The original recording of this song made in 1931 by the ethno-musicologist on both expeditions, André Schaeffner, can be heard here between 2'42" and 3'10". These recordings were presumably staged and the same boy (perhaps the 15 year Abara who was the translator assigned to him (Jolly, 2014: 36) who is shown in Figure 4 in Jolly (2009) p.117) seems to sing on all songs on this cylinder. I have not consult the field notes that André composed which might provide more specific details on this song—see Gérard (2009) for more details on the style and type of information he included. I suspect the recordist may also have worked on the transcription, which to my ears, does not follow exactly what is recorded.

At the time of writing Griaule probably thought there was one Dogon language with much dialectic variation whereas today there are considered to be at least 20 separate languages (Blench, 2005). At Kaça (Kassa), the language is Tommo So[11] whereas at Sanga referred to in the footnotes, which was Griaule's research base, it is Toro So.[12] The wonderful online flora and fauna lexicon section of the Dogon and Bangimi Linguistics project website[13] (henceforth referred to as DBL) provides some help with the Tommo So bird names in this song:

sàdàá	bird (any)
goro	not listed in any of the languages in the lexicon
dorye(h)	no matches found for this Sanga name for the above bird
bàndèý	used for various small colourful finches (firefinch, cordon bleu, etc.). There is limited evidence that firefinches (*Lagnostica* sp.) are crop pests (Manikowski, 1984), but other Estrilid finches, which are presumably captured under this name are, though they might not all be colourful.
perege	presumably pèrè-péré/pèrè-géré which is used for the laughing dove (*Streptopelia senegalensis*), a known crop pest millet (*ibid*.)
gùrùmbáá	Alone this word is a primary name referring to the domestic pigeon, an unlikely pest, but as gùrùmbàà-gádà refers to the speckled pigeon (*Columba guinea*)a more likely one (*ibid*.), it might be being used here in a truncated form.

Though the reference in this song, (and the two following), to wishing diarrhoea upon the birds they are scaring may seem nothing more than a scatological references to an affliction the children knew all too well, the extra detail here to a healer for it going to the Peul (Fulɓe) village of Banan adds a layer of complexity. Dogon-Peul relationships are complex with a marked conflictual aspect (see de Bruijn *et al.* 1997 for a full examination) so though it may simply be a barbed comment, there is probably much to unpack here. For example, it could be informed by the Dogon association of the Peul with the bush and its animals, spirits and magic (*ibid.* p. 252). Knowing more about local conceptions of the aetiology of diarrhoea and its various forms is also essential to examining these references further.

11 https://dogonlanguages.info/languages/tomm1242
12 https://dogonlanguages.info/languages/toro1252
13 https://dogonlanguages.info/florafauna.cfm

The second song is from Sanga, (language Toro So), where the same bird-scaring practise as the precedent were said to be used and again the song opens with the shared generic name for a bird (*sada*):

saɗa yagogoy	Où est parti l'oiseau ?
dunã goy	Il est parti à Dounan
dunã yugǫ ilęlila	A Dounan ! Ce mil-ci n'est pas mûr [8]
kolosal(y)e ko ǰongomõ damĩ(h)	Il est impossible d'en soigner la diarrhée.
ǰongomo na(y)ĩ hoyahoy.	Il est difficile de soigner ! Hoyahoy !

Footnote 8: Let him go to Dounan, the millet in this field is not ripe.

The DBL website has a database of Dogon villages (and interspersed non-Dogon ones)[14] which has four candidates for Dounan. Given that there are good historical reasons why there could be a social connection between an old Dogon settlement and a farming village elsewhere, the linguistic details of three of these exclude them, leaving only Douna (Worou Kan), a small village situated on the plains 34 km SSE of Sanga (Sangha). Unfortunately no further details are provided for this locality and only fieldwork can determine whether it is the place in question and its significance to this song. In the meantime it useful to briefly look at the early 20th century farming history of the area. With the *pax gallica* (c. 1896[15]), the Dogon swarmed out of their old settlements on the escarpment and plateau where cliffs, scree and canyons had long afforded them some protection from slave-raiders (van Beek, 1993, Gallais, 1965[16]). In the first decades of the twentieth century, these movements were first towards the fertile soils near what its now Burkina Faso and then to the sandy soils closer to the escarpment (van Beek, 1993), which is where Douna (Worou Kan) lies. A strong motivating factor to access new farm lands was not only its scarcity around the old settlements but the social inequalities accessing the better localities there—see Diawara (1997) for an overview. One therefore has to ask whether the song's inclusion of Dounan references these inequalities: knowing who farmed there might reveal a further layer of meaning.

With new distant settlements springing up, some extended Dogon families were able to spread their resources between their old homes and new extra-territorial farms (van Beek, 1993). In the second half of the twentieth century, when a decline in soil fertility in these new lands coincided with a period of droughts, the different agro-ecologies on the plateau and plain helped these families reduce their risks. However, when Griaule and his team recorded this song in the 1930s, mobile granivorous birds, as it indicates, had already adapted to the bounty of widely spread new food resources despite the children's efforts to scare them away.

The song ends with the untranslatable expression *hoyahoy* which is presumably a directive aimed at the birds to drive them away. These linguistic elements can be expected in bird-scaring songs and sayings and indeed feature in five out of the six examples presented here. Falling into a sub-category of a growing field of linguistics that looks at what are termed either conative animal calls (Andrason, 2023) or animal-orientated interjections (Cabrera, 2025), they are worthy of close attention. Research on a subgroup of these calls/interjections called

14 https://dogonlanguages.info/geography.cfm

15 van Beek (1992: 65) notes that the Dogon fought more or less their last battle against the French in 1896 at Kassa and before the century turned, the area was considered 'pacified'.

16 This contains some wonderful photographs of Sanga and its farmscapes.

dispersals, which humans use to drive animals away, across diverse languages has revealed interesting non-arbitary patterns (Andrason, 2023). Much of this work has naturally, been focussed on dispersals aimed at domestic animals, the most frequent addressees. However, claims have been made that this form of communication with wild animals tends to be "more of the 'mimicry type,' frequently involving imitations of naturally occurring cries" (Heine (2025:248) citing Bynon (1976:41)) and to be "conceptually less differentiated" (Heine, 2025: 252) though in the following sentence the author goes on to say that nevertheless they may exhibit various conceptual distinctions and cites an example from Guma (1971) of four different directives used by speakers of the Southern Sotho language of Lesotho to drive wild birds from fields: for doves (*hobei, hoboi*), sparrows (*holia*), crows (*hukubi*) and red-bishop birds *(khube, thakhube*). Perhaps closer attention[17] to this type of material will reveal similar non-arbitary patterns for directives aimed at the same, or similar, wild birds. It should be noted that there has already been some research on this topic among Togo-Teŋu Kan speakers, a Dogon language (Andrason & Sagara, 2024), but regrettably this lists only one relevant dispersive (*kìré*) that is used to chase away birds or make injured/ trapped birds fly: searching for more avian specificity, or finding its absence, would be useful[18].

Griaule's third bird-scaring song is from Madougo, where the language is Jamsay[19] and where this activity was done without a sling but brandishing dry millet stalks, singing:

sisa yabo yaiy	Où est parti l'oiseau ?
gona yaiy gona beresalę gō	Il est parti à Gona
ilēri huya go huya.	La diarrhée de Gona (l'attend)
	(Car le mil) n'est pas mûr. Houya gohouya !

As the DBL fauna and flora lexicon entry for the Jamsay generic for bird is *sà:j-î:ⁿ*, it is worth questioning whether the addressee here is indeed a generic as the translation suggests (and the two previous songs have indicated). It might simply be a mistranscription and the DBL lexicon offers no obvious alternative. In the DBL villages database a Gona is listed without coordinates within the Mombo speaking area. This Dogon language is spoken on the plateau, west of Bandiagara, which makes it an unlikely candidate over 60 km west of Madougo that lies on the plains. Furthermore the database indicates that the two oldest sections of Madougo were settled from villages on the nearer escarpment (Ibi and Arou). Gona may instead refer to a landscape feature and a seasonal river of this name passes just west of Sanga[20] which is only 6 km west of Ibi and Arou, and might be a candidate, especially as a vegetated roosting site before the development of onion farming. This song ends with the directive 'houya gohouya' which is somewhat similar to the *hoyahoy* of the preceding one from Sanga.

Griaule's final bird-scaring song is from Pergesay (also written Pergassa or Pergassaye), where the Nanga[21] language is spoken, where chasing birds the young guards sang:

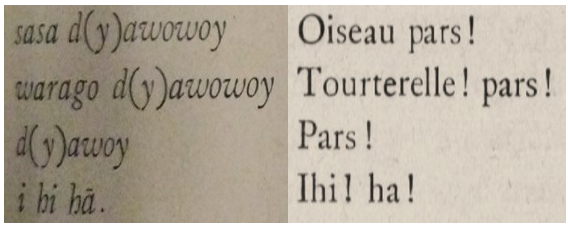
17 Bynon (1976: 41 footnote 8) had also noted a difference in the scare calls towards birds in general (kkšš!) and sparrows in particular (ẓukk!) in his study community, though still maintained they were more or less arbitrary.

18 This is also a wider issue as there are, as yet, very few dispersals addressed to specific wild birds recorded in the Living Database of Conative Animal Calls Version 1.1 (Andrason, A. *et al.* 2024).

19 https://dogonlanguages.info/languages/jams1239

20 Griaule helped build a dam across this watercourse in 1948-49 so that the retained water could be used to water gardens especially for onions—see photo and background in Doquet & Jolly (2023).

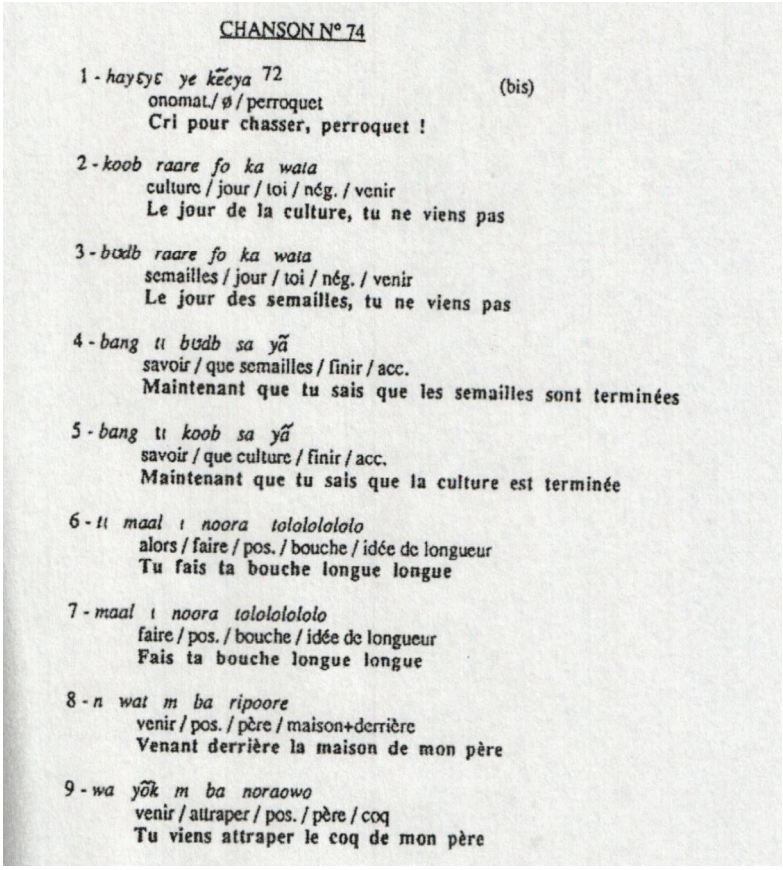
21 https://dogonlanguages.info/languages/nang1261



sasa d(y)awowoy	Oiseau pars !
warago d(y)awowoy	Tourterelle ! pars !
d(y)awoy	Pars !
i hi hã.	Ihi ! ha !

The DBL lexicon again questions the translation of the addressee as a generic bird which in Nanga is given as the rather more distinctive *lì:gí* but no alternative sticks out. The translation of *warago* as dove is also questionable given that *péndì-gìré* is the basis of the Nanga names for the various species. The marked similarity with the first part of the Jamsay name in the lexicon for the red-bishop (*Euplectes orix*), a well known crop pest, suggests however the possibility that this might be an indirect name: [*wàrà-gó-m*]-[*tɔ̀:-gó-m*], which means, "I don't farm" "I don't sow". It could therefore still refer to crop-eating doves and perhaps in support of this is the rather distinct dispersal, *ihi*! *ha*!

Kaboré's two bird-scaring songs were collected in the former Mòosé (Mossi) kingdom of Koupéla in east central Burkina Faso, where he had grown up. They feature among the one hundred children's songs he recorded[22] and analysed in his doctoral thesis (defended in 1982) which later appears in his book (1993). On page 136 he explains how the children assigned to guard the ripening millet fields sing the first one between throwing gravel to keep away the birds coming for the grains. With 24 verses it is the longest in his corpus but as he points out (p. 136), only a structural anaylsis reveals the deeper meaning of what otherwise might appear to be an incoherent and disordered song.



CHANSON N° 74

1 - *hayɛyɛ ye kɛ̃eya* 72 (bis)
onomat./ ø / perroquet
Cri pour chasser, perroquet !

2 - *koob raare fo ka wata*
culture / jour / toi / nég. / venir
Le jour de la culture, tu ne viens pas

3 - *bʊdb raare fo ka wata*
semailles / jour / toi / nég. / venir
Le jour des semailles, tu ne viens pas

4 - *bang ti bʊdb sa yã̃*
savoir / que semailles / finir / acc.
Maintenant que tu sais que les semailles sont terminées

5 - *bang ti koob sa yã̃*
savoir / que culture / finir / acc.
Maintenant que tu sais que la culture est terminée

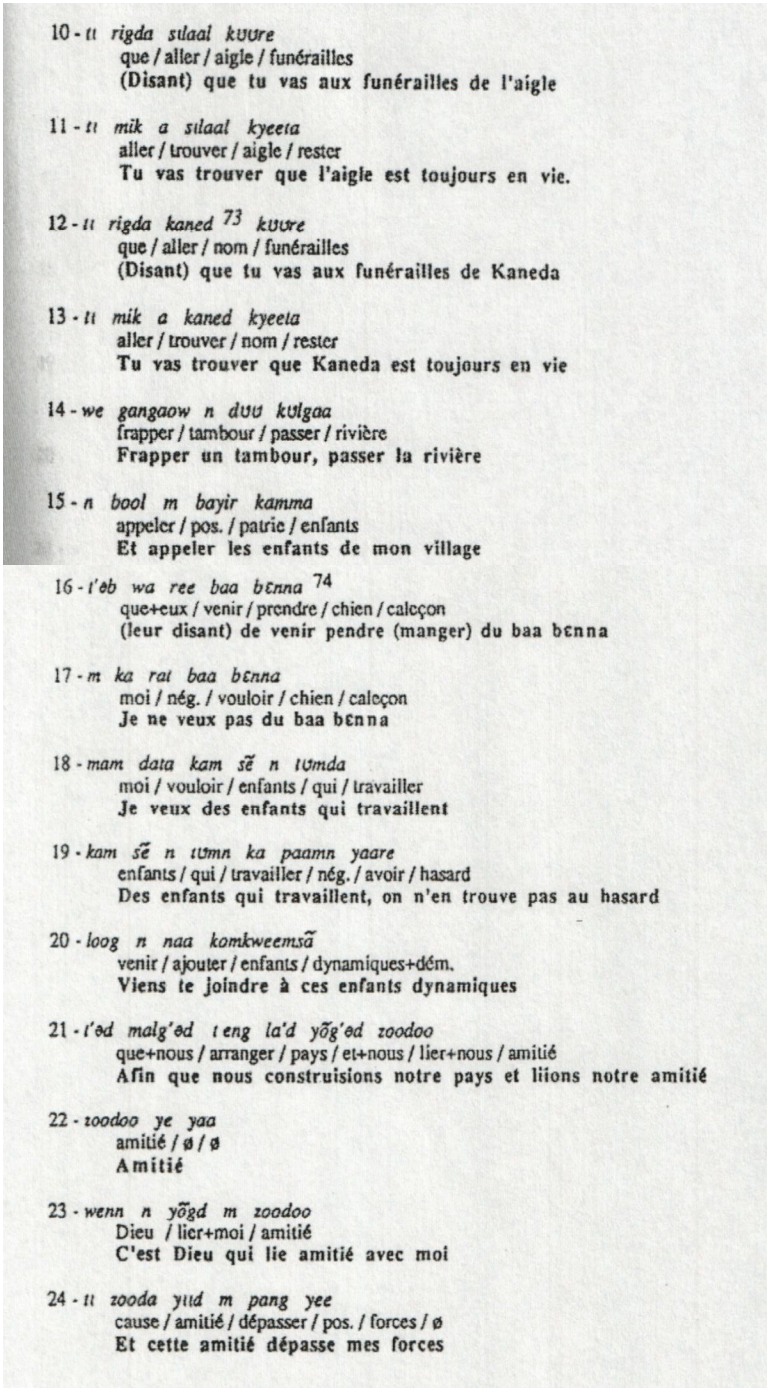
6 - *ti maal i noora tolololololo*
alors / faire / pos. / bouche / idée de longueur
Tu fais ta bouche longue longue

7 - *maal i noora tolololololo*
faire / pos. / bouche / idée de longueur
Fais ta bouche longue longue

8 - *n wat m ba ripoore*
venir / pos. / père / maison+derrière
Venant derrière la maison de mon père

9 - *wa yõ̃k m ba noraowo*
venir / attraper / pos. / père / coq
Tu viens attraper le coq de mon père

22 Where these are kept is unknown, but hopefully they are preserved safely somewhere.



10 - *tɪ rigda sɪlaal kʊʊre*
que / aller / aigle / funérailles
(Disant) que tu vas aux funérailles de l'aigle

11 - *tɪ mik a sɪlaal kyeeta*
aller / trouver / aigle / rester
Tu vas trouver que l'aigle est toujours en vie.

12 - *tɪ rigda kaned* [73] *kʊʊre*
que / aller / nom / funérailles
(Disant) que tu vas aux funérailles de Kaneda

13 - *tɪ mik a kaned kyeeta*
aller / trouver / nom / rester
Tu vas trouver que Kaneda est toujours en vie

14 - *we gangaow n dʊʊ kʊlgaa*
frapper / tambour / passer / rivière
Frapper un tambour, passer la rivière

15 - *n bool m bayir kamma*
appeler / pos. / patrie / enfants
Et appeler les enfants de mon village

16 - *t'ɛb wa ree baa bɛnna* [74]
que+eux / venir / prendre / chien / caleçon
(leur disant) de venir pendre (manger) du baa bɛnna

17 - *m ka rat baa bɛnna*
moi / nég. / vouloir / chien / caleçon
Je ne veux pas du baa bɛnna

18 - *mam data kam sẽ n tʊmda*
moi / vouloir / enfants / qui / travailler
Je veux des enfants qui travaillent

19 - *kam sẽ n tʊmn ka paamn yaare*
enfants / qui / travailler / nég. / avoir / hasard
Des enfants qui travaillent, on n'en trouve pas au hasard

20 - *loog n naa komkweemsã*
venir / ajouter / enfants / dynamiques+dém.
Viens te joindre à ces enfants dynamiques

21 - *t'ɛd malg'ɛd teng la'd yõg'ɛd zoodoo*
que+nous / arranger / pays / et+nous / lier+nous / amitié
Afin que nous construisions notre pays et liions notre amitié

22 - *zoodoo ye yaa*
amitié / ø / ø
Amitié

23 - *wenn n yõgd m zoodoo*
Dieu / lier+moi / amitié
C'est Dieu qui lie amitié avec moi

24 - *tɪ zooda yɪɪd m pang yee*
cause / amitié / dépasser / pos. / forces / ø
Et cette amitié dépasse mes forces

Footnotes: 72: Senegal parrot (*Poicephalus senegalus*): 73: *kanedà*: negative + person: "it is not a person", a derogatory name intended to deceive the divine presence to preserve the life of the child (Houis, 1963)[23]: 74: *baa bɛnna*: "dogs underpants", figurative name for a rather bland food: food for the poor or at least in the hungry season, composed of hibiscus leaves, flour etc.

Before looking at Kaboré's analysis it should be noted that the song starts with a directive towards a Senegal parrot that he considered onomatopoeic which supports Bynon's (1976) notion cited above that such mimicry is a common feature of this type of communication with wild animals. These parrots, it should be noted, are well-known pests of sorghum and maize (Manikowski, 1984). Kaboré's analysis of this song starts by breaking it down into five parts

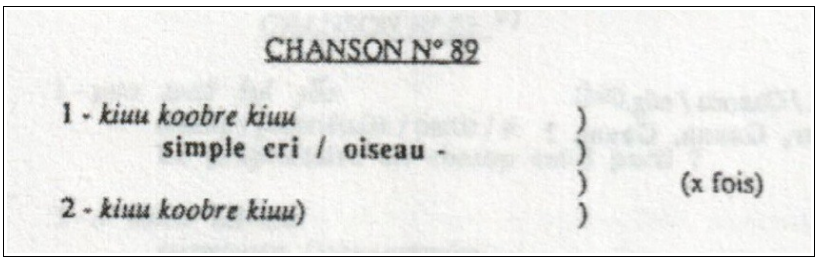
23 Houis, M. (1963) *Les noms individuels chez les Mossi*. IFAN, Dakar. 141 p.

(p.179-180):

a) Verses 1-5: the child addresses the millet-eating bird and stigmatizes its laziness. It does not participate in the cultivation or in the sowing of the field.
b) Verses 6-8: the child reproaches the bird for its gluttony. The idiophone tolololo.,. suggests that it likes to eat a lot because it has a long mouth.
c) Verses 9-13: this passage denounces the lie. The bird (?) came to illegally seize the child's father's rooster, pretending to go to a hypothetical funeral of individuals still alive.
d) Verses 14-19: at this level, other children enter the scene. It is a question of refusing food in favor of working in the fields (evoked by the drumming for collective cultivation).
e) Verses 20-24: exaltation of the friendship that unites dynamic children in the same ideal, that of building their country. This very strong friendship is a divine emanation.

From this breakdown, Kaboré reveals how a traditional bird-scaring song has been subtlety amalgamated to a contemporary Christian song around section c (verses 9-13). He adds in footnote 1 (p.180) that the children had actually admitted to him that they had learned this song during their Cœurs Vaillants—Âmes Vaillantes[24] activities organized by the local Pères Blancs Mission. He points out that the traditional and modern songs are easily fused because they share a common moral: rejecting the faults called into question and adopting the ideal qualities proposed.

Kaboré's second 'song' (more a repeated cry) is used mainly be boys[25] aged 7 to 15 who herd the family sheep and goats around the village in the rainy season after the morning's fieldwork. He reports that it is used in two ways, firstly to scare the birds away from the crops but also as an audible signal to their herding companions.


CHANSON N° 89

1 - *kiuu koobre kiuu*)
simple cri / oiseau -)
) (x fois)
2 - *kiuu koobre kiuu*))

Though Kaboré says there is no precise sense to this 'song' (p. 234) he notes earlier that it is onomatopoeic of the calls the red bishops (*Euplectes orix*) make when they fly from the fields (p.141), which again supports Bynon's (1976) mimicry hypothesis for this type of dispersal. Kaboré notes that in Mòosé these bishops are called *kóaabá*, singular *kóobré,* and it is interesting they are addressed in the singular when they are surely flocking, but this is perhaps for a truer or more pleasing sound.

24 Somé & Bennett (2001) provide background on the various Catholic evangelising organisations in the country.
25 As the author notes in footnote 40, p.141, if the family don't have any boys, girls may also do this activity.

Trap Driving

Monique Brandily (1982) notes from research just outside the region, that bird-catching songs belong to the stock of hunting techniques used by various ethnic groups in northern Chad to drive birds towards snares without causing them to fly away. She then provides a wonderful analysis of four such songs uncircumcised Teda boys use in the Tibesti mountains. This activity she notes, is very much their prerogative because all adult members of the population refrain from eating birds, but when the boys catch them, they roast and eat them on the spot. A critical point though is that the boys only hunt four species of birds[26] in this manner and there is a special song for each one. Furthermore:

> "Quite apart from their immediate purpose of heading the birds toward the snares, the basic function of the songs may be to ensure that a distinction is made between edible and non edible birds. There are, in fact, many more species present than the four mentioned above, but the children only eat those for which a hunting song exists." (p. 372)

The two examples provided here lack any analysis or accompanying context but at least document children's trap driving songs among two other ethnic groups in Mali and Mauritania respectively. The bird names used should however enable some follow-up research to determine their dietary position within these two societies.

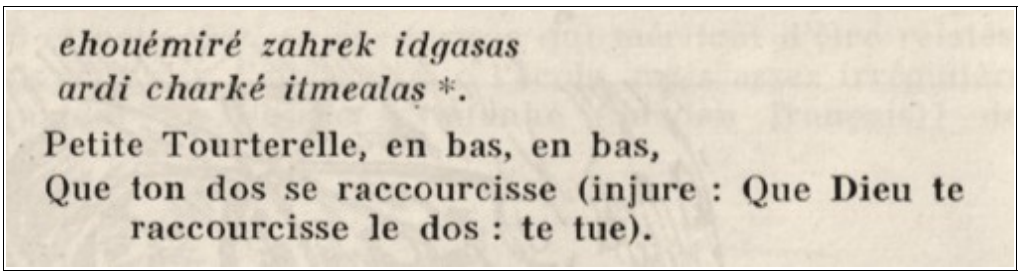
René Rousselot was a veterinary doctor in the French colonial service whose various posts included *Chef de la Circonscription d'Elevage de Mopti*. In his 1939 write up of the birds of this region he notes on page 47 for the Namaqua dove (*Oena capensis*) what the Peulh/Fulɓe children sing to *lourel* when driving them towards their traps:

Remarques : reconnaissable à sa longue queue, cette petite tourterelle affectionne les routes. Les enfants Peulh qui les piègent chantent en les chassant vers leurs pièges :

Lourel, lourel,	Tourterelle, tourterelle,
Arde, n'diéhén na ?	Passe devant, y allons-nous ?...
To kéñen men to	Où nous sommes allés hier
Gaouri ana ton	Il y a du mil là-bas
Maro ana ton	Il y a du riz là-bas
Tiobal ana ton...	Il y a de la bouillie de mil là-bas...

Charles Béart in his 1955 publication, *Jeux et Jouets de l'Ouest Africain*, notes on page 156 in relation to the widespread use of noose snares in the region to catch various birds adds that in Mauritania, where this trap was said to be common, the children sang the following, presumably driving the doves forward:

26 *kuduguru*: turtle doves, presumably the resident subspecies (*Streptopelia turtur hoggara*), *ebero*: wild rock doves (*Columba livia targia*), *kwɔdɛy* "millet-eaters" which erroneously she considered to be the red-billed quelea (*Quelea quelea*), which aren't known from the Tibesti (https://www.wabdab.org/db/) and *bɔrko*: Lichtenstein's sandgrouse (*Pterocles lichtensteini*).



ehouémiré zahrek idgasas
ardi charké itmealaṣ *.

Petite Tourterelle, en bas, en bas,
Que ton dos se raccourcisse (injure : Que Dieu te raccourcisse le dos : te tue).

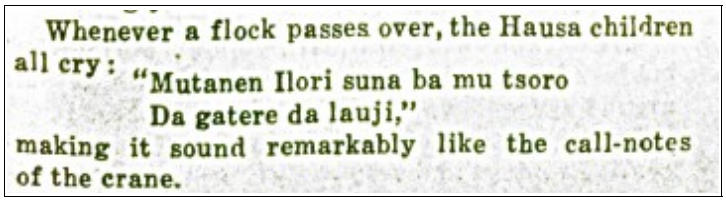
Béart adds that the caught bird's throats were then slit in the ritual manner. He sources this information to Marc Le Noble who on other pages we learn was the *Directeur des Ecoles Nomades du Tagant*, which is a region in south-central Mauritania where the language spoken is Hassaniyya Arabic. Efforts are on-going to determine whether the bird name used in the above is a generic term for doves or specific. Given that the Namaqua dove is the smallest in Africa, there is a likelihood that this is the referent here, which would make for a curious case of similar interactions with this species by children (boys only?) across three different cultures: Tibesti Teda, Massina Fulɓe and Tagant Arabs. I have purposefully added place references before the names of these groups as though these people speak languages[27] spoken over wider areas than these, this activity has only been noted, so far, within these confines. As each of these cultures is markedly stratified, further details are required for the latter two especially[28] to understand which specific children did/do sing trap-driving songs to this dove, and how it compares to their parents' interactions within this bird.

27 It is worth noting that these people speak languages from distinctly different groups thereby obviating a simple ancestral origin for this interaction: Teda is Nilo-Saharan, Fulfulde Atlantic–Congo and Hassaniyya Afro-Asiatic.

28 Brandily (1982) is not however particularly clear whether boys from the three Teda strata she identifies (the Teda themselves, descendants of prisoners, and blacksmiths) all engage in this interaction and whether they do so in the same manner: do they even play together?

Bird Encounters

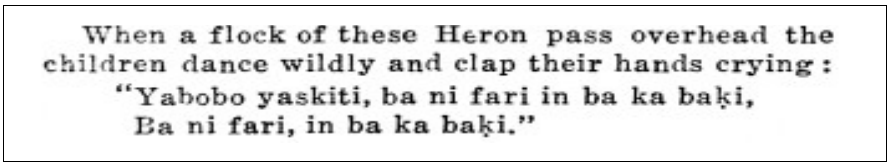
Emily Clark was a missionary with the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) who served mainly at their station at Wushishi (but also Minna) in northwest Nigeria, from 1912. She clearly had a passion for birds and in her delightful 1931 publication, *One Hundred Birds of the Niger Province,* she includes Hausa names for 80 species and cites two examples of sayings children made when they saw certain birds in flight. For the crowned crane (*Balearica pavonina*), known in Hausa as *gauraka* or *kumare,* she notes (p.11):



Whenever a flock passes over, the Hausa children all cry: "Mutanen Ilori suna ba mu tsoro
Da gatere da lauji,"
making it sound remarkably like the call-notes of the crane.

With help from the Bargery (1934) dictionary, I suspect this can be translated as "the people of Ilorin scare us with their axe and elephant trunk". Whether this is just a humorous composition for the purpose of imitating these birds will be difficult to ascertain. Local history may provide insights in the area's relationship with Ilorin, but given the uncertainty about the geographical origins of the children she heard the saying from,[29] they may be tenuous. Furthermore, given the precipitous demise, if not extinction, of the crowned crane in Nigeria (Turshak & Boyi, 2011), childhood memories of these birds will have to be sought among the older generation there sooner rather than later.

For what Clark calls the cattle heron, now known more often in English as the cattle egret, (*Bubulcus ibis*), and *balbela* in Hausa, she notes on p.17:



When a flock of these Heron pass overhead the children dance wildly and clap their hands crying:
"Yabobo yaskiti, ba ni fari in ba ka baḳi,
Ba ni fari, in ba ka baḳi."

The first two words, y*abobo yaskiti,* do not appear in Bargery (1934) and have not been recognised as Hausa words by my old friend Oumar Tiousso Sanda. One possibility is that they may simply be a name or form of address invented by the local children. Another is that given the diverse ethno-linguisitic origins of the local population, they are from a language that their parent's spoke at home. Further enquiries are required and Nupe and Gbari may be good starting points for the latter possibility. The meaning of the rest of the phrase is however clearer, which again thanks to Oumar means something like "give me your white and we will give you our black" though a word-for-word translation is somewhat confusing.

Another song sung by children encountering the same birds flying over them was recorded in the fruits of a pioneering collaboration between an anthropologist and an ornithologist in south-eastern Senegal (Gessain & Blume, 1967). On page 35 for the cattle egret, known as *a-napa ɔ-xᵉᵟʸ*or *ɓa-napa ɔ-xᵉᵟʸ* in Bassari, they note the following:

29 See Manvell, (2025: 7-8) for discussion on the origins of the Hausa population in the area.

Cet oiseau s'appelle dans les contes : **bangolugolin**. Il est responsable des taches blanches sur les ongles, associées aux cauris. Quand un garde-bœufs passe sur leurs têtes, les enfants secouent les mains au-dessus de leur tête en chantant des chansons : **ba-ngol -golin iline ɔtyambas mun masyened ɛgare** (ou bien **ɛgɔrɛl**) : garde-bœufs, donnez-moi des cauris, je vous rembourserai en perdrix (ou bien crânes). **bangolugolin i-line ɔ-tyambas** : garde-bœufs, donnez-moi des cauris (chez les Coniagui aussi, les cauris viennent du ciel, conte MG. 1961, X, 14).

Examining the role of *bangolugolin* in local folk-tales may offer insights into the children's reactions to these birds. There is also an interesting similarity in this song and the Wushishi example above to explore, namely the offer of something in exchange for the birds' whiteness. A closer look at the significance of *ɛgare,* the common double-spurred francolin/spurfowl (*Pternistis bicalcaratus*), may be helpful in this regard. Its dark greyish brown upper-parts, though heavily vermiculated, still make it a relatively dark-coloured bird so perhaps the offer is based on the same black for white exchange in the Hausa case. The alternate version offering skulls suggests however there could also be a deeper meaning. Throughout their range, these birds are often trapped by children and it is possible that in this example they (only boys?) are imitating in their play with them the animal sacrifices that Bassari adults make at various shrines (see Di Muro, 2017: 25-26, who also notes that even children can be guardians of these sites), of which one feature, are the skulls of sacrificed animals.

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