

# **TRANSFORMATIVE SUBSTANCES, KNOWLEDGE AND POWER**

*Affecting the Course of Events in a Gambian Mandinka Village*

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## Abstract

The present thesis is based on a fieldwork that was conducted in a small Mandinka village in the West African republic of The Gambia. This thesis revolves around the Mandinka concept of *booroo*. *Booroo* is commonly translated as “medicine”, but the application of *booroo* is not confined to prevention and treatment of sickness. *Booroo* refers to diverse substances, objects and, on occasion to certain utterances: such as biomedicines, amulets and prayers which can be used in order to attain changes, for instance to cure sickness, find a spouse or achieve success. Even if the main focus of the thesis is on *booroo*, which does embrace notions of medicine, the focus is not exclusively on themes prevalent within medical anthropology. This study seeks an understanding of a local concept of power (*semboo*) through exploring practices related to the use of *booroo*.

The thesis explores how people’s conceptions of power influence their use of *booroo*. It further investigates what renders *booroo* and practitioners of *booroo* powerful. The main part of the thesis discusses power as a transformative force inherent in the world and beings within it, and it also considers how power is perceived as working in social relations. This power may cause wanted and unwanted changes. People can gain knowledge (*londoo*) of how to manipulate this power, for instance by using *booroo*. Such knowledge makes people capable of affecting the course of events and renders them powerful in relation to others.

This study illustrates how vernacular concepts of power do not simply, or necessarily, give power to those who control power, but also how these understandings shape people’s ways of acting in the world. In this respect, it contributes to the ethnography of medical systems, and additionally, of power, social organisation and religion.

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## Notes on Orthography and Pronunciation

Since Gambian Mandinka is not a written language, there is no fixed orthography. I have taken into account the spellings in David P. Gamble's (1987a) "Intermediate Gambian Mandinka-English Dictionary and W.E.C. International Mandinka-English Dictionary. I omit the tonal markers used by Gamble. I use ng and ny instead of ŋ and ñ respectively while the latter letters are used in W.E.C. dictionary. Pronunciation is as follows.

a as in hut

e as in let

i as in sit

o as in hot

u as in shoe

The vowels are doubled to express a long sound.

c "ch" as in chapter

j as in jar

g as in garden

s as in house

w as in we

y as in yes

Other consonants correspond to pronunciation in English.

ng as in singer

ny as in Kenya

Plural forms are formed by adding *-lu* at the end of a noun.

# Chapter One

## INTRODUCTION

The present thesis revolves around the Mandinka concept of *booroo*. *Booroo* is commonly translated as “medicine”, but the application of *booroo* is not confined to prevention and treatment of sickness. *Booroo* refers to diverse substances, objects and, on occasion to certain utterances: such as biomedicines, amulets and prayers that are conceived of as possessing transformative power and which can be used in order to attain changes, for instance to cure sickness, find a spouse or achieve success. People use *booroo* continuously and *booroo* is involved in important life events. In order to avoid that the concept of *booroo* is restricted to medicine, I retain the local term and use *booroo* in singular and *booroolu* in plural.

The fieldwork on which this thesis is based was carried out in a small Mandinka village, Jarranding<sup>1</sup>, in the West African republic of The Gambia. I explore the ways in which people affect the course of their lives through the use of *booroo*, and I investigate local notions of power (*semboo*). People frequently describe *booroo* as powerful and they often comment on knowledge (*londoo*) and power possessed by practitioners of *booroo*. Studying *booroo* is thus a way of approaching local concepts of power.

Even if the main focus of my thesis is on *booroo*, which does embrace notions of medicine, my interest is not exclusively on themes prevalent within medical anthropology. Medical anthropology includes a wide diversity of studies, but especially in non-Western contexts it has frequently been concerned with medical pluralism, namely the coexistence of

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<sup>1</sup> In order to respect the wish of some of the villagers the names of persons and places in this thesis have been changed except the names of larger towns in The Gambia.

diverse medical methods within a given society (e.g. Janzen 1982). Studies within medical anthropology have often compared different medical systems and investigated encounters between them (e.g. Foster 1998; Finkler 1998). Medical pluralism exists in Jarranding, in the sense that villagers apply *booroo* of both Western and local origins. Practitioners of *booroo* include biomedical health personnel, marabouts – Muslim clerics who use the Qur’an in order to prepare *booroo* – and healers who make *booroo* out of trees and plants. My aim, however, is not to compare different medical realms; I seek an understanding of a local concept of power (*semboo*) through exploring practices related to the use of *booroo*.

I explore how people’s conceptions of power influence their use of *booroo*. I further investigate what renders *booroo* and practitioners of *booroo* powerful. The main part of the thesis discusses power as a transformative force inherent in the world and beings within it, and I also consider how power is perceived as working in social relations. I attempt to show that people in Jarranding conceive of the world as a world of transformative power (*semboo*), power which is possessed by people, animals, spirits, plants, trees and inanimate things. This power may cause wanted and unwanted changes. People can gain knowledge (*londoo*) of how to manipulate this power, for instance by using *booroo*. Such knowledge makes people capable of affecting the course of events and renders them powerful in relation to others.

### **Perspectives and Arguments**

Arens and Karp hold that in anthropological studies of power “[a]nthropologists should... consider indigenous concepts carefully” and recognize that power is not only “what power does”, but also “how power means” (1989: xv). Throughout the present thesis I explore emic terms and expressions in order to seek an understanding of what people refer to and how they understand concepts like *booroo*, *semboo* – which provisionally translates into power – and *londoo* – a concept associated with knowledge. As was already implied above, these

three terms are closely connected with each other. In order to facilitate reading for those who are not familiar with Mandinka language, I use English terms as long as there are reasonable translations and add the Mandinka words from time to time in brackets.

Anthropological approaches to the study of power vary. Social sciences often apply Weber's definition of power as the influence and control that one person exercises over others (Weber 1964: 152). Arens and Karp hold that Weber's definition "fails to consider how concepts of power are used by agents to produce their actions or how those concepts are grounded in cultural resources" (1989: xiii-xiv). In order to approach an understanding of the concept of power, it is necessary to explore people's ideas about the nature of the world and forces that act on the world (Arens and Karp 1989: xii; Herbert 1993: 2). I argue that people in Jarranding perceive the world as being full of transformative power that has an influence on the world and entities within it. This power is inherent in entities that inhabit and exist in the world, such as people, spirits, trees, utterances, etc. Transformative power also involves knowledge of how to manipulate power in order to create things and make changes (Herbert 1993: 2-3). For instance, blacksmiths know how to transform iron into implements and marabouts are able to transform powerful utterances and plants into *booroo* (see also Wright 1989: 52-53). Herbert (1993: 2-3) holds that people who are capable of "transformative processes" may gain control over others. Similarly, marabouts in Jarranding may gain power in the Weberian sense and appear superior in their relation to others, because of their transformative power and knowledge. However, their power is not necessarily, or only, perceived as influence over others. By describing marabouts as powerful, people refer to their skills at preparing *booroo* and to their ability to perform transformative actions.

Being able to affect the course of events involves an idea of causation. Within medical anthropology, Foster (1998: 114) describes what he calls "personalistic etiologies", as

consisting of several “levels of causality” including both “efficient” and “immediate causes”. The “efficient cause” refers to a being, for instance a witch, who is an agent behind a sickness, while the “immediate cause” is “the instrument or technique” used by the agent (Foster 1998: 210). Goody (1962: 209-210) recognizes also a third level of causality, namely supernatural power, that withdraws its protection from a person. People in Jarranding recognize diverse agents behind events – such as marabouts, witches and spirits – and in accordance with their Muslim faith they consider God to determine the course of events and the world in the last instance. There are multiple “levels of causality”. While I find Goody’s theory helpful, I modify some of his terms and present an idea of immediate, personalistic and final of sources of power prevalent in Jarranding. I refer to them as sources instead of causes for several reasons. As opposed to causes, sources of power do not always produce specific effects, but may result in both wanted and unwanted changes in varying degrees. Furthermore, the word “cause” has a connotation of motivation, but these changes are not always caused intentionally by motivated agents. In addition, people can obtain knowledge and power from these sources that enable them to manipulate the sources of power.

Goody (1962: 208-209) holds that all three levels of causation are made relevant in cases of death among LoDagaa in Ghana. My material opposes Goody’s findings, in the sense that in many cases in Jarranding, all the three levels of sources of power are not always made relevant. Foster (1998: 115) holds, that in “personalistic systems, with multiple levels of causation” people are more concerned about “the efficient cause” of sickness than “the immediate cause”. I argue that this is not the case in Jarranding. When people get sick they try to treat the immediate sources of sickness at first and in most cases it is not necessary to deal with any personalistic agents. Whyte (1997: 28) argues along similar lines with respect to Nyole in eastern Uganda.

In many parts of my thesis I lean on West African ethnographic literature. In past years local concepts of power have been a recurrent theme within studies of “castes” or “occupational groups” (e.g. McNaughton 1988; Wright 1989; Hoffman 1995; Frank 1998). In many West African studies, the notion of power is described as transcending the realm of social relations, and as characterised by an idea of inherent power that pervades all living beings and inanimate objects in the world (e.g. Frank 1998: 79). Secret knowledge possessed by different “occupational groups” is also considered to be powerful (e.g. McNaughton 1988: 41). This power may have both beneficial and detrimental effects and people in possession of this power are often both feared and admired for their mastery of transformative actions (e.g. McNaughton 1995: 46). While West African “caste” systems are based on hierarchy, recent studies have changed the focus, or emphasis, towards the differentiation and interdependency of different “caste” groups (e.g. Wright 1989: 40). I approach the notion of power in another context by exploring *booroo* and practitioners of *booroo*. I consider how my findings correspond to concepts of power brought into focus by West African “caste” studies. By exploring the activities of marabouts, I argue that practitioners of *booroo* can gain power in social relations due to their secret knowledge and their clients’ dependency on their abilities. At the same time, social ideals restrict the extent to which they can become superior to others.

By thus applying insights from studies of “castes”, I hope to illustrate some other spheres of power, and how vernacular concepts of power do not simply, or necessarily, give power to those who control power, but also how these understandings shape people’s ways of acting in the world. In this respect, I hope to contribute to the ethnography of medical systems, and additionally, of power, social organisation and religion.

### **The Village and its Surroundings**

Jarranding<sup>2</sup> is a little Mandinka village located in a rural area of Jarra in the West African republic of The Gambia. The Gambia is the smallest country on the African continent. It is surrounded by Senegal, except for a short coastline on the Atlantic Ocean. The country is nowhere wider than 48 kilometres and it extends about 480 kilometres eastwards from the coast. There are several ethnic groups in The Gambia. The six largest are: Mandinko, Fula, Wolof, Jola, Serahuli and Serer. The Gambia was a British colony until 1965, while the surrounding Senegal was colonized by France. English is the official language of The Gambia, but not all can speak it and every ethnic group has its vernacular language.

Jarra lies about 150 kilometres east from the Atlantic coast, on the southern bank of the River Gambia. River Gambia flows through the country. Jarranding is situated between small hills about five kilometres away from the River Gambia. On the riverside of the village there is a forest and rice fields that are flooded during the rainy season. Elsewhere, groundnut and millet fields surround the village. Further away from the river, the landscape turns to savannah and grassland. Trees are dispersed. The most impressive of them are massive baobab and tall silk cotton trees. In addition, there are plenty of mango trees. The rest of the vegetation consists of grass and shrubs.

The village is situated a couple of kilometres from the main road where one can catch a bush taxi in order to travel long distances. The road to the village is passable by car but there is no regular transport and nobody in the village owns a car. One man has a motorbike and another one has a moped. A few men and boys have bicycles, but most of the people walk to the main road and neighbouring villages. Heavy loads are transported by donkey, oxen or horse carts.

Sandy roads and paths run between fenced compounds. Fences are made of corrugated iron, straw, stems of rhun palm leaves, mud bricks or cement. A few houses are

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<sup>2</sup> The suffix *-nding* means “little”. Therefore Jarranding translates “Little Jarra”.

made of cement but most of them are built of mud bricks. Those who can afford it plaster the walls with a mixture of lime from oyster shells and cement. The plaster gives walls a white colour and makes them stronger in heavy rains. The mud walls that are not plastered often collapse during the rainy season. Roofs, window shields and most of the doors are made of corrugated iron. Some houses have earth floors while others have them cemented.

In the middle of the village, under the shade of a big mango tree is a sitting platform (*bentengo, kabeefoo*<sup>3</sup>). Men gather there daily to relax and to chat with each other. Communal meetings concerning the village matters take place at the sitting platform, which is also used as a dancing area at great celebrations such as weddings. Women are seen at the sitting platform only during meetings or special events.

Close to the sitting platform is a mosque. All villagers are Muslim, like the majority of Gambians. Only men are allowed to enter the village mosque, but elder women perform some of their prayers at the veranda of the mosque under the palisade. Other women pray at home and many men prefer to do most of their prayers at home, even though most men attend the congregational noon prayer on Friday at the mosque. Messages concerning the village matters are announced at the mosque after the prayers.

There is an Islamic school (*madras*) in Jarranding. All children start their Islamic education when they are about five years old. The Islamic school in Jarranding goes up to the third grade. Most children attend the Islamic school for about one to three years. A so called “white man’s school”, that is based on the British system and where teaching is in English, is in a neighbouring village, Jarrabaa<sup>4</sup>, about three and a half kilometres walk away. There is both a primary and middle school up to ninth grade, but those who want to continue

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<sup>3</sup> This can be translated “says everything”. The village sitting platform is a place of conversation and discussion.

<sup>4</sup> *Baa* means “big” and therefore this made up name of the village translates as “Big Jarra”.

to the high school leave the village to study in the urban area of the Atlantic coast or in the inland towns of Georgetown, Mansa Konko or Farafenni. According to my estimations, approximately one half of primary school-aged children go to the “white-man’s school” and it is more common for the boys to attend school than girls. (For education in The Gambia see e.g. Paludan 1998)

The nearest health centre is also in Jarrabaa. There are two trained midwives in Jarranding and there is also supposed to be a trained health worker who is able to give first aid and administer medicines for minor pains, but the man who had this position has moved away from the village. The villagers have chosen his follower but he had not gone through the required training during my stay in Jarranding. Therefore he does not get medicines and he cannot practise as the health worker.

There is neither telephone nor electricity in the village. Most of the compounds have battery-run radios and tape recorders. Two compounds have television sets that are run by car batteries. The national post service covers rural areas poorly. Villagers send and receive letters through travelling friends and relatives. Those who are illiterate get help to write and read messages. There are a few small stalls in the village, where people can buy small amounts of everyday groceries such as rice, sugar, tomato paste, stock cubes, edible oils, Chinese green tea, canned milk, candies, kola nuts and sometimes bread. The stalls also sell small everyday items, for instance candles, matches, soap, cigarettes and batteries. All of the stalls are run by Fulas who make up a small minority in the village.

A weekly market (*lumoo*) is held about three and a half kilometres away by the main road junction to Jarrabaa. The nearest police station, pharmacy and telephone are also there. There people can buy everyday groceries in larger amounts, also meat, different kinds of fish, bread, vegetables and spices that are not available in Jarranding. In the weekly market

people can find everything they need: textiles, ready-made clothes, shoes, jewellery, wigs, cosmetics, cooking utensils, buckets, radios, tape recorders, tapes, ropes and domestic animals. There are tailors, blacksmiths and leatherworkers. Sometimes a magician shows up to entertain the crowd. Restaurant stalls serve local meals, roasted meat, sandwiches, omelettes and coffee. People gather at the weekly market from all the surrounding villages, not only to buy things, but also to sell their own products or simply to meet other people at the lively market place.

### **Population and Subsistence**

According to a census I took at the beginning of my fieldwork, there are about 600 inhabitants in Jarranding. About 94% of the population is Mandinka. Mandinka belong to the Mande people of West Africa, who trace ancestry to the ancient Mali Empire, *Manding*. In addition to Mandinka, five small, unrelated Fula families and a couple of Wolof men have settled down in Jarranding<sup>5</sup>. People say that the village used to be a lot bigger, but there has been a large amount of urban migration during recent years. It is difficult to make one's living in Jarranding and especially young boys leave the village in order to study and to work in other places.

People are farmers and every household cultivates food. Men cultivate mainly groundnut and millet. In addition, some of them have small maize fields. Women cultivate rice. The farming period starts in June before the rains begin, by clearing the fields, and the harvest is in November. Due to precarious weather conditions annual harvests vary. Other threats for the crops are birds, baboons and wild pigs. During the dry period some women

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<sup>5</sup> During the farming period some "strange farmers" (*luntangolu*) come to work in Jarranding from Senegal and Mali and they return year after year. During my fieldwork there were about eleven "strange farmers" in the village.

have small gardens where they grow for instance okra, sorrel, cassava, tomatoes, bananas and oranges. Many villagers have mango trees in their compounds.

Families consume the rice, millet and maize that they cultivate. Rice is the staple food but villagers are not self-sufficient in it; they also eat the vegetables and fruits, but the women usually sell some of them. Groundnuts are the main cash crop and the single most important export of The Gambia. However, the smallest farmers cannot earn any significant amount of money by selling the excess of groundnuts that is left after their family's own consumption. In order to become a successful groundnut farmer, a pair of oxen to pull a plough, and workers, are needed. Mostly, family members and other relatives work in the fields. Only a few farmers in the village employ "strange farmers" (*luntangolu*<sup>6</sup>). An employer does not pay the "strange farmers", but he gives them land to cultivate and seed nuts<sup>7</sup>, provides them with food and a room to live in. The "strange farmers" work four days a week at their employer's fields and the rest of the time they can spend on their own fields (see also Wright 1997: 153-154).

The domestic animals in Jarranding include cows, oxen, donkeys, horses, goats, sheep and chickens. There are two Fula men who herd the villagers' cows. Other animals are looked after by their owners. During daytime goats and sheep stroll and pasture around the village.

Nobody in the village is able to make a living exclusively from farming. The ways in which people earn money vary. There are some male teachers, tailors, carpenters, building workers, fishermen and shopkeepers. In addition, there are ten marabouts, Muslim clerics who earn money by for instance preparing *booroo* and conducting divination. Some men

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<sup>6</sup> *Luntango* is used for strangers in general, but farm workers who come to work at the village from other places are always called "strangers".

<sup>7</sup> Sometimes a "strange farmer" may have to pay back the seed nuts after the harvest.

make baskets, cut thatch or fell rhun palms illegally<sup>8</sup>. Some men and especially boys bind fans of rhun palm leaves to earn some money at the market. Women sell things they make and collect, such as embroidered clothes, clay pots, soap, salt, baobab fruits and *kuntomansingo* – roots of a swamp plant. The latter are sold to Senegal where incenses are produced from them.

### **Social Organisation of the Village**

The village leader (*alikaaloo*) is the oldest man in the senior line of the family that founded the village. The village leader's main responsibility is to maintain peace in his village. He solves quarrels and land disputes. The village leader has a group of advisors (*kiitiilaalu*) consisting of elder men who help the village leader with his decisions. The village leader must be informed of all the matters that concern the village. Strangers who want to settle down there must be presented to him and the planning of any development or aid program goes through the village leader. He is responsible for housing and feeding people who come to help the villagers, for instance to dig a new well or to build roads. The village leader is also an intermediary between the government and the village. He helps the government workers to collect taxes and he informs government officials about the needs of the villagers.

Village leaders of the same district are governed by a district chief (*seefoo*). If someone is discontent with the village leader's decisions or settling of arguments, he may take his case further to the district chief. However, both village leaders and district chiefs have lost a lot of their power after the establishment of governmental institutions. The police and the court of justice deal with serious transgressions that require punishment in the form of a fine or imprisonment.

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<sup>8</sup> People can get a permit to fell rhun palms in order to build houses, but if caught felling rhun palms illegally the fine can be severe. However, people say that when a family is hungry, it is better to steal from a forest than from a shop, and it is worth taking the risk of getting caught.

The imam (*alimaamoo*) is the religious leader of the village. His principle duty is to lead the prayers at the mosque and other religious ceremonies, and to advise people in religious matters. The imam has to be a man with a good knowledge of Islam. Women cannot lead the prayers. The villagers elect the imam and he may continue in the position as long as the majority is pleased with his conduct. There have been a lot of disputes attached to the imam post in Jarranding and the post has not been held within the same family, as in some other villages in The Gambia (see e.g. Seibert 1993: 18). During most of my fieldwork, the village imam was sick and a young man with Islamic skills acted as his substitute. People prefer to have an older man as imam and even though the villagers were content with the work of the substitute imam, they said that due to his age he could not have a permanent position as the village imam.

The compounds in Jarranding are divided into three *kaabiiloolu*. *Kaabiiloo* is often understood as referring to a lineage, an extended family who have a common male ancestor (see e.g. Seibert 1993: 18; Overballe 1990: 150). In Jarranding some compounds within a *kaabiiloo* belong to the same patrilineage, but there are not necessarily family relations between all the compounds that belong to the same *kaabiloo* (see also Gamble and Rahman 1998: 1). People who have moved to Jarranding from other places belong to the *kaabiloo* that gave them land to build their compounds. Therefore, compounds belonging to the same *kaabiloo* are usually close to each other geographically, forming a neighbourhood or a compound cluster<sup>9</sup> (see also Gamble and Rahman 1998: 1). The leader of a *kaabiiloo* (*kaabiilootiyo*<sup>10</sup>) is the oldest man in the senior line of the family who founded the *kaabiiloo*. Important matters concerning the *kaabiiloo*, for instance marriages and disputes, must be discussed with the leader of the *kaabiiloo*.

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<sup>9</sup> In Jarranding one *kaabiiloo* is on the outskirts of the village and forms a half circle that surrounds the two other *kaabiiloolu*. Some of the compounds that belong to this *kaabiiloo* are on opposite sides of the village. Furthermore there are fields between some of the *kaabiloo*'s compounds.

<sup>10</sup> This means literally "owner of the *kaabiiloo*."

There are thirty-two compounds (*koridaalu*), each consisting of several buildings that are surrounded by a fence. The compound leader (*koridaatiyo*<sup>11</sup>) is the eldest man in the senior line of a patrilineal kingroup. He must be consulted in all matters concerning the compound, such as life cycle ceremonies and disputes, and his decisions must be respected by other members of the compound. Other compound members may consist of the compound head's wives and unmarried children, his married sons with their wives and children, and his younger brothers with their wives and children. In addition there may be widowed mothers of the male compound members and strangers who have settled down there either temporarily or permanently. The size of the compounds varies. The smallest compound in Jarranding consists of a single nuclear family of four persons, while in the biggest compound lives an extended family of fifty-nine people. Seventeen of the compounds consist of only one household. In the bigger compounds there are from two to seven households.

Every married man is the head of a household (*suutiyo*<sup>12</sup>). His household consists of his wife or wives and their unmarried children. In addition, a household may include the husband's widowed mother or mothers, both biological and classificatory, and his divorced or widowed daughters or sisters. Divorced or widowed daughters from the wives' earlier marriages may also be included in his household if they were brought up at his compound.

When a man has more than one wife, his household may include several cooking units (*sinkiroo*<sup>13</sup>). Some of the married women have their own cooking hut, while other co-wives share a cooking place and take turns in cooking. Cooking is done over an open fire. A big iron pot stands on three stones between which the fire is lit. This fireplace is called a

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<sup>11</sup> This means literally "owner of the compound".

<sup>12</sup> This means literally "owner of the home".

<sup>13</sup> This means literally "fireplace".

*sinkiroo* and women who cook on the same fireplace form a cooking unit that is also called a *sinkiroo*. Furthermore, people who eat food that is prepared in the same pot are also regarded as the members of the same *sinkiroo*<sup>14</sup>. Women of the same cooking unit, their daughters and young sons eat from the same bowl while the men of the compound and school aged boys gather to eat together from the bowls that are brought to them by the women. Sometimes children get a separate bowl.

Polygyny is common in Jarranding. Over half of the married men have more than one wife, but only one man has the maximum of four wives allowed by Islam. The men who have several wives often tease those who have only one spouse. It gives a man prestige to have several wives, at least if he manages to maintain peace in his household. Several wives also give him a chance to have more children. Children are precious. They contribute to making a family a functioning entity. Children help their parents with the daily chores and farming. They will also support and take care of their parents when they get old. There is always the hope that at least one of the children will be successful in his or her life.

It is common to have foster children acquired from relatives or close friends. Barren women are especially eager to foster children, since having children is considered to be the most important aspect of womanhood. It is also convenient for a woman whose own daughters have left the compound to foster a granddaughter who can help her with household chores. Also, boys are taken as foster children. For instance, families who have not got a son may wish to raise a boy. Some children move to relatives in places where there are schools, in hope of a better education.

Co-wives take turns sleeping in their husband's room. Each of them spends two nights with him. Other nights, women sleep in women's houses (*musoo bungo*) together with

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<sup>14</sup> The Mandinko often spend a long time greeting each other and asking how or actually where, the rest of the family and its members are. A question "*Dimbaayaa lee?*" is frequently used when greeting each other. *Dimbaa* means fire. Therefore the question can be translated "Where are the people of the fire?" i.e. "Where is your family?"

their daughters and young sons. Boys start to sleep in their own bedroom when they are around seven years old. The wife who sleeps in the husband's room cooks the day's meals, does his laundry, cleans his house and fetches him water on those days. Usually, co-wives seem to get along well. They spend a lot of time in each other's company. They join one another's working parties at the rice fields and they attend social gatherings together. Co-wives appreciate each other's help at the household chores and a co-wife makes it easier for a woman to visit relatives and friends in other places as the household chores can be tended to by her co-wife. Women rarely admit hostile feelings towards their co-wives when they are asked directly about it, but jealousy among them is a common theme in discussions. Islam stresses that a husband must treat his wives equally, but elder wives often feel left alone when their husband gets a young bride (*maanyoo*). However, an elder wife has some authority over a younger co-wife. She is privileged by her age and she can, for instance, order her husband's new bride to do certain tasks. Wives who have not born any children to their husband often feel inferior to those who have done so.

The population in Jarranding is also divided into three hereditary and traditionally endogamous "occupational categories" or "castes"<sup>15</sup>: "nobles" or "non-professional freemen"<sup>16</sup> (*sulaalu*), professionals (*nyamaaloolu*) and slaves (*jongolu*). The category of professionals consists of blacksmiths (*numoolu*), griots (*jeloolu*) and leatherworkers (*karankeewolu*). A great majority of the village belongs to the first category of non-professional freemen. This is typical in West African "caste" societies (Tamari 1995: 61).

Out of thirty-two compounds in the village only four belong to professionals. One of them is

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<sup>15</sup> There is no exact Mandinka word for "caste" that could only be applied in order to refer collectively to "occupational categories". A word *siyo* can be used, but it also refers to, for instance, ethnic groups and nationalities (see also Hoffman 2000: 240-241; Janson 2002: 252n17). There has also been discussion whether the term "caste" can be applied to these groups in West Africa (see e.g. Wright 1989; Launay 1995).

<sup>16</sup> Sommerfelt (1999: 40) uses this term instead of the more common "nobles" because not all the people belonging to this category are descendants of royal families. Furthermore she refrains from applying two other prevalent terms for this "caste" category, namely, "freemen" or "freeborn", because they carry a false connotation of all the others being perceived as unfree (Sommerfelt 1999: 40).

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a blacksmith compound, another is a griot and the remaining two are leatherworkers. There are also people belonging to the slave category in Jarranding, but I was unable to recognize them. People said that slavery in The Gambia was abolished a long time ago and warned me from probing into slave families, because calling somebody a slave is a serious insult and a person could be taken to court for it (for similar experience see Sommerfelt 1999: 50). In opposition to other “caste” groups that often can be recognized from their surnames, there are no typical slave names since slaves were given the surname of their “owners” (see also Sommerfelt 1999: 126).

The villagers say that endogamous marriage rules are not as strictly followed as before. This statement is corroborated by actual marriages among professionals. For example, in addition to other griots, griots have married leatherworkers and smiths; furthermore a second wife of one griot is a non-professional freeman. However, this man said that it took a lot of negotiation before her father allowed him to marry her. However, since Jarranding is a small village and the amount of professionals is low, it is hard to base any evaluations of prevalence of such exogamous marriages on my material. (For other findings on the matter see e.g. Sommerfelt 1999: 51-53; Schaffer 1987: 62)

Across the family based groupings people are divided into age-sets (*fulan-kafoolu*) that include persons of approximately the same age. Age-sets are further divided by gender. Children and youth raise money with their age-mates, for instance by weeding on farms, in order to organise their own parties with refreshments during the major Muslim celebrations of *Id al-Fitr* at the end of Ramadan (*Sunkaroo Saloo*) and *Id al-Adha*, Tabaski (*Banna Saloo*). Sometimes age-sets assist their members in organising naming ceremonies and weddings. When somebody of an age-set has a wedding, his or her age-mates (*fulangolu*), both men and women, often organise some entertainment for him or her. Age-mates form lifelong relations with each other and since the age-sets crosscut kinship ties they are

considered to add cohesion within a society (see also Schaffer 1987: 90-94; Weil 1971: 283-284; Overballe 1990: 148-149).

In addition to the age-sets, both men and women have their own groups (*kafoolu*) in the village. These groups include all the men and women from different age-sets. They raise money by making contributions to common savings. The money is used for the common good in the village, for instance to maintain public buildings, such as the mosque and Islamic school. Groups are also formed in order to carry out different projects in the village. There is, for instance a garden-group (*naakoo-kafoo*) which is responsible for planning the rebuilding of a communal vegetable garden that burnt down a couple of years ago.

### **Fieldwork and Method**

Hastrup holds that the present tense that is prevalent in anthropological literature “reflects the reality of fieldwork” (1995: 20). During the fieldwork “the ethnographer is actively engaged in the construction of the ethnographic reality or, one might say, ethnographic present” (Hastrup 1995: 16). The present thesis is based on the fieldwork that I conducted from September 1999 to July 2000. Despite the fact that time has passed and changes have occurred both in Jarranding and in The Gambia in general, I present my material in ethnographic present in order to emphasize that ethnography is an ongoing interpretive process.

Only a few men in Jarranding speak English fluently. To learn a local language, Mandinka, was necessary in order to communicate with most of the villagers, especially since I did not manage to employ a translator. My Mandinka skills were very poor when I first arrived in Jarranding. The first four months I spent a lot of time learning the language. My skills improved, but I did not become fluent in Mandinka. I could chat (*kacaa*) with people, but when I listened to vivid conversations I was often only able to understand a part

of them and I had to ask people to explain them to me slowly. Alternatively, if there was somebody who spoke English I asked him to help and translate for me. Often I noticed that people did not translate everything that had been said and they presented the matter from their point of view. In these cases, I posed further questions to the people who were involved. Especially in the early phase of my fieldwork, I often satisfied my curiosity by talking with the men who speak English. After a while I was able to talk more with others, both men and women, who often were surprisingly patient in explaining their matters to me. Sometimes people told me that I should return another day with somebody who could translate, because they got frustrated when I did not comprehend everything at once, and wanted to make sure that I understood everything correctly. Often I discussed the same things with the same people on different occasions in order to make sure that I had not misunderstood. Finally, I assume that without the basic skills in Mandinka, several important and meaningful aspects of how people perceive the world would probably have remained hidden for me. As will become apparent in my thesis, it was often through trying to understand local expressions, the ways and contexts in which they were used, that I gained a better understanding of people's way of thinking and acting.

I became a member of an extended griot family that consisted of three households. Ousman, a son of the compound head's late brother, became my father. Ousman has three wives and his second wife, Aisatou, became my mother. In the beginning, due to my problems with the language, I was not able to do much more than to participate in and observe daily chores and activities in the village which I, of course, kept on doing during the entire fieldwork. I spent time in my mother's cooking hut; helped her at her rice fields; went to collect salt, firewood and baobab fruits with women; worked on my father's groundnut farm with my sisters; visited naming ceremonies, prayers after death and weddings together with my family, etc. In the early phase of my fieldwork I also took a census of the village by

visiting every compound. This turned out to be a good way to get to know people. After this my language skills were good enough to carry out structured interviews. In the course of time I made friends, and interviews turned into more informal conversations, although I always had several questions to pose.

My aim with the fieldwork was to explore how people conceive of sickness, what they do when they become sick, how they combine different healing methods and their ideas of aetiology. In addition to interviewing people and observing what they did when they got sick, I visited the health centre in Jarrabaa several times where I interviewed and talked with nurses. I also interviewed marabouts, other healers and diviners in Jarranding and in some neighbouring villages. While most of the marabouts, healers and diviners I met were willing to discuss their occupations with me in general terms, none of them wanted to reveal their secrets, at least not for free, or allow me to observe them while they were working. People often want to keep their visits to marabouts, healers and diviners private, but I had some opportunities to accompany my friends who consulted them. I also consulted some marabouts myself and a couple of times my mother initiated a visit on my behalf. Throughout the fieldwork my focus was mainly on the ideas of people in general, not on the practitioners of *booroo* per se.

The writing process after fieldwork can be seen as a continuation of the interpretive process that goes on in the field (Wadel 1991: 160). When I went through my field notes and read more West African ethnography, several Mandinka words and aspects within society in Jarranding appeared more meaningful than I had first thought. Through the writing process I began to see a bigger picture in all that I had learnt and observed during my ten and a half months stay in The Gambia. This involved also recognition of the fact that the realm of *booroo* embraced far wider fields than the realm of sickness and healing.

## The Chapters

Chapter Two introduces the concept of *booroo*. I consider contexts in which people apply *booroo* and contemplate the application of the word *booroo*. I describe briefly diverse types of *booroolu* and practices in the realm of *booroo*. I further introduce how *booroo* is associated with local notions of knowledge (*londoo*) and power (*semboo*). Finally, I consider some moral aspects related to *booroo*.

Chapters Three and Four are concerned with ideas of causality and how these ideas affect people's choices of *booroo*. In Chapter Three I base my discussion on the idea of multiple "levels of causality" that often has been recognized in African thinking (Evans-Pritchard 1976: 26; Goody 1962: 209-210). I introduce an idea of three levels of sources of power which is prevalent in Jarranding and describe what these sources consist of. In Chapter Four I continue to explore ideas of causality from a more pragmatic point of view. Through discussing an empirical case I investigate how people go about using *booroo* in cases of sickness. I approach questions on how people reflect on aetiology and to what extent ideas of causality are made relevant in people's choices of *booroo*.

In Chapter Five I concentrate on *booroo* in the form of powerful substances and words. I explore what kind of substances and words people conceive of as powerful and why they consider that some *booroolu* are more effective than others.

Chapters Six and Seven turn to consider actions of practitioners of *booroo*. The main focus is on marabouts. In Chapter Six I explore how practitioners of *booroo* gain their knowledge and power. I further investigate the extent to which knowledge about *booroo* is secret and restricted to the hands of a few members within society. Chapter Seven concerns power in social relations. I investigate economic and social advantages of possessing secret knowledge related to *booroo* and to what extent marabouts can gain power over others'

actions. I consider how both ability to prepare *booroo* and access to *booroo* through others may render a person powerful.

## Chapter Two

### INTRODUCING *BOOROO*

Babanding is showing me out of his house when I notice a small dusty bottle above the entrance door. There is a piece of paper attached to a string from which the bottle hangs from the wall. I ask what it is. “It is *booroo*. It is only *booroo* (*Booroo le mu ti. Booroo dorong*)”, he replies on his way out hurrying to carry the sacks of groundnuts his son has brought from the fields into a store.

*Booroo* is everywhere. The villagers refer to diverse amulets as *booroo*. Small children play in the compounds with amulets hanging as necklaces on their chests. Amulets can be pieces of paper with written verses from the Qur’an wrapped in leather or cloth, crocodile teeth, pieces of wood and small antelope horns containing pounded leaves. Older children running along the sandy paths have amulets tied around their necks or waists, but some of them have lost them somewhere. Some adults have amulets around their upper arms, others carry them in their hair and many have them hidden under their clothes. Some men have hung round leather belts, filled with powerful designs and verses drawn and written by marabouts, on the wall, waiting to be used on travels perhaps. Amulets are attached to sticks put in the ground near the cattle that is grazing on the field. Strips of cloth tied around the wrists of newborn babies and branches of *kipanpango* shrub that are suspended above the door where they sleep are called *booroo*. A young mother applies some potion, *booroo*, over the face of her child that she is carrying on her back before she leaves their compound. People regularly come from the bush carrying plants they will prepare *booroo* out of. Branches of dried leaves are stuck under the roofs of verandas, there are

bottles filled with potions under beds and empty Paracetamol covers lying on the roads. The villagers say: “It is all *booroo*. It is good. (*I bee mu booroo le ti. A beteyaata.*)”

In the present chapter I introduce the concept of *booroo* by considering people’s comments on *booroo* as “good” (*beteyaata*). I begin by describing typical situations when *booroo* is used and how the word *booroo* is applied. In turn I consider the ambiguous moral character of *booroo* as being both good and evil. Good and evil are relativistic and contextual categories among people in Jarranding, and often what is emphasised is the usefulness and effectiveness of *booroo*. I also introduce two themes that I continue to investigate in the following chapters, namely *booroo* conceived of as power and knowledge.

Villagers who speak English, and Mandinka-English dictionaries (Gamble 1987a, W.E.C. International 1995), translate the Mandinka word *booroo* as “medicine”. Whyte (1997: 28, 179) points out that in many African languages, the word for medicine has a wide range of meanings. Among Nyole in eastern Uganda “[a]lmost any substance that has the power to change something can be called a medicine” (Whyte 1997:28). Whyte indicates that the meaning of the word “medicine” in Lunyole, the language spoken by Nyole, is more comprehensive than in English (1997: 28, 179). People in Jarranding too refer to diverse substances and objects that are used to protect, to cure, to attain a change, to harm and to give guidance by one generic term. In the following, I will give a brief description of various types of *booroo*. I do not describe them in detail, but I want to give an idea of the great diversity of *booroo*. I refer to other sources for descriptions where I find it possible and some examples will be given in further detail later on.

The translation of *booroo* into medicine is problematic and biased in certain ways. In English dictionaries medicine is pre-eminently defined as practice of the prevention and

treatment of disease or as a substance to prevent and cure diseases (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 1989: 774; The Oxford Encyclopedic English Dictionary 1991: 901). As described below, the things comprehended as *booroo* affect a far wider realm than that of disease and the human body. Translating *booroo* as medicine may give an impression that the use of *booroo* is limited to cases concerning diseases. The wider English definition of medicine includes for instance spells and charms which are believed to cure afflictions (The Oxford Encyclopedic English Dictionary 1991: 901). Although this definition covers a wider application than simply cases of disease, it still differs significantly from *booroo*, which in addition to the cure and prevention of affliction, can also be used to cause suffering. Below I explore *booroo* on its own premises by considering its diverse effects and purposes. In order to avoid unjustified connotations to the common English definition of medicine, I choose to keep on using the Mandinka words *booroo* in singular and *booroolu*<sup>17</sup> in plural.

### **Contexts and Purposes of Use**

As implied above, *booroo* includes numerous kinds of substances, objects and practices that affect the course of events, for instance, biomedicines, potions, amulets, parts of plants and trees. *Booroo* is practised both by laymen and diverse types of specialists, including biomedical nurses (*noosoolu*) and doctors (*doktoorolu*), marabouts (*morolu*), healers (*jaarallaalu*), circumcisers<sup>18</sup>, magicians (*koritelaalu*), “owners of fetish” (*jalang-tiyolu*) and bone-setters (*bulandilaalu*). Moreover, *booroo* is a generic term that denotes a wide range of subcategories. Before considering applications of the word *booroo* in more detail, I provide some brief examples of circumstances in which the term *booroo* is used to denote substances and objects, and how these *booroolu* are used and what is expected of them.

<sup>17</sup> In Mandinka the plural form of nouns is formed by the addition of *-lu* in the end of the word.

<sup>18</sup> Female circumciser is called *ngansimbaa*. Male circumciser is referred to as *numoo*, which means blacksmith, because it is usually men from a blacksmith “caste” who circumcise boys. Often female circumcisers are also members of the blacksmith “caste” (Frank 1998: 130), but in Jarranding the female circumciser belongs to a leatherworker “caste”. Sommerfelt holds that “[m]embers of the leatherworker- and smith categories are often represented as ‘one and the same’” (1999: 44).

In general, everyone uses *booroo* at some point. Certain *booroolu* are used continuously while others are used during different phases of the year. An individual's life cycle also creates circumstances that require *booroo*. Finally, there are several unforeseen situations in which villagers choose to seek help from *booroo* and those who practise it.

Some types of *booroolu* are in use all the time. Some of the most common *booroolu* used by villagers are protective written amulets (*safoolu*) and script potions (*nasoolu*) prepared by marabouts. In order to prepare a written amulet (*safoo*) a marabout writes certain verses from the Qur'an or draws a design (*katumoo*) consisting of letters, calculations, words, names and/or verses from the Qur'an on a piece of paper that is, for instance sewn into a piece of leather or concealed inside a horn by a leatherworker. Amulets are carried on the body, suspended on buildings and dug into the ground in compounds. In order to prepare a script potion (*nasoo*) a marabout writes the verses or draws the design on a wooden writing board (*walaa*) and washes the writing off the board into water. Potions are consumed internally and used externally on the body as well as sprinkled around the surroundings. Many use protective *booroo* continuously. It safeguards people against harm caused by spirits (*jinoolu*) and the ill will of other people, including cannibal witches (*buwalu* or *moo domolaalu*<sup>19</sup>). It keeps people away from accidents and brings them good luck. It also protects their houses and property.

There is also periodical use of *booroo*, for instance in connection with a farming season. Both women and men acquire written amulets and script potions from marabouts in order to get good harvests. Some people use *booroolu* made of plants and trees to strengthen their bodies during arduous farming periods and to prevent malaria, which is frequent during the rainy season. At this time of year an extra caution is also taken to avoid mosquitoes inside houses. Mosquito nets are repaired and those who can afford it buy mosquito

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<sup>19</sup> *Moo domolaa* means literally a human eater.

repellents (*suusuulaa booroo*<sup>20</sup>). When the rains are over and the village is surrounded by tall and dry grass, people gather together to burn down the grass in order to make a firebreak, so that bush fires that occur during the dry season, do not reach the village. In addition, many people sprinkle protective script potions around their compounds as prevention against fire. This too is referred to as *booroo*.

*Booroo* is useful in several circumstances of individuals' life cycles. *Booroo* is used in rites of passage and is applied to meet diverse needs of people that vary according to their age. Circumcisers prepare *booroolu* out of trees and plants that protect the newly circumcised from witches and make their wounds heal faster. Ceremonies with crowds, such as naming (*kulliyoo*<sup>21</sup>), circumcision<sup>22</sup> and wedding (*maanyoo-bitoo*<sup>23</sup>), make people particularly cautious of evil eye (*nyaa jawoo*), envy, and the ill will of others that might harm a person. Especially those who are celebrated use protective amulets and potions mentioned above. Marabouts are consulted in order to find a suitable spouse and love magic (*kanoo*) can be used to make him or her amenable to marry. *Booroo* helps those who have difficulties conceiving children and it can determine the baby's sex. It is also applied as birth control. *Booroo* can enable success in studies and assist a person in securing a good job.

<sup>20</sup> *Suusuulaa* means a mosquito. It comes from a verb *suusuu* that means to suck.

<sup>21</sup> This means literally head shaving. *Kungo* means head and *lii* is to shave. An infant's head is shaved and he or she is given a name in a ceremony that is held when the child is eight-days-old, but people in Jarranding do not count the day the child is born and talk about seventh day "head shaving" ceremony. The ceremony is held on the same day of the week as the child was born. (For description of the ceremony see e.g. Gamble and Rahman 1998: 5-11)

<sup>22</sup> There was no male circumcision in Jarranding during my fieldwork, but I attended a celebration after circumcised boys' seclusion period in Serrekunda. I know that at least one girl was circumcised during my stay in Jarranding, but I was not invited to the ceremony, probably because only circumcised girls and women are supposed to be present. (For some accounts of circumcision see e.g. Gamble and Rahman 1998: 18-39; Skramstad 1990: 5-8) However, people tell that traditions attached to circumcision have changed tremendously in the past years.

<sup>23</sup> This means literally covering of a bride. *Maanyoo* means bride and *biti* is to cover. The ceremony is usually held after several years of marriage. The whole wedding day the bride's head is covered with an expensive decorated cloth that she carries over her head and shoulders. When people gather together to give advice and to pray for the wedded couple, the bride's whole body is covered with two white cloths. (See e.g. Gamble and Rahman 1998: 67-69)

Certain occasions and unforeseen situations entail the application of *booroo*. In cases of illness diverse kinds of *booroolu* are used both for diagnosis and cure. People hardly ever embark on long journeys without protective amulets or potions. *Booroo* can reveal thieves and witches. It can be helpful in quarrels and fights. There is *booroo* that can cause illness, severe misfortune and death to others, or deport them from a village.

It is easy to focus on the use of *booroo* in critical situations and in cases when specific aims are sought, but it is equally important to point out that *booroo* is in constant use. While *booroo* is acquired ahead of uncertain situations and in times of distress, it is also generally good to use *booroo* when peace and well-being prevail. When asking people about their amulets, they frequently comment on protective amulets by saying: “It is only *booroo*. It is good. (*Booroo dorong. A beteyaata.*)” *Booroo* is good because it adds security. It is not only used in order to bring things back to normal or to obtain goals in life, but it is also applied in order to avoid change and to maintain the regular course of daily life. On the other hand, *booroo* can be bad (*jawuyaata*) or described as “not good” (*mam beteyaa*) when it is used to harm others. All in all, *booroo* is used in order to affect the course of events.

### **Concepts of *Booroo***

In the following I clarify how the word *booroo* is applied. What do people refer to and conceive of as *booroo*? Objects and substances called *booroo* can be differentiated by diverse terms that indicate their form or purpose. The word *booroo* is the generic term for them all, while other words are used to specify the type of *booroo* in question.

Some of the terms that specify the form of *booroo* include the word *booroo* in its indefinite form *boori*, for instance *boori kesoo*<sup>24</sup> – tablet, *boori jiyo*<sup>25</sup> – liquid *booroo*, *boori*

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<sup>24</sup> *Kesoo* can be translated as pill, but also as grain, bullet or key of a xylophone (Gamble 1987a: 67).

<sup>25</sup> *Jiyo* means water.

*tuloo*<sup>26</sup> – ointment and *boori munkoo*<sup>27</sup> – powdered *booroo*. While tablets refer to biomedicines, the three other words are used to describe both biomedicines and *booroo* made of plants and trees. Other examples of words based on the form of *booroo* are *penkoo* – injection, *nasoo* – script potion, *safoo* – written amulet and *tafoo* – an amulet that is a piece of string with knots in it. Strictly speaking both *nasoolu* and *safoolu*<sup>28</sup> include Arabic verses from the Qur’an. In daily speech people also often refer to liquid *booroo* (*boori jiyo*) exclusively made of trees and plants as *nasoo* and to amulets consisting of a crocodile tooth or a bone of a donkey, as *safoolu*. Alternatively, people call them *booroolu*.

Amulets can be differentiated according to where they must be carried, for example, *kunto safoo* and *karalaa*. *Kunto* means “above” or “on the top” and *kunto safoo* is attached to hair. *Kara* means “side” and *karalaa* is an amulet worn on the side.

There are also specific terms that indicate the purpose of the *booroo*. For instance, protective written amulets and script potions mentioned above are called *tankarangolu* or *balakantarangolu*. Both *tanka* and *kanta* can be translated “to protect” while *rango* is a suffix that can be added to some verbs in order to form nouns<sup>29</sup> (Gamble 1987b:8). *Bala* means “body” and therefore *balakantarango* can be understood as a thing that is for protection of the body. *Balandango* is a written amulet that makes its carrier impenetrable to knives and other sharp objects. *Balang* means “to refuse” and *dango* is another suffix by which nouns can be formed out of verbs<sup>30</sup> (Gamble 1987b: 8). A specific name for a written amulet that protects against bullets is formed by adding a word for “a gun”, *kidi*, in front of

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<sup>26</sup> *Tuloo* means oil.

<sup>27</sup> *Munkoo* means powder or flour.

<sup>28</sup> *Safee* means to write.

<sup>29</sup> Some other examples of forming words in this way are a bed, *laarango* where *laa* means to lie, and a broom, *fitarango* where *fita* means to sweep (Gamble 1987b: 8).

<sup>30</sup> Another example is a cup, *mindango*. *Ming* means to drink. (Gamble 1987b: 8)

the word – *kidibalandango*. *Dabaroo* and *koriteewo*<sup>31</sup> refer to any form of *booroo* that is used in order to hurt someone.

### **Other Components in the Realm of *Booroo***

When people want to acquire *booroo*, the Mandinka expression says that they go to look for it (“*I be taa boori nyinoo la*”). People do not merely seek *booroolu* as substances and objects; they also look for help in the form of advice and treatment from diverse practitioners of *booroo*. Sometimes people equate prayers (*duwaalu*) and spells (*hijaaboolu*) with *booroo*. Divination (*juubeeroo*) that results in giving charity (*sadaa*) is not referred to as *booroo*, but villagers frequently consult marabouts and diviners (*juubeerilaalu*) when they are searching for *booroo*. Some people are only specialized in divination and they do not prepare any *booroo*, but marabouts often perform divination in addition to preparing a written amulet or a script potion. In the following I describe briefly practices that have similar effects as *booroo* and that are frequently combined with the use of *booroo*.

Sometimes people in Jarranding, especially elders, comment that prayers are their *booroo*. They say that instead of using *booroo* made of trees and plants or in the form of amulets, potions or biomedicines, they rather utter prayers (*duwaa*<sup>32</sup>) or some verses from the Qur’an. People recite the verses towards their palms, after which they spit slightly on their hands and pull them over their faces. People repeat the verses three or seven times. Ousman, one of the biggest groundnut farmers in the village, said that he does not bother to consult a marabout before the farming season in order to get a good harvest like many others do. Instead, he says: “*Bisimillaay*” – “In the name of God”. He believes and hopes that God will help him.

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<sup>31</sup> Gamble (1987a: 26) translates *dabaroo* as magic, sorcery and *koriteewo* (Gamble 1987a: 72) as a spell.

<sup>32</sup> These prayers are different from the five daily Muslim prayers that are called *saloolu*.

Other types of prayers are not referred to as *booroo*, but they are believed to have similar effects as *booroo*. When people greet each other they often say short prayers in Mandinka, for instance:” May Allah grant us long life and good health (*Alla maa siimaayaa baa aning jaati kendeyaa baa.*)” People gather together to say prayers for those who depart on long journeys and to new building projects. In life-cycle ceremonies, prayers are said on behalf of those who are celebrated and after death prayers are said for the deceased so that he or she would deserve a good afterlife<sup>33</sup>. Villagers can invite others to pray for them by giving them charity. Sometimes people pay for persons learned in Islam (*taliboolu*) to recite the Qur’an on their behalf in order to obtain them blessings. Performing Muslim prayers (*saloolu*), in addition to the obligatory five daily prayers, is also believed to have a beneficial effect. Prayers affect the course of events like *booroo* does. In addition, as will be pointed out in Chapter Four, prayers are often an ingredient in other forms of *booroo*.

Parallels are also drawn between spells (*hijaaboolu*) and *booroo*. On occasions when villagers say that somebody has good *booroo* for a certain situation, for instance a pain in a throat or a sore, this *booroo* consists of a secret spell. A healer recites a secret spell in a quiet voice, so others cannot hear it, on the body part that is injured and draws his or her hands over it. Each time the healer finishes the words he or she spits slightly on the patient’s body. Sometimes a healer may also prepare an amulet (*tafoo*) by using a spell. The healer mutters the spell towards a piece of string, spits slightly on the string and ties a knot in it. This is repeated three or seven times. Then the amulet is tied to the patient’s body.

Marabouts and diviners use diverse methods of divination (*juubeeroo*) in order to help people. They divine by dreams (*lastakaari*), throwing cowrie shells (*kuuring fayi*) (see e.g. McNaughton 1988: 53-54), drawing lines in sand (*ramuloo*) (see e.g. McNaughton 1988: 54-55), by use of Muslim prayer beads (*yaajjimoo*) (see e.g. Trimmingham 1961: 120-

<sup>33</sup> Prayers are organized the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> day after death (see e.g. Gamble and Rahman 1998: 82-85).

121), or they receive information (*kibaaroo*) through a spirit. People say that spirits know future happenings, but they cannot remember the distant past. The word for divination, *juubeeroo*, comes from the verb *juubee*, to see. Through divination marabouts and diviners can see the future and causes of affliction as well as ways to attain desired goals, to avoid misfortune and to get rid of suffering. Solutions are found in giving charity (*sadaa*) and sometimes certain other actions must be carried out, for instance, a marabout can advise a person to catch a bird, hold it in his or her hands while saying prayers and let the bird free again. Occasionally the divination may recommend a person wait before proceeding with his or her plans. Villagers hardly ever make any major decisions or embark on long journeys without consulting divination that can give advice on how to manage the personal challenges of life.

### **Indigenous Categories of *Booroo***

It has been pointed out that *booroo* is a generic term that can be specified according to its form and purpose, but sometimes *booroo* is also divided into categories that include diverse *booroolu* and other components in this realm, based on different types of knowledge.

Occasionally, villagers divide *booroo* into two categories, namely “white man’s” *booroo* (*tubaabu booroo*) and “black man’s” *booroo* (*moofing booroo*). By “white man’s” *booroo* they refer to biomedicines and biomedical practices that were introduced in The Gambia by Europeans. The first hospital in The Gambia, The Royal Victoria Hospital in Banjul, was built in the 1850s and biomedical practices were pioneered by Catholic nuns (Thuv 1998: 79; Berglund 1975: 81). By “black man’s” *booroo* people refer to objects, substances and practices that were already in use before Europeans introduced their methods. “Black man’s” *booroo* includes *booroolu* made of plants and trees, amulets and potions made by marabouts, as well as prayers, spells and divination. “Black man’s” *booroo* is often also called traditional *booroo* (*cosaani booroo*) or *Mandinka booroo*.

Dilley (2004: 66-67) discusses two opposing domains of lore and knowledge in Fuuta Toro in the Middle Valley of the Senegal River. By constructing elaborate pedigrees *toorobe* Islamic clerics linked their origins to the white Arab-Berber populations. They contrasted their lore and knowledge as an Islamic “white lore” or “religious lore” superior to a non- or pre-Islamic “black lore” or “occupational lore” of the men-of-skill, namely craftsmen, musicians and praise-singers (Dilley 2004: 66-67). People in Jarranding have a similar idea of opposition between certain traditional *booroolu* and *booroo* called Muslim *booroo* (*moori booroo*). Villagers see Muslim *booroo* as based on Islam and excluding the practices that are conceived as pre-Islamic. For instance, spells (*hijaaboolu*) that do not derive from the Qur’an and amulets that do not contain Qur’anic verses are non-Islamic and belong to traditional *booroo*. People say that they are “only Mandinka customs” (“*Mandinka aadoolu dorong*”). However, there is no consensus of opinion about all the methods whether they belong to the sphere of Islam or not.

A frequent example of Muslim practices as opposed to traditional practices is to be found among the methods of divination. The divination through dreams (*lastakaari*) that is performed by marabouts is considered a Muslim method while some villagers say that Islam condemns soothsaying by the method of throwing cowrie shells. In order to divine through dreams, a marabout recites certain verses from the Qur’an when he is praying after which he goes to sleep and “sees” the solution to his client’s problem in his dream (see also Trimingham 1961: 122-123; Sanneh 1979: 191). Throwing cowries is mostly done by fortune-tellers (*juubeerilaalu*) who can also be specified as being cowrie-throwers (*kuuring-fayilaalu*). A cowrie-thrower throws twelve cowries on the ground and by interpreting the way they fall he “sees” both past and future happenings.

Among others, Lamin, a young man who often tells narratives based on Muslim characters, explained that throwing cowries is condemned by Islam because during the flight

of Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina, a cowrie-thrower revealed their hiding place to the people who were chasing them (see also Wittrup 1992: 191). Lamin said that if you consult a cowrie-thrower Allah will not answer your prayers for forty days and if you do not repent for it you will be punished. Lamin consults the cowries regularly, but he repents for it afterwards. Lamin claims that, even if cowrie-throwers may say a lot of nonsense, the first thing they say is always true. Some people, like Lamin's father – Ousman, emphasize the importance and seriousness of their faith by saying that they refrain from using “black man's” methods that are not based on Muslim belief. Ousman does not deny that the cowries can reveal future happenings, but in his opinion the use of them is not good (*mam beteyaa*), because it is against his faith. However, several marabouts in Jarranding, who are learned in Islam, say that there are no religious reasons not to use cowries. Some of them say that they know the method themselves, but none of them uses it, because they are used to divining by prayers and dreams (*lastakaari*) instead.

Even if it can be specified, Muslim *booroo* is usually included in the category of “black man's” *booroo* in opposition to “white man's” *booroo*. This is understandable for several reasons. Islam in West Africa was spread by black people (Trimingham 1961: 31) while Europeans who are associated with “white man's” *booroo* are seen as non-Muslims and Christians. Islam was introduced by North African Berber merchants during the 10<sup>th</sup> century, and in The Gambia it gained its power among the wider population through Marabout wars in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Wright 1997: 30, 156-159). Since Islam has a long history in the country and all the villagers are Muslims, people in Jarranding consider Islam as a part of their tradition (*cosaani*). Islam and traditional customs have developed and changed each other through a mutual dialogue (Trimingham 1961: 40; Dilley 2004: 112) that has resulted in “cultural patterns that are at one and the same time African and Islamic” (Trimingham 1961: 42). Trimingham (1961: 120) argues that Islam does not change people's

psychological attitude towards divination. Pre-Islamic methods of divination continue to exist since people, like Lamin above, are mainly interested in the capacity of diverse forms of divination to work. People in general use a great variety of different methods.

Names of different categories of *booroo* refer to the alleged origins of the *booroo* in question, namely Europe, Mandinka or Islam. They are perceived as based on different types of knowledge introduced by different groups of people. People in Jarranding believe that God has given different knowledge to different people. People do not only talk about “white man’s” *booroo*, but also about “white man’s” schooling (*tubaabu karango*) that is based on the British system and where the teaching is in English, in opposition to Muslim schooling (*karangta, moori karango*) that is based on Islam, and the languages used are Arabic and Mandinka. Like “white man’s” *booroo* “white man’s” schooling was introduced to The Gambia by Christian missionaries during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Berglund 1975: 76; Wright 1997: 195).

Whyte holds that among Nyole in Uganda knowledge of medicines tends to be secret and restricted and therefore “[a]ll medicines, in a sense, come from outside, so that it may be misleading to make too strong a contrast between Nyole medicine and foreign medicine” (Whyte 1988: 225-226). Even if different types of *booroo* are divided into these two or three categories in Jarranding, people do not always make a difference between them, and in general they simply talk about *booroo*. It is not always necessary to specify the category, and categories overlap. In addition, as already exemplified above in the case of fortune telling, there is not always consensus of opinion whether a specific method belongs to the Islamic sphere or not. Different situations may require different types of *booroo*. The use of the “white man’s” *booroo* is limited to the sphere of diseases, while “black man’s” *booroo* can be applied to the wider realm. There are also sicknesses, such as those caused by witchcraft and spirits, that are considered unknown to western biomedicine and therefore require

“black man’s” *booroo*, but in many cases of sickness people consider both “white man’s” *booroo* and “black man’s” *booroo* effective. For instance, in order to prevent tetanus (*jaralaa*), people consider three different methods useful, namely drinking boiled leaves of a mango tree, getting a vaccination from the health centre and tying an amulet around young children’s necks. *Booroo* made of plants and trees is talked about as Mandinka *booroo* or traditional *booroo*, but it is frequently used by marabouts. Furthermore, it is similar to “white man’s” *booroo* since – as the villagers point out – much of it is made out of plants and trees.

### ***Booroo* as a Realm of Power and Morality**

McNaughton (1995) writes about a seemingly contradictory character of Mande blacksmiths in an oral lore as terrifying sorcerers on the one hand and as wonderful culture heroes on the other. He argues that while Westerners, due to Judeo-Christian traditions, judge good and evil quite apart from context, among the Mande they are relative and contextual categories. McNaughton claims that the Mande are far more concerned about aspects of power than ideas of good and evil. By “power” he means the ability to master powerful forces and to make something work (McNaughton 1995). Similar ideas are visible in the way people in Jarranding conceive of *booroo*. *Booroo* is powerful, because it influences the course of events and induces effects in the world. However, in addition to their concern about the power of *booroo*, people make evaluations on whether the use of certain *booroo* is good (*beteyaata*) or not good (*mam beteyaa*), acceptable or not acceptable according to their values. These statements bring forth some ideas of indigenous morality, what people in Jarranding consider to be right and wrong behaviour towards others. As we shall see, whether the use of *booroo* is considered morally right or wrong is relative and contextual.

People often talk about the power (*semboo*) of *booroo*, namely to what extent the *booroo* has anticipated effects as well as how drastic and comprehensive its effects are. In

such statements, *booroolu* are judged by the amount of their power and these judgements of *booroo* move on two parallel axes: very powerful – not powerful (*semboo warata baake* – *mang semboo soto*) and very good (*beteyaata baake*) – not good (*mam beteyaa*). In this case *booroo* that is not good does not refer to any moral aspect of it, but to its futility.

The power of *booroo* has a seemingly contradictory character, since it can bring about both positive and negative consequences. This is a common characteristic of specialized knowledge in many African societies (see e.g. McNaughton 1995: 50; Whyte 1997: 28; Wright 1989: 49). The same knowledge can be utilized both to help and harm people. Furthermore, the same *booroo* can have both beneficial and detrimental consequences to its user. For instance, some very powerful protective *booroo* can as a side effect result in difficulties conceiving children.

When asked directly about the use of *booroo* to harm others (*dabaroo*, *koriteewo*), both laymen and marabouts in Jarranding dissociate themselves from the use of it, because it conflicts with their Muslim ideals. People say that *booroo* is not used so much to hurt others anymore. Many say it was more common in the past when there were wars and no laws to settle land disputes. Now they do not want to fight each other, but to live in peace, and there are more peaceful ways to settle disputes.

However, by other comments people in the village give a different description. Marabouts say they can help you to get a high position at work, even if other candidates are better qualified. They boast about amulets they can prepare that enable you to smuggle goods over borders by making customs officers unable to stop you. Teenage pupils tell about amulets that have helped them to succeed at school better than others and sometimes these amulets have even made their competing class mates repeat a year at school. There is nothing wrong with helping oneself, it is good to do so. People use *booroo* frequently in

order to enhance their own positions and, although at the same time others can get hurt, this is not considered morally wrong. Persons who get harmed by such actions might condemn them, but often they use similar *booroo* themselves.

People consider harming those who have behaved morally wrong acceptable. For instance, amulets that make a thief unable to sleep, urinate or defecate before turning himself in are not condemned. A wife who does not want to have co-wives and uses *booroo* (*dabaroo*) to make her husband unable to have sex when he is together with other women is easily criticized for unacceptable behaviour, but a husband who makes his wife's lover impotent is not disapproved of by people in general, even though the lover's family may condemn the action. There is nothing wrong with using *booroo* against somebody, human or spirit, who is giving you a tough time. All in all it is contextual and relative whether people consider *booroo* that harms others morally right or wrong.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter has been to introduce what people in Jarranding conceive of as *booroo* and how they use it. Several of the themes taken up are explored further on in following chapters. Moreover, *booroo* can be defined as powerful objects, substances, and on occasion certain utterances, that people use in order to affect the course of events in both positive and negative ways. There are also certain practices closely related to the use of *booroo*. People refer to *booroo* as both good (*beteyaata*) and not good (*mam beteyaa*). These statements refer either to the usefulness and effectiveness of *booroo* or to moral aspects associated with it. *Booroo* is a generic term that is specified according to its form and purpose. Furthermore *booroo* can be divided into different categories according to its origin and the knowledge on which it is based, but often people refer to all types of *booroo* simply as *booroo*.

## Chapter Three

### EXPLORING SOURCES OF POWER

In the present chapter I explore ideas of causality in Jarranding. It is necessary to comprehend what people consider to affect the course of events in order to understand how they make choices between different *booroolu*, which I will investigate in the next chapter. As a good starting point I discuss briefly some of Evans-Pritchard's (1976), Goody's (1962) and Whyte's (1997) views on causation among Azande in the southern Sudan; LoDagaa in northwest Ghana and Nyole in eastern Uganda respectively. I modify some of the terms and definitions used by Goody and continue to present an idea of different sources of power that may result in various changes and with which people need to deal in order to influence the course of events.

#### **Ideas of Causality**

Evans-Pritchard (1976) drew attention to different ways of explaining misfortune among Azande in the Southern Sudan. In Zandeland it happens that an old granary collapses over people who are sitting beneath it. For Azande, it is insufficient to explain the accident by saying that people were seeking shade under the granary, and that it collapsed because its supports were eaten by termites. They also want to know why exactly those people happened to be sitting under the granary at the very moment it collapsed. They explain the coincidence by concluding that there was witchcraft involved. They seek an answer to the question of why these people got injured (Evans-Pritchard 1976: 22-23). There is a "plurality of causes" (Evans-Pritchard 1976: 26) among Azande for failure and misfortune. These causes include sickness, incompetence, ignorance, laziness, witchcraft, sorcery and breach of taboos (Evans-Pritchard 1976: 28-29).

In a similar way Goody (1962: 209-210, 218-219) recognizes three different “levels of causation” for death among LoDagaa in the Northwest corner of Ghana, namely, the immediate, the efficient and the final. The immediate cause of death is the technique that sets off death, or is used to kill, such as diseases, snake-bites or witchcraft. The efficient cause is the agent of death, the person who employs the technique and is behind the act of killing. The final cause is the supernatural power that by withdrawing its protection from a person makes the death possible. Goody (1962: 209-210) points out that the divergent explanations for causes of death may appear incoherent, but by realizing the existence of different levels of causality several causes may all be equally valid as reasons for death.

Such “plurality of causes” (Evans-Pritchard 1976: 26) and different “levels of causation” (Goody 1962: 210) can also be recognized in Jarranding. I find Goody’s division into immediate, efficient and final causes helpful, but instead of calling them causes I rather refer to them as sources of power. I understand a “cause” as the producer of an effect; a person or thing that acts or exists in such a way that some specific thing happens as a result. A “source”, on the other hand, refers to a person or thing from which something comes or can be obtained. A cause produces more specific effects while the sources of power recognisable in Jarranding can result in diverse outcomes. Results deriving from the same source can be both positive and negative in varying degrees, as shown in examples of *booroo* in the previous chapter. While a “cause” also means a reason or motive for an action, the outcomes that arise from the sources of power are not necessarily intentional, but may be coincidental. Furthermore, the definition of the word “source” includes the idea that something can be obtained from it. In many cases, people in Jarranding have the possibility to acquire knowledge and power that enables them to influence the courses of events from these sources for their personal purposes. The sources of power may supply people with means to create something and to act on the world. The sources of power affect the course of

events, but people can also resort to them in order to make a change, for instance, by applying *booroo*, consulting marabouts or appealing to God by prayers. Since all the three levels can produce effects and are in this sense efficient, I shift the concept of “efficient sources” to the intermediate level and refer to this as a level of “personalistic sources” of power, thus referring to agents behind the effects.

People in Jarranding consider that different substances and agents possess transformative power that has a capacity to influence the course of events by improving or impairing living conditions. The powers inherent in the world also contribute to maintaining the regular course of life without necessarily resulting in changes, but rather preventing unwanted changes occurring. All events in Jarranding can be seen as influenced by diverse sources of power. Such events in Jarranding include, for example sickness, recovery from sickness, giving birth, miscarriage, passing and failing exams at school, etc. These events can have further consequences, for instance a sickness makes a man unable to work and he becomes poor or a child is good at school and manages to get a well paid job. Immediate sources of power include substances and actions that result in different outcomes, such as *booroo* and the other components in the realm of *booroo*; substances causing sickness, such as infected water and poison of a snake; incidents, for instance falling from a tree that may result in breaking a leg; and individual efforts or lack of them, for example working hard on the fields or not paying attention at school. The personalistic level of sources consists of agents – people, spirits and animals – who possess substances and are behind actions that affect the course of events. Personalistic sources of power is not a completely adequate choice of the word, since a word person refers to a human being, but in the lack of a better word I include animals in the personalistic sources. Immediate sources of power may be obtained from the personalistic sources of power. All people influence their own and others’ lives, but diverse practitioners in the realm of *booroo*, persons using detrimental *booroo*

against others, witches, and witch-fighters, are especially pointed out as personalistic sources of power. While immediate and personalistic sources of power include several elements, the final source of power is Allah who determines in the last instance.

Goody holds that levels of causation form a “causal chain” (1962: 210). Apart from deaths of infants who are not yet weaned and men who have grandsons (Goody 1962: 208-209), “deaths among the LoDagaa are accounted for at three levels of causation” (Goody 1962: 219). Whyte’s findings among Nyole, in Uganda, differ from those of Goody. Whyte (1997: 23, 28) holds that Nyole consider that there are probably “personalistic agents” behind all sicknesses, but, and contrary to Goody, in most cases it is not necessary to identify them. Whyte (1997: 23) recognizes two main idioms for dealing with misfortune among Nyole, namely a “symptomatic” and an “explanatory idiom”<sup>34</sup>. She does not understand idioms merely in a linguistic sense, but sees them “as guides to action that are in common currency in a community..., that convey meaning and are understood like a vocabulary, and that constitute a situation in a particular way” (Whyte 1997: 23). The “symptomatic idiom” is centred on the symptoms of affliction perceivable by the senses, while the “explanatory idiom” recognizes causes of misfortune in terms of “personalistic agents” that must be dealt with (Whyte 1997: 23, 25-26). In most cases of sickness among Nyole, it is sufficient to treat symptoms, while “personalistic agents” are not relevant for the treatment (Whyte 1997: 28).

In Jarranding different sources of power can form a chain where the final source influences a personalistic source that has an effect on an immediate source which may have further consequences on the course of events. However, and contrary to Goody’s statement, people in Jarranding do not always consider that such a chain exists behind every event and a chain does not necessarily follow the above order. Furthermore, as among Nyole, all three

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<sup>34</sup> Whyte recognizes also “[a] third idiom, of individual responsibility,... promoted by biomedical professionals and religious organizations, but [it] is not as significant as the other two” (1997: 23).

sources of power are not made relevant on all occasions. Let me provide some brief examples. There is not a personalistic source behind every effect. For example, while some headaches are considered to be caused by witches or spirits, others are simply the will of God, or some say they are so addicted to green tea that they get a headache if they have not drunk it. Different sources of power may affect each other mutually. For instance, a marabout appeals to God's mercy to give him power to make a script potion that makes a child clever. Different elements belonging to the immediate or personalistic source can also influence each other. For example, a *booroo* may eliminate a substance that causes a sickness. Even though Allah is always a final source of power, nobody would account for a husband hitting his wife as a decision of God. Evans-Pritchard (1976: 26-29) points out that the cause or causes made relevant depend on the social situation and who is talking about it. A poor man may say that his poverty is the will of Allah, but others might comment that he is poor because he is lazy.

In the following I describe different sources of power that can be recognized in Jarranding. I explore how, in what circumstances and to what extent people make them relevant as sources of power that are operative in bringing about diverse changes.

### **Immediate Sources of Power**

Gillies (1976: 387-388) points out that, like Evans-Pritchard, many anthropologists have been more interested in indigenous ideas of "who" causes misfortunes, while they have ignored conceptions of "how" misfortunes occur. Gillies (1976: 363-364) holds that even if Ogori in Nigeria blame some misfortunes on for instance witches and "medicine-men", there are several diseases that do not require such explanations. For instance, Ogori explain that fevers are sunstrokes and guinea-worm infections are caused by contaminated drinking water (Gillies 1976: 364).

In Jarranding explanations of aetiology of sicknesses vary from person to person, but personalistic agents and Allah are not always made relevant for explaining illness, and sometimes a personalistic source is missing altogether. For instance, people say that they can get stomach ache, diarrhoea or intestinal worms, if they drink impure water, and being exposed to cold weather may cause cold, fever and pneumonia. Many sicknesses are explained as being caused by “water” (*jiyo*) that is named after a sickness and moves around the body causing symptoms. Some people use the word “grain of sickness” (*kuurang-kesoo*) instead of “water”. For instance, one of the most common sicknesses in Jarranding is called *kulfetango*. People name several symptoms of *kulfetango*, such as skin disorders, cracks in feet, nails falling off, bad sight, pain in the body, headache and white hair. Usually people explain it only by saying that it is “a sickness that is inside the body” (*balo kono saasaa*). They say that it is caused by *kulfetango*-water (*kulfetango jiyo*) that moves around the body causing the diverse symptoms. Many do not have any explanation how *kulfetango*-water enters the body. Some say that when newly cooked food is covered with a lid, the steam from the food gets condensed into water on the lid and drops back into the food; a person who then eats the food may get *kulfetango*. Then one can, of course, say that the person who prepared the food is the personalistic agent of the sickness, but this is not made relevant in people’s explanations and most people do not use the latter explanation at all.

### **Personalistic Sources of Power**

#### Witches and Witch-Fighters

Witches (*buwaalu*) are both men and women who eat human flesh. As one of the marabouts in Jarranding once put it, they have a similar craving for human flesh as smokers have for cigarettes<sup>35</sup>. Sometimes they are called cannibals or “eaters of people” (*moo domolaalu*).

They have a capacity to transform into any living creature or inanimate object and to fly as

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<sup>35</sup> Ames (1959: 265) records similar comparison among Gambian Wolof. His informant said that witches are just like drunkards who want to get liquor.

fast as a wind to do their bad deeds in far-away places. The villagers suspect especially nocturnal animals, such as hyenas and owls, of being witches since witchcraft is most active during the night.

As among Azande (Evans-Pritchard 1976: 31) the villagers express ideas about the witchcraft with uncertainty. Only witches themselves know exactly how it works, but according to a common understanding, witches remove the entrails of their victims or suck out their blood by touching them after which the victims fall ill and die (see also Ames 1959: 265). Some say witches may also give deathly kola nuts to people (see also Ames 1959: 265). Therefore the immediate source of sickness or death brought about by witchcraft is considered to be removal of the entrails, lack of blood or poisoning. In Jarranding witchcraft is suspected only in some cases of sickness and death. In opposition to Azande (Evans-Pritchard 1976: 18) people do not blame other kinds of misfortune on witchcraft. For instance, a potter would never claim that her pots were broken because of witchcraft. Witches are interested in providing themselves and their fellow witches with human flesh and therefore their aim is to kill people.

Even though villagers talk about witches and say that there are several of them in Jarranding, people are reluctant to name them and witchcraft accusations are rare. Most incidences of witchcraft recounted by people are from the past, often from other places and frequently heard from others than those who were directly concerned. During my fieldwork, a few names were whispered, but there was only one man who was openly suspected of witchcraft in Jarranding. Yahya, a man belonging to the Fula minority in the village, was said by Babah to have transformed himself into a hyena. Babah's father is the youngest advisor (*kiiitilaa*) of the village head (*alikaaloo*) and he is respected in Jarranding. Babah is grown up and has moved from the village to work in Kombo, in the large town of Brikama. Once when he came to visit his family the bush taxi arrived at the junction of Jarranding

when it was already dark. Yahya had taken the same transport and started to walk towards the village. People consider it hazardous to walk outside of the village during the night because of the hyenas, spirits and witches that are around. Babah preferred to wait for a while by the main road and try to catch another bush taxi to a nearby village where he could spend the night. No more cars turned up and Babah started to walk after Yahya while he still could see him from a distance. Suddenly Babah lost Yahya from his sight. When he came to the place where he thought Yahya had disappeared he found a hyena standing beside the road. Babah held that Yahya was a witch and had now transformed himself into the hyena. Witches are said to be more likely to attack children who are careless, the weak, and less intelligent people, often when they are alone because they make an easier target. They avoid clever persons who might recognize them. In order to show that he was neither scared nor ignorant, Babah stopped, looked the hyena straight in the eyes and said to it: "Both you and I know who you are, but you don't know who I am." The hyena followed him to the outskirts of the village, but it did not attack Babah. Babah told his mother about the incident. She went to Yahya and threatened him by saying that if somebody died in the village he would be taken to the district chief (*seefoo*). After this everybody seemed to know about the accusations. About half a year earlier a young boy suddenly died at the compound where Yahya lives and now some women in the village were suspecting that it was Yahya who had killed him.

In general the villagers condemn witchcraft accusations for several reasons. They say that Islam advises them not to discuss witchcraft because it causes unnecessary conflicts and it is very difficult to prove witchcraft. Babah's accusation was also only a suspicion. He had not seen that Yahya took the shape of the hyena, he only supposed so. In the past people accused of witchcraft in The Gambia could be tortured in order to make them confess their wrong doings and witches could be given the death penalty, put into slavery or deported

from the village (Ames 1959: 268-269; Gamble 1967: 59, 71). Nowadays law prohibits such practices. The villagers say that witches can be made to pay a fine to a victim's family or locked up, but those accused of witchcraft hardly ever admit it and they cannot be punished without evidence. The only punishment Yahya got was that others kept away from him.

Many people say that witchcraft accusations are backbiting and often innocent people get stigmatized. They say one never hears about wealthy and respected people accused of witchcraft. It is only those who are poor and lonely. Ames (1959: 271) holds that in Gambian communities that are predominantly Wolof, the known witches were either members of other ethnic groups, very often Fula, or of the lowest "castes" in Wolof society. My findings show the same pattern. Another witchcraft accusation that took place during my fieldwork was in a neighbouring Mandinka village. There too, the man who was accused was a Fula. Some men in Jarranding, especially teachers in "white men's school", say that witchcraft is only a superstitious belief and there is no human being who can transform into an animal.

A belief that witches attack only their relatives can make witchcraft claims inconvenient for accusers. Witches are social beings and believed to co-operate. While one witch is making a victim sick, another witch in the victim's close family is observing how people react. If the victim goes to the health centre, the witch may continue the killing. But if the victim or some of the family members decide to resort to a marabout or some other practitioner able to recognize and cure witchcraft, the witches cover their traces. A common theory says that when witches take out the entrails they hide them in a goat and fill the stomach with grass. In the case that somebody in the victim's family begins to suspect witchcraft they return the entrails back to the stomach.

Biomedical doctors can never detect witchcraft. Practitioners specialized in witchcraft can by the help of *booroo* both reveal witches and force them to leave their victims in peace, and in some cases kill witches. When witches manage to kill their victim they gather a couple of days after the burial at the graveyard during night-time; they open the grave and share the meat with each other (see also Dilley 2004:142). When people suspect that a death has been caused by witchcraft they may go to check the grave some days after burial to see whether it is as they left it or if it looks like witches have been opening it.

Witches expect reciprocity from one another (see also Schaffer 2003: 203). After killing a relative of one of them, another one has to indicate the next victim by pointing out one of his or her relatives. Consequently, as long as there are no witches in a family the members of it are not bothered by them. Witchcraft accusations may not only stigmatize the family of the accused, but also the family of the victim. Blaming a death in a family on witchcraft is at the same time admitting that there is at least one witch among the family members. Furthermore, since only witches know for certain who are witches, a strong witchcraft accusation may make accusers themselves suspected of witchcraft, otherwise they would not be able to recognize a witch for sure. In spite of all this, the villagers also record cases where people have pointed out their close relatives as witches. People say that one cannot be sure whether one's own spouse is a witch.

Often a person accused of witchcraft is defended by his or her family members. If one person in a family is recognized as a witch, it puts other family members' reputation also at risk, since witchcraft runs in families. Several authors hold that in the areas they have conducted their fieldwork in The Gambia, witchcraft is perceived to be inherited through the maternal line (Ames 1959: 265; Gamble 1967: 71; Sommerfelt 1999: 151). In Jarranding the opinions on the matter diverge. One of the reasons why the man in the neighbouring village was so strongly suspected of witchcraft was that his late mother had also been accused of

witchcraft. Most of the villagers hold it to be more common to inherit witchcraft matrilineally, but many claim that also children of male witches may become witches. People agree that not all of the children of witches inherit witchcraft. Sommerfelt (1999: 151) holds that many of her informants in the town of Farafenni, west of Jarranding, described that witchcraft is perceived to be an ability that a child learns as a foetus in the mother's stomach by observing how the mother eats people. If the mother does not eat any human flesh during the pregnancy the foetus will not gain the knowledge of witchcraft and therefore the child will not become a witch.

In addition to marabouts specialized in witchcraft cases, there are other counter-agents to witches called *kung-fanuntewolu*. *Kung-fanuntewo* means literally a person whose head is open, wide and clear<sup>36</sup>. The villagers who can speak English translate them as witch-fighters. Often people say that the witch-fighters are witches; they just do not eat human flesh. The villagers describe both a witch and a witch-fighter by saying that his or her head is open, wide and clear (*A kungo fanuta*). Their "wide and clear heads" give them a capacity to perform inhuman actions. Like witches, witch-fighters can transform themselves into living animals and inanimate objects, travel long distances in a short time and eat a papaya by only touching its skin without splitting it. Due to their wide knowledge and similarity to witches, witch-fighters can easily recognize the witches and make an end to their wrongdoings.

Dilley (2004: 141) writes about "witch-hunters" and "witch-seers" among Haalpulaar'en in Senegal. The "witch-hunters" are witches who after a treatment have lost their craving for human flesh. They still retain "the same spiritual power as witches but can use it to oppose them" (Dilley 2004: 141). "Witch-seers" have an ability to see people's internal organs and recognize both witches and attacks of witchcraft. People in Jarranding

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<sup>36</sup> *Kung* means a head and *fanu* means to be open, wide, clear.

say that the witch-fighters can see everything day and night. Gamble (1967: 71) and Ames (1959: 265) mention people similar to the witch-fighters among Gambian Wolof and say that they have “second sight”. Ames (1959: 265) holds that this “second sight” makes them able to see witches and “supernatural beings”. Among Wolof the ability to fight the witches is believed to be inherited by a child whose father is a witch (Gamble 1967: 71; Ames 1959: 265). In Jarranding people say it can be inherited from both parents or it is a gift given by God. Schaffer records an explanation among Mandinka in Senegal that, if a pregnant woman does not cover her stomach her child will become a witch-fighter, “because he has seen the world early” (2003: 189).

In opposition to witches, who are despised by the community, witch-fighters are admired for their bravery and ability to stop witchcraft. While witches can be the source of sickness and death, witch-fighters are the source to counter-act witchcraft.

### Spirits

In Jarranding spirits are considered to be personalistic sources of effects much more often than witches. While many say that witchcraft accusations are condemned by Islam, spirits are part of the Muslim belief. Esposito defines spirits in Islam as following with references to the Qur’an:

“Somewhere between angels and humans are the invisible, intelligent spirits called jinn. In contrast to human beings, the jinn were created from fire instead of earth (7:12, 55: 14-15). They have the ability to assume visible form and, like humans, can be good or bad, sin as well as be saved (46: 29-31). They will be judged on the Last Day and consigned to paradise or hell” (Esposito 1994: 27).

In Jarranding spirits are sometimes referred to as “people in the bush” (*wuloo-kono-nkoolu*). They lead similar lives as human beings beyond the village. Spirits have their dwellings on the hills or they inhabit trees. At the outskirts of Jarrabaa there is a tamarind

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tree (*timbingo*, Latin *Tamarindus indica*) that is known to be inhabited by spirits<sup>37</sup>. Like people, some of the spirits are Muslim while others are not. In Jarranding there are dwellings of Muslim spirits (*jinna misilimoolu*) at the edge of the village, on a hill nearby the ruins of the old mosque. Non-Muslim spirits (*jinna kaafiroolu*) live on the two hills towards the main road and on the hills close to the river. Spirits are believed to live in the villages similar to those of human beings. The villagers say that sometimes at night they can see lights from their houses, shops and cars up on the hills and hear them pounding their grain. Schaffer (1987: 37, 2003: 71n47, 181-182) holds that Mandinka believe that every village has a double village inhabited by spirits and in the past, when Islam had just started to spread in the area of Senegambia, it was common to have two adjacent villages, one Muslim and one non-Muslim. The villagers never mentioned such an idea of double villages, but in former days one of the two biggest families in Jarranding was Muslim while the other was non-Muslim. Nowadays all the villagers are Muslim.

Most of the time spirits are invisible to the human eye. Spirits can see people all the time, but people can see them only when they reveal themselves<sup>38</sup>. People say that nowadays there are not that many spirits as in the past. This they explain by saying that spirits dislike the smell of gasoline and car exhaust, which is a common idea also in other African countries (see e.g. Gottlieb 1992: 131; Lan 1985: 196). Only a few people in Jarranding have seen a spirit personally, but there is a consensus of opinion about their physical appearance. Most spirits are said to be quite like people, but somehow their appearance differs from human beings and it makes people easily scared. They have a body like human beings with a head, legs and arms. Often spirits are described as having long hair and male spirits have a beard. There is a certain resemblance between spirits and Europeans

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<sup>37</sup> Dilley (2004: 141) alludes to that among Haalpulaar'en in Senegal spirits are believed to live particularly in tamarind trees.

<sup>38</sup> Local narratives in Jarranding tell that a long time ago spirits were visible to people.

(*tubaaboolu*). They have a fair complexion and many claim that Europeans are able to talk with them. While spirits can understand African languages, Africans in general cannot understand them. Furthermore, in opposition to most Africans, Europeans are claimed not to get scared of the sight of the spirits and spirits do not hurt them. Still, spirits are considered to be much greater in number in Africa than in Europe. Like witches, spirits can transform into any living being or inanimate object. This makes it sometimes difficult to recognize whether one is dealing with a witch or a spirit. In order to scare people, spirits often appear as giants. When they do not want to scare a person away, they take the form of somebody he or she knows and female spirits are said to appear to men as beautiful women (see also Gamble 1967: 71). Spirits may also appear to people in dreams. Sometimes they transform themselves in dreams as well and often they appear in the form of a masked dancer (*kankurango*<sup>39</sup>).

Some of the spirits are said to be good (*jinna betoo/ kendoo*) while some of them are bad (*jinna jawoo*). In general this difference is considered to be parallel to their religiosity. Muslim spirits are beneficial while non-Muslim spirits are malicious, but this division is by no means absolute. The villagers often stress the aspect that spirits are just like people. Every Muslim – whether human or spirit – sins sometimes. Spirits have different characters, just as people are different from each other. Some of them are more wicked than others and Muslim spirits can also harm people.

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<sup>39</sup> There are two types of masked dancers called *kankurangolu*: a *fita-kankurango* and a *fambondi*. A *fita-kankurango* can be seen dancing at social gatherings and threatening people to work when there is a communal party. The upper part of the dress is made of the red bark of the *faara* tree (Latin *Piliostigma thonningii*) while the skirt is made of the leaves of mahogany (*jallo* Latin *Khaya senegalensis*). The whole cover of a *fambondi* is made of the bark of a *faara*-tree. While people dress up a *fita-kankurango*, they do not know who is inside a *fambondi*-dress. Some say *fambondi* appears from a wind. A *fambondi* protects newly circumcised boys, who stay in seclusion in the bush, against witches and spirits who want to harm them. Weil (1971: 282) records that both masks are said to have “wide heads” (*kungfano*) and the ability to recognize witches and spirits. It is considered dangerous for uncircumcised boys, girls and women to see *fambondi*. (See also Schaffer 2003: 205)

Sometimes spirits want to help people. When they choose to assist a person they usually give him or her a ring. They can bring people good fortune and give them advice, for instance how to prepare *booroo*, as well as information about future happenings and how to influence them. However, in general people try to avoid meeting spirits, since they are more notorious for harming people.

Spirits do not always harm people intentionally. A person may run into or see a spirit by chance. If the person gets frightened and shocked (*A kijoo farata*) at the sight, his or her “capacity to think” (*sondomoo*) gets mixed up and confused which in turn results in that the person goes mad (*sondome saasaa/kuurango, nyaamaatoo*) or dies. This “capacity to think”, *sondomoo*<sup>40</sup>, is conceived to be an inner organ within human and animal bodies. There is no consensus on where in the body it is located. Some say it is close to the heart (*jusoo*), others say it is close to the lungs (*kufukafoo*) or the kidney (*kookiloo*). All agree that it co-operates with brains (*kung-cengo*) and includes five common senses: hearing, sight, taste, smell and touch. It enables a person to think consciously and to feel emotions. While the personalistic source behind madness or death is a spirit, the immediate source is the change in the person’s “thinking capacity” (*sondomoo*). Sometimes the “thinking capacity” can be calmed down by *booroo* and the person recovers. If the person does not get scared when seeing a spirit, his or her “thinking capacity” remains unaffected and nothing happens to the person.

Other times spirits hurt people deliberately out of wickedness. Accidents are generally claimed to be caused by spirits (see also Dilley 2004: 68). For instance, they capsize boats, or cars drive off roads because spirits make drivers see the road double, and when little boys climb up great baobab trees to collect the fruits, a spirit can push them down. Spirits may also hurt people who trespass their dwellings (see also Gottlieb 1992: 26). People in Jarranding do not go to the hills where notorious spirits reside and they advise not

<sup>40</sup> Sometimes the villagers translate it as “heart” in English (see also Gamble 1987a: 115; W.E.C. International 1995: 302), but they say it is not the same as *jusoo*, which means a physical heart.

to touch the tamarind tree inhabited by spirits in Jarrabaa. Tamarind trees have small fruits which people use to prepare a drink. Several persons who have collected fruits of the tamarind tree in Jarrabaa have fallen sick and died.

Spirits may both help and harm people out of love. Spirits are said to be very fond of human beings, especially Africans. Sometimes they want to bring people to their world. They may exchange an infant with one of their own when nobody sees it. At first people do not notice anything, but when a baby spirit gets older, he or she usually has some disability, such as being unable to talk or walk (see also Gamble 1967: 71). Bledsoe (2002: 79) records that spirits are said to cause miscarriages by taking human foetuses and bringing them to their world. Sometimes spirits take adults to their world as well and they may return after several months with extraordinary knowledge and abilities learned from the spirits. It happens that a spirit marries a human man or woman. Many marabouts and other practitioners of *booroo* are said to have such spirit spouses who advise them in their work. Spirits come to visit their human husbands and wives certain nights of the week. For instance, Seedy, one of the healers in the village, says that his late father, who taught Seedy his knowledge, had such a spirit wife. When she came to visit Seedy's father every Monday and Friday night none of his human wives slept in his room with him. These spirits make the diviner able to learn everything about their clients just by looking at them. In Jarranding the spirit spouses are sometimes jealous and they do not want their human husbands and wives to be married to a human being (see also Gamble and Rahman 1998: 74). Such spirits may make their human spouse unattractive to other people by causing him or her some disability or serious sickness, killing his or her human spouses or preventing a woman having children. Spirits may also bother persons they are not married to, but in love with (see also Schaffer 2003: 207-209).

Gamble (Gamble and Rahman 1998: 74) and Schaffer (1987: 37; 2003: 71n47, 181-182) hold that Mandinka conceive that everybody has “a spirit counterpart”. Gamble (Gamble and Rahman 1998: 74) refers to them as “devil<sup>41</sup> husbands and wives” who accompany people from birth. Schaffer (1987: 37) holds that marabouts need to protect their clients from the wickedness of their “demon-spirits”. In Jarranding I was presented a couple of times with the idea that every person has not only one, but two spirits. Other villagers corrected these statements by saying that every person has two angels (*malayikoolu*<sup>42</sup>). On the Day of Judgement, one of them records a person’s good deeds and the other the bad ones. Seedy, a healer, mentioned a belief that when a girl is born, people should mention the name of her future husband otherwise spirits will come and want to take her. People talk about how ugly newborn babies look and they are frequently commented on as not being beautiful (*A mang nyinyaa*)<sup>43</sup>. This is considered to be joking, especially on the behalf of babies’ grandparents, who keep on joking mutually like this with their grandchildren. Maimona, one of the village’s mid-wives, said that there is a belief that if spirits hear that a baby is pretty they want to come and get him or her. However, she said that it is just a belief and people do not really believe in it. Still, strips of cloth with a spell (*hijaaboo*) against spirits are often tied around the wrists of newborn babies. People say that when an infant is left alone, a spirit might come to get him or her. When the baby gets scared he or she starts to cry and move their arms so that the spell attached to the wrists scares the spirit away.

People in Jarranding fear that spirits want to take newborn babies to their world or that they

<sup>41</sup> People in Jarranding translate *jinoo* as devil in English, but I find such a translation fallacious, since devil refers to evil spirit, while spirits in question can be both evil and kind.

<sup>42</sup> *Mala* means to light and *-nkoolu* means people of. Even if the -n is omitted in *malayikoolu* it can be understood as people or beings of light, especially since according to Islam angels were created out of light as opposed to humans created out of clay and jinn created out of fire (Esposito 1994: 27).

<sup>43</sup> Maranz (1993: 174) holds that in the area of Senegambia, compliments, especially those that refer to a person’s body, may raise suspicions about the motives of the giver of the compliments, since what others say about a person may cause him or her misfortune. Fulbe in Northern Cameroon hold that compliments to an infant can make him or her sick (Regis 2003: 110-111).

want to marry them, but people try to prevent this from happening. Not everyone is perceived to have a spirit, it is only certain people married to spirits or bothered by them who are talked about as having a spirit.

On the other hand, there is an idea that there is a satan (*seetaanoo*), an evil spirit, within every human being. A local story explains it as following. Iblish, a fallen angel, who refused to follow God's order to show respect and bow to Adam (see Esposito 1994: 27-28), took his son, Yuwasivisu, to the garden where Adam and Eve lived. Iblish left Yuwasivisu with Eve so that she would look after him. When Adam saw whom Eve was taking care of, he killed Yuwasivisu. But when Iblish returned to get his son, Yuwasivisu was not dead after all and answered his father. The following day Iblish returned with his son. Adam still did not succeed in killing Yuwasivisu. The third day, after Iblish had left his son with Eve again, Adam killed Yuwasivisu and burned his body in fire. Then he mixed the ashes with water and both Adam and Eve drank some of it. When Iblish returned to get his son, Yuwasivisu answered from the chests of Adam and Eve. Since all human beings (*adamadingolu*<sup>44</sup>) descend from Adam, there is a satan within all of them.

Satans are descendants and followers of Iblis. Often the word satan (*seetaanoo*) is used parallel with a malicious, non-Muslim spirit (*jinna jawoo, jinna kaafiroo*) (see also Trimingham 1961: 53; Dilley 2004: 100). But while the spirits described above can be both beneficial and malevolent in differing degrees and they cannot be judged as exclusively good or bad, satans are conceived always as mischievous and on the Last Judgement Day they will all be sent to hell. They bother people, try to engage them in evil actions and make them follow Iblish. In daily speech people comment that, for instance quarrelling is satan. They say it is satan within a person's body that makes him or her dispute with others. Satans are claimed to affect the way people behave.

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<sup>44</sup> This means literally "children of Adam".

People in Jarranding also talk about specific kinds of spirits, such as, *kontorongolu*, *faarilaalu* and *ninkinankalu*. *Kontorongo* is a spirit that looks like a dwarf whose feet are turned backwards. If somebody tries to push it away, it never falls. *Kontorongolu* are herdsmen. They look after both wild and domestic animals and they carry a calabash for milking cows. People in Jarranding say that *kontorongolu* do not harm people and sometimes they may even help them by giving them a spell (*hijaaboo*) that brings cows, money or rice. Gamble (1967: 71) holds that sometimes a *kontorongo* might challenge a human being to a wrestling match and throw the person so that he becomes unconscious. *Faarilaalu*<sup>45</sup> are said to be small and dirty spirits. They carry bows and poisonous arrows. If a *faarilaa* shoots a human being or an animal they get sick and sometimes sickness results in death. During the fieldwork *kontorongolu* or *faarilaalu* were never made relevant in any present circumstances. Incidences where they had been involved had all happened in the past. On the contrary, once when the main road on the southern bank of the River Gambia got broken and all the traffic was stopped for a couple of days, many of the villagers claimed that the road was destroyed by a *ninkinanka*. *Ninkinankalu* are big spirit-snakes who live inside hills. They stay in the ground but every seven years they get out and go to the river. People in the village near to the place where the road was broken were said to have seen the strong light from the *ninkinanka*'s eyes. If you see a *ninkinanka* itself, you get scared and die. Some villagers were of the opinion that the road had collapsed due to poor maintenance and not because of the passing *ninkinanka*.

#### Other Agents: Humans, Animals and Insects

People in general are personalistic sources of power. Everyone is to a great extent responsible for his or her own living conditions; marabouts and nurses provide people with *booroo* and clever teachers promote the success of their students. People in Jarranding consider that many sicknesses – such as fever, meningitis, tuberculosis, HIV and pain in the

<sup>45</sup> *Faa* means to kill and therefore *faarilaa* means literally a killer.

eye – are contagious from person to person, if they for example sleep in the same room, eat from the same bowl, drink from the same glass, have sexual intercourse, use the same washing cloth or wear the same garments. Sweat and spit of sick people are conceived of as spreading sicknesses. People say that contagious sicknesses can be carried further around by wind. Some sicknesses, for instance *kulfetango* that was mentioned above, and chronic pains in the body, are said to run in families. There is a personal source behind contagious and hereditary sicknesses. However, I have never heard that people would consider that the carriers of contagious sicknesses spread them intentionally. In cases of contagious sickness people mainly consider the immediate source of power, namely the substance that causes the sickness.

Goody (1962: 210, 219) holds that a snake who kills a person is an immediate cause of the death. He does not differentiate between the venomous snake bite and the snake itself, but sees them as a technique used by an agent to kill someone. I consider snakes and other animals as personalistic sources of power. Animals, like human beings, affect the course of events through actions. For instance, a snake and a malaria mosquito are not perceived as immediate sources of sickness and death in Jarranding. The immediate source is the poison (*kunoo*) that enters the body from the teeth of a snake or a mosquito bite. Merely seeing a snake or a mosquito does not cause any sickness.

### **Allah – the Final Source of Power**

In accordance with Islam people in Jarranding believe that Allah has decided their destinies already before they were born. A local narrative recounts how Allah before putting human beings on earth, first created them as flying ants. Those whose right wings touched each other when they were flying around would get married once on earth. After this Allah cut their wings and told them to swallow each other. Each of them would get as many children as they swallowed and at the end the one who was to become Adam swallowed them all.

Allah is the final source of power, but in order to affect the course of their lives people also need to consider the immediate and personalistic sources of power they are dealing with. For instance, God is the final source of all sickness, but by explaining sickness as the will of Allah does not help to define whether a patient needs to have *booroo* against malaria or witchcraft. In many cases Allah is not made as relevant as other sources of power in order to explain misfortune, but there are some typical circumstances when people refer to God as the source of power by stating:” Only Allah (*Allah dorong*).”

On the one hand, minor sicknesses and setbacks are explained to be the will of Allah. Nothing needs to be done, for example with mild headaches or a bad day with little profit at the weekly market. Such things are unavoidable parts of human life. It is just the way Allah has created the world and people accept it without introducing immediate or personalistic sources of power. On the other hand when people fail to end suffering, for instance to cure severe sickness, they say it is caused by Allah. If several possible *booroolu* have been tried out and everything is of no avail, the patient and his or her family finally give up. They accept the condition as the will of Allah that no human can go against, even if there often is another explanation for it. For instance, the villagers tell that Ibrahima, an adult man, sits in a wheelchair because he was “caught by a spirit” (*jinoo y’aa muta*) when he was a little boy. Ibrahima had been to the bush with his mother, who had told him to squat down and urinate under a tree. She did not know that the tree was inhabited by spirits. The spirits got angry because he urinated on their compound and one of them made Ibrahima unable to walk. Ibrahima’s parents spent a lot of money in order to cure him, but the spirits did not agree to make him walk again. Ibrahima’s own explanation for his condition is “only Allah”. He says that it all happened a long time ago and there is nothing to be done about it.

On some occasions, people explain that misfortune is caused by Allah, in order to express and emphasize their religiosity and faith in Islam. When I asked Ibrahima about his

condition he did not deny the explanations given by others, but he did not like to talk about it. He rather showed me how he could prepare script potions (*nasoolu*) by the help of the Qur'an. He believed that spirits harm people, but ultimately the reason why he cannot walk anymore is because Allah has decided so, just like he decides everything else in the world.

In his well-known definition of religion, Geertz (1993: 100-105) asserts that religion provides people with the way to comprehend their lives including suffering in it. People in Jarranding say that sometimes Allah tests believers' faith by causing them suffering. To be patient and to endure (*munya*) is a valued quality. God is believed to reward people for their patience and faith in life after death.

Death is always finally considered to be the will of Allah. Even if people may recognize both immediate and personalistic sources for death, none of them could kill a person against Allah's will. To cry a lot over the deceased is discouraged. It is considered to be an expression of self-pity and worry over one's own future without the help of the deceased. All of us have to die some day and Allah decides when it is our time to go.

Misfortune and suffering are also seen as God's way to punish people. God does not like immoral behaviour and those who do not follow Islam. Villagers say that affliction is pay-back for their wrongdoings so that they will deserve a better life after death. In Senegal many Muslims considered the repeated droughts of the 1970s and 1980s as Allah's judgement on the decadent lifestyle of Senegalese youth (Dilley 2004: 167). Severe misfortune can be seen as a warning from God, but people in Jarranding do not necessarily have any specific case in mind in order to perceive suffering as a punishment of Allah. As they say: "Everybody sins sometimes." Considering misfortune as the recompense for immorality makes suffering into, as Geertz puts it: "something bearable, supportable – something...sufferable" (1993: 104).

People in Jarranding believe that ultimately it is Allah who causes all illness, misfortune and hardship as well as bringing health, happiness and success to people's lives. However, this belief does not result in the kind of passive acceptance of fate as Donald R. Wright (1997: 200) argues has happened in Niimi, an area on the northern bank of the River Gambia. He claims that the more the Muslim religion gained strength among people, the more easily they accepted their destinies as the will of Allah. Wright holds that Islam has had a negative effect on development in Niimi by arguing that "when one becomes less able to recognize the human hand in one's misfortune, one becomes less inclined to take action to improve life on earth" (1997: 200). On the contrary people in Jarranding do not submit to suffering. Villagers assert that Allah expects people to be active and to react against affliction. God helps those who have faith in him and work hard to attain their goals. People say that one never knows what God has decided. Considering Allah as the final source of power does not exclude other sources of effects with which people can and must actively deal with. The extensive use of *booroo* is a proof of the villagers' desire and active attempt to make changes in their lives. Even when villagers express that Allah is omnipotent, they at the same time conceive of themselves, to a large extent, as responsible for and in control of their own lives. They affect the course of events through their behaviour and actions.

### **Conclusion**

In Jarranding, sources of power that affect the course of events can be discerned on three levels – immediate, personalistic and final. These sources consist of transformative powers that have an influence on the world and entities within it, and result in both wanted and unwanted changes.

Evans-Pritchard (1976: 23) and Goody (1962: 219) point out that even if people they have studied do not talk about the causes explicitly the same way as they as anthropologists have done, their representations are not in conflict with nor distort the way Azande and

LoDagaa think. People in Jarranding do not divide different sources of power into three categories as I have described above, but this way of thought clearly comes forth in their explanations and search for *booroo*.

In order to affect the course of events people need to deal with the sources of power, but they do not make all the levels relevant in every situation. I now turn to explore how people in practice make an effort to change the course of events by the use of *booroo* and how their ideas of different sources of power influence their choices in their search for effective *booroo*.

## Chapter Four

### USERS' SEARCH FOR *BOOROO*

People in Jarranding choose different *booroolu* depending on their needs and the way they understand the circumstances in question. For instance, a mother takes her feverish child to the health centre in Jarrabaa to get *booroo* for malaria, but in order to find a good husband for her daughter she visits a marabout. But when a desired aim proves to be difficult to attain, the search for efficient *booroo* may become a relatively intricate and long lasting process of trial and error that is influenced by indigenous ideas of causality, especially in cases of persistent sickness. In the present chapter I explore how people go about finding efficient *booroo*.

Foster (1998: 115) holds that in “non-Western medical systems” with “multiple levels of causation” people are not so concerned about “the immediate cause of illness”, but rather want to know “Who?” causes illness and “Why?”. Foster continues to say that it is first “[a]fter the who and why have been determined, treatment for the immediate cause may be administered” (1998: 115). As considered in the previous chapter, Whyte (1997: 23) recognizes a “symptomatic” and “explanatory idiom” among Nyole, in Uganda. Contrary to Foster, she holds that in most cases of sickness among Nyole, it is enough to treat symptoms. It is only when the symptomatic treatment fails that Nyole attempt to recognize “personalistic agents” causing the sickness (Whyte 1997: 28).

People in Jarranding recognize different levels of sources of power that affect the course of events, but like Nyole, they act contrary to Foster’s generalizing statement. When villagers fall sick they always try to treat the immediate sources of their sicknesses at first.

People use home made *booroo*, visit a health centre and consult marabouts and other healers. While marabouts and some of the other healers can prepare *booroo* that affects the personalistic sources of power, a great amount of the *booroo* administered by them is used to treat the immediate sources of sickness. It is only in cases when sickness proves to be persistent that the personalistic sources of sickness are taken into consideration.

Whyte (1997: 28) holds that classifying diseases and symptoms is less important for Nyole, than evaluation of the development of the patient's condition and the treatments that have been tried. Similarly, even though people in Jarranding reflect on the sources of sickness, they are mostly concerned about the effectiveness of a *booroo*. In many cases they do not reach their aims before they have tried several *booroolu*.

I begin with an account of Fanding's visit to a practitioner of *booroo* and how Fanding described his search for *booroo*. I base my discussion below on this example and I will return to it in the following chapters.

### **Fanding's Case**

One day I met Fanding on the road. He had got an open sore in his right instep. He said it was some grass that had injured him in the bush. Fanding goes often to the river to catch fish for his family and sometimes to fell rhun palm trees illegally in the bush to earn some money. One needs to have a permit to fell trees since desertification is an environmental threat in The Gambia. Fanding risks a fine and he agrees it is wrong to fell the trees, but he considers it better than stealing from others. He is poor and has a family to feed. He has two wives and altogether they have six children staying at home. In addition, Fanding's married daughter stays with them with her son while her husband is studying abroad. Fanding farms millet and some years groundnuts, when he is able to get seed nuts. His wives cultivate rice for the family. Fanding is poor and often he has to ask for help from his friends and

relatives. He has a good social network and, even if he is not considered as an important person in the village due to his economic conditions, he has several close age mates in Jarranding, some of whom are relatively well-off.

When I met Fanding again a couple of weeks later, he had got a sore on his left instep as well. He had difficulties walking and he was not able to work. Now he told me that a snake had bitten him. He also suspected that the snake might have been a witch who was not skilful enough to kill him. Fanding had already tried several kinds of *booroo* that he had got from his friends and relatives. He had also consulted several practitioners of *booroo*. People had advised him to go to Birkanma, a nearby village, where there is a man called Lamin Sanneh who is good at curing snake bites. I was welcomed to join him and three days later Fanding managed to borrow an oxen cart that could drive us to the main road where we could catch a bush taxi to Birkanma.

Lamin Sanneh was not at home when we arrived at his compound. He came after a while and we went to sit inside his house. Fanding explained to him in broad outline what had happened, where he had been to get help, what people had said about his sores and what kind of treatment he had received.

When Fanding had got the first sore a couple of months ago he had gone to a marabout in a village nearby. The marabout had given him both a potion (*nasoo*) to drink and a powdered *booroo* (*boori munkoo*) to apply on the sore. Both were against a skin disease called *nyonkomekatoo*. The marabout had told him that when you have got *nyonkomekatoo*-water in your body, it makes sores on different parts of the body and they itch. But instead of itching, Fanding's right foot felt like burning as if there was fire or hot pepper in it. In the evenings he took Paracetamol before going to sleep to ease the pain.

Fanding's relative, who is a marabout, had told Fanding that he had *taaling janoo*, a ring worm<sup>46</sup> He gave him bark of *kuntanjaayoo*<sup>47</sup> to drink so that the poison (*kunoo*), the substance causing the sore, would get out in his urine.

Fanding did not get better, but worse, since he got the sore in his other instep as well and his feet got swollen. He travelled to Casamance to see a marabout who told him that he had been bitten by a snake. Fanding could not understand how it had happened since he had not noticed any snake. He said the snake must have gone away very fast.

On his way back from Casamance, Fanding had stopped to visit a female healer. She had asked what time of the day Fanding had been to the bush. When Fanding had pointed out the position of the sun, she was assured that Fanding had been bitten by a snake. She pulled two snake's teeth<sup>48</sup> out of each of his ankles and gave him powdered *booroo* that he should apply on the sores after he had washed them.

On his way home, Fanding also visited another woman, Baakono, in a village close to Jarranding. While she does not cure people, she is able to give them information (*kibaaroo*) and advice by the help of her spirit husband. Baakono has inherited a ring from her late father who had got it from a spirit. Baakono's father had a good relationship with spirits and Baakono got herself a spirit husband, who comes to visit her three times a week (Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays) riding a white horse. With the help of the ring she can see him in a little mirror and talk with him through a little horn that she holds as if it was a

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<sup>46</sup> *Taaling janoo* means literally "spider burn". Ringworm is a fungus infection that sometimes grows in the shape of a ring. While the infection has nothing to do with worms it has got its name due to the shape it takes. In the similar way the shape resembles a spider's web where it probably gets its Mandinka name from. Another Mandinka word for ringworm is *fiitewo*.

<sup>47</sup> I do not know the Latin name of this tree. People say it has edible fruits.

<sup>48</sup> The Mandinka word for this practice is *kunakosoo*. *Kuna* means poison and *kosi* is to strike. Therefore one could understand that the practitioner is "striking out the poison", even though the practitioner does not strike the patient but rather strokes him. People call the particles that come out as a result of *kunakosoo*, both poison (*kunoo*) and teeth (*nyingolu*). Snake's teeth are conceived of as poisonous. I follow the villagers' own translation in English and call the treatment "pulling out a snake's teeth" or "treating a snake-bite".

telephone. She was the first one to advise Fanding to go to Birkanma and meet Lamin Sanneh. Later on, one of Fanding's friends had told him that Lamin Sanneh had cured his wife after a snake bite.

Fanding told me that one of his friends had written him a potion (*nasoo*) to prevent the poison from getting higher up in the body. Fanding washed himself with it daily. He said that if the poison had reached his heart (*jusoo*) he would die. Seedy, one of the healers in the village, who was mentioned above and who is also Fanding's good friend and age-mate, had pulled three snake's teeth out of his right leg. He had treated his left leg as well but there were not any teeth coming out of it. Fanding had also been twice to the health centre. He got two injections the first time and then one more the second time<sup>49</sup>. In between these injections, a nurse who was visiting his family in Jarranding had also given Fanding an injection.

After Fanding had explained to Lamin Sanneh what had happened so far, we went back outside where Lamin Sanneh started to prepare *booroo*. He took some water in a cup and added a little bit of salt to it. Then he added two different kinds of powder to the water. He said it was pounded logs of trees, but he did not want to say which ones. Then he mixed the water by turning the cup around while he was muttering a secret spell (*hijaaboo*) after which he spat slightly in the cup. He repeated the spell three times. Then he drank a bit of the *booroo* himself and gave some of it to a young boy who was sitting with us. Afterwards Fanding explained that they took some of the *booroo* since they were not sure whether Fanding's sores were caused by witchcraft, or probably, a spirit. If that was the case they needed to protect themselves.

Then Fanding got a little bit of *booroo* to drink and Lamin Sanneh started to remove the teeth from his legs. He rubbed the rest of the *booroo* on Fanding's legs. While doing this

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<sup>49</sup> After I described Fanding's condition to nurses in Jarrabaa, they said that he had got penicillin injections.

he was again reciting a secret formula and spitting slightly on the legs. Then he disappeared inside his house and brought out a dirty jacket with which he dried Fanding's legs. He then started to rub gently Fanding's right leg still reciting the spell. Then he did the same with Fanding's left leg. Once in a while he picked out very small particles from Fanding's left leg, altogether three of them. Each time Lamin Sanneh asked me to reassure Fanding that there was something coming out from the leg since Fanding's eyesight is poor and he could not see all of them. To me the particles looked very small, like pieces of dust. Then Lamin Sanneh returned to rub the right leg and pulled out five more particles.

Fanding bought some of the powdered *booroo* Lamin Sanneh had given to him to bring it home to his family. Lamin Sanneh said it should be mixed with salt and water and when a person drinks even just a little bit of it, snakes will never bite him or her and if the person gets children after drinking the *booroo*, the children will not be bitten by snakes either. Lamin Sanneh warned Fanding that the *booroo* would cause him vomiting or diarrhoea because there was still some poison left in his body.

### **Questioning the Course of Events**

In Jarranding people often formulate questions about a sick person's condition as an interrogative comment: "I hope you are not sick (*Kor' i mang saasaa*)?"<sup>50</sup> Usually people reply to such a question, in spite of their condition, by saying: "It is getting better, but it is not well (*A fisayaata, bari a mang kendeyaa*)." When people want to get more comprehensive answers they ask: "What happened to you (*Munne keta i la*)?" and "How did you get the sickness (*I saasaa/ kuurango*<sup>51</sup> *soto nyaa-dii*)?" The way of formulating the latter question brings forth the idea that sickness is obtained in one way or another. These questions leave a lot of room for reflection. Rather than inquiring the exact name of the

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<sup>50</sup> When people greet each other they state a similar interrogative comment: "I hope there is no trouble (*Kor' tan ante*)?" This is replied to by saying: "There is no trouble (*Tana nte*)."

<sup>51</sup> *Kuurango* is often perceived as more severe sickness than *saasaa*, but these two words are used in parallel.

sickness or the causes of it, people want to know how the person got sick or obtained the sickness. The focus is on the course of events.

Answers vary and they reflect ideas about sources of power. Sometimes people name the condition they think they are affected by. Fanding gave several such answers in the course of his sickness. At different points in time he said his sores were caused by some grass that had stuck him, a skin disease, a ringworm, and finally a snake-bite that probably was an act of witchcraft. When people cannot name the sickness they may describe the symptoms and their development. Fanding described his sores at times when different treatments failed and he was uncertain what was bothering him. People may also answer by telling about the circumstances around the sickness – by giving an account of events prior to the first symptoms and what have they done in order to cure the sickness. If a child returns home with a persistent headache after playing around in the village and mentions that somebody has been patting his or her head, the parents might suspect witchcraft. In Fanding's case, his trip to the bush was considered significant. Sometimes people simply reply: "Only Allah's sickness (*Allah saasaa dorong*)."

As considered in a previous chapter, by such a comment people often imply that they are not planning to take any further action with the matter.

When a person wants to find *booroo* for a sickness the focus is on immediate and personalistic sources of power. Questions to sick people do not inquire about the diagnosis, but rather help to determine it. While people in cases of sickness try to define the sources of power that must be dealt with, they at the same time keep on trying several different *booroolu*. When one booroo fails to help them, they try another one. In many cases the search for booroo is both the search for the diagnosis and the search for specific substances, objects and practices that can cure it.

### **Trial and Error**

People in Jarranding say that when they get sick, they try some home made *booroo* prepared out of plants and trees. Appropriate plants and trees are chosen by considering the symptoms. If people do not get better in a couple of days, they go to visit the health centre in Jarrabaa. Small children are an exception; when they get sick they are carried to the health centre as soon as possible. If the health centre fails to cure the sickness, people say they resort to marabouts and other non-biomedical practitioners of *booroo*. In addition to curing immediate sources of sickness, many of them can also deal with the personalistic sources behind the sickness that biomedical health personnel cannot help with, namely spirits and witches. The villagers often act in this order in cases of sickness, but frequently diverse *booroolu* are used simultaneously and people alternate between different methods.

It happens villagers postpone the visit to the health centre when they feel that their life is in no danger and especially if they have difficulties walking since there are no bush taxis between Jarranding and Jarrabaa that both lay a couple of kilometres from the main road. Those who are unable to walk need a draught animal and a cart to get to the health centre. There is a car at the health centre that is used to pick up sick people in emergency cases, but since there is no telephone in Jarranding the villagers cannot call for it. As opposed to biomedical professionals, other practitioners of *booroo* often do not require to see the patient. The patient's relatives and friends can describe the situation and pick up *booroo*.

People may also drop the visit to the health centre, if they have heard that they are out of medicines, or because of their personal or others' previous experiences. For instance, Aminata, a teenage girl, did not bother to go to the health centre when she had pain in her tonsils (*haarandoo*). She said that the *booroo* in Jarrabaa was not good (“*Jarrabaa la booroo mam beteyaa*”). She had had pain in her tonsils before and the medicine nurses had

given her did not help. She went instead to Karamo, a man in a neighbouring compound, who prepared her an amulet (*tafoo*) and treated her throat by reciting a spell (*hijaaboo*).

I cannot say whether Fanding had visited the health centre before going to the marabout who had treated him for a skin disease, since Fanding kept on changing the chronological order of these visits on different occasions. However, it is clear that at the beginning the aim was to define the sickness causing his sore by observing the symptoms, and the *booroolu* were chosen according to the diagnosed sickness in order to get the substance causing the sores out of the body. The focus was on the immediate sources of his condition. Fanding had kept on evaluating his symptoms continuously. The only *booroo* that had helped at all were the injections he had received from the nurses. He had returned to the health centre and in addition he had got an injection from a nurse who visited his family in Jarranding. The injections made Fanding's condition "a little bit better, but not well" and Fanding continued to try other solutions. Each time there was a deviation from the expected result and no improvement in Fanding's condition he considered the diagnoses and therefore also the *booroo* to be incorrect.

Before Fanding visited Lamin Sanneh he had gone to the health centre twice, because the injections helped. Another reason why Fanding returned to the health centre may have to do with the fact that the nurses encourage people to come back if their condition does not improve or if they do not recover completely. In the same way as Fanding searched for *booroo* by trial and error, the biomedical practice tries another treatment if the first one fails. There is no laboratory to run tests in Jarrabaa, which enhances the chances of wrong diagnosis and following treatments. Diagnoses are based on observing symptoms, but the same symptoms can be caused by several diseases. As one of the nurses explained, a sick child can have a big belly due to intestinal worms, malnutrition, hepatoma or nephritic syndrome. If the child's mother says that the child spits a lot and scratches the anus, the

child is treated against intestinal worms, even if a stool test cannot be taken in order to approve the diagnosis. When stating the diagnoses biomedical health personnel also consider other factors besides the symptoms. For example, during the rainy season mosquitoes are abundant, and then people with fever, headache, nausea and diarrhoea are treated against malaria without running a blood test.

The nurses complain that if people do not get well, they often think that biomedicines cannot help them and they do not return to the health centre, but visit marabouts instead. The staff at the health centre and those participating in Unicef's breastfeeding program<sup>52</sup> try to change people's attitude and behaviour by organizing meetings, where information is presented to people in the form of drama, songs and quizzes. Some of the villagers re-visit the health centre in Jarrabaa when their sickness continues, but if the second visit turns out to be to no avail people look for help from somewhere else. It does not necessarily mean that they abandon biomedical services altogether. Sometimes the villagers visit a bigger health centre in Mansa Konko, or hospitals in Banjul, Bansang and Farafenni. Patients are also referred and transferred to these places from the health centre in Jarrabaa when there is no capacity for adequate treatment. As opposed to the biomedical personnel, marabouts and other healers seldom expect their clients to return if *booro* given by them does not work. When a marabout fails to help, a person may comment: "My luck was not in the hands of this marabout (*N na harijoo te nying moroo bulu*)."<sup>52</sup> A healer does the best he or she can and if it does not work people try another one. The villagers often also say: "There are many kinds of marabouts, but they are not equal (*Moroolu siifaa siyaata, bari i mang kanyang*)."<sup>52</sup> By this they mean that marabouts use different methods and their

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<sup>52</sup> Unicef has organized breastfeeding programs in The Gambia, including Jarranding and several villages nearby. The aim of these programs is to educate both women and men to ensure proper maternal and infant nutrition. Because of remarkable health benefits provided by breast milk, mothers are encouraged to exclusively breastfeed their newborn children for the first six months of life and continue to breastfeed up to two years of age or beyond.

abilities vary. They can help people with different problems and some of them are better than others. By trying out different marabouts and other healers a person may find one who is able to help. This way of trial and error also explains why villagers do not necessarily find it reasonable to visit the same health centre several times.

### **Exploring Personalistic Sources of Power**

In many cases the treatment of the immediate sources of sickness is enough to cure a sickness. They can be treated by home-made *booroo*, biomedical personnel, marabouts or other healers. A personalistic source does not exist behind every illness. When Fanding's condition kept on getting worse despite of the diverse *booroolu* he used, the personalistic sources were taken into consideration. The attention was no longer only on diagnosing the sickness, but also on the agent behind it. Like the immediate sources, the personalistic sources of sickness can also be determined by considering the course of events and observing symptoms. In addition, diverse forms of divination are used.

One of the female healers Fanding visited on his way back from Casamance did not merely look at Fanding's sores. She was interested in what had happened before he got them. When Fanding had told her that he had been to the bush, she had asked him about the time of the day when he went there. After Fanding had showed that the sun was high in the sky the healer was assured that he had been bitten by a snake. There was also a suspicion that the snake might have been a spirit or a witch. Fanding never said explicitly why the position of the sun was crucial, but spirits are said to be most active during the hottest hours of the day, and at night (see also Gamble 1967: 71-72). In addition, Fanding had been to the bush where the spirits stay most of the time, and both spirits and witches are known to take the shape of a snake in many cases.

Fanding pointed out that his legs got swollen. Especially swollen legs, but also swollen stomach, face and arms, are mentioned as typical signs of a sickness called *fonyoo*. *Fonyoo* means a wind in general, but most of the villagers say that the sickness called *fonyoo* is caused by whirlwinds (*tonkolongolu*) that occur during hot weather. These winds are believed to be caused by spirits. If a person meets such a wind and is caught by it, the person falls ill and the air of the wind, that is considered to be bad, causes swellings in the body. Although Fanding did not explicitly point out the connection between the swollen legs and *fonyoo*, it is known that this was most probably one of the reasons why his condition was suspected to be caused by a spirit. Ames (1959: 167) writes that according to Gambian Wolof the place touched by a witch becomes swollen and very sore. Sometimes people in Jarranding say that witches cause *fonyoo*. They also explain that it is not the same kind of sickness as that caused by the whirlwinds made by spirits, but witches make the body big so that it becomes better for them to eat it. Therefore Fanding's swollen feet could also be considered to be caused by witchcraft.

Personalistic sources of effects can also be revealed by different techniques of divination, which is typical in Africa in general (e.g. Whyte 1997: 60; Gottlieb 1992: 27; Evans-Pritchard 1976: 33; Gillies 1976: 361). After our visit to Lamin Sanneh, Fanding went to visit a marabout in Birkanma. Fanding asked him to perform a divination dream (*lastakaari*) for him, but he did not want to tell me what it was about. It could have had something to do with Fanding's suspicion about witchcraft, but as considered above such accusations are grave and often people do not want to discuss them. Even if Fanding clearly stated that he believed his sores were caused by witchcraft, he did not want to point out any suspects. Instead he continued to tell that one of his sons had died about one year earlier because of witchcraft. Since witches only attack their relatives, he was implying that there is a witch in his close family, but he never made any accusations. Usually people are content

with protecting themselves against witches without confronting people they suspect of witchcraft, for reasons already considered in the previous chapter. On our way back from Birkanma, Fanding picked up a branch, which he knew was effective against witches, from one isolated bush beside the path. He could not remember the name of the bush and since it was in the middle of the dry season there were no leaves on the bush which could make it easier to recognize. When I went to visit him later, he pointed out that he had suspended a piece of that branch above the door in front of the picture of his late son.

A couple of weeks after Fanding had been treated against the snake-bite by Lamin Sanneh there was remarkable improvement with the sores. Even if healing of the sores was slow, Fanding did not look for other explanations anymore. The snake might have been a witch, but the most important thing was to find a person who was good enough to remove all the teeth and poison out of Fanding's legs. After our visit to Birkanma, he went to get similar treatment in another village nearby. There were various reasons that supported the theory that Fanding had been bitten by the snake. Instead of differing opinions like in the beginning, there were several persons who said that he had been bitten by the snake. Fanding also got a concrete proof of it. The snake's teeth were pulled out of his legs and after drinking the *booroo* made by Lamin Sanneh he had vomited and seen some black particles in his vomit. Now Fanding did not conceive any conflict between the diagnosis and the symptoms, even if he had not seen the snake. He had been walking in high grass and the snake had been very fast. The potion that one of his friends had prepared for him had stopped the snake's poison at his waist preventing it from reaching his heart (*jusoo*), in which case he would have died. From the waist the poison had lowered down to his feet causing a sore on his left foot as well. Although the recovery took some time, he was feeling better day by day<sup>53</sup>. When we went home from Birkanma, Fanding walked from the main

<sup>53</sup> Ames (1959: 267) holds that when Gambian Wolof become sick, they keep on telling their visitors that they are feeling better, because they are scared that some of the visitors might be witches and a weak person makes an easy target for a witch. Also, sick people in Jarranding keep on saying that they are better, but they

road to the village without any difficulties. Eventually, Fanding's sores disappeared, and the recovery was the final proof that they had been caused by a snake-bite.

### **Conclusion**

Even if people in Jarranding sometimes recognize personalistic sources of power behind their sicknesses, when they get sick the questions they ask are not "Who?" causes the sickness and "Why?", as Foster (1998: 115) holds is typical in systems with "multiple levels of causation". In Jarranding people want to know what happened and how a person got sick in order to find a proper *booroo*.

Whyte (1997: 28) holds that when Nyole get sick they are at first concerned with a "symptomatic idiom". If they fail to cure symptoms, they consider an "explanatory idiom". Similarly people in Jarranding observe symptoms and begin by treating immediate sources of sickness. When *booroolu* fail and sicknesses prove to be persistent, people may recognize personalistic sources behind them. Often, however, it is not necessary to confront the agents directly, it is sufficient to use *booroo* for protection. On the contrary, in order to recover, people always need to treat the immediate source.

People reflect on sources of power causing the sickness and they make choices between different *booroolu* according to their perceptions of causality, but the search for *booroo* also involves a lot of trying and failing. Whyte (1997: 28) holds that Nyole are much more concerned about recovery than diagnosis. Similarly the essential aim for people in Jarranding is to find a *booroo* that is powerful. They keep on using *booroo* that is efficient. A *booroo* that cures a sickness can be considered as evidence for a correct diagnosis, but the

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also readily continue to admit that they are not well ("*A fisayaata, bari a mang kendeyaa*"). Even if people in Jarranding also say that witches attack weak persons and that those about to die are easy prey for them, I have never heard anybody referring to an explanation similar to that given by Ames (1959: 267).

causality often remains unclear after recovery, because people frequently use several *booroolu* at the same time.

## Chapter Five

### POWERS OF SUBSTANCES AND WORDS

I have defined *booroo* as powerful objects, substances, and on occasion certain words, that people use in order to affect the course of events. Thus, people in Jarranding also refer to certain prayers (*duwaalu*) and spells (*hijaaboolu*) as *booroo*. It has also been pointed out that people are mainly concerned with how effective and powerful *booroo* is. Villagers judge diverse *booroolu* by statements such as “This *booroo* has got the power (*Nying booroo semboo soto*)”, “The power of this *booroo* is great (*Nying booroo semboo warata*)”, “The power of this *booroo* is very great (*Nying booroo semboo warata baake*)”, “The power of this *booroo* is not great (*Nying booroo semboo mang wara*)” and “This *booroo* has not got the power (*Nying booroo mang semboo soto*)”.

Several points should be made explicit in this context. Instead of describing the *booroolu* themselves as powerful or less powerful, the expressions above are concerned with whether the *booroo* has got power or not. This brings forth the idea that the *booroo* is conceived of as having an inherent power. There is also, clearly, an idea that the powers of diverse *booroolu* vary in degree. Some of them are considered more powerful than others. The more power the *booroo* has, the more efficiently it leads to anticipated results. For instance, the *booroo* may heal a sickness quickly and completely; cure the patient eventually; merely make the patient a little bit better, or may not alleviate suffering at all. In the latter case the *booroo* is either wrong according to circumstances or it is interpreted as mere sham on the part of the person who advised on its use. Either way, the *booroo* lacks the necessary power in order to be effective in the case in question.

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The idea of inherent power, *semboo*, resembles the concept of *nyama* that is frequently discussed in literature about Mande (see e.g. McNaughton 1988: 15-21; Bird, Kendall and Tera 1995: 28; Hoffman 1995: 43; Zahan 1963: 133). Frank describes *nyama* as “a kind of vital energy...that pervades all things” (1998: 79). Substances, speech, people, animals and spirits are conceived of as possessing power (*nyama*), that induces both positive and negative effects on the world (McNaughton 1988: 16-17; Frank 1998: 79; Hoffman 1995: 43). Janson (2002) has studied Mandinka griottes in Eastern Gambia. She holds that the notion of *nyama* and associating griots with “this supernatural power” has given “an ‘exotized’ picture of the profession of bards” (2002: 194-195). Janson holds that the griottes she worked with did not talk about *nyama* at all, but “expressed the power of their words by means of the concept of *saabo*” (2002: 161). She continues to explain that griots believe that if they “wash their mouth” with “medicine” they get from a marabout, they “become endowed with *saabo* so that their words become powerful” (2002: 161). Janson translates the word *saabo* as “means” (2002: 161). This is also my understanding of the word *saabo*, namely, a marabout can provide a person with “means” (*saabo*) to attain something and such “means” are considered to be powerful. But I do not agree with Janson that it equates with the concept of *nyama*. People in Jarranding do not use the word *nyama*, but I hold that they describe a similar power by the concept of *semboo*, not with the word “means” (*saabo*). It is an unfortunate choice of words to describe powers, other than “means”, as necessarily “supernatural”. This power (*semboo*) is conceived as pervading both animate and inanimate entities and therefore people consider it as a natural part of the world, even if it may appear occult, since the ability to manipulate certain powers in the world frequently remains a secret in the hands of a few, a subject that I will take up in the following chapters.

In the present chapter I explore the inherent power (*semboo*) of *booroo*. I concentrate on *booroo* in the form of substances and words and approach the following related

questions. Firstly, how does *booroo* gain its power and to what extent are *booroolu* made powerful by human intervention? Secondly, how are powers of *booroolu* understood to vary in degree? I argue that *booroo* is considered to be more powerful when several sources of power are combined in it. This argument requires an exploration of what people perceive as powerful.

Moerman (2002: 4) holds that biological consequences of medicines and events in life may vary from one cultural context to another, depending on how people experience knowledge, symbol and meaning. Moerman uses a term “meaning response” which he holds to be:

“...‘the psychological and physiological effects of *meaning* in the treatment of illness.’ When such effects are ‘positive’ (however understood), they include most of the things that have been called the placebo effect; when such effects are ‘negative,’ they include most of what has been called the nocebo effect.” (Moerman 2002: 14-15)

Moerman (2002: 151) argues that “...meaning can activate biological processes, and it can enhance the effectiveness of powerful drugs...” In the following I explore aspects of *booroo* which render it meaningful to people in Jarranding and therefore may enhance the effectiveness of *booroo*.

As we have seen in Fanding’s case, once he was certain that he had been bitten by a snake he kept on looking for diverse *booroolu* in order to cure his sores. Several *booroolu* made him better, but he needed a *booroo* that would be powerful enough to cure his condition completely. Fanding said that he wanted to go to Birkanma, because he believed that there was still poison left in his legs. In order to recover it was necessary to get it all out. I wondered why he did not rather ask Seedy to repeat his treatment. At first he complained that Seedy was asking too much money for it. Still, Fanding did not even know

how much Lamin Sanneh would ask for the treatment. When I argued that he might ask even more and that Fanding had to pay for transportation in addition, Fanding said that he had heard that he would also get a potion (*nasoo*) from Lamin Sanneh that Seedy could not prepare<sup>54</sup>. While Fanding could not walk to Birkanma, he felt better after Lamin Sanneh's treatment and walked back home from the main road.

People in Jarranding often say that they prefer to use script potions (*nasoolu*) instead of other types of *booroolu*. Although people in general often combine the use of various kinds of *booroolu* and some prefer to use prayers (*duwaalu*) or amulets (*safoolu*) rather than script potions, many consider script potions (*nasoolu*) more reliable and effective than other types of *booroolu*. Prayers, amulets and script potions may all consist of verses from the Qur'an, and both amulets and script potions may include parts of trees and plants, but script potions differ from prayers and amulets due to their liquid form and in that they can be consumed orally. By exploring these considerations, the aspects of *booroo* that make it powerful become more conceivable.

### **Material Substances**

The villagers regard the world as being endowed with powers, but they have to learn how to take advantage of them. I will take up how people acquire knowledge of these powers in the next chapter. Here I explore some material substances, namely trees and plants that can be used as *booroo*. I investigate what measures are needed in order to make *booroo* out of them and how people consider them effective.

People in Jarranding refer to numerous plants and trees as *booroo*. They say: "Trees are *booroo* of Mandinka people (*Yiroolu mu Mandinkoolu la booroo le ti*)."<sup>54</sup> Villagers point

<sup>54</sup> Before our visit to Birkanma, Fanding thought that Lamin Sanneh was a marabout. When Fanding said he would get a *nasoo* he probably thought that he would get a script potion. As considered earlier, in the strict sense of the word *nasoo* refers to a script potion that includes verses from the Qur'an, but in daily speech people also call liquid *booroo* (*boori jiyoo*) prepared out of plants and trees *nasoo*. As it turned out Fanding Sanneh was not a marabout, but a healer (*jaarallaa*); the potion prepared by him did not include any written verses, but he included a spell (*hijaaboo*) in it.

out trees and plants commenting: “This is *booroo* (*Nying mu booroo le ti*).” People prepare *booroo* out of leaves, roots, branches, bark, fruits, seeds, flowers and sap of various trees and plants. Due to their ability to induce changes and affect the course of events, certain plants and trees are said to possess power (*semboo*). On the whole, different *booroolu* consisting of trees and plants cover the diverse purposes of *booroo* mentioned in Chapter Two. They are used for protection and healing. They can help a person to get a job and enable people to harm others. They can also be used to divulge information, for example to reveal witches. All in all, people in Jarranding have mentioned nearly one hundred different *booroolu* made of plants and trees. Here I name a few examples, before discussing aspects relating to the power of material substances in further detail.

One of the most frequently named ingredients of *booroo* is leaves of *jambakatango* (Latin *Combretum glutinosum*). *Jambakatango* grows as shrubs and small trees around Jarranding. The leaves are boiled or simply soaked in water. Some people dry the leaves at first and then pound them into powder that is mixed with water. Sometimes sugar or salt is added before the *booroo* is consumed orally. Leaves of *jambakatango* are used both to cure and prevent sickness. They are generally held to be effective against pain, such as stomach-ache, headache and pain in the chest. Some people add that they are good against cough, high blood pressure, fever, and on occasion malaria and intestinal worms. Sometimes they are also claimed to improve poor eyesight. Many simply state that the leaves of *jambakatango* are good for every physical ailment.

Another common *booroo* in Jarranding is prepared by soaking the roots of *jambakatango*, *sinjango* (West African Caesalpinaceae, Latin *Cassia sieberiana*) and *batio* (Guinea peach, Latin *Nauclea latifolia*) in water. *Sinjango* is a small tree. When it blooms it has yellow flowers and its fruits are thin, black pods (Gambian-German Forestry Project n.d.: 10). *Batio* is a climbing shrub. It has white flowers and round, brown fruits that are

eaten by animals (Gambian-German Forestry Project n.d.: 5). Like leaves of *jambakatango* the roots of all these shrubs and trees are claimed to cure a wide range of diverse bodily ailments, such as headache, stomach-ache, pain in the body, fever and malaria. These three shrubs and trees are all talked about as great Mandinka *booroo* and their combination results in the mixture that many villagers claim can cure and prevent all sicknesses. By saying this some people imply that it is always worth trying this mixture in case of sickness, but their experiences show that it does not cure all sicknesses.

Some other plants and trees have more specific qualities and no further preparation is required. For example, the thick, white sap from the leaves of *kipanpango* (Sodom apple, Latin *Calatropis procera*) that grows as a stout shrub at some compounds in Jarranding, heals ringworm<sup>55</sup> and closes open sores when applied on them directly. Contrary to many other *booroolu* made of trees and plants that drive a substance causing a sickness out of the body, *kipanpango* results in the blockage – it stops bleeding or the spreading of ringworm. The leafy branches of *kipanpango* are also suspended above the doors of the house where a newborn baby stays, in order to protect the baby from witches. The parallel between the effectiveness of *kipanpango* on ringworm, open sores and against witches is plausible: in a similar way as it stops ringworm growing, closes sores and stops bleeding, it closes the entrances to the house from witches, stops them at the door and prevents them from sucking out the baby's intestines or blood. The colour of the sap may also be meaningful to people and make them to perceive *kipanpango* effective against witches. People say that the colour white is associated with peace and that is why marabouts often advise people to give things that are white as charity, such as paper, candles, cooked white rice and white kolanuts<sup>56</sup>. In addition, newly circumcised boys who are considered especially vulnerable to witchcraft

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<sup>55</sup> Ringworm is a fungal infection that sometimes grows in the shape of a ring.

<sup>56</sup> This is not always the case. Marabouts also advise people to give charity in the form of red kolanuts and red rice, namely rice prepared with red palm oil and tomato paste.

attacks, are always dressed in white gowns (see also Schaffer 1987: 97; Gamble 1967: 64). Even though villagers often pointed out that the sap of *kipanpango* is white, they did not express the connection between the sap and the meaning of the white colour in general, as I have done above.

McNaughton (1988: 60) holds that metal is an especially suitable material to make amulets from due to its high levels of power (*nyama*). Similarly, people in Jarranding conceive of plants and trees as inherently powerful. The powers possessed by diverse species vary both in kind<sup>57</sup> and effectiveness. Certain species are more powerful than others in the way that their effect is more complete, faster and/or lasts longer. *Jambakatango* is said to have a great power (“*Jambakatango la semboo warata*”) since it can cure a wide range of sicknesses effectively. Frank (1998: 79) holds that according to Mande potters the power (*nyama*) possessed by raw clay can destroy people’s health and well-being if the clay is not handled properly. Since some plants and trees are harmful to people – especially to children who are not yet strong – in small or large amounts, people have to be aware of these powers and careful with the substances in question, unless one is wishing to hurt somebody, for instance to cause a man to be impotent.

Sometimes, no further preparation of plants and trees is necessary. As we saw above, the branches and sap of the *kipanpango* are efficient as such. Parts of certain plants and trees can be chewed, rubbed on the body or eaten as they are, or they can be used as amulets both on the body, and in houses, courtyards, fields, etc. However, usually some preparation is required before trees and plants can be consumed or applied as *booroo*. For example, liquid *booroo* (*boori jiyu*) is made out of the leaves of the *jambakatango* tree. Liquid *booroolu* are drunk, applied on the body or sprinkled in houses, courtyards, fields, etc. In addition to being mixed with water the powdered *booroo* (*boori munkoo*) can be sniffed or applied on

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<sup>57</sup> A local story tells that Prophet Seleman was able to understand trees and plants and they all revealed to him what they could be used for.

sores and rashes. Sometimes different parts of a certain plant or several plants are mixed together. In the mixture of *jambakatango*, *sinjango* and *batio* mentioned above it is a matter of making the power of *booroo* more effective since all the three shrubs and trees are believed to be capable of curing a great diversity of bodily ailments. At other times the mixtures can be made in order to make *booroo* effective in several ways, and sometimes combinations are necessary to make *booroo* successful.

The *booroolu* made of plants and trees are mainly used to treat immediate sources of bodily ailments. People often draw a parallel between them and biomedicines by pointing out that many biomedicines are made of plants and trees. Among other things people say that the leaves of *jambakatango* can cure abdominal pain. An aching stomach is said to be “dirty” (*nooring, noota*). Drinking the *booroo* made of leaves of *jambakatango* causes diarrhoea that “washes the stomach” (*A ye kono kuu le*) and thus relieves pain<sup>58</sup>. The *booroolu* made of trees and plants are often expected to have laxative and emetic effects, and to cause increased urinating, spitting or sneezing. These are considered as proof that the sickness is getting out of the body. In addition, people may detect a change in their bodily fluids, for example, the urine gets darker yellow or there are unusual particles in their vomit or stools. For instance, Fanding had observed black particles in his vomit.

However, trees and plants are not exclusively used to prevent and cure immediate sources of bodily ailments. As we have already seen, branches of *kipanpango* can be used against witches which are personalistic sources of sickness and death. The *booroo* made for Fanding by Lamin Sanneh, consisting of tree bark and a spell (*hijaaboo*) he recited, provides another example. On the one hand the *booroo* helped to get the snake’s teeth and poison out. On the other hand it protected against snakes, witches and spirits.

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<sup>58</sup> Bledsoe (2002: 174) holds that women in The Gambia sometimes drink boiled *jambakatango* in order to clean and wash out their wombs after birth.

As the latter example alludes to, spells are often included in *booroolu* made of plants and trees. I will now turn to explore the power of utterances and how they enhance the power of the liquid *booroo*.

### **Utterances**

As mentioned in Chapter Two, prayers, verses from the Qur'an and spells (*hijaaboolu*) are often used instead of *booroo*. It was also described how they can be attached to amulets and potions either orally or in writing. In addition to trees and plants, liquid *booroolu* often include powerful utterances. In a similar way as plants and trees, certain utterances are considered to possess an inherent power that may affect the course of events.

Maranz (1993: 233) holds that in Senegambia uttered words can be powerful. Both negative and positive comments about others may cause misfortune (Maranz 1993: 173-174, 233). Other types of speech are also considered to have power (*semboo*). For instance, a prayer of a marabout that results in anticipated effects is said to have a great power (“*Nying moroo la duwaa semboo warata*”). When the leader of the village (*alikaaloo*) and a group of village elders (*kiitilaalu*) discuss land disputes, nobody dares to disturb them. Their speeches are considered powerful (“*I la diyaamoolu semboo warata*”), because their negotiations are important and meaningful. Their decisions have a concrete effect on village matters.

Hoffman (1995: 43) writes about Mande griots and holds that there is power (*nyama*) in their speech that enters the listener and makes him bigger with the honour thus given to him. People in Jarranding also allude to the griot's speech as being powerful. They say that listening to their family history recited by the griot makes them happy, but at the same time they are worried that the griot might say something bad about them. For both reasons, they feel compelled to pay well for they want to hear the entire story praising their family, and aim to please so that the griot will not insult them. Especially, when there are others around

listening to the griot the family's reputation and therefore their power, is thereby enhanced and reinforced.

Dilley holds that among Haalpulaar'en in Senegal "to utter a name is also to summon the presence of the thing named" (2004: 164). Therefore people sometimes avoid using the names of dangerous animals and rather refer to them by epithets, for instance by calling crocodiles "killers" (Dilley 2004: 164). In Jarranding some of the women say that a spirit (*jinoo/seetaanoo*) is bothering them and causing them headaches or barrenness. Usually people refer to such a condition as *kunto-fengo*<sup>59</sup>. Some say it is because people want to avoid mentioning spirits. As stated earlier, spirits are also called "people in the bush" (*wuloo-kono-nkoolu*). Mentioning spirits may summon their presence, but people also get annoyed if somebody calls them out loud by their name after sunset, because it is believed to invite spirits to come to the person who was called by name. The ninety-nine names of Allah mentioned in the Qur'an, such as "Compassionate" and "Merciful" are frequently used in order to approach God and request God's assistance. They are often also included in script potions (see also Dilley 2004: 166, 187).

Similarly, verses from the Qur'an are used to ask for help and advice from God. For instance, people often pray for God's protection by reciting the first sura from the Qur'an, *Al-fatihah*; and the sura 112, *Al-ikhlas*<sup>60</sup> is also used frequently. Dilley (2004: 174) holds that among Haalpulaar'en in Senegal the "meaning" of the verses lies, not in their semantic content, but in their "power" to "bring about effects". This is also true in Jarranding. Even though people in general cannot understand the meaning of the verses from the Qur'an, they are perceived as powerful, because they may affect the course of events. Mere sounds can also be powerful. For instance, whistling is disapproved of because it is believed to summon

<sup>59</sup> *Kunto* means "above" or "on top of" and *fengo* means "a thing".

<sup>60</sup> People in Jarranding refer to this sura as "*Qul huwa*" which are the opening words of the sura.

spirits. The villagers also tell about a witch drum that was played in the past. The sound of the drum attracted witches to come to dance and make them confess whom they had killed.

Above I cited Moerman's (2002: 14-15) definition of "meaning response". Dilley sees verses from the Qur'an as meaningful because they are effective. The view suggested by Moerman (2002: 14-15) turns this around by holding that the verses are effective because they are meaningful to people. Moerman (2002: 151) holds that medicines work better when they are meaningful to people. In Jarranding Muslim faith renders verses from the Qur'an meaningful and therefore powerful for villagers. The Qur'an is the Holy Book for Muslims. As Muslims see it, the Qur'an was revealed to the prophet Muhammad by Allah in Arabic, and the words have not been changed. The words written in the Qur'an are considered to derive directly from God and the Qur'an is conceived of as proof of a direct connection between people and God. The words of the Qur'an make up the language of God and they are considered powerful since they enable communication with Allah, the final source of power. People say that God helps those who believe in him. By the same token, several villagers hold that belief in powers of *booroolu* is crucial in order to render *booroolu* effective in general, including those made of plants and trees. People comment that *booroolu* work as long as you believe in them and conversely they do not work if you doubt them. They say that any fetishes (*jalangolu*) work, if you trust in their powers.

Even if certain utterances are powerful per se, many people have practical difficulties saying them. Often people do not know the required words and even those who know them might be unable to recite or pronounce them correctly. Dilley (2004: 175) writes that among Haalpulaar'en in Senegal the efficacy of the verses to bring about effects lies in the correct performance of them. He warns that any mistake in recitation returns the power of the verse upon the speaker and causes him or her misfortune. In Jarranding, this does not seem to be the case. If a person makes a mistake in the preparation of *booroo*, for instance recites the

verses of the Qur'an incorrectly, it simply renders the *booroo* ineffective or diminishes its power. When the *booroo* is weak it naturally leaves its user in greater danger than the *booroo* with superior power. People say that the *booroolu* meant to harm others can return their powers to the users and cause them to suffer instead of the intended victim, if the victim has powerful enough *booroo* to protect him or her. A marabout who heals illness caused by spirits also takes the risk that after leaving his client in peace a spirit will start to bother him or his family. This is a reason why in Fanding's case that was described in the previous chapter, Lamin Sanneh drank some of the *booroo* he prepared for Fanding and he also gave some of it to the boy who was present. Lamin Sanneh wanted to protect himself and the boy against spirits and witches. Mistakes per se in the preparation of *booroo* do not harm people, but they result in a futile or weak *booroo* that renders its user vulnerable.

When a person cannot pronounce powerful verses correctly, it is best that someone who is capable of uttering them recites them on his or her behalf or makes, for instance, a liquid *booroo* out of them. Utterances can be attached to potions both orally and in writing. As described in Fanding's case, Lamin Sanneh recited a secret spell (*hijaaboo*) when he was preparing *booroo* out of powdered barks. Each time he finished the spell he spat slightly in the water. Saliva transmits the power of the words and seals it into the *booroo* (see also Dilley 2004: 152; Sanneh 1979: 187; Hoffman 2000: 169). People explain that it encloses the words into the *booroo* as one encloses a letter into an envelope. To prepare script potions (*nasoolu*) verses from the Qur'an are written on a wooden writing board with soot that is washed off cooking pots<sup>61</sup>. The text is then washed off the board into water by rubbing it with sand. Sometimes, sand from places that are conceived of as especially powerful, for instance close to the graves of great marabouts, is used, in order to further enhance the power of the script potion.

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<sup>61</sup> In some cases curses are written with blood from hens and cocks.

People who have consumed or applied a liquid *booroo* that includes the protective utterances have the protection with them and then there is no need to say the words in time of danger. Anybody can find himself or herself in a sudden or hidden danger. Even those who are able to say the required words are uncertain whether they are capable of or have enough time to say the protective utterances in a threatening situation. A dangerous situation, such as a car accident, or whirlwinds created by spirits (*fonyoo*) that make people sick by touching them, may occur suddenly. Sometimes spirits appear in forms, for instance as giants, that startle people so much that they are not able to speak. A person can also be in danger without noticing it. People can inflict harm by evil eye (*nyaa jawoo*) and anyone or anything can be a witch or a spirit wishing to hurt you, since witches and jinn are able to transform themselves into any living creature or inanimate object.

The powerful words in their written and/or spoken form are frequently added to liquid *booroolu* with other powerful substances, such as parts of plants and trees. As in the case of mixtures made of plants and trees that were mentioned above, the utterances add power to liquid *booroolu*, widen the range of their effects, or they are required in order to make the *booroo* effective. The villagers often say: “*Bisimillaay*” – “In the name of God” – before applying or consuming *booroo*. It protects people from evil (Dilley 2004: 167; Ames 1959: 270) and appeals to God so that he might let the *booroo* be effective. Since it is Allah who decides everything, there is no *booroo* that can be effective against God’s will. By including appeals to God the *booroo*’s effectiveness is widened to affect sources beyond the immediate and personalistic sources of power, so that it influences the final source as well.

### **Applying and Consuming *Booroo***

Powerful utterances can also be sealed in amulets both in writing and orally, as described in Chapter Two. However, there are several reasons why many find potions more reliable and practical than amulets. These will be considered below.

Although verses from the Qur'an make amulets and potions powerful, they at the same time bring on a weakness attached to them. They can be destroyed by urine, faeces, menstrual blood and semen, which are substances people have to be clean from before Muslim ritual prayers and when they touch the Qur'an. By this I do not imply that such bodily discharges are considered as impure in general. Douglas holds that "uncleanness is matter out of place" (1966: 40). By the same token Gottlieb holds that among the Beng of the Ivory Coast menstrual blood is polluting and dangerous only when it is "removed from its proper place" (1982: 35). Similarly in Jarranding discharges are not exclusively conceived of as damaging. Menstrual blood and semen are considered necessary in order to generate children, who are seen as blessings. Farmers take advantage of cow dung as fertilizer, but before the Muslim prayers people need to perform an ablution in order to clean their bodies of such discharges. In Jarranding pre-menopausal women do not go to the mosque at all and the older women who are not menstruating any longer pray on the veranda of the mosque without entering the building itself. In the same way as people need to be clean when approaching God and handling the Qur'an, the amulets and potions that are meant to appeal to God and include parts of the Qur'an must be kept clean of these bodily discharges. This is also why some people argue that potions used to protect the compounds must be sprinkled over the roof tops so that animals do not urinate or defecate on them. While anybody can damage his or her amulet without noticing it or somebody else might destroy it, once a potion is consumed or applied on the body it cannot be spoilt.

People argue that potions are superior to amulets because once you have consumed it or applied it on your body it stays there. People can forget to tie their amulets, and especially children, often break or lose them. Rather than bothering to get the amulets repaired or providing their children with new ones the parents wash their children with potions once in a

while. Potions cannot be lost or broken once they are inside or on the body. When the *booroo* is consumed, its power strengthens the person and becomes a part of him or her.

Some liquid *booroolu* must be applied regularly in order not to lose their effectiveness, while others are so powerful that only a small amount lasts for the rest of a person's life. Sometimes the power can even transfer over generations, like the power of the liquid *booroo* that Fanding got from Lamin Sanneh against snake bites. Script potions are very economical in use since a small amount can be diluted with water and the *booroo* still retains its power.

Earlier I have considered the importance of Islam and belief for effectiveness of *booroo*. Religion is also visible in the way people use script potions. Often people apply script potions over their face and head with similar movements to those they perform during ablution before the Muslim daily prayers. They wet their palms with some script potion and pull them from their chin over their face and head to their neck after which they pull their palms back to the chin again and once more to the neck. This way of applying the script potion may be meaningful to people because it reminds them of cleansing their body from impurities both physically and spiritually. Therefore the way potion is applied may enhance the effectiveness of *booroo* as held by Moerman (2002: 151).

Some people argue that *booroo* is more powerful and effective when it is consumed than when it is simply carried on the body. Mommodou is a man close to his fifties. He is one of the few of his generation in Jarranding who has attended the so-called "white man's school" in his youth. Mommodou has done some petty business selling cloth in Brikama in Kombo, but a couple of years ago he came to Jarranding to take care of his elderly father who was sick. Now the father has passed away, but Mommodou, his two wives and their two daughters remain at the family compound together with Mommodou's brothers. Mommodou

helps his brother with farming. His first wife, Nabba, cultivates rice, while Liso, his second wife stays at home with her baby girl, Fatoumata, and Nabba's foster child, Tida.

Mommodou is interested in *booroolu* made of plants and trees. He knows more about them than the average villager and he prepares them frequently for himself and his family.

Sometimes he makes them for his friends as well, but he never asks for any money for it and people do not come to ask for *booroo* from him. Mommodou often belittles his wives and others' stories about spirits and witchcraft. In his opinion they are superstitious beliefs.

One day Fatoumata had got a new amulet among the old ones in the string around her neck. Liso said she had got it from Liso's mother. There is bark of the cotton tree (*bantango*) in it. It is good for children who are teething and it prevents fever and diarrhoea. Mommodou, who overheard our conversation, said that the amulet was just "an unreasonable belief". He said that people claim that the bark has to cross the river and then it helps in the form of the amulet. He meant that it helps, if the mother believes in it. He continued by explaining that if you cook the bark of the cotton tree and rinse your mouth with it, it is good against toothache. Mommodou said that anyway everything was fixed since Fatoumata had also been sucking the bark and now she had the *booroo* in her body. Mommodou considered the *booroo* a lot more effective inside the body where it had a greater physical effect on Fatoumata than if she was only carrying it on her body.

In general *booroo* is attached close to the matter that it is supposed to influence. For instance, *booroolu*, such as amulets and potions against pains in the body, are frequently placed or applied on the part that is aching. Harmful *booroo* (*dabaroo*, *koriteewo*) must be stepped on or consumed by its victim<sup>62</sup>. When sickness is considered to be caused by "dirty

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<sup>62</sup> Whyte holds that among Nyole in Uganda "[m]edicine buried to affect one person can be unwittingly 'jumped' by someone else, who then falls ill instead" (1997: 29). This would not happen in Jarranding, because *booroo* that is aimed to affect others' actions, for instance in "love magic", includes the name of the target person. To avoid any confusion the name of the person's biological mother is also included. People point out that you can never be certain of the father, but everybody knows who gave birth to the person.

water” that moves around inside the body, people often consume liquid *booroo*. The *booroo* being a more powerful substance than the “dirty water” is supposed to “wash” out the “dirt” when it comes into contact with it.

### **Power of Water**

The ideas attached to inherent power of substances has already been considered above by the help of some examples of plants and trees. Here I return to one more powerful substance, namely water. Contrary to plants and trees, people in Jarranding do not refer to water as *booroo*, but it is always a basic ingredient in liquid *booroolu* and like any other powerful substance it has both positive and negative qualities. Several advantages of *booroo* that is in liquid form as opposed to *booroo* in the form of utterances and amulets, have already been pointed out. Here I investigate some properties of water and how it is perceived as a powerful substance. I further explore the influence that these meanings may have on the effectiveness of liquid *booroo*.

Water in general has a great effect on human life. On the whole, all the villagers are engaged in and dependent on farming in one way or another. Rains are one of the basic requirements for a good harvest, but even if a rainy season makes cultivation of food possible, it also brings uncertainty with it. Firstly, the rains must fall in the right phases of farming. While water is needed at the beginning of the farming season the rains towards the end of it destroy the ripening of the crops. The rainy season is also notorious for roads damaged by heavy rains and frequent cases of malaria, since the abundance of water increases the amount of mosquitoes.

While the rainy season is an annual occurrence, there is also a more frequent natural phenomenon attached to water, namely a high-tide (*waamoo*) that raises the river level twice a month, around the full moon and the new moon, lasting for five days at a time. Seeni, one

of the midwives in Jarranding, holds that deaths caused by sickness occur during the high-tide and women give birth during this period. People complain that they feel tired and lazy, blaming the monthly tidal cycles for it. Those who have ailments in their body feel that the pain is intensified, and the mentally ill (*sondome saasaa*), “mad people” (*nyaamaatolu*) and persons bothered by spirits (*kunto-fengo*) are worse during the high tide. At other times mentally ill people may behave normally and often their abnormal conduct is taken as a sign of the high-tide. If a mentally ill person has an especially difficult period, people can comment that the power of the present high-tide is great (“*Nying waamoo la semboo warata*”).

People say that washing oneself in sea water cleanses the body both physically and spiritually. Since salty water rises up the River Gambia from the sea, bathing in the river is also considered to be purifying. It cleans cuts and wounds, but it also cleans the mind. Newly circumcised boys are only washed in the river – once during their seclusion period, that lasts around one month (see also Gamble and Rahman 1998: 30; Schaffer 1987: 99) and on the day they come out of the seclusion. Furthermore, if a person has done something morally wrong, his family may tell the person to go and bathe in the river.

It is necessary for people’s well-being to have water in their bodies. There is an expression that describes a simple-minded and foolish person by saying that there is no water in his or her head (“*A kungo mang jiyoo soto*”). When a man arrives home from the fields his wife will immediately go to greet him with a cup of water to drink. In spite of the health centre’s advice that women should feed their newborn babies only with breast milk, mothers give their babies water to drink. All living creatures need water.

There is always water in the body and it is vital, but like other powerful substances, such as the rains and high-tides mentioned above, bodily fluids are considered both

positively and negatively. As in previous examples these distinctions are not clear-cut opposites, but bodily fluids are seen as both good and bad depending on context. For instance, it has been mentioned that excessive saliva (*daajiyo*<sup>63</sup>) is considered to be a sign of sickness getting out of the body. It is regarded as contaminated water and people do not want to swallow it, but spit it out. At other times people use their saliva, for example in order to attach prayers on their bodies or to seal spells into the *booroo*. Therefore saliva can be on the one hand dirty and bad while it is clean and good on the other. In either case it is powerful, but the character of its power is contextual.

Moerman (2002: 66) holds that in addition to the content of medical treatment, its form can be of significance for its effectiveness. He provides examples from the United States of America of experiments in which inert injections have worked better than inert tablets (see Moerman 2002: 51-52). Moerman holds that people just “know” that injections are more powerful than tablets and that is why they appear more effective (2002: 53). I do not have any evidence, like Moerman has, that injections work better than tablets on people in Jarranding, but villagers appear to trust the effectiveness of injections more than that of tablets. This is reflected in their comments after their visits to the health centre. They are disappointed when they have only got some tablets and not an injection, and in a similar way they can be astonished that their condition has not improved despite so-and-so many injections. Since both tablets and injections are consumed internally in the body, this does not explain people’s preference for injections instead of tablets, in the way that the liquid *booroolu* which are consumed orally are often seen as superior to the amulets which are carried on the body. The preference for injections may have something to do with their fluid form and people’s conceptions of water as powerful. As has been pointed out, when a person gets sick the water inside the body is described as dirty. It has been considered that when

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<sup>63</sup> *Daa* means “mouth” and *jiyo* is “water”.

*booroo* gets in contact with this “dirty water” it flushes it out. Most of the “black man’s” *booroolu* that are used in order to “wash the body” and cure sicknesses are in the liquid form. This may partly explain the greater popularity of injections that are in fluid form than biomedicines in tablet form, but most probably people in Jarranding prefer injections because they have experienced them as more effective. White (2000: 100) holds that while Africans had previously avoided injections, demand for injections grew remarkably after they experienced the effectiveness of injected Salvarsan in the treatment of syphilis and yaws. Similarly people in Jarranding appear pragmatic in their choices of *booroo*. They are concerned with practical results and judge the power of *booroo* out of their concrete experiences of its effectiveness.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have described how certain plants, trees, words, sounds and water are perceived as possessing power (*semboo*). These powers may have both beneficial and detrimental effects on the world and beings inhabiting the world. They may have a transformative capacity, for instance the leaves of a certain tree may render a sick person healthy. Powers inherent in diverse substances and words vary both in kind and amount. The concept of power (*semboo*) in Jarranding resembles the Mande concept of *nyama* that is described as energy or power inherent in the world and beings within it (e.g. McNaughton 1988: 16; Frank 1998: 79).

Due to their inherent powers certain substances and utterances are regarded as *booroo* per se, but often some preparations are required before their inherent powers are applicable, or in order to make them more available to people in general. Amulets and potions may be prepared out of diverse substances and words. Many people prefer potions to amulets, because they find them more reliable. By combining diverse powerful substances and words *booroolu* can be made more effective and the range of their uses can be widened.

Moerman (2002: 151) holds that the ways medicines correspond to concepts that people find meaningful may enhance the effectiveness of drugs. Similarly, people in Jarranding may associate the power of *booroo* with their ideas of the effectiveness of, for instance, plants and trees, colour, utterances, faith, and liquid form; but most of all, people base their ideas of the power of *booroo* on their experiences.

It has been implied that *booroolu* also gain power through the people who prepare them, and first of all, in order to be able to take advantage of powers inherent in the world, the correct knowledge of them is required. These are some of the themes I now turn to explore.

## Chapter Six

### SOURCES OF PRACTITIONERS' POWER

The aim of the present chapter is to elaborate further on ideas of power by examining perceptions relating to the power possessed by practitioners of *booroo*. Resembling the way people comment on the power (*semboo*) of *booroo*, people talk about the power (*semboo*) of the practitioners of *booroo*. A practitioner who is able to help or harm others is considered to possess a great power (“*A la semboo warata.*”).

Arens and Karp hold that it is important to explore “how concepts of power are used by agents to produce their actions and how those concepts are grounded in cultural resources” (1989: xiii-xiv). They continue to say that “[t]ransformation is the key to understanding concepts of power in African societies” (1989: xx) and “the powers agents have allow them to transform the world” (1989: xx). As has already become clear in previous chapters, this is also a valid argument in Jarranding. Like the power of *booroo*, the power possessed by practitioners of *booroo* is frequently understood as transformative. Wright holds that different occupational groups are “transformers of matter and deed” (1989: 52), for instance leatherworkers make skins out of animals, and griots “transform action into identity” (1989: 53). Different occupational groups are able to take advantage of power that is inherent in the world and transform it into useful objects and practices. Similarly, marabouts are able to transform for instance plants, and verses from the Qur’an, into *booroo* and perform practices in the realm of *booroo*, by which they may affect the course of events.

A connection between transformative power and knowledge is prevalent in West African ethnography. It is necessary to possess knowledge of powers inherent in the world in order to be able to affect them (Herbert 1993: 2). McNaughton (1995: 51) holds that among Mande, power involves possessing “means” that enable a person to create things and to generate force (*nyama*). He continues, that most often, such action “focuses on the arcane knowledge used to master powerful forces” (1995:51). Dilley uses the concept of “knowledge-power” among Haalpulaar’en in Senegal by which he conceives “a body of learning and a form of agency that results in effects being brought about by means of that learning” (2004: 132). In addition to the comments about practitioners’ power, people in Jarranding talk about the amount of their knowledge (*londoo*). A skilful and powerful practitioner is considered to have a lot of knowledge (“*A la londoo siyaata.*”), while an unsuccessful practitioner is said to have weak power and not knowledge (“*A la semboo mang wara. A mang londoo soto.*”). To people in Jarranding, practitioners of *booroo* gain their power through their knowledge. Therefore, it is the knowledge that makes practitioners of *booroo* capable of manipulating different sources of power.

The main focus of the present chapter is on marabouts (*morolu*), and to a great extent, I focus on the way in which they are perceived as Islamic practitioners of *booroo*. I also discuss, in brief, marabouts who are known as drawing on sources other than Islam to achieve and exert power. The term “marabout” is a French version of the Arabic *murabit*. In the literature, they are described as Islamic clerics, religious specialists and healers. In Jarranding marabout is a term that is not used unanimously. In the strict sense of the word, the villagers use the term marabout when they refer to practitioners of *booroo* who use the Qur’an in order to help people. Colloquially they also refer to other practitioners of *booroo* as marabouts, namely healers who use plants and trees (*jaaralaalu*), fortune tellers (*juuberilaalu*), those who get their knowledge from spirits (*jina-morolu*) and “owners of

fetish” (*jalang-tiyolu*). I begin this chapter by exploring how some practitioners of *booroo*, namely hunters (*dannoolu*), who are often said to have been marabouts in the past, and marabouts as Muslim clerics, acquire their knowledge and power.

In West African ethnography, powerful knowledge is often described as secret and belonging to certain groups of people (see e.g. McNaughton 1995: 51, 1988: 41; Dilley 2004: 150; Hoffman 1998: 90-93). I explore to what extent the knowledge attached to maraboutic *booroo* belongs to a limited number of people and is kept secret by them. As we shall see, restrictions in the distribution of knowledge attached to *booroo* result in concentration of this knowledge in the hands of a few members within the society. I explore the influences this has on the aspects of power in social relations in the next chapter.

### **Gaining Transformative Knowledge and Power**

In the following I explore diverse ways in which some practitioners of *booroo* can gain transformative knowledge (*londoo*) and power (*semboo*) by considering the methods used by hunters and marabouts, both of whom are renowned for their abilities to prepare *booroo* and perform practices in the realm of *booroo*. As has been reflected upon in the previous chapters the villagers in Jarranding consider that the cosmos consists of diverse sources of power, which I have divided into three categories and referred to as immediate, personalistic and ultimate sources of power. In this sense, power can be perceived as “multicentered” (Arens and Karp 1989: xvi), even if all power is considered ultimately to derive from God. As shown in the preceding chapter, *booroo* and practices in the realm of *booroo* are perceived to gain their transformative power from different sources. In order to prepare *booroo* and influence the course of events practitioners need to gain knowledge about the sources of power and how to manipulate them. As we shall see, the knowledge and power of practitioners derives from the same sources they aim to manipulate. Thus, sources of power are at the same time sources of knowledge. In more general terms “the source of power

resides in the interaction between natural, social, and supernatural realms” (Arens and Karp 1989: xvii), as in many other African societies.

I have pointed out that using sources of power can result in both wanted and unwanted changes. Therefore practitioners of *booroo* need to have knowledge and be powerful in order to deal with these forces without harming themselves or others. Arens and Karp hold that “ritual behaviour creates danger for those most intimately involved, and as such they demonstrate their control over such situations and emerge as sources of power themselves” (1989: xviii). As considered below, powers that marabouts and hunters deal with expose them to danger. By mastering precarious situations practitioners of *booroo* emerge as powerful, but such circumstances are often also necessary for them in order to gain knowledge and power.

### Hunters

In Jarranding hunters are noted for possessing great knowledge (*londoo*) and power (*semboo*)<sup>64</sup>. Furthermore they are renowned as practitioners of *booroo*. These ideas are common in Africa (see e.g. McNaughton 1988: 71; Schaffer 1987: 34; Regis 2003: 92; Gottlieb 1992: 126; Herbert 1993: 184). They are said to gain their knowledge and power from animals in the bush that are conceived of as endowed with both power (*semboo*) and knowledge (*londoo*). In addition, hunters need to be powerful in order to deal with forces in the bush. Dilley (2004: 138) holds that Haalpulaar'en consider that hyenas and many other bush animals possess knowledge. Furs of these animals are used to prepare amulets and according to a local story forefathers of the weavers took in as part of themselves the hyena's knowledge and power by eating their flesh (Dilley 2004: 138). According to McNaughton (1988: 16) Mande hunters believe that duikers for example, although the smallest of the antelopes, are full of life force (*nyama*). Killing them is extremely dangerous

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<sup>64</sup> This power does not refer to their physical strength. “Hunter is (physically) strong” translates to “*Dannoo bambanta*” in Mandinka.

as hunters may get hurt from this power and in concentrated amounts this power may be fatal, but each time a hunter manages to kill one of these antelopes his own power is enhanced (McNaughton 1988: 15-16; see also Bird and Kendall 1980: 16).

People in Jarranding say that in the past hunters were often those who cured sicknesses. Seedy, a man who is known in the village and its surroundings for his skills at curing certain sicknesses, learned healing from his late father who was a hunter. Nowadays, there are no hunters in Jarranding. While The Gambia is known for its rich bird life, there has been a remarkable reduction in the country's wildlife when it comes to larger animals, for instance the elephants, lions and bigger antelopes are long since gone. Villagers say that in the past, when there was still plenty of game, hunters could spend several weeks in the bush without going to a village. They could observe animals' behaviour at close range and they saw which plants the animals preferred when they were sick. People explain that hunters' knowledge of the use of plants and trees as *booroo* has to do with their familiarity with nature. They gain their knowledge from other hunters and animals which are personalistic sources of power.

One example of *booroo* based on the knowledge acquired by hunters is a small horn (*binoo*) that Fatoumata, Mommodou's under one-year-old little girl, carries around her neck. Mommodou seemed a bit proud when he explained that he prepared the horn for Fatoumata himself. He has put leaves of *kalakatoo*-plant<sup>65</sup> inside a horn of a small antelope called *mankaroo* in Mandinka<sup>66</sup>. Mommodou is fluent in English and he explained: "Then your child does not start to tremble. It is against tetanus<sup>67</sup>. Nowadays children get vaccinations, but we believe that these leaves can cure tetanus. We believe that tetanus comes from

<sup>65</sup> *Kalakattoo* is a plant that produces black beans. I do not know its English or Latin name.

<sup>66</sup> I do not know the English or Latin name of this type of antelope.

<sup>67</sup> In Mandinka tetanus is called *jaralaa* or *dingding-saasaa*. *Jara* means to tremble or to have a convulsion. Therefore *jaralaa* refers to the symptoms of tetanus. *Dingding-saasaa* means literally "child-sickness", which alludes to people's consideration that tetanus is most common among children.

animals in the bush<sup>68</sup> and they too, they cure themselves by leaves and roots.” He continued to explain that some hunters had seen how a *mankaroo* antelope cured its sick young one by making it eat leaves of *kalakatoo*. The young antelope recovered and the hunters learnt to use *kalakatoo* as *booroo*.

The villagers say that hunters need to have knowledge and be powerful and brave in order to survive in the bush for long periods of time. Even if most people frequent the bush, it is perceived as potentially more dangerous a place than the village. This is mostly because the chance of meeting spirits is considered to be greater in the bush than in the village. While wild animals posed a greater threat to people in the past, there are still plenty of hyenas whose howling is frequently heard all the way to the village at night, as well as venomous snakes and scorpions which are run into from time to time.

Gottlieb (1992: 25, 27-28) holds that Beng in Ivory Coast do not perceive forest as dangerous wilderness, although spirits who live there may make people sick, if they are disturbed. Beng consider the forest rather as orderly space that is divided into different zones for spirits, farming, hunting, etc. (Gottlieb 1992: 28). Similarly people in Jarranding consider carrying out activities in the bush as relatively safe as long as they stay away from places known to be inhabited by spirits, and keep to the areas that are experienced as secure. People walk to neighbouring villages and to the cultivated fields that are further away from the village through the bush. The river where fishermen go to fish and women go to collect salt is situated in the bush. The villagers also gather for instance firewood, fruits of baobab trees, parts of plants and trees for *booroo* and building materials in the bush. People also take other precautions. They avoid walking in the bush during the night and at midday when

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<sup>68</sup> On another occasion Mommodou said:” Some believe that tetanus is an animal sickness, but according to scientific belief a baby gets it at the time of labour, if the knife that is used to cut the umbilical cord is not sterilised.” Many villagers consider that tetanus (*jaralaa*, *dinding saasaa*) is caused by spirits.

spirits are said to be most active. If it is necessary to go to the bush at these times, most people prefer to go in groups since spirits are considered to be more apt to appear to a person who is alone.

Hunters, however, possess a greater knowledge of the bush than average people. Through experience they are familiar with several areas in the bush. Therefore they are able to move around the bush relatively safely and to spend the night there. Their knowledge and power make them more able to take care of themselves in dangerous circumstances as well as to gain more power by mastering these situations.

### Marabouts

Usually marabouts state that they have spent around twenty years studying Islam, Arabic, the Qur'an and esoteric Muslim sciences before they started to practise their vocation. Marabouts have often studied in various places, also abroad in Guinea and Senegal, under the guidance of different clerics and experienced marabouts. In addition to arduous studies marabouts consider their knowledge and power as a gift from God. In the following I describe in broad outline how marabouts acquire the knowledge and power that enables them to prepare *booroo* and perform practices related to *booroo*.

Both boys and girls in Jarranding start Muslim education when they are about five years old in order to gain a basic knowledge of Islam. Children are expected to start to do their daily prayers regularly at around the age of seven. An Islamic school (*madras*) in the village goes up to the third grade. In addition, some marabouts arrange Islamic studies (*karangta*<sup>69</sup>) at their compounds. In contrast to the Islamic school (*madras*) where children go during the daytime, the latter studies (*karangta*) are usually held in the evening so that children who attend the so-called "white man's school" in Jarrabaa also have an opportunity to participate. Elementary Islamic studies consist of learning the Arabic alphabet, reading

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<sup>69</sup> *Karang* means to study.

simple texts and memorizing parts of the Qur'an (see also Sanneh 1979: 154; Dilley 2004: 148). The rote learning of the entire Qur'an takes approximately five years (Sanneh 1979: 154) and only a few complete this task. Most children in Jarranding receive only basic Islamic education for about one to three years.

Those who want to become marabouts have to continue their Islamic education for several years. At the elementary level there is little attention paid to the understanding of the words (see also Dilley 2004: 148). The interpretation and meaning of the text comes into focus if a person is willing to continue the studies at the advanced level. Those willing to become marabouts usually attend an educational establishment called a *majlis*, which is run by a qualified Muslim cleric (see Sanneh 1979: 165-166). Advanced level Qur'an school students are generally called *taliboolu*. Scholars who enter a *majlis* are given the title *Arfang* and their heads are shaved<sup>70</sup>. Higher Islamic education consists of diverse subjects, such as Arabic language – including grammar, linguistics, philology and further elaboration of correct pronunciation; the exegesis of the Qur'an; theology; the Hadith – narrative reports of the Prophet Muhammad's life; Islamic law and jurisprudence (Dilley 2004: 148-149; Sanneh 1979: 158).

The knowledge mentioned above is necessary in order to become and practise as a marabout, but not all the people learned in Islam (*taliboolu*) or with the title *Arfang* are able to perform maraboutic practices, such as preparing written amulets (*safoolu*) and script potions (*nasoolu*), performing and interpreting different forms of divination and reciting prayers and curses that result in hoped-for effects. Such Islamic<sup>71</sup> magic cannot be learnt by studying books. It must be learnt from an experienced marabout (see also Sanneh 1979: 164;

<sup>70</sup> Entering a *majlis* can be considered as a rite of passage. The shaving of the hair makes it resemble another "rite of passage", namely the seventh day head shaving ceremony of a newborn baby. One week after the birth an infant's hair is shaved off and he or she is given a name. For a description of entering a Qur'an school, see Sanneh 1979: 150-151.

<sup>71</sup> Dilley (2004: 151) holds that some people consider these practices pre- and non-Islamic. In Jarranding, however, they are considered as Islamic.

Goody 1968:13). It is not enough to be able to read, copy and understand the Qur'an, a person needs to be guided in how to work it. A person willing to become a marabout has to learn how to manipulate the power of letters, numbers and words, especially the ninety-nine names of God mentioned in the Qur'an (Dilley 2004: 151). Amulets and potions often consist of patterns (*katumoo*) that are drawings of rectangles or circles divided into varying numbers of squares. The squares are then filled with letters, numbers, words, names and verses from the Qur'an. There may also be text and signs surrounding these designs (see also Dilley 2004: 179-180, 183, 185-186). A scholar needs to know whether amulets and potions require any additional ingredients (*sumarewo*), for instance plants, stones or perfume; the way amulets must be sealed; how amulets and potions should be applied and whether there are any restrictions in their use.

Even to be taught by an experienced master is not enough to become a powerful marabout. Like the power of *booroo* that was considered in the previous chapter, the power of marabouts is perceived to derive ultimately from God. Those who want to practise as marabouts appeal to God through their devotion and means provided by their Islamic knowledge. In addition to the obligatory five daily prayers and fast of Ramadan, they conduct voluntary prayers and fasts as well as recite the Holy Qur'an and meditate on the words and verses of the Qur'an. Marabouts aim to achieve personal communication with Allah, which is perceived as the highest form of knowledge (Dilley 2004: 150; Brenner 1988: 34). God may answer marabouts by revealing to them knowledge and fulfilling their requests. Such revelations appear usually in the form of dreams, like in a previously described dream divination (*lastakaari*), and sometimes through spirit spouses that have been considered in previous chapters.

Marabouts do not only need knowledge and power in order to affect the course of events. Knowledge and power are also crucial for their own safety, since they are often

dealing with powerful forces, for instance with spirits. Practising maraboutism can be a precarious undertaking, especially without proper skills. Goody (1968: 13) provides an example of a man in western Ghana who was claimed to have become sick because he was not aware that he should take precautions before reading certain powerful parts of the Qur'an.

On occasion marabouts in Jarranding seclude themselves in order to seek guidance from God either for themselves or their clients (see also Dilley 2004: 150; Triaud 1988). These retreats (*kaliwalu*) last from three to forty days (Sanneh 1979: 186). Marabouts in Jarranding spend usually three or seven days in seclusion praying, reading the Qur'an and fasting. In seclusion they sleep as little as possible and during the time they sleep they perform dream divination. This kind of retreat is considered dangerous, because it is believed to invite spirits to come and try to disturb a marabout performing it. If the marabout is not well-learned they might harm and injure him seriously. One marabout in Jarranding told about his colleague who had planned to do a retreat for forty days. When there was a foul smell coming out of the house he was secluded in, people decided to go and check on him. They found him dead and laid the blame on spirits. Areas with many non-Muslim people and spirits are considered especially dangerous places to perform these retreats.

It is not the knowledge per se that renders marabouts powerful, but the knowledge enables marabouts to attain power from its sources. Knowledge makes marabouts capable of preparing *booroo* as well as to manipulate and affect immediate sources of power; to communicate with personalistic sources of power; and finally to approach Allah, the ultimate source of power and knowledge.

In principle anybody can acquire knowledge about *booroo*. Still a great part of this knowledge is guarded as a secret by people in possession of it. I will investigate possible reasons for this in the next chapter. I now turn to explore the distribution of knowledge of *booroo* among people.

### **Distribution of Knowledge**

There is a prevalent conception in Jarranding that diverse groups of people possess different types of knowledge that is often conceived of as secret. In Chapter Two, I mentioned that villagers sometimes differentiate between “white man’s” (*tubaabu*) and “black man’s” (*moofing*) *booroo*, which they hold to be based on different types of knowledge. Different ethnic groups are also perceived to have different knowledge. Bambara from Mali (*tiliboonkoolu*<sup>72</sup>), for instance, are often said to be good at preparing harmful *booroo* (*koriteewo*). Hoffman (1998: 90-93) holds that in Mande societies groups of people differentiated by age, gender, caste and craft possess knowledge and secrets that separate members of a specific group from others. In the following I explore to what extent some knowledge attached to *booroo* can be considered as secret and belonging to marabouts.

#### Differentiated Knowledge

Depending on their age, gender and “caste” people have different rights and obligations within society. People’s amount of knowledge and their right to participate in social matters grows with age. Herbert (1993: 177) holds that among Mande very old people possess a great amount of inherent power (*nyama*) because of their age and knowledge. Elders must be respected by those younger than them and their decisions are said to have power (*semboo*), meaning that others have to follow their orders. Women and men have different knowledge due to the differentiation of their tasks and responsibilities. Different genders also have their secrets, for instance those attached to life-cycle rituals.

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<sup>72</sup> This means literally “people from the east” or accurately “people from where the sun rises”.

Male smiths and leatherworkers in Jarranding do not practise their original “caste” occupations and the adult men in the griot family say that their fathers did not want them to engage in musical activities because they conceived them to conflict with Islam. In West African “caste” societies potters are usually women in the blacksmith “caste” (McNaughton 1988: 7; Frank 1998: 4). In Jarranding some women made clay pots just after my arrival and did not yet know the people, so the potters’ “caste” background remains unclear to me, but at least some of them belong to the blacksmith “caste”.

The “caste” professions are perceived as the birthright of people belonging to a specific “caste” and even if they do not practise their occupation their original background becomes visible from time to time. For instance, the eldest griot in the village repeats in a loud voice the information given by the village leader at village meetings. If the oldest griot is absent this is done by an elder smith or a leatherworker. On occasions when the villagers join together to slaughter a cow, the griot family is always given its head since they are the ones who give their voice to society.

### *Booroo* as an Open Category

In Jarranding practising *booroo* can be considered as a relatively open category of knowledge in the way that both men and women are involved with it and it is not attached to any specific “caste”<sup>73</sup>. However, a lot of knowledge runs in families and a person’s talent is an important factor that is taken into consideration when passing on knowledge. I return to those aspects that influence and restrict the distribution of knowledge later on, but at first I explore the basis on which all people can learn more about *booroo* and become a practitioner of it.

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<sup>73</sup> In West African ethnography blacksmiths are frequently mentioned as being involved in practices, which in Jarranding involve preparation of *booroo*, such as healing, midwifery, circumcision, excision and sorcery (Frank 1998: 125; McNaughton 1988: 41, 56-57).

Basic knowledge about *booroo* and practices in the realm of it cannot be described as secret. As has already been pointed out, the healing ability of certain plants, trees and verses from the Qur'an is common knowledge. Furthermore, many of the practices attached to *booroo* are techniques that most people are able to perform, at least to a certain degree. Anybody can attempt to affect the course of events by prayers and receive information (*kibaaroo*) through dreams.

Peek (1991: 196) holds that at least during divination, African diviners are marginalized as “special persons” from the other members of their society. According to Peek, African divination “deals with non-normal sources of knowledge” (1991:199) and “[a]s a means of acquiring normally inaccessible information, divination utilizes a non-normal mode of cognition” (1991:194). Myhre (2006) opposes this view by arguing that among the Chagga-speaking people of Rombo district in Kilimanjaro, “[t]he vernacular concept ‘to dream’, . . . , is used not only by diviners to mean their unique experiences; it is used by anyone to talk about the activity of dreaming in their sleep” (2006: 317).

Conceptions of dream divination in Jarranding are contrary to Peek's view in several ways. Even if dream divination (*lastakaari*) is usually conducted by marabouts in order to find solutions to diverse problems or to make choices between different options, people say that anybody who is able to recite the necessary prayers and verses from the Qur'an can aim to provoke a divination dream. Trimmingham (1961: 123) holds that sometimes a cleric advises his client to recite certain verses from the Qur'an in combination with a daily prayer before going to sleep in a quiet place. The client receives a dream out of which the cleric interprets the answer to his or her request (Trimingham 1961: 123). In addition to divination when a dream is actively provoked, the villagers perceive all dreams as containing omens or resolutions. There is no time limit as to when incidents indicated by a dream will take place, but they will certainly occur sooner or later (see also Sanneh 1979: 191). Some people say

that it was in their dreams that Europeans got the knowledge to make technical inventions, such as cars, telephones, TVs, etc.

The villagers say that dreams are brought by spirits called *ruwaanoolu*<sup>74</sup> and the information they reveal derives ultimately from God. Only the most powerful marabouts are said to have seen *ruwaanoolu* themselves. Usually people see only visions made by them or hear their voices in the form of a dream. Everybody dreams and is said to “have” such spirits, but some people’s *ruwaanoolu* are considered to be more powerful and to have more knowledge than others’.

Sometimes a dream presents information in a clear form, but often interpretation is required<sup>75</sup>. Mommodou told about a dream he had had. He had gone back to sleep after doing his morning prayers and dreamt that he received an envelope filled with spoons. In the evening a man had brought him a letter with two notes of money in it, from his brother who lives in Europe. Mommodou said he had been expecting to receive some coins after dreaming about spoons made of metal like coins, but afterwards he understood that the spoons meant something to “eat” or something to spend. In Mandinka the verb “to eat” (*domo*) is also used in the expression “to spend money”. For instance, “He has spent all the money” translates as “*A ye kodoo bee domo la.*” Some dreams are quite easy to understand, but often the wider knowledge possessed by marabouts is needed in order to reveal the hidden messages of dreams.

The dream divination in Jarranding cannot be described as “a non-normal mode of cognition” deriving its knowledge from “non-normal sources” (Peek 1991: 194). The dream

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<sup>74</sup> Other types of spirits (*jinoolu*), especially satans (*seetanoolu*) may also appear to people in their dreams in diverse forms. An Islamic manual about dreams, *al-Nabulsi*, differentiates between three types of dreams: dreams from God, dreams from Satan and dreams from the self provoked by auto-suggestion (Sanneh 1979: 203). Trimingham (1961: 123n1) also mentions the division of dreams into three groups, but he says that the dreams are from God, angels or Satan.

<sup>75</sup> Trimingham (1961: 123) holds that dreams have to be interpreted and only trained persons can do this.

divination, other practices in the realm of *booroo*, *booroo* itself and the practitioners of it, attain their knowledge and power from sources that are, at least to a certain degree, accessible to all human beings. In cases of dream divination the immediate source is a dream, the personalistic sources are spirits (*ruwaanolu*) and the ultimate source is Allah. Often laymen are capable of using similar techniques to marabouts and other practitioners of *booroo*, in order to tap knowledge and power from their sources.

#### Amount of Knowledge and Power

All adults in Jarranding are able to prepare some *booroo*, but the amount of knowledge and power possessed by people varies. Marabouts have wider, more correct and more powerful knowledge than laymen. There are also differences in the amounts of knowledge and power between diverse practitioners.

Alhadji Drame, a respected marabout in a neighbouring village, known for his skills in curing people caught by spirits, once compared marabouts to trees. He said that marabouts who can only help with certain kinds of problems are like the branches of a tree, while those who can cure all sicknesses and are able to help people with a diversity of problems are like the stem and roots of a tree. Some people know only the secrets to cure certain complaints, or are specialized in certain areas of knowledge (see also Wittrup 1992: 192). For instance, some can only ease the pain in tonsils or pull out snake teeth. Some marabouts know how to cure sicknesses; others are good at love affairs. Marabouts can also be specialized in certain methods, for instance in divination or the preparation of amulets. However, most marabouts in Jarranding are able to help people with a wide range of problems and they use several techniques. The knowledge and the amount of it vary from one marabout to another. It is as people sometimes comment about knowledge in general: "We are all human beings, but people's knowledge is not the same (*Bee mu adama-dingo le ti, bari moolu la londoo mang kilinyaa*)."

Marabouts are often said to achieve contact with God more easily because they have more knowledge than average people and their knowledge is more accurate. Mommodou said that marabouts know the “real” names of God and that is the reason why Allah is more willing to answer their prayers than those of an average person. Mommodou explained this to me by an example:

“If you are standing in a field and somebody calls you by the name of Mariama you will answer him. Then a third person comes and tells the person calling you that you will answer for Mariama, but your real name is Katri. Then he calls you by the name of Katri. It makes you very happy and you think that this person knows you very well.”

The villagers call me Mariama and only a few know my usual name. Mommodou’s point was that marabouts know all the ninety-nine names of God mentioned in the Qur’an, such as “Compassionate”, “Merciful” and “Creator”. They can pronounce and write them more accurately than average people. The correctness enhances the power of these words.

Mommodou continued to tell that he had witnessed something very interesting a couple of days previously. His friend who is learned in Islam (*taliboo*) had written all the names of Allah on a piece of paper and given it to him. Mommodou wanted to use it as protective *booroo*, and let the piece of paper dissolve in a bottle of water. When the *booroo* was ready and Mommodou was just about to go to bathe himself with it, Fatoumata, Mommodou’s daughter, took the bottle that was standing on the floor and laid it down on its side. The bottle got broken in two. Mommodou insisted it was not because Fatoumata had knocked it down, because she had laid it down very carefully, but because the names of God were written very correctly in it, and it made the potion so powerful that it broke the bottle.

Marabouts gain power through their Islamic knowledge, religious activities and piety, which are perceived to bring them closer to God. A union with God is the ultimate goal in

Sufism (Brenner 1988: 34), a mystical tradition of Islam, a predominant form of religion in West Africa. The most powerful marabouts are said to be “great friends of God”<sup>76</sup> (*welliyoolu*). They are considered to be especially chosen by God who renders them blessings (*baraka*), power and knowledge (see also e.g. Brenner 1988: 36; Dilley 2004: 102). Marabouts often state that their ability to help people with their problems and affect the course of events is a gift from God.

### Restricted Knowledge

Even if, theoretically, anybody can train to become a marabout, the secret knowledge related to maraboutism is more easily attainable by certain members of the society than others. In practice, gender, an individual’s character and talent or age, as well as family background, have quite a lot of influence on a person’s opportunity to become and practise as a marabout. In many ways ideas and customs attached to maraboutism resemble those attached to “caste” occupations.

In Jarranding it is only some of the boys who continue their Islamic studies beyond the basic education (see also Dilley 2004: 148). It is considered enough for girls to know how to perform their daily prayers and to have a basic knowledge of Islam<sup>77</sup>. In the sense that the marabouts have an extensive Islamic education they seem to be always men, but there are also women who are, at least colloquially, called marabouts. Some people call them more specifically “spirit-marabouts” (*jina-morolu*), because they are perceived to get their knowledge from spirits. They have disappeared for some period of time to a spirit world where spirits have taught them special skills, or they are married to a spirit who advises

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<sup>76</sup> In literature they are also often referred to as saints (e.g. Dilley 2004: 24; Sanneh 1979: 200), but Otayek holds that “the Qur’an ignores the notion of sainthood” (1988: 93). (See also Brenner 1988: 36).

<sup>77</sup> Even if it is nowadays more common than in the past that girls go to “white man’s school”, the female education was described by one of the teachers in Jarranding as follows: “Going to school is a temporary situation for girls. Even if they get a chance to go to school, it is rare that they get any higher education. They are expected to get married and stay at home, have children and take care of household chores.” Women in general are expected to work most of the time at home or in the rice fields, and at the weekly market where they can sell their products.

them, like Baakono who was mentioned in Chapter Four. Others deny that they can be called marabouts at all, because they do not work by using the Qur'an. They say these practitioners are "spirit-women" (*jina-musoolu*) and have nothing to do with marabouts.

As has been already pointed out, in order to become a marabout a person has to have a teacher. Most of the marabouts in the village say that they have learnt, at least in part, their knowledge from their fathers and many of the fathers were in turn taught by their fathers. Even if maraboutism often runs in families, there are also marabouts who agree to teach others, namely, children from non-maraboutic families and children of marabouts who have passed away. Experienced marabouts are willing to guide only those who display a certain talent towards maraboutism. Scholars need to be sharp minded (*hakiloo diyaa*) and willing to work hard, since they are expected to go through arduous studies. Wittrup (1992: 190) holds that a marabout often chooses to train a son who shows ability to analyze and gain knowledge from his dreams. Baakono, who is a "spirit-marabout" in the neighbouring village, told that her father wanted to give the ring, which he had got from the spirits and that enables communication with spirits, rather to her than to her brothers, because she was more upright and honest than them and spirits do not like liars.

Younger marabouts need to respect their masters and elders as in any other occupational group. Hoffmann (1998: 92) holds that a young griot woman should not perform in front of elder griots without their permission, out of politeness and respect towards them. There is a similar form of politeness and respect among marabouts. Alhadji Drame, a well-known marabout in a neighbouring village whose father is also a famous marabout, told that as long as his father was practising he could only work outside of his home village. Only after his father stopped practising due to his old age, could he return to the village and keep up the practice there. Usually sons of marabouts do not start to practise their occupation in their father's village before their father has passed away or given up the

practice. This custom is rather based on respect towards elders than in order to avoid competition of clientele, since several marabouts may practise at the same compound. For instance, there is a compound in Jarranding where two classificatory brothers practise as marabouts.

In the Senegambian region certain groups of people are often held to have a proclivity for clerical activities. While early *toorobe* clerics in Fuuta Toro in Senegal were from all “caste” groups, later on clerisy became a closed occupational group (Dilley 2004: 94). Jakhanke in the region of Senegambia, who Sanneh designates as “a specialized caste of Muslim clerics and educators” (1979: 1), have accepted to teach children from other families, but they have prioritized the education of their own children at the expense of the others (Sanneh 1979: 171, 228-229). Schaffer (1987: 64) holds that theoretically anybody can become a marabout independent of “caste”, but most marabouts are “non-professional freemen”. This is also a valid argument in Jarranding, but due to the small amount of professionals it is unjustified to draw any conclusions on the matter. While the villagers say that maraboutism is not attached to any particular “caste”, all those who are unanimously called marabouts in the village are “non-professional freemen”. Some say that Seedy, who is a leatherworker, could be called a marabout since he is able to cure many sicknesses, but because he does not prepare written amulets or script potions, most people rather refer to him as a healer (*jaarallaa*). Furthermore there are certain families in Jarranding that are especially known for their maraboutic tradition. Sometimes maraboutisme is stated to be their original profession comparable with occupations that are considered as a birthright of smiths, griots and leatherworkers. According to McNaughton, “[t]he Mande say that every significant activity and profession has its secret expertise” (1988: 41). Knowledge of some professions, such as farming, is easily available to all and nearly anyone can become a hunter, although he needs to be initiated into a hunters’ association. Blacksmith tradition,

however, is kept more secret and restricted to their endogamous “caste” group, and people believe that an attempt to practise smithing would be damaging to those who do not have it as their birthright (McNaughton 1988: 41).

Herbert (1993: 116) holds that Mande professionals are born with an inherent power (*nyama*) that enables them to carry on their original occupations, while hunters must acquire such power through initiation and the animals they kill, as already considered above. Therefore their power and blessings (*baraka*) is understood as transferable and to a certain extent it can be perceived as inheritable (see also Otayek 1988: 93) in a similar way as the power of professionals (see e.g. Frank 1998: 130) or witches and witch-fighters that were considered in Chapter Three. But not all the children of blacksmiths become smiths and not all the children of witches end up as witches. Children of marabouts may have more inherent talent for their fathers’ occupation than others, or they may have learnt by watching him work, but aiming to practise maraboutism is a precarious affair regardless of family background. Children of marabouts have a better opportunity to attain knowledge from their fathers, which enables them to gain the required power and avoid the dangers. Sommerfelt holds that within the griot category, specialities such as drumming, playing kora and reciting genealogies, often are hereditary, but “[i]ndividual skills are considered as individually achieved” (1999: 48). In the same way sons of marabouts may learn from their fathers, but they need to achieve the communication with God themselves. Not all the members of maraboutic families are able to become marabouts.

## **Conclusion**

“It is a truism that knowledge is power in Africa” (Herbert 1993: 2). Knowledge renders people capable of transformative actions; it enables them to manipulate power that is inherent in the world creatively, and influence the course of events (e.g. Herbert 1993: 2; Wright 1989: 52-53; McNaughton 1995: 51). By power of the practitioners of *booroo*,

people in Jarranding refer to their intellectual and spiritual power, and to their ability to act on the world by taking advantage of different sources of power and preparing *booroo* out of them.

Practitioners of *booroo* acquire knowledge and power through “the interaction between natural, social and supernatural realms” (Arens and Karp 1989: xvii). They observe, communicate and have contact with, animals, other people, spirits, and God. Marabouts obtain their knowledge and power from the same sources that they aim to influence.

Knowledge and power are required in order to create things and carry out transformative deeds. In principle the knowledge and power to prepare *booroo* and perform practices in the realm of it are attainable to all. Knowledge and power are not based on “non-normal sources” or acquired through “a non-normal mode of cognition” as Peek (1991: 194) holds is the case in African divination. However, the type of knowledge and power varies among different groups of people. While practising *booroo* is not attached to any specific “caste” group in Jarranding, there are several restrictive measures that keep the ability to practise advanced *booroo* to within a certain number of people. These restrictions, such as age, gender, personal talent and family background, result in significant differences in the amount of power and knowledge possessed by individuals.

Herbert (1993: 2-3) holds that people who master transformative processes may gain control over others. In the next chapter I turn to explore this aspect of power, namely whether marabouts are thought to have influence over others’ actions.

## Chapter Seven

### POWER OF KNOWLEDGE IN SOCIAL RELATIONS

In an article about literacy, Goody holds that “restrictive practices tend to arise wherever people have an interest in maintaining a monopoly of the sources of their power” (1968: 12). Possessing specialized knowledge and being able to perform transformative acts renders a person powerful in relation to others. Other members of the society depend on the Islamic knowledge of marabouts. As religious clerics, marabouts carry out religious activities in the society and as practitioners of *booroo* they help people with their problems. People’s dependence on the knowledge and transformative power of marabouts contributes to making marabouts respected and enables them to earn an income from their practices.

Marabouts are perceived as powerful. I have already mentioned that in Jarranding the word power (*semboo*) may be understood in several ways. When people say that a person’s speech is powerful (“*A la kumoo semboo warata.*”) it has diverse meanings. On the one hand, as it has been pointed out in Chapter Five, people may imply the transformative power of a spell or prayer in itself. On the other hand, it may refer to the fact that the meaning of the speech is important and should be respected. The advice and orders given by a marabout should be followed. In a similar way, customs (*aadalu*) and tradition (*cosaani*) are stated to have power (*semboo*) in varying degrees, or to lack power altogether depending on how strictly they are followed and respected. Marabouts are regarded as possessing power both because they are capable of affecting the course of events and as a result of their being respected by others.

The aspect of power that concerns control over others' actions by giving them orders, corresponds to Weber's definition of power as "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests" (1964: 152). Arens and Karp (1989: xiii) point out that Weber's definition accentuates the exercise of power by human agents who pursue individual rather than collective goals, by rationally calculating the benefits of using different methods. In the present chapter, I explore to what extent marabouts are perceived as superior in relation to others and how they can benefit individually. I approach the matter from a Weberian point of view and consider recurrent local discussions in Jarranding, about the ways marabouts aim to possess control over other members of the society and to gain economic profit through their practices.

Being able to exercise control involves an idea of hierarchy, where a person in power is perceived as superior to others. Arens and Karp hold that "power is multicentered" (1989: xvi). By this they mean that "power does not emanate from a single source and social formations are composed of centers and epicentres of power in dynamic relationship with one another" (1989: xvi). There has been a shift of focus in studies concerned with the concept of power in West African "caste" systems. While the West African "caste" system has earlier been conceived as hierarchically ranked groups, where "non-professional freemen" are superior to professionals who are in turn superior to slaves, the view of "caste" studies has changed in the past years. "Castes" are perceived as interdependent groups differentiated by their capacities rather than simply as a hierarchy (Conrad and Frank 1995: 11; Wright 1989: 40, 42; Sommerfelt 1999: 101-102). I argue, in accordance with the view prevalent in the current perspective on "castes", that rather than conceiving of marabouts as simply superior or inferior to others, they must be considered as involved in interdependent dynamic social relations with them. Marabouts' secret knowledge differentiates them from

other members of the society and provides them with abilities on which others depend, but at the same time marabouts depend on their clients and supporters in order to be recognized as marabouts.

In ethnographic literature social relations among Mande are considered to revolve around two complementary axes called “father childness” and “mother childness” (McNaughton 1988: 14; Bird and Kendall 1980: 14; Janson 2002: 27, 158-159). “Father childness” refers to competitive relationships between siblings who descend from the same father, but from different mothers. “Mother childness” refers to affectionate and loyal relationships between siblings with the same father and mother. The use of these terms is not restricted to kinship relations, but they can be used to describe any relation between persons. Behaviour attached to “father childness” may result in selfish political and economic interests, while “mother childness” is characterized as passive behaviour and submission to the conventional authorities of the society. Everyone is considered capable of displaying both types of behaviour according to different circumstances, but some people are more characterized by one or the other of these traits. (McNaughton 1988: 14) Bird and Kendall (1980: 15, 23) hold that Mande encourage “father childness” behaviour in their children in order to raise some individuals who are not afraid to aim to make a change in the present order of things, but that “mother childness” always prevails within the society.

In Jarranding, relationships between children with the same father and mother (*baadingyaa*) are perceived as more harmonious and co-operative than those between siblings with the same father, but different mothers (*faadingyaa*). The villagers consider that there is potential rivalry and jealousy between the latter. People frequently stress the importance and ideal of co-operation and peace in social relations. It is considered to be good that sons of different mothers sleep in the same room, because it enhances a loyalty they feel towards each other. A man whose wives are quarrelling with each other and who

cannot retain peace in his household is considered to have failed his responsibility. At the same time, individual effort is encouraged. Many parents acquire *booroo* for their children, so that they will succeed in their studies and get a well paid job. If children succeed economically, their parents benefit from it. Children are expected to follow the tradition (*cosaani*) of supporting their parents and give part of the money they earn to them. In general, a wealthy person is expected to be generous.

There is a constant pull between “father childness” and “mother childness” behaviour. People aspire to individual success, but “mother childness” is often described as the type of behaviour that is rewarding in the long run, by resulting in a good reputation. The pull between “father childness” and “mother childness” behaviour is not restricted to family relations. The similar pull can be seen in the relation between marabouts and others. In the following I explore how circulation of *booroo* among people expresses and constitutes social relations between them.

### **Economic Power of Marabouts**

Marabouts in Jarranding make their living partly by their practices, but in addition they are involved in farming and livestock breeding like the other villagers, and they do not seem to be considerably wealthier than the population in general. However, respected marabouts can sometimes earn significant sums of money. Prices of protective written amulets (*safoolu*) and script potions (*nasoolu*) vary a lot. The villagers estimate that most often they pay something between two to thirty dalasis for them<sup>78</sup>. In comparison a piece of soap costs two dalasis and a fifteen-litre plastic bucket costs about thirty dalasis. Occasionally villagers have paid up to 350 dalasis for a written amulet or script potion. In Jarranding and the surrounding villages the price of divination through dreams (*lastakaari*) is fixed at five dalasis. The expenses of charity (*sadaa*) indicated by a divination vary a lot and sometimes

<sup>78</sup> In the case of amulets people have to pay an additional couple of dalasis to a leatherworker who sews the piece of paper in a leather cover.

they are much greater than the divination fee itself. A marabout can advise a person to give anything as charity, for instance a couple of candles, or to slaughter a goat. The charity does not go to the marabout, but it causes an extra expense for his client. In cases of serious illness or life threatening sicknesses costs are generally higher. In such circumstances people say that they have paid from one hundred to two hundred dalasis for one treatment. This is a lot of money; in comparison, a fifty kilogram bag of rice costs around two hundred dalasis, and covers the need of a family with six adults or teenagers and four children, for half a month. Furthermore, when a sickness is persistent, people usually visit several marabouts. If the patient recovers, marabouts often ask for an additional fee that can be, for instance, a cow or up to 1000 dalasis. These are significant sums of money for people in Jarranding, where an average groundnut farmer earns about 3000 dalasis for his harvest, once a year.<sup>79</sup>

Generosity and the kind-hearted will to help others that is “mother childness” type of behaviour, enhances the good reputation and popularity of marabouts. The elder villagers often recall past memories about a late marabout, Morobaa<sup>80</sup>, who used to live in Jarranding and was perceived as a “close friend of God” (*wellyoo*). He lived a very modest life and was never seeking luxuries. People say that he did not even wear sandals, which is considered to be a sign of a poor person. Some say Morobaa never wanted to hold money given to him in his hands. He asked his clients to lay the money on the ground instead. Then he called his students to come and share the money among themselves and to recite prayers for the giver. If a poor man came to him and said that he did not have an animal to slaughter in a naming ceremony, Morobaa could ask him to wait a bit and when somebody paid him with a goat he gave it to the poor man.

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<sup>79</sup> All the prices mentioned are prices that were valid during the fieldwork 1999-2000. At that time the exchange rate of 100 dalasis was approximately 67 Norwegian kroner.

<sup>80</sup> His name, like all the others, is rendered anonymous. Morobaa is not actually a name, but means a great marabout (*moro baa*).

The villagers complain that nowadays some marabouts only help people in order to earn money. Greediness is considered as a bad trait generally in all people, because it makes people act in morally unacceptable ways. Avarice is considered to be attached to “father childness” since an individual gives priority to his or her selfish economic interests over the well-being of others. Wright (1989: 49-50) holds that among Wolof in Senegal, greedy people who are unwilling to reciprocate are often seen as sorcerers. In Jarranding, people say that marabouts who prepare *booroo* to harm others (*koriteewo*, *dabaroo*) do it for the sake of money only. Marabouts ask great amounts for harmful *booroo*, because they know it is against Muslim ideals, and that they have to suffer for preparing it in the life after death.

Greedy marabouts are often accused of being “charlatans” (*kalabantewolu*) who “do not know a thing” (“*I buka feng long.*”). Ansoumaneh, a young unmarried man, told that he once met his old schoolmate in Serrekunda, the urban area by the coast, pretending to be a marabout. He said his old friend was walking around dressed like a marabout in a long gown and carrying the long prayer beads (*tasabayoo*) used by marabouts in meditation and prayer recitation. Ansoumaneh was certain that his friend did not possess the required knowledge, but feigned it through appearance in order to make some money.

According to some villagers Morobaa had said that money is “satan” (“*Kodoo mu seetaanoo le ti*”), because it makes people think about earthly things instead of spiritual quest. It leads Muslim scholars onto a wrong path. The desire for excessive material wealth runs contrary to the ideals of marabouts. Sanneh (1979: 153, 171, 184n75) holds that one of the reasons why Islamic educational centres (*majlis*) were established in areas that were distant from commercial centres, was to avoid “secular pressure” and distractions from the studies. Seclusion from earthly matters is important in order to achieve spiritual goals. This is emphasized in retreats (*kaliwaa*) - already described in a previous chapter – when marabouts seclude themselves from society and aim to attain a communion with God.

A marabout who asks unreasonable payment for his services risks losing his credibility in the eyes of others. Marabouts frequently stress that they are not doing their work because of the money involved, but they expect to get paid for their efforts. Marabouts in Jarranding usually say to the villagers that they may pay any amount they find reasonable, since they all know each other. Sometimes a marabout may state an estimated price, but leaves a client free to pay what he or she is able to afford.

Even if villagers sometimes complain that marabouts only seek the money that their practices can bring them, people regard it as reasonable to pay marabouts according to their abilities. As it becomes clear from the examples of prices mentioned above, villagers do not hesitate to pay considerable sums of money to marabouts who have a reputation to be successful in their practices, especially when health and life are at stake. A compensation given to a marabout can be seen as a sign of his clients' recognition of his transformative power and their respect towards him. Marabouts who are renowned for their wide knowledge and abilities get paid more than minor practitioners who know only a certain cure. For instance, Karamo, who can prepare an amulet to ease the pain in tonsils, got only 25 or 50 bututs for his treatment. 25 bututs is the price of a box of matches.

Villagers often comment that they just have to pay marabouts whatever they ask for, and sometimes they have to borrow money from their friends. Many say, that if you do not pay a marabout for curing a sickness, the sickness will return. In cases of sickness caused by spirits (*jinoolu*) some people say that the price is not set by a marabout, but by the spirit who causes the condition. If the marabout does not receive the full price, either the spirit will not leave the patient in peace or the spirit may start to bother the marabout or his family members instead.

Villagers also comment that one can never know what marabouts may do if you disappoint them, indicating that since they are capable of helping people they have powers to harm them as well. Ansoumaneh once said that he never drinks water from the well of Morokunda<sup>81</sup>, a compound where two marabouts live and where many villagers fetch their drinking water, because it is cooler than water from water pumps. Ansoumaneh said: “They are all marabouts. You never know what they put in that water.” He held that the marabouts might harm you or control your actions by putting some *booroo* in the well. However, it happens that people pay less than indicated by a marabout, because they cannot afford the full amount. Sometimes they commute the rest by giving a marabout some fowls and kolanuts, the latter being generally a token of goodwill.

Maranz holds that some marabouts are believed to possess “the power to control the will of another in order to make the person an abject follower” (1993: 168). From time to time marabouts are criticized for misusing their positions and powers for personal gain, but in Senegalese media “[t]he criticisms are always carefully worded so that they never attack true marabouts but only the charlatans” (Maranz 1993: 169). Wittrup (1992: 190-191) holds that in The Gambia marabouts get paid for their educational activities by using their students as labour power in their fields and that marabouts are accused of exploiting their students in order to gain economically, for instance by making the students beg money for them.

Sanneh provides a more multi-faceted picture of using students as labour power. In the past clerical centres derived their economic power by using slaves in farm work. After slavery was abolished clerics now accept to teach students who provide an economically valuable manpower for their teachers in return for education. Students from other families than the teacher’s own, also provide an advantage to the teacher’s own children, who can

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<sup>81</sup> This means “Marabout compound”. Many compounds are named by adding a suffix *-kunda* to a family name of the compound owner. For instance, Dramekunda is a compound where a family called Drame lives or the compound of blacksmiths can be called “Blacksmith compound”, *Numukunda*.

refrain from work and concentrate full-time on their studies. At the same time the labour power provided by students is necessary in order to maintain an educational centre. While part of the money earned by cash crops goes to cover the expenses of the teacher's family members, the teacher is also responsible for feeding his students and visitors at the centre. Some money is also used to buy books for the school library. In the old days when a student completed their studies, his parents had to provide the teacher with a slave or the price of one. Parents are still expected to pay the teacher in some way when their child completes his studies, and often former students keep on giving annual remuneration to their old teachers. (Sanneh 1979: 152-153, 219, 226-229)

Marabouts are able to gain economic profit by agreeing to teach others, but to what extent it is a question of exploiting the students varies from case to case. In Jarranding, I have never heard villagers criticizing marabouts for taking advantage of their students. Sometimes people comment that Morobaa never worked in other fields than those of his teachers, but they say it in admiration of Morobaa's respect towards his masters, his dedication towards his studies and his arduous attempt to acquire his knowledge. Villagers consider it reasonable that students recompense their teachers for acquiring knowledge. At the moment there is no higher Islamic educational centre (*majlis*) in Jarranding, although some have existed before. However, people give money to a teacher of the Islamic school (*madrass*) when he takes his pupils to recite prayers around the village. Nobody considers it as unreasonable that the teacher keeps the money, as it is seen as compensation for his time and efforts.

### **Power of Marabouts over Others' Actions**

One day villagers in Jarranding had received an unexpected message from a marabout who has studied Islamic secret knowledge in the village. He had dreamt the same dream about the village three times. In the dream he had seen the villagers gathered around the mosque in the

middle of the village. There were people all the way to the old mosque, that is now only a ruin on the outskirts of the village. He advised the villagers to kill a bull for charity (*sadaa*), to pray to Allah and to repent their wrongdoings. About one month later people in Jarranding gathered to pray by the mosque in the morning. After this they went seven times back and forth from the new mosque to the old mosque. Later on the bull was slaughtered and the meat was distributed to every cooking-unit (*sinkiroo*). Some of the meat was cooked by the women besides the mosque and the villagers gathered to eat it after noon prayers. Then they prayed together till mid-afternoon prayers, when they dispersed. This re-enacting of the dream of the marabout would help the village to prosper and live in peace.

In this case people had not consulted the marabout, but he advised them spontaneously. Such incidents happen from time to time, but most often people contact a marabout themselves.

Adams holds that “[p]ower is granted when one individual gives decision-making rights to another individual” (1977: 388). Adams (1977: 396) points out that a person who gives the right to others to make decisions on his or her behalf, can always withdraw this right. He continues to say that “[s]uch granting of power usually has some overarching reciprocity in the first instance, since otherwise, there is no particular reason for an individual to do it” (1977: 396-397). Similarly in Jarranding people “grant power” to marabouts. Villagers choose marabouts they consult based on previous experiences. They usually visit marabouts who have succeeded in helping them before or marabouts that have been recommended by others. People do not hesitate to abandon *booroo* given by a marabout, if it appears ineffective. People frequently consult several marabouts and change from one marabout to another, either in order to enhance their chances of attaining the hoped-for results or because a marabout fails to help them.

In cases of sickness, marabouts do not only compete for clients with other marabouts, but also with several other practitioners of *booroo*, including healers and biomedical personnel. Fanding's case in Chapter Four is an example of villagers frequently consulting several practitioners of *booroo*. Fanding did not trust the diagnosis and treatment given by one single practitioner of *booroo*, so he consulted several marabouts, healers and nurses. Furthermore, people do not have any difficulty changing between different aetiological explanations and treatments in the course of a sickness. Let me provide another example by explaining briefly what the imam (*alimaamoo*) of the village did when he got sick during my fieldwork.

The imam's voice was very weak and some days he could barely talk. His legs were also hurting and he had difficulties standing. He travelled to a hospital in Senegal where doctors had treated him with injections and biomedicines. The imam had stayed there for nine days, but then he had decided to go back home. He wanted to get help from a marabout because he believed that his sickness was caused by a satan. The imam based his diagnosis on a dream divination (*lastakaari*) he had performed for himself. He had dreamt about a masked dancer (*kankurango*), which refers to a satan. The imam went to a neighbouring village to see Alhadji Drame, a marabout who is known for his ability to cure sickness caused by spirits. Alhadji Drame had told the imam that there was no use eating the medicines given by the doctors, since it was the satan who made him sick. Alhadji Drame had prepared a *booroo* out of roots that the imam had to drink, and a script potion (*nasoo*) that the imam had to wash his body with every morning and evening. The imam followed the advice given by the marabout, but he continued to be sick. Then a nurse who came to visit his family in Jarranding went to see the imam. The nurse suspected that the imam was suffering from tuberculosis. The imam travelled to the capital city of Banjul together with his first wife. He was taken into a hospital where it was confirmed that he had tuberculosis.

When his wife got back home she told people that now the imam was only using biomedicines.

By giving advice, marabouts affect people's actions. However, marabouts in Jarranding cannot force people to do anything against their will. If people are not content with the advice a marabout gives them, they can always go to consult another marabout. People do not believe that all decisions from marabouts are correct. Some people point out that if marabouts were always right, they would all give the same solutions.

Marabouts possess knowledge and abilities that differ from the knowledge and abilities possessed by other people. Furthermore there are differences in knowledge and power possessed by different marabouts. Herbert holds that different groups of people – such as hunters, smiths and healers – draw power from a common source through their “own body of arcane knowledge” and “no single group has a total monopoly of power sources” (1993: 187). A similar idea is also prevalent among marabouts as a group. Even if marabouts are considered to gain their transformative power from the same sources, knowledge and power possessed by them varies from person to person. They are capable of different acts, and even if they may compete for success with each other, none of them can get a total monopoly over practising maraboutic *booroo*. Knowledge of *booroo* and the ability to practise it are possessed by several individuals at the same time.

Hoffman records a following Mande proverb: “When the healer of stomachaches is sick himself, there is nothing to do but swallow his own saliva” (2000: 169). As mentioned several times, practitioners of *booroo* often use their saliva in order to prepare *booroo* and to treat people. Their spit is considered to include and transfer the transformative power of the words they utter. Hoffman (2000: 169) holds that the proverb is used by people as a reminder that each “caste” has its fixed role to play according to traditional Mande ideology.

Different “castes” cannot fulfil each others roles and therefore they depend on each other (Hoffmann 2000: 169). Others depend on products made by blacksmiths and leatherworkers. People’s reputation is enhanced by the praises of griots. Different genders, age-groups and occupations also have their special knowledge on which others depend. For instance, women cultivate rice to feed their families and men earn money to support their dependants by groundnut harvests. People in Jarranding recognise marabouts as positioned within this scheme of complementary knowledge. In general terms, they are not described as using their control over natural resources and spiritual realms, in order to gain economic power.

### **Access to Power Through Marabouts**

Bird and Kendall (1980: 16) hold that Mande heroes have “special powers”, but even if their motivation to gain them may have been a selfish desire to be greater than others, the whole society may benefit from their powers. “Father childness” types of interests to earn money and gain respect within the society, may have inspired marabouts in Jarranding to acquire their knowledge and power; but they are expected by others to show “mother childness” types of loyalty which enables the whole village to benefit from their knowledge.

Villagers need people learned in Islam in order to carry out religious activities. In addition to an imam who leads the prayers at the mosque and a teacher at the Qur’an school, marabouts in Jarranding contribute to the common good of the village by reciting prayers and the Qur’an in religious ceremonies. Once a year marabouts of the village gather together and prepare a protective script potion (*nasoo*) that is then distributed to every compound in Jarranding. Compound leaders dilute the script potion and give every adult member of their compounds some of it. Every year the villagers also organize a big Islamic happening that is attended by relatives and friends from other places. Women clean the open area in front of the mosque and men prepare a roof that provides a shade for the quests. Men slaughter bulls and women cook for the visitors. During the daytime marabouts and other Muslim scholars

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(*taliboolu*) recite the whole Qur'an on behalf of the entire village. As has been mentioned, reciting the Qur'an is always considered to bring blessings from God. Late in the evening, close to midnight, people gather together around the mosque to listen to Muslim clerics who are invited to preach about Islam and correct Muslim behaviour.

McNaughton (1995: 51) points out that it is not only the ability to perform transformative actions that renders a person powerful, but also having access to people capable of such actions. There are several competing situations in the lives of people in Jarranding when people consult marabouts, for instance adults trying to attain better jobs, and rivalries can occur in love affairs. In such situations, all the rival parties are likely to consult marabouts and a person who has the most powerful marabout behind him or her is believed to win the competition. Banna's account helps to illuminate the point in question.

Banna lives in the urban area of Serrekunda where she goes to high school. Once when she was visiting her relatives in Jarranding she said that she did not wear a lot of amulets (*safoolu*) before she started to study. She was one of the best students in her class competing for the highest marks with another girl, Binta, who was an ethnic Jola. When Banna did better than Binta in exam rankings, Binta had warned her by saying: "You know I am a Jola. My mother is a Jola and my father is a Jola." Banna explained that Binta was indicating that Jolas are good at preparing amulets and she would use them against Banna. Banna failed her next exams and she had to repeat one year at school. She suspected that Binta had something to do with it. Banna told her parents what Binta had said to her and her parents started to buy amulets from marabouts. Now Banna was wearing several written amulets covered in leather and sealed in small horns. The amulets were attached to two strings that she had tied around her waist under her wraparound skirt. She said she had one more string with amulets at home in Serrekunda. She explained that one of her amulets would return all the bad wishes. If others wanted something bad to happen to her, it would

happen to them instead. Banna said that after she had started to use amulets Binta had to repeat one year at school as well.

People in Jarranding often comment that people from the Jola ethnic group are good at preparing *booroo*. Even if not every Jola can prepare powerful *booroo*, they all have a reputation of being capable of tremendous acts because they have good marabouts and “owners of fetish” (*jalang-tiyolu*) among them, who are accessible to Jola in general. Some people say that there is always a lot of pepper in the food in villages where both Mandinka and Jola live, because pepper is considered to make harmful *booroo* inefficient.

Binta only needed to point out her ethnic background in order to make Banna understand that she was going to compete against her by using *booroo*. After a while Banna started to use *booroo* as well. In the end, it was not enough in order to succeed that the girls studied hard, but they needed access to powerful *booroo* in order to counteract each other’s bad wishes.

## **Conclusion**

In a Weberian view people aspire to power over others in order to achieve individual aims (Weber 1964: 152; Arens and Karp 1989: xiii). Accordingly, marabouts guard their knowledge as secret, rendering others dependent on their abilities which further enables them to gain economic and social benefits. Marabouts may conduct certain control over others’ actions, but not against their will. As Adams (1977: 388) points out, people may withdraw the decision-making right they have given to another person. Marabouts cannot gain “a total monopoly of power sources” (Herbert 1993: 187) and people frequently consult several practitioners of *booroo* who are conceived of as possessing different types of knowledge. While marabouts appear superior in their relation to others, they at the same time depend on their clients in order to be recognized as marabouts.

In many respects, marabouts resemble heroes of Mande oral lore as described by Bird and Kendall (1980: 24). Mande heroes are encouraged to the “father childness” type of behaviour of individual success by their societies, but in the end “mother childness” prevails and the whole society is regarded as benefiting from them. The hero’s aspiration is to become famous and be venerated after his death, but he cannot succeed without support from others (Bird and Kendall 1980: 24). Marabouts can earn money on their work and attain a respected position within a society, but at the same time they have to live up to their ideals of anti-materialism and helpfulness in order to maintain their credibility in the eyes of others. There is a constant pull between “father childness” and “mother-childness” behaviour. The greatest reward for the marabouts is a good reputation, which they attain through success in their practices and loyal behaviour.

## Chapter Eight

### CONCLUSION

The present study has explored how people in Jarranding use *booroo* in order to affect the course of events. I have focused on local notions of power by investigating people's ideas related to *booroo*, the ways they use and apply *booroo*, as well as how *booroo* is prepared and practised.

People in Jarranding conceive of the world as being full of transformative power that acts on the world and entities within it. I have divided different sources of power into three levels – immediate, personalistic and the final. The immediate sources of power consist of diverse substances and actions that result in different outcomes. The personalistic sources are agents who possess substances and are behind actions that influence the course of events. The final source of power is Allah who determines over the world in the last instance. The sources of power have both beneficial and detrimental effects. People are not passively submitted to these powers. People themselves make up part of the personalistic sources of power and can actively aim to affect the other sources of power and the course of events. By obtaining knowledge about and from the sources of power people may manipulate power to their own advantage and attain desired changes. People are constantly in dynamic relationship with other sources of power. They may attempt to cope with them for instance by use of *booroo*.

Different *booroolu* vary in the kind and amount of power they possess. They may affect different sources of power. People in Jarranding choose between diverse *booroolu* according to their needs and they reflect on sources of power behind events, but in many

cases finding an efficient *booroo* is an intricate process of trial and error. All the levels of sources of power are not made relevant in every case, but *booroo* is often conceived of as more powerful when it influences several sources of power. The power of *booroo* is enhanced when it includes several substances that people consider to be powerful. An evaluation of the degree to which a *booroo* results in anticipated effects is an important part of the process of searching for *booroo*, and often the sources of power remain unclear. People in Jarranding are mainly concerned with attaining hoped-for results.

Most adults in Jarranding can prepare *booroo* for common ailments, but the knowledge possessed by people varies in kind and amount. People who are capable of tremendous transformative actions guard their knowledge as secret in order to make others depend on their abilities. Persons who are able to transform for instance plants, trees and words into *booroo* and are capable of performing practices in the realm of *booroo* that affect the course of events, can gain economic profit and become powerful in relation to others. However, if the practitioners of *booroo* are too greedy and selfish, they easily lose their credibility in the eyes of others. Furthermore, it is not only the ability to prepare *booroo* that renders a person powerful in social relations, but those who have access to the services of practitioners of *booroo* may also profit from their powers.

In Jarranding the power possessed by practitioners of *booroo* is first and foremost perceived as their transformative abilities. Their power is based on their secret knowledge, that renders them capable of performing practices in the realm of *booroo* and that affects the course of events.

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