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## The renewal of *Tales of the Lagle Naaba* on Burkina Faso's national television service

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Thanks to the action of the *Lagle naab a Abga*, the evenings of folktales in villages were given a new lease of life on Burkina's National Radio from the sixties. His grandson, the *Lagle naab a Tigre*, in collaboration with Henriette Ilboudo (presenter in the Mooré language on Burkina's National Television) initiated *soirées* of folktales on the small screen. The introduction of the folktales on television is part of the political desire to promote the national cultural heritage and regional integration. The strong Burkinabè and mooréphone diaspora who retain links with Burkina Faso listen to national cultural productions. But the fact of using a medium like television to broadcast folktales brings about the violation of certain taboos (time of the narration, length of the performance and television space). Unlike evenings of folktales in the village, programmes that are recorded during the day and broadcast at night have a greater ability to enter homes that have a television set, both in Burkina and elsewhere in the world, thanks to satellites. The participants in the *soirées* of folktales usually wear traditional clothes and take care with their use of the Mooré language, avoiding words borrowed from French and the presence of modern objects on the set. The *soirées* of tales are a school in which moral values are applauded and deviant behaviour condemned, in order to build a society of peace and justice. **Keywords:** Burkinabè folktale, tradition, language, media and culture.

In the 1990s Burkina's National Television introduced, under the leadership of the Head of Television at that time, Mahamoudou Ouédraogo, a series of new programmes devoted to folktales in the national languages (Mooré, Jula, Fulfulde, Bisa).<sup>1</sup> The impetus for such an initiative was the desire of the political authorities to have national cultural practices well represented in the public media. The National Radio had set the example since the 1960s by according slots in their timetables to national cultural practices.<sup>2</sup> From that time, tales in Moore, under the direction of the lamented late chief *Lagle naab a Abga*, constituted one of the most popular programmes on the National Radio of Upper-Volta, former name of Burkina Faso. With his deep voice, this Minister of the Emperor of the Moose held the attention of millions of his compatriots both inside and outside Upper Volta at that time. The enthusiasm of his listeners compares favourably with the present infatuation of city-dwellers with Brazilian soap operas. Despite his critics, the *Lagle Naaba* knew how to turn his *soirées* of tales

into moments of happiness, as well as opportunities for disseminating education, information and lessons in civics. The *Lagle* was indeed criticised for bringing his social rank into disrepute: the folktale was considered a minor activity not to be publicly exercised by someone in his position. However, his passion and vast knowledge of traditions triumphed over his critics. What is more, he knew how to instil the love of folktales in his audience and their descendents.

When he died in July 1982, his programme, after some hesitation, was continued with his former colleagues and his son, *Lagle Naab a Belem-Wende*, who had succeeded him to the throne. The latter's reign did not last long, not giving him sufficient time to take the place of his father in the minds of the Burkinabè. On his death, his son succeeded him and took as his official name the *Lagle Naab a Tigre*, taken from one of his mottos, worded as follows: *tigr yāmb zaka tī kom-bi laad moagna, tī nikēm sōseg lebg noogo* ("in a time of plenty, children are happy and old people converse easily"). Following steadfastly in the footsteps of his grandfather, he undertook to pay particular attention to culture. In spite of his youth, he learnt all he could from the elders and soon acquired stature and influence both nationally and internationally. Combining tradition and modernity, he decided to open up the traditional values of the Moose to modernity.<sup>3</sup> He resumed with much pleasure the *soirées* of *Tales of the Lagle* on the National Radio of Burkina Faso. The general public greatly appreciated his contributions.

This is when the National Television of Burkina Faso asked him to co-present, together with Henriette Ilboudo, its new programme first called *Tales in Mooré* and later *Tales and Legends in Mooré*, broadcast the last Wednesday of every month. Like his grandfather, who knew how to combine Court duties with those of the town council, the *Lagle Naab a Tigre* is also active in Burkinabè public life. He was a bank official and is now a member of the National Assembly.

African oral tradition is in the process of being completely transformed with the appearance of new media. Therefore it is interesting to discover what effect television is having on the Burkinabè folktale. Such a change necessarily entails a certain number of readjustments both for the actors and the performance. It is a question of discovering whether television is an ally or, on the contrary, a danger for the survival of the Burkinabè or African folktale. For the purposes of my research, I watched programmes of the *Tales in Mooré* and *Tales and Legends in Mooré* on television and conducted an interview with the main presenter, Henriette Ilboudo.

### **Tales on television: an expression of political will**

The Burkinabè political authorities have ceaselessly tried to decolonise the media. It will be remembered that the African Festival of Cinema (Fespaco) was born shortly after the decision taken by the authorities to nationalise the cinemas of Upper Volta.

From that heroic period onwards, the country has not stopped fighting to improve the standing of African culture; among the cultural events hosted by Burkina Faso, can be mentioned the International Crafts Show of Ouagadougou (SIAO), the National Cultural Week (SNC), the International Festival of Theatre and Puppets (FITMO), the International Festival of Development Theatre (FITD), the Atypical Nights of Koudougou (NAK), and numerous regional festivals. While the National Radio of Burkina Faso has many national productions in its programme schedule, it must be acknowledged that television remains a medium that still concentrates on foreign cultural products (films, games, sports, coverage of major international events, music, etc.), despite certain efforts made to broadcast African films and cultural programmes on traditional Burkinabè rites and practices.

The decision taken in the 1990s to create space for the folktale on television was the result of the political desire to see National Television reflecting the indigenous cultural values, while opening up to the outside world. The choice of the folktale was not accidental, for it was the most popular and most widespread of oral genres in Burkina Faso. The project, far from being a break with the past, ensured the continuation of a policy, for the National Radio has broadcasted on Tuesday evenings since the 1960s a programme of tales in Mooré.<sup>4</sup> The National Television of Burkina Faso opted for a monthly programme (the last Wednesday of every month) from 17:00. This scheduling enables radio listeners and television viewers (who are sometimes one and the same) to follow both broadcasts. Certain precautions are nevertheless taken to avoid having the same tales broadcast on both media, seeing that the *Lagle Naaba's* company produces both programmes, often with the same actors, with one or two exceptions.

Beyond the need for Burkinabè television viewers to see the tales, the authorities aspired to include the programme in the framework of regional integration. Burkina Faso has experienced systematic emigration, beginning with the colonial period and continuing after independence up to the present day, with the result that there is a diaspora of more than seven million individuals in neighbouring countries. The Burkinabè diaspora in Côte d'Ivoire is estimated to be 3.5 million persons, the majority of whom maintain ties with their homeland. Based on the success of the radio broadcast of Mooré tales with the Burkinabè diaspora in Côte d'Ivoire, the authorities wanted, by creating the programme of tales on National Television, to create a partnership with the Ivorian Television that, for several years, had a slot reserved for the Mooré language.<sup>5</sup> The idea was to make available to the Burkinabè diaspora productions of folktales from their native land, so that they could see the main presenters whose voices they were used to hearing over the sound waves of Burkinabè Radio. Unfortunately the outbreak of the Ivorian crisis in 2002, which has led to the deterioration of the political climate between the two countries, resulted in the cancellation of this slot.

### **The television set or village space in the heart of modernity**

Those who remember folktale evenings in villages cannot help noticing the huge changes imposed by the production of tales for television. In their traditional milieu, tales are told live in the evening, often under moonlight, in the courtyard or inside the hut. It is even strictly forbidden to tell a tale in the daytime on pain of calling down on oneself and one's family terrible calamities. Details can be given of misfortunes that have supposedly befallen all who have violated such a prohibition: blindness, illness, epidemics, the milk of women and cows drying up, flood, drought, famine, death of parents-in-law and grand parents, etc. Moreover, the tale is a product of the night; the day is reserved for serious activities of production and construction. Tales are considered to be the products of spirits (*kinkirsi*) who live in the bush, far from towns. As the spirit world is considered to be the opposite of that of humans, the tales of spirits are fabricated only during the night. Myths recount how tales were stolen from the spirits one day by a human being and introduced into the village. In order to avoid reprisals by the spirits, men agreed to tell tales only at night, when spirits are supposed to go about their business in the bush. This explains why, when they are forced to tell tales in the daytime, the Moose participate in a propitiatory ritual that consists of pronouncing the following formula *kums soalem yung t'm soalem wintoogo* ("the spirits tell tales at night to allow me to tell tales in the day"). With this formula they endeavour to confuse the spirits' minds, giving the opportunistic storytellers the time needed to put on their performance.

The set of the National Television of Burkina Faso serves as the framework for the company of the *Lagle* composed of musicians, a group of singers (consisting of three men and one woman), storytellers and dancers. The recording studio is a small enclosed space with enormous projectors and three or four cameras. Four armchairs are reserved for the main presenters, while the performers sit on a mat on the floor. On the left and right sides, two foldaway benches have been installed for guests. The recording is done on the second last Wednesday of the month from 15:00. This means that the storytellers are knowingly violating the ban on telling tales in the daytime. But how can they do otherwise if they are unable to do the show live? According to the presenter, the fact that the recording takes place in a studio, under the glare of projectors, creates the illusion of night, thus making it possible to tell tales in complete safety, shielded from reprisals of the spirits who retain authorship of the tales. Questioned on the subject, the *Lagle Naab a Tigre* explains that the prohibition on storytelling during the day is linked to the context of traditional society, where life was based on the rhythm of night following day. Days were devoted to productive activities (work in the fields, raising animals, making crafts, constructing houses, etc.) while nights were reserved for relaxation and sleep. Under these conditions, any disturbance of the rhythm could result in major social harm. Nowadays, the rhythm of life is no longer intimately linked to the strict succession of day and night, for

electricity has abolished the darkness making it impossible to perform certain activities of production or relaxation. When all is said and done, the ban on storytelling during the day is revealed as being a precaution invented by the elders to prevent young people from confusing the time for productive work and the time for unproductive leisure.

The recording studio is of course a closed space, specially created by technicians and decor specialists. Contrary to village space, the set cannot be extended and it therefore offers a reduced margin for manoeuvres to the actors whose number is limited to about ten individuals. The freedom that storytellers and members of the audience have in the village milieu to come and go during storytelling sessions becomes a problem when tales are presented on television. In the traditional village space, the physical space of the tale is open, enabling new actors and spectators to make their appearance, or conversely actors can choose to leave the stage, without this creating a disturbance and interrupting the normal course of the performance. In other words, the traditional space of the tale is an integrating space, remaining open to social life as it unfolds beyond the space created for the tale.

The television set on the other hand is a rigid frame that does not permit intrusions and the unexpected. The actors occupy fixed positions; only the dancers, for their performance, are called upon to leave their place, immediately behind the storytellers, and move to the front. The rigidity of the television frame is due to the requirements of manipulating cameras and microphones.

The cameras, by their framing, demarcate an area beyond which the actors are no longer visible and accessible. The set's layout prevents certain actors from being outside the frame, which would immediately put them out of play. The same is true for microphones. Whether it be a clip-on microphone (for presenters) or a roving microphone (for guests) passed around from one to another, the absence of a microphone deprives one of the right to speak! Any attempt to do so at that moment is perfectly useless. Access to a microphone therefore determines who speaks.

However, in spite of the non-integrating space of the set, it nevertheless proves to be open to wide spaces and a wider public. During the recording, it may be possible to confuse the actors with members of the audience (not to mention the television technicians doing the recording), but when the programme is broadcast, new spaces are created. Throughout the length and breadth of the country, television sets create and multiply the spaces of the tale, thus allowing the actors to be seen and heard by millions of viewers. The great advantage of television over radio is its ability to show the actors, to give them faces, to make them familiar to their audience. The living rooms of homes, courtyards, shops, bars, hotels, streets, etc. are transformed into open spaces of tales. In fact, through television, the people go to the tales without being forced and can just as easily decide to end the performance by switching off the set or changing channels.

### The time of narration

Storytelling sessions in a village last on average four to five hours and constitute the anteroom of sleep for the children. They begin after the evening meal and end when sleep begins to close the eyes of the storytellers. Village time, characterised by its elasticity, does not seem to suit television timetables that function according to allocated timeslots that must be strictly adhered to. For the *soirée* of folktales on television, fifty-five minutes must be allocated. Why is the length of the programme on television reduced to less than an hour, when it is known that speech in storytelling is actually released after an hour, that is after the development of the *soalem-koeese* (short tales, but in effect slogans or mottos) a kind of minor genre that introduce tales (*soalem-wogdo*), which are considered to be the major genre? For the Moose, the motto or slogan is a short tale, whereas the folktale is described as being long. The *soalem-koeese*, which are verbal sparring matches, prepare the listeners to enter into the magical universe of folktales. But the constraints of time and certain other considerations of an ethical nature make it impossible for the programme of tales on television to dwell at length on *soalem-koeese*.

The limited duration of the programme is a castrating time for more than one reason. It must be remembered that the folktale, being the production of an ethnic group (Moose), is expressed in the language of the group (Mooré) entirely committed to its cause. Thus the tale in Mooré addressed to Moose or to Mooré speakers is in their cultural environment. Under these conditions, time no longer counts. But in the context of Burkina Faso that is not limited to Moogo, the traditional territory of the Moose kingdoms, it is necessary to take into account numerous other linguistic groups (about 60) present in the country.

Thus, for a national television service, one of whose missions is to ensure social and cultural cohesion and is consequently aimed at millions of individuals belonging to different cultures, it is not desirable to run the risk of having half of its viewers obliged to turn off their sets because of their inability to understand Mooré. A proverb in Mooré stipulates that when an aunt changes husbands, it is fitting for her nephew to change jesting relationships (*pugdb sãn teem sida, bi f teem rakiire*). Burkina Faso is the home of the Moogo, but nowadays the Moogo has gone beyond its borders, if one takes into account the extensive Mooré speaking diaspora in neighbouring countries (Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and Mali).

But the tale in Mooré, while changing its space, has to adapt in order to survive in a multi-ethnic urban context and, as the *Lagle Naab a Abga* was fond of saying: *kuilg sã n golem, bi yēbg tũ n goleme* ("when the course of the river is full of twists and turns, the crocodile must perform contortions to conform to it"). Moreover, urban areas offer many distractions and entertainments, making it impossible to retain the public's attention for several hours on end.

Whereas in the past, after the session of storytelling, it was time to go to sleep,

nowadays, after the session of tales on television, the evening continues with other kinds of activities and leisure. This is all the more so since the programme slot from 17:30 to 18:25 does not coincide with bedtime. The hours until bedtime are spent in recreation (music, reading, film, writing, etc.), completing daily activities or preparing tasks for the next day. In fact, the programme planning does not take into consideration the work schedule of civil servants or of people who work in the private sector, except for senior executives who have television sets in their offices. The day on which the programme is broadcast (Wednesday) does not coincide with the free periods of pupils and students. If it were broadcast on Thursdays, such an audience segment could have been targeted.

When the presenters (*Lagle Naab a Tigre* and Henriette Ilboudo) were asked about the prohibitions regarding the time that the programme is recorded, the one gave a subjective reason for such a ban, while the other cited the subterfuge used to create night in the studio. Concerning this subterfuge, it must be stated that the fact that the programme is broadcast from 17:30 prevents the *soirées* of storytelling from becoming the traditional school of the night or “an evening’s illusion”<sup>6</sup> plunging individuals into mythical times when men, animals, vegetables, minerals and concepts all had the power of speech.

### **The actors and the audience of tales on television**

The main actors of the sessions of tales for television are: Henriette Ilboudo (presenter), the musical company of the *Lagle*, the *Lagle Naaba* (Minister of the Moog-Naaba and traditional chief of the *Lagle* district) and members of his Court, among whom can be mentioned the *Kasiri Naaba* and the uncle of the *Lagle*, Anatole Tiendrébéogo, whose presence ensures continuity with the grandfather, the *Lagle Naab a Abga*, creator of the Company of the *Lagle* (that bears his name) and initiator of Mooré tales on the National Radio. As the programme is seen as a showcase of Mooré tales, any Mooré speaker who has great storytelling skill is called upon to participate. Storytellers who do not belong to the Company of the *Lagle* are required to put on a performance, before the recording, at the home of the *Lagle Naaba*, who assesses their linguistic competence and the quality of their tales. He has to decide on the pertinence of the performance, based on a certain number of criteria concerning propriety and language quality. Such a test ensures that only the people whose tales have been selected are invited for performance on the set.

A real live audience (when the recording is made), consisting of about twenty young people, women and elderly people, is put together, on the set, for each of the actors. In actual fact, when one of the actors tells a tale, all the others become the live audience, whose comments punctuate the performance of the main narrator. The storytellers take the microphone in turn to narrate their tales, to the applause and

laughter of the audience. Besides the *Lagle*, his uncle and the main presenter, the other members present are authorised to tell their tales by taking over the microphone, after getting permission from the *Lagle* who decides who speaks next.

The audience that is present on the set during the recording is limited and finite. But the magical nature of television resides in the fact that this audience is not the true audience for whom the messages are destined (the true receivers). It is only a pre-audience, or rather actors performing for a virtual audience consisting of millions of television viewers. The fact that it is not a live broadcast could be considered detrimental to the quality of the audience's receptiveness, as is the case for instance with football matches. But this does not happen here, for the television viewers are caught up in the fiction of the tale, the small television screen seems to be a window opening out onto an invisible and magical world. The programme's audience comes from all spheres of Burkinabè society. The main presenters of the programme affirm that administrative and political authorities, diplomats, educators, pupils, students and ordinary citizens contact and congratulate them on the quality of the messages. The frequency of the programme has created a faithful following, who look forward with great impatience to the last Wednesday of the month, when they can renew ties with the charm of the folktale. If the programme is not broadcast, preference being given to football matches of the African Cup of Nations, the Champions' League or the World Cup, Henriette Ilboudo says she receives many queries from the public: "The months that the programme does not appear, I get many queries. I can't even go to the market without people questioning me, *Ha, ed ka le wθmd soalema ye! Ha, ed ka le wθmd soalema ye! Naab togame la?* ("We don't hear the tales any more! We don't hear the tales any more! Has the Chief been transferred") (Ouedraogo 2005).

Such appeals indicate the public that is targeted and the impact of the programme. An analysis of Burkinabè society reveals that the population, more than 80% of which are illiterate, express themselves mainly in the national languages. While the majority of the illiterate population are to be found in the rural areas, it must be stated that, in the urban areas (as a result of the rural exodus and the housing estates that are transforming villages into new districts of towns under construction), illiterate people, who are numerically the largest group, belong to the informal sector, practising commerce and craft industries. The time that the programme is broadcast does not bother them, for they are not subject to the constraints of timetables like office workers. Moreover the markets and the *yaars* (little outlying markets) are mainly frequented by a public of women (housewives or newcomers to the informal sector), who more often than not are in front of their little television screens when the programme of tales is broadcast, in so far as they are not salaried people.

For a long time the audience of *Tales in Mooré* on television came from within the national borders. But subsequently, thanks to the reproduction of copies of the programme on videocassettes, another public beyond the national borders was targeted,

according to Ilboudo (Ouedraogo 2005): "People who are in the embassies, in the United Nations, who every time they come here [to Burkina Faso], they have me make copies. They say that they hold *soirées* in New York devoted to the *Lagle*. On those occasions, every Burkinabè and friends who are not Burkinabè are invited."

However, the fact that television coverage, estimated at 90%, is not yet a reality over all of Burkina Faso must be deplored. Fortunately, since the *Télévision Nationale du Burkina* (TNB, Burkina Faso National Television) has become available on satellite, this shortcoming has been reduced in part. Thus, the virtual audience is made up of all the Mooré speakers of the Burkinabè diaspora, which is estimated to be seven million individuals.<sup>7</sup>

But unlike the audience present during the recording, the target audience is unable to intervene in the unfolding of the narration. This does not prevent it from reacting of course, but this reaction has no effect on the performance of the actors. Thus the members of the audience of the storytelling *soirées* on television assume the role of television viewers, not participants: they attend at a distance a spectacle that no longer exists at the time when it is seen. Only their enthusiasm and fervour still give actuality to what is in essence ephemeral.

### **The unfolding of the tales (the performance)**

In traditional storytelling sessions, it is customary to begin with riddles or short tales called *soalem-koeese*, which are in fact verbal sparring matches that allow two adversaries to challenge and confront each other on an intellectual level. The *soalem-koeese* make it possible, through the game of question and answer, to test the knowledge of the partner who, in the event of being unable to respond, is placed in a situation of being given the answer in a way that can turn out to be impertinent, or even humiliating. The use of *saolem-koeese* was justified in so far as folktales brought together people sharing the same social standing. Thus individuals of the same age group, the same generation or linked by a jesting relationship are allowed to make use of *soalem-koesse*, without any restriction. But it is not advisable for a young person, or someone whose social position is inferior, to humiliate another person considered to be superior in age or by birth. The *soirées* of the *Lagle* constitute a break with the tradition that forbade chiefs or persons of noble birth to tell tales in public. When analysed, tales are subversive speech that people of the land (without power) can express to people in power (Izard 1985). Thus the different characters are merely allegories that allow them to criticise personalities, without running the risk of being subjected to their anger or revenge – a technique similar to that found in the writings of Jean de la Bruyère in *Les caractères ou les mœurs de ce siècle* ("Characters or mores of this century", 1973). Indeed, a Mooré proverb, *ka pud m yθθr zabr yaa toogo*, states that it is difficult to complain when a criticism does not mention you by name. This is why, under cover of animal

characters, the powerless grant themselves subversive speech, which enables them to denounce the faults and abuses of the powerful. But the *Lagle Naab a Abga*, by choosing to make the narration of folktales his hobby, retrieves politically free speech, transforming it into normative speech respecting the social order. The intrusion of the chieftain class into storytelling makes the *soalem-koeese* a genre difficult to practise because of the respect and etiquette that is their due. In practice, when a *naaba* – King, chief or authority – pronounces the first part of a *soalem-koeega*, his partner should refrain from giving the answer, even if he knows it, in case this constitutes a crime of *lese-majesty* (i.e. a crime against the sovereignty of a chief or king). Similarly, if the *naaba* were unable to give the right answer to a riddle, his partner should refrain from pronouncing it so as not to appear impertinent. All these restrictions prove that the *soalem-koeega* genre, because of the verbal licence it authorises, cannot be employed in a situation where social differences persist. This is what Robert Pageard (1976: 7), speaking of the *Lagle Naab a Abga*, affirms when he writes:

The authority, more moral than material, that he represented was always characterised by respect for the person he was speaking to, whether this was the poorest of passers-by or the simplest of peasant women. This respect – often silent – came from a profound sense of the need for human beings to support one another; it also emanated from his faith in a secret justice, foreign to our world; these ardent convictions explained his passion as a storyteller, as a creator.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, as an introduction to the *soirée* of tales, the presenter, after greeting and thanking the audience, hands over to the *Lagle* for his introductory speech that usually consists of a celebration of the values of traditional life, punctuated with proverbial sayings. Then it is the turn of the *Lagle's* uncle, Anatole Tiendrébéogo, to tell a tale. After his narrative, the *Lagle* does a commentary of the tale and introduces his own tale, or hands over to another storyteller. The presenter can then introduce a musical interlude. The musicians include drummers who use large calabashes, castanet players, some one playing a *kunde* (traditional guitar with three strings) and two singers (one man and one woman). The dance group, composed of four women, performs for a few minutes to the sound of the music. The presenter then thanks the musicians, indicating the end of the interlude, and hands over to the *Lagle* for the continuation of the programme. He can then tell another tale or invite one of the other storytellers on the set to tell his tale. During the storytelling, the audience on the set do not remain passive. They intervene with comments expressing their opinion of the action or the attitude of the characters in the tales. One notices a certain consensus emerging to condemn or, on the contrary, to praise certain qualities or certain defects brought to light in the narratives. The session continues with words of wisdom of the *Lagle* inviting the audience to adopt the positive behaviour of the characters, as recommended by tradition. When the time comes to end the *soirée* of tales, the musicians are invited to perform once more.

It is in a festive atmosphere that the presenter thanks the guests and all the television viewers and makes an appointment with them for the following month.

### **The contents of the tales on television: between ethics and aesthetics**

The company of the *Lagle* is made up of talented artists and eminent storytellers. The *soirées* of folktales are seen as festive moments during which people, forgetting their everyday cares, grant themselves moment of dreams and happiness. Therefore, particular attention is given to dress. The *Lagle Naaba a Tigre* always wears formal clothes that inspire respect and admiration and dons his chieftain's headgear. The presenter wears an ensemble made from a local cotton fabric, a string of red pearls and a scarf called *luili-peende* or bird scarf, an adornment that was high fashion in colonial times. The members of the audience also feel obligated to wear cotton fabric (called *faso dan fani*) or boubou. Similar care is taken with the costumes of the dancers who wear short skirts with girdles of cowry shells; their hair is plaited in the traditional style. They are required to dance barefoot.

Particular care is also exercised with the level of language. As the language of the tales is aesthetic, the storytellers are advised to demonstrate an excellent mastery of the Mooré language. Knowledge of the Mooré language does not turn an individual into a storyteller, but ignorance of this linguistic tool constitutes a serious handicap. For the *Lagle Naaba*, the *soirées* of tales are also a pretext for improving the national languages, which are sidelined in official life. In this regard, it is instructive to examine the classification of languages in Burkina Faso where a distinction is made between the official language, which is French, and the national languages. In other words, the national languages are not classified as official in a country in which French is still the home language of only 0.01% of Burkinabè, thus a very small fraction of the population. In everyday life, it is scarcely better if one realises that genuine francophone speakers in the country account for less than 2% of the total population (Diallo 2004: 21). This concern for the promotion of the Mooré language, as a medium of traditional values, is noticeable when one listens to the sessions of tales. The *Lagle Naaba* is an advocate of linguistic purity who does not accept "bastardised language," which consists of introducing into the narration of a Mooré folktale words and expressions of the French language. This is moreover one of the reasons for the audition of storytellers that is conducted by the *Lagle* prior to recording sessions. But if, in spite of the precautions taken, such impurities do intrude during the recording, they are erased at the editing stage. For such an operation, the advice of the storytellers is no longer required; if it is taken for granted that all the participants in the broadcast are concerned with promoting and preserving Moaaga culture and the Mooré language. The French expressions and words in the narration of the Mooré tales are consequently considered to be a poor performance and a lack of command of the Mooré language by the storyteller.

In line with the orthodoxy of the tales of the *Lagle Naab a Abga*, who favoured fables rather than moral or supernatural tales, the *Lagle Naab a Tigre* has a liking for tales with a high moral and educational content. He considers tales to be an artistic heritage to be preserved and handed down to new generations intact, without much alteration. The words of the tales are words from the dead, after the fashion of the proverbs that the *Lagle Naaba* handles with consummate art and ease. Consequently, tales that include modern objects (planes, ships, computers, telephones, cellphones, radios, televisions, etc) are not acceptable as they are considered too recent.

Aware of the wide range of viewers who tune into the programme, the *Lagle Naaba* is careful to ensure that the contents of the tales promote positive values and are politically correct. Therefore customary practices considered retrograde or detrimental to human rights are not celebrated. Thus, for example, one does not recollect seeing tales on television praising the benefits of the practice of excision! Tales in favour of violence, ingratitude, debauchery or anarchy do not feature in the performance of the storytellers of the *Lagle*. What is more, the style of the storytellers, while being pleasant, must remain serious. Following the example of the *Lagle Naab a Abga*, whose deep voice inspired respect, the discourse of the storytellers must not sink into bawdiness and jokes in poor taste, or include treacherous and irreverent allusions.<sup>9</sup>

### Conclusion

The choice of a medium like television constitutes an innovation that deserves to be commended, for it is liable to ensure the survival of the folktale in Burkina Faso. If it is undeniable that in urban areas the practice of the folktale tends to disappear, I have had the opportunity of observing that in the rural areas the situation is scarcely brilliant. Young people prefer to devote themselves to more modern activities such as watching movies on television, in cinemas or on video, rather than listening to tales that unfortunately their elders are no longer telling. And so it seems that the *Lagle Naaba's* initiative is one of the possible responses to the loss of traditional values in the towns as well as in the countryside. The timeslot of the programme should be reviewed to make it accessible to a much wider audience and more like the *soirées* of tales of yesteryear. For the sake of school-going children, the programme could be repeated once a month, on a Thursday afternoon for instance, the day after the Wednesday night broadcast. Besides television, the possibilities offered by information and communication technologies to exploit folktales in new inventions aimed at young people and adults should be explored. Tales for children using multimedia would help entice them away from the Burkinabè television screens that are flooded with made in Hollywood cartoons!

Translated by Jill Daugherty

## Notes

1. Mahamoudou Ouédraogo held the portfolio of Minister of Culture from 1996 without interruption until 2006, despite name changes in the Department. In 1999, the Department of Communication became independent and the Ministry of Culture became the Ministry of Culture and Arts (MCA) from 1999 to 2000. From September 2000 to August 2002, it was called the Ministry of Arts and Culture (MAC). From September 2002 to 4 January 2006, it took the name of the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism (MCAT). In 2000 *Worldlink* (a magazine of the World Economic Forum) named Minister Ouédraogo the best Minister of Culture in the world. The Minister and the writer are in no way related. Ouédraogo is a very common surname in Burkina Faso.
2. According to information gathered by Rural Radio, tales of the *Lagle Naab a Abga* were first broadcast in 1967.
3. The *Lagle Naab a Tigre* edited for a number of years a monthly cultural journal (with contributions by academics and men of culture) called *Tradition et modernité*.
4. Under the *Lagle Naab a Abga* the programme was broadcast on Tuesday from 21:00 and lasted an hour. Nowadays it is broadcast from 19:45 to 20:30.
5. Traditionally Mooré is not an Ivorian language, but because of its large number of Mooré speakers, it is today judicious to consider such a language as being part of the Ivorian linguistic heritage. This is exactly what the Ivorian authorities seemed to understand prior to 2002.
6. *Mensonge d'un soir* ("Evening lie") is the title of the programme of tales broadcast prior to 2002 on RTI (Ivorian Television).
7. If one refers to the ethnic distribution of the Burkinabè population (the Moose represent a little more than 50%), the Mooré speaking public of the diaspora is estimated at more than four million.
8. "L'autorité, plus morale que matérielle, qu'il représentait avait cette particularité de s'exprimer toujours dans le respect de l'interlocuteur, celui-ci fût-il le plus pauvre des passants ou la plus simple des paysannes. Ce respect – souvent silencieux – naissait d'un sens profond de la nécessaire entraide humaine ; il émanait aussi de la foi en une justice secrète, étrangère à notre monde; ces convictions ferventes expliquaient sa passion de conteur, de créateur." (Pageard 1976: 7)
9. Robert Pageard (1976: 7) in the preface to *O Mogho! Terre d'Afrique. Contes, fables et anecdotes du pays mossi* wrote quite rightly, "His voice was deep, slow, modulated, an actor's voice, the impact of which I could well imagine in Mooré discourse" ("La voix était grave, lente, modulée, une voix d'acteur dont je devinais l'impact dans le discours moré").

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