

Writing the Ethiopian Minotaur: Michel Leiris's Account of Ritualistic Possession in *Minotaure's* Dakar- Djibouti Issue

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Minotaure illustrates the transgressive eccentricity of surrealist periodicals. With thirteen issues appearing between 1933 and 1939, the publication's transcultural dynamics reach out to African, Asian, Oceanic, and Latin American arts, myths, and cultures. The mythical figure of the Minotaur — — half human, half bull — that is imprisoned in the labyrinth became a powerful symbol for the periodical's literary and artistic concept of transgression through different methods of *ars combinatoria* combining plastic arts and poetry, archeology, and architecture, as well as ethnography and mythology. This essay demonstrates how the writer and ethnographer Michel Leiris draws on the Minotaur as an emblematic symbol of a surrealist poetics from the perspective of ritualistic possession that he studied in northern Ethiopia. His ethnographic account "Le taureau de Seyfou Tchenger" (Seyfou Tchenger's Bull) in which he describes the sacrifice of a bull in the *zar-cult* of Gondar was published in 1933 in the second issue of the Parisian periodical *Minotaure* that was exclusively dedicated to the so-called "Mission Dakar-Djibouti."

It exemplifies the extent to which the journal's interdisciplinary surrealism was inspired by the arts and rituals of non-Western cultures. The Dakar-Djibouti issue can be considered a catalogue that describes the French ethnographic expedition to sub-Saharan Africa led by Marcel Griaule. It took off from Dakar, Senegal, on the west coast of Africa, on 12 July 1931 to make its way to the Horn of Africa at the eastern coast of the continent, crossing 20,000 km of Sub-Saharan territory. The "documentation" of the expedition's activities and findings in the high-quality journal *Minotaure* was also important in the history of ethnology as a young discipline in France that sought to professionalize itself (Debaene 41).

Leiris, who participated in the Dakar-Djibouti-expedition as secretary and archivist, was also new to the discipline. *Minotaure* was the first medium in which he published extracts from his ethnographic notes that he called "Carnet de route" (Roadbook) and that would shortly after appeared as the monumental travel diary *L'Afrique fantôme* (*Phantom Africa*) in 1934. Within the framework of the periodical's

aesthetics his ethnographic account “Le taureau de Seyfou Tchenger” can be read not only as an allusion to the Minotaur as symbol of a surrealist conception of creativity but also in the context of Leiris’s ambiguous position between scientific objectivity and literary subjectivity, given his double role as ethnographer and writer. The intermedial relation between photography and text particularly testifies to this ambiguity, especially since his essay in *Minotaure* relies on the photos taken by the expedition’s leader Marcel Griaule, who had developed a method of objective ethnographic documentation that Leiris deeply mistrusted. According to James Clifford, Leiris’s writing between ethnography and literature is characterized by a self-reflexivity that turns him into a precursor of the *Writing Culture* debate that emerged in the field of ethnology at the end of the 1980s, emphasizing the part subjectivity and affections played in ethnographic observation. Irene Albers also considers Leiris a pioneer of the postcolonial approach to visual anthropology that criticizes the appropriation of the other through ethnographic photography and other medial representations (*Diskrete Charme* 572). His self-reflexive approach to the written and visual material the Dakar-Djibouti mission collected made him an opponent of Griaule’s positivist claim to objectivity.

In “Seyfou Tchenger’s Bull” Leiris questions Griaule’s ethnographic methodology as he destabilizes the supposedly objective documentation of his account. The text-image relations thus create a tension between transparency and opacity, allowing the author to cross-examine the ethnographic limitations as well as the poetic potential of reporting on ritualistic possession. The bull sacrifice is celebrated by the members of the *zar*-cult in Gondar to contact and appease the *zar*-spirits they believed themselves to be possessed with. The possession cult is still widespread in northern Ethiopia and Sudan and mainly practiced by women. As a syncretic practice that incorporates Christian, Muslim, and animistic beliefs, it was strongly marginalized by official religious institutions (Albers 402). In his ethnographic “documentation” of the ritual, Leiris especially interrogates the photographs’ ability to visualize the spirits of possession. At the same time, the bull sacrifice mirrors his “obsession” with his own writing between literature and ethnography; he reflects upon the Ethiopian ritual as a conflicting process that implies simultaneous self-control and imaginative capacity, anticipating his 1946 concept of *tauromachie* (*Âge d’homme* 9-22). By approaching Leiris’s essay in terms of the tension between surrealist opacity and ethnographic transparency, I want to reconsider Clifford’s concept of “ethnographic surrealism” from a poetological and transcultural perspective. While Clifford examines the effect of the surrealist vision on ethnography, I would like to stress the impact of ethnographic observation on Leiris’s surrealist poetics. In the context of the periodical’s transcultural poetics, “Seyfou Tchenger’s Bull” revisits the periodical’s founding myth, as it invokes *Minotaure*’s surrealist credo of making its readers see the “CONTENU LATENT” ‘latent content’ of the unconscious hidden underneath any manifestation, as the editorial of its ninth issue states (Skira et al., “A nos

lecteurs").¹ Through the lens of a surrealist poetics, Leiris's account of the Ethiopian Minotaur not only destabilizes ethnographic representation but also struggles with the main source of surrealist creativity, the imagination.

Anticipating Africa

Through his contributions in *Documents* (1929-1930), above all his essay "L'œil de l'éthnologue (à propos de la Mission Dakar-Djibouti)" 'The Eye of the Ethnographer (About the Mission Dakar-Djibouti),' in which he anticipates his sojourn in Africa, Leiris had already become known for his engagement against racism and colonialism, even before the 1931 collective resistance of the surrealists against the colonial exhibition in Paris, spread through the tract *Ne visitez pas l'Exposition coloniale* 'Don't visit the Colonial Exhibition.'² The periodical *Documents*, founded by George Bataille, has often been considered the competing precursor of *Minotaure*, and much closer to ethnography. The Swiss art publisher Albert Skira, who mainly funded *Minotaure*, intended to bring the opposing groups around André Breton — who belonged to those in charge of the editorial direction — and Bataille together (Walker 640). Joyce Suechun Cheng considers the Dakar-Djibouti issue a "sequel to *Documents*, which had ended with some of its major contributors' departure for the mission" (470).³ In contrast to *Documents*, which was printed on cheap paper and ran out of money after the second volume, *Minotaure*, with its spacious DIN A-4 format, high-quality prints of art works and photography in black and white as well as in color was a "lavishly illustrated," deluxe journal (Cheng 469). The publication of the Dakar-Djibouti issue served the directors of the Musée d'Éthnologie du Trocadéro in Paris, Paul Rivet and Georges-Henri Rivière, both as "publicity" and as "catalogue" for the exhibition of the collected objects at the newly inaugurated "Salle d'Afrique" (Walker 639). The ethnographers of the Dakar-Djibouti mission distanced themselves from the exoticist euphoria and fetishist "theatricalization" of African artifacts (Larson 236) that strongly prevailed in the French avant-garde scene of the 1920s and early 1930s. Instead, they tried to communicate a more "authentic" and serious image of African cultures by studying languages, rites, and the function of cultural artifacts and rituals of different sub-Saharan peoples.

In "Œil de l'éthnologue," published in the seventh issue of *Documents* in December 1930, Leiris characterizes the Dakar-Djibouti mission as an enterprise of a "grande portée humaine" (99) 'great human significance' (qtd. in Edwards 5), as it would contribute to dissipating the primitivist and phantasmagoric prejudices

¹ Translations are provided by the author unless otherwise noted.

² The original document can be seen on the André Breton Website:
<https://www.andrebretton.fr/en/work/56600100711050>

³ Dawn Ades supports this argument when she states that "*Documents* and surrealism have come together in *Minotaure*" (280).

produced by Western discourse (33). At the same time, he wanted to encounter “la hantise exotique” ‘the exotic haunting’ of his childhood by acquiring “une vraie connaissance” ‘a real knowledge’ (“Œil” 93) of the African continent.

Another initial exposure to Blackness, cultural otherness, and ecstatic performance constituted his attraction to jazz when it appeared in Paris during World War I. In his autobiography *L'âge d'homme* he considers it “une possession” ‘a kind of possession’ that taught him the “mythe des édens de couleur” ‘myth of black Edens’ (159-60; *Manhood* 109) and would finally lead him to Africa and ethnography. His essay “The Eye of the Ethnographer” shows that, shortly before leaving for the expedition, Leiris is conscious of the tension between his identification with the ethnographic mission “sous la direction de mon ami Griaule” (99) ‘under the direction of my friend Griaule’ (99; qtd. in Edwards 5) and his fantasist idea of an exuberant, ecstatic Africa deriving from his readings of Raymond Roussel and Joseph Conrad, as well as from his early fascination with jazz. In his speech “Message de l’Afrique” (“Message from Africa”) which he delivered in Haiti in 1946, Leiris recalls that, before leaving Paris to join the mission, he had a mythological idea of the continent that appeared frightening and at the same time like a paradise to him (880).

Jean Jamin underlines Leiris’s desire to leave his Western education and culture behind and to become someone else (52),⁴ a desire connected to the surrealist critique of western values and the celebration of alterity as a conception of selfhood. The Dakar-Djibouti mission constituted an experience of initiation for Leiris, particularly into the myths and rites of African cultures that he desired to uncover and become part of. His essay “Le taureau de Seyfou Tchenger” in *Minotaure* reveals his self-reflexivity regarding the conflict between his role as a writer and that of the ethnographer, although in his contribution to the Dakar-Djibouti issue it is much less obvious than in *Phantom Africa*, where he constantly seeks to separate himself from his literary persona, who desires to experience African cultures through the eyes of a poet but at the same time has an equally pressing need to distance himself from his ethnological colleagues whom he criticizes for their claim to objectivity.

Appropriating African Cultures

Leiris’s conflictive ambiguity as writer and ethnographer also concerns his positioning towards the mission’s “acquisitions” (Larson 238). In the editorial foreword of *Minotaure*’s Dakar-Djibouti issue, the director and co-director of the

⁴ For further readings of Leiris’s “search for a new skin” and his desire to become someone else, see Clarck-Taoua (479-89), and Albers, *Diskrete Charme* (390-422).

Musée d'Ethnologie du Trocadéro,⁵ Paul Rivet and Georges-Henri Rivière, proudly present the success and the results of the African expedition. It consisted of the study of thirty Sub-Saharan languages and dialects, 300 manuscripts gathered for the National Library of France, 200 ethnographic recordings, 6,000 photos from field studies, and above all the collection of 3,500 objects brought to Paris to “enrich” the museum’s collection (Rivet and Rivière 3) and turn it into a modern and research-oriented site. They also highlight the acquisition of Christian Abyssinian wall paintings from the seventeenth century that the museum had obtained from the Saint Antonius church in Gondar, Northern Ethiopia (5). One of these paintings is inserted as one of few color prints in *Minotaure’s* second issue (fig. 1). In *L’Afrique fantôme* Leiris reports that Griaule, together with the artist Gaston-Louis Roux — who also designed the cover for the Dakar-Djibouti issue — removed the wall paintings on 3 August 1932 and replaced them with copies that they had produced themselves (*Phantom Africa* 465-66). For *Minotaure’s* ethnographic issue, Griaule includes an article on the Abyssinian murals, in which he notes that many Abyssinian churches were endangered by “total destruction” (“Peintures” 83, fig. 2). With the argument to protect the wall paintings in the conditions an ethnologic museum could offer the wall paintings’ removal was legitimized by the mission.⁶

What Rivet and Rivière depict as “enrichment” often meant that the mission illegitimately appropriated objects and art works from their place of origin, sometimes even under the sign of theft.⁷ Especially in the countries of the French colonies such as French Sudan (present-day Mali), the ethnographers removed sacred cult objects without asking the local communities for their permission, or even threatening them that they would be punished by the colonial authorities if they did not hand them over (Larson 238).

⁵ Paul Rivet took over the Musée d'Ethnologie du Trocadéro in Paris in 1928 — with Georges-Henri Rivière as co-director — and transformed it into a modern, research-oriented museum that opened in June 1938 as the Musée de l'Homme after the destruction of the Palais du Trocadéro (Albers 210-16).

⁶ Leiris comments that the mission did have permission to remove the wall paintings from the church’s intendant (*Afrique* 573). However, he does not make clear under what circumstances the permission was given. For further discussion on the recent restitution claims, see Sally Price’s 2007 monograph *Paris Primitive: Jacques Chirac’s Museum on the Quai Branly*.

⁷ The map, which is placed above the second issue’s table of contents, already indicates the problematic enterprise of the Dakar-Djibouti mission. It omits Europe’s colonial imperialism in a large part of the Sub-Saharan region, as it does not define which territories are under colonial rule (Weber-Caflisch 330). A more detailed map of the mission’s itinerary, containing the colonial as well as the national borders, can be found in the 1996 edition of *L’Afrique fantôme*, edited by Jean Jamin (98-99).



Figure 1: Color image of a wall painting from the Saint Antonius Church in Gondar. *Minotaure*, no. 2, 1933, p. 90. (Photo: Clichés Dakar-Djibouti). Universitätsbibliothek Johann Christian Senckenberg, Frankfurt am Main.⁸

Leiris often denounces the mission's cultural exploitation throughout his travel diary. He critically comments on his colleagues' attitude during their stay in Abyssinia, which, despite Italy's attempts to impose colonial rule on the country, remained an uncolonized territory: "Les Européens ont toujours grand plaisir à parler de l'anarchie abyssine. Ils aiment à s'en gargariser. Au fond de leurs discours, toujours ce leitmotiv: tout se passerait pour le mieux dans ce pays, qui serait le meilleur des pays, si seulement on en faisait une colonie" 'Europeans always greatly enjoy talking about Abyssinian anarchy. They like to wallow in it. Always underlying their talk is this leitmotiv: everything would be the best in this country, which would be the best of countries, if only it were made into a colony' ("Afrique fantôme" 573; *Phantom Africa* 466). However, he does not conceal that he also participated in the mission's "thefts" (Larson 238), for example in the Dogon land in French Sudan (Mali), where the ethnographers stole several cult

⁸ Despite the author's best good-faith efforts, it has proven impossible to identify copyright holders for all of the works illustrated in this article. Anyone claiming copyright should feel free to contact the author in order to make suitable arrangements.

objects from autochthonous sanctuaries. He admits that he enjoyed the “aventure” ‘adventure’ of being filled with a thrilling criminal energy when the mission sends him to remove a *kono* mask from a sanctuary that is still covered with dried ritual blood (*Afrique fantôme* 190-96; *Phantom Africa*, 152-56). In the Dakar-Djibouti issue, this moment of exploration and exploitation is anticipated in a photograph illustrating Griaule’s “Methodological Introduction” (10). It shows Griaule and Leiris in front of a Dogon sanctuary that shelters the precious *kono* masks. The caption of the photograph reads that ‘two members of the mission are about to sacrifice two chickens to the *kono*’ (fig. 3).⁹

Although Leiris is often the Dakar-Djibouti mission’s most vehement critic in *L’Afrique fantôme*, the *kono* sequence demonstrates his ambiguous role with regard to the mission’s “acquisitions” of African art.¹⁰ Albers highlights Leiris’s desire to experience colonial and exotic adventures in Africa (*Diskrete Charme* 357). Because of his self-reflexive approach to African cultures, he is nevertheless considered a pioneer of anti-racism and anti-colonialism and hailed as an “essential figure of modern humanism” by the postcolonial philosopher Édouard Glissant (611). Leiris continuously questioned his own positioning as a European and tried to transgress the hierarchy that the expedition established towards the local communities. Especially during the mission’s stay of several months in Gondar he begins to identify with the community of the *zar*-adepts with whom he establishes a close relationship, especially with the leader Malkam Ayyahou and her daughter Emawayish (fig. 6, below). In his approach to *L’Afrique fantôme* Gérard Cogez observes a turning point in which Leiris’s “primitivist” desire evolves into a “vrai désir de communion” ‘real desire of community’ (252). Leiris’s transgression of the border between ethnographic field work and personal involvement with the local community, however, created an increasing conflict with Griaule that intensified in Gondar where the mission arrived in July 1932.

⁹ The mission purchased another *kono* mask for the price of ten Francs. The chief of the community had to accept the price because, otherwise, he had to present himself at the next police station. In his entry of 6 September 1931, Leiris himself considers this act of threatening the local community an “Affreux chantage” (*Afrique fantôme* 194) ‘Appalling blackmail’ (*Phantom Africa* 153). The African-American surrealist writer and artist Ted Joans was also critical towards Leiris’s infamous theft of a Boli statue from the Bamana in Mali. For a further reading of Ted Joans’s African and Afro-Diasporic (re-)visions of surrealism, see Terri Geis’s article in this issue.

¹⁰ For a further reading of how Leiris faced colonialism that includes the *kono* sequence, see Edwards 17-25.



FRASE DE L'ÉGLISE. CÔTÉ OUEST DU MUR SUD, ÉGLISE ANTONIUS DE GONDAR (ÉTHIOPIE SEPTENTRIONALE). 140x340 1/2

PEINTURES ABYSSINES

L'Église d'Antonios, située à une heure de marche au nord-ouest de Gondar (Éthiopie septentrionale), a connu un temps où son enclos n'était pas envahi par les hautes herbes, son toit pourri et son mur circulaire maintenu à grands renforts de petits troncs de cèdre. Comme la quarantaine d'autres églises de Gondar, elle avait autrefois un cloître prospère et richement doté, et, de temps à autre, l'aubaine d'une attention royale. Construite, il après Bruce, en 1714, sous le règne de l'usurpateur Yostos (1), elle eut la chance

(1) BRUCE, *Travels in the Interior of Nubia*, t. II, p. 564 de l'éd. in-8.
«... au mois de janvier 1714, tandis qu'il (Yostos) surveillait les travaux de l'église d'Alsa Antonios, qu'on bâtit sur à Gondar... »

LA NATAIVÉ. MUR SUD. ÉGLISE ANTONIUS DE GONDAR.
140x135 1/2



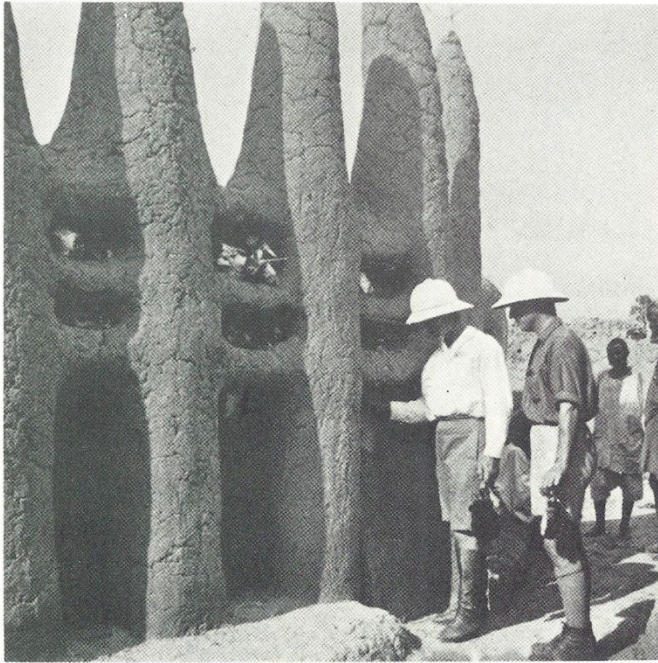
d'échapper jusqu'à nos jours à une destruction totale, sort commun à la plupart des églises abyssines : car, si ce n'est la négligence de leurs prêtres, qui laissent les saisons des pluies s'accroître sur leur chaume, les divisions intestines et les invasions se chargent périodiquement de mettre leurs murs au soleil.

Au moment où la Mission Dakar-Djibouti vint à Gondar, le miracle prenait fin. Ouverte à tous les vents, ses panneaux de porte maintenus tant bien que mal avec des pierres et des herbes, le mur circulaire prêt à s'effondrer au nord et à l'ouest, elle n'était même plus un abri pour ses prêtres ; la moindreaverse faisait de son sol un cloaque et ruisselait sur les murs du sanctuaire cubique occupant le centre de l'édifice.

DÉTAIL DU FANSHAW DES ROIS. MUR EST. ÉGLISE ANTONIUS DE GONDAR.
140x137 1/2



Figure 2: Marcel Griaule's "Peintures abyssines" about the wall paintings from the Saint Antonius Church in Gondar. *Minotaure*, no. 2, 1933, p. 83. (Photo: Clichés Dakar-Djibouti). Universitätsbibliothek Johann Christian Senckenberg, Frankfurt am Main.



DEUX MEMBRES DE LA MISSION S'APPRÊTENT A SACRIFIER DES POULETS AU « KONO ». KÉMÉNI (CERCLE DE SAN, SOUDAN FRANÇAIS).

Figure 3: Michel Leiris and Marcel Griaule in front of a Dogon Sanctuary in Kéméni, French Sudan. In Marcel Griaule: "Introduction méthodologique." *Minotaure*, no. 2, 1933, p. 10. (Photo: Clichés Dakar-Djibouti).
Universitätsbibliothek Johann Christian Senckenberg, Frankfurt am Main.

Approaching the Document: Griaule's Methodology – Leiris's Critique

Griaule considered Leiris's closeness to the local community especially problematic given that that he wanted to demonstrate the professionalization of ethnology as a field of study by reflecting its methodology. For this reason, he introduces the Dakar-Djibouti issue with a methodological introduction (7-12) that stresses the discipline's commitment to combining ethnographic documentation with research grounded in lived experience. Vincent Debaene notes that the Dakar-Djibouti mission was particularly influenced by the French ethnographer Marcel Mauss's ideas of "mentalizing" the object, as well as his approach to

studying the “atmosphere” of non-Western communities, in order to explore the “consciousness” and “affections” conveyed by their cultural artifacts (44). Griaule wanted the texts and images of *Minotaure*'s ethnographic issue to convey the impression of being dynamically “pris sur le vif” ‘taken on the spot’ (Debaene 43) and not statically exposed in a museum. Involvement and direct observation are also Griaule’s methodological credos because he considers them the ‘surest,’ ‘easiest,’ and ‘most natural’ way of doing ethnographic fieldwork (“Introduction” 10). In his eyes, the premise for studying African cultures implies the familiarization with local contexts. However, for him “familiarization” did not mean the creation of community and friendship, as it did for Leiris.

A major difference between Leiris and Griaule was also their approach to documentation. For both, “the document” had a major importance, as it led to a more “authentic” representation of African cultures compared to fantasist or picturesque literary and artistic depictions. Debaene even asserts that, in the context of French ethnography’s close relationship with the field of literature and the arts, Griaule’s ethnographic approach was — like Leiris’s — also characterized by a “‘face-à-face’ entre science et littérature” ‘face-to-face between science and literature’ (40).¹¹ However, in *Minotaure*, the mission’s leader stresses the objectivity of documentation in order to demonstrate and legitimize ethnographic methods, which also implies a maximum of observatory control over the rituals in the situation of fieldwork. Regarding his differentiation between a qualitative and a quantitative method of ethnographic research, the latter seems to move into the foreground when he states that only the most complete process of collecting could lead to attaining maximal knowledge about a specific society: “Théoriquement, il serait possible de parvenir à la connaissance d’une société en fondant l’observation sur tout ce qu’elle crée ou utilise en l’entourant d’un maximum de documentation” ‘Theoretically, it would be possible to attain knowledge about a society by grounding one’s observation on everything it creates or uses, approaching it through a maximum of documentation’ (7).

Leiris’s monumental travel diary *Phantom Africa* — characterized by Clifford as a “text monster” because of its density, heterogeneity, and obsession with writing (*Predicament* 165) — also seems to be committed to this “maximum of documentation” claimed by Griaule (7). However, he defends his travel notes as “une chronique personnelle, un journal intime” ‘a personal chronicle, an intimate journal’ (“Afrique fantôme” 395; *Phantom Africa* 320) situated between subjectivity and objectivity. Because of his claim to subjectivity, Leiris openly despised Griaule’s methodology, especially its positivist and supposedly objective implication. As he comes closer to the community of the zar-adepts in Gondar, especially to Emawayish to whom he feels attracted, he notes in his diary: “[J]e ne peux plus supporter l’enquête méthodique. J’ai besoin de tromper dans leur

¹¹ Debaene refers to Griaule’s book on “Abyssinian entertainments,” *Les Flambeurs d’hommes* (The People’s Gamblers), published in 1934 (40).

drame, de toucher leurs façons d'être, de baigner dans leurs chair vive. Au diable ethnographie!" 'I can no longer put up with methodical research through interrogation. I need to submerge myself in their drama, to touch their ways of being, to bathe in living flesh. To hell with ethnography!' (602; 490).

Whereas Griaule's method of documentation "pris sur le vif" 'taken on the spot' (Debaene 43) implied the "neutral" observer position required by ethnographic fieldwork, Leiris's desire of bathing 'in the living flesh' of African cultures — as cited above — entailed a maximum of immersion. Given this claim to subjectivity, he was very critical of the expedition's scientific approach to African cultures, while Griaule reproached him for his lack of distance to the local communities. Leiris's "ethnographic surrealism" becomes most apparent in *L'Afrique fantôme*, especially with regard to his surrealist perspective: According to his formula "devenir un autre que soi" 'to become someone else' (Albers 399), he was yearning to discover and incorporate the "capacité imaginative" 'imaginative capacity,' and the "puissances affectives" 'affective forces' (Leiris, "Message" 879) of sub-Saharan cultures (especially in those regions that were not yet colonized) that he found lacking in Western civilization. Nevertheless, as his travel notes in *L'Afrique fantôme* demonstrate, he was often frustrated in this endeavor of overcoming his rational viewpoint, which he considered a requisite to embrace and understand the societies he examined as ethnographer and surrealist writer. In his foreword to *L'Afrique fantôme* that he writes after coming back from the Dakar-Djibouti mission, he admits that his "tentative d'évasion n'a été qu'un échec" 'attempt at escape has been only a failure' (*Brisées* 54; *Brisées: Broken Branches* 46) because it didn't help him to leave behind his "isolation" and the "phantoms" that were haunting him.

Not only against the background of his personal disillusionment with his African experience but also in the context of *Minotaure's* "continuing Surrealist quest" (Walker 639), it is surprising that, in the framework the Dakar-Djibouti issue, Leiris's essay on the bull sacrifice in Gondar is characterized by an explicitly documentary and impersonal style lacking any claim to subjectivity, although in "Le taureau de Seyfou Tchenger" he even refers to his personal experience of being initiated into the *zar*-cult (79-80), an episode he recounts in *Phantom Africa*. Prior to the bull sacrifice celebrated by the whole community, he actively participated in the ritual of sacrifice, in which Malkam Ayyahou slaughtered two roosters for him to offer them to his guardian *zar*-spirit Kader. For Clifford, this is a key scene of Leiris's ethnographic transgression (168), especially because the author continued to take notes for his travel diary with the rooster's diaphragm placed on his forehead, which was covered with butter. What is further striking about this sequence is Leiris's disappointment with his surrealist desire for a sacred initiation into ritualistic possession because it was impossible for him to experience "real" magic and to be drawn into the power of the unconscious enhanced by the ritual. In a letter to his wife on 19 September 1932, he states: "[C]ette histoire des *zar* ne relève guère que de ma propre imagination. Il y a une chose terrible dans la magie,

c'est qu'elle ne réussit pas" '[T]his business with the *zar* is hardly more than a product of my own imagination. The terrible thing about magic is that it doesn't succeed' (*Afrique fantôme* 659; *Phantom Africa* 538).

Leiris's detached account of the bull sacrifice in the Dakar-Djibouti issue seems to reconcile the hardened frontiers between his personal desire for transgression and Griaule's positivist claim to objectivity. Leiris even seems to affirm the latter's methodological claim as he uses Griaule's sequential photographs as an illustration of his essay on the bull sacrifice. Photography was a significant method for Griaule's approach to ethnographic documentation. In *Méthode de l'ethnologie*, he calls ethnographic photographs "pièces authentiques" 'authentic pieces' and "témoins indépendants" 'independent witnesses' that would render a complete image of a given culture (81-82). To study the ritual of sacrifice practiced by the *zar*-cult in Gondar, Griaule invented a method with which he could take sequences of several hundred pictures taken from three different "panoptical" perspectives (Albers 49). This was done using three cameras that were placed in an elevated position. In accordance with the colonial appropriations of the Dakar-Djibouti mission, this method corresponds to Michel Foucault's concept of the *panopticon*, which reflects the instruments of domination in modern societies. Griaule sought to completely control the ritual sacrifice through this positivist method of ethnographic documentation.

However, in *Minotaure*, these ethnographic photographs also become "a prime site" of interaction between ethnographic materials and the "aesthetic *frisson*" created by surrealism, as Walker argues (639). The aesthetics of the "document" destabilize the ethnographic material presented in the Dakar-Djibouti issue: "The Surrealist dimension of the Dakar-Djibouti pictures in *Minotaure* is far less evident, only perceptible if one is aware of the broader context in which they were placed. That status remains ambiguous" (Walker 640). *Minotaure's* oscillation between ethnographic documentation and surrealist aesthetics thus mirrors Leiris's ambivalence between his role of writer and ethnographer. In contrast to *L'Afrique fantôme*, in which he claims subjectivity as a means of criticizing ethnographic methods, in "Le taureau de Seyfou Tchenger" his conflictive position can be observed on the inter-media level between the visual exposure of the photographs and the textual description of the possession ritual in Gondar.

Approaching the Spirit(s) of Sacrifice

The northern Ethiopian *zar*-cult reflected Leiris's obsessions: he was specifically drawn to "real" manifestations of possession, as he repeatedly described himself as "possessed" in his autobiographical writings. Regarding his research he states: "J'aimerais mieux être possédé qu'étudier les possédés" 'I would rather be possessed myself than study possessed people' (*Afrique fantôme* 560); *Phantom Africa* 456). His interest in ritualistic sacrifice was also inspired by Bataille who in 1937 founded the group of the Collège de Sociologie that explored social forms

and expressions of a “sacred surrealism” inherent in messianic and sacred cults as well as religious delusions (Brough-Evans 17-18).¹²

According to Jamin, the animal sacrifices Leiris studied in Africa corresponded to his belief in a “mythologie du sang” ‘mythology of the blood’ (44)¹³ In this mythic understanding, the animal blood stands for the release of creative impulses and poetic invention, as well as for an exploration of the unknown realms of the self and its surrounding outside world. For Leiris, the animal’s blood has a mediating function that would initiate him into the discovery of the unconscious and other levels of reality:

Car, décidément, l'étranger, la brousse, l'extérieur nous envahissent de toutes parts. Nous sommes tous, soit des chasseurs qui réunions tout, nous vouons volontairement au monde du dehors pour être pénétrés, faire notre nourriture et nous enorgueillir de certaines forces supérieures, grandes comme le sang qui bout au cœur des animaux, l'inspiration fatalement diabolique, le vert des feuilles et la folie; soit des possédés que cette même marée du dehors vient un jour déborder et qui . . . acquièrent le pacte avec l'éternel démon imaginaire du dehors et du dedans qu'est notre propre esprit.

For, without a doubt, the unfamiliar, the bush, the outside world invade us from all sides. Either we are hunters who repudiate everything, dedicate ourselves voluntarily to the outside world so as to be imbued by, to draw sustenance from, and to take pride in certain superior powers – great like the blood that beats in the heart of a beast, great like all inspiration, inevitably diabolical, great like the green of leaves, like madness; or we are the possessed, doomed sooner or later to be overwhelmed by this same quagmire of the outside world and who . . . acquire the right to sign once and for all a pact with the eternal, imagery demon of the outside and the inside which is our own spirit. (*Afrique fantôme* 588 ; *Phantom Africa* 477)

¹² For more detailed information on Leiris’s friendship and personal correspondence with Bataille, see Louis Yvert’s edited collection *Échanges et correspondances*. Regarding Bataille’s understanding of “the sacred and its fundamentally ambivalent nature, high and low, pure and impure,” inspired by his readings of Sigmund Freud’s *Totem and Taboo* and Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals* as well as Henri Hubert’s and Marcel Mauss’s ethnographic essay on the function of sacrifice, see Hollier (11).

¹³ In the above-mentioned letter to his wife from 19 September 1932, Leiris also refers to the mythical-religion dimension of the blood: “On ne croit plus au sang; on le craint trop pour des raisons humanitaires au lieu de le redouter pour des raisons mystiques” ‘We don’t believe enough in blood anymore; we fear it too much for humanitarian reasons instead of dreading it for mystical reasons’ (*Afrique fantôme* 660; *Phantom Africa* 539).

His rumination on the penetrating force of the irrational, the foreign, and the animal blood as sources of inspiration shows that his ethnographic essay in *Minotaure* cannot be separated from his continuous reflection on his own writing and the question whether it is stimulated from within him or rather from the "outside world."¹⁴ This reflection is related to his field work in Gondar and his contact to the community committed to the possession cult. In his search to understand the uncontrollable, "diabolic" forces of creativity and the inspiration, the powerful animal of the bull best represents his mythology of the blood 'that beats in the heart of the beast,' as it is turned by him into a symbol of the uncontrollable source of the writer's inspiration "invading" him from the "outside world."

According to the cult's beliefs, the possession by a spirit called *zar* has destructive as well as healing and protective potential. In "Le taureau de Seyfou Tchenger" Leiris explains that *balazar*, "having the *zar*," (78) means that the spirits have punished someone with illness, conflict, or the death of a loved one. However, it also characterizes someone in a powerful position because being possessed by one or several *zar* carries special knowledge. Such is the case of Malkam Ayyahou, the mission's local informant. Leiris describes her house as a gathering center for ritual practice, but it also serves as a hospital, hotel, coffeehouse, and brothel. She is a healer and an authority in the community, above all because of her possession by the leader of all *zar*-spirits, Seyfou Tchenger. Between admiration and irony, Leiris calls her "la dame chef des *zar*" 'the lady chieftess of the *zar*' (*Afrique fantôme* 564; *Phantom Africa* 459) because she is the carrier of the community's most powerful spirit. To honor and appease Seyfou Tchenger, the *zar*-practitioners sacrificed the bull to him on 8 September 1932. Leiris notes that Griaule had offered the sacrificial animal to the community to convince its members to participate in his field research and let the ethnographers observe them ("Taureau" 80). This indicates that the rite was reenacted for the French ethnographers, who wanted to study it systematically according to Griaule's methodology. Ironically enough, the "authentic" ritual of possession and sacrifice that the mission meant to observe was ultimately an intercultural spectacle, as Albers remarks ("Phantom" 49). In his travel notes, Leiris criticizes Griaule for taking advantage of the *zar*-cult adherents but also worries about them

¹⁴ Leiris drank the rooster's blood during his active participation in the sacrifice ritual. In contrast to "mythology of the blood," the reality of drinking the blood of the sacrificial animal filled him with awe but also with disgust. In *L'Afrique fantôme*, he recounts how Malkam Ayyahou's daughter Emawayish, to whom he feels sexually attracted, flees to the kitchen to wash her mouth after the sacrifice because drinking the animal blood makes her feel sick. This seems like a sort of profanation to him (*Phantom Africa* 516). In "Le taureau de Seyfou Tchenger," he adds a footnote citing Emawayish's son Tebabou, who is a sacrificial priest and speaks of the danger inherent in the blood, because the hostile *zar* spirits can still act out from it for punishing purposes, even after the sacrifice, and despite the prayers he utters during the ritual (80).

taking advantage of the Europeans. Malkam Ayyahou and Emawayish repeatedly ask him and his colleagues for money and gifts, especially raki liquor and sacrificial animals. Eventually, he feels betrayed by their increasing demands which also demonstrates his exoticist idealization of their non-Europeanness that he thought would reach beyond any consumerist desire (*Afrique fantôme*, 555; 566-67; 689-90).¹⁵

Leiris's essay on the bull sacrifice in the Dakar-Djibouti issue was published prior to his travel diary, which appeared in 1934. It seems that he had explicitly chosen — or even extracted — the description of the bull sacrifice for publication in *Minotaure* because, in *L'Afrique fantôme*, he only writes about the preparations for the ritual and briefly comments on the death throes of the bull, without going into further details. On the contrary, in the Dakar-Djibouti issue, he systematically describes the sacrifice, explaining the different steps of the ritualistic slaughter. Additionally, each step is documented photographically. He chooses twelve images, all of them taken — except for the first one — by means of Griaule's panoptical photographic method. Considered against the background of Leiris's conflict with Griaule and his disapproval of the objective methods of ethnographic documentation, his understating remark in the beginning of his essay nonetheless reveals a certain skepticism and ambivalence towards Griaule's panoptical method: "Le texte n'est que le commentaire de douze images extraites des documents rassemblés par la Mission lors de son séjour à Gondar" "The text is just a commentary on twelve images taken from the documents collected by the mission during its stay in Gondar" ("Taureau" 76).

For Leiris, the images move beyond their status as objective documents or "independent witnesses," as Griaule claims in his methodology (*Méthode* 82). In the framework of *Minotaure*, the intermedial dynamics between the images and the text alludes to the surrealist vision, "the revealing-concealing play of the gaze," as Michael Janis suggests (583). In the Dakar-Djibouti issue, this surrealist vision creates a tension between opacity and transparency destabilizing the documentary character of ethnographic photography. This is already indicated by an image preceding Leiris's text. It shows Malkam Ayyahou in a trance preparing for the ritual. She is protected from the sun by an umbrella in the background — a contrasting symbol of western civilization that often appears in colonial photography. Her kneeling body is hidden under a cloth and seems to anticipate the ritual, as she resembles a bull in this position (fig. 4). By concealing more than it shows, the photograph recalls the illusionist aesthetics of the images in

¹⁵ The question of ritual authenticity haunts Leiris. In his 1956 essay "La possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar" (Possession and its theatrical aspects at the Ethiopians from Gondar), he distinguishes between the "théâtre joué" 'performed theater' and the "théâtre vécu" 'lived theater.' With the latter he no longer condemns the staged character of the *zar*-rituals as inauthentic but recognizes it as a condition of ritualistic situations and aesthetics.

Minotaure. Malkam Ayyahou's covered body corresponds to the picture of the "jeune garçon dogon habillé de feuillage pour un rite saisonnière" 'young Dogon boy dressed in leaves preparing for a seasonal rite' (fig. 5) that covers the initial page of Griaule's "Introduction méthodologique" (7). In this photograph, the Dogon boy is "disguised" by a sort of cone mask made of leaves, which hides almost his entire body from the spectators' gaze, except for his lower legs. This image conveys a similar mystery to that of the *zar* healer's cloth-covered body and illustrates how *Minotaure's* surrealist aesthetics interfere with the documentary style of the ethnographic issue.



Figure 4: Malkam Ayyahou in a trance under the *chamma* preparing for the Ritual of the Bull Sacrifice. In Michel Leiris. "Le taureau de Seyfou Tchenger." *Minotaure*, no. 2, 1933, p. 74. (Photo: Marcel Griaule). Universitätsbibliothek Johann Christian Senckenberg, Frankfurt am Main.

In a comparable way, the images on the first page of Leiris's contribution allude to the covering/uncovering mode of representation. On the lower page, there is a portrait of Malkam Ayyahou; above her, the spectators can see an image of Seyfou Tchenger, the spirit that possesses her and inhabits her as an invisible doppelgänger underneath her outward appearance (fig. 6). Enqo Bahri, another leader of the *zar* community who cooperated with the mission, created a series of

gouaches of the different *zar* personalities for the ethnographic research. In the syncretic logic of the *zar*-cult, these personalities make up an imaginative parallel society beyond the social reality of the cult's members. Leiris's comment on her portrait photo reveals that Malkam Ayyahou is not only possessed by Seyfou Tchenguier but by various *zar*-spirits that all act through her in different ways, as host and housekeeper (Chankit), travelling companion and protector (Rahiélo), property consultant (Abba Qwosqwos), or judge and moral advisor (Abba Yosef) ("Taureau" 78).

INTRODUCTION MÉTHODOLOGIQUE

par MARCEL GRIAULE

L'EXPÉDITION française qui vient de parcourir l'Afrique sur la transversale Dakar-Djibouti avait entre autres buts

l'étude de certaines populations noires dans leurs diverses activités, et en cela elle n'était pas exclusivement ethnographique, si tant est que l'ethnographie connaisse surtout des manifestations matérielles.

Certes toutes les activités humaines se traduisent par des objets, et l'on peut dire que, théoriquement, il serait possible de parvenir à la connaissance d'une société en fondant l'observation sur tout ce qu'elle crée ou utilise en l'entourant d'un maximum de documentation.

C'est en application de ce principe que la Mission a constitué une collection africaine destinée à combler certaines lacunes du Musée d'Ethnographie.

Mais il serait imprudent de s'en tenir là et de ne pas renverser le problème en voyant aussi dans l'objet le témoin rassurant qu'il faut rencontrer à chaque pas de l'enquête de sociologie descriptive, à mou sens activité principale de l'ethnographie.

C'est ainsi que la Mission s'est livrée lors des trois plus longs séjours qu'elle effectua (falaise de Bandia-

gara, Nord-Cameroun, Éthiopie septentrionale) à des études où l'acquisition d'objets n'était pas son unique préoccupation.



Il ne saurait être question de donner ici un aperçu, même succinct, des travaux qu'elle a effectués. Au reste les pages qui suivent en montreront divers aspects. Il me paraît plus opportun d'exposer les méthodes qu'elle a suivies et dont les grandes lignes ont été dégagées de l'enseignement donné à l'Institut d'Ethnologie de l'Université de Paris.

Tout d'abord deux voies principales s'offrent à l'ethnologue qui se rend sur le terrain : la méthode *extensive*, consistant à étudier des questions données dans le plus grand nombre de sociétés possible ; la méthode *intensive*, qui consiste, au contraire, en une enquête approfondie d'une seule société.

La méthode extensive est très délicate, apparemment à juste titre, extensif se confond souvent avec superficiel ; extraire de l'imbroglio des faits sociaux une documentation se rapportant uniquement à l'un d'eux, c'est vouloir retirer un élément du jeu de jonchets sans ébranler l'ensemble. Pratiquement, ce tour de force ne s'obtient qu'en mettant des œillères à l'informateur, en le ramenant sans

7

Figure 5: Young Dogon Boy Dressed in Leaves for a Seasonal Rite. *Minotaure*, no. 2, 1933, p. 7. (Photo: Marcel Griaule). Universitätsbibliothek Johann Christian Senckenberg, Frankfurt am Main.

As becomes clear in the gouache, Seyfou Tchenguier himself is accompanied by three other protecting spirits, "noble guards" called *wouriéza*, according to Leiris (77).¹⁶ The *zar*-spirit's entourage demonstrates his power. For this reason, he can only be satisfied by a sublime sacrifice, the bull. Considered from a transgender perspective, Malkam Ayyahou's possession by this male power is ambivalent: On the one hand, her embodiment by Seyfou Tchenguier turns her into an authority; on the other hand, Leiris stresses the fact that she is only his "servant." During the ritual, he turns her into his "horse," meaning that her body in trance becomes the

¹⁶ For further explanation of the gouache of Seyfou Tchenguier, see Leiris, "Possession," 1006-07.

medium through which he expresses himself.¹⁷ It is remarkable that the page layout in *Minotaure* reproduces the hierarchy of male domination inherent in the possession cult, as the gouache representing Seyfou Tchenger is placed on the upper left side of the page presiding over the photographic portrait of Malkam Ayyahou on the lower right side.



Première image : Seyfou Tchenger.

L'À l'appart des moindres sont attribués, en Haïtisme, à la possession par les esprits malins et féroces qu'on se représente comme des hommes invisibles – habités généralement le femme, les lieux battus ou réactionnels – et auxquels un grand nombre de personnes, surtout dans les villes, ont de se consacrer leurs larmes et de quêter. Le zar attaqué plus fréquemment les femmes que les hommes ; ainsi la femme normale de la sorte de « zar » est celle un groupe de femmes malades inspirées la notion d'une grande possible devenue qu'on s'en, et se réalisent à date fixe lors des principales fêtes de la religion officielle.

Le traitement habituel consiste à faire entrer en scène la personne malade et, la tenir dans « Armoche » sur elle, à interroger ce dernier, généralement l'habitué jusqu'à ce que, par la force de la bonne volonté, il révèle son identité – ou le personnage de quelque chose appartenant un sacrifice dont il indiquera lui-même la nature, quant à l'origine et à la couleur de la victime. Par la suite, la possibilité d'une offre à son zar ou sacrifice est faite.

Condamnés par les frères chrétiens comme par les musulmans, ces malades sont sans malades, mais les personnes qu'on dit malades ils, sur sans aucun moment que seuls les possédés professionnels (guérisseurs ou guérisseuses) fonctionnent un utilité son par à fait. Il n'est presque jamais possible, le femme « qui » le zar « est » normale et que un rôle important : que la consigne pour les personnes de malade, les offrandes de viande ; elle intervient dans les mariages, les offrandes, les anniversaires ; aussi elle prend l'air. Le zar, habituellement, se manifeste le plus souvent de nuit ou tôt le matin ; mais il peut aussi passer à un instant, lors de fête ou à elle.

Il semble que cette institution, maintenant des religions qui, en ce pays, prédominent le christianisme, ait une influence sur d'autres.

LE TAUREAU DE SEYFOU TCHENGER

par MICHEL LEIRIS

DEUXIÈME IMAGE : MARCEL AYYAHOU.



Figure 6: Gouache of the zar-spirit Seyfou Tchenger by Enqo Bahri, and portrait of Malkam Ayyahou (Photo: Marcel Griaule). In Michel Leiris. “Le taureau de Seyfou Tchenger.” *Minotaure*, no. 2, 1933, p. 75. (Photo: Clichés Dakar-Djibouti). Universitätsbibliothek Johann Christian Senckenberg, Frankfurt am Main.

¹⁷ In his Haiti speech “Message de l’Afrique” (Message from Africa) Leiris stresses the similarities between the zar possession and the Voodoo cult, in which the loa spirits also speak to the people through the “horse,” the mediating body of one participant in a trance (880).

The Ethiopian Minotaur

Following Malkam Ayyahou's and Seyfou Tchenger's portrayal, Leiris's account focuses on a sequence of ten images representing the sacrifice. The first depicts the practitioners of the ceremony twisting the bull's head to lay him down on the right side (fig. 7, top). In the next step, the bull — at this time, still alive and in agony — is wounded, and Enqo Bahri, who has a leading function in the ceremony, hands a cup filled with its blood to Malkam Ayyahou (fig. 7, bottom left). Following Leiris, the next image demonstrates how two female participants of the ritual treat the bull's injury with a liquid mixture of honey and beer (fig. 7, bottom right). The next photograph exposes the bleeding bull after the ceremonial leader has cut his neck and killed it, while other participants cover the blood spilled from its wound (fig. 8, top). The limbs of the bull's dead body — bound together to prevent the animal from hurting any of the practitioners during its agony — are then untied in order to dissect and skin it (fig. 8, top). Leiris explains this process referring to two more images, stressing the importance not only of the bull's skin remaining intact, but also its diaphragm, called *mora* ("Taureau" 80). The last picture, which follows that of the coffee-serving ritual, shows the crowning ceremony, in which we see Malkam Ayyahou wearing the bull's diaphragm/*mora* on her head (fig. 10).

Leiris's text goes beyond a simple commentary on the images. His account includes more than what can be seen in the photographs, for example the sacred songs or the description of other practices during the ritual, such as the meal of the bull's entrails. It is striking that his explanations refer explicitly to those elements in the photographs that remain invisible to the spectators. Above all, the spirits that become visible for the participants as they are embodied through the bull sacrifice cannot be seen in the pictures. Commenting on the image in which the bull's neck is twisted, Leiris even characterizes the *zar*-spirits as witnesses — themselves spectators — of the scene in which the participating women enter in the state of a trance by making the traditional movement of the *gourri*, a rhythmic swinging and rotating of their heads ("Taureau" 80). Obviously, the medium of photography cannot depict this movement. However, in Griaule's photograph the heads of the women are cut off; so, the readers of the essay cannot see their facial expression during the trance. The images thus frustrate the Western reader's desire to observe authentic obsession in African culture. Leiris's explicatory text might also trigger the spectator's interest in seeing "primitivist" practices visualized in the images, such as the consumption of the sacrificial blood and meat. Leiris indicates that the drinking of blood is the moment within the ritual in which Seyfou Tchenger is present before leaving his representative Malkam Ayyahou, who will eat the bull's meat in his place: "[L]e grand zar n'est là qu'au moment où il s'agit de consommer le sang, cédant ensuite la place à un représentant qui mangera la viande (mélange cru des douze parties...)" '[T]he great zar is present only when it is time to consume the blood, then giving way to a representative who will eat the meat (raw mixture of twelve parts . . .)' However, the readers of

Minotaure cannot see Malkam Ayyahou drinking the bull's blood because her body is covered by one of the members' robes. It can even be assumed that the participants in the ritual deliberately resist the cameras' gaze to protect their practices from being observed and exposed to non-initiates. Curiously enough, in the same images neither can Malkam Ayyahou be detected, nor the bull, because members of the ritual block the camera lens's view of the animal lying on the ground (fig. 7, bottom). Griaule's panoptical method thus fails to render an "image totale" 'total image' (*Méthode* 82) of the zar-cult, as the crucial moments remain imperceptible in the ethnographic photographs.



TROISIÈME IMAGE : LUTTE POUR TRASSER LE TAUREAU. LE CHASSEUR KARAHOUN, TOMBIQUE D'ARSA JÉSONI, UNE CORÉE DE L'ARABAL DANS LE PLANC, LUI RENVERSE LA TÊTE.

Le zar se rencontre en Abyssinie, en Arabie, en Egypte, en Erythrée, à la Côte française des Somalis, au Soudan anglo-égyptien... On connaît par ailleurs le bori, en pays haoussa et jusqu'à Marrabechi, Tansa et Tripoli.

La Mission Dohar-Djibouti, qui a relevé l'existence de sectes très analogues sur divers points de son parcours, notamment au Soudan français (1), a étudié le zar à Gondar (Ethiopie septentrionale) et à la Côte française des Somalis.

(1) A Kita et à Djimako, la secte du éyéouou ou « tambour d'eau » ; à Mirat, celle du oïé boué ou « dalle des fous », différente de la précédente en ce qu'elle est une secte mixte, comprenant un nombre sensiblement équivalent d'hommes et de femmes.

Le texte qui suit n'est que le commentaire de douze images extraites des documents rassemblés par la Mission lors de son séjour à Gondar. La première est la reproduction d'un dessin aux encres de couleur exécuté par le chef d'église Enjo Babri (membre de la principale secte de zar de Gondar malgré sa qualité d'ecclésiastique) au verso du folio 10 du manuscrit 332 de la collection, série de portraits de zar qui lui avait été commandée. La deuxième est une photographie de Malkam Ayyahou, stalle qu'émissaire, chef de la secte dont j'ai parlé. Enjo Babri et qui fut notre principale informatrice sur cette question. Les dix autres sont des photographies prises par Marcel Oriante lors du sacrifice à Seyfou Tchenger, le 8 octobre 1932.

J'ai utilisé pour la rédaction de cet article mes propres notes et

QUATRIÈME IMAGE : LA TASSE DE SANG.



CINQUIÈME IMAGE : ASPERSION DE LA BLESSURE



Figure 7: The Bull Sacrifice. In Michel Leiris. "Le taureau de Seyfou Tchenger." *Minotaure*, no. 2, 1933, p. 76. (Photos: Marcel Griaule). Universitätsbibliothek Johann Christian Senckenberg, Frankfurt am Main.



SIXIÈME IMAGE : DU L'HORREUR EST NÉSE SUR LE SANG.

celles prises en ambryque par le létré abyssin Abba Jérôme, délégué par l'Empereur auprès de l'expédition pour l'aider dans ses recherches. Les notes prises par Abba Jérôme, soit au cours des expéditions auxquelles, grétes à lui, il nous a été possible d'accéder, constituent le manuscrit 236 (A, B, C, D) de la collection. J'ai fait de très larges emprunts à ces notes, traduites par Abba Jérôme et moi-même sur le terrain, en recourant à nos informateurs chaque fois que s'en faisait sentir le besoin.

Un tel article, nécessairement rapide, peut présenter tout au plus à vôtres certains aspects fondamentaux de la question.

*Première image. — Seyfou Tchenger, en tenue d'apparat, entouré de ses gardes nobles ou courtisans. Il porte la croix sur le front, tient son épée hors de son fourreau d'or. Selon Malham Ayyalou son « cheval » c'est à dire la femme qui est possédée par lui, il est le chef de tous les zar. Lorsqu'il descend sur quelque'un, que ce quelque'un entre en transe et que, parlant par la bouche de celui qu'il possède, Seyfou fait le *frabbon*, c'est à dire récite son thème de guerre, comme un soldat ou un chasseur qui se présente en se vantant de ses victoires, il dit d'abord : « Au nom du Père, du Fils et du Saint-Esprit. Dieu unique », puis :*

*Garde des quarante
Organisateur des quarante
Qui Messa mille
Qui fait blesser mille
Qui fouette mille
Qui fait sauter mille
Seyfou Tchenger
Armateur du loi des awella (1)*

ou encore :

*Qui pérore dans la mer
Qui met le djinn en adresse
Seyfi Djinnou Djinnou
Qui ne rentre pas sans avoir tué
Le bouffe et le donkoulu (2)
Taux d'ail d'ombre (1)
Organisateur des zar.*

(1) Grand zar ou grand illuminé.
(2) Sorte d'austrolo.
(3) Variété de univavils spiritus.

Il peut dire également :

*Profanateur de prêtres
Profanateur d'amiel*

et :

*Gouérisseur de morts
Comme le Crétéen.*

Seyfou Tchenger est le plus grand de tous les zar. Il commande directement aux « quarante », qui consistent ce qu'on appelle la « maison droite », indirectement aux « quatre-vingt-dix-huit », qui sont la « maison gauche ». Il est le grand ennemi des *djinn* ou démons de l'air ; c'est pourquoi on l'appelle « le seigneur de mer » et tueur de djinns ». Lorsque, après avoir étudié quatorze ans à Jérusalem, il revint chez sa mère Womer, près du lac Tana, il délivra sa sœur Rahiido, génie de la peste et du choléra, qu'un djinn avait enlevée et emportée dans la « mer » du Ni-Blass. Disant : « Au nom du Père... » il tua le djinn avec son arc. En même temps que Rahiido il délivra les cinq enfants que celle-ci avait eus avec le djinn. Ces cinq enfants nés dans la mer sont de la maison gauche.

Seyfou est un bon chactien. C'est de Dieu qu'il tient son pouvoir de « casser » avant de les livrer aux autres zar ceux qu'il veut rendre malades parce qu'ils se sont mal conduits ou indignement se zar, ceux encore qu'il veut posséder lui-même (ou faire posséder par l'un des siens) afin de les soustraire aux mauvais esprits. Revenant de Jérusalem où il avait appris à dire la messe selon le rite des Amhara, il était indécis, ne sachant comment s'y prendre pour exercer son sacerdoce de chef des zar, étant entendu qu'il ne pouvait pas faire le chant et la danse religieuse, qui font partie du rite chrétien. Son frère Seyf Keder et lui allèrent consulter le grand saint Abba et ce dernier conseilla, comme moyen d'amadouer les zar, la *wadafia*,

SEPTIÈME IMAGE : ON DÉCÈRE LE TAUREAU.

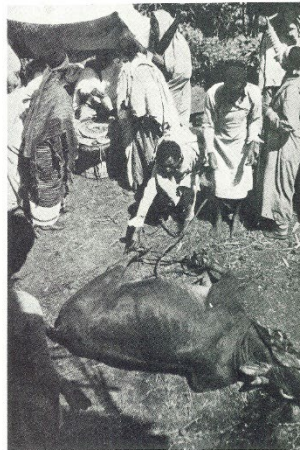


Figure 8: The Bull Sacrifice. In Michel Leiris. "Le taureau de Seyfou Tchenger." *Minotaure*, no. 2, 1933, p. 77. (Photos: Marcel Griaule). Universitätsbibliothek Johann Christian Senckenberg, Frankfurt am Main.

Albers notes that, while Griaule's photographs often correspond to "dem stereotypen Imaginären des Primitivismus" "the stereotypical imaginary of primitivism," for Leiris they were emblems of liminal experiences reflecting his own phobias, phantoms, and obsessions (*Diskrete Charme* 591). For this reason, with the description of each image Leiris stresses the fact that the *zar*-spirits are present. Regarding the coffee ceremony (fig. 9), he even emphasizes their observatory and controlling function, explaining that they carefully ensure that the liquid is served from the sacred bowl called *guenda*, that nobody touches the reeds on which the bowl is placed, and that the ground remains untouched by the participants so that the worms living on it will not be killed ("Taureau" 81).



Figure 9: Coffee Ceremony. Michel Leiris. "Le taureau de Seyfou Tchenger." *Minotaure*, no. 2, 1933, p. 81. (Photo: Marcel Griaule). Universitätsbibliothek Johann Christian Senckenberg, Frankfurt am Main.

Leiris's essay seems to interrogate the idea that ethnographic photography can "embody" the unseen spirits that are perfectly visible for the participants in the ritualistic bull sacrifice. Moreover, only the explicatory text is able to "visualize" them in the readers' minds as it draws their attention to the unseen spirits. Griaule's images thus depend on Leiris's text that, despite its descriptive and impersonal style, triggers the readers' imagination and makes them change their vision of the images as they try to detect what cannot be seen in the photographs. The way the text interacts with the images reveals the tension between transparency and opacity. Griaule's positivist claim that his panoptical method of photography would achieve the best possible transparency of ethnographic observation stands in contrast to Leiris's concept of documentation that renders the pictures poetically opaque and mysterious by referring to the invisible phantoms populating them as well as by frustrating the desire of *Minotaure's* readers to become witnesses of "primitivist" possession.

Leiris's own obsession with being "overflowed" by magic and leaving his rational point of view of the western observer behind crystallizes in the bull. Considering the photographic sequence as a whole, it becomes clear that instead of transparently demonstrating and providing evidence about the ritual, Leiris chose the images in which the camera circles ostentatiously around the powerful animal, as if drawing the spectators into the labyrinth of the Minotaur (fig. 7 and 8). Within the surrealist vision of the journal, the human-animal being of the Minotaur stands for the unconscious forces of creativity, the "TOUTE-PUISSANCE DU DÉSIR" 'the omnipotence of desire' (Skira et al. "Éternité"), as the last issue's editorial states. From a transcultural perspective, Leiris conjures the ancient Greek myth of the Minotaur and reformulates it through the north

Ethiopian possession cult. He seems to particularly project his idea of the inspiration deriving from the animal blood onto the image that exposes the bull's wound (fig. 8, top). Keeping in mind his own consumption of the sacrificial rooster's blood and its roasted liver that Malkam Ayyahou prepared for him (*Phantom Africa* 602-03), it seems that the act of absorbing — of literally “taking in” the animalistic forces — makes him believe that he can step out of himself, leave his self-control behind and be driven by the unconscious.¹⁸ Yet, as the possession ritual by the members of the *zar*-cult shows, the bull sacrifice not only discharges the uncontrollable forces of the unconscious, it also makes them compliant.

This becomes evident in the image that represents Malkam Ayyahou wearing the bull's diaphragm as a sign of an achieved unity with the animal and with her spirits of possession. Regarding the layout, the photograph representing the coronation ritual is placed on the center of the page with the text set around it (fig. 10). However, through the profile perspective, the *mora* completely hides Malkam Ayyahou's head, so again, any facial expression revealing her possession remains hidden from the spectators. In this image, the healer embodies the human animal of the Ethiopian Minotaur by wearing the *mora* (the bull's diaphragm), which simultaneously refers to her possession by as well as her appeasing of uncontrollable spirits. Her image conveys Leiris's own ambiguity and his poetics of writing between the loss and regulation of self-control.¹⁹ At the same time, Leiris's “documentation” of the Ethiopian bull sacrifice resonates with *Minotaure's* surrealist vision, as it raises the question of whether the reality of possession can in any way be rendered without the intervention of the imagination. Thus, his essay is permeated by *Minotaure's* founding myth as well as its later surrealist credo of making its readers see “the latent content” of the unconscious hidden underneath any manifestation (Skira et al. “À nos lecteurs”).

¹⁸ After the ritual Leiris muses: “Resté sur le banquet je me sens très séparé, très saint, très élu. Je pense à ma première communion: si elle avait été aussi grave que cela, peut-être serais-je resté croyant; mais la vraie religion ne commence qu'avec le sang” (“*Afrique fantôme*” 751) ‘Left on the bench I feel very isolated, very saintly, very elect. I think of my first communion: if it had been as serious as this, I might have remained a believer; but true religion only begins with blood’ (*Phantom Africa* 603).

¹⁹ This interrogation anticipates his poetological concept of *tauromachy* from 1946, in which the Spanish bullfight symbolizes the limitations of self-writing. Leiris is particularly fascinated by the contrast between the “savage” ritual of killing on the one hand and the majestic appearance and the “strict ceremonial form of the corrida” on the other, as Albers points out (*Diskrete Charme* 646). In his 1958 essay “La possession et ses aspects théâtraux . . .” he continued reflecting the ambiguity between indomitability and regulation by approaching the “dressage” of the *zar*-spirits through the sacrificial performance as a means of calling them back to order (958-77).

phragme qui lui pend dans le dos. Près d'elle et regardant le photographe, la femme d'Enqa Bahri, que son état de grossesse avancée n'a pas empêchée, la nuit dernière, de faire violemment le gouzz.

Un peu plus tard on revêtira Malkam Ayyahou d'une sorte de polterme formée de l'estomac bien lavé et séché de la vicine, attaché devant par une épingle de sûreté.

Lors du sacrifice d'une laetité blanche à Rahiéb, voyant Malkam Ayyahou vers la fin de la journée ôter le coucou formé par le diaphragme et l'intestin enroulé de la vicine et l'accrocher à une patère, Enqa Bahri disait : « C'est lourd comme la cozzanne... » Et en « elle », le jour où il repart le sang, le zar est comme un roi. Il en sera ainsi pendant sept jours, que le zar soit présent personnellement, détendu sur la possédée, ou qu'il agisse sur elle par tel ou tel représentant.

Durant toute cette semaine on festoiera. Il y aura des trances, des ehans, des amusements, tels que procès burlesques à propos d'interdits qui ont été violés ou comédies où l'on se moque du clergé et des rites religieux. Parlant la langue des zar, les adeptes emploieront des mots déformés ou des expressions qu'il faut entendre contresens, tels : « C'est un sor-pain dire : « C'est vrai » et, pour dire « Je non », ce même mot déformé de telle sorte qu'il veuille dire : « Nous sommes devenus fins ». Elles tutoient ou féminin les non-possédés, hommes ou femmes.

Au matin du troisième jour, l'herbe du *das* sera embovée par les esclaves, enveloppée dans une peau de bœuf, portée au dehors et jetée dans un buisson (12). Sous le *das* on brûlera de l'encens. Puis on se rendra en procession. Malkam Ayyahou en tête, dans une case d'habitation. Portant des trois jours passé sur les roseaux, l'entay — adepte qui m'a toujours fait penser à une vieille fille de patronage — dira alors : « Nous avons été trois ans

en brousse, nous allons maintenant rentrer à la maison » (13).

Un gâteau sculpté à base de céréales consacré au zar (pèreux Azaj Doulo, qui habite les centres du foyer et est dit « le balayer du sang », sera partagé entre tous par les sons d'Azaj lui-même descendu sur Malkam Ayyahou.

Le gâteau est servi dans une cuvette de bois qu'on pose devant Malkam Ayyahou, sur trois pierres qui représentent les pierres du foyer. Il est de forme sensiblement tétraplèrique, saumuré d'un



DERNIÈRE IMAGE : MALKAM AYYAHOU VÊTUANT.

« le gâteau est préparé avec trois boulettes, représentant trois pierres, où que la coupole ne touche pas terre. Trois autres boulettes sont sur le gâteau pour représenter les trois taudis de chevous de Changit et les entrées de la lipre d'Azaj, pas encore éclatées ». Selon Kima-waviki la boulette « romme » représente la poterie qui surmonte le faite de la maison.

Malkam Ayyahou gardera pour elle la coupole et préparera avec la masse du gâteau des boules qu'elle distribuera aux assistants. On se passera aussi un godolet de *banbarié*, bouteille de bière d'orge pas encore fermentée. Les restes du gâteau seront donnés aux gens du dehors par les adeptes.

Ce rituel accompli, Malkam Ayyahou demande aux adeptes et aux assistants :

« C'est votre droit. Avez-vous reçu ? — Nous avons reçu. Est-ce que vous avez reçu la part des quarante ?

« Nous sommes reçus. » « Que sa gate et sa malchie s'en aillent dehors ! » ajoute quelque'un.

Au matin du septième jour, après sept nuits passées pour la plus grande partie en wadajé, l'herbe qui jonchait le sol de la case sera à son tour balayée et l'on se séparera.

(12) De même que dans le sacrifice on dispose un jerr en potier noir dans un trou pour que la possédée pense qu'elle pourra y aller de se farder sans déshonneur de votre maladie ou la contractant elle-même.

(13) « Il y a des déceptions et des lies dont nous tirons les manades. L'awalia et le *da d'Azaj*, jure-épouse sont habités par le bul, il est sans avec les bêtes de la brousse » (Malkam Ayyahou).

Figure 10: The Crowning Ceremony: Malkam Ayyahou Wearing the Bull's Diaphragm. *Minotaure* 2 (1933), p. 82. (Photo: Marcel Griaule).
Universitätsbibliothek Johann Christian Senckenberg, Frankfurt am Main.

Concluding remarks

Leiris's "ethnographic surrealism" engages with the limitations of an objective representation of non-Western cultures, particularly with regard to the discrepancy in the text-image relationship: His essay especially approaches what remains unrecognizable on the photographs, either because it is invisible as the zar-spirit or because the participants hide decisive moments in the ritual from the camera's gaze, as Malkam Ayyahou's drinking of the bull's blood. Although, according to Griaule's methodology, the images' aim is to be transparent, they resist appropriation by a western readership. Leiris's account seems to continuously alert us of the imaginative capacity involved in writing and reading

African cultures from a Western perspective, and finally in observing them. Even if his ethnographic writing in the Dakar-Djibouti issue notably relies on an objective documentary style (in contrast to the subjectivity of *L'Afrique fantôme*), in conjunction with the images it triggers the readers'/spectators' "primitivist" desire to detect the invisible and hidden appearances on the images. Thus, "Seyfou Tchenguier's Bull" participates in the "revealing-concealing" gaze (Janis 583) as it is practiced and propagated in *Minotaure's* intermedia contributions.

As part of the Dakar-Djibouti issue and its claim to objectivity, Leiris's essay oscillates between surrealist opacity and ethnographic transparency. This is what turns the writer into a critic of Griaule's "panoptical" method and the latter's ambition to attain a maximum of documentation — and a "complete" image — of the possession ritual practiced by the *zar*-adepts of Gondar. Regarding Leiris's use of Griaule's photographs, it seems that he has explicitly chosen concealing instead of revealing examples that resist a transparent representation of possession. The question remains whether Leiris's transgressive approach to ethnographic "documentation" by living experience — that also implies problematic moments of exoticist desire and the idealization of the other — has brought him any closer to understanding the reality of the Ethiopian possession cult. His dilemma, as expressed through his self-reflexive writing in *L'Afrique fantôme*, consists in his ongoing conflict between the willingness to believe in the (sur)reality of the *zar*-spirits and his frustrated attempts to experience "authentic" possession beyond his own imagination. Considering his disillusionment with the combat against his own phantoms (Leiris, *Brisées* 54), Griaule's photographs mirror Leiris's own obsession and his conflicting position as ethnographer and surrealist writer, for which the Ethiopian Minotaur becomes a powerful symbol.

As a reflection on his poetics, the bull sacrifice — especially the mythic idea of taking in the bull's blood — expresses Leiris's desire to unleash the affective forces of the unconscious and at the same time obtain control over them. The animal-human appearance of Malkam Ayyahou, who is crowned with the bull's diaphragm at the end of the ceremony while her face remains hidden to the spectators, is a key image for Leiris, as it reflects the ambiguity of his "ethnographic surrealism," which is divided between his eagerness to represent the cultural reality of ritualistic possession beyond fantasist and exoticist outgrowths, and his concession that any method of documentation is affected by the invisible and invincible phantoms of the imagination. In the framework of *Minotaure's* interdisciplinary approach to ethnography and poetry, Leiris's ambiguous perspective on the bull sacrifice is as resistant to Griaule's objective claim as it is to Breton's concept of a surrealist vision, "[l]'œil existe à l'état sauvage" '[t]he eye exists in its savage stage' (*"Surréalisme"* 349; *Surrealism* 1). Evoking the antique myth of the Minotaur in the transcultural setting of the Ethiopian bull sacrifice, Leiris reflects on the limits and the potential of approaching ritualistic possession through a surrealist vision that perceives reality through opacity and the imagination.

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