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## Éric de Dampierre: Social Scientist and Discreet Builder of French Ethnology

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POUR CITER CET ARTICLE

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I first met Éric de Dampierre in 1981. I was a Peace Corps volunteer stationed in Bangassou, Central African Republic, with a BA in anthropology and in linguistics under my belt. During my second year, as I dabbled in local languages and stories, I was told of a tall Frenchman who lived in the bush, spoke Nzakara like an elder, and knew all about Nzakara history. I rode my bike to a house a few kilometers north of town at the end of a dirt track and there indeed found "Monsieur Dam Pierre," as he was known locally. Before my third year in the Peace Corps began, I was enrolled at the University of Paris X-Nanterre to pursue graduate studies in ethnology under his supervision.

Dampierre had been carrying out fieldwork since the mid-1950s in Bangassou, the center of a former Nzakara kingdom. The Nzakara are close cousins of the Zande, [1] made famous by E.E. Evans-Pritchard. The groups are similar enough that they can be considered a single society, especially with regard to worldview, modes of thought, and art. In fact, the Nzakara were referred to as the Western Zande by Evans-Pritchard and early explorers. [2]

In this personal perspective of Dampierre, I focus on his fieldwork and theoretical contributions, especially since, to my knowledge, his work has never been translated and many provisional papers—in particular, 38 numbered *Notes de recherche*—have never been published. I include only a brief biographical sketch and an overview of his teaching and publishing activities, as, thankfully, others have published their own accounts of

Dampierre's life's work, in particular Lautman et al. (1998) on his role as journal editor, Chemillier (1998) on his contributions to ethnomusicology, and Blanchy and Mouton (2022) on his role in founding the Department of Ethnology and *Laboratoire d'ethnologie et de sociologie comparative* at the University of Paris – Nanterre. I should also mention two previous publications of my own (Buckner 1998, 2010) from which some material has been adapted for the present article.

Like the Nzakara poets he so respected who sang for “good listeners,” Dampierre wrote for good readers. His dense, elegant writing requires effort to interpret. He expected readers to be “serious.” They must work—even deserve—to understand. He made references to ancient, often obscure philosophers (in the broad sense) and included citations in assorted languages, never interpreting, “unpacking,” or translating. [3] In this sense, the translations and explications I include here—and all the citations in English are my translations—could be viewed as sacrilegious. Nevertheless, I have chosen here to translate and paraphrase his writing, believing that, in this case, the ends justify the means. [4] Moreover, rather than trying to match the elegance of Dampierre's French—something I could never do—I have opted for directness and transparency. Interested (“serious”) readers are encouraged to consult his original works (listed under References) for the full power of his ideas and writing.

## Biography

Éric de Dampierre was born on July 4, 1928, of a Belgian mother and French father and after an elder sister. Remarkably, [5] he passed his high school baccalaureate at age 16, received his *licence ès lettres* (the equivalent of an American Bachelor of Arts) at 18, a *licence en droit* (law) a year later, and, at age 20 (in 1948), a diploma in political science from the *Institut d'études politiques*, where Raymond Aron, his principal mentor, was teaching. [6] After his obligatory military service in the air force (1948–1949), first in Casablanca, then in Villacoublay (France), he took an adjunct position (*vacataire*) at the *Centre d'études sociologiques* in Paris (1949–1950).

He then spent two very influential years (1950–1952) as an exchange fellow at the University of Chicago, where he was a member of the Committee on Social Thought, and where he rubbed shoulders with the likes of Leo Strauss, Friedrich Hayek, Robert Redfield, and John Nef. In Chicago he experienced firsthand the American divisions of social sciences, so different from those in France. Back in Paris, he was admitted to the *Centre d'études sociologiques* as a researcher until 1959.

In 1954, Dampierre and a colleague were invited by the ORSTOM (*Office de la Recherche Scientifique et Technique d'Outre-Mer*) to carry out a six-month mission to Bangassou (see below), which launched the long-lived *Mission sociologique du Haut-Oubangui*, or MSHO (Sociological Mission to the Upper Ubangi). Over the next 22 years, Dampierre spent periods of up to three months almost every year there (1954–1955, 1957–1958, annually from 1964 to 1987 except for three “seasons”).

Still a researcher at the *Centre d'études sociologiques*, he spent a year (1959–1960) at UNESCO in Paris as head of the Division of Human Rights and Anti-Racism. Over the next several years, he taught at several institutions, including the *École pratique des Hautes Études*, the *Institut d'études politiques*, and the *École polytechnique*, all in Paris. In 1966, he found a permanent home at the University of Paris X-Nanterre, even before he received his state doctorate (*doctorat d'état*), which he defended in 1968. [7] At Nanterre, he taught sociology and ethnology and served as department head (1967–1978) for the newly established Department of Ethnology, and later also headed the doctoral program. Also in 1967, he founded the *Laboratoire d'ethnologie et de sociologie comparative* (LESC) and was its director until 1980. By establishing simultaneously an academic department and a research laboratory, he conjoined teaching and research in a way that was new in France and that continues to this day: department instructors are members of the LESC, and researchers in the LESC teach classes and supervise graduate students, and graduate students are, for the most part, also members of the LESC.

After retirement, and though ill with cancer, he continued to write, publish, [8] and supervise doctoral students. Count Éric de Dampierre died on March 9, 1998, his remains interred in the Père Lachaise cemetery.

## Early Scholarship (pre-CAR)

Dampierre was an eclectic [9] and prolific reader. He read in several languages besides French, including English, German, Italian, Latin, and Greek. He was also a master translator, especially from English (Edward Shils, Leo Strauss, Lord Byron), German (Max Weber, Hegel), Greek, [10] and Nzakara.

He published his first article, “*Sociométrie. Note étymologique*,” in 1948 (at 19 or 20 years of age) in *Échanges sociologiques*, a short-lived journal he co-founded. Though a Dr. Moreno claimed to have coined the word “sociometry” in 1943 (Moreno 1943), Dampierre traced it to an Austrian, F. X. de Neumann-Spallart, who used the term during a session of the International Institute of Statistics in Rome in 1887. Dampierre then also cited August Chirac, who said he had invented the word first and who developed his ideas in a published article (Chirac 1897). This paper presaged Dampierre’s extremely conscientious use of terms as well as his meticulous care in finding and critiquing sources. As Pierre Smith (1968:1209) commented in his review of *Un ancien royaume bandia*, “What distinguishes this work from most others of its kind and quality, however, is the unusual care and scrupulous accuracy displayed throughout. [...] the book begins with nearly a hundred pages devoted to a critical study of sources.”

In the same year, 1948, Dampierre published an article in *La Révolution prolétarienne* titled *Juin 1848 : de l'enthousiasme à la déception et au massacre* (“June 1848: From enthusiasm to deception and massacres”). He also carried out research (unpublished) on “The formation of worker elites and the rejection of advancement” (*La formation des élites ouvrières et le refus de parvenir*).

These early works reveal his distinct awareness of and interest in social relations and class differences, which remained constant in his life.

In 1949, he wrote the report for an interdisciplinary study of a French commune in the Paris suburbs, an exemplar of what would later be called “community studies.” [11] The idea for the study originated at a 1948 conference at the Royaumont Abbey on the comparative method in social sciences. The report describes “Malvire-sur-Desle” (a fictional name [12]) in all its social, economic, and political complexity, and shows how the various factions in the community interacted—or did not. As Dampierre (1956:70) stated, the study was concerned with “grasping the global fact that is a village, in the reciprocity of perspectives that links elementary groups and global society,” a study of “social tensions.”

Another early, albeit unpublished, manuscript, dated September 1951, *Sur deux différents types d'hérétiques* (“On two different kinds of heretics”), explored the difference between dogmatic and scientific thinking. Here is an abbreviated excerpt:

In dogmatic thinking, truth is already there at the start, before it is discovered by man. It could be a revelation from God, ... a rational essence, ... or the meaning of history. In all these cases, man needs the key to the treasure; it is either given to him, or he must find it, or he must make it. In scientific thinking, there is no dogma. To continue with the metaphor, man must seek not the key to the treasure, but the treasure itself, though it never appears to him immediately. He constructs it himself, by abstracting it from reality and mentally organizing it. That is scientific theory. While dogma is the truth that is given to me, science is the truth that I verify, and thus that I create. ... Dogma is by its very essence unchangeable, perfect, and finite... The dogmatic heretic is burned at the stake. ... Science is, on the contrary, imperfect, cumulative, and infinite. The scientist does not seek to translate reality, he abstracts it to master it. ... He invents concepts, and the richer his imagination, the stronger his power of abstraction, the better his theory. ... The scientific heretic inaugurates new theory. ... The heretic of yesterday is the doctor of tomorrow.

Thus, Dampierre, at twenty-one years of age, was already contemplating the difference between a traditional—dogmatic—world view and scientific thinking, a theme he never left. Moreover, his translation, a decade later, of Hegel’s “Who Thinks Abstractly?” (Dampierre 1963) conveys the importance he placed on the idea of abstract thought.

While in Chicago, Dampierre (aged 22–23 years) was invited by Robert Redford to write a “*Note sur ‘culture’ et ‘civilisation’*” for the Committee on Social Thought (Dampierre 1968 [1951]). In this “note” (18 pages, in French), he argued that “the birth of social sciences is happening before our very eyes” and was made difficult by the lack of vocabulary to translate well-defined concepts; scientists need to agree on the meaning of words in order to use them as tools. [13] He showed himself to be a historian of words and concepts as he traced the uses and iterations of “culture” and “civilization” and their affines in Greek, Latin, German, English, and, of course, French through the centuries, proof of his deep familiarity with

modern and ancient texts in these (and other) languages. He underscored the significance of the pluralizing of these words and the new meanings this entailed. He pointed to the danger of assuming that social scientists use these words and their (often false) cognates in the same way across languages. As a case in point, the French “*civilization*” is used as English “culture,” as in “*la civilization Touareg*” or “Tuareg culture,” whereas the English “civilization” is the top stage of a universal developmental pyramid of human progress. And yet... his concluding sentence states that, in the final analysis, it is the concept of *affinité*, rather than “culture” and “civilization,” that remains to be determined. In other words, we have yet to define what holds groups together: the values, the feeling of belonging, the rules and behaviors they share. His long career would seek to do just that.

A meticulous writer, Dampierre had great respect for words and their meanings and nuances, as well as an interest in how individual languages—whether French, German, Greek, or Nzakara—categorize their respective realities. He also appreciated word play, [14] and was always searching for *le mot juste*. He was constantly revising; only when he considered a book or article as perfect as it could be would he submit it for publication. He practiced what Nancy Gibbs, TIME editor-in-chief, preached: “Every paragraph must earn its sentences, every sentence its words,” with nary a superfluous word.

## Editor and Publisher

In addition to teaching, fieldwork, and writing, Dampierre worked tirelessly to further the dissemination of important research in social sciences. As he mentioned in “*Note sur ‘culture’ et ‘civilisation’*” (discussed above), he realized he was participating in the development of social sciences in France; indeed, he was spurring it on.

In 1952, just back from Chicago, he created and edited a book series on “Research in human sciences” with Plon publishers (Paris) with the particular goal of translating important foreign sociologists, philosophers, political scientists, and linguists into French. By the time of his death, 35 works had appeared, including, in addition to works by French sociologists (e.g., Raymond Aron and Raymond Boudon), philosophers (e.g., Eugène Fleischman and Eric Weil) and ethnologists (e.g., Marguerite Dupire and Denise Paulme), the first French translations of Max Weber, Leo Strauss (both co-translated by Dampierre), Friedrich Hayek, Karl Popper, and Talcott Parsons.

In 1960, he cofounded the journal *European Archives in Sociology* (with Raymond Aron, Ralf Dahrendorf, and Thomas Bottomore), oversaw its publication until 1984, and remained an active member of the editorial board until his death. Thirty-nine trilingual (English, French, and German) volumes were published between 1960 and 1998. The editorial committee broke its rule of not publishing obituaries by writing one for Dampierre. “It was thanks to his rejection of disciplinary boundaries, his extensive reading, his personal intellectual network, and also, sometimes, his talent for persuasion that the Archives were able to publish so many scholarly articles that were unexpected outside of specialized journals, or that were

unconventional and provocative” (Lautman et al, 1998:3, my translation). The journal is still going strong.

In 1961, he cofounded, with Michel Leiris, Gilbert Rouget, and Claude Tardits, the *Association des Classiques africains*, with the aim of publishing African “oral literature” in the original language with French translation. Starting with his own *Poètes nzakara*, 35 bilingual volumes have appeared to date in the *Classiques africains* series.

As head of the *Laboratoire d’ethnologie et de sociologie comparative* (LESC), Dampierre also oversaw its publishing activities. In 1988, these were transferred to the *Société d’ethnologie* (<https://societe-ethnologie.fr/>), which he founded with funds bequeathed by friend and colleague, philosopher Eugene Fleischman (who taught a doctoral seminar in the department) to provide scholarships, hold an annual conference, and publish works in ethnology. There are now ten series published by the *Société*; Dampierre was responsible for the series *Recherches oubanguiennes*.

In all these enterprises, Dampierre oversaw not just the content but also the aesthetics of publishing, including fonts, layouts, margins, spacing, sketches, etc. Many exquisite drawings were created by Marc Chevy, who worked in the publishing wing of the Laboratory and for the *Société d’ethnologie*. Books published under Dampierre’s direction were things of not only intellectual but also material beauty. [15]

## Non-Anthropologist

Dampierre was a sociologist, ethnologist, ethnographer, philosopher, political scientist, historian, linguist, and ethnomusicologist, but certainly not an anthropologist.

Unlike anthropology, from the Greek *anthropo*, whose object of study is humans, ethnology, from the Greek *ethnos*, is the study of *ethnies*. Ethnology has a long history in France. Sociologist Marcel Mauss and philosopher Lévy-Bruhl created the *Institut d’Ethnologie* in 1925 (MacDonald 2008:620) to include “primitive tribes” in their theories and analyses of society and mind. Over the next fifteen years or so (until the start of WWII), the *Institut* launched a wave of ethnographic expeditions to sub-Saharan Africa headed by such ethnologists as Marcel Griaule, Michel Leiris, Éric Lutten, Solange de Ganay, Germaine Dieterlen, Denise Paulme, and André Shaeffner, among others [16]. Ethnology began in France, then, as a comparative branch of sociology. “For all these theoreticians [Émile Durkheim, Célestin Bouglé, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, and especially Marcel Mauss] ..., ethnology, a comparative discipline *par excellence*, is actually a branch of sociology” (Larousse, my translation).

Ethnology is holistic in that it encompasses all the (non-physical) “anthropologies” (social, cultural, linguistic, political, economic, psychological, medical, etc.) for a given group. Its cornerstone is long-term fieldwork that includes learning the language(s) and developing personal relationships. Ethnologists strive to discover what holds groups together, to find manifestations of shared thoughtways, to analyze rules for interaction, and to understand



how they adapt to historical and environmental circumstances.

Social (as opposed to physical) anthropology arrived in France when Claude Lévi-Strauss (trained in philosophy) became chair of social anthropology at the Collège de France in 1959 and founded the *Laboratoire d'anthropologie sociale* the following year. He (re-)defined ethnography as data collection, ethnology as synthesizing that data, and anthropology as the comparative, theoretical work that produces new generalizable knowledge about humans (see Bonte and Izard 1961 and MacDonald 2008). The goal of the new French social anthropology under Lévi-Strauss was to find universals in human thought and behavior by comparing ethnographic data—especially myths and rituals—from around the world. As the British and American models of social and cultural anthropology, respectively, influenced French institutions of higher learning, the divide between anthropology and ethnology disappeared for some (the terms are often used interchangeably) but widened for others. As MacDonald (2008:620) so astutely chronicled, Lévi-Strauss' tripartite division of labor had some almost comic consequences. It became chic to call oneself an anthropologist, and “all sorts of academics who had spent any time at all among a tribal group declared themselves specialists of the anthropology of this or that.” [17]

Lévi-Strauss' definition, which demoted ethnology to the handmaiden of (social) anthropology, never caught on with Dampierre or, until recently, at Nanterre. As Olivier Herrenschmidt (2010:9) said so eloquently,

I continue ... to refuse to be an anthropologist... I am an ethnographer-ethnologist, who does comparative sociology... I totally embrace my Nanterrois identity, the name of the department [ethnology] and that of the laboratory [ethnology and comparative sociology], into which Éric de Dampierre welcomed me in 1968. I never asked him, unfortunately, but I've always been convinced that for him the name [of the laboratory] was redundant: true sociology is comparative, and true sociology is ethnology. I remember that, institutionally, he always preferred to remain a sociologist (my translation).

Indeed, on the back cover of *Une esthétique perdue*, published in 1995, Dampierre is (self-)described as a sociologist.

Dampierre once told a colleague of mine that medical anthropology is good only for nurses (personal communication; see also Blanchy and Mouton 2022). He did not explain why, but his reason would have been that such a subdiscipline would mean abstracting healing and medicine from everything else, as an analytical construct in and of itself, which would render it useless in sociology and ethnology. Dampierre's comment on a doctoral thesis from an American anthropology department that used the Zande to propose a model for human interaction is telling; he asked, “What did we learn about the Zande?” If the answer were “nothing,” the work would be in vain.



## Fieldwork

### Context

In 1954, Dampierre and a sociologist colleague were invited by the ORSTOM to investigate the low birth rate among the Nzakara in the Mbomou province of eastern Ubangi-Chari, now the Central African Republic. That first research mission did not suffice to solve the problem, so he invited the collaboration of physician, Dr. Anne Laurentin, who found the low birth rate was due not to collective suicide as had been suspected but to a high prevalence of venereal disease. (Dr. Laurentin returned to the field many times, not only to treat infertility [18] but also to carry out ethnographic studies of her own.) But right from the start, Dampierre (1967:11) “developed respect for the way this old Zande society worked and affection for its political warriors, its intrepid poets, its witches, its noble diviners.” And so began the *Mission sociologique du Haut-Oubangui* (Sociological mission to the Upper Ubangi), or MSHO, and Dampierre’s almost annual visits to Bangassou, a former Nzakara kingdom. In fact, the MSHO maintained a post office box—number 98—at the Bangassou post office at least until the mid 1990s.

Dampierre converted the home of a former colonial administrator, Godeste, on the outskirts of Bangassou into a research station. It consisted of a two-room, thatched-roof, stone house with a small annex for washing up; one room served as library and workspace, the other as sleeping quarters. Across a small clearing was a circular *paillote*, half walled-in guestroom, half outdoor dining area. He more-or-less adopted an extended Nzakara family to help run the research station, including a housekeeper, a cook, and a driver-mechanic. Each year, he would stop at their village on the way to Bangassou, load them all into his Land Rover, and drive them to Godeste (as the research station was called locally), where they would settle themselves for the season. A local man served as year-round groundskeeper.

The station became Dampierre’s second home. He invited researchers from anthropology and other disciplines—botanists, geologists, musicologists, linguists—to Godeste, as well as Nzakara elders, particularly poets. From this home base, he traveled the length and breadth of Nzakaraland, also making excursions into Zandeland, going at least as far east as Mboki.

### Principles

In the field, nothing was insignificant; everything and everyone was related to everything and everyone. He built working theories based on small details observed in daily life. Rather than formal interviews, he favored observing spontaneous speech and behavior. He paid attention to how people expressed themselves, and what people did NOT say as well as what they DID say. He was interested in everything, noticed everything: how fingers were placed on harp strings, how roof poles were distributed, the behavior of children. No person, practice, or phrase was irrelevant; he talked with everyone: nobles and commoners, old and young, women and men.

Though he admired Evans-Pritchard, he lamented the latter’s inability to include women in

his fieldwork. Indeed, Evans-Pritchard talked with only half the Zande population—he left out the women. As he explained, that was the condition of doing fieldwork among the Zande, for the men, hypersensitive to adultery, would not allow him to talk with women, especially privately, out of fear there would be fooling around. [19] Dampierre, on the contrary, made a point of including women in his research, of adopting their point of view.

Learning the language is paramount. Thanks to Dampierre’s knowledge of the local language, he could not only converse and hold discussions with the Nzakara, but also catch their unsolicited, spontaneous comments. In order to build a Nzakara glossary, Dampierre started transcribing and translating song-poems (*bia*), which are sung accompanied by the harp (see below). He was meticulous in his translations. In the MSHO archives are countless pages of letters exchanged with Robert Bangbanzi, who carried out the bulk of the transcriptions and translations for *Poètes nzakara*. A single tone could be the subject of a discussion several paragraphs long. [20] Nuances and alternate translations were considered at great length until a final translation was agreed upon. The Nzakara glossary he compiled, with over 3,000 entries, abounds with examples of usage and nuance drawn from the poems.

Long, repeated periods in the field were crucial. In his typical subtle way, Dampierre made this point through the epigraph he chose for *Des ennemis, des arabes, des histoires...* (1983:41): “We were so successful that at the end of two hours, the Pygmy was sketched, measured, feasted, showered with gifts, and submitted to a detailed interrogation” (Schweinfurth 1875:113). Good ethnographic research is a lifelong venture. He was skeptical of ethnographers who did not stay long in the field, did not learn the language well, and did not return regularly.

The core of Dampierre’s fieldwork was seeking underlying patterns, relationships, and rules, as the following three examples illustrate. First, in *Sons aînés, sons cadets: les sanza d’Ebézagui* (“Elder sounds, younger sounds: Ebézagui’s sanza”) (1982), Dampierre demonstrates the analogy between the *sanza* (“thumb piano”) and kinship. The six lamellas, or keys, on the left side (the younger lineage) are a step lower than the six corresponding keys on the right side (the elder lineage). Each lamella has a name: the fathers (one for each lineage), the wives/mothers (three on each side), including the favorite, the head wife, the ‘big wife’ who works for the head wife, and two lesser wives; then four children, in birth order. The bridge (*chevalet*) is called “the mother-in-law carrying children,” while the pressure bar (*barrette*) is called “guardian of the ancestor shrines” (see Figure 1).

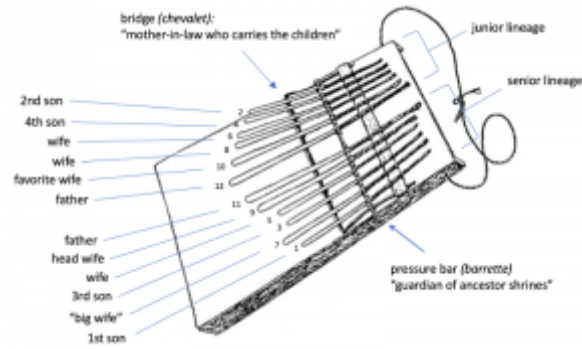


Figure 1.

Sanza with labeled parts.

Drawing adapted from Marc Chevy's sketch in  
Dampierre 1982.

According to sanza player Ebezagui, the lamellas are mounted and tuned—highest to lowest—in the following order:

1. eldest son (senior lineage)
2. second son (junior lineage)
3. third son (senior lineage)
4. fourth son (junior lineage)
5. wife
6. wife
7. “big wife”
8. wife
9. favorite wife
10. head wife
11. father (senior lineage)
12. father (junior lineage)

Ethnomusicologist Gilbert Rouget (1982) studied the intervals and found that lamella number 7, the “big wife,” she who always does whatever she likes, also sticks out musically, is asymmetrical. Kinship ranking is reflected in the tones of the sanza.

Similarly, in *Le jeu nzakara de la guerre* (“The Nzakara game of war”) *Note de recherche* 1, [21] (1974, published posthumously in 2014), he argued that *kisoro*, a Zande and Nzakara board game parallels Zande/Nzakara warfare. The game board consists of four rows of eight holes; each adversary has two rows and thirty-two “men.” The two opponents play at the same time, each moving his men independently of the other’s movements. By analyzing the vocabulary and the strategies of the game, Dampierre deduces a series of strategies and tactics used by Zande/Nzakara armies. These include: (1) At the start of a battle, neither side is handicapped; each side has an equal chance of winning. A battle involves parallel maneuvers that are not dependent on each other’s movements. (2) Initially, the adversaries do not take into account each other’s actions and each begins moving without calculating their opponent’s movements. (3) Since raids are organized on an opponent’s territory, a raid is followed by

immediate retreat. (4) Capturing enemy forces is the only way to strengthen one's own power, and must happen at both the enemy's front and rear. (5) Captured warriors are immediately incorporated into the winning army. (6) Reinforcing your front means exposing yourself to the enemy; but leaving your front exposed means you cannot capture enemy warriors; this contradiction imposes a war of movement. Thus, paying attention to a recreational board game offered insight into war strategy (though the Nzakara and Zande haven't carried out battles since the early 1900s).

Finally, on one of my visits to Godeste, Dampierre and I were eating lunch under the *paillote* when an old woman, the grandmother of the family installed at Godeste, appeared at the edge of the clearing, walking slowly with her cane. A toddler cried from behind the *paillote*, "Grandmother, oh!" and started running towards her as fast as her small legs could carry her. Upon reaching the center of the clearing, though, she stopped and waited while her grandmother continued to advance slowly from the opposite edge of the clearing. When her grandmother finally reached her, the child gently took her hand and the two continued across the clearing to the kitchen where the family waited. After we had watched the scene in silence, Dampierre said to me, "You see? The little girl, who can barely talk, has already internalized the rules of her society. She knew to stop exactly halfway across the clearing and wait for her grandmother to cross the other half by herself."

For Dampierre, research for research's sake was not enough. A researcher has a responsibility to the people he or she studies. Dampierre's Land Rover served as taxi, moving van, and ambulance. He wrote to the French consul in Bangui on behalf of local World War II veterans. He helped people navigate bureaucracy, such as local drivers who needed to renew their driver's license. At the Lycée de Bangassou, he filled in as French teacher for a semester, and, where students were being taught about French history and ancient Japanese dynasties, he gave public conferences on the history of Nzakara and Zande dynasties. He encouraged Central African high school students who were interested in ethnology or archaeology and paved the way for half a dozen to pursue graduate studies at Nanterre. He fought—unsuccessfully—for the return to Bangassou of the Nzakara royal bells, which had been carried off by American missionaries. He made sure all his books (except one, *Penser au Singulier*) were available in the Central African Republic—especially—in Bangassou, at cost, or even at a subsidized price.

## Research Themes

### History and Oral History

For Dampierre, a historical perspective is essential in order to understand social processes and dynamics. His book *Un ancien royaume bandia* (1967), begins with a 70-page critical review of historical sources. In his *présentation de thèse* (the equivalent of a dissertation defense) (1968:1–2), he explains why:

The method I used in this work is perhaps not completely recommended.

Our British colleagues, who rightly insist that the ethnologist should observe behavior rather than listen to what people say or read old texts, warn us not to read the past into the present or read the present into the past. But that is exactly what I have done, while taking special precautions. The first, and the most important, is to do fieldwork *before* reading historical documents. One is often surprised to find, after five or ten years, new meaning in documents that at first seemed absurd, wrong, or crazy. One must, of course, make the necessary transpositions, and, from the very beginning, understand how such or such behavior would have appeared to the innocent explorer or administrator. To that first effort I have added a second: to treat the European context and the African context in counterpoint. The contrasting interpretations of the treaty between [King] Bangassou and Vangele [Belgian explorer] provide a good example. Furthermore, one must spend a long time in a place in order to grasp the African reality behind the administrative accounts.

With an understanding gained from living among the Nzakara, he wove together written history and oral history to piece together the past, to sketch out past events that led to current social organization. He had faith that oral history, properly gathered and interpreted, could be more reliable than second-, third-, and fourth-hand accounts recorded by European travelers and administrators. In a very slim book, *Des ennemis, des arabes, des histoires...* (1983), [22] Dampierre, using Nzakara oral history, refutes the generally accepted historical account that the Arab slave-trader Rabih invaded the Nzakara kingdom twice, vanquished the royal army, and pillaged the territory; in fact, he invaded only once, and was routed by the Nzakara army. Dampierre demonstrates that artfully gathering oral traditions yields better results than consulting the often erroneous accounts of European explorers. The book's concluding paragraph summarizes the role of the oral historian:

I have attempted here, after critically reviewing the sources, as all good historians should, to reconstruct the collective experience of partial testimonies, scattered in space and time, and to understand that experience through its reflection in the mirror of the outsider. In a society without writing, asking piecemeal questions in privacy gets only useless information or answers that most please the interrogator. That is why continuously questioning the elders can only be useful over a lifetime and done in public. One must learn to get old. Contrary to what one often feels obliged to write, bringing that experience to the surface has nothing to do with tradition. That very action, for the society that wants or accepts it, can actually preserve tradition. We need to know how to use tradition to uncover what refutes it. Such is the work of the mandrels, those modest intermediaries (1983:41).

He uses a metaphor to describe the historian's role in an oral society: that of a mandrel, a cylindrical, rotating shaft that serves as an axis for a larger rotating part. He saw himself as a tool that allowed various partial memories of Nzakara experience to take shape in a coherent history, thus enabling the Nzakara to solidify their tradition. (Notice that in the citation above, Dampierre indirectly includes himself in the category of "good historians" and "modest intermediaries.")

## Nzakara Poetry and Music

As noted above, Dampierre began recording and studying Nzakara poems—which are sung and accompanied by the harp—as a means to a linguistic end, a way to learn the language. He met and made a list of poet-harpists in the area during his first two visits (1954–55 and 1957–58) and enlisted Dr. Anne Laurentin, already investigating the reproductive health of Nzakara women, and his erstwhile Nzakara assistant Robert Bangbanzi, to record poets in 1959–1961, and then Dampierre continued recording in the years that followed. As he spent time with poets and listened to their art, he soon saw the poetry as an end in itself, a window into Nzakara/Zande music, mind, and society.

Each poem-song is a unique event, improvised on the spot, without a recognizable beginning or ending. Historically, poets were minstrels at royal courts; their social and political commentary was biting. A chronicle of court events, the poems also expressed the complaints and the desires of everyday life. Dampierre spent many long years perfecting the translations of the poets' songs with the help of his Nzakara collaborator Robert Bangbanzi; as mentioned above, their abundant correspondence shows the depth of discussion involving the translation of a single phrase or the linguistic tone of a single syllable. Dampierre learned Nzakara poetry inside out: double speech, word play, allusions, idiomatic expressions, irony, satire, and stinging criticism veiled in metaphor. The edited volume *Poètes nzakara* published by Dampierre in 1963—dedicated to Bangbanzi—resulted from this collection. It was the first collection of texts to be published in the Nzakara language, and the first published book by Classiques africains; it also later constituted Dampierre's secondary dissertation for his state doctorate. [23]

Besides the words of the songs, Dampierre directed his attention to the harp and its music. He spent years tracking down Zande harps that had found their way into European museums. He corresponded with luthiers, art historians, and museum curators around the world. His two final books, *Harpes zande* (1992) and *Une esthétique perdue* (1995), are devoted to Nzakara and Zande harps, harp music, and harpists-poets, and have received rave reviews from international specialists. He concludes, based on expert, detailed analyses of both harp and music, that Zande (and Nzakara) harps represent a pinnacle in African lutherie (1992:11), and that the art of these harpists is millennia old (1992:155).

## Political Organization

A graduate of the *Institut des sciences politiques*, it is not surprising that early on Dampierre focused on the political organization of the Bandia kingdoms in Nzakara—and western Zandeland, in the upper Ubangi and Uele basins (see Figure 2). His main question was, what is the social foundation of political authority? The Bandia kingdoms were an exemplar of Max Weber's traditional authority as a basis for legitimate rule (vs. rational and charismatic). Dampierre was especially interested in how the foreign Bandia clan established their political power, how they made the Nzakara need them. These investigations resulted in his aforementioned magnum opus, *Un ancien royaume bandia* (1967), which also served as primary thesis for his *doctorat d'État*. He addressed the question in his *présentation de thèse* (1968):



Every once in a while, we see appear in history what historians call a military autocracy. Not long ago, P. de Vaux (1967) described the secret of the Horites in Genesis: “Once they infiltrated Palestine, they seized power in the principal Palestinian cities and, without imposing their language or their customs, they quickly assimilated into the native populations.” Those are people who resemble our Bandia. But how did it happen? By what mechanisms, by what needs, by what liberties? Can one truly explain power without analyzing dependence? For power is in part violence, and the exercise of violence, like the exercise of war, is not an easy object of sociological study. Looking through the other end of the telescope is, I feel, more fruitful. How are the bonds of dependence in a given society woven, organized, and hierarchized? That indeed makes a good object of study (1968:3).



Figure 2.

Map of Nzakara and Zande lands and Bandia and Vungara dynasties

Dampierre found a crucial structural difference between the political systems of the Vungara (central and eastern Zandeland) and the Bandia (western Zandeland) dynasties. Evans-Pritchard had studied the political organization of the Vungara with a focus on Gbudwe’s kingdom, while Dampierre analyzed Bandia politics, with a focus on the Nzakara kingdom of Bangassou; they thus covered the two ends of the spectrum.

The Vungara were a native Zande clan who gained political power and then expanded eastward to incorporate and Zande-ize surrounding groups, while the Bandia were Ngbandi-speakers who moved north and adopted Nzakara and Zande language and customs even as they established political dominance. In a nutshell, the Vungara moved out, the Bandia moved in. The Vungara kingdoms were very unstable, with a new set of kingdoms every twenty years, and Vungara princes were their own worst enemies; the easternmost Zande kingdoms where Vungara expansion was most recent were the most heterogeneous.

According to Evans-Pritchard (1971), the Vungara rulers used the surplus produced by intense horticulture to political advantage. Taking advantage of permanent battalions of young warriors and the temporary labor of adult men to work their fields, and also receiving tribute from the surrounding area, Vungara kings and princes were able to control a very large amount of food, which they then redistributed in a way that strengthened their authority. Furthermore, Vungara courts assured stability, military protection, and justice for peoples that until then had been small-scale, autonomous groups. Food was given generously to feed courtiers, battalions, and people who came to the court for redress of wrongs or with



requests of the king. Kings also gave bride wealth (in the form of marriage spears) to anyone who asked, as well as wives to loyal governors, military leaders, and others who had shown great service or loyalty. The number of subjects of a given king was directly related to his generosity, military strength, and style of justice. Evans-Pritchard (1971:33) reports that Zande say that men are subjugated by food and justice, and that “Azande subject themselves to the princes on account of the gifts they receive from them.” Wars were fought to gain subjects who would contribute to the king’s stores and labor and military pool.

Dampierre, however, describes a very different scenario for the Bandia. In ancient Nzakara (and Zande) society, wives were exchanged between lineages, which were equal. Each lineage was simultaneously wife giver and wife taker; families exchanged sisters and became allies. In this system, a *régime de la parentèle*, allies were assured (1971:267). When the Bandia arrived, in order to get into the good graces of the Nzakara and Zande, they co-opted the latter’s system of alliance and used it to their advantage. This they did by providing wives not to their relatives but to their clients (subjects). Women were no longer exchanged by lineage elders but distributed by Bandia rulers; no longer was equality at the heart of the exchange. By controlling the circulation of women, the Bandia developed clienteles at the expense of the traditional, egalitarian lineage system. “A surplus of women and their distribution by the dominant clan are the keys of the new system, which, though it creates allies, is much better equipped to create subjects” (1967:294-5). Allegiance gradually replaced alliance. To maintain power, the Bandia needed a surplus of women. Annual wars were fought not to gain subjects, as with the Vungara, but to capture women to give away as wives. Dampierre was explicit about the reasons for the wars: “The maximum acquisition of women became the means of government and renewed the symbolic pomp of power” (1967:273). With the arrival of Europeans, the well dried up. The king’s army was prevented from carrying out wars to capture women, and colonial courts upheld the right of women to be married by compensation only. No longer able to distribute women, the Bandia lost their clients and, without clients, were no longer patrons.

In his final publication, *Les idées-forces de la politique des Bandia à travers les propos de leurs souverains (1870-1917)* (“The key principles of Bandia politics through the words of their sovereigns”) (1998 [1983, revised 1996]), Dampierre expands our understanding of the Bandia kingdoms by examining the kings’ own words to see how they themselves regarded their power. King Djabir, for example, said to Commandant Francqui, “I cannot yet tell you which of my two sons will be designated by my people to succeed me; certainly the best will be chosen, and whatever my people decides will be for the best.” In his commentary, Dampierre explains: the king is chosen by a royal council, approved by the royal family, and acclaimed by an assembly of adult men. Second, King Bangassou claimed that he is “the master of people, not the guardian of borders.” Dampierre comments that the notion of borders is totally foreign to African political life. In a third example, King Bangassou said to Bonnel de Mézières: “You see the Kengu [Mbomu] River? It is big because the other streams flow into it. It is the same with my chiefs: if they didn’t need my gifts, they would no longer come to me and I would be nothing.” Dampierre explains: The power of a Bandia king only becomes

authority when he renounces violence and sets about meeting the needs of those who have sworn him allegiance. In other words, the king commands only because he redistributes food, goods and, especially, wives.

### Effects of Colonization

Far from being an arm of a colonial system (as ethnographers of this epoch are often accused of being), Dampierre was caustic in his analysis of colonial endeavors. In his *présentation de thèses* (1968) for his state doctorate, he offered a profound critique of the philosophy, mentality, and rationalization of French colonialism, citing Renan, Karl Marx, and Jules Ferry, among others.

In his article “Coton noir, café blanc” (Black Cotton, White Coffee) (1960), Dampierre describes in detail how the introduction of the plantation system led to conflicts and ultimately the disintegration of traditional society. The *paysannat* system (used mainly for coffee cultivation in the Nzakara kingdom) brought about important changes in cultural practices and modifications in social relations. For example, the new system upended a relatively even gendered division of labor: since women traditionally gardened, they now ended up working in the plantation fields, leaving men with nothing to do. On a deeper level, Dampierre observed that the *paysannat* needs *paysans*, or peasants, farmers who grow a surplus that will be sold in a market. But there can be no peasants until there are town-dwellers (*citadins*); there can be no countryside (*campagne*) without towns (*villes*), for country and town are indissolubly tied together through a double flow of goods. However, “the people of the Mbomu region did not yet have needs. The Nzakara did not produce more than they needed for their own subsistence, their traditional obligations, or their taxes. Moreover, they often left some of their crops unharvested. The products of the city reached them only in the form of cloth and aluminum basins. Why would they want to double their income?” (1960:146).

In Chapter 8 of *Un ancien royaume bandia* (1967), aptly titled “A model pillage economy,” Dampierre meticulously analyzes the activities of the private trading companies that, aided and abetted by colonial administrators in Bangui and Paris, sucked ivory and rubber from the colony (Oubangui-Chari), leaving the local economy in shambles. He focused on the *Société des Sultanats* (the Nzakara and Zande kings were often called sultans, their kingdoms sultanates) that operated in the former Bandia kingdoms. The details he provides are prodigious, including the personal communications and transactions in the founding of the *Société*; the names, addresses, and number of shares of the 152 company stockholders who profited from the pillage (the largest being the French Bank of South Africa, with 1,764 shares); the mutually-beneficial finagling among sultans, company directors, and colonial administrators; the amount of ivory and rubber extracted each year; and the total extracted between 1901 and 1911 (2,577,674 tons of rubber and 412,196 tons of ivory). He shows once again that processes and events cannot be understood without considering the historical context and *all* the actors involved.

## An Aesthetics of Leftovers

In 1994, Dampierre wrote a short but dense note entitled *Autre formulation de mes thèses, à critiquer* (“Another formulation of my ideas, for critique”). Here is my translation:

1. African music and sculpture have nothing to do with representing the exterior world.
2. If a Fang relic “represents” an ancestor, it is only metaphorically.
3. A sculpture is, on the contrary, a product of the artist’s memorial geometry, of his topology of inner images, the organization of which constitutes his memory. The musician’s art is a product not only of this geometry, but also of key rhythmic elements [*des clés rythmiques*] and the color of tones selected and stockpiled in his inner memory.
4. This space-time of the sculptor and musician is not made up of indiscernible elements; it is made of structured relations, whose formative rules can be made explicit, and that is what allows us to seek not only a work’s canonical tangible qualities but also its relational codes.
5. This memorial space-time, endowed with more dimensions than the three-dimensional space-time necessary for the representation of the exterior world, the fruit of mental concentration and of duration, nevertheless depends on the forms and volumes of a few ambiguous natural objects (the rainbow, the mythical bird *iso*, the branching leaves of the plant *bisibili* (*Trachophrynium braunianum* [?]) ...
6. ... ambiguous because governed by the dyad of more and less; consequently, this memorial space-time also depends on the “leftovers” of these forms, leftovers endlessly produced by the rejection of identicalness.

This formulation summarizes and synthesizes Dampierre’s work in central Africa. It shows that music and art are windows into the Nzakara mind, where “leftovers” must always prevent anything and anyone from being identical to anything or anyone else, in other words, where people *pensent au singulier*, or “think in the singular.” He holds that this way of “thinking in the singular” guides all Nzakara and Zande thought, aesthetics, discourse, and practices.

Parenthetically, the thought processes involved in sculpting and playing harps was the focus of several *Notes de recherche* over the years (NDR 10, 26, 27, 29, 31, 33, 36, and 38) along with a few less formal *Notes divers*. In one of his final papers, *L’humanité des harpes* (1998), he offers an additional proposition: linguistic and technological processes are at opposite extremes. He quotes Louis de Bonald (1754–1840): “a man thinks his speech before speaking his thoughts” (*l’homme pense sa parole avant de parler sa pensée*). One does not think *about* language, one thinks *in* language. But with technology, Dampierre proposes, it is the reverse: Man thinks *about* the object he is making; indeed, he must think about it *before* he makes it, whence the importance of mental schemas, of memorial space-time.

### *Penser au singulier*

Published in 1984, *Penser au singulier* crystallized Nzakara/Zande thoughtways. One of Dampierre's shortest books, and likely one of his least read, it was an answer to Claude Lévi-Strauss' *Pensée sauvage* (1962) and epitomized the oral societies of Jack Goody's *Domestication of the Savage Mind* (1977). More philosophical treatise than ethnography, it was not published in the *Recherches africaines* series of the *Société d'ethnologie* with earlier works on Central Africa but in the *Recherches thématiques* series in a special pink jacket. It was, to my knowledge, the only book he published that was not made readily available in the Central African Republic. *Penser au singulier* permeates his other works, culminating in *Une esthétique perdue* (1995).

The basic idea is that identicalness [24] and equality do not occur in nature but are constructed by humans. "Everything on earth has a singular existence. Nothing is identical, or equal, to anything else. Each thing or being is viewed in its difference" (Dampierre 1984:11). No two things or people are identical, equal, or interchangeable. Counting human beings is rude, for it implies they are commensurable, replaceable. Each thing or being—including lineages, brothers, wives, animals, and notes on a musical scale—is ranked in a hierarchy, has its unique place in a constellation of relations. Identical twins are unnatural and to be avoided or mitigated. Likewise, in activities such as building roofs or serving food, surfaces and quantities are never divided into equal parts: there must always be a remainder or leftover to keep sections or portions from being identical, equal, or symmetrical. In music, art, and storytelling, exact reproductions or repetitions are avoided. Each Zande or Nzakara Trickster story is—and must be—unique (Buckner 2017).

The second half of the book illustrates how this way of thinking in the singular is enacted in social life (*la vie civile*) and ends with an account of how King Bangassou ended governing in the singular when he declared that all "citizens"—including foreigners—should be treated equally. The account was slightly expanded in *Les idées-forces de la politique des Bandia à travers les propos de leurs souverains (1870–1917)* (1998 [1983, revised 1996]). Circa 1890, Bangassou made an oath before the shrine Bendo—and not at the ancestors' shrine—that from now on he would reign over an immense people, made up of foreigners from all over. It was a historic moment: the oath before Bendo is the equivalent of a reform of Clisthène. The sovereign solemnly renounces the ancestral foundations of his authority. He renounces treating people in the singular organized by descent and alliance, kin ties, and clientele. Lineage affiliation will no longer be the organizing principle of his people.

This political decision, this inversion of accepted values could only have been carried out by the king... The decision created identical subjects and, in particular, treated Arabs, Whites, and Blacks on the same level... Bendo, the friend of women, the protector of harvests, had presided over the identification of everyone with everyone. A universalist rule had appeared. The singular, which is ignorant of the distinction between the particular and the universal, had lived politically (1984:39).

As paraphrased from above, the singular does not know the universal. The universal appears when people or things are put into classes; they can then be particularized, individualized; they can be tokens of a type. In a singular thoughtworld, there is no need to show one's individuality, to distinguish oneself from others, for one was never classed with others to begin with.

Dampierre takes the rejection of identicalness (*identité*) to a fascinating level in “*Accord entre deux harpes, accord entre deux voix en Afrique équatoriale*” (*Note de recherche* n° 29, 1994, “memo provisoire”). He observes that two harps that will be played in a duo are tuned one an octave higher than the other, so they are perceived as different (at an octave) but still considered the same. He relates this principle to the voice in *chantefables*, the cycle of Trickster tales that alternate sung parts and spoken narrative. The sung parts are (or were) normally sung an octave higher than the normal speaking voice. But since an octave voice alone would be considered “the same” as a normal voice, the sung parts are also sung in a falsetto, or head voice, that opposes the chest voice. So, in *chantefables*, not only are sung parts opposed to spoken narrative and sung parts an octave higher than normal voice, but, for sung parts, falsetto opposes chest voice. [25] Dampierre proposes that, in *chantefables*, the head voice, or falsetto, indicates a supernatural intervention that either shifts the action from the world of natural causes to the world of fantasy, or, on the contrary, brings it back to the natural world. In a footnote, he adds, intriguingly, “the supernatural character attributed to the falsetto recalls ‘baroque’ Italian opera where the roles of gods or mythological characters were often played by *falsetti* or eunuchs,” citing Roland de Candé, *in litt.* 10 ix 1994.

### **A Lost Aesthetics (*Une esthétique perdue*)**

*Une esthétique perdue* (1995) was compiled by Dampierre in collaboration with Gaetano Speranza, Ezio Bassani, and Marc Chemillier. The basic premise is that in this “society of irreducible individualists,” (1995:10) “there are no indiscernibles; between two beings there is always an intrinsic, qualitative difference...” This *parti pris* points to “an aesthetic of the singular, which I think is at work in several areas: rhetoric, sculpture, music” (1995:14).

From morning to night, all Nzakara minds think in terms of more and less, of surplus and lack [*d'Excédent et de Déficience*] (... and also of elder and younger, of father and son, of head wife and favorite wife). Like Pre-Socratics who would have understood why Plato replaced the One and the Infinite of Pythagorus with the One and the Dyad of Greater and Lesser (1995:16).

In this book, Dampierre shows, based on expert analyses on Nzakara/Zande sculpture (Gaetano and Bassini) and music (Chemillier), that sculpture, poetry, and rhythms enact “thinking in the singular.” No two harps are alike; no harp makers would every dream of making them so. The design of the harp, the proportions of the strings and the resonance box, the sculpted head, all reject sameness. In rhythms, too, there is always something left over: they are staggered, they have a gap, a lag, an irregular interval.

### The Superparticular Leftover (*Le reste épimore*)

The first sentence in *Le reste épimore* (*Note de recherche* n° 33, revised 1996) speaks volumes: “I continue my efforts in the search for the basis of the practices described in *Penser au singulier* [1984] and *Une esthétique perdue* [1995] concerning the rejection of equal sizes, the rejection of symmetrical areas, and the rejection of commensurate durations.” This paper presents an analogy between the Nzakara and Zande rejection of symmetry and the Greek concept of “epimore” (superparticulars) in musical scales. An epimoric relation is that between a number (whole integer) and the same number plus (or minus) 1, e.g., 9:8, 15:14. In his discussion of Pythagorean music, Crocker (1964:326) refers to the theorem of Archytas (circa 400 BC) “which demonstrates that an epimore cannot receive a geometric mean.” In other words, epimores cannot be equally divided, mathematical symmetry is rejected.

... The rejection correlates to the emphasis placed on “leftovers” [*restes*], which are not truly leftovers since no exhaustive procedure to reach a limit was sought. These “leftovers,” which make calculations troublesome, are conceived of by Zande and Nzakara as a privileged property of nature that only humans can, in certain cases and under certain conditions, do away with.

These practices in the Upper-Ubangi, which lead to the explicit formulation of “thinking in the singular,” render vain—illusory, even scandalous by nature—all relations of identity [identicalness], whatever they may be (Ndr 33).

For Dampierre, this way of thinking in the singular, of rejecting equality and symmetry, of always having a leftover permeates (or permeated) every aspect of Nzakara and Zande life. And his publications over the last twenty years of his life were proof of the importance he placed on this “aesthetics of leftovers.”

### Legacy

Dampierre understood very well social relations and bureaucracy—a constellation of singular beings each with his or her own capacities, concerns, and connections. At the same time, he cultivated a vast, international network of friends, colleagues, and professional acquaintances, including university presidents, publishers, journal editors, government ministers, museum curators, and scholars and researchers of all kinds. He was thus able to finesse the system in the interest of the department, the LESC, the MSHO (and individuals in all three), the Nzakara, and sociology (not necessarily in that order) and to shape French intellectual life. His mark on institutions—especially those he founded or co-founded—was great and is felt to this day. Furthermore, he supervised (as committee chair) 11 state doctorats (*thèses d'État*), one *habilitation*, and 26 PhDs (*thèses de troisième cycle* and *doctorats d'université*). His students would populate a Who's Who of French “anthropology,” and most have gone on to teach and mentor in their turn, with an emphasis on holistic, long-term fieldwork and engagement.



Given his painstaking use of historical sources, it is no surprise that Dampierre left meticulous records of his own observations and fieldwork. The office of the *Mission sociologique du Haut-Oubangui*, now attached to the *Laboratoire d'ethnologie et de sociologie comparative* at the University of Paris-X (Nanterre), houses published and unpublished works dealing with the Upper Ubangi and surrounding areas, as well as artifacts from the region, for the use of interested researchers. The archives include miles of recorded tapes (both music and narrative, in Nzakara, Zande, and, more rarely, Sango), hundreds of photographs (both historical and from his fieldwork), the complete genealogical records of the various lineages of the Bandia clan going back some fourteen generations, a map collection, a French-Nzakara dictionary, around fifty field notebooks, all numbered, paginated, indexed, and cross-referenced, and a two-tiered filing cabinet containing hundreds of letters, clippings, unpublished reports, and sundry manuscripts. (The plant collection was recently moved to the National Museum of Natural History.) Though other members of the MSHO also contributed to these archives to some degree (e.g. myself, Marc Chemillier, Alan Morel, and Boniface Ngabondo), the bulk of the collection was constituted by Dampierre himself. All the audio recordings have been digitized and many are accessible on Telemata, the CNRS's digital archives [26]. The photos have also been scanned and digitized and are stored in the Fonds Éric de Dampierre, which can be accessed at the Bibliothèque Éric de Dampierre, of the Laboratoire d'ethnologie et de sociologie comparative.

In the 1980s, Dampierre admitted that it was becoming increasingly difficult for him to continue his annual MSHO sojourns. The Zande, as Evans-Pritchard and others have highlighted and I couldn't help but notice, are known for the ease with which they borrow customs, ceremonies, and beliefs (often dropping them just as quickly), including magic spells and potions, circumcision rites, cults (such as *yanda*), harp styles (they now play the harp upside-down!), and even "God" (likely borrowed from neighboring Mangbetu). In contrast, the Nzakara clung to traditional practices, including music (poetry and harp), and beliefs (Fate rather than God). Then, when their world was turned upside down and change could no longer be avoided, the Nzakara "broke" while the Zande "bent" and adapted. Along with the natural passing of the elders Dampierre was close to, this rupture, especially the ignorance of Nzakara youth, caused him much sorrow and his annual visits became harder to bear.

Under these circumstances, perhaps Dampierre's greatest achievement was helping to preserve the history, language, music, and knowledge of the Nzakara for the Nzakara themselves, even as they faced the loss of their tradition. In the introduction to *Un ancien royaume bandia* (1967) he describes the sad paradox:

Akabati, Zangandu, Nukusa, Kaali, Gbesende, Vugba, Sayo, and others who offered me hospitality have now died without knowing that by talking with me they also wrote their people's history. Their sons, all too conscious of their past because they want to be others, reclaim that history, fearful that they'll never know it. If this book, by some horrible trick of history, could



transmit to the sons the knowledge of their fathers, it would take its place among the uncertain fruits of those few very rare years in human history: those few years in which our common civilization, impoverished because merged into one, but infinitely rich in a history it recreates endlessly while at the same time projecting its future, meets and immediately recounts insolently the complex splendor of societies who live in the present and are content with their origins, but who discover in the hearts of their children, for the first and the last time, the face of the outsider (1967:12).

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[1] Evans-Pritchard chose to use the Zande plural prefix "à-" (which resulted in the Zande appearing in indexes sometimes as "Azande," sometimes as "Zande").

[2] Evans-Pritchard (1971:27) includes the Nzakara on the list of peoples contributing to the Zande complex under the column "almost assimilated culturally," whereas Nzakara and Zande are actually sister languages that likely separated no more than a thousand years ago and are still somewhat mutually comprehensible, especially on the frontier.

[3] Even in the 1980s, proficiency in foreign languages was a given in graduate courses at the University of Paris X- Nanterre. A professor once assigned our class readings in German and Italian. A student asked, "What if we don't read those languages, sir?" The response: "That's your problem, not mine."

[4] I am all the more encouraged in this task because when, decades ago, I said I might try to

translate his book *Penser au singulier* (1984), the next day he offered me *Sous l'invocation de St. Jérôme*, a classic on the art of translating.

[5] Lautman et al. (1998) propose that his remarkable schooling was likely thanks to his exceptional mother.

[6] It was only in 1958 that a student could obtain a first degree (*licence*) in sociology (Bowen and Bentaboulet, 2002).

[7] His primary thesis was *Un ancien royaume bandia du Haut-Oubangui* (published in 1968), his secondary thesis *Poètes nzakara* (published in 1963). His jury included Raymond Aron and Claude Lévi-Strauss.

[8] It seems he worked all the harder during the final years of his life, already ill, to finish notes and publications that were dear to him, including *Une esthétique perdue* (1995) and *Les idées-forces de la politique des Bandia* (1998).

[9] To prepare me for French life and academics, he gave me a list of about a dozen books I should read. Along with more expected works such as *Nouvelles Asiatiques* by Gobineau, and *Essais* by Montaigne, it included Raymond Queneau's *Zazie dans le metro* and Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*.

[10] In *Music and Trance*, Gilbert Rouget complimented his friend, an erudite Hellenist, on his translation of a passage from Plato with these words: "Since I do not know Greek, which I can hardly spell, I owe this translation to Éric de Dampierre, whose long familiarity with Plato's language on the one hand and with ethnology on the other [have] particularly well prepared him for this enterprise" (Rouget 1980:342, n. 10, cited in Chemillier 1998:207).

[11] Dampierre had thus carried out a community study *before* he went to Chicago, which raises the question of his role in the development of community studies at Chicago, given his related interest in sociometry, which also preceded his Chicago fellowship. "By the early 1950s, the 'Chicago approach' had developed into a multifaceted sociological perspective emphasizing a focus on cities. It involved a commitment to empirical research which included macroscopic quantitative studies and micro-level ethnographic community studies, as well as specific interests in race relations, social marginality and social pathologies in urban contexts" (Waters 2015:46).

[12] The community was Asnières-sur-Oise. The report was published in 1956 under the title "*Malvire-sur-Desle : Une commune aux franges de la région parisienne*" (Dampierre 1956).

[13] Dampierre (1968:34) reminds us that Descartes' remark is no less important here than in the natural sciences: "*Si de verborum significatione inter Philosophas semper conveniret, fere omnes illorum controversiae tollerentur.* (If there were ever agreement among philosophers about the meaning of words, almost all of these controversies would be removed.)"

[14] In *L'humanité des harpes* (1998), he wrote "En affaires de langage, je suis Bonald," the second part of which can be translated as "I am Bonald" or "I follow Bonald," *suiv* being the first-person singular form of both verbs, *être* (to be) and *suivre* (to follow). He subsequently specified he meant "I follow Bonald."

[15] He commissioned the manufacture of a special, massive typewriter with a dual carriage in order to type Zande and Nzakara with tones and tension markers; fortunately—or unfortunately—it was used only for my master's thesis (and a few miscellaneous notes), for computers became available soon thereafter. Dampierre regretted that I chose to type my dissertation—which was full of Zande texts—on a computer using a visually disagreeable font rather than on the custom typewriter, which can still be found in the office of the MSHO on the Nanterre campus.

[16] <http://naissanceethnologie.fr/>

[17] Herrenschmidt (2010:3, note 2) bemoans the fact that "there are more and more professors and dissertation supervisors who set their students on "everything and anything," under the pretext that any object is "ethnologizable" from the subway to skate-boarding in a square in Montreal."

[18] In a letter dated July 12, 1958, Robert Bangbanzi, Dampierre's research assistant in Bangassou, wrote: "Already, women have gone to see the Senator to tell him they have been able to conceive children and maintain good health thanks to the sociologists of the Upper Ubangi."

[19] On the other hand, Evans-Pritchard related uncritically what men told him about women's behavior, including very detailed—and imaginary—lesbian sex scenes.

[20] Mail to and from Bangassou was rapid and reliable in the early years of fieldwork, with letters from Bangbanzi reaching Dampierre in as little as three days.

[21] Dampierre wrote 38 *Notes de recherche*, or Research notes, from 2 to 16 pages long, that expressed all he could say on a subject, complete with footnotes and bibliographical references. They were the fruit of in-depth investigation, considerable reflection, and careful writing, and most, if not all are of publishable quality. Indeed, after revision(s), several were published.

[22] In the title, *histoires* can be translated as either "stories" or "histories"; in this case, it is both.

[23] Some fifty years later, I was able to finish *Poètes nzakara II* (Buckner 2015), which had been planned from the start but which Dampierre was not able to publish in his lifetime. One reason for this was his discovery in 1967 of an exceptional master poet and musician, Nzouka, aka Lamadani, who sang his entire repertoire in one session, and was recorded by Dampierre. The edited volume, *Satires de Lamadani*, published in 1971, was the first volume of *Classiques africains* to include the original recording, in this case in the form of an audiocassette.

[24] Dampierre uses *identité* in French, but "identity" in English does not have the same meaning, except in mathematics. Identity, in English, and more recently in French, is something that can be constructed, forged, created, defended, claimed, attributed, shared, or flexible. One can have multiple identities (racial, religious, sexual, ethnic, etc.) that are based on qualities abstracted from an individual's whole. This is the very opposite of Dampierre's use of *identité*, i.e., the relationship between two beings or entities that are identical.

[25] In my own study of Zande chantefables (Buckner 2017), I found that most storytellers no longer use a head voice for the sung part or even sing an octave higher than their normal speaking voice, though the oldest and best ones do.

[26] [http://diadems.telemeta.org/archives/fonds/CNRSMH\\_Dampierre/](http://diadems.telemeta.org/archives/fonds/CNRSMH_Dampierre/)