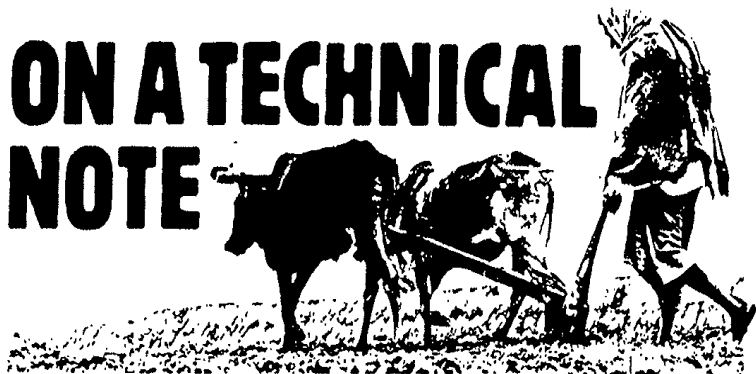


# ON A TECHNICAL NOTE



## Bogolan A traditional dye

by Zakaria Ouedraogo



*Bogolan* is a Bambara word (Malian language) composed of the common noun *bogo*, which means clay or mud, and a suffix *lan*, which indicates something that can bring about a result. *Bogolan* means literally "the result that clay gives" (upon cloth). It refers to a technique of applying clay to dyed fabric.

### Who does it?

Unlike indigo dying, which is widespread in West Africa, *Bogolan* is an ancestral technique of people in the Mandé group (Bambara, Malinké, Senoufo, and Dogon ethnic groups). Originally, women practiced bogolan in their leisure time to decorate wedding gowns, stylish clothing, or skirts to sell. Hunters and shepherds also would dye hunting or ceremonial clothes for their own use.

### How is it done?

Even though this technique is traditional for only a few ethnic groups, clay- and plant-based dyes are easily available wherever you are in Africa. All you need to do is search in the bush for your primary materials.

Making a *bogolan* requires two stages:

#### ■ Dyeing the cloth

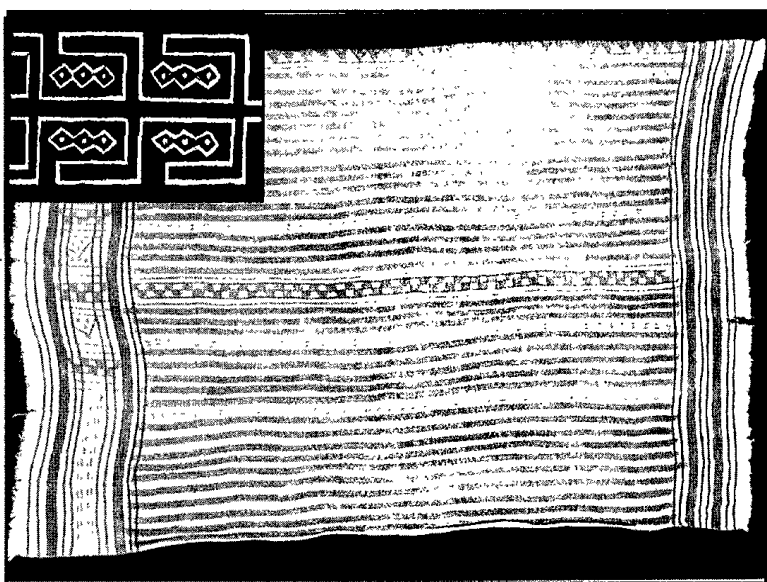
The colour you dye the fabric depends on the plant that you use. You can obtain yellow, blue, green, red, etc.

#### ■ Marking the fabric

Place clay in the designs that you desire upon the dyed fabric. A chemical reaction occurs between the iron contained in the clay and the tannin of the plant. This reaction dyes the cloth black.

### What are the advantages?

Unlike classical dyeing, you don't have to buy the colouring. The only thing you need to pay for is the cloth. This technique is therefore inexpensive. And *bogolan* sells very well both locally and in the export market.



In the upper left corner, and scattered throughout the text, you see examples of some traditional Bogolan designs used in Mali. The photo shows a piece of cloth after the Bogolan process is applied.



# Necessary materials

## To find in the bush



### Plants

Use these to dye the whole cloth. Some names of common plants and trees used as natural dyes are shown at left (see box) along with the colours they will give. There are sure to be other plants in your area which are well known among the village craftspeople.

Plant	Type	part used	colour
<i>Acacia nilotica</i>	Tree	Pod	Khaki green
<i>Anogeissus leiocarpus</i>	Tree	Leaf	Yellow
<i>Ficus gnaphalocarpa</i>	Tree	Bark	Khaki green
<i>Indigofera tinctoria</i>	Forbe	Leaf	Navy blue
<i>Lannea microcarpa</i>	Tree	Bark	Dark red <sup>1</sup>
<i>Lawsonia inermis</i>	????	Leaf	Yellow, red or black <sup>2</sup>

1. Add soda after filtering to obtain the colour.
2. Different colours depending on how long the plant soaks.



### Clay

It must be rich in iron to give the black marks on the cloth. And you can find it around streams that don't dry out. In its natural state, this type of clay is grey coloured.

Latin	Swahili
<i>Acacia nilotica</i>	Mgunga
<i>Ficus gnaphalocarpa</i>	Mukuyu
<i>Indofera tinctoria</i>	Indigo (in English)
<i>Lawsonia inermis</i>	Mkokoa

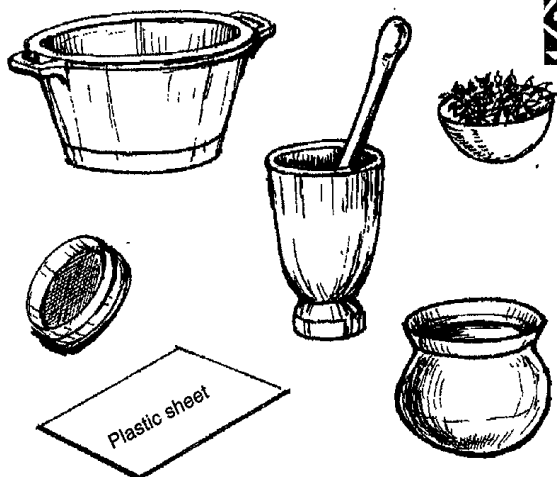


## Equipment needed



### Cotton

Traditionally hand-woven cotton skirt cloths are used. You can also buy fabric that is at least 50% cotton.



A large terra cotta jar or pot, a pestle, a large bowl or basin, a fine sieve (like you would use for flour, for example), plastic sheets that are of a thickness one can cut with a razor blade.

# The method



## Ferment the clay



Put the clay that you gathered in a terra cotta pot. Add water (preferably from a stream). The clay should never dry out! Allow the fermentation to take place for at least 15 days. A rotting odour is completely normal! In fact it is a good sign! For proper fermentation, stir the contents of the pot with a stick at least once per day.

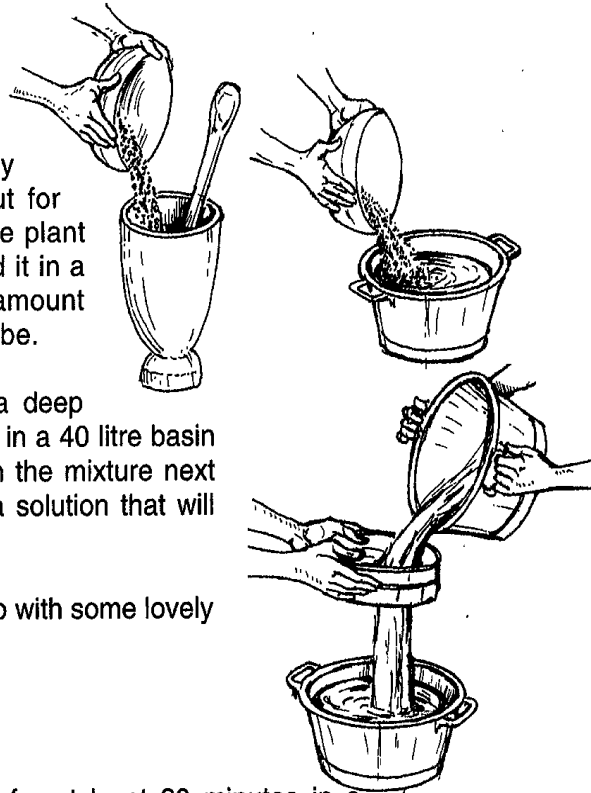
## Prepare your dye



Making a *bogolan* is truly all natural. It may be easy to purchase commercial dyes, but for this method, use plants. Dry the part of the plant that gives the colour (see table at left). Then pound it in a mortar. Mix the powder obtained with water. The amount to add depends on how deep you want the colour to be.

For example, with *Anogeissus leiocarpus*, you get a deep yellow by mixing a 15 litre bucket of dried leaf powder in a 40 litre basin of water. Let it sit between 12 and 24 hours. Strain the mixture next (you'll need someone to help you). You now have a solution that will dye your cloth.

Don't be afraid to mix different plants; you can come up with some lovely shades of colours.



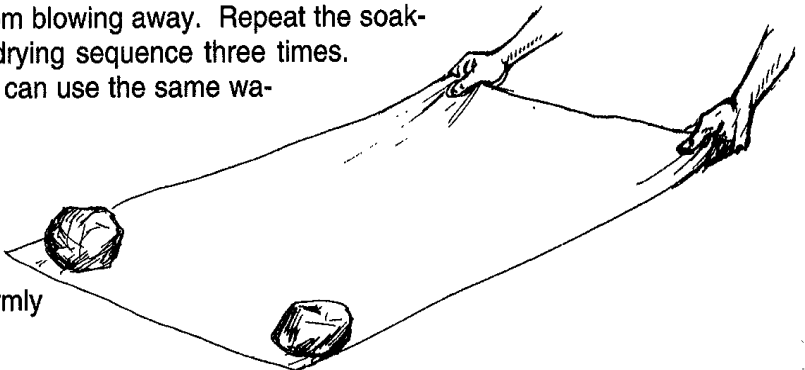
## Dye your cloth



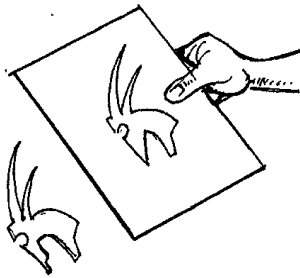
Soak your cloth for at least 30 minutes in a basin containing your dye. Dry it in the sun; spread the fabric horizontally on the ground. Place stones on the edges to avoid wrinkles and keep it from blowing away. Repeat the soaking/drying sequence three times. You can use the same wa-



ter the whole time. When finished you should have a uniformly dyed cloth.



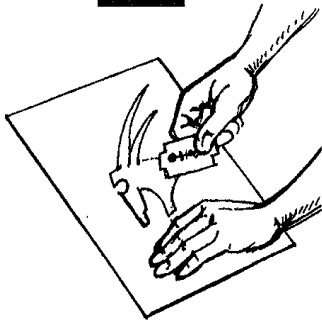
# Making the pattern



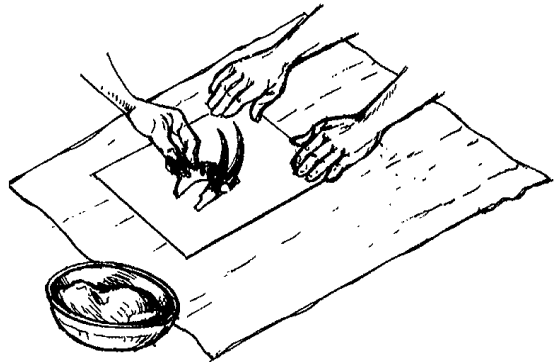
## Make your stencil



You are at an important stage in the job; you will now create an original cloth with whatever designs or symbols you desire!

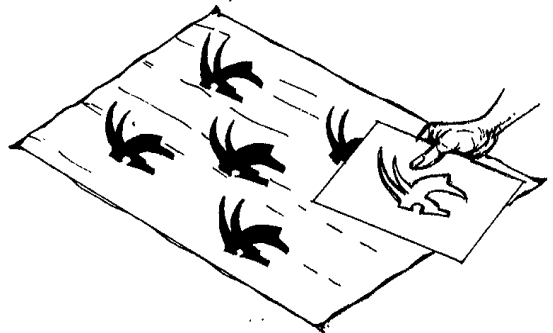


■ To do this you must make a stencil; draw the design you would like to print on your cloth on a sheet of plastic. Cut it out with a razor blade and set aside the part removed.



■ Put your well-dried dyed cloth on a table. Place your stencil upon the cloth and fill the "hole" in the plastic with clay. If you want to make different patterns on your cloth, you will need to make a different stencil for each. The hole filled with clay is where the black colour will appear, as shown below.

■ Allow the clay to thoroughly dry (20-30 minutes after applying it to the cloth). Then you can remove the clay and wash the cloth. If you are near a creek or river, wash the cloth directly in the water, avoiding scrubbing it. Otherwise first



remove the dry clay, then wash the cloth in a basin of water. Be careful during these procedures to retain the colours.

## Voilà the final product!

You now have your *bogolan*, which is your CREATION! It will be the envy of your friends who could never have the same thing. The *bogolan* can also earn you money since it is a product of interest to tourists and the export market.

For more information, don't hesitate to contact Zakaria Ouedraogo, who is an entrepreneur and craftsman working with dyes. He makes died fabric for the local and international market. Zackaria is also the General Secretary of the Association of Youth for Promoting African Art.



**Zakaria Ouedraogo**  
A.J.P.E.A.A., 07 B.P. 5405  
Ouagadougou 07, Burkina Faso