

The Younger Brother and the Stranger

In Search of a Status Discourse for Mande*

In precolonial times the town of Kangaba (located on the left bank of the Niger river, 95 kilometres south of Bamako) was an important place in the Sudan: Mungo Park mentions the town as a big slave market,¹ and the ruler of Kangaba, who collaborated with the armies of Samori Toure, was one of the main opponents of the French, in the period they occupied the Mandé area in the 1880s. He lived in a two storey palace, described as an architectural masterpiece (Peroz 1889: 252). Kangaba was said to be the last capital of the famous Mali empire.

The French knew that Mande once was the core of a great empire,² but to them the Mande region seemed in chaos at the moment of their first contact. They considered the ruler of Kangaba to be an usurper who dominated other legitimate rulers, and sent him and his family in exile.

In this article I shall elaborate the idea that those measures had been based on a set of misunderstandings with respect to principles of status and social organization in Mande. Contrary to many others, I think the ruler of Kangaba had been the legitimate leader of a relatively stable society for a long time. My argument is based on an analysis of well-known genealogies, namely those that are recited in text editions of the Sunjata epic. I reject the analysis of these genealogies as it has been put forward by Niane (1975), Person (1981) and Camara (1990) in their reconstruction of the position of Kangaba in precolonial times.³ Their point of view—produced in order to reject Delafosse's never proven remark that Kangaba may have

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1. corrections and comments:
PARK (1983) writes about Kanga six times: pp. 147, 181, 197, 233, 243 sq., and 248 (the index only mentions it three times).
2. See, for instance, *Sénégal et Niger: la France dans l'Afrique occidentale, 1879-1883*, Paris, Ministère de la Marine et des Colonies, 1884, p. 49.
3. For a summary of their arguments, see GREEN 1991.

Soucieux de reconstruire un état de pureté originel, les études sur l'association socio-religieuse du Kôma/Komò ont eu tendance à négliger les échanges entre les pratiques et représentations religieuses locales, et l'islam. Les discours sur les Kômaw maninka des monts Manding — une région perçue par certains comme le « berceau » de la civilisation mande — expriment ces interactions qui, selon les conjonctures politiques, situent davantage l'association vers un pôle identitaire musulman ou païen. Actuellement, l'accent mis sur les « génies » du Kôma, plutôt que sur ses objets occultes, témoigne d'un nouveau rapprochement avec l'islam. La logique des « génies » sert également à légitimer la direction du Kôma par des groupes sociaux écartés de la chefferie politique. Ceci ne remet pas en question son caractère conservateur. Or, comparable à l'image des institutions politiques lignagères du Manden, l'association représente à la fois une force imprévisible venue d'ailleurs, et l'ordre préétabli par les aînés.

ABSTRACT

The Spirit of the Kòma: Local Identities, Religious Mentalities and Sociopolitical Issues in the Manding Mountains. — Seeking to restore an original state of purity, studies of the Kòma (or Kòmò), a religious association, have tended to overlook exchanges between, on the one hand, local religious practices and conceptions, and, on the other, Islam. Discourses about the Maninka Kòmaw (in the Manding mountains, a region considered to be the cradle of Mande civilization) express these interactions, which, depending on the political circumstances, vary between the two poles of identity as a Moslem or 'heather'. The current emphasis placed on the Kòma 'spirits' (rather than on ritual objects) is a sign of a new phase of reconciliation with Islam. This emphasis on the «spirits» also legitimates the Kòma's leadership by social groups that have been formally barred from traditional political offices. This does not however compromise this association's conservative nature. In the likeness of Manden political (lineage) institutions, the Kòma represents both an unpredictable force coming from outside the society, and also the order that elders previously established.

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been the capital of the medieval Mali empire—is based on a methodological bias in analyzing the genealogies of royal dynasties. I think there is no evidence for believing that Kangaba is the most recent in a long list of capitals of the former Mali empire; the idea that the Keita dynasty in Kangaba settled and took power there in the seventeenth century is unacceptable.

As an alternative I link the structure of genealogies to patterns of task differentiation and principles of settlement in Mande society and oral traditions. On the basis of those patterns I shall argue that Kangaba had a prominent position in cooperation during warfare for a long time, and that this is reflected precisely by the 'younger brother' claim in ideology. Moreover, I shall propose that the organization of precolonial Kangaba is comparable to the Segu 'warrior state' as it has been described by Bazin (1982) and Roberts (1987). Although I think that Kangaba's position had been accepted for a long time in precolonial times, I do not want to try to prove that the town was the capital of the medieval Mali empire.

I do not divide Mande into territorial segments, since Mande rule was over people and not over land, and therefore status claims were in terms of social relations. I mainly want to show why it is logical for a powerful group to express its status by claiming the position of the youngest brother and why it is meaningful to incorporate the ancestors of the dynasties in adjoining regions as the older brother, even though the older brother has the right of succession.

In order to explain the preference for the younger brother, I am going first to analyze his position in genealogies and, later on, his position in tales and 'real life'. Mande genealogies have been used as either 'true' products of the excellent memories of Mande bards, or as rather meaningless 'praise lines'. I shall elaborate also a third option by stating that Mande genealogies do not reproduce a factual reconstruction of the past, but nevertheless contain a historical dimension due to their relation to genealogies from other regions. This approach would mean at least a more economic use of the sources, since many of them, which have been considered to be unreliable or uninteresting, are turned into meaningful accounts of the principles that reproduce Mande society. Thus, this article is not only meant as an attempt to reconsider Kangaba's history, but it also gives an alternative method for those who work on Mande history.

This last point is worked out in the idea that Mande tales, genealogies, travel accounts and the Sunjata epic are all part of the same status discourse, which is used in any context, and it explains the variety in the sources I present. Thus, I do not agree with Person who writes that the Sunjata epic is 'une section isolée, fossilisée' in Mande oral traditions, and that 'sa fonction est culturelle et symbolique, elle [the epic] n'a pas d'utilité pratique immédiate' (1981: 613, 629).

Status is expressed in terms of a hierarchical relationship. This is typical

of any group in the Western Sudan, since any group or family in Mande society derives its identity from stories about a legendary ancestor (the first one with the patronymic [*jamu*] of the family) who 'worked' (*ka baara kè*) together with the ancestor of another group, although this never leads to a fused identity of the two groups.

Patterns of Settlement in Mande Society

Mande society is patrilineal, marriage is virilocal, and descentance in patrilineal. This means that, in an ideal situation, the sons remain living on the paternal compound, and marry women from elsewhere. In the long run, it results in huge compounds populated with groups of classificatory brothers (often five generations: grandfathers, fathers, brothers, sons and grandchildren), and their wives and children. These huge compounds can still be found everywhere in Mande. As families reproduce themselves on the same spot, and because kinship is largely classificatory, any man in Mande is surrounded by dozens of grandfathers, fathers, older brothers and younger brothers, children and grandchildren. This means that a man's position is always dynamic: he is expected to be able to act constantly and interchangeably as a grandchild, a son, a father, a younger brother, an older brother, and a grandfather.

Compounds cannot extend indefinitely, and therefore segmentation is necessary; they are said to split up due to conflicts between brothers. Segmentation of compounds thus becomes equal to segmentation of the patrilineage (*bonda*). The tension in a brother-brother relationship is clearly visible in the Bamana/Maninka terms for 'harmony' and 'conflict'. *Badenya* is both 'harmony' and 'siblinghood' (children of one mother);⁴ the mother represents peace and harmony in Mande. *Fadenya* stands for both 'conflict' and 'half-siblinghood' (children of one father and different mothers). Bird and Kendall (1987) convincingly show that these two terms, *badenya* and *fadenya*, represent centripetal and centrifugal forces in Mande society, as *badenya* is used to describe peaceful cohabitation and *fadenya* is often said to be at the origin of a segmentation of compounds.

Another cause of compound segmentation is genealogical distance. Although not necessarily accompanied by quarrels or tensions, segmentation between *fadenw* is the most probable fault line in the case of segmentation by genealogical distance. However, after the establishment of two separate compounds, tensions will arise on another level: besides brother-brother relations within the two separate compounds/patrilineages,

4. My colleague Saskia Brand rightly remarked to me that a *badenya* relationship exists also in the case of a mother who has children by more than one man. I do not include this possibility in Fig. 1, because this form of *badenya* is not found in the genealogies analyzed in this article. During my fieldwork in Kela *badenya* was translated with 'même mère, même père'.

the brother-brother relation between the recently segmented compounds/patrilineages can become a source of conflict or harmony. Thus, in Mande society, *fadenya* and genealogical distance are mixed in processes of settlement and segmentation.

This brings me to an aspect of the related terms *badenya-fadenya* which has not been mentioned by Bird and Kendall, namely the fact that *fadenya* can be overruled by *fadenya* on a higher level, transforming the lower level *fadenya* into *badenya*. Let me explain this with a figure:

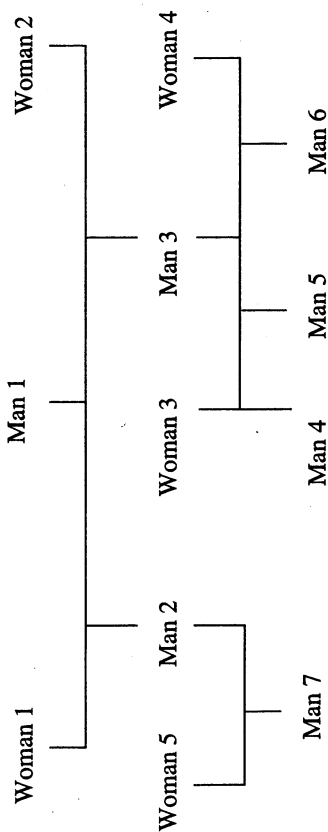


FIG. 1. — *Badenya* and *fadenya*.

In the genealogy, the men represent, in the first instance, human beings, but, as we shall see, they can also represent, in stories on status claims, patrilinear descent groups (*bondaw* or *siw*). Man 4 and Man 5 both have the same mother and father; their relation is characterized by *badenya*. *Badenya* is only partially present between Man 4 + 5 and Man 6; on a micro level, tension is possible, because 4 + 5 and 6 have different mothers. However, in their relation towards Man 7, a classificatory brother, Man 4 + 5 + 6 are joined in harmony.

Thus, one sees that, in another context, an opponent becomes the partner, namely when Man 7 is involved. It is also possible that Man 4 + 5 + 6 + 7 will support one another, for instance when they are in conflict with an 'outsider'. Then *fadenya* turns into *badenya*. This relative character has completely been overlooked by Leynaud and Cissé (1978) in their study on the Maninka of the Haut-Niger. They write (*ibid.*: 254): 'Si les relations sociales s'appuyaient uniquement sur les structures généalogiques, la cohésion de la communauté villageoise aurait bien du mal à se maintenir, car on

sait que chez les Malinke, *fadenya* (descendance patrilinéaire) est synonyme de rivalité pour le pouvoir.'

Patterns comparable to the mutual exchangeability between *fadenya* and *badenya*, as proposed here, are of course well known to many African societies which have been classified as 'segmentary'. Nonetheless, authors who normally describe Mande as segmentary mainly stress the scattered character of these societies. Amselle is, as far as I know, one of the few who has tried to analyze the interchange between unifying and destabilizing tendencies in Mande society,⁵ but he uses arguments others than kinship structure.

The Royal Genealogy According to the Kangaba's Rulers

The brother-brother relation described above can also be found in the genealogies of the hereditary rulers (*mansaw*) along the Niger river. These genealogies are still acknowledged by their descendants and recited in public by the *jeliw*, their client-bards (bard is *jeli*, 'griot'). In this article, I only deal with the first five generations of these genealogies, because they contain names which are known all over Western Sudan.

The most powerful dynasties in Mande bear the patronymic Keita. They present themselves as descending from Sunjata, the legendary founder of Mande society, and are related to each other as classificatory brothers. This principle can be illustrated by the genealogy put forward by the population in and around Kangaba:

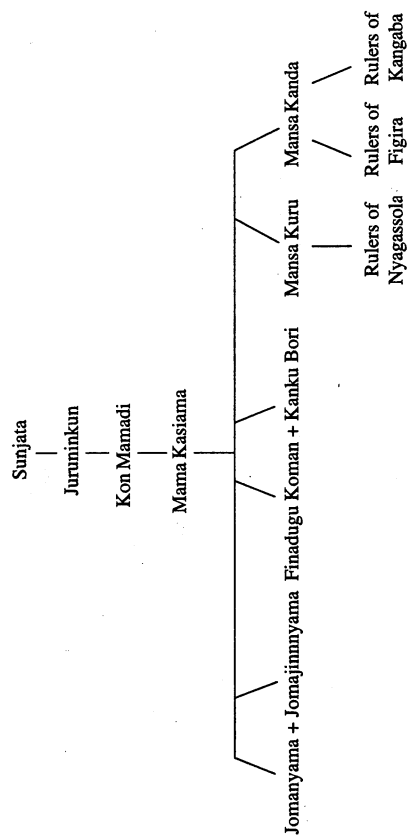
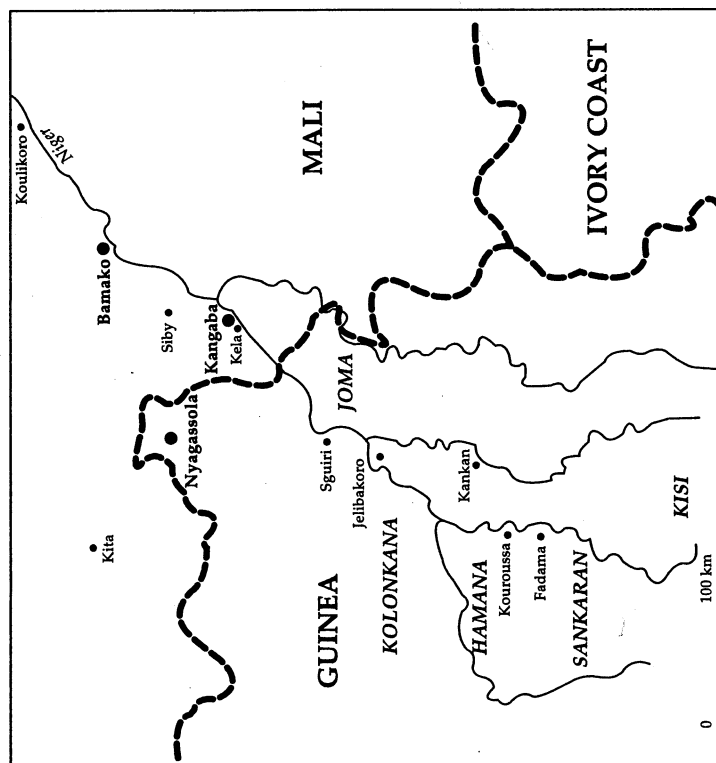


Fig. 2. — The genealogy of the rulers of Kangaba.

5. See AMSSELLE 1990, and his communication to the Mande Studies Association (Bamako, 1993), published here (pp. 755-761) under the title 'L'étranger dans le monde manding et en Grèce ancienne: quelques points de comparaison'.

This genealogy ends with six kings, each of them the founder of a dynasty.⁶ The descendants of Mansa Kanda are known as the Keita Kandasi. The descendants of the oldest son of Mansa Kanda rule Figira, a town on the right bank of the Niger river. The descendants of the youngest son are the rulers of Kangaba, on the left bank of the Niger river. Although the distance between Kangaba and Figira is not great (about ten miles), the towns are separated by a major geographical barrier: the Niger river.

The older brothers of Mansa Kuru and Mansa Kanda clearly refer to regions. Finadugu is just north of Kangaba, and the descendants of the two middle brothers rule in the town of Narena and villages adjoining Narena (Leynaud & Cissé 1978: 145, 448-451). Joma (Juma) consists of two regions, separated by the Niger river (see map).



Map of Mande

6. The oral traditions speak of 'six sorcerers' (*subaga woro*).

The division into spheres of influence is said to be the result of the disintegration of the Mali empire. In an article that has been considered the standard for the history of the aftermath of the Mali empire, Person writes (1981: 627):

'Dans le triangle malinké, on ne trouvera plus au *xix*^e siècle que des *kafu*, ces petites unités étatiques qui forment les cellules politiques fondamentales du monde mandingue. Certains d'entre eux savaient faire reconnaître leur hégémonie à leurs voisins, mais aucune structure politique permanente n'existait à un niveau supérieur. Beaucoup d'entre eux, dont les plus puissants et les plus peuplés, seront alors commandés par des lignées *Kéita* qui se réclament, avec quelque vraisemblance, des empereurs du Mali médiéval.'

Although there is no centralized administration, the region has a remarkable stability as far as its borders are concerned.⁷ When Mungo Park left Bamako for Siby, he noted that he entered the Mande kingdom and from that moment on the rulers were called *mansaw*. One century later, the French 'explorer', lieutenant Vallière, on his way from Siby to Bamako, mentioned almost the same spot as the limits of Mande. He also noted a lack of organization and writes (Vallière 1885: 338):

'La nation manding manque absolument d'unité, et il faudrait, sans doute, remonter bien loin dans son histoire pour la trouver constituée avec un gouvernement reconnu par tout le pays. Chaque village vit séparément avec son chef particulier et, bien que ces chefs appartiennent tous aux deux ou trois familles les plus illustres, ils n'ont, malgré ces liens de parenté, aucune solidarité d'intérêts.'

Remarkably, the present-day genealogy of the descendants of Sunjata (Fig. 2) still mentions the same border line, since the two middle brothers—Kanku Bori and Finadugu Koman—rule the region that was considered the northern part of Mande. Thus, there is also a parallel between 'ideology' and 'area of influence'.

The relation between the two classificatory brothers/dynasties may have been tense as well as intense. The descendants of Mansa Kuru,⁸ the older brother of Mansa Kanda, are the rulers of Niagassola. The two regions are marked by a geographical barrier. Niagassola is situated in the Mande hills. When Vallière arrived in Niagassola as the first white man, Niagassola's ruler, an old man named Mambi Keita, told him that his younger brother, another Mambi Keita, was the ruler of Kangaba. Mambi of Niagassola stated that his namesake in Kangaba was a very brutal man, and that Niagassola and Kangaba had been at war with each other for generations. However, when Vallière left Niagassola, the same Mambi of Niagassola

7. See also JANSEN 1996.

8. *Kuru* may signify 'rock'. The name Mansa Kuru is not restricted to the Mande region. For instance it is also part of the genealogy of the Segu kings (CONRAD 1990: 86-88). Conrad links *kuru* to 'canoe' and suggests a reference to the famous Mansa Musa.

advised him to go to Kangaba, where he would be received with the same hospitality he had enjoyed in Niagassola (*ibid.*: 314). Since he wanted to visit his commander, captain Gallieni, and as the rains slowed the progress of his exploration, Vallière decided to take a different direction and went straight to Bamako.

This event indicates two sides of the relationship between the rulers of Niagassola and Kangaba. Mambi of Niagassola disliked his 'younger brother' in Kangaba, but also admitted his importance. This recognition is visible in the fact that Mambi of Kangaba married two princely women from Niagassola (Jemusa Sumano, in Camara 1990: 133), thus showing the existence of a diplomatic relationship between the two towns, although the French noted that the rivalry between Kangaba and Niagassola was so vehement that they always chose opposite positions.⁹

Of course, this is a most peculiar situation. Historians and explorers claim that the unifying factor among these petty rulers is the memory of the famous Mali empire, which had fallen a long time ago. On the one hand they note a certain sense of unity and, actually, there really is a stability in the territory which is called 'Mande'. On the other hand, they record tensions between many towns and dynasties, and find usurpers in Kangaba, the acknowledged centre of the Mande region. How can this be explained?

The Younger Brother's Position in Royal Genealogies

The fact that several dynasties of rulers consider themselves as 'brothers' is not sufficient to explain the feelings of unity, just as the relation between brothers is no guarantee for peaceful cohabitation. On the contrary, it is as well a cause of tensions, as explained above.

Moreover, the position of Kangaba's powerful rulers seems to be a source of conflict, since they are in the position of the youngest brother's descendants. In Mande, succession is collateral: when a man dies, he is succeeded by his oldest brother. This person can be a descendant of a different father, or the oldest son of a deceased brother of the deceased, since many classificatory brothers live as neighbours in one village. The death of the chief of the patrilineage is often the moment when conflict arises.¹⁰ There are numerous cases in which several persons claim the right to succession after the death of a chief of the patrilineage. A conflict like this may lead to segmentation into several patrilineal descent groups.

Since the rulers of Kangaba are the classificatory younger brothers of all the other rulers, the French colonial administration considered the power of the rulers of Kangaba illegitimate. During their conquest of the Mande

region, the French collaborated with Niagassola and Figira in order to beat the extremely resistant ruler of Kangaba. Kangaba, in its turn, was supported by the famous leader Samori Toure. After the fall of Kangaba, its ruling dynasty was sent into exile, and the French endowed the rulers of Figira—the older brothers—with the function of *jamanatigi* ('chef de canton'), thus governing the area of both Kangaba and Figira. Niagassola was also liberated from the authority of Kangaba. The French built a fortress in Niagassola and reorganized its *maara* ('area of influence') into a separate district. Nowadays, Niagassola being part of the national state of Guinea, the separation from Kangaba is complete.

These measures by the French were not only a reward for the support they had received from Figira and Niagassola; they considered them to be justified by the rules of collateral succession which determine that older brothers come first. From the authors cited, I get the impression that the French administrators were serious ethnographers, who certainly made great efforts to understand Mande society, but were also fascinated by the region they regarded as the main source of the gold they saw in the Sudan. Moreover, they knew that this region had been at the core of a former empire. The French's fascination for the Mali empire may have been similar to that for Timbuctu.

Despite their position in the royal genealogy, the rulers from Figira were never accepted by the population of Kangaba, but the French arrangement lasted until 1951, when the former rulers from Kangaba were restored to the position of *duguigi*. The position of *jamanatigi* is still in the hands of the Keita from Figira, and they still live in the former palace of the Kangaba kings.

Thus, although the genealogy (Fig. 2) was recognized by both Kangaba and Figira, at the same time Kangaba's population did not accept the 'legitimate' older brother from Figira. The logic of this situation becomes clear when one analyzes genealogies from centres of power adjacent to Kangaba and Niagassola. First, let us look at Kita, west of Niagassola (Cissé & Diabaté 1970: 91 sq.).

In the Kita tradition, Sunjata is said to have had eight sons. The oldest, Nyamagan, settled in Kita, followed by his younger brother (from the same mother) Jinè Magan. The names of the other six sons are not mentioned. After an unknown time span Nyamagan went to Siguiri, leaving Jinè Magan behind in Kita. The praise song for the town of Kita contains the names of the two brothers (*ibid.*: 92):

'Je vous parle de Kita ...
De Kita Kuru¹¹ et de Mansa Ganda
De Nyamagan et de Jinè Magan.'

11. This means 'the hill of Kita'. Compare with Mansa Kuru, 'the ruler of the hill' (*supra*).

9. *Sénégal et Niger* ..., pp. 75, 175 (see ref. *supra* fn 2).

10. DIABATÉ's novel, *L'assemblée des Jirns* (1985), although it is a fiction, is a beautiful case study of a conflict in Mande.

These Kita praises contain some names similar to those in the genealogy of the kings of Kangaba. Again the duo Nyamagan/Jomamagan and Jinè Magan/Jinnenyama are said to be the oldest. However, when recited as a praise-song Kita Kuru and Mansa Ganda come first, thus suggesting that they are the oldest.¹²

The departure of the elder brother is remarkable since this means that the Keita of Kita themselves claim descent from a younger brother. This is similar to the other centre of power, Kangaba, whose rulers also claim to descend from a younger brother. The logic of the situation appears when data from Siguiri, the main town of Joma, are taken into account. Niane writes (1975: 96) that a 'branche cadette' moved from Kita to Joma. Thus the Joma genealogy is the reverse of that of Kita, and both claim descent from a younger brother.

The genealogies of the descendants of Sunjata are similar to the principles of settlement; both are in terms of brother-brother relations and this means they represent tension and mutual acknowledgement. The genealogies are transformations of the same set of names; one presents oneself as the youngest, and the neighbour—that is the rival—as the older brother.¹³ Centres of power (Kita, Kangaba, Siguiri) claim the position of the younger brother and, at the same time, place their neighbours in the position of the older brother.

Sunjata and Mande Bori

I have discussed the descendants of Sunjata, but I shall now turn to the dynasties that relate to him through his parents. Not all the princely Keita are descendants of Sunjata. South of Joma, in Hamana and Kolonkana (in present-day Guinea), live princely Keita who claim descent from Sunjata's younger brother, Mande Bori. While even further south, in the forests of Kisi, others trace their descent to Sunjata's older brother, Mansa Dankaran Tuman.

The following genealogy has been often recorded in the region of Kangaba.¹⁴

12. Although Kita Kuru and Mansa Ganda are not mentioned as human beings (kings or brothers) in the praise lines for Kita.

13. I made a selection of the available quantity of data. However almost any genealogy that I found fits within the pattern of preference of the younger brother position. For instance, see the genealogies in Cissé & Kamissoko (1988: 386 sq.).

14. This story can be found in the three versions of the Sunjata epic told by the griots of Kela, the official 'court historians' of the rulers of Kangaba. These versions cover the entire twentieth century. VIDAL did his research in the 1920s (1924), Ly-Tall recorded the Sunjata epic in Kela in 1979 (JABATÉ 1987), and I recorded the epic in 1992 (JANSEN, DUINTEJER & TAMBOURA 1995).

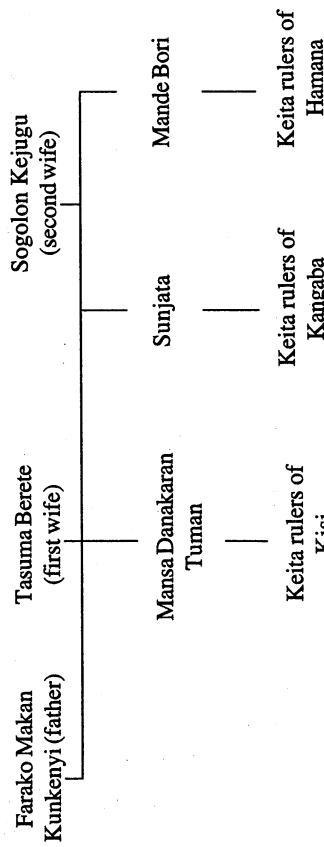


FIG. 3. — The royal family, the Kangaba perspective.

In Hamana and Kolonkana the same order is accepted, although with a seemingly minor difference: this genealogy contains one more *fadanya* construction.

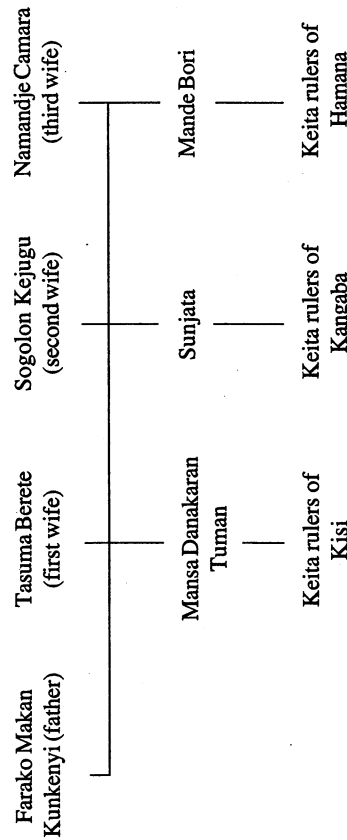


FIG. 4. — The genealogy of the Keita in Hamana (Niane 1975).

The introduction of a third wife takes away the *badanya* which existed between Sunjata and Mande Bori in the Kangaba perspective. Thus, the descendants of Mande Bori themselves see a kind of rivalry with those of Sunjata, while the latter are convinced of the harmony between the two brothers/regions.

It is interesting to have a look at the story that tells about the relation between the two brothers. Both the descendants of Sunjata and those of

Mande Bori agree upon the events of this narrative.¹⁵ It is said that Mande Bori insulted his sister and for that reason he will never be 'leader of the war' (*keletigi*). In Kangaba this event is taken as an explanation for superiority over Hamana, but in Hamana the story is used to explain the alleged organizational chaos along the Niger river. Thus, although the story is mutually accepted, its message is a point of dispute between adjoining regions.

The other dimension of how status can be expressed in Mande is seen in the case where the Hamana perspective is accepted and incorporated into a Kangaba narrative. Leynaud and Cissé give the following genealogy, which they claim to have recorded from the famous bards of Kela, who are attached to the Kangaba rulers:¹⁶

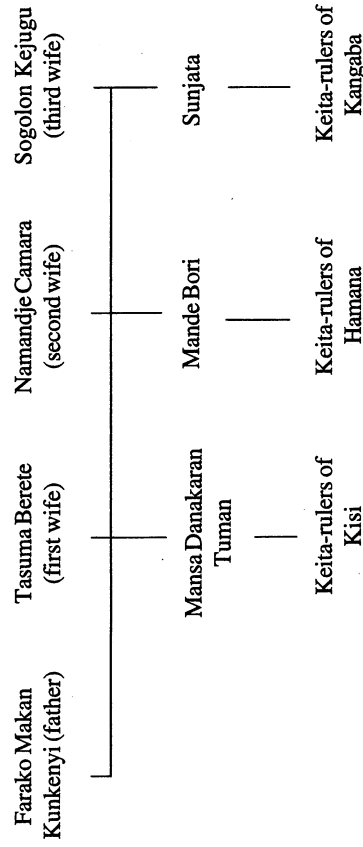


Fig. 5. — The genealogy of the Keita as presented by LEYNAUD and Cissé 1978 (condensed version).

This genealogy contains the same transformation as seen with the descendants of Sunjata, who place themselves in the position of the youngest brother in relation to the descendants of Mande Bori. The position of the younger brother is always worked out; no attention is paid to the descendants of the older brother.

Thus, the position of the oldest brother is not favored: the Keita in the

15. For a full account, see JABATÉ (1987: 53); JANSEN, DUJNTJER & TAMBOURA. (1995: 140). Information from David Conrad who did extensive fieldwork in Hamana (Aug. 1994).

16. Although I am still surprised that this genealogy is said to have Kela as its origin, I do not consider it as either 'wrong', or 'pure coincidence'. While rereading my fieldwork notes I found that the following dialogue had taken place the day after my arrival in Mande (Kela, Oct. 25, 1991): 'I explained to Damori Diabate (son of Lansine Diabate) that I had come to Kela to hear stories about Sunjata. He nodded and said: "Yes, Sunjata and Mande Bori." "Mande Bori, who is that?" I asked. Damori was astonished. "Don't you know him? He is the older brother of Sunjata."'

Kisi region are a powerless branch among the Keita dynasties and this may explain why they were linked to Mansa Dankaran Tuman, a coward who fled from Sumanguru Kante and settled in the forests of Kisi.¹⁷

The Younger Brother in Oral Traditions

In Mande, many stories are told about the origin of different social categories and their relation to each other. These stories often have a brother-brother relationship at their core. Undoubtedly the most famous is the story about the origin of the Diabate bards (Niane 1960: 26, fn 6):

'Les deux frères Oulani et Oulamba étaient tous les deux des Traorés; quand le cadet eut tué le buffle, Oulamba le frère aîné composa sur le champ une chanson au vainqueur qui s'écria: "Frère, si tu étais griot, personne ne te résisterait" ce qui se dit en malinké "Koro toun Baké Djéli à Dian bagaté" et l'expression Dian-Baga-té est devenu "Diabaté" et par déformation Dioubaté. Ainsi les Dioubaté griots sont frères avec les Traoré.'

In this tale, accepted by both Diabate and Traore, the oldest brother stands aside and the youngest kills the dangerous buffalo of Do. Thus, the bard—who receives gifts and is not supposed to fight in a war—is represented as an older brother, while the younger brother is at the origin of the Traore, a *jamu* which represents noble warriors.

A less known story gives another example of a difference in status categories. This time, the members of the two status categories have the same *jamu*. The story explains why certain Conde are noble in the Sankaran region in Guinea, while others are bards (Niane 1974: 65):

'Les Conde de Fadama représentent la branche aînée du clan. Voici dans quelle circonstance celle-ci a été déclassée: les frères cadets partirent un jour en guerre et ramenèrent à Fadama un grand butin. Parmi les prisonniers se trouvait une belle femme que les vainqueurs avaient destinée au frère aîné. Celui-ci en fut ravi et épousa la prisonnière, elle lui fit un enfant, mais le jour du baptême de l'enfant, la femme révéla qu'elle était d'origine griote.¹⁸ du clan Kouyate. Ainsi donc, les héritiers du frère ne pouvaient plus prétendre au pouvoir. L'aîné accepta le fait accompli et Fadama, son village, devint le centre historique pour les pays du Haut-Niger.'

Again the younger brother accomplishes a deed, while the other is respected, but stays aside.

A 'fraternal' story which has received much attention from bards themselves in the last decade tells of the three sons of Mamadi Kanu. The youngest takes the throne of Mande and from his offspring Sunjata will be

17. Actually, nothing is known about royal Keita in the Kisi region (BÜHNEN 1996), and this shows the artificial character of the kinship construction.

18. She started to sing when the baby was born (CONDÉ 1989: 9).

born much later; all the Keita thus descend from this youngest brother. Both in Kela as well as in Bamako the oldest brother is considered to be the ancestor of the Sumano bards. When told by Bakari Sidiki Sumano, chief of the Union nationale des griots du Mali, some characteristics of the older brother-younger brother relation become visible.

He told me in an interview in French (December 19, 1992) that the youngest brother was emotionally moved by his election as the ruler of Mande. The youngest brother then went to his oldest brother and declared that he accepted the rule over Mande because it was God's will. However, he would only execute the commandments coming from his older brother. Then, according to Mr Sumano, the youngest brother thus spoke to his older brother: 'Mais toi, tu restes. Toi tu t'occuperas de la maison-même, tu t'occuperas de la famille'. Mr Sumano thus explained his patronymic. He continued: *ina so mano*, en malinke, "tu tiendras la famille". Toi, tu t'occuperas de la famille. *ina so mano*. Alors, notre nom vient de là: Sumano.'

This is the perspective of the older brother! He allows the younger to accomplish deeds to make war. The older brother stays at home; he is immobile, and he is still in command over his younger brother. Since 'Sumano' is not a very reputed *jamuw*, this story is not widely known but it gives an indication of the relationship between an older and a younger brother. Moreover, it shows that the bearers of some *jamuw* (that of bards)¹⁹ are proud of the position of the oldest brother in relation to other *jamuw*.

Not only the noble *jamuw* (Keita, Traore) prefer the position of the youngest brother within the genealogies. For instance, the Diabate bards do the same. Besides the story of the two brothers who kill the buffalo of Do, the Diabate tell of another ancestor. In many versions of the Sunjata epic, they claim descent from Kala Julia Sangoy, a warrior who liberated Sunjata's sister, Tasuma Gwandilafe, from the hands of Sumanguru Kante. Kala Julia Sangoy had three sons: Tuba Kate, Monso Kate and Fatiya Kate. Fatiya Kate had two sons: Donfenogo and Gwèdè. The bards from Kela claim to descend from Fatiya Kate and Gwèdè. On October 17, 1992, Lansine Diabate from Kela explained to me that the descendants of Tuba Kate live in Figira and those of Monso Kate in Kita. However, descent from Gwèdè is preferred by any Diabate: Clemens Zobel's host, Sidiki Diabate (from Gambia and linked with the Diabate from Kita) also claims descent from Gwèdè (Zobel 1993: 57). When Zobel, known in Mande as Brehman Diabate, questioned Lansine again on the subject of the Diabate genealogy,²⁰ Lansine, who knows Zobel and his host well, placed the bards from Kita among the descendants of Gwèdè. Apparently being a descendant of the youngest brother is the most prestigious position.

19. Nowadays, many Sumano are griots and claim that they all used to be noble. Therefore, the story told by Mr Sumano does not make a difference between status categories.

20. Interview, Bamako, Oct. 17, 1994.

The Position of the Younger Brother in Daily Life

Before I attempt to explain this preference for the position of younger brother by the Keita royal dynasties, I will discuss some fieldwork data.

My host in Kela, Lansine Diabate, has two adult sons: Brehman (born in 1969) and Damori (born in 1972). One day, looking for Damori, I entered Lansine's compound, and only found Brehman; he was twining a rope in front of his hut. I asked him where Damori was. Brehman replied that he was in the fields and added that there was some work to do at home, and some out in the fields. Since he was the older brother, he had to do the work at home, and Damori, the younger brother, had to go to the fields. Brehman gave me this information with an expression of pride on his face.

This short dialogue made me reflect about the allocation of roles between brothers, and I later realized that the division of labour between Brehman and Damori was a representation in a nutshell of the drama of the Mande male population. Since Brehman is the oldest, he will succeed his father and thus stay on the paternal compound. In case of shortage of economic means, Damori will have to leave in order to accomplish something elsewhere. Brehman's right to succession makes him responsible for the reproduction of the paternal compound; he stays at home, just like the Sumano ancestor and the oldest Conde brother. The younger brother is active outside the compound, but is accountable to his older brother, who is the one in command over him.

The sedentary position of the older brother is also visible in Mande views of the famous leader Samori Touré, who was the main regional opponent of the French at the end of the nineteenth century. I already noted that the Keita of Kangaba were allies of Samori. Stories about Samori are abundant in southwestern Mali.

From written sources we know that one of Samori's war leaders was his 'younger brother', Keme Brehman, who was active in Mande in the nineteenth century and is remembered in the title of the praise song for Samori, the 'Keme Brehman *fasa*'. At first sight, it may seem strange that a praise song about the famous Samori should bear his younger brother's name rather than his own.

When I recorded this song, in March 1993, I did not recognize it, and asked Madu Diabate, the only French-speaking person around, for an explanation of the song. He told me that it was the 'Keme Brehman *fasa*' and added that only 'les Blancs' talked about Samori. Madu said that he had himself also learned about Samori at school; however, he added, in reality, 'Samori, il était toujours assis'. According to Madu, Samori's younger brother, Keme Brehman, was the active warrior and for that reason he is praised. Actually, Madu Diabate pointed out only one aspect of Samori. In the 1880s, the French captain Peroz writes (1889: 398-399):

'Depuis [1874], il se mit rarement à la tête de ses armées, n'ayant plus l'occasion de les réunir pour combattre un adversaire digne de lui. Il les divisa en sept corps, puis en dix, à la tête desquels il plaça ses frères et ses guerriers les plus dévoués et les plus habiles. [...] Les frontières furent en même temps divisées en huit secteurs: à chacun d'eux un corps d'armée était attaché, avec mission d'opérer toujours en avant.'

Samori's career can be divided into three steps.²¹ First he was successful as a war leader (*keletigi*), then he became *faama* ('settled ruler' without hereditary rights) and finally *almami* (spiritual leader). Samori was already *almami* at the time he opposed the French. As an *almami* Samori was 'assis': because he was commanding others — 'younger brothers' in the French accounts —, he had to be 'seated'. This explains why the French colonial reports often mention diplomatic meetings between French officers and Samori's 'younger brothers' and generals.²² Samori never presented himself: 'il était toujours assis'.

Apparently, the principles shaping Mande oral tradition do not provide a model for such a three-step career. It seems that the people of Mande have two models for the incorporation of Samori and Keme Brehman in their oral traditions, because historical reality fits only partially to their cultural models. First, they have the possibility of keeping Keme Brehman the youngest and then they are able to ascribe activity to him at the cost of Samori. Secondly, they could have represented Samori as the younger brother in order to make him as important as he is in written histories. The people of Mande 'chose' the first option, making Samori 'assis'. This shows that a historical event can only be kept in mind correctly as long as it is developed as a tradition along well-known lines about task differentiation, or if the event confirms this task differentiation.

The Younger Brother, the War Leader

The younger brother represents activity and warfare, but the older brother has the right to succession and commands the younger brother. Both statuses are highly esteemed and prestigious. Before I explain why the descendants of Sunjata prefer the position of the younger brother in the genealogies, I shall draw the reader's attention to a long narrative, which is told in Kangaba in order to explain the prominent position of Kangaba in relation to the adjoining villages. The story deals with the descendants of Mansa Kanda, the rulers of Kangaba and Figira. I consider it to be the most revealing account I found during my research.²³

21. I thank my colleagues at the Institut des sciences humaines in Bamako for discussion and information on this subject (Oct. 6, 1994).

22. Moreover, my interpretation explains the abundance of Samori's younger brothers in the French reports; these 'younger brothers' were officers or officers-in-training.

23. JABATÉ 1987: 73-74. English summary is mine, J.J.

'When Benba Kanda was dying he called his children in order to give them his blessings. He called Nan Tanwulen whose descendants live in Figira and said: "Find a place to settle and bring me a present, so I can give you my blessings, and I will tell you your profession." Nan Tanwulen chose Nyaniinba and donated a basket filled with white sorghum. Benba Kanda gave him his blessings and said that his descendants will cultivate white sorghum. That is the reason why the population of Figira cultivates white sorghum and always has a good harvest.

Then the ancestor of the people of Degela had to present himself. He donated a meal of fonio and said: "I do not move too much and want to settle near my maternal uncles." His father gave him his blessings and said that his descendants will cultivate fonio. That is why the people of Degela always have a good harvest of fonio.

Then Nyakalen Mori and Nyakalen chose a hill as their place to stay and came back with game. Their father said: "Well, you did not investigate other possibilities, but you wanted to have meat. Your descendants will be hunters."

Après quoi, Tenènba Koman, à son tour, alla se promener. Il revint avec un fer à esclaves. Il prit le fer à esclaves et alla le poser aux pieds de Benba Kanda. "Mon père, dit-il, je me suis promené, mais je voudrais m'installer ici auprès de ma mère. Je vais m'installer ici. Voilà un fer à esclaves que je t'apporte pour que tu me fasses des bénédictions [en échange]." "Gloire à Dieu! répondit Benba Kanda, cela me convient et me fait plaisir. Ah! Koman mon fils, tu ne m'apportes qu'un fer à esclaves pour qu'en échange je te bénisse. Que Dieu fasse que ce fer-là ne soit jamais vide [d'esclaves]. Si ce n'est de nos jours, il y avait toujours des gens au fer à Kaaba [= Kangaba]."

Again we see that real prestige is given to the youngest brother, the one who is active in war and who makes captives. However, this time the youngest settles at home, thus reproducing the paternal compound. The claim for reproduction of the paternal compound has been put in terms of harmony, since the younger brother settles besides his mother. This choice is a message for the other villages, saying that their mother is in Kangaba. The story is a brilliant construction: Kangaba claims both leadership in 'external' affairs (the acquisition of slaves versus agriculture), and the central position in 'internal' affairs (living next to the mother, while her other sons settle in neighbouring villages).

I use the dichotomy external/internal, because I wish to explain the position of the younger brother in Mande genealogies along these lines. The position of Mansa Kanda as the youngest brother (see Fig. 2) was accepted in a region that surpassed by far the actual area of influence (*maara*) of the *mansa* of Kangaba. As the younger brother is always active outside—as a warrior—in my opinion the position of younger brother is equal to the claim of being war leader (*keletigi*) when the entire region was attacked from outside, and when temporary cooperation was necessary.

In 'real life' politics, the rulers seemed to have acted along the lines of the genealogy of Fig. 2. For instance, Niagassola and Joma always disagreed with Kangaba, except when the region was attacked from outside. Although the status of Kangaba as the youngest had been acknowledged for a long time (see *supra*), the town had to reconfirm it again and again, since all the older brothers (Figira or Niagassola) try to tackle the youngest. Peace is always 'relative' and relational!

The fact that the Keita of Joma (who claim a relation with Kita) are seen, by Kangaba, as the oldest brother of all shows the relative dynamics of society: for the people in Kangaba, Joma was expected to be 'less obedient' than Niagassola. Joma thus had more freedom of action than Niagassola. This may explain, for instance, why the ruler of Niagassola promised the Toucouleur to help them destroy Kangaba, but in the end guided the armies to another village which was burned down (Peroz 1889: 239), and also why he wanted Vallière to visit Kangaba.

The relation between the descendants of Sunjata and those of Mande Bori—the princely Keita in Hamana and Kolonkana—is marked by the same mechanism. Although Mande Bori is presented as younger, in the story it is stated very explicitly that his descendants will never be the *keletigi*. Thus, ideally, when attacked from outside, when collaboration in defense is necessary, Kangaba, being a descendant of Sunjata and being recognized as the youngest brother among the dynasties claiming descent from him, was most probably to function as *keletigi*. However, the Kita perspective represents a counterclaim, because Mansa Kanda is mentioned before Nyamagan.

Written sources confirm my analysis of the genealogies: powerful families worked together only in case of an external threat. The French captain Peroz complains (*ibid.*: 386 sq.) that regions only join forces when attacked from outside; when the external threat disappears, the mutual hostility returns.

And this is not surprising: considering the power of the *keletigi*, he constitutes a potential threat to his companions, his 'older brothers'. Look at what happened to the chief of Kankan who gave the function of 'généralissime' to his younger brother Moriba (*ibid.*: 385-386). Moriba suffered some defeats in the early 1860s and therefore decided to ask Niagassola for military support. This temporary alliance led to a great deal of plundering, weakening the position of Kankan in the end, and bringing much booty to Niagassola. This story shows the enormous power of the *keletigi*. It would therefore be dangerous to have a continued collaboration between 'brothers', that is, to accept one person as a *keletigi* for a long period, or to intensify the collaboration. In the long run this would undermine the position of the 'older brothers'.

Kangaba as a Warrior State: A Comparison with Segu

Although an analogy is not similar to evidence, it may be useful to look at characteristics of the organization of the Segu warrior state as it has been described by Bazin (1982) and Roberts (1987). We know that Segu had much influence in nineteenth century Mande, and that Kangaba paid taxes to it; and because of that contact between Kangaba and Segu, a comparison is justified. I shall argue that my analysis of Mande genealogies seems complementary to sociological characteristics of Segu in precolonial times.

I do not want to get involved in discussions on state typologies, and use the 'warrior state' model only because of the clearness of the studies on Segu society by Bazin and Roberts. Bazin warns that a warrior state is almost uncomparable to the state as we know it. He writes (1982: 324): 'C'est dans la mesure où l'on admet que l'État ne saurait être essentiellement autre chose qu'un principe d'instauration de la paix, d'arbitrage et de régulation harmonieuse des intérêts particuliers qu'on s'interdit d'en appliquer le concept à une entreprise de domination par la force.'

War was the 'raison d'État' of the warrior state. According to Roberts (1987: 2), 'The survival of each state depended on its ability to reproduce its capacity to make war'. He adds that 'the state's particular role must be understood as a process of social reproduction of the power and social structure of the ruling group', and that 'most states developed a coercive capacity that took the forms of legitimated violence, waging war and preparing defense' (*ibid.*: 4, 9).

The warrior state is not a euphemism for a situation of plunder and pillage. Bazin writes (1982: 342): 'Si une société telle que Segu peut être qualifiée d'État guerrier, ce n'est pas tant parce que la guerre en général y tiendrait plus de place qu'ailleurs mais parce qu'une certaine forme de guerre, celle qu'un dispositif étatique et militaire surpasseant livre à des communautés villageoises, est le moment nodal de sa reproduction.'

Roberts (1987: 19-20) agrees that 'warfare was an expression of state power':

'Armies marched. Sometimes they conquered, sometimes they were defeated. The success of a military venture [. . .] had deep ramifications within the structure of the state itself. Too few successes cast doubt on the legitimacy of state power in its present form. Too many successes expanded the state beyond the limits effectively controlled by existing forms of rule and institutions of state.'

This notion of the warrior state is compatible to the impression given by the Mande genealogies, because in these genealogies the royal dynasties stress a kind of army leadership comparable to that of the Segu kings. Since a dynasty could rule a warrior state by making war, it now becomes logical that Mande dynasties presented themselves as war leaders and therefore, on an ideological level, as the youngest brother. Mande is also comparable to the Segu warrior state in that it considers the position of the *keletigi* as that of the army leader. As described above for Kankan, too much success of the *keletigi* leads to a catastrophe, for the leader of Kankan as well as its surrounding regions which used to be under its control. This is similar to Roberts' abovementioned remark.

The position of the king of a warrior state needs some description, too. Roberts (1987: 39) writes that the king had to redistribute his holdings in order to ensure the loyalty of his followers: 'To be considered unwilling to share wealth [. . .], was to threaten the state.' The king's role as a distributor in a warrior state may give another explanation for his position as

the youngest brother in Mande genealogies. Since a younger brother is supposed to give to his older brothers, a distributing king or a king who gives all the booty to the older brother king actually is in a similar position as a younger brother is in relation to an older brother.

Meillassoux's description of tension between elders and cadets in Bamana society (in Roberts 1987: 30 sq.) adds more evidence to our argument. The elders' power rested on their management functions, through which they organized and limited access to food. Cadets were organized in bachelors' associations that could be hired for warfare or the defense of the village. Although not a division between older brother and younger brother, Meillassoux's scheme for Bamana society draws an obvious parallel between 'young' and 'warfare'.

Summarizing this section, I suppose that Mande society was more or less identical to the Segu state. One may even guess that Mande was more stable than Segu as far as its organization is concerned, because the genealogies proclaimed in Mande are still recognized by major parts of the population, while this is not the case with the Segu royal genealogies. In Mande, Kangaba always stood at the centre and its leadership seems more or less accepted, at least on an ideological level. Therefore, I think I can 'improve' Meillassoux's suggestion (1968: 179-180) that Kangaba's leadership was more or less accidental and assigned by lot.

Moreover, Kangaba's organization sheds light on political processes in Segu. From the Kangaba material it is clear that relations between brothers combine both harmony and conflict. This may explain, on an ideological level, the war-like character of the warrior state: any relation had to be both harmonious and tense. The political context decided which side of the balance would prevail. Therefore, as described by Roberts, war at the frontier implied a flourishing economy within the state, and similar to peace, a flourishing economy is also relative and relational.

Mande Status Discourse

The parallel between younger brother and the task of war leader in case of an external threat may also be corroborated by looking at the correspondencies between the younger brother, the stranger, the hunter and the sister. I shall start with the stranger.

Many villages in Mande tell foundation stories which explain a certain division of authority. The people that descend from the founder are called the *dugurenw*, the original inhabitant ('autochtone' in French). The function of 'chef de terre' (*dugukolotigi*) is attributed to one of these *dugurenw*. The *dugukolotigi* is responsible for the division of the village ground and in former times he used to guard the *tyiwarra* masks which danced in the fields at harvest time, and to make sacrifices in order to obtain a good harvest.

The function of 'chef de village' (*dugutigi*) is in the hands of a group of so-called strangers (*lolanw*) ('allochtones'). In the foundation stories these *lolanw* are said to have arrived last as conquerors.²⁴ Traditionally the village chief had to welcome guests and to preside over the meetings of the old inhabitants of the village. Nowadays he is also responsible for the collection of taxes.

Similar to the brothers, the one that arrived first, the founder, is responsible for reproduction. The stranger, the one who arrived last, is associated with violent activity and takes care of external affairs. Parallels with other tales about dichotomies are common. For instance, in the above mentioned village of Fadama, the Condé bards, descendants of the older brother (see *supra*), are considered to be the founders of the village (Condé 1989: 14).

A stranger in Mande is, in fact, not 'strange' at all; the term 'stranger' is as neutral as, for instance, the term 'hunter' or 'brother'. The stranger is treated according to the strict rules of hospitality. René Caillié (1989: 321) experienced in Kankan how great this hospitality can be in the Sudan:

'J'allai donc à l'humble cabane de mon nouvel hôte, qui était très pauvre, mais il me reçut du mieux qu'il put: il me donna même la natte sur laquelle il avait l'habitude de coucher. Je fis difficulté de l'accepter, car il m'était pénible de déplacer ce bon veillard, mais il insista en me disant que, comme étranger, je devais lui céder, qu'il était naturel qu'il me fit les honneurs de chez lui.'

Caillié experienced how a stranger is treated with a high esteem, just as the position of the youngest brother can be: the stranger's wishes come first.

The younger brother and the stranger are related on a logical level, too. A younger brother has no right to succession and will therefore leave the paternal compound in case of conflict. Having left the compound, he will be the stranger upon arrival in another village. Moreover, the youngest brother 'arrived' last in the family, just as the *lolanw* arrived last in Mande foundation stories. The parallel between order of arrival and task differentiation is striking.

There is also a parallel between a younger brother and a hunter, since both are active in a violent fashion outside the village. In stories younger brothers hunt and so do Sunjata and Mande Bori. However, after Sunjata became *mansa* ('ruler') of Mande, he was no longer allowed to get involved in external affairs. The Sunjata epic gives numerous examples of heroes (Tiramagan, Fakoli) who compel Sunjata to stay at home or are sent by Sunjata, after he became *mansa*. Sunjata's younger brother, Mande Bori, remains a hunter and, in present-day Northern Guinea, is considered to be the ancestor of the hunters.

24. I refer to the 'latest goup' in village foundation stories. Of course, in every Mande village there are families who immigrated recently; however, they are never part of the foundation story. All the families who feature in foundation stories settled a long time ago in the village.

The parallel with the hunter shows another characteristic of the 'younger brother complex': the lack of reproduction. Austen (1986: 388) notes that Sunjata never acquires food by production, only by 'violence'. Sunjata hunts, uproots a baobab in order to give its leaves (food) to his mother, and cuts a piece out of his leg to give meat to his bards. As a *mansa* Sunjata, lured from Nema with agricultural products, no longer engages in such activities: he has become immobile and is responsible for reproduction.

Mande hunters are considered to be great sorcerers and the 'brousse' is the domain of sorcery, contrary to the village in which social order—the paternal compound—is reproduced. These facts give insight into the identity of women in Mande oral tradition, because in the context of the story the identity of a Mande woman is dependent on her 'mobility'. I already mentioned the harmony and stability which are represented by the mother (*ba*) and the concept of *badenya*. This does not seem to fit with another characteristic attributed to women, namely their power as sorcerers, because sorcery is linked to the brousse. However, this can be explained through an analysis of women's mobility. As a man's mother, a woman is supposed to stay in the paternal compound; after the death of his father, the son will take care of her. However, as a sister she is supposed to move: being married out, she transgresses the 'brousse' and becomes a stranger in the village of her husband. This explains how in Mande traditions a sister/wife is given entirely different characteristics than a mother (cf. Van Hoven & Oosten 1994).

Summarizing the dichotomies and the parallels mentioned in this article, the following list of oppositions can be given:

immobility	mobility
internal	external
sitting	on the road
reproduction	expansion/violence
older	younger
village	'brousse'
<i>duguren</i>	<i>lolan</i>
<i>dugukolotigi</i>	<i>dugutigi</i>
<i>badenya</i>	<i>fadenya</i>
agriculture	hunting
<i>mansa</i>	<i>keletigi</i>
mother	sister/wife
order	dynamics/sorcery
receive	give
continuous status	temporary status
command	execution

I consider these oppositions as a list of not necessarily related parallels. I do not want to suggest a hierarchical order in the dichotomies: Mande culture does not 'start' with either one basic parallel, nor one aspect (the Sunjata epic, patterns of compound structure, kinship, labour differentiation, or state formation processes). The list may, however, be useful

in order to analyze how arguments and traditions are (re-)constructed in Mande according to lines which are more or less predictable; certain characteristics coincide and presuppose each other.

The oppositions in the list represent certain tendencies which can be articulated in a context according to the same lines of logic/predictability: the older is immobile and is responsible for reproduction and the younger is active externally and, thus, can achieve status in war, or in other external relations. Or to put it more bluntly, if he does not succeed in warfare, he is a worthless younger brother. The discourse on brothers can be used to express change—and therefore 'society-as-it-really-is', because the younger brother is supposed to bring a stimulus, a change, to his paternal compound (Jansen & Zobel 1996).

The oldest brother must guarantee its continuity. This explains the well-known Mande proverb: 'The hero is welcome only on troubled days' (in Johnson 1986: 42). The hero is the stranger, the hunter, the violent one, the one who comes from outside, the younger brother who deposes his older brother in order to replace him as the compound chief. Such a person is only welcome when the reproduction of society is in danger.

In this way, it becomes clear how groups attribute status to themselves in relation to other groups. The relationship with the other is hierarchical, and primarily stresses a difference of social roles. Both these roles are honorable, but in some context one can be more 'profitable' than the other. For instance, in case of war, the position of younger brother was especially valuable, because Mande genealogies show that every royal descent group preferred this position when explaining its heroic origins.

Moreover, I use the term 'discourse' because an opposition is a way of talking about social events, and not a statement of their essential character. In the discourse, oppositions are often 'mixed'. Let me explain this with some examples. Camara (1990: 269-270) writes that a newly chosen ruler of Kangaba was called 'the stranger' when he was the first of a new generation. (After the generation of 'fathers' had died, the oldest 'son' had the right to be his successor on the throne.) Of course, the son was not a stranger, a man from outside. The label 'stranger' referred to its equivalent 'younger brother' and showed the new ruler's power to act.

The label 'stranger' is applied to Sunjata, too. Bird and Kendall (1987: 18) write that Sunjata's mother sang the following words on the day that Sunjata first walked: 'Stranger, stranger, Oh! Sunjata became a stranger today.' According to Bird and Kendall, Sunjata acquires extraordinary powers on the moment he starts to walk. These powers turn him into a dangerous person, and that would be the reason why he is called a 'stranger'. I do not agree with this explanation, as there is no indication whatsoever that strangers are seen as dangerous in Mande. The stranger is a neutral concept which has nothing to do with the fear that certain people have for 'foreigners'. Caillié mentioned how welcome a stranger is. Rather, I propose that Sunjata is called a stranger on the day he starts to walk because a stranger is

mobile. Within the Mande status discourse it is logical to draw this parallel. From this follows the more or less predictable step that Sunjata starts to hunt as soon as he can walk, and that he is dangerous as soon as he is 'en brousse'.

Sometimes an extra dimension is attributed to the older/younger opposition. This mechanism can be seen in the genealogy of the rulers of Cendugu, a region fifty miles west of Kangaba (Samaké 1988: 388). These rulers bear the *jamu* Traore; they claim to consist of four groups, descendants of four brothers. The function of ruler belongs to the descendants of the youngest of the four brothers. Moreover, those descendants are the classificatory children of the descendants of the three older brothers. Here the opposition older/younger has an extra dimension: the descendants of the three brothers are older in age as well as in generation.

Another reason for preferring the term 'status discourse' is that the parallel usages can be combined in a single statement. The day before my departure from Kela, old Mamadi Diawara greeted me. He knew me by the name of Sidiki Kuyate and therefore used the following words:²⁵ 'Les Kuyate sont les premiers griots du Mande. C'est pourquoi ils sont inférieurs à tous les autres. Alors, pour tous les griots du Mande c'est obligatoire de donner aux Kuyate.'

Mr Diawara used these words in order to announce the blessings he wanted to give me. His statement clearly offers an insight into 'Mande logic'. In this article, I presented some narratives about older brothers who became ancestors of bards. Bards receive, as older brothers do, a portion of all goods acquired by the younger brother. Among the bards, the Kuyate receive from other bards, who are considered to have been 'converted' to 'griotism' later.

The basic problem of a gift is that it restricts freedom of action, since the receiver has to pay attention to the giver. Therefore, the youngest brother is the freest. He has accomplished real freedom of action. Thus, although the oldest is the one who is respected most, from another perspective his position, because of its related obligation of accepting gifts, leads to inferiority.

*

In Mande, groups prefer the status of 'old' in some contexts and that of 'young' in others. Mande society is a whirlpool of status claims, interpretations of status claims, and counter claims.

In this article, I used various kinds of data: genealogies, fieldwork data, 'family' histories, travelers' accounts, and the Sunjata epic. I made this choice for showing that Mande has a discourse which is applied at all levels of society in all contexts. This turns an 'isolated' research project—such as a reconstruction of the past on the basis of genealogies or succession lists—

25. Translated in French on the spot by Seydou Diabate, a young man from Kela.

into a risky enterprise, since data must always be analyzed within the general background, namely the patterns that shape Mande status discourse. They cannot be studied as isolated facts.

I hope to have shown that many historians who studied Mande and the history of the aftermath of the Mali empire made a methodological mistake by analyzing Mande genealogies from a perspective of positivist chronology. Most of the time Mande genealogies have less to do with chronology than with status claims in relation to others, and, as a consequence, claims for a particular task differentiation, which actually keep the relationship stable.

This task differentiation varied over time and context, but claims could be more or less acknowledged mutually for a long time. I want to stress the principles according to which stability was sought and acquired, again and again, between a group of petty rulers. It was advantageous to anyone involved to avoid a static, 'closed' view of the mutual status claims, because claims had to be used in different contexts. For instance, the Keita Kandasi are *mansaw* in the immediate surroundings of Kangaba but *keleligi* in the case of an attack from outside; in relation to other Keita dynasties (in other regions) the most expansionist position was taken, and this was represented by the claim of descent from the youngest branch.

This explains why the Sunjata epic, the story that legitimizes rule, is relatively stable within such a vast region; anyone wanting to make status claims must know the stories before it is possible to use them. The bards had a lot of work to do in precolonial Mande! The Sunjata epic was only the tip of the iceberg: the real struggle was about additions and interpretations. The discussion on the relationship between Sunjata and Mande Bori is a clear example of such a struggle for interpretation. The story is told by the descendants of both brothers, but they use it as a means towards different goals. Any interpretation, however, had to fit within the patterns of Mande status discourse. For instance, others had to be acknowledged as 'brothers'. The discourse is very complex, because it is extremely dynamic, every claim creating a counter claim. The bards of Mande are the masters of this status discourse (and their often praised 'tête historique' has been molded by this discourse).

An example of the intellectual efforts by bards can be seen in the tale about the sons of Fa Kanda. In this story Kangaba claims to be both the war leader (the youngest brother gives slaves, the others give agricultural products) and the hereditary ruler (the youngest brother settles beside his mother). It covers all possible claims from whatever perspective one takes. That is the reason why it is so brilliant.

Such a story must not be labeled 'ambiguous', because it makes sense within the Mande status discourse. In Mande, contradictory roles must be performed in different contexts. This is the routine of daily life, since any person plays a variety of 'contrasting' public roles as an inhabitant of a compound on which related patrilineal descent groups live.

The status discourse analyzed here can be found at all levels of Mande

society. Here I stressed its use in the determination of leadership in times of war. Therefore, I had to put emphasis on the younger brother. I showed that the Sunjata epic has to be analyzed as a vivid story full of leadership claims that are based upon genealogies; the epic is intermingled again and again with contextually relevant information.

The patterns discerned in the Mande status discourse compel me to reconsider the history of Kangaba as it has been described by various historians. This history is not one full of coups d'État and usurping families, and it is not probable that Kangaba's star rose only recently in Mande, nor that the *janu* Keita immigrated in Mande in the seventeenth century. The idea that the Keita of Kangaba took power in the eighteenth century—or even later—is nowadays even used to date non-Mande sources (Green 1991: 130 sq.). This is a dangerous development in West African historical research. Lists of the 'capitals' of the Mali empire always mention Kangaba as the newest/last one (*ibid.*), but this does not necessarily refer to a recent foundation.

On the contrary, lists that present Kangaba as the last capital illustrate that the status of this famous town has been widely recognized for a long time—Kangaba is the ultimate youngest brother, the ultimate invading stranger. The fact that 'Mansa Kanda' is considered to be the youngest brother in a wide region, and the fact that he is an older brother in Kita, show that, at the moment of the French conquest, Kangaba's status had already been high for centuries.

This does not mean that Delafosse was right, when he claimed that Kangaba was the capital of the medieval Mali empire. My analysis rejects only the myth that was created by historians who thought to modify Delafosse's point of view, but it does not prove Delafosse's claim. Summarizing, I would say that Delafosse was possibly right, and that his successors certainly made methodological mistakes.

That is the reason why I think the French took precisely the wrong measures when they reorganized Mande. The 'older brother' from Figira had no legitimate 'customary right' to the 'throne of Kangaba'. It was a mistake to send the rulers of Kangaba into exile because of their position as 'usurpers', as younger brothers. Both the Mande population and the colonial rulers suffered from the French failure to understand the manner in which the organizing principles of Mande society were articulated.

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ABSTRACT

This article examines different categories of expression (genealogies, family histories, themes from the Sunjata epic, principles of segmentation, labour division) in Mande, and proves that they all develop along lines of predictability, and are therefore products of the same discourse. It is argued that genealogies are artificial kinship constructions which represent status claims. Any genealogy in Mande is operative only in a specific context: as an argument in a struggle for interpretation, and thus the usual positivist, chronological interpretation of genealogies is contested. The relationship oldest/youngest in particular serves to express unity and tension in diplomatic relations between social groups, and relationship has been articulated politically in a functional way in relation to other oppositions such as mobile/immobile, interior/exterior. This status discourse is illustrated by the discussion on the position of the rulers of Kangaba, the alleged ancient capital of the Mali empire.

RÉSUMÉ

Le frère cadet et l'étranger. À la recherche d'un discours sur le statut au Mande. — Cet article examine différents registres d'expression mandingue (généalogies, gestes de familles, thèmes de l'épopée de Sunjata, principes de segmentation, division du travail). Il tente d'établir une théorie performative et contextuelle des généalogies qui doivent être restituées dans le cadre d'une 'lutte pour l'interprétation', en opposition aux concep-

tions chronologiques habituelles de celles-ci. La relation aîné/cadet sert notamment à exprimer des relations diplomatiques d'unité et de tension entre groupes sociaux et elle est politiquement articulée en fonction du contexte à d'autres oppositions comme mobile/immobile, intérieur/extérieur. Le discours sur le statut est illustré par la problématique de la position des rois de Kangaba, supposée être l'ancienne capitale de l'empire du Mali.

Keywords/Mots clés: Mali/Mali, Mande/Mande, genealogies/généalogies, oral tradition/tradition orale, status/statut.

Gérard Dumestre

De l'alimentation au Mali

Il n'est sans doute pas inutile, avant d'aller plus avant dans ces observations, de rappeler qu'actuellement encore la sous-alimentation est chronique au Mali, et que sur ce plan la situation, depuis les années soixante, s'est plutôt détériorée. Ainsi la consommation de viande, qui était de 20 kg par habitant et par an dans les premières années de l'Indépendance, est tombée à 13 kg en 1977. Pour ce qui concerne l'agriculture, « on peut constater que, depuis 1960, la disponibilité de céréales per capita a diminué en raison de la stagnation de la production de céréales et de l'accroissement de la population » (Conférence... 1990 : 5). Une enquête récente menée à Koutiala, ville située dans une région pourtant fortement agricole, montre que la dénutrition chronique touche deux enfants sur cinq (Oshaug 1992 : 12). Les dépenses journalières moyennes par personne pour la nourriture, en 1983 à Bamako, étaient de 65 à 100 F CFA pour plus d'un tiers des ménages (le kilo de riz était alors à 125 F CFA). On pourrait multiplier les indicateurs, agronomiques, économiques, médicaux : tous montreraient à la fois que la situation nutritionnelle est médiocre ou mauvaise et qu'elle s'est plutôt dégradée depuis 1960. Le Mali est un pays où la faim, et plus encore la peur de la faim, sont encore des réalités présentes et pesantes. De là, comme dans beaucoup de sociétés traditionnelles où la certitude de manger n'est pas garantie pour chacun et pour chaque jour, la présence de la nourriture est quasi obsessionnelle, non seulement dans le quotidien — et avant tout dans celui des femmes — mais aussi dans tous les domaines de la vie sociale. Ainsi les premiers mots qu'on apprend dans une langue inconnue, ou les seuls qu'on connaisse dans celle de l'étranger de passage, sont toujours, après « bonjour », « viens manger » ; ainsi encore, la relation presque exclusive qui associe, dans le *tâna*, nom de clan et interdit alimentaire. La présence de la nourriture comme motif ou comme ressort essentiel de l'intrigue se retrouve non seulement dans les contes, les récits, le théâtre, mais aussi dans l'histoire : c'est le vol d'une part de viande qui fournit le prétexte de la dispute entre Bakari Dian et Bilissi ; le « prix du miel » est le nom de l'impôt qu'on payait dans le royaume de Ségou, et la raison de la préséance donnée à Da sur Tiéfolo, tous deux enfants princiers, tient à la gourmandise du messager chargé d'annoncer au souverain la naissance de son premier fils.

Un autre trait caractéristique est l'importance accordée à la quantité de