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THE MANDE PRAISE SONG *KAYRA* (PEACE): MANDE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

One might think that recording and archiving of an oral performance may save a song for the future. Indeed, this is often the case, but sometimes the language of the performer is so particular that his or her own explanations are needed to understand the text of the performance. The song presented here illustrates this interesting aspect of methodology: half a century after the recording, the performer was traced and he helped to transcribe his own words. These words were difficult to understand because the performer, at the time a young artist in Bamako, the capital of the French colony Soudan Français, used fashionable expressions and neologisms derived from French, a language he didn't speak. Many of these are not in use anymore. The song presented here is of major historical importance because it is an old recording of what nowadays is a classic (see discography) in Sub-Saharan West-Africa and because the performer is generally considered to be its "author." Moreover, this song presents a view on an African society that is not often considered by scholars of African history: the song text illustrates how and to what extent global issues were re-imagined on a local level. In this case, the locale is Mande, the zone south of the West African Sahara which is inhabited by culturally and linguistically connected ethnic groups, most of which trace descent to the medieval Mali empire and its founder, Sunjata.

The song *Kayra* has been recorded by many musicians in the vast diaspora of Mande peoples, which spreads across the West African Sahel and Savannah zones and stretches to Europe and North America. It is generally believed to date from the World War II era. The earliest known recording is held in a historic collection of several dozen songs recorded in Mali and Guinea in 1949 by Arthur S. Alberts that is now housed at the Archives of Traditional Music at Indiana University. Alberts recorded some of the most

renowned musicians of the time, including the family of Sidi Djeli Dioubate of Kankan, Guinea, the creators of the musical event Mamaya (see Kaba and Charry), the family of Kayra Seku Koita, and Siramori Diabate of Kela, a Malian village widely known as an important center of historical knowledge (Camara; Jansen, *Épopée-Histoire-Société*), musical education (Charry; *Mande Music*, Hale) and verbal skills (Hoffman). Alberts's recordings from all over West Africa were released on a series of LPs and a recent CD (Alberts). *Kahira*, a version of *Kayra* from Kissidougou, Guinea using two *kora* and a guitar, was issued in 1954 (Alberts, *The Field Recordings of African Coast Rhythms*). Alberts recorded three pieces by the Kela *griots* on May 2, 1949 in Bamako and released excerpts of the Kela Diabate performances in 1954. "Sara," one of the three pieces, is known as the signature song of Siramori Diabate (see also Jansen, "'Elle connaît tout le Monde": A Tribute to the *Griotte* Siramori Diabate"). Although the artists were unidentified on the recordings, Eric Charry readily identified them as the Kela Diabate family of *griots* after making inquiries in the 1990s.¹

A chance meeting in Bamako in 1997 between Charry and Jansen led Jansen, who worked closely with the Kela artists, to pursue research on the recordings. Jansen took the tape to Kela and *Kayra* was immediately recognized as the product of Kayra Seku Koita from the village of Djoliba. Subsequently, Jansen presented the cassette to Kayra Seku and interviewed him about the recording and his career. Then Charry and Jansen asked Seydou Camara to translate it. He attempted to do so, but succeeded only after visiting Kayra Seku in Bamako in February 2000 to ask him about his use of neologisms and his peculiar pronunciation of French words. Since Kayra Seku doesn't speak French, he produces words that are vaguely connected to the French original (for instance, *Kiléri* for Hitler).

None of the people interviewed remembered when the recording in question was made. The Kela *griots* and Kayra Seku remembered the names of Jumé Dunbuya on balafon, Yamudu Diabate (vocals), and Kayra Seku himself (vocals) as the performing artists. With both Camara and Jansen, Kayra Seku discussed a studio recording he made in 1962, a few years after Mali's independence.² He claimed that the recording discussed in this article was made at

that time, although other evidence points to 1949 as the date of the Alberts recordings. A similar doubt accompanies a picture, in the collection of Yamudu Diabate, of people from Kela who performed on the Alberts recording. The front row consists of Bremajan Kamissoko (vocals), Nankomanwulen Kouyate (balafon), and Yamudu Diabate (vocals); in the back row stands Siramori Diabate. Yamudu claimed that this picture was taken during or shortly after the festivities to celebrate Mali's independence, but according to Yamudu's nephew Madou Diabate, "1949" is written on the back of the picture (see picture). If Madou Diabate is correct, then it is even more plausible that the recording is from 1949.

The origin of the *Kayra* piece is unclear.³ Mr. Koita should be the ideal informant on this question: more than four decades after quitting the music scene, he is still known as Kayra Seku Koita, and he is considered by many people to be the author of the song. The Kela people say that the Alberts recording is "Kayra Seku's song," and Kayra Seku himself told Camara that he made it a few years before the end of the Vietnam War. *Kayra* is a traditional piece that has been interpreted by many artists. However, whether Kayra Seku was the first to come up with such an interpretation or one among several artists to develop it may never be known. In West Africa, the idea of a composer is less definitive than in Euro-American musical traditions. The one who develops and popularizes a piece may be just as important as the original composer.⁴

Kayra Seku was born in 1922 to Dantuman Koita and Nunmuso Sumano and grew up in the village of Djoliba, thirty kilometers south of Bamako, the capital of Mali. His family is of *jeliw* origin. *Jeli* is the Malinké term for *griot*, a regional term of uncertain origin that designates hereditary oral historians, diplomats, and musicians who are part of the *nyamakalaw*, the endogamous social category of artisans (Conrad and Frank). His family's tradition led Seku to be involved in music from birth,⁵ and his sister is Ami Koita, a star of the contemporary Malian music scene. The world of music in Djoliba was very vibrant: Mali's megastar, Salif Keita, also grew up in Djoliba and made the first steps in his transformation—so criticized by his father—from nobleman to musician there (Keita).

The young Kayra Seku chose the *ngoni mèsèn*, the traditional lute with four or five strings, as his instrument. He appeared to have a

good voice, and therefore performed for a lengthy period with the pair Yamudu Diabate (1923-1997) and Bremandjan Kamissoko (who died in the 1980s) from Kela. "Yamudu ni Beremajan" is a group still remembered vividly in the area between Bamako and Siguiri in Upper Guinea.⁶ Kayra Seku lived in Kela for five or six years and played in a musical group between 1940 and 1948. Kayra Seku describes himself as a travelling merchant (*jula*) and *griot* (*jeli*). As a *griot*, he has made tours in Senegal, Niger, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mali, the countries that once formed the French colony known as "le Soudan Français." Kayra Seku also performed often in Guinea, south of Kela. He stopped at the relatively early age of 33, in 1955, and currently lives in Bamako, in the compound of one of his sons. Every Saturday, he visits the Siby market. While he was conducting fieldwork in the Siby area, Jansen observed that Kayra Seku is still very eager to speak during public events, such as the funeral of Siby's village chief in 1996. It also seems plausible to us, given this recent observation, that he has still performed occasionally since his rather early "voluntary retirement."

Hitler's shame: Mande perspectives on global events

The 1949 *Kayra* recording is valuable not only because of its age, but also because the text itself is a crucial historical source that contains important information about Mande culture. The format is that of a typical Mande praise song: the singer presents himself or herself and the musicians and refers to people in the audience. The references to Islam are one noteworthy aspect of this text.⁷ The area south of Bamako was converted to Islam in the first half of the twentieth century. From reports on village and canton chiefs stored in the National Archives of Mali at Koulouba, it is known that most people converted to Islam between 1920 and 1940. At the beginning of World War II, the French administrators estimated that more than 90% of the population was Muslim. The young, including many performers of today, must have been among the first to convert: for the artists who perform this version of *Kayra*, their Muslim identity has been important their entire life. Kayra Seku is a devout Muslim who refuses money for *griotism* (*jeliya*) and Yamudu Diabate made a pilgrimage to Mecca; he had close

connections with Wahabite (fundamentalist) Muslims in Bamako (For more information on the Wahabites, see Amselle; L. Kaba).

This song, in Kayra Seku's interpretation, represents the entire world at war after World War II. It is a poetic call for peace. For Kayra Seku, who says he composed the song at the time of the Vietnam War, the connection between the war in Southeast Asia and World War II was logical, since in both wars, the French Sudan had to supply the "mother country" with soldiers. In the Mande view, war is not necessarily a destructive and violent clash between political entities, but rather an arena in which individuals perform heroic and laudable, though violent, deeds. In this arena, all participants can take a share of the glory. That view prepares the ground for a significantly different interpretation of a controversial historical figure such as Hitler. Most notable is the remark that Hitler committed suicide because of shame. Hitler is still viewed with fondness in sub-Saharan popular culture as "the person who dared to declare war on the British Empire" or "the man who nearly beat De Gaulle." People all over Africa have chosen "Hitler" as a nickname and some have baptized their children with the name of Hitler. Zimbabwean opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai's second name is Hitler.

The relationship between Hitler and shame is rather uncommon in historiography, and it deserves closer attention. One can understand the remark on Hitler's shame by looking at the values of heroic behavior in the Mande world. Mande people sometimes compare Hitler to Sumaoro Kante, Sunjata's adversary in the widely known Sunjata epic that serves as a social charter for the Mande world (Austen 1999). Although Sunjata defeats Sumaoro Kante, the latter is allowed to stay in Mande after he transforms himself into the rock formation near Koulikoro, 100 kilometers east of Bamako. The thousands of people with the family name Kante, who claim descent from Sumaoro, do not suffer from the consequences of Sumaoro's defeat: they have blacksmith status and belong to the social category of *nyamakalaw*. They are not regarded differently from other *nyamakalaw* who trace their descent to Sunjata and his allies. In the Mande world, then, those who suffer defeat are not necessarily excluded as scapegoats. On the contrary, they are fully integrated into society.

The concept of shame has not yet been extensively investigated in Mande,⁸ even though it is a crucial organizing factor in Mande society. Since shame has to be avoided at all cost, people use intermediaries such as *griots* to settle conflicts so that neither of the parties involved loses face and feels ashamed. In public, opinions must be voiced using metaphors rather than being stated forthrightly. Only in times of general harmony such as the fortieth-day ritual, during which a family celebrates a highly esteemed deceased person, is shamelessness (*malobaliya*) allowed. This shamelessness is, however, highly ritualized: an invited griot or griotte praises people in the audience, loudly stressing the harmony among them. As many people as possible are included. When such a performance is a success, the *griot* may claim—with pride—that he or she has been shameless (Jansen, *The Griot's Craft*, for a discussion of *malobaliya*, see Duràn). In the *Kayra*, the fact that shame is suggested as the cause of Hitler's suicide not only demonstrates the importance of the concept in the Mande world, but also accuses Hitler's enemies of a lack of compassion (*hinè*) for their defeated adversary. This line can therefore also be read as a critique of European ways of dealing with conflicts.

The performance and its presentation as a text: a moment in time

The *Kayra* song is in Malinke (or Maninkakan), a language closely related to Bambara for which official orthographies exist.⁹ The language of the song demands closer attention, as it contains terms and expressions that are strongly influenced by French, but have since disappeared from Maninkakan. The song is a valuable source for the dynamics of Maninkakan and other Mande languages. Some of the French terms in the 1949 version may have been borrowed by Kayra Seku, since he does not speak the French language with any appreciable proficiency: *gorobinè* (*gros bonnet*), *dara balan* (*drap blanc*), *sarikonba* (*char de combat*), *mètèrèyasi* (*mitrailleuse*), *tanki* (*tank*), *bonmèrèma* (*bombardement*), *sofèrè* (*chauffeur*), *larisan* (*l'argent*), and remarkable neologisms derived from French, such as *deregison*. It must be emphasized that the French terms used by Mr. Koita have never gained general acceptance. Now, a driver is a *mobili-tigi* (car-owner)

or *sofèrè-kè* (chauffeur-man), which demonstrates that “chauffeur” had been incorporated into Maninkakan decades before, but only for a limited period before being “mande-ified” into *sofèrè-kè*. The term *larisan* has also disappeared from daily use, the term *wari* (money, silver) is used instead. Thus, this text has a major historical value because it contains the daily language of half a century ago.

Kayra Seku’s language is highly idiomatic, and Camara only managed to make a translation after he had consulted Kayra Seku himself. In our opinion, it seems that Kayra Seku Koita attempted to incorporate many French expressions without knowing their meaning. A good example is Kayra Seku’s expression *Bèrèlèn supòròtera*, meaning “Berlin has fallen.” The French word “supporter” is used incorrectly for “support” or “tolerate.” The biggest obstacle in the translation of this song, however, was obtaining information about its context. Although the general theme, peace, is universal, only those familiar with the local context can truly understand the performed text. Hence the footnotes to the translation are necessary for an outsider to be able to grasp the song fully. This is a general problem in translating *griots’* songs, but it also explains why *griots* are so highly appreciated: they are able to place international events in a local context by invoking widely accepted values. This aspect also helps to explain why one cannot claim that a particular artist has “written” a song. Even when contemporary artists perform their hits live, they adapt the text of their hit song to reflect the indigenous milieu and the audience.

If we are to grasp the full measure of African literature, we must not only read novels, plays, and poems written in European languages, but also engage the richly diverse world of literary art in African languages. We cannot separate songs from epics and stories: all are part of the oral art of Africa.

Notes

¹ Jansen had the opportunity to record a one hour interpretation of the Sunjata epic by Kayra Seku and his version has characteristics that are typical for the Kela version (published in Jansen, *Épopée-Histoire-Société*). This is at least worth noting, since Djoliba is close to Krina which is famous for its own interpretation of the Sunjata epic (Cissé and Kamissoko). Thus, Kayra Seku seems to have acquired his knowledge of the Sunjata

epic mainly in Kela, where he lived as a young man, and not in Djoliba, where Kayra Seku spent his childhood

² This studio, in Bamako, was owned (according to Kayra Seku) by Makanba Dunbuya from Koursalé, a village adjoining Kayra Seku's native village of Djoliba. Makanba was a rich merchant who lived in the Dravela neighborhood of Bamako. A man called "Makan" is, indeed, praised in the text presented here.

³ The instrumental recording by the late Sidiki Diabate and Jalimadi Cissokho (1971) is a classic. That tradition has been carried on by Diabate's son, Toumani Diabate (1988), and an unusual version with Kassemady Diabate (the well-known vocalist from Kela), Toumani Diabate, Djelimoussa 'Ballake' Sissoko (son of Jalimadi), and African American bluesman Taj Mahal ("Atlanta Kaira" on Diabate and Mahal).

⁴ The answer Kandia Kouyate gave in 1990 to Stephan Werdekker on an Amsterdam radio station helps to clarify this difference. Interviewed about the way she composes songs, she replied (as Jansen remembers it) "We take a part of a traditional song and then elaborate on it, musically and textually. If we like what we play and sing, we decide that we will perform it that way in the future, and won't deviate from it."

⁵ When Jansen asked Kayra Seku about the differences between present-day *griots* and the *griots* of his age, he replied, "Nothing has changed, only our voices were very much louder. We didn't have microphones."

⁶ For "In Memoriam" for Yamudu Diabate, see the Mande Studies Association's newsletter, *MANSA* 36 (Winter 1997-1998). The duo was so famous that it is remembered in a song. The Ivorian amateur researcher Mamadi Kaba (159-160) remembers the song Yamory et Bremajan, which he classifies as "*un chant d'expression colomale*," probably because the last sentences of the song are (in Kaba's French edition): "*Autres temps, autres mots qui font image / Autre temps, autres soucis et moeurs' / Disent Yamory et Bremajan. / Quand je dis que je déteste / Les mots pleins de mépris / Le commandant blanc me met en prison / Et puis après, ce sera Kourémalé / La prison de Kourémalé est un enfer / Là-bas, l'homme toubab est coléreux / Et le garde cercle ignore Dieu*"¹. Kourémalé was the administrative center of the "Subdivision de Kourémalé" that existed from 1934 to 1951. In 1951 the administration moved to Kangaba. Kela was part of this "subdivision." In a note, Kaba gives the following information about the song: "*Vers 1943, deux chanteurs de même taille, l'un de teint clair et l'autre de teint foncé, défrayaient la chronique. Leurs chants attirèrent les foules qui faisaient preuve de largesse à leur égard. Ces deux chanteurs, c'étaient Yamory et Bremajan. (.) C'est un chant qui s'écoute, mais ne se danse pas. Seuls les deux chanteurs au milieu du cercle formé de spectateurs et des femmes battant des mains, dansent à pas lents en allongeant le cou tout en suivant le rythme. C'est un chant de Haute Guinée qui suit le rythme du diagba.*"

⁷ See Charry, "Music and Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa," for more information on the musical impact of Islam.

⁸ For some examples of how people deal with shame and what they esteem to be shameful behavior, see Brand, chapter 5

⁹ In the song text, we use the characters *è*, *ò*, and *ny* because the available computer software does not support Mande orthography. We follow Camara's preferences in orthography, although these may sometimes appear slightly old-fashioned.

¹⁰ This line was delivered by Yamudu Diabate.

¹¹ This sentence must be read as praise for Jumè Dunbuya, the balafon player. Fakoli is considered the ancestor of five families known as the Bila groups, and one of these five is the Dunbuya family.

¹² The twins, according to Kayra Seku, are Yamudu and Bremanjan

¹³ Bamako and Dakar represent the many places Yamudu and Bremanjan performed

¹⁴ Someone from Guinea, according to Kayra Seku.

¹⁵ A reference to a certain Sekouba, a famous koranic scholar from Kankan (in present-day Guinea).

¹⁶ The *grôts*' host (*yatigi*) is (Ujan) Makan(ba) Dunbuya (see note 2).

¹⁷ Difficult to translate. Kayra Seku told Seydou Camara the following about this sentence: "In 1964, thirty Maninka joined each other in a '*société*' to which each contributed 25 000 francs. Business flourished, but then the two treasurers Malado Manbi and Nan Manbi took a huge part of the money for their own use. They were put in prison and never paid it back."

¹⁸ Literally "New Bamako." The Bamakokura neighbourhood was established in the first decades of the twentieth century, when Bamako was still a small town. Bamakokura is a neighbourhood of Bamako. Once an outskirt of the town, it is now at the heart of the metropolis. In the 1950s, Bamako counted about 50.000 inhabitants. In 2000, it is about one million. For the history of Bamako, see Meillassoux and Gaudio.

¹⁹ In this context, a reference to Yamudu Diabate. Kalajula Sangoy is a legendary ancestor of the Diabate. In oral tradition he is considered to be a traveling merchant (*jula*) with gold in his pockets. It is often heard in Mande that a merchant always has money in his pocket.

²⁰ The term *tolon* or *tulon* has often been translated into French as *l'amusement* or *le jeu*. We are of the opinion that such translations of *tulon* are too light-footed. *Tulon* is not entertainment, but a meticulously directed situation in which feelings of harmony among the audience must be articulated by the speakers and performers.

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KAYRA

Ayi y'a damina	
Kayira Seku le ne di	
Yamudu ni Beremajan tònnyògònkè	
N bèna Kayira daminala	
Ko man di bèe la	5
Jòn ka bag'a jòn nyògòn ma	
Aa, fununkeya do gwèlèman duniya	
Sarikonba ni mètèrèyasi	
Ani tanki ni bònmerèma	
K'alu ye kèlè la	10
Bèrèlèn supòròtera	
Sarikonba ni mètèrèyasi	
Ani tanki ni bònmerèma	
K'alu ye kèlè la	
Bèrèlèn supòròtera	15
Iyo! Alu m'a ye	
Alu m'a ye, Kilèri fu ye	
Kèba malo kojugu	
F'a bad'a yèdè fagala	
Ayi m'a ye	20
Faranse gorobinèlu	
Politiki bada kanya Degoli min ma Pare	
Parekalu sònna aa!	
Bila Fakoli bè yan de	
Jumè, Bila Fakoli bè yan	25
Ko, n bada gwènfòlalu ye	
Lajiné gwènfòlalu bèe ye de	
Ko, n bada gwènfòlalu ye	
Sudan gwènfòlalu bèe ye de	
Jumè balafòbolo tè mògò bolo	30
Ko man di bèe la	
Fakoli bè yan de	
Jali tè fili a nyabaga ma	
Walayi muso tè fili a ta kè le ma,	
kayira layila ilala	35
Se bè Ala ye, n dali mansa	

PEACE

You can start¹
I am Kayira Seku
The companion of Yamudu and Bremanjan
I will begin with "Kayira" right now
Not everyone has luck
Who wants to provoke his neighbor? 5
Ah, it is difficult to be young in this world
The armored cars and the automatic guns
The tanks and the bombings
People have been at war
Berlin has been taken 10
The armored cars and the automatic guns
The tanks and the bombings
People have been at war
Berlin has been taken
Oh! Have you not seen 15
Have you not seen, Hitler is a nothing
The great man suffered from so much shame
That he committed suicide
Have you not seen
The big hats of the French 20
Politics are not with De Gaulle in Paris
The Parisians said: "Yes."
Fakoli, the Bila, is here²
Jumè, Fakoli the Bila is present here
I see the balafon players 25
I see all the balafon players from Guinea
I see the balafon players
I see all the balafon players from the Sudan
No one among them equals Jumè
Not everyone has luck 30
Fakoli is here
The griot is never mistaken in recognizing his well-wisher
I swear that a woman is never mistaken in recognizing her husband
and appreciating his behavior.
May peace and luck be. 35

Fununkelu la kelennamiiri gèlèman	
Aa, layila ilala	
Se bè Ala ye, n dali mansa	
Fununkelu la kelennamiiri gèlèman	40
Ko man di bèe la	
Lannaya le gèlèman, kayira	
Jaa jaa, layila ilala	
Ko man di bèe la	
Wula bara janya	45
K'ayi ma filaninnu ye?	
K'ayi ma filaninnu ye?	
Bamakokalu ma filaninnu ye?	
K'ayi ma filaninnu ye?	
K'ayi ma filaninnu ye?	50
Dakarokalu ma filaninnu ye?	
Olu ni dara balan le bè yala	
Ko man di bèe la	
Bubakari Sidiki iii!	
Kutubu lawuliyayi!	55
Jòn ka bag'a jòn nyògòn ma	
Bamakokalu nin ye kèla di?	
Manden jalidenmèsèn bèe nada	
Bili parisidan nada	
Kela jalikè kunbalu nada	60
Jòn ka bag'a jònnyògòn ma	
Kela jalidenmèsènnu le nada	
Kela Yamudu ni Beremajan, kayira	
Wula bara janya, kayira	
Barika jaa Alifa Mori, o!	65
Jaa, ko bèe n'a tumana le	
Ko bèe n'a waati le	
Aa, Fakoli man kèndè	
Ko ko man di bèe la	
Ala le faama sebaga di	70
Ayi ma Makan komèn?	
Ujari Makan man kèndè	
Makan dundun ni Makan dèndè	73
Fònyòbadèndè Makan kili ka di	

God is powerful, oh Lord!
 It is hard, the young are reflecting in solitude
 Aa, layila ilala
 God is powerful, oh Lord!
 It is hard, the young are reflecting in solitude 40
 Not everyone has luck
 Mutual trust is precious, peace
 Jaajaam layila ilala
 Not everyone has luck
 See here those who penetrated the bush 45
 Have you not seen the twins?³
 Have you not seen the twins?
 Have you not seen the twins of Bamako?
 Have you not seen the twins?
 Have you not seen the twins? 50
 Have you not seen the twins of Dakar?⁴
 They are walking in with linen
 Not everyone has luck
 Bubakar Sidiki iii!⁵
 Kutubu lawuliyayi!⁶
 Who wants to provoke his neighbor
 People of Bamako, what must we do about it?
 All the young griots of Mande have come
 President Bili is present
 The great griots of Kela have come 60
 Who wants to provoke his neighbor?
 The young griots of Kela have come
 Yamudu and Bremanjan from Kela, peace
 Penetrated the bush, peace
 We are grateful to Alfa Mori, oh! 65
 Yes, each thing will come at its specific time
 Each thing will come at its specific moment
 Ah, Fakoli is not well
 Not everything has a chance to succeed
 God is the almighty Lord 70
 Have you not heard talk about Makan?⁷
 Ujari Makan is not lucky
 Makan of this and Makan of that

Sogo tè Makan tòlò	75
Fò kumakan diman	
Jègè tè Makan tòlòla	
Fo kumakan diman	
Makan dundun ni Makan dèndè	
Sebaaya ka di	80
Ala le faama di	
Ujari la ...	
Jòn ka bag'a jòn nyògòn ma	
Jura denmèsèn nin ye kèla di?	
K'ayi tè fara kuruyewari la	85
Kuruyewari ye mògò fònsela	
I m'a lòn kòntèbò le gèlèman	
Aa lanlala	
Jaramuso saba le Bamako	
Jaramuso saba ye Bamako	90
Namisa Jaralaka	
Iyo Fanta Jaralaka nin kèla di?	
Masitan Jaralaka bè Bamako	
Aa, Ala le faama di duniya	
Aa, ko bèe n'a wagati	95
Jòn bèe ní lakununkan	
Lannaya gèlèman	
Nikunnakanuntèya gèlèmanba	
Sarakabò man gèlèn	
I m'a lòn sarakamina gèlèman de,	100
Aa, layila ilanla, aa, layila ilanla	
Se bè Ala ye, n dali mansa	
Tolon kèra filaninnu ye	
Alu ma filanin ye	
Bamakokuda filaninnu nani	105
O ni fila Madi di yèlè la, yèlè la aa	
Sofèrè ni yèdèfèrèn tè kelen di	
Dipulomutigi o, n makonon ba	
Aa, lalanla	
Jaa deregisòn gèlèman de	110
Mògò ni deregisòn tè kèlèla	
Bèe y'i mürila fèn min ma	

It is pleasant to evoke Makan the Twister
 Meat does not fatten Makan 75
 But only pleasant words do
 Fish does not fatten Makan
 But only pleasant words do
 Makan of this and Makan of that
 It is good to be powerful 80
 God is the Lord
 About Ujari ...
 Who wants to provoke his neighbor?
 Petty tradesmen, what are we going to do?
 Avoid the money of the Jews⁸
 The money of the Jews will also increase your problems
 Don't you know that accounting is difficult
 There is no God but our Lord
 There are three Jara women in Bamako
 There are three Jara women in Bamako 90
 Namisa of the Jara family
 Yes, Fanta of the Jara family, what will we do?
 Masitan of the Jara family is in Bamako
 Ah, God is the Lord of the world
 Ah, each thing has its specific moment 95
 Every servant of God has his destiny
 Mutual trust is precious
 Friendship is most precious
 A sacrifice is not difficult
 But you should know that a promise is! 100
 Ah, there is no God but our Lord, ah, there is no other God but our Lord
 God is powerful, our Lord
 This event has been organized for the twins
 Have you already seen the twins?
 The twins of Bamakokura⁹ have come 105
 They and Madi the Peul enjoy themselves, they enjoy it
 A driver and a weekend motorist are different
 Qualified people, wait a while for me
 Ah, God is our Lord
 Ah, it is difficult to be a flying squad 110
 You must avoid a conflict with a flying squad

Larisan, o ye Kala Sangoyi kun I kònkiransinyògòn bée sègèra gwansan Barika, Ala le faama di	115
Kònkòndugu maninka ni Jabe Maninkalu le! Kasama Mamurunin ka an sòn mísi la, tora Aa Mamuru sigida Kasama lon min Kasama suruku ma kasama mísi kunba mina ... karamòkò	120
Kasama Mamurunin di, kayira Aa, Jaralaka Woyiyo Jaralaka le Koma Jarakala i jugujugu Ko man di bée la	125
Wula bédè janya Sangoyi ni ... bè Kumakara A fò k'a ka kòntiniye Ala le faama di Woyiyo Sangoyi mògònìla Faridu Masaman wulila Ba	130
Tolon tè sèbè sa Iyo kanun man gèlèn n na Fò labanbaliya Iyo furu man gèlèn n na Fò labanbaliya Wulajannafuru man gèlèn n na Fò labanbaliya	135
Iyo kani ka sa a sakun na Walayi furu ka sa a sakun na Bèe n'i haminanko Iyo mògò kan'i kòndòkuma fò juka ye, kayira Eee, eee, eee, eee	140
Olu m'a ye Solonkònòko tele le san ma Bèe n'i haminanko Aa, sike n na Ala le faama di eee!	145

About what are all the people thinking?
 Money! It is with Kalajula Sangoyi¹⁰
 That all your competitors tire themselves in vain
 Thank you, God is our Lord 115
 Malinke from Konkondugu and Malinke from Jabe
 Little Mamudu from Kasama, peace
 Ah, since Mamudu settled in Kasama
 No hyena has touched one of his cows
 ... teacher ... 120
 Little Mamudu from Kasama, peace
 Ah, the Jara family
 Yes, the Jara family
 Koma Jarakala i jugujugu
 Not everyone has luck 125
 The bush is far away
 Sangoyi is at Kumakara
 Say he has to continue
 God is our Lord
 I call Sangoyi who offers people 130
 Faridu Masaman rose up
 Ba ...
 Relaxation¹¹ doesn't spoil serious business
 Yes, friendship is not difficult, according to me
 Except when people are incapable of thinking it through 135
 Yes, marriage is not difficult, according to me
 Except when people are incapable of thinking it through
 Yes, marrying someone a great distance from your home is not
 difficult, according to me
 Except when people are incapable of thinking it through 140
 Yes, that a friendship may only end for good reasons
 By God, that a marriage may only end for good reasons
 Everyone has his own business
 Yes, no one should open his heart to a skunk, peace
 Eee, eee, eee, ee 145
 Have you not seen that the sun of the bird Solon glitters in the sky
 Everyone has his own business
 Without doubt, my mother
 God is our Lord, eee

Afiriki la, Sudan Faransè...
Tinya, Ala le faama di
Lannaya do gèlèman an!

150

In Africa, the French Sudan
It is true, God is our Lord
Mutual trust is a precious thing for us.

Notes

¹ This line was delivered by Yamudu Diabate.

² This sentence must be read as praise for Jumè Dunbuya, the balafon player. Fakoli is considered the ancestor of five families known as the Bila groups, and one of these five is the Dunbuya family

³ The twins, according to Kayra Seku, are Yamudu and Bremajan.

⁴ Bamako and Dakar represent the many places Yamudu and Bremajan performed.

⁵ Someone from Guinea, according to Kayra Seku

⁶ A reference to a ceertain Sekouba, a famous koranic scholar from Kankan (in present-day Guinea).

⁷ The griots' host (*jatigi*) is (Ujari) Makan(ba) Dunbuya (see note 2).

⁸ Difficult to translate. Kayra Seku told Seydou Camara the following about this sentence: "In 1964, thirty Maninka joined each other in a 'société' to which each contributed 25.000 francs. Business flourished, but then the two treasurers Malado Manbi and Nan Manbi took a huge part of the money for their own use. They were put in prison and never paid it back."

⁹ Literally "New Bamako." The Bamakokura neighbourhood was established in the first decades of the twentieth century, when Bamako still was a small town. Bamakokura is a neighbourhood of Bamako. Once an outskirt of the town, it is now at the heart of the metropolis. In the 1950s, Bamako counted about 50 000 inhabitants. In 2000, it is about one million. For the history of Bamako, see Meillassoux and Gaudio

¹⁰ In this context, a reference to Yamudu Diabate. Kalajula Sangoy is a legendary ancestor of the Diabate. In oral tradition he is considered to be a traveling commercant (*jula*) with gold in his pockets. It is often heard in Mande that a commercant always has money in his pocket.

¹¹ The term *tolon* or *tulon* has often been translated into French as *l'amusement* or *le jeu*. We are of the opinion that such translations of *tulon* are too light-footed. *Tulon* is not entertainment, but a meticulously directed situation in which feelings of harmony among the audience must be articulated by the speakers and performers