Habitation and warfare strategies in 19th century Mande: a view from the 'Kafu'.

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HABITATION AND WARFARE STRATEGIES IN 19TH CENTURY MANDE—A VIEW FROM THE *KAFU*

JAN JANSEN

"You researchers must realize that our kingdoms were all different."[1]

In the past decades, the West African *kafu* has been studied exten-sively as a level of organization in a segmentary society[2] Thanks to the research of J.-L. Amselle, A. Bazin, R. Roberts, and others, we gradually have come to understand the political, macro-economic, and macro-sociological trends which shaped and transformed *kafuw* over time. Yet, at a lower point of abstraction, it is difficult to get a grip on the history of a particular *kafu*. In this chapter, I aim to deepen our understanding of the *kafu* by studying it its wider geo-graphical context, particularly by focusing on habitation strategies, warfare, and trade routes, as well as on the ecological changes caused by the inhabitants themselves. I seek to illustrate the dialectical rela-tionship between strategies of habitation and strategies of warfare, on the one hand, and political and economic trends on the other hand, thus giving an impression of how people lived in *kafuw* in the 19th century. I attempt to describe the agency of the populations of two *kafuw*, a topic which has hitherto never been analyzed because of an alleged lack of sources.

The second goal of this chapter is to demonstrate that many sources for African history become more useful if historians sharpen
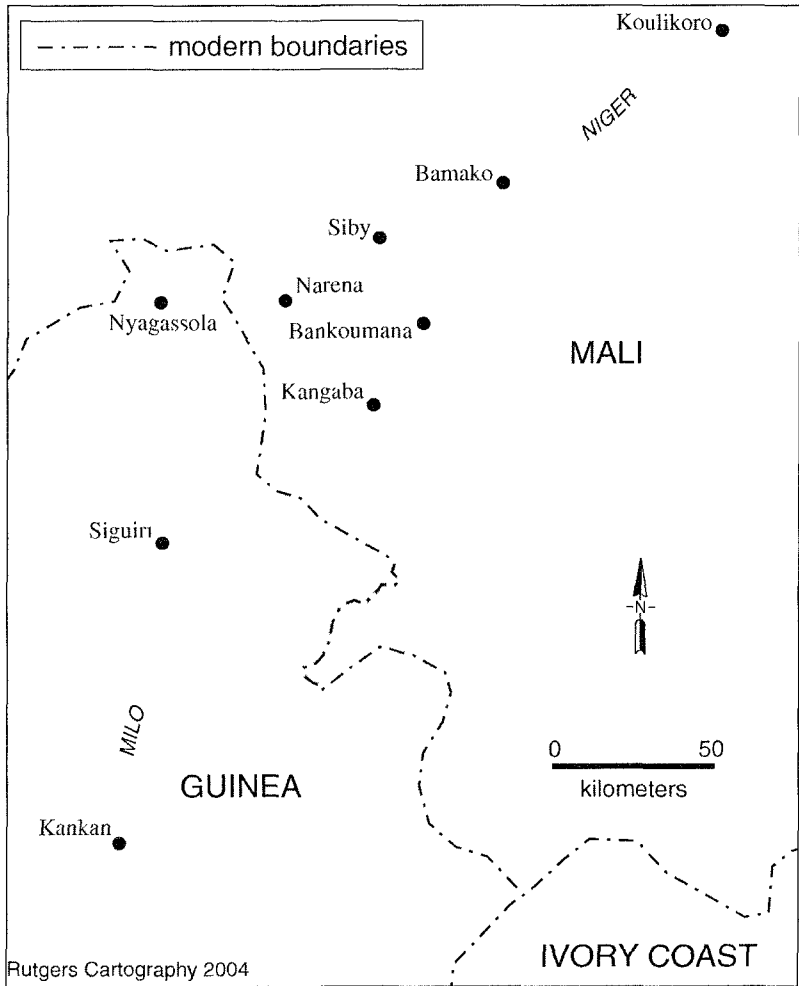
Fig. 19. Mali/Guinea Region

their methodological tools or change their point of view. The sources that seem to be the most appropriate for the study of the *kafuw's* histories are the village foundation stories, However, I reject them as being not simply un-useful but as likely to introduce errors in reconstructing the past. Those stories, in fact, represent colonial models for administration and 20th century political claims. Thus, I extensively use 20th century sources in order to demonstrate the impossibility of reconstructing the 19th century landscape from oral traditions.

Inspired by historians of the Annales School—such as Marc Bloch and Ferdinand Braudel—I take the landscape of a region as an analytical concept. I use the term landscape to integrate empirically defined parameters such as social organization, material culture, and the environment. Thus I address the *kafuw* members' agency in relationship to historically determined but ever-changing spatial structures. In addition, I see the necessity to explore the inhabitants' mental landscape, but this is not the subject of this chapter and may be a difficult task for the 19th century because of lack of sources. (See final section of this chapter.)

The geographic scope of this study is the area between the Mande hills and the river Niger, the region South-West of Bamako. The time dimension is the period between the first visit to the area by a European and the actual implementation of French colonial rule in 1888. I will argue that changes in habitation can be proved for the 19th century, and that these were the result of increased warfare and changed warfare strategies. In the 19th century, this region suffered much from intruding armies. According to Mungo Park, around 1800 the area was dominated by Kangaba, an important slave market town that, in its turn, paid tribute to the kings of Segou. Kangaba had messengers stationed in the other *kafuw*. The mid-19th century jihads had a materially devastating effect: generals of El Haji Umar Tall destroyed many villages in and along the Mande hills. During 1883 and 1888 the area was the battlefield for Samori Toure's armies and the French imperial troops, who at that time could not successfully continue their occupation of the West African Sudan.

I restrict my investigation to two villages which are physically close to each other, but which have a quite different geography and history: Siby and Narena (see Fig. 19). Siby—50 kilometers southwest of Mali's capital Bamako—is located along the cliff that marks the Eastern border of the Mande hills. Narena is 40 kilometers southwest of Siby, on a plain that slowly ascends to the Mande hills. Siby

and Narena both were the power focus of *kafuw* that are still cele-
brated in oral traditions. Siby was the "capital" of the Sendougou
kafu, and the present day village of Narena was the core of the
ancient *kafu* of Narena. Moreover, Siby and Narena are well embed-
ded in stories about the "far past": a place called "Siby" is men-
tioned all over Sub-Saharan West Africa as the place of origin for
thousands of people with the patronymic Camara. Narena is often
described as a capital of Sunjata's Mali empire, even in oral tradi-
tions as far away as Senegal (Monteil 1929; Folmer and Van Hoven
1988). When the French occupied the area they imposed a canton
structure. The indigenous term for the canton was *jamana* (of course
derived from the Arabic). *Jamana* was already in use as an equiva-
lent of *kafu*. However, a canton was never called a *kafu*. In the
decades after the imposition of the canton structure the French kept
on adapting canton frontiers, often inspired by local oral traditions.
In 1915 the French introduced a completely new canton structure
in the area in order to facilitate the selection of the soldiers they
needed to fight in the First World War.

A Fragile Environment

People have been settling on and along the Mande hills since the
Stone Age.[3] In order to interpret the historical processes of location
and people's understanding of the landscape along the Mande hills,
its ecological fragility must first be mentioned. Because of the absence
of detailed data on hydrology and the soil, this section will be impres-
sionistic, but it still seeks to provide some major clues to a better
understanding of the dynamics of a Mande *kafu*.[4] For the starting
point of my analysis, I take a quote by Mungo Park, the oldest
written source I use. In 1796, Park traveled through the area on his
way back home from his exploration of the Niger, and he described
how difficult living conditions were in Mande and adjoining areas:

> The population, however, considering the extent and fertility of the
> soil, and the ease with which lands are obtained, is not very great in

[3] Along the road Bamako-Siby, between Kakele and Terenabugu, a Stone Age
site has been made accessible for visitors. Archeologist Tereba Togola told me that
similar sites are numerous in the area

[4] As far as I know there are no scientific reports on this rainfall, soil, and related
topics for this area.

the countries which I visited. I found many beautiful, and extensive districts, entirely destitute of inhabitants; and, in general, the borders of the different kingdoms were either very thinly peopled, or entirely deserted. Many places are likewise unfavourable to population, from being unhealthful. The swampy banks of the Gambia, the Senegal, and other rivers towards the coast, are of this description. Perhaps it is on this account chiefly that the interior countries abound more with inhabitants than the maritime districts. (Park 1983:200)

Park wrote that Manding was "a country which is indeed hilly, but cannot properly be called mountainous, much less barren," and he may have considered the population to be relatively well off, since there were no "swampy banks" on the mountains or in the area between the mountains and the river Niger (Park 1983:229).

In spite of the alleged good conditions in Mande, population density has always been remarkably low in the area south of Bamako. Although the ground was relatively fertile and additional income was guaranteed by gold digging and gold washing, life in pre-colonial Mande must have been very precarious and tough. In the 20th century, after occupation by the French, the villages along the river Niger grew rapidly in population, but along the Mande hills population density often remained less than 5 per square kilometer. On the mountains themselves it was much lower, often not more than 1 per square kilometer.

A question to be solved is the apparent depopulation of the Mande hills in the period 1820–1920. This area had suffered much from 19th century slave raids, and but did not experience population growth after the French took over, as might have been expected. The scarce data available hint at ecological changes. Water seemed to be a constant source of sorrow, sometimes because of its scarcity, sometimes because of its abundance. This constantly forced people to search for new places to settle. People say that Wanda—an important and fortified place north of Siby that was visited by Mungo Park—was abandoned, before the French came, "because of (shortage of) water." Entire cantons became depopulated in the 1910s because of river blindness. Colonial reports from the 1920s state that people in the "canton" of Ouenta became blind at the age of twenty, and died at the age of forty.[5] Moreover, the presence of the tsetse

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[5] Ouenta, Wanda, or Wonda (Mungo Park) are the same People on and along the mountains refer to Wanda or Wanta when they talked about the northern part

fly made sleeping sickness endemic in this area. At the time of a
survey in the 1930s, the population of Ouenta's five villages was
found to be 256 "imposables"—healthy adults who could be taxed
by the colonial administration. Therefore, in 1935, the French decided
to add Ouenta and the adjoining canton of Bintanya Kamalen to
the canton of Kenieba-Congo, creating a canton with only 1835
inhabitants in 700 square kilometers.[6]

Water was not only the transporter of diseases, it also created
problems related to settlement and ground cultivation. Contrary to
what is generally believed, the ground level of inhabited areas does
not automatically rise. In West Africa, habitation often creates ero-
sion of the soil, particularly of the roads that lead to a village. As
a result, in a few decades a dry spot may transform into a swamp.
This is aggravated by rain water flowing to the village by the eroded
roads and paths.[7] For Siby, this process is illustrated by "Sansankoro",
a spot which is said to have been the first village of the Coulibaly
people in Siby, but which is nowadays a rice field. During fieldwork
I noted that in many Mande villages the mango orchard is the spot
where the village chief's family once had its compound. Since mango
trees must stand in the water each year for some weeks in order to
guarantee a good harvest, and since people will never settle on
grounds which drown annually, these terrains must have been vic-
tim of processes of erosion, and were undoubtedly much higher when
they were chosen for house construction.

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of the mountains, the uninhabited areas that nowadays consist partially of a pro-
tected forest Some people claim that Wanda is an old name for Mande, while oth-
ers say it was the town of origin of some prestigious Keita branches

[6] ANMK FR 2 E-5 Fiches de Renseignements des Chefs de Canton Bamako II,
1917 1955, canton de Ouenta ANMK FR 2 E-4 Fiches de Renseignements des
Chefs de Canton Bamako II, 1917 1955, canton de Kinieba Congo 1917 1946
See also Zobel (1996) It appears that the French did not know how to cope with
such shifts in population size and habitation At the end of the 19th century they
created the canton of Nana, but 25 years later this canton was cancelled and the
new canton of Kenieba-Congo was created which incorporated the remnants of
Nana As far as I know, the only source on Nana is ANMK FA 1 E 18, "1900"
which contains a report of an exploratory tour made in the cantons of Nana and
Bintanya It is worthwhile noting that the people of Kenieba-Congo trace the his-
tory of their *kafu* back to the 18th century, although as it apparently was created
in 1915

[7] According to Roderick McIntosh this phenomenon happens all over the West
African Sudan (personal communication, Banjul, June 17, 1998)

Problems due to abundant rainfall become manifest in different ways even in nearby places. For the area between Kangaba and Bancoumana, major towns on the bank of the Niger, total annual rainfall determines which places will be flooded by the river. For the inhabitants of the Mande hills, the problems start the moment the rain begins to pour down. Along the cliff in Siby, people have to deal with torrents, literally waterfalls, and even a modern irrigation system sometimes cannot handle the immense amounts of water coming from the cliff. Within an hour after a heavy rain, parts of Siby are flooded, and they remain flooded for the next several hours or as long as a day. Taboun, 5 kilometers southwest of Siby along the Siby-Narena road, provides another example. Taboun is celebrated in the Sundiata epic and in Mande tradition generally as an ancient Camara settlement, but the present-day site was occupied in 1943. It does not seem to have been a good choice, at least in the long run. On a visit there I witnessed the following: one hour after a moderate shower began the paths in the village had been transformed into wild brooks as rainwater coming down off the mountain followed the tracks to Taboun created by pedestrians, bicycles, and donkey carts.[8]

It is difficult to comprehend why people would settle on a spot that would drown regularly, or why unhealthy places would be occupied. Regarding the Mande area, I seek some answer to this problem by supposing that there were hardly any places where a maintainable infrastructure could be developed. On almost any spot, in spite of an alleged attractiveness, human presence led to an environmental deterioration that could not be avoided by the available technique that people had available to manage the village infrastructure.

Having discussed the environmental dimension of the landscape, I now turn to the changed social climate. In the 19th century, increasingly large numbers of people were faced with war and therefore forced to change their living sites or modify them for defensive purposes. These choices depended on possibilities provided by the physical

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[8] On the move of Taboun, see ANMK FR 1 E 7 Rapports Politiques Rapports de Tournées, Cercle de Bamako 1950-1958, dossier 'Canibala (Bamako) 1958'. Taboun used to be between Guèna and Nienkèma, 'à flanc de montagne Taboukoulou'. According to Valhère, Taboun was in the hills and it had a very savage population (1885:322 3).

geography. Firstly, people along the Niger developed a system by which they could flee on the Niger, sometimes to temporary settlements on the other side of the river. Second, those near to the hills could resettle in the hills or immediately adjacent. There they could protect themselves against invaders by throwing and rolling stones upon them. Third, people in the open plains transformed their settlements into clusters of fortresses. However, additional defense was offered by the *fanfaw*, grottoes in the cliffs of the Mande hills. These can be found at a few kilometers from the villages—on the plains or along the cliffs—and they offered refuges to the villagers while an invading army destroyed their village. Thus, in the 19th century, in a fragile environment, defense became part of the landscape. This major political change had its impact on social organization, the organization of warfare, leadership, and architecture.

The "Road of Mande":
The Impact of Warfare on Spatial Patterns in the 19th Century

I found the key to the question of how and why habitation changed structurally in the 19th century by comparing the accounts of Mungo Park from 1796 and Lt. Vallière in 1879–1881, when he was sent by Gallieni to explore the "Manding". In 1796 Mungo Park arrived in Bamako, after a trip of almost one year during which he explored the "Interior of Africa."[9] He was on his way back home, coming from the Segou area. He was exhausted, and decided to return to the coast as quickly as possible. Since the shortest track, to Kangaba and further southward, had not yet been explored, he decided to go westward and follow the track people from Bamako showed him. The road he took actually was much more southward than he represented in the map added to his travel report, probably because his pocket compass had been broken during a robbery on his way from Bamako to Siby. After leaving Bamako, Park first visited Kooma: "This village is surrounded by a high wall, and it is the property of a Mandingo merchant, who fled hither with his family during a former war . . . the rocky hills secure him from the depredations of war." After travelling "over several rocky ridges" Park reached Siby which

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[9] The following sections are taken from Park (1983).

he called Sibydooloo [Siby village], "the frontier town of the king-
dom of Manding" where "the Dooty [dugutigi] or chief man [was]
called Mansa, which usually signifies king." Siby, he wrote:

> is situated in a fertile valley, surrounded with high rocky hills. It is
> scarcely accessible for horses, and during the frequent wars between
> the Bambarrans, Foulahs, and Mandingoes, has never once been plun-
> dered by an enemy.

Wonda, a small town with a mosque and surrounded by a high wall,
was Park's next destination. He noted that there was a great famine
in the Siby-Wonda area, which made him a serious burden for any
landlord. He therefore decided to continue and took a rocky road,
after having left his depleted horse with his landlord at Wonda. Then
he passed through a number of unfortified villages (Ballanti, Nemacoo,
Kenyeto, and Dosita) while he proceeded toward "Jerijang, a beau-
tiful and well-cultivated district, the Mansa of which is reckoned
among the most powerful chief of any in Manding."[10] "Jerijang" can
be found on no map, but oral tradition clearly proves that this vil-
lage is historically connected to present-day Narena. Early 20th cen-
tury traditions contained in French colonial reports as well as
present-day oral traditions mention Diarradjan or Jèjan as the youngest
son of Nankoman a.k.a. Konkoman, the founder of Narena (texts
and analysis in Camara and Jansen 1999).

From Jerijang Park went to "Mansia" (undoubtedly present-day
Bala Mansaya), where he witnessed much gold mining activity, and
then arrived in "Kamalia, a small town, situated at the bottom of
some rocky hills, where the inhabitants collect gold in considerable
quantities. The Bushreens live here apart from the Kafirs, and have
built their huts in a scattered manner at a short distance of the
town."[11] There Park stayed for half a year recuperating. He has pro-
vided us with a drawing of the "town of Kamalia": in the back-
ground there are rocks, in the foreground a forge and some individual

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[10] I have not been able to locate Ballanti on my maps; however, between Siby
and Namiko is a rocky hill called Balandougou; Nemacoo = Namiko, now 6 kilo-
meters north of Keniero; Kenyeto = Keniero or Kenyèro; Dosita is located on a
map in Anonymous 1884, around present-day Kenyèma.

[11] Several villages in Mande are called Kamale (cf. Kamale North of Siby, and
Kamale in the Bintanya region). They all have Keita village chiefs. Kamalia and
Kamale are different renderings of the same name, and in the 19th century the
French sometimes spoke of Kamalia instead of Kamale.

huts located in between closely connected groups of traditional round
houses. Kamalia must be present-day Kamale, not far from the
Kokoro river, the border between the present-day republics of Guinea
and Mali. The drawing that Park made shows that it was then
unfortified.

After his long stay in Kamalia, Park returned to the Atlantic coast
in the company of a slave caravan. He was following a track known
as the Mandesira, the "Road of Mande" which went through the
mountains that formed the watershed of the Senegal and Niger
Rivers, passing Nyagassola and Narena.[12] This was part of a system
of trade routes which had been in use for centuries in Sub-Saharan
West Africa. I see the jihads as the motor behind an intensification
of the use of the Mandesira, since areas more to the northward were
becoming too risky for trade. Merchants lived all along the trade
route. The traders Park met were all Muslims and they lived sepa-
rately from the non-Muslim population. It seems that they had exten-
sive networks: Park was helped by a Toure and his brother. In the
19th century, the Toure and the Niare were the most influential
groups in Bamako. The patronymic Toure generally is, in practice
as well as in general belief, associated with Islamic scholarship.

What Park encountered after his departure from Kamalia is reveal-
ing of the changes caused by the rise of states to the north and west
of the Mande heartland, notably Futa Jalon and Fuladugu (see fig.
20). After a few days of travel he wrote:

> We continued at Kinytakooro until noon of the 22nd of April, when
> we removed to a village about seven miles to the westward, the inhab-
> itants of which, being apprehensive of hostilities from the Foulahs of
> Fooladoo, were at this time employed in constructing small temporary
> huts among the rocks, on the side of a high hill close to the village
> (Park 1983:252)

Although there is no source material for the 1700s, the incursions
from the North into Mande seem in Park's time to have been a
new phenomenon. When Park arrived, trade to Kangaba from Segou
still flourished, since Park mentions Kangaba as an important slave

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[12] ANSOM 14 mi 686 D299 Mission Quinquandon 1883 1884 is a document
containing the plans for a 'Mission' in Mande by Quinquandon It is mentioned
that there are two roads from Nyagassola to Bamako the northern one through
the hills was short, but difficult to do

market. The Mande area was peaceful for the most part, and forti-
fications are absent in Park's account, although he mentions them
often during his trip through the area north of Mande. It is remark-
able that in Wonda Park found a mosque, while further southward
the Muslims lived separately. This seems to hint at the non-conversion
to Islam by the Mande population. Certain observations can be made
about settlement patterns. An economic base existed in agriculture,
craft production, gold mining which drew laborers and traders from
a wide area around, and trade to the interior and the coast. The
mansaw in this region, although long past their peak of influence,
provided an overall political authority that helped to maintain order.
They were not, however, primarily focused on warfare, and this
could be seen in the architecture. North of the region, jihads had
already compelled people to adapt the architecture of their settle-
ments and sometimes the location. There where houses with two
floors (Park 1983:157) or villages with entrance gates (Park 1983:
171, 251). The southern limits of this "Sudanic" habitation style was
north of Siby, since Kooma and Wonda were fortified. In the suc-
ceeding century, the need to find methods of defense became com-
mon over the whole of Manding, but the precise response differed
according to physical location and strategy chosen.

In 1879–81, Vallière traveled in the opposite direction as Park.
Vallière departed from Kita, went to Nyagassola and then proceeded
along the Southern cliff of the Mande hills to Narena. From Narena,
there were two possible ways to reach the Niger: to Bamako via
Siby, or to Kangaba. He chose the first option because he wanted
to meet Gallieni in Bamako. Vallière's report conveys a quite different
impression of the residential patterns than Park's. Along the Mande
hills, every village he saw was fortified. South of Wonda and Kooma,
Park had not mentioned a fortified place until he traveled West of
Kamalia, where he saw people "apprehensive of hostilities" who were
building places of refuge. Park's drawing of Kamalia depicts no
fortification, but Vallière saw a strong fortification on the same spot.

In addition to warfare and raiding in the first half of the century,
the region had since the late 1850s come under concerted attack
from the expanding armies of the El Hajj Umar Tal. As David
Robinson writes, while unique in certain respects, this was a con-
tinuation of an established pattern that affected a large area on the
upper Senegambia and nearby sections of the Niger:

> For the small Mandinka villages and chiefdoms [*kafuw*] in the Bafing
> and Bakhoy watersheds, the Umarian force resembled the raiders from
> Segu, Karta and Tamba that they had long endured As part of the
> West African 'Middle Belt' of vulnerable societies, they took refuge on
> the mesas above the valley, or in the lands to the south, leaving be
> hind their grain, cattle and some of their weaker members (Robinson
> 1985 251)

The Umarian army which carried out the conquest of much of the
area was known as Mourgoula, and it established the fortress center
of the same name northwest of the Siby-Narena region (Oluruntimehin
1972 57, 243, 255 6, Robinson 1985 251ff) In 1879, Valliere vis-
ited Mourgoula, then part of the Segou Empire headed by Umar's
son Shaikhu Ahmadu The officer noted that it would be easy prey
for French armature, in case an attack was necessary [13]

In terms of the landscape of people in Manding, Mourgoula had
first been a base for the Tukulor jihadists to wage religious war and
extend their influence Later it was one of the fortified centers from
which Segou under Shaikh Ahmadu attempted to dominate the
region, continuing to attack the surrounding Manding *kafuw* which
generally were resistant to Tukulor overrule From the perspective
of Ahmadu, Mourgoula was a major point used to control the trade

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[1] Peroz writes about these fortifications In effet les places fortes soudaniennes
sont dans leur ensemble comparables a des positions defensives organisees a la
vance par la faible importance des obstacles et par la rapidite relative avec laque
lle les attaques qu elles motivent prennent habituellement fin Tetat obstacle d une
valeur defensive tres serieuse pour les Soudaniens mals armes et nullement entraines
aux attaques de vive force qu il necessite, n a guere pour nous que l importance
d un couvert bien organise et parfois bien conçu l artillerie y peut generalement
faire breche rapidement quoique avec une grande consommation de munitions et
il est rare que sa hauteur soit telle que l infanterie ne puisse l enlever d escalade
avec des moyens meme rudimentaires Cependant chaque fois que nous avons eu
a nous rendre maitres d un de ces ouvrages nous avons eprouve des pertes toujours
plus considerables qu en rase campagne de plus nous avons du employer pour les
enlever des regles tactiques entierement differentes de celles qui president ordi
nairement aux operations de nos collonnes expeditionnaires   Nous avons dit que
le mot tata adopte par nous pour indiquer une enceinte en pise ou en briques
cuites au soleil etait impropre C est en effet le terme employe par les ouolofs pour
designer une enceinte une cloture quelle qu elle soit Or l art de construire des
murailles d argile ou d argile et de pierres seches est un art exclusivement soudanien
et particulierement mande (bambarra ou mandingue) dans la langue mande l en
ceinte qui entoure une ville ou village ou un hameau se nomme guin (Peroz
1890 99 102 3)

and communication between Kita and other interior points, on the one hand, and the Manding states of the upper Senegambia-Niger zone, on the other, and also to block further French advance. When in late 1882 the French determined to launch their direct campaign against the Tukulor Empire, they first targeted Mourgoula which to them symbolically represented Tukulor strength and French weakness in the area. Desbordes, the commander, found it too well defended to take militarily and gained the center only by capturing its leaders through deception (Oloruntimehin 1972:245, 255–56).

Returning to Vallière's trek, after Mourgoula and Sitakoto, he came to Nyagassola, which had an impressive fortification (see picture in his report in Gallieni 1885:299). From Nyagassola to Narena he saw gold mining in Koumanakouta, ruins in Namarana, and a strong fortress in Kamale.[14] (Gallieni 1885:310ff.). Both Nyagassola and Kamale were held by the Keita.

About Narena Vallière wrote extensively and his description is quite different than Park's image of "Jerijang," Narena's predecessor:

> We soon saw that Narena with its two huge surrounding walls was a very important village. Since the reports of the indigenous population had made the place to be unhospitable, I was in a hurry to see the chief, with the aim to win his hospitality with some presents we had brought; but I received the most awful welcome. At the moment I conformed to the custom I thought to be universal in the Sudan, and stretched out my hand, he turned suddenly around, saying 'that these manners are those of the Segou people whom he did not like' This inhospitable individual bears the name of Bandiougou, and he presents himself as a declared adversary of the Toucouleurs. His village, of about 800 inhabitants, has suffered much from the visits of the musulman armies and contains a rather large number of refugees from the Fouladougou, who have feelings of hate again the former invaders . . . I soon found out that our host regretted his presentation . . . and had mistaken me for a friend of the Toucouleurs. . . . I [was informed] that Narena was the oldest village of the Manding and that all its inhabitants were of noble origin.

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[11] In October 1997, the chief of Kamale—nowadays a hamlet, but in the past the main village among the five villages of the Bacama region—showed me the grave of the "grandfather of my grandfather" in order to prove to me that everything he had just told me about his ancestor was true. He said that this was within the limits of the old fortress of Kamale, which they had left before he was born because of a shortage of drinking water. He showed me the periphery and entrance of the former tata of Kamale. This probably is the place Park spent half a year, but when no fortress existed.

When Vallicre left en route to Siby, he passed the recently destroyed town of "Samba Fida" (Samalofida) and did not opt to travel to Kangaba One year later Mahmadou Alpha, an "officier indigene" of the French troops, concluded that Kangaba was bigger and more important than Vallicre had assumed from information he had received It consisted of six tatas [15]

The local history of Narena published by Keita and Kouyate gives some information about the fortifications of Narena that the Narena people had observed in their youth (Keita and Kouyate 1997 2 7) [16] Three of the constructions were called Kandia, Issakourou, and Bankumana [17] They are still celebrated in oral tradition as Fadima Kone recounts

> I saw the ruins of the tata of Kandia Behind the house of Kague Soma, close to the soro-tree was a remnant of the tata On the road to Fadabanfada, there also was the remnant of a tata The first tata of Narena was the one called Issakourou, I saw the remnants of this tata The cheese tree of Bankumana that fell [in 1996—JJ] was brought from Issakourou when it was small The Diara family asked my grand-father Fah permission to plant it in front of his door Nanyouma Kouda, who lived with the family of Nanyouma Fode had the duty to water it Next to that house of Alama Basandiou was a remnant of the tata It was about three meters high and one and a half meters wide You could walk around on it on horseback I also saw the tata of Bankaran (Bankoumana), on the domains of Soukouba Diara It was a high and complete tata It was in the direction of Solo

[1] ANSOM Senegal et Dependances dossier 73 bis, Campagne 1880 1881, rapport du Lieutenant Colonel Borgnis-Desbordes (30 chapters 561 pages) Chapitre XXVII mentions the mission to Kangaba by Mahmadou Alpha

[1] The following two pages are based on texts collected by and analyzed in Camara and Jansen (1999)

[17] The tata of Bankumana does not seem to be historically related to the village of Bancoumana, 40 kilometers from Narena, although the similarity in name is explained sometimes as a historical relationship In the context of the argument of this article, it is important to note that these fortifications are sometimes perceived as villages For instance, ANSOM Senegal et ses Dependances IV dossier 92A contains a manuscript titled 'Mission du Manding fait par le lieutenant ROUY des spahis 6 avril 1888 statistique des villages visites This text mentions a village called Kandia in the pays de Narena, pille par Mambi" (the ruler of Kangaba—JJ) In colonial as well as pre colonial times Kenyema, Samolofida Nafague, and Koulouka were dependent on Kandia Rouy stated that the first three were small places the last large However, there was a significant difference between the pays de Narena in pre-colonial times and the colonial post-1915, canton of Narena to which Sokourani was part At the end of the 19th century, Sokourani belonged to the pays de Djoulafondo It is remarkable that the present-day inhabitants of Sokourani say that their village used to be called Djoulafondo

Nounfaran Kante has given another account:

> I personally walked on the ruins of the tata of Kandia. At that time,
> lots of it remained. This tata was the property of the Konate. I also
> saw the ruins of Issakourou. This tata was owned by Koulouba Diara,
> the general with the task of protecting Fili Diby [chief of Narena in the
> early colonial period—JJ]. I also saw the ruins of the tata of Bayan,
> the ancient capital of Narena. My house has been built on the remains
> of the tata of Bankoumana. . . . The ruins of the tata of Kandia and
> of Bankoumana, which I saw, would reach to three meters high. My
> father had the habit of shooting at a cow (sic) . . . from the holes through
> which one can watch. As a child, I personally killed birds through
> those watch holes.

The old people of Narena also recall a palace which stood in Narena.
One man who saw the spot where it had stood estimated its sur-
face at fifty square meters (Noumouni Bala Keita, cited in Camara
and Jansen 1999) Another said: "I saw the ancient site of the palace
because our compound was on that spot. The palace was a special
site in the tata. Not the entire royal family lived in it. Only his
favorite wife inhabited the place, together with the king." (Nounfaran
Keita cited in Camara and Jansen 1999).

Vallière's description of Narena gives a clue to the way people
altered territoriality in the Narena *kafu* in order to accommodate to
the military and political realities of the 19th century. My argument,
however, is not based upon a coincidental change in architecture
and village outlook. If that were the case, this analysis would be
conjectural history. The available sources strongly hint at structural
changes in social organization and in authority.

The fortresses Vallière observed must have been created in the
mid-nineteenth century, and probably not all at the same time. Their
leaders may have maintained some political autonomy while coop-
erating for the common defense. As the above account of Nounfaran
Kante shows, a general in service of the chief had his own tata, as
did Koulouba Diara. The distance between the fortresses are not
described in the sources, but during fieldwork I conducted in the
Mande hills I observed some that were separated by about 100
meters. The tata were temporary structures; Vallière saw two of
them, but oral tradition has kept the memory of many more.

The presence of a Diara suggest, by the origin of this patronymic,
the influence of Segou, or at least the presence of a small relatively
independent warlord in service of Narena's chief. The chieftaincy

itself seems to have altered in nature over the century, although the same Keita family stayed in power. Mungo Park called the ruler a *mansa*, a term referring to legitimate and ancient kingship. Present-day old men, however, talk without exception of the *faama* of Narena when they refer to the pre-colonial chief of the place. *Faama* is a term that refers to warfare; it would be appropriate to consider him as the established leader of a group of warlords or army leaders (*keletigiw*) (Jansen 1996; Person 1968). Thus, in Vallière's time, Narena was a collection of people related to each other by kinship, military services, and patronage, such as the refugees Vallière saw. It would be impossible to construct a map of the village in the 19th century, however, not only because of the destructive wars and the temporary character of the fortresses but also because of the changes Narena has gone through in the 20th century. Since it was located along the road the French built to Guinea, the village center has moved slowly to the road and the site of the palace is in the periphery of the present-day village.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

Northward, on the Mandesira, people also suffered from a long history of raiding and warfare, but their response strategies often were different because of the different ecological possibilities. On his way to Bamako, Vallière continued to follow Park's route in the opposite direction. After Samolofida, he almost overlooked the population of Tabon/Nyenkenma, which had sought refuge in the mountains. In Siby, he arrived in the middle of a *Komo* ceremony and was confronted with drunken men dancing around the sacred groove. His impressions of the place are revealing:

> The village of Siby has a very particular aspect; instead of a compact entity, it is composed of various groups of huts, established on one line on the foot of a long mountain with almost vertical cliffs. This arrangement has been taken to make it possible that at a moment of danger, everyone can quickly seek refuge in the rocks. The village, when deserted in this way, becomes uninhabitable, because those who have fled do not miss the opportunity, from the heights of their retreat, to roll on the attackers enormous boulders which they only have to push. The inhabitants, about two thousand, are quite unified the people say; they belong to the tribe (sic—JJ) of the Camara, a tribe of workers, blacksmiths, and gold diggers. They are lowly esteemed among

the other Manding people, who believe themselves to be from a bet-
ter origin and who disdain their activities; however, energetic and well
armed, they remain independent and not disposed to accept the dom-
ination of others.

The Siby people had chosen the same solution as had the inhabi-
tants of Kinytakooro in the time of Park and, then later, those of
Taboun/Nyenkenma. In contrast, the people of Narena developed
a strategy that was a self-evident solution for a town on a plain:
they constructed tatas, as did others in similarly located centers.

After spending the night in Siby, Vallière continued the next day
to Bamako. Passing Nafadjè, he remarked that this was the end of
Manding; Vallière's notion of the extension of Manding thus coin-
cides geographically with Park's area of kings (*mansaw*). Again, a com-
parison of Park and Vallière gives an important clue. Park tells that
the village chief is called *mansa* and therefore his patromymic will
have been Keita, since the Keita are considered, in Mande, to be
the *mansaren*, royalty. Nowadays, only a few Keita are left in the
Sendougou area; the Camara are dominant. These Camara relate
themselves to the Keita of Kangaba and in reports from the early
colonial period, the Camara from Siby are pictured as people of
Susu origin (meaning, from the forest of Guinea) whose suzerain is
the ruler of Kangaba. Today, though, the population no longer traces
descent to Susu.

It seems, therefore, that during the 19th century the Sendougou
area had become affected by a grand political maneuver engineered
by the rulers of Kangaba, or the Keita in general. The Keita them-
selves has been replaced as local authority holders by audacious for-
eigners in order to create a buffer between the Keita and the invaders
from the north. These settlers were accustomed to live in the harsh
conditions caused by constant danger. And warfare also had changed,
probably in a revolutionary way, during the century. While Park
described Siby as unconquerable, early 20th century written docu-
ments inform us that, in the 1880's, Siby was completely destroyed
at least two times by Samori's armies. Thus, the Siby case demon-
strates that a *kafu* was part of a wider system of alliances and polit-
ical maneuvers and that the ability of a group to adapt to changing
circumstances had its limits. The Keita's plan for the buffer failed,
however, and royal Keita disappeared from the area.

War did not end with the French defeat of Almami Ahmadu's
forces and the destruction of Mourgoula, which put a halt to the

razzias into Mande. It continued in succeeding years with the clashes
between Samori and local rulers and between Samori and the French.
The French highly valued Kangaba—located at the end of the
Mandesira—as a post, and they explored the Mandesira with the
hope of establishing a trade route (possibly by rail) from Kita to
the Niger.[18] Sheiku Ahmadu's occupation of the Segou area meant
that a more Northern route was unattractive at that moment. However,
when Borgnis-Desbordes headed for Kangaba in 1882 along the
route taken by Vallière a few years before, he discovered that: ". . . a
previously unknown chief a few years ago, Samori . . . the ally of
Mamby of Kangaba, chief of the lower Manding . . . only had to
make one more step to close for us the Bakhoy valley that we had
occupied up to Kita."[19] Segou's power was crumbling, and thus
Borgnis-Desbordes directed his troops to Bamako, which was occu-
pied in February 1883. In order to keep Samori at a distance he
fought a battle with the armies of Fabou a.k.a. Keme Brehman
(Samori's younger brother) at the Wonyonko river and he destroyed
all the villages south of Bamako up to Bancoumana. He thus cre-
ated a no man's land between the French and Samori, which helped
to establish Bamako as a politically secure site necessary for the end
of their railway line.

With these pieces in place, the French no longer considered con-
trol over the Mandesira important, at least for the short run. In
1885 the armies of Samori destroyed Narena (Person 1968). Until
1887, Samori remained master of the left bank of the Niger, south
of Bancoumana. Kangaba chose Samori's side when the French had
not sent the support they had promised in 1881, and flourished by
this alliance (Jansen 1996). This was the era that in Person's words
was the Wild West of Africa, as illustrated by the actions of the
"Mission du Lieutenant Combes" who had been assigned to explore
Mande in 1885. Combes could not, however, resist the temptation
to become a legendary conqueror, and thus he decided to help the
people of a town called Kenieba, on the right bank of the Niger

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[18] ANSOM, Senégal et Dépendances IV, 75 Expansion territoriale et politique
indigène "Rapport sur une reconnaissance faite sur le Niger en Février 1882 (Kita,
le 20 Mars 1882)".
[19] ANSOM, Senégal et Dépendances IV, 90 bis, Expansion générale 'Vallière,
Rapport sur l'organisation politique donnée aux états de Mambi situés sur la rive
gauche du Niger (Kangaba, 5 mars 1888)', and Vallière's report in Galhem 1885

and under siege by Samori's armies. He arrived too late: Kenieba had already been destroyed. On their way back, the French were attacked by Samori's armies at Nafadji (between Nyagassola and Siguiri), suffered severe losses, and had a narrow escape. From then onwards, the French were very careful with Samori, who—again according to Person—had superior tactics and who would certainly have beaten the French, if he had better armature (Person 1968 and 1977). In 1887, however, Samori voluntarily withdrew his troops from the left bank in order to attack Sikasso, and in 1888, an army lead by Vallière occupied the left bank and he destroyed the palace of the king of Kangaba. In succeeding years the French suppressed further resistance and began to assert control.

The Twentieth Century:
the Imposition of a Village Structure, and its Consequences

In the early decades of the twentieth century, French rule had a great effect on settlement patterns and forms of habitation. I argue that this impact has become interiorized and that earlier adjustments have been completely forgotten in popular memory. As the French measurement changed the infrastructure and the administration, the landscape the Mande people lived in changed so much that the inhabitants obliterated many of their previous memories. Therefore, although present-day accounts of the foundation of villages seem to be the most appropriate historical source to reconstruct the history of a *kafu*, such accounts are weak and probably even misleading. They are not reliable sources for the study of changes in habitation strategies in late pre-colonial times in part because the village structure was not as ubiquitous then as it is nowadays, after French colonial politics led to a movement and proliferation of villages.

In part the erasure of memory took place because the French imposed their own principles of rule via the "chefs de canton" and "chefs de village" and also constructed roads in order to improve transport and the flow of commerce, and, of course, to impose rule more efficiently. Two roads are particularly significant for this study of habitation strategies. One that brought many changes was the road from Bamako to the Guinea border through Siby to Narena and then to the important gold mining center of Kouremale (on the frontier), with a branch to Kangaba that passed through Koflatè—

where gold also was discovered in the 1940s. The French first
attempted to construct the Bamako-Kangaba road in the early 1920s,
but then abandoned it in 1937, probably because it was destroyed
annually by the flooding Niger. Only after the Second World War
was a good road constructed on this trajectory, thanks to the intro-
duction of the grinding machine.[20] Thus, over the period from 1890
to 1940 both Siby and Narena were located along the most impor-
tant road to Guinea, which had a great impact on the habitation
strategies.

Confronted with the new possibilities and restrictions of colonial
rule, people in Siby and Narena made critical decisions regarding
habitation. In Siby, the construction of the Bamako-Siby-Narena-
Kouremale road ended flooding by water falling from the cliff, since
at that time the water was canalized and directed to the bridge sit-
uated next to the present-day post office. Elder inhabitants have
described the changes. Kanda Camara, for instance, recounted the
following:

> The trajectory Siby-Bamako used to be done on foot. The present day
> road between Siby and Bamako did not yet exist; the old route was
> along the foot of the mountain. Narena was the first to establish the
> road between Siby and Narena. Then Siby constructed the road up
> to Samanyana and Samanyana established the road to Bamako. At
> that time, there was not yet a road between Kangaba and Siby. The
> road between Siby and Bancoumana was constructed recently. (Diawara
> *et al.* 1997)

Attracted by the road, partially pushed by French policy, many
Mande villages moved to the road. For Siby, this has resulted in an
entirely new habitation strategy. As described above, Siby was a
"conglomerate" along the cliff in the late pre-colonial era. The French
did not seem to have known how to handle the area called Siby.

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[20] ANMK, Fonds Recents 1 L-70 I, "Rapports Politiques- Rapports de Tournee
Cercle de Bamako 1921 1944" refers to a 'piste' Bamako-Djoulafundo that was
built after twelve years of discussion (then, the 230 km between Bamako and Siguiri
[in present-day Guinea] could be done by car in 8 5 hours, but only in the dry
season) "Rapport 1953 Narena" in ANMK Fonds Recents 1 E-7, "Rapports poli-
tiques et rapports de tournees cercle de Bamako 1950 1958" mentions a road along
the river which was abandoned in 1937 Colonial administrator J Lucchesi argued
that the Bamako-Siby-Narena road was in a deserted area and advocated con-
structing a new Bamako-Bancoumana-Kangaba road through a more densely pop-
ulated area

Just after occupation it was considered to be a village, but in 1900
it is observed that the population had doubled, from 423 to 812, in
a few years, since many liberated soldiers settled there after the war
with Samori had come to an end. However, I wonder if this village
of Siby covered the same area that Valhère saw Siby inhabited by
2000 people; probably, the Samorian wars had forced many to reset-
tle. A few decades later the French ruled the conglomerate as a set
of independent villages under a chef de canton. The "Carnet de
chef" of canton chief Morignouma Camara (1949–1955) demon-
strates this. His canton consisted of eleven villages with 6,880 inhab-
itants in 1951, of which 3,334 lived in Bancoumana and 728 in
Siby.[21] This Siby of the 1950s equaled the present-day quarter of
Jinkono. Today, however, Siby consists of five "quartiers" or neigh-
borhoods: one being Jinkono, and the others Kakala, Jisumale,
Sebekoro, and Kinyekunna—which is of very recent origin When
one walks in present-day Siby, the center of the settlement is Jinkono
where the market place is located.[22] Jinkono originally was located
between the steep cliff and the sacred hill Kuruninba—where the
Komo ceremony used to be performed by the ancestors of the pre-
sent-day Siby population. Nowadays, Jinkono is 300 meters from its
ancient site, having been moved to the road. The quarter of Sebekoro
came into existence in the 1930s, around a *sebe* tree along the road.
Old people of Siby still vividly tell about how the houses of Sebekoro
were constructed. Jisumana also moved a short distance from the
cliff towards the road, and Kakala is one kilometer northeast of Siby.

Thus, as the canton chief's "Carnet de Chef" demonstrates, the
quarters of Siby were independent administrative units in colonial
times. The memory of this situation is kept in the title of the author-
ities. The head of Siby is the *dugitigiba*, literally "big village chief,"

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[21] ANMK FR 2 E 5 Fiches de Renseignements des Chefs de Canton Bamako
II 1917 1958, dossier 18 "Sendougou"
[22] The name of Jinkono is subject to various explanations Daouda Diawara, one
of the authors of Diawara et al (1997), assured me that the term Jinkono did not
mean "in the fortress" (jin as 'tata', cf Peroz above), but that jin refers to an archi-
tectural style, to a house type which has become rare in the region It was a rec-
tangular house with a wooden skeleton plastered with clay, thus consisting of thick
walls and roofs, it was very comfortable but too feeble for heavy rains and nowa-
days expensive because of the cost of wood This house type used to be dominant
in old Jinkono, where Daouda Diawara's father (d 1989) had his butcher's shop,
before Jinkono moved to its present-day site

and is chosen from the "chefs de quartier" of Kakala and Jinkono, while each "chef de quartier" bears the title of "village chief" (*dugutigi*) referring to the colonial era. However, the colonial situation covered up the previous form of organization. The fact that these quarters celebrated the Komo ceremony together demonstrates there was at least a ritual unity among them.

The present-day village of Narena also is a complex construction that has been deeply affected by its colonial heritage. Its center moved slightly to the road, and from this perspective changes were much less dramatic than in Siby. However, it was very difficult and illogical to adapt Narena to the village model, even though there was on this site a group of neighboring and closely collaborating, but semi-autonomous, fortifications. Even more than Siby, Narena seems to have been a term referring to an area. The term does not refer to a village. For the present day village of Narena, people have some "old names." "Memebugu" is often mentioned as such by people (Camara and Jansen 1999), while Jerijang (mentioned by Park) and Kandia may also be called as names.[23] Clearly, however, Kandia was a "pars pro toto"; it was the most famous among a group of fortifications. It is interesting that Park does not mention a Jerijang as a village or town but as a "district". This name, we can only guess, might be related to a *faama*, even to the name of the youngest son of Narena's founder Kankoman. Narena represented—according to many present-day inhabitants of Narena—a political phenomenon of a larger scale. It was the name of what in this volume is being referred to as a territory, or a formal region; French colonial sources often mention "le Naréna." I think that Narena was a concept in the 19th century only relevant in relation to warfare, since Narena's chief was faama, an authority that derives its status from the practice of warfare. There was no such a thing as a village, but only a group of fortifications, each with its particular authority.

Under colonial rule this form of organization caused a lot of trouble for the Keita and other claimants to authority. Since the Keita had no rights to the chieftaincy of the biggest "village," yet were occasionally superior to those chiefs, the French were not eager to appoint them as *chef de canton*. In the end, canton chieftaincy was

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[23] Carte NO XIV, G. Grandidier, *Atlas des Colonies* (Paris 1934) mentions Kandia, instead of Narena.

given to the Keita, but members of other families could and still can be appointed "village" chiefs over the settlements then collectively labeled as Narena. This seriously weakened the Keita political position in the area. In the long run, the geography of Narena and its rule adapted to French practices. However, Daouda Nambala's complaint that "our kingdoms were all different" certainly refers to the inability of the French administrative model to cover the spatial variations in pre-colonial rule. Therefore, one must be careful with village foundation stories as historical sources; they may be a political tool that to a great extent reflects the structure imposed by the colonial government as well as the post-colonial governments. It must never be forgotten that Mali's first president Modibo Keita promoted a socialist regime in the villages that were managed like a kind of kolchozes (cf. Leynaud and Cisse 1978). This had much impact on people's lives and on village organization.

However, village foundations stories became even more relevant for politics under the present-day policies of decentralization (*maara ka segn so*) in which groups of villages have had to join in order to create a "communauté", if possible on a firm historical basis. It is remarkable that, in the Mande region, often the colonial canton model was chosen as a point of departure, and then one village was excluded, while another one, from a different canton, was included. This community formation was supervised and promoted from the capital by the government executives as well as by members of NGOs who also did some historical research, in particular on village foundation. This led to situations that are a nightmare for a professional historian. In Narena, I witnessed a civil servant asking the royal Keita to give the village foundation account of Narena, thus denying that the concept of Narena did not actually allow for the possibility of a village foundation story. In Siby, the village chief was responsible for telling the foundation story. However, I knew that if the NGO-researcher had gone to the quarter of Jisumana, he would have heard a dramatically different version which turned the tables entirely. This demonstrates that for Siby the village foundation story at the moment is the product of a discussion on village chieftaincy. In short, the image of the village has become a historiographical notion accepted by all participants in historical discourse. Nonetheless, the notion of "landscape"—as it has been elaborated in this chapter—better covers the wide range of empirically collectable data and is actually a more appropriate concept.

Principles of Settlement, Army Organization, and Warfare

Warfare played a major role in the changes in social organization
during the 19th century, forcing the population of the Siby and
Narena regions to adapt their habitation in response to the changes
in the nature of the incursive jihad armies. Park described warfare
as an activity done by raiding armies that attacked a village by night
and took away its population (1983:224). However, at the end of
the 19th century warfare had become a highly organized activity.
In his ethnography on Nyagassola, Orza de Reichenberg described
what he called "traditional" Malinke warfare as follows (** indicates
that the original text is difficult to read):

> In order to conquer a tata, the Malinke operate in the following way.
> Their army is always divided into three regiments that attack the tata
> at the same time. As soon as the warriors arrive at the foot of the
> wall, they place themselves between two **battlements (creneaux)**.
> With **pioches** they make holes in the walls that permit passage for a
> man. Then one of the two, attacked or attacker, who is able to shoot
> the other person first is the winner. During the time an attacker makes
> a hole, a warrior is along side of him ready to give him his gun as
> soon as he can. Through these openings, the attacking troops glide
> into the village. If ** are not resolved the battle is continued in the
> huts. This way of attacking explains the numerous failures which the
> attackers generally suffer. When they have weakened an enemy, the
> defender waits stubbornly behind his tata, shooting almost every ** to
> the attacking groups. The first attack decides almost always who wins
> that day. The demoralized enemy withdraws or leaves quickly in order
> to return another time.[21]

This description shows the strength of the defense works in relation
to the available armature. As both Samori's armies—which depended
on European armature—and the colonial armies proved, the tatas
and their defenders were easy victims of European armature (see
also Peroz's description in note 13). Thus, the tata had become an
old fashioned habitation strategy by the 1870s. D'Orza de Reichen-
berg's description illustrates that an attacking army had a tripartite
organization. On a village level this could be accomplished by different

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[21] Centre d'Accuile et de Recherche des Archives Nationales (CARAN) in Paris;
see Jansen 1999, pp. 28–31.

organizational principles. For instance, in the nearby kingdom of
Kangaba, the army consisted of the members of three age groups
which still solemnly celebrate their role during the well-known
Kamabolon ceremony (Jansen 1998). Age groups were not the only
"self-evident" organizational model for an army, if one looks to social
organization. It is plausible that an army subdivision consisted of the
male population of one tata. Towns may have consisted of a group
of tatas brought together to facilitate defense, but it is more plausi-
ble that a group of tatas was the geographical representation of
socially delimited groups which acted together under certain cir-
cumstances according to certain functions.[25] Narena oral traditions
confirm this model. In Narena people tell about three *kèlèbolow* (war
branches) which trace their origin to the three sons of Narena's
founder Nankoman. The concept of Narena was used to express
unity in warfare, when the people considered themselves as descen-
dants of one mother, called Naren or Nan (Monteil 1929). The claim
"to descend from the same mother" is, in the Mande world, an often
used metaphor for political harmony and collaboration (cf. Jansen
1996). Narena may have been an important military settlement on
the crossroads of the Mandesira, controlling the trade and slave car-
avans to Kangaba as well as Bamako. The tatas were the material-
ization of its power.

The inhabitants of Siby had a different solution to the changed
conditions in the 19th century. When Park's and Vallière's descrip-
tions are compared, one gets the impression that Siby had moved
a short distance to the cliff during the 19th century. This move may
have split up the village of Siby geographically, but the ritual unity
(the Komo was performed together) did not change.

Apparently historical genealogies were often elaborated along lines
that echo principles of behavior of the 19th century Mande popu-
lation: a younger brother position represented political leadership
and army leadership in times of warfare (Jansen 1996). The changes

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[25] The military logic of this is uncertain since two small tatas would have in total
a longer periphery than one tata of the same interior dimensions, and thus it would
take more people to defend the two tatas, on the other hand, two (or more) adjoin-
ing tatas might have protected one another's flanks and required a large attacking
army The adjacent location would be explained if they moved to the place of
refuge at different times and under different local authorities

in habitation strategies reconstructed here for 19th century Mande—
namely the creation of small units that collaborated in times of war-
fare—actually reflect the characteristics of Mande "historical" genea-
logies and the division of tasks among reputed "brothers," which are
often in threes. Three represents the male figure and the impossi-
bility of achieving balance, whereas four, the female figure, can be
divided into two equal parts. Thus, 19th century habitation strate-
gies strengthened, produced, or perhaps were even produced by,
social logics of a Mande status discourse.

Encoding the Landscape - a point of view

Attention to the geographical dimension in history is not new; works
by scholars of the Annales School, in particular, have enriched our
images of the past. Probably because of an alleged lack of sources,
African history has never been studied using the Annales approach.
My chapter can be read as a methodological exploration to fill this
gap and to demonstrate that this approach can be fruitful for study-
ing the history of Africa.

The present-day analysis of pre-colonial West African history is
dominated by discussions of large-scale political systems and eco-
nomics. Most of the time, source material of non-African origin forms
its basis. This approach has produced brilliant studies and stimulat-
ing insights, but yet I think that—given the increased quantity of
available sources—the real challenge nowadays lies at the regional
or even local level. The combination of geographical, environmen-
tal, and social aspects discussed here, of course, form only one side
of the coin; that other side is the study of mental landscape, the
process of how people "encode the landscape". An expanded analy-
sis would involve, for instance, the role of sacred places that struc-
tured the human experience and influenced people's behavior. Each
village had its *solidaw* (cult places), and some of the *solidaw* had a
regional function. For instance, sanctuaries such as the *bolonw* in
Kangaba and Kenyèro—which are restored in septennial ceremonies—
create sentiments of unity on a regional level (see Jansen 1998).
Moreover, many sites loaded with historical meaning have given form
to the landscape because they have been and often still are highly
esteemed by Mande people because they represent or refer to the
heroes who are celebrated in the widely known and highly esteemed

Sunjata epic. For instance, there are two legendary places called Old
Rock: one of them known as Kirikuru is just north of Narena; the
other, Krikuru, is not far from Nyagassola, in present-day Guinea.
These places are believed to be the sites inhabited by the most
ancient Mande. Some geophysical idiosyncrasies are related to etio-
logical legends that are part of the story of the creation of society
as it is represented in the famous Sunjata epic. For instance, near
Siby is located *Kamajan donda ani a bòda*, the entrance and exit por-
tal considered to have been made by the Camaras' ancestor Kamajan.
Kurukanfugan is an open space north of Kangaba, where Sunjata, the
legendary founder of the medieval Mali Empire, is believed to have
divided the world among his generals' families after the victory over
Sumaoro Kante. This event created the task division by patronymic
which still is widely common in the Mande area.[26] Moreover, in
Balanzan, south of Kangaba, there is a place venerated as the grave
of Sunjata's general Tiramagan Traore. Such long-lasting charac-
teristics have been encoded in the imagination and provide a basis
for giving form and meaning to the landscape, whatever direction
historical developments go.

   I realize that Daouda Nambala Keita took the extreme point of
view when he said to me: "You researchers must realize that our
kingdoms were all different." For me, Daouda's statement has been
an invitation to detailed research: the lack of the typical source mate-
rial—such as manuscripts, literature, material culture—challenges us
to explore other kinds of sources that may become relevant to each
other when approached with a novel analytic process. My prelimi-
nary reply to Daouda's complaint is the connection made in this
chapter: a connection between shifts in habitation, principles of social
organization, and strategies of warfare and defense, as manifested in
the occasional observations of travelers in combination with oral
accounts. This chapter has sought to demonstrate that in the con-
text of powerful macro-regional, even global, forces, the active role
of people in local and regional history can be shown by examining
their changes in place, namely habitation, and related social and

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[26] At least it is known that the king of Kangaba gathered his troops on Kuru-
kanfugan, and in 1882 King Mambi decapitated on this spot almost the entire pop-
ulation of Kenyoroba the skulls were still piled up there when Vallière occupied
Kangaba in 1888. In 1925 the French started to use this plain as an air strip.

political processes and meaning, as well as their perspectives on the broader landscape.

An Afterword

It is tempting to speculate briefly on what this essay means for the organization or existence of the famous Mali Empire. Both Park and Vallière refer to the same area around Siby as the northern border of Manding, but originally this area called Manding—the remnants of the kingdom of Mali described by Ibn Khaldun and Ibn Battuta— was more extended. Coming from Segou, Park noted that west of Koulikoro "the language of the natives was improved from the corrupted dialect of Bambarra, to the pure Mandingo." (Park 1983: 177) Since then this linguistic line has shifted southwards: nowadays the border between Bambara and Malinke is south of Bamako, more or less along the political line drawn by Park and Vallière.

In oral tradition Koulikoro is considered to be the limits of 'Mande' (according to Lansine Diabate in Jansen et al. 1995:160). It is famous as the place where Sunjata's adversary Sumaoro Kante transformed himself into a rock. Given the fact that Islam pushed into Mande from the north (Segou, Macina) during the 19th century, it becomes plausible that the region between the Mande hills and the river Niger was really shaped by a process of slow change that was initiated in the North, in which warfare transformed the landscape. This could mean that the beginning of the 19th century was the last phase of the warfare and habitation strategies typical of the Mali Empire, a society characterized by an absence of fortresses. Actually, Park may have observed its decline, without knowing it. This hypothesis, however, suggest the danger of projecting a static image upon the medieval Mali empire, which becomes benign, profitable (the Mandesira), and an innocent victim of Muslim armies.

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