The Sunjata Epic—The Ultimate Version

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In the last decades the Sunjata epic has enjoyed much attention as a masterpiece of African oral literature; at American universities it is often part of undergraduate courses on literature or world history. The Sunjata epic is considered part of the historical heritage of the famous medieval Mali empire: already in the fourteenth century the Arab traveler Ibn Battuta heard griots praising the king of Mali as a direct descendant of Sunjata. Although it is not certain whether the memory of Sunjata had at that time already been shaped in the literary genre of the epic, it is beyond doubt that Ibn Battuta's Sunjata was the same Sunjata as recalled by present-day griots. Today, Sunjata is remembered in large parts of West Africa as the founder of "Mande" or "Manding." Although present-day Mande is but a small region around Kangaba—100 kilometers southwest of Mali's capital, Bamako—in the context of the Sunjata epic, "Mande" has a much broader meaning for the West African audience and is similar to "society" or "the civilized world" in general. Thus although maybe once a king of a founder of a royal dynasty, Sunjata has become a mythical figure, a culture hero with a pivotal position in West African oral history, and the Sunjata epic has become the *primus inter pares* among all African oral traditions.

Part of the Sunjata epic's prestige is based on the fact that it is, as far as I know, the only epic in the world that is entirely orally transmitted as well as claimed to be performed in a ceremonial context, namely, the famous septennial Kamabolon ceremony in Kangaba, Mali. In this ceremony the Kamabolon sanctuary—a traditional hut with colorful paintings—is restored, and the night before the new roof is put on top of the hut, the "canonical" version of the Sunjata epic is recited in the restored but still roofless sanctuary.

The whole Kamabolon ceremony lasts five days and may be regarded as a recreation of society (see Dieterlen; Cisse and Kamissoko; de Ganay; Jansen, "Hot Issues"). The ceremony basically has the function of inaugurating a new *kare* ("age group"), since those who form the new *kare* and those who form the future new *kare* are responsible for most of the ritual labor, such as restoring the walls of the sanctuary, constructing the new roof, and keeping the audience at a distance. The parts that attract the largest audiences are performed the last two days. First, there is the arrival of the Diabate griots in Kangaba, on Thursday afternoon, and the subsequent famous nocturnal recitation that can be considered as a tribute to the ancestors and the recently deceased leaders. Second, there is the action of putting the new roof on top of the sanctuary. This is done on Friday afternoon. Only young men from the local royal Keita lineage are allowed to participate in this ritual labor. Impure Keita who try to lift the

new roof will either die soon or even on the spot; when "bastards" try to lift the roof, the roof simply refuses. It is generally believed that the Keita are able to lift the roof only because of the power of the words of the Diabate griots. In short, one can say that the words of the Diabate griots are crucial in the correct execution of the ritual labor, and thus the recreation of the society in which the new *kare* has been incorporated. When the Kamabolon is roofless, society is experienced as being in anarchy (see above and Jansen, "Hot Issues"). As soon as the new roof is on top of the sanctuary, people applaud, shout for joy, run to the hut in order to touch the new roof, then go home, happy with the blessings they received by attending the ceremony. Thus the Diabate's words in particular are necessary to get society back on the right track.

In spite of the prestige of the texts recited during the Kamabolon ceremony, the data about them are scarce. There are several reasons for this information gap. First, the people responsible for reciting the "ultimate version" of the Sunjata epic, the Diabate griots from Kela, are reputedly difficult to work with. Second, the recording of rehearsals is prohibited. Third, rehearsals are rare. Finally, the authoritative recitation takes place in the Kamabolon sanctuary and is not accessible for outsiders and thus cannot be heard. Quite discouraging factors for researchers!

Among the scholars who have attended one or more Kamabolon ceremonies, only Germaine Dieterlen and Solange de Ganay have attempted an impression of the words spoken during the ceremony. De Ganay is most explicit, since she claims to give a text edition of all the stories recited during the 1954 ceremony. This text, however, is only a few dozen pages and therefore cannot cover the entire performance. The text is a strange hybrid of stories from the Koran and from Genesis, Dogon mythology, and the Sunjata epic. It was recorded in the absence of de Ganay by her assistants who were not from the region and who were standing at quite a distance from the Kamabolon. They probably whispered the text into the microphone since they were afraid of disappointing their patrons. Moreover, the text has been adapted or embellished by outsider informants whom Ganay worked with in the decades following the 1954 ceremony (for a critical analysis of de Ganay's book, see van Beek and Jansen).

Dieterlen also has an opinion about the words recited during the Kamabolon ceremony. Basing her opinion on research during and after the 1954 Kamabolon ceremony, she holds that the words refer to "le mythe de la création, les généalogies mythiques, puis les généalogies historiques des Keita, comme celles des familles apparantées ou alliées à ces derniers" (40) 'the creation myth, the mythical genealogies, then the historical genealogies of the Keita, like those of the families related by kinship or allied to them.' Regarding this list of themes, the creation myth has been a point of debate (see Austen) because its text has never been published, with the exception of the highly synthetic descriptions in Dieterlen's own work. The remaining themes mentioned by Dieterlen are, of course, similar to the Sunjata epic as it is told in Kela. Although Dieterlen may have had access to de Ganay's material, since they both worked under Marcel Griaule's supervision, her material is different from de Ganay's.

A third scholar who has attended several Kamabolon ceremonies is Youssouf Tata Cisse. While he often refers to the Kamabolon and the texts recited in it, he has focused on the paintings in the sanctuary (see in particular his contribution in de Ganay). These paintings symbolize predictions according to Cisse. Working in the intellectual tradition of Griaule, Dieterlen, and de Ganay, Cisse (and Kamissoko) rarely mention names of informants or other contextual data, and this has a mystifying effect on their reports. One gets the impression that the local people are philosophers and that research means obtaining their "secrets" (see van Beek, Clifford). This approach has molded almost all the research done so far on the Kamabolon ceremony.

This article aims to make a twofold contribution to the studies of African oral literature.[1] First, it will answer several questions about the kind of texts recited during rehearsals and the performance of the Kamabolon ceremony by presenting "empirical" data, thus contextualizing the material. Second, it will illustrate that the recitation of the Sunjata epic is not necessarily in the first place the product of the griots' imagination and literary creativity, but a highly standardized oral text that is carefully reproduced by its "owners." Thus, this article attempts to offer a counterweight to statements on the presumed dynamic literary variation of griots' performances of the Sunjata epic, an idea that has been current in studies on African oral art for some time, probably the heritage of Gordon Innes's pioneering research on Sunjata. Moreover, I expect that the data presented here have in retrospect an impact on the discussions in the 1970s by scholars like Ruth Finnegan, John William Johnson, and Isidore Okpewho, on the existence of epics in Africa. I will demonstrate that although the text is more or less fixed, the "live" performance of the epic is an event in which many people participate and does not aim solely at a perfect recitation of the text. This essay offers a detailed account of texts that are recited on Thursday night. Little attention will be paid to the rest of the ceremony, which is described in my "Hot Issues." I think it is useful to give such detailed accounts of rehearsals because of the uniqueness of the material and because of the importance of the Sunjata epic for the contemporary study of African literature. I will refer often to the text editions based on recordings from Kela obtained by researchers (see Vidal; Ly-Tall et al.; Jansen et al.). It is not necessary, however, to know these versions; the argument should be comprehensible for those who have read a non-Kela version (see Bulman), for instance, those by Djibril Tamsir Niane or Johnson. Therefore, I consider most story themes to be known, such as those about the massacring buffalo of Do; the killing of the buffalo by the Traore hunters; the marriage of Sunjata's mother Sogolon Kejugu; and the rivalry between her and her husband's first wife; Sunjata's youth as a lame young man; the conflict between Sunjata and his half-brother Mansa Dankaran Tuman, which leads to Sunjata's exile; the vain attempts of Mansa Dankaran Tuman to stand up to Mande's arch-enemy Sumaoro Kante; and the return of Sunjata from exile in order to liberate Mande from Sumaoro's rule. When lesser known themes are mentioned, I will provide short additional information.

I do not exaggerate when I say that my entire academic career has been a preparation to study the Kamabolon ceremony and the role of the griots in the ceremony. My research agenda had always been based on the following idea: if I succeed in knowing the repertory of the *kumatigi* ("master of the word"), that is, the person responsible for reciting the Sunjata epic during the Kamabolon ceremony, I will be able to estimate the topics recited inside the Kamabolon. The words recited inside the Kamabolon had fascinated me since my reading of Dieterlen's and Cisse's magnificent, but vague, descriptions of the texts allegedly recited in the Kamabolon sanctuary. With this idea, I approached, in 1991, *kumatigi* Lansine Diabate (born ca. 1930) and received written permission to live on his compound. After I arrived in Kela, the two of us asked permission to the other Diabate for a study of their daily life and for the writing of books, since the old male Diabate, as a group, are considered to be the owners of the authoritative version of the words we have labeled as "the Sunjata epic" (see Johnson 25; Leynaud and Cisse). The epic and its "ownership" are not an individual's affair. The Diabate agreed, and at each of my subsequent visits, they confirmed their permission and gave blessings over my work when I left.

Thus I had a suitable place to live, but systematic fieldwork was impossible: the Diabate refuse to do something like an interview, which compelled me to spend my days in Kela sitting and waiting, and I had to be satisfied by accidental remarks and observations during their daily activities. Luckily, at the end of my first period of fieldwork, I was permitted to make recordings of induced performances of songs (some of them published on PAN-records) and of the Sunjata epic (published in Jansen et al.). Next to the above-mentioned text editions of sources, my observations inspired me to work out an alternative interpretation of genealogies in the Mande world (see Jansen, "Younger"). Moreover, I wrote an article hypothesizing on the content of the Kamabolon version of the epic ("An Ethnography," written in 1993).

During my research, I established a close relationship with Lansine Diabate, alternately having the role of "guest," "pupil," and "son." Lansine took me to every public event he attended, and I organized a concert tour in Europe for him and four other griots from Kela as an attempt to express my gratitude for his hospitality. Our relationship was intensified by recurring false accusations about alleged donations of great amounts of money. After Lansine's version of the epic was published in 1995, it was generally believed that we earned millions of F CFA by the sale of copies of the Sunjata epic. Such accusations occur very often in Mali when there is close collaboration between two individuals, but they are, of course, very annoying and sometimes made us quite desperate.

It is strictly forbidden to record live performances of the *Mansa Jigin,* as the Sunjata epic is called.[2] I attended a three-hour live performance on the day of my first arrival in Kela (see "An Ethnography" 2). That day I was told that such rehearsals take place three times a year, but during the almost eighteen months I spent in Kela in the period 1991-97 I never again heard of anything like such a rehearsal. A *Mansa Jigin* was performed—as

I was told in 1996—in October 1993 at the funeral of the *bolontigi,* the so-called "owner of the Kamabolon." This function is attributed to the classificatory oldest member of the royal Keita from Kangaba, who are the patrons of the Diabate of Kela.[3] At that time, Lansine was in Switzerland, and his role was taken over—at least partially—by young Seydou Diabate, a very silent young man, who is said to have inherited the voice of Lansine's predecessor, Kanku Madi, [4] and who is therefore considered by his agemates as a future *kumatigi.*

The "promised" three annual rehearsals did not take place; therefore I had to wait for a Kamabolon ceremony, which occurs only once every seven years and which in this case was even postponed an additional year.[5] Three rehearsals take place in preparation for the Kamabolon ceremony, according to the Diabate. On 19 March 1997, I happened to be in Kela and then heard that the next Monday, 24 March, was to be announced as the date for the Kamabolon ceremony. Thus, I decided to stay at Lansine's side as much as possible until the end of the ceremony. I did not want to miss anything of the preparation!

Already in early March 1997, during a short visit to Kela, two young adult Diabate (M., born in 1960, and S., born in 1972) had assured me that there would be a Kamabolon ceremony that year. They of course remembered how I had spent the entire month of April 1996 in Kela waiting in vain for the ceremony. M. Told me that the old men had told him many secrets in the past months, in preparation for the ceremony. S said the same and added: "Especially your host Lansine has told a lot to me. He is my uncle, and he doesn't hide away his secrets from me. His words demonstrate that our tradition as we got it from our ancestors and the things taught in Islam are of the same origin."

On Wednesday 26 March, an intermediary of the Keita of Kangaba came to Kela and offered kola nuts to the Diabate and requested to recite the *Mansa Jigin* in the Kamabolon (see also Traore). The Diabate accepted, and this, according to Lansine Diabate, meant that the ceremony could not be canceled anymore. On Friday 28 March, it was announced in public in Kela that the ceremony would take place from 28 April until 2 May. Soon I was to witness the first signs of the *kumatigi*'s preparations. Every night Lansine and I drank tea together in the company of some of my friends, most of them Diabate. One night, 3 April 1997, Lansine's classificatory younger brother Mamadi (aka Jetennemadi Deux) showed me his new guitar and played the melody of the *Sunjata Fasa,* the praise song for Sunjata (see Couloubaly). To my great surprise, Lansine then started to recite stories. Some of Lansine's stories were new to me.[6] He began with a story about Adam and God, which I was hearing for the first time, followed by well-known praise lines for the Keita (see appendix 2). Then there was a story about Adam and Eve, which was also new to me. I was not able to understand the stories.

The story about Adam and Eve ended with a long list of Arab-sounding words, which Lansine announced as "forty" of something. The next day, during an informal chat, Mamadi told me that the list consisted of the names of the twenty twins Adam and Eve begot. This story theme was at

that moment new to me, but I learned that it is also known in the Gambia,[7] and therefore may be a popular theme all over West Africa and even beyond. Lansine contined with a story about two persons, one called "Hanipul," if I remember correctly. It may have been a version of the story of Cain and Abel, but it is also possible that it was the story of the fraternal killing in the Adam and Eve story (see note 7).

Next followed the report about the confrontation between the Prophet Mohammed and Surukata, the ancestor of the griots. In this story Lansine called Surukata *kafari nyèmogo* ("the chief of the pagans"). I had never heard the story, but Mamadi explained it to me the next day. Surukata wanted to attack the Prophet, who reacted by saying *kudju*. Hearing this, Surukata's horse immediately stopped, thus sliding forward. By doing so, it got a white nose and white knees. Lansine then proceeded with a story I understood well, since I had recorded it in 1992.[8] It was about Nabugu Biriman, who found the Ka'aba, the black stone venerated in Mecca, while he was clearing the ground (*tu tigè*) on which Mecca was to be built. The whole session lasted about forty-five minutes. A few times Lansine injected lines of praise for the Keita. The recitation did not attract any audience; those who were present just sat and listened. After he had finished his recitation, Lansine said to me with a smile on his face: "In the next weeks, you will hear much more." The next day, Mamadi said that "these kinds of words" were spoken in the Kamabolon. He apologized for not being able to remember everything that had been told. He said that he had not listened to them, because everybody knew these stories. Mamadi believed, for instance, that the story about Batara Aliu (the Mande name for Ali, the fourth khalif, a hero in Muslim oral tradition all around the world) had been spoken, and he was astonished when I assured him that Lansine had not told that story, which is the first part of the Sunjata epic I recorded with Lansine.

In the following weeks, I tried several times to get Lansine to talk about this performance, but as usual he refused to discuss his words. The only thing he quite often said—with a friendly smile on his face, but clearly refusing to discuss the matter—was that I was going to attend a *koba* (a "big thing").

From 7 April until 12 April, Lansine visited Bamako and Siby. In Bamako, Mali's capital, he bought a light green kaftan that he planned to wear during the Kamabolon ceremony. The purpose of his travel to Siby (50 kilometers southwest of Bamako) was to visit the hamlet of Kalassa, homestead of the famous hunter Kalassa Bagi Konate. When we arrived in Kalassa, Lansine met a classificatory son of Kalassa Bagi outside the compound. Lansine greeted the man by reciting praise lines for the Konate, and he continued to do so when we entered Kalassa Bagi's compound. I had never seen a male Diabate from Kela doing this, although I knew this practice from literature.

When we arrived before Kalassa Bagi, Lansine recited the story about Adam and concluded with the recitation of the names of the twenty twins. Thus, Lansine performed some exercises for the Kamabolon ceremony!

Then Lansine explained that "the way of the artisans" (*nyamakalaya sira*) was not the same as "the way of the earth priests" (*somaya sira*) and "the way of the hunters" (*donsoya sira*). Therefore since he was an artisan, he requested Kalassa Bagi to prepare for him medicines that would help him during the Kamabolon ceremony. Kalassa Bagi agreed and ordered his "son" to make the medicines. Lansine got medicinal twigs and leaves (*jura*) and a medicinal sacred fluid (*nasi*). Moreover, he was told to sacrifice a white guinea fowl (*kami*) as soon as he returned to Kela. Lansine was quite satisfied with the instructions and medicines he received. When we walked back to Siby, Lansine was amused about what I had understood during the visit and he explained to me the use of the medicines.

Then a period of waiting and speculation (by my friends in Kela) about rehearsals followed. On Monday 14 April, Lansine told me that he soon should have a talk about the rehearsals with "Yamuducinin" Diabate, one of the five compound chiefs among the Diabate griots in Kela. Yamudu is also Lansine's classificatory father, alhtough he is only a few years older; as a child he got the nickname "Yamuducinin," literally Little Yamudu, and this nickname has been in use ever since. The very next day, Lansine told me that the talk with Yamuducinin had taken place. He announced rehearsals for Monday 21 April and Friday 25 April. Moreover, he told me something about a Monday, but that part I did not understand well. Lansine added that this was said in strict confidence; I had to keep my mouth shut, and so I did.

Although my friends had always assured me that one rehearsal should take place before the Islamic feats of Tabaski, the "sheep feast" (in 1997 on 18 April), Lansine's scheme was different. It followed older notions of time calculation in which Monday and—to a lesser extent—Friday were sacred days. For instance, on Monday it used to be forbidden to dig gold in the gold mines.[9] Then on 19 April, Kelabala Diabate died (see my "Al-Haji"). El Haji Bala Diabate, aka Kelabala, was a famous griot, marabout, and politician. He had been seriously ill since 7 April, but his death still came as a shock to the Malians, and certainly to all the groups who participate in the Kamabolon ceremony. Almost immediately a rumor developed that the Kamabolon ceremony would be canceled. On 20 April, the day of Kelabala's funeral (an event attended by about 1,000 people, including three television crews), I heard adult men chatting. They told each other that the very same night the *Mansa Jigin* was to be performed, thus giving many people the opportunity to profit from the blessings that are said to be "found in" a *Mansa Jigin* performance. That speculation, however, proved incorrect.

On Monday morning, 21 April, Lansine guaranteed to me that the first rehearsal was to be postponed until next Friday. At 4 pm, however, he came to me and said that it had just been decided to perform that same night. He did not use the term *Mansa Jigin,* but as usual he talked about a *baroo* ("chat"; see Couloubaly). Thus, his prediction of 14 April proved to be correct. Some minutes later it was known to all the Diabate, and then some young adults began to restore the platform on which the Diabate are seated when singing, reciting, and listening to the Sunjata epic. These

young men requested that I join them in their labor, since this would be beneficial for me, and I did so. "This is an important night for you," some said to me. "You will get many blessings by attending a *Mansa Jigin.*"

Recordings of rehearsals are forbidden, so I am obliged to trust my memory in my description of the performance. I was lucky that Lansine spoke only texts or words that I had often heard from him, in daily talk or while translating my tapes of the induced recording of the Sunjata epic. Thus I was in the unique position of understanding most of his words—quite an experience for someone who is not fluent in the local language. The words of others were also often standardized, and were therefore easy to understand. The only exception were the few words by El Haji Yamudu (Kelabala's younger brother, who died in October 1997; see my "Al Haji"); his messages were translated by friends sitting next to me.

The following descriptions have been based on the notes I made in my hut immediately after the rehearsal. When attending the rehearsal, I repeated again and again to myself what I was witnessing, and in which order. Of course, I do not exclude the possibility of having confused some elements, but my notes may provide the kind of descriptions of live performances of the Sunjata epic that have never been presented by Dieterlen and Ganay. Moreover, these data will contribute to the study of both the African epic and the bards' memory. Where I have doubt about my memory, I will note it explicitly.

In the middle of the open space between the Diabate compounds, the place where the platform stood, one TL-lamp was hung in order to make the performance visible to the audience. Althought there was a good PA-system available—used by visitors for their prayers for Kelabala—the recitation was "unamplified." On mats in front of the platform sat about twenty male Diabate. They had about five ngoni's (Mande's traditional plucked lutes) and two acoustic guitars. These instruments were played by "young" Diabate, varying in age from 15 years to about 45 years old (the famous singer Kassemady Diabate and his younger brother Lanfia). They were assisted by Kassemadi Kamissoko, the only non-Diabate on the mats. On the platform many Diabate had gathered. The old sat in the first row, while the younger were seated behind them. In addition to the Diabate there were two non-Diabate from Kela: Issa Diawara and Mamuduba Kamissoko. The latter had the role of "witness": he had to confirm/corroborate every sentence by a Diabate with the word *naamu* ("indeed").[10] The atmosphere was solemn—silence ruled—but relaxed; people sat and drank tea, smoked cigarettes, or got themselves some water, sweets, or kola nuts.

In front of the platform sat Kunba Diabate—mother of the above-mentioned Issa Diawara—next to a pan of water. Kunba is an old woman, born in Kela and married to the Diawara. She was presented to me as the "doyenne" of the Diabate women in Kela. A few times she gave water to the old men: I was told that this was her official function (see Meillassoux). Moreover, during the entire performance and all the other performances described in this article, every now and then she shouted something to the men—often an exhortation like *Ayi Jabate* ("you Diabate), sometimes a blessing for the Diabate or for Kela.

The basic "unit of performance" consisted of Lansine, El Haji Yamudu, and Yamuducinin, the person who was responsible for setting the dates of the rehearsal (see above). They sat in the first row, with Lansine in the middle. To the right of them sat, among others, some classificatory younger brothers who live in Lansine's compound: Sidiki, aka "Super," Mussa, and Mamadi; I sat on a chair to the left of them. About 250 people attended the rehearsal, many of whom had come on Sunday to offer condolences for Kelabala. Among them was Mali's Minister of Culture, Bakari Koninba Traore.

The group of musicians had been playing the melody of the *Sunjata fasa* ("praise song for Sunjata") for about a half hour. In the meantime everyone had come and had sat down. Then at about 10 pm, rather suddenly Yamuducinin started to sing an incantation that begins with the words *Dibi Kèlèèèèn* ("It is getting da-a-ark"), *Sègè-woooh* ("Sparrow-ha-a-awk"). All the men from Kela sang with him, or at least tried to do so, since the text is difficult to "grasp." In appendix 1, I elaborate on the text of this song, which is, in my opinion, a solemn remembrance of all the deceased warriors and kings. I never saw Lansine singing; he clearly took the sung part as a break, a moment to rest his voice.

That was the first of many Dibi incantations I was to hear, and it lasted a few minutes. Then Lansine started to speak. He announced that tonight there would be speaking in honor of Kelabala. These words were followed by some praise lines for the Keita. Then Lansine began to recite. He directed his words to the audience, and accompanied every sentence by a move with a "stick" (a cow tail on a stick) in his hand, thus following the rhythm of his recitation. His recitation was the Sunjata epic as we know it. He began at line 001 of my 1992 recording (see Jansen et al.), a text to which I will henceforth refer often. Lansine may have used different syntactical constructions, and sometimes elaborated a little on a theme, but I understood almost every sentence he spoke. It seemed as if Lansine Diabate had a kind of film script in mind: every scene was successively described in more or less the same words as had been done in 1992.

After about ten minutes, the Dibi incantation was again sung. If I remember well, it was at the moment when Asse Bilali had got his new name (l. 015). This is a well-known story in West Africa. Asse Bilali is the first muezzin, according to Muslim oral tradition. It was Mohammed himself who appointed Asse Bilali to recite prayers. In Mande folklore, Asse Bilali is the father of a king named Mamadi Kanu. In Kela, this Mamadi Kanu is mentioned as the first king of Mande. Sunjata's father is connected to Mamadi Kanu's youngest son by a list of kings about whom there are no historical narratives in Mande oral tradition. Therefore, it is plausible that the Asse Bilali part is a relatively recent addition to the Sunjata epic.

I remember well that the story about Asse Bilali was followed by an almost endless amount of standardized praise lines. This resulted in donations, with people giving small amounts of money (often 500 F CFA = 1 US$). That money was collected mainly by Karim Diawara, who then passed it to Fantamadi Diabate, who stood in the middle of the ngoni players, in front of Lansine. Karim whispered softly to Fantamadi the name of

the giver. Fantamadi then gave the money to Yamuducinin and said aloud, for example: *Umu Sumano—dòròmè kèmè—k'ayi ka duwawuw kè a ye* ("Umu Sumano gives 500 F CFA, so that you will give blessings to her").

Since 500 F CFA is not much money, everyone had the financial means to donate a gift in exchange for blessings. Thus, old and young, male and female gave donations, and the performance became quite chaotic. Then a young Diabate proposed that it would be better to put a bag in the middle, thus giving everyone the opportunity to donate anonymously. He argued that the money ruined the performance: "Stop this money affair!" (*Ayi ya wariko tigè!*) Sokèmadi, Lansine's older brother, protested this proposal, arguing in an emotional discourse that this had never been done and therefore would never be done. Since money kept on coming, Lansine kept on reciting praise lines. While reciting the praise lines for the Kone, Lansine had begun the story about Samanuna (l. 112), a legendary ancestor of the Kone, but he soon stopped it and continued the recitation of praise lines. Then the famous singer Kassemady Diabate—who had only recently returned from France—took the floor. He sang nicely, still on the melody of Sunjata's praise song.

At this time I expected that the whole rehearsal would become one big praise song. Then, however, Yamuducinin started a Dibi incantation, thus putting the entire performance back on track. Lansine continued to follow the content of the text edition. He came to the moment when Batara Aliu refuses the booty of the war of Kaibara (l. 024). That was the moment Yamuducinin started an incantation that begins with the word *Karisi,* a praise name for the descendants of Batara Aliu, the Cisse. By then money giving had ceased completely and Lansine continued reciting while the *Sunjata fasa* was played. When he arrived at the passage where Madogoto meets her husband who is dressed in a new garment, Madogoto is said to have sung the well-known song "God has never created a day like today" (l. 071). At the induced recording Lansine had sung these words, but now at the live performance, all the Diabate joined him and for about thirty seconds they sang the song.

Lansine then said some words about the Somono fishermen's ancestor Haja Buna Naki. This probably is the theme of the *Mansa Jigin* text recorded with Lansine's predecessor Kanku Madi (Ly Tall et al. 36-37), which Lansine had skipped when he recited the epic to me. The story about Haja Buna Naki lasted a few minutes. (I know for certain that Lansine told a story about Haja Buna Naki in this phase of the rehearsal, although Sunjata has not yet been born at that time.) Lansine for some time then recited words and stories I knew. Next there came a very interesting moment regarding the construction of the epic in a live performance. At a certain moment in the epic the two Traore brothers who hunt the buffalo of Do take a piece of charcoal and at that very moment "darkness fell"—*dibi donna* in Maninkakan (l. 189).[11] Immediately after Lansine had recited that line, Yamuducinin began the Dibi incantation. This shows how attentively Yamuducinin is following Lansine's recititation and shows that Yamuducinin had clearly in mind the moments at which the Dibi incantation was to be sung.

The moment Lansine told that the people of Do confirmed that the two Traore brothers were the killers of the buffalo of Do (l. 198), the musicians turned to the *Tiramagan fasa,* the praise song for the Traore. While praise lines for the Traore were recited, Karim Diawara suddenly interfered and changed the subject to Kelabala. Since in Mande worldview the Diabate are considered to be the "older brothers" of the Traore, and since both Diabate and Traore have the *Tiramagan fasa* as their praise song, this is a logical choice. Karim's timing, however, must have been excellent, since several persons ran (!) to him with bank notes in their hands, thus expressing their respect for Kelabala. The mood was very emotional; a few guests went to their homestead in order to get their rifles, which they then shot in honor of Kelabala—a hunter's custom to express respect for someone. Next there followed praise lines for Minister Traore. Both Kassemady and Lansine's "younger brother" Mamadi sang elaborate praises. "Super" also sang a few lines. Both Fantamadi and Mussa recited some praise lines.

Lansine continued the epic for a while. The musicians "returned" to the melody of the *Sunjata fasa,* but I cannot remember the exact moment. Once, Lansine made a small mistake, which he corrected immediately. "*Safurulayi, an segenna dooni*" ("Sorry, we are a little tired"), he apologized. He then arrived at the passage about the origin of the joking relationship between the Traore and the Kone (l. 215), and then Minister Traore remarked to someone in the audience: *"Kone, i ye a mèn?"* ("Kone, have you understood?") Everybody laughed. That was the only remark by a non-griot during the entire rehearsal.[12]

While reciting the epic, Lansine used an interesting variation, which shows the formulaic aspects of his recitation (compare Johnson). When he talked about the distances between the two brothers and Sogolon Kejugu when passing the night, he mentions the names of the villages of Kangaba (where Sogolon Kejugu sleeps), Kela, and Degela. In the 1992 recording, he used Kela (for Sogolon Kejugu), Kangaba, and Balanzan (ll. 218 ff.). In 1979, Kanku Madi had mentioned the villages of Degela and Kenyoroba (Ly-Tall et al. 34).

When the story about the Traore brothers was finished, El Haji Yamudu gave many blessings, and I thought the session was over for that night. However, Lansine took over and continued up to the moment Sunjata's father decided that Sunjata is second in birth order (l. 234). Then El Haji Yamudu eventually stopped the session and announced that they would continue as many nights as necessary. That was not the end of the performance, however: the musicians switched to the melody of the *janjo,* and it was announced that this *janjo* was dedicated to Kelabala. Mamadi sang beautifully and Sokèmadi danced the *janjo* in a very introverted manner; he was very sad, and after a few minutes he fell to the ground, crying.

In the meantime, El Haji Yamudu had gone back to his hut in order to fetch his sword, an object he has been carrying with him on all his travels. In spite of his age, he was still a great dancer and a real acrobat with his sword. When El Haji Yamudu came back with the sword, he gave it to his classificatory father, El Haji Mamadi Diabate, who was from a generational

perspective the oldest Diabate among those who attended the rehearsal, although about the same age as El Haji Yamudu. El Haji Mamadi danced a while with the sword in his hand, then gave it to Minister Traore. Again El Haji Yamudu went back to his hut, this time in order to fetch an artificial "antique" pistol. He had hidden it in a plastic bag, and when he arrived in the middle of the public square, he took it out of the bag as if to surprise the audience. In the meantime many old men had begun to dance and Mamadi sang a very moving *Tiramagan fasa* for Kelabala. In the end, El Haji Yamudu got his own sword back after it had passed through the hands of several old Diabate. This is a standard procedure to demonstrate the "legitimate successor," in this case El Haji Yamudu's succession to the vacant position of compound chief (*lutigi*). Karim Diawara added some praise lines, both for Kelabala and Minister Traore, which were followed by similar words sung by Mamadi. Then the music stopped.

At this moment a certain Mr. Tounkara, the minister's griot, took the opportunity to speak, introducing Minister Traore in an incredibly fast "rap," the fastest I have ever heard. Then Mr. Traore spoke to the audience and said, among other things, the words people often had said to me: "People who happen to attend a *Mansa Jigin* are lucky, since they will get many blessings by attending a *Mansa Jigin*." Bwa Diabate from the village of Selinguè replied to his speech.[13] He argued that "the minister had not spoken like a politician" but "had said the truth." The "commandant de cercle" (district commander) was the next speaker. He spoke in French and his words were translated on the spot. Then it was suddenly over. There was no formal closing. When I went to Lansine's house in order to say goodnight to him, I found him together with Yamuducinin, counting the revenues of that night. I estimate the revenues at between 50,000 and 100,000 F CFA.[14] The rehearsal had lasted almost four hours, since it was a quarter to two when I entered my hut.

The second rehearsal had been announced for Friday 25 April. That day, however, happened to be the seventh day after Kelabala's death and thus a good many visitors came to offer their condolences to his family. Therefore when I asked Lansine Diabate about it, on Friday afternoon, I was not surprised when he replied that they were too tired for a rehearsal. Moreover, that night there happened to be a very noisy wedding in Kela—the sound of the drums could be heard all over the village.

Saturday 26 April appeared to be a satisfactory date for a rehearsal. The audience consisted of about 100 persons. There were hardly any visitors, since the Diabate do not publicize the rehearsals. Lansine's wife Amy, for instance, heard only at 8:30 pm that her husband was to recite that night. The audience was therefore small, and there were even enough chairs for everyone to be seated. Kassemady and Lanfia Diabate played the acoustic guitar, and four young Diabate played the ngoni. Again I sat next to the three old men on the platform, and I decided to watch closely the role of Yamuducinin.

The mood was relaxed. El Haji Yamudu instructed the musicians that they had to play in one tempo. Then the Dibi incantation was begun. This time it lasted a relatively long time, perhaps about five minutes, and many

lines were repeated. I recognized some words: *Tiramagan, bolon ci, Kuyate sama gwè di* ("Tiramangan," "restoring the roof," "Kouyate the white elephant"). Lansine then announced that he would resume the story line where he left it the first time, and so he did. Especially in the first half hour he "embellished" the text quite often with praise lines. Lansine kept on reciting lines very familiar to me, with the exception of one passage about a certain Safure, an ancestor of the Somono fishermen. In this passage are featured Sunjata's mother, Sogolon Kenjugu, and a piece of iron (*nègè*). Moreover, I understood that someone was collecting firewood (*logo nyini*). This must be a story that is in Kanku Madi's version (Ly-Tall et al. 36-37) but not in Lansine's.

Donations of money began when Lansine treated Sunjata's exile, which begins with his visit to Soma Jobi (l. 276). The amounts of money were smaller than during the first rehearsal. Moreover, they were few. Kassemadi Kamissoko collected the money and passed it to Fantamadi. Contrary to Karim Diawara during the first rehearsal, Kassemady apparently did not do his job with much attention, because this time Fantamadi often said, "Someone has given some money in order to get blessings." Fantamadi did not know the names of the donors because Kassemadi Kamissoko had not told them. Throughout the entire session, Yamuducinin stared at the audience. He was very concentrated and interfered actively in Lansine's recitation. Sometimes when Lansine waited a little bit to finish a line, Yamuducinin added the rest, and Lansine immediately repeated these words. Most often Yamuducinin's interferences seemed to me quite appropriate and functional to the recitation, but one was rather particular. When Sunjata wanted to walk, he asked his father to command a blacksmith to make a huge walking stick. According to Lansine it took nine units of metal to make this stick. However, when Lansine said "nine," Yamuducinin interfered and whispered "fifteen," and Lansine immediately repeated "fifteen." He must, of course, accept the words of his father, who is believed to know many secrets.[15]

The story continues up to the line when Sunjata warned Kankira Warini, the messager of Sunjata's older brother Mansa Dankaran Tuman, that his older brother must not waste the paternal heritage (l. 335). Immediately after these words, representing a highly dramatic moment because of the reference to brotherly relations and heritage (see Bird and Kendall; Jansen, "Younger"), Yamuducinin began the Dibi incantation. A few minutes before, at the moment when the bull comes back to life (l. 333), Yamuducinin had started a song whose first word was *tura* (bull), but hardly anyone in the audience joined him and he thus stopped after a few phrases. Then something happened that offers insight in the reproduction of the Sunjata epic, namely, Lansine made a huge error. After having recited about the exile, he talked about the reunion of the people of Mande who were looking for someone to liberate them from the burden of Sumaoro's dictatorship. This passage (ll. 392 ff.), however, does not yet make sense, because first Sumaoro must take power in Mande by chasing away Mansa Dankaran Tuman, who had offered his daughter Tasuma Gwandilafe to Sumaoro Kante.

That is the part of the epic, I believe, in which mistakes can easily be made, since the actors act in different locations: some are in Soso (Sumaoro, Jakoma Doka, and Tasuma Gwandilafe), some in Mande (Mansa Dankaran Tuman and the people of Mande), and some in Nema (Sunjata and his family). That situation makes the correct telling of the succession of events rather complex. Realizing that Lansine had made a mistake, Yamuducinin interfered. Lansine shook his head, admitting that he was off the track. While the music continued, Lansine remained silent for a bit. Some of his brothers, among them Fantamadi and Mussa, shouted *"kòrò ta."* I suppose that this means "He is seizing [*ta*] the meaning [*kòrò*]." Then Yamuducinin began another Dibi incantation, followed by Lansine who again recited about the reunion of the people of Mande. After a few sentences, however, he "returned" to the passage in which Jakoma Doka and Tasuma Gwandilafe are sent to Sumaoro in Soso, and in this way he brought himself back to the correct story line without admitting his error in public.

Lansine continued up to the passage where the marabouts of Mande enter the home of Sunjata in Nema, after having been invited by Sunjata's younger sister Sogolon Kolonkan.[16] Then Yamuducinin started the incantation beginning with *Karisi.* This had also been sung during the first rehearsal, but then in relation to the Cisse's ancestor Batara Aliu. Since Cisse as well as Berete and Ture, whose ancestors were the leaders of the people in search of Sunjata, all are patronymics referring to a maraboutic identity, this shows that the incantation *Karisi* is a praise song that is not restricted merely to the Cisse, aka "Karisi" (see above).

When Lansine arrived at the explanation of the expression *I bara kala ta* (l. 462), I expected Yamuducinin to start singing the well-known "national hymn of Mande," which starts with this expression. Moreover, I expected that this would be the end for that night, because this passage was the end of my first recording of the Sunjata epic (see Jansen et al. 10). I was wrong, however; there was no singing, and it was not yet over. Lansine continued with elaborate praise lines for the Keita, the Traore, the Bila families (descendants of Fakoli), the Kamissoko, the Magassouba, and the Diabate. Then Yamuducinin proceeded with a Dibi incantation. Lansine continued with a passage unknown to me. It was about an ancestor of the Somono fishermen, Safure or Sansan Sakalon—I forgot who it was exactly. I caught the word "twelve" (*tan ni fila*) and at a certain moment Sogolon Kolonkan shouts to Sunujata: "Hey, older brother!" This is probably a story told by Kanku Madi (Ly-Tall et al. 57), which is not in Lansine's text of the epic, and in which Sogolon Kolonkan shouts, "Hé, older brother."

Again Lansine mixed up the story line. He told how a partridge (*wolo*), filled with a sacred fluid, provoked Sumaoro to make war with Sunjata, but he forgot to talk about Tasuma Gwandilafe's liberation; she was still kept hostage by Sumaoro, and Sunjata did not dare start war with Sumaoro before she had been liberated. I did not notice (or forgot) how Lansine corrected himself or was corrected, or how he linked the themes together. After the telling of the story of the partridge came the story of how the Diabate ancestor Kala Jula Sangoy liberated Tasuma Gwandilafe and

returned home with her. On this occasion the praise song for the Diabate is said to have been sung for the first time. Yamuducinin started to sing this song, but he got no reaction from the audience, which certainly knows the text of this song very well.

Lansine told how Sunjata's army crossed the river, with the help of Sansan Sakalon. This was followed by a Dibi incantation, and then—totally unexpected for me—it was over. El Haji Yamudu gave some blessings and said that "next Monday" there would be one more session. Everybody went home, and Yamuducinin and Lansine were again counting money when I said goodnight to them. It was just after midnight; the rehearsal had lasted two hours. I noted that this night again Fantamadi and Mussa had the occasion to recite some praise lines. In general, this night was more sober than the first; for instance, there was no solo singing, and no praise lines for any member of the audience.

The third rehearsal was performed, as had been announced, on the next Monday, 28 April, and it was rather similar to the second in terms of setting and mode of performance. Again it lasted from 10 pm to midnight, and again it was attended by about one hundred persons. The session started with a short Dibi incantation. This was followed by a speech by Fantamadi. He said that it was forbidden to make recordings and warned that they were not responsible for anyone who should try to make a recording.[17] Then Lansine gave some blessings. El Haji Yamudu and Lansine said something to which Fantamadi replied *naamu* after every sentence. At that time already some people had begun to give money.

Then there was a Dibi incantation, and Lansine proceeded from the point he had stopped at last Saturday's rehearsal. He finished the story about Sunjata's victory over Sumaoro. The story had its climax, I believe, when Yamuducinin sang two times solo *Suba-oo Sirifiya Magan Konate,*[18] right after Lansine had told how Sumaoro transformed himself into a rock (l. 515). After these two lines by Little Yamudu, the other Diabate joined Little Yamudu, who sang a few more praise lines for Sunjata. This was followed by a very long recitation of praise lines for the ancestors of Mande. Finally, Yamuducinin started a Dibi incantation, and Lansine proceeded with the story about Jolofin Mansa, a foreign king who was decapitated by the hero Tiramagan for having insulted Sunjata as being a ruler not worthy to own horses. Thus, Lansine was still following the order of the text edition (ll. 519 ff.).

The telling of this story was an interesting event, since Lansine made two errors at the introduction of the story. In the text edition, Lansine correctly begins the story by telling that Sunjata gave money to Ibun Dauda Sulemani in order to buy a few *donfenw* for him. Only halfway through the story is the audience supposed to discover that a *donfen* is a horse (*sɔ̀*). Then the teller is supposed to explain: "We used to call horses *donfenw.*" Now, at the rehearsal, Lansine told that Sunjata gave money to buy horses. Yamuducinin corrected him and said *donfenw.* To this Lansine reacted: "Sunjata gave him money to buy *donfenw;* we used to call horses *donfenw.*" That is a simple solution, but it ignores a special narrative effect.

Then Lansine proceeded by saying that Ibun Dauda Sulemani bought twelve horses for Sunjata. Again this is a mistake to which Yamuducinin reacted by murmuring "three hundred" (*kèmè saba*). Lansine corrected himself by reciting *"sò kèmè saba ani saba ani kurinin kilin"* ("three hundred and three horses and one short-tailed").[19] During the rest of this story line, up to the decapitation of Jolofin Mansa, I noted nothing "remarkable." The story was followed by a long Dibi incantation that also contained the words "Kouyate the White Elephant" (see above). I remarked that this song has a nice dialogue of about six lines: one group of Diabate replied some words to some words to words sung by the other group. I had the impression that the young replied to the old. This part must be well-known becuase it was sung very loudly and with much enthusiasm by both young and old.

Then, one hour after the rehearsal had begun, there was a ten-minute break. Even the musicians stopped playing. Sweets and kola nuts were distributed through the audience. My neighbor whispered to me that a *duguren* (an "authochthonous"—in this case, someone from Kangaba) had been caught recording the rehearsal. Yet when I asked for more information, no one could give it. Others explained afterwards to me that it was just a break, in order to rest a little bit. That, however, is also a strange explanation because the Diabate are able to perform for hours without a break. Then again there was a Dibi incantation, followed by a speech by Lansine about the treasures of Jolofin Mansa, which are said to be kept by the Diawara in Kela.[20] El Haji Yamudu added a few words. The next morning I was told that El Haji Yamudu had invited the guests of the Diabate to go to the Diawara and have a look at the treasures. (Because I had seen, a few years earlier, the trouble and the money involved at a Franco-Malian troupe's visit to see the sword, I deliberately decided not to respond to the invitation. Acceptance would also mean a kind of exposing myself, which is, in Kela, a bad thing for a "young man.")

The recitation proceeded with a less known story about Niana Mansa Kara who killed Bun Munu Lamini, who had insulted his wife during a game of wari, a traditional African board game. This story was told up to the moment when Fakoli stated that he will personally avenge the insult of Sunjata (l. 616) by the same Niani Mansa Kara. That very moment, Super said to the musicians that they have to play the *janjo,* the praise song for Fakoli. They did so, and Super started to sing some well-known lines of the *janjo.* Mussa added to this a recitation based on the same set of lines, and he finished by mentioning Kelabala's name. This was followed by Lanfia signing the *janjo* for Kelabala. Several people came to him to donate 500 F CFA, thus showing their respect for Kelabala. After a few minutes, one of the old men on the platform interrupted Lanfia, saying that he must finish his praisings. After a few lines, Lanfia did so, and he gave the donations to Yamuducinin.

The musicians changed their melody and "returned" to the *Sunjata fasa.* A Dibi incantation was sung, and Lansine started reciting by repeating a little part of what he had already told (ll. 614-15). The story was finished (Fakoli killed Niani Mansa Kara as well as Bun Munu Lamini's

adulterous wife), a few praise lines were recited, and Lansine proceeded with the story about Kon Mamadi, Sunjata's grandson who regains the throne of Mande by killing the usurper Jonnin Sekura. At the point Jonnin Sekura's goat was said to be killed (l. 651), a Dibi incantation was sung.[21] When Lansine recited that the slave sing of joy because they are "liberated" by Kon Mamadi (l. 659), he sang the words sung by the slaves. Although he told this part two times, and sang it twice, no one in the audience joined him. This may be explained by the fact that these words are not part of a popular song, but part of the story.

After finishing this story, Lansine proceeded with some praise lines, including the often recited list/genealogy *Jona Nyama, Jom Jinnema, Finadugu Koman, Kanku Bori, Mansa Kuru, Mansa Kanda* (see appendix, different analyses in Jansen, "Younger Brother" and Camara, "La tradition" ch. 2). He explained that Joma is in presentday Guinea, and that Mansa Kuru represents the people of the Rock of Nyagassola (*Nyagassola Kuru*) and the Rock of Kita (*Kita Kuru*). According to him, several royal Keita descent groups live there, among them the Banjugusi, the Sinisi, and the Katumasi.[22]

This was followed by a list of Mansa Kanda's descendants. I understood from it that the oldest grandson is represented by the descendants of the village of Niamé and the "two villages of Kamalen" (*Kamalenso fila*), a well-known idea in the region of Kangaba. At the end of this list he mentioned the name of Benba Fakandacinin (literally, "Ancestor [grandfather] Little Father Kanda"), the name of the legendary ancestor of the Keita rulers in Kangaba, the patrons/hosts (*jatigiw*) of the Diabate of Kela. Hearing that name, Yamuducinin said, "A sera" ("He has arrived," or "It has been finished").

Lansine concluded by giving some blessings, Fantamadi and El Haji Yamudu spoke some words, and then it was over. Yamuducinin and Lansine went to Lansine's house and counted money (this time not more than 20,000 F CFA, I estimate. I forgot to note who had collected the money during the third rehearsal. Fantamadi received the money.)

By now I had attended rehearsals that had together lasted eight hours. This is more or less the length of the famous nocturnal session in the Kamabolon. Therefore I thought that my main hypothesis (expressed in Jansen "Ethnography," an article written in 1993) was proven: the Kamabolon version is mainly an embellished version of the Sunjata epic as we know it from the text editions. Moreover, I thought that I had collected the data to reject Dieterlen's idea that a creation myth was told in the Kamabolon. However, there were still some surprises.

The 1997 Kamabolon ceremony lasted from Monday morning, 28 April, when the old roof was lifted from the sanctuary, until Friday afternoon, 2 May 1997, when the new roof was put on top of the Kamabolon. On Thursday afternoon the Diabate griots left Kela for Kangaba, and from Thursday night until Friday morning they recited in the Kamabolon. Before the ceremony started, a hedge was built around the Kamabolon, at a distance of at least 15 meters from the sanctuary. Only the "authochthonous" are allowed to enter the surrounded space. I knew this information

before the ceremony started, both from oral accounts and from the literature.

What I had never realized was the incredible tension experienced by all the participants during the five days of the ceremony. As soon as the old roof was taken from the hut, until the moment the new roof was placed on the hut, fear and violence ruled in the quarter of Old Kangaba. For instance, animals and insects that approached the sanctuary were chased away or killed, because they were suspected to be transformed human beings who attempted to enter the roofless Kamabolon. Several persons were beaten for having disobeyed the prescriptions for the ceremony; one was even killed.[23] Many persons were chased away, for wearing red cloths or for being suspected of having cameras in their pockets or bags. This article will not deal with these aspects (see Jansen, "Hot Issues"), which are important features of the setting in which a Kamabolon ceremony takes place. (Dieterlen's articles contain beautiful and illustrative pictures made by Marcel Griaule. Nowadays it would be impossible to make pictures, but apparently Griaule succeeded in doing so by collaborating with the colonial government.)

The Diabate, too, were quite concentrated. They had already told me in advance that they were not allowed to communicate with outsiders from Thursday afternoon until Friday afternoon. Together with a few dozen official "guests of Kela," I was given a chair under a shed, not far from the hedge, at a distance of about twenty meters from the Kamabolon. I was supposed to stay there and watch the ceremony, and so I did. I found myself in an uneasy, ambivalent position. On the one hand, I had full permission, by the Diabate, to write about their activities. I had the status of an official guest, meaning that I had eaten a "fetish meal" together with all the Diabate and the other guests, and that I had washed myself with a protecting medicinal water.[24] On the other hand, I clearly aimed to make an account of a ceremony whose audivisual recording is prohibited, a ceremony that is supposed to remain secret. Several times over the past years, Malian intellectuals who visited Kela have called me a "Cartesianist," arguing that I saw only the outside but missed what was really happening. Yet by analyzing the Kamabolon ceremony from the griots' perspective, I sometimes felt uneasy, because I probably was about to go beyond this "Cartesianist" level.

Finally it was Thursday, 1 May 1997.[25] During the afternoon, the ceremony lasted from 3 pm until 7 pm and—after a break for dinner—from 9 pm until 6 am the next morning. Only between 4 am and 4:45 am was I not able to make observations: although I had taken some caffeine pills, I fell asleep for a while. The afternoon session did not show me anything new from a textual point of view. Watched by a few thousand silent (!) attendants, between 6 pm and 6:30 pm about fifty male Diabate from Kela walked in line a few times around the Kamabolon, the new roof, and the sacred water pit adjoining the Kamabolon (for a map, see Dieterlen, "Mythe"), while Lansine recited well-known praise lines. Sometimes Fantamadi or Mussa took over for less than a minute. About a dozen times the group stopped and Yamuducinin started the Dibi incantation and others joined him.

At night, this tour around the Kamabolon was performed again. Then Lansine and some others (impossible to see, since there is no electricity in Kangaba) entered the Kamabolon. I expected the Diabate to start the recitiation of the Sunjata epic, but I was wrong. Lansine's voice could hardly be heard from the spot where I sat, in spite of the attendants' silence.[26] All the sung parts, however, could be heard very well. Thanks, partially, do the historian Seydou Camara, who sat next to me, I still got an impression of the stories recited by Lansine. Between 10:30 pm and midnight, Seydou Camara heard two things: first, the name of Adam, and much later (after a Dibi incantation), the words "Adam, Eve, and their children." For me this shows that Lansine was reciting the stories he had told on 3 April, the result of the fusion between knowledge about the Koran and regional/Mande stereotypes of heroic behavior. These were probably the "secrets" S. Diabate had heard and which demonstrated, according to him, the communal root of knowledge about Islam and Mande history (see above).

Since nothing could be heard or seen, many attendants went home before midnight. However, at that time, many words could be heard outside the Kamabolon, since people started to give money. These gifts were collected by one or two persons, who were sometimes active outside the hedged area. Almost every donation was 500 F CFA.[27] The money was received by someone at the entrance of the Kamabolon, who shouted the amount of money [28] and the name of the giver with the addition "so that you will give blessings." Thus, the gifts during the ceremony resembled those during the rehearsals. This activity lasted, almost nonstop, until 2:30 am.

Between 10 pm and 2:30 am, I heard quite a few things without Seydou Camara's help. Of course, there were several Dibi incantations. At the beginning of the evening, Kelabala's oldest son Madu (b. 1960) recited Arab blessings. Moreover, I heard Mamadi (who was the first and oldest among those who sang solo that night), Kassemadi, and Lanfia singing praise lines. Kunba Diabate, the women's "doyenne," was seated at the entrance of the Kamabolon and now and then she shouted a blessing to the Diabate. At 2:30, the Diabate came out of the Kamabolon. They walked in a line around the Kamabolon, and Lansine recited praised lines. Again they processed within the hedged area, and sometimes they stopped and sang a Dibi incantation, always at a sign from Yamuducinin, who started singing. After that, they entered the sanctuary. At that time there were only a few dozen persons left outside the hedge, and most of them were asleep.

Between 2:30 and 3:30 am, I twice had the chance to hear some of Lansine's words. First I heard *mansakè* ("king") in combination with *ka . . . bò, ka . . . bò, ka . . . bò.* This is undoubtedly the story of the king who gives "a hundred of each" to Asse Bilali as a reward for his honest behavior (l. 061). This story is at the beginning of the Sunjata epic. Not much later, I heard very clearly: *Alakira ye duwawuw kè Samanuna ye* ("The Prophet gave blessings to Samanuna' "").That is line 114! Thus, apparently, the recitation of the Sunjata epic had just begun.

At a certain moment, quite a bit later, I heard Lanfia singing "*I bara kala ta,*" after which others joined for a while, and thus the story had "arrived" at line 462. I was very tired then and not able to concentrate very well, but I clearly remember that I was astonished that they had already come to that point of the epic in such a relatively short time. Also, I remember that I reflected about which part must have been skipped, and concluded that at least all the repetitive descriptions of the wari games played by Sunjata and his successive hosts during his exile must have been summarized (ll. 276-345).

Thus, it seems that the Diabate were in a hurry to finish the epic; the stories about Adam and Eve plus the money donations had taken so much time that there was not enough time left to tell the epic in an "appropriate" way. The rehearsals had illustrated that a live performance takes between six and eight hours. I therefore suppose that a huge part of the exile plus the stories about Tiramagan versus Jolofin Mansa and about Fakoli versus Niani Mansa Kara had been skipped in order to complete the recitation of Sunjata's adventures between 2:30 and 5:30 am. Thus, the version of the Sunjata epic as it is recited in the Kamabolon is quite limited from a literary point of view. Lack of times does not seem to be unique for the 1997 Kamabolon ceremony, because de Ganay, had the same impression in 1954. I tend to think that once, a long time ago, only the Sunjata epic, to which the rehearsals are dedicated, was recited during the Thursday night of the Kamabolon ceremony, and that the stories about the creation of the world had been integrated into the ceremony later. This may explain the lack of time during the ceremony, and the dissimilarity between the rehearsals and the ceremony itself.[29] I vaguely remember that between 3:30 and 5:30 the Diabate came out of the hut once more, for walking and singing. At 5:30 some of the participants came out of the hut and El Haji Yamudu Diabate came out the hedged area. He said that it was over, and wanted me to go to bed. I refused, claiming that it is over only when Lansine comes out the hedged area. El Haji Yamudu smiled, and re-entered the hedged area. In any event, the fact that someone wanted me to go to bed gave me a lot of energy, and I was awake again. I heard Mamadi starting to sing a *janjo,* followed by a change of melody to the *janjo.* This lasted about ten minutes. At 6:15 everyone came out of the Kamabolon. Again praise lines were recited, and a Dibi incantation was sung. Everyone looked tired, even exhausted, and Lansine could hardly speak anymore.[30]

Now the time has come to draw some conclusions from the data presented. My observations may not answer satisfactorily all the questions concerning the content of the words spoken in the Kamabolon—they may even disappoint those who like the work of the Griaule school—but they provide an empirical outline of the way the Sunjata epic is produced in a more "natural" context than those induced by scholars in search of "the" text of the Sunjata epic.

Regarding the performance, it is clear that the "ultimate" version is not the product of one person. This is a major difference from the texts

published in text editions. Also, several melodies may be played in a ceremonial recitation of the Sunjata epic; recitation is also possible on melodies other than the *Sunjata fasa.* This is a difference between the Kamabolon version and, for instance, the version I recorded with Lansine Diabate. During that recording only the melody of the *Sunjata fasa* was played. Moreover, when induced by a ceremony, a performance of a Sunjata epic becomes long compared to those induced by scholars, with Dibi incantations and the many additional praise lines. These lines have, in part, the function of communicating with the audience, which may react by donating money, one more time-comsuming activity. More important, however, is the observation that a live performance does not necessarily have to cover the entire "corpus" of story themes about Sunjata, since these are already more or less known to the audience and since this is not the aim of the performance. Some other stories may be added, as the performance during the Kamabolon showed. In this respect, the three rehearsals deviate from the performance in the Kamabolon, since they represented more or less all the information on Sunjata as it is "available" in Kela. However, each separate rehearsal was called a *Mansa Jigin,* and thus the Diabate do not seem to strive for textual completeness.

One may ask if a text edition covers the "ultimate" version of the Sunjata epic. The answer depends on a choice between the rehearsals and the famous nocturnal session in the Kamabolon. If the three rehearsals are chosen, all the available text editions (Vidal, "Légende"; Ly-Tall et al.; Jansen et al.) are good illustrations of the information on Sunjata that is known in Kela. Among these three texts, it is clear that Kanku Madi's is the most "complete," in terms of story themes. Lansine's text, however, gives a better impression of the function and position of praise lines. These repetitive praise lines are absent from Kanku Madi's text, since Ly-Tall deleted every repetition of a set of praise lines when she was editing the text.[31]

If the words in the Kamabolon are chosen as representing the "ultimate version," it must be admitted that thsee words are only partially covered by the text editions. I think I demonstrated that during the first hours of the nocturnal session, stories about Adam and Eve were told. One may even argue that, precisely, the presence of a selection of story themes about Sunjata and his descendants in combination with the presence of oft-repeated sets of praise lines and incantations as well as interference by others are typical for the "ultimate version." Seen from this perspective, all text editions focus too much on the text and give no insight into the performance strategies, which have been "blocked" by the scholars' interferences in the performance. Regarding the discussion about the Sunjata epic, the conclusion may be that the rehearsals take a middle position between the text editions and the Kamabolon narrative. From the Kamabolon perspective, one must conclude that "the Sunjata epic" and "the ultimate version" do not meet on very many points.

Still, Dieterlen's opinion that a creation myth is told in the Kamabolon is defendable. However, as I demonstrated, the discourse on creation and origin was molded by Islam. One may argue that in the 1997 performance, the "Islamic" stories have replaced the 1954 "traditional" creation myth.

However, Kela in the 1930s was already a village in which Islam had a great influence. Moreover, the "official" version of the Sunjata epic was the "property" of Islamic Haidara in the early 1920s, and not of the Diabate, when Vidal collected his text.[32] Therefore a discourse on creation as it has been published by Dieterlen (see "Mythe") may be recorded at that time from hunters or earth priests, but it is improbable that the performers of the Kamabolon ceremony told these things in those times.

My observations of the preparations and the performance of the 1997 Kamabolon ceremony, in the period 21 March-2 May, also has consequences for the scholarly opinion of the production and reproduction of the Sunjata epic. The Kela example clearly shows that a Sunjata epic is not necessarily an individual literary creation. Other versions of the Sunjata epic may be so, but the Kela version clearly is not. The Diabate in Kela consider their *Mansa Jigin* to be their communal heritage, and the way they perform it shows that although the text is highly standardized, the performance is a communal achievement. When different texts from different periods as well as when different performances by "Master of the Word" (Lansine) are analyzed, textual variation is limited. The presence of old men who have the authority to correct the performer not only adds to the stability of the text, but their presence is also necessary to give prestige (Truth) to the performance.

The stability of the Kela version has an obvious social and political function, and from this point of view, it must be analyzed primarily: the meaning of the text can only be understood in its wider social and political context. Researchers from Indiana, for instance Charles Bird and John William Johnson,, have rightly stated that the Sunjata epic is a political epic (see Bird 357 and Johnson 50), but have never demonstrated why it is, and how it is used. The answer may now be given:

a) The geneaologies, encapsulated in the standardized praise lines, are status claims in favor of the Keita of Kangaba, the patrons of the Diabate from Kela (Jansen, "Younger").

b) By incorporating the recitation of the Sunjata epic in a ceremony that symbolizes the re-creation of society, the political content is corroborated.

c) By keeping the performance of the Sunjata epic "semi-secret," keeping the text very stable, and keeping it a group's "heritage," the Diabate not only give an extra dimension to the position of the Keita of Kangaba, but also make it impossible for an inidvidual to "steal" the *Mansa Jigin.*

It is my hope that this article has answered some questions that have been asked for decades in discussions about Mande worldview, and about the Kamabolon ceremony as well as the Sunjata epic in particular. Moreover, I expect to have added valuable ethnographic data to the discussion on epics by illustrating the performance of a Sunjata epic is neither necessarily an individual's achievement nor an individual's literary creation: it is the product of a highly standardized, collectively performed heritage. The

performance of the *Mansa Jigin* is different than the published text editions of the Sunjata epic Actually, this article illustrates Isidore Okpewho's opinion that nowadays oral tradition rightly tends to be analyzed in the context of its performance (42) The Sunjata epic as we know it from the text editions may to a great extent be the product of our own fascination for the written word and the taperecorder

APPENDIX 1
The Dibi Incantation

Crucial to an understanding of the live performance of the Kela version of the Sunjata epic may be the words which cannot be heard in other contexts, that is, the part I have labeled "the Dibi incantation " This incantation starts with the words *Dibi Keleeeen* ("It is getting da-a-ark") followed by *Sege woooh* ("Sparrow-ha-a-awks") The translation of these words is subject to much doubt I comprehended the incantation only partially, and am only sure about the first two lines I asked several people about this incantation, but their answers were difficult to assess *Kumatigi* Lansine Diabate gave the clearest reply "You never heard it before, and you will never understand it " End of discussion! Some others were less difficult to approach They all (five persons) said that *dibi* means "darkness" ("l'obscurite" in French) They said that they just repeat what they hear, but cannot translate it "It is too profound," two people said However, everyone, including Lansine, agreed on the fact that *kelen* was derived from the verb *ke* ("do, happen, come into being") My suggestion of *kele* ("war") was always immediately rejected

One griot (from Kela, but not a Diabate), a good friend of mine with a limited active vocabulary in French, said immediately after the Kamabolon ceremony, when we walked back together to Kela "I cannot translate it, but we use these words when a *mansa* has died " Accoi ding to him, a *mansa* (literally, "king" or "ancestor") is a person who has done many great deed during his life He could not translate *dibi,* but when I asked him if *dibi* was "darkness " he enthusiastically confirmed it I had witnessed this man singing the song loudly during the rehearsals He told me "The words of this song drop from your mind after two days I only know one sentence for sure *Mansa saba jama, jama diman* ("The people of the three kings, these people are all right") Although I pei sonally had never heard these words during a rehearsal, they are worth mentioning because they may refer to the three age groups that constituted the army in precolonial times (see Jansen, "Hot Issues ')

Sege is also difficult to translate A few people who dared to speak about these words all said that it signified "sparrow-hawk " This bird is the totem of the Kouyate A repetitive mentioning of the Kouyate totem is also extremely remarkable, and gives reason to speculate about a former ownership of the *Mansa Jigin* by Kouyate griots See this in combination with the fact that I heard Kouyate presenting themselves during the Kamabolon ceremony as *bolontigiw* ("owners of the Kamabolon" or "the people responsible for the Kamabolon") Camara holds the opinion that Kouyate were the first owners of the words recited in the Kamabolon *(La tradition orale*

307). Moreover, in more elaborated versions of the Dibi incantation, the expression *Kuyate sama gwè di* ("Kouyate the White Elephant") was sung. This is a well-known honorary title for the Kouyate. During the incantation I never heard an explicit praise line for the Diabate. (During the Kamabolon ceremony, I heard a Kamissoko griot telling his neighbor that the Diabate sing *an segenna* ["we are tired"]. This seems implausible to me.)

In conclusion, one may say that the Dibi incantation remains hard to analyze, both in content and meaning, but seems to refer to a celebration of the death and to the rulership over the army by the king.

De Ganay may also have heard that words I heard, but her translation is different from mine (see 138, 141, 142, 144-46, and 151). Her texts, however, refer to warfare, and this interpretation relates her texts to the function of the ceremony (see above). De Ganay presents a song—unknown to me—titled "Reception of the War Chief," and talks about "the war of the darkness"—clearly her translation of *dibi kèlen*—and about the sparrow-hawk. In contrast to de Ganay, I never heard mention of Sunjata during the incantations. Regarding the praise lines, I can say that de Ganay heard words similar to those I heard in other contexts.

In another context, a story about Adam and Eve, de Ganay notes the following words: *Masa nyuman dyama, dyama duman; masa nyuman dyama, dyama duman; masa nyuman dyama, n'naa n'tuuru-tèère* (159). These words closely resemble the words given by my friend! It is difficult for me to appreciate de Ganay's translation; personally, I would translate the first five words with "the people of the good king are good people," while de Ganay gives "La foule qui célèbre le bon roi / Est une foule <agréable>, heureuse" 'The people who glorify the good king / are nice/happy people.' A similar text is given by de Ganay when she talks about "la guerre de l'obscurité" 'the war of the darkness'—without giving the Maninkakan text (141-42). On page 144 she gives: *Tènèba Koman dyamana, dyamana, dyamana duman; masa nyuman dyama, n'na n'tuurutèère.* This has been translated as "[Ainsi] au pays de Ténémba Koman [the royal Keita of Kangaba are often called during public events 'the descendants of Tenenba Koman—JJ] / Le peuple est <agréable>, le peuple vit heureux. / Au milieu de la foule (qui célèbre son bon roi / Je me pavane (et je vais et viens)" 'Thus in the land of Teneba Koman, the people live happily / In the middle of the people [who glorify the good king] I walk proudly.' The same song also gives *Sègè woo* ("O éperviers"—'O sparrow-hawks') and *A ye dibi kèlè* ("Vous avez combattu l'obscurité (l'obscurantisme et les rivalités sourdes)"—'You have fought the darkness'). Note that de Ganay writes *kèlè* ("war") and not *kèlen*, which was the "unanimous" choice by my informants.

Thus, although one of us may be wrong, it is worth noting that we both present words that refer to leadership, death, and the organization of the army. I discussed the Dibi incantation with Seydou Camara, during the 1997 ceremony, and he said that he would write about it. That may make things clearer, but for the moment we must do with the tentative interpretations by two non-Africans.

APPENDIX 2
Praise Lines for the Keita

This article often refers to "standardized praise lines." These are phrases in the so-called "griot language" *(jelikan)*. This appendix presents one example, taken from Lansine Diabate's recitation of the Sunjata epic (published in the Maninkakan-French in Jansen et al. 122-24). A set of "standardized praise lines" is always a new combination of well-known "fixed" praise sentences/expressions. The appendix presented here is an example of praise lines for the Keita, the descendants of Sunjata, who is referred to as a "Sinbon," a master hunter.

Maninkakan Text
Alimankanbara,
Sogosogo Sinbon,
Ani Sinbon Salaba.
Jakoma warala Sinbon.
Kunbalutèèbaga,
Jata Konate.
Dabalufarabaga,
Jata Konate.
Dugu mina dugutigi la,
Sinbon ya jurufòkan ye nin di.

Kinyè mina kinyètigi la,
Sinbon ya jurufòkan ye nin di.
Dunanjugufòbaga,
Tògòmajugukèbaga.
Duguyoro,
Dugutigiyoro.
Kinyèyoro,
Kinyètigiyoro.

A faralen Sinbon saba la,
A faralen Kani Sinbon na,
Ka fara Kabala Sinbon na,
Ka fara Sinbonba Tanyagati la,
Ka fara Mansa Bèlèmòn na,
Ka fara Bèlobakon na,
Ka fara Farako Magankèn Kunkanyan.
A Sinbon ya jurufòkan ye nin di.

A faralen subakè wòòrò la,
Joma Nyèman,
Joma Jinèman,
Finadugu Koman,
Ani Kanku Bòri,
Ani Mansa Kuru,
Ani Mansa Kanda.
A faralen Sinbonw la.

Sògòsògòlèngbè,
Fòlòmògò siya banna.
Tasuma bèè tè bò gwa la.
Denmisèn t'i nyagari,
Kèmògò t'i nyagari.
Jiginkònòwulu,
A tè dunansenkan lòn,
A tè dugulensenkan lòn.

Warabakundamabin,
Misiba karatò,
O le b'o bin damun.
Sinbon ya jurufòkan ye nin di.

Munyankònòkònò,
I bara ji kè munyan kònò,
N'a ma b'a dò fè,
A b'a da dò fè.

Sinbon ya jurufòkan ye nin di.
Ka tògòmajugu kè,
Ka dununjugu fò.
Ka bunbalu tèè,
K'a be f'o ma Manden yan,
Ko kunbalutèèbaga.
Ka dabalu fara,
K'a be fò o ma Manden yan,
Ko dabalufarabaga.
Ka bolobalu kari,
K'a be fò o ma Manden yan,
Ko bolobalukaribaga.
Mògòtògò dè ka jan n'i si ye.

Translation

Alimankanbara,
Sogosogo Sinbon,
And Sinbon Salaba,
Master of the lions.
Crusher of the big heads,
Jata Konate.
Tearer of the big mouths,
Jata Konate.
Who takes the village from the village chief.
Yes this is the Sinbon's music.

Who seizes the sand divination from the fortune-teller.
Yes this is the Sinbon's music.
Who plays a dangerous drum,
Who makes dangerous expeditions.
Who shapes the village,

Who shapes the village chief.
Who shapes sand divination,
Who gives form to the fortune-teller.

He descends from three Sinbons,
He descends from Kani Sinbon,
And descends from Kabala Sinbon,
And descends from Sinbonba Tanyagati,
And descends from Mansa Belemon,
And descends from Belemon Danna,
And descends from Mansa Belo,
And descends from Belobakon,
And descends from farako Maganken of Kunkanyan
Yes this is Sinbon's music.

He descends from six sorcerers,
Joma Nyèman,
Joma Jinèman,
Finadugu Koman,
And Kanku Bori,
And Mansa Kuru,
And Mansa Kanda.
He descends from these Sinbons.

Sogosogolengwè,
The people of the past have disappeared.
Every fire doesn't always come from a cooking place.
The child is unhappy,
The chief is unhappy.
The dog in the granary,
Won't recognize the difference between the footsteps of the stranger,
And the footsteps of the autochthonous inhabitant.

The grass next to a lion's head,
An audacious cow is able to eat this grass
Yes this is the Sinbon's music.

The interior of a beehive,
When you pour water in it,
If the water does not come from one side,
It will come out from the other side.

Yes this is the Sinbon's music.
Making dangerous tours,
Playing a dangerous drum,
Who crushes the big heads,
And who has been called here in Mande,
Crusher of the big heads.
Who tears the big mouths,
And who has been called here in Mande,

Tearer of the big mouths
Who breaks the big arms,
And who has been called here in Mande,
Breaker of the big arms.
Someone's reputation lasts longer than his life.

NOTES

1 This research was made possible due to a two-year postdoctoral appointment financed by the Netherlands Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Research (grant W 52-708) I am indebted to Ralph Austen for help and comments

2 *Mansa Jigin* may be best translated as "(the story about) the coming together of the kings " *Mansa* is undoubtedly "king" or "prince," but *jigin* is quite difficult to translate It has two basic meanings 1) hope, 2) to descend All my informants in Kela, including Lansine Diabate, rejected a translation of *jigin* in *Mansa Jigin* by "hope," although this meaning has often been proposed in scholarly literature on the topic The most often heard explanation (also given by Lansine Diabate) was that it was the name for an event in which the story about all the kings was told ("All the kings sit down together," Fodekaba Diabate, born 1960, explained to me)

3 M D (born 1960) told me, in March 1997, that no one is allowed to touch the body of the *bolontigi* before the Diabate have come in order to give their blessings He also said "At his funeral the griots walk three times around his body, just as we walk three times around the Kamabolon during the ceremony We perform the *Mansa Jigin*, it lasts the whole night "

4 Kanku Madi was *kumatigi* from 1960 until his death in 1987 I was told by several young Diabate that Seydou had inherited eight music cassettes formerly owned by Kanku Madi. To me, this idea merely shows that many young Diabate can hardly believe that someone is able to recite an epic without external mnemotechnical devices

5 Former ceremonies took place in 1954, 1961, 1968, 1975, 1982, and 1989 Therefore I had come to Kela in 1996, only to find out that the ceremony was postponed Its performance in 1997 actually came as a big surprise to me, since I had expected that it would not be performed again (see my "Powerful")

6 Although I later found out that a story about Adam is recorded on Sacré I haven't yet translated this tape

7 Kemp writes that God expelled Adam and Eve from heaven, because they had eaten from the forbidden fruit Eve, who was first in eating from the forbidden fruit, was punished with menstruation, and Adam, who almost choked when eating the fruit, was punished with the Adam's apple On earth, Adam and Even had twenty twins, boys and girls God told them that "first and second pair should marry " However, one of the sons, Sam [sic!], decided to marry his sister, and not the girl of the twin couple following him in age God warned him, but "Sam" did not listen, and killed the man who was supposed to marry his sister (88)

8 Performance 7 in Jansen "Ethnography," which I translated superficially with Boubacar Tamboura Since this recording contains several stories about ancestors mentioned during the performance of the Kamabolon ceremony (see below), but not in the available text editions, I made a mistake by not adding it to Jansen et al I was misled by the fact that it was not about Sunjata, and that it was recorded after my recordings of "the" Sunjata epic (see also note 29)

9 Archives, rapport 13 In this report, a document dated 23 Apr 1947 (sic) says about Monday that on this day people do not work, since it is the "jour désigne par les fétiches "

10 Note here an important principle in Mande social organization never close the group! Although the platform is only for Diabate, they include some representatives of other griot families in Kela, Mamaduba even has an important role during the whole night And although the Diabate play the music, the excellent ngoni-player Kasemadi Kamissoko from Kela is allowed to join them

11 *Dibi* is not only darkness, but also a hunters' fetish (Coulibaly 96)

12 At a few other moments the audience laughed, although softly Regarding the first rehearsal, I remember the following three occasions that drew laughter the betrayal of the oldest sons of Mamdi Kanu by the Berete ancestor (1 106), the dialogue between the old women (1 126), and the story about the Traore brothers pouring the drinking water in their pockets (1 225)

13 Many male inhabitants of Kela had recently talked with Bwa, when they met each other during a great reunion of the Diabate in Sirakoro, 24-26 Mar 1997 During this rehearsal, Bwa had actively stimulated the audience to snap their fingers

14 After the third rehearsal the money has been distributed among the Diabate

15 Camara ("La tradition orale" 315) claims that El Haji Yamudu (= Nansa Yamoudou in his text) was supposed to become the successor of Kanku Madi as *kumatigi,* and that he refused this honor because of bad health and because he had made the pilgrimage to Mecca From the observations made during the rehearsals, one may ask if Camara mixed up the two Yamudu Diabate, since only Yamuducimin interfered during the rehearsals However, it must be admitted that El Haji Yamudu is always next to Lansine when a *Mansa Jigin* is recited, and that inhabitants of Kela used to proclaim to me that El Haji Yamudu knows "la tradition" better than Lansine Only in 1997 were these voices not heard, since that would undermine their collective heritage

16 When reciting the way Sogolon Kolonkan and Jelimusonin Tuma Mininyan meet each other at the market, Lansine told that Sogolon Kolokan sniffed the *datu,* and he added an explanation for this, starting with the words *hali bi* ("even today") This was a rare moment of deviation from "the" text

17 Given this clear interdiction on any form of recording, both during the rehearsals and the ceremony itself, one must conclude that Sacré has been naive as well as impolite in recording a rehearsal in 1989, since he recorded without permission, as he told me in 1990 when he gave me his tape

18 A well-known praise line, which is hardly translatable It means something like "O sorcerer, Magan Konate from Sirifiya " ("Sirifiya Magan Konate" is a praise name for Sunjata)

19 This expression Lansine used several times, and he clearly pronounced its words These words are equal to the words of Madi, who talked about "three hundred and thirteen horses and one short tailed" (Ly-Tall et al 64) In the 1992 induced recording, Lansine mentioned "one hundred and thirteen *don-*

fenw" only once, and this is followed by a barely audible phrase that does not sound like "one short tailed" (1 521 plus note 119)

20 About these treasures, see also Cisse and Kamissoko, "Gloire" 99, n 18 A picture of Tiramagan's sword is in Sissoko 41

21 The sheep, male or female, may be a sign of royal power For instance, in the version of the Sunjata epic collected by Adam (355), the killing of a "mouton fétiche" results in the death of the king I thank Stephen Bulman for helping me to find the reference to Adam

22 Lansine told me later in private that the Konkomansi, the descendants of the famous Konkoman and rulers of Kangaba's "arch enemy" Narena, do not belong to the Nyagassola Kuru group He said that they were immigrants from the Land of "Kong " This is contrary to what the people of Narena themselves tell, since they say that the Konkomansi are a branch of the Banjugusi

23 His death was seen by many as proof of the widespread conviction that everyone who enters the hedged area without permission will be killed While in 1997 some questioned whether he had died, I was assured in 1999 by several people (in Kela and Bamako) that he had indeed died before he arrived at the hospital Also interesting in this perspective is the attempt to burn down the Kamabolon in May 1997 Mamadi Dembele, archeologist at the Institut des Sciences Humaines in Bamako, wrote me in a letter dated 13 June 1997 "Deux semaines apres la réfection traditionnelle de la toîture, la case a encore fait l'objet d'un attentat, a la grenade, dit-on La toîture a presque totalement brûlé, mais elle a été refaite rapidement par la population [ ] " 'Two weeks after the traditional reroofing, the hut was the victim of an assault, by a grenade, it was said The roof was burned almost completely, but it was quickly restored by the population [ ] ' Lansine Diabate wrote to me that four young men, among them a Keita of "pure" descent, were involved in the burning Two of them were captured The population of Kangaba wanted to punish them, but the gendarmes handed them to higher authorities in Bamako

24 This medicine was called *"badaji"*, it had been prepared the morning of Thursday, 1 May A friend of mine told me that *"badaji"* is something of "fétiches", if it had been made by marabouts, it would have been called *"nasiji"* (a well-known term for a fluid talisman)

25 I was much impressed by the context of the ceremony, and did not dare to make notes I was very much afraid to be caught with pencil and paper, and therefore I did not make any notes between 29 Apr and 3 May However, I had been repeating constantly the things that I wanted to note down by "reciting" them in a diachronical order The account of my experiences had been written down on Saturday night, 3 May, at the airport and in the airplane

26 Only those who had been allowed to enter the hedged area, the "autochthonous," may have captured Lansine's narrative I only heard that Fantamadi was saying "naamu " Later that night, "Super" took over his role, and the last three hours another Fantamadi (younger brother of Lansine's wife Fanta Diabate) had the responsibility to confirm Lansine's words Mamduba Kamissoko, the 'first choice" under normal circumstances, could not show up in the Kamabolon, since he is not a Diabate

27 However, there were some exceptions A woman from Bamako gave 10,000 F CFA in order to receive blessings to find a husband This "advertisement" was a shock for the audience I got the impression that it was not much appreciated At dawn, at 6 30 am, a (group of?) Kouyate gave 25,000 F CFA

28 He did not use the word *dorome,* but *dalasi* I had never heard anyone using this old-fashioned word, which appeared to generally known among the audience *Dalasi* is still the name for the currency in The Gambia

29 Thus, it may not be a coincidence that Lansine told me the Mecca stories only after he had finished the Sunjata epic and had to fill one more cassette, because he had promised to me that he would do so (see performance 4 in my "Ethnography")

30 When preparing himself for the recitation during the Kamabolon ceremony, Lansine had taken some indigenous medicine plus one Sedaspir pill (which contains codeine and caffeine) He did not look extremely exhausted, but his voice had suffered much On Friday afternoon he had to recite some praise lines during the reroofing of the Kamabolon, but then Fantamadi and Mussa took over a major part of the recitation On Saturday morning, when I left Kela, he had lost his voice almost completely

31 Seydou Camara told me, in 1992, that Ly Tall left out the repetitive praise lines for editorial reasons This may explain why "my" text is longer than Ly-Tall's, although her recording of Kanku Madi lasts six hours, and mine only four Thus, Ly-Tall's (not consultable) recording may be considered as the most precious recording ever made in Kela, since it contains many repetitive praise lines as well as the greatest amount of story themes

32 Vidal ("Sujet") says that he collected his material with the "griots de Keyla" and then he writes that he talked with "funé lettres" with the patronymic Haidara! This is remarkable, since nowadays the Haidara are "charifs " Thus, it seems that they have made a status jump, because *finaw* are *nyamakalaw* ("casted artisans"), and the "charifs" are *horonw* ("noblemen") According to Vidal, the Haidara are the "chapelains de la cour" (607) of the Keita of Kangaba, and this shows their role in religious life

When Vidal visited Kela, the world view of the Haidara may have been an anomaly, because of their extraordinary social position as teachers of koranic schools In 1932, there were only ten koranic schools (with 85 pupils) in the entire "cercle de Bamako," but six of them (with 61 pupils) were in the canton of Maramandougou (which had Kangaba as its capital) Of these six schools, two (with 45 pupils!) were in Kela (Archives, *FR IE 70*) Thus, at the time Vidal did his research, Kela clearly was a center of koranic teaching and its population was not representative of the population of the "cercle de Bamako "

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Classicism in Shaaban Robert's Utopian Novel, *Kusadikika*

Said A. M. Khamis

Classicism embodies elasticity beyond that of acknowledged excellence (Cuddon 122). On the one hand, it is associated with "literary immortality" or "timelessness," and on the other, with the "universality" that goes with "humanistic idealism." A classical work like Shaaban Robert's *Kusadikika* (1951),[1] therefore, shows openendedness and a certain flexibility that allows for an analysis oscillating between the past and the present. *Kusadikika* is a novel of "grand style" with an ambivalent theme that bears some relevance today, as it did when it was first written. The aim of this paper, then, is to show the classical nature of *Kusadikika* and how it transfuses its relevance to the contemporary situation. Since in the final analysis form and content in a work of art are inseparable, the tendency here will be to take certain formal features not as discrete units but as features that are in a complementary role with content. The artistic aspects under scrutiny are: the utopian nature of the novel; *Kusadikika* as a satirical tale; characterization; plot, story, language, and narrative style; and axiomatic endings.

The novel has an imaginary nonspecific setting,[2] though its thematic kernel can be conjectured to have evolved from the author's colonial past. The name *Kusadikika* ("The Believable,"[3] or perhaps "The Unbelievable"?) refers to a country that has no real existence outside the text. Kusadikika as a country simply floats in the air as a void, discerned only by means of the winds blowing from the four cardinal points and bordered from above by the sky and below by the land:

> Kusadikika ni nchi ambayo kuwako kwake hufikirika kwa mawazo tu. Nchi hiyo iko katikati ya mipaka sita. Kwa upande wa Kaskazini imepakana na Upepo wa Kaskazi, na kwa upande wa Kusini imepakana na Upepo wa Kusi. Mashariki imepakana na Matlai, na Magharibi mpaka wake ni upepo wa Umande. Kwa kuwa nchi yenyewe inaelea katika hewa kama wingu, zaidi ya kupakana na pepo nne hizo, ina mipaka mingine miwili. Mipaka miwili yenyewe ni hii. Kwa juu nchi hiyo imepakana na mbingu na kwa chini imepakana na Ardhi.
>
> *Kusadikika* is a country whose existence is only thought to be in the mind. That country is situated amid six boundaries. In the north it is bordered by northerly winds, and in the south by the southerly winds. In the east it is bordered by "Matlai" [easterly winds] and its boundary in the west is "Umande" [westerly winds]. Since the country is floating in the air like a cloud, apart from being bordered by the four winds, it has two other borders. These two other borders are the sky from above and the land below. (xii)