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From Orality to Writing: The Presence and Absence of Griots in Mande Novels

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ABSTRACT

From Orality to Writing: The Presence and Absence of Griots on Mande Novels

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My work in Comparative Literary Studies and French explores the link between the Mande oral tradition and its literature to reveal the presence and absence of the griots' words and their portrayal in the novel. Authors Amadou Hampaté Bâ *(L'Étrange Destin de Wangrin*); Massa Makan Diabaté (*L'Assemblée de Djinns*); D.T. Niane (*Soundjata; Ou, L'Épopée Mandingue*); and Yambo Ouologuem (*Le Devoir de Violence*) have used the orality of the griots to inform their narrative. In looking at the griots' words, I examine how these authors have not only adapted it in written form but also translated the speech from Bambara, the local language, to French, the written one. In this act of double translation, I investigate which aspects of the griots' speech are and are not reflected in the novel. Moreover, I ask how does the translation from oral Bambara to written French affect our reading of the novel?

My Fulbright Hays supported fieldwork in Mali in 2005-06 year addressed these issues. I lived in Kela and Kita, two sites found in Mande region of Mali, where I worked with three different griots families: Diabaté, Kouyaté and Tounkara. Through observations of and interviews with the family members, I examined the griots' speech as it is used in their daily lives. Particularly, my focus was on the speech – text – of the griots in their "social" performances at baptisms, weddings and funerals. My study of the griots and their speech in these settings allowed me to uncover the significant absence and presence of the griots' speech from my field research to the novels mentioned above.

For example, a prominent marker of the griots' speech in the novels is to preface a conversation with a figure of speech. In my fieldwork, I look at how the griots use these spoken metaphors compare to what I have read in the novels. The novels show a concise rendering of these spoken metaphors whereas the griots use them frequently and repetitively. In the end, I employ ethnography to inform my literary readings of the texts; at the same time, it represents a link between my fieldwork and the novels.

Thank you mom and dad for your patience throughout the years,
Mireille for your guidance and
Jaime for being there at the very end.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Grounding the Novel for a Literary Beginning

The Novel, a Genre and a Text

For readers who enjoy Francophone literature from Mali, it is a surprise to discover that the novel, as a genre, is only a recent phenomenon in the country. In an oral culture such as the Mande, the oral tradition remains strong and, effectively, renders writing a novelty for most Malians. My research on four Francophone novels from Mali looks at this disjuncture between orality and the novel; it is literary based but incorporates many of the underlying influences of orality to re-read these works in a manner that considers the novel not simply as a written text but one very much oral in nature too. Developments in recent years within and beyond Mali's borders have brought changes to both the reception and perception of the novel as well as the oral culture that it juxtaposes. Griots, the definitive image of the Mande oral culture, experience a growing anti-*griotisme* sentiment that looks unfavorably on their craft as professional storytellers and praise singers. Beyond their practice of *griotisme*, these bards face momentous changes to their society that include an enlarging literate population with improvements in schooling and an expanding use of medias such as television and radio. As a part of these changes, the novel represents another development in the Mande society affecting orality and the griots.

To comprehend the role that orality holds in these changes, I move first to look briefly at the background of the novel in Mali to provide a base to return to when

examining the spoken word in the written text. My start with the novel is a leap forward to help situate my thesis as I explore the influences of orality later on in the written text.

A Belated but Gradual Appearance in Mali

Compared to the early documentation of griots as part of orality in the 11th century with accounts by travelers such as Ibn Battuta, novels in Mali have only made a recent debut. They appeared first in the 1950 with Amadou Hampaté Bâ's *L'Empire Peul du Macina*[1] in 1955, Fily Dabo Sissoko's *La Passion de Djimé* [2] in 1956, and Seydou Badian's *Sous l'Orage* [3] in 1957. These novels came quite late in comparison to other works published by authors in neighboring Francophone countries. Indeed, the first novel written and published by an African national was *Les Trois Volontés de Malic* [4] by the Senegalese Ahmadou Mapaté Diagne in 1920, almost forty years before Bâ's work. In this respect, the arrival of the novel in Mali followed other Francophone countries such as Senegal, the Ivory Coast, Guinea and Benin. Thus, to fully view the development of the novel in Mali, one needs to frame it with other Francophone countries.

After Diagne's novel appeared in Senegal, others slowly came onto the scene. They included *Force-Bonté* [5] by Bakary Diallo from Senegal; *L'Esclave* [6] by Félix Couchoro from Benin and *Mirages de Paris* [7] by Ousmane Socé Diop from Senegal. This early generation of authors struggled more with content than structure in their novels. In their efforts to render their works recognizably literary by Western standards,

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[1] Amadou Hampaté Bâ. *L'Empire Peul du Macina*. Bamako: L'Institut Français de l'Afrique Noir, 1955
[2] Fily Dabo Sissoko. *La Passion de Djimé*. Paris: Éditions de la Tour de Guet, 1956.
[3] Seydou Badian. *Sous l'Orage*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1963
[4] Ahmadou Mapaté Diagne. *Les Trois Volontés de Malic*. Nendeln: Kraus Reprint, 1973.
[5] Bakary Diallo. *Force-Bonté*. Nendeln: Kraus Reprint, 1973.
[6] Félix Couchoro. *L'Esclave*. Akpagon: A.C.C.I, 1983.
[7] Ousmane Socé Diop. *Mirage de Paris*. Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Latines, 1964.

these authors wrote novels that were imitative in form and experimented very little with voice and style. Priscilla Clark concurs and describes:

> The absence of an African vision in the early West African novel is compounded by the lack of a personal voice. The tone is generally didactic and highly moralistic, perhaps another legacy of the folk tales whose function is precisely to teach. In any event, the teaching and preaching, the explanations and descriptions slacken the pace of the novel and diminish its drama (130)

Clark's description of these early works speaks largely to the continuing influence of orality on the development of the novel. With their attempts to imitate the novel, these authors, in actuality, displayed a style closer to Diagne's *Les Trois Volontés de Malic* with its instructional approach, which draws heavily on the didactic nature characteristic of the oral tradition. For Mali, this period was marked more by absence than a struggle between content and structure. Novels published in Mali during these early years are difficult to track. Unlike its Francophone neighbors, Mali experienced very little of the literary explosion they encountered. Its literary awakening arrived with the next generation of Francophone writers.

The next wave of authors of the 1950s and 1960s made their works the centerpiece to criticize colonialism and provoke questions regarding an African identity. Such was the theme that Badian addressed in his novel *Sous l'Orage*. He questioned the dichotomy between African tradition and modernity that arrived with foreign often colonial cultures. His questions provoked a debate that other Francophone authors also engaged with in their writing during this period. At the same time, these years were also ones of great experimentation. One sees novels appearing where authors played with style, form and voice. The themes of their works centered less on criticizing colonialism and moved to an inward examination. The first modern Francophone novel to appear

under this guise was Camara Laye's *L'Enfant Noir* [8] in Guinea. *L'Enfant Noir* uses an autobiographical form that recalls an oral narrative to chronicle the author's nostalgia for his home in Guinea while studying abroad in France. Laye's autobiographical novel was the beginning of a trend amongst authors to find their identity as well as to experiment with voice and style. Novels after Laye's began to adopt a political tone to their writing in this exploration. Among them was Ousmane Sembène from Senegal who used his experiences working in docks of Marseille as the background to many of his novels to lament and criticize France's colonial practice. Some of his works include *Le Docker Noir*;[9] *O Pays Mon Beau Peuple*;[10] and *Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu*.[11] Sembène's works are notable not only for the steadfast political stance that he takes but also for his depiction of strong African characters – a portrayal that corresponds to the postcolonial African identity that Francophone writers were discovering for themselves in real life.

By the late 1960s with a decade of independence for most Francophone countries passed, another trend in the novel appeared. This time, the writers were less interested in expressing their anti-colonial stance than delving into a new realist presentation of the colonial experience. Two works in this genre were Ahmadou Kourouma's *Les Soleils des Indépendences* [12] from the Ivory Coast and for Mali, Yambo Ouologuem's *Le Devoir de Violence*.[13] Both novels played with language and form in their portrayal of an Africa that was at times seen as both friend and foe. Kourouma's work looked at Malinké

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[8] Camara Laye. *L'Enfant Noir*. Paris: Plon, 1953.
[9] Ousmane Sembène. *Le Docker Noir*. Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Debresse, 1956.
[10] Ousmane Sembène. *O Pays Mon Beau Peuple*. Paris: Amiot-Dumont, 1957.
[11] Ousmane Sembène. *Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu*. Paris: Le Livre Contemporain, 1960.
[12] Ahmadou Kourouma. *Les Soleils des Indépendences*. Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1968.
[13] Yambo Ouologuem. *Le Devoir de Violence*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1968.

society after independence through the lens of new realism that moved away from the romantic vision of Africa propounded by Négritude; Ouologuem's novel drew on the oral tradition to inform his telling of the fictitious Nakem Empire. Henri-Daniel Pageaux explains:

> For these "new" novels, it is less theme and argument in the usual sense (bad living conditions in Africa, disappointment in the face of dictatorial and corrupt politics) that matter as it is the search for a new novelistic diegesis: the revision of the notion of character, a new way of organizing dialogues, chronology and a questioning of meaning (be it social or textual). . . . Here, the novels selected created a problematic space . . . where the internal imperfection of the individual and his decentering in relation to the social, political, cultural spaces, and to a confused and crushing "hic et nun," never cease to turn themselves into words (Pageaux 33 translated and quoted by Ngaté 70)

Certainly, Ouologuem achieved this play with space and time in the novel with his manipulation of the griot's speech. The telling of the Nakem Empire draws on the oral tradition that uses the past to narrate the present to render African and Africans to close examine themselves. Following Ouologuem's use of the oral tradition in the novel was Bâ with *L'Étrange Destin de Wangrin*.[14] Bâ's narrative differed from Ouologuem with its focus on the daily lives of people rather than a kingdom under colonialism. His other works, *Amkoullel, L'Enfant Peul* [15] and *Le Petit Frère d'Amkoullel* [16] followed too the autobiographical form of Laye, which showcased overall the experimentation with voice and style in novels from Mali.

Moving farther into the 1970s and 1980s, novels in Mali began to reflect the transitional period the country experienced. Notably, Ibrahima Ly's *Toiles d'Araignées* [17] was an indirect criticism of the Trauré military regime. His novel was similar to

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[14] Amadou Hampaté Bâ. *L'Étrange Destin de Wangrin*. Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1973.
[15] Amadou Hampaté Bâ. *Amkoullel, L'Enfant Peul*. Arles: Acte Suds, 1991.
[16] Amadou Hampaté Bâ. *Le Petit Frère d'Amkoullel*. Paris: Syros, 1994.
[17] Ibrahim Ly. *Toiles d'Araignées.* Paris: Éditions de l'Harmattan, 1982.

Ouologuem in its depiction of crude violence. Other novels that spoke of the social and political situation in Mali include Nagogninmé Urbain Dembélé's *L'Inceste et le Parricide*;[18] Ismaïla Samba Traoré's *Ruchers de la Capitale*;[19] Mandé Alpha Diarra's *Sahel, Sanglante Sécheresse;*[20] and Moussa Konaté's *Chronique d'une Journée de Répression* [21] and *Les Saisons*.[22] Collectively, these novels gave voice to the tumultuous events in Mali during the 1970s and 1980s, from a military rule to the country's drought to the overthrow of the dictator Moussa Trauré in 1991 by Amadou Toumani Touré or "ATT." Massa Makan Diabaté joined in the portrayal of Mali during these years with his Kouta trilogy – *Le Boucher de Kouta*; [23] *Le Coiffeur de Kouta*; [24] and *Le Lieutenant de Kouta* [25] – that added humor to the current situation.

By 1992 Mali issued in its first democratically elected president with Alpha Konaré and with it, a new period in the publication of novels. Authors from earlier generation such as Bâ and Diabaté passed away while others, Ly and Ouologuem produced very little. This led to a decline not only in the publication of novels but to new authors writing them. Works that appeared after the Trauré regime were surprisingly few. Some include *Le Destin de Samba* [26] by Drissa Doumbia and *Un Mariage de Raison* [27] by Moussa Bissan. The themes of these novels continued on the inward examination of the previous generation but now in a democratic setting. In fact, most of these novels avoided

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[18] Nagogninmé Urbain Dembélé. *L'Inceste et le Parricide*. Bamako: Éditions Impriméries du Mali, 1982.
[19] Ismaïla Samba Traoré. *Ruchers de la Capitale.* Paris: L'Harmattan, 1982.
[20] Mandé Alpha Diarra. *Sahel, Sanglante Sécheresse*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1981.
[21] Moussa Konaté. *Chronique d'une Journée de Répression*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1988.
[22] Moussa Konaté. *Les Saisons*. Bamako: Éditions Jamana, 1989.
[23] Massa Makan Diabaté. *Le Boucher de Kouta*. Paris: Hatier, 1982.
[24] Massa Makan Diabaté. *Coiffeur de Kouta*. Paris: Hatier, 1980.
[25] Massa Makan Diabaté. *Le Lieutenant de Kouta*. Paris: Hatier, 1979.
[26] Drissa Doumbia. *Le Destin de Sa. mba*. Bamako: Éditions Jamana, 1989.
[27] Moussa Bissan. *Un Mariage de Raison*. Bamako: Éditions, Jamana, 1996.

writing and speaking about anything political and ideological. They remained focused on the everyday life in Mali.

From these different periods in the development of the novel in Mali two remarkable absences appear. One, novels written by women and two, novels published in the local languages. The first absence is not exactly one of a lacuna but one of lack. Works by women in Mali appeared first with the publication of Aoua Keïta's voluminous autobiography*, Femme d'Afrique: La vie d'Aoua Kéita Racontée par Elle-même* [28] in 1975. Keïta led the path for many women in Mali not only by her role as a midwife but also her involvement and work with the political party *l'Union Soudanaise-Rassemblement Démocratique Africain* in what was then the French Sudan. Yet based on these two roles, she is less known as an author than for her work in midwifery and politics. Following Keïta is a handful of women who have successfully published. Among them is Adame Ba Konaré, a professor and historian who is also the wife of Mali's former president. She has written and published extensively on Mali's history. Some of her works include familiar names such as *Sunjata, Fondateur de l'Empire du Mail* [29] and *L'Epopée de Ségou*.[30] In the literary scene, Aïcha Fofana published *Mariage: On Copie* [31] in 1994. Almost ten years later in 2002, Aïda Mady Diallo came out with *Kouthy, Mémoire du Sang* [32] and Fanta-Taga Tembely with *Dakan.*[33] These women showcase the growing albeit slow rise of female authors in Mali. On the other hand, the

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[28] Aoua Keïta. *Femme d'Afrique: La vie d'Aoua Kéita Racontée par Elle-même*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1975.
[29] Adame Ba Konaré. *Sunjata, Fondateur de l'Empire du Mail.* Dakar: NEA, 1983.
[30] Adame Ba Konaré. *L'Epopée de Ségou*. Paris: Pierre-Marcel Favre, 1987.
[31] Aïcha Fofana. *Mariage: On Copie.* Bamako: Éditions Jamana, 1994.
[32] *Aïda Mady Diallo. Kouthy, Mémoire du Sang. Paris: Gallimard, 2002.*
[33] Fanta-Taga Tembely. *Dakan*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002.

absence of novels in the local language points starkly to the publishing obstacles facing Malian authors, which, in some cases, even include French. The obstacles are intricately tied to the question of language, which I address in the last chapter.

Narrative Structure: From Pedagogy to Re-envisioning Another Literary Form

The presence of orality was not completely absent throughout the novel's rise in Mali. It appeared closely alongside the novel's progression from a didactic rendering of its narrative to a psychological portrayal of characters. Either in the autobiographical or narrative form, the novel looks toward orality as a part of its "telling." For instance, Bâ turns to memories of his childhood to relate his story while Ouologuem draws on the oral tradition to relate his narrative of the Nakem Empire. Along with these examples, there are also direct references to orality seen in the various transcriptions of the *Soundjata* epic. The use of orality in novel in these various adoptions reminds one of Diagne's *Les Trois Volontés de Malic*, which was overlooked earlier due to its structural flaws. What the early didactic form suggests and is now resurfacing for Francophone writers is the relationship between the oral and written in the novel that was previously overshadowed due to comparisons to "literariness" defined by a Western literary tradition.

Looking at this connection between the two brings forth new ways to understand the Francophone novel. Abiola Irele calls this ". . . an occasion for challenging the conventional Western view of textuality and consequently of literature as linear and spatial, which is based exclusively on the model of writing." Orality functions on the temporal, but this does not mean that it loses its significance or interest if it is produced as a written work (Irele 10). Such a rethinking of the novel not only challenges the form

itself but also the genre. Examples of these playful manipulations of the novel appeared with the examples of Bâ and Ouologuem noted above. The mixing of orality and writing revises notions of the novel while it simultaneously serves to guard both modes.

In this new way of re-envisioning the novel, spoken language also plays a key role. Irele argues for the novel or here, the text that:

> The notion of *text* itself. . . . Not only must we conceive of this as a sequence—whether extended or not—of structured enunciations, which form therefore a pattern of discourse, but we must also consider the nature of those specimens in the oral tradition that are endowed with the same character of literariness as written texts. . . . a literary text, whether oral or written, is language *intensified* (9)

Irele's reference to the oral discourse appears similar to the griot's speech that authors adopt and manipulate in their writing. In this case, the language of adoption becomes *intensified* in its transcription and translation. Placed in the novel, the text with its incorporation of the griot speech challenges the conventional notion of the textuality that Irele advocates and becomes a new form of writing with its uses of orality. The results of this new narrative form appear in the novels of Bâ, Ouologuem, Diabaté and D.T. Niane's *Soundiata* that work to incorporate orality into the written form.

Grounding Orality to Understand its Influences in the Novel

Beyond the Spoken Word: Understanding Orality as a Text

For my research, Irele's understanding of the novel lends itself very much to a rereading of orality too. Drawing on Irele allows me to look at orality with a better understanding of its influences in the novel. The notion of orality is an expansive one that encompasses more than the utterances of words. Viewed within the context of an "oral"

culture or an "oral" tradition, orality describes also the society and people in which speech appears. My work with the Mande in western Mali and Guinea highlights both the privileging of orality and its effects on writing. The Mande is a group widely known for its oral culture as the figure most representative of it: the griot. Known as professional singers who recount tales and shower praises to their patrons, griots are enduring figures in the Mande culture. Often, the oral performances of griots and the words they speak are not considered when reading novels written by authors from the Mande-Francophone tradition who draw on orality. Such an approach, however, unnecessarily separates the oral from the written and misses the position of orality as its own text. To bridge this divide, my work aims to uncover the link between the griot's oral performance and selected works by Mande-Francophone authors by engaging in an intertextual reading of the novels and field research. In this light, orality becomes a text grounded in its own cultural relevance verbally expressed and performed in everyday practices. This re-thinking of orality as a text appears most pertinent when applied to the Mande culture in which speech trumps writing and, correspondingly, influences the written word.

My study begins with observations of the griots in their social environment as a part of an ethnographic study to understand orality as a text. Through viewing the griots in their daily settings, I am able to "read" the text found in the orality of the Mande culture and tradition. From my observations, I compare the text of orality to that of the novels, focusing mainly on how the authors adopt the griot's speech and portray these bards in their narrative. By moving between my observations of the griots in their oral performances and my reading of the novels, I show not only the link between orality and writing in their respective view as texts but also how one informs the other. Neither can

be read on its own. The novels look to the oral performance for their adoption of the griot's speech and portrayal while the latter becomes a text for the former to draw upon. Highlighting this connection requires adopting strategies of intertextuality to read the novels. The approach not only views orality as a text, seen in my viewings of the griot's oral performance but also writing as one, represented in my reading of the novels.

Previous studies on African literature often separate oral tales from the novel, thereby creating a false divide and hierarchy between these two important forms of expression. In this respect, written works are often privileged over oral ones. Ruth Finnegan's pioneering study, *Oral Literature in Africa*, [34] began to ask questions about the oral tradition on the continent. Since her study in 1970, leading scholars of orality have addressed other themes surrounding the oral tradition in Africa. Eileen Julien's study of *African Novels and the Question of Orality* [35] moves to disabuse us of the view that orality is a metonym for Africa and argues for a wider reading of African literature as its own social and aesthetic phenomenon. Other researches include Sory Camara [36] who looks at the status and condition of the griot in Malinké society, a branch of Mande culture, while Jan Jansen[37] focuses on the apprenticeship of these bards and the effects of technology on their profession. Thomas Hale's thorough study, *Griots and Griottes*,[38] analyzes their verbal art and touches upon the existence of female griottes. All of these works offer diverse perspectives on orality and, particularly, the griot; however, they

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[34] Ruth Finnegan. *Oral Literature in Africa*. London: Clarendon P. 1970.
[35] Eileen Julien. *African Novels and the Question of Orality*. Bloomington: Indiana UP. 1992
[36] Sory Camara. *Gens de la Parole: Essai sur la Condition et le Rôle des Griots dans la Société Malinké*. Paris: ACCT, 1992.
[37] Jan Jansen. *The Griot's Craft: An Essay on Oral Tradition and Diplomacy* New Brunswick: Transaction Publisher, 2000.
[38] Thomas A. Hale. *Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1998.

remain exclusive to the spoken word.

Similarly, research on African novels usually addresses the issue of language. The "Conference of African Writers in English Expression" at Makerere University College in 1962 in Kampala first posed questions about language in African literature and its choice by African authors. On this point, Ngugi wa Thiong'o[39] argues in *Decolonising the Mind* that for African writers, there is an intrinsic relation between language and culture. His conclusion that African literature can only be written in local languages has not dissuaded African authors to continue writing and publishing in European languages, all the while appropriating it for themselves. While the debate about language continues, an understanding of the oral tradition as a representative of African literature is rarely questioned based on language (European or African) or form (oral or written).

In my study, a close examination of the interface between orality and writing reveals three distinct ways in which figures of the griots and their speech find their way into the novel. In the novels I examine, they appear as: novelistic renderings of the oral epics, seen in D.T. Niane's version of *Soundjata*; characters in the novels themselves, evident in Massa Makan Diabaté's *L'Assemblée de Djinns* [40] and Amadou Hampaté Bâ's *L'Étrange Destin de Wangrin* and the manner in which the authors reproduce the griots' particular speech patterns, as in the narrative of Yambo Ouologuem's *Le Devoir de Violence*. Questions on this interface arise frequently and point to how the authors adopt the griot's speech and portray these bards. For example, in Diabaté's *L'Assemblée de Djinns*, the writer depicts the clash between several griot families at the moment when a

[39] Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London: Heinemann, 1986.
[40] Massa Makan Diabaté. *L'Assemblée de Djinns*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1985.

new chief griot is chosen in Kita. His portrayal of the griots in this event attributes a satirical and pessimistic tone to them that adds a dry humor to the narrative. How Diabaté depicts the griots opens questions on what was said during this event and what was subsequently written and translated into the novel. In *Griots at War: Conflict, Conciliation, and Caste in Mande*, [41] Barbara Hoffman is critical of Diabaté's approach because of his position as a griot and his strong ties to Kita. Rather, she gives the fundamental telling of these events to the voices of the griots who were present. Focusing on what was said is key in this case because "it is in the life of language, in everyday speech as well as formal discourse, that the art that separates the griot and noble castes lives and breathes, . . ." explains Hoffman (9).

The "life of language" that Hoffman describes poses a parallel question about the loss of immediacy with words—griot speech—when it has been translated and written. Here, Georg Lukács' [42] distinction between the "first nature" of the epic and the "second nature" of the novel is pertinent. The novel, according to Lukács, shows detachment and distance because it does not speak of the world first-hand as the epic does. Walter Ong,[43] on the other hand, proposes another view of the loss of spoken words and, instead, calls it a technology that has been interiorized with external tools (pens, paper, computers) that themselves also become internalized. For Ong, "technologies are not mere exterior aids but also interior transformations of consciousness, and never more than when they affect the word" (107). Drawing on Ong's description of interiorization, I posit that the presence of the griot's speech in the novel retains its "life of language" when one reads

[41] Barbara G. Hoffman. *Griots at War: Conflict, Conciliation, and Caste in Mande*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000.
[42] Georg Lukács. *The Theory of the Novel*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971.
[43] Walter Ong. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. London: Routledge, 1982.

orality as a text. In this case, the liveliness of the griots' words in the novel is not lost or detached from orality; it maintains Lukács' "first nature" in the manner that Christopher Miller [44] alludes to when he notes that "the text thus prepares to transport the griot's words from orality to literacy, while at the same time taking the literate reader 'back' to world of orality" (91). By following Ong's notion of interiorization, words are brought inside with external tools, which enables the text of orality to maintain its "life of language" while it moves between the oral and the written mode.

Specifically, the "world of orality" that Miller references applies to the Mande, a group encompassing the *nyamakala* caste of artisans and musicians. While the term *nyamakala*, according to David Conrad,[45] does not describe a fixed hierarchy or predetermined relationships, it highlights the ever-changing social dynamics among its members that underline my observations of the griots in their social environment to understand orality as a text in the Mande culture. Such an inquiry into the Mande and their oral tradition appears in my ethnographic work where I meet with the griots in their quotidian setting, a departure from the common study of these bards as great depositories of history and renowned praise singers. Instead, I view them more as "social" performers who embody the role of mediator and translator speaking at social events such as weddings, baptisms and funerals for the families present. It is the everyday griot or griot with a lower case g that interests me and from which I make the distinction between the griot as person and the griot as performer. The griot as person is someone who holds other roles than the one who simply recounts oral epics or sings praises. The griot as

[44] Christopher Miller. *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology of Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago P, 1990.
[45] David Conrad and Barbara Frank. *Status and Identity in West Africa: Nyamakalaw of Mande*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995.

performer is someone who speaks for an audience during a social event. In both instances, they are "performing," but the performances that concern me are "everyday" and "off-stage" ones in which griots play a role other than one of oral storyteller or praise singer.

My exploration of griots in their "off-stage" performance as a part of my ethnographic fieldwork began during the summers of 2003 and 2004 in Mali. In 2003, I studied all aspects of orality by looking at the spoken word in various mediums (radio, television, markets, workplaces and homes) and among family and friends. In 2004, my focus turned concretely to the griots when I visited two prominent sites of oral tradition—Kela/Kangaba and Kita—through my affiliation with Seydou Camara at the Institut des Sciences Humaines (ISH), a research center that works mainly on the study of Mande culture. I returned to Mali again in September 2005 to spend a year working specifically with the griot families in Kela and Kita that I had met previously. In Kela, I lived and worked with the Diabaté, the major griot family in the village. In Kita, my work with the griots extended beyond the Diabaté to include also the Kouyaté and a handful of *funé*, Islamic praise singers who spoke along with the griots. With both the Diabaté and Kouyaté, I conducted observations and interviews of the griots and their families and friends.

Observing the griots in my ethnographic fieldwork highlighted their oral performances but also revealed their complex oral culture inclusive in the understanding of orality as a text. The Mande culture I encountered during my research has been visibly affected by the history of colonization as well as the present democratization and modernization occurring in Mali. The Mande and, thus, their oral tradition create an ever-

evolving text in relation to the orality that it defines. Nowhere were these changes more evident than in the practice and perception of the griot's craft. Today's griots exist and function in a climate that perceives them with as much appreciation as disdain for their anachronistic role. I encountered these parallel sentiments in the anti-*griotisme* feelings that appeared among griots and *horon*, the noble, in my fieldwork. The sentiment spoke less to the griots themselves and more to *griotisme*, the practice of earning a living off of one's words. Amidst this climate, griots are also reinventing themselves and using the democratization and modernization changes in Mali to become more than simply singers of praises and oral epics. I witnessed as well as experienced some of these changes to the griot's crafts in my fieldwork, from the notoriety they have gained to the payments they demand now for their performance. These developments to the craft as they appear presently in study will continue beyond it. Concurrently, with the novel becoming more present and prominent in Mali, my research looks ahead at some of the forthcoming issues surrounding orality that will inevitably touch on its relationship to literacy. Will the novel slowly eclipse orality and, moreover, the oral tradition in Mali, particularly in light of the anti-*griotisme* sentiment that abound? These are some of the concerns that call for a continuing study.

My work starts with a study of the griots. The first chapter provides a historical background on the griot framed within two important statements expressed repeatedly in my fieldwork: all griots are artists but not all artists are griots; and, griots are *parasites sociaux* (social parasites) and *pesanteurs de la société* (burden on society). Both remarks highlight how things have changed and, paradoxically, not changed for the griots. Key in this chapter is an understanding of the griots as a part of the Mande tripartite structure,

which reveals as much about these bards as the culture to which they belong. The background provides a more nuanced picture of the griots for one to understand why some of the contradictions in today's perception of the griots are not always so easily defined or resolved.

After the historical background on the griots, chapters two and three are analyses of the four novels in my study separated into two sections: the griot's speech and the griot's portrayal. My readings of the novels set a foundation for me to later compare to my fieldwork as a part of the larger link between writing and orality. Chapter two looks at the adoption of the griot's speech by Niane in *Soundjata* and Ouologuem in *Le Devoir de Violence*. I examine how each author respectively adopts and manipulates the griot's speech. While Niane presents a very traditional adoption of the griot's speech due to his collaboration with the griot, Mamadou Kouyaté, Ouologuem completely destabilizes it in his playful rendering. Ouologuem's novel has also been the subject of many debates on plagiarism; I address these charges and argue that Ouologuem's references to Andre Schwarz-Bart and Graham Greene are less an act of copying and more of a manipulation of the griot's speech that is a part of orality with its loose borrowings of other works.

Chapter three moves from the griot's speech to their portrayals as translators and mediators in the novels *L'Étrange Destin de Wangrin* by Bâ and *L'Assemblée de Djinns* by Diabaté. In both works, I consider how the authors play with their depictions of the griot in these roles. Bâ's protagonist, Wangrin, is a translator; yet, his function in this role also reminds one of a griot speaking for another person. I view Wangrin as a translator who embodies the functions of a griot in his act of translating. The theme of translation is further seen in the larger "translation" of the narrative between Bâ and Wangrin. The

griot-protagonist relates the story to the author who then transcribes it. Bâ's novel shows how one brings orality into writing through the act of translating and transcribing. For Diabaté, his presentation of the mediator emerges with the Anabon and Guena, two griot clans who battle for the position of chief griot. I argue that Diabaté plays with the notion of mediation when he shows the griots utilizing these skills to secretly undermine one another rather than to negotiate between the two clans. Diabaté's portrayal draws on the real life conflict between the Tounkara and Diabaté families in Kita, which he plays with and exaggerates in his version for the novel. Again, in Diabaté's case, one sees how an actual event is brought into novelistic form.

From the novels, I chronicle my fieldwork with the griots in Kela and Kita in chapters four and five in order to draw parallels between my work with the griots and the novels. I move thus from the text of the novels to the text of orality, evident in my fieldwork with the griots. Chapter four focuses on my work in Kela with the Diabaté family while chapter five looks at Kita and my collaboration with three griots: Fodé Diabaté, Modibo Kouyaté and Madou Kouyaté. At both sites, I observed how the griots act as mediators and translators and utilize the griot's speech in their real life "off-stage" performances. Gathering what I found at both sites, I compare not only the similarities and differences between them but also return to the written works to read the same points between my study of the novels and my observations in the field. Some of the comparisons that I focus on between the novel and my fieldwork include: the passing of the griot's speech, the use of repetition, the act of teamwork, the portrayal of the griots as translators and mediators and the appearance of the anti-*griotisme* sentiment.

Chapter six looks at issues surrounding the novel that moves beyond its literary reading. My focus is on the publication of the novel in Mali and the constraints and obstacles related to it. Of them, language is a key obstacle that affects both authors and readers. Malians write in a language that is not a local but colonial one: French. The publication of novels in French is noteworthy for orality and its influences on griots. I examine the current situation with an anticipation to its lasting effects given the changing milieu surrounding the griots and the practice of their craft in Mali.

Chapter Two

Historical Background on Griots

From the Pages of *Soundjata* to the International Superstar

All griots are artists but not all artists are griots. This point of view was echoed by a number of Malians – griots, musicians, local researchers and civil servants – I interviewed during my fieldwork in Mali[46] in the summers of 2003 and 2004. In the fall of 2005 when I returned to conduct a year-long research, another viewpoint appeared: Griots are *parasites sociaux* (social parasites) and *pesanteurs de la société* (burden on society). The drastic move from one opinion to the next puzzled me. What had changed in Mali during my brief absence for two such disparate views to appear? The answer, I discovered during the course of my year-long fieldwork, was simple: nothing. Both opinions, although simply stated, speak to the complex views about griots shared by most Malians and these masters of words themselves; griots and the role they hold have both changed and, paradoxically, remained unchanged in today's independent Mali, a country that has endured both the post-independence socialist rule of Modibo Keïta[47] and the

[46]I am referring to the country as Mali, even though I am aware that the name too has its own history. Known as the French Sudan (*Soudan Français*) until its independence in 1960, this former French colony became the Republic of Mali after its failed attempt with Burkina Faso, Niger and Senegal to form the Mali Federation. Burkina Faso and Niger pulled out before the formal organization began. Senegal withdrew a month after signing the agreement in August 1960. The name Mali (literally meaning hippopotamus or where the king resides) refers to the ancient Mali Empire that began in the 12th century with Soundjata and spanned two centuries as well as many present day West African country borders.

[47] Modibo Keïta was Mali's first leader after the country received its independence from France in 1960. He led a one-party socialist rule from 1960 to 1968 when Moussa Trauré overthrew him in a bloodless coup. Trauré continued the one party rule but based on a practice of democratic centralism. In 1991, after much unrest and rioting among students, civilians and government workers, military officer Amadou Toumani Touré overthrew Trauré. Touré arrested Trauré and opened the way for the first democratic elections in Mali. Alpha Oumar Konaré became Mali's first president in 1992; he stepped down after his second five-year term in 2002. Touré reappeared as a candidate and won the elections; he is Mali's current president.

dictatorial regime of Moussa Trauré before choosing Alpha Konaré as its first democratically elected president. To gain insight into their present role and understand what has changed and not changed for these bards, one needs to look first at the history of griots in Mali.

Griots are found among Mali's many ethnic groups but are generally known to be a part of the Mande, a term that describes a region as well as a collective group of people. As a region, the Mande area expands extensively across southern Mali up to northeastern Guinea. This is the region most noted in the epic of Soundjata, the great Malian king who ruled from 1230-52. Other areas, and ones of contention, include the drier savanna of central Mali along the Niger River from the capital Bamako to Macina. Here, Bambara is the main language spoken. As a collective group, Mande refers to the diaspora community of Mande speakers throughout West Africa who have adapted their language to their new environments. Such is the case for the Jula, traders who have traveled and settled in Burkina Faso and the Ivory Coast. Jula is also the Mande term for itinerant merchants. Other diaspora groups are the Khassonké and Mandinka of northwestern Mali and eastern Senegal. Again, in both areas, one sees similarities in the culture with slight variation in the language.

For my study, I draw on both Ralph Austen's understanding of Mande along with Jan Jansen's interpretation of the term. Austen views Mande as a term that unites all the regions and communities who share a set of closely related languages as well as a common set of cultural references (5). Although he differentiates Mande further to Manding to describe the similarities in the languages spoken among the different diaspora groups, I will use Mande to refer to both the people and the language. For his part, Jansen

extends Mande to encompass the meaning of "society" and "civilized world" that moves it beyond the geographical region around Kangaba that was depicted in the Sunjata[48] epic ("The Sunjata Epic" 14). My use of the term takes Jansen's notion of "society" to look at the Mande and its griot culture in the region described by Austen as the "savanna and light forest lands of southern Mali and northeastern (Upper) Guinea, extending outward from either side of that stretch of the Niger River that flows northeast from around Kouroussa to somewhere near Bamako. . . ." (5). My fieldwork with the griots in the village of Kela and the city of Kita covers some of the area that Austen describes. Bambara and its variation, Malinké, are the predominant languages in this region.

Evidence of griots in the Mande region surfaced early in Mali's history. The first documented appearance of the griot emerged in the oral epic of Mali's first ruler: Soundjata. In a story that has now been frequently recited and rewritten, audiences and readers alike have come to know Soundjata and the Mali Empire he created in the area covering the Mande region from the recitation of a griot. Within the epic of *Soundjata* is also a griot character —Balla Fesseka—who slowly reveals throughout the narrative the underlying characteristics of these bards and the protocol that governs their life in the thirteenth century. One learns that griots are not simply storytellers; they are associated with a family for whom they speak and serve by feeding their patrons with words of praise and exaltation and sometimes, in contention with their status, criticism. Their position is also not taken lightly since they inherit it along with the family to which they belong. Attempts to break this tie can cause war, as shown in the example of Sumaguru

[48] Variation in the spelling of Soundjata comes from the different authors' use of them.

kidnapping Balla Fesseka away from Soundjata in the epic.

These views of the griot were confirmed almost a century later in 1352-3 in the chronicles of Ibn Battuta. Born in Tangiers, Morocco in 1304, Ibn Battuta became one of the most prodigious travelers of his time, voyaging throughout North and East Africa, the Middle East and Asia. His trip to the Mande region provides a first hand account of a mesmerizing orator and interpreter in the court of Mansa Sulayman, a descendant of Soundjata In his depiction of Dugha, the orator/interpreter, Ibn Battuta describes both the latter's dress and his interaction with Mansa Sulayman: "On his head is a turban which has fringes, . . . He is girt with a sword whose sheath is of gold, on his feet are light boots and spurs. . . . In his hands there are two small spears, one of gold and one of silver with points of iron. . . . He who wants to speak to the sultan speaks to Dugha. Dugha speaks to the man who is standing, and he speaks to the sultan (Hamdun and King 47-48). One can fairly presume this person to be a griot. Along with its first hand account, Ibn Battuta's visit is important because it gives details about the griot's dress and demeanor that are not found in the oral epic. Moreover, his description reiterates the important functions of the griots in the royal court, a role that was previously depicted in *Soundjata* but now witnessed and recorded from an actual event.

Many of Ibn Battuta's experiences with the griots appeared later in passing references made about singers in the Sudanese or Timbuktu chronicles known as the *Tarîkh el-Fettâch* and *Tarîkh es-Sudan*. According to Thomas Hale, John Hunwick, the first to translate the *Tarîkh el-Fettâch* and *Tarîkh es-Sudan* into English, interprets the description of singer to be a griot (80). Both works originated in Timbuktu in the sixteenth and seventeenth century and were mostly likely written by African Muslims in

Arabic. Their ascribed authors, Mohamed Kati and Es Sadi, are known to have written parts of the chronicles with additions having been made posthumously. The singers or griots are not the centerpiece as the scribes who are writing them are. Nonetheless, the narrators acknowledge these singers and their powerful use of words.

Mentions of griots continued to appear in various sources from explorers and researchers in the Mande region between 1300 and 1800.[49] One notable story takes place in 1796 with Scottish explorer Mungo Park when he makes a distinction between two classes of orators or, in his description, "poets of Africa." He explains:

> They consist of two classes; the most numerous are the *singing men*, called *Jilli kea*, . . . One or more of these may be found in every town. They sing extempore songs, in honour of their chief men, or any other persons who are willing to give "solid pudding for empty praises." But a nobler part of their office is to recite the historical events of their country; hence, in war, they accompany the soldiers to the field, in order, by reciting the great actions of their ancestors, to awaken in them a spirit of glorious emulation (213).

The first class Park describes hints strongly at the griot figure one knows today. His reference to them as *Jilli kea* is similar to *jeli*, the Bambara word for griot. The second part of Park's description alludes to another oral figure, the *funé*. Known as Islamic praise singers, *funé* are lesser known than griots but are often mistaken for these bards. Park's keen observation draws a distinction between the *funé* and the griot and begins to bring a more nuanced view to who these oral singers are. The distinction he makes opens up for later inquires on the origin of griot as a word as well as a figure in the Mande culture. Hale concurs and notes, ". . . he [Park] seems to understand more clearly than his predecessors the importance of griots in the societies in which he traveled" (96).

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[49] In *Griots and Griottes*, Thomas Hale provides some of these accounts that appear beyond the Mande region to include Mauritania, Senegal and the Gambia.

Surprisingly, and in contrast to Park's account, the advent of French colonialism in the late 1800s brought only sparse documentation of griots. Accounts of these bards were rare and, often, were subsumed in colonial administrative reports that were more interested in reporting on the economic and political development of a region than its people and culture. This was true for the colonial records on the Mande region I found in Koulouba, the National Archives in Bamako, Mali's capital. A monograph looking at the political and social organization of Kita and its surrounding villages from 1889 to 1944 recognized the presence of griots but made no acknowledgement of their particular status in its census of the region: "Les griots sont encore plus rares: 50 Diabaté à Toroloro, 30 Koyaté et quelque Camara appartenant à la caste Funé ou Finira (inférieure aux griots)" ("Monographie"). Similarly, an early political report on Kangaba made no direct references to the griots but alluded to them briefly in Komakara, a village 18 kms away: "Komakara, village de griots cultivateurs très sympathiques" ("Rapport"). What is noted about the griots in both documents is not their status as oral speakers but an account of their numbers and their work beyond the use of words in order to render them recognizable and homogenous.

Government records such as these reveal the colonial administration's knowledge of the griots' existence. Little is known or recorded of the griots and their complex society in these official reports. For an in-depth understanding of the griots during the colonial period one has to look to early researchers such as Marcel Griaule, Germaine Dieterlen and later Solange de Ganay and their ethnographic work in Mali during the 1950s. Griaule, who is best known for his work studying the Dogon cosmogony in northern Mali, also extended his research to the Mande region where he teamed up with

Dieterlen, his student, and de Ganay to examine the history of the Mande. Particularly, he and his team collaborated on a mission out to Kangaba to study the Kambolon ceremony in 1955 – the septennial re-roofing of a scared hut that is known to guard the secrets of the griots as well as the Mande. Their work, appearing forty years later in de Ganay's book, *Le Sanctuaire Kamablon de Kangaba: Histoire, Mythes, Peintures Pariétales et Cérémonies Septennales*,[50] developed the pioneering ethnographic approach that Griaule used in his study of the Dogon cosmogony on the Mande to uncover their beliefs and practices. However, the research was fraught with a colonial bias that paralleled the attitude of the French administration at this time. Walter E. A. van Beek and Jan Jansen reveal the colonial approach years later in their review of Griaule and de Ganay's work in Kangaba. Comparing their mission to that of a military campaign, van Beek and Jansen note:

> L'étude ethnographique enterprise par S. de Ganay reflète les présupposés de M. Griaule . . . . La civilisation étrangère est vue comme une forteresse qui doit être franchie par une équipe de spécialistes. Dans ce projet on parle de l'ingérence dans la vie de l'autre. L'étranger Dogon ou Mandingue, est l'adversaire puisqu'il essaie de garder ses informations, d'empêcher l'ethnographe d'avoir accès aux données les plus intéressantes et surtout de sauvegarder les secrets tribaux (371).

What van Beek and Jansen highlight in their observation is the pioneering technique adopted by the Griaule research team. Yet in their emphasis, they show its problematic treatment of the Mande culture as "une forteresse" and the Dogon or Mandingue as "l'adversaire." Hints of colonial bias are clear in these remarks and show the pervasive reach of colonialism to the Mande, including the griots.

Indeed, griots were equally affected by the practice of colonialism despite the

[50] Solange de Ganay. *Le Sanctuaire Kamablon de Kangaba: Histoire, Mythes, Peintures, Pariétales et Cérémonies Septennales*. France: Editions Nouvelles du Sud, 1995.

scant attention given to them by the French administration. Like most Malians, griots experienced changes brought on by colonialism that moved them from their rural existence to a more visible urban one. One legacy of the colonial administration was the change to the rural infrastructures seen in the reorganization and developments of villages, *arrondissements* and *cercles*. Creations of these new sites led many Malians to migrate to larger urban areas to improve their lives and engage in a metropolitan. Griots were among a large number of Malians who traveled to towns and cities to seek fortune and fame for themselves. Today, the large presence of griots in a large city such as the capital Bamako is not unusual. They are visible, practicing their craft and being seen and heard widely by the public.

The effects of Mali's infrastructure reorganization carry enduring effects for the griots. An immediate result of the griots' expanded audience is a change to the patron/griot relationship that the griot Balla Fesseka noted in the *Soundjata* epic and Ibn Battuta confirmed in his first person account. Patrons of the griots are now no longer rulers but politicians and the audience is not the village but often the entire country. Such was the case in the election of Modibo Keïta, Mali's first post-independence leader. Griots supported their candidate with songs that not only sang the praises of Keïta but also reminded Malians of his connection to the country's illustrious thirteenth century ruler, Soundjata. The special relationship between griots and the Keïta surname recalls the former connection between a ruler and his griot from the *Soundjata* epic. The case of Modibo Keïta is an exceptional one; yet, it highlights how patrons, be they politicians or businessmen, are highly desired by griots since they are the means for them to attain the fame and fortune they seek in the larger urban areas.

The griots' quest for fortune and fame in the cities also has a large impact on their craft. Another remarkable effect is the change to their singing repertoire, described succinctly in the opening line of this chapter: All griots are artists but not all artists are griots. Both griots and artists engage in the practice of singing; however, as artists, griots draw on their repertoire of songs and stories to sing while some also play instruments. Artists, on the other hand, perform and play instruments but lack the lineage that enables them to sing as griots and, thus, remain mere singers. Two examples showcasing the artist/griot distinction are seen with the artists Toumani Diabaté and Salif Keïta, both known international stars. Diabaté, who carries one of the most common griot names, embodies both the griot and artist title while Keïta, who belongs to one of the most famous noble lineages, is only seen as an artist. Fodé Diabaté, the *représentant du chef des griots* in Kita, confirmed this distinction to me when he emphasized that one is born a griot and follows the familial customs passed down from one generation to the next. Everyone else is an artist who trains to perform (Interview July 7, 2004).

The surname of each artist – Diabaté and Keïta – signals that they each hold a particular position in Mande society. The strict lines between an artist and griot indicate an unwavering change to the definition of a griot since it is still intrinsically tied to the Mande tripartite social structure. Yet, changes are noticeable for both the *horon* (noble) and griot if one looks closer. The success of Keïta, a noble by birth, shows that he has "crossed-over" and adopted a profession that is clearly not a part of his lineage. Not everyone (including his family) agreed with his choice, but Keïta's international success proves a wider acceptance within and beyond Mali. Similarly, the frequent cases of griots becoming artists prove that the strict lines of the Mande tripartite social structure are

more fluid in practice. Diabaté is better known as an artist than a griot. His fame rests on his talent playing the kora and not his singing, which he leaves to other artists. Thus, while roles in the Mande tripartite structure prevail, they are also easily worked around.

The evolution of griots to artists stems as much from the change to their singing repertoire as it is from the democratization and modernization occurring in Mali. Aside from the reorganization of Mali's infrastructure, another significant move that reflects Mali's step toward a democratic rule is the widening accessibility of radio to Malians in urban and rural areas. Since the late 1980s, Mali has been undergoing a privatization of its airwaves, beginning and occurring ironically under the dictatorial regime of Moussa Trauré. Griots have taken advantage of the multiplying radio outlets and the lacuna it created in both cities and villages throughout Mali to reengage with their audience and broaden their traditional role as singers of praises and oral epics to that of popular songs.[51] As a result, in the past twenty years, many griots have attained superstar status from their singing due to the radio airplay of their songs. Griots have, in effect, become

[51] Studies of radio in Mali are emerging. Dorothea Shultz's dissertation"Praise in Times of Disenchantment: Griots, Radios, and the Politics of Communication in Mali" (1996) addresses the influences of radio on the griots' craft; while Craig Tower's research on "Media Savvy in Mali: Listening to FM Radio in Koutiala" (2007) looks at the social integration of FM technology and broadcast practices in Mali. He argues that FM is a resource in linking audiences and stations in three main ways. First, audiences and broadcasters are linked not only through broadcast programming (listening to the radio) but also through messaging practices which bring audience members physically to stations to send messages, and attract listeners who might otherwise be uninterested in radio broadcasts by serving as a source of news about others in their direct social network. Second, FM radio stations engage in political infighting to mobilize faithful listeners and demonstrate their power in local patronage systems. Third, FM stations carefully balance the cultural representations in their programming to satisfy minority audiences, while directing the bulk of their programming to urban, cosmopolitan listeners who are the most likely to send messages over the airwaves and otherwise contribute station budgets. FM stations in Mali don't match other models of FM broadcasting (community radio, pirate radio, educational radio, etc) but because of cultural and technological considerations attain a close integration with their audience. Both studies consider the use and effect of radio in Mali's overall development as a democracy.

artists, singers of popular songs; while radio has provided them with a medium previously absent to enlarge their audience base within and beyond the country.

The proliferation of griots as artists supported by Mali's path toward democracy and modernization has, in turn, created a backlash against these bards. Griots who become artists often lack the training in the oral epics or the genealogy of a family that makes them great orators, well known and respected for their knowledge. Seen as artists, griots are frequently accused by *horon* of neglecting their craft for the opportunity to gain fame and fortune with their performance of mainstream songs. Yet, the desire for fame and fortune not only affects griots who are artists but also ones who remain faithful to their craft. For these non-artist griots who sing the praises of others for money, they engage in *griotisme*, a practice viewed with both disdain and resentment by the *horon*. The practice of *griotisme* among griots who, similar to the artists who lack traditional training, has given voice to an anti-*griotisme* sentiment that is reflected in the second viewpoint noted in the introduction: Griots are *parasites sociaux* and *pesanteurs de la société*. The sentiment behind these words speaks not to the griots themselves but to their practice of living off of their words. In both cases, griots sing popular songs or praises in order to extract money from their audience. Such a strong criticism of the griot and artist-griot reveals an underlying frustration by *horon* and other groups toward the griots. Yet, the frustration is also recognition of the tripartite caste structure in the Mande culture that allows griots to engage in their craft. Griots still belong to the *nyamakala* group despite the modifications that have occurred to their profession.

Breaking Down the Griot as the First Step to *Nyama* and *Nyamakala*

The possession of *nyama* and status of *nyamakala* is the one singular fact that remains constant amidst the widening acceptance of artists such as T. Diabaté and S. Keïta. One cannot escape a discussion of the griots without referring to their place in the Mande tripartite caste structure. It also recalls Park's earlier distinction between the Bambara words *jeli* and *funé*. Park's observation is key to understanding the origin of the griots and the complex Mande social structure to which they belong – two points that also relate to the current debate on griots and their role in Mali today.

To comprehend the origin of griots, one needs to look at the word griot or *jeli* and its comparison to *funé*. In Bambara, the word *jeli* refers to an oral storyteller and singer. *Funé*, on the other hand, encompasses certain characteristic of a *jeli* but refers more specifically to an Islamic singer. Due to the specific role it references, the translation for *funé* carries less ambiguities than *jeli*, which is translated generally as griot. Mande scholars who use *jeli* in their works do so without much reservation or hesitation about its reference to an oral speaker, storyteller and singer. However, the translation of *jeli* into griot brings more discussion than consensus among its users based on the mysterious etymology of the latter. The most common explanation relates it to the early French word *guiriot* that first appeared in 1637, which was subsequently transformed into griot. Others speculate that the word derives from the Fulbe *gawlo*, the Wolof *guewel* or even the Portuguese *criado* and the Spanish *guirigay*. Still others suggest a Berber origin in the Hassaniya Arabic dialect of the word *iggio* and even Arabic in the term *qawal* that bears similarities to the Wolof *guewel*. Hale too offers his own interpretation that draws on the "Ghana empire by way of the slave trade through Spanish to Berber" (362). His reading places the origin of griot in Africa as it travels and changes along this route and within

these different groups. These varied and disparate theories of the word griot leave no version as the definitive one since they are all quite plausible, which only adds to the uncertainties that surround it.

As mysterious as its origin, the use of "griot" today is open to another interpretation. In my conversations with both griots and local researchers during my fieldwork, I received a new definition of the word. Madou Kouyaté, a griot in Kita, explains griot to mean all of the *nyamakala* professions, from the ironsmith to the leathermaker, and not simply the oral storyteller or praise singer that is the general use of the term (Interview March 28, 2006). Its meaning is a more generalized one that encompasses the entire *nyamakala* caste. Seydou Camara, my research affiliate, confirms Kouyaté's definition, noting that griot is, in fact, a generic term that refers to all four castes (Interview May 5, 2006). Yet, even among its many interpretations, the ambiguous origin of the word has not deterred its free and open adoption among Mande scholars, musicians and even the griot themselves. The word also helps to explain the Mande social structure from which it comes.

The Mande Tripartite Caste Structure

The Undeniable *Nyama* and *Nyamakala*

To understand the social position griots hold in the Mande culture, one must be aware of *nyama*, a term that cannot be concisely defined since it describes both the Mande's belief in the supernatural and the caste structure in which it appears. Often, *nyama* is seen as an occult power or force found in the words that the griots utilize. When griots speak, they are drawing upon *nyama* to perform their speech. *Nyama*, in turn, facilitates their use of words by giving them the power to speak. It is an omniscient

power or force that cannot be seen or heard but clearly evident in the griots' engagement with words. The use of words is an essential part of the griots' craft because it relates directly to their membership in *nyamakala*, a caste group in the Mande tripartite social structure that griots belong to base on their employment and possession of *nyama*.

Similarly, *nyamakala* holds also a variety of meanings that do not always equal the sum of its parts. In their study, Charles Bird, Martha Kendall and Kalilou Tera uncover many definitions for *nyama* and *kala*. Principally, *nyama* means "natural force" and *kala* indicates "stick". Additionally, *nyama* refers to evil or satanic, morally neutral, dangerous, polluting, energizing, animating and necessary for action; while *kala* also points to an antidote for evil, remedy against pollution, and antidote for poison or remedy for garbage (Bird, Kendall and Tera 30). Based on these varied associations, Bird, Kendall and Tera contend that *nyamakala* is regionally based, found mostly in the eastern dialect of Mandekan[52]—Bambara, Malinké and Dyula—that reflects its different uses not only from region to region but also from speaker to speaker (32). The particular use of *nyamakala* in the Mande culture supports Bird, Kendall and Tera's account of the term.

Who the *nyamakala* are becomes clearer when one compares them to two other groups in the tripartite structure: the *horon* (nobles) and the *jon* (slaves). The *horon* are the dominant group who are mostly farmers and warriors. Their position in the Mande social structure is not always stable for *horon* can become slaves through warfare. Unlike the *horon* and *jon*, *nyamakala*, cannot become nobles or be reduced to slaves because they are an endogamous group; their status remains fixed. *Jon*, on the other hand, can be

[52] The use of Mandekan here is a mixture of both French and Bambara. Mande is the French and English word that describes the Mande. Kan, in Bambara, refers to languages in general. Thus Mandekan is the disperse group of languages that stem from the Mande.

released from their slave status since they can buy their freedom through their work; they are the most prevalent of the three groups. Due to this last reason, some view the *jon* as a separate class because of their ability to move into both the *horon* and *nyamakala* positions. Bréhima Béridogo proposes that *jon* do not represent a separate group but, rather, a social class: ". . .nous estimons que les esclaves ne constituent pas une caste mais une classe sociale ce que fait qu'ils insèrent mieux dans le système des ordres. . . . En principe, le régime des castes est caractérisé par l'immobilité et le phénomène des classes sociales par la mobilité" (15). Béridogo's reading emphasizes the mobility of the *jon*, seeing them less as a formal group and more as an interchangeable one who exists simply to become *horon* or *nyamakala*. While this interpretation offers another insight into the *jon*, it undermines the tripartite caste structure that requires the existence of all three groups. Viewing the *jon* as a separate class dismantles the tripartite of the Mande caste structure and overlooks other essential characteristics of these three groups, particularly for the *nyamakala*.

For instance, the endogamous character of the *nyamakala* presents social boundaries for them that appear most prominent in their practice of marriage. Intermarrying and sexual relations between the *horon/jon* and the *nyamakala* are generally forbidden since marriages normally take place within a group. It is a practice that continues presently despite what Tal Tamir sees as contacts with the West and the development of the modern sector that affects the traditional role of reach group. Intermarrying between the *nyamakala* and *horon/jon* is a rare practice. This fact remains even in light of the weakening importance that status plays when members of the

nyamakala acquire an education and move into government positions from which they effectively wield power over the nobles (Tamir 231).

Unlike social status, the work embedded in each category is quite interchangeable due to the practical and developing needs of each respective group. For the *horon* and the *jon*, their positions equate them easily with farming. Farming, however, is not exclusive to these two castes; the *nyamakala* are also allowed to farm and have obtained a considerable portion of their livelihood from this source (Tamir 225). On the other hand, work involving natural elements such as wood, leather and iron, are not exclusive to the *nyamakala*. *Horon* and *jon* are able to engage in these crafts if it does not move beyond what is necessary. For example, a *horon* can perform the task of woodwork to build a house if such an activity does not move beyond the construction of the home for his livelihood.

Increasingly, the question of what is necessity becomes more and more difficult to justify as *horon* in Mali's majors cities such as Bamako, Skiasso and Segou are turning to lucrative crafts (jewelry and woodcarving) typically restricted to the *nyamakala* to earn a living for themselves (Tamir 231). Such a liberal borrowing of the *nyamakala's* crafts blurs the boundaries that mark the overlapping functions between these three groups. In this case, Tamir reasons that the use of Western-type goods and use of Western-type technique to perform these crafts (jewelry and woodcarving) are not restricted to any one status (232). Her emphasis on the "West," seen in a "Western" adoption of this practice to create "Western" cultural objects, removes the association of *nyama* with the craft and maintains each caste—from *nyamakala* to *horon* to *jon*—distinguishable from each other.

Yet, while Tamir's reference to the West upholds the caste structure in the Mande tripartite system, her explanation does not avoid the slippage created by such a borrowing of the *nyamakala's* crafts. The work that the *nyamakala* perform speaks strongly about their position as a caste, which, argue David Conrad and Barbara Frank, cannot be defined in terms of fixed hierarchy or predetermined relationships (11). For them, the understanding of *nyamakala* carries as many ambiguities as the people who are a part of this caste.[53] To understand the *nyamakala* is in large part to look at how they define themselves. Explains Conrad and Frank, "Only when we accept such contradictions and ambiguities implicit in the *nyamakala* perceptions of themselves and in how they are perceived by others, can we begin to understand the nature of their special status and attempt to construct a more dynamic model of their social history" (13). Conrad and Frank's assertion becomes even more pertinent in light of the changes to the griots' craft from the period of colonialism to modernization in Mali. Béridogo explains:

> "Il y a donc une diversification des activités socioprofessionnelles et leur ouverture de principe à toutes les couches sociales. Cette diversification se fera par le biais de l'école, de l'armée, des centres d'apprentissage, du compagnonnage et du salariat. . . . La colonisation a, aussi, introduit des types de travaux artisanaux, jusqu'à ici inconnus comme la conduite de véhicule à moteur, la couture, la coiffure, la boulangerie, un nouveau type de travail de forge (la menuiserie métallique), la réparation d'objets manufacturés (automobiles, montre, radio, etc). La production artisanale des hommes de castes inférieurs cédera progressivement du terrain aux produits manufacturés" (21).

[53] The ambiguities that Conrad and Frank see in the definition of *nyamakala* extend to their views about caste, a word generally imbued with the notion of an Indian caste structure that separates groups based strictly on a hierarchy. Seeing little parallels between the Indian and Mande understanding of caste in their social structure, both Conrad and Frank eschew the use of caste and replace it with class. While acknowledging Conrad's and Frank's preference for class rather than caste, I recognize the use of the latter as a part of the Mande tripartite social structure based on the three major characteristics highlighted in this section and also noted by Barbara Hoffman: ranking, endogamy and purity/pollution. These three characteristics help to distinguish the qualities of the Mande tripartite caste structure, which includes the *horonw*, *jonw* and *nyamakala*.

Who the *nyamakala* are and how they define themselves are best seen in their crafts. The *nyamakala* work with organic elements that are tied to balancing the earth's composition. Jansen views them as those who employ the occult or supernatural power *nyama*. Griots have often been mentioned as a member of this category, but they are not the only ones. Others who belong to this caste category include blacksmith, weavers and leatherworkers. "Most frequent caste occupations," explains Tamir, "are [associated with] metalworking, music-making, and entertainment, leather working and woodworking (224). There is also a caste of women who exclusively repair calabashes. S. Camara offers a similar breakdown of the *nyamakala*, which he lists under four ranked subcategories: *namu* (blacksmith); *jeli* (griots); *funé* (Islamic praise singer); and *garanke* (leatherworker) (Interview June 11, 2004). S. Camara's list separates the *jeli* from the *funé*, giving them each a separate category even though they share some overlapping functions as singers.

Engendered in the caste category is also a rank system. Both S. Camara and Tamir touch upon this point in their discussion. Explains Tamir, "Blacksmiths and epic bards have the highest rank. Leatherworkers have a low status. [The] Bambara spontaneously state that members of a certain social category are "better' or 'worse' than those of another" (230). Furthermore, the Fulani, Tukulor and Manding represent what Tamari dubs as "quasi-caste." These are the people (fishermen, boatmen) who hold an intermediate status between the caste and the nobles. "All these groups show a marked tendency towards endogamy, but are not excluded (even in principle) from marrying members of other groups," says Tamir (231). In his subcategories, S. Camara ranks them

according to the list he offers above, placing the blacksmith on top and the leather worker at the bottom. However, he notes that the list can also be read in both directions, depending on the criteria that one uses for the ranking (Interview June 11, 2004).

For Jansen, an exception to the classification mentioned above is the hunters who, although they hold *nyama*, are not *nyamakala*. Hunters work in the wilderness and do not disrupt the social harmony of the natural world with their peripatetic work. By comparison, the other members (metal, wood and leather workers) in this caste category work in the village and are positioned differently than the hunters who are constantly wandering (Jansen 6). Jansen's description of *nyamakalaw* members highlights not only the transformation process that their work entails but also the physical exterior and interior spaces in which it occurs.

Indeed, both notions of transformation and space are essential to comprehend how *nyama* functions since it is upon these very premises that the natural elements are put into use. For instance:

> The male blacksmith transforms ore into iron, and then turns it into tools; the blacksmith works with wood and turns it into furniture; the female blacksmith works with clay and turns it into pots and household utensil; the leatherworker turns the skins of beast in clothing; . . . The weavers works with animal products, turning them into cloth; the griot as well as the *funé* (Islamic praise singer) create social identities for people by relating them to the past via ancestors. . . . Hunters liberate *nyama* by killing game and transforming it into food, but this happens outside of the village (*The Griot's Craft* 6-7).

In all of these activities, *nyamakala* members work with raw and natural materials (ore, wood, clay and leather) to transform them into cultural objects (iron, furniture, pots and clothing) that are used in everyday life. Such a process takes what is in "nature" and transforms it into "culture" through a "liberation" of *nyama*. At the same time, the work

of *nyamakala* members moves from an exterior space to an interior one when the transformation between "nature" and "culture" occurs. This movement is not simply a physical one but also a symbolic one, as it relates to the liberation of *nyama*.

In light of the griots' craft, their use of words does not create or produce cultural objects that move them from one space to another similar to other *nyamakala* members. Rather, their work affects the social framework in which they and those around them exist. Jansen elaborates on this point when he explains the nature of *nyamakala* in general and the griots in particular:

> A *nyamakala* does not have 'an' ambivalent status: *nyamakala* status is assessed monovalently, but it changes in relation to the temperature of the situation. Since radical change is never appreciated, griots are supposed to guide the process of heating and cooling down. . . . Identities are constructed in interaction, therefore the strategies *nyamakala* use to shape social interaction demand further analysis (9).

In this case, the words that the griots speak continue to move between an interior and exterior space because the "the crucial features of *nyamakalaw* [in their craft] are therefore related to social transformation: to social being, on the one hand, and to culture tools, on the other" (Jansen 7). For the griots, the spoken word originates in an internal mode (non-spoken speech) that moves to an external one (spoken speech). The nature of their speech and their speaking illustrate the intrinsic relationship between griots and their words, which demonstrates the overall understanding of *nyama* and *nyamakala*.

What has Changed and Remained Unchanged

From this integral view of the griot's relationship with words based the notion of *nyama* and their membership in *nyamakala*, little and a lot has changed for them. Griots still use words as a part of their craft, which is as much a birthright bestowed on them as

an obligation to fulfill. Of course, how griots employ words in the practice of their craft has been slightly altered through what Ong argued earlier as the "technologizing of words." Griots have available to them radio and, to an extent, writing tools, that abet their role as public speakers and singers. As a result, the view of griots today is one that acknowledges both points with a grudging acceptance. One cannot overlook the Mande tripartite social structure in which griots belong, allowing them to live or work exclusively on words; at the same time, a feeling of resentment begins to appear among the *horon* toward the griots based on this very undeniable fact. Changes to the griot's craft have had minor effects on the bards since they are still able to rely on their words. Non-caste groups, especially the *horon*, see the practice of the griot's craft less beneficial and more of a drain on their pockets since they are often the unwilling sponsors of the griots; however, they accept it. Such was the environment of the Mande and its oral tradition that I encountered during my fieldwork; it reflected the paradox for the griots showing how things have changed and remained unchanged for them. Before delving into my fieldwork, I look first at the novels to begin the discussion on the link between orality and the novel represented through the figure of the griot and framed within my reading of orality as a text.

Chapter Three

Griot's Speech in the Novels

Diverging Perspectives on the Adoption of the Griot's Speech: Original or Plagiarized?

Looking at the link between orality and the novel, one pertinent question constantly appears: Can a written text that draws on orality ever be seen as an original work? Orality as a text lends itself to borrowing; however, read within the context of the novel, it becomes seen as plagiarism. The shift from an oral mode to a written one significantly alters not only what one studies but also how one looks at it. This leads one to ask: "Can one read a written text in the same manner as one that has been recited orally?" Concerns about language and meaning are less pressing in orality than they are in writing. Instead, ones about originality and authenticity appear more prominently and point to questions about the production of the text rather than its interpretation. These questions and issues frame my discussion of the novels in this chapter as I examine what has often been noted or "borrowed" between the two mediums: the griot's speech.

The nature of the griot's speech, characterized by the use of family praise, repetition, digression and various figures of speech (metaphor, simile, alliteration), makes it easy to translate from the oral to the written mode. Unfortunately, the likely adaptability of the griot's speech also exacerbates the contention of originality and authenticity that surrounds authors who imitate it in their writing. As a result, the adoption of the griot's speech in the novels opens itself more to speculation and further begets the question: How does one cite an oral source? Should authors mention the griot from whom they draw their speech as much as the oral epic that they use in their novels?

Or, does the oral mode of the griot's speech render it impossible if not impractical to refer to as an original source? The difficulty that one encounters in dealing with the citation of an oral source in a written work brings up a key point – plagiarism – in contrast to originality and authenticity. How, then, does one view the griot's speech and its appropriation by an African author in the novel? Is it an original form of speech that subsequently renders the novel authentic by the author's adoption of it? Or, does the use of the griot's speech by an African author err on the side of plagiarism? In effect, what influence does the appropriation of the griot's speech hold on the perception of the novel and its author: original or plagiarized?

All of these questions concerning an original or authentic work call for a more concrete study of plagiarism to understand its implications on the use of the griot's speech in the novel as well as the authors behind them. To address these points—originality/authenticity and plagiarism—I will examine three works that use the griot's speech in distinct ways, showing the varying degrees in which this adoption as well as the text can be representative of an original rather than plagiarized work.

First, I will look at the adoption of the griot's speech by Yambo Ouologuem in his initial and only novel, *Le Devoir de Violence*. Ouologuem's use of the griot's speech is both an act of manipulation and destabilization; he draws on oral tradition and history to narrate his story, rendering it similar to a griot recounting a tale. Interspersed throughout his novel are sections that appear more narrative than narration; they follow a novelistic reading rather than the narrating voice of a griot. The switch between the two represents a break with the traditional use of the griot's speech that both manipulates and destabilizes it. Within my discussion on Ouologuem, I will also examine Marcel Griaule's study of

the Dogons, *Conversations with Ogotemmêli: An Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas*. Griaule's work is important because he unknowingly uses different aspects of the griot's speech in his research that offers another perspective on its adoption in written form. What Griaule achieves with this form of writing is an enriching body of information about the Dogons related to him first hand from the sage Ogotemmêli.

Second, I will move onward to D.T. Niane who draws very much on a traditional rendering of the griot's speech in his novel of the *Soundjata* epic. He does not play with this form of speech in his writing, which gives his narrative a simplistic style that both respects and privileges the griot's voice. Niane attributes his story to the words of the griot Mamadou Kouyaté who sits and recounts the epic to him. The difference between Ouologuem's, Griaule's and Niane's use of the griot's speech speaks very much to the versatility it holds when it moves from the oral mode to the written one. A closer examination will show how each author appropriates it accordingly to give their respective work—either novel or research—a distinctive read, all while drawing on the various characteristics of a griot speaking.

Background to Understanding an Outsider Among Outsiders

While much has been said about Yambo Ouologuem's *Le Devoir de Violence* and its innovative narrative structure based on the use of the griot's speech, I want to take a step back and look first at the novel's author for a closer study of Ouologuem will provide a better understanding of both the narrative and the narrator, especially in light of the plagiarism charges surrounding his book.

The representation of Ouologuem by critics and scholars who have either praised or criticized his novel has often lacked one important fact: his Dogon origin. In the debates that surround him and his novel, Ouologuem is either referenced as an African or Malian writer. While these titles are correct, they are also problematic because they do not fully represent who Ouologuem is. Marilyn Randall's reading of the plagiarism in Ouologuem's novel as a part of a "de-centered and dissolute self" makes no mention of his Dogon origin. Similarly, Eric Sellin's praise and later disappointment in the novel and of Ouologuem lack this one important fact. And while most critics list his winning of the Prix Renaudot, they tend to view this achievement bestowed on a *Malian* writer for his compelling *African* novel. Indeed, few, with the exception of Christopher Wise, mention his Dogon origins. The omission of this important fact does not allow for the nuanced reading of Ouologuem and his writing that its inclusion offers. Ouologuem is Dogon. Understanding who the Dogons are provides an essential background to knowing who Ouologuem is, as an African, Malian and writer.

The Dogons are one of the many ethnic groups (Bambara, Bobo, Fulani, Songhrai, Senufo) found in Mali. Living throughout the rocky terrain of the Bandiagara cliffs in the dry and hot Sahelian region of Mali, they are better able to maintain their traditional lifestyles than other ethnic groups due to their difficult accessibility to the outside on the one hand and the impenetrability of the world to them on the other hand.[54] As a result, they stand apart from other ethnic groups by their ability to live relatively

[54] This isolation—and relative tranquility—that the Dogons have experienced is slowly changing with the vast number of tourists who travel to the Dogon region every year. Hiking the Dogon cliffs or visiting a Dogon village remains one of the most popular tourist destinations in Mali, an attraction promoted by both the Minister of Tourism and, to some extent, the Dogons themselves.

unaffected by exterior influences. With the arrival of French colonialism, the Dogons become the outsiders of outsiders, separated from other ethnic groups as well as the French.

The first in-depth study of the Dogons by a western scholar appeared in 1948 with *Conversations with Ogotemmêli* by Marcel Griaule. Moving away from the colonial works of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl—*The Notebooks on Primitive Mentality* [55] — and Father Placide Tempels—*Bantu Philosophy* [56] —Griaule offers a glimpse into the beliefs of this group known as Dogon cosmogony. His work delves into the daily lives of the Dogons and paints a picture of an intricate society that stands in stark contrast to the primitive ones Lévy-Bruhl and Father Tempels show in their own works. Griaule first arrived in the Dogon region in 1935 and continued to visit and perform research in this area from this year until 1956, with an unplanned break from 1939 to 1945 due to World War II. The extended time that Griaule spent in the Dogon region allowed him to form a trusting relationship with the villagers, which enabled him to interview the sage Ogotemmêli and discover the philosophy underlying the Dogon cosmogony. In this respect, Griaule's research is notable on two points: one, the length of time he spent in the Dogon region from which his work is based; and two, the secondary role he played as a researcher to

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[55] In his work, Lévy-Bruhl argues the difference between Western and non-Western manner of thinking, noting: Whereas the most important concepts in Western culture are learned primarily in academic settings and have a long history of intellectual development, the most important in non-Western cultures are typically learned in rites and rituals that involve intense affective and psychomotor experiences. Such concepts are mystical rather intellectual and refer to forces, actions and entities that are real, but imperceptible to the senses (40).

[56] Father Tempels's study of the Bantu is a more judicious approach to looking at African ontology. Key in his reading is the notion of a *vital force*. It is here that Tempels sees the fundamental difference between the Western approach to the question of ontology and that of the Bantu: "We can conceive the transcendental notion of "being" by separating it from its attributes, "force," but the Bantu cannot. "Force" in his thought is a necessary element in "being," and the concept "force" is inseparable from the definition of "being." There is no idea among Bantu of "being" divorced form the idea of "force" without the element "force, "being" cannot be conceived" (67).

his subject, the sage Ogotemmêli.[57]

What Griaule uncovered in his research was a vast and complex understanding of the Dogons' origins based on a mythic world system between heaven and earth. One learns that the birth of the Dogons began with the one God, Amman, whose intercourse with the earth mother created the single birth of the jackal and the twin birth of the spirits Nummo. The jackal, in his incestuous copulation with the earth mother, begets the single birth of man that the twin spirits Nummo correct with their creation of woman. Both man and woman will come to bore the first two children in a series of eight who are to become the ancestors of the Dogon people. Griaule explains it similarly:

> Here, he reflected, is a creator God spoiling his first creation; restoration is effected by the excision of the earth, and then by the birth of a pair of spirits, inventive beings who construct the world and bring to it the first spoken words; an incestuous act destroys the created order, and jeopardizes the principle of twin-births. Order is restored by the creation of a pair of human beings, and twin births are replaced by dual souls (23).

The information Griaule gathers from Ogotemmêli begins with a familiar creationist origin. However, in the ensuing chapters, details about the Dogon cosmogony become more complicated and, at times, a bit esoteric.

In one scene, Ogotemmêli attempts to illustrate verbally to the European character the piece of celestial earth that one of the ancestors stood on when he came down from Heaven. When this fails, he tries again by offering a model of such a construction in a woven basket. The European listens patiently, even though he is clearly confused by the description of its measurement given by Ogotemmêli. Frequently, in his conversations with the sage, a sense of patience permeates, as he, the European, must wait for the latter

[57] The term sage should not be confused with griot for Ogotemmêli's exchanges with Griaule about the Dogon cosmogony is not the passing of an oral tradition, as in the case of a griot relating tales and stories to his audience. Rather Griaule's conversations with Ogotemmêli are exactly that – conversations.

to slowly explain what he means to the former. “It was a piece of celestial earth,” says Ogotemmêli about the portion of Heaven that an ancestor stood on. “A thick piece?” questions the European. (Griaule 32). “Yes! As thick as a house. It was ten cubits high with stairs on each side facing the four cardinal points” (Griaule 32). The narration goes on to note how “he [the European] kept returning to this conception in order to get it quite clear, while the other [Ogotemmêli], patiently groping in the darkness which enveloped him, sought for fresh details” (Griaule 32). The response that the European finally receives is not a verbal but visual one when Ogotemmêli pulls out another old woven basket that had been stored away to show the researcher his definitive model of the celestial earth. “Its only use now is to put chickens in,” he concludes bashfully (Griaule 34).

Griaule continues to collect details about the Dogon cosmogony with other similar depictions of the exchanges between the European and Ogotemmêli. As he moves along, a distinguishing mark comes to light about his account: Griaule is not the primary speaker. Rather, he gives voice to the Dogon cosmogony and the person who relates it: Ogotemmêli. In her preface, Germaine Dieterlen describes Griaule’s role as someone who was summon to the venerable individual’s [Ogotemmêli] house in which the latter “laid bare the framework of a world system, the knowledge of which will revolutionize all accepted ideas about the mentality of Africans and of primitive peoples in general” (Griaule 2). Dieterlen’s remarks provide a telling picture of what occurred between Griaule and Ogotemmêli during their interactions with each other. Griaule comes, sits and listens mostly while Ogotemmêli speaks freely about the Dogon cosmogony. He plays a secondary role to Ogotemmêli who, in effect, becomes the narrator. After their

sessions together, Griaule appears to take a primary role when he transcribes the spoken word of Ogotemmêli into a written narrative; but, here, he effaces himself completely and re-represents himself as a third person witness—the European, the white man, the Nazarene—who observes Ogotemmêli. Again, Griaule continues to place himself in a secondary position to Ogotemmêli in his reinterpretation of himself in third person. His writing of a third person helps to explain the appearance of the European character in the passage cited above.

Unbeknownst to Griaule, the style that he adopts is characteristic of the interaction that occurs between a griot and his interlocutor. In this case, as a listener who asks questions interspersingly, Griaule embodies a comparable role to African authors in their exchanges with griots. He sits, he listens and he observes. Griaule encapsulates this role most in his transcription of these conversations when he no longer presents himself as a researcher, but a third person, known as the European. Griaule is no longer Griaule but another character who is able to relate what happens as both an outsider and an insider. The narration is about Griaule talking about himself while he is talking to Ogotemmêli about the Dogon cosmogony. As noted above in his reflections on the Dogon origins, Griaule does not mention himself doing this in first person but refers to himself in the third person pronoun "he," as in "Here, he reflected, . . ." (Griaule 23). In the previous sentences to these reflections, he describes himself in a similar manner: "The European, returning through the millet field, found himself wondering about the significance of all of these actions and counteractions, all these sudden jerks in the thought of myth" (Griaule 23). Griaule's portrayal as the European never ceases; he continues to view himself in third person in all of his interactions with Ogotemmêli.

For his part, Ogotemmêli's narrating voice reads similarly to a griot's speech. First, Ogotemmêli moves along slowly in his narrative as he is recounting an oral epic. In each of their exchanges, Ogotemmêli provides the European with bits and pieces about the Dogon cosmogony through short vignettes. The story of creation illustrates such an example; it is short in its narrative but ample in its description of what occurred between the God, Amman, the jackal and the twin spirits, Nummo. Subsequent details that the European receives about man's decendence to earth also relate to the origin story and help to paint a collective narrative of the Dogons. Second, Ogotemmêli pauses when he suspects someone close by listening. This occurs often when the slightest distractions from women, children and even animals cause the sage to stop his narrative. Sometimes, the noise from these distractions becomes too loud for either Ogotemmêli or the European to converse freely, causing the former to stop and fix the problem. During one of the exchanges, Ogotemmêli throws a piece of wood at a rooster who is crowing too closely and incessantly for him to speak to the European. Third, Ogotemmêli presents verbal as well as visual metaphors to the European. The viewing of not one but two baskets to depict the earth that Ogotemmêli describes is a fitting example of his verbal as well as his visual metaphors. These different instances of Ogotemmêli speaking are all parts of the griot's speech with its own uses of pause and various figures of speech, including metaphors. Again, it is Ogotemmêli who talks while the European mostly sits and listens, with a question posed from time to time.

In this respect, Ogotemmêli's narrative represents an original work that offers the readers direct access to the Dogon cosmogony. Ogotemmêli is not drawing on anyone else's words but his own. He is the oral source at the same time that he is the narrator.

Griaule maintains Ogotemmêli's voice throughout the narrative in the precedence that he gives to the former during their exchanges. Thus, the readers encounter the Dogon cosmogony first through Ogotemmêli's spoken words and not Griaule's interpretation of them as the European character. The European helps to facilitate Ogotemmêli's narrative of the Dogon cosmogony with his presence, albeit unobtrusive. His diminished role as an active participant openly enables Ogotemmêli and his recounting of the Dogon cosmogony to speak for itself.

At times, the European notices that Ogotemmêli's speaking is slow and interrupted due to his fear of the women and children overhearing him. These gaps (or pauses according to the griots' speech) contribute further to the originality of the narrative by adding a sense of realism to Ogotemmêli's description of the philosophy. In doing so, the readers find themselves alongside the European and Ogotemmêli in their exchange and, thus, receives a better understanding into the complexities of the Dogon cosmogony – known as much for its esoteric nature as it is for its realist presentation through the direct words of the sage.

As mysterious as the Dogon cosmogony appears, one can ascertain from the exchanges between the European and Ogotemmêli that Griaule accords it more to philosophical beliefs than oral tradition, even though the stories that the sage relates to the European can be easily interpreted as the passing of oral tales. The lack of reference to an oral tradition certainly opens the debate about the existence of one among the Dogons. However, to read the Dogon cosmogony simply in this manner would misinterpret Griaule's research and make claim to an oral tradition among the Dogons that has not clearly been established.

If not or rather than an oral tradition, I see the information that Ogotemmêli imparts to the European parallel to what Oruka Odera's discusses in his work, *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy*. Arguing what he calls philosophical sagacity, Odera defines it as the identification of the sages in each culture who use their insights and experience to critically assess and reflect upon the dissemination of conventional beliefs and practices. In this case, the sage is an important figure not only for the breadth of knowledge that he holds [58] but also for the individuality that he brings to this role. For, according to Odera, it is the individual teaching of the sage that speaks for the whole, which differs starkly from the traditional belief in a collective African view. Thus, the work and role that each sage performs presents a notion of individuality to the teaching of African culture that moves away from a community one

Manipulation of the Griot's Speech from an Outsider

Understanding the Dogon cosmogony through the lens of philosophical sagacity helps to explain the secrecy involved in Ogotemmêli's account of the philosophy since he is the only one who carries this knowledge. At the same time, it also reveals the mystery that still surrounds the Dogons. Not surprising, Ouologuem's life as a Dogon also represents such an enigma. Not much is known or written about Ouologuem's family or his background. It is only through a close friend that one even begins to know Ouologuem's origins. Wise interviews his friend, al-Hajj Sékou Tall, who gives a

[58] Most sages are known to be male. Odera does not mention female sages in his work; however, their absence does not mean that female sages do not exist. I view such an absence similar to that of griots. Early works on griots mostly focused on male ones. Now much, if not more, attention focuses on griottes and their work. Barbara Hoffman highlighted the lives and work of griottes when she trained to be one for her research on the *Griots at War: Conflict, Conciliation, and Caste in Mande* (2000).

background into Ouologuem's family. The Tall and Ouologuem family hold strong ties to each other that have endured for many generations. For this reason, Tall is able to speak for and about Ouologuem more as a family member than friend:

> Before our trip to Sevare, I was aware of several bonds that existed between the Tall and Ouologuem families, some secular, some religious, some personal. Time and history have united us within a single garment of destiny. Yambo Ouologuem, baptized as "Amadou" at his birth, is the child of Boukary Yambo Ouologuem, a Malian professor and former student at the Ecole Normale des Instituteurs of Katibougou, about fifty kilometers from Bamako. During his professional career Yambo's father served as director of the normal school in Sevare [14 kilometers from Mopti], which later was renamed the Lycée Hammadoun Dicko (after an important Malian figure). Boukary Ouologuem was considered a "light among lights" by his countrymen and the pride of the Dogon people.
>
> A childhood companion and longtime schoolmate, Boukary Yambo Ouologuem has always been my friend and brother, and he remains so even now after his death, for "death is only the beginning of Immortality." The mother of Yambo Ouologuem is named Aïssata Umar Karambé. Thus, Yambo Amadou Ouologuem comes from a family of animist on the side of his paternal grandparents, from who he received the name "Yambo." He also comes from a family of Muslims on the side of his maternal grandparents, as a descendant of Umar Karambé, the father of Aïssata, his mother. Moreover, he bears the name of his maternal uncle, Amadou Umar Karambé, a Malian army colonel. So, you see, Yambo Amadou Ouologuem is both a homonym for "Yambo," the name of his paternal grandfather, and for "Amadou," the name of his maternal uncle (Wise 233).

This background knowledge of Ouologuem as a Dogon and, moreover, an animist and Muslim, helps to explain why he stands apart from the other ethnic groups in Mali. And correspondingly, it also allows for a more nuanced reading into his adoption of the griot's speech in *Le Devoir de Violence*. Ouologuem's use of this form of communication in writing is an unfamiliar practice for him. As the figure of the griot is not found among the Dogons, the recounting of oral tradition – the griot's speech – is not a traditional form of speech for Ouologuem. Unlike Massa Makan Diabaté who holds direct ties to a griot

family or D.T. Niane who works directly with a griot, Ouologuem has little experience using the griot's speech.

Instead, in what is his adoption of the griot's speech, Ouologuem is not simply transcribing it from orality to writing but brings the oral form into the written one and appropriates it uniquely into his writing. Descriptions about his book have noted its oral nature, evident in the narrative structure, play with words and vivid description, which, unsurprisingly, are all characteristic of a griot speaking. William Hemminger concurs:

> There are, to be sure, qualities of orature in the work. The chronicle is regularly punctuated by interjections and oaths, as if the text were being spoken as the narrator comments—sarcastically, most often—on the tale. There is an urgency to the language of the text as well, as if the narrator were currently inspired to make large and sweeping statements in either Nakem and its leaders to illustrate these statements in hyperbole or litotes (161).

Hemminger's comment offers an apt description of Ouologuem's writing but does not consider how such similarities to orature can also work against it. I suggest that Ouologuem draws on the griot's speech as a tactic to inform his narrative, which, in turn, works simultaneously to manipulate and destabilize it in the written form. For this reason, Ouologuem's writing resists labeling for he builds a tension between orality and writing that highlights his play with the griot's speech.

Ouologuem's play with the griot's speech appears immediately in the first chapter, "The Legend of the Saïf." Here, he relates the historical kingdom of Nakem and recounts the lineage of the Saïf, the principle character, through an imitation of a griot chant. Begins Ouologuem: "Nos yeux boivent l'éclat du soleil, et, vaincus, s'étonnent de pleurer. Maschallah! Oua bismillah!… Un récit de l'aventure sanglante de la négraillle – honte aux hommes de rien! –tiendrait aisément dans la première moitié de ce siècle;" (9).

One can picture a griot speaking in this dramatic opening that includes an introduction to the story –"un récit de l'aventure sanglante de la négraillle" – and the exclamatory calls of "Maschallah! Oua bismillah!" that emphasize its oral nature. Such sweeping lines are characteristic of the griot's speech, especially the exclamatory calls. If not the ones of "Maschallah! Oua bismillah!" Ouologuem also uses simple remarks for these exclamatory calls. The description of the short reign of Saïf El Hilal, one of the sons, includes an interjection of "comble de disgrâce" that differs from the common Arabic benediction call (Ouologuem 14). By substituting one for the other, Ouologuem plays with the griot's speech. On the one hand, he guards the exclamatory note to these calls by placing them interpersingly throughout the narrative; on the other hand, he undermines its sweeping tone when he uses simple remarks to say them instead of the grandiose call to Allah. One can view these simple remarks carrying a sweeping tone when they are called out in such a manner; yet, they do not produce the same effect that "Maschallah! Oua bismillah!" or "Allah harmin katamadjo!" does.

Ouologuem continues his manipulation of the griot's speech by playing with its pauses and breaks seen in his use of ellipses. In the telling of the reign of Saïf Isaac al-Heit and the succession of his evil son, Saïf al-Haram, the narrative moves quickly, with some paragraphs ending with periods while others with ellipses. The last paragraph describing the end of the reign concludes with a call, "O temps! O moeurs. . ."; and the next paragraph begins, ". . . en 1545 donc, la noble racaille qui s'était fait une vocation de dominer, en l'abâtardissant, le peuple Nakem, connut la même situation qu'en 1532:" (Ouologuem 23). The ellipses between the two paragraphs show a continuation that occurs elsewhere, which the narrative is unable to elaborate further as it proceeds with

the next event. A lacuna, thus, appears in the narrative, leaving the readers to fill in the gap, or not. These gaps are reminiscent of the abrupt endings that griots utilize often in their performance that leaves their audience in a sense "hanging." Ouologuem, however, plays around with the griot's speech by drawing it out with the ellipses before continuing to the next event.

With the exclamatory calls and ellipses, Ouologuem also plays upon another aspect of the griot's speech: digressions. The calls and ellipses only mark a brief break from the narrative while other digressions appear longer and more descriptive. For instance, after the introduction of Nakem, the narrative continues with an unlikely proposition: "Ici, nous atteignons le degree critique au-delà duquel la tradition se perd dans la légende, et s'y engloutit; car les récits écrits font défaut et les versions des Anciens divergent de celles des griots, lesquelles s'oppsent à celles des chroniqueuers" (Ouologuem 11). Again, one can picture a griot speaking in this part as he pulls away from the narrative to question what occurs. Ouologuem uses these digressions as an opportunity to play with the griot's speech at the same time that he problematizes it with a self-inquiry into what it is saying.

In this case, Ouologuem not only undermines the griot's speech but also challenges the oral account of history that it relates. His questioning is quite different from a mere criticism of orality, as he states: "Mais il faut se rendre à l'évidence: ce passé –grandiose certes—ne vivait, somme toute, qu'à travers les historiens arabes et la tradition orale africaine que voici:" (14). For Ouologuem, it is not the oral mode of transmission that he considers problematic, but the history itself. He does not mention any one specific oral or written sources in these general reference, but one imagines that

the African oral tradition draws from the tales in Mali while the Arab history speaks to the chronicles of *Tarîkh el-Fettâch* and *Tarîkh es-Sudan*, also known as the Sudanese or Timbuktu chronicles. How reliable are histories that are drawn from these oral sources? The question is a key one that Ouologuem addresses in his inquiry of the oral history told through the griot's speech. Ironically, his inquiry is not very far from the ones that Ouologuem's critics pose about the originality of his novel in their investigation of the plagiarism charges surrounding it.

The publication of *Le Devoir de Violence* in 1968 issued in a new era of African fiction on the international scene. The novel was quickly hailed as "the first truly African novel" at the same time Ouologuem was praised by Western critiques (while lamented by African ones) for his stark portrayal of African violence and cruelty. Colonialists, especially European colonialists, were not the only evil characters who plundered and profited during the colonial years. The character of Saïf proved to be just as despicable, taking advantage of both the Africans and Europeans. Randall provides an overall summary of these critiques:

> Much of Ouologuem's success came from the explicitly indigenous –that is, "original" as both primitive and new—nature of the text. It is written largely in the oral storytelling style of the traditional "griots," it borrows heavily from traditional tales and folklore, is luridly savage in its depiction of violence and perverse sex, and responds in this way to the occidental taste for the exotic –the "real" Africa (536).

Indeed, it is what the critics believed to be the "original" and "real" representation of Africa that they found praiseworthy in their commendation of Ouologuem's novel. Such an emphasis, however, proved portentous later in the light of the plagiarism charge that first appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement*. An anonymous critic noted parallel passages to Graham Greene's *It's a Battlefield*; at the same time, suspicions of

similarities from Andre Schwarz-Bart's *Le Dernier des Juste* surfaced within the academic circle. At this point, critics and scholars alike began to question the originality of Ouologuem's novel, as charges of plagiarism continued to emerge.

Ouologuem's own responses to these charges unfolded slowly. First, he asserts that he did indeed place notations to *It's a Battlefield* and *Le Dernier des Juste* in his manuscript that his publisher, Édition du Seuil, excluded. The claim can only be verified between Ouologuem and his publisher, which the latter did not do. Second, he takes a less defensive stance and offers a more insightful reading of his novel for his critics. In his interview with the *Times Literary Supplement*, Ouologuem explains how his narrative is not "traditional" or "an African novel." Here, his description shows that Ouologuem recognizes his adoption and manipulation of the griot's speech in a manner that differentiates his novel from earlier African ones. Such an acknowledgement on Ouologuem's part did not draw as much criticism as his later one when he admits to looking to "international examples" for his novel. Here, his reference to "international examples" brings up the question of plagiarism. Why is Ouologuem taken to task for this latter point when his references to an oral and written source are both well maintained by him? Does an admission to the use of oral sources render his novel original, even though it is not "traditional" in the sense that he manipulates the griot's speech, while reference to a written source is simply an act of plagiarism? Why are his references to both the oral and written source not seen as plagiarism? In effect, how does one consider plagiarism in Ouologuem's case?

Contentions of plagiarism rest on tenuous grounds that have changed throughout the centuries. According to Randall: "In the twentieth century, plagiarism exists

simultaneously as a moral and legal offense – the first perpetuated against beliefs in the intellectual honesty and aesthetic values such as the uniqueness of the individual imagination, the second against property rights entailing the economic consequences (526). For Ouologuem, these offenses appear applicable when one views his novel on the international level that its fame and consequent fall demonstrated. However, a more fitting interpretation of plagiarism for Ouologuem is seen in the distinction that Randall underlines: "The accusation of plagiarism partly depends, for contemporary legal questions as for classical aesthetic ones, not on the textual fact of repetition, but on the author's presumed intention to conceal the act and thus to deceive" (527). Were the references to these oral and, especially, written sources a known act that Ouologuem attempted to hide? Again, Ouologuem admits, albeit later, that he made notations to these other novels in his manuscript that his publisher omitted. Unfortunately—and ironically—the claim cannot be substantiated since it becomes one's word (Ouologuem) over the other's word (the publisher). I believe, as I have argued, that Ouologuem did not intend to plagiarize the works that his critics accused him. Rather, the manipulation of the griot's speech that he affects in his novel renders it so that he achieves what Christopher Wise sees as a blurring of the line between what is original and what is copied (228).

To look at this point more closely, I want to examine a passage that has often been cited as an example of Ouologuem's plagiarism. In the opening paragraph of *Le Devoir de Violence*, Ouologuem writes:

> Nos yeux boivent l'éclat du soleil, et, vaincus, s'étonnent de pleurer. Maschallah! Oua bismillah!… Un récit de l'aventure sanglante de la négraillle –honte aux hommes de rien! –tiendrait aisément dans la première moitié de ce siècle; mais la veritable histoire des Négres commence beaucoup, beaucoup plus tôt, avec les

> Saïfs, en l'an 1202 de notre ère, dans l'Empire africain de Nakem, au Sud du Fezzan, bien après les conquêtes d'Okba ben Nafi el Fitri (9).

A similar passage from Andre Schwarz-Bart *Le Dernier des Justes* appears as:

> Nos yeux reçoivent la lumière d'étoiles mortes. Une biographie de mon ami Ernie tiendrait aisément dans le deuxième quart du XXe siècle; mais la véritable histoire d'Ernie Lévy commence très tôt, vers l'an mille de notre ère, dans la vieille cité anglicane de York. Plus précisément le 11 mars 1185 (1).

Both passages present the same sentiment for an opening to a grand narrative. They begin similarly with the eyes registering the light and include in the middle a turning point marked by the use of the word "but." However, beyond these similarities, the pace and description of each passage diverge. Schwarz-Bart's opening reads succinctly and moves quickly to the end with a precise date: March 11, 1185.

On the other hand, Ouologuem takes the time to illustrate how his narrative will start. In this manner, I suggest Ouologuem's adoption of the griot's speech speaks through description. The passage expresses thoroughly the brightness of the sun and the names given to the kingdom and its rulers. The descriptive quality of this opening scene pictures a griot speaking since the passage includes the call of "Maschallah! Oua bismillah!" and a digression, seen in the side commentary of "honte aux hommes de rien!" that is placed within the paragraph. Moreover, the double use of "beaucoup, beaucoup" recalls a repetition technique that griots employ in their performance for emphasis. Clearly, Ouologuem's reference to Schwarz-Bart's passage uses the author's passage to recreate his own in a manner that reproduces the griot's speech.

In this reading of Ouologuem's borrowing of Schwarz-Bart's opening to *Le Dernier des Justes*, the line between plagiarism and original is a blurry one, as Wise noted earlier. Certainly, similarities between Schwarz-Bart's and Ouologuem's are

discernible. Yet, can Ouologuem's reference to this passage be seen as plagiarism if he reinterprets and describes it for his own? What is original and what is plagiarized in this case?

The question continues to be asked with many differing and dissenting views. Seth Wolitz writes in support of Ouologuem while raising some provoking questions:

> Ouologuem is not longer an authentic African writer. He makes use of non-African sources, and what's worse, fails to alert the critics to his borrowing at the foot of the page. (Since when have Europeans novelists and dramatists declared their sources?) What, should an African novelist who is making use of a *non-African* genre, a *non-African* language, be deprived of the right to draw on European models, on literary techniques and motivations imitated from non-African sources? (131).

Wolitz's strident defense of Ouologuem touches on two key points that have circulated widely, albeit subtle, in the discussion on what Ouologuem refers to as his "international examples."

First, Wolitz refers to the constantly changing definition of plagiarism that writers—African and non-Africans—continue to struggle with in their work. Especially with the crossing of mediums between orality and writing and the borrowing of "literary techniques" that are often more challenged and altered than simply adopted, the question of plagiarism becomes less and less clear. Also, what constitutes as plagiarism has changed throughout the years, as Randall describes above, moving from a focus on the moral and legal offenses of the author to his or her intention. In Ouologuem's case, the question of plagiarism is constantly contrasted with original in the debate about his writing and its effect.

Second, Wolitz notes an underlying racism that persisted throughout the debate on Ouologuem's talent and the veracity of *Le Devoir de Violence*. Early praises for the novel

in publications such as *Le Monde*, *Newsweek* and *Time* were assuredly followed by a note that Ouologuem is a Malian or African writer. Writes *Le Monde* in its regular "Vient de paraître" column: "Yambo Ouologuem. *Le Devoir de Violence*. This half-historical, half-fictional novel about the penetration of the Whites into Africa, viewed from the African side, is the first work of a young Malian, accepted as a candidate in the École Normale Supéieure. . . ." (Wise 68). In later critiques of the novel, similar references were made to his origins as Malian or African. From the beginning, both Ouologuem's supporters and critics unfairly placed him in a binding situation where his success and failure continued to be based on one common denominator: his origin as a Malian or African writer.

Sellin exemplifies this form of critique in his reservations about Ouologuem's work:

> Ouologuem has committed a European faux-pas. Obviously, a man of some genius, Ouologuem must have known that he was violating accepted procedure. He made the grievous error of first hiding his methods and then trying to make light of them. He has also, by calculated use of material created by others—not in the tribal tradition but in the European market place of individuation—done a disservice to his fellow African writers (155).

The reservation that Sellin expresses in his critique of Ouologuem is as disappointing as his disappointment in the latter. Sellin's reference to Ouologuem's origin indirectly through his mention of other African writers is an unfair assessment of the author, particularly as he extends his critique of Ouologuem's actions to its possible consequent effects on these other authors. One cannot escape the mention of Ouologuem's origins as it is noted here dutifully. Sellin, however, is overreaching in his critique to base the success of other African writers on this one singular act that remains debatable.

Evidently, the focus on Ouologuem's origins cannot be detached from the debate on his novel. Ouologuem is supposed to write a novel that represents the "real" and "original" Africa using graphic and violent language based on his (general) "African" background. Thus, his use of oral sources is acceptable while his reference to written sources is clearly unacceptable; and his mixing of the two, seen in his manipulation of the griot's speech, is not only unacceptable but also largely misunderstood. It is the "original" and "real" found in this, "the first truly African novel" that the critics praised only to have these very words reflect their own shortcomings when the charges of plagiarism appeared. Randall speaks directly to this hypocrisy when she writes:

> In the same vein, its defenders maintain that the insistence on Africanness in its folkloric mode denies the essential reality of a contemporary Africa created by the assimilation of Western traditions imposed by those very colonial forces which continue to ghettoize the African by valorizing only tradition folklore. The irony, of course, is that the real Africa is precisely the one that the West rejects in the form of accusations of plagiarism (536-37).

The hypocrisy is inarguable when one looks at another work Ouologuem published shortly after his novel in 1969, *Lettre à la France négre*. In this collection of essays, Ouologuem addresses the issues he presents in the novel along with criticism toward the policies of many post-independent African states and, for some, their relationship to France. The essays, however, received disappointing reviews for its lack of "literariness," particularly in comparison to the novel. Upon this point, one sees an obvious contradiction in the reactions to both his novel and collection of essays: a novel that is criticized for its plagiarism is viewed to have more literary value than an original collection of essays that Ouologuem writes to address the very issues he raises in the *Le Devoir de Violence*. Clearly, it becomes the cliché catch 22 situation for Ouologuem

since the discussion about his plagiarism sees no apparent end. How does the reading of what is original or plagiarized affect "literariness" of a work?

I suggests that *Le Devoir de Violence* is not an act of plagiarism in the light that his critics see it; rather, it adopts and challenges the griot's speech to the point where it blurs the distinction between original and copied. What is an original or a borrowed source is intentionally confused in Ouologuem's destabilization of the griot's speech. His writing clearly displays this manipulation in his play with exclamatory calls, ellipses and digressions. Moreover, he builds a tension between the orality and writing in his questioning of the oral history that is related through the griot's speech. Sadly, his talent to achieve all of this has been easily overlooked with the focus centered mainly on the plagiarism charges against his novel.

A More Careful Adoption

Griot Speech by a Griot

Having examined Ouologuem's use of the griot's speech, the question becomes: How innovative is Ouologuem's employment of it compare to other novels by African authors who also adopt the griot's speech? Were the critics correct in their praises of his novel and its innovative narrative structure? To address these questions, I want to compare it to another use of the griot's speech by looking at D.T. Niane's novel of the Malian oral epic *Soundjata*.

Niane's transcription of this Mande epic comes from his collaboration with the griot Mamoudou Kouyaté. Like Ouologuem, Niane does not come from a griot background; however, these bards are not unfamiliar to him. He was born into a Tukolor family that settled in northern Guinea, a region where an enduring oral culture still exists.

Niane spent most of his childhood there and, again like Ouologuem, went to France to attend the university; he returned to Guinea after he completed his thesis at the university in Bordeaux. [59] After his return, Niane spent a few years working in various positions and cities throughout Guinea. He eventually settled in Conakry, working as a history teacher and then headmaster at the primary school. During this time, Niane met Kouyaté through an old school friend. Upon meeting Kouyaté, he found the griot "eager" and "open" and possessing "la verve" to recount the *Soundjata* epic to him (Bulman 243). These qualities facilitated the telling of the epic for both parties involved and enabled Kouyaté to relate the story to Niane in a series of sessions over several weeks.

Niane, in turn, conflates Kouyaté's oral account of the epic into a single seamless narrative that becomes his novel, *Soundjata; Ou, L'épopée Mandingue* (Bulman 243). Here, Niane draws on an oral source—Kouyaté—as Ouologuem does, when he sits and listens to Kouyaté relate the epic in order to write it down later. The borrowing in this case is well noted with Niane's acknowledgement of Kouyaté's contribution to the novel and of griots in general to the Mande culture. He explains: "Ce livre est plutôt l'oeuvre d'un obsur griot du village de Djeliba Koro dans la circonscription de Siguiri en Guinée. Je lui dois tout. Ma connaissance du pays malinké m'a permis d'apprécier hautement la science et le talent des griots traditionalists du Mandingue en matière d'Histoire" (5). Niane's gratitude to Kouyaté establishes from the start the significant role that the griot holds along with a recognition of the Mande oral tradition. Particularly, he distinguishes

[59] Niane also draws on Arabic and oral sources to inform his thesis, *Recherches sur L'Empire du Mali au Moyen Age*, which details the economy, politics and society of medieval Mali. His research for his thesis helped him to write *Soundjata*, as far as the "circumstantial and historical details" according to Bulman. Coincidently, the publication of the novel appeared at the same time that his thesis was published in a series of articles in 1975.

the influence of the Mande oral tradition in the rendering of the oral epic *Soundjata* into a novel. Although this is an obvious point –the novel after all is based on this well-known and often cited oral epic—it is, nonetheless, important to highlight since it also points out a key difference between Niane's and Ouologuem's work. In Niane's novel, the presence of a griot and the establishment of an oral tradition are apparent while both are absent in Ouologuem's novel.

The role of the griot is an essential one as Niane goes on to say: "Dans la société africaine bien hiérarchisée d'avant la colonisation, où chacun trouvait sa place, le griot nous apparaît comme l'un des membres les plus importants de cette société car c'est lui qui, à défaut d'archives, détenait les coutumes, les traditions et les principes de gouvernement des rois" (5-6). Niane's description of the griot's many responsibilities draws the link between the griot and his importance to the history of the Mande. Griots, in effect, are not only important to the continuation of oral epics but also history.

The link between the two is clearly demonstrated by Kouyaté in his role as a griot and his knowledge of Mande history through oral accounts. In his telling of Soundjata, the founder of the Mali Empire, to Niane, Kouyaté recounts an epic that holds both folkloric and historical elements. Niane's retelling of it provides a reading of *Soundjata* that is a fictional as well as a historical account of the beginning of the Mali Empire. Unlike Ouologuem, Niane does not question the veracity of this account by Kouyaté; he values the oral nature of his sources. Indeed, while Ouologuem works to destabilize the oral sources that he draws upon; Niane, on the contrary, relishes in them and, in effect, emphasizes the oral origin of his work. Stephen Bulman describes Niane's work as one that "marks a stylistic break with most earlier literary accounts of the epic: although

Niane [does] not reject the magical elements of the tradition, he [grounds] his narrative in a recognizable and believable historical content" (242).

Paradoxically, it is also on this very point that Niane is taken to task for by his critics. Again, Bulman explains: ". . . Niane [does not] openly philosophize about the African soul and African culture or eulogize the African past. Instead, the author assumes a direct and (perhaps disingenuously) simple style, leaving all generalizations to the griot whose words he is recording" (242). While Bulman's critique is a valid one, he is also (in his own way) being disingenuous in this assessment. He is correct in noting that Niane's voice does not appear as prominent as Kouyaté's in the narrative. Yet, to read this as an absence of Niane's involvement, "leaving all generalizations to the griot whose words he is recording" overlooks the primary collaboration between the author and the griot. Niane sits, listens and records the oral epic that Kouyaté recounts. Later, in his translation and transcription of it, Niane chooses to give voice to Kouyaté rather than overlapping it with his own. His choice recalls the one that Griaule also makes in the transcription of his exchanges with Ogotemmêli.

Undoubtedly, Niane privileges Kouyaté's role as a griot and, correspondingly, his voice in the telling of the *Soundjata* epic. His reason for placing such an emphasis on Kouyaté is due partly to the inadvertent favor given to writing over spoken words. The prominence of the written word over the oral one was a consequent effect of French rule, which brought along with it the beginning of "western" education under the auspices of colonial schools. As a result, the griots' role as guardians of history changed since their knowledge of historical events, passed down orally from one generation to the next, became questionable. Noting this change leads Niane to assert: "La parole des griots

traditionalists a droit à autre chose que du mépris" (6). He puts his words into action when he gives precedence to Kouyaté and his words in the rendering of *Soundjata* into novel form. [60]

Such privileging is evident from the start when Kouyaté has the "parole" even before the story begins. He spends the time not only giving a history of his own genealogy as a griot but also underlining the importance of his words. "Je tiens," he states, "ma science de mon père Djeli Kedian qui la tient aussi de son père; l'Histoire n'a pas de mystère pour nous. . . Ma parole est pure et dépouillé de tout mensonge; c'est la parole de mon père; c'est la parole du père de mon père" (Niane 9-10). The presence of Kouyaté's "parole" at the start of the novel is important for it serves to emphasize his knowledge of the epic and reminds the readers that it is the griot—due to his words—telling the story to Niane.

Niane continues to retain the griot's voice throughout his transcription of the epic. The first chapter notably begins with an address to the readers: "Écoutez donc, fils du Manding, enfants du peuple noir, écoutez ma parole, je vais vous entretenir de Soundjata, le père du Clair-Pays, . . ." (Niane 12). And it follows with a lengthy genealogy given of the Mande kings that is reminiscent of a griot praise song. Niane's adoption of the griot's speech in this case maintains the simplistic style that he chose at the beginning of the novel. The listing of the different kings and their successors moves accordingly without any digressions or repetition of names that were both evident in Ouologuem's use of the griot's speech. Thus, Lahilatoul Kalabi, the first black prince to complete the pilgrimage to Mecca, had two sons, Kalabi Bomba and Kalabil Dauman, the oldest who had Mamdai

[60] The irony here is not lost since Niane privileges Kouyaté's voice in the very written form that questions the latter's knowledge based on its oral nature.

Kani who then had four sons, and the list continues until the end when it arrives at Maghan Kon Fatta, the father of Soundjata.

While this form of narrative helps to maintain the griot's voice, it is soon lost in the novelistic rendering of the story. This aspect of the novel is similar to *Le Devoir de Violence* where the narration of the book is interspersed with the narrative. Like Ouologuem, Niane switches between the narrative voice of the griot and the narration of the story in third person. Immediately after the chapter on "Les Premiers Rois du Manding," where the genealogy of the Mande kings are listed, the following one, "La Femme-Buffle" loses the griot's voice and moves into a third person narration that begins the story. The chapter immediately jumps in and describes the rule of Maghan Kon Fatta and the events leading to Soundjata's ascent. As the third person narration of the story takes over, Kouyaté's voice recedes into the background. This change in narrative voice is marked by the inclusion of dialogue that appears between the characters. Rather than hear Kouyaté speaks, as one does in the beginning, dialogue now appears between characters.

The story of *Soundjata* proceeds accordingly in a third person narrative from the chapter "La Femme Buffle" until the end when Kouyaté's voice reappears with these closing words: "Hommes d'aujourd'hui, que vous êtes petits à côté de vos ancêtres, et petits par l'esprit car vous avez peine à saisir le sens de mes paroles"(Niane 152). The re-emergence of Kouyaté's voice marks another switch back to the griot speaking. Even with this change, the narrative reads without any discursive breaks that mark it with a simplistic style both noted and criticized by scholars such as Bulman. In looking at the overall narrative, one sees that Niane follows the epic from its oral form to the written

one without much play with the griot's speech. The switch between the narrative voice of Kouyaté and a third person moves along and does not challenge the readers as Ouologuem's complete destabilization of the griot's speech in *Le Devoir de Violence* does.

In addition, Niane makes use of one writing technique that Ouologuem does not: footnotes. Many of the footnotes that he employs help to explain the history of the region (Mande) and the people (Mandinka). His use of them reiterates the historical value of the *Soundjata* epic.[61] Again, while not completely based on historical fact, Niane's retelling of the legend of Soundjata speaks to an important historical figure and event in the history of the Mali Empire. The footnotes contribute to the simplistic style that Niane adopts in his transcription of the epic, both of which help to ease the readers into the changes from narrative voice of Kouyaté's to that of a third person as they both relate the history of the Mali Empire.

For this reason (and more), Niane's transcribed version has attained a canonical status compared to others.[62] Ralph Austen acknowledges this fact while noting that "most serious research into the *Sunjata* epic has occurred subsequent to the 1960 publication of Niane's text. . . ." (2). Thus, as he goes on to say, "[it] loses most of its claim to represent the 'authentic voice' of the Mande 'tradition" (2). Whether or not Niane claims an authentic voice to his transcription of the *Soundjata* epic appears tangential in light of the prominence he gives to Kouyaté's voice. Rather, the more

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[61] One can say that Niane's use of footnotes in *Soundjata* parallels his use of them in the writing of his thesis in which he also drew extensively on oral sources.

[62] These titles only represent a handful of the works done on Soundjata by scholars: Camara Laye, *Le Maître de Parole* (1978); Jan Jansen, *Epopée, Histoire, Société: le cas de Soundjata: Mali et Guinée* (2001); John William Johnson with the griot Fa-Digi Sisòkò, *The Epic of Son-Jara: a West African Tradition* (1986); Adam Konaré Ba, *Sunjata, le fondateur de l'empire du* Mali (1983); David C. Conrad with Djanka Tassey Condé, *Sunjata: a West African Epic of the Mande Peoples* (2004).

pressing question is why Niane's *Soundjata* continues to be the version *par excellence* that most classrooms use? Many transcriptions of the epic, including a pedagogical one by Adam Konaré Ba, wife to the former president of Mali, Alpha Konaré, have appeared since Niane's novel in 1960; they, along with Niane's version, represent one of the many possibilities into reading the *Soundjata* story. However, these reasons do not explain why Niane's version and not John William Johnson's or Jan Jansen's is more widely read and known among students and teachers of African history and literature alike. Even, the claim of authenticity that Austen notes earlier is but a tenuous explanation since (as he also points out) many other versions of the epic continue to appear after Niane's *Soundjata*.

The answer to this question is not found in any one singular response. Many factors help to explain why Niane's *Soundjata* holds the canonical status that it does. Foremost, Niane was the first African author to transcribe, translate and publish the epic for an audience beyond the African continent. Whether or not his version speaks to a "real" or "authentic" version because it was the first one published holds little influence over its popularity. [63] Second, the simplistic style that Niane adopts – including a thorough introduction and conclusion and the use of footnotes – helps the readers to engage in the story as well as the history of the Mali Empire. This second point relates to the third and last one: Niane's respect for oral tradition. The high esteem he holds for the griot Kouyaté is unquestionably evident throughout the novel and speaks to Niane's reverence for the continuation of the Mande culture. The simplistic style that Niane

[63] Questions concerning Niane's *Soundjata* as the first work on the epic are not new. They were present at the "*Sunjata* Epic Conference" held at Northwestern University from November 13-15, 1992. Scholars, including Ralph Austen, Seydou Camara and David Conrad, gathered to discuss not only Niane's work but also others that have been done on the epic.

chooses for the novel enables him to introduce the Mande culture and its oral tradition to readers who are unfamiliar with both. Collectively, all these reasons work to explain the popularity of Niane's *Soundjata*.

Of course, these points are not exhaustive; I offer them here based on my reading of the novel above. For Niane, the author, it is important to note that he has written and published other works beyond *Soundjata*, including a contribution to the UNESCO general history on African history. However, fortunately or unfortunately for Niane, he has become known solely for his work on this epic.

Having examined all three works, it becomes evident that each one addresses and answers the question of originality and plagiarism differently. Ouologuem's novel tackles the charges of plagiarism directly at the same time that it shows itself to be an original work in light of Ouologuem's play with the griot's speech. Griaule, on the other hand, struggles less with the charges of plagiarism and presents an original work with the precedence that he gives to Ogotemmêli's voice. It is Ogotemmêli who speaks throughout the narrative with Griaule's own presence and voice playing a secondary role. Niane, similarly, gives precedence to another voice—Kouyaté's—that, in effect, produces a work that is not original in the sense that the *Soundjata* is a well known epic in oral culture but a canonical one that is frequently referenced in classrooms and by scholars. The many versions of *Soundjata*, both related by other griots and transcribed by other authors, render the question of plagiarism obsolete for Niane.

In all cases, orality acts as a text in which each author draws upon. Ouologuem looks to the stylistic form of the griot's speech to relate his narrative; Griaule draws on the words of Ogotemmêli to inform his understanding of the Dogon cosmogony; and

Niane looks to the recitation of the griot Kouyaté to recount his version of the *Soundjata* epic. Each author uses orality in a manner that addresses the questions of plagiarism and originality differently while positioning orality as a text in their reference. The link between orality as a text and the novels are seen closer from this reading. Further use of orality is also evident in the portrayal of the griots in the novel, which I examine in the next chapter.

Chapter Four

Maintaining Orality in Writing with the Portrayal of Griots

The Griots as Mediator and Translators in the Novels

The adoption of the griot's speech represents only one influence of griots in the novels. Ouologuem and Niane give two varying examples in their respective work as either a play or transcription of the griot's speech. Beyond the griot's speech, these masters of words are often portrayed as characters playing themselves in the novel. Their presentation ranges from the stereotypical and cunning griot to the revered guardian of history. Two well-known novels in which they appear are Amadou Hampaté Bâ's *L'Étrange Destin de Wangrin* and Massa Makan Diabaté's *L'Assemblée de Djinns*. In both books, griots are not only central characters to the story but also help to narrate it.

While much can be said about the griots upon this latter point, I want to focus on their portrayal in two important roles: translator and mediator. My choice to study the griots in these two roles is not an arbitrary one since much has already been written on them as translators and mediators. Notably, Thomas Hale includes both of these roles and an extensive list of others in his voluminous work, *Griots and Griottes*.[64] Along with translator and mediator, he lists historian, spokesperson, advisor, teacher and musician.

By looking specifically at the griots in the role of translator and mediator, I want to highlight their play with words, especially as it brings forth the nature of their interaction with people. On the one hand, they draw upon their knowledge of more than one language to translate words for people; on the other hand, they use words to bring a

64 Thomas Hale. *Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1998.

compromise or reconciliation between two parties. In both cases, the manner in which griots employ words plays a crucial part in their work on translating and mediating. To illustrate both examples, I will look first at Bâ's novel to examine the griot as a translator and, second, as mediator in Diabaté's work.

Gathering, Translating and Transcribing, Bâ Becomes the Unlikely Ethnographer

The story that Amadou Hampaté Bâ's receives from Wangrin is truly a narrative within a narrative that the former subsequently writes and publishes as *L'Étrange Destin de Wangrin*. The novel retold by its eponymous character—Wangrin—relates his rise and fall working as a French interpreter during the nascent period of French colonial rule. Wangrin chronicles his under-handed and double-handed dealings with the colonial government and local population through his work with them as a translator. He achieved fame, power and riches from his mischievous acts but eventually met his demise through his own success. Wangrin makes it clear to Bâ that in recounting his life story for the latter to translate, the author must not use his real name (a fact that the readers never truly find outs) but another, a borrowed one: Wangrin. This passage, presented in the foreword of the novel, is key in both highlighting and demonstrating this central theme in the story: translating. In hearing Wangrin's story and later transcribing it as a part of his own work, Bâ engages in an act of translating the former's words into his own. The narrative is not his but told to him in order for it to be written down for, as Wangrin hopes, posterity. Wangrin, thus, speaks through Bâ, which brings forth the transfer of words by one person to another person.

In this act of transfer from one person to another, Bâ holds an equally significant role as Wangrin. His participation in the story is often overlooked since he is the formal author: *L'Étrange Destin de Wangrin* by Amadou Hampaté Bâ. Yet, Bâ holds more than the translator and transcriber role in the rendering of the novel from orality to writing; I read his role also as an ethnographer who gathers and collects the oral narrative for its transcription into the novel. The scene between him and Wangrin at the beginning of the novel resembles an ethnographic exchange and gathering that occurs between the two in their conversation. Wangrin recounts his life story while Bâ listens, collects and deciphers details of the narrative. His work mediates between the orality of the narrative and its later transcription into the novel – a mediation that reflects the larger one between the oral tradition and writing.

The fact that Bâ uses the act of translation to receive Wangrin's story is reminiscent too of an exchange between a griot and a researcher in this ethnographic gathering. Its hint to orality highlights the translating function of the griot that Bâ's adopts for his story to make it a narrative within a narrative. He is an ethnographer who employs a narrative technique of the griot. Speaking of Bâ's play between orality and writing, Moradewun Adejunmobi notes: "Not only does he therefore invoke tradition, he constantly calls attention to the process of transcription itself, and so justifies his own vocation as transcriber/collector of oral texts" (30). In this case, one sees how Bâ uses writing—a tool of African colonialism—as a means to preserve orality—African tradition—in his role as an ethnographer.

Adds Adejunmobi: "For Hampaté Bâ, orality is obviously important, but orality does not survive on its own in a world that has experienced colonialism. Orality survives

only to the extent that it is co-opted into and preserved by writing" (30). Even Wangrin realizes the usefulness and necessity of putting down his words for posterity. He comes to Bâ prepared to relate his story to the latter. For his part, Bâ is the unknowing ethnographer gathering information; at the same time, he becomes the creator of the story due to the transfer of words that occurs between him and Wangrin.

As a result, *L'Etrange Destin de Wangrin* is a narrative that reflects the dual role that Bâ embodies and, thus, sits between "a displaced orality to the written text" and "a bid to locate the narratives within an intellectual tradition of scholarly ethnography" (Adejunmobi 33). Adejunmboi explains further:

> The notes, preface, and translations enhance the scholarly dimension of the text, showing what it owes to a system of recording, interpreting, sifting, cross-checking, and researching. Meanwhile the elements of the supernatural, the songs in the indigenous languages, the encoded folktales, the narratives of rituals confirm the origins of the written text and its indebtedness to oral sources (33-34).

The interplay between orality and writing is present constantly; the words Bâ receives from Wangrin enable him to create the novel, which, in turn, helps to retain its orality in writing. Translating, thus, becomes the inescapable albeit central theme that appears both in the novel and the creation of it.

Wangrin, An Interpreter Playing a Griot

Wangrin's character as an interpreter in the novel exemplifies the theme of translating and underlines this very act of speaking for someone through another person. His job as an interpreter is not exclusive to his work of translating words but also mediating and manipulating them to his advantage. In this case, the roles that Wangrin holds vacillate between that of a hero (speaking for the advantage of the local population)

and a trickster (speaking against everyone for his own advantage). However, another role that Wangrin embodies equally is griot; his play with words through his work of "interpreting" adopts the functions of a griot and easily renders him a master of words.

The figure of the griot is one that is present throughout the novel from the very beginning. Wangrin includes a griot character, Kuntena, in his narrative while one, Dieli Madi, is also present during the recounting of his story to Bâ. The appearance of more than one griot –fictional and non-fictional—in the novel helps to emphasize the theme of translating with its practice of speaking for someone through another person as they relate to these bards and their use of words.

The reading of Wangrin as a griot highlights also the central theme of translating. At the same time, it touches upon two important aspects in the relationship between orality and writing: first, the transmission between orality and writing, mentioned above with Bâ's role as an ethnographer and translator; and second, the precarious role of the griot in this transmission, seen in the transcription of Wangrin's narrative from his conversation with Bâ.

Griots are synonymous figures of orality who guard oral histories for a time immemorial. For Wangrin to recount his story to Bâ reveals a diminishing dependence on the griot as the guardian of words since the act of transcribing Wangrin's words gives precedence to writing; writing takes over and, in turn, becomes the medium to guard the spoken words of Wangrin. Through this act, Bâ questions the enduring function of the griot. Notes Adejunmobi: "This [transfer of narrative from Wangrin to Bâ] is done in the presence of the griot, and suggests that the griot alone no longer suffices to ensure the transmission and preservation of the story" (28).

The change not only occurs with orality and writing but also with what Christopher Miller sees as literacy too. Recognizing the embedded relationship between orality and the mirrored literacy and writing, he explains: "The text thus prepares to transport the griot's words from orality to literacy, while at the same time taking the literate reader 'back' to the world of orality" (91). A reversal of roles takes place between writing and orality as the former is used now to preserve the latter.

Adejunmobi continues with this point and argues that Wangrin, as an interpreter himself, does not need Bâ to transcribe his narrative since the former is also literate and fluent in French through his years studying at the École des Otages. Adejunmobi explains: "Unlike composers of other oral texts, the source of this particular text – namely, Wangrin—does not in fact require the services of a transcriber, since he is himself an accomplished transcriber" (28). Based on Adejunmobi's argument, Wangrin is as much a transcriber as Bâ. My reading of Wangrin as a character who functions as a griot challenges Adejunmobi's view since it places more emphasis on the oral nature of the character and less on his ability to write and transcribe. Indeed, it is a role that Wangrin is often not given. However, for these very reasons, I propose that Wangrin embodies a griot character based on the functions of a griot that he adopts; first, his transfer of words in his conversation with Bâ; and second, his play with words as an interpreter in the novel.

His embodiment of the griot becomes clearer when one compares him briefly with the two other griots mentioned in the novel. First, Dieli Madi who is present during Wangrin's and Bâ's meeting but does not appear again. His only appearance is in the foreword from which on note very little other than his role as a griot. Even Bâ

acknowledges the peripheral role that Dieli Madi plays and makes it clear that he is the one who transcribes the story that Wangrin narrates to him. Second, Wangrin's griot, Kuntena, is a character who appears throughout the novel; however, he holds mostly a secondary role to Wangrin. His work entails the showering of praises and advice to his patron – a typical portrayal of a griot that is not difficult to ascertain. Wangrin, after all, adopts Kuntena as his griot after he sees how the latter would be an asset to him.

Wangrin's life is one that engages with both the colonial and African world, illustrated by his roles as an interpreter for the French colonial government and, what I view as a griot playing the part of a translator. From his birth, Wangrin receives a prophecy that he will have a successful albeit turbulent life marred by his enemies. In his initiation to the society of Komo, Wangrin hears the following words:

> Toi, mon cadet, tu réussiras dans ta vie si tu te fais accepter par Gongoloma-Sooke et cela tant que la Pierre d'alliance de ce dieu sera entre tes mains. Je ne connais pas ta fin, mais ton étoile commencera à pâlir le jour où Ntubanin-kan-fin. . . se posera sur une branche morte d'un kapokier. . . . A partir de ce moment tu deviendras vulnerable et facilement à la merci de tes ennemis. . . . (Bâ 24).

How Wangrin will become successful is not explicitly described; however, the high marks he earns in school clearly pave the way for him to progress from a school instructor to an interpreter for the French colonial government. In addition, his fluency in French strongly appeals to the Commandant in Diagaramba who quickly replaces the ill-prepared Racutie with Wangrin as an interpreter.

Undoubtedly, knowledge of more than one language is essential to a translator's success. According to Hale in his classification of the griots' numerous roles, these masters of words are the most likely candidates to become translators based on their facility with language. Explains Hale: " . . . their past travels to learn the profession, and

their desire to interact with people, these artisans of the word are likely to have learned most of the languages of the multicultural areas in which they live" (35).

In reading Wangrin as a griot, one can also see how he too fits the role of translator by his linguistic skills. Wangrin not only possesses a fluency in French that he acquired from attending the colonial schools, but he also speaks the local dialects in the various regions that the colonial administration sends him. His ability to translate between the French administrators and the local population shows both his linguistic skills and his capacity to delve into his new environment with the people. Words, after all, only represent one aspect of his translation work. Again, Hale notes: "The griot must interpret not simply the words but also the meaning behind the words. The language of origin for this meaning is merely the starting point for a complex and delicate process of exegesis, clarification, and embellishment" (35). Wangrin's talent to familiarize himself in each of his new surroundings beyond the mere translation of languages demonstrates Hale's point. As an interpreter, Wangrin does not simply stop with the translation of words; he also works to understand the local practices and politics at each of his new posts.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the "cattle affair" in which Wangrin completely takes advantage of the Count de Villermoz's laissez-faire running of the administrative bank account. Indeed, Wangrin relishes in his role as an interpreter for it gives him access to the administrative working of the French colonial government at the same time that he works with the local population. His additional role as secretary to the Commandant further provides him with a certain freedom of indiscretion. In the "cattle affair," Wangrin uses Villermoz's supervisory absence and the release of pre-signed

checks to build his own riches while helping his friends in the process. Wangrin falsely "interprets" the checks to his gain by playing the role of both translator and businessman between himself and his friends. In his side business dealings with his friends, he pays for absent cattles that his friends supposedly supply. When the scheme draws suspicion from the Commandant and Villermoz, Wangrin again manipulates the situation by having a local thief steal the letters that would exonerate Villermoz and place the guilt completely on him.

One can view Wangrin's actions here as an attempt to protect himself; however, a more fitting reading sees him as a griot and, moreover, translator, who draws on his talent with words to say and do what he must to place him at an advantage over his adversary, Villermoz. At Wangrin's trial over the "cattle affair," Villermoz, expects underhandedly to win the case over this simple colonial translator. To his astonishment, it is Wangrin who surprises them all when he pulls out evidence – an amass of signed papers attesting to Villermoz's complicity in the "cattle affair" – that renders him innocent and, consequently, the enduring wrath of his adversary. Wangrin's actions demonstrate a griot's performance in which he plays and manipulates the situation through his use of words as an interpreter. Adds Adejunmobi: "For as long as he remains conversant with he inner workings of the colonial government, its laws, it bureaucracy, its reliance on written documents, Wangrin is able to manipulate the system to his advantage" (29). On the one hand, he is able to explain to the Commandant and Villermoz in French the discrepancy found in the bank account at the exclusion of his friend or "partners in crimes"; on the other hand, he speaks in his own language to his co-plotters, namely Sori Buri, and trains him in what to say to the French administrators at the exclusion of the outside party.

In order to pull off such a feat, Wangrin manipulates words between the Commandant and Villermoz and Sori Buri while drawing on his "insider's" knowledge of the two parties. His understanding of them comes from information that he has gathered from his observations and conversations with the Commandant and the locals in Diagaramba. And, as illustrated by the "cattle affair," unbeknownst to both the Commandant and Villermoz, Wangrin has insights about the political situation in the city among the families and different ethnic groups that they are completely unaware. Thus, Wangrin's success as an interpreter stems not only from his ability to speak several languages but also his keen knowledge and understanding of his environment and the people around him through his griot acumen.

Such a portrayal of Wangrin as a translator who skillfully embodies the functions of a griot role brings forth an inevitable question about the character: is Wangrin a common or an exceptional depiction of griots in their function as translators? The story, told by Wangrin to Bâ, chronicles the life of the former. What appears as truth or fiction in this transmission is a factor that one must also consider since the task each one holds as the teller or transcriber of the story influences the telling of the narrative. I suggest that the translating work of both parties reflects the cunningness that Wangrin demonstrates in his griot character. Wangrin is an interpreter who plays the part of a griot while Bâ draws also on the narrative techniques of these bards to translate and transcribe the story. Wangrin's role is not a distinguishing mark of all bards but only one aspect of their character that Bâ's typifies in this case.

Mediating in Different Social Spaces

Defining a Griot and his Place in the Mande Tripartite Caste Structure

Another notable role that the griot plays in the novels is mediator. In Diabaté's *L'Assemblée de Djinns*, he depicts how the griots poorly portray this role in a conflict among themselves. The story centers around two clans of griots—Anabon and Guena—who battle to see who in their group will take over as *chef des griots* after Tiékmoko (Anabon) dies. Danfaga, his younger brother, naturally assumes himself to be the best candidate to succeed his brother. However, Sangoï (Guena) questions his actions on the pretext that he has not followed the proper protocol of succession to elect the next oldest griot in line. Soon other clans join Sangoï to contest Danfaga's arbitrary succession to *chef des griots*. Sangoï plots to have his own candidate, Yamoudou (Joukoulou) placed in this role. Manipulation and mediation thus ensue between the two clans and ends with the deaths of Famoussa, Danfaga's younger brother, and Yamoudou before a *chef des griots* is finally chosen.

Diabaté's novel is based on a dispute between two griot families –Tounkara and Diabaté – that occurred between 1983-1985 in Kita. Both the Tounkara and the Diabaté families fought over who will assume the leadership of these masters of words. Barbara Hoffman also based her research on this conflict for her study of the griot war.[65] She lived and apprenticed herself as a griotte or *jelimuso* with Adé Diabaté [66] as part of her examination of the interplay between language and the Mande caste structure. Both accounts—fictional and non-fictional— speak about the role that the griot plays as

[65] Hoffman's research for *Griots at War: Conflict, Conciliation, and Caste in Mande* occurred in April 1985, as the griot succession war in Kita was slowly coming to an end with her attendance at the Griot Hall marking the ascension of a Diabaté as *Chef de Griot* or Head Griot .

[66] For consistency in writing, I have changed Hoffman's spelling of Adé Jabaté's name to Diabaté.

mediators. Hoffman, however, marks her study with a focus on the Mande caste structure.[67] In undertaking her research, she is critical of studies that have overlooked the complexities and ambiguities that language plays among the griots in the Mande caste and in their relationships to the other groups, notably *horon* (noble). She acknowledges that "while the verbal art of griots is well represented and much studied in epic poetry, little of their oratorical skills and the social roles they play as mediators has been captured in previous studies" (8).

To address this lacuna, Hoffman looks at the griot's social spaces and its boundaries to understand the power relations that exist between the *nyamakala* (caste) and *horon*. Griots belong to the *nyamakala* group. The social space that each group occupies enables them to act as well as communicate with each other. Thus, language becomes a key tool for communication for the griots with their natural ability to use words and, in effect, places them in a much more advantageous position than the *horon* who are unable to speak publicly. To better understand these social spaces, Hoffman defines the social marker between griots and *horon*:

> Looking at griot behavior in terms of learned culture—habitus—and the application of that learning to new situations—structuration—particularly to those situations that reinforce and re-create differences between group—schismogenesis—permits an analysis of the stratification of Mande society as a dynamic system of interdependencies in which noble-griot relations can be explicated in terms of asymmetrical relation rather than as a hierarchically structured system of power and authority. Hierarchy leaves such relations inexplicable paradoxical (17).

Hoffman's rereading of the griots and the social space they occupy loosens previous

[67] The Mande tripartite caste structure—the *horon* (nobles), *jon* (slaves) and *nyamakala* (griots, ironsmiths, leatherworkers)—explains the griots' position in Mande culture as well as the nature of Mande society. See chapter one for a more thorough discussion.

understandings of the Mande society as a strictly hierarchal system that leaves no room for movement. Her asymmetrical argument offers a more integrated view of Mande social structure that moves the vertical direction of power to a horizontal one to include the changes that have influenced and affected the people and their surroundings.

Such an approach differs from Sory Camara who continues to view Malinké society according to many hierarchies: caste, gender, age.[68] Drawing on Bouglé's work on caste structures, Camara accords the former's definition to the Mande as "un grand nombre de groupes héréditairement specialisés, hiérarchiquement superposés et mutuellement opposés" (Bouglé 4). In adopting these criterions, Camara reaffirms the existing hierarchies within and between the groups, notably the *horon* and the *nyamakala*. A *nyamakala* who is born to a blacksmith will naturally assume this profession when he grows up; similarly, a *horon* who will follow in his father's job. In their respective position, the *horon* will normally call on the *nyamakala* for a task that only the latter can perform; while the *nyamakala* depends on the *horon* for services or goods that he cannot attain due to his caste position in Mande society.

Indeed, traditional relations between *horon* and *nyamakala* rest mainly on an exchange. Bréhima Béridogo lists two types of relationship: reciprocal, based on an exchange of commodity and services; and vote catching, characterized by the dependency of the lower caste to the upper ones (3). However, these roles are not fixed since movements between the two are not uncommon. In the past, a *horon* can become a *nyamakala* through adoption or warfare; or presently, a *nyamakala* can move away from

[68] The Malinkés are a part of the Mande culture. They are found mostly in the western part of Mali and eastern Guinea. Camara's research on Malinké society is in part also a study of the Mande since both share similar cultural and social practices, as exemplified by the presence of the griot and the caste structure.

their craft and ascend to a civil servant position. The possibility of social advancement for everyone changes the relationship between the *horon* and *nyamakala* with less and less dependency on the former. Such role switching is more common than rare and demonstrates the influences—cultural, economic and political—to Mande society that have allowed for these shifts to occur.

Although, Béridogo is also quick to caution that wealth and social status are still conferred by the upper administrations who maintain the reciprocal relationship but under a new face of "professional building" (Béridogo 3). Looking at the changes between the two roles –from the *nyamakala* to the *horon* – one sees the asymmetrical movement that Hoffman proposes rather than the hierarchal one that Camara argues. Yet, whether one adopts Hoffman's asymmetrical reading or Camara's hierarchal one, the social space that a griot occupies both within and beyond his caste remains unchanged in his ability to perform his duties as a mediator. To understand the griot's role in Mande society according to its caste structure, one needs to be aware of the social space he occupies both within and beyond his caste.

Negotiating the Social Spaces for Diabaté, the Griot and Diabaté, the Novelist

Nowhere does this appear more evident than to begin with Diabaté, the novelist with griot origins. As an author putting the oral tradition that he received from his uncle, the renowned Kélé Monson Diabaté, into writing, Diabaté moves constantly between the world of orality and writing – a movement that speaks to both his position in the Mande caste structure and his education in the schools. It is Diabaté's association with the Mande caste structure that both enabled and hindered him in his work as a novelist.

Cheick M. Chérif Keïta describes the concurrent poles in the Mande caste structure that influenced Diabaté: "La première, le *fasiya*, détermine chez sa naissance. C'est l'axe de l'apprentissage et de l'intégration dans une caste et dans la famille, entités dont les functions sont définies d'avance par la société. . . . La deuxième force est le *fadenya*, l'axe de la competition avec les modèles du passé telles qu'ils sont incarnés par le père" (9-10).

Both the *fasiya* and *fadenya* axes focus exclusively on the family and work to identify Diabaté with the heritage that his surname signifies. *Jamu*, or last name, is an important marker in the Mande culture that simultaneously distinguishes families and describes their relationship to each other.[69] Solely knowing someone's *jamu*, one can assess the history of a particular family, both formally and jokingly.[70] For Diabaté, his last name clearly indicates that he belongs to a griot family.[71] To be a griot and, particularly, one in Kita, the stronghold of Mande orality, is a constant reminder for Diabaté of his role and the tradition it carries.

Diabaté's move from his role as a griot to that of a writer problematizes his

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[69] A usual praise in Bambara is to say, "I and your last name." Thus, to compliment someone with a Koné surname, one says, "I Koné." It is also not uncommon to get inquiries about your last name – *jamu jumen*?—as part of an introduction or to yell out a last name to someone in hopes that the person shares the same one as you. Introductions normally occur by giving the last name first and then the first name.

[70] Mali is similar to other West African countries with its "joking cousin" game in which families tease and banter each other based on their last names. These families are "jokingly" related to one another, although no one really knows the origins of the "joking cousin" relationships or how they came about between the families. The playful regard toward one's last names becomes quite handy to ease awkward situations or liven boring ones.

[71] The story behind the Diabaté last name is also one of the griot origins. Two hunter brothers are traveling in the forest. The older brother says he cannot go on any farther because he is hungry. The young brother tells him to stay and wait while he goes look for food. He goes off and cuts a piece of his thigh to bring back as food for his brother. The older eats it but notices later that the younger brother has a wound on his thigh. He inquires and learns the younger brother's sacrifice for him. He praises the younger brother, calling him Trauré, which means a call to someone who will help others. Trau/wuli; trau = to go; wuli = to call. The younger brother honored by his older brother's praises responds and call him Diabaté, which says no one can refuse you anything. Dj/bak/té. Dj = personne; bak = refuse; té = nothing. From this day, the two clans, Trauré and Diabaté, and groups, *horon* and *nyamakala* began.

relationship with both his *fasiya* and *fadenya* and the social space each axes holds. Not only does his work appear in French, but it also translates the very oral tradition that his griot background makes available to him. Putting the oral tradition he receives from the elder Kélé Monson Diabaté into writing brings it to a wider audience but also opens up a key question about Diabaté's work and, moreover, his authority to perform such a task. Does Diabaté have the right to reveal the secrets of his caste—his *fasiya*—and the teaching of Kélé Monson Diabaté, a father figure to him—his *fadenya*—and share what he has learned to a world outside of the Mande one?

It is a question that Diabaté contends throughout his twenty-year career (1968-88), as he works to reconcile his *fasiya* and his *fadenya* with his roles a griot and writer. He admitted knowingly of this contrary role: "Je suis ce que Kélé Monson a voulu faire de moi en m'initiant à la tradition orale mandingue. Et je dirai que je l'ai trahi en écrivant des romans. . . Voilà je suis l'enfant de Kélé Monson, mais un enfant traître" (Keïta 78). Hoffman speaks of a similar sentiment from her research on the griot war in Kita:

> Massa Makan Diabaté was not present at the 1985 Kita gathering [to mark the ending of the griot war he wrote about in *L'Assemblée des Djinns*], and his rendition of its antecedents is colored, as are many of his works about Kita, by his own ambivalence toward his griot identity, his kinship ties to the parties involved, the pain he suffered coming of age as a literate griot under the repressive policies of Mali's first independent administration, and his penchant for literary license (9).

Both critiques (one coming from the author himself) share the sentiment of betrayal; yet, to read and judge Diabaté as a traitor simply because he said he is represents a rather haste conclusion. The sense of betrayal that Diabaté evokes is not the catastrophic rejection of his *fasiya* and *fadenya* that the author describes. The word *traître* – to betray – can have both a good and bad connotation. According to Keïta. "Tradition is betraying

under the guise of loyalty but you have to do it in a very clever way so that your betrayal becomes a part of your loyalty. . . . Every generation has to betrayed the one that came before it" (Interview February 2, 2006).

In Diabaté's case, his sense of betrayal is in fact his loyalty to his griot tradition. The author tested the limits of his *fasiya* and *fadenya* when he became a novelist and engaged in a function completely different from a griot: writing. Such limits were not known until they were passed. As the Bambara proverb (translated into French) elucidates, "Une limite ne devient pas un limite si on n'y est pas à depassé" (Interview February 2, 2006). The sense of betrayal that Diabaté evokes is in fact his push to go beyond the limits of himself, which becomes a reevaluation of who he is. Keïta recalls in his conversation with Diabaté how the author often touched upon the points of limits and borders that one must cross and pass. Diabaté, he feels, was obsessed by this idea to "dépasser une limite" in his life and work, especially as it relates to his identity in the sense of *fadenya* and *fasiya*.

It is such a limit that one can easily read as the internal conflicts that function less as a hindrance and more as motivation for Diabaté in his writing. Keïta explains:

> En somme, Diabaté voit son rôle d'écrivain francophone comme la recherche d'une nouvelle cohérence sociale par la prise en charge de son héritage paternal, son *fasiya*. Son objectif sera de se faire une personnalité originale, celle du griot-à-plume, dans le cadre même de son identité de caste, en utlisant la force de l'outil que l'école européenne lui a donné (28)

For Keïta, the social space that Diabaté occupies in the Mande caste structure is not the same in this reworked and new collaboration between his *fasiya* and *fadenya* and his role as a novelist.

An Inner Conflict Revealed in his Portrayal of Griots as Mediator

Nonetheless, it is from this space that one sees the ongoing ambivalence Diabaté carries and brings to his portrayal of griots in *L'Assemblée de Djinns*. Rather than present them as the great figures of oral tradition and history, Diabaté paints a picture of these bards that recalls the title, *L'Assemblée de Djinns*. The griots are seen as magical figures who, on the one hand, work toward reconciliation and, on the other hand, are manipulative and cunning in their actions. Fellow author and Kita local, Moussa Konaté, is wary of such a portrayal but explains, "Je sais qu'à Kita, il y a cette tendance de parler les griots comme des gens territoires magiques" (Interview October 3, 2005).

Konaté's explanation is not far from Bani Diallo who sums up the griots in the novel as "des hommes très subtils, très dangereux, très manipulateurs" (Interview October 3,2005). These images are not unusual for these masters of words, especially modern ones who use their role solely for material and monetary gains. For the griots in Diabaté's novel, these descriptions speak starkly to their roles as mediators. Adds Keïta:

> Il [Diabaté] montre les griots non pas au centre de l'édifice social, mais plutôt en marge, pour prouver, si besoin était, que ceux-ci ont perdu pour toujours leur rôle de détenteurs de la force vitale mandingue. Alors que traditionellement la parole du griot avait le pouvoir de construire des familles, des clans et des empires, dans ce roman, elle est présentée comme vaine, vulgaire et destructive (27-28).

Keïta's assertion appears similar to Konaté's and Diallo's in noting the changing role of the griots in their ability to work peacefully between families and clans. With this shift, the emphasis turns away from their role as mediator and, in effect, the social space that they occupy as a part of it.

As a mediator, the griot is usually called upon to help with disputes between families. Camara points out that these disputes occur in all domestic and political social

spaces: from families to families; from a father to a son; and from a husband to a first wife or second wife. The ease that the griot possesses to move between these spaces touches upon the asymmetrical movement that Hoffman argues in her work. In this case, the asymmetrical movement is also visible in the myriad relationships the griot has with all members of society: male/female or young/old. The griot can and is able to work with members of society who stand above (*horon*), equal (*nyamakala*) or below (*jon*) him. Thus, the space in which the griot functions and moves in his task as a mediator is an important and particular one. Removed from his role as a mediator, the griot no longer has the ability to move freely between these social spaces. It is here that one sees how the role of the griot as mediators has changed.

Diabaté highlights such an occurrence in his novel when he shows Danfaga leaving the counsel of the griot clans and going to see a government official. Danfaga, not content with the decision of the other clans to choose Yamoudou as the *chef des griots* over him, decides to seek help from outside the griot community. He goes with his fellow griots to the *secrétaire général* of the region to voice his grievances. When he finds the *secrétaire général* unsympathetic to his concerns, he decides to go to the *commandant*. Arriving at his office, Dangafa and his friends see how "le commandant daigna les recevoir une seconde fois pour leur dire que la nomination du chef des griots n'était régie par aucun texte en vigeur" (Diabaté 73).

The divide between the griot and the administrative world is evident with the commandant's mockery of the griot in his ending of "aucun texte en vigeur," a reference that speaks to the wider gap between the educated (writing) and the uneducated (orality). Such a reaction is not surprising since it recalls Camara's assertion that certain

hierarchies continue to exist. Diabaté's portrayal of Dangafa in this situation suggests that Camara's claim of a continual hierarchal structure and Hoffman's reinterpretation of it as an asymmetrical one can only exist separately and not simultaneously. Clearly, the movement between the social and political spaces for the griot only works so far as he maintains his role as mediator. Relinquished of his mediating position and space, the griot no longer holds any authority to act.

Equally absent in the example above is the lack of diplomacy on Danfaga's part. As a mediator, the griot needs to know the other parties as well as how to negotiate with them. Jan Jansen underlines the importance of diplomatic strategies for the griot in an extensive list that he offers. One key strategy – "being sent" – is a way to create space for social relation. The griot can rely on the fact that the two parties with whom he is negotiating are not present together. Thus, he not only has the liberty to speak for them but also carry the prestige of being their voices. By "being sent," the griot has a social space for the negotiation that also gives the griots a variety of other strategies to choose from for his work (Jansen 40). Danfaga overlooked any such strategy or form of diplomacy when he goes directly to speak to the *secrétaire général* and *commandant*. In doing so, he loses his power to negotiate as well as his space to mediate.

Diabaté illustrates a similar example in the beginning of the novel when forty-nine days after the death of Tiékmoko, Danfaga sends Famoussa to Guena under the pretext of offering Sangoï the "bonnet du chef des griotss au clan des Guena, qui en est la propriétaire" (Diabaté 18). Protocol dictates that Danfaga should have also gone himself. His reason for not going was that he was "alité." In this case, Danfaga not only acknowledges but also plays up the "being sent" diplomatic strategy to secure his place as

the next *chef des griots*. By not following proper channel, the peace that Danfaga offers Sangoï through Famoussa is disingenuous since he has already broken protocol by not paying his respect to the latter himself. Moreover, in his journey to Guena, Famoussa breaks another protocol by eating half of a kola nut that he is to offer to Sangoï. The diplomacy as well as the meditation that were supposed to occur here have already been compromised in many ways. Even though Danfaga adopts the "being sent" strategy, he breaks other diplomatic ones that are equally important.

Along with the "being sent" strategy, Jansen discusses other key skills that the griot characters in Diabaté clearly ignored in their attempts to be successful mediators. In the practice of "being sent," the griot must keep the two parties apart and ensure that they will not speak to each other first. To do this, the griot will show that he is in complete agreement with whatever party he is speaking to at the moment and convince them that he is on their side. He must also convince the two parties not to speak about their conversations with the griot if ever they all meet together. And when the griot communicates with the two parties, he engages in what Jansen calls repetitive talking to communicate the message through the chain of people involved. Explains Jansen: "Such repetitive talking serves many ends: the construction of an official version of the message; the shaping of the group which has to deal with the message; educating young people in the appropriate behavior; the 'cooling down' of the messenger/guest; and as a mnemotechnical device (44). With the repetitive talking, the griot also needs to give the impression that something is being done. Thus, he employs the slowing down tactics that makes it look like something is being done while nothing is taking place in hopes that the problem will resolve itself, or rather, cool down on its own.

Another similar strategy is to let others take the initiative, which moves the message from the people who are involved in the negotiation beyond the griot and the parties involved. Lastly, the griot gives the appearance of choice for the people to accept the inevitable based on what Jansen sees as the "because you" reason. Certain choices in life are inevitable but the griot gives the appearance that there is still a decision to be made. In turn, to not upset the messenger, the people will accept the proposal "because of you" or *i kòsòn* than protest.

Adding to Jansen's list, Camara states that the griot holds an unlikely power to speak for families and friends in his role as mediators. He is in an advantageous position to help them in both the domestic and political spaces because of his ability to draw upon the joking cousin relationships between members of society. However, the griot's use of the joking cousin relationships is not merely a reference to one family's enduring tie to another; he must use it convincingly as a means to mediate the conflict between the two families without offending one or the other. Camara recognizes this latter point when he states: "Enfin, nos gens de parole disposent de moyens de persuasion tout à fait spéciaux: l'art de la parole" (229). It is foremost the griot's talent and mastery of words that enables him to mediate between families and friends. His use of the joking cousin relationships becomes ineffective if he is unable to use it in a manner that persuades and moves the families or members of society from mediation to reconciliation with each other.

Whether Diabaté, the author, was deliberate in his depiction of the griots in the novel to caste aside all of these strategies is unclear since his portrayal of them was based on an actual event, the griot war in Kita. On the other hand, Diabaté, the griot, was

certainly aware of these strategies since he is, after all, a griot, a fact that is often overlooked when one studies him and novels. Keïta admits to this error during their first meeting when he failed to distinguish between Diabaté, the author, and Diabaté, the griot. He recalls: " I was so shocked by his behavior. . . . he was a 'provocateur'. . . . he was so exuberant that was one of the things, confrontational and I must even say, at times, vulgar" (Interview February 2, 2006). The man he thought to be an author acted more like a griot. He continues: "I had a certain image in mind, and I was expecting a certain protocol but he didn't conform to that" (Interview February 2, 2006). Diabaté's behavior demonstrates his understanding of his griot origin and the *fasiya* and *fadenya* from which he learned and continued to practice his craft both as a griot and an author.

Thus, his portrayal of the griots in *L'Assemblé de Djinns* as failed mediators amongst themselves stems from his own understanding of the griot culture. Their secretive albeit provoking manner toward each other is a performance that Diabaté is familiar with from his own background. Moreover, his knowledge of the succession conflict between the different griot clans enables Diabaté to manipulate them in their mediating role to be seen more as *djinns* and less as griots. Such a depiction, however, only works to affirm the griot's mediating role, evident in the protocol that surrounds their work along with the social spaces they occupy and the strategies they use.

The portrayal of the griots by Bâ and Diabaté shows another influence of orality and, particularly, the griots in the novels. Along with the adoption of the griot's speech examined in the previous chapter, both read orality as a text. In the next two chapters, I examine orality as a text more concretely with my fieldwork in Mali between 2003-2006. My reading of orality through my research in both the village of Kela and the city of Kita

provides me with a text in which to compare with my readings of the novels from chapters two and three. In addition, the fieldwork I conducted in these two places revealed to me the Mande culture and tradition that orality encompasses. Here, orality takes on a more expansive notion as it shows itself framed within the Mande culture. My comparative reading of my fieldwork with the novels at the end of chapter four and five incorporates the Mande culture and grounds my analysis within it.

Chapter Five

Kela and Kangaba: Fieldwork with the Famed Griots

Setting the Site: Background on Kela and Kangaba

To say that Mali possesses a rich oral tradition is too succinct of a statement to describe the presence of orality in a country that takes great pride in its past. Orality or the oral tradition survives and thrives today in the Mande culture as it has in previous generations. Thus, to read orality as a text is now to fully review the culture in which it envelops and its current social climate. For most Malians, the mention of orality quickly brings the heroes of Soundjata or Askia Mohammed to the mind. Reminders of these heroes are displayed in the numerous street signs and building names that appear in the capital Bamako, such as the Lycée Askia Mohamed.[72] Mention again the figure related to the oral tradition—griot – and one receives a mixed reaction that underlies a completely different sentiment. Malians acknowledge griots and their position in the Mande culture but also smirk at their anachronistic role today. *Les parasites sociaux* (social parasites) and *les pesanteurs de la société* (weight of society) are the most frequent descriptions of griots today. These images of the griots speak less to who they are and more to what they do in their practice of *griotisme* and *jeliya*.[73] Oddly, for the importance they hold both historically and presently, griots are – at best – tolerable in Malian society.

It was this unexpected sentiment of anti-*griotisme* that I stumbled upon in my fieldwork on the griots in the Mande region of Mali. Griots are embedded in the social

[72] Similarly, Malians have named many of their schools and public buildings after well-known authors and public figures such as Massa Makan Diabaté, Amadou Hampaté Bâ and Aoua Keïta, the first woman elected to the Malian National Assembly.

[73] A simple English translation of these terms would not suffice. *Griotisme* or *jeliya* describes what the griots do – a craft or a profession that is largely dependent on the solicitation of money through praises.

fabric of Malian society. They appear throughout the country, from Timbuktu (north) where they carry the name Sango to Segou (northern central) to the Mande region (western) where they are known predominantly as Diabaté and Kouyaté. Although my work focused on the griots in the Mande region, I found the resentment applicable to all griots, be they Malinké or Songhrai.

Most astonishingly the anti-*griotisme* sentiment appeared strongly in the Mande region where I conducted my field research on the griots. The voices against the griots emerged loudly in Kita, a city 180kms west of Bamako. Kita was quite different from Kela, a village 106kms southwest of Bamako where I began my fieldwork. Kela is a small village where the griots hold a strong influence; by contrast, Kita is a city with a larger and more diverse population that includes griots and other groups. The differences between these two sites were telling of what I found at each one as well as the sentiment of anti-*griotisme* I encountered.

Certainly, the anti-*griotisme* feeling affected and influenced my research, particularly my observations of the griots in their roles as mediator and translator at social events such as baptisms, marriages and funerals. The anti-*griotisme* sentiment hung constantly over my research; and, as it often goes in fieldwork, it became the unanticipated factor that subsequently colored the whole of my study on the griots. To delve into how the feeling of anti-*griotisme* altered my research necessitates first some background information on both of my sites: Kela and Kita. I begin here with some background information on my first site, Kela and its neighbor, Kangaba.

Administrative Co-Development of Kela and Kangaba

My field research began in Kela, a village 106kms from Bamako on the southwest road to Guinea. Kela is located on the edge of the Mande region that expands west toward Guinea. The language and people in this region are Malinké, a branch of the Mande culture similar to Bambara. The village is relatively close to the Guinea border sitting only 50kms away. Its proximity to Guinea is as notable as it is to the town of Kangaba 6kms away in the opposite direction. In fact, one cannot examine Kela without looking at Kangaba since both were founded by the same family.

On the administrative level, Kela is part of the *commune* of Kangaba that includes eleven other villages. Kangaba belongs in turn to the larger *cercle* of Minidian that sits in one of the eight regions in Mali.[74] Mali organizes the makeup of its villages, towns and cities on three levels. At the very bottom are the villages that are collectively organized to form a *commune*. A *commune* can also be one large village or an urban town.[75] These *communes* are all part of a larger *cercle* made up of many *communes*. The *cercle* sits in one of the eight regions of Mali that are denoted by their proximity to the closest regional capital city. The exemption is the capital, Bamako, which is called Koulikoro. Thus, Kela is a village that sits in the *commune* of Minidian that is a part of the *cercle* of Kangaba in the Koulikoro region.

Previously, Minidian was a canton that used Kangaba as it primary administrative site. It installed its first *chef*, Moribadié Keïta, who resided there from 1887 to 1889. Today, the role of the *chef* has been transformed to mayor in Kangaba, as the canton of

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[74] The eight regions include Koulikoro, Kayes, Sikasso, Segou, Mopti, Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal. Bamako does not belong to a region but is known as the District of Bamako.

[75] Similar to *communes* are *communes rurales* for larger rural areas. The creation of *communes rurales* is a recent reorganization in Mali; they were officially sanctioned by law in 1996 to replace *arrondissements*. *Communes*, however, existed already in urban areas.

Minidian is a *cercle* today. The Keïta have remained in the mayoral position in Kangaba since Moribadié Keïta first held the *chef* role in 1887. The present mayor is Mamadou Keïta. Unofficially, the Keïta in Kangaba act also as the patrons for the Diabaté griots in Kela. Beyond the mayoral position, a *sous-préfet* resides over the collective *communes* while a *préfet* is in charge of the *cercle*. [76] The change in the region is one that was slowly but certainly coming to the Koulikoro region. According to an archival political report, the transformation – particularly for Kangaba – began in the early 1950s, a period still under colonial rule. It notes: "La population est satisfaite et fière de voir Kangaba érigé en chef lieu de Subdivision, et les travaux qui, menés rapidement, transforment déjà le village en petite cité, annoncent ce qu'elle sera demain" ("Rapport Politiques").

The village of Kela 6kms away holds no official offices; villagers travel to Kangaba for all formal business, such as paying taxes, acquiring a marriage certificate or registering a birth, which is important for population census and taxes. Along with the mayor's office, other services in Kangaba include a health center, a bank (more a credit and loans operation) and a post office. Kangaba also has a large first and second cycle school (primary and secondary) and a teacher-training center, L'Institut Pédagogique de l'Engseignement Général (IPEG), that prepares post-secondary school graduates to become instructors.

Kanyi Camara, the Leading Founder of Kela and Kangaba

Historically, Kela and Kangaba are linked through their respective discovery.

[76] The *sous-préfet* is a leftover bureaucratic role that has carried over from when the organization of villages in Mali was known as *arrondissement*. Today the *sous-préfet* and *préfet* roles are administratively redundant positions since a rule over a collectivity of *communes* is similar to that of a *cercle*.

Kanyi Camara [77] settled in Kangaba around the 12th century and is regarded by locals today as the town's founder. The name Kangaba draws from the Malinké word *kaaba kô* that means an extraordinary and surprising event. The expression comes from a villager who lost the blade to his hoe while clearing the land. He looked for it among the weeds and exclaimed *kaaba kô* when he could not find it. The expression stuck and became the name of the town ("Schema"). Along with their founding of Kangaba, the Camara, "forment la couche de peuplement la plus anciennement installée à Kela" according to Seydou Camara (296). They moved from Kangaba and resettled in Kela. Their relocation to Kela led to its discovery and placed them as the village's first chief.

Aside from the role of the Camara, the discovery of Kela remains unremarkable until one begins to examine the origin of its name. S. Camara lists many versions in his study. First, he looks to Massa Makan Diabaté who proposes that *ké* signifies heritage while *la* is the substantive of *il y a* (Camara 295). Of course, the founding Camara contest this version since it does not highlight their key role in the village's creation. Second, S. Camara refers to D. Bagayogo who believes that "Kela serait une déformation de 'Kola' qui signifie 'Chez les porteurs de queue' (de ko: queue et de la: chez) ce qui fait allusion à un ancêtre porteur de queue" (Camara 295). The possibility of this interpretation touches upon the proximity of Kela to the Guinea border. Migration and commercial exchange occurred between the village and Guinea in the past as it does today despite the horrible crenellated laterite road that connects the two places. Moreover, kolas are an important commodity that remains the typical protocol gift to present to griots. Both references render "un ancêtre porteur de queue" as the origin of the village's name a

[77] I have changed the spelling of Kamara to Camara for consistency in my dissertation.

more likely possibility. Third, S. Camara brings it closer to home when he notes, "Il faudrait plutôt chercher du côté de 'ke' qui signifie travail, culture et 'la' (lieu de). Kela c'est là où on travaille la terre"(Camara 295). The village is surrounded by plenty of arable land. It also benefits from the nearby Niger River that provides it with an accessible body of water year round and enables the 1,700 inhabitants to grow rice and millet abundantly. In addition, fish is available throughout the year.

That none of these versions allude to the Camara indicates their decreasing influence in Kela after their founding of the village. They were soon taken over by the Konaté and Diarra who were subsequently replaced by the Haidara, more by sheer numbers than by force. Today the Haidara remain the ruling family with Demba Haidara acting as the present village chief.[78] After the Haidara, the Diabaté are the most influential family in Kela. Their authority equals and sometimes exceeds that of the village chief due to their large numbers as well as the role they hold as griots. In this respect, two figures stand out among the Diabaté griots: *jelikuntigi* [79] or *chef des griots* (head griot) and *kumatigi* or *maître de parole* (master of words).

The *jelikuntigi* is elected to his position by his peers and family, all of whom come from the same generation; or as S. Camara calls *la generation de père* (the generation of father). His responsibilities include presiding over meetings, welcoming foreigners and guarding a secret object called *faké,* a paternal heirloom (Camara 301). For the last task, the *jelikuntigi* does not travel outside of the village. If he has an errand elsewhere, he sends his *nòkansigi* or *adjoint* (assistant). *Jelikuntigi* is also known as

[78] The name Haidara is also notable in that it alludes to the family as descendants of the Prophet Mohammed.
[79] Again, I have changed the spelling of *jalikuntigi* to *jelikuntigi* for consistency in my dissertation.

gwatigi or *kabilatigi*, which means *chef de lignage* (head of the lineage). Tradition has it that the day before the 40th day after his death, the families organize a night called *mansa jigi* (a recitation of genealogy) when the *kumatigi* relates the genealogy of the deceased before a successor is named. When a new successor and his *nòkansigi* are known, the passing of the *faké* occurs. It is placed into a gourd and carried to a hut where it is given to the new *jelikuntigi* to guard (Camara 303). By contrast, the *kumatigi* is chosen largely on the basis of his knowledge, irrespective of age or hierarchy. He travels doing work for the *jelikuntigi*, sings the epics and trains the young. When he dies, a *nyògòndan* (concourse) is organized to find his replacement.

Kela and Kangaba. . . of Soundjata and Kambolon Fame

The importance of the griot in Kela brings forth another historical link between the village and Kangaba: the septennial Kambolon ceremony. The event celebrates the reroofing of the sacred hut in Kangaba when the griots from Kela and *only they* come to perform the *Soundjata* epic. Foreigners are not allowed to participate in the ceremony, although they are able to observe from nearby as Jan Jansen did in 1997.

He describes from his observations:

> The ceremony lasts for five days and can be seen as the inauguration of a new *kare* (age group) who will be the ones to continue this ceremony. On Thursday night there is the arrival of the Diabaté griots from Kela and, subsequently, the famous nocturnal recitation that can be considered as a tribute to the ancestors and recently deceased leaders. On Friday afternoon is when the new roof is placed on top of the sanctuary. Only young men of the Keita clan are able to participate in this ceremonial lifting aided by the power of the Diabaté's griot words (14-15)

Jansen is the most recent scholar to have viewed both the rehearsal and performance of the griots at the Kambolon ceremony. Apart from his visit, only a handful of scholars

have succeeded in a similar observation; among them are Germaine Dieterlen and Solange de Ganay, both of whom worked with Marcel Griaule, and Youssouf Tata Cissé.

The Kambolon ceremony also speaks to the strong ties the griots in Kela (as well as the Mande region in general) have to Islam. According to D. T. Niane, "La tradition de Keyla sent une forte influence de l'Islam; il est dit que les livres d'histoire du Manding, écrits en arabe, se trouveraient dans le Kama-Bolon. Les Diabaté de Keyla passent, aux yeux de la plupart des Malinké, comme les détenteurs des secrets du Manding" (61). For this reason, foreigners are only deterred from participating in the ceremony while strictly forbidden to enter the hut. However, Niane's assertion is also open to speculation since no proof has been shown to what is inside the hut. Only the griots of Kela know; and they will not reveal their secret.

It is the secrecy that surrounds the Kambalon hut and its septennial ceremony as well as Kangaba and Kela's proximity to Bamako that attracts tourists and non-government organizations (NGOs) to the area. On my ride out to Kela to start my research, I met two French tourists coming out to visit the sights of Kangaba. They had hoped to return the very same day to Bamako. Indeed, the sight of foreigners was quite common during my time in the area. Asked about what they were coming out to see, most answered the Kambolon in Kangaba and, of course, the griots of Kela.

The high number of NGOs operating in Kangaba is also quite surprising for its size of 7,100 inhabitants. Among them are some well known to lesser known ones such as Plan Mali (a region extension of the Plan International); Groupe d'action pour le development (GAD); Projet d'appui au development (PAD); Solidarité SIDA; Projet d'appui au development intégré (PADI) and Centre Local d'Information et

Communication (CLIC), a USAID sponsored program that provides Internet access ("Monograhie"). Both the presence of NGOs and the visits of tourists indicate a constant exposure, if not contact, with foreigners in Kangaba and Kela. As I will learn later the effects of foreign contact will be both beneficial and detrimental to my research.

Kela and Kangaba Begin the Research Journey

My decision to conduct research in Kela was based on three factors. Foremost, the site was recommended by my Malian research affiliate, Seydou Camara, at l'Institut des Sciences Humaines (ISH). S. Camara had worked with the griots in Kela for his doctoral study and remained in contact with them over the years for his continuing research. Having S. Camara as my resource and contact to Kela facilitated my introduction to the village. We had already made two trips to Kela together before I started my work there.

Our first visit to Kela occurred in June 2004 when S. Camara and I investigated Kela and Kangaba as a possible research site. He introduced me to several members of the Diabaté families in Kela, including the three main griots for my research: the *jelikuntigi*, Demba Mamadi Diabaté, his *nòkansigi*, Yamadou Diabaté, and the *kumatigi*, Lansiné Diabaté. We all met at the *jelikuntigi's* compound where a formal meeting took place in which S. Camara presented them with the protocol gift of kola nuts along with 5000 CFA;[80] he also explained to them my possible return to work with them the following year. Our second visit in November 2005 occurred in the same manner with S. Camara confirming this time my definite return to Kela to conduct fieldwork. S. Camara also used the meeting to describe to the griots more concretely the goal of my stay and

[80] The exchange rate that I use normally for CFA to dollars is 500CFA =$1. Thus, 5,000 CFA is the equivalent of ten dollars.

study in Kela. At this time, it was decided, albeit informally, that I would be living with the family of Yamadou Diabaté since he had previously lodged S. Camara during his research.[81]

Along with S. Camara, a second factor to go out to Kela was the griots themselves. The griots in Kela carry a reputation among Malians for their difficulty as well as their knowledge of the oral tradition, particularly the *Soundjata* epic. They are in many ways known to be the typical griots – irascible, cunning and intimidating – which drew me to them for my observation. My aim was to observe them in their quotidian surrounding. I had little interest in their performance of *Soundjata* epic but realized their knowledge of it contributed to their colorful personality as well as their reputation.

The accessibility of Kela from Bamako was an important third factor. The distance rendered the travel between the capital and the village only a half-day journey. Although the road was almost insurmountable at some parts during the rainy season, the travel remained hassle free – on a good day. Access to Bamako was also important for communication. Kangaba had Internet access through the CLIC but lacked a fully functioning telephone. Outgoing calls were available but incoming ones were not.

[81] Yamadou became my *jatigi*, a term in Bambara that comes from the words *ja* (spirit or soul) and *tigi* (master or owner) to describe the person who becomes your host as much as your shadow in many ways. The choice of a *jatigi* is not a light matter. Yamadou was the primary choice based on his relationship with Camara that was passed on to me. Not choosing Yamadou would have been an insult that overlooked the *jatigi* role he played for Camara. In this role, Yamadou was completely in charge of my living arrangement in Kela. As it turned out, his son, Seydou, took on this role as soon as I arrived. Yamadou remained the *jatigi* I acknowledged while Seydou was the one who took care of my stay in Kela.

Kela, in Which Misunderstandings and Mayhem Resulted in the Ultimatum: "You Pay or You Go."

Starting Down the Path with Kela

The background information that I gathered about Kela and Kangaba and my visits to the two sites helped me when I began my fieldwork in January 2006.[82] My research goal in Kela was to observe these bards in their daily lives in order to gain insight into two aspects of their functions as griots. First, I wanted to observe the griots as mediators and translators to compare them in these roles to how they are depicted by Bâ in *L'Étrange Destin de Wangrin* and Diabaté in *L'Assemblée de Djinns*. Both authors exaggerate the griots in these roles in their portrayal of them. Griots hold these roles; however, their embodiment of them differs from Bâ and Diabaté's depiction. The griots act as mediator and translator for families at social events such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals. My observation of the griots in these roles occurred at these events along with my daily interactions with them.

Second, I wanted to examine the griot's speech as a part of their mediating and translating tasks. My study of the griot's speech focuses on the everyday spoken word of the griots known as *jeliya kuma* that is different from the griot recitation of an oral epic called *mansa jigi*. *Jeliya* speaks to the practice of *griotisme* while *kuma* are the words they use in this act. My use of *kuma* refers to the speech the griots use that is different from language or *kan* to describe the griot's speech. I see the griot's speech less as a language or *jelikan* and more as a form of discourse or *jeliya kuma*. The griot's speech is a form of speaking that both Niane in *Soundjata* and Ouologuem in *Le Devoir de*

[82] My arrival in Kela was delayed a bit due to the rainy season and Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting.

Violence have adopted in their writing. While Niane presents a very traditional rendering of the griot's speech, Ouologuem completely manipulates it. My study of the griot's speech proposes to view the differences between how these authors have used it to how the griots speak in real life. Again, the events in which I observed the griot's speech were at baptisms, weddings and funerals.

In both cases, my emphasis on the daily lives of the griots marks my work less as a study of their stage performance and more as an observation of their quotidian activities that include them speaking at a baptism or assisting in a marriage negotiation. I call it the griots acting "off-stage" in their everyday performances. The "off-stage" approach allows me to delve deeper into the griots' connection to orality and the novel (writing) that moves away from their image as figures who merely recite oral epics that are translated and transcribed. At the same time, it renders "griots" the very subject of my study and less the oral tradition they recount with a concentration on who they are through their everyday activities.

A Surprising Question Upon Arrival

My trip out to Kela was uneventful; I came alone without S. Camara. Immediately upon my arrival, I was led to the compound of Yamadou Diabaté where he and I sat down to a long round of greetings.[83] Afterward, he brought me to see the *jelikuntigi*, Demba Mamadi Diabaté. Again, another round of greetings occurred. They told me a larger meeting with the key Diabaté family members would take place the next day.

[83] Greetings are an essential part of Malian culture. One cannot begin a conversation without first inquiring about the person's day, health and family. Malians have a greeting for each part of the day, from morning (*i ni sogoma*) to afternoon (*i ni tile*) to early evening (*i ni aula*) to evening (*i ni su*). The greetings translate basically to you and the morning and etc. Not greeting someone is as impolite as it is an insult.

Since my last two visits to the village with S. Camara had centered on these formal meetings, I was not very wary of one being called in my affiliate's absence.

I imagine the meeting having two purposes: to announce my presence in the village and to explain my research again to the griots. The meeting occurred at the *jelikuntigi's* compound the next day with both Yamadou, the *nòkansigi*, and Lansiné, the *kumatigi*, present. These three main griots were often present at all of the meetings I observed. Along with the older griots, Seydou Diabaté, the son of Yamadou, Madou and Modibo Diabaté, the sons of the well-known deceased griot Kela Bala Diabaté and other younger Diabaté family members appeared.

Madou worked as my translator to the three main griots during the meeting.[84] I needed a translator to navigate the nuances between Bambara, the language I learned, and Malinké, the one the griots spoke. Madou used French to translate the Malinké for me while performing the reverse function (French to Malinké) for the griots.

At first, nothing unusual occurred at the meeting from the ones that I had with S. Camara present. The griots went through several rounds of greetings and benedictions before Lansiné threw out at the very beginning of the meeting: "What did you bring us?" I was caught off guard by Madou's blunt translation. The question was phrased less as a request and more as demand for something. The surprise was even more unexpected by the absence of such a demand from my previous visits with S. Camara. The griots made no mention of a payment to S. Camara or myself; at the same time, they had always

[84] French became the language of communication between the griots and myself through the assistance of a translator. The three main griots knew expressions in French such as *bien dormi* or *tout va bien* but did not possess a fluency in the language. On the other hand, I did not have a comfortable knowledge of Malinké to be able to ask them important questions directly. Malinké and Bambara are similar in their structure to each other. I did not study Malinké since I already had knowledge of Bambara from my service as a Peace Corps volunteer. No one in the village was assigned the official translator. Usually, it was Mador or someone else who had a basic knowledge of French.

accepted the kola nuts and money we offered as sufficient gifts.

Clearly, what I had presented with S. Camara earlier was no longer satisfactory for the griots. They demanded a different form of payment for my extended stay and work in the village. I did not answer them directly but explained my status as a student and the difference between my work and others. Previous researchers in Kela ranged from those who have done long term study of the griots and their craft to those who have stayed short term to ask the bards to perform for them. I was not interested in the griots' performance of the *Soundjata* epic or *mansa jigi* (a recitation of genealogy) but their *jeliya kuma* (griot's speech) and day-to-day lives. I also mentioned the assistance I would be giving to my host family to help them out with lodging me.

Neither Demba Mamadi nor Lansiné were content with my answers. They disregarded the distinction I made between my research and others. I was simply another foreigner coming to work with them who they could demand a payment. The majority of researchers in Kela have all come from abroad, which made it easy for the griots to view them collectively as one. My situation was no different. Moreover, the griots stated that what I had planned to give to my host family was between Yamadou and myself. I found their answer on this part contradictory when they later noted that the five sub-families of the Diabaté in Kela are all one.

Lansiné pressed on with the question: "What did you bring us?" They were now demanding a formal payment in exchange for my ability to do fieldwork in their village. To add more pressure, Demba Mamadi mentioned another group of researchers that Camara brought to them who paid a million CFA, giving 200,000 CFA at the beginning

and sending 800,000 CFA later.[85] The amount appeared quite large; however, I could not say much about it not knowing the story. I knew that I could not pay such an amount myself and continued to insist upon my two earlier points. Demba Mamadi became more animated in his speech and actions while Lansiné was getting impatient. Tension hung in the air. It was Demba Mamadi who constantly pushed for an answer followed by Lansiné who kept posing the question. Yamadou remained quiet for most of the meeting.

Finally, I told them to name an amount that I would consider. Demba Mamadi threw out 200,000 CFA for my three-month stay and work in Kela. The amount was still quite a lot considering that I had not anticipated on making such a payment. Few Malians I knew earned this sum in a month. The tension increased. I found myself in a vulnerable position, not wanting to jeopardize my research before it began but knowing the amount was still too much. [86] In fact, I only had 120,000 CFA with me at the time. I told them that I only had half of the amount with me. They agreed and noted that I would give them the remaining amount the next time I was in Bamako. I gave Madou the money; he counted it and handed it over to Demba Mamadi who gave it to Yamadou. The remaining amount was not mentioned again until my return from Bamako four weeks later.

The scene of the meeting could not have been more different after I paid them.

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[85] The group of researchers was in fact La Fondation SCOA (Société Commerciale de l'Ouest Africaine), an organization that recorded and printed a performance of the *Soundiata* epic recited by the then *jelikuntigi*, Kanku Diabaté. Camara worked as the intermediary between the Fondation and the griots in Kela; he confirms the 800,000 CFA that they sent after they completed their recording but remains uncertain about the amount paid during their work. The one million CFA the griots quoted is a possible or exaggerated amount. The recording and publication of the performance occurred in 1979. For the griots to draw on this singular event shows both their keen memory and sense of opportunism. The publication of the performance is available at ISH under the title *L'Histoire du Mande d'après Jeli Kanku Diabaté*.

[86] A student of Jan Jansen was also in Kela during my time there. She lodged in the village (in Lansiné compound) while conducting her fieldwork in Kangaba. To my knowledge, the student never received a demand of payment from the griots. I believe her work outside of Kela along with Jansen's presence during her installation in the village helped her to avoid such a request.

The three main griots quickly changed their agitated faces to happy ones, especially the *jelikuntigi*. Demba Mamadi promised that I would learn all there is to know about the griots and Kela during my stay there. He pointed to Lansiné and told me he would be my teacher for the duration of my stay. He chose Lansiné because the latter holds the *kumatigi* role and is the one most sought out by researchers.

The outcome of the meeting foreshadowed a rocky forecast to my work in Kela on two points. One, the griots' misapprehension about my work demonstrated by Demba Mamadi's appointment of Lansiné as my teacher – my one and only teacher; and two, the remainder of the griot payment became a point of contention later and erupted into a dramatic final meeting.

Passing Around the *Jeliya Kuma* or Griot's Speech

Despite both of these misgivings, my experience in the meeting provided me with another occasion to study the *jeliya kuma*. In meetings with foreigners present and in the "hot seat," the griots demonstrate a playfulness with their *kuma* that recalls its adoption by Niane and Ouologuem in their novels. In this case, the *jeliya kuma* resides less in what is said and more in how it is said with the passing of the *jeliya kuma* amongst the griots. In its passing, the *jeliya kuma* is both a visible and invisible tool the griots draw upon for their work. It is a metaphorical baton that each griot holds when he is speaking or has the *kuma*. The griots play no part other than themselves in these meetings; the *jelikuntigi* is the head griot, his *nòkansigi* is the assistant and the *kumatigi* is the master of words.

Two notable meetings illustrated the playful passing of the *jeliya kuma*. The first one I observed involved a French tourist who was interested in a performance of the

Soundjata epic to take place in a nearby town, Siby. Along with the inquiry, the tourist also made a request to record the griots. He arrived in Kela accompanied by two Malians who acted as his intermediary during the meeting. The second meeting included a French organizer who wanted to get permission from the griots to hold a music festival in Kela. He had also an intermediary in two griots who were from Kela but lived Bamako.

The first meeting with the French tourist started with several rounds of greetings and benedictions passed among the griots and guests. Demba Mamadi began with an *aw ni sogoma* to everyone. The young griots responded with a chorus of *nba* to the greetings and *amina* to the benedictions.[87] Soon everyone began addressing each other and asking him about his day, his health and his family. These exchanges can occur for a good ten to fifteen minutes. Beginning with greetings and benedictions is an important start to a meeting since they serve to acknowledge everyone present; at the same time, they highlight an interactive exchange between the men that occurs with the passing of the *jeliya kuma*.

After the introductions, the intermediary addressed the griots on the part of the French tourist about his request. The griots listened and passed the *jeliya kuma* around. The *jeliya kuma* was passed among the three main griots first before the younger members of the group contributed their thoughts. In this case, Demba Mamadi addressed Lansiné first since he was the *kumatigi* who would perform. The *kuma* moved back and forth between the two before Lansiné gave it to a young griot in attendance. The young

[87] The response in Malinké as well as Bambara for greetings is *nba* for men and *nse* for women. Meetings such as this one among the griots involved men only. Women are never allowed to participate. Exceptions are made for foreigners and researchers – both of which were applicable in my case.

griot shared his thoughts with Demba Mamadi, Lansiné and Yamadou. Yamadou responded to the young griot who had another chance to speak. Another young griot picked up the *kuma* and presented his thoughts. The *kuma* remained among the young griots while the three main griots listened.

At one point, a question appeared on Lansiné's part. He passed it on to a young griot who addressed the intermediary to ask the tourist. The tourist answered and his response is carried back in the opposite direction through the intermediary to the young griot to Lansiné. The discussion resumed and the passing of the *jeliya kuma* moved on. Everyone, be he old or young, who wanted to speak was able to share his thoughts. The passing of the *jeliya kuma* continued in this form of interactive exchange until the *jelikuntigi* made a decision based on all that he has heard; he gave it to a young griot who repeated it to the intermediary. The intermediary translated and relayed all that had been said to the French tourist who was the last one addressed.

In this manner of speaking, the passing of the *jeliya kuma* demonstrates a repetitive act among the griots that reveals the hierarchal process of an indirect discourse. The *jelikuntigi* is always the first to speak. He addresses the group of young griots before opening the *kuma* to everyone and allowing them to make their contribution. The *kuma* travels within the group with the speaker always acknowledging what the previous one has said. The *kuma* returns to the *jelikuntigi* when he declares his decision, which he hands to a young griot to pass along to the intermediary who translates it to the foreigner. Thus, the *jelikuntigi* never speaks directly to a foreigner. Here, the repetition occurs not only in the passing of the *jeliya kuma* but also in another important point: translation.

When the *jelikuntigi* makes his final decision, it is not only repeated to the foreigner through the chain of speakers but also translated to this person in the end. Translation of the *jeliya kuma* is a tricky task since it can get lost in its numerous repetitions before arriving at the foreigner's feet.

In the second meeting that I witnessed, the translation was lost in the end to the French organizer. He had come to Kela seeking permission to hold a music festival in the village. The event would highlight the talents of the griots both in the village and the Mande region. The French organizer arrived with two young griots from the village working with him to promote the event in Bamako. During the meeting, the griots demonstrated again the passing and repetition of the *jeliya kuma*. Demba Mamadi, Lansiné and Yamadou began the meeting with the usual greetings and benedictions to the other griots and the visiting party. Afterward, they gave the visiting griots a chance to speak. The two young griots explained the festival to Demba Mamadi, Lansiné and Yamadou. Soon, the *jeliya kuma* was passed around in a similar manner to the meeting with the French tourist. All of the exchanges occurred in Malinké.

Lansiné grew very agitated in this meeting and made an unexpected outburst of his feelings with another griot. An argument between the two ensured before the other griots tried to calm Lansiné down. Still, he was not so easily placated and raised his voice often to show his disagreement with the other griots throughout the meeting. No one addressed the French organizer or myself about the outburst. We remained clueless for the entire meeting. The meeting came to an abrupt end when the two griots acting as the intermediary to the French organizer translated that consent had been given with no other explanation. I was surprised at the speediness of their answer since the French organizer

was not involved in the passing of the *jeliya kuma* during the whole meeting. None of the griots had addressed him. He learned nothing of what had transpired between the griots in the meeting, particularly Lansiné's outburst. It was clear that the two young griots chose not to repeat what the griots had discussed in their translation to the French organizer. Consent was granted and that was enough for him to know; the repetition of the *jeliya kuma* disappeared in its translation. For his part, the French organizer's placid reaction to their short response made me question whether Lansiné's outburst had frightened him. I recalled my own discomfort in my initial encounter with the griots.

The French organizer and my experience reveal how the role of a foreigner is also tricky in these meetings. Foreigners, be they researchers or tourist or organizer find themselves as much present as they are absent due to their unfamiliarity with the griots' behavior and inability to comprehend the language. Their ambivalent standing becomes compounded by the suspense that hangs in the air since foreigners are always the last one addressed and always indirectly through multiple translations. As a result, foreigners find themselves in both a vulnerable and disadvantageous position since all comprehensible social protocols they understand are no longer relevant in these meetings.

The passing and repetition of the *jeliya kuma* is a circus act to observe given the foreigner's tricky position; yet, its movement among the griots is not only necessary for the repetition that it entails but also for the lead it carries into the scene noted above: the outburst. In such a display of outburst, the griots demonstrate another play with their *kuma*. A griot will suddenly raise his voice in the midst of a meeting and begin a heated exchange with another bard. One might say he steals the *kuma* for his fifteen minutes of fame by quarreling with another griot. The argument is unusually over a minor point (the

location of the performance or the assistance of one or two musician to the *kumatigi*) that is more a performance for the visitor than a genuine disagreement.

A meeting with a foreigner present will frequently have an outburst between two griots exchanging heated exclamatory words. However, for a foreigner who does not speak or understand Malinké and is unfamiliar with the griot's style of speaking, the scene can appear quite intimidating. Unknown to the visitor in this scene is the underlying teamwork exhibited among the griots. The griots are working together in this manner to build up and open to another moment: the *jelikuntigi's* decision. He mediates between the arguing griots to calm them down before announcing what he has decided. Usually, it is a demand for payment or a specification of terms. The other griots work together afterward to put pressure on the foreigner.

In these two meetings many similarities appeared that showcase the passing of the *jeliya kuma* and its repetition among the griots. I have noted five from my observations:

First, griots do not work alone but in teams. The gathering of the three main griots and their respective family members is not merely for show. These griots know what their role is in these meetings and perform them accordingly. No cues are needed.

Second, the griot's speech begins with the *jelikuntigi*, his *nòkansigi* and the *kumatigi* and moves around to younger griots before it arrives at the intermediary's foot to translate and repeat the *jelikuntigi's* decision to the foreigner. Anyone who wants to speak must respect the hierarchal process in which the passing of the *jeliya kuma* functions. Directly addressing someone is a grave breech of speaking protocol.

Third, an outburst between two griots is an important component of the meeting. It enables the *jelikuntigi's* to mediate between the two griots before declaring his decision

– a semblance of calm before a final decision arrives. The outburst serves also as an intimidation tactic for the foreigner who sits mostly in ignorance.

Fourth, an effort is made to prolong the passing of the *jeliya kuma* in order to keep the foreigner in suspense. Building suspense is another tactic to intimidate the foreigner who will more likely bend under pressure.

Fifth, one person always keeps pressure on the foreigner. The pressure occurs through a constant bombardment of questions and demands to the foreigner.

***Denkundi*: Presentation of the Newborn**

Drawing on these five points, I used them as a base to observe other events to in which the passing of the *jeliya kuma* and the griots in their role as mediator and translator appear. The meetings I witnessed had set a tone and level of theatrics that I expected to find in my observation of *denkundi* and *furu*. Again, I was surprised by what I witnessed. These events possessed another sense of formality that differed considerably from the meetings and showed another use of the *jeliya kuma* that was not present in the former.

Baptism or *denkundi*[88] functions as both a presentation of the child to the families and a naming ceremony for the newborn. The passing of the *jeliya kuma* occurs very seldom at a *denkundi*. My focus during this event was less on the manner of speaking and more on the nature of the *kuma* since the role of the griot at a baptism is to announce the birth of the child and the sacrifices that all the different families in the village are making for the newborn. In his announcement, the griot acts as a translator for the family because they are unable to speak publicly. He takes their words, renders them a part of his *jeliya*

[88] Literally, *denkundi* means to shave the child's head. *Den* is child, *kun* is head and *di* is to shave. The act is symbolic of the child's entry into the world. *Denkunli* is the Malinké variation of the word.

kuma and addresses the audience on behalf of the family.

A *denkundi* occurs a week after the birth of the child. However, the counting of the days can vary from 7-9 days or according to when the umbilical cord falls off. Men and women celebrate the *denkundi* separately. The ones I attended in Kela were largely the men's ceremony with Lansiné and Yamadou speaking. The *jelikuntigi* never attends a *denkundi* but leaves them to his *nòkansigi* and the *kumatigi*. Along with the griots, the Imam plays a prominent role in the baptism since he names the newborn.[89] His role and function at the *denkundi* renders it as much a naming ceremony as a presentation of the newborn. In fact, a *denkundi* cannot begin until the Imam arrives. The village chief is also present, but he accomplishes no particular task other than his appearance.

Before a *denkundi* begins, men give both Lansiné and Yamadou small coins of 50-100 CFA upon their arrival. Lansiné starts the ceremony by calming everyone down with a few *haketos* [90] followed by a list of benedictions. As the *denkundi* proceeds, the griots count the money together and announce the total amount. The contribution of money by those in attendance symbolizes the sacrifice and responsibility that everyone shares in the rearing of the child. Lansiné and Yamadou, in turn, redistribute the coins and, in some case, return the money to the very same family members who have made the contribution. The redistribution of the money to the villagers is to help them in their sacrifice for the newborn.

While Lansiné and Yamadou hand out the money, women come in and place big gourds of sweet balls made from corn and rice flour in the center of the *balon* (meeting

[89] The Immam is a head religious figure in Islam who holds extensive knowledge of the Koran.
[90] The word draws from Arabic and loosely translates to "excuse me".

hut).[91] In some cases, dates and candies are also included. Meat is part of the offering if the family possesses the means to sacrifice a sheep. The men who sit around the bowls will slowly put the sweet corn and rice balls into small plastic bags for everyone to take home. Usually, it is three corn balls, a rice ball, a couple of dates and candies per bag.

Following the gourds, an elderly woman appears with the newborn and hands the child to the Imam. The latter carries the child and sings out a list of benedictions before giving the newborn his or her name. The Imam returns the newborn to the elderly woman who brings the child back to the group of women waiting in the background and announces his or her name to them. [92]After she leaves with the newborn, the Imam sings a few verses from the Koran in Arabic followed by some benedictions in Malinké. Both bring an extended *amina* from the men in the audience that closes out the *denkundi*.

The scene of a *denkundi* differs considerably from a meeting. Notably, no dramatic outburst occurs while the passing of the *jeliya kuma* seems incongruous to the griot's announcement of the birth in his role as a translator. Lansiné and Yamadou are the main speakers who address the audience for the family of the newborn. They also draw on the occasion to praise and highlight the family's history since a *denkundi* is a naming ceremony that relates the newborn to the lineage of the family. Lansiné is often the chosen speaker for this part since he is the *kumatigi*. He proceeds with an announcement of the newborn and begins to pay tribute to the family. In some cases, his *kuma* is strong and confident when noting the family's background in Kela; in other cases, his *kuma*

[91] The corn and rice balls have no significance in themselves. They represent the means of the family to offer treats that are readily available from the rice and corn grown in the village.

[92] Men and women celebrate the *denkundi* separately. During the men's ceremony, the women sit off to the side and observe. They have their own ceremony later in the afternoon, which is livelier event with singing and dancing. Griottes help to mediate the ceremony for the other women. The new mother stays inside, listening to the celebration but not participating. Gifts are handed out to the new mother (fabric, soap and small toys) as well as monetary donation from the other women.

becomes an unexceptional perfunctory listing of the family's genealogy. I have observed both cases in which Lansiné impressed and disappointed the audience and noted two reasons to explain the discrepancy.

First, Lansiné's knowledge of the family affects his trajectory of their background. If he knows the family well, he feels comfortable speaking for and about the family and presenting them to the public. This point will come up again during my work with the griots in Kita. The *denkundi* in which Lansiné disappointed the audience reveals his lack of knowledge of the family whereas the ones in which he impressed them shows his familiarity with them. Second, the high number of *denkundi* in Kela affected the griots' performance. During my time in the village, a *denkundi* occurred at least twice a week. Sometimes, more than one would take place in a day. Lansiné and Yamadou attended every one of them. I recall leaving a *denkundi* with Lansiné and Yamadou to attend another one immediately afterward. The work as well as the frequencies of the *denkundi* brought a certain level of fatigue as well as boredom to their task.

While the passing of the *jeliya kuma* is absent at a *denkundi*, the teamwork among the griots is evident. Both Lansiné and Yamadou work together in their task to announce the birth of the newborn. In this case, one can also include the role of the Imam since he names the child. All three figures collaborate to present the newborn to the public. Lansiné and Yamadou announce the child's birth while the Imam names him or her.

***Furu*: Confirmation of a Union and the *Namu Laminala's* Confirmation**

Teamwork is also evident in the weddings that I witnessed. Weddings or *furu* in Kela are not defined by a celebration that includes the presence of the bride and groom

and their families and friends. The bride and groom were both absent during the ceremony that I attended. Men from each family and their representing griots are the only ones present to meet and discuss the dowry. Women are altogether absent. It would not be until my time in Kita that I learned the different ceremonies involved in a *furu* for both the bride and groom. What I witnessed in Kela was less a *furu* and more a confirmation of the dowry that is a part of the *furu* ceremony. To facilitate my discussion here, I will use *furu* to describe the dowry confirmation.

Lansiné, Yamadou and the Imam are always present at a *furu*. The griots act as a mediator between the two families on the amount of the dowry while the Imam blesses the agreement between them; all three men work together. What distinguishes the teamwork in this ceremony from a *denkundi* is the presence of the person known as the *namu laminala*.[93] Barbara Hoffman defines a similar role in her study and calls it *laminala kuma* or "catcher of speech." Her description stresses the speech part of the role that differs from my emphasis on *namu*. In both cases, the meaning of the role holds a base similarity. The *namu laminala* is usually a young griot who is the "response" that stands or sits next to the speaking griot and answers him. Hoffman adds, "Typical griot discourse often calls for a second *jeli* to serve as the one who acknowledges, responds to, and transmits the first griot's message" (22). The *namu laminala* says *namu* after each of the griot's lines to acknowledge his speech and encourage him. *Namu* is the most common response that he gives. It is a term adopted from Arabic that basically translates to "I am here." Along with *namu*, he can also use other words of emphasis such as *kosebe* (a lot), *dooni* (slowly or little by little), *N'Allah sonna* (If Allah wills it) or a proverb. The

[93] The verb *ka lamine* in Bambara means to respond; *kuma* is speech and *namu* is a form of recognition.

variation he chooses is less important than his response to the griot. My introduction to the *namu laminala* occurred in Kela and expanded with his ubiquitous presence at most of the social events I observed in Kita.

In the *furu* that I witnessed, Seydou, the son of Yamadou, held the role of *namu laminala*. He responded to each of Lansiné's line with a *namu*. The *jeliya kuma* moved from Lansiné to Seydou to Demba Haidara, the village chief, back to Seydou to Lansiné. Those who wanted to speak addressed each other through the *namu laminala* with the exception of the family member of the bride and groom. They remained silent since their griots represented them and mediated for them. Thus, the griots contributed at one point while the Imam spoke a few words at another for the family members. Amidst this passing, the passing of the *jeliya kuma* stayed with Seydou, the *namu laminala*. When both parties had accepted and confirmed the amount of the dowry, the *namu laminala* directed the speech to the Imam who blessed the agreement with a final benediction and everyone responded with an *amina*.

In a *furu*, the *namu laminala* is an important part of the *jeliya kuma*. As Madou Kouyaté, one of the griots I observed in Kita, describes: "Si la parole est un faggot de bois, le *namu* est le support" (Conversation March 4, 2006). Kouyaté's metaphor underlines the teamwork among the griots with the passing of the *jeliya kuma* through the *namu laminala* person. The *namu laminala* acts as an intermediary who encourages and acknowledges the speaking griot while mediating the *kuma* among the men in attendance. The intermediary role is different in this case from the one who represents a foreigner since the *namu laminala* is a griot working among his peers.

The use of a *namu laminala* varies from one to many griots. Whether he is one or

many in number, the presence of a *namu laminala* is not always guaranteed at every ceremony. Their appearance and number depend largely on the ceremony. *He* appeared in the dowry confirmation I saw in Kela while *they* were quite present in the *dantegeli* (another ceremony in the wedding) and funerals I attended in Kita. In these ceremonies, the *namu laminala* person helps the quality of the *jeliya kuma* by building teamwork and alleviating any boredom and lack of unity among the griots if only one is speaking.

Having examined the griots at events such as the meeting, *denkundi* and *furu*, I arrived at a point where I was able to see the connections between what I observed and what I read in the novels. The link between the two was the aim of my research – to show the relationship between my work with the griots in Kela and my study of the four novels: *Soundjata* by Niane; *Le Devoir de Violence* by Ouologuem; *L'Étrange Destin de Wangrin* by Bâ; and *L'Assemblée de Djinns* by Diabaté. Particularly, my discovery of the *namu laminala* allowed me to look back at the other parts of the *jeliya kuma* as well as the griot's performance as mediator and translator to see how they appear in the novels. Thus, in my rereading of these novels, I reexamined the adoption of the griot's speech and the portrayal of the griots as mediator and translator according to what I had discovered in my fieldwork. I delve more into these links in the next section.

Moving Back to the Novels – Presence and Absence of Griots from Fieldwork Observation to a Rereading of the Novels

Looking at the *Jeliya Kuma* from Kela to Niane and Ouologuem

Many similarities arose throughout my fieldwork between my observations of the griots and my study of the novels by all four authors: Niane and Ouologuem for the *jeliya kuma* and Bâ and Diabaté for their portrayal of griots as mediators and translators. At the

same time, many aspects of the *jeliya kuma* and the mediating and translating role were absent from my fieldwork to the novels. To draw the parallels between my fieldwork and analysis of novels, I want to focus on the similarities and the differences I found between my work in and outside of the books that both represent the presence and absence of the griots from real life to the novel.

To begin, I want discuss what has been the central find in my fieldwork: the passing of the *jeliya kuma*. In all of the events that I observed, including ones where Lansiné was or was not the central speaker, the *jeliya kuma* moved around the room, enabling everyone to speak and contribute his thoughts. Such a passing of the *jeliya kuma* is much more difficult to assess in the novel. In Niane's case, his adoption of the *jeliya kuma* shows very little of the passing that I observed since he and the bard, Mamadou Kouyaté, are the only ones speaking. Niane records the *Soundjata* epic that Kouyaté relates to him. And in his rendition of the epic, he follows a very linear narrative that flows with few interruptions or pauses. The beginning and conclusion of the novel feature an appearance by Kouyaté who both introduces and concludes the epic.

Apart from Kouyaté's appearances, the rest of the novel reads in a third person voice that follows Soundjata's crippled childhood to his exile from the village to his return and rise as king. Actions move the narrative along and leave few opportunities for the passing of the *jeliya kuma* to occur. For instance, in the chapter leading up to Soundjata's return to his village, one discovers: "A Mema, Soudjata apprit que Soumaoro avait envahi le Manding et que son frère, Dankaran Touman était en fuite: il apprit aussi que Fakoli tenait tête au roi de Sosso" (Niane 83). Hearing about these events galvanizes Soundjata to act quickly to restore his kingdom and place in it. Passages similar to this

one are consistent throughout the novel to narrate the story. As a result, the play with the *jeliya kuma* is largely absent due to the narrative structure that Niane uses.

The opposite is true for Ouologuem. His manipulation of the *jeliya kuma* reveals more instances of a passing of the *kuma* in his novel. From the beginning, one hears many voices relating the history of the Nakem Empire. One voice presents the turbulent times in which the Nakem Empire appeared while another one speaks directly about the family of the Saïf. Between these two voices are pauses that Ouologuem creates with his use of ellipses and parentheses that causes one to see how his manipulation of the *jeliya kuma* also reveals its passing. One passage on the Nakem Empire begins with ". . . L'Empire s'effritait. . . La dynastie Saïf périclitatit dans la branche paternelle.. . . ." (Ouologuem 25). The ellipses within the paragraph highlight a passing of the *jeliya kuma* with its constant breaks. The passing becomes even more apparent in the following passage when a new narrative line starts, "Cependent, au milieu de cet effroyable chevauchement de coutumes, d'exactions, de razzias, de dilettantisme encapsulé dans la vie dévote, féodale, terrienne, oisive et sensuelle de l'Islam, quelques grandes familles furent sauves:" (Ouologuem 27). The change in voice from a first person narrative to a third person one between the two passages shows a passing of the *jeliya kuma* even as they are both relating the family of the Saïf. Unlike Niane, Ouologuem's novel is not a linear rendition of the Nakem Empire. His narrative moves between the presentation of the family and its notable characters, such as the Saïf ben Isaac al-Heit, and the general history of the Nakem Empire. Ouologuem's play with the *jeliya kuma* in this manner continues throughout the novel, which helps to maintain the different voices that render it similar to the real life passing of *kuma* from one person to another.

Related to the passing of the *jeliya kuma* is the presence of the *namu laminala* and the practice of repetition and translation. Certainly what I witnessed as a part of Lansiné's outburst, the French organizer's simple acceptance of the griots' consent or Seydou's role as the *namu laminala* during the dowry confirmation draws no direct parallel to my study of the *jeliya kuma* in the novel. These events were particular and unique to my fieldwork experience. However, what appears relevant in this case is the act of repetition and translation in the *jeliya kuma* since it touches upon all three events.

Both Niane and Ouologuem utilize repetition and translation in their work. In *Le Devoir de Violence*, Ouologuem draws on repetition in the many calls he embeds in each paragraph. Again, in his presentation of the history of the Nakem Empire and the family of the Saïf, Ouologuem inserts exclamatory calls constantly in the narrative. From grand ones such as "La malédiction de Dieu sur lui!" to lesser ones such as "héritier légitime du trône," they recall the repetition of the *jeliya kuma* as it is moves around with the goal and effect that with every repetition, greater emphasis occurs. Repetition takes place also in Ouologuem's reference to the notable Saïf ben Isaac al-Heit, who brought both fortune and misfortune to the Nakem Empire. His consistent naming of this one Saïf brings to mind Demba Mamadi and Lansiné's constant reference to the "one" researcher who came and paid them generously to work with them. The Fondation SCOA comes to my mind. Niane's work demonstrates too the practice of translation and repetition. He brings Kouyaté's account of the *Soundjata* from orality to writing in his translation of the epic. In this process, Niane is also repeating the story that Kouyaté relates to him into his own novelistic rendering of the epic. As noted above, the novel reads in a very traditional

linear narrative that exhibits no passing of the *jeliya kuma* even as it highlights these instances of translation and repetition.

Reading Bâ and Diabaté's Griot Portrayal in Kela

Evidence of repetition and translation occurs more in Bâ's *L'Étrange Destin de Wangrin* and Diabaté's *L'Assemblée de Djinns* with their presentation of the griots as translator and mediator. My observations of the Lansiné and Yamadou in these roles show them translating and mediating at ceremonial events such as *denkundi* and *furu*. In these roles, they do not appear to be the colorful griot characters seen in Bâ and Diabaté's works. As a translator at a *denkundi*, Lansiné appears more dutiful than cunning in his function. His translation of the family's history – speaking for them – demonstrates quite a subdued presentation of the *jeliya kuma*. Lansiné's real life performance differs considerable from Bâ's portrayal of his well-known translator: Wangrin. Unlike what I observed of Lansiné, Wangrin represents a less honest translator in his task of speaking for other people. He uses his skills as a translator to not only speak for people but also take advantage of them.

Such was the case in Wangrin's successful undoing of his nemesis son, Doumouma, on a rape charge. Doumouma drugs the young Pugubila under his service and takes advantage of her. When she discovers that she has been violated, she returns home in shame. Wangrin's spy reports the incident to him, which he, in turn, uses to manipulate both the local magistrate and the parents of Pugubila to formally bring charges against Doumouma. To do this, he coaches the family on what to say in front of

the sub-district officier. Rather than speaking for them as a translator, Wangrin trains them to speak directly but using his words. He explains to them the night before:

> Allez demain trouver le petit commandant, et dites-lui ceci: Notre fille a été dépucelée par Doumouma Romo. Nous sommes tus jusqu'à present par peur, Doumouma ayant déclaré que les femmes et jeunes filles mises à sa disposition pour le "macadamage" des maisons et des routes lui appartenaient corps et âme durant toute leur période de corvée (Bâ 165).

The words that he places in the parents' mouth enable him to manipulate the family to say what he wants them to say. He translates for them in advance, which gives him an advantage of both situations – by telling them what to say and having them say it in front of the sub-district officer. The Doumouma incident demonstrates one of the many examples of Wangrin's mischievous dealings as a translator.

Admittedly from this example, Lansiné and Wangrin appear to sit too far apart to draw any concrete comparison: Lansiné performs his role as a translator at ceremonial events while Wangrin acts as a translator whose functions recall that of a griot in his irascible dealings between the local people and the French colonial administration. However, the differences are not as stark when examined closely. In both cases, Lansiné, the *kumatigi*, and Wangrin, the character griot, are speaking for other people. Their task to achieve this is also the same: translating. Lansiné's function as a translator enables him to speak for the family. What he chooses to say and how he presents it shows his knowledge of the family that reflects upon his role as a translator. Thus, his praise of the family benefits them as much as it does him – a point that is not always noted.

Upon this point, one sees the goal of Lansiné's translating tasks similar to that of the griot character found in Wangrin. Both translate in a manner that would work more in their favor. Of course, the end result of their translating functions is different, and, here,

they differ. While Wangrin works to manipulate those around him, Lansiné hopes to appease the family with his praise and knowledge of them. The discrepancy between my real life observation and my novel study of a griot performing his task as a translator highlights the varying functions of a translator as they are performing the same task.

A similar argument can be made for a griot in his role as mediator. Diabaté presents a satirical portrayal of a mediator in his version of the griot war in Kita. His depiction of the griots in this conflict shows them to be anything but the mediator they are purported to be. Again, the presentation of the griots as mediators in the novel differs from my observation of them. Lansiné and Yamadou acted as mediators in the *furu* that I witnessed. They represented the bride's family and mediated firmly for a reasonable and acceptable dowry. The *jeliya kuma* was passed accordingly with the help of Seydou, the *namu laminala*, between the two families and Lansiné, Yamadou and the Imam. Seydou also assisted Lansiné and Yamadou in their *jeliya kuma* with his repetitive and supporting calls. The mediation between the bride and groom's family on the part of their respective griots represents a situation that is similar to Diabaté's portrayal of the different clans mediating between themselves to see who would become the next chief griot. In both cases, they are large families or clans mediating between each other. In Diabaté's depiction, Danfaga believes he is the next in line after the death of his brother Tiékmoko, the former chief griot, while Sangoï challenges him on this arbitrary succession based on the fact that he did not follow the proper protocol.

Apart from this one similarity, everything else differs between my observation of Lansiné and Yamadou and Diabaté's depiction of the Anabon and Guena clan. The griots in the novel use their mediating function to manipulate and scheme rather than to

reconcile conflicting parties. Their mediation works against them since each clan is also working to install their own chief griot if not himself. The secret acts of scheming and manipulation reveal themselves in the pivotal meeting between the Anabon and Guena as well as many other clans. Danfaga believes he will be anointed the next chief griot when Sangoï tells him:

> Les Guena qui sont les garants de la chefferie ont décidé que cette fois-ci le critère de l'âge l'emporterait sur celui de l'honorabilité. . . . Aussi, j'ai consulté Fakourou qui réside à Jilakon. Il est, à ma connaissance, le plus âgé des griots du cercle due Woudi. Fakourou a décliné l'honneur, disant que sa charge de chef d'une grande famille l'accaparait. J'ai loué sa sagesse. Ah, si l'âge et le discernement se mariaient toujours, nous aurions fondu les deux critères en un seul. Aujourd'hui nous sommes réunis pour connaître le plus âgé d'entre nous après Fakourou (Diabaté 56-57).

The reaction to Sangoï is quick and harsh. Calls of traitors ring out in the meeting. Danfaga contains his anger before responding to Sangoï, "Pourquoi m'avoir demandé de succéder à mon frère si tu devais évoquer le critère de l'âge?" (Diabaté 59). Sangoï denies ever having made such a promise to Danfaga. The mediation that was to take place among the clans to choose the new chief griot has now dissipated with Sangoï's sudden announcement and the immediate reaction of Danfaga. The most telling moment comes in the end when Sangoï offers Danfaga a piece of kola nut to alleviate the tension between them. The latter refuses as Sangoï goes on to offer the chiefs of the other clans one. Describes Diabaté: "Puis il sortit de sa poche de grosses noix de cola toutes rouges et en offrit une à chaque chef de clan. Chacun accepta la sienne, avec cérémonie, comme pour sceller un pacte" (60). Sangoï's action is symbolic for its gesture as well as the message it sends out. Clearly no honest reconciliation or resolution occurred in this

scene. Rather than mediate between and among themselves, the griots only worked against each other.

The last point brings up another important find in my fieldwork: teamwork. The manner in which the griots worked could not have been more different from my fieldwork to their presentation in the novels by all four authors, Bâ, Diabaté, Niane and Ouologuem. No ill intents were visible in my observation of Lansiné and Yamadou working as themselves at the meetings, as translators at the *denkundi* and as mediators at the *furu*. At all of these events, they worked collectively to achieve the goal at hand – be it extracting money from a foreigner, acknowledging the sacrifice of a family for a newborn or mediating between two families for a dowry amount. The griots worked consistently as a team. The teamwork they displayed was quite a surprise for me, not only among themselves but also in front of others, especially a foreigner. Nowhere was this teamwork more evident than in my departure from Kela. My experience with the griots on my exit from the village highlights the ultimate teamwork at play. No comparison to the novels appears appropriate on this point other than to emphasize the teamwork among the griots. I narrate the experience below.

Breaking up. . . is so Hard to do with Griots

Misunderstanding Reappears in *Mes Cours*

Apart from these three events (meetings, *denkundi* and *furu*), my fieldwork included sporadic gatherings with the three main griots in what they called *mes cours* (my classes). Initially, I saw them no differently from a meeting but was later corrected to view them as *cours*. Even so, the *cours* were nothing more than an informal meeting with Demba Mamadi, Yamadou and Lansiné. We all sat together in the *balon* at Demba

Mamadi's compound and communicated as best as possible between my Bambara and their Malinké. If a translator was available, he too was present. Usually, Madou or his brother Modibo filled this role at different times. Yet, more often than not, the three main griots called whoever was nearby at the time that spoke passable French.

The *cours* represented a misunderstanding of my research that stemmed from our initial meeting. After my payment to the griots and the formal appointment of Lansiné as my teacher, an agreement had been set between them and myself. I believed when Demba Mamadi pointed to Lansiné as my teacher, he also meant *cours* to be part of the *kumatigi's* role. The *cours* acknowledged my payment to them and commenced our agreement. They were fulfilling their end of the agreement by giving these *cours* while my attendance at them confirmed my part in it.

For the griots, the *cours* were concrete evidence of their work with me. My observation, which was the true aim of my research, appeared incomprehensible to them since I was sitting with the griots with no particular purpose. I struggled constantly to explain my approach to the griots. Soon, to show rather than tell them, I mentioned the *cours* less and hung around with the griots more, particularly Lansiné. It was in these sittings with him that I acquired a more integrated view of the griots' role in Kela that became telling of my departure from the village.

Getting to Know and Breaking up with the Three Main Griots: Demba Mamadi; Yamadou and Lansiné

The Diabaté are the eyes, ears and mouth of Kela. Nothing much occurs there without their presence or consent. Michel Kuentz founder of the Bibliothéque du Mande in Kela, explained their unique position as both griots and village chief, even though

Demba Haidara holds the latter position My rare sightings of the village chief confirm Kuentz's remark. Demba Haidara attended many of the functions with the griots but did not have the same authorial presence as the latter. Due to the griots' particular role in Kela, Kuentz admonished me portentously, "Il ne faut pas vexer les griots" (Conversation, Jan. 23, 2006).[94]

The Diabaté are separated into five sub-families: Bintoula, Kanofinla, Brémala, Djetmourila and Djsusmissala. The division into these five sub-families occurred when the sons from the original family moved and built their own family compound. Bintoula and Kanofinla are named after the women these men married. Brémala, Djetmourila and Djsusmissala are named after the men themselves. Both Lansiné and Yamoudou belong to Djetmourila while Demba Mamadi is part of Bintoula. Regardless of the break up, all the Diabatés in Kela view themselves as one large family, a point that was dutifully noted to me in my first meeting with the griots. (Conversation January 16, 2006)

Among the three main griots, I spent most of my time with Lansiné since he was my appointed teacher. Unlike Demba Mamadi and Yamadou, he embodies the stereotypical griot personality that I had envisioned from my readings and conversations with other Malians. He is not the reticent figure that Yamadou projects or the griot who derives his authority from his position that Demba Mamadi casts in his role as the *jelikuntigi*. Lansiné possesses a dubious quality in his character that both charms and

[94] Kuentz is an eccentric character who has lived in Kela for five years. A lot of ill feelings exist between him and the griots. He has created the Bibliothéque du Mande with the help from some villagers. The library receives support and books from his friends and contacts with NGOs. The griots contend the library is simply exploiting them. Most villagers show no interest in the library, which stems from the griots' strong feeling against Kuentz. The disagreement between Kuentz and the griots escalated when he created a website about Kela – www.kelamali.com. I have viewed both the library and website and have found nothing egregious about them. I believe the griots' contention is not with the library or website but with the fact that a foreigner such as Kuentz created them without their consent or support. If he had collaborated with them, I believe the griots would not feel such animosity toward him.

intimidates people. One never quite knows what he is thinking or what he will do. He is, as Jansen attests, a difficult person to work with and get to know (Conversation, Jan. 15, 2006). My interactions with him were no different.

The mood of our exchanges all depended on Lansiné's temper for the day. If he was in an upbeat mood, Lansiné would come over to Yamadou's compound to talk with me or bring me along to meet someone else.[95] If he was in a sour mood, he would make anyone in his presence feel unbearably uncomfortable with a shroud of scowled silence. The mercurial nature of Lansiné's temperaments showed me the fickleness in his character that is typical of a griot who quickly changes his mind for his own benefit.

Lansiné demonstrated his unpredictable mood most in the final debate over my remaining payment to the griots. I told Demba Mamadi, Yamadou and Lansiné that I was unable to pay the rest of the amount they requested upon my return from Bamako a few weeks later. Lansiné had inquired about the payment as soon as I returned; I did not answer him directly but asked for a meeting the next day to make my announcement to all three griots. In the meeting, I emphasized and stated what I felt when they announced the amount to me; the amount was too much and I could not pay the rest now. The griots were not happy to hear the change to our agreement. A scowled expression appeared on Lansiné face; Yamadou remained quietly shocked and Demba Mamadi looked very annoyed.

Demba Mamadi demanded why I had not come to tell him immediately upon my

[95] During one occasion, he showed me what he called a book of his knowledge. I thought they were some old manuscript of the *Soundiata* epic that he had learn to recite. Instead, they turned out to be Jansen's transcription and translation of his recitation of the Soundiata epic published in both Dutch and French. I related the story to Jansen later who was quite pleased that Lansiné was sharing these books.

return to Bamako. I responded and told him that I had asked Lansiné to call the meeting that we were all sitting in now. Not much was said among the griots afterward. They appeared too astounded and displeased to begin a discussion. Finally, Demba Mamadi spoke and declared that I could not break the agreement since he had already informed the other Diabaté families of the full amount that I was to pay. To change the figure now would place him in a difficult position with them; they would think he was keeping the rest of the payment for himself. From this point, he asserted decisively: no payment meant no research. He said no more and quickly left the *balon*.

I returned to Lansiné's compound with him where we discussed the payment. He appeared unusually friendly with me in our conversation. Demba Mamadi's decision was clearly on his mind. Lansiné maintained that my work in Kela could not end presently. Neither he, as my teacher, nor the others griots wanted my research to stop. The time had not arrived; and I had yet to learn all there is to know about the griots and Kela. I viewed Lansiné's assertion of his role as my teacher and the work we still needed to do as his attempts to cajole me into paying the remaining amount. He was the ever-cunning griot. "What if the money does not come?" I asked him. He reassured me that it would. Over the next few days, he became a mediator and attempted to negotiate between Demba Mamadi and myself over the remaining payment.

The non-defensive stance that Lansiné displayed to my announcement was a stark contrast to Demba Mamadi's hostile position. The latter's brisk exit from the meeting spoke clearly of his dissatisfaction with my change to our agreement; at the same time, it showed his outrage at my affront to his authority as the *jelikuntigi*. In the time that I observed Demba Mamadi, I learned that he regards himself very highly in the *jelikuntigi*

role and demands respect for it. However, I noted also that he is a *jelikuntigi* who garners respect more by the position he holds and less by the person he is. Demba Mamadi lacks an imposing presence that often renders him dismissible at meetings if not for his position. He is unlike Lansiné who exemplifies the cunning and shrewd personality of a griot. Many days I found him doing nothing but reposing in his hammock. For all of his shortcomings, the griots respect the *jelikuntigi* and wait for Demba Mamadi's final decision in all matters. In turn, Demba Mamadi's relishes the power that his role imparts and takes the slightest disregard to anyone who offends him. My change to our agreement represented a challenge to his authority that clearly insulted him. His final decree and brisk exit from the meeting were evidence of how much I had upset him.

A Decision of Singular Consequence and Result

The change I felt about paying the remaining amount came after I conferred with my colleagues in Bamako. All were thoroughly shocked at the amount the griots demanded and felt they were taking advantage of my presence in the village. S. Camara found the request as unexpected as I did. He maintained afterward that he stressed my status as student to them (Conversation, Feb. 21, 2006). His emphasis, however, proved ineffective. The griots were in the habit of having all foreign researchers working in Kela pay them. Jansen, who was in Mali at the time, thought the amount was outrageous and felt the griots had trapped me into the payment by calling the public meeting with the other Diabaté families present (Conversation, Jan. 26, 2006). The culmination of all these views confirmed my own uneasiness about the payment when it was first put forth to me

in the initial meeting. I decided to tell the griots that I could not pay the remaining amount upon my return to Kela and braced myself for the outcome.

My decision broke many protocols, I admit. First, it disregarded the agreement the griots and I made from the beginning of my stay in Kela. They had set the payment at 200,000 CFA, and I agreed to pay that amount when I gave them the first half. The remainder was supposed to come after my visit to Bamako. Second, it was a brazen affront to the *jelikuntigi*'s authority when I announced that I could not pay the rest of the amount. Not only was I not recognizing his position as the *jelikuntigi* but I was also forgetting my own place as the foreigner and, in many respects, woman in the Malinké culture. Demba Mamadi felt deeply insulted on both accounts. As a result, he responded harshly: I needed to pay or leave.

Ultimatum: You Pay or You Go

Over the next few days, I weighed the ultimatum given by Demba Mamadi [96] and decided in the end to pay the remaining amount; I reported the news to Lansiné who was happy to hear it. The friendliness he showed me during the past couple of days continued unabated. He brought me over to Demba Mamadi's compound to share my decision with the latter. We all greeted each other upon our arrival. Lansiné gave me the *kuma* after he spoke briefly to Demba Mamadi about the purpose of our visit to his compound. I announced to Demba Mamadi that I would pay the rest of the amount even though I felt the payment was still too much. I would get the amount the next time I was in Bamako; I

[96] I used also the time to go to Kangaba and email Jansen. I hoped his experience with the griots in Kela would offer me some insights on what to do. Unfortunately, his response came too late in light of the quick changing events in Kela. I was unable to contact Camara by email or phone. His email address is a shared one with ISH that he checks rarely and the phones in Kangaba receive incoming calls only.

had scheduled a visit in two weeks. Demba Mamadi stayed silent for a bit. When he spoke, he accepted the two-week wait; however, he would not give any *cours* until I made the complete payment. He was too *énervé* (irritated) to give any *cours*.

Unfortunately, the resolution was short lived. Demba Mamadi called a meeting with Lansiné, Yamadou and a few other members of the different Diabaté families later that same day. No one formally called me to attend. I happened to chance upon it because I was with Lansiné who led me to Demba Mamadi's compound. I had no idea what the meeting was for when I arrived. Demba Mamadi began to speak. As soon as he mentioned *ton* or payment, I knew it was about me. Clearly, he had changed his mind from the afternoon. No longer would he accept that I stay in the village during the two weeks before I went to Bamako to get the rest of the payment. I needed to leave the next day. He announced repeatedly *a be taa sinin*! (She leaves tomorrow!)

No one dared contradict the *jelikuntigi*. Rather, the discussion focused strongly on the payment. The *jeliya kuma* passed mainly among the three main griots. The younger griots contributed from time to time. Demba Mamadi made his announcement and described what had transpired in the past few days. He appeared as *énervé* as he was when I told him about the change. Lansiné noted the conversations he and I shared about the payment. Yamadou and his son, Seydou, related their experience as my *jatigi*.[97]

Clearly, Demba Mamadi's mind was made up and the griots were only supporting his decision. No one said anything to me until the end, when, according to the protocol, a

[97] My living arrangement with Yamadou and Seydou had many difficulties ranging from my diet (vegetarianism) to my sleeping quarters. During my first three weeks, I slept on a bench in Seydou's compound, first outside and later in the entry way to his hut. My belongings stayed in Yamadou's compound around the corner. I had hinted at a better sleeping accommodation to Seydou but nothing was done. Fortunately, Jansen spoke about my sleeping arrangements to them. I found out they had a room available for me but thought I had wanted to sleep outside so never showed it to me.

young griot translated and repeated Demba Mamadi's final decision to me. I had gathered already from what I understood of the discussion the *jelikuntigi's* decreed: I needed to leave Kela the next day; I could not spend the coming two weeks in the village until my next visit to Bamako; and I needed to go to Bamako to get them the rest of the payment immediately. Only after I had the rest of the payment in hand could I return, pay the griots and continue with my research in Kela.

The decision was a drastic change from the afternoon. Demba Mamadi was no longer asking for my payment but my departure. I addressed the young griots directly in my response. "You want me to leave," I asked? The young griots denied any such intention on their part. However, their evasiveness only confirmed the true message they were sending. Left with no other choice, I stated that if I leave tomorrow, I would not be coming back. They showed very little surprise at my response. I believe it was the reaction they wanted from me and for the others to see – the research ended on my accord and not theirs. In both scenarios, I was the one who decided. If I did not pay, research could not continue. If I had the money and did not return from Bamako, I still decided to end the research. The finger cannot be pointed at them to say they terminated the research. I saw through their intentions and felt, as I did in the first meeting, completely in a vulnerable position and quite taken advantaged of by the griots.

The three main griots stayed quiet during my exchanges with the young griots. Demba Mamadi remained quiet but agitated. Yamadou carried a look of relief for the matter was coming to an end. Lansiné held his usual scowled expression. He who had been my one support in the whole situation with his friendliness and cajoling no longer had anything to say. I was witnessing another part of Lansiné's mercurial nature as a

griot. In this case, it was also a political move. He drew back his support for me in deference to the *jelikuntigi's* decision. Rather than stand singularly, he joined the rest of the griots. After the meeting ended, Lansiné turned to shake my hand and wished me a good evening. He said no more. Rather than leave the next day, I returned to my hut, packed my bags and left that evening. No one blinked at eye at my departure.

Another Part of Fieldwork: Leaving

My abrupt ending in Kela confirmed and highlighted a part of the griots' behavior that I had seen in my observations but underestimated: teamwork. The griots acted as a team, standing together and supporting the decision of the *jelikuntigi*. The meeting was an opportunity for Demba Mamadi to gather the other griots around him so he could to reassert his authority. If he had not done so, and I had stayed in the village during those two weeks, he would have lost face to me. I would have been the one dictating the terms to him. I had agreed to pay but noted when I would pay and planned to stay in the village during this time. My actions displayed a clear disregard for his authority as the *jelikuntigi*. He could not accept the situation as it was and called a meeting to regain his position and authority with my expulsion from the village in the presence of the other griots. In turn, the other griots' support of Demba Mamadi's decision was exactly the reaction he sought.

In their actions, the griots remain a cohesive group, showing a deep attachment to their identity as griots as well as their caste. And as a part of the caste, the griots adhere strongly to the rules and protocols dictated by their endogamous birth. A young griot who dares to speak up or challenge the *jelikuntigi* would have been ostracized by his peers and

reminded dutifully of his position. It is this strict adherence that leads the griots to hold a deep reverence for their role and their functions in it – a reverence that they expect a *horon*, or in my case, a foreigner, to heed and respect even more since the latter two parties are not a part of the caste. At the same time, my departure meant little to the griots since they knew that others would come. A foreigner in Kela was not an unusual sight. Moreover, a foreigner coming to ask for a performance (such as the French tourist and organizer) or to do research in Kela (myself and the student of Jansen's) was quite common for the griots. Indeed, Demba Mamadi alluded to it when he said repeatedly *do be na* (others will come). For him, others will come and pay. Given this fact, the other griots remained united behind him in his decision. [98]

My experience with the griots in Kela spoke to an anti-*griotisme* sentiment that I felt but could not describe until my arrival in Kita. In the urban city, I encountered a vocal criticism of the griots and their practice of *griotisme* that mirrored my experience in Kela. Knowing and learning about the anti-*griotisme* sentiment provided me with a more nuanced reading of the griots that helped me to understand my abrupt exit from Kela. It also influenced my research in Kita since anti-*griotisme* addresses larger issues that reflects the urban surrounding and diverse population of the city. Lansiné was correct

[98] A similar albeit larger display of griot unity appeared in Hoffman's depiction of the griot war in Kita. She was present during the three-day event in April 1985 when griots from all over the Mande region from the Gambia to Kela descended upon Kita to witness the end of the griot war with the ascension of Makanjan Diabaté as the *jelikuntigi*. The mass appearance of griots was not only due to the end of the two-year war between the Diabaté and Tounkara families but also a momentous effort by the griots to resolve the conflict among themselves. An earlier attempt made by the Malian Administration to help end the conflict pushed the griots to act. Explains Hoffman: ". . .[the Malian Administration] encountered a level of resistance against which they had insufficient official power. Realizing this, the officials appealed to other *jeliw* to resolve the situation quickly, and, most importantly, among themselves" (48). Of course, the griots reacted quite decisively as evidenced by the large three-day gathering. While there are little parallels between my experience in Kela and what Hoffman witnessed in Kita, the display of unity evidenced in both cases shows the griots' assertion of their role in the Mande caste structure.

when he stated that my research was not over; however, it had come to an end in Kela. I knew I could not return to the village after my disastrous departure. I also knew that my approach in Kita would be different from Kela and my methodology would need to change due to the anti-*griotisme* sentiment found in the urban city.

Chapter Six

Kita, Known as the "Land of Griots"

Setting the Site: Parallels and Differences with Kela

For the second part of my research, I traveled to another city in the Mande region, Kita. It sits 180kms west of Bamako on the western road to both Senegal and Guinea. Kita holds a dual role as a *commune urbaine* and a *cercle* due to its size. It is a *commune urbaine* that represents the many outlaying neighborhoods of the city while also acting as a *cercle* to the surrounding villages. Kita is a part of the Kayes region, named after the largest city in the western part of Mali – Kayes. Kita follows as the second largest city.

The city's dual role as both a *commune urbaine* and *cercle* speaks more to the lack of development in the western region than its popularity as an administrative site for the central government in Bamako. Aside from Kita, Kayes and the small town of Manatali in which a dam was built, the western region of Mali appears to have a dearth of towns that are able to perform and hold an administrative role.

Kita was fully recognized as a *commune urbaine* in 1966, years before the 1996 law that sanctioned the creation of *communes rurales* altogether. An earlier date found in the archives on Kita notes the year at 1959:

> Avant la création de la municipalité de Kita en 1959, les quartiers étaient des villages indépendants, chacun ayant son propre chef et son organisation interne. L'indépendance a fait des quartiers les bases de l'organisation du parti et des coopératives; avec ce renforcement de leurs fonctions, les quartiers ont conservé largement l'indépendance et l'esprit d'un village. En même temps, la croissance de la villa a mené à une prise de conscience plus aiguë, fondée sur le rôle économique et la sophistication relitive de la ville (Hopkins 7).

The early push for Kita to become a *commune urbaine* reflects the lack of viable and functioning towns in the region to take this role; at the same time, it was an early indication of the rapid expansion occurring in Kita that marks it less a village and more a urban city. Locals who are a part of Kita *commune urbaine* and *cercle* use the city similarly to how villagers of Kela utilize Kangaba for all their official businesses. Services available in Kita are quite expansive; they include several offices, ranging from government (court and police department) to civic ones (health center, bank and post office). There are also several primary and secondary schools located in many of the neighborhoods in the city.

Kita has a mayor, a position created with the recognition of Kita as a *commune urbaine* in the late 1950s to mid-1960s. Currently, Amadou Cissé carries this role. Unlike Kangaba, not all of the mayors in Kita have belonged to one particular family. Past mayors have included the Diallo, the Fofana and even the Diabaté. Still, one cannot overlook the Keïta completely. They hold a *chefferie* (variation on *chef*) or village chief role that differs from a mayor. Today, the *chefferie* speaks more to their part in the discovery of Kita than any real administrative power.

Camara, Tounkara and Keïta – Different Families Laying Claim to Kita

The founding of Kita involves several competing families, rendering it both a complex and telling narrative. The first family to appear in Kita was the Camara who came in the guise of a hunter named Sema Toleba Camara from Guinea. He arrived in Kita and quickly settled in the area that is now the mayor's office. Sema Toleba did not stay in Kita but moved onward to find land to farm in Bérénimba 5kms away.

Following the Camara are the Tounkara who arrived in Kita from Mema, Ghana as a part of Soundiata's troop in their battle against Soumaoro Kanté. After the battle, they settled in Ségouna in Gadougou also called Ségouna Kourou on the periphery of Kita. Despite their heroic feat in the battle, the Tounkara were soon overshadowed by the arrival of another family: the Keïta. The "Monographie du Cercle de Kita 1189 – 1944" notes the arrival of the new family in the changes that occurred for the Tounkara: "Dès l'arrivée des Keïta, les Tounkara ont renoncé au commandement du pays. Par contre ils sont chefs de la terre dans tout le canton et sont obligatoirement consultés lors de la désignation du diamanatigui" ("Monographie du Cercle de Kita 1189 – 1944").

The last family to come to Kita is the Keïta; they are the original family of the Mande region, even though their appearance in Kita follows the Camara and Tounkara. They hold a prominent role among the other families since the Keïta, ". . . constituent aujourd'hui le clan le plus cohérent et le plus nombreux du cercle. . . . Les Keita ont pris à leur compte la légende du glorieux Soundiata et se considèrent comme la famille noble par excellence. . . ." ("Monographie du Cercle de Kita 1189 – 1944"). Such was the case in 1944 and continues today with the Keïta in Kita.

These families still reside in Kita along with others who have settled later. All have formed their own neighborhood denoted by the family's relation to the name. For instance, the Keïta live in the neighborhood of Samédougou. The name was given to the Keïta by a griotte who came by and saw them eating *riz gras* (greasy rice) which in Malinké is called *samé*. Thus, the name Samédougou applied, *dougou* denoting "the land of." Overall, there are fourteen neighborhoods in Kita with new ones developing as the city expands. The estimated population of Kita is close to 40,000 inhabitants according to

the lastest census ("Monographie de la Commune Urbaine de Kita").

. . . and Do Not Forget the Griot Families

The dominant griot families in Kita remain the Diabaté and Kouyaté. The Tounkara are also griots but can be nobles too. The distinction between the griot caste families and non-griot noble ones played out often during my stay and was the topic of many discussions about *griotisme* and the harsh anti-griot sentiment attached to it. For Kita, the sentiment is not new. It appeared quite expressively in the "Monographie du Cercle de Kita 1189 – 1944" and described the caste as:

> inassimilables et cependant ne créent jamais de collectivités. . . .Leur situation sociale est assez complexe et il est inexact de dire qu'ils sont méprisés. Ils le sont d'autant moins aujourd'hui que grâce à leur activité, à leur sens des affaires, à leur subtilité naturelle et aussi par le fait que beaucoup de chef dans leur enfance les ont envoyés dans nos écoles à la place de leurs propres fils, ils ont atteint un niveau de vie généralement supérieur à celui des castes libres.

I encountered similar opinions during my time in Kita among the young and retired men in the different *grins* I observed. However, the persistence of some griots who practice their craft exclusively has caused the strongest condemnation from the non-caste group and the proliferation of the anti-griot sentiment.

A *jelikuntigi* exists in Kita; however, a *kumatigi* appears a lot more difficult to pinpoint. None of the griots I worked with proclaimed themselves to be a *kumatigi* even though they all used their speech in the general sense. The present *jelikuntigi* in Kita is a Diabaté. He does not reside in the city proper but in Karaya, a village 10kms away. In place of the *jelikuntigi* is Fodé Diabaté, the *représentant du chef des griots* (representative of the head griot) who lives in Kita.

The relatively large size of the city and its proximity to both Senegal and Guinea necessitate a mention of the different ethnic groups in Kita. The city is primarily Malinké. In addition to the Malinké, the population includes Bambara, Khhassonké, Maure, Peulh and Sarakolé. The list is not an exhaustive one since migration often occurs in this region of Mali. The different ethnic groups living in the city creates an open and tolerable atmosphere in Kita that appeals and attracts foreigners.

Kita also alludes to a migratory movement. Its name stems from the Malinké expression *An Kita* that means we have been sent. It was a message that the Malinké or *massarins* brought to the French colonizers in Médine to ask for their help against the Peulhs. General Faidherbe, the colonial official who received them, only heard the Kita part of the Malinké expression and gave the city its name along with the French's assistance. Previously, Kita was known as Guénou Kourou, a name that describes it as old Kita. Today, the mixture Kita Kourou is still commonly used to refer to the old city and the hill that stands over it.

Kita sits prominently in the Mande region and is famous for its griot culture. Unlike the griots in Kela whose fame rest on their recitation of the *Soundiata* epic, the bards in Kita and the city are simply known as "the land of griots." D. T. Niane believes that Kita held a much more significant role to the oral tradition than it does today. He notes in his study:

> Kita a été l'une des villes les plus importantes de l'Empire à l'époque de Soundjata ; le Kita-Kourou (montagne de Kita) joue encore un rôle important dans les mythes et légendes du Manding. C'est dans cette montagne que se trouvait le fameux lac aux eaux magiques appelées Mokoya-dji. . . . La langue de Kita conserve beaucoup d'archaïsmes et s'éloigne notablement du Kan-gbè du Manding-sud. A partir du xv ème siècle, Kita a été le centre de ralliement des

> Malinké avant le déclenchement des mouvements migratoires en direction du sud (62).

A strong historical attachment to the oral tradition remains in Kita despite the changes over the centuries. Mention griots to any Malian and their initial response will be Kita. Its fame appears in the celebrated griots and authors who claim origins in Kita; they include griot Kélémonson Diabaté and his nephew, Massa Makan Diabaté; musician Fodé Kouyaté and Batrou Sékou Kouyaté; and contemporary author Moussa Konaté.

Kita, Still a Town Far, Far, Far Away

Despite Kita's reputation as "the land of griots" it remains largely unknown to both tourists and NGOs. Most of its tourist sites rest in the city's surrounding hills and the caves found in them. The largest one is Kita Kourou, spreading out north, south and west of the city. Another notable hill is Maria Sénou Koulou, situated south of Kita. Apart from these two hills, several smaller ones are found east and west of the city.

The lack of tourism in Kita is less a sign of what the city has to offer than the means to get there. Kita is far from a half a day journey from Bamako as Kangaba and Kela are; poor roads and an even poorer train system are the only means to reach the city. The horrible transporting conditions have seriously impeded infrastructural development in the region and commercial trade with Senegal and Guinea over the years. Fortunately, the central government in Bamako is slowly waking up to the problem and working to rectify it with plans to pave the road.[99] Not much hope appears for the train. Built and functioning efficiently during the colonial period, the train is now a shadow of its former self. Departing in Bamako and running through Kita to Dakar, Senegal, the train brought

[99] Mali is a landlocked country that depends largely on its roads to connect it to its surrounding coastal countries: Ivory Coast, Guinea and Senegal.

a flurry of activities to the western region during its heyday. Today, the train is poorly maintained and manages to function on a good day. It runs sporadically and derails often to the detriment of both its passenger and cargo.

Many NGOs work in Kita. Plan Kita is the largest one and appears ubiquitous in most Malian towns or cities. Kangaba also had its own Plan branch. Others include, Projet de Développement Rural Intégré de Kita (PDRIK); Association pour la Planification et la Promotion Familiale (APPF); Collectif Ingénieurs; and Société d'Intérêts Collectifs Pour la Promotion de l'Elevage (SICOPE). The number of NGOs in Kita is small considering the size of the city and its role as both a *commune urbaine* and *cercle*. Kangaba was much smaller in size but appeared to have NGOs as the core make-up of the town. USAID is not present in Kita as in other cities, particularly with its CLIC program. Again, the difficult access to Kita and the Kaye region is a major obstacle that has prevented most NGOs from coming out west. As a result, Kita has lived fairly unaffected however isolated from contacts with tourists, NGOs and, to an extent, the central administration in Bamako.

For my research, the city's and the people's moderate contacts and exposure to the "West" was an unexpected benefit to my work. I found the griots in Kita fairly experienced with tourists and other researchers to accept my presence without finding it overwhelmingly unusual; at the same time, they were not spoiled by the benefits of such contacts to demand exorbitant payments or gifts. Furthermore, I discovered the griots, in particular and the population of Kita, in general a lot more open to learning about what I (a foreigner) was doing their city. The city's history and ongoing contact with the different ethnic groups who pass and sometime settle in Kita plays a large part in the

population's openness. Their inquisitiveness conveys a genuine curiosity that shows both their awe and dismay at what they encounter.

This one remarkable difference I discovered in Kita was partly due to their isolation from the "outside" but also to their acceptance of Christianity. Christian missionaries arrived in Kita in 1888, a period still under colonial rule, and have stayed throughout the years to build a church along with a large following to the faith. The population of Christians in the area is one of the highest in Mali numbering close to 2,500 (Pamphlet). Kita represents also a pilgrimage site for Christians in West Africa. The continuing practice of Christianity in Kita attests to the acceptance and co-habitation of both the Christian and Muslim communities. A certain openness and respect exist between the two. Leaders of both communities are always invited to the religious celebrations of the other's faith. The presence of Christianity in Kita has made the Muslim majority tolerable to the "other" in their backyard, which extends to their encounters to the other (tourists, researchers, etc.) of the "others" that they meet.

Kita Finishes the Research Journey

Kita was my choice for a second site of research to study and complete my observations of the griots that my departure from Kela left incomplete. Fortunately, three factors presented themselves to help me begin my work in Kita. Foremost, my fortuitous contact with professor Chérif Keïta was an invaluable resource to my introduction to Kita. Professor Keïta was in Mali running his study abroad program from Carleton College. Among the visits he organized for his students was one to Kita to meet the family of Massa Makan Diabaté and the real life son of the character that the author

portrayed for his novel, *Le Lieutenant de Kouta*. The visit was an excursion for his students and an opportunity for me to meet Professor Keïta's contacts in Kita who would help me with my research. Professor Keïta introduced me to Bobo Tounkara, the *Député Représentant de l'Assemblée* from Kita, who became my *jatigi* for the duration of my stay in Kita. In turn, Tounkara introduced me to two griots, Madou and Modibo Kouyaté, who both became a part of my observations and, in turn, informed me of other bards. Second, the reputation that Kita carries as "griot land" made it an obvious alternative site to Kela. Having previously visited Kita in the summer of 2004 for possible research, I was already familiar with the city. The fact that I had no formal connection there as I did in Kela through S. Camara was now no longer an impediment since Professor Keïta filled this role.

Third, the possibility of a comparative study of griots in two sites in the Mande region began to take shape in my research. Kela and Kita are far enough in their distance while still remaining in the Mande to note comparisons as well as differences. Other sites were possible, such as Kirina, the village of the renowned griot Wa Kamissoko, but were often too close to Kela for my research to draw any conclusive comparison.

A Larger Griot Population Begets a Larger Debate: Anti-*griotisme*

Getting Resettled: Readjustments to a New Site for Another Start in Kita

Kita presented a bigger fishbowl than Kela for me to conduct my research. In many ways, it was a new site as well as another start for my continuing work with the griots. My earlier visit to Kita in July 2004 helped introduce me to the city but lacked the groundwork preparation that I had done in Kela with S. Camara due to its urban size. For this reason, I knew that my return to Kita with Professor Keïta would expand my research

in many ways that would need to take into account the larger griot population. Rather than having one major griot family, I had several families along with a supporting cast of *funé* [100] and other members of the Mande social structure. The Diabaté and Tounkara are the two main griot families in Kita, as evidenced by the griot war that occurred in the mid-1980s. Barbara Hoffman chronicles the conflict between the two families and their struggle for the chef des griots position in her doctoral work, *Griots at War: Conflict, Conciliation and Caste in Mande*. Along with the Tounkara and Diabaté, the Kouyaté appear prominently in the city too. These three families represent the three major griot families in Kita.

Notably among the Tounkara, not all are griots; others are *horon*. Such was the case with my *jatigi*, Bobo Tounkara. Bobo was a *horon* and not a *nyamakala*, the caste group in the Mande tripartite social structure noted in the introduction. Bobo explained later the confusion that his last name holds for those who meet him. In Kita, everyone knows him as a *horon* as well as the *Député Représentant de l'Assemblée* and greet him accordingly. However, outside of Kita and in Bamako, where he travels frequently for official business, people address him warmly with the colloquial *frère* (brother) unsure if he is a *nyamakala* or *horon* (Conversation March 16, 2006). Bobo's name demonstrated one of the many intricacies found among the griots in Kita that was absent in Kela. They represented a much more varied group in the number of different griot families present, such as the Tounkara, Diabaté and Kouyaté. Along with these griot families were a

[100] The *funé* are a member of the caste who are also public speakers known mostly as Islamic praise singers; they rank below the griots. More details on the Mande tripartite caste structure appear in the introduction.

handful of *funé* with the Camara. They were present and spoke along with the griots at many of the events I observed. My work, however, remained centered on the griots.

The presence of so many griot families affected my research approach in Kita. The methodology I applied in Kela seemed no longer adequate to address the different griot families in Kita; thus, I made three changes that reflected my work with a larger griot population in an urban area. The first change involved my choice of a griot or, in this case, griots. Selecting a single griot would not have been practical given the tendency toward rivalry that such a large population of griots entailed. I wanted also to avoid a similar situation to Kela in which I was limited to working with one large family, as with Yamadou acting as my *jatigi* and Lansiné becoming my teacher. Fortunately, having Bobo as my *jatigi* put a distance between the griots and myself. As my *jatigi*, I established an affiliation with Bobo's family that placed me in a neutral position to work with more than one griot without creating a formal relationship between us. All the griots knew that Bobo was my *jatigi* and could not lay claim to me, as was the case in Kela with Yamadou and Lansiné. For his part, Bobo introduced me to two griots with whom he worked and supported: Modibo Kouyaté and his nephew, Madou Kouyaté. I began my work with these two griots who Bobo asked to help me in my research. Modibo and Madou could not refuse Bobo's request since the relationship between the two families extends to their great-grandfathers.[101]

My decision to work with more than one griot brought a second change to my

[101] Modibo explained to me later the historic connection between the Tounkara and Kouyaté families that resulted in the current relationship. Modibo's great-grand father left the city to look for farming land in Doumba, a village 5km from Kita where Bobo's extended family resides. The great-grandfathers of Bobo offered the older griot land to farm in the village. From this gesture, a griot and patron relationship between the Kouyaté and Tounkara families formed (Conversation, March 29, 2006).

research methodology. Not having one particular griot to follow shifted the primary focus of my research from the griots to the social events. Announcements about them in the urban city were made sporadically from a day to a week's notice. Getting these announcements depended on who you knew as much as who you happened to talk to that day. Both the *denkundi* (baptism) and the *sarakabo* (funeral) occurred according to their traditional waiting period while the *dantegeli* (ending ceremony of a marriage) always took place on a Friday with the *furu* (wedding) passing the day before. Modibo and Madou became my main resource to hear about these events. The informal yet formal arrangement between Modibo, Madou and myself reflected the working relationship we had. They were not my official griots; yet, they stepped in to speak for me to the other griots and men when the occasion arose. As time passed, my relationship with each of the griot developed distinctively from each other – a change that reflected their different personalities as much as their views on *jeliya*.

Nothing distinguished their personalities more than the *grin*[102] or a group of their friends with whom they spent time with everyday. I passed most of my time with the *grin* of Modibo and Madou who consisted of both *nyamakala* and *horon*. Modibo, as the older griot, belonged to a group that consisted mostly of retired men while Madou was part of a younger crowd. Spending time at each of these *grins* represented less another change to my research methodology but an addition to it. Unlike Kela where I spent most of my time with griots, my time in Kita include interactions with both *nyamakala* and *horon*. These encounters provided me with another perspective on the griot's lifestyle that I was unable to view in Kela due to the prominence of the Diabaté family and my exclusive

[102] A common colloquial term used among Malians who speak French to describe their group of friends.

contact with them.

The men at both *grins* discussed freely their thoughts on issues ranging from politics to family affairs. One ongoing topic was on anti-*griotisme*. The anti-*griotisme* debate spoke less to the griots and more to their practice of *griotisme*. Griots who live on their singing and praises of others are viewed with condescension as well as resentment. The sentiment recalled my experience with the griots in Kela even though the debate was largely absent there. Anti-*griotisme* was popularly expressed among the *horon* and sheepishly recognized by a small number of griots in Kita. Its presence and its strong vocalization appeared in Kita despite the large griot population found in city. The debate on anti-*griotisme* in Kita posed the third change to my research that calls for a closer examination since it encompasses all three changes I made to fieldwork noted above.

We Talk, We Discuss, We Debate Anti-*griotisme*

To comprehend anti-*griotisme* requires first an understanding of the griots in Kita that comes from them as well as the *horon*. My conversations with both *grins* helped me to identify the different views found in anti-*griotisme* and how they influenced the practice of *jeliya* among the griots in Kita. Amidst the debates that I witnessed, the focus of my research on the *jeliya kuma* and the griots in their role as mediators and translators continued unchanged even though it was colored by the anti-*griotisme* sentiment.

Anti-*griotisme* appeared most prominently among the retired men of Modibo's *grin*. All of the men have worked civil servant or industrial jobs as either teachers or laborers; all are retired now and live off of their pension; and all are very proud of the fact that they have worked by what they say "la sueur de nos fronts." Drahma "Capi"

Sangaré, a *horon* and retired physical education teacher, describes it quite succinctly when he exclaims, "On est fait pour travailler" (Conversation March 5, 2006). Old age too is a time to live off the fruits of one's labor. Griots who live off of their words are continuously working without a time in their old age to enjoy themselves. Drahma's thoughts are shared by many of the old men in the *grin*.

Among them is Fodé Diabaté, the *représentant du chef des griots* in Kita. Fodé holds a particular position since he is both a griot and a former laborer. Before he retired, he worked for an industrial company called SOMIEX that differentiated him from other griots who lived solely on their practice of *jeliya*. Now, in his retirement, Fodé functions mostly as a griot, attending and speaking at social events that I witnessed. His title as the *représentant du chef des griots* draws him further into his role as a griot. Due to his particular position, Fodé's thoughts on anti-*griotisme* extend only as far as his inclusion in the *grin* as another retiree. For his *horon* friends, Fodé remains a griot through and through.

This inescapable reality between them was clearly highlighted to me one morning when I arrived at the *grin*. Two men (*horon*) were present discussing Fodé. Upon seeing me, Angha Maïga, one of the men, reassured me that I had arrived at a good time. If I had come any earlier, I would have encountered Fodé going to perform *jeliya*. He did not have money for his wife to pay for the *condiments* to prepare their evening's meal and needed to obtain it from someone. Thus, he had gone to sing the praises of the director of the Compagnie Malienne du Développment et du Textile (CMDT), a cotton cooperative.

The men responded unanimously against Fodé's practice of *jeliya*; yet, they admitted that if he had asked them for money, they could not refuse him. Here the

paradox in anti-*griotisme* emerges. Griots are loathed in their practice of *jeliya*, but their demands (especially for money) cannot go unheeded. A *horon* has no other choice but to give something rather than nothing; otherwise, they are perceived badly, not the griots. "Nous [*horon*], on ne peut pas les jeter," states Drahma (Conversation March 7, 2006). Moreover, the *horon* recognizes that griots "exploite l'ignorance" of people who listen to their empty praises and find themselves unwilling participants in the *jeliya*. Indeed, both the social constraints and structure of the Mande culture inhibits them from acting differently. As a result, the griots and their practice of *jeliya* have caused a growing anti-*griotisme* sentiment to abound.

One is born a griot, but one does not have to take up *jeliya* as the only means to survive is the most common response of the *horon* to *jeliya*. And some griots have heeded these words – although not always completely. Fodé and Modibo represent two griots who straddle the exception. Fodé's narrative has already been noted earlier. Like Fodé, Modibo also worked as a laborer and is now retired. He functions as a griot at the ceremonies I attended but rarely speak publicly at these events. The path he chose was much influenced by his father who raised his children on manual labor and not *jeliya*. Modibo explains, ". . . [ne] pas travailler, dépendre des [sic] autres, être nourri par les autres n'est pas bon" (Conversation March 29, 2006). His uncle, he adds, is the well-known kora player Batrou Sekou Kouyaté who was chased away from the family because of the father's disapproval of his son's profession. Despite all of these stories that might lead to the contrary, Modibo is proud to be a griot and, moreover, a Kouyaté. The Kouyaté are the true griots according to Modibo; and he declares, "Je suis un pur griot"

(Conversation March 29, 2006). His assertion displays his pride in being a griot even though he does not fully support the practice of *jeliya*.

However, the anti-*griotisme* sentiment is not shared among all Kouyaté members in Modibo's family. Madou, his nephew, practices *jeliya* and is not shy about it. He portrays what the retired men in Modibo's *grin* see as *les pésanteurs de la société* or *les parasites sociaux*. Madou admits his dislike for manual labor while his lack of an education beyond the sixth grade prevents him from attaining a civil servant job. For this reason, he has chosen *jeliya* as his means to earn a living; it is a profession that is more or less bestowed to him by his birth as a *nyamakala*. The young men who are a part of Madou's *grin* acknowledge his practice of *jeliya* without much ambivalence. Rarely, did I encounter the heated debates about *jeliya* among them as I did with Modibo's *grin*.

The different views I encountered between the two *grins* showed the complexities of anti-*griotimse* for both griots and *horon* alike. On the one hand, the retired men who are *horon* in Modibo's *grin* express a great satisfaction for their work as civil servants, laborers or merchants. They hold a lot of pride in their chosen profession and, thus, resent the weight of the griots on them and in their pockets. The practice of *jeliya* is not an honest profession for them since one does not gain a living by one's sweat but by the exploitation of others. On the other hand, griots who practice *jeliya* to earn their living believe it is as much a profession as their natural born right to do it. In this case, Madou represents quite a controversial figure for the retired men not only for his age but also for his unabashful practice of *jeliya*. For his part, Madou's strong embrace of *jeliya* merely reflects who he is – a griot in the Mande social structure.

Between these two disparate views is an obligation from both parties to the practice of *jeliya* that extends from their role in the Mande social structure. A *horon* cannot refuse a request by the griot due to their position as nobles while the *nyamakala* feels entitle to make such a demand of the former based on their caste status. In addition, the pervasive practice of *jeliya* even among griots who have held civil or manual jobs demonstrates a strong adherence to the Mande social structure that is an inescapable reality for both the *horon* and *nyamakala*. Its acknowledgement by both groups shows an undeniable recognition and understanding of their position in the Mande social structure. For any changes to take place to the practice of *jeliya*, one would need to start with a restructuring of Mande society – a momentous task to say the least. The caste represents an ingrained part of the Mande social structure that is unlikely to change immediately since it places a person in his or her position by birth. A griot or any members of the *nyamakala* is born into their profession. While they can choose to take on other jobs, they cannot escape their *nyamakala* status in Mande society. Similarly, *horon* too cannot escape their birth even though they are able to move between the noble and *jon* (slave) status.

Anti-*griotisme* on Display with Three Different Griot Personalities

The different views on anti-*griotisme* mirrored the diverse griot personalities I encountered. Getting to know these griots helped me to understand their stance on it as well as their practice of *jeliya*. Modibo, Madou and Fodé proved most insightful upon this point. My introduction and later acquaintance with these three griots came through their *jeliya kuma* at the *dantegeli* and *sarakabo*. Moreover, observing them in their roles

as mediator or translator at these two events allowed me to see their practice of *jeliya* through their *jeliya kuma*, which, in turn, reflected their stance on anti-*griotisme*.

Among the three griots, Madou appears the most dynamic due to both his youth and self-confidence in his role and practice of *jeliya*. Both Modibo and Fodé are older and have already experienced the golden years of their *jeliya*. The respect they have from their peers is due to their old age and the position they hold, such as the *représentant du chef des griots* for Fodé. As a younger griot, Madou is not only the most vocal but also the most strident example of the *jeliya kuma*. He possesses a gift for speaking that appears every time he opens his mouth in public by engaging the audience with his *jeliya kuma* and his animated gestures – a fact that is not lost in his self-confidence. Madou's talent resides in what he calls *la verve* (wit or cleverness) that is coupled with a *reconnaissance de la famille* (knowledge of the family). In addition, one should choose well and wisely to say what one knows of the family that is appropriate to the event. Madou calls it *une ramassé* (a gathering) (Conversation March 4, 2006). Thus, the *verve* is the power in his *kuma* that he builds upon based on his *reconnaissance de la famille*, which he places accordingly in *une ramassé* for his speech so it does not fall in a litany of praises but includes a history or an anecdote of the family. Executed perfectly, Madou's *kuma* creates energy among the audience members, building heat inside of them and stirring them to their feet to dance or hand the griot money.

Of Madou's three points, a *reconnaissance de la famille* is key in the success of the *jeliya kuma*. A well-spoken griot should have knowledge of who and what he is talking about when he speaks in public. Not knowing a family and their background hinders the *jeliya kuma* and reflects badly on the skills of the griot. Madou's emphasis on

a *reconnaissance de la famille* recalls the *denkundi* that I witnessed in Kela with Lansiné speaking for the family. Lansiné's sparse knowledge of the family became clear when his praise of them became a perfunctory listing of their genealogy. Madou's words hold a lot truth; yet, for the many griots who practice *jeliya* to earn money, they are not aware of who they are praising or what they are saying apart from a hyperbolic emptiness.

One word that Madou avoids to use in his *jeliya kuma* as well as his description of it is *flatter* (to flatter or charm). The use of flattery devalues the words of the *jeliya kuma* and does not fully acknowledge the griot's role. Rather, he prefers *louange* (praise) as a much more appropriate description of the *jeliya kuma*. While Madou eschews the word his friends in his *grin* use it more freely due to their *horon* status. As a griot, and *nyamakala*, Madou takes a much more particular stance due to his practice of *jeliya*.

Fodé appears completely different due both to his personality and age. Fodé is much older than Madou; he does not exude the presence that Madou carries or does he draw attention to himself. Fodé says very little when sitting with the other retired men at the *grin*. He depends more on the role that he holds – *représentant du chef des griots* – than the talent he has to garner respect from his peers, a case that his similar to Demba Mamadi in Kela. Fodé has held this position for 15-20 years. The number of years varies since no one can recall the exact number of years except for the fact that it has been a while. Fodé never went to school, but he is able to speak a sparse amount of French. He appears less educated than Madou, even though the latter only went up to the sixth grade.

Fodé's and Madou's distinctive personality prove that not all griots possess the talent to speak. They are griots by birth but do not always have the knowledge or skill to

speak publicly. Modibo confirms this point for me. He carries the same demeanor as Fodé but appears more engaging in the *grin* with the other retired men. Unlike Fodé, however, Modibo does not try to speak in public. At the *dantegeli* and *sarakabo* that I have attended with him present, he says very little or acts simply as the *namu laminala*. Often, he sits among the other griots and helps count the money or performs other duties apart from speaking. Modibo admits that he does not like to speak in public and realizes that he does he have the skill to do it. Indeed, his background training in manual labor along with his father's objection to the practice *jeliya* shows that apart from his birth, he had very little training in *jeliya kuma*.

The varying practices of *jeliya* among the three griots reflect their stance on anti-*griotisme*. Fodé's practice of *jeliya* represents a subdue version of his views on anti-*griotisme*. He draws on *jeliya* in his retirement but realizes that it is not his only means to live since he receives a pension too. Indeed, the role that Fodé carries as the *représentant du chef des griots* brings him more stature than his skills in *jeliya*. Modibo holds great pride in being a griot even though he supports the anti-*griotisme* sentiment. His views on anti-*griotisme* display less of an ambivalence and more of a distinction between the griot as a person and the practice of *jeliya*. He attends the *dantegeli* and *sarakobo* out of his duty as a griot and less as a performance for money. Madou sits on the other end of the anti-*griotsime* from Fodé and Modibo since he practices *jeliya* wholeheartedly and, in fact, notes the skills to be a well-spoken griot compared to a bad one. Like Modibo, he is proud to be a griot but also takes great pride in his practice of *jeliya*. These three personalities provided me with a background of the griots and their practice of *jeliya* in the mist of the strong debate on anti-*griotisme*. I kept all this in mind in my observations

of them at the social events that I attended. Unlike Kela, I was not able to view any *denkundi*; instead, most of my observations took place at the *dantegeli* and *sarakabo*.

***Dantegeli*: With Honor we Offer. . .**

The style and content of the *jeliya kuma* at a *dantegeli* and *sarakabo* depend on the griots present as much as the event itself. During a *dantegeli*, the style of the *jeliya kuma* is much more animated and dynamic since they are celebrating the union of two individuals as well as two families. Griots will honor the union and praise the two families. For a *sarakabo*, the *jeliya kuma* moves the audience less to their feet. Griots praise the decease and his or her family while honoring their genealogy. The sense of honor is present at both event but differs considerably; one is celebratory while the other is reflective. Both events are lengthy processes with the ceremony that I attended representing only one part of it. It is in this part of the ceremony – *dantegeli* and *sarakabo* – that the griots speak publicly to the audience. I begin with the *dantegeli*, which is the ending ceremony of a *furu*, a wedding.[103]

A *furu* occurs normally on Thursdays in Kita with the brides's move or *konyo* to her new home occurring the next day, Friday. In her *konyo*, she brings all of her belongings and the gifts she has received from friends and family over to her new home with her husband and his parents. The meeting between the two families is known as the *dantegeli*. The term in itself makes no specific reference to a *furu*; rather, it is the

[103] A *furu* is the religious ceremony and not a civil one requiring a certificate attesting to the union. The civil ceremony occurs at the mayor's office. I viewed one administered by Moussa Diarra, the mayor's assistant. The bride and groom were present along with two witnesses from the bride's family. Diarra began by saying a few words; then he delved into the official law pertaining to marriage, reading the rights of both the wife and the husband. Afterward, he asked the couple to confirm what they have heard before signing their names in a ledger. At this point, the marriage was over. No griots were present.

acknowledgement of someone or something that has arrived. Hoffman describes it similarly to a *jatigi-dunan* (host/guest) relationship as "the process of explaining the reasons for one's coming, known as *dantige*,[104] literally, to 'cut the boundaries,' colloquially, to break the ice at the start of a visit, is an important marker of a *jatigi-dunan* relationship" (61). As part of a *furu*, the meaning of *dantegeli* extends beyond the breaking of ice or boundary that Hoffman notes. In this case, it is says also, "On veut donner la femme, la trousseau et dire ce qui est dans notre coeur" explains Famakan Oulé Tounkara[105], the brother of Bobo (Conversation March 10, 2006).

From the *dantegeli*, a union between the two families commences. The layout of the *dantegeli* is telling of the collaborative efforts between the two families. The groom's family sits facing west to receive the bride and her family upon their arrival. The bride's family takes their place facing east. In their respective position (west/east), they both face each other directly. Both families have their griots sitting with them too. The layout of the *dantegeli* remains unchanged whether it is a large or small gathering.

Between the two families are the bride's belongings that she is taking to her new home. They include things that will help her to establish herself in her new home as a wife: cookware (large marmites; cooking utensils; bowls for cooking and eating);

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[104] Hoffman spells it as *dantige*; etymology of *dan* means boundary; *tige* means to cut; *li* is a suffix addition.

[105] Famakan explained the lengthy process of a *furu* to arrive at a *dantegeli*. The ball starts to roll when the man seeking the woman's hand sends ten kola nuts and a small amount of money to her family. He does not go directly but sends a griot as his *émissaire* (emissary). The griot will send the kola nuts and money three times; the repetition gives the two families time to come to an agreement on the dowry mediated by the griot. A response comes from the woman's family in a *dalafà* when they give their consent and send some money to the man's family. The man and the woman are now engaged. A *baroli* or *une série de causerie* (a series of chats) occurs after the engagement becomes official. The *baroli* takes place over three nights with the fiancé and his friends. They bring tea, sugar and kola nuts to celebrate the engagement. A *baroli* is a part of the *furu* but is not always practiced. The main event comes with the *bolola sere*, which refers to the tying of the bride's hands. The event speaks to her entry into marriage and motherhood when her hands are tied symbolically to her husband.

houseware (broom/dustpan; washboard/bucket; soap) fabric; clothing; and little accessory items. According to Famakan, the bride's *trousseau* (chest) is already present when the *dantegli* begins. It becomes a part of the *jeliya kuma* when the griots call upon the women in the family to come and inspect the *trousseau*. The women will examine what there is by opening chests or untying bundles. One woman has a list of everything and reads off the items to the griot of the bride's family who will call it out to the groom's family and audience to hear and acknowledge. I saw the list at one of the *dantegeli*. The items were written in French while the woman called it out in Bambara. The experience was quite telling of the interplay between orality and writing through the apparent language gap. Orality as a text appeared in Bambara while the list in its textual representation of the items was written in French.

Surrounding the scene is the audience who consists mostly of relatives and friends of both families. Unlike the *denkundi* I observed in Kela, both men and women are present during the *dantegeli*; however, they sit apart with the men given priority seating closer to the scene of action. Women are usually in the back or to the side. Griottes are also among the women in the audience; they interject frequently with their own praises for the family during the *dantegeli*.

The *jeliya kuma* starts after the griots have settled in their respective position facing one another and the audience has calmed down. They begin by calling out each other's name. For example, a Diabaté exclaims Kouyaté while the other griot does the same, yelling Diabaté. Following their acknowledgement of each other, the griots continue with a long list of greetings and benedictions, which can last for as long as twenty minutes. The practice recalls the extended greetings that occurred in my

observations of the meetings and *denkundi* in Kela.

After the introductions, the *jeliya kuma* proceeds. The griots turn their focus to the families and begin to speak for them. The *jeliya kuma* centers on the new phase in life that the *furu* represents for both families. The emphasis of the *jeliya kuma* is less on the bride and groom and more on the family's relationship with each other and how the *furu* of the two individuals affects it. They stress the honor of the family on this point. Djarwadi Trauré, a member of the retired men's *grin*, describes how the griot of the bride's family will declare "Avec l'honneur, nous remettons la femme comme épouse." In turn, the griot of the groom's family will acknowledge the other by saying, "Par l'honneur, nous acceptons la femme" (Conversation March 20, 2006).

Honor is not only important for the families' relationship to each other but also the future they now share as a result of the union. At this point, friends of the bride and groom express both their happiness and hope for the union of the two families. Everyone who wants to speak is given the change to share his or her thoughts except for family members; they sit quietly and observe what others are saying about them. The griots hold a key role in this respect since they help facilitate the communication between the audience members and the family. They act as both mediator and translator between the two parties by overseeing the *jeliya kuma* between them. The *jeliya kuma* moves between the audience and the griots but always returns to the latter who acknowledges the praises and greetings. In return, the griots repeat what the audience members are saying to the family for them. The passing and repetition of the *jeliya kuma* at a *dantegeli* is similar to that of the meetings that I observed in Kela. In both cases, the griots acknowledge and repeat what one party has said to another in the passing of the *jeliya kuma*.

A *namu laminala* appears also and sits next to the griot to assist him with the passing of the *jeliya kuma*. In Kita, it was common to see more than one *namu laminala* present a ceremony. The role they performed was similar to my observation of a *namu laminala* in Kela at the dowry confirmation. They acted as an intermediary between the audience and the griot; encouraged the griot in his *jeliya kuma*; and acknowledged what the griot says to the audience for both parties. Most importantly, the *namu laminala* worked to keep the flow of the *jeliya kuma* constant between the griot and the audience.

My focus on more than one griot in Kita enabled me to view the passing of the *jeliya kuma* again as well as its distinctive styles among the different speakers. Two distinguishing styles appeared at a *dantegeli* that I witnessed with both Madou and Fodé speaking for the bride side of a family. The difference between their *jeliya kuma* was as stark as night and day. Fodé began the ceremony by greeting everyone and saying a few benedictions such as *Allah Sacko i Sacko* (Allah, the will is your will). He talked very lowly and slowly, which only worked to emphasize the monotonous tone of his voice. His mannerism matched his voice, showing very little movements to enliven his *kuma*. Indeed, his *jeliya kuma* neither engaged the audience nor drew them to their feet since he was not only very subdued but also very long winded, talking endlessly without pauses. Mamadou Coulibaly, one of the young men in Madou's *grin* notes succinctly, "Il n'est pas bref" (Conversation March 2, 2006). Fodé lack of brevity combined with his absent dynamism renders his *jeliya kuma* boring to his audience. I noticed audience members losing interest or beginning to talk among themselves during Fodé's *kuma*.

Moving from Fodé to Madou, one felt as though the volume was being turned up on the *jeliya kuma*. Madou spoke forcefully and engaged the audience with his gestures

by pointing to them or acknowledging them through his facial expressions. His voice was deep and strong with its pitch moving up and down throughout his *jeliya kuma*. Both his voice and animated gestures resonated strongly with the audience and created a lot of excitement and energy among them. Madou's *jeliya kuma* carried the *verve* and *reconnaissance de la famille* that he outlined earlier. He knew what to say, how to say it and when to say it when speaking in public. A lot of women and men in the audience stood up to give him money in 1000 CFA denominations. Fodé received nothing throughout the event.

Giving money in this manner highlights an interactive exchange between the griot and the audience that differed from my observations in Kela. The griot is no longer the sole performer when he moves an audience member to his or her feet to give him money. In this case, the audience is as much a performer as the griot by going up to the bard and handling him money. The scene is as much a show as the griot speaking.

At the same time, the spontaneous giving of money to the griot from an audience member attests to the former's talent to move the latter with his *jeliya kuma*. The *dantegeli* is a celebratory event that provides the griot with an opportunity to play up his skills as a speaker for both the family and the audience. Clearly, at this *dantegeli*, Madou displayed his talent and knowledge, proving that he was not shy about what he knows.

The self-confidence Madou carries hints to an arrogance that he projects to those around him. When I asked him about what I had noticed between him and Fodé and the money he received, his evasive response was telling of his self-confidence. First, he laughed at my observation and question. Second, he repeated what I said to his friends in the *grin*. Only after these two reactions did he turn to me and address my inquiry. A griot

cannot express what he really thinks, he admitted. It would create jealousy and tension among them. On this note, he stated simply, "Chacun est content de ce qu'il peut" (Conversation March 4, 2006). Madou's response not only reflects his self-confidence for what he knows but also his stance on anti-*griotisme*. His behavior confirms Bobo's words that the young griot is a controversial figure for many of the *horon* and older griots in Kita.

Along with money, the griots receive praises from the audience, another exchange between the two parties that differed from my observations in Kela. People in the audience chime in from time to time to compliment and encourage the griot on his *jeliya kuma*. Among them are griots, griottes as well as *horon* who are attending the *dantegeli*. They function as an informal *namu laminala* with their exclamations of *kuma a nyena* (great speech). Of course, their praises do not replace the *namu laminala* who is present and continues to perform his duties amidst these spontaneous praises. In all, the passing of the *jeliya kuma* appears in this manner throughout the *dantegeli*, involving the audience speaking interchangeably with the griot as well as interspersedly with their impromptu praises and monetary gifts to the bards.

***Sarakabo*: Making the Sacrifice. . .**

A *sarakabo* is a ceremony celebrating the death of the person. It is different from the actual burial of the body since the corpse needs to be buried before a *sarakabo* can take place. *Sarakabo* means literally to bring out or up the dead. *Sara* is death while *ka bo* is the verb to bring out or up. Another description of *sarakabo* is a sacrifice. In French, a *sarakabo* is referred to as a *sacrifice*. The name does not describe the full

meaning of *sarakabo* in Bambara and can be a bit misleading too since nothing is really sacrificed. Rather, the sacrifice comes from the people in attendance who give money to help the family of the decease. It is their sacrifice in monetary donation to assist the family that the French naming of the ceremony truly refers. The gesture is similar to the one found in the *denkundi* I observed in Kela where villagers gathered and donated money to the newborn family. Madou explains, "Chacun vient avec tout ce qu'il veut selon le pouvoir de chacun" (Conversation March 4, 2006).

A *sarakabo* occurs three, seven and forty days after the burial of the body. The counting of the days from the burial varies from an inclusion of the burial date to a complete counting of days. Each of the day ceremony is symbolic of the different stages that the corpse goes through after it has been buried. Madou described the different stages of a *sarakabo* according to the days, "Trois jours, l'homme commence à se décomposer; sept jours, les vers pénètrent l'homme; quarante jours, le corpse est fini"(Conversation February 26, 2006). Each period marks a transformation in the decease's body, when it goes from a human to a corpse to its final stage as a spirit. A *sarakabo* takes place at each stage to honor the decease. Again, Madou explains, "[On vient] saluer et remercier celui qui est mort, en faisant de parler des ses bienfaits, les liens de parentés et amitiés" (Conversation February 26, 2006). My observation of a *sarakabo* was mostly at the three-day ceremony.

The layout of a *sarakabo* is different from that of a *dantegeli*. Men and women celebrate the occasion on the same day but sit apart from each other. The three-day ceremony that I attended was mostly the men's part of the event where they sat outside in the courtyard while the women gathered inside in different huts. The griots assembled

together in a group that faced the audience rather than each other. Some griots sat while others walked around collecting money from people who were arriving slowly. The giving of money at a *sarakobo* is similar to a *denkundi*. Griots collect and count the money they receive and give it the deceased's family in the end.

The role of a griot is key at a *sarakabo* because he acts as both a translator who recounts the life of the deceased for the family and a mediator between them and audience who come to pay their respect and donate money. As the translator, the griot is the main speaker who acknowledges the deceased and highlights ". . . . ses bienfaits, les liens de parentés et amitiés" along with a "reconnaissance" of the person's life. In this case, knowledge of the family is important. A griot cannot speak of a family if he does not know the family's background. Still, knowledge is only one part of the *jeliya kuma* when he is speaking about the family. He must also choose what to say and what not to say from his knowledge of the family that is appropriate for the occasion – two points that Madou stressed earlier for a successful *jeliya kuma*.

On this point, Fodé committed an error at one of the *sarakabo* I attended with Madou in attendance. During his recitation of the deceased's life (a woman), he mentioned the number of times she was married, not from divorce but death. After the death of one husband, she married a brother or close family member according to the Islamic practice. Fodé's mention of her numerous marriages gave the impression that she was a loose woman rather than one following tradition. In this case, he did not choose very wisely or appropriately on what to say about the deceased's life.

The mediating role that the griot holds is an important one too at a *sarakobo* since the people who donate money cannot speak directly, especially if they are *horon*. A

horon cannot speak in public, and the *sarakabo* is no exception. However, Madou notes that a *horon* can speak in public if he is under the supervision of a griot.[106] Usually, the *horon* will give the griot money who, in turn, will present it publicly to the audience, saying, "Tounkara has donated 1000 CFA to the family." The griot will praise the *horon* at the same time that he lists the relationship between the donating family and the deceased family. He will also say, if the person donating the money has stipulated, how the money will be used.

The rule that a *horon* cannot speak in public applies to the family of the *sarakabo* and extends to the audience members as well. In this situation, the *horon* will use a griot to speak for them. I have seen griots sitting in the audience at a *sarakabo* speaking for their own patrons and the donation they are making for the deceased family. Such was the case with Souleymane Kouyaté at the *sarakabo* of Fodé's aunt. Although he is a griot and possesses the ability to speak in public, he was not a part of the griot group that acted as the main speaker that day. The one time he spoke publicly was to acknowledge the contribution from one of the audience member, a *horon* who could not speak. Here, he acted as the personal griot for this individual.

The griot's role as the speaker for *horon* appears essential at public events. However, the choice to use a griot or not as a speaker or not depends on several factors according to the retired men at the *grin* – all of whom are *horon*. One considers 1) the relationship between the griot and the person who donates money; 2) the relationship of

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[106] *Horon* or nobles are not the only one restricted from speaking publicly. Madou notes a less stringent rule for the marabout who recites the Koran at the *sarakabo* A marabout is not able to speak until the griot gives him permission. Marabouts are young men who study to read and recite the Koran. Among the marabouts, an Imman is chose according to the person's level of instruction and knowledge of the Koran. For this reason, most marabouts are not selected to become an Immam until they are pretty well into their years.

the griot and to the deceased's family; 3) the relationship of the person who donates the money to the deceased's family. All three points touch upon one central theme: relationship. Depending on these relationships, a *horon* can choose to have a griot speak for him or not at a public event.

A completely different reaction appeared at the *sarakabo* of Gaoussou Cissé, the *chef de quartier* of Moribougou, one of the neighborhoods in Kita. Here, the rule and understanding that *horon* cannot speak in public is one that is strictly enforced and adhered. A young man (presumably a Cissé) from the audience rose and spoke. In his speech, he mentioned a conflict between the Cissé and Tounkara, which reflected badly on the Tounkara. The *sarakabo* was in honor of a Cissé. Bobo, my *jatigi* and a Tounkara, heard what the man said and rose quickly to confer with his friend, a Keïta, on how to respond. Both are *horon* and are not able to speak.

The scene of Keïta and Bobo speaking to each other as the *sarakabo* continued was a sight that the audience and other griots could not overlook. It was clear that something amiss had occurred. Fortunately, a griot spoke immediately after the insult and calmed the situation down. Afterward, the audience members, particularly the group of *horon* in which Bobo belonged, told the griots to end the *sarakabo* soon before things turned again and another conflict erupted. For Bobo and his friend Keïta, the ability to speak publicly was not an option. They knew and understood that their roles as *horon* forbid them to speak. Between the *horon* in the retired *grin* and Bobo and Keïta, two point of views about the griots appeared. While one spoke of a lessening dependence on the griots as public speakers, the other still believed they were essential. Both point of views speak to the varying sentiment of anti-*griotisme* that abound in Kita.

Assessing Hints of Anti-*griotisme* in the Novels?

Rereading of all Four Authors: Bâ, Diabaté, Niane and Ouologuem

Having encountered such a pervasive sense of anti-*griotisme* in Kita led me to reread the novels with a new question in mind: Is there a an underlying anti-*griotisme* sentiment found in the author's adoption of the griot's speech and their portrayal of the griots as mediators and translators in the novels? The question does not presuppose that a rereading will reveal the authors' stance on anti-griotisme since the novels do not speak specifically to their point of view. However, the manners in which they adopt the griot's speech and portray these bards do. By examining how Bâ, Diabaté, Niane and Ouologuem's use the griot's in their novels, one can assess their tendency toward anti-*griotisme*. For Niane, his praise of griots in the preface along with his faithful adoption of the griot's speech diminishes a sense of anti-*griotisme* in his novel. Ouologuem, on the other hand, shows more playfulness with his adoption of the griot's speech that suggests his views on these bards are more complex. Similarly, Diabaté's portrayal of the griots as scheming and manipulative characters hint at some anti-*griotisme* feelings – a sentiment that he strongly knows and understands since he himself is a griot. Bâ's depiction of what he perceives to be a griot character parallels Diabaté's hints of anti-*griotisme*. By reexamining these works and their authors, I anticipate a range of views on the griots expressed in the novels to my observation of them in Kita.

Among the three authors, Niane appears to hold the most esteem for the griots. As he notes in the preface, his novel would not have been published if not for an obscured griot (Niane 5). Niane goes on to talk about the griots and provides a brief outline of their role in history as public speakers as well as musicians and counselors to kings. His views

on the griots are much influenced by their importance in history – a history that is based largely on orality and not writing. Explains Niane: "Dans la société africaine bien hiérarchisée d'avant la colonisation, où chacun trouvait sa place, le griot nous apparaît comme l'un des membres les plus importants de cette société car c'est lui qui, à défaut d'archives, détenait les coutumes, les traditions et les principes de gouvernement des rois" (6). Niane's training as a historian enables him to have a nuanced view and understanding of the griots that expands their role and duties beyond a public speaker and speaking.

It is not surprising that Niane shows his homage to the griots by choosing one of the most canonical story to relate about them – both in their telling of the narrative and their presentation within it. To this effect, he recognizes the important role of the bard when he adapts the griot's speech in his rendering of the oral epic into a novel. Niane introduces the griot, Mamadou Kouyaté, at the beginning of the novel and gives him the *kuma* or *la parole* to speak about himself and his craft. Describes Kouyaté: "Je tiens ma science de mon père Djeli Kedian qui la tient aussi de son père; l'Histoire n'a pas de mystère pour nous; nous enseignons au vulgaire ce que nous voulons bien lui enseigner. . . . (Niane 9). Kouyaté appears again in the final chapter of the novel, *Le Manding Éternel*, where he provides summary words to the epic: "Que des ruines amassées, que de grandeurs ensevelies; mais les faits dont j'ai parlé se sont passés il y a très longtemps et tout ceci a eu pour théâtre le Manding; les rois ont succédé aux rois, le Manding est toujours resté le même (Niane 150). At the same time, he concludes the epic, Kouyaté reminds the readers of his role as a griot: "Pour acquérir ma science j'ai fait le tour du Manding. . . . A Keyla, village des grands maîtres, j'ai appris les origins du Manding, là

j'ai appris l'art de la parole." (Niane 153). The presence of Kouyaté at key moments in the novel – introduction and conclusion – gives precedence to the griot since the reader opens and closes the narrative with his words. Niane's inclusion of Kouyaté in this manner renders the novel as much of the griot's work as his own. In doing so, he treats the text not merely as a work of fiction but a representation of the griot and his words. The novel, thus, becomes Niane's careful adoption of the griot's speech in which he demonstrates his knowledge and acknowledgment of Kouyaté.

For his part, Ouologuem's adoption of the griot's speech appears more complex. Not only does he adopt the griot's speech, but he also manipulates it in the writing of his novel. In this provocative act, Ouologuem overlooks the high regard given to the griot's words based on their immemorial oral status. He provides two hints in the novel to suggest an anti-*griotisme* sentiment: first, his sparse mention of griots in the novel and second, his use of inflammatory words as a part of his play with the griot's speech.

First, for a novel that draws very much on orality as its source, Ouologuem rarely mentions the figure most often associated with it: griot. The griot is mostly absent in the beginning of the novel when Ouologuem relates the history of the Nakem kingdom as he is throughout the narrative when the actions and misdeeds of the Saïf occur. When Ouologuem mentions the griot, he does so in passing. In one scene, he describes briefly an encounter between the Saïf" and a gathering of griots: "Devant les griots assemblés, Saïf jura de rapporter la tête des chefs blancs, et se mit, dès le lendemain, en compagne" (Ouologuem 39). In this scene, the griots act merely as descriptive characters who blend into the background while the primary event – the war between the French and Africans –

takes precedent. The griots are not an important character in the novel along with his main characters, the Africans, which leads to the next point.

Second, Ouologuem's use of the word *négraille* to describe the Africans in his novels has caused as much controversy for its negative connotation as it does for his bold use of it. The word, originally used by Aimé Césaire, holds a stronger meaning in Ouologuem's adoption of it. Translated to English, the word means the slang "nigger" and, moreover, "trash." Much has been debated on Ouologuem's use of *négraille*, including Christopher Miller who discusses Ouologuem's use of *négraille* in relation to the plagiarism charges that surrounded his novel. Miller argues, "If the plagiarist is a slave of another text, merely repeating it while passing himself off as its master and creator, then the ghost-writer nègre is a master passing himself off as a slave" (225). Miller's argument parallels Ouologuem's own defense for his use of the word. For Ouologuem, he holds *négraille* closer to *nègre* and presents it as a synonym for "slave" and "ghost-writer," which he exploits to create a text that questions its very authenticity. Ouologuem's redefinition of the term is foremost a response to his plagiarism charges. At the same time, it is also a play with the word *nègre* or *négraille* that Ouologuem relishes for the multiple meanings that he places on it. Thus, he treats the text and, subsequently, his adoption of the griots speech in a casual manner that recalls his manipulation of the word *négraille*.

Little doubt of anti-*griotisme* appears for Diabaté in his portrayal of the griots in *L'Assemblée de Djinns* compared to Niane and Ouologuem. None of the griot characters in the novel appears to have anyone's interest in mind but his own. To this effect, Diabaté exaggerates the scheming that occurs between the Anabon and Guena clans in their

struggle to become the next *chef des griots*. He shows them breaking protocol, as in the case of Danfaga (Anabon) sending Famoussa to pass news to Sangoï about the death of the *chef des griots* Tiémoko (Anabon). Protocol dictated that Danfaga should have gone himself in respect of age. Along the way, Famoussa breaks another protocol by eating a part of the ten-kola nuts that he is supposed to offer Sangoï. Sangoï declines to say anything when he notices the half eaten nut. Rather,". . . c'est à Danfaga que Sangoï en voulait. Peu lui importait l'erreur que Famoussa avait commise en croquant la moitié d'une cola" (Diabaté 27). Though he declines to say anything, Sangoï registers both offenses, one more insulting than the other. The antagonistic relationship between the griots in the novel follows what I have observed of them in my fieldwork, particularly between Madou and Fodé. Both griots tread carefully around each other, paying close attention not to offend or react to the other. Age and talent keep these two griots apart. While Madou is the younger and more gifted griot, he must show his respect to the older and less well-spoken Fodé. Madou, after all, has a troubled relationship with most of the older griots who view his self-confidence as a sign of disrespect. The tension between them remains even though they do not act upon it.

In other instances, Diabaté portrays them working clandestinely from each other and seeking counsel from parties outside of the griot clans with the local administration. The coup that Sangoï pulls in the meeting between all the clans reveals his secret meetings with an elder griot that allows him to declare that honor is no longer as important as age in choosing the next *chef des griots*. The next *chef des griots* must also be the oldest among them. Danfaga and his clan respond angrily to this sudden and unexpected change. However, their reaction was the assured revenge Sangoï wanted for

the Danfaga's earlier insult and likely usurpation of the *chef des griots* title. The lack of protocol portrayed among the griots in the novel was rarely seen in my observations of these bards at the ceremonial events. Even when an insult had occurred, the griots usually found a constructive manner to address the two parties. The case of Bobo and the insult his family received at the Cissé family *sarakabo* comes to mind. The griots spoke quickly afterward to quell any forthcoming conflict between the two families. Protocol was key in this situation for both the griots who worked to mediate and calm the families and the *horon* who respected the rule that they could not speak in public but relied on their bards.

In the novel, not content with the decision, Danfaga looks for an arbiter outside of the griot clans and breaks another protocol in the process. He goes to the local administration, visiting the commandant who tells him, "Je ne connais pas vos coutumes, car je ne suis en fonction à Woudi [name of town] que depuis six mois" before sending him off to see the mayor (Diabaté 72). The mayor meets with him for a few minutes before sending him back to the commandant who suggests coldly that he goes see the general secretary. Danfaga becomes a clown for the local administration who prefers to shuffle him around rather than deal with his complaint seriously. In all three cases, the narrative shows the griots giving no regard to any of the protocol that they break.

Diabaté's status as a griot strengthens his portrayal of these bards since he is speaking as an insider as much as an outsider. Diabaté knows and understands the position of a griot who practices *jeliya* or who – like him – uses and adopts his trade to another medium such as writing. The decision he made to move from orality to writing caused Diabaté much contestation throughout his life but also allowed him to observe the

practice of *jeliya* from both the inside and outside. It is from this stance that one can read hints of anti-*griotisme* in Diabaté's novel.

In his portrayal of the griots, one hint overlooked often is in the title, *L'Assemblée de Djinns*. Diabaté use of the term *djinns* to refer to the griots paints not only a manipulative picture of them but also a supernatural one. *Djinn* translate as a genie in English, but its use in the Malian French context holds a much more harmful meaning that borderlines on fear and suspicion. By calling the griots *djinns*, Diabaté attributes supernatural qualities to these bards who, as caste members, are suspected to hold such powers by the public, especially the *horon*. His portrayal of the griots in this manner helps to confirm the public's perception of the griots and becomes a means to express the anti-*griotisme* sentiment in the novel. Diabaté's depiction follows a loose exaggeration of their real life behavior. *L'Assemblée de Djinns*, after all, is based on the griot war that occurred in Kita in the mid-1980s.

Bâ's character, Wangrin, holds many similarities to the griots in Diabaté's novel. Although Wangrin is not a griot, Bâ portrays and treats him as one in the novel. The characteristics that Bâ ascribes to Wangrin in this role are largely negative ones. He appears cunning, deceitful and suspicious of everyone. They show Wangrin as a griot character who functions less as a mediator and translator and more as an instigator and manipulator who creates havoc among his peers. The instances of Wangrin's scheming activities are numerous. They begin from the time he begins his work as a translator for the French Commandant in Diagaramba to his position as a local leader who manipulates the downfall of his enemies, such as Doumouma Romo.

Along with his malevolent portrayal of Wangrin, Bâ includes elements of the supernatural to the character that parallels Diabaté's use of the term *djinns* to describe the griots. It is a part of a supernatural oracle that prophesizes Wangrin's rise and fall; and it is Wangrin's use of the supernatural through his fetishes that he is able to learn the secrets of his enemy and gain an advantage over them. His dependency and use of the supernatural abets his rise as much as it brings forth his downfall. In one scene, Wangrin wakes up from a nightmare and seeks its interpretation from a captive, Diofo. He describes the dream: ". . . j'ai rêvé cette nuit être chassé par cinq hyènes fantasmagoriques. Quatre d'entre elles avaient des dents en forme de casse-tête. Je courais comme un guépard poursuivant une biche et sautais par-dessus terrasses, mures et murettes" (Bâ 194). Diofo reads the dream for Wangrin and tells him that he will encounter difficulties but fortune will also be found "soit par don, soit par ses propres efforts" (Bâ 195). Wangrin's success is as dependent on the good will (*don*) of others as it is on his own efforts (*propres efforts*). Diofo's words begin to hint at Wangrin's downfall, which leads him to depend more and more on the supernatural to assess his enemies.

From this scene, Wangrin proceeds to pray to his fetish more fervently, which becomes an augur of his downward spiral into the supernatural. Bâ's portrayal of Wangrin serves to confirm the pervasive belief among *horon* and other non-caste groups about griots, in particular and the *nyamakala*, in general on their supernatural status as part of the caste. His presentation of the Wangrin as a griot acting in this manner leans toward an anti-*griotisme* sentiment that helps to perpetuate the image of these bards as

manipulative characters who depend as much on their cunningness as they do on the supernatural to create trouble and mischief.

In all four novels, hints of anti-*griotisme* emerge in the various adoptions of the griot's speech and portrayals of the griots by the four authors. Looking at the novels along with my fieldwork helps to confirm the depiction of the griots and their perception among the *horon*. On both accounts, the anti-*griotisme* sentiment in both the novels and my observation of the griots presents an impending debate on anti-*griotisme* that the authors signal in their work. The debate appears straightforward (*griotisme* vs. anti-*griotisme*) at the same time that it is intricate for all of the levels it touches – social, cultural and political.

On the surface level, the *horon* can choose not to participate in the practice of *jeliya* with the griots. It was clear that the old men in the retired *grin* –given the choice— would choose not to participate in *jeliya* when I posed such a question to them in our conversations. On a deeper level, a mere refusal to not take part is not as simple as it appears. Rejecting the practice of *jeliya* cuts into the very social structure that defines the Mande culture. The old men in the retired *grin* response to my question was telling of the intricacy involved in the practice of *jeliya* for both the griots and non-griots, particularly the *horon*. They simply could not refuse the griots. Placed in this position, *horon* and other non-caste groups begin to feel hostile toward the griots and their practice of j*eliya*. Bâ, Diabaté and Ouologuem's use and presentation of the griots in their novels reflect the public feelings on the griots. As the exception, Niane's reverence for the griots as oral depositories of history still holds true too. Certainly, the griots in Kela, such as Lansiné, the *kumatigi*, and Demba Mamadi, the *jelikuntigi*, are sought after by Malians and

foreigners alike not only for their knowledge of the oral epics but also the prestige and respect they carry for their talent as griots. In response, they have turned their practice of j*eliya* into marketable skills; Lansiné and Demba Mamadi no longer see themselves as simple depository of history but also businessmen who demand money for their knowledge. Their behavior evokes strong feelings about such a monetary exchange and recalls my own experience with them. A change is certainly on the horizon as the debate on anti-*griotisme* begins to take center stage more and more. The *horon* and other non-caste groups will begin to assert their discontent while the griots will need to recast themselves again and adapt to the changing perception and world that surround them to remain the true performer they are.

Chapter Seven

Rise of the Novels in Mali

Publishing! Language Obstacles and Opportunities for the Novel

Concluding my fieldwork in Kela and Kita, I move from the world of orality characterized by the figure of the griot to the world of literacy exemplified by the rise of the novel in Mali. Thus far, my focus has been on the griots and the link they hold between orality and writing, specifically the novel. My focus too has been on examining orality as a text as it actually appears in the Mande culture and oral tradition that the authors in my study reference for their narratives. Now returning to the novel, I look concretely at its development in its path toward publication in Mali.

As a part of this path, language holds a major influence. Malians read and write in a language that is not a native tongue but a colonial one: French. The prominence of French in the lives of Malians renders what they read and write as important as the language they read and write in. The use of French, along with English and Portuguese, are all part of a larger debate on language politics that has been examined over the years by authors, philosophers and politicians from the African continent. The discussion, however, has centered mainly on the parallels between the use of indigenous languages with an African identity and unity. Rather than continue this debate, my focus on language places it in the context of the novel's rise in Mali. And, as noted earlier, the creation of this new genre – the novel – along now with the use of the French language have had a lingering effect on orality, specifically the griots. Both marginalize griots not only by its written mode but also its formal linguistic elements. This leads one to ask

collectively about the role of the novel in the Mande culture and how its development in a language other than a local one affects the griots and their craft amidst the social and technological changes occurring in Mali.

The rise of Francophone novels both in the pre- and post-independence periods coincided with the availability of African focused publishers. Particularly, the creation of *Présence Africaine* in 1947 and the expansion of *L'Harmattan* to cover West Africa were a boost to both Francophone authors and novels. No longer did authors from Francophone countries depend exclusively on French publishers who were taking a chance on them or who lacked resources to promote their work. *Présence Africaine* came onto the scene during the high period of Négritude when the promotion of African artistic talent was most prominent. Léopold Sédar Senghor, one of its most vocal advocates, made use of Négritude to legitimize the literary and artistic works of black Africans. The movement broadened their works from novels to poetry while *Présence Africaine* and *L'Harmattan* expanded the universe of their reception, extending beyond West Africa to Europe, North America and the Caribbean. A result of the steady publication of Francophone novels and their dissemination beyond the African continent was an urgency to bring the debate on language to the forefront.

Discussions on language first grew in importance between the late 1950s and early 1960s when most Francophone countries were on the cusp of achieving independence from France. Leading the debate were philosophers and authors who argued for an African unity and identity that drew attention to the paradox of African authors writing about their experiences in the language of the colonizer. At this time, two schools of thought appeared in the discussion: one questioned the use of European

languages to express the African experience and culture that included authors such as Abiola Irele, Ngugi wa Thiong'o[107] and Ousmane Sembène; and the second argued for the use of European languages to engage African writers with the world beyond their continent and had the support of Chinua Achebe. The opponents overshadow the proponents in this debate when they correlated the use of African language with an African identity. They argued non-African languages, such as English, French and Portuguese, created a disjuncture between the African authors and their local language and community by making it difficult for them to translate their culture into another language. For these authors, language and culture were intrinsically linked, prompting Kwame Botwe-Asamoah to ask, "If, therefore, culture cannot be separated from language, how does thought translated from one's language to a foreign one retain of one's cultural and aesthetic values in literary expression?" (752).

Responses to Botwe-Asamoah's question appeared in an early discussion on language in 1962 at the Conference of African Writers in English Expression at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda. Participants at the conference ranged from politicians to writers from across the African continent who all convened to contest the use of foreign languages. Achebe, from Nigeria, defended his use of English by the fact that he had "been given a language and . . . [he] intends to use it" (Botwe-Asamoah 749). Irele, also from Nigeria, responded to such an argument with a warning that "[. . an] attachment of our modern literature and culture to the European languages is at odds with the facts of African life" (Botwe-Asamoah 749). His comment begins to address the difficulty African writers encounter when trying to describe their experience in a "foreign"

[107] Although wa Thiong'o is a strong propopent of writing in the indigenous language with his use of the Kikuyu, he has also written in English. His latest novel, *Wizard of the Crow* (2006), is in English.

language. While some writers have started to use the local language to bridge this disjuncture such as wa Thiong'o and Sembène, others have alluded to looking beyond written African literature and back to orality as the true expression of the African experience, and thus identity.

Weighing in on this debate were African philosophers who stressed a return to indigenous languages in order to read and understand Africa vis à vis its myriad cultures to arrive at its multitude of identities. The approach moved away from a worldview of Africa among philosophers such as John Mbiti who saw all African cultures collectively as one. The acknowledgement of the different languages in Africa enabled one to read each culture locally and individually, which spawned the varied philosophical readings from Kwasi Wiredu's "folk philosophy" to "ethnophilosophy" to what Odera Oruka termed "philosophical sagacity." What these different philosophies proposed was a study of the cultures according to its own terms. Botwe-Asamoah puts it succinctly when he draws the connection between the local culture and the language:

> . . . language is not only the carrier of culture but the linguistic channel of national life. It offers a structural framework for the expression of life experiences. Literature extends this feature of language through communicative functions, which proceeds from its environment. For this reason, the African writer who expresses his African world in a European tongue denies himself this linguistic channel of national life (760).

Botwe-Asamoah's observation reflects the core ideas behind these different philosophies, which also paralleled the outcome of the Kampla Conference with its recommendation for "[. . .] translations into autochthonous languages, wherever possible, of works by African writers in French, English, Portuguese, Spanish and so on" (Botwe-Asamoah

746). Such a resolution holds an optimistic outlook that has, in reality, been slow in its realization for both authors and publishers over the years.

Working amidst this social climate, Mali, like other African countries, has struggled since independence to maintain and operate local publishing groups despite a lack of funds and a small readership. Only two notably publishing houses exist in Mali: *Donniya* and *Jamana*. Both are private with the latter started by former president Alpha Konaré. They survive through the inconsistent publishing of various items such as booklets, novels, and textbooks. In some cases, authors who have achieved success return to Mali and open their own publishing house. Moussa Konaté is an example with his printing office, *Le Figuier*.[108] He has learned, as his predecessors have, that the task of operating a publishing house is a formidable and arduous one. Günter Simon asserts, "Declaring independence is nothing; being independent is a costly business" (209). Publishers play a key role in this business with their constant negotiations with the many parties involved: the government (regulations), readers (translation), authors (translation/intermediary between writer and international stage) and bank (funds) (213). The success of these independent publishers depends largely on the ability of the director to maneuver between these various parties.

For Malian authors who write in local language, having a local publisher does not always alleviate the different parties and questions involved. More likely, issues of funding, readership and translation are exacerbated with the smaller lesser funded

[108] Moussa Konaté, author of *Les saisons* and *Le Prix de l'ame* created *Le Figuier* to help local authors publish in Mali. Among the writers he has helped is Ousamane Diarra, a part-time author and librarian at the *Centre Culturel Français* in Bamako. Diarra is the author of many short novels and children's books that he has translated and transcribed from the oral tradition. Some of his works include, *Vieux Egard* (2006*); L'Ombre de la Nuit* (2006); *La Longue Marche des Animaux Assouffés* (1996).

publishers. Particularly, to translate or not to translate is a constant and critical question. Most publishers hesitate to print works in local languages because of the small readership available and the minimal commercial success they will bring. The reverse—to translate works written by African authors in French or English into local languages—poses similar issues. Attempts made by larger publishers such as *Présence Africaine* and *l'Harmattan* to print in the local languages have only been met with modest success in Mali and other African countries, making the process of translation an admirable but risky venture. In Mali, works published in the local languages appear usually as folk tales that have been transcribed into children's books with illustrations. Such is the case with Father Bailleul[109] who has published many children's books both in French and the local language with *Donniya*. Yet, a novel in the local language has yet to appear. As Hans Zell states pointedly: ". . . no publisher in his right senses will dabble in such worthy causes unless the books are subsidized, or he can carry such innovation on the back of mainstream publishing and the lucrative educational book markets" (72). Ahmed Djiri Soukouna, the director of promotion and distribution at *Donniya*, shares the sentiment when he explains, "Une éditeur est d'abord [un] commerçant; on ne fait pas la promotion humanitaire" (Interview August 26, 2003). Thus, it remains that profit reigns, which gives works published in either French or English an advantage.

Mali's Language Politics Mirror the Novel

Surprisingly, the debate on language is not exclusive to the struggles of the publishing houses. Similar deliberations on language appear in the governing of Mali.

[109] Father Bailleul is also known for writing and updating the Bambara/French and French/Bambara dictionary used by most researchers and foreign government and non-governmental agency (NGOs) workers.

With its independence from France in 1960, Mali decided to take a practical approach in regards to its language politics. It chose not to adopt Bambara, or any other indigenous languages spoken in the country, as its official language. Instead, French remains the official language of Mali, used in the rule of government and the teaching at schools and colleges. The decision shows the government's cautious approach to avoid a language war but does not reflect the reality in Mali. Apart from its official status, French is a secondary language for most Malians since they speak Bambara or one of the other indigenous languages first before learning French. Malians who speak and write in French vary in level from the farmer in the village to the civil servant in the city.

In my fieldwork, I encountered the French language mostly in the cities, with the capital Bamako representing the largest urban area. Other cities include Mopti, Segou, Kita, Kayes and Sikasso. In these cities, French is spoken at government offices, schools and organizations ranging from state run to non-governmental (NGOs) ones. Yet even within these environments, Bambara is often mixed with French. One sees the paradox particularly in the first cycle at the primary school level when French is used as the language of instruction for children who only speak the indigenous language.

Moving slowly away from these institutions to the streets, the open markets and the mosques, Bambara becomes the vernacular of the Malians and French is heard less and less. French turns now into the secondary language that is used interspersedly with Bambara. The facility to change languages from the workplace to the streets shows the porous boundaries between these spaces. Clearly, where Malians speak French or Bambara is not permanently demarcated from one place to the next but loosely defined, rendering the speaker a creator and receiver of both languages.

Farther away from the metropolitan to the rural areas, the environment changes dramatically due to the lack of development in the villages. Here, French is almost non-existent. Villagers who speak the language are ones who have received a secondary level schooling to know the greetings and pose basic questions. Many of the translators I worked with in Kela represented this small educated group in the village. Other than this small group, one only hears French among the civil servants who are assigned to these rural posts by the government. The three griots I worked with in Kela – Lansiné, Demba Mamadi and Yamadou – only had a passing knowledge of French. On the other hand, the griots I encountered in Kita with Madou and Modibo Kouyaté spoke more French. The difference is in part due to the location (village compared to city) and accessibility along with the generation gap between these two groups of griots.

While Bambara dominates in the oral mode, the opposite is true in the written form. French is the written language used at all levels in Mali, a fact that highlights the continuing gap between French and Bambara, particularly in the publications of novels. Bambara, while widely spoken in Mali, has no real print media; French, spoken at varying levels throughout Mali, is the language used to publish newspapers, government documents and educational texts. Faced with this current reality, Malians cannot ignore the use of French in their lives. They need to have reading and writing knowledge of French in order to comprehend and engage with each other and the world beyond their borders. French is able to hold its dominance in writing since it is the language of instruction in schools. Malians use French to learn how to read and write in the language. In some cases, Malians who have achieved a proficiency in French move on to learn

Bambara. Unfortunately, resources for Bambara or other indigenous language instruction are scarce from the both primary and secondary school to the university level.[110]

Efforts to place a standardized form of Bambara and other indigenous languages – Senufo, Peul, Songhai and Malinké – in the schools are ongoing for the Minister of Education in their goal to achieve bilingual education. Since 1994, the Ministry of Education has worked to implement what they call *écoles expérimentales* or *pédagogie Convergente* throughout Mali.[111] The schools target teaching French along with the indigenous language at the primary level. In the first year, students are taught exclusively in Bambara. The second year, French is introduced but only orally, making it 25% French and 65% Bambara. The third year, the use of French auguments, increasing it now 65% French and 25% Bambara. The same continues for the fourth year. In the fifth and sixth year, French and Bambara are used equally in the oral and written. Today, according to Youssouf Haidara, a language specialist at the Ministry of Education, there are 1256 *écoles expérimentales* throughout Mali teaching indigenous languages that are appropriate to the region (Interview June 26, 2003). In Bamako and the areas surrounding it, the language is Bambara while it is Senufo in the south and Tamachek in the north.

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[110] The Direction National de l'Alphabétisation Fonctionnelle et de la Linguistique Appliquée or DNAFLA located in Bamako offers courses in some of the local languages. However, access and knowledge of these courses are not very widely known. Students who attend these courses are normally university students.

[111] Tracy Wells's dissertation, "The Complexities of Postcolonial Educational Reform: Teacher Implementation of Mali's *Pédagogie Convergente* Method" (2006), examines the *écoles expérimentales* in three regions in Mali (Bamako, Koulikoro and Djenné) and the mixed outcomes they offered. The policy lingers inbetween what she calls, "a top-down and bottom-up approach. As a result, she notes the misunderstanding of the teachers to implement the *pédagogie convergente* method, which was demonstrated in their "ambivalent attitudes and hybrid practices" toward it. ". . .[T]eachers," she found, "incorporated Malian languages more than the recommended percentages in the first four years of primary school while they prioritized French in the last two years."

The aim of the *écoles expérimentales* is to make future generations of Malians literate in their own language with the hopes that print media will follow.

Unfortunately, the goal of bilingual education is on a very slow path, evidenced not only in the small number of Malians who are able to read and write in the indigenous language but also in the scarce resources for them to practice their skills. Malians who are able to access the local language hope to find an audience conversant enough in the native tongue to enjoy their work. The minimal success of the *écoles expérimentales* provides only a small number of Malians who are able to read and write in the local language. The effect, thus, becomes a cyclical one with too few numbers of Malians literate in their native tongue on the one hand and too few resources for them to practice it on the other hand. Such a reality not only touches upon Mali's education policy but also leads one back to the publishing obstacles facing Malian authors who write in the indigenous language; the intrinsic relationship between the political and publishing fronts becomes clearer.

Debating the Language Question with Orality and the Novel

Such a gap between the written colonial language and the spoken indigenous ones brings one back to the debate among African authors. The discussion continues today with the promotion of indigenous languages gaining wider support. In part, the focus on indigenous languages comes from the authors themselves. Sembène realized that he was alienating himself and his audience by writing in French. Senghor admitted too that he found it difficult sometimes to translate his Wolof thoughts into French. Additionally, the

use of French in the mode of writing brought Francophone authors farther and farther away from orality. Botwe-Asamoah considers:

> . . . the prevalence of the European languages in African literature has also led to a devaluation of those orature that are original to the people. Through colonialism, these European languages relegated African orature to marginal positions, whereby the new literature attached to the European languages have been regarded as the rule and direction of creative effort. But it is in the oral tradition that one notices the organic unity between imaginative thought and the autochthonous 'language, which provides a common connection between the individual imaginative consciousness and the collective life (753).

The emphasis turns now to orality since griots use their mother tongue to tell stories. For its supporters, promotion of orality becomes the most effective way of restoring indigenous languages since it leads African writers back to a tradition and a past that speaks to an African identity more concretely.

Of course, a return to orality as a means to re-access the local languages has both its supporters and detractors. French and, moreover, writing has become an integral tool for Malian and Francophone writers alike. Malian authoer Gaoussou Diawara proclaims his choice to write in French and in different genres. He reasons: "I am a poet, but also a prose novel author. At some point I abandon the light arm, the machine gun, of poetry to use the tanks that are the novels, the short stories" (Qtd. in Woodward 180). Diawara's use of French reflects an affinity to the language that extends beyond a mere choice. It is a weapon to be used in combat; a weapon that authors, who earlier called for a return to the indigenous language, have themselves begin to use. Such is the case with Thiong'o who have gone from writing in English to Kikuyu and back to English.

The move on Thiong 'o part shows a growing acceptance for authors from both the Francophone and Anglophone traditions to adopt the language as their own; at the same time, it acknowledges who their readership is. Often, they live abroad while fans at

home are mostly the elite and assimilated classes who, in some cases, may view the use of indigenous languages as inferior. The differences among the readerships at home point to *différences* between Africans not based so much on their ethnic *différences*, but on the *différence* in their colonial past ". . . [which]. . . are discernible in the different way they write, think and live" (Oyekan 352). Indeed, V.Y. Mudimbe offers an insightful comment to this point when he notes that accounts written about Africa shows more about the authors' Western cultural orientations as they do anything about Africa itself (Hallen 119). Francophone authors who choose to write in French not only demonstrate this point clearly but also acknowledge the reality surrounding them in light of publishing constraints and unsuccessful education policies.

On the other side of Diawara's full embrace the novel genre through his use of the French language are authors who seek to combine orality in their writings. Amadou Hamphaté Bâ provides several examples in his body of works. He not only incorporates French and the local languages in his writings but also looks to the oral tradition for his literary inspiration. Commenting on Bâ, Irele considers: "His approach has been based on an understanding of the disparity between the oral and the written media, which makes the later inadequate for a proper presentation of the oral texts without adaptations" (84). In this case, Bâ,'s use of French is only part of his narrative as he works to integrate it with the orality of Bambara, Fulani or Malinké. His novel, *Les Fortunes de Wangrin*, is an example of the mixing of these two modes. It shows a mediation between the voices of Wangrin who recounts his life in Bambara, and Bâ who proceeds to transcribe it into French. The audience receives the finished work as an imaginative fiction: a novel that transmits the "imaginative values" and "reactivates" the essential human significance

found in the oral text (Irele 84). Bâ's novel brings him back to orality; at the same time, it challenges the linear textuality of the novel that Irele re-envisioned earlier for a new narrative form.

So, What About the Griots?

While Bâ draws on orality with his incorporation of it in his writing, the participation of the griot remains minimal in the development of the novel, particularly in the local languages. Alain Ricard believes "the stagnation of literature in African languages seems to coincide with the demise of the bards" (197). He observes that most people under 30, born after independence, know orality as a conflation of two definitions: "[. . .] the orality of long ancient epics told and retold by bards and the orality of the media that is a byproduct of illiteracy and is the opposite of memory" (197). The media seen in television and radio represents a new form of orality that replaces the griot. For Ricard, they are inadequate substitutions for the "eminent dignity of the civilization of orality" since they enable the audience to stay in "orality by default" without memory of a past offered by the griots (197). For the 62% majority of the population in Mali who are illiterate, television and radio hold an important role in their lives. Most radio shows are broadcast in French while television shows are similarly dubbed, with few exceptions for programming in Bambara. These changes to the orality and, moreover, the griots' status move beyond the anti-*griotisme* sentiment and place both in a more precarious position. One can say that the griots are slowly going out of business, and not of their own volition. The history of colonialism, independence and the present political environment along with the appearance of written literature in various forms – newspapers, novels and

poetry – have relegated orality to an African past. "The question now," Ricard posits, "concerns the vitality of African languages in new urban environment" (197). His remarks parallel the support for the use of indigenous languages in literature, especially in such cases where orality has become a corrupt form. Griots are central in this debate as they are affected by both the rise of the novel and the move in language from indigenous to foreign ones.

Amidst all these changes, one asks if griots are still able to practice their craft. Following Ricard's argument presents a bleak future for these bards. Yet, it poses a reductionist view of the debate between writing and orality that even Ricard admits, "The fade out of orality would, as some have it signal the fade-in of literacy. But nothing fades out; everything remains, and continues to work within a new medium (Ricard 195). What appears is not a one or another scenario but a co-existence of orality along with writing in both French and the indigenous languages that Irele offers earlier in his challenge to reenvsion the novel; at the same time, orality, seen with the bards, maintains a strong place in the Mande tradition due to the caste system. What danger lurks in this debate is not to accept what these changes bring and, rather view the figure of the griot as representative of the African past and identity. Marcien Towa cautions against this position when he calls ". . . the oral tradition as nothing but "griotisme avilissant," a debasing minstrelsy, imprisoning Africans in a nostalgic identity that prevents confrontation with global reality" (Miller 71). Towa's critical remark is a strident warning for one not to reify the oral tradition as the authentic marker of Africa. However, what he overlooks in his caution is the changes that have occurred for the oral tradition too. Orality has not been as stagnant as Towa's comment might lead one to believe. It has

too transformed over the years, evidenced in the "orality by default" that Ricard describes above. Griots remain vital by changing as the novel has.

Among these influences, literacy too has had an effect on the oral culture with the advent of the novel. Its appearance in Mali speaks to a rise in reading practices that shows orality co-existing with writing. Jack Goody marks this distinction when he notes how "oral communication in society with writing is different than orality without writing. Consequently, an oral tradition that is supplemented by a written tradition cannot be thought of as the same as an oral tradition in a society without writing (Goody 23). In Mali, the transition from an exclusively oral society to one with writing encompasses the two worlds that Goody describes. Mali sits now in the latter of the two with an oral culture working to adapt to the social changes that writing and literacy bring. Certainly, Goody and, equally, Ian Watt view literacy holding a key role in this transition. Miller, however, reminds one not to forget the Francophone context in which these changes appear too: "Goody and Watt are right to insist on the fundamental importance of literacy as a tool of social change; but by attributing 'intrinsic' qualities to writing, they sort-circuited their attempt to get away from the 'diffused relativism and sentimental egalitarianism' of Rousseau and the 'indivisible wholeness' of Lévy-Bruhl" (106). The extent of influence that literacy brings to the practices of orality depends on factors that include and move beyond publishing constraints and language. There is also the anti-*griotisme* sentiment, an issue that is very local to the Mali. Indeed for Irele, ". . . any discourse on African literature and the language question ought to be linked to African agency; it also has to take into account the dual character of language – communicative

and culture. . . .” (762). The reality for Mali now is a world that has been touched by writing and literacy.

Conclusion

When I completed my fieldwork in Kita, I said goodbye to my griot friends and the men who I saw daily at the two *grins*. Saying goodbye was not a mere farewell and thank you; it was an informal ceremony to show my appreciation by offering kola nuts and tea to the groups of people with whom I spent time and worked. Particularly for the griots, I wanted to show them how invaluable their help was to me. I was choosing my exit strategy in this situation and not the griots, as it was in the case of my departure from Kela. The morning of my departure, I arrived at the *grin* with the older men as usual; most already knew of my impending departure. No one said very much until I pulled out the gifts of kola nuts and tea and gave it to one of the younger griots to present to Fodé and Drahma since both were the two most senior among the men at the *grin*. Drahma declared contentedly upon receipt of the gifts that I now knew and understood the Malian custom of saying goodbye. His words remained in my mind after my returned from Mali during my subsequent months of writing about my research and findings. Had I really understood the Malian custom or were these practices themselves changing with the times?

Clearly, the one constant thing that appears for Mali is change. Change in the practice of *griotisme*, change in the reception and perception of griots and other members of the caste and non-caste, change in how Malians approach their oral tradition and change in the ways they receive and communicate information with writing and other forms of medias (radio and tv) becoming more prominent. Mali is a country experiencing

enormous changes to both its people and culture. My focus on novels and orality as texts helped to uncover these changes and brought a better understanding of the Mande culture to my discussion.

Reading the novels as "texts" enabled me to view them as written works from the Mande tradition. Similarly, reading orality as a text allowed me to place the spoken word within a cultural context based on the everyday practices and utterances of the Mande. Seen both as texts, my intertexutal reading of the novels and orality showed the effects one had on the other. These influences appear in the numerous changes occurring in Mali presently. Thus, the question now becomes: Where does Mali go from here?

To address this inquiry, I would like to reexamine a theme that permeated throughout my dissertation: power. Most of the changes in Mali touched upon the altering dynamics of power. The reorganization of *cercle*, *arrondissment* and *commune* was an administrative change that stemmed from the central government in Bamako to the outlaying regions. The reclassifcation of these spaces also led to the movement of people. As noted, more and more Malians migrated to the larger towns and cities as one result of the reoganization. Such movements brought a shift to the livelihoods of Malians and a change to the Mande tripartite structure. For the griots, it meant a change to their craft and the patrons they sought as a result. Consequently, this brought a backlash against the griots seen in anti-*griotisme*. The sentiment revealed the altering power dynamics to the caste, noble and non-caste groups. Griots who gained fame and fortune often enjoy a more comfortable lifestyle than their noble and other non-caste counterparts. Here, tension arises as the traditional power base changes while the underlying Mande caste structure remains the same. This last point emphasizes my earlier argument on what has

changed and remarkably remained unchanged for the Mande. A griot, no matter how successful he becomes, remains a griot and a member of the caste; while a noble or non-caste continue to be view as such regardless of his economic status. For any momentous changes to occur, a reinterpretation of the Mande tripartitie caste structure needs to take place to loosen the view that one is not always wedded to one's profession or caste by birth. Until this happens, Malians will continue to make exceptions and adapt to these changes rather than change themselves.

If Malians are not changing themselves, they are certainly speaking about it through oral and written mediums such as radio, TV and novels. The rise of these different medias provides Malians with opportunities to engage and communicate with each other beyond their region. In the case of TV and, particularly, radio, griots are using these medias to enlarge their audience. Griots are becoming international stars based on an adapation of their craft from a praise singer to a singer of popular songs. At the same time, artists or musicians are not only from a caste background but a non-caste and even noble one. Similarly for Malian authors, the publication of novels gives them a readership that is more abroad than at home. Malian authors who publish do so in a language – French – that serves more of an advantage than obstracle for them. Language is becoming less and less of an issue for Malian authors who view the benefits of publishing in French to reach a wider audience, a move that is similar to griots using tv and radio to reach a larger population. The development of these medias reveals changes in power at both the local and global level, affecting Mande and their oral culture. Amidst these transformations, Malians appear to want to change but are unwilling to act upon it. Rather, from what I viewed through my fieldwork adapation appears as a means to deal

with changes as Malians face a world that evolving in front of them. What is next for Mali and Malians is a slow but eventual stept to confront the changes in their culture as they try to understand their role in a much more open and interconnected world beyond the Mande.

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