

SANGALAN ORAL TRADITIONS AS PHILOSOPHY AND IDEOLOGIES¹

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I

Sangalan is located in northeast Guinea in the *région* of MaliYampering. It was a federation of groups of villages, consisting of three *taane* (*kafo* in Malinke, districts or groups of villages): Dombiya, Uykha, and Djulabaya. To these three *taane* correspond three ethnic subgroups, the Dombiyanne, Uykhanne, and Djulabayanne. The Dombiyanne were mostly the Keita families; the Uykhanne the Camara; and the Djulabayanne the Nyakhasso. The people of Sangalan are Dialonka—those living in Sangalan are called the Sangalanka. They are originally all from Dialonkadougou, at first a province of the Soso empire founded and ruled by Sumanguru Kante, and later a province of the empire of Mali, created by Sundiata Keita in the thirteenth century.² The Sangalanka call themselves “Sosoe Forine” (Old Sosoe), the Sosoe who lived on the high mountains (*dialon*) of both the Soso and Manden empires. They call the other Sosoe, living along the Guinean coast, Bani Sosone (Sosoe of the Coast, near the water). The Soso Forine and Bani Sosone lived in the Futa Jallon and were driven away by the Fulani invaders in the eighteenth century.

In the Futa Jallon the Soso people regrouped in their new Dialonkadougou, bearing the name Dialonka (N'Daou 1975,11-18; N'Daou 1993, 13-14; Demougeot, 1944, 11; Bangoura 1972, introduc-

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² Dialonkadougou was the name of the Futa Jallon before the eighteenth-century Fulani *jihad*: Gray/Dochard 1825:37.

tion).³ Supposedly, Dialonkadougou was finally destroyed by the Tukolor conqueror Umar Tal in 1854. The Dialonka of Sangalan became independent and consequently constructed a new social identity in the name of Sangalanka⁴ ("Mission Oberdorf"; "Mission Lechatelier-Audéoud"). Through divers forms of struggle the Sangalanka have managed to maintain relative autonomy from all dominant powers within not only the villages, groups of villages, and federation of groups of villages, but also the colonial and postcolonial Guinean societies. Those forms of struggle vary from armed resistance, collective flights, and rumors and gossip to ideological debate and political propaganda (N'Daou 1993).

II

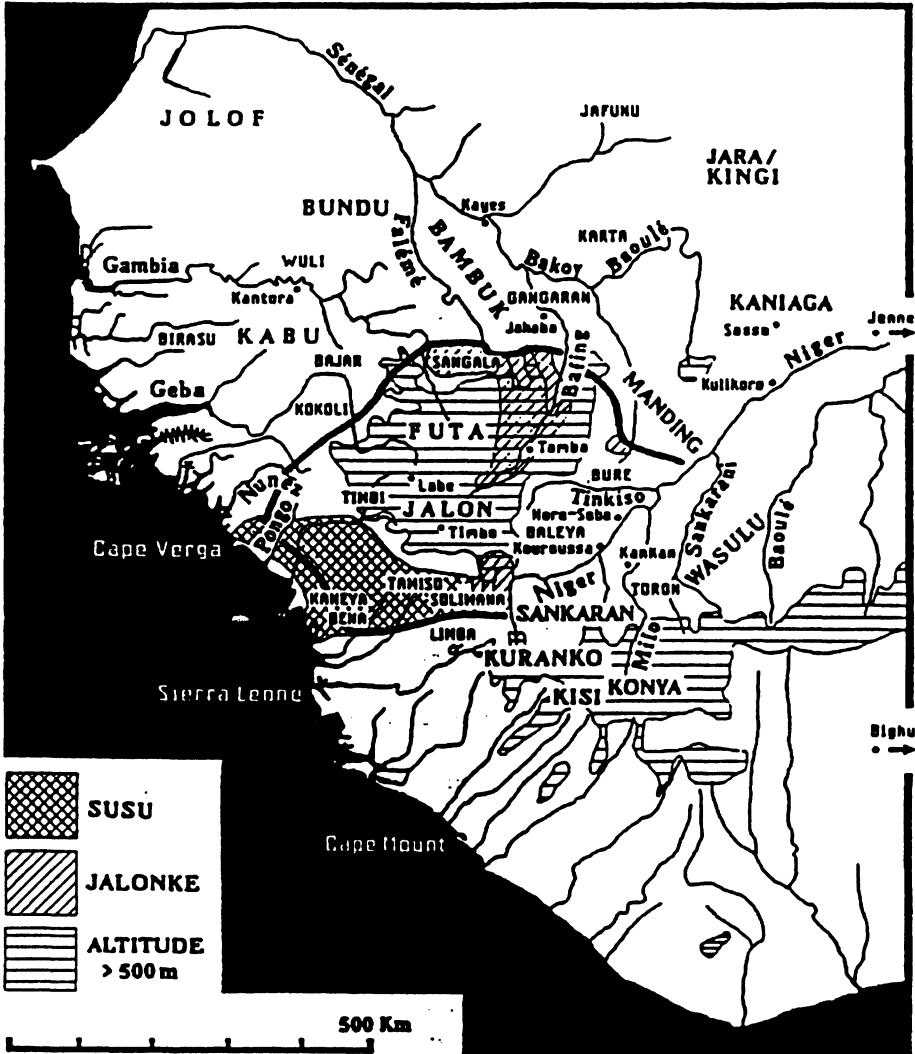
In this paper I interpret the Sangalanka's accounts of past events as both the vehicles of a precolonial cognitive worldview—in effect, a philosophy which all the individuals and social groups (elites and subordinates, men and women, elders and juniors) shared—and the instruments of the ideological struggle in which those individuals and social groups engaged in order to gain access to power, land, and labor. The accounts of past events are not merely literary texts. They express the feelings and thoughts of competing individuals and social groups.⁵ As means of appropriating the past they are Sangalanka's answers to the questions: where do we come from? what happened to us as both individuals and a group? who were we in the past? who are our ancestors and what did they do? and who is the founder of the village, group of villages and/or federation of groups of villages? It is according to how they answer to these questions that Sangalanka have structured their actual relations to land, men, and women (both insiders and outsiders), leaders, and transcendental phenomena.⁶

³ "Soosoos are always called Jalunkas" (Thomas Winterbottom, *Royal Gazette and Sierra-Leone Advertiser*, 24 April 1821, 2, as quoted in Fyle 1977:10). See also Bangoura 1972. The name "Dialonka" is the English version of the French "Dialonké" Sangalanka call themselves Djallonka. Mahawa Bangoura defines Dialonka as inhabitants of the mountains: in actual fact the term "Djallonké," referring to a people of Malinke origin, simply means "inhabitants of the mountains" or gold workers. Jalon correctly means "mountain" in old Yalunka, a name only Futa carries today, it extended from the northeast of Siguiiri as far as the mountainous *massif* of Futa. "Dialon" means "mountain" and "Ka" adds the meaning "inhabitant of."

⁴ "De cette dislocation [de l'empire de Tamba par El Hadji Omar Tall] resulte l'indépendance de cette série de petits ou moyens territoires que la main de fer de Boug Ari avait tenus sous le joug. El Hadji Omar soumit le Koulou et les pays de l'Est ainsi que Sangala, le Dentilia, le Gdhawoundou et les territoires entre Falémé et Bafing s'affranchirent de tout pouvoir suzerain."

⁵ Hamilton (1987) develops a similar understanding of oral tradition.

⁶ My intuition on how individuals and social groups construct their actual social rela-



My argument is that Sangalanka's oral traditions in general, and their accounts of past events in particular, were determined not only by the initiatives and interests of the Sangalan elites. Subordinates created their own variants of the oral traditions in order to carve out for themselves a space of relative autonomy, as conscious and responsible agents of their history. As a matter of fact, depending on the historical circumstances, Sangalan oral traditions were used both as means to build social consensus and to realize social competition. These principles of unity, collaboration, dialogue, and accommodation—but also conflict, competition, and resistance—structure the precolonial Sangalan philosophy of the human person.

In general, built on the definition of life as vital force, Sangalanka's faith constructs and organizes the images of the ancestors, earth spirits, and representatives of ancestors, whether men or women, into a hierarchical system of ontological relations. In this worldview ancestors and earth spirits are represented as the owners of the land and other natural resources, legislators of the society and the legitimizing source of political authority (N'Daou 1993, 124-30). The Sangalanka were conscious of the fact that their debate over who was the founder of a village or congeries of villages was a struggle for their access to power, land, and labor.⁷

tions through their conscious and creative participation in the struggle over sociohistorical meanings developed out of my fieldwork and my reading of various books and articles too numerous to be cited here, but probably familiar to most readers.

⁷ In 1975 El Hadji Bacar Keita gave me a version of the Foton War that was different from the one recorded in both his "Tarikh of the Dialonka People of Sangalan" and in Destibeaux's "Rapport." The new version ends as follows:

[Image-segment 21]: "Almamy addressed the Dialonka, begging for peace. He seemed very sincere when he said that, although Manga Hammorro was killed, the Fulani respected him and his people. Carefully selecting his words, he said: 'Let us stop our quarrels, if not to become friends, to bury our dear sisters and brothers. War is ruining us all.' Facing his armies, the Fulani king, Almamy Ibrahim, cursed whoever among them would point his gun on the Sangalanka again. The French came shortly after and found Fulani and Sangalanka united like two brothers of the same blood. Fulani armies passed through Sangalan to attack neighboring countries. They went to Futa through Sangalan. They never attacked Sangalan again. Instead they shared their booty with us" (interview no. 12, July 1975).

El Hadji Bacar Keita said that he himself reconfigured the old story and explained the reason by the necessity he had to select and use ideas and facts rigorously, which would not pull Dialonka and Fulani apart but bring them together:

"[Talking to me] you are right! I have added and/or eliminated certain elements from this [old] history... the present account is a little bit different from the one I have here [in the "Tarikh"]. For my people and me the history I just told you is what mostly counts. Only the old men know the difference between the two stories. Some have never seen my Tarikha; they do not know the old story.... I have to choose between not changing the old story and keeping Dialonka and Fulani in the same house, in peace. Why should one teach his children that they are not brothers and sisters but enemies? Do you think that Sékou Touré [first president of post-colonial

In fact, based on the view that the ancestor of the founding lineage and his descendants are the “owners” of the land, Sangalanka do not separate the question of who is the founder of the village, group of villages, and/or federation of groups of villages from the question who are the owners of the same. The social implications of the answers given to those questions are more important to Sangalanka than their metaphysical elaboration.⁸ It is not the ancestor, but land, labor, and power that constitute the objects of struggle between Sangalan individuals and groups. But it is over which ancestor to promote that Sangalan subordinates compete with their leaders to gain and protect their rights and legitimacy in these areas.⁹

To put this in general terms, Sangalankas’ reworking of their accounts of past events is determined by the *present* conflicting social issues in which they are engaged. They consciously construct individual and collective accounts of past events to make and/or remake their identities as the descendants of founding ancestors, i.e., as the legitimate owners, managers of the land and labor, and the rulers of their societies. As cultural constructs all these accounts of past events build on the Sangalanka’s philosophy of what the human person actually is, in general, and their philosophy of ancestral authority, in particular, just as they also embody notions of time and space.

A history of this struggle over the meaning of the past, during the precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial periods is a history of Sangalanka’s identities. To adapt or reshape both their identities and social frontiers, the Sangalanka recapture and reappropriate external events such as the wars between Sangalan villages or groups of villages and those between the whole Sangalan and the theocratic empire of Futa Jallon, French colonization, and the postcolonial Guinean revolution. They did not give up their historical responsibility simply to become the victimized followers of the dominant

Guinea] is telling everything he knows about the history of Guinea?” (interview no. 13, 22 July 1975). On another occasion he said: “I am simply following my ancestors, grandparents and parents. I am responsible for the present and next generations of Sangalanka. This responsibility is more important; it dictates my attitude towards the past. My language can be either a fire, to burn my people, or pure cold water, to purify their body and spirit. I want to be wise enough, to distinguish the fire from the pure cold water” (interview no. 12, July 1975).

⁸ Paul Irwin (1981:10) develops similar ideas: “Old wise men respond consciously to traditions, testing them against the wisdom of their different experience and the dictates of their various interests, accepting some of what they hear and rejecting some, gradually building up their ideas about the past.”

⁹ “A village’s claim to same common land ‘by custom from time immemorial’ often expresses not a historical fact, but the balance of forces in the constant struggle of villages against lords or against other villages” (Hobsbawm/Ranger 1983:2).

national or transnational political forces. As a definition of "African initiative" or "African voice" from the African perspective, this history of Sangalanka's identities is rooted in the internal dynamics of the Sangalan society in general, and Sangalan culture in particular.

III

The scope of this paper is limited to precolonial Sangalan between 1850 and 1920. During this period Sangalan became an independent political entity in middle Guinea ("Mission Levasseur;" N'Daou 1993, 138-39; Demougeot 1944, 26-27, 78; Destibeaux, "Rapport," 207); The federation of groups of villages was created in the 1850s after the destruction of Diallonkadougou, ruled by Boug Ari. The Sangalanka signed the first treaty with the French explorer Oberdorf in 1887. However, they did not relinquish their sovereignty until 1920 (Demougeot, "Inspection;" Demougeot 1944, 78). The reforms which the colonial administrator F-B Albert used to integrate Sangalan in French Guinea politically and economically were introduced in 1920.¹⁰ The province of Sangalan, created in that year, was dissolved in 1932 and reconstituted in 1937 (Demougeot, "Inspection"). It was restructured and renamed the *arrondissement* of Sangalan in 1958, when Guinea achieved independence from France.

Because of time limitations the development on the Sangalanka's struggle over the meaning of their precolonial past itself will be based on the single example of the 1871 Foton war. Here, through two pedagogically determined questions, I engage my readers in a conversation, which will not only facilitate cross-cultural understanding but also help show oral traditions as socially constructed by self-determined, creative, and independent historical individuals and social groups. The two questions are: who won the 1871 Foton War? and who is (are) the author (s) of the 1871 Foton War narrative?

¹⁰ "Depuis la suppression de Madina Kouta, on a presque jamais rien demandé aux Diallonkés. C'est le tort qu'on a eu; aussi trouvent-ils toujours extraordinaire et difficile de faire ce qu'on leur ordonne" (Destibeaux, "Rapport," 207.) The *cercle* de Madina-Kouta was created in 1903 and suppressed in 1905. Sangalan villages remained "independent" as Demougeot (1944:78) characterized the 21 villages that constituted Sangalan in 1905. In 1905, and again in 1911, the Sangalanka opposed the centralization of the powers of the precolonial federation of groups of villages (Kermadec, "Extrait").

"On peut considerer qu'en 1920 l'organisation du cercle de Labé était enfin réalisée sur les bases solides qui vont permettre à l'action administrative de s'exercer effectivement; les quelques modifications qui devront y être apportées en raison des circonstances, porteront sur des points de détail sans toucher à l'essentiel, sauf toutefois pour ce qui est du Sangalan" (see as well Demougeot [1944], 77, 79).

Four themes dominate Sangalanka's precolonial memories: the settlement in Sangalan and immigrant groups' relations to the land; creation of the Sangalan federation of groups of villages; the struggle for autonomy within the village and congeries of villages; and the wars that opposed Sangalanka to the Fulani of the Futa Jallon. All these themes are interrelated and ideologically appropriated; they are not "objective" studies of land, war, political organization, and social conflict. Sangalanka's accounts of not only their occupation of the land but also war, social institutions, and co-related social conflicts are simply the narrative embodiment of their social representations of themselves, time, space, ancestors, earth spirits, God, and other living-dead persons. These representations cannot be separated from the Sangalanka's culture in general, or their philosophy of the human person in particular. To demonstrate this I study the Foton war between the Sangalanka and the Fulani of Futa Jallon, focusing on the following perception management-related question: who won the 1871 Foton war?

IV

I invite readers to study the following account and try to answer this question. Then reflect on the difficulties I presume you will have when studying the Foton war from the Sangalanka's perspective rather than that of the outsider. This is the account:¹¹

[1] *Dialonka and Fulani* were constantly fighting with each other; this started when all of them were residing in the *central Futa Jallon*. Because of those quarrels, they dispersed; *certain Dialonka went to Sangalan; among those were the Keita*, followers and/or descendants of *Manga Dombi, the Dombiyanne*.

[2] *One lineage of the Dombiyanne clan*, led by *Manga Hammoro*, settled in *Foton*. The *Foton war* opposed the Fulani and *Manga Hammoro's* followers. *Sangalanka* and the Fulani continued the old quarrel, each of them crossing the *Dimma River*, in order to *plunder* its rival group. One day, a band of *Manga Hammoro's* militia crossed the *Dimma River* and surprised a group of *Fulani herdsmen*, who were asleep. The *Sangalan militia* stabbed them to death and brought their cows to *Foton*.

[3] When informed of the raid, the cows' owners went to *Merepounta*, to complain before their chief: "we need help from you, against *Foton Dialonka*, They have killed our herdsmen and driven our herds to *Foton*."

¹¹ Oral Text by Alpha Bacar Keita with notes from his unpublished "Tarikh of the Dialonka People." The numbered sections represent what I call image-segments, several of which are discussed below.

[4] Knowing the limit of his own power, the chief transferred the matter to the *king Alpha Mo Labe, father of Alpha Yaya*. The latter sent a messenger to Manga Hammoro, who refused to comply with the demand to return the stolen cows: "now that the cows have crossed the Dimma River, they cannot be returned to Fouta." Manga Hammoro also rejected Alpha Mo Labe's subsequent request for the return of half of the stolen cows. "A war only can bring the cows back to Fouta," Manga Hammoro finally told the third Fulani messenger. Alpha Mo Labe accepted the challenge, telling Hammoro that he would soon be the "host of the Fulani army." Manga Hammoro asked the Fulani messenger to inform Alpha Mo Labe that "the meal prepared for his army is already cold; the Fulani guests are late but Sangalanka are nicely waiting for them." The declaration of war was made in these metaphoric formulae.

[5] The Fulani decided to mobilize the best warriors in all of the *misside*, particularly in *Labe, Kobia, Koin and Merepounta*.¹² Before launching the attack, the Fulani felt the need to check, through divination, on the outcome of the war; the most outstanding diviner of the whole Fouta was asked to prophesy the outcome of the projected war with the Sangalanka. He communicated that an *offering* was necessary to guarantee the Fulani's victory over their Sangalan rivals. It should consist of a *porcupine (segelana in Dialonka)* and a *deer (bolena in Dialonka)*. The *wise man* sat and magically summoned those two animals, by invoking their *names, praying*, and telling his *prayer beads*. Each of the *two animals came from the forest to the village*; then, they were caught and killed. After making the offerings, the wise man said he could ensure the Fulani warriors of their triumph over the Sangalanka.

[6] Sangalan sentries saw the Fulani crossing the *Dimma*. They immediately informed Manga Hammoro. He and his people were not surprised; on the contrary, they were well prepared, having known that war with the Fulani was inevitable.

[7] *It was the end of the rainy season*, the beginning of the first harvest, particularly that of *fonio (foundenyi in Dialonka)*; however, most of the crops had not been harvested yet.

[8] *Foton inhabitants* were gathered in their *fortress*, which consisted of *three thick and high walls*. The Fulani army besieged the fortress. *Merepounta warriors* attacked one side; those of *Labe, Kobia and Koin* installed themselves at the other different strategic points.

[9] The Fulani troops were to attack in the *morning*. Foton had

¹² A *diwal* (pl. *diwé*) (a province in the theocratic empire of Futa Jallon) was divided into *missidé* or districts. A *missidé* consisted of villages which were regrouped into two types: the *foulasso* or village of free men and *roundé* or village of the Foulasso masters' slaves.

enough military supplies and its troops were strongly motivated to fight. Once the battle started, it lasted the entire day; it was horrible. On both sides *countless number of soldiers died*. The battle was still raging intensely and the soldiers strongly determined to continue the struggle. The *firearms* became hot and red, in the hand of *soldiers who were insensible to hunger, fatigue, death, and/or fear*.

[10] Sangalanka had ample military supplies and the Fulani had innumerable soldiers. The number of deaths did not affect the military capability of the Fulani. It was as if the dead soldiers were instantaneously replaced. The battle continued for *three days and three nights*; the situation remained deadlocked.

[11] Manga Hammoro sent messengers to the other Sangalan villages, namely *Takhure, Tombomkhori, Moria, Buria, and Uykha*. He desperately needed food supplies; he explained the urgency by the *size, skill, and moral engagement of the Fulani army*. *Three groups of three messengers were sent three times*. The villages responded favorably.

[12] On the *fourth day* the fighting was still intense. The arrival of their enemies' food supplies seriously undermined the morale of the starving Fulani army. It aggravated the *battle fatigue* of the *chief of Merepounta*; he deserted. Informed of the desertion, Alpha Mo Labe sent certain *sofas* [soldiers] to tell the chief of Merepounta that if he ran away, he should exile himself also, leave the Futa. This threat brought the chief of Merepounta back to the battlefield.

[13] The *fifth day* ended without bringing any substantial change in the balance of power between the Foton and Fulani armies. Convinced that they could not conquer Foton by force alone, the Fulani decided to use their *habitual trick* of gaining time and information about their rivals through a temporary negotiation of peace. So, they sent an *old woman called Fori Debele* to negotiate with Manga Hammoro; she said the Fulani recognized that the war they had themselves provoked was unjust and that the victory was Manga Hammoro's. The latter responded: "until I die, I am determined to fight but not negotiate with my enemies;" *he then politely sent Fori Debele back to the Fulani*.

[14] Worrying over the fact that their military supplies and soldiers had been considerably reduced, the Fulani again sent Fori Debele to negotiate a temporary peace agreement. Manga Hammoro once again rejected their offer.

[15] Manga Hammoro was also under pressure; he needed to obtain new military supplies from his Sangalan neighbors or face losing the battle to the Fulani. His inspection of his troops confirmed his worries.

[16] Knowing that their enemies could not get supplies from their agricultural fields, the Fulani made the decision to overcome Sangalanka's determination through *starvation*. They waited, run-

ning the risk of possible desertion of their own demobilized and hungry soldiers.

[17] The sixth day was ending; it was similar to the other days in its intensity and violence. Manga Hammoro sent new messengers to Moria, Tombokhori, Uyukha, Buria, and Kolissoko. Kolissoko was expressly asked to exert pressure on the Fulani army by occupying the strategic space of the Dimma River, the only issue leading to Futa. Uyukha, Buria, Tombokhori, and Moria took their time in preparing and consequently could not come when they were badly needed.

[18] The *anti-Fulani Dialonka* population felt the threat of a possible military defeat and preferred to die before the Fulani could capture them. The families divided the remaining gunpowder and each of them went to their respective homesteads (*tandenna* in Dialonka). There, men and women, elders and youth, along with the babies, sat around the gunpowder; they ignited it, triggering a *violent explosion*. The resulting violent death liberated the Foton people from the potential threat of being enslaved by their Fulani enemies.

[19] Pretending that he had accepted the Fulani's proposed peace agreement, Manga Hammoro allowed Fori Debele to arrange a meeting between him and Alpha Mo Labe. The latter, however, suspected Manga Hammoro's sudden commitment to peace; so he sent a delegate, who was asked to present himself as being Alpha Mo Labe. When receiving 'Alpha Mo Labe,' Manga Hammoro allowed his own bodyguards to be disarmed by the Fulani warriors. Knowing that the war was almost over, and since he had not received the aid he had requested from his Sangalan neighbors, Manga Hammoro was planning to kill both himself and Alpha Mo Labe. A knife was hidden in his pants; he had only to find an appropriate time to realize his project.

[20] He only succeeded in "*enlarging the mouth*" of Mo Labe's delegate, *cutting it up to the ears*. Manga Hammoro's victim screamed and soon received help from his fellow warriors. Manga Hammoro was caught and seriously beaten. He was, however, magically immune to harm from knives and firearms. He voluntarily gave the Fulani the secret to his *invulnerability*; he could be killed only by beating him with *three exposed roots of a tree*; the Fulani did as he told them, thus finally killing Manga Hammoro.

[21] Manga Hammoro's death reanimated Sangalanka's anti-Fulani feelings. All the villages entered into the war. *Manga Diango II* protected Sangalan by invoking the ancestor Mago Bamba's divine intervention.¹³ *Dodyon*, his messenger, *killed a white sheep and*

¹³ Son of Manga Bamba, also called Mago Bamba, Mago Bamba is remembered for having conquered the Kamanke village of Mago, with which his name is associated.

poured its blood on Mago Bamba's grave, adding the following message: "Mago Bamba, galla bara Sangalan korri" (Mago Bamba, military troops have destroyed Sangalan.) Dodyon was crying while he addressed the ancestor Mago Bamba. He made the offering after the rising of the sun.

[22] Soon after, at midday, *when the sun was at the zenith*, the rain suddenly started to fall. It was such *an abundant rainfall that it caused the Dimma to overflow*. Supported by Mago Bamba's spirit, Sangalanka defeated the Fulani; they killed a countless number of them and forced the remaining handful to retreat. In the middle of the Dimma River *the cord that the Fulani were using to cross the river was magically cut; as a result, many Fulani of the retreating army were drowned*. A few Fulani survived, to serve as messengers of the Dialonka people before the Fulani who did not personally witness the Foton war.

V

"Who won the 1871 Foton War?" was the question I posed to El Hadj Bacar Keita in 1975, when I first heard this account of the Foton war. Since then, I have asked the same question to my African and American students and colleagues, in different African and American universities. They have had the same kind of difficulty I experienced while I was trying to cross the cultural bridge that separated me from the Sangalanka. Here, using my memories of the class discussions on the Foton war and my fieldwork materials, I intend to demonstrate that the key to understanding this account is knowledge of the Sangalanka's culture in general, and their philosophy of the human person and ancestral authority in particular.

When I was doing my research on the Sangalan political and ideological institutions in 1975, I was a materialist and intolerant Marxist scholar. I perceived Sangalanka's organization and distribution of power, and related ideological justifications and material cultures, as respectively "political" and "ideological superstructures," determined in the last instance by the mode of production, i.e., Sangalan productive forces and relations of production. In this view politics and ideology are simply reflections of the economic structures; based on the principles of political economy, this vision essentially represents the individual as a rational and universal economic agent. I discarded the politics of memory—the role that culture plays—as a relatively autonomous region of the social fabric, in the definition of individuals' and groups' social identities.

This compelled me to look at the narrative of the Foton war as another vehicle of kinship relations of solidarity, cooperation, and social consensus. I considered that the rudimentary character of

Sangalan productive forces dictated solidarity and consensus as means of rationally organizing and managing labor. I selectively paid attention to the relationship between the "living Sangalanka," their material means of production and relations of production, and their "living-dead ancestor" Mago Bamba. The "living Sangalanka" are Manga Hammoro, his Foton juniors (both men and women,) and his allies in the neighboring Sangalan villages and groups of villages. Manga Hammoro is Mago Bamba's representative. As such he is the ruler and the symbol through which the members of the community are united as the descendants of a common ancestor, i.e., the "insiders" of a village or congeries of villages, facing common threat from "outsiders." My approach was structural functionalist and materialist, and it guided my answer to the question: who won the 1871 Foton war?

Considering exclusively the "material," "rational" factors of the story, I decided that the Fulani won the war. Those factors are the number, discipline, and determination of the Fulani troops; the collective suicide of the Foton people; the death of Manga Hammoro; the disarming of his bodyguards; the lack of military supplies; the siege of Foton by the Fulani army; and the level of military support received from the neighboring Sangalan villages and groups of villages.

El Hadji Bacar Keita, however, opposed my "materialist" approach to the war; he insisted that the Sangalanka won the war. He used what I called then the "idealist," "irrational" factors in the story to support his argument. Those factors are the sacrifice of a white sheep to the ancestor Mago Bamba; rain; flooding of the Dimma River that magically caused drowning of the Fulani troops; the motivation and guidance of all Sangalanka by the spirit of the ancestor Mago Bamba; and the subsequent increase in their military capacity during the battle at the Dimma River. El Hadji Bacar Keita was convinced that his people won the war; the memories of the Foton war evoked in him anti-Fulani feelings but also the related sense of pride he shares with all of the descendants of the ancestor Mago Bamba. These beliefs and feelings separated me spiritually from El Hadji Bacar Keita.¹⁴

¹⁴ Whatever the nature of the physical events, this narrative and the attitudes it encodes is part of the reality of the past and present. An "event" or "history as it was" has no meaning for people if it is not integrated into their perception of the world. Then it should not be surprising that to appropriate the memories of the Foton War, the Keita elites waged a continuous struggle over how Sangalanka should perceive and interpret these historical events. They transformed these "objective facts" into vehicles of their ideology of ancestral authority. For a similar interpretation see Rappaport 1990.

VI

We were now on the opposite ends of our cultural bridge. Because of my "materialist" point of view, I could not cross this cultural bridge. I came to Sangalan with my own perspective on history and I returned with it intact. My first dissertation on the Sangalanka's political and ideological superstructures was a simple projection of my own beliefs and feelings. Through it I rediscovered myself, but did not meet or study the Other. And, I believe, this was the normal way of doing research on and writing about the Other. I was taught that one cannot know the Other; my belief was that a study of the Other is a rediscovery, a projection of oneself.

At first all of my students and colleagues reacted the same way to the account of the Foton war. They projected their own cultural biases onto the account. Like me, and on the basis of the same "materialist" argument, many of them considered that the Fulani won the war. In contrast, those who are religious believers felt strongly that the Sangalanka won the war. They adhere to the same beliefs in the spirits as the Sangalanka.

Along the way there was always a third group that considered two moments, two victories, and two defeats for both the Fulani and the Sangalanka. This group believes that the Fulani won the war in the episode that ends with the death of Manga Hammoro. Here the Sangalanka were defeated. In the second episode that ends with the magically caused drowning of the Fulani troops, the group believes that the Sangalanka won the war and the Fulani were defeated. Some students and colleagues in this group are so confused that they cannot tell whether the Fulani or the Sangalanka won the war. In this third category, students and/or colleagues used a mixture of "materialist" and "idealist" arguments to make their decision about the outcome of the Foton war.

These three categories of students and colleagues also do not cross the cultural bridge. Projecting their own scientific and religious convictions, or a mixture of the two, on the Sangalanka's perspective, they have decided for themselves about the winner of the Foton war, instead of paying equal attention to the Sangalanka's point of view, their beliefs, and feelings. Consciously or unconsciously they have overlooked the fact that the Other exists and that he/she is the author of the account of the war. For the students and colleagues who were exposed to it, the account of the Foton war is a symbol; it represents the Sangalanka, whose culture is not familiar to them. Students and colleagues have worked to transform the unfamiliar into familiar. But is there another way of dealing with the unfamiliar?

To cross the cultural bridge in order to meet the Sangalanka and

to know their point of view I did fieldwork following the example of those "ethnophilosophers" and "ethnohistorians" who use the technique of observation participation to immerse themselves in the culture of the Other. I too worked to study the Other's point of view by focusing on the meanings he/she herself has associated to his/her material symbols. However, my results are different from those of the ethnophilosophers and ethnohistorians who use oral traditions to celebrate the elite's initiatives and leadership, considering the subordinates only as passive followers. I pay equal attention to how both elites and subordinates participate in the ideological struggle over social meanings in order to gain access to power, land, and labor. I strongly believe that one cannot study African history without a deep knowledge of the African philosophy of history and the human person.

VII

The Sangalanka became my primary source of information on their history and philosophy. As a result I perceive them now from their "idealistic" point of view. I believe that the Sangalanka have constructed their account of the Foton War to invoke thoughts and feelings they needed in order to build social boundaries between themselves and their Fulani enemies. Their idealistically based account of the war transforms what a materialist critique sees as a defeat into a victory. This interpretation is sociologically grounded. It is largely based on my understanding of the Sangalanka's philosophy, implicit in their account of the war.

The italicized words and phrases in the account of the Foton war are material symbols, consisting of names of people, transcendental and historical figures, places, animals and objects, images, facts, events, and dates. Those symbols embody the Sangalanka's philosophy. I intend to illustrate this by the following three elements, drawn from the account: the definition of the Foton war as a war beyond the realm of human beings; human beings as the embodiment of spirits' and ancestors' thoughts and feelings; and the superiority of the ancestors' powers over the human military capacities of their enemies.

The first point concerns the definition of the Foton war as a phenomenon beyond human beings' understanding and will. It is manifest in the facts that both Sangalanka and Fulani believed they could know through divination the outcome of the war (5 and 20 on the Fulani's divination and Manga Hammoro's confidence in his invincibility. This is mostly explainable by his belief in his invulnerability; see as well 19 and 20 on Manga Hammoro's death). This conception of the war is illustrated through Manga Diango's invo-

cation of the ancestor Mago Bamba, the ultimate source of strength against the tragedy of the Foton war (21 and 22 on Dodyon's invocation of the ancestor Mago Bamba, and on the magically provoked abundant rain and the related image-segment of the Fulani defeat).

The second point concerns human beings as simple reflections of spirits' and ancestors' thoughts and feelings. This is embodied in the fact that elders are the only decision-makers and intermediaries between the human and supernatural beings (1-4, 20-22, and 5 on Manga Hammoro and Fulani chiefs as the principal actors of the war, and Manga Diango and the Fulani chiefs of Merepounta and Labe as the spiritual leaders of their armies). This same idea is also projected through men's monopoly of both the war decision-making process and the role of intermediary (1-4 on men's dominant role in both Fulani and Dialonka war activities; 13 on the subordinate role attributed to the old woman Fori Debele; 1-4 on youths as simple instruments in the hands of the chiefs Alpha Mo Labe and Manga Hammoro; 15 on the relationships between Manga Hammoro and his sentries and troops, who consisted of male age classes; and 12 on the desertion of the Merepounta chief). This principle of human beings as the incarnation of supernatural beings is also inscribed in the representation of the Foton war as a war between the descendants of two different ancestors (1-4 and 6).

The third point stresses the superiority of the "omniscient" and "omnipotent" ancestors over human military capacities. It is embodied in the fact that the Foton war is represented as a victory, caused by the ancestor Mago Bamba's intervention, through both his descendants' bodies (see 21 on Dodyon's invocation and Sangalanka's "possession" by Mago Bamba's spirit) and the abundant rain (22 on the Fulani's tragedy in the Dimma River.) The same idea of the superiority of supernatural powers is manifest in the Fulani's divination and sacrifice (5 on Fulani's oracle and the sacrifice of a porcupine and a deer).

These three points correspond to the three main principles of Sangalanka's ideology of ancestral authority. The first of these is the principle of the world as regulated by a life force, the body being simply its vehicle. Here it is conceived that the "mundus imaginalis" is where all decisions concerning human life are taken. Not only war, but also issues of land, labor, and power are considered as realities beyond human understanding and capacity.

The principle of human beings as embodiment of ancestors' and/or earth spirits' thoughts and feelings derives from the first principle. Human beings are represented as both body and spirits—the first component pertains to the physical world; it is a receptacle or a vehicle. The second component of human beings is defined as su-

pernatural; it is metaphorically represented as the inhabitant of the body.

Finally, there is the principle of ancestors as demiurges, the legislators of the human realm. This principle is also related to the first principle—the ancestors and the earth spirits are represented as the source of all of the decisions that affect the economic, political, judicial, and cultural life of the living human beings.

VIII

The three principles are selected to serve in both the definition of the identity of the ancestor and in his ontological relationships with living human persons. What is missing is the Sangalanka's view of the human person in general. Consequently, before I analyze the ideological implications of the meaning of the ancestor and co-related ontological relationships, I should elaborate further on the concepts of life force and personality.

Sangalanka consider that all things have a material shape (say "husk") and an immaterial (spiritual) invisible being (*nina* in Dialonka). For example, a human being is both body (*fatena*) and spirit (*nina*). *Nina* is conceived of as immortal; Sangalanka believed that men's and women's spiritual beings survive the death of the body. This immortal spiritual being is the life force in us, our creative potentialities, our destiny; it is different from the spirit that is more closely associated with our breath (*yengina* in Dialonka). *Yengina* is concerned with how one realizes one's creative forces. As an ensemble of values, feelings, sentiments, and actions, *yengina* is our personhood, our self, or our personality. Animals and plants have *nina* (life force) but not *yengina* (personality). *Yengina* is what defines people as human, *nina* humanized, realized according to the values that regulate social relations, within Sangalan society. *Yengina* is an ethical person.

According to the degree of one's contribution to the well being of the society, one can increase or decrease the strength of one's *Yengina*. The difference of degree between the *Yengina* of the progenitor and his/her progeny as well as the *Yengina* of elders and juniors depends on the quality of the individuals' social participation. This participation itself is determined by the quality of each individual's creative forces. This is why elevation to the rank of ancestor was strongly affected by the influence elders personally had exerted on their people. It is assumed that an ancestor does not relinquish the role he exercised before his death. On the contrary, he was thought to have acquired spiritual powers, which increased both his/her strength and knowledge of the visible and invisible worlds. Depending on the power of *Yengina* he/she builds for him-

self/herself, Sangalanka elevated a living-dead individual to the rank of either an ancestor or a venerated historical figure. They honor and respect both the formal and informal leaders.

It appears clearly that an individual might very well think and act according to the principles embodied in the traditions, created by his/her ancestors without losing his/her relative autonomy as a creative and independent agent of his/her own history. The ancestor deals with the individual's *Yengina* but not his/her *Nina*. Ancestral traditions may serve as a framework for the self-fulfilment of the individual's *Nina*; the outcome is the birth of *Yengina*. However, an individual may use his/her *Nina*—that is, fulfil his/her destiny—by adapting or transforming existing old traditions and building new ones. Reformulations of existing traditions are interpreted as the creations of a particular ancestor, thinking and acting through the body of a chosen individual. The believed acting ancestor is thought to be easily recognizable through remembered habits of a well-known historical figure. Radical new traditions may embody the feelings and thoughts of a living Sangalanka, be he a representative of the existing recognizable ancestor or not. The new leader represents himself as the representative of his selected real or fictive ancestor and mobilizes his people in a different social space.

As can be seen, because of the existence of both *Nina* and *Yengina*, the socialization of the individual is always incomplete; thus conflict, competition, and resistance are inevitable. At the same time this principle of the autonomy of the historical agent reveals Sangalanka's perception of history as a process of social change, not as a passive undergoing without any innovation or dynamism.

IX

Why is the Sangalanka's view of the person as a socially integrated member more emphasized in the account of the Foton war than their view of the person as creative and independent agent of his/her history? This question generates the same answer as the question: who is (are) the author(s) of the war narrative? The material symbols that represent Sangalanka's ideology of ancestral authority are not simply mnemonic devices; they are products of a conscious "selecting and structuring."¹⁵ In effect they are determined by Sangalanka's struggle over their past memories.¹⁶

The economic, political, and ideological implications of the ancestral principles explain the necessity of selecting and structuring.

¹⁵ See Miller 1980, and Scheub 1975.

¹⁶ For more development on the material symbols as pedagogical tools see N'Daou 1988. Cf. Vansina 1985; Mathieu 1986; Rappaport 1990; and Erny 1972.

The first implication of the three principles studied above is that as representatives, the male descendants of the ancestors become the legitimate rulers of Sangalan. This allows them to exercise their control over land, labor, and political power at the level of the federation of the groups of villages. The second implication is that, if the ancestor is a male, only men are eligible to exercise such power. The third implication is that only elders of the founding lineage and the nearest of their ancestor, who have also built a very strong *Yengina*, can exercise power at the federal level.

The author(s) of the Foton war narrative saw a strategic ideological advantage in invoking the Keita royal family, Mago Bamba, Manga Hammoro, Manga Dombi, Foton, Dimma River, Dombiyanne, Fulani, Futa Jallon, Alpha Mo Labe, and the names of neighboring Sangalan villages and groups of villages. All these material symbols were selected and structured to create the identity of the author(s) of this version of the Foton war. They are associated with the meanings that the author(s) use(s) to appropriate the Sangalan past and, thereby, construct his/her/their own identity. The selected names, images, transcendental and historical figures, dates, events, and places, as well as the definitions of the relations between the characters are consciously created metaphors for both Sangalan social forces and society. It is the selection process itself that creates the metaphor.

Through their account of the Foton war the Keita publicly make two claims. The first is that their ancestor Mago Bamba is the ancestor of all Sangalanka (see 21 and 22 on Mago Bamba as the cause of Sangalanka's victory), while the second is that the Keita elites are the Sangalanka's protectors against their Fulani enemies (See core-image of the Foton war as a struggle between one lineage of the Keita clan and the Fulani army, constituted by the best warriors of the provinces of Labe, Kobia, Koin and Merepounta.)

X

Others tell the story of the Foton war differently. Foton was supposedly an ensemble of villages founded by Keita, Camara, Danfaga, and Diawara, and the war mobilized the whole Sangalan against Almamy Ibrahima and Alpha Ibrahima Mo Labe.¹⁷ Before the war

¹⁷ Liurette, "Rapport;" Destibeaux, "Rapport." Arcin 1911, 118-20, quoting Blyden, considered that the Fulani army could amount to 15000 to 20000 soldiers. Concerning Sangalan, he wrote: "assisté des Alphas du Koin et du Labé, il (Almamy Ibrahima-Donghol Fello) conquit le Ouontofa." Arcin is referring to the same war, with a different date and the limitation of the war to Ouontofa. Therno Bhubha Dyan and new Arabic sources have corrected Arcin's chronology of the history of Futa Jallon: see *Autobiographie*" and Fyle 1977, 150-53.

Foton was attacked by Alpha Gassimou (Liurette, "Rapport," 221).¹⁸ In his "Autobiographie" the marabout Bubha N'Diyan considered that this first war happened in 1865.¹⁹ Even then, Foton constituted a strong military power, regrouping warriors of different Dialonka groups.²⁰ The following is an account of the Foton war as it was perceived by the lineage of the Camara, the rainmakers of Foton:²¹

Because of the cow stolen in Merepounta, Alpha Ibrahima organized a military expedition against the Dialonka of Foton. The Fulani besieged Foton but failed to conquer it, although they were militarily better equipped and had well-trained soldiers. Foton was magically defended by Fori Goli, the chief of the Camara. An incident that opposed Manga Hammoro's and Fori Goli's sons became a source of conflict between the Keita and the Camara lineages. Fori Goli took off his magical net, which had been over Foton, thereby favoring its destruction by the Fulani army. Foton was saved thanks to the ancestor Mago Bamba, invoked by Manga Diango (Destibeaux, "Rapport").

Why did the Keita elites ignore the Camara's account of the Foton war? Why did they choose the ancestor Mago Bamba, instead of Manga Sanga and Manga Dombi, the founders of Sangalan and Dombiya? Why not Manga Simbara I, the creator of the Sangalan federation of groups of villages? Manga Sanga, Manga Dombi, and Manga Simbara I were the ancestors of Manga Bamba. Was the choice of Manga Bamba determined by the crisis of legitimacy the Keita were facing during and after the formation of the Sangalan federation of groups of villages?

This crisis was caused by the fact that Manga Sanga's group was not the first to settle in Sangalan. Before the implantation of Manga Sanga and his followers, Sangalan had been occupied by the Kamananke. According to Sangalanka's definition of a legitimate ruler as the descendant and representative of the founding ancestor of the first village, the Kamananke, not the Keita, elites are the legitimate rulers of Sangalan. Manga Bamba is the conqueror of Mago, the Kamananke's capital. His name is a frequent reminder of

¹⁸ See Destibeaux, "Rapport," 221: attack of Foton by Alpha Gassimou and his allied troops from Bara and many other Yambering villages.

¹⁹ Bhubha Dyan was born in 1848; he kept the records of all the important events which dominated Futa Jallon during his lifetime. I owe him the information that the second Foton war happened in 1871. According to him Alpha Ibrahima led the 1871 Foton War, during which Dombi, Hammoro, and almost all the people were killed. Buria (Buria) successfully defended itself.

²⁰ Destibeaux, "Rapport," 221.

²¹ Destibeaux, *ibid.*, recorded it from both Manga Tombo and Manga Gara, brothers of Manga Kambi, El Hadji Bacar Keita's father. Thematically and structurally, almost the same account is recorded in Keita, "Tarikh," 45-48.

the fact that Sangalan was founded by the Kamananke. In defining Mago Bamba as the ancestor of all Sangalanka, are the Keita elites trying to transform the bad memories of the military conquest of Mago?

In 1871 this was certainly a necessity. Manga Simbara's defeat during the war with Alpha Ibrahima and his flight to Bitari, along the Tamikoure river (Destibeaux, "Rapport," 207), certainly obliged the other groups of villages to question the legitimacy of the Keita elites' domination. As a matter of fact, after the death of Manga Simbara I the Dombiya group of villages was reduced to a single big village called Solia.²²

But the Keita elites could also celebrate the ancestor Mago Bamba since he is the only ancestor who victoriously imposed himself on both the Fulani and the Kamananke. In contrast, the Fulani defeated Manga Dombi, Manga Sanga, and Manga Simbara I. Manga Dombi was killed during the Foton war, but this is carefully omitted in his Keita descendants' account of the war. In 1785 Manga Sanga was attacked and defeated by Almamy Sori Maoudho, the successor of Karamoko Alpha, the first *almamy* of Futa Jallon.

Yet the Keita elites' account of the Foton war seems to be an artistic success.²³ The Keita elites wanted to externalize their image of themselves as both the leaders of Sangalan and the heroes of Sangalanka's struggles against the Fulani. To reach this goal they represented the Foton resistance as that of a village consisting of only one Keita lineage (1) and defined the relations between Foton and the Uykha and Djulabaya groups of villages as those between lineages living in the same space. Through "Foton" thus represented, it is the image of Sangalan that is projected. The scenario on the Keita's collective suicide (18) and that on Manga Hammoro's refusal to surrender to the Fulani enemies constitute a drama also calculated to set the Keita's resistance as a symbol for the Dialonka anti-Fulani struggle. Mago Bamba's "participation" in the war (21-22), which transformed a tragedy into a victory, is also a source of affective sentiments for his Keita descendants. In omitting the image-segment related to the intraclass conflict between Manga Hammoro and Fori Goli, the chief of the Camara, the Keita elites were certainly consistent with their project of transforming the Foton war into a means of seizing leadership and legitimizing their authority.

In both cases the Keita were aiming at creating and controlling a

²² Destibeaux, "Rapport," 207-08. To distinguish the old Manga Simbara, founder of the federation of groups of villages, from his grandson and homonym Manga Simbara, chief of Sangalan from 1906 to 1910.

²³ I do not confuse the artistic success, related to the form of presentation of an ideology, with political success, measured by the number of followers mobilized.

centralized and extended power over the whole Sangalan, including its land, labor, procreative forces, and decision-making process. Dramatized in the public domain during the Sangalan annual festival, the Keita elites' account certainly evokes strong sentiments of affinity among Sangalanka against their common enemy, the Fulani. At the same time the story established the Keita as the dominant group of Sangalan and their version of the events as the dominant version.²⁴

XI

The storyteller is expected to achieve this result by an efficient externalization of the dominant images of both Sangalan and its historical figures. He will reach this goal by freely manipulating the material symbols generally known by Sangalanka—in fact, for historical circumstances like the Sangalan annual meetings, accounts that concern the majority of the participants are always the object of the storyteller's choice

Sangalanka had two ways to limit the ideological impact of this theatricalization and dramatization of the Keita elites' accounts of past events. First they could pursue the festival in their own societies, giving themselves the opportunity to invoke their own versions of their relationships with other Sangalan societies in general, and with the Keita-ruled Dombiya in particular. They could also ask their storyteller to compete with the Keita elites' engaged storyteller. During the annual festival this competition was inevitable; consequently, each group of villages developed its own champion storyteller.

To avoid repeating myself I will discuss only this second form of resistance to the Keita elites' powers. Here the competing storytellers operate on the core-image of the same account of past event. Each of them will try to draw the attention of the audience to those image-segments that emphasize the contribution of his group of villages. Requiring the use of appropriate tones and gestures, and both selecting and structuring facts, the externalization of those images depended on the storyteller's personal initiative and creativity. To put this differently, the nature of what the storyteller said through the image-segments was virtually mandatory. His ability to get an

²⁴ In December 1911 Destibeaux attended the Sangalan annual festival and reported ("Rapport," 209) on the competition between the Kemaya and Kotto's champion storytellers: "le soir, les jeunes du villages se réunissent sur la place du village et chantent en chœur; ce n'est pas très beau, ni très gracieux mais j'ai remarqué qu'il ya deux parties très distinctes et que les tonalités correspondent à ce qui, pour notre oreille, est un intervalle juste."

audience to accept what he told, however, varied according to his individual skill.

During the competition each group of villages tried to emphasize both unity and difference with the Dombiya dominant political organization. I will illustrate this through the Uyakha and Kolissoko's versions of the Foton war. Because of the length of the original text, I will use its paragraph numbers instead of rewriting the corresponding paragraphs, to represent the image-segments integrated in the variants.

The Uyakha version of the Foton war does not change from image-segments 1 to 16; image-segment 17 is reconstructed, however, and image-segments 21-22 are eliminated from the text.²⁵ In the Kolissoko version only image-segments 21 and 22 are eliminated.²⁶ These are image-segments 17-19 in the Uyakha's account of the Foton war:

[17] *Manga Hammoro* climbed up the fortress to inspect his troops. He looked at *the eastern side of the fortress*; his soldiers were fighting one to one hundred with the Fulani; on the *western side* the soldiers were also fighting one to one hundred. On *the northern and southern sides* of the fortress, *thousands of the Fulani* were dead, but a countless number of them were still waiting to be killed. They would not surrender. After the inspection of the troops *Manga Hammoro* said to his generals: *Haaaa... Won tillin farica O denkun*. In this secret military interjection, he was expressing the gravity of the moment.

[18] *His messengers came to Uyakha seven times and transmitted seven times the same message*; *Manga Hammoro* was no longer asking for food, he wanted the *war bees* to be launched; Foton was tired... of killing. *Manga Uyakha* presented *the white sheep* to his ancestor *Manga Uyakha* and went to Foton with *Manga Hammoro's seventh messenger, a woman, Fori Debele*.

[19] Foton was imperceptible; *Fulani were on Foton like bees on a rotten mango*. Our ancestor *Manga Uyakha* transformed us into bees. The war started with thousands of dead; the chief of Merepounta witnessed it and did not want to waste his time; he ran away, pointing his finger on us, saying *nyakhi ...nyakhi ...nyakhi...* (bees, bees, bees, in Fulani). This disoriented the Fulani warriors and forced the handful of survivors to retreat in panic. *Kolissoko* warriors and the *Dimma river* limited the killings; there was a need for Fulani survivors, our messengers, to inform Futa of the Foton war.

The Kolissoko version largely reconstructs image-segments 21 and 22:

²⁵ See Liurette, "Rapport," 92-94; Destibeaux, "Rapport," 221-27.

²⁶ Liurette, "Rapport," 46, 58; 94; Destibeaux, "Rapport," 207-10, 233-37.

Fulani arrived exhausted; the whole *Kolissoko* was present; for *seven days* they were waiting, strongly motivated to confront the Fulani. They were prepared to force them pay an *old debt*.²⁷ The *battle started with one hundred Fulani for one of our warriors; it ended with one hundred Sangalanka for each surviving Fulani warrior*. The Dimma became a *red river*. The small number of the Fulani survivors crossed *the river of blood*; without them, Futa could never know what happened to *Almany Ibrahima's army*.

XII

The Uyukha's and Kolissoko's accounts concern the same historical event—the Foton war between Manga Hammoro and Alpha Mo Labe—but compared to the Keita elites' account, these emphasize different places, roles, ancestors, events, historical figures, images, and names. In the Uyukha's account the dominant material symbols are Manga Hammoro, one hundred to one, Haaa ...won tillin farica O denkun, Uyukha (both people and political space), Manga Uyukha, the ancestor Manga Uyukha, white sheep, war bees, nyakhi, Fulani on Dialonka like bees on rotten mango, Fori Debelen, messengers seven times transmitting the same message seven times, the chief of Merepounta, Kolissoko, and the Dimma river.

²⁷ Did Fulani attack Kolissoko before 1871? According to Guebhard (1909, 46-56) *almamy* Amadou personally conducted a strong military expedition against Kolissoko; he fixed the date of the expedition around 1888. Moreover, he considered Kolissoko as separate from Sangalan. Arcin (1911, 562-64) was very critical of Guebhard's chronology of the history of Futa Jallon. His main critique is that Guebhard relied too heavily on Mamadou Saidou, a Fulani from Futa Toro, who was *almamy* Ibrahima's political adviser, before serving *almamy* Bocar Biro. Arcin considered that Mamadou Saidou's interpretation was politically determined by his alliance with the elites of Futa Jallon: "M. Guebhard a eu le tort de ne s'appuyer que sur les dires d'un indigène intéressé à cacher la vérité." He gave examples of Mamadou Saidou's manipulation of historical facts to construct materials for political propaganda.

This same judgment can be made against Arcin, who depended almost exclusively on the French (Noirot, Ballay, Lechatelier, Faméchon, Becquart, and Blyden) and British (mainly Gordon Laing) explorers as the main sources of his history of Futa. He underrated the historical materials produced by the subordinate classes, and discarded the Arabic sources (see his judgments on the African informants in Arcin 1911, 562-65; cf. Fyle 1977, 150-53). Fyle shares Guebhard's and Therno Bhubha N'Dyan's chronologies of the history of Futa Jallon. They all agree that Karamoko Alpha went mad in 1766, and question Gordon Laing's date of 1768 as the time of the founding of Falaba. They consequently opposed Arcin, who founded his chronology on that of Laing. But on *almamy* Amadou's attack of Kolissoko their points of views are divergent. According to Therno Bhubha N'Dyan, *almamy* Amadou came to power in 1875 and did not lead any military expedition against Kolissoko during 1888, *pace* Guebhard. As can be seen, the written records do not corroborate the Kolissoko's oral data on the war with the Fulani they believe took place before 1871. Nor do they contradict them.

Through these symbols and co-related events, Manga Hammoro is represented as dependent on the Uyukha and Kolissoko subordinate groups of villages. "Haaa... won tillin Farica O denken" and messengers sent seven times... transmitted seven times the same message" dramatize Manga Hammoro's recognition of his own limits and the necessity of unity among all Sangalanka against the Fulani. The relationship, one Dialonka for one hundred Fulani, is also a metaphor for the Fulani's objective superiority over Sangalanka in military, demographic, and geographical terms.

The Futa state consisted of nine provinces (*diwe* in Fulani) and nine independent and relatively well-equipped *jihad* armies, supported by a strong and stable economy, based on internal and external long-distance trade.²⁸ Each Fulani province was more or less equal to the whole of Sangalan. Without unity among themselves, every Sangalan group of villages could be like a "rotten mango" that would serve as a "meal" for the Fulani. This image of bees eating a rotten fruit is a cliché that Sangalanka used to express the military danger that the lack of unity between them could entail. The Foton war transformed the cliché into reality; the Fulani military expedition was led by *almamy* Ibrahima Sory Donghol Fello and Alpha Mo Labe. It was a coalition of soldiers from all nine *diwe*.

The Uyukha's account of the war not only stresses the need of unity and de-emphasizes the Keita elites' dramatized representation of themselves as the heroes of Sangalan anti-Fulani wars, it also draws attention to the contributions made by subordinate groups of villages such as Uyukha and Kolissoko. Instead of "Foton" the Uyukha's account represents Uyukha (see image-segment on Manga Uyukha invoking the ancestor Manga Uyukha) and the battlefield outside Foton fortress as the determining places of the war (18 and 19). An offering of a white sheep (18) and the invocation of the ancestor Manga Uyukha are considered as the principal "weapons" used against the Fulani.

This is dramatized in the image-segments on the messengers in general, and Fori Debele in particular. The character of the crying old woman is used to represent both the Keita elites' weakness and the desperate reliance they put on the Uyukha people. The message transmitted seven times was about "not food but war bees... the Keita are tired of killing" (18-19). These symbols intensively focus the attention not on the objective factors of the war but on its supernatural subjects. The ancestor Manga Uyukha is considered as the main hero, he who "transformed" the Uyukha warriors into bees and provoked a panic among the Fulani armies. Both the symbols

²⁸ Rodney 1970, 176, 184, 186, 226, and particularly, 232. This view was shared by Liurette and Destibeaux in their "Rapports," 204 and 47-52, 209 respectively.

"nyakhi" and "Merepounta chief" (19) reinforce this heroic image of the ancestor Manga Uyakha.

By also considering Kolissoko and the Dimma River as the key places of the last battle against the Fulani, the Uyakha account supports its claim that Manga Uyakha was the savior of the Sangalanka. In fact the account opposes the Keita elites' interpretation of the last battle as magically provoked and implicitly challenges the key role that the Keita attribute to their ancestor Mago Bamba (see the Keita elites' account, 21-22)

The Kolissoko's account also emphasizes different material symbols and de-emphasizes and/or minimizes the Keita elites'. The main symbols in this account are Kolissoko, the Dimma River, seven days, an old debt, "one hundred Fulani for one of our warriors," "it ended with one hundred Sangalanka for one surviving Fulani warrior," red river, river of blood, and Almamy Ibrahima.

As a material symbol, Kolissoko represents the Djulabaya group of villages. This representation is also emphasized by the association of Kolissoko with both the battle and its site, the Dimma river. "Seven days of waiting," in order to force the Fulani to pay an old debt back and "one hundred Fulani for one... and one hundred Sangalanka for one surviving Fulani warrior" are poetic representations of the Djulabaya people's heroic struggle against the Fulani. "Old debt" alludes to the 1870 Kolissoko people's resistance against the invading army, led by *almamy* Amadou of Futa Jallon (cf. Arcin 1911, 119).

During the Kolissoko war the objective of the *jihad* army was either to destroy or force the submission of the resisting anti-aristocratic Dialonka. They plundered, but did not overcome, Kolissoko resistance. In the Kolissoko account the Foton war is considered an opportunity for revenge; the result of the heroic struggle at the Dimma River is expressed through the images of "red river" and "river of blood." The blood is that of the Fulani killed by the Kolissoko. The image is a poetic evaluation of the number of Fulani killed during the Dimma battle.

Obviously the Kolissoko people's account of the Foton war exclusively emphasizes their own contribution and discards the Keita elites' representation of the Dimma battle as magically led by their ancestor Manga Bamba. Instead, the ancestor Manga Djulaba, the founder of the Djulabaya group of villages, is implicitly considered as the inspiring spiritual being that stimulated the Kolissoko warriors.

Through their own accounts of the Foton war, the Dombiya, Uyakha, and Djulabaya groups of villages invoke the same event of the past, but their representations stress both their unity and the differences that exist among them. Unity appears in their common

battle against the Fulani enemies, and this explains the subordinate groups' partial acceptance of the Keita elites' definition of their ancestors as the ancestor of all Sangalanka. The repeated invocation of the same past event, in the name of the same ancestor, creates sentiments of solidarity between members of a regular audience.

XIII

The resulting "society" can be called into being whenever its individual participants are reminded of their supposed commonly-experienced past event. A collectively organized war against their common enemy made a very powerful impression on all Sangalanka; consequently, all the Sangalan social groups exploited the emotional content of the anti-Fulani wars in order to create a collective identity among Sangalanka against those who wanted to enslave them.

In all the accounts the main classification is between Sangalanka and the Fulani of Futa Jallon. The Keita claimed that their ancestors were the supernatural powers that protected all Sangalanka against the Fulani. Their accounts were diffused in all the groups of villages to mobilize and organize the Sangalanka. By creating a strong and efficient unity among them, Sangalan groups of villages victoriously resisted their common Fulani enemies. In the long run the Keita elites' accounts of past events ceased to be both a fiction and an exclusively class-based instrument. It became a "reality" and a means to call into being Sangalan society with the specific purpose of protecting Sangalanka against the Fulani and maintaining the social cohesion between groups of villages.

Supposedly, treaties between Keita and Camara and Keita and Nyakhasso also maintained this restriction on the powers attributed to the leaders of the Sangalan federation of groups of villages. In reality, subordinate groups themselves imposed this restriction on the Keita elites' federal powers. For example, in the details of the way they told the story of the Foton war, they disputed the claims made by the Keita and advanced other claims that served their own interests. They respectively identified themselves with the ancestors Manga Uykha and Manga Djulaba, against Manga Sanga, Manga Simbara, Manga Dombi, Mago Bamba, and/or Manga Diango.

This identification with an ancestor had practical implications of a political, economic, and ideological order. The ancestor was considered as the ally of the spirit which "owns" the land; his descendants were his representatives, i.e., both the legitimate landlords and the organizers of economic activities. At the political level those representatives were the rulers of their societies—represented as the incarnation of the ancestor's thoughts and feelings. The latter are

both the customs invented by the historical ancestor and the inspirations the representatives received from the living-dead ancestor through divination and dreams.

At the cultural level the representatives of the ancestor were the educators of their society; customs and “divinely” inspired “reinvented” traditions were imposed as the descendants’ rites of marriage, circumcision, baptism, and funeral. As can be seen, to identify with an ancestor is to adhere to a corpus of ideas concerning the control of the land, power, feelings, and thoughts.

Then the Dombiya, Uyakha, and Djulabaya ancestors metaphorically represented the social projects of the Keita elites, Camara, and the Nyakhasso subordinates respectively. The first project is materialized in the dominant and centralized political unit of the Sangalan federation of groups of villages. The two others are incorporated into the subordinate political units of the Uyakha and Djulabaya groups of villages. Thus, behind their struggle over ancestors, the Keita elites were mostly concerned with the construction and control of power at the federal level. The Uyakha and Djulabaya elites struggled to create and maintain the autonomy of their societies within the Sangalan federation of villages.

The hierarchical relations among the three social projects are embodiments of the hierarchical relations between the ancestors Manga Bamba and both Manga Uyakha and Manga Djulaba—and vice versa. The ideological debate over the definition and relations between the ancestors at different levels of social organization was thus more than a metaphor for the struggle over land, labor, power, feelings, and thoughts.

In the mid-nineteenth century Sangalanka’s struggle over memories was mostly determined by the necessity to construct a centralized political organization capable of leading a strong resistance against the Fulani. But how to prevent this centralized power from becoming the dominant elites’ means of political and economic exploitation? I have argued that Sangalanka’s struggle over the meaning of past events provides an answer to this question. Sangalanka used their oral accounts of past events to construct separated social discourses and corresponding independent social spaces. The result is the territorial and social organization of Sangalan into very loose centralized powers, coupled with integrated but strongly autonomous societies.

In the 1930s, A-M-J Demougeot, the French colonial officer in charge of the administrative and judiciary affairs of the *cercle* of Labe, captured for us the image of the Sangalanka as they were prior to the advent of colonial forces. In the report he made after his research into the history of Sangalan political and social institutions, he wrote that “[h]atred against the Fulani is the source of unity

among the Dialonka; characteristically very independent, the unity of the population is founded upon this sentiment only. The Dialonka are apathetic; they know that any chief would want to shake off this inertia and, because of this, I believe, they appreciate being independent" (Demougeot, "Canton du Sangalan").

As vehicles of this global image of the Sangalanka, precolonial oral traditions in general, and accounts of past events in particular, materially embody the commonly shared philosophy and the diverse ideologies of all of the Sangalan social groups that constructed them and instrumentally used them to shape their identities.

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