

Sangalan
Oral Traditions

Sangalan ***Oral Traditions***

History, Memories, and
Social Differentiation

Mohamed Saidou N'Daou

CAROLINA ACADEMIC PRESS
Durham, North Carolina

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

N'Daou, Mohamed Saidou.

Sangalan oral traditions : history, memories, and social differentiation / by
Mohamed Saidou N'Daou

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-89089-722-0

1. Yalunka (African people)--Folklore. 2. Yalunka (African people)--History.
3. Yalunka (African people)--Ethnic identity. 4. Oral tradition--Guinea--
Sangalan (Region) 5. Social structure--Guinea--Sangalan (Region) 6. Sangalan
(Guinea : Region)--History. 7. Sangalan (Guinea : Region)--Social life and cus-
toms. I. Title.

DT543.45.Y35N33 2003

966.52--dc22

2003062601

Carolina Academic Press
700 Kent Street
Durham, North Carolina 27701
Telephone (919) 489-7486
Fax (919) 493-5668
E-mail: cap@cap-press.com
www.cap-press.com

Printed in the United States of America

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Prefatory Note

Acknowledgments

I first met a Dialonka person in 1975, in Upper-Guinea (Faranah). The kingdoms of Firia and Solima, which the Dialonka built in Faranah, did not succumb to the Fulani, Kooranko, and Malinke invasions of the previous two centuries. In 1975, the Dialonka were still fighting for their existence as a people. The name Dialonka was only occasionally referred to in politics and the media of the nationalist elites. Being now a minority group, the Dialonka were condemned to be absorbed by the Malinke of Faranah and Siguiri (in Upper-Guinea) and by the Fulani (in Middle-Guinea). I decided to study the history of the Dialonka people, who were among the first occupants of Fouta Djallon and the founders of the celebrated empire of Tamba (Dinguiraye). I successively produced "Etude et Analyse des Sociétés Traditionnelles Africaines. Application: Les Dialonka" (DES) (*Diplôme d'Etudes Supérieures*) IPGANC (*Institut Polytechnique Gamal Abdel Nasser de Conakry*) (1975–6), *Matérialisme Historique Appliqué aux Sociétés Traditionnelles Africaines* (Conakry: Imprimerie de Conakry) (1978); "Quelques Problemes Philosophiques dans Les Sociétés Traditionnelles Africaines" *Miriya* 13 (1978; *Etudes des Superstructures Ideologiques de la Societe Pre-Colonial Dialonka* (Conakry: Imprimerie de Conakry) (1983) and *Philosophie Traditionnelle Africaine* (Conakry: Imprimerie de Conakry) (1985) The Department of Philosophy of the University of Guinea at Conakry was soon transformed into an African Studies department, with a curriculum dominated by research projects on pre-colonial Guinean societies. By 1986, teachers and undergraduate students had already studied almost all of the main Guinean pre-colonial societies.

The quality of this work was affected by the theoretical approach we generally used, historical materialism as applied to African pre-colonial societies. Our projects appeared to be a rediscovery of our own theory illustrated by the oral data. This created a new intellectual constraint: the construction of a theory adapted to the data that I had already collected. The immediate implication of this new understanding was the rejection of the principles of French Marxist theory applied to African pre-colonial societies.

M. Thompson, the former Cultural Attaché of the U.S. embassy in Guinea, was the first to recognize and support my project to study the memories of pre-colonial Guinean societies. He offered me the opportu-

nity to pursue my work in the United States through the Fulbright Program. Thompson is physically dead now, but his altruistic spirit lives on through people like me, in whom he wholeheartedly believed and supported. My special thanks go to this American who initiated the spiritual journey which has led to my present personality transformation. Through him, I also thank Senator Fulbright, the initiator of the Fulbright Program; Bedy Sheck; and Borden Virgil, cultural attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Guinea; and Jean Lawicki, Barbara Sanjunkin, and Nathalie Philander, my Fulbright advisors. To paraphrase Natalie, these advisors made me the “prince of the Fulbright Program.” As an African, I say that they have participated in the construction of my good memories of the country and people of the United States. For the same reasons, Theresa Harell also deserves special thanks. She is one of the confidants who guided me during the difficult times of my academic work.

In my academic work, many American scholars became not only my advisors but also brothers and sisters. Allen Isaacman treated me like an adult and allowed me to continue working on my project on the Djalunka people; my new perspective on the history of the Sangalanka is the result of my friendship and good collaboration with him. The theory that structures my present work is partially elaborated by him. What I have also learned from Allen is his devotion to the uplifting of ordinary people. The spirit of his work is embodied in every line of the present work. Bruce Lincoln is another guide on the spiritual journey I made from 1987 to the present. My conception of social memory is also partially based on his invocation-evocation theory. I consider the supervision of my work by these two guides to be an example of fruitful collaboration between scholars of the first and third worlds.

My special appreciation goes to Jan Vansina, the founder of the school of oral traditions as history. He has not only read this book and made needed critiques and suggestions; he has also helped me in my professional development. He has opened my eyes to the originality of my work on oral traditions as philosophy and helped shape my ideas.

The same appreciation must be extended to Marshall Sahlins of the Department of Anthropology of the University of Chicago. Marshall and his wife Barbara have given me the same family spirit as my own father and mother. My conversations with them have almost always been a sort of interview related to my academic project. This is also true of Jean and John Comaroff, Ralph Austin of the University of Chicago, David Cohen of Northwestern University, and Vicky Coifman of the University of Minnesota.

My special thanks go also to Stuart Schwartz, who allowed me to transform my independent studies in Latin American history into comparative studies of South American and African societies.

I am grateful to Roland Delattre, Ron Aminzade, and Rus Menard, who encouraged the same type of initiative in my studies of the theoretical approaches used by American scholars in their cultural, sociological, and historical works.

My knowledge of American society also comes from my friendship with David and Sherry Hall and their children. Their family constituted a kind of university for me. Like them, Barbara Isaacman and Luise Lincoln have positively participated in the correlated socialization in which I consciously engaged myself during my academic work.

My present beliefs and sentiments are partly the product of my social engagement with the American friends cited above. They are truly the subtext of my present work. I offer my example of learning from the American society itself to all international students.

My special thanks go finally to my informants who initiated me to the “secrets” of their society and adopted me as one of their spokespeople. These, among others, are El Hadji Bacar Keita, El Hadji Danfaga, Amadou Keita, Aguibou Keita, Fori Firigui Camara (Kombonya-Faranah), Souleymane Camara, Bamba Nyakhasso, and Hadja Biradi Keita.

For their moral support and warm friendship, I am thankful to the following: Beatrice Weschcke Asfeld, Dado N'Daou, Djaou N'Daou, Diakhou N'Daou, Fatou N'Daou, Bintou N'Daou, Souleymane N'Daou, Mamadou N'Daou, Djibril N'Daou, Keba N'Daou, Fatou N'Daou, Suzanne N'Daou, Sagouye N'Daou, Zenab Sy Savanne, Elizabeth Goavogui, Therno Moussa Diallo; Mamadou Sakho, former Governor of the region of Mali; Sadiouma Barry, present Governor of the region of Mali; Ambassador Alpha Ibrahima Sow, the advisor on my first works about Sangalan; Niane Djibril Tamsir and Sekou “Philo” Camara, who introduced me to the social sciences; Dr. N'Famory Kourouma, Sidiki Kobele Keita; J.K.Lama, former Minister of Education; Assifat Dorank Diasseny, Minister of Culture, Art and Sports; and Alkaly Bangoura, former Ambassador of Guinea to Germany (the latter two active members of the research team on the pre-colonial Guinean societies); Souleymane Niang, President of the University Cheick Anta Diop at Dakar; Madame Diagne, Director of the housing services of the University Cheick Anta Diop; Facinet Beavogui, doctoral candidate, Université de Paris V, France; Melissa A. Crews, John Wratfall, and Hans Verbaten, doctoral candidates, the University of Minnesota; and M. Batchili, Chairman of the Department of History of the University Cheick Anta Diop.

I especially appreciate the impact of my beloved wife, Joy Maria N'Daou, and my mother, Fatoumata Batouly Toure. My father died when I was young; from that time until her death, my mother was the

xvi Acknowledgments

head of the household. She did not know much about schooling but provided me with the encouragement and moral support I needed to meet the challenges of the external world. She died while we were preparing together for my trip to the United States. Her spirit came with me to the States and certainly has helped me survive during the difficult times of my life. Joy Maria N'Daou is not only my beloved wife but also my best friend and the co-editor of the present work. She has accepted without complaint the status of "academic widow" to which my intense work has relegated her. I rightly consider this book as the first fruit of my marriage with Joy Maria N'Daou. I dedicate this book to her and my mother.

In addition to the Fulbright Program, I received financial assistance from the McArthur Interdisciplinary Program on Peace and International Cooperation, the Office of International Education and the Department of History of the University of Minnesota, the Department of History of the University of Cheick Anta Diop, and the Department of External Relations and Culture of the U.S. Embassy in Guinea. The workers of the Archives Nationales du Senegal, Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire (IFAN), Archives de Guinée, and Archives d'Outre-Mer d'Aix-en-Provence provided a generous service in collecting the necessary archival materials, in the limited time available.

In the process of publishing this book, I received valuable support from my dedicated editors, namely Jim Lance, Acquisitions Editor, African Studies, Greenwood/Heinemann, Elsa Peterson, owner of Elsa Peterson editing company, Robin A. Benny and Richard G. Milo, Chicago State University. My dream to see this book published is partly due to the devotion of these new friends, who forced me to meet the challenges required for excellence.

To all of the above, and to any I may have inadvertently neglected to name, I offer my sincere appreciation.