

FORMS OF INITIATIONS IN THE MANDINKA WORLD, A CASE STUDY OF THE PAKAO (SEDHIOU AND MARSASSOUM)

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Abstract: This paper is about the forms of initiations in the Mandinka world. It is based on empirical research conducted in 2011. It helps to better contribute to the development of the Mandinka culture. In so doing, special attention is given to the distinction between *kaŋkuraŋ* and *Fambondi* and *Sissal* which are all mandinka masks and the different functions they fulfill in the society. The main goal of this paper is to demonstrate the role initiation plays in the mandinka traditional culture. The study has showed that the mandinka culture is very rich in practices. It has also helped to understand the different functions the *kaŋkuraŋ* and the *Fambondi* play at the cultural and social levels.

Keywords: *kaŋkuraŋ*, *fambondi*, *sissal kintaraŋ jambadoŋo*

LES FORMES D'INITIATIONS DANS LE MONDE MANDINGUE, LE CAS DU PAKAO (SEDHIOU ET MARSASSOUM)

Résumé : Cet article porte sur les formes d'initiations dans le monde mandingue. Il s'appuie sur une recherche empirique menée en 2011. Il permet de mieux contribuer au développement de la culture mandingue. Ce faisant, une attention particulière est accordée à la distinction entre *Kaŋkuraŋ* et *Fambondi* et *Sissal* qui sont tous des masques mandingues et les différentes fonctions qu'ils remplissent dans la société. L'objectif principal de cet article est de démontrer le rôle que joue l'initiation dans la culture traditionnelle mandingue. L'étude a montré que la culture mandingue est très riche en pratiques. Elle a également permis de comprendre les différentes fonctions que jouent le *Kaŋkuraŋ* et le *Fambondi* au niveau culturel et social.

Mots-clés : *kaŋkuraŋ*, *fambondi*, *sissal kintaraŋ jambadoŋo*

Introduction

In the present contribution, we propose to deal with the theme of initiation in the traditional Mandinka environment of Pakao. Although scattered throughout the country, the Mandinka form a homogeneous settlement area in the middle of Casamance, between Sédhiou and Kolda. The choice of this theme can be explained by the content of the teaching and training, which focuses on human being, his education and his social integration. Beyond information, it is education, submission to ancestral values. During this period, which precedes the initiation, there are dance sessions or *jambadoŋ* (leaf dance). This is an opportunity to animate the village and the surrounding area.

Eliade, on this regard notes that:

Initiation represents one of the most significant spiritual phenomena in the history of humanity. It is an act that involves not only the religious life of the individual, in the modern meaning of the word "religion"; it involves his entire life. It is through initiation that, in primitive and archaic societies, man becomes what he is and what he should be—a being open to the life of the spirit, hence one who participates in the culture into which he was born. For as we shall soon see, the

puberty initiation represents above all the revelation of the sacred-and, for the primitive world, the sacred means not only everything that we now understand by religion, but also the whole body of the tribe's mythological and cultural traditions. In a great many cases puberty rites, in one way or another, imply the revelation of sexuality-but, for the entire premodern world, sexuality too participates in the sacred. In short, through initiation, the candidate passes beyond the natural mode--the mode of the child-and gains access to the cultural mode; that is, he is introduced to spiritual values.

(Eliade, 1958, p.4).

Having long been a traditional and cultural practice in the Mandinka traditional society, initiation has drawn much interest for many scholars due to the functions it fulfills. Today, though many works have been undertaken on the theme, less have been said on the different functions its masks play on the social and cultural level. To better approach our study, it is requisite to ask the following questions: what is the role of the *kúyá* in the Mandinka traditional society? What are the functions and senses of the use of the mandinka masks? What is the social construction of meanings, the significance of circumcision and genital cutting for women? The main goal of this paper is to demonstrate the role initiation plays in the mandinka traditional culture. The study has showed that the mandinka culture is very rich in practices. It has also helped to understand the different functions the *Kankúran* and the *Fambondi* play at the cultural and social levels. To answer these questions adequately required the paper be structured as follows: section 1 historical background of the study, section 2 deals with the methodology, section 3 review of the related literature, section 4 theoretical approach, section 5 stresses the different forms of the ritual practices of the Mandinka culture including the meaning and forms of initiation in the mandinka culture. This includes undertaking a conceptual and definitional review of the different mandinka masks.

0.1. Background of the study

This section offers a panoramic vision of the historical background of the Mandinka culture. Mandinka, like most West African languages, is materialistic in its nature, and, wherever possible, speech refers to some concrete object rather than to the abstract. This fact is mentioned several times in the study of the language and explains many things in the language which might otherwise be difficult to understand. (Parker, 1935, p. ix). The term initiation in the most general sense denotes a body of rites and oral teachings whose purpose is to produce a decisive alteration in the religious and social status of the person to be initiated. In philosophical terms, initiation is equivalent to a basic change in existential condition; the novice emerges from his ordeal endowed with a totally different being from that which he possessed before his initiation; he has become another. Among the various categories of initiation, the puberty initiation is particularly important for an understanding of premodern man. These "transition rites" are obligatory for all the youth of the tribe. To gain the right to be admitted among adults, the adolescent has to pass through a series of initiatory ordeals: it is by virtue of these rites, and of the revelations that they entail, that he will be recognized as a responsible member of the society. Initiation introduces the candidate into the human community and into the world of spiritual and cultural values. (Eliade, 1958, p.x).

The *kanjúran* or *mama* ritual marks the high point of Mandinka people's cultural life. Indeed, it is most often associated with circumcision, an essential stage in

the constitution of identity that everyone must go through, and which is accompanied by complex and varied ceremonies. The initiatory act is considered as a marking process, an inscription mechanism or even as a printing machine: it would be at the same time mark, sign and trace. Initiation is a cultural practice which remains deeply rooted in Mandinka traditional society and contributes much in the shaping of manhood. Initiation is a very important aspect of the Mandinka community since it shows that those initiated young people have come of age. The Mandinka culture has two fundamental elements, one animist and the other Islamic. The Islamic element has today prevailed in the Mandinka settlements of Senegambia thanks to the marabouts and traders. However, many Mandinka people remain very attached to their ancestral beliefs and traditions, which they often tell with respect and dignity despite their spirit of openness towards other cultures and modernity. The Mandinka people believe in oral tradition, which permeates the daily life of the villages with griots and other traditional communicators. Moreover, among Mandinka people, each individual owes his or her existence to the ancestors who built the world in which he or she lives. These ancestors are celebrated through original myths, legends, tales, poetry and initiation songs. The vision Mandinka people have of mankind is indicative of their religious syncretism.

0.2. Methodology

In this section, we have tried to identify and analyze both the research method and the strategy to be adopted. Given the importance of the study and due to its scientific and multinational dimension, in conducting our research, three tools were privileged, namely library research and observation. Library research is one of the fundamental elements of our methodology. It constitutes the basis of all scientific research. It allows us to list all the studies that relate to our study area and/or research theme. The aim is to avoid, on the one hand, conducting research that has already been done and, on the other hand, to avoid drawing inspiration from the methods used by other researchers on similar studies. Most of the documents used to understand our theme come from university library and resource centers. The reason for choosing in Sedhiou and Marsassoum was deliberate. Also, elements of oral literature (tales, sayings ...) in the variety of languages of this region were collected, in order to better define our problem. The work was conducted in Marsassoum and Sédhiou from August, 15th to November 15th 2012. It is a real challenge in that it allows us to understand our cultures in their particularities.

0.3. Review of the related literature

In this section our aim is to outline the literature review used to conduct this study and research. It consists in collecting works that deal with a specific subject related to a fact, library research is, therefore, essential and fundamental to any research work. Indeed, library research allows the researcher to become acquainted with the work carried out on the subject he wants to treat and to have a panoramic view of the problematic in order to better orient his work. After our research, we found only a few published parcel documents on our subject. In order to arrive at a valid representation of our study, we were rightly obliged to reserve a privileged place for the various researchers who have tackled the themes that revolve around Mandinka, its customs, in general, and circumcision and initiation in particular. Thus, in the context of our study of forms of initiation in the Mandinka world, we consulted works dealing with circumcision, excision and general works that tell us about initiation in

general and in the Mandinka environment in particular. This documentation revolves around a few key works for the realization of this work. Alphousseyni Seydi (2007), for example in his work: "*Le Kankourang, masque d'initiation des Mandingues de la Sénégambie*" recalled the meaning and functions of the Kankourang. He also mentioned the different stages of circumcision and initiation in the Mandinka environment of the Senegambia. His work also represents a very deep testimony on the rituals of initiation of the Mandinka people in the Senegambian zone. Babou Konaté (1989), for his part, deals with the theme *Le Kuyamba ou l'initiation en milieu traditionnel Mandingue de Casamance*. This is a very complex subject, but it provides us with elements of appreciation of the caste system in the Mandinka environment, by giving some useful details on the origins, structures and roles of the castes. Initiation into this environment is entrusted to the latter, hence the importance we also attach to its work. This form of initiation constitutes a training school in a Mandingo environment where the initiates are trained to perpetuate this tradition. Mamadou Sané (1981), in his article entitled "L'initiation en milieu mandinka du Kaabu" deals with the cultural foundations of the Mandinka cultural identity through the initiation in the Mandinka environment of 'Gaabu'. He returned to the notion of initiation which is the foundation of the Mandinka cultural identity but also with the presentation of mystical characters where he evokes the notion of worship among African peoples. In addition, he was very interested in the different functions of the Mandinka masks. The interest of his reflections lies in the ethno-cultural analysis of the masks and the functioning mechanism of secret societies, especially that of the "*Kañkùran*" which is one of the essential points of our subject of study. Alimata Konaté, in her master's thesis entitled: "*Les mutilations sexuelles féminines au Burkina Faso: le cas de la pratique de l'excision dans la société bwa de Hounde*", describes the practice of excision by retracing its history before addressing the issue among the Bwaba. The author not only discusses excision as a ritual practice among women, but also the social organization of the Bwa of Hounde. This study also served as a recall of the role of women in that society. Ibou Sané (2007), in his article entitled "« Sens et Fonctions du « *Bukut* » ou « *Foutamp* » chez les Joola de Basse Casamance (Sénégal)", conducted research on the influence of animism towards Islam, which is perceptible through initiation ceremonies such as the "*bukut*" of the Joola ethnic group of the Lower Casamance. His paper aimed at showing what initiation is for the Joola but also what are its meanings and functions. At the cultural level, the author noted that the Joola have changed their cultural habits during initiation ceremonies where they spend exorbitant amounts of money throughout the event. Jean Girard (1969), in his article entitled "*Genèse du pouvoir charismatique en Basse Casamance (Sénégal)*", reverts largely on the general characteristics of the settlement of this part of the country with emphasis on the most widespread form of initiation among the Joolas (the *Bukut*) which is the sacred grove. He also mentioned the various masks that exist in the Joola world, including the *kañkùran* borrowed from the Mandinka culture. Lamine Ndiaye (2004) in his article "L'initiation : une pratique rituelle au service de la victoire de la vie sur la mort" sought first to show the different definitions of initiation. Then, he asserts that in the ethnological tradition it is customary to distinguish three categories of initiation practices called "tribal", "religious" and "optional". He also pointed out that all ritual activities are full of meanings. He, in the same line of ideas mentioned that all ritual activity is full of meaning. He cited the example of the ritual ceremony of the "*ndëpp*" among the Wolof, which, according to him, has become very rare because of the almost total adherence of this community to the religion of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

1. Theoretical approach

Cultural studies have always been a multi- or post-disciplinary field of inquiry that blurs the boundaries between itself and other 'subjects. Further, cultural studies have been something of a magpie: it has its own distinctive cast, yet it likes to borrow glittering concepts from other nests. There is nothing particularly problematic about this for it produces some original thinking. Here originality is best thought of as the rearrangement and juxtaposing of existing elements to form new patterns. That is, we generate a new way of seeing, a new perspective on or picture of the world in the same way that a kaleidoscope rearranges its existing pieces into new images. Of course, being an academic project rather than an artistic one, cultural studies use words to write new sentences rather than colours to paint new pictures. (Barker, 2002, p.3). The study employed the social constructionist approach to gain an understanding of the practice of female genital cutting and the influence of gender on the construction of meanings attached to the practice. The approach considers how meanings of social phenomena that develop in a particular social context become the reality or the norm in the everyday lives of those who accept it. It holds that what is perceived as reality is a construct of a particular culture or society (Sergio, 1993:517). The social constructionist approach seems to be similar to symbolic interactionism, particularly concerning the interactions of individuals in the interpretation of meanings. However, symbolic interactionism focuses only on the human agency and ignores the dialectical relationship between agency and structure. (quoted in Africanus, 2014, p. 47). Quite often, the term culture is used as a synonym for society, as when one speaks, in everyday language, about 'other cultures'. At the same time, a view distinguishing the two also seems widespread, as in terms such as 'multicultural society'. If such societies exist, it is in other words possible to have one society, but several cultures. Although this way of speaking can be meaningful in the simplified terminology of journalism and colloquial speech, it is too inaccurate to be useful in anthropological research, even if terms such as 'multicultural society' are suggestive of relevant anthropological issues.

2. Brief presentation of the country and the sociolinguistic environment

Situated at the extreme west of the African continent, Senegal is a geographical and human crossroads where three civilisations coexist and interfere: a Negro-African, an Arab-Muslim and a Western one. This cultural mosaic is coupled with an ethnic and linguistic diversity that is manifested through the different languages that serve as a vehicle and expression for these cultures. (Cissé, 2001, p. 100). It is a country with 14 regions divided into 45 departments covering an area of 274,200 km². The extreme distances in the interior of the country are 480 km from north to south and 820 km from east to west. Dakar, the political and economic capital of the country, is the gateway to Africa. It covers an area of 550 km² and is a peninsula located in the extreme west of the country. The climate is Sudano-Sahelian. It is characterised by the alternation of a dry season from November to May and a rainy season from June to October. The country is bordered to the north by the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, the south by the two Guineas, the east by Mali, and the west by the Atlantic Ocean on a coastline of nearly 700 km. A former French colony, Senegal gained political independence on April 4, 1960. In terms of its age and gender structure, Senegal is still a country with a young population with a predominance of women. Senegal's population remains very unevenly distributed in space with an average density per

square kilometre of 50 inhabitants, with a minimum of 10 in the south-east of the country and a maximum of 3963 inhabitants in Dakar, the region of the administrative and economic capital. The Senegalese population, according to the latest projections of the year 2020 (from the 2020 General Population Census) is estimated at 16 million 705 thousand 608 inhabitants, an increase of about 3% compared to the year 2019. (NADS, 2020). This average conceals an uneven distribution of the population, with a contrast between under-population in the east (with densities of the order of 1 to 5 inhabitants per km²), and a high concentration on the coast (the density of the Dakar region exceeds 4 000 inhabitants per km²). More than 25% of the population is concentrated in the Dakar region. The other pole of concentration is the groundnut basin made up of the regions in the centre of the country (Fatick, Kaffrine and Kaolack) with more than 35% of the population; the east of the country is very sparsely populated. Women represent 52% of the population. Foreigners account for about 2%. The latter are mainly present in the capital, Dakar, and are active in trade, industry, services and international organisations. The religions practised are Islam (94%), Christianity (5%) and animism (1%). (C.E.D.E.F, 2009, p.4)

Economically, in 2004, according to independent sources, the gross national product (GNP) was \$7.2 billion, or an average per capita income of \$700. Following an ambitious programme of structural reforms launched in 1994, the Senegalese economy entered a phase of vigorous growth (5% annual GDP growth for the period 1995-2006), driven from the 2000s onwards by construction, trade, transport and telecommunications. While this programme has improved the situation of public finances and monetary stability, it has not, however, led to a significant reduction in poverty (more than half of Senegalese people live below the poverty line) and a reduction in unemployment affecting 40-50% of the population, particularly among young people. Agriculture plays an important role in Senegal's economy. In the interior of the country, there is a significant rural exodus towards Dakar, the capital. The size of the migratory flow to this city has favoured its demographic explosion in recent years. Moreover, the Senegalese population is highly ethnically diverse. There are around twenty ethnic groups, the main ones being the Wolof (43% of the population), the Pulaars (24%) and the Serer (15%). The other groups are Diolas (4%), Mandingo (3%) and Bambaras (0.5%). Other ethnic minorities live in the mountains of the South East, such as the Bassaris in the foothills of the Fouta-Djalou.

3. Different forms of the ritual practices of the Mandinka culture

3.1 *The Kuyáŋ or circumcision*

For the best approach of our study, the reflection will be organized around three axes. In so doing, we: Explain what we mean by *Kuyáŋ*, initiation rite of the Mandinka people from Senegambia; Describe the meaning and functions of this practice in the Mandinka world; Finally study the different types of initiations in the Mandinka world with an emphasis on the masks of the Mandinka secret society. As we have already mentioned, we are interested in ritual practices, i.e., the forms of initiations in the Mandinka world; in particular the ritual practices of initiation. But, before doing so, it is important to recall what rite means. According to Mienne,

Etymologiquement le mot rite vient du latin *ritus* qui signifie l'usage sacré, la cérémonie religieuse ou l'habitude, la coutume, la manière de vivre, façon, méthode, procédé. L'étymologie nous laisse entrevoir un certain nombre des domaines pertinents de l'étude des rites : le sacré, le religieux, les habitudes, la culture, la codification du rite. Le mot rite est largement entré dans le sens commun, il désigne bien souvent des actes, des gestes qui ont un caractère

répétitif, presque tombés dans une forme de banalisation, que l'on opère sans vraiment y donner d'importance, ni de sens, ni de valeur. C'est justement ce caractère d'invisibilité qui confère au rite sa force. Bien souvent il passe inaperçu ou on ne lui accorde que peu d'importance. Cela s'est d'autant plus amplifié dans notre société avec l'individualisme grandissant, et la séparation entre le sacré et le profane. Dans une société de type traditionnel le rite est souvent présent pour tous les actes de la vie quotidienne, comme pour rappeler à chacun qu'avant d'être des individus ils appartiennent au groupe, à la communauté.

(Mienne, 2007, p.89)

He starts by giving the etymology of the word itself. According to him, the word ritual is a latin word which means *ritus*. By giving this definition of what ritual means, he tries to draw the attention of scholars on the sacred practice of such a culture and custom. He shows the main practices which go with the rituals namely: the sacred, the religious, the habits, culture and the ritual's codification. In the same line of thought, he mentioned the omnipresence of the ritual in all spheres of life. All of these invisible things are true manifestations of its strength. In approaching in the same way, Lamine Ndiaye considers initiation in the following words:

Terme polysémique s'il en est, est un vocable-signifié dont la compréhension ne peut, semble-t-il, être possible qu'à condition que soit prise en compte sa dimension plurielle. Appréhendé dans un sens vulgaire, le sens commun, il renvoie à l'idée d'une expérience première, dans une acception restrictive. Étymologiquement parlant d'ailleurs, le mot est l'équivalent de « commencement ». Cherchons un peu plus loin et le Dictionnaire Universel nous prête sa définition du mot : « action d'initier ». Tentative de définition qui, à y réfléchir de très près, relève du tautologique et ne fait que nous enfermer davantage dans des limites. Pour mieux comprendre le vocable, allons du côté de l'anthropologie sociale et culturelle. Les anthropologues en ont fait un « objet » d'étude, un des domaines de prédilection de leur discipline. Ainsi voit-on souvent le terme précédé du mot rite pour donner l'expression « rite initiatique » ou « rite d'initiation » que A. Van Gennep qualifiait, déjà en 1909, de rite de passage. Pour aborder ce thème relatif à l'initiation, il est crucial de se focaliser sur la place occupée et sur la signification prise par les notions de rite et d'initiation dans le champ de la recherche anthropologique [...]. L'irrecevabilité humaine de la « mort-néant » est très certainement l'une des motivations premières des êtres humains pour instituer des savoir-faire ritualisés au nom du triomphe de la vie.

(Ndiaye, 2004, pp.199-200)

According to the author, the term initiation is a polysemic one. Therefore, for the best approach of the latter one has to take into account its pluralistic dimension, that is to say the different meanings it can cover. Grasped in its common sense, it can have a restrictive meaning. An attempt of definition which falls within the remit of tautological that will lock us further into bounds. Ralph Linton, following the same logic conceives that:

La culture en tant qu'ensemble fournit aux membres de toute société un guide indispensable pour toutes les circonstances de la vie. Il leur serait impossible, aussi bien qu'à la société elle-même, de remplir efficacement leur fonction sans cette culture. Le fait que la plupart des membres d'une société ont l'habitude de réagir à une situation donnée d'une façon donnée, permet à quiconque de prévoir leur comportement, sinon avec une certitude absolue, du moins avec une forte probabilité"

(Linton, 1986, p.23)

For Linton, culture as a set of beliefs for a speech community and as such constitutes a guidance in all circumstances of life. He also recalls the importance of culture which has an undeniable role to play in the shaping of a human being. Ibou Sané as for him considers that:

L'initiation est l'achèvement du processus rituel social. Elle constitue le dernier échelon de toute la formation sociale. [...]. Dès lors, il y a deux institutions : d'un côté, nous avons la circoncision et de l'autre, l'initiation. Mais en réalité elles sont idéologiquement liées et s'entremêlent parfois et qu'il est difficile de déceler les limites. Mais du point de vue sociologique, la circoncision n'est que le prélude indispensable à une plus importante cérémonie consécatoire.

(Sané, 2006, p.236).

For the author, initiation is the completion of the social ritual process. And as such it constitutes the last scale of the social training. He also distinguishes two main sociocultural institutions in the Joola traditional society, namely circumcision and initiation. He considers the two sociocultural institutions as interlinked. But he still considers in regard to sociology that circumcision is only the indispensable prelude to a more important consecratory ceremony. A rite of tribal initiation, in the narrowest sense of the term, is a singular public rite performed by members of an age cohort that is necessary and sufficient for their admission to adult privileges and responsibilities within the community. (Leitao, 2003, p.109). According to the same author:

[...] the contemporary approach to ritual leads one to focus on the sorts of social identities that are performed by adolescents and on how the social meaning given to these performances is negotiated by the performers themselves and various groups within the larger audience. Classicists have tended to pay more attention to the structure of maturation rites than to the content, and as a result have proceeded with a rather limited conception of the identities that are created in these rites, most scholars seeing them as creating only "adults" or only "adult citizens." Such a narrow conception of identity might be adequate for the traditional societies upon which the tribal initiation model was originally based, but the identity of a young man [...] was more complex than that of a young man in the simplest traditional societies. Small-scale, traditional societies are for the most part organized according to kinship and gender, and male transition rites in such societies are conceived largely in terms of a change in the latter: the (feminine) boy becomes a fully masculine man.

(Leitao, 2003, p.110)

This analysis of the author brings us to draw an inference on the contribution of rituals to strengthening social identity. This means that in any social group people are organized on the basis of the rules that govern their community. He also, throughout his analysis tries demonstrate that culture is a means to social identity. This amounts to saying that plays a very important part in the shaping of human life. That's why the words of Gennep are very relevant to this observation:

A society is similar to a house divided into rooms and corridors. The more the society resembles ours in its form of civilization, the thinner are its internal partitions and the wider and more open are its doors of communication. In a semicivilized society, on the other hand, sections are carefully isolated, and

passage from one to another must be made through formalities and ceremonies which show extensive parallels to the rites of territorial passage [...]. An individual or group that does not have an immediate right, by birth or through specially acquired attributes, to enter a particular house and to become established in one of its sections is in a state of isolation. This isolation has two aspects, which may be found separately or in combination: such a person is weak, because he is outside a given group or society, but he is also strong, since he is in the sacred realm with respect to the group's members, for whom their society constitutes the secular world.

(Gennep, 2011, p.26)

For the author, in every society, you have a stratification which allows people to adhere to a specific branch. In other words, members of a society are put together according to the category they belong to. Through those categorisations, they attain to acquire attributes allowing them to move from one stage to another and fulfil their roles in the society.

3.2 *The Kuyáŋ or circumcision*

Initiation, as announced in the conceptual definition, marks not only the passage from one social state to another, but also the completion of one period of childhood life for the benefit of another, responsible youth. This ritual involves, among the Mandinka people of Senegambia, purifications, character formation and civic education lessons in which the *ñansun* (newly circumcised) are taught the behaviours, laws and customs that govern the lives of adults and the community. Adolescents are usually circumcised between the ages of twelve and sixteen, but gradually the age at which they undergo the operation is approaching the age of infancy. According to Mandinka tradition, the initiation rite or Kuyang [kúyáŋ] is explained by a founding myth. Indeed, Mandinka people explain circumcision through three distinct systems, the cosmological, ethnographic, and medical-hygienic and sexual one. (Seydi, 2007, p.23).

3.3 *Le Kuyáŋ-baa ou l'initiation (bois sacré)*

The *Kuyáŋ-baa* is a tradition, a period during which young people between the ages of 15 and 20 must undergo both physical and moral training. It prepares the young person to face the difficulties of life. No one can be considered a man if he has not been initiated. At the same time, he must also undergo intellectual, social and spiritual training. In short, *Kuyáŋbaa* is a social practice of great sacred importance. It is, in this perspective that Alfred Schwartz, quoted by Babou Konaté, in his book entitled *La vie quotidienne dans un village guéré* notes:

L'initiation, quelles que soient son origine et ses implications physiques, est avant tout un rite de passage qui permet à l'adolescent de pénétrer à part entière dans la société des adultes. Jusque-là, le jeune homme ne participe pas réellement à la vie sociale. Il n'est qu'un auxiliaire irresponsable. L'initiation libère l'individu de l'état d'irresponsabilité qui était jusqu'alors le sien, allège la tutelle de ses parents et aînés et, en le rendant « capable » au sens juridique du terme, le fait entrer de plain-pied dans le monde des adultes.

(Alfred Schwartz quoted in Babou Konaté, 1989, p.1)

The *Kuyáŋbaa* is the second phase of the passage from childhood to manhood in the Mandinka society. And this practice contributes to the training of generations to help

them better understand some key values of their culture. After having dealt with the *Kuyañbaa* which is a generic for talking about the greatest cultural and social training school of the mandinka people, we can also recall the female genital mutilation namely known as excision which is the next point of our work.

3.4 Excision

A very old practice, which, contrary to what one might think, has marked almost all the countries of the world, female genital mutilation has disappeared today in the so-called developed countries of Europe and America, but still persists in Africa and to a limited extent in the Middle East and South-East Asia. It affects the vast majority of women in the countries where it is practised. (Konaté, 1993, p.6). According to some estimates, 70,000 to 80,000 women in the world are "mutilated". In recent years, these mutilations have provoked hostile reactions from Westerners. They criticise them strongly and sometimes excessively. Still following Konaté, since the work of A. Van Gennep, the excision of the "mutilated" has been a major issue. According to A. Van Gennep, excision has been included in the category of 'rites of passage' occurring at puberty. It is often considered to be part of the initiation rites that introduce the adolescent girl fully into the adult category, and in so doing, allow her full access to social life [...]. There is unanimity regarding the antiquity of sexual mutilation. The discovery of archaeological remains in the Nile Valley in the last century has confirmed the existence of these practices, which are attested by testimonies dating back to the beginning of the Christian era. Indeed, while it is easy to recognise their antiquity or to locate geographically the areas in which they are practised, it is not, on the other hand, very easy to locate their origins. Paleopathological research has not yet provided precise knowledge of the origin of these practices. (Konaté, 1993).

Moreover, FGM (Feminine Genital Mutilation) is almost universal among ethnic groups of Mandingue (the Malinké, Bambara, and Sarakholé) and Halpulaar (the Fulani, Toucouleur, and Khassonké) origin. Conversely, some ethnic groups (the Dogon, Bwa or Bobo, and the Sénoufo) do not fully embrace the practice for cultural or religious reasons (Protestants in particular). The lowest level of incidence of the practice is recorded among the Sonraï (48%) and Tamacheq (17%), in the north of Mali. Arabs, Moors and Berbers in the north of the country are also very little affected by FGM. FGM seems to be compatible with all religions in the country: it is practised by Muslims (94%), Christians (85%), and animists (88%) alike. (Diallo, 1997).

4. The various mystical characters who intervene during initiation ceremony

Etymologically, the word Kankourang is composed of two syllables: Kang, which means voice in the Manding language, and *Kùra*, to raise one's voice or to shout. This refers to the cry of the Kankourang Kaabunké (i.e., Kaabu). This Mandinka cultural being was born from the meeting of the Komo Mandenka and the Simo of the Nalu Baga and Landuna. This *kankùrà* [kankura] is fundamentally different from its fellow *Kumpo*, the Kasso of the Bassaris of Kédougou. Their only link is the initiation where thousands of children enter the men's hut sacrificing to the ritual of circumcision but also in the sacred wood (*kuyañbaa*) the great initiation where the circumcised (operation which consists in cutting the foreskin of the child) will undergo another test which consists in spending several days in the bush under the supervision of the wise men of the village but especially of the *kankuràn*. And there one teaches the

young teenagers bravery, dignity, humbleness and respect of their neighbors but especially of old people.

4.1 Origin of the *Kaŋkùràŋ*

According to Finna Malang Faty, known as Man Finda, historian and traditional communicator, quoted by Alphousseyni Diato Seydi, the appearance of the *Kaŋkùràŋ* dates back to the era of the Prophet peace be upon him. This dates back to the second millennium BC. The Prophet Abraham was a member of a polytheistic clan in UR, Chaldea. He was ordered by God to leave his homeland and travel to an unknown country which was to become his promised land. After a stay in Egypt, he settled in Canaan with his wife Sarata (Sarah) and his nephew Lot. There, God asked Abraham to circumcise himself, as a sign of the covenant with him, at the age of forty-eight (48), according to our informant, ninety (90), according to the Bible. Sarata, having no children, asked her husband to marry her servant Adjara (Hagar), a slave girl from Abyssinia, who gave her Ishmael. It was during the circumcision of Ishmael and the other boys of the mythical village of Akwaba that the red mask appeared in the form of a boubou that hid the whole head. According to Finna Malang Faty, "to ward off the forces of evil, and on the recommendation of God, the prophet Ibrahim (pbuh) made a miniature red mask called *jùbùrùlàn* among the Mandinka. This miniature mask can be seen today in the fields and rice fields in the form of a red puppet whose role is to protect the crops against animals (monkeys, birds, reptiles, etc.). Faced with the threat of sorcerers on the circumcised, God again ordered the Prophet Ibrahim, according to our informant, "to wear the red mask at night, during the whole circumcision, to create fear and eternal fear among the evil spirits and wandering in the darkness. This disguise, called "Bourmous woulio" by the Mandingo, continued to exist until the era of Dianké Waly SANE, the last king of Kabou. (Seydi, 2007, pp. 25-26). Among the many versions of the origin of the *Kaŋkùràŋ*, this one maintains that in its present form, it originated in the ancient kingdom of Kabou, more particularly in the Bissao-Guinean part. Its mask was composed of a red cloak called *Burmus wulin* which covered the initiate entirely. The appearance of the fibre mask was linked, according to Old Papiya Touré, a great dignitary of the community, to a serious event during the circumcision of Kumus Nema in Guinea Bissau at the beginning of the 20th century. The territory was under Portuguese administration. Indeed, a circumcised person died in the Sacred Grove and caused concern among the families. In retaliation against the sorcerers (sutamo or buaa), the *Kúyaŋ Mansá* (king of the sacred forest) and the notables decided to take out the mask. In retaliation, he killed the daughter of Malamine Berthé (other sources speak of a pregnant woman). The latter, with the complicity of Bourama Bayo (gendarme of the Portuguese colonial service), lodged a complaint against the *Kaŋkùràŋ*, claiming that it was not a spirit but a person. The commander of Kumus Néma sent a summons to the *Kúyaŋ Mansá* ordering the day and time when the *Kaŋkùràŋ* must appear. The notables, after consultation, entrusted themselves to the secret brotherhood of the Mama Jombo of Woye Bironki Touré Kounda. On the instructions of *Kaŋkùràŋ* Malang Touré, an initiate was sent to Kumus Néma. The notables presented themselves, not with the burmus wulin, but for the first time with the costume made of fibres extracted from the bark of the semmelier (Fara Jung) called *Kaŋkùràŋ* Fanoo (the mask loincloth). On that day, the *Kaŋkùràŋ* became Fambondi (the king of masks) and was henceforth identified in every Manding community with a Jinné (spirit). This mask is said to have been introduced in Senegal and Gambia at the beginning of the 20th century. Indeed, it was in 1904 that the *Kúyaŋ*

Mansá Baye Mady Koté (born in 1853 in **Mansá** Mansidi in the Kabou, in Guinea-Bissau) introduced the *Kañkùràŋ* to Mbour.

4.2. The functions of the *Kañkùràŋ*

-Protective function

This mystical character plays a very important role in the sacred grove. He intervenes to protect the new initiates against evil spirits and all those who want to harm this institution. The sacred grove is a real school of training and education. The *Kañkùràŋ* is the guardian of this sanctuary. He is dressed in fibres extracted from a marble called *faaraa*. Moreover, when repeated suspicious deaths occur, which are attributed to witchcraft, the *Kañkùràŋ* is called upon to find the wrongdoers and punish them. Wherever he goes, the fire is quickly put out, and only the initiated can accompany him. This spirit is called upon to gather the whole village for a collective undertaking, such as the digging of the sacred well. In the event of a quarrel between families, it is brought out if the elders in charge of reconciliation fail in their mediation. (Seydi, 2007).

-Educational function

Apart from his role as protector of the initiates against evil spirits, the *Kañkùràŋ* takes an active part in the education and training of these young adolescents. He inspires fear in his 'apprentices'. The *Kañkùràŋ* beats them with the flat of his machetes on their backs. Sometimes the *kintàŋ* or overseer brings out this mystical figure and invites the initiates to follow him away from their place of retreat, often into the bush. There they are subjected to a real physical test of endurance which consists of learning to crawl through the brush in the fields under a scorching sun. The initiates burn their elbows and knees. During this endurance test, the "lambee" or (overseers) administer lashes. From now on, they recommend moderation, a sense of proportion and the ability to keep any secret that has been communicated to them. The initiates learn the ritual dance or 'kindoo' often under the guidance of this mystical figure. Sessions of searching for dead wood are organised to help the women prepare their meals.

Conclusion

At the completion of this study, it should be noted that initiation rituals constitute an important institution, because they enable this society to bring young people to penetrate the intrinsic values of the ancestors, to know the place reserved for them and to participate effectively in the common work. Initiation is a school that shapes man and transmits to him knowledge that he did not know. Through the philosophy of the teachings given during the initiation stays, through the ritual nightly songs and riddles called "*pàssín*", the young adolescents are taught the group spirit that constitutes the strength of this community. They are also taught that society is the only way for people to blossom and develop. This leads to socialisation. Furthermore, the initiates are formally obliged to keep secret everything they have seen or learned during their stay in the sacred forest. In fact, secrecy and discretion are *jure* for many reasons. It is more a matter of personal protection, in the face of the fantasies of others, than of primary necessity. It is possible and even useful to give everyone the tools to take the first steps on the hermetic path. On the other hand, it is difficult to talk about the real secrets of initiation, which are of the inner domain, because they are by nature difficult to communicate. Each person is faced with himself, in relation to what will be a personal revelation. Secrecy has another function here, that of allowing inner

processes to mature that a hasty revelation would disturb. It is by keeping to oneself what can hardly be communicated in any case that the inner journey is better brought to completion. The necessary secrecy in initiation rituals is due to the fact that it often gains in effectiveness when it can play on the emotion linked to the surprise effect. The general study of the forms of initiation in the Mandinka world has led us to consider that there are indeed initiation rites linked to paths of orientation, that they are rites of passage and an initiation rite of relationship to knowledge. It constitutes a process particularly articulated in well-defined stages. It is pronounced by the village elders and relatives of the initiates and ratified by a ceremony convened for this purpose.

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