

MANDING/FULA RELATIONS as reflected in the Manding song repertoire*

by

RODERIC KNIGHT

The Manding and the Fula (also known as the Mandé and Fulani, or Peul) are two of the major ethnic groups of West Africa. The Manding, known more commonly by their regional names – the Mandinka (Mandingo) of Gambia, the Maninka (Malinké) of Guinea, the Bambara of Mali, and the Dyula of Ivory Coast – are descendants of the great empire of Mali that flourished in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and the Fula are cattle nomads (or in some cases settled cattle herdsman) whose territory stretches across the savannah regions from Senegal to Cameroon.

Music in both Fula and Manding societies is almost exclusively the province of professional musicians or *griots*, whose concern has always been not only with providing music for various occasions, but with chronicling the achievements of notable people and maintaining the genealogies of the ruling or otherwise influential families. Since many historical and genealogical facts have found their expression in songs composed by the musicians, it is possible to gain insights into these matters by examining the song texts of either group. In the Manding repertoire, a topic that comes up frequently is the subject of Manding/Fula relations, and it is this topic that will be addressed in this paper, after taking a more general look at the song texts of the *jali*, as the griot is known in Mandinka.

From long before the time of Sunjata, the legendary first emperor of Mali (reg. 1230-55) (Oliver & Fage, 1966), until the arrival of the colonial era in the nineteenth century, the *jalis* performed their duties very much as royal musicians, whether they were employed by the emperor himself or a lesser chief. The women were (and are) especially renowned for their singing ability, the men for their mastery of an instrument – the *kora* (21-string harp lute), *balo* (xylophone), or *kontingo* (5-string plucked lute) – or their command of words, whether in song or narration. In addition, a male *jali* often served as a counselor to his patron in both state and personal matters, and as an interlocutor, conveying pronouncements with fitting drama and force, and relaying messages back to the patron in turn.

In the present day, when the government salaries of elected officials no longer permit the luxury of having one's own private *jali*, many of these activities are losing their significance, and the emphasis is more on music and singing. The audience too, is changing. Since the *jali* rarely relies on a royal or otherwise permanent patron, but travels about seeking performance opportunities in many places, his music has come to be known and appreciated by a much larger audience than in the days of royal patronage. These changes have of necessity wrought changes in turn on the repertoire, so that in recent years, the standard fare of heroic and commemorative songs is being augmented by songs about young women, love, or other subjects considered frivolous in comparison.

* This paper was originally presented at the International Conference of Manding Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, June 1972.

Even so, the main bulk of the repertoire consists of songs which commemorate the heroes of the Manding. Their names appear as the song titles, and the jali identifies for his listeners the names of their relatives and ancestors, cites their achievements and where they took place, quotes proverbs or sayings relative to their life, and may tell the story or part of the story behind the song as he plays his instrument. In doing this he brings them back to life so that people today may appreciate their achievements as did their contemporaries. As the jali would say of the hero, "M b'a wulindila," ("I am waking him up"). This illustrates the significance of the praise song among the Manding. In effect, the act of composing a song (*julu teo* in Mandinka) assures for the recipient a place in the "Manding Hall of Fame", for the purpose of singing that song in the future will always be to stir memories of the past in the hearts of the listeners.

Naturally, there is no board of control that determines which heroes are great enough to have songs composed for them. Any man or woman whose achievements stand out as exemplary or significant in the history of the Manding deserves to be commemorated with a song, or at least to be praised in new lines to the melody of an existing song. Beyond this, the birth of a song is largely subject to chance and circumstance, as is its demise. Thus, although every history of the Manding mentions Kankan Musa, the fourteenth-century Emperor of Mali (1312-1337) (Labouret, 1934) who made the pilgrimage to Mecca with so much gold that it devalued the currency of Cairo, there is no song today that commemorates his rule. Possibly there was a song for him in the past, but the popularity of songs waxes and wanes among the Manding just as it does elsewhere.

In spite of this, it is possible to study the repertoire as it is known today, and to learn from it something about the ideals, philosophy, and life of the Manding and their neighbors. Several factors make it virtually impossible to define the exact size or content of the traditional Manding repertoire. Different regions within the Manding area have their own heroes and songs for them, and each jali has his own favorite heroes or contemporary patrons about whom he sings. New songs are composed in traditional style, and new words are invented for old melodies. But by limiting ourselves to a given area, it is possible to identify a core of songs which are the best known and most often heard, and to examine these songs as representative of the basic traditional repertoire. The concentration of Manding peoples along the Gambia River, where they are known as the Mandinka, lends itself well to a study of this sort. Musically speaking, the area may be divided into two parts, the east and the west. The musicians in the western half are located in the districts of Kombo, Niumi, and Baddibu, and their repertoire consists mostly of songs for historical figures of The Gambia, Casamance (southern Senegal), and Guinea-Bissau, sung in the Mandinka language. The musicians farther up-river in the districts of Niani, Wuli, Kantora, and the area known as Fuladu (Eropina, Jimara, and Tomani Districts) specialize more on songs from "Tilibo," or "the East," meaning primarily Guinea and Mali, and sing them in the languages of these areas, namely Maninka and Bambara (see map, p. 47).

Table One is a selected list of fifty songs representing these two components of the Gambian repertoire. It is not a random sample list, but is based on information gathered during a year (1970) of recording and learning songs from both areas. It includes the best known, most often heard, or otherwise significant songs in the repertoire. In each column the top few songs are the oldest, and the bottom few are

Table 1. Selected List of the Gambian Repertoire

Mandinka (Western)		Tilibo (Eastern)	
1. Tira Makang	B	1. Sunjata	A
2. Mamadu Masina	B	2. Kura (for Sunjata)	A
3. Kelefaba (Kelefa Sanneh)	B	3. Lambango (for the jalis)	E
4. Chedo (Kingdom of Kabu)	B	4. Tutu Jara	A
5. Fainkunko	B	5. Duga (any great warrior)	B
6. Hamaba	B, D	6. Janjong (any Sissoko)	A
7. Fode Kabba	B, D	7. Mamadu Bitiki	C
8. Sunkariba	B	8. Mali Sajo	E
9. Mansa Jata	A	9. Amadu Falike	A
10. Jula Faso (any trader)	C	10. Satang Madi	A
11. Ala l'a ke (Mamadi Kora)	A	11. Tara (Lamin Julube)	A, D
12. Bamba Bojang	C	12. Maki (Muntaga Taal)	A, D
13. Bakariba (Bakari Jobate)	A	13. Galajo (Koli Tenguella)	B
14. Alifa Yaya	A, B	14. Jara Dinke (son of Samori)	E
15. Kata Ndau	C	15. Sori (Alimani Samori)	A, B
16. Jula Jekere (Jekere Bayo)	C	16. Nya Wuleng (Musa Mollo)	A, B
17. Abdu Njai	B	17. Kairaba (Kairaba Turay)	E
18. Sherif Sidi	D	18. Miniyamba (name unknown)	F
19. Silati Ngaleng Koi	B	19. Sumbu Yaya	G
20. Musa Koli	A	20. Tubanka (Sori Kandia)	G
21. Suntu Baji	A		
22. Balang Kula (any brave man)	B	<i>Key</i>	
23. Kodi n'a julo	C	A. King or great leader	18
24. Nteri Jato (Wandifeng Jobateh)	E	B. Warrior	16
25. Kumbu Sora	A	C. Trader	6
26. Malang Marang	A	D. Religious leader	5
27. Sira Ba	F	E. Folk hero or friend	5
28. Tabara	F	F. Woman	4
29. Dandan Nyariya	F	G. Love or other modern	
30. Yeyengo	G	subject	3

the youngest. The majority in each case fall somewhere in between (often in the nineteenth century), but no chronological ordering beyond this is intended, since it is often not possible to date a song exactly. Most of the songs bear the name of their owner as the title. Where they do not, his name is shown in parentheses next to the title. The letter code at the right represents the person's "claim to fame" or calling in life, as shown at the bottom of the list.

A preliminary look at this list supports clearly what any jali will tell you about his profession: the jali does not sing randomly about anybody. It is the leaders – the political, military, financial, and spiritual leaders of the people that he singles out for his praise. There are, of course, two reasons for this: (1) they are most deserving of the recognition thus given, and (2) they are in a position to appreciate and to support such praise. The latter point is picturesquely stated in a proverb often quoted by the jali: "Ni i ye siseo je ji bila noma, a man nyo surala le je," ("If you see a chicken following the water carrier to the well, he didn't see the woman beating millet"). In other words, just as the chicken knows the best source of food, so does the jali know the best source of support for his trade.

Though this list is not scientifically objective in the strictest sense, it does include most of the repertoire, and we may thus put some credence in the totals shown at the bottom. It is no surprise that a large percentage of the songs are dedicated to great leaders or fighters when we remember the history of the Manding. The continuous procession of power struggles and the conflict between the forces of Islam and the traditional religions could hardly have produced other results.

The expansive reach that the Manding extended over West Africa, both during the days of the empire under Sunjata and his successors, and during the days of the lesser kingdoms of the nineteenth century, put them in close and continuous contact with many other peoples in the area. If we add to our list the ethnic background of the people included there, we are immediately aware that not all of the heroes in Manding songs are Manding. Table Two shows the same fifty songs again, grouped this time by the ethnic background of the people commemorated.

Table 2. The Gambian Repertoire by Ethnic Background

Manding	21. Jula Faso	7. Mamadu Masina
1. Sunjata	22. Ala l'a ke	8. (Chedo)
2. Kura	23. Bamba Bojang	9. Hamaba
3. Lambango	24. Bakariba	10. Alifa Yaya
4. Duga	25. Jula Jekere	11. Tabara
5. Janjong	26. Silati Ngaleng Koi	
6. Mamadu Bitiki	27. Balang Kula	Bambara
7. Mali Sajo	28. Kodi n'a julo	1. Tutu Jara
8. Jara Dinke	29. Nteri Jato	2. Amadu Falike
9. Sori	30. Kumbu Sora	
10. Kairaba	31. Malang Marang	Wolof
11. Miniyamba	32. Dandari Nyariya	1. Kata Ndaou
12. Sumbu Yaya	33. Yeyengo	2. Abdu Njai
13. Tubanka		
14. Tira Makang	Fula	Jola
15. Kelefaba	1. Satang Madi	1. Musa Koli
16. Chedo	2. Tara	2. Suntu Baji
17. Fainkunko	3. Maki	
18. Fode Kabba	4. Galajo	Mauretanian
19. Sunkariba	5. Nya Wuleng	1. Sherif Sidi
20. Mansa Jata	6. Sira Ba	

The proportions of these groups would vary considerably if this list were compared with others from Senegal, Mali, Guinea, or other areas where Manding music can be heard. But in the Gambian repertoire at least, the Fula clearly hold an important position. Next to the Manding, there are more songs for or about them than for any other group. If we look more closely at these songs, we will gain several insights into relationships between the Fula and the Mandinka.

These two groups have interacted in many ways over the past centuries, and continue to do so to this day. The nomadic Fula have traditionally used Mandinka lands for their pasturage and some farming, and have paid the owner tribute for the privilege. The sedentary Fula of the Futa Jallon region of Guinea-Bissau have always had Manding peoples in their midst. These relations were sometimes peaceful, sometimes not. In addition, certain Fula allied themselves early with the cause of Islam, and

spearheaded or assisted many battles against the then pagan Mandinka. Some Fula leaders did not fight for Islam, but merely for control of land. The results were equally long-lasting and significant. Perhaps the most significant interaction is the one that continues today after the wars and heated issues of the past have died away – that of intermarriage.

Bertrand Bocandé, writing in 1849, noted the symbiotic relationship between the Soninke (meaning the pagan Mandinka rulers of Kabu, a kingdom in the Futa Jallon), and the Fula pastoralists who lived on their land. He noted that the Fula selected an area which they found hospitable and settled there, paying tribute to the village chief by providing him regularly with fresh beef and other presents. The chief in turn based the extent of his wealth, strength, and abilities on the number of Fula settlements on his land. However, if he asked too much of them they would quickly desert him, leaving only their grass-walled houses behind (Bocandé 1940). It is surely a situation such as this – beneficial and yet uncertain – that gave rise to one of the most common phrases sung about the Fula, not associated with any one song, but incorporated into many: “Ni i ka Fulo long, i ma Fulo fulanjang lon, Fulo s’i mone, Fulo s’i mone.” (“If your experience is limited to dealing with only one Fula, beware, for the next one might surprise you.”) On one occasion a Manding jali singing this was quick to add however, “Nte me ke Fulo ye fisiriwale ti!” (“I would not be ungrateful to a Fula!”).

It was a group of Fula in Kabu that objected to the spoiling of their millet crop by the renegade horsemen of the Mandinka, who, in addition to trampling it, were using it for kindling. This objection became the opening line of the song entitled *Chedo*, which is one of the Fula words for the Mandinka. It says “Mandinka, don’t spoil my millet. If you do I will be forced to return to Firdu and the war has already driven me from there” (See Example 1A). The rest of this song is about the war between Futa and Kabu, which began as a civil war between the Islamic Mandinka and their pagan Mandinka rulers. The Fula settlement of Kabu joined on the side of Islam, eventually involving the Futa Fula to destroy Kabu in 1867 (Moreira 1948). The resolve of the pagan Mandinka warriors against their adversaries is characterized in other words from *Chedo*: “The slave of a Fula I will not be” (Example 1B).

The reluctance to conversion is characterized in another song dealing with a less cataclysmic event than the Kabu war. The song is for Amadu Falike, a Bambara king who began to accept the teaching of Islam by the son of El Hadj Omar. After some time Falike repudiated his study and forbade the use of prayer beads or the Fula language in his kingdom because his people were calling him a coward for relinquishing his own beliefs. His stubbornness against Islam is described metaphorically in the imagery of the cattle-herding Fula: “Ninsi balanding te Fula kango moi.” (“The stubborn cow cannot (prefers not to) understand the master’s Fula tongue.”)

Hama Ba, or Ma Ba, the leader of the *jihād* in the area of the Sine and Saloum Rivers in Senegal and along the North Bank of the Gambia River, according to the official version of his ancestry, was a descendant of the Denianke dynasty of Futa Toro (Quinn 1967). The dynasty was founded in the sixteenth century by a Fula named Koli Tenguella (Labouret 1959), also known as Guelajo or Galajo. Hama Ba and Galajo are both included in the Manding repertoire, and Galajo is an important figure in Fula songs as well. In Hama Ba’s song, the jali sings of his religious zeal: “Kafirolu kele, sum bali, sali balolu kele, Hama Ba Jata.” (“Fight the heathens, fight those who refuse to fast and those who refuse to pray, Hama Ba the Lion!”)

$\text{♩} = 192$ Basic Example 1, Chedo

$\text{♩} = 192$ (instrument doubles voice)

A

Che-do ka-na mma-jo bang
(measure remains same)

Che-do ka-na mma-jo bang che-do Jan-

ke ka-na mma-jo bang Sa-ne Ma-

ne jang be di le?

$\text{♩} = 108$ (instrument doubles voice)

B

Ye mbaringo ye mba-ring

nte ke-la fu-la jo-ngo ti

mbaringo ye mba-rin

mman ta ke-la fu-la jo-ngo ti

- | | | |
|----|---|--|
| 1A | Chedo kana m majo bang
Sane Mane jang be di le? | Mandinka, don't spoil my millet
Sanneh and Manneh, how is it here? |
| 1B | Ye, mbaringo, ye, mbaring
Nte kela Fula jongo ti
Mbaringo ye, mbaring
M man ta kela Fula jongo ti. | Oh, uncle, oh, uncle
I won't be the slave of a Fula
My uncle, oh uncle,
I'm not going to be a Fula's slave. |

Note

Most of the song excerpts are shown as they would be accompanied on the *kora*, the principal instrument of the *jali* among the Gambian Mandinka, and well known throughout Manding. It may be tuned to three or four different tunings, according to the song being performed. It is common to transcribe the kora in F since this pitch level is close or identical to that of a large number of instruments (See Knight, 1971). The key signatures approximate the sound of the different tunings. In the two-stave notation used here the range of the instrument is from F below the bass clef to A above the treble clef. For simplicity, all notes are joined to a central beam, and rests are shown by an empty stem. The tempo marking is given for a beam-group. A conventional western time signature is shown to aid in feeling the rhythms. In performance, the instrumental part shown is repeated with continuous subtle variation as the various vocal lines are sung.

Hama Ba was greatly inspired by El Hadj Omar, the Tukolor leader of the much more extensive *jihad* carried out against the infidels of the Fula and Bambara kingdoms of the interior. El Hadj Omar himself does not appear to have his own song in the Mandinka repertoire at present, but his sons Lamin Julube and Muntaga Taal are honored with the songs *Tara* and *Maki*, respectively, and one of the Fula kings of Masina against whom he probably fought is commemorated in the song Mamadu Masina (See Example 2).

m = 96 Basic variation

x x x x x (x etc.)
(taps on instr. by second person)

Ma-si-na Ma-di Ma-si-na. Ma-si-na Ha-ma-di Ma-si-na.

Fu-lo Ma-di Ma-si-na Fu-lo Ma-di Ma-si-na

Fu-lo i nin.. se-ne.

Example 2, Mamadu Masina

Masina, Madi Masina
 Masina, Hamadi Masina
 Fulo Madi Masina
 Fulo, i nin sene.

Masina, Madi of Masina
 Masina, Hamadi of Masina
 Madi the Fula of Masina
 Fula, greetings to you,
 working in the field.

We have seen the conditions of the Fula living under the Mandinka expressed in song, and also the reluctance of the Mandinka to submit to Islam, but in many areas it was the Mandinka who were living under Fula rule, either by volition or by conquest. Words in the song *Jaka*, which is a version of *Hama Ba* in a different tuning, give us an idea about this. The song is usually dedicated today to Cherno Bande, son of Musa Mollo, the last king of Fuladu ("Fula Country") in The Gambia. In it the jali sings, "The Fula lunches on beef, he dines on beef, wealthy Fula." Though most of the inhabitants of Fuladu were and still are Fula, the Mandinka living there also contributed to the king's table, just as the Fula had done for their Mandinka overlords in Kabu. Musa Mollo himself, as with El Hadj Omar, appears not to have his own song, except for *Nya Wuleng* ("Red Eyes," symbolizing bravery), which has no text. However, it is very common for the jalis in the eastern regions of The Gambia to sing about him through most of a performance of *Sunjata*, *Kura*, or *Tutu Jara*, since his achievements have a more immediate appeal to present day audiences. A text that is frequently sung calls him the "great bar of soap," as valuable to the people as a bar of soap is to the women washing clothes.

Another side of the coin in Mandinka relations with their Fula hosts is shown in the song *Satang Madi*, an adaptation of *Hasimi Ngai* or *Hasiminka*. This song was composed for Madi Jallow of Timbo in the Futa Jallon region by a Manding jali who had visited him, performed for him, and found his generosity grossly lacking. He composed new words to malign Jallow, saying that he was not worthy of his noble birth, that he had gotten all of his young jali women pregnant, and other abuses that, true or not, achieved the desired effect (See Example 3).

♩ = 84

Basic variation

x x x x (x et.)

Sa-tang Ma-di man fo-ro-ya ... Sa-tang Ma-di man fo-ro-ya

A-la k'a la Sa-tang Ma-di man fo-ro-ya.

A y'a la ja-ti ndin-din dun ke-no bu-na ja-ti ndin-din-nu man son wo

ma Tim-po Sa-tang Ma-di man fo-ro-ya.

Example 3, *Satang Madi*

Satang Madi man foroya
 Ala k'a la Satang Madi man foroya,
 A y'a la jali ndindin dun kono buna
 Jali ndindinu man song
 Woma, Timpo Satang Madi man foroya,

Satang Madi is not of noble birth
 Allah says his Madi is not noble.
 He's gotten his jali women pregnant
 The jali women had not agreed.
 Thus, Satang Madi of Timpo is not
 of noble birth.

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that Fula-Mandinka relations have encompassed a wide range of situations, and that most of them are covered in Manding songs about the Fula. The most fruitful situation for both parties concerned, that of intermarriage, doubtless went hand in hand with most of the others, and continues to this day, making clear-cut distinctions between the two peoples less and less meaningful. One such marriage was linked directly to the war between Futa and Kabu. The Fula king, Alifa Ibraima Jallow, in his conquest of Kabu, took the former wife of Janke Wali, the last king of Kabu, to be his own wife. Her name was Kumancho. The fruit of this union was Alifa Yaya, who became a leading figure in the fight against the French in the nineteenth century. He is commemorated in a Manding song that has become (with new words) the national anthem of Guinea today (See Example 4).

$\text{♩} = 60$

Be mang kang Be mang kang Ali- fa Ya -

ya man- so- lu be mang kang

Example 4
 Alifa Yaya

Be mang kang, be mang kang
 Alifa Yaya, mansolu be mang kang

All are not equal, all are not equal
 Alifa Yaya, kings are not of equal
 ability.

Two other songs commemorate Fula women who married Mandinka men. One is for Sira Ba, a slave girl whom a king of Kabu named Mansa Sio chose to marry, thus liberating her from the usual burdens of slavery. The other is for Tabara, a *gawulo* or professional Fula singer whose beauty attracted Nankulang Nkoma, then the chief of Niani on the North Bank of the Gambia River (See examples 5 & 6).

$\text{♩} = 168$

Si-ra Ba la jon-ya wo te mo di-min-na, a t'a tu-
la mo ye, a t'a bi-la mo ye---

Example 5, Sira Ba

Sira Ba la jonya
Wo te mo diminna
A t'a tula mo ye
A t'a bila mo ye

Sira Ba's slavery
Wouldn't bother anybody.
She doesn't pound grain for anyone
She doesn't fetch water for anyone.

$\square = 108$

Nko ma le y'a fo Tabara ka di nye

Example 6, Tabara

Nkoma le y'a fo
Tabara ka di nye.

It was Nkoma who said it:
"I like Tabara."

In addition to these Fula people who have been commemorated by actual songs in the Manding repertoire, there are many others whose names are mentioned in the context of songs about other people. Although they may not be honored with an entire song to their name, they have achieved a glint of recognition along with their many Manding counterparts for their role in the life of the Manding.

In summary, the repertoire of songs in praise of the heroes of Manding in The Gambia illustrates the types of people that the Manding have traditionally chosen to commemorate in song. Most were great leaders or warriors. Many were not Manding themselves, but Fula, a people that have been in close contact with the Manding for centuries. The songs for the Fula illuminate the relations between the two, helping us to understand better what we may know from other sources. Some

songs honor the men and women by praising their achievements or bringing to our attention their importance, as in *Alifa Yaya*, *Mamadu Masina*, *Tara* and *Maki*, *Tabara* and *Sira Ba*, while others provide us with small vignettes: the Fula's life among the Mandinka in *Chedo*, and the Mandinka's life among the Fula in *Satang Madi*, *Jaka*, and in words for Musa Mollo. The struggles between the Muslims and the followers of traditional religions are depicted in *Chedo*, *Amadu Falike*, and *Hama Ba*. Together these songs underscore the broad scope of Fula-Manding relations in the past, and serve as a reminder of their importance in the present day.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bocandé, Bertrand**
1940 "Notes sur la Guinée portugaise ou Sénégal méridionale", *Société de Géographie, Bulletin*, Paris, Ser. 3, Vol. 12, 57-69.
- Knight, Roderic**
1971 "Towards a notation and tablature for the kora, and its application to other instruments", *African Music* 5/1, 23-36.
- Labouret, Henri**
1934 *Les Manding et leur langue*, Paris, Larose.
1959 *L'Afrique précoloniale*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France.
- Moreira, José Mendes**
1948 *Fulas do Gabú*, Bissau, Centro de Estudos da Guine Portuguesa.
- Oliver, Roland and Fage, J.D.**
1966 *A short history of Africa*, Baltimore, Penguin Books.
- Quinn, Charlotte**
1967 *Traditionalism, Islam and European expansion: The Gambia, 1850-1890*, (Ph. D. dissertation) University of California, Los Angeles.

