

Democratic Infelicity:
Speech, Authority, and Disbelief in Malian Politics

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation presents a contribution to the ethnographic study of institutional politics in postcolonial societies, in this case, contemporary Mali. It examines the ways in which transitions to democracy have transformed everyday politics not only through the creation of new institutional arrangements, but through the promotion of new understandings of social and political authority. In particular, this research examines the expectations that democratic institutions place on political deliberation and public speech, as well as the multiple ways in which democratic political speech has failed to fulfill those expectations. To address these questions, it combines Linguistic and Political Anthropology in the analysis of everyday discussions that took place in institutions of political representation in contemporary Mali—from the National Assembly to local councils and party meetings. This linguistic evidence was collected during fifteen months of fieldwork in Bamako and Kita, Mali, in 2010, 2011, and 2012.

Each chapter is centered on one of the various categories that mediate the relationship between political speech and action—such as authority, representation, and sincerity. My analyses of discursive patterns within the specific political context of Mali lays bare an oscillation between a serious engagement with democratic political discussion on the one hand, and its rejection through expressions of suspicion and disbelief on the other. Drawing on J. L. Austin's speech act theory, I argue that democratic political speech suffers "infelicity," or a recurrent difficulty in authenticating formal political speech and investing it with added performative force.

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Only public figures and participants of public events appear in these pages with their original names.

Introduction

This dissertation is an ethnographic analysis of political speech in Mali. It looks closely at formal political meetings—from parliamentary debates to village party meetings—as entry points to examine the status of language in new democracies. I believe that the “transition to democracy” in Mali—as in many other countries—was in itself an era, much like the *Belle Époque*. I say “was” because even though democratic institutions are still standing and will continue to transform social and political relations for a long time, the earnest enthusiasm of those first decades has faded.

Liberal democracy offered a set of political procedures and rules—of which the two most significant ones for Mali were “clean and competitive” elections and freedom of speech. However, democracy promised much more. It promised, to all those willing to participate, the opportunity to shape the course of events. In Arendt’s terms we would say that it offered “authorship,” or the possibility to take part in the discursive creation of a common world (Arendt, 1958). Liberal democracy established a line linking public discussion to political action. This dissertation is about the fortunes and misfortunes of that link.

In Austin’s theory of performative language, speech acts are utterances that do something; they differ from “statements” in that they are not “true” or “false,” but “felicitous” or “infelicitous.” Infelicity is speech ineffectiveness or the inability of speech to become act. Austin’s investigation begins with rather extraordinary examples of speech acts, such as marriages and baptisms. However, it progressively incorporates most quotidian acts, like

promises, truth claims, greetings and commands. Speech acts abound in politics, from peace agreements to the adoption of new laws and campaign promises. It would be possible to create a typology of political styles by looking at their most emblematic speech acts: promises are to liberal democracy what commands are to authoritarianism.

In Austin's theory, however, felicity and infelicity appear as universal features of language. That is, even though he places the relationship between speech and context at the core of his understanding of language, he does not examine the possible relations of infelicity with broader social, political or historical circumstances. That is, for him felicity is an analytical problem, not a socio-historical one. Austin convincingly argues that the validity of speech acts requires not only the utterance of a linguistic formula, but also an "appropriate" relation between speech and context. For instance, if a priest correctly performs a marriage between two chairs, the context would be "inappropriate" and the act infelicitous. The question that interests us here would be: do "inappropriate" speech acts—i.e. invalid marriages—become more widespread under certain circumstances? (Austin, 1962).

Austin asks: how widespread is infelicity? Such formulation calls for an answer of universal scope. Conversely, this dissertation is based on the premise that felicity has an uneven distribution across time and space. That is, it cannot be assumed, it needs to be researched case by case. Felicity also has a history, which is inseparable from that of secularization of language. Austin's idea of speech acts, as conventional formulae that achieve something, emerged in a world in which it had already been stated that language, other than "representing," does not do anything—that spells, prayers, and curses, for instance, are ineffective. An anthropological inquiry into felicity needs to ask how entire realms of language lose or gain efficacy, and how

felicity relates to other processes, from state-formation to the coexistence of multiple regimes of language (Kroskrity, 1999). It is said that during the colonial period in Mexico, indigenous people would hide representations of their “idols” inside the hollow figures of Catholic saints and in such manner address their prayers to both simultaneously. Something similar happens in Malian political discussions.

Speech acts can be divided in those that derive their felicity from the correct repetition of a well established formula—e.g. marriages, degree conferrals, the voting in of new laws at the parliament—and those that need to at least partly inaugurate or create their own conditions of felicity. In the realm of politics, this distinction can be mapped onto that between “administrative” and “constitutional” politics. That is why the question of felicity leads to that of sovereignty. Many speech acts, especially of the kind found in politics, have a legal status; they appeal to the State as ultimate enforcer. Moreover, the ability to produce a self-sufficient speech act, one that inaugurates its own felicity and responds only to itself, is the emblematic sovereign act. Following Schmitt, I here understand sovereignty as “the capacity to decide on exception” (Schmitt, 1988). The clearest example is the foundational or constitutional act, the act that inaugurates a social order.¹ However, this is not the only one, the legislators and local council members that are the protagonists of this story find themselves “deciding on the exception” of perhaps trivial matters on daily basis. As such, they are recurrently confronted with the (in) efficacy of their speech acts.

¹ In the philosophies of the “social contract” this original speech act is one that transfers sovereignty from the people towards a “man or assembly of men” who represent them. Consider for instance the following passage from *Leviathan*: “This is more than consent, or concord; it is the real unity of them all, in one and the same person, made by covenant of every man with every man, as if every man should say to every man, *I authorize and give my right of governing myself, to this man, or to this assembly of men, on this condition that thou give up your right to him, and authorize all his actions in such manner*’ This is the generation of that great Leviathan, or rather, of that Mortal God, to which we owe, under the Immortal God, our peace and defense.” [Hobbes, 114] [My emphasis]

Felicity is the point where language and sovereignty meet. Following this definition, I argue here that institutional political speech in Mali suffers from infelicity. By infelicity I do not mean discontent or dissatisfaction with democratic institutions. I mean recurrent difficulty in authenticating formal political speech and investing it with performative force. Unkept promises, invalid marriages, unheeded commands, broken agreements, unratified laws, are some of the examples of infelicity that appear in this dissertation. Infelicity has multiple causes and manifestations; some point towards State (in)capacity, some towards the regimentation of language *per se*. As an analytical tool, infelicity helps me underscore a feature shared by seemingly unrelated phenomena. In particular, it allows me to see political mendacity, the “crisis of authority,” and “crisis of trust,”—all of which were recurrent themes in my fieldwork—as different aspects of the larger question regarding the relationship between speech and acts.

Infelicity is broad, widespread, and it incorporates many things. For that reason, each chapter of this dissertation turns loosely around a category addressing one particular aspect of the relationship between political speech and action. These are authority, representation, conflict, intention, and speculation. The list is not exhaustive and is rather arbitrary, as it was partly dictated by my own theoretical interest and partly by the questions that emanated from my ethnographic material. Within each chapter, there is a miscellaneous combination of “internal” and “external” analytic categories—which some anthropologists used to call “emic” and “etic.” To justify this methodological choice, I can only say that using one language to explain another language is one of the practices the protagonists of this story and I share.

Each chapter is centered on one main event, such as a meeting, a conference, or a parliamentary debate. I alternated between examples from the national political scene in

Bamako, the capital, and political discussions at the level of the *cercle* or county, in Kita. The events I describe show the coexistence not only of multiple languages—French, Bambara, Malinke, and Arabic—but also of multiple regimes of language. That is, diverse understandings of the proper ways to do things with words. Malian political speech is formed by layers of extremely complex language regimes that to abbreviate we could qualify as Mande, Islamic, and French. I tried, to the extent of my ability, to account for this diversity as the analysis of my material demanded it and without aspiring or aiming to reconstruct a cohesive cultural system. The reader will notice that I did not try to delimit traditions or ascribe a cultural affiliation to the different practices I saw. This was to me the best way of showing how politicians move constantly between these different regimes, not only through spontaneous “code switching,” but through more complex theories and meta-pragmatic arguments of what is best done in which way. In so doing, they draw from a repertoire of practices that cuts across any bounded notion of “language” or “regime.”

Even though my inquiry was largely driven by an interest in language and communication *per se*, attending political meetings proved to be also a productive way to investigate political practices more broadly. The themes addressed in meetings range from the most apparently trivial matters—e.g. how many liters of gasoline should each party member get—to the most far-reaching questions concerning, for instance, democracy, authority, and personhood. What I found most fascinating about working with linguistic evidence from these meetings was that themes emerge as points of contention rather than as the cohesive assertions that tend to predominate in interviews.

Discussions in meetings also index the institutional and spatial configuration within which they take place. One question that runs through this dissertation is how democracy and decentralization have shaped the political relations between Bamako, the capital, a regional center like Kita, and the rural areas. This spatial configuration can be traced through by the physical movement of politicians between these different points, which I was at times able to reconstruct from the accounts. The movement of information and messages through face-to-face reported speech, personal phone calls, and the media also can also be partially traced from political debates. In almost every meeting, attendants deliver, contrast and verify information from different sources. A large portion of the time in party meetings is spent establishing the truth about who went where and what was said by whom to whom.

Different grounds of political authority and prestige also become visible in these meetings. With time in the field, one begins to notice how diverse conceptions of the craft of politics correspond to different political personae. The notion of political persona refers to something larger than the “socio-cultural profile” of politicians, because it includes the conscious fashioning of the public self. The techniques of the self that participating in politics involves are particularly explicit among the youth; young politicians talk more openly and devote more time to thinking about the personal qualities that may foster their political careers. A large portion of the ethnographic material that I gathered among the politically engaged youth unfortunately fell outside the scope of this dissertation. However, the descriptions of the relation between political activity and personhood scattered across this dissertation rely strongly on those conversations.

Malian politicians often function as intermediaries of one sort or the other; they depend on their ability to distribute or allocate material benefits. These come from diverse sources, from

international development aid to the personal fortunes of party leaders. Some of the discussions that I describe in this dissertation turn around resources, more specifically, around money and land. Tracing the form, direction, and temporality of the material exchanges that electoral democracy fosters proved highly fruitful, and I believe that an anthropological understanding of democracy cannot do without a detailed analysis of the sort of exchange cycles linked to politics. However, a full account would have required a different kind of fieldwork; here I limit myself to examining the indirect evidence of such material exchanges, as my ethnographic material is filtered by politicians' judgments of what they considered appropriate to discuss in public meetings.

One of my methodological premises was, from the beginning, to look at so-called formal, institutional politics. In this case, this refers to politics that take place either among elected politicians or among those who seek to get elected. As I will discuss in more detail below, anthropological approaches to democracy have tended to privilege "social movements" and "civil society" (Paley, 2002). In so doing, I believe, they have partaken of the generalized discredit of institutional politics, rather than taking such discredit as a question in itself.

Political anthropology has also tended to privileged "the informal" and the "margins," terms that are used to point at the set of political practices and transactions that hold an ambiguous position vis-a-vis public norms, political aspirations, and sometimes the law. This sort of "semi-conscious" realm in many cases constitutes the most solid base of political power, and even though it is known by everyone, it is considered that it must remain below the line of public representations. In Africa, as in Latin America, "informality," or the gap between real political practices and those that fit the norms, produces a sort of national embarrassment, and it is an

object of permanent complaints of reformist intellectuals. My own previous research about drug-trafficking in Northern Mexico emanated from a similar desire to unveil *real* politics.

This was not the case with this dissertation, which asks how institutional politics attempts to establish its own dignity: what it leaves out, what it incorporates, and on what grounds. Here, my interest was to understand how suspicion, accusations of deceit and corruption, and the generalized transfer of *real* politics to an invisible realm fulfill pragmatic functions in everyday, visible, and business-as-usual politics. How, for instance, are conspiracies and other forms of “anti-publics” attributed all the felicity that visible, public politics lacks. In other words, how the idea emerges that politicians do not respect their public engagements because they respect their secret engagements too much.

In sum, this dissertation is about the everyday struggles of elected politicians as they attempt to do things with words.

Anthropology of democracy

The Republic of Mali, writes Gregory Mann, “became an independent nation in 1960 with the break-up of the Mali Federation and the socialist option of September 22nd. And again in 1961, with the expulsion of French troops from military bases on its territory. And again in 1962, with the creation of the Malian franc” (Mann, 2015:15). Something similar can be said about democracy, the Republic of Mali became democratic in 1960, in 1977, in 1992, in 2012, and in 2013.

Democracy and decentralization, with those names, were part of the political project that the socialist government of Modibo Keita and the US-RDA party pursued after independence (Mann, 2015; Hopkins, 1965). In 1968, a military *coup* overthrew Modibo Keita’s regime and

brought to power a *junta*, the *Comité Militaire pour la Libération Nationale* (CMLN), with Moussa Traore as Head of State. Political activity was banned. By 1974, however, the military regime proposed a new constitution, and its adoption through a popular referendum marked the beginning of the Second Republic of Mali. Gradual political liberalization led in 1977 to the creation of the UDPM party and the organization of presidential and legislative elections. Moussa Traore remained in power, and all parties besides the UDPM were considered illegal. However, the transition to civilian rule, the reemergence of political competition within the party, and the organization of elections were at the time referred to as an era of “politics,” and in official documents as a “transition to democracy” (Fay, 1995).

In the late eighties, labor organizations, students associations, and progressive intellectuals came together in a clandestine struggle against the corruption of the Traore regime and for democracy—understood this time by Malian intellectuals as a multi-party system with “clean” elections and political rights (Fay, 1995). In March 22nd 1991, thousands of demonstrators met the violent repression of the army and hundreds died. In March 26th, Lt. Colonel Amadou Toumani Touré launched a *coup d'état* and apprehended Moussa Traore. Despite being a military officer, Toumani Touré promptly set the conditions for a transition to civilian, democratic rule. The organization of the National Conference in the summer of 1991 proved an impressive process of consultation and social dialogue. In 1991, the Constitution elaborated by the National Conference was adopted and marked the beginning of the Third Republic of Mali. Political parties, civil associations and independent mediated proliferated.

Ten years later, in 2002, Amadou Toumani Touré, the same officer who had led the coup against Moussa Traoré in 1991, won the presidential elections as an “independent candidate” and

leader of a “citizens’ movement” [Fr. *Mouvement Citoyen*]. He was reelected in 2007 forming a massive alliance that incorporated all parties with representation at the National Assembly except three. By 2011, only one party, SADI, was in the opposition. Toumani Touré’s second presidential term would have ended in June 2012. However, a military coup led by captain Amadou Haya Sanogo overthrew Touré’s regime in March 22nd, 2012. The two explicit reasons for the *coup* were Touré’s inability to act against the Touareg rebellion in the North of the country and his alleged intentions to remain in power. Interestingly, the governmental organ established by captain Sanogo in 2012 was called Committee for the Recovery of Democracy and the Restoration of the State [Fr. *Comité pour le redressement de la démocratie et la restauration de l’état*]. In other words, the army suspended a constitutional government in the name of another, truer, deeper, form of democracy. This sentiment was shared by the pro-coup organization, in particular, those regrouping the kin of soldiers in Kati.

International pressure against the military regime took effect quickly. By April 1st, captain Sanogo announced the restoration of the constitutional order. However, elections were conditioned upon the recovery of the territory. The three largest regions of the North—Kidal, Timbuktu, and Gao—were at the time controlled by a volatile combination of separatist and jihadist groups. In January 2013, at the request of the Malian interim government, the French army intervened in the North and regained most of the territory. After the signature of a peace agreement, presidential elections were organized in July 2013 and marked the restoration of democratic, constitutional order, for the fourth or fifth time.

This absurdly succinct account of more than fifty years of political history has the mere purpose of situating the 1991 transition to democracy in a longer history of institutional efforts,

many of which measured themselves against the democratic ideal. Democracy is one of the most indisputable concepts of modern politics, to the extent of having become almost synonymous with political legitimacy. For that reason, I use the term in this dissertation strictly as an historical, “local” category, rather than as a transhistorical value that humanity must pursue. In other words, the purpose of this dissertation is by no means to judge how “democratic” Mali is, under any definition of the term. I will not try to assess how close Mali has gotten to realizing the government of the people, how “clean and competitive” its elections are, how “healthy” Malian civil society is, or anything of the sort. I do not have any “recommendations” to make either. To me, the purpose of an anthropology of democracy is to understand how different democratic institutional experiments and the democratic ideal *per se* shape social, economic and political relations, and transform political values and aspirations.

In this case, I’m interested in one of those many democratic projects, the one that towards the end of the twentieth century came to stand for democracy as a whole. To differentiate it from previous democratic experiments, we can call this one liberal, representative, plural, or electoral. Tilly classifies definitions of democracy as “constitutional,” “substantive,” “procedural” and “process-oriented” (Tilly, 2007). The set of principles and institutions that spread during the nineties fall roughly within the two latter types. Procedures, primarily “clean and competitive elections,” were the indispensable requirement, and in many cases, they remained the only noticeable difference between the “authoritarian” and “democratic” regimes. However, more expansive definitions of democracy gave their fullest signification to electoral procedures; democracy was as continuous process: “a series of regularized interactions among citizens and officials” (Tilly, 2007:10). A number of features—“freedom of expression,” “alternative sources

of information,” “associational autonomy,” and “inclusive citizenship”—determine the democratic character of such relationships (Dahl, 1998:85).

Pluralism is central to the definition of democracy that became popular in the nineties. The government of the people can only be authenticated if it results from the confrontation, or “dialogue,” between divergent opinions and interests. This is a definition of democracy that emerged in the sixties in opposition to the notion of totalitarianism. Anything unitary is suspicious of being “undemocratic.” Perhaps the most consequential application of this principle was the idea—first formulated by Raymond Aron in *Democracy and Totalitarianism*—that political regimes are best differentiated by the number of parties they have. Democracies can only be “multi-party” regimes (Aron, 1965).

Millennial transitions to democracy were presented primarily as a negative process, that is, as the removal of obstacles to the free political expression of citizens. True enough, in Mali, the transition did allow political organizations and parties to emerge to the surface, so to speak, after years of political repression. However, this emphasis on the negative aspects of transitions shifted attention away from the positive ways in which democratic institutions shaped political and social relations. In contrast with cold-war “ideologies,” liberal democracy appeared as a set of non-ideological, self-evident procedures that could easily travel from one context to another; a sort of container that would be filled with particular, plural, voices (Lilla, 2014).

This dissertation, conversely, looks at liberal democracy as a set of converging institutions and ideologies that not only allow the expression of a plurality of opinions and interests, but shape social relations and the most basic beliefs concerning legitimacy, personhood, and language. Alexis de Tocqueville was the first one to understand democracy as

much more than a political regime, that is, as a comprehensive social system. *Democracy in America*, which I consider the first ethnography of democracy, includes topics such as how democratic institutions “tend to raise the cost and shorten the length of leases,” or how they affect “American manners” (Tocqueville, 2003).

Liberal democracy established a procedure for deciding *who* governs. Citizens, all national adults, cast a secret ballot every fixed number of years. In Mali this is done by placing a piece of paper with the selected option inside a box; each one of those pieces of paper is in French called a “voice” [Fr. *voix*]. The Malian electoral system combines a two-round majority system, used for presidential elections, and proportional electoral system at the local level. The government thus formed is called “representative.” To be legitimate, this procedure must fulfill a number of requirements, some easier to verify than others. For instance, there must be multiple party choices on the ballot; individuals should make their political choice autonomously, free from external coercion, and even free from their most basic material needs; and the counting of ballots must be accurate. Elections fulfilling these requirements are called “competitive,” “clean,” and “transparent.” This procedure must also lead to the succession of different parties in power, which authenticates a regime as “democratic.” In French (and Spanish) there is a term for it, “*alternance democratique*.”

Even in this description of the most basic procedures and rules of electoral democracy it is easy to see a number of peculiar but naturalized assumptions. The list includes the secrecy of the vote, the opposition between a majority and a minority, the notion of political representation, the idea that exchanging votes for material benefits is illegitimate, and the idea that political power expires at the end of a strictly defined term. Anthropologists working in “transitional”

regimes have been interested in understanding how this set of ideas and practices interact with local ideas about political legitimacy. Those working in Africa have paid particular attention to the play of secrecy and publicity in elections (West, 1994; Ferme, 1999; Apter, 1999), and to democratic politics and the occult more broadly (Ashforth, 2005; Geschiere, 1997). Another theme that has concerned African intellectuals in particular is the opposition between the alleged African tradition of consensus and the principle of majority rule, which is seen as the cause of widespread post-electoral violence (Sy, 2009).

In Mali, as in many other African countries, the emergence of liberal democracy is one among a number distinct but related processes that include the adoption of neoliberal economic reforms, human rights, gender equality, decentralization, and non-governmentality (Mann, 2015). Each one of these ideologies and processes has its own logic and temporality, and they all extend back in time at least a couple of decades if not half a century. The bulk of neoliberal reforms in Mali, for instance, took place before the transition to a multiparty regime. Despite their differences, these processes represent a cohesive and mutually reinforcing set of transformations in social and political relations. For instance, it is not rare to see NGO's operating in Mali devoted to the "promotion of democratic values" designate women and children as their main beneficiaries. The ideological proximity between these processes is such that it is not rare for social actors and analysts to collapse the distinction between democracy, which establishes political rights for citizens, and human rights more broadly, which are based on the idea of universal human dignity and enable different forms of international intervention.

Interestingly, of all the above-cited processes, formal politics is the one that has received least attention from anthropologists working in Africa, particularly from the American academy.

There are very rich and interesting ethnographies of borders, taxes, informality, extractive economies, refugee camps, humanitarian aid, social movements, human rights, witchcraft, and civil society. However, I found very few of political parties, parliaments, local assemblies, governmental organs, the foreign service, elections or any other aspect of everyday, institutional politics in new democracies. It seems that a tacit disciplinary division of labor has assigned the study of politics and politicians to Political Science, History and Sociology. This dissertation was conceived as a contribution to the ethnographic understanding of democratic politics; in particular, of the expectations it places on dialogue, public debate, and speech more broadly.

All understandings of democracy—from the narrowest, strictly electoral definitions to those that see it as a comprehensive social project—rely on a set of beliefs about language. Some of these are explicit principles with a legal status, such as freedom of speech. Some are implicit assumptions built in the institutional and ideological edifice of liberal democracy, such as the belief that the confrontation of divergent ideas is productive or that abundant public discussion signals a “healthy” civil society. Beyond these broad underlying notions, there are countless everyday ways in which democratic institutions shape political speech almost inadvertently. Examples of the latter go from the adoption of particular ways of running meetings, to the use new vocabulary, to the transformation of publics and the circuits through which information circulates.

A note on the study of political speech

Meetings, as a sort of platonic form, lie quietly in the depths of modern political ideas. Their felicities and infelicities are rarely examined directly, but the idea that sovereignty and legitimacy emanate from an original gathering of men runs across political philosophy; it is

central to the republican, democratic, parliamentary and constitutional traditions. Consider as an example Hannah Arendt's definition of power, which she opposed to violence and force:

Power springs up whenever people get together and act in concert, but it derives its legitimacy from the original getting together rather than from any action that may then follow. (Arendt, 1970:52)

The "original getting together," however, is just presupposed, not discussed. A large portion of the constitutional and republican traditions, influenced by the experience of the thirteen American colonies, saw in a real or imagined assembly of men the natural source of political legitimacy.² According to Arendt, every political gathering partakes of the legitimacy of an original foundational act; each meeting contains the seeds of new foundations and is capable of emitting sovereign decisions replicating the original one. It would be impossible to retell modern history or explain political institutions without assuming the common knowledge of things like assemblies, congresses, conventions, committees, parties, and conferences. Modern political magic happens in meetings of one sort or the other; and modern political routine happens in meetings as well. Both the countless hours of "empty" speech and the exceptional "beginnings" that take place in meetings deserve more attention.

Yet, little has been written about meetings themselves. Studies on political language, from Cicero onwards, have privileged speeches, which are monological addresses relatively isolated from their circumstances of enunciation. Political speeches are emblematic of the

² The following passage from Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* is a good illustration: "who will not agree that the beginnings of Rome and Venice were by the uniting together of several men free and independent of one another, amongst whom there was no natural superiority or subjection. And if Josephus Acosta's word may be taken, he tells us that in many part of America there was no government at all.[...] So that their political societies all began from a voluntary union and the mutual agreement of men freely acting in the choice of there governors and forms of government." (Locke, p. 58)

political figure that Arendt called “the hero” or “the initiator,” the subject who momentarily occupies the place of “author” in the author-less human history (Arendt, 1958). We remember great orators, but rarely great meetings.

Political speech fulfills the two-fold purpose of delivering a message and revealing the subjectivity of the speaker in front of an audience. The message is not delivered but “inhabited,” and style is the bridge between message and subjectivity. “Style is the substance” (Silverstein, 2003). That is why studies on the history of political communication are often concerned with identifying and interpreting the rhetorical patterns characteristic of an epoch. Debates about style are revealing of the ways in which authority and political subjectivity are conceived, and provide an entry point to the analysis of major social transformations. For instance, the transition from neoclassical forms of political rhetoric to “popular speech” in nineteenth-century America can be seen as the effect of mass democracy. The neoclassical standard provided a measure to differentiate “the few” from “the many;” conversely, “attacking gentlemanly decorum meant that you did not necessarily have to be refined to have your words count” (Cmiel, 1990:15).

Meetings as an object of linguistic analysis are slightly different. They can be decomposed into a number of individual orations, but the whole is larger than the sum of its parts. Not every form of dialogue or collective discussion is a meeting. Meetings are more like speech acts, and as such, they require a particular form and a degree of faith. There is usually a procedure to mark the transition from “everyday speech” to “meeting speech,” which often includes strong shifts in register. Duranti’s analysis of the Samoan *fono*, the meetings of a village council, shows interesting contrasts between the grammatical patterns used in *fono* speech and those of “everyday speech.” Grammatical patterns used in *fono*, he argues, emphasize agents as

they distribute “praise” and “blame;” so that in each meeting one can see a “moral flow” occurring side-by-side with the “information flow.” This means that in meetings the standing of individuals in a community is made explicit and sometimes redefined (Duranti, 1994).

Anthropologists of politics and law have also been interested in meetings as forums in which a repertoire of rules and norms becomes visible and in many cases contested. Many of the most detailed ethnographies of meetings resulted from an interest in disputes and conflicts (Gluckman, 1940; Turner, 1957). Meetings encapsulate in one cohesive act the negotiation between what classic legal anthropology called “rules” and “processes.” That is, the negotiation between a repertoire of relatively explicit rules and their invocation in an irreducibly contingent historical circumstance lived by specific individuals (Comaroff and Roberts, 1981). It is precisely in that undetermined space between “rules” and “processes,” or what others have called “structure” and “agency,” that politics takes place. Because it is in that space that people deliberately fashion their world.

This dissertation takes to heart the idea, initially formulated by Malinowski and later reiterated by Maurice Bloch, that the object of anthropological study is “a long conversation taking place among the people with whom we live during field-work and in which we inevitably join” (Bloch,1977). What follows is my own version of what was said where by whom to whom and on what grounds.

Chapter 1. Authority

The question of Authority, writes Arendt, can only be asked in the past tense: what was Authority? Authority, she argues, has vanished from the Western world together with the other two elements of the trinity: religion and tradition. For her, however, Authority means a very specific thing, different from coercion and from persuasion; “against the egalitarian order of persuasion stands the authoritarian order, which is always hierarchical” (Arendt, 1954). She is not the only one to have announced the end or the crisis of Authority. Many have forecasted it, at many different times and places; some with enthusiasm and some with nostalgia. Authority has been vanishing for a long time. If mourning means “to let go,” then Authority remains unmourned; every time someone announces its end, a bit of its past glory comes back to life.

The word “democracy” in rural Mali is often used to name such crises of Authority and the slow but unmistakable dissolution of social hierarchy and seniority privileges. As we will see in this chapter, elders in Kita talk about the ruin of “respect” and “education,” and contrast the hardships they suffered with the youth’s lack of rigor. They blame democracy and the West more broadly.

The crisis of authority always presents itself as a novelty. However, concerns about the relaxation of social norms and the moral decadence of the youth are not a new thing in Mali. In a beautiful ethnography of youth associations in Bamako during the sixties, Claude Meillassoux noticed that in “clubs,” the novelty of the time, seniority and family values were rejected.

Instead, their young members embraced money, ballroom dances, French slang, and monogamous love. Political authorities at the time were not less concerned by urban social decomposition and used the Youth Section of the party as a tool to promote discipline and uprightness among the youth (Meillassoux, 1968).

Claiming the end of Authority seems to be an integral, cyclical part of generational conflict. Yet, it is perhaps also true that Authority has slowly faded and that the ideology of democracy is implicated in that process. To make such an argument, I need to differentiate between Authority and authority. The first one is a comprehensive ideology of the social order inseparable from social and domestic hierarchy, it is an ideology that posits obedience and hierarchical respect as core virtues. The second one is a general function—not limited to any particular social order—that provides “the conditions of possibility for a *command* to be obeyed” (Weber, 1978: 212). The notion of “command” can be extended to mean much more than “order;” it can include all sorts of collective or individual, tacit or explicit, arbitrary or justified, indications of a course of action to be followed in the future. A command can be both an obligation imposed by an external agent perceived as authoritative or a self-imposed conviction. The force of such a command, the extent to which, given its form, content, or source, it compels us to follow it despite its possible contradictions with other commands or desires signals its *deontic authority*.

There is another aspect of authority that is not fully accounted for in Weber’s definition: the force of truth claims, the degree of acceptance with which they are received. If we talked about the “unquestionable authority of Western medicine,” for instance, we would not be referring to the force of its commands but of its truth claims. Truth claims range from the most

simple forms of reported speech or accounted experience, to different forms of deductions, inferences and predictions about past and future events, to the extremely complex bodies of knowledge of different sciences, religions and philosophies. To differentiate forms of authority, I will call this one *epistemic authority*, as opposed to the *deontic authority* of commands.

Linguistic Anthropology has been for a while interested in understanding the ways in which epistemic authority relates to linguistic patterns. It has looked for instance at how particular ways of speaking are more likely to be taken as authoritative, or how evidence and commitment to the truth content of an utterance are indexed in speech³ (Hill & Irvine, 1992). Different linguistic patterns correspond to different *grounds* of authority, from having first hand evidence to holding university degrees.

To recapitulate, my argument is that gaining analytical clarity on the question of “the crisis of authority” calls for a distinction between *Authority*, a hierarchical ideology of the social order, *deontic authority*, the conditions of probability for commands to be obeyed, and *epistemic authority*, the degree of acceptance of truth claims. As the examples below will hopefully illustrate, liberal democracy acts against Authority, but it does not eliminate authority. As any other kind of hegemonic discourse, liberal democracy establishes its own irrefutable truths and universal claims, but it does so in peculiar ways. It promotes linguistic patterns that to gain epistemic authority need to differentiate themselves from the ideology of Authority. Patterns, for

³ This definition of authority is close to Kockelman’s definition of “residential agency” as “the degree to which one can control the expression of a sign, compose a sign-object relation, and commit to an interpretant of this object relation” (Kockelman, 2007).

instance, that *authoritatively* affirm the end of hierarchy, the importance of dialogue and consultation, the right to disagreement, opposition and dissent, and so on.⁴

In this chapter, I will analyze a large conference that took place in Kita, in April 2011, which brought together representatives of all major political institutions and social authorities. Experts and deputies travelled from Bamako to meet with the locals, among which there were elected politicians, traditional chiefs, imams, police officers, representatives of the “civil society,” griots and others. This conference was one of the most exceptional discussions I witnessed during my time in Mali. It offered an opportunity to hear dissonant voices coming from a large number of institutional “compartments” confront each other. During my time in Kita, I attended numerous meetings of diverse groups or institutions—from political parties, to youth associations, to the communal council, to NGO’s, and the Catholic women’s association. I was therefore relatively well prepared to identify in this conference “samples” of some of the recurrent arguments and styles that I had heard in other circumstances.

It is easy to see in the discussions I refer to here the clash between “global” and “local” understanding of political legitimacy and authority. Here the notion of scaling, in the sociolinguistics’ sense, becomes useful. Grounds are not equivalent but stratified, and not all actors can move between them with the same ease. Every linguistic interaction implies various layers of indexical orders attached to immediate and remote contexts. By context, I mean the larger agglomerates of norms, institutions, and assumptions, which constitute the *ground* or the *environment* in which commands or truth claims acquire their authority or felicity. Large portions

⁴ To give an example, consider how the spread of a “participative culture” in the US education system has promoted the proliferation of disclaimers which enhance the epistemic authority of a statement precisely by denying its authoritative character: “I don’t know but...,” “It is my opinion that...,” “Personally...,” and so on.

of these *grounds* exist only indexically, that is, they are the effect produced by the sum of iterations that point at them and invoke them. The notion of scaling helps to convey the hierarchical stratification of these multiple grounds or contexts (Blommaert, 2006). As such, it is a helpful analytical tool to trace the linguistic mechanisms through which hegemonic discourses claim the place of “the universal” and create compliance.

However, seen from within this conference, scaling is much more unstable. In other words, it was not obvious that the experts from Bamako represented a more authoritative, global voice than the Kitan elders. It was clear, however, that they were appealing to diverse grounds, sometimes simultaneously, to make claims about the best way of ruling political and social affairs. In this confrontation between forms of authority, none of the parties managed to fully seize or fix the ground or context of authority.

The mirror of translation

In the second floor of the National Assembly of Mali there is a peculiar office, it is composed of only two rooms, one for the secretary and one for the director, but it is equipped with a fancy coffee machine, air conditioning and an up-to-date computer. It hosts the RECAN, the Office for Capacity Building of the National Assembly, a *sui generis* agency that is neither part of the permanent administrative staff of the National Assembly, nor an elected body. This office functions independently and reports directly to the Royal Embassy of Denmark and the United Nations Program for Development, which fund the RECAN as part of their efforts to “build the capacities of the Malian Parliament in the context of Democratic Governance and the Rule of Law.” To that end, the RECAN designs and manages a number of simultaneous “projects” for the most part oriented at furnishing the Assembly, training its staff and elected

representatives, and “promoting dialogue and debate.” When I told the director that I was observing political meetings, he invited me to attend a big conference that the RECAN had organized.

The conference took place in April 2011 in Kita, a medium size town of approximately 50,000 inhabitants in southwestern Mali. It was called “Inter-Institutional Seminar: Strengthening Republican Institutions and Promoting Dialogue with the Communities and the Civil Society.” The project’s “Terms of Reference” described its main goal as: “...to create an environment of understanding and agreement [Fr. *entente*], and promote dialogue between the population and public servants,” and included an allusion to the series of riots that had taken place in Kita in the past decade confronting the local population and state agents. The most violent of these riots took place in 2009 when a police officer shot dead a driver’s apprentice, and the Kitan youth came out and burnt all state offices in town. As a result, more than thirty students and other youth were taken to prison in Kayes, and in 2011, when the conference took place, some of them still had not been released.

The RECAN, however, organized this conference not to discuss these events directly, but as a kind of pedagogical tool to “inform” the people of Kita and the local authorities about their rights and responsibilities in the context of democracy and decentralization.⁵ To that end, national representatives or deputies [Fr. *députés*], the General Attorney [Fr. *Procureur général*], and “experts” had travelled 120 miles from Bamako, to meet the local authorities from Kita and surrounding villages. Every local public figure was present: the mayor of Kita, the president of

⁵ Nicholas S. Hopkins recalls that public “information meetings” were common in 1964 during the Modibo Keita regime. He noticed that even though these meetings were different from others in so far as they were not called “in order to make a decision” but simply “to facilitate the dissemination of information to the townspeople,” participants, nevertheless spoke as “if it were something in their power to decide” (Hopkins 1972:162).

the Kita *Cercle* Council [Fr. *Conseil de Cercle*], the president of the Regional Assembly of Kayes, the traditional neighborhood and village chiefs [Bam. *dugutigiw*], the head of the *griots*, representatives of the “civil society,” representatives of the veterans association, imams, priests, army officers, gendarmes, police officers, customs's agents [Fr. *douanes*], and representatives from the “Waters and Forests” local office [Fr. *Bureau d’eaux et forets*], among others. The experts from Bamako lectured on topics such as “Peace Culture,” “The Role of the Civil Society” and “Democratic Mediation,” and were followed by a vigorous, and rather unrelated, debate. Each major social organization—from the traditional chiefs, to the youth associations, and the imams—had a chance to raise concerns and demonstrate their public oratory skills.

The first thing to notice about the organization of the conference was that the name of the RECAN was not mentioned or written anywhere. As far as the Kitan audience was concerned, this meeting had been organized and called by the National Assembly of Mali. Like any other public meetings in Kita, it had two masters of ceremony and it began with the formula: “We spent the night in peace, may God allow us to spend the day in peace.” After which, the masters of ceremony explained: “we will first listen to three lectures and then we will open the floor for debate. Your attention, please.”

The two masters of ceremony in charge that day carried a griot family name, Kuyaté. The younger one is a professional griot who specializes in political events, I had seen him animate campaign acts and party ceremonies a couple of times before this conference; he can switch from Bambara to French seamlessly, using proverbs and ornate rhetoric in both languages. The older one is a high school teacher who sometimes accepts to function as master of ceremony, more in his capacity as teacher than as griot; in this occasion, he was also in charge of providing a

Bambara summary of the lectures delivered in French. “We spent the night in peace, may God allow us to spend the day in peace” is a common morning blessing, often used also to mark the transition from regular speech into a formal public meeting. It is a sentence with two faces, one looks to the past with gratitude, the other one acknowledges future uncertainty and asks God for peace.

Attendants took their time to gain their seats. We were in a big hall with a tin roof that had been recently built in the property of the Catholic Mission of Kita, one of the few venues in town that can host as many people. Mamadou Diakité was the first lecturer and the title of his presentation was “The Culture of Peace.” He spoke in French and after him the translator summarized a half hour lecture in five minutes. Diakité’s lecture followed very closely the UN “Declaration on a Culture of Peace” adopted by the General Assembly in 1999. He began by recalling the origin of the term “Peace Culture” which was coined in Yamassoukro, Ivory Coast in 1989 during a UNESCO Congress. The particularity of the UN definition of “Culture of Peace,” he explained, is that it moved from a restricted, negative definition—peace as “the absence of conflict”—to a larger, positive one: “A culture of peace is a set of values, attitudes, *traditions*, modes of behavior and ways of life.” After defining the term, Diakité enumerated the principles that ground “Peace Culture.” The list he gave was a comprehensive reiteration of the liberal canon in its “purest form,” ranging from gender equality to democracy and development:

[1.1] [Fr.] The fuller development of a culture of peace is integrally linked to: 1) Promoting peaceful settlement of conflicts, *mutual respect* and understanding and international cooperation; 2) Compliance with international obligations under the Charter of the United Nations and international law; 3) Promoting *democracy*, development and universal respect for and observance of all human rights and fundamental freedoms; 4) Enabling people at all levels to develop skills of *dialogue*, *negotiation*, *consensus* building and peaceful resolution

of differences; 5) Strengthening democratic institutions and ensuring full *participation* in the development process; 6) Eradicating poverty and illiteracy and reducing inequalities within and among nations; 7) Promoting sustainable economic and social development; 8) Eliminating all forms of *discrimination* against women through their empowerment and equal representation at all levels of decision-making; 9) Ensuring respect for and promotion and protection of the rights of children; 10) Ensuring *free flow of information* at all levels and enhancing access thereto; 11) Increasing *transparency and accountability* in governance...

When I transcribed the lecture, I realized that Diakit  had read verbatim articles 2 and 3 of the UN declaration on a “Culture of Peace.” It was a clear instance of “authoritative discourse” in the sense that Bakhtin gave to the term: an impermeable voice coming from elsewhere and maintaining its form through each iteration, allowing “no play with the context framing it, no play with its borders, no gradual and flexible transitions, no spontaneously creative stylizing variants on it” (Bakhtin, 1981: 343). Large segments of Diakit ’s lecture fit this description. He did not change the phrasing, nor did he add much commentary; he animated a compact string of words the authority of which emanated from a distant source. The closest comparison would be an orthodox mass or the recitation of Quranic verses.

In Bakhtin’s understanding, authority stands for lack of critical, dialogic engagement; authoritative discourse does not converse. In this, Bakhtin partakes of the Enlightenment tradition, particularly the philosophies of science and knowledge that in the Sixteenth Century opposed reason to authority.⁶ Bakhtin’s authority is Authority. Paradoxically, in Diakit ’s lecture, a passage from a UN declaration valorizing “dialogue,” “participation,” “free flow of information,” and “cultural diversity” behaved formally as any other established form of authoritative discourse: from a mass to soviet propaganda. That is, in Bakhtin’s terms, it took the

⁶ The writings of Kant and Bacon provide the most famous examples of this opposition of Reason and Authority.

form of a bounded, impermeable speech demanding formal adherence. This points to one of the most distinctive characteristics global liberal democratic discourse. It presents itself as a purely negative form of authority having no content of its own; a sort of formal container, transparent and ready to be filled with the voices that shall emerge at the end of Authority.

The spread of liberal discourses obeys of course material and geopolitical reasons, but it also entails linguistic and textual crafting. The UN “Declaration on a Culture of Peace” cited above lends itself very easily to be replicated verbatim in all sorts of contexts; it is already packed and ready to travel, to say it metaphorically. In the terms of Urban and Silverstein, we would say that it is highly “entextualized,” that is, it is an instance of discourse with very little attachment to a particular context (Silverstein & Urban 1996: 21). There are many ways in which entextualization is achieved, mere repetition is one of them; but in this case, the original document deliberately pursues freedom from context. It contains no indexicals or shifters—such as pronouns or terms like “here” or “there”—the only proper noun it includes is “Charter of the United Nations,” and it states general principles with alleged universal validity.

In the second part of the lecture, Diakit  shifted from the UN declaration to what he called its “application to the local context.” He said that there are “positive traditional values” which could ground this “Peace Culture” in Mali. He cited a book on traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution in Mali from which he drew a list of traditional values:

[1.2] [Fr.]What are positive traditional values? I insist on the term “positive” because there can also be negative traditional values. You know those positive traditional values: sharing happiness, harmony, good living together, tolerance, the respect of the given word and of the decision made under the “deliberation tree,” hospitality, and humanism, all of which are firmly anchored in our societies since times immemorial.

Interestingly, the traditional values that he listed are also a very standard set of qualities commonly attributed to traditional, rural, communitarian life not only in Mali but in many other African countries too. The list that Diakité provided—in particular the term “humanism”—are common French translations of the Bambara word *mogoya*, which has acquired a sense somewhat similar to that of the Zulu term *ubuntu* in post-Apartheid South Africa, even though in Mali it never acquired the same political and cultural preeminence.⁷ *Mogoya*, like *ubuntu*, has the same components as the word “humanity” (“human”+prefix for abstract nouns), but its meaning is closer to personhood or human kindness, because it does not refer to the quality of being a member of the human species, but, on the contrary, to the acquired capacity to live among people. Children do not have *mogoya*, they have to develop it (Brett-Smith, 1983: 47). The French word “humanism” is an odd translation of the Bambara term *mogoya*, and Bailleul’s translation as “politeness” and “*savoir-vivre*” seems more accurate (Bailleul, 2000).

To a much lesser extent than *ubuntu*, *mogoya* figures in the repertoire of terms used to “africanize” liberal democracy; it “kills two birds with one stone” as it fulfills the purpose of authenticating political doctrines but it does so through a concept that fits easily within liberalism, or as Diakité said, it is a “positive traditional value.” Resorting to tradition to authenticate political norms and principles has been a very common resource for the establishment of political authority in Africa, the African socialist doctrines also presented African traditional life as socialism *avant la lettre*. Regardless of the degree of accuracy that we

⁷ Literature about Ubuntu is abundant and it ranges from philosophy to business management, self-help and political theory. Christian Gade has traced the historical development of the use of the word in written documents since the late nineteenth century. He argues that in the sources prior to 1950, ubuntu refers “to a human quality,” during the second half of the Twentieth century the word began to be used to refer to “African humanism, a philosophy, an ethic, and as a worldview.” Furthermore, it was only in 1993 that the proverb “a person is a person through other persons” that is often used to illustrate the meaning of ubuntu began to be used for the first time in writing (Gade, 2011).

attribute to these renditions of African traditional life, it is interesting to notice that Diakité's attempt to explain "the application to the local context" of the UN declaration resorts to an "entextualized" account of "African tradition." In particular, one resulting from a process of selection, presentation, and writing marked by the influence of the "Western" political philosophy to which it is supposed to be an African alternative. In other words, African tradition here is a mirror in which liberal democracy sees itself.

So far, we have examined Diakité's formal adherence to the UN Declaration and his resource to codified African traditional values. The first one was an example of "authoritative discourse" defined by its fixed form, or incapacity to merge with other voices or the new context. The second example shows how the process of grounding such "authoritative discourse" in the "local context" is a translation loop, as it requires establishing equivalences with a rendition of "tradition" that incorporates the demands of the "authoritative discourse" in the process of its own "entextualization." However, to follow my own definition of authority, which privileges pragmatic over textual analysis, I need to ask: did the audience of this meeting in Kita accept the truth claims made by Diakité—or perhaps I should say: "made by the UN through Diakité's voice"? It is hard to know, but I have at least one important sign of how it was interpreted: the way it was translated into Bambara.

The older of the two Kuyaté griots, the high-school teacher, summarized Diakité's lecture in ten minutes. After greeting the audience, "men and women," "elders and youth," he listed the persons to whom Diakité had addressed his greetings. Diakité had mentioned that his family is originally from Kita; Kuyaté emphasized that fact and did not omit the name of the neighborhood where Diakité's kinfolk live. Then he explained that the talk was about "how to

maintain peace,” “not only in Africa” but also in the “countries of the white” and said that the leaders of all nations had a big meeting in Ivory Coast and saw a path or a method to maintain peace. He summarized the conclusions of such meeting, that is the UN Declaration on Peace Culture, in the following terms:

[1.3] [Bam] People need to change. We need to educate humans. How does one educate humans? That begins in the direct family [Bam. *gwa*], the man and his wife, then in the extended family, all the members of the big family [Bam. *lu*] need to guide and correct children, and if the child goes out to the street, people in the street should be responsible to correct all children, even if they are not their own. If the child studies something, whether it is the Islam or white people’s education, we need to add something to that education...

The first thing to notice about this translation is how loose it is, in fact it is barely a translation. Looseness itself indicates a relationship with the original contrary to the one that Bakhtin described; here, there is no attempt to preserve some original form carrying authority. The school teacher gave his own interpretation of social order, one with an emphasis on good upbringing, parental authority and generational respect, which, as we will see below, fits very well that of the Kitan notables. Then he talked about the ways in which peace was maintained in Africa traditionally, he talked about the importance of marriage, which “used to be an alliance between two families, and not two individuals,” and he added “these are the paths that worked yesterday and they could work today.” He did not use the word *mogoya*, nor did he mention the “deliberation tree.” In other words, he made both the UN Declaration and his rendition of the “African ways” confirm the understanding of good social order of the local notables. If Diakit  made “African tradition” agree with the UN Declaration, Kuyat  made the UN Declaration

confirm the local understanding of peace and order. All this, while expressing respect and admiration for the Bamako intellectual.

The second lecturer was Amidou Diabaté, a lawyer, Member of Parliament, ex-minister, and Secretary General of the PARENA party. Diabaté was born in Kita and even though he is a very well educated lawyer and had been a minister, people in his hometown sometimes refer to him as a *griot* because Diabaté is a typically griot last name.⁸ He carries this genealogy with pride, and told me once to go see “his older brother,” referring to the head of the *griots* in Kita. He was part of the group of intellectuals that had taken part in the struggle for democracy in 1991, and had been close to the government since then. I had the opportunity to follow him around in his visits to party meetings in some of the rural communes near Kita and witnessed his humble, pedagogical style. On one occasion, as we were sitting inside a small hut receiving the food that the spouses of party members had cooked in the village of Sebekoro, he told me: “People say that the PARENA is a party of intellectuals, but I have always said that peasants are the real force of the PARENA.” “This is the PARENA,” he insisted, as he pointed to the rows of men and women sitting under the thatch roof, many of whom had travelled a considerable distance from their villages to attend the party meeting.

The category of “intellectual” has an ambiguous place in Malian politics; a large portion of the Bamako political class would be considered “intellectuals,” because the category includes everyone with a university degree who speaks French well including, among others, appointed

⁸ Members of the Diabaté and Kuyaté griot lineages have been part of the Kitan political scene at least since the sixties. Nicholas S. Hopkins mentions Makan Kuyaté, a member of a jeli family who became a doctor, and served many years in Guinea. After the independence of Guinea, Kouyaté returned to Kita and was in charge of the hospital. In 1959, Kouyaté was elected representative at the National Assembly by the USRDA (Hopkins, 1972:129).

professors.⁹ “Being intellectual” is of course associated with a certain kind of *epistemic authority*. Many times in the villages around Kita I heard peasant renounce to the authority of their own words by saying: “We don’t know, we are not intellectuals.” At the same time, as Diabaté’s claim that the PARENA is a “party of peasants” indicates, peasants are attributed precisely the cultural authenticity and political dignity that intellectuals are accused of having lost. Therefore, Diabaté and other “intellectuals” engaged in politics are caught in the dilemma of having to “change” or “educate” the peasants they seek and claim to represent.

Diabaté’s lecture at the meeting in Kita was a product of such a dilemma. It was titled “New citizens and their responsibilities in the context of democracy” and it described the legal mechanisms of conflict resolution and mediation that the transition to democracy and the decentralization reforms established. He spoke in Bambara interspersed with French and began by explaining the basic rules of democratic politics:

[1.4] [Bam.] Democratic power says that everyone must vote, and that everyone is equal according to the rules of voting. Everyone: it is universal, everyone is included, everyone must vote, nobody is excluded. Everyone’s *vote* is equal. One person’s *vote* is not worth more than another person’s vote. Men’s votes are not worth more than women’s votes. Nobles’ [*horon*] votes are not worth more than slaves’ [*jon*] votes. All votes are worth the same.

He used the terms “vote” and “voting” in French, since there is no easy equivalent in Bambara. The Bambara pedagogical rhetoric that Diabaté uses in Kita and surroundings is very different from his French orations at the National Assembly, for example he uses repetition much

⁹ The most famous example is Diouncounda Traore, at the time president of the National Assembly who is a professor of mathematics, but examples of politicians who are also intellectuals or academics abound: Ali Nouhoun Diallo, Issaka Bagayoko, Cheik Oumar Diarra, Brehima Beridogo.

more when speaking Bambara.¹⁰ Affirming that everyone's vote is equal is not a trivial matter in Kita. It is precisely the dissolution of social hierarchies—much more than elections, multi-partyism or any other strictly political procedure—that Kitan notables associate with democracy, often considering it equivalent to contemporary social disorder and moral decadence. The affirmation of equality, however, is not new at all, it was a prominent aspect of the ways in which Kitans understood the ideology of the socialist regime of Modibo Keita in the sixties, which also aspired to democracy (Hopkins, 1972). In Diabaté's explanation of democracy, the dissolution of hierarchies is not only implicit in the norm that all votes are equal, it is also secured by the secrecy of the vote, which, as Diabaté explained, places “the new citizen” beyond the reach of the authority or influence of those around her. He said:

[1.5] [Bam] Everyone should *vote*, and when you vote you go into a secret “hut.” No one is going to look at you and tell you “do like this.” You are going to do what you want. No one is going to put pressure on you so that you tell yourself: “Ah, I'm afraid of this person.” There is none of that. If we asked people to raise their hands in front of everybody, people might get mistrustful or embarrassed, or maybe they would be afraid. They might raise their hands, but not following their own will. But voting is done in a secret room; that is what is good.

While the validity of the vote, as a genuinely autonomous act, is granted by its secrecy, the legitimacy of the State is linked to transparency and publicity.¹¹ Diabaté spent time describing the ways in which citizens can hold the State accountable. According to the law, he said, all

¹⁰ Barbara Johnstone argued about Arabic rhetoric: “In contrast with Western modes of argument, which are based on a syllogistic model of proof and made linguistically cohesive via subordination and hypotaxis, Arabic argumentation is essentially paratactic, abductive and analogical. It persuades by making its argumentative claims linguistically present: by repeating them, paraphrasing them, and clothing them in recurring structural cadences” (Johnstone, 1983).

¹¹ Harry West described a similar tension between the “visibility” and “legibility” of voter-registration cards and the “secrecy” of the electoral process as it figured in the Northern region of Pemba, Mozambique during the 1994 elections. (West, 2003)

citizens have the right to receive information from all State offices, and even though “there are exceptions and limits” nothing should be a “secret” for the citizens; everyone has the right to visit a State office and receive guidance. By law, he continued, every public office in Mali needs to have a written sign in front of the door with the message: “You are welcome [Bam. *I bismillah*];” elders and people with disabilities are the only ones with the privilege of skipping the waiting line. As I transcribed Diabaté’s lecture with the help of the Malian historian Oumou Sidibé, she commented: “He is talking about another country, that is not how things work in Mali.”

Diabaté spoke mostly as an expert in Malian Law, but as a Member of Parliament and party leader, he was able to leave his position as “lecturer” and address the more practical concerns of the locals. He emphasized his current role in advocating for the release of the Kitan youth in prison, and demanding the State to bring tree logging under control. Kitans were very receptive to that part and directed their questions to those issues. In that way, perhaps, the discomfort that his initial statements might have produced among certain members of the audience was diluted by his practical efficacy in the second part.

The lectures of Diakité and Diabaté were different; the first one used global discourses to talk about the principles that should ideally rule social relations in a “culture of peace,” the second described in detail the rights and responsibilities established by Malian legislation after the transition to democracy. However, both talked about how things should be, and not about how things are, assuming the role of intellectual as shaper of social aspirations. Some members of the audience, especially a couple of representatives of the youth, seemed inspired by their ideas. However, the large majority seemed indifferent. Disregarding the ideological content of

political speeches, not contradicting them overtly, and centering on the efficacy of a politician as mediator are old practices in Kitan politics (Hopkins, 1972). The discussion that followed the lectures made evident the layered understandings of authority that intersected in this conference, it also showed that the Kitan audience was more concerned with explaining the root causes of the riots and confrontation with the State.

Founders, foreigners and impostors

After the lectures, the *griots* asked each major social group—traditional chiefs, civil society, imams, youth, etc.—to choose an orator. The floor was first given to Bobo Tounkara, the spokesman of the retired Members of Parliament of Kita, and member of one of the four original families of Kita; he is considered a senior but not an elder. His oration included some of the compositional elements characteristic of public speech in Kita: an opening short prayer, greetings and expressions of gratitude, asking for permission to speak, recalling Kitan epic past, using proverbs to express controversial opinions, and closing by asking for forgiveness. This is how he began, in Bambara:

[1.6] [Bam.] I want to begin my remarks by thanking Nare Famakan. You are older than I. You were a deputy [Fr. *député*] before me. It is only because of trust that you have allowed me to speak on your behalf. I accept your trust. I would not refuse this honor. I thank you. I also pay my respects to the traditional chiefs: I come from you; I couldn't be anyone without your acquiescence.

Even though Tounkara spoke on behalf of retired deputies, his speech resembled those of local notables more than those of current national representatives and experts, not only in its style and composition, but more significantly because he began by situating himself *within* a local network of hierarchies and personal relations. A characteristic of Kitan public speech is that speakers make explicit references to their position according to criteria of authority “external” to

language—most commonly age, seniority, and origin. Public speech does not occur in a neutral arena where distinctions are suspended; quite the opposite, the capacity to acknowledge and respect the social order is a crucial aspect of oratory skills. Tounkara began by stating his own humble position within seniority-based hierarchies, the role of spokesman would correspond to his senior, Nare Famakan, but *trust* justified the suspension of such hierarchies. Arguably, his capacity to show humbleness and respect for his seniors works as an indication of his own dignity and reinforces his authority. He continued:

[1.7] [Bam.] I would also like to pay my respects to the presidium, in particular to the deputies here. Deputies, you are the spokesmen and the messengers [Bam. *cidenw*] of the people. You are the ones who express the concerns and worries of the people. If you become a congressman somewhere, you need to know that, as the Bambara say: “The foal does not fetch a good price when he is born.”

Tounkara placed himself under the traditional chiefs’ jurisdiction, but addressed the legislators from Bamako as his juniors by giving them advice. Even the proverb he used to warn junior deputies of the office’s ingratitude, placed the rewards at the end of a long road, underlying the importance of experience and perseverance (age). In addressing the deputies and exalting their social role, he translated the function of political representation accorded to members of the National Assembly to a well-known figure in Bambara, *ciden*, the messenger, which is sometimes used to refer to *griots*. Other speakers addressed the notable guests from Bamako as *ñemogow*, a general term referring to all kinds of leaders or people in positions of power. However, by using the word *ciden*, Tounkara emphasized the fact that legislators were commissioned by their constituencies, which could be interpreted as a way of lowering their

rank, especially in comparison to the traditional chiefs. He then offered a highly stylized account of Kitan politics to the Bamako elites:

[1.8] [Bam] Kita has been part of the Manden since 1237. The rules established by the Kurukan Fuga Constitution govern Kita up to today. The original rules concerning social, economic, and political affairs have governed Kita up to today. You will never have problems with the people of Kita, if you follow those rules, only if you forget those rules. Your visit is a pleasure for us, may God pay you back. May God allow you to return to your homes safely. The respect that you have showed us, may God make that same respect be shown to you.

Experts travelled from Bamako to explain to Kitans what the new domestic and international legal regimes say about the relationship between State and citizens. Conversely, this retired deputy reacted by evoking a prior legal order to which Kitans are supposed to have a privileged relationship and which, he implied, is being disrupted by State representatives in the locality. Kitans derive great pride from having been one of the towns of the Manden, the Empire of Mali (c.1230 to c.1600), which is said to have established the *Kurukan Fuga* or “Mande Chart,” an oral agreement regulating social relations, around 1236. The current inscription of the Chart is the result of a series of NGO-funded workshops that in the late nineties sought to promote democracy and human rights. As Mann convincingly argues, the inscription of the Chart is a product of its time and circumstance, as it offered “a way out of the zero-sum logic that in earlier decades had seemed to oppose human rights and African sovereignty”, by opening a way for human rights discourse to “provoke precolonial pride” (Mann, 2015: 240). Politicians and intellectuals from Bamako often talk about the *Kurukan Fuga* constitution and invest it with

great moral authority for different reasons: for its authentic African character and for being an example of primordial democracy and tolerance.¹²

It is extremely rare to hear Kitan elders talk about the *Kurukan Fuga* Chart. They talk about prior social norms often, but refer to those as Kita's own foundational agreement [Bam. *Kita sigi benkan*], or the original rules of the Manden more broadly. Moreover, the allusion to prior norms by Kitan elders serves as completely different purpose. It either comes as they lament the decline of authority, hierarchy, and "respect" in modern times, or to frame an issue as question of "hospitality," pertaining to the relationship between Kitans and foreigners.

Toukara's mention of the Chart in this conference served a similar purpose: it framed the problems between Kitans (natives) and State agents (foreigners) as a problem of hospitality and respect for the hosts. If one of the two parts transgressed ancient norms, he seemed to imply, it was not Kitans. His interpretation of the riots followed this logic:

[1.9] [Bam.] Having said that, let us not avoid the real problem. You are here in Kita because of what happened here... You came to explain to us certain things, the ignorance of which allowed this conflict to happen in the first place... But it was the lack of respect that caused the conflict in Kita. The lack of respect. If you make someone suffer, and you do it, and you do it, and you do it, there is going to be a moment in which you won't be able to control him any longer.

He first placed himself among the people who "ignore" the things that the experts are explaining, but right away he switched back into a position of authority and pointed at the *real*

¹² An interesting example of the symbolic power of the Kurukan Fuga constitution in contemporary Malian politics was the launch ceremony of the CARE, a new political party created by the son of the ex-dictator Moussa Traoré, in April 2011. Cheick Boucadry Traoré, the party's president and presidential candidate, had just returned to Mali after a long stay in the US and was surrounded by English-speaking advisers. The ceremony took place in the town where the Kurukan Fuga constitution was first adopted in 1236, and the president of the party read a new Kurukan Fuga Chart in an attempt to bring together cultural authenticity and liberal democratic principles.

cause of social conflict. He indicated the problem, “lack of respect,” but left the agent undefined. Understanding who he claimed was being disrespectful required reading between the lines. He seemed to be referring to the police agents that had been bothering the locals until they became unmanageable. He reiterated the authority of the traditional chiefs and excused them for having been unable to prevent the damages that the local youth caused to the state offices:

[1.10] [Bam.] I cannot believe that something can happen in Kita without the knowledge of the traditional chiefs. [...] But if you see that something has escaped them, the Bambara say: “The dog and his master cannot both be gluttons.” Also, the lack of authority is not always a bad thing; for an animal to have no master is not something necessarily bad, but for a person to have no master is really bad. Human beings with no master got involved in this affair and ruined it.

The proverb he used states the impossibility for a master and his subordinate to share privileges and ambitions, and relies on the self-evidence of natural hierarchy—the animal and his owner—to defend the preservation of social hierarchies. However, here it was even less evident who was he implying was the master and who the dog, and in which way the interruption of such order figured in the Kitan conflicts and riots. He could have meant that local state representatives, who had been “disrespecting” the local population, should comply with the limits that the Manden order imposed on “guests,” since, after all, they were living in the town of Kita as “foreigners” and were occupying the land of the local chiefs. Even though they represent “the State,” they still need to respect local notables as hosts and masters. However, when he talked about the people “with no master,” he could have been referring not to the state security forces but to the youth who rioted in Kita. Furthermore, those two groups—state security forces and young radicals—can be consolidated under the category of youth in general. In other words,

there are at least three axes of conflict, youth versus elders, natives versus foreigners, and State versus civilians. Furthermore, they overlap—state security forces, for instance, also happen to be for the most part “foreigners” (non-Kitans) and youth.

Youth, state agents, or foreigners, what is clear from Tounkara’s speech is that social conflict is the direct result of the transgression of hierarchies: “the dog and his master cannot both be gluttons” “human beings with no master ruined the matter.” The model for authority is domestic and therefore hierarchical. Bringing peace to town requires, according to Tounkara, recalling that we are all members of a family:

[1.11] [Bam.] Look around you: every person in this hall, from the prefect to the forestry agent, comes from a family, and there is education in each one of those families. ... What happened in Kita is shameful for all of us. But I repeat: “The dog and his master cannot both be gluttons.” ... I am a child; there are people here of whom I am a grand-child, or even a great-grand child. Let us do everything to preserve the good name of Kita. When you return to your homes, be at ease, what happened in Kita is not going to happen again, I promise you that.

Diabaté gave a lecture on the legal resources available to citizens to hold state agents accountable. Tounkara put forward a different form of accountability. Everyone, including the police officer, belongs to a family and that means that they can recognize and respect social hierarchies. Furthermore, each person represents a lineage, carries a family name, and is responsible for preserving and honoring a genealogy; such should be, according to Bobo Tounkara, the most effective mechanism of social control. He closed his remarks with another affirmation about his lower status reaffirming his capacity to recognize hierarchies, unlike the masterless people that he derides. Next to such humbleness before his seniors, or perhaps because of it, he also placed himself as someone who can “promise” to the people from Bamako

that the regrettable events won't happen again, someone who can guide and keep under control the Kitan people.

After Tounkara's speech, Namaké Keita, the oldest man in Kita and surrounding villages, spoke on behalf of traditional chiefs, and in a mixture of Malinke and Bambara, he said:

[1.12] [Malk/Bam.] My Muslim brothers, good morning. I greet you, and I greet you also on behalf of the other chiefs. The National Assembly has called this meeting. We greet the Assembly, and we give it our blessing. May God allow you to remain strong and prosperous...

Blessings and authority are intimately linked, not only because the direction in which blessings flow often indicates a relationship of seniority, but because one of the most serious consequences of disregarding authority is losing the blessings of one's parents. Blessings and curses are one of the most effective resources at the disposal of elders to produce compliance and obligation. If your mother curses you, nothing will work for you ever after. A friend in Bamako told me once: "Never give money to a woman begging on the street, she surely has been cursed by her parents." Interestingly, among all the infelicitous speech acts that I traced, which we will examine in Chapter 5, I never heard anyone say that a curse was inoperative or infelicitous. Curses are so felicitous, so effective, that even if your mother curses you in a moment of rage, there is little she can do to undo the harm; the words work by themselves.

After the formulaic greetings and benedictions, and in agreement with Tounkara's speech, the old man reminded the audience that hospitality and the respectful treatment of "foreigners" were part of Kita's foundational agreement:

[1.13] [Bamb/Mal] If you hear the name of Kita, people say many things about Kita, but they are not true. People come here to attack us, but we don't attack anyone. The agreement on

which Kita was constituted says that we the natives we don't make foreigners cry, we don't bother them. If you come to our place as a guest we will offer you our bed.

Unlike ex-congressman Bobo Tounkara, Namaké did not talk about the *Kurukan Fuga* Chart, but about Kita's own "founding word" [Bam. *Kita sigi benkan*]. The foundation of Kita as a social unit, a *polis* if you will, is also the act in which the distinction between "natives" and "foreigners" gets established. Hospitality, which regiments the relation between the inside and the outside of such *polis*, is as old as the foundation. If we follow J.L. Amselle's interpretation of the figure of the "foreigner" in Manding social organization, and its coincidences with Ancient Greece, that relationship of alterity and hospitality *is* the basic blueprint of social relations more broadly. This, Amselle argues, is true not only in a structural sense, but also in a historical one. The political history of the territory of the Ancient Mande is one in which "guests" becomes "hosts," as the original owners of the land are conquered and subordinated by a new ruling family. The relationship is sometimes reflected in the existence of a ritual "joking relationship" [Bam. *sinankuya*]. Moreover, nobles [Bam. *horon*] are designated as the hosts or patrons [Bam. *jiatigiw*] of the associated lineages of "castes" [Bam. *nyamakalaw*], typically *griots* and blacksmiths. That the relationship between Kitans and State agents is to be understood as one between "hosts" and "guests" respectively is perfectly logical (Amselle, 1996). Like ex-congressman Bobo Tounkara, the old chief Namaké Keita framed the recent events in Kita as another proof of the world's social decomposition and moral decline. He went even further and referred to the present times as "the end of the world." He said:

[1.14] [Bamb] However, now, with the end of the world, everything has been ruined. Fraud and intrigue conducted by people of low character ruined the world. Fraud and intrigue are the source of all conflict.

Even though both Tounkara and Namaké coincided in their understanding of social change as a regressive movement away from tradition and authority, they underlined slightly different causes. For Tounkara the problem is the dissolution of social hierarchies, for Namaké fraud the biggest problem. He used the Bambara word *nanfigiya* which usually describes the actions of conmen, of people who do not honor their engagements, and of people who spread rumors to incite conflicts. *Nanfigiya* is duplicity, deceit, self-interest and lack of honor, and it is a strong accusation, particularly among the Malinke nobles who praise themselves of consistency and determination. The old man's words resonated with comments I recorded among the political elite in Bamako, about a current "crisis of trust" in Malian politics, a recurrent difficulty to authenticate one's words and divert the generalized accusation of mendacity. For the old man, however, it is not the intrigues and lies among the politicians that brought disorder, but the conflict among the four founding families of Kita and the inability of their *griots* to bring peace among them:

[1.15] [Bam.] The conflict that exists in Kita today... The four original family names of Kita are Tounkara, Camara, Keita and Cissé. If the four families don't fight among themselves, nothing is ruined in Kita. But if they fight, nothing will be well afterwards. And that is precisely what is happening in Kita today... Heed my words! The difficulties that we are having nowadays are because there is no harmony among the Tounkara, Camara, Keita, and Cissé! If there is no harmony among the founders of the town, how could there be peace among the people? You need to understand this, you need to write it down.

Namaké did not alternate his imperious statements with humble considerations, he occupied his place as the oldest chief to the fullest and distributed commands accordingly. Many of his sentences are imperatives: "Heed my words!" "Find a solution!" "Bring agreement and

concord!” and “Write it down!” Bobo Tounkara had alluded to the conflict between youth and elders, State and civil society, and natives and outsiders, but Namaké shifted from these antagonisms, to the “horizontal” rivalry between the four original names of Kita. According to his logic, social harmony can only be guaranteed by an agreement among the elites. He spoke as member of one of those four families, the Keita, and from such position he asked deputies to bring peace among the founding names. Such task is usually the *griots*’ responsibility but Namaké interestingly transferred it to the political class as he launched into a fierce attack against *griots*:

[1.16] [Bam] If you [deputies] want to bring us to an agreement, do it, because there is no peace in Kita. ... We have asked our griots. As you know, in Kita we don’t need to go elsewhere in search of words, we have griots everywhere here. The house of speech is here in Kita. We have asked our *griots* to talk with us, but *griots* fear losing their profits. The *griots*’ chief is present. *Griots* feared losing their profit! Find a solution [to the congressmen]! Bring agreement and concord! You have to first bring peace among these four. If they don’t get along, there will never be peace in Kita. Have you understood that? I’m telling you, these four have to be as one. It used to be like that. Today we are divided, today there is division. Do something to bring peace among us.

Namaké placed himself and the ruling families as those who either *look for* words or *receive* them, but not as the sources of those words. The figure of the speechless sovereign is a recurrent theme in the anthropology of the Manden. According to some interpretations, there was a traditional division of realms in which action and reticence corresponded to rulers, and speech and eloquence to *griots* (Conrad & Frank, 1995; Wright, 1989; Bazin, 1986). The opposition between sovereignty and speech would also emanate from the fact that producing agreement

among discording parts requires ambiguity and flexibility contrary to the solidity and resolution of political authority.

Kita is “the capital of griots,” for that reason, people say that Kitans do not need to “look for words” elsewhere. However, according to Namaké, *griots* have lost their capacity to create harmony among the noble families because they give priority to their own financial interest. This infelicity in griots’ speech is another sign of social decline. *Griots* are a common target of social critique in contemporary Mali; in fact, calling someone a “griot” or saying that someone speaks “like a griot” nowadays in Kita usually implies lack of sincerity, excessive flattery, and the search of material benefits (Schulz, 2001).

The audience did not react well to Namaké’s mention of a possible conflict among the four families in a meeting devoted to peace and in particular in front of people from outside Kita. It was considered quite ungraceful. People remained relatively silent as the old man spoke, even though, as my recording confirms, people were expressing timid dissatisfaction about the old man’s belligerent intervention. By the time Namake’s closing remark came, however, all solemnity was lost. He said:

[1.17] [Bam.]The second thing that I’m going to add...it is not really the Assembly’s business...this topic shouldn’t be brought up here, but as people say: “every thing finds its path.” Now, the question of the traditional chiefs’ salary! Since last year, we have been waiting...They haven’t told us anything. The salary question! The salary question! The salary question! Write it down and go show it to the leaders, the question of the traditional chiefs’ salaries. Find a solution!

The same man who had just denounced griots’ financial concerns, went straight into a plea for his own salary. Traditional chiefs are functionaries, they receive a public compensation for their services, and as many other public servants in Mali, they have to deal with recurrent delays

in payment. The old man's speech was so infelicitous, that the following speaker, another elder sitting close to Namaké, tried to redress the situation by asking the presidium for forgiveness and understanding. Interestingly, this elder spoke as "representative of the civil society." He said in Bambara:

[1.18] [Bam.] May God give you health and longevity... The representative of the traditional chiefs who just spoke was enrolled in school in 1921. Look at his age, and know that it is a person of great importance who has just spoken. He is more than ninety years old. So...what he just said, you need to understand... the mission that brought you here...there are other things that have been added to that because of his age. Don't be angry with us...There is not conflict among us here. There is no conflict among the Keita, the Tounkara, the Camara and the Cissé. We share the same problems.

Voice from the audience: Solve the old man's salary problem!

As it is often the case with statements that seek conciliation, this attempt to redress Namaké's belligerent statement was ambivalent. It reaffirmed the authority of elders at the same time that it subtly asked the audience to dismiss Namaké's statements as distortions brought by age, the very ground of their authority. A voice from the audience completed the task of undermining Namaké's words by implying that the old man's lack of salary made him speak with anger and desperation. Laughter filled the hall. This fact is important because it suggests that the authority of elders and chiefs is also unstable, despite the attempts of speakers who, like Bobo Tounkara, presented it as monolithic and unchanging. The old chief's words were not taken seriously either.

However, not all the attendants were willing to dismiss Namaké's words that easily. The Head Griot, clearly insulted by Namaké's calling the griots "frauds," defended himself and the honor of all griots. I cite him at length to preserve the texture of his speech, which as that of a

local specialist in public oratory. Kuyaté interwove a large number of formulas, or standard phrases that griots repeat across contexts (regular font), with a few context-specific reactions to the old man's words (italics). In the middle of which he managed to accuse the founding families of being impostors (underlined). He said:

[1.19] [Bam.] **Head Griot:** Brothers, the world didn't begin today and will not end today either. *The way in which these four families cannot understand each other is the same way in which humans have disagreed with each other since the beginning of the world.* What I say has a deeper meaning. This is the house of peace today, this is the house of compassion today, this is the house of unity today, this is the house of marriage alliances today, this is the house of hope today. If this hope and this truth are as clear as water, and they are recognized by the imams, by the Christians and by the possessors of the sacred objects, we ask God to help this cause.

*Something was said today that hurt us, but when something hurts you it is because there is truth in it. The griots of Kita! The griots of Kita left the Manden! Passed by Naani! Passed by the Jeni Hill! Tounkara and Camara were there with Dangarantuma, and came here to establish this hill. When people are stingy with themselves, they cannot be generous with others. Those who founded Kita are not living in Kita any longer, the real founding fathers are living elsewhere. They came together, they settled down together. *Tradition did not get ruined on griots' hands.* You need to know the Malinke language, we say: "If the hunting dog's trainer is wary of the quarry, the dog's owner will be mistrustful too." *People are saying that we the Griots of Kita were afraid, and that we created conflict.**

Senior master of ceremony. Hey! Don't talk about conflict, there is not conflict among these families!

Head Griot: *That hurt us. We have been speaking with every family, money has been offered to us, but we rejected it. We ask God that until the end of the world, we shall not be responsible for Kita's sorrow. *The griots of Kita are not frauds* [Bam. nanfigiw].*

The boundaries that I traced between the different compositional elements of this passage—formulas, reactions to Namaké's words, and criticism—are of course excessively schematic. They are only an analytical device to present graphically the rhetorical strategy Kuyaté used to

affirm and undermine the chief's authority simultaneously.¹³ The parts of this passage written in regular font are known formulae used by griots to recall social values—compassion, peace, marriage, etc.—endorsed, as he said, by all religious leaders. Recalling the trajectory followed by Sundiata and his allies before reaching Kita, and the mythical foundation of the town also served to reiterate the ideal of political legitimacy. In the middle of such normative discourse, however, he slipped a harsh criticism: Kitan chiefs are “impostors” (underlined). Kuyaté did not criticize the principles grounding chieftaincy or “traditional” authority more broadly, he simply said that *legitimate* chiefs “live elsewhere.” His accusation is symmetrical to Namaké's, who accused *griots* of being frauds [Bam. *nanfiguiw*].

In 1985, the American anthropologist Barbara G. Hoffman, who was trained as *griot*, attended a major meeting in Kita celebrating the installation of a new Head Griot [Bam. *jeli kuntigi*]. The meeting became the arena for a big confrontation between two prominent *griot* lineages, the Kuyaté and the Diabaté. Hoffman argues that the manipulation of polysemy, or the multiplicity of meanings, was a major rhetorical strategy in achieving the conciliation. The professional achievement of griots, she writes, “depends upon sensitivity to and skilled use of the social ambiguities that discrepancies of time and place make possible” (Hoffman, 2000: 21). The Head Griot's speech in the 2011 meeting that I attended also provides a good example of the ability to produce polysemy. Holding the knowledge of genealogies and the power to interpret them is not a small thing in a place where “traditional” authority is directly linked to the claim of descending from original founders of the town. By slipping his critiques in between praises the Head Griot managed to accuse Kitan nobles of inauthenticity.

¹³ This movement between these different components maps onto an oscillation between self-effacing and self-enhancing speech; the sentence “the world didn't begin today and will not end today either” would be an example of the former, and “that hurt us” an example of the latter.

However, the Head Griot made the same mistake as the old chief Namaké: he spoke of conflict in front of outsiders and at a meeting devoted to peace. The moment he mentioned the word “conflict” and expressed his resentment against Namaké, the senior master of ceremony, the high school teacher with a griot last name, asked him to drop the matter. A senior police officer [Fr. *commandant de police*] spoke after him, and he too tried to redress the situation, this time, by denying the existence of any conflict, either between the four founding families or between State officers and civilians. He said, in an intricate combination of French and Bambara:

[1.20] [Bam./Fr] Namake touched on a topic... I’m going to make a special request to the journalists present here...Actually, today here in Kita, frankly speaking, there is no *problem*. There is no *problem* at all in Kita today. What Namake wanted to say...between Keita, Tounkara...In every town of Mali we find the same situation, those who came first and cleared the brush, and those who came later.. I’m from Sikasso, it was the Diamuntenes who cleared the brush there, but today at Sikasso, inside the big Tata wall, family after family, no one even calls the Diamuntenes. That is how evolution goes...in my opinion, *it’s going to be fine*. [...] So, Head Griot, *don’t bother* to say that you were hurt, drop the matter.

By giving the example of his own town, Sikasso, he implied that substitution, imposture and conflict are part of “traditional” authorities everywhere, and dismissed the whole debate casually with the French expression: “It’s going to be fine” [Fr. *ça va aller*]. Interestingly, of all the public figures present in the hall, he was the only one who made an explicit allusion to the press, and the need to curate their account of the meeting, surely because he had the added interest of proving that he was doing a good job. He, who is not from Kita and who, in the terms of the local elders, would be considered “foreigner,” defended “local privacy.” The sense of locality that he put forward, however, is not that of the four founding families and their original

agreements, it is one constituted by the fraternity of state officers and the local population. About which he also said: “There is not a problem between the state security officers and the population in Kita, the proof is that we celebrated January 20th here, the police and the gendarmerie went to the streets to collect money for the celebration. They were able to collect one and a half million. A party like the one we had this January had not taken place in Kita before!” People clapped, and the senior police officer received praises that day, someone from the audience stood up to say that if “it wasn’t for this young man, there would be no peace in Kita today.”

The effect of the chief’s tempestuous statements about Kita’s internal war, fraud, and the end of the world were slowly dissipated; and the griots had to put their hurt pride aside. In the discussion between the chief and the griot, however, the ideal hierarchical order presented by the retired deputy Tounkara revealed its fragility. The initial distinction between founders, foreigners and impostors became progressively unclear, and was closed by the police officer’s casual statement: “it’s the same everywhere,” “that’s how evolution goes,” “it’s going to be fine.”

The End of Authority

Once the main authorities spoke, the floor was open to the general audience. The masters of ceremony wrote down the name of some twenty speakers and gave each person three minutes for short questions and comments. One of the speakers complained about the restriction of speech time: “This conference is so big, but its organization is flawed, because in a town like Kita, which is the town of speech, to say that you have to stop your speech somewhere because your time is over, that is difficult. That’s what you do at the National Assembly...” This statement introduced a long speech, he prayed for Kita’s land to “cool down” and for Kitans to “speak with the same tongue.” He explained that it was the state authorities who were not

respecting the limits of their function and abusing the population of Kita, but before he could end, the griots suspended his speech abruptly because he had exceeded his three minutes. His complaint against such a strict regulation of speech time signaled the differences in the regimentation of public speech opposing Kita, as ‘the town of speech,’ to national institutions of representation, in which people restrict speech time.

Among the speakers there was not a single woman. Furthermore, only two of the male speakers presented themselves as “representatives of the youth.” The style and composition of their orations contrasted sharply with those of the elders. The first one spoke in very formal French, pronouncing “r’s” the way is done in France. He said:

[1.21] [Fr.] I’d like to congratulate the speakers for their brilliant presentations. I am a member of the civil society, and in my capacity as leader of an association I’d like to ask a question to Dr. Diakité concerning the role of the organizations of the civil society. I noted down that we have an important role in guiding and raising awareness among the population, also in defending the rights of the population. I’d like to ask Dr. Diakité to specify *the main axes* of these guidance and awareness campaigns.

I chose this oration as an example of the speech style of a relatively new class of young politicians trained in the world of non-governmental organizations and development projects. This style is recognizable in the lexicon—words such as “guidance [*encadrement*],” “awareness” [*sensibilization*], “axis,” “mission,” “leadership,” and “capacity building,” among others, appear frequently. This vocabulary is part of an approach to politics and social action centered on project management, and comes associated with the learning of specific practices—particular ways of running meetings, designing of timetables with “short term” and “long term” objectives, identifying “indicators” to “evaluate” outcomes etc. Of all those who spoke, he was

the only to refer to Diakité's lecture. I was sitting next to him and was able to see the neat notes about the lecture that he written down in a small notebook.

For these young politicians, cultivating these skills can translate into obtaining and managing international resources or jobs in the non-governmental industry, which almost automatically places them financially above their seniors. International non-governmental organizations offer an alternative ground of authority, or we can say an alternative context, in which the local disadvantages of age or gender can be turned into assets provided one learns how to translate them and operationalize them (Englund, 2006). This class of "young leaders," as they are sometimes referred to in the NGO jargon, occupies an ambivalent position in respect to both the rural population that development projects target and the political authorities from Bamako, which they accuse of corruption and of having deviated from the original values of the transition to democracy.

The other "representative of the youth" had a very different style. He was the president of one of the many youth associations registered in Mali which, even though they self-identify as "non-political," usually function as "schools for politicians." These associations offer community services, from cleaning public spaces and organizing football matches, to more ambitious project like giving "anti-corruption awards" or surveying electoral processes. They often become "clients" of senior politicians who sponsor some of their activities, in exchange for visibility and electoral support. In this occasion, the young speaker made a very concise point concerning the fulfillment of promises. He said in a mix of French and Bambara:

[1.22] [Fr/Bam] Good afternoon. My question is addressed to politicians. Since 2007 we were told that they were going to build a municipal stadium in Kita. Every *cercle* now has a stadium, in Kita; however our demands have not succeeded.

The young man addressed national representatives and other guests from Bamako jointly as “politicians,” placing their function as mediators and managers of public funds above the formal definition of their posts. The distribution of benefits, as public works, international development aid, or campaign expenditure, is central to the construction of a politician’s prestige and electoral success. Interestingly, this form of mediation does not always translate into authority, epistemic or deontic. On the contrary, it seems that elected politicians are always “borrowing” authority from the future by making promises, and lagging behind in their capacity to fulfill them. This peculiar, future-oriented logic of electoral democracy makes of the correspondence between verbal commitments and future actions the central political virtue. However, given the inflation of electoral promises, such virtue is never fully attained.

In contrast with that of elected politicians, the authority of the *faama*, a general term used in Bambara to refer to different kinds of powerful and rich people, emanates from the past and is verifiable in the present. Consider the statement of Abdoulaye Sissoko, the second oldest man in the region, who spoke after the two young speakers finished and recalled a completely different version of the relationship between political authority and material benefits:

[1.23] [Bam/Malinke] I am Abdoulaye Sissoko of Kita. I am the leader of the Camara [lineage]. In the entire region there is only one person who is older than me, and that is Namaké. I greet the delegation. *There are things in this life about which not everyone has the right to talk.* As a leader [*Bam.faama*], if you come to address an issue in Kita, if you arrive in the evening and it rains, whatever you came to do here, God is going to solve that for you, God is going to give you the exact thing that you came to find. That is an incontestable truth.

In different regions of Mali there are slightly different versions of this theme, which is that the capacity of a leader to bring rain with him indicates the power and blessings that he carries. In some places people used to refer to president Toumani Touré as “the rain maker.” In

Abdoulaye Sissoko's formulation, it is not the leader who brings rain to the land he visits; rather the land of Kita receives with rain those people whose missions and goals are blessed. In other words, rain is an index of a blessed leadership. It rained on the night the delegation from Bamako arrived to Kita; Abdoulaye Sissoko recounted that he noticed it and exchanged comments about it with an old Tounkara, another member of the four families. Those are the types of signs that the elders of the founding families can identify and interpret. Not everyone knows those truths, not everyone can talk about them, he says. After reassuring the deputies of the good omens of their arrival, Sissoko provided an interpretation of the ills of contemporary society, which reiterated the arguments previously given by the elders. He said:

[1.24] [Bam] All the difficulties that we see today are because education was ruined long ago. We are already living in that reality. I am 94 years old; thanks to the blessings of my father and my mother... We are worried about youth because we have given them too much independence. If you give children too much independence, they'll do whatever they want. Nowadays, if you beat a child and leave a mark, the police will tell you that you shouldn't beat a child.

The English word "education" does not fully convey the sense of the Bambara word "*maara*," which refers to good upbringing and good manners reflected in people's capacity to recognize and honor seniority and other hierarchies. A well-educated child, for instance, knows that after having eaten he has to thank every family member to whom he is a junior. Moreover, "*maara*" is also often translated into French as "government" or "administration;" the relationship between state agents and the inhabitants of a place, for instance, is one of "*maara*." In that sense, Sissoko's example about the police obstructing a family chief's capacity to educate and punish his child is an example of State "*maara*" interfering with domestic "*maara*."

Statements about the dissolution of domestic hierarchies and its pernicious social effect are ubiquitous, not only in Mali or Africa, but in many contexts. In 1937, the anthropologist Monica Wilson recorded the following statement among the Nyakyusa, in present day Zambia: “Since European custom has been established we have joined our children, we eat with them. Boys, both Christian and pagan, greet their fathers without stopping down; in the old days a boy would not dare to go near the place where his fathers were eating” (Wilson, 1977: 92).

This type of statement can be understood as a mere pragmatical resource for elders to affirm their authority at the moment of speaking. Whereas, in 1937, the loosening of relations among generations was attributed to the adoption of European customs; in 2011 in Kita, the same type of arguments was used to discredit democracy. However, this pragmatic dimension of the argument does not necessarily invalidate it as an accurate description of the difficulties that these elders face. The next speaker, who introduced himself as representative of the association of army veterans, added some interesting elements to the argument about the dissolution of education and respect. He said:

[1.25] [Bam.] We are elders, we are veterans. We thank you. Wherever you are, call us, we will complete your arguments. We can testify to the truth of your ideas. We are accusing each other of the things that are happening nowadays. Education shows its leaves wherever it goes. *You brought a law to Mali that made the task of governing [Bam. maara] people more difficult. I am talking about democracy.*

This was the most direct criticism addressed at the politicians from Bamako in this conference. While other local notables talked about “the ruin of education” in abstract and impersonal terms, this army veteran pointed directly at them: “you brought a law to Mali...” By

“democracy” he meant something very specific: the dissolution of social hierarchies. He continued:

[1.26] [Bam.] People have taken democracy too far, they say that you no longer need to recognize your mother and your father. It is not true, it shouldn't be like that. That made our task more difficult. Your wife will tell you: “you met me in the servitude of marriage, but now I don't recognize you any longer, we are equal.” That is what made our task difficult. The same thing happened within the army, the recruitment methods are not what they used to be. I spent thirty years in the army, and I can tell you that it is not what it used to be.

Interestingly, the examples that he gave to prove that democracy had “made the task of governing people more difficult” came from the family and the army. That is, his examples cut across the distinction between the administration of the State and that of the household. For him, the diagnosis of the problem applied to both realms equally: if women, youth and soldiers do not learn to recognize and respect hierarchy, how can the chiefs of households accomplish the task of governing, educating people, and maintaining social order? To translate it into my own terms, I would say: if hierarchy disappears, what can guarantee the felicity of commands?

The element missing in this conundrum is the State, or government more broadly. The dissolution of social hierarchies in the West, as this veteran suggested, are part of what we call “a democratizing process.” However, they are the flip side of the progressive growth of the State's administrative capacity; and thus of the slow eradication of all intermediate authorities and privileges mediating between “citizens” and “State.” Let me recapitulate.

As odd as it seems nowadays, the parallel between the family and the army is not completely foreign to Western states. Many have argued that the family provided the model for

government and hierarchical authority in the West.¹⁴ Foucault argues that the emergence of “governmentality” was enabled by a transition in the subject and unit of power from “family” to “population”:

In other words, prior to the emergence of population, it was impossible to conceive the art of government except on the model of the family, in terms of economy conceived as the management of a family. From the moment when, on the contrary, population appears absolutely irreducible to the family, the latter becomes of secondary importance compared to population as an element internal to population: that is no longer a model, but a segment” (Foucault, 2000: 216).

Similarly, Norbert Elias argues that the relaxation of domestic norms and the “civilizing of parents” in the West correspond with the progressive accumulation of force in the State (Elias, 1998). In this way, hierarchical authority— which initially characterized domestic and private relations—came to be relegated to armies and bureaucracies, in which the obedience of commands is vital. At the same time, hierarchy slowly came to be considered inappropriate as a form of regimenting social and domestic relations, including their most “natural” environments, such as schools and families. Any assertion of a hierarchical differentiation between citizens, nobles and slaves, for instance, is considered anti-democratic on principle.

In Foucault’s historical account, governmentality emerged when “the family” lost the status of model of government and became just “a segment.” Interestingly, as we will see in detail in next chapter, it is the family as such that has been one of the most visible objects of governmental intervention in Mali. No parliamentary debate has received more attention than the

¹⁴ In 1954, for instance, Arendt wrote: “The most significant symptom of the crisis, indicating its depth and seriousness, is that it has spread to such pre-political areas as child-rearing and education, where authority in the widest sense has always been accepted as a natural necessity” (Arendt, 1954).

discussions of the Family Code that took place in 1962, in 2009, and in 2011. Each time, the core of the controversy was precisely the preservation or elimination of domestic hierarchies.

Chapter 2. Representation

La Saison des pièges, a novel by the Malian writer Seydou Badian, depicts a debate among a crowd of demonstrating students in Bamako. A student shouts: “See! They imposed multiparty democracy, fashionable in their societies. Pluralism? We have the record: one million inhabitants and sixty political parties”[My translation] (Badian, 2008:177). The statement is not accurate, but is not farfetched either: Mali has 15 million inhabitants and 125 registered political parties. Of those 125 parties, 16 had representation at the National Assembly in the 2007-2012 legislature, and only 3, with a small number of seats, did not join the governmental alliance and were therefore the only formal opposition. That is, in all practical senses, the National Assembly operated as it would have in a single-party regime: all governmental initiatives were approved virtually unanimously. This peculiar functioning of the party system in which division amounts to consensus prompts a number of questions. What is a political party in Mali? Why do parties split and proliferate? Does the presence of 16 parties at the National Assembly affect the form and content, if not the outcome, of parliamentary debates? In which ways does a member of the Malian National Assembly “represent” his or her constituents?

In this chapter, I will first discuss some rather formal aspects of the Malian party system. I will then analyze and contrast two parliamentary debates on the same topic but from two different eras, the adoption of the first Malian Family Code in 1962, and the attempt to reform it in 2009. In so doing, I seek to use the debates themselves as evidence of the transformations in

the understandings and practices of political representation that took place in those fifty years. On both occasions, deputies referred directly to their functions as “representatives of the people.” Looking at how deputies talk about their constituents is also a way to see how they exercised their role as representatives.

I chose the Family Code not only because it was doubtless one of the most controversial issues of Touré’s presidency (2002-2012), but especially because, given the very nature of the topics under discussion, crucial issues regarding social organization, government, and the individual become manifest; these two discussions of kinship are also, I argue, discussions of citizenship and representation. Moreover, the social unrest that the adoption of an allegedly “anti-Islamic” Family Code triggered in 2009 was largely aimed at deputies, who, according to this argument, had failed to “represent” the cultural and religious convictions of the majority of Malians. The Code was thus seen as the result of a failure in the mechanisms of political representation not in a single-party, authoritarian regime, but right in the democratic era, when the number of parties and associations had never been larger.

The large tree of Malian political parties

Malian journalists and other commentators of politics, just like the student in the opening quote, often point to the large number of political parties as a sign of politicians’ indiscipline and of democracy’s absurdity more broadly.¹⁵ However, the existence of 125 parties is not necessarily an oddity in itself. More puzzling to me is how little parties’ public rhetoric and political programs vary, and especially how enthusiastic is the participation of the educated youth in party politics. One of the most reliable principles of political science, first formulated by the

¹⁵ To give just one example of such arguments, in his essay on Malian democracy, Ali Cissé affirms: “With the proliferation of political parties we have indisputably lost in quality what he won in quantity” (Cissé, 2006:48) [My translation].

French sociologist Maurice Duverger,¹⁶ suggests that plurality electoral institutions, also known as the “winner takes all” method, tend to favor two-party systems, whereas proportional representation fosters the proliferation of parties. France, for instance, has 285 registered political parties, of which around 50 qualify for public funding every year; in Tunisia, 150 parties have been registered only since the 2011 transition to a multi-party regime.

This observed general tendency coincides with the reasons that Malian politicians give to explain the existence of many parties. According to the explanation I heard, small parties, even if they do not attain the majority of votes, can obtain one or two posts in communal elections, which sometimes gives them a significant power to negotiate with bigger parties, form alliances, and shift the balance in tight elections. Moreover, once a political party attains a minimum number of votes, even if it has not won a single election, it is entitled to receive public funds, which constitute a non-negligible incentive.

The advantage of small parties, I was told, is that even though they might have fewer resources, the cost for a candidate to get a good slot on electoral lists is smaller. In Mali, slots in electoral lists are often sold by the party; the larger the party, the more expensive the slot. A student seeking to build a political career quickly, for instance, has a better chance of becoming a candidate in a local election if he is running for a small party. Since voters shift their loyalties often, and even big parties such as ADEMA cannot count on a strong percentage of reliable voters, especially in local elections, small parties can aspire to win posts in the short term.

¹⁶ Duverger presented this argument in a series of articles published during the 1950s, and developed it in his book, *Political Parties*. Against the explanations that attributed America’s two-party system to national character, he said: “The influence of such national factors is certainly very considerable; but we should not in their favor underestimate the effect of one general factor of a technical kind, the electoral system. Its effect can be expressed in the following formula: the single-ballot majority system favors the two-party system. Of all the hypotheses that have been defined in this book, this approaches perhaps the most nearly to a true sociological law.” (Duverger, 1954: 217).

I also heard more personal reasons for party splitting. Once a politician has gained some prominence, he might prefer to “take his people with him” and form his own party instead of waiting in the long lines of the larger parties. Every “big man” wants to try his chance and test his popularity, or as I was told: “everybody wants to be a candidate.” Personal rivalry plays a big role: a proud young leader who has not obtained a candidacy might be tempted to switch to another party or create his own if he has the means. Parties that come into existence in this way are usually referred to as “the younger brothers” and the ensemble of parties as “the big family of political parties.”

The image below is a (poor) photograph of a mural at the headquarters of the CMDID, a NGO devoted to “the promotion of democratic values in Mali.” This mural depicts the history of party formation in Mali since 1991 as a large tree with a solid trunk and numerous healthy branches emerging and splitting. The caption reads: “Malian political parties genealogy tree.” Behind the tree there is a map of the Nation. As depicted here, political division emerges from a unitary trunk which grounds and gives coherence to an otherwise scattered whole. Furthermore, political parties are connected to each other like lineages with relationships of kinship and seniority mediating between them.



Kinship metaphors and genealogy trees have also the effect of presenting political antagonism as the result of relative positions within a whole rather than of irreconcilable differences in substance. Indeed, the proliferation of political parties in Mali does not result from the need to voice differences in public policy orientations, perspectives on particular social issues or political platforms more broadly; those disagreements exist and sometimes find their way into parliamentary debates, but are simply not organized along party lines. The notions of "Right" and "Left," which are the central coordinates of the French political tradition, have no relevance whatsoever in the Malian political scene, and almost no one uses ideological labels such as

“liberalism,” “socialism,” and so on. Many Malian political parties have nominal ideological alignments. ADEMA and RPM, for instance, are members of the Socialist International, the PCR is a member of the Liberal International. However, these terms are never deployed in everyday discussions: neither in the press, nor in the parliament, or in party meetings, nor can those affiliations for the most part be inferred from the party’s approach to specific issues. Malian party politics is not organized along ethnic, regional or religious distinctions either. A party may of course have a particularly extended presence in one region, often in the birthplace of its leaders, but such presence is rarely reflected on its rhetoric or agenda.¹⁷ Malian party politics are strikingly secular; besides the prayers and benedictions framing some parliamentary orations and the punctuation of regular office activities by praying duties, the entire parliamentary ritual, in its symbols and rhetoric, instantiates “the republic” as understood in the French tradition.

Rather than representing different opinions or approaches, Malian political parties function as networks of exchange and loyalty in which the most important currencies are votes, jobs, personal connections with influential people, and funding—domestic or international. In the following chapter, we will look closely at how this distribution takes place in the *cercle* of Kita. Most of the accounts about joining a party that I heard among junior politicians reflected this pattern: they knew someone, commonly an uncle or a professor, who already had a good position in a party and invited them to adhere; their decision to stay in a party often entailed a compromise between the electoral success of the party, their expectations for candidacies or jobs, and their personal loyalty to party leaders. Besides the members of the SADI, a party

¹⁷ It is noteworthy that the participation of leaders from the Northern regions in Malian national politics was for the most part channelled by the ADEMA, the largest party with the most widespread presence in the entire territory. Between 2007-2013, all northern deputies at the National Assembly were ADEMA members.

recognizable as “leftist” for its emphasis on social injustice and strong anti-imperialist rhetoric, I did not hear anyone mention the party’s program or ideological line as the reason for their adherence.¹⁸

If ideological or programmatic differences among the parties are difficult to trace in their everyday activities and speeches outside the parliament, they are even less apparent inside the National Assembly, where they form inter-party alliances. A multi-party parliament is a good example of what classic British anthropology called “segmentary systems,” in the sense that opposed or complementary terms at one scale are merged when opposed to a third in a higher scale or under a different form of aggregation (Evans-Pritchard, 1940).

In the case of the Malian National Assembly that merging process results in virtual consensus. At the most basic level of the Malian parliament between 2007-2012, there were sixteen political parties, each one of which could in theory represent a different segment of society or a different ideological tendency. Those sixteen factions associate themselves to form ten parliamentary groups and then, at another level of aggregation, become a binary and largely asymmetrical system: parties in the government versus parties in the opposition. The fact that president Touré won the elections as an “independent” candidate facilitated the process of aggregation on the governmental side. However, some analysts argue that this consensual government did not translate for Touré into political strength, but that, on the contrary, it made him vulnerable to the demands of the large parties which exchanged their support for access to State resources (Chauzal & Baudais, 2006).

¹⁸ Malian intellectuals and journalists often comment on this lack of “ideological clarity” among parties, and lament the fact that personal charisma and loyalty have substituted “conviction” and “principles” in democratic politics. Ali Cissé sums of this frustration in a short and clear way: “The aren’t 103 ‘social projects’ [...] there are rather 103 variations of the same ‘social project’ which is reiterated over and over to the public” (Cissé, 2006: 48).

In segmentary systems, oppositions are *relative* rather than *substantial*, which means that different party systems can be contrasted according to where and how they trace the boundaries of possible aggregations or where they place “substantiality.” Alliances between “the Right” and “the Left” in Mexico, for instance, exist but are considered highly impure; Communist parties all over the world often prioritized the transnational alliance with parties of the same affiliation rather than national alliances with “bourgeois” parties, and were thus outside the segmentary system, as the concept of “the fifth column” suggests. In Mali, even the SADI, the leftist party that attributes the most “substantiality” to ideological differences, has accepted to become part of the governmental alliance.

The peculiar functioning of the Malian party system and National Assembly—the large number of parties, the blur of ideological distinctions, the absence of significant opposition—is sometimes interpreted by Malian and foreign analysts as a sign of “political immaturity.” For example, on April 26th 2011, *Les Echos*, a Malian national newspaper, published an article titled “ATT’s Mali: The political bubble” in which the author states that:

[2.1] [French] One of the fundamental differences between Western democracies and ours, which are called by some analysts, a minority coming from our own countries, “banana-democracies” or “peanut-democracies”, resides in the fact that our versions of democracy don’t assign any official place to the opposition parties.

In “real” democracies, the article goes on, the status of opposition allows those who have lost the elections to participate in political life and not “die of hunger” while the other side governs. Contrary to what happens in Mali, he continues, where:

[2.2] [French]...after a few years of opposition and exclusion, our politicians become absurdly convinced of the uselessness of political struggles and thus develop the idea of collaborating with the authorities in office which they attempt to seduce, forgetting that

yesterday they used to call them impostors. *The big political and philosophical ideas that sustain political action are abandoned for the sake of personal comfort and the social advance of one's own people.* [My emphases]

The first thing to notice about this newspaper article is that it is very critical and oppositional, that is, it provides a good counter-example to the situation that it argues pervades in Mali. Besides *L'Essor*, which is the official newspaper, most daily publications (and radio stations) do provide a space to voice dissent. Interestingly, such criticism often involves contrasting Malian politics, the “peanut democracy,” with a model of politics supposedly operative in “the West.” Consequently, most criticism is addressed at political *practices* and not at political *principles*. Furthermore, this article presents the “abandonment” of the ideas that “sustain political action” as a sacrifice that results from material constraints, not as a feature of party politics in Mali more generally.¹⁹ The betrayal of ideas for the sake of interests often appears in the Malian newspapers and personal conversations as a perversion of the democratic multi-party regime, as the distortion of a purer form of politics, which is assumed to be the natural starting point. According to this argument, the Malian reality is too precarious for normative principles to survive; “hunger” imposes itself and private commitments interfere with public ideals.

The absence of significant opposition and debate at the heart of the Malian National Assembly turns the institution into a sort of theater in the eyes of intellectuals and journalists. Another newspaper article titled “When the National Assembly dozes,” published on December 10th 2010 in the *InfoMatin*, provides a good example of the suspicion produced by the lack of correspondence between the ideal of the parliament and its Malian reality:

¹⁹ As I wrote this chapter, in March 2015, the Malian National Assembly approved a new code to regulate the activities of political parties and facilitate the existence of a “real opposition.”

[2.3] [French] Does parliamentary opposition have a *real* existence? Even if it exists, it, however, does not play more than a *figured role*, since it has not been able to properly play its role of catalyzer of the democratic debate. Nobody doubts the role of the *real* opposition in a democracy. What happens under our sky resembles a *comedy* [...] It is as if here, the fear of receiving the curses of the omnipotent executive power prevented us from fulfilling our role. [...] Maybe the representatives, or at least a large number of them in a large number of localities, *owe their posts to the generosity of the regime and not to the people*. *What follows, as we see, is the kingdom of the undivided thought installed in our country*. The independent president of the republic doesn't allow for the *existence* of any opposition either within his field or amongst the supposed opponents. For a *real* grounding of democracy in our country, everything has to be remade.

The Malian parliament is thus portrayed as a uniform, somnolent body that barely wakes up to ratify presidential initiatives and cash monthly checks and gasoline bonuses. The author talks about parliamentary activity as not *real*, he uses metaphors drawn from theater to describe it, such as “comedy” or “figured role.” The parliament cannot authenticate itself as “catalyzer of democratic debate;” for it to be authenticated it would have to present “a plurality of opinions,” and what we find instead is the “kingdom of the undivided thought,” the automatic repetition of the president’s unified voice. Importantly, the reason that the author gives for such state of affairs is that national representatives “owe their posts to the generosity of the regime and not to the people.” In other words, unanimity indicates a flaw in the mechanisms of political representation.

As the notion of representation came to be associated with that of democratic government in the West, it was operationalized into sets of rules and institutions, which historically have varied greatly depending on the specific understanding of representation at play (Pitkin, 1967). The question of what constitutes evidence of effective political representation can have many answers. A parliament can be considered representative because of the mode of selection of its

members, but also for what they say or how they say it,²⁰ to which social categories its members belong, how long they have occupied their positions, how accountable they are to their constituents, and so on. The particular understanding of representative democracy that became prominent towards the end of the twentieth century places great importance on pluralism as the ultimate sign of effective representation, both in party politics and publics more generally.²¹ Society is conceived as an assemblage of groups with conflicting opinions and interests, and thus the ideal democratic public is constituted by a multiplicity of dissonant voices. The institution of the parliament, to different degrees depending on the particular political tradition, is conceived as a sort of scale drawing of such a society.²²

John Adams, for instance, argued that a representative legislature “should be an exact portrait of the people at large, as it should feel, think, reason, and act like them” (“Letter to John Penn,” cited in Pitkin, 1952:60). To give an example drawn from the French tradition, Mirabeau stated that: “a representative body is for the nation what a map drawn to scale is for the physical configuration of its land” (cited in Pitkin, 1952:62). Although the understanding of political representation associated to the third wave democratization processes in the nineties was much more “procedural” than “descriptive,” it still retains some of the same conviction, insofar as it

²⁰ In *Democratic Eloquence: The Fight over Popular Speech in Nineteenth Century America*, Kenneth Cmiel traces the displacement of the older, neoclassical forms of public rhetoric and the construction of “popular” style that was better suited for a democratic nation.

²¹ One of the first theoretical moves in this direction is found in the courses that Raymond Aron imparted at the Sorbonne between 1955 and 1958—which have been published as a book under the title *Democracy and Totalitarianism*—he chose the number of parties as the central criterion for distinguishing between political systems: “Quant au critère de discrimination, je choisirai, par une décision qui se justifiera à la suite de l’analyse, la distinction entre partis multiples et parti unique” (Aron, p.74).

²² This type of argument is particularly prominent in the tradition of “descriptive representative” which is at the base of the argument for proportional electoral systems.

sees multi-party regimes as more representative by definition: pluralism authenticates political representation.

During the 2007-2012 Malian legislative term, concerns about political representation merged and became explicit around one controversial issue; unsurprisingly, it was the Family Code. The Malian Family Code—following the French tradition of Civil Law—is a compilation of more than a hundred articles regulating all aspects of personhood and kinship: from names and birth certificates, to marriage, domestic life, death and inheritance. Two years after independence, the Republic of Mali voted in a new Family Code to substitute and compile the legislation that the French colonial government had left in place. The Code approved by the National Assembly in 1962 was radical in many respects but it was only superficially enforced. Reforming the Family Code was part of the political agenda at least since the 1991 transition to democracy, but it was not until 2009 that the government sent a new version of the Code to the National Assembly.

Legislators discussed and enacted this new Family Code in 2009, even though it contained some highly controversial and arguably anti-Islamic points. For instance, it defined marriage as a civic act (which the 1962 had done too), it stated that children born outside marriage were entitled to inheritance rights, and it substituted the sentence “a wife owes obedience to her husband” by “the spouses owe each other respect.” Protests and demonstrations against the Code were so tumultuous that president Touré, using a constitutional prerogative that had never been exercised before, sent the law back to the Assembly for a “second reading.” This presidential concession to the High Islamic Council and its numerous followers left the members of the National Assembly in the awkward situation of having to revise a law they had just approved.

Even though the Code was a presidential initiative, legislators had to assume most of the political cost: they became the scapegoat of journalists and the general public for having voted a Code that contradicted the "religion and culture of Malians." By 2011 a new version of the Family Code, with significant concessions to the High Islamic Council in every controversial point—in particular, it retained the word “obedience” rather than “respect”—was again voted in almost unanimously by the National Assembly. That is, the same legislature approved almost consensually two very different versions of the same Code within two years.

The failure of political parties at the National Assembly to voice the strong opinions of the electorate, both against and for the Code, left the institution of political representation in a very precarious place: what is the role of political parties and representatives if the president is the ultimate interpreter of a unitary “will of the people”? Some national representatives were vocal opponents of the Code outside of the parliament, and yet gave their approving vote. Out of 147, there were 5 votes against and 4 abstentions, but I have only been able to locate one of the deputies who voted against. Was unanimity at the parliament related at all to how the issue had been debated or was it only the result of political discipline and party loyalty?

Through a series of coincidences that I can only apprehend as the doings of “archive demons,” I was able to obtain the integral transcription [Fr. *Procès Verbal* or *PV*] of the parliamentary debates on the Family Code from 1962 and 2009. I was not present at the parliamentary debate in 2009, but having attended many sessions in 2010 and 2011, I heard many of the same legislators speak and knew their party affiliations, which I hope helps ground my textual analysis of the discussions. I read these texts looking for indicators of how representatives understood and exercised their role as mediators between the government and the

electorate, as well as for evidence of the passage from a single-party regime to a multi-party one in the discussion itself. Even though the outcome of the debate was the consensual approval of the Code, many representatives expressed their dissent, and conflicting understandings of social organization were definitely at stake in the debate.

Family and Progress in 1962

The Family Code that the single-party government of socialist inspiration voted in unanimously in 1962 was radical in many respects. It defined marriage as a civil act, fixed a minimum age for marriage, limited the value of dowry to discourage what at the time was referred to as “marriage speculation,” banned divorce by repudiation, among other things.

The first legislature of the National Assembly was at the time composed of 52 [?] deputies, all of which were also members of the US-RDA party. The president of the National Assembly was Mahamane Allasane Haidara, a school teacher from the region of Timbuktu with a long parliamentary career. Before becoming president of the National Assembly of Mali, he had been elected as senator in the French Fourth Republic from 1948 to 1958 [Fr. *Conseil de la République*]. The day of the plenary debate, neither Modibo Keita, the president of Mali, nor Madeira Keita, the minister of the interior, were present. Jean Maria-Kone, the minister of Justice, was in charge of defending the proposed law in front of the National Assembly.

In 1962, Aoua Keita was the only female member of the National Assembly. She was a midwife trained in Dakar, and famously assisted a woman in labor while surveying the 1951 elections in the northern town of Gao. She was an engaged militant of various labor and women’s organizations and was the first woman to be elected to the National Political Bureau of the US-RDA in 1958. At the discussion of the Family Code in 1962, Aoua Keita was the first one

to speak once the parliamentary commissions had presented their reports and the floor was opened for individual speeches.

Aoua Keita began her speech with a reference to the international context in which Mali was trying to assert its new place. She said she was proud to notice in the international conferences she attended, that Mali was one of the few African nations where women enjoyed all political rights. She listed the “concrete realizations” that proved the commitment of the new regime to improve the situation of women: kindergardens, nurseries, family allowances funds [Fr. *Caisse d’allocations familiales*], and radio campaigns to educate women. These are all, she said, “the irrefutable proofs of your will to make of Malian women the equals of the women from progressive countries” (PV, 1962, 18). Aoua Keita spoke on behalf of *all* Malian women and thanked the government and the members of the Assembly for the new law:

[2.4] [French] All these deeds prove your deep understanding, and all the value that you assign to the emancipation of your *sisters*. *Malian women are delighted with all these positive achievements and ask you to believe in their sincere appreciation.* (P.V., 1962, p.18)

She presented herself as messenger by using indirect reported speech: “the women of Mali are delighted with these positive achievements and ask you to believe in their sincere appreciation.” She represented women and brought their words, they received the Family Code as a gift, and women thanked the government and the parliament for it. It is significant that she referred to the rest of women as “your sisters.” In *Afrique Occidentale Francaise* (AOF), the enfranchisement of mothers of two or more children became a law in 1951, five years before universal suffrage, in the last decade of colonial rule (Mann, 2015). Women entered the political

scene first as “mothers,” but here Aoua referred to them as “sisters,” which perhaps suggest a more egalitarian relationship.

Aoua Keita made an interesting comment enhancing her role as advocate of a larger coalition of female political organizations. She mentioned that the Women’s Executive Committee of Bamako—a female branch of the party—in coalition with other female organizations “had conducted a serious examination of the Code” submitted to the National Assembly and had agreed with all of its dispositions (PV, 1962, 18).

From her oration, it was clear that Aoua Keita, at least on this occasion, saw herself as a representative of women, whom she presented as a cohesive social group with unconditional and total support for the new Code. Conversely, the oration of most male representatives were more ambivalent; they sought to conciliate their support for the government and their concerns with the popular unrest that the new Code could trigger.

The transcription of the 1962 parliamentary debate includes the two Reports that were read. The first one seems to have been elaborated by the government to present the project to the National Assembly, and the second was elaborated by the Commission of Justice. Both frame the pursuit of gender equality as one of the obligations that the Republic of Mali, “now a sovereign State,” acquired by subscribing to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Even though both Reports celebrate “emancipation” and “social progress,” there are interesting differences among them.

The governmental Report is harsher in its condemnation of the “millenary traditions” that ruled marriage and family affairs in Mali. For example, in the second paragraph it states that “gender equality is the objective of a struggle—in the name of human dignity—between the

factors of progress against the deeply rooted force of millenary traditions based on male supremacy (PV, 1962, 3).” This adherence to the universal principle of gender equality is followed by a list of all the social ills caused by “the problem of marriage” in a “country where people are still ruled by a retrograde private law” (PV, 1962, 3). Of all the signs of “moral degradation” that the Report lists, dowry speculation is presented with the most urgency and gravity. The dowry, explains the report, has become the “price of a woman” rather than a proof of two families’ commitment; a list of dispositions to take against speculation follow and are presented as the main contribution of the new law.

Despite its confident reformist tone, the Report also conveys the government’s concern with the contradictions between the new law, and two other forms of authority, “African traditions” and Islam. To conciliate these three systems, the Report introduces the scientific notions of “evolution” and the “social development of populations”:

[2.5] [French] In order to attain these goals, the effort of *renewal* has to draw its inspiration from traditions, from Muslim law, and from Western law, because to evolve doesn’t necessarily mean to become Western or Eastern, it is above all to purify traditions, to clean them of all barbaric content, to harmonize them with the social development of populations (PV, 1962, 4).

This passage is striking for a contemporary reader because of its earnest belief in the universality of notions like “social development, “renewal,” “evolution.” It is also striking because it does not hesitate to call traditions “barbaric” or affirm that they should be “purified.” At the same time, the very formulation of the argument, the fact that the Government included such a “disclaimer” in the Report shows an awareness of the social resistance that the Code could engender. It is a preemptive reaction to the accusation of “Westernization.”

The Report elaborated by the Commission of Justice reveals an even greater concern with popular resistance against the new law. It begins by saying that the new Code “has aroused many hopes among certain social strata²³ [Fr. *couches*], and lots of apprehension among other” (PV, 1962, 13). The Report of the Commission takes pains to subscribe all the principles cited by the government—the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, progress, emancipation, gender equality, etc. However, it also requests from the government “a degree of flexibility in its application” (PV, 1962, 14). All along the debate, legislators struggled to conciliate their support of the governmental initiative with their worries about the social resistance the Code was engendering even before its adoption.

In 1962—as in 2009—legislators knew that the Family Code was a very delicate issue and one of the few parliamentary affairs significant to the “people on the street.” The initiative to regulate and modify marriage and inheritance must have triggered many comments and concerns among the people, as the speeches of some representatives at the parliament refer to such ongoing public conversation:

[2.6] [French]Never before has a bill prompted so many comments *in the cities as well as in the villages*. Never has a bill been examined with so much interest and detail by Malian *men and women*. Never has a bill been so well known by *the man on the street* before being voted by the National Assembly. We must admit that some of our fellow countrymen—who are concerned by current transformations and protective, perhaps rightly so, of the good old African mores, and are nostalgic of the good practices of their youth—some of our *elders*, I say, speak of this code with a lot of apprehension. *Youths and women* sigh and wonder with anxiety if some evil genie is not going to prevent or delay the adoption of this law, which is, in their eyes, the concretization of equality between *men and women*. (PV, 1962, p.20).

²³ The use of the term “strata” [Fr. *couches*] instead of “class” is not insignificant. Gregory Mann argues that US-RDA party members, in particular Madeira Keita and Seydou Badian, saw in the term “couches” an alternative to “class,” which was considered an inaccurate analytical tool to describe African, “classless” societies (Mann, 2015: 37).

The social categories that Kamaté lists appear recurrently in both 1962 and 2009 debates: urban and rural population, men and women, politicians or intellectuals and laypersons, and elders and youth. Kamaté strives to voice diverse opinions on the Family Code and even slips in an oblique critique of the government: some of our fellow countrymen are concerned, “and perhaps rightly so,” by current transformations. The list is interesting because it provides a “portrait” of the Malian society as the legislators perceived it. This portrait emphasizes differences and tensions among categories of people. Despite the official use of a rhetoric that extols the progress and evolution of the Nation as unity, legislators were highly aware of the underlying social conflicts. They did not talk about “class,” but they did bring to the parliament some evidence of social conflict: elders are apprehensive about the degradation of the good old African morals while women and youth look forward to the possibility of an equal relationship.

Government and legislators opted for a pedagogical approach to the issue. People had to be educated for this new Code; “barbaric” costumes and traditional practices had to be purified to meet international standards and, above all, the demands of a newly independent Nation. Deputies were asked to interpret the new law to the population and “awareness campaigns” were launched. *L'Essor*, the governmental newspaper, published an article on March 19th, 1962 featuring a long interview with Jean-Marie Kone, the minister of Justice. He explained the most significant aspects of the new Code and described it as the “codification of the traditions that have always regulated these issues in our country;” again we see a politician and public servant “modulating” the regime’s revolutionary efforts before the people (*L'Essor*, March 19th, 1962 p.12). Next to the article, a photograph shows a group of women sitting on mats attending an “awareness workshop.” There is a brief caption underneath the picture:

“Explanatory conferences have already begun and, as this picture shows, women attended massively to the Party’s call.”

The members of the National Assembly, however, also perceived the limits in the government’s capacity to enforce this Code. On repeated occasions during the debate, they asked the government to give the population some time to adopt these new practices that contradict “a millennium-old tradition.” They expressed their approval of the new law on principle but expected a good degree of tolerance on its application. Deputy Monzon Traore, who spoke after Aoua Keita, addressed the minister in the following terms:

[2.7] [French] That is why, Mister president, I share the commission’s hope that, during the first stage, the government will ask from its agents a lot of flexibility in the application of this law to prevent possible frictions. In my opinion, this law which we approve should be a source of progress, justice, and hopefully a source of social peace, not of troubles (PV, 1962, p.20).

Representatives’ request for tolerance makes evident the split between written law and practical reality. Their job consists precisely in bringing these two terms closer together, or rather, in negotiating the existence of an acceptable gap between the two. On the one hand, they advocate for the people by asking of the government a degree of tolerance in the application of the written law. On the other one, they represent the government in front of the people by voting in unpopular laws for the sake of a higher end or an adduced value.²⁴ The existence of an international authoritative discourse on progress and development, by which the government abides, liberated them from having to comply with “domestic public opinion.” In this case,

²⁴ This position of the representatives as “modulators” of governmental initiatives had very clear political motivations too; Modibo Keita’s regime was far from being strongly established and its revolutionary policies created social resistance. As Nicholas Hopkins points out “The success of such revolution depended on its success in rural Mali, and this in turn depended on the ability of the government to mobilize the people. Mali leaders recognized this, and emphasized the importance of participation of the entire population in this projects” (Hopkins, 1969: 457).

epistemic authority—that is, having access to a truth unavailable for the population— and the mandate to represent the people acted as opposite forces. Legislators know what is good for the development of the population better than the population itself.

One of the clearest examples of the representatives' mediation between governmental directives and social practices occurred when legislators debated which forms of identification would be allowed in civil marriage. Legislators managed to pass an amendment, against the government's opinion, allowing family certificates [Fr. *Carnet de famille*] to be as valid as birth certificates as personal identifications. This concession was passed in the name of the countryside: “Practically, in the bush, we only know family certificates as ID” (PV, 2nd part, p. 3).

To this day, when representatives in the National Assembly request governmental tolerance, they often formulate the petition in the name of peasants and villages—using the French expression *en brousse*, in the bush. As we see in the excerpt above, legislators do not contradict the new law on principle, they accept it and even celebrate it, but at the same time, they manage to voice conservative resistance, perhaps partly their own, by presenting it as consideration for people in "the bush." It is not exactly a “two-level negotiation”—which would imply that representatives negotiate simultaneously on two fronts and are accountable to their electoral districts for what they vote at the National Assembly. Rather, here representatives are able to ask the government for flexibility in the application of the law by animating a message but not committing to its truth content. In Goffman's terms, we would say that representatives are not only the “animators” of a message of which peasants are “authors,” which is what the definition of representation as “speaking on behalf” would imply. In this case, representatives are

both “animators” and “authors” of the message, and rather are making of peasants the ultimate “principal” or accountable unit for such “backward” arguments and practices.

In 1962, the most intense part of the parliamentary debate turned around article 35, which stated that in polygamous marriages every wife should be considered as a *separate* household. If one of the wives has a profession other than that of her husband she should contribute to the household expenses. However, a husband should not use the income of one of his wives to support the others. The debate around this article unfolded in two directions.

In the first part of the debate, the commission suggested an amendment to remove the word “separate” and leave “every wife should be considered a household.” The legislators’ argument was that the word “separate” would undermine family cohesion and the “traditional sense of conviviality between the wives.” The minister defended the government’s original phrasing by saying that: “What we need to eradicate in a Republic is that in certain regions, husbands place two or three women in the same room by giving them separate mats” (PV, 1962. 2nd Part, p. 10). The government sees as its duty to correct the most intimate aspects of citizens’ life to make them correspond to the expectation of a newly formed republic. However, the legislators vote in the amendment removing the word “separate” which constituted a small victory of the members of the National Assembly over the government.

The second part of the debate on article 35 concerned the status of working women in relationship to their husband and co-wives. The minister suggested that a salaried woman should not receive the same clothing allowance that every wife (to this day) is entitled to receive from her husband. Aoua Keita intervened twice to defend the right of salaried women to be treated equally, that is, to receive from her husband a clothing allowance as non-salaried women do. A

very peculiar interaction took place between Aoua Keita and the president of the National Assembly, Mahamane Haidara, in the context of this debate:

[2.8] [French] **MP Aoua Keita:** I considered necessary to underline my opinion because all representatives have spoken as men and not as representatives of the people.

President of the National Assembly: Ah! Ms. Aoua Keita, I ask you to take your words back!

MP Aoua Keita: I take them back [...] According to the minister, a woman who works doesn't need to be dressed by her husband. I find it odd that all women are not to be treated equally with respect to their clothing (P.V., 1962, 2nd part, p.15).

The accusation of speaking as men and not as representatives of the people was considered unacceptable. Political representation was asymmetric; whereas Aoua Keita meant to speak as woman and on behalf of women, male legislators have to represent the people as a whole, indicating a hierarchical relationship.²⁵ Hierarchy, in Dumont's classic sense, is defined as "the principle by which the elements of a whole are ranked in relation to the whole" and ordered by relations of "complementarity." Dumont opposes this holistic ideology to the Western, and democratic, ideology of individualism. In the context of democratic individualism, Dumont argues, hierarchy has become ungraspable if not as a "ladder of command" or a gradation of authority (Dumont, 1970:65-66). This modern understanding of hierarchy as a "ladder of command," proper of armies and bureaucracies, is the one that is often expressed with the metaphor of verticality.

²⁵ Lomnitz describes a similar case for 19th Century Latin America: "The idea of nation was originally tied to that of lineage; members of a nation could be linked by vertical ties of loyalty as much as by horizontal ties of equality. This is most obviously relevant when considering the way in which age and sex enter the picture of national identity. Women and children could and can very much identify with their nations even though usually they are not their nation's representative subjects (Lomnitz, 2001: 335).

The argument between the minister and Aoua Keita presupposed a hierarchical relation between men and women, understood as two asymmetrical parts of a whole, and it addressed the formation of a “vertical” relation between salaried and non-salaried women. The minister argued that a woman who receives a salary needs to dress differently, whereas Keita claimed that all women of the same man need to be treated equally. In other words, she proposed to prevent the class distinction between salaried and non-salaried women from entering the domestic space. The situation was particularly ambiguous because here the establishment of a “vertical” class distinction—salaried women versus non-salaried ones—entails the loss of a right: being dressed by one’s husband, as opposed to the acquisition of a privilege.

More than ten representatives participated in the discussion concerning polygamous marriages. Kansaye’s oration is worth transcribing here because it reiterated an ideology of unity and consensus that the discussion had shaken:

[2.9] [French] I, like the government, hope that all Malian women shall become one, and that we all become one and one for all. We have to be in agreement to find a solution to our daily sufferings. Elsewhere as well as in this Assembly, in Mali women cannot go without their husbands’ help. *Don’t laugh*, I only wish that you consider certain images with me. You all wish for a Mali that is coherent and resistant to all flows, through time and space. A husband is the *main component* of both monogamous and polygamous families. With good understanding, we will have coherent families (1962, p. 13, 2nd part).

Unity is not egalitarian, but hierarchical. In 1962, legislators did not have much space to maneuver, they could have rejected certain amendments or suggested new ones, but not much more than that. The debate, however, exceeds the limits of the textual commentary on the proposed amendments, it exceeds the goal of adopting new laws. Even though it had few consequences, the debate in the parliament was profound and intense. Judging by their orations,

participants seemed invested in this collective exercise of bringing governmental reformist interventions and social conservatism rhetorically closer.

Family and Culture in 2009

In 2009 it was precisely the government's incapacity to impose a law "contradicting social uses and customs" that became evident. The question of to what extent this incapacity was due to multi-party democracy remains open. Social rejection of the new Family Law was not channeled or orchestrated by parties, which for many people demonstrated the superfluous character of the National Assembly as an institution of political representation.

The text of the new Family Code submitted to the National Assembly in 2009 had a long history and was the result of a long series of discussions incorporating different social groups. According to president Touré himself, the need to reform the Code voted in 1962 was first expressed as early as 1986, but it was not until 1996, after the transition to multi-party democracy, that the project was reconsidered. A "team of experts" including representatives of relevant associations, notably the AMUPI (Malian Association for the Unity and Progress of Islam) and the CAFO (Coordination of Women's Associations of Mali), was established.

Regional conferences and workshops took place in Selingue, Segou and Mopti, which led to a concluding national consultation held in Bamako in September 2001. When Touré became president in 2002, he put in place new committees to revise the bill attending the demands of the High Islamic Council (Fr. *Haut conseil islamique*) which claimed to have been excluded from the elaboration process. After this unusually long process of consultation and revision, the text was submitted to the National Assembly in the summer of 2009, close to fifteen years after the initial consideration of the project.

On August 3rd 2009, the bill was discussed and approved by the National Assembly with 117 votes for, 5 votes against, and 4 abstentions. A number of demonstrations organized by the High Islamic Council and other associations followed; on August 22nd, 2009, around 50,000 people attended a massive meeting at the *26 Mars* Stadium. On August 26th a delegation formed by the most prominent religious figures, leaded by Mahmoud Dicko president of the High Islamic Council, visited the presidential palace. That same day, president Touré replied that the controversial Code would be sent back to the National Assembly for a second reading and asked the religious leaders “to stop pronouncing maledictions and emitting *fatwas*,” remove the religious sanctions against legislators, and “promote peace and national unity.” It took another two years for the National Assembly to write and approve another version of the Family Code, which accepted most of the requests of the Islamic associations and removed all controversial points.

The members of the National Assembly who approved the Family Code in 2009 and in 2011 were elected in 2007, on the fourth legislative election since the 1991 transition to multi-party democracy. The Alliance for Democracy in Mali (ADEMA) had the largest representation with 35% of the seats, and the Union for the Republic and Democracy (URD)—which split from ADEMA in 2007—was the second largest party at the Assembly with 20% of the seats. No single party had an absolute majority, but the president of the National Assembly was the mathematician Dioncounda Traore, also president of the ADEMA, the party with the largest representation in the Assembly. Every time a new prime minister takes office, he or she forms a new government. A party belongs to the government if it agrees to place at least one of its members in a ministerial post, and it is considered opposition if it has no members in the

government. In 2007, only two parties—PARENA and SADI—out of the sixteen with representation at the National Assembly were opposition; all other groups had at least one member in the government.

Let us look closely at how the parliamentary discussion of the Family Code unfolded in 2009 with this new party system in place. The commission in charge of elaborating and presenting the main report was the Constitutional Laws Commission, which had Ms. Camara Saoudatou Dambele of the MPR party as its president. Thus the first person to speak happened again to be a woman, this time in a parliament in which ten percent of female members. Ms. Camara, who began by recalling the memory of Aoua Keita, “whose book is always by my side,” said:

[2.10] [French] You all understand how moving it is for me to take this microphone and introduce such a sensitive issue. Any imperative mandate is null, I agree, but how could I not speak today *as a woman*? This bill is the epilogue of a long battle and the beginning of a new era. [...] Having said that, Honorable colleagues, the Family Code is not a *code for the promotion of women; the code is not a law that will consecrate the victory of women over men*. Far from it. This code is the consecration of the political will to give families the necessary juridical foundations to establish *cohesion* in our society. (PV, 2009, p. 2).

The question about the grounds of political representation was present from the very outset. Ms. Camara laid out a dilemma: imperative mandate is null, but she cannot help speaking as woman. “Imperative mandate” is a legal term that describes a relationship of representation in which the representative is bound to act according to the concretely transmitted preferences of the electors, and has no independence. The “mandate versus independence” controversy is central to modern debates on political representation; nevertheless as an institution, “imperative

mandate has been rarely applied and it was proscribed in France since the 1789 National Assembly (Pitkin, 1967).

In this case, however, there is a conflation, claiming that speaking “as woman” is tantamount to using an imperative mandate implies that her electorate is composed exclusively by women, or that she was elected because she is a woman, which, as far as we know, was not the case. Speaking as a woman would depend on a different version of representation that is not mediated by the vote but by common belonging to a social category, it would be “descriptive representation” as some analysts have called it. What this conflation seems to be pointing at, in any case, is a tension between her belonging to a particular category, women, and her duty to represent an unmarked whole, the people or the nation. After making explicit this dilemma, she leaned towards the second option, and consequently, but somehow contradicting her first statement about what the Code means for women, she described the new Code not as women’s victory but as an attempt to promote the “cohesion” of Malian *families*.

Whereas Aoua Keita in 1962 openly spoke on behalf of all Malian women, which her mere belonging to such a category allowed her to represent, and thanked the government for the new law, Ms. Camara does not dare to speak as a woman, evokes the danger of gender antagonism and then strives to keep it at bay. She is not the only one. We recurrently find in the 2009 debate warnings against interpreting the Code as the *victory* of one category over another one, as well as the exhortation to read it as a consensual step for the improvement for all Malians. Yaya Sangaré—a member of the ADEMA majority—spoke in the same sense:

[2.11] [French] So ladies and gentlemen, honorable deputies, these reforms, of which we have listed the most important ones, should not be perceived *as a victory of one group over the other*. I notice that *many women* attended the Assembly today. If this code is approved today, it should not be *understood by them as a victory of women over men*. It is not so, I

think, but rather it is an achievement for the benefit of *all Malians*. If we understand it in such way, no single part of society will feel excluded. *As representatives of the people, I believe that we should not legislate in favor of this or that category, en favor of this or that part of the population, of this or that religion, rather we should legislate consciously and knowingly for the whole of the Malian people* (P.V. 2009, Yaya Sangare, p.41).

It is common for politicians all over the world to claim that they govern and legislate in the name of and for the wellbeing of a totality—although there are also cases in which representatives have explicitly claimed to defend particular categories and interests. What is interesting in the case at hand is that when Ms. Camara and Yaya Sangaré talk about “the victory of one group over the other” they are not referring to the victory of one political party versus another, not even to the victory of the governmental side versus the opposition. They are talking about the victory of women over men. Here, gender appears as a much more relevant classifying criterion than political affiliation. Political representation is more easily guaranteed by common belonging to a gender category, than through partisan membership.

Ms. Camara, for instance, belongs to the MPR party, which was formed by old members of the Moussa Traore administration reclaiming the political legacy of the dictator. Amadou Toumani Touré, president in 2009 when the Code was discussed, was the young captain that led to military coup in 1991 to remove Moussa Traore from power and call for national elections. In other circumstances, such political genealogy would be enough to difficult cooperation between party and government at the parliament or would prompt “symbolic” actions of rejection in the name of the party’s identity. In this case, however, party affiliation is not even traceable from the debate.

Not only is the language of party competition not deployed at all, but the possibility for the new law to be seen as the result of a struggle of interests between two opposed sectors of the population—men and women—is evoked only to be quickly dismissed. Implying that this law could be interpreted as a “victory of women” already presupposes a subtle transformation in gender relations, because competition is closer to the logic of equivalence and equality, than to that of hierarchy and complementarity in the traditional sense. Competition and “victory” presuppose a degree of equality.

The exhortation of Younoussi Toure—president of the URD and at the time vice-president of the National Assembly—indicated a rejection of competition and antagonism. His oration restored a hierarchical logic by reminding the audience that women and children are the most vulnerable members of society and therefore deserve to be protected:

[2.12] [French] [...] This project seems to be a clear improvement in the process of taking into account the fundamental preoccupations of *Malian men and women* in terms of freedom, in terms of human relationships, and simply in terms of taking into account the conditions of the *most deprived social strata*[*Fr. couches*], *those of women and children*. (P.V. 2009, p.47).

Laying out the question in this fashion eliminates the problem of competition or “victory” of one element against the other. In 2009, the use of the term “social strata” was still more prevalent than that of “class,” which does not figure in the parliamentary debate. Women and youth, as categories, occupy a peculiar place in Malian political vocabulary, one that resonates with that of classes or professional corporations in other countries. Every political party in Mali has Youth and Women Sections, as parallel and subordinate structures.

Deputy Lamine Mare, one of the members of the majority party (ADEMA), elected in the town of San, was one of the few to criticize the Code openly. He did not say that he would not

vote for the bill, but the tone of his speech was notoriously contentious, especially for someone in the governmental alliance. He addressed the point that prompted the most debate on the streets, which is precisely about hierarchy: does a woman owe obedience to her husband? He said:

[2.13] [French] Now, talking about I don't know which article which says that women don't owe obedience to their husbands anymore, but that we owe each other faithfulness and respect and so on. I will confess that I have two wives, and I would be interested in a third one. But now I'm afraid that in the future I may become single again because if one of my wives does not respect me, she is leaving my house. That much is clear. She must obey me in my house. I will ask women to be proud, because given that now it's all about equity and equality and so on, everything now favors women. And the dowry, now, is it men who are going to pay it? No. I'm asking women to be proud: women will have to begin to pay the dowry now. Or we can pay each other the dowry. Come on! (P.V., 2009, p. 38).

Instead of discrediting his intervention, the casual tone of his speech—forgetting the number of the article to which he is referring and misquoting it, for instance—might have had the effect of granting his speech the authenticity that technical political speech arguably lacks. He abandoned the position of the neutral legislator looking after a totality and spoke *as a man* in a domestic situation familiar to many other members of the National Assembly: “I have two wives and would like a third one, but with the new dispositions I might end up single because if one of my wives doesn't obey me, she is leaving my house.” He used irony to appeal to the common sense of male and female legislators and pushed gender equality to its absurd conclusion: if we are equal now, then women should pay the dowry too.

The interventions of these three representatives pointed, from different perspectives, to a similar question: how to prevent the establishment of a relationship of competition between men and women? Yaya Sangaré warned against the possibility of the Code being interpreted as a

“victory” of one side. Younoussi Touré attempted to restore the idea that women and children require protection, which is hierarchical. Lamine Mare suggested that if equality is going to be the new paradigm, then the dowry—the emblematic price of male supremacy— should also be carried evenly by the spouses. None of these representatives threatened to vote against the bill. The first two, Younoussi Touré and Yaya Sangaré, were more concerned with promoting an interpretation of the Code in which the relationship between men and women would not portrayed as antagonistic. In the same way, they seem to have prioritized the preservation of unity and consensus inside the National Assembly, by approving the new law despite their personal doubts.

It is remarkable that not even Mountaga Tall, a distinguished lawyer who had advocated for the legalization of religious marriage since 1994 and became one of the leaders of the opposition against the new Family Code, voted against the bill at the Assembly in 2009. He justified himself in front of the press by saying that voting for the Code had been his personal choice and that he was sure that sooner or later the Code would come back to the Assembly for revision **[ref]** Even the four representatives of the RPM, which at the time was still a party on the opposition, opted for abstentions and their leader, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, simply did not attend the parliament that day.

There were, however, four votes against the code—of which I have only been able to attribute one, that of Gossi Dramera, from Bafoulabé. Interestingly, he is a member of the URD, a party well established on the government’s side during Touré’s presidency, and one of the oldest representatives. He said:

[2.14][French] We cannot escape from the wind coming from the North; it won’t leave us. But that won’t prevent me from saying what I think. [...] Aren’t we today in Mali uprooting

all of our history to take that of Europeans or the West instead? [...] I don't speak only as a Muslim. Of course, I have chosen to be a Muslim, but I am speaking now *as a Malian from the countryside*. I am a Malian from the countryside. Eighty percent of Malians...because *you, the intellectuals that are here present, you are the 20% or even the 10% of the population*. [...] I know this Code will be passed today, that is sure. But, excuse me, I am not going to vote for it, that much I can tell you. (P.V., 2009, p.49).

Dramera's statement is unique because it lays out an irreducible difference: "you the intellectuals" versus "us the Malians of the countryside," and chooses to speak as a member of the second category. Other representatives, as we saw, attempted to restore unity and consensus in different ways, but Dramera recurred to the antagonistic logic of majority versus minority—which is to this day quite rare in Malian deliberative spaces. At the parliament, he finds himself as part of the tiny minority that will vote against the Code, however, he trusts that his speech represents the stance of "the majority," not because his is a member of the second largest party at the parliament, but because he, unlike "the intellectuals," *belongs* to that authentic Malian rural majority. Dramera's statement contained an oblique accusation undermining the legitimacy of the National Assembly: legislators belong to an urban, French-speaking minority that has lost its connection with the roots of the Malian nation under the influence of the West. On what grounds can they represent the people?

The accusation that the representatives betrayed the people by contradicting "cultural" and religious norms was recurrently stated in the newspapers and public discussions around the Code. A newspaper article titled "When the National Assembly dozes," for instance, stated: "It is because of their unawareness of the public opinion, that they [legislators] did not perceive the big threat that this bill involved." However, on repeated occasions during the debate representatives expressed their concern about the possible reactions of the population.

One of the most explicit concerns with public opinion came from a member of the ADEMA, elected in the northern district of Menaka, in the region of Gao. Deputy Bajan Ag Hamatou is a good example of the political continuity linking the “pre” and “post” transition to democracy periods. He has been elected representative at the National Assembly six times, he was elected for the first time in 1981 as a member of the UDPM, the single party created by Moussa Traore, and has been reelected ever since, as a member of the ADEMA since 1991. Interestingly, he was one of the few legislators who laid the dilemma about voting for this bill as a conflict between at least three forces, party loyalty, the respect of the will of the majority, and religious duties:

[2.15] [French] However, Mister President, let me come back to the same question: have we assessed the reaction of the population regarding this bill? [...] Because what we have found everywhere is that *the majority of Malians* are asking us not to pass this bill, even if we are going to pass it. [...] I was saying that I’m going to vote this law initiative because *it’s my country, it’s my party*, even if I will have to ask *GOD* to forgive me. [Laughter in the hall] I will have to pray every day and ask *GOD* to forgive me. This project, President, everyone knows, in many respects contradicts *the Muslim religion and our culture*, thus it is problematic for *all Malians*. [...] I know that somehow there is pressure from *women* to vote this law [...] But is it the *majority of Malian women* that want to vote this law? Because to my knowledge, *Malian women* have the *same culture* as *Malian men*. (PV, 2009, p.44) [My emphases].

His statement oscillated between pluralist competition (majorities versus minorities) and unitary notions such as “the Malian culture” and “the Muslim religion.” He first stated that women could be the “pressure group” behind this Code, then he reduced their numerical importance by saying that it is only some women who support this Code. Finally Ag Hamatou abandoned that logic of competition altogether and restituted national unity by saying that all Malian, men and women, share the same culture.

Bajan Ag Hamatou's oration laid out with frankness the moral dilemma that legislators confronted, the religious predicament might not have been strong enough for him to refuse voting the Code, but it was one of his concerns. What prompted laughter in the hall? Was it a secular laughter triggered by the exaggeration of his religious predicament? Was it prompted by his suggestion that he would have to “fix” his transgression by praying more? I do not know.

Bajan Ag Hamatou listed "his party" and "his country" as the reasons justifying the transgression of a religious norm, but how exactly was party discipline enforced? Representatives siding with the government at the moment of voting seemed to have acted more out of respect for an implicit norm to vote unanimously than as a result of party coercion. However, such a hypothesis cannot be proved.

Journalists and local commentators assumed that the pressure to approve the law had come from “international funders,” implying that legislators were more concerned with assuring the flux of international aid than respecting the will of the Malian people. Conversely, president Touré's subsequent decision to yield to popular pressure and to the requests of the High Islamic Council restituted a sense of organic unity between the sovereign and the people. One that does not require the mediation of representatives.

As some analysts have pointed out, the erratic and contradictory trajectory of the Family Code in contemporary Mali is a good example of how democratic institutions have had the "unintended" effect of strengthening religious pressure groups. Leonardo A. Villalón, for instance, writes:

To the surprise of the political class of reform-minded francophone intellectuals who led the movements in favor of democratization, the transitions in Mali and Niger very quickly empowered religious groups to pursue their agenda in the political sphere. As these groups realized the potential benefits of their demographic advantage in electoral

contests, the power of popular opinion forced political actors to align themselves more with popular (religious) sentiment and away from the secular values of the francophone promoters of democracy (Villalón, 2013: 249).

Contrasting the parliamentary debates on the Family Code from 1962 and 2009, however, suggests something slightly different. The influence of such religious pressure groups was not channeled through political parties and thus is not a direct result of the transition from a single-party to a multi-party regime. The expression of dissent at the parliament did not come from the opposition but from members of the parties with the largest presentation, ADEMA and URD.

If it were true, as Villalón affirms, that “the power of popular opinion forced political actors to align themselves more with popular (religious) sentiment,” the Code would not have been voted in unanimously in 2009. Representatives voted the Code not only against what they knew was the prevalent sentiment but in some cases against their own religious convictions. Moreover, it is not clear that the multi-party, electorally competitive context of 2009 produced a greater interest in public opinion among Malian politicians. Representatives in 2009 did not refer to “public opinion” more than those of 1962 did. The only clear difference is that those of 2009 backed their arguments with loose numerical estimations of “majorities” and “minorities.” It can hardly be said that “public opinion,” as systematic statistical exegesis of public preferences, exists in Malian contemporary politics. To interpret what the popular sentiment about the Code was, representatives did not resort to statistics, on the contrary, they derived such “public opinion” from unitary notions such as the “culture and religion of Malians.”

Nevertheless, the link between electoral democracy and the empowerment of religious groups that Villalón indicates remains plausible. What is less clear is the exact mechanism of the

link. In Mali, religious pressure groups did not use political parties as conduits, but they did occupy the “democratic public sphere.” Let me suggest a hypothesis.

Democracy is not exclusively as series of institutions of political representation—elections, multi-party systems, and freedom of speech. It is also the slow denaturalization of social hierarchies and the acceptance of egalitarian, universal citizenship. Democracy is not only a “negative” process in which the mere removal of obstacles allows previously repressed religious and cultural sentiments to emerge into the public. Democracy is also a positive process that generates a new need for ideologies of cohesion and unity of different kinds. It is after the *de facto* dissolution of a hierarchical social order that “religion” and “culture” acquire greater ideological power.

In 1962, legislators spoke about the opposition between “progress,” as defined at the time by transnational discourses with socialist inflections, and the everyday life of Malian peasants. They asserted the need to “purify” barbaric customs, but asked the government for flexibility in the application of the law. Their capacity to represent the Malian people was not dependent on identity or cultural authenticity.

Conversely, in 2009, it was precisely the legislators’ alleged proximity to the “Western” understanding of society and politics, the fact of being “intellectuals,” that discredited them as valid representatives. The slow participative process of elaboration of the proposed Family Code and of its approval by a parliament composed of sixteen political parties did not suffice to authenticate it as a product of the “the Malian people,” because its content was marked by “foreignness.” There is perhaps a link between the decline of the ideology of hierarchy—in which cohesion is achieved by assigning a ranked place to each component within a whole—and

the intensification of cultural authenticity as a unifying criteria and the basis of political legitimacy.

The parliamentary discussion about the organization of the family mirrored arguments and concerns about political representation. Cohesion and unity were presented as the highest values. The threat of competition, division, and conflict was in the horizon of most speeches, and it pertained to both the domestic and the political realms. Ms. Camara hesitated between speaking “as a woman” and proclaiming social cohesion. Yaya Sangaré observed that whereas he could see that “many women attended the Assembly today,” representatives should not legislate “in the favor of one category.” Lamine Mare joked about rather being “single” than allow his women to disobey him. Bajan Ag Hamatou stated that Malian men and women are all united by the same culture and religion. There were many other examples during these debates that pointed at the need to represent a cohesive totality.

The struggle to preserve unity and cohesion in a political regime defined by competition is not exclusive to Mali. In 1957, Raymond Aron stated that the central conundrum of all Western regimes, by which he meant multi-party democracies, was: “how to conciliate national unity [*entente*] and permanent contestation?” (Aron, 1965: 78). Malian representatives were accused of passivity and inability to perform the role of “opposition.” Judging by those accusations, one would draw a picture of the Malian democracy as an inert apparatus. In the next chapter, we will examine the dynamics of political conflict in one county. When Claude Lefort defined democracy as “the institutionalization of conflict,” he could have been talking about Kita.

Chapter 3. Conflict

Kita is a railroad town, an important stop on the route that connected Bamako to Kayes in 1904 and Kayes to Dakar in 1924. As the administrative center of a region dominated by the production of peanuts and cotton, Kita has been linked to the global economy for many decades.²⁶ However, the town retains a very strong sense of locality; Kitans treasure the secrets of their venerated mountain and cultivate an aristocratic pride derived from having been one of the centers of the Great Mande Empire. This provincial town has also a longstanding reputation for being a capital of politics and intrigue. Rivalry between the four original families, frequent riots against central state offices, factionalism, strikes at the local high school, and competitive elections confirm this reputation.

The town of Kita (approximately 50,000 inhabitants) is also the administrative center of the *cercle* of the same name, which comprises thirty-three rural communes and hundreds of villages. Kitan political elites have to negotiate with the leaderships of the rural communes under Kita's administrative control, on the one hand, and with the capital elites on the other. Kitan politicians brag about their firsthand knowledge of both the villages and the capital, but a good degree of mistrust characterizes their relationship with both fronts, as well as with rival factions in the town of Kita. In Kitan political meetings, messages and information coming from the villages converge with those coming from Bamako. Messages and information, however, do not flow smoothly through these personal networks. There are "gates," "closed circuits," "leakages,"

²⁶ To give an example, in 1925-1926, Kita produced 87 tons of cotton, of which 14 tons, 18%, were consumed locally, and 73 exported via Kayes and Dakar to France. The percentage on local consumption is one of the lowest; in the same year, Segou consumed 50% of the cotton that it produced and Bafoulable 57% (Roberts, 1996: 207).

distortions, and especially rivalry and mistrust, that is, generalized doubts about the truth content of most statements and about speakers' intentions.

Nicholas S. Hopkins spent 1961 and 1964-1965 in Kita writing an ethnography of local politics under the recently established socialist regime of Modibo Keita and the US-RDA party. Besides being a highly acute and rigorous analysis of local politics, the book that Hopkins wrote, *Popular Government in an African Town*, is an invaluable historical document. The sets of relations and practices that he described—such as the organization of the party, the dynamics of factions, the way of running meetings, the modalities of intrigue and agreement, the relationship with the central state and the elites from Bamako, the profile of the leaders, among many other—fascinated me because of their similarity to what I found fifty years later, between 2009 and 2012.

Let me advance one, particularly striking example of these “coincidences.” In this chapter, I will examine the conflict between three factions within one of the largest parties in Kita; the leader of one of the factions is Sissoko, an ambitious young politician who operates a network of regional trade of salt and cereal across West Africa; the leader of one of the other factions is Keita, a reticent politician with a notorious vocation for town intrigue, and more importantly, a member of the family that has traditionally held the chieftainship of Kita, the Keita. In 1964, Nicholas S. Hopkins traced the history of two factions formed within the RDA around 1959, after the elimination of the “Canton Chief” post and the RDA’s electoral victory over the PSP in the last years of the colonial period. One of the factions was led by Moussa Keita—a member of the branch of the Keita family that had lost the chieftainship in 1942 in favor of Fatogoma Keita—and the other faction was led by Moriké Sissoko, a regional peanut trader (Hopkins,

1972:124). Given the importance that family names [Bam. *jamuw*] have in Malian social organization, this recurrence can hardly be understood as a coincidence; however, it also should not prevent us from examining the deep transformations that have taken place behind continuity.

Hopkins himself was interested in change, but he saw that despite the transformation of the formal organization of politics—which were significant between the fifties and sixties—there was a parallel stream of local politics. This was centered on prestige and expressed through the rivalry of local factions and, as Hopkins wrote, had its own *rhythm*. The party and state institutions, writes Hopkins, “provided the posts that gave or confirmed prestige,” and so they somehow enabled and shaped that other stream of local politics, in which the ruptures between the late colonial and independent regime of Modibo Keita and the RDA were less evident (Hopkins, 1972, 115). Hopkins traced the history of local political rivalry from 1939 to 1966 and identified four phases. In the first one, conflict emerged over the election of the last “canton chief” in 1942; the second one was structured by the opposition between two parties, the PSP and the USRDA; and after the defeat and elimination of the PSP, he recorded two phases marked by two consecutive sets of binary factions within the USRDA. According to Hopkins, “the dualistic system of opposing factions was always maintained,” as he claims that it was only when the PSP was eliminated that the local USRDA split. The main political issue all along, he writes, “was the question of the degree of influence non-locals should have in Kita’s politics” (Hopkins, 1972: 140). Later on, Hopkins suggests that this “binary opposition” was an interpretative habit of Kitans themselves, who would always see two factions in what looked more like a proliferation of cliques. In any case, two of his observations seem still valid: first, the splitting of parties into

factions, and factions into cliques results from their success, and second, the influence of non-locals in Kitan politics is a central political issue.

One of the core arguments of Hopkins' book is that despite its organic links to the capital and the rural communes, most political action in Kita took place in an *arena* that coincided with the town's social network and its geographical delimitation, which in turn subordinated such action to the control of the town's "public opinion." Hopkins writes: "...one of the strengths of the town as a social unit was that it so frequently formed an arena within which forces worked towards the resolution of the crises that arose" (Hopkins, 1972:157).

Rivalry, factions, and intrigue were "endemic to Kita," but for Hopkins these were also part of a larger, homeostatic process, that secured not only the cohesion of the town, but a relative degree of what he called "self-government" and popular participation.²⁷ That is, the existence of such "arena" allowed Kitans to resist, *de facto* although not in principle, unpopular initiatives of the central government, and it also guaranteed the accountability of the faction leaders insofar as their leadership required local popular support which was not easy to obtain. The process Hopkins describes is a positive feedback loop, in the sense that competition between the factions exercised *within* Kita helped reaffirm the boundaries of the social unit that it presupposed, and translated into relative local autonomy and popular accountability. In this regard, Hopkins analysis partakes of a long-standing analytical tradition that has seen social conflict as a "productive" force (Simmel, 1971).

²⁷ "In a sense the system of competitive political relations defined the limits of Kita's social system, which for all practical purposes corresponded on the ground to the town of Kita. Neither the nearby villages nor the outlying parts of the circle were included, and citizenship in the town was tantamount to participation in the competition for prestige in the arena. People within the system measured their prestige against one another, and those outside the system, whether they were from rural areas or from the capital, were essentially personal allies of the faction leaders in Kita" (Hopkins, 1972:116).

Without the background of such a carefully crafted and historically grounded ethnography, *Popular Government in an African Town*, it would have been easy for me to perceive the political conflicts that I found as new or at least as particularly critical, and attribute them to the institutional framework and normative principles of electoral, multiparty democracy. This would have been particularly tempting since that is a common interpretation among certain local actors themselves who talk about conflict and division as a novelty related to a broader and recent process of social decline.

In this chapter, I will look closely at a meeting of the largest party in Kita as an entry point to examine the ways in which political rivalry and conflict figure in Kitan politics today. My analysis will be punctuated by references to Hopkins' book in an attempt to discern new and old patterns of political organization, but also the diverging conclusions that different analytical perspectives may induce.

I describe two significant transformations partly induced by multiparty, electoral democracy and decentralization. The first one is the dissolution of that Kitan political arena to which Hopkins attributed so much importance. Contemporary Kitan politics are not contained in "the polis," if they ever were, and barely any local political institution has the capacity to "stand for the whole" or to instantiate the town as a unit. Kitan party politics are merging with those of the recently created rural communes, as they both remain economically dependent on Bamako.

The second transformation has to do with the forms of exchange between the Kitan elites and the rural *communes*; electoral competition fosters campaign expenditure, and it does so in limited, predictable, and cyclical ways, which in turn shape social relations. Hopkins talked about intrigue in rather benign ways; reading his ethnography, one does not get the same sense of

overall suspicion and mendacity accusations that I found, but that might be only because meetings were my entry point. Spatially, what I will describe would look as if one big node pulling towards its jurisdiction numerous channels of information and resources had exploded into dozens of smaller nodes forming a fractal pattern in which each part both participates in the regional factions and contains in itself the seed of a similar conflict.

The arena

The current organizational chart of most political parties in Mali has the same basic form that the US-RDA had in the sixties. Parties are composed of four types of units, which are, going from the top down: National Headquarters or CE [Fr. *Comité Exécutive*], Sections, Subsections and Committees. I have not been able to locate the exact origin of this organizational structure, which looks like a hybrid of socialist and communist party structures.²⁸ In France, “sections” usually correspond to the administrative level of the *commune*, whereas in Mali they correspond to the *cercle*. Furthermore, in the French Socialist Party, “sections” were not further divided into smaller units, or when they were these were not called “comités.” Interestingly the decision of the French Socialist Party to keep the “Sections” as the smallest, most direct unit “was a reaction provoked by the disputes between small groups which had weakened the earlier socialist parties” (Duverger, 1954:24). In any case, what we know is that in Kita the establishment of ward *comités*, under an already existing “Section” of the USRDA, took place around 1960 and

²⁸ “Sections” or branches were one of the most revolutionary inventions of Socialist parties, because contrary to the organization in “caucuses,” “sections” imply a stronger coordination between the parts of a whole, permanent mobilization, and mass adherence. Additionally, the Malian division of *Sections* into *comités*, especially in the sixties when adherence to the party was mandatory and universal, recalls the “cell,” which was an invention of the soviet communist party, even though “cells” were typically rooted in the workplace (Duverger, 1954: 24).

was the result of a series of petitions to the national party by a faction seeking “to gain control over the political bureau [BPL] by outflanking the group in power” (Hopkins, 1972:127).

With some exceptions, the large majority of the parties registered in Mali today maintain this basic organizational structure.²⁹ However, the administrative division of the country changed significantly with the decentralization reforms of the nineties, and thus similar nomenclature conceals significant differences. Party structures map on to administrative divisions, party committees correspond to villages in rural areas and wards in urban ones; party sub-sections correspond to urban and rural *communes*; sections correspond to the *cercles*, and the CE in Bamako corresponds to the Nation. The decentralization reforms of the nineties gave the status of rural communes to hundreds of villages in the country.

Each one of the thirty-three rural communes in the *cercle* of Kita elects a mayor and a communal council; consequently party *comités* in those communes are directly engaged in electoral competition. The budget and national weight of the Kita Section depends not only on the numbers of posts it wins in the town of Kita, but on the number of posts it wins on the entire *cercle*, which means that the Kitan political elite has an incentive to contribute to the electoral campaigns in the *communes*. Moreover, representatives at the National Assembly are elected by the entire *cercle*, so no local politician can aspire to become a deputy without campaigning in the rural areas. If, as Hopkins claimed, it still holds true that posts—whether in the party or in the local representative organs—are the target around which factions form, then it is at least plausible that the more posts there are, the more factions and intrigue there will be.

²⁹ The only two parties that to my knowledge have a different structures are Yelema and SADI. Yelema, for instance, was the first part to eliminate the Youth and Women Sections as separate structures, so that all party members participate and compete in the same hierarchy.

According to Hopkins, in 1964 not only the members of the *bureau* (BPL) of the Kita Section of the US-RDA were all residents of Kita town, but members of the villages or wards party committees, once these were established, were rarely allowed into the meetings of the Section's BPL, which "preferred to keep its deliberations secret" (Hopkins, 1972: 84). Conversely, nowadays, it is very common for party members to militate at various levels *simultaneously*; members of the wards and sometimes even village committees not only attend meetings of the Kita Section but more often than not, they occupy posts in the *bureau* of both the committee and the Section at the same time. The most influential members at one level tend to be the ones who have privileged access to both the immediate upper and lower levels, or at least to one of the two; this allows them to convey information "top down" and mobilize popular support "bottom up."

Moving between administrative levels entails switching between languages and rhetorical styles. In the case of the *cercle* of Kita, this transition is from Malinke, at the village level, to Bambara, at the *cercle* level, to French, at the National level. Moving between the villages committees and the Kita *Section* also implies a significant investment in gasoline or transport fees that is far from available to everyone. For most everyday activities, the cost of transportation and communication—prepaid cell phone airtime primarily—are covered by party members themselves, while parties cover transportation expenses for events. Despite the costs, party members from the villages travel long distances to attend meetings in Kita, and politicians from Kita, and Bamako, accord great importance to their visits to the villages.

Some of the most important members of the Kita party Sections live in Bamako, either because they are deputies at the National Assembly or because they are public servants.

Similarly, and this is a considerable departure from what Hopkins described, there is a relatively new class of young, educated politicians who live in Kita but occupy administrative or even elected posts in the town-halls of the rural communes. These junior politicians often have a college degree and some knowledge of administrative procedures for which there is an important demand in these recently formed public offices. Absenteeism in the rural communes is an effect of such a structure; one of the first things one notices when touring the villages is that the recently built town-halls are empty, since the buildings are mostly unfurnished, the administrative staff often prefers to operate from their homes rather than from the office. Moreover, many of the elected and administrative functionaries of the *communes* either live in Kita and come only once a week to attend to specific administrative issues, or live in the village but spend long seasons in Kita and Bamako where they participate in upper level politics.³⁰

³⁰ For instance, one of the first persons I met at the National Assembly in Bamako was a young photographer who was greeted by everyone as mayor, “*monsieur le maire*.” It turned out that he was actually adjunct-mayor in a commune in the region of Kayes, but spent all the parliamentary seasons in Bamako where he made a living taking the photographs of congressmen during the sessions and selling them to them.



Fig.2 Town-hall of the Souboula *commune*, *cercle* of Kita, during a meeting with an NGO in 2011.

There are intricate networks of personal and official channels connecting these administrative and party levels, official visits, formal letters, cell phone calls, delegates, representatives, kinship ties, and trade networks.³¹ Their complexity is multiplied by the number of parties operating in the area. Even though some villages are too small to accommodate more than one party, rural *communes*, which are constituted by many villages, often elect multi-party councils. In 2011, there were around a dozen active parties holding regular meetings in the town of Kita; and in the rural *communes*, their number ranged from two to five. Suspicion and intrigue

³¹ Nicholas Hopkins describes the existence of a patron-client relationship between Kitans and the villagers in the organization of the peanut economy in the late colonial period. This cash crop economy gave rise to “a commercial organization involving several tiers of African, Lebanese, and French middlemen, which was centered in the town of Kita.” This commercial system, Hopkins argues, was based on personal relations “blending into patron-client relations” in which “those who bought groundnuts from a particular peasant were frequently those who sold them consumer goods, often on credit against the following year’s crop” (Hopkins, 1969: 459).

abound in the relationship *between* parties. I heard, for instance, members of one party accuse members of another party of spreading false rumors to damage their reputation and hinder the recruitment of new members, or even of secretly supporting the choice of a “non-charismatic” candidate in a rival party to decrease the party’s chances of electoral success. However, the sharpest forms of rivalry and suspicion that I saw were among members of *the same* party. This was particularly true within the largest parties, where these rivalries were usually fueled by the competition over candidacies and party posts.

Party meetings take place regularly at each one of these administrative levels. The frequency, content and enthusiasm of these meetings varies widely, often depending on electoral calendars. Large, well-implanted parties maintain permanent activity throughout the electoral calendar, but the majority of the small parties go through large periods of latent life, especially in small towns and villages. In 2011, as the 2012 presidential elections (which did not take place) approached, competition and intrigue were at their peak.

Large parties such as ADEMA, URD and RPM which had managed to maintain their structures in place since the last election were in the process of choosing their presidential candidates as they continued with their everyday meetings and activities. Many of the smaller ones, such as PARENA, UDD, MPR, PIDS—to cite the examples of those I personally followed—had lost contact with “their bases” in many localities and were revisiting them to set new *bureaux* in place and encourage members to work hard for the coming elections. Finally, there were those newly created parties, such as the PDES, CARE and YELEMA, which were just beginning their implantation in the country: making public presentations, visiting local personalities, recruiting adherents and establishing local *bureaux* for the first time.

The format of party meetings has not changed a lot since the sixties, but its material organization has undergone some discrete but consequential changes. Party meetings reiterate the “parliamentary procedure” used at the National Assembly, as well as in Communal Councils, and youth associations. The agenda [Fr. *ordre du jour*] is read, amended and approved at the outset, usually in a rather casual way, although sometimes approving the agenda can be an entire process in itself.³² The president starts by providing a summary of the points to be discussed and giving out recent information, then the floor is open for discussion; sometimes there is also time for commissions or individuals who have been tasked to present their accounts, and once all points in the agenda have been covered, there is an open section, called “*divers*,” which tends to be quite lively. This is if the meeting actually manages to follow the agenda, which I saw happen more often in the meetings of youth associations; otherwise it just dissolves into arguments until the call for prayer ends it.

As for their material organization, meetings take place in the party headquarters or at someone’s home if it is a small party; there is usually a table at one end of the room, which serves as main podium, where the president and secretary sit facing the rest of members sitting in rows. Hopkins remarked that in 1964 “meetings of one kind or another were an almost daily occurrence in Kita.” That holds true today, especially when looking at meetings of parties, youth associations, NGO’s, Councils, women associations and other groups as an ensemble (Hopkins, 1979: 158). In 1964, however, most party meetings were relatively secret; Hopkins only obtained

³² In *From Grammar to Politics*, Alessandro Duranti analyzes the *fono*, a type of formal public speech act from Western Samoa. These formal speeches usually have a very formulaic beginning, mostly greetings, and end, wishing good health to the present. Discretely inserted in the middle there is a short and vague articulation of the “agenda.” Since naming the problem to be discussed is already to interpret it, Duranti notices that the rule is “to say the least” and “be vague” (Duranti, 1994:117). In Kitan meetings the tendency is to start with highly formal, sometimes written, descriptions of the agenda, which dissolve into confusion as conflict takes over and its reclaimed as sometimes as a form of ending the argument and bringing people back on track.

permission to attend “information meetings,” which contrary to most party meetings, were totally public as they were held at an open-sided market shed where hundreds of people could gather to listen. That fact might have influenced his understanding of the meetings as a forum corresponding to the “abstract Kita arena”:

Meetings provided the essential forum where political consensus could form through the confrontation of different points of view. They also provided a physical expression of the abstract Kita arena where political moves could be made in public to increase one man’s prestige or attack another’s, and thus were essential to the continuous processes of factionalism. By providing a field for the political processes in the town’s social system, they helped to sharpen the definition of the limits of that system (Hopkins, 1979: 169).

In 2011, meetings were both less secret and more fragmented. They were less secret because I easily got permission to attend and record all sorts of meetings and often such permission came with the statement “we have nothing to hide.” They were more fragmented because, besides the Conference organized by the RECAN that I described in Chapter 1, there was no one single meeting in Kita that could be considered a “town meeting,” as Hopkins saw them in 1964. Many of the party meetings I attended in the *cercle* of Kita were public ceremonies, often celebrating the appointment of a new local *bureau* with music and praises. However, even in those cases, there were only some special nonaffiliated guests, and the rest of the attendants were party members. If interpreting those public party ceremonies as enactments of the “town arena” was difficult, it was simply impossible when it came to the internal, business-as-usual, party meetings, which I was allowed to attend on a couple of occasions. One of those rare opportunities came in April 2011, when I got permission to attend a three-hour meeting of one of the largest parties in Kita.

The meeting

The meeting took place in the party headquarters, a large concrete room in a central but secluded location. There were around thirty attendants, all male. Party members accused each other of intrigue, mendacity, lack of "love for their party," and even of saying hurtful things. As Oumou Sidibé and I transcribed the entire recording of the meeting, we managed to partially reconstitute the multiple layers of the conflict, which in broad terms had to do with the relations between Bamako, Kita and the villages, and the rivalry between two or three factions, or "*tendenciw*" as they called them, within the Section of Kita. As the particulars of the situation were discussed, speakers, in various forms, reiterated one theme: the untruthfulness of all members and the difficulty of creating lasting peace and agreement [Bam. *bɛn*]. Virtually every speaker used two words: "truth" [Bam. *tɪŋɛ*] and "agreement" or "peace" [Bam. *bɛn*].³³ The two most frequent statements were "we are not telling the truth, we need to tell each other the truth" and "there is no agreement or peace, we need to bring peace." However, by the time the sunset call for prayer sounded, the attendants left the room still visibly upset, without having established a satisfactory truth, and without having "stabilized peace" [Bam. *bɛn ka sabati*].

The party was at the time starting the internal process to select its presidential candidate, the list of official nominees had not been determined yet, but a dozen names were already sounding as potential "pre-candidates." Some of these aspiring candidates had already begun to promote themselves in the party Sections. Even though the list of pre-candidates was not official yet, party members in Kita had begun to make moves to side with different potential candidates, in particular with one, Sekou Diakité, who is originally from the region of Kita and thus has

³³ Malians usually translate the Bambara term "*ben*" to French as "peace" or "concord," but some of its uses seem closer to "agreement," "cooperation," and "unity." People often illustrate the meaning of *ben* with a gesture of the same name, which consists in clasping one's hands and interlacing fingers.

special ties to the region. The argument at the meeting broke out because a couple of party members had toured some villages without the Section's permission and were accused of secretly campaigning for Sekou Diakité in the villages as well as of railing against the other *tendenciw* of the Kita Section. People expressed their disapproval of this type of behavior, but as the argument unfolded, it became clear that the conflict which divided the Kita Section was deeper and went back at least to the last legislative elections of 2007. Ever since then, the party was divided in factions which were suspicious of each other; therefore, as some members pointed out, everything that has been said and done since then was “conflict-speech” [Bam. *kɛɛ kuma*], which means that it is impossible to fully account for all the words and deeds and that many otherwise innocent actions become suspicious acts in the context of conflict.

The day of the meeting, the Secretary General was absent and the Secretary General adjunct presided the meeting. He sat at a table, next to the doyen, facing the rows of attendants sitting on chairs. Tounkara is one of the most influential members of the Section; as a Tounkara, he is a member of one of the four Kitan founding families. He, however, lives in Bamako, where he is a member of the party's CE, and travels to Kita with regularity; he also mentioned that he had recently been in Benin and in France. He has served at different state offices, including the CMDT—the Malian textile state enterprise which has a factory in Kita—but he has never occupied an electoral post. Tounkara spoke in Bambara with some sentences in French intertwined. He divided the agenda into two broad sections, "the situation of the party at the national level" and "the situation of the party at the local level." He began by emphasizing the importance of unity: “we are asking all the Sections to be united, to be in agreement, so that we can attain power.”

Toukara explained to the local members the formal procedure for the selection of presidential candidates. He said that any interested member was allowed to submit his or her candidacy. Although the idea of someone from the Section aspiring to be presidential candidate triggered laughter. He described in detail the paperwork needed to submit a candidacy, which included a "society project," and two oaths. He said: "you have to swear that if you become president, you will not waste things that belong to the Nation, you will not take or use this wealth because it does not belong to you, it belongs to the country, and you will also swear that if the ADEMA chooses another candidate instead of you, you'll support such candidate no matter what." He translated these requirements—which were written in French at the Party national headquarters in Bamako—into Bambara.

As someone living in Bamako, he was also the best qualified among those present to give an account of the candidacies that were "sounding" in the capital. The big names that he mentioned did not require an introduction, and many of the Kita party members knew already who were the potential candidates. Toukara, however, did not introduce or assess the candidates themselves, but rather described *his* own personal relations with each one of them. He specified whether he had read about their candidacy in the newspapers or they had been "presented" to him personally. For the latter cases, he gave a very detailed report of the place, time, and content of his personal exchanges with each candidate. He said of one of the candidates: "he invited me to his place to inform me of his candidacy respectfully. Personally, he wants me to help him, because of many things; when I was mentoring the youth in the Section of Kayes, he was my first mentor. There are many things that join us, even his house and the house of my older sister are next to each other."

It seemed appropriate, and even expected, for him to expose this network of loyalties and personal debts; moreover, his description of his personal relations and meetings with these men was full of “evidence,” details, such as hours, addresses, number of cell phone calls, exact reported speech, etc., which had the overall effect of authenticating the account.

I interpret Tounkara’s introductory speech in two ways. By making explicit his personal position within the party informal networks of trust and loyalty, he indicated his choice of an open and “fair play,” rather than intrigue and secrecy. When he was talking about one of the candidacies that was “presented” to him, he used direct reported speech to convey to the meeting what he had answered to the person attempting to gain his political support: “[Bam.] Me, to whom everyone must come and present a candidacy, if I’m not careful at the moment of speaking, if I side with someone, that will be the cause of my own destruction. That’s why I say to you: ‘you have told me, I have heard you, I’m going to think about it.’” Besides this deliberate effort to maintain neutrality, Tounkara’s emphasis on his personal exchanges with prominent party members was a form of demonstrating his political importance in front of the Kitan members by reaffirming his position as an intermediary between Kita and Bamako. Tounkara’s principal political assets were those connections.

After describing this network of personal relations and exchanges, he talked in more general terms about the need to regain unity and peace [Bam. *ben*] in the Section in order for the party to win the presidential elections. He made references to the existence of conflict and division in the party, but attributed it to the interests and intrigues of rival parties. He said:

[3.1] [Bam] All the newspapers are saying that there is too much ambition in our party [too many people who want to become presidential candidates], and that we are not going to survive this problem, that we are going to split into small pieces and explode. *They have turned the rumors into a truth* [Bam. *k'o ke tiñe ye*], and little by little they have managed to

even convince party members that their words are real. The enemies of our party are using that, they are writing a lot in the newspapers to say that we are going to explode, *that no one should invest money in our party*, that there is nothing but caimans in this party, that we eat money. Shouldn't we reflect about this? We have come a long way, if we do not think about this, about that which people want us to become, that is what we will become; and that which we want to become, we are not going to achieve it.

Toukara referred to the press multiple times during this meeting, often as a source of rumor and intrigue, and more specifically as a forum of political speculation.³⁴ National newspapers, however, rarely leave Bamako. There is no single shop in Kita which sells daily publications, and the few people in town who enjoy reading them usually get them with some delay from people visiting from Bamako. I was therefore surprised by Toukara's reliance on the press and his indication that the credibility of a party and the trust of its members could be affected by what was said in such a restricted forum. He offered a detailed description of the process through which rumors become truths and produce real effects in parties. Rumors can *act* as self-fulfilling prophecies. According to Toukara, newspapers, and rival parties through them, criticized his party, denounced its internal corruption or tendency to "eat money."³⁵ More importantly, rivals made a *prediction*, "it's going to split in small pieces and explode," and they urged people not "to *invest their money* in that party."

³⁴ Between 2010 and 2011, I collected and catalogued close to three hundred newspaper articles on politics from five different publications. One of patterns that I traced by comparing and tagging these articles, was that press accounts of party politics were often centered on identifying whether a party's or a politician's popularity and power were raising or falling. Even though this was partly the case because parties were at the time already getting ready for the presidential elections, I was struck by the extent to which the content of political commentary was centered on electoral speculation.

³⁵ It is very common in Mali to talk about corruption as "eating money." In French, the most common expression is "bouffer l'argent" which conveys lack of restraint more than simply "eating."

Toukara and many other speakers after him emphasized the strategic importance of unity. The only way, he said, for the party to win over the surrounding speculation that seeks to divide us and make us disappear, is by achieving internal cohesion, otherwise “nobody will obtain anything, we will all lose.” In what seemed a classic “prisoner’s dilemma” situation, he said:

[3.2] [Bam] Because if we arrive to the presidential elections in this state of division, even if a member of this party becomes president, he will not know that the Section of Kita supported him, *all he is going to see is that some people here were against him*. [...] Even if the majority of us supports someone, and the minority supports someone else, if that minority complains and revolts, it is those complaints and insults that people are going to *hear from far away*, so he is going to think that it was the entire Section that was against him, not just a minority. And we will obtain nothing out of this whole thing! Nothing!

According to Toukara, only if there is no dissent at all can the Section’s support for a presidential candidate effectively translate into benefits for the Section of Kita. In other words, information travels and is received differently depending on its content, whether it conveys insults or praises. The relationship between adherence and dissent is asymmetrical; dissent even if it comes from a minority, will stand for the whole, whereas for adherence to count it has to be absolute. Toukara presents this threat and the promise of possible post-electoral benefits as incentives for the members of the party Section to cooperate and suspend conflict. However, even though all attendants agreed nominally on the strategic importance of cooperation, they did not seem to believe— from what I heard and was told to me afterwards—in the sincerity of each other’s engagement, and assumed that no one else was going to respect such words of peace.

Conflict-speech and Politics-speech

After Tounkara finished his introduction, the doyen also provided some moral guidelines regarding the importance of unity in the party. He made an interesting commentary about speech: "The waters are turbulent right now, we should not speak, let us stay quiet. Once the waters are calm, we will see the path clearly." During the meeting, speakers moved between the idea that a sufficiently exhaustive account could eventually expose the truth that everyone claimed was lacking and needed to bring reconciliation, on the one hand, and the fear that it was precisely the abundance of words that was taking them away from truth and agreement, on the other. In particular, attendants referred to two types of speech, political-speech [Bam. *politiki-kuma*], and conflict-speech [Bam. *kele-kuma*], which were partly to blame for the lack of understanding among attendants.

Robert Sidibe, who was directly involved in the most recent wave of intrigues, was the first one to speak after the two members of the presidium finished, and he began by alerting the audience that he was going to switch to "local concerns." Robert Sidibe's speech presupposed, in its form and content, a chain of previous conversations and accusations having taken place outside the strict space of the meeting the content of which I can only try to infer. He and two other party members visited a number of villages without an official authorization from the Kita party Section disregarding the "Visits Schedule" [Fr. *Plan de sorties*] that the Section had elaborated during a previous meeting. The rest of the party members condemned strongly this unilateral initiative and the lack of party discipline that it reflected, but their concerns and

suspicion were mostly centered on the possible *content* of the message that Robert Sidibé and his companions spread in the villages.

In his initial speech, Sidibé tried to convince the other members, who had already heard of the travels, that the purpose of their visits to the villages was to "talk about the situation of the Section and explain to the villagers that defending the party is a good thing, but that they [the villagers] should stop defending particular individuals because that brings division." He assured the other members that they were acting for the sake of agreement and peace [Bam. *ben*]. He enhanced the veracity of his account against the background of suspicion on his declared intentions:

[3.3] [Bam] I am going to cite the names of the people with whom I have talked about this mission *to show that the path that we are taking is the path of truth* [Bam. *tiñe sira*]. I talked with Sissoko in the evening of the day before yesterday, he called me, I told him where I was, he came to meet me and told me: "We hear that certain people are making trips to the villages." I said: "No, the rumors need to stop, no one is doing visits, it's me and Kamissoko, and we took Adama along."

Robert used various tactics to authenticate his account of the events and especially of his own intentions, which he claimed were against factionalism. Appealing to his witnesses seemed to be also a form of showing that since his movements were no secret, they were not ill-intentioned. In his statement, "the path of truth" has also a moral dimension, it does not only mean that his account is accurate, it also means that it is rightful.³⁶ The other rhetorical tactic he

³⁶ The Bambara term *tiñe* can function as an adjective qualifying a statement, in which case it translates to English as "true" or "truthful," or as a noun, in which case it can correspond to the English term "truth," but in some cases also "rightfulness" in a moral sense. It can, for instance, appear in a proverb or general normative statement, such as "Truth and beautiful words look alike but are not the same." It also appears in more context dependent expressions that would translate literally as "truth is not with him," but are semantically closer to the English expression "he is not right." This last type of use is very common in disputes where people are determining which part is "right" and which part is "wrong." In that sense, *tiñe* has an epistemic dimension, it judges a statement as accurate or inaccurate; but also has a deontic or moral dimension, it qualifies *an action* or statement as right or wrong.

used was to deny the importance of political strategy altogether. Since the rumor was that they went to the villages to campaign for one of the presidential candidates, Robert resorted to a general principle about political power to remove the doubts of his fellow party members over his intentions:

[3.4] [Bam] No, we are not campaigning for a candidate. He who is going to win...being president is part of someone's destiny [Bam. *dakan*]. One does not become president because of money, because of gold or because of knowledge, it is your destiny that makes you president. People are born with a particular fate.

Dictums like this one are very frequent in Kitan political meetings, they are recognizable because they appear as general principles, very often have an abstract subject such as “persons” or “humans” [Bam. *ademadenw, mogow*], and they also have a characteristic prosody. They imply a shift in “footage,” the speaker is not their source or “author,” but by animating them, he partakes of their authority; these dictums “leak” wisdom.³⁷ They also tend to shift attention away from personal agency and the particulars of an account, and evacuate topics from the field of the arguable. I identified in Robert’s speech another resource that I heard in similar occasions; it consists in asserting one’s independence, understood as not needing someone’s money, help, or recognition. Dependency and truth pull in opposite directions, as the idea of “conflict of interests” suggests. He said to the audience:

[3.5] [Bam] We don't look at anyone, we are not afraid of anyone. Because if you are afraid of someone, or if you look at someone, that means that you are close to that person. No, this is our own move.

³⁷ I borrowed the term “leakage” in this sense from Jane Hill and Judith Irvine, who use it to describe the transference of responsibility from the author of a message to its animator, as the English expression “shoot the messenger” illustrates. In my example, the leakage works in the opposite direction, by animating a well-known, widely accepted truism, the speaker borrows some of that impersonal wisdom (Hill & Irvine, 1992: 12-13).

His speech, however, was not considered convincing or appropriate, and for the next hour or so, members raised their hands to condemn his actions and elucidate the truth. The first one was Seydou, an elderly man who spoke in a very slow, clear and imperative way. He started out as follows:

[3.6] [Bam] When ones dies, one finds oneself alone in the tomb. Therefore, everything that you say, say it as it happened, everything that happened, tell it exactly as it happened.

A couple of speakers in this meeting referred to solitude as the ultimate test of mendacity, which is also implicit in another common expression: “It is between you and God.” Social relations are defined by the fact that one can never fully know someone else, let alone circumvent deliberate secrecy and deceit (Simmel,1906). However, there are two entities or witnesses to whom that rule does not apply: God and oneself. Solitude in the above examples appears as the state in which those two “voices” become manifest. Another speaker said:

[3.7] [Bam] But the truth, when a person is alone, aren't you going to tell yourself that you will be in shame tomorrow for what you just said? Because that is what being human means [Bam. *mogoya*].

Even though this statement also refers to solitude as the state in which one confronts one's lies, the most painful consequence of having lied is strictly social: shame. Whereas solitude confronts us with our lies, social relations provide the punishment but also the incentive to lie. The latter is particularly true of debt— as a type of social relationship—as Robert's statement that they “weren't looking at anyone and weren't close to anyone” suggested. The same speaker continued:

[3.8][Bam.] If you, Touunkara, do something, I'm going to tell you: "Touunkara, I don't agree with you." You don't feed me, you don't know how many kilograms of rice are cooked at my home daily, we found each other here in the party. Good morning, Good evening. Greetings are already something. You don't owe me anything, I don't owe you anything. We need to trust each other, everything depends on trust. People will say whatever [criticize you] but stay with the truth. As a person, if you live in truth, God will honor you, you will never be embarrassed.

The above passage is revealing because it indicates what the *ideal*, most conducive situation for truth and agreement would look like: two men who are not otherwise related, symmetrically independent of each other, meet in the party. Various speakers mentioned that members of the party were not related in other ways, and one even complained that they were not inviting each other to baptisms and weddings. This point reiterates what Hopkins noted in the sixties, that the organization of the party and of the factions was rather open and cut across traditional forms of organization and distinction.

However, even though within each party level, inside the *comités* or the Section, for instance, meetings can take place on a relatively egalitarian basis, such balance is threatened by the differentiated access that members have to the upper levels. This translates into differentiated information, influence, and resources. Party members do not interact with each other exclusively as individuals, but as components of larger factions or networks that do not fully correspond to the party. Such is the way in which the following speaker described the singularity of political speech, or *politiki-kuma*:

[3.9] [Bam.] What we heard is that they are visiting the villages. This is politics, if you two go inside a room to say something, the person about whom you talked is going to hear what you said. Political speech cannot be hidden, political words are not secret! [...] Political speech [Bam. *politiki-kuma*] is not secret, even if you say "mh, mh" here in Kita someone is going to go say that to Touunkara in Bamako over there. In political speech, if

you cannot say something in front of a person, don't say behind his back [...] Too many things were said, we need to forget all that.

According to this statement, what is characteristic of *politiki-kuma* is not its form, content, or temporality.³⁸ *Politiki-kuma* is defined by its mode of circulation and its inextricability from a web of social relations. “If you cannot say in front of the person, don't say it at all,” which means that even when it's private it's public, that the entire network is your audience. The trouble is that it doesn't travel just as “information,” it travels encapsulated in purposeful *actions*. These emanate from located individuals who are *doing* something by transmitting the words of another. Thus *politiki-kuma* accumulates “noise” and can incite conflict and antagonism.

During this meeting, I was able to locate another significant local category referring to speech (a meta-pragmatical category), this one was also composed of two terms “war” or “conflict” [Bam. *kele*] and “speech” [Bam. *kuma*]. *Kele-kuma* is conflict speech, not argument *per se*, but the proliferation of words and explanations that a conflict, and the attempts to redress it, produce. This is how one of the speakers described it:

[3.10] [Bam.] Everyone has said many things here. But to me, all those things that have been said, all that is conflict-speech [Bam. *kele kuma*] and conflict things. So, instead of getting all agitated by conflict **words and things**, let drop all that. Let's analyze where the *source* of the conflict is and which are the solutions that we can find to end this conflict. *The words internal to the conflict, details, there is no end to those*. Now, how do we end this conflict?

³⁸ Interestingly, the distinctiveness of political rhetoric for Aristotle was the fact that it concerned the future.

If we follow this statement closely, *kele-kuma*, conflict-speech, appears as having exactly the opposite direction as *politki-kuma*; it is driven by the attempt to *retrace* what was said and done, follow the footsteps back to the source, locate the points of distortion, and hold individuals accountable for their *actions*. Many speakers pointed out *kele-kuma* is endless and fruitless, most of the time it does not result in lasting agreement and peace.³⁹ The following is just one example of the many variations of this theme in the meeting:

[3.11] [Bam.] What I want to say is that we always come sit down here to say that we are looking for agreement and peace [Bam. *ben*], it's been many times already. Everyone says: "Yes, we want peace [Bam. *ben*]." But if we leave this room, peace stays here. If we cannot understand each other, then let's go directly to *the core* of the conflict [...] Today we need a Section's *conference*, in this conference people will tell each other the truth, and we will find a course of action.

He said "conference" in French, and it seemed that these party "conferences" are a known practice. Various speakers supported the idea, and even expanded on the details of the organization and format of such events. Interestingly, the idea was that in a "conference," attendants would tell each other the truth, reach the source of the conflict, and finally create lasting peace and agreement. That is, the ineffectiveness of speech is to be overcome with more speech, but of a different kind, of the "conference" kind. Part of this forensic process was done in this meeting; in the following section, I will examine some aspects of the dynamics of factions and conflict.

³⁹ A similar example came from Ndiaye, who said: "All the time we come sit here, we shake hands, hug, and say that the conflict is over, but as soon as we leave, peace stays here."

Regional Publics

The first person to respond to Robert's speech was Seydou, the same old man we heard introduce his speech with a reference to the solitude of death; from a position of moral authority he told Robert off and disclosed his moves:

[3.12] [Bam.] I know which places you visited. Which one was the first? You went to Madina, and from there you went to Koutuba. It's true that this is politics, but let's not lie to each other here. Lying it's wrong. You know what you went for and said over there. I passed by the villages after you, what you said over there is between you and God, you know it. But you didn't go there to say things that "sew" people together, you said things that divide. Keita was with you in Koutouba, and the money that you handed out, you know that too.

Between hints and open accusations, Seydou managed to reconstruct a completely different version of what Robert and his clique did in the villages; shortly put, they incited conflict and gave out money. He also said that Robert and his partners were not acting independently; Keita, identified as the leader of one of the factions and absent in this meeting, was with them. Later on, when the argument reached its most heated part, as members shouted to each other in disorder, it became clear that what turned their visits to the villages into such a serious matter was the belief that they were operating with money coming from Bamako, from Sekou Diakité himself, the pre-presidential candidate that Keita's faction favored, and such money had not come through the Section as it should have:

[3.13] [Bam.] **Seydou:** You Robert, the visits that you did, it was Sekou who gave you the money!

Robert: Even a cent of Sekou's money is not in my stomach!

Seydou: Your are a destroyer, your are the internal enemy of the party!

Seydou's accusation provides an important clue for understanding the political relationship between Bamako, Kita and the villages. The preemptive nature of the alleged monetary exchange between the Kitan faction and the villagers, which took place before the list of official pre-candidates was even official, exposes the peculiar temporality of electoral democracy. Hopkins refers the existence in 1964 of a hierarchical relationship parallel to the party, but nevertheless important in the production of political prestige and factionalism, which brought together petitioners, brokers, and grantors. "Petitioners" were either peasants or townsmen who needed a favor, "brokers" were Kitans with access to someone in a position of power, and "grantors" were for the most part people in administrative positions. "Petitioners" considered "brokers" as friends but were not reciprocated; according to Hopkins, "brokers" did not obtain any benefit from their intermediation other than popularity, and since this was a "network for dispensing favors rather than for distributed resources" it was loosely structured. Hopkins contrasts the functioning of this triad with the late colonial relationship between merchants and peasants, which was based on credit, was longer lasting, and was mutually recognized as friendship [Bam. *teriya*] [Hopkins, p.144-145].

In my example, we see yet a different type of exchange between Kitans and the villagers. Rather than petitioners, brokers, and grantors, I will talk about "investors," "recruiters," and "recipients." Sekou Diakité would work here as "investor," the Kitan "conspirators" could be considered as "recruiters," and the villagers were the "recipients." Insofar as this exchange places debt on the side of the villagers—although it is not evident that its understood as such—its resembles more the "peasant-merchant" relationship, than to that of "petitioners" and "brokers."

There are at least three distinct phases in this cycle of exchange. First, the party's internal process of assigning candidacies, then the external or popular campaigns and elections, and finally the potential occupation of posts. As we saw with Robert and his clique, top-down distribution *within* the party builds up right before the assignation of candidacies; it reaches its highest point and spills over to non-party members during the campaign, and, if the candidate is elected, distribution fades out as a generalized form and becomes limited to the "investors," whom at this point need to recover their investments and perhaps make some profit.

This suggests that there is a mismatch between the temporality of monetary exchanges and the temporality of campaign speeches in Malian electoral democracy and perhaps in other places too. Before and during campaigns, as a candidate is recruiting support on his way to power, the "distributive" logic is at its peak. Once the candidate reaches power, the more certain, generalized, and rather inconsequent, form distribution has already taken place; and what takes over is "reciprocal exchange," in the sense that he will now be concerned with returning to the "investors" what they spent.⁴⁰ However, campaign speeches place the reward in the future, they request people's votes by *promising* something, and those promises are rarely fulfilled, which in turn creates a cycle of illusion and disappointment. In other words, electoral democracy is cyclical, and it cyclically evokes transcendence.

This exchange pattern could also indicate that there is a built-in "incentive" for the proliferation of parties, factions and even conflict more broadly, since it seems that competition among factions fosters the availability and distribution of resources. This is what Tounkara, who

⁴⁰ I am using these terms in the sense that Marshall Sahlins gave to them in his classic comparison of "chiefs" and "big-men" (Sahlins, 1963).

presided over the meeting and made the initial introduction, told party members in his second intervention, as a response to the conflict that emerged:

[3.14][Bam.] Stirring things up, setting people against each other, don't you know that there are people who gain something from this? Because they'll ask for something [money] to be on your side, you give them something, and then they go to the other side ask for something as well. How could this end?

So far we have seen that conflict and factionalism, as well as suspicion and lack of agreement more broadly, are linked to how political-speech spreads through a myriad of purposeful actions and to the temporal cycle of exchange in electoral democracy. Political conflict in Kita is also inseparable from the regional configuration of party publics that I described at the beginning of this chapter. By regional configuration I mean the spatial mapping of relatively overlapping networks formed by the movement of people, words, money, and commands, as well as the complex power differential embedded in such distribution. The formal organizational chart is only one element among others in the creation of hierarchy. As we will see, age, charisma, money, and personal connections are also important generators of difference. Moreover, this spatial distribution, and the tendency for the various scales of political activity to merge with each other, has not reduced the importance of older ideas about the relationship between the town [Bam. *dugu*] and “the bush” [Bam. *wulakono*], which anthropologists have documented extensively (Bagayoko, 1989).

During this meeting, speakers constantly moved the center or the source of the conflict from Kita to either the villages or Bamako. Tounkara, for instance, after saying that there are people who profit from division, said that villagers were at least partly to blame:

[3.15] [Bam.] People from the *communes*, it's them who are stirring everything up. They leave the *communes* to come here and say that Sissoko visited them, and that he said this

and said that. [...] The other day, they came to tell me that when Iba had his event here in Kita, only my praises were being played on the sound system, and that the others ran to ask them to remove my praises [Laughter in the audience].

People laughed at this comment because it conveyed a slightly condescending image of the villagers as ignorant intriguers concerned with matters of supposedly superfluous importance, such as genealogical praises. However, aside from this patronizing attitude from a local politician settled in Bamako, what is interesting in Tounkara's point is that the villagers were not only passive receptors of Kita's factionalism but active participants willing to pay the cost of transportation to come to Kita and convey someone's words. In fact, among those present in this meeting, there was a party member from one of the rural *communes* that Robert and his clique visited; this is an example of the simultaneous participation at various party levels that I mentioned in the first part of this chapter. He said:

[3.16] [Bam] These trips to the *communes* are “*travail fractionel*” [original French] which is not allowed. Let's avoid it. Take the example of my *commune*, the evening you left the *commune*, people came to see me and give me the full account of everything that was said. According to the account they gave me, your words were not words that bring peace. Moreover, I am one of the Party leaders at Sinfo, you should have come to see me. The people you talked to are not even members of our party. They came to tell me everything you said, and if they are telling the truth...then, you are just playing with the party!

This statement confirms that having access to information is one of the main components of a politician's standing. Party members compete to be “insiders.” Having access to various relatively secluded publics, receiving information *personally*, either in face-to-face interactions or through cell phone calls, and knowing as many people as possible are all crucial components of the economy of political prestige. Additionally, this statement also suggests a rather cohesive

communication at the level of the village, in this case Sinfo, which is not easily disrupted by Kitan factionalism. Not only was it embarrassing for the “conspirators” to address the wrong people in the village, but to make matters worse, those villagers did not keep the “secrets” of the Kitan “conspirators,” but conveyed everything to the leader of the party in the locality when the “conspirators” left. Interactions like this one with the villagers prompted another speaker, N’diaye, to suggest that in the context of conflict and factionalism, the only safeguard against suspicion is traveling together and witnessing each other’s words:

[3.17] [Bam.] I think that if you go out to visit the *communes*, you should inform each other. You should even mix in people from different factions on purpose, if you are going somewhere, take people from the other faction along, that way everyone will know what you said. Otherwise, even if people say that you went there to talk about murder, that shouldn’t surprise you because you went there alone!

N’diaye’s suggests a technique of “suspicion management” which relies on direct witnessing, left as the only reliable way to circumvent generalized mistrust and reported speech distortions.⁴¹ No matter how interconnected Kita and the villages might be, being outside the physical boundaries of the town, especially in “the bush,” reduces the accountability of Kitans. N’diaye almost implies there are no witnesses whatsoever in the *communes*: if the rumor says that you talked about murder, there wouldn’t be a form to prove such a rumor wrong. The difficulty in controlling and surveying peoples’ movements and words in the rural areas prompted some speakers to suggest that *all* visits to villages should stop until the conflict among the factions of Kita was not solved, because in the context of conflict and division everything becomes suspicious. If nothing else, this debate about the trips to the communes proves the

⁴¹ I found a very similar technique of suspicion management in the organization of drug-trafficking in the Mexico-US border.

importance that politicians in Kita, and even in Bamako, assign to their anchorage in the rural areas.

Other speakers in this meeting were more concerned with the other end of the rope, and blamed the local conflict among factions on the doings of the Bamako party cadres, who were using Kitans as their “marionettes.” An older man who has been in the party since the early nineties said:

[3.18] [Bam.] *Tendenci, tendenci, tendenci*, all these *tendenciw* are based in Bamako, the other *tendenci* is also based in Bamako.

Towards the second part of the meeting, Toukara and other speakers who had access to information from the capital, gave new hints that confirmed the involvement of the Bamako party cadres, particularly two of the presidential pre-candidates, in the Kitan conflict. Shortly put, the larger sums of money come from Bamako, either as part of the official budget to fund campaigns, “party money,” or as a candidate’s own contribution to their campaigns, “investors’ money.” An interesting example of how this works came up. One of the presidential pre-candidates, Sekou Diakité, offered to fund an event in Kita and he asked Moséré, the Secretary General of the Section of Kita, whom he met at a workshop in Bamako, to go back to Kita and meet with the Section to prepare a budget for this event. Moséré called for a meeting in Kita to prepare the budget; the faction led by Keita, that I identified earlier as “the conspirators,” did not attend the meeting. Nevertheless, the budget was written in their absence, and when Moséré went to Bamako to give the budget to Sekou Diakité, he responded in the following way, according to one account:

[3.19] [Bam.] Moséré took the budget from here to Bamako. Which was Sekou’s first question? “Moséré, were my people present in the meeting that prepared this budget?”

Moseré asked: “Who?” Sekou said: “the Keitas.⁴²” He named Keita by name! He said: “Were Keita’s people in the meeting?” They weren’t so that’s is why he didn’t release the money.

This suggests that there are attempts to limit Kitan politics to the town, or as Hopkins would say, to make the political arena coincide with the social boundaries of the town; even so, often loyalty, trust, and social ties were stronger within regional networks, linking different levels together, than at the interior of each level. Interestingly, it might be the case that Kitan identity, defined not by place of residence but by genealogy, was at play in this example, because Sekou Diakité, although he lives in Bamako, is considered “a son of Kita” and Keita belongs also to one of the four original families, unlike Sissoko, of the opposite faction, who lives in Kita but is treated as “newcomer.” It is significant that Sekou’s question is whether his people were present in the meeting; since voting is avoided in most local meetings, someone’s presence in a meeting is enough to know that he participated in some kind of consensual decision-making process.

This is another theme common to these examples, the great importance accorded to face-to-face conversations and meetings, either in the “the bush” or in Bamako. Face-to-face discussions are seen as the only way to rebuild mutual trust among the members of the Section of Kita, as someone said: “If we all come to the meetings we will understand each other.” This plea for attendance to the meetings was a recurrent one during this meeting. It is significant that the strategy of one of the factions was to not attend meetings at all, so that even though Keita lives in Kita, the relationship with him is also mediated by reported speech, as with the people in the

⁴² Using the leader’s name in plural to name the entire faction is a practice that Hopkins noticed too: “The most striking symbol of the existence of a faction was it had a name. Kita’s factions were referred to as if they had a single individual at their head. They were called for instance “Mamadou’s people” or “Sylla’s people,” after their presumed leaders” (Hopkins, 1972: 145).

communes and in Bamako. The following statement reveals the environment of generalized suspicion:

[3.20] [Bam.] Let's tell each other the truth, Keita does not come to the meetings, but there are "elements" who come here to obtain information and who would do anything to destroy the party. We don't tell each other the truth in our face.

Keita was absent from this meeting, as he had been from most of the previous ones; unsurprisingly, he was also the only person who did not agree to give me an interview. Keita has a long political career, one that did not begin with the "transition to democracy," as he appears in the lists of communal Council members from the eighties. Since 1991, he has been a member of two parties, he was elected mayor by one, and then moved with his people to another one and then managed to get elected as President of the *Cercle* Council. His participation in party politics is clearly driven by the competition for electoral posts, rather than commitment to a party. In the next section, we will see how these different interests and political roles figure in Kitan democratic politics.

The feeders and the fed

There was an older man sitting at the back of the room who stood up to describe the genealogy of the conflict; he had been a member of the party since the very beginning and donated the first party headquarters. He gave some important clues for the interpretation of conflict:

[3.21] [Bam] If we stopped disrespecting each other here, there would be no need to go follow people in other places [Bamako]. We were together during the *clandestine struggle* [original in French] before the party was created. I met many of the people present here during the *clandestine struggle*. [...] Of those who created this party in 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, there is only five present here: Madou Diarra, Soriba Cisse, Sissoko,

Mamadou Kamissoko, and Lasi. That is an *incontestable truth* [original in French], there is no question, it was them who started.

He resorted to a form of authority that emanates from the foundational act, in this case the foundation of the party, very similar in principle to the authority of Kita's four original families, as we saw in Chapter 1. The dignity of the "founding fathers" is here emphasized by the hardships of the clandestine struggle, and the original personal sacrifices that the foundation of the party required.⁴³ He went on to explain that there are two "source conflicts" behind all the "noise." The first conflict involves Sissoko and Tounkara, and it was triggered by their competition over the presidency of the Kita party Section and a candidacy the National Assembly; the other conflict involves Sissoko and Keita, and it emerged over the competition for the presidency of the *Conseil de Cercle*. We will examine these conflicts in more detail at the light of the interpretation that this man provided:

[3.22] [Bam.] *Let's be clear, the party exists, it feeds some people, and some people feed the party. We need to remember that the person who is here and feeds the party has a particular dignity* [Bam. *horonya*]. If he does not receive the respect that he deserves, there will be conflict. None of the persons I cited because they are in conflict today could promptly solve a 10, 000 CFA problem for the party in 1991-1992. Not even one could pay 10,000 CFA, they didn't have houses nor wives. [Laughter] We need to say it, it's true.

This is one of the most revealing passages in this meeting, and it brings us back to the cycles of exchange in electoral democracy. From the rest of his speech, it became clear that those "who feed the party" are those who invest in it, not only for the sake of their own popularity, but

⁴³ This mention of the clandestine struggle is interesting because it may point at the existence of a trust network in Tilly's sense during an earlier time. Also, the risks of clandestine political struggle usually promote the creation of trust networks of dissidents that protect each other, which did not survive once political parties were not only allowed but promoted (Tilly, 2005)

for the party itself, by, for instance, building the party headquarters. Conversely, those “who are fed” are those who occupy electoral posts, and specially those who are thought to have become rich as a result of their political career; those who had neither “houses nor wives” in 1991 and are now rich. The difference between feeding and being fed is not only determined by the amount of money each person has given, but by the gap between what he has given and what he has received. In other words, the feeders are those to whom “the party” owes something. He says that “the feeders” need to be respected, and when they are not, there is conflict.⁴⁴ Interestingly, both of these types, “the feeders” and “the fed,” enjoy a particular form of social prestige but in different arenas; the prestige of the feeders is internal to the party, whereas the prestige of the fed is popular, external to the party, as electoral success and power. Here is the interesting part: the “fed” are constantly trying to assert themselves as “feeders,” and the “feeders” want to be fed but cannot say so without losing merit. As the different personalities present in this meetings spoke, and in the interviews I had with some of them, it became that this was the main criterion against which they were measuring each other.

One of the names the old man mentioned, indeed the name that was mentioned the largest number of times during this meeting, was Sissoko, who requires a longer introduction. Sissoko is recognized by other members in the Section of Kita as a charismatic figure and a skillful politician. He is tall and holds himself with an arrogance that forces people around him to admire him; he also likes to brag about his wealth. When the old man said that no one in 1991 could give out 10,000 CFA to solve a problem, Sissoko jumped in his seat and shouted: “In 1991, I already had a 7 million business! We haven’t reached the point of insulting each other yet!”

⁴⁴ The Bambara word that he used is *horonya*, which is often translated as “freedom,” “independence,” or nobility. It refers to the status of not being slave or member of a caste, but it was also used to talk about national independence. It is interesting that the same term is used here to refer to the party sponsors.

Sissoko was born in Bafoulabé, also in the region of Kayes, and he moved to Kita because his father was teacher who came to work in town. He is still considered a “foreigner” and his local adversaries, politicians like Tounkara and Keita who are members of the four families, do not let his foreign origin pass unnoticed.

Besides being charismatic, foreigner, and rich, Sissoko has the self-made, entrepreneurial pride of successful traders. He told me that in the 1970s when he finished school, family relations offered him a position as a public servant, but he did not like “to wake up every morning to go to an office,” and he did not like the UDPM regime either. That is why he decided to leave Kita in search of fortune, or *aller à l’aventure*, as they say in Mali. He travelled all over West Africa, and began to trade, first perfumes from Nigeria, and then salt and cereal between Senegal and Mali; he bought two trucks and settled back in Kita in the late 1980s. “I was single and rich,” he told me, and so “I could give money out to the youth;” and that is how he got involved in the clandestine struggle to overthrow Moussa Traore, mobilizing the youth and participating in public agitation. He gave me another interesting detail, he had one of the few private phone lines in Kita in 1990, and received all the subversive instructions from Bamako through that number, which he remembered and dictated to me. After the transition to democracy, he built his political career in the Youth Section of the party; he climbed the entire ladder of the party hierarchies, reaching the national level, but always in the parallel structure of the Youth. Finally, he began to obtain candidacies and occupy posts. He had been communal councilor twice, and was President of the *Cercle* Council from 2004-2009.

The fact that he was a regional trader is not trivial, it means that he travelled constantly and had clients everywhere; he told me that his political base was in the bush. When the

suggestion to cancel all visits to the communes until the conflict was solved came up in the meeting, he reacted:

[3.23] [Bam.] Hey! Hold on, concerning the visits to the communes, I don't do official visits, you shouldn't mix my own work with the work of the party. I plant fruit trees and right now is the season, I have trees in all the corners of the *cercle*, and every time I go see a plantation, I have to go greet the secretary general of the communal party comité. I cannot stop my work because of the party, and what do you want? You want me to go to the communes and not greet?

Whereas Robert received public reprobation for his visits to the communes, Sissoko could tour the entire *cercle* with “diplomatic immunity.” Physical movement is inseparable from his political success, which he explained to me in very frank terms: “If I visit someone in the bush, I eat from their dirty dishes; if they come see me, I'll invite them to sit at the table with me; if he has an ill kin at the hospital, I pay the bill and keep going my way, if they invite me to a baptism, I go and leave something, the same for funerals, and weddings. Serving people is the secret of politics.” In the same casual way, he tells me about his work at the party and presents himself also as a feeder: “I come to the party with millions, I leave with nothing, this a pleasure [hobby] for me.” For him, the difference between him and his rivals is that he does not need politics to support himself, he loses money in politics.

Of all the politicians I interviewed in Kita and Bamako, it was Sissoko who transmitted to me in the most striking way the passion of politics. I do not mean the redemptive passion of politics as means to transform social reality that I found among the young radicals from Bamako, but the passion of politics as the search for name and glory. Sissoko alluded casually to the joy of social popularity, making it sound like a secondary thing, but he talked excitedly and openly about the joy of rivalry, the joy of “war,” as he called it; “that is my problem, once I start a

combat, I'll never drop it.” “I have two enemies who have searched my death: Keita and Tounkara,” he said. Of these two, it was the conflict with Tounkara that meant the most for him; “I have told my son and my wives to never like Tounkara or any of his kins. We are sworn enemies, and we shall remain so.”

The conflict between Tounkara and Sissoko started around 2007: Sissoko was President of the *Cercle* Council and wanted to run for the National Assembly in the legislative elections of that year. Tounkara told him not to run for that post, and supposedly turned the Bamako elites against Sissoko. A few years later they confronted each other again over the constitution of the Section's *bureau*. Sissoko said that the source of the conflict was envy: Tounkara and Keita are members of the four Kitan families, “they can't stand to see a foreigner figure above them on an electoral list.” According to Sissoko, it doesn't matter in which party each faction is, enmity goes beyond partisan competition. “For them—he told me—it's very easy: Sissoko is too strong, Sissoko needs to fall, Sissoko needs to fall.” Therefore, Sissoko refuses to drink or eat anything his rivals have touched, he notices that they throw little pouches and bundles with “medicine” inside his car to kill him, and that they attach thin threads across his house's gate for him to break them as he goes out in the morning and die. When the Section was meeting to set up the new *bureau*, Sissoko told me, Tounkara brought four fetishists from Kolokani: “I saw them at the party headquarters—he told me—I shook their hands and kept going. I know how to protect myself too.” “You see—he concludes—I'm alive thanks to God and the benedictions of my mother.”

As Hopkins noticed in the sixties, compared to the passion of these personal rivalries, parties, State, posts, money, all seem secondary means to attend the ultimate end, which is

victory over one's rivals. This, however, does not prevent anyone from conducting the day to day of business-as-usual politics. In the meeting I attended, Keita was absent, but Sissoko was sitting in the back rows, and Tounkara, as we saw, presided the meeting, and both talked about the importance of loving the party, and loving Kita.

After the old man brought up that the source of all conflict and “noise” was the competition between those three men, none of which could call himself a real “feeder,” Tounkara spoke to make his own apology. He spoke without losing his calm, as if he did not care. He reminded the audience that he had contributed to Sissoko's campaign:

[3.24] [Bam.] If it is not true that my money completed the party's money to fund Sissoko's campaign, may God deny me everything that I seek in this life. I wanted your happiness [to Sissoko], it was you who decided to humiliate me in my father's home.

He kept going with the same conciliatory tone and even complimented Sissoko's charisma and admitted his own lack of it:

[3.25] [Bam.] Because the things that Sissoko can get done in politics, no one else can get them done. The way in which he can please people, his charisma [Bam. *kolandi*]...If I decide to run for the National Assembly, I will lose...

Of course his modesty and monetary contributions to Sissoko's campaign accounted for his own prestige. Tounkara, like everyone else, emphasized the fact that the party had not “done anything for him,” and “had not giving him anything.” “It's me—he said—who has contributed to the party when I have had something.” His position and engagement with politics is different from that of Sissoko; the force of the latter is in “the bush,” where people like him and owe him money and favors, Tounkara's strength resides in the capital, where he has access to the highest party cadres. This is how he described his personal situation to the attendants of the meeting:

[3.26] [Bam.] I'm satisfied with myself, because I am not looking for a political post, I'm not looking for the presidency, I will not be representative at the National Assembly. Those who wish to do so, can pull me to their side, me and my followers will vote for you, you are going to win. Those who don't want to do so, those who want to be in conflict with me, it's they who loose. I don't loose anything! How can someone who is not after something loose?

Of those present in the meeting, he is the one that fits most closely the definition of a “broker,” although not exactly in Hopkins' sense as those who obtain favors for people. Tounkara offered to transform money into votes, and votes into money. His main assets were his connections which translate into influence and information, by moving between Bamako and Kita, he could see a larger picture of the political machinery. He had access to multiple, semi-secluded circuits, and part of his trade was to keep information expensive, that is, to maintain its scarcity. His case illustrated a different aspect of electoral democracy and party politics, the question is, if he was not running for an electoral post, what drove his participation in politics? It seems that Tounkara benefitted from the party itself, rather than from the State as those who occupy posts, through the funds that either “the party” or particular politicians “invest” in campaigns. We could say that he charged a sort commission for turning that investment into votes. During the meeting, he talked with the same casual tone about how difficult it was to account for campaign money with precision, he said:

[3.27] [Bam.] In politics, you know that someone works very hard, his wife has a problem, and you know that he is one of the best party members. If he comes to see you, to tell you that his wife is sick, and you give him 30,000 CFA, isn't it true that you are going to give them to him?

Tounkara mediated the distribution of money coming from Bamako, and made sure that the hard work of party members was rewarded when they most needed it. Benefiting primarily

from campaign money means that his main target was to have the party win as many posts as possible, because official and personal campaign funds depend on such success. Tounkara, unlike Sissoko and those centered on personal social prestige, had an interest in supporting the candidates that had the most chances of winning over his own ambition for electoral success. This dilemma is not exclusive to Tounkara; the same tension between internal party merit and external popularity emerges at each level at the moment of distributing candidacies, the choice is: who deserves a candidacy versus who can make the party win.⁴⁵ The fact that Tounkara was at the moment more invested in the party's electoral success than in his own allowed him to appear as neutral.

Tounkara turned this position into an indication of his capacity to *say the truth*. "If you see that I can say everything, and that I can say the truth, it's because I'm not after anyone's vote," he said; to which someone jokingly replied: "You also are after a post." To Oumou's and my surprise, and in apparent contradiction with what he had just said, he answered affirmatively: "Yes, obviously, if because of the truths that I say, you decide to vote for me, then that will make me happy. Because there is nothing wrong with that." Here the serpent bites its tail: he can say the truth because he doesn't want people's votes, but if he could change such truth for votes, that would make him happy.

Unsurprisingly, the meeting ended without a resolution, without truth, and without peace. A couple of times during the discussion, speakers mentioned explicitly the relationship between those two terms: "If we don't say the truth, there cannot be peace." The question then becomes:

⁴⁵ Roughly at the same time this meeting in Kita took place, a similar debate was going on at the national level over the possible presidential candidacy of Diounounda Traore. The argument was that Diounounda *deserved* to be a presidential candidate as a reward to his work for the party, but that given his lack of charisma, which was agreed upon by all commentators, he was a risky choice for the ADEMA in electoral terms.

Who can say the truth? What grounds such truth? If it is by definition impossible to account for everything that was said as conflict-speech [Bam. *kele-kuma*], the only way of establishing the truth is performative, and thus it requires a subject capable of emitting the felicitous speech act that would establish such truth. From what we saw in this meeting, it seems that such subject would have been able to present himself as a genuine and absolute “feeder,” which does not refer to the person who has given the most, but to the person who is not seeking to be “fed.” While no one managed to occupy such position and enunciate the truth, conflict continued. The meeting dissolved into shouts and accusations, people left scattered and upset, and the last one to speak was the doyen:

[3.28] [Bam.] Tounkara, I want to say an elder’s word. Why did our elders use to say every morning that you should go greet everyone? Because, if you greet someone every morning, even if there is conflict between you two, it’s going to end.

The doyen’s advice is similar to Pascal’s argument about the search of God in which prayer precedes faith. Greet each other and peace will follow, without the need to establish the final truth about all past words and deeds. This argument also obviates sincerity, because greetings can effectively produce reconciliation regardless of the internal thoughts and emotions of the actors.

In this chapter conflict and mistrust related to the spatial configuration of democratic politics and its cycles of exchange and distribution. Competition for posts and resources led party members to accuse each other of lying and conspiring. Stopping the chain of accusations requires a subject who can authenticate the claim of “no seeking anything.” Kitan politicians compete to give the most and receive the least, at the same time, they pursue their own (economic) interests and assume everyone else to do the same. Party meetings are about the past: defining who said

what to whom, and how much money has each person given. They are also about the future: discerning what are the intentions of factions leaders, and speculating on the potential electoral success of members.

In the next chapter, I will follow politicians to the National Assembly. There, conflict and intrigue are not as visible; no one talks passionately about political rivalry. Parliamentary debates do not deviate from the script; the adoption of new national laws is carried out in an environment of consensus and agreement. Nevertheless, national representatives confront a similar difficulty in authenticating their speech. In this case, it is not their fellow assembly members who accuse them of lying and conspiring; but the general, anonymous public which dismisses their words as empty and inconsequential. I argue that in Mali the statement that politicians lie refers to something very specific: the inconsistency between words and actions. This denunciation of political mendacity is only secondarily concerned with other forms of deceit, misrepresentation and secrecy.

Chapter 4. Intention

The National Assembly of Mali stands right in the middle of the big market in downtown Bamako, facing the central mosque. One must navigate across an ocean of people, stands, motorbikes and cars to reach a gate guarded by half a dozen soldiers who open it every time a deputy's 4WD vehicle approaches. They also demand identifications, reasons and registration from all non-regular visitors; a written permission to enter the Assembly or a call from someone inside are often needed to smooth the admission process. Most administrative staff—close to a hundred people working as secretaries, archivists, librarians, escorts, transcribers, legal advisors and so on—check in at 9.00 a.m. and leave around 4.00 p.m. Amongst the regulars there are also a couple of vendors, a Fulani lady who comes in twice a week to sell fresh and curdled milk to the administrative staff, and a child who brings big bowls of rice and peanut sauce from a nearby food stand. The contrast between life inside and outside the gates is acute; the parliament stands like an island of somnolence, air conditioning, dusty archives, and administrative routines in the middle of the noisy and bustling central market.

Malian parliamentary debates have a very limited audience. Sessions are by law open to the public, but one usually finds only a few journalists sitting on the back rows of the parliamentary hall reserved for the general public. Even the press attends only during important ceremonies such as the openings and closings of parliamentary seasons, or when the agenda includes one of the few issues that attract public attention. ORTM, the national television network, sometimes broadcasts parliamentary debates, but during the time I was in Mali I saw

very few TVs tuned in to the debates. Even the Assembly staff seems indifferent to parliamentary debates. The podium's microphone is connected to speakers both inside and outside the main hall, so that the voices of the national representatives are heard from each corridor and corner of the building during the debates. However, no one outside the hall seems to care: "What for? It's only lies. It all stays on paper." A pun circulates the halls of the assembly which consists of changing the French word *parlementaire* to the neologism *parle-menteur*—which would translate to English as "speaker-liar."

The term "*parle-menteur*" illustrates a widespread belief in Mali: that politicians lie. This belief is common to many different publics all over the world, but the relationship between politics and lying takes on diverse forms. It can refer to propaganda, to State secrecy,⁴⁶ to the embezzlement of public funds, or to thorny secrets in politicians' private lives, to mention just a few possibilities. The explanation I received the most often in Mali was that politicians are liars because they do not fulfill their promises. Interestingly, this affirmation places the emphasis not on the untruthful nature of their words, but in the relationship between present verbal engagements or commissions and future actions.

I will follow Anscombe's classic work on the matter to examine this definition of mendacity as a question of intentions. Anscombe offers a helpful distinction between "expressions of intention for the future," "intentional action," and "intentions in acting." Promises are a (binding) type of "expressions of intention" to act in the future. Most of my uses of the term "intention" will fall within the category of "expressions of intention," which, as

⁴⁶ This is, for instance, the kind of lying that Hannah Arendt's analysis of the Pentagon Papers addresses (Arendt, 1972). The argument that issues concerning the survival of a State should be kept secret is a prominent one in the history of Western political thought, condensed in the term *arcana imperii*. In fact, what stands out as an oddity is the ideology of transparency, or the belief that it is possible for a government and its citizens share all information.

Anscombe argues, are grammatically very close to predictions and commands. However, in the last section of this chapter, I will also examine an example in which a deputy and a minister engage in an exegesis of governmental “intentions in acting.” I should clarify from the outset that the object of my analysis is not intentions *per se*, which are elusive if not absolutely ungraspable, but the production of signs around them, and more specifically, the ways in which different political styles secure expressions of intention (Anscombe, 1957).

The lack of correspondence between words and actions that Malians see in politicians can be divided into three theoretical possibilities. First, a politician can make a promise without the intention of fulfilling it and with the strict purpose of gaining popular support or of pleasing his audience; this possibility is the closest to a lie, understood here as a false representation of one’s real intentions.⁴⁷ Second, a politician can make a “sincere promise” and change his mind afterwards; in this case, saying that he is unreliable and untrustworthy would be more precise than saying that he is a liar. Third, a politician can make a “sincere promise” and keep it, but be incapable of actualizing it, in which case, we can say that he is powerless. These three possibilities are present in the ways in which the relationship between politics and lying figures in Mali.

The first type, false promises, is characteristic of campaign speeches but has come to stand for political speech as a whole, partly because multiparty democracy fosters the proliferations of electoral promises. Interestingly, journalists and other local commentators in Mali have noticed that politicians make campaign promises that have no relation to the faculties of the posts they are aspiring to occupy; a candidate for the National Assembly, for example, may promise the

⁴⁷ Anscombe talks about the analytical independence of lying about present intention and the fulfillment of those intentions in the future: “I might even be lying in saying I was going to do something, though afterwards did it” (G. E. M. Anscombe, 1957: 4).

electorate to build classrooms in a village.⁴⁸ This fact tells us that promising to do a good job as representative—promising to convey local concerns and opinions to the national government, for instance—is not enough for a deputy to gain popular support. Representatives cannot offer the results of their work as legislators to their constituents in exchange for their support. False expressions of intention are in practice identical to the second analytical type, shifting intentions, with the difference that the latter are associated with a different type character flaw: opportunism. This flaw is often attributed in Mali to politicians who do not have the financial independence that would allow them to keep their engagements in the volatile game of interpersonal interests.

The third type, that is, the institutional incapacity to fulfill a promise or put a law into effect, is the one that is most systematically misrecognized. In democracies sustained by strong States, the adoption of new legislation sometimes requires intense negotiations and gets defined at the end by a small difference in the number of votes at the parliament. The intensity of such negotiations, however, is not due to a natural inclination for debate or an essentially “plural political culture.” It is at least partly the effect of the administrative capacity of a strong State to put the text of legislation into effect, causing benefits and disadvantages for different social groups. Accordingly, the debates at the National Assembly of Mali are often uninteresting for most of the population, and sometimes even for deputies themselves, not because of some ancestral “culture of consensus,” but because their effects are unlikely to be realized or

⁴⁸ Ali Cissé makes a good description of this practice: “Une bizarrerie de ces campagnes c’est que les promesses des candidats se ressemblent quel que soit le poste électif convoité. Celles ou ceux qui ambitionnent d’être président de la République, député à l’Assemblée Nationale, ou conseiller communal jurent tous de promouvoir l’autosuffisance alimentaire, de construire des routes, des écoles, des centres de santé, de donner le travail aux jeunes, de garantir la sécurité des villes, de d’améliorer le cadre de vie des populations etc..” (Cissé, 2006, p. 68).

perceived, given the small administrative capacity of the State. That is why the affirmation that deputies are liars often comes with the sentence “it all stays in paper.”⁴⁹

The difficulty in turning speech into action that has led to representatives’ reputations as “*parle-menteurs*” is partly structural. It is due to the separation of the “executive” and “legislative” powers and especially to the reduced administrative capacity of the Malian State. However, I argue in this chapter that such structural difficulty is often misrecognized and interpreted as politicians’ lack of personal commitment or lack of intention. Malian political debates do not pay much attention to the private life and inner feelings of politicians as, for instance, American media do.⁵⁰ Although the Malian press, especially the radio, is critical to the point of insulting politicians on their personal ways, it does not ventilate thorny issues about politicians’ domestic life. I did not hear many references to sincerity, understood as a correspondence between politician’s emotions or feelings and their words either. However, there is a strong emphasis on politicians’ personal worth understood as trustworthiness and reliability, and, as I claim above, on the correspondence between present spoken engagements and future action.

In this chapter I will first describe the material process involved in a parliamentary debate, from the elaboration of reports inside the commissions to the transcription and archiving of

⁴⁹ The debate on the Family Code presents an interesting case because its importance seemed to have been mostly symbolic. The Malian State does not have the capacity to enforce either female obedience or spouses’ mutual respect, whatever the law established in this respect mattered little for the everyday organization of domestic life. However, it seemed that beyond the question of its applicability, it was ideologically crucial not to affirm gender equality within marriage. Most law projects do not have the same symbolic importance, but face a similar difficulty in their applicability.

⁵⁰ In *The Politics of Sincerity: Plato, Frank Speech, and Democratic Judgement*, Elizabeth Markovits gives an interesting list of examples of this obsession with politicians’ inner feelings in contemporary America. She recalls the controversy set off in 2004 over the fact that Donald Rumsfeld “had used an ‘autopen’ to sign the condolence letters to the families’ of the soldiers died in Iraq” (Markovits, 2008:169).

debates. I argue that parliamentary debates' main addressee, if we can call it so, is bureaucratic routine itself, the impersonal continuity of forms; this process is concerned with signs but obviates the question of intention. In the second section, I will suggest some elements for an idealized typology of political persona present in the Malian parliament. In each one of these ideal types—“intellectuals,” “technocrats,” and “big men”—the relationship between political speech and personhood is defined in different ways. I argue that each one these types presents a particular set of virtues and vices to counteract the generalized assumption of political mendacity; broadly speaking the accent shifts from trustworthiness, to authenticity, to accountability. Finally, I will examine a verbal exchange that took place in early 2011 at the National Assembly, in which deputy Koniba Sidibé questioned the government's spokesman on his exegesis of the governmental intentions *in* terminating twenty-eight chief financial officers in early 2011.

Life and death of a parliamentary debate

During 2010 and 2011, I attended the National Assembly on regular basis during three parliamentary seasons to observe mostly one type of social interaction: plenary sessions. The National Assembly meets in plenary sessions every two or three weeks during the three-month ordinary seasons. By the time the plenary meets to vote on a law proposal, most important decisions, debates, and compromises have already taken place at the heart of the concerned commissions, which meet in private. I could only get an indirect sense of the work inside the commissions, based on my conversations with administrative staff. The first thing that happens when a commission receives a “law proposal,” is the organization of closed-door hearings [Fr.

écoutes] with experts, civil organizations, and representatives of social groups that would suffer or benefit from the approval of the new law. Considering those hearings, commissions elaborate Reports, which have a very standard form and often repeat the sentences they use to praise a project or advise its approval.

Each report has a first section titled “Context and Justification,” then a summary of the concerns and opinions expressed during the hearings by relevant actors—usually listed under the categories of “political class,” “government,” “civil society” and “experts.” Then come an analysis of the project, a list of proposed amendments, and the recommendation to approve the project provided the amendments are voted in. The standardization of reports is largely the effect of administrative continuity; Malian parliamentary routines, protocols and overall *savor-faire* is maintained by the Assembly staff, rather than by the legislators. The assistant of the Commission of Constitutional Laws, for instance, has served for over fifteen years, and has a Report template saved on a USB key to which he makes the required adjustments.

Around three quarters of the duration of a plenary session are spent *reading* documents. The president of the National Assembly formally opens and closes each plenary session, with a few inspirational words and sometimes a short prayer in Arabic. Approving the agenda is the first part of the debate; it is done quickly, without much discussion. The president of the National Assembly reads the agenda integrally, which has been circulated in advance and usually contains five to seven proposed laws. If no one proposes amendments to the agenda, it gets adopted. The reading of the Reports and the voting in of the amendments to the proposed law is the second part of the debate. The president of the commission in charge of reviewing the project reads a short formulaic statement and then calls another member of the commission to the podium who

reads the Report integrally, after which representatives of four or five other commissions read short Advices or Opinions [Fr. *avis*]. All this is done ceremoniously and with abundant mentions of honorary titles: “Mister president,” “Honorable deputies,” “Mister minister,” and so on.

The response of the corresponding minister follows the reading of the commissions’ Report and Advices. A short debate on the amendments with one speaker “for” and one “against” follows; and finally amendments to the proposed law are voted in. After all amendments have been discussed, the floor is opened for a general debate on the proposed law in which representatives express their concerns on an individual basis. The minister replies to this round of general concerns. Ministerial responses alternate spoken explanations with the reading of arguments and statistics prepared by a technical team. Sometimes a second round of representatives’ speeches follows, to which the minister provides new answers. The last part of the process is the voting in of the new law. After counting the votes and enunciating the result, the president of the National Assembly strikes the gavel against a wooden sound block to signify the adoption of the new law.

Plenary sessions have an elaborate *mise-en-scène*. The president and vice-presidents of the National Assembly sit at the dais and two soldiers wearing dark glasses stand behind them for the entire session. Government representatives enter the hall once the session has been opened escorted by the protocol team, and seat on the right side; the doyen and other respected members of the Assembly staff seat on the left side and supervise the session. Representatives take time to gain their seats, they wrap up their elegant *bazin boubous* around their shoulders as they walk in and greet their acquaintances, visibly aware of their peers’ gaze. There is always a degree of social excitement when the plenary meets that dissolves slowly during the long hours of listening

to the readings of reports and other documents. Deputies come in and out the hall during the sessions, they read newspapers and pass them around, chat among themselves, give instructions to their assistants, and so on. Only a couple of times I saw the Assembly at its full capacity, there was always between fifteen and twenty-five percent of absenteeism of deputies, who voted by “procuration,” that is, they authorized another representative to represent them in voting. This was often the case for senior politicians, who are rarely present in the hall. During the three parliamentary seasons I attended, I saw Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, Mali’s current president of Mali and a deputy at the time, only twice.

There is a careful compliance with procedural rules; allocation of speech time, motions, interpellations, vote counting, all need to be done according to “the texts.” Procedural errors would invalidate the outcome of the session. Parliamentary debates can hardly be linguistically understood as examples of a larger category of discussions, arguments, disputes or debates. They are closer to theatrical displays; they are an official representation of a debate, a formal requirement. They do not allow the deviations from the script characteristic of an open-ended discussion in which each person strives to affect the outcome. There are practical reasons for this as well: national representatives, unlike local council members, need to speak at the microphone to be heard. The President of the National Assembly had the switch to the podium microphone, and when representatives exceeded their speech time, he turned off the microphone unapologetically.

Some parliamentary affaires are dispatched promptly, some may incite two rounds of speakers, but the script always retains the same basic form regardless of the urgency or importance of the matter at stake. The abrupt transition from “The destiny of our country

depends on..." to "Your time is over" is shocking. Furthermore, the views of the participants are not visibly affected by the arguments of their peers; there is no resolution, let alone moments of resignation of the type: "You have convinced me." As Marc Abeles noted for the French National Assembly, it can hardly be said that deputies are talking to each other. They speak in this forum to address the government, party executives, and, to a much lesser extent, to address some abstract electorate (Abélès, 2001: 313). The most certain audience of Malian parliamentary debates is the bureaucratic process itself, the subsequent official speech acts that presuppose the existence of such debate. Such an audience requires the inscription of parliamentary speech into documents.

The podium microphone connects to a speaker inside a recording room where every word is recorded on numerous tapes. There is usually a very animated and completely unrelated conversation inside the recording room that is only interrupted whenever the tape needs to be changed—a number of times, however, I saw the staff laughing, complaining or reacting nonchalantly to the discussion in the main hall. The door contiguous to the recording room opens to the transcription room, where the *proces verbaux* (PV's)—the copious documents containing the exact transcription of parliamentary debates—are produced. A year might elapse before a debate acquires its final form as a print document. According to the law, PV's must be read and ratified in plenary sessions, but this is rarely the case. In the archives of the National Assembly there is a dusty pile of PV's waiting to be ratified. All the PV's produced since Independence are stored in the Archives of the National Assembly, and it is there that one senses more poignantly the futility of it all.

The archivist was the first person I met at the National Assembly; his name is Sidiki Diaby. He joined the Assembly administrative staff in 1982 as an archivist and was promoted to *chef de service* in 1995. He has witnessed two military coups, one in 1990 and the other in 2012, and he claims to have been sitting at his desk even during those short periods when the National Assembly was suspended. “There was a fire—he told me while pointing at the chaotic aisles full of boxes—and we have not been able to reorganize the archives ever since.” He waited for the arrival of some funding from the Netherlands, which would come soon and allow him to catalogue, digitize and organize the archives. In the meantime, he devotes as little time to the documents as possible. Instead, he carefully stores the memories of the Assembly’s administrative staff; he collects group photographs taken during workshops and other internal occasions going back decades, and talks with nostalgia of the deceased colleagues. In rare occasions, the archives’ phone rings and someone on the other end, usually the administrative secretary of the Assembly, requests the PV of a recent debate, which somehow Sidiki knows where to find.

The administrative staff of the Assembly deals with all the words uttered in the main hall as little more than noise, an excessive stream of signs that bears no importance for anything that could matter. They go on with their daily routines ignoring the voices of the national representatives inside the hall: they pray, drink tea, listen to the radio and discuss regional politics with all the passion lacking from their attention to parliamentary debates. The archives office is the gathering point where old members of the administrative staff spend the empty hours of public service discussing all sorts of things, from religion to geopolitics. Arguments can go on for a long time and be quite serious, especially around issues that produce polarities. The day

after the arrest of Laurent Gbagbo in April 2011 in Ivory Coast, for instance, some usual members of this informal assembly were nowhere to be seen: “They are avoiding us—commented Sidiki—they don’t want to see any pro-Ouattara person today.” These heated informal debates are particularly striking against the monotonous background noise of parliamentary debates.

In plenary sessions questions affecting the lives of all Malians—from international loans to the creation of a new institutional structures—are discussed and decided. Yet, these debates are notably less animated than discussions in the Communal Councils which turn around topics as seemingly irrelevant as the need to move a particular market stand to keep the street free of obstructions. This is partly due to the material organization of parliamentary debate—the large number of participants, the need to use the microphone to be heard, the strict regimentation of speech time, and so on. However, beyond these material reasons there are other aspects that contribute to the perceived emptiness of parliamentary debates.

In Mali, the separation of “legislative” and “executive” powers means that the parliament neither produces initiatives nor is in charge of applying them; its interventions are for the most part at the level of amendments. If we gave an anthropomorphic shape to this separation of powers, we would see that the work of the parliament is neither at the level of intentions (the initiatives) nor of actions (their application), but an odd, reflective pause in the middle. The bureaucratic process is concerned with the recording and transcription of verbal signs with a legal value. Will and intention might be expressed in conventional forms, but strictly speaking they are not signs: one cannot capture them nor invest the debates with more of them

(Anscombe, 1957). Therefore, representatives, as politicians, need to find other ways of proving to their constituents that they are not *parle-menteurs*.

Political Personae

The general debate on the proposed legislation is the most animated part of the session. Once the floor is open, the president writes down the names of the deputies who wish to participate in the debate, and calls each to the podium. A limited number of deputies, around twenty, dominated most discussions during the seasons I observed. After a couple of sessions, one begins to notice that orations at the plenary fall within certain types. Distinct speech styles accompany relatively regular types of political persona; authenticating parliamentary speech against the background assumption of political mendacity requires elocution and argumentation, but above all it requires the projection of a public persona that embodies prestige, authority and trustworthiness. Since parliamentary debates are so systematically ignored, I was not able to gather much information on the local categories used to describe and judge parliamentary speech. I will then for the most part interpret deputies' rhetorical and personal styles as I perceived them.

In 1992, Prof. Ali Nohoun Diallo inaugurated the first multiparty legislature of democratic Mali. He took part in the clandestine struggle that overthrew Moussa Traore's regime; after which he became the first president of the National Assembly through the ADEMA party in 1992. Diallo does not like to identify himself as a "politician,"⁵¹ even though he was elected to the National Assembly for two terms. Conversely, he is one of the most emblematic public

⁵¹ "Portrait de la semaine: Aly Nouhoum Diallo, un grand pionnier du mouvement démocratique" Maliactu.net [malfunctioning site]

intellectuals of contemporary Mali, and even though he is a physician by training, the title “Prof.” always precedes his name. In 2011, he no longer occupied a political post, even though he remained an active member of the ADEMA party and his name figured in most forums of public debate—particularly in those organized by youth associations and NGO’s devoted to the promotion of democratic values.⁵² The rejection of the “politician” label by someone who is an active party leader echoes the discredit of “partisan politics” and recalls what in French is known as “les politiciens,” as opposed to “les hommes politiques.”

In his 1992 inaugural speech at the National Assembly, Nouhoun Diallo asked deputies to observe a moment of silence in the memory of those who died “for the emergence of a democratic society in Mali,” and recalled the names of the “fathers” who contributed to the “liberation of the colonized peoples of Africa.” He reminded the deputies of the challenges awaiting them, exhorted them to remain true to the spirit of “the transition to democracy,” and to find ways to overcome partisan rivalries: “work together in the realization of common, national objectives” (Diallo, 1994:12). Diallo also expressed his conviction that the Assembly would succeed in these tasks, given “its social and professional composition.” He said:

[4.1] [French] The large number of physicians, engineers, lawyers, teachers, liberal professionals, and peasants means we can expect a rich and thorough debate. Doubtless, such an assembly will not limit itself to playing the unflattering role of recording studio or echo chamber [Diallo, p.13].

The metaphors of the National Assembly as an “echo chamber” and “recording studio” appear frequently in Malian contemporary press. Nouhoun Diallo’s use of them in 1992 suggests

⁵² Some of those NGO’s are of Malian origin, such as Cri2002 and Centre Djoliba; other operate with international funds, such as the CMDID.

that they might have originated during the Moussa Traore regime, when there was no partisan opposition at the Assembly. For Diallo, however, what would authenticate the debates as more than “echo” is the training of the representatives on the one hand, and their closeness to the people, on the other. In his list of professions, the mention of “peasants” looks like a last-minute addendum with symbolic character.

The alliance between modernity and the symbolic power of the countryside is suggested at other places in his speech. The most striking example is his description of himself: “As for me, I still haven’t forgotten and I hope never to forget the hard life of the Sahelian herders from whom I descend. Today, I’m a doctor faithful to the Hippocratic oath and I can see to what extent health is beyond reach for the majority who lives in precarious material conditions” (Diallo, 1994:14). This symbolic alliance between liberal professions on the one hand, and the backward but merit-full peasants and herders on the other, leaves out a crucial component of Malian politics: the traders [Fr. *commerçants*].

Among the members of the legislature that was elected in 2007—the fourth since Ali Nuhoun Diallo inaugurated the first pluralist parliament—there were lawyers, academics, engineers, and doctors, as well as some peasants and herders. There were also two *marabouts* and two Koranic teachers. However, two professional categories dominated by far in the composition of the parliament: teachers and traders. Among the 147 members of the National Assembly, there were close to 30 schoolteachers, and close to 50 members of the private sector—25 traders, 10 accountants, and 12 who called themselves “*opérateur économique*”, which can refer to multiple functions within the private sector.

In Mali, the term “intellectual” refers broadly to everyone with a university degree and fluent in French, it is used to refer to teachers and professionals, but can also include managers and people from the private sector. At the National Assembly, it is possible to perceive a nuanced difference between lawyers, teachers and professors on the one hand and what we could call “the technocrats,” on the other. The differences between these groups are not as clear as in Latin America, where the “technocrats” stand out as a numerous group of politicians and public servants trained in Economics and Public Policy in American Universities. The association between this group and the “neoliberal” reforms is also less clear in the Malian case. Nevertheless, the term “technocrat” is sometimes used by Malian journalists, in particular, to refer to Soumaila Cissé, the leader of the URD party.

Soumaila Cissé has a masters degree in management and computer sciences from a French university, he work for IBM in France before returning to Mali, where he became minister of finances, and president of the West African Economic and Monetary Union [Fr. UEMOA], and presidential candidate two times. In 2011, he gave up a job offer at the IMF to begin his presidential campaign.⁵³ Interestingly, “technocrats” are often presented in opposition to “politicians.” In February 11th, for instance, the *InfoMatin* newspaper published an article discussing the big transformation of the cabinet that president Touré carried out at the time. The articles argued that “technocrats” had substituted “politicians” in the new governments. Here, “technocrats” referred to career public servants as opposed to party members.⁵⁴

⁵³ Mamadou Fofana “Soumaila Cissé sollicité para la FMI” *L’Independent*, [incomplete]

⁵⁴ Seydina Diarra, “Remaniment ministeriel: Les ministres politiques débarqués?” *InfoMatin*, February 11th, 2011, p. 3.

Some representatives at the National Assembly share elements of the “technocratic” political type. They have degrees from French universities in management, finances, or economics; work in the private sector or international organizations, and often phrase their interventions at the parliament in technical and quantitative terms. They wear suits and ties more often than *boubous*, and are usually enrolled in the commissions that deal with finances, economics, development, mining and natural resources. One of the characteristics of the technocratic political stance is that it responds to the generalized assumption of political mendacity with an emphasis on transparency and accountability. That is, the central virtue is not trustworthiness and reliability, as we will see below, but efficiency and budgetary precision. Consequently, financial corruption, and not unreliability, becomes the ultimate political vice.

The small minority of opposition representatives and in particular those that claim a leftist affiliation could also be considered “intellectuals,” but they cultivate a completely different style. Oumar Mariko of the SADI party is the most obvious example, he rarely wears *boubous*, and is one of the few deputies who wears cloths made of hand woven African textiles, of the type that became popular among African leftist leaders in the seventies. He is one of the few deputies I saw come to a plenary session wearing jeans and a colorful Mao-collar vest. This style seems to reflect an attempt to differentiate themselves from “deceitful politicians” and identify with “the common man.” One of the core virtues of this type of political persona is authenticity, as an imperative to be “part of the people,” defined both in national and class terms. The importance of authenticity for this political persona can also be seen in the emphasis on the loyalty to *political ideals*. It is not by distributing benefits and keeping their promises that these politicians can aspire to earn the trust of others, but by subordinating their political ambitions to the “higher

ends” of politics and adjusting their behavior to fit those principles. As a technique of the self, this political persona emphasizes sacrifice, and sharing the suffering of the people you claim to represent is considered a merit.

Even though the numerical importance of this group is minimal, they are known for being very vocal. Their speeches privilege denunciation, describe the injustices and sufferings undergone by the “voiceless,” and poor masses, and they seek to move the audience. On various occasions I heard staff and journalists react expressing their approval of these orations coming from the opposition, usually with the sentence: “He is saying the truth!” I noticed that this affirmation usually came as a reward to the display of an audacious, accusatory tone against the government, and that “saying the truth” is considered an act that requires courage. These ephemeral praises from the audience were often counterbalanced with the affirmation that these opposition figures, Mariko in particular, have benefited from the government.

Despite the differences and subgroups, one of the commonalities among all the “intellectuals” is that they discuss politics from a national and international perspective and in rather abstract terms. Most of them have built their political careers in the capital, Bamako, and travel sporadically to their electoral districts. This fact differentiates them from the large majority of deputies who use their speech time to advocate for improvements in their localities. One of the young assistants of SADI, the only opposition party in the Assembly at the time, who would sometimes sit in the back rows made me notice the difference. He had no patience for representatives interested only on public works and local transactions who overlooked the larger questions of social justice and national sovereignty, which for him were *real* politics. Unsurprisingly, representatives who have built their careers in local politics—as mayors, local

councilors, and so on—are the most interested in functioning as intermediaries between their localities and the government. They come to the parliament to demand things such as the construction of roads, hospitals, schools, and so on.

A good example of this type of pragmatic and locally grounded deputy is Mamadou Tounkara, one of the representatives from Kita at the National Assembly from 2007 to 2014. He was born in 1952, and his first political experience was as a member of the Pioneers, one of the youth organizations of the socialist era. Ten years later, he joined the youth sector of the UDPM, under Moussa Traore’s regime. By 1983, he was Secretary General of the UDPM Youth in Kita as well as member of the Kita Section *bureau*. During the seventies and eighties, he used to split his time between Bamako and Kita; he told me that he could not participate directly in the struggle for democracy because his host [Bam. *jiatigi*] in Bamako was a close friend of Moussa Traore, and thus it would have been disrespectful. Nevertheless, the political power that he amassed during the UDPM regime served him after the transition to democracy; Mamadou Tounkara joined the ADEMA and in the first communal elections he became mayor of one of the recently created rural communes in the *cercle* of Kita.

The rural commune of Sibikili is only 9 kilometers away from Kita town and its inhabitants used to travel to Kita for most affaires before decentralization. When Mamadou Tounkara became mayor of Sibikili, the village had three classrooms as sole infrastructure, and there was no town-hall building. In our conversation, he listed with precision and pride all he had built during his term: the town-hall, twelve classrooms, a small communitarian clinic [Fr. *CESCOM*], a kindergarten, a library, a football field, an aqueduct, and a well. “Go take a look at the village,

you will see the work yourself,” he told me. Then he explained me how he had funded the public works:

[4.2] [French] *Plan*⁵⁵ helped me build the classrooms... for the clinic it was a...Belgian project, which was working all over the country...Donors can help you get the work done, but they’ll ask you: what will be your own contribution? For example, for the aqueduct, the commune had to pay CFA3,850,000, and then the donor would complete the total sum. For the clinic, we had to pay CFA1,444,000. The classrooms for students...well, *Plan* does that, but the commune needs to pay 20%. We agreed to do the physical work ourselves, mixing the concrete and things like that. When you calculate the work plus some cash, you get to the 20%. That is how you get things done.

Mamadou Tounkara’s description of his work as a mayor coincides with the accounts that I gathered while visiting rural communes around Kita. The primary function of politicians as a whole, regardless of the specificities of their posts, is to obtain funds for public works primarily from international development projects. This means that for the most part the repertoire of ideas for public works and local development projects are rather fixed and predetermined. The role of the community and its local political class is to choose from a set of available options, which are roughly the items that Tounkara mentioned: classrooms, clinics, offices, energy and water supplies, and so on. Another important effect of this logic is the emphasis on building, preferably using concrete and other durable materials. It is therefore significant that Tounkara asked me to go “see” [Fr. *constater*] his work in the commune.

After serving as mayor of the rural commune of Sibikili, Mamadou Tounkara decided to leave the ADEMA with Ibrahim Boubakar Keita to create the RPM in 2001; in 2007 he was

⁵⁵ *Plan* is a Spanish International Development Organization founded in 1937 during the Spanish Civil War. It works in the promotion and protection of the rights of children in more than 50 countries all over the world.

elected as representative to the National Assembly this time by the RPM. I asked him what being a deputy was like and he answered:

[4.3] [French] People haven't understood yet what the functions of a deputy are, especially in the rural areas. A deputy cannot build a school, a deputy can only vote on new legislation. However, we do have easy access to donors, because everyone receives us. For that reason, people need us to dig wells and build aqueducts, schools, and all that. People tell us: "You have to help us, find us a donor to build a clinic, a school..."

His answer suggests that in practice there is no big difference between the role of a mayor and that of a representative at the National Assembly. Deputies serve all the communes in the *cercle* and are not as present "on the ground," but what people expect from them is also that they obtain funding for public works. Besides mediating with donors, Tounkara explained to me, a deputy has to attend countless personal petitions from the constituents: "those never end—he said—we receive calls every day, every day." Indeed, while I interviewed him in the RPM office at the National Assembly, he received four calls from people in Kita asking for contributions for events like weddings, funerals, baptisms and so on. This genre of events and contributions that in Mali are known as "the social" [Fr. *le social*] are an obligation for all powerful men and women, and are the core of political influence. I asked Tounakara whether he had to respond to all those petitions positively and he said: "Well, sometimes, to be honest, we can't, but we must do our best, we do our best." He said that the key for political success in Mali was honesty, and this is how he defined that term:

[4.4] [French] One must be honest with everyone. If you come ask me to do something for you, if I can do it, I will say yes, but I can't, then I should say no. You should not create false expectations; that is wrong. Also, people need to feel that you are committed to their cause, if they have a problem, you need to be close to them, and even if you cannot solve the issue, at least they will see that you share their pain. But everything rests

on honesty...not pursuing someone else's women, someone else's children, the social side is very important.

Toukara used the words *honnête* and *honnêteté*, which in French, as in English, condense a wide range of related but distinct qualities, such as honorable, upright, incorruptible, frank, and sincere. His explanation of an honest behavior, however, did not accentuate either incorruptibility or sincerity, which are the meanings that predominate in English and French, but a solid correspondence between verbal engagements and future actions: doing what one has agreed to do and not agreeing to do things one cannot do. He reiterated the importance of reliability and trustworthiness when he described his reasons for leaving the ADEMA party and joining the RPM.

Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, Mali's current president (2013-) and founder of the RPM party, was at the time seen by a part of the public opinion as embodying the political values that Toukara defended. As a prime minister and president of the National Assembly, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita earned the reputation of being decisive, reliable, and authoritative, which was captured in a Bambara epithet. Journalists and other commentators often called him *kankelentigi*, which would translate to English as something like "the holder of the undivided word." In our conversation, Mamadou Toukara recalled this epithet. He said:

[4.5] [French] Ibrahim [Boubacar Keita] accords great importance to his word, to the extent that he has been called *kankelentigi*. When he says "black," it is black, when he says "white," it is white. He has proven it to me a thousand times.

The literal translation of *kankelentigi* is "the owner of one word," but definitions of the epithet I heard vary slightly. *Kankelentigi* is someone whose words do not change across time and among audiences, who does not play with the gradients of secrecy and intrigue that we saw

in Chapter 3. *Kankelentigi* is a leader who produces certainty and thus creates trust and cooperation, who establishes a solid correspondence between words and actions. Again, the emphasis is not on sincerity understood as a faithful representation of inner thoughts and feelings, but on clear and steady intentions.

The ideal persona for this political stance is a pure “feeder” who keeps his promises, distributes benefits, and “doesn't owe anything to anyone.” The fact that Mamadou Tounkara said that politicians have to “do their best” to attend the constituents’ monetary requests suggests that these political practices are also ethical commitments. Thus, two central virtues of this political type are material generosity and trustworthiness; these are projected through a particular style that we can call “the big man” style, although it includes many female deputies. They usually wear opulent *bazin boubous*—and sophisticated headdresses in the case of women—are liberal with money, and grandiose in their campaigns. The ideal rhetorical match for this type of political persona is intricate and ornamented, with abundant figures, references to the Greek antiquity and the Malian epic past. They put particular emphasis on people’s titles, are very good at praising important personalities visiting the Assembly, and always call each other “honorable,” the formal title of national representatives.

One of the most common modes of classifying political persona in the West is to place them on an axis that goes from idealism to pragmatism, depending on the proportion of principles and interests in the definition of someone’s political behavior. In Mali, I found instances of use of a similar criteria which classified politicians by their degree of “conviction,” understood as the capacity to subordinate interests and material needs to ideals and principles. Among the political youth, I heard multiple times that the “problem of Malian democracy” is that

politicians have “no convictions.” This lack of convictions would explain politicians’ erratic behavior or their “opportunism.” However, the idea that it is the force of “principles” that can stabilize and render predictable political trajectories is itself the product of a very particular understanding of politics. Shifting the attention from this opposition of ideals and interests to the nuanced “core virtues” of different political persona shows a different picture. These virtues are of course not mutually exclusive, nor do these ideal types of political persona exist in any “pure” form; as analytical tools, however, they allow us to see a larger repertoire of techniques of the self that designed to confront the generalized assumption of mendacity and unreliability.

Here I traced some of those core virtues—trustworthiness, authenticity and accountability—and began to delineate their particularities. Each one links a conception of the politician’s roles to a technique of the self, designed to secure the relationship of words and actions.⁵⁶ I claim that political mendacity in Mali is primarily understood as the lack of correspondence between verbal engagements and actions, or as the unreliable character of politicians’ expressed intentions to act in the future. Each one of these core virtues places the source of stability ~~in~~ of? intention in a different place. Trustworthiness derives stability from the force of reciprocity and social obligation; authenticity derives it from an identity with the people or the nation, and accountability derives it from the public gaze over financial transactions. In the following section, I will examine an interaction between deputy Koniba Sidibe and the minister of communication and government spokesman at the time, Sidiki N’fa Konaté, in which intentions are present not as engagements for future actions but as the retrospective interpretation of the meaning and purpose of governmental actions. In the discussion, the distinction between office

⁵⁶ Lionel Trilling argues that in Western cultural history, sincerity in the way we understand it emerged in the sixteenth century, and gave way to authenticity in the nineteenth century. See Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1972.

and incumbent, that is between institutional and personal responsibility, is unstable; at times it is affirmed and at times obviated.

Governmental Intentions

There is parliamentary procedure that allows representatives to confront the government on a subject of their choice. Individual deputies can address a letter to the head of a government office with a set of questions that the governmental representative is required to answer at a plenary session in a formal procedure known as “Oral Questions” [Fr. *Questions orales*] During the three parliamentary seasons I observed, I saw Oral Questions take place only four or five times, and in all occasions it was the initiative of one of the two opposition parties at the time, SADI and PARENA.

On April 13th 2011, the Council of Ministers, the highest government body, issued a decree terminating the totality of Chief Financial Officers [Fr. *Directeurs Administratifs et Financiers or DAFs*] of all State Departments. In one day more than twenty high public functionaries lost their jobs. This unexpected measure was part of a series of abrupt changes in the composition of the government that president Toumani Touré carried out in the first months of 2011, the last year of his presidential term. Unsurprisingly, the disproportion and seemingly capricious character of this measure set off a controversy about the intentions of the president *in* such action. Sidiki N’fa Konaté, Minister of Communication and government spokesman at the time, gave an interpretation of this presidential decision on the national news broadcast by calling it “a big step in the war against corruption and fraud.” This statement fueled the discussion even further, whereas some commentators praised the president’s uncompromising attitude against corruption that such measure was meant to reflect, many others resented the form in which it was done: was

the government implying that the totality of DAF's could be assumed to be corrupt without conducting individual investigations and without providing any evidence?

Koniba Sidibé, a member of the PARENA party and the Finances Commission, filed an Oral Question requesting an explanation on this issue from the Minister of Communication. Sidibe has a PhD in Economics and has worked both in the private and public sectors; he was one of the most engaged and outspoken representatives in the 2007 legislature. Interestingly, Sidibé's letter to the minister did not request an explanation of the government's decision to terminate the Financial Officers, but of the intention that the spokesman attributed to the decision on the television news, that it was an act against corruption. Accordingly, the answer of Sidiki Konaté, minister and government spokesman, was a hybrid between a personal apology, for having offended the public servants, and a new exegesis of the governmental decision to explain what he meant by "war against corruption."

Unlike most ministers, Sidiki N'fa Konaté did not read his response to the Assembly. He took advantage of the occasion to demonstrate his rhetorical mastery. His speech was ornamented and delivered with a very histrionic prosody, marked by pauses and shifts in tonality. He used abundant rhetorical figures, in particular repetition and strings of semantic cognates, and few technical terms and numbers. His style reminded me more of the enlightened elitism of the ancient rhetoricians than the variations of "popular" and "expert" speech common in Western democracies nowadays. Here is how his response began:

[4.6] Mr. President, this democratic exercise, in which I take part for the first time...I submit myself to it with added conviction since I'm persuaded that it enables the establishment and

consolidation of democratic culture which features information as a key element. Inform to know [Fr. *connaitre*], know to know [Fr. *savoir*], know [Fr. *savoir*] to decide, decide to act.⁵⁷

Abundant and pompous words followed each other with an elegant and well modulated prosody; the minister and government spokesman pronounced each one emphatically and let it weigh on the audience as if it was enormously significant. Affirming his gentlemanly willingness to receive criticism and submit himself to a “democratic exercise” entailed a degree of disengagement from the subject matter. What seemed to matter most was not to establish the truth about the termination of the DAF’s, but to celebrate information, debate and democratic culture *per se*. To convey the importance of information, he indulged in a peculiar and rather obscure rhetorical figure: “Inform to know [Fr. *savoir*], know to know [Fr. *connaitre*], know to decide, decide to act.” This peculiar string is composed of five verbs, each one of which is supposed to depend on the previous one, establishing a neat connection from information to action. He continued:

[4.7] [French] In *our capacity as* government spokesmen, our *role* is to enable domestic and international public opinion to *understand government resolutions*. *We* have to explain major government decisions and make sure that major actions taken by the government are known and understood by the citizens. *This logic of acting and creating understanding* has to reach the entire public: population, institutions of the republic, trade unions and business owners, civil society, international donors, etcetera, etcetera. This abrogation was a major *government act*, it was important to create understanding as quickly as possible among all Malians—men and women—to prevent rumor and misunderstanding from spreading [My emphases].

The minister exalted repeatedly the beauties of a sound communication between government, citizens, and all major social institutions—trade unions, private sector, international donors and so on. According to his argument, the government needs to explain itself. This

⁵⁷ This sentence translates poorly, the original in French was: “Informer pour savoir, savoir pour connaitre, connaitre pour décider, décider d’agir.”

resounds with the notion that governmental decisions are not only supposed to be visible and public, they also have to be interpreted and understood. By communicating with the people, he claims, the government acts against rumor, which is based on misunderstanding. Konaté's speech resonates with the embrace of public transparency that gained global acceptance in the nineties and early 2000s. However, it also differs in one important way, as it is not centered on making State information available to the citizens but in providing and diffusing the correct interpretation of governmental acts.

In the above passages, Konaté switched from the first singular person, "I," to the royal "we" as he began to describe the responsibilities of the office he occupies. Using Goffman's concept of "participant roles," we could say that ministers, as incumbents of an office, are *animators* of a locution of which they are only partially *authors*, since there is usually a team working to generate the responses that are read in the National Assembly. The *principal*, or the entity in which the responsibility for those decision lies, is the government, an abstract, impersonal subject. As a general rule, when government representatives speak at the National Assembly, they reinforce this distinction between their role as office incumbents and as private individuals through self-effacing linguistic patterns. Conversely, deputies often use self-enhancing linguistic patterns which underline their own agency and project them a cohesive persona.

In this occasion, however, the response of the government spokesman was peculiar because this desegregation in "participant roles" was somewhat erratic. Deputy Koniba Sidibe requested from him something between a personal apology for having offended the *DAFs* on TV and a general justification of the governmental decision to terminate these functionaries. Throughout

his response, the minister presented himself as occupying different roles and degrees of responsibility. He first described how he received a last minute instruction to attend the news broadcast and insisted on the fact that he acted only as spokesman of the government (animator), and thus diluted his responsibility for the message he delivered. However, right after he made this clarification, he provided a technical justification of the government's measure, this time speaking as minister, and thus partaking of the authorship and responsibility of the decision. Finally, when he got to the core of the issue—the accusation of corruption implicit in his statement on television—he delivered an intricate logical game in which a string of tropes on transparency and democratic governance were tangled up with a personal apology:

[4.8] [Bam.] It is true that the other day, when commenting on this abrogation, *we* said that it was inscribed in the general context of the fight against corruption and financial crime; that it was aimed at creating *trust* between the State and the citizens and that its goal was also to foster *dialogue* between the governing and the governed. *However, we never said, we never thought, that these citizens were financial criminals; we never said, we never thought, we never wrote that these honest public servants were corrupt.* [My emphases]

The reference to his thoughts dissolved the distinction between office and incumbent by turning his attempt to disambiguate an official declaration into a question of personal sincerity: if he was only a spokesman, why should it matter what his thoughts were? In this passage, the minister projected a cohesive correspondence between his roles as animator, author and principal by presenting himself as the agent of the three actions which we can consider emblematic of each one of these roles: to say (animator), to write or compose (author), and to intend (principal). Bureaucracy desegregates these functions and underscores forms and formality.

Here, however, the spokesman reconstituted himself as a cohesive subject in which all those functions coincided. His statement sought to produce governmental credibility by relying

on the linguistic strategies that “private” persons, outside of their roles as office incumbents, would use to authenticate their words and intentions. The movement between “personal and “impersonal” statements, however, was not exclusive to him. President Touré’s decision to fire the DAF’s without an investigation reflected a similar tendency, as it implied that the president knew personally who was corrupt. Koniba Sidibe’s question did the same thing by requesting an explanation of the words that he heard “coming out of the spokesman’s mouth” on TV.

Moreover, the words that the spokesmen used to describe the type of relationship that should exist between government and citizens in a democracy, one ruled by “trust” and “dialogue,” also attribute an anthropomorphic character to the government. The idea of a “dialogue” between citizens and government assumes that the two elements of such exchange have a relatively symmetrical composition. That is, that they are responsible for their words and deeds in relatively the same way. However, linguistic exchanges between deputies and representatives of the government at the National Assembly usually show something different. Even when deputies interpellate government representatives in an almost personal manner, ministers answer without betraying the internal logic of bureaucracy. That is why this exchange between Sidibe and the minister of Communications was so singular.

The minister and spokesman continued the exegesis of the words he pronounced on TV and embarked in a convoluted rhetorical game to reduce the meaning of the term “war against corruption” to a minimum:

[4.9] [French] [We said..] That it was a political decision inscribed in the general context of the restoration of the rule of law, flexibility in the promotion and reassignment of civil servants, and improved management of the State’s financial and material resources; all of which are intended to foster citizens’ *trust* in the State, establish an efficient public administration, and assure good governance. We will easily understand, ladies and

gentlemen, that when we talk about good governance, we can't help but talk about the fight against corruption and financial crime. Such is the unassailable logic that made us speak about the fight against corruption and financial crime.

According to his explanation, all the qualities of a "good governance" present in the contemporary democratic canon ultimately lead to the war against corruption. To dissolve the accusation implicit in his TV declaration he had to reduce the meaning of "war against corruption and fraud" to a minimum: "It was a political decision [...] seeking to insure good governance [...] and you will understand that one cannot speak of good governance without speaking of war against corruption and fraud." There is an implicit analogy between the governmental attributes of transparency and corruption and the personal attributes of sincerity and deceit. "Trust" bridges these two realms, as "the war against corruption" is supposed to foster citizen's *trust* in the State. This idea of transparency, however, is not that of the perfect bureaucratic machinery that leaves no margin for mismanagement. Here, transparency requires a personal exegesis in which governmental decisions are attributed intentions. In other words, what the government spokesman offered to the public on TV was not an account of how the DAF's had mismanaged funds, but an explanation of what the government intended to achieve by firing them all.

When his time to replicate came, Koniba Sidibé provided an interesting commentary on the minister's rhetorical style, which he dismissed as vacuous. He said:

[4.10] [French] I would like to thank minister Sidiki for this brilliant and very pedagogical exposition, which is characteristic of a communications expert. However, I remain dissatisfied with the responses offered, and with the fact that he did not address many of my original questions.

Interestingly, he attributed the vacuity of the minister's speech precisely to the fact that he is an "expert in communications." Sidibé, thus, relied on the common opposition between sincere spontaneous versus artificial learned speech. He placed himself on the opposite end of the spectrum, as someone who does not have the same "eloquence" and therefore is more truthful. He continued:

[4.11] [French] "Abrogation of the appointment decree" all that...I don't know what that could mean if not collective sacking. [...] If it was done as a way of improving management of public resources, as you just said, then that is just a different way of saying that the goal was to advance the fight against corruption... As a communications expert, you speak positively, but I speak otherwise to say that it remains the same thing.

For Sidibé, the minister's strategy was ineffective, as it did not manage to dissolve the accusation of corruption implicit in his TV statement. Koniba Sidibé addressed the minister as "person" not as incumbent of an office. He acknowledged that the minister was not entirely responsible for the decision, but asserted his full responsibility as interpreter of the decision. He continued:

[4.12] [French] [...] I know that he [the minister] is not the only one making these decisions, but it was he who spoke on TV to say that the decision was made in the context of the fight against corruption and financial crime. I did not hear this from anyone else, sir; *I heard from your mouth on TV*, Mr. Minister. So you cannot have said the other day that it was in the context of the fight against corruption, then come and say something else today!

The words came out of the ministers' mouth and the responsibility leaked into his person, because he animated them and because he committed to the their truth. Sidibé's mode of addressing the minister felt like an interruption of the parliamentary speech register. I would say that it felt like a transition from a "mock" debate to a genuine one. Interestingly, such "genuine" character required the agglutination of all roles in one person and with it the reconstitution of

personal responsibility. Sidibé asserted the first hand nature of his evidence: “I did not hear this from anyone else, sir; I heard from your mouth on TV.” His accusation turned the ambiguity and obscurity of the government’s decision into a problem concerning the personal discontinuity of the minister, who said one thing and then a different one.

In the next chapter, I will examine a dispute concerning the payment of a restitution. It took place at the Kita town-hall in 2011 and involved a deputy, the mayor, and some council-members. In this discussion, State’s administrative ineffectiveness and suspicion over personal intentions get similarly conflated in the production of a conspiracy narrative or “anti-public.” This “anti-public,” which I define as the aggregate effect produced by all the public statements that indicate its existence, has the felicity that the world of visible politics lacks.

Chapter 5. Infelicity

A few years after the 1991 transition to electoral democracy, an audacious decentralization policy began to transform the territorial and administrative structure of Mali. By 2000, seven hundred villages and towns had acquired the status of rural *communes* governed by elected organs and enjoying a significant degree of autonomy in the management of local resources, particularly land. Electoral democracy and party politics reached most of those communes in the 1998-1999 communal elections, which brought 12,000 new local representatives into office as mayors, adjuncts, and council members all over the country. New elected councils were created at each level, from the Communal Councils to the *Cercle* Councils and Regional Assemblies; the ones that already existed gained new faculties.

The authority and legitimacy of these new “spaces of deliberation,” as they are called in the new governance jargon, are fragile, as is their capacity to affirm themselves as a forum for local concerns and significant decision-making. At the local level, elected representatives share their authority with State functionaries (prefects in particular), non-governmental organizations, and traditional chiefs. Abundant accusations of duplicity and deceit have drained public politics of significance by creating the impression that *real* politics takes place in other forums. This displacement of politics towards a real or imagined “anti-public” has had the effect of invalidating visible, official politics. I draw on speech act theory to argue that these local councils, and democratic politics more broadly, suffer from *chronic infelicity*, or a recurrent ineffectiveness of speech acts.

In this chapter, I will first contrast the neotraditionalist ideology of language of the decentralization reforms with the local regimentation of formal talk that I observed in Kita. Then, I will briefly examine the history of the Communal Council of Kita as seen through the “Book of Minutes” [Fr. *Livre de PVs*] which extends from 1961 to the present day. Finally, I will analyze a meeting of Communal Council of Kita that took place in April 2011. In this meeting, council members discussed a regional court ruling which required the *mairie* of Kita [town-hall] to pay restitution to an ex-deputy for the damages caused to his property during a popular riot. Broken promises, commitments not kept, and accusations of deceit are ubiquitous in the stories that I will recount. There is an ongoing difficulty in producing effective binding force through speech acts. I argue that this infelicity points to an underlying conflict between competing regimes of language—each one relying on alternative sources of obligation—ranging from written laws, to signatures and documents, to the sacred objects in possession of the founding families. I contend that the examination of linguistic felicity, and in particular of the production of binding acts, eventually leads to the question of sovereignty. Following Schmitt, I understand sovereignty as “the capacity to decide on exception,” that is, as a force that only responds to itself or creates its own conditions of possibility.

Authority returns home

Malian decentralization is not an isolated case by any means, as international organizations and governance consultancy firms promoted similar reforms in many African, Latin American and European countries around the same time.⁵⁸ The language of

⁵⁸ For comparative ethnographic analyses of the role of Non-Governmental Organizations and Think Tanks in the promotion of local governance and democracy around the since the 1990s see B. Pétric, 2012.

decentralization, nevertheless, resonated well with a long-lasting mistrust of the central State prevalent in some Malian towns (Amselle, 1968; Hopkins, 1972). Furthermore, the Malian team of experts that designed the institutional framework of decentralization presented the adoption of international models of local governance as the *recovery* of a long African tradition of local self-governance. Ousmane Sy, the main architect of Malian decentralization, recounts that his team had been looking for a term in Bambara that would convey the meaning of the French word *décentralisation*, which was not always understood by the villagers [Fr. *les populations*]. Specialists in national languages had been unable to provide a translation. One day during a meeting in the Malinke village of Kiéniégoué, an old man told Sy and his team that they were not suggesting anything new: since the times of Sundiata Keita, the Great Manden had been governed in a “decentralized” manner.⁵⁹ This reform, the old man said, is just “the return of administration to the household.” That is how, according to Sy, the expression in Bambara “*mara ségi sô*”—“the administration returns home”—became the official Bambara slogan of the reforms (Sy, 2009, 87).

Contemporary Malian discussions on local governance frequently portray villages, which sometimes come to stand for Africa as a whole, as examples of democracy and self-government *avant la lettre*. The symbol of the “deliberation tree” [Fr. *arbre à palabres*] under which elders gather to discuss matters of public relevance, and the claim that village discussions always reach consensus are both emblematic of this “invented tradition.”⁶⁰ Ousmane Sy relies on this image of

⁵⁹ Sundiata Keita (c.1217-c. 1255) was the founder of the Great Empire of Mali (c.1230 to c.1600).

⁶⁰ For another example of how “invented traditions” have been used to ground decentralization see Jean-Loup Amselle’s analysis of the uses of N’ko writing and of Souleymane Kanté’s account of the Empire of Mali in the justification of the reforms (Amselle, 2006).

traditional deliberation and consensus as a foundation for the new institutions of local governance:

In village public meetings, the floor is given first to the youngest and last to the eldest. The latter summarizes the opinions expressed by everyone before suggesting a consensual decision. If consensus is not possible, another meeting is necessary. This is how decisions are still made among the majority of the population. This type of practices cannot and should not be ignored as we build the new forms of public management. [My translation] (Sy, p.131).

This passage is an example of a larger discursive formation that I will call the language ideology of the “primordial consensus.” By “language ideology” I refer to a set of normative assumptions *in* and *about* language and their relation to a social context; these assumptions can be located at three levels, which we can call: language structure, regimentation of language in use or “meta-pragmatics,”⁶¹ and “meta-discourses” on language (Schieffelin, Kroskrity, and Woolard, 1998). These three “levels” are perhaps more easily understood as degrees of explicitness or degrees of reflection. They range from lexical and grammatical patterns, to the regimentation of the *use* of language embedded in interactions, to an ideology *of* or *about* language. The boundaries between these three levels are not always clear, and in many ways they

⁶¹ This second part corresponds to Silverstein’s understanding of language ideologies as “implicit metapragmatics” or “the linguistic signaling that is part of the stream of language use in process and that simultaneously indicates how to interpret that language-in-use.”

overlap. What matters to this argument is that these three levels affect each other, but cannot be inferred from each other; that is, they are not coherently organized.⁶²

In the above passage, Ousmane Sy turns a description of language *use* in the rural areas into an ideology of language with normative weight. The explicit purpose was to ground the sovereignty of the newly created councils in the ways in which “decisions are still made among the majority of the population.” This idea of a rural, ancient capacity for deliberation and consensus can be understood as a nativist fantasy of the educated elites. However, it is much more than that. References to a mythical past of felicitous deliberations and consensual agreements are *also* common in the villages and small towns. Elders resort to the “primordial consensus” ideology as they lament the disappearance of respect and agreement in the current times; but their meaning and intent are likely to be quite different from Sy’s perspective.

The ideology of the “primordial consensus,” as articulated by both intellectuals and local elders, presupposes a relatively isolated and self-contained village as the incontestable unit of action and accountability and the main arena of discussion (Kockelman, 2007). Whereas the elites take the existence of such a unit for granted, the Kitan elders see it as linked to a foundational or constitutional speech act that is often mentioned in public discourse. In Kita, for the four founding families, the possibility to produce binding, consensual agreements was

⁶² Let me give an example. The existence in Mexican Spanish of a grammatical distinction between “tú” (you familiar) and “usted” (you formal) reflects a linguistic ideology that presupposes the existence of two types of addressees; that much can be inferred from the grammar and lexicon. My mom telling me that I should always use “usted” when talking to a waitress is an example of “meta-pragmatics” or the regimentation of language’s *use*, notice that my mom’s norm and its social implications cannot be derived from grammar. Finally, if I wrote an article saying that the distinction between “usted” and “tú” is a vestige of an aristocratic past that should not have any place in a democratic republic, such intervention would be an example of the third level, a “metadiscourse” or an ideology *about* language. If I managed to eradicate the use of “usted” in Mexico, that would be an example of an ideology of language affecting the other two levels: grammar and use.

ideologically secured by the tight association between the foundational agreement [Bam. *Kita benkan*], the ground of the village—both as land and as distinctive landscape features which protect the force of the foundation, and the distinction between foreigners and natives.⁶³ The force emerging from the foundational speech act is understood to reside in the place itself, and can be manipulated by the original families. The foundational agreement is anything but egalitarian; in fact, it inaugurates hierarchy, among other things, by establishing a distinction between hosts and guests (Amselle, 1996). Seen from the perspective of the “primordial consensus” ideology, all subsequent meetings held in the name of Kita take place *within* the “constitutional” frame established by that foundational act. When the notable elders talk about the old times it is not to emphasize the egalitarian and public character of “traditional” meetings, but to lament the loss of their authority, and with it, the loss of agreement and cooperation [Bam. *ben*].

So far we have only looked at the ways in which two groups of people—identified here as “intellectuals” and “Kitan elders”—talk about “traditional” meetings and the difference in what they value or emphasize. They are both examples of ideologies *of* language or “meta-discourses.” Observing meetings as they unfold, that is, looking at the regimentation of language *use*, reveals other things about the ways in which “decisions are still made among the majority of the population.” The legendary “deliberation trees” [Fr. *arbre à palabres*] are indeed part of most villages’ design, and it is common to see people hanging out in their shade, but I never heard anyone give them too much importance. However, “vestibules” [Bam. *bulon*]*—*the small rooms

⁶³ The opposition between *dùgùden* and *dunan* or “natives” and “foreigners” among the Mandingues has been largely discussed by anthropologists, for a recent discussion in relation to decentralization see Traore, 2006.

built at the threshold of a notable house's inner court and the street in which elders used to sit to discuss serious matters— still hold symbolic importance and in some places are still in use. The image of the “deliberation tree” is an egalitarian and public one, and even though the right to speak is allocated by age and gender, everyone is entitled to it. Conversely, “vestibules” are right on the threshold of a house are therefore much more exclusive than trees, as they have an owner and a few regular attendants. Beyond trees and vestibules, what I found in Kita and the surrounding villages was that serious conversations, other than the meetings of large association [Bam. *ton*], always took place in a room inside a house. Since most domestic activities, including cooking, eating and watching TV, take place in the courtyard, it was remarkable that only when people needed to discuss serious matters or receive an important guest would they go inside a room.

Accompanying politicians in their tours of the villages, I confirmed this pattern, as they were always received in absolute privacy by the local notables. The procedure was always the same: one must visit the chief's house first, (he might be sitting under a thatch roof by himself, while women and children go on with their activities). After the guests have greeted everyone and drunk water, the chief stands up and goes by himself into a room, then one of his wives comes to let the guests know that he is waiting for them. I was excluded from these political conversations. However, I participated in a similar “chamber discussion” of a very serious kind concerning the dissolution of a marriage engagement; the old aunts travelled hundreds of kilometers from their villages in “the bush” to Kita just to hold this conversation. Only the young people directly involved in the issue participated in the meeting with elders, and as in Sy's excerpt, the youths were allowed to speak first. The meeting lasted

hours, everyone spoke, and although married women dominated the discussion, the conclusions and compromises were articulated by elder men. I would not say that a consensus was reached, but the man's decision to dissolve the engagement was respected despite the fierce opposition of most of the elders, who at the end gave up. In contrast with the political meetings I had attended, this "private public" meeting was remarkable in its solemnity. It did not occur to any of the participants to disqualify the discussion itself, neither because of its format or procedure, nor because of the intentions of the speakers. The meeting was secluded and the discussion earnest, and insofar as the whole affair was put to rest afterwards, the agreement was also binding or felicitous.

What I found at the Communal Council was quite different. As we will see in this chapter, some aspects of the linguistic regime I call "primordial consensus" figured in the official political discussions—in particular, the relevance of age and the dislike for solving issues through voting. However, these practices appear in the communal councils as part of a larger repertoire of competing ideas concerning public speech and politics. The coexistence of these multiple linguistic ideologies is not always peaceful or mutually reinforcing; quite the opposite. It is common to hear local commentators emphasize the conflict between this traditional linguistic order and the diffusion of liberal principles such as pluralism, "critical debate," and freedom of speech.

Every regime of language has its own procedures for the accomplishment of felicitous, binding speech acts. Everyday language is full of examples of this regimentation: a check needs to be signed, a promise needs to be sincere, a marriage engagement comes with a ring, and so on. For Austin, such procedures work because they are based on "convention," which is to say that

every time I sign a check, I “cite” a known procedure. However, in the particular case of the check, the felicity of the speech act — that is, my ability to cash the check — is guaranteed by a financial institution and ultimately by the State. Both compliance with established procedures and the existence of an institutional framework are required for the felicity of the speech act; neither condition alone is sufficient. However, if I promise my sister not to lie to her, the felicity of that promise does not presuppose the existence of an institutional framework in the same way as signing a check does. Therefore, it is possible to classify binding speech acts by looking at (a) whether they require an external enforcement or fulfillment mechanism, and (b) which form that mechanism takes: the state, the army, the university and so on. These criteria also allow us to see different aspects of the relationship between felicity and sovereignty. For example, a communal council can agree to impose a sales tax of 5%, but it might need the help of the central state to collect such a tax; conversely, a drug cartel might decide to impose a fee and collect it without the need of another institution.

The idealized version of village deliberations is concerned with legitimizing the process through which decisions are locally made, but it takes for granted the ability to implement those decisions. The decentralization reforms that announced the “return of power home” created many new institutions for collective decision-making, but they assumed that the binding power of such decisions was guaranteed by the legitimacy and validity of the process—from the mode of election of council members to the organization of the meeting itself. However, these reforms did not increase the capacity of the municipalities to enforce and administer their decisions substantially.

The Communal Council of Kita

The urban Commune of Kita acquired its status of “partly self-governing commune” [Fr. *commune de moyen exercice*] not in 1999, as did many other Malian towns and villages, but in 1955, during the last years of the French colonial period.⁶⁴ Ever since then, an appointed or elected Local Council has been part of Kita’s political life. Following the decentralization reforms, the *mairie* of Kita, the administrative center of *commune*, retained some of its old functions and acquired some new ones. *Mairies* are in charge of performing civic marriages, keeping the vital records of the *commune*’s population, collecting local taxes and market fees, dividing and assigning communal land, and managing public facilities such as public abattoirs and standpipes. The large majority of the people living in Kita only attend the *mairie* in order to obtain an identification or other type of personal document, or to get married; in fact, the mayor-adjunct who is in charge of performing marriages is known informally as the “popular mayor” [Fr. *le maire populaire*].

Besides these administrative functions, *mairies* also house a political organ, the Communal Council, manned by locally elected representatives and presided over by the mayor. The Communal Council approves the yearly communal budget, decides on local public works, serves as interlocutor for NGO’s operating in the area, and manages the activities and resources

⁶⁴ The November 19th 1955 Law voted on by the French National Assembly transformed the territorial administration of French West Africa (AOF), Equatorial France and Madagascar by establishing fully self-governing communes [Fr. *communes de plein exercice*], and “partly self-governing communes” [Fr. *communes of moyen exercice*]. The few communes that attained such status, such as Kita, Kati, and Koulikoro, were governed by a mayor, who had the status of public functionary and was designated by the *chef de territoire*, and a Municipal Council, elected by a college. The differentiated assignment of citizenship rights to heterogeneously defined units is characteristic of the redefinition of the relationship between the metropole and the colonies that resulted from World War II (Cooper, 2014).

resulting from the Sister Cities program, among other tasks.⁶⁵ The Council issues “deliberations,” which are the main legislative instrument at the communal level. These deliberations can take the form of general rules — such as “the tax on alcohol sales should be five percent”—or *ad hoc* decisions regarding a specific matter, such as “Mister Konaté should move his market stand because it is obstructing circulation.”

The meetings of the Communal Council of Kita take place mostly in Bambara, but representatives switch to French frequently: when they have to deploy a legal term, when they read documents or cite official letters, when they dictate the written formulation of a “deliberation,” and sometimes for no apparent reason. The General Secretary doubles as a simultaneous translator as he writes down in a big, official-looking notebook, in French, a summary of each oration and all the “deliberations” issued by the Council. The way of conducting meetings and the rhetorical styles deployed by the representatives alternate between standard French civic procedures—reading the “order of the day” and approving it, confirming that the quorum is attained, raising hands before speaking, asking for motions, and so on—and at particular moments, the use of local styles of formal speech. The most distinct example of the latter happens when a councilman begins to fulfill the task of word “catcher”, which in other venues is usually fulfilled by a griot who interjects an approving sound at the end of every sentence uttered by the main speaker.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Almost every urban and rural commune in Mali has a “sister commune” in Europe. Sister communes maintain some communication throughout the year and carry out joint cultural, economic, and social projects. The minutes of the meetings of the Communal Council of Kita show that a very significant amount of time and resources of the Mairie of Kita have been devoted to manage issues related to the sister communes program. Judging by the Council discussions, the expenses of receiving, hosting and feeding the French delegates were sometimes perceived as higher than the benefits received from the program.

⁶⁶ This type of genre has a very distinct prosody resulting from the rhythmical combination of statement +griot’s affirmation+statement.

I was allowed to look into the archives of the *mairie*, a couple of old colonial wooden cabinets full of large notebooks and dusty bundles of documents. One set of notebooks contained the minutes [Fr. *PVs*] of all the discussions that the Council has had since 1961—first written by hand and later on typed in sheets of papers glued to the pages of the big notebook. Another set contained all the “Deliberations” issued by the Council since 1955. There was also a “Journal de Poste,” a sort of log kept by the Administrative Secretary with a short entry for almost everyday. Some of the entries referred to the weather and to phases of the moon. Between February 25th and March 12th 1991, all the entries read: “Student Unrest” [Fr. *troubles scolaires*]. The next entry was from March 26th: “Fall of the Moussa Traore regime.” After which, commentaries on the weather continued.

Reading the minutes of the Council session from the late eighties, one finds other striking continuities, but also some subtle changes. In the late eighties, during the last decade of the Moussa Traore single-party regime, the sessions of the Communal Council were always attended by UDPM party authorities, which were not council members and figure in the minutes as “Invited Personalities.” In the last communal elections of the UDPM in 1988, the mayor El-Hadj Seydou Mariko Keita and a large number of council members were reelected; the speeches of the *commandant de cercle* and the party authorities are quite critical and make references to “unsatisfactory results” of the municipal administration. The mayor began the first session of this new council by saying:

[5.1] [Fr.] I will never cease calling for sincere, frank and loyal cooperation. We are the lungs of a single body. Once the elections are over, rivalries should end. Let us work hand in hand for the happiness of our town. [December 27th, 1988, *Livre de PV*, Kita]

Judging by the minutes, it seemed that during the era of the single-party regime, the communal council was struggling with rivalry, suspicion and intrigue as much as it was in 2010, when I began to attend the sessions. Competition within the UDPM party during election season was similar to inter- and intra-party rivalry following the transition to democracy. In 1989, an interesting discussion took place, which I will recount briefly because it provides an interesting contrast to the 2010 discussion that I analyze later in this chapter.

The building that to this day hosts the *mairie* is a colonial, two story house in rather bad shape; the first floor serves as the *mairie*, and the second floor as the house of the *commandant de cercle*. This “cohabitation,” as they refer to it, has been the source of trouble over the years. In June 1989, the mayor called for a council meeting to discuss the situation because the *commandant* had unilaterally built a partition between the entrance to his house and the entrance to the *mairie*. According to the mayor, the *commandant* told him that the *mairie* had no rights over the building or the land, which, he said, belonged to the state administration. Two representatives of the UDPM party, one of them also a deputy at the National Assembly, were invited to the meeting. The council discussion must have been heated, since the minutes report council members repeatedly urging each other to argue “without passion.” Council members accused the mayor of calling them to discuss a “*fait accompli*,” instead of preventing the *commandant* from building the partition. One of the council members in 1989 was Dabo, who was mayor in 2010 when I attended the council session that I describe below. The Secretary translated and summarized Dabo’s intervention in the following terms:

[5.2] [Fr.] I blame the mayor and think he was wrong. When the *commandant de cercle* informed him of his intention, he should have refused right away. People are going to call us cowards. [June 17th, 1989, *Livre de PVs*, Kita]

He was not the only one to speak against the mayor or to express concerns about public opinion. After harsh speeches from a few council members, the deputy and representative of the UDMP in the meeting intervened. He complained for having had to wait so long before speaking, then said:

[5.3] [Fr.]All this commotion doesn't bring anything concrete. We know the source of the problem, and we are not simply standing by with our arms folded. The Secretary General of the Party Section has already begun the negotiations needed to reach a desirable and definitive result. [June 17th, 1989, *Livre de PVs*, Kita]

The deputy's speech obviated the need for any further debate; attendants understood that the party authorities at the Section level (at the time, the UDPM only had a Sous-Section in Kita) were going to take care of the problem. This conviction was reiterated by one of the council members, Kabouné Kouyaté, who said: "Too many people have commented on this issue. I think that now that politicians are in charge, we should let them act freely." The relationship between elected authorities, the *commandant de cercle*, and civil servants was tense, and not only because of the physical cohabitation in the building; there are other examples of this tension in the minutes. This short case suggests that the UDPM provided at the time an alternative, if informal, channel for the municipal elected authorities to affect State decisions at a regional or national level. With the adoption of multi-party democracy, such capacity to act as intermediary between the municipality and the central state was divided into "slices" of different sizes, each one constituting the asset of one of the many parties. The transition to democracy, in all its dimensions, appears in the books of the *marie* of Kita as a one page handover speech act, with the signatures of the outgoing mayor, the incoming mayor and the *commandant de cercle*, who

acts as witness. The only difference from previous handover documents is that after the “transition to democracy,” authority was transferred from a mayor to a “special delegation.”

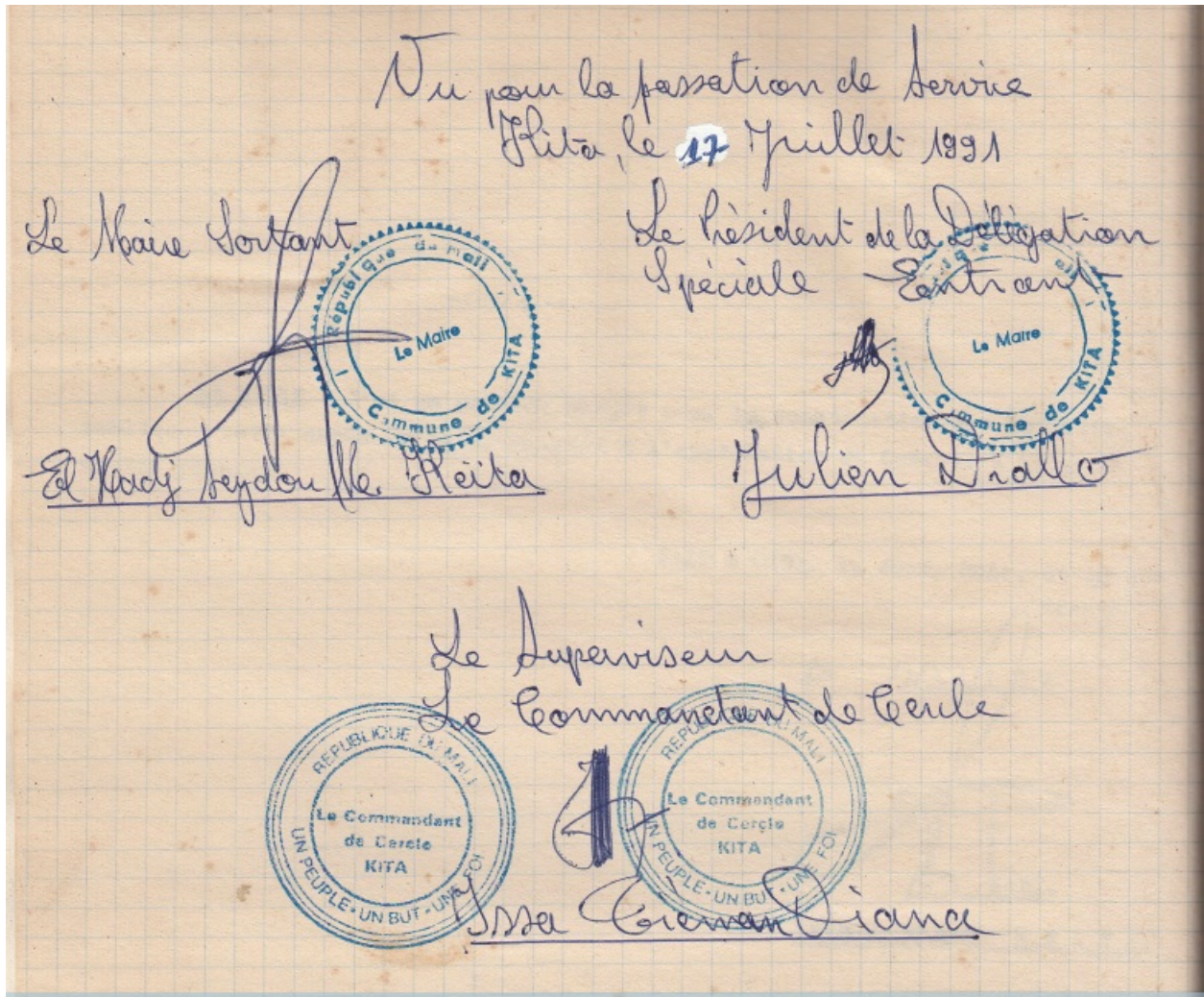


Fig. 4. Document of Handover from the last UDPM mayor of Kita to the “special delegation” in July 1991.

The “Special Delegation” met only once, and it was to discuss with the traditional chiefs the organization of “awareness campaigns” in each neighborhood. The next page in the book contains minutes from April 1992, when the first session of the new multiparty communal council took place. The number of council members remained the same, 31, and out of these, 6

were outgoing UDPM members who had now been reelected through one of the various parties created after the transition to democracy. One of them was the doyen, who on that occasion said:

[5.4][Fr.] This council is composed by militants of multiple political parties. However, we are grouped here for a common cause: the well-being of the *commune*. That cannot be done within diversity. So, let's forget the past, political fights and factions. The management of a commune is not an easy thing, especially in the case of ours.

Just as in 1988, the doyen's inaugural speech reiterated the need to create unity out of division; the difference was that now there were multiple political parties. The sentence that the secretary used to translate the doyen's words is striking: "[Securing the well-being of the people] cannot be done within diversity." Besides the ongoing preoccupation with division and conflict, another interesting constant over the decades is the argument that Kita is a very "difficult town." In 1992, one of the council members confirmed the doyen's opinion in this respect: "Indeed, our commune is one of the most difficult ones from the point of view of the mentality of its inhabitants." From the discussion, it became clear that one of the more difficult aspects of the relationship with Kitans was tax collection; the new multi-party council received a *marie* that had not been able to collect virtually any taxes in years.

One unexpected novelty appeared only after the transition to democracy: transparency. In the same first council session of 1992, one council member said: "I demand that all work should be done with the transparency that democracy demands. All the decisions concerning our town should be made in council deliberations." Another council member echoed the sentiment: "Everyone advises transparency, me too, I think that it is only in those conditions that we will be able to build the well being of our people." I do not know whether council members used the French term "*transparence*", or "*kokaje*", the Bambara expression that

became popular during the transition to democracy, which literally means “to clean” or “to wash.” In this context, “transparency” primarily referred to the public denunciation of the Moussa Traore regime’s financial corruption.

The 2009 Communal Council, whose sessions I attended, consisted of 31 representatives from five political parties. In communal elections, each party presents a list with as many candidates as there are council seats; constituents vote for the entire list, not for individual candidates. The number of seats that each party obtains is proportional to the number of votes; candidates are selected in their order of appearance on the list. Once the relative weight of each party in the council is determined, all the posts (mayor, adjuncts, treasurer and so on) are distributed among the council members. Usually, the party with the largest representation gets to place one of its council members as mayor. However, when the results of elections are close — as is often the case — there are intense negotiations to determine who occupies which post; the situation is further complicated by the fact that council members, once elected, can switch parties and thus shift the entire balance of the election. This phenomenon is sometimes called “political nomadism.”

A couple of weeks go by between the elections and the formal configuration of the municipal administration; this is a period full of intensity and intrigue. Someone told me the story of a rich marabout who was trying to become mayor in a commune near Douantza and had invested a considerable amount of money in the campaign; the results of the election were so tight that if only one of his men shifted to the other party it would prevent him from becoming mayor. His solution illustrates the undercurrent of suspicion and the scarcity of binding forces that I am trying to convey: he locked up in a room the man whose betrayal he most suspected, to

prevent him from being tempted by members of the rival parties who would surely come to offer him money.

Communal elections in Kita are rife with tactics of this sort. One of the council members gave me a full account of how the negotiations unfolded after the 2009 elections, which resulted in the situation that I found a year later. The two parties with the largest number of votes were the ADEMA and its “younger brother” the URD, which split from the ADEMA in 2003. The negotiations took place in the house of the youngest ADEMA council member, N’diaye. They began early in the morning; all the elected council members attended and discussed the matter until sunset. “Keita smoke two packs of cigarettes that day, he almost cried,” N’diaye told me. They finally reached a compromise: the ADEMA would choose the president of the *Cercle* Council and the URD would choose the mayor, and they distributed all other posts following the same alternating principle. Once the agreement was reached, another question emerged: “how do we make sure that everyone respects the agreement if voting is secret?”

A reliable and shared source of binding force had to be found to prevent council members from changing their minds on the day of the internal election, which would finally formalize the decision made at N’diaye’s house. The solutions found are significant because they incorporated multiple regimes of language; it was almost a “*pacte satanique*,” N’diaye said. The select groups of party leaders met at one of the two hotels in Kita called *Le Refuge*. After eating, they swore over the Quran to respect their engagement. Then they resorted to a second known procedure, which consists in drinking a sort of porridge collectively—later on, someone else told me that to be effective, the porridge had to be prepared by a virgin woman with a particular type

of mill. At that point, a number of council members said that “swearing over the Quran was enough for them” and left the group.

However, the remaining small group decided to add another lock to the agreement, which this time required going to “the bush.” Fifty kilometers away from Kita, there is a small village where some people go to make pacts; breaking an engagement made there brings death. I have heard multiple and fragmented versions of the story of that place; I was told that a very religious man used to live there, and that his son committed a serious transgression against the rules of hospitality, by attacking a guest. The son either died or was sacrificed by his father (accounts vary), but his spirit is still around and punishes betrayal. One of the three procedures — or some combination of the three — must have worked, because the agreement was respected and the posts were distributed as planned. However, in the sessions of the council, the same difficulty in the production of a binding force was sometimes apparent.

The Restitution of Baba Oumar Bouré

In November 2010, the mayor of Kita called for a special session of the Communal Council to discuss an unusual affair. Seven years earlier, a number of riots had taken place in Kita. During one of those riots, arguably led by the local youth, the house of one of Kita’s representatives at the National Assembly, Baba Oumar Bouré, was looted and burned. The context of this incident was not explained in the Council meeting, and it was only later that I was able to get a full account of the events that took place in 2004.

Baba Oumar Bouré had been a prominent political figure in Kitan and national politics since the transition to democracy. He was elected representative to the National Assembly in the

district of Kita for two consecutive terms running for the ADEMA party. In 2003, he joined the faction that split from ADEMA and formed URD; “he took all his people with him and left ADEMA because the president of the URD is his kin,” as a local commentator remarked. He was elected for a third term as representative to the National Assembly, this time running for URD. At this point, people from Kita had begun to resent his “gluttony” or excessive political ambition. The fact that he originally came from somewhere else to settle down in Kita became increasingly problematic and people began to call him a “foreigner” [*dunan* in Bambara].

The incident that led to the burning of Oumar Bouré's house started with a radio broadcast. In early April 2004, the local station of Radio Kayira⁶⁷ retransmitted a recording of Oumar Bouré's campaign promises. The radio broadcasting exposed the inconsistency between Bouré's electoral promises and his actions. This is the first in a series of broken promises and unkept commitments in this story. Someone informed Oumar Bouré, who was not living in Kita at the time, of what was going on at the radio station. Bouré called the prosecutor of Kita, who immediately went to the radio station and confiscated the cassette. At this point, and possibly under the instigation of Radio Kayira, the mobilization began; a crowd filled the streets and ended up looting Bouré's house.⁶⁸

After the incident, Oumar Bouré opened a judicial process against the *mairie* of Kita, demanding restitution for the damages caused to his property. The Regional Court of Kayes

⁶⁷ Radio Kayira is a station linked to the SADI party, one of the few openly leftist and oppositional political parties in Mali. Its headquarters are in Bamako but a few regional affiliates broadcast intermittently. It is known for making public the concerns and struggles of poor people all over the country, but it is also often criticized for fueling local conflicts.

⁶⁸ Johanna Siméant has convincingly argued that demonstrations and riots are a far more common resource in Malian political life than the overall ideology of consensus would admit. Most demonstrations taking place in Bamako have been, according to the author, physically, symbolically and administratively closely linked to the State (Siméant, 2011).

issued a ruling favorable to Oumar Bouré and held the *mairie* of Kita accountable for the payment of 71 million FCFA (approximately 130,000 dollars). Years went by and the restitution remained unpaid. In 2011 the issue reemerged, as the prefect of Kita sent a letter exhorting the *mairie* to pay the restitution. This letter prompted the special Council meeting which I analyze here. The issue was so unusual that not only councilmen but also traditional neighborhood based authorities [*dugutigis*], were invited to attend the meeting.

The mayor of Kita at the time was Dabo, a member of the URD party, and thus a fellow party member of MP Oumar Bouré. Mayor Dabo is not an idealist politician by any means. A trader by profession, he had a very pragmatic approach and was always interested in the commercial aspects of politics: attracting investment to the commune, organizing trips to France to purchase machinery, buying office equipment for the *mairie*, and so on. His use of French suggested experience and travel rather than schooling, and he was quite familiar in his bearing with others. In a newspaper interview he affirmed: “In two years, Kita will be a modern city, with roads, an adequate sewage system, modern bus terminals, and big residential buildings like ACI 2000 in Bamako” (*Les Echos*, April 13th 2011). More importantly for Kitans, mayor Dabo is categorized as a “caste man,” because of his last name. Casual and pragmatic, he did not have any objections to my presence in the Council meetings and was in fact quite welcoming; “our work is transparent,” he said to me.

In his opening briefing to the meeting in question, mayor Dabo deployed a number of legal notions limiting the range of courses of action available to the Council. It is unimaginable for a *mairie* to disregard or resist a court ruling, because “the State is also subject to the law.” Public administration, he said, “is continuous,” therefore the current administration had to

assume all debts and issues left behind by the previous one. The only option left to the Council was to decide on the payment arrangements and make an offer to settle the issue with less than 71 million. This is how he opened the session:

[5.5] [B] Which is the first point in today's agenda? [F] It is the disposition to take regarding the restitution of the damages and interests caused to honorable Oumar Bouré in conformity with the ruling number 61 of December 22nd 2005 of the *Court d'appel* of Kayes. To brief you a little bit...the events [B] took place in 2005, youth rose up to go and burn Bouré's house. Bouré was Kita's representative at the National Assembly at the time. [F] So...[B] his house was burnt. He brought the State to the tribunal, by State I mean the *Mairie* of Kita. The first trial took place here, he won it. A second one took place in Kayes, he won that one too...The minister sent me a letter, here is his letter, to say that we should try to pay the 71 millions to Bouré. Here is the letter, I'll pass it around so you can read it. The ruling of the *Court d'appel* is also here. Bouré also sent a letter to the minister to ask him to help him get his money...so when the letter reached the minister, the minister read it, and thus decided to write to the governor, the governor wrote to the prefect, and the prefect sent us a letter to say that we should pay this money. ["B" at the beginning of a sentence indicates that the original is in Bambara, "F" indicates that the original is French]

Since many of the participants in this meeting had already taken part in the efforts of the previous administration to solve this question, the mayor needed to explain how the question had reemerged. The mayor's introduction placed Kita within a larger network that extends across many geographical locations and administrative scales; the incident began at the local level and reached the regional one, only to come back as a command moving from the capital to the region, and from there to the *commune*. Even though he said that the *mairie* of Kita is "subject to the Law" in his introduction, the court ruling itself seemed less important than the series of quasi-personal letters asking the *mairie* to pay the debt. As the discussion unfolded, the source of obligation and the types of binding acts kept shifting, including campaign promises, rulings,

personal letters, foundational agreements, personal engagements, the manipulation of occult forces, and conspiracies.

Written documents were brought to the table and read out loud to emphasize the gravity of the matter and the enforceability of the judicial decision. The mayor took pains to read each letter and pass it around. The councilmen pondered them, explicitly relating their obligatory nature to the quality of being *written* documents. Councilmen were confronted with four documents, of which two—the letter Oumar Bouré wrote to the Minister, and the letter the Minister wrote to the Prefect—were actually personal letters, though written in a very official style. Oumar Bouré’s letter to the minister had as its subject “Request of intervention for execution” [Fr. *Demande d’intervention pour execution*]. When the mayor read this letter to the Council, he dwelled on the title: “Notice the term, eh”—he said to the Council in French —“notice the term: request of intervention for execution.” The letter continued: “Mister Minister, I have the honor of appealing to your benevolence to grant me your cooperation in the enforcement of ruling number 61 of the Court of Appeals...” After reading these two sentences to the Council, the mayor interjected a short translation in Bambara: “He wants the minister to help him.” In other words, this was a personal petition and would have carried less weight if its author had not been a representative at the National Assembly and a powerful politician, but its bureaucratic style made it sound impersonal and appear as a legal resource equally available to any Malian citizen. The letter was simultaneously an instance of personal and impersonal mediation, “formal” and “informal” politics.

Following the mayor’s introduction, the Council’s discussion started in a slow, reflective tone. It followed a pattern that I have observed in other meetings of this kind. The first speaker

simply rephrased the issue, emphasizing its importance and refraining from adding anything new. Then a number of procedural objections were made: there is no quorum, the agenda has too many points, the agenda should be voted on before the discussion is opened, and so on. These sorts of objections are very common in political meetings, especially in councils and youth associations, where half of the time of the meeting might be spent debating procedural matters. It might be that overcoming these objections reinforces the legitimacy and formality of the meeting, allowing for felicitous speech acts.

According to Austin, speech acts can be infelicitous, or ineffective, if they are not appropriate to a context; if they, for instance, don't follow the conventional procedures, are not uttered by the appropriate subject, or are not completed. Austin calls "misfires" the speech acts that derive their ineffectiveness from flaws in procedure. "Misfires" are different from "abuses" which are speech acts that have no procedural flaws but are infelicitous because they are insincere (Austin, 1-24). The procedural objections often made at the beginning of political meetings serve to reduce the likelihood of "misfires." If, for example, the Council were to issue a deliberation without the necessary quorum, such deliberation would be invalid or void. Once procedural objections have been overcome, the risk of "misfires" is contained. However, the risk of "abuses" remains. The requirement of sincerity does not have to be exclusively understood as the correspondence between an individual's speech and his or her internal emotions, thoughts, or intentions.⁶⁹ It can be broadly understood as the degree of concurrence between the different

⁶⁹ In a well-known article, Michelle Z. Rosaldo argued that Searle's choice of promises as the paradigmatic example of speech act and his emphasis on individual intentions and sincerity made culturally specific categories the basis for a universal taxonomy. Among the Ilongot, she argued, commands are the exemplary act of speech and little importance is accorded to the correspondence between speech acts and individual internal states. See Michelle Z. Rosaldo, "The things we do with words: Ilongot speech acts and speech act theory in philosophy," *Language in Society*, 11 (2): 20-237.

arenas or networks in which a politician is moving. The containment and inflation of “abuses” are the main concern of what follows.

The interventions of the first couple of speakers centered around a common concern: why was the question of Bouré’s restitution was being raised again? Many of the participants recalled a previous commitment which was supposed to end the quarrel, and which had now proved infelicitous since the matter had come up again. Someone suggested looking back into the Council book to review the terms of the previous agreement with Bouré. At this point, the oldest man in the room, the traditional chief, spoke:

[5.6] [B] I am certain that this is the fourth time that Bouré’s affair has been raised here. Another person and myself were sent last time to go to his place and ask him to drop the matter. I said: “The relationship that we have built, which made you Member of Parliament three times, is not an insignificant relationship. You leave our place to go to your place, and this is how you pay us: by leaving us a debt of 71 million! By bringing the matter to the courts!”... I said: “Bouré, this is not fitting. Whatever happens to you, it is as if it happened to us. We cry with you. We come to beg you. If we made you deputy three times, it was because of trust. In the name of that same trust: drop all problems between us.”

According to the old man, the norms regulating the relationship between natives and newcomers—or hosts and guests—in the Manden apply to Bouré’s case, and pre-empt any other legal principle. The regional court stated that the *mairie* of Kita owes a restitution to Bouré, but for the old man, it is Bouré who is indebted to Kita for having used its lands and received the trust and votes of its people. The other interesting aspect of the old man’s oration is his surprise and frustration at seeing that the negotiation he led did not result in a lasting solution to the issue. Not only had Bouré broken his promises to the population; he had also failed to respect his engagement with the elders. He had pretended to agree while concealing his true intentions; there

was no correspondence between what he said and what he did. This is how the old man explained it:

[5.7] [Bam.] Bouré said: “There is no problem, I’m going to withdraw the written complaint.” But he didn’t withdraw it, he just gave us false reassurances. He didn’t withdraw it! [...] He said: “God willing, we will drop this affair.” That is how we departed last. But inside him he did not accept! I wouldn’t believe that people are still talking about Bouré in this town if it weren’t for this letter [He points at the letter that was passed around]. However, Bouré is gone, but the mountain of Kita is still standing. It hasn’t left its usual place! We will show the question of Bouré to the mountain of Kita. It is not a question of making sacrifices to the *ñā*. But we will show the mountain this question of Bouré. ... Let us leave this affair to the mountain of Kita, let us leave this affair to the binding word on which Kita was constituted.

Bouré’s engagement was an “abuse,” in Austin’s terms. It lacked conviction, it did not translate into acts. For this elder, the mountain of Kita —*Kita-Kouroun*, which contains the force of the foundational act — is the appropriate arbiter and enforcer as far as the transgression of the original rules goes.⁷⁰ The mountain of Kita is associated with the power of “the binding foundational word” [Bam. *Kita sigi benkan*]. The power of the mountain *is* sovereignty. Not just anyone can mediate between Kitans and the mountains, it is the prerogative of the founding families, which the elder represents in the meeting.

As the old man finished speaking, mayor Dabo expressed his approval: “Yes, that’s right, *dugutigi*.” However, the discussion quickly returned to administrative matters and written

⁷⁰ The mountain of Kita is mentioned in most versions of the Sundiata epic. According to D. T. Niane’s version, before the arrival of Sundiata, Kita was inhabited by the Camara clan and governed by a powerful king who was protected by the “jinns” of the mountain. There was a little pond in the mountain and its water would give power to whoever drank it. When Sundiata and his people arrived to Kita, they made a big sacrifice for the mountain: one hundred white ox, one hundred white lambs and one hundred white cocks. The jinns of the mountain listened to Sundiata, and he was able to seize the town of Kita peacefully, only the king died. That is how the alliance between the Camara and the Keita was founded (Niane, 1965).

responses. The following speaker stated in a pragmatic tone: “The negotiations that took place earlier did not succeed. What we need to do now is discuss the modalities of the payment and answer this letter.” That is, he indirectly stated the ineffectiveness of the old chief’s methods in obtaining Bouré’s commitment to give up the affair, and the need to use written documents instead of oral engagements.

At this point, the mayor disclosed that he had already written a formal response to Oumar Bouré communicating the will of the *mairie* of Kita to pay the restitution and announcing that a council meeting would be held to discuss “the modalities” of the payment. The fact that the mayor had written a response *before* consulting the council provided the perfect excuse for those who were interested in calling the whole affair into question. The discussion became heated and confrontational. *Malian*, one of the councilmen who had been interjecting concerns since the beginning of the meeting, openly dissociated himself from the mayor: “That letter is your personal engagement, you can’t speak in the name of *mairie* of Kita if the council has not deliberated.” Mariam Keita, the only female member of the council, also expressed her disapproval: “It is not even worth for the council to meet if you already decided what to do. You are inviting us to eat leftovers.” Just as they did in 1989, council members complained that they were being asked to discuss a *fait accompli*.

The mayor defended his position: “What did you want me to say? I had to answer like that. The State is a subject of law—I’m speaking as an intellectual here—I had to reply like that. What do you want me to say? That we are not going to pay?” The mayor’s response is a meta-pragmatic commentary, he tells *Malian* that his response was the *only* acceptable one given the legal status of the *mairie*. He also slips a commentary about the “intellectual” nature of his own

speech. The mayor defended the content of his letter, but *Malian's* point was not that the letter's content was *wrong*, but that the letter was *invalid* because it had not been preceded by a Council deliberation. In Austin's terms, the letter was a "misfire." The argument about the response letter not only undermined the possibilities of consensus, it also cast doubt and mistrust over the entire process.

As this incident suggests, defining the conditions of felicity for certain speech acts goes far beyond the application of preset procedural norms and becomes part of the deliberation itself. Establishing that there is a quorum only requires counting; but in this case, determining whether a mayor's letter engages the council becomes a discussion within the discussion. It needs to meet its own requirements of felicity to produce a legitimate outcome and assure the felicity of the broader discussion.⁷¹ To put it in different terms, sometimes the regimentation of "felicity" looks like the application of a *rule*, but sometimes it looks rather like the outcome of a *process*.⁷² Furthermore, *Malian's* contention that the letter involved procedural flaws became an indication of potential "abuses" by casting doubt about the mayor's *real* intentions. If that were true, it would mean that sometimes infelicity spills over from procedural errors ("misfires") to invalidate the presumption of sincerity ("abuses").

The mayor tried to defend his position and made a concrete proposition to solve the problem: "The *mairie* of Kita should make an offer to Oumar Bouré in parcels of land and hope

⁷¹ This logic recalls Carl Schmitt's definition of the sovereign as "he who decides on exception." In a sense, defining the condition of "felicity" for speech acts is a constitutional act, it requires "rules" to locate themselves outside the order that they are creating. (Schmitt, 1988).

⁷² Comaroff and Roberts trace two different traditions or paradigms in Legal Anthropology. The authors trace the interest in rules or "the positivist orientation" back to Maine's *Ancient Law*. Conversely, the emphasis on "processes" or the idea that "behavior is constrained primarily by the intrinsic properties of social relations and by the exigencies of interactions" goes back to Malinowski's *Crime and Custom in Savage Society*. (Comaroff & Roberts, 1981).

to settle the affair with less than 71 million.” The council, however, was not willing to discuss the technicalities of the payment yet. Speakers kept discussing the premises of the issue and more general questions: the fact that the problem had not been successfully solved in the past, the need to raise awareness among the youth to prevent similar incidents from happening again in the future, and so on. It became clear that there was not going to be an easy, consensual solution to the case.

At this point, N’diaye—the youngest councilman (38 years old) and a member of the ADEMA party—openly addressed a point that seemed to have been avoided by senior council members, but that was on the table nonetheless: “71 millions is too much money. There is not a house in Kita that is worth that much money.” This was the first time the justice of the court’s ruling was explicitly questioned. A passionate altercation broke out between N’diaye and Sangaré—a senior councilman and a fellow party member to the mayor and Oumar Bouré, all from the URD party. The dispute almost reached the level of physical violence: N’diaye and Sangaré stood up aggressively shouting at each other, chairs were moved, and the mayor and other participants tried to calm the two adversaries. In the middle of all the noise and overlapping shouts, Sangaré and Younousi shouted back and forth in French:

[5.8] [Fr]

N’diaye: 71 million is too much!

Sangaré: Is not too much!

N’diaye: Is too much!

Sangaré: Is not too much!

N’diaye: Is too much. You have something at stake!

In short, N’diaye was accusing Sangaré—and, by association, the mayor—of having a secret deal with Bouré. The implication may have been that the mayor and other URD

councilmen wanted the *mairie* of Kita to pay the restitution because Bouré would share part of the gain with his fellow party members. Interestingly, if we overlook for a moment the accusation of corruption, we see that the explicit core of the dispute is a disagreement about the value of local real estate. Accepting that the deputy's house is worth that much money entails a heavier financial burden for the *mairie*, but this inflation in the value of local land is not necessarily bad for a political class in the habit of trading with that currency.⁷³ Later in a personal interview, N'diaye explained the issue to me in the following terms:

[5.9] [F]We shouldn't have accepted to pay such an amount in the first place for a house that is not worth it. That day, I figured they had agreed among themselves beforehand to come and tell us that. Because it seems that Baba Oumar left Kita not long ago⁷⁴...since the mayor is a member of the same party, and Sangaré too, he is the General Secretary. All those people are URD. So, it seems that Baba Oumar left Kita not long ago, so maybe he pushed them to make that suggestion. And then they come and put this as the first point of the agenda!

In N'diaye's rendering of the conspiracy meeting, participants trust each other, reach agreements, cooperate, and respect their engagements. Bouré betrayed the ADEMA and joined the URD. His house was burnt because he had not kept his promises to the population; he did not honor the verbal commitment to drop the matter that he had expressed in front of the chief. There were doubts about the mayor's intentions because he wrote a letter without consulting the council. Infelicity is ubiquitous in this story, except in the imagined occult or private meetings. The face-to-face meeting that N'diaye imagines took place between Oumar Bouré, the mayor

⁷³ The primary development plan of mayor Dabo in 2011 was in fact the construction of a gated community for "overseas Malians" and "rich people." In an interview with *L'Independent* in April 2011, Dabo explained that the Mairie was hoping to generate 300 million FCFA from the cession of the 35 hectares for this project. *L'Independent*, April 13th 2011, p.3.

⁷⁴ Saying that someone "Left not long ago" [*Il a quitté ici recement*] is a common expression used both in French and Bambara to say that someone came from somewhere else to visit and has now left.

and other URD councilmen is assumed to be felicitous, unlike the real council meeting. By felicitous, I mean that the participants were bound in an agreement that they respected. This brings me back to Kita's regime of language.

The verb “to conspire” in Bambara is composed of two elements “janfa” and “siri.” “Janfa” means “betrayal,” and “siri” means “to attach” or “to tie a knot,” but “siri” is more broadly used to signify binding acts and contracts. For instance, the performance of a marriage by religious or civic authorities [Bam. *furū-siri*] also has “siri” as part of it. “Siri,” in other words, indicates a local category of binding speech acts of which conspiracies are an example. When I told a local friend the story of how the chief claimed to have persuaded Bouré to drop the matter, she said that certainly the chief had “attached” (*siri*) Bouré beforehand — by which she meant that he had used invisible powers, probably with a *marabout*'s help, to make him agree to everything. This is another example of a speech act, in this case involving invisible forces, which is expressed with the verb *siri*. Interestingly, in Bambara, the word “*jùru*” means both “debt” and “rope,” which suggests that claiming a debt is also, metaphorically, a form of attaching someone. According to N'diaye, the URD members—mayor Dabo, deputy Bouré and Secretary General, Sangaré—got together in private and “attached the knot of a conspiracy,” to reclaim the *marie*'s debt to Bouré. This explanation was so obvious to N'diaye, so “transparent,” that he did not even need the evidence from the visible, public meeting of the council. He told me:

[5.10] [Fr.]I understood right away what they wanted. Even before they exposed the question, I knew they were going to suggest that we should make an offer in parcels of land [...]. I know them very well. I know their moral standards, we were together in the ADEMA long ago, and they are the ones who left.

If N'diaye knew so well what to expect, why was he overcome with rage and why did he decide to make a public accusation in the meeting itself? "I wasn't able to control myself that day," he told me. This contrasted with the more cynical attitude he adopted later in our conversation. Younoussi's accusation threatened to make the entire frame of the council meeting collapse. If he were right in thinking that everything had been arranged behind the scenes to benefit the members of the URD party, then the council meeting would be a farce, an "abuse" from beginning to end, a "formality" to give official status to a decision made elsewhere, in the felicitous conspiracy.

The discrediting of public information and official political acts is not a rare phenomenon. It has been described as a common trait of official publics with a highly ossified ideology that elicits only formal adherence from its citizens, who follow the protocols but do not necessarily abide by their truth claims.⁷⁵ It is also characteristic of publics marked by conspiracy theories that read all official public information as lies or "abuses." In a similar situation, one could adopt a cynical stance, take the meeting as a meaningless formality, and attempt to advance one's interest in the political contexts that *really* matter.

However, N'diaye's choice to make a public accusation in the space of the meeting itself points towards a more ambivalent relationship with official political institutions. His accusation might have hurt the reputation of other councilmen, and even helped to delegitimize the council as an organ, but at the same time it reasserted the norm of transparency and disinterest that this "anomaly" violated. The presupposition of a conspiracy did not invalidate council meetings as an

⁷⁵ I am in particular thinking about Alexei Yurchak's argument that the late soviet period was characterized by a "formal" adherence to ideology. See Alexei Yurchak, "Soviet Hegemony of Form: Everything Was for Ever, until It Was No More," *Comparative Studies in History and Society*, 5 (3): 480-510.

effective resource to block or advance initiatives, but it complicated the production of trust necessary to contain the accusations of “abuses.” In N’diaye’s intervention, the Communal Council retained its ambivalent legitimacy.

The Council meeting reached a dead end. The mayor and other Council Members managed to de-escalate the conflict and, to a certain extent, discount N’diaye’s accusation. At the climax of the altercation, as the mayor was trying to prevent Sangaré from physically attacking N’diaye, age-based hierarchies emerged as an organizing principle: “Sangaré, he is your younger brother, don’t judge him; N’diaye, there are elders in the room, calm down.” Several speakers suggested formulae typical in the treatment of “sensitive” issues: “A commission should be formed to discuss the payment” or “Speakers should limit themselves to concrete propositions.” At the end, the mayor’s voice took over a silent hall. He spoke in a slow, authoritative tone: “We have no personal interest in this. Bouré will be paid. We will offer from 10 to 20 land lots and we’ll close this question once and forever. We will write a letter renouncing any further judicial action and he will sign it.” “What if he refuses to sign?” someone objected, again concerned with binding acts. “We will solve the question on the social level,” was the mayor’s response as he moved towards the second point of the agenda.⁷⁶ To solve something on the “social level” means to address the plaintiff personally and find a negotiated solution to the problem. This resolution was not formally approved by the Council, nor written down in the book of “Deliberations.”

This story contains multiple layers and kinds of infelicity. The whole affair would not have emerged if the judiciary system had the capacity to enforce its ruling and collect the restitution. The lack of State capacity enabled this story just as much as popular anger against the

⁷⁶ Original in French: “On va gérer ça dans le plan social.”

empty promises of a national representative did. The traditional chief was commissioned to mediate, but only managed to obtain a void verbal commitment from Bouré. His strategy to produce obligation failed as well. Years later the issue reemerged through a number of semi-personal letters advocating for Bouré. The mayor brought the question to the council and proposed to pay Bouré with parcels of land. The mayor's personal proximity to Bouré—based on party membership—became suspicious. N'diaye's accusation made the meeting collapse. No agreement was reached and the whole thing seemed a farce.

The final solution proposed by the mayor has two components: a personal negotiation and the signature of a legal document. These are mutually dependent. Bouré had already proved that he could change his mind easily and that a verbal commitment would not be enough to bind him. However, getting him to sign the letter required the personal intermediation of the mayor. Interestingly, personal relations between the mayor and the deputy were the main source of suspicion and official infelicity; but at the end they turned out to be also the only effective solution to the issue. Solving the issue “on the social level” was attributed the felicity that the official meeting lacked. However, the commitment required a signature.

The infelicity of “formal” speech is profitable to the felicity of the “informal” speech. These two realms need to be seen as a whole. Perhaps the best outcome for the mayor and Bouré was for the official meeting to be infelicitous so that the “social” solution could be felicitous. Perhaps there is an investment in official infelicity. This argument echoes the idea of the “political instrumentalization of disorder” (Chabal & Daloz). Official infelicity means more margin of action in “the social level.” It opens up possibilities for different actors.

In the Epilogue, I will look at how the rumor that president Touré did not intend to leave the presidency began to spread in 2011. I suggest that rumor and speculation are forms of action that emerge in the space opened by official infelicity.

Epilogue

I left Mali in October of 2011 planning to go back in April of 2012 to follow the campaigns for the scheduled 2012 presidential elections. The military coup of March 2012 took me completely by surprise. I was struck by the speed of the events, not imagining that it would be so easy to overthrow Touré's regime, or any regime, for that matter. I returned to Mali in June 2012, revisited the National Assembly, spoke to some of the politicians I had interviewed in 2011 in Bamako, and spent some time talking with "pro-coup" organizations in Bamako and Kati—the garrison town that became the headquarters of captain Sanogo and the *junta*. I will discuss those conversations elsewhere. Here, I will only address only one theme, because it pertains to the relationship between speech, intentions and action.

Democratic time is cyclical; it imposes a particular rhythm on politics, punctuated by the regularity of elections. Democracy establishes a predictable succession of "dry" and "wet" seasons: periods of activity and inactivity (Evans-Pritchard, 1940). Electoral democracy is one of the few, (if not the only) strictly *pro tempore* forms of government, in the sense that exceeding the constitutional term of a mandate implies the automatic elimination of political legitimacy (Linz, 1998). In 2011, the rumor that president Touré did not intend to leave the presidency began to spread. The argument is now a historical counterfactual, because the coup ended the presidential term before the argument could be proven. The rumor, in fact, was among the arguments for the *coup*.

The military *coup* led by captain Sanogo against president Touré interrupted constitutional, electoral cycles with two main arguments. The central one was that president Touré had proven incapable of commanding timely and decisive military actions against “rebel” groups in the north of the country. The second argument was that he did not *intend* to leave the presidency at the end of his term. Some commentators went further and suggested that Touré had “a deal with the rebels” to stay in power.

The *junta* hardly had a political platform; the *coup* began as an army riot in the garrison town of Kati, which then led to a rather infelicitous constitutional act. It ended with an international agreement that granted captain Sanogo the rights and privileges of a retired head of state. All this occurred within a couple of months. This interruption of constitutional, electoral cycles opened up a space for other, non-electoral, interpretations of political time to come to the foreground. Conversations often focused on time and temporal categories: international deadlines and ultimatums, constitutional terms, pauses, blockages, predictions, counterfactuals, generational conflict, delays, History, revolution, renewal, and backwardness, were some of the most common ones.

I noticed many people saying that they had vexpected the coup, that they had seen it coming. Furthermore, the counterfactual assertion that president Touré would not have left the presidency at the end of his term had become almost a certainty. I was surprised to hear one of his close collaborators, a member of the team of experts that drafted the constitutional reform, say: “Now, I’m not so sure, I think that maybe it was true that president Touré was not planning to leave power.” We engaged in long retrospective exegesis of the signs and proofs that could have indicated how events would unfold.

As an epilogue, I will look at newspaper articles from early 2011 to show how the debate about president Touré's intentions took form. I do not intend to establish a causal relation between the rumor and the *coup*, but only to delineate some aspects of this other form of public discussion. In these commentaries, president Touré figures as an inscrutable center around which interpretations proliferated. The aggregate effect of these interpretations was uncertainty and unpredictability. The question is: to what extent can such collective production of uncertainty be considered a form of political action?

Speculation

During the early months of 2011, the rumor that president Touré would not leave the presidential office at the end of the constitutional term in June 2012 began to circulate widely in the media and in private conversations. There were three main arguments supporting this claim.

In 2008, President Touré commissioned ex-minister Daba Diawara and a group of experts (CARI) to create a reform project to “strengthen democratic institutions.” The group of experts proposed a project with far-reaching institutional changes—which included creating a Senate, establishing quotas to increase the political participation of women, adopting proportional representation at the National Assembly, requesting a mandatory financial disclosure from all civil servants, among others. Since the reforms required constitutional changes, they could only be adopted through a popular referendum. President Touré submitted the project to the National Assembly in 2011, requesting authorization to organize the referendum.

At a time when most parties were concerned with the organization of presidential elections—which require considerable expenses—the idea of organizing a popular referendum before the elections seemed absolutely untimely. However, most people's worries lay elsewhere: there was a

widespread belief that the reform involved removing the presidential term limits established by article 30 of the constitution. In other words, people believed president Touré was proposing to reform the constitution in order to get reelected for a third term. Even among deputies and people who collaborated closely with the reform project, there were either real doubts about the truth of this claim, or a deliberate effort not to disclose any information regarding that aspect of the reform. Students, journalists, and politicians in Bamako talked about the reform but very few had seen the proposed text. The draft proposal had been ready since 2010; no one, including the team of experts that created it, understood why president Touré took so long to send it to the National Assembly. At the end of 2010, one of the members of the CARI gave me a Power Point presentation by the reform team explaining the main points. Interestingly, the presentation did not mention the proposition to allow a second presidential reelection. Most commentators at the time, like myself, ignored whether the removal of term limits was really part of the reform.

However, I was struck by how the rumor became a certainty. Moreover, it seemed to follow the logic of regional contagion: commentators repeatedly evoked the catastrophic case of Niger —where president Tadjá's attempt to reform the constitution ended up in a coup— as a way of alerting the public of the possible dangers of a constitutional reform in Mali.

A second major argument supporting the claim that president Toure did not intend to leave office was the government's silence and inactivity regarding the organization of elections. Many political parties, and not only the minority in the opposition, expressed concern that the government had not taken clear steps to organize elections. Ten months before the expected election date, a reliable voter registry [Fr. *fichier électoral*] had not been created.

The validity of elections as speech acts depends on the existence of an up-to-date, accurate list of voters. This is particularly crucial in a country like Mali, in which the large majority of voters are youth and therefore might not appear on earlier lists. The costs and logistical challenges of creating such a registry cannot be taken for granted in a State with limited administrative capacities and where a part of the population is nomadic or semi-nomadic. Many parties and politicians, from the PARENA to the MPR, spoke in 2011 in favor of incurring in those expenses for the sake of preventing post-electoral conflicts of the kind that afflicted Ivory Coast and Guinea. Furthermore, many demanded the creation of a voter registry with biometric scanning to avoid post-electoral conflicts.

The third factor grounding the rumor that Touré would not leave, and the one that triggered the most commentaries, was that different political actors—from mayors to representatives of the private sector—openly expressed their wishes to give president Touré an extra “two-year bonus.” The argument was that the president needed time to complete the “major transformations” he had started, and that those two years would enable a “harmonization of terms” [Fr. *harmonisation des mandats*]. That is, the extension of the presidential term would allow for all electoral terms to start and end at the same time, making all elections—communal, national, legislative and presidential—coincide. The idea was that this would reduce campaign expenditures and the overall cost of organizing elections.

This idea gained momentum in January 2011, when a hundred people signed a petition in the city of Sikasso asking president Touré to “extend his presidential term” until 2014 to make “communal, legislative and presidential elections coincide and allow him to complete the big projects for the development of our dear Mali” [ref]. When the rumors and commentaries

triggered by what came to be known as “The Sikasso Letter” were at their peak, a related initiative came from the private sector.

Jeamille Bittar—a wealthy man of Lebanese origin and head of the Chamber of Commerce during Touré’s presidency—collected donations from the “private sector” to offer a gold medal to the president. A public ceremony at the Modibo Keita stadium was organized and 30,000 people were expected to attend. The newspaper articles published around that time — late January and early February of 2011 — show a rising tide of speculation, suspicion, and unanswered questions centered around the president’s intentions: was he planning to leave office or not?

One of the most controversial points was the price and weight of the medal. Nobody seemed to know for sure how much it was worth; numbers varied from 20 to 250 million FCFA —that is, between forty thousand and half a million dollars. It was also unclear whether it was made of one or two kilograms of gold. Speculations concerning the characteristics of the medal were tied to the question of what were the *real* intentions of Bittar and his group in paying tribute to the president with this ceremony and how was president Touré going to handle the praises coming from this group. A number of journalists and political actors—notably Ibrahim Boubar Keita—alerted president Touré against this untrustworthy group. A good example of this type of public statement containing an exhortation addressed to the president was published by *Les Echos* on February 4th 2011:

[6.1] [Fr.]ATT, remember that you have been elected and that your term has a limited duration in time. We are not against your decoration, Mister President, but it should be done by honorable people, people of proven integrity. Don’t fall into the trap of those who think only about their own interests, those who want to buy you with gold. Give up the recognition (of the belly) of Bittar; chose instead the eternal recognition of the Malian people...

[My translation] (Alexis Kalambry, “Les 2 kilos d’or de Bittar à ATT: Quand tombent les masques.” *Les échos*, February 4th, 2011).

Public statements like this one made of praise and adulation the main threat. They presented the president as vulnerable to it and warned him against those who surrounded him. In the above passage, the warning is addressed directly at the president, using the second singular person. However, as a newspaper article, this letter to the president is meant to be read by a larger, anonymous audience. This formal choice produces an interesting effect. The president is represented as surrounded by deceitful advisors and intriguers who addressed him for the sake of “their own interest.” Kalambry, the article’s author, presented himself also as an advisor, but a genuine, well-intentioned one. Using the second person to advise the president suggests that the president is influenceable, and the decision still open. It emphasizes uncertainty.

For as long as Touré’s intentions remained unknown to the people, interpretation and speculation about his plans and thoughts proliferated. According to this logic, the center of the system was opaque and unpredictable, and needed to be interpreted. The president did not appear here as an almighty will, but as someone at risk of being blinded by the praises and plots of those seeking to advance their own interests. There was a very similar pattern in the exhortation of Ibrahim Boubacar Keita and the commentary that Falé Coulibaly, a journalist from *L’Independent*, added to it:

[6.2] [Fr.][Even though] Current national events are marked by rumor and speculation about a hypothetical extension of the presidential term, the president of the RPM remained untroubled. For him, president ATT can be trusted not to follow bad advisors. IBK stated: “I have advised the president of the Republic ATT to beware of those people who pretend to help him whereas they only seek to benefit themselves. [My translation] [Falé Coulibaly, “Présentation des vœux de nouvel an 2011 au RPM: IBK demande a ATT de se méfier des conseils de son entourage, *L’Indépendant*, February 3 2011]

Boubacar Keita (IBK) reported to the general public a private conversation in which he advised the president to mistrust other advisors. Again, in so doing, IBK emphasized his own proximity to power, but also the president's vulnerability to bad advisors. He stated his trust in the president's integrity, but also warned him against the double game of those around him. In these warnings, the image of a king in relative isolation and whose relationship with the subjects is mediated by mischievous advisors and courtiers comes to mind. The following excerpt from another newspaper article published on January 26th, 2011 dwells on these monarchic images:

[6.3] [Fr.] ATT, nothing but ATT, and then ATT, ATT....and is it really for ATT or for the ATT system? But where is ATT in all this? [...] Since he [ATT] didn't say clearly that he did not want [the extension of his term], the clan of courtiers and partisans inferred that he did, and the shameless opportunists raced to outdo each other in bowing before the desires of the Chief, vying to fulfill the "will" of the Prince before it was even expressed [...] We are of those who think that, until proven otherwise, president ATT did not engage anyone to make the case for a term extension after a tumultuous match of two five year terms. [My translation] (Sambi Toure, "ATT sera-t-il complice?", Le Quotidien des sans voix, Mercredi 26 janvier 2011).

Just like Boubacar Keita, this journalist felt compelled to reiterate his trust in president Toure's integrity—his capacity to resist the influence of the courtiers, for example—as well as his innocence. The president is not part of the intrigue to make him stay in power, everything happens *around* him. These repeated public expressions of trust in the president seemed look like discursive mechanism to bound him by making him responsible to such trust.

Most statements portrayed the president as silent. For instance, according to the above article, what might have prompted the intriguers to start their praises and petitions was that the president did not "say clearly that he didn't want" to stay in power. The center of power did not

speak and expectation built up as people waited for him to provide information about his intentions. On January 25th, *L'Independent* published an article written in a neutral, informative tone about the medal ceremony. It emphasized the expectation that the president would clarify the issue around the project to extend his term:

[6.4] [Fr.] In this ceremony the president of the republic will receive, on behalf of the national private sector, the “Gold medal of the 50th anniversary” worth about 250 million FCFA. Certainly, the March 26th 1991 hero will seize the opportunity offered by this big meeting of all Malians to further clarify his actual position on the harmonization of electoral terms, a concept which is on everyone’s lips today. [My translation] (Mamadou Fofana, “Remise de la médaille d’or du cinquantenaire d’une valeur de 250 millions FCFA le 5 février au stade Modibo Keita,” *L'Independent*, January 25th, 2011, p.5)

The switch from “the president of the republic” to the epithet of “March 26th 1991 hero” is an innocuous rhetorical device to avoid repetition. It is, however, significant because it switches from a constitutional role, the president, to one situated outside or beyond the constitution: the hero. The “hero” was Toumani Touré as army officer leading a *coup* against dictator Moussa Traore in 1991, renouncing to power and grandiosely granting a democratic constitutional order to the Malian people. One of the more interesting ambiguities in the petition to grant the president a couple of “bonus years” was that Touré’s capacity to renounce power in 1991 was used to argue that he deserved a bonus in 2012. The “Sikasso Letter” referred explicitly to this act of political self-restraint. Touré’s proven respect for the constitutional order was used as an argument to advocate for an unconstitutional exception.

The article cited above is from January 25th, 2011. A couple of days earlier, on January 21st, president Touré accorded an interview *Les Afriques*—a weekly financial newspaper based in Geneva with broad circulation in Francophone Africa. Touré blunt statements seemed enough

the end the debate about the extension, the president committed to leave. The interviewer was a “foreigner” whose identity and nationality remained anonymous. The security crisis in the North of the country was the main theme of the interview. However, the interviewer was sufficiently informed about the Bamako political scene to inquire about the rumors and petitions concerning the extension of the presidential term. This was president Touré’s answer to this question:

[6.5] [Fr.]I don’t know how they will extend my term. I don’t know what it means to extend a term. My term ends on June 8th, 2012 and I have never thought... I’m even surprised to see them discuss my fate without me, and without anyone, beside you, coming to ask me what I think. I think that these are artifices. These are things that have absolutely no sense. [My translation] [ref]

There was no uncertainty after all. The president was completely excluded from the discussion of his on fate. Rather, he saw the debate with astonishment and judged it undeserving of an intervention: he had not said anything for the simple reason that no one asked him. He found the debate absurd and as he interestingly pointed out: he did not understand how it got started in the first place. Unsurprisingly, Malian journalists reacted bitterly to these dismissive comments and blamed Touré’s preference for foreign journalists for the lack of communication. These were the remarks of Sekouba Samaké, a journalist of the *InfoMatin*, which preceded the integral transcription of the famous interview of *Les Afriques*:

[6.6] [Fr.]ATT will not have a dauphin [favored successor] in the 2012 elections. He said so straightforwardly to our foreign colleagues, who had no trouble eliciting comment from him (a local journalist would have spent what is left of the presidential term without obtaining from ATT the smallest remark on this issue). As far as interviews go, for local journalists, ATT is secluded in a bunker; it would be impossible to be admitted if it were not for the traditional June 8th press conference, which takes place only once a year. However, the international press, the darling of Koulouba, does not miss any occasion to be the star. This time, it succeeded in the feat of making Bamako’s big-man speak out on a very controversial

issue that will have interesting repercussions on the rest of the national body politic. [My translation] (Sekouba Samake, “Les héritiers d’ATT: Et maintenant?” *InfoMatin*, February 2nd, 2011).

Discontent with the president’s silence remained after his blunt and straight forward answers. Journalists simply added more precision to the original statement: it was not true that the president did not speak, he just did not speak to his own people. As far as Malian journalists were concerned, Touré was “secluded in a bunker.” The interview with *Les Afriques* dissipated rumors for a short while, and made Bittar's medal ceremony seem more awkward and difficult to justify. If the president had already stated that he did not intend to extend his term, what were Bittar and his clique seeking with their public praises? Bittar organized a press conference on January 31st to clarify that the medal was not worth 250 million but only 20 million FCFA. Journalists, however, did not take well this delayed attempt and dismissed it by saying: “If he needs to justify himself, it means he is guilty of something.”

Two months later, the gold medal and the ceremony had been forgotten, but the speculations on Touré’s intentions and the concerns about the organization of the elections had not faded at all. Many politicians and public figures made public statements about the urgency to set the bases for “transparent and reliable” elections to avoid post-electoral crises. A central question to this debate was the creation of an accurate electoral census, since the one available had not been updated, meaning that the names of deceased people had not been removed and those of the younger generation of voters had not be added. The RAVEC, a new electoral list secured with biometric data, became for many the only guarantee to a peaceful electoral transition even though it would increase the costs of elections significantly. On April 1st, to cite

one example, Elhadj Tiégoum from *Le Republicain*, wrote in his note on the PARENA's public statement concerning the importance of having an accurate electoral list:

[6.7][Fr.] PARENA worries about the silence surrounding the RAVEC operations and warns the authorities against mismanaging the 2012 elections: "If we don't pay attention, we will end up either in Benin's embarrassing situation or in Ivory Coast's tragic one" added PPR, the General Secretary of the PARENA. Contrary to what happened in 2006, when not a single authority lent an ear to PARENA's concerns regarding the electoral census, *this year we have heard some responses*. First from the President of the Republic, who promised clean elections with or without RAVEC (without, most likely). Then from the Prime Minister who wrote a letter to PARENA to "assure them that the government would take all measures needed for the good organization" of elections. [My translation][My emphases](Elhadj Tiégoum, "La sonnets d'alarme et les sourds", *Le Républiquein*, April 1st, 2011).

This is a good example of what I call "contagion arguments." These were common at the time in newspapers and at the National Assembly. In Mali, politicians, journalists and students follow closely the political events of all Francophone Africa, in particular of the neighboring countries. Events in other countries often prompted a domestic parallelisms. Conflicts in other countries were used to illustrate the domestic catastrophes that could take place if the proper decisions were not made. In this article, the cases of Ivory Coast and Benin were used to underscore the importance of a reliable registry.

The author again states that the source of worries is government's silence and inactivity. However, it also made an interesting clarification. The government was not silent; governmental statement were being dismissed:

[6.8][Fr.] *In a normal country*, once the president and Prime Minister had spoken, we would end the debate, move on, and get to work. However, Mali is, if not abnormal, at least "atypical" as a country. *Declarations abound, but often actions are taken belatedly, if at all*. It is certainly for this reason that political actors have urged each other to sound the alarm and pull the government out of its lethargy.

[My translation](Elhadj Tiégoum, “La sonnets d’alarme et les sourds”, Le Républicain, April 1st, 2011).

Elhadj Tiégoum’s interpretation of Malian political life suggests that dissociating political statements from actions is a national habit. In “normal” countries, he writes, “public promises would be enough to put everyone at ease.” The Malian anomaly, according to Tiégoum, is that even though these politicians received a formal answer, no one was reassured. He calls the problem: “atypical country.” I call it infelicity and suspect that it is more widespread in “atypical” and “normal” countries than Elhadj Tiégoum thinks.

The decisions of president Touré only became more opaque. In April 2011, he appointed a new government with Ms. Cissé Mariam Kaidama Sidibe as prime minister; that was the first time a woman led the Malian government. She had two missions: accomplishing the ambitious constitutional reform projected by CARI and organizing “transparent and credible presidential elections.” However, the new government took three months only to submit its political platform—*Politique générale de gouvernement (PGG)*—to the National Assembly.

An extraordinary plenary sessions was called on June 27th to discuss the platform of the recently appointed government. The Assembly hall was at its full capacity. All ministers were sitting on the right side of the plenary hall facing the central podium. Representatives also came numerous, even the seats that had remained empty for most of the ordinary season were occupied by men and women wearing their most exuberant outfits. The prime minister had thirty minutes to explain the central guidelines and goals of her government. Deputies had a chance to express their concerns. There were only a couple critics of the government’s guidelines. One of the harshest ones came from Boubacar Keita and it concerned time. He said:

[6.9] [Fr.] I have no doubts about your qualities. But is that what matters here? No! Here and now we are discussing priorities and *timing*. All the Olympian gods seem to have been consulted. It seems, however, that the most important one has been ignored. Yes, madam, Chronos! The god of time is particularly cruel against those who shall forget his omnipotence. And, alas, his wrath begets awful surprises. So let us protect ourselves against them. [Short prayer in Arabic] God forbid.

Boubacar Keita invoked Chronos' wrath. He directed the minds of the audience towards "awful surprises." Then he called to strive for their avoidance, and uttered a short prayer to dissipate the possibility opened by his own words and closed the statement with "God Forbid." This is a well-established rhetorical formula, which I call "God Forbid." The prime minister visited the National Assembly to present her vision of the future and her strategy to actualize such vision. Boubacar Keita's statement carved out an exception in the government's vision. He did not even define the threats, he left them up to the audience's imagination.

Competition between two possible futures is politics in the most classical way. In the Aristotelian definition, political oratory differs from forensic and laudatory types because it is centered on deciding future collective action. In the "God forbid" formula two future scenarios compete. One is considered fortunate, the other unfortunate. The visions of disaster urge the audience to act. However, the depiction of disaster is performative and is attributed some degree efficacy. Otherwise, the prayer and the statement "God forbid" would not be necessary. The evocation of disaster always comes coupled with its antidote. There is a leakage of responsibility in the sense that the mere enunciation of future misfortunes entails a degree of responsibility for the speaker. "God Forbid" is the exact opposite of "Insh'allah." Both are examples of performative speech.

All the examples I have referred show different people—journalists, politicians, and “the private sector”—speculating about presidential intentions and the future more broadly. On one end of the spectrum, Bittar and his group offered the president a “2 year bonus” and a gold medal of controversial value. On the other end, journalists and politicians warned the audience against political catastrophes. The aggregate effect of these statements was uncertainty and unpredictability. Speculating on the president’s intentions is admitting that they have a bearing on the duration of his term and thus admitting that the near political future is ultimately uncertain.

Uncertainty was partly justified by the government’s inactivity concerning elections and by the president’s abrupt decisions. However, looking at this collection of statements suggests that the government was only partially responsible for uncertainty. Other actors—journalists, politicians, “the private sector”—seemed to have contributed to establish doubts about the future. In other words, they speculated. Speculation is a form of political action.

Uncertainty multiplies conceivable future scenarios. It enables new courses of action to some actors, and forecloses some other. It widens the range of the politically possible by removing institutional constraints, it also narrows it by making the long-term outcomes more difficult to calculate. Emphasizing the opaque and unpredictable nature of presidential intentions enabled courses of action.

In the summer of 2012, when I returned to Mali after the *coup*, I had a conversation with a high-school teacher. He supported Sanogo and the coup. He was sure that Touré did not intend to leave power. He, however, wished the captain had waited until the rumor was proven right, in which case the coup would have been a legitimate move against a “dictator.”

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II. Newspapers

Les Echos, Bamako.

L'Essor, Bamako.

InfoMatin, Bamako.

L'Indépendant, Bamako.

Le Républicain, Bamako.

Appendix 1: Transcriptions in the original languages

Chapter 1. Authority

1.1

L'épanouissement d'une culture de la paix est lié de façon intrinsèque à: a) La promotion du règlement pacifique des conflits, du respect et de l'entente mutuels et de la coopération internationale; b) Le respect des obligations internationales en vertu de la Charte des Nations Unies et du droit international; c) La promotion de la démocratie, du développement et du respect universel de tous les droits de l'homme et de toutes les libertés fondamentales; d) La formation, à tous les niveaux de responsabilité, de personnes qui sachent favoriser le dialogue, la médiation, la recherche du consensus et le règlement pacifique des différends; e) Le renforcement des institutions démocratiques et la possibilité de participer pleinement au processus de développement; f) L'élimination de la pauvreté et de l'analphabétisme et la réduction des inégalités au sein des nations et entre celles-ci; g) La promotion d'un développement économique et social durable; h) L'élimination de toutes les formes de discrimination à l'égard des femmes grâce à leur autonomisation et une représentation équitable à tous les niveaux de la prise de décisions; i) Le respect, la promotion et la protection des droits de l'enfant; j) La promotion de la libre circulation de l'information à tous les niveaux et de l'accès à l'information; k) Une gestion des affaires publiques plus transparente et une responsabilité accrue en la matière...

1.2

Quelles sont ces valeurs traditionnelles positives? J'insiste beaucoup sur le terme "positive" parce qu'il peut y avoir de valeurs traditionnelles négatives...Mais ces valeurs traditionnelles positives, vous le connaissez, c'est le partage du bonheur, la bonne entente, et du bien vivre ensemble, c'est la tolérance c'est le respect de la parole donnée et de la décision prise sous l'arbre a palabres, n'est-ce pas? C'est l'hospitalité, c'est l'humanise solidement ancré dans nos sociétés...

1.3

A kuma kuma ba, ben be lasabati ni sira jumɛn ye? Fo hadamaden yeɛ ka dilan. Hadamaden be dilan cogo jumɛn? A be damine gwa kɔnɔ. Ce n'a muso, u ka gwa kɔnɔ; lu kɔnɔ, lu denw beɛ lajelen. Den mana boɔ bolon na, bolon kɔnɔ mɔgo beɛ ka je ala k'a ladamu. N'a taara kalan ta fen o fen na, Morikalan ta, Tubabu kalan ta, a mana taa nin kalan ta fen o fen na, ka do fara ladamu kan.

1.4

Ko be ka kan fanga la, démocratie fanga ko, ko voter in be dama ka kan a la. Beɛ: c'est universel, beɛ de b'a la, beɛ de be voter, mɔgo si te b'o a la, beɛ. Awa be da ma ka kan a vote fana la, do ka vote man fisa do te ye...ce ka vote man fisa muso ta ye, hɔɔn ka vote man fisa jon ta ye, be ka vote ye kelen ye.

1.5

Bɛɛ k'a kɛ. Voter in fana n'i b'a kɛ, i b'a kɛ gundo so de kɔɔ. Mɔɔ t'i n'i lajɛ a kɛ fɔ, min ka d'i ye i b'o kɛ. Ka d'a kan mɔɔ t'i ni lajɛ ka fɔ: "Ah!, ne bɛ siran karisa jɛ!" O t'a la. N'a ya sɔɔ a fora ko i n'i bolo kɔɔ ta kɛnɛ kan, mɔɔw bɛ jigin jɔɔɔn na, mɔɔw bɛ maloya jɔɔɔn na, mɔɔw bɛ siran jɔɔɔn jɛ yɛɛ. O bɛ se ka to mɔɔ dɔ bɛ se k'a bolo kɔɔta dɔ ye ka sɔɔ o tɛ a sago ye. Mais nin bɛ kɛ gundo so de kɔɔ o de ye juman ye.

1.6

N bɛ n'ka kuma daminɛ ka foli kɛ kɔɔ Nare Famakan ye. E ka kɔɔ ni ne ye wo kɔɔ, i ye député ye kɛ ne jɛ. Mais nka n'i ya bila ko ne ka kuma i tɔɔ la, o bɛ danaya de don. N'bɛ sɔn a ma, n'tɛ boli a jɛ. Nb'i fo. Ka n'ka kuma bojɛ da dugutigiw kɔɔ. Nɛ bɔra aw de la koyi, ne te se ka kɛ fosi ye ka taga ka aw dan.

1.7

Ka n'ka kuma boja da présidium kɔɔ, kɛrɛn kɛrɛnlɛnya la, k'a da députew kan. Aw ye jama ka kuma fɔ bagaw de ye, aw ye jama hamin fɔ bagaw de ye. N'i mana ta députeya la yɔɔ min, i k'a dɔn ko Bamananw bɛ min fɔ o de bɛ k'i la dɛ! Ko sodenin tɛ sɔɔɔn sɔɔ a woloyɔɔ.

1.8

Kita ye Manden dugukole de ye, Manden jamana, depuis 1237. Depuis kurukan fuga fe k'a se bi ma, reglement fɛn fɛn fɛra ya o de bɛ ka Kita gerer. Min bɛ ademayan sira wo, min b'a nafoloko sira la wo, min b'a marako sira la wo, o de bɛ ka Kita gerer. Fo ni mɔɔ min y'o sira bila n'o tɛ n'i m'o bila, i ni kitakaw tɛ bila jɔɔɔn na. Aw nali diyara an ye députew. Allah k'aw sara. Allah k'aw juman segin aw ka so. Aw nin min kɛ, aw ye boja min da anw kan Allah k'a jɔɔɔn da aw fana kan.

1.9

N'o bɔra yen, anw kana tɛmɛ kow kɛrɛfe, n'i y'aw nalen ye Kita yan, min kɛra Kita yan, aw nal'o de la...Aw nana de kana fɛnw yir'an na, aw hakili la, minnun dɔmbaliya y'a to, nin kɛɛ wilila Kita. Aw nje caman fɔ yan, an b'a caman dɔn...Nka mun ye kɛɛ wili Kita yan? Jɔnbaya don de! Jɔnbaya don de! Ko kɛ mɔɔ la, k'a k'a la, k'a k'a la, n'a sera yɔɔ dɔla, i bolo t'a bɛn de!

1.10

Parce que ne ma d'a la ko ko bɛ kɛ Kita yan, n'a ba dugutigi ninnun bolodɛɛ, o teyin...Nka n'i ya ye fɛnmin y'u bolo dɛɛɛ, kuma dɔw Bamananw bɛ kuma dɔ fana fɔ: "wulu n'a tigi jɛ tɛ sɔnjuguya ye!" Wulu n'a tigi jɛ tɛ sɔnjuguya ye de! Awa, fɛn o fɛn tigintan, bagan yɛɛ tigintan o manjugun, nka adamaden tigintan ka jugu de! Hadamaden tigintanw de donna nin kola, k'a tije.

1.11

Aw k'a lajɛ bɛɛ o bɛɛ, mɔɔ o mɔɔ bɛ yan bi, ka ta préfet ma ka ta se eaux-et-forets la k'e ka se douanes na, e bɛ se ke fɛn fɛn sigilan bɛ yan bi, u bɔɔra du dɔ de kɔɔ, et mara

b'o du bee kono...Nka n'tena kuma jaja, nin min kera, a y'an bee maloya. A ye Kitaka bee maloya...Nka nbe segin a kan de: "wulu n'a tigi je te sonjuguya ye." ...Nye demisenin ye, y'u senkorɔ dɔw mɔɔden ye n ye, dɔw mɔ...u kuloma sina yere ye nye. Nka an k'an jija, tɔgo min be Kita la, hali bi, a ka to a nɔla. Aw bi taa, aw k'aw hakili sigi, a jɔgon te ke tugun, ne fana, nb'o layidu d'aw ma. Ny'a don a jɔgon wera tena ke nin ko.

1.12

N'baden alisilamew, aw salame alekum, ne balu fo, ka segi, kalu fo dugutigi tɔgɔla. Assemblée min ye nin kuma yin baju ye, an be assemblée fo, ka duwawu k'i je, Allah ka y'i bamba.

1.13

I nara kuma minna nin ye, a diyara an ye kosobe. Ka da kan, n'i y'a men ko Kita mɔgɔwlu be son caman la Kita la k'a soro a son te. Mɔgo de bena bin an kan, n'o te an te bin mɔgo kan. Kita sigira kan mi no, an dugulenw, an te dunan lakasi, an te dunan tɔgon. Dunan, n'i nara an ma, an be bo an la yoro, i b'i laye.

1.14

Nka sisan sa, dije laban nin ro, fen fen y'a ro tija o le ye naafigiya ye. Naafigiya ye diiya bila jɔgon na de!

1.15

Geleya min be Kita bi...Kamara, Tungara, Magasere, ani an ka moriw Sise, nin senkuru naani le be Kita. Ni nilu ma fo jɔgon ko, foyi te tija Kita. Ba ni ninnun fora jɔgon ko, foyi te ben o ko. Ole dun be Kita bi. Alu ka kuma faamuya de! Geleya min be yan bi, o ye Kamara ni Tungara ni Magasere ni Sisew, ben t'olu ce. Dugu sigi baga dun, ni ben t'olu ce, ben be ke dugudenlu ce ja di? O geleya le be Kita yan bi. Alu yo faamu, alu ka seben de!

1.16

Aw b'a fe k'an laben yan, a ya na ben, n'ote ben te yan de! Ole Allah sago alu sago. An y'a pinin an ka jelilu fe... , i b'a lon Kita konin, an te se ka taa mogo pinin joro wera, k'o ka na an ka kuma fo. An fan bee jeli, kuma so be yan len. An y'a pinin jelilu fe u ka kuma an ce, k'a an na ben. Jelilu siranna, naata. Jelilu kuntigi be yan de! Jelilu siran na ala ni naata ma. u ma se ka an na ben. O, n'i un y'a ma fele fen fen noni nin mogo saba, mogo naani dun ma ben Kita yan, Kita te ben de! N'olu ma ben Kita te soumaya han! Alu n'o faamuya han! Nb'a falu yem f'olu ka ke kelen ye, Folo, I le tun ye kelen ye. Bi, n'olu tila la, ole tile liye. Alu ka fere ke ali k'olu la ben.

1.17

O fila nan be min la o kan, alu ka ko te, a kuma te fana, kuma mankan ka bo nin fe. Bari mɔgɔlu la kuma lo, ko "fen o fen , a be n'a temen sira la." Sisan, dugutigilu la sara ko! Kabiri salon an be jama nen-nen la la, fen ma f'an ye de! An le dun...sarako, sarako, saroko, sarako, u ka je pinin ala.

1.18

Eh! Presidium mɔgɔw, aw ni ce, aw ni baraji, ala ka si ni kenɛya d'a ma! Dugutigiw ka nɛmɔgɔ min bana kuma na nin ye, a donna lakole la 1921. Ala si filɛ aw k'a dɔn mɔgɔ ba de tun bɛ kumana sisan. A donna lakole la 1921, a san bi-kɔnɔtɔn ni kɔ le ye bi ye. Donc...a na na ka na min fɔ aw ye sisan, aw k'o faamuya. Aw nana mission min na sisan, bila kɔ dow bila l'a bolo, mɔgɔ ba ya le o ye ayi kana jigi an na dɛ...N'ote problema t'a ni jɔgɔn cɛ yan dɛ! Problema tɛ Magasere ni Tounkara cɛ yan, a t'an ni Camara cɛ, a t'an ni Sise cɛ. An na ko bɛɛ kɛlɛn.

Voice from the audience: A y'a la sara ko janabo dɔrɔn!

1.19

Head Griot: N'balimaw bi ma dijɛ dan, bi tɛ dijɛ ban. Dunia dan fo ka taa dijɛ ban, ninun dɛsɛlɛn jɔgɔn nɔ cogomin, hadamadenw dɛsɛ ne jɔgɔn na ten. Kuma min be n'bolo, a n'a kɔrɔ bɛ jɔgɔn na.

Nin ye bɛn so le ye yan bi, nin ye hina so le yan bi, nin ye kɛlɛnya so le ye yan bi, nin ye furu so le ye yan bi, nin ye jigi so le ye yan bi. N'o jigi ni o tija le jɛnin fɛrɛrɛ, k'a ta diina mɔgɔw ma, ka n'a bila nansaraw la, ka n'a bila anw ko tigiw la, n'o le gɛlɛn don, Allah ka tija dɛmɛ fɛn dɔ fɔra bi, o gɛlɛyara an ma. Mais n'a geleya r'i ma, i b'a sɔrɔ i sɔn b'a rɔ. Kita jeli, Kita jeli! Ka bɔ Manden! Ka Naani kɛ, ka Jenikuru kɛyan! Tounkara ni Camara, so tigi Dangaran Tuma, ka kuru in sigi. Mɔgɔ o mɔgɔ y'i yɛrɛ woloden nun bɛ kɔ. Ka na jɔgɔn fɛ, ka sigi jɔgɔn fɛ, laada ma tija anw bolo dɛ! Maninka sɔn kan dɔ le, ko wulu la jɛla mana siran fɛn fɛn ja, ko wulu tigi t'o mina.

Anw, an Kita jeli, mɔgɔ o mɔgɔ man'a fɔ ka fɔ ko anw siran na ka hɔrɔnw bila jɔgɔn na, ala!

Senior master of ceremony: Kana bila jɔgɔn na ko kuma fo, ayi ma bila jɔgɔn na sa.

Head Griot: O gɛlɛyara an ma dɛ! Anw y'a bɛɛ ka correspondence sɔrɔ, an ma mɔgɔ ta jaa bi. An ye kota sɔrɔ, an ma mɔgɔta jaabi, an ye sabri de jɛnin aw ni jɔgɔn cɛ, an b'a jɛnin fana fo k'an sa an kana kɛ sababu ye ka Kita jamana goya. An jiatigi Kita yan ka jija. [...] Kita juman ya la, an bɛ Allah dei, Kita hɔrɔn ya la, an bɛ Allah deli. [...] An jeliw an ka Allah deli lo o ye, an jatigiw da fɛ. Kita jeli, Kita jeli tɛ nanfigi ye dɛ! Soli ala Mohamed.

1.20

Namake da sera kuma min ma, à l'intention surtout de la presse, ne tun bɛ fɛ ka kuma ka se a yɔrɔma. En réalité, Kita yan bi, franchement problem te yin. Probleme foyi te Kita bi. E, Namake tun bɛ fɛ ka yɔrɔ min fɔ, entre les Keita, les Tounkara, mais, o bɛ Mali duguba bɛɛ la, minun ye tu tikɛ, minun nana kɔ fɛ...Ne ye Sikasso ka de yɛ, Diamantɛnw de ye Sikasso tu tikɛ. Mais bi, Sikasso ye, n'a fɔra lu ka lu Tara so ba u tɛ Diamantɛnw wele yɛrɛ. C'est l'évolution, be fɛ, ça va passer.

1.21

Et je félicite l'ensemble de conférenciers pour leurs brillantes exposées. Je suis membre de la société civile, parce que que suis là en tant que responsable d'association et à ce titre j'ai une question à l'endroit du docteur Diakité, par rapport au rôle des organisations de la société civile. J'ai noté que nous avons un rôle pertinent dans l'encadrement, dans la sensibilisation et dans la

défense des droits des populations. Je souhaite que docteur nous précise les axes de cette sensibilisation, de cet encadrement.

1.22

Aw ni tile ! Ne ka kuma jubaju be an politikiw de kan. Pratiquement depuis 2007, a jirala anw denmisɛnw na Kita yan k'a fo ko stade municipale k'a be jo an Kitakaw ye. Cercli o cercli n'a ka bo komi Kita stade municipale numan a jolen be a beɛ la. Hali sa an Kitakaw o lapini o ma sabati

1.23

Ne ye Abdoulaye Sissoko ye Kita. Camara la jemɔɔ le ye ne ye. Ka bo Kayi la kataka bila fo Solola, n'kɔɔ kelen pe le a ro bi, n'o ye Bankoremana yere Jankun kɔfe. Salle yin kɔɔ yan bi, mɔɔ kelen pe le yan min ka kɔɔ ni ne ye, n'o ye Namake ye. Ne ka foli be se délégation ma ka fo ko ko do ye hadamaden ya la, beɛ da te se k'a fo, beɛ da hake te o di kelen ye, minun ta hake y'a ya ye, olu da ma se a hake ma. Masake o masake n'i nana ko dila na Kita yan, n'i nana wulafe, ni sanji nara, e nana min dilan Allah b'o ja e yere nana min pinin, Allah b'o d'i ma. O te wili few, o lada ye Kita yan.

1.24

Mara tijena a menna. Ne be san bi kɔɔɔɔ ani san naanin na. Ny'o la bi Allah n'i nfa ni nba barika ani Allah ni kira barika. Mara tijɛ la a menna, an ye mara tija le bolo. Kɔɔɔɔ filii o kɔɔɔɔfilii ye Mali kan. [...] Den lu bara an kɔɔɔɔfilii, k'a sabu ke, an ye independence di den lu ma kojugu. N'an ye independence di den lu ma kosobe, min kadi alu je alu y'o ke de! I mana i den gosi kadala la, i mana wa polisi la, k'a man kan la gosi.

1.25

Anw ye personnes agées mɔɔɔw de ye, anw ye anciens combattantw de ye. [...] K'o foli fo aw ye. N'aw be yɔɔ wo yɔɔ, a ka anw wele an k'a ka kuma dafa. Anw de be se k'aw ka kuma kanw sere ya yan. Chef de cabinet be yan, n'be se k'a ka kuma seɓentiya, ke wale do beyin bi, an beɛ be jigi jɔɔɔɔna, laamɔ n'a bulu de don. Parce que aw ye loi do k'an na Mali kɔɔ, an minun be lamɔ na bi, a y'an ka baara gele y'an bolo doɔni. N'o ye democratie ye.

1.26

Democratie mɔɔ minun y'a faamuya kojugu, olu ko ko mɔɔ kan'i fa don tugun, i kan'i ba don tugun. C'est pas ηrai. A y'an ka baara geleya doɔnin. I muso ko k'a fo i ye ne lon furu jɔnya la, nt'i don nfuru ce tugunin, an beɛ ka kan. A y'an ka baara geleya. O tuma, tenue tigi fana be yani. Ni sɔɔɔdai ce tun be ta folo, a be ta cogoya minna n'o ni bi ta n'o ye kelen ye, nye san bi-saba ke l'armee na. Ce n'est pas la meme chose.

Chapter 2. Representation

2.1

L'une des différences fondamentales entre les démocraties occidentales et les nôtres que certains analystes, dont une minorité vient de chez nous-mêmes, qualifient tantôt de bananiers, tantôt d'arachidières, réside dans le fait que nos versions de la démocratie n'accordent aucune place officielle aux partis politiques de l'opposition.

2.2

Au bout de quelques années d'opposition et d'exclusion, nos hommes politiques, quelles que soient leurs convictions politiques et idéologiques, en viennent de façon absurde à se convaincre de l'inutilité des combats politiques et développent de idées de collaboration avec les autorités en place que l'on se met alors à courtiser, oubliant qu'hier encore on les traitait de fantoches. Les grandes idées politiques et philosophiques qui fondent l'action politiques sont aussi abandonnées au profit de la recherche du confort personnel et de l'élévation sociales des siens.

2.3

L'opposition parlementaire a-t-elle une existence affirmée? Si elle existe, certains ne l'accordent qu'un rôle de figuration, n'arrivant pas le plus souvent à jouer convenablement son rôle de catalyseur dans l'animation du débat démocratique. Personne ne doute du rôle d'une opposition politique véritable dans une démocratie. Ce qui se passe sous nos cieux frise la farce. [...] C'est comme si, ici, on craint de jouer son rôle sous peine d'encourir des malédictions du tout puissant exécutif.[...] Peut être que les députes, pour un grand nombre d'entre eux, et dans de nombreuses localités du pays, tiennent leur mandat non du peuple, mais de la générosité du régime en place. [...] Pour tout ce que s'en suit, on le voit, c'est le règne de la pensée unique qui s'installe dans notre pays. L'indépendant de président de la république qu'est ATT ne se reconnaît aucune opposition, ni dans son propre camps, ni dans l'entourage des opposants déclarés. Pour un réel encrage démocratique dans notre pays, tout est donc à refaire...

2.4

Tous ces faits démontrent votre haute compréhension, et tout le prix que vous attachez à l'émancipation de vos soeurs. Les femmes du Mali se réjouissent de tant de réalisations positives et vous prient de croire à leur sincère reconnaissance [...] Monsieur le président, mes chers collègues, je suis convaincue que vous êtes tous d'accord avec moi pour convenir avec moi que ce Code qui réhabilite la femme malienne est profondément humain.

2.5

Afin d'atteindre ces objectifs, l'effort de rénovation doit s'inspirer des traditions, du droit musulman, du droit occidental car évoluer n'est pas nécessairement s'occidentaliser ni s'orientaliser, c'est surtout épurer les coutumes, les débarrasser de leur contenu barbare, les mettre en harmonie avec le développement social des populations.

2.6

Jamais projet de loi ne suscita autant de commentaires divers dans les villes comme dans les villages, jamais projet de loi ne fut examiné avec autant d'intérêt et de minutie à la fois par les hommes et les femmes du Mali; jamais projet de loi, avant son vote, par l'Assemblée Nationale, ne fut aussi connu de l'homme de la rue. Il faut bien le dire, certains de nos compatriotes, inquiets du train de l'évolution actuelle, jaloux à juste raison peut-être des bonnes moeurs africaines et ayant la nostalgie des bonnes pratiques du temps de leur jeunesse, certain de nos vieux aînés, dis-je, parlent avec beaucoup d'appréhension de ce code. Les jeunes et les femmes, eux, soupirent, et se demandent avec anxiété si quelque mauvais génie ne va pas encore empêcher ou retarder l'adoption de cette loi qui concrétise à leurs yeux l'égalité de l'homme et de la femme.

2.7

C'est pour quoi, Monsieur le président, je souhaiterais avec la Commission que, dans une première étape, le Gouvernement exige de ses agents d'exécution beaucoup de souplesse pour prévenir heurts possibles, car, à mon avis, cette loi que nous votons doit être une arme de progrès, de justice, et, je le souhaite, de paix sociale, et non de troubles.

2.8

Deputy Aoua Keita: J'ai jugé nécessaire de préciser mon point de vue car tous les députés on parlé en tant qu'homme et non comme représentant du peuple.

President of the National Assembly: Ah! Mme. Aoua Keita, je vous demande de retirer ce que vous venez de dire.

Deputy Aoua Keita: Je retire. [...] D'après M. le Ministre la femme que travaille ne doit pas être habillée par son mari. Je trouve anormal que toutes les femmes ne soient pas mises sur le même pied d'égalité au point de vu vestimentaire.

2.9

Je souhaite, comme le gouvernement, que toutes les femmes du Mali ne forment qu'une, et que nous formions tous un et un pour tous. Il faut que nous soyons d'accord pour trouver une solution aux souffrances que nous subissons quotidiennement. Ailleurs, et dans cette assemblée, au Mali, les femmes ne peuvent par aller sans l'aide de leur mari. Ne riez pas, je voudrais seulement que vous goutiez certaines images avec moi. Vous souhaitez tous que nous ayons un Mali cohérent, résistant, a tous les effluves, a travers le temps et l'espace. Le mari est la cellule fondamentale de la famille qu'elle soit polygame ou monogame. Avec la bonne entente nous aurons des familles cohérentes.

2.10

Vous comprenez tous mon émotion face à ce micro pour introduire un sujet aussi sensible. Tout mandat impératif est nul, j'en conviens, mais comment pourrais-je ne pas parler aujourd'hui en tant que femme ? Le projet de loi portant Code des personnes et de la famille est l'épilogue d'une longue bataille et l'aube d'une ère nouvelle. [...] Cela dit, Honorable Collègues, le Code des

personnes et de la famille n'est pas un code pour la promotion de la femme ; le code n'est pas une loi qui consacre la victoire de la femme sur l'homme. Loin de là. Le code est la consécration d'une volonté politique, celle de donner à la famille les bases juridiques nécessaires pour asseoir la cohésion de notre société.

2.11

Donc Mesdames et messieurs les honorables parlementaires, ces réformes dont nous venons d'énoncer quelques-unes les plus importantes ne doivent pas être perçues comme une victoire d'un camp sur un autre. Je pense bien que les femmes sont venues en grand nombre à l'Assemblée. Il ne faudrait pas, si ce Code était voté, que les femmes comprennent par exemple que c'est une victoire des femmes sur les hommes. Je ne pense pas que ce soit ça, c'est plutôt des acquis au bénéfice de tous le Maliens. Si c'est compris comme ça, aucune composante de la société ne va se sentir exclue. [...] Elus du peuple, je crois que nous ne devons pas légiférer en faveur de telle ou telle catégorie, en faveur de telle ou telle partie de la population, de telle ou telle religion, mais nous devons le faire en toute conscience, en toute connaissance de cause pour l'ensemble du peuple malien.

2.12

[...] Il apparaît nettement que ce projet est une avancée dans la prise en compte des préoccupations fondamentales de l'homme et de la femme malienne en matière de liberté, en matière de rapports humains et en matière tout simplement de prise en compte des conditions des couches les plus démunies de nos populations, et ces couches se situent au niveau des femmes et des enfants.

2.13

Maintenant en parlant de je ne sais quel article qui dit que la femme ne doit plus obéissance à son mari mais on se doit mutuelle fidélité et respect et autres. J'avoue que j'ai deux femmes, j'étais amateur pour une troisième si jamais il y avait une prétendante mais cette disposition-là...je ne suis plus prétendant pour un troisième. Je crains même dans un proche futur je ne sois célibataire, parce que ma femme qui ne va pas me respecter va au dehors, ça c'est clair. Elle est obligé de m'obéir chez moi. Je demande aux femmes un sursaut d'orgueil, parce que étant donné que l'égalité, la parité, l'équité, tout est prôné en faveur de la femme. Et la dot, maintenant, c'est l'homme qui va payer? Non. Moi je demande un sursaut d'orgueil aux femmes: il faudra que les femmes commencent a nous payer la dot. Ou bien qu'on se paie mutuellement la dot. Vraiment.

2.14

Le vent venu du Nord, on ne peut pas y échapper, ça ne peut pas nous laisser. Mais cela ne m'empêche pas de dire ce que je pense. [...] Mais est-ce que aujourd'hui au Mali on n'est pas en train d'enlever toute notre histoire pour prendre celle des Européens ou bien de l'Occident? [...] Moi je ne parle pas seulement en tant que musulman. Bien sur, j'ai opté pour être musulman, mais je parle en tant que Malien de terroir. Je suis un Malien de terroir. 80% de Maliens..., puisque vous les intellectuels qui êtes ici, vous êtes peut-être a 20 ou bien 10% même je veux

dire.[...] Je sais que ça va être voté aujourd'hui , ça c'est sur. Mais excusez-moi, je ne voterai pas, ça il faut le dire.

2.15.

Mais monsieur le Président, je reviens sur la même question: est-ce qu'on mesure un peu la réaction de nos populations face a ce projet? Si le Gouvernement l'a déjà fait, nous, on n'a pas eu le temps de nous renseigner. Mais ce que nous, nous rencontrons partout, c'est que la plupart des Maliens nous demandent de ne pas voter la loi bien que nous, nous allons la voter.

2.16

Moi je disait que je vais voter ce projet de loi parce que c'est mon pays, c'est mon parti, bien que je serai obligé de demander à DIEU de me le pardonner (rires dans la salle.) Je serai dans l'obligation de prier chaque jour et demander à DIEU de me le pardonner. Le projet, M. le Président, tout le monde sait qu'il est souvent à l'encontre de la religion musulmane et même de notre culture, donc il pose problème à tous les Maliens. Je sais qu'il y a quelque part aussi une pression des femmes. J'ai vu une lettre de femmes qui demandent de voter le projet. Mais moi, ma question: est-ce que si on soumettait ce projet à un référendum, ou seules les femmes vont voter, est-ce que c'est la majorité des femmes maliennes qui vont le voter ou non? Parce qu'à ma connaissance les femmes maliennes aussi ont la même culture que les hommes maliens, qu'il soit culture de la religion musulmane ou autre culture.

Chapter 3. Conflict

3.1

Journalw bæe bi kan k'a fɔ ko ADEMA kɔnin, komin an ka ambition ka bon, ko ADEMA kɔnin nin kelen yin na, ko ADEMA bæna fara-fara, ko ADEMA bæna ci. O kuma, k'o ke tijɛ ye, k'o tɔkɔtɔ-tɔkɔtɔ k'o ke tijɛ ye ADEMA denw yere tulo la. ADEMA opposantw fana bæ k'u wasa don o la. Olu fana bæ k'u ka journow seɓe kɔseɓe! Ko ADEMA bæ ci, parti nin, mɔgɔ kan'i ka wari don a la. Ayiwa, bamba daman de b'a kɔnɔ, wari dun yɔrɔ ni den jugu yɔrɔw, o gansan-gansan de b'a kɔnɔ sisan. Ayiwa, an tɛ jateminɛ ke, an bɔra yɔrɔ jan dɛ! ADEMA bɔra yɔrɔ jan fo kan'a se bi ma. Donc, ni an ma jateminɛ ke, mɔgɔw b'a fɛ an ka ke min ye, an bæ k'o ye. Sani an yere b'a fɛ an ka ke min ye, an tɛ k'o ye dɛ!

3.2

Wa n'an fara-faralen tagara, President min mana sigi ni ADEMA don, hali a t'a dɔn k'a fɔ Kita y'a,...sabu mɔgɔw bæna sɔrɔ yan minun b'a contre la. Donc, o de bæ k'a kɔnɔ! Halini majorité kɛra dɔ fɛ, majorité ka ke dɔ fɛ, o minorité ka kɛle, ɛh! Tijɛnin de ka nɔgɔ ni jɛnin ye wo! Tijɛnin, kuma kuntan fɔ b'o la, fa nɛnin ni ba nɛnin b'o la, donc fɛn bæe b'o la. O de bæ mɛn yɔrɔ jan. Donc, a b'o de mɛn, a b'a fɔ ko Kita section b'a contre la k'a sɔrɔ minorité dɔrɔn de don. Donc, an tɛ fɛn sɔrɔ a ko la. An tɛ fɛn sɔrɔ koyi!

3.3

Donc a kuma tɛmɛ na ne ni mɔgɔ minun cɛ, n'b'a tigiw tɔgɔ fɔ. Pour dire que anw bæ ka taa sira min kan, an bæ ka taa tijɛ démarche de kan. Kuma tɛmɛ na ne ni Sissoko de cɛ kununasinin su. N'k'a ma, il m'a téléphoné, n'ye n'yɔrɔ fɔ a ye, il est venu me joindre, il m'a dit que dɔw bæ sorties la,... J'ai dit: "non, il faut arrêter, mɔgɔ tɛ sorties la dɛ, ne ni Kamissoko de don. On s'est fait accompagner par Adama."

3.4

Donc, je crois que dɔ tun y'ale wele k'a fɔ a ye ko anw bæ ka candidat dɔ lafasa n ko non! Anw tɛ candidat lafasa la dɛ! Ni min y'a sɔrɔ, presidentya bæ dakan de rɔ. Wari t'a di mɔgɔ ma, sanu t'a di mɔgɔ ma, i ka lɔnin t'a d'i ma. Adamaden bæ dan'a kama de. Mɔgɔ o mɔgɔ ni min y'a jɛnin parti la, a bæe y'an ka mɔgɔ de ye, ni min y'a sɔrɔ, an bæ tugu o de nɔfɛ. Nka, an tɛ ka mɔgɔ soutenu dɛ!

3.5

An tɛ mɔgɔ lajɛ, an tɛ siran mɔgɔ ja. Parce que i man'a mɛn i bæ siran mɔgɔ jɛ ou bien ka mɔgɔ lamɛn o y'a ye i n'a ka surun de. Donc, anw b'o bolo de kan.

3.6

Ni mɔgɔ saara, i bæ da i sibiri de kɔnɔ. O la n'i bæ fɛn o fɛn fɔ i k'a fɔ a ke cogola. Par conséquent, fɛn o fɛn ma na ke, i k'a lakale a ke cogola, o de bæ bɛn.

3.7

Mais, tiɲɛ, mɔɔɔ n'i bɔra i kelen,... est ce que ne ye min fɔ, est ce que n'ye min fɔ, n'tɛ maloya a la sinin wa? Parce que an bɛ hadamadenya de la.

3.8

Moi aujourd'hui, n'e Macoumba ye ko kɛ, ne b'a fɔ i ye "Macoumba, je ne suis pas d'accord avec toi". E tɛ ne balo, i tɛ ne ka barama kilo da dɔn wo! An ye ɲɔɔɔn sɔɔɔ parti in de kɔnɔ yan. On n'est pas de la même famille! Parce que an bɛ hadama den y'a de la. "Bonjour," "bonsoir," o ye bele-bele ye koyi! Tu ne me dois rien, je ne te dois rien, le bonjour là, c'est quelque chose! O ka to an ni ɲɔɔɔn cɛ, bɛn kɔnɔ la la. An ka da ɲɔɔɔn na. N'an daara ɲɔɔɔn na, fɛn bɛɛ b'a kɔnɔ. E yɛrɛ y'a fɔ, ADEMA ye parti bele-bele ye wo, an kan'a to a ka fara. Hadamaden, n'i bɛ tiɲɛ la, ala de b'i la wasa, i tɛ malo wo.

3.9

Après, an ye min mɛn? K'u bɛ sortie la. Politiki de don wo, i mana don sokɔnɔ aw mɔɔɔ fila ka min fɔ, a bɛ lase a tigi ma. Politiki-kuma tɛ dogola koyi! Parce que an tɛ se k'a bɛɛ dogo. An y'a kuma mɛn, anw ko k'o ye kuma fu de ye. [...] N y'o de fɔ, n'ko politiki-kuma a tɛ dogo, hali i man'a fɔ yan ko "um-um," a bɛ taga fɔ e Macoumba ye. Politiki-kuma, n'i tɛ se ka min fɔ a tigi ɲɛna, i kan'a fɔ a kɔfɛ n'o tɛ, a bɛ lase a tigi ma. Fɛn caaman fɔra yen, an k'o bɛɛ toyin, mais an kɔnin n'u ma kuma

3.10

Bɛɛ ye kuma caaman fɔ yan. Mais, ne yɛrɛ bolo, nin kuma fɛn o fɛn fɔ len filɛ nin yan, nin bɛɛ ye kɛɛ kɔnɔ kow de ye. Yan'an k'an girin-girin kɛɛ kɔnɔ kumaw ni kɛɛ kɔnɔ kow kan, an k'olu ye k'u toyin. An kan k'a lajɛ, solution jumɛn beyin ka kɛɛ nin ban de? An k'o ɲinin sisan bani. Kɛɛ kɔnɔ kuma, o dɛtail, dan t'o la wo. Maintenant, a bɛ ban cogo di?

3.11

Voilà ne bɛ min fɔ, a bɛ siɲɛ caaman bɔ, an bɛ sigi nin yɔɔɔ kelen in na yan, an b'a fɔ ko ka bɛn ɲinin. Bɛɛ b'a fɔ: "Oui, an ka bɛn ɲinin." Mais n 'an bɔra yan dɔɔɔn, bɛn danna yan[...] N'a ma ɲa min kɔ, ni bɛn tɛ kɛ, an k'a kɛ bɛnbaliya kun kelen ye. C'est ce que moi je dis, hein! An tɛ se ka na an sigi yan don o don k'a fɔ k'an ka bɛn, an bɛ bɔ yan, dɔw bɛ taa ko wɛrɛ kɛ kɔfɛ[...] Aujourd'hui, on a besoin d'une Conference de section. Et c'est au cours de cette conference de section que les gens vont se dire la vérité et avoir une ligne de conduite. N'o ma kɛ a tɛ bɛn dɛ!

3.12

Aw tara yɔɔɔ minun na, ne b'a dɔn wo. A yɔɔɔ fɔlɔ fɔlɔ ye yɔɔɔ jumɛn ye? Aw tagara Madina, aw taara Kotuba. Politique ye tiɲɛ ye, nka an kana ɲallon da ɲɔɔɔn na, c'est très mauvais. Aw ye min fɔ yen, aw ni membres cɛ, aw b'o dɔn. Moi je suis passé sur le

terrain après vous, aw ye min fɔ yen, aw ni Allah cɛ aw b'o dɔn. Aw ma fen fɔ min bɛ mɔgɔw kala, aw ye fen fɔ de ko ka an jɛnsɛn, aw ka bila jɛfɛ. Aw n'o kuma de sera yen. A Kotuba, en compagnie de Keita, aw ye wari minun di, aw b'a dɔn.

3.13

Seydou: E Robert ye sortie minnun kɛ n'ko Sekou de y'o wari d'i ma.

Robert: Sekou ka dɔrɔmɛ kelen tɛ anw kɔnɔ.

Seydou: E de ye destructeur ye, tu es l'ennemi interne du parti.

3.14

ɓagamin-ɓagamin yɔrɔw jɛfɛ dɔrɔn, ka mɔgɔw bila jɔgɔn na, vous ne savez pas que mɔgɔ dɔw fana beyin, olu bɛ fen sɔrɔ nin de la? Parceque u ka kɛ e fanfɛ, u k'a fɔ e ka dɔ d'u ma, u bɛ dɔ d'u ma, dɔ in fana fanfɛ, o bɛ dɔ di. O bɛ ban cogo di?

3.15

Commune kɔnɔ mɔgɔw la, olu de bɛ k'a ɓagamin aw ni jɔgɔn cɛ koyi. Olu bɛ bɔ, u bɛ n'a fɔ, Sissoko bɔr'an fɛ yan, a nana nin fɔ yan, a nana nin fɔ yan... Commune dɔw bɔra yan ko Sissoko taar'a fɔ olu ye ko ni section ka papier tɛ, k'olu tɛ ka mɔgɔ recoit, ko parce que k'olu bɛ campagne na IBA ye. U taar'a fɔ ne yɛrɛ ye ko don min na IBA nana yan, ko Radio dɔ tun bɛ donkilidala yan, ko ne fasa b'a la dɔrɔn ko bɛɛ bolila ka taa ko ka ne fasa bɔ a la. Aw tɛ jɔgɔn ye koyi!

3.16

Sorti ko min ni petit frère y'a fɔ sisan, travail fractionnel de don wo, o man kan. C'est le travail fractionnel. An k'o éviter. N'i ye exemple ta ne bara kan, aw bɔra yen don min wula fɛ, compte rendu bɛɛ taara kɛ ne ye wo. Compte rendu min taara kɛ yen, bɛn compte rendu t'o ye wo. N'o tɛ, n'aw taara yen, ne ye ADEMA jɛ mɔgɔ dɔ ye Sinfo, aw kan ka se ne ma! Ne ye aw kɔrɔ de fana ye! Politique sira yɛrɛ ka boyin. Hadamaden y'a an ni jɔgɔn cɛ yɛrɛ, aw kan ka se ne ma! Mais aw ma se ne ma wo! Aw sera minun ma, u tɛ hali an ka ADEMA mɔgɔw ye. Olu ye min fɔ aw ye ani aw taara min fɔ olu ye, u taar'a bɛɛ jɛfɔ ne jɛna. Bɛn kuma tɛ. Fo n'o y'a sɔrɔ u ye ɗalon da aw la dɛ! An bɛ ka tulon kɛ parti la dɛ!

3.17

Ne hakilila, n'aw bɛ bɔli kɛ, a y'aw sara jɔgɔn na. Hali n'aw b'a ɓagamin, aw ka taa jɔgɔn fɛ yɛrɛ. Comme ca, bɛɛ b'a dɔn min bɛ fɔ la. Mais n'a fɔra aw taara mɔgɔ faga ko de fɔ yen, a man ka dig'i la, parce que i kelen de taara. Donc, n'aw bɛ bɔliw kɛ, aw ye taa jɔgɔn fɛ!

3.18

Tendance, tendance, tendance; tendance in kɔsɛmɛ len Bamako, tendance dɔ in kɔsɛmɛ len Bamako.

3.19

Mosere ye déŋis ta yan fo Bamako. Sekou ka nininkali fɔɔ kɛra mun ye? Moséré est-εue aw ye réunion min kɛ ne ka mɔgɔw tun bɛ yen? Mosere ko jon? Ko Keita ninnun? Il a nommé nominalement Keita. Est-ce εue Keita ka mɔgɔw tun bɛ reunion na wa? Raison pour laεuelle il n'a pas financé.

3.20

Cɛ, an ka tiŋɛ fɔ ɲɔgɔn ye quoi. Keita tɛna réunion na, mais, il y a des éléments qui viennent s'informer et qui ne font que détruire. Eh! An tɛ tiŋɛ fɔ ɲɔgɔn ɲɛnɛ!

3.21

N'an dɔgɔya r'an yɛrɛ ma Kita yan, an ma taga koloso mɔgɔ la... C'est ce que j'ai dit, la lutte clandestine la, anw y'o kɛ de, avant que l'ADEMA soit crée. Nin fɛn o fɛn filɛ nin ye, je les ai connu dans la lutte clandestine [...] En 91-92-93-94, minun y'a ɲanaman ya, o maa duuru dɔrɔn de bɛ jama la yan. Madou Diarra, Soriba Cisse, Mose Moussa Sissoko, Mamadou Kamissoko ani Lassi. Ca c'est wilibali! ɲininkali t'o la, olu de y'a latigɛ, olu de y'a ɲanaman ya.

3.22

Parti be in nɔ, a bɛ dɔ balo, dɔ yɛrɛ bɛ parti balo. Mais min beyin n'o bɛ parti balo, i k'a dɔn ko hɔrɔnya dɔ de b'o bolo, o ni boɲa min ka kan, n'o ma di o ma, o de bɛ na ni kɛlɛ ye. En '91, '92, maa naani min fɔlen filɛ, a kelen si tun tɛ se ka waafila mago ɲɛ parti ye yɔrɔ nin kelen. O don tun y'a sɔrɔ so tun t'olu yɛrɛ bolo, muso t'u bolo yɛrɛ. O kɛra.

3.23

Eh! Attendez la, par rapport aux missions, moi je ne fais pas de mission. Il ne faut pas que vous confondez mon travail avec le parti. Moi je plante des arbres et maintenant c'est la saison. Moi je plante dans tous les coins du cercle et chaque fois que je pars sur un chantier, il faut que j'aïlle dire bonjour a un SG, parti ko kama, ko n k'o dabila, n'tɛ se k'o kɛ. Et vous voulez que j'aïlle dans les communes sans dire bonjour a un SG ou a un militant? N'tɛ se k'o fana kɛ. Hali ni section ko n'k'a dabila, n'tɛ se k'o kɛ.

3.24

A don ni ne ka wari tɛ ka parti ka wari dafa ka campagne kɛ Sissoko ye, n'bɛ fɛn o fɛn ɲinin diŋɛ la tikɛla, Allah fɛ, ala kan'a nɔgɔ ya n'ye. Ne y'e ka hɛrɛ de ɲinin, e de ɲɔlen b'a kan ko fi ka ne malo, n faso kɔnɔ yan.

3.25

Parce que a bɛ se ka ko min ɲanabɔ, mɔgɔ tɛ se k'a ɲanabɔ. A ko landi min bɛ a la...Ni ne ko ne bɛ campagne kɛ bi, députation na n b'a jɛ...

3.26

Ne yɛrɛ de bɛ n diyara, n'tɛ politique place ɲinin na, n'tɛ President y'a ɲinin na, n'tɛ kɛ député ye... N'a kadi mɔgɔ min ye, i bɛ'n sama ka don i ka da fɛ, ne ni n'ɲɔfɛ mɔgɔw,

an be voter i ye, i be gagner, n'a mandi min ye, i be n'kɛɛ. Ɛh! E de be perdu, ne tɛ perdu dɛ! Mɔgɔ min tɛ ko nɔ fɛ est ce que o be perdu?

3.27

Politiki la, i b'a dɔn nin be baara kɛ kosobe, probleme dɔ ka nin muso sɔrɔ sisan, e dun b'a dɔn c'est un des meilleures militants. A mana n'i fɛyen k'a fɔ a muso mankɛnɛ i ka waawɔrɔ d'ama, i y'a dɔn i b'a di?

3.28

Tounkara, nɛ be fɛ ka maa kɔrɔ kuma dɔ de fɔ aw ye. Pourɛuoi nos ɲieuɲ disent a chæue matin, ko bɛɛ ka taa karisa fo. Ko n'i taara mɔgɔ fo don o don, hali ni kɛɛ b'aw ni ɲɔgɔn cɛ, a be ban.

Chapter 4. Sincerity

4.1

La présence en grand nombre de médecins, d'ingénieurs, d'hommes de droit, d'enseignants, de membres des professions Libérales, de paysans laisse augurer des débats très enrichissants et surtout très approfondis. A n'en pas douter, une telle Assemblée ne pourra se résoudre à jouer le rôle peu flatteur de chambre d'enregistrement ou de Caisse de résonance.

4.2

Plan m'a aidé pour le classes...pour le CESCO c'était un projet belge...qui était dans tout le Mali. Les bailleurs peuvent t'aider à faire les choses, mais ils vont te dire: toi même ton apport c'est quoi? Par exemple, a la réalisation de l'adduction d'eau, le village et la commune devaient payer 3,850,000 CFA. Maintenant les bailleurs complètent. Le CESCO, il fallait payer 1,444,000 CFA. Maintenant, les classes, pour les élèves, *Plan* aussi fait ça, mais on paye le 20%, c'est à dire, on accepte nous mêmes de faire les travaux physiques, par exemple, mélanger le ciment, apporter ça au maçon etc. Nous mêmes on faisant ça. Bon quand tu évalue ça, ça va te faire le 20%. C'est comme ça que tu fais les choses.

4.3

Jusqu'à présent on n'a pas compris ce qu'un député doit faire, dans le milieu rural là. Sinon un député ne peut pas construire une école, nous on ne peut que voter les lois. Mais, on a des facilités quand même pour avoir les bailleurs, tout le monde peut nous recevoir. Donc à partir de là, généralement on a besoin de nous pour faire les adductions d'eau, les forages, les écoles...Les gens viennent te dire: "Il faut nous aider, trouvez nous un bailleur pour construire un CESCO, ou bien une école, un bien un forage..."

4.4

Il faut être honnête d'abord avec tout le monde. Si tu viens me demander de faire quelque chose, si je peut le faire, que je te dis oui, si je ne peut pas, que je te dis non. Et puis, que les gens sent en toi que tu est engage pour leur cause, s'il a un problème que tu viens auprès d'eux, même si tu n'arrive pas a résoudre, qu'ils savent au moins que tu est prêt a partager la douleur avec eux, mais tout ça repose sur l'honnêteté, ne pas fréquenter les femmes d'autrui..

4.5

Il tient vraiment a ça parole, jusqu'a ce qu'on la surnommé *kankelentigui*, quand il dit que c'est noir, c'est que c'est noir, quand il dit que c'est blanc, c'est que c'est blanc. Ja'i confiance a ça. il m'a prouvé ça mille et une fois...

4.6

Monsieur le président, cet exercice démocratique auquel je participe pour la première fois...je me plie avec d'autant plus de conviction que je suis persuadé qu'il permet d'asseoir et de consolider

la culture démocratique dont l'un des items essentiels demeure l'information. Informer pour connaître, connaître pour savoir, savoir pour décider, décider d'agir...

4.7

En notre qualité de porte-parole du gouvernement nous avons comme rôle de permettre à l'opinion publique nationale et internationale de comprendre les prises de position du gouvernement, les grandes décisions du gouvernement nous devons de les expliquer, de faire en sorte que les actes majeurs posés par le gouvernement soient connus, compris des citoyens. Cette logique de faire et de faire savoir doit être amenée à destination de tous les publics: population, toutes les autres institutions de la république, partenaires sociaux, société civile, partenaires au développement, etcétera, etcetera.[...] L'abrogation était un acte majeur posé par le gouvernement, il était important qu'on le fasse comprendre le plus rapidement possible aux maliennes et aux maliens pour éviter la rumeur, pour éviter la mauvaise interprétation.

4.8

Il est vrai qu'en commentant ce jour la cette mesure d'abrogation nous avons dit que cela s'inscrit dans le cadre général de la lutte contre la corruption et la délinquance financière et que cela consistait à faire en sorte qu'il s'établisse une confiance entre l'état et les citoyens et que cela avait pour but aussi de favoriser le dialogue entre gouvernants et gouvernés. Pour autant, nous n'avons jamais dit, nous n'avons jamais pensé, que ces citoyens étaient des délinquants financiers, pour autant nous n'avons jamais dit, nous n'avons jamais pensé, nous n'avons jamais écrit que ces cadres honnêtes étaient des corrompus. [...]

4.9

Qu'il s'agit d'une décision politique qui s'inscrit dans le cadre général du renouveau de l'action publique, de la mobilité des cadres, de l'amélioration de la gestion des ressources financiers et matériels de l'état, toute chose que contribue à renforcer la confiance des citoyens à l'état, à assoir une administration performante et assurer une bonne gouvernance. Vous comprendrez aisément mesdames et messieurs que lorsqu'on parle de bonne gouvernance on ne peut pas parler de lutte contre la corruption et la délinquance financière. Voilà la logique implacable qui nous a amené à parler de lutte contre la corruption et la délinquance financière.

4.10

Je remercie monsieur le ministre Sidiki pour cette communication brillante très pédagogique de l'expert en communication, mais je reste largement sur ma faim quant aux réponses apportées, et surtout le fait qu'il ne se soit pas prononcé sur beaucoup de questions que j'ai posées. [...]

4.11

Abrogation de décret de nomination" tout ça... je ne sais pas si ça peut être autre si ce n'est pas un limogeage collectif.[...] Si c'est dans le cadre de l'amélioration de la gestion des ressources publiques, comme vous l'avez dit tout à l'heure dans votre intervention, c'est une autre façon de dire que c'est dans le cadre de lutter contre la corruption... en expert en communication vous parlez de manière plus positive, moi je parle autrement en disant ça revient à la même chose.

4.12

Je sais qu'il n'est pas le seul à prendre ces décisions, mais c'est lui qui a intervenu dans la télé pour dire que c'est dans le cadre de la lutte contre la délinquance financière, monsieur je ne l'ai pas entendue de quelqu'un ni de personnes d'autre, je l'ai écouté de votre bouche monsieur le ministre à la télé, alors vous ne pouvez avoir dit ce jour que c'est dans le cadre de la lutte contre la délinquance financière et contre la corruption pour dire autre chose aujourd'hui. [...]

Chapter 5. Felicity

5.1

Je ne laisserais jamais de lancer des appels à tous pour une collaboration sincère, franche et loyale. Nous formons tous les mêmes poumons d'un seul corps. Je pense qu'une fois les élections municipales passées, les rivalités doivent cesser. Travaillons la main dans la main pour le bonheur de notre cité.

5.2

J'accuse le Maire et lui donne tort. Quand le commandant de cercle l'a informé de son intention, il devait refuser sur le champ. La population va nous traiter de lâches.

5.3

Tout ces brouhaha ne mènent a rien de positif. Le fond du problème est la. Nous le connaissons et nous n'avons pas les bras croisées. Le Secrétaire General de la Section, Mr. Niomby, a déjà entamé les démarches nécessaires a fin d'aboutir a un résultat souhaitable et définitif.

5.4

Ce conseil est composé de militants de plusieurs Partis Politiques. Nous sommes ici regroupés pour la même cause, le bien être des habitants de la commune. Cela ne peut se faire dans la diversité. Alors, oublions le passé, les luttes politiques est le tendances. La gestion d'une commune n'est pas chose facile surtout quand il s'agit de la notre.”

5.5

Bore ka kuma nin, ne y'a lon nin kuma fara yan a siye naani nan le ye nin ye. N'ye ne ni do le délégué ka ta Bore ma k'a k'a bila. “An jera cogomin na, k'a ke député ye an bolo siya saba, o te je ro kolon ye de. O n'e bora an fe i be taa l'i fa bara, e taga to ye an sara nin de la, ka million biwolonfila ni kelen donin da an kun. Ah Boré an je wo je, fara kojuman jogon te. Bar'i ye fara kojugu ya k'an na de! N'ko Boré nin ma ben de! An b'a miiri ni nin ke r'e la, a ker'an de le la. A be kasi i fe. Bari an m'a lon k'i be an wele sariya la nin na. An nar'i ma sa, sisan, lanaya le y'a to an y'i ke député ye an bara siyan joli. O lanaya kelen in na, an b'a pinin i fe i ka nin bila an ni jogon ce.

5.6

A k'an ma, a ko: “Baasi te, k'a be seben nin ko sagin.” A m'a ko sagin, a y'an negen de, a m'a ko segin! Kuma bilara nin le ma. Ne yere hakili t'a ma yere ko Boré ko kuma yere be Kita kono halibi, ni nin seben in te. [...] Boré, ale konin tagara, ah, bari, Kita Kuru be yan de! O ma taga de, o b'a nora. An konin be Boré la ko yira Kita Kuru le la. O ti “na” la son ye de! Bari an b'a yira o la. Bari so nin, a bangu, Kita bangu le nafa o nafa n'a ya kono a be bora Kita yan le. N'o kera, n'ale yan sara ninna, um an ka nin to allah ma, an k'a to Kita Kuru ma, Kita sigi kan, an k'a to o ma. N'Allah sona, a jaabi be yan de, Allah sago alu sago.

5.7

N'diaye: 71 millions c'est trop!

Sangaré: Ce n'est pas trop!

N'diaye: C'est trop!

Sangaré: Ce n'est pas trop!

N'diaye: C'est trop! Il y'a parti pris!

5.8

On ne devait pas accepter de payer telle somme pour une maison qui ne vaut pas cette valeur. Mais moi je trouvais ce jour la qu'ils se sont mis d'accord pour venir nous raconter ça. Parce qu'il paraît que Baba Oumar a quitté ici... comme le maire lui même il est de son parti, ils sont du même parti, Sangaré aussi, c'est lui le Secrétaire General. Tous ces gens la c'est URD. Donc, il paraît que Baba Oumar a quitté ici il n'y a pas longtemps, donc peut être qu'il les a poussé a proposer ça. Et puis ils mettent ça au premier point de notre session.

5.9

J'avais compris toute de suite ce qu'ils voulaient. Depuis qu'ils n'ont pas exposé le problème, j'avais tout compris, je savais qu'ils aller dire "il faut compenser ça avec de parcelles, parce qu'il n'y a pas d'autres moyens." Moi je trouvais que c'est des magouilles qu'ils préparaient. Moi je sait très bien. Je connais leur moralité, on a cohabité ensemble dans l'ADEMA y il a longtemps et c'est eux qui sont sortis.

Chapter 6. Speculation

6.1

ATT, souvenez-vous que vous êtes un élu avec un mandat à durée limitée dans le temps. Nous ne sommes pas contre votre décoration, monsieur le président, mais cela doit être l'œuvre de gens d'honneur, des gens à la probité établie. Ne vous laissez pas piéger par ceux qui ne pensent qu'à leurs affaires, qui veulent vous acheter avec de l'or. Laissez tomber "la reconnaissance" (du ventre) de Bittar; optez pour celle éternelle du peuple malien..."

6.2

L'actualité nationale étant marquée par des rumeurs et autres supputations sur une hypothétique prorogation de mandat du président de la République, le président du RPM n'a pas manqué de dire toute sa sérénité. Pour lui, le président ATT est suffisamment crédible pour ne pas suivre certains mauvais conseillers. Et IBK de déclarer : "J'ai conseillé au président de la République, ATT de faire attention aux personnes qui font semblant de l'aider, alors qu'elles ne cherchent qu'à se servir".

6.3

ATT, rien qu'ATT, après ATT, ATT... Est-ce vraiment pour ATT ou le système ATT? Mais et ATT, dans tout ça ? [...] Alors, pour n'avoir pas dit clairement qu'il ne voulait pas, la coterie de courtisans et de zéloteurs en a déduit qu'il en voulait, et les plus affidés de l'opportunisme sans vergogne ont engagé une course à qui mieux-mieux pour se courber au "bon vouloir" du Chef et satisfaire la "volonté" du Prince avant même qu'elle ne s'exprime. [...] Nous sommes de ceux qui pensent, jusqu'à preuve de contraire, que le Président ATT n'a mis personne en mission pour lui faire jouer une prolongation après un palpitant match de deux quinquennats."

6.4

Au cours de cette cérémonie le président de la république recevra la "Médaille d'or du cinquantenaire" d'un cout de quelque 250 million de FCFA au nom du secteur privé national. Certainement que le héros du 26 mars 1991 saisira l'opportunité de ce grand rendez-vous des Maliennes et des Maliens pour éclairer davantage la lanterne des uns et des autres sur sa position réelle sur l'harmonisation des mandats qui est aujourd'hui sur toutes les lèvres.

6.5

Je ne sais pas comment ils vont prolonger mon mandat. Je ne sais pas ce que cela veut dire de prolonger un mandat. Mon mandat finit le 8 juin 2012 et je n'ai jamais pensé... Je suis même étonné de voir discuter de mon sort sans moi, sans que personne, sauf vous, ne vienne me demander ce que j'en pense. Je pense que ce sont des artifices. Ce sont des choses qui ne veulent absolument rien dire.

6.6

ATT n'aura pas de dauphin pour sa succession en 2012. Il l'a dit sans détour à des confrères étrangers qui n'ont d'ailleurs eu aucune peine à le faire réagir (un journaliste de la place aurait passé le reste du temps qui lui reste au pouvoir sans jamais parvenir à obtenir d'ATT le moindre entretien sur la question). Des qu'il s'agit d'interview, pour les journalistes locaux, ATT est comme retranché dans un bunker, impossible d'être reçu, sauf s'il s'agit de la traditionnelle conférence de 8 juin que ne se défile qu'une fois dans l'an. Mais voilà la presse étrangère, la coqueluche de Kouloba elle ne rate aucune occasion pour se mettre en vedette. Cette fois-ci encore, elle réussit la prouesse de faire parler l'homme fort de Bamako sur un terrain bien polémique qui ne manquera pas d'avoir des répercussions intéressantes sur le reste du corps politique national.

6.7

Parena s'inquiétait du silence qui entoure désormais les opérations du RAVEC et mettait en garde les autorités contre des élections bâclées en 2012 "Si on ne fait pas attention, on tombera soit dans le ridicule du Bénin soit dans la tragédie de la Cote d'Ivoire", devait ajouter PPR, le secrétaire général du PARENA. Contrairement à 2006, déjà, ou aucune autorité n'avait prêté une oreille attentive aux craintes exprimées par le Parena concernant le fichier électoral, cette année il y a eu droit à des réponses. Celle du président de la République d'abord qui s'est engagé, avec ou sans le RAVEC (plutôt sans), à organiser des élections propres avant de laisser le tablier en 2012; puis celle du Premier ministre qui a adressé une lettre au Parena pour lui "donner l'assurance que le gouvernement prendra toutes les mesures pour la bonne organisation" des élections.

6.8

Dans un pays normal, après que le Président et son Premier ministre se soient exprimés, on clôt le débat et on passe à autre chose en se mettant au travail par exemple. Sauf que le Mali est un pays sinon anormal du mois "atypique." Très souvent on proclame, mais souvent les actes tardent à suivre ou ne suivent même pas. C'est certainement pour cette raison que tous les acteurs politiques se sont passés le mot pour tirer la sonnette d'alarme dans l'objectif avoué de tirer le gouvernement de sa torpeur.

6.9

Après avoir dit mon mot d'entrée, je ne doute certes pas de vos qualités. Mais s'agit-il de cela? Que non! Il s'agit ici et maintenant de priorisation et d'opportunité. Tous les Dieux de l'Olympe ont semble-t-il été consultés. Pourtant, il semble que le plus important ait été ignoré. Oui, Madame, CHRONOS, ce dieu du temps se montre particulièrement cruel avec ceux qui oublieraient sa toute puissance. Et la, hélas, son courroux réserve de très mauvaises surprises. Gardons-nous en donc. [Expression in Arab] Dieu nous en préserve!