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## GENIES OR THE OPACITY OF HUMAN-ANIMAL RELATIONSHIPS IN KAKANDE, GUINEA

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**ABSTRACT** This article investigates what it means for some inhabitants of northwestern Guinea to relate to the realm of ‘nature’ and, more specifically, to animals that are categorized as ‘wild’ by Westerners. The materials analysed in this article include villagers’ narratives about their hunting activities, some of which were obtained while tracking chimpanzees in their company to gather behavioral data. Additional evidence was generated during a long interview with a *griot* who provided a wealth of ethological information through a series of short animal stories. For a hunter, the relationship with an animal is not bipolar because a genie may come between the predator and his prey in various ways, according to the kind of animal that is targeted. As for the physical and behavioral descriptions of animals in stories, they constitute heterogeneous knowledge that reveals the diversity of relationships that can be established with multiple species.

**Key Words:** Ethnography; Kakande (Guinea); Hunting; Storytelling; Genies; Animal symbolism.

### INTRODUCTION

Through this ethnographic enquiry, we intend to illustrate heterogeneity in the notion of nature, which is massively opposed to that of culture in Western societies. By postulating the autonomy of the latter, the discipline of anthropology has contributed to the perpetuation of this opposition and has developed an efficient concept that can be used to structure and secure the specificity of its knowledge in dedicated institutions that are separate from those of ‘natural’ science (Descola, 2002). However, this division derives from a Western-based ontology (Descola, 2013) which underlies the production of scientific knowledge: objects that we qualify as natural are isolated from our everyday practices and lives so that they can be manipulated and studied to clarify conditions of their existence and behaviors. This reduction, establishing environmental control over these objects, is the means of intelligibility of what we call ‘nature’. For instance, the creation and maintenance of ‘natural’ reserves, parks and other categories of areas that are protected from human intrusion is grounded in this nature/culture dichotomy. From a naturalistic perspective, these spaces are conceived as laboratories whose various floristic and faunal components are used to test our conceptions of what constitute living organisms and the processes of their evolution.

A detailed consideration of the representations of ‘nature’ and related practices in various societies on the African continent indicates that the use of quotations is required when referring to this concept. For example, there is no adequate

translation of the concept of nature in Fula or Landuma, two languages spoken in the Kakande area of northwestern Guinea. Among the southern Susu people of the Guinea/Sierra Leone frontier, Thayer (1983) considered the nature/culture dichotomy to be on par with the sacred/profane opposition that is deemed characteristic of local Islamic practices. However, more recent research suggests that such clear-cut dichotomies are not tenable. Nature is neither dominated nor socially separated from humans: the latter are always involved in negotiations with ‘the other beings surrounding them and the forces which fill them with life’ (Geslin, 2002: 115).

Therefore, this article investigates what it means for Kakande inhabitants, or Kakandeka, to relate to the realm of ‘nature’ and, more specifically, to animals that are categorized as ‘wild’ in the naturalistic ontology,<sup>(1)</sup> at a moment when social and historical studies of nature in the Africanist field have tended to focus on landscapes and the plant kingdom (e.g., Fairhead & Leach, 1996; Nyerges & Green, 2000; Cormier-Salem & Basset, 2007; Temudo, 2009; Leblan, 2012 for West African case studies). To answer this question, we refer to evidence concerning hunting practices and a bestiary that was provided by a storyteller.

## STUDY LOCATION AND METHODS

The observations that are analysed in this article were gathered during fieldwork in 2003–2004 (5 months) and 2005 (6 months) in the Kakande region, which is located between the middle courses of the Rio Nunez and Cogon rivers in northwestern Guinea (Fig. 1). It is considered to be the territory of the Landuma people, who came to the area from north-west of the Fouta Djallon mountains, probably as early as the 17th century because of the expansion of the Rio Nunez trade (Suret-Canale, 2000). On the northern tip of this area, approximately 50 km from the right bank of the Rio Nunez, the Landuma have coexisted with *runndebe* Fula since the late 19th century, and perhaps as early as the mid-19th century (Leblan, forthcoming). Although they differ linguistically, the two groups exhibit overall similarities that extend to other neighboring groups and stem from the use of Susu as their *lingua franca*, from an ancient economy of generalized slavery and wars against the Fouta Djallon that occurred before the 20th century, and from their subsistence agriculture based on rice cultivation (Sarró, 2009).

Both groups of people are sedentary slash-and-burn farmers whose diet is based on rice as a staple crop, oil-based sauces, fish and, more rarely, game that hunters hand out to their relatives or sell in the village. While the use of ethnonyms remains appropriate for referring to ethnolinguistic entities that travel narratives have placed in the same regions for several centuries (Gaillard, 2000), the similarities between the Fula and Landuma livelihood techniques, land-use patterns and the way they are organized through relationships with tutelary beings of the land make any distinction between their relationships with the environment unnecessary. For instance, among both peoples, consulting genies, who dwell mainly in inter-village areas, is a prerequisite for anyone who wishes to found a new village or open up a new field (Bricka, 2004; Leblan, 2007).

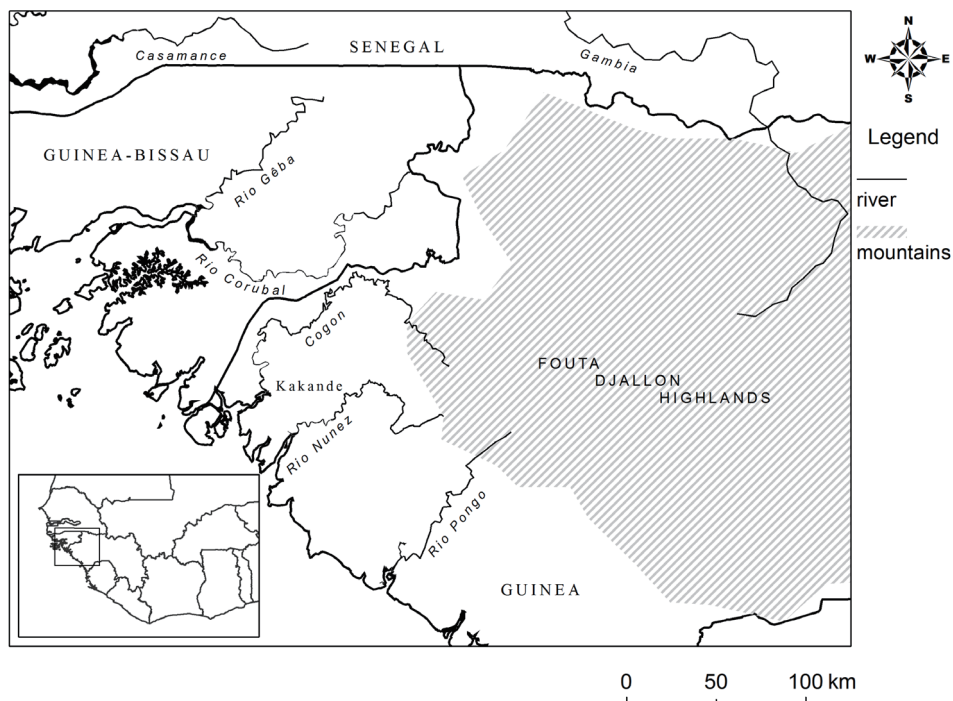


Fig. 1. Map of western Guinea featuring the location of the Kakande region.

A large portion of the discourse considered here about hunting activities was obtained while tracking chimpanzees in the company of local hunters in order to gather behavioral data (Leblan, forthcoming). Among our hunter interlocutors, one was outstandingly endowed with most of the social and political attributes of the emissaries that villagers commonly send to strangers who are investigating ‘society-environment’ relationships, regardless of whether the person is a representative of the forest administration, a conservation program agent, or an anthropologist. Aged about 45 years, he had lived for several years as a retail trader with kin who had emigrated to Dakar and Conakry, before coming back to his natal village after his father’s death. Learning French in these West African capitals certainly gave him an advantage over the other villagers for dealing with any extra-local administrative issue. In addition, he also stood out as a member of the village’s founding lineage. Indeed, most of the main local administrative functions that are planned by the Guinean constitution are occupied by its members: his elder uterine brother had been *Président du District* for nearly 20 years and he himself had been *Chef Secteur* (i.e., village head for the administration) for about 10 years at the time of this study. Furthermore, his reputation as a brave hunter favored his appointment as gamekeeper by the prefectural administration for environmental resources. Ranking these various attributes is probably pointless, but we can emphasize that they make him a privileged interlocutor in his village’s relationships with temporary visitors.

Additional evidence was generated during a single long interview with a ‘*griot*’ who provided a wealth of ethological information about the behaviors of many animals. Our assistant, a young male adult native from the same village, who was then living essentially as a retail trader in Kissidougou (southeastern Guinea), used the word ‘*griot*’ to convey in French the meaning ‘public entertainer’. Our informant may otherwise locally be referred to as a *nyamakala*, which denotes an individual who likes to stand and talk in public with a certain degree of exuberance and provocativeness. A *nyamakala* also has a reputation for being prone to tell stories that are not necessarily judged to be true. This is the kind of man, who was otherwise an ordinary farmer within the village, who decided to tell us ‘a hundred stories about animals’.

Thus, in this village inhabited by descendants of Fula *runndebe* or Fula slaves, we were rather far from the social distinction that operates in Mande societies between *horon*, referring in Bambara to a noble or free man, and *nyamakala*, referring to a category of craftperson to which the terms *griot* or *jeli* usually apply. The *griot* in that context is a performer and transmitter of oral historical narratives, praising the actions of the founders of the Mali Empire (Jansen, 2001). In contrast, our assistant’s specific use of the *griot* term falls within the range of more recent meanings that were made explicit by Thiers-Thiam (2004), and which currently often includes artists, musicians, writers, etc., in ordinary conversations. Until the various uses of the *griot* and *nyamakala* concepts are clarified within Fula society, there is no reason to reject our assistant’s translation.

The *griot*’s session took place under a shady mango tree bordering the road and the main walking path that cuts across the village. Children progressively joined in as he told his set of stories. The session started at about mid-day; therefore, most adults were busy working their fields. An old man lying in his hammock under the same tree was half listening a few meters behind the speaker.

## WHERE ANIMALS ARE SEEN

In Susu, the *lingua franca* of Fula and Landuma speakers (with French essentially being spoken in urban areas), living beings are referred to by different categories. *Dali se* embraces those that we would class in the animal kingdom. *Sube* refers exclusively to four legged animals (thus excluding fish or crabs), domesticated or not, and also designates meat that is served to eat. The meaning of this word is specified by the action’s context. When one wishes to talk about bush animals to the exclusion of domesticated ones, he or she uses *wula kui se*, namely ‘things in the bush’ (*wula* being opposed to *ta*, i.e., the village or inhabited space). Names for individual animal species are not imbued with a practical meaning, in contrast to plant species whose names often directly refer to their uses: the calabash, the rope, the mortar, dye, the whip, and so on (Leciak, 2006; see Frazao-Moreira, 2001, for similar evidence from the Nalu that is spoken in southern Guinea-Bissau).

These categories efficiently indicate the locations of ordinary interactions with animals. People are in close and permanent contact with domesticated animals inside the village. Consisting mainly of poultry and goats, these animals are the

individual property of a man or a woman who decides when to eat or sell it. They are hoarded in the event of economic difficulties and generally kept until a specific social event calls for their sacrifice, such as a baptismal ceremony, a wedding, a funeral, or a collective session of agricultural work. Some interactions with *wula kui se* occur in fields where they parasitize crops. There, children and women keep a lookout for crop-raiders (essentially birds, monkeys, warthogs and antelopes), and chase them away by screaming and throwing stones at them. Sometimes, men shoot these pests. For example, bush pigs can cause heavy damage in fields by eating various roots and cassava tubers, which are among their preferred foods, and by extensively trampling on the young shoots of other crops when foraging gregariously. The nocturnal bush pig may be kept at a distance with fires, while the diurnal warthog is sometimes preventively tracked down. In any case, both of these animals are rarely eaten, as this practice is prohibited by Islamic rules. According to our informants, the meat is usually smoke-dried and sold through commercial networks that supply urban-based game restaurant owners. The Islamic doctrine is not very explicit about this specific issue, which may account for the variability in practices surrounding pork consumption. Indeed, it is not known whether *hinzîr*, the koranic term for ‘pig’, refers only to domestic varieties or if it also includes wild ones (Benkheira, 2000). In the Kakande area, the consumption of any species of swine is prohibited, as is the case in most Islamic societies (*id.*), but its consumption may be tolerated by uncircumcised children. According to one of our informants, a father may even go as far as to hunt one of them intentionally to feed his children (Fig. 2).

Old fallows and forests, some of which are inhabited by genies, often serve as hunting grounds. A hunter will watch for animals that are not necessarily raiding



Fig. 2. End of a warthog hunt.

crops, such as does or porcupines. Economically speaking, hunting appears to be a rather marginal activity that may, at best, supplement the daily rice and sauce dish. Hunters are found in only one out of every five households, and dogs often appear to be farm watchers rather than hunting dogs.<sup>(2)</sup> However, hunting practices are symbolically and politically far from trivial. For this analysis, hunting may be a means of gaining insight into the genies' universe and their relationships with people and animals.

## WHO ARE THE GENIES?

In many areas of the Sudano-Sahelian zone, the air, bush and waters are inhabited by genies. For example, the Bandé Fula of eastern Senegal distinguish *Ngooteere*, considered to be the shepherds of wild animals, *Yimbe Ledde* or 'tree people', and Jinne or jinns/genies (A. & S. Epelboin, 1978 in Tourneux, 1999). In the Songhay area of Mali, genies or *Zin* (assimilated to « *djinn* ») are named after the type of element that they govern: wind, water or earth (Rouch, 1960).

In the Kakande region, these creatures are named either '*genie*', '*jinna*' or '*diable*'. But why should there be three different ways to designate what seems to be a single ontological category of beings? It seems that, beyond linguistic differences, these designations express some level of social differentiation. Indeed, '*genie*' is the term used by people who were in the schooling system for a long time, usually urban-based dwellers, while '*diable*' ('devil' in French) is used in rural areas when speaking French (as was often the case with the authors of this article). Finally, '*jinna*' was borrowed from Arabic and is found in the Fula and Landuma languages, referring to Islamic 'jinns' in the urban dwellers' discourse, and to tutelary beings of the land in rural areas, some but not all of whom are mentioned in the Koran.

In many Islamic West African societies, '*jinna*' are considered to be "evil beings, apparently being local spirits of animism [as opposed to those of Islam] that have been renamed" (Person 1968: 133) and wander around inhabited spaces. The coexistence of Muslim and non-Muslim genies is a common scheme in these societies (Kuczynski, 2002). Hence, there would be very little use in trying to distinguish animist or Islamic origins in the Kakande area, but we may keep this coexistence in mind as an indication of the magnitude of the historical transformations that have affected ontological categories. For convenience, and in accordance with the ethnographic literature, we will use the generic and more common term '*genie*' in this article.

Certain genie names that are used by the Kakande Fula and Landuma are also found among people living outside of the study region. For example, the *Ninguinanga* genies gave their names to a patch of forest located in the territory of Kakande's Niama Yara Wol village, where slash-and-burn agriculture is prohibited. The *Ninguinanga* exist or have existed in the Diola territory (Casamance, southern Senegal), in Susu- and Fula-speaking regions as well as in the Baga, Landuma (Appia, 1944) and Nalu (Sampil, 1961) territories of western Guinea, among the Coniagui of the Guinea-Senegal frontier (de Lestrangé, 1950), the Mandingo of



**Fig. 3.** Young shoots of rice arranged inside a stone circle as an offering to the genies in a new field.

the former Gabu Empire in present-day Guinea-Bissau (Niane, 1989) and the Malinke of Upper Guinea (de Lestrangé, 1950).

Genies in Kakande's rural areas play active roles in organizing land tenure and land-use because their permission is required to live in or occupy a new space, whether it be a new village site or a temporary field. For instance, clearing an agricultural plot for the first time requires making sure that no genies are present in the area through the sesame test: one spits a few sesame seeds out of one's mouth and onto the foliage of coveted forests; if the seeds produce noise when hitting the leaves, it means that genies have left the place and that it can be cultivated by a human. Hence, inter-village areas are not open spaces. In certain places that are inhabited by genies, humans must refrain from particular practices. These two categories of beings may not coexist: where genies live, humans may not stay too long, and vice-versa (Fig. 3).

Generally speaking, genies are linked to any matter related to economic wealth.<sup>(3)</sup> They can propose that men exchange their women for material goods. They seek to fool humans by placing gold, silver or shiny metallic jewels in their path, or white pieces of stone that shine like diamonds. But these are just tricks to turn humans' attention away from real sources of wealth, as a way of hiding them better. In order to seize their goods, one must either negotiate with them or fool them with the help of 'medicine'.<sup>(4)</sup>

These creatures are more specifically described as having a head and limbs articulated to a trunk, but the proportions of these body parts may differ from those of a human. A hunter talking about one of them said that, "If he sits on a stool, his knees are taller than his head." Another one has reversed feet so that anyone trying to follow his tracks is misled. Genies are invisible and inhabit



forests, waterfalls, cavities, dark places, topographic accidents and termite mounds, which is analogous to documentation of Mande societies (Derive & Dumestre, 1999). Kakandeka discourses mention air genies who appear as whirls on roads and paths, or as smoke coming out of caves; genies living in trees, in which animals may find refuge from hunters; other genies tell animals about the presence of hunters.

#### ANIMAL-HUNTER RELATIONSHIPS *VIA* GENIES

All experienced hunters are guardians of secrets concerning the protection that certain animals receive from genies. To hit an animal, a hunter needs to withdraw it from this protection. Genies interfere between humans and certain animals by maintaining the animals under a kind of opacity relative to the hunter, a disguise magical practices can help to remove. This is the case with the defassa waterbuck, according to one hunter, which is surrounded by genies that hide it from him. It is also the case with the chimpanzee that is protected from hunters when sitting on a *demukori* tree (undetermined tree species that translates as ‘chimpanzee bone’ in Fula). However, this knowledge varies from one hunter to another. For instance, one experienced Landuma hunter did not know if chimpanzees are protected by genies like he thinks that the buffalo and porcupine are. The social norm seems to concern the protection system at large rather than focusing on a specific animal species.

There is no particular social restriction against engaging in hunting. However, the killing of certain game animals follows social conventions between humans and genies from which a hunter cannot deviate without considerable risk to himself or his family. Hunting involves protecting oneself from the harmful actions of genies, or becoming one of their allies, while some experienced hunters opt to deceive them. In other words, human-genie relationships fall within a transaction system to which both parties fully commit, and which can be initiated by either one of them. However, these transactions are not an obligation. As in Mande societies (Derive & Dumestre, 1999), they only concern the most experienced hunters.

An anecdote told by a Fula hunter testifies to the genies’ capacity for initiative. One day, the hunter found a charm<sup>(5)</sup> in the stomach of a red-flanked duiker. Confused by this discovery, he opened it to see what it contained, then closed it up again (the informant did not tell us anything about the contents) and placed it to dry in the sun in front of his house. Unfortunately, a rooster swallowed it and the hunter did not try to retrieve the object. When this happened again, he kept the charm, took it with him when hunting and hit many prey. However, spots would appear on his hand if he stopped hunting for more than three days: “You must go out to hunt, otherwise he [the genie] will bite your hand.” Another hunter attending this conversation added that, “As long as you have the charm with you, you will get plenty of prey,” and then pointed out that the genie would take it back whenever he pleased. While the causes and consequences of this situation remain generally unclear to us, we can at least perceive who is guiding the transaction. The hunter has to go out to hunt when using the genie’s charm,

otherwise he is struck by a kind of disease that he relates to the action of the genie. He is obviously not in a position to end the transaction.

This short narrative also provides a good illustration of the traditional hunting method that consists of using ‘medicine’, which is usually made up of faunal and floristic elements. One example consisted of an object exhibited by a Landuma hunter that he named *alene*. He received it from a Malinke commercial hunter, who worked in the region, as a gift in exchange for housing. It was made from a bushbuck’s horn<sup>(6)</sup> enclosing a duiker’s hoof; it was sealed at the base by a strip of leather held by a piece of cotton string, in which a porcupine quill was planted. It gained its efficacy when the owner pronounced a specific word. The object was then permanently activated. All the hunter has to do is carry it along during hunts and it will allow him to shoot any animal. According to another hunter, there is a system of correspondence between specific animals and the types of medicine that are to be used if one wishes to catch them. These medicines are only used so that the hunter can see the animal or get closer to it.

But why would genies protect certain animal species? A Landuma hunter answered: “If I own chickens, I let them out in the daytime and bring them back inside at night.” From this it may be said that animal species are caught in a dual relationship, as the genies’ domesticated property and the hunters’ prey. This system of relationships determines some of the animals’ interactions with humans because only the most experienced hunters master the techniques and possess the social skills that allow them to withdraw an individual animal from the genies’ protection.

Finally, let us not forget that while hunters have strategies to make certain animal species visible, some animal species also have the power to become invisible to hunters under certain circumstances. In other words, some animals are endowed with abilities that protect them from hunters. This is particularly true in the cases of the doe<sup>(7)</sup> and the *coba* (unidentified animal). When a doe is about to give birth, she takes water from two rivers, carries it in her mouth and pours it onto the delivery spot; then, no hunter will be able to evict her from that spot until the little one has grown. *Coba* females follow a similar pattern; a female will choose to lie under a *bosse* tree (Fula, *Gardenia ternifolia*) and ingest all of its fallen leaves, which will make her unassailable by hunters until she gives birth. These protective rituals do not result from pacts with genies, but with the God of Islam.

## CONVERSATION WITH A *GRIOT*

In order to provide a wider view of the ties that villagers have established with animals, we considered the bestiary that the *griot* offered to describe to us in a single session to be a useful tool. Each of his very short stories about a given animal was translated on the spot from Fula to French by our field assistant. This conversation’s translation into English reflects our assistant’s French as closely as possible, especially in the use of tenses, to keep the order of an animal’s actions as it was told.

After trying to organize the elements of his discourse into a multiple-entry table (name of animal, habitat type, food, physical peculiarities, behavioral traits, human uses, miscellaneous), his knowledge appeared highly heterogeneous and far from offering a unifying perception of the diversity of living things. Instead, his statements insist on the diversity of species through a wide range of particular accounts. In this, are we really facing the idea of inherently different knowledge from one species to another, or is this the expression of an educational attitude that consists of the progressive delivery of information? There is no easy answer to this; nevertheless, we can outline some of the elements that were used to describe animals.

For each animal, the *griot* indicated either elements concerning a specific behavior, a physical particularity, a feeding strategy, or a type of habitat. Many of his statements, which were similar in structure to Kipling's *Just So Stories*, explain the origin of a certain animal's particularity. Only in a few instances did he mention humans' use of a species, or some of its body parts. Not all animals are perceived through systemic and uniform criteria, nor do they appear to be known through identical verbal forms; indeed, ethological discourse may be opposed to narratives or tales in which the animal occupies a position as a signifier in a more or less explicitly moral discourse.<sup>(8)</sup> Such discourse also helps explain the morphological evolution of the animal. For example:

At the time, the elephant had no teeth in his mouth. He asked the *dubehi* tree [unidentified species] to help him earn teeth otherwise he's a big animal, but he won't be able to eat. The *dubehi* prayed God for the elephant who gave him one and only tooth as long as this [size of the forearm] which he gets out to eat, otherwise stays in the belly. It's the biggest of all animals.

The hippo also wanted to leave water and to stay in the bush. But he has all his body in the water and his head too. He asked the elephant "where did you get your teeth?" The elephant answered: "No, I cannot tell you that, it was given by God." Now, the hippo is angry, he decided to stay in the water. The elephant didn't tell his story.

A narrative can also explain the evolution of an animal's relationships with other animals or with its environment. Thus, for the porcupine and the *tchieyere* (unidentified):

They were all in the same hole. It's the lizard who created swindle between them. He instilled lying between them. They separated themselves. The *tchieyere* doesn't enter the cave anymore. He enters tree holes: he digs to get in there. When he sees a tree lying on the ground, he digs a hole, he makes a neat place over there. He sleeps over there.

Only a minority of animals are mentioned for their human utility regarding consumption or medication, or for the carrying of positive or negative omens.

For example, the *jigacaro* bird is described in this way:

It's a bird that we eat. But in order to cook it, you must add a palm nut inside the pot. Otherwise, you cook but even tomorrow it won't be ready. *Jigacaro* feathers are also used to heal scars. The feather must be put into the fire, mixed with red oil, and groundnut oil, and then all you have to do is apply on the wound.

Likewise, the *griot* talks about the *mukubi* fish:

There is something in his stomach. You expose it to the sun, then you wash it and make a powder out of it. It treats gonorrhoea.

As for animals that constitute a sign, we can mention the black snake or the porcupine: when seen in the daytime, they announce that someone will die. The doe, and the *bugal* (a bird) mean luck and that fortune is near. The same applies to the buffalo and the chimpanzee. A traveller who is lucky enough to catch sight of a patas monkey while on the road knows that his journey will be smooth. But a hunter who kills an antelope standing on a termite mound will never catch game ever again.

Certain animals appear in moral narratives, implicitly inviting a transposition into the human world. They play roles in short accounts where they appear as signifiers. For example:

The oribi and the red-flanked duiker want to race against one another. After running from the morning until the early afternoon, the oribi is tired and has stopped. The duiker, for his part, has continued to run until he reached the ocean, where he dies. The oribi said: "you ran faster than me, but you didn't stay alive."

Some animals are metonymically assimilated to aspects of their behavior and their names are used to refer to specific humans who exhibit similar behaviors. For instance, *ngandeere*, an unidentified species of antelope, is the topic of the following narrative:

*Ngandeere*, he was called *ngandeere*, because this animal is the most in love of all animals. Even if he's ready to go get a drink by the river, when he meets woman, he has to go back with her, he doesn't go to drink. For humans, when we want to consider someone who is in love, we say '*ngandeere*'.

But many animals are described by their relationship to their environment, which provides them with a habitat and food, and in which they entertain intra- or interspecific relationships. This sometimes seems to be independent of whether people consider them good to eat or good to think about. The *griot* described their strategies for storing food, as with the squirrel, or how they take possession

of other animals that are parasites or prey for other animals:

The sparrowhawk: comes to the village to take the chicks. When he begins to eat the chicks, the snake also comes out, stings the sparrowhawk and the chicks fall to the ground and the snake eats them all, sparrowhawk and chicks.

The python (Fig. 4): when he's out of his hole, some insects sit on his head. The turtle runs after the snake up to his hole: when the snake wants to get inside, the insects will stay outside.



**Fig. 4.** Boa snake (*Python* sp.) ready to be skinned.

The leopard: he comes to take either the villager's goats or chickens. After taking them, he goes back to the bush and ends up encountering the *ɲeleru* (unidentified) who will take them from him.

The *ɲeleru*: he came to the village, and made his anus come out, which is as red as a palm fruit. When the hen sees this, she thinks that it's a real palm fruit; she pricks it and then the *ɲeleru* catches and traps her head in his anus and runs away.

Certain fish are also described in such narratives, but the limits of their strategies are always emphasized:

There is a fish named *bapora*. He's always in the river. This fish, when bees are gone to drink water by the river, will come out to take the bees. But as soon as he swallows them, he will die.

The catfish is used to eating small fish, but there is a little in there called *konkonkore*. As soon as the catfish eats it, it's over for him as well.

The *griot* also evokes certain aspects of the behavior of this or that animal, particularly with regard to monkeys:

*Kula mela* (unidentified 'black monkey'): in the morning, each one looks for lice to eat on their fellows' heads. When they want to destroy somebody's field, for example, if it's corn, they take it this way [gesture: the *griot* puts an imaginary corn cob under his armpit] and leaves.

The black and white colobus: never eats what man cultivated. Even fruit from the bush, he climbs to get them but never eats them on the tree. He picks them up and goes down to eat them.

The lion: this animal, when his head aches, his tears leave traces on his face, it's not his hair. He doesn't walk on all fours, except when he sees a chief, a human chief. When he sees a chief, he walks on all fours. He walks on all fours to kill the chief. When he sees a chief, the chief won't leave. He doesn't like chiefs.

About certain animals, he does not mention anything but a physical peculiarity. For instance, in this narrative:

*Kula kirkissa* (unidentified monkey): the only monkey to have a tail on its back. He has the longest teeth of all monkeys.

*Muntuwal* (a species of duiker): black animal with a white spot on the back.

There were still other animals whose names were simply mentioned, such as *lopoore* (unidentified).

To sum up, certain animals are described only in relation to their environment: they feed on a particular kind of fruit, leaf, or animal, and may eventually have strategies to take another animal's prey. Others are described through the social relationships they have with individuals in the same group (e.g., chimpanzees, below) or with individuals in other groups (e.g., hippo and elephant, or *coba* and buffalo). Other animals have the ability to establish symbolic links with their environment, such as the doe or the *coba* female engaging in rituals to protect themselves from hunters before giving birth.

In one case, the narrative seemed to encompass more than one of the above-mentioned categories: it concerned the chimpanzee, whose descriptions were the most detailed and complex and whose resemblance to humans was clearly stated. However, the uniqueness of the chimpanzee should be considered cautiously because in the months preceding this interview, one of us (VL) had been explicitly tracking chimpanzees in the company of a hunter from the same village to gather behavioral data and had been asking other villagers questions about where they had recently heard or seen chimpanzees. Therefore, the *griot's* narratives could have been an artefact of our previous interactions with inhabitants about chimpanzees:

G: The chimpanzee looks like humans as he walks, because the chimpanzee can stand on his two feet, walk like a human, he has five fingers like a human, he has a foot like the human. If you give him rice, he eats like a human.

VL: In their everyday life, do they have any similarities with humans? Does a chimpanzee get angry, or fight? And make peace?

G: Even if the chimpanzee has a child, he feeds from breast until a certain age. To stop feeding him this way, she thumps him. This is the day he stops getting milk.

BB: He will hit the little one, correct?

G: Yes, to tell him that from this day, you don't get milk from me anymore.

BB: What are the differences between the chimpanzee's and people's way of life?

G: The chimpanzee is in the bush, people are in the village. What the chimpanzee does, people don't.

BB: Such as...?

G: The chimpanzee sleeps in the bush, humans sleep in the village. The chimpanzee screams, humans don't. They don't climb either.

[...]

VL: Are there any chimpanzee stories?

G: When he makes his bed, he takes a leafy branch from the East, and one from the West.

BB: Why does he do that?

G: He looks for these two branches when he's ready to make his bed (Fig. 5). He will use these branches first. Why we say that the chimpanzee



Fig. 5. Three chimpanzee beds.

has the genie: when you receive the first two leaves that he used, you put them in water, then you wash someone who is sick from the genie, he will recover.

VL: Does it heal the chimpanzee's genie's injury or just any genie's injury?

G: Any genie's. When the chimpanzee gets sick, he doesn't stay on trees; he stays on the ground. When he's sick, he goes to look for under the silk cotton tree (*Ceiba pentandra*). This tree's roots leave holes around. It's in these holes that he looks for the leaves. When he's ill, all the other chimpanzees will look after him. They will stay as long as he doesn't get better. None of them will climb on the tree. Only the sick individual will lie on the leaves, otherwise his fellows just stay like that. The branch on which he lies when he's sick, the day the others see him take this branch and climb, they will know that his bed will also contain this branch. In his bed, this is where he will stay. Once he gets up there, when the others want to know if he is really cured, they will bring him some food. If he eats it, they know that he has recovered.

The *griot's* knowledge about the chimpanzee was obviously much more developed than that of other species. He pointed out both morphological and behavioral similarities with humans (group solidarity, communication through signs, symbolic gestures) and an essential difference: the chimpanzee belongs to the world of the bush, as opposed to the village. The chimpanzee also has a genie of its own,



which protects him when he sits on the *demukori*, an undetermined tree species that translates as ‘the chimpanzee bone’ in Fula. This is the only animal that is said to have a personal genie.

Why are certain animals spontaneously qualified and primarily known by certain attributes? Would another interlocutor distribute these traits in the same way? The disparity in this zoological and ethnological knowledge can of course be a reflection of the fragmented state of our data, which were collected during a single session. However, it already appears that knowledge about animals was not necessarily honed through contact with useful species, as the example of the lizard or even the chimpanzee demonstrates. The restriction that only a few animals have the capacity to maintain symbolic and ritual relationships with the environment also needs further confirmation; however, we did note that this characteristic was reflected in the way that several species, especially monkeys and apes, arrived in the world. To what extent can this type of knowledge for characterizing individual animals be related to the place that each of them occupies in creation narratives?

#### THE TRANSFORMED HUMAN/THE TRANSFORMABLE HUNTER

The tentative mapping of human/animal boundaries and links gave way to divergent answers from the *griot*. The first statement about human/animal differences concerned their bodily constitution: humans walk on two feet, animals on four. He then moved to the psychic realm: humans are able to think and feel; animals cannot. However, interestingly, this frontier seems to be intermittently open to some people. One passage from our discussion with the *griot* is particularly interesting in this regard:

BB: How were animals created? Where do they come from?

G: The great hunter can transform himself into an animal.

BB: How can he transform himself?

G: If, in the bush, an animal wants to act on you, you can recite invocations inside your head and you can change into a termite mound, a tree or an animal.

VL: Into a termite mound or a tree?

G: Yes, you change into a tree, an animal and a termite mound too.

BB: Which animals?

G: Chimpanzee, lion, monkey.

VL: What other animals?

G: No.

When asked about the origin of animals, the *griot* answered with the idea that a hunter who is threatened by an animal can shift into another animal or into other living forms.<sup>(9)</sup> This does not make him more efficient at hunting, but it allows him to escape a dangerous situation. Origins and transformations seem to be just a few easy steps away.

Where do animals come from? According to a hunter from the same village,

the existence of monkeys is explained by the transgression of a particular hunting ban. Certain men would have hunted on a Saturday, thereby braving a divine interdiction, which led to their transformation into monkeys and the attribution of a tail. Later on, God ordered gun-carrying men to shoot them in order to keep them permanently away from the village. According to two other hunters, all monkeys were originally individuals who fished on a forbidden day. A blacksmith said that God, after creating the world, first populated it with humans and plants, with animals appearing only after the trespass of specific rules. As for the origin of chimpanzees and their kinship with humans, he adds that in the beginning it was forbidden to forge on Thursday and Sunday, but that a few blacksmiths wanted to defy the proscription's arbitrary character: they went under the *leenguè* (*Afzelia africana*) and started to forge, and God drove them away from humans and transformed them into chimpanzees.

Therefore, according to one version, only chimpanzees and monkeys are renegades, while in another, the totality of the creation of animals constitutes the expression of divine punishment against disrespectful humans. One of us recorded nearly identical narratives about the origins of chimpanzees in the Tristao Islands sector of the Guinea/Guinea-Bissau frontier, with variations occurring in the banned activity (fishing, forging...) and/or the day of the ban. Other research has testified to the existence of these histories south of the current study area, in the Rio Nunez mouth region (Leciak, 2006). These narratives come from an Islamic version of the origin of monkeys that is told in the Koran and certain Hadiths, according to which the consumption of monkey meat is forbidden as these creatures correspond to humans changed into repellent beings by God's will after committing an extremely serious fault (Benkheira, 2000).<sup>(10)</sup>

## DISCUSSION: RELATING TO ANIMALS IN THE KAKANDE REGION OF GUINEA

The aim of this article was to question what it means for Kakandeka to relate to animals that are categorized as 'wild' in Western societies (*wula kui se* in Susu), by emphasizing how they are perceived through encounters and indirect interactions on one hand, and through evidence provided by the *griot* on the other.

First, under the present evidence it is still difficult to determine which activity, hunting or farming, will drive one to encounter and interact more frequently with *wula kui se*. As we have seen, fields attract crop raiders such as swine and other species (mainly birds, cane rats, and baboons when they have not been completely wiped out, as in southern Kakande) on a regular basis. This occurs frequently enough that hunters may actually wait for certain prey near cultivated areas, such as antelope, which are attracted by cassava or sweet potato leaves. Fields, like permanent settlements, correspond to pieces of land that are not inhabited by genies, as verified through the sesame test. They appear as a farmer's temporary territory from which it is perfectly legitimate to repel animal pests. This is probably why interactions with *wula kui se* around fields unfold without any specific consideration of their potential ownership by genies.

The majority of Kakandeka are otherwise reluctant to spend regular and extended periods of time outside villages and fields, in spaces that are presumed to be genie territory. For instance, over a total of 255 days looking for chimpanzee traces in the company of hunters, encounters off tracks with non-hunters hardly occurred at all and usually involved people collecting fruit (palm fruit,<sup>(11)</sup> *Dialium* sp., *Parkia* sp., or mangoes that were still growing on abandoned village sites). The people were usually foraging for fruit near their village or field site to reduce transportation distance, which also reduced the chance of encountering *wula kui se*.<sup>(12)</sup> As a consequence, hunting may be considered the major mode of relating to these animals. Indeed, hunters are the only people who regularly wander around in uninhabited and uncultivated areas.

This specific ability of hunters is also reflected in settlement foundation narratives which often describe them scouting any new areas. In the Kakande region, these narratives almost always fall under the following scheme: a hunter or a group of hunters, who are usually related to one another through agnatic ties (fathers and sons, uterine brothers, possibly accompanied by uncles and nephews), move out of their settlement searching for a new place to establish a farm. If the harvest is abundant and hunting is rewarding, the group sends out one of its members to bring back members of their households who stayed in the original settlement, and to convince other members of their lineage (younger brothers and their households) to join them. Other oral traditions retrieved in western Guinea evoke the prominent role of hunters in the search for and foundation of new settlements. For instance, migration narratives retrieved from the Susu in the Rio Pongo region describe their ancestors moving from the Falémé river region towards coastal areas as a result of hunting elephants (Saint-Père, 1930). Other Susu narratives from the Konkouré valley describe hunters being attracted to the area by abundant buffalo populations and finally settling there after finding that farming was also profitable (Fréchou, 1962). Closer to Kakande, the Baga Sitemu people living in the Rio Nunez estuary also report that their villages were founded by hunters (Sarró, 2009).

However, these subsistence criteria are not sufficient cause when it comes to deciding whether to stay in a given place. In every case, this decision is preceded by a propitiatory sacrifice to the genies inhabiting the area, in order to make sure that it is possible to stay there. For example, the first settlers of a Landuma village presented the genies with an offering made up of cola nuts, a rooster and *kuntchum* balls (grinded raw rice, kneaded with water and sugar). The sacrifice was completed before the genies' dwelling place, a large *K-ntol* tree (*Daniellia olliveri*). The settlers then organized the village around the tree and named the village after the tree itself (*Tantol*). This is a common scenario throughout Kakande, where several villages bear the names of genies' trees, like *Dikawe* (literally 'place of the kapok tree' in Landuma), or *Bantan Tiriti* (a combination of Fula and Susu meaning 'the kapok tree on the path').

Hence, overall, it is experienced hunters who most often face the dangers of confronting genies. While hunting may not generate more frequent encounters with *wula kui se* than farming, hunters go out to meet them and interact with them when they roam away from territories that villagers and farmers have secured

from genies. There is always a chance that *wula kui se* dwell on genie grounds. In these areas, they accordingly change their status in relation to humans. Genies appear as unavoidable mediators when attempting to take certain game animals like the buffalo or the porcupine. Hunting interactions can unfold on the condition that the hunter has succeeded, through the mastery of magical techniques and social skills, in unveiling the opaque protection that is conceded by genies to animals. Therefore, the interaction cannot be reduced to a fight with the animal. It is rather like a duel or a transaction with the genie over the animal. In other cases, some hunters are able to negotiate with genies for a successful shot.

However, we have also seen that a few animal species, like the doe and the unidentified *coba* (Fula), are imbued with similar powers that they hold from God and that allow them to protect their progeny from hunters. The similarity of their status compared to hunters is suggested by further evidence. The cross-analysis of oral and ancient cartographic data indicates that the first hunting camp at the location of the *griot's* village dates back to the 1920s (Leblan, forthcoming). The Fula name for this place, *Niama Yara Wol* or 'The river where one eats and drinks', is derived from the name of the river that runs near Kandetare, an abandoned village located 3 km upstream, where the founders came from. While drying some bush meat under the sun, then eating it right by the river's water, the idea for the name of this place would have spontaneously grown in the minds of the meal's participants. Just as the doe insures its descendants' protection by pouring out water collected from two rivers on her territory, the hunters founded a new village by associating food and drinking. The extent to which the doe's gesture can be considered a civilizing one remains an open question, but it is remarkable that 16 of the 21 Kakande villages in our study region are located at the convergence of two rivers.

To sum up, interactions between humans and certain animals outside of spaces that have been domesticated by humans involve two protagonists who are engaged in a battle, as well as a couple of other actors: God and the genies. The former is said to control animals' reproduction and has granted some species protective rituals that permit them to give birth safely. The latter, on the other hand, grant some animals protection by making them invisible to hunters. In the present state of our research, the nature of the genie-animal pact remains somewhat unclear. However, these observations tend to confirm a hypothesis that was described in earlier research: some animals seem to be in a state of domestic service to the genies; therefore, relationships between humans<sup>(13)</sup> and these genies may be understood as competition for the control of game (Leblan, 2007).

The short narratives provided by the *griot* single out another animal that occupies a significant position, the chimpanzee, who has a strong relationship to a genie according to some hunters. He is all the closer to humans because he is actually a human renegade according to an Islamic 'origins' narrative that is commonly heard in Kakande and other parts of western Guinea. Monkeys may be granted a status similar to chimpanzees, because they also appear as human renegades in certain creation narratives. The inclusion of monkeys in this scheme may depend more or less on restrictive translations of the Arabic *qird*, which may refer to monkeys, apes or both (Wehr, 1979). A comment

offered by the *griot* as we were trying to identify the *ɲeleru*, an animal that is able to deceive hens with its palm fruit-like anus, tends to confirm the near human status of monkeys: “this is not a monkey, it’s a bush animal.”

Overall, the *griot*’s physical and behavioral descriptions constitute heterogeneous knowledge that reveals the diversity of relationships that can be established with different species. These animal stories can be compared to those that are traditionally compiled as ‘tales’ in the ethnographic literature. They are often presented as ‘*Just So Stories*’, referring here to their being conceived independently of peoples’ daily experiences with animals, with the aim of entertaining or educating an audience, as was the case here. This could, however, be a biased perception on our part due to the small number of clues available to determine the context of the production, enunciation and reception of most of these stories (Descola, 2013). The majority of the stories lack social contextualization (e.g., Copans & Couty, 1976, but see Ferry, 1983, for a few elements concerning the relationships between storytellers and their audiences). Ultimately, the social meaning of these stories, especially the moral judgements that they may convey, will only be understood through an analysis of several of the *griot*’s storytelling performances. New field research is needed, therefore, to account for the diversity of relationships that Kakande inhabitants have with animals.

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## NOTES

- (1) The article mentions a total of 34 animal species. Animals that could be taxonomically identified (n= 22) are listed in the Appendix with translations in English, then French and Susu (*linguae francae*), Fula and Landuma (local languages). They are cited in English in the article. Among the remaining animals, eight are only known and thus directly referred to in Fula, with supra-specific identifications (class or order). Four animal names that were expressed in Fula remain taxonomically unidentified.
- (2) These data come from a questionnaire survey conducted by my field assistants Moussa Kaba and Salian Traoré in 206 households distributed in 15 settlements in the Dabiss sous-préfecture. Compared with the 1996 State population census, this sample amounts to almost 10% of the sous-préfecture population (Leblan, forthcoming).

- (3) This is also the case for beings labeled as genies in the Ouatchi area of southeastern Togo (Hamberger, 2010).
- (4) ‘Medicine’ is the term used by villagers, when they speak French (‘médicaments’), to name a remedy that heals. It also refers to the talismans that one wears on the body and that are used to protect oneself from the genies.
- (5) *Gris-gris* in French or *talkuru* in Fula; designing a sewed piece of leather that contains koranic verses that are supposed to keep genies away.
- (6) An ingredient of many maraboutic medicines; also sold in city markets.
- (7) ‘Doe’, or ‘biche’ in Kakande French, refers to any of the multiple species of antelope: blue duiker (*Cephalophus monticola*), red duiker (*C. rufilatus*), yellow-backed duiker (*C. sylvicultor*) or grimm’s duiker (*Sylvicapra grimmia*), the bongo antelope (*Tragelaphus euryceros*) and the bushbuck (*T. scriptus*), as well as the ourebi (*Ourebia ourebi*) and the two species of kobs *Kobus kob* and *K. ellipsiprimus*.
- (8) However, we do not possess information that would allow us to specify the meanings of these moral judgements in Kakande society.
- (9) Several pieces of ethnographic research in West Africa refer to voluntary human transformations into animals, suggesting that some elements of personhood may, in certain political contexts, be distributed outside the human realm, and even be attributed to plants or pieces of stone (e.g., Jackson, 1990 in the Sierra Leone Kuranko; see also Richards, 2000 in Sierra Leone Mende; for Central African case studies emphasizing human-ape differences and similarities, see Fernandez, 1972; Giles-Vernick & Rupp, 2006; Lingomo & Kimura, 2009).
- (10) Kruk’s (1995) analysis of the status of anthropoids and monkeys in Islam does not mention their metamorphosis from humans. However, the limit between the two seems easily negotiable in many cases because traditions reported in the same article mention acts of interspecific mating. Numerous Hadiths also consider the metamorphosis of Jews, Christians or Muslims into monkeys as a divine punishment (Lichtenstadter, 1991; Rubin, 1997 & 1999; Cook, 1999).
- (11) Chimpanzees often range far away from permanent water courses, where most palm trees are located (Leblan, forthcoming).
- (12) For instance, chimpanzees usually do not nest less than 700–800 meters from a village (Leblan, forthcoming).
- (13) This case concerned the appropriation of game by a conservation program funded by the European Union.

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Appendix List of taxonomically identified animals that are mentioned in the text

Scientific name	English	French	Susu	Fula	Landuma
<i>Accipiter</i> sp.	sparrowhawk	épervier			
<i>Apis mellifera</i>	bee	abeille	kuni	ɲaki	
<i>Cephalofis</i> sp.	duiker	biche	muntuwal		
<i>Cephalophus rufilatus</i>	red-flanked duiker	céphalophe à flancs roux	bollèrè	toɲèrè	wore
<i>Clarias anguillaris</i>	catfish	poisson-chat	gberèka	mukubi	
<i>Colobus polykomos</i>	black and white colobus	colobe noir et blanc	kula bandooru		
<i>Erythrocebus patas</i>	patas monkey	singe patas	kulè gbeli	kulè gghodè	n'bidewulè
<i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i>	hippopotamus	hippopotame	meli	gabbi	akane
<i>Hystrix cristata</i>	porcupine	porc-épic	sagalè	sangaldè	alip
<i>Kobus ellipsiprymnus</i>	défassa waterbuck	cobe de fassa	yale	dusa	waluk
<i>Loxodonta africana</i>	elephant	éléphant	sily	tjiwa	warang
<i>Macrotermes</i> sp.	termite	termite		biti	
<i>Ourebia ourebi</i>	oribi	ourébi		jabarè	
<i>Pan troglodytes</i>	chimpanzee	chimpanzé	demui	demûru	ademu
<i>Panthera leo</i>	lion	lion	n'gayuri		
<i>Panthera pardus</i>	leopard	léopard	bufoori		
<i>Phacochoerus africanus</i>	warthog	phacochère	koubinyè	n'balaladè	agnanda
<i>Potamochoerus porcus</i>	bush pig	potamochère	kosè gbeli	kosè whui	agnanda
<i>Python regius</i>	python	python ( <i>boa</i> )*			
<i>Syncerus caffer</i>	buffalo	buffle	sekèningué	hèda	oban
<i>Tragelaphus scriptus</i>	bushbuck	guib harmaché	kèli	diaourè	wat heg
<i>Xerus</i> sp.	squirrel	écureuil	yèdèhè	yuliru n'djoldu	tudormane

Source: Crossed-checked with Barnett & Prangley, 1997; Robertson, 2001; Leciak, 2006; Wright et al., 2006.

Spelling for Susu, Fula and Landuma adapted from Diallo (1972).

\* The italicized word corresponds to local French.