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THE DEVELOPMENT OF CASTE SYSTEMS IN WEST AFRICA[1]

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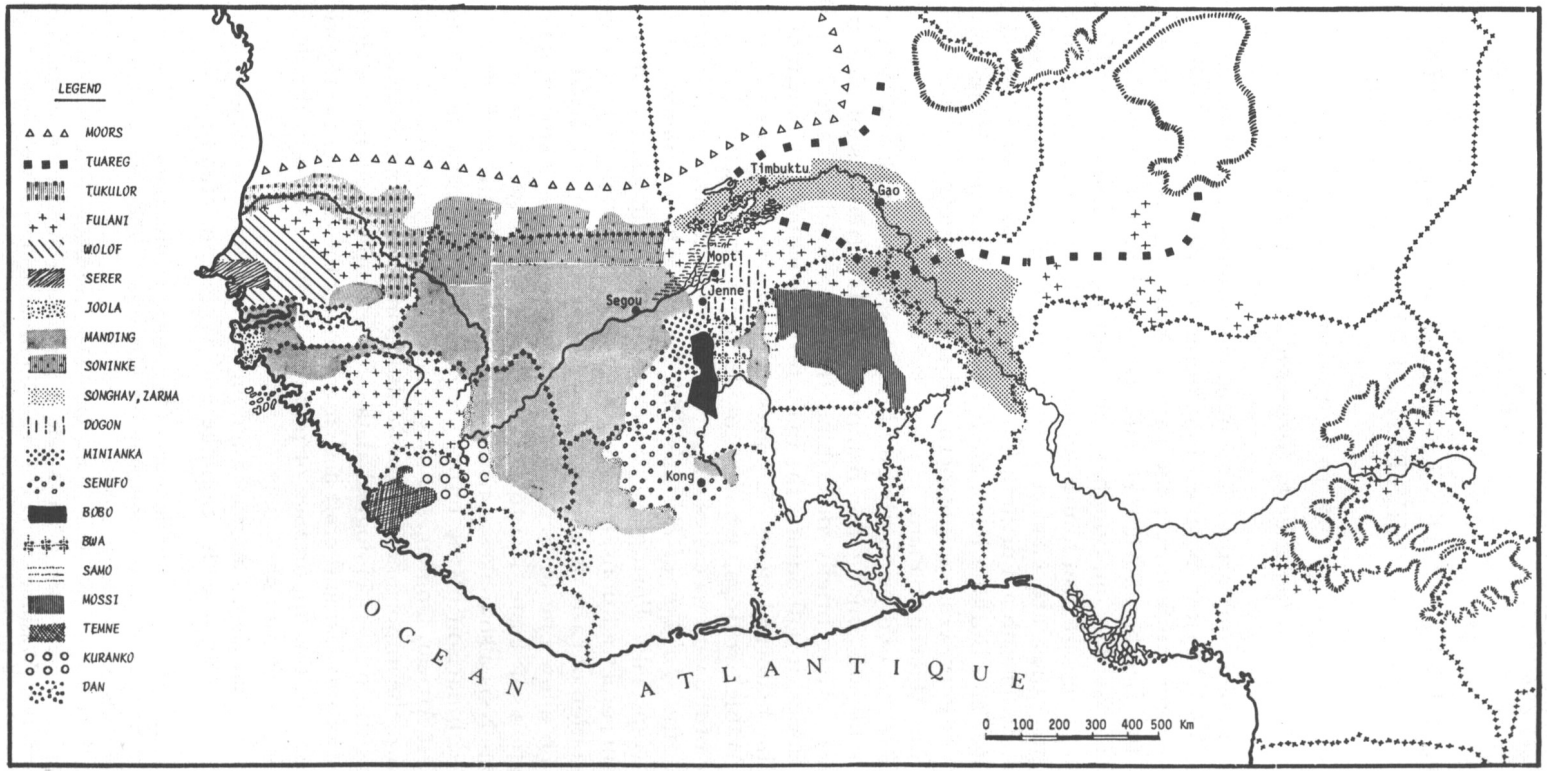
'CASTES', endogamous artisan and musician groups, are characteristic of over fifteen West African peoples, inhabiting at least fourteen states. They are found among the Soninke, the various Manding-speaking populations (including the Bambara, Malinke and Khassonke), the Wolof, Tukulor, Senufo, Minianka, Dogon, Songhay, and most Fulani, Moorish and Tuareg populations. They are also found among some Bobo, Bwa, Dan, and Serer groups. Thus, they are characteristic of most of the peoples of Mali, Mauritania, Senegambia, northern Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Ivory Coast, western Niger and Burkina Faso, as well as some of the peoples of northern Cameroon, eastern Ghana, northern Liberia and Sierra Leone, and the Tuareg of the Algerian Sahara.

This article is based primarily on library research but also on a year and a half of fieldwork among the Bambara of Mali (regions of Segou and Beledougou).[2] After briefly describing the roles of the 'castes' in West African societies, it will outline the main features which are known of their history. The historical analysis makes use of several types of sources: medieval Arabic writings, which provide some clues as to the dates of appearance of the various castes; the great seventeenth century chronicles of Timbuktu, the *Ta'rīkh al-Fattāsh* and the *Ta'rīkh al-Sūdān*, and the European (especially Portuguese) sources, which help clarify their early development; oral traditions, including both the Sunjata epic, which suggests an interpretation of caste origins, and traditions referring to relatively recent times, which allow one to trace the migrations of caste members and the transformation of caste institutions over the past two centuries. The historical analysis also makes considerable use of linguistic and sociological data. The comparison of the terms used to designate caste people in the various West African languages shows a high frequency of word borrowing, and therefore, the importance of cross-cultural influences in the development of caste institutions. Sociological data – for example clan names and the distribution of musical and craft activities among the different categories of society – confirm the importance of population movements in the development of caste institutions.

I will argue that castes appeared among the Malinke no later than 1300, and were present among the Soninke and Wolof no later than 1500. For

[1] This article summarizes the findings of my doctoral dissertation, 'Les castes au Soudan occidental: étude anthropologique et historique' (thèse de doctorat d'Etat, Université de Paris X – Nanterre, 1988).

[2] In April–June 1979, Sept.–Dec. 1985, Oct.–Dec. 1986, and Feb.–Aug. 1988. The first field trip was undertaken while I held a graduate fellowship from the National Science Foundation (Washington, D.C.). The following field trips were financed by the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (France).



Map 1. West African ethnic groups with castes.

purposes of this article, the term 'caste' can be understood to mean 'endogamous ranked specialist group'. I have elsewhere discussed the value of this term for comparative and theoretical analysis, as well as general reasons for the formation and persistence of vocationally specialized endogamous groups in traditional societies.[3] However, considerations as to the relationships (if any) between the West African institutions and Indian and other 'caste systems' have no bearing on the interpretations presented here; these are based entirely on African data.

ETHNOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

In most of the West African societies where they are found, castes form one of three social categories.[4] The others are the 'nobles' or 'freeborn', and the slaves. 'Nobles' or 'free persons' are associated with agriculture, or, in the case of the Fulani, herding. The alternate usage of 'nobles' and 'free persons' to designate the most usual social status reflects a real difficulty in the translation of the African terms. The most common status is also perceived as a very prestigious one. This kind of ambiguity may be

[3] Tamari, 'Les castes', 37–128, 299–336, 567–653. A book on this subject is in preparation.

[4] The fullest ethnographic accounts of West African social hierarchies and endogamous occupational groups include: Sory Camara, *Gens de la parole. Essai sur la condition et le rôle des griots dans la société malinké* (Paris, 1976); Pathé Diagne, *Pouvoir politique traditionnel en Afrique occidentale. Essai sur les institutions politiques précoloniales* (Paris, 1967); Abdoulaye-Bara Diop, *La société wolof. Tradition et changement. Les systèmes d'inégalité et de domination* (Paris, 1981); Majhemout Diop, *Histoire des classes sociales dans l'Afrique de l'Ouest.* Vol. 1: *Le Mali.* Vol. 2: *Le Sénégal* (Paris, 1971–2); Bernhard Gardi, *Ein Markt wie Mopti. Handwerkerkasten und traditionelle Techniken in Mali* (Basel, 1985); Patrick R. McNaughton, *The Mande Blacksmiths: Knowledge, Power and Art in West Africa* (Bloomington, 1988); Bokar N'Diaye, *Les castes au Mali* (Bamako, 1970); Eric Pollet and Grace Winter, *La société soninké. Dyahunu (Mali)* (Brussels, 1971); Dolores Richter, *Art, Economics and Change: The Kulebele of Northern Ivory Coast* (La Jolla, Ca., 1980); Yaya Wane, *Les Toucouleur du Fouta Tooro. Stratification sociale et structure familiale* (Dakar, 1969). Other important accounts include: Germaine Dieterlen, 'Contribution à l'étude des forgerons en Afrique occidentale', pp. 5–28, in *Annuaire de l'Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, V^e Section: Sciences Religieuses*, 1965–6; Mamadou Diouf, 'Le problème des castes dans la société wolof', *Revue Sénégalaise d'Histoire*, II (1981), 25–37; Marguerite Dupire, 'A nomadic caste: the Fulani woodcarvers', *Anthropos* LXXX (1985), 85–100; Gabriel Gosselin, 'Ordres, castes et Etats en pays sérèr (Sénégal): essai d'interprétation d'un système politique en transition', *Can. J. African Studies*, VIII (1974), 135–143; Danielle Jonckers, 'Notes sur le forgeron, la forge et les métaux en pays minyanka', *Journal de la Société des Africanistes*, XLIV (1979), 103–24; Dolores Richter, 'Further considerations on caste in West Africa: the Senufo', *Africa*, L (1980), 37–54; Hugo Zemp, 'Musiciens autochtones et griots malinké chez les Dan de Côte d'Ivoire', *Cah. Et. Afr.*, XV (1964), 370–82. On the Moors, the Tuareg, and the multi-ethnic society of Timbuktu, see especially: Lloyd Cabot Briggs, *Tribes of the Sahara* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960); H. T. Norris, *Shinqiti Folk Literature and Song* (Oxford, 1968); Henri Lhote, *Les Touaregs du Hoggar* (Paris, 1944); *Comment campent les Touaregs* (Paris, 1947); Johannes Nicolaisen, *Ecology and Culture of the Pastoral Tuareg, with Particular Reference to the Tuareg of Ahaggar and Ayr* (Copenhagen, 1963); Dupuis-Yakouba, *Industries et principales professions des habitants de la région de Tombouctou* (Paris, 1921); Mohamane Albassadji Ibrahima, 'Tombouctou. Etude de géographie humaine, économique et sociale' (thèse de doctorat de 3^ème cycle, Université de Paris I, 1970).

characteristic of many traditional societies; the Manding and Soninke terms for 'noble' (*hɔ́rɔn*; *hoore*) are borrowed from Arabic *ḥurr*, which, like the African terms, may be translated by either 'noble' or 'free'. However, among the Wolof and Tukulor, only a small proportion of the 'free' category may (even in principle) accede to political power: these societies distinguish between hereditary princely lineages, who collect heavy taxes on crops, and peasants or commoners.[5]

Most West African societies distinguish between slaves acquired through trade or war, who may be sold, and ones born in the master's household, who may not normally be sold or alienated. Nobles could become slaves (most usually as a result of capture in war), but caste people, who generally were not allowed to bear arms, could under no circumstances be reduced to slave status.

Even in societies where caste institutions are most highly developed, caste people form a small minority of the population. They have been estimated to form ten to twenty per cent of the Wolof population, and about five per cent of the Soninke population.[6] They also seem to form about five per cent of the Bambara population.[7] Among the Dogon, and *a fortiori* among the Dan, Minianka and other peoples who recognize only one or two castes, they form a yet smaller proportion of the population. In contrast, slaves formed up to fifty per cent of the population in certain areas in the estimates of some eighteenth- and nineteenth-century explorers.[8]

The most frequent caste occupations were metalworking, music-making and entertainment, leatherworking and woodworking. Iron was, of course, the most frequently worked metal, though copper, brass, gold and, more rarely, silver were also worked. In most areas, the same smiths worked both iron and the more precious metals, but in major towns such as Jenné and Mopti, certain families specialized in jewelry. The Senufo distinguish several kinds of metalsmiths, some of whom had the right to work only the 'black' metal (iron), while others would also work one or more of the 'red' or 'white' metals.[9] Blacksmith women are usually potters, though in some areas this craft is practised by bard women. Blacksmiths usually work wood as well as iron, making not only handles for tools and weapons but also mortars and pestles, doors and door locks, stools and other items of traditional furniture.

[5] See notably Abdoulaye-Bara Diop, 'La tenure foncière en milieu rural wolof (Sénégal): historique et actualité', *Notes Africaines*, CXVIII (1968), 48–52, and *La société wolof*, esp. pp. 181–96; Y. Wane, *Les Toucouleur*, esp. pp. 34–40; Mamadou Wane, 'Réflexions sur le droit de la terre toucouleur', *Bulletin de l'Institut Fondamental de l'Afrique Noire*, XLII (1980), 86–128.

[6] Ousmane Silla, 'Persistance des castes dans la société wolof contemporaine', *BIFAN*, XXVIII (1966), 731–70, especially pp. 755–8; M. Diop, *Le Mali*, 47; Pollet and Winter, *La société soninké*, 218.

[7] Fieldwork within a radius of 30 km around Segou (1985, 1986) and in the Arrondissement de Nossombougou (1986, 1988).

[8] See, e.g. Claude Meillassoux (ed.), *L'Esclavage en Afrique précoloniale* (Paris, 1975), 15–18.

[9] See, e.g. Yves Person, 'Un cas de diffusion: les forgerons de Samori et la fonte à la cire perdue', *Revue Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer*, CXCIV–CXCVII (1967), 219–26; Richter, 'Further Considerations', 39–40.

There are also weaver castes (Fulani and Tukulor *maabo/maabuuɓe*; Wolof *ràbbkat*) and a caste (Bambara *kùle*: Senufo *gùlèbèlè*) whose women specialize in the repairing of calabashes (used as containers for liquids). Many societies distinguish between castes that specialize in epic poetry, who are usually attached to families whose genealogies they transmit, and buffoons. Blacksmiths, leatherworkers and woodworkers, as well as bards, have specific musical and dance repertories.

Societies vary greatly in the number of castes they distinguish. Societies where castes are marginal distinguish only one (bards among the Dan) or two (blacksmiths and woodworkers among the Minianka). The Moors and Tuareg of the southern Sahara, for whom castes play an important but not a central role, have 'blacksmiths' (who may also exercise all the other crafts) and bards. Most Manding, Soninke and Dogon populations recognize three groups of endogamous specialists (bards, blacksmiths and leatherworkers), but some Bambara populations add woodworkers-calabash menders and a second category of bards. Due to its complex political history and its role as a commercial center, the town of Segou includes castes with Manding, Soninke, Fulani, and Tukulor ethnic affiliations. The Songhay distinguish up to six and the Senufo up to seven castes, with partially overlapping specializations. The Fulani and Tukulor distinguish twelve castes, with partially overlapping specializations, though all of these are never present in the same area. These data are summarized in Table 1.

While caste persons are by no means obliged to engage in craft or musical activities, free persons may not engage in metalwork, woodwork (beyond that necessitated by house construction), leatherwork and pottery-making, nor (among the Fulani, Tukulor, and perhaps also Wolof) weaving. Among the Bambara, only blacksmiths and woodworkers may cut down large, old trees, believed to be the homes of divinities. Freeborn adult men may not sing or play musical instruments, except in the context of the initiation societies. Adolescent boys and young men may, however, play several kinds of rudimentary musical instruments, and women and girls may use calabashes as percussion instruments to accompany their singing and dancing.[10] It seems that traditionally nearly all caste children and adolescents learned the specialties associated with their caste, but sometimes they gave them up or practised them only occasionally in adulthood.[11] Caste people were nearly always allowed to farm, and indeed obtained a considerable portion of their livelihood from this source. However, Dogon, and possibly also Soninke blacksmiths, were not allowed to engage in agricultural work.[12]

Caste people were nearly always considered to be inferior to freeborn, but superior to slaves. However, among the Dogon, blacksmiths are thought of as superior or equal to – but different from – the freeborn, while among the Manding and Fulani, buffoons may be thought to be inferior even to slaves.

[10] Dominique Zahan, *Sociétés d'initiation bambara. Le N'Domo. Le Korè* (Dijon, 1960), 234–6; René Luneau, *Chants de femmes au Mali* (Paris, 1981).

[11] Fieldwork, regions of Segou (1985, 1986) and Beledougou (1986, 1988); also Bafoulabe area, 1985.

[12] Denise Paulme, *Organisation sociale des Dogon* (Paris, 1988), 182; confirmed by Geneviève Calame-Griaule, personal communication, 1984. Soninke: Claude Meillassoux and Yakouba Diagana, personal communications, 1989.

Table 1. *The Vocabulary of Social Classification in the Western Sudan*

	MANDING OF MALI	JULA (Kong, Ivory Coast)	MAUKA (Malinke, Ivory Coast)
Freemen	hɔ́rɔn	hɔ́rɔn	wǫ́
General designation			
Sub-categories			
Intermediate categories	Diawambé, Diogoramé, Diokoramé		
Caste people	nyàmakala	nyàmakala	ABSENT
General designation			
Sub-categories	nùmu *blacksmith*	nùmu *blacksmith*	nùnàkà, càgì } *blacksmith*
	jèli, gèsere, gáwulɔ, gáwulɛ } *bard*	jèli *bard-leatherworker*	yèè, yèèlàkà *bard-leatherworker*
	gáranke, gárange *leatherworker*		fìnɔ̀nà *singer*
	kùle, laobe, segi } *woodworker*		
	surasegi *bard-woodworker*		
	máabɔ *bard-weaver*		
	fùnɛ *various occupations*		
Intermediate categories	Sɔ̀mɔnɔ		
Slaves	jɔ̀n	wóloso	wóósó
General designation			
Sub-categories	jɔ̀n *first generation slave*		
	wóloso *inalienable slave*		
	SONINKE	DAN	
Freemen	hoore		
General designation		absent	
Sub-categories			
Intermediate categories			
Caste people			
General designation	ñaxamala	absent	

Sub-categories	tage *blacksmith* gesere, jaare, kusatage } *bard* garanke *leatherworker* sakke *woodworker*	yœmi (m.)/yœḍɛ (f.), yœbo (pl.) } *bard*	
Intermediate categories			
Slaves			
General designation	kome		
Sub-categories	kome *first generation slave* sarida, jonkurunke, wanokunke } *inalienable slave*		
	SELAKA (Malinke, Ivory Coast)	MANDINKO (Malinke, Senegal)	KURANKO
Freemen			
General designation	wɔ̀	sula	
Sub-categories			
Intermediate categories			
Caste people			
General designation	absent	nyamalo	nyemakale
Sub-categories	nùn, càgì } *blacksmith* yèè *bard-leatherworker*	numo *blacksmith* jalo → fino, joka } *bard* karanke *leatherworker*	jeliba finaba → finaningbe, musa kule fina } *bard*
Intermediate categories			
Slaves			
General designation	wésó	jungo	

Table 1. (*continued*)

Sub-categories	WOLOF	TUKULOR	FULANI
Freemen	jaambur	dimo/rimɓe	dimo/rimɓe
General designation	gor		
Sub-categories	garmi, gellwaar } *royals* dom i bor *notables* baadoolo *commoners*	toorooɗo/tooroɓɓe ceɗɗo/seɓɓe	
Intermediate categories		jaawanɗo/jaawamɓe cubballo/subalɓe	jaawanɗo/jaawamɓe
Caste people	ñeeño	nyeenyo/nyeenyɓe	nyeenyo/nyeenyɓe
General designation		*rarely :* nyaamakala	
Sub-categories	tëgg *blacksmith* géwél *bard* uudé, wuudé *leatherworker* lawbe *woodworker* ràbbkat *weaver*	baylo/wayilɓe *blacksmith* maaɓo/maaɓuɗo, bambaaɗo/wambaaɓe } *bard* gawlo/awluɓe sakke/sakkeeɓe, galabbo/alauɓe } *leatherworker* labbo/lawɓe *woodworker* buurnaajo/buurnaaɓe *women : potters*	baylo, bayillo/wayluɓe *blacksmith* maabo/maabuuɗo, bamɓaaɗo/wammɓaaɓe, gawlo/awluɓe, jeeli } *bard* nyamakala sakke/sakkeeɓe, garanke, garankejo/garankeɓe, garkasaajo/garkasaaɓe } *leatherworker* labbo/lawɓe *woodworker*
Intermediate categories			
Slaves	jaam	maccuɗo/maccuɓe	maccuɗo/maccuɓe
General designation		jyaaɓe	
Sub-categories	jam i garmi jam i bor		maccuɗo/maccuɓe *first generation slave* diimaajo/riimaayɓe *inalienable slave*
	SENUFO	DOGON	MINIANKA
Freemen	sẽ-nãɔ̃/sẽnãábèlè	absent	absent
General designation	(*cultivator*)		
Sub-categories			
Intermediate categories			
Caste people	fẽ-ɟɛ̃ɔ̃/fẽ-ɟɛ̃ɛ́bèlè	absent	absent
General designation	(*artisan*)		

	SONGHAY	HASSANIYA (MOORISH ARABIC)	TUAREG
Sub-categories	fɔ̰nɔ̃ɔ̀/fɔ̃nɔ̰̀bèlè } *blacksmith* sūmbóróbèlè } çàgíbèlè *jeweller* cēdúmbèlè *tinker* kpɛ̰̀gɛ̰̀bèlè *autonym :* lɔ̀ʁɔ́ *brass founder* cèlìbèlè *leatherworker* gùlèbèlè *woodworker*	írunɛ/írũ } *blacksmith* jémɛnɛ/jɛmõ } gɔ̀:gɔ̀:nɛ/gɔgɔ:ũ *bard* jàũ *leatherworker*	tũtũ *blacksmith* kule *woodworker*
Intermediate categories			
Slaves *General designation* *Sub-categories*		gunɔ́, gunɔnɛ	
Freemen *General designation* *Sub-categories*	bórcìn		
		ᶜarab *warrior* zwāya *marabout* laḥma } *vassal* znāga }	imochar *warrior* inislimen *marabout* imrad *vassal*
Intermediate categories			
Caste people *General designation* *Sub-categories*	zèm *blacksmith* zémmùkóẁ } jèsérè } gáẁlà } *bard* maabe } gáŕàsà *leatherworker*	ṣunnāᶜ } *artisan* mᶜāllem/mᶜāllemīn } īggīw (m.)/īggāwen *bard* tīggīwit (f.)/tīggāwāten	enad/enaden } *artisan* gargassa } ag'gou/ag'gouten *bard*
Intermediate categories			
Slaves *General designation* *Sub-categories*		ḥarṭānī/ḥarāṭīn *serf*	iklan *slave* iklan-n-egef } *serf* bella, bouzou }

Castes are ranked relative to each other. Blacksmiths and epic bards have the highest rank. Leatherworkers have a low status.[13] Bambara spontaneously state that members of a certain social category are 'better' or 'worse' than those of another.[14] While some Western anthropologists have argued that Westerners have projected a hierarchical world view onto West African societies, most West African social scientists have considered that vocationally-linked social hierarchies are an essential feature of West African caste societies.[15]

Caste and free could not marry or have sexual relations. The practice by certain Malinke chiefs of marrying a blacksmith woman shortly after their accession to power is probably the only exception to this rule.[16] Most marriages take place within a caste. However, among the Soninke of the Dyahunu region of Mali, castes form hypergamous dyads. The high ranking bard (*gesere*) men may wed both previously married blacksmith women and virgin girls, whereas the blacksmith men may only wed bard widows and divorcées.[17] Among the Bambara, bards and blacksmiths could marry each other's women and girls, though marriage within the caste remained most common.[18] Two very low-ranking Bambara groups, the *kùle* and the *fùnɛ*, never married outside their caste. Caste men, like free men, could take slave concubines: the children acceded to the father's status.[19]

In addition to their craft and musical activities, caste people had a number of specialized roles. Bards and blacksmiths, and more rarely leatherworkers, were used as go-betweens by freeborn families, especially in the context of interfamilial disputes and marriage transactions. Bards, and more rarely blacksmiths, served kings and chiefs as messengers. Among the Soninke, Malinke, Fulani, and Dogon, blacksmith men perform circumcision; among the first three peoples, blacksmith women perform excision. Among the Soninke, Malinke and Bambara, caste women provided most of the hairdressers and cosmeticians; among the Soninke of the Dyahunu area of Mali, only leatherworker women could make up and dress the hair of caste women.[20] Among the Bambara and Malinke, blacksmiths had a key role in the Komo, the main initiation society, while all other caste people were excluded from it.[21]

As implied by the above, caste people were subjected to few forms of social segregation and avoidance behavior other than endogamy itself. Caste people

[13] See notably Paulme, *Organisation sociale*, 184–5, 192; Geneviève Calame-Griaule, *Ethnologie et langage. La parole chez les Dogon* (Paris, 1987), 397; Pollet and Winter, *La société soninké*, 206–60; René Luneau, *Les chemins de la noce. La femme et le mariage dans la société rurale au Mali* (Lille, 1975), 101, 106–11. [14] Fieldwork, 1985, 1986, 1988.

[15] Cheikh Anta Diop, *L'Afrique noire pré-coloniale* (Paris, 1960), 7–18; Diagne, *Pouvoir politique*, 71, 73; M. Diop, *Le Mali*, 47, 57–9; Camara, *Gens de la parole*, 57–66.

[16] Paul-Emile-Namoussa Doumbia, 'Etude du clan des forgerons', *Bulletin du Comité d'Etudes Historiques et Scientifiques de l'A.O.F.*, XIX (1937), 334–80, 337; Youssouf Cissé, personal communication. [17] Pollet and Winter, *La société soninké*, 233.

[18] Luneau, *Les chemins de la noce*, 111; and fieldwork, Segou region, 1985, 1986.

[19] Fieldwork, Segou region, 1985, 1986.

[20] N'Diaye, *Les castes*, 73, 85, Pollet and Winter, *La société soninké*, 217–18.

[21] Germaine Dieterlen, *Essai sur la religion bambara* (Brussels, 1988), 166–7; Germaine Dieterlen and Youssouf Cissé, *Les fondements de la société d'initiation du Komo* (Paris, 1972), 30–1; Dominique Zahan, *La dialectique du verbe chez les bambara* (Paris, 1963), 144.

usually lived in separate neighborhoods. However, this accords with the usual West African pattern, in which each major lineage occupies a distinct part of the village, often forming a neighborhood. More rarely, caste people formed separate villages or hamlets. The Wolof and Serer traditionally refused burial to bards (their bodies were placed in the hollows of baobab trees),[22] and among the Bambara of the Beledougou region of Mali, blacksmiths are often buried in separate cemeteries. Also in Beledougou, some nobles do not allow blacksmiths to settle near their homesteads.[23]

In addition to endogamous vocational groups, the Fulani, Tukulor and Manding distinguish what I have elsewhere dubbed 'quasi-castes'. The social status of members of these groups is similar, but not quite identical, to that of caste people. The Tukulor explicitly say that the *cubballo/subalɓe* (fishermen who live along the Senegal river) are intermediate in status between nobles (*dimo/rimɓe*) and caste people (*nyeenyo/nyeenyɓe*). Some Fulani consider that the Jaawandɔ/Jaawamɓe are nobles (*dimo/rimɓe*), while others consider that they are caste people (*nyeenyo/nyeenyɓe*). Likewise, some Bambara consider that the Sɔ̀mɔnɔ boatmen and fishermen, most of whom are concentrated near the town of Segou in Mali, are caste people (*nyàmakala*) while others consider that they are nobles (*hɔ́rɔn*).[24] Two of these groups draw their livelihood primarily from activities (fishing and transportation) that contrast with those of the majority population. The Jaawamɓe do not have any specialized economic activities – they may be herders, cultivators or traders – but, like the other two, they have long been excluded from political power. All these groups show a marked tendency towards endogamy, but are not excluded (even in principle) from marrying members of other groups.

Contacts with the West and the development of the modern sector have tended to weaken the importance of caste. Caste people have been able to acquire Western education and thereby accede to government positions from which they effectively wield authority over nobles. However, caste-noble marriages are rare even in the larger towns in Mali, and they tend to be accompanied by considerable family opposition. To the best of my knowledge, such marriages do not occur in the villages, except in the immediate periphery of Bamako. The vocational dimension of caste is, however, disappearing. In rural areas, the children of blacksmiths, but not bards and leatherworkers, usually learn at least some of the skills associated with their status.[25] In Bamako and Segou, nobles are increasingly turning to lucrative

[22] See, e.g. Silla, 'Persistance', 746–9 and Raymond Mauny, 'Baobabs-cimetières à griots', *Notes Africaines*, LXVII (July 1955), 72–76.

[23] Fieldwork, Arrondissement de Nossombougou, 1986, 1988.

[24] Among the best discussions of these groups, one may cite: Y. Wane, *Les Toucouleur*, 42–50; N'Diaye, *Les Castes*, 55–61; Boly Diop, 'Les subalbé. Pêcheurs de la moyenne vallée du fleuve Sénégal', Brevet du Centre des Hautes Etudes de l'Afrique et de l'Asie Modernes (Paris), 1968; Robert Pageard, 'Notes sur les Diawambé ou Diokoramé', *Journal de la Société des Africanistes*, XXIX (1959), 239–60; Jean Bazin, 'Commerce et prédation: l'Etat bambara de Ségou et ses communautés marka', International Conference on Manding Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 1972. Charles Monteil, *Les Bambara du Ségou et du Kaarta* (Paris, 1924), makes numerous brief references to the Sɔ̀mɔnɔ.

[25] Fieldwork, regions of Segou (1985, 1986) and Beledougou (1986, 1988); also Bafoulabe area, 1985.

crafts (jewelry and woodcarving) traditionally restricted to caste people. The production of Western-type goods and use of Western-type techniques (as in carpentry, metallurgy, factory work, and auto repair) may be practised by persons of any status.[26]

CHRONOLOGICAL MARKERS

The medieval Arabic sources suggest that the appearance of special status artisan and musician groups occurred no later than the fourteenth century. Thus, the great Moroccan traveller Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, who visited the Mali empire in 1352–53, stated that the king always spoke through an interpreter. The chief interpreter was, furthermore, responsible for the organization of all musical, dance and acrobatic entertainments in the palace, and the best musician of the court. Moreover, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa states that musicians were called *jūla*, singular *jālī*. They were thus known by the same term as the modern Manding bards (in Bambara: *jèli*).[27] The early fourteenth-century historian al-'Umarī, some of whose informants may have observed the Malian court as early as 1300, corroborates Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's account of the etiquette of the Malian court.[28] Thus, the writings of al-'Umarī and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa show that musician-spokesmen, whose activities were identical or similar to those of modern bards, were present in the Malian court by the first half of the fourteenth century. The accounts do not inform us as to the exact social status of the medieval bards, and do not tell us whether they were endogamous, but they do show continuity between the medieval bards and present-day ones.

In contrast, Arabic descriptions of the Soninke empire of Ghana indicate the absence of professional bards. Drums are the only musical instruments mentioned in al-Bakrī's and al-Idrīsī's detailed accounts of the Ghanaian court. Al-Bakrī, who wrote in the mid-eleventh century, does not mention any interpreters, and al-Idrīsī, in the mid-twelfth century, explicitly states that the king spoke directly to his people.[29]

European sources prove that by 1500, endogamous professional bards were present among both the Manding and the Wolof of Senegambia. Valentim Fernandes' account, which is based on the eyewitness descriptions of Portuguese sailors, has generally been thought to refer only to Wolof bards. Although he does not cite the Manding word for 'bard', Valentim Fernandes insists on the fact that Manding of honorable birth never leave

[26] Mahamadou Sissoko, 'Les castes à Bamako. Essai d'étude sur leur évolution' (mémoire de fin d'études, D.E.R. de Philosophie, Ecole Normale Supérieure, Bamako). Other important discussions of modernization include Claude Rivière, 'Guinée: la difficile émergence d'un artisanat casté', *Cah. Et. Afr.*, xxxvi (1969), 600–25, and Silla, 'Persistance'.

[27] Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Tuḥfat al-Nuẓẓār fī Gharāib al-Amṣār wa-'Adjā'ib al-Asfār*, ed. by C. Defrémery and B. R. Sanguinetti, (Paris, 1969), iv, 398–410; French translation in Joseph Cuoq, *Recueil des sources arabes concernant l'Afrique occidentale du VIII^e au XVI^e siècle* (*Bilād al-Sūdān*) (Paris, 1975), 301–10.

[28] Al-'Umarī, *Masālik al-Abṣār fī Mamālik al-Amṣār*, Ms. B.N. 5868, 26v, 29r–33r, translation in Cuoq, *Recueil*, 264, 269–76.

[29] Al-Bakrī, *Kitāb al-Masālik wa-'l-Mamālik*, ed. William MacGuckin de Slane (Paris, 1965), 175–6; Cuoq, *Recueil*, 100; al-Idrīsī, *Nuzhat al-Mushtāq fī Ikhtirāq al-Āfāq*, ed. R. Dozy and M. J. de Goeje (Leiden, 1866), 6; Cuoq, *Recueil*, 133–4.

their homes unless accompanied by a musician-interpreter. Fernandes reports the Wolof word for bard (*géwél*, which he spells *gaul*) and states that these bards may not marry outside their group. He furthermore adds that the bodies of deceased bards are placed in baobab trees rather than buried, since the Wolof believe that this would cause drought – a belief still current in mid-twentieth-century Senegal. Fernandes refers to both the Wolof and Manding bards as Jews, since he, like most of the sixteenth and seventeenth century writers, believed that the social segregation to which the bards were subject could only be due to Jewish ancestry.[30]

Although several early writers describe West African craft techniques, the Cape Verdian merchant André Alvares de Almada, who wrote in the 1590s, was the first to describe the social status of the artisans. According to him, among both the Manding and the Wolof, blacksmiths, leatherworkers and weavers as well as bards were subject to severe social segregation. He states that these persons, whom he refers to as Jews, were never allowed to enter the homes of the well born, nor marry their women. Like Valentim Fernandes, he describes the Wolof practice of exposing the bodies of bards in baobab trees.[31]

Claude Jannequin, in the 1630s, provides the earliest descriptions of the *subalɓe* fisherfolk of Fouta Toro (Senegal). Mungo Park, in the 1790s, describes (though he does not name) the *fùnɛ*, Manding-speaking bards who specialize in Muslim religious songs. He also provides the first description of the Sɔ̀mɔnɔ boatmen, most of whom lived near the Bambara capital of Segou. Gaspard-Théodore Mollien, who travelled in 1818, provides the first and remarkably full description of the Fulfulde-speaking *lawɓe* woodcarvers. Heinrich Barth, in the 1850s, describes a full complement of Fulani castes.[32]

The *Ta'rīkh al-Sūdān* and the *Ta'rīkh al-Fattāsh*, two chronicles written in Timbuktu largely in the mid-seventeenth century, provide early dates for several castes. Thus, the *Ta'rīkh al-Fattāsh* reports that the master of ceremonies at the Songhay court of Askia Muhammad was called the *gissiridunka*.[33] The term *gissiri* is a variant spelling of Songhay *jèsérè* and Soninke *gesere*. *Dunka* may be the same as Soninke *tunka* 'king' or 'chief'. *Gissiridunka* could thus mean 'chief of the bards' or 'chief bard'.[34] Thus, the *Ta'rīkh al-Fattāsh* implies that *jèsérè* bards were present among the Songhay

[30] Valentim Fernandes, *Description de la côte occidentale d'Afrique* (*Sénégal au Cap de Monte, Archipels*), ed. and translated by T. Monod, A. Teixeira da Mota and R. Mauny (Bissau, 1951), 8–11, 44–5. The assimilation of Jews to bards in the early European sources has had one enduring consequence: in Portuguese Creole, bards are called *judéus*.

[31] André Alvares de Almada, *Tratado breve dos Rios de Guiné do Cabo Verde*, ed. Luis Silveira (Lisbon, 1945), 23-4.

[32] Jannequin, *Le voyage de Lybie au royaume de Sénégal, le long du Niger* (Geneva, 1980), 173–9; Mollien, *Voyage dans l'intérieur de l'Afrique, aux sources du Sénégal et de la Gambie* (Paris, 1820), i, 155–8; Park, *Travels*, ed. Ronald Miller (New York, 1954), 213–14, 150; Barth, *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa* (London, 1965), iii, 112–13.

[33] Ibn al-Mukhtār, *Ta'rīkh al-Fattāsh fī Akhbār al-Buldān wa-l'-Juyūsh wa-Akābir al-Nās*, ed. and translated Octave Houdas and Maurice Delafosse (Paris, 1981), 11, 94, 155 (pp. 14, 177 and 276 of the translation).

[34] The term has already been discussed by J. O. Hunwick, 'African language material in Arabic sources – the case of Songhay (Sonrai)', *African Language Review*, IX (1970–1), 69.

by 1500. As other evidence indicates that the Songhay *jèsérè* are of Soninke origin, it follows that the *gesere* were present among the Soninke even earlier.

The *Ta'rīkh al-Sūdān* mentions that during a raiding expedition in 1550, Askia Dāwūd captured and brought back to Gao a large number of *mābī* singers.[35] This group has been identified with the Fulani *maabo/maabuuɓe* bard-weavers.[36] It follows that the presence of *maabo/maabuuɓe* among the Fulani antedates 1550 by a considerable margin. The *Ta'rīkh al-Sūdān* implies that the *mābī* singers first became known to the Songhay as a result of Askia Dāwūd's expedition. *Maabe* musicians, who claim a Fulani origin, are still present among the Songhay.[37]

Both the *Ta'rīkh al-Sūdān* and the *Ta'rīkh al-Fattāsh* include numerous references to the Fulfulde-speaking Jaawamɓe. As mentioned earlier, the Jaawamɓe are not a caste in the full sense of the term, but they are often ideologically assimilated to *nyeenyɓe* or *nyàmakala* by members of other social groups. The earliest reference occurs in the *Ta'rīkh al-Sūdān*, which mentions a military expedition undertaken by Sonni 'Alī against the Zaghrānī in the 1480s.[38] ('Zaghrānī' is the designation for the Jaawamɓe still current in the Arabic dialect of Timbuktu).[39] The *Ta'rīkh al-Fattāsh* mentions that Askia Muḥammad employed a Zaghrānī to supervise construction work in 1496–7.[40] Both the *Ta'rīkh al-Fattāsh* and the *Ta'rīkh al-Sūdān* make numerous references to the military and political undertakings of the Zaghrānī in the sixteenth century.[41] The term Jaawandǒ, singular of Jaawamɓe, occurs three times in the *Ta'rīkh al-Sūdān*, as part of the name of a sixteenth-century Songhay territorial administrator, Shā' FRM 'Alī JawnD.[42]

On the other hand, it does not seem that the descriptions of the 'servile tribes' included in the *Ta'rīkh al-Sūdān* can be used to establish early dates for castes. These passages are among the additions to the original seventeenth-century text made in the 1820s by Seku Amadu Lobbo, founder of the Fulani-dominated Muslim state of Macina in Mali, and one of his chief advisors, Alfa Nuh.[43] The 'servile tribes', whose numbers are variously

[35] Al-Sa'dī, *Ta'rīkh al-Sūdān*, ed. and translated Octave Houdas and Edmond Benoist (Paris, 1981), 102 (p. 168 of the translation).

[36] Henri Gaden, *Proverbes et maximes peuls et toucouleurs, traduits, expliqués et annotés* (Paris, 1931), 323.

[37] Boubou Hama, *L'histoire traditionnelle d'un peuple. Les Zarma-Songhay* (Paris, 1967), 119–20; Ahmadou Djibrilla Maiga et Mahamadou Maiga, 'Le griot en milieu songhay', mémoire de fin d'études, D.E.R. de Lettres, Ecole Normale Supérieure, Bamako, 1977–8; Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, *Concepts et conceptions songhay-zarma* (Paris, 1982), 281–2. [38] Al-Sa'dī, *Ta'rīkh al-Sūdān*, 81 (p. 116 of the translation).

[39] Siré-Abbas Soh, *Chroniques du Fouta sénégalais*, ed. and translated Maurice Delafosse and Henri Gaden (Paris, 1913), 148, 225.

[40] Ibn al-Mukhtār, *Ta'rīkh al-Fattāsh*, 65 (pp. 123–4 of the translation).

[41] *Ibid.* 116, 181–2, 186 (pp. 212, 317, 323–4 of the translation); al-Sa'dī, *Ta'rīkh al-Sūdān* 143, 147, 157–8, 165 (pp. 223, 229, 243, 253 of the translation).

[42] Al-Sa'dī, *ibid.* 122, 140, 210 (pp. 196, 219, 321 of the translation). FRM (to be read Farma) and the final 'd' of JawnD (to be read Jawndǒ) are not vocalized.

[43] Nehemia Levtzion, 'A seventeenth century chronicle by Ibn al-Mukhtār: a critical study of Ta'rīkh al-Fattāsh', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, XXXIV (1971), 571–93; Michel Abitbol, *Tombouctou et les Arma. De la conquête marocaine du Soudan nigérien en 1591 à l'hégémonie de l'Empire Peulh du Macina en 1833* (Paris, 1979), 12.

given as twelve or twenty-four, have long been identified with the endogamous artisan castes, though in some respects their social status, as described in the *Ta'rīkh al-Fattāsh*, is very much at odds with that of the caste people.[44] Given the textual history of the *Ta'rīkh al-Fattāsh*, it may be safely said that the passages concerning the 'servile tribes', far from being descriptions of caste people in the Mali and early Songhay empires, are indicative of the status that Seku Amadu and his collaborators wished to impose upon blacksmiths and the Sɔ̀mɔnɔ fishermen and boatmen. Sɔ̀mɔnɔ oral traditions support the view that Seku Amadu attempted to reduce them to slave status, while reinforcing the hereditary character of their occupations.[45] However, he was apparently unable to implement this project.

Thus, written sources provide *termini ante quem* for several groups: *c.* 1350, for Manding *jèli* bards (or a group that ultimately developed into the endogamous *jèli* caste); 1500, for Soninke *gesere*, Songhay *jèsérè*, and Wolof *géwél* endogamous bards, as well as the Jaawambe; 1550, for the Fulani *maabo/maabuube* bards; 1600, for the *subalbe* fisherfolk; 1800, for the Fulfulde-speaking *lawbe* woodcarvers, Manding *fùnɛ* bards, and Sɔ̀mɔnɔ boatmen.

In fact, linguistic and sociological evidence implies that all of these dates, except perhaps for the first one, are far too late. The fact that similarly named blacksmith and leatherworker groups, as well as bards, are found among virtually all the far-flung Manding populations suggests that each of these groups appeared, and became an integral part of Manding social structure, well before the final collapse of the Mali empire *c.* 1600.[46] By the time European travellers first described them about 1800, *lawbe* woodworkers were present in a great part of the West African savannah. This implies that they must have acquired their distinctive identity as a social group well before then.

I will suggest, on the basis of an analysis of the Sunjata epic, that vocationally specialized groups that would rapidly develop into endogamous bard and blacksmith groups first appeared among the Manding in the thirteenth century, as a result of the Sosso/Malinke war. Such an early date for Manding caste origins raises the possibility (though of course it does not prove) that even Wolof and Soninke castes ultimately developed from Manding ones. As most Soninke and Wolof populations came under Manding domination for at least a century, beginning sometime before 1300, they had many opportunities for adopting the caste institutions of their Manding overlords. There is some evidence that such a process did in fact

[44] Ibn al-Mukhtār, *Ta'rīkh al-Sūdān*, 31–2, 55–8, 61–2, 64–8, 70–1, 116–17, 119, 123, 140–1, 143–4, 149 (pp. 52–4, 106–13, 118, 121–31, 136–7, 212–15, 218–19, 224–5, 255–6, 258–60, 266–8 of the translation).

[45] William Brown, 'The Caliphate of Hamdullahi ca. 1818–1864: a study in African history and tradition' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin at Madison, 1969), 116, 124, 129.

[46] Most of the Bambara villages of the Beledougou region of Mali do not have resident bards or leatherworkers, only blacksmiths. However, the fact that Beledougou *hɔ́rɔn* do not make any leather goods (except water skins) or play any of the musical instruments associated with bards, as well as their familiarity with the word *nyàmakala*, shows that they operate in terms of the social concepts and structures characteristic of other Manding areas. Beledougou Bambara make use of the services of wandering Malinke, Bambara, Soninke, and even Moorish artisans and bards. (Fieldwork, 1986, 1988).

take place. Thus, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa states that each of the provincial governors (*farārī*, modern Manding *farba*) was accompanied by his own troop of musicians when in attendance at the Malian court.[47] These governors took their musicians – whose instruments seem to have been similar or identical to those of the king's bards – into the provinces with them. In 1352, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa visited the Soninke-Berber town of Iwālātan (Walata), Mali's northernmost outpost to the west. He reports that the Malian administrator spoke only through an interpreter, that is, probably, a *jèli*.[48]

THE FOUNDING OF BARD AND BLACKSMITH CASTES AMONG THE MALINKE

Several facts indicate that the Sunjata epic is of unusual historical value. The epic, which takes its name from the first Malian king (*Sunjata fàsa* – litt. 'praise song in honor of Sunjata') relates the struggle between the Malinke and the Soninke state of Sosso.[49] Arabic sources (Ibn Khaldūn, corroborated on some points by Ibn Baṭṭūṭa and al-'Umarī) confirm the reality of a Malinke/Sosso war, which the Malinke perceived as extremely violent; they supply Sunjata's name as well as that of one of his brothers and permit dating of the founding of the Keita dynasty, following the Malinke/Sosso war, to the early to mid-thirteenth century.[50] Ibn Baṭṭūṭa mentions that bards regularly recited poems honoring the reigning king's predecessors and recalling their great deeds, and that this was a longstanding custom of the Malian court.[51] It would be surprising if Sunjata, the founder of the dynasty, were not among those whose deeds were recalled in the praise songs.

Textual and literary analysis also confirms the value of the Sunjata epic as an historical source. The fact that the Sunjata epic is known to all Manding-speaking populations vouches for its great antiquity, while the fact that among over twenty available versions (full or abridged) of the epic, there are very few differences in the characterization of political and military events or the main personages, again argues for its value as history. Unlike West African epics that refer to relatively recent times – the Bambara ones, for example – the Sunjata epic has a strict chronological framework: the different versions agree as to the ordering of events. This by no means implies that the order is accurate, but it is a supplemental indication of the antiquity of the epic; for it seems that in general, in both African and non-African cultures,

[47] Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Tuḥfat*, vol. 4, 404–5; Cuoq, *Recueil*, 304.

[48] Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Tuḥfat*, vol. 4, 385; Cuoq, *Recueil*, 294.

[49] The fullest versions collected include: Djibril Tamsir Niane, *Soundjata ou l'épopée mandingue* (Paris, 1960); Gordon Innes, *Sunjata: Three Mandinka Versions* (London, 1974); Youssouf Tata Cissé and Wa Kamissoko, *L'empire du Mali*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1975, 1976); *La grande geste du Mali, des origines à la fondation de l'empire* (Paris, 1988); John William Johnson, *The Epic of Son-Jara: A West African Tradition* (Bloomington, 1986). Johnson provides quite a full bibliography, to which one should add Sory Camara, *L'histoire pour les Mandenka*, Université de Bordeaux, n.d., and a version included as an annex to Drissa Diakité, 'Le Mansaya et la société mandingue' (thèse de doctorat de 3ème cycle, Université de Paris I, 1980).

[50] See especially Ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-'Ibar wa-Dīwān al-Mubtadā' wa-'l-Khabar* (Beirut, 1956–1961), vol. 4, 413–15; Cuoq, *Recueil*, 343–6; and Nehemia Levtzion, 'The thirteenth- and fourteenth-century kings of Mali', *Journal of African History*, IV (1963), 341–53.

[51] Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Tuḥfat*, vol. 4, 413–14; Cuoq, *Recueil*, 307–8.

epic poems are first transmitted as 'cycles' (i.e. 'bundles') of thematically related, relatively short poems, before being pared down and reorganized as an ordered sequence (thus becoming long, unified epics).[52] The fact that the Sunjata epic contains a great deal of folklore material is not, in my view, an argument against its value as an historical source, but rather an indication of its great antiquity. Nearly all the folktale elements occur in the first part of the epic, relating to Sunjata's childhood, and thus do not impinge upon historically significant events.[53]

Nevertheless, I do not wish to claim that all or most events reported in the epic are literally true. My interpretation of the appearance of endogamous professional groups among the Manding is not based on the affirmations of the epic, *but on the internal contradictions of a tradition that developed from poems almost as old as the events they purport to relate.* The Sunjata epic explicitly states that the Sosso king, Sumanguru Kante, is a caste blacksmith. However, Sumanguru Kante's behavior is totally incompatible with caste status. Caste persons are not allowed to exercise political power (except indirectly, as advisors to *hɔ́rɔn* nobles), may not bear arms, and may not marry *hɔ́rɔn* women. Yet Sumanguru Kante not only rules a state, but also victoriously leads military expeditions and marries Malinke princesses before he is finally defeated. Furthermore, another prominent personage in the epic, Sumanguru's nephew Fakoli Dumbia, also conducts military expeditions and marries *hɔ́rɔn* women.

Information provided by the epic concerning Balla Fasseke Kuyate, Sunjata's personal bard, also contains several discrepancies. The epic states that Balla Fasseke was the son of Jakuma Duga, Sunjata's father's bard. In several respects, Jakuma Duga and Balla Fasseke are model bards, counselling their noble patrons and cheering or encouraging them by their songs. However, according to the epic, Balla Fasseke's favorite instrument was the *kɔ́ra* – a large harp lute which, though popular with the modern Malinke, apparently did not exist in the fourteenth century.[54] This strongly suggests that several aspects of the epic's description of Jakuma Duga and Balla Fasseke are anachronistic.

[52] This idea, initially developed by H. Munro Chadwick and N. Kershaw Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature* (3 vols., Cambridge, 1932, 1936, 1940), has been applied to the Manding epics by John William Johnson, 'The epic of Sun-Jata: an attempt to define the model for African epic poetry' (Ph.D. thesis, Folklore Institute, Indiana University, Bloomington, 1978).

[53] Thus, I reverse Gordon Innes' argument. According to him: 'Folklorists have rightly pointed out that there is reason to suspect the historicity of any purportedly historical account when similar accounts are found elsewhere in the literature, either oral or written. [...] Hence in the case of the Sunjata epic, which contains so many common motifs, one begins to wonder what, if anything, is based on historical facts. I must confess that if there were no independent historical documentation confirming the existence of Sunjata, I should be inclined to doubt that there had ever been a historical Sunjata' (Innes, *Sunjata*, 26).

[54] The only stringed instrument mentioned in the medieval Arabic sources is the *kanībrī* (Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Tuḥfat*, iv, 406; Cuoq, *Recueil*, 305). This Persian word refers to an instrument which normally has only two strings (R. Mauny, V. Monteil, A. Djenidi, S. Robert, J. Devisse, *Extraits tirés des voyages d'Ibn Baṭṭūṭa*, Dakar, 1966, 55, n. 4). Trumpets, drums, and especially the xylophone are the prominent instruments at the Malian court. Cf. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Tuḥfat*, iv, 405, 412; Cuoq, *Recueil*, 304, 307; and al-'Umarī, *Masālik al-abṣār* fo. 29v., 31; Cuoq, *Recueil*, 269–70, 272.

One passage of the epic is particularly intriguing. According to it, Balla Fasseke discovered and learned to play the *bála* or xylophone while held captive by Sumanguru Kante. Till then, Sumanguru Kante was the only person entitled to play the xylophone, which he kept in his fetish room.[55] This suggests that the *bála* xylophone, like ironworking, was one of the sources of Sumanguru Kante's mystical power. It also suggests that the scene in which Balla Fasseke finds and learns to play the xylophone represents the transfer of mystical control of the balafon from the Sosso king to the Malinke.

I suggest the following explanation of the epic's apparent inconsistencies. Sumanguru Kante was a blacksmith, but not a caste blacksmith. He was a blacksmith only in the sense that he had formed an alliance with divinities associated with ironworking, and thus iron, ironworking and certain iron objects were for him both symbols of – and means to – mystical and political power. After Sumanguru's defeat at the hands of the Malinke, his descendants, relatives, members of his clan, and/or political allies preserved their special relation to ironworking. However, the nature of this relationship was gradually re-interpreted. While retaining its symbolic and religious dimension, it increasingly became the prime professional specialization of Sumanguru's descendants and allies. At the same time, the social status of blacksmiths was modified, so that they could no longer pose a threat to Malinke power.

Balla Fasseke may have been either a Sosso or Malinke agent, but when he and his descendants, or other groups closely associated with him, were entrusted with the xylophone, their relationship to the Malinke princes (i.e. the newly founded Keita dynasty) was modified, so that the Malinke could benefit from the balafon's magical powers without being threatened by them. Persons entrusted with the *bála*, who at first may have also had important consultative and political roles, gradually developed into professional musicians-spokesmen.

These hypotheses are supported by several kinds of evidence: (1) Iron, ironworking, iron objects, and musical instruments are symbols of kingship in numerous societies, both in Africa and elsewhere. In several African states, kings and chiefs are explicitly identified with blacksmiths, and in a few cases, members of the ruling dynasty may even engage in ironworking.[56] Musical instruments figure prominently among the regalia of African kings, and as such, receive libations and sacrifices.[57] (2) The epic places considerable stress on the magical properties of the xylophone. (3) The Kuyate families of Niagassola (Guinea) maintain a cult in which a very large and old xylophone, said to have been that of Sumanguru Kante, figures promi-

[55] Niane, *Soundjata*, 73–7; Cissé and Kamissoko, *L'empire du Mali*, i, 359–67; Innes, *Sunjata*, 200–31, 272–81; Johnson, *Epic*, 148–50.

[56] See, e.g. Walter Cline, *Metallurgy in Negro Africa* (Menasha, Wisconsin, 1937) and Georges Balandier, *La vie quotidienne au royaume du Kongo du XVI^e au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1965).

[57] See notably Claude Tardits, *Le royaume bamoum* (Paris, 1980), 512–513, 587, 637–639, 682–693; Claude-Hélène Perrot, *Les Anyi-Ndenye et le pouvoir aux XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles* (Abidjan/Paris, 1982), 135–6; Alfred Adler, *La mort est le masque du roi. La royauté sacrée des Moundang du Tchad* (Paris, 1982), 291–4, 336–7; Joseph Fortier, *Le couteau de jet sacré. Histoire des Sar et de leurs rois au sud du Tchad* (Paris, 1982).

nently.[58] (4) Kante, Kuyate, Dumbia, and the other bard and blacksmith clan names cited in the epic are typical bard and blacksmith names today. Propositions (3) and (4) do not, of course, prove the historicity of the epic, but they do show that there must be some relationship between the events described in the epic and the social structures of imperial Mali.

Examination of modern Manding social structures suggests that interclan joking relationships (*sènenkunya*) may have evolved as a model for the establishment of the relationships that ultimately led to the emergence of castes. Like caste status, the joking relationship contracted by two clans is eternal, transmitted indefinitely from one generation to the next. The interclan joking relationship, like the noble/caste client relationship, requires that each party help the other. Above all, it prohibits each party from killing or inflicting bodily harm upon the other. Like the noble/caste link, the joking relationship may be accompanied by a prohibition of intermarriage. Among the Malinke, unlike many other peoples, *sènenkunya* relationships may be contracted by groups of unequal power or status; one is often referred to as the junior, the other as the senior brother. The ceremonies by which *sènenkunya* relationships are contracted involve the bilateral exchange of blood by the contracting partners. Stories of the origin of caste (especially bard) groups often refer to the unilateral ingestion of part of the body substance of the ancestor of the noble group by the caste ancestor.[59] While these stories may not be literally true, they do show that for the Malinke, joking relationships contracted by noble clans, and the noble/caste relationships, are conceptually related. Thus, it seems that castes may have originated in interclan alliances contracted in conditions of extreme inequality. With time, these relationships, which may have initially bound the 'bards' and 'blacksmiths' only to the leading Manding clans, and their major correlates – exclusion from political office and a prohibition on intermarriage – may have been generalized, creating endogamous, politically subordinate groups.

Analysis of other West African institutions shows that while it is of course realized that one group may deprive another of political or military power, it is generally believed that one may never dispossess a group of its religious or magical prerogatives. Thus, in areas or villages where one ethnic group has deprived another of its political privileges, the autochthonous groups nevertheless remain responsible for rituals associated with farming, the Earth, and *genii loci*.[60] In many or most African states, members of an

[58] Namankoumba Kouyaté, 'Recherches sur la tradition orale au Mali (pays manding)', Diplôme d'Etudes Supérieures, Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines, Université d'Alger, 1969–70.

[59] For a general interpretation of joking relationships, see Harry Tegnaeus, *Blood Brothers: An Ethno-Sociological Study of the Institutions of Blood-Brotherhood with Special Reference to Africa* (New York, 1952). About joking relationships in the Manding world and their relationships to traditions of caste origins, see notably Henri Labouret, 'La parenté à plaisanteries en Afrique occidentale', *Africa*, II (1929), 244–54; *Les Manding et leur langue* (Paris, 1934), 100–4; Doumbia, 'Etude'; Denise Paulme, 'Parenté à plaisanteries et alliance par le sang en Afrique occidentale', *Africa*, XII (1939), 433–44, and 'Pactes de sang, classes d'âge et classes en Afrique noire', *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* (1968), 12–33; and Camara, *Gens de la parole*, 34–40, 228–30.

[60] See, e.g. Maurice Delafosse, *Haut-Sénégal-Niger* (Paris, 1972), iii, 128–33, and Labouret, *Les Manding*, 43–9, on the distinction between political and Earth chiefs among

evicted dynasty retain a privileged status.[61] These thought patterns help explain why the Malinke rulers would have been interested in forming some kind of alliance with the vanquished Sosso leaders: only by this means could they preserve themselves from their potentially dangerous magical powers – and even turn them to their own advantage.

Interpretations of the epic that do not see it as reflecting a radical transformation of the status of bards and blacksmiths, linked in some way to the Sosso/Malinke war, are unsatisfactory. One may reject the view that any relationships between the protagonists of the epic and present-day caste people are purely coincidental. How can one explain, on such an hypothesis, the continuity in clan names, or that caste people still maintain cults associated with the epic's heroes?

According to another, seemingly plausible interpretation, the epic, or certain parts of it, could be merely a transposition of Malinke court rituals. The scene in which Balla Fasseke discovers and learns to play the xylophone may indeed be a transposition of a court ritual, symbolizing the transition from Sosso to Malinke power. However, such a ritual makes sense only if both (*a*) there was a major Sosso–Malinke conflict; and (*b*) the xylophone had emblematic and therefore also (in the context of West African thought) magical value.

One may also reject a third hypothesis, according to which the epic's depiction of bards and blacksmiths is aimed at justifying their present (subordinate) place in society. Thus, Sumanguru Kante's defeat would serve to show later blacksmiths that they should not strive for political power. However, how would a *hɔ́rɔn* society, which had long assigned blacksmiths an inferior role, imagine that they had ever been rulers? Furthermore, would not the fictional evocation of such a situation go against Malinke *hɔ̀rɔn* ('noble') interests, by suggesting to blacksmiths that they once had a leading role and that they may yet recover it? Furthermore, this hypothesis is

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the Manding. In contrast to many recent studies (including Michel Cartry, 'Résumé des conférénces et travaux', in *Annuaire de l'Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, V^e Section – Sciences Religieuses*, vol. 91 [1982–3], 85–9, and Michel Izard, *Gens du pouvoir, gens de la terre. Les institutions politiques de l'ancien royaume du Yatenga* (Cambridge/Paris, 1985), I feel that a careful look at the historical evidence shows that certain religious duties are attributed to the earliest or earlier inhabitants, sometimes leading – in areas characterized by several waves of settlement – to the parcelling of religious privileges.

[61] For example, descendants of the Songhay ruler Sonni Ali are still renowned as magicians, and both they and descendants of Mali's Keita dynasty hold periodical gatherings. See, e.g. Jean Rouch, *La religion et la magie songhay* (Brussels, 1989); Germaine Dieterlen, 'Mythe et organisation sociale au Soudan français', *Journal de la Société des Africanistes*, XXV (1955), 39–76 & XXIX (1959), 119–38; Claude Meillassoux, 'Les cérémonies septennales du Kamablõ de Kaaba (Mali) (5–12 avril 1968)', *Journal de la Société des Africanistes*, XXXVIII (1968), 173–83. Sékéné-Mody Cissoko has shown that among the Manding-speaking Khassonké of the Kayes region of Mali, some princely lineages, though permanently excluded from political office, retained considerable prestige and received indemnities and tax exemptions. ('Les princes exclus du pouvoir royal [*mansaya*] dans les royaumes du Khasso [XVIII–XIX^e s.]', *BIFAN*, XXXV [1973], 46–56, esp. pp. 54–6). In the quite different cultural context of southwestern Chad, Alfred Adler has shown how representatives of the first Moundang dynasty retained a residual role in the court ceremonies of the succeeding dynasty (*La Mort*, 33–8, 106–9).

incompatible with another aspect of the epic: while characterization of Sumanguru Kante is negative, that of his nephew Fakoli – a great blacksmith warrior who eventually joins the Malinke cause – is extremely positive. Fakoli has all the qualities of a great Malinke hero – generosity and cunning as well as physical might and strategic ability, but as a blacksmith, he no more than Sumanguru Kante had the right to bear arms, let alone lead men into combat or marry *hɔ́rɔn* women.

THE SPREAD OF CASTES

Linguistic and sociological data and oral traditions referring to relatively recent times (the past two hundred years) combine to show that caste institutions were independently founded by at most three peoples: the Wolof, the Soninke, and the Manding-speakers.

Comparison of terms used in West African languages to designate endogamous artisans and musicians shows a high frequency of word borrowing. We have identified sixty-seven terms, used in eleven languages. They are formed from at most thirty-three distinct roots. The twenty-three terms for bards correspond to only nine roots and the ten terms for leatherworkers to at most eight roots, while nearly all the languages have at least one native term for 'blacksmith' (eighteen terms, twelve roots), a fact which, consistently with other data, suggests that knowledge, or at least awareness, of ironworking techniques preceded the emergence of a well-developed caste system among most West African peoples.[62]

The implications of these figures – which, in the present state of African lexicography, can only be regarded as rough indicators – become clearer when we examine the languages for which we have relatively full data. The Bambara and Malinke of Mali distinguish up to eleven different designations for caste people, corresponding to nine distinct groups (*segi* and *surasegi* are

[62] These languages are: Manding, Soninke, Dan, Wolof, Fulfulde, Senufo, Dogon, Minianka, Songhay, Moorish Arabic and Tuareg. Dictionaries consulted include: Manding: Maurice Delafosse, *La langue mandingue et ses dialectes (malinké, bambara, dioula)*, vol. 2: *Dictionnaire mandingue–français* (Paris, 1955); Charles Bailleul, *Petit dictionnaire bambara–français, français–bambara* (England, 1981); Wolof: *Lexique wolof-français*, Centre de Linguistique Appliquée de Dakar, 4 vols. (Dakar, 1976, 1977, 1979, 1981); Fulfulde: Henri Gaden, *Le poular : dialecte peul du Fouta sénégalais*, vol. 2: *Lexique poular-français* (Paris, 1914); G. V. Zubko, *Dictionnaire peul (fula)-russe-français d'environ 25,000 mots* (Moscou, 1980); Dogon: Geneviève Calame-Griaule, *Dictionnaire dogon. Dialecte tɔrɔ* (Paris, 1968); Minianka: Jean Cauvin, *L'image, la langue et la pensée*, vol. 2: *Recueil de proverbes de Karangasso* (St Augustin, 1980), which includes a vocabulary; Songhay: André Prost, *La langue sonay et ses dialectes* (Dakar, 1956), 'Supplément au dictionnaire Sonay–Français (parler de Gao, Mali)', *BIFAN*, xxxix (1977), 584–657, Jean-Marie Ducroz and Marie-Claire Charles, *Lexique soŋey (songay)–français. Parler kaado du Gorouol* (Paris, 1978); Moorish Arabic: Roger Pierret, *Etude du dialecte maure des régions sahariennes et sahéliennes de l'Afrique Occidentale Française* (Paris, 1948); Tuareg: Charles de Foucauld, *Dictionnaire touareg–français. Dialecte de l'Ahaggar*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1951); Francis Nicolas, *La langue berbère de Mauritanie* (Dakar, 1953).

The following works also proved particularly helpful: Pollet and Winter, *La société soninké*; Olivier de Sardan, *Concepts*; Zemp, 'Musiciens autochtones'; and Norris, *Shinqiti*. All transcriptions and analyses of Senufo terms are due to Pierre Boutin and correspond to the Tyebara dialect (personal communication, 1982).

alternative designations for the *laobe*). Four terms are native to Manding (*nùmu*, blacksmith, *jèli*, bard, *fùnɛ*, religious bard or buffoon, and *kùle*, woodworker), while a fifth term (*garanke*, leatherworker) could be either of Manding derivation or borrowed from the closely related Soninke language.[63] These five groups are socially the most significant ones, and also the ones most frequently present among the Manding. The *maabɔ*, *laobe* and *gèsere* are found in some localities only, and are always considered to be of recent foreign origin.

The Soninke language includes six designations for specific castes. The three most widely represented and socially significant groups – the *gesere* bards, the *garanke* leatherworkers and *tage* blacksmiths – are known by terms of Soninke derivation. The name of a second group of bards, the *jaare*, is borrowed from Manding *jèli*, while another term, *sakke*, whose linguistic history is obscure, applies to Fulfulde-speaking woodworkers. A sixth term applies to a localized, highly specialized bard group that claims descent from Soninke blacksmiths (*kusatage*: from *tage*, blacksmith, and Kusa, a Soninke population).[64]

Of the five Wolof designations for endogamous occupational groups, four, including a term each for blacksmiths, bards, leatherworkers, and weavers, may have been formed from Wolof roots (*tëgg*; *géwél*; *uudé*, *wuudé*; *ràbbkat*). The fifth term, *lawbe*, designates Fulfulde-speaking woodworkers, and is borrowed from their language.

The various Fulfulde (Fulani and Tukulor) dialects prominently include both native and borrowed terms among the designations for the main endogamous occupational groups. Of thirteen terms, ten are of considerable frequency. Terms for the blacksmiths (*baylo*, *bayillo/wayilɓe*, *waylulɓe*) and two of the three main bard groups (*maabo/maabuuɓe*, *bammbaaɗo/wammbaaɓe*) are formed from Fulfulde roots, as is the term for the woodcarvers (*labbo/lawɓe*). The word for 'blacksmith' is derived from a verbal root meaning 'to shape' or 'to form'; *bammbaaɗo/wammbaaɓe* is derived from a verbal root meaning 'to carry on one's back like a baby', expressing the bard family's dependency on its noble patrons. Numerous West African languages have borrowed the Fulani term for woodcarver.

However, none of the four terms for leatherworkers can be linked to a Fulfulde root. Furthermore, the syllabic structures of two terms – *garanke* and *garkasaajo* – are incompatible with a Fulfulde origin.[65] The first term is borrowed from Manding or Soninke *garanke*, while the second term has affinities with Songhay *garaasa* and Tuareg *gargassa*. A third term, *galabbo/alauɓe*, literally means 'a person from Galam', a Soninke zone near Fouta Toro. The term *sakke/sakkeeɓe*, which applies to Fulfulde-speaking woodcarvers among the Soninke, applies to Soninke-speaking leatherworkers

[63] *Fùnɛ* (also pronounced *fina* or *fino*), which designates a caste whose members often specialize in reciting the Koran and singing praises of the Prophet, pilgrims and religious scholars, may in fact be derived from the Arabic root *fann*, 'art', 'technique'. However, it does not seem to be related to any non-Manding African words.

[64] Claude Meillassoux, Lassana Doucouré and Diaowé Simagha, *Légende de la dispersion des Kusa* (Dakar, 1967).

[65] Fulfulde words are constituted by closed syllables, CV(V)C(C), to which various suffixes may be added. Manding words are typically composed of open syllables, CV(V)(N). (C, consonant; V, vowel; N, nasal).

among the Fulani. It could have an origin in either language but must have changed its meaning at least once in its history. The fact that Fulfulde terms for leatherworkers vary from region to region and often correspond to those of alien castes argues not only for the intrusive nature of leatherworking castes in Fulani society but for the foreign origin of advanced leatherworking techniques. The remaining three terms apply to small, marginal groups. The terms *jeeli(jo)* and *nyaamakala*, which do not always carry the Fulfulde class suffixes and whose syllabic structures are unusual in that language, are obviously borrowed from Manding (*jèli*, bard, and *nyàmakala*, the collective designation for caste people). The term *buurnaajo/buurnaaɓe*, which applies to an endogamous group whose women are potters, may have originally referred to a group of Wolof slaves.[66]

In several languages, however, virtually all the terms used to designate caste people are of foreign origin. Thus, of the seven Senufo terms, three are obviously of Manding origin. (*Càgi*, jeweller → *çàgɪ̀bèlè*, jeweller; *jèli*, bard-leatherworker → *cèlìbèlè*, leatherworker; *kùle*, woodworker → *gùlèbèlè*, woodworker; *-bèlè* is the Senufo plural suffix. Note that Senufo has preserved the Manding tonal schemes.)[67] The tonal scheme of *kpɛ̀ɛ̀bèlè* is incompatible with a Senufo origin, while the tonal schemes of two other terms – *sūmbóróbèlè* (blacksmith) and *cēdúmbèlè* (worker in white metals) – strongly suggest that they are borrowed.[68] Only one of the Senufo designations for the endogamous occupational groups, *sūmbóróbèlè* (blacksmith), exhibits characteristic Senufo phonological and tonal structures. Thus, of the five Senufo designations for metalworkers, only one is likely to be formed from a Senufo root, while both the term for specialist woodworkers and that for specialist leatherworkers are of foreign (specifically Manding) origin.

At least three out of four Songhay words for bard are of foreign origin. (Soninke *gesere* → Songhay *jèsérè*; Wolof *géwél* → Fulfulde *gawlo* → Songhay *gáwlà*; Fulfulde *maabo* → *maabe*.) The Songhay word *zémmùkóẁ* may have been formed either from a root common to Songhay and the Manding languages (it has been argued that Songhay has affinities with the Mande family of languages), or involve borrowing from Manding. The Songhay language includes the verb *zemmu*, 'to praise', but according to the Songhay themselves, the term *zamu*, 'song in honor of an individual and his clan', comes from Manding *jàmu*, 'clan name'.[69]

One of the Dogon words for blacksmith (*írunɛ/írũ*) and the Dogon word for leatherworkers (*jàũ*) exhibit the characteristic phonological and tonal structures of the language. *Irunɛ/írũ* was probably formed by dissimilation

[66] According to Gaden (*Lexique*, 22), *buurnaajo* comes from a Wolof expression meaning 'the Buur's man'. This etymology is powerfully supported by the fact that most *buurnaaɓe* have Wolof clan names. See Wane, *Les Toucouleur*, 59.

[67] *Càgi* may ultimately come from Arabic: classical Arabic *sā'igh*, pronounced *sāyigh* in most North African dialects > *cayigi* → *càgi*.

[68] In the generic form of the base, Senufo nouns present the following tonal schemes: low–low, middle–low, middle–middle, low–middle. The last three schemes are found only in Senufo roots. The tonal scheme –low–low is found both in Senufo roots and in loanwords. The tonal scheme –middle–high is found both in compound words and in loanwords. The tonal schemes low–high and high–high are only found among loanwords (Pierre Boutin, personal communication, 1982).

[69] Jeanne Bisilliat and Dioulde Laya, *La tradition orale dans la société songhay-zarma : les zamu ou poèmes sur les noms* (Niamey, 1972).

from the inferred form **ínunɛ*, 'iron man'.[70] However, the other Dogon word for blacksmith, *jémɛnɛ/jɛmɔ́* – curiously enough, the one that applies to what the Dogon believe to be the oldest and only authentic blacksmith group, and the only one to which they assign a major ritual role – comes from Songhay *zèm* (often pronounced [*jɛ:mi*].[71] The Dogon do not have a specific term for caste musicians. The term *gɔ̀:gɔ̀:nɛ*, formed from the verbal root *gɔ̀:*, 'dance, heartbeat', may apply to any dancer or musician.

Endogamous specialist groups are a feature of Minianka social structure in some areas only. Blacksmiths, whether or not they form endogamous groups, are known throughout Minianka country as *tũtũ*.[72] Endogamous woodworkers and calabash menders, who are always regarded as Bambara, are called by the Bambara term, *kule*.[73] The Dan term for endogamous bards – a group found among only some Dan populations – is borrowed from Manding. (Dan *yœbo* [masc. sing.], *yœḍɛ* [fem. sing.], *yœmi* [masc. pl.]; from southern Manding *yèè*; *-bo*, *-ḍɛ*, and *-mi* are Dan class suffixes).[74] The endogamous blacksmith groups found among the Voltaic-speaking peoples of eastern Ghana are known by the Manding term *numu*.[75] The Temne designations for bards and leatherworkers, *ū-yēlībá and ū-káránké*, also come from Manding (*-ba* is a Manding augmentative suffix; u- is a Temne class marker; Temne has preserved the tonal scheme of the Manding terms).[76]

The Moorish term for endogamous bards – masc. sing. *īggīw*, pl. *īggāwen*, fem. sing. *tīggīwit*, fem. pl. *tīggāwāten*) – comes from Wolof *géwél*, 'bard'. Furthermore, the presence of the prefix *t-* in the feminine form shows that it was borrowed at a time when the ancestors of the present-day Moors were predominantly Berber rather than Arabic-speaking.[77] The Moors have two, synonymous designations for the endogamous metalsmiths: *m'āllem* and *ṣunnā'*. Both terms are Arabic, though they are rarely if ever used with this meaning in other Arabic dialects or in classical Arabic. In classical Arabic *mu'allim* means 'teacher', while *ṣāni'*, pl. *ṣunnā'*, is a general term for 'craftsman' or 'worker'. *Ḥaddād* is the usual designation, both in classical Arabic and in the modern dialects, for 'blacksmith'.

The Tuareg, like the Moors, call their endogamous musicians *ag'gou*, pl. *ag'gouten*. Among the northern Tuareg, the endogamous blacksmiths are known as *enad*, pl. *enaden* (lit. 'the other'), a term which well expresses Tuareg perceptions of their strangeness. Among the southern Tuareg, endogamous blacksmiths are known as *gargassa*, a term related to Songhay *garaasa*, Fulani *garkasaaɓe*, and possibly also Soninke and Manding *garanke*.

The importance of cross-cultural influences in the development of social

[70] Calame-Griaule, *Dictionnaire*, 122.

[71] *Ibid.* 130–1.

[72] Cauvin, *Recueil*, Jonckers, 'Notes'.

[73] Jonckers, 'Notes', 112.

[74] Maurice Houis and Hugo Zemp attempt to derive the Dan terms from the frequent Manding form *yèli*, but, for both linguistic and geographical reasons, this is unlikely. The Dan have manifold cultural relations with the Mauka, who use the form *yèè* (Zemp, 'Musiciens autochtones', 377–8).

[75] René A. Bravmann, *Islam and Tribal Art in West Africa* (London, 1974), 74–80, 83, 87, 95–7, 99, 128, 132.

[76] A. K. Turay, 'Manding and Susu Loanwords in Temne', International Conference on Manding Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 1972.

[77] This point has already been made by H. T. Norris, *Shinqiti*, 53.

hierarchies in West Africa becomes even clearer when one examines collective designations for caste people, i.e. terms that apply to all the endogamous occupational groups present in a given society. Such terms are found in only five societies – among the Manding, Soninke, Wolof, Fulani, and Tukulor – and have developed from only two radicals. Manding *nyàma-kala* is a compound word, formed from *nyàma*, which in this context probably means 'energy' or 'life force', but could also mean 'junk, refuse'; and from *kàla*, 'receptacle, handle'.[78] Soninke *ñaxamala* cannot receive a convincing etymology in that language, but could have easily been formed from Manding *nyàmakala* by metathesis (commutation of syllables within a word).[79] Tukulor and Fulani *nyeenyo*, pl. *nyeenyɓe*, probably comes from Wolof *ñeeño*. The Fulani and Tukulor forms can be related to a Fulfulde radical meaning 'to flatter', but it is more likely that they were borrowed from Wolof, since at least one other Fulfulde designation for the endogamous specialists is borrowed from Wolof (W. *géwél*, 'bard' → Fulfulde *gawlo/awluɓe*) and other evidence supporting strong Wolof influence on the development of Fulani and Tukulor social hierarchies. The term *nyaama-kala*, occasionally used by the Tukulor as a synonym for *nyeenyɓe*, is obviously borrowed from Manding; its syllabic structure is incompatible with that of Fulfulde and it lacks class suffixes.[80] The Senufo term *fezɛ̰ɔ̰*, pl. *fe-ɟɛ̰ɛ́bèlè*, is not a true equivalent of Manding *nyàmakala*, Soninke *ñaxamala*, Wolof *ñeeño*, or Fulani and Tukulor *nyeenyo/nyeenyɓe*. It literally means 'peculiar, unusual, non-ordinary people' and applies to all those who do not derive their living primarily from agriculture, including traders and non-caste artisans.

Sociological data and oral traditions combine to show that the Fulani and Tukulor, who originated many but not all of their designations for caste people, ultimately derived their caste institutions from those of other peoples. Endogamous specialist groups are found only among sedentary (or semi-sedentary) Fulani populations – notably those of Mali, Senegambia, and northern Guinea – who have been in prolonged contact with societies (Manding, Soninke, or Wolof) which have had highly developed caste institutions for centuries. Caste institutions are highly developed among the Fulani of Mali, Senegambia, and northern Guinea, but absent among the Fulani of Nigeria as well as among the Bororo Fulani. Furthermore, there is little continuity between the musical and literary repertories of the Fulani-affiliated caste bards and those of the Bororo Fulani.[81] In Mali, the major

[78] Discussions of the meaning of *nyàma* and the etymology of *nyàmakala* include Youssouf Cissé, 'Notes sur les sociétés de chasseurs malinké', *Journal de la Société des Africanistes*, XXXIV (1964), 175–226, pp. 192–207, and Charles Bird, Martha Kendall and Kalilou Tera, 'The etymology of Nyamakala', forthcoming.

[79] For various hypotheses concerning the origin of Soninke *ñaxamala*, see Claude Meillassoux, 'Notes sur l'étymologie de *nyamakala*', *Notes Africaines*, CXXXIX (1973), 79.

[80] Yaya Wane nevertheless provides a Tukulor popular etymology. According to him, this word literally means 'those who eat from any trough', *Les Toucouleur*, 50.

[81] Christiane Seydou provides a good discussion of this question in 'Aspects de la littérature peule', in Mahdi Adamu and A. H. M. Kirk-Greene (eds.), *Pastoralists of the West African Savanna* (Manchester, 1986), 101–12. Also, compare Christiane Seydou, *Silâmaka et Poullôri* (Paris, 1972), and *La geste de Ham-Bodêdio* (Paris, 1976), to Roger Labatut, *Chants de vie et de beauté, recueillis chez les peuls nomades du Nord-Cameroun* (Paris, 1974).

instrument of the Fulani bards, a four-stringed guitar, is identical to that of the Bambara bards. Although the Fulani have one of the few weaver castes of West Africa, several key Fulfulde terms for thread also occur in Manding and several other West African languages.[82]

Most Tukulor leatherworkers have Soninke clan names, while most Tukulor blacksmiths have either Wolof or Soninke names.[83] Members of several Senufo castes speak a Manding dialect among themselves.[84]

Oral traditions confirm the foreign origin of Songhay endogamous bards. Thus, the *jèsérè* claim Soninke descent while the *maabe* claim Fulani descent. Each of these groups supports its claims by genealogies. Furthermore, the *jèsérè* bards often sing in Soninke, while members of the other two groups sometimes perform in Fulfulde.[85] The genealogies of the Senufo *gùlèbèlè* reach back as many as two hundred years, showing an origin among the Bambara *kùle*.[86] Genealogies of Dan endogamous bards show that many families, fleeing the upheavals caused by Samory's campaigns, only settled in Dan country in the last decades of the nineteenth century.[87] The Moors ascribe a black African origin to the *īggīw* musicians, a view supported by *īggīw* genealogies.[88] The *lawɓe* woodworkers, found throughout the West African savannah, are always regarded, both by themselves and others, as of Fulani origin, and although they are usually bilingual, they invariably speak Fulfulde as a first language. Minianka endogamous blacksmiths not only believe themselves to be of Manding origin, but have Manding clan names. Furthermore, only those Minianka cultivators who themselves claim a Manding origin fully respect the rules of clan endogamy.[89]

Analysis of the distribution of craft and musical activities among various social groups further confirms the ultimately foreign – and incompletely assimilated – nature of caste institutions among the Dogon, Songhay, Dan, Moors, and Tuareg. Among each of these peoples, only a few musical activities are restricted to endogamous bards. Among the Moors and Tuareg, most, but by no means all, musical performances are provided by bards.[90] Furthermore, among the Moors and Tuareg, metalwork is the only craft activity restricted to the endogamous groups: art-quality work in wood, leather, and stone may be performed even by the highest-ranking persons.[91]

In summary, linguistic evidence shows that endogamous specialist groups developed as a result of foreign influence – specifically, the implantation of

[82] Gaden, *Proverbes*, 323; Gardi, *Ein Markt*, 335–7.

[83] Y. Wane, *Les Toucouleur*, 52, 54.

[84] Pierre Boutin, personal communication, 1982.

[85] Hama, *Histoire traditionnelle*, 119–20; Maiga and Maiga, *Le griot*; Olivier de Sardan, *Concepts*, 157, 224–30, 281–2, 310, 330–1, 353–4, 400–1.

[86] Richter, 'Further considerations', 39, *Art*, 15–17, 81–2.

[87] Zemp, 'Musiciens autochtones, 376. [88] Norris, *Shinqiti*, 35–6, 53–4, 65–7.

[89] Jonckers, 'Notes', 106, 119–20.

[90] See, e.g. Calame-Griaule, *Ethnologie et langage*; Jean Rouch, *Religion*; Bernard Surugue, *Contribution à l'étude de la musique sacrée zarma-songhay* (Niamey, 1972); Hugo Zemp, *La musique dans la pensée et la vie sociale d'une société africaine* (Paris, 1971); Norris, *Shinqiti*; and Michel Guignard, *Musique, honneur et plaisir au Sahara* (Paris, 1975).

[91] See, e.g. Lhote, *Les Touaregs*, 276–8; and *Comment campent les Touaregs*, 51–61, 90–1, 107–10; and 'L'anneau de bras des Touaregs, ses techniques et ses rapports avec la préhistoire', *BIFAN*, XII (1950), 456–87.

caste persons initially affiliated with another ethnic group – among the Senufo, Minianka, and several peoples where they constitute marginal minorities. The allogenous origin of these endogamous specialist groups is furthermore confirmed both by oral traditions and by sociological analysis. Linguistic evidence establishes the foreign origin of certain key social groups found among the Fulani, Tukulor, Songhay, Dogon, Moors, and Tuareg. Oral traditions, linguistic and sociological data, taken together, prove that each of the latter systems developed, largely or wholly, from foreign institutions. The Manding and Soninke, and to a lesser extent the Wolof, assimilated endogamous groups who acquired their distinctive characteristics while affiliated with another ethnic group; but there is no evidence that any of the castes that plays a pivotal role in the social life of these peoples is of foreign origin. Thus, either caste institutions developed independently among each of these three peoples, or, having appeared among one or two, they were adopted by the other(s) at so early a date that no trace of foreign origin has been left in either language or social structure.

TRANSFORMATIONS OF CASTE CHARACTERISTICS

Caste characteristics evolved with time. Modification of caste characteristics was particularly favored by movement across highly permeable ethnic boundaries, but also took place among groups that did not change ethnic affiliations. The most frequent transformations included: increase in importance of a secondary occupation, until it became the primary occupation; a complete change in occupation; change in rank and in the nature of relations with the majority population. Numerous examples of each of these developments may be cited.

The emergence of a secondary activity as a main occupation helps explain why the Senufo *cèlìbèlè* leatherworkers, who clearly developed from Manding *jèli*, have no specialized musical activities. Among most Manding-speaking groups, *jèli* have both musical and leatherworking activities, and the musical ones are considered primary. However, in some areas, most *jèli* have leatherworking but not musical skills. *Jèli* skilled in leatherwork may have given up their musical activities when they settled among the Senufo, who do not assign any musical activity on an hereditary basis. Alternatively, the *jèli* who settled among the Senufo may have specialized primarily or exclusively in leatherwork.

Yaya Wane has documented several instances of change of caste occupation and/or affiliation among the Tukulor. Most *lawɓe* woodworking groups obtain part of their living from entertainment, but one group has completely given up woodwork for music and dance. Some of these *lawɓe* musicians, and at least one group of *maabo/maabuuɓe* musician-weavers, have been assimilated to the *bammbaaɗo/wammbaaɓe* bards. There are some differences between the social status, as well as musical repertories, of *maabo/maabuuɓe* and *bammbaaɗo/wammbaaɓe* bards.[92] The Tukulor distinguish between the *lawɓe laaɗe*, who specialize in boatmaking, and the *lawɓe worworɓe*, who make all other wooden items. Both groups presumably developed from a single, initially undifferentiated *lawɓe* group.

[92] Wane, *Les Toucouleur*, 50–2, 59–62.

Many Soninke believe that the *kusatage* bards, who are associated with the Kusa subgroup of the Soninke, were originally blacksmiths. This view is powerfully supported by the etymology of *kusatage*, which literally means 'blacksmiths (*tage*) of the Kusa'.[93]

Many Senufo populations have matrilineal kinship systems, or, alternatively, emphasize patrilateral relationships for some purposes and matrilateral ones for others. Though their origins lie with the patrilineal Manding, Senufo caste people have adjusted by at least partially adopting the kinship practices and terminologies of their hosts.[94] Manding caste people, except for blacksmiths, are excluded from the main Manding initiation society, the Komo. Senufo caste people, however, are generally admitted to the main Senufo initiation society, the Poro.[95] Manding *jèli* living among the Soninke have a lower social status than the *gesere* bards, whom the Soninke consider their only true bards.

It is easier to document expansion of the caste system than loss of caste status, but this process too must have occurred. In several societies, one can observe intermediate situations, where persons whose origins lie in highly hierarchical caste societies continue to be regarded as 'different', but are not ranked relative to other categories of the population. Thus, in eastern Ghana, *numu* blacksmiths, who clearly hail from Manding societies, practise their traditional craft specialties, have important ritual roles, and maintain group endogamy, but are considered to be neither superior nor inferior to the cultivators.[96] Among the Senufo and the Minianka, descendants of Manding caste people no longer form fully endogamous groups. One Senufo specialist group, the *gùlèbèlè* (whose origins lie with the strictly endogamous Bambara *kùle*) have even succeeded in acquiring a favorable matrimonial status: they accept cultivator girls as wives, but do not allow their own daughters to marry out.[97] In general, the historical record implies that caste people have been repeatedly assimilated by their hosts. For example: Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's fourteenth-century account of Iwālātan implies that endogamous bards (or a group ancestral to them) were present in this Soninke-Berber town, yet Moorish traditions imply that endogamous bards became a significant factor in Moorish society only in the sixteenth century.[98] The *Ta'rīkh al-Fattāsh* indicates that castes were present among the Songhay no later than 1550, but many contemporary Songhay bards claim a recent foreign origin.[99] This implies that several waves of bard immigrants were assimilated as ordinary status people into Songhay society.

Among the Manding, Wolof, Fulani, and other peoples whose caste institutions are highly developed, caste endogamy is strictly observed; that

[93] Meillassoux, Doucouré and Simagha, *Légende*.

[94] Albert Kientz, 'Approches de la parenté sénufo', *Journal de la Société des Africanistes*, XLIX (1979), 9–70; XLIX (1979), 9–28.

[95] G. Clamens, 'Notes d'ethnologie sénoufo', *Notes Africaines*, LIX (1953), 76–80; Kulaseli (pseudonym), 'Une phase de l'initiation à un poro forgeron sénoufo', *Notes Africaines*, LXV (1955), 9–14; Gilbert Bochet, 'Le poro des Diéli', *BIFAN*, XXI (1959), 61–101.

[96] Bravmann, *Islam*, 74–80, 83, 87, 95–7, 99, 128, 132.

[97] Richter, 'Further considerations', 46–7, *Art*, 26–9, 95–7.

[98] Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Tuḥfat*, vol. 4, 385; Cuoq, *Recueil*, 294; Norris, *Shinqiti*, 35–6, 54–5.

[99] Ibn al-Mukhtār, *Ta'rīkh al-Fattāsh*, 11, 94, 155 (pp. 14, 177, 276 of the translation); Hama, *Histoire traditionnelle*, 119–20; Maiga and Maiga, *Le griot*.

is, persons do not knowingly marry outside their own caste, or the small set of castes with whom they have recognized matrimonial exchanges. However, this does not mean that castes are demographic isolates. Caste men, like free men, may take slave concubines; the children accede to the father's social status.[100] Sometimes, free persons claim to have caste status in order to avoid slavery when they are made captive in war.[101] (As noted earlier, caste persons, unlike free men, may never be reduced to slavery.) Fusion of Manding- and Fulani-affiliated blacksmith castes was observed by Béatrice Appia-Dabit in the Fulani-dominated Futa Jalon (Guinea).[102] Most Tukulor-affiliated blacksmiths have either Wolof or Soninke clan names;[103] this strongly suggests that the Tukulor blacksmith group developed by fusion of Wolof and Soninke groups working in the same area. When caste people moved into a hitherto casteless area, they sometimes forced cultivators who practised a craft or musical activity on a part-time basis to give it up, as has been documented for the Senufo.[104] In other cases, skilled artisans and musicians may have preferred assimilation to the foreigner group to abandonment of their activities.

CONCLUSION

This article shows that it is possible to provide a partial solution to what may have seemed an intractable problem in West African social history – namely, the formation and development of endogamous artisan and musician groups – through the use of a sufficient number and variety of sources. External Arabic sources, local Arabic language chronicles, and early European travellers' accounts, as well as oral traditions, each illuminate different aspects and periods of the African past. This article also shows the value of the comparative analysis of vocabulary and institutions for the reconstruction of West African social history. Finally, it shows the value of regional-level analysis. One of our most important results – that the caste institutions now characteristic of over fifteen West African peoples developed from at most three centers, found among the Manding, Soninke, and Wolof – could not have been reached in any other way. The value of these methods for the study of castes suggests that they could be used to elucidate other aspects of West African social history.

SUMMARY

Endogamous artisan and musician groups are characteristic of over fifteen West African peoples, including the Manding, Soninke, Wolof, Serer, Fulani, Tukulor, Songhay, Dogon, Senufo, Minianka, Moors, and Tuareg. Castes appeared among the Malinke no later than 1300, and were present among the Wolof and Soninke, as well as some Songhay and Fulani populations, no later than 1500. All the West African castes ultimately developed from at most three centers, located among the Manding, Soninke, and/or Wolof. Migration is the key process explaining the current distribution of caste people. Formation of blacksmith and bard castes

[100] Fieldwork, Segou region, 1985, 1986.

[101] Doumbia, 'Etude'; Jean-Loup Amselle, *Les négociants de la savane: histoire et organisation sociale des Kooroko (Mali)* (Paris, 1977).

[102] Béatrice Appia-Dabit, 'Les forgerons du Fouta-Djallon', *Journal de la Société des Africanistes*, XXXV (1965), 317–52.

[103] Wane, *Les Toucouleur*, 52.

[104] Richter, *Art*, 102–3.

among the Manding may be related to the Sosso–Malinke war, described in the Sunjata epic, which led to the founding of the Mali empire. As they evolved over time, castes acquired secondary specializations or changed occupations, and moved up or down in rank relative to other social groups. Although marriage alliances took place within a caste or among a limited number of castes, castes did not form demographic isolates. Children of caste men and slave concubines had caste status, while free persons taken captive in war sometimes claimed to be caste members. Assimilation of local artisans to a caste may have occurred when caste institutions were first introduced into a given area.