

Salvation through Writing

The N'ko, a West African Prophetism

Jean-Loup Amselle

One of the characteristics of this ending century might very well be the resurgence of ethnic, nationalist, and fundamentalist movements, a group of manifestations conveniently designated by S. Huntington in the expression "the clash of civilizations."¹ Although in the West we live, since the end of the nineteenth century, in the paradigm of class struggle – even despite the fact that World War I fighters had proven that they accepted to "die for their country"² – the 1990s seem to toll this model's bell in favor of a hardening of identity demands.³

Much more so than Europe, Africa is habitually accused of being the chosen land of ethnic antagonisms and tribal conflicts. But contrary to the received idea, the African civil wars are not in any way an eternal characteristic of this continent, which the Europeans would have miraculously ended by instilling colonial peace and which have reappeared when the African peoples got rid of Western tutelage. In good logic, contemporary ethnic conflicts have something to do with an explanation that puts current factors first: before anything else, these result from the existence of a contradiction between the colonial character of the state and the colonial distribution of ethnic groups. It is because colonization ended both with a hardening of ethnic groups and a rigidification of the state structure that tribal antagonisms have taken on today such a violent character. The identity affirmation of the ethnic type thus discloses a feedback effect of statements written on fuzzy identities, such that we can observe in action the full weight of European historiography in the definition of identity movements claiming the most authentic africaness.⁴ It is within the context of this problematic that we propose here to examine the genesis,

development and principle characteristics of a West African scriptural prophetism, the N'ko.

The N'ko

Originally a simple alphabet aimed at transcribing the Malinke language, the N'ko (literally "I Say" in Mandingo languages)⁵ has become over the years a movement of identity affirmation with prophetic connotation throughout most of the West African countries housing members of the Mande people, notably Guinea, Mali, and Ivory Coast. The N'ko is also present in Romania and particularly in Egypt where a small community of West African nationals linked to the University Al-Hazhar publish, using elaborate technical means including computer usage, a good part of the literature in N'ko distributed in Africa south of the Sahara.

The links to the illustrious Egyptian university well illustrate the ambiguity sustained by the N'Ko movement and particularly its founder, with the Arabic language on the one hand and the Muslim religion on the other. The personality of the N'ko founder is in fact from the outset situated in line with West African maraboutism – itself intimately linked to knowledge of the Arabic language – even though, as we shall see, the latter never ceased to define his linguistic practice and identity affirmation in opposition to the Arabic language and culture.

As it is delivered to us by his intellectual inheritors, Souleymane Kanté's biography comes close to hagiography and resembles, given its essentially oral character, a foundation myth. From this fact the story that we shall read, itself the result of interviews with N'ko members, holds elements intended to make sense with respect to the current stakes of the movement and the conflicts of diverse nature that traverse it.

The Foundation Myth

The founder of N'ko, Souleymane Kanté, is the descendent of a lineage of *numu*, belonging to the status group of "blacksmiths,"

distantly originating from the Segu region in Mali. The name of this lineage, Kanté, holds great importance to the narrative device at play in the memory of the movement, in that it refers to Sumanoro Kanté, the illustrious founder of the Sosso empire, to whom all “blacksmiths,” in assuming the patronymic, involve the memory. The reference to Sumanoro, whose efforts are praised for fighting against despotism and enslavement, is in fact sometimes used as an actual model of political organization, concurrently with Sunjata, his victorious adversary and founder of the Malian empire. In any case, the destiny of Souleymane Kanté’s close ancestors is much less glorious than that of their celebrated grandfather. After leaving the region of Segu, the lineage reached the end of a long migration at Niako, in the Guinean Wasolon, where Souleymane Kanté’s paternal grandfather moved, at the end of the nineteenth century, to exercise his blacksmith activity. At this time, this entire zone is the theater of innumerable wars that fed the slave trade destined for Sahel, the Sahara and the Maghrib. Samori’s epic is nonetheless situated in this warrior and enslaving context, the great Malinke conqueror who, at the occasion of one of these raids, lifted Souleymane Kanté’s father out and away and placed him, with other captives, in the hands of the marabouts of Kankan, the Muslim capital of Upper Guinea. This region enters an era of peace as it was soon to be placed under French domination, permitting Souleymane Kanté’s father, in the meantime become a Koranic school teacher (*karamoko*), to leave Kankan and reside at Koloni, a small locality where the founder of N’ko sees the day in 1922. Following in his father’s tracks, the young Souleymane goes to the Koranic school, and passes the various steps of the curriculum, first learning the Koran (*kuranakalan*) then deepening his knowledge of Arabic grammar (*kitabukalan*).

In 1941, following his father’s death, he decides to try his luck in other countries, as a marabout and a peddler, all the while surveying from afar the activities of the Koranic school founded by his father. His peregrinations bring him to Ivory Coast where he has the opportunity to enlarge his intellectual horizon by learning French, and to Ghana where he learns English and where he discovers a Bible translated into one of the local languages, Fanti.

In 1944, at the occasion of one of his trips to Ivory Coast, he happens upon an article written by a Lebanese journalist published in an Arabic journal, containing a violent diatribe against African languages, guilty in the eyes of the writer of having neither writing nor grammar. Shocked in his African Muslim dignity by a critique emanating from an Arab, he decides to answer to that which he deems a provocation by launching into the transcription of African languages beginning with Malinke, his native language. He attempts first to transcribe this language using the Arabic alphabet but gets nowhere, and then turns to the Latin alphabet which proves equally inept at making evident the tonal character of this language.

On 14 April 1949, while at Bingerville in Ivory Coast, he is seized by a veritable revelation and invents the N'ko alphabet, which looks like the Arabic alphabet to the extent that it reads from right to left, and like the Latin alphabet to the extent that it is made up of twenty-six letters composed of vowels and consonants.

Henceforth Souleymane Kanté puts the invention of this alphabet to good use, writing and translating more than one hundred works in domains as disparate as pedagogy, literature, history, the law, and Islam, according particular importance to pharmacopoeia and to medicine that constitute, with literacy, as we shall later on see, one of the major axes of activity of the movement.

From 1977 to 1982, he resided in Mali where he attempted to impose his writing system without success, the government preferring to adopt the Latin alphabet to transcribe national languages and ensure the literacy of adults. Souleymane Kanté nonetheless profits from his stay to form the disciples who will become the framework for the N'ko association of Mali. In 1982, he leaves for the Ivory Coast where he succeeds in modifying the official transcription system of the Dioula language. Following the death of the Guinean president Sekou Touré in 1984, he returns to his native country and lives out the last years of his life surrounded by his disciples. One year before his death in 1987, these create the ICRA-N'ko association which has the role of aiding the founder and ensuring the permanence of the movement.

The Movement

In response to the article written by the Lebanese journalist considered a provocation by Souleymane Kanté, the primary goal of the ICRA-N'ko association is to "lift the challenge of writing in Africa." It is also about "ensuring the promotion of African languages and cultures and popularizing science and technical subjects relying on national languages." To activate this program, the directors of the association propose to promote literacy in the city layers and particularly among the traders, to deepen the knowledge of neo-literates in the domains of arithmetic and theology particularly, and finally to initiate the literates who use the Latin, Arabic or Slav alphabets to become trainers who can, in turn, diffuse the N'ko within the city and rural masses. Parallel to this literacy work, the members of the N'ko, relying on Souleymane Kanté's pharmacopoeia and medicine treaties, initiate a training program of traditional therapists who pursue the scientific work of plant classification begun by their master and launch into the traditional production of medicines using local substances.

Since Souleymane Kanté's death, this program has been largely handled successfully in the principal countries of West Africa where large Mandingo communities live. In Guinea, the movement is powerfully implanted, bringing together tens of thousands of neo-literates, primarily in the region of Kankan, in Malinke country, but also in the forest areas of the Kissi established around N'Zerekoré, and leading a strongly structured area of traditional therapists. In the Ivory Coast, the N'ko movement relies on the practice of Dioula as lingua franca and is represented in most of the big cities.

Finally in Mali, Souleymane Kanté's disciples who are at the head of several associations deploy an intense activity on the whole of national territory. The N'ko Movement Association (*Manden Yelenya Dè*), which includes a thousand members and is implanted in Bamako, Segou, Niono, Koutiala, Sikasso and Kayes, heads the other associations. Its directors essentially devote themselves to the promotion of literacy and proselytize actively by distributing brochures and intervening on radio and television.

The N'ko Movement Association of Traditional Therapists (*N'ko Yèkonkona Basiya Dè*) regroups the therapists who exercise

their activities in different pharmacopoeia centers of the district of Bamako. Finally the *Kurugan fuga* association, of the name of the plain where Sunjata pronounced the political charter of Mande, constitutes the ideological iron spear of the movement and aims to penetrate the ruling Malian elite by promoting a doctrine that focuses on the defense of the authentic values of the Malinke civilization.

While the characteristics of the N'ko in the three mentioned countries are not strictly identical, (the Muslim exclusion of the Ivory Coast branch in particular contrasts sharply with the more tolerant attitude of the other ramifications), it is nonetheless possible to define the larger distinctive traits of this movement, that is to say, its anti-Arabicism, its anti-Europeanism, and its demand for a pan-Malinke identity affirmation. This confrontation with the Arabic culture and world on the one hand and the European culture and world on the other is situated in the setting of a genuine "war of writing" in the exact words of the president of the N'ko Association of Mali.

The "War of Writing"

All the while coming from a Muslim background and most from the Medersas filiation, the N'ko leaders reproach the Arabic language for its "disorganized" character. In support of this thesis, they mention the existence, in this language, of a multiplicity of terms used to designate a same semantic element. This accusation of anarchy in the language moreover spreads to the Arabic cultures and societies and applies equally to the other languages and cultures of white Africa (Berber). Invoking the ideas of Cheikh Anta Diop, the fixity of the Malinke calendar anterior to Sunjata's reign is for example thus opposed to the mobility of lunar months consecutive to an ulterior islamisation.

The hostility of the members of the N'ko toward the Arabic-Berber not to say Semitic⁶ world must without a doubt be attributed to an increase of contacts between black Africa, the Maghrib, and the Middle-East. It is in this context that one ought to read in fact the mythical link that is established between the invention of

the N'ko alphabet and Souleymane Kanté's reading of the article by the Lebanese journalist denigrating African languages. Similarly the accounts that cite the difficulties encountered by the African students of Al'Azhar university, members of the N'ko, who are accused by the Egyptian ulemas of propagating another language than Arabic, even though without a doubt reflecting in part reality, must also be replaced in the setting of a rejection of the Arabic-Berber, and thus the "white" world.

The movement's will to stand apart from white Africa and the Middle East, which has as a corollary the defense of authenticity of African cultures, can also be found in the founder's attitude with respect to Europe. It is in this sense that one should understand Souleymane Kanté's declaration that "The N'ko, like Arabic, is written right to left, but like Latin, it is written with two types of letters, vowels and consonants, and it is such that it is independent because it is neither occidental, neither oriental. It is therefore based on a positive neutrality."⁷ Indeed as we have seen, the Arabic alphabet was no more apt at transcribing the Malinke language than was the Latin alphabet, which constrained Souleymane Kanté to invent a new alphabet. Admittedly the official transcription system of Bambara used by the Malian State uses the Latin alphabet all the while respecting the tonal character of this language, but it is nonetheless challenged by the N'ko supporters who qualify its adepts as "European students" and even "second colonizers." Generally, N'ko members express a certain mistrust towards the European or American researchers who have recently become closely interested in this ideologico-cultural movement. Translation attempts of some of Souleymane Kanté's works into European languages have collided with his disciples' refusal, suspecting western scholars of profiting from their master's knowledge through the publication of works dealing with his body of work. This mistrustful attitude translates a will to affirming Malinke identity, and beyond, of defending the specificity of African cultures with respect to the exterior world, Arabic or European.

Although Souleymane Kanté intended his writing for all African languages, the name of this alphabet alone – N'ko – indicates its application to the Malinke language above and beyond any other. Since Delafosse's work⁸ this language, known as

maninka kan by its speakers, is considered a part of the Mandingo linguistic family which also consists of Malinke, Bambara, and Dioula. Malinke is spoken in Upper Guinea and in southern Mali, Bambara in oriental Mali, and Dioula in the Ivory Coast and southern Burkina Faso. While the classification adopted by Souleymane Kanté does not totally follow that of Delafosse, it nonetheless takes up the Malinke, Bambara, Dioula tripartition and adjoins two other linguistic sub-groups: *Mandingo* spoken in western Mali, Casamance and Gambia, and *Wankara* employed in north-western Ghana.⁹ It is the unity of this linguistic family that founds the pan-Malinke hegemony that the leaders of different associations forming the N'ko understand to be exercising in the ten West African countries where live the Mandingo speakers. However, in contrary fashion, these same leaders, due most likely to the Guinean origin of most even in Mali, establish a hierarchy between the different dialects of this linguistic group claiming that the *maninka kan* is the only correct form. This exclusive legitimacy accorded to Malinke is accompanied by a correlative devalorisation of Bambara which is considered only a bastardized version of the "mother language." This concern for linguistic normalization has clearly been a hindrance to the distribution efforts of the N'ko alphabet with respect to the bambaraphone speakers of Mali who little appreciate seeing their dialect considered tantamount to "slang" or worse seeing their language and culture associated to the Senoufo people. Aware of this blunder, the leaders of the Malian branch have toned down their linguistic exclusivism and have decided to concentrate on literacy work as well as the promotion of pharmacopoeia and medicine.

A "Scientific" African Medicine

N'ko medicine, as it is practiced by the association's therapists, tries to be modern and scientific. It claims indeed to rest on anatomy, physiology and the experimental method, and furnish a complement to the medicine of Western inspiration generally accepted throughout Africa. Put into practice in clinics and using some of the modern medical signs (health records), it is opposed to

the traditional healers who prescribe and sell their medicines out in the open and involve incantory magic (*kirisi*) in their consultations.

The knowledge of the N'ko therapists relies on Souleymane Kanté's treatises of pharmacopoeia and medicines which, as we have previously seen, represented a good part of his written work on health problems. Inspired by Mandingo and *haoussa* medicine, that of Liberia as well as that of European "traditional medicine" books, the N'ko founder carried out a considerable classification work of illnesses (several hundred) and medicinal plants (several thousand), establishing thus the foundations of a corpus that were taken up again and deepened by his disciples. These latter have in fact developed the taxonomy created by their master and have further innovated in the domain of anatomy, physiology and pharmacy. Having recourse to the combined contributions of Arabic and of Western medicine and pharmacy, the N'ko "doctors," as they call themselves, intend to surpass the stage of illness identification and the prescription of craft-like remedies and shift to the industrial production of medicines (syrups and pills) fabricated using local plants.

N'ko medicine thus appears as the double product of a will to rationalize traditional African therapy, notably consisting in "writing medicines" according to the remarks of a N'ko doctor, and a parallel concern of indigenization of Western medicine. The recourse to Western science is in fact not perceived as a simple borrowing but more as a sign that permits both a resurgence and a regeneration of an African knowledge buried as if in a palimpsest. It is in fact in terms of regeneration that N'ko medicine defines itself, regeneration of a knowledge "already there" and that is unveiled and vivified in the contact with other medicines, regeneration of bodies by the application of rational treatments offering the possibility of surmounting the throes of modernity. With N'ko therapy, we touch the heart of the doctrine and the practice of this movement, that is, the way of existence of Afro-Malinke authenticity in the context of the affront of this culture with the Western and the Arabic worlds. It is without doubt to this nodal situation of medicine that should be attributed the particular conditions of the transmission of this knowledge. While the body of Souleymane Kanté's work and his disciples is accessible to whomever knows

the Malinke language and the N'ko alphabet, pharmacopoeia and medicine are the object of a secret language named *do*, known only by the doctors of the movement. This defense of an Afro-Malinke authenticity can be found regenerated in the political domain, where the N'ko endeavors to make its views prevail.

N'ko and politics

Given its social weight in Guinea where the movement counts tens of thousands of neo-literates, not only in Malinke country, in the region of Kankan, but also in the forest zones, the N'ko plays a forefront role in political life, notably at the occasion of elections that in this country traditionally take the form of a struggle of ethnic type between three main groups: the Peuhl (Fulani), the Malinke, and the Soussou.

In Mali, where one of the Mandingo languages, Bambara, figures as second official language and where, since the 1960 independence, State personnel largely identify with the Mande world, the N'ko brings a weighty contribution to the definition of the leading elite ideology.

It is around the historic signification of the Malian empire, which gave its name to the newly independent country and also furnishes the paradigm of analysis of contemporary political life, that the principal themes of the N'ko doctrine adapt themselves. The legendary figures of this empire, notably Sunjata and Tiramakhan, were massively used by the *griots* (traveling black African poets and musicians) to sing the praises of the first two presidents of the Malian Republic: Modibo Keita and Moussa Traoré. Since 1992, under the third Republic, the imperial schema acquires a new function in the context of the implementation of the decentralization that appears as the major reform of the five-year term of the president Alfa Oumar Konaré. This reform consists in cutting the lower level of the administrative organization – the *arrondissement* – and replacing it with a “rural commune” with an elected mayor and municipal councils responsible for the communal budget. The philosophy of decentralization is inspired on the one hand by the Western model, and by the experience

accumulated within the “village associations” in the cotton zones. It corresponds on the other hand to the desire of good “governance” expressed by the backers of international funds as well as the Malian government’s will to delegate a part of its power to a “civil society” that it controls with more and more difficulty. But in addition the decentralization could not be fully legitimate without the call for historical models for no important reform can be undertaken in Mali without referring to a past experience, even if this experience proved largely fictitious.

Now the N’ko leaders, in particular those that campaign within the *Kurugan fuga* association, precisely propose of model of intelligibility and a ideological justification for the changes that have been introduced into Malian political life following the application of this reform. Souleymane Kanté’s historical body of work is thus convoked in the goal of nourishing the reflection destined to the leading elite. The founder of N’ko, we have seen, wrote and published a certain number of works dedicated to the history of the great empires that followed one another in western Sudan, notably those of Sosso, Mali, and Samori.¹⁰ Even though these works have not yet been translated into European languages, for the reasons previously indicated, the few elements communicated orally by the members of N’ko reveal that they are bearers of a conception which puts to the forefront the fundamentally decentralized character of these big political formations as well as the absence within these of a solution of continuity between the village, the canton, and the state. As such the Empire (*kafo bolo*) can appear as an enlarged form of village or canton (*kafo lé*) and reciprocally the village or the canton as a small state. For the leaders of the association, the decentralized “constitution” of the Malian empire as it was edicted by Sunjata at *Kurugan fuga* can still be observed in the actual functioning of village communities such that it is agreed upon to resurge this type of political organization by “bringing back” according to their own expression, “the power to the house” (*Ka mara ka segin so*).

The question of knowing whether the analytic framework proposed by the N’ko will be officially guaranteed by the Malian government and in particular by the decentralization Mission which directly takes care of the instillation of rural communes has not yet been settled. And there is good reason to suppose that the Malian

State, which also tries to be a modern state, will be averse to letting itself be closed in an historical schema emanating from an organization which has already been refused its alphabet as the official mode of transcription of the Bambara language. In any case, the decentralized imperial paradigm proposed by the N'ko, as the inaugural form of the Malian "nation," remains a central element of discussion for the political and cultural elite of this country. The different segments which compose it are indeed held to situate itself with respect to this theme, including its fiercest adversaries that only reproduce its ideas, insofar as it is true that the reference to the great empires is a founding principal of intellectual life in Mali.

Ethnic Malinke Fundamentalism and The Reemployment of Colonial Ethnography

One might be tempted to see in the thematics of the great empires, as they are used by the Malian intellectuals either in the mode of a demand or on the contrary in the mode of a refusal, another example of the weight that tradition exercises on African societies confronted with modernity. If it is undeniable that the present Malian territory has housed great political formations, for which we are still today in great difficulty to discern with precision not only the geographical contours but also the large traits of political organization, it remains that the "Malian empire" as an actual symbolic form would not exist without the one who appears as the true "father" of present Malian authenticity, that is, Maurice Delafosse.

As an ethnographer and a colonial administrator, Maurice Delafosse (1870-1926) played a determining role in the fixation of the *doxa* proper to the totality of French colonies of Western Africa and more particularly to the corresponding territory of present Mali. In *Haut-Sénégal Niger* (1912) which constitutes his major work,¹¹ M. Delafosse states, basing himself on extremely rich historic documentation, the thesis upon which, within the great political formations that succeeded one another in Western Sudan (Ghana, Mali, Sonraï), no discontinuity would exist between the family, the canton, and the state. In his evolutionary perspective, the state is in fact in embryonic form in the family, while correla-

tively the family is in a certain sense a reduced state. This continuistic thesis thus permits the conception of the Malian empire as a whole composed of homologous segments, and authorizes the vision of an alternation between centralized political formations and decentralized forms once the state has constituted itself in an inaugural fashion on the basis of the family. The question here is not to determine the accuracy of this thesis to which it is entirely possible to subscribe if it is first freed from its evolutionary connotation. It is important to state however that this idea can be found in the historical work of Souleymane Kanté dedicated to the Sosso and Malian empires in the form of the opposition already mentioned between the federal state (*kafo bolo*) and the canton (*kafo lè*). In the same way, the chronology of the great empires as well as the linguistic classifications, which were literally invented by Delafosse, are taken up in full in the works of the N'ko founder, despite the fact that these are supposed to express a properly African vision of West Africa's past.

It is most certainly easy to be ironic about the recuperation of the entire literate colonial tradition by a movement that precisely presents itself as the champion of African authenticity and resolutely defines itself against Europeanism and Arabism. This attitude is precisely that of intellectual Malians who challenge the N'ko doctrine as marked by the most contestable aspects of colonial thought. However, we cannot disqualify the attempt of a given identity affirmation in the name of the re-employment of an imported knowledge since in this case it is not so much about writing a history of the Malian empire than founding a memory of the Malinke ethnicity. In a modern context, it cannot be defined independently of the group of writings on its subject since the beginning of the colonial period, and it is in this capacity that the N'ko movement fits into the entire series of scriptural prophecies that are currently flourishing in West Africa.

Scriptural African Prophetisms

Since the use of the Arabic alphabet to transcribe Peuhl (*adjami*) to the Vai writing system of Sierra Leone passing through the Baoule

alphabet of Koboua Yao in the Ivory Coast,¹² the list of attempts in West Africa is long to make up, through the means of writing, the existing lateness between Africa on the one hand, and the Arabic and European worlds on the other. The paradigm of writing seems in fact to be coexisting with that of modernity which at the same time in the African context has to conjugate itself in the mode of authenticity, which first privileges the transcription systems invented locally even if these turn out, as in the case of N'ko, from a makeshift exercise blending various contributions that are both conjoined and globally rejected in the name of their foreignness.

Situating itself at equal distance from the Arabic and Latin alphabet, thus from the West and the East, the N'ko is engaged in the affirmation of a Malinke identity which nonetheless does not exclude Islam as one of its essential components. But Islam, far from being seen as a religion imported from the Middle-East and the Maghrib, is on the contrary perceived as a founding trait of Mandingo and more generally of Negro-African identity. The demand for an original Islamness thus places the N'ko among all of the indigenization enterprises of imported religions, which are translated by the emergence of the black Christs or even by the separation of Muslims from black Africa and from the coreligionists of Maghrib.¹³

It is in this view that the N'ko founder presents himself as "the inventor of the African phonetic alphabet," as the "doctor of Muslim rights," and finally as the "teaching professor of Islam and the history of Africa in the N'ko language."¹⁴ The emphasis placed on the Muslim component of the definition of Malinke identity shows without a doubt the will to rehabilitating this people in distinguishing it from the Bambara, notably, who are associated to paganism.

In the context of the process of rehabilitation, the mastery of writing takes the Malinke a step further towards the "light" permitting an access to the most recent scientific knowledge.¹⁵ But according to an analogous principle to the prevailing one in the religious domain, this incorporation of Western science happens in the mode of an auto-attribution, which situates Malinke fundamentalism, as it is expressed through the N'ko, on the same level as Muslim fundamentalism. In both cases, the adhesion to the rationalist ideology of the Enlightenment is indeed on par with

the secret wish of rivaling this ideology, inducing prophesies that aim to confirm in retrospective fashion the discoveries of western science.¹⁶ In the same way that for Muslim fundamentalists the Koran has in a certain sense anticipated the great scientific inventions, Souleymane Kanté announced the major technological innovations of the twentieth century.

As with many prophetic fundamentalisms, the N'ko attempts to appropriate foreign influences by rooting them on African soil, that is to say, by straining to find equivalents in local culture. The superimposition of science with indigenous knowledges acts as a pointer to the potentialities of the latter and thus permits to regenerate them. The equal inventivity and thus equal dignity of those cultures laid down, Malinke ethnicity can play its partition in the concerts of other human communities. The N'ko, as a scriptural prophetism, appears for cultures formerly entirely oral or weakly using writing, both as the condition and the result of their insertion into globalizing modernity.

Notes

1. S.H. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 1993, 72, (3), pp. 22-49.
2. E. Kantorowicz, *Mourir pour la patrie*, Paris, 1984.
3. For the French case, see J.-L. Amselle, *Vers un multiculturalisme français, l'empire de la coutume*, Paris, 1996.
4. Concerning Africa, this problematic is defined in J.-L. Amselle and M'Bokolo (eds.), *Au coeur de l'ethnie, ethnies, tribalisme et Etat en Afrique*, Paris, 1985; and in J.-L. Amselle, *Logiques métisses, anthropologie de l'identité en Afrique et ailleurs*, Paris, 1990; forthcoming english translation, *Mestizo Logico*, Connecticut, 1997.
5. In the context of this article, I indifferently use the terms Malinke, Mandigo, Mandenka, Maninka, etc.
6. Thus first names of Arabic origin such as Yakuba are accused of being Jewish.
7. S. Kanté, *Méthode pratique d'écriture n'ko*, Kankan, 1961.
8. M. Delafosse, *La Langue mandingue et ses dialectes (Malinké, Bambara, Dioula)*, Paris, 1955.
9. In S. Kanté, (note 7 above).
10. See among others S. Kanté, *Précis de l'histoire de l'empire Sosso (993-1235)*, 1993.
11. M. Delafosse, *Haut-Sénégal Niger*, Paris, 1972 (1912), 3 vols.

12. On K. Yao's scriptural prophetism, see M. Augé, *Génie du paganisme*, Paris, 1982, pp. 298-300. For further Ivory Coast examples, see J.-P. Dozon, *La Cause des prophètes*, Paris, 1995.
13. On the thematic of black Christs, see M. Augé, *Ibid.*; on the will for separation of the Muslim Soninké of France, see M. Timera, *Les Soninké en France*, Paris, 1996.
14. This confusion between writing and language is perfectly significant of the assimilation of the alphabet invented by Souleymane Kanté and of the Malinke language.
15. Hence the N'ko motto, "The light has risen up to the horizon, Light of the transcription of knowledge in the Mother Tongue."
16. On Muslim fundamentalism in Mali, see J.-L. Amselle, "A Case of Fundamentalism in West Africa: Wahhabism in Bamako," in L. Caplan (ed.), *Studies in Religious Fundamentalism*, London, 1987, pp. 79-94.