A unique Malian cultural custom known as “cousinage” provides a basis for understanding among these ethnic groups. … This open and friendly acknowledgement of differences seems to provide Malians a sense of confidence in their common nationhood while defying African interethnic stereotypes.¹

It was a teacher who hit the nail on the head concerning one of the features of the renowned “Guinean exception.” … Guinea’s fundamental uniqueness lies in the existence of an unwritten national pact, making the Guineans very tolerant and hospitable in the face of all sorts of difficulties. … this unwritten pact was devised at the time of the Mali Empire in the thirteenth century. … It was Sundiata Keita and his illustrious successors … who thought up this notion for “social peace” through the elaborate system of Sanankuya.²

We should all—especially those of us who belong to the political classes—keep this flame alive, a flame which illuminates our precious country, which has always been able to suppress its fears and crises, in unison, and with understanding. This is what some refer to as “the Senegalese exception,” made up of tolerance and mutual respect. I have conducted extensive historical researches so as to place these values, but it finally seemed simpler to assume that they lay in our charming system of joking cousinage, in the ambience created under the palaver tree, where mutual trust and the moral code of unbroken promises have always prevailed.³

It has to be said that Burkina Faso is an “atypical” country… Another asset, not to say secret, is the joking kinship that unifies a number of ethnic groups in

our country by its genuinely cohesive qualities. It is a piece of unprecedented cultural good fortune.⁴

In spite of the many ethnic groups which characterize it, Niger is one of those rare African countries where symbiosis, harmony, and mutual respect reign among the people. Connections of joking cousinage, woven among the ethnic groups from time immemorial, mean that tensions and potential social crises are automatically averted as soon as the armor of joking cousinage is put on.⁵

Most Zambians have joking relations with other tribes; the relationships go back many years. … this is an important distinction from other countries, where greater animosity exists. Zambians may consider their tribe superior to another, but there is an overall sense of unity across all groups.⁶

The new reputation of “joking relationships” within the public domain in several West African countries over the past few years deserves to be questioned at the very least. This was the aim of the colloquium “Alliances à plaisanteries et politiques en Afrique de l’Ouest” (“Joking Relationships and Politics in West Africa”), which brought together anthropologists, political scientists, and sociolinguists.⁷ Even if these celebrated joking relationships once constituted a “classic” subject in anthropology, a reappraisal of this body of practices, which have, at one time or another, attracted the attention of scholars working in a variety of fields, has now become necessary. This objective came from a three-fold assessment of the situation:

– An already long-standing critical return to certain topos from the “colonial library” (Mudimbe 1988), such as the notion of “tribe” (Vail 1989), “ethnic group” (Amselle and M’Bokolo 1985; Chrétien and Prunier 1989), and “caste” (Conrad and Frank 1995) had until recently (Fouéré 2004b) passed over “joking relationships.” This was undoubtedly because of their elusiveness both in

⁷ Colloquium held at the Centre d’études et de recherches internationales (CERI; Center for International Studies and Research), Paris, October 27 and 28, 2005, from which a few of the contributions have been printed in this publication. This theme has also been taken up at three recent events: a focus group held at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology (Halle, Germany) on December 18, 2002, entitled “Friendship, Descent, Alliance in Africa”; a focus group at the 2003 annual meeting of the African Studies Associations in Boston entitled “Joking Kinship and Interethnic Cooperation in Senegambia”; and a seminar held at the Institut d’études africaines d’Aix-en-Provence (Institute of African Studies in Aix-en-Provence), November 16, 2005, entitled “Pardon, palabre, plaisanterie: espaces publics africains et passés recomposés” (Forgiveness, Palaver, Joking: The African Public Domain and the Past Revisited).
scientific and political terms, an elusiveness which contrasted with the reality of the ethical disputes periodically rekindled around the old institutions of “tribalism” and “ethnicity.”

– The deconstruction of the functionalist paradigm widely used in the social sciences had not yet reached the metaphorical shores of “joking kinship”—its days were being prolonged in recent studies more than they should have been—even though its deconstruction presented opportunities for new analyses concerning “joking alliances.”

– A reevaluation of the theme itself would ultimately experience an astonishing comeback in the domain of politics and the media, resulting from a number of factors that should be taken into account, and concerning which the emergence of a reactive or “derivative” discourse intended to overturn the negative, tribal view of Africa is of major importance.

Thus, on the basis of this assessment, a series of analyses is justified which, by their global nature, take into account both the current practices constantly being reinvented by individuals in their daily lives and the proliferation of discourses related to them in the contemporary “African” public domain, drawing on two matrices that have, for that matter, already been called into question, namely the culturalist ethnology of the “colonial library” and irenicist functionalism.

The analysis of these two dimensions, both practical and discursive, aims, therefore, to constitute an enquiry concerning the predominantly political and contemporary issues surrounding these joking alliances in order to avoid the pitfalls—often unconscious—of the reification and dehistoricization of these practices, with the commendable, but frequently illusory, intentions of “cultural” engineering and the “pacification” of societies.

Words and Things

One of the difficulties related to this exercise resides in the accordance of “words” and “things.” Once criticism of the classic concept of joking relationships was made, the important thing was to ascertain the various practices that may not always be reduced to a generic term. Within the continuum of observable social practices, which ones should come under the intellectual label of “joking relationships”? Is not this label pointless in itself? This fact has been

8. The term has been placed in quotation marks because the processes of the promotion and rediscovery of “traditions” of joking alliances are indissolubly local and universal, national and international, African and global. The inventions of the tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) are generally produced simultaneously by internal and external arguments, whether as the product of European nationalism or that of various Afrocentrism. We will therefore refrain from schematizing these processes here, in terms of unfounded exogenous inventions or indeed the native counterpart represented by a purely local “agency.”
emphasized with some amusement by a number of scholars, namely Marcel Griaule (1948), Mary Douglas (Tew 1951, 1968). Whether the relationships are characterized by specifying the particular groups and individuals involved (relationships between cousins, maternal uncles and uterine nephews, grandchildren and grandparents, brothers and sisters-in-law, alternate age classes, matriclans, patriclans, socioprofessional groups, masters and slaves, residential areas, villages, regions, political entities, patronymic labels, honorary titles, groups which are henceforth “ethnic”) or by the power of the connections involved (matrimonial alliances, whether preferential or forbidden; blood ties whether real or imaginary; simple mockery or relationships that have been sanctioned by a “forfeit”; complete freedom of tone or minimal joking; free humor or humor for services rendered) or their direction (from symmetry to asymmetry), these relationships, which have been classed as part of the oversized area of joking relationships, are characterized indisputably as a whole by heterogeneity. Indeed, the answer to the question “what are they?” already presupposes a body of knowledge with which it has been possible to demonstrate to what degree it rested on an “abstraction among abstractions” (Fouéré 2004b, 67). Rather than uniformly fixing boundaries concerning the relationships to be studied, it seemed better to allow the authors the freedom to determine them themselves. In spite of all this, the body of work presented here concentrates on analyses outside the family domain in order to focus on relationships between larger groups (patronymic labels, communities) even if it means simply emphasizing the fact that the metaphor of the original “family” and “cousinage,” in the strict sense of the word, appears in more widespread relationships.

Once it had been rejected, the requirement for a strict definition implied by the question “what are they?” has meant that we should at least agree on another question, namely, “what are we talking about?” This has raised the issue, however, of the variety of vernacular terms, a list that is ever expanding. Moreover, the inextricable links between meanings, the possibilities concerning the range of different joking relationships (“caustic” and “mild,” “subtle” and “offensive,” “strong” and “weak,” and so on), and their different levels of contractual formality (pacts versus straightforward teasing) vouched for by the words used must be emphasized in concrete and contextualized studies. It has therefore seemed preferable to retain the terms used by native speakers in a given situation.

9. The distinction made by Radcliffe-Brown (1940) between symmetrical (egalitarian) and asymmetrical (unequal) relationships is questionable, as there is, in fact, a whole possible continuum between symmetry and asymmetry.

10. This is why we prefer to use the term “joking alliance” rather than “joking relationship” (following a distinction made by Sory Camara [1992, 39]).

11. We can thus include terms used to describe joking relationships or more formal “pacts,” for instance the terms senankuya and jo in Bamanankan; njongu and kalengoraaxu in Soninke; kal and gàmmu in Wolof; dendiraagu njongu (or denidiragaal) and hoolaare in Pular; sanawuya and dankutoo in Maninkakan; sanakuyagaal in the
Written tradition (classical anthropology) is just as rich in terms purporting to be generic. Two terms have gradually become established as concepts: “joking relationship” and “parentés à plaisanterie.” However, these should not make us forget the synonyms and analogous expressions in both French and English that have come to characterize intellectual debate concerning these practices.\(^12\) Owing to the fact that these two canonical terms may be criticized on many counts, we have left our authors free to choose concerning the use of intellectual terms.\(^13\)

The concept of “parenté à plaisanterie” or “joking relationship”\(^14\) therefore has an academic past that should be highlighted. The practices connected with it have been thoroughly described. They have been classified by stakeholders working in situ, and placed by “informants” and ethnologists in the general category of joking relationships. Famous prototypes, such as the relationship between the Fulani and the blacksmiths (Doumbia 1936), or the Dogon and the Pular of Fuuta Jalon; *maasir* in Serer; *agilor* in Joomla; *maikel* in Lobi; *dikale* in Bissa; *mangu* in Dogon, *bara* in Bwaba; *baasseterey* in Songhay; *ubuse* in Kinyarwanda; *utani* in Kiswahili; *banungwe* in Bemba; *awalongo* in Lamba; *uzakuru* in Nyanja; *mwilo* in Yao; *wusensi* in Lunda; *muzenze* in Kaonde, and so on.

There are also derivatives, designating associates in the relationship, active verbs, and so forth.

\(^12\). Examples include: “suzeraineté” (suzerainty) (Béchet 1889, 186); “parentés reciproques” (reciprocal kinship) (Humblot 1918, 520); “parenté à libre parler” (frank-talking kinship) (Bâ 1977, 196; Leenhardt 1930, 86); “alliance cathartique” (cathartic alliance) (Griaule 1948); “privauté domstiques” (domestic liberties) (Pélassier 1966, 194); “injure affectueuse” (affectionate insult) (Diarra and Fouflage 1969, 8); “cousinage rituel” (ritual cousinage) (Gravrand, 1983, 154); “parenté plaisante” (joking kinship) (Ndiaye 1992); “pacte de paix perpetuelle” (permanent peace treaty) (Diouf 1996, 15), and “cousinage à plaisanteries” (joking cousinage) (Kouyaté 2003).

In English: “privileged familiarity” (Lowie 1917, 42; McVicar 1935); “comradeship in sport” (Wilson-Haffenden 1930, 117); “playmateship” (Meek 1925, 31–32); “vituperative alliances” (Scrivenor 1937); “funeral friendship” (Stefaniszyn 1950); “clan jest” (Stefaniszyn 1951); “intertribal insult” (Beidelman 1966); “teasing relationships” (Howell 1973); “joking affinity” (Freedman 1977), “teasing kinship” (UNESCO 1974, 19); “joking partnership,” or “affinal joking” (Schildkrout 1978, 153), and so on.

\(^13\). In emic and media-centered debate, terms also abound in French: “injures diplomatiques” (diplomatic insults); “fraternités à plaisanteries” (joking fraternities); “fraternités interethniques” (interethnic fraternities); “ethnies à plaisanterie” (joking ethnic groups); “railleries ethniques” (ethnic banter); “cousinages ethniques” (ethnic cousinage); “plaisanteries de cousinage” (joking cousinage), “plaisanteries de parenté” (joking kinship); “pseudo-parenté” (pseudo-kinship); “parenté par plaisanterie” (kinship through joking); “cousinages béats” (happy cousinage), and so on. Usages differ according to country and the native speaker in question: “parenté à plaisanterie” (joking kinship) is more common in Burkina Faso, for instance; but in Senegal, “cousinage à plaisanterie” (joking cousinage), or “cousinage” is more common.

\(^14\). “Joking kinship,” which is closer to the French term, is the term which will be used henceforth, in preference to “joking relationship” (see the panel “Joking Kinship and Inter-Ethnic Cooperation in Senegambia” at the meeting of the African Studies Association, Boston, 2003, and contributions from Dennis Galvan and Mark Davidheiser in this volume).
Bozo (Griaule 1948), as well as the enumeration of the characteristics of these relationships seen from a comparative perspective (Mauss 1928; Radcliffe-Brown 1940), have marked the development of this field of study, the stages of which should be briefly described.

The Canonization of the Tradition, Act 1

Types of servitude somewhat reminiscent of Feudalism exist between some of these families, so that a Diakite is able to pull the beard of a Dialos without the latter having the right to retaliate. Others, the Diaras and the Troures, I think, greet each other with bizarre questions on the more or less flourishing state of their virility.

(Béchet 1889, 187)

The Contribution of Observed Practices to Generic Discourse

The first contact between foreign travelers, conquerors, or colonial administrators and these practices, which will be referred to henceforth as joking relationships, met with astonishment sometimes mixed with fascination for: these “strange ways” and “very idiosyncratic customs” (Béchet 1889, 186–87), this “very strange” custom (Reichar 1890 cited by Fouéré 2004b, 38),15 this “very distinctive phenomenon” (Delafosse 1912, 3: 106), or this “curious relationship” (Labouret 1934, 100). At this early stage of “Africanism,” the reference to alliances also appears in the lists of oral traditions and in a number of monographs on West Africa (Boilat 1853, 179; Tautain 1885, 8; Monteil 1903, 320; 1915, 281; 1924, 225; Desplagnes 1907, 91; Arnaud 1921, 261; Meek 1925; Wilson-Haffenden 1930, 117–25; Doumbia 1936), southern Africa (Dale 1896; MacAlpine 1906, 257–68; Junod 1912; Smith and Dale 1920, 295f.; Goodall 1921, 75; Melland 1923, 251–53; Doke 1931, 197; Young 1931, 169; Brelsford 1935, 212) and East Africa (Abdy 1924; McVicar 1935; Scrivenor 1937).

Local names have therefore been retained, whether utani in Tanganyika, banungwe in Rhodesia, or senankuya in French Sudan. The authors are generally satisfied with simple descriptions. Even if Delafosse (1912, 3: 106f.) was not the first to describe the senankuya observed in French Sudan (Béchet 1889; Monteil 1903), his Haut-Sénégal Niger was, on the other hand, the first general analysis to go beyond the description of precise prototypes, although he did not apply a general term to them. This analysis of senankuya among the Jamuw

15. Marie-Aude Fouéré (2004a, 34–36) highlights the reference to mock battles for precedence among East African caravans made by Burton and Speke, a practice which was noted with some surprise in their travel journals in 1858. For Abrahams (1967, 66), whom she cites, it was a sort of proto-utani.
was to constitute the first link in the intertextual chain on the subject for French West Africa (Humblot 1918; Labouret 1929; Pagaeard 1958).

However, the generic term “joking relationship” was coined first on North American territory by Lowie (1912, 204–6; 1917, 42–45, 79–80), and was later taken up by Radin (1923, 85). We learn from Marcel Mauss (1928, 7), moreover, that “American observers were very much struck by the uniqueness of these customs.” It was Mauss who would pioneer a general cross-disciplinary theory in a talk given in 1926 at the École pratique des hautes études (EPHE) and published two years later, in which he translated the English term used by Lowie—“joking relationship”—as “parentés à plaisanterie,” which was to be the opposite of relationships of avoidance and respect (“les parentés à respect” [respectful kinship]) paid to certain precise types of kin, a sort of release from the burden of etiquette: “These institutions have a very clear function. … they express a defined psychological emotional state: the need for release, a relaxed attitude that provides a break from a mode of conduct that is overly prim.” Indeed, Mauss compares this manner of relaxation to “soldiers released from an armed position,” “schoolchildren running around on the playground,” and “men loosening up in the smoking room after being polite in front of women for too long” (ibid., 8–9). He was not entirely satisfied with this hypothesis, however, since the question he perceived as being central had not yet been clarified, namely, why x jokes with y and not with z. According to him, the answer had to lie within the system of kinship and the relative positions of x, y, and z, a situation that called for a general theory of joking relationships that would give an explanation as to why these “varied and alternating oppositions and solidarities” (ibid., 10) existed. He therefore suggested that joking relationships should be ordered within a category of “systems of complete benefits,” in which cooperation between groups of relations and allies was organized by “compulsory rivalries.” In this case, joking relationships, which were “more unsophisticated, simpler institutions,” would constitute an earlier stage of “highly developed potlatch institutions” (ibid., 12).

Thus, the generic term came from a desire to classify a body of similar practices observed in three “ethnographic divisions” of the world established by western ethnologists: “the American Prairie,” “the Melanesian Islands,” and “African tribes” (Mauss 1928, 6). We witness, from this point on, how practices observed in the field are progressively subsumed under this common term, divorced from their sociopolitical contexts and concrete situations of communication. Joking practices, ever so slightly ritualized, could no longer be observed without being labeled and incorporated into the field of joking relationships. If the other two “ethnographic divisions” were to produce observations relating to these practices (South-Sea Islands: Hocart 1923, 1935; Leenhardt 1930; Mead 1934; Tompson 1937; North America: Eggan 1937, 75–81), it was with respect to the third that the most numerous studies on the subject would be developed. Indeed, one year after the publication of Mauss’s paper, Henri Labouret (1929) would use the term “joking kinship” for relationships observed in Senegal,
French Sudan, and Upper Volta in the journal *Africa*, interpreting the relationships of *senankuya* (Mande), *deniraagu* (Pulaar), and *gàmmu* (Wolof) through this generic term, which he applied both to the asymmetrical relationships between certain categories of kin (cross-cousins), and between clans and peoples.\(^{16}\) This would not be the end of the alternative forms of politeness mentioned above, but it represented the effective canonization of the French term in the journal *Africa*, taken up later on by Paulme (1939) and fixed as the definitive equivalent of the English term “joking relationship.” This term was introduced into East Africa by McVicar (1935), who translated the Swahili term *utani* as “joking relationship.” It was then taken up by Radcliffe-Brown (1940), as well as by Pedler (1940) and Moreau (1941, 1944). Between the theoretical essays produced by Mauss (1928) and those of Radcliffe-Brown (1940, 1949), the field was enriched by new field studies (Evans-Pritchard 1929, 1933; Richards 1935, 1937; Fortes 1945, 1949), which served as ethnographical material for Radcliffe-Brown (1924) in addition to his own experience in the field.

Following Mauss, the theories of Radcliffe-Brown (1952, 111) marked a new stage in terms of generalization, encouraging transcontinental analysis and interest to produce a general theory of the phenomenon: “It seems to me that in this way the joking relationship between clans and tribes recorded from Africa can be brought within the scope of a single theory that refers all instances of these relationships to a certain general type of structural situation.” As with Mauss, he emphasizes the fact that “customs of avoidance” and “joking privileges” must be studied together because they represent two opposite ways of holding together the opposing forces of conjunction and disjunction in society. The joking relationship is a form of friendship that is a “unique combination of goodwill and antagonism,” “a relation of friendship in which there is an appearance of antagonism, controlled by conventional rules” (ibid., 112). Again, as with Mauss, Radcliffe-Brown places joking relationships in the category of “friendly rivalries” (ibid.) comparable to the relations that connect the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, for instance. After Mauss, it is Radcliffe-Brown who, even more emphatically, highlights the peacekeeping role of these joking relationships. In this “playful antagonism” and its “regular repetition” (ibid., 92) apparent hostility “is an alternative to genuine friendship” (back-translated from the French edition, 1964, 1959). Radcliffe-Brown (1952, 107) thus introduces the peacekeeping hypothesis, according to which the “relationship in which insults are exchanged and there is an obligation not to take them seriously, is one which, by means of sham conflicts, avoids real ones.”

All subsequent studies would be marked by this functionalist approach. If Radcliffe-Brown is criticized, it is not because of his functionalist bias, but for

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16. Labouret’s analysis is the most complete after Delafosse (whom he cites), embracing the entire subregion, from the Jola people of the Casamance region to the Gurunsi of Upper Volta. He would continue this analysis in his book *Les Tribus du Rameau Lobi* (1931, 248) and in *Les Manding et leur langue* (1934, 98–104).
his comparativist stance. He is criticized by Marcel Griaule (1948), who proposed the term “cathartic alliance” to describe the alliance between the Bozo and the Dogon, a criticism to which Radcliffe-Brown would reply a year later. Griaule found fault with Radcliffe-Brown for the very idea of a comparative theory of joking relationships divorced from their specific contexts:

The name “joking relationships” has been given to diverse institutions and manifestations that may not be of the same nature … and importance is given to an apparent factor, contumelious joking, which is to be found in numerous unrelated instances. … retaining the “joking” aspect of several phenomena risks linking the most disparate things. A bell signals both deaths and marriages. No one would think of maintaining that funerals and weddings should come together in a series of events called “bell ceremonies.” (Griaule 1948, 242)

For Griaule, it is not “rejoicing in the insult” that is important in mangu relationships, but the purification function of the protagonists, whence the name “cathartic alliance.”

However, in spite of their opposition, the approaches of Radcliffe-Brown and Griaule are similar in a number of respects. The functionalism of the former, in the search for a general theory, converges with the “particularizing” culturalism of the latter, which regards the “coherence” and “function” of peacekeeping as almost systemic in joking relationships or “cathartic alliances.” A similar debate brought Mary Douglas (Tew 1951, 122) into conflict with Stefaniszyn (1902). Mary Douglas, like Girling (1957, 102), stresses the absurdity of the “theory of joking relationships” dear to Mauss, Radcliffe-Brown, and Stefaniszyn (Douglas 1968).

In spite of these initial criticisms, like Radcliffe-Brown, anthropologists now had a concept and a theory that structured a specific field of knowledge that would undergo considerable development. This field has been enriched by studies concerning the other “ethnographic divisions,” namely, Oceania (Leenhardt 1947; Pouwer 1964; Luomala 1966); America (Brant 1948; Driver 1961, 462–63; Kennedy 1970; Brackelaira 1992, 1993), and Europe and Japan (Girling 1957; Sykes 1966; Bradney 1957; Yoshida 2001). Most of these works concern Africa, however (Tegnaeus 1954; Reynolds 1958). Nevertheless, of all the works on Africa, only those by anthropologists have really fueled comparativist, frequently functionalist theories of joking relationships.

In the very numerous studies on central Africa, particular attention has been paid to phenomena concerning “funeral friendship,” and intrafamily and avuncular relationships (Stefaniszyn 1950, 1951; Tew 1951; de Sousberge 1955; Wilson 1957; Gulliver 1957, 1958; White 1957, 1958; Douglas 1968; De Heusch 1974; White 1994). The studies conducted by the Manchester School in

17. We make no reference here to the numerous comparative sociological and anthropological works on the “function” of laughter and humor, in which Radcliffe-Brown’s theory has long been discussed. Those of Lundberg (1969) and Howell (1973) are frequently cited in works related to Africa.
southern Africa, however, are incontestably the most interesting (Colson 1968; Gluckman 1955, 1965; Mitchell 1956b; Boswell 1969; Handelman and Kapferer 1972). Nevertheless, even if Elizabeth Colson (1953) and Max Gluckman (1965, 10, preface by Colson) emphasize—quite rightly—the close connections enjoyed between joking alliances and the moral space of the “clan,” their analysis of the practices relative to alliances and the reciprocity they organize remains tainted by a desire for rationalization and tidying up in terms of “obligations” and unchanging moral values. On the other hand, Clyde Mitchell’s (1956b) analysis in *The Kalela Dance* is more innovative inasmuch as it breaks with the traditional study of practices in a rural community, which he himself practiced (Mitchell 1956b) in order to grasp their revived usage in an urban community in the context of “tribalism in town.” Since then, studies concerning joking alliances in urban situations have been few and far between, except for a few conducted in Dakar (Diarra and Fougeyrollas 1969), Dar-es-Salam (Leslie 1963, 37–38), Kabwe in Zambia (Handelman and Kapferer 1972), and Kumasi in Ghana (Schildkrout 1975). Inspired by Goffman (1961), the comparative study carried out by Don Handelman and Bruce Kapferer (1972), based on an analysis of the interaction between Bemba and Ngoni workers, raises the question of the problem of defining the “context” of the interaction of the joking relationship in an urban situation.

The history of clan systems in the African Great Lakes region has also served to clarify “joking alliances” (Jervis 1939, 56; d’Hertefelt 1971, 6; Mworoha 1977, 35–38; Newbury 1991, 120–25; Chrétien 2000, 75–76), as have the ethnographical studies concerning practices relating to insults and joking conducted in Burundi (Rodegem 1976) and Rwanda (Freedman 1977). Monographs or anthropological works concerning kinship in East Africa complete the picture (Uganda: Beattie 1957, 1958; Sharman 1969; Kenya: Ueda and Ueda 1975; 133–35; McKay 1975; Herlehy 1984, 305–6; Tanganyika then Tanzania: Spies 1943; Mayer 1950, 1951; Christiansen 1963; Beidelman 1963, 1964, 1966; Rigby 1968; Lansberg 1977; Heald 1990). Following the interest in the “Copperbelt” in the 1950s from the Manchester School, English East Africa seemed to take over as the focus for research on joking relationships. Thus, in December 1966, a conference devoted entirely to joking relationships was held at the Makerere University in Kampala (Desaï 1966). At the same time, in 1974, Stephen Lucas published at Dar-es-Salam, from a Marxist perspective, the most substantial study (seven volumes) of *utani* relationships in Tanzania, based on original accounts of these relationships in oral tradition.

We have seen how the concept of joking relationships or “parenté à plaisanterie” was originally—and remains in anthropological journals and manuals—an officially recognized transcultural concept validated largely by works

18. For a critical appraisal of the different monographs on Tanzania, as well as the previous writings of McVicar (1935), Scrivenor (1937), Pedler (1940), and Moreau (1941, 1944), see Fouéré 2004b.
on Africa. Additionally, the academic label has been reappropriated for use in the various discourses taking place in contemporary African society, notably West Africa, in which these joking kinships and alliances are sometimes made out to be specifically African, a local cultural know-how which requires “explanations” and “explainers” for the benefit of the outsider unfamiliar with these “very particular usages.” It is a process at the end of which these joking relationships, although they are not specifically African, have finally come to symbolize “Africanity.”

West Africa: A Continuous Production

Very early on, West Africa was introduced as a key area for the review of joking alliances. Following in the footsteps of Delafosse (1912), a number of administrative and military personnel, fascinated by onomatology and the search for an “adequate” indigenous civil status, showed a keen interest in this, based on a quasi-administrative survey of alliances and their equivalents between Mande and, more widely, West African jamuw, without concern for theory (Arcin 1907; Humblot 1918; Delaforge 1932; Delamond 1945; Pageard 1958; Molinié 1959). Meanwhile, the Griaule School was continuing its formal systematization of oral traditions by analyzing these alliances within the context of reflections concerning the notion of self, and the relationship between cosmogony and social order (Dieterlen 1951, 1955, 1959; Pâques 1954; Calame-Griaule 1954; Griaule 1973). All these works are similar in that they emphasize the “importance” of the alliances in question, but also in that they disregard their political dimension in favor of an excessively culturalist interpretation.

In the wake of the “Griaule-inspired” works of the 1950s, interest in the Mande world, and in particular in the Epic of Sundiata, in which the famous senankuya are an integral part, contributed largely to the perpetuation of the problem. Joking relationships were perceived from the “cathartic” perspective (Camara 1969), from a precolonial “political” or “diplomatic” angle (Niane 1969), from a precolonial “political” or “diplomatic” angle (Niane 1969).
1960; Tamari 1991, 1993, 1997), or through accounts of migrations and populations (N’Diaye 1970a, 1970b; Innes 1974, 1976, 1978; Cissé and Kamissoko 1988, 1991; Giesing 2000; Timmer 2000; Schaffer 2003). Whatever the point of view, it was clear that *senankuya* could not be analyzed without taking into account the socioprofessional stratification, and the social and political hierarchies of the region, as they are portrayed in oral tradition. Analyses concerning these practices were thus connected to West African political mythology.

In addition to these references to the history of the West African empires and the Mande epic, the theme is also present in monographs. These alliances generally feature in a “section” under the heading of “family,” “kinship,” “social structure,” or “etiquette” (for example: Balandier and Mercier 1952, 10–12, 67–69; Leriche 1956, 175; Ames 1956, 158; Gamble 1957, 54–55; Pageard 1959a, 1959b; Niclaisen 1963, 454–56; Ly 1966, 286–89; Pélissier 1966, 194, 659; Wane 1969, 206–19; N’Diaye 1970a, 19–21, 67, 78, 85–88; 1970b, 104–5; Pollet and Winter 1972, 191f.; Riesman 1974, 124–27; Gailey 1975, 76; Bâ 1977, 196–201; Lallemand 1977; Leynaud and Cissé 1978, 131–34; Schaffer and Cooper 1980, 50f., 85f.; Gravrand 1983, 89–94). The connection of joking alliances to age-class systems and structural relations between the eldest and the youngest furnished a subject for particular investigation (Hammond 1964; Paulme 1968; Smith 1973). The political dimension and the historicization of these alliances are, for this reason, absent in these works, which favor a sociological analysis wherein joking relationships are linked to the more general characteristics of social organization.

At the same time, “joking kinships” feature widely in works concerning the ethnographical study of language; these focus on types of humor, insults, and obscenities (Sissoko 1950; Palau-Martí 1960; Zahan 1963; Camara 1969; Irvine 1974, 1993; Lallemand 1975; Dupire 1979; Sow 1991; Schottman 1998; Schiavore 2001, 41–67, 217–42; Douyon 1995; Long 2005; Wending 2005). Finally, joking alliances are also mentioned in linguistic manuals, bearing the hallmark of the other, thus justifying explanations for the benefit of the learner, who is “uninitiated” in this matter (Girier 1996, 220–24; Leroy and Balde 2003).

However, the recent thematic revival of joking alliances is predominantly the result of works that insist even more explicitly than previous works on the supposed “peacekeeping” role of joking alliances, which thus prolongs certain features of ethnological culturalism and irenicist functionalism that were inherited from the “great ancestors” of ethnology and astutely adapted to suit the new zeitgeist.

The Functionalist Revival: Irenicism and Peacekeeping

In the 1990s, an interest in joking relationships, understood as a means of “moral peacekeeping,” was rekindled through the development of studies concerning
the resolution of conflict. In North American social science, this interest sometimes led to a new discipline which sparked off research into “traditional mechanisms” of conflict resolution (Zartman 2000), and the adoption of the jural\textsuperscript{23} analysis model used in earlier functionalist works and culturalist ethnology, and espoused by numerous international institutions. These works, which reinstated what constituted a “tradition” as far as preceding generations of ethnologists and their devotees were concerned, reactivated joking relationships, which were supposed to act as “a remedy.” Largely inspired by the growing field of international expertise and institutions, this insistence on the cultural dimension of the development (Poncelet 1994) meant that a special place was accorded to the discourses that promoted cousinage as a means of peacekeeping and social regulation (Mariko 1990; Ndiaye 1992, 2000, 2001; Sessouma 1993; Legré Okou 1994; Badini 1996; Barké 1996; Diouf 1996, Diouf 1997; Idrissa 1997, 50; Diouf 1998, 61f.; Konaté 1999; Faton 1999; Wilson-Fall 2000; Sarr 2000; Nyamba 2001; Doumbia 2002; Sissao 2002; Kouyaté 2003; Meîté 2004; Diall and Traoré 1999; Teme 1999; Tanou 2003; Sambou 2005). This espousal of “cousinage” or “joking kinships” was, above all, a reaffirmation and celebration of “local know-how” or “endogenous knowledge.”\textsuperscript{24} “Joking kinships,” like the “palaver tree,” “traditional” justice, hunting brotherhoods, or the “return of the kings” would constitute a remedy for conflicts of political identity.\textsuperscript{25} This exponentially growing production highlights a revival, particularly—but not exclusively (Mkangi 1997; Wegru 2000; Myamba 2000, 2001)—from French West Africa, and necessitates an analysis of its place in the wider field of neo-traditionalism and the “recourse to cultural resources” (Poncelet 1994), which has, for that matter, been analyzed extensively.

On the whole, these recent works pass over the hierarchical dimension of joking alliances that were emphasized by early writers (Labouret 1929) and recalled in later works (Ly 1966; Wane 1969; Amselle 1977; Launay 1977; Tamari 1997; van Hoven 1977).\textsuperscript{26} Since the 1970s, a number of works of political anthropology have suggested that scholars should break with previous cathartic and functionalist approaches so as to highlight the historical nature of these joking alliances and their relationship to politics, power relations, and the negotiations and exchanges concerning identity in which they are inextricably bound (Schildkrout 1975, 1978, 138–60; Amselle 1977, 37–46; Launay 1977;

\begin{enumerate}
\item[23.] Marie-Aude Fouéré (2004, 75–79) has very much emphasized the significance of the jural model in the anthropological theorization of joking relationships.
\item[24.] However, it should be noted that the CODESRIA (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa) and the programmatic volume on “endogenous knowledge” edited by Paulin Hountondji (1994) have not taken this theory on board.
\item[25.] For one of many examples taken from Ivory Coast journalism, see “La Parenté à plaisanteries: quel impact dans une Côte-d’Ivoire en crise” (Joking Kinship: What Has Its Impact Been on an Ivory Coast in Crisis?), Le Patriote, October 13, 2003.
\item[26.] The complex question of hierarchy and domination is discussed further on in the introduction.
\end{enumerate}
Towards a Political and Contemporary Approach

Listen carefully, you other Serer people from Touba Toul and its vicinity, you, my slaves. I would like you to pay your rural dues hereafter: henceforth and on time, without further ado. It is these which will enable the rural community to contribute so that the PNIR [Programme National d’Infrastructures Rurales] can come to your area and implement more projects there, such as maternity wards, schools, women’s centers, or canteens like the ones you have in your market place… This is an order! If you can’t afford it, go and sell your chickens. Or, if necessary, bring them to me. As you do not deign to eat them, give them to the Jola, connoisseur of good meat that I am. In return I will give you the means to settle your rural dues …

This was said by the sous-préfet (subprefect) who, backing up his words with gestures, tapped his stomach, which he described as a “chickens’ graveyard”; this was done to heckle the people he was addressing, whom, in passing, he did not hesitate to accuse of being simple yokels.27

Along the lines of recent studies in which this approach has been adopted (Canut 2002; Fouéré 2004, 2005; De Jong 2005), the objective of the contributions collected in this volume lies in the creation of contextualized analyses of “joking alliances,” focusing on their political and contemporary dimension, on their revived usages, and on the discourse occasioned by them. Without any pretensions to a general theory in the manner of Mauss and Radcliffe-Brown, this volume intends to set in motion comparative reflections, both on the inclusion of these practices in social environments in the process of transformation (town, administration, politics, media, as well as rural areas that have been subjected to global change) and on the emergence of a political discourse concerning these practices in several West African countries. This comparison is particularly useful because, in spite of the specific nature of the contexts (Senegalese, Malian, or Burkinabe for instance), they have been affected over the last few decades by the same type of transformation relative to the African political stage: democracies undergoing adjustment, decentralization, a proliferation of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and programs initiated by international institutions to promote the cultural side of development, the liberalization of the public domain, and the creation of a sense of identity, which constitute many opportunities for the emergence of areas for vocalization and expression. In addition to these fundamental processes and their fragility, the events affecting the continent—in particular three major events, namely the

27. Le Quotidien, (Dakar), May 27, 2004.
genocide in Rwanda and its repercussions in central Africa, the matrix of the Mano River conflicts (Liberia and Sierra Leone), and lastly the dynamics of the Ivory Coast civil wars—are behind the consideration of desirable means of integration in the context of nation-states and possibly beyond.  

It is important for us to ask questions in light of these contexts and their consequences on the practices and discourses of joking alliances. Three themes are explored in turn: the dynamics of conflict and accommodation within the interaction between joking groups or individuals; the reproduction of and adaptation to practices in the new public domain; and, lastly, the neo-traditionalist discourse leading to the new canonization of the “tradition.”

Power, Memory, and Identity in Interaction

For more than fifteen years, studies now considered classics have established the importance of boundary dynamics in the production and reproduction of local identities and political societies (Kopytoff 1987), and of “systems of transformation” at work within “these social chains” (Amselle 1990). It has become necessary to reinsert these formations of politics and identity in a vast, subregional space, a “symplectic social fabric” (Meillassoux 1978, 132) characterized by mobility and the dynamics of interaction (Fay 1995, 1997; De Bruijn and van Dijk 1997; Diallo and Schlee 2000; Gaillard 2000; Kuba, Lentz, and Somda 2004). It is therefore within this global matrix of power (political, military, economic, and religious), hierarchical arrangement, and the distribution of roles that we should analyze the creation of joking relationships and their transformation as these contexts change (Fay 1995). It thus appears that, in the past, a transformation of political and military conflicts into “alliances” constitutive of a power relationship, and a creation of hierarchy, was at work. However, this does not encompass all the reasons behind the production of alliances that are sometimes capable of borrowing from other areas (cooperation, mutual aid, and migration). In this respect, the study of joking alliances is an advantageous place from which to analyze the process involved in the reshaping of representations and stereotypes. This is especially so with respect to history, that is slavery, religious conversion, rivalry, property, power, settlement, and conquest, since the topical aspects of these “jokes” are without doubt slavery, “barbarism,” religious belief, superiority, gluttony, and so on. These euphemistic and metaphorical features illustrate contemporary rhetorical jousting, but

28. In addition to these globally significant elements, each of the nations studied in this volume has internal dynamics that are noted by the authors concerned, not without consequence in terms of the prominence of the problem of joking alliances: the Casamance conflict in Senegal, the political crisis of the aftermath of the Zongo affair in Burkina Faso, decentralization, the development of tourism in Mali, and so on.
they are also extraordinarily historical and recurrent in West Africa. As Claude Meillassoux (1978, 132) reminds us:

The social intermingling that resulted from the displacement of captives, the deportation of populations, the displacement of soldiers, the flight of beleaguered populations, and the movement of merchants; the constant threat of being captured which weighed over everyone at the same time as the desire of each one to benefit from the servitude of others, have all contributed to the creation of a very involved society, stretching out over thousands of kilometers, in which the components—the clans, the castes, and the classes—recognize each other, oppose each other, and gradually become united over immense tracts of land. Between them, and the one against the other, alliances that are numerous, diverse, and often compulsive, which represent by their interconnections a symplectic social fabric, act as the support of an original social body, the ethnic idiosyncrasies of which tend to disappear in favor of a diffuse social sphere that penetrates the very heart of each state and each clan.  

Even if we insist on the diversity of the origin narratives of these joking alliances, we must agree they are in fact generally variations on the same theme, and they borrow from the myths and political language shared by the entire subregion (brutal separation, asymmetrical absorption, common migration, a fire that creates confusion between two babies, a reversal of roles, an exchange of attributes, a taboo broken, a legendary conquest). These stories are similar to the origin myths of socioprofessional groups and social divisions such as noble/griot, noble/person of an inferior caste, oldest/youngest, maternal uncle/uterine nephew, children belonging to a maternal uncle/children belonging to a paternal aunt, master/captive, conqueror/conquered, and so on. Following the example of works on the creation of social hierarchies and professional groups among the Malinke and neighboring communities, and highlighting the role of the hierarchical alliance as a model for political relationships and the integration of outsiders (Amselle 1977, 1990, 1996; Murphy and Bledshoe 1987; van Hoven 1997; Bellagamba 2002, 77–114; Conrad and Frank 1995; Jansen and Zobel 1996; Tamari 1997; Giesing 2000; Timmer 2000; Schaffer 2003), the historicization of these joking relationships and their origin stories therefore enable us to understand the creation of the abstract structuring of opposing pairs (master/captive, noble/person of an inferior caste, conqueror/conquered, civilized/barbaric, Islamic convert/pagan, city-dweller/bushman, and so on). However, in spite of the imposition of interpretations produced by the dominant groups,

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29. We could make similar remarks concerning East Africa. Christensen (1963, 1323), discussing the studies of Moreau (1941) and Spies (1943), emphasizes the fact that utani have their origins in war, long-distance commerce, slavery, and sometimes “an act by a Good Samaritan” (Spies 1943, 49).

30. For Tal Tamari (1997, 133), the link between senankuya and social “castes” is explicit, as it creates the hypothesis that “the relationship between nobles and people of an inferior caste might have ... been engendered by a joking relationship ... sealed under particularly marked conditions of inequality.” On this point, see Paulme 1939, 1968; Camara 1969 and 1992, 38–50; Amselle 1977, 37–48; Launay 1995, 161; Tamari 1997, 131–38. In the case of senankuya between the Fulani and the
the concrete uses of these available pairs of opposites leave a wide margin for interpretation and dispute as far as the protagonists are concerned, since they go back to a past, if not forgotten, then at least sufficiently removed in time for them to be oversimplified and open to conflicting interpretations. These emic historical “debates,” frequently reactivated through interaction occasioned by joking relationships, enable the maintenance of mutual ethnocentrism as well as the public discussion of memories that are in conflict despite being shared.  

In an analysis of joking alliances, we should therefore attempt to understand these matrices of identity and power relations that provide the setting for relationships of subjection and coexistence, as well as the creation of stereotypes that mark the symbolic boundaries between groups (Barth 1969; Armstrong 1982). In this respect, it is clear that the erection of boundaries through the most commonly used servile metaphor should be investigated.

These joking relationships thus represent one mode, among others, of maintaining possible relations with “others” and of creating a sense of exteriority between blacksmiths (Doumbia 1936), or between certain families and certain professional groups, the similarity is even more pronounced.

31. Thus, the jokes between the Toucouleur and the Serer on the reasons for the “departure” of the Serer from Tekrur recounted in oral tradition (refusal to accept conversion to Islam or the escape of slaves); between the Jola and the Serer concerning the myth of Jamboñ and Ageen (who was “in front” and who “behind” in the canoe in the legend of the two sisters); between the Fulani and the blacksmiths (who made who reach the state of manhood); between the Fulani and the Jaaxanke (who captured who); between the Fulani and the Malinke concerning the fall of Kansala (which version of the battle should be imposed), and so on. Behind these apparently different memories, there is still, however, a similar political and cultural matrix created from widely disseminated oral traditions and stories. For an example of the creation of shared memories of the battle of Bunxoy between the Kajoor and the Fuuta, see Boulégue 1999.

32. Indeed, precolonial domestic slavery seems to constitute one of the matrices for relationships of joking cousinage observed today (Launay 1977). The language used testifies to the heritage of servitude in the imaginary world and the fragile transition from the status of “slave” (very real) to that of “cousin.” Thus, in 1954, a Vai chieftain in Sierra Leone was able to reply to the person to whom he was speaking, “No, we don’t have slaves now—we have cousins” (reported by Lewis [1954, 67; the author’s italics] without precise details as to the context in which this statement was made). On the echoes of slavery in the metaphors of kinship in Sierra Leone, see M. Ferme (2001, 82–88). On the difficult and uncertain transformation of the Haratin from “slave” status to that of “cousins” (notably by marriage) of their erstwhile masters in Maure society, see Bonte (1998, 170–82). We should note, however, that early references to joking alliances in accounts written by travelers or colonial administrators leave the ambiguity concerning the metaphorical or real nature of slavery between “allies” unresolved. Tautain (1885, 8) and Labouret (1929, 251) insist on the extreme inequality and the unilateral nature of these “alliances” imagined through an analogy with slavery. In the account of the travels of Parfait-Louis Monteil (1894, 99f.), however, we find a striking example of a rhetorical “capture” of some Bobo villagers by a Fulani griot, who made them his “slaves” and forced them into an act of submission before Monteil. It does not seem that at that time it was a matter of the ordinary joking alliance between the Fulani and the Bobos practiced nowadays …
Building on his earlier analyses, Claude Fay (1995, 1997) demonstrates in this publication that they constitute a continuum (exclusion, elimination, the creation of hierarchy, juxtaposition) and revolve around property and power. In Maasina, within this range of “contractual” relationships, hoolaare (a pact of trust formalized between different ethnic groups) and relationships of actual cousinage (dendiraagu) are reinterpreted and manipulated with the help of the universal reformulation of relationships associated with power and property belonging to the Malian government, notably with respect to decentralization. The contractual logic between groups is performative, as is emphasized by Fay, because it “manufactures” opposing identities generally associated with professional or statutory property, the distribution of which reflects power relationships between groups. The reciprocity of benefits does not therefore exclude the hierarchization of statuses. Joking relationships constitute a means of moving between social contracts, political pacts, and the division of labor, and enable a redistribution of differences that aims to integrate and incorporate those who are dominated within the hierarchy by means of a political ideology in which connections and correspondences are created (“We are all the same,” “We are as one” so common in Africa).

In his article, Youssouf Diallo analyses the interactions of Fulani groups, which, like the Ngoni in Tanzania, or following the example of the West African groups of merchants, warriors, or holy men, are part of mobile groups who possess the largest number of “joking alliances.” This study of Fulani herdsmen in the interstitial space (Kopytoff 1987) to the west of Burkina Faso involves the examination of their relationship with the historical kingdoms of Segu and Kong, two dominant political centers in the eighteenth century; in other words, a study of the alliances and their equivalents which were forged between these marginal groups and the dominant political powers. The historical approach to anthropology espoused by Claude Fay and Youssouf Diallo also reminds us of how these joking alliances, once they have been instituted, serve as markers of power relations between the “people in power,” on the one hand, and “people of the earth,” the “hole,” or “the grotto,” on the other. At the same time, they defy the distribution of power, the creation of identity, and the movement of property between the Dogon and the Bozo, the Bozo and the Fulani, the Fulani and the Bobo, and so on. In addition to this production and reproduction of hierarchies, there are reasons for solidarity behind these joking alliance relationships that include practical advantages (lodging, the exchange of benefits, mutual assistance at ceremonies, and so on). Joking relationships, like the convertibility of patronymic labels, function as a “structure of welcome” for outsiders (Amselle 1977, 1996), enabling their inclusion within the dominant groups, and constituting a reminder of prestige and power distinctions, as is emphasized by Youssouf Diallo in his example of the spread of jamu among subservient groups in the Ouattara Empire.

The connection between practices involving joking relationships and differences in terms of status has already been highlighted by Robert Launay
Robert Launay revisits this subject in this book, but from the perspective of the micropolitics of joking relationships. Based on a series of case studies concerning the Jula people from the north of the Ivory Coast, the author dissociates the practice of senankuya from any systematization of human relationships or names (jamiu), in order to restore it to its purely incidental and interactional character. Occurring between groups or individuals, this practice takes place, not as a subsequent by-product of other relationships already in place, but is, on the contrary, the creator of new relationships. This change of perspective is justified by detailed observation of a multitude of transformations relating to identity, by play involving the very choice of cousins, by implications of the so-called values established by cousineage, and by the social or family negotiations resulting from the practice of senankuya. None of these joking relationships is therefore automatic, expected, or predetermined. On the contrary, for Robert Launay, they vary according to context, outside of any structural, normative, or symbolic framework. If the ambivalence of power relations between individuals is brought out by actions involving joking, it really seems to have been created by the act itself rather than reflecting the ambivalence. “Joking” exists for the author as one of the possible means of social interaction in a given situation and according to particular strategies. It furthermore constitutes a powerful means of subverting hierarchical relationships, aggression, or social imposition. It would seem that the only way of avoiding functionalist errors, which focus too often on the social attributes implicit within senankuya, is through the systematic study of identity and status at play in a given interaction, instead of considering senankuya the active process behind the construction and deconstruction of social relationships.33

The anthropological politics of joking alliances therefore emphasize the point at which they form part of a continuum of social relationships, which it would be risky to abstract. We should note, however, that there is a tendency for joking alliances to provide a model for most external relationships, thus assuming even more importance as far as the scholar is concerned. Unlike other practices related to cooperation, the structure of power relationships, hospitality and patronage (jatigi), or the extension of kinship (by marriage), owing to premature theories involving them, as well as the fact that they are once again in a conceptual spotlight, joking relationships have been endowed, particularly in American political science, with the importance of an “institution” and an “unfailing means of explanation” with which authors seek to measure their potential role in settling conflicts.

33. This point has already been emphasized by David Parkin (1980).
Conflict and Cooperation: Are Joking Alliances Effective?

Representing the “conflict resolution” approach, in a study carried out in several Malinke villages in south-west Gambia, Mark Davidheiser analyses the issues at stake in a peacekeeping process using joking alliances. He refuses, however, to underestimate the role and the significance of ideologies of social harmony set in motion by figures of mediation and made possible by ties of joking cousinage, while acknowledging the extent to which the classic anthropological stance has become outmoded, a stance which involves adherence to a functionalism insistent on the supposed role of these relationships in maintaining social harmony. Davidheiser stresses the fact that mediators are constantly reinventing fictitious kinships and connections between the warring sides by using the language of joking alliances in order to resolve conflicts that have not been resolved by other means. Joking alliances become one of the preferred means of creating this connection by bringing up to date a familiar script seen as legitimate and convenient as far as interaction, cooperation, and mutual obligations are concerned. This recourse to alliances enables the creation of a liminal space which sometimes brings about changes in attitudes by drawing together these “related” intermediaries and the classic (and ambivalent) symbols of mediation, the nyamakalaw for example (Camara 1969; McNaughton 1988; Conrad and Frank 1995; Hoffman 2000), religious chiefs, and deposed princes as “creators of peace” (Bazin 1988). These alliances should therefore be viewed as ritualized but flexible practices; the narratives invoked frequently amalgamate Islamic discourse and enable sanawuya to be extended to fit new situations, depending on context.

In his contribution, Dennis Galvan is concerned with the factors influencing the effectiveness, or otherwise, of cousinage, interpreted as informal and cohesive transethnic institutions. Based on a field study carried out in a number of villages in Serer country in Senegal, the author undertakes to determine the necessary conditions for the effects of joking cousinage in terms of promoting tolerance and cooperation, and their potential role in maintaining national sentiment. The local political economies, rival versions of the history of the social groups in question, the “cultural resources” brought into play by stakeholders, political interests, and circumstances involving urbanization and migration thus all constitute factors that should be taken into account in order to be able to measure, on a local level, the chances of success for the rhetoric and practice of joking cousinage. On a national level, the promotion of national unity by means of a discourse celebrating cousinage instituted by the former governor, Saliu Sambu, for example, is only possible through the addition of other symbols of Senegalese national unity: the popular legacy of Cheikh Anta Diop, culture relating to Senegal as a state, the Islamic brotherhood, mbalax, and others. Thus, by approaching joking alliances as a syncretic institution in which creativity and the constant recombinations made by individuals are recognized,
Dennis Galvan avoids paralyzing dichotomies (neo-primordialism and its critics; neo-functionalism and its critics) in favor of an analysis of necessary conditions of cousinage, both practical and symbolic.

Various Diverse Practices

Most of the authors in this volume highlight the wide variety of uses for joking relationships, as well as the diverse ends to which they are put (in order to obtain information and favors, to resolve a conflict, as a means of benefiting from hospitality and attention, to save one’s life, to make veiled criticisms, to obtain electoral support). These ends are part of a whole repertoire of actions, and are set in motion according to the strategies of the stakeholders and circumstances.

However, expectations related to solidarity and peacekeeping are often contradicted by the political and economic interests at stake. Indeed, Dennis Galvan stresses the fact that the political interests of factions within the dominant party serve to neutralize the potential effects of mutual aid brought about by cousinage. Conflicts over land and the deterioration of the socioeconomic conditions of those concerned constantly get in the way of the reasons for cooperation, and make the stereotypes more concrete (O’Bannon 2003). Sten Hagberg reminds us that joking kinship was not utilized during the most serious political conflicts in Burkina Faso. Ferdinand de Jong (2005) shows how the rhetoric of cousinage, used by a number of protagonists in the Casamance conflict, failed to address the real causes of the conflict.

As all the authors demonstrate, the various ways in which cousinage is exploited are only successful in contexts in which their use is plausible and legitimate. Success depends on the way the version of the alliance is manipulated; those manipulations made to suit the interests of the dominant groups or those perceived as being legitimate try to impose their version of the history and memory of the relationship enjoyed by both parties. It remains predicated, however, on the endorsement—or otherwise—of the intended recipients of the interpretation, of the resulting ideology, of the historical version used, and of the suggested stereotype.

Power relations and their inequality are therefore at the heart of the micropolitics of joking relationships. They can always be challenged as part of this power relationship, however. This is possible especially through the metaphor of slavery and captivity, which is easily evoked as a basis for the humorous assertion of “rights” by the subservient party at the time and the creation of “duties” as far as the dominant party is concerned. In fact, we should mention the fundamental ambiguity of certain interactions observed between joking allies, an ambiguity which, according to tried and tested mechanisms, enables the ironic and temporary reversal of a relationship of domination, a subtle criticism of hierarchy, and the expression of a subliminal message in a “third” space.
that allows for ritualized joking. A number of contributions to this volume (Douyon, Haberg) emphasize the ambiguities of a criticism made through joking alliances. We should indeed analyze the possibilities offered by joking alliance interactions for “conveying messages” to an interlocutor without seeming to do so, of offering criticisms without clashing head-on, all while reaffirming stereotypes and precedence.

The contributions differ concerning the importance attached to the role of agency as opposed to that of domination. It seems preferable to avoid restricting the debate on these questions—dominance/resistance, or symmetrical/asymmetrical—in order to focus observations on the heterogeneous nature of possible interactions, which it would always seem preferable to interpret case by case, rather than put forward a general and exclusive theory.

Similar caution should also lead us to distrust a misleading choice between the “decline” and the “widening” of these practices.

Change

Changes to these practices during the colonial period (seen as decline by some and expansion by others) under the impact of a relative growth in urbanization did not go unnoticed by early scholars. R.-E. Moreau (1944, 398) maintained, for instance, that these relationships were becoming increasingly obsolete owing to the sheer number of obligations of solidarity (due to the increasingly frequent contact between populations). It had therefore become difficult to sustain these in an environment in which there was an increasing amount of migration and westernization among the elite. On the other hand, Clyde Mitchell (1956b, 35) held the view that these relationships were in fact recent and “modern,” sparked by the growing amount of interaction between young workers and migrants of different origin in urban centers, who found there an opportunity

34. However, this does not imply an adherence to the hypothesis of “cathartic alliance,” or an analysis along the lines of that proposed by Max Gluckman (1954) concerning “rituals of rebellion.” For an analysis of the *Ncwala* ritual (claimed by Gluckman to be the joking relationship *par excellence*) as a joking relationship, see Apter 1983. He attempts to reconcile the approaches taken by Gluckman, Beidelman, and Radcliffe-Brown.

35. “Undoubtedly easier communications are breaking down the observances. As between the Chagga and Pare the forfeit customs are said to be a thing of the past because intercourse is so frequent. Among the Bondei the ‘joking’ is obsolescent. It seems impossible that Zigua living on the main Turiani-Korogwe road could keep open house for the Nyamwezi, the Sukima, the Kami, the Luguru, the Hehe, the Gogo, and the Zaramu who now pass in such numbers on their way to work on the sisal estates. And it is obvious that a place like Tanga market, with its admixture of tribes, would be in a constant uproar if mutual recrimination, ‘April fooling,’ and forfeiting went on with pristine vigour. Other Western influences must have a damping effect …” (Moreau 1944, 398–99).
for renewing joking alliances between groups, symptomatic of “tribalism in
town.”

James Boyd Christensen (1963, 1325) also believed that *utani* relationships in Tanzania were in the process of expansion rather than contraction owing to the introduction of the concept of “tribe” by Europeans, allowing for the standardization and diffusion of these relationships over a wider area. In other words, whether it was during the precolonial (Amselle 1997; Perinbaum 1997; Fay 1995, 1997), colonial, or postcolonial periods, we should consider joking relationships as in a permanent state of creation, reinforcement, and obsolescence.

As far as the present is concerned, we might observe a certain dwindling of obligations, solidarity, and comfort expected of these relationships (which is seen as a source of regret for some of those concerned, or more generally speaking, by the intellectuals engaged in promoting them). Claude Fay emphasizes an “evaporation of pacts” in Maasina owing to the fact that the issue at stake is no longer clear. Only those which are useful to individuals are maintained, while others are being marginalized. If politicians are attempting to manipulate the objective reasoning behind alliances in a democratized and decentralized environment, their effectiveness would seem to be very much reduced. Dennis Galvan also notes that in cities, impoverishment and conflict over resources can serve to undermine the “cousinage” connections maintained in villages. Even in a rural environment, this “cousinage” is often more a reminder of the past than a current practice in a context in which resources are scarce (O’Bannon 2003).

However, Denis Douyon and Cécile Canut emphasize that, in an urban context, where the potential for identity change is greater due to anonymity, bringing with it possibilities for concealment, conversion, and changes in status, there are more opportunities for an activation of imaginary kinships based on the model of joking relationships. These extend both to individuals and to groups not hitherto included in these networks of relationships, whether through allied families, the number of which tends to be on the increase, or through the standardization of intergroup relationships, often through their transitivity. In addition, as is mentioned by Mark Davidheiser, young people have a tendency “to become more traditional” as they age, and a number of people interviewed admit to the fact that they have discovered the “usefulness” of these relationships with age.

As Denis Douyon demonstrates in his analysis of the “senankuyamania” prevalent in Malian politics, the exploitation of joking relationships is the surest indication of the vitality of these practices, for which there are always opportunities for realization, since the people involved expect certain benefits from them. The evidence for these changes and the permanent reshaping of the reasons behind these pacts and alliances lead us to suggest an analysis that is the very antithesis of any idea of an exact perpetuation of supposed “ancestral

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36. In this respect, what is the difference between these joking practices and those adopted by European government officials, as noted by Marc Abélès and Irène Bellier (1996)?
practices.” It is undoubtedly in the area of strategic use and exploitation that the most promising research remains to be done.\(^\text{37}\)

Thus, in addition to these concrete practices, the intention behind this volume is to demonstrate the use of joking relationships (both in terms of practice and narrative) in the contemporary public domain and the media for the purpose of entertainment, as well as for strategic ends. The joking practices between certain groups, characteristic of “alliances,” reassign to the media the old questions of precedence, questions which are then played out symbolically.

The Public Arena and Performance

It is, of course, the public sphere and the contemporary political scene that constitute the special areas in which these practices have found new uses, destined for the “public”; for example, newspaper readers, people who listen to the radio in the national language, spectators, and voters.

The practice may exist essentially for entertainment purposes, as is illustrated by the number of examples derived from contemporary music. These include the show put on by the comic Senegalese “singers” Tonton Ada and Sylla Mounial, featuring the struggle between a Serer and a Toucouleur aiming to come to a decision once and for all (Étienne Smith in this volume), or the song entitled “Sordassi kè” by the Guinean singer, Cheikh Pénor Traoré, which publically pokes fun at the gluttony of the Condé,\(^\text{38}\) or indeed the song by the Guinean singer, Mama Diabaté.\(^\text{39}\)

Some newspapers play a leading role in writing about and illustrating jok ing relationships. This is done almost systematically in the case of the Journal du Jeudi in Burkina Faso (see Sten Hagberg in this volume, who analyses the editorial policy of this newspaper edited by Boubacar Diallo), as well as in the Guinean newspaper, Le Lynx, or indeed in L’Observateur Paalga in Burkina Faso (“Nobila-cabaret” alias Boniface Batiana). Other examples include the

\(^{37}\) Since ethnic and patronymic labels are easily changed and can be manipulated, an individual is very often able to pass him/herself off as a “joking relation” in order to benefit from the advantages expected from the relationship (asking a favor, benefiting from gifts at ceremonies, taking advantage of hospitality, avoiding a penalty, turning an interaction or a negotiation to one’s advantage, saving one’s life, trying to win voters, and so forth). In addition to this type of exploitation, which is perceived as being illicit and improper once it is discovered, joking relationships are often used in professional practice to facilitate networking, to convey a message, or to obtain information (a census official, a medical employee, a tradesperson, a postman, a teacher, a researcher, a rural supervisor, an NGO employee, an administrative employee on a tour to raise awareness, a politician, magistrate, policeman, and so on).

\(^{38}\) “Sordassi kè,” on the album Kéléa, n.d.

\(^{39}\) In the song “Bara bali,” through a dialogue with his guitarist Petit Condé, the artist denounces the laziness of most of those with the same patronymic label (Kouyate 2003, 39). Condé and Diabaté, like their opposites, Koné and Traoré, are \textit{senankiw}. 
PACTS, ALLIANCES, AND JOKES

Senegalese newspapers *L’Observateur* and *Le Quotidien* (particularly the summer column “Le Coin du Couz,” in which the journalist Soro Diop pokes fun at the Ndiayène). Certain politicians and personalities, and indeed ordinary citizens, are the object of tongue-in-cheek remarks made by journalists who notice the slightest “saalit” from their cousins, however important.

Comedians are not to be outdone: for instance, Baïla Sow, in Guinea, mocks the Diakhanké (Kouyaté 2003, 32). In addition to the rural and community radio stations that devote whole programs to cousinage, national radio and television stations are often the place in which joking practices are aired. For example, the programs *Rions un peu* and *Éclats de rire* in Mali give considerable space to calls from listeners, making jokes at the expense of their *senankuw*; or the comic series *Vis-à-vis* in Burkina Faso, which pokes fun by imitating the accents or the clothing of Fulani or Bobo “stereotypes” (Sissao 2002, 152). Popular theater also borrows extensively from this theme.

Literature sometimes takes up the theme that joking alliances are part of the cultural setting of intrigue (Kourouma 1990, 37, 42, 117, 183; Bá 1991, 266f., 275f., 316; 1994, 91, 103, 180; Ndiaye 1999, 13–14; Prignitz 2001; Sissao 2002). Joking alliances can also provide the narrative means in literature, as in *Peuls* by Tierno Monenembo (2004), which opens with the following dedication: “For Serer fools …”

Finally, a number of Internet sites actively participate in the revival of cousinage practices. Most often this takes the form of jokes between Internet users, but can also involve a debate concerning these practices, their meaning, and their future.

There thus exists a whole “popular” satirical and comic culture that borrows extensively from the stock of available ethnic stereotypes in the spirit of

40. In the form of a cultural program inviting an educated person to discuss these alliances and to list them, or just simply for fun, especially through calls from listeners.

41. In the works of a number of authors, Amadou Hampâté Bâ for instance, the logic of the deliberate creation of cultural heritage is very real, since these customs are always accompanied by footnotes or brackets that explain these practices to the uninformed reader. For other authors (Tierno Monenembo, Ahmadou Kourouma, Jean-Hubert Bazï), the use of joking alliances in a novel is more for their entertainment value, because they are part of a cultural setting that does not need to be explained.

42. The opposite point of view is taken in the novel, with the Fulani being ridiculed by the Serer.

43. Senegalese, Malian, and Guinean forums have of course been consulted. We might note that, in a written medium, the ambiguity of the “setting” for the interaction is greater, frequently creating misunderstandings and arguments. See the debate on a Cameroon forum on the possibility or otherwise of the “Burkinabè” practice of joking kinship in Cameroon: “Les Moqueries intertribus au Cameroun… est-ce possible?” (sic) [Intertribal mockery in Cameroon… is this possible?], http://www.cameroon-info.net/. Accessed November 5th, 2005.

44. This is not limited to the practice of joking alliances, of course. Popular ridicule of the dominant power has largely been analyzed in the framework of analyses of “politics from below” (Toulabor 1981; Dubuch 1985; Mbrembé 1996; 2000, 139–86).
joking alliances, without limiting itself to them. In this humorous form, ethnicity is omnipresent in the public domain of the countries in question. The playful dimension, however essential, should not make us forget the ambiguity of the setting for this media expression of often one-sided ethnic stereotypes.45

In any case, this light-hearted practice highlights the fact that joking has been freed from particular codes so as to become an integral part of the widespread field of “ethnic humor” (Davies 1990; Gundelach 2000; Vucetic 2004). In addition, the joking borrows from a globally understood range of jokes. The content of the joking exchanges is sometimes influenced by universal motifs, especially those in the amusing stories that circulate on the Internet. An example is a “Letter from a Toucouleur Mother to Her Son” from the Senegalese newspaper, Le Quotidien. It takes the form of typical banter (with innuendos on the part of the Serer) directed at the Toucouleur, and is an exact replica of a current joke in Europe targeting blonds.46 In the same way, on certain Internet forums, the jokes posted sometimes borrow from the habitual register of joking relationships (gluttony, slave/king, physical type), and sometimes from a universally understood range of jokes. Although these joking alliances partly retain their specific quality (for, despite the extended uses highlighted here, this humor does not target just any group, but refers specifically to those affected by the alliances), we are not witnessing an evolution toward the more classic practices of “ethnic mockery,” which are increasingly becoming a particular subgenre of universal ethnic humor. In any case, its use by the media stresses the creativity and versatility of practices that cannot simply be reduced to exploitative tools.

Nonetheless, this exploitation really does exist, especially in politics. Practices involving joking alliances can be turned to the advantage of politicians, even if their use depends on context, the relationship with popular culture, and the “political style” characteristic of every politician. Thus, President Senghor in Senegal and Lamizana in Burkina Faso have made the rhetoric of cousinage a permanent feature of local politics. As Denis Douyon points out in his analysis of the uses and abuses of senankuya in Malian politics, Malian politicians are tending to use it more and more. He stresses the fact that these strategic uses cause all sorts of scheming: “cousinage has become the means of

However, popular comedy, drawing on the repertoire of joking alliances (Hagberg and Douyon in this volume), has not hitherto been studied.

45. Thus, in the 1980s, a number of listeners of the program Rions un peu (broadcast by the Malian radio and television network ORTM [Office de Radio et Television du Mali]), complained that the jokes were focused too exclusively on one community. Similar remarks are made by Internet users on Senegalese or Guinean Internet forums. It is a matter of the ambiguity of the “context” of the interaction, with the derogatory jokes not being limited to the more or less codified and mutual exchanges typical of cousinage. In this respect, it is enough for us to remember the macabre metamorphosis of certain stereotypes in Rwanda or the Ivory Coast, for example, which also made use of the channel on which “jokes” had been broadcast and had made the targeted groups laugh …

46. Le Quotidien, July 24, 2005.
expounding important principles and making minor arrangements.” However, strategy and cunning are not the prerogative of political elites, since individual voters also know how to use cousinage to try to draw their elected representatives into a moral relationship of accountability and make them reformulate their vote-catching tactics to the voters’ advantage. Contributions by Sten Hagberg and Denis Douyon thus invite us to imagine the part played by practices involving joking alliances in the creation of Burkinabe or Malian politics. Joking alliances are part of a cultural knowledge shared by political elites and the people alike, as is noted by Sten Hagberg, who takes up the analysis made by Achille Mbembe (2000) concerning the epistemological proximity of governors and the governed in postcolonial times, which both relates to shared ritualized farce and an even more pronounced domination. This ambiguity resurfaces in the image of the moral qualities necessary for a “good politician.” As far as a political leader is concerned, the accusation of practicing cousinage is sometimes seen as positive (“he made good use of it,” “he made considerable use of it,” “he remained rooted in his culture,” “he was closer to the people”), and sometimes negative (“he used and abused it,” “he was able to deceive people,” “he played too much on the emotions”). Apart from their fundamental ambivalence, joking relationships are essential to the understanding of the political imagination. As Sten Hagberg points out, “joking kinship opens up a culturally based arena for laughter, satire, and entertainment in Burkinabe political culture.”

In addition to the visual side of a shared political culture, we should analyze how these practices affect centers of government in the closed world of assemblies, administration, business ventures, and territorial control, at political meetings and campaigns, and at important national events, issues which are

47. These judgments were made regarding Senghor in Senegal and Lamizana in Burkina Faso posthumously.

48. In Burkina Faso, Alain Sassao (2002, 141) calls for an “appeased leadership,” which “would enable a more thorough understanding of the people being governed” (and vice versa), modeled on the appointment of Cerma administrators in Lobi country. In Senegal, the question arose particularly in connection with the conflict in Casamance, concerning which a number of interpretations of territorial control in terms of “error” or “abuse” once justified the appointment of Serer administrators in Jola country. A number of authors have pointed out that the governors and prefects in Senegal were sometimes deliberately appointed in regions where they had numerous cousins (Villalón 1995, 54; Diané 1997, 360; De Jong 2005, 398). Indeed, this seems to have been practiced, but it does not constitute a general rule. Be that as it may, this use (genuine or claimed) of intercommunity joking alliances by the republican government in the name of an arguably greater efficiency raises interesting questions concerning the informal uses of ethnicity in the daily functioning of governments, and the pretense involved in the argument between Jacobinism and multiculturalism.

49. Ceremonies (marriages or funerals of important people, the inauguration ceremony of a head of state, political meetings, the transfer of power between ministers, electoral campaigns, and so on) are the areas singled out for the manifestation of joking alliances. Thus, when the doua took place on the seventh day after the burial of former President Lamizana in Burkina Faso, “the Mossi did not stop teasing the Samos (the ethnic group of the deceased) and the latter continued to retaliate. For instance,
tackled in a number of articles (by Canut, Davidheiser, Douyon, Fay, Galvan, Hagberg, and Smith). However, owing to the romantic image given by those who use joking cousinage in the daily political running of institutions, caution should be exercised in this area and observation should always constitute the basis for analyses. These articles are ultimately part of a wider problem concerning the use of language and metaphor relating to kinship in politics which, far from being specific to Africa and joking alliances, becomes even more apparent in the context of these alliances.

Indeed, in addition to these humorous practices and individual strategies, joking alliances are also used in the discursive reasoning behind the creation of a common heritage, particularly in the context of genuinely symbolic state politics.

Local Knowledge, Global Audience:
The Canonization of the Tradition, Act 2

Sinanguya or “joking cousinage” is one of the salient features in Malian culture and the lynch pin of national unity. A veritable institution above all others, it enables two—in fact more than two—ethnic groups, races, or communities to poke fun at one another, but also—and this is the most important thing—to maintain harmony within social relationships thanks to intercession, especially in situations of conflict. … Any additional information concerning “joking cousinage” would be gratefully received.50

we heard some of them say that they had come to a party in honor of the Samos. Others predicted that more Samos (at least ten of them) would soon join the General. The Samos challenged all this by maintaining the opposite. While all this was being said with a straight face, three women barged in with a rusty-colored dog. One was dressed in a Mossi outfit and another in a grass skirt with an image of the general undoubtedly made at the time when he was in power. These women maintained with straight faces that they had come to the old general’s party to present a bull (the dog). The crowd was seized with hilarity (Bendré, June 5, 2005). In the same way, in Mali, “at the Palais des congrès, the head of state, Amadou Toumani Touré, the president of the National Assembly, Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, and the minister of culture, Cheikh Oumar Sissoko, all Sinankoun, exchanged calabashes full of beans on national television. This scene, which was appreciated by the public, taught an important political lesson, namely that it is possible to campaign for different things and yet remain brothers (L’Essor, February 27, 2004). Finally, in Senegal, at a political meeting with the prime minister in his native town of Fatik, the prime minister (Macky Sall, Toucouleur), the president of the regional council (Ablaye Sène, Serer), and the representative of the MFDC ([Mouvement des forces démocratiques de Casamance, or Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance] Bertrand Diamacoune, Jola) took turns in passing to each other a sheep and a bag of beans, “presents” from the Fuuta delegation, which caused amusement among the general public (É. Smith, Carnet de terrain, April 2, 2005).

50. United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) report from Mali, CERD/C/407/Add.2, § 156, Geneva, no. 61, August 21, 2002. During the reading of the report presented by Mali, the members of the CERD called for more information on “cousinage.” The presenter was anxious about the
Some of the contributions in this volume are therefore concerned more particularly with discussing joking cousinage as used for promotional purposes, the topicality of which is only too apparent. The “mass production of traditions” (Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983; Anderson 1983; Thiesse 1999; Dimitrijevic 2004), a now commonplace appraisal of the situation, finds a vast area of analysis here. This sweeping movement towards the standardization of identities, the canonization of myths and oral traditions, and the “recycling of the anthropological tradition” (Hagberg in this volume), apparent in Africa and elsewhere, places joking relationships at the very heart of the process in the countries considered here. This breadth, from which we undoubtedly lack sufficient distance, has given rise to a number of contradictory interpretations. This discrepancy is also characteristic of the different contributions collected here.

These conflicting interpretations notwithstanding, three types of process have consistently been highlighted in this collection of articles. These include strategies for the creation of a common heritage, attempts to create imaginary national communities, and the creation of a discourse intended for the rest of the world. Although they are intrinsically linked, they will be discussed individually.

The Logic behind the Creation of a Common Heritage

The creation of a common heritage involving joking alliances, which are perceived as part of a cultural heritage that should be preserved, is, in spite of very different aims, the joint creation of designers, journalists, businessmen involved in heritage matters, associations, scholars, and politicians. This strategy of creating a common heritage transforms the manner in which joking alliances are practiced by grafting onto it discursive thought processes concerning their promotion and the explanation of these practices for the benefit of the general public.

Senankuya have also been appropriated by contemporary music—an exciting showcase for a country like Mali, for instance—to promote the country and its supposedly unique “values.” The singer, Rokia Traoré\(^{51}\) and

51. “Oh Mali, Oh people of Mali / Far from you / Your values are with me / Your lessons comfort me / … Who dares to say that there is nothing in Mali? Come with me, come and discover the land of my ancestors for yourselves / There where ‘joking alliances’ work miracles / Between people of rival patronyms / Between brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law / Between grandparents and grandchildren / There where there is mutual respect / Oh Mali, which has been able to unite its different groups / Around essential values …” (Rokia Traoré, vocal performance of “Niènafîng,” on Bowmboï, Label Bleu, 2003). Translation from the Bambara/French liner notes.
her fellow Malians Habib Koïte (the song “Baro”) and Adama Yalomba (the song “Jamana”), as well as the Guinean singer Pathé Moloko (the song “Sanakuyagal”), the Senegalese singer Ndèye Kassé (the song “Serer”), or the Nigerien group Sogha (the song “Baaseterey”), are putting this common heritage into practice through their example. The network of rural and community radio stations, another media publicity-vehicle for common heritage, is playing an active role in the collection and broadcasting of the origin legends of cousinage relationships that are associated with the foundation stories of villages. The different versions are sometimes debated live among guests and members of the audience. New collections of cousinage “traditions” are being built up in this way. Apart from the radio, a whole range of participants, from the ministers concerned to NGOs, are engaged in creating a common heritage of this practice, a sort of “cultural mapping,” which is nowadays part and parcel of the cultural policy of different countries, in partnership with the institutions connected with the African Union, such as the CELHTO (Center for Linguistic and Historical Studies by Oral Tradition) in Niamey, Niger, and international stakeholders such as Intermedia Consultants, The Sahel Club, or Enda Tiers-Monde (Enda Third-World). Thus, in Mali it is possible to note the entry of “joking relationships” in the national museum. This material is also being used in films. Inspired by a trip to Burkina Faso and Senegal, the Belgian director, Jacques Faton (1999) has published a book and directed a documentary film

52. “Sanakuya are not bad in reality, sanakuya are not bad / He said so, let’s listen and accept that Sanakuya are not bad … / Our Ba, don’t take offence, the world is like Sanakuya / … My dear Eyoo, my dears, Sanakuya are made for joking / Sanakuya affect women, sanakuya affect men / sanakuya are not made to do harm, sanakuya are not made for that / in the ‘districts’ and the towns, they’re really good! / Our griots from Daaka really appreciate them! / Our Diakhanké in Guinea, how nice they are (pleasant)! / … / Dear Eyoo friends, have fun! Dear Eyoo friends, sanakuya are traditional / … Our Ba, don’t puff yourselves up, ‘Super-Diallo’ is coming in person! … Diallo, we are all equal! Ba, we are all equal! Noble Barry, we are all equal! Sow, we are all equal! (Pathé Moloko, vocal performance of “Sanakuyagal,” on Sanakuyagal, CDS Production, 2002). Translation based on the French translation from the Pular by Mamadou Diallo.

53. The video (2006) accompanying the song has the Serer community as its setting, including the big-wigs (Senghor), livened up with a nod and a wink at their Toucouleur and Jola cousins.

54. To be taken in the literal sense: Alain Sissao has, for example, created a map of “ethnic groups” in joking alliances in Burkina Faso. Raphaël Ndiaye and Yoro Doro Diallo have carried conducted patronymic surveys in Senegal so as to draw up a list of alliances between patronymic groups. The NGO Enda has even put these alliances and their family equivalents into practice by making children carry placards with a patronymic label, showing their allies and equals.

55. CELHTO has notably digitized a large number of rural radio programs on joking relationships from different West African countries as part of the ARTO digital database project.

56. Sacrée plaisanterie, directed by David Helft and Ewa Santamaria (Bamako, Mali: La Nomade Production / ORTM, 1993), VHS, with the famous actor Bala Moussa Keïta.
on the subject. In Burkina Faso, Boubacar Diallo, the director of *Journal du Jeudi*, has also directed a film promoting joking relationships (Hagberg, in this collection of articles).

State support for the discourse promoting joking alliances has increased during the last few years, as is borne out by the Semaine nationale de la culture (SNC; National Culture Week) in Burkina Faso and the Grandes conférences du ministère de la culture (Major Conferences of the Ministry of Culture), which have put considerable emphasis on the subject (Kompaoré 1999; Nyamba 1999; Topan 1999), as well as the Festivals des origines (Festivals of Origins) and other Journées culturelles (Culture Days) in Senegal, resulting in conferences and publications on the subject (Tambadou 1996; Sambou 2005); or indeed the cultural events sponsored by the Malian government, such as the Biennale des Arts (Biennial Arts Festival), or the festivals in celebration of the Charter of Kouroukan Fouga. Thus, in Mali, the year 2003 was declared the year for pro-

57. *Du coq à l’âme* (Graphoui, ASBL, 1999). The film aims to create an overview of the triple program of initiatives involved in the promotion of joking kinship: “To bring information concerning a little-known African idiosyncrasy. To bring a different perspective to the ethnic conflicts ravaging Africa. To suggest a link between an African sociocultural element and western Humanism of the sixteenth century.” The idea behind the eponymous book (Faton 1999), the author tells us, came from thoughts concerning the conflicts in Rwanda and Burundi. The work compares extracts from conversations on joking relationships in Senegal and Burkina Faso, extracts from Erasmus’ *In Praise of Folly*, and a letter from a Burundian friend containing a first-hand account of political violence in the Great Lakes region. By means of this arrangement, the author proceeds to compare joking relationships, the “ancient African practice,” with the humanism espoused by Erasmus, who made use of popular literature, carnival, and farce to criticize those in power at the time, and the “fratricidal wars” of his contemporaries: “Rival ethnic groups in West Africa were using humor to defuse violence, as Erasmus did, and long before him.”

58. This should not be confused with the Manden Charter (1222) of the brotherhood of hunters (Cissé and Kamissoko 1991, 39; Cissé, Fofana, and Sagot-Duvauroux 2003). The Charter of Kouroukan Fouga (1236), which was presented as “the first democratic constitution of the medieval Empire of Mali,” was “restored” by Manden traditionalists in a focus group on rural radio stations held at Kankan in Guinea in March 1998 under the aegis of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie and Intermedia Consultants (a Swiss development group). Traditionalists from Senegal, Mali, and Guinea met behind closed doors so as to compare their versions, and then the Guinean magistrate, Siriman Kouyaté, organized the translation and produced a written version of forty-four articles preceded by a foreword in the manner of a modern constitution. Like the Manden Charter, described by the calligrapher Aboubacar Fofana as a “buried treasure” (Cissé, Fofana, and Sagot-Duvauroux 2003), the invention of the Charter of Kouroukan Fouga “treasure,” which is due to be published by the African Union with a preface by Djibril Tamsir Niane, is the fruit of a veritable subregional cultural exercise in codification and the production of African political “texts,” undertaken in partnership with NGOs from the north. It is worth bearing in mind that, even before its official publication, a number of school textbooks had already taken it on board as an “important founding text,” in which the “citizenship of the Empire” was laid out. It has been used in support of the most diverse arguments (decentralization, local democracy, the protection of the environment, feminism, the right of asylum and diplomatic immunity, human rights, cultural diversity, and social
moting senankuya. In a number of cultural events sponsored by the Burkinabe government, time slots were reserved for joking relationships in the official schedule. We should also note that in the organized soccer matches between Bisa and Gurunsi, San and Moose, the issue at stake is to lose so as not to win the infamous trophy “confirming” the stereotype (dog’s head, basket of ground-nuts, and so on). During the SNC, a “joking relationship village” or “community village” is installed, promoting the “patriotic,” festive, and culinary rivalry of the different communities taking part (Sissao 2002, 152–55), in a manner reminiscent of the Serer-Jola Festivals des origines in Senegal. All of these events contribute to the institutionalization of cousinage and its regulation in major state-sponsored traditions.

The issue of joking relationships is also the object of official funding. In Burkina Faso, for example, the Grandes conferences aside, the theme of joking alliances has been made a research priority by the Centre national de la recherché scientifique et technique (CNRST; National Center for Scientific and Technical Research 1995), which has given rise to several field studies (ibid.). According to the CNRST (1995, 360), “it seems expedient to identify them [the joking relationships or alliances], classify them, and analyze them in order to make the most of them.” Likewise, in Senegal, the report of the symposium on “Convergences culturelles” (cultural convergences) in 1994 advocates that studies should be carried out on the “impact of joking relationships” (Tambadou 1996, 36). Various subregional workshops (Labbé 1997; Bamako 1997; Kankan 1998; Mopti 1999; Bamako 2004; Conakry 2005) organized by the NGO Enda Tiers-Monde, the Swiss development agency, and the Sahel Club have also

security), which all have in common the fact that they look to the prestigious past of the West African empires, “inventing” equivalents of the Magna Carta (1215), the Bill of Rights (1628, 1689), Habeas Corpus (1679), the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen (1789) imported from the West. The inventor of the N’ko alphabet, Solomana Kanté, had already, in his time, insisted on the “division of the world” and the institutionalization of senankuya operated by Sunjata Keïta at the Kouroukan Fouga assembly (Amselle 2001, 198f.), as did Djibril Tamsir Niane (1960, 138f.). In the “constitutional” version of the Charter (1998), “Article 7” states, “Sanankunya (joking relationship) and tanamannyonya (blood pact) have been established among the Mandinkas. Consequently, any contention that occurs among these groups should not degenerate, respect for one another being the rule. Between brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law, between grandparents and grandchildren, tolerance and rag [sic] should be the principle.” The Charter is available from the site http://www.africa-orale.org/charte.rtf. A calendar of the year 764 of the Kouroukan Fouga (2000 CE) was published and sold at the Salon du livre de jeunesse in Montreuil in 1999. A film was also produced by the Malian director Alioune Ifra Ndiaye, entitled Le Bal de Kurukanfuga, based on a show thought up by the BlonBa theater company and the national broadcaster, ORTM, and inspired by the proclamation of the Kouroukan Fouga. The film was the central element in the programs broadcast by ORTM to celebrate the millennium.

Thus, daily sessions of “oratorical jousting between joking kin” in the square in front of the town hall of Bobo-Dioulasso were planned in the program for the thirteenth SNC of 2006.

59.
established an information-gathering program on “joking kinship” throughout the subregion, both in writing (Camara 1969; Diall, and Traoré 1999; Teme 1999; Thea 1999) and in the form of community radio programs (archives at CELTHO in Niamey; ARTO digital databank project).

A large number of stakeholders with different statuses and objectives are involved in these promotion ventures. These include the individuals behind the establishment of legitimate “traditions,” who are in fact much more “traditional” than traditionalist; or the responsible politicians, such as El Hadj Sékou Tall (1996), the Larlé Naaba Tigré, who edits the journal *Tradition et Modernité* in Burkina Faso, and Bakary Ndiaye, the former chief of the griot poets in Mali. There are also researchers such as Raphaël Ndiaye from Enda Tiers-Monde, and Alain Sissao; journalists such as Martin Faye and Boniface Batiana; presenters of cultural programs broadcast on radio or television; men of the theater like Prosper Kompaoré; writers like Cheikh Hamidou Kane; scholars such as Saliou Kandji; activists in defense of national languages, Babacar Sédikh Diouf and Yoro Doro Diallo, for instance; governors like Saliou Sambou in Senegal; magistrates like Siriman Kouyaté in Guinea; Msgr. Anselme Sanon in Burkina Faso; and the director of CELHTO, Mangoné Niang, in Niamey. Some of these cultural entrepreneurs are experts on the subject of “joking alliances” and are consulted by various international stakeholders. Of course, behind a unanimous discourse lurks struggles for position, attempts to monopolize the expression of local knowledge, and disputes over legitimacy. However, there is also a desire to “save” a cultural heritage that is apparently under threat.

To that end, the creation of associations for promotion is worth noting, such as the Association Burkinabé pour la Promotion de la Parenté à Plaisanteries (AB3P; The Burkinabe Association for the Promotion of Joking Relationships), which was created in 2001 at Ouagadougou, the Association pour la Promotion de la Parenté à Plaisanteries at Bobo-Dioulasso (Sissao 2002, 154), or the Association Aguène et Diambogne in Senegal in 1994 (De Jong 2005), the

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60. Interview with the Larlé Naaba Tigré on joking relationships, *Les Frères d’Armes* 244 (2004).

61. Interview with Bakary Soumano on this subject can be found at: http://www.bamakoculture.org/tribune/sinakuya.html. Accessed October 13th, 2005

publicized objective of which is to promote and re-instill in young people “joking kinship” and the values associated with it.63

The emergence of these associations is inextricably linked with a report made by their founders concerning a supposed crisis of transmission and lament for the “loss of traditional values.” As for endangered languages, it seems appropriate that they should be taught to the young once again so that they are not forgotten.64 The proliferation of discussions concerning their promotion seems to be correlated to the report made by the founders of these associations concerning the supposed “decline” of these practices. As an attempt to “prioritize tradition” and as a possible future (Diagne 1992), the debate concerning the necessity for a “cultural solution” (Poncelet 1994) has become an integral part of the strategy to promote skills and raise funds (for ethnological research and associations for promotion and rediscovery).

These associations in Senegal and Burkina Faso have notably called for the creation of: national joking alliance days and a “Sahelian joking alliance day” (the principal displays of which were to take place at Kurukan Fuga), a “cousinage week,” a number of “summer camps” for groups with joking alliance connections, a “cousinage festival,” and so on.65 In addition, the teaching

63. It is also worth noting that, since 2004, the Burkinabe association Sagl-Taaba, which is increasing public awareness concerning questions of civic and moral education through the theater, has made it its aim to “reactivate joking kinship nationally and in the French-speaking countries of the subregion; and through it to promote the integration of the peoples of West Africa; to annihilate or, at the very least, to reduce interethnic and interstate tensions thanks to the integration of its peoples.” It has notably organized an “evening of joking relationships.” See: Le Pays 3242, October 29, 2004.

64. In Senegal, a campaigner from the Association Culturelle Aguène et Diambogne pointed out that “young people don’t really know the extent of joking cousinage. But with the creation of the Ageen Jamboñ association we are in the process of educating them” (interview with Yayha Badji, Ziguinchor, November 29, 2004). In Burkina Faso, the Association pour la Promotion de la Parenté à Plaisanterie (The Association for the Promotion of Joking Relationships) is undertaking to reeducate the people, especially in cities, about the essence of their common heritage which has been lost or is in the process of disappearing” (Sissao 2002, 155). This approach highlights the timeliness of the tradition/modernity scheme as far as representations and the desire to manage them are concerned. The reference to the famous work by Cheikh Hamidou Kane, L’Aventure ambiguë, made both by Alain Sissao (2002, 132) and Raphaël Ndiaye (1999), for example, is undoubtedly not without significance. In 1961, Cheikh Hamidou Kane (1972, 34) asked the famous question concerning children attending French schools: “Would what they would learn be worth as much as what they would forget?” He replied in 1995: “The reply is that it is possible to learn without forgetting, and even to learn again what has been forgotten!” (Kane 1995, 145). On this point, see Ndiaye 1999.

65. It is worth noting that, in the past, there were festivals centered on joking alliances or cousinage, giving rise to war games (beating and hunting) between joking allies, as at Muslim New Year (Ashura in Arabic, Jombende in Malinke, Wowo in Hausa) observed at Kankan in Guinea (Humblot 1918, 532), at Bonduku (Tauxier 1921, 289), and in northern Nigeria (Wilson-Haffenden 1930, 125). These festive New Year practices involving beatings between senankuw (and between age classes),
of joking alliances as part of the school curriculum and the creation of didactic materials on these alliances for civic education courses have been called for in Burkina Faso (Sissao 2002, 135) and even implemented in Senegal thanks to collaboration with the NGOs. There is, thus, a return to the ethical “prescriptions” of joking alliances in a written form. This neo-functionalist teaching of joking alliances (that is to say, the desire to standardize these practices by turning them into mechanisms for keeping the peace and resolving conflicts), aims to transform them from spontaneous practices resulting—as pointed out in various contributions to this volume—from diverse and changing strategies in terms of interaction, into a “tool” serving a well-defined and unchanging purpose. While accepting the possible effectiveness of a peacekeeping dialogue and its commendable intentions, we can only emphasize the illusory nature of social modeling and the educational inculcation of absolute “values” promoted by this educational discourse. The same ideology of “peace through culture” appears in the “good practices” kit put together in order to preach reconciliation between Ivory Coast communities by the American NGO Search for Common Ground, which, at the request of their local radio station partners, makes use of joking alliances in the radio program “Passerelle.”

The various stakeholders are therefore carrying out the cultural task of standardization and rationalization. Seen from the perspective of classic common heritage, “ethnic groups” are regarded as creative spaces and their diversity as a source of cultural richness. Whether this national cultural heritage leads, as some believe, to reification and artificiality in terms of practice, or as others believe, to new creative uses, these are the scenarios that will also constitute “tradition” as far as the people involved are concerned. This will inevitably create misunderstandings between the promoters of these alliances and researchers, on the one hand, and the majority of individuals who are not involved in the question of common heritage and the “survival” of these specific everyday practices, on the other.

66. For example, in Senegal, the NGO GRA-REDEP (Groupe Agora pour l’Education aux Droits de l’Enfant et a la Paix) and the management of the elementary school have used and adapted works by Raphaël Ndiaye in the civic education manuals for the pilot program “school administration,” including: descriptions, examples, and sketches to be acted out by the pupils who have to use cousinage relationships in order to resolve a conflict within the school. The Charter of Kouroukan Fouga is included in the appendix (DEE-GRA-REDEP 2003).

67. Ventures promoting joking alliances are developing a moral and moralizing side to the discourse connected with them based on the “values of cousinage,” whether they are renamed “ethics” (Diouf 1997), “codes of conduct” (Doumbia 2002), or “doctrine” (see the following article from the Tanzanian press, which emphasizes the extent of ignorance in urban populations concerning “Utani doctrine”: Edgar Mbaganile, “Utani Hailed for Enhancing National Unity,” Sunday Observer, n.d., 2002). See also Étienne Smith’s contribution to this volume.

68. Fraternité Matin, November 17, 2005.
The Creation of National Identities

The reasons for the creation of a common heritage outlined above reflect the revival of national and nationalist projects in West Africa, of which we are able to appreciate both the continuity with the institutions which existed prior to independence as well as their adaptation to the new zeitgeist. Nationalist discourse is in a state of crisis, but it is in the process of being rekindled by the creation of a common heritage involving joking alliances. The classic ways of displaying official nationalism are called on as part of the discourse in which joking alliances are exalted. Although the nationalist spirit of the “suns of independence” has often tended to deny the existence of ethnic groups, which are perceived as being in competition with a project involving national integration, the contemporary nationalism analyzed here is caught up in the global zeitgeist of “cultural diversity,” which is forcing it to create different communities out of the various cultural identities.

Does the insistence on joking alliances as an illustration (a cause even) of peaceful interethnic relationships between different national constituents serve as an argument in favor of creating the uniqueness boasted of by every country? As the appended references would indicate, the exceptions of the Senegalese, Burkinabe, Malian, Guinean, Nigerien, Zambian, and so on owe much to joking alliances that “cement the connections within nations.” The “heritage” that must be maintained (Kouyaté 2003), and the “treasure” that must be brought to fruition are the metaphors used to describe the gifts, of which the relevant nations must prove themselves worthy, as they are what make them “unique.” Joking alliances are highlighted within the image of the countries when they are promoted abroad; for example, on a number of official websites in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. The official presentation of Niger at the Fifth Francophone Games in 2005 ran as follows:

The power behind the social cohesion in Niger undoubtedly lies in its joking cousinage. This cousinage enables the various ethnic groups to criticize each other without coming into conflict. It is an excellent means of reducing interethnic problems and has made society in Niger a tolerant society, a nation of peaceful coexistence.

Sometimes, in a veritable “cultural effort” intended for export, the discourse relating to promotion is brought into very diverse international situations. Of note is the Conférence sur la parenté à plaisanterie (Joking Alliance Conference) organized by the Burkinabe minister in charge of relations with parliament at the Burkina Faso embassy, which took place in Paris on May 25, 2002. In addition, there is the conference concerning cousinage in Mali intended

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as part of the “Journées culturelles du Mali à Vienne” (“Malian Cultural Days in Vienna”) held in October, 2006, and organized by the minister for Malians abroad. In the program of the latter event, it was asked:

Is it fair to say that the whole of Africa is awash with ethnic conflicts? The whole of Africa? No, indeed! Central Sahel, especially countries like Mali and Burkina Faso, are characterized by stable, multi-ethnic societies. A lot of Malians think that the interethnic harmony in their society is due to the existence of cousinage, which allows you to make fun of people and resolve certain conflicts at their very source.

At international conferences and interviews, representatives of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Senegal are at pains to remind people of the “custom” that accounts for the peacefulness of their respective societies. On the embassy website, an active role is thus attributed to senankuya, with the message from the ambassador to Mali in Japan running as follows:

There is a custom in Mali known as “Sananguya,” passed down through the generations in different ethnic groups, which says that we should not dominate but support one another while laughing and joking, irrespective of the place or circumstances. Japanese textbooks cite the efforts of the Malians to build friendly interpersonal relations as an example of a culture that places importance on greetings.71

The point of these narratives is to promote “national know-how.”72 Seen from this perspective, promotion for the tourist market and the celebration of joking alliances are often one and the same thing.73 Furthermore, this discourse is not unique to the countries under consideration here; the (paradoxical?) suggestion of exporting “peace practices,” which are part and parcel of national “genius,” to other continents that do not have them has been taken up by intellectuals from a variety of disciplines.74

72. “Joking alliances are a subject of national expertise, part of a transnational phenomenon able to serve the interests of peace in the subregion in a useful manner” (from an interview with Boniface Batiana, president of the AB3P, by Gonzague Rambaud, “Injures diplomatiques!,” Le Nouvel Afrique Asie 180 (2004). “The implementation of joking relationships as an area of expertise in Burkina Faso for the management of conflict” may be noted among the objectives of the AB3P in Burkina Faso (Sissao 2002, 155).
73. Internet sites and tourist guides are too numerous to cite here so we will limit ourselves to a Zambian example of joking relationships constituting a characteristic feature of the country, alongside its landscapes and wildlife: http://naturallyafrica.org/country/zambia/guide/guide-interesting-facts.php. Accessed, December 15th, 2005.
74. Thus, the philosopher Jean-Louis Sagot-Duvaouroux, in his “Lettre à Monsieur le consul de France au Mali” (L’Humanité, October 31, 2002, http://www.humanite.fr/node/431200), makes the suggestion that they should form the basis for new relations between the ex-colonists and the ex-colonized in the same way that senankuya once used to build relations between the conquered and the conqueror; or indeed, the anthropologist, Thomas Hylland Eriksen: “This wonderful African institution deserves being exported to other continents. Perhaps Jews and Palestinians, or Christians and
For local stakeholders, the method is to anchor these national institutions in the past and attribute historical depth to them, a classic process of naturalizing the imagined community, giving the impression that nations and national sentiment existed before the nation-states inherited from the colonial period. The groups interconnected by cousinarie would thus have had an “ancestral” consciousness of their common destiny. According to this interpretation, joking alliances should at the very least be an indication and, at the most, the cause of a national sentiment founded on a cultural unity that existed before the nation-states. Amadou Toumani Touré’s speech, which brought the Biennale des Arts of 2003 to a close, is a good example of the discursive process of naturalizing the Malian nation:

An exception in Africa, rarely has a people preexisted a nation-state in such an indisputable way. Cemented by history, Malian consciousness is a reality, founded on the collective certainty of belonging to a nation, the age and extent of which exceed those of the modern Republic of Mali by a long way. Ethnic diversity and cultural solidarity: this state of mind has a basis in fact: at a given moment in a history over a thousand years old, each of the major ethnic groups has known a period of glory, in which it reigned over the others. Relationships between the ethnic groups have been consolidated by the cultural cross-fertilization of the various communities and reinforced by *sinankuya* or joking relationships.  

Nationalist Malian narrative thus proclaims that *senankuya* are “relationship ties,” the heritage of a past characterized by diversity and cross-fertilization. 

They are the visible sign that “democracy” and “decentralization” are not an

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75. Amadou Toumani Touré, concluding speech, Biennale des Arts, September 11, 2005, http://www.koulouba.pr.ml/article.php3?id_article=691. Accessed November 10th, 2005. Kélétigui Mariko (1990, 36) says the same thing about Niger: “National unity in Niger predates the creation of the nation-state and is based on relationships of joking kinship forged between the ten ethno-linguistic groups.” Similarly, in Senegal, it was observed at the Colloque sur les convergences culturelles (Colloquium on Cultural Agreement) in 1994 that “the nation’s profound cultural unity is not a political creation, but the fruit of an age-old cross-fertilization in areas of cultural convergence such as Futa and Gabu. From an African perspective, this demonstrates the possibility of a citizenship that transcends ethnic belonging, and institutes diversity as a level of richness, rather than being an end in itself” (Tambadou 1996, 36).

76. Mohamed Ag Amani, speech, Conférence épiscopale de l’Afrique de l’Ouest francophone, February 4, 2003, http://cerao.cef.fr/txt/acc_disc.htm. The complete sentence is as follows: “A crossroads of civilization, Mali is a nation which is heir to illustrious empires and kingdoms, which have shaped its destiny through the age-old cross-fertilization of cultures, universally transforming its diversity into relationships that every Malian is proud to savor through joking cousinage, the satisfying results of which contribute to the pleasures of mutual acceptance.”
import, but a local tradition, coming from a Malian know-how established since the “federal” Empire of Sunjata Keïta and the Charter of Kouroukan Fouga.\textsuperscript{77}

We should therefore analyze how joking alliances have been integrated within these national narratives of cultural convergence and transformed into ties through which the different communities within the national whole are linked (De Jong 2005; Galvan, and Smith, both in this issue). Within this narrative, joking alliances function as symbolic factors of the transition from the plurality of “ethnic group” to the “nation,” which is the result of their combination. The objective, which is on the whole very much in keeping with Renan’s views (Renan 1882), consists in attributing value to past conflicts in terms of social integration (whether they are referred to as such or glossed over as “alliances,” “interconnections,” and “convergences,”) and therefore to the alliances that constitute a popular, light-hearted reminder of them (Smith, in this volume).

Some of the interpretations offered by the contributors to this volume differ somewhat in this matter. For instance, should we see in this combination the desire to create a national feeling through “connectivity” (Smith, Galvan), or an indication of a retreat from the community promoted by an ethnicizing discourse (Fouéré, Canut)? It is nonetheless possible to reconcile these approaches by analysis of the ambiguity and inherent difficulties of connecting community differences and national unity. In this sense, Marie-Aude Fouéré and Cécile Canut emphasize the fact that it is above all a reactive discourse. The reaction concerns the material nature of the conflicts, on the one hand, and, on the other, an ethnicist interpretation promoted by the dominant discourse, that of the western media, which contributes significantly to the creation of a nationalist discourse as a by-product. This particular discourse has adopted a codified and ready to use “joking kinship” as one of the traditions listed in the colonial library in order to apply a “remedy” and to canonize a “tool” that is essential to national integration.\textsuperscript{78}

In Africa, which is systematically billed as a


\textsuperscript{78} Thus, for example, in the argument in the official document establishing the thematic priorities related to research in Burkina Faso, the genocide in Rwanda is expressly described as a model to be avoided at all costs, highlighting the urgency with which the “management” of “interethnic relationships” should be put into practice as well as the necessity for an investigation into joking relationships (CNRST 1995, 361.) This is also the case in a work on \textit{Convergences culturelles} [cultural convergences] in Senegal taken from the colloquium of June, 1994, (Tambadou 1996).
continent torn by ethnic conflicts, the objective would be, in a manner that is both authentic and African, to find ways to “put the pieces back together again” (that is, ethnic pieces), and to “fill in the gaps” between particularisms, to use an expression coined by Senghor. In this respect, we might take note of the intrinsic ambiguity of a discourse that both promotes the differences between communities (necessary for joking alliances to function) and their convergences within the nation as a whole (De Jong 1995).

It is striking, however, that the discourse promoting joking alliances, which is favorable to the expression of African uniqueness, externally speaking, runs in precisely the opposite direction to native logic, internally speaking (Bayart, Geschiere, and Nyamnjoh 2001), whether in Senegal with the Casamance crisis (De Jong 2005; Smith in this volume), or in Burkina Faso on the part of members of civil society who find there an opportunity to criticize the manipulation of ethnicity by certain politicians (Hagberg, in this volume). Even if the discourse extolling joking alliances undoubtedly contributes to the standardization—or even the hardening—of identities owing to its performative dimension, it would be difficult to see in it, in terms of intention, the community-making logic of ethnicism or localism, as, on the contrary, it is a matter of recovering, domesticating, and reorganizing ethnic narratives within the wider picture of a national(ist) rhetoric (Smith and Galvan in this issue; De Jong 2005). The venture to promote cousinage takes a gamble that the recognition of ethnic groups, in terms of culture and their communal celebration, would make it possible to avoid all political exploitation of differences, so as to banish separatist thought processes. According to this premise, ethnicity should be culturally legitimate in order to be politically illegitimate.

In other words, should we not differentiate between intentions and consequences? In this way, we are able to emphasize the different ways in which joking alliances are exploited by stakeholders with diverse aims; however, the shared, sometimes unintentional effect of this contributes to the validation of the term “ethnic group.” This discourse is a reaction to the very “essence” of the term. It is unable to come to terms with abandoning the deconstructionist notion, as anthropologists refer to it, and at the same time constitutes a reaction

79. We should note that the development of ethnic stereotypes in Africa is such that conflict and “tribalism” are regarded as the normal and expected result of any “ethnic” diversity. It is therefore the absence of ethnic conflict that seems “miraculous,” “fortuitous,” and “exceptional.” The terse subheading to an article on joking relationships in Burkina Faso runs thus: “Soixante-deux ethnies, zéro conflict!” (Sixty-two Ethnic Groups, Zero Conflict!)” (“Parenté à plaisanterie: moquez-vous mais ne vous battez pas!,” *Syfia International*, September 1, 2001, http://www.syfia.info/index.php?view=articles&action=voir&idArticle=1259). Similarly, in an article in the journal of the NGO Enfants du Monde (Children of the World), “La Parenté à plaisanterie: véritable régulateur social au Burkina Faso,” *Mond’Info* 1, March 2004, 2, we read, still à propos of joking kinship in Burkina Faso: “The social peace reigning there seems to run contrary to the composite and heterogeneous nature of its population” (our italics).
to ethnicism. The publicized objective of this discourse is to save the “ethnic group” (which is fairly essentialized, reified, and endowed with the character of folklore) from becoming autochthonous by attributing supposedly cohesive and peacekeeping virtues to interethnic relations in order to produce an open-ended ethnicity. The category “ethnic group” is thus both confirmed and superseded. As far as their promoters are concerned, it is a matter of the political mobilization of interethnic or transethnic alliances—the overlap between groups, rather than “ethnic groups” per se, even if this mobilization clearly leads to processes of essentialization and reification similar to those produced by “ethnic” mobilization.\footnote{By insisting on the ties themselves, we thus validate the categories that should be connected. The conundrum concerning cultural cross-fertilization, which presupposes a distinction between the essential ingredients to be blended (Amselle 1990), is not easily resolved in the discourse of a national community made up of an amalgamation of elements that are themselves interconnected. Although generally opposed to the narrative of autochthony (beyond promotion of an “African tradition” versus the rest of the world), it is sometimes possible to connect the rhetoric of promoting of joking alliances with this discourse. Thus, Henri Legré, an Ivory Coast professor, extols joking relationships as a unifying factor in Ivory Coast … although this is done to emphasize “the intrusion of exogenous elements”: “Well before colonization, the Ivory Coast had in place the fabric of a pre-established national conscience. I am emphasizing ‘joking kinship or relationships.’ We have four kinship circles, and four axes of ‘joking relationships,’ stretching from the Eighteen Mountains as far as the Lobi. Everyone within this circle is related. … This is so that all those who consider themselves to be related, and, indirectly, as allies of allies, can never come to blows, still less kill each other. This is the reason why, for a very long time, we knew relative stability, and, moreover, it is this that testifies to the intrusion of exogenous elements in the Ivorian political domain which are there in order to sabotage it” (L’Inter 1533 [2003]).} Their purpose is to show that “ethnic groups” can be transcended, not only by an imported sense of citizenship, but also, and above all, by a local transexthnic “precolonial” code of conduct, judged by them to be more mindful of a sense of otherness in terms of the necessary expression of differences than of “abstract universalism” (Smith, in this book). One of the ways of emerging from this debate between the authors here is to return it to the wider and more comparative problem of the different models of national integration being debated in Africa, thus depriving it of its distinctive features. This enables the discussion to steer clear of false debates of the “state” versus “ethnic groups,” each in turn accused of all the evils, while emphasizing the different national contexts relative to African nationalism and the problems shared by them (Berman, Eyoh, and Kymlicka 2004; Forrest 2004; Barrington 2006).

We should also note that the inclusion of the issue of joking relationships in nationalist projects does not exclude their utilization on the subregional level by most of their advocates. The existence of many of these connections within the whole West African subregion, the transitive quality of the alliances, the erstwhile migrations, and the equivalences between cultural groups are therefore emphasized (Mariko 1990; Ndiaye 1992; Sissao 2002; Kouyaté 2003). The
reference to erstwhile areas of integration, the retrospective imaginings of the Kouroukan Fouga and imperial lands more vast than the modern nation-states, sometimes spanning several of them (Ghana, Mali, Gabu), are omnipresent within the discourse of promotion, although they often remain at the level of rhetorical eulogy.

The Cosmopolitanism of Nationalism

The authors of this volume hold differing opinions concerning the role of the “West” in the reinvention of national traditions and the reasons for making a common heritage out of joking relationships. Cécile Canut and Marie-Aude Fouéré highlight the dominant role of northern stakeholders in development and cooperation, particularly through funding, in this neo-functionalist invention of local traditions of joking alliances. The role of external stakeholders in the development of national or regional inventions, and the creation of identities, is well-known and of fundamental importance, as is demonstrated by the numerous works on European nationalism during the last two centuries (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Thiesse 1999). On this point we might do well to take up the phrase used by Anne-Marie Thiesse (ibid., 64), namely, “the cosmopolitanism of nationalism.” This recourse to a comparative stance enables us to put into perspective, not the significance of the “colonial library” as such, but its specific nature. It goes without saying that UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) has replaced the Brothers Grimm in terms of the classification and promotion of “national” traditions in “initiatives for the creation of identity” (ibid., 83), but the processes are similar irrespective of whether we are involved in reinventing joking alliances, or patriotic traditions in India or Europe. There is therefore a requirement for unified questioning that concerns a global distinction in terms of the authority of national traditions and the chain reaction connected with them through the imitation of, or resentment towards, western hegemony (Kedourie 1960, 1971; Berlin 1970; Smith 1973; Chatterjee 1986; Greenfeld 1992; Crepon 1996; Amselle 2001; Jaffrelot 2005).

The study of the external conditions producing these forms of nationalism should not mask the often decisive part played by internal agency (Galvan, Hagberg, and Smith in this volume). The rise of discourses relating to the reinvention of joking alliances certainly represents a typical example of the north-south circulation of motifs, practices, and narratives. The invention of local traditions is a global and cosmopolitan phenomenon, but is always carried out

81. We should note here that retrospective imperial imaginings concerning the Gabu Empire have also given rise to a more nativistic reappropriation of them, in opposition to the existing nation-states; for instance, in the rhetoric of the MFDC in Casamance, or in the idea that the appropriation of the heritage of the Mali and Wagadou empires might potentially lead to controversies between nation-states (Mali versus Guinea, and so on).
by both external and internal agents. There is, thus, a convergence of two purposes. On the one hand, there is a desire, asserted by local stakeholders and their intermediaries, for an Africanization of governments and—seen from a very Senghorian or Herderian point of view—for participation in the universal through a specific contribution. There is also, on the other hand, the well-developed discourse maintained by international agents concerning “peacekeeping” and “conflict resolution” with respect to “others.” Ultimately, the origins of the reinvented “tradition” of cousinage do not matter, despite remaining paradoxically trapped within the illusory nature of these “origins.” The interpretations are thus in agreement that this venture in neo-traditionalist promotion is not just a simple reproduction of the formal orders of international organizations, which—and we would do well to remember this—generally have no idea of the meaning of joking relationships. It is more a question of a “window of opportunity” as far as the stakeholders are concerned, “native developers” as they are called by Marc Poncelet (1994). For they know how to combine their own strategic agenda with “the rehashed clichés of international parlance” (Mbembe 2000), notably “recourse to cultural resources” (Poncelet 1994).

Nevertheless, as is demonstrated by Marie-Aude Fouéré and Cécile Canut, what is at stake in the discourse about the reinvention of joking alliances is as much the individual national inventions (Senegalese, Malian, and Burkinabe) as the image of Africa in general and its relationship with the rest of the world. This discourse is part of a wider discourse concerning “African democracy,” “human rights,” and “cultural diversity” (Fouéré 2005). The “palaver tree” and “joking cousinage,” redescribed and reinvented through the vocabulary of democracy and contemporary multiculturalism, are prevalent themes in Africa and with regards to its place in a globalized world. These are specific characteristics, both promoted and subsumed within a wider motif, that of the

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82. The tension between the universal and the specific nature of conflict resolution concerns both international and national stakeholders alike.

83. We might wonder, however, whether this discourse serves to create internal boundaries between West Africa and central Africa, and even between Sahelian and “forest peoples,” reaffirming the all too familiar racial divisions… Fily Dabo Sissoko (1950, 230) wrote in 1950: “It [senankuya] can be observed among almost all the Sudanese peoples, who are apparently distinguished thus from the Bantu peoples, who are for that matter ignorant of castes.” This is also the view held by the American journalist, Yaroslav Trofimov, who notes: “that tradition is known to locals as ‘cousinage,’ and arose as a way to preserve peace as empire succeeded empire in medieval times. The descendants of winners and losers were usually made ‘cousins’ in order to bury grievances. The tradition of loyalty to multiple cousin groups still defines social relationships in Mali, in contrast to the tribal allegiances that are the rule in much of the Arab world and tropical Africa further south” (Trofimov, “Polling Timbuktu: Islamic Democracy?”; our italics). On the other hand, we should point out that it is emphasized in works on Tanzania, for instance, that utani relationships exist only within and between “Bantu tribes” (sic) (Christensen 1963, 1324).
requirements of a universal zeitgeist. Should we see in it the umpteenth reincarnation of a re-emergent Afrocentrism (Fouéré and Canut in this volume), or perhaps the classic process of appropriation and indigenization/endogenization (Hagberg, Smith, and Galvan in this volume)?

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This volume does not claim to be exhaustive. It demonstrates a renewed interest in the study of joking relationships, a field which had been relegated to the backburner after its heyday in classical anthropology. This interest reflects a desire to scrutinize the political and contemporary uses of joking relationships, an area that has not received individual attention up to this point. Priority has been given to three areas: the dynamics of interaction in urban and rural communities, their use in the public domain, and finally the discourse promoting these joking relationships. The analysis of these three areas has made it possible to address the broader research fields of intercommunity relations, contemporary politics, and the process of reinventing traditions in West Africa. The break with functionalism and the culturalist ethnological approach has made it possible to reintroduce and reaffirm the political dimension present in both past and current uses of the alliances, and investigate practical and scholarly contemporary usage.

There are a number of omissions in this venture, however. For example, this volume lacks studies of the problem of gender in joking alliances, studies from a sociolinguistic standpoint, and studies of their historic origins. On this final point, the matrix of these relationships within a given context undoubtedly


85. The “invention” of the Charter of Kouroukan Fouga and the promotion of joking kinship in West Africa seem to have given rise to similar ventures in search of “found ing texts” and institutions along the lines of joking kinship. The “Declaration of Libreville” of 2003, which concluded the International Conference on Intercultural Dialogue, held under the aegis of UNESCO and the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), warmly recommends: “the reinforcement of public spaces and the creation of new ones based on ‘joking kinship’ so as to eliminate aggression, … the encouragement of a systematic study of epic narratives and other great founding texts in the region, following the example of studies relating to the Manding Epic. The revival of the Centre International des Civilisations Bantu (CICIBA) and the completion of the creation of its national base” (UNESCO 2005, 21; our italics).
remains to be determined (if indeed there is one that is shared by the various practices included within this concept). What is the role of slavery and captivity, of Islam, of precolonial political institutions, especially blood pacts and oaths, social stratification, long-distance commerce, migrations, military conquests, environmental constraints, matrilineal organization, and avuncular and cross-cousin relationships, and so on in the origins of alliances and imaginary relatives? Indeed, the overlap between academic and political ways of thinking remains one of the most difficult problems. For some scholars, it is a matter of revealing the relations of power and domination that are undoubtedly present in these practices, or rather of emphasizing the illusory nature of peacekeeping in cultural engineering and the intrinsic lack of understanding within culturalist neo-traditionalism. On the other hand, others have as their objective the mapping, classification, standardization, and promotion of these relationships, as well as aiming to deactivate the hierarchical matrix by stressing the intrinsic

86. In academic literature, the debate concerning the origins of joking alliances has a particular bearing on the question of whether intrafamilial joking relationships precede interclan and interethnic relationships, or vice versa; in other words, the possible extension by imitation of avuncular relationships and cousinage to include relationships between different political communities, the fear of the world outside, the inclusion of outsiders, and the maintenance of political relationships that are gradually forming, within a familiar hierarchical idiom, namely that of the family. For both Christensen (1963, 1324) and Moreau (1941, 5), this process has taken place through the extension of internal utani (intrafamilial and then interclan) to include external utani (interethnic). Conversely, for Griaule (1948, 242–43, 255), the mangu between the Bozo and the Dogon constitutes the genuine “original institution,” with mangu relationships between different Dogon groups being merely derivative and imitative of Dogon-Bozo mangu. We do not intend to resolve this question here, but merely to emphasize the fact that interethnic alliances were in all likelihood the last on the scene, being contemporaneous with the discursive processes of ethnogenesis (precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial); the very question is in itself misleading. The radical distinction made—as with Moreau—between a relationship that is “internal” to the group (intratribal utani) and an external relationship (intertribal utani) comes down to making the boundaries between groups the determining factor, when, on the contrary, it is in fact the similarity of the relationships that argues in favor of a continuum. Moreover, the expression and the repetition of the relationship largely contribute to producing the same boundary not “already in situ.”

87. Among the discussants of the contributions presented at the colloquium, Jean Schmitz very notably emphasized the importance of the Islamic matrix in creating the stereotypical pairs frequently used in joking alliances (town/bush; city dwellers/barbarians; Muslim/pagan mores), as well as the recourse to a “third party” in mediation practices. For his part, Jean-Loup Amselle has stressed the need to study Mande senankuya from the viewpoint of the structural evolution of the “two-race war” in local power theories, and as a hierarchical structure for incorporating outsiders or those who have been defeated. Highlighting the transformation which is currently underway, he emphasized the fact that senankuya were thus an integral part of this hierarchical matrix, which has, in fact, been “deactivated” in the current discourse of promotion.
equality of its protagonists. It is therefore in the interest of these promoters to ignore the conditions under which these alliances were produced and implemented so as to stir up national sentiment or to resolve conflict. This widespread movement, which is concerned with the reinvention and classification of political, cultural, and religious traditions in which the promotion of cousinage plays a part, is apparently one of the elements of political creativity characteristic of Africa, of which the scholar lacks the distance necessary to be able to evaluate the impact. As a temporary measure, a case-by-case analysis and attempts at interpretation from many different standpoints seem to represent the most sensible approach to an appraisal of the motivations, opportunities and constraints, the objectives, the intellectual heritage, and the mobilization of social resources specific to the stakeholders involved in promoting cousinage. Time will tell whether this exercise in promotion is part of a lasting trend of an original political reinvention of the continent (which resulted from the crisis caused by sweeping interpretations such as ethnology, modernization, development, nationalism, adjustment, democratization, and sound government), or whether it constitutes a passing phase of culturalist celebration of a continent with such supposedly “amusing” social skills …

Whatever the answer, the social dynamics of joking alliances will probably give rise to further questions for a long time to come. The questions raised by the studies included in this volume deserve greater attention, and will inevitably result in further study for as long as the inextricable embroilment of joking alliances in African politics continues.

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