A MATTER OF TRUST
Political Identities and Interpersonal Relationships Along the River Gambia[*]

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1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary literature on social and cultural identities makes a point of representing them as a precipitate of meaningful actions, a play between agency and structure carried out within specific historical constraints (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992:32–33; see also Amselle 1990; Barth 1992; Werbner 1997). Relationally constituted in shifting patterns of dominance and subjugation, they are embedded in more global landscapes, continually being defined and redefined by the web of relations in which they inscribe themselves. The very process of their construction must be described, or to put it succinctly: "[...] all associations of place, people and culture are social and historical creations to be explained" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:4). Memory, too, is invoked in a number of broader discourses of identity:

> [...] as humans we draw on our experience to shape narrative about our lives, but equally our identity and characters are shaped by our narratives. People emerge from and are the product of their narratives about themselves as much as their stories emerge from their lives. Through acts of memory they strive to render their lives in meaningful terms (Anzte and Lambek 1996:xxi).

Representing, forgetting and interpreting the past is a complex and meaningful action through which subjects and groups place themselves quite specifically in relation to

past events while creating a multiplicity of assertions and performances "that carry moral entailments of various sort" (Antze and Lambek 1996:xxv). Following this line of thought I will explore some of the meanings assigned to the notion of *karafoo*, i.e. entrusting, among Mandinka groups living along the River Gambia and in southern Senegal (Casamance). After some general remarks about the ethnographic and historical context in which my researches were carried out, I will take into account the recurrence of this very concept in historical narratives relating to the foundation and development of Bansang, a small Mandinka town located on the south bank of the River Gambia, in the district of Fuladu West, Republic of the Gambia.[1] Numbering at present more than five thousand inhabitants, the settlement grew during the colonial period as the result of a series of migrations which led individuals and families to settle by the river looking for opportunities created by the commercialisation of groundnuts, a process that started to interest the surrounding regions during the mid nineteenth century. Mandinka families, traditionally involved in trade (*dioula*), were among the first settlers, a historical event which, according to the rules of precedence and seniority structuring local village politics, allows them to legitimate their claims to control the political life of the town. After the Second World War Fulbe and Wolof immigrants gradually followed in their wake.[2] In the old part of the town it is still possible to recognise the typical Mandinka structure of settlement, with the compound as the basic unit, usually owned by a man (though women can also assume ownership) and inhabited by his wives, sons and daughters (including adopted ones), together with matrilineal relatives, strangers and tenants (Seibert and Sidibé 1992:19). Several compounds are gathered into wards, i.e. clusters of interrelated families gravitating around a core group of people, tracing descent from a common ancestor through the male line (*kabylaa*). Families are ranked according to origin, whether they are freeborn, artisans or former slaves.[3] In this context discourses on *karafoo* explain how people come to

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[1] Between 1992 and 1998 I collected more than a hundred historical narratives relating to town and district histories. Most informants claimed a Mandinka identity. Some were men, others were women and all of them were elderly. I will also make some reference to historical narratives dealing with the creation of Fuladu, the polity under whose influence the present-day district of Fuladu West lay in the latter part of the nineteenth century (Innes 1976). For reasons of historical documentation I have chosen to retain the name of the town and the surnames of the families involved in its development, while changing the surnames of the informants mentioned in the text.

[2] The Gambian population totals about 1.200.000 inhabitants. At the beginning of the 1990s the national census identified eight major ethnic groups. Serrahuli, Jola, Serer, Kiro and Manjago make up 26 % of the population, while Mandinka make up 42 % and Fulbe and Wolof 16 % each. English is the official language while Mandinka, Wolof and Fula are the most widespread local languages (Central Statistics Department 1993). This official picture leaves little room to grasp the processes of identity construction and negotiation that have marked the history of this area of West Africa: the different groups are bound together by thick networks of marriage alliances and linguistic and socio-cultural similarities that allow them to cross "any boundary imposed by a feeling of ethnic distinction" (Wright 1997:45).

[3] Historical and ethnographical literature describes Mande societies as characterised by patrilineal descent, patrilocal residence rules and a virilocal form of marriage (Jansen 1996:661). Surnames identi-

live together in a certain locality, negotiating their reciprocal positions and managing to create a feeling of trust among themselves as a guarantee against future uncertainties: entrustment is one of the strategies which enable individuals and groups to recognize their belonging to wider forms of coalition. Finally, I will discuss some of the changes in this practice in colonial and postcolonial Gambia.

2. THE HISTORICAL SETTING

By the fifteenth century, when the first Portuguese vessels sailed along the River Gambia, there were already several Mandinka polities controlling the surrounding regions (Buhen 1992; Linares 1992). On the north bank of the river Niumi, Baddibu, Niani and Wuli maintained a certain degree of reciprocal autonomy while some of the kingdoms located on the south bank (like Wuropana, Jimara and Toumanna) were part of a wider coalition of states named Kaabu, ruled by Mandinka families who traced their origins back to the core of the Mande world, and whose influence stretched from the River Gambia up to Rio Geba.[4] The processes leading to the creation of a Mandinka identity in this area of West Africa are actually quite complicated, based as they are on long centuries of contacts and commercial relationships between present-day Senegal and Gambia and the inner regions of Mali and Guinea (which had been controlled between the twelfth and fifteenth century by the ancient kingdom of Mali), as well as on a gradual dissemination of Mande language, culture and political institutions among the autochthonous populations, i.e. the ancestor of the present-day Jola, Biafada, Papel, Balanta, Banjuk, etc.[5]

In the fifteenth century the area around Bansang was controlled by two of the most ancient Mandinka states, Jimara and Wuropana. A warrior élite, deeply involved in the Atlantic slave trade, had established its supremacy over a wider population of traders, artisans, religious scholars, peasants, Fulbe nomads and slaves. Society was at the same time plural and highly stratified. Differences of role and occupation, between nobles and commoners, freeborn and several categories of slaves, artisans and other specialised groups, abounded. Muslim enclaves, mainly composed of traders and scholars, lived within a wider religious context characterised by variety of religious beliefs and cults.[6] People negotiated their own ethnic affiliations and their social and

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fy one's belonging to a certain descent line. Ideally they also denote their status as freeborn, artisans or slaves, even though many surnames cross the boundaries of these social categories. Matrilineality is extremely important especially among Mandinka groups (Hopkins 1971:100). On the same point see also van Hoven (1997:78–79) and Weil (1971:251).

4   Brooks (1993:113). See also Niane (1988), Quinn (1972), and Wright (1997).

5   Wright (1985:340). See also Buhen (1992).

6   Further details on the social, cultural and political organisation of these kingdoms can be found in

cultural identities in relation to dominant groups, paying tributes, tending their herds, trading or divining their futures, and transmitting their deeds in narratives and artistic performances. For those who could not find an appropriate place within this order "life must not have been either too pleasant or too rewarding" and they were more likely to face the risk of being enslaved and traded away (Wright 1987:300).

Mandinka rule came to an end towards the middle of the nineteenth century for a number of reasons, the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade by the British in 1807 being just one.[7] Caught in a deepening political and economical crisis, the ruling élite tightened its hold over the commoners, demanding more and more tribute and exercising a growing amount of violence against traders, Muslim clerics and Fulbe groups. In the meantime the commercialisation of groundnuts, whose trade was not controlled by the élite, meant for these same categories the possibility of buying firearms and thus opening up forms of resistance (Klein 1972). Religious wars spread on the north bank of the river, while on the south bank the Kaabu confederacy broke up into a multitude of states and fortified settlements lacking any encompassing unity, the fall of its capital Kansala (dated by the historians around the 1867) symbolically representing the end of an era (Rôche 1985:127). Like all the other polities along the River Gambia, Wuropana and Jimara disintegrated during this same period. Wuropana history is not well known, but, according to oral traditions, by the beginning of the nineteenth century this old chiefdom seemed already to have lost the ability to control its territory (Galloway 1980:54–55). Oral traditions also state that Jimara's capital and its other fortified settlements were destroyed during the second half of the same century by the religious wars led by Fode Kabba Dumbuya, a Jakhanka *marabout* still remembered in contemporary Gambia as one of the heroes of local resistance against European intrusion: the old inhabitants which had not been killed or enslaved, simply fled (Rôche 1985:132–134).

Meanwhile, in neighbouring areas, political alignments were undergoing a deep process of change. For centuries Fulbe groups had been migrating into the lands controlled by Kaabu, moving from Macina (Mali), Futa-Toro (northern Senegal) and Futa-Jallon (Guinea), all areas densely populated by Fulbe, towards the Atlantic coast, but fragmentation dispersed their impact on local structures of power. Living in the inter-

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Galloway (1975) (Wuli), Niane (1988), Quinn (1972) (for information on Kaabu religion) and Wright 1997 (Niumi).

[7]   The fall of Kaabu must be considered the result of internal and external factors, i.e. the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade and its widespread economic effects (although exports had already declined during the eighteenth century; see Curtin 1975) and by growing involvement in a market economy dominated by the cultivation of groundnuts as cash-crops. Religion too was a matter of confrontation between the various groups as, after centuries of peaceful cohabitation, Muslim communities became actively engaged in the sometimes violent conversion of their 'pagan' neighbours. On the external front, Futa Jallon pursued expansionist policies towards the fertile land of central and southern Senegambia. For more details on this topic see Klein (1972), Niane (1988), Bowan (1997), Wright (1997) and Barry (1998).

stitial spaces of Mande influence and entertaining highly particularised relations with local rulers, they acknowledged the authority of Mandinka chiefs. Protection and the use of land for pasture were granted to them in return for gifts, taxes and various services. At the beginning of the nineteenth century they constituted the majority of the population in several areas controlled by Kaabu, such as Firdu, between the Gambian border and the Senegalese town of Kolda. Partially sedentary, they lived alongside Mandinka settlements, leasing small parcels of land, tending the herds of the landowners as well as their own, and intermarrying with the local population (Quinn 1972:21–22; Bowan 1997). They grew millet (the main staple food in pre-colonial times) and gradually became involved in cotton and groundnut cultivation for sale. Around the 1865s (soon after the destruction of Kansala) Firdu Fulbes started to contest Mandinka supremacy under the leadership of Moloh Egue Baldeh, an elephant hunter who had achieved much prestige, and through war they created a new political entity, latterly named Fuladu, a Mandinka word meaning "the land of the Fula".[8] By 1875 the Baldeh family had extended its sovereignty to the riverbanks in the old lands of Jimara and Wuropana (Rôche 1985:134).[9] Some years later (1881) the founder of Fuladu died. Succession feuds marked relationships between Mussa Moloh, his son and designated heir, and other members of the family. By the mid 1890s, thanks partly to the aid of the French who were interested in expanding their influence in Southern Senegal, Mussa Moloh gained control over the lands conquered by his father (Rôche 1985:238–239). Colonial domination was in any case close. Between 1899 and 1900 Fuladu was eventually divided into French and British spheres of influence. During the following year, 1901, Mussa Moloh's relations with the Governor of the Gambia intensified, leading in 1902 to the annexation of the Gambian portion of Fuladu to the British Protectorate (see Gailey 1064; Quinn 1971). In 1903, having been informed that the French were going to arrest him, he moved to the Gambia

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[8]   Fulbe groups are known in the Gambia by the Mandinka ethnonym Fula. At the beginning of twentieth century, when ethnographic surveys were carried out by British colonial administrators, Fulbe groups along the River Gambia were characterised by a wide range of diversity: Fulbe Torodo and Fulbe Futa Islamic traditions were paralleled by local religious cults, still practised by the majority of the Fulbe. Livelihood styles were different too. Torodos, from Futa Toro, were itinerant scholars. Fulbe Jawarangabe, also known as Fulbe Firdu, the core of Molo Eggue's followers, were farmers and shepherds. Fulbe Doro, or Lorobo, were among the largest cattle owners along the river and followed a nomadic life-style. Among other Fulbe groups were the Habobo and Jombongabe, living near the river and Laube, who were itinerant woodcarvers (see Quinn 1971, 1972; Bowan 1997 and National Record Office CSO 76)

[9]   Public Record Office, London, CO 87/129, Original correspondence, 26/10/1886, Firdu country, contains one of the first reports by a British colonial officer on Fuladu. On topics such as Mande-Fulbe relations in the Casamance see N'gaïde (1997). The history of Fuladu has been examined by Leary (1970), Quinn (1971), Rôche (1985), Sidibé (1984) and more recently by Barry (1992) and Bowan (1997). Futa Jallon played a key role in the construction of a new Fulbe polity in the central and southern regions of Casamance (Bowan 1997:41–61). A wide collection of oral sources relating to this polity can also be consulted at the Archive of the National Council for Arts and Culture, Banjul, Gambia.

together with a few thousands of followers. He settled in the village of Kesserekunda, not far from Bansang, where he died in 1931, after over thirty years of conflicts and negotiations with the British (Quinn 1971). The local pattern of settlement changed as a consequence of his arrival: colonial officers estimated that more than three thousand people came with him and even though some soon afterwards returned to Senegal, many remained with him scattered all along the upper River.[10] The number of Fulbe villages increased. Despite falling under the influence of a Fulbe polity, the region included in Fuladu West had been previously inhabited mainly by Mande groups. Wolof, too, migrating from the North bank of the river, started to settle in the district at the beginning of the twentieth century.

At the present time the area shows an interesting merging of Mande and Fulbe identities, due, among other factors, to the policy of alliances with powerful local Mandinka families pursued by Mussa Moloh Balde throughout his life. Actually the Baldehs, having established their supremacy mainly through war, tried to legitimate their power by asserting a form of continuity between their rule and that of their predecessors. In the history of the family handed down by Mussa Moloh's descendants living in the Gambia the founder of Fuladu clearly stated that "our government, how the Mandinkas did it, that's how we will also do it, because we are learning it from them" (MFB, Yoroberikunda, Fuladu West, 27/09/1994). However, it should be noted that the coalition of people involved in the creation of Fuladu included not only Fulbe but also Mandinka and other Islamized Mande groups, like the Jakhanka, disgruntled at the oppression exerted on them by the Kaabu élite. Secondly, the revolts were just an episode in a long chain of century-long exchanges and interactions between Mandinka and Fulbe which caused the Fulbe themselves to assimilate partly to Mande culture. At least temporarily, in any case, the creation of an autonomous Fulbe polity in regions once controlled by Kaabu shifted the equilibrium towards a major consolidation of Fulbe identities, given the reports that Mussa Moloh Baldeh unsuccessfully tried to impose the Fulbe language over all the areas he controlled. Having subsequently lost his autonomy, as well as the means to enforce his orders with violence, he moved towards a more negotiated strategy of alliances and relations with all the powerful groups and families living along the River Gambia, marrying their women and giving many of his daughters in marriage to prominent people, like traders and religious scholars. British colonial rule and the vicissitudes of post-colonial Gambia, whose political life was dominated from independence right up to the military coup of 22nd July 1994 by a Mandinka-oriented party (the People's Progressive Party), helped to consolidate Mandinka culture all over the country (Weil 1968; Hughes 1975). Under these conditions the Baldehs managed to maintain a prominent position within the

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[10]   See, for instance, the list of new villages in Fuladu East District contained in Public Record Office, London, CO 460, Gambia Government Gazette, vol.5, 1902–1904, 30/1/1904, XXI, n.5, p.57. The colonial correspondence of the year 1903 also gives details of the settlement of Gambian Fuladu by Fulbe groups; see Public Record Office, London, CO/87/168; CO/87/169; CO 87/170.

Fuladu West political scene. Mussa Moloh's son, Cherno Kady Baldeh, was appointed district chief of Fuladu West in 1924, an office he held until 1952, while his own son Laning Baldeh ruled the same district from 1964 to December 1997.

3. THE MEANING OF KARAFOO

Coming closer now to the core of my argument, I will turn to an episode which occurred during my fieldwork. In September 1994 I was collecting historical narratives about the settlement of the town and the political development of the district. One day I had an opportunity to see the enactment of a practice which was considered by the elderly I met as one of the elements shaping their networks of social relations. Under the trees of his large compound the district chief Laning Baldeh was narrating some of the major events in his father's life. A delegation from one of the surrounding Mandinka villages arrived. The men were in their forties. There were a freeborn man, a friend of his and a leatherworker, who was to act as mediator.[11] While the freeborn man was talking, the leatherworker kept repeating his words to the chief. The *karafoo* alliance that linked their forefathers to the father of the district chief was recalled. When they had arrived in Fuladu West, during the colonial period, they had entrusted themselves to the late chief, Cherno Kady Baldeh. Now, the freeborn man intended to renew that old alliance, formally entrusting himself to the current chief and using the Mandinka verb *karafa*ma*. The request was accepted and the act sealed by the presentation of kola nuts.

I do not know the outcome of this episode. In 1997 Laning Baldeh was invited to retire by the government and a new chief, who traced his descent from another branch of the Baldeh family, stepped in, thus changing the equilibrium of power at the local level and giving rise to a need to re-negotiate political allegiances and identities. In any case the phrase these men used, *ngakarafaaima* (I entrust myself to you) sounded familiar to me, since I had heard it several times while collecting narratives of Bansang and Fuladu West history. The word *karafoo* has a multiplicity of meanings focused on the concepts of trust and responsibility: a country is entrusted to its ruler, a community to its Imam, a town to its chief, a child to its stepfather.[12] As one Bansang

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11   In Mandinka culture the ability to mediate is considered a prerogative of professional skilled groups (i.e. bards, leatherworkers and blacksmiths), collectively known as *nyamaloo*. Their status is quite ambiguous since they are considered as being dependent on the freeborn but also the custodians of specialised forms of knowledge preserved by the very endogamy of their lineages (see Conrad and Frank 1995). In contemporary Gambia, *nyamaloo* continue to perform their role as mediators and spokesmen for the freeborn, as in the episode mentioned above. Such occasions, perceived as 'traditional' by the partners involved, entail the need to behave in a traditional way, employing a *nyamaloo* as mediator between freeborn individuals.

12   In Mandinka *karafoo* is the noun and *karafa*ma* the verb. *Karafoo* is the same as Bamana *kàlifá* and

elderly man liked to repeat, the verb *karafa*ma* is one, but it can be used in different ways (BK, Bansang, Fuladu West, 23/12/1994).

The most common meaning assimilates *karafoo* to child adoption or affiliation. *Karafoo dindingolu* are children entrusted by their parents either to relatives or to prominent people so that they will be fed, clothed and educated as if they were the true sons of their warden. The reasons underlying this choice may be different: the parents may be dead or may have migrated abroad. They might be divorced and remarried. They may be living in hardship and have to rely, as a consequence, on family networks. As a rule these children are thought to need more care than one's own offspring.[13] Nevertheless *karafa*ma* is more than this entrusting of children and young people according to the networks which connect the adult world. Objects of value, goods or money can be also entrusted to somebody, a common practice when banks were not yet in being, as the elderly of Bansang who were mostly involved in commercial activities during their youth, liked to remember. Last but not least, the verb *karafa*ma* has political implications, denoting a covenant between two people implying a relationship of protector and protégé. The point is clearly stated in the following passage. The two villages mentioned here are not far from Bansang.

> In those days, when a person travelled to a new area, he entrusted himself to an influential person in that area. After some time he sought his permission to build his own town. There were various kinds of *karafoo*. For example Sare Bakary founded the village of Dobankunda here and entrusted himself to it. That is why it is called Sare Bakary Dobankunda. Another place was called Kerewan Dumbokono and another Kerewan Langkuta. Langkuta was the town of Fode Kabba's father. The Fulbe in all these areas entrusted themselves to Kerewan (HTT, Bansang, Fuladu West, 24/12/1994).

I have quoted this narrative because it is quite representative of the different implications embedded in the practice of *karafoo*. First, an act of entrusting is presented as the first and necessary step in the construction of a new settlement: the name of the village Sare Bakary Dobankunda recalls the *karafoo* that its founder, Sare Bakary, made with Dobankunda people. Between the two there is a relationship of historical precedence that treats the more recent settlement as one of Dobankunda's potential allies and supporters. Secondly, *karafoo* is described as a more general relationship of protection between Fulbe groups and Mandinka landlords, quite similar to the kind of interactions that have shaped their lives over the centuries along the River Gambia.

Entrusting can be seen as a recurrent theme in historical narratives, as an explanation of how people move and settle in places where other people's influence is al-

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Manika *kàrifá*, from the arabic *kallafa*, meaning "charge with". I am indebted to Valentin Vydrine, author of the first volume of the comparative dictionary of Mande languages, for this information.

[13]   Another Mandinka practice that implies the mobility of children is *kuluuro*, that is training. The typical case is that of boys entrusted to a *marabout* for their own education or girls to the families in which, according to marriage pattern of exchange, they are supposed to marry.

ready evident, either politically and materially or spiritually. Yet this is not all there is
to it because once a village is founded the practice of *karafoo* also allows expansion of
the community's human resources, enabling the adoption of strangers within the
founding families. Bansang elderly men considered *karafoo* one element that had
enabled the foundation of the town, representing its later development as a complex
network of relationships which, starting from the figure of the founder and then grow-
ing around other prominent figures on the local scene, had increasingly extended and
ramified. Its growth was envisaged as the result of the ability of some powerful men,
mainly between the 1940s and the 1980s to attract an increasing number of strangers,
as it is shown by another passage from the same narrative quoted above:

> I have told you before how Bansang was built. It was karafoo. Even the Imam, when he
> came, entrusted himself to the people of Bansang and likewise the Fulbe of Angle Futa[14]
> they entrusted themselves to him. Some Fulbe, who now have a compound there, it is
> because of him. When he came here it was the Mandinka who made him Imam, and
> henceforth all the Fulbe who lately came here entrusted themselves to him. That is
> karafoo. One entrusts oneself to a person who is very influential in a town and who has a
> lot of power. Here, I don't know among the whites, but here the one who is powerful peo-
> ple entrust themselves to him. Even myself, here, some people in this town, the reason they
> have built compounds here is that they have entrusted themselves to me. You see, there
> are compounds behind me, some people came from Niani, others from Senegal, they came
> and brought kola nuts and entrusted themselves to me, that I should give them protection
> so that no harm is done to them. I am not the owner of the compound here, I am not the
> headman and I am not the Imam, but even I may be influential (HTT, Bansang, Fuladu
> West, 24/12/1994).

As far as these words allow one to infer, the practice of *karafoo* creates alliances even
when the partners engaged in the relationship are socially remote. It is indeed in the
very context of landlord and stranger reciprocities – a topic well described as far as
Mande groups are concerned – that it acquires a good part of its social relevance (see
Person 1968; Curtin 1975; Launay 1979; Brooks 1993; Amselle 1996). David Launay
has pointed out how among Dyula communities in the Côte d'Ivoire "landlord" and
"stranger" are social identities, whose meaning was, and still is, relationally defined:
"every stranger" – he writes – "has a host, every host at least one stranger" (Launay
1979:76) and the relationship between the two can also assume different connotations,
according to the influence and the strength of the partners involved. Gradually the
stranger will be incorporated into his landlord's network of relationships in a position,
that is, at least to a certain degree, subordinate: as artisans and individuals of lower
rank, strangers play, or rather should play, the role of supporters. Indeed landlord-

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14   Angle Futa, densely populated by Fulbe migrated from Guinea Conakry, is one of the sections into
      which Bansang is divided, the others being Duma Su (Old Town), Santa Su, Jammajeng (Wolof
      quarter), Mauritanian and business centre, together with other, lesser wards. Mandinka families are
      mainly settled in Duma Su and Santa Su.

stranger reciprocities are a sort of idiom that can be used to express very different kinds of interaction (i.e. those between a landlord and his customer, a host and his temporary guest, a political patron and his immigrant-clients) and to establish both temporary and long-term forms of relationship between groups or individuals. The stranger can also be an immigrant, somebody who wants to settle down in a certain place for good. In this case the bonds that tie him to his host will be inherited by his descendants. During the pre-colonial period "one important strategy for gaining or maintaining political influence within the village was [...] to attract as many immigrant strangers as possible, increasing in this manner the number of men over whom one had direct political control" (Launay 1979:79). Even today stranger families are easily recognizable in every Dyula village, thanks to the bond of dependence, at least formally expressed on certain ritual occasions, that they maintain with their former hosts.

Similar observations can be gleaned from the literature concerning Mandinka groups living in Senegal and the Gambia, among whom the categories of landlord and stranger (*jiyatiyo, luntango*) have historically allowed them to organise the relations existing within local communities according to a hierarchy between first comers and later-comers. First settlers, Margaret Haswell observed during the 1940s in the village of Genieri, located along the middle Gambia, maintained their control over the community through the sole management of resources, thus regulating a newcomer's access to them (Haswell 1953:11). During the 1960s, Peter Weil recognized in the principle of seniority a recurrent theme of Mandinka social life: it was an instrument to re-establish the control of older generations over younger ones (Weil 1971). It also allowed access to power for the various descent groups that dwelt in the same village to be defined, thus stating a substantial difference between those who considered themselves the first settlers and the groups that had arrived later on. The former had come to an agreement with the local deities, i.e. the spirits of the land, flora, fauna and rain (Weil 1971:250), after asking their permission to dwell in the area and offering them sacrifices and libations. As a result, they had obtained control of the land and its products. The resulting bond constituted a sort of model for the relationship that any newcomer would later form with the first settlers. The descendants of the founders were thus considered the owners of the place. Relationships would strengthen through a gradual process of stranger assimilation, but differences could never be removed completely. In a more recent essay on Mandinka groups living in Wuli (eastern Senegal) the original agreement with the local deities is indicated as *karafoo* (van Hoven 1997:73).[15]

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[15]   Van Hoven makes two more references to *karafoo*, firstly, when he refers to the entrusting of the village mosque to its Imam; secondly when he narrates the life history of a young man, who was entrusted by his father to his father's owner (van Hoven 1997:166, 168). The only other reference I found is in Carreira's Mandinka-Portuguese dictionary included in his monograph about Mandinka people living in Gabu, near the border between Casamance and Guinea Bissau (Carreira 1947). There are, nevertheless, some additional hints. Weil emphasises how adoption is one of the ways in which Mandinka villages form relationships with the surrounding communities although he does not give further details (Weil 1968:102). Galloway describes well how the families of traders of the ancient

In the following pages, drawing on oral narratives of the foundation of Bansang, I will show how the relevance of entrustment is strictly situational and differently shaped according to the levels or contexts being examined, as well as their being potentially sources of conflict and litigation.

4. FOUNDATION STORIES

Bansang is first mentioned as a landing-place in late nineteenth-century colonial correspondence, when the British had not yet begun administering the surrounding regions. It is marked in colonial maps from the beginning of the twentieth century as a *tenda* (wharf).[16] References become more frequent after the 1920s, allowing us to trace its development.[17] During the 1930s it was already one of the most important commercial sites along the middle course of the river.[18]

Between the end of the nineteenth century and the 1920s, when colonial correspondence just mentions the presence of a wharf, local historical narratives describe a seasonal movement of traders and commercial mediators who used to leave the coast and go up-river during the dry season. In those days Bansang was not even a village, but only a place where people met to carry out their transactions. Temporary structures were erected, and the various commercial companies controlling the flow of trade along the River Gambia sent their representatives, Aku, Wolof and Hausa traders, to purchase groundnuts from local middlemen and farmers and send them down the river.[19] From June to September, during the rainy season the place was deserted until the following trading season.

The adventures of the man who is remembered as the founder of Bansang took place against this background. He was a young trader, named Bakary Darboe. At the time of the First World War he arrived from Dobo, a village of scholars and traders, not far from Bansang on the North bank of the river, in order to engage himself in trade. He built a compound and got married. During the rainy season, he used to move

kingdom of Wuli respected landlord-stranger reciprocities but she does not actually mention the word *karafoo* (1975:336, footnote). Beckerleg tells us how strangers are adopted into the families of their hosts but she fails to explain the exact nature of this adoption (Beckerleg 1992). Other hints on landlord-stranger relationship can be found in Beedle (1980).

16 National Record Office, Banjul, Gambia, CSO 54/7, Papers related to the boundaries of the Gambia Colony and Protectorate, p.88, Mussa Moloh Baldeh to the Manager of MacCarthy Island (Since 1998 the National Record Office has started to re-catalogue its files following different criteria. In this text I quote the old catalogue, which is still available in Banjul.).

17 Public Record Office, London, CO 87/227/7, Report on Provinces 1927, South Bank Province

18 Public Record Office, London, CO 87/238/1, Report on Provinces 1933, South Bank Province

19 Wolof and Aku were the best represented ethnic groups in the Colony of The Gambia. Hausa traders from Nigeria used to move along the commercial networks of the British colonial empire (Nyang 1994). For more details on the development of trade along the river, see Mbodji (1992).

to the surrounding villages where he would grow groundnuts to be sold during the
trading season. Local narratives stress how he progressively enriched himself and built
his own network of relationships. Relatives, friends and followers gradually joined him.
He had people who could help him organise trade and cultivate wide areas of land. He
was the first one, in all Fuladu West District, to own a lorry.[20] In the 1930s colonial cor-
respondence mentions him as one of the wealthiest local traders.[21]

Different versions are articulated around this basic theme. Bansang had never
been a closed community, even in those early days. It would better be defined as an
unbounded site where people from a plurality of places met and progressively entered
into networks of reciprocal relationships, creating among themselves an atmosphere
simultaneously of trust and competition over political and economic resources. As in
many other settlements along the River Gambia, different and contrasting foundation
stories can be elicited (Beckerleg 1992:49). The version transmitted within the found-
er's family (i.e. among his sons, brothers, nephews and wives as well as his dependants)
emphasised the fact that when he originally came from the village of Dobo the place
where present-day Bansang lies was empty, except for the fishermen who seasonally
dwelt in the area. Bakary Darboe was the first to build a permanent compound there.

Another story, though not entirely different, introduces other elements into the
foundation narrative. The second prominent family to settle in town, whom I will call
the Baldehs, was strictly related to the district chief, Cherno Kady Baldeh and to the
prominent position that the Baldeh had attained in the district during the colonial pe-
riod. Most of them came from Kesserekunda, the place where Mussa Moloh Baldeh,
last ruler of Fuladu, had died. During the 1930s, thanks to the help of the district chief
himself, who wished to control the developing wharf town and its trade, one of the
Baldeh, actually his sister's son, became the headman of Bansang and married one of
the chief's daughters: he settled there and took Bakary Darboe's daughter as his sec-
ond wife. In narrating the foundation of Bansang the elders of the Baldeh family
recounted an interesting episode, quite similar to the one I had the opportunity to wit-
ness during my fieldwork. They said that when Bakari Darboe decided to settle in
Fuladu, he went to Kesserekunda in order to visit Mussa Moloh Baldeh accompanied
by his father, who told Mussa Moloh: "Here is my son, I entrust him to you". Mussa
Moloh gave Bakary Darboe permission to trade and live in Fuladu. Later the young
man married one of Mussa Moloh's daughters, thus creating an even stronger rela-
tionship between the two families, which the elderly of the Baldeh family explicitly
described as *karafoo*.[22]

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20   KD, Bansang, Fuladu West, 24/12/1992; BS, Bakau, Kombo, 10/8/1996; AS, Serrekunda, Kombo,
      12/12/1994.

21   National Record Office, Banjul, Gambia, CSO 62, Political records, Fuladu West, Papers related to
      Cherno Kady Baldeh, Head Chief of Fuladu West.

22   BK, Bansang, Fuladu West, 8/12/1992; MB, Bansang, Fuladu West, 6/12/1994; HTT, Bansang,
      Fuladu West, 24/12/1994; MB, Bansang, Fuladu West, 19/1/1994; BS, Bakau, Kombo, 10/8/1996.

Several interesting points arise from the example of Bakari Darboe. For one thing entrusting is represented as a matter of respect: a man who settles in an area acknowledges the power that others already exert on that territory, whether they are human beings or some supernatural entity whose benevolence is to be invoked. No place is deserted, and no category of people is excluded from the necessity of entering into a relationship. Another example supporting this point of view is provided by Mussa Moloh Baldeh's vicissitudes: after reaching the Gambia and deciding to settle in the village of Kesserekunda, he found that some families from Mali had already established themselves in the area. He was the ruler of the whole area, as some of the elderly men and women I met liked to remember, and a word from him was enough to enslave anybody (even though he committed himself not to do this in negotiations with the British when handing over the management of the Gambian territories of Fuladu West to them). Local narratives tell how Mussa Moloh, the ruler, asked Kebba Kesser, the elder of the settlement, for permission to dwell at Kesserekunda (NJ, Bansang, Fuladu West, 9/10/1994). Similarly settling down at Bansang, meant for Bakari Darboe crossing the borders of Fuladu West, Mussa Moloh's dwelling place. Secondly, with the passage of time, entrusting can be assimilated to a kinship relation: a marriage tie will incorporate he who has entrusted himself to his protector's family thus creating a descent line common to both. The kind of marriage that is be stipulated will depend on the rank of the partners involved. If the rank is the same, as in the case of the Baldehs and the Darboes – a ruler's family and a traders' one, both of them freeborn – there can be a sort of bilateral exchange in the following generation. But, if the rank is different the roles are not interchangeable and the difference between the two partners will continue to be stressed.[23]

Thirdly, the act of remembering and forgetting a *karafoo* has wider consequences for current coalitions and political alignments. So while the first story, narrated by Bakary Darboe's descendants, emphasises the emptiness of the place where he decided to settle, the second one, without contesting this assumption, remembers how the area far from being totally empty, was already under the influence of a powerful man, Mussa Moloh Baldeh: nobody could enter his land without invoking his protection. There can never be a single perspective on how certain events occurred. By evoking an act of entrusting, the Baldehs clearly stated their superiority over the Darboes in the political life of the town, reminding the latter that they were only a group of allies among others and that in case of necessity, i.e. a political competition at both local and national levels, they should side with the Baldehs. On the other hand by trying to live down their old act of entrusting, the Darboes claimed for themselves a certain degree

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[23] On marriage exchanges and their connection with rank, see van Hoven (1997). It is interesting to reflect on the kind of exchange entailed by the practice of *karafoo*. The kind of exchange depends on the status of the people involved, its general rule being protection in return for support. An analysis of exchange patterns involves a detailed consideration of a plurality of family histories, a topic which lies outside the limits of this article.

of autonomy, while also aspiring to a major recognition of the part they had played in the foundation of Bansang. At the time when these narratives were collected a member of the Baldeh family was the town headman, a supremacy it had held since the 1940s, while the Darboes had the opportunity of access to the same office only for a short period during the 1930s.

From a historical perspective nobody can really be the first. *Karafoo* ties bind men with one another: the man who is prominent today is the same man who only yesterday entrusted himself to somebody else. People can simultaneously occupy different positions: who, in one situation, asks for the help of an important person, can, in his turn, be the centre of a no less extended web of relationships. The practice of entrusting builds a wider network of personal ties of dependence, which extends the pre-existing bond created by kinship, marriage alliances and differences in origin and rank. It indicates the presence of a centre, mainly a powerful and wealthy man, around whom solidarity grows in an expanding web of ties, thus suggesting the idea of wealth-in-people (a concept that anthropologists and historians identify as informing several pre-colonial African polities) (see Kopytoff 1987; Guyer 1993). In the social world emerging from historical narratives some are powerful while others are not and the bonds negotiated between the two create a pattern of seniority and precedence, rights and duties. For the man who is seeking alliance, *karafoo* is a request for help and protection. According to Mandinka idiom he is putting 'himself behind', recognising the existence of a hierarchy and trying to associate himself to the feats of a successful man (van Hoven 1997:81). Entrusting will ensure for him the protection of his host and the latter's mediation whatever may happen. On the other hand the man who accepts the bond commits himself to consider his protégé as part of his own network of relationships, thus enlarging his own responsibilities. For both partners the act is binding to an extreme degree, as it is stated by the Mandinka proverb "karafoo precedes cowardice" (*karafoo ye jotentung saabang*) which means that even the man who runs away from danger will have to be brave if the person entrusted to him gets into trouble.[24] The practice of *karafoo* generates hierarchy, as well as inequality, between the partners engaged in it, but it also creates a climate of trust difficult to obtain in other ways. Precedence and seniority are, in Mandinka idiom, a matter of respect (*bugnaa*) and honor (*horomaa*), which is also a sort of formal and public affirmation of reciprocal positions. However, entrusting is ultimately not only a difference among partners but also a mutual and absolute trust that can last, hopefully, the span of a lifetime and can be renewed in future generations. Its substantial content, based on the idea of protection and support and on the meticulous exchange of small favours and goods, can be manipulated in order to fit particular political and economic circumstances. Like other kind of alliance originally stipulated between two individuals it can even be forgotten.

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[24]   I thank Mr. Bakary Sidibé for having informed me of the existence of this proverb and explained its meaning.

Certain events in the history of a settlement might well be silenced by some, while others still make the effort to recall them in order to affirm different hierarchical positions, thus creating a context in which past events become a topic for more or less open confrontation; however, accusing somebody of having broken a *karafoo* is yet another matter, a serious wound in the history of families and descent groups, something people would neither like to think or talk about. The practice, in fact, somehow partakes of an oath being represented as a covenant stipulated between two men in the presence of God (*kaloo*). Those engaged in this kind of relation can think of themselves as honourable people and good Muslims. As time passes, *karafoo* can be renewed or forgotten according to the changing fortunes of those engaged in the relationship. Even if the roles of protector and protected can be reversed, especially when the partners share the same rank, the alliance itself is made to last and the people involved are supposed to do their best to respect it.[25] I believe that the stories relating to the foundation of Bansang clearly state these points. Competition between the Darboes and the Baldehs never arose but was rather an ongoing discourse carried on in an informal way, through gossip and small annoyances: on the public stage the former always paid the latter the respect they deserved while the Baldehs openly addressed Bakari Darboe's descendants as the founders of the town.

5. BETWEEN TRUST AND DISENCHANTMENT

Post-functionalist anthropology has put interpersonal relationships at the core of its analytical interest, progressively emphasising the relevance of an interpretative approach against a normative one (Eisenstadt and Roniger 1984:4). With this agenda in mind a wide literature on personal dependence has flourished: an example could be the issue of "Cahiers d'Études Africaines" edited by George Balandier on this subject (1969) as well as the large literature on patronage bonds typical of Mediterranean and Middle East societies. Following this perspective and its later developments, societies can be seen as constructed rather than given. At any moment the order achieved is at peril. Relations are acted and re-enacted, negotiated and manipulated, claimed or forgotten by different categories of subjects engaged in the processes of producing and contesting the meanings that shape the social spaces in which their own lives are inscribed.[26]

From this point of view *karafoo* can be seen as a practice entailing the voluntary

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[25] It is also worth noting that the covenant is ideally stipulated between two freeborn persons – to respect an act of *karafoo* is one of the attributes of freeborn identities – but it is not confined to this social category: historical narratives related to the creation of Fuladu, for instance, give a clear example of a *griot* entrusting himself to a ruler-to-be (Innes 1976).

[26] This point of view has been recently applied to the analysis of Mande societies too. See, for example, Amselle (1996); Conrad and Frank (1995); Jansen (1996); van Hoven (1997).

construction of a realm of solidarity and trust. Like other kinds of ritualised personal relations (i.e. friendships and blood covenants), it tends to create "a realm of intimacy, trust or participation in a spiritual realm beyond the major institutionalised spheres of a society – particularly but non only that of kinship – in which trust is seemingly most fully articulated" (Eisenstadt and Roniger 1984:29).

Further details emerge if we consider it together with the notion of *kabylaa*, one of the main axes of Senegambian Mandinkas social organisation, at least in pre-colonial times.[27] Again the word has several meanings. It is first a principle organising the structure of the settlement: it identifies all the compounds related to the same family within a village (that is in Bansang the Darboes or the Baldehs, as well as their followers, dependants and allies). Secondly, a *kabylaa* is also a group with identical aims and interests, whose members can be scattered over different geographical areas (Galloway 1975:128). Thus the word denotes an extended family, a lineage, a household, but it also has the broader meaning of a coalition of people, with common interests, sharing among themselves a differentiated set of social relations (i.e. descent, affiliation, marriage, as well as different kinds of bonds of dependence).[28] During pre-colonial times *kabylaa* were united by "intricate patterns of marriage" and other forms of relationship and they exerted a wide influence on the political scene (Galloway 1975:129). In those days *karafoo* was certainly one of the strategies that enabled the strength of a descent group and the web of relationships of prominent people to increase. The elderly men I met described it as an ancient practice that had its origin, possibly at a time when Mandinka rulers controlled the regions around Bansang, in a period of insecurity and warfare when it was unthinkable to cross someone else's sphere of influence without somehow recognizing his authority at least with a symbolic act of submission.[29] Even more interesting is its persisting use during the twentieth century in an expanding urban context where patterns of authority and mobility were also shaped by colonial regulations.[30] Bansang actually grew after the Second World War when groundnut cul-

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[27]   See also Launay for the connections between host-stranger relationships and the concept of *kabila* among the Dyula of the Côte d'Ivoire (Launay 1979). For Senegambian Mandinkas see also Bekerleg (1992:47); Hopkins (1971:101); van Hoven (1997:242–243).

[28]   See also Bekerleg (1992:47); Hopkins (1971:101); van Hoven 1997:242–43).

[29]   There are also connections with the trading communities located along the river Gambia. Even today Bansang is a commercial town. Most of the Mandinka families who have settled here claim a *dioula* origin, i.e. a hereditary involvement in trade. This is the case of the Darboe, whose original village, Dobo, was a community of traders and scholars. Amselle has noted the presence of contractual bonds as a possible element of differentiation between trading and agricultural communities in Mali (Amselle 1972:262).

[30]   See Launay: "[...] during and after the colonial period, it was not necessary for strangers to achieve the same degree of absorption. First, their status was protected by the existence of central government at the metropolitan and later the national level. Second, movement was primarily into the large new towns or rapidly growing old towns where essentially local identification was superseded by new urban categories" (Launay 1979:82, note 5). The effects of colonial rule on Senegambian patterns of mobility are analysed in Colvin (1981:58).

tivation spread following the increase of prices on the international market (Webb 1992:543). People migrated to urban settlements attracted by the working opportunities offered by the colonial government, commercial companies and petty trade, while continuing the cultivation of cash crops in the rainy season having leased land from the surrounding villages. Many of the town elders had been successful farmers who annually attracted many seasonal workers (known in the Gambia as 'strange farmers') on to their farms and accommodated them according to the idiom of landlord-stranger reciprocities. Colonial government, always worried about labour shortages, favoured these seasonal migrations (Swindell 1981). Meanwhile, even within the constraints of colonial rule large coalitions of people continued to play a relevant role in local politics, especially in building up consensuses, or conversely the animosity, that surrounded the mandate of a head chief. The chiefs themselves were engaged in the difficult task of supporting a wide network of retainers and followers, thus reasserting the importance of wealth-in-people as a strategy to gain power and preserve it.[31] Moreover, both during the first colonial period, when districts were governed by chiefs under the authority of a travelling commissioner, and then in the 1930s with the implementation of Indirect Rule (which conferred on chiefs a major degree of autonomy while transforming the commissioner into a supervisor) British administration actively set itself the task of preserving and consolidating the chief's authority and its traditional symbols.[32]

Political developments during the 1950s and after independence brought about several changes. First, chiefs saw their power eroded by the growing influence of political parties. They had to make political choices that clearly influenced their ability to maintain their own offices, in that those who chose to support the opposition were quite soon removed from their positions (see also Weil 1968). Secondly, people continued to use *karafoo* as a strategy to evoke and create forms of trust and mutual solidarity: from Bansang to the district, from the district to the wider national context, they created alliances, renewed ancient covenants and validated old relationships. Strangers who had arrived in order to trade had to refer to the authorities of the town, be they the headman, Imam or other influential people on the local scene. At least symbolically, people living in Fuladu West considered the act of entrusting themselves to the district chief as a meaningful action. But the efficacy of this kind of strategy had to be measured against the wider situation created by the emergence of a government élite who controlled, with various degrees of authority and power, access to state resources, development projects and international aid. In this context *karafoo* found a new expressive space in electoral politics, while losing part of its relevance as a means of negotiating the structure of local communities. As a matter of fact entrusting was

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[31]   Cherno Kady Baldeh, who ruled Fuladu West district between 1924 and the 1950s, is a good example.

[32]   See Gailey (1964) and National Record Office, Banjul, Gambia, CSO 75/3, 1933, Governor Palmer: Political memoranda.

indeed used in politics, especially during the ascendancy of People's Progressive Party, which stressed the importance and role played by traditional Mandinka institutions at the local level (see also Hughes 1975; Weil 1971). The same point emerges from the analysis of narratives relating to the post-colonial period, where it is clear that during electoral campaigns political candidates sought the alliances of prominent men in local communities. Acting as 'strangers' in their future constituencies they used *karafoo* as a strategy to enter the political scene at both village and district levels. At the same time the already existing *karafoo* ties, and other forms of local alliance[33] were mobilised to gain support, as well as to legitimize the position of families and descent groups with a particular political party. Events nevertheless demonstrated that, as a political practice, not even *karafoo* can entirely pre-empt the uncertainties of electoral politics. One of the elders of Bansang concluded his explanation about *karafoo* thus: "Karafoo is very strong here and it is very different from politics. If one entrusts himself through politics when there is a rift in the politics there is also a rift in the karafoo" (HTT, Bansang, Fuladu West, 24/12/1994).

The informant brings in a clear distinction between politics and the experience of entrusting. Although it is true that patronage relations – or better, the concept that the power of a man is the same as the networks of relationship he can mobilise – have also affected the national political life of the Gambia during the last thirty years, the elderly men I met bitterly valued their own political experiences. Modern politics brought with it disenchantment and the idea that forms of relationship, considered to be an inheritance from the past, run the risk of being marred when used, or rather misused, in the context of electoral competition. On the other hand younger generations virtually ignore the political nuances of the notion of *karafoo*, reducing its meaning to children's adoption. Recent changes at the national level have also reshaped the arena in which such a practice could be negotiated. Since 1996 the country has had a government led by a political coalition, emerging from a military coup, in which Mandinka are not the majority and whose new leaders are careful to mark the distance between themselves and their predecessors. It is still too early to evaluate the balance between past and present in contemporary Gambia.

6. FINAL THOUGHTS

My analysis of the meaning of *karafoo* has developed on several levels of articulation. First, I devoted particular attention to the lines along which memory is organised, in order to grasp some of the core meanings which shape local representations of the past

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[33]   These include joking relationships among families, patronage bonds due to differences in origin and rank, and marriage ties.

(Passerini 1988:108). From this perspective the use of the verb *karafa*ma* in historical narratives can be seen as a device which allows the making through time of forms of relation characterised by a feeling of trust to be thought about and narrated. It is a conceptual tool to describe the historical making of a local community, narrating the relationships which bind those who are living in them and explaining, in the meantime, the wider networks in which the community itself is inscribed. In everyday life the practice can be considered a constitutive part of Mandinka *adoo* – a word that may alternatively mean custom, culture or tradition – as long as the concept of *adoo* is taken as an arena where the relationship between past and present is continuously imagined and negotiated, rather than a pristine reality that somehow existed once upon a time. From a comparative perspective the analysis might also be pursued with reference to the other ethnic groups with which Mandinka have been historically interrelated. The notion of dependence this implies should be related to other forms of bonds and social covenants witnessed by ethnographers and historians in the wider Mande world. I am thinking, for instance, of those alliances, called in Mandinka *sanakuu* and *dankuto*, which relate descent groups which cannot intermarry through a pattern of joking relationships (see, for example, Galloway 1975:129). The narratives explaining their establishment, clearly state how the bond, as in the case of *karafoo*, originally came into being between individuals only to be later incorporated in the history of their respective descent groups. Much more could be elicited by focusing attention on the way gender relations shape access to this practice. In every respect *karafoo* was described by the elderly I met as a male prerogative: men founded villages, travelled, negotiated alliances, entrusted themselves to other men while women were assigned a secondary role, as the mothers, wives and sisters of powerful men. Only further researches will be able to throw some light on the part *karafoo* may have played or still plays in the structuring of the female world.

Secondly, I described Bansang as an open site where people, from a plurality of places, met and progressively entered into networks of reciprocal relationships. Bansang is not a Mandinka town, and a good portion of its inhabitants would not agree with such a definition. Particularly during the 1970s, the settlement experienced a steady growth due to the immigration of new settlers, which completely changed the local balance of power in favour of Fulbe and Wolof groups. Nevertheless its origin and the way its development was described by the elderly I met help give a Mandinka flavour to a settlement where Mandinka do not constitute the majority of the population.[34]

Launay gives the following definition of community: "[...] communities are socially constructed identities predicated precisely on the collective recognition of some common moral framework. This framework is always subject to negotiation. It can

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[34] The growth rate was 6.1 % between 1973 and 1983, and 3.1 between 1983 and 1993 (Central Statistics Department 1993).

always be called in question in a way or another" (Launay 1992:33). In my belief, the practice of *karafoo*, and the fact that it is continuously recalled by historical narratives, plays a meaningful role in the construction of this common moral framework. It is one of those concepts which permit partnerships and networks to be imagined and deployed (Rosen 1984:181) as a core of trust and mutual solidarity which comes into being thanks to the feeling of sharing a common set of key cultural concepts, however negotiated and contested they might be (Perinbaum 1997:85). In his study of the Moroccan town of Sefrou, Rosen has underlined the performative role of language in the construction of social reality, making it clear that he considers it rather made than given (Rosen 1984). Actually people use the verb *karafa*ma* more frequently than they speculate on the nature of *karafoo*. Entrustment is both a practice and a way of talking about social relations that shapes the very reality it speaks about. It implies a specific view of the social order, where, even though trust and solidarity ideally permeate the life of the *kabylaa*, betrayal is around the corner. It is only among those who are actively engaged in a relation of *karafoo* that trust can be fully articulated.

Hence I come to my last point: the imaginative and constructive power exerted on the social world by local historical knowledge should particularly be stressed. Surely narratives carry with them a quest for legitimacy. By bringing the past into the present, they explain how a certain order came about through the actions and choices of different individuals. The very fact of evoking the way in which these relationships were stipulated opens up possibilities of revitalisation, re-enactment and even contestation, throwing them, once again, into the flux of social life. It also brings with it the feeling of a sharp contrast between past and present, yesterday and today: the former being seen as a world of lost honour and solidarity and the latter as an experience of loss and decay. In this nostalgic view it looks as if real and mutual trust can only be only a past experience confined to the realm of historical narratives, even though for a while images of a world that had once been can create the feeling of an ordered pattern of social relations, which moulds and gives shape to the present state of affairs.

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