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Narratives of the Nation and Democracy in Mali

A View from Modibo Keita's Memorial*

This article focuses on a few brief instances of the complex process of articulation of Mali as a democratic nation during Alpha Oumar Konaré's presidency (1992-2002)¹. It centers² on the ways in which one of the founding fathers of the Malian nation and Mali's first president (1960-1968),

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1. This article was originally written when Alpha Oumar Konaré was still Mali's president. Due to the recent end of his second mandate in June 2002 and the election of Amadou Toumani Touré as Mali's new president, minor editorial changes were made. This article remains focused on cultural politics and political processes during Konaré's presidency.
2. This paper deals primarily with Mali's political leadership—an influential but limited component of Malian society—and their narratives of the nation. Aspects of the complex relation between the leadership and different segments of the Malian citizenry have been covered in HOPKINS (1972) and FAY (1995). I have examined this relation in the case of women's formal organizations (1997).

Modibo Keita, is represented, contested, and reappropriated in recent narratives of the nation³. The pertinence of such an analysis is further sustained by the recurrence of celebratory discourse on the founding fathers and/or key figures of Malian history in much of Malian national narratives (Bagayogo 1992). Within this discursive context, Modibo Keita has emerged as a major reference point in the construction of this country's democratic present.

The departing point for the present analysis is Anderson's (1991) seminal work on nations as imagined communities. In other words, it is important to examine the ways in which the Malian nation has been and is symbolically represented. However—and differently from Anderson, who relies upon a notion of national culture as an integrated and coherent whole—, culture is seen here as a less orderly, less cohesive construct. According to Llobera (1998) in his analysis of Catalan historical identity, Anderson's view, which harks back to Renan's work on the nature of the nation-state, does not adequately take into account the dialectic process by which national identities are constructed within a multinational state. In such a state, we often find not a univocal and uncontested common history but competing memories in action; indeed, "multinational states that engage in historical reconstruction... may have to compete with alternative ethnonational visions—even if the latter tend to be projected in a weaker light" (Llobera 1998: 332)⁴. A similar point is made by cultural studies scholar Homi Bhabha, but he does not limit it to the imagined realities of ethnovisions, and he also pays more attention to the conditions and the openness of narration itself. Bhabha (1990: 4) argues for the importance of problematizing the image of a nation as a totalizing tale and of focusing instead on the modalities of its "dissemination":

"To study the nation through its narrative address does not merely draw attention to its language and rhetoric; it also attempts to alter the conceptual object itself. If the problematic 'closure' of textuality questions the 'totalization' of national

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3. Political debates have been one of the most productive moments of my several visits to Mali. I had some occasional conversations on the history of the US-RDA since my first visit in Mali in 1991, but it was only during my last two visits (1999 and 2001) that I systematically focused on Malian cultural politics and Keita's political and cultural legacy. The present paper is based on interviews with several representatives of the Ministry of Culture, government representatives, and a number of US-RDA party leaders. I have also extensively relied upon local periodicals and the increasingly rich online material on Mali. Under Pascal Baba Coulibaly, cultural adviser to the president and head of the Ministry of Culture under Konaré, a fair amount of information on government cultural policies is now available via the Net (see the Web page of the Ministry of culture at <http://w3.culture.gov.ml>).
 4. Mali could arguably be considered as a multinational state, as shown, for instance, by the recurring Touareg rebellions in the north and the dramatic destruction of the village of Sakoiba, headquarters of the ethnic-based Bamanan party in the late fifties (SIMONIS 1995).

culture, than its positive value lies in displaying the wide dissemination through which we construct the field of meanings and symbols associated with national life.”

Bhabha rightly focuses his attention on the ways in which the nation is articulated and disseminated—however momentarily and incompletely—in the process of narration. His more open-ended perspective allows us to overcome not only a homogenous ethnicist vision of the nation state that characterizes much of European history (Amselle 2001) but also the too easy dichotomy between the state and local societies implicit in much ethnographic writing on the invention of traditions (Bellagamba & Paini 2000)⁵. I argue that with the progressive move from a one-party system to a multi-party democracy, a new complexity in the Malian public sphere has emerged, one that such simple opposition can no longer encompass (if it ever could). Indeed, despite certain tendencies that have reminded local observers of the one-party period—in particular, the progressive insertion of politicians from the opposition into the majority party, the Association pour la démocratie au Mali (ADEMA), since it won the elections in 1992 (Samake 2001)—the government can no longer be seen as the sole writer of the official tale⁶.

This article will thus focus on some of the divisions and contradictions of recent Malian politics via the analysis of a specific set of national narratives—those surrounding Keita’s legacy. It will begin by locating the two main producers of Keita’s narratives, the government and the Union Soudanaise/Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (US-RDA, one of the most vocal voices of the opposition), historically and within the present-day democratic context. It will then move to discuss some of the newly emerged state rituals surrounding Keita, in particular the anniversary of his death and the controversial creation of the Modibo Keita Memorial⁷. It will

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5. In the context of the debate over the invention of tradition, local societies are represented as sources of traditions to be reappropriated, reimagined, and woven into a supposedly cohesive national culture. On this debate see RANGER (1983); BRIGGS (1996); BELLAGAMBA & PAINI (2000).
 6. The policy of “enterism”—that is, the integration of external party members into a majority party—was first practiced by the US-RDA party shortly before independence, when other political bodies were dissolved and their members joined the US-RDA. However, in the case of the US-RDA such adhesions were not always voluntary, while in the case of ADEMA, at the time this was Mali’s majority party, they were. In addition, beside ADEMA, the coalition majority was also composed by a number of smaller parties such as the Parti de la renaissance nationale (PARENA). The policy of enterism, though, led opposition leaders and other citizens to regard ADEMA as a renewed version of the old one-party system.
 7. Broadly speaking, in the following I will distinguish two major political entities. On one hand are the government and in particular Mali’s former president Alpha Oumar Konaré and former minister of culture, Pascal Baba Coulibaly, who played a prominent role in shaping this country’s rich *politiques culturelles*. These political representatives were inspired but drew freely from the previous regimes’ experiences and in particular from Keita’s cultural policies. On the other hand, I shall distinguish the US-RDA leadership’s approach to Keita’s legacy.

suggest that narratives on Keita have represented one privileged arena for the expression of the profound divergences between the opposition (and especially the US-RDA party) and Konaré's government concerning the meaning of national cultural heritage and, ultimately, the practice of democracy.

Notes on Malian Postcolonial History

Mali, former French Soudan, achieved independence from France in 1960. During the first three decades of its existence, Mali was ruled by one-party organizations. Mali's first one-party regime was the US-RDA—a party of socialist inspiration. Under the leadership of Modibo Keita, Mali's first president (1960-1968), the US-RDA launched an extensive program of national development that included the creation of an independent economy, the formation of African cadres, and the development of a national culture. Despite important economic and social achievements, Keita's regime progressively managed to alienate important sectors of the population such as the peasants, the army, and the merchants (Amselle 1985, 1992). In 1968 a group of army officials overthrew Keita's regime—an initiative that was initially received with broad popular support (Sanankoua 1990). For the next ten years, Mali suffered the despotic rule of the Comité militaire de libération nationale (CMLN) under the leadership of Lieutenant Moussa Traoré. In the late 1970s, Traoré established Mali's second one-party system with the creation of the Union démocratique du peuple malien (UDPM). Traoré's period was characterized by increasing liberalization of the economy, the curtailment of civil liberties, and endemic corruption among state officials and administrators. Due to Traoré's refusal to open the country to multipartyism and free elections, wide sections of the population such as students, union representatives, and women began to organize a series of strikes in the spring of 1991. When the army was ordered to fire directly on the people, a number of the soldiers sided with the opposition forces. On 26 March 1991 a military coup under the leadership of Colonel Amadou Toumani Touré put an end to Traoré's era. During the fourteen-month period of interim rule that followed, Touré and his Comité transitoire de salut du peuple (CTSP) took a number of important steps toward developing a democratic state, such the organization of a national conference to discuss and organize the transition to democracy, and the coordination of the first multiparty elections (1992). In January 1992 a new constitution was adopted, which marked the beginning of Mali's Third Republic. Mali's first democratic elections signaled the victory of ADEMA and the election of

Due to their direct participation in the socialist regime and their experiences of imprisonment during the military dictatorship, the US-RDA elders considered themselves the legitimate guardians of Keita's memory and resisted the marginal position they had come to occupy on the national political scene since the controversial 1997 elections.

ADEMA's candidate Alpha Oumar Konaré as president. Konaré completed his second and final term in June 2002. Amadou Toumani Touré was then elected Mali's new president.

Malian citizens enjoy unprecedented opportunities to express their political opinions and new freedoms to create political groups of their liking, as shown by the myriad of newspapers and radio stations that have continued to emerge since 1991. Despite these important changes, the last ten years have also been characterized by the hegemony of ADEMA over all other political parties as well as a difficult relationship between the majority coalition (composed of ADEMA and other minor parties) and the opposition forces. Opposition leaders have accused ADEMA of having transformed itself into a party-state, that is, an organization that resembles all too closely Mali's first two regimes—although they recognize that they could not have raised such criticisms under the previous regimes (Bagayogo 1999: 32-33). They claim that ADEMA's rule has led to the reemergence of a generalized state of confusion between state and party infrastructures, fostered large-scale corruption, and hampered the development of viable political alternatives (Bagayogo 1999; Fay 1995). In other words, it would appear that although different parties can freely voice their dissenting opinions, their proposals are often not given sufficient consideration in the government's decision-making process. The inability of the various governments of the Third Republic to form a sufficiently broad coalition has led to the consolidation of the opposition forces and the boycotting of a number of government decisions. However, such conflicts do not seem to jeopardize certain important conquests of the democratic process. The government and the opposition were able to put aside temporarily some of their differences and cooperate in the organization of the 2002 presidential elections.

Since the democratic turn of 1991, more than seventy parties have been created in Mali. Not all of these parties are active on the political scene, and many are ephemeral constructions that last only the length of an electoral campaign. The two parties that we will be discussing in this paper, ADEMA and US-RDA, represent, despite internal tensions and splits, some of the relatively most stable and influential political bodies in current Malian politics (others are the Congrès national d'initiative démocratique [CNID], Mouvement pour l'indépendance, la renaissance et l'intégration africaine [MIRIA], etc.). Moreover, they are both widely represented across the territory, while the supporters of most other parties are typically limited to a specific area, predominantly Bamako.

Democracy and National Culture

Throughout most of Mali's postcolonial history, culture has emerged as one fundamental avenue to promote social transformations (M. Keita 1967)⁸.

8. For general syntheses on Malian national culture, see KLIMKEIT (1997) and DE JORIO (2001b).

In the writings and political speeches of government representatives during Konaré's presidency (Aminata Traoré, Alpha Oumar Konaré, Adame Ba Konaré, Pascal Baba Coulibaly), it was argued that, in order to develop a nation, economic changes were not sufficient. These were to be coupled with, if not embedded in, broadly conceived programs of cultural development. For instance, in the words of Aminata Traoré, former minister of culture and tourism, the valorization of "cultural heritage [was the] foundation and the engine of an enduring social and human development in Mali" (Ministère de la Culture et du Tourisme n.d.: 1).

It is along these lines that we must read the articulated and wide-ranging effort by the government to valorize the national and local cultural heritage via the promotion of artistic events⁹. In the last few years the government organized an unprecedented number of cultural festivals, exhibits, and conferences on Mali's cultural heritage. Some of the cultural programs consisted of the critical reimplementation of formerly established traditions that were discontinued during the latter part of Traoré's regime, such as the Biennales des Arts et de la Culture, whose national phase was scheduled to take place in September 2001¹⁰. They reflected the government's effort to disengage these cultural events from their past subjection to party politics—when they were essentially used to echo party objectives (Sissoko 1995: 42)—and its commitment to promoting greater freedom of cultural expression.

Other cultural programs explored new expressive dimensions, such as the government's massive investment in monumental art. This policy was the result of the joint efforts of Mali's third president, Alpha Oumar Konaré, and Pascal Baba Coulibaly, who first played the role of cultural advisor to Konaré and later was appointed minister of culture (2000-2002). In the government literature the monument was presented as a way to "cultivate a democratic form of citizenship" (Ly 2000) by making culture more widely available to the general public, as well as a means "to replace an elitist and cliquish culture with a popular and egalitarian culture" (*ibid.*). In the last few years of Konaré's presidency, more than twenty monuments were built in various corners of Bamako, and a few were built or planned for other

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9. More recently there has been an effort to promote the privatization of cultural initiatives, with the creation of the Cellule d'appui aux programmes culturels du Mali. This institution was directed by Malia Salé and funded by the European Community at the time of my visit in Mali in 2001. Its objective is to offer financial and logistical support to community-based cultural initiatives. It should be clear, though, that the state remains the major promoter of cultural activities.
 10. During the one-party regimes a number of national cultural festivals such as the Semaines artistiques et culturelles (1963-1968) and their heir, the Biennales artistiques et culturelles (1970-1988), were organized. Despite nominal changes (for instance, from *semaines* to *biennales*) the *semaines* launched by the Keita's government were continued for the most part unchanged under the dictatorship (Sissoko 1995: 32). The *semaines/biennales* consisted of various phases, where artistic groups would progressively earn the right to compete at the local, regional, and ultimately national levels.

Malian cities. These monuments celebrate past historical events (e.g., *Hommage aux Martyrs*, *Monument à l'Indépendance*), national "heroes" (e.g., *Mémorial Modibo Keita*, *Monument à Abdoul Karim Camara dit Cabral*), symbols of traditional culture (crocodile, hippopotamus), and some national key values (e.g., the obelisk that celebrates the peaceful coexistence between different ethnic groups, or the monument dedicated to Nkrumah that reaffirms Mali's continuing support of pan-African values)¹¹.

With its program of monumental art, the state has become more directly involved in the formation of a collective memory, and by so doing has often been perceived as aiming to undermine the monopoly on state memory held by the griots—a semi-endogamous professional group of bards and praise singers. The government position built on a widespread social critique of the griots' political role during past regimes (Schulz 1996). Historically, Malian intellectuals' positions have ranged from Bagayogo's (1992) critical view, according to which the griots and their narratives often re-create a time of social injustice and status distinctions that should be overcome, to Cheick Mahamadou Chérif Keita's (1993, 1995) nostalgic position that "real" griots did not engage in opportunistic submission of their art and talents to the power of the day, as they have begun to do since the Traoré regime. Monumental art, according to the government line, was to establish more immediate (but not less controversial) communication with the local population and visibly reflect Mali's recent democratic turn¹².

Mali's cultural politics should also be understood as an important effort, albeit at a symbolic level, toward reappropriation of the development strategies promoted by Western nations, international aid agencies, and international financial institutions. The present situation is indeed characterized by numerous economic and political constraints and in particular by various programs of structural adjustment that since the late 1980's have been imposed on the Malian state and economy by international organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund¹³.

11. The obelisk was temporarily dismantled in 2001 in order to complete some road work in the area.

12. Conversations with a number of Malian people from different walks of life and educational backgrounds led me to realize that the monumental art is an extremely controversial issue. Some criticize what they consider useless expenditures given people's overwhelming poverty. Others take sincere pride in the beautification of the city and in the new images that Mali can offer to visitors. Noteworthy is the fact that the monuments have been quickly incorporated in one of the main family rituals, marriage. On Thursdays and Sundays one may easily find numerous wedding parties swinging by a favorite monument to take some pictures with which to remember the day.

13. These programs have increased class differences as well as contributed to the creation of a situation of partial inefficiency of state institutions in the absence of an adequate number of employees. For instance, in the summer of 2001 I had to hire a retired projectionist from the Centre national de production cinématographique (CNPC) to view some old news reports because this institution could no longer afford to hire a new employee in this capacity.

Local traditions are reimagined to authenticate recent political and economic changes. An example among many is the Ministry of Culture's Internet site (<http://w3.culture.gov.ml>), which opens with a photo of a gigantic tree under whose shade are assembled a group of village elders, presumably immersed in a discussion of community events. The caption reveals this clearly: "L'arbre à palabre, symbole de la culture démocratique malienne et africaine." This example reflects the political leaders' search to localize what are often perceived to be exogenous political institutions (e.g., the democratic state). They either seek local roots for what many view as new Western impositions or search for particularizing meanings in generic signs such as democracy, multipartyism, and so on (Amselle 2001: 100).

This well-known process of the reimagining of traditions has two major implications (Ranger 1983; Keesing 1989; Briggs 1996; Bellagamba & Paini 2000). First, in this process local cultures are transformed and, to some extent, made more homogeneous (Bagayogo 1992). For instance, in the late 1990s the minister of culture and tourism, Aminata Traoré, organized a number of meetings (*tuguna*) between Western-trained and local intellectuals (artists, griots, etc.) to collectively reflect upon some of the key values of Malian culture, such as the values of hospitality (*jatigiya*) and the Mande notion of the human being (*maya*). These local traditions were presented as inescapable foundations for any viable political and economic development (Ministère de la Culture et du Tourisme au Mali n.d.). It is, however, quite revealing that once these traditions were discussed, the meeting participants moved to discuss possible translations from Bamana to other local languages—thus implicitly acknowledging that the fundamental similarity of Malian local cultures was more of a work in the making than a preexisting reality. In addition, they also discussed how to sensitize local people to these "common" themes¹⁴.

Second, this re-imagining of local traditions entails an important critical dimension. This identity search was also informed by Malian leaders' and the people's critical readings of certain Western traditions that tend to be recursively presented by Western and Western-trained development experts under the guise of the universalizing discourse of democracy, free enterprise, and personal freedom. Some Western scholars tend to consider such critical assessments of allegedly Western-specific democratic values and the reassertion of unbridgeable cultural diversity as a sign of the incapacity of so-called third-world peoples to free themselves from Western dictates (Keesing 1989; Bellagamba & Paini 2000), in that they are uncritically interiorizing an orientalist view of themselves, which prevents them from pursuing what are perceived to be more just political and social arrangements. However, we can also see here a reflection of a syncretic attempt by Malian intellectuals to incorporate a critical view of other cultural traditions in the

14. On these issues see also DE JORIO (2001a, 2001b).

negotiation of reimagined traditions including, for instance, Western development projects—a process that certainly does not exhaust the complexities of the various modalities of reimagining past traditions (Urry 1996). Indeed, Malian intellectuals' position as outsiders allows them to critically reflect upon many of the hidden injuries caused by such Western traditions as well as to explore their possible reinterpretations in light of their cultural specificities¹⁵. A critique of Western development policies is lucidly expressed by Adame Ba Konaré (1993, 1998), a Malian historian and the wife of former president Alpha Oumar Konaré, who has long opposed the fragmented and shortsighted logic of many foreign-driven development projects. This critical analysis is behind several of this author's publications as well as her decision to create the Association Partage, a humanitarian association based on the idea of development projects as disinterested gifts as opposed to the falsely meritocratic logic that informs many such projects. The association targets all those citizens who remain at the periphery of economic development, such as people with physical disabilities, children, and the homeless. This was an attempt by the Konaré government to offer an alternative to the technocratic and often uncoordinated development policies promoted by international aid agencies. Among other things, it was intended to offer to the population renewed conceptual tools that can be used to confer familiar meanings on the present, which is often experienced as troubling and alienating. Referring to the Biennales Nationales des Arts et de la Culture, cultural festivals organized by the previous two regimes, Pascal Baba Coulibaly (2000) noted: "In recent years, we have encountered in many places the expression of the nostalgia for this period... in relation to the present, where [we find] a youth that ignores itself, without a stable cultural viewpoint, abandoned to the uncertain references of a globalization without any precedent in the history of the humanity."

Beside the rereading of selected traditions, the democratization of national and local cultures, and the critical assessment of Western development policies, there is an additional dimension to this effort of reimagining a common cultural heritage. Perhaps the most significant difference between cultural programs under Konaré and those of earlier periods is the lively responses with which such programs were met. Indeed, in the process of rearticulation of the nation via narratives (the reimagining of the origins of the new nation and its historical markers), the Konaré's government was faced with new challenges. It had to confront a strong opposition and the diverging sensitivities of an extremely diversified civil society¹⁶. But most of all, it had to deal with the various political parties existing in Mali today,

15. On the epistemic opportunities made possible by the outsider position of the interpreter in a cross-cultural dialogue, see KÖGLER (Forthcoming).

16. A discussion of the Islamic community's views on Mali's current cultural politics, albeit important, is beyond the scope of the present work. My primary objective here is the study of the relations between the majority party, ADEMA, and the US-RDA as they are evidenced by their differential claims to Keita's memory.

each with its own reconceptualization of the past, its own selective identification with specific symbols (such as the Modibo Keita Memorial), and its own claim to participation in the public sphere(s). It is to a description of these new political conflicts and their implications at the level of cultural politics that I now turn.

Keita's Memory and the Construction of Political Legitimacy in Mali

The representation of Modibo Keita's legacy is far from being an uncontested issue within the Malian public sphere. It is the arena for the expression of profound conflicts within Keita's party over the legitimacy of the leadership's claim to represent Keita's weighty political legacy¹⁷. In the attempt to resolve these conflicts, or to better establish the legitimacy of contradictory paternity claims, the recollection of the past becomes the explanatory paradigm upon which decisions are made and the rights to represent Keita's legacy are determined¹⁸.

Remotti (2000: xi) distinguishes different readings of the past, ranging from "the options of faithfulness and attachment to the past" to that of "refusal and distancing from it". I will argue that in the US-RDA, with its internal divisions, it is ultimately a narrative of close identification with past events that recursively prevails, one that is based on the elders' direct experience of past events. In other words, the creation of what Pierre Nora has described as *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) to commemorate a nation's past is systematically undermined by the *milieux de mémoire*—people whose identity and political legitimacy are based on a direct experience of that past and who claim special rights to its management (Nora 1989). The US-RDA's position is to be juxtaposed to the one that was promoted by Konaré's government—often represented by a younger political class—and described as one of "scientific" distance and "desacralization" of the past (and also more representative of its democratic option), to which I shall return in the next section. As shown by Michael Rowlands (1999) in his analysis of war memorials, the forgetting of some controversial aspects of the past is a necessary step in the process of memorializing.

17. This divisiveness is not a situation unique to the US-RDA. One of the most influential ADEMA leaders, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, created his new party, the Rassemblement pour le Mali, in view of the 2002 presidential elections. On the segmentary tendencies of Malian politics, see BAGAYOGO (1999).

18. I would like to thank Nicholas Hopkins, discussant for the panel "Modibo Keita's Mali: 1960-1968-2000" at the 2000 African Studies Association meeting in Nashville, for his comments on my paper, particularly his emphasis on the historical antecedents of present political conflicts. I would also like to thank Baz Lecocq and Gregory Mann for organizing the panel, which provided a further stimulus for my own research on this historical figure and his present-day legacy.

In the aftermath of the 1991 overthrow of the military dictatorship, US-RDA leaders—who had temporarily joined the ADEMA alliance to fight the dictatorship—decided to resurrect their party and move out of ADEMA, which was changing its status to that of a party¹⁹. They justified this choice by elaborating on what they felt was their unique and pressing historical “mission”: one of “clarification and defense” of the party work and its leadership after a twenty-three-year silence imposed by the Traoré regime (A. Traoré 1993, 1996)²⁰. This program turned out to be difficult to execute, and not only because of the gravity of the task at hand. For instance, it was certainly not easy to account for the repression of dissident groups during Mali’s First Republic. A crucial problem were the divisions that soon emerged within the US-RDA over the right to represent Keita’s legacy. I will focus my attention on the two major splits that occurred within this party; one was in 1992, and the other occurred in 1997 and was recently resolved (2001). In both instances, the connection to Keita’s “biological and political family” as well as a narrative of a faithful rendition of Keita’s legacy turned out to be the winning idiom (M. B. Touré 1999).

The first tensions within the US-RDA emerged on the occasion of the presidential elections in 1992, when the party split on the selection of their official candidate for the elections. According to the Haidara wing, which ultimately prevailed, this crisis marked the reemergence of old divisions within the party, the same divisions that had led the more radical fringe of the US-RDA to launch the Active Revolution in 1967 in an attempt to reinstate the “true” socialist ideals of the beginning. The opposing group was represented by Tieoulé Konaté, who was the son of the other founding father of the US-RDA, Mamadou Konaté, and the younger and more conservative face of the new US-RDA. By opposing Konaté’s political ambitions, the old party leadership was reasserting its more radical option and the right of the elders to be the ultimate arbiters of the party’s inheritance. The biological link between Tieoulé and his father, a clear asset in this political confrontation, was carefully deconstructed to demonstrate that the son had not measured up to his father’s memory. The electorate was reminded that Tieoulé had grown up in France, far away from his father, and had thus not benefited from his direct teaching. Upon returning to Mali at the conclusion of his studies, Tieoulé had professed his ideological distance from the US-RDA party²¹. It was also asserted that Tieoulé had celebrated the fall of the Modibo Keita regime by killing an ox and uncorking a bottle of champagne. Finally, he had cooperated with the Traoré regime as first minister and later pursued a career at the World Bank, a position, according to the

19. On Keita and the US-RDA see also AMSELLE (1978); DIARRAH (1986); HODGKIN & MORGENTHAU (1964); HOPKINS (1972); MORGENTHAU (1964); MORLET (1977); SANANKOUA (1990); SIMONIS (1995).

20. Also A. S. TRAORÉ, personal communications, 1994, 1999, 2001.

21. Keita, however, still offered him an important position as the director of the Banque de la République du Mali to honor his father’s memory.

elders, that he could not have occupied without Traoré's support²². "How could he have deserted his father's party in 1968 and yet pretend to represent it once Moussa Traoré was gone?" rhetorically asked Amadou Seydou Traoré²³. This and other similar considerations led the more radical elders to rally around Baba Akim Haidara as the official party candidate at the presidential elections of 1992.

Despite the Haidara wing's firm opposition, Tieoulé came in second after president-elect Alpha Oumar Konaré of ADEMA in the presidential elections. To ensure Konaré's victory against their own party member, the Haidara wing voted en masse for Konaré in the second round of the presidential elections. At stake was the leadership of their party, and Tieoulé's victory would have dramatically changed the balance of power within the party itself. The intergenerational struggle lasted well beyond the electoral process. Both sides brought the matter to the courts, which were asked to deliberate on the legitimacy of the US-RDA leadership. In 1994, the Malian judiciary system ultimately recognized the Haidara wing as the party's rightful heir. This wing could count on the support of some of the most resolute supporters of Keita's regime, such as Mamadou Gologo (who was (elected general secretary at the first party congress in 1991), Mamadou Talla, and Amadou Seydou Traoré. They were the political leaders who had struggled beside Keita during the independence period, worked actively within various institutions of the first republic, served time in prison because of their political convictions, and on the basis of their past claimed to represent the authentic voice of the US-RDA. Siding with them was Keita's extended family, and in particular Keita's first wife and his younger brother, Tati Keita. Faced with the victory of the radical party elders, Tieoulé and his followers had to resort to the creation of their own independent party, the Bloc démocratique pour l'intégration africaine (BDIA).

A few days after the final verdict was made public, BDIA members took advantage of their adversary's decision to commemorate the anniversary of Keita's death to officially question the US-RDA's narrative strategy of empowerment (Y. Diallo 1994: 2). BDIA leaders questioned the US-RDA's exclusive right to claim direct filiation from Keita's founding period. They argued that Keita was not to be monopolized by a single party, criticized "the attempt to deprive the BDIA of its right to Modibo Keita's political and moral heritage" (*ibid.*), and stated that, contrary to US-RDA leaders' beliefs, Keita "belongs to all Malian citizens" (*ibid.*). In addition, they added, too much emphasis had been put on Keita at the expense of the other founding father of the party, Mamadou Konaté, who died prematurely in 1956. They

22. Immediately after the military coup, Tieoulé Konaté maintained his position as president of the Banque du Développement du Mali. He was then appointed minister of finance for a few years (BA KONARÉ & KONARÉ 1983), and finally worked for the World Bank, a position, according to US-RDA leaders, he could not have held without the political support of the regime.

23. A. S. TRAORÉ, personal communication, 1994.

claimed that the silence surrounding Mamadou Konaté was only a strategy to undermine Tieoulé's political leadership as his direct descendant. They campaigned for a joint commemoration of the anniversaries of the two men's deaths, which happened to fall only a few days apart. According to the press coverage of this event, the BDIA's demands were not met and the US-RDA successfully organized its commemoration, which was widely attended by representatives of other parties as well as of the government (Diawara 1994: 3).

A few years later, a new split, much similar in dynamics and outcome to the previous one, emerged within the US-RDA²⁴. The occasion for the reemergence of the struggle between the radical and the conservative wings of the US-RDA party was offered by the controversial 1997 elections. The US-RDA joined the opposition in questioning ADEMA's electoral practices and refused to recognize the election's political outcomes. They joined forces with other opposition parties to create an opposition bloc—the *Collectif des partis politiques de l'opposition* (COPPO). COPPO proclaimed a boycott of all political activities, including the forthcoming municipal elections (1998). However, it turned out that not all the US-RDA leaders agreed with COPPO's position. Indeed, faced with an increasing radicalization of the opposition, a number of US-RDA party representatives began to question their party's participation in COPPO. They contemplated leaving the opposition coalition and were considering some possible forms of cooperation with the government. This more moderate US-RDA wing found its voice in one distinguished US-RDA elder, Seydou Badian Kouyate, and in the then newly elected US-RDA party secretary Daba Diawara.

Upon recognition of the more conciliatory direction taken by the newly elected leaders, the party elders—that is, the same party representatives who once supported Baba Akim Haidara and who were now led by Mamadou Bamou Touré, who was secretary-general of the US-RDA—decided to take the matter back under their direct control. They were strongly opposed to any dealings with a government that had, in their view, not been democratically elected, and were deeply embarrassed by Diawara's deception. Their response was firm. They convened an extraordinary party congress that ratified the expulsion of Daba Diawara and his companions from the party (1998). The Mamadou Bamou Touré wing also attacked the divisive politics pursued by the government, including the strategy of dividing the opposition by inserting what they regarded as pro-ADEMA cells—for instance, Daba Diawara—into opposition parties such as the US-RDA. As the two sides disagreed radically on the general direction the party was to take after the elections, both wings decided to pursue legal avenues in the attempt to assert their undisputed control over the party. The resolution of the question of the party's legitimate filiation was once again handed over to the judicial system.

24. In the meantime the BDIA suffered a severe setback as the party leadership disappeared in a dramatic car accident in 1995.

As the trial unfolded, Diawara and his companions argued that ADEMA would be a much more coherent party ally than the oddly assembled COPPO. In COPPO, the US-RDA found itself cooperating with the Mouvement patriotique pour le renouveau (MPR), which is the party of the military dictatorship's heirs (Daou 1998)²⁵. The Diawara wing called attention to the similarities between the US-RDA and ADEMA: both were genuinely democratic parties, and both had fought to bring the Traoré dictatorship to an end in 1991. Diawara also claimed that recognition of the results of the election was a civic duty—something, he added, that opposition representatives had yet to learn²⁶. In addition, he stressed that his side had enjoyed all along the support of its share of venerable US-RDA elders, but he regretted that because of their age and health status they had decided to withdraw from the public sphere. He asserted that the true leaders, those who “really” counted during the US-RDA years, were with him. Among this number he counted former US-RDA party secretary Idrissa Diarra. However, Diarra had been defeated by the Active Revolution, and this would seem to support the observation that many of the recent tensions were reactualizations of old conflicts within the party. Diawara also clearly enjoyed the support of the government, which granted to his wing privileged access to state-controlled media. However, all of the government's attempts in this direction were promptly denounced by the opposition as problematic attempts to influence the outcomes of a legally constituted trial.

On the other hand, the Touré wing maintained a line of radical opposition to the government. Its supporters argued that ADEMA was not a democratic party, as demonstrated by the fraudulent 1997 election and the repression of political dissent in its aftermath. In addition, they criticized the government for its unprecedented corruption, to which they nostalgically juxtaposed the US-RDA leadership's ethical conduct under Keita²⁷. They claimed that despite its promising beginning as a major player in the struggle to overthrow Traoré, ADEMA had since operated in a not too dissimilar way from the one-party systems of the past—that is, it had gradually come to monopolize Mali's politics and was not willing to let other parties take a role in the country's governance.

During all this, the Touré wing enjoyed the support of COPPO. The president of the opposition coalition early on issued a statement clarifying that COPPO “refuses to accept that the Union Soudanaise-RDA be taken out of the hands of the authentic repositories of the ideals that were defended by the founding fathers” (D. Coulibaly 1999)²⁸. COPPO stated that as long

25. D. DIAWARA, personal communication, 2001.

26. D. DIAWARA, personal communication, 2001.

27. Konaré reckoned with this pervasive problem by launching a massive anticorruption campaign in 2000.

28. In the controversy, some of the old accusations that had emerged during the first split reemerged here. From the US-RDA perspective, Diawara was just the most recent expression of the conservative forces that had divided the party since the mid-1960s. On the other hand, Diawara questioned the credentials of those who

as party founders such as Mamadou Gologo and Keita's wife were alive, they should be regarded as the true heirs of Keita's legacy (*ibid.*). Ultimately, these legitimacy claims won for the Touré wing the support of the court. After approximately four years of heated disputes, public addresses, and sudden turns of events (on a couple of occasions it seemed that the Diawara wing was about to win), the Touré wing was recently reconfirmed as the party's legitimate heir. In the autumn of 2002, Daba Diawara had already funded his own independent party, the Parti de l'indépendance, de la démocratie et de la solidarité (PIDS). Once again the legal system had thus validated the narrative strategy pursued by the Touré wing, one of closeness to Keita's "authentic" message. The more radical current of the US-RDA and many of the original members were able to maintain the leadership of the party. Their attachment to Keita's socialist regime (and in particular the last two years of his regime), their direct involvement with the events surrounding the independence movement, their often painful experiences during Traoré's dictatorship, and the support of Keita's extended family were essential in this struggle.

New State Rituals and the Opposition: Keita and the Pantheon of National Heroes

Keita's legacy was not only a matter of contention within his own party, but a difficult matter to handle for Konaré's government itself, which was committed, like most democratic forces, to a reevaluation of Keita's First Republic after the silence imposed by the Traoré regime. Konaré's government tried to weave a legitimizing tale that established a direct connection with this founding phase of the Malian nation, characterized by the enthusiasm of the immediate post-independence period and the extraordinary efforts made to construct an independent national economy, among other measures. However, all attempts by the government to claim its share of Keita's legacy encountered strong opposition by US-RDA party representatives. This conflict goes back to the electoral campaign of 1992, when president Alpha Oumar Konaré and his political entourage effectively presented ADEMA as the true heir of Keita's legacy, but one that had learned from the mistakes committed during Keita's period. Moreover, ADEMA leaders had struggled to secure as their headquarters a building in Bamako Kura that had been formerly occupied by the US-RDA party prior to the latter's move to the *Permanence du Parti* in the late 1960s. The choice was interpreted by internal observers as a further attempt by the majority party to claim to be the inheritor of the mantle of Mali's socialist period²⁹. These

presented themselves as the true Keita's companions and foregrounded the historical and political relevance of his own elders.

29. E.g., A. S. TRAORÉ, personal communication, 2001.

symbolic moves were met with fierce criticism by US-RDA leaders, who took them as a government-led attempt to dispossess the US-RDA of its political heritage. This situation translated into an initial silence on the part of the Konaré government on the issue of Keita's legacy—an uncertainty on which US-RDA representatives were quick to jump.

The Anniversary of Keita's Death

The hesitation by Konaré's government about embracing the political legacy of Modibo Keita was brought to the attention of the media by various US-RDA representatives³⁰. For instance, in an interview with *La Nation*, Moussa Keita dit Tati, Modibo Keita's younger brother and former *haut commissaire à la Jeunesse et aux Sports* under the Keita regime, observed: "In fact, during the first two years of the third republic, a deep silence surrounded Modibo Keita" (F. Traoré 1994: 2). He hoped that the 17th anniversary of Modibo Keita's death (in May 1994) would become an occasion to acknowledge Keita's contribution to Mali as a nation. Presumably this campaign to reevaluate Keita's work influenced the government position—or perhaps, the BDIA party's critique of the US-RDA monopoly of Keita's memory the year before had emboldened the government to pursue more firmly its own share of Keita's legacy. In any event, beginning in 1995, the Konaré's government instituted the commemoration of the anniversary of Keita's death as an official state ritual.

The choice of this event is important for a number of reasons. Keita's death is a highly charged event in the collective memory of the Malian people. Most Malians believe that Keita was killed by the dictatorship because of his enduring political influence. In the months that preceded his death in 1977, the students had organized a series of strikes against the regime and had demanded Keita's liberation (François 1983: 23). Keita was arrested during the 1968 military coup and detained until his death without a regular trial. Contrary to the military goal of discouraging further popular revolt, the announcement of Keita's sudden death became "the occasion for a large-scale anti-CMLN demonstration by teachers, students, and former supporters. The CMLN responded by arresting several hundred people, most of whom were released several months later" (Imperato 1989: 69)³¹. This event did not generate any immediate consequences for the

30. Interestingly, in Aminata Traoré's two-year program on "*les grandes figures du siècle*", at least as reported by the local press, Modibo Keita was not even mentioned, although here the focus was on the *hommes et femmes de culture* (Dicko 1999).

31. The casual announcement on the radio of Keita's death—framed as the death of a "retired teacher"—produced a profound shock in the collective consciousness of the Malian people and is a theme many times reelaborated in contemporary Malian literature. See A. Diallo's creative transformation of this event in *La Révolte du Kômò* (2000), where the character so described—differently from Keita—receives all the recognition that he deserved from his fellow citizens.

military regime, which would remain in power for another fourteen years, but it constituted an important step in a longer-term struggle against the dictatorship.

In addition, by appropriating this event the government, was creating a new link between what was seen as the glorious moments of the Malian people's struggles against the oppressor—first the colonial regime and later Traoré's dictatorship (Arnoldi 2000). This historical narrative finds further expression in the monumental art promoted by the government. Many of the new monuments represent Malian and African leaders of the anticolonial struggle (Nkrumah, Ouezzin Coulibaly, and Patrice Lumumba, as well as Modibo Keita), as well as those patriots who sacrificed their lives in the struggle against Moussa Traoré's military dictatorship (Monument à Abdoul Karim Camara dit Cabral, Monument des Martyrs). The incorporation of the anniversary of Keita's death is a further chapter in the heroic and populist narrative that characterized Konaré's presidency.

However, the government's appropriation of Keita's memory and the momentary coalition of diverging political forces in Keita's name—the US-RDA included—did not go unquestioned for very long. From 1997 to 2002, and as a reflection of the strong divisions surrounding the 1997 election outcomes, the government and the COPPO opposition bloc began organizing two separate commemorations of the anniversary of Keita's death. The government ceremonies were held in the morning, when the president and his entourage drove to the cemetery at Hamdallaye to deposit a flower wreath on Keita's tomb. The opposition's events were much more elaborate; the march from Keita's former residence to the cemetery in the afternoon was just one in a daylong series of events that began with prayers at Keita's house. This parallel commemoration of Keita's death marked the government's partial failure to forge a national narrative. Instead of being an event around which the Malian people might have identified, the anniversary of Keita's death became an arena for the expression of irreconcilable political positions—and more particularly for the opposition to express its lack of confidence in the government.

The Case of the Modibo Keita Memorial

The construction of the memorial is seen as a milestone in the so-called *grands travaux du président* (M. Diallo 1997: 3). Requested by the president itself, the memorial was completed by Covec, a Chinese construction company, in only six months. Despite some journalistic reports on the government's excessive expenditures on monumental art, the financing of the memorial came primarily from China and North Korea³². In return

32. See, for instance, the article "Mali's Monumental Folly?" by the BBC correspondent in Bamako, Joan BAXTER (2001).

Mali reduced duties on Chinese products and provided some free labor for the memorial's construction³³. The memorial, located on Avenue du 5 septembre, in the Fleuve quarter, is at the center of the future heart of the capital, according to the urban development plans. It is one of the few monuments that builds on a local figurative tradition (the majority feature a celebratory architectural style typical of many socialist countries). The plant of the building replicates the motive of the Mali *mogonin* (lit. "little person"), a stylized representation of a human body that was inspired by the Dogon mask *kanaga*. The arms of the *mogonin* form four staircases that lead to a large terrace upon which sits a statue of Modibo Keita. The building is surrounded by a large garden embellished by smaller architectural structures such as a fountain in the form of three crocodiles, symbolizing Bamako, and a high-relief representation of Mali's former independent currency, the Malian franc (1962-1967). The memorial's staff is composed of a director, the historian Modibo Diallo, a secretary, and maintenance and security personnel. The primary (and difficult) mission of this institution is to find a balance between the commemoration of Keita as one of the most influential Malian politicians and a rigorous study of the man and his period. Indeed, for Diallo the memorial should be "a research laboratory and a desacralized space... to immortalize the man [Keita] who has devoted all his life to the construction of a new Mali and for the African unity"³⁴. Accordingly, M. Diallo (1997: 4) has set as one of his principal goals the constitution of an online archive of primary and secondary material on the life and work of Mali's first president.

Given the divided and contentious political climate which I described in the foregoing pages, it comes as no surprise that the creation and operation of a memorial dedicated to Keita turned out not to be an easy task. The opposition, and in particular the US-RDA, shifted from an initial position of support to the initiative to one of firm opposition to what they perceived as exclusionary practices of the government in operating the memorial. This situation has ultimately affected the memorial's mission, and in particular its capacity to function as a space to freely reflect upon Keita's work and period. In the following sections I will focus on the three most controversial moments in the memorial's short existence: the donation of the statue by North Korea, the dedication of the memorial, and the politics behind the use of the memorial's facilities. All these moments, as I will show briefly, are acts that are highly political in nature and reflect the potential divisiveness of Malian politics as well as some of the contentious issues at stake.

On the roof of the memorial, easily visible from a distance, stands a life-size bronze statue of Modibo Keita. While the statue is described as a gift from North Korea to celebrate the long-standing good relations between these two countries, the identity of the gift's recipient is much in

33. M. DIALLO, personal communication, 2001.

34. M. DIALLO, quoted in BOUARÉ (2001).

dispute³⁵. According to the US-RDA, the statue was promised to a delegation of party members during a visit to North Korea. Apparently North Korean president Kim Il Sung, who had not been previously informed of Keita's death, was shocked to hear of it and generously offered as a gift to the Malian people a statue of Keita and four others to honor his friend's memory (Dramé 1999). The government version was significantly different. According to government sources, it was president Alpha Oumar Konaré who negotiated this offering with the North Korean government; Konaré commissioned four statues and asked that Keita's be provided as a gift in light of the excellent relations between the two countries.

These profound differences in accounts of the origin of Keita's statue underline one of the main issues at stake in this political and symbolic conflict: the struggle between the government and the US-RDA for control of the monument, in which many of the US-RDA leaders were hoping to play a wider role. The US-RDA position was clearly stated in the opposition literature: "Mamadou Touré and his companions... deplore their marginalization after having contributed a number of photos necessary to make the model of [Keita's] statue" (Dramé 1999: 1). It is no coincidence that recently the US-RDA elders have publicly and provocatively requested that the government immediately return a number of buildings that were the property of their party when the military coup d'état took place in 1968, including the building that was once the *Permanence du Parti* and is now the Primature, and the building where the founding congress of the US-RDA was held in 1946 and which is now the Lycée Askia (Sanogo 2001: 5)³⁶.

The dedication of the memorial was in itself a very serious diplomatic affair, and it required long and careful preparation to avoid political repercussions³⁷. The memorial was completed in 1997 but not dedicated until two years later. Apparently the president was first worried about being accused by the opposition of using the memorial for electoral purposes. Once the elections of 1997 were over, Konaré had to work to rebuild the torn relationship between his government and the opposition forces—a step he regarded as necessary before the dedication could take place. In particular, the president wanted to make sure that the US-RDA leadership would participate, and this was for a long time uncertain. When the date was finally announced as 6 June 1999, some of the US-RDA party leaders accused the government of not having sent them an invitation. Mamadou Bamou Touré issued a statement in which he condemned the exclusionary practices of the government, but invited party members to attend the event en masse anyway to demonstrate publicly the resilience of the US-RDA.

35. It should be reiterated that the interest in these divergences is not so much to ascertain the ultimate "truth" but rather to reflect upon the meanings of such conflicts (ROSALDO 1993).

36. A. S. TRAORÉ, personal communication, 2001.

37. M. DIALLO, personal communication, 2001.

At the dedication Konaré used this context to further elaborate on his reading of Keita's legacy. He emphasized his distance from the US-RDA's (that is, the Touré wing's) eulogistic and too often anecdotal reading of Keita's personal and moral worth as well as of his political thoughts and actions. Indeed, during the dedication, Konaré made it clear that "this ceremony is not a sacred thing; even less a personality cult". Konaré's disclaimer was also intended to calm Islamic fundamentalists, who have opposed many of the cultural initiatives promoted by the government and in particular monumental art, which they accuse of being conducive to idolatry and animism. Konaré looked to history for inspiration but also for ammunition in order to avoid the mistakes that were made by the previous one-party regimes (Drabo 1999; Konaré 1995).

The part of the press that is closer to the government welcomed Konaré's attempt to promote a more critical and democratic reading of the past, commenting: "The advantage of democracy is the possibility of identifying embarrassing truth, of deciphering it with as much objectivity as possible, of consciously integrating it into our collective experience" (Drabo 1999). The state press described US-RDA leaders as "guardians of the temple of Keita's memory" and questioned party representatives' commitment to forging a critical reading of Mali's past. This historical task, much needed for the growth of the nation at large, was to be taken on by the intellectuals, as "it is the duty of researchers to give back the historical truth" (*ibid.*). The current government has placed some of Mali's finest intellectuals in key political positions, thus marking a significant departure from the anti-intellectual climate that reigned during Traoré's dictatorship³⁸.

Parallel to this attempt to critically integrate this silenced and controversial past, Konaré also made a reference to the more inclusive reading of the past pursued by his government. The president clarified that Keita's memorial was one aspect of a broader politics aimed at building "a pantheon to preserve the memory of those whose actions still inspire us today" (B. Touré 1999). In its last few years the government sought to reevaluate controversial historical figures such as Fily Dabo Sissoko—known as the leader of the Parti soudanais progressiste (PSP) and Keita's main political opponent prior to independence—to widen its political basis. A two-day conference organized by the minister of culture, Pascal Baba Coulibaly, in May 2000 focused particularly on Sissoko's work as a writer and poet, and ultimately led to a less partisan reading of his political work and his party (Bagayogo 1999)³⁹. Coulibaly's initiative was positively received by the

38. S. CAMARA, personal communication, 2001.

39. For instance, in his recent analysis of Malian democracy, Bagayogo underlines how one should not forget that the Parti soudanais progressiste (PSP), like all other Sudanese political forces, was sustained by progressive French parties and that the PSP did eventually join the US-RDA in its pro-independence program (BAGAYOGO 1999).

media, which praised the government for restoring the historical role of this much-neglected Malian intellectual and politician⁴⁰.

Thus the dedication became an important moment for the government to identify its reading of the past and distinguish it from the US-RDA's narrative of faithful attachment to Keita's memory (Remotti 2000). But it was also the occasion to reinstate its commitment to forge a much more inclusive national narrative, one that incorporated Modibo Keita within a complex pantheon of political figures. The narrative chosen was one that could erase past divisions and ideological differences and, at least in intention, constitute the basis for a widening of the imagined community of citizens.

The government used the seemingly persuasive argument of pursuing a more detached and critical approach to the past. However, a return to the US-RDA's perspective highlights some political underpinnings of the desacralized and distanced narrative espoused by the government. The Touré wing repeatedly accused the government of not granting them the use of public facilities for party events. For instance, US-RDA party members had requested use of the Stade Modibo Keita to commemorate the 1999 anniversary of Keita's death, but their request was apparently denied (Dramé 1999: 1). They also argued that the government was favoring in all possible ways the Daba Diawara wing by providing them with unlimited airtime and access to public facilities at a time when the outcome of the court proceedings was still uncertain and the filiation of the US-RDA not yet ascertained. One such instance of favoritism allegedly took place at the Mémorial Modibo Keita itself. Here, and with the declared intention that it was an intellectual encounter and not the celebratory-type event promoted by the US-RDA leadership, Diawara was allowed to organize a conference entitled "Modibo Keita l'Africain" in May 2000. The initiative was advertised as officially sponsored by the US-RDA party, although by then Diawara was no longer considered a member in good standing by the original founders of the party (and the trial for the party's leadership was still under way). This event prompted discomfort among some of the invited speakers, who were opposed to Diawara and had not anticipated the political implications of the conference—a public sanctioning of Diawara's leadership. It also triggered a firm public response by the Touré wing, which protested against the government's involvement in internal party affairs and its unfair treatment of the Touré wing.

Those additional tensions caused by the creation of the memorial had the effect of producing a significant change in the mission of the institution—forcing it to broaden its scope.⁴¹ In one of our conversations, Diallo stated

40. A number of newspaper articles reporting on the centennial were suggestively titled, including "Fily Dabo: l'injustice réparée" (HAIDARA 2000) and "Centenaire de Fily Dabo Sissoko: le createur revient à la lumière" (DIAWARA 2000).

41. It should be clear that while the political situation may be divisive, Mali has traditionally been a country where violence is only sporadic and peaceful agreements are ultimately achieved (see on this issue DRISDELLE [1997] and in particular her discussion of cousinage as a powerful strategy to overcome conflicts). For

that his goal had now become that of making this memorial a sort of “museum of modern history”, partly because of the absence of any such institution in Mali today. For instance, the memorial recently cohosted the 10th-anniversary celebration of the March 1991 democratic revolution⁴². Diallo still hoped to establish an archive of work by and on Keita. However, a visitor to the memorial could not help but remark on the limited sources available on Keita and the US-RDA. In 2001 the collection was limited to a number of photographs of Keita and some more recent documents. US-RDA leaders (those of the Touré wing) made it clear that they were not likely to donate their privately owned collections until they were more closely involved with the management of the memorial. The transfer of intergenerational knowledge thus will also depend on some resolution of this conflict, which has for a decade pitted the government against the opposition⁴³.

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Centering on some of the recent political narratives that surround Mali's first president, Modibo Keita, this paper has argued that these narratives constitute a privileged arena to observe some of the political tensions and their symbolic expressions in democratic Mali. To begin with, Modibo Keita's legacy is a matter of continuous debate and conflict within the US-RDA. The resolution of the various internal conflicts shows the hegemony of the values of authenticity and direct historical filiation in the process of legitimization within the US-RDA. In other words, this party remains solidly in the hands of its founding fathers, and more specifically those who remained beside Keita until the very end of his regime—the Active Revolution included. To cite the effective formula used by US-RDA party secretary Mamadou Bamou Touré (1999) prior to the dedication of the Modibo Keita Memorial: “Modibo Keita belongs first and foremost to his biological and political family and his political family, the US-RDA, and only after that to the whole of the Malian people.”

In this context, the government's attempt under Konaré presidency to weave a national narrative with which the citizenry may identify turned

instance, in one of my conversations with the Ségouvian branch of another opposition party, the Congrès national d'initiative démocratique Faso Yiriwa Ton, the local leadership underlined how they were concerned about keeping their disagreement with the government within certain limits to avoid further deterioration of the situation.

42. M. DIALLO, personal communication, 2001.

43. An additional concern is represented by the misuse of public documents, many of which are either in bad physical conditions or have disappeared over the years—a situation that has prompted Diallo to try to put together an online archive on Keita.

out to be a difficult endeavor. After Mali's democratic turn, the country's leadership showed some hesitancy in the process of assessing Modibo Keita's legacy for the new democratic nation. It then gradually proceeded to carve out its own distinctive reading of Keita—appreciative but critical of the more problematic aspects of Mali's First Republic. Moreover, it has attempted to elaborate a broader pantheon of national heroes with which a broader citizenry, and not just the US-RDA constituency, could identify.

However, these narrative attempts by the government were strongly contested by the opposition forces, especially after the controversial 1997 elections. This situation found expression at the cultural level in the development of parallel public rituals by the government and the opposition, as in the case of the commemoration of Keita's death as well as in the conflicts surrounding the creation of the Modibo Keita memorial.

These political debates can clearly be read as a sign of the liveliness of the Malian public sphere and of the unprecedented opportunity to express political dissent in today's Mali. It is also clear, though, that this divisiveness caused temporary paralysis of state institutions under Konaré presidency. The experience of the memorial has demonstrated all the difficulties encountered by the state in nationalizing certain historical figures, partly because specific parties conceive of them as their exclusive intellectual legacy (and/or have used such symbolic struggles to mine the legitimacy of Konaré's second mandate). On the other hand, the government seems to have used its prerogatives (access to public facilities, airtime on national television) to favor more conciliatory party wings over those more radically opposed to the government—thus contributing to further political tensions. In the midst of all this, one of the memorial's primary goals, that of being a desacralized space to think about Keita's work, was seriously undermined. Despite the government's investment in a rich and far-reaching program of cultural renaissance, in the absence of effective resolution of the country's internal divisions the transfer of knowledge from the old political generation to the new one remains a contested and partly unresolved issue (at least within the historical parameters being considered), with a number of local observers expressing the concern that many government-promoted cultural programs may turn out to be ephemeral achievements.

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ABSTRACT

One central query that informs this article is the study of the complex relationship between memory and political identities in Mali during Alpha Omar Konaré's presidency (1992-2002). In particular, I investigate the implications of the fall of one-party systems for the narration of this West African nation. The official narration of

the nation and its past is no longer an activity solely in the hands of states and dominant parties. Since Mali's recent democratic turn, a number of newly emerged or re-emerged parties compete over often contrasting narratives of the nation. My study of the memorial that is dedicated to Mali's first president, Modibo Keita, examines some of the contradictions of Mali's democratic turn—the newly available freedom of expression but also the process of fragmentation of Mali's politics (as shown by the proliferation of political parties and the lively opposition to the government during part of Konaré's presidency). A focus on contested historical accounts and the production of history is crucial to further our understanding of the process of democratization in Africa—in particular the innovations, continuities, and contradictions of current political contexts.

RÉSUMÉ

La nation racontée et la démocratie au Mali : vue du mémorial de Modibo Keita. — Cet article se penche sur la relation complexe qui existait au Mali entre la mémoire et les identités politiques sous la présidence de Alpha Omar Konaré. Nous nous intéressons en particulier aux implications de l'effondrement des systèmes de parti unique sur le récit de cette nation d'Afrique de l'Ouest. Le récit officiel de la nation et de son passé n'est plus l'apanage des États et des partis dominants. Depuis le récent revirement démocratique du Mali, plusieurs partis ayant récemment fait leur apparition (ou réapparition) rivalisent entre eux pour présenter des récits souvent discordants de la nation. Notre étude du mémorial dédié au premier président du Mali, Modibo Keita, analyse quelques contradictions du revirement démocratique qu'a connu le Mali — la nouvelle liberté d'expression, mais aussi le processus de fragmentation du politique (comme le montre la prolifération de partis politiques et la vigoureuse opposition au gouvernement pendant une partie de la présidence de Konaré). Il est essentiel de se concentrer sur les récits historiques controversés et sur la production de l'histoire pour mieux comprendre le processus de démocratisation en Afrique — notamment les innovations, les continuités et les contradictions des divers contextes politiques actuels.

Keywords/Mots-clés: Mali, democracy, national culture, social memory, Modibo Keita Memorial/Mali, démocratie, culture nationale, mémoire sociale, Mémorial de Modibo Keita.