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THE KURUKAN FUGA CHARTER: AN INSTRUMENT OF SOCIAL STABILITY FOR THE MALI EMPIRE

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Résumé

Cette étude porte sur la Charte de Kurukan Fuga et son rôle dans la stabilité sociale de l'Empire du Mali. La Charte de Kurukan Fuga a beaucoup contribué à la stabilité sociale de l'Empire du Mali après son adoption en 1236. Cet article vise à expliquer les acquis sociaux de cette charte dans l'Empire du Mali. La théorie du postcolonialisme est utilisée pour analyser et interpréter les données. La méthode qualitative est employée collecter les données. Grâce à la mise en œuvre des dispositions sociales de la charte, l'Empire du Mali est devenu une zone stable pendant beaucoup de siècles. Les résultats montrent que la stabilité sociale de l'Empire lui a permis d'être non seulement réputé, mais aussi éternel pour les générations actuelles et futures. Cette stabilité sociale de l'Empire du Mali continue à inspirer de nombreuses sociétés africaines et non-africaines dans le monde, faisant de la Charte de Kurukan Fuga un héritage éternel pour le monde entier.

Mots clés : : : Charte de Kurukan Fuga, instrument, Empire du Mali, social, stabilité.

Abstract

This study deals with the Kurukan Fuga Charter and its place in the social stability of the Mali Empire. The Kurukan Fuga Charter contributed a lot to the social stability of the Mali Empire after its adoption in 1236. This article seeks to explain the social achievements of this charter in the Mali Empire. The theory of postcolonialism is used to analyze and interpret the data. The qualitative method is used to collect the data. Thanks to the implementation of the social dispositions of the Charter the Mali Empire became a stable area for many centuries. The results show that the social stability of the Mali Empire permitted it to be not only reputed, but also everlasting for the present and future generations. This social stability of the Mali Empire continues to inspire many African and non-African societies in the world, making the Kurukan Fuga Charter an undying heritage for the whole world.

Key words: Kurukan Fuga Charter, instrument, Mali Empire, social, stability.

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Introduction

The former Mali Empire was famous at all the levels: social, political, economic and environmental. The instrument of that reputation was certainly the Kurukan Fuga Charter. That charter was adopted in 1236 in Kaaba, current Kangaba to be the solution to all the issues of the new Mali Empire. The implementation of the social dispositions of the Charter permitted the whole empire to become a socially enjoyable area.

The main objective of the study is to demonstrate that the Kurukan Fuga Charter was undoubtedly an instrument of social stability of the Mali Empire after its adoption in 1236. To attain the aforementioned objective of the study, the following questions are raised:

- How did sanakunya and education, dispositions of the Kurukan Fuga Charter, contribute to the social stability of the Mali Empire?
- What was the place of respect, a disposition of the Kurukan Fuga Charter, in the social stability of the Mali Empire?
- What were the achievements of solidarity and hospitality, values of the Kurukan Fuga Charter, in the social stability of the Mali Empire?

The analysis and interpretation of the data is carried out in the theoretical context of postcolonialism. The qualitative method is used to collect the data. The paper is made up of three major parts:

- The achievements of sanakunya and education in the social stability of the Mali Empire
- The place of respect, a disposition of the Kurukan Fuga Charter, in the social stability of the Mali Empire
- The achievements of solidarity and hospitality, values of the Kurukan Fuga Charter, in the social stability of the Mali Empire

1. The achievements of sanakunya and education in the social stability of the Mali Empire

Anything judged useful and essential to the present and future of the new empire was given consideration and included in the charter. From that viewpoint, the constituents during the conference granted much importance to social stability. Ways and strategies necessary to bind the different people and communities were taken to achieve that purpose in the whole empire. As the implementation of the charter was a reality, its achievements in maintaining social stability were observed.

Social bonds were reinforced. The Manden society is the union of different and various entities. That diverse but common union starts at the family level and gradually moves to age groups, districts, villages, kingdoms up to the empire level. To make people live together in harmony at each level, strong social dispositions needed to be taken. The constituents of the Kurukan Fuga Conference were truly aware of that necessity in 1236. To achieve that purpose,

they included in their fundamental law some dispositions capable of reinforcing the social relationships at all the levels of the society. Those dispositions included the former ones which had shown their efficiency in the past, but were reinforced with their institutionalization in 1236. Some new measures were also added to the former ones to enlarge their field of competence in the whole empire. The articles capable of reinforcing social bonds among the different communities were the ones related to sanankunya, marriage, solidarity, sacredness of human life, integration of foreigners, generational brotherhood and rigor at work. Those measures were not just taken but carried out. They permitted the good cohabitation between the different social classes, age groups, families, villages and kingdoms together for many years. The people of the whole empire were like a single soul inhabiting different bodies. This permitted the survival of the empire for some centuries. Some of those measures, because of their efficiency, are even in full practice in many contemporary African societies. The past is always important for Africans, especially in West Africa where it is believed that “the future derives from and depends on the past”. This charter can even be more important for us in the future if we explore it in the right way.

The practice of sanankunya was one of the main ways to reinforce social links among the different communities. It is Article 7 of Kankan’s variant¹. It is stated as follows: “The sanankunya (the kinship of pleasantry or joking relationship) and the tanamangnongonya (blood pact) have been established among the Mandinka. Consequently, any contention that occurs among the different social groups should not degenerate, the respect for the other being the rule. Between brothers-in law and sisters-in law, between grandparents and grandchildren, tolerance and play (racket) should be the principle”.

This practice was implemented in the empire and it achieved its goal that is uniting the different local nations into a single community. In *Histoire Générale de l’Afrique IV, l’Afrique du XIIe au XVIe Siècle* (1987), a proof is provided about the implementation and achievements of this practice in this passage: “Correspondences were established between Mandenkas’ names and the other nations of Soudan; banter brotherhood was established between the communities; that practice continued after Sunjata. In many cases, it reduced the tension between ethnic groups”² (p.158). The practice of sanankunya is a very old practice. It began before the Kurukan Fuga Conference in 1236. It was given a special cachet during the latter conference. Soundiata Keita stands as the first emperor to have institutionalized the concept. His successors followed his steps as indicated in the excerpt. This concept regarding its advantages could not in any way be neglected in the empire. For instance, a man from the Konde community, is considered as a brother by those from the Ndiaye community. In the same way, a Traore is treated as a brother

¹ Two main written variants of the Kurukan Fuga Charter are available today. They are the one designed in Kanakan in 1998, composed of 44 articles and the one provided by Solomana Kante in 1970, composed of 133 articles. They differ in their number of articles, but similar in their content. The variant designed in Kankan (Kankan’s variant) is mostly used in this study. The 44 articles are available in the book *Kurukanfuga, Miroir d’une culture universelle* (2018) by Modibo Diabaté. The 133 articles are available in the book *La Charte de Kurukanfuga en 1236* (2009) by Solomana Kanté, written initially in Nko in 1970.

² Des correspondances furent établies entre noms claniques mandenka et noms claniques des autres ethnies du Soudan; la parenté à plaisanterie s’établit entre les ethnies; cette pratique continua après Sunjata Keita. En bien des cas, elle fit diminuer la tension entre groupes ethniques (1987, p.158).

by any person bearing the name Diop, etc. By settling in the Wolof country, a Traore can take the family name Diop or inversely, a Diop can become a Traore in the Mandenka country too. That socially devised parenthood between communities played and continue to play a big role in West Africa.

The practice of sanankunya was well spread in the empire. It was a simple way of creating friendship and brotherhood all over the empire. Opposition that is the main source of conflicts was avoided through play and laughter. The scholar Thierno Amadou Ndiogou (2016) sustains this view as follows: “The social conjuncture was supported by friendship which is not hampered by insult, by joyful antagonism and its regular repetition”³ (p. 55). In the same frame of mind, Lala Aiche Traore (2019) cites the advantages of the practice of sanankunya in the Mali Empire in the following terms:

This practice permitted the emperor to soothe the tension which existed between the people through a purifying strategy based on humour and joke between the individuals and the communities. But it permitted especially Manding of that time to set up between the different social classes a spirit of tolerance and especially of peace after nine years of continuing wars and traumatism.

So, to strengthen better the spirit of tolerance in Mali, do not the griots say that Soundiata would have authorized a captive to treat him as Djon? This example shows us how much the emperor was interested in the practice of the banter brotherhood between family names and different people⁴. (p. 348).

The passage undoubtedly confirms the implementation of Sanankunya in the empire. The supreme leader of the empire who is the emperor even encouraged the practice by implementing it himself. Before him, the practice existed but it was not institutionalized by his predecessors. Any law that is well respected by the decision-makers is likely to survive. That is the case of most of the laws of the Kurukan Fuga Charter. sanankunya was not an exception to this. This enabled it to reinforce its social roots and survive until today.

Education as a whole was a way of bringing stability in the empire. It was granted a special importance during the Kurukan Fuga Conference in 1236. It is Article 9 of Kankan’s variant. It runs as follows: “The education of children behooves the entire society. The paternal authority therefore falls to everyone”. That education of children agreed on was implemented in the empire. Its implementation and achievements in the empire are provided in the following passage:

Family life centered around children. For the first twelve years of their lives, children were trained by their mothers. When the boy reached twelve, they were circumcised with their peers, then they became apprentices in the castes of their uncles. If the family could afford it or a boy was talented enough, he was sent to

³ La conjoncture sociale était maintenue par l’amitié qui ne s’offusque pas de l’insulte, par l’antagonisme joué et sa répétition régulière (p. 55).

⁴ “Cette pratique a permis à l’empereur d’évacuer l’agressivité qui régnait entre les peuples à travers une démarche purificatrice basée sur l’humour et la plaisanterie entre les individus et les communautés. Mais il permit surtout au Manding de l’époque d’instaurer entre les différentes classes sociales un esprit de tolérance et surtout de paix après neuf (9) années de guerres incessantes et de traumatisme.

Ainsi pour mieux fortifier l’esprit de tolérance au Mali, les griots ne disent-ils pas que Soundjata aurait autorisé un esclave à le traiter d’esclave ? Cet exemple nous montre à quel point l’empereur tenait à ce que la parenté à plaisanterie entre les patronymes ou ethnies différents soit mise en pratique⁴. (P. 348).

Niani, Gao, or Timbuktu to study or apprentice under a master craftsman. Some young men joined the professional military. (Patricia and Kissack, 1994, p.67).

Education was granted a special importance in the empire because everything turned around it. It was part of the instruments used to tie up family and communal relationships. Boys were sent in their uncles' families to learn the work they were supposed to do. They also acquired the principles of life different from what they usually learn in their families. That way, integration into other communities were easy. At the communal level, some boys were sent to the big cities of the empire like Niani, the capital city, Gao and Timbuktu to acquire more knowledge and talent. This was like offering a scholarship to students to study in prestigious universities like Sorbonne in France, Harvard in the USA and Oxford in England. This permitted those grant students to reinforce the links between their communities of origin and the welcoming ones. Those among them who were more skilled in the field of the army joined the army of elite of the empire.

Education was a very important way of transmitting knowledge, linking individuals and creating social cohesion. Initiation was one of the best strategies certainly used in the empire to educate the children before they became adult and responsible men in the community. This initiation is explained in the following way:

Manden seems to have transmitted to its close or far sons of the original cradle, what we will call "the soul of Manden" that is initiation. In those communities, in age group and according to the sex, from realization till death, the individual receives the essential of the experience in the "initiation societies" based on the African spirituality which are the container of knowledge, know-how and manners, teaching, training, upbringing and daytime and night knowledge⁵. (Sidibé, 2019, p. 400).

This passage thus confirms the implementation of Article 4 of Kankan's variant. It is the division of the society into age groups. The society was not divided into age groups just for the pleasure of division. It was divided for many purposes. Among them, there was unity of the members of the group, their multi-dimensional training and their active participation in all the development activities of the society. Regarding the multi-dimensional training, initiation was one of the best strategies used to carry it out. Without it the children could not get the required values to be united forever and the knowledge indispensable to the development of the community as well.

The practice of initiation was just one of the instruments of applying Article 9 of Kankan's variant which gives the monopoly of education to the whole community. The purpose of that collective responsibility was not only the promotion of unity between individuals, but also the restoration of social cohesion in the community. Thanks to the practice of initiation in the different initiation societies in the empire that purpose was attained.

⁵ Le Manden semble avoir transmis à ses fils proches ou lointains du berceau originel, ce que nous appellerons « l'âme du Manden » à savoir l'initiation. Dans toutes ces communautés, en groupe d'âge et selon le sexe, de la prise de conscience jusqu'à la mort, l'individu reçoit l'essentiel de l'expérience dans les « sociétés d'initiation » fondées sur la spiritualité africaine et qui sont le réceptacle du savoir, du savoir-faire et du savoir-être, de l'enseignement, de la formation, de l'éducation et de la connaissance diurne et nocturne. (Sidibé, 2019, p. 400).

To back up our understanding, the term “initiation” is defined in *Sundjata an Epic of Old Mali* (2006) in the following way:

This is the process by which a human child becomes a full adult member of the komo society. It involves a training period to learn the secrets of religion, and a ceremony to signify entry into adulthood. Children participate in initiation with other members of their age-class, and form bonds that remain influential for the rest of their lives. In the epic, Soundjata remains close to several members of his age-class (half-brother Manding Bory, cousin Siara Kouman Konaté, friends Fran Kamara and Kamadjan) and they aid him in the final battle against king Soumahoro Kante of Sosso. (p. xi).

As alluded to in the above passage, the institutionalization of age groups or age-classes was an important instrument adopted during the Kurukan Fuga Conference in 1236 to link the individuals and communities. The age groups existed before the Kurukan Fuga Conference. However, they were reorganized and reinforced. That disposition was well implemented in the empire under the reign of Soundjata. Issiaka Kone (2019) confirms this in the below passage:

Soundjata has institutionalized the age groups to make of the youth between 18 to 30 years old the manpower of the community; the able-bodied carry out the communal fields and the public utility activities. It was question to organize the age groups to motivate and train them, to unite the hearts and shape their conscience around an ideal. This permitted the age groups to maintain solidarity, the sense of duty, brotherhood, which have made up the life blood of the manding society up till now⁶. (p. 391).

This passage shows the existence of age groups in the empire as recommended during the Kurukan Fuga Conference in 1236 and the fundamental role they played in the development and cohesion of the empire.

2. The place of respect, a disposition of the Kurukan Fuga Charter, in the social stability of the Mali Empire

Another disposition used to link the different communities and create social cohesion was the implementation of Article 23 of Kankan’s variant. It goes as follows: “Never betray one another. Respect your given word (word of honor)”. According to it, there should be no betrayal between people in the community and everyone should respect his given word (promise). That disposition was enforced because different people have lived in the empire for a long time. That idea is illustrated by Baboucar Diouf (2019) as follows: “This is all the more important that it renders justice in Article 23 of the charter reinforced by a Mandingo saying which states this: “a man is his speech”. These codes of behavior consolidate the idea that the Mandingo Empire “included various people among whom the Mandingo and Bambara, the Sonikes, the Peuls, the Ouolofs, the Sereres, the Maures”⁷ (p. 360).

⁶ Soundjata a institutionnalisé les classes d’âges pour faire des jeunes entre 18 et 30 ans la force de travail des communautés ; les bras valides qui réalisent les champs collectifs et les travaux d’utilité publique. Il était question d’organiser les classes d’âge pour les animer et les éduquer, pour unir les cœurs et former leur conscience autour d’un idéal. Cela a permis aux classes d’âge d’entretenir la solidarité, le sens du devoir, la fraternité qui en ont fait la force vive de la société mandingue jusqu’à nos jours. (p. 391).

⁷ Cela est d’autant plus vrai qu’il rend justice à l’article 23 de la charte conforté par un dicton Mandingue qui dit ceci : « un homme, c’est sa parole ». Ces codes de conduite consolident l’idée que l’Empire Mandingue « englobait

Different people lived together in the Mali Empire as seen above. The Kurukan Fuga Conference was the starting point of that living together. Many other communities including the ones evoked in the passage took part in the gathering in addition to the Mandingo nation. All those different people lived together and shared everything due to the respect and trust which existed between them. There was no act of betrayal between them. Mutual confidence was the needle which tied them together for many centuries. This also implies that there was no racism and discrimination between the individuals, for they are consequences of betrayal. So, brotherhood was developed thanks to the enforcement of the saying: “do as you would be done by”. As these people were ashamed of betraying themselves, they did not betray others, but regarded them as brothers.

Another means used to reinforce social bonds between communities and bring stability was the respect granted to women in the society. As men alone could not do everything, some articles were specifically taken to involve officially women in the development of the society. Those articles (Articles 11, 14, 15 and 16 of Kankan’s variant) somehow granted women freedom, participation, consideration and respect. Those articles were implemented in the whole empire. Some of them survived until today and they are part of our daily practices. Issa Makan Keita (2019) explains below how precolonial African women were emancipated:

The woman’s emancipation was already a reality. She was already associated to the decision-making and her participation in the public management was recognized. Moreover, it was strictly forbidden to make her undergo any act violence. These dispositions were considered as a reward to the woman who played a determinant role in the founding victory of the empire in the Kirina Battle. We remind that history teaches us the defeat of Soumangourou, king of Sosso, is partly due to his wife who had revealed his secret of invincibility to Soundjata⁸. (P. 101).

The African woman’s full participation in the development of her society began centuries ago before the Kurukan Fuga Conference. The victory of Soundjata Keita over Soumahoro can be regarded as a feminine achievement. Soundjata’s sister who was Soumahoro’s last wife was at the origin of that victory. Soundjata Keita and his brave allied warriors did not say she was a woman to keep her away from the solutions against Soumahoro. They knew well what women could do in any sector of development. They also believed in the saying “What woman wants, God wants”. So, the defeat of Soumahoro was achieved thanks to a woman’s will and intelligence. The victory of Soundjata was facilitated with the collaboration of women in the affairs of the society. As they were important in the society, the fundamental law of the empire could not be devised by letting women aside. That is why, they were officially alluded to in some of the charter’s articles.

divers peuples parmi lesquels des Malinkés et des Bambaras, des Soninkés, des Peuls, des Ouolofs, des Sérères, des Maures » (p. 360).

⁸ L’émancipation de la femme était déjà une réalité. Elle était déjà associée à la prise de décision et sa participation à la gouvernance publique était reconnue. De plus, il était formellement interdit d’exercer une quelconque violence sur elle. Ces dispositions étaient considérées comme une récompense à l’endroit de la femme qui a joué un rôle déterminant dans la victoire fondatrice de l’empire lors de la bataille de Kirina. L’on se rappelle que l’histoire nous enseigne que la défaite de Soumangourou, roi du Sosso, est en partie due à sa femme qui avait révélé son invulnérabilité à Sundjata. (P. 101).

3. The achievements of solidarity and hospitality, values of the Kurukan Fuga Charter, in the social stability of the Mali Empire

As illustrated above, everything was done to reinforce the social links among the diverse communities of the empire, from collective to individual levels. This was a necessity to the restoration of peace and stability in the whole empire. Another important social value advocated in the Kurukan Fuga Charter and implemented throughout the Mali Empire was solidarity. It was widely practiced in the empire. Article 30 of Kankan's variant deals with it in general and it is stated in the following way: "We should help those who are in need". Solidarity was seen as an important element for the well-being of the empire. Its stability and survival depended on it. That is why, during the Kurukan Fuga Conference many articles were devoted to its practice besides the one evoked above. Nearly most of the articles in the charter adopted in 1236 were intended to achieve the ideals of solidarity. Anything implying collectivity, unity, peace, stability and prosperity were somehow based on solidarity. None of these conditions can be achieved without solidarity. No one alone can perform them. For that reason, solidarity was granted the greatest attention and regarded as one of the most important values in the society. Everyone was concerned with its implementation. It existed between all the members of the same family, all the inhabitants of the same district, all the people of the same village, all the individuals of the same kingdom and finally all the people of the empire. It also existed at all the levels of the society: moral, economic, physical and intellectual levels, in the battle field, on the farm, in the workshops and even in the worshipping places. The large enforcement of solidarity was not a mere slogan. It was undoubtedly implemented. This permitted the Mali Empire to be stable and prosperous for many centuries.

Another form of solidarity that was practiced in the empire to reinforce social bonds between individuals and bring stability was the existence of a good relationship between the neighbors. As it is commonly said: "One's closest parent is one's neighbor". In case of problem or need, he is the first to be besought. Keeping good relationship with one's neighbor is like reinforcing family links. Doing this is also performing solidarity. During the Kurukan Fuga Conference, some articles were taken regarding this aspect. In Kankan's variant, they are: Article 10: "We should offer condolences mutually"; Article 11: "When your wife or child runs away, stop running after them to the neighbor's house"; Article 15: "Never beat a married woman before her husband has tried to correct the problem"; Article 21: "Do not follow up with your constant attentions the wives of the chief, of the neighbor, of the marabou, of the priest, of the friend and of the partner"; Article 31: "We should respect kinship, marriage and neighborhood". All these articles call for the reinforcement of social links with the neighbor. For instance, Soundiata Keita, the first emperor of the empire did put emphasis on these rules in practice as shown below:

Soundiata laid the emphasis on the relationships of good neighborhood, basis of cohesion in the community. The respect and assistance to the neighbor are essential virtues in the in the life of group. A Mandingo saying states: "Another person makes me what I am, as I am under the obligation to assist him become what he is.

Hasn't the nature made and established us the ones for the others?"⁹ (Dembele 2019, pp. 156-157).

Solidarity has always existed in Africa to preserve the living conditions of individuals and mutual assistance. In Africa it is an obvious, historical and legendary fact. Lusengue M. (2008) confirms this: "Africa has known accordingly since its origin, the importance and practice of cooperation activities qualified most often as "traditional solidarity" whether it is to produce, consume or any other activity"¹⁰ (p. 11). That disposition was not put into oblivion in the Mali Empire. It was even given emphasis with its institutionalization during the Conference in 1236. From this passage, everyone must understand that the African solidarity is as old as Africa herself. Whoever talks about the practice of solidarity, talks about the existence of civilization. As Africa is the cradle of humanity, so it is not only the cradle of civilization but also the teacher of civilization to the rest of the world.

Hospitality was another disposition of the Kurukan Fuga Charter to ensure stability in the whole empire. Articles 24 and 25 of Kankan's variant show it: "In Manden, never ill-treat the foreigners" and "The ambassador does not risk anything in Manden". There was no discrimination in its practice. That is why, even unknown foreigners from far nations were well received in the empire for their stay either long or short. In the article "Trade, Transport, Temples, and Tribute: The Economics of Power" (1998) by Candice Goucher, Charles LeGuin, and Linda Walton, an instance of this is provided through the stay of Ibn Battuta in the Mali Empire:

While the vast majority of written historical sources on the Mali Empire were compiled by non-Africans who rarely set foot in Africa and never ventured south of the Sahara, an important exception is the eyewitness account by the Arab traveler Ibn Battuta. Its wealth of detail and observation makes his memoirs, *Rihla*, an unprecedented portrait of life in fourteenth-century Mali. Ibn Battuta was born in Tangier, Morocco, in 1304. Although he studied law, he began his celebrated travels as a young man in 1326 with the pilgrimage to Mecca. In the course of his lifetime he journeyed more than 70,000 miles to China, Southeast Asia, India, East Africa, the Niger, and the Byzantine Empire. Ibn Battuta considered himself a citizen of the Dar al-Islam, the entire "abode," or world, of Islamic civilization. It was through this lens that Ibn Battuta viewed Mali in 1352–1353. After two months of traveling across the Sahara from Sijilmasa in Morocco, Ibn Battuta's caravan reached Walata. The oldest city of Mali, Walata was a trading center where Sudanese and Berber merchants and scholars interacted. It was here that Ibn Battuta had his first taste of the inroads Islam had made into the integrity of Mali's indigenous ceremonial and cultural life. (P.5).

Welcoming foreigners, their security and integration are fundamental rules in the charter to maintain social stability. The stay of Ibn Battuta in the Empire from 1352 to 1353 justified the enforcement of those regulations. He visited other places like China, India and East Africa

⁹ Soundiata a mis l'accent sur des relations de bon voisinage, base de l'entente dans la communauté. Le respect et l'assistance dus au voisin sont des vertus essentielles dans la vie du groupe. Un dicton malinké dit : « Autrui me fait être ce que je suis, comme j'ai mission de l'aider à devenir ce qu'il est. La nature ne nous a-t-elle pas constitués et établis les uns pour les autres ? (Pp. 156-157).

¹⁰ L'Afrique connaît donc, depuis ses origines, l'importance et la pratique des actions de coopération qualifiée le plus souvent de « solidarité traditionnelle », qu'il s'agisse de produire, de consommer ou de toute autre activité (p. 11).

before Mali. His visit in the empire shows its importance in the world at that time. Another aspect proving the implementation of hospitality to far foreigners is the presence of Sudanese and Berber merchants and scholars in the trading center Walata. The presence and the fruitful interaction of those different communities with local populations witness the openness and the welcoming spirit of the leaders and populations of the Mali Empire.

The leaders and the populations of the Mali Empire were in no way hostile to foreigners. Their openhandedness permitted many sorts of people to visit the empire. The Arabs were not the only foreigners who visited the area like Ibn Battuta. Even the Europeans visited the Mali Empire. In *Histoire Générale de l'Afrique IV, l'Afrique du XIIIe au XVIe Siècle* (1987), an illustration is given: "In the middle of the 15th century, the Portuguese navigators entered in contact with the *mansa* when they arrived at the embouchure of the river Gambia; through them, we know that these western regions were strongly 'mandenguisés'"¹¹ (p. 181).

The Europeans who visited the Mali Empire in the 15th century were the Portuguese navigators. Like them, other Europeans visited the empire of course. From their visit report, the populations of the regions they visited were well integrated into the political system going on. Cheikh Anta Diop (1987) clearly points out the implementation of hospitality towards foreigners living in the empire as follows:

In all those centers, the foreign people had their districts where they lived in the most absolute security with their goods by flourishing their business in the trading field. They were mostly Arabs from North Africa, from Egypt, from Yemen, and Europeans mainly Spanish. Some of them were even students in Timbuktu, Black Africa was welcoming for the foreigner. The king of Djenne wished that his capital were more peopled with foreigners than with natives, ...¹² (P. 128).

This is just an illustration of the implementation of the Kurukan Fuga charter and its achievements in the empire regarding its hospitality policy. This openness and integration of foreigners gave way to the social stability and prosperity of the empire.

Conclusion

The Kurukan Fuga Charter adopted during the Kurukan Fuga Conference in 1236 was a masterpiece for the Mali Empire. Its achievements in social stability of the empire show that it was undoubtedly implemented even in other domains such as economy, politics and environment. It was an efficient instrument of the Mali Empire at all the levels. As a living heritage, it can still be useful for the current Malian society if it is better understood and adapted to the different issues and challenges.

¹¹ Au milieu du XVe siècle, les navigateurs portugais entrèrent en contact avec le *mansa* quand ils arrivèrent à l'embouchure du fleuve Gambie ; par eux, nous savons que ces régions occidentales étaient fortement «mandenguisées» (1987, p. 181).

¹² Dans tous ces centres, les ressortissants étrangers avaient leurs quartiers où ils vivaient dans la sécurité la plus absolue avec leurs biens tout en faisant fructifier leurs affaires sur le plan commercial. Ils étaient en majeure partie des Arabes d'Afrique du Nord, d'Égypte, du Yémen, et des Européens surtout Espagnols. Certains d'entre eux étaient même étudiants à Tombouctou, L'Afrique noire était accueillante pour l'étranger. Le roi de Djenné souhaitait que sa capitale fût plus peuplée d'étrangers que de nationaux, ...¹² (P. 128).

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