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Special Issue:
**Central Peripheries and Sliding Contexts:
Absence and Marginality as Spaces
of Emergence**

Introduction to Special Issue: Central Peripheries and Sliding Contexts: Absence and Marginality as Spaces of Emergence

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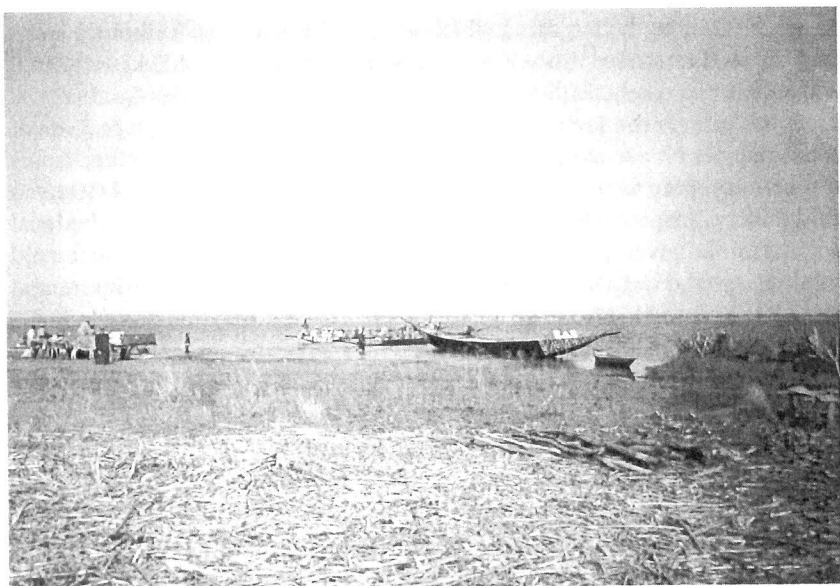
The social-anthropology approach to rural space has undergone major changes over the last twenty years, spurred by an agency-oriented approach to the landscape (Soja 1989; Ashmore 2002; Mather 2003). These changes have affected not only the conceptualization of space, but also interest in the cohabitation of a broad range of actors engaged in highly mobile activities, both internal and international (Amin 1995; de Bruijn, Van Dijk, and Foeken 2001; de Haan and Rogaly 2002). This new turn has led to a more comparative perspective on both local practices and their transnational effects.¹ In particular, this trend toward increased mobility, conflict, and accommodation to change has included reexamination of the concept of *limes* (van Wolputte 2010), removed from both Frederick Jackson Turner's center-versus-periphery model (Turner 1893) and Igor Kopytoff's multipolar centers-versus-periphery model (Kopytoff 1987). Here, the *limes* is perceived and managed in a space increasingly marked by sharing and disputes, punctuated by dwindling resources and the accelerated monetarization of rural economies. Noteworthy studies include focuses on political war economies (Lawson 2003; Raeymaekers 2010; Renton, Seddon and Zeilig 2006), informal and illegal economies (Aning 2003; Ellis 2009; Ellis and MacGaffey 1996; Meagher 2003; Roitman 2003; Shaw 2002; Titeca and De Herdt 2010; Van Schendel and Abraham 2006), and the dynamics of indigeneness (Chauveau, Jacob, and Le Meur 2004) resulting from "'bottom-up' regionalism" (Söderbaum and Taylor 2010), to mention only a few. The microhistory perspective in social history has furthered a view of the socially shaped African landscape as a shared commodified space (Flynn 1997; Chalfin 2001; Niger-Thomas 2001; Fold and Nylandsted Larsen 2008; Agergaard, Fold, and Gough 2010), as well as an arena for politics of authenticity (Schultz 2008).

In connection with these recent approaches to the dimensions of time and space, the present special issue offers an array of views on the *limes*, through center-and-periphery dynamics first approached by panels held at the triennial MANSA (Mande Studies Association)² conference and the

third biennial ECAS (European Conference on African Studies) conference.³ The aim of this cross fertilization was to qualify the vision of a structural urban–rural split by showing that the social dynamics of marginal contexts are not refracted reverberations of national policies, but rather, centers of change in their own right (Hanchard 1999; Leach 2003; Agegaard, Fold, and Gough 2010). A second aim is to show the exclusionary effects of national and international governance policies, as well as the new arenas of social production in marginal contexts and groups, along with the ensuing dynamics of belonging connected with those effects.

Searching for Gold on the Sankaran Border (Wasulu, Mali): Mingled Memories and Territoriality

The territorialization of the memory of gold in the Sankaran region on the Mali–Guinea border is revealing of the spatial and social memory stakes involved in negotiations around belonging in a context of political control of mobility and monetarization of the land. This region reflects the paradox of a buffer space both socially open and politically closed in notwithstanding which the *limes* dimension and its center–periphery variations are constantly reworked, between local perceptions and subregional relations, through the differential of management of the memory of gold. The history of settlement of the Wasulu region shows a continuous intermingling of populations, which can be pieced together, only partially, when traced back to the fourteenth-century Mande migration to the Sangha region (Bedaux 2003; Bedaux and van der Waals 2003). The political organization of Wasulu was based on hereditary chiefdoms, the *kafow*, subject to lineage-group conflicts, which broke them down regularly until the Fulani came to dominate in the nineteenth century and Samori's troops invaded the area (1881–1883). The proximity of such strong entities as the Segu kingdom, the Kabadugu, and the Futa Jalon considerably impeded the development of a centralized political power, while encouraging internal strife (Amselle 1985). Around 1800, the Diallo, Sidibé, Diakité, and Sangaré Fulani,⁴ chased by the slave-hunting jihad led by Omar Tall in the Futa Jalon (Klein 1998, 2003; Barry 2001),⁵ crossed Dogon country and the Macina, to reach Bougouni, before settling in the Sankarani region, in small groups of families (Panella 2007). Before Samori's advances, an internal migration of Wasulu Fulani had affected the Kita region, and Briko in particular, thus breaking clearly with Wasulu country.⁶ The sedentary settlements were reinforced following the arrival of the French and their territorial organization of the region. Until enforcement of the French colonial administration's gold-mining policies in the 1920s, access to the Sankarani gold mines, reflecting the mobile political structure, was characterized by intense comings and goings of Soudanese⁷ artisanal gold miners (*orpailleurs*) toward the border-area mines of Balandugu, Kama, Sidikila, and Goloba, and of Guinean gold miners toward the Soudanese placers of Leba and Komana. Before Samori's invasions, gold miners from



The Mali/Guinea border in the Sankaran region (view from Malian bank)

the Bamako, Bougouni, Kayes, and Segou districts (*cercles*) were allowed to exploit Guinea's Bouré placers, provided they paid the mine bosses and the canton chiefs. The Siéké placers in Upper Guinea were worked by Soudanese *orpailleurs* from the Bamako, Bougouni, Kayes, and Segou *cercles*, as far as Timbuktu.

The colonial administration's efforts to channel the influx of *orpailleurs* in the Sankaran area, combined with discrepancies between mining legislation in Guinea and French Soudan and conflicting farming policies on the two banks of the Sankarani River interrupted that mobility on the Sankaran border. The issue of gold mining was examined during a mission by M. Tissier, Inspector of Administrative Affairs, accompanied by Jouret, Commandant de Cercle of Bougouni. The latter reported mining at the Kalana placer gold deposits (canton of Goundiaka) in 1933, whereas the riverbank dwellers had been mining gold there since 1928.⁸ The presence of those gold deposits made Kalana one of the main locations for local trade. The 168 inhabitants registered in 1931 soared to 15,000 three years later during the seasonal gold-mining activities. In 1934, there were, respectively, 8,000 and 2,000 *orpailleurs* on the artisanal gold-mining sites of Kourémalé and Koflaté (Jansen 2010). Placers were also exploited in Sindoba (canton of Basidibé) and Tenentu (canton of Kurulamini), where villagers considered mining placers near their village when they discovered a few nuggets there.⁹ In 1935, Kalana, Kalako, and Sindoba are mentioned as the largest mining fields, as measured by local trade.¹⁰ Placers are also mentioned near Siékorolé starting in 1936, because extremely wet ground on the Kalana sites had limited gold mining there in 1935–1936.¹¹ In 1941, there were twenty main gold mines in the

Bougouni Cercle, the largest of which were still Kalana and Keikoro. Nevertheless, production for this region was estimated at a mere 400 kg in 1934,¹² whereas it had reached 1,500 kg in the Siguiri Cercle in Upper Guinea.¹³

In Guinea, the French administration's mining legislation had major consequences on social mobility on both sides of the Sankarani River. In his inspection report to the Mines Department (1913) on the state of Guinean gold mining, Inspector of Colonies Mouquillot recommended that the local population be given priority over companies for mining rights, since gold mining was the only source of income in the border regions of Bouré and Siéké. Access to the Guinean placers represented a major stake when the administration regulated the flow of gold miners from the subregion, thus discriminating against Soudanese gold miners. The decree of 22 October 1924 limited access to the Siéké (Siguiri) placers to residents of Bouré and Siéké, whereas Siéké was known for its rich marriage settlements in gold and its numerous matrimonial alliances with the Malian Sankaran (Panella 2007). Soudanese migrants flowed constantly into the Guinean canton of Siéké from 1927 on, the native Guinean population viewing them as a solution to the manpower shortage. Edmond Julian, Assistant Mining Engineer, balked at the prevalence of the Soudanese on the Siéké placers. He restricted access to the mines to resident *orpailleurs*, alleging the need to recover the advances allocated for equipping them—which would not have been feasible beyond Guinea's borders (Panella 2007). In 1933, Siguiri was one of the rare *cercles* in French West Africa in which taxes were paid readily, thanks to the income from gold mining, viewed by the colonial administration as a worthwhile activity.¹⁴

Conversely, the legislative void and wide range of local gold-mining practices in French Soudan encouraged outflows of gold, especially gold from Kalana, to Guinea via Diula intermediaries. There were 20,000 *orpailleurs* in Kalana in 1937, and their number rose to 40,000 in 1940, at the Keikoro mine.¹⁵ The Diula traders were highly mobile, spurring transactions in gold and making control difficult, particularly since practically the entire production was transferred to Guinea through Syrian and Soudanese middlemen.¹⁶ In spite of the decree of 30 April 1941, introducing a distinction between retail and wholesale buyers,¹⁷ gold from Keikoro continued to be sold in Bamako, Sikasso, and the Ivory Coast.

Gold Mining and Farming: Two Identity Mirrors for Border Relations

The construction of identities on the Sankaran border is visibly articulated with stakes revolving around gold, as shown by three major factors in the history of farming and trade in the region during the 1930s: the rise in gold mining, the colonial policy of supporting cotton growing, and taxes. In 1934, after the gold rush, the Moorish caravans herded hundreds of cows, sheep, and goats toward Kalana, viewed as "the most attractive place, because of all

the business being done in the area." This influx mostly took place in the dry season, when gold mining was at its height.¹⁸ One consequence of the presence of *orpailleurs* was that producers and merchants awaited their arrival to sell their goods in Kalana, Kalako, and Sindoba, where prices doubled when mining was going full force, during the dry season. In the Jalonfulah canton, food products were available at far lower prices than those found at the neighboring mines of Siguiri and Kalana. At the time, gold prospecting was limited to the dry season and usually did not require that farming be abandoned.¹⁹ Gold mining was done from time to time, to cope with the "hunger gap" (*période de soudure*), to pay taxes and sometimes marriage settlements. Before Mali's rejoining the CFA franc in 1984,²⁰ gold, like grain and cattle, represented a family heritage and was managed by the family head, the *sòtigi*. Since the gold was not used as currency, the family could store the metal over the long term (Panella 2007). However, in the Basidibé and Jalonfulah regions, gold mining never represented a real alternative to growing rice. The development of the ricefields in Mali's Sankaran, the colonial propaganda encouraging increased cotton production, and the strict agricultural subsistence program supported by socialist President Modibo Keita (1960–1968) relegated gold mining to the background in the imagery of local identities, with preference given to a farming ethic represented by food self-sufficiency obtained through communal fields (*malifòdòyi*). Under President Moussa Traoré (1968–1991), neither region received gold-mining encouragement, and it remained peripheral until the farming crisis of the early 1980s.

The difference in exploitability between farmlands in the border areas of Upper Guinea and Malian Sankarani partially accounts for the greater complexity of sociopolitical stakes revolving around gold mining in Guinea, as opposed to French Soudan, and explains why farming never represented an element of the national identity in Guinea, in spite of the many rural development projects.²¹ On the Guinean side of the Sankarani, in contrast, the massive artisanal gold mining reflected the constraints of the Guinean high plateaus in relation to farming. The overexploitation of Guinea's natural resources under European domination led to shortages in farm products, as well as an economy increasingly based on trade in rubber, ivory, and, above all, gold. While the inhabitants of the Bouré and Siéké regions located on lateritic knolls grew rice and did some limited finger-millet and peanut farming on the stony hillside slopes, they worked full-time at gold mining and trade. As opposed to French Soudan, where large-scale rice growing was introduced in the 1920s, a real policy for the development of rice growing, and more generally of subsistence farming, was not introduced in Guinea until the Second World War. So in the late 1950s, Guinea produced 160,000 tons of rice and imported another 40,000 tons (Gallais 1959), to reach the figure of 60,000 tons in 1974 (Leunda 1974).

Consequently, gold became an element in identity claims in Guinea, whereas on the Mali side it remained tied to the family memory and economy (Panella 2005, 2007, 2010a). Access to gold mines and farmland has

been an object of low-intensity but repeated cross border conflicts since the 1940s, when the border was marked out by Lasausse, Commandant de Cercle of Bougouni, and they culminated with lethal clashes in 2007, in a context of land shortage, individual accumulation, and banditry.²² These are telling indications of the failure of Guinea's farming policies, of the increasing importance of gold in the region, and ultimately, of the paradox of a border area without borders. Owing to the clayey soil and the proximity of the Sankarani river, many Guinean villages located on the left bank, including Dalakan and Niani, had been working fields on the right bank of the river, on Soudanese territory, since the colonial period. Guinean farmers paid ten kola nuts to the Malian land chiefs for each new patch cleared, leaving the older fields lie fallow, tacitly for repossession by Malian villagers, including people from Siradjuba (in the Commune of Guèlènikorò). According to the Guinean press, the inhabitants of Siradjuba are actually Guineans who first settled in Limbana. Following a conflict with the Limbana villagers, the village of Dalakan allowed them to farm land in Siradjuba, on the Malian side of the Sankarani (Condé 2010). In December 1969, disputes over land-use rights led the Governor of Sikasso to intervene. In the late 1980s, many families from Dalakan began to build "unauthorized" hamlets in which to winter, and occupied some plots, including N'Gweila in particular, thus preventing people from Siradjuba from farming them. In 1995, gold was discovered near the land farmed by the Dalakan villagers. The village of Siradjuba then prohibited access to those plots, causing a series of ongoing conflicts that culminated in 2007. During the last attack, on 6 November 2007, about 300 Guineans armed with shotguns and Russian arms, including some military, crossed the river to attack the village of Siradjuba. Dozens of huts and granaries were burned, and close to a hundred head of cattle stolen (Maiga 2007; Maliweb.net; Zhao 2007). At present, the local administrations on both the Guinea and Mali sides adduce the boundaries imposed by the colonial Pax Romana to reinforce security in what remains a legally undefined, imprecise border zone. The colonial administration's regulation of access to Guinea's placers fractured the memory of the Maninka Sankaran landscape, just as it brought about a territorialization of the shared oral history tied to the Sundjata epic.²³

As I have tried to show in regard to border relations in the Sankarani area, the main subject of this issue concerns mediations and interrelations between central and peripheral states. Rather than stressing the elements stabilizing the status quo, the authors of this issue emphasize the fluidity of those conditions by exploring new modalities of social and political space (Howard and Shain 2005). The authors examine how power relations govern belonging and establish criteria thereof and the correlative logics of social integration and exclusion, resulting in an absence of social and/or political visibility. At the same time, they illustrate strategies for accommodation to political constraint; more generally, they observe the strategies for change adopted by marginal actors, as well as their effects on local economies.

These processes occur within a cohabitation involving heterogeneous spatial and temporal dimensions such as social practices, political representations of space and time, and global history. In an interpretation of the concepts of liminality and marginality,²⁴ João de Pina-Cabral returns to the work of Victor Turner (1967) and Colin Turnbull (1990), according to whom the concept of liminality is not defined with respect to a predefined center within a structure, but tends to correspond to a state shared by all phenomena in the course of transformation. Pina-Cabral thus views the social order described by Max Gluckman (1962) as a trend, rather than a starting point. Since spatiotemporal spaces are considered contingent, the notions of marginality or liminality, center or periphery, and social order turn out to be relative and legitimizing conventions, tied to “the capacity to establish the validity of particular definitions” (de Pina-Cabral 1997:35). These conventions determine spaces of absence and emergence, where absence, according to the conceptualization advanced by Bonaventura de Sousa Santos (2002, 2007) is viewed as a state of social exclusion and/or political underrepresentation, nonetheless creating emergent dynamics of creation and social change.²⁵ This perspective stands as an alternative to a linear approach to time, and it infers the existence of *in fieri* temporalities: fragmented, contradictory, unfinished or not-yet-finished temporalities, nonetheless constituting full-fledged epistemological states in their own right.

In this issue, Riccardo Ciavolella suggests his own reading of Gramsci on the “Southern question” in Italy, with an analysis of the stakes of political visibility in the conflict between the Mauritanian state and the FulaaBe nomads. According to Ciavolella, the representation of FulaaBe reveals an essentialization of nomadic people, stereotyped as antimodern and therefore antistate. Ciavolella shows the notion of “margin” to be the outcome of dynamics that are both contradictory and synergetic, involving exclusion and integration, extraversion and dependency, resulting in neotraditionalist policies, such as processes of reification of the past, social differentiation, and exoticizing national integration policies.

Sabine Luning depicts the interaction between local groups and the staff of a gold-mining corporation in Burkina Faso as based on the dynamics of cohabitation between heterogeneous actors in a context of legal pluralism (neoliberal policies merging in customary law), and analyzes aspects of power relations in the dynamics of indigenism. In line with Pierre Bourdieu’s (1985) analysis of social space, she articulates her analysis on the one hand around the role of the temporalities of alliance-or-conflict power relationships and the dynamics of cohabitation of differing interests; on the other hand, in the wake of Peter Geschiere’s work, she evaluates the daily lived relationships of autochthony in relation to land claims.

Cristiana Panella analyzes the confrontation between the Malian state’s patrimonialization criteria and the survival strategies of tourist-art woodcarvers at Bamako’s Maison des Artisans, viewing those strategies as tools for iconographic innovation and markers of social change. In that framework, the conception of materiality underlying UNESCO’s official

patrimonialization criteria is viewed as opposed to the idea of corporeity interwoven with the informal acts of production interwoven with the carvers' daily lived activities. Panella gives her own reading of the concept of cultural heritage in a perspective of social change, where "center" and "periphery" are conditions underlying socioeconomic situations where social inequality and the dynamics of innovation prevail.

Jean-Pierre Warnier outlines a new reading of his book *Echanges, développement et hiérarchies dans le Bamenda précolonial* (1985), in which he showed the existence of two center-versus-periphery systems, one regional, the other subcontinental, revolving around Atlantic coastal trade. His paper in this volume questions the conception of a Grassfields region on the periphery of Wallerstein's world system, which in the light of multidisciplinary research in the region, he sees as an endogenous producer of innovation, especially with respect to the slave trade and the creation of sociopolitical conditions for social inequality. His perspective would support the view that the Grassfields region has developed complex social products in a world system for centuries, in a context of mobility of persons and things.

The multidisciplinary approach of the author represents a challenge for an open debate on the economic relationships between the Niger Bend, in particular the Grassfields region, and the transatlantic trade through insightful comments proposed by Ralph Austen, Joseph Inikori, and John Thornton. The authors do agree with Warnier's hypothesis concerning the existence of an intraregional economic system in the Niger Bend area before the beginning of the slave trade. In particular John Thornton recalls archaeological evidence confirming the autochthon development of the Nile Valley and of the Lake Chad region. Joseph Inikori underlines the globalization of the exchanges in the Niger Bend system before the arrival of the Portuguese. Nevertheless, the three authors also stress the lack of ample documentation in the literature to highlight a convincing analysis of the complexity of social and economic processes in the Grassfields and surrounding regions in a "world system" (Atlantic and the Indian Ocean), as Warnier seems to assert. On the other hand they propose a deep analysis of slave trade archival sources and literature carrying on the hypothesis of the acceleration of market dynamics and monetarization linked to the rise, in the eighteenth century, of the transatlantic slave trade in this region.

It results in a fascinating confrontation between anthropologists, archaeologists, and historians on methodology issues relaunching the classical debate on the "exchange systems," the "formation of the state," and on the "world history" approach. The alternative perspectives sketched out by Jean-Pierre Warnier would reverse—as Austen underlines—"the arrows of African historical dynamics from external to internal frontiers."

1. The African Borderlands Research Network of researchers testifies to the considerable development of "frontier" issues in social anthropology (<http://aborne.org/nc>).
2. "From 'Center' to 'Periphery' and back again? Powers, Marginalities and the Construction of the Frontier as Contingent States" (Lisbon, 23–28 June 2008).
3. "Absence as a Space of Emergence: Day-to-Day Coping with Social Exclusion, Transnationalism and Globalization" (Leipzig, 4–7 July 2009). These two panels, as well as an initial project for the joint publication of this dossier, were designed in collaboration with Clemens Zobel. My sincere thanks go to Clemens Zobel for our exchanges on the preliminary version of the introduction to this issue. Also, I am indebted to Laura Arnston and Susan Gagliardi, who participated in the Lisbon panel, and Mathilde Leduc and Alexis Roy, participants in the Leipzig panel, who are not present in this special issue.
4. According to oral history, when the Sangaré and Sidibé were besieged by Samori's troops in the village of Samamamoudoula, the Sangaré betrayed the Sidibé and went over to Samori, letting water into the gunpowder arsenal.
5. For information on the Fulani military expansion in the nineteenth century, see de Bruijn and van Dijk 2003.
6. According to Abdoulaye Sidibé (Siékoroilé, November 2004), a second migratory wave of Wasulunka Fulani toward Kita, already occupied by the French, took place after Samori's invasions, and the Fulani coming from Briko make a classificatory distinction between themselves, the Jalonfulah Fulani, and those from Basidibé.
7. I am referring here to the former French Soudan; this colony, created in 1891, encompassed the present Republic of Mali.
8. Sidiki Sidibé (Sindon), 5 December 2004.
9. A.N.M. 1-Q-332. "Rapport Economique Cercle de Bougouni, 1926–1945." R.E. 1er trimestre 1933.
10. Idem, fourth quarterly trade bulletin for 1935.
11. Idem, R.E. 1936.
12. R.E. 1934—"Situation générale." In 1936, gold sold for 17.50 francs per gram; in 1941, the price of a gram of gold was 36–37 francs.
13. A.N.M. 3-Q-12 Gold, "Note sur l'exploitation indigène d'or de la région de Siguiri (Guinea, 1934)."
14. By 1937, the annual gold production of the Siguiri cercle had risen to 3,115 kg (Marvier 1952). For 1936, Marvier (1952:332) gives the figure of 3,110 kg, whereas Balandier (1948:539) reports 4,750 kg.
15. A.N.M. 1-Q-332. "Rapport Economique Cercle de Bougouni, 1926–1945." R.E. 1940.
16. Idem. R.E., third quarter 1938.
17. Idem, R.E. 1941.
18. Idem, "Rapport Economique du cercle de Bougouni, 1922–1945." Second quarter 1934.
19. Idem. "Rapport Economique du cercle de Bougouni, 1922–1945." Tour report. Census of the Jalon-Fula canton by Mr. Lasausse, Commandant de Cercle.
20. Mali left the CFA zone, created in 1945, in 1962, and reentered it in 1984.
21. The rioting in Conakry when rice was distributed for free in late 2004 is emblematic in this respect. Faced with a dizzying rise in the price of foodstuffs, demonstrators demanded that the government extend the free distribution of bags of rice. This request testified to the

repeated failures of the country's agricultural policy, henceforth based on the distribution, to the population, of stocks of food previously purchased by the administration.

22. I analyzed the 2007 conflicts at the Sankarani border at an annual conference of the French Colonial Historical Society in Paris, in June 2010. My communication, presented in French, was entitled "From Shared Social Memory to Border Conflicts: The Migration of Soudanese *Orpailleurs* to the Mines of Upper Guinea."
23. Lack of reference to the Maninka Sundjata epic on the right bank of the Sankarani, due to the prevalence of the Fulani, has accentuated the national stereotype of a culturally fallow region, dependent on the Maninka cultural birthplace of Kangaba. Claims to Maninka cultural heritage have been publicized by historiography and the national integration policy, and are due to the identification of gold with Upper Guinea. For an analysis of the Sundjata epic and its stakes and representations, see Jansen 2000.
24. For an approach to the concept of liminality and its methodological implications in political anthropology, see Horvat, Thomassen, and Wydra 2009.
25. It is Clemens Zobel who suggested the theme of subsidiarity and the concept of absence as an emergence of dynamics of change (de Sousa Santos 2002).

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