THOUGHTS ON GAMBIAN FOLKTALES

David P. Gamble

Brisbane, California
May 2005

CONTENTS

PART I

PARALLELS BETWEEN MANDINKA AND WOLOF STORIES FROM THE GAMBIA AND STORIES RECORDED ON THE COAST OF SOUTH CAROLINA AND GEORGIA.

Shortly after I had translated a series of Mandinka stories from The Gambia in West Africa in 1976 and 1977 (Gambian Studies #3-9), I happened to turn to anthologies of tales recorded in Georgia and South Carolina, and was struck by the detailed similarity in a number of the tales.

However, subsequent analysis showed that comparison could be a complicated matter.

The major American sources used were:

Charles C. Jones: Negro Myths from the Georgia Coast (1888)

Elsie Clews Parsons: Folk-lore of the Sea Islands, South Carolina (1923)

Guy B. Johnson : Folk Culture on St. Helena Island, South Carolina (1930)

Also consulted were:

A.M.H.Christensen: Afro-American Folk Lore, (1892)

S.G.Stoney & G.M.Shelbry: Black Genesis (1930)

South Carolina Folk Tales (1941)

(Compiled by Workers of the Writers' Program of the Work Projects Administration of the State of South Carolina.)

The Mandinka newspaper that is mentioned, Kibaro (News), began publication in Banjul in August 1950, under the auspices of Mr. Humphrey Smith, the Senior Commssioner, being edited by Mr. Sherif T. Jammeh (a Mandinka from Upper Badibu, and the son of Seyfo Tamba Jammeh), who worked in his office, as interpeter.

Publication continued until 1956, about fifty issues being produced. Contributions were made by various writers - school pupils, teachers, civil servants, chiefs, traders, et al.

The paper was distributed to schools and government institutions up river.

(1) HARE (BRER RABBIT) AND THE GARDEN

The first story was written by Kekota Manneh and published in Kibaro in June/July 1953. The translation is as follows: "There was once a man who had a large bean farm. When his beans were about to ripen, he left his child to guard it, so that animals would not touch it. The little boy's name was Siyaka. One day Siyaka went early to the bean farm. As soon as mid-morning came, little hare arrived, and said to him "Siyaka, your father says where the beans are dark, you should tie me there, so that I can eat them. When the sun is overhead, you should let me free to go and drink." Then Siyaka went and tied little hare in the middle of the beans. He ate the beans until he was full. Little hare continued this until one day Siyaka's father went round the farm and found that many beans had been eaten there. Siyaka's father asked him the reason. Siyaka replied "Something comes here every day, and tells me you said he should come for me to tie in the middle of the beans, so that he can eat until lunch time. Then I release him to go and drink." Siyaka's father said to him "If he comes again, catch him, and bring him home."

Next morning little hare did not fail to come. When he came, Siyaka caught him and was about to take him home. Little hare raised his ears and said to him "I am going to stab you." Siyaka was afraid, and let him go. When Siaka reached home he told his father. His father said to him "He is not able to stab you, he has no horns, what he raises up are his ears." The next day little hare came again. Siyaka caught him, and set off for home. Little hare raised up his ears and said to him "I am going to pierce you." Siyaka replied "Nevertheless I am going to take you home." Thereupon Siyaka took him home,

and tied him to the large tree in the middle of the compound. When Siyaka's father came he saw him, and said "Tomorrow, I am going to have him for breakfast."

That night hyaena did not cease from his wandering. He came and found little hare tied up in the man's compound along with a bull. Hyaena said to him "Brother hare, what are you doing here ?" Little hare said to him "I came to greet this big-man, and he went on to say I should not return home until he had honored me with this bull." Hyaena said to little hare "Let me loose you, and you tie me in your place." Hyaena loosed little hare. Little hare tied hyaena fast,and went about his business. Night passed, dawn broke. In the morning early Siyaka came to look at little hare. When he saw him, he was startled, andexclaimed "Heh, little hare has changed into a hyaena." Siyaka ran and went to his father and said "Father, come, a little thing has become a big thing." The man came out and looked at it, and he too said "It is a hyaena." Thereupon he took a stick and beat the hyaena. Hyaena was startled, broke the rope, and ran off...."

Two versions of this story are given by Parsons (#27 and #28 on pages 40-42) and one by Johnson (pp.137-138). Johnson's version reads as follows:

"'Bout de man. de lee' gal, and Buh Rabbit. Man have a pease patch an' lef' lee' gal fuh watch um. Buh Rabbit come up an' say, 'Mornin ', lee' gal. Yo' paa say tu'n me in pease patch at twelve an' tu'n me out at five." Lee'gal say, "All right, Buh Rabbit," so she tu'n Buh Rabbit in de pease patch. 'E eat an' eat, an' when five come 'e say to lee' gal, "Time

to tu'n me out." She tu'n 'im out. When 'e paa come home 'e say "Who been in my pease patch ?" Lee' gal say "Buh Rabbit say you sen' word fuh me to tu'n 'im in de pease patch." 'E paa say, "Well, if Buh Rabbit come tomorrow, you tu'n 'im in an' don' let 'im out till I come."

So nex' day Buh Rabbit come, an' de lee' gal tu'n 'im in de pease patch. 'E eat an' eat, an' den 'e say, "Lee gal, time to tu'n me out." Lee' gal say, "I busy now." Buh Rabbit wait awhile. Says, "Please let me out now." Lee' gal say, "Wait a minute, I too busy now." Den 'e paa come home.'E ketch Buh Rabbit in de pease patch an' tek an' lock im up in a cyage, den 'e gwine off fuh git a cyaa't load of switch fuh beat Buh Rabbit. Buh Wolf come along an'see Buh Rabbit in de cyage an' ax 'im, "What you do deh, Buh Rabbit ?" Buh Rabbit say, "Oh, man, dey gwine be beeg time tonight - beeg party, singin' an' dancin' and eatin'. Don' you wanna help ?" Buh Wolf say, "Sho, man, let me in." "All right, onlock dat do' an' come in." Buh Wolf onlock de do' an' come in de cyage. Buh Rabbit jump out and lock 'im up. Man come back, say "Buh Wolf, what you do in deh ?" "Oh, Buh Rabbit say we gwine have beeg time." Man say, "Yes,we sho' is gwine have beeg time," an' 'e tek de cyaa't-load o' switch an' beat Buh Wolf mos' to death'.

Hare has become Rabbit, hyaena has become wolf, beans become peas, Brer Rabbit is put in a cage rather than tied to a tree, otherwise the narrative is extremely close.

Many years later (1933), for a course I gave on Folklore & Anthropology, a student, Janet Kraus, recorded the following tale from Gregory Herron, who came originally from Los Angeles, but was then living in Oakland (California). When he was eight years old his mother had died, and he and his brother went to live with their grandparents on a farm in southern Mississippi. He helped on the farm - fields that grew corn, cotton, watermelons, cucumbers, etc, and ploughing was done with a mule. After the day's work was done people would gather on the 'Ole Front Porch', and eventually jokes and stories began to flow.One of the stories that his Grandpa liked to tell was as follows:

"Once upon a time there was this farmer, and he had this garden. It was a prize garden. He had a whole lot of greens, some real nice turnips, cabbages and some real pretty carrots. He was tending his garden, making it all pretty for the show to come up. And you know this guy Brer Rabbit he was a kind of trickster. Anytime he could get out of doing work, manual labor, he would trick someone . That was the way he would make his living. That is the way he would get his food. That's the way he would get extra money. He was a real slick cat, ya know.

So, one time Brer Rabbit he came by the farmer's garden and he noticed the carrots over there. So they were lookin' real nice, so he figures out a way to get into the farmer's garden, and after he figured out a way to get into his garden, he would go to one of the corner posts and he would sneak up under the fence. And go in and get his carrots and come back out and he'd cover it back up. So the farmer wouldn't exactly know how he got in. So, after a few days, the farmer starts noticing his carrots are missing. He searched around his garden and he found

the place where Brer Rabbit had his little fix so that he could come in and steal the carrots. So the farmer says"I'm going to fix him", and he covered his tracks back up so it looked just like it looked when Brer Rabbit left the garden the last time. But he also put a trap there . And when Brer Rabbit came in the next day to get more carrots he went through the regular little trap door, but on the other side of the fence inside the garden the farmer had his trap set up and he was caught. So the farmer came out to check out his garden and he sees Brer Rabbit in the trap. And he says "Oohh, I got him now." So he go out there, and he start talking to Brer Rabbit. He said "Yeah, you' re a real smart rabbit, you're a real trickster, you trick me a few times, you done broke into my garden. I've been trying to catch you a long time, but now I got ya. So I guess I'm going to make you pay for all this stuff you're doing. So he said "I 'm going to build a fire and I'm going roast ya." And so at this time Brer Rabbit has to figure out a way to get out of the situation. And so he says to the farmer: "Roas'me, please roas'me, just roas' me real tender and nice, you know just barbecue me up real good. But don't throw me in that briar patch over there." And the farmer is listening to this and he said: "Well, I'll tell you. It's too much trouble to start a fire, so that I can roast him, so I guess I'm going to have to try something else. I know what I do. I hang him. And then Brer Rabbit said ,"Hang me, yeah, please Mr. Farmer, hang me, hang me from the highest tree you have but don't throw me in that briar patch. That would be cruel. You don't want to do that. Don't throw me in that briar patch." And the farmer say, "Oh, wow , no . I'll have to get some rope, and I don't have

time to find some rope if I need to hang him. So I know what I'll do - I'll drowned him." And then Brer Rabbit said "Oh, please, Mr. Farmer, drowned me, get the deepest water you can find and drown me. But please for the Lord's sake don't throw me in the briar patch. And the farmer says: "Why he always agreeing with me ? What's wrong with this rabbit ? Damn, I know what I can do to him. This would definitely hurt him. " He said "I'd skin him. Skin him alive." and Brer Rabbit says: "Yeah, you can skin me alive, you can dig my eyeballs out, you can tear my legs off, you can pull the hair out of my hide. But please, please, don't throw me in the briar patch." And the farmer says: "Aw, shit, every time I tell him I'm going to do something to him, he agree with it. But he always says don't throw him in this briar patch. So the farmer was all confused and not knowing what to do, he just grabbed Brer Rabbit by his leg, swung him around his head, and he threw him into the briar patch, and Brer Rabbit hit the briar patch- BAM- and he start flopping around cause he was getting all stuck up and stuff. Then the farmer was looking to see , ya know, if he was going to be really hurt..... in a few minutes he heard a call. He look up on the hill, and there was Brer Rabbit sitting on a log. And the farmer said: "Aw, shit, he done trick me again." And he was really mad. He said "Damn, this damn rabbit." There's Brer Rabbit sitting on the log combing his fur, picking the thorns and briars out of it, and he starts laughing and he says: "Ha, ha, ha, kiss my ass, the briar patch is where I was bred and born, hear that, farmer, the briar patch is where I was bred and born."

A version of the story, told by Bessie Jones, is given in Mary Arnold Twining : "An Examination of African Retentions in the Folk Culture of the South Carolina and Georgia Sea Islands," Ph.D. Thesis, Folklore Institute, Indiana University, June 1977, Part II. Collected Texts, pp. 31-33.

That remind me once to tell you about a little girl she was bonded to old Brother Wolf. He raised her up after his wife had died to mind the house and do everything around there and also so anyway. Old Brother Rabbit was so sharp so slick and sharp and he knew Brother Wolf always planted a nice garden. And in this garden he had all kind of good things, onion, cabbage and all like that. And so old Rabbit he always been a liar and a sharp one too. So this particular rabbit he come up the hill one day he said to himself that he gonna eat him some of them greens out of that garden so he went to the house, knock and call the little girl and she come to the door. See people didn't tell folk lies in them days so the little girl thought he meant what he said she went to the door and said "Suh." He said, "Your daddy, uh you father, said let me go in the garden and eat all the greens I want and twelve o'clock let me out." She thought he meant it. She say "Yes, Suh." She let him in there and he eat and eat and eat. Twelve o'clock lil girl come and let me out. She let him out. So the next day same thing and the next day. So three days he had that. The third day Brother Wolf went out there to see about his garden. And all around there just eat up greens and cabbage the onions and all so he ask his daughter bout it she say. "Brother Rabbit sayd you said to let

him there every day and eat and I did it." He said, "Brother Rabbit fool you but tomorrow when he come here you keep him in there when he say let him out don't let him out." So tomorrow come and here he come over the hill tippity tippity tip. Really got up there. He said ,"Lil girl "(high voice) ."Suh ?" "Say, your pappa say let me in the garden and let me eat all I want." She let him in there. Twelve o'clock come he say, "Lil girl, lil girl , lil girl (increasing volume) "SUH?" "Come let me out ! Twelve o'clock." "No suh, pappa said don'let you out 0000 and he were gonna get angry." He got so angry. He started to run and knuckle all round the garden knuckle all round the garden after a while he see he could't get out nary-a-hole ! He was so full. And so the father come home he was in there and he sort out things, "So you're the one who is telling my lil girl the story saying that I say let you in the garden." "I know it. I know it I know I done wrong just kill me just cut my head off. I don't care what you do to me I know it I know I done wrong but just don't throw me in the briar cuz there's stickers that scratch up my skin they hurt me I can't stand the briars." So he said , "Anything" so he carry him on out there to the chopping block. He say, "I'm going to cut your head off. I got a good mind cut it on off." "Cut it off, I know I done wrong. I know I done wrong, just cut it off, just don't put me in the briar please don't put me out there they'll tear my skin off cut my head off." "I've got a good mind to throw you in this brook." "Throw me in the brook, throw me in the brook, anywhere cept in the briar patch." Finally he came to a great big bunch of briars, them black berry bushes with them long prongs on em. He looked over there in them bushes and all them big old

rattails and all that was in there that a good place to put him he can't get out of there and he'll punish. He thought he really would punish. He took him by the heels and gave a sling and throwed him over in the briar. Time he throwed him in the briar, "Oops, thank God, this is where I bred and born at ! "

Told by Bessie Jones

There are several variants in the story:

One of the best known versions in American tales is that of Brer Rabbit touching a "tar baby", set up in the garden to entrap him. The Tar-Baby story was made famous by Joel Chandler Harris in his book Uncle Remus: His Songs and his Sayings, 1880. I have no recollection of the "tar baby" motif occurring in any Gambian stories.

There are two main variants in the ending to the story.

Hare escapes

(1) by persuading another animal to take his place - the hyaena in West African tales, wolf or fox in the American versions.

or (2) by talking his way out of it , e.g.persuading the farmer to throw him into "a briar patch" - where he was born and bred. The "briar patch" is an American feature.

But in several Wolof versions of the story, hare escapes by being thrown into "long dew covered grass", after saying that if he was touched by the dew, it would kill him.

(2) HARE SEEKS FOR MORE CUNNING & IS GIVEN THREE TASKS

The second story type is one in which little Hare goes to God to seek for more cunning and is given a series of tasks to perform. This is a widespread story in West Africa, also being told of Ananse the Spider in Ashanti. I have two versions from The Gambia. The first was seen in a duplicated form, undated, and with no author named. It might well have been part of the material produced for the literacy campaign of the Nutrition Field Working Party at Genieri (Jenyer) in 1948. A second version was published in the October/December 1955 issue of Kibaro, no author being named. The version in Kibaro is shortened in parts due to editing - only a limited amount of space being available for the story.

Duplicated form (Translated by David P. Gamble)

"Hare went to his master God, and said "I have come to look for cunning". God replied to him "You should look for weaver birds for me - a gourdful, and buffalo milk - that also a gourdful. And a live python. And a live hyaena. You should bring me those." Hare went and looked for two gourds. He went to where the weaver birds were. When he reached there he kept saying. "It will fill it. No, it will not fill it."

The weaver birds said to him "What are you and your people talking about ?" He said to them "If I open the mouth of the gourd, and you enter there, you won't be able to fill it."

They told him to open the mouth, and then they went in until it was full. He closed the mouth, and then went on.

A buffalo which had given birth , he reached there and said to her. "It will fill it. No, it will not fill it."

She asked him "What are you and your people talking about ?"

He said to her "If you milk one teat into this gourd, it will not fill it." She said to him "Open the mouth of the gourd." He opened the mouth of the gourd. The buffalo put milk in the gourd until it was full. Then Hare closed it up.

He passed along, and reached where python was. He cut a long piece of bamboo, and kept saying "It will not be enough. No, it will be enough." The python asked him "You and your people, what are you talking about ?" Hare said to him. "If I put down this bamboo and you lie on it, and I tie the two sides, you will not be as long. The python said he should put down the bamboo. He put it down. The python lay on the bamboo. The hare tied the python to the bamboo. He picked it up, and went on.

He went to where hyaena was, and said "Hey, I don't see the hyaena. He said "Lord God is going to prepare a charity, but I do not see hyaena." The hyaena heard that. He came out of the grass, and said to him "Here I am." Hyaena said "Let me carry the python for you. We shall go to the Master's charity place.

When they left the hare was singing, and said to Lord God, "Didn't you say it ? That I should bring a gourd of weaver birds. Here it is Master."

He said "Didn't you say it ? That I should bring a gourd of buffalo milk, Here is a gourd of buffalo milk, Master."

He said "Didn't you say it ? That I should bring a live python." Here is a live python, Master.

He said "Didn't you say it ? That I should bring a live ohung (hyaena). Here is a live ohung."

Then God asked him: "How did you get these things ?" Hare told him the way . God then said to him: "Go away, the cunning which you have, if I add to it, you will also catch human beings."

A Wolof version is given by Emil A. Magel in Folktales from The Gambia, 1984 - "The Hare Seeks Endowments from Allah," pp. 179-181. The conclusion here is: "But Allah scolded him, 'If I give you any more intelligence, you will entangle the world and destroy it. What you have is sufficient."

Other Wolof versions are the tale in L.Senghor & A. Sadji La Belle Histoire de Leuk-Le-Lievre, 1953, where he is given the tasks of obtaining whale's milk, a lion's tooth & a leopard's claw. In A. Terrisse: Contes et Legendes du Senegal, 1963, God asks Hare to bring a snake, milk from a leopard, and the tail of a wild pig. This he does with the help of squirrel, cricket, and monkey.

A Wolof version and a French translation "Le Lievre et les Moineaux" (The Hare and the Sparrows) is given by L'Abbe Boilat: Grammaire de la langue woloffe, 1858, 402-404. This ends with "God, striking him on the head, sent him away, saying "That's enough, if I increase your intelligence, you will upset the world."

In America, Parsons gives seven variants of this tale #8, 14-19. In one version he asks for larger eyes, in two, for a longer tail, and in the others for more sense/wisdom/ trickiness. Usually he is asked to bring a bag of blackbirds, a tooth from a rattlesnake, and an alligator's tooth. In two versions 'deer's tears', is substituted for one of the items.

In a tale provided by Christensen, he seeks for a longer tail, and is asked to bring a bag full of birds, a rattlesnake, and a deer's tears.

In the tale given by Guy B. Johnson, Rabbit seeks as a wife the daughter of the King, and is told to bring a bag of blackbirds, a rattlesnake's tooth, and an alligator's tooth.

William Russell Bascom published an article in 1978 in Research in African Literatures, 9, 216-55 (reprinted in book form (Ch. 3) in African Folktales in the New World, 1992.) in which he lists 29 examples of the tale from Africa, 49 from the Americas. Eight were recorded in Indian communities in Oklahoma, Louisiana, Georgia, Florida & Guatemala. Twenty three in Black communities in Alabama, Mississippi, Virgina, South Carolina & Georgia, and Nineteen in the West Indies and South America.

Tales of Hare and Hyaena are widespread in the Sudanic zone of West Africa, so tales are found among many peoples, Bambara, Mandinka, Wolof etc. extending to Hausaland and beyond.

Among the Wolof it has been pointed out by Emil Magel that the gewel (griots) regard Hare as one of their own people.[1] Consequently tales told by griots about Hare represent the best features of his actions- by means of his cunning and verbal skills, he induces a wrongdoer to reveal himself and justice is served. In his Folktales from The Gambia, the tale on pages 53-57, shows how Hare creates a song which Hyena sings and reveals himself as a wrongdoer to the King. Hare restores the status quo, for Hyena had violated social norms by creating a village of his own, where an offence was committed. The frequently told tale where Hare intervenes in the case of a child captured by a crocodile, and is able to save the child and punish the crocodile is another example of this type of tale. Freeborn people, on the other hand, telling tales about Hare, regard him primarily as a trickster.

In the American situation it would seem that in a number of early tales Brer Rabbit behaves like a griot - he plays a musical instrument, (a fiddle, a flute) he goes around as a messenger, or town crier, he composes songs, etc. Then, in later tales the trickster element is stressed, and finally he becomes the symbol of a person who gets the best of a cruel master.

So the situation in which the tale is told, and the social position of the teller, are important elements in evaluating a tale, but are rarely mentioned in published accounts.

1. See following page.

1 Katrin Pfeiffer : Mandinka Spoken Art, 1997, pp. 146-8, has a Mandinka tale in which Hare is a symbol for a jali.

(3) THE CROCODILE AND THE CHILD /
THE REWARD FOR KINDNESS IS BADNESS .

(This tale came to mind when I was thinking of Hare's role as griot, in using his verbal skills and trickery to make right a bad situation, and punish the evil-doer. The tale is widespread in West Africa, but in the texts I was able to consult, I could not find an example in Black American folklore. Here I use the text written by A.K.Rahman in 1948 for the literacy program of the Nutrition Field Working Party at Jenyeri.)

(Translation by David P. Gamble.)

"One day it happened that a child went to look for firewood in the bush. He found a crocodile sitting on its eggs on the sandy bank. When the crocodile saw the child, he said to him, "Help me, carry me to the river, dawn found me here, the sun then became hot (and) I am not able to go." The child said to the crocodile, "If it happens that you will not eat me, I will help you." The crocodile said "I will not do that." The child was sorry for him, he went to a fara tree, and stripped off some cord, came back and tied the crocodile's legs . He put him on his head, and went with him to the river.

When they reached the edge of the river, the child was about to put him down. The crocodile said to him: "Complete your kindness, do not put me down here, take me to the water." The child agreed, and went down with him to the mud, and was about to put him down there. The crocodile said: "Please, take me into the water, I am very tired, and cannot walk." The child took him into the water, until the water came up to his waist. The crocodile said to him: "Put me down." The child put

him down, and loosened the cord. When he loosened him, the crocodile seized his leg, and said to him: "I am going to eat you. " The child said to him: "Are you going to repay my kindness with wickedness ?" The crocodile said to him "The world is that way - the payment for goodness is wickedness." The child said: "Well then, let me look for a witness." The crocodile said: "Yes, three witnesses, if they all say the reward for kindness is kindness, I shall let you go, but if they say the reward for kindness is wickedness, I shall kill you." The child said "I agree." The child and the crocodile remained there until an old donkey came by, wanting to drink. The crocodile asked "Who is it ?" The donkey replied. The crocodile said to him: "Before you drink, you should decide the truth between me and this child." The donkey said "State your case." The crocodile explained everything. The donkey said to him: "In this world the reward for kindness is only wickedness. Don't you see how I am ? When I was young, I had strength, I carried loads. My owner used to ride me. At that time he used to give me millet to eat; the children would cut grass for me, they would sweep my house, they would give me water to drink. But don't you see now I am old, I have no strength, I cannot work, people ignore me, my owner does not even know if I am at home. He does not smoke my house, the mosquitoes are biting me. They have forgotten all my work. They do not even answer me. As for me, I know that humans repay goodness with wickedness."

The crocodile said to the child "You hear ?" He said "Yes". The old donkey drank and went off.

Not long after, an old horse came and was about to drink. The crocodile said to him: "Horse, what is the reason

you are here? The horse said to him : "Hn, man's wickedness. The time I was young,my owner used to be concerned about me, he would take me to far-off places, he would make me dance, at that time I would live only on millet grain. Every day my body would be washed , water would be drawn for me, my house would be swept, everything would be done for me, but don't you see, now that I've become old, my sinews are all cut, they ignore me, they have tossed me to one side...if it were formerly I would not have had to come to look for water here. They have paid for my kindness with wickedness.

The crocodile said to the child: "You've heard the second witness." The child said "Yes".

They were there (until) they saw a hare running along towards them. As he was about to pass, the crocodile called him. He stopped and asked "What is it ?" The crocodile said to him "There is a court case here. I want to explain it to you. The hare said to him: "Tell it, but hurry, I don't want nonsense." The crocodile explained all to him.
The hare asked the child, the child also told him his case.
Hare said "No, I don't believe that this child brought you here." The crocodile said "He did". The child also said "I did". The hare said to then: "Well, then you all should come out please." The crocodile and the child came out of the water, and came and stood on the shore.
Hare said "I shall not believe your tale unless we all go to the place where you met. Child you must tie the crocodile, and carry him again, that we may go there." They agreed.
The child tied the crocodile, and put him on his head.

Hare followed behind them, till they reached the sandy bank. The child stopped and said "It was here." He stopped and was about to put down the crocodile. Hare said: "Wait, does your father eat crocodile ?"[1] The child said "Yes". He asked "Does you mother eat it ?" The child said "Yes". He said to the crocodile "Did this child find you here? " The crocodile said "Yes". Hare said to him : "If this child had not helped you to reach the river, what would have happened to you ? " The crocodile said: "The dogs would have found me here, and would have killed me or else the hunters."

Hare said to the child "Take him to your father and mother, and eat him."

He said to the crocodile " After today, the reward for kindness is kindness."

The child went home with the crocodile. His father cut it up, and they had it for dinner.

That is the reason if someone does a good thing to you, you should repay it with goodness.

1 Some clans have a prohibition against eating crocodile.

1. A version of this tale, written by K.M.Sedileigh, was published in Kibaro, December 1953, p.2.

2. M. Labouret: Les Manding et leur langue, 1934, gives the following versions:

   In the Malinke dialect of Guinea (pp. 249-253).
   Extracted from Dictionnaire Francais Malinke et Malinke Francais par un Missionnaire du Saint-Esprit, Conakry, 1906, p. XXXVIII.

   In the Bambara dialect of Segou (pp. 253-256).
   Extracted from the Dictionnaire Bambara-Francais du R.P. Bazin, Paris, 1906, p. 690.

3. A Bambara version "Le chasseur, le boa et le lievre," which involves a hunter carrying a python back to the water, and in which an old cow and an old horse are called as witnesses before Hare, is given in: Moussa Travele: Proverbes et Contes Bambara, 1923, pp. 188-195.

4. A Wolof version (in French translation) is given in Birago Diop: Les Contes d'Amadou Koumba, Paris: Presence Africaine, 1947 ? pp. 97-104.

5. The story has also been reproduced in
   Bayo, Abdoulie (Transcriber)
   Dindingo aning Bambo: Mandinka Talingo. (The boy and the crocodile - A Mandinka story.)
   Banjul: Gambia Cultural Archives, 1976, 18 pp.

6. The fable of the ungrateful crocodile is also to be found in E.W.Lane: The Thousand and One Nights , (1859 1st edition), Vol.1, p.84 and note 28 on page 114, where the story is given in full (1889 edition). Here the story is found in an Egyptian context.

7. A Portuguese translation of a version from Guinea-Bissau is given in Manuel Belchior: Contos Mandingas, Porto: Portucalense Editors, n.d. pp. 207-211, "A sentenca da lebre."

8. A Hausa version is given in Skinner , Neil : Hausa Tales and Traditions, Vol.1, 249-250. (1969, Cass) (translated from ~~Frank Edgar's~~ collection).

9. A Manding version is also to be found in:
   Mariku, Keletigui: Sur les rives du fleuve Niger: Conte Saheliens.
   Paris: Karthala, 1984, pp. 99-101.

10. An English version, based on a narrative provided by Yankouba Saho (in Mandinka) is given in Sona Mariama and Other Folktales, Edited by Patience Sonko-Godwin, published in 1991 by the Research and Documentation Division of the National Council for Arts and Culture. pp. 20-26.

(4) ELEPHANT / LION & GOAT COMPETE IN EATING.

Another story from The Gambia was also seen in a duplicated form, undated, and with no author mentioned, - as mentioned above probably one of the stories produced for the Nutrition Field Working Party in 1948. The translation is as follows:

"Elephant and Goat quarreled. Elephant said his eating was greater than Goat's. Goat said his eating was greater than Elephant's. So Elephant said to Goat "Look at me. I am very big. I am ten times bigger than you, because my eating is bigger than yours." Goat said "It is true you are bigger than I, but I am always eating, that is why my eating is more than yours." Elephant was angry and shouted at Goat "Show me your eating." Goat replied "Now let us begin eating. We shall see whose eating is the greatest . That one shall eat the other." Elephant agreed. Goat said he was ready. Elephant said he was ready, and took a branch with his trunk. Goat also began . Elephant took many leaves, and swallowed them, then he took many leaves, and when he swallowed those, he took more leaves, when he had swallowed them, he took more leaves...the elephant was eating in a hurry. But Goat was eating slowly. He was chewing the grass slowly. He was chewing (the cud) at that time, for a long time, and while he was chewing he was thinking. Now the place they had to eat was all finished. Elephant went to look for more food. Goat also went to look for food on another side, but he did not go far. All day Elephant was still eating, he was eating grass, he was eating leaves, he was eating branches, he was eating trees, he was eating until he was full and could not walk. At that time he could not eat anything again. At the

time night was coming Elephant went to look for Goat. As he was going he looked on all sides and said. "I have eaten everything here, look at these trees, I have eaten all the leaves, look at the ground here, I have eaten all the grass." He was saying to himself "I have beaten Goat at eating." When he was saying that, he looked ahead and saw Goat lying on a big rock chewing. Elephant looked everywhere, he did not see any grass, he did not see leaves also, he asked Goat "You are still eating ?" He saw Goat chewing, but did not believe it. Goat replied "I am still eating, I have not stopped yet. Now you know I can eat more than you. " Elephant asked him "What are you eating, because I don't see any grass, I don't see any leaves." Goat said "It is rocks I am eating, and when I finish the rocks, I will eat you." Elephant was afraid because he knew that whoever ate rocks would not hesitate to eat him, because rocks are harder than his skin. He wanted to run off, but he was so full he could not run, and could only stagger away. Since that time Elephant is afraid of Goat."

A story recorded by Jones in Georgia is of the same type, though it is an incident involving Lion and Goat.

XVI Buh Lion an Buh Goat

Buh Lion bin a hunt, an eh spy Buh Goat duh leddown topper er big rock duh wuk eh mout an der chaw. Eh creep up fuh ketch um. Wen eh git close ter um eh notus um good. Buh Goat keep on chaw. Buh Lion try fuh fine out wuh Buh Goat duh eat. Eh yent see nuttne nigh um ceptin de nekked rock wuh eh duh leddown on. Buh Lion stonish. Eh wait topper Buh Goat. Buh Goat keep on chaw, an chaw, an chaw. Buh Lion

cant mek de ting out, an eh come close, an eh say:

"Hay , Buh Goat. wuh you duh eat ?" But Goat skade wen Lion rise up befo um, but eh keep er bole harte, and eh mek ansur: "Me duh chaw his rock, and ef you dont leff, wen me done long um me guine eat you." Dis big wud sabe Buh Goat. Bole man git outer diffikelty way coward men lose eh life."

Apart from the duplicated version I have not otherwise come across this story in The Gambia, but know of it from Sierra Leone. Ruth Finnegan in Limba Stories & Storytelling 1967, p.329-330 gives the story "The elephant and the goat compete in eating."

Benjamin G. Dennis writing of The Gbandes- a people of the Liberian Hinterland, pp. 218-219 also gives a similar story.

A brief Vai version (English translation) is given in George W. Ellis: Negro Culture in West Africa, 1914, p.191.

Rene Basset: Contes Populaires d'Afrique, Paris, 1903, pp. 196-197 gives a Boullom version from Sierra Leone, taken from Nylaender: Grammar and Vocabulary of the Bullom Language, 1914, Church Missionary Society, 53-54.

Thomas Winterbottom: An Account of the Native Africans in the Neighborhood of Sierra Leone.... 2 vols. London, 1803, Temne version, vol.1, p. 120.

(5) THE TRAVELLERS AND THE BEAR

Another story provides a close parallel between one written by J.M.Saidy and published in Kibaro in September 1952, and one recorded on the Georgia Coast by Charles C. Jones and published in 1888. The translation of the Mandinka version is as follows:

"There were once two friends. One week they were in the bush farming until they were tired. When they left the farm, and were returning home, on their way they saw a Creature in front of them in the distance. One friend said to the other, "He ! indeed, it is a dark day. As for me I can climb..I will climb up until the Creature has passed." His friend said to him: "Today I shall see stars in the daytime, because I cannot climb, nor can I get away from this Creature by running, but if it reaches me I shall throw myself on the ground and stretch out like a corpse and shall not even breathe. When this Creature reaches me, it will think I am dead and will pass by me." The friend who could not climb added "I have heard this Creature does not do anything to a corpse." As soon as they had finished talking, the Creature reached them. The friend who could climb, jumped, and took hold of a branch, and climbed up and sat high up in the tree. His friend who could not climb suddenly threw himself down on the ground. When the Creature reached him, however much it touched him with its feet, the little man did not stir. The Creature passed and went about its business. When it had gone far off, the little man rose up, and dusted himself off. His friend who had climbed up came down to him, and asked "What did the Creature say when it stood beside you ?" His friend replied "It said to me, I should beware of one who, when hardship comes, does not think of his friend, but only of himself."

The Georgia Coast version of Jones (#XXIX) is as follows:

"Two fren, dem bin a mek one journey togerruh. Dem haffer go tru one tick swamp wuh full er bear an edder warmint. Dem prommus fuh tan ter one anurrer, an help one anurrer out ef de warmint should tack dem. Dem yent bin git half way tru de swamp wen one big black Bear jump outer de bush and mek fur dem. Steader one er dem tan fur help fight um, eh leff eh fren an clime one tree. De tarruh fren bin yeddy say Bear no go gwine eat dead people, so him leddown on de groun, an hole eh bref, an shet eh yeye, an mek out say him bin dead. De Bear come up ter um, an smell um, an tun um ober, and try fuh ketch eh bref. Wen eh fine eh cant ketch eh bref, eh gone off leely way an eh watch um. Den eh tun back an smell um gen, an notus um close. At lenk eh mek up eh mine say de man bin dead fuh true; an wid dat eh leff um fuh good an gone back der wood. All dis time de tarruh fren duh squinch ehself up een de tree duh watch wuh bin gwine on.Eh dat skade eh wunt do nuttne fuh help eh fren, er try fuh run de Bear off.

Wen eh fine de Bear done gone fuh sho, eh holler ter him fren say : "Wuh de Bear bin tell you ? Him an you seem luk you bin hab close combersation." Den eh fren mek answer: "Eh bin tell me nebber fuh trus nobody wuh call ehself fren, an wuh gwine run luk er coward soon es trouble come."

However, in this case, it is unlikely to be a direct transmission from West Africa to America, as the item is clearly derived from one of Aesop's fables. In the Penguin book "The Complete Fables: Aesop. Translated by Olivia and Robert Temple,"1998, page 190, we have:

The Travellers and the Bear.

Two friends were travelling along the same path together when a bear suddenly appeared. One of them quickly climbed up a tree and hid himself there. The other, who was about to be caught, threw himself down on the ground and feigned death.The bear sniffed him all over with his muzzle, but the man held his breath. For it is said that a bear will not touch a corpse.

When the bear had gone away, the man hiding in the tree came down and asked his friend what the bear had whispered in his ear. The other replied: 'Not to travel in future with friends who slip away when there is danger.'

This fable shows tnat when danger threatens, true friends will face it.

The Aarne/Thompson Types of the Folktale, p.65 lists:

179 What the Bear Whispered in his Ear. Paid guide climbs tree and leaves traveller to mercy of bear. Traveller feigns death and the bear sniffs at him and leaves. The Guide: "Whats did the bear say to you ?" He said, never trust a coward like you." (Motif J1488).

I wrote to J.M.Saidy about the story, but before I recieved (in 1978) any reply, I had a visitor/from The Gambia who was a contemporary of Mr.Saidy, and had been to school about the same time . I asked him if he knew the story, and whether it was a Mandinka one. I replied that he knew the story, but it was not a Mandinka one. He had read it in a book while at school. He then proceeded to (in Mandinka, if my memory is correct). tell it,/ though it must have been about twenty years since he had read it. Unfortunately he could not remember the book (a school reader) involved.

(1979)

On a later visit to The Gambia,/ I met Mr. Saidy - by now a distinguished journalist, and he confirmed that he had in fact translated the story from a school text book and submitted it to the Mandinka newspaper Kibaro. The editor of Kibaro often stated that he wished only for traditional tales, and not items translated from English books, but this one slipped by.

I then talked to the Head Teacher of the Roman Catholic School at Saare Mansajang near Basse (a Fula), to see if he recognized the tale and could recall the book. He could not discover the book, but he stated that he had transformed the tale into a play which he used to have his pupils act out.

One of his current teachers, however, had the tale written in his "Teacher's Notes", but the animal involved had been transformed from the European "bear" to an African "lion."

So the tale had now gone into local culture in a changed form.

PART II Aesop's Fables & African Tales

Apart from the previous tale (The Travellers and the Bear), several other tales in Aesop's collection find parallels in West African tales. Did Aesop derive these from Near Eastern or North African sources (The Western Sudanic zone)? Or did Aesop's version spread south ?

In modern times Gambian newspapers have been fond of publishing fables from Aesop. Gambian writers have also adopted the custom of adding a moral, when publishing translations of local tales into English, but whereas Aesop's morals are brief, the comments of many Gambian writers tend to be long-winded.

Another fable of Aesopswhich has parallels in Senegambia is

The Lion, the Wolf and the Fox."

"A very old lion lay ill in his cave. All of the animals came to pay their respects to their king except for the fox. The wolf, sensing an opportunity, accused the fox in front of the lion:

"The fox has no respect for you or your rule. That's why he hasn't even come to visit you."

Just as the wolf was saying this, the fox arrived, and he overheard these words. Then the lion roared in rage at him, but the fox managed to say in his own defence.

"And who, of all those who have gathered here, has rendered your Majesty as much service as I have done ? For I have travelled far and wide asking physicians for a remedy for your illness, and I have found one.'

The lion demanded to know at once what cure he had found, and the fox said: "It is necessary for you to flay a wolf alive, and then take his skin and wrap it around you while it is still warm."

The wolf was ordered to be taken away immediately and flayed alive. As he was carried off, the fox turned to him with a smile and said. "you should have spoken well of me to His Majesty rather than ill."

The fable shows that if you speak ill of someone, you yourself will fall into a trap.

in 1950

The following version was provided/by A.K.Secka, a Wolof, from Banjul: There is no record as to where he heard it.

The Goat on Pilgrimage and the Wolf and the Lion.

One day a goat started a journey on a pilgrimage to Mecca carrying a gourd full of honey. On the way he met a wolf (i.e. hyaena) , and wolf asked "Where are you going?" To Mecca on pilgrimage " replied to goat. "You have completed the pilgrimage when you met me; when a goat is going to Mecca and meets a wolf that is its destination,"said the Wolf. The goat begged the wolf, but the wolf would not listen and took the goat to a cave to eat him. Luckily they met a lion there. The wolf was frightened at the sudden appearance of the lion, and offered him the goat saying : "I heard you were ill, and I brought you this goat." The lion asked the goat, "Where were you going ?" The goat said "I was going to Mecca." "And what is in your gourd ?" continued the lion. "Holy water," answered the goat. "Will you give me some ?" asked the lion. "But it is not used like that," said the goat, "you must mix it with some wolf skin." At once the lion caught the wolf by the leg and tore off a large piece of skin and handed it to the goat. The goat dipped it into the honey and gave it to the lion who heartily enjoyed it. "Some more please," demanded the lion. Again it was done, and wolf asked permission to go, saying "I am going to urinate." They allowed him, and off he went. They waited for some time, and then lion said "I am going to look for wolf and come back soon." When lion went away, the goat also took off and made his way home. Lion came back without finding either of them.

1 A similar tale : "The adventure of the murabit goat" is given in H.T.Norris: Shinqiti Folk Literature and Song. Oxford, 1968, p.120.
(Folk-tales of the Trarza, in Mauritania.)

2 A Mende version from Sierra Leone , involving Goat, Leopard, and Lion is given in:
Marion Kilson: Royal Antelope and Spider, West African Mende Tales, 209-212.

3 Demb ak Tey , Issue No.1, published in Dakar (no date given) is devoted entirely to the tale of El Hadj Bouc, based on a satirical Fula version, originally published in L. Arensdorff Manuel Pratique de Langue Peulh, Paris, Guethner, 1913, 311-335.
(Told by Karamoko Ba from Fougoumba, Fouta Dajalon),

It was republished in La Femme, La Vache, Le Foi, Edited by Alfa Ibrahim Sow. Paris: Armand Colin, 1966, 236-245. (Les mesaventures d'El-Hadj Bouc).

In Demb ak Tey a Wolof version is given on pages 19-25.

(It is also translated into Serer).

(The rest of the issue 27-56 discusses various aspects of the tale and its characters, including Mandinka reactions.)

(7) Aesop's Fable The Tortoise and the Hare has numerous parallels in West Africa.

Aesop: "The tortoise and the hare argued over which was the swifter. So, as a result,they agreed a fixed period of time and a place and parted company. Now the hare, trusting in his natural speed, didn't hurry to set out. He lay down at the side of the road and fell asleep. But the tortoise, well aware of his slowness, didn't stop running and overtaking the sleeping hare , he arrived first and won the contest.
(This fable shows that hard work often prevails over natural talents if they are neglected .)

In a recently published book Gambian Folk Tales and Fables , narrated by Cornelius Gomez (2001 ?) Chapter 6,
"Rabbit and Chameleon were companions. They were fond of arguing over who could run faster than the other. One morning, Rabbit said to Chameleon: "Let us go and see Grandpa Elephant. He will be able to tell us who is faster than the other" "I agree. Let's go!" said Chameleon. They left for Grandpa Elephant's home. When they arrived , he asked them about the purpose of their visit. Rabbit replied: "This slow creature thinks that he can run faster than me! " Grandpa Elephant looked at Chameleon and asked him: "What do you say about that, my child ?" "Yes, I said so ! I can move faster than him ! replied Chameleon. Grandpa Elephant thought for a while before he said to them. "Well, both of you will race each other. You will go back to the village. There you will start the race and finish here under this tamarind tree. I shall give a prize to the winner. He asked Goat to go back with the two friends.

When they arrived at the village. Goat started the race for them. Rabbit took off like the devil. He ran so fast he raised a

big cloud of dust behind him. Chameleon, who followed, could hardly see ahead or breathe well. Regardless of this he moved steadily along the road. One could hear his bones creak, sekeku, wekeku, nyekeku . The race went on and on. Chameleon was left very far behind. The distance was so great and the sun was so hot that Rabbit decided to have a nap. He thought that Chameleon was too far away. So he lay under a big sooto tree. Then he fell asleep. While Rabbit slept, Chameleon walked slowly, steadily but surely towards the tamarind tree, sekeku,wekeku, nyekeku. On is arrival at the sooto tree, Chameleon saw Rabbit. He was snoring. Chameleon never stopped. He moved ahead while his bones creaked - sekeku, wekeku, nyekeku. When Chameleon almost reached the tamarind tree, Rabbit woke up suddenly. He looked up and saw the setting sun, At once, he sped away, his legs went. Karr Bati ! Karr Bati ! Sambuleh leleh, Sambu Njaay ! Sambuleleh, Sambu Nyaay (Njaay ?). Rabbit ran and ran and ran. He still believed Chameleon was behind. At the tamarind tree, all the villagers hoped to see Rabbit win the prize. Therefore, when they saw Chameleon arrive first, they were all very amazed. Yet, they all clapped and danced for him.

A short while later, Rabbit appeared in the distance. He heard the drums and he thought that was all for him, So, when he looked behind him and did not see Chameleon, he slowed down. Then he trotted slowly, slowly and with great confidence to the tamarind tree. But when he arrived Rabbit saw everyone dancing, clapping and singing around Chameleon. He couldn't believe his eyes ! He felt so ashamed he ran away and hid in the bush. Chameleon had won the race!

Gomez version is for children aged 10-15.

The Lesson of the tale is spelt out in detail.
"Too much confidence without discipline iss bad. However able we are, we should not be playful. We must be serious when we do our work. Let us remember that there are others who are always trying to be better than us. We could be the best, yet, if we are not careful with out work, we will never succeed."

The stories in the book, though given in English, seem all to have been originally Wolof. Publication of an original Wolof version is promised.

A Mandinka variation follows: (Recorded in 1952).

Recorded on a dictaphone at Fajara, Kombo St.Mary, 1952
from Usman Bajo of Gunjur.

Tankongo aning nyankonkorongo	The hartebeeste and the chameleon
Subol' bee benta. I ko i be muso	The animals all met. They said they would
di keo la, meng si bori no,	give a wife to the man who could run best.
meng folo futata muso la,	The first one to reach the woman,
a si muso ta.	should take her.
Tankongo, wo le mu subo borila ti,	The hartebeeste, that was the (greatest) runner of the animals,
subo mi y'a long kat,	an animal that you should know,
a ye boro no wulo kono subo bee ti.	could outrun all the wild animals.
Nyankonkorongo a buka bori,	The chameleon could not run,
a man taria tamola,	he did not hurry in moving,
bari a ye fero soto	but he had a plan
men s'a tinna a si muso (samba ?) la.	by which he would take the woman.
Ye muso londi, ye tankongo siti,	They set down the woman, and tied the hartebeeste,
subo bee borita,	and all the animals set off running,
i be muso waling na,	and were getting near the woman,
nyankonkorongo man boro no,	the chameleon could not run,
a nata mining,	he came and turned round,
a ye tankong firing,	and set the hartebeeste free,
a denta tankongo karo to,	he clung to the side of the hartebeeste,
ning tankong borita,	when the hartebeeste ran
ni be na futa la subo-o-subo la,	as they reached each animal,
a b'a fo la:	he would sing:
[1]	
"Tankong ye, tankong ye	Tankong (Hartebeeste), tankong,
kumparere, juma le ye tankong bula ?	kumparere, who freed the hartebeeste ?
kumparere, juma le be karo to ?	kumparere, who is on (his) side ?
kumparere, "	
Tankong be buri la,	The hartebeeste was running ,
a be tambila subo bee la,	and was passing all the animals,
f'a be na futala musu la dula la.	until they were about the reach the woman's place.
I be na futa la muso la tembo men na,	When they were about to reach level with the woman,
nyankonkorongo saunta,	the chameleon jumped off,
a danta muso la,	and reached the woman,
jan ning tankong futata muso la.	before the hartebeeste reached her.
Tankong fota muso la,	The hartebeeste lost the woman,
wo le y'a tinna,	that is why
nyankonkorong(ko)fero nyong t'a la.	the chameleon's cunning, there is nothing like it.
la ?	

(Translated by D.P.Gamble)

1. From the notes it is not clear whether the words 'Tankong ye' go with the last part of the previous sentence i.e. singing to the hartebeeste, or whether they form the first line of the song. As the words tankong ye ,or tankong nye, were repeated, they would seem to be part of the song.

The tale of a contest between a very swift animal - deer, hare and a very slow one - tortoise, chameleon, snail.[7] is widespread in European, African, and Afro-American folklore.

There are several major patterns.

(a) The swift animal e.g. hare, is overconfident and decides to take a nap, and while he is sleeping is passed by the slower animal.

(b) The slower animal wins by deceit , e.g. the tortoise rounds up his relatives and places them at intervals along the course, so that whenever hare reaches a given point, he finds the opposition already there.

(c) The slower animal e.g. the chameleon, drops on the faster animals back (deer), and clings there. When they reach the finishing point, the chameleon jumps or is pitched forward and wins...

This is one of the rare cases when an animal gets the better of hare.

The 'cooter' in Afro-American tales is the tortoise, and is clearly derived from the Mandinka word kutoo .

(8) Aesop's Fable: "The Fox and the Bunch of Grapes",

"A famished fox, seeing some bunches of grapes hanging [from a vine which had grown] in a tree, wanted to take some, but could not reach them. So he went away saying to himself. "Those are unripe."

This has led to the English expression "Sour grapes".

A Mandinka parallel is:

Sulo ka a fata bantabaa dutoo la,	The monkey says he does not want the mango from the village meeting place,
a y'a tara a sotonyaa le t'a ye .	it means he has not the means of getting it.
---	
wo le mu nying ti.	The explanation is this.
i lafita feng na,	You want something
i t'a soto no la,	but cannot get it.
i s'a fo ko: "a mam beyeyaa".	so you say: "It is not good."

PART III

A Wolof Story: The Buur and his Attendant's Wife (Recorded in 1974) shows how a tale current at the present day, told by a Wolof griot, and regarded by all who heard it as a "typical Wolof tale", can in fact be related to tales found in the Middle Ages in Europe and the Middle East.

But could the tale have gone from Western Sudanic traditions into European and Near Eastern tradition or did it move in the opposite direction ?

(The tale was first published in Gambian Studies #22, 1989, pp 49-61).

A WOLOF STORY: THE BUUR AND HIS ATTENDANT'S WIFE.

David P. Gamble and Linda K. Salmon

In 1974 when Linda Salmon was on her way to visit a particular compound in Banjul, the capital of The Gambia, accompanied by Alhaji Hassan Njie of Radio Gambia, they happened to meet a géwèl (griot), Matar Ndumbe Faal, from Jaji in Senegal. After greetings had been exchanged, and he had learnt the surnames (clan names) of the two,[1] he began praising the lineage of the Njies (Njay). Alhaji Hassan asked him a question about Njanjan Njie, the ancestor of the Njies. Matar Ndumbe dealt with this briefly, and went on to relate the history of the village of Jaji Al Demba, formerly called Bind Yew, where his own family had lived for several generations. All of them then went inside the compound, and there the griot was asked for a story.

Their conversation in the street had been taped, then the story was recorded. When Matar Ndumbe had finished, Alhaji Hassan repeated the tale in English, and this too was taped. But Matar Ndumbe spoke at such an extremely fast rate[2] that subsequent transcription of the Wolof text was exceptionally difficult, and nothing was done with it. More than ten years later, in the United States, the tape was studied again, but the first Gambian Wolofs who listened to it had trouble, because of both the dialect and the speed, trying to repeat slowly what the griot had actually said, though they could follow the main lines of the story. A copy of the tape was given to Alhaji Hassan Njie in 1986, and he provided a written translation, indicating that he had had to listen to the recording many times before it could be completed. With his translation in hand, we began going over the tape again, listening to it many times to see if we could decipher the Wolof text, until finally with the help of Ebou O. Ndure who was visiting San Francisco, we were able to produce a reasonable (though not perfect) transcript, spending over two hours on the four minute recording. (October 1987).

Here we give only the translation, and have followed Alhaji Hassan's written version as closely as possible, but changed pronouns such as he, she, etc. to the appropriate nouns, the Buur (King), the father, the young man or attendant (dak), the wife, etc. to clarify the narrative. The rhythm and intensity of the story in the original Wolof, which build up to a climax, are, to a large extent, lost in translation. Early in the story it seemed as if the griot spoke as though he were the young man, using the pronoun I, but then switched to he. This section has been changed to the third person. It could be, however, that the words mu ne, he said, were there, but with the extreme speed of the narrative, cannot be picked up on the tape. Words added for clarification have been given in parentheses [.....]. Alternative translations are indicated by (.....).

Matar Ndumbe Faal's Tale.

"There were three people.[3] Their time was not like the time now. During the time before you[4] owned the country, the Buur that should own it, before the country is entrusted to him, must [show that he] excels in the Quran.[5] If he excels in the Quran, then the country is entrusted to him. When the country is entrusted to him, then he holds [power over] the country.

After they had given the Buur the country, a certain young man like me came and said he wanted to stay with him. The Buur asked him: "What [work] are you going to do ?" The man replied: "I want to be your messenger (attendant, dak). You can send me anywhere you want." The Buur said: "That is exactly what I want, because in my household I have only women to send on errands."

The messenger went to fetch his wife, who also happened to be well versed in the Quran like the Buur. The Buur saw that she excelled (was more beautiful than) any of his wives [and wanted her], yet he hesitated to go against the Quran, because he had read in the Quran that one must not love another man's wife. He kept the prohibition for about four days. Then [the Buur's desires got the better of him and] he came and told the young man that he was going to send him off to a town in a far part of the country. So the dak took leave of his wife saying:"I am going away", and she replied: "Go and come back [safely],"

[When he had gone], the Buur went to the [dak's] wife and said: "Today I am your stranger (guest)." The young woman said: "My guest ?" He said: "Yes." She pointed out that he was trying to usurp the place of her husband. The Buur replied: "Yes indeed, that is what I want."

After a while the wife said that she was going to go to the market. [While she was gone, the Buur lay down on the bed and fell asleep.] At the market the woman bought ingredients to prepare an excellent maafe.[6] She also went and bought twelve different bowls, of different colors.[7] In each she put some rice and stew, covered them, and placed them on a large table. Then she woke him up from his sleep. When he woke up, he remarked that she had done more than enough, because he was just one person, and yet she had prepared twelve dishes. He looked at the green bowl, and said he was going to open it first. He uncovered the green bowl and it was maafe. He looked at the black bowl. It was maafe. The red was maafe. The white was maafe. Each bowl that he uncovered was maafe. [He said he was no longer hungry] and told her to take away her utensils. She cleared away the utensils and took them back to the kitchen. Then she ? took down some tulakuna[8] (a bitter oil).

After chatting for a while, he became afraid, took off his ring, put it under the pillow, left it there, and ran off.[9]

After a few days the husband returned. He went to the Buur and greeted him. The Buur said: "You've come back ?" The young man said: "Yes, I've been to where you sent me, and come back." After they had talked for a while, the dak said he was going home to his compound. He returned and found his wife there, and greeted her. Then he sat down [on the bed], and his wife started to massage his feet.[10] He pulled the pillow [forward], and saw the Buur's ring under it. He recognized it, picked it up, and concealed it. [His wife, busy massaging his feet, did not see her husband's action.]

Later, when the young woman had gone outside to the bathroom, the husband exclaimed: "I have parted company with the world today. My wife who is so well versed in the Quran, and the Buur also, so that the country has been entrusted to him - I left the two of them when I went on a journey, and they have engaged in an unlawful affair."

[When his wife came back], though he was angry, he did not say anything to her. But when she wanted to lie beside him in bed, he went and lay down on the floor, and when she lay down beside him on the floor, he got up and lay on the bed. [This state of affairs continued for some time, until] finally the wife went to her father and said: "You gave me in marriage to my husband, but we are not as husband and wife now.[11] He does not tell me what annoys him. Call him and ask him what annoys him about me." Her father went to the Buur, and stated that his daughter had laid a complaint against her husband, and that the Buur should call everyone [to hear the case]. The Buur did so, everyone came. When all had gathered, the wife told the people that she had lodged a complaint against the dak of the Buur. The Buur confirmed it. They asked her what the complaint was about.

Her father said: "I had plenty of land, and the young man said that he wanted a field [to farm]. I told him to go and look, because I did not possess just one or two fields, but many. He looked around until he saw the field he wanted, and when he told me: "This is the farm I want," I gave it to him. He was using it, and was satisfied. Then I discovered that he was not using the field [any more], so since he is not using it, now I want him to return it, so that I can give it to someone who would cultivate it and get benefit from it."

The man got up, and said that he still wanted the field even more than when he first asked for it, but when he went to the farm, he found lion footprints in the field, and he is afraid of the lion, as a lion is more powerful than he is. "If I go to work in the field, and lion finds me there, it will kill me. If I find the lion in the field, it will kill me. Nevertheless I still like the field."

The Buur rose up and told him to go and cultivate his field. The lion went there, but did not want to eat grass, and his farm is still the best among all others.[12]

So the question is - of the three of them - the husband, the wife, the buur[13], who is the noblest ?"

With the last question the story is turned into a 'dilemma tale', one in which listeners are invited to discuss the case. Some of the women who had been listening in the background felt that as buurs were all-powerful, a buur could do as he wanted. If he wanted a particular woman, he could just take her, and nobody could do anything about it.

If the question asked is "Who had the sharpest mind ?" or "Who was the cleverest ?" this poses a more realistic question. The woman ?

She did not openly confront the Buur, she fulfilled her duty of making a guest feel at home (the quality of teraanga), yet by providing many bowls with the same maafe, she was in effect saying: "You have many wives and concubines at home, another woman is no different from all the others." The father ? He posed the husband/wife dispute in terms of a farm which had been neglected, had avoided shaming his son-in-law in public, yet had presented his daughter's case, and in the end helped restore the status quo, though the griot seemed to forget him. The husband ? He too had taken care not to offend the Buur, thereby risking his own life, he did not openly accuse his wife of infidelity, but, by neglecting her, forced her to make the next move, and then he was able to express his unspoken fears in the metaphor of lion tracks on his farm. The Buur ? He solved all of the riddles, and though tempted, in the end committed no offence, and gave an honorable decision which set right the misunderstanding.

The posing and solving of puzzles, and face saving mechanisms, are found in a number of classic Wolof tales, particularly those involving Kocce Barma, a Wolof sage believed to have lived in the 16th century. More recent examples of this type of tale are found in Emil A. Magel's Folktales from The Gambia[14] (1984). Yet Matar Ndumbe's tale is not to be found in any published collection of Wolof stories, though all who heard it for the first time felt it to be typically Wolof.

A search of the tale types and motifs revealed that it was in fact a tale common in Near Eastern and Southern European traditions, and is to be found, for example, in the Arabian Nights[15], in Boccaccio's Decameron[16], in the Hebrew Tales of Sendebar[17], in Folktales of Israel[18], (though here originating in Yemen), and in the Spanish collection The Book of the Wiles and Contrivances of Women.[19] In the

European/Near Eastern versions we have two main ways in which the woman preserves her honor, by conveying the message through multiple dishes of the same food, or by giving the king a book to read in which adultery is condemned, or more rarely, by a cleverly phrased rebuke. Here, with the stress that both are learned in the Quran, the book motif is implied. In most European/Near Eastern versions the king has to have the meaning of the multiple dishes explained to him. In the Wolof version he (as well as the listeners) has to work it out in his own mind. Some of the versions have the motif of "The Lion's Track." This seems particularly appropriate in the Wolof version where the royal line of Njie has the praise name of gaynde (lion), and lion's clan name is Njie. The use of multiple dishes to show that all women are the same is given by Rene Basset quoting Arabic sources, and is found in the Magrib and Morocco.[20]

The following table shows a comparison between the major versions of the tale.

	Arabian Nights	Boccaccio Decameron 14th cent.	Folktales of Israel (Ex Yemen) 1956	Wolof (Senegal) 1974
Characters	King Vizier Vizier's wife Wife's father	King of France wife	King Sage (haham) Sage's wife Wife's brothers	Buur Attendant (Dak) Attendant's wife Wife's father
Wife is beautiful & virtuous	x	x	x	x
Husband	Sent away	On Crusade	Out	Sent away
King visits wife	x	x	x	x
Wife prepares multiple dishes of same food	x	x		x
Wife provides book dealing with morality			Torah	Knowledge of Koran implied
Wife has to explain meaning of multiple dishes	x	x		
King in his confusion leaves	ring		gold coins & rosary	ring
Man sent off reports to King	x			x
On going home discovers object left by king	x		x	x
Refuses to speak to wife	x		x	x
have sex	x		x	x
Wife complains to	father		brothers	father
Riddle of garden that is no longer cultivated	x		x	x
Husband says he found lion's prints in garden	x		x	x
King understands riddle; indicates that husband has nothing to fear	x		x	x

From this table it is clear that the Wolof version is very close to that in the Arabian Nights, though there are a number of purely Wolof features in addition. It would seem that the Wolof have done here what they have done with many cultural elements, made as their own items which are ultimately derived from far off places. When the tale was recorded it was assumed that it was a traditional Wolof tale, and the narrator was not asked where he had learnt it. It did not cross anyone's mind that he might have read it in a book, and it was supposed that this was a traditional tale handed down orally. Among the Mandinka and Fulbe David Gamble has found an instance in The Gambia where a written version of one of Aesop's fables went back into oral tradition, with the animal concerned (a bear) being changed to a lion. The source - a school textbook - was now forgotten, and unknown to most of those who subsequently learnt the tale.

When one examines the various collections of published tales derived from the Wolof one generally finds a number of close parallels to Near Eastern and Southern European tales, and these presumably spread with the coming of Islam to Senegambia from North Africa, rather than coming from European sources. Those who published African tales did not attempt to relate them to the tale types of the folklorists.

One finds for example that a story given by Bérenger-Féraud in his Recueil de contes populaires de la Sénégambie (1885), "L'homme qui avait beaucoup d'amis [The man who had many friends] " , is one which is derived from Arabic sources, and became widely known in Europe through Petrus Alfonsi's[21] (1062-1110) Disciplina Clericalis. It also appears in A Treasury of Jewish Folklore (1948).[22]

Birago Diop in his Contes et Lavanes (1948) has the tale of "The cat who went on the pilgrimage to Mecca," a story found also in Berber and Syrian traditions.[23]

In a recent collection of Wolof stories edited by Lilyan Kesteloot and Sherif Mbodj, Contes et Mythes Wolof (1983), out of fourteen stories three, and possibly more, are found internationally.

(1) The story Lan mooy addina [What the world is like] is one which is found in the writings of Poggio Bracciolini of Florence (1380-1459)[24] [Please All-Please None],[25] and was widely known in Europe in the 15th and 16th centuries.

(2) The story of the "Three Hunchbacks" (Netti xuuge yi) has close similarity to the tale Gibbosi in the Tales of Sendebar,[26] (The Hebrew version of the Seven Sages.)

(3) The story of the "Sorcerer and the Young Woman," (Jinne ji aq Ndaw si), is found in both Arabic sources,[27] and Italian Renaissance Tales.[28]

Isabelle Leymarie in her dissertation[29] provides a tale about the wife of a king and her lover, which reads like a story from the Decameron, though at the same time being typically Wolof. It includes both the themes of the successful escape of the lover hidden in a trunk, and the wife swearing an oath to assert her innocence.[30]

Clearly collectors of Wolof tales now need to pay attention to the way in which Wolof stories are transmitted. In the urban situation there can undoubtedly be feedback from written sources into oral tradition. At any rate the reader is left with an additional dilemma to solve: "How did a traditional Wolof griot learn this tale of the Buur and his attendant's wife ?"

NOTES

1. Linda Salmon was an honorary member of the Njie clan.

2. The telling of the tale took 4 minutes 15 seconds. Expert griots talk at a much faster rate than ordinary people.

3. There were actually four characters in the story.

4. Linda Salmon is here seen as a "European."

5. In reality most Wolof rulers were resistant to Islam, which threatened their powers. The term Buur is the general word for King or Ruler, and was also used in the title of the rulers of various Wolof states, the ruler of Jolof being the Buurba Jolof, the ruler of Saalum, the Buur Saalum. Wolof rulers were generally elected to the position from among eligible candidates by a small electoral body of officials. *(See additional note on page 13).*

6. Maafe is a dish of rice with a sauce made from groundnuts, tomatoes, onions, peppers, etc. and meat.

   In the absence of her husband the wife has a duty to honor distinguished visitors. On the other hand in polygynous households the wife whose turn it is to sleep with her husband cooks his dinner on that day. Cooking specifically for a man who is not a stranger generally implies that the woman is agreeable to sleeping with him.

7. Enamel bowls with lids are commonly used in serving food. [See also p.53]

8. This was omitted in Alhaji Hassan's translation. Tulukuna is a Mandinka word meaning bitter oil, and is derived from the seeds of a tree of the Carapa sp. The oil is bitter and nauseous, and is used in soapmaking. One person suggested that tulukuna was used in the detection of witches, which might explain why the Buur suddenly seemed to feel afraid, though this element might have been a motif from another tale which slipped in.

9. At first it was thought that while the wife was at the market, and the buur rested on the bed, his ring slipped off his finger accidentally. In leaving hastily he did not notice that it was missing. On listening to the tape later, it seemed that he took off the ring deliberately and left it there (perhaps as a reward for her virtuousness ?). Both situations occur in various versions of the tale.

10. This is a traditional wifely duty when the husband has been on a long journey. In Ousman Sembene's film, Mandabi, there is a scene in which Ibrahima Dieng's youngest wife, Aram, performs this task for her husband as he lies on his bed.

11. By traditional Wolof law women have a right to regular sex, and failure to provide it is grounds for divorce.

12. It is implied that he will not find the 'lion' there again, and that the character of his wife is unstained.

13. Alhaji Hassan translated the last question as "Who is the noblest ?" D.P.G. was less certain of the last word used, thinking it might be "Who was quickest on the uptake ?"

14. Emile A. Magel: Folktales from The Gambia, 1984, pp.163-171. "The Marriage of Two Masters of the Wolof Language, I & II." The question and response on pp. 170-171 also occur in Jewish folklore.

15. The Book of the Thousand Nights and One Night, translated by John Payne, Volume 5, 1914, p.263, "The King and his Vizier's Wife."

16. Decameron, Fifth Tale of the First Day.

17. Tales of Sendebar, an Edition and Translation of the Hebrew version of the Seven Sages, based on unpublished manuscripts, by Morris Epstein. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1967, pp.92-101.

18. Folktales of Israel, 1963. Edited by Dov Noy, #59. "The Lion Who Walked in the Garden," told by a person from Yemen in 1956.

19. The Book of the Wiles of Women, translated by John Esten Keller. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1956, pp. 21-22.

The Spanish version: Libro de los engaños e los asayamientos de las mugeres, (1253), translated from an unidentified Arabic version.

20. René Basset: Mille et un contes, récits & légendes arabes. Paris,1926. Vol.II, Toutes les femmes se ressemblent, pp. 25-26. El Khaouarizmi: Mofid el 'Oloum, p.74. See note on p.53 add.to #7.

21. Petrus Alfonsi (1062-1110) was a Spanish Jew, familiar with Arabic scholarship, who converted to Catholicism in 1106, and wrote the Disciplina Clericalis within a few years of his conversion.

22. A Treasury of Jewish Folklore, 1948, pp. 570-571. "The Test of a True Friend," (Adapted from the Midrash.)

23. Marguerite Taos Amrouch: Le grain magique: contes, poèmes et proverbes berberes de Kabylie. Paris: Maspero, 1966, pp. 211-213.

Arab Folktales : Translated & Edited by Ineb Bishnaq. New York, Pantheon Books, 1986. p. 216. (A Syrian tale.)

24. A Treasury of Italian Folklore and Humor. Edited by Henry D. Spalding, 1980, pp. 18-19.

The Facetiae of Giovanni Francesco Poggio Bracciolini. A new translation by Bernhardt J. Hurwood. New York: Award Books, 1968, pp. 93-94, Tale XCIX.

25. Motif J 1041.2 ["The miller, his son, and the ass."], "Trying to please everyone."

26 Tales of Sendebar Ed. Morris Epstein, pp. 301-309.

27 "The Maiden of the Tree of Raranj and Taranj," in Arab Folktales, Translated and edited by Ineb Bishnaq. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986, pp. 109-114.

28 "The Three Citrons," A tale by Giambattista Basile (1575-1632) in Janet Levarie Smarr: Italian Renaissance Tales, Rochester, MI: Solaris Press, 1983, pp. 260-268.

29 I. Leymarie: "The Role and Functions of the Griots Among the Wolof of Senegal." Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1978, pp. 202-203.

30 Motif K 1513 - Wife's equivocal oath. Tale type 1418.

Final note on translation problems. In the third sentence of the third paragraph, Alhaji Hassan wrote: "He kept the book (téérê) for four days," though the sentence did not fit well. D.P.G. thought that the word tèrè (to prohibit) might have been the word used.

Addition to note #5.

Fluency in the reading of the Quran was ruled as the sine qua non for the accession to the throne of independent Kajoor. Amadu Bamba Diop. Bull.I.F.A.N. ser. B. 28(nos 1-2), 1966, p. 494.

Addition to note #7

A long footnote in Tales from The Arabian Nights, Selected from the Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night, translated and annotated by Richard F. Burton. Edited by David Shumaker, 1978 New York: Avenel Books, p.825, details a man who received every day for three days the same kind of food. The woman he was interested in, asked him "What did you eat these days past ?" He replied "Always the same thing !" "Well," said she, "all women are the same thing." .....

PART IV

Comments on Gambian collections of Mandinka, Wolof, and Fula tales.

(1) MANDINKA STORIES

Collections were put together and issued in The Gambian Studies Series :

No.6 (Dec.1976). Mandinka Stories from Books Published to 1960.

This comprised material from works published by W.T.Hamlyn of the Education Department. He had previously been in Sierra Leone, and a number of his tales are similar to those found among the Temne and Mende of Sierra Leone. Others came from the work of A.K. Rahman, who had been working for the Nutrition Field Working Party at Genieri (Jenyeri), contributing to their literacy program sponsored by George O'Halloran.

No.7 (Apr.1977) Mandinka Tales from the Newspaper Kibaro.

This was a Mandinka newspaper, started in August 1950, by the Senior Commissioner, Mr. Humphrey Smtih, and published monthly(11 issues a year), continuing until 1956, being ably edited by Mr. Sherif T. Jammeh. A vast amount of interesting material was contributed by a variety of writers, school pupils, teachers, civil servants, chiefs, traders, et al.

As regards tales , they varied in sophistication. Some were clearly written by schoolchildren, others were sent in by adults. Some changes were made by the editor, and it seems that because of limitations of space episodes would sometimes be condensed - e.g. in Kibaro, Dec 1953, p.2 we find "What the horse said, the donkey also said", In the oral version the full statememnts would be repeated.

It was also to be noted that all of the contributors were male. At this time few Mandinka girls went to school, but at home women and girls tell stories more frequently than do the men. In the tales told by women and girls songs form an essential part of the narrative. In the written stories prepared by men songs, however, do not appear. The themes also reflected the male side of Mandinka culture, and themes which appear in women's stories such as the fate of a disobedient daughter who does not marry the man her parents have chosen for her, are absent.

No.8 (Apr.1977) Mandinka Stories- Dictated, Written, or Recorded.

This collection included tales written by A.K. Rahman, some of which he had prepared for me at an early date (1947) some of which he had written for the Nutrition Field Working Party.

A few tales were recorded on a dictaphone in 1951-52, and transcribed from the disk. Later (1963, 1966) some tales were recorded on tape.

Some tales (written in English) were also provided by High School students.

No.9 (Sept.77 Manding Kuno .

This is a long narrative prepared by A.K.Rahman in 1943.

No. 3 (June 77) Mandinka Dilemma Stories, Puzzles, Riddles, and Proverbs.

Includes material from Kibaro, with some items from independent recordings.

In more recent times the major collection of Mandinka material is Mandinka Spoken Art:Folk-tales, Griot Accounts and Songs. edited by Katrin Pfeiffer. Koln: Rudiger Koppe Verlage, 1997.

(2) WOLOF STORIES

The Wolof are a people of the Western Sudan, and in many respects are typical of its general culture. One also has to remember that from the days of the slave trade Bambara have been brought into Wolof country, and many were absorbed into Wolof society. Since then others have continued to come as seasonal workers (navetanes, 'strange farmers') and brought with them Bambara tales. The father, for example, of one of the best story tellers in Njau, Upper Saalum in The Gambia, was of Bambara origin. So many similarities in tales are not surprising.

The collection of Wolof material (Gambian Studies No. 10A, 1987 revision) was started to provide backgrund and reference material for further studies of present day Wolof story telling. In the case of the collection of Mandinka stories that had been put together (Gambian Studies,3,4,6,7,8, and 9) the starting point had been the Mandinka texts, whether written or recorded, translations then being made into English. Very few Mandinka stories were to be found only in an English or French version.

The situation for Wolof stories is very different. Until recently few Wolof texts had been published [1] and in the collection, apart from Walter Pichl's texts, they existed for only eight of the narratives - three of these for the same story (Hare and Monkey) with a high probability that the two later versions are based on the earliest text. Most stories are found in French translation, even when the author has been Senegalese.

Generally the background data that would be routinely recorded by a folklorist - the sex and age of tha narrator, the setting and place, where the story was heard- are unavailable, data about the original story teller being given for a very small proportion of the tales.

It is also somewhat difficult to be sûre that all are indeed Wolof tales. Birago Diop, for instance, though he heard tales from his grandmother, and the griot Amadou Koumba also states "Ces mémes contes et ces mêmes légendes, à quelqùes variantes près - je les ai entendu également au cours de mes randonnées sur les river du Niger, et dans les plaines du Soudan, loin du Sénégal." (These same stories and these same legends - with some variations- I have heard also in the course of my travels on the banks of the Niger, and in the savanna of the Sudan, far from Senegal.) Some of his tales are clearly located in Mali, but one cannot always be sure that all the rest are of Wolof origin.

So, Gambian Studies No. 10 provides a collection, the core of which is formed by written French versions of tales that were told originally in Wolof. This means that they have been modified, even where Senegalese writers are concerned, either to meet educational needs by being turned into elementary school readers (e.g. Senghor's stories) or to suit French literary style and non-Wolof readers (Diop). Fuller descriptions are generally added to explain terms, situations, and settings unfamiliar to an outsider, and the Rabelaisian element, so strong in any rural Wolof story telling session, is played down. Written tales are different from the oral presentation, where the tales are almost acted out before an appreciative audience which responds

to and interacts with the narrator. So major changes both in style and content have generally taken place before one sees the product in print. Early writers like Bérénger-Féraud seem to have taken earlier versions of tales, and expanded them in their own way.

Tales are also going to vary depending on whether they are being told by a professional story teller (griot), by an adult to a child, or children to one another. A school-child writing a story as a classroom assignment, produces a bare outline of the real thing. But we are given few indications as to the circumstances in which the stories were obtained.

1 The best collection of texts is provided by Walter Pichl in Afrika und Ubersee. 1960/61 XLIV 253-282 · 1961/62 XLV 67-95, 189-205, 271-85 1962 XLVI 93-109, 204-218.

Wolof texts are also provided in:

Lilyan Kesteloot/Cherif Mbodj
Contes et Mythes Wolof .
Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1983.

(A collection of 22 stories and legends).

2 For The Gambia see:

Emil A. Magel : Folktales from The Gambia.
Wolof Fictional Narratives.
Washington: Three Continents Press, 1984.

The Wolof text is given for only one of the forty-five tales, translated and annotated.

(3) FULA STORIES

My interest in the folktales of the Fulbe developed in 1975, after I had been translating various Mandinka tales, and was beginning to compile a new Fula-English Dictionary. Mary Umah Baldeh from Saare Mansajang (Mansajangkunda) near Basse in the Upper River Province of The Gambia, was visiting San Francisco, and spent part of the summer helping me, and I suggested that she tell some traditional tales.

In her home village most stories are told by women. These they tell at night to an audience of children, generally while engaged in some routine domestic chore such as shelling peanuts. The men whom I have heard telling folk tales have generally been the sons of such women. The narrator goes on from one tale to another, with only a brief pause in between, but may be given a short rest by someone else who desires to contribute. Children may ask for a favorite tale - "Tell us such and such a tale."

Certain women are known above others for their knowledge of many stories, and their ability to elaborate the details and turn the presentation into a dramatic performance. The tales have a great deal of direct speech in them - about one third - and a story teller imitates the voices of the various characters. Short songs are found in many tales, marking stages in the development of the story, or bringing about magical results, and in a few tales the songs actually form a greater proportion of the proportion of the presentation than the prose. A skilled story teller varies her voice, and uses repetition, emphatic phrases, rhythmical prose and onomatopoeic sounds to enliven the narrative and keep the attention of the audience.

"He tasted them and cried 'cham, cham, cham' (an exclamation of disgust). "They squeezed him and squeezed him, and squeezed him and squeezed him for a long time...."

"The dogs were howling and barking, howling and barking, howling and barking until in the end...."

"Hyaena came back, piirti, piirti, piirti, piirti, piirti , piirti, etc. "

As the tales are generally told in semi-darkness, and as the hands of the narrator are often employed in other activities, it is primarly through her voice that the narrator holds the attention of the audience, and a good narrator generally produces a balanced structure to her story, and a very rhythmical form of prose.

Tales, however, do not exist in a fixed form which is memorized perfectly. A skilful story teller can expand or contract a tale, depending on his or her mood, and that of the audience. Children giving their version of a tale usually provide only a bare outline; an experienced adult can fill out the narrative with descriptive detail. But no two narrations - even by the same story teller- are ever identical, though the sequence of events and some key phrases remain much the same.

All stories begin and end with set phrases "tal taale" (Here is a tale. ngonoodo buri ko alaa-no-don (Someone who was there is better than one who was not there), the ending formula being ni footi (That's it), taalol dimalle (a tale of lies), di na yaha, di na arta (There it is going away, there it is coming back.) Sometimes an additional formula may be added "Tomorrow morning, if you go to the well, you will see beads there, pick them up. That's the very end."

Interaction between the narrator and the audience is essential. One person respondswith little grunts (uum-de) to each sentence. If the narrator forgets an essential point someone may remind her. If a sentence is ambiguous, a question may be asked. On the other hand she may have to stop in mid-sentence to deal with a small child, or respond to a visitor, and then pick up the story where she left off.

A characteristic form of many Fula tales is that an abnormal or unjust situation is created (a wife is unmustly divorced, the family cattle are mysteriously lost, etc., there is a period of suffering, the situation is remedied, generally through magical means (often with the help of a spirit or of an old woman who has been befriended and treated with respect) by a member of the family (a child, a son who grows up, a mother); those who created the trouble are punished or shamed, and an ideal situation results with the people who suffered becoming rich and happy again.

Some of the stories belong to a general West African tradition, and find close parallels in the stories of other cultures (e.g. Hyaena and Hare tales). A number have actual Mandinka of Mandinka-like songs in them, and suggest that there may have been borrowing, but the characters in the stories are Fulbe, speak as a Fula would speak, and the values expressed are Fula values.

The advice of one's parents, if followed, leads to a reward, If ignored, to trouble. Young men show themselves to be brave, protecting their girl friends against fierce animals and monsters, and are prepared to die for their love. Generous hospitality is shown even to those who have offended you.

Strangers are provided with water to drink, food to eat, and kola nuts to chew. A quarrelsome nature, exemplified by Hyaena, leads to trouble. Greed leads to the offender being shamed. Telling tales about others or interfering in the affairs of others, brings severe punishment down on the head of the offender. Shame is constantly mentioned as a major sanction. In some tales the offenders are so shamed that they turn into monkeys (i.e. their behavior is not that of humans, but of animals.)

Some of the content depends on the sex of the story teller. When tales are told by women - and they are the major story tellers- women and girls are often the central characters, and the men emerge as rather poor characters. A hunter does nto know which one is his best wife. A farmer beats his wife for failing to bring food which he has already eaten in his greed as she was coming along the path. Young men emerge in a better light - by taking up arms to protect their girl friends, while sons fulfil their duties towards their mothers by restoring the family herd of cattle, destroying enemies, etc.

Women are shown in various lights. Very old women may be spirits in disguise. One should help them ; in return they may provide magical help to those in trouble. But some old women are busybodies who interfere and cause trouble . The co-wife situation is one frequently frought with jealousy or outright hostility. Most stories have a mother as an important character, generally giving advice and help, but occasionally one may be described who fails her child. There are frequent references to the beauty of women and children. The attractiveness of tattooed lips and gums, and polished, pointed shining teeth, as well as the great beauty of a smile.

The major animal characters follow the characterizations given by other West African peoples. Hare is small, but survives by his cunning, and outwits larger animals such as Hyena. Hyena represents the worst side of human nature, untrusting, greedy, quarrelsome, preying on the old and the weak - all of which lead him into trouble. Hippopotamus is fearsome, but is generally helpful to those in trouble. Lion, representing Royalty, comes to the aid of the oppressed, but is not seen as a very intelligent character.

In a literate culture one becomes so used to seeing tidied written versions of stories and speech, that one forgets that normal everyday speech is different from a literary form. Grammatical errors, and half finished sentences are common in speech. A narrator may change sentence structure in mid-stream, or forget a word, and rather than slow down the rhythm and pace of narration, substitute the dumanin's (the what's its name), for names, nouns, and occasionally forgotten verbs. There is frequent repetition, which gives the narrator time to think out the next sequence. A vital point may have been missed out, so the storyteller backtracks to include it. Inconsistencies occur in the names of trees and animals mentioned. In listening one does not perceive these as awkward, as one is concentrating on what is being said at the moment, and anticipating what is to come. Only when one is reading a written version reproducing every word, do inconsistencies stand out.

.(4) Stories published in English

National Council for Arts and Culture: Research and Documetation Division.

Sona Mariama and Other Folktales 1991, 61 pp.

Twelve tales. Mandinka, from Jarra, Baddibu, and Kombo.

Mam Maty Cham

Olimata: A Collection of Gambian Folktales.. 2002. 48 pp.

Sixteen tales. Wolof origin. from Chamen, Lower Niumi District.

Cornelius Gomez

Gambian Folk Tales and Fables. 2001. 113 pp.

Fifteen stories. Wolof origin.