Diasporic *Jeliya* in New York: A Study of Mande Griot Repertoire and Performance Practice

by

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Abstract

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Beginning in the late 1980s, many hereditary professional musicians (griots) from Francophone West Africa began moving abroad, first, to France, and then to North America. In my study, I explore the ways in which Mande griots' experiences in the most recent African diaspora in New York have affected their trade, which embraces some of the most significant musical traditions in sub-Saharan Africa. I examine the degree to which their collaboration with non-griot musicians has reshaped the parameters of their repertoire and performance practice in the New York milieu and world music sphere. Although *jeliya* in the Mande sphere is conceived as a verbal art, it is recast as groove-based "jam music" in clubs and concert halls; even a vocalist's part is judged upon the basis of its musical merits alone, allowing *jeliya* to flourish as a vocal art as well. Diasporic *jeliya* inspires listeners in the Western milieu to respond, act, and reflect in spite of their inability to understand the words of the griot, which are lost or neglected in transit. My work entails a detailed view of their music from the vantage point of a close collaborator (as a guitarist) with extensive professional experience working with griots and their Western associates. Collaborators learn the tools of the griot trade through "intensity of contact" with griots and their music. An array of artists determines

the form and content of diasporic *jeliya* in New York, allowing it to grow and flourish in multiple permutations as marketable entertainment.

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Introduction

The story of Mande hereditary professional musicians (griots) captivates and inspires the imagination. The griot trade or *jeliya*, in words of one New York Mande patron, "has stood the test of time as if it were a stick standing in water," yet it continues to change, adapting to new environments and music industry demands in Africa and abroad. Griots have recast themselves as commercial artists in the West, while they retain a sense of accountability for traditional roles, which include praise-singer, genealogist, historian, and musician.[1] Griots use creativity as a means for negotiating transactions and social change as they move freely between the Mande sphere and world music sphere via the concert stage. They invite extensive collaboration with non-griot Africans and Westerners, and their generosity is matched only by their enthusiasm. Griots target Western audiences that along with changes in context provide salient sources of patronage upon which they rely. Only the best and brightest professionals, according to Western collaborator Andy Algire, have ventured to the United States, and a select few have decided to relocate. New York griots such as Keba "Bobo" Cissoko, Abdoulaye "Djoss" Diabaté, Famoro Dioubaté, Balla Kouyaté, Ismael Kouyaté, Mackane Kouyaté, Mamady "Djelike" Kouyaté, Yacouba Sissoko, and Abou Sylla and their associates collectively form the hub of an extensive professional network that stretches from Africa to the West, and back, but that finds its locus in New York. While their surnames (e.g., Diabaté, Kouyaté, and Sissoko) abound and signify membership in a special group of hereditary musicians from Mande West Africa, griots use their inherited

[1] I henceforth use the term "griot" to include both males as well as griottes, their female counterparts. For a detailed discussion of the etymology for the term, griot, see Charry 2000: 111-114.

traditions and acquired skills to promote themselves in the world music sphere and to achieve a degree of social mobility in diasporic contexts.

This research project was inspired by Tom Van Buren. Van Buren is an independent scholar who has worked closely with griots in New York as an organizer, promoter, and researcher since the 1990s. He openly acknowledged that his 2001 doctoral dissertation, "The Music of the Manden in New York City: A Study of Applied Ethnomusicology in a Western African Immigrant Community," is not "intended to define genres, performance practice or repertoire" (2001, 4). I was also intrigued by Van Buren's call to contemplate the degree to which the relocation of Mande musicians would impact the griot repertoire, as the immigrant Mande community continues to grow and consolidate in New York (2001, 168). In 2005, I called Abdoulaye "Djoss" Diabaté, whom I had read about in Van Buren's work and heard on the CD, *Badenya: Manden Jaliya in New York*, with a simple request: I desired to learn the Manding guitar style and repertoire, which I had read about in books and articles, and heard on recordings. I hoped to address Van Buren's call, which I interpreted as a proposition. Djoss and I quickly established a solid rapport based primarily upon our musical interactions and exchanges via the guitar, which spoke a language that was mutually intelligible. The guitar served as our chief means of communication, since the language barrier frequently created miscommunication between us. It facilitated our collaboration, and allowed my study to progress and develop. Research, writing, musical composition, and guitar playing eventually became mutually reinforcing activities with "The Epic of Sunjata" project, which I discuss at length in Chapter 5; Africanist Akin Euba termed this method of research "creative ethnomusicology," which is "a process whereby information obtained

from music research is used in composition" (see Euba 1999). This study, in any case, would not exist if it were not for Djoss, who helped me navigate the "diasporic *jeliya*" scene in New York. He provided an emic perspective of the griot trade that greatly contributed to my understanding of diasporic *jeliya* in general.

Chapter 1, "Diasporic *Jeliya*: An African Art in Transit," provides an overview of the griot profession as practiced in Africa**,** which has been researched extensively by Knight, Durán, Jansen, Hale, Polak, and Zanetti, and Charry. Christopher Steiner's *African Art in Transit* provides a figurative template for my examination of *jeliya* in the Mande and world music spheres, which griots bridge with their emergence upon the world's stage as a vanguard of contemporary African music. *Jeliya* in the Mande sphere, which embraces tradition and modern innovation in Africa as well as New York**,** is primarily a verbal art in which instruments provide support for the griot's (or griotte's) praises and exhortations. It is bound by social practice and ritualized through obligatory exchanges that have occurred in the Mande sphere for centuries. The leap onto the world's stage has entailed the decline of text orientation in favor of purely musical merits. *Jeliya* as a verbal art (see Hale 1998) is recast and reconceptualized as groove-based "jam music," in Van Buren's words (2001, 161), in restaurants, clubs, and concert halls.

Van Buren's work, which I discuss in greater detail at the end of section 1.3 "The Transition from the Mande Sphere to the World's Stage" (and in Chapters 2 and 3), shows that the arrival of Mande drummers to New York during the 1980s and 1990s set the stage for the griots' emergence as commercial artists, facilitating the transition from the Mande sphere to other performance environments. The dance and drum scene and

diasporic *jeliya* coexisted for a number of years until many of the dance schools, such as Fareta and Djoniba, closed their doors. These schools were the initial meeting places for griots such as Keba "Bobo" Cissoko and important non-griot collaborators such as Andy Algire, Peter Fand, and Sylvain Leroux. Griots have also performed and worked intermittently at various educational institutions, and have been featured in programs that showcased the music of Africa and the African Diaspora. However, my inventories and lists in subsequent chapters are not exhaustive, and they only highlight the pieces that I have learned and the musicians with whom I have had varying degrees of contact. My views in general were gleaned from my own collaboration with Djoss and others within his immediate circle, as well as my numerous interviews and conversations with other members of the commercial griot music network.

In these new contexts, instrumentalists reign supreme and, as Banning Eyre's Afropop program on NPR boasted, "guitar is king." Diasporic *jeliya* brandishes a cross-cultural appeal, which griots, griottes, their non-griot associates, and Western audiences embrace as these artists "hurdle the barriers of space, language, and cultural context to touch" diverse audiences (Hale 1998, 244-245). As Paul Stoller, the author of *Money Has No Smell: The Africanization of New York City*, observes, African arts' transition in this respect is part and parcel of a global phenomenon that he refers to as "the commodification of culture" (2002, 76), making *jeliya* and griot music a viable commercial art and commodity in the marketplace. As a sense of groove pervades griot music and all it inspires, *jeliya* knows few boundaries as the embodiment of an idealized African past, which fascinates and piques the interest of audiences.

Chapter 2, "Ethnography, Social Dynamics, and Standards of *Jeliya* in the Diaspora," surveys *jeliya's* demographic trajectories in two diasporic urban contexts. During the 1980s, Mande professional musicians began moving abroad in search of greater opportunity as hopes of prosperity in Senegal, Mali, and Guinea waned. Griots migrated to France and then North America, settling in urban centers such as Paris (s**ee** Knight 1991) and New York, where many of them work as commercial artists, as well as fulfill traditional roles within Mande communities. Van Buren and Ryan Skinner (2005) provide ethnographies of *jeliya* in New York, though neither scholar focuses upon the extent to which the roles of hereditary musician (in the Mande sphere) and commercial artist (in the world music sphere) impact the griot repertoire in different ways. Mande professionals in New York negotiate the demands of obligation and artistry, straddling the lines separating the two spheres. While griots such as Djoss continue to work to satisfy the exigencies of the Mande community, the aims of obligation and artistry are sometimes incompatible, making these pursuits mutually exclusive for some Mande musicians (e.g., Djekorea Mory Kante). Multiple and divergent accounts make it difficult to acquire a clear view of performance in New York's Mande sphere as patrons and musicians frequently present different impressions of community-based events. The relationship between griots, their music, and the African-American community in New York demands further examination since the marketability of Afro-centric ideologies has not had a significant impact upon the various collaborations that have come to characterize the diasporic *jeliya* scene in downtown clubs and many concert venues.

From my vantage point as a collaborator**,** an air of irreverence, impertinence, and casual versatility marks griots' lives as commercial artists as they perform in clubs,

restaurants, and concert venues throughout Manhattan and Brooklyn. Disparate criteria for performance allow us to distinguish between, on the one hand, the socio-musical aesthetics of Mande concert parties and transition rites celebrations and, on the other, club dates and concerts in the world music sphere. A new standard for social interaction, which defies time and space, underpins and informs the dynamic between griots, their collaborators, and fans. Christopher Steiner, the author of *African Art in Transit*, points out that knowledge of the trade is among the most viable resources for traders, who barter and broker their skills in the modern sphere. Griots and collaborators in New York pool their collective knowledge, creating a niche for themselves in the music industry.

One collaborator, who has performed in a number of ensembles, referred to the griot network as a "family," whose relationships are marred by internal strife and marked by continual reinvention. In Chapter 3, "Mande Griots in New York, Their Collaborators, and Repertoire," I discuss the origins and evolution of griot collaboration over the course of the last decade. Three types of collaboration, which I describe as research-driven, griot-music centered, or griots as a resource, become salient means for classifying each group and project **(**see Chapter 3). Keba Cissoko's ensemble, Tamalalou, was a training ground for musicians, who later became the leaders in subsequent ensembles, such as Fula Flute, Source, Kakande, and the Mandingo Ambassadors. Each group has its own style and approach that pervades its treatment of familiar resources.

While the names of groups are different, the rosters are comprised of many of the same artists, who speak a common language through their knowledge of shared repertoires. Newer compositions are largely recomposed upon the basis of older works.

As a collaborator, I have performed with griot groups such as Super Mande in a number of capacities and become intimately familiar with their repertoires, which I highlight in this chapter through the comparison of transcribed materials. Griots use their intimate knowledge of the Mande sound and style and interest in creating more accessible forms of expression to contribute to the on-going hybridization of griot music, inspiring a multitude of creative appropriations through their collaborative efforts with non-griot musicians. Whether the aim is to encourage action or reflection, griots move people with their music.

In Chapter 4, "The Learning Process for Griots and their Collaborators; Rehearsal; Composition in Performance," I describe the acquisition of necessary skills and competencies for griots and collaborators. Musicians learn the trade through a variety of means. I discuss my initial encounters with *jeliya* in Abdoulaye Diabaté's Bronx apartment, which set a precedent for my subsequent research. Recording technology, which has been paramount in diasporic *jeliya*, facilitates the learning process for these musicians, whose work is informed by acute attention to modularity---a salient criterion in hybrid jam music. Griots use recorded materials to prepare for performances. My own use of recordings allowed me to broker my skills "faking it" as a quasi-collaborator in concerts and ceremonies as well. Intensity of contact gleans the tools of the trade, which are acquired in rehearsal and performance.

Tactile and tacit cognitive skills with respect to musical proficiency are best understood in terms of formulaic composition. Grooves or formulae underlie composition in performance in nearly every respect. Lucy Durán makes passing reference to more elaborate procedures that she describes as "extended variation," which

I explore in my analyses of "Mami Wata" and "Nanfulen." The most reputable instrumentalists, who musicians in New York emulate, master and internalize the art of "extended variation," providing a sense of continuity in and through their work.

The Loft Theatre production, "The Epic of Sunjata" staged at Dowling College, was the capstone of my involvement with griots. It exemplified the significance of collaboration in the griot trade. Writers, actors, and musicians pooled their collective resources in order to celebrate the griot's art and its history through a dramatic interpretation of Sunjata's life and accomplishments. Chapter 5, "Episode of a Life of a Hero: Locating Sunjata in New York," begins with a survey of the extensive literature on the Sunjata epic, providing evidence of this epic's embattled history in theoretical and practical terms. In light of this previous research, I propose that in spite of its rhetoric to unite, the Sunjata epic inspires *fadenya* or "rivalry" among groups of individuals in the Mande sphere; it is bartered, brokered, and traded as a form of cultural currency that provides power and authority to competing constituencies in Africa.

At Dowling, griots and collaborators transcended racial and cultural difference in an effort to create a work underpinned by *badenya* or "affection." A collective and cooperative spirit fueled our recomposition of Sunjata's past, which featured the most celebrated collection of pieces in the griot repertory, the "Sunjata *fasa*." I provide detailed analyses of select works, such as "Sunjata," "Numun," and "Tiramagan," which formed the basis of the musical scoring, and underscored the most significant episodes in Sunjata's life. As musical director, I utilized the creative process as a research tool in order to learn as much as possible about this music and its place in the griot repertoire. I

am indebted to griots Abdoulaye Diabaté and Famoro Dioubaté, and my colleagues at Dowling, for their work and effort on this project.

The griot narrative continues to unfold in New York. My dissertation is based upon nearly four years of collaboration with Mande professional musicians, who are no longer mere informants but trusted friends. Mutual dependence and obligation inform our lives, since if one befriends a griot, he or she becomes a part of the griot's family. Griot music and the trade are our shared interests that only scratch the surface of our transactions, which inform our social relations in general. Griots and collaborators aspire to create music that is *dununya*, "universal," and these two groups have become integral and indistinguishable parts of diasporic *jeliya*.

Chapter 1

Diasporic *Jeliya*: An African Art in Transit

1.1 Introduction

Travel and itinerancy have become an integral part of the griot's narrative in recent years. It seems fitting that the first in-depth account of griots, who were once tied exclusively to landed nobility, was made by a traveler to the Mali Empire at its apogee during the fourteenth century (Charry 2000, 105). Ibn Battuta, a Moroccan trader from the city of Fez, encountered griots at the court of Mansa Sulayman on July 28, 1352 (Hale 1998, 1), and "left the most detailed descriptions of royal court life, including performances of music and poetry" (Charry 2000, 43). Dūghā the interpreter acted, spoke, sang, and performed on the king's behalf in search of remuneration, which was compulsory, and he led the poets, who dressed in suits of feathers and sang poems of praise to their sole benefactor or patron. The griot's "art" or *jeliya*, which Ibn Battuta describes, "is as old as the most ancient cities of West Africa, such as Jenne-Jeno, which archaeologists now tell us antedates the time of Christ" (Hale 1998, 1).

> When he [the king] is sitting they hang out from the window of one of the arches a silken cord to which is attached a patterned Egyptian kerchief. When the people see the kerchief drums are beaten and trumpets are sounded and there come forth from the gate of the palace about 300 slaves….Dūghā the interpreter stands at the gate of the council-place wearing fine garments of silk brocade (*zardakhāna*) and other materials, and on his head a turban with fringes which they have a novel way of winding….Each *farārī* has his followers before him with lances and bows, drums and trumpets. Their trumpets (*būq*) are made out of elephant-tusks and their [other] musical instruments are made out of reeds and gourds and played with a striker (*sattā'a*) and have a wonderful sound….Anyone who wishes to address the sultan addresses Dūghā….
>
> The sultan comes out of a door in the corner of the palace with his bow in his hand and his quiver between his shoulders….The singers come out in front of him with gold and silver stringed instruments (*qunbarī*) in their hands and behind him about 300 armed slaves….As he sits the drums are beaten and the trumpets are sounded.….A seat is set up for Dūghā and he sits on it and plays the

> instrument which is made of reed with little gourds under it, and sings poetry in which he praises the sultan and commemorates his expeditions and exploits and the women and slave girls sing with him and perform with bows.
>
> With them are about thirty of his slave boys (*ghulām*) wearing red *jabbas* of cloth and with white *shāshiyyas* on their heads. Each one of them is girt with a drum which he beats. Then come his young followers who play and turn somersaults in the air as the Sindi does. In this they show unusual elegance and skill. They play with swords in the most beautiful way and Dūghā [also] plays remarkably with the sword. At this the sultan orders him to be given a bounty and a purse is brought in which there are 200 mithqals of gold dust. He is told what is in it publicly. The *farāriyya* stand and twang their bows in thanks to the sultan. On the next day each one of them gives to Dūghā a gift according to his rank. Every Friday, in the afternoon, Dūghā goes through the same performance as we have mentioned….
>
> On the feast day, when Dūghā has finished his performance, the poets come. They are called *julā* [spelled out], of which the singular is *jālī.* Each of them has enclosed himself within an effigy made of feathers resembling a [bird called] *shaqshāq*, on which is fixed a head made of wood with a red beak as though it were the head of a *shaqshāq*. They stand in front of the sultan in this comical shape and recite their poems. I was told that their poetry was a kind of exhortation….(quoted in Charry 2000, 357-358).

For centuries, *jeliya* has been described in a variety of languages, including Arabic, French, Portuguese, and English, as a form of entertainment (Charry 2000, 105). Whether juggling swords or words, or performing on instruments such as the *balafon*, *ngoni,* and *kora*, Mande professional musicians have tailored their repertoires in order to satisfy their sources of patronage. One French account of griots from the seventeenth century describes them as "people….whose only occupation is to praise," while a later source maintains that the term *guiriot* "properly signifies a buffoon" (Charry 2000, 106-107). Although griots have had "a unique relationship to the nobles" of Mande society (McCall 1995, 182), they are poets, musicians, and instrumentalists whose roles are prescribed and well-defined within traditional Mande society. Their occupation and social status are viewed in comparable terms, and griots have procured a degree of security from their profession by fulfilling a variety of roles.

In the Mande sphere, griots "are professionals in that they get something in return for what they do (some earn their whole livelihood from it), but not in the sense of selling their product" (Charry 2000, 97-98). The "music and songs of the griots," according to Guinean Sory Camara---Charry's informant---"escape the world of economic exchange, the law of supply and demand. It all takes place simply as if it were an occasion for demanding one's due, which one qualifies, however, as a gift." Unfortunately, "demanding one's due" or the dispersion of gifts does not provide a viable livelihood for many griots living in Africa or abroad. In search of new sources of patronage, griots have targeted the marketplace, which McCall describes as a "professional site" that "is crucial to social mobility" (1995, 183). Mande professionals have begun to actively market *jeliya* to the widest possible audience, viewing the "world itself as a transformative force," which is "shaped by the conflicts and contradictions of a capitalist world economy" (Steiner 1994, 1).

Diasporic griots in New York thrive upon the multitude of professional opportunities in the city's burgeoning commercial music industry; they commercialize and commodify their trade in order to appeal to a primarily Western milieu, showcasing the purely musical elements of their shared repertoires. Although a griot's words had once been the cornerstone of his trade, a griot's proficiency as an instrumentalist has become his most prized and trusted professional resource. In the "jam music" culture of New York's restaurants, bars, clubs, and concert halls (Van Buren 2001, 161), griots invite extensive collaboration with non-griot African and Western musicians, who provide additional support and inspiration for them. Mande professionals pique the interest of Western consumers (musicians and fans), who view them as repositories of

knowledge, ancient storytellers and oral historians, and embodiments of "Mother Africa." Their reputation in this regard favorably impacts the market value of *jeliya* and the demand for griots in general.

In Africa, an instrument is considered to be a "human extension" (Stone 1998, 9) that is comparable to a singer's voice, while in jam music the voice is viewed as a musical resource that is evaluated in absolute terms. This distinction is part of a recent phenomenon, which is restricted to Western contexts. The view of the singer's voice as one of many resources stands in stark contrast to the preeminence of the voice, and singers in general, within the Mande sphere. In the Mande sphere, the instrumentalist plays a supporting role as an accompanist to the vocalist, whose words inspire physical and visceral responses from an audience. Vocalists, who are frequently female (griotte), are the undisputed stars of performances, and they received a great degree of recognition in Africa for their verbal artistry (see Durán 1995).[2] A griotte's words and exhortations are valued far above the music or musicians that support her; for example; in the *Mandekalou* DVD (2004), a live concert recording from Bamako, Mali, singers, such as Guinean superstar Kandia Kouyaté, are paraded on stage. They showcase their vocal dexterity and virtuosity as the patrons applaud, while the instrumentalists are barely seen

[2] Griottes have had less success than griots, who are the renowned Mande instrumentalists, in diasporic contexts; in the late 1980s, Knight observed that women singers were not a viable part of the African music scene in Paris (see "Music Out of Africa: Jaliya in Paris." *The World of Music* 33 (1) (1991), 52-69), and this trend continued in New York where female vocalists have been less prominent. Durán observed that *jelimusow* were the "unrivaled stars" of the local music industry in Mali and Guinea during the 1990s, though *jeliya* as a verbal art prevails in West Africa, as the *Mandekalou* concert DVD from 2004 demonstrates. Since this dissertation is focused upon diasporic *jeliya*, I will refer to only griots, but I do not mean to imply that no griottes have relocated to New York; for example, vocalist Missia Diabaté performs with Kakande, and travels back and forth between Africa and the United States, admitting that she receives greater notoriety in Guinea and Mali.

or heard. Diasporic griots, in contrast, aspire to maximize each piece's groove potential in live performances, making their music "accessible across cultures" (Van Buren 2001, 161) since the griot's words are incomprehensible to Westerners.

As "artisans" or "shapers of sound," griots "transform events and actions" through their art (Charry 2000, 90). In New York, "deep *jeliya*," which Charry describes, has been absorbed into new modes of expression and hybrid styles. The hybridity of griot jam music places a new premium on musical creativity, as griots use familiar resources in new and interesting ways. Griots embrace their roles as entertainers and showmen, mediating exchanges among Western musicians and audiences in a manner comparable to that of Dūghā at the court of Mansa Sulayman during the fourteenth century. In initiating countless transactions in multiplex networks, diasporic griots create a niche for themselves in Western contexts, while they maintain a sense of accountability and social responsibility in traditional settings in which *jeliya* is still viewed as a verbal art (Hale 1998, 114-145). The rise of disc jockeys in the Mande sphere, however, quickly supplants the need for musicians, exacerbating the decline of the griot's verbal artistry.

Christopher Steiner's work, *African Art in Transit*, inspires the title of this chapter and its format, while Paul Stoller's *Money has No Smell: The Africanization of New York City* informs my interpretation in many respects. In this chapter, I examine the form and structure of traditional celebrations, and the role of the djembe (a single-headed goblet drum) as a mediator between traditional and urban contexts (see Polak 2006; 2007 and Zanetti 1990;1996). I discuss *jeliya* as a verbal art in the Mande sphere, surveying some of the most significant research on Mande griots in Africa by Knight, Durán, Jansen, Hale, and Charry. I focus upon *jeliya's* most salient verbal manifestations, which are

exemplified in a declamatory style of musical recitation (*sataro*) and are supported by instrumental playing (*foli*). With increased media exposure and attention beginning in the 1970s, *jeliya* was recast as groove-based jam music that inspired the primarily Western milieu to respond, act, and reflect despite its inability to comprehend the multivalent meanings of Mande praises and proverbs in performances. In New York, the precipitous decline of text orientation and the birth of the groove have occurred in tandem. Western musicians have used comparable musical competencies that they acquired from their previous experiences in related Afro-centric musical styles, such as jazz, to barter their way into the griot profession in New York. Extensive collaboration with non-griot musicians, which began rather innocently during the 1980s, underpins *jeliya's* transition onto the world's stage, and its subsequent emergence as a commodity and a commercial art in the world music sphere.

1.1.1 Overview of Musical Style, Terminology, and Concepts

Mande griots are hereditary professional musicians who play an integral role in the Mande communities of Senegal, Gambia, Mali, and Guinea, and New York, performing for a variety of occasions, which include naming ceremonies, concert parties, and wedding celebrations (see 1.2, The Griot's Art in the Mande Sphere, and 2.3.5, *Jeliya* in New York's Mande Sphere). The Mande griot sound and style is comparable to other indigenous styles of the African savannah region, which display much uniformity (DjeDje 2008, 167). Mande griots emphasize solo singing in the various Mande dialects with one or more instruments in accompaniment. The vocal parts are described in terms

of two contrasting vocal styles, *sataro* and *donkili* (or its Mandinka equivalent, *donkilo*).[3] *Sataro* is a heightened form of musical recitation that is melismatic and ornamented, and features extensive improvisation (see 1.2, The Griot's Art in the Mande Sphere, for detailed discussion of sataro). *Sataro* phrases form the basis of praise-singing and proverbial declamation, though they are highly irregular and unpredictable, as Knight (1984) has shown. *Donkili* refers to "the song aspect of *jeliya*" (Charry 2000, 311), and some native-speakers use it as an equivalent for the term, "music." It offsets the random quality of declamatory sataro singing with simple, strophic refrain melodies that are unique to specific pieces in the repertoire. *Donkili* performance features the most memorable tunes in griot music that allow musicians and listeners to distinguish between one piece and the next, especially if an instrumental accompaniment pattern has been recycled (e.g., "Tiramagan fasa," "Allah l'a ke," and "Kakande" use the same instrumental part, but have different *donkili* and texts that identify them).

The hereditary instruments of griots are the kora (harp), ngoni (lute), and balafon (xylophone). Each of these instruments predominates in different geographical regions of Mande West Africa and provides the basis of subtle differences among regional styles in Senegal, Gambia, Mali, and Guinea (see Charry 2000). Other instruments such as the guitar and drum sequencer (BOSS DR-5) have also become integral parts of griot performance practice, especially in rehearsals and the Mande sphere (see 2.3.5, *Jeliya* in

[3] Gambian Mandinka, Guinean Maninka, and Malian Bamana are the most prevalent Mande dialects in the region (Charry 2000, 16). Donkili (Maninka) and donkilo (Mandinka) are variants of the same concept, which combines two words, dòn (dance) and kili (call), to translate into English as "dance-call" or call to dance (Charry 2000, 405). Singers literally "create" or "lay down" a "dance-call" when they sing since the verb to sing requires either "da" (to create) or "laa" (to lay down) when spoken or used in a phrase.

New York's Mande Sphere and 4.2.3, Rehearsal Techniques and Practice). The guitar bridges the Mande and world music spheres, acting as a mediator of change and exchange. Instrumental playing or *foli* is described in terms of a set of contrasting terms, *kumbengo* and *birimintingo*. The term *kumbengo* has multiple meanings that vary with context, but its definition as a "recurrent theme" (see Durán 1981) or an accompaniument pattern is most significant. Charry describes the concept of *kumbengo* as "versions of named pieces" that manifest as recurring melodic or harmonic patterns (2000: 314). A *birimintingo* (solo), on the other hand, is a relatively long, descending melodic run that is most frequently improvised by instrumentalists. It is formulaic and idiomatic, and creates a range of embellishments upon the recurrent theme, thereby contrasting the regularity of the *kumbengo*. While the instrumental and vocal repertoires are separate, they are intimately linked since *kumbengo* and *birimintingo* are understood to be derivatives of vocal parts or based upon singing in general (see 1.2, The Griot's Art in the Mande Sphere).

These sets of terms comprise the basic principles associated with Mande vocal styles and instrumental playing. Roderic Knight (1973; 1984) discusses *sataro* in great detail, while Eric Charry (2000) provides the most thorough account of kumbengo as it relates to different instruments; he describes its counterpart, *birminitingo* (solo), as the part that an instrumentalist performs when there is no singing (2000: 314). I have focused upon instrumental playing in my own work as a collaborator, so it receives the greatest attention in subsequent chapters, especially in Chapters 4 and 5. As Charry has shown (2000: 314), the basic terminology of instrumental playing is divided into two parts in order to facilitate the transmission of this tradition to younger generations and to

outsiders. I use the term *groove* as a surrogate for the terms *kumbengo* and *birimintingo* (see 1.3.2, The Birth of the Groove). The concept of groove has multiple meanings and encompasses the most salient aspects of instrumental playing. Groove refers to a recurring pattern or to the sense of movement in music that draws listeners in and inspires them to respond. It is a fluid concept that varies from one performance or style to the next since instrumentlists (and vocalists) can perform grooves, while contributing to a sense of groove, which might be less tangible than parts or patterns that recur.

Jam music embodies a collective musical aesthetic in which grooves form the basis of "jams" or episodes of extended solos in live performances and on recordings. It is a catchphrase that refers to a style of music and performance that has been cultivated by "jam bands" such as the Grateful Dead, Phish, and Widespread Panic for over four decades. Jam bands have operated with great success on the periphery of the commercial music industry, gaining popularity through informal networks and the sale of bootlegged concerts. They draw on a number of styles to create hybrid music for a dedicated and enthusiastic fan base. In griot jam music, pieces are based almost entirely upon grooves, and the soloists use the available resources to create extended variations (see 4.2.5, Composition in Performance: "Mami Wata" and "Nanfulen"), combining elements of the groove and scalar playing within the parameters of a tone system. Unlike the Mande concept of solo (birimintingo), a solo in jam music is comparable to a solo in jazz, fusion, or rock music. It constitutes an extemporized composition in its own right and can be studied as a wellspring of ideas and formulaic expressions. While vocal and instrumental soloing is the most salient feature of griot jam music, improvisatory episodes are best viewed in relation to the grooves that support and the melodies that inspire them.

1.2 The Griot's Art in the Mande Sphere

Griots embody "a basic cornerstone of social organization" in Francophone West Africa, and they are potent symbols of traditional Mande society (Knight 1973, 28). They belong to an artisan caste of specialists (*nyamakalaw*), which has been maintained through endogamous lineages for centuries. Griots' roles in the Mande societies of the past were numerous; they served as advisors to kings, and as emissaries, mediators, genealogists, historians, praise-singers, and entertainers. While their trade is "learned over a lifetime and passed down through generations," griots specialize in one of three fields: speech (*kuma*) or the means through which stories, narratives, and proverbs are expounded; song (*donkili*), which refers to the "named pieces," such as "Sunjata," in their repertoire; instrument playing (*foli*) (Charry 2000, 90-91). A griot may be proficient in two of these areas, but he excels in just one field since each competency requires specific training and expertise.

Rainer Polak discusses the participatory structure of interaction in his study of traditional celebrations in Mali. For him, the djembe served as a mediator throughout his research on transition rites such as naming ceremonies or weddings, which "consist of one or two evening receptions preceding the main event (*denba-tulon*) in honor of the bride's honorary mothers (*denbaw*), who organize and finance the festivals" that comprise 80 percent of a professional drummer's work in Bamako (2006, 162). Polak proposes a bilateral view of performance in which audience members are active participants, suggesting four categories of involvement that inform three types of interaction. Weddings have emerged "as an almost exclusively female public domain"

(2007, 6), consisting of the organizers and financiers, the invited guests, the hired professionals, such as musicians and videographers, and the members of the community at large. Drummers and singers exhort patrons and mediate the various levels of interaction that are determined by patronymic status, one's position relative to the event (e.g., father of the bride; extended family member; passerby or visitor), and special position or activity roles at the reception. Social obligation to participate through dance binds these various groups and levels of interaction together since, as Polak emphasizes, "common participation" is "absolutely indispensable" and lies "at the heart of the success or failure of each celebration" (2007, 10).

Both Polak and Zanetti examine the degree to which the djembe, which "monitors" participation at weddings, and its repertoires have been appropriated as part of commercial African music within the last twenty years. The djembe first introduced Mande music to new audiences via traveling national ballet and folkloric groups, which featured only the most accomplished specialists (Zanetti 1996, 171) during the 1960s. For Zanetti, the traditional and modern styles of djembe playing represent "two distinct voices" (1996, 168) that have merged, informing a mutually intelligible language in villages and urban centers such as Conakry (Guinea) and Abidjan (Ivory Coast). Modifications to the instrument have paralleled the most recent musical developments for the djembe, which has become a "globalized instrument" (Polak 2006, 170). Zanetti observed that the ballet repertoires and presentation style in general greatly affected drumming in villages, resulting in the consolidation of drummers' repertoires, which brandished "new" techniques that drew from a synthesis of old and new, and served as a representation or simulation of professionalism in Mande society (1996, 171). While

ethnic-specific drum languages were lost, the griot's words endure and prevail at Mande celebrations.

Jeliya in the Mande sphere is primarily a verbal art since "most of the griots' functions" in the traditional sphere "involve words" (Hale 1998, 18), which evoke a wide range of emotional responses from listeners. While the precise meanings of praise formulae and proverbs are frequently unclear, "these expressions lie at the heart of every individual identity" whose history is etched within Mande genealogies. Even the most knowledgeable griots are unable to extrapolate the precise meanings of these phrases and expressions, which have been preserved by griots for centuries (Jansen 1994). The words of the griot, and the musical phrases that accompany, support, and identify them, are widely known throughout Mali and Guinea. They comprise the collective musical anatomy of Mande culture, which can be difficult to fully appreciate from a Western perspective.

As a genealogist and historian, the griot is a "human link between past and present" (Hale 1998, 20). When he recites a genealogy at a naming ceremony or in an epic performance, Mande patrons are challenged to measure their lives and achievements against their ancestral pedigrees (Hale 1998, 18, 20). A genealogy can have several implications; for a male adolescent, it may suggest competition (*fadenya*) with his father since "your father is your first *faden*" or rival, while, for others, in the words of linguist John William Johnson, it might establish an "inheritance of occult power" (Hale 2000, 20). Self-promotion is also a concern for griots in genealogical recitations, which they use to affirm their own authority by making explicit favorable references to the griot's art

in pieces such as "*Jeliya*." Griot Mamadou Kouyaté, the main informant for Tasmir Niane's version of the Sunjata epic, *Soundiata: An Old Epic of Mali*, asserts,

> I, Djeli Mamadou Kouyaté, am the result of a long tradition. For generations we have passed on the history of kings from father to son. The narrative was passed on to me without alteration and I deliver it without alteration, for I received it free from all untruth. (Niané 1965, 41)

The declamatory and improvised style of recitational singing, *sataro*, exemplifies the verbal artistry of *jeliya* in musical terms. *Sataro* may or may not include a named melody (*donkili*), which frequently serves as a refrain, and it comprises the most salient features of a griot's verbal manifestations (Knight 1984, 30). The *jamundiro* or "surname praise," *jali kumalo* "words of the *jali*," *mansalingo* "proverbs," and extemporized *jamundiro*, each address specific patrons for whom the pieces are composed. Each praise-worthy surname, such as Keita, Traoré, and Touré, has a set of praise lyrics, verbal formulae, and specific melodies (*donkili*) that are associated with it, and these texts make up the main body of surname praises or *jamudiro*; the praises, moreover, invoke the spirit of the family's principal ancestor and recall his chief attributes and/or achievements. Some ancestors are noted for their abilities as warriors, their propensity to accrue wealth, knowledge, and fame, or their undying loyalty.

Jali kumalo or the "words of the jeli" consist of a large body of miscellaneous texts that are "philosophical dwellings" on two main themes: (1) the advocacy of Islam and (2) moral judgements. These dwellings include comparisons, observations, and advice regarding proper behavior (Knight 1984, 32-33). Greetings and expressions of gratitude for patrons, references to wealth, and anecdotes of the past, which may suggest that there is something to be learned, also abound in the griot's words. Most of these lines are memorized and can be interpolated at any given point in a performance. They

address general topics, such as the interdependence between man and God (Allah) or human mortality. Through these words, the griot can maintain continuity in his verbal art while providing a contemporary view of past events and occurrences, which is a function that is nearly always in demand regardless of the specific context.

The third type of text included in musical recitations is the *mansalingo* or "proverb," which may also be considered a subset of "the words of the griot" that I discuss above. These lyrics, like *jali kumalo*, are committed to memory and address general topics, though they are frequently presented as metaphors. *Mansalingo* can also be set to *donkili* melodies; for instance, according to Knight the following verse recurs frequently since it summarizes the basic outlook of the griot:

> A chicken following the water carriers to the forest hasn't seen the women pounding millet in the compound. (A jali looks to known benefactors for support). (Knight 1984, 33)

The most significant aspect of *sataro* performance is the extemporized surname praise in which griots invoke ancestors or themes in order to publicly acknowledge the patron to whom the praise is addressed, or the piece is dedicated---a service for which remuneration is compulsory. This form of *jamudiro* extrapolates the basic message from a set of praise lyrics (e.g., "This name is worthy of praise"), which are addressed to Mande patrons. The extemporization elevates the status of the named individuals, while it impresses the audience with the singer's aptitude to contextualize through his references to the past. The audience members thus become an integral part of the composition (Knight 1984, 33). Texts are inserted between the more standard lyrics, which identify the individual and/or quote a known proverb directly, making the praise more personal and effective. There is a multitude of expressions that can accommodate the names of

people and places, and these formulae facilitate the rapid extemporization of lyrics suitable for any situation (Knight 1984, 34). This type of praise allows the griot to display his or her facility with the language and knowledge of the culture, which extend beyond the recitation of memorized text lines.

Instrumentalists, who figuratively make their instruments "speak" on their behalf, accompany vocalists in the Mande sphere, and instrumental playing (*foli*) is described with the vocalist's part in mind.[4] Grooves, patterns, and formulae (*kumbengolu*) frequently bear a special relationship to the *donkili*---the basic refrain melody of a piece that distinguishes it from the other compositions in the repertoire---while the extent to which grooves depart from these simple, syllabic, repeated tunes, determines the classification criteria of *kumbengolu*. Knight identifies three "types" of pattern: "parallel," "derivative," and "independent." Neither a basic melody nor an accompaniment, however, is "fixed," as Durán has observed, and the *donkili* and the *kumbengo* in compositions vary greatly "from one player, and one performance, to another" (Durán 1981, 191). Vocal melodies and instrumental patterns thus collectively provide the tonal resources in an instrumentalist's bag of tricks, which he uses to support the vocalist.

Kumbengolu are relatively short in duration, and their harmonic progressions are fairly simple; for example, many of these parts oscillate between two tones, which act as

[4] The verb "to speak" in Bamana is *foli*, and it is used to describe the instrumentalist's act of playing in some cases. A guitarist does not "play" the guitar, but rather "speaks" through his instrument. My referemce to speaking on one's behalf acts as a metaphor for how a guitarist's role can be conceived by griots such as Mackane Kouyate, whose remarks on one occasion support this understanding. Bamana, however, is not a tonal language such as Yoruba, and there are no "talking" instruments in griot music to my knowledge.

"roots," that are a whole step apart (e.g., C and D), while the tonal resources of *kumbengolu* in general are determined by the kora's construction and tuning. The two lowest and most audible pitches on the Mande harp---what Knight refers to as the timbango and its answerer---which are a fifth apart (e.g., F and C), serve as tonal anchors in many compositions. These two pitches are viewed as being interchangeable and synonymous, while the octave also marks the important pitches in each instrumental part. The timbango and its answerer, furthermore, are heard repeatedly and at key points of each *kumbengo*, providing a tonal frame of reference for the vocalist, and they provide a bass resonance in the kora part, which is frequently unaccompanied (Knight 1973, 222).

Specific bass-line patterns also mark the important points of harmonic change and repetition within groups of related *kumbengolu*. Knight establishes four separate categories for grooves, moving from the most to the least common type of pattern, which he describes as being "single-form" and "bipartite" (Knight 1973, 191). Patterns can also be classified in terms of their metric and rhythmic characteristics, which are determined by the number and grouping of pulses in the groove (e.g., 2, 3, 4, or 5). The most reliable indicator in determining the "identity" of a pattern on the kora, however, is the *konkondiro*----a tapping pattern that is performed in the back of a second kora, which fits each *kumbengo* in a particular manner; four basic tapping patterns are articulated at either regular or irregular intervals of duration, and they assume the names of pieces for which they are employed (e. g., the "Lambango" pattern). Knight suggests that the *konkondiro* often provides "important clues to the jali's conception of the music," though they are less germane and audible in ensemble performances (Knight 1971, 192).

Knight analyzes the first four minutes of a performance of "Lambango," which is regarded as one of the oldest songs in the Mandinka repertoire. He focuses upon the relationship between the *kumbengolu*, which are played on two koras, and the recitative style of singing (*sataro*) performed by the vocalist, Fatoumata Jebateh (see Knight 1984). The instrumental bass line groups the twelve pulses of the pattern into six beats, establishing the temporal framework in "Lambango." Knight categorizes fifty-one extemporized vocal phrases into separate breath groups in exploring the different ways the vocal part relates to the groove. He concludes that the *sataro* for "Lambango," like those of other pieces (e. g., "Suolou"), displays a "random" quality which contrasts with the "regularity" of the accompaniment. Over thirty-four different melodic profiles emerge from Knight's study; he uses the starting and ending pitches and the general contours of phrases as criteria in creating his inventory of six phrase types, which are labeled according to their frequency of occurrence. One feature is ubiquitous in each set of phrases: the vocalist's use of a step-wise, though sometimes tiered, melodic descent. In discussing "consonance" and "dissonance" in Mandinka music, Knight highlights the "stability" provided by pitches one and five ("the timbango and its answerer") within the heptatonic system and, conversely, the "lack of finality" of pitches two and six, and the significance of the tension-producing pitch four as a source of "dissonance." He concludes that by classifying a *kumbengo* based upon its relationship to the basic refrain (*donkili*), and extemporized vocal and instrumental passages (*sataro* and *birimintingo*), a "theory" of Mandinka music emerges, yet his "theory" only applies to a limited number of works, making it less useful than a more comprehensive theory.

Lucy Durán presents a slightly different view of the Mandinka kora repertoire by focusing exclusively upon its instrumental attributes. Her account provides a template for my forthcoming discussions and analyses, which examine the use of grooves, and their importance within the griot repertoire in New York. In her study of an instrumental version of "Tuta Jara" performed by Gambian griot Amadu Bansang Jobaté, Durán refers to the *kumbengo* as the "recurrent theme" and *birimintingo* as "variation and embellishment" (Durán 1981, 186). Jobaté employs four different recurrent themes that are interspersed with his own embellishments, making his performance of "Tutu Jara" immediately distinctive. Certain factors serve as unifying devices in his interpretation of this piece: the presence of a recurring rhythmic pattern (*konkondiro*), which marks four evenly spaced pulses; frequent alternation between duple and ternary metric groupings; the prevalence of a "key phrase," which identifies "Tutu Jara" and acts as "the point in the *kumbengo* to which all variation must return" (1981, 189).

Duran's "key phrase," which I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 4, is a melodic distillation or reduction of what is musically essential in a composition, and it provides the melodic scaffolding for the various parts. Jobaté's themes and variations, Durán explains, are frequently wed to the key phrase, which she transcribes as a two part voice-leading scheme, or, in many cases, they are stock ornaments and motifs that recur in an array of pieces. Jobaté also uses a playing technique referred to as *sariro* in which the strings of the kora are strummed while a simplified version of a melody is played in the lower register with the thumbs. Each of these types of variation is incorporated into Jobaté's performance of "Tutu Jara." More complex syntactic permutations correspond in length to two or more statements of the groove and are called "extended variation" by

Durán. In the end, Durán emphasizes that the "main theme" in a kora piece, or in any Mandinka piece, is only one of many facets in a large configuration that operate simultaneously on multiple levels in a given performance. Works consist of aural complexes in which parts interlock, overlap, and complement one another, providing a kaleidoscope of sound for musicians and audience members.

A survey of *jeliya* in the traditional sphere would be incomplete without further acknowledgement of Eric Charry's work, *Mande Music: Traditional and Modern Music of the Maninka and Mandinka People of Western Africa*, and his significant contributions in the area of Mande music scholarship. In fact, Knight and Durán's writings represent streams of knowledge and insight that feed into Charry's crowning achievement. In his study of professional musicians throughout the Mande world, Charry explores the four distinct spheres that call for griots in Mande music-culture. To paraphrase his categories, they include:

> (1) music related to hunters' societies and their legendary hunter heroes, sung to the accompaniment of the *simbi*, a 7-string gourd harp
> (2) music of the *jeli*, played on the traditional griot instruments, such as the *bala* and *kora*, which is associated with rulers, warriors, traders, and other patrons
> (3) drumming related to various life and agricultural cycles
> (4) modern electric groups largely dominated by guitar-playing *griots*, which draw from the other three spheres. (2000, 1-3)

Each of the first three spheres of Mande music in Africa has its own repertoire, and musicians, who are always mindful of "what is and what is not supposed to be within their purview," are keenly aware of the boundaries that separate these bodies of music. Griots in Africa and New York have collapsed these spheres, in one way or another, into a unified expression of the fourth sphere via the guitar, which "has pulled this music system and its traditional instruments into the theater of international popular music"

(Charry 2000, 10). *Jeliya*, formerly "made up of pieces associated with each of the jeli's instruments, with particular geographic regions, empires, family lineages, and kinds of people (e. g., warriors, leaders, merchants, or generous patrons)" (Charry 2000, 12), has absorbed the body of works related to hunters' societies and legendary hunter heroes, which griots perform in a variety of contexts on acoustic and electric guitars, as well as "traditional" instruments, with the addition of a trap set player, a drum sequencer---the BOSS DR-5---or other electronic instruments filling out the ranks of the ensemble. Even if "the pieces jelis play are all named," the titles of pieces are becoming superfluous and less relevant in diasporic environements; the basis of works seems to have become more finite, even crystallized into a canon of musical expression through the recomposition of familiar resources.

1.3 The Transition from the Mande Sphere to the World's Stage

Several griots benefited greatly from increased exposure via the mass media in the years following the decade of independence in West Africa (the 1960s); after inclusion in local radio programming, Mande musicians such as Salif Keita became recording artists and concert performers of international repute, capitalizing upon the appeal and marketability of African music abroad. African stars from outside the Mande sphere, such as Senegalese Wolof singer Youssou N'Dour, also helped propel the Mande music juggernaut by bringing the continent's premiere artists and popular music to a new milieu in the West. Musicians became cultural mediators, bridging "the distance between the field of production and field of consumption." They bartered their trade as performers and artists in an effort to satisfy "the cultural values and desires of two different worlds"

(Steiner 1994, 13-14). *Jeliya* took its first steps onto the world's stage as a commercial art, which became the basis of their trade in New York during the 1990s. Griots and Westerners worked hand in hand to promote *jeliya* to consumers, who acted as their chief beneficiaries in the West.

Griots began to address a wider audience during the 1970s with the assistance of writers, cultural critics, and academics, such as Charles Bird and John William Johnson. In 1978, linguist Charles Bird promoted a tour of American universities and colleges for Sekou Kouyaté, his wife Dionton Tounkara, and Nantenegwe Kamissoko, and, in spite of their inability to comprehend the Malinke lyrics, proverbs and praises, audiences were captivated by the Mande sound. Bird observed that "a polite attentive audience of two hundred was suddenly transformed into a snake dancing throng, caught up in the music and behaving in a way no one had expected," illustrating that

> West African griots could hurdle the barriers of space, language, and cultural context to touch an audience that had limited understanding of the distant continent. The new audiences for griots included not only university students but also researchers, educators, museum directors, librarians, fans of world music, and a vast diaspora of people in the Western hemisphere who wanted to more about their cultural heritage in Africa. (quoted in Hale 1998, 244-245)

Alex Haley---the author of *Roots* **(1976)**--created an interest in griots and an unparalleled awareness of West African professional musicians worldwide. Haley, who participated in the first scholarly conferences focused upon Mande people, demography, history, and culture, introduced griots to the Western milieu. *Roots*, which was not based entirely in fact, inspired several West African countries to begin oral history projects to rediscover their cultural past and identities that had been largely neglected or forgotten during the colonial era. According to one American scholar of African literature, David Chioni Moore, whom Haley cites, *Roots* should be appreciated as a "symbolic truth…a

world foundational text that focuses not simply upon the recreated origins of a single family but on the reality of a multiracial collection of thousands of people" (1998, 255). Griots in New York, like Haley, tap into an interest shared by a broad spectrum of people whose interest in griots, their art, and their esteemed heritage widely vary.

Roots was made into a television mini-series in 1977**.** The audience base for griots greatly expanded, while the griot network of contacts and collaborators became more inclusive, increasing in number and scope. It marked a watershed point, and it offered a benchmark for Afrocentric ideals, philosophy, and aesthetics that reached into the Western consciousness. By the 1980s, griots, such as kora patriarch Papa Susso, who still performs occasionally in New York, had developed a close rapport with promoters, who were instrumental in introducing griots to consumers in the United States (Hale 1998, 267). The occasional tours of American universities, which Bird first initiated, frequently led to extended artistic residencies for griots at educational institutions. Guinean balafon player Abou Sylla, for example, recently secured a position at the University of Florida as a teacher and artist in residence, following in the footsteps of Papa Susso and his protégé, New York griot Salieu Suso.

Jeliya's transition onto the world's stage had a tremendous impact upon the profile of the griot trade, affecting its style and presentation. While some griots, such as Amadu Bansang Jobaté, altered their approach very little, others embraced manifold change in their professional lives; for example, Foday Musa Suso did not appear in a *boubou*---the traditional attire for a griot---in many of his publicity photos. Instead, he wore modern clothing and jewelry, which, for most Muslim men, is strictly forbidden. Suso's music also incorporated many stylistic characteristics associated with

contemporary Western popular music, paralleling the "change in his worldview" (Hale 1998, 272). His polished sound and tight arrangements provide a foil to the commercial music of his griot contemporaries, such as Kasse Mady Diabaté (Djoss's brother) whose recordings do not conform to conventional Western pop standards. Griots chose to either embrace or reject hybridity in their trade, and their decisions directly affected their viability in New York.

Changes in context and audience were significant on both sides of the Atlantic during the 1980s. Griots in the Mande world, according to Durán, "see their role as having evolved as a result of the shift in the patronage----what we might term audience." She reports,

> perhaps the most encouraging trends of *jaliya* in the last decade is its use in local "pop" music. Many of the well-known bands of Manding countries, bands like the "Rail Band of Bamako," Mory Kanté, Salif Keita, and even some non-Manding bands like those of Youssou N'Dour and Baaba Maal, incorporate many traditional *jaliya* songs into their repertoire. Some of the personnel of these bands, especially the guitarists and percussionists, are members of the *jali* caste…The future of *jaliya* no doubt lies in the concert hall and recording studio, though without individual patronage, it is bound to alter radically in style. (quoted in Hale 1998, 273)

Durán's prediction seems almost prophetic in retrospect. Recording, collaboration, and live performances are the focal point of diasporic *jeliya*, allowing it to flourish in Western contexts, while *jeliya's* saliency, value, and utility in the traditional sphere have experienced a precipitous decline. Recent projects that target the consumer revel in gags, ploys, and novelty. Sekou Kouyaté of Ba Cissoko's group, who has been hailed the "Jimi Hendrix of the kora," uses a flanger, a wah-wah pedal, distortion, and delay to affect his Mande harp on recordings. I hesitate to classify the music of Dallam Dougou or Brewed by Noon (see Chapter 3) within any of Charry's four categories for

Mande music, which has become greatly affected by forms of representation in Western pop-culture. Has commercialization contaminated the griot trade, and will *jeliya* as a fine art be lost? As always, it is a matter of choice, or *situational selection*, as J. Clyde Mitchell (1966) refers to it, and there is a range of choices for Mande professionals in transit.

Some diasporic griots and griottes, such as Moussa Sissoko, Djekorea Mory Kanté, and Missia Diabaté, for example, have recently returned to Africa after only a few years in New York. Sissoko and Kanté will probably never return to the West, while Diabaté visits on an intermittent basis to perform, and to see her partner, Famoro. As a vocalist, Missia is highly valued in Africa where *jeliya* as a verbal art prevails and is predominant (see footnote #2). In each of their cases, the choice to stay in New York or to return to Africa was informed by overwhelming ambivalence since the conventional responsibilities of griots (and griottes) in the traditional sphere are not always compatible with the criteria of commercial artistry (see "Obligation and Artistry" in Chapter 2). Griots can choose to remain hereditary professional praise singers, musicians, and entertainers with well defined social responsibilities (e.g., Kanté, whose sister insisted "my brother is a griot" and "not an artist"); they can embrace modernity at the expense of their traditional roles (e.g., Foday Musa Suso); or they can straddle the two worlds of obligation and artistry (e.g., Missia and Djoss Diabaté), which is an activity that Djoss Diabaté describes in plain terms during an interview with Ryan Skinner (Skinner 2005, 102-103). While these choices might seem limited, the opportunities for social mobility have increased drastically for griots in the West. Djoss Diabaté proclaimed that "In America, you can do anything." As I discuss later, the allure of material accumulation

has made some griots more prosperous than diasporic patrons, who have struggled to make ends meet in many cases.

Banning Eyre's accounts of Djelimady Tounkara's US tour in 2002 illustrate the degree to which Western involvement has impacted the griot trade in the last decade. His experiences parallel my own in nearly every detail since he acted as a researcher, student, and collaborator, fulfilling a multitude of roles simultaneously. Eyre enthusiastically explained,

> This month a longstanding dream of Djelimady's and mine is coming true. He is bringing his acoustic group to tour in the United States. This will be the first time American audiences will have to experience directly the acoustic guitar mastery with which Djelimady first seduced me nearly a decade ago. I've signed on as road manager for the tour--a first!--so I'll be at every show, hawking Djelimady's CDs and my book, and dealing with all the adventures that inevitably accompany a tour of this sort.[5]

The tour commenced on the west coast and moved eastward through the midsection of the country. Tounkara and his group performed for enthusiastic audiences in concert halls and college auditoriums, and conducted workshops for music students, who desired to learn the Manding repertoire for guitar and other instruments. The scene in Crowell Hall at Wesleyan University---Eyre's alma mater and the institution at which Mande music specialist Eric Charry is employed---was reminiscent of Bird's account of the response to griots in 1978; audience members danced and were moved by performances in spite of their inability to understand the singers' Malinke praises, proverbs, and texts. The tour concluded in Boston and New York, where Tounkara's group performed at Symphony Space---one of Manhattan's premiere concert venues.

[5] see *On the Road in Griot Time: Part 1*, tour dispatch on afropop.org website.

Eyre, who served primarily as the road manager on Tounkara's tour, both facilitated and benefited from the presentation of *jeliya* as a commercial art, though the clerical work that was required of him comprised the "thankless" part of this endeavor. Eyre reported,

> Samba Diabaté, the group's extremely talented rhythm guitarist, liked to rib me about my work. "Still calculating?" he kept asking me, and when I wasn't on the computer, he would ask, "Isn't there more calculating to do?" To him, this was very funny. To math-challenged me, it was less so, and it made me realize that the amount of work involved in accounting for all the CDs, sales figures, cash and checks, tour cash, per-diem money, pay from gigs and workshops, expenses, receipts, and so on, was mystifying to these musicians.[6]

Eyre's administrative skills were crucial to the tour's success. His duties as a facilitator were comparable to the tasks of itinerant traders in West Africa and New York, who act as middlemen in the sale and trade of African art objects. Western collaborators, such as Eyre and myself, frequently assess the necessary demands of performance contexts, which include determining the commercial viability of goods and services (e.g., CDs, books, instrumental instruction, concert performances etc.), ensuring that *jeliya* is presented in a favorable environment so that the consumer---whether a music student at Wesleyan or a world music enthusiast at Symphony Space---is satisfied. Without collaborators, who, as one can see, wear many hats, the transactions between griots and the wide array of consumers could not be consummated, and the transition from the traditional sphere to the marketplace via staged performances would be rough, and in many cases, impossible.

Jeliya's commercialization, in the Eyre/Tounkara case, can be considered from a number of vantage points. Tounkara's trade skills, proficiencies, and music were

[6] see *On the Road in Griot Time: Part 5*, tour dispatch on afropop.org website.

appreciated as a form of entertainment on the concert stage, utilized as an educational resource for students, and sold as a commodity via his CD, while Eyre's book served as a promotional tool for him as a close collaborator. Knowledge of the trade was crucial in these transactions, just as Christopher Steiner maintains in *African Art in Transit*. Griots frequently showcase their knowledge of performance, which is a viable professional resource for them in the marketplace. It acts as a form of currency or capital that they use as leverage in promoting themselves and their music. Recognized as repositories of Mande cultural history and musical traditions, griots exploit their collective knowledge of Africa's idealized past in the modern sphere, where *jeliya* is frequently appreciated from a distance as a precious artifact or an excursion into the exotic. Their sheer musical prowess and renowned facility as instrumentalists, or, in the case of Abdoulaye "Djoss" Diabaté, as vocalists, on the concert stage and in recordings, allow them to assert their presence in nearly every performance situation.

Griots promote themselves as ambassadors of African culture in the West, and they embody an ideal of traditional society, which becomes a fetish for Westerners in a metaphorical sense. Hale accounts for the multitude of pop-culture references to griots that abound in the media, which directly impact Western perceptions of them and their music. Musicians and writers alike have used the term "griot" to invoke authority and insight in different forms of artistic expression; for the African American community, according to Hale, the term signifies respect for those who knew about the past, are artists in various media, or are simply high achievers (Hale 1998, 4). Yet, African American involvement with diasporic griots in New York largely restricted to these rhetorical terms, and the paths of Mande griots and African Americans rarely seem to cross. In

fact, only one African American musician---Kelenia bassist Joe Sanders---has performed with griots on regular basis over the course of my research, while African Americans rarely attend gigs at venues such as the Zinc Bar and Barbès (see Chapter 2).

Diasporic *jeliya* has become "part and parcel of a global phenomenon" that Stoller describes as the "commodification of culture," which is not constrained by class, gender, ethnicity, or one's expectations (2002, 76). The griot's art has become a symbol whose saliency is measured in terms of its marketability. The griot has become a caricature of sorts in the minds of Westerners, who provide reliable sources of patronage for Mande professionals in New York and abroad. Griots are entirely amenable to this process, which provides them with an unprecedented degree of freedom in their personal and professional lives. Creativity, Fabian observes (1998, 26), is frequently an integral part of social change. In expanding their network of associates, Mande professional musicians aspire to a kind of cosmopolitanism to which Turino refers in his work *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe*; diasporic griots share goals and objectives of self-advancement through education and material accumulation with their Western brethren, distancing themselves from their quasi-feudal past. Westerners, like Eyre, have acted as middlemen, who facilitate *jeliya's* transition onto the world's stage, mediating the process as producers and consumers in the urban marketplace.

The New York diasporic *jeliya* commercial music scene began to take its current shape during the mid to late 1990s with arrival of Keba "Bobo" Cissoko. Key members of the griot network first met and performed in Cissoko's group, Tamalalou (see Chapter 3). The relocation of griots to New York, however, was not without precedent; as Van

Buren has shown, Mande drummers, who defected from touring folkloric companies such as Les Ballets Africains during the 1980s and 1990s, were among the first Mande musicians to relocate. These musicians were "principal figures of the expatriate West African Manden music and dance world in New York" and "key players in the local development of a Western African transnational cultural identity through performance" (Van Buren 2001, 128). Following in the footsteps of Papa Ladj Camara, who first arrived in New York during the 1950s, drummers, such as M'Bemba Bangoura who Peter Fand also cites as a "patriarch" of African music in New York, utilized the Mande performance network in order to encourage collaboration "in numerous performance programs and teaching engagements" (Van Buren 2001, 128-129). In the Mande dance culture of the 1980s and 1990s, three genres prevailed: the *dundunba* of Guinea; the *sabar* dance of Senegal; the masked dance complex of the Ivory Coast. Artists such as N'Deye Marie Basse consolidated their repertoires from these principal and distinct genres in order to develop a "pan-Manden performance practice," which was germane in a variety of settings in New York. As Zanetti observed with drummers in Africa, the distinct voices of the past and present were blended in the spirit of hybridity, which diasporic *jeliya* espouses and expresses in nearly all of its incarnations. Cissoko's group rehearsed at Fareta Dance and Drum, which was a dance school that was located in lower Manhattan. The dance and drum milieu thus provided an ideal venue for intercultural "artistic convergence," which Van Buren discusses and I summarize in the next chapter (see 2.3), providing a more concrete and comprehensive view of all the New York City scenes in which griots are (or have been) active. As Sunkett has shown (see 1.4.1), the drum and dance are powerful mediators of change and exchange that encourage the art of

cultural brokerage within and amongst diverse groups. Percussionist Mackane Kouyaté, who arrived to New York in 2000 and is a relative of Djeli Sory Kouyaté, openly acknowledged that griots pursue a wide range of opportunites in the Western milieu. Yet the griot's art is transformed in mediated forms of expression, which are commodified in New York and beyond.

For Mande professional musicians and Hausa street vendors, who sell African masks and statues, which they refer to as "wood," as souvenirs and tourist art in order to turn a profit, "art is…a commodity, like any other" that they "hope will bring a good return in the New York market;" for both groups of traders, "money," as the West African adage dictates, "has no smell" (Stoller 2002, vii). For griots living abroad, however, their music is not merely "wood," but rather a living, breathing entity to which they feel connected, either through tradition or artistry. Even if "money has no smell," *jeliya* continues to resonate with these musicians. Griots promote *jeliya* to the Western milieu, while they continue to fulfill traditional roles at community-based events, which are loosely referred to as West African "parties" or concerts by griots and their associates (see Chapter 2.3.5, *Jeliya* in New York's Mande Sphere). Like the Hausa traders, though, they have cashed in on the Western preoccupation with them as symbols of Africa in constructing long-distance trade networks to facilitate the sale of their goods and services. Griots broker their music, heritage, and skills as performers, which act as selling points for them in the urban marketplace. Whether griots promote an idealized or simulated conception of African music or culture to a concert audience or a bar crowd, or collaborate with Western non-griot musicians in creating new musical soundscapes, *jeliya's* market value informs the new standards of commercial artistry.

Griots are teachers as well as performers; the public programs coordinator of the Museum of African Art thanked kora player Salieu Suso "for presenting a wonderful educational storytelling" performance at the museum, which was a part of a family program series in 2001. In November 2006, I performed with Djoss and members of Super Mande at the 92nd St. Y for New York City elementary and middle school children, who were learning about Africa and its culture in school. We traveled to Williams College where our concert was preceded by a demonstration and a lecture by Abou Sylla, who spoke at length during our engagement. Sylla continues to market himself as an educator at schools and universities, such as the University of Florida; even collaborators such as Andy Algire use their expertise in educational settings, frequently performing for students across the tri-state area. Griots, on the other hand, are a vanguard of the world music industry, positioning themselves at the crossroads of the traditional sphere and the urban marketplace, and recasting their profession as a "contiguous contemporary expression, developing on both sides of the Atlantic as a component of popular culture" (Fabian 1998: 26). Their commercial artistry and opportunism have provided an unprecedented degree of social mobility for them, and led to other significant changes as well. The move onto the world's stage has had significant consequences that manifest in the assigning of new roles to instrumentalists, who speak on behalf of vocalists in many cases on the world's stage. The griot's words are lost in transit and are superfluous in the minds of Westerners.

1.3.1 The Decline of *Jeliya* as a Verbal Art

Sataro or recitational singing, which provides the basis of the griot's art in the Mande sphere, has experienced a precipitous decline in diasporic contexts since it does not speak to the concerns of the host milieu. No longer do griots rely exclusively upon their words to inspire listeners to act or reflect. As Bird's account from the 1970s reveals, griots willingly "hurdle the barriers of space, language, and cultural context to touch an audience" that has a "limited understanding of the distant continent." Van Buren suggests some criteria for diasporic *jeliya* in New York, maintaining that "the change from royal court status to marketable entertainment" has "led to the promotion of three types of performance" in general (Van Buren 2001, 162):

> (1) the *donkili* topical and love songs for performances at social engagements within the community
> (2) the *gbobili* praise songs for patrons
> (3) the *kuma* speech-song commemorative recitations, abridged classical songs, and historical epics performed for general audiences

Distinctions among vocal genres have become less important in the world music sphere and various marketplaces. Mande vocal genres are text-oriented and conditioned by transactions that are restricted to the Mande sphere (see 2.3.5, *Jeliya* in New York's Mande Sphere), and few outsiders can appreciate their significance. Only Mande speakers can understand the words of griots, though Mande singers inspire meaning in their vocal performances that are judged and evaluated upon their music merits. While *jeliya* is not a verbal art in the world music sphere, it remains a vocal art for singers such as Djoss, Missia Diabaté, and Ismael Kouyaté. The decline of text orientation in favor of the music's purely musical aspects is not a phenomenon unique to diasporic *jeliya*, as several authors, including Manuel, Fiol, and Ragland, have shown. In a recent article entitled "Mode, Melody, and Harmony in Traditional Afro-Cuban Music: From Africa to

Cuba," Manuel and Fiol concludes that the "regularization and consolidation" of Afro-Cuban traditional music occurred as fluency in Yoruba declined in Cuba; song melodies and texts changed, while musicians introduced their own alterations to complement this tide of hybridity and creolization that became a predominant force in Afro-Cuban folkloric genres beginning in the 1960s (2007, 70). These processes are abundantly evident in the realm of *batá* drumming, though they have also inspired a certain degree of refinement and standardization in the approach of other musicians as well (2007, 71). Manuel compares consolidation in Cuban music to similar phenomena in the diasporic traditions of Trinidad and Guyana where the emphasis on texts in "tan-singing" has experienced a precipitous decline. As fewer and fewer Indo-Caribbean peoples spoke and understood Hindi, musicians began to focus upon the "purely musical, and especially rhythmic, aspects of the inherited music tradition" (Manuel and Fiol 2007, 71).

Ragland observes a similar phenomenon in her comparison of Mexican norteño and Texan (tejano) musics. She writes,

> For the norteño musician, the accordion's primary role is to introduce the song and each verse. It provides the musical framework for the telling of the story. In tejano conjunto, the accordion takes on a more central role, to guide dancers and as means for the accordionist to show off his playing and personal style (which is very often the way Tejano listeners identify the group). (2006, 214)

Whether crossing the border or the Atlantic, the decline of text orientation occurs frequently in diasporic musics. While spoken languages are lost, new musical discourses emerge that are marked by hybridity. As Manuel's discussion of Indo-Caribbean "tan-singing" suggests, contact between diverse groups of people, whether through colonial conquest, globalization, or the spread of religion, has led to manifold change in India's classical traditions, which predate many recent forms of diasporic music, such as

bhangra, as they have evolved through the centuries. Manipulative processes in music, which are always at the discretion of the practioners of a specific style or genre, should be embraced since novelty is frequently the mother of invention. Genres and styles that do not adapt well to new environments are consigned to a slow death, while consolidation can act as an adaptive strategy for arts in transit. As Knight points out, griots can "move easily into new contexts" if they are versatile, flexible, and open to engaging in new transactions that increase the overall marketability of their trade. Salif Keita, who has enjoyed great success worldwide, has been drawn to the novelty of styles that originated in the West, incorporating elements of jazz-fusion and rock into his conception of the Mande sound. Although he is not a griot, he has had a profound impact upon griot music and its popularity, and his songs have become incorporated into the active repertoires of New York-based griots.

The droves of onlookers, fans, and aficionados that flock to the griots' gigs throughout New York City rarely require translations of texts in order to enjoy a performance. In fact, if words and their meanings were important to these individuals, Mande griot music would not be among their musical preferences, unless they speak Bamana, which is almost never the case. Spoken verbal descriptions or, in the case of commercial recordings, liner notes occasionally inform and prepare listeners in this respect. Programmatic references are quickly forgotten once the band commences with a lengthy composition, replete with flashy introductions and solos. Verbal explanations are lost in the aural spectacle in which a piece can exceed twenty minutes in length.

1.3.2 The Birth of the Groove

Instrumental grooves, patterns, and formulae form the basis of the griot repertoire, allowing griots and collaborators to move easily from one context to the next. A groove is a "persistently repeated pattern" or an unspecified, although "ordered sense of something that is sustained in a distinctive, regular, and attractive way, working to draw the listener in" (Kernfeld 2002, 100). Kernfeld expounds upon the topic of groove as follows:

> The meaning of the term "groove," and the question of whether or not it is present in a performance, is every bit as arguable and qualitative as "swing," and if possible even more elusive, because it applies so far beyond the world of jazz. Within jazz circles, Gold identifies the phrase "in the groove" – which from around 1936 to 1945 (i.e., during the height of the swing era) was in widespread use in referring to jazz performances which were "excellent" or, by extension, "sophisticated" – and the term "groove" – referring in the 1940s and 1950s to "routine, preference, style, source of pleasure." These usages underline the importance of aesthetic judgements in identifying the presence of, or evaluating, a groove; by further extension, a groove might perhaps be boring, or bad, or an inept appropriation.
>
> The definitive early use on record is the swing instrumental *In the Groove* (1937, Decca 1621), by Andy Kirk's big band. Other well-known titles from the swing and bop era include Chick Webb's *In the Groove at the Grove* (1939, Decca 2323), with Ella Fitzgerald singing the lyrics, and small-group pieces by Dizzy Gillespie (*Groovin' High*, 1945, Guild 1001) and Earl Bostic (*That's the Groovy Thing!*, 1946, Gotham 104). Although the present dictionary recognizes these broad and continuing usages (noting, for example, the appearance of Bernard Purdie in the year 2000 in a soul-jazz trio, the Masters of Groove), the term "groove" or "groove-based" refers herein to group performances or recordings in which the achievement of a groove seems to be the single foremost musical quality. Characteristically (but with no intent of excluding other possibilities), such usage tends to operate with reference to styles from the latter third of the twentieth century which utilize characteristic accompanimental ostinatos drawn from African-derived dance music, whether African-American (e.g., soul, funk, disco, rap, hip-hop), Afro-Cuban dance music (e.g., salsa), or Afro-Brazilian (samba), or some other such fusion. (Kernfeld 2002, 100)

Grooves, in nearly every sense of the word, which are learned, shared, and frequently gleaned from recordings, recur within and among pieces in the griot repertory. The acquisition of knowledge in this regard, which is the foremost tactile and tacit task at

hand for the practicing musician, entails intense practice and rehearsal of a specific set of skills and resources that are both specific to the griot's repertoire and an integral part of groove-based griot jam music in New York. Charry observes that Mande musicians learn and practice "exemplars of pieces" so that they can cultivate skills for such endeavors, just as jazz musicians transcribe and practice the solos of their favorite players (Charry 2000, 341). Grooves in griot music, like rhythm changes and blues in jazz, are templates for extemporization that invite extensive substitutions and creative appropriations in general. Sylvain Leroux remarked to me, quoting Pablo Picasso, good artists "borrow," while great artists "steal," so pieces are never "copyrighted" within this network of musicians. In fact, instrumentalists are heralded for drawing inspiration from other musicians, and actively encouraged to study other players.

Van Buren describes the music of Keba Cissoko's group, Tamalalou, and its repertoire as consisting of "hybrid jam music" which is "accessible across cultures" (Van Buren 2001, 161). As I previously mentioned, "jam bands" are musical groups whose albums and live performances relate to a fan culture that originated with the 1960s group The Grateful Dead and continued in the 1990s with a new generation of bands such as Phish and Widespread Panic. Their performances, which are frequently hawked as "bootleg" recordings, feature extended musical improvisations ("jams") over rhythmic grooves and chord patterns, and are frequently characterized by long sets of music that cross genre boundaries. Groove in music inspires performers and listeners to dance, and to move parts of their body in a specific manner (e.g., "tap the foot' and "bop the head" among other coordinative responses). It is a unifying criterion in the repertoires of

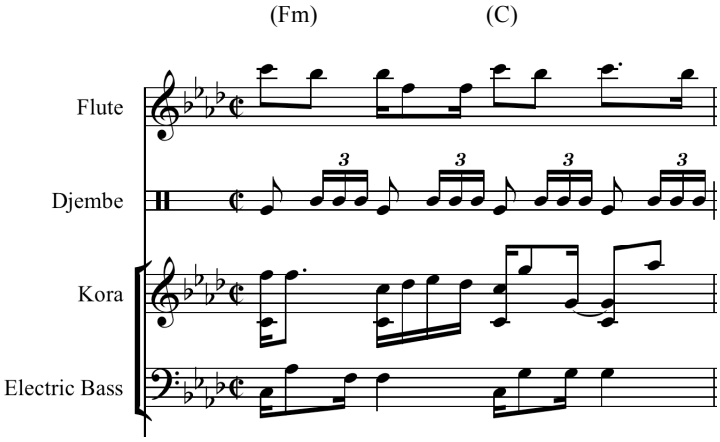
groups, such as Tamalalou, and later Source and Kakande, whose works focus upon this compositional device.

It is precisely the jam band model that griots and collaborators embrace in bringing their hybrid music to Western audiences. One informant commented that Source's songs are frequently conceived as "excuses to solo." Instrumental improvisations are intended to entertain and captivate audiences in clubs, such as the Zinc Bar in West Greenwich Village, where fans relinquish their inhibitions by dancing well into the early morning. We both openly recognized in our discussion that extensive extemporization and spontaneity are criteria that draw members of the Western milieu to griots, such as Abdoulaye Diabaté, and their music. Indeed, these qualities, which are contingent upon instrumental proficiency and sound musicianship in general, have made *jeliya* marketable entertainment in New York.

In Tamalalou's composition "Wa Salaam Aleikum," a groove or a "persistently repeated pattern" is clearly established by Cissoko's kora part, and intensified by the other instruments, which also include electric bass, *tambin* (the Fulani flute), and percussion. On the recording, the clapping of an audience member on the "beat" becomes clearly audible as this "jam" builds momentum before taking flight. Instrumental solos predominate throughout the performance and are clearly the main compositional concern in this hybrid music. Kora players, such as Cissoko, conceptualize pieces in terms of two complementary components: the "recurrent theme" (*kumbengo*) and the "variation and embellishment" (*birimintingo*) (Durán 1981, 191). The combination of the recurrent theme with other melodic details, such as the vocal refrains and episodes, and bass and percussion parts, form the basis of the groove, and the

variations and embellishments that occur as the performance unfolds. More importantly, the coordination of instrumental and vocal parts contributes to the overwhelming sense of groove that is pervasive in Tamalalou's repertoire. Instrument-based grooves are the building blocks upon which songs are created and identified, while groove-based "jams" are the focal points of performances. Both the traditional and modern repertoires of griot music are largely conceived as extemporizations over recurring instrumental patterns, making them well suited for hybrid jam music in Western contexts.

Ex. 1 "Wa Salaam Aleikum"



My notation in Ex. 1, which is one of several transcriptions that I considered to represent the groove, captures one cycle in performance or a "moment of articulation" (Gerstin 1998, 157), and is a kaleidoscopic snapshot of "Wa Salaam Aleikum" which exceeds seven and a half minutes in length. Keba's performance is noteworthy for its economical use of musical resources; his kora part establishes the groove, recurring throughout the piece, while the flute part alternates between a variant of the kora part and the phrase transcribed above in Ex. 1, as well as numerous extemporizations. The kora accompaniment or *kumbengo* oscillates between two minor sonorities built upon the first (F) and fifth (C) degrees in the heptatonic tone system, which is equivalent to an f

(natural) minor scale or mode (as the key signature indicates). Peter Fand's bass part both anchors and reinforces the kora part, as well as the prevailing harmonies.

Most notably, the off-beat rhythmic accents on the first and third beats of the measure coordinated amongst the individual parts greatly contribute to the groove in this piece. Keba's kora part and bassist Peter Fand's bass ostinato create localized senses of harmonic instability by emphasizing the fifths (C and G) of the respective chords (Fm and C), which serve to enhance the piece's drive and forward propulsion. The groove is also intensified by the djembe part whose recurring figure also informs subsequent instrumental extemporizations. Variations and embellishments frequently create harmonic implications in which fourths and fifths are mixed and matched with thirds, or even played simultaneously, over a prescribed root, resulting in crunchy sonorities that are an integral part of griot music in general.

1.4 *Jeliya* in the World Music Sphere and Marketplace

The world music industry is a burgeoning bubble that has yet to burst. Inflation in the griot trade is a tremendous impetus and stirs a great deal of excitement for Mande professionals, who are frequently handsomely compensated for their commercial artistry, which is steeped in tradition, but is produced expressly for the sale to outsiders. Djoss and others have been remunerated with large sums of cash for concert performances and tours, and, as savvy traders, they prefer to be paid more for less. Their "copies," simulations, and parlor tricks are potent forces in the marketplace, while their trade skills remain wed to certain "culturally embedded aesthetic and formal standards" (Steiner 1994, 35); for example, their traditional repertoire retains many of its salient musical

criteria, but showcases an alternate side of the same coin as my discussions of the decline of text orientation and the birth of the groove illustrate.

Mande griots cultivate new musical landscapes through extensive collaboration working under the auspices of the Western milieu and marketplace. Recent commercial recordings, such as *African Guitar Summit* (2005) and *African Guitar Summit II* (2006), which have received unprecedented acclaim in Canada, attest to the saliency of griot music in diasporic contexts and its marketability worldwide. Guinean griots Naby Camara and Alpha Yaya Diallo helped comprise the all-star line up of nine musicians, who gathered in Toronto to participate in the unique recording project for CBC Radio's On Stage radio program, which yielded the first of the two recordings. African guitar–driven popular styles, such as highlife and rumba, and Mande *jeliya* are combined in an endless stream of musical appropriation on *African Guitar Summit*; all of the participants listened and danced in the control room while the recordings were made, and the griot's exhortations, in the case of Camara and Diallo, which were once reserved for patrons in the Mande sphere, were aimed at the other studio musicians, who hailed from different regions of the continent (e.g., Rwanda, Burundi, Madagascar, and Ghana). Producer Tom Fraracci observed that the musicians, who had been "dropped like seeds" in Canada, "quickly became a collective force committed to supporting each other's music and celebrating new influences" (Fraracci 2004). Naby Camara was elated by the experience, commenting to Sylvain Leroux that he received a great sum of money for his work. In fact, Camara implored Leroux to move back to Canada so that he could also benefit from the increased market demand for African music in Toronto.

The social use value of *jeliya* has changed drastically with *jeliya's* move into the marketplace via the recording studio. *Jeliya* in the Mande sphere, which comprises a griot's rights, responsibilities, and obligations, and escapes the world of economic exchange, the laws of supply and demand, is recast as a commercial art, whose worth is measured by its price; it brandishes its broad appeal as jam music for listening, reflection, and dancing, which is commodified with CD and internet sales worldwide. Diasporic *jeliya* thus addresses a new audience, which, according to Durán's account (quoted in Hale 1994: 273), represents a "shift in patronage." Traditional pieces such as "Duga," according to Djoss, that were once reserved to praise specific social groups (e.g., heroic hunters) in Africa, while explicitly excluding others (e.g., women), are appropriated differently in the marketplace and appear in abundance on CDs for mass consumption. Praise songs such as "Tiramagan," which account for most of the griot's traditional works, are viewed as a collective musical resource, while the original titles of pieces become less relevant; no longer under the exclusive purview of Mande patrons, as a commercial art and commodity, the griot's trade renegotiates its worth in the urban marketplace.

According to Marxist economic theory, a commodity, which can also be a service, assumes its value according to the quantity of labor, whether physical, mental, or spiritual, that is needed to produce it. Value and the quantity of labor or the services provided are analogous. A commodity has "use value," "exchange value," and a "price" which all must be conceived separately. As a form of entertainment, the griot's art in the African diaspora satisfies human needs, wants, and desires, whether real or imagined, assuming a particular social use value via recordings and on the world's stage that it does

not have in traditional settings. In the Mande sphere, the griot trade is subsumed in ritual transaction, while in the marketplace, the commercial artistry of the griot predominates and reigns supreme. As artists, unlike migrant traders, griots feel connected to their products, which they use to measure or gauge the quality of their work.

Imitation is the highest form of flattery (and in some cases it is used as a means for contestation), and griots embrace the art of simulation in their trade. While their stage parodies of the griot's art may confound distinctions between truth and fiction, what is "real" or what is not, simulation is a focal point in the griot repertoire as Mande professionals elevate the feelings of nostalgia for their cultural past to new heights (Stoller 2002: 85). Fabian observes that Africans "probably long before modern colonization, have employed mimetic modes of confronting and construing alterity that produced, among other things, some of the most striking creations of African visual and performative art" (Fabian 1998, 26-27). Popular and modern African musical repertories have relied heavily upon mimetic modes of creativity as a means for innovation. Kubik's study of Malawian Daniel Kachamba amplifies this point, and has inspired me throughout my own research.

Daniel Kachamba, whose surname translates as "one who smokes hemp" in his native Chichewa (Kubik 1975: 8), developed his repertory of playing styles and pieces by copying South African *kwela* music. Kubik provides extensive documentation of Kachamba's activity as a composer, which yielded two hundred and sixty-nine compositions by his own account (1975, 26-29). Kubik classifies Kachamba's output in three categories, which document the Malawian's stylistic development and compositional prowess. They are:

(a) *Pieces taken from records*: Kachamba imitated, adopted, and adapted select *kwela* works, which formed the basis of his repertoire and style. He learned the lyrics of songs, which were frequently in Zulu, phonetically without knowing their precise meanings, while creating new texts in his own language for many of the songs that he gleaned from records; Kubik observes, "this is a common experience among villagers in Kachamba's environment, who dance to South African records played on a radiogram" and "invent a Chewa text that is usually close phonetically to the original" (Kubik 1975, 27).

(b) *Pieces assembled from isolated elements of other music*: Kachamba used "isolated short passages or parts" (e.g., grooves) that he lifted from recordings as "the building blocks for his own compositions."

(c) *Original compositions*: Kachamba's original compositions were inspired by his personal experiences. They began as instrumental works for solo guitar that Kachamba finished after presenting to the other members of his group, which included his younger brother Donald and Kubik on occasion. Kachamba frequently worked out ideas for different compositions simultaneously, admitting "You must know I have always many new songs in my mind" (Kubik 1975, 29).

Simulation underpinned and inspired Kachamba's compositional endeavors during the 1960s and 1970s. He created new texts for pieces, which he learned through

aural transmission, while generating original compositions from isolated elements that he gleaned from his favorite *kwela* recordings. Like rumba musicians in the Congo or highlife musicians in Anglophone West Africa, who combined Christian hymnody and traditional grooves in developing viable dance band music after the World War II, or Nigerian *jùjú* musicians, Kachamba's training began with various forms of mimesis. Kubik describes Kachamba's activities in terms of "re-Africanization" since *kwela* has its basis in African American swing music, which he believes is also closely related to traditional forms of African music via the blues. Contact between peoples and their cultures inevitably yields innovation in the sphere of Afro-centric arts, which have always been greatly affected by Anglo-Americans; this story continues to unfold with griots and their collaborators in New York.

Western-inspired dramatic forms imitate and simulate the griot's life as well; for example, the griot plays an integral part or role in African Francophone theatre of the post colonial era, whose plays reenact the oral histories of traditional culture in order to build cultural awareness and instill pride in African peoples. As a historian steeped in tradition, the griot is viewed as a repository of knowledge, a "library," mediating the reenactment of idealized traditional culture for all participants (e.g., playwright, actor, and audience member) in chains of transactions (Conteh-Morgan 1994: 61-85). In theatre, griots copy themselves in order to satisfy the expectations of their sources of patronage or audience. Griots embody "Africanness," and Mande professionals actively market it to consumers in the marketplace. Choices abound for griots in new environments and *jeliya* is transformed as a matter of consequence. So, we must put

aside our biases and preconceptions concerning what African music, Mande music, or griot music should be, and embrace *jeliya* in its new manifestation as a commercial art.

1.4.1 Instruments of Change and Exchange: The Djembe and the Guitar

Both the djembe and the guitar are the world's instruments and "cultural universals" in the musics of Africa and the African Diaspora. Polak and Zanetti observed that djembe players, in particular, have encouraged market integration and musical change in general within the Mande sphere. For Mark Sunkett, his study of Mandiani---a Mande drum and dance tradition in West Africa and the United States----provided considerable insight on how the djembe has facilitated change and exchange within, among, and between African and African American cultural formations. Sunkett writes, "Mandiani provides a manifestation of black aesthetics for African Americans involved in the presentation of this music and dance form" (1995, 73), and in spite of the changes that have occurred in transit, the drum parts, rhythms, and dances of Mandiani have been well preserved. This performance tradition inspires pride in some African Americans, who feel connected to their African roots through their involvement in Mandiani in the United States. Drummers, whose djembe playing is central to this dance tradition, stress three areas of concern that relate to their study of Mandiani: health; posture; comfort (Sunkett 1995, 82); these are significant criteria that encourage attention to one's personal well being, which is sometimes neglected in the less affluent African American neighboorhoods where Mandiani thrives and flourishes. A strong sense of community emerges for participants, who benefit greatly from their involvement in Mandiani.

Sunkett concludes that the "aesthetic code" for practicing Mandiani encompasses a range of values, which are important to African Americans and their system of beliefs.

The auspicious and enticing title of the CD *African Guitar Summit* speaks volumes with respect to the guitar's importance in the development of contemporary African music. Although Kubik warns that there is no single type of "African music," the guitar serves as a common denominator for musicians worldwide, and it bridges discrepancies among regional styles and genres. The guitar has inspired Africans and Westerners alike. For me, the guitar has served as my most trusted research tool. Abdoulaye "Djoss" Diabaté first learned guitar from his brother Kassy Made, and it has figured prominently in his professional life since the 1970s. John Low traveled to Central and East Africa to learn the "dry" finger-style music of native musicians such as Mwenda Jean Bosco. Classical guitarist John Williams---a student of Spanish virtuoso Andres Segovia----recorded *Magic Box*, which is dedicated to the guitar music of Africa. Liberian sailors first introduced the Spanish guitar as an instrument of incomparable import, which facilitated forms of intra-continental and international exchange. The electric guitar later became a symbol associated with Ghanian independence and the most important instrument in *chimurenga* music of Zimbabwe, which was championed by cosmopolitan, Western-educated Africans, such as Thomas Mapfumo, who started his career covering the music of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. More recently, Sekou Kouyaté of the group Ba Cissoko from Guinea, as I discussed earlier, has been heralded "the Jimi Hendrix of the *kora.*" The guitar is an inseparable part of these relationships and musicians do not discriminate in drawing inspiration from it and its music. Even in the most remote villages in Africa, children and adults build guitars from scratch and

compose music that stretches the possibilities for the instrument, informing stylistic developments as well. Networks and personal relationships are founded upon knowledge of the guitar, as my experiences with Abdoulaye and the other griots in New York exhibit.

Instruments such as drums and the guitar facilitate the consolidation of African styles for the Western milieu and mass consumption in the marketplace. Hybrid African styles such as soukous and highlife, are included under the "Afropop" rubric, which embraces these genres for their appeal, passing over language and origin. Congolese rumba, for example, which embodies the "re-Africanization" of a Cuban dance style that it barely resembles, has received acclaim for its ability to inspire visceral responses from Parisian club goers in spite of their inability to comprehend Lingala, while griot music has followed a similar path in New York and beyond. The strategic or sometimes unwitting use of instruments mediates and informs the art of cultural brokerage, which has become so vital for African arts in transit. Instruments are in fact metaphors of exchange and the focal point of adaptive strategies for musicians, who strive to reach their audiences and move them with their music. The processes of change and exchange are complex; however, the study of instrumental styles provides a vantage point from which we can observe the extent to which creativity fosters contact and interaction in the modern world.

1.5 Conclusion

While I focus upon the advent of jam music as a commodity in New York's world music sphere, this chapter is mediated by specific criteria, and many questions have not

been addressed. The chapter outlines my basic argument, and it was conceived primarily as a creative response to Steiner, the author of African Art in Transit (1994), whose study and methods inspired its title and informed my interpretation. Musicians and their music as this chapter's title suggests, however, are constantly "in transit," making it difficult to adequately describe each case and permutation. Many griots do not fit comfortably into either the Mande or world music sphere, providing a multitude of exceptions to the criteria I propose. For example, some Mande professionals such as the anonymous kora players who are ubiquitous on Manhattan subway platforms operate on the periphery of the commercial music scene, brokering their skills in more modest terms in order to make ends meet and secure a livelihood in New York, even as the careers of other Mande griots such as kora player Yacouba Sissoko, Djoss, and Famoro Dioubaté, who never perform in subways or on street corners (to my knowledge), grow and flourish by comparison. Regretfully, there have not been any studies of these more marginal musicians since Van Buren, Skinner, and I have focused our attention upon the same group of informants (e.g., Djoss and Super Mande). Further study of *jeliya* in New York thus would require accounts of their repertoires (and stories) as well.

There are griots in the New York Mande community who do not practice their birthright and trade outside of the Mande sphere; for example, I have seen and performed with many griottes or *jelimusow* and other instrumentalists at concert parties who only occasionally, rarely, or perhaps never play in clubs or in concerts for the Western milieu. Griots acknowledge that social obligation in the Mande sphere and commercial artistry outside of it can be, but are not always, mutually exclusive areas. I will explore the differences between the griot as hereditary musician and commercial artist in greater

detail in Chapter 2. Perhaps varying degrees of musical competence or interest determine whether or not musicians venture outside of the Mande sphere into the commercial music industry in New York and abroad. In any case, membership to the griot caste does not require that individuals pursue music as a profession in either sphere, and some griots have relocated to New York in pursuit of other wage earning occupations (e.g., cab drivers, businessmen, street vendors). Griots who are not performers do not relinquish their social status or traditional identity as a member of the Mande artisan caste *(nyamakalaw)*. Djoss has many relatives in Africa, who in his words "don't play music," just as there are Mande griots in New York who do not play or sing for others. Classifications of Mande music in general with respect to the griot's art would need to be reconceptualized in order to account for semi-professional and informal activities so that Mande drummers, who play at late-night jam sessions in Brooklyn or Manhattan but are not remunerated in cash or kind, and kora players who broker their skills in subways and on park benches (in Paris) without a captive audience, can be discussed within the purview of diasporic *jeliya*. These activities have not yet been addressed by scholars and do not fit into any of the existing categories for *jeliya*. If Djoss, who is primarily a vocalist, sings a lullaby to his children (or in the shower), and he is not publicly remunerated, does this constitute *jeliya*? If it is not *jeliya*, how do we classify these repertoires, since *jeliya* translates into English as "what a griot does?"

Chapter 2

Ethnography, Social Dynamics, and Aesthetics of *Jeliya* in the Diaspora

2.1 Introduction

During the 1980s and 1990s, West African professional musicians began to move to Europe and North America. As tours of folkloric groups such as Les Ballets Africains came to a close, musicians overstayed their work visas and endured great hardship with the support of others (e.g., Tom Van Buren and Sylvain Leroux) in order to relocate to urban centers, such as Paris, Toronto, and New York. Mande griots were a vanguard in African music's bold transition from Africa to the West. They serendipitously encountered and embraced a new source of patronage in the Western milieu as they moved away from their ancestral homelands in West Africa. The griot's reputation as an incomparable musician and performer became his calling card, which he brandished while extending his professional networks abroad. Separate paths in the griot trade emerged. While aspirations for material wealth and self-advancement are important, griots are careful and cautious never to forget their roots and sources of inspiration, which remain in Africa.

This chapter examines *jeliya's* demographic trajectories to two urban centers, Paris and New York. During the late 1980s, griots began to address a wider audience in Paris by performing in collaborative projects with non-griot musicians for patrons of African restaurants (see Knight 1991). I do not intend to use Knight's accounts to assess the more recent situation in New York, but rather to show the degree to which the griot trade began to evolve in an earlier dispersion of Mande peoples abroad. One could

conduct a comparable study in Toronto where griots have settled and had great commercial successes in recent years. In any case, diasporic environments present new challenges for griots who aspire to achieve commercial success through their trade, while fufilling their role(s) and responsiblities in the Mande sphere. These musicians negotiate the exigencies of obligation and artistry by responding appropriately to changes in context and shifts in patronage (e.g., Mande and world music sphere), using their repertoires in different ways on a moment's notice in some cases. As I mentioned previously, ambivalence surrounds views of performance in the Mande sphere, yet all of the griots with whom I have had contact enjoy and sometimes prefer to play with non-griot musicians for Western audiences. While some griots such as Yacouba Sissoko hold engagements at Mande concert parties in high regard, others such as Djoss and Mackane Kouyaté have mixed feelings about working at community-based events. Mande patrons view these parties as beacons of Mande culture, as my earlier partial quote of a Mande patron (in the Introduction) shows. Parties are opportunities for patrons to display their wealth and confirm their status within the community. At one event in September 2007, a patron publicly remunerated a griotte with a large sum of cash for her praises in a song, which had been recorded and locally distributed on CD. The different forms of talk and emics that surround and occur at these events, however, seem to complicate the matter. Patrons and musicians have divergent opinions, and my experiences performing in New York's Mande sphere with Djoss and his circle challenge romanticized interpretations of concert parties and transition rites celebrations.

2.2 Paris

After the election of Socialist party candidate François Mitterand as French president in May 1981, the French government relaxed the country's immigration laws, and a deluge of African migrants flooded ethnic neighborhoods such as Barbès in Paris. The changes in policy not only encouraged African immigration, but also created a healthy environment for the "emerging Paris-based African music network" to grow and flourish (Winder 2006, 26). Mitterand bolstered the Ministry of Culture in an effort to embrace the cultures of France's most recent immigrants during his tenure as president, and he even created an annual national music festival---"La Fête de la Musique"---that featured African artists. Knight (1991) reports that a "Manding Province" emerged in Paris, which brought men, women, and children from West Africa to Europe for the first time. The number of African immigrants grew precipitously over the course of the decade until immigration policies changed during the 1990s and a new wave of conservatism swept France, making its borders less permeable.

Mande hereditary professional musicians from Senegal, Mali, and Guinea were among the most resourceful musicians to relocate to Paris. As the hopes for prosperity dwindled at home, griots looked to capitalize upon the growing interest in African popular music, which had recently become marketable throughout Europe, and they quickly became an integral part of the "African music" scene in Paris, performing regularly at restaurants and clubs throughout the city. For African musicians in Paris, the idea of Africa and its traditional culture were selling points for them in each and every performance context, while griots, in particular, quickly became identified with the sort of musical hybridity that later became a hallmark of diasporic *jeliya* in New York during the 1990s. They began integrating traditional musical resources and techniques with

various forms of technology, such as drum machines and sequencers, which were readily available in Paris; recurring loops and patterns, which served as aural templates in compositions, could be easily programmed into a sequencer. Musicians no longer required an entire band to perform, and these developments encouraged itineracy, making the griot's art more mobile. During the 1990s, travel and eventual relocation to North America provided griots with more opportunities to improve their economic status, while bringing their music to the Western milieu.

Knight describes the Mande music scene in Paris as follows: a handful of highly visible musicians such as Salif Keita performed as a part of the "tourist trade" in concert halls, while most hereditary professionals followed more "traditional" routes to the West. Many griots hoped to rely exclusively upon Mande patron families for their livelihood as griots had done for centuries in the Mande sphere. They first arrived on student and tourist visas, which allowed them to enter the country, and they looked to the generosity of patrons to pay for their living expenses, food, and other costs. Most Mande patrons, however, could only procure menial jobs as janitors, cooks, and kitchen workers, and they were unable to support griots in Paris. The traditional caste divisions were maintained, but the patron's responsibilities to the griot became less manifold and inclusive. Occasional visits and impromptu praise performances were graced by a warm camaraderie that pervaded their interactions in spite of the economic limitations, though patrons and griots never fully relinquished their traditional roles, obligations, and responsibilities; for example, griots continued to perform at naming ceremonies, weddings, and other transition rites celebrations, which were limited to the Mande diasporic community. Hereditary professional musicians, in any case, were forced to

address a wider audience in France, which recently had become increasingly aware of *jeliya* via the mass media (Knight 1991, 53). The griot performance style and repertoire became wed to the new contexts in which griots performed, and valued on a scale determined by how well they were received by their new environment.

Parisian griots who were primarily young men in their twenties and thirties were itinerant musicians. They moved from place to place in search of work, which they frequently found in African restaurants, on street corners, or in subway stations where they relied exclusively upon tips, customer gratuity, and the generosity of strangers for remuneration. Griots cultivated a "style of presentation," to use Knight's phrase, that appealed to Westerners throughout the city's districts and neighborhoods. Kora players from Senegal and Gambia abandoned their tense or piercing vocals and aggressive playing styles for a more relaxed, subdued, and understated approach, which was less abrasive in general, making it more palatable to the Western ear. In fact, some griots used restaurant gigs, which usually inspire neither intrigue nor excitement in artists or professionals in general, as an opportunity to experiment and innovate; for example, Sourakata Koité developed his own repertoire, which he performed on a 22-string kora in a tuning of his own devising, singing in Mandinka as well as French. He moved from table to table and extemporized songs of praise for restaurant patrons. Koité extolled "the attractiveness of their clothes, neckties, eyeglasses, hair, or even (for women) their breasts, hips," and waist (Knight 1991, 58). Knight maintains,

> One is inclined to say (in fact, some more traditionally-minded patrons might *jalolu* would say) that his is not Mande music any more, only a Mande instrument and performer, playing a new genre of his own creation: entertainment music for Parisian African restaurants. (1991, 58-59)

Griots worked with musicians from other parts of Africa as well; Knight recalls that he contracted a griot to perform at an African restaurant, "La Cornoë," in 1988. The restaurant, however, booked a Cameroonian guitarist to perform the same night. The griot, who played kora and balafon, and the guitar player in Knight's words, "tried out their repertoires on each other" in front of a small, though captive audience (Knight 1991, 59). The serendipitous combination was a success, yielding a blended style that inspired the two musicians to continue their collaboration for several months until the Senegalese griot left Paris. Knight commented that "the restaurant has since closed, but during its short life it afforded this illustration of the process by which new genres can be created" (Knight 1991, 59). Griots create new professional networks through collaboration, as Knight's accounts of the 1980s demonstrate and my forthcoming chapter on collaboration illustrates. Joint projects with non-griot African and Western musicians provide both opportunity and inspiration for griots living abroad.

Itinerant griots, who can no longer rely exclusively upon the good graces of Mande patrons, freelance as musicians for hire in urban centers such as Paris and New York. Their activities include griottes as soloists and background vocalists, but there seems to be less opportunity for women as artists in these local commercial music scenes. Missia Diabaté, whom I cite earlier (in Chapter 1), receives greater recognition and remuneration in Guinea as a premier vocalist where women are the unrivaled stars. As a result, she has been reluctant to commit to relocation, thereby clinging to her intinerant status. Vocalist Tapani Cissoko performs in concerts for Western audiences in New York, but rarely ventures into the dowtown club milieu. However, jelimusow such as Missia, Tapani, and Mai Kouyaté continue to be an indispensable part of *jeliya* in New

York's Mande sphere. Although griots in the diaspora address a wider audience in Europe and North America, they assume a patron's responsibilities in certain respects. Hereditary professionals are better compensated for their work in the West, which allows them to provide support and aid to their extended families in Africa; for example, Abdoulaye explained to me that the planning, packing, and prepation for a return trip to Africa must always include additional funds for distribution to his family members, who, by his own account, "have nothing." Some musicians send money "home" on a monthly basis, while others save for an extended period of time before they wire money to their families. In any case, a griot's support is an indispensable resource for his family in Africa. Indeed, the allure of self-advancement and material accumulation piques the interest and imagination of griots in the diaspora. Knight observed,

> The world is changing, and Africa with it. The Mande *jalolu* who are able to expand jaliya to Europe are merely keeping up with their patrons, as they have always been able to do…Their success is a mark of the professional attitude they take that music is a livelihood, to be pursued with all the seriousness and zeal one can muster. It is fortunate that at the same time western popular tastes have been awakened to their music, expanding the possibilities even further. (Knight 1991, 62)

2.3 New York

Mande migration to New York began during the late 1970s. Mourid traders and businessmen of Senegal and Gambia, who sought to extend their trade networks as street vendors, helped establish communities in Harlem and the Bronx. Immigration from the other countries of Mande West Africa followed similar trajectories that led to the city's other boroughs (see Van Buren 2002). English-speaking Mande of Liberia and Sierra Leone settled in Staten Island and Queens, while the more prominent communities of Francophone Guinean and Malian expatriates, who have more recently arrived from

France, relocated to and move between Manhattan, the Bronx, and Brooklyn. Griots were eventually swept up by the "culture of travel" (see Skinner 2004) abroad as prospects of prosperity at home and in France seemed to fade. Around 2002, census figures revealed that nearly twenty thousand Mande peoples lived in the city (Van Buren 2002). While these communities maintain their own active mutual-aid associations, their activites overlap. I performed at a wedding celebration in 2006 and have rehearsed with Super Mande, whose musicians are from Mali and Guinea, at the Gambian Society of New York community center on Jerome Avenue in the Bronx. The Mandingo Ambassadors, who are led by Guinean Mamady "Djelike" Kouyaté, have rehearsed at the Gambian center as well.

Initial encounters between griots and non-griot musicians occurred at a number of venues in New York, including clubs, dance and drum schools, and yoga studios (see Van Buren 2001). These places were "points of artistic convergence" for Mande musicians and potenial collaborators (Van Buren 2001, 172). According to Peter Fand and Andy Algire (and Van Buren), Fareta and Djoniba dance schools in lower Manhattan fostered much interaction between griots and Westerners. While both studios served as refuges for Mande musicians such as Keba "Bobo" Cissoko and Abou Sylla, they also had adequate facilities to accommodate griots and their students who later became collaborators. Public events such as concerts also encouraged members of the diverse communities in New York to congregate and to interact. While the griots' Western colleagues, whom Mande musicians first met downtown, have performed with griots at Mande events in Harlem and the Bronx, they (like griots) prefer downtown venues (e.g., clubs) and public events (e.g., concerts) that serve New York audiences with the

resources to support them as professional musicians (Van Buren 2001, 204). Cover charges, drink minimums, and ticket sales allow places such as the Zinc Bar and Symphony Space to feature these artists on a recurring basis. Both griots and their Western colleagues bridge these distinct contexts that Skinner describes in terms of a series of "itineraries" for *jeliya* in New York (see Skinner 2005). Skinner's model is another paradigm for understanding the social dynamics of *jeliya*. He writes,

> I conclude that *jeliya*---the art form, social condition, and aesthetic practice of Mande bards and storytellers---presents an emergent culture of travel possessing its own social logics, structure, and meanings. (Skinner 2004, 140)

Skinner emphasizes that griots operate primarily "through community" in the diasporic settings. Yet Knight first observed that patrons in Paris could not support griots in the first significant wave of Mande migration abroad, and griots looked outside of the community and the Mande sphere for salient sources of support. New York griots have followed in their Parisian predecessors' footsteps, aspiring to reach far beyond the Mande milieu and informal markets in order to accumulate wealth and build their reputations. Many of these professional musicians are commercial artists, who have become an integral part of a pop-culture phenomenon, which entails the "commodification" of African culture for Westernern consumption. Griots do not, cannot, and never planned to rely heavily upon Mande patrons, who are a fleeting resource for them in New York. On the contrary, Westerners comprise the griot's primary audience in the city where he performs with primarily non-griot musicians in bars, clubs, restaurants, and concert halls, positioning himself at the center of African music "scene" in Manhattan and Brooklyn. The griot profession in New York is less exclusive than in Africa where griots work primarily with other hereditary professional musicians, who are frequently close relatives

or family members. Diasporic *jeliya* is not guarded or protected, like the Sunjata epic in the Mande sphere, but rather is put on display, showcased, and glorified in the Western milieu. The commercial recordings and CDs of groups, such Fula Flute, Source, Kakande, and Dallam Dougou, are not sold from only marginal locales, such as the vendor stalls of the Shabazz Market in Harlem or the backs of trucks, as Skinner's comparison to Hausa traders suggests, but rather are promoted, marketed, and sold from various websites, such as I-tunes, CD Baby and Jumbie Records, making them available for public consumption. While these websites might also be marginal in some respects, they cannot be compared to the vendor tables of the New York City streets, whose potential for trade, transaction, and exchange is limited in scope.

Griots move abroad in order to attain a degree of social mobility, which they achieve primarily by utilizing the resources of various marketplaces outside of the Mande sphere. While griots may not attain the notoriety of international pop stars such as Michael Jackson, they receive more acclaim in Western contexts as commercial artists than as anonymous accompanists or praise-singers. They are not reluctant urbanites as Skinner maintains, but rather were urban dwellers in cities long before they decided to relocate. Both Djoss and Famoro lived in Abidjan and Paris for years prior to their migration to New York. The liner notes of Djoss's 2003 solo CD, *Haklima*, confirm his vocation in New York and read as follows:

> Djoss Diabaté has arrived. Though this powerhouse singer is no newcomer to commercial recordings and concert performances, *Haklima* both announces and confirms his artistic arrival as a long-awaited African star.[7]

[7] Heather A. Maxwell, notes to Djoss Diabaté, *Haklima* (2003), CD, Goin' Native, GN 0105.

While these notes are hyperbolic, they reflect a perception of griots by their Western fan base and an attempt to promote Djoss as a performer. Djoss and other active members of this network settled in New York during the middle or late-1990s, struggling for years to obtain their green cards and bring their families to the United States. Some of them have not yet obtained permanent residence status and therefore avoid international travel, fearing that they will be unable to reenter the United States once they leave. The handful of Mande griots who have relocated to New York are "cosmopolitans" with modern values and aspirations, which bind peoples of different race, class, and religion together with shared interests. They dress in modern attire, such as tee shirts, blue jeans, and baseball caps, and reserve the boubou for traditional contexts or concert performances. Djoss delights in Hadja's (his 16-year old daughter's) interest in education and aspirations to become a teacher; he hopes to bring his two eldest children to New York from Mali so that they can receive a college education. Famoro recently brought one of his two daughters from Guinea to live with relatives in Michigan, hoping that she can also benefit from the educational system in the United States.

Djoss refers to the griot trade as his "job;" for him, *jeliya* is an occupation, and, as vocalist, he is a specialist in *donkili* or "song." Djoss also works as a guitarist accompanying griottes, who are the stars of Mande concert parties, which I discuss in section 2.3.5 "*Jeliya* in New York's Mande Sphere," in Harlem and the Bronx. Unlike Sory Camara, who maintained that the music and songs of griots are not "products," to be bought, sold, or traded, Djoss relies upon the earning potential of his trade skills and proficiencies as a griot and an artist, and his songs or repertoire in general act as a form of currency in New York's commercial music industry. He has secured many of the

comforts money affords those who have it (or at least some of it), through his professional endeavors, and, like other griots in New York, he revels in material pursuits; for example, Djoss has purchased several cars, a Blackberry, and a cinema-size television set with well over 100 channels (among other consumer products) while in New York. The degree to which he is remunerated in cash and kind is a very important professional criterion for Djoss, who, however, always shares his accumulated wealth with the members of his extended personal network, including his non-griot Western colleagues.

As urbanites, Mande griots embrace and relish the comforts and conveniences of city life and have found new sources of patronage in the New York African music scene. New York has become their new home where they feel the most comfortable and secure. At the end of 2006, Abdoulaye "Djoss" Diabaté received his green card and excitedly planned his first trip back to Africa in nearly a decade. To my surprise, his enthusiasm seemed dulled upon his return. He observed that life in Africa is hard, uncompromising, and filled with uncertainty, admitting to me that the griot trade in Africa seemed foreign to him after years abroad.

2.3.1 Obligation and Artistry

While griots aspire to stardom in New York, as Maxwell's notes suggest, they never lose sight of, relinquish, or abandon their traditional roles within the Mande community in New York and abroad. They must also act as patrons and provide financial aid and material support to less fortunate members of their families in Africa. New dimensions of the griot's trade thus have emerged, creating new demands within the profession. Djoss, who, along with "Djelike" Kouyaté, is one of the oldest griots in the

New York network of Mande professionals, understands his responsibilities as a servant of Mande patrons, recognizing that he owes everything to his superiors. For Djoss, obligation and artistry are compatible, while for others, such as Djekorea Mory Kanté, these two areas or fields require different skills that are more or less exclusive and rarely overlap. Charry observed that griots specialize in one of three fields (speech, song, or instrumental playing), which are best viewed as the tools of their trade, enabling them to fulfill their obligations and social responsibilities in the Mande sphere. For example, Djoss alluded to me that his "art" in traditional contexts is never "for him." In Western contexts, however, commercial artistry has emerged as a fourth criterion for griots, and it is paired with either "song" or "instrumental playing," which griots study, learn, and perfect over the course of their lives and careers. Djoss did not relocate to New York with Mande patrons in mind, but he understands that the traditional social dynamics of patron-griot relations should never be ignored or forgotten. Hence, he begrudgingly performs at community events when he would rather stay at home with his family. He also recognizes the need for him to give back to the community.

Djoss reserves his verbal artistry for situations and circumstances in which he feels obliged to "speak" the names of patrons; these occasions, however, arise in multiple settings. If a griot (or griotte), for example, is invited to a baptism or a wedding, attendence is compulsory because if the sponsors, who are the griot's superiors, according to Djoss, "don't see him or her there," it will be construed as an insult (in Skinner 2005, 102). Once a ceremony begins, griots exhort patrons, who dance in a concentric circle with cash in hand, by exhalting them in the form of genealogical recitations, proverbs, or praises in a public display. Exchanges between griots and

patrons are highly ritualized; they affirm the social divisions of the Mande caste system that have provided a sense of identity for patrons and griots in Mande traditional societies for centuries. While individuals, who are born into a particular caste, might have more choices and enjoy a greater degree of social mobility today than in years past, they respect the caste system as a significant social institution, which was bequeathed to the people by God through Sunjata Keita, recognizing that certain lines should not be crossed.

If a Mande patron attends a gig in a club, such as the Zinc Bar, Djoss adapts his verbal art for the Western milieu, incorporating honorific praises, proverbs, and verbal formulae into the griot jam music template, which prevails in New York, making *jeliya* accessible across cultures, and, in Djoss's words, "the concert" or, in this case, the club date, "becomes like a baptism, it's the same thing" (in Skinner 2005, 103). Seamless appropriations of a griot's words into a club or concert setting exemplify code switching, which has been researched extensively in the field of socio-linguistics by Goffman and others. A griot's verbal artistry, which is highly ritualized in the Mande sphere, therefore, can also be extemporaneous, unplanned, and uninhibited, though it may go completely unnoticed by Westerners in a club. *Jali kumalo* or the "words of the griot," in any case, do not compromise *jeliya's* accessibility as a form of jam music and, in fact, only serve to make the simulation of traditional practice more "real" for an observer, who is not directly involved in the exchange or transaction. Although *jali kumalo* are transmutable and transferable, they arise in obligatory ritual transactions between a *jeli* and his *horon*. Since Djoss openly acknowledges that patrons are his superiors, who have done everything for him, if he neglects to address *horow* (nobles) in a club, at a

ceremony, or on the street, they will "have harsh words" for Djoss (in Skinner 2005, 103).

As an urbanite and a commercial artist living abroad, Djoss has other responsibilities as well; for example, he begins his preparations for a return trip to Mali and Guinea months in advance, and has many things to consider. Token souvenirs of his life in New York do not suffice, and Djoss must share his good fortune with his extended family in cash and kind, which includes cars, calling cards, musical equipment, and clothes. He is obliged to assume the role of a patron and to distribute his accrued assets to his relatives, who are less fortunate than him. His possessions are never hoarded since his relatives in Kela, Mali and Abidjan, Ivory Coast stake claim to his belongings as part of the collective pool of resources that is frequently stretched to meet overwhelming needs and demands. His money and accumulated wealth, like the land of the Manden, must be shared and distributed among community members.

Griots have multiple roles in a variety of contexts, and the criteria for diasporic *jeliya* parallel a griot's traditional occupational status as a historian, genealogist, mediator, and musician in this respect, yet a different set of expections have emerged. Djoss is a servant of Mande patrons, a commercial artist, and a provider within the Mande community. Djekorea Mory Kanté, however, was unable to tread the lines between these roles and was not equipped to deal with these demands. Kanté, according to his sister, is a griot and not an "artist." Kanté returned to Guinea in August 2005 since he never embraced life as a commercial artist and was unable to find sufficient professional opportunities as a "griot," in his sister's sense of the word, in order to subsidize his stay. Skinner (2004), in any case, rightly points out that diasporic *jeliya*

provides a point of orientation to negotiate the disparities between Mande musicians' roles as griots and artists in the modern world. Diasporic contexts provide Mande professionals with opportunities to use their skill sets and talents in a new and interesting ways, though some musicians, such as Kanté and Moussa Sissoko, do not view *jeliya* as a commercial art.

2.3.2 Contexts for Musical Performance

Although some griots such as Djoss willingly tailor their repertoires in order to satisfy different sources of patronage simultaneously as my code switching example above illustrates, there is little that can be done to reconcile the glaring differences between the performance expectations in the Mande sphere and Western restaurants, clubs, or concert halls. As Andy Algire observed, while Westerners (in general) are familiar with the polarized dynamics of stage performances in which musicians who sit or stand on a stage, perform a set program for an audience, few Western contexts are analogous or comparable to concerts in the Mande sphere. Algire once remarked that "anything goes" at an African concert, and participatory audience interaction, which Polak observed in his research, frequently blurs the lines between performers and audience members, while the music and musicians are submerged in the cacophony of ritual transaction and exchange, positioning, conflict, and competition. Occasionally, musicians and audience members in a club such as the Zinc Bar or at a concert will simulate the griot's traditional form of remunerative exchange in which musicians are "sprayed" with cash as they perform, but few other comparisons can be made.

Disparities between these two contexts are also manifest in the griot's performance styles and attitudes in general toward the Mande sphere. Griots such Famoro Dioubaté view neo-traditional concerts as social occasions or as an opportunity to wear a new boubou or hairstyle, and they rarely value them for the music they yield or produce. The basic or fundamental criteria that determine a musician's "success" or "failure" at a community event, moreover, are incompatible with the standards in a club or, especially, a concert; Western patrons and world music aficionados would be appalled by the sound quality of the music, which would repel even the most steadfast fan, in neo-traditional settings. Obligatory ritual transaction, and not artistic achievement, underpins performance at traditional gatherings, and competition, which I examine in "Traditional *Jeliya* in New York," lies at the very core of these enterprises in which griots and griottes rarely agree. The distinction between obligation and artistry, which Mande professionals recognize and willingly negotiate or dismiss, underscores these differences as well.

2.3.3 Life as a Commercial Artist for Diasporic Griots: Restaurants, Club Dates, and Concert Halls

While I have never met a griot in New York who aspired to perform exclusively in restaurants or clubs, these venues provide a complementary source of work and income for Mande professionals. If griots can secure regular gigs a few times a month, they can become established and less itinerant. I have performed on many occasions with Djoss in restaurants, bars, and clubs in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and on Long Island, and while some griots disdain the restaurant or club scene, others such as Djoss and Famoro accept it as a necessary and integral part of their careers. Performances for a restaurant milieu were among the first significant appropriations of *jeliya* in Western contexts, as Knight has

shown, and my own experiences with griots Djoss Diabaté, Famoro Dioubaté, Yacouba Sissoko, Abou Sylla, and Mackane Kouyaté between 2005 and 2007 attest to *jeliya's* saliency as a form of restaurant entertainment in New York.

The "Afropop NYC Map" (2007) (see map below) provides an overview of the restaurants, clubs, and other venues where griots perform in New York, while highlighting the premiere concert halls for world music such as Symphony Space and Lincoln Center (for a more legible map see the Afropop.org website). The map provides a sense of where griots perform in Manhattan and Brooklyn, though many places have closed since 2007. Afropop Worldwide is a radio program, which presently airs each night at 11 pm on 91.5 FM and features pieces on the musics of Africa and the African Diaspora. Its companion services include a website (afropop.org), a map, an e-letter, a film series, and an archive and database, which are comprised of over twenty years of research, photographs, and interviews. Banning Eyre, who is among the most significant collaborators (see Chapter 3), is the senior contributing editor for Afropop Worldwide. For musicians, fans, and researchers, Afropop Worldwide is an incomparable resource that monitors the pulse of the New York African music scene, which has remained relatively unchanged in the past four years.

The map includes a range of venues that is not limited to restaurants, clubs, and concert halls. It also lists African music retail stores, such as Tribal Sounds, annual festivals, cultural centers, and dance schools. Most of the griots' performance activities occur in downtown Manhattan or Brooklyn, as the map illustrates. African dance schools, such as Djoniba and the defunct Fareta dance school (not on the map), which were once meeting places for griots and Westerners during the 1990s, however, have become less germane. Griots, such as balafon players Abou Sylla and Famoro Dioubaté, who first met collaborators, such as Andy Algire, Peter Fand, and Sylvain Leroux, at

dance schools, no longer frequent these establishments. Djoss and kora player Yacouba Sissoko, who arrived after Keba "Bobo" Cissoko's initial encounters with collaborators at Fareta, have not used dance schools in establishing their professional networks citywide.

In 2005 and 2006, I solicited gigs at many establishments on the Afropop NYC map for Djoss and myself. We performed at Madiba and Joloff, and Djoss plays three sets with Source on the first Friday of each month at the Zinc Bar, which features African music on a weekly basis. The Mandingo Ambassadors, who are led by "Djelike" Kouyaté, currently perform at Barbès (Wednesdays 10-12 PM), which also intermittently hosts Famoro Dioubaté's group Kakande and Oran Etkin's collaborations with various African musicians, who are a part of the New York network. Group Kelenia, which is led by Etkin, has performed at SOB's, which also hosted the CD release party for Kakande's *Dununya* in February 2008. Le Grand Dakar, one of two Senegalese restaurants in the Clinton Hill/Fort Greene area of Brooklyn, also hires griot groups such as the Ambassadors and Group Kelenia, to perform on occasion. St. Nick's Pub has advertised live African music "every Saturday night" for years, but none of my informants (to my knowledge) have performed at this club with any degree of frequency. Djoss recalls playing at St. Nick's Pub in the past, but has refused subsequent offers to perform since he was not duly compensated. Venues such as Lincoln Center and Symphony Space also each feature griot groups, such as Djoss Diabaté's Super Mande and Fula Flute annually.

Since 2005, I have continually tracked artists, groups, and their performances with the Afropop Worldwide web resources, and I frequently receive e-mails from these artists that promote upcoming events. The Afropop NYC map can be misleading---a painful

fact that my solicitation endeavors in 2005 and 2006 revealed; for example, while the venues on the map feature African artists, many do not have live performances on a recurring basis. Work for African musicians can be fleeting since many places, such as the defunct Satalla and Tonic, which are not on the map, frequently close their doors due to financial problems after a few years. Securing a livelihood from club dates thus can be precarious for griots, though certain bars have come to recognize griots as their resident African musicians. The Brooklyn bar Zebulon, for example, has featured Mande griots such as Baye Kouyaté and Yacouba Sissoko, who performed at the Celebrate Brooklyn festival in August 2007, on a regular basis for years and considers Kouyaté an artist in residence. It is difficult to determine, however, if diasporic *jeliya* is a sustainable commercial industry with respect to the club and restaurant scene, though clubs continue to be a source of patronage for diasporic griots.

In restaurants, bars, and clubs, griots draw freely from their traditional and modern repertoires, and their performances aim to entertain the urban, cultured, cosmopolitan audiences that serve as reliable sources of remuneration. Griots embrace irreverence and horseplay, which are indispensable for them since diasporic *jeliya* is conceived primarily as a form of entertainment. At the Trickle Up annual gala at the Rainbow Room in April 2008, Djoss, Famoro, and I performed for a dinner crowd that enjoyed our performance in spite of the antics on stage. Griots create a relaxed atmosphere through their impertinence, which is never intended as a form of disrespect, but rather serves to express feelings of good will and *badenya* ("affection") for the Western milieu. Djoss and Famoro extemporized lyrics as we performed, observing the patrons as they ate, listened, and responded with smiles and nods. I once remarked to

Andy Algire, "Djoss could sing a menu" and receive positive feedback from an audience; in this case, absurdity and truth seem to converge unexpectedly.

Reprocity in the form of recognition, applause, and monetary compensation is crucial and plays an integral part in *jeliya* in the diaspora. Griots espouse *badenya* in and through their work, which they intend to be universal (*dununya*). Mande professionals endear themselves to Western audiences with their music, whose appeal is undeniable. They aspire, above all, to be appreciated and recognized as artists, who negotiate new social terrains with their instruments in hand. While hereditary musicians observe social practice, they also challenge it through their trade, which does not limit itself to the praise of Mande patrons as in the past. Truth and fiction become integral parts of simulation, which provide the basis of griot performance practice in New York.

2.3.4 Griots, the African American Community, and Beyond

West African migrant traders, who buy and sell Malcolm X paraphernalia (e.g., tee shirts; sweatshirts; caps) and kente cloth, commodify Afro-centrism, "a specific philosophical orientation to African and African American sociocultural life," on the city's streets and in markets (Stoller 2002, 67); however, diasporic griots, who are symbols of traditional African society, do not appeal to the African American community in New York. African Americans do not perform with griots on a regular basis and rarely attend gigs at venues citywide. The jazz and world music scenes in Manhattan and Brooklyn, to my surprise, barely overlap. Occasionally, jazz players will sit in with Source at the Zinc Bar---a gig that features a constant rotation of musicians---but their repertoires and skill sets are quite different from a griot's musical vocabulary, which

many collaborators dedicate themselves to learning, absorbing, and internalizing. Certain collaborators, who view griots as a resource, combine elements of jazz and griot music in their original works, but their styles are idiosyncratic and quite exclusive.

My wife, Marième Daff, who is Senegalese Tukalor and a *jawando* (a freeborn caste name) by birth, recently observed that she was the only "black" person in the audience at an Ambassadors' gig in Brooklyn, contemplating "Where are all the black people?" The demography of the Ambassadors' gig, in any case, was typical, and I had learned my lesson years earlier. At Source's monthly engagement at the Zinc Bar in Fall 2005, I approached an African American woman and patron, hoping that she could quell my quandary regarding the absence of Africans Americans in bands and audiences. I asked her politely, "Why do you come to see Source perform?" and she replied, "Well, it's African music night, and I am black." So, in this case, a member of the African American community worked under the same presumption that inspired my inquiry in the first place, yet she provided no insight or explanation. She seemed insulted as she went along her way, while the woman, who wore dreadlocks, most likely noticed that she was in the minority at the Zinc Bar if not the only black person in the audience. So, what were her real motivations and---"Where were all the "black" people?" While the African American community might exhalt griots in the spirit of ethnic solidarity via Afro-centric thought, as Sunkett observed and Hale has shown, its interest in *jeliya* is superficial and fleeting. Even in their formative years at the Fareta dance school during the 1990s, griots were drawn to white Americans, who reciprocated interest in them and their music, and have supported the griot's art in New York as collaborators and fans.

Dr. Richard Donald Smith has researched the contentious relationship between Africans and the African American community in New York. The African American community perceives migrant enclaves of Africans as being "closed." On the other hand, griots and their constituents remain aloof and are unable to relate to many African Americans, who they perceive as being rude and undignified. African Americans harbor feelings of resentment for West Africans who cannot identify with them or their way of life nor do African Americans take an interest in learning about griot traditions.[8] While African American djembe players have participated in the dance and drum school scene, none of them (to my knowledge) are active members of the New York Mande griot network. The djembe is not a hereditary instrument such as the balafon, kora, or ngoni and its repertoires are not specific to pieces that griots perform in New York. While the music of griots celebrates people and their achievements, drum rhythms of Mande music are associated with specific occasions such as weddings or naming ceremonies, making them more generic in this regard (Charry 2000: 12). The djembe has not played an important role in the evolution of jeliya in diasporic environments nor does it embody the spirit of hybridity that griots have come to embrace. As I previously mentioned, the guitar has bridged the spheres that previously separated the various repertoires, though the djembe has fostered initial encounters and contact between musicians in many cases.

African Americans cannot be completely excluded from the New York griot ethnography. They live in close proximity to griots in the same apartment buildings in the south Bronx and Harlem, and have many of the same worries and uncertainties, such

[8] Personal communication, September 7, 2009. Dr. Smith has a Ph. D in Music Education and wrote his dissertation on music education in Nigeria. He teaches music at the International School of the United Nations and continues to research African American responses to African music in New York.

as job security, provding basic needs for their families, and the threat of eviction. Drug abuse, violence, and crime (not in this particular order) are shared concerns, but the Mande musicians whom I have befriended are able to remain relatively unaffected by these urban realities. Some African American jazz musicians, such as Don Byron, who hails from the Bronx, have taken a passing interest in griots such as Djoss Diabaté in the last decade, but these instances are rare and do not provide an accurate measure of African American involvement in the griot trade. Only recently, a second African American musician, who plays bass, has been included in the rotation of musicians that comprise the Mandingo Ambassadors and Source, but he acts as a substitute for Nick Cudahy, who is an Anglo-American and a seasoned professional.

Some Mande professionals have used Afro-centrism as the basis of their marketing strategies, but have failed make an impact outside the immediate migrant communities in Harlem and the Bronx. Kora player Salieu Suso, whom I have never met or seen perform, highlights African arts exhibitions and cultural events in his accomplishments on his resume. Van Buren features Suso in his dissertation among the many Mande artists to participate in the *Badenya* project. Salieu is a protégé of kora legend Papa Susso, who represents an earlier wave of migration to New York, which is better characterized as a trickle in comparison to the relative stream of musicians to relocate to New York during the mid to late 1990s. Salieu's group, Jaliya Kafo, has performed primarily in the Bronx, and none of my informants mentioned Suso in interviews or conversations. Suso's conservatism with respect to his style, which Van Buren describes as "remarkably flat," was perhaps a deterrent for him in New York (2001, 145). The late Keba Cissoko and Yacouba Sissoko have cornered the market with

respect to the griot harp, and they are the only kora players to work on a regular basis in the New York Mande music scene over the last decade.

The complexion of the African music scene in New York and elsewhere, in any case, is "lily white" on the whole. The most significant collaborators, such Andy Algire and Peter Fand, hail from places in North America such as Wisconsin or suburban New Jersey, that are not particularly diverse or cosmopolitan, while the areas in which African music thrives, such as Eugene and Portland, Oregon and Boulder, Colorado, act as magnet locations for African artists; world beat groups are in constant demand and African musicians such as Thomas Mapfumo are greatly valued and appreciated. Many of the most lucrative annual festivals for world music occur on the West Coast and in Canada, where African music has become highly marketable and a profitable industry. Just as hip-hop appeals to primarily young Anglo-Americans, African music has followed a similar path as a commercial art, which is commodified for mass consumption. However, African Americans, who provide significant support to hip-hop artists, do not play a part in the griot trade.

An ancillary personal experience, which did not occur during formal research or my fieldwork, sheds light upon the type of networking that best exemplifies the nature of social dynamics in the griot trade. In March 2007, I performed with collaborators Wisconsin-born Andy Algire (drums and balafon) and Senegalese bassist Mamadou Ba, whom I met in the griot network in New York, in a concert at Dowling College. I invited my roommate from college, Matt Wasowski, with whom I had discovered African music in Washington, D.C., to sing and play guitar with us. An instant rapport was established between these three strangers, lively conversation ensued, and a warm camaraderie

pervaded our exchanges during the rehearsal. Matt and Andy's paths had crossed in Taos, New Mexico, where both musicians lived and worked between 1998 and 2000 in close proximity to the world beat scene in Alburquerque, while Matt and Mamadou are both well acquainted with Zivani Musango, a Shona musician, who currently lives and works in Boulder, Colorado. During his numerous visits to New York, Matt has attended a West African party in Harlem with Djoss and Famoro, the Celebrate Brooklyn festival, which is listed in the Afropop NYC map, and Source's monthly gig at the Zinc Bar in West Greenwich Village, remarking with respect to Source, "I love everything about the Zinc Bar, Source, and the scene in general; there is such a great vibe, and vitality in the music and those who perform it." On one trip, I taught Matt the groove for "Fakoli," a griot classic, which he later played with a Mande griot in Boulder, who was delighted that he was familiar with it. Matt had internalized a piece of the griot tradition while in New York and brought it with him to Colorado, sharing the Mande griot repertoire with his associates.

Cosmopolitan musicians pass considerable knowledge and experience through their trade activities that allow them to connect to others in the cosmopolitan network, and keep the griot tradition alive, current, and exciting. The complex web of transactions and exchanges, which I have attempted to describe, is difficult to trace, but it demonstrates the vast trajectories of the griot trade in the African Diaspora, which are kaleidoscopic in nature. The social dynamics of diasporic *jeliya* thus impact places and spaces in many people's lives. Participants are dialed into a personal and professional network, which, as my experiences illustrate, is tightly knit, but ever expanding; for example, Mamadou referred affectionately to Musango, the Shona musician that I

mention above, as "Z," which elicited a comparable response from Matt, while we all spoke highly of Djoss as a musician and a person. Griots, non-griot Africans, and Westerners willingly participate in cross-cultural exchanges that embody the prevailing social dynamics of this network. Energy and excitement emanate from all sides of these on-going, self-perpetuating interactions that bounce from Africa to Europe and North America, and back in a richocet of ideas and information. Social pluralism mirrors the multi-directional path that *jeliya* has taken in recent years, and travel is an integral part of these developments in both literal and figurative terms.

Social networks in the African diaspora transcend time and space, and are greatly informed by a form of cosmopolitanism that brings seemingly disparate groups together unexpectedly. For cosmopolitan musicians, such as griots and their collaborators, "home" is an imagined state, which is built upon the relationships that they have cultivated over a number of years through "intensity of contact," which I explore in Chapter 3. The standards of social dynamics, in this case, are determined by the degree to which individuals engage each other's pursuits, which become tangled and web-like over the course of time. As I suggest at the conclusion of Chapter I, the guitar has allowed me to form relationships that words, interviews, and verbal dialogue could never have established, and it keeps me connected to this network. I have learned to "fake it" so that I could stay involved in the lives of griots, who have become good friends and trusted confidants. The guitar has served as a "cultural universal" in various African musical styles that seem to emanate from griots and their traditions. In fact, other collaborators, such as Sylvain Leroux, were first drawn to the guitar playing in Mande music before undertaking intense study of traditional instruments. Griots and non-griot

Western musicians, in any case, collectively form the hub of an extensive network of professionals and fans worldwide.

West African traders, who view "art" as "wood" that is intended to turn a profit in the marketplace, in the words of one griot, have "taken root" and "branched out" in a comparable manner. Stoller represents a trader's relationships visually as a personal economic network, which includes Taiwanese suppliers, Japanese tourists, and African American consumers, in the form of several concentric circles with the hereditary trader at its center or core, providing the axis for transactions (2002, 60). His informants, for whom he provides pseudonyms to protect their identity, gathered information from a "wide array of sources" in spite of their shared links in West African trading networks. They established "on-going" and "productive" relationships with a largely African American and Asian clientele that extended well beyond their immediate sphere; for Boubé, his van was central to his operation, and he used it to establish broad trade networks outside the African community (Stoller 2000, 62). Long-distance trade was an inherited occupation and a birthright that he continued through various types of transactions, which "define a key activity in the social networks of West African traders in New York" and abroad (Stoller 2002, 54). The participants, who are involved in "multiplex networks," engage in "countless exchanges" that transcend ethnic and national boundaries. Griots, non-griot Africans, and Westerners, furthermore, are involved in many comparable permutations of social interaction, which occur through various forms of contact. Their worlds frequently collide, but the cosmopolitan musicians in this particular network have come to expect that paths will cross; "the links of such networks function as channels of information exchange and flow of resources," providing a source

of stability for griots and their associates in diverse urban environments (Stoller 2002, 56).

2.3.5 *Jeliya* in New York's Mande Sphere

In December 2005, I entered the Mande sphere as a participant-observer for the first time. I performed with Djoss, Mackane, Yacouba, Abou, and others at a Mande concert party on the day after Christmas, and this experience provided me with many valuable insights into the repertoire. At Mande concert parties, singers engage patrons in ritualized exchanges, while instrumentalists play a supporting role. These concerts are not only musical performances, but also and more importantly social occasions for members of the community to celebrate, congregate, and interact. While concert parties may confirm hereditary roles such as patron and praise singer, they are filled with conflict and contestation. As a result, griots hold a range of views on these gatherings, and their forms of talk and discourse vary with context and company. In any case, Christopher Waterman's work on neo-traditional Yoruba performance, which I discuss below, provides an interesting departure point for my own observations of New York's Mande sphere. Waterman articulates many of the dynamics of interaction that occur at both types of parties, though Yoruba events are less contentious, reflecting the prevailing socio-musical hierarchies of Yoruban music culture.

Mande social occasions that feature live music are comparable to Yoruba neo-traditional events in a number of ways. Performances occur at elaborate parties after important rites of passage in which the role of song as a medium of praise and "coordination in sound and physical movement" via music and dance, converge in

obligatory ritual expressions (Waterman 2008, 199). The Mande patrons, who are mostly female and subsidize the festivities, are the sponsors, or "honorary mothers" as Polak refers to them, and the focal point of the parties, forming the conceptual axis for transactions and exchanges, as people dance, converse, and interact. The *denbaw* procure banquet halls and community centers for the parties that commence late in the evening and conclude in the early morning hours. Like neo-traditional *jùjú* performance contexts, Mande celebrations provide successful urban patrons in New York with a venue to display their wealth in public, which is an occasion that they always document on video and DVD.

> The ceremony is the symbolic demonstration of the host's resources: material and social. His (or her) wealth and the contribution of the guests are used to make the occasion as satisfying for participants as possible. (Waterman 1986, 334)

These material and symbolic gestures, however, do not guarantee that the events will proceed in accordance with the patron's plans for the party or meet her expectations in general. Traditional Mande events are open to the community and in spite of the sponsor's agreement with the bandleader, who is usually a griotte, Malian Tapani Sissoko, *jelimusow* arrive in droves, vie for the microphone and demand to be remunerated. The lead vocalist, who enlists griots, such as Djoss and Djelike Kouyaté to assemble a band and perform as accompanists on guitar, mediates the intense exchanges between the sponsors, other *jelimusow*, and the band, activities that result in cacophony on stage. Many of the guests, to my surprise, frequently appear bored, disinterested, or mildly annoyed; they stare at the walls, causally interact, or talk with others in attendance, and seem relatively unaffected by the commotion that ensues for hours without reprieve. Patrons, according to Djoss, have begun hiring DJs more frequently in

order to avoid paying "twenty dollars, twenty dollars, twenty dollars, twenty dollar…(etc.)," to every professional musician, who manages to participate in the celebration.

The practice of "spraying" or "dashing" with money, as with neo-traditional Yoruba performance, also provides the basis of remuneration in the Mande sphere, which impacts the musical form of each event as well. "A satisfied praisee dances up to the band leader or praise singer and pastes money to his forehead" (Waterman 2008, 200), or, in the Mande sphere, she hands the money to the *jelimuso* or tosses it in her general direction. Waterman (2008, 200) explains that "cash advances, guaranteed minimums, and record royalties are, except in the case of a handful of superstars, minor sources of income," which frequently creates problems for griots such as Djoss, who never know exactly how much they will be paid for events that may last eight to ten hours. Djoss nearly always brings his family; his daughter collects the bills, which fall to the ground, storing them in guitar cases until the event concludes, when the cash is counted and dispersed among the musicians. As with Yoruba music, the dynamics of remuneration determine the musical form at Mande celebrations, which is "modular" or "serial;" performances in these settings consist of "a series of expressive gestures---proverbs and praise names, slang, melodic quotation, and satisfying dance grooves---unreeled with an eye toward pulling in the maximum amount of cash from patrons" (Waterman 2008, 200).

Dances, which occur in slow moving, concentric circles that move in a counter clockwise direction in front of the bandstand at Mande celebrations, have conventional "movement characteristics and recognizable gestures" that are highly formalized.

"Posture," Sunkett writes, provides the basis for all dance movement; the basic posture of Mande traditional dance styles is "knees bent with the upper body inclined forward at the waist," which trained dancers refer to as the "forward pelvic tilt" (Sunkett 1995, 23-24). Characteristic Mande movement styles include the following: a sequence of steps in which the dancer raises and lowers each foot in alternation as he or she either stands in one place or moves from side to side; the steps, furthermore, occur on beats two, three, or four of a movement cycle, which is "performed in even numbered repetitions" (Sunkett 1995, 27). Dancers execute variations of this basic pattern, which may also include an "arm extension." Sunkett describes this gesture as follows:

> When this movement starts with count one on the right foot, the arms circle in front of the body in a clockwise direction. When count one begins with the left foot, the arms circle counterclockwise. The hands actually pass each other in front of the chest at count three, (and)…the arms resemble two propellers whirling in opposite directions. (Sunkett 1995, 27)

Instrumentalists, such as balafon players (e.g., Abou Sylla; Famoro Dioubaté; Balla Kouyaté), guitarists (e.g., Djoss Diabaté; Mamadi "Djelike" Kouyaté), and drummers (e.g., Mackane Kouyaté) provide the musical basis for dance, praise, and exchange at Mande celebrations. They play a subordinate role in general to the sponsors and singers, who praise and exhort the patrons in attendance. The "language" of instrumentalists is "derived from the dance movements, commonly practiced rhythmic cells, or culturally recognized rhythm patterns" (Sunkett 1995, 55). One of Sunkett's informants explained that while playing the music, the instruments "speak the language" of the people. Drummers, in particular, as Polak (2007, 3-18) has also shown, respond to, comment upon, and mediate many of the ritualized transactions and exchanges; "if the

drummer is playing and someone walks in, he (the drummer) can tell you who the person is and what the person is doing (with phrases played on the djimbe)" (Sunkett 1995, 56).

In January 2006, I performed at the annual Mamaya celebration in Harlem with Djoss, Abou, and Mackane. This concert party was held at the opening of the Shrine Bar Restaurant (2271 Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Blvd), whose conference room has become a popular venue for Mande community events; two of the five community parties that I attended in 2005 and 2006 were held at this establishment. The audience was comprised of primarily Mande women, who arrived late after their work at African hair-braiding salons, which employ many women in the New York community, had concluded. I was one of two Anglo-Americans in attendance, though a few African Americans who worked for the restaurant, were in the "audience" as well. Mamaya, according to Kaba and Charry (2000, 188), originated as "exquisite and joyful" music that centered on a dance event, which was developed by urban youth, who worked in Kankan, Guinea during the 1930s. Both men and women participated and dressed in their finest attire. Its namesake composition, furthermore, "has attained the status of a modern classic, rivaled in reputation only" by older works, such as "Sunjata" and "Janjon." Malian and Guinean bands in Africa routinely include this piece in their active repertoires or compose new songs based upon its musical accompaniment. Kaba and Charry explain,

> The word Mamaya has no clear meaning in the Maninnka language. It implies, however, a sense of collective excitement, joy, and refined pageantry cultivated in a prosperous urban environment. It also conjures up images of serious artistry in music and dance of the colonial era in which local African culture was celebrated with finesse and pride. (Kaba and Charry 2000, 192)

In spite of its cultural importance, the 2006 Mamaya celebration in Harlem, which I attended and participated in, like many others in the Mande sphere, concluded with a

major conflict, which did not surprise Djoss, Abou, or any of the Mande professionals. One collaborator once remarked that a Mande concert party is incomplete without a fight, disagreement, or blow-out over compensation. It was the second time in a month that I had observed such an occurrence; the drummer at the December 2005 event, "Abou from Côte d'Ivoire" as I came to know him, became exceedingly exasperated by the length of the gig, the noisy conditions, and quality of the music. He eventually stormed out of the party with his trap set in hand in the middle of a "song." Djoss and Abou exchanged words in an argument that quickly escalated into a screaming contest. Djoss declared that Abou was "no good," vowing never to work with him again. The recollections of my first experience in the Mande sphere focus upon this memory in particular and not upon the music that I played with Djoss, Abou, and the other musicians. In fact, I cannot describe the music in any detail (e.g., program, titles of pieces) for the reader since I did not know a single "song" that we played; I can only relay the experience of how I "faked it" as a performer, which I describe below.

The role of the guitar varies from one context to the next, yet the guitar's "language" in traditional settings provides us with yet another metaphor of spoken discourse and dialogue, and the basis of the griot's art in the Mande sphere, which informs its incarnations in the marketplace. In a brief rehearsal before a Mande concert party, Mackane Kouyaté encouraged me to raise the volume on my Fender amplifier so that my "voice" could be heard, and his comment remains one of the most striking memories of my first Mande concert party performance. As I discuss in the Introduction and Chapter 1, the guitar acts as a mediator, whose roles are manifold and variable within the Mande griot repertoire, and African music in general. Instrumentalists, such as Djoss

and Ibrahim Soumano, frequently begin their training on traditional instruments, such as the koni (plucked lute) or balafon, and "literally graft" playing styles and pieces onto the guitar (Charry 2000, 295), which represents an inverse process for some collaborators, who were inspired by Manding guitar music before moving to traditional instruments. Guitarists such as Djoss, who perform with a balafon player and a drum sequencer in the Mande sphere, sit, or in the case of Djelike, stand on stage and represent "voices" in the ensemble. During performances, the guitar (in my experience) creates composite melo-rhythmic lines on the basis of its aural surroundings, which include a number of stimuli and sources from which a guitarist can draw; guitar grooves, patterns, and formulae, which in my case were nearly always improvised, match, complement, and interlock with the other parts in the ensemble.

The guitarist is dispensable in many cases, and his participation is not required since the drum loop and balafon player provide the basis of accompaniment for singers; for example, on one occasion Djoss and I both left the stage for an extended period of time in order to eat, though our absence did not affect the performance, and "the band played on." Yet, in other instances, the guitar provides the foundation of compositions, assuming the role of a balafon player, whose part defines nearly every traditional piece. The variability of roles and repertoires illustrates the following: *jeliya*, and the griot's active repertoire in general, which I discuss in Chapters 3 and 4, can never be etched in stone nor can a finite canon be well established. A musician's training, as with a classical Persian musician who learns "the Radif," prepares a musician by equipping him with the tools of the trade, stock formulae, and the most widely used resources; instrumentalists such as guitar players learn how to respond to and coordinate their parts with the other

"voices" in an ensemble, which may include a balafon, kora, electric bass, drums, or sequencer in multiple combinations and permutations. Pieces such as "Sunjata" or the countless others I have learned are models for extemporization, and one's proficiency is determined by how well one recycles, improvises, and creates within the formal constraints of the model, which can be accurately described as a "module." Tacit competencies in this regard, which I explore in greater detail in Chapter 4, inform the nature of professionalism in the Mande sphere and beyond. While collaborators can never become griots, they can achieve recognition as "professionals" in the eyes of their Mande counterparts. The aesthetics of Mande events, however, frequently act as a deterrent for professional musicians, such as Djoss, Sylvain Leroux, and Robert Bonhomme, who rarely speak highly of their experiences performing at Mande concert parties and have decided to avoid them altogether.

Competition and contestation, which frequently lead to conflict, lie at the heart of Mande celebrations, which are best viewed as "social dramas." Victor Turner writes,

> During my fieldwork I became disillusioned with the fashionable stress on fit and congruence, shared by both functionalism and different types of structuralism. I came to see a social system or "field" rather as a set of loosely integrated processes, with some patterned aspects, some persistences of form, but controlled by discrepant principles of action expressed in rules of custom that are often situationally incompatible with one another. This view derived from the method of description and analysis which I came to call "social drama analysis." (Turner 1986, 74)

For Turner, a "social drama" arises in situations that invite and encourage contestation and conflict, and the Mande concert party, in the experience of griots and collaborators alike, satisfies this basic criterion. The paradigm for "social drama analysis" contains four parts, which are informed directly by performative measures, concerns, and considerations; they are: conflict or "breach of norm-governed social

relations;" crisis; redressive action; reintegration. The nature of events, which are open to the community, and the system of remuneration, whereby payment can vary considerably, encourage competition among singers and players, determining the various performance roles (e.g., praiser; praisee, hired accompanist, disinterested attendee). The roles, furthermore, shape the attitudes of participants and affect the social dynamics of patron-griot relations (Turner 1986, 75). As Polak (2007) observed, the levels of interaction, which are nearly always participatory and rarely exclusive, are determined by the degree of one's involvement or interest in the event. Mande professionals, for obvious reasons, have a vested interest in satisfying patrons at concert parties, so positioning, jockeying support, and verbal sparring become indispensable for a griotte or griot whose fee is dependant upon her or his success in this regard. While crises may occur, redressive measures via monetary compensation allow reintergration to take place and the system to be self-perpetuating. In plain terms, if the participants (e.g., patrons and griots) are publicy recognized and duly compensated, the event is a success in spite of the conflict that arises in many cases.

A Mande concert party, in any case, departs from such an event as a Yoruba neo-traditional concert with respect to the designation of roles within groups and the basic socio-musical dynamics it creates and promotes through various forms of contestation; for example, "the organization of instruments in Yoruba popular music" is based upon the "pattern of traditional drumming" (Waterman 2008, 199). The "captain" leads the *jùjú* band, whose instrumental forces are organized into a hierarchy: the drummers are led by the "mother drum," while the guitarists, which include a bassist and a "lap steel" player, follow the "captain." The ensembles and individual roles within traditional

Mande groups, on the other hand, are marked by a degree of fluidity, and hierarchal relationships are not reflected in or by the music. At a Mande concert party, the band's composition changes over the course of a night and the roles shift unexpectedly; some musicians start playing and then stop, while others join the ensemble for a song or two, and then vacate the performance space. My role or the guitarist's role in general is neither prescribed nor is it cast in stone, as I previously discussed. Roles within the ensemble thus can be marked by great deal of latitude and flexibilty. The drum section of Mande groups is not structurally important and does not provide a figurative template for performance, which centers on modules, whose parts provide recurring instrumental grooves that musicians perform, and singers lead with their patronymic exhortations and praises. The instrumentalists are at the mercy of the vocalists whose whims and preferences prevail, and, as Waterman observed in Yoruba performance, have "an an eye toward pulling in the maximum amount of cash from patrons." If singers continually vie for the microphone, as they frequently do, performance roles are constantly challenged, negotiated, and subject to compromise.

Social distinctions in neo-traditional Yoruba performances are "visually symbolized" in apparel and physical positioning (Waterman 1986, 355). The members of the ensemble cluster around "the captain" of *jùjú* bands, who leads the performance from the front of the band. The captain, who sings and plays the guitar, uses his instrument(s) to signal and perform motifs that "speak" to the musicians, cuing the subsequent shifts and musical transitions. Supporting vocalists, who stand on either side of him, sing responses in two and three part harmony or entertain guests with "dancing and horseplay." Little horseplay occurs at the front of a Mande band, and yelling and

screaming determine transitions if they occur at all. Pieces begin and conclude abruptly, and are frequently repeated over the course of an evening. The volume can be excruciating, and I have resorted to shuffing tissue paper into my ears in order to protect them from irreparable damage; whistling, buzzing, and feedback define the immediate soundscape in and around the band, while musicians frequently wince and shake their heads in resignation.

Little or no competition, conflict, or contestation occurs in the immediate environment of Yoruba neo-traditional events, in which copious amounts of alcohol and cannabis lubricate the social relations among the participants. The performance roles in Yoruba groups are recognized and well respected, and musicians never looked to mutiny against the captain at the expense of the event in an effort to be remunerated. Mande patrons have attempted to distance themselves from imminent conflict and reduce their costs in general by hiring DJs, who work alone and use prerecorded music, though, even with DJs, fights among griottes ensue. Djoss plainly admits that the West African scene in Bronx and Harlem is stagnant. He prefers to perform for Westerners, who cheer and dance, and reciprocate his generosity, and he values small, intimate engagements for the Western milieu; Westerners' inability to understand his words, which are lost in the transition from the Mande sphere to Western contexts, is subsumed by Djoss's primary objective, which is to entertain. In the spirit of traditional practice, he obliges his patrons if they are in attendence, though Djoss would rather sing exclusively to Westerners in a club or concert hall.

2.4 Conclusion

A number of options emerge for cosmopolitan griots, and a new set of relations becomes relevant to their lives and the lives of others in their networks. Diasporic Africans determine their paths or routes according to "situational selection" as Coplan explores in *In Townhip Tonight!: South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre* (2008) and Djoss demonstrates. J. Clyde Mitchell (1966) also focuses upon the shifting social matrixes that comprise an urban African's life, and while his work is somewhat dated, it is still germane in this case. Mitchell concludes that structural and categorical social identities are in a constant state of negotiation, as this chapter illustrates, while personal relationships lead to the most significant changes in general. Personal and professional rapport thus becomes a vital element in shaping transactions and exchanges. Shared information is "central to ongoing transactions" that griots encourage and upon which they rely (Stoller 2002, 54).

Louise Meintjes (see *Sound of Africa!: Making Music Zulu in the South African Studio*) emphasizes the importance of personal relationships in musico-ethnographic research in her study of *mbaqanga* and its place in the South African music scene. She concludes that *mbaqanga*, which bears the Zulu name for a type of stiff corn porridge, is best reflected upon in terms of the personal relationships, and networks of musicians, producers, and promoters that were crucial to its sound, style, and development. Her work shows that people and their networks drive the development of musical styles, which cannot be reduced to a set of descriptive terms since it rarely relates the whole or even part of their stories. Even Paul Simon's work on *Graceland*, which uses *mbaqanga* as its chief resource, cannot be fully appreciated unless the musicians' individual and collective voices are heard. My experiences with "The Epic of Sunjata" production and

its music illustrate a similar point; this epic tradition derives its meaning and importance from the feelings and emotions it inspires in musicians and listeners. It can unite people in the spirit of collectivity or serve as a divisive tool. In either case, the Sunjata epic evokes responses from all who engage it.

The trajectories of exchange for diasporic griots are numerous and, as the demography for griots expands, their networks grow exponentially. From Mali and Guinea to the West and back, *jeliya* asserts its presence in both traditional and modern contexts. The roles of griots as commercial artists, servants of Mande patrons, and patrons to their families in Africa, are continually negotiated----an activity that they prefer to mark with an air of irreverence, which should be a lesson to all of us. The conflict and competition in the Mande sphere must be viewed as inescapable realities of their trade, which also entails that griots give back to their families in Africa. *Jeliya* in the diaspora provides a social template for transaction that reaches across time and space in bringing diverse peoples together.

CHAPTER 3

Mande Griots in New York, their Collaborators, and Repertoire

3.1 Introduction

In the early 1970s, the renowned cultural anthropologist and Africanist Gerhard Kubik discovered that one does not have to be "African" to play "African music." On one particular occasion, Kubik performed on the rattle with the Kachamba Brothers Band (a neo-traditional Malawian group) in a concert for a Viennese audience. After the performance, a disgruntled audience member, who had been berated by the group's leader Daniel Kachamba during the concert for clapping on the "wrong beat," questioned Kubik's role in the ensemble since he was not Malawian or even African (an experience with which I can empathize). In response to the audience member's overwhelming suspicion, Kachamba did not hesitate to set the record (and the audience member) straight. Kubik gleaned specific criteria for understanding "African music" from Kachamba's response in his defense. He ascertained that individuals acquire tacit competencies and learn to perform "African music" through "intensity of contact"---a philosophy that Kubik carried with him throughout his career. One's competence and knowledge in general are not determined by ethnicity or the color of one's skin (Kubik 1983, 313).

Kubik's criteria may not apply to every style and permutation of music that has its origins on the African continent; for example, a "talking drum" player in King Sunny Ade's *jùjú* ensemble during the 1960s (presumably) needed to be a native speaker, well versed in Yoruba, in order to understand and respond to Ade's praises. The ability to

articulate the proper rhythmic accents, subtle pitch inflections, and responses on the "talking drum"---making traditional proverbs, epigraphs, and slogans comprehensible to Ade, an audience, and the other performers in the ensemble---was among a drummer's tacit competencies. The skill to create a dialogue with Ade's vocal and guitar parts was crucial to *jùjú's* efficacy and success in Nigeria. *Jùjú* functioned as a mechanism for galvanizing popular support in the years leading up to Nigerian independence (1960), and as a symbol of cultural revitalization during the immediate post-independence era. So, perhaps in this case, "ethnicity" was among the criteria for *jùjú* at its apogee. In the years that followed *jùjú*, like diasporic *jeliya*, became commercialized and commodified by international world music stars, such as Ade and Chief Commander Ebenezer Obey. *Jùjú* became valued by a diverse international clientele on the basis of its purely musical merits with less emphasis placed upon Ade's praises, and the words and phrases suggested by the drummer's strokes. More recent recordings of Ade's band reveal that he began to rely more heavily upon showcasing his rhythm section and *jùjú's* rhythmic features in general, which were less prominent and overwhelming on his earlier "classic" recordings from the 1970s.[9] Extensive drum solos and episodes that appeal to a new milieu and source of patronage---a primarily Western concert-going public---began to supplant the more subtle interplay between voice, guitar, and drums which was an integral part of *jùjú's* style in its earlier incarnations.

The development of diasporic *jeliya* in New York parallels *jùjú* in this respect. Mande griots in New York vehemently advocate and encourage the changes that have

[9] The CD recordings to which I refer are *King Sunny Ade: The Best of the Classic Years* (Shanachie 2003) and *King Sunny Ade and his African Beats: Live Live Juju* (Rycodisc 1988).

occurred, openly embracing the Western milieu that has become their most reliable source of both collaborators and consumers. Mande professionals, such as Yacouba Sissoko, Abdoulaye "Djoss" Diabaté, and Famoro Dioubaté, have been extremely vocal with me regarding the extent to which they value their non-griot counterparts, as well as Western audiences; Yacouba cited world music star Baaba Maal, who is neither a griot nor Mande, as his "man" and his favorite musician with whom he has collaborated. Famoro openly refers to American cellist Raul Rothblatt as his "brother" and most trusted confidant. In a recent interview, Abdoulaye cited his work with Canadian-born multi-instrumentalist Sylvain Leroux in the group Source as noteworthy among his professional accomplishments. Abdoulaye frequently listens to the group's CD---a document of his collaboration with Leroux---at home. Each musician has expressed to me through his discourse that Western fans and enthusiasts of African music are among his most prized supporters. Griots are grateful, appreciative, and, in some instances, overwhelmed by the positive responses of Western audiences.

The non-griot collaborators with whom I have had varying degrees of contact over the last four years have different sources of inspiration that underpin their involvement with griots. Three categories of collaboration are pertinent to our understanding of diasporic *jeliya* in New York. For me and others such as Banning Eyre and Dr. Tom Van Buren, journalistic and scholarly research has led to different types of collaboration that are not limited to performing or recording with griots, but also include other activities, such as promotion, scholarship, and education. For some, such as multi-instrumentalists Sylvain Leroux and Andy Algire, intense study and contact with griots, and competence upon traditional griot instruments, such as the tambin and balafon are

parts of a life-long pursuit. The study of griot music has come to determine their professional path as performers and artists in general. Yet a third type of collaboration persists in New York. Some musicians, such as Oran Etkin and Raul Rothblatt, have viewed diasporic *jeliya* as a distinct set of shades and colors, and griots are a compositional resource for them in cultivating their own personalized artistic visions. Mande professional musicians in New York have ventured outside of the closed societies of their traditional past. No longer do the walls of their family compounds, in a figurative sense, limit their professional options. The wide array of collaborative projects that have come to define diasporic *jeliya* in New York, according to balafon player Famoro Dioubaté, would not be possible in Africa. Dioubaté revels in the freedom he enjoys in making creative decisions in his band Kakande, noting in a recent conversation that the title track from his recently released CD, *Dununya*, which features a solo cello and Western transverse flute introduction by Western collaborators Raul Rothblatt and Sylvain Leroux, is his "favorite" cut on the recording. Griots have become participants in more universal forms of exchange in which musical hybridization has allowed their music to flourish in New York.

I have compiled a detailed list of Mande griots in New York, their collaborators, and the performance ensembles that have resulted from their collective endeavors (see Table I. below). The groups are organized according to two of the three categories of collaboration to which I refer above and outline at the beginning of Chapter 3. The cast of individuals on my list has played an integral part in redirecting the griot's activities from Mande patrons to Western audiences in New York. *Jeliya* as a "verbal art" is in a slow decline. Griot music has been increasingly commercialized by griots and their

bandmates on the basis of its musical appeal, and what the griot's art might suggest in the imaginations of Western audiences.

Table I.

(a) Mande Griots in New York

Keba "Bobo" Cissoko (kora and vocals)
Moussa Cissoko (guitar)
Abdoulaye "Djoss" Diabaté (vocals and guitar)
Missia Diabaté (vocals)
Famoro Dioubaté (balafon)
Djekorea Mory Kanté (guitar)
Bala Kouyaté (balafon)
Baye Kouyaté (percussion and vocals)
Ismael "Bon Fils" Kouyaté (vocals)
Mackane Kouyaté (djembe)
Mamadi "Djelike" Kouyaté (guitar)
Tapani Sissoko (vocals)
Yacouba Sissoko (kora)
Ibrahim Soumano (electric guitar)
Salieu Suso (kora)
Abou Sylla (balafon)
Ibrahim Sylla (guitar and vocals)

(b) Western Collaborators

Andy Algire (drums, balafon, and keyboard)
Peter Apfelbaum
John Benitez (bass)
Shai Bachar (keyboard)
Robert Bonhomme (drums)
Don Byron
Nick Cudahy (bass)
Sean Dixon (drums)
Oran Etkin (bass clarinet and saxophone)
Banning Eyre (journalist and guitar)
Peter Fand (acoustic bass, electric bass, and kora)
Avrom Fefer (sax and clarinet)
Sylvain Leroux (flute, sax, tambin, and guitar)
Tzafrir Lichtenstein (drums)
Kalman "Osci" Magyar (fiddle)
Sean Noonan (drums)
David Racanelli (guitar)
Raul Rothblatt (cello and vocals)

Joe Sanders (acoustic bass)
Tom Van Buren (scholar and producer)
Daniel “Lezardo” Villaneuve (congas)
Emi Yabuno (piano)

(c) Non-Griot African Collaborators

Azouhouni Adou (keyboard)
Mamadou Ba (electric bass)
Cheik Barry (electric bass)
Mamadi Doumbaya (electric guitar)
Fred Doumbe (electric bass)
Lionel Loueke (guitar)
Kewulah Kamara (poet and dancer)
Emile Soumah (vocals)
Bailo Bah (tambin and vocals)

(d) Griot Music-Centered Ensembles and Projects

Keba “Bobo” Cissoko and Tamalalou
Keba “Bobo” Cissoko (leader), Bailo Bah, Abdoulaye “Djoss” Diabaté, Famoro Dioubaté, Peter Fand, Sylvain Leroux, and Yacouba Sissoko

Fula Flute
Keba “Bobo” Cissoko, Bailo Bah, Abdoulaye “Djoss” Diabaté, Famoro Dioubaté, Peter Fand, Sylvain Leroux (leader), and Yacouba Sissoko

Source featuring Abdoulaye “Djoss” Diabaté
Azouhouni Adou, Andy Algire, Mamadou Ba, Shai Bachar, Bailo Bah, Moussa Cissoko, Abdoulaye “Djoss” Diabaté, Fred Doumbe, Djekorea Mory Kanté, Sylvain Leroux (leader), Daniel “Lizzardo” Villaneuve, and Emi Yabuno

Abdoulaye “Djoss” Diabaté and Super Mande
Andy Algire, Cheik Barry, Moussa Cissoko, Abdoulaye “Djoss” Diabaté (leader), Famoro Dioubaté, Sylvain Leroux, David Racanelli, Yacouba Sissoko, Ibrahim Soumano, and Abou Sylla

Kakande
Missia Diabaté, Famoro Dioubaté (leader) Sean Dixon, Peter Fand, Brian Glashow, Avrom Fefer, Sylvain Leroux, Mamadi “Djelike” Kouyaté, Raul Rothblatt, and Yacouba Sissoko

The Mandingo Ambassadors
Andy Algire, Nick Cudahy, Oran Etkin, Brian Glashow, Ismael “Bon Fils” Kouyaté, Mamadi “Djelike” Kouyaté, Sylvain Leroux, Emile Soumah, and Mamadi Doumbouya

(e) Griots as a Compositional Resource

Dallam Dougou
Abdoulaye "Djoss" Diabaté, Famoro Dioubaté, Avrom Fefer, Sylvain Leroux, Tzafrir Lichtenstein, and Kalman "Osci" Magyar, and Raul Rothblatt (leader)

Group Kelenia
Oran Etkin (leader), John Benitez, Abdoulaye Diabaté, Lionel Loueke, Balla Kouyaté, Mackane Kouyaté, and Joe Sanders

The ranks of these respective ensembles are not, and have never been, etched in stone. A core group of musicians comprised of the former members of Keba Cissoko's group, Tamalalou (in one of its later incarnations), has served as the common denominator in terms of personnel for diasporic *jeliya* in both concurrent and subsequent projects. The musicians (and the repertoires) amongst these groups, as my list suggests, are largely shared, sometimes blurring the lines between one ensemble and the next. One close collaborator referred to this network of musicians as an "incestuous family," a phrase replete with its positive and negative implications; while it may be tightly knit, in-fighting, greed, and competition have frequently taken their toll on the collective morale within this "family." Some musicians, moreover, no longer collaborate with one another as a result of the rugged individualism espoused by certain individuals. Many Mande griots and their collaborators in New York have become like brethren or relatives, supporting one another in all aspects of their lives. Both groups have played an integral part in reshaping the griot's profession in the diaspora and are excited to be a part of collaborations that are the first of their kind.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of Mande griots, their collaborators, who are not limited to professional musicians, and the various ensembles that best exemplify a

commercial strain of diasporic *jeliya* in New York. My portraits of individuals and groups are grounded by my concise analyses of select pieces, which provide a sense of the styles that permeate the griots' repertoire. I begin with research-oriented collaborators, such as Banning Eyre and Tom Van Buren, whose involvement with diasporic griots in New York has frequently exceeded the conventional expectations of research in general (e.g., study, interviews, and participant observation). I discuss some of the similarities and differences in the styles of the various performance ensembles, illustrating how a common aesthetic binds them together, while showcasing the mutual benefit the adaptability of the griot's repertoire has afforded them. As the griots' worldview has expanded, so has the breadth or compass of their music as my brief reference to Famoro Dioubaté's comments suggests. I hope that my verbal and analytical descriptions together will adequately showcase some of the complex and engaging musical features of the griot's music, which I have studied from the vantage point of a colleague of sorts for the last four years. My descriptive analyses represent my understanding of these pieces from an instrumentalist's point of view, which was gleaned from my collaboration with griots in both professional and quasi-pedagogical settings. I integrate key concepts of previous scholarly research with my own views arrived at through practice, trial and error, and experimentation.

3.2 Research-Oriented Collaboration

3.2.1 Banning Eyre

Thomas Hale credits Alex Haley with exposing griots and their music to a wider audience through both the printed and cinematic versions of *Roots* during the 1970s (Hale

1998, 1-17). Journalist Banning Eyre has carried on the spirit of *Roots* in his collaborations with Mande griots that began during the 1990s. Author of *In Griot Time: An American Guitarist in Mali* (2000) and *Guitar Atlas: Africa* (2002), Eyre is a nationally recognized expert on African guitar music and a senior contributing editor to Afropop Worldwide---a web-based resource and service for "world music" aficionados whose "headquarters" and archive are located in Park Slope, Brooklyn. I visited the Afropop archive with Abdoulaye before he performed with Eyre at Barbès, a club in Park Slope that frequently features griot bands, such as Kakande and The Mandingo Ambassadors. Banning has written about international music as a reporter for NPR's *All Things Considered*, *The Boston Phoenix* and *Guitar Player*, co-authoring *Afropop! An Illustrated Guide to Contemporary African Music* with Sean Barlow in 1995. Eyre has used his collaboration with Mande griots in New York, namely Abdoulaye "Djoss" Diabaté, as an extension of his journalistic research. His knowledge of Mande music and its repertoire for guitar was gleaned primarily from his seven-month apprenticeship with Super Rail Band guitarist Djelimady Tounkara in Mali between 1996 and 1997. Eyre's initial involvement with Tounkara led to further collaboration in the years that followed, which I discuss in Chapter 1, and his accounts of attending a "naming ceremony" are reminiscent of my own.

3.2.2 Tom Van Buren and The Center for Traditional Music and Dance

As Eyre's book and accounts of his stint as Toukara's tour manager and student demonstrate, research has played a key role in galvanizing support for the griot's trade. Research-oriented collaboration has taken many forms and has been inspired by multiple

disciplines. Academic research has played a key role in facilitating *jeliya's* transition from the traditional to the modern sphere since the 1970s; Thomas Hale---author of *Griots and Griottes: Master of Words and Music*, speaks at length on the importance of scholars in bringing griots "from the courtyards of the nobility to a global audience" (Hale 1998, 244-287). Dr. Tom Van Buren, whose 2001 Ph. D. dissertation *The Music of Manden in New York: A Study of Applied Ethnomusicology in a Western African Immigrant Community* first inspired me to conduct further research on diasporic *jeliya*, has served as the torch bearer of research-oriented collaboration in New York since the 1990s. His study is not limited to *jeliya*, but his work as the director of field research for the Center for Traditional Music and Dance (CTMD) has had the single greatest impact in exposing listeners in New York to diasporic griots and their music. Van Buren has also contributed to the commercialization and commodification of diasporic *jeliya* through his involvement in the "Badenya" project that yielded a series of annual concerts in New York City between 1997 and 2000, and a CD, *Badenya: Manden Jaliya in New York* (2002) on Smithsonian Folkways.

If Samba Diabaté found Eyre's clerical duties "mystifying," then Van Buren's responsibilities as the CTMD director of research surely would have made his head spin; Van Buren played an integral role in developing a collaborative program entitled "Badenya" under the auspices of CTMD. It was designed to showcase the talents of artists and musicians within the Mande community in New York---griots in particular---- and celebrate Mande cultural heritage in general. Van Buren documents this long–term project in his dissertation. The CMTD's initiative culminated in an annual concert series between 1997 and 2000 in New York, and the CD mentioned above. A committee

comprised of Van Buren, local artists and musicians, and community members was assembled to plan the "Badenya" concerts. The planning process became nothing short of a logistical nightmare. In many cases, individuals had their own agendas regarding how these performances should take shape.

Van Buren summarizes the goals of his efforts, thereby elucidating the rationale for this collaborative project, which began "at the juncture of two agendas" (Van Buren 2001, 209). The participants looked to conduct research through presenting the Mande performance arts to a wider community. They aimed to educate through the presentation of Mande artists on the concert stage, while increasing awareness of Mande peoples among various groups, such as the members of the media, sponsors, and government arts agencies. Van Buren reports that his task was to create a relationship with this newly established, though ever growing diasporic group. It was a maiden voyage of sorts since neither the CMTD nor Van Buren had any previous experience with Mande peoples prior to the mid-1980s. Between 1997 and 2000, the scope and production value of each event grew. What began as a free, community-based concert in East Harlem culminated with a spectacular showcase in "Badenya 2000," which celebrated the return of South African singer Miriam Makeba, who, incidentally, spent many years in exile in Guinea during the 1970s. The concert was held for 2,500 patrons at the City Center Theater in Midtown Manhattan.

The Bamana title of this project, "Badenya," bears special significance; the term *badenya* among Mande-speakers evokes a sense of deep social and cultural heritage. It is frequently used to refer to cooperation within a community. This cooperative spirit has extended beyond the immediate Mande community to include Westerners through

collaboration. To be sure, Mande griots in New York and their collaborators support one another in various aspects of their lives. Yacouba Sissoko explained to me that if one befriends a griot/griotte, he or she becomes a part of his or her extended family, and relatives support one another in times of need. So, when times are slow, calls for advance payment for performances scheduled in the near (or sometimes distant) future frequently occur. Griots conceive these transactions as part of their social responsibility in which mutual aid and support, and social obligation are tantamount. A griot's responsibility to one's family also extends to relatives living abroad. Collaborators in New York accept certain inconveniences in keeping with the African spirit of community and sharing of resources.

3.3 Griot Music-Centered Ensembles and Projects

3.3.1 Keba "Bobo" Cissoko and Tamalalou

Long-time collaborator Peter Fand, who has performed with and recorded Mande griots in New York for over a decade, affectionately referred to kora player and bandleader Keba "Bobo" Cissoko as the "patriarch" of griot music in New York. Cissoko was among the first Mande griots to begin relocating to the United States during the mid 1990s, and he set a precedent for the long line of musicians that followed. In fact, the name of his ensemble, Tamalalou, speaks to his particular vocation; *tamalalou* is the Bamana word that refers to a "traveler" that gleans insight and knowledge from his or her travels in order to share the spoils of his or her experiences with family, friends, and other close constituents. Griots market this type of knowledge to both Africans and Westerners. As travelers abroad, Mande griots are expected and required to share the

benefits of what they reap. Their generosity in this regard also informs their performance practices and working relationships with collaborators.

Fand recollects Cissoko speaking passionately to new members of his band, who had recently entered its ranks, saying "Now, you are Tamalalou." Cissoko infused his group with the cooperative spirit evoked by the term *badenya*, which I previously discussed. Leroux reflected positively on his early experiences in Tamalalou. Also a "traveler," Leroux found "a home away from home" in Cissoko's ensemble, which first came together in the now-defunct Fareta Dance School in Lower Manhattan. Tamalalou was a training ground of sorts for New York griots and collaborators alike. It was comparable, in many respects, to the Ellington Orchestra during the 1930s and 1940s in this way. Musicians in the Ellington Orchestra such as tenor saxophonist Ben Webster frequently returned after their initial attempts to strike out on their own were unsuccessful. Cissoko's group laid the foundation, in terms of personnel and repertoire, for subsequent groups in New York, and has provided inspiration for his relatives in Africa, who, according to Fand, carry on his tradition in Guinea with the group Ba Cissoko. Fula Flute virtually supplanted Tamalalou, although the two groups coexisted for a number of years.

Cissoko was instrumental in bringing griot music from Manhattan subways, where he frequently performed, to dance schools and clubs, and, ultimately, to concert venues. He displayed an emphatic singing style that was matched only by the brilliance of his kora playing. He gravitated toward ethnically "mixed" ensembles, which, according to Van Buren, made him an exception among griots during the 1990s (2001,191). Racially integrated groups soon became the rule of thumb for griot music-

centered ensembles and projects in the years to follow. Although much of Cissoko's music, according to Fand, remains unmixed in the archives of his studio, a CD was made released in 2001. Fand acts as a custodian of Cissoko's affairs on his behalf, sending royalties for his CD sales directly to Keba's family in Guinea. Live performances provided ideal opportunities for Cissoko to showcase his talents and inventiveness. His compositions are quite original, although they retain many of the formal characteristics (e.g., use of a recurring groove) that place them comfortably in the ever-expanding catalogue of Mande music (see Chapter 1 for a discussion of Keba's "Wa Salaam Aleikum").

3.3.2 Fula Flute

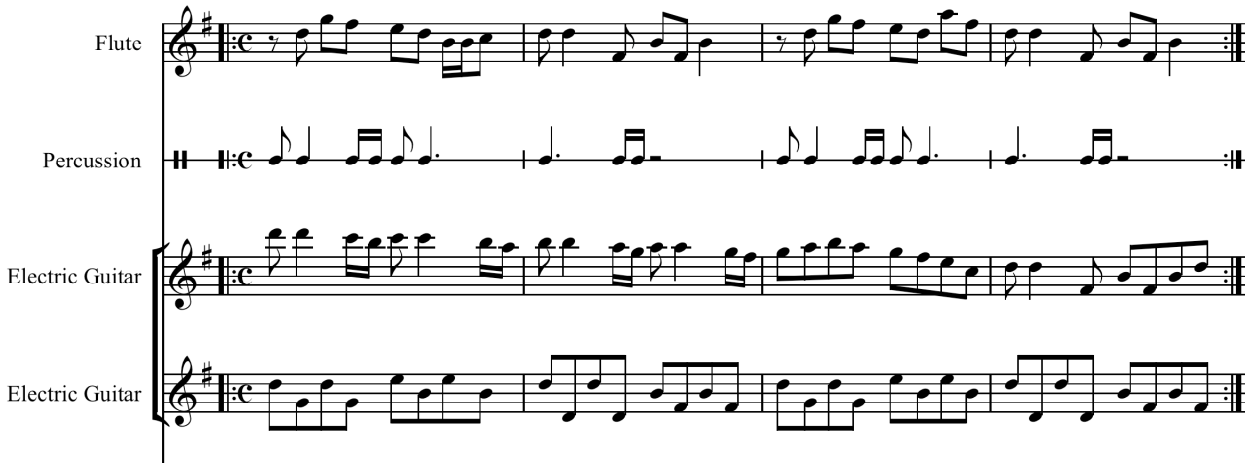
Tamalalou performed regularly until Cissoko's death in 2003. Multi-instrumentalist Sylvain Leroux, a founding member of Cissoko's ensemble, struck out on his own in 2000 and initiated the "Fula Flute" recording project. With little money in hand, Leroux explained, he began recording duet renditions of griot classics, such as "Chedo," "Duga," and "Janjon" with Guinean tambin master Bailo Bah. Members of TamaIalou, including Cissoko, Fand, and balafon player Famoro Dioubaté, participated in the recording process, and Fula Flute was born. Unlike Tamalalou or his more recent band Source, Fula Flute, according to Leroux, was conceived as a "chamber ensemble" whose music was intended to inspire reflection and wonder in listeners, rather than compel them to move and dance. Fula Flute's aesthetic is comparable to "deep *jeliya*," which, according to Charry, "is for listening" (2000, 90). It targets primarily visceral responses from its audiences and is intended for presentation on the concert stage.

The *tambin* or Fulani flute was at the heart of this enterprise. The "most striking" characteristics associated with this instrument, according to Leroux, are the voice/flute effects and multiphonics produced by the instrumentalist by over-blowing and interspersing blown notes with yodeling. Its sound can be startling and bewildering to the uninitiated ear upon first hearing, although its beauty is enough to bring the listener to tears. Fula Flute has performed at some of New York's esteemed musical venues, such as Carnegie Hall, and continues to capture the truest sense of griot music as a form of musical expression. The Fula Flute recording contains some of oldest and most revered works in the griots' traditional repertoire. "Keme Bourema" is a favorite in this ensemble.

"Keme Bourema" originated as a balafon piece that was dedicated to the brother of Almami Samory Touré. Touré was a late nineteenth century general and political leader whose forces occupied much of Guinea, southern Mali, and parts of the Ivory Coast (Charry 2000, 153). During the 1960s, "Keme Bourema," was employed as a praise vehicle for Guinean president Sekou Touré, whose claim to be a direct descendent of Almami Samory Touré served as a mandate for his own political power. This composition was also included in Dowling College's theatrical adaptation of "The Epic of Sunjata" in February and March 2008. As music director and guitarist in the "pit band," I played this piece as a "prelude" to nearly every performance with Abdoulaye "Djoss" Diabaté (vocals and guitar), Famoro Dioubaté (balafon), who plays balafon on the Fula Flute recording of "Keme Bourema," and Andy Algire (percussion and balafon). This composition is part of the active repertoires of other griot music-centered ensembles in New York, including Dioubaté's group Kakande and Algire's group The

Mandingo Ambassadors. It has taken many shapes and forms, though certain features relating to groove persist in all of its incarnations.

Ex. 2 "Keme Bourema"



Keme Bourema's eight-beat duple accompaniment, transcribed in the lower of the two electric guitar staves in Ex. 2, establishes the sense of groove in this piece. This part provides the most salient criterion for identifying this piece in the repertoire. This guitar groove, in all likelihood, originated as a balafon accompaniment; it closely resembles Lansine Kouyaté's part in his balafon duet with Bala Dounbouya recorded by Eric Charry in Dakar, Senegal on April 13, 1989.[10] The other guitar part is an instrumental introduction for "Keme Bourema" (to be discussed in greater detail below), while the flute part consists of two eight-beat phrases performed by Leroux on the Fula Flute recording. My transcription of the percussion part was taken from Algire's part in the "Epic of Sunjata" performances. I conflated these parts on the basis of my knowledge of

[10] Track 30 on the companion CD for Charry, Eric. 2000. *Mande Music: Traditional and Modern Music of the Maninka and Mandinka of Western Africa* contains six excerpts of "Keme Bourema." The recording to which I refer is the fourth of the six samples.

this piece. Any number of additional instrumental combinations frequently occur in performance. The "unspecified, although ordered sense of something that is sustained…in an attractive way, working to draw the listener in" to quote Feld (in Kernfeld 2002, 100), frequently takes multiple forms in the griot's repertoire. This eight-measure excerpt represents yet another "moment of articulation" within a larger aural configuration.

The instrumental groove in "Keme Bourema" unfolds in the first guitar accompaniment as a combination of arpeggiated dyads and single notes doubled at the octave (G/D, E/B, D/D, and B/F#) in the first guitar part. The pitches G, E, D, and B, are conceptualized as the roots in this two-measure harmonic progression. Griots such as Abdoulaye and Famoro recognize root progressions as successions of "tones" in their discourse regarding a griot's harmonic vocabulary, making the terms "tone" and "root" synonymous. Major and minor "chords," in the Western sense of the term, are never discussed. Harmonic simultaneities created by the convergence of sonorous "streams," as Andy Algire so eloquently referred to them, are not limited to any particular intervallic relationships. Octaves and fifths, in particular, appear the most frequently if one compares and contrasts the possible melodic combinations. Varying, and in some cases even random, degrees of "consonance" and "dissonance" characterize the conflation of the instrumental parts.[11] The dyadic harmonic relationships expressed in the basic accompaniment, which are reinforced by the tambin part(s) and the other guitar variants,

[11] "Consonance" and "dissonance," according to Knight (1984: 11), are determined by whether or not the parts in a particular sonority "match," though this criterion seems too narrow to ascertain stability and instability in this music.

provide the most salient and reliable aural markers for an instrumentalist and other active participants.

The melody transcribed in the higher of the two electric guitar staves in Ex. 2 distinguishes "Keme Bourema" from the numerous other "songs" in the griots' repertoire that utilize the same instrumental groove. Dioubaté performs this phrase as an introduction on the Fula Flute recording of "Keme Bourema." The sixteen-beat musical strophe is an elaboration of the *donkili* or "named melody" for this composition, which frequently appears at the beginning of performances in general. *Donkilo* are "melodies that are unique to the pieces" (Charry 2000, 312). Vocalist Sory Kandia Kouyaté's nearly fifteen-minute rendition of "Keme Bourema" commences with a repeated variation of this phrase before he launches into his extensive declamatory recitations. The *donkili* is also sung as a choral refrain on select recordings, although the refrains frequently differ from one performance to the next. In certain pieces, such as "Keme Bourema," "Janjon," and "Sunjata," *donkilo* can serve as stock formulae, providing reliable aural cues for performers, and are conceived as an additional resource in groove-based jams.

3.3.3 Source featuring Abdoulaye "Djoss" Diabaté

The idea for Source, according to its leader Sylvain Leroux, originated long before Sylvain moved to New York. Source, in its more recent incarnations since 2003, has adapted to the ebb and flow of the music industry in New York City and continues to thrive. Leroux remarked that Source "delivers a message of human spirit, of individual and collective creativity, demonstrating how different cultures can meet and

communicate through their personal relationship to music."[12] It has been a ubiquitous presence in the New York club scene and even inspired griot Yacouba Sissoko to name his own group "Sina," which means "source" in his native language, Bamana. Fellow collaborator and journalist Banning Eyre remarked, "This is a splendid group whose sound and spirit capture a unique moment of African emergence and synthesis in New York City."[13] Source features Abdoulaye "Djoss" Diabaté, who was heralded by Eyre as "the most talented African singer currently resident in the United States," on vocals and guitar.[14] Its repertoire features many of Abdoulaye's compositions, including "Nama," "Wunafaki," and "La Guerre."

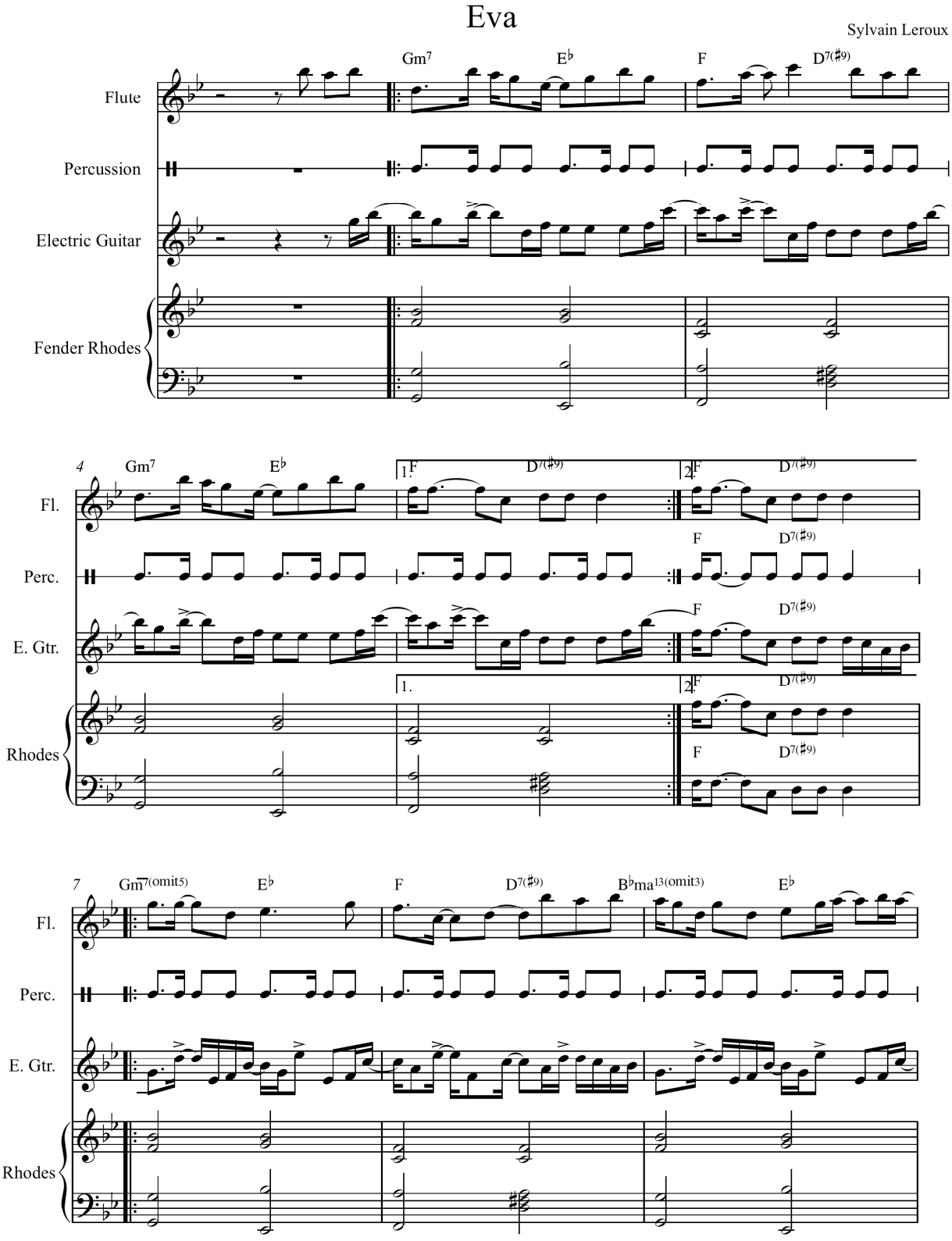
This group's CD, *Tonight's African Jazz Band*, showcases the musical hybridity that is a definitive feature in African popular music. The title of the CD makes reference to the band's regular gig the first Friday of every month at the Zinc Bar in lower Manhattan, where Source has performed since 2004; Leroux and fellow bandmate Daniel "Lezardo" Villaneuve remarked, "Thank God for the Zinc Bar," which is one of the few New York establishments that features "African" music on a weekly basis. I have attended performances and sat in on guitar on many occasions over the course of my research. In February and March 2006, I rehearsed the group's active repertoire for guitar with Abdoulaye, though I have never performed with Source on a regular basis. Source embraces the griot "jam band" model first introduced by Tamalalou during the 1990s. Its groove-based repertoire is replete with "spaces" for performers to improvise and stretch out over instrumental patterns and chordal vamps. Abdoulaye's vocal

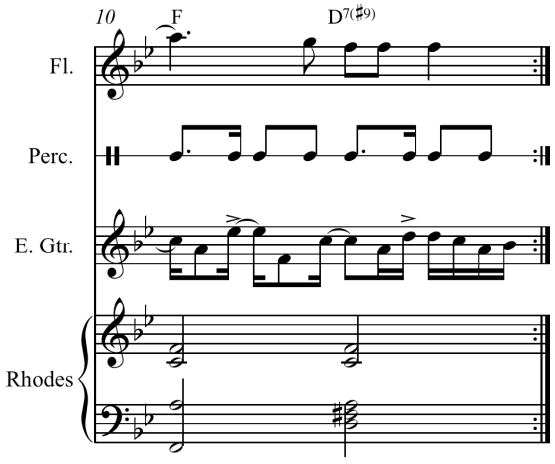
[12] see http://www.fulaflute.net/source/home.html
[13] http://www.fulaflute.net/source/reviews/banning_eyre.html
[14] Ibid.

extemporizations are conceived as a purely musical resource that becomes a focal point or highlight in jams, while his guitar parts form the basis of groove in Source's repertoire. The instrumentation in Source showcases both traditional and modern instruments, such as the *tambin*, transverse flute, saxophone, and electric guitar and keyboards. Each instrument, moreover, functions as an accompanist and as a soloist in jams, which are frequently extensive.

"Eva" (transcribed in Ex. 3) is a groove-based instrumental composition that nearly always commences Source's first set at the Zinc Bar. The chordal vamp (Gm^7-Eb-F-$D^{7(\#9)}$), which is coordinated amongst the instrumental forces, provides the basis of groove and the harmonic basis for subsequent improvisations. Two distinct permutations of the instrumental groove are pertinent at the opening of this work: Abdoulaye's two guitar parts are frequently paired with Leroux's two complementary four-bar phrases transcribed in mm. 2-5 and 7-10. Each permutation, in effect, produces a separate and distinct "inherent rhythm," defined by Kubik as the "summing up of all constituent parts in rhythmic-melodic combination" (1994, 70). By creating shifts in the total image, Source maintains a sustained level of interest in its jams, engaging both the listener and performer in a number of respects. Like a musical kaleidoscope, subtle changes in the constituent parts produce noteworthy changes in the overall aural composite without sacrificing the efficacy of the groove. Solos in this hybrid style are conceived and judged in much the same way; the performer's ability to extemporize new variants while maintaining the integrity of the persistently repeated pattern, which is groove conceived in its simplest terms, is a highly valued tacit competency in Source and other griot-music centered ensembles.

Ex. 3 “Eva”


Eva
Sylvain Leroux
Flute
Percussion
Electric Guitar
Fender Rhodes
Gm7
E♭
F
D7(♯9)
Fl.
Perc.
E. Gtr.
Rhodes
Gm7(omit5)
B♭ma13(omit3)



3.3.4 Abdoulaye "Djoss" Diabaté and Super Mande

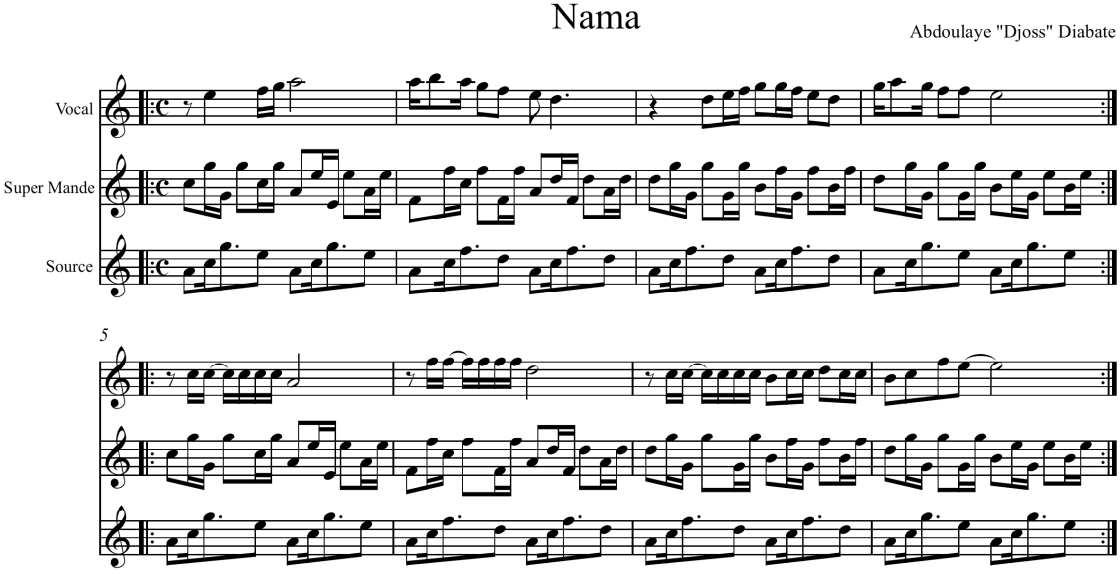
Collaborator Oran Etkin referred to vocalist Abdoulaye "Djoss" Diabaté's band Super Mande as a "pick-up band." It has existed in multiple forms; its story, however, does not begin with collaborators in New York, but with griots in Africa over three decades ago. In 1975, Super Mande's leader Abdoulaye "Djoss" Diabaté relocated to Abidjan, Ivory Coast from Kela, Mali, where his family members act as custodians of the "Sunjata *fasa*," which is the most revered collection of pieces in the griot's traditional repertoire. Abidjan was a thriving cosmopolitan center and afforded griots such as Abdoulaye great opportunities to perform for patrons. Super Mande established itself as a leading band throughout the Ivory Coast, and recorded and released its only album, *Wahabiadashi*, during its tenure in West Africa. The album's title track was considered inflammatory for its critiques of local religious leaders, and the record was banned from airplay. Since the 1990s, Super Mande has featured a steady rotation of musicians, although the close rapport between Djoss and balafon player Abou Sylla was integral to its reformation in New York. Its style, like that of Fula Flute, is comparable to "deep

jeliya" for listening, though its repertoire is shared amongst different griot groups in New York.

Super Mande is featured on the Smithsonian Folkways compilation entitled *Badenya: Manden Jaliya in New York City*, which was produced by Tom Van Buren. The group's contribution to this recording project is comprised of some of the oldest pieces in the griots' repertory, which is a testament to Abdoulaye's musical pedigree. The first track on the Badenya CD---"Fakoli"---is one of Abdoulaye's personal favorites, while others such as "Nanfulen" remain staples in the griots' repertoire. Super Mande frequently performs "Nama," whose adaptability has made it a viable resource in different groups. Abdoulaye first recorded "Nama" on his solo debut album *Haklima* in 2003 and this version best represents its Super Mande incarnation.

"Nama" is the Mande word for "hyena." The song honors the most skillful and hardworking farmers, who, in the African societies of the past, provided food for the community; on *Haklima*, Abdoulaye uses the metaphor of the archetypal "great farmer" of traditional Mande culture to praise a prominent Mande businessman in New York to whom the song is dedicated. This song is also in Source's active repertoire and is frequently performed during the middle of its first set at the Zinc Bar. Two different instrumental grooves are associated with "Nama," which support Abdoulaye's refrain melodies and extemporizations, which are identical in both groups' renderings of this piece (see Ex. 4).

Ex. 4 "Nama"



I have transcribed Abdoulaye's two vocal refrain melodies for "Nama" in the highest stave. The two lower staves contain both the Super Mande and Source instrumental grooves for "Nama" respectively. Both patterns are sixteen-beat phrases, though they differ in a number of respects; for example, the Super Mande accompaniment, Abdoulaye explained, has "more tones," while the Source groove is comprised of "only two tones." Abdoulaye identified the "tones" of the Source accompaniment as D (mm. 2 -3/ mm. 6-7) and E (mm. 1 & 4/mm. 5 & 8).[15] These tones, which are comparable to roots, are not explicitly expressed in the accompaniment, although bassist Mamadou Ba plays D and E when Source performs "Nama" at the Zinc Bar.

The Super Mande groove is comprised of six "tones," which are paired with their respective fifths and octave duplications in a manner comparable to Fula Flute's "Keme Bourema." This pattern follows a cycle of descending thirds (C-A-F-D-G-E), which is interrupted by an ascending fourth between the roots D and G. Despite their differences,

[15] The beginnings of the vocal refrains and their accompaniments do not coincide, though I have used the vocals in determining the "starting points" in my transcription.

both the Super Mande and Source grooves for "Nama" provide different means to the same end; these patterns provide an aural template upon which musicians in both Super Mande and Source can based their extemporizations, although the Source groove comprised of "only two tones" is better suited for the jam band aesthetic that I have been describing. Abdoulaye cannot play the Super Mande accompaniment for "Nama" on the the guitar and relies solely upon the instrumentalists in Super Mande, (whomever they be) to perform this instrumental groove in concerts.

3.3.5 Kakande

In Spring 2006, Abdoulaye pointed to a concert poster on his living room wall that contained a photo of balafon virtuoso Famoro Dioubaté, who is the leader of the group Kakande. He heralded Famoro for his prowess as an instrumentalist, proclaiming (as he frequently does), "Whoa, oh my God," in an attempt to articulate his feelings regarding Famoro's musicianship. Famoro's fellow collaborator in Fula Flute and Kakande, Sylvain Leroux, openly acknowledges Famoro for his talent, comparing him to a "god," who bestows knowledge and strength upon his constituents and humble subjects. I met this musical giant in the apartment of djembe player Mackane Kouyaté, who lived three floors below Abdoulaye and his family in the south Bronx, although I didn't recognize Famoro at first. In June 2006, before a West African party in the Harlem, amidst the cannabis and the horsing around, Famoro proudly unveiled some recordings to Abdoulaye and me. These recordings were the rough mixes of Kakande's debut CD, *Dununya* or "Universal," which was not released until February 2008.

Kakande bears the name of Famoro's village, Kankan, which, in both a figurative and a literal sense, lies at the heart of the Manden in Northeastern Guinea. Famoro's reputation was inherited, in part, from his grandfather Djeli Sory Kouyaté, the leader of the National Instrumental Ensemble of Guinea during the 1960s and 1970s. Famoro remarked, "My grandfather has given me everything" and he still calls Djeli Sory Kouyaté, who is well into his 90s, in Guinea on a regular basis. Famoro, who is accomplished in his own right, still yearns to acquire the knowledge and insight regarding *jeliya* from his grandfather; Djeli Sory is Famoro's familial link to the past. Famoro moved to the West with his grandfather and training in general as his most trusted and reliable resources, which have served him well in the diaspora.

After an artistic residence in France in 1994, Famoro moved to New York and joined the ranks of Cissoko's Tamalalou in 1999. Much like Djoss, Famoro moved to New York hoping to reap the financial benefits of the commercial music industry and to, literally, "make a name for himself." In fact, the spelling of his last name "Dioubaté," he explained to me, originated as a typographical error on his birth certificate, which should have read "Diabaté." He decided to retain the (mis)spelling since it made him feel distinguished among the countless griots with the surname "Diabaté" throughout Mande West Africa.

Kakande, according to Raul Rothblatt, who is both Famoro's manager and a member of the group (among other things), has "a unique sound" that represents a "new direction in African music." Self-promotion has long been an important aspect of *jeliya*, and Western collaborators, such as Rothblatt and Eyre, are well equipped to assist diasporic griots in this regard. Kakande's "unique sound " is nonetheless steeped in

practices of the distant and recent past, while its style adheres to the griot jam band aesthetic that thrives in New York. Its repertory is best understood in relation to my previous accounts of Fula Flute, Source, and Super Mande.

Many of the compositions on *Dununya* use familiar grooves. Two of the songs, "Souaresi" and "Mali Sadjo" are Kakande's renditions of popular Mande griot classics that were also recorded by vocalist Sory Kandia Kouyaté in the 1970s. Seven of the remaining nine songs are based upon grooves from older compositions. "Bouba Sylla" utilizes the "Keme Bourema" succession of four "tones," while "Nina Kaba" and the title track "Dununya," employ Source's "Nama" groove. The piece "Kakande" uses the "Allah l'a ke" groove, which, according to Abdoulaye, is based upon "Tiranmagan" from the "Sunjata *fasa*." The second track "Bani" employs a groove in the guitar part, which is comparable to a modern staple of the griot repertoire entitled "Djarabi," although their respective harmonic rhythms or the rate at which their "tones" change differ in each case. "Bani" and "Djarabi" are comparable to "*Jeliya*" and "Sunjata" in this respect, which are also "musically related" works (Charry 2000: 352). "Bani" was also recorded as a flute duet by Bailo Bah and Sylvain Leroux and appears on the Fula Flute's first CD, although in this version its groove is comparable to Source's "Nama" with respect to its basic pattern. "Mariama Traore" is one of numerous praise songs composed for female patrons with the first name "Mariama," though most are dedicated to "Mariama Kaba," who is a relative of "Nina Kaba" and also member of Famoro's patron family in Kankan.

Kakande's CD and practices in general clearly illustrate the extent to which the adaptability of the griot's instrumental repertoire has afforded mobility and accessibility within groups in terms of both personnel and repertoire. We can draw a parallel between

griots and jazz musicians in the West, who share similar performance habits and strategies, and utilize their respective repertoires in much the same way. Instrumentalists working in the jazz idiom frequently perform stock melodic and harmonic sequences. Their knowledge in this regard allows for mobility and the accrual of credibility as "players." The ability to "blow" or improvise over rhythm changes or blues is a key component in a proficient jazz musician's repertoire. It is a tacit competency that frequently is neglected in discourse among jazz musicians, although it is an important part of his or her training and understanding of jazz in general. Without these proficiencies, an instrumentalist that aspires to be a professional jazz musician would not be taken seriously.

3.3.6 The Mandingo Ambassadors

Banning Eyre writes, "If you step into a New York club where the Mandingo Ambassadors are playing, and close your eyes, you go back in time and across the Atlantic to Guinea" during the 1960s.[16] Indeed, the Ambassadors, as group member Andy Algire refers to this ensemble, personify the sound of "modern music" in Mande West Africa. Charry writes,

> Modern music in Mali and Guinea is rooted in two parallel worlds that had little contact with each other before independence: small urban orchestras playing European and Latin American popular music, made up primarily of French-educated African elite, and *jeliya*, the music of jelis (Charry 2000, 242).

The leader of the Ambassadors, guitarist Mamady "Djelike" Kouyaté, is a direct descendant of Balla Faseke Kouyaté, who was Sunjata Keita's bard and chief consul.

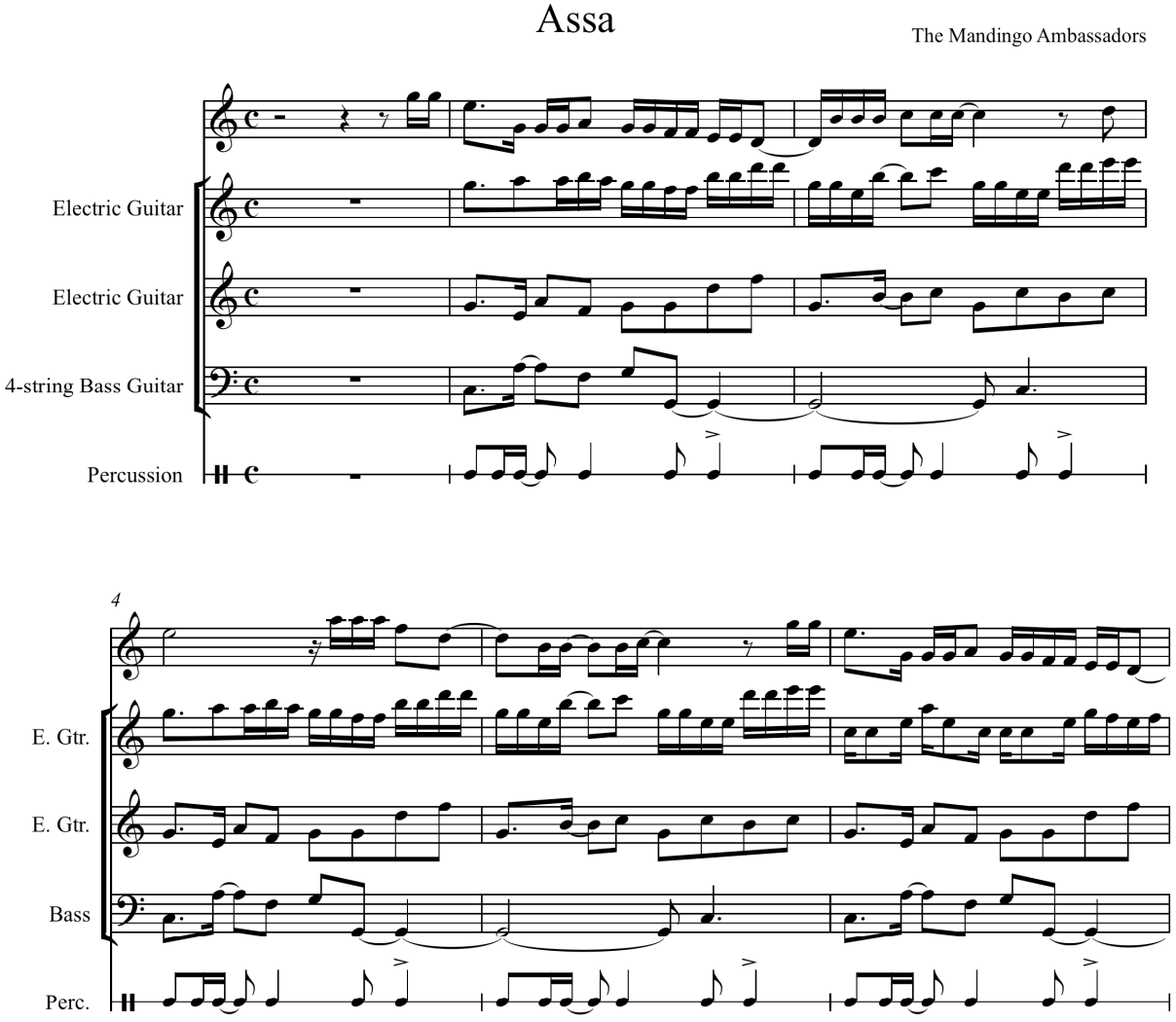
[16] see http://.guitarplayer.com/article/mamady-Kouyaté-60s/Aug-06/22546

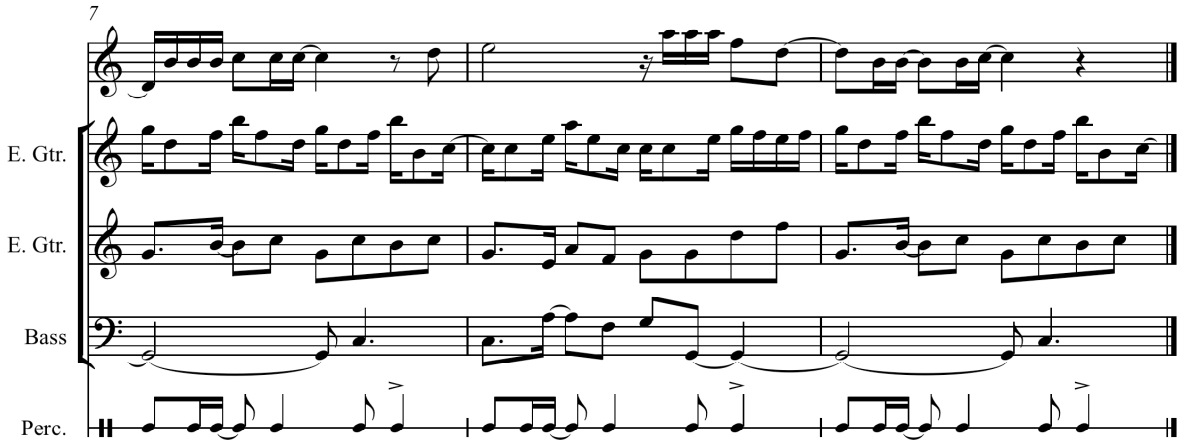
Mamady and the group's astounding vocalist Ismael "Bon Fils" Kouyaté embody traditional *jeliya* in New York, while they encourage extensive collaboration with Westerners, such as Algire and bassist Nick Cudahy. During the 1970s, Mamady Kouyaté worked both as the leader of a regional band in Guinea and as an alternate in a number of the government-subsidized national orchestras. Djelike, as his bandmates refer to him, helped resurrect the defunct Bembeya Jazz during the 1990s, which had been Guinea's most formidable ensemble three decades earlier; its sound and style live on in the Mandingo Ambassadors in New York.

In 2004, Kouyaté moved to the United States, seeking political asylum and refuge in the West. He has not returned home since his initial exodus and lives in Connecticut, though he performs regularly in New York. Andy Algire has facilitated Kouyaté's stay in New York and has helped the Mandingo Ambassadors establish itself throughout the tri-state area in a relatively short period of time. Just as Sunjata Keita had Balla Faseke Kouyaté to turn to for advisement and guidance, Djelike has Andy Algire---a Westerner---to assist him in a number of capacities. This role reversal is an underlying theme or subplot in the griot epic in the diaspora, which Arntson first observed, in part, during her research in Africa, and Eyre observed in his experiences with Djelimady Tounkara. Western collaborators have become mediators for diasporic griots, such as Kouyaté, and provide an additional source of support and patronage for them, especially in times of need.

The Ambassadors' repertoire consists of standard works, such as "Keme Bourema" and "Nanfulen," as well as groove-based original compositions, such as "Assa," a topical love song (see Ex. 5).

Ex. 5 “Assa”


Assa
The Mandingo Ambassadors
Electric Guitar
Electric Guitar
4-string Bass Guitar
Percussion
4
E. Gtr.
E. Gtr.
Bass
Perc.



In "Assa," the parts both interlock and overlap, creating an aural kaleidoscope or a complex, colorful, and shifting pattern. Each pattern is set against an eight-beat groove in the rhythm guitar part performed by Kouyaté's brother-in-law Mamadi Doumbouya, which is transcribed in the electric guitar stave directly above the bass part in Ex. 5. The vocal phrases notated in the highest stave and instrumental patterns are based upon and elaborate the chords C and G^7; the oscillation between two sonorities built upon the first and fifth degrees of an anhemitonic heptatonic tone system, as exemplified by countless pieces, is a predominant feature in Mande griot music. "Wa Salaam Aleikum," "Mariama Traore," Kakande's "Bani," and "Djarabi," are among the numerous groove-based pieces that griots would recognize as exhibiting this harmonic feature, which takes multiple forms in different songs. The harmonic identity of sonorities in other pieces, such as Source's "Nama" and related works, is less clear. The tonal basis for formulae and patterns, which provide the sense of groove in these pieces, can be understood in more than one way, though the harmonic progression in "Assa" is unambiguous.

In Ex. 5, I have transcribed two pertinent cycles in "Assa." The composite groove and resultant pattern, or the "summing up of all constituent parts in rhythmic-melodic

combination" (Kubik 1994, 70), are slightly different in each case. Ismael Kouyaté's sixteen-beat vocal phrase, which is transcribed in mm. 2-5 and mm. 6-9 respectively, is accompanied by two different eight-beat patterns in Djelike's part. These aural segments are two select combinations or "moments of articulation," to use Gerstin's phrase, that I have gleaned from the Ambassadors' recording, which both adhere to the recurring harmonic oscillation between C and G^7. Each part, figuratively speaking, is analogous to a colored shape inside a kaleidoscope; as rotations occur and the relation of parts change, the patterns shift against one another in a different light, providing a varied and sometimes completely different total image. Through variation and embellishment, interest in the groove is sustained for both listeners and performers. Jams are contingent upon the sense of groove multiple combinations create, which inspires individuals to think, reflect, and dance. Each griot music-centered ensemble approaches performance in a comparable manner. A shared aesthetic allows musicians to move from one group to the next with relative ease and share their resources with others in this network of artists.

The fundamental concept of groove is an axiom of the griot repertoire. It can be viewed from a number of vantage points. As I previously mentioned, instrumental and vocal grooves are "persistently repeated patterns" that provide the basis of groove-based jams. Jams proliferate in both jam bands, such as Tamalalou, Source, Kakande, and the Mandingo Ambassadors, and in groups such as Fula Flute and Super Mande, which aspire to "deep *jeliya*" for listening in concert settings. The combinations of different patterns and formulae contribute to the overall "sense of groove"--- the unspecified, although "ordered sense of something that is sustained in a distinctive, regular, and attractive way, working to draw the listener in" (quoted in Kernfeld 2002, 100)---that is a

criterion for griot music in general. Grooves as patterns are different means to a shared end, which involves creating a "sense of groove" either to inspire listeners to act through physical response or to reflect. Tapping or "dialing" into a piece's groove potential, as other Western collaborators have suggested, lies at the center of performance strategies for griots and collaborators, and is an overarching aesthetic that binds the strands of griot music together.

We can extend the metaphor of a kaleidoscope to these points; goals, objectives, and concerns regarding performance in these ensembles frequently overlap and are not entirely mutually exclusive. A "complex set of circumstances" dictates the cause and effect in the dialectic between musicians and fans. Audience members at a Super Mande concert are not forbidden to dance, although dancing as a form of audience participation is not actively encouraged. Jam bands, such as Source, according to Abdoulaye's comments, pride themselves upon their ability to inspire coordinated physical responses among listeners, who are drawn to the kinetic properties in griot music. We must begin to broaden our understanding of *jeliya* to account for the hybridity the griot's art takes in different contexts. Its multivalent nature invites a number of investigations that, much like the shapes in a kaleidoscope, overlap and change when viewed in a different light.

3.4 Griots as a Compositional Resource

In an interview regarding the genesis of Paul Simon's *Graceland* composer Philip Glass remarked that Simon's 1986 experiment with South African music and musicians was a "serious" compositional endeavor.[17] Simon comments upon the raw

[17] "Classic Albums - Paul Simon: Graceland," RED Distribution, 2005.

"Africanness" of the album's opening track "Boy and the Bubble" and reflects upon how he used recordings of jams from his sessions in Soweto as the basis of his own compositions on the album. Since Simon's success with *Graceland* and *Rhythm of the Saints*, which was inspired by Afro-Brazilian and West African music, musicians have attempted to capture some of his "magic" in their work. Groups in New York such as Dallam Dougou, Kelenia, and Brewed by Noon are drawn to diasporic *jeliya* for many of the same reasons that inspired Simon to pack his bags and travel to South African townships in 1985; they are curious, and attracted to the sound and style of griots in general. For many of these collaborators, griots are merely musical and artistic resources from which they draw inspiration. Their interest in learning the griots' traditions is limited at best. These ensembles view diasporic *jeliya* as a creative wellspring that feeds their own repertoires.

Collaborations in which griots and their music are a compositional resource treat diasporic *jeliya* as a novelty. Griots do not discriminate, openly embracing these collaborations since novelty is frequently an impetus for innovation. They perform traditional griot music in these select groups as well. Abdoulaye explained to me that he introduced the pieces "Allah l'a ke" and "Wunafuki," a griot classic and one of his original songs, to Sean Noonan's group, Brewed by Noon, in spite of Noonan's inexperience regarding the aesthetics of "African music" in general. He reflected positively upon his experiences with Noonan and continues to tour with him on an intermittent basis. Abdoulaye and other diasporic griots' generosity with their music and knowledge in this regard, according to Leroux, is a defining characteristic of diasporic *jeliya* in New York. Griots offer an open invitation to outsiders with whom they openly

share their music and lives in general. Collaborators in New York feel equally touched and blessed to be a part of the griots' creative process or to have griots contribute to their own endeavors.

Raul Rothblatt, for example, describes Dallam Dougou as his "Afro-Hungarian Jazz Thang." The group's sound and style is difficult to adequately summarize, though Rothblatt excitedly describes Dallam Dougou's recording *New Destiny* on the Jumbie Records website as follows:

> The first few seconds of the CD introduce all the elements to come: an energetic Hungarian Gypsy riff lays the groundwork for the rest of the rhythm, and it is quickly joined by acoustic bass and drums. Then comes a clarinet solo that is wild but never loses the sense of dance. Then comes a balafon (the West African ancestor of the xylophone), which leads the group, the main melody, and is lyrical, and not afraid to meander. But this is only one way to listen to this. You could focus on the ethnographic elements, and marvel in the fact that the tune is a Guinean and jazz interpretation of a rhythm inspired by the Hungarian Roma (a.k.a. Gypsy) band from Szazcsavasz in Transylvania who are interpreting a Turkish rhythm. Or maybe you just like the vibe.[18]

Dallam Dougou's repertoire also makes "tongue-in-cheek" references to its sources of musical inspiration. "JSB meets Mande Jeli" begins as a Baroque chamber piece that leads seemingly effortlessly into a groove reminiscent of the griot classic "Sunjata." The balafon accompaniment supports coordinated flute and cello parts arranged in a quasi-Baroque contrapuntal style, although they adhere neither to the *prima* nor *seconda prattica*. Rothbatt admits that the group began as a "novelty" in 1998, but its members discovered something "beautiful" while conducting their musical experiments. He has a difficult time containing his enthusiasm regarding the degree to which he values his personal and professional relationships with griots, such as balafon player Famoro

[18] http://www.jumbierecords.com/dallamdougou/index.html

Dioubaté; as we observed in Dioubaté's own remarks at the beginning of this chapter, the feeling is mutual.

For griots, collaborations, such as that with Dallam Dougou, would not be possible in Africa, as Famoro Dioubaté's earlier remarks reveal. Even Abdoulaye has claimed, "Here (in the West), you can do anything," with reference to griot performance practice, while in Africa conventions and traditions regarding music are observed. Diasporic *jeliya* affords caste-bound musicians an unprecedented degree of flexibility and creativity in their profession. Griots are freed from the constraints of traditions, and revel in their choices and options. As previously mentioned, Abdoulaye remarked upon his return from Africa in 2007, "I don't understand music there anymore," implying that the customs of his brethren in Kela, Mali have become a distant memory after a decade of living in New York.

Oran Etkin's Group Kelenia offers yet another example of how the adaptability of griot music has benefited griots and collaborators alike. In terms of its style and repertoire, Group Kelenia draws freely from jazz, and traditional and popular African idioms. Clarinetist, bass-clarinetist, and saxophonist Oran Etkin has cultivated a very personal voice through a decade of work with some of the best musicians in both the modern jazz scene and the world of African music. His forthcoming CD, *Kelenia*, explores the connection of these two worlds through Oran's original compositions and fresh arrangements of traditional African melodies. Displaying a complete comfort with both traditional West African music and modern jazz concepts, Oran has managed to create a warm and organic sound with a groove that will make anyone want to dance.[19]

[19] http://www.sonicbids.com

Etkin performs and records with Abdoulaye Diabaté on an intermittent basis, and works frequently with balafon player Bala Kouyaté and percussionist Mackane Kouyaté, who both appear on his forthcoming recording. In an ambitious endeavor, Etkin combines his bass clarinet extemporizations with balafon and a string quartet on "New Dwellings," which is a composition that treads upon the lines between Bartok's quartets, Stravinsky's neo-classical style, *klezmer*, and free jazz. Etkin also recorded and performs standards in the griot's repertoire such as "Mali Sadjo," a song on Kakande's CD, and "Wassoulou Foli," a work recorded by Salif Keita and Les Ambassadeurs of Guinea during the 1970s. "Wassoulou foli" is also a piece in Abdoulaye's active repertoire, which he performs with Source.

Brewed by Noon is a recent collaboration between Abdoulaye Diabaté and drummer Sean Noonan. The group, according to Noonan, combines music from his former avant-garde jazz band, The Hub, with diverse elements from a wide array of musical styles and genres, which include rhythm and blues, funk, and traditional *jeliya*. Through collective interpretations of ideas, new sounds and concepts, in Noonan's words, are literally "brewed," allowing for a new type of expression.[20] "Improvisation, communication, and connection" according to Noonan, are among the significant performance criteria in this group. Noonan explains that a "wandering folk concept" underpins many of his creative decisions as a composer and bandleader; by encouraging a democratized and participatory approach to composition, he explains, pieces realize their full potential in performance. In this group, Abdoulaye's music and voice are grafted onto a broad musical canvas, which is far removed from griot music and its conventions.

[20] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PFXr70sxPeM

Abdoulaye is proud of his work with Noonan, and he displays concert posters of his tours with Brewed by Noon on the walls of his apartment, which act as a portfolio of his other collaborative projects as well.

3.5 Conclusion

Collaboration with a primarily Western milieu has opened up griots to a world of possibility in New York. Casts of characters comprised of griots and collaborators are the progenitors of diasporic *jeliya* in the West. Shared repertoires allow musicians to barter their skills in jam bands, traditional ensembles for listening, and even within the numerous collaborations that view griots as a musical resource. *Jeliya* in the Mande sphere is a verbal art, though diasporic *jeliya*, on the contrary, is valued in absolute musical terms by griots, collaborators, and Western audiences. The concept of groove in all of its permutations prevails in most cases, allowing griots and collaborators to easily adapt their musical repertoires to meet the demands of a given context. Grooves, which are combined in numerous ways, yield virtual kaleidoscopes of sound. Select grooves form the basis of multiple compositions and provide points of comparison between stylistic approaches, as we observed with the Source and Super Mande versions of "Nama." Yet a broader theme emerges from these observations.

Diasporic *jeliya* in New York aspires to *dununya* or "universality" as the title of Kakande's CD suggests. In fact, the concept of *dununya* best captures the collective spirit that has allowed diasporic *jeliya* to thrive in New York. Abdoulaye frequently insists that griots and collaborators need to work together. Fula Flute and Source leader Sylvain Leroux comments on "how different cultures can meet and communicate through

their personal relationship to music." Writing on Famoro Dioubaté's behalf, Raul Rothblatt explains in the liner notes to *Dununya* that "while the events of tomorrow remain a mystery of fate, we can work together to create something of lasting beauty." With the idea of collectivity looming large in the rhetoric of griots, we can begin to understand the griot's trade in more universal terms. The *dununya* ideology underpins griots' motivations and professional decisions in the West. Griots and collaborators take collective ownership of diasporic *jeliya* with the idea that their music is a part of a shared discourse that crosses the boundaries of race, religion, and ethnicity. As Kubik observed, "African music" can be learned, loved, experienced, and shared by all through "intensity of contact."

Diasporic *jeliya* inspires a sort of eclecticism that griots embrace but do not actively pursue on their own. Griots respond to the conditions of new environments, recognizing that change is crucial to their survival. Through manifold collaboration with non-griot musicians, Mande professionals are able to continue to pursue music as a trade in diasporic contexts, while developing styles of presentation that are suited for Western audiences. I have observed griots such as Djoss, Famoro, and Yacouba use their repertoires indiscriminately as they negotiate moving between spheres with the assistance of their non-griot associates. Rapport and reciprocation are extremely important to griots, and they provide the basis of their musical and personal relationships. In New York, a new sphere emerges in which collaborations and hybridization take precedence, and "tradition" is syncretized as various forms of "popular" music. As Waterman observed in Yoruba music, the boundaries separating "traditional" and "popular" forms of expression, however, are frequently difficult to discern.

CHAPTER 4

The Learning Process for Griots and their Collaborators; Rehearsal; Composition in Performance

4.1 Introduction

In spite of my aspirations to attain "proficiency" as a professional in the eyes of my informants who are my greatest inspiration, I have frequently entertained the thought: "What *exactly* am I studying?" Does knowledge of a handful of patterns or grooves, which recur in multiple compositions, constitute an instrumentalist's competence? Why have I felt as if I was "faking it" so much of the time? Abdoulaye "Djoss" Diabaté, with whom I have had extensive contact and performance experience, insists that I "know everything." He has asked me for assistance in composing and arranging parts for pieces, such as "Mariama" and "Mami Wata," and requested that I teach him grooves, which I had either gleaned from recordings or created anew. The study of griot repertoire and performance practice invites many germane questions regarding my understanding. One collaborator once remarked in passing that "almost" is frequently considered "good enough," while, in other instances, entire recording projects are put on hold for years (or abandoned entirely) in the pursuit of unyielding excellence on the part of diasporic griots, such as Djelike Kouyaté and Abou Sylla. I use my resources as a student of ethnomusicology to quell my ambivalence.

The requirements of a style or genre in general, according to Stephen Blum, are quite inclusive; they "may include advance preparation of new or old compositions, variation or recomposition of existing pieces during performance, spontaneous composition of a performance suited to the occasion or some combination of these"

(Blum 2001, 187). Each of these criteria has figured into my competency acquisition as a collaborator. As a performer, I have gleaned a specific skill set from learning named works, such as the "Sunjata *fasa*," that has prepared me for the act of recomposition or spontaneous composition in performance. I have performed entire concerts with little or no prior knowledge of the pieces in the program, extemporizing parts on the spot as compositions unfolded. Tacit competencies in this regard are crucial for both griots and collaborators. These skills require an informed approach to hearing the music that demands both practice and rehearsal for Westerners. As Kubik observed with respect to Ganda music, griot music must be viewed in terms of the resultant and subjective rhythms it creates, and most incarnations of griot music in the diaspora invoke both of these phenomena in their conception, while allowing for differences in style and approach. Put simply, musicians strive to dial into the aural kaleidoscope that griot music frequently inspires in an effort to maximize each piece's groove potential. The basic requirements of performance, as Blum's criteria suggest, takes many shapes and forms, and they are not always mutually exclusive.

In this chapter, I compare, contrast, and discuss the learning process for griots and their non-griot associates in New York. I conflate salient features of previous academic research on the training of griots in Africa by Durán, Charry, and Hale in order to reflect upon my own experiences "faking it" with diasporic griots, who use creativity as a means to negotiate change in their lives and music, while engendering a sense of continuity in their art. Modularity, in terms of the parts and pieces musicians learn, practice, and perform, is crucial for both griots and collaborators; it allows musicians to adapt their repertoires of formulae, and skill sets in general, to meet

specific performance criteria, which can be both idiomatic and idiosyncratic. I examine how rehearsal and practice techniques, and the use of recorded media, shed light upon a practicing musician's understanding of "Kaira," a staple of the griot repertoire. I analyze the ways in which griots compose in performance through extended variation by discussing two works, "Mami Wata" and "Nanfulen" in great detail. The stages of competency acquisition---learning, rehearsal, and composition in performance---are clearly interrelated endeavors, and they frequently occur simultaneously, so our examination must consider each of these creative acts as codependent. Griots and collaborators learn by doing, which takes the forms of rehearsal through informed repetition, and composition through variation techniques.

4.2 The Learning Process for Griots and their Collaborators

4.2.1 The Making of a Griot

As Charry points out, Mande ways of learning music and ways of learning Mande music for Westerners can differ in many respects. Hale reports that "a child born into a griot family is exposed to both the values and the sounds of griot life on a daily basis" (Hale 1998, 173). Years of immersion and informal training from an early age provide griots and griottes with the necessary tools to excel in their profession, which is conceived as their birthright. Westerners, on the other hand, must acquire performance competencies and a cognitive understanding of griot music through other means and methods. Collaborators do not have the luxury of being born into a griot family in which *jeliya* is as commonplace as formal greetings and colloquial expressions, such as "Wa Salaam Aleikum" ("Peace be upon you") and "In

sha Allah" ("God willing"). As Sylvain Leroux glibly remarked, "Here [in the West], your name does not mean anything," so Western collaborators are creative in their approaches to learning and performing griot music. Andy Algire admits that he frequently "flips the beat around" since his cognitive understanding regarding the "beat" and its location, and the proper placement of stresses and accents, sometimes differ from a griot's sense of groove. I have asked Abdoulaye to tap his foot in order show me where exactly he marks the main accent in a groove, which has created more problems than it has solved. For Mande griots, the main stress in a cycle and the "downbeat," in many cases, frequently do not coincide, yet they understand that there is more than one way to embody the rhythms of the music. In spite of the apparent disparities between Mande ways of learning and ways of learning Mande music for Westerners, griots and their collaborators have reconciled these differences through patience and persistence, and intensity of contact over a number of years.

The making of a griot, according to Hale, is a long and arduous process, which he compares to earning a doctoral degree in Western academia (Hale 1998, 167). Hale succinctly summarizes a griot or griotte's education and typifies his or her career as follows:

1. The griot absorbs the griot world at home, which comprises specific values and sounds.
2. From age seven to ten, he or she follows a focused training as either an instrumentalist or a vocalist.
3. As a young adult, he or she seeks out a mentor, who is frequently a master griot. The apprentice follows his or her teacher to local ceremonies where the young griot or griotte's talents become more visible to the community.
4. After more training, a young griot or griotte might visit other regions or

countries.

5. By middle age, the most talented griots and griottes receive wider recognition via various forms of mass media, such as audio recordings, television, and the internet (e.g., "Youtube.com")

The making of a griot is, in part, comparable to the training of singers in the Serbo-Croatian epic tradition---a connection I elaborate further in my discussion of composition. Lord recounts Parry's interview with Šećo Kolić, who roughly describes three stages of learning---"first, the period of listening and absorbing; then, the period of application; and finally, that of singing before a critical audience."

> When I was a shepherd boy, they used to come for an evening to my house, or sometimes we would go to someone else's for the evening, somewhere in the village. Then a singer would pick up the gusle, and I would listen to the song. The next day when I was with the flock, I would put the song together, word for word, without the gusle, but I would sing it from memory, word for word, just as the singer had sung it…Then I learned gradually to finger the instrument, and to fit the fingering to the words, and my fingers obeyed better and better….I didn't sing among the men until I had perfected the song, but only among the young fellows in my circle...(Lord 2000, 21)

Charry identifies two contexts for learning griot music in Africa: classes at the National Conservatory in Dakar, Senegal and the homes of griots. Informal sessions in the griots' houses were the most instructive and revealing. "The practice of young boys with miniature instruments sitting next to their fathers, if not striking the exact pitches, then at least trying to imitate the finger or hand movements" typifies an instrumentalist's training in Africa. Abdoulaye teaches his son Toumani, who was always present during my lessons with Djoss, in a similar way. Griots or Africans in general do not abstract scales or exercises from their music, as Westerners frequently

do, but rather "practice…exemplars of pieces." "The very nature of the music," according to Charry, "makes this possible" (Charry 2000, 341).

> Instrumental renditions of pieces consist of harmonic-melodic patterns, usually lasting from a few seconds to less than fifteen seconds, that are played cyclically, with various kinds of input expected from the performer. One cycle of a piece, then, can be repeated over and over without variation as practice. I refer to one cycle of a piece as an exemplar of that piece. These exemplars would usually not be less than one cycle long, so that contact with the musical whole is retained. The density of hand or finger movement can be pared down for beginners, and they can also be elaborated internally---that is, the length always remains the same, but more movement can be added to increase the density, or new movements can be substituted for old ones. No matter how simplified the exemplar may be made, it is still considered to be the piece, albeit a beginner's version. (Charry 2000, 341)

Instrumental music is further subdivided into two basic parts for teaching purposes: (1) *kumbengo* or "accompaniment pattern" and (2) *birimintingo* or "solo" (Charry 2000, 314). *Kumbengo* has accumulated several related musical meanings for musicians (Charry 2000, 315):

1. a tonic pitch and, by extension, the interval of an octave and a fifth above the tonic
2. a specific tuning
3. a rhythm or the particular rhythmic characteristics of a pattern
4. any accompaniment pattern in general

The *birimintingo* consists of "long melodic runs that are played when the voice is resting or is a featured part of an instrumental performance without voice" (Charry 2000, 314). Griots also use the French word *variation* to refer to these figures, which are frequently sequential in nature. Durán defines the complementary parts of instrumental music as the "recurrent theme" and "variation and embellishment." A more fluid categorization, which straddles the lines separating theme and variation, arises from her

and my own observations. The *kumbengo* merely provides, in Durán's words, a "musical framework" or the basic groove, while extemporizations occur "within strictly defined limits and along formulaic lines." Durán writes,

> …although a kumbengo may be repeated with some consistency for teaching purposes, it should not be regarded as a fixed composition, or indeed as anything other than a melodic idea whose realisation into specific note patterns varies constantly from one player, and one performance, to another…equally important are its associated variations and suitable places for inserting stock ornamental phrases. (Durán 1981, 191)

4.2.2 Emics and Speaking of Music

While Mande terminology such as *kumbengo* and *birimintingo* is useful for instruction and basic understanding, New York griots do not use it in their discourse. Djoss remarked, "We don't use those words," assuring me that he and his associates do not use technical terms when speaking of music. After much strained thought, Djoss identified kumbengo as the tonic of a piece, though he uses the French equivalent for this term, "le ton," in most cases. Djoss was unable to define other terms such as birimintingo, donkili, or sataro, and his daughter who speaks Bamana and English well, also did not recognize the Mande musical terminology. Djoss uses the terms, "l'intro," "solo," and "l'accompaniment" when speaking of musical parts, though he rarely articulates in abstract terms any other aspects of musical expression. His vocabulary for speaking of music comprises a patchwork lingua franca of English and French colloquialisms and equivalents that neither clarifies nor reflects upon the emics of griot practice. While griots may not use Mande technical terms in their discourse, the manner in which they describe music or discuss it informally yields more insights.

Djoss has stressed to me the importance of playing the basic part(s) "straight" and "clean" without significant deviation when he is singing or another musician is soloing. As a vocalist, Djoss relies upon a firm aural foundation in order to extemporize parts and phrases. The role of accompanist is crucial for all instrumentalists, and Djoss distinguishes the best instrumentalists upon basis of their ability to play several accompaniments for a single piece. On the other hand, Abou Sylla once advised me to "loosen up" and to "follow along" in concerts, suggesting that if one plays his part too "straight" it could comprimise the sense of groove in the music. He emphasized, "You need to ready for anything" on stage. Yacouba Sissoko, Djoss, and Ibrahim Soumano demonstrated that listening to recordings can be instructive and allows musicians to expand their vocabularies of phrases and formulae. On the way to a concert in 2006, Sissoko sang many of the phrases in Toumani Diabate's "Kaira" as it played on the stereo. I observed Djoss shadow the extensive recitations of Kasse Mady's "Kulanjon" with his voice, rarely missing a cue or an entrance. In any case, griots do not speak of music at length, but discuss other matters in greater detail. Instructions such as "play it straight," "loosen up," or "follow along" hardly shed light upon the learning process, and descriptive terms such as *chauffage* ("heating up") do not provide significant insights of this musical system, practice, or tradition. Therefore, we require additional means to assess jeliya as understood and practiced by griots in New York.

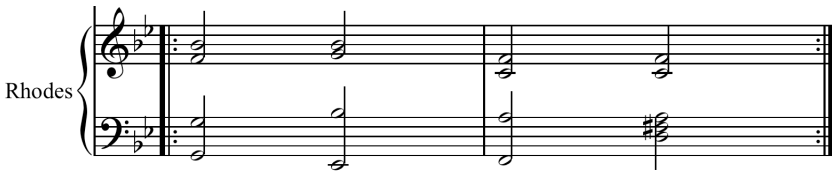
On one occasion in 2005, Djoss explained, "you need to be inside" the music when you play. Once "inside," players must identify the suitable places for interpolating phrases best viewed in terms of modularity, which characterize the conceptual apparatus for musicians. Lortat-Jacob defines a musical module as "a construction fixed in its

boundaries" which is comprised of mobile elements and "substitutable unities" (in Gerstin 1998, 152). A module possesses a functional autonomy since its constituent parts are nearly always interchangeable provided that certain criteria, such as proper placement within a cycle, are observed. Lortat-Jacob explains that a module "constitutes a space of realization…into which other equivalent modular utterances may enter." Personal expressivity and inventiveness, which are paramount for competency, as Gerstin observed in Martinican *bèlè*, must also be considered in these terms.

As Charry notes, griots learn by first applying "exemplars" of pieces and stock extemporizations within the most popular and celebrated compositions such as "Kaira" or "Sunjata," before creating parts anew. They internalize pieces as "spaces of realization" through listening, as well as tactile and tacit learning and practice. Pertinent knowledge of viable musical spaces and time is not restricted to formal rehearsal or lessons, but rather is sometimes acquired through less tangible and quantifiable means. My own recognition of modularity in African styles allowed me to begin my training years before my fieldwork. If the spaces that comprise the music greatly exceed the conventions of modularity in African music (e.g., eight, twelve, or sixteen beats in a cycle), it becomes difficult for griots to effectively apply their skill sets in performance.

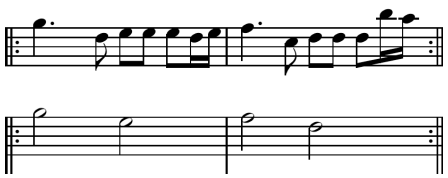
If we consider "Eva" by Source, multiple melodic streams or lines are suggested by the chordal ostinato or module (see Ex. 6). Abdoulaye's three guitar grooves dial into the kaleidoscope produced by the recurring vamp, which is performed by the keyboard player in Source, whomever it may be on a given night.

Ex. 6 Module for "Eva"



The first accompaniment that I was taught, and that Djoss frequently plays at the opening of this piece, is a variation of the opening flute melody or head, which ornaments the chords by articulating their roots on beats 1, 3, and 7, and a non-harmonic extension ($^{\#9}$) on beat 5 of the vamp (see Ex. 7).

Ex. 7 Djoss's guitar part #1 for "Eva"



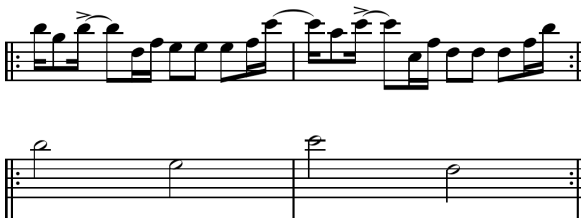
"melodic skeleton"

Griots do not articulate chords as vertical sonorities, but rather select melodic patterns that they can tease out of vamps, ostinati, and modules (see melodic skeleton below the part in Ex 7). Balafon player Famoro Dioubaté refers to simultaneities, which frequently occur as dyads, as "colors," but he does not identify them in terms of their quality (e.g., major; minor, dominant, diminished). Griots frequently use tonic designations (e.g., "do," "la," or "fa") to identify the "key" of a piece before it is performed; these designations, however, can be misleading since multiple interpretations of tonality prevail among musicians in many cases. Changes in "key" are frequently made to either accommodate an instrument of fixed pitch, such as the balafon, or the range of a singer's voice.

Djoss's two other accompaniments for "Eva" exploit another set of melodic relations that can be discerned in terms of the module (see Ex. 8).

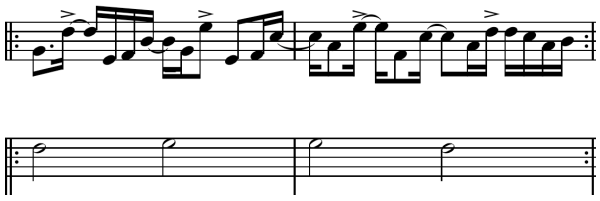
Ex. 8 Djoss's guitar part #2 and #3 for "Eva"

(a)



"melodic skeleton"

(b)



"melodic skeleton"

Ex. 8 (a) accents Bb and C, anticipating the downbeats and creates a stepwise melodic oscillation in the highest voice part as the cycle recurs. In Ex. 8 (b), the accented melodic oscillation between D and Eb in the groove's registral extremes makes it comparable to Ex. 8 (a) in this respect, although the oscillation accents different pitches, which are constituent parts of the module that is notated in Ex. 6. Abdoulaye's repertoire for "Eva" consists of these three phrases for guitar. His use of these grooves is not limited to any particular moment in performances, though they most frequently occur in the order that I have discussed them, exemplifying extended variation (to be discussed in greater detail in "Composition in Performance"). Each of Djoss's patterns demonstrates

the extent to which modularity figures into his creative process as a guitarist. The grooves create contrasting melodic figures that accent and frequently anticipate chord tones and extensions, while observing the boundaries and the prevailing tonal characteristics of the chordal vamp. My skeletons beneath each part suggest what Djoss hears as the basis of his parts; aural streams or lines, as Algire refers to them, run through the spaces of realizations or modules refracting differently with subtle changes in the grooves, which vary from one performance to the next. In my intermittent experiences sitting in with Source at the Zinc Bar or performing with Super Mande, I have extemporized parts based upon similar criteria; Djoss assured me that if my parts were not idiomatic, then he would let me know, so I could only assume that what I was doing was acceptable to him and others.

Instrumentalists create substitutions with modularity in mind, and each "new" groove is best viewed in terms of its melo-rhythmic correspondence to basic accompaniments, formulae, and phrases whether they are chordal or melodic in nature. Each player's repertoire varies according to specific pieces and patterns that he prefers, which, in every case, requires the same competencies for instrumentalists working in this idiom. Tonal changes result from purely melodic procedures in which players can articulate several lines or pitch levels simultaneously. Guitarists such as Abdoulaye Diabaté, Ibrahim Soumano, and Djekorea Mory Kanté think of their parts in terms of the linearity my descriptions suggest and my transcriptions confirm, with little or no interest in playing standard chord voicings or chords in general. Griots mix and match thirds with fourths, fifths, and sevenths (among other intervals) in creating harmonic

simultaneities in the form of dyads, which represents the extent to which they view the guitar as chordal instrument.

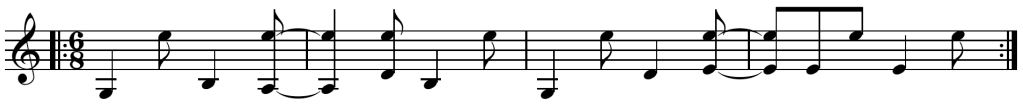
A number of options are available to performers, who view griot music as an aural universe. Abdoulaye and other griots extemporize parts on the spot on the basis of alternating grooves and stock extemporizations within the specific formal limits (e.g., tonal oscillation, beat cycle, or melodic skeleton) each piece suggests. Balafon player Abou Sylla attributes this skill exclusively to musicians whom he considers to be, in his own words, "professional." In a rehearsal for a series of upcoming performances in fall 2006, he reflected upon his criteria for professionalism, which I had first encountered at Mande concert parties; Sylla explained to me that the visiting guitarist, Ibrahim Soumano, who is widely respected among Mande griots, would determine the program, transitions, and song choice on stage in spite of the hours of rehearsal, and that I should "be ready for anything" and "follow along." It was the first and only time that a griot had articulated this basic requirement of competence in a conversation, and, in retrospect, it clarified my some of my initial quandaries, which I present at the opening of this chapter. As an instrumentalist, one needs to expect the unexpected, and steer clear of the other musicians' parts, while contributing to the conversation; the "whole" is greater than the "sum of the parts," and griots work from this basic assumption. Through "intensity of contact," which can occur in a variety of ways, collaborators internalize this standard of performance as well.

4.2.3 Learning to "Fake it" as a Collaborator

The first two stages of my learning process, "the period of learning and absorbing and "the period of application" (Lord 2000, 21), began long before I met Abdoulaye "Djoss" Diabaté in May 2005. These phases even predate my formal introduction to *jeliya*, which occurred in a graduate music course on the "Music of Africa" three years earlier. For over a decade, I have, at some points unwittingly, honed my chops for African guitar styles. I frequently listened to and played along with field and commercial recordings of African musicians, hoping to discover the internal logic of instrumentalists, who, in spite of the limitations of their instruments, which were frequently homemade, created endless streams and lines from restricted sets of musical resources. They played seemingly simple grooves with variations, which were accompanied by rhythmic patterns tapped out upon wooden objects or an empty bottle. My introduction to Manding guitar styles began with Eric Charry's chapter, "The Guitar and the Modern Era," though my apprenticeship commenced with my research for this dissertation, which brought me to Abdoulaye's Bronx apartment for the first time.

The first piece that I learned from Abdoulaye on the guitar was "Fatou." Its accompaniment is performed in a style reminiscent of Ali Farka Touré, who is a member of the Songhai---a neighboring ethnic group to the Mande in Mali (see Ex. 9 below).

Ex. 9 Guitar part for "Fatou"



The Songhai people utilize pentatonic tone systems in their traditional music, providing a marked contrast with the heptatonic nature of the Mande sound. As Charry notes in his discussion of Ali Farka Toure's "Singya," "Fatou" sets up a drone played by

the index figure, which is heard against a moving bass line in the lower register articulated by the thumb (Charry 2000, 294). The relationship between these parts was initially difficult to discern since Djoss began by showing me only the bass line. Griots have become accustomed to simplifying their parts when instructing Westerners, though this can sometimes create more problems than it resolves or avoids. It is most helpful to learn parts and accompaniment patterns in their complete forms so that their metrical properties and their relationship to the "beat" in general are not obscured. After learning the bass line to "Fatou," Abdoulaye played two short melodic phrases against the bass part and even taught me a variation of the groove. I used my recording of our session to learn how to coordinate the drone with the bass line.

My first lesson in May 2005 was nearly three hours long, though frequent interruptions created a continuous backdrop of distraction. When our session concluded, I offered to pay Djoss in cash, but he declined my payment. After approximately one month of recurring visits, I gave Abdoulaye a new acoustic guitar since his instrument was old, could not be adequately tuned, and was difficult to play; my offering was the least I could do to compensate Abdoulaye for his time and knowledge, and express my gratitude to him. I visited Abdoulaye's apartment in the Bronx approximately three times a week for two or three months, learning as many accompaniment patterns and variations for different pieces as possible. I began internalizing the modules for "Kaira," "Nanfulen," and "Fakoli," which are staples of the griot's traditional repertoire. Djoss, who was impressed by my progress, soon began insisting that I would perform as an accompaniest in his band, Super Mande, though I did not believe him at first; I originally concluded that he was just trying to be an encouraging teacher and mentor to me.

I recorded and practiced my parts as if they were sacrosanct. By the end of August, I could play approximately 15 to 20 pieces or their accompaniments from memory, though I was always eager to learn new works, or variations of grooves that I had already been taught. My apprenticeship, however, provided only a limited view of the music's groove potential, and it appeared that I had tapped the limits of Djoss's active repertoire by the end of the summer. When the expansion of my personal repertoire seemed to stall, the next stage of my learning process began, and it was the most crucial to my understanding of competency acquisition. This phase involved coordinating my guitar parts with other instruments, such as balafon and kora, in an ensemble setting since I had only heard them in isolation, and harvesting lines from commercial recordings.

I began to perform with Abdoulaye and his group, Super Mande, on an intermittent basis beginning in Fall 2005, and the tenor of my research shifted to include extensive participant observation. Super Mande's repertoire is limited to traditional works and Djoss's personal favorites, which I had learn to play with a drum sequencer. I struggled to expand the breadth of my knowledge of the griot repertoire in general since Djoss, Famoro, and Abou, who are torchbearers of the griot tradition in New York, resorted to playing the same pieces in informal sessions, rehearsals, and in preparation for concerts. In fact, concert programs and set lists, as I mention above, were frequently abandoned in spite of hours of rehearsal. Djoss, in particular, does not identify pieces with names and titles, but rather the grooves that he utilizes in performance. Song titles become superfluous if new works merely recycle recomposed parts and patterns from traditional pieces, such as "Allah l'a ke" that act as shared resources. Once I observed that grooves recurred within and among pieces, I became less fixated upon learning

"new" songs, and concentrated upon refining my understanding of the pieces I could already play.

As I mention earlier, the guitar mediated my interactions and exchanges with Djoss and has served as an invaluable tool or "instrument" for research. It has allowed my relationship to the griot repertoire and the individual musicians to grow and flourish. In fact, my research agenda via the guitar has spared me the aggravation of competing with other musicians in the network. Within the first few months, Djoss recognized that I was not an unscrupulous opportunist, and we established a close friendship on the basis of mutual trust. African musicians, in particular, have taken advantage of Djoss's generosity and talents on many occasions, so he has come to rely heavily upon Western collaborators such as Leroux and myself who keep his interests in mind. More importantly, Abdoulaye openly recognized that competency acquistion requires on-the-job training, which I received at concert parties and in concerts.

My use of the phrase or expression, "to fake it," refers to how I have frequently felt during my tenure as a collaborator and a quasi-colleague. The acquisition of tactile skills, in any case, has assumed many forms, and whether I was performing with Super Mande, playing in a club, "faking it" at a concert party, or horsing around in Djoss's living room, I observed that the learning process, practice, and composition occur simultaneously and are mutually reinforcing activities; they overlap and complement one another in many instances. Musicians in the griot network learn to extemporize parts, patterns, and formulae upon the basis of their immediate aural surroundings and musical intuitions, which are informed by their knowledge of the style. Professionals compose parts that are modular, and my own recognition of the repertoire as groove-based or

pattern-driven has informed my understanding through contact and served me well over the course of my research.

4.2.4 Rehearsal Techniques and Practice

Griots rarely practice or learn new material unless they are coerced. One close collaborator remarked that he had never seen two balafon masters, Famoro and Abou, practice on their own. Rehearsals with griots never quite met my presumed criteria, and while I may have been prepared to learn the music on guitar, my rehearsal experiences defied all of my expectations; hours of taped sessions consist of primarily "dead air," small talk, and horseplay. The rehearsal process for me, in any case, occurred both on an individual basis and within group settings with other musicians. Informal settings for rehearsals were the most instructive, while scheduled rehearsals were frequently riddled with problems from the very beginning. Through rehearsing, which requires varying degrees of informed repetition, instrumentalists, including balafon players and guitar players, are afforded opportunities to perhaps hear pieces in new ways, and they are able to build upon their own personal repertoires of knowledge regarding specific modules such as "Kaira." Instrumental parts, and their relations and subsequent combinations in griot music, can be viewed in terms of a groove-based aural kaleidoscope, whose profile changes with each and every instrumental variation and embellishment. So musicians must always consider how best to complement the other parts in an ensemble performance, whether it occurs on in a club, on a concert stage, or in someone's living room.

Abdoulaye and I frequently used the BOSS DR-5 drum sequencer to practice, in rehearsals, and on gigs. At first, the idea of using an antiquated synthesizer from the early 1990s did not appeal to me. Both Banning Eyre and I agreed: the synthesizer had already caused the demise of other African popular styles, such as highlife, and especially soukous. We both did our part to spare griot music from a similar fate. I even tried to convince Djoss to invest in a newer sequencer, which would sound much less "canned," though he insisted on using the BOSS DR-5. He knew how to operate the BOSS DR-5, and it served its purpose well in performances. It took a while for me to accept the BOSS DR-5 as a viable musical resource. I asked myself, "Is this authentic?" I ultimately realized that I needed to reconsider my expectations regarding the nature of "authentic" Mande music. I began to value the drum machine once I understood its role and function in the music.

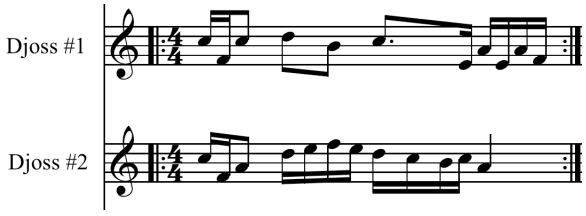
The BOSS DR-5 is an integral resource in a griot's arsenal in New York as well as abroad. The loops provide vocalists and instrumentalists with an aural template upon which new parts can be layered, and serve as the starting points from which performances can commence. Djoss has implored me to purchase as many units of the BOSS DR-5 sequencer for him as possible, for his own use, and so that he can sell them to other musicians in order to make a profit. He has sent the BOSS DR-5 to family and friends in Africa, where it has become an accepted part of performance practice, especially in traditional contexts. The sequencer is also an invaluable tool for practice, rehearsal, experimentation, and, even, composition. I have arrived at Abdoulaye's apartment on several occasions in which he has been playing along with the sequencer (similar to my own approach of playing with recordings). Djoss acquired three sequencers for himself

(and still wanted more), though they were lost with his luggage on his return trip to Africa in December 2006.

"Kaira" was the first piece that we rehearsed with the drum machine. It is a modern composition that originated on the accordion (of all instruments) and, later, it was disseminated amongst guitarists (Charry 2000, 156). "Kaira" is widely recognized throughout Mali and Guinea, and, like many other pieces in the griots' active repertoires, it "is used as a standard accompaniment for creating new songs." I have come to know this piece, which I have performed countless times, in terms of much simpler or basic criteria than the terms "accompaniment" and "pattern" imply. This song has been performed and recorded by Malian kora virtuoso, Toumani Diabaté, and his father on a number of occasions throughout the years. It was originally dedicated to a Fulbe interpreter Kaira Barry in Guinea before 1940, though Abdoulaye's exposure to "Kaira" most likely began during his youth in his village of Kela, where his father Sira Mory Diabaté recorded several versions of it.

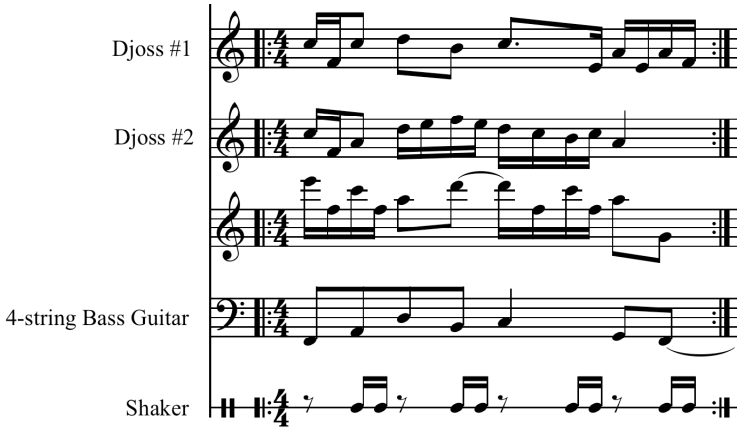
The first accompaniment that Abdoulaye taught me for "Kaira" was a variation of the bass part from the BOSS DR-5 loop ("Djoss # 1" in Ex. 10). He also showed me a brief cascading melodic figure that could be used, at the performer's disposal, as a viable substitute for the first phrase ("Djoss #2" in Ex. 10).

Ex. 10 Djoss's guitar parts #1 and #2 for "Kaira"



Nearly every drum loop performs at least three melo-rhythmic patterns, providing the basis of the composition for musicians. Griots would add more parts if it were not for the limitations of the sequencer. The first two parts are complementary melodic formulae, while the third part, transcribed in the shaker part in Ex. 11, is frequently rhythmic in nature.

Ex. 11 Djoss's guitar parts for "Kaira" with BOSS DR-5 loop



I have contextualized the first two guitar accompaniments for "Kaira"---"Djoss #1 and "Djoss #2"---with the other parts provided by the loop, which are notated in the three additional lower staves (shaker, 4-string bass guitar, and the untitled treble clef) in Ex.11. The bass and treble parts are reminiscent of grooves that would normally be performed simultaneously by a kora or a balafon, while the shaker accentuates the "off-beats" for the entirety of the performance. Instrumentalists are free to double the sequencer parts or create new lines that overlap or interlock with the loop at key points. Abdoulaye frequently has his own set of patterns that he prefers to play against various loops, although some compositions allow for more latitude than others in this regard. Each performer develops skills and tools that allow him or her to create parts and patterns almost instantaneously. Compositions such as "Kaira," or the numerous others that I

learned, provide instrumentalists with an opportunity to expand their own repertoire of patterns or approaches to this style of playing, which requires a certain type of technical proficiency and versatility.

4.2.5 Recorded Media as a Resource

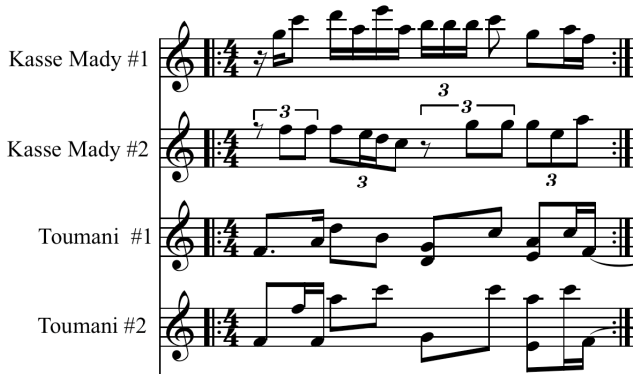
Recorded media in the form of audiotapes, CDs, and video have greatly facilitated the learning process for diasporic griots and their collaborators. Audio recordings provide an effective means through which diasporic *jeliya* is transmitted by and to its practioners. Classic recordings of celebrated performances by the Rail Band of Mali and Bembeya Jazz of Guinea are the aural sources that feed the repertoires of these musicians in every respect. Many of the guitar accompaniments and variations that Abdoulaye taught me were gleaned from commercial recordings. Djoss's arrangement and three main grooves for "Sunjata," for example, are included in the longest of the three Rail Band recordings of "Sunjata," which is nearly thirty minutes in length. His instrumental renderings of "Kulanjon," "Kaira," "Nanfulen," and "Mami Wata" are also reminiscent of other CD recordings that I have acquired over the course of my research.

The scope of tools for competency acquisition has widened. My own experience as a collaborator includes two mutually reinforcing activities---a synthesis of "old" and "new" approaches: personalized student-mentor interaction with griots and work with commercial recordings. In fact, Djoss, Famoro, and Djelike also use recordings as the basis of their practice routines and competency acquisition. In keeping with the spirit of diasporic *jeliya*, griots never hesitate to experiment, introducing new ideas in rehearsals or concerts. Sometimes a griot's personal preference, rather than correctness, determines

the appropriateness of reworked material from a performer's perspective; however, I have been unable to distinguish one from the other in most instances.

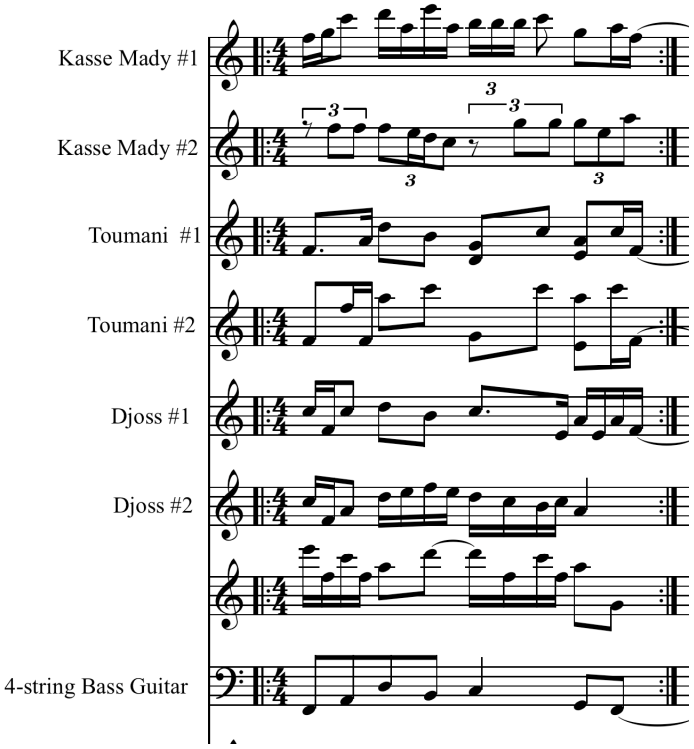
My guitar parts for "Kaira" were gleaned from Kasse Mady Diabaté's rendition and kora player Toumani Diabaté's solo recording of "Kaira." Djoss Diabaté remarked that he liked, even preferred, the "Toumani #2" groove as an accompaniment to his vocals (see Ex. 12 below).

Ex. 12 Kasse Mady and Toumani's parts for "Kaira"



If we consider these four alternative grooves within the context of the other parts provided by the BOSS DR-5 loop and Abdoulaye's parts for "Kaira," we begin to see the manifold impact recorded media can have upon an instrumentalist's repertoire (see Ex. 13 below). Eight options are available to a guitarist at the beginning of each cycle on the basis of the parts that I have learned from Abdoulaye, the BOSS DR-5 sequencer, and commercial recordings of "Kaira."

Ex. 13 Combination of all the parts for "Kaira"



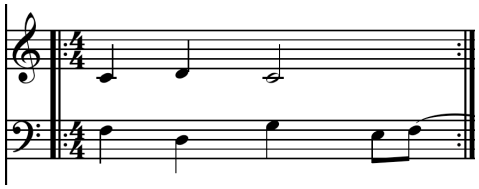
These parts can be played either simultaneously or in a contiguous manner in an ensemble performance. The projection of the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection onto the axis of combination, therefore, is relevant for practice and rehearsal.[21] Paradigmatic schemes, such as my notation of "Kaira" in Ex. 13, base the assignment of units entirely upon repetition so that "anything repeated (straight or varied)," according to Jakobson, "is defined as a unit, and this is true on all levels," from sections to phrases and individual sounds (1960, 358). In spite of their obvious differences in profile and content in general, the eight formulae notated above are equivalent, and are immediately recognized as "Kaira" by instrumentalists and vocalists alike. Most instrumentalists prefer a select set of patterns for specific pieces. For "Kaira," I have most frequently employed the "Djoss" and "Toumani" grooves. Each groove can be performed in

[21] I have adapted the terminology of paradigmatic analysis from Roman Jakobson "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics," Thomas A. Sebeok, *Style In Language*, MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1960, 358.

contrasting registers, which, according to Djoss, are conceived as the "same" parts due to octave equivalence. The choice of register is determined by the role of an instrumentalist within a particular ensemble, and his role may change as the performance unfolds.

These formulae, which manifest as a myriad of notes, are simpler in conception than they may first appear. A single voice-leading scheme or, using Durán's term, "key phrase" unites these parts within the "Kaira" rubric (see Ex. 14).

Ex. 14 Key phrase for "Kaira"



The key phrase, according to Durán's informant kora player Amadu Bansang Jobate, "acts as the point" in the groove "to which all variation must return" (Durán 1981: 189). Viewed from another vantage point, the key phrase represents the melodic threads from which patterns depart. Three tones---F, D, and C---provide the tonal basis for the grooves for "Kaira." The tones act as aural signposts for performers that combine their parts in a kaleidoscope of sound, which makes up the total image. Five of the eight instrumental grooves for "Kaira" anticipate the arrival of the tonic note F on beat four of the cycle. This particular "off-beat" accentuation is one of this composition's most salient musical characteristics.

Durán's analyses of Jobate's grooves show that each part and its variations consist of a different "melodic skeleton." Each skeleton is wed to a single key phrase. Parts are classified as a particular piece, yet they can be realized in number of ways. The art of "extended variation" occurs when grooves are arranged and combined in a contiguous manner; a myriad of skeletons or streams emerge and provide the basis for compositions.

Durán reminds us, however, that composition "takes place within strictly defined limits and along formulaic lines" (1981, 191).

4.2.6 Composition in Performance

Gregory Smith, who is indebted to Leo Treitler, based his "quest of a new perspective on improvised jazz" on the point that the roles of composer and performer in this idiom frequently merge. While Smith was not concerned with the medieval chant repertoire and its development, he discovered that there were significant parallels between Treitler's observations and his own findings. "Compositional decisions," Smith observed, "are made largely in the course of performance" and the "balance between spontaneous and predetermined choices is reflected in the terms we use to describe the performer's role in the compositional process" (Smith 1991, 34). Composition in diasporic *jeliya*, as in improvised jazz, is a "thriving practice" that occurs primarily in performance, as my previous observations and forthcoming analyses illustrate. For balafon player Abou Sylla and other griots, composition in performance is a skill reserved for professionals. Composition in griot music, furthermore, is comparable to the conventions of improvised epic verse in the Balkans. Lord's findings (like Treitler's adaptation) revealed that bards make "rapid-fire decisions in the heat of performance using a system of formulaic composition" (Smith 1991, 29). "Patterns," "grooves," and "modules" in griot music are best understood as synonyms for the formulae that comprise the repertoires of jazz musicians, griots in New York and their collaborators, and bards in the Serbo-Croatian verse-making tradition. These respective performance practices are bound together by these fundamental principles of composition, which are shared by all.

The study of epic verse provides the basis of our examination of composition. Ideas cast in similar wording are recognized as formulae. Related phrases that express comparable meanings in a slightly different manner are conceived as variations, which are related to a common theme, and considered equivalent. Griot music, like epic verse, using Lord's words, consists of a series of "formulaic expressions" that occur both simultaneously, as my discussion of "Kaira" demonstrates, and through extended variation, which combines patterns in a syntactical ordering. Formulae in the griot's repertoire are clearly articulated and abound, so we are not faced with the same challenges as Smith (1991, 27-50) in his analysis of Bill Evan's improvised passage from "My Romance." Extended variation, which frequently corresponds in length to two or more renderings of a basic groove, is the key to instrumental composition. We can deconstruct a piece in terms of its ordering of grooves, which we can label and classify in terms of modularity and its key phrase that binds them together. My forthcoming analyses of "Mami Wata" and "Nanfulen" will illustrate the degree to which formulas impact large-scale composition and highlight their importance in the repertoires of instrumentalists.

To compose in performance along formulaic lines is very common in oral or aural music traditions. In many cultures, according to Stephen Blum, compositions are valued, above all, as items in a repertory that can be "recomposed" (2001, 87). Formulae accommodate, facilitate, and encourage the process of recomposition. My discussion of Kakande's CD *Dununya* demonstrates the degree to which "new" works are derived from familiar grooves, but does not reflect upon the active process of composition in performance or the use of formulas in such an endeavor. So, with formulaic composition

in mind, we can begin to augment our understanding, alleviating my quandary at the opening of this chapter regarding the nature of my own instrumental proficiency.

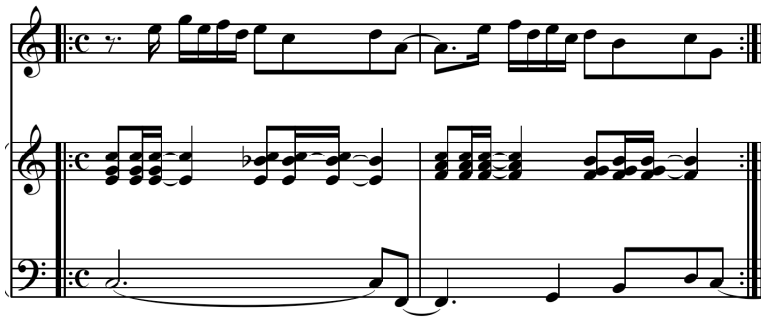
"Mami Wata" is a composition named for the water spirit and deity,"Mother Water." References to "Mami Wata" in the West and Central African, and diasporic popular cultures abound in print and the visual arts as well. The figure of "Mother Water" epitomizes hybridity (Drewal, Gore, and Kisliuk 2006), which is one of the most prevailing characteristics of diasporic *jeliya*. The classic recording of "Mami Wata" by Bembeya Jazz provides the basis of my discussion, while Sekou "Bembeya" Diabaté's guitar solo, in particular, demonstrates the importance of formulas in the construction of this piece. I have teased out a handful of grooves from his solo and the recording in general in order to expand my own repertoire for "Mami Wata." I have frequently reordered, varied, and recomposed many of the parts to satisfy my own needs and ends. I have even used patterns from related compositions, such as the numerous pieces employing the palm-wine highlife "Ya Amponsah" groove upon which "Mami Wata" is based, to expand my palate for this piece. My resourcefulness in this regard inspired Abdoulaye to ask and implore, "Where did you learn that? Show me!!!"

Each groove in "Mami Wata" adheres to an eight-beat, using Lortat-Jacob's phrase, "space of realization," that consists of a three-tone harmonic progression, and key rhythmic accents and articulations (see Ex. 15 (a) and (b)). We should resist the temptation to classify "Mami Wata" as merely another song in African popular music comprised of a recurring chordal vamp on scale degrees I, IV, and V, although no one can deny its affinity to such pieces. The syncopated bass line figure acts as a key phrase in this piece. The anticipation of the tonal roots---C, F, and G---is crucial in

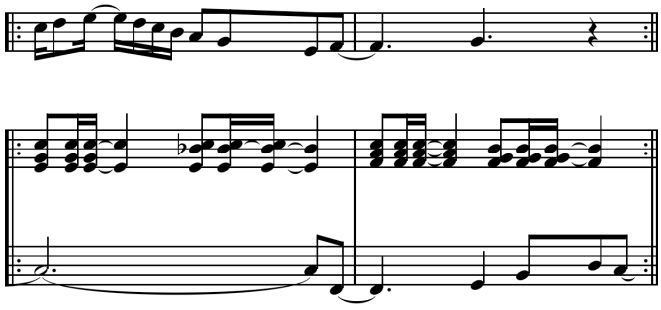
performance and an indispensable feature of this work in nearly all of its manifestations. Two refrain melodies, which recur throughout the various renderings of this composition by Bembeya Jazz, Grand Papa Diabaté, Fode Baro and others, also identify this piece, much like *donkilo* or named melodies in traditional music. Both formulae were extrapolated from vocal parts for guitar by Djoss Diabaté and inform Sekou Diabaté's lengthy solo episode on the Bembeya Jazz recording.[22]

Ex. 15 Two refrain formulae for "Mami Wata"

(a)



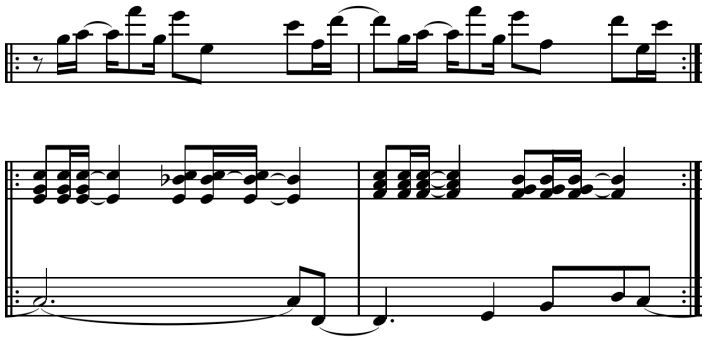
(b)



Sekou transitions into his solo with one of his two accompaniments for "Mami Wata" transcribed in the highest treble stave below (see Ex. 16).

[22] The classic recording of "Mami Wata" appears on the CD *Bembeya Jazz National: Hommage à Demba Camara* (2000).

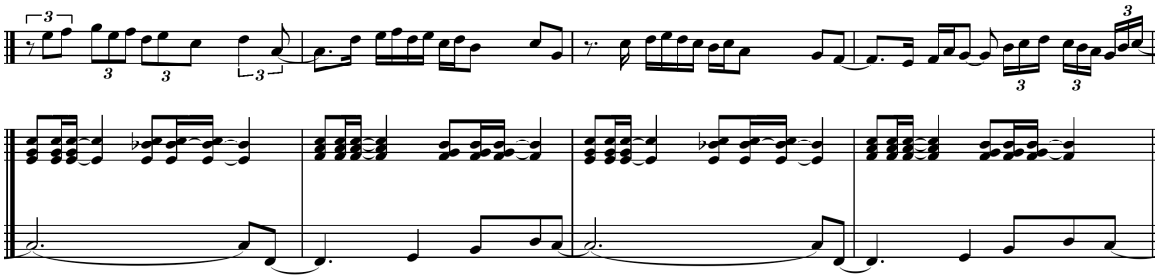
Ex. 16 (time cue 2:51-3:11) First phrase of Sekou's solo in "Mami Wata"



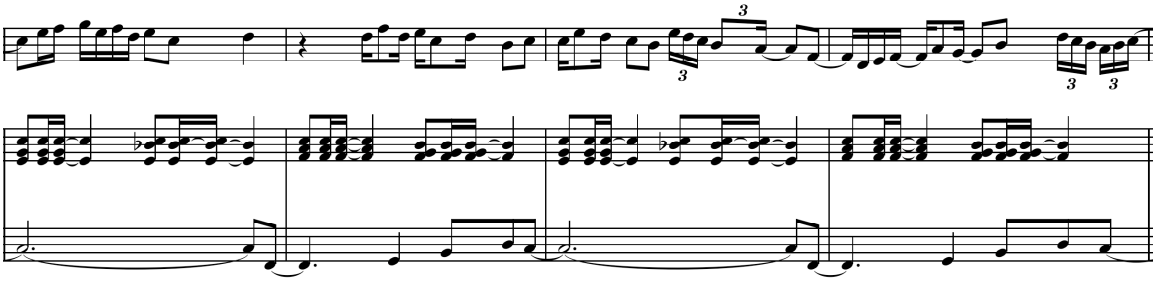
This eight-beat phrase recurs four times before Sekou's extended variations begin; he elides the two refrains from Ex. 15 (a) and (b), and they provide the basis of his first episode (see Ex. 17 below).

Ex. 17 (time cue: 3:12-3:30) First episode of Sekou's solo in "Mami Wata"

(a)



(b)



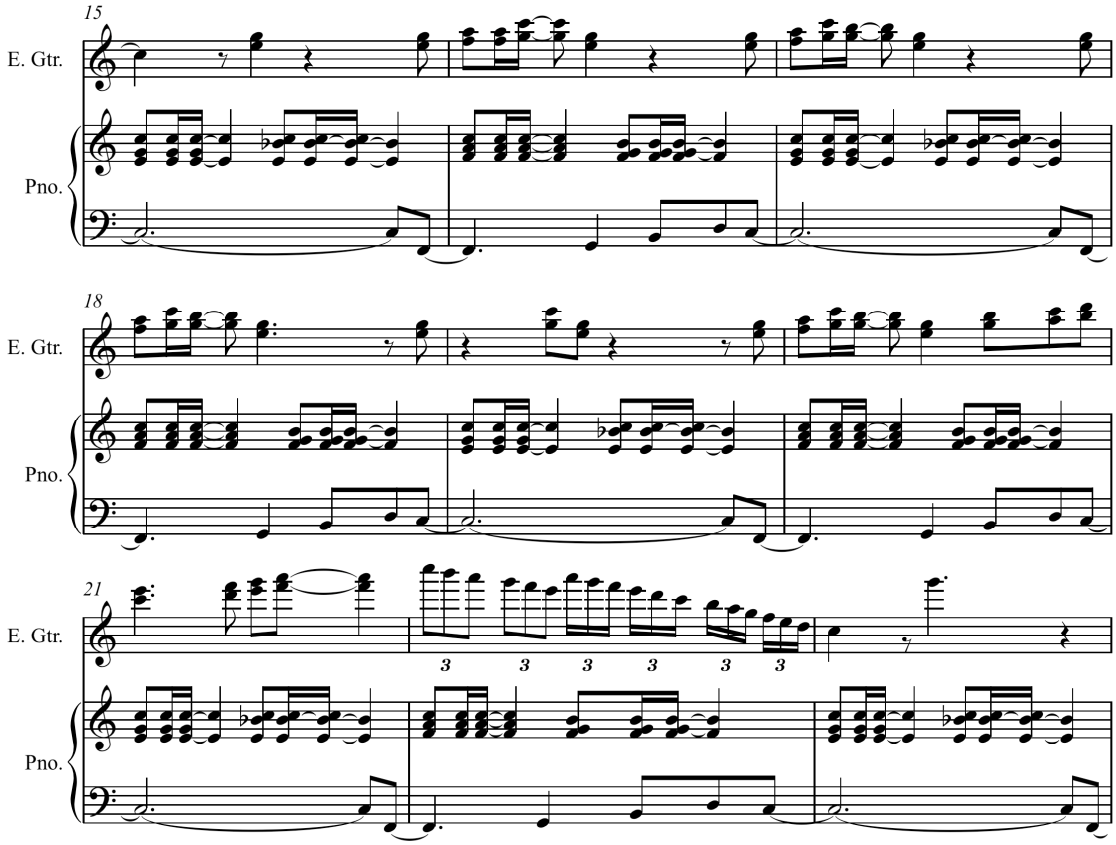
Both sixteen-beat segments transcribed in Ex. 17 (a) and (b) represent extended variation in Durán's use of the term; the two refrain melodies in Ex. 15 (a) and (b) are

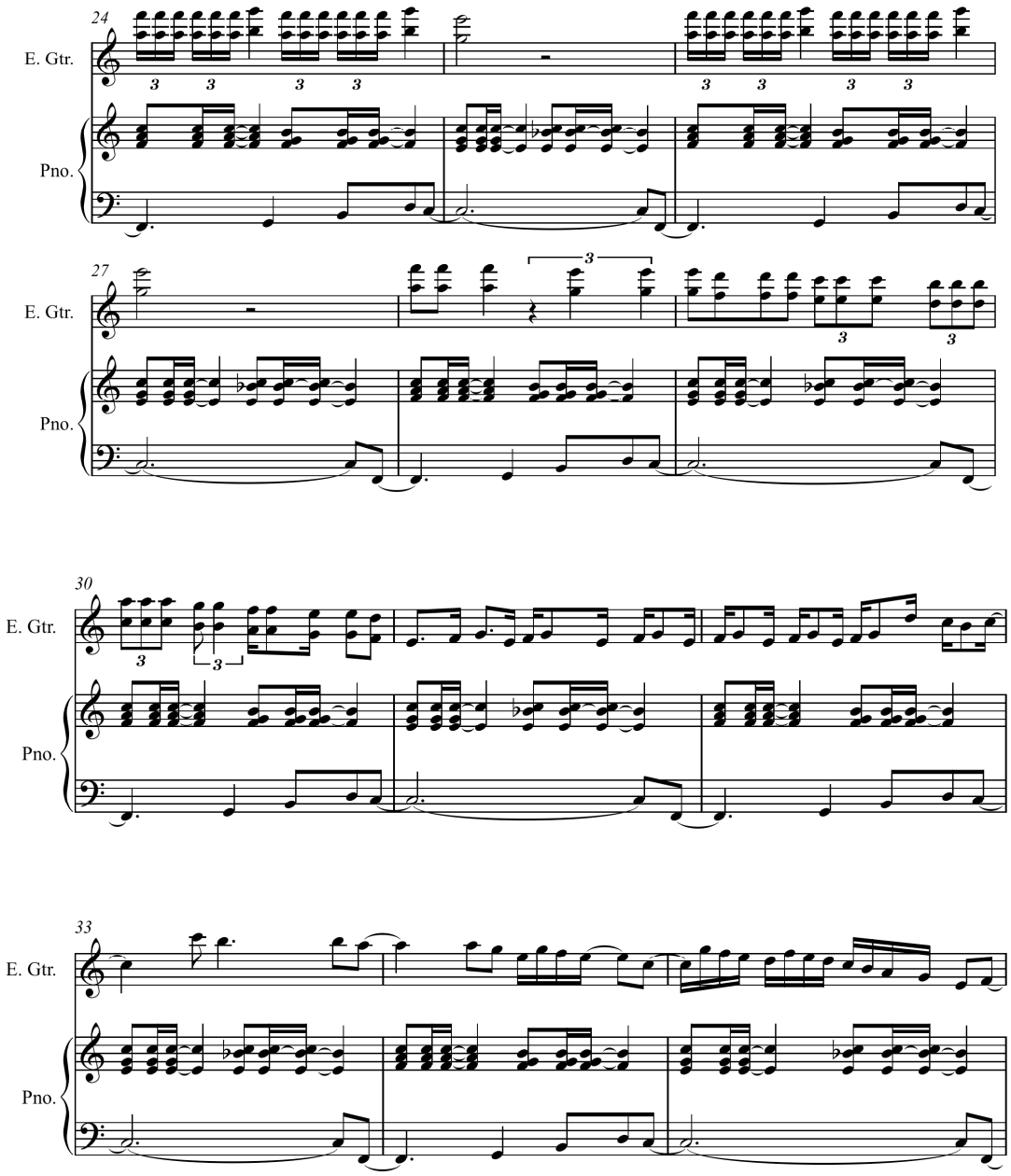
juxtaposed and combined to form a phrase twice their original length. These musically related phrases are wed to the basic groove and its key phrase in the bass part. The two extended variations in Ex. 17 are paradigmatic equivalents based upon a comparable, although expanded, musical framework provided by the module and elaborated by Diabaté. The "projection of the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection on to the axis of combination," which I observed in "Kaira," occurs in performance in Sekou's solo. It exemplifies modular thinking realized in an extended format, which answers my question regarding the internal logic of African instrumental music; extended variation, which, according to Durán, is by definition sequential in nature, both in terms of its *birimintingo* phrases and the order of grooves, creates almost innumerable possibilities for instrumentalists (Durán 1981, 191). Options are greatly enhanced if we also consider other grooves for "Mami Wata" that are not limited to guitar parts.

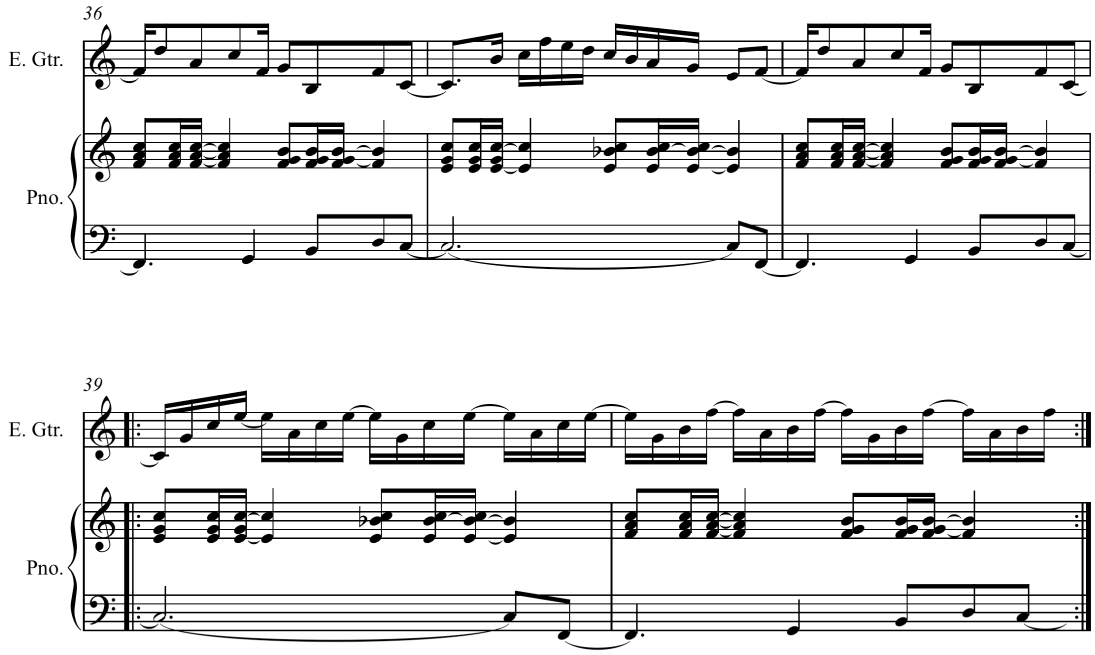
I have transcribed the remainder of the solo in Ex. 18; Sekou retains the thirty-two beat template for his next three episodes (mm. 15-22, 23-30, and 31-38). He introduces a new four-beat pattern, which commences on the "off-beat" of beat two of the basic groove (see Ex. 18). This formula recurs six times with variation. The last statement of this phrase leads to a melodic scalar ascent in harmonized thirds, which is followed by a rapid, descending, cadential phrase that features both eighth-note and sixteenth-note triplet passagio. It constitutes *birimintingo* or "long melodic runs" that is a featured part of many instrumental performances without voice (Charry 2000, 314). As the solo unfolds, one observes how Sekou uses formulae and scalar patterns for his extended variation of the four-beat groove, while composing in performance. Each new episode

builds upon the previous sections, which are rooted in the basic three-tone progression, and its key rhythmic and melodic accents.

Ex.18 Final three episodes and last phrase of Sekou's solo in "Mami Wata" (time cue: 3:31-4:43)




24
E. Gtr.
Pno.
27
E. Gtr.
Pno.
30
E. Gtr.
Pno.
33
E. Gtr.
Pno.



Sekou elides his second and third episodes by overlapping phrases (see m. 23 of Ex. 18). The conclusion of the previous section acts as the beginning of the next segment, which also follows a thirty two-beat framework. He introduces a new formula that matches the length of the groove and repeated (see mm. 24-25). This pattern, unlike any of the previous grooves in this solo, which commenced either on beat 1 or on the "off beat" of beat 2, begins on beat 5 or in the second half of Mami Wata's defining eight-beat three-tone module. The fourth thirty-two beat episode, which commences in m. 31, introduces three contrasting figures and patterns of different lengths, and also includes variations of his guitar introduction for "Mami Wata" (compare mm. 35-38 to opening of the Bembeya Jazz recording). His solo, which is nearly two minutes in length, concludes with another recurring eight-beat beat pattern (see m. 39-40). This final phrase bookends Sekou's composition conceived in performance, which began with a comparable groove, although he repeats the last phrase of the solo three, rather than four times.

My analysis exemplifies the degree to which formulas, grooves, and patterns in general inform Sekou's extended variation in "Mami Wata." Recurring parts and sequential figures comprise nearly every aspect of Sekou's extemporized composition. His solo can be summarized as follows: Two recurring phrases, which Diabaté most likely had stored in his instrumental bag of tricks, mark the aural boundaries for his composition, whose interior components consist of four episodes that I have transcribed and highlighted in Ex. 17 and Ex. 18. The alternation between part playing and scalar runs are the basic criteria for Diabaté's solo. His improvisation certainly required advanced preparation gleaned from prior experiences playing "Mami Wata" and the numerous other compositions that employ the same groove, or griot music in general. The first track on Source's CD "Bara" is comparable to "Mami Wata" in nearly every respect; it also uses a recurring syncopated key phrase on scale degrees I, IV, and V, which informs its various parts and accompaniments. "New" pieces continuously recycle parts and patterns as I have already demonstrated. Instrumentalists use comparable units as viable substitutes for one another, as exemplified by "Kaira," but also arrange patterns sequentially in extended variation, which Sekou's "Mami Wata" illustrates. If we consider all the permutations four independent eight-beat patterns can yield in a sequential ordering, twenty-four different thirty-two beat extended variations are possible. The options seem almost limitless

"Nanfulen" or "N'Toman" also exemplifies a formulaic approach to composition in performance. "Nanfulen," which translates as "come release me," is a piece that originally protested French colonial rule (Charry 2000: 286). It was dedicated to a Mande trader who was imprisoned by the French for trading with Gambians, who were

under British rule. Djoss and Famoro, however, attribute "Nanfulen" to a prolific tambin flute player, who traveled extensively throughout Mali and Guinea. In 1978, "Nanfulen" was recomposed and used as the basis of the "N'Toman" recorded by Les Ambassadeurs International on the epochal album *Mandjou* featuring Salif Keita. An anonymous studio technician named the band, which also featured Kanté Manfila and Ousmane Kouyaté on guitars.

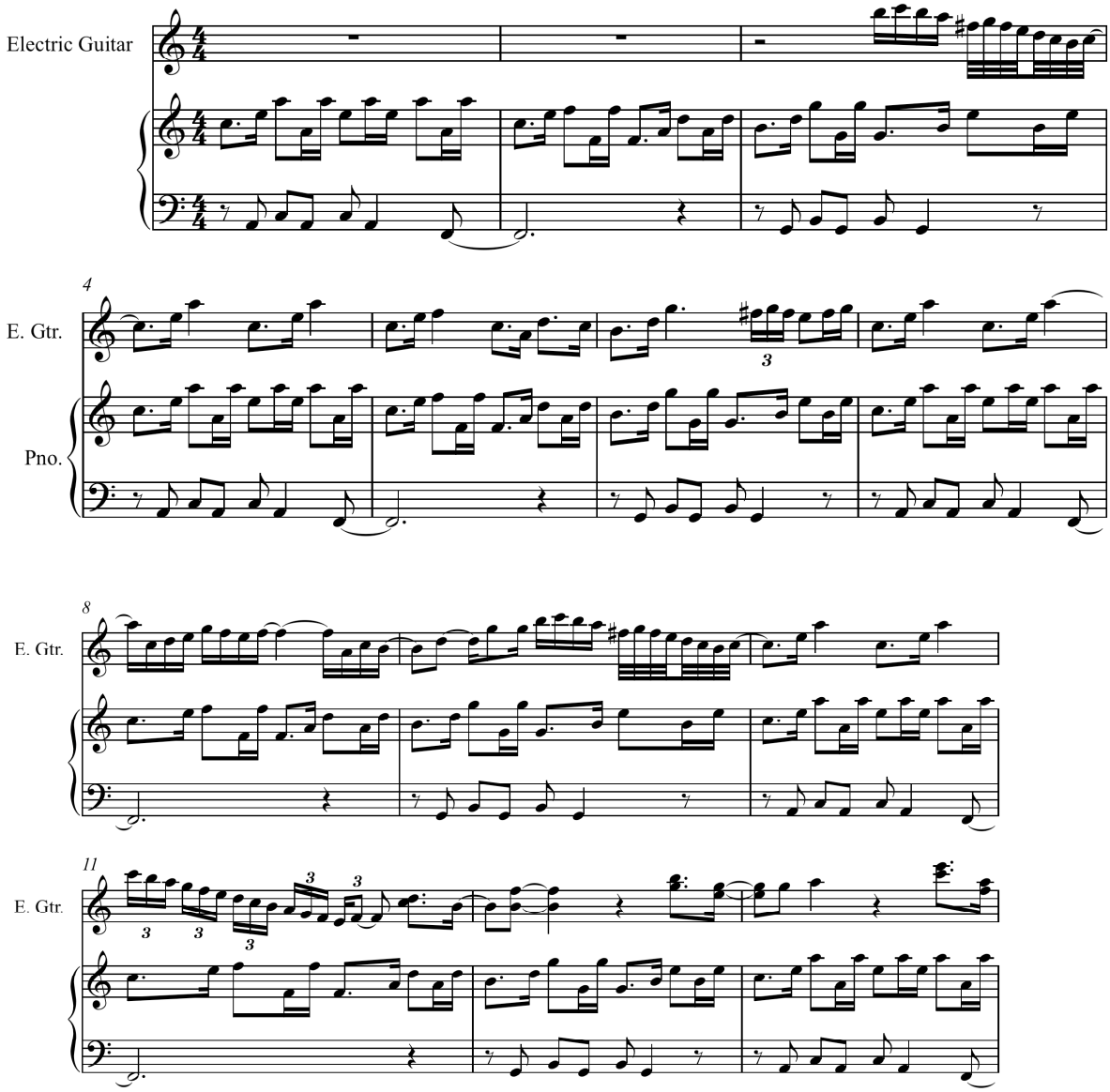
The word "N'Toman," according to Gretz and Troulliet (2005), translates into English as "homonym," yet the piece's lyrical content expresses the essence of a marital union between of man and woman, who become "one" after their nuptials. The piece's meaning remains ambiguous from their descriptions. Famoro translates "N'Toman" as "namesake;" "If a child is named for a mother or father," Famoro explained, "then he or she is "N'Toman" or a "namesake." The relationship between a person and his or her namesake is significant throughout West Africa. If a person is named for another in his or her family, then he or she frequently inherits the personality or the overall disposition of his or her older relative or, in some cases, ancestor. The names of people are important in traditional thought, while the names of songs are less germane. My concerns lie in the extent to which musical parts or units are transferable from one piece to the next, and how these grooves are used for extended variation and composition in performance in general. Reconciling opinions regarding the origins and meanings of a particular song can be quite frustrating as my brief discussion of "Nanfulen" and "N'Toman" illustrates.

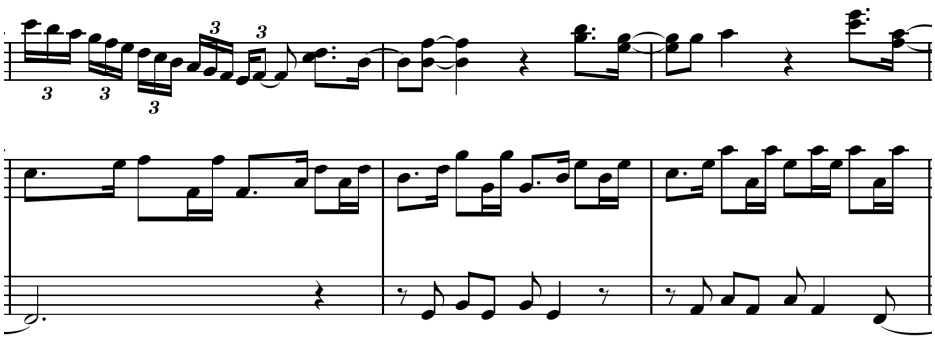
The Les Ambassadeurs International recording of "N'Toman" features a lengthy guitar solo by Manfila.[23] It is analogous in conception and design to Sekou Diabaté's composition in performance in "Mami Wata." I will highlight a brief section of the solo to further illustrate Manfila's formulaic approach. Abdoulaye's parts for "Nanfulen," which is also a staple in the Super Mande, Kakande, and Mandingo Ambassadors repertoires, were gleaned directly from the "N'Toman" recording. The guitar parts and phrases on the "N"Toman" recording retain Nanfulen's most salient and identifiable features from an instrumental perspective. The modularity of the musical accompaniments and extemporizations facilitate the expansion of the repertoire in general.

Unlike "Mami Wata" whose formal characteristics are largely shared with many other compositions, "Nanfulen" is unique, even within the griot's repertoire. It is based upon a three tone twelve-beat groove (see Ex. 18), which provides the aural support for Manfila's solo as it slowly unfolds on the "N'Toman" recording. I have combined parts that I have gleaned from my collaborations with Abdoulaye and Famoro with my transcription of the solo; the parts in the two lower staves are not from the recording. These parts bear striking resemblances to the grooves in "N'Toman," though at no point did any of the griots mention the title "N'Toman" to me. After years of performing "Nanfulen" with Abdoulaye and others, I discovered the recording and I made the connection. A more recent discussion with Famoro in spring 2008 provided the meaning of "N'Toman." For griots performing in New York, the two compositions---"Nanfulen" and "N'Toman"---are virtually synonymous.

[23] *Golden Afrique Vol. 1* (2005).

Ex. 19 (time cue: 3:58-4:31) Manfila's solo excerpt from "N'Toman"





This excerpt from Manfila's extemporization in "N'Toman" demonstrates a formulaic approach to composition, which he conceives in performance. His solo displays an economical use of resources and restraint, and it is heavily rooted in the groove and basic accompaniment, which emphasize the roots A, F, and G respectively. He frequently employs melodic diminution or replaces long notes with notes of shorter values as his improvisation moves through the progression of tones. Many of the phrases or formulae within this short passage recur with and without variation, and the entire solo is constructed in this manner. Manfila rarely moves too far from the basic accompaniment, but rather uses it as the foundation for his elaborations of the recurrent theme. Taken as a whole, Manfila's extended variation meets the criteria proposed by Durán. Although it does not conjoin different grooves, as Diabaté does in "Mami Wata," the solo uses several isorhythmic ornamental phrases, which are frequently sequential (see dyads in mm. 11-14). Each phrase returns to the basic groove, which maintains the integrity of the piece. As Nyama Suso remarked, "good *birimintingo* depends on leaving and returning to the *kumbengo* smoothly (quoted in Durán 1981, 191). Durán concludes, "it may be observed that the use of more than one" groove or pattern "as the basis of

performance…allows for more extended structure," which both "Mami Wata" and "Nanfulen" illustrate.

4.3 Tacit Competencies

Diasporic *jeliya* for Western instrumentalists working in both the traditional and modern spheres is comprised of specific skills and competencies. Pattern recognition, above all, is a key to performance for musicians working in this musical idiom. Kubik identifies patterns as fundamental cognitive elements that underpin many African styles, though, as he points out, the term "pattern" should not be narrowly conceived; it is best understood as an aural stimulus that can "differ on many dimensions," and have various sorts of implications (Kubik 1983, 329). Instrumental patterns or grooves in griot music overlap and interlock, while the combination of parts yields aural complexes that are kaleidoscopic in nature. The phenomenon of resultant rhythm best describes the process through which the musical whole or total image is greater than the sum of its parts. Kubik, however, distinguishes resultant parts from inherent or subjective patterns, which parse resultant rhythms into "autonomous lines of human perception." The distinction between resultant and inherent rhythm is important. Griots and their collaborators, frequently extrapolate individual parts (subjective patterns), as in "Eva," on the basis of their perception of the total image created by the confluence of instrumental grooves within modules.

Performers must learn to engender a sense of continuity in performance, and this skill is among the most important tacit competencies, which I continue to pursue on a daily basis. The ability to negotiate transitions between parts without disrupting the flow

or the groove is extremely important, as Nyama Suso plainly articulates above. Griot music creates an unrelenting momentum, which moves people in both a literal and a figurative sense. If performances constitute reality, as Gerstin suggests (1998, 144), we must acknowledge that competency acquisition is a continual work in progress or an on-going task. Griots intuitively recognize the importance of continuity in performance, which also informs their professional decisions and lives in general.

Temporality takes precedence in the repertoire and pieces are in a constant state of negotiation, while musical time is unending in forms that do not commence or conclude, but rather seem to pick up where they previously left off; the abrupt transitions of a concert party are best understood with these points in mind. Time is "a thick experience stretching from the past, projecting into the future, and interpreted in its continuity" (Gerstin 1998, 145). It combines "retention of the past" with anticipation of future occurrences. A performer's awareness must always be rooted in the moment, and shortcomings in this regard can prove to be the most damaging to performances. As Camara, Charry, and Jansen observe in their examination of "Kaira," pieces can be considered as fluid texts, whose identities frequently change to the point that they are barely recognizable; works are presented at a particular moment in time and contingent upon external forces (2002, 300-321).

4.4 Conclusion

The stages of competency acquisition can be complex and riddled with inconsistencies. They are frequently malleable and forgiving, and allow for a great deal of latitude. My research, observations, and personal experiences fully support these

views. Through intensity of contact, I have been able to work through the quandaries regarding my understanding of griot music that have frequently kept me up at night. The learning process, rehearsal, and composition in performance are mutually reinforcing tasks, which are best understood in terms of the style or approach that is embraced by griots and collaborators alike. As Duke Ellington observed, "The secret of any dramatic art is *routining*," which has become a mantra for griots through the centuries. "Repetition" has come to characterize the music from a number of vantage points, although its flexibility in terms of its target milieu and accepted contexts for performance has allowed it to grow and flourish in New York. Modularity can be viewed in a figurative manner as it relates to the griots' brief history in the West. Diasporic *jeliya* is "self-contained enough to be easily rearranged, replaced, or interchanged to form different structures or systems," as the definition of "module" suggests.

My relationships with my mentors, especially Djoss Diabaté, never fit the conventional student-teacher paradigm to which I was accustomed and that I had expected to encounter during my fieldwork. I did not "learn" to play Mande music from a native-born master pedagogue (e.g., Sumarsam) in a university ensemble or in a conservatory with a focused curriculum, which are learning environments in which students can ask questions and reflect upon concepts relevant to research and postulation. In my case, imitation of my colleagues served as my education, and I gleaned the necessary skills through careful observation, trial and error, and experimentation, using all of the resources at my disposal (e.g., scholarly literature, private instruction, ensemble playing, and recorded media). Roderic Knight (1984) set out to extrapolate a theory from practice in Mandinka music, but his findings were

neither entirely conclusive nor did they stem from his professional experiences playing with griots. This study therefore raises many questions with respect to the nature of performance-based research in ethnomusicology since tactile and cognitive skills do not necessarily work hand in hand, and griots seemed reluctant to discuss competence or proficiency in any great detail. For example, how should I distinguish a griot's understanding from my own, and how do I remain focused upon my informants and their repertoires? At what point does my interpretation become misrepresentation? Since emic terminology such as *kumbengo* ("recurrent theme") and *birimintingo* ("variation and embellishment") only scratches the surface of this practice, does my informed understanding accurately depict diasporic *jeliya* as a living and vital performance tradition? Learning to play Mande music and Mande ways of learning do not facilitate a scholar's tasks or aims in these regards, so we must pool our resources in order to provide further insight into this investigation in the future.

Chapter 5

Episode in the Life of a Hero: Locating Sunjata in New York

5.1 Introduction

At the end of Act 1 of the Loft Theatre's "The Epic of Sunjata," the son of Sogolon and the rightful heir to the throne of the Manden---Sunjata Keita---proclaims "the deeper the roots, the higher the reach," as he goes into exile, resolving to return in order to "remember" the broken community of his people. These proverbial and prophetic words were not scripted by griots as one might expect. Tracy Berseley, the director of the Loft's "The Epic of Sunjata," lifted the pithy catch phrase, "the deeper roots, the higher the reach," from the wall art at one of the many Starbucks in Manhattan, incorporating it into the script, which was in a constant state of revision. It was a mantra that drew attention to Sunjata's resolution to build solidarity by "remembering" his promised kingdom in a literal and figurative way. Memory can be selective, elusive, and even fleeting, especially when Western popular culture, West African myth and history, and dramaturgy collide, or are used as resources for recomposing the past.

In the Loft production, recomposition for diasporic griots occurred on a grand scale through an entirely cooperative and collaborative process. The song suite related to the life and times of Sunjata---the "Sunjata *fasa*"---is the griots' claim to the past, and they openly shared it with us at Dowling College and its immediate community. Musicians in West Africa travel for hundreds of miles to Kela, Mali every seven years to observe the Diabatés rehearse pieces of the "Sunjata *fasa*," while the Loft Theatre staged ten performances, which included nearly twenty pieces from the repertoire, after extensive rehearsal over a three-week period during February and March, 2008. The epic

of Sunjata, which was once protected by griots, was made, using Famoro Dioubaté's sentiment, *dununya* ("universal") through collaboration. The songs or pieces of the "Sunjata *fasa*" were treated as "texts" with specific uses and functions in the narrative; they also account for the creation of the repertoire, making the study of the Sunjata myth and our interpretation of it quite useful.

In spite of its rhetoric to affirm social cohesion, the Sunjata epic has inspired *fadenya* ("rivalry") among various constituencies in Africa. Patrons, griots, and intellectuals have used the story persuasively as a mandate for power and authority in their respective spheres of influence; for the former presidents of Mali and Guinea, Modibo Keita and Sekou Touré, the story, for obvious reasons, established a historical basis for their claim to power and right to rule. For griots, the epic affords them a position of authority regarding the dissemination of Malian history, which is continuously reformulated. French administrators used the epic as a form of cultural currency to barter and negotiate with the Mande in West Africa during colonial rule. Academics and intellectuals, such as Massa Makan Diabaté, have deployed its narrative codes in order to advance personal agendas and viewpoints. The epic is a template for social drama in Victor Turner's use of the term that is rarely free of contestation and debate even among the recognized custodians of the epic---the members of the Diabaté clan of Kela. The extant literature on the epic in Africa overwhelmingly demonstrates the extent to which his story is continuously recomposed as means to specific ends that frequently vary from one context to the next. According to Mande cosmology, outsiders, such as traders, who do not use force to overtake the land, are welcome and seen as a great source of power and inspiration, which is a point that seems to resonate in New York (Johnson 1999: 13).

This epic for diasporic griots and their collaborators in New York served entirely different ends in the Loft Production. It espoused *badenya* ("affection"), which, as Van Buren also observed, encourages contact, cooperation, and solidarity among diverse peoples. The Loft production transcended the barriers of race, religion, and ethnicity to embrace universal themes, such as mutual dependency and accountability, in an increasingly globalized world. The co-writers and directors, Dr. Andrew Karp and Tracy Berseley, the musicians, and cast and crew members, invited audience members to enter a world of stories, and griots, according to the script, "long to tell stories." Griots and their collaborators were the axis upon which his story or Malian "history" were reoriented to address a new milieu and a host of concerns, which ranged from commercialization and entertainment to loftier aims expressed in the "badenya" motto. The artists were the conduit for change and exchange in their effort to harness the power of collectivity, which was teased from the narrative through collaboration. Although this project was a major undertaking, it was not the first of its kind in New York or elsewhere. Van Buren also helped organize and promote a partial reenactment of the Sunjata epic during his Niani Badenya concert (1997) in which collaborative efforts were made (see Van Buren 2001). Yet Van Buren's work yielded a concert program rather than a full-fledged theatrical adaptation of the epic as a musical drama.

In this chapter, I discuss the Sunjata epic from a number of vantage points. I begin with an interpretation of the relevant literature on Sunjata which has been conveniently summarized by Charles Bird and Eric Charry, and compiled by Ralph Austen in the book *In Search of Sunjata: The Mande Oral Epic as History, Literature, and Performance*. The chapters of Austen's book support my thesis that the epic has

been used primarily as a manipulative and divisive instrument since its inception nearly eight hundred years ago. As Paulla Ebron whom I paraphrase observed, "historical agency," which the epic and its performance has inspired, is a product of the interrelationship of "great figures and their history-making dependents, the jali" (2002: 99). More importantly, "performance creates history," which can be approached from a number of perspectives (e.g., patron, griot, African intellectual, Western academic). I provide a detailed analysis of the "Sunjata *fasa*," illustrating how these pieces either appropriated earlier works or informed more recent compositions. I discuss how we wove these works into the fabric of the most significant episodes of Sunjata's life in the Loft adaptation. "Sunjata," "Fakoli," "Tiramagan," and "Numun," were combined with other pieces in the griots' repertoire to express shifts in mood and dramatic action. They underscored the most important events in Sunjata's life. We abandoned historical accuracy, in some cases, but adopted an uncharacteristic precision in other respects; the musicians were required to commence and conclude pieces on the basis of verbal and physical cues on stage, and pieces were characterized by brevity rather than extended variation. Our creative license with the story and its music was entirely amenable to griots Abdoulaye and Famoro, who regarded the work as "important" for a number of reasons. I summarize and compare our adaptation to the extant versions of the story that were conflated in the script writing process. Griots and collaborators made the epic accessible to a new milieu and universal in spirit of *badenya* in New York.

5.2 The Sunjata Epic: Historiography

5.2.1 Overview

Stories recounting the rise of Sunjata Keita and his empire abound and appear in multiple incarnations. Stephen Bulman identified sixty-four published versions of the Sunjata epic, which range from transcriptions of oral accounts to novels written by Africans (Charry 2000, 40). The epic provides the basis of the griot's musical repertoire that consists of hunter's music, such as "Janjon," and praise songs dedicated to Sunjata and his closest allies---Fakoli and Tiramakan Traoré. The episodes of his story played an integral role in the formation of national identities in Mali and Guinea during the 1960s and 1970s, which was bolstered primarily by recordings of government-subsidized dance bands, such as the Rail Band and Bembeya Jazz National. The search for Sunjata, in figurative terms, frequently concludes once a particular interest has been lobbied, met, or satisfied. Peoples' claims to Sunjata and his legacy are shared begrudgingly among various constituencies that vie for authority through his mandate, which is continuously reinterpreted and reconsidered.

The innumerable episodes of Sunjata's life have been concisely summarized into three main epochs: "the events leading to the birth of Sunjata, his youth and exile from Mande, and lastly his return, victory over the invaders, and formation of the Mali empire" (Bird 1971: 21). "Differences among the wide variety of published accounts," according to Charry, "indicate regional and personal variations" (2000, 41). Any single version of this story represents only one of many possibilities. The details of the epic are most important for the genealogies recounted in the "Sunjata fasa," while other features, such as the exact length in years of Sunjata's reign, are constantly disputed. Members of the Mande community continuously read between the lines of these texts in order to better

position themselves based upon their standing and status in society, which are clearly articulated in the various episodes of the epic.

The epic, according to Jansen (1994), is highly valued by diverse peoples throughout West Africa; "it offers a blueprint for good social behavior." Historical contexts and circumstances relating to the origin of surnames, such as Keita and Diabaté, which is documented in the epic, determine modes of interaction between individuals within groups, and their manner of comportment; "the origin of someone's *jamu* is crucially important to the way people behave and expect to be treated." A Dowling student, Moussa Keita, who is a direct descendent of Sunjata, remarked, "I don't sing, I am sung to." The story's implications thus are still socially viable for Africans living abroad.

> No matter if you are rich or poor, no matter how you earn your daily living, and no matter to whom you are married: the *jamu* provides an ultimate identity. Thus, a Keita is a descendent of Sunjata and a "noble warrior," a Toure is a "serious musulman," and a Kouyaté is automatically a *jeli* (Jansen 1994)

The historical importance of surnames is embedded into the consciousness of Mande peoples, and informs their daily lives and interactions. Formal greetings and salutations comprising verbal formulae are determined by one's *jamu*. "When people greet each other, they end by mentioning the jamu of the other person: "You Diabaté?" "Indeed, you Traoré." The epic demonstrates that each noteworthy surname is associated with "its own special melody" and groove. Jansen refers to these melodies as "anthems" for special identities, and they are the praise songs, which have been preserved and disseminated by griots for centuries. The Kela Diabatés are the widely acknowledged authorities in this area, and their knowledge establishes the template for how members of society "remember" the past and relate to one another on a daily basis.

It is a griot's right and obligation to fulfill the role of historian in the caste-bound societies of West Africa, yet griots never seem to agree with one another---not even the Diabaté in Kela. Certain parts of the epic, however, are regarded as "factual" and recur in nearly every version. The relevant portions include genealogies of the most significant *jamu*, which provide the basis of power and authority in Mande culture. A narrative thread is not always explicit among written documents and within recorded performances, so contextualization is frequently left up to the imaginations of listeners and performers alike during musical renderings of the epic. The story unfolds as follows:

> Two brothers of the Traoré clan hunted and killed a "magic buffalo" that ravaged the countryside in the land of Do. The younger of the two brothers was the braver hunter, and became the ancestor of the Traoré (a noble *jamu*). The older brother sang him praises, becoming the founding member of the Diabaté clan of griots. They were rewarded with a local woman, Sogolon, who they brought to the king of the Manden---Magan Kon Fatta. Magan took Sogolon, who gave birth to Sunjata, as his second wife, which inspired great jealousy in his first wife, Sasuma Berete. Susuma had already given birth daughter, Nana Triban, and her son, Dankara Touman, became Sunjata's rival for the throne during his youth. Ballafaseke Kouyaté---the son of Magan's griot---was appointed Sunjata's chief advisor and confidant, becoming the Kouyaté ancestor of griots.
>
> As a child, Sunjata was unable to walk; in a glorious moment, he pulled himself up with an iron rod and took his first steps, later becoming a great hunter. After Magan's death, however, Dankara Touman, took the throne, driving Sunjata, his mother, and his family into exile. While in exile, Sunjata successfully allied himself with the rulers of the surrounding territories, which included the Wagadu empire (Ghana). In the Manden, the blacksmith sorcerer-king Sumanguru Kanté, who ruled the Sosso territory, threatened the sovereignty of the Mande people. Dankara Touman sent Balafaseke Kouyaté as an emissary to the Kanté, who captured Ballafaseke, making Kouyaté his griot. Kanté seized control of the Manden, destroying its capital, Niani, and organized a search party to locate Sunjata, who was the last remaining threat to his sovereignty.
>
> The party, however, persuaded Sunjata to return to the Manden in order to claim his throne as Magan's rightful heir. He raised an army comprised of his newly acquired allies, which included the nephew of Kanté, Fakoli, who is associated with Dumbia, Sissoko, and Koroma griot surnames. Upon his return, Sunjata fought Sumanguru Kanté, yet no clear victor emerged at first. Balafaseke managed to escape from Kanté's control and returned to Sunjata. Sunjata finally triumphed with the help of his half-sister, Nana, who had discovered Kanté's

> secret weakness; after he was grazed by an arrow from Sunjata's bow (much like Achilles), Kanté fled and was never seen again. Sunjata destroyed Kanté's kingdom of Sosso, and emerged the king of the Manden and its surrounding territories. He instituted a social hierarchy with well-defined roles and responsibilities that are still observed by Mande peoples throughout West Africa, as well as abroad.[24]

5.2.2 Competing for the King's Favor

The last sentence of the summary above is very significant. It provides a historical precedent for historian John William Johnson's unequivocal assertion; he writes that the epic secures the griot's "monopoly" over oral literary genres, which form the basis of Malian history, performance traditions, as well as certain social and socio-economic roles in Mande society (Johnson 1999, 9). Mande authority structure is based upon a patrilineal bias that has been promulgated and maintained for centuries. This system of governance is determined by the continual reinterpretation of a thirteenth-century parable with little or no concern for statutory regulations set down in written laws as in the West (Johnson 1999, 11). There is a pervasive tacit understanding that griots perform for patrons, thereby legitimizing their right to rule and the griots' right to perform the epic, which acts as their charter. The checks and balances of this system are articulated through obligatory social practices and customs, which are couched within the epic and its countless variants. The real authority of the Sunjata epic, according to Johnson, lies in the degree to which performances impact public opinion regarding power relations in Mande society. The epic allows the griot to attain "occult power," or

[24] This summary combines information from Charry's account of the epic (2000: 41-42) and my own research. I have attempted to link significant historical figures (e.g., the Traoré and Diabaté ancestors) in the story, whose place in the epic is described by Niané, to surnames that are celebrated in the "Sunjata *fasa*," which I discuss in section 5.3

pertinent means of persuasion, which is still a viable resource in the Mande sphere, and patrons to assert political authority. Johnson writes,

> Power is not perceived as a process, but rather as an entity to be stockpiled until enough is gained to enable the possessor to exercise political and social control over others. The stockpiling process is accomplished religiously, among other ways, through occult practices such as conjuring and the preparation and weaving of amulets and talisman. Both authority figures and individuals outside the authority structure compete for control by practicing methods of obtaining this occult power (*nyama*). (Johnson 1999, 10)

Ivor Wilks reports that scholars use the Sunjata story "for purposes of historical reconstruction," and some question its veracity. "Even if historians can establish that Sunjata did exist," Innes writes, "I should regard with extreme suspicion any aspect of his life reported in the oral history" (Wilks 1999, 25). Casting doubt upon the griot's birthright is a direct challenge to his authority. Members of academia have thrown down the gauntlet with respect to the griot's "monopoly" over their knowledge of the past, and, as the cliché dictates, "knowledge is power." By deconstructing the griot's art, as Ralph Austen openly admits (1999, 69), academics look to disenfranchise the griots, thereby relinquishing their occult power or *nyama*. Researchers use their own resources to draw conclusions based upon the numerous published transcriptions or summaries of the epic that frequently throw individual accounts into sharp relief. Working under the guise of rational logic and objectivity, *nyama* for academics lies in their ability to question or refute the empirical nature of the griot's art through methodological comparison of materials, which are in abundence and at their disposal. Study of the epic becomes an opportunity to mark off their territory with regards to Malian culture and history. Books, articles, summaries, even passing references to the numerous versions of the epic that circulate, act as talismans for researchers, to be stockpiled. Academics hoard their

knowledge, and use it to position themselves as authorities in their respective fields, challenging many of the power structures that predate academic research on griots, and Mande culture in general. As Seydou Camara points out,

> History retains the life of great men only, and although it is based on historical recollection, this story serves to explain and especially to justify the ascent of Sunjata, by revealing his warrior's destiny as well as the ways in which Maninka society works. It induces people to recognize their own identities, and leads them to act accordingly. One may find all the cultural and ideological data of the Mande within the epic; it can be considered truly an encyclopedia of Mande culture in the form of a metaphor of the initiatory path and of political (and sociological) legitimization (1999, 63-64).

Literary mediators have staked their claim to the epic as a written document as well. Their task includes the transformation of oral and extemporized recitations into fixed literary works (Bulman 1999, 232). Literate Malian Muslim notables, French colonial administrators, and, more recently, European-educated West Africans have also used the epic as a metaphor of power, advancing their own agendas in the process. For Mamadou Aïssa, whose accounts achieved local currency in Mali around 1910, chronicling the past within a "specifically Islamic frame" was a major consideration (Bulman 1999, 233-34). He attempted to tie Sunjata to Middle Eastern figures and presented Western Sudanese history as extending from the savanna and the Sahel into the Sahara. Bulman suggests that Aïssa's desire to make Sunjata a "Muslim hero," however, is clear from the portions of the epic that "betray a clear Islamic context." Bulman writes that although "Islam is a familiar context for most written versions of the epic," the epic is rarely used for "the promotions of the Muslim faith."

Early European versions of the epic from the turn of the twentieth century resulted from imperialistic activities in the region. "It was a matter of colonial policy for

officials at regional offices to inquire into the cultural background of local cultures" (Bulman 1999, 238). The epic was used as a bartering tool with which French colonial leaders formed alliances with local rulers during periods of territorial conquest. One French leader remarked, "it is necessary to know those whom one wishes to dominate" (Bulman 1999, 238). The French openly admitted to editing the epic and censoring episodes as they saw fit. Some leaders held the epic in contempt, regarding it as "long and tedious" (Bulman 1999, 237). In 1924, Vidal, according to Bulman, inserts into the epic a modern judgment of Sunjata, who he considers a greedy, booty-hungry mercenary (1999, 237). His judgment challenges the ideological rights of patrons as political leaders throughout the region, thereby creating a window of opportunity for colonial administrators.

Members of Western-educated African elite began to contribute to the written corpus on Sunjata beginning in the 1930s (Bulman 1999, 239-46). Early writers employed the epic as a didatic tool, celebrating African culture and heritage through the newly acquired medium of the French language. Their accounts were a direct response to the policy of cultural hybridization instituted by the French in the region. In one version, Sumanguru Kanté, who is Sunjata's chief adversary in nearly all variants of the epic, is Sunjata's brother; this manipulation suggests a call for African solidarity in the face of European cultural imperialism. Writings on Sunjata became absorbed into the rhetoric of early Négritude authors, who combined their versions with other non-Mande traditional stories. Sunjata became a pan-African symbol of cultural heritage and a champion to diverse peoples throughout the region.

Djabril Tasmir Niane's prose narrative on the life of Sunjata---*Soundjata: An Epic of Old Mali*---had the greatest impact upon "Africa and the rest of the world" during the 1960s (Bulman 1999, 242). He distills the epic by producing an account that is more believable and palatable. Bulman writes,

> *Soundjata* was composed more as an historical and educational project than a literary work, and quickly became established as the *Sunjata* text…Footnotes explaining obscure points and noting variant traditions---- plus something of Niane's attempt to codify Maninka oral art into traditional "schools"---all add to the impression of scholarly weight and balance (1999, 243).

Camara Laye's *Guardian of the Word* (1980) attempts to reconcile African elements of oral history in the medium of a Western novel. He uses the epic to highlight contemporary dilemmas, such as the exploitation of power by political leaders. His narrative ends with the exhortation, "May the example of Sunjata and his family illuminate us in our progress along the difficult road of African evolution" (quoted in Bulman 1999, 244). By the 1980s, the epic had a "wide educational rationale" and was incorporated into primary school curricula across the region. It was seen as a vehicle for promoting "Mandinka society, its philosophical concepts, and its ways and customs" (quotation of Konaré Ba in Bulman 1999, 244). Ba's portrayal places a great deal of emphasis on the role and importance of women in Sunjata's rise to power.

Massa Makan Diabaté, the author of *Le Boucher de Kouta*, uses Sunjata to negotiate shifting identities in post-colonial West Africa (McGuire 1999, 254). He isolates narrative techniques, tropes, and culturally embedded concepts of social action in the epic in order to contemporize Mande literary culture. Diabaté addresses a widespread dilemma for West Africans living in the modern world: how can Africans reconcile differences between traditional and modern viewpoints? From the perspective of

diasporic griots, such as Abdoulaye and Famoro (and Massa Makan Diabaté), it is clearly a matter of choice. Their professional decisions clearly parallel other paths or routes that they have taken in migrating to New York. Abdoulaye married a Fulani woman, who is his only wife---an exceptional case in a society in which polygamy is valued and accepted, if not encouraged. Famoro is not married and has two daughters with different women. Djoss is modern and progressive in his relationships with his children, whom he brings to parties and other events. Modern griots challenge the conventions of their traditional culture in quiet acts of defiance that inform their daily lives.

The epic in Kela affords much flexibility with respect to its meaning in the traditional sphere. Jansen reports that it is "open-ended" and is rarely performed in its entirety. "Completeness," according to Jansen, who compares and contrasts six different performances, "is impossible because there is never enough time" (Jansen 1999, 304). Griots frequently use the past to reflect on current issues, calling into question the piece's historical reliability and saliency in many repects. Even Jansen's extensive ethnography of the Sunjata epic in Kela does not clarify its inconsistencies, which create ambivalence for even the most seasoned researchers. "Remembering" the past through Sunjata is a dubious enterprise since each new project has its own agenda and set of concerns. Ownership of the epic represents a brass ring that various constituencies vie for, fight over, and brandish once obtained

Robert C. Newton provides some of the most recent accounts of the epic in the modern world (1999, 313-327). Many recorded performances of the epic were sold on cassette during the immediate post-colonial era. Many Malians---most of whom were non-literate---created personal audio libraries of the most significant compositions

performed by the most notable griots, such as Malian vocalist Sory Kandia Kouyaté to whom I have frequently referred in my study of griot music. The griot's repertoire became canonized, commercialized, and commodified---a process that continues in the diaspora---with the emergence of national orchestras during the 1960s and 1970s. By the 1980s, Mali's national television station began airing prerecorded and live performances of the epic. The audio and video markets merged as Congolese guitar styles and horn arrangements were incorporated into *jeliya*. Modern groups recomposed traditional works in order to engage a new generation of listeners. Newton writes,

> Changes in social relations, economic conditions, and technology have altered patron-performer and audience-performer contracts as well as aesthetics. The resulting shifts in the performances themselves reflect the ongoing negotiations between the performers and the changing world in which they live and perform---and therefore constitutes both a rupture and a continuity of the form and spirit of *jeliya*. (Newton 1999, 326)

The "rupture" to which Newton refers reflects *fadenya* or "rivalry," which best describes the epic's impact in Africa in spite of its aim to unite Mande peoples. Patrons, griots, Muslim notables, French colonial administrators, African intellectuals, and Western academics have attempted to use their knowledge of Sunjata as a mandate in the ongoing power struggle that has ensued for centuries. The epic espouses "good social order," but seems to have inspired people to act and behave badly over the centuries. Johnson also defines *fadenya* as "social destruction," which the epic's historiography seems to convey. Taped performances of the epic have become one of many competing commodities circulating in the marketplace, and Sunjata's tale is "no longer under the control of the jeli." Newton writes, once it is "sold to the owner, who then controls the circumstances under which it is heard" (1999, 326), griots relinquish exclusive control of their art. Diasporic griots in New York, who openly share this tradition with a Western

milieu, provide continuity in the form and spirit of the Sunjata epic. For them, the epic inspires affection (*badenya*).

5.3 The "Sunjata *fasa*"

The strongest sense of continuity in the epic lies in the praise songs that celebrate the most significant surnames in Mande culture, whose number is quite small. The "Sunjata *fasa*" provides the basis of the griot's repertory of pieces, and contains templates for grooves in many subsequent compositions, while it has also absorbed earlier works from the hunter's repertoire as well. Some pieces, which Charry previously classified as having no clear association to either the cycle or hunter's music, can also be understood as a viable part of the suite; for example, "Duga," Wilks concludes, commemorates Sunjata's griot, Ballafaseke Kouyaté, though Niané refers to "Duga," or "The Vulture's Tune," in an significant episode of the core epic involving Ballafaseke and Sumanguru Kanté---Sunjata's chief adversary (Wilks 1999, 49 and Niane 1965, 38). The "Sunjata *fasa*" directly informs the repertoire as a corpus and griot performance practice with respect to recomposition.

Abdoulaye proudly introduced me to a Malian patron in New York prior to his trip to Africa in 2006, boasting that I could play the "Sunjata *fasa*," which meant that I knew the standard accompaniments and formulaic interpolations for "Sunjata" on the guitar. In the Loft Production, we pooled our collective resources, considering pieces that originated in both the traditional and modern spheres. We drew freely upon the griot repertoire. I made an extensive list and several rehearsal CDs for the directors Andrew Karp and Tracy Berseley, who were inspired by the music while writing and revising the

script and composing original choreography. In spite of the creative license we took with the setting the words and action to music, the "Sunjata *fasa*" remained the basis of the musical scoring, which also underscored the most pivotal points in the story.

5.3.1 "Sunjata"

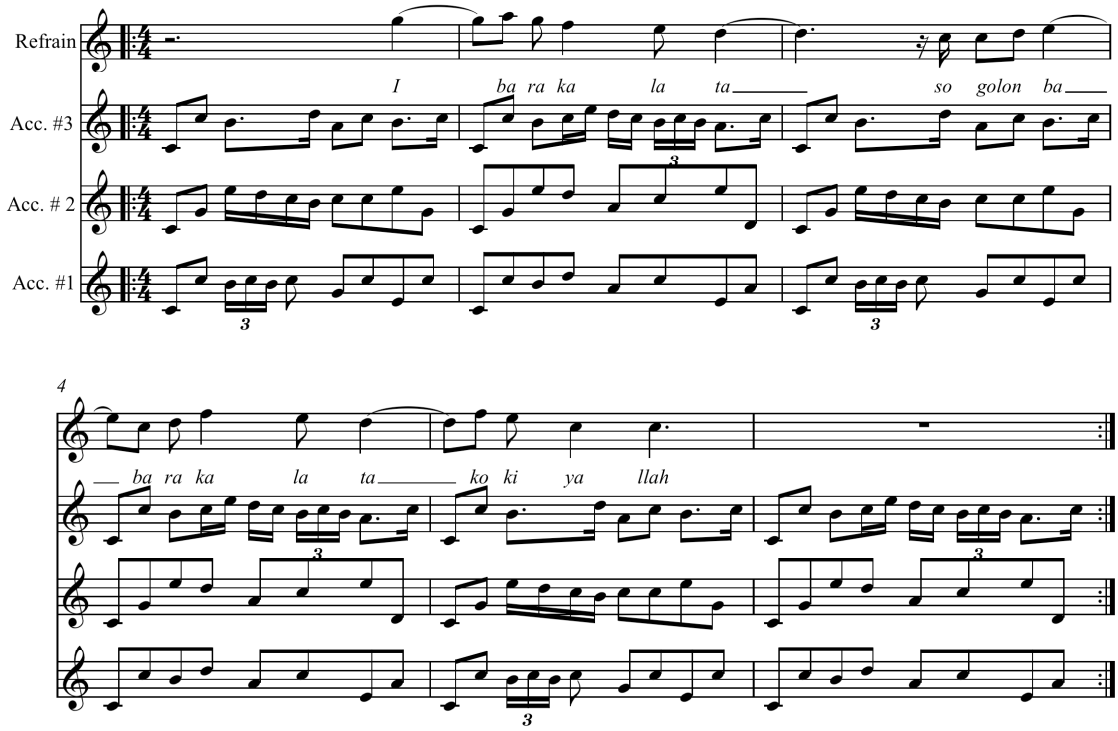
"Sunjata" is a most important piece in the "Sunjata *fasa*;" its *donkili* or refrain melody, according to Jansen (1994), is employed as the main melody when griots from Kela are invited to perform at funerals and other ceremonies, and "they are able to talk using this melody for hours!" The text frequently set to this phrase, "I bara kala ta" ("He took up the bow"), which recurs in innumerable variants and permutations, commemorates Sunjata's coming of age or awakening. Jansen claims, "these words evoke more emotions than the national anthem for the Mande people." Niané refers to Sunjata's praise song as the "Hymn of the Bow," and recounts this famous episode as follows:

> The apprentice smiths were still there, Sogolon had come out and everyone was watching Mari Djata. He crept on all fours and came to the iron bar. Supporting himself on his knees and one hand, with the other hand he picked up the iron bar without any effort and stood it up vertically. Now he was resting on nothing but his knees and held the bar with both his hands. A deathly silence had gripped all those present. Sogolon Djata (Sunjata) closed his eyes, held tight, the muscles in his arms tensed. With a violent jerk he threw his weight on to it and his knees left the ground. Sogolon Kedjou was all eyes and watched her son's legs which were trembling as though from an electric shock. Djata was sweating and sweat ran from his brow. In a great effort he straightened up and was on his feet at one go---but the great bar of iron was twisted and had taken the form of a bow! Then Ballafaseke sang out the "Hymn of the Bow, "striking up with his powerful voice: "Take up your bow, Simbon, take up your bow and let us go. Take your bow Sogolon Djata." (Niané 1986, 20-21)

Like most pieces in the griot repertoire, "Sunjata" has several grooves associated with it. These parts can be combined either simultaneously or in a contiguous manner,

and subjective rhythms can be extrapolated freely in performance based upon their inherent properties, such as an internal recurring melodic oscillation between two tones a whole step apart during second half of the groove (e.g., C and D) (see Ex. 20).

Ex. 20 “Sunjata”



The main groove for “Sunjata,” which is labeled “Acc. #1” in Ex. 1, is an eight-beat phrase; it is compulsory in performance and is played continuously, while the other two parts, “Acc. #2” and “Acc. #3,” are optional. All three parts appear on recordings by the Super Rail Band of Mali from the early 1970s and the more recent *Mandekalou* griot all-star collaboration from 2004. The refrain, which includes the lyric “I bara kala ta,” is reminiscent of the recurring *donkili* on Jansen’s *An bè Kelen/We Are One: Griot Music from Mali* recording to which he refers so passionately. Stock interpolations and melodic formulae are frequently employed and are used to mark transitions within extended variations. Players rarely switch from one groove to another while the refrain is sung, but

will frequently introduce a new phrase once the singing has concluded. "Acc. #2" and "Acc. #3" are conceptualized as "solo" parts to be used at an instrumentalist's discretion, and any number of variations can be used as viable substitutes. Griots, however, are creatures of habit that develop a sense of continuity and style in their playing from years of experience, which they apply in multiple settings.

Although "Sunjata" is musically related with respect to its progression of tones (e.g., two tones that are a whole step apart) to other works such as "Lamban" and "Boloba," its groove does not recur in any other pieces with the exception of Dallam Dougou's irreverent "Bach Meets Mande Jeli." Charry refers to the three compositions---"Lamban," "Sunjata," and "Boloba"---collectively as the "Sunjata complex" (2000, 152), which suggests close correspondence between these pieces. "Boloba," however, employs an irregular meter. I asked Abdoulaye to teach me "Boloba," but he needed to listen to a recording of it in order to glean a suitable part or accompaniment for it. "Lamban," which I discuss later, is also called "*Jeliya*" and has it own refrain, which is does not resemble Sunjata's hymn in any respect. Although we rehearsed "Lamban" or "Jeilya" for the Loft Production, it was never included in the adaptation, which did not bother griots Djoss and Famoro in the least.

5.3.2 "Tiramagan" and "Allah l'a ke"

"Tiramagan" is a praise song for the Traoré *jamu*; it celebrates the hunter (the younger brother) who slayed the magic buffalo at the beginning of the core epic. Niané describes the encounter between the two brothers and the "magic buffalo" from the younger brother's perspective as follows:

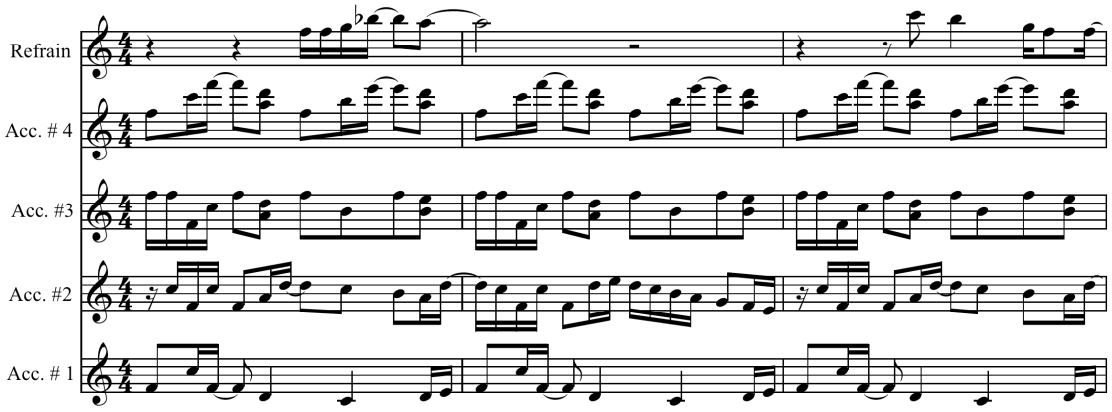
We were advancing warily, our eyes well skinned when we saw an old woman by the side of the river. She was weeping and lamenting, gnawed by hunger. Until then no passer-by had deigned to stop by her. She beseeched us, in the name of the Almighty, to give her something to eat. Touched by her tears I approached and took some pieces of dried meat from my hunter's bag. When she had eaten well she said, "Hunter, may God requite you with the charity you have given me…young hunter, your heart is generous and it is you who will be the buffalo's vanquisher. I am the buffalo that ravages Do. (Niané 1986, 7-8)

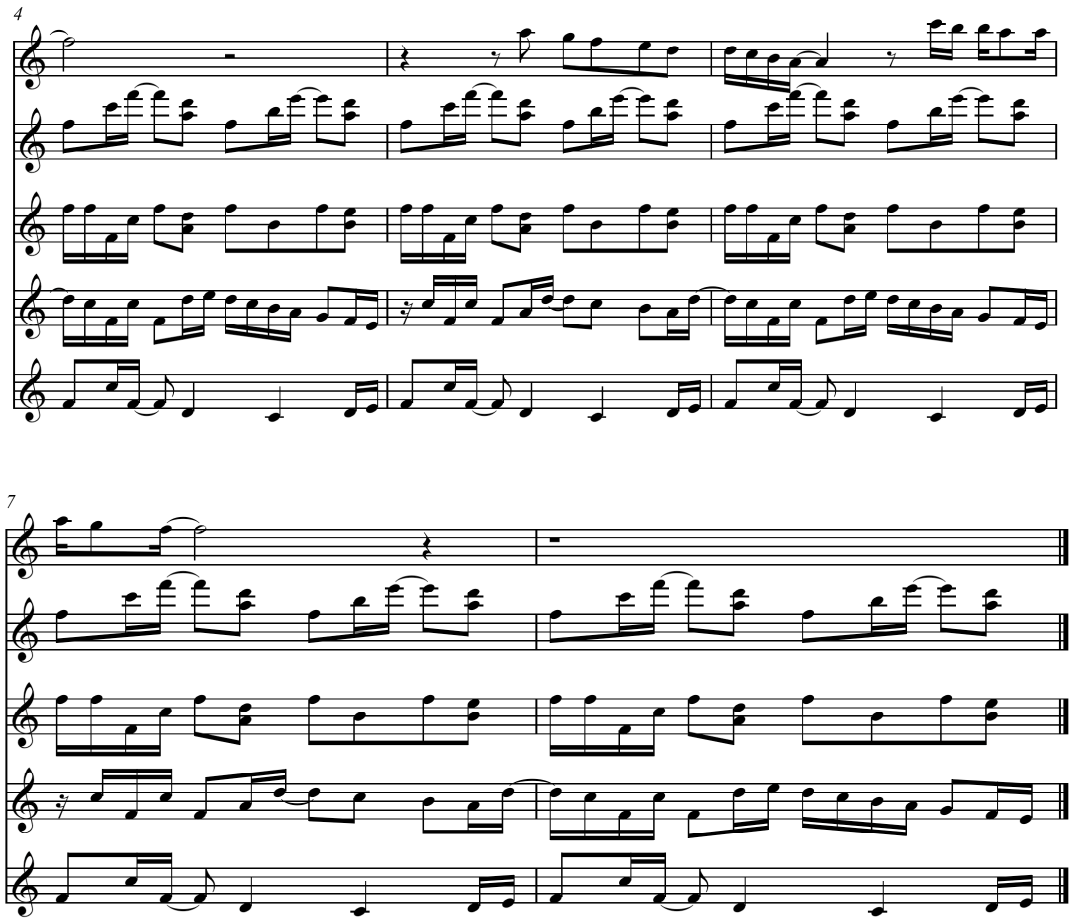
Tiramagan---the person for whom the Traoré praise song is named---was one of the well-known generals in Sunjata's army, and the hunter's direct descendant. The piece, according to Jansen, also commemorates the Diabaté ancestor (the older brother) who became Traore's griot, after the magic buffalo was vanquished. For diasporic griots, "Tiramagan" has become synonymous with "Allah l'a ke" ("God has done it"), which is a staple of nearly every griot group in New York. When I asked Djoss how to play "Tiramagan," he replied, "Play "Allah l'a ke"…that's it." Sylvain frequently refers to "Allah l'a ke" as the piece one first learns in his or her study of Mande music. Kakande's namesake and the first track on its CD *Dununya*, "Kakande," uses the same groove; in a car ride with Famoro, I began singing the refrain for "Allah l'a ke" while "Kakande" played on the car stereo, which he deemed appropriate and acceptable, insisting, "Man, you are crazy;" both Famoro and Djoss frequently used the expression, "you are crazy," in our discourse as a response to my enthusiasm for learning the repertoire and desire to make connections between pieces. I later confirmed that Famoro had recycled "Allah l'a ke" for his composition, "Kakande."

"Allah l'a ke" is also well traveled; it originated during either the late 19th or early 20th century as a kora composition in the Gambia (Charry 2000, 154). It was a morality tale that concerned the children of Fulaye Kora, who was appointed chief of the Tumana

district in eastern Gambia by a Fulbe leader at the beginning of British rule in the region. "Allah l'a ke" was dedicated to Mamady Kora, who was Fulaye's eldest son and the rightful heir to the Tumana chieftaincy. The younger son, Kemonding, convinced the town elders to appoint him as chief and banish his brother, Mamady, from Tambasansang, which was the seat of the district. Mamady eventually returned and claimed his right to rule, but did not exact revenge upon his misguided brother, but rather forgave Kemonding for his unjust deeds. In his recording of "Allah l'a ke" on the *Badenya* CD, kora player Keba Cissoko transitions seamlessly into "Tiramagan," singing its characteristic refrain melody. His performance further consummates the bond between "Tiramagan" and "Allah l'a ke," which is simply a recomposed variant of the Traore praise song (see Ex. 21).

Ex. 21 "Tiramagan" and "Allah l'a ke"





Abdoulaye's refrain and three of his accompaniments for "Allah l'a ke" are notated in Ex. 2. The four-beat groove labeled "Acc. #1" recurs throughout each of his performances. He frequently plays this pattern in Source as an introduction and to support his vocals. Sylvain and Source's bassist, Mamadou Ba, generate their parts on the flute and electric bass from the figure, F-D-C-D, in "Acc. #1." Abdoulaye frequently switches to either "Acc. #2" or "Acc. #3" during instrumental jams. I gleaned "Acc. #4" from a recording by kora player Papa Suso and have used it on many occasions. Although "Allah l'a ke" is derived or based upon "Tiramagan *fasa*," which is a much earlier work, it has virtually supplanted "Tiramagan" in the griot's active repertoire. The Traoré praise song is never performed, and "Allah l'a ke" has become a resource for

more recent works, such as "Kakande," as I have already illustrated. It is difficult to determine with any degree of certainty the progression of tones in "Allah l'a ke;" "Acc. #1" seems to suggest three tones---F, D, C, D---as "roots." However, none of the three other grooves use these pitches in a comparable manner.

Charry uses "Allah l'a ke" to exemplify some basic elements of instrumental grooves. By comparing numerous versions of "Allah l'a ke" on kora, he reflects upon the "Mande aesthetic of music making" (2000, 168). He writes,

> The harmonic scheme of *Allah l'a ke* represents a model of the basic musical structure of pieces…a binary form, eight beats divided into four plus four, apparently with no major differences between the two halves. In actual realization, though, there is some change in the second half, no matter how subtle, that distinguishes it from the first half…Another distinctive feature of *Allah l'a ke* is the melodic line, a descent from F' to D' and C' to G' (or back up to D'). (Charry 2000, 170-175)

Charry's last point regarding "the melodic line" applies to diasporic griots' approach for this piece. None of the other patterns in Ex. 21, however, figure into Charry's study of "Allah l'a ke," nor does he mention the connection between "Allah l'a ke" and "Tiramagan." Charry expounds upon the relationship between finger movements for "Allah l'a ke" and the patterns they play---a discussion that can be both revealing and misleading; although there is a significant amount of evidence that African music can be understood as a "motional system," the musical composite or the "whole" is nearly always "greater that the sum of its parts," or the physical movements that produce them. Through a kind of musical synergy, the roles of fingers in a kora accompaniment, or the movements of mallets in a balafon part, are less important than the ability of an instrumentalist to maintain his or her groove while performing with others.

Griot music has traveled with great success as my discussion of "Tiramagan" and "Allah l'a ke" demonstrates. Specific aural responses and relationships are more important than the manner in which they are produced, allowing for a great degree of latitude in the griot repertoire. At a traditional gathering in June 2006, I performed "Tiramagan," which Abdoulaye referred to as "Allah l'a ke," with Abdoulaye, Famoro, djembe player Mackane Kouyaté, and the BOSS DR-5 sequencer; there was no discussion of what fingers or position on the guitar to use, nor did Abdoulaye specify the particular order of parts within the extended variation, that lasted over ten minutes. The sense of groove took precedence; I was free to choose how to articulate my part based upon my prior experience with "Allah l'a ke." The sequencer, which I had previously loathed, supplied the basic accompaniment, allowing Abdoulaye, Famoro, and me to switch parts and change registers at our discretion.

5.3.3 "Fakoli" and "Janjon"

"Fakoli" is associated with the Sissoko or Dumbia surname. Fakoli was the nephew of Sumanguru Kanté, and joined Sunjata, helping him to claim his birthright to rule. He is celebrated as one of Sunjata's greatest generals and chief allies, and receives favorable mention in academic discourse. Conrad writes on Fakoli's relationship to Sunjata and his main adversary, Sumanguru Kanté.

> At one level Fakoli serves to bridge what might be called the "sociological gap" between these two central figures, which places him at the heart of the epic's principal events. Clearly a figure of major importance, he operates on a level virtually equal to that of Sunjata and Sumaworo. Distinguished bards of Guinea and the Gambia have devoted entire performance to him. Similarly weighty evidence of Fakoli's importance is that *Janjon*, the most respected of all heroic songs of Mande, praising only heroes who have faced grave danger, is

> traditionally dedicated to him. For the bards of Mali, Fakoli's stature renders him timeless. (Conrad 1992, 150)

Due to his critical role in the Sunjata epic, Fakoli is celebrated like no other in song. He is commemorated in two pieces in the "Sunjata *fasa*"---"Fakoli Janjo" and "Fakoli." Both works are dedicated to "Fakoli," but they are musically dissimilar. Fakoli has many names in Mande oral tradition; he is portrayed in the epic as a "big-headed" and "big-mouthed" roof raiser, who was diminutive in stature (much like Napoleon Bonaparte). According to Conrad, he is also a symbol of change within the traditional Mande social hierarchy (1992, 171). Fakoli is the personification of the "kingmaking ideology" that predominates within traditional Mande ideology; lines of succession ensure order and stability and Fakoli, above all, is remembered as a great facilitator of succession or change. He sacrificed his own exploits for the good of the community, rallying support for Sunjata among elders and initiates.

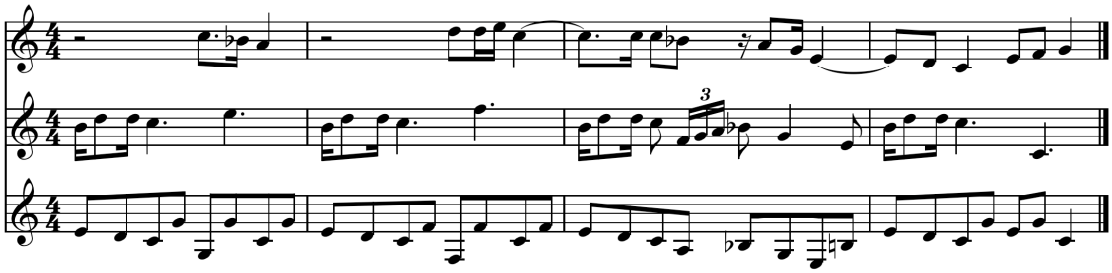
"Janjon" predates the core epic. It originated as a ritual song within brotherhoods of hunters and was first performed on the *simbi* harp. Cissé writes on "Janjon," and his comments, as translated by Charry (2000, 83), expound upon Conrad's remarks,

> "Janjon," for example, is exclusively for hunters, who by their coolness, their fearlessness, or their courage have triumphed over their "enemies" or escaped a danger. "Who can dance Janjon before seeing a calamity!" says the refrain of this hymn.

"Janjon" or "Fakoli janjo," according to Jansen, is also a dance: one step forward one step in place, and "people dance it very slowly with a sword or gun in their hand" (Jansen 1994). Some scholars claim that this piece originally celebrated Sumanguru Kanté as the "first King of the Mande" before Fakoli "captured" the song on Sunjata's behalf (Charry 2000, 84). Bird views this exchange of ownership as a symbol of the

victory of northern horsemen (Tuareg) over blacksmiths in the south of Mali during the 13th century (1999, 275-296). Musically, the "Janjon" groove, its stock interpolations, or its refrain (see Ex. 22), do not recur in any other songs, and it is very different from "Fakoli," which was among the first pieces I learned on guitar and is one of Abdoulaye's favorite compositions. On the *Mandekalou* recording (2004), a variant of "Fakoli" and "Janjon" appear as autonomous pieces, so circumstances seem to determine differences and similarities among praise songs for "Fakoli."

Ex. 22 "Janjon"

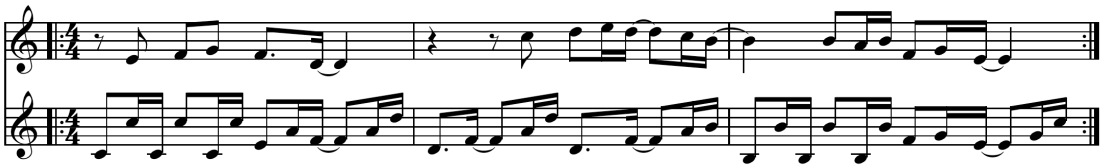


The main groove for "Janjon" is transcribed in the lowest stave in Ex. 22, while the two other staves contain typical formulae and a common refrain, which recurs in multiple versions of "Janjon," respectively. Like the musicians on the *Mandekalou* recording, which include Abdoulaye's brother Kasse Mady, diasporic griots would not classify "Janjon" and "Fakoli" as musically related. They are two very different pieces with distinct grooves, harmonic schemes, and refrain parts. The "Janjon" groove centers on two main tones C and F, while E, and its fifth, B, play an important melodic and harmonic role on beat twelve of the sixteen-beat accompaniment, which is most frequently performed at a moderate or slow tempo.

"Fakoli," on the other hand, features a twelve-beat groove with a progression of three tones---D, B, and C. It is performed at a moderate to fast tempo (see Ex. 23).

Abdoulaye nearly always performs this piece with Super Mande in concerts, though he does not play this piece with Source. I have notated the main guitar accompaniment for "Fakoli" in the lowest stave in Ex. 23 and a reduction of Abdoulaye's vocal part in the upper stave, which can be heard on the first track of the *Badenya* CD. Abdoulaye showcases his prowess as a vocalist on the recording, extemporizing many variants of the rather simple twelve-beat phrase as the performance unfolds. The griot all-stars of the *Mandekalou* sessions perform a variant of "Fakoli," which employs the same progression of tones transposed down a fourth (A-F#-G), but they perform it in a ternary rather than a duple meter.

Ex. 23 "Fakoli"



5.3.4 "Sumaoro *fasa*" and "Numun"

The "Sumaoro *fasa*" commemorates the sorcerer-king Sumanguru Kanté, who forcibly occupied the Manden before Sunjata, in Jansen's words, "chased him away."[25] It praises Sunjata's adversary, who entered the Manden "dressed in clothes made of human skin," for his bravery and cruelty. Niané writes,

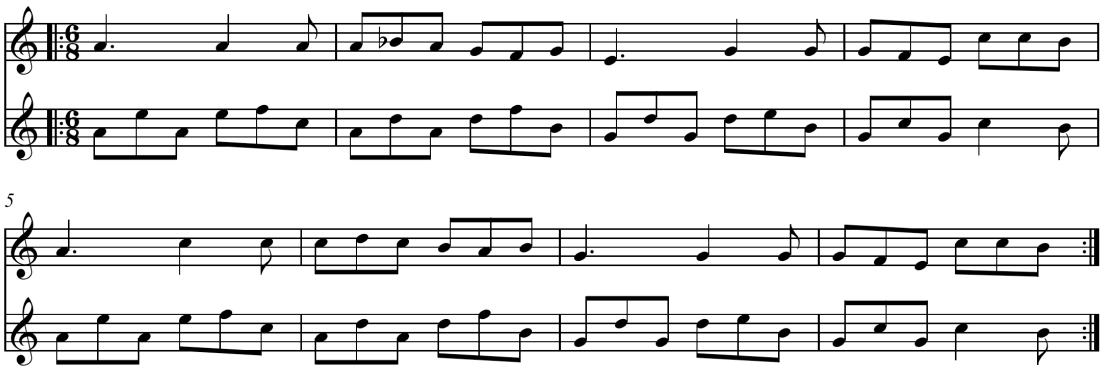
> Like all masters of fire, Soumaoro Kanté was a great sorcerer. His fetishes had terrible power and it was because of them that all kings trembled before him, for he could deal a swift death to whoever he pleased. He had fortified Sosso with a triple curtain wall and in the middle of the town loomed his palace, towering over the thatched huts of the villages. He had had an immense seven-

[25] Jan Jansen, notes to *An bè Kelen/We Are One: Griot Music from Mali* (1994), CD, Pan Records, B0000036ZZ.

> story tower built for himself and he lived on the seventh floor admidst his fetishes. This is why he was called "The Untouchable King." (1986, 38)

Power and violence are celebrated in the epic tradition; they are viewed as "constructive forces" that help build society (Jansen 1994). Sumanguru is celebrated for his exploits in this regard. Sunjata is further exalted as the "greater conqueror" for many of the same reasons. Abdoulaye refers to the "Sumaoro *fasa*" as "Numun," which means "blacksmith" in Bamana. The surname Kanté is associated with blacksmiths, who are the "masters of fire" to which Niané refers, and griots. Blacksmiths and griots are both members of the artisan caste (*nyamakalaw*) in Mali and Guinea. We used the title "Numun" to identify Sumanguru's praise song in our Sunjata performances (see Ex. 24).

Ex. 24 "Sumaoro *fasa*" and "Numun"



I have notated the eight-beat groove and the vocal refrain with variation for "Numun" in Ex. 24; the guitar accompaniment, which is transcribed in the lower stave, moves through several tonal areas, while it emphasizes the tones A, G, and C on beats one, five, and seven of the pattern. The "Numun" groove suggests a cycle of descending thirds (A-F-D-B-G-E-C), which is a feature that the Super Mande "Nama" groove also exhibits. Harmonic changes occur every beat as the pattern unfolds in a recurring triplet ostinato. This pattern does not recur in any other compositions and is reserved

exclusively for Kanté's praise song. The vocal refrain matches the groove in length and contains some subtle tonal nuances, such as the use of Bb as a neighbor note. In performance, the groove and refrain can be used as aural markers that guide one's composition through extemporization. My analysis is only one of several interpretations that could be germane to an understanding of "Numun."

5.3.5 "Duga"

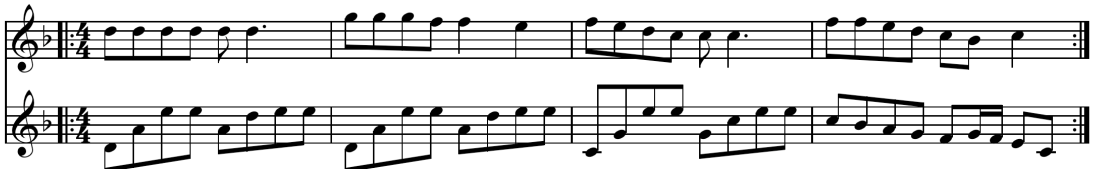
"Duga" ("Vulture"), according to Charry, is one of the oldest pieces in the griot repertoire (2000, 155). It originated either as a vocal piece or on the *koni* (the Mande lute). "Duga" was dedicated to warriors who only narrowly averted death, and it was frequently performed as a dirge at the funerals of great hunters. This piece has been associated with a number of rulers, including Duga Koro---the king of Kore---and the Segu king Da Monson Jara, who was his successor, though much ambivalence surrounds "Duga" and its storied past; for example, Wilks views the "first singer" Jankuma Duga and Ballafaseke Kouyaté as the same person, suggesting that "Duga" celebrates the memory of Sunjata's griot. Niané refers to the "Vulture's Tune," which is presumably "Duga," in his episode on Ballafaseke's encounter with Sumanguru Kanté's "great balafon" in his Kanté's secret chamber. Niané writes,

> One day when the king was away Ballafaseke managed to get right into the most secret chamber of the palace where Soumaoro safeguarded his fetishes…To the right of the door he discovered a great balafon, bigger than he had ever seen in Mali. Instinctively he pounced upon it and sat down to play. The griot always has a weakness for music, for music is the griot's soul.
>
> He began to play. He had never heard such a melodious balafon. Though scarcely touched by the hammer, the resonant wood gave out sounds of an infinite sweetness, notes as clear and pure as gold dust; under the skillful hand of Balla the instrument had found its master. He played with all his soul and the whole room was filled with wonderment. The drowsy owls, eyes half closed, began to

> move their heads as though with satisfaction. Everything seemed to come to life upon the strains of this magic music. The nine skulls resumed their earthly forms and blinked at hearing the solemn 'Vulture Tune' with its head resting on the rim, the snake seemed to listen from the jar. (1986, 58-59)

Kanté, who was nearby, returned to his fortress at once, demanding that Ballafaseke extemporize praises of exhortation on his behalf. Ibn Battuta also describes Dūghā the interpreter in his accounts of Mansa Sulayman's kingdom during the fourteenth century as playing a balafon and singing poems of praise to the king. It is not clear whether "Duga" commemorates Ballafaseke Kouyaté (a.k.a. Jankuma Duga), Sunjata's griot, Duhga the interpreter, Mansa Sulayman's griot, or perhaps "Duga" celebrates the memory of dead kings in general as Niané's episode suggests. Yet, its mention as the "Vulture's tune" in the secret chamber episode places it within the "Sunjata *fasa*," though its connection to the suite is less explicit than the well-documented Fakoli-Janjon merger that I previously discussed. Abdoulaye remarked that "Duga" is for "men only." His remarks do not help clarify the issues at hand.

Ex. 25 "Duga"



I have transcribed the guitar groove for "Duga" in Ex. 25 and an incipit of Abdoulaye's vocal part taken from a live radio broadcast, "Live from Where," which we recorded during the first week of March, 2008. The instrumental part, which was dictated to me note-for-note by Famoro, exemplifies Charry's "model of the basic musical structure of pieces;" the second half of the groove is a modified transposition of the first half down a whole step from D to C. Any number of descending stepwise

patterns or formulae can be used during the last four beats provided one makes a smooth melodic connection to the first half of the cycle. Charry also points out that "Duga" is noteworthy for its use of a minor mode, though unlike other pieces such as "Sunjata" and "Allah l'a ke," there seem to be a number of ways "Duga" can be performed. For example, although his version retains the piece's minor quality, Sory Kandia Kouyaté's rendition of "Duga" is truncated to eight beats. Abdoulaye's vocal part is a far cry from the lyrical, strophic "I bara kala ta" refrain in "Sunjata." My transcription represents a conflation of two performances during which this particular phrase recurs. The vocal part for "Duga" is less codified than other items in the griot repertoire.

5.3.6 "Lamban" and "*Jeliya*"

"Lamban" and "*Jeliya*" are synonymous. "Lamban," according to Charry, is one of the few pre-twentieth-century pieces that do not commemorate a single person (2000, 152). He attributes "Lamban" to the entire Kouyaté lineage of griots. Abdoulaye claims that "Lamban" celebrates the Diabaté clan. In either case, "Lamban" is a part of Charry's "Sunjata complex," and it has become a popular musical template for griottes in Mali and Guinea. It has a specific three-stroke *dundun* part associated with it, suggesting that it also functioned as a dance piece in the past.

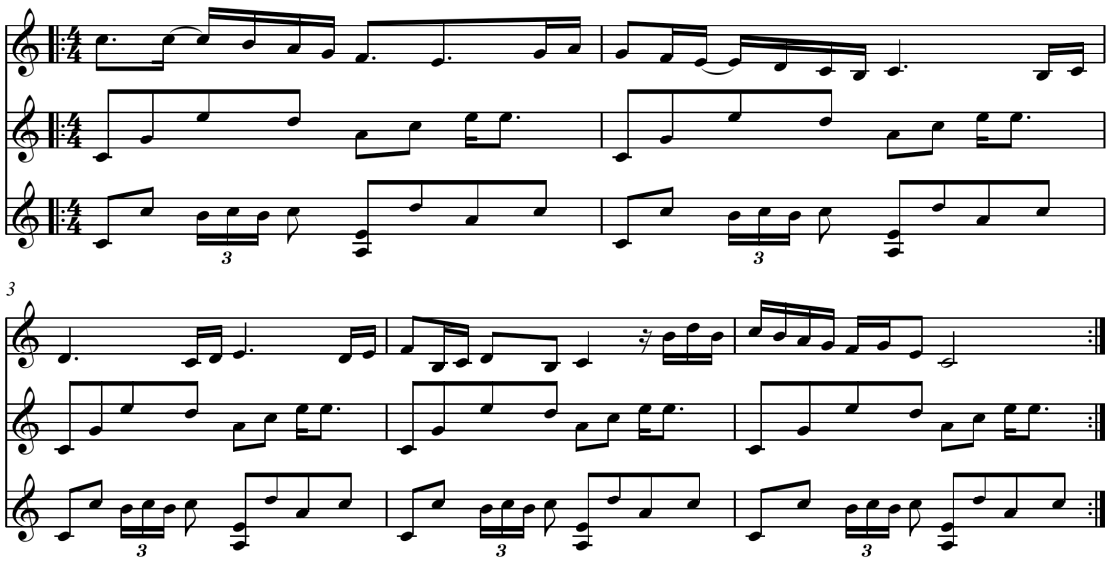
"*Jeliya*" is "a widely known song about the joys of being *jeli.*"[26] Jansen explains (1994),

> the lyrics refer to a familiar expression which stresses the importance of *jeliw* to social cohesion. *Jeliya*, o ye jalla di, ni jalla wulila, kulisi bè wuli. (The art of *jeliw* is like a belt: if you take it away the trousers fall down).

[26] Jan Jansen, notes to *An bè Kelen/We Are One: Griot Music from Mali* (1994), CD, Pan Records, B0000036ZZ.

In preparation for the Sunjata performances, we rehearsed "*Jeliya*," which I later discovered was "Lamban;" "*Jeliya*" and "Lamban" employ the same groove and vocal refrain, which Jansen cites above. The refrain serves a melodic resource in performance and can be woven into the groove at the instrumentalist's discretion. The "*Jeliya*"/"Lamban" groove is a condensation, or rather, a truncated version of the main accompaniment for "Sunjata." The accompaniments are four beats in length and contain an internal melodic oscillation between C and D, which occurs at different points in two complementary patterns (see Ex. 26).

Ex. 26 "Lamban" and "*Jeliya*"



In my experience as a collaborator, I never performed "*Jeliya*" or "Lamban" in a ceremony, concert, or gig. I rehearsed it on several occasions with Abdoulaye and Famoro in preparation for two different shows, yet we never actually played it as a part of either program. As I mentioned previously, rehearsals frequently do not match concerts with respect to the content of the performances. Once on stage, griots, such as Abdoulaye, frequently abandon plans to play "new" pieces and perform many of the

staples to which I have referred. For an outsider, such as myself, this habit of indiscriminately extemporizing a set list on a concert stage in front of an attentive audience is disconcerting and unsettling at first. As time passes, one begins to expect these digressions, which characterize griot performance practice in general.

5.3.7 "Kouyaté *fasa*"

The "Kouyaté *fasa*" is a praise song for the Kouyaté line of griots. Ballafaseke Kouyaté---Sunjata's griot---is perhaps the most recognized and celebrated griot in West Africa. His surname carries with it a degree of respect and repute that has only grown throughout the centuries. Kouyaté, to my knowledge, is the only pure griot *jamu*. Each of the other griot surnames is rooted historically in other castes or sub-castes; for example, Diabaté was originally a noble name, as the core epic reveals, while Kanté has become a common griot name in spite of its original association with blacksmiths---a sub-category of the artisan caste (*nyamakalaw*). Niané begins his version of the epic with the words of Mamadou Kouyaté, who is Ballafaseke's direct descendant. He asserts himself in an unequivocal manner as follows:

> I teach kings the history of their ancestors so that the lives of the ancients might serve them as an example, for the world is old, but the future springs from the past…My word is pure and free from all untruth…Listen to my word, all that want to know; by my mouth you will learn the history of Mali. (1986, 1)

In describing his recording of "Kouyaté *fasa*" from Kela, Jansen explains (1994), "the famous expression "Jeli ma Kouyaté bo" is repeated several times. This performance of the "Kouyaté *fasa*" does not resemble the simple tune Abdoulaye associates with the Kouyaté *jamu* or surname. The Kela recording features an *a cappella*

performance in which a leader and a chorus sing in a responsorial manner; an eight-beat phrase is exchanged between a female soloist and an all-female group, which is accompanied by handclapping and a recurring triplet pattern performed on a small ribbed iron pipe (*karinyan*) struck with an iron bar. Abdoulaye's knowledge of the "Kouyaté *fasa*" is limited, nor do any other diasporic griots (to my knowledge) perform this piece on a regular basis. I learned the "Kouyaté *fasa*" in passing as a simple, strophic melody whose accompaniment merely doubles the short phrase to which I refer. The praise lyrics Abdoulaye sets to the melodic phrase match Jansen's "famous expression," though I hesitate to classify Kouyaté's praise as a groove since its accompaniment merely doubles the melody to which the text is set. As previously mentioned, the Kouyaté surname has been associated with other works, such as "Duga" and "*Jeliya*," so it has not been completely neglected in the Sunjata corpus.

5.4 The Loft Production of "The Epic of Sunjata"

5.4.1 Prologue

With the resources in hand to adapt the Sunjata story as a theatre piece for a Western audience, we had an incredible opportunity at Dowling, yet we faced many challenges. The epic, from my perspective, has had a troubled past; it has frequently served the ends of individuals with specific agendas in mind. Competing constituencies comprised of freeborn patrons, griots, African intellectuals, and Westerner administrators have sought to divide and conquer with their knowledge of this tale. Traditional ideology regarding "social cohesion," which African participants espoused and supported, rarely prevailed in spite of the recurring rhetoric that encouraged solidarity. The slogan "An Bè

Kelen/We Are One," which adorns the cover of the Jansen recording, for example, only refers to Diabaté griots of Kela. Even for diasporic West African collaborator and poet, Kewulah Kamara, who performs his own version of the epic in New York on an intermittent basis, the Sunjata corpus has become a territory to be marked and protected. Kamara, according to Van Buren, has co-opted *badenya* as a marketing slogan to promote himself as an authority on the epic.[27]

Heeding the advice of griot Badian Kouyaté, we reached a collective understanding of the epic "based on the double necessity of taking root and opening out," which the catch phrase, "The deeper the roots, the higher the reach," inadvertently echoes (McGuire 1999, 255). We "remembered" Sunjata's past in a manner that was universal and germane for Westerners and Africans alike. We strove to retain the story's integrity, yet we encouraged the cooperative spirit of *badenya* ("affection") by promoting a cultural dialogue through collaboration, which according to Djoss and Famoro had never been attempted in the epic's history. New York griots and collaborators embraced the project and acknowledged that it embodied all that diasporic *jeliya* espouses, which is best conveyed in Rothblatt's philosophy that, together, griots and their Western brethren create "art of lasting beauty."

One of our greatest hurdles in developing the adaptation has troubled composers for centuries. How could we retain the continuity of the story as it unfolds and the salient features of the epic tradition, such as the extensive use of formulaic expressions, proverbs, and praises, while incorporating the "Sunjata *fasa*"---the representative musical corpus---in an effective way? Folklorist John William Johnson reflects upon this

[27] Personal communication, August 12, 2007, at Out of Doors concert at Lincoln Center.

predicament in his own extensive analysis of the Sunjata epic, which should be understood as merely a figurative analogy to our experiences at the Loft Theatre. Three modes or manners of expression, according to Johnson, are significant in the epic---the narrative mode, the praise-proverb mode, and the song mode (1986, 31-32). An "aesthetic tension" immediately arises when these modes are combined or coordinated.

Johnson discusses the differentiation between his modes with respect to the musical settings of the texts. He concludes that the song mode is unique, writing that "the amount of aesthetic tension" between the words and the music is "the lowest for both melody and rhythm" in the song mode, which makes it more forgiving. Yet, the song mode is difficult to assess in terms of its "literary function" (1986, 32-33). Johnson asserts that "one thing is for certain: Songs appear at the major points of the narrative and seem to function like arias in grand opera, commemorating the major incidents in the plot." Johnson's observation was an impetus and a guide for me as musical director of the Loft Production, since I was committed to retaining the integrity of the epic tradition as much as possible. My understanding of the operatic tradition in the West---a connection that was confirmed by Johnson's last remark---provided a model for me as we began work on the adaptation.

5.4.2 Act 1

The show opens with a primordial rumble that emanates from behind the stage; after an abrupt crash, an ominous light immediately shines upon the translucent baobab tree---a source of strength in traditional West African societies. In the tree, a griotte (Ballafaseke Kouyaté) awakens, bewildered and disoriented, though she is comforted by

her wraith (Djoss), who is a symbol of wisdom and knowledge, and her source of inspiration. As Balla begins her opening monologue, people emerge from the ground, sprouting from the roots of a great baobab tree. They stand in amazement of the griotte and her ethereal counterpart. They address the audience directly as Sunjata dances eloquently along the perimeter of the stage area. Balla reflects,

> Who is this? Sunjata? I have heard this name and felt its vibrations in my bones, but who is Sunjata? A man. A legend. A myth. A belief. I don't know the answer, but Sunjata comes to us now for to be without him would to be without roots.

The root-born characters, whom the griotte refers to as "storytellers," distribute imaginary seeds to the audience in order to plant the "dream" of Sunjata in their heads, which will flower and bear fruit or insights. Balla instructs the audience as follows:

> Hold your seed tight, and imagine yourself deep beneath the earth, like a tiny seed. Then let the darkness do its best to frighten you out of your encasement into the light. For the darkness is the best place to tell stories and we griots long to tell stories.

Ballafaseke encourages the audience members to allow their "collective imaginations" to "soar together" as a "Sunjata" is pulled from within each person. With one fell swoop, Sunjata, who had graced the stage with strength and virility, becomes paralyzed from his waist down and is forced to crawl upon the earth. With this last dramatic display, the story begins.

Throughout Act 1, our collective recomposition of Sunjata's past involved a great deal of creative license, though we retained the main divisions of the narrative, which include the events leading up to Sunjata's birth, his exile, and return; for example, the second scene "Sunjata Taunted" portrays Sunjata's half-brother and half-sister---Dankara Touman and Nana Triban---teasing Sunjata, who cannot yet walk. This episode is almost impossible to substantiate, but it is an effective way to create sympathy for the

protagonist, who will stand up and walk in the climatic scene of Act I. Incipits and fragments of dialogue, and stage action, were cues for the pit band comprised of Abdoulaye "Djoss" Diabaté (vocals and guitar), Famoro Dioubaté (balafon and vocals), Andy Algire (percussion), and myself as music director and guitarist. A "cue sheet," which contained a complete list of the musical pieces we performed (and some reprises), served as my guide. As Ballafaseke, who serves as a narrator at key points throughout the performance, announces that Sogolon prepares to become the second wife of King Magan of the Manden, the band enters with "Kaira," which underscored the wedding celebration. Tracy Berseley chose "Kaira" and created original choreography for it, relying entirely upon a recording of Kassé Mady that I had made for her. Since there is a great deal of continuity in the performance practice, we were able to reproduce "Kaira" for the shows. It was much more difficult to end pieces with precision and this was one of the greatest challenges for the musicians.

Although Djoss was born to play this part, his memory failed him. He needed to consult a DVD of the epic, which had been made in Mali, in order to remember the past of his ancestors, and the core story.[28] Neither Djoss nor Famoro had great insights or knowledge of the narrative. For them, knowledge of the Sunjata's past did not extend beyond the pieces that commemorate Keita, Traoré, Sissoko, Kanté, or Kouyaté. Our extensive rehearsals had little or no bearing on the script writing process, which was a collaborative effort between Andrew Karp and Tracy Berseley. Djoss and Famoro, however, made suggestions regarding the use of particular pieces in the adaptation.

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[28] *Keïta!* [videorecording] *: The heritage of the griot* / AFIX Productions Les Productions de la Lanterne ; Sahélis Productions ; L'E tat de Burkina ; scénario et réalisation, Dani Kouyaté ; scripte, Véronique Paris.

Djoss objected to our decision to use certain compositions from one of the more recent Toumani Diabaté recordings, which were not standards in the repertoire. Other pieces, which are not a part of the "Sunjata *fasa*" proper, were included and played key roles in dramatizing the action and events on stage.

A series of flashbacks allowed the story to unfold in a non-linear way. After the wedding celebration for Magan and Sogolon, the play introduces the audience to the first wife of the king, Sassuma, and her plans to promote her son, Dankara Touman, as the rightful heir to the throne. Sogolon and Sassuma are set up as rivals and their relationship parallels the initial enmity between their sons, and the eventual rivalry between Sunjata and Sumanguru Kanté. After Magan's death, Balla is bequeathed to Sunjata, who still cannot walk. Dankara Touman is named king to the satisfaction of his mother, Sassuma. As Niané's account confirms, Sunjata finally arises in a grand display, bending an iron rod in the shape of a hunter's bow, which becomes a harbinger of his future as a *simbon* or a master hunter. The pit band performed the "Hymn of the Bow" in a manner comparable to the Super Rail Band or the Mandekalou all-stars. Djoss and Famoro sang the refrain from the end of the Rail Band's nearly thirty-minute rendition of Sunjata, which Famoro had suggested, but Djoss could never sing properly. As one collaborator's dictum confirms, "almost" was "good enough" since "the show must go on." Act 1 concludes with Sunjata's entrance into exile and his resolution to "remember" the broken community of the Manden upon his return.

5.4.3 Act II

Act II begins in the lair of Sumanguru Kanté, the much-maligned rival of Sunjata. He poses a direct threat to the sovereignty of the Manden and its people, whom he eventually conquers. As the name of his caste (*nyamakalaw*) illustrates, Kanté is a sorcerer and a master of the occult (*nyama*). We underscored Balla's encounter with Kanté in his secret chamber with "Duga" ("The Vulture's Tune") and "Numun" respectively, which befit these events in the narrative. Sunjata returns upon the request of his half-brother Dankara Touman, whose character absorbed the role of Fakoli in the epic. Sunjata defeats Kanté after his half-sister, Nana, discovers his weakness through seduction. In a defiant act of solidarity, the cast seizes Kanté, vanquishing him by forcibly placing him into the hollow and illuminated baobab tree, which was the place at the center of the stage where the play began. We highlighted this moment by performing "Nanfulen," which, according to Van Buren (2002), celebrates liberation and independence. The performance concludes with "Allah l'a ke" ("God has done it") as the characters leave the stage area in a euphoric state, dancing and singing in celebration of the triumph of Sunjata.

Pieces from the "Sunjata *fasa*" and others in the standard repertoire, such as "Kaira," "Djarabi," and "Malisadio," served to underscore the most significant and important points of the play. Works such as "Wassoulou foli," a piece that was originally recorded by Salif Keita during his tenure in the Super Rail Band, provided musical accompaniment for the stage action in both acts. We reprised certain songs in order to create musical connections and continuity in places where thematic relations already existed. The most effective uses of the repertoire occurred at the most significant points in the story, such as "The Lion's Awakening" and the liberation of the Manden from the

control of Kanté at the conclusion of Act II. Djoss and Famoro were ecstatic after each performance. They had never seen the Sunjata epic recomposed in this manner before and cherished the experience. Griots and collaborators worked together in celebrating the shared message of the epic. "Remembering" the past must be a collective process in order for *badenya* ("affection") to prevail.

5.5 Conclusion

If "the deeper the roots, the higher the reach" is not already a Mande proverb, it should be. The griots' commitment to preserving their past via the Sunjata epic in its multifarious forms inspires great humility in their Western brethren. Collaborators realize that their shared experiences with New York griots relate to a tradition of almost unfathomable scope, which inspires wonderment and child-like amazement in all that encounter it. We must learn to take root and branch out as griot Badian Kouyaté observes in his assessment of the Sunjata epic. The Sunjata story became a distillization of the griots' message in the West, which espouses collaboration at its very core. *Badenya* or collectivity fosters, encourages, and shepherds *dununya*, which comprises the universal components of diasporic *jeliya* in New York.

In this chapter, I use the terms *fadenya* ("rivalry") and *badenya* ("affection") in a figurative manner. They are metaphors for the types of rivalry and affection that have impacted the recomposition of the Sunjata epic in the past and more recently in New York. Charry observes that these concepts in particular "make for a rich panorama of artistic possilbilties and aesthetic viewpoints full of paradoxes" (2000: 55). Malian Chérif Keita identifies *fadenya* as the force in the artistic plane that encourages

innovation, suggesting that I have misappropriated the terms, *fadenya* and *badenya*, with respect to my discussion of the "Epic of Sunjata" production at Dowling College (Charry 2000: 57). My interpretation, however, is idiosyncratic, and it is not based upon the etymologies of these words or how these terms might function in Mande contexts. I reflect upon the degree to which these concepts can inform new views of griots as artists who embrace collaboration with a host of outsiders. Terms such as fasiya, fadenya, and badenya describe parts of the struggle that griots encounter in their efforts to gain wider recognition within and outside of their communities. I am always suspicious of terminology that is made to accommodate new meanings, but in this case I merely hope to provide a framework for my discussion of the Sunjata epic. Badenya reflects the spirit of the Sunjata project at Dowling and diasporic jeliya in general, and it can also be understood to inspire innovations of its own kind, as Charry has also shown (2000: 56).

Conclusion

In light of this work, *jeliya* as a musical practice must begin to account for significant relations outside the Mande sphere. Thus a new chapter commences in the griot narrative that originated during the thirteenth century, though many questions remain with respect to how griots will continue to respond to ever-changing cultural climates and market demands. Knight (1973) acknowledged that *jeliya* and the roles of the griot of the past would soon be unrecognizable to us. My own experiences confirm that a griot's utility as a hereditary professional in the Mande sphere has been challenged by the advent of DJs at community events and the paucity of professional opportunities in general. The griot repertoire remains a source of inspiration for these musicians that sustains them as professionals in the world music sphere. For Djoss and others, music is a job and an occupation, while their repertoire constitutes the tools of their trade.

The tools of the griot trade have changed with respect to styles of presentation and reception. The jam music paradigm embodies the shift from verbal art and literary genre to objectified forms of absolute music. As a musical practice, *jeliya* is commercialized and commodified in Western contexts as a form of entertainment for new sources of patronage. Since griots never relinquish membership to the Mande artisan caste and their sense of tradition remains strong, it is unlikely that they will forget their past. Their practice, which includes the use of instruments such as the balafon and guitar, trademark pieces, and specific playing styles, is a constant reminder of their ancestral pedigree, and thus it resists manifold homogenization. Contact with new peoples and environments breeds change in the griot's art, whose saliency is measured in terms of its marketability in both the Mande and world music sphere. Social responsibility and commercial

artistry, however, are different pursuits that many griots embrace and negotiate with their trade skills. In any case, the success of griots in New York and elsewhere is a testament to their versatility and adaptability, while the conditions of globalization remain out of their control. The words of the griot are lost in transit or translation, but the world of music (or world music) is enriched by their involvement or participation in creating hybrid styles of popular music.

With each passing day, it becomes clearer to me that my study is not the end of the griot story in New York, but only the beginning. Contemporary griot music is truly the world's music and is entangled in a web of international exchange. The griot diasporic experience (like griot music) is kaleidoscopic in nature, while subtle changes and variations refract peoples' lives in new directions. The dialectic among griots and Westerners continues to persist, and griots are leaders in the African music juggernaut that has transformed *jeliya* into a commercial art. For many collaborators, imitation began as the highest form of praise, while griots revel in their newly found creative freedom in the West. Transactions continue to redefine the social realities for Mande caste-bound professionals, who are dialed into an extensive network of individuals and groups worldwide. As Fabian observed, creativity is crucial for social change, which griots engage in diasporic *jeliya*.

I am honored to be a part of this process and to affect the lives of my African friends and colleagues. A recent CD release speaks to these points. At the end of 2008, a collection of African artists assembled for a recording project, which was comparable in nature and scope to the *African Guitar Summit* collaborations. *In The Name of Love:*

Africa Celebrates U2 symbolizes the kind of reciprocation that I have been earnestly describing. Producer Shawn Amos writes,

> How is it a band from Ireland can touch a continent half a world away? How is it the very same continent can remain a mystery while appearing in the news everyday? The idea for this collection was born in Africa. I was a black American visiting Africa for the first time. Building a home for a man named Musa. We worked side by side, and some days I listened to U2 on my headphones while laying cinder blocks. I have thought about Africa and Musa every day since leaving them. U2's music and Bono's work have helped to keep me connected. Africa, like U2's music, is filled with hope and promise…These songs---originally written and recorded a half a world away---now belong to Africa, they are about Africa. (Amos 2008)

The album features Ba Cissoko, who is Keba's relative in Africa, and his group, along with an array of world music superstars. Cissoko brandishes his griot heritage in his performance of U2's "Sunday Bloody Sunday" (I thought I'd never see the day). The kora performs the Edge's signature eight-beat guitar groove, which is affected by delay, a flanger, and compression, providing an ethereal or interstellar quality. Once again, *jeliya* is commercialized, commodified, and marketed to the widest possible audience. The network of participants in this collaboration is indescribable. The trajectory of social relations is angular and non-linear, and massive in scope. Diasporic *jeliya* is best summarized in terms of its universal (*dununya*) appeal, and the affection and cooperative spirit (*badenya*) it inspires in all it touches.

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