

Hauke Dorsch

**Diasporizing Tradition**  
Griots and Scholars in the  
Black Atlantic

ARBEITSPAPIERE DES  
INSTITUTS FÜR  
ETHNOLOGIE  
UND AFRIKASTUDIEN

WORKING PAPERS OF  
THE DEPARTMENT OF  
ANTHROPOLOGY AND  
AFRICAN STUDIES



Herausgegeben von / The Working Papers are edited by:

Institut für Ethnologie und Afrikastudien, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz,  
Forum 6, D-55099 Mainz, Germany.

Tel. +49-6131-3923720; Email: ifeas@uni-mainz.de; <http://www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de>  
<http://www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de/92.php>

ISSN (Online): 2750-7866

Geschäftsführende Herausgeberin / Managing Editor: Theresa Mentrup ([tmentrup@uni-mainz.de](mailto:tmentrup@uni-mainz.de))

Copyright remains with the author.

Zitierhinweis / Please cite as:

Dorsch, Hauke (2022): Diasporizing Tradition. Griots and Scholars in the Black Atlantic. Arbeitspapiere des Instituts für Ethnologie und Afrikastudien der Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz (Working Papers of the Department of Anthropology and African Studies of the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz) 200.

---

## **Dorsch, Hauke: Diasporizing Tradition. Griots and Scholars in the Black Atlantic.**

### **Abstract**

This contribution follows three generations of West African musicians from griot families along their Atlantic travels, connecting their trajectories with scholarly debates in African Diaspora studies. Arguing that both, the scholarly debates and the griots' travels, react to broader social and cultural trends, this chapter will show how griots and griottes use their claim to tradition as cultural capital vis-à-vis their diasporic audiences, and how growing up in the diaspora might as well change existing griot traditions of gendered roles.

### **Zusammenfassung**

Dieser Beitrag folgt drei Generationen westafrikanischer Musiker aus Griot-Familien auf ihren transatlantischen Reisen und verknüpft ihre Routen mit den Wendungen in wissenschaftlichen Debatten zur afrikanischen Diaspora. Ausgehend von dem Gedanken, dass sowohl die wissenschaftlichen Debatten als auch die Reisen der Griots auf breitere soziale und kulturelle Trends reagieren, zeigt dieses Arbeitspapier, wie Griottes und Griots ihren Anspruch auf Tradition als kulturelles Kapital gegenüber ihrem diasporischen Publikum geltend machen und wie das Aufwachsen in der Diaspora bestehende, von der Griot-Tradition sanktionierte Geschlechterrollen verändern kann.

### **Keywords / Schlagworte**

African music; griots; changing gender roles; Mandinka; theories of the African Diaspora / Musik Afrikas; Griots; wechselnde Gender-Rollen; Mandinka; Theorien der Afrikanischen Diaspora.

## **Der Autor**

Dr. Hauke Dorsch leitet das Archiv für die Musik Afrikas und lehrt am Institut für Ethnologie und Afrikastudien der Johannes-Gutenberg-Universität Mainz. Forschungen zu Musik, Migration, Integrationspolitik und Diaspora führten ihn nach Gambia, Senegal, Mali, Südafrika, Mosambik, Namibia, Kuba, die USA, Großbritannien, Frankreich und Deutschland.

**E-Mail:** [dorschh@uni-mainz.de](mailto:dorschh@uni-mainz.de)



## I. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Back in 1999, when I conducted research on West African musicians and their role for the African Diaspora, I visited some concerts in The Gambia, where I saw a young woman playing the harp-lute called kora. This sight was quite surprising, given that the respective literature would state that exclusively men from a certain group of hereditary musicians, called *jali* or griots, were allowed to play this instrument. I was even more surprised when I interviewed Siffai Jobarteh, the above-mentioned musician, and her father, who had taught her to play, about her playing the kora. Both actually denied that she had played, or more precisely, that she had ‘really’ played. They would say that she just strummed along for the sake of the sound. Thus, the norm was not questioned, women just did not play the kora. At the time, I did not discuss this issue profoundly (Dorsch 2006a: 38ff.), given that my focus was on griots and the diaspora – and women did not perform as kora players in the diaspora and most griots I interviewed, who had toured the Global North, were men. I could not know then that twenty years later this very question would turn out to be a central example for the decisive role that a female kora player and griotte from the African Diaspora would play with regards to this ancient tradition – and would thus open a new chapter of the role of the griot in the diaspora as well as of the impact of the diaspora in West Africa.

Following a number of authors who stressed the symbolic importance of griots in the African Diaspora (Dorsch 2006a, Ebron 2002, Hale 1998), I will use griots as my example for central actors and symbols in the African Diaspora. In many ways, griots and griottes can be described as diasporists in Tölölyan’s (1996: 14ff.) understanding of the term (Dorsch 2005). Griots and griottes – men and women – are not only musicians, but also artisans of communication. They are entertainers who tell stories, who sing, and whose privilege it is to play certain musical instruments like the harp-lute called kora. During the last decades, however, griots and griottes extended their repertory of musical instruments and styles incorporating global pop music influences. They are mediators in disputes, masters of certain ceremonies, and counsellors whose advice is widely respected. Their origins can be traced to the hierarchical societies of West African empires in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Griots would praise and – through genealogical accounts – legitimize the ruling families of these empires. They also had the privilege to criticize rulers in public. Today, this role persists, and West African politicians cherish, fear, and use griots for electoral campaigns due to their extraordinary rhetorical abilities. As professionals who are responsible for history, they remind people of their ancestry, of events, places, migrations, and traditional values, which were important for shaping collective identity. As counsellors, they were – and are still today – intermediaries between different empires, clans, and ethnic groups. As “masters of the word”, they translate between different local languages (Dorsch 2006a; Hale 1998).

---

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on research on the role of griots in the African Diaspora. Data were gathered through participant observation and interviews in Germany (1998-2003), the US (Aug.-Sep. 1999), Gambia and Senegal from Oct.-Dec. 1999 in June-July 2000, and again in March-April 2019. However, discussions on these issues continue with many griots who over the last decades have decided to settle in Europe – or simply via Facebook. Funding for this research was provided by the Heinrich Böll Foundation, the University of Hamburg and the Mariann Steegmann Foundation. I would like to thank the many griots and griottes, musicians, organisers, audiences, colleagues and others who took their time talking to me. This is the English version on an article published in Portuguese (Dorsch 2021). The editors kindly accepted this English version to be published online. This working paper is also based on an earlier contribution (Dorsch 2013), which was extended and updated to reflect developments of the last few years.

Griots have a close and complementary connection to their patrons. Patrons were traditionally members of noble warrior, scholar, and later also trader families. Today, any wealthy person may serve as a patron. In earlier centuries, griots stayed at the courts or compounds of nobles. The Mandinka word for patron, *jiaatiyo*, actually translates as ‘host’. However, contemporarily, griots have their own compounds and travel to their various patrons to perform there. In these societies, where tradition was mainly kept alive orally, people were and some still are keenly aware that their deeds would only be remembered in oral tradition, which means mainly in griots’ songs. Praise singing is thus not just flattery; it connects the individual present to his or her past, to the endless line of ancestors and long vanished empires. The songs may help remember your name for the generations to come, if you conform to traditional norms or achieve some extraordinary deeds. This is especially important for migrants whose family background is entirely unknown and seemingly meaningless in their new surroundings. Thus, the griot legitimizes the noble using his cultural capital. In doing so, this cultural capital often is converted into economic capital, because the noble will donate some money or some other gift to the griot. However, the person praised gains an additional advantage, too, as he or she will assume the symbolic capital of an honored noble. This social relation between griot and noble helped establish the griots’ role in the diaspora. The griot’s and griotte’s cultural capital, however, is his or her knowledge of history, genealogy, sayings, riddles, songs, and poems – tradition in general. In the way he or she has the ultimate knowledge how to correctly interpret history, he or she embodies tradition.

In order to understand today’s griots’ role in the diaspora or, more generally, in a globalized context, we need to delve into West African Sahelian history, because the main features of the institution of griots developed between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. The empires of Ghana (or Wagadu), Mali (or Manden), Songhoy (or Sonrai) and smaller political entities that developed after the downfall of any of these empires, rose and fell subsequently from the 10<sup>th</sup> century until colonial times. Based largely on the unifying features offered by the introduction of Islam, these empires lived of the trans-Sahara and trans-Sahelian trade routes, and increasingly of the trans-Atlantic slavery. According to griot traditions, the institution of griots already developed in the Ghana Empire in the 10<sup>th</sup> century and spread first to dependent political entities, then to other empires (Dieterlen and Sylla 1992; Dorsch 2006a; Hale 1998).

Studies of the griots’ role in the African Diaspora have so far not sufficiently focused on the historical dimension. Since the existence of the Sahelian empires, griots served as diasporists. Caused by the expansion but also by the fall of any of these empires, large parts of their respective populations spread all over West Africa. These populations kept some memory of their respective homeland and could thus be seen as diasporas. Griots guarded the tradition of each empire and its ruling elite and transmitted it to the respective following empires (Dorsch 2006a: 80ff.). Thus, already in pre-colonial times, griots served as a link between different empires, diasporas, and localities, evoking and representing a glorious past. As I will show by introducing three generations of travelling griots from The Gambia, this role as a link to an ancestral homeland was continued in colonial and post-colonial times. Griots would now link different levels of the “African Diaspora”, that is the “Old” and the “New” African diasporas, the first mainly based on the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the second on post-colonial migrations towards former colonial centers and increasingly other destinations of the Global North.

I will try to not only look at these three generations of travelling kora players, but also discuss the state of respective contemporary academic reasoning about the African Diaspora.

Following Yelvington (2006), I will have to reduce the complexities of this scholarly discourse to three paradigms of theorizing the African Diaspora, which will be linked to each of these generations: The first phase may be described by its essentialist approaches to Blackness and a reifying concept of culture. Culture was regarded as something transported over the Atlantic and ‘kept’ in Africanisms. A historical focus on what Black people brought to the New World, and how these contributions would help arguing against racist perspectives that denied Blacks’ achievements, characterized this ‘contributionist’ approach. Its most visible expression was probably the Herskovits–Frazier debate (see Yelvington 2006: 9ff.). The second phase established a focus on identity and asked for the dialectical relation of homeland and diaspora. Its ‘master-trope’ was creolization and probably its most influential publication Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* (1993). For the new century Yelvington (2006) identifies – or rather establishes – a third phase of scholarly, and especially anthropological, approaches to the African Diaspora, which he calls ‘dialogical’. Informed mainly by Matory’s dialogic perspective on the Black Atlantic (Yelvington 2006: 23ff.; Matory 2006: 164ff.), these recent works include reflections on the scholars’ role in constructing a field (like “diaspora”), but interestingly only rarely lead to explicitly dialogic publications in this field<sup>2</sup>. This article aims at contributing to this last phase by trying to bring the griots’ travels into dialogue with scholarly reasoning about the African Diaspora. I will close by arguing that by changing the tradition in the homeland, the diaspora opened a new chapter in the dialogue between diaspora and homeland.

## II. In Search of the Lost Essence: Africa as Zion

The image of the griot, the griot as symbol of the connection of Africans in the diaspora and their homeland, had travelled to Europe and the Americas as early as in the 1910s when a group of writers and historians in Haiti called themselves ‘griots’. Two decades later, Négritude authors like Damas, Césaire and Senghor in Paris used the image of the griot in their poems (Damas 1960, Senghor 1969: 162ff., Thiers-Thiam 2004: 57ff.). With the independence of Guinea in 1958 and its government’s establishing a National Orchestra, griots would soon be touring the world representing the new African nations. The representatives of the first generation of travelling griots I will refer to are the two Gambian kora musicians Alhadj Bai Konte (also: Konteh) and Amadou Bansang Jobarteh (also: Jobate, Diabaté). I rely mostly on interviews with interlocutors of their children’s generation because Bai Konte was already dead when I first visited The Gambia and I had only one opportunity to interview Amadou Jobarteh before his death in 2001. However, these data are sufficient to provide us with some information on their trajectories.

Both travelled first in the region that is The Gambia, Southern Senegal and Guinea-Bissau, visiting their patrons, but both had also been invited to visit the United Kingdom, the former colonial “motherland”. (Actually, Bai Konte may have visited Britain during colonial times, the chronology is not entirely clear about that). Thus, the radius of this generation’s travels extended increasingly, starting off in the late colonial period, when griots travelled along the networks that their forefathers had established with local patrons in the Mandinka-speaking areas of Gambia, Senegal, and Guinea-Bissau. Following independence and the establishment of the Commonwealth, these tours reached to the metropole, where they performed for the

---

<sup>2</sup> Rasolofondraosolo and Meinhof 2003 and Meinhof and Rasolofondraosolo 2005 on Malagasy musicians would be an example.

Queen and for the West African communities that slowly established themselves in Britain. The same development had been observed in France, where griots have been invited by African immigrant communities to perform mainly in Paris (Manchuelle 1997).

The colonial metropolis served as diasporic center for the first generations of West African migrants, and for the first generation of griots travelling internationally, too, as they followed the migrants' trajectories. The metropolis was a center of diasporic learning, self-representation, and of debates on the diaspora's character. When the West African and Antillean authors Léopold S. Senghor, Aimé Césaire and Léon-Gontran Damas developed the concept of Négritude in Paris, this concept was intended a poetic version of pan-Africanism that established a humanist cultural base linking the Black movements across the Atlantic. Some African intellectuals, however, saw Négritude as a mainly Francophone project – uniting the former French colonies in West and Central Africa, Madagascar, and the Antilles. Wole Soyinka's famous quote "A tiger does not proclaim its tigritude, it pounces" (in: Jahn 1968: 265) was directed at Négritude's being too elitist and academic. Nonetheless, this debate established a discursive space important for the development of a Diasporic and pan-Africanist consciousness. Only later did Soyinka express his appreciation of Senghor's contribution to African and Diasporic thinking throughout the independence era and after, by comparing Senghor to a griot (Soyinka 1999: 141f.).

The above-mentioned 'real' griots, however, travelled trans-nationally expanding their horizons even further by crossing the Atlantic and performing in the USA. Amadou Jobarteh was artist in residence at the Ethnomusicology Division of the University of Washington in 1986/87<sup>3</sup>. Bai Konte toured the US repeatedly, first invited by white American music enthusiasts and later in the 1970s went on tour with his sons Dembo Konte and Malamini Jobarteh. Bai also taught Americans and Europeans to play the kora (Hale 1998: 266). Their invitations to the US took place in an era shaped by the popularization of pan-Africanism. In the 1970s, two phenomena spawned an unprecedented US-American and even global interest in Africa: first, the huge international success of Reggae music and the closely connected Rastafari image of Africa as an idealized Zion; secondly, the publication of the novel and TV-series *Roots* (1977) and *Roots – The Next Generations* (1979), that presented an African American perspective on American history. It turned out to be the most successful TV series at its time (Hale 1998: 245ff; Dorsch 2006a: 153ff.) and has been remade in 2016. The novel and the 1979 series both presented the griot as a link from Africa to America. The griot Kebba Kanji Fofana tells the narrator, i.e., Alex Haley, his family history, and, by doing so, links an African American family history to an African genealogy (Haley 1976, 1981, 1987). Bai Konteh performs as a kora player in this series, which probably lead to his being repeatedly invited to perform in the US afterwards. He developed a relationship to his white American tour manager that resembled that to a patron in Mandinka society. He used the income from the tours and from teaching kora to Americans to finance his pilgrimage to Mecca. So, this is an example of how the interest in the "Old" African Diaspora shaped trajectories of travelling griots.

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://music.washington.edu/ethnomusicology-visiting-artists-archive> (accessed August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020). According to Wikipedia, Bai Konte was the first solo kora player performing in the US at the Newport Jazz Festival in 1973. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bai\\_Konte](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bai_Konte) (accessed August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020). But Hale (1998: 246) and again the University of Washington's website tell us differently that Jali Nyama Suso (he, too, is a Gambian griot and kora-player) already stayed in the US from 1971 to 73.

One could trace a genealogy of the idea of an African Diaspora back into the 19<sup>th</sup> or even earlier centuries, because of the longstanding tradition in Afrodiasporic intellectual and popular discourse of comparing one's own situation with that of the Jewish people as narrated in biblical texts. Slave songs, spirituals, and the writings of early pan-Africanists, especially Blyden, who made use of this comparison are well-known examples. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century this tradition was continued. Marcus Garvey, like others before – and after – him, was called a Black Moses, Rastafarians reasoned about the scattering of Africans in Babylon and the longing for an exodus back to the African continent now called Zion, and Négritude-authors mused on the notion of exile. The alienated life in surroundings dominated by Whites, of adhering to a religion catering for white interests, led to a number of Black political, religious, economic and cultural movements. This line of reasoning is continued by some of today's Afrocentrists or Rastafaris who claim that a return to Africa – not necessarily a physical, but at least a spiritual return would heal those haunted by the collective memory of suffering (Dorsch 2000). Haley's novel could be read as a popular version of this spiritual return.

Scholars and political activists mostly regarded these millennialist visions of redemption through return with some skepticism. The idea, however, that researching African and African American history could serve as a means of supporting African Americans in their struggle for civil rights has a long, although not undisputed history. Inspired by the anthropologist Franz Boas, the famous political activist, writer, historian, and sociologist W.E.B. DuBois published on African history. Likewise, the anthropologist Melville Herskovits, again supported by Boas, worked on African influences on African American culture, hoping that an awareness of old traditions would help African Americans gain recognition in American society, an idea that was fiercely questioned by sociologist E. Franklin Frazier (Harris 1982a: 8; Yelvington 2006: 9ff.). Finally, Zora Neale Hurston was also influenced by Boas, with whom she studied. She also saw her anthropological, folkloric, and oral history work as a means to support the African American community. Her attempt to confront American society with its history of slavery and the Middle Passage through the interview with Cudjoe Lewis, the possible last survivor of a slaver was, however, not successful in her lifetime as the book was only published in 2018 (Hurston 2018, Salamone 2014).

It was during the time of Haley's research for his novel, that the British historian Shepperson is said to have come up with the concept of an 'African Diaspora' in a contribution to a conference in 1965. However, he himself declared that it was already in use when he and his American colleague Harris introduced the term into scientific discourse. Published in 1968, the articles of the two historians laid out some guidelines for a description of African Diaspora, which characterized further research. They understood "African Diaspora" as a scientific concept, which allowed for an understanding of the historical connections of people of African descent to Africa. An aim of a history of the African Diaspora would be to make Africans on the continent and in the diaspora visible as actors, not just as victims of the European making of history. Stressing that diaspora would allow for understanding the Afrodiasporic experience as an extension of African culture and history, they aimed at a change of perspective towards what we might today call an Afrocentric view on African and global history. Another important aspect of their discussion, which was taken up by later scholars, was the comparison to the Jewish experience, which, of course, was due to the association of the term with Jewish history (Harris 1968; Shepperson 1968).



It took some time before other scholars took up Shepperson's and Harris' concept. From the mid-1970s onwards, the time of the first griots' performances in the US, there is a stream of publications dedicated to the African Diaspora. Probably, the success of "Roots" had an influence on this stream, like it had on the research of oral tradition and oral history (Ambrose 1978; Moore 1994). Few voices argued against adopting the term 'diaspora' because of its associations with the Jewish experience – most outspokenly probably Tony Martin (1982) and Leon Damas (cited in: Racine 1982). After the white racist denial of the existence of African or African American history, they argued, it would be wrong to analyze African and African American history with a concept rooted in other peoples' experiences. Instead, terms like "uprooted or scattered Africans" should be used. Obviously, this critique was not successful. Following Safran (1991), Tölölyan (1991) and other authors (cf. Kokot, Tölölyan, Alfonso 2004, Brubaker 2005) I would suggest that this was because of the comparative value of the concept diaspora and probably because of the existing tradition of adopting the Jewish example for describing Afrodiasporic experiences. Thus, scholars of the African Diaspora developed a heightened awareness that they discussed in an already existing tradition of Afrodiasporic intellectual exchange on the meaning of Blackness in the context of white racist surroundings, and that it is partly this exchange that shaped the diaspora (Zapata 1995).

Consequently, only few authors ever argued for extending the concept towards pre-historical migrations, some starting with humanity's exodus from its place of origin, others with possible pre-Columbian African travels. More generally, it was accepted that recent migrations from Africa towards the North could be understood within the framework of the concept, taking into account the colonial sources of current inequalities and the continuities of migration networks from colonial times onwards. The anthropologist Harrison (1988) argues that the concept does mean neither understanding these structures of exploitations nor the cultures of the suppressed as unified, but that it allows for comparison with other suppressed groups. Although Shepperson and Harris already hinted at voluntary movements, like those of laborers, tradespeople, soldiers, students or politicians, many authors later understood the concept to contain forced migrations only. This idea of diaspora as forced exile was used stressing the common experiences of Jews, Armenians, and Africans, as opposed to Chinese, Irish or Indians. In the case of Steady's (1981) work on "Black Women Cross-Culturally", this understanding of diaspora meant including African American and African, but not Black British women in a volume she edited, because the latter's migration was not considered as forced.

Scholars discussed the complex relations between homeland and host society. With regard to the latter, the possibility to overcome methodologically nationalist and contributionist models of African American history was seen as an advantage of the diaspora concept. And even where contributionist arguments prevailed, it was asked, which kind of knowledge precisely was imported from Africa to the Americas (Harris 1982a; Uya 1982). In 1975, Drake, more than others before him, stressed the connection to a homeland as the central element of definitions of diaspora. Skinner (1982) argued that this homeland-connection might refer to either a physical or spiritual return, and that the fate of the homeland is connected to the emancipation of the diaspora. The idea of the diaspora, that only in a homeland full dignity could be gained, led to support for the homeland and other diasporic groups. This ability to organize support for the homeland is what Edmondson (1986) calls a mobilizing and Harris (2001) a mobilized diaspora. Connections to the homeland were analyzed from different angles. There are studies on commercial, religious, and political exchange as well as return migrations and

establishments of diasporas on the continent. Because of the small numbers of those actually emigrating to Africa, more often the spiritual dimension of the connection to Africa was stressed. The homeland-link was often discussed along a Herscovits'ian line, as a continuation of African cultural elements or Africanisms and as a transfer of an African worldview mainly in religious ritual, oral traditions, and musical performance (Niane 1982; Lara 1982; Harris 1982b; Levine 1982).

How much the success of *Roots* inspired this scholarly thinking is open to speculation, although some historians working with oral sources were obviously excited by the popularization of their approach by Haley (see Ambrose 1978). His appearance on the first international Mande Studies conference with a group of griots praising him and his supposed Gambian ancestor Kunta Kinte may have irritated the academics present (Haydon 1985: 9). However, it offers us the first example of this adaptation of the role of the griot to a new group of patrons of the Old Diaspora. And it shows that "griot" itself starts to function as a successful metaphor for a diasporist linking of Africa and America, because Haley assumed the role of a griot himself by creatively constructing a link to a glorious past, as Hale (1998: 254) observed. *Roots* continued and popularized the tradition of Afrodiasporic thinking about belonging to or even in Africa. Like the griots in *Roots*, Amadou Bansang Jobarteh, Alhadj Bai Konte, and others of the first generation of griots invited to the US became the representatives of a direct link to a denied history that seemingly only had to be uncovered to heal the wounds of the diaspora (Dorsch 2004).

### III. The Dialectics of Identity: Navigating the Black Atlantic

Bai Konte's adopted son, Malamini Jobarteh, started his career following, quite literally, his father. They travelled with Bai's son Dembo Konte to Bai's patrons in Gambia, Senegal, and Guinea-Bissau. Malamini, Dembo and others of this second generation, however, went beyond the trodden paths and transformed the style of playing the kora into what one could call a pop style, using the kora for dance and entertainment (Dorsch 2019). After Gambian independence in 1965, Malamini joined Gambia's National Troupe and was sent to the Soviet Union, to Britain, and to Nigeria to perform at FESTAC in 1977. Furthermore, he was invited with his brother and father to play in the US. He, too, then widened the range of his tours. He travelled through a number of countries, first with his father and brother under the name of "Konte Family", then with his brother only, then alone, and finally with his two sons as "Jobarteh Family". He, too, paid his *hajj* with the money earned from touring and from teaching foreigners.

The widened trajectories of this second generation can be explained along two phenomena: firstly, a burgeoning world music industry, secondly, cheap charter tourism from Europe to West Africa. From the late 1980s onwards, the label "world music" was coined as a marketing instrument for music from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. However problematic this label is, it undoubtedly helped to bring large numbers of non-Western musicians to the stages of North America, Europe, Australia, and Japan – and thus helped sell their records (Bohlman 2002; Lipsitz 1997; Taylor 1997; White 2011). Malamini Jobarteh, for example, used the infrastructure established by this new marketing instrument and performed on world music festivals. The regular concert tours that the world music industry made possible were interesting for African migrants, too, because they would not only go to the concerts but also invite performers over

to their places if the tour timetable would allow that. Furthermore, they would organize some additional concerts that were addressed mainly at the diaspora communities.

During the 1970s and 80s, the former colonial capitals London, Paris, Brussels, and Lisbon continued to be centers for African migrant communities and for the production of African music, due to their better music production infrastructure. However, other links than former colonial connections became increasingly important. Migrants started to settle beyond the colonial metropole. Gambians lived by now not only in London and other British cities, but had established large communities in Paris, supposedly due to existing family networks with Senegalese, who had moved to their former colonial capital. Being characterized as Manding Province (Knight 1991), Paris drew Manding speakers not only from the former French colonies Burkina Faso, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Mali and Senegal, but also from Anglophone Gambia, Liberia and Sierra Leone, and from former Portuguese Guinea-Bissau. Although Paris remained a center for Manding music production throughout the 1980s and early 90s, musicians looked for opportunities beyond the former colonial capitals. Thus, singer Cesaria Evora from the former Portuguese colony Cape Verde started her international career in Paris, and Youssou N'Dour, a singer from former French colony Senegal, started his in London. Indeed, an entirely new West African music genre was developed neither in Africa nor in a former colonial center, but in the German port city of Hamburg. For some time, Hamburg was host of Germany's largest West African migrant community, originally established by former seamen. Ghanaians, the largest national group of West Africans in Hamburg, developed their own brand of popular music, called Burger Highlife (Carl 2013). Another sizeable and active community of Gambians established itself in Stockholm, Sweden. Even though this seems unlikely at first, it owes to the fact that Swedish companies started charter tourism in The Gambia. This is an interesting case of a tourist industry resulting directly in the establishment of a diaspora community (Sawyer 2000; Thomas et al. 2007; Wagner and Yamba 1986).

Charter tourism and cheaper individual arrangements in the 1980s and 90s made trips to "Third World" countries available for a growing number of people. After the dissolution of the National Troupe, Malamini worked for a hotel, performing there himself, and organizing other musicians' performances. He even represented Gambia at the International Tourist Fair in Berlin in the 1990s. Tourists visited Malamini's compound, and I often observed him explaining his profession<sup>4</sup>. Migrants, too, used these cheap flights for connecting with their families – and with their griots as well. Patrons would link up with a griot, invite him to live at their homes, cook for him and thus perform their role as a host, very much in accordance with the Mandinka word *jiaatiyo*, which means both, patron, and host. Both Malamini Jobarteh and Dembo Konte had stories to tell about migrants' associations in Europe and America inviting them and catering for them.

In the 1980s and 90s the question of construction and reproduction of Afrodiasporic identities has been discussed widely, as in Lemelle and Kelly (1994), who adapt Anderson's (1983) concept of *Imagined Communities*. This discussion owes a lot to the contribution of Cultural Studies and its stress on questions of identity and belonging in this second phase. In the context of Cultural Studies, it is Stuart Hall, who, apart from Gilroy, proposed the most profiled approach to the African Diaspora. Especially in his rejection of what he calls the 'backward looking' idea of belonging to a homeland, he charted new ground. Again, the

---

<sup>4</sup> Actually, a performance of Malamini Jobarteh, his wife Yankui Kuyateh, and two of his sons, Bai and Pa Bobo Jobarteh, directed at an Anglophone audience is available on YouTube under the heading "Brikama Griots": <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6MY3v-WA94> (accessed October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022).

comparison to the Jewish example shapes the argument, but this time as a reminder that a diasporic claim to a homeland might victimize or even diasporize other groups. Consequently, Hall's definition of diaspora needs no homeland, but uses the term synonymously with hybridity, creolization, or syncretism. Thus, he understands African cultures, too, as being diasporized through centuries of colonial suppression. Furthermore, he claims that neither contemporary nor historical Africa is of no special relevance to Afrodiasporic, more precisely Afro-Caribbean, culture. He is interested in the image of Africa as it is remembered and shaped in the Caribbean. So, there is no fixed, transhistorical Black or African essence, there is only a Black identity shaped and reshaped within the frames of contemporary struggles, and along the lines of resisting groups, be they African, Australian, Asian or others (Hall 1989: 72-76; 1990: 235-236; 1996: 250).

The shift towards discussing identities and the dialectic relationship of homeland and diaspora (Skinner 1982) was most influentially brought forward by Paul Gilroy in his seminal *The Black Atlantic* (1993). Gilroy takes up earlier discussions about the African Diaspora with those on the existence of a Black world and its common cultural features. He combines them with Linebaugh's and James' ideas concerning transatlantic exchange among sailors, workers, religious, political and resistance movements of Europe, North America, and the Caribbean<sup>5</sup>. Because of these inheritances, the innovative aspects of his work tend to be overlooked. I think they are best summarized as a combination of the following arguments: He states the existence of a Trans-Atlantic Black literary tradition. Part of this tradition is the ongoing discussion of the meaning of being Black in societies dominated by whites – be it the plantocracy of the Americas or colonial regimes in Africa. This tradition is influenced by and influencing another transatlantic exchange – that of popular culture. Because of white oppression, this Black popular exchange developed a common culture of partly encoded languages and signs reflecting this domination and the history of Middle Passage and slavery. This special historic experience led to an early formulation of themes characteristic of modern discourse generally, especially those of estrangement and up-rootedness. Because of the West's failure to live up to the promises of Enlightenment, and because of the historic Afrodiasporic experience of work not as liberating but enslaving, Black Atlantic culture, according to Gilroy, is best understood as a counterculture of Modernity. Because of these historical experiences of being excluded, but finding the arguments for inclusion in the rhetoric of the excluding, Afrodiasporic intellectuals developed a DuBois'ian 'Double Consciousness'. Gilroy finds himself uneasily located between 'postmodernists', like Hall, who deny any African or Black cultural 'essence', and the Afrocentrists who, like Haley, hope for a cure from modern uprootedness in a heroic African past. The concept Diaspora serves Gilroy as a way out of these dichotomies. His understanding inspired several studies in history and the social sciences, leading to a growing awareness of the conscious re-shaping of Africanisms in the diaspora. It is construed as a revisionist concept that challenges interpretations of African American culture as purely creolized and its connections to Africa as mere inventions (Lovejoy 1997).

Gilroy developed these ideas as arguments against the growing influence of Afrocentrism both in academia and popular culture. By the 1980s and 90s the scientific Afrocentrist perspective referred to above had turned into a full-fledged worldview, even a religion. It includes not only rituals and festivities, like Kwanzaa, but also the idea that a preference for the African-inspired attires, like Kente-cloth, learning African languages, mostly Ki-Swahili, and an

---

<sup>5</sup> Of course, many more influences by authors who worked on the political economy of the Atlantic space might be cited, even the term 'Black Atlantic' is an invention by Thompson (1983).

orientation to what was seen as African ethics would help Africans in the diaspora overcoming their cultural alienation in the West. The most famous representatives of this movement are probably Molefi K. Asante and Maulana Karenga (cf. Asante 1987, 1992; Karenga 2002, 2008).

Gilroy's critique of the Afrocentrist obsession with African Americans' roots in Africa has been criticized as not facing the importance of Africa as an imagined center of pride and psychological stability. Okpewho, for example, argues that Gilroy's "postmodern disdain for the idea of 'nation' leads to an obsessive phobia against all forms of essentialism or particularism" (Okpewho 1999: xxii). Indeed, Gilroy criticizes African American particularism from a very European perspective. He argues that Afrocentric representations of African culture and history have been a lot more influenced by Western, especially American, than African worldviews. It is because of this, that he suggests that Afrocentrism would better be called *Americocentrism* (Gilroy 1992: 306-308, 1993: 87, 191-193). This is, of course, provocative, as is his insistence that the most influential African American writers were those who sought their intellectual inspirations outside the US and found them not in Africa but in Europe instead. Even more provoking, he analyzed aesthetic and rhetoric parallels between Garveyism and Fascism (Gilroy 2000)<sup>6</sup>. Of course, such perspectives do not warrant him a cozy place in Black Nationalist or Afrocentrist circles. Gilroy situates his argument in the context of discussions of modernity, Enlightenment, and capitalism, which open up paths for us to see parallels and continuities of both racism and anti-Semitism. He does not understand the Black Atlantic as being outside of the West, as being another to Modernity. Black Atlantic culture forms a counterculture to modernity inasmuch as it criticizes its shortcomings from within – an argument Mbembe (2013) has developed further. Even before the publication of *The Black Atlantic*, Helmreich criticized Gilroy convincingly for both using androcentric metaphors, such as diaspora (with its common etymological roots with sperm) and his androcentric depiction of the Black Atlantic, whose main protagonists, sailors, writers, and DJs were mainly male (Helmreich 1992: 243ff.). I will come back to this critique in the conclusion.

Black Atlantic counterculture, in Gilroy's reading, is enacted in popular culture, in a utopia of celebrating a time and space where bodies are not forced under the rhythms of production of profits. He shows how musical history is at the same time cited and reworked in popular musical expression: hip hop samples quote old jazz or funk riffs, British reggae musicians of Caribbean and African origins quote US-American Soul song to praise a South African politician. Likewise, griots do not simply continue to reproduce an age-old tradition, but adapt it to contemporary needs and expanding audiences. There are recordings of griots jamming with jazz musicians, having their kora melodies combined with salsa rhythms, singing in call-and-response with rappers about ancient West African empires. They use the Black Atlantic's musical archive. This, however, does not mean that they provide an unproblematic return to the roots. Dembo Konte once talked to me about his encounters with African Americans. When touring the US, some would come to see him after the concert, asking him whether he could tell them from where exactly in Africa they came from. He responded that in order to do so, he would need to know their African family names with which he could localize their origins. Differently to Alex Haley none of them had any memory of their African heritage or a family

---

<sup>6</sup> In an E-Mail to me Michael Hanchard pointed to this argument's lack of critical assessment of the basis of Fascism in state power, in the collusion of labor and capital, and in persecution of minorities. With this comparison, I think, Gilroy aims not at an interpretation of Garveyism as Fascist. He rather tries to expand his earlier argument informed by Richard Wright, that Black essentialism has the potential of producing a Fascist ideology (Gilroy 1996:26-27, 1993:146-150).

name passed down to them. People would sometimes cry, and these were sad situations<sup>7</sup> Therefore, both Dembo Konte and Paul Gilroy have a message after the era of the *Roots* euphoria and the Afrocentric wave, which is that there is no simple return to an untainted African past.

#### IV. Trans-Atlantic Dialogues – Africa Globalised, Kora Players Feminized

With the 1990s and 2000s, a new generation of griots started their tours. I will focus on three kora players: Tata Dindin Jobarteh and Pa Bobo Jobarteh, two sons of Malamini Jobarteh, and Sona Jobarteh, daughter of the kora player Sanjally Jobarteh and granddaughter of the above-mentioned Amadou Bansang Jobarteh. Only with her, female kora players have entered the stage. But first things first.

Malamini and his two sons performed together as the *Jobarteh Family* both in Gambia, giving concerts in the neighborhood and in hotels, and internationally (for example on a tour in 1998 to Australia and Singapore). Tata Dindin Jobarteh followed in many ways his father's trajectories; actually, he inherited his father's contracts with European managers, indeed very much like the griot-patron relationship would usually be inherited from one generation to the next. However, Tata expanded his networks, not only regionally to Dakar but also internationally touring Libya, Sweden, Spain, Australia, and other countries. Pa, the younger of the two brothers, was the first to start his career not locally but in Britain by performing at the WOMAD Festival as early as 1988 – as a 12-year-old. He is an exceptional case of a griot-musician being successful internationally even before having established himself as a star at home. Tata started his career in The Gambia, founding his own group, called "Salaam Band", and gaining a growing followership from the late 1980s onwards. Taking Jalibah Kuyateh<sup>8</sup>, a griot from his hometown Brikama, who had incorporated electric guitar and bass, brass instruments, drum kit, and synthesizer into his popular version of griot music, as his teacher and example, Tata too had his kora amplified and looked for a sound that fused elements of Western soul, rock, and pop with the griot tradition. This style became popular among Gambians in the diaspora, too, who invited him over to concerts in France, Britain, Sweden, Germany, and other European countries. So, both Western world music tour managers as well as Gambians living in the West, would invite him to Europe and sometimes cooperated. His concerts catered for both European and West African Diasporic audiences. He offered pop music versions of traditional griot songs that would present a link to a glorious past, he would praise important families in the audience and individuals who served as his patrons or supported him otherwise. These concerts were videotaped and the tapes semi-professionally packaged and traded along the Diasporic networks in Europe and West Africa (Dorsch 2006b).

By reminding their West African audiences of their origins, touring and emigrated griots serve as diasporists supporting diaspora communities by evocating a collective memory during their concerts (Dorsch 2005). However, the organizers of griots' concerts may as well be described as diasporists. Many immigrants were active in the Senegambian communities and organized concerts during the time I conducted my research in the late 1990s and early 2000s. West Africans living in the diaspora were agents in bringing griots over to Europe and the US.

<sup>7</sup> Interview Dembo Konte, 22.10.1999.

<sup>8</sup> See Dorsch 2017 for a discussion of a concert by Jalibah in Paris.

They saw these concerts as an important way of creating a link to the homeland and, at the same time, to establish a community in the respective host society.

As has been mentioned above, the griots did not only perform for West African audiences when touring Europe. Within the World Music context, Malamini and Tata Jobarteh performed with a wide range of musicians, including a German piano player, a Mongolian violin player, a German harpist, an Indian tabla player, etc. Actually, Tata continued to perform with some of the very musicians his father had performed with before he retired from touring. In the last decade, Tata widened his interest, collaborating with DJs, but most important, he toured with Andre Heller's "Africa Africa" show that visited several European countries. While Tata was abroad, his younger brother Pa established himself nationally, performing widely in the Senegambian region, building up his own group of fans and supporters.

The nineties and noughties produced an increasing number of studies on the African Diaspora and related issues. Two tendencies of discussing the African Diaspora are striking: on the one hand, an increasing number of comparisons, linking the African Diaspora to other diasporas and especially the experience of the Middle Passage and New World Slavery to other forms of slavery, forced labor, and forced deportations (cf. Christopher 2007); and, on the other hand, a diversifying and detailed analysis of expressions of diasporic experiences, memories, or socialities (cf. Gomez 2006). Furthermore, the scope of historical research was widened especially towards the Indian Ocean (Harris 2001). Consequently, more work was done to understand the African Diaspora as a global phenomenon.

In a very ambitious contribution to the ongoing conceptualization of the African Diaspora historians Tiffany Patterson and Robin Kelley set out to shape a research agenda for future work in this field. They aim at sketching the complexities of common identity and cultural, class and gender differences inherent in this concept. Leaving an Africa-centered conceptualization of the African Diaspora behind, they not only understand the concept of overlapping diasporas<sup>9</sup>, but also argue for an understanding of it as both being shaped by Western modernity and shaping its economic as well as political, social, cultural, and intellectual expressions. Their move "beyond Diaspora, toward an African Globality" (Patterson and Kelley 2000: 24) is therefore meant to stress the integrity of the Black experience to Western modernity. Distancing their idea from Gilroy's conceptualization of the Black Atlantic as counterculture to modernity they write: "One reason that New World black cultures appear 'counter' to European narratives of history is that Europe exorcized blackness in order to create its own invented traditions, empires and fictions of superiority and racial purity." (Patterson and Kelley 2000: 13).

Quite in contrast to the invented images of a mystified ancestral homeland, a growing number of Africans living in the diaspora have rather recent memories of an African homeland – immigrants from African countries who moved to Europe and the Americas during the last three or so decades, like the organizers presented above. Differently from somewhat unified images of the "motherland" constructed in the Diaspora, their memories refer to a very special space and culture, which – although often referred to as "African" by them – does by no means

---

<sup>9</sup> This complex sphere of inter-diasporic exchange was probably more appropriately coined "diaspora space" by Brah (1996: 181, 208-211). The idea of space here functions as a reminder of the concrete locales that often shape this diasporic exchange.

encompass the culture of the people of a whole continent (Ebron 2002). Often, they keep connections to their homeland alive through kinship-, friendship-, religious, political, and economic networks. This obviously growing complexity of African cultures in the diaspora led to concepts like the “New” African Diaspora, a multi-layered diaspora, African diasporas in plural etc. (Byfield 2000; Elabor-Idemudia 1999; Lewis 1995; N’Diaye 2001; Patterson and Kelly 2000).

Indeed, the different layers of the African Diaspora – or the different African diasporas – did not only become intertwined when griots as diasporists of the old Mande Diaspora came to sing about Kunta Kinteh as representative of the African American longing for a home in Africa. Indeed, with the growing influence of reggae, Rastafari and hip-hop, diasporic discourses shape the younger generation in Africa as well. When talking to Pa Jobarteh, for example, I realized that he would refer to Europe not as *tuubaaboduu* (“Land of the Whites” in Mandinka) as is used commonly, but as *Babylon*, just as the Rastas would name it. This was not just new terminology but a different concept of Europe, which presented the continent less celebratory, and less distanced than *tuubaaboduu*. Partly influenced by Rasta reasoning, he talked to members of his band about Europe as the place of unhealthy stress and bad weather, where people are too busy making money – thus, as a place that is good for earning an income but not necessarily to spend a desirable life. Influenced by the recent diasporic discourse, his image of Africa seemed less hopeless and that of Europe less idealized and desirable than they have been for earlier generations – at least this is the case for a musician who had travelled the West and was successful at home.

When I asked Tata Jobarteh about the meaning of performing internationally with a wide range of musicians from different traditions, his answers will cater for both, cosmopolitan and essentialist tastes. He once told me that performing with German, Mongolian, Indian or English musicians would by no means change the core of his music, which remains deep Mandinka. Thus, very self-consciously combining cosmopolitan and essentialist motives. Both griots made sure during the 2000s that they widened their support bases, thus being able to tap quite different resources - circles of followers and the national elites at home, and internationally, World Music promoters, European touring shows and diasporic patrons. In a way, both brothers present in their statements and career development the normalization of the African Diaspora’s participation in global modernity and so illustrate quite well what Patterson and Kelly (2000) or Byfield (2000) discuss.

In the context of a tradition, which only allowed male griots to play a stringed instrument, be it the Bambara *ngoni*, the Wolof *xalam*, the Peulh *hoddu* or the Mandinka *kora*, it is obvious that women were not welcomed to learn this instrument. However, there have been pioneers globally and locally. On the one hand, European women who learned to play the kora in West Africa; on the other, local women from ethnic groups such as the Moors or Tuareg, who play the *ardin* or *imzad*. Nevertheless, the ethnic difference still prevented Mandinka women from claiming the tradition of the kora for themselves. However, there have been exceptions to the rule. Back in the 1990s, I heard about a musician in Senegal who posed with a kora on the cover of her music cassette, but would not play herself, and saw the music cassettes of Mama Diabaté of *Les Amazones de Guinée*. And then, there were the daughters of Malamini Jobarteh in Brikama, who had been taught by their father, even though he himself had repeatedly assured me that women would not play the kora. This was a classic case of a discourse-practice discrepancy that pleases anthropologists. The younger of the two daughters, Aji Dindin, admitted that she had only practiced a little, but then gave it up, while the older one, Siffai



performed repeatedly, mainly as a singer. Even she denied having played kora and when I insisted that I had seen her playing, she stated that she only did it when her brother Pa Bobo, the actual kora player star of the band, could not play the instrument himself because of his acrobatic dance interludes. She just made sure that the sound of the instrument continued to be present in the mix.

So, most interlocutors would deny that women played kora – at least "properly". As a reason for this I heard repeatedly the following sentence, perhaps even proverb: if a woman plays kora, the calabash breaks. This saying is open to two interpretations: either it refers to the calabash that makes up the body of the kora and could hint at the spiritual dimension of playing the kora, perhaps, that the *jinn*s that some people associate with a masterful playing of the kora could be too dangerous for women. Or the calabash would stand for as the bowl and thus as pars pro toto for household utensils, which would translate to playing the kora makes women's fingers insensitive and no longer suitable for housework.

That this 'taboo' (as some interlocutors would call it) is currently no longer upheld among many Gambian griots is mainly due to one kora player: Sona Jobarteh. She grew up in Great Britain, the daughter of a white British woman and the Gambian kora player Sanjally Jobarteh, who left Britain for Norway, and is now back in The Gambia. His father, her grandfather, was the above-mentioned kora player Amadou Bansang Jobarteh. Sona learned from her father, her half-brother Tunde Jegede, and her famous grandfather. Thus, Sona does both, she carries on the tradition of her forefathers whilst at the same time breaking with it as she, as a woman, performs the kora in public. She started her musical education and career in Great Britain before touring internationally and has recently become increasingly involved in Gambia. On Gambian TV, her video clips are often played. During my research in early 2019, I saw them on screens at concerts by other musicians. The video for the song *Gambia* is used by the Gambian tourist office for promoting the country. She enjoys international success as a kora player, takes to stages all over the world, and has recorded several highly acclaimed CDs, first with her brother Tunde Jegede and now as a solo artist with various musicians (Dorsch et al 2020).

When talking about her impact as a female kora player, I did not encounter many criticisms. Rather, people would recognize her commitment in the country, stating, that she could have an easy life in Europe, but decided instead to perform, to engage and to invest in The Gambia. Especially the Gambia Academy was repeatedly highlighted as being particularly effective. This is a secondary school in the countryside that has become a showcase project, visited by German Federal President Steinmeier, Prince Charles and others. The school provides general education but has a musical focus and the students learn traditional instruments such as the kora. Most importantly, many of the students who learn traditional instruments in this school are neither male nor griot families, thus transgressing two boundaries associated with playing certain traditional instruments. Interestingly, although some people said that she was breaking a 'taboo', some griots and especially griottes even tried to make her innovation conform to tradition. The elderly griotte Yankui Kuyateh told me that Sona encountered women in Mali who had played kora<sup>10</sup>. Mali symbolizes tradition among the Gambian Mandinka ethnic group, given that they trace their origin back to this country, the idealized ancestral homeland of the Mandinka diaspora. So, if women play kora in Mali, then that should not be a break from tradition.

---

<sup>10</sup> Interview, March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019, Brikama, The Gambia.

Sona, in contrast, stated that she had not seen any traditional or professional female kora players. She knew neither about Malian, Guinean, or Senegalese female kora players, nor had she heard from the nuns of the Senegalese Catholic monastery Keur Moussa, who also played kora, or anywhere else. She had no role model, but her grandmother particularly encouraged her to learn about her family and ethnic tradition. Out of respect for tradition, she never played at weddings, naming ceremonies (*kunglewo*), or similar contexts of traditional griot performances. Thus, her first public performance in The Gambia took place only in 2011. She chose the 'secular' stage for her career as a kora player instead of any traditional performance contexts. She would also distinguish between female kora players who simply played music and those who, like herself, played kora from the griot tradition. She would not teach non-griot students more than the musical aspect of playing this instrument. The rhetorical reference to tradition is also central to the idea of the school she had established, where the students should learn a new self-confidence to no longer see themselves as second-class global citizens merely because of coming from the Global South. In this regard, the Gambia Academy should be a vanguard – for the nation and the continent. Today, she said, the importance of women for social progress is recognized globally, and tradition has to reflect that. Her work is not about questioning tradition, but about adapting it to the contemporary times<sup>11</sup>. Whether and to what extent this will influence the Jaliya, the art of the griots, in the future remains to be seen.

## V. Conclusion

By now, other griots followed Sona's example. Thus, Dembo Jobarteh for instance, a younger brother of Tata and Pa, teaches his daughters to play the kora – and Sali Jobarteh may be the next generation's kora star. But what does this mean when discussing the African Diaspora? The concept of diaspora has been criticized for normalizing male perspectives, as have been narrations, like Gilroy's, of the male writers and sailors that crossed the Atlantic, for omitting female voices. It can be argued that, historically, these were simply male dominated contexts. However, a closer look may have brought other voices to the fore. The male griot Kebba Fofana may have told Haley about his Gambian forefathers, but without his great-aunt 'Cousin Georgia', who remembered Kunta Kinte's name, Haley would not have been able to locate his origins in Africa. A choice of perspective creates certain findings – and leaves out other, as we all know.

The travelling griots I wrote about in this paper travelled in mostly male dominated contexts – they followed the mostly patrilineal narration of the history of the Kintes and the Haleys, they were invited by male, white American and European music managers, and later by male, West African Diasporan tour managers (at a time where their patrons in West Africa were already more diverse, i.e., during the 1980s independent women patrons played an increasingly important role). The gender-based division of labor among the griots, however, was not yet questioned: women sang, men played the stringed instruments. This has been mostly reproduced by scholars writing about griots – and more rarely – about griottes. The concepts we worked with likewise shaped our approaches – and those stemmed not just from African Diaspora studies, but from diaspora studies more broadly. When, in 1991, Tölölyan

---

<sup>11</sup> Interview, November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019, Mainz, Germany.

celebrated 'diaspora' as the other of the nation-state, this reflected the era's euphoria about globalization as a process that might lead to the overcoming of divisive and even genocidal nationalism. Diasporas were seen as possible vanguards of a more diverse and respectful world society. A decade later, Krings (2003: 151) sounded much more disillusioned about the possibilities of diasporas – not surprising after events that took place in this decade. He rather stressed the necessity of a more analytically sharpened concept of diaspora that would focus on a special type of transnational community – and argued, that outsiders' perspectives, i.e., those of people who did not claim belonging to a diaspora, may add some more sober perspectives. In between these two publications my research took place and, thus, reflects both perspectives. Focusing on how griots and other musicians performed the homeland in their concerts by references to tradition and to ancient empires, I realized an important aspect of their successes – and how they conformed to ideas of diaspora conservatism. However, this focus on the diaspora as a group and the taking seriously of its dialectic relation to the homeland combined with a research methodology that made a comparison of performances in different localities possible, i.e., multi-sited research in the homeland and different countries of residence of the respective diaspora, allowed for empirical data, that supported some diaspora theories. However, this focus meant that I also left out, how musicians addressed white European or other Diasporic audiences – thus downplaying, what Avtar Brah (1996) describes as 'diaspora space'. Surprisingly, some years later, Kiwan and Meinhof (2011) argued, using the same methodological approach, for quite the contrary, seeing a multi-sited approach that would follow individual musicians' networks as a means to overcome what they saw as simplistic homeland-diaspora-relationships. However, losing this relation out of sight won't make research, it won't make generalization about diasporas or travelling musicians much easier. It may help to better understand individuals' multiple identifications, diverse or even contradictory feelings of belonging, etc., but may keep social processes out of sight. Thus, focusing on clearly defined questions, such as the one proposed by Kokot at al. (2013) to understand diaspora as a resource – for all parties involved, diasporas, homelands, and countries of residence – may better help (partly) understand the dynamic a single person like Sona Jobarteh may bring to homeland-diaspora-relations. Of course, it is too early to say whether her example will change male-female-relations among musicians or will just remain another exception to the rule – but so far, it is an impressive example of how griottes use their authority of the tradition to carefully adapt it to changing social realities, claiming the change to be a continuation of tradition. It is impressive to see how a diasporic biography allows for this ambivalent position vis-à-vis the tradition, respecting it, whilst changing it.

## References

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. London, Verso, 1983.

Ambrose, Margaret Styles. Roots – A Southern Symposium. In: *Callaloo*. no 2, 1978, pp. 124-126.

Asante, Molefi Kete. *The Afrocentric Idea*. Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1987.

Asante, Molefi Kete. *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge*. Trenton, N.J., Africa World Press, 1990.

Bohlman, Philip V. *World Music – A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 2002.

Brah, Avtar. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. London and New York, Routledge, 1996.

Brubaker, Rogers. 'The 'Diaspora' Diaspora.' *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28, 1, 2005, pp. 1–19.

Byfield, Judith. Introduction – Rethinking the African Diaspora. In: *African Studies Review* 43, 1, 2000, pp. 1-10.

Carl, Florian. From Burger Highlife to Gospel Highlife: Music, Migration, and the Ghanaian Diaspora. In: Krüger, Simone and Trandafoiu, Ruxandra (eds) *The Globalization of Musics in Transit: Musical Migration and Tourism*. London, Routledge, 2013, pp. 251–271.

Christopher, Emma (ed.) *Many middle passages: Forced migration and the making of the modern world*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 2007

Damas, Léon G. Price-Mars, le père du haïtianisme. *Présence Africaine*, Juin-Septembre, XXXII-XXXIII, 1960 pp. 166-178.

Dieterlen, Germaine and Sylla, Diarra. *L'empire de Ghana – Le Wagadou et les traditions de Yérééré*. Paris, Karthala-Arsan, 1992.

Dorsch, Hauke. *Afrikanische Diaspora und ‚Black Atlantic‘ – Einführung in Geschichte und aktuelle Diskussion*. Hamburg and Münster: Lit Verlag, 2000.

Dorsch, Hauke. Griots, Roots and Identity in the African Diaspora. In: Kokot, Waltraud; Tölölyan, Khachig; Alfonso, Carolin (eds.) *Diaspora, Identity, and Religion*. London and New York: Routledge. 2004, pp. 102-115.

Dorsch, Hauke. Cosmopolitans, Diasporists, and Griots – The Role of Diasporic Elites. In: Weißköppel, Cordula and Adogame, Afe (eds.) *Religion in the Context of African Migration Studies*. Bayreuth (Bayreuth African Studies Series Vol. 75), 2005, pp. 56-77.

Dorsch, Hauke. *Globale Griots – Performanz in der afrikanischen Diaspora*. Münster: Lit, 2006a.

Dorsch, Hauke. Griots in der Manding-Provinz Paris. In: Wendl, Tobias; Pinther, Kerstin and von Lintig, Bettina (eds.) *Black Paris – Kunst und Geschichte einer schwarzen Diaspora*. Wuppertal: Peter Hammer, 2006b, pp. 338-349.

Dorsch, Hauke. Griots Navigating the Black Atlantic and Scholars Constructing the African Diaspora. In: Kokot, Waltraud; Giordano, Christian und Gandelmann-Trier, Mijal (eds.) *Diaspora as a Resource – Comparative Studies in Strategies, Networks and Urban Space*. Zürich, Münster: Lit, 2013, pp. 171-197.

Dorsch, Hauke. Making Manding in the Concert Hall –Jali Pop in Paris. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*. Vol. 29, 2017, 177-193.

Dorsch, Hauke. Yenyengo. In: *Bloomsbury Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World*, Volume XII: Genres: Sub-Saharan Africa. New York and London, Bloomsbury, 2019, pp. 561-565.

Dorsch, Hauke; Jonveaux, Isabelle and Langewiesche, Katrin. La kora et l’imaginaire musical dans le monde et dans le cloître. *Hermès – La Revue*. 86, 2020/1, pp. 201-204.

Dorsch, Hauke Diasporizando a Tradição. Griots e Estudiosos no Atlântico Negro. In: *Contemporânea* 86, 2021, pp. 203–206.

<https://www.contemporanea.ufscar.br/index.php/contemporanea/article/view/1013>.

Drake, St. Clair. The Black Diaspora in Pan-African Perspective. *Black Scholar* 7, 1, 1975, pp. 2-13.

Ebron, Paulla A. *Performing Africa*. Princeton, Princeton UP, 2002.

Edmondson, Locksley. Black America as a Mobilizing Diaspora: Some International Implications. In: Sheffer, G. (ed.): *Modern Diasporas in International Politics*. Kent: Croon Helm, 1986, pp. 164-211.

Elabor-Idemudia, Patience. Gender and the New African Diaspora: African Immigrant Women in the Canadian Labor Force. In: Okpewho, Isidore / Davies, Carole Boyce / Mazrui, Ali A. (eds.): *The African Diaspora – African Origins and New World Identities*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1999, pp. 234-254.

Gilroy, Paul. It's a Family Affair. In: Dent, Gina and Wallace, Michelle (eds.): *Black Popular Culture*. Seattle 1992, pp. 303-316.

Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic - Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard UP, 1993.

Gilroy, Paul. Route Work: The Black Atlantic and the Politics of Exile. In: Chambers, Iain and Curti, Lydia (eds.): *The Post-Colonial Question*. London and New York, Routledge, 1996, pp. 17-29.

Gilroy, Paul. *Against Race*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard UP, 2000.

Gomez, Michael A. (ed.). *Diasporic Africa: A Reader*. New York and London, NYU Press, 2006.

Hale, Thomas A. *Griots and Griottes – Masters of Words and Music*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana UP, 1998.

Haley, Alex. *Roots – The Saga of an American Family*. New York, Doubleday, 1976.

Haley, Alex. Heimkehr in die Fremde. *Geo* 10 (Oktober), 1981, pp. 54-58.

Haley, Alex. Black History, Oral History, and Genealogy. In: Dunaway, David K. and Willa K. Baum (eds.): *Oral History –An Interdisciplinary Anthology*. Nashville (Tenn.), 1987, pp. 264-287.

Hall, Stuart. Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation. In: *Framework* 36, 1989, pp. 68-81.

Hall, Stuart. Cultural Identity and Diaspora. In: Rutherford, Jonathan (ed.): *Identity*. London: Lawrence and Wiskot, 1990, pp. 222-237.

Hall, Stuart. When was 'the Post-Colonial'? Thinking at the Limit. In: Chambers, Iain and Curti, Lydia (eds.): *The Post-Colonial Question*. London and New York, Routledge, 1996, pp. 242-260.

Harris, Joseph E. Introduction to the African Diaspora. In: Ranger, T.O. (ed.): *Emerging Themes of African History*. Nairobi, East Africa Publishing House, 1968, pp. 147-152.

Harris, Joseph E. Introduction. In: Harris, Joseph E. (ed.): *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*. Washington D.C., Howard UP, 1982a, pp. 3-16.

Harris, Joseph E. A Comparative Approach to the Study of the African Diaspora. In: Harris, Joseph E. (Ed.): *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*. Washington D.C., Howard UP, (1982b) pp. 112-124.

Harris, Joseph E. The African Diaspora in World History and Politics. In: Walker, Sheila S. (Ed.): *African Roots / American Cultures: African in the Creation of the Americas*. Lanham et al., Rowman and Littlefield, 2001 pp. 104-117.

Harrison, Faye V. Introduction – An African Diaspora Perspective for Urban Anthropology. In: *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development* Vol. 17, 2/3, 1988, pp. 111-141.

Haydon, Geoffrey. Introduction. In: Haydon, Geoffrey and Dennis Marks (eds.) *Repercussions: A Celebration of African-American Music*. London: Century, 1985, pp. xx-xx. (Seitenangaben müssen noch gecheckt werden.)

Helmreich, Stefan. Kinship, Nation, and Paul Gilroy's Concept of Diaspora. In: *Diaspora* 2, 2, 1992, pp. 243-249.

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo"*. New York: Amistad Press, 2018.

Jahn, Janheinz. *A History of Neo-African Literature – Writing in Two Continents*. London, Faber, 1968.

Karenga, Maulana. *Introduction to Black Studies*. Los Angeles, University of Sankore Press, 2002 (3rd ed.).

Karenga, Maulana. *Kwanzaa – A Celebration of Family, Community and Culture*. Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press, 2008.

Kiwan, Nadia and Meinhof. Ulrike H. *Cultural Globalization and Music: African Artists in Transnational Networks*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Knight, Roderic Copley. Music out of Africa – Mande jaliya in Paris. *The World of Music* 33, 1, 1991, pp. 52-69.

Kokot, Waltraud; Tölölyan, Khachig and Alfonso, Carolin (eds.). *Diaspora, Identity, and Religion*. London and New York, Routledge Press, 2004.

Kokot, Waltraud; Giordano, Christian und Gandelsmann-Trier, Mijal (eds.) *Diaspora as a Resource – Comparative Studies in Strategies, Networks and Urban Space*. Zürich, Münster: Lit, 2013.

Krings, Matthias. Diaspora: Historische Erfahrung oder wissenschaftliches Konzept? Zur Konjunktur eines Begriffs in den Sozialwissenschaften. *Paideuma: Mitteilungen zur Kulturkunde*, 49, 2003, pp. 137-156.

Laforest, Marie Hélène. Black Cultures in Difference. In: Chambers, Iain and Curti, Lisa (eds.): *The Post-Colonial Question*. London and New York: Routledge 1996, pp. 115-120.

Lara, Oruno D. African Diaspora: Conceptual Framework, Problems and Methodological Approaches. In: Harris, J. E. (ed.): *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*. Washington D.C., Howard UP, 1982, pp. 54-68.

Lemelle, Sidney J. and Kelley, Robin D. G. (eds.) *Imagining Home – Class, Culture, and Nationalism in the African Diaspora*. London and New York, Verso, 1994.

Levine, Lawrence W. African Culture and U.S. Slavery. In: Harris J.E. (ed.): *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*. Washington D.C., Howard UP, 1982, pp. 127-135.

Lewis, Earl. 'To Turn as on a Pivot': Writing African Americans into a History of Overlapping Diasporas. *American Historical Review* 100, 3, 1995, pp. 765-787.

Linebaugh, Peter. All the Atlantic Mountains Shook. In: *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 10, 1982, pp. 87-121.

Lipsitz, George. *Dangerous Crossroads - Popular Music, Postmodernism and the Poetics of Place*. London and New York: Verso, 1997.



Lovejoy, Paul E. The African Diaspora – Revisionist Interpretations of Ethnicity, Culture and Religion under Slavery. *Studies in the World History of Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation*, II, 1, 1997.

Manchuelle, François. Willing Migrants – Soninke Labor Diasporas, 1848-1960. Athens, London, Ohio University Press, 1997.

Martin, Tony. Garvey and Scattered Africa. In: J. E. Harris (ed.): *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*. Washington D.C., Howard University Press, 1982, pp. 243-249.

Mbembe, Achille. *Critique de la raison nègre*. Paris, La Découverte, 2013.

Meinhof, Ulrike H. and Rasolofondraosolo, Zafimahaleo. Malagasy Song-Writer Musicians in *Transnational Settings*. *Moving Worlds* 5, 1, 2005, pp. 144-158.

Moore, David Chioni. Routes – Alex Haley's *Roots* and the Rhetoric of Genealogy. In: *Transition*, Issue 64, 1994, pp. 4-21.

N'Diaye, Diana Baird. New American Diaspora Communities in the United States: Community-Centered Approaches to Research and Presentation. In: Walker, Sheila S. (ed.): *African Roots / American Cultures: Africa in the Creation of the Americas*. Lanham et al., Rowman and Littlefield, 2001, pp. 232-243.

Niane, Djibril Tamsir. African Oral Traditions and Afro-American Cultural Traditions as a Means of Understanding Black Culture. In: Harris, Joseph E. (ed.): *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*. Washington D.C., Howard UP, (1982) pp. 106-111.

Okpewho, Isidore Introduction. In: Okpewho, Isidore / Davies, Carole Boyce / Mazrui, Ali A. (eds.): *The African Diaspora – African Origins and New World Identities*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1999, pp. xi-xxviii.

Panzacchi, Cornelia. *Der Griot - Seine Darstellung in der frankophonen westafrikanischen Literatur*. Rheinfelden, Schäuble, 1990.

Patterson, Tiffany Ruby and Robin D. G. Kelley. Unfinished Migrations – Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World. In: *African Studies Review*, 43, 1, 2000, pp. 11-45.

Racine, Daniel L. Concepts of Diaspora and Alienation as Privileged Themes in Négritude Literature. In: Harris, Joseph E. (ed.): *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*. Washington D.C., Howard UP, 1982, pp. 94-105.

Rasolofondraosolo, Zafimahaleo and Ulrike H. Meinhof, Popular Malagasy music and the construction of cultural identities In: *AILA Review* 16, 2003, pp. 127-148.

Safran, William. Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return. In: *Diaspora* 1:1, 1991.

Salamone, Frank A. His Eyes Were Watching Her. Papa Franz Boas, Zora Neale Hurston and Anthropology. In: *Anthropos* 109, 1, 2014, pp. 217-224.

Sawyer, Lena. *Black and Swedish – Racialization and the Cultural Politics of Belonging in Sweden*. University of Gothenburg, PhD Dissertation 2000

Senghor, Léopold Sédar (ed.) *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1969.

Shepperson, George. The African Abroad or the African Diaspora. In: Ranger, Terence O. (ed.): *Emerging Themes of African History*. Nairobi: East Africa Publishing House, 1968, pp. 152-176.

Skinner, Elliott P. The Dialectic between Diasporas and Homelands. In: Harris, Joseph E. (ed.): *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*. Washington D.C., Howard UP, 1982 pp. 11-40.

Soyinka, Wole. *The Burden of Memory – The Muse of Forgiveness*. New York, Oxford, Oxford University Press 1999.

Steady, Filomina Chioma (ed.). *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally*. Cambridge (Mass.), Schenkman, 1981.

Taylor, Timothy D. *Global Pop – World Music, World Markets*. New York, London: Routledge, 1997.

Thiers-Thiam, Valérie. *À chacun son griot - Le mythe du griot-narrateur dans la littérature et le cinéma d'Afrique de l'Ouest*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004.

Thomas, Deborah; Campt, Tina; Mahon, Maureen; Sawyer, Lena. Diasporic Hegemonies – Popular Culture and Transnational Blackness. In: *Transforming Anthropology* 15, 1, 2007, pp. 50-62.

Thompson, Robert Ferris. *Flash of the Spirit*. New York: Random House, 1983.

Tölölyan, Khachig. The Nation-State and Its Others: In Lieu of a Preface. In: *Diaspora* 1:1, 1991, pp. 3-7.

Tölölyan, Khachig. Rethinking Diaspora(s) - Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment. In: *Diaspora* 5, 1, 1996, pp. 3-36.

Uya, Okon Edet. Conceptualizing Afro-American/African Relations: Implications for African Diaspora Studies. In: Harris, Joseph E. (ed.): *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*. Washington D.C., 1982, pp. 69-84.

Wagner, Ulla and Yamba, Bawa. Going North and Getting Attached – The Case of the Gambians. In: *Ethnos*, 51, 3-4, 1986, pp. 199-222

White, Bob W. (ed.) *Music and Globalization – Critical Encounters*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011.

Yelvington, Kevin A. Introduction. In: Yelvington, Kevin A. (ed.) *Afro-Atlantic Dialogues. Anthropology in the Diaspora*. Oxford, James Currey; Santa Fe, School of American Research Press, 2006, pp. 3-32.

Zapata Olivella; Manuel. The Role of Black Intellectuals in Forging Black Unity. In: Moore, Carlos; Saunders, Tanya R.; Moore, Shawna (eds.): *African Presence in the Americas*. Trenton, N.J., Africa World Press, 1995, pp. 411-426.