

**THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION AND TRANSMISSION IN THE
GLOBALIZATION OF GUINEA'S *DJEMBÉ***

by

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**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Music: Musicology)
in the University of Michigan
2010**

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Dedication

To

Deborah Anne Duffey
the wind beneath my wings;

Herdith Flaig
who encouraged me to be strong and independent;

Erhardt Flaig
who always believed in me;

and

Rainer Dörrer
who gave his life for the *djembé*.

Acknowledgements

Given the scope of the research that preceded the writing of this dissertation, there are many people to thank. Of all the individuals I met in Germany, Guinea, and across the United States I am sure to miss a few. There are not enough pages to be able to name all people who have: helped me find directions, connect with informants, provided me a place to stay, shared their food, and compared notes in a *djembe* workshop. To all who remain nameless, I thank you for making this project possible.

I would like to thank the Rackham Graduate School and the School of Music, Theatre and Dance at the University of Michigan for generously funding my graduate work. I was honored to receive a Board of Regents Fellowship as well as several Teaching Assistantships which helped me to reach candidacy. I was also honored to receive the Glen McGeoch memorial Scholarship during my final semester as a Graduate Student Instructor. I am also thankful for the support I received after candidacy: First, the Rackham Graduate Student Research Grant made it possible for me to attend Mamady Keïta's "Mini Guinea" drum camp in Ramona California in April of 2007. Second, a Rackham Conference Travel Grant allowed me to present a paper, based upon the preliminary research I conducted in Germany, at the Society for Ethnomusicology National Conference in 2007. Finally, a Rackham One-Term Dissertation Grant made it possible for me to finish this project.

My research in Germany would not have been possible without the generous assistance of Uschi Billmeier. Her enthusiasm for the project led to many great discussions not only during lessons and classes, but also during our many long walks. I came to Munich in March of 2007 because Uschi had scheduled workshops with guest teachers, Billy Konaté and Rainer Polak, during that time frame. The day that I arrived she invited me to have dinner with her and Billy. From the first moment I stepped foot in Germany she immersed me in the daily activities of her drum school *Djembé! Schule München*. I am also very grateful to Billmeier's student, Akiko Yotsumoto, who hosted me during my stay in Munich in June of 2007. I would also like to thank Thomas Ott who spent an afternoon with me at his home in Berlin to discuss his work applying Guinea's *djembé* as part of an alternative approach to music pedagogy. Thomas later sent me all of his published articles for reference. Although I only worked with Thomas Gebele and Rainer Arold very briefly, the vast knowledge and insights they shared with me about the *djembé* in Germany brought incredible depth to chapter four of this dissertation. Special thanks also go to anthropologist/ethnomusicologist Rainer Polak, who invited me to observe his *djembé* master-class at Billmeier's *djembé* school in Munich. It was Polak's article about the globalization of the *djembé* that first inspired me to take on this project. I was thrilled to be able to meet Polak and study the urban *djembé* style from Bamako with him. The students attending this class were some of the leaders of the *djembé* scene in Germany. This two-day workshop by Polak thus presented a rare opportunity to get to the heart of some of the issues surrounding the transmission of *djembé* music in Germany.

In June, I had the fortune to meet Joachim Uhl, better known as "Uhuru," whose initial contact was made for me by Uschi Billmeier. Even though he had never met me in

person, Uhuru invited me to come and stay at his home in Ulm. There I was quickly welcomed as part of the family during my four-day stay. Uhuru introduced me to his two very talented sons who, like their father, play *djembe*, *dunun*, drum kit, and keyboards. The two boys, who are just entering their teens, make up the performing duo called, *Die Löwenstarken Trommler*. When they performed for me on a couple of occasions I was amazed at the fullness of their ensemble – they sounded like a four-piece band. Uhuru was extremely generous with his time, granting me two or even three interview hours per day. Thanks also to Eva Mantel and Ingrid Celustek who accompanied me from Munich to Uhuru’s home outside of Ulm.

Much of the research at Famoudou Konaté’s drum camp in Guinea was greatly enhanced with the help of Rainer Dörrer. His openness to the research process was crucial to my comparative work in Guinea. Shortly after passing on the reins of Konaté’s Guinea camp (which he had run for almost twenty years) to Helen Bond, Dörrer passed away suddenly in January of 2009. His legacy to the globalization of the *djembe* cannot be underestimated. Were it not for his persistence, Konaté’s music would not be known and enjoyed around the globe today. All who knew Dörrer, enjoyed him for his honesty, easy going nature, passion for the *djembe*, and his affection for Guinea. The global *djembe* community has lost one of its most passionate leaders as a result of his passing.

Many thanks also go to Helen Bond (Greys Lake, IL) who was, and continues to be, my primary teacher in the United States. It was Helen who first introduced me to Famoudou Konaté. During the times I was on my own in Guinea (after Konaté’s camp ended), it was a comfort to know that she was still in Conakry, just on the other side of the city at Konaté’s compound. Thanks also to Alan Tauber who hosted the six-day

intensive workshops for Konaté in Boston. Thanks also go to Anna Melnicoff who hosted both Famoudou and Billy Konaté in Toronto, and offered me a last-minute interview between classes. Thanks also to all of Konaté's students from the Boston workshops and the Guinea drum camp who gave up a portion of their free time between classes to be interviewed: Monique Grössl, Barbara Hess, Grant Ellerbeck, Liz Pacheco, John Ward, Annegret Baier, Allen Boyd, and Linda Shoemaker.

Michael Markus made my first introduction to Guinea much less stressful than it could have been. He was eager to provide all the resources that I needed, while at the same time, making sure that I also gained confidence to find my own way around. I would like to thank M'Bemba Bangoura for allowing me to come to his camp as a researcher. I truly appreciated Bangoura's willingness to provide me with an interview during my second visit to Guinea. I would like to raise a toast to my wonderful roommates, Susan Nesbit, Janessa Olsen, and Sharon Hughes, who made my first experience in Guinea much less overwhelming. French Canadian, Catherine Veilleux, was an inspiration to me as a female drummer and researcher alone in Guinea. I would also like to thank Karen Baird with whom I rehearsed many complex *dunun* parts on the roof of the compound between classes. Last but not least, my knowledge of the African American drum and dance scene in New York would have been less informed were it not for the many discussions I had with Ray Philip, Robin Gee, Hasan Baker, and Karen Love. Thank you all for sharing your insider's view of this historically significant drum and dance scene.

I would not have been able to pursue such an in-depth study of the *djembe* without the enthusiastic support of Mamady and Monette Keita. During the Mini-Guinea

Drum Camp in Ramona California, Mamady spent three evenings answering student's questions in a large group interview. The fact that he allowed all the students to freely audio and video tape these sessions, made my job as a researcher feel less intrusive. Monette's careful translation of student questions and Mamady's responses was vital to the success of these evening "interview" sessions. Mamady also helped me by impressing upon the students, the importance of their interviews for my research. As a result of Keïta's encouragement and enthusiasm, many students volunteered to be interviewed by me both in California and in Guinea. Many thanks to all the students who entertained my interview questions with their thoughtful responses: in Guinea: Ali Thomas (CA), Cliff Koufman (OR), Bernard "Tomo" Wertheim (England), Peter Bruys (Holland), Géraldine Grifoni (France), Martin Turšić (Croatia), Nenad Kovačić (Croatia), Krunoslav Kobščak (Croatia), David Dar-Fu Sheun (Taiwan), Lee Chi Chuan (Taiwan), Peter Schaup (South Africa), and Lisza Reutenauer (France/U.S.A.); in California: Rita Petrosik (OR), Xavier Eikerenkoetter (CA), Valerie Kane (CA), James Mallory (CA.), Tyler Braun (UT), Djenne Hearne (ID), Adrianna Hernandez (Mexico), Beto Escobar (Mexico), and Noritsugu Tomari (Japan).

Special thanks go out to my three roommates at "*chez Mamady*" (the nick-name we gave Mamady's compound in Guinea – due to the indoor plumbing and nightly cocktails we enjoyed there.): Geraldine Grifoni, Ali Thomas, and Akiko Hiyama. Many thanks also go out to Alpha Omar Sidibé (a.k.a. Bongo) and M'Bemba Sylla who provided *dunun* accompaniments for Keïta's lessons. Thanks also go out to the wonderful women who cooked meals for the students of the drum camp, the women who laundered our clothes, and to Aisha who single-handedly kept the place spotless.

I could not have completed my research in Guinea were it not for Mohamed Condé who acted as my research assistant and translator during my entire stay in Conakry in 2008. I cannot thank him enough for putting me in touch with Sekou Konaté and Daouda Kourouma as well as assisting with their interviews. Condé hopes to pursue a masters degree in the United States some day; a dream I am sure he will realize very soon. I cannot forget my two running buddies in Guinea, M'Bemba Sylla (a.k.a. Michael Jordon) and Simba Camara, who helped me stay in shape by accompanying me on my early morning (6:30-7:30AM) runs through the streets of Conakry. Simba also acted quickly (with the help of our mutual friend, Thierno) by getting me to his doctor (Dr. Traoré) when I contracted Malaria one week before leaving Guinea. Many thanks Simba and Thierno for potentially saving my life.

Thanks to all the young drummers who I interviewed: Alpha Omar Sidibé, Mamady Kouyaté, Sékou Koné, and Sékou Keïta. Thanks and respect, go out to the senior *djembefolas* who generously provided me with their patience and wisdom during interviews: Daouda Kourouma, Sékou Konaté, M'Bemba Bangoura, and Mamady Keïta. Thanks also to Monette Moreno Keïta who, on many occasions, gave me time out of her very busy schedule to answer my endless questions.

Thanks to Tom Kondas of Wula Drums, who not only managed to make time for my endless questions about his contributions to the drum building process, but also found me a place to stay during my final month in Guinea. Many thanks go to Fatu, who was my host for the final weeks of my stay in Conakry. Fatu welcomed me into her home and provided me with water from her well and three wonderful meals every day. In return I provided (among other things), gas for her generator so that she could watch her favorite

American T.V. show “Extreme Make-Over, Home Edition.” My hearty thanks go to Kondas (a.k.a. Rambo) who made it possible for me to photograph, film, and document the entire drum building process from the carving of the rough shell to the completion of the finished product.

Once the research was complete, my dissertation committee guided me through the difficult process of interpreting my fieldwork. Judith Becker (co-chair) always found a way to encourage my efforts even when the results were sometimes less than stellar. One of the most important things Judith has taught me is that the way to learn and consolidate ideas is to write. Christi-Anne Castro (co-chair) provided me with essential constructive criticism mixed with heartfelt support for the process I was undertaking. Her, “red-flags” saved me from many potential scholarly minefields. Mbala Nkanga’s vision and enthusiasm for my project helped me to take the work of interpretation very seriously. Mbala pushed me to delve deeper into the political significance of the *djembe* as both a national and global representative of Guinea. He also steered me toward some very important sources of information. Charles Garrett helped me to see the details. His rigorous annotations helped me to ask critical questions about each item that I included in a chapter. Vanessa Agnew helped me to question the essentializing ideas and labels which sometimes found their way into my work. Her guidance with my research and analysis of the *djembe* scene in Germany, taught me to step back and look at the larger picture while taking in the details.

I would also like to thank Professor Linda Gregerson and the members of the Mellon Foundation Dissertation Writing Seminar (2008) who helped me launch into the process of writing the dissertation. It was through this seminar that I learned how to think

beyond the twenty-page term paper toward the structure and logic of creating a dissertation chapter. I would especially like to thank Rebecca Wines and Christina Chang (from the Mellon Seminar) who together with myself, and two new members, Sebastian Ferrari and Andrea Dewees, formed Team Completion. This dissertation writing support group made it possible for me to complete the dissertation much more efficiently than I ever could have working alone. The processes of, weekly planning, the presentation of a chapter every five weeks, and reading each other's work, kept me inspired to stay inside and write even though the summer sun was calling me to other activities.

None of this could have happened without the support of the two most important women in my life: my partner Debbie Duffey and my mother Herdith Flaig. My mother taught me and my sisters to be strong, independent thinkers. I remember being continually frustrated as a child when I would ask for help with my homework and she would reply, "There is the dictionary and the encyclopedias, look up the answer yourself." With a little bit of "tough love" my mother taught me the finer points of being a researcher. It was not surprising then, when I ran out of funding options to do research in Guinea, that my mother pooled her resources and came to my financial aid. She has always been willing to provide me with the tools I need to learn. My partner Debbie has supported the two of us while I was in graduate school. More importantly, her belief in me has helped me overcome the fears and insecurities that crept up from time to time as I dealt with the challenges of graduate school life. I appreciate most, the sacrifices she made so that I could be away for the better part of a year to do my research. This dissertation belongs as much to her as it does to me.

Preface: Researching a Globalized Instrument

When embarking upon a global project involving not only the West African countries of Senegal, Mali and Guinea, but also many parts of Europe and North America, difficult choices need to be made along the way. Very early into my research I decided to focus my study on two very influential drummers from Guinea, Mamady Keïta and Famoudou Konaté. The global influence of these two master drummers is so vast that I had to narrow my focus even further. Rather than becoming overwhelmed by the geographical scope of their work, I decided to analyze the particular relationships they established early in their careers which helped to shape the global *djembe* scene. Within that context, I examine their shifting relationship with the national ballets that launched their global careers as professional drummers. I also investigate the sometimes awkward relationships that Keïta and Konaté have with African American drummers in the United States. Their late arrival to the two-decade-old African American *djembe* scene in the Eastern United States has led to some friction and misunderstanding that I theorize from historical and political perspectives.

Finding Keïta and Konaté

Similar to many of my informants, I discovered the *djembe* quite by accident. When I was shopping for my first hand-drum at a music store in 1992, I tried out many styles of frame drums as well as congas and bongos, but I found myself drawn to the dynamic and melodic range of the *djembe*. Two days later I attended my first drum circle

in Toronto's High Park. At first I was captivated by the experience of drumming with a large group of people. I initially enjoyed the hypnotic repetition of the music, and the organic way that each individual contributed their own complementary rhythm to the mixture. I even learned a little bit about technique by mimicking the hand movements of the drummers playing beside me. Yet, I quickly became bored with the predictability and the lack of musical structure I found in this drum circle. The trained musician in me wanted something more structured and musically challenging.

Two events contributed to my initial interest in the historical and cultural origin of the *djembe*. The first event occurred at the beginning of my third month of participation in the High Park drum circle: A drummer from Montreal joined the group. He was not very pleased with our choice of grooves and our largely improvised jam session. He kept asking, "What song are you playing? What rhythm is this?" This Montreal-based drummer was used to the drumming that took place in Mount Royal Park. A number of Malian drummers and dancers have immigrated to Montreal and these individuals usually lead the drum circle there. Rather than holding a freestyle jam session (which is what they do in High Park), these drummers teach the group particular rhythms and songs from Mali. Given that this *djembe* player from Montreal was used to something much more structured and culturally specific, he was understandably frustrated by what must have seemed like a haphazard approach to drumming. The second event occurred during my initial studies with Ubaka Hill at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival in 1997. With each "drumsong" or rhythmic exercise she taught the group, I found myself asking, "Where does this come from? How did it arrive here?"

While this dissertation is about a musical instrument, the heart of the research lies with the people who have been directly impacted by the *djembé* as well as those who have participated in shaping its transmission to the rest of the world. My research into the globalization of the *djembé* would thus depend upon my continued ability to establish personal connections with particular people and networks involved in the process. During the research for my third term paper on Ubaka Hill (2005), I learned more about Hill's influences, which included some of the first students of Ladjji Camara who was the first *djembé* soloist of *Les Ballets Africains de la République de Guinée*. During my fieldwork with Hill, I also met Helen Bond who is an apprentice of the second lead drummer from *Les Ballets Africains de la République de Guinée*, Famoudou Konaté. Concurrently, I took my first workshop with Mamady Keïta, the former lead drummer and musical director for *Ballet D'Joliba* (president Touré's personal ballet company). From this initial research and my ongoing studies with Konaté and Keïta, it became clear that the globalization of the *djembé* occurred in two stages: first, with Guinea's national ballet companies and then through the concerts and workshops given by Konaté and Keïta as they embarked on solo careers outside of the ballet.

Research Challenges and Interruptions

I decided to begin my research by attending Keïta and Konaté's workshops in Guinea not only because this was where the *djembé* began its global journey, but also because this was where their most dedicated students from all over the world would gather in one place. Even though I began the registration process three months in advance, it was very difficult to find an opening in either Keïta or Konaté's drum camps. Keïta's camps were all full, so I decided to attend the drum and dance camp of his

successor in the *Ballet D'Joliba*, M'Bemba Bangoura (12/27/06 – 1/19/07). Then, after much negotiation, I was able to get the last space in Konaté's second camp (1/21/07 – 2/10/07). I quickly learned that I would have my work cut out for me when it came to gaining access to Konaté as a researcher. I was welcome to participate in the camps as a student, but the minute I declared myself a researcher I was grilled about my intentions by three of Konaté's representatives and almost barred from attending.

During Bangoura's camp there were a series of civil strikes protesting the cost of rice and gasoline. I was told by my hosts that these types of strikes were typically short-lived and occurred every few months in Guinea. The government response normally consisted of a swift lowering of the prices. I had nothing to be concerned about. Still, out of respect for the strikers, we would cancel classes on strike days. But, by the middle of the second week we had gone several days without classes. In addition, we were often confined to the compound as the military came through the neighborhood firing shots into the air in order to intimidate striking workers. By the final week, everything calmed down, and it seemed that the rest of my stay would proceed relatively peacefully. I had two free days between the completion of Bangoura's camp and the start of Konaté's camp. I used the time to move from Taouyah to Simbaya de Gare so that I could settle into Konaté's compound before classes began.

After only two days of classes at Konaté's compound the violence escalated. Konaté's neighbors threatened attack if we did not stop drumming classes. In their view, if we were not participating in the strike we were siding with the government. It was at this point that I realized the strike was about something much more significant than the cost of rice. Guineans had tolerated enough of the government corruption which took

place under the leadership of President Lansana Conté. The people were demanding that Conté appoint a new Prime Minister to run the government. The strike was aimed at convincing President General Lansana Conté to appoint ex-patriot Lansana Kouyaté as Prime Minister. Guineans trusted Kouyaté to keep General Conté in check and to stop the tide of corruption that was robbing them not only of their wages, but also of necessary improvements to basic infrastructures such as roads, water, and electricity. What began as a series of work stoppages and peaceful protests about Guinea's out-of-control inflation, escalated into a battle between the armed military and unarmed civilians. The defining moment occurred during an organized march to the Presidential Palace on January 22, 2007. The strategy was to place women and children at the front of the march to prevent the army from shooting. The plan failed and there were several women and children hurt and/or killed when the army unexpectedly opened fire. The morning following this event, I noticed that Konaté was having a serious discussion with camp organizer, Rainer Dörrer. An announcement at breakfast informed all camp participants that the workshop was officially cancelled due to official warnings sent out by the Japanese, German, and American consulates. We had only one-hour to pack and go to the airport so that we could be first in line to get one of the last Air France flights out of Guinea. Only three and a half weeks into my research, I was back in Ann Arbor frantically making plans for my next research destination.

A month after arriving home from Guinea the political situation was resolved and I was on my way to Germany. I went to Germany because this was where Keïta and Konaté developed their pedagogical approach in collaboration with their German apprentices. Konaté and his sons all took up residence in Germany, giving workshops,

making recordings, and writing pedagogical books in collaboration with their most advanced German students. While Keïta resided in Belgium, his pedagogical publications and recordings were also developed in collaboration with German drummers. My strategy for the research in Germany was to situate myself within the *djembé* community in Munich making side trips to other locations in southern and northern Germany as needed. I became a “researcher-in-residence” at *Djembé! Schule München*, established by Keïta’s long-standing collaborator, Uschi Billmeier. I also attended classes and conducted interviews with Rainer Arold (Munich) who recorded pedagogical CDs with Keïta, Rainer Dörrer (Stuttgart) who has transcribed hundreds of Konaté’s rhythms in the context of their twenty-year collaboration, and Thomas Ott (Berlin) who, with the help of Konaté, published a school teachers’ guide to the *djembé*. Most of my ideas about the process of transmission came from my study of these transcriptions and pedagogical publications of *djembé* music and the cross-cultural negotiations that led to their creation.

After my research trips to Guinea and Germany, I spent the spring and summer months attending workshops given by Konaté and Keïta as they toured the United States and Canada. My research took me to Chicago, Boston, Toronto, and San Diego where Konaté and Keïta were giving their most intensive workshops. Similar to his workshops in Guinea, Keïta’s Mini-Guinea ten-day workshop in San Diego attracted many foreign students from Europe, Mexico, and Japan. What I noticed immediately was the seriousness with which Keïta approached his role as a *djembé* teacher. He started each new rhythm with a detailed explanation of its history and cultural context. He then demonstrated the *dunun* parts that would accompany the *djembé* solo for that rhythm. Unlike Konaté, Keïta expected the students to practice the solo phrases of each rhythm

between classes so that he could gradually help students gain the facility to play the entire composed solo. I was fortunate that Keïta was supportive of my project even to the point of encouraging the other students to be interviewed by me. But, with two hours of instruction in the morning and another two in the afternoon, and at least two or more hours of practice per day, there was very little time left over for interviews. With Keïta as a central subject in my project, I was going to have to build up the stamina not only to fulfill the requirements of being his student, but also learn to balance that with the demands of my role as a researcher.

During my second attempt at conducting research in Guinea, I was able to register for the drum camps of both Keïta and Konaté. During the year between my first and second trip, I also had time to re-evaluate my research strategies and concerns. While the interviews I conducted with international students in Guinea during my first research trip were interesting, they only told the globalization part of the story. During my second trip I decided to focus more of my attention on the large network of local musicians and apprentices that surrounded Keïta and Konaté. When I later began to transcribe the many hours of interviews I had with these individuals, I discovered that there was a political side to the representation and transmission of the *djembé*. At this point, it became obvious to me that the representation of “traditional” *djembé* music and culture that Keïta and Konaté were transmitting to their apprentices and students was a reflection of their political views. It was only when I began to interview the drummers that surround Keïta and Konaté (as colleagues and apprentices) that I started to appreciate the extent of their influence within Guinea. When I further researched the formation of Guinea’s national ballet companies, I concluded that the political policies of Sékou Touré were not only

responsible in shaping their initial formation, but also for the fate of the musicians and dancers who inaugurated what became a new class of urban professionals within Guinea.

The final week of Keïta's drum camp coincided with the first week of Konaté's camp. This not only presented me with scheduling and transportation problems, but also with several pedagogical challenges. Keïta and Konaté have distinctly different teaching and playing styles. Very few students study with both masters, and even then they would rarely do so within the same week (one German-South African student also attempted to attend both camps at once). The most challenging part of attending both camps at once was adjusting to the different way in which each *djembéfol*a plays his rolls. Keïta starts with a sixteenth-note triplet and adds eighth notes one at a time to extend the roll from four, to five, to six tones and/or slaps. Conversely, Konaté fires off an initial group of four sixteenth notes to which he adds more sixteenth notes to lengthen the roll from four, to five, to six, and frequently up to seven tones/slaps. Each Konaté roll ends with one or two eighth notes. The other major difference between Keïta and Konaté's teaching styles is the inclusion of singing and *dunun* classes for each *djembé* rhythm taught. While Keïta's entire focus is on developing his students' *djembé* playing proficiency and technique, Konaté wants students to walk away from class with a working knowledge of the entire percussive melody which includes the *djembé* solo as well as the *dunun* parts and their variations. In order to facilitate an accurate transmission of each rhythm, Konaté provides students a pedagogical performance of each part and the entire ensemble which they can record for later reference. While Keïta allows recording during any part of a lesson, Konaté restricts students from recording until he has decided on the final arrangement of each rhythm. Konaté, unlike Keïta, actually discouraged the playing of

drums outside of class time. Given that Konaté frequently changed the solo phrases he taught from day to day, this rule actually saved students a great deal of frustration.

The Fieldwork

This is a multi-sited study that has taken place in Guinea, Germany, Canada and the United States. These sites were chosen because they each represent an important link in the establishment of global *djembé* communities based both inside and outside of the African diaspora. A multi-sited research project such as this is not by any means revolutionary. Rather, it is informed by current theories and movements within the practice of ethnography itself. George Marcus explains that,

The shifting boundaries of the ethnographic project . . . are moving speculatively into this broader frame itself, treating it ethnographically through the multi-sited trajectory of research. This is partly because of the noted inadequacy and loss of authority of both older and new formulations of metanarratives – like colonialism (or postcolonialism), Marxist political economy, and globalization (an as-yet poorly theorized, but apparently necessary, concept in wide currency) – and partly because of the changing nature of the kind of material sought from and offered by fieldwork subjects who think in terms of their connections beyond the local. (Marcus 1999: 100)

The majority of people participating in this music are aware of the global connection of which they are a part. None of the musicians, in the localities I visited, was limited in any way by the musical and cultural influences of his immediate surroundings. Even the Guinea locals who participate as assistant musicians and workers in the *djembé* camps have a strong awareness of the global impact of their music. As a result, I consider each location in terms of a particular set of individuals defined not by their ethnic or national affiliation but by their involvement in *djembé* music. Essentially, I am studying communities of interest which exist within larger communities traditionally defined by

ethnic and national affiliations. These communities of interest are, in turn, connected on a global scale.

Knowledge about the many manifestations of Guinea's *djembe* music exists mainly as oral history. As a result, much of the research has been carried out in the form of interviews. Each interview was conducted as a unique dialogue where I attempted to come to an understanding of the many facets of each individual's personal experience informed by, but not limited to, their culture and/or country of origin. In this sense the global is understood not only as a network of localities but of individuals. Similarly the music created exists beyond the boundaries of a locally situated culture. Yet, both the music and its history are interpreted and reworked within the different localities where it is played. In order to understand this phenomenon in the context of ethnographic practice, I have turned to Jonathan Friedman who states that

If the global is not a place but merely a set of properties that informs the local then nothing in the fieldwork situation need change other than the perspective on what we are looking at and the need to understand that world processes work through a number of different places simultaneously . . . Multi-sited ethnography should have always been a part of ethnography, because the world has always been organized in global/local articulations. And it might be argued that ethnography has always had a multi-sited component. (Friedman 2007: 115)

In this sense many of the techniques and systems of analysis of traditional fieldwork remain useful in this multi-sited study.

Throughout much of my fieldwork I took on the role of a participant observer. I attended classes and workshops in various parts of the United States, Canada, Germany, and Guinea. In the course of my travels I also interviewed many students and teachers of this music in all of these locations. In addition to attending workshops and classes, I also attended and filmed many performances of this music (ballet, percussion ensemble,

chamber *djembe* music) in all of the locations listed above. During performances I took note of the dramatic interplay between the various audiences and the performers. I also have documented the rhetoric used to present this music within the workshop, classroom and performance settings where people come to participate.

My research was conducted in three languages, English, German, and French. I used a translator only when subjects preferred to be interviewed in their native African languages (Malinké, Susu, or Fulani). Many of the individuals involved in learning this music have also taken it upon themselves to learn a second or third language to be able to communicate with either their African teachers or with other individuals involved in this music. For example, several American students have begun a serious study of French, while Taiwanese students attending Keïta's workshop in Guinea took three months (in preparation of their trip) to improve their knowledge of English, the common language used between all students attending the workshop. I have been able to witness a unique dialogue (often taking place in several languages at once) among members of these communities of interest from different localities world-wide. This dialogue is as much a part of the creation of a global *djembe* culture as the rhetoric passed on by Keïta, Konaté and their apprentices.

This dissertation represents the beginning of a much larger set of projects. One of these projects entails an ongoing study of Keïta and Konaté's impact on communities in Japan, Mexico, and the Middle East. Another project involves a documentation of the substantial African American contribution to the initial development of *djembe* music and dance in the United States. This would include a collection of oral histories from the original drummers who studied with Ladjí Camara and other members of the *Les Ballets*

Africains de la République de Guinée when that troupe was in residence in New York during their initial tours in the early 1960s, as well as during their extended Broadway run between February and April of 1969. I have found that the research for this dissertation has left me more determined than ever to continue documenting the rich history and continuing influence of Guinea's *djembe* as it is introduced to diverse communities all over the world.

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Chapter One

Introduction: Globalization and the Politics of Guinea's *Djembé*

Setting the scene: January 20, 2008

It was a warm day in January when Guinea's prime minister, Lansana Kouyaté, arrived back to his compound in the Conakry district of Matoto. Kouyaté had negotiated a deal with president General Lansana Conté to avoid a repeat of last year's crippling national strike. As usual, word of the prime minister's imminent arrival spread quickly through the neighborhood. Soon a large crowd gathered outside the gates of his compound. Mr. Kouyaté, who was appointed by President Conté after the National Strike of 2007, is much loved by the people and always greeted enthusiastically in his Matoto neighborhood.

Just down the street, at Mamady Keïta's *djembé* camp, Ali Thomas, Alpha Omar Sidibé, M'Bemba Sylla, and several other drummers also rushed out into the street in the direction of the prime minister's compound. (As is customary in Guinea, a government official is often greeted with spontaneous musical performances.) By the time they arrived, the crowd outside the gates had grown much more insistent and aggressive. As a result, this small group of musicians decided to move down the street and away from the center of the chaos. Once Thomas, Sidibé and Sylla began to play, some of the crowd, diverted away from the prime minister's gate, began to form a circle around the drummers. One of the women, who plays *kenkeni* and sings at Keïta's camp, jumped into the center of the ring and began to dance to the music. It was not long before others also took a turn in the ring.

I witnessed events such as this many times during my stay in Guinea. The Africa cup soccer games between Guinea and Ghana or Guinea and Côte D'Ivoire often sparked spontaneous street parties such as this one. I also witnessed this music in the context of weddings and naming ceremonies. What was different this time is that the group playing was being led by an American woman. Moments after the event I recalled that,

The most amazing thing was the reaction of the women in the crowd to Ali playing the lead *djembe*. When she encouraged the crowd to clap along with the music, one woman responded by making up her own clapping pattern. Other women soon joined in. (Fieldwork notes taken by Vera Flaig: January 20th, 2008).

Ali Thomas has undergone intense study with renowned Guinean drummer, Mamady Keïta, for the past five years. She has an understanding of this music that is further informed by three two-month stays in Guinea. Sidibé, a Susu, born and raised in Conakry, has studied with Keita for the same length of time (see fig. 1 taken at Keïta's drum camp, Jan. 2008).



[Fig. 1: Camara on *sangban*; Keïta on *djembe*; Thomas on *kenkeni*; Sidibé on *dununba*.]

The quality of each of the drummers playing was unquestionable yet the reaction of the crowd to each of these musicians was informed by something other than the music. As I observed the crowd, I noticed that the women watched Thomas with a mixture of disbelief and pleasant surprise. While at first the women seemed to find her skill as a lead *djembe* player strange and curious, they soon joined in, jumping into the circle to test Thomas's skill in interpreting their dance moves on the *djembe*. Given that the *djembe* is strongly associated with male strength and power, and by witnessing the attention given to Thomas by the women in the crowd, it seemed that Thomas's skill as a female *djembe* player was quite surprising the spectators.

The music being played in the street that day has its origins in the *Maninka* village traditions of Upper Guinea (bordered by Mali to the north and north/west, see Fig. 2), yet none of the musicians playing were from this region. Aside from the Ali Thomas the one American, the Guinean musicians involved in the celebration were all were born and raised in Conakry, Guinea's capital. Furthermore, the students attending Keïta's drum camp hailed from Canada, Holland, Taiwan, Japan, England, Ireland, France, South Africa, the United States, and Croatia. In addition, there were several more camps happening in other districts in Conakry; M'Bemba Bangoura's camp was attended by Italian and Dutch drummers, and Famoudou Konate's camp was attended primarily by German and American drummers. For the past twenty years people from all over the world have come to Conakry to study the traditional Malinké village music associated with the *djembe*, a drum that ethnomusicologist, Eric Charry has called "the best known and most widespread African drum" (Charry 2000: 193).



[Fig. 2: Map of Guinea and surrounding area © Nations Online Project]

In the process of its movement from the villages to the capital, and from the capital to various destinations around the globe, the *djembé* has become the primary carrier of knowledge about Guinea to the rest of the world. In order to understand the ways in which this knowledge has been constructed, mediated and brokered it is necessary to frame this drama within the context of Guinea's independence movement, subsequent nationalism, and the role music played in the decolonization process.

A short history of the *djembé*

The *djembé* has an ethnic history that is little known to the people across the globe who play it. The *djembé* can be seen/heard played in a host of musical genres from Irish fiddle music (jigs and reels) to American rock and pop bands. The reason that it is so versatile is that it contains, within one instrument, the sonic capabilities of many drums combined. The goat skin drumhead on the *djembé* is tighter than any other drum skin on an African drum. As a result, multiple pitches produced on the Irish *bodhrán* and

the American drum kit can be produced on this instrument with the percussionist's bare hands.¹ When played by a master drummer, the tonal range of the *djembe* is often compared to the human voice in that it provides a drummer the possibility of producing melodic or speech like qualities.² Furthermore, because the *djembe*'s sound is produced with the hands (and not with a stick), many drummers consider its expressive qualities to be far more personal and emotional (Wilson 1992; Diallo and Hall 1989). "The combination of bare handed playing technique and a tight drumhead contributes to a mystique that has surrounded the *djembe* outside of Africa" (Charry 2000:195).

The *djembe* was historically used as an instrument to facilitate perhaps a dozen or so village festivals ranging from naming ceremonies to initiations, harvest celebrations, and marriages. It is not these festivals and ceremonies which have become global (although the music associated with these ceremonies is included as part of the global *djembe* repertoire), but the instrument which was used to lead the dancing during these festivals. It was in the context of Guinea's national ballets that the *djembe* initially found its artistic voice as the leader for the dramatic action taking place on the stage. The *djembe* player both leads and follows the dramatic movements of the dancers telling the stories central to any particular ballet through movement and gesture. The *djembe* accents and punctuates these movements through a combination of attacks on the drum head which range in pitch from the highest soprano to the deepest contra-bass. In this sense the

¹ Charry states that "Out of the dozens, if not hundreds, of drums used in West Africa, the *djembe* is one of the relatively few that are played exclusively with both bare hands . . . of those drums played with both bare hands, the head of the *djembe* is the tautest of them all" (Charry 2000: 195).

² "Adama Dramé, the master of the *djembe*, knows how to make it talk" (Klöwer 1997: 28). Thomas Ott in referring to Famoudou Konate stated that, "what we call a rhythmic pattern, he calls melody. He always says 'la melodie c'est comme sa.' And I think he's right because these are melodies" (Ott interview 2007).

djembé, as played by a master drummer, takes the place of the dancer's voice. Still, it is the dancer who attracts the audiences' attention, not the drummer.

Through various political, cultural, and economic moves,³ orchestrated initially by Guinea's first president Sékou Touré, this instrument has become an important voice in post-colonial Guinea. As a result, the locus of *djembé* playing has moved out from the ethnic enclaves of village life in Upper Guinea to the urban centre of Conakry. This move was initially orchestrated by Touré when he brought the finest musicians and dancers from the villages to the capital to form Guinea's national ballets. *Les Ballets Africains de la République de Guinée*, consisting of several touring companies which set up temporary residences in various parts of Europe and in New York, and *Ballet D'Joliba* (known as the president's personal ballet company) became the representation of Guinea nationalism to the rest of the world.

When *Les Ballets Africains de la République de Guinée* performed at the First World Festival of Black Arts in Dakar in 1966, it was the first time musicians and other artists from across the African continent saw the *djembé* being used in a professional performance context (*Présence Africaine*, Vol. 57-60: 1966). The impact was so profound that the *djembé* is now one of the most widely used drums in Africa.

Djembé playing did not become a profession until the instrument was adopted by Guinea's national ballets. Guinea was the first nation, among West African countries colonized by France, to form a ballet where the *djembé* played an important role. Keita

³ Of all the possible musical genres, village festival music based upon the *djembe* was what was chosen to represent Guinea as a new nation. This was a strange choice given that the masked dances that are part of these village ritual celebrations were initially discouraged as a backward and superstitious practice that stood in the way of Guinea becoming a truly modern nation. In the context of the national ballets, staged versions effectively drained these village rituals of their efficacy, while, at the same time presenting a image of Guinea aligned closely with the Western imagination of Africa. These touring national ballets were so successful internationally that they became an important source of income for Sekou Touré's government. I will be dealing with these issues in greater depth in chapter two of this dissertation.

Fodéba set the stage for both Senegal and Mali to form similar national ballets in which the *djembé* played an important dramatic role.⁴ Ironically, international interest in the *djembé* playing did not come to fruition until the death of Touré in 1984. It was only when the national funding for the ballet became threatened that smaller ensembles of *djembé* players, *dundun* players, and dancers put together tour groups that could be formed and managed privately. Furthermore, with the death of Touré came more opportunities for artists to tour internationally.⁵ In any case, when looking at this history, it becomes clear that Guinea is the central locus for the launch of the *djembé* into the world of professional music.

Changes to the performance and construction of the *djembé* as it became global

However alluring the dramatic sounds of the *djembé* were when Europeans and Americans first encountered them within the performances of Guinea's national ballet companies, it was not until the *djembé* took center stage within percussion ensembles such as *Percussions de Guinée*⁶, and *Africa Djolé*⁷ that it was truly appreciated as a dynamic musical instrument in its own right (Charry 1996; Billmeier 1999; Polak 2005; Interviews: Dörrer 2007; Uhuru 2007). Furthermore, there are a couple of practical

⁴ Mark Sunkett credits Fodéba with drawing "serious attention" to the *djembé* during the formation of the Senegalese National Ballet Company following Senegal's independence. While Sunkett dates the formation of the ballet as the mid-1950s, it actually formed after Senegal's independence (1960) in the mid-1960s (Sunkett 1995: 32). The most prominent dance and drum style in Senegal's present national ballet is *Sabar*. This drum and dance genre (drums are played with one stick and one bare-hand) originates with the *Wolof* people, one of the largest ethnic groups in the region surrounding Dakar (Castaldi 2006; Tang 2007).

⁵ "Since the late 1980s international interest in the jembe has taken an unprecedented upturn, owing in part to the death of Sekou Touré, which triggered a search for new sources of patronage by Guinean musicians. Former members of national ballet troupes of Guinea, Mali and Senegal routinely settle abroad to teach and perform, jembe students flock to drum classes and camps" (Charry 2000: 193).

⁶ Eric Charry states that the drummers who made up the *Percussions de Guinée* were primarily drawn from *Ballet D'Joliba* (Charry 1996: 1).

⁷ Rainer Polak explains that Fodé Youla switched to the *djembé* from his lower pitched drum from (lower Guinea) when he joined Africa Djolé. Polak goes on to say that "this different instrument, with greater soloistic and expressive qualities was just what the German Afro-percussion scene was looking for" (Polak 2005: 169).

factors that led to the *djembe* becoming a globalized instrument. First, it has been suggested that part of the success of the *djembe* as an instrument desired by musicians in the west has to do with its portability (Nkanga 2007). Unlike the fragile *kora*, and *balafon* (both of which use gourd resonators), the two other major traditional instruments used in the ballet, the *djembe* is a rather hardy instrument that is also quite portable. Second, the *kora* and *balafon* use a hexatonic tuning system and both instruments take years of intense study to master. In comparison, the basics of playing simple accompaniment rhythms on the *djembe* can be picked up by an amateur or professional musician in a relatively short time.

Innovations to the design of the *djembe* have continued to make it more accessible to Guinean and Western musicians alike. The first modification was the replacement of a tied-on drum head to one that was fastened with nylon chord and two sets of iron rings.⁸ This modification made it possible to tune the drum without the aid of a fire to dry out the skin. It also made it possible to change or repair drum heads in less than half of the time it took with tied heads (Polak 2005: 172). Both of these modifications made the *djembe* more portable and adaptable to new climates. Rainer Polak explains that “the iron *jenbe* has turned out with time to be a pre-condition for the globalization of the *jenbe*” making possible the “massive spread of the *jenbe* to industrialized countries in the 1990s”(Polak 2005: 178). Polak goes on to say that it was necessary for drummers in Bamako (capital of Mali) to master this heading technique in order to remain competitive with their colleagues from Guinea, Côte D’Ivoire, and Senegal who had already entered the

⁸ Rainer Polak relays one account that places the development of the iron rings with Ladj Camara in New York, U.S.A. Conversely, German *djembe* master Uhuru explained in a 2007 interview that he first saw the iron rings used in Côte D’Ivoire. Polak explains that it is possible that “artisans in Dakar and Abidjan had developed the iron *jenbe* independently” (Polak 2005: 171, 173-174).

international market with this new technique a decade earlier. What made this new tuning technique so vital was not only its convenience for tuning the instrument, but also the possibility of tuning the drum much higher in order to amplify its dramatic presence both within the ballet and the newly formed percussion ensembles mentioned earlier. A parallel development to the *djembé's* higher tuning was a new level of virtuosity in *djembé* playing. As a result, the *djembé* also became more attractive to Western percussionists who desired to be challenged by the drum's musical possibilities.

Why was the *djembé* chosen to represent Guinea?

Of all the possible instruments within the Mande culture, the *djembé* was least important, and therefore the most unlikely choice to represent the nation of Guinea. The instruments played by the *jeli* or professional caste of musicians in Guinea were first, the *bala* (a xylophone with gourd resonators), and second, the *kora* (a twenty-one stringed African harp). These were the instruments *jelis* used to accompany their retelling of the *Sunjata Epic*. This epic, which tells the history of the founding of the Mali Empire by Sunjata Keita, represents the foundation of all Mande cultures (see appendix). If the goal of revolutionary music was to revitalize pre-colonial African identity, pride, and cultural practices, the most obvious choice should have been the music and instruments of the *jelis*. The dramatization of the *Sunjata Epic*, in the context of a national ensemble, would be symbolic of the restoration of a powerful history and rich culture. While this would be meaningful for Guineans who belong to a Mande cultural group, the depth of the meaning would not be immediately accessible to a global audience. Conversely, the immediate and dramatic effect of the *djembé* when combined with choreographed dance and spectacular costumes, turned out to be an even more powerful representation of

Guinea than could ever have been anticipated. But, the reasons the *djembe* was chosen go far beyond the practicalities of global marketing. Touré believed that if Guinea was to become a modern nation, the power structures and influence of individual ethnic groups needed to be dismantled. This included the most powerful caste in the Maninka culture, the *jeliya*.

Music and Politics in Guinea under Sékou Touré

Many of the ethnic groups that make up Guinea, (Malinké/Susu, and Fulani to name two) have socio-cultural and politically stratified societies. Guinean scholar Mohamed Saliou Camara argues that unlike the “highly discriminatory caste system known in India . . . social stratification in Western Africa was a matter of social division of labor” (Camara 2005: 37). Camara goes on to note that the “sociopolitical cleavage” between the Mande *horo* (nobility) and *nyamkala* (artisans) was much narrower than “the one that has separated for ages the Indian castes” (ibid.: 36). In pre-colonial times the *nyamakala* musician/historian, known as the *griot* or *jeli*, wielded great political influence in his role as mediator between the people and the ruling nobility (king). The *jeli*, by virtue of his status as “master communicator and diplomat,” not only kept the political leader “in-check” through his role as messenger of the people and political advisor, but also served as the leader’s voice in public forums.⁹ Aside from these political roles the *jeli* was also an entertainer, a role that superseded all others during colonial and postcolonial national regimes.

⁹ Camara explains that, “Neither a Mande *mansa* nor a Fulani *landho* would ever undertake a state visit or officiate in public without the presence and valued input of his master griot, who was also his spokesman . . . In fact . . . a high level political or religious official was not supposed to raise his voice. He always spoke to the audience through a griot” (Camara 2005: 38-41).

The role and status of the *jeli* changed considerably in the context of colonial and post-colonial Guinea. During colonial times the role of the *jeli* was transformed from his political role as a communicator, diplomat, and valued historian into “a vulgar troubadour” who peddles his musical skills and historical knowledge only to “laud the wealthy and the powerful” in order to survive (ibid.: 41). In the early years of Guinea’s independence the *Partie Democratique de Guinea* (PDG) developed a policy of “social leveling” identified as *programme d'emancipation sociale*. This program, along with Touré’s demystification program, was meant to unify the nation of Guinea by stripping individual ethnic groups of their cultural distinctions. In addition, the social and political stratification of the Malinké/Susu and Fulani ethnic groups ran contrary to Touré’s ethics of African democracy. Camara explains the new role of the griot (*jeli*) in the following way:

Even though griots could still entertain, they could only do so at the national level within the party’s organized cultural and artistic groups, and musical bands in which they performed side by side with the descendents of former *rimbhé* or *horo* [nobility], including descendents of *lambhé* or *mansa* [political leaders]. Therefore, under the generic denomination of ‘*artistes du peuple*’ (the people’s artists) griots . . . competed and shared national fame with non-griots . . . As far as epics and legends go, only those magnifying the party and African heroes were told in the forms of ‘revolutionary’ (political) poetry and hymns. (Camara 2005: 42)

Even though it seems that the *jelis* were reduced to communicating governmental propaganda, Camara makes it clear that they still exerted a reasonable amount of influence not only upon Guinean society but also upon Sékou Touré (ibid.).

For Sékou Touré all cultural traditions existed only to serve the political goals of the PDG. For example, during a series of meetings about a very heated border dispute among Touré, General Moussa Traoré (president of Mali), and General Sangoulé

Lamizana (president of Upper Volta), Touré “resorted to the griot and to history to help settle the matter” (Camara 2005: 155). During an evening griot concert at the People’s Palace (Touré’s governmental residence) Sory Kandia Kouyaté was given the assignment to call upon Traoré and Lamizana’s shared ancestral connection to the great Mali Empire and its greatest hero and leader, Sundjata Keita. Kouyaté conveyed an emotionally stirring message of peace among *Bambara*, *Mossi*, and *Malinké* peoples. The griot was so convincing that the leaders rose and hugged as brothers at the conclusion of the song. The following day the negotiations consisted of little more than an official signing of papers (Camara 2005: 155-156). As part of the application of *programme d’émancipation sociale* in Middle Guinea, griots were appointed as party or state officials over former aristocratic families and clans (Camara 2005: 65-66). While the examples provided here illustrate some of the ways in which Touré could engage traditional griots for his own political ends, there was no traditional cultural performance genre which escaped being “enlisted” by the PDG’s nationalist political agenda (Touré 1963; Camara 2005).

The national ballet companies (*Les Ballets Africains de la République de Guinée; Ballet D’Joliba; Ballets de l’Armée*), which drew their inspiration from the drum and dance traditions of rural Guinea, were mandated to represent Guinean culture to the rest of the world. Far from sparking a rural revitalization of pre-colonial cultural practices, the ballets served instead to urbanize these as neo-traditional African “arts.” The purpose behind this was to reclaim urban, political, and intellectual space as something African in the process of decolonization. In his 1963 publication entitled, “The Political Leader as the Representative of a Culture,” Touré set fourth his decolonization mandate. Through most of the essay he outlined the ways in which Guineans had been intellectually

colonized through their French colonial education. He stated that only through a reintegration in one's social background, a "return to Africa by the daily practice of African life" was it possible to "readapt oneself to its basic values, its proper activities, its special mentality" (Touré 1963 trans. 1971: 8).¹⁰ As an example of an artist who was successful in his return to Africa, Touré turned to the creator of the ballet, Keita Fodeba:

Take the example of the ballets of our comrade Keita Fodeba which for several years have been touring the world to reveal through the medium of that traditional mode of expression, African dancing, the cultural, moral, and intellectual values of our society. And yet it was not at the Paris Opera or the Vienna Opera that these artists were initiated. Their choreographic initiation merely started from their authentically African education and the national consciousness of our artistic values. The troupe is an anonymous troupe in which there is no first or second star. The singers only know the popular songs of Africa as they learned them in their village. The value of the troupe of our comrade Keita Fodeba is its authenticity, and it will have done more to revive the social and choreographic values of African than will ever be done by all the works of colonial inspiration which have been written on this subject. (Touré 1963 trans. 1971: 9).

There is a certain irony in Touré's statement. In his analysis of Fodéba and the ballets, he regards "authenticity" as a central value, an "authenticity" which he in turn associates with the villages. Yet, through his demystification program, Touré banned the very ritual practices that resided at the center of village culture.¹¹

The authenticity Touré referred to was directly linked to the construction of Guinea as a distinctly African national culture. Frantz Fanon, who referenced both Touré and Fodéba as examples of African nationalism, began his chapter "On National Culture"

¹⁰ James Clifford has observed that "After 1950 peoples long spoken for by Western ethnographers, administrators, and missionaries began to speak and act more powerfully for themselves on a global stage. It was increasingly difficult to keep them in their (traditional) places. Distinct ways of life once destined to merge into 'the modern world' reasserted their difference, in novel ways" (Clifford 1988: 6).

¹¹ David Berliner explains that, "Inspired by a Marxist conception of religious alienation, Sékou Touré intended to replace the so-called traditional mentalities with positivist conceptions and to free human imagination, which had been burdened by mystification (Rivière 1971). He set up "demystification campaigns" to do away with "fetishist" ritual practices, and he strongly encouraged the folklorization of traditional religion both on the national and local levels. At the national level, this politics of folklorization yielded the renowned Ballets Africains in 1958" (Berliner 2005: 576).

with a quote by Touré who stated that, “For an act to be authentic one has to be a vital part of Africa and its thinking, part of all that popular energy mobilized for the liberation, progress, and happiness of Africa” (Fanon 1963, trans. 2004: 145). For Fanon there were three phases of cultural development which eventually led colonized people to the point of revolution: (1) “assimilation of the language” and culture of the colonizer; (2) “recollection,” where an artist, now disconnected from his heritage, tries to remember the culture of his people; (3) “combat revolution,” “national culture,” where the artist turns into a “galvanizer of the people” (ibid.: 159). Fanon cast Fodéba as an example of an artist in the third stage:

Kéita Fodéba, today Minister of Internal Affairs in the Republic of Guinea, when he was the director of the “African Ballet” did not play any tricks with the reality which the people of Guinea offered him. He reinterpreted all the rhythmic images of his country from a revolutionary standpoint. (Fanon 1963, trans. 2004: 163)

The most important thing to note here is that for Fanon, Touré, Amilcar Canral (Leader of the liberation struggle in Guinea-Bissau), and many other African scholars and political figures, ethnicity and nationalism were understood to be mutually exclusive domains. Christopher L. Miller, in his chapter “Ethnicity and Ethics” critiques the violence done to ethnic cultural practices in the name of nationalism, violence which, according to Fanon, was justified in order to make national culture possible (Miller 1990:49-50; Fanon 1963, trans. 2004: 63-96). Fanon painted a picture of the rural “peasant masses” who, while they could be generous and fierce soldiers of nationalism, could just as easily be swayed back into their ethnic rivalries by colonial administrators in their attempts to squash a national revolt. As Miller states, “For Fanon, ethnicity is unethical: ethnic forces are constantly reactionary, dupes of the colonizer” (Miller 1990:

50). It is important to keep in mind realities of African independence struggles which Fanon was addressing. In that context, ethnic rivalries could easily have prevented the unified struggle necessary for independence to become a reality.

Not all the artists involved in the revolution saw their ethnicity and the struggle for Guinean independence as mutually exclusive. As Miller points out in his close reading of Fodéba's poems, "Kéita Fodéba *engaged* with his ethnic tradition in his works." The two examples Miller draws from are "Minuit" where Fodéba "involved himself in the most traditional Mande art form, praise of the ancestors" and "Aube Africaine" where he refers to the Douga, a dance reserved for elite Mande heroes, tracing them back to Sundjata Keita, the founder of the Mande empire (Miller 1990: 51-67). While both poems deal with current political issues, they are expressed using traditional Mande cultural contexts and images.¹² While his writings were banned throughout French West Africa in 1951, he continued creating ethnically inspired works that commented directly on contemporary politics within his creation of *Les Ballets Africains* (Miller 1990:53). Miller notes that Fodéba referred to the ballet as "modern folklore, that is, traditional Mande music and dance adapted to Western means of presentation" (ibid.).

¹² Miller states that, "'Minuit' is written in dramatic form, with the stage set as a Mande village, a *griot* bard playing his guitar, another *griot* telling the story. Thus we are presented with a setting that could not be more traditional, dating back centuries in Mande history to the time of the emperor Sundjata, who united much of West Africa under Mande hegemony in the early 13th century . . . The 'legend' that is title in 'Minuit' does not, however, come from a mythical past. It begins with an explicit political reference" (Miller 1990: 54-55). The reference Miller describes is part of the history of African resistance to colonialism in the 1890s. Samory, the 'grand chef Noir' refers to "the most successful African kings and emperors who [initially] fought French incursions into their territory" (ibid.: 55). "Aube Africaine" addresses "the massacre of Senegalese soldiers returning from combat in Europe, by French soldiers, at Thiaroye, Senegal on December 1, 1944" (ibid.:56). The story is told from the point of view of the elders of a village where their strongest and bravest young man was chosen for military duty at the request of the occupying French. Once it is discovered that the young man was killed, not in battle but upon his arrival back to Africa, the scene becomes deeply mythical. A vulture hovers over the young man's dead body, a symbol of the Douga (dance of the vulture) which is a dance reserved for those in Mande society who have been authorized to dance it by the council of elders (Fanon 2004: 163-166; Miller 1990: 57).

However, the mixture of African and Western elements did not violate the authenticity of the ballet as far as Fodéba was concerned:

We heard so many times the word “authenticity” employed haphazardly in relation to folkloric spectacles! Really, authentic in relation to what?! To an idea more or less false that one holds of the sensational primitivism of Africa? No! . . . For us, authenticity is synonymous with reality . . . with living expression . . . that is why the folklore of modern Africa is as authentic as the folklore of ancient Africa, both being the real expression of life in our country at two different moments of its history. The contemporary tendency of a folkloric company like ours must be to inform the whole world of the cultural values of those two Africas: the traditional and precolonial Africa of our ancestors, and today’s Africa, which little by little is imprinted by western civilization. In fact, it would be even more absurd to fix our folklore only to the past of our country, since no folklore in this world is not partly hybrid. (Fodéba 1957 trans. Castaldi 2006: 63)

Fodéba made this statement partially in an effort to redress criticism aimed at the ballet for misrepresenting tradition and/or being too Western (Rouget 1956). Judgments as to the ballets’ authenticity are as prevalent today as they were in Fodéba’s time, the only difference being that these judgments now come from former ballet drummers and their international students.

In the context of this dissertation, I argue that in the decades after independence there is a renewed interest in Guinea’s pre-colonial ethnic cultures, both locally and globally. In the capital there is a rediscovery of older Susu and Malinké musical genres, some which are now finding their way into local ballets and performance groups.¹³ The revitalization of these older traditional genres is largely due to the reclaiming of ethnic identities all over Guinea. This is not being done in opposition to national Guinean identity but in concert with it. Fifty years after independence it seems as if young and old

¹³ During the first annual *festival D’Echange Culturel Nord/Sud* the winning group *Boté Percussion* was the only group to perform using an ancient Susu drum called the *boté* instead of the *djembe* which has become the standard choice for Susu and Malinké ballet groups in Conakry.

people alike are searching for their ethnic “roots.” Millers offers the following definition of ethnicity:

A sense of identity and difference among peoples, founded on a fiction of origin and descent and subject to forces of politics, commerce, language, and religious culture. ‘Ethnicity’ will thus not stand for a conceptual prison but for an inquiry into notions of identity and difference. (Miller 1990:35)

The people of Guinea who are reviving and renegotiating their ethnic traditions, are not attempting to recreate the past as some static, fixed ideal. Instead, new performance genres are being inspired by older “traditional” music, dances and stories. Rather than reverting back to former beliefs and ways of life, current living is being enhanced with the riches of the past, re-contextualized. Fanon argued against reviving neglected traditions stating that this activity amounted not only to “going against history” but also, “going against one's people” (Fanon 1963 trans. 2004:160). Fanon went on to state that:

When a people support an armed or even political struggle against a merciless colonialism, tradition changes meaning. What was a technique of passive resistance may, in this place, be radically doomed. (ibid.)

What Fanon is referring to here is what he considered the misguided efforts of African intellectuals who attempted to revive older, ethnic traditions as a means of combating the depersonalization of colonialism. As far as I observed in Conakry in 2007 and 2008, these ethnic revivals, though political, were not challenging the validity of Guinea as a nation but rather making space for ethnic diversity within Guinea nationalism.

Ballet musicians and dancers: a new class of urban professionals

Of all the individuals involved with the ballets only the *jelis* came from families of professional musicians. The dancers and the drummers from the villages who were conscripted into national service became professional musicians and dancers within the

context of the ballet. Francesca Castaldi examines how this works in the context of the National Ballet of Senegal:

What are the claims to professionalism that ballet dancers and choreographers assert through their work? This is a particularly relevant question because Ballets compete on one side with griots (Mande and Wolof in particular), who have historically occupied the position of professional musicians and choreographers, and on the other side with the dancing skill of the general population, which is well versed in entertainment dances. This last point is especially relevant because, as with the National Ballet, a troupe's repertory often includes the very dances that are performed by the general population at social celebrations. (Castaldi 2006: 151)

In Guinea members of the ballet did not need to claim their professional status; the government did this by virtue of issuing each musician and dancer an official I.D. card that gave them special travelling privileges both within Africa, and abroad. They also received a government paycheck – and were in fact considered public servants. The musicians and dancers became professional due to their political role as ambassadors of Guinean traditional culture. In contrast to Senegal, the Guinean ballet members professionalism was directly linked to politics.

Prior to winning regional contests and being chosen to join one of the national ballet companies, most of these young individuals came from farming families. They had to be quick to adapt to the realities of urban life and the daily riggers of practices that took place on concrete floors and not the soft mud ground of their villages. In addition, they not only had to learn new arrangements and choreographies of their own traditional dances, but also a great deal of new repertoire from different regions and ethnic groups represented in the ballet. Once these young men and women began their careers in the ballet very few ever returned to their villages. Mamady Keïta, lead *djembé* player for *Ballet D'Joliba*, was disowned by his family for joining the ballet. Due to his tour

schedule and his subsequent emigration to Belgium, Keïta did not return to his village to see his family for twenty-three years.

Djembé players: the new jelis?

Though motivated by politics, Touré set into motion the crucial social elements that eventually led to the globalization of the *djembé*. First, through the institutionalizing of *programme d’émancipation sociale* Touré made it possible for any citizen, regardless of social stratification determined by birth, to become a professional musician. Second, he nurtured ballet musicians and dancers to take on political/diplomatic roles (not unlike the griots of the past) in fulfillment of their mandate as ambassadors of Guinea to the rest of the world. Unlike the *jelis* of the past, village *djembé* players did not function as diplomats and it was highly unusual for a *djembé* player to represent the aristocracy or be involved in anything political. One of these unusual circumstances was described by Famoudou Konaté during a workshop he gave in Boston on June 3, 2007. Konaté describes the awkward situation he and his brother were put in when he was just a teenage *djembé* player living in his village in 1957:

It was a very difficult time because maybe four people wanted independence from France and another four wanted to stay with the French. It was a very hot issue. And I was the drummer for the village and there was a lot of fighting: “go play over here;” “go play over there.” It was very difficult for me to choose where I should go. One position had a lot of money. The other people did not have very much money but they spoke very strongly and had much to say. So I was thinking, “Where do I go?” “What is the better position?” There was a *sangban* player, my brother, his name was Diarra Dama. I played the *djembé* and he played the *sangban*. There was no *kenkeni* and no *dununba* but the public was behind us. My brother just played the rhythm like this: ♪ ♪ | ♪ ○ ♪ ♪ | ♪ . . . The women in Africa are very strong. In Africa if you want to be president you have to love the women and the children because they will shout out for you, “Ayé, Ayé!!! Sékou Touré!!!! Sékou Touré!!!!” The song is in Susu but we’re playing a Malinké rhythm: “Ayo, Ayo Mboré! Ayo Ayo Mboré! Sékou Touré foto nyanima koné na Conakry.” (Konaté workshop: 2007)

Normally a village *djembéfola* plays every celebration he is asked to play without asking for monetary reward of any kind.¹⁴ This is part of his duty as the village drummer. The types of events usually played for are weddings, naming ceremonies, initiation and harvest festivals. There is no choice, the *djembéfola* is required to play for all celebrations. In the situation described above, Konaté and his brother cannot play for both sides and are thus forced to make a choice to represent one or the other. The minute they make their choice they engage with their music in a political manner not unlike a griot. When Konaté taught this song in Boston, he called it *Kenyeredi* which is the Malinké word for “freedom.” When he taught it to my teacher, Helen Bond, in France he called the song R.D.A. These letters refer to the *Rassemblement Démocratique Africain* which was founded in 1946 as a coalition of Francophone West-African leaders demanding emancipation from France. The influence of this organization gradually affected French colonial policy undermining “General de Gaulle's dream for a commonwealth *à la française*” (Camara 2005: 51).¹⁵ The label R.D.A. was thus chosen by Konaté for the French workshop for obvious political reasons.

The cases of Mamady Keïta and Famoudou Konaté

Much of the research in this dissertation revolves around the work of two of the first professional *djembé* players in Guinea, Mamady Keïta and Famoudou Konaté, both former drummers of Guinea's first national ballets. Keïta was the lead *djembé* soloist for

¹⁴ The term *djembéfola* is widely used to describe someone who has not only mastered the instrument, but is considered a carrier of rhythmic, historical, and ritual knowledge of the *djembé* and *dununs* as they are used in the context of village celebrations. Alongside their role as mentor for future *djembefolas*, senior *djembéfolas* teach other men in the village how to play accompanying *djembé* and *dunun* parts for all rhythms used in village festivities and rituals.

¹⁵ Camara paints the following picture of post-war France: “While France was considering more ‘harmonious’ ties with the colonies to assure her post-war economic reconstruction and political stability and to resuscitate her nationalistic image, termed *le grandeur de la France*, in a new Europe victorious over Fascism and Nazism the colonies were demanding emancipation” (Camara 2005: 51).

Ballet D’Joliba while Konaté held the same post with *Les Ballet Africains de la République de Guinée*. Both drummers spent over twenty years of their career in a government-run national ballet company. For both of them, their participation in the ballet was mandatory because their role in the ballet was considered a civil service.¹⁶ It was only after the death of Guinean president Sekou Touré that these two drummers became free to explore other career options. Keïta describes his experience in the following way,

I remained in this position until 1984. After the death of President Sekou Touré, the country opened itself up to the rest of the world, and for the first time in my life, I was able to think about what I really wanted to do. Though I had medals and diplomas and had traveled around the world in the name of my country, I had remained poor, like all the other musicians in the ballet. I saw no financial prospects for me and my family. (Billmeier & Keïta 1999: 21)

Although Touré’s death further opened up trade and cultural exchange between Guinea and the rest of the world, it was a time of crisis for life-long ballet musicians and dancers such as Keïta. Ballet artists had spent their lives devoted to Touré and the idea that they were participating in the emancipation of Africa. Keïta recalled that, “we considered ourselves revolutionaries.”¹⁷ In this way, the death of Touré created both a financial crisis and an identity crisis. The resourcefulness demonstrated by Keïta (and other ballet musicians and dancers) in the face of a hopeless situation, was a key factor in accelerating the globalization of the *djembe*.

¹⁶ In order to find the best drummers in Guinea, Touré sent militia out into the villages on a mission to gather the finest *djembe* players they could find and bring them back to the capital. Once there, these drummers were subjected to a military type of camp where the audition process took place over the course of six months. Once a drummer passed the audition process he was required to accept a position in the ballet and perform in the national company. In a sense this was similar to the conscription process used for the national army (Keïta interview: Ramona, California, 2007).

¹⁷ Keïta make these comments within the context of his documentary film *Djembefola*: Djembefola Productions and Fontimusicali, 2006.

At the conclusion of a two-year contract with the Côte d'Ivoire *Ballet Koteba*, Keïta was invited to teach at a percussion school in Brussels, Belgium, where he worked from 1988-1991. Shortly after his arrival in Belgium, Keïta created the percussion group *Sewa Kan* (roughly translated from the Malinké as “the sound of joy”). Also during his tenure at the drum school in Belgium, Keïta released his first CD entitled, *Wassolon* (1989) named after the region of Guinea where Keïta was born. The second CD, *Nankama*, released in 1992, was also recorded in Europe with a largely Belgian group of musicians who made up *Sewa Kan*. In 1995 Keïta made a dramatic shift in his recording location and in the musicians with which he chose to collaborate. *Mögöbalu* was recorded in Conakry, Guinea with an all-star cast of drummers, singers and other instrumentalists (including Famoudou Konaté and Famoudou's son, Ibro Konaté, Fadouba Oularé, Daouda Kourouma and Sékou Konaté who were well known in Guinea's national ballet circles. Many of the same musicians also appeared on Keïta's next CD in 1996 entitled *Hamanah*. This shift to using local Guinea musicians and recording in Conakry signals the beginning of Keïta's personal mission to record and preserve the traditional village rhythms of his region. At the same time that Keïta reconnected with local Guinean musicians he also came upon the idea that it would be his life-long mission to preserve traditional rhythms by transmitting them to students world-wide. It seems that in the process of rediscovering his musical roots he also developed a sense urgency that this music must be kept alive.

After only three years in Belgium, Keïta started his own drum school called *Tam Tam Mandingue*. Due to the growing demand for workshops all across Europe, Keïta decided that what was needed was not a single school but a series of satellite locations

where students could benefit from weekly lessons thereby immersing themselves more fully into the music and culture of the Mandingue *djembé*. Between 1992 and 2008 Keïta has established (at least) twenty-three, official *Tam Tam Mandingue* schools world-wide and certified over thirty, *Tam Tam Mandingue professors*. With five *Tam Tam Mandingue* schools in the United States, six in Germany, eight in France, two in Japan, one in Israel and one in Portugal, Keïta managed to build a veritable *djembé* empire within a fifteen year span of time.¹⁸ Keïta boasts that no matter which *Tam Tam Mandingue* school one goes to, the same *Malinké* rhythms will be played in the same way (Keïta interview: Ramona California, 2007). I argue in this dissertation that Keïta has taken-on and absorbed the European (particularly German) values of traditional music being preserved as an unchanging object or *urtext* as well as the ideas of empire building.¹⁹ In so doing he embodies the multiple positions of mediator, culture bearer, culture broker and artist. In this way, he becomes an example of the multiple dimensions of the paradoxical process of globalization. I believe that globalization is a process where cultural traffic not only travels in every direction but where boundaries between cultures have become increasingly porous.

Conversely, for Famoudou Konaté the move to Europe came more gradually. The main German drummers responsible for Konaté's initial entry into the European market were, Johannes Beer, Paul Engel and Rainer Dörrer. Of these German drummers, Dörrer decided to bring Konaté to Germany in 1988 and 1989, one year after he had spent six

¹⁸ These statistics are based upon a combination of the listing found in the appendix of Keïta's book, *Mamady Keïta: a Life for the Djembe* (by Keïta and Billmeier: 1999) and the current listings on Keïta's website.

¹⁹ Keïta was initially exposed to this European idea of tradition through his involvement in the national ballet. Charry states that, "one result of the creation of the national ballets has been the reification of natural canons or repertoires of dances [and their accompanying rhythms] . . . these new interpretations of traditional rhythms are created and solidified, existing perhaps as the only living examples of abandoned traditional dance practices" (Charry 2000: 210-211).

months in living in Conakry studying with Konaté. At this point Konaté was still employed by *Les Ballet Africains de la République de Guinée*. Konaté would lead a ballet rehearsal in the morning and come back and teach Dörrer in the afternoon. The initial teaching and performing tours in Europe were successful enough that upon returning to Guinea, Konaté was not only able to build a new compound in Conakry, but also to retire from *Les Ballet Africains de la République de Guinée*. While Konaté used his German drum students to form an ensemble for each of the first two tours, he brought his own ensemble from Guinea on the following tours. Eventually, Konaté settled in Germany with his long-term partner Uschi Dittmar, spending the summer in Germany (during Guinea's rainy season) and the winter months in Guinea. Aside from organizing Konaté's initial tours of Europe, Dörrer also organized yearly tours for his German drum students to study with Konaté at one of his compounds in Guinea. These are ongoing even today and attract between twenty and thirty students not only from Germany, but also from other locations in Europe, North America, and Asia.

Unlike Keïta, Konaté has not created a drum school empire. However, like Keïta he subscribes to a narrative of cultural preservation in light of what he sees as a waning tradition of *djembe* among young people in his own as well as in other villages in Guinea. When asked about the young, up-and-coming *djembe* players in Conakry, Konaté laments that the solos and rhythms are now being played too fast and young players are losing the true essence of this music in an effort to out-perform each other. He also has stated that none of the younger *djembe* players seek him out for study because that is just not how these young people have been socialized to learn music. Konaté has, however, been the primary teacher to four of his sons, three of whom are internationally known *djembe*

players in their own right.²⁰ In addition, all of the men and women, and children Konaté brings into Conakry from his village to help with his yearly Guinea *stages*²¹, contribute as both teachers and students along with the Europeans who have come to study. Unlike Keïta, Konaté has no system of evaluation or teacher certification, In fact, he playfully mocks this part of Keïta's personal mandate. Konaté's goal is to give his students what they came for – an experience of his village culture (although most of the workshops take place at his compound in Conakry) and an enjoyable route to learning traditional Malinké drumming and dancing. Unlike Keïta, Konaté teaches in a way that many European students would consider inconsistent. He is not concerned that a solo be played the same way twice nor does he believe a rhythm (which he calls a melody) can be understood without learning as many *dunun* variations as possible. As a result, Konaté is considered by the larger *djembe* community as someone who exudes more of an African approach to this music.²²

The first recording of Konaté was a field recording made by Johannes Beer which was later released by the Museum Collection of Berlin under the title *Rhythmen Der Malinke: Guinea*. While this recording was made in the city of Conakry in 1990, it has the flavor of a village celebration. There are a variety of rhythms that are played (fifteen different ones in total) without a break between pieces. Some of the rhythms are played for a short while and others are repeated later in the performance. This was to be the last

²⁰ Since the 1990s, “Billy” Nankouma, Diarra and Ibro Konate have all settled in northern Germany. Although they were essentially raised in Conakry, each son has a close tie to their father's village in Sangbarella. All three sons also tour internationally giving both workshops and concerts throughout Europe, Asia and, more recently, North America. They are often featured on Famoudou's CDs.

²¹ The French word “*stage*” is used by Keïta, Konaté and their students to refer to the drum workshops or drum camps that are held throughout Conakry each winter. I find that this word, which is more literally translated as a training course or training period, better describes what actually occurs in these drum camps.

²² Many of the drum students that I interviewed emphasized this difference between Keïta and Konaté's teaching style.

such “live” recording of a celebration that Konaté would make. Included in the recording is a booklet by Beer which explains the rhythms and provides notation for several of them. His next recording did not come until five years later (but released in 1997) when Thomas Ott, a professor of pedagogy at the *Hochschule der Künste Berlin*, convinced Konaté to do an educational book and CD. In the process of making this educational CD, Konaté was not only introduced to a strict format but also required to record each rhythm and song using a consistent musical form which placed the singing of the song and the solo phrases in a fixed order. It was this format that became the template for all of Konaté’s subsequent recordings.

Konaté’s next two recordings were made in Conakry in 1998 and 2000 respectively on the French label, Buda Music. In the 1998 recording (which was divided into two discs with Volume 1 released in 1998 and Volume 2 released in 2003), *Famoudou Konaté Maître-Djembé & l’ Ensemble Hamana Dan Ba Guinée: Percussions et Chants Malinké Volumes 1 and 2* (part of the *Musique du Monde* series), the producer was Nasser Saïdani and the engineer was Etienne Dreuilhe, both staff members at Buda Music. Conversely, for the 2000 recording, Konaté went back to the recording engineer responsible for his collaboration with Ott in 1997, Thomas Goldhahn. The production was overseen by his German partner, Uschi Dittmar. Unlike the 1998 recording for which the first disc was released in the same year, it took until 2003 for the second recording, *Famoudou Konaté Maître-Djembé: Hamana Föli Kan*, to be released. The next C.D.’s, *Famoudou Konaté Hamana Mandenkönö* (recorded in 2000 and 2004: released in 2004) and *Hamana Namun* (released in 2008) were recorded in Conakry, Guinea with Dittmar as the producer and Goldhahn as the engineer.

For both Keïta and Konaté, the focus of their initial work in Europe was teaching and not performance. In both cases the move to a European market was motivated by poor financial prospects in Guinea.²³ Furthermore, the initial work was for these two *djembé* masters to introduce their music to a European audience without the visual spectacle of the National Ballet companies which they initially led. The positive reception of the *djembé* in Europe depended upon the formation of smaller percussion ensembles formed by both Konaté and Keïta on their initial tours of Europe. Thus the focus of performance shifted from dance to music and from active audience participation to a European classical concert scene.

Keïta and Konaté: caught between two worlds

While Touré's *programme d'émancipation sociale* was instrumental in creating new opportunities for *horon* (nobility) to pursue careers as professional musicians, it could not erase centuries of Malinké cultural beliefs and practices. Both Keïta and Konaté find themselves in a precarious social position when they return to Conakry to run their international drum camps. The most obvious reason for this awkwardness lays in the fact that their families and neighbors expect these international *djembéfolas* to share all of the wealth they have accumulated as a result of their travels. While some international artists would just refuse to meet the demands of these people back home, Keïta and Konaté have no choice but to honor them. This is the case because, according to Malinké traditional culture, Keïta and Konaté, by virtue of their family name, are both *horon*, or nobility. At the same time, like the class of artisans which the *jeli* occupy, they make their living as

²³ With as many as 50% of the residents in Conakry working for the public sector in the early 1980s (due to Touré's promise that every high school and university graduate would have a job upon graduation), dramatic wage decreases were needed to fulfill payroll obligations (Arulpragasam and Sahn 1997: 121). These decreases included all those employed with the national ballets as well as the military ballet.

musicians. As a result, Keïta and Konaté live between two conflicting social classes. The *horon* who are often called the freeborn, are never supposed to lower themselves to the level of the *jeli* by becoming musicians. As a consequence, the *jeli*, who can never become a *horon*, rightly expects the financial support or patronage of any *horon* he entertains and advises. It is considered shameful for a *horon* not to pay a *jeli* who has just rendered his or her services by either singing the *horon*'s praises or providing him advice.

Keïta and Konaté have different ways of meeting their obligations as members of the *horon* class. Keïta fulfills his duty as a *horon* by lending his financial support to local and national ballet troupes and/or percussion ensembles in Conakry. During the drum camps there is a performance every evening at his compound. Keïta makes a point of spraying the performing group with crisp 10,000FG bills during the performance.²⁴ In this way he makes a show of his wealth and generosity as a *horon*. In addition to these more subtle performances of his class, Keïta also sponsors events where young musicians and dancers can perform. In 2008 he sponsored an international drum and dance competition in Conakry called *Festival d'Echange Culturel Nord/Sud*. Konaté, on the other hand, bumps up with the conflicting realities of his position in more subtle ways. For instance, it is quite common for one of Konaté's drum classes to be interrupted by a *jeli* who just walks through the gate of Konaté's compound and approaches him singing his praises. Rather than reprimanding the *jeli* for interrupting his class, Konaté stops teaching and gives his full attention to the *jeli*. At the conclusion of the *jeli*'s praise song, Konaté gives the *jeli* money and resumes teaching the class. Within the Malinké cultural

²⁴ Spraying of money is what is done when professional musicians perform. The money is either stuck to their body or thrown around them as they play. Musicians and dancers are typically sprayed when an audience member is happy with their performance. Most people in the audience can only spray 100, 500, or 1000FG bills during a performance. Keïta's use of copious amounts of larger, newer, bills emphasizes his place in the class structure.

context it would be considered very rude to interrupt a *jeli* or send him/her away empty handed.

While some ex-patriots such as Manthia Diawara consider the continuation of these ancient cultural practices as running counter to the progressive modernization of West Africa, these same practices have also been part of what has sustained Guineans through the difficulties and uncertainties of daily life (Diawara 1998 [2000]: 113-119). As musicians, neither Konaté nor Keïta receive their patronage from fellow Guineans. When they are home in Conakry, they are the patrons. The money that Keïta and Konaté receive comes almost exclusively from their Western students and audiences. Whether by conscious choice or not, this set-up makes it possible for both men to be professional musicians without violating any cultural taboos. For the younger generation of *horon* professional musicians still living in Conakry these class divisions have little impact on their daily life. The only time these traditional class divisions become problematic or conflicted is when young men first announce their choice of profession to their families. If they are successful at earning a living, most young people are forgiven by their families and communities for violating this cultural taboo.

The *djembé* as a global phenomenon

The rise of Guinea's *djembé* music into a global phenomenon is not a matter of size but of scope. There are only a few dozen players at any one site, but there are classes and workshops of *djembé* players taking place on every continent (most recently including Asia and the Middle East). It would appear on the surface that the term 'internationalization' might be less problematic than globalization in dealing with a multi-sited study such as this. However, the term "international" refers directly to exchanges

between nations. While the initial travel of Guinea's *djembe* music occurred at the level of national representation, its continued proliferation continues to be dependant upon a network of individuals working between localities not necessarily defined by national identity.

The current travel of Guinea's *djembe* music operates, for the most part, at an unofficial level, outside the purview of national and international corporate and political interests. First of all the recordings have been produced in Guinea using local musicians, and second, the distribution of these recordings takes place through an informal network of drum teachers and drum stores worldwide. In order to understand these *djembe* networks which function outside of the realm of commercial music production, I am drawing on Arjun Appadurai's ideas of "grassroots globalization" (Appadurai 2001: 1-3). Appadurai describes this as,

A series of social forms has emerged to . . . create forms of knowledge transfer and social mobilization that proceed independently of the actions of corporate capital and the nation-state system. These social forms rely on strategies, visions, and horizons for globalization on behalf of the poor that can be characterized as 'grassroots globalization . . . or globalization from below. (Appadurai 2001:3)

While the aim of grassroots organizations surrounding Guinean *djembe* artists mainly exist to facilitate the brokering of workshops, concerts and professional training of drummers, many have also begun to do the work of aid agencies. For example, the *Benkadi Project* initiated and operated by Famoudou Konaté's North American manager, Helen Bond, has raised money to build a new school and three new wells in Konaté's village. Similarly, organizations such as *Magbana* from New York and *Like Water Drum Works* from Michigan have managed to support whole communities of musicians, drum builders, and other support workers by focusing their production of instruments within

Guinea and by running yearly *djembé* camps in Guinea for American students. Essentially, the grassroots globalization that I am looking at amounts to a patronage system that operates not on a local scale but on a global one. Unlike the system of patronage found in the youth organizations within Mali, where youth working in urban spaces (some working abroad) return to their village to finance and perform a yearly festival of mask dances and other entertainment (Arnoldi 1995: 1-2), Guinea has no system of patronage for *djembé* music outside the limited government funding of the two national ballet companies. In order to create the capital needed to support professional artists dedicated to the performance and teaching of this music, a “grass roots community” needed to form. But, unlike grassroots communities of Appadurai's study, consisting largely of NGOs, this global *djembé* community cannot be defined solely on the basis of providing aid to a developing nation.

The Politics of Representation: “tradition” as commodity

I am examining the current transmission of Guinea's *djembé* music as a movement partly motivated by disillusionment in the ideology of unity imposed by the nation-state. As Diawara writes,

In reality, some of the rituals died out at the beginning of the twentieth century, and the memory of them survives only through oral traditions. But they are being reconstituted everywhere in Guinea today, as in other parts of Africa, by tribal minorities in search of their ethnic identity . . . In fact, ethnicity is in vogue today in Africa, and everyone from the intellectual to the businessman is claiming it against the unity proposed by the nation-state. Some African intellectuals see the new democratic wind blowing in Africa as bringing hope for the future: recognition of ethnic difference within the nation-state. (Diawara 1998: 183)

The current music taught by Keïta and Konaté, both within Guinea and throughout the world, is defined by them as the most traditional and considered to be of a higher

aesthetic value than the “invented” music of the Ballet (Keïta and Billmeier 1999; Konaté and Ott 1997; Interviews: Keita 2007; Daouda Kourouma 2008; Sékou Konaté 2008).

The combination of their published books of history and rhythms along with the rhetoric central to their teaching in workshops, throughout Europe, America and parts of Asia, has resulted in a community of students who believe that Keïta and Konaté’s versions of Guinean *djembé* music are the most authentic and traditional and thus superior to anything found in either the ballet or in the *djembé* traditions of other regions of West Africa. Part of the work of this dissertation is an analysis of the formation of this aesthetic community, its impact on this music within and outside of Guinea, and the tools used to ensure its continuation.

Another equally important motivation for the current promotion of “traditional” Malinké *djembé* music is financial. After development agencies withdrew their financial support from African states within the international “structural adjustment” policies of the 1980s, many African nations looked toward “traditional culture” as an important source of national income (Ebron 2002: 22). Anthropologist Paula Ebron explains that:

On one level of analysis ‘culture’ is that set of goods and practices now being fashioned into a commodity for international consumers . . . For those without abundant natural resources to sell on the world market, selling traditional culture has been one of the most available avenues for generating national revenue. (ibid.: 23).²⁵

By the 1980s the state acquired most of the profits generated by Guinea's internationally touring ballets, leaving the musicians and dancers with a continually dwindling paycheck.

In the mid-1980s, Guinean *djembéfolas* responded to the trend of cultural

²⁵ Through his many state-sponsored national performance troupes, Sékou Touré was ahead of his time when it came to using Guinea’s cultural riches as a form of national income. For more on ethno-tourism and the commodification of culture see (Cohen 1984; Schechner 1088; Hooks 1992; May 1996; Taylor 1998; Nash 2000; Jackson 1999; and Bruner 2001). In chapter three I will be focusing on ethno-tourism and the commodification of culture as it is taking place within Guinea.

commodification through their own development of “traditional culture” marketed in opposition to the nationalist productions of the ballet. This move was the direct result of the inadequate pay provided by the state for their participation in the national ballet companies.

As independent professional musicians functioning outside of the context of the ballet, *djembéfolas* have had to learn anew how to adapt to their audience. In their capacity as cultural representatives today’s *djembéfolas* function in a similar capacity to the *jelis*. As former village drummers, Konaté and Keïta traditionally took their cues from the *jelis* who led the festivities. Now they find themselves situated within an expanding range of possible performance and teaching venues. In order to be able to make a living, *djembéfolas* must now negotiate their representation with their audience. In contrast to the nationalist production of the ballet, today’s production and reception of the *djembé* as a cultural representation of Guinea takes place as a negotiation between the *djembéfolas* and the specific audience unique to each performance venue.

Venues for cultural representation and promotion of Guinea’s *djembé* exist both within and outside of academic institutions. In the course of this case study, I will be looking at the ways in which western scholars and other professional musicians mediate and negotiate the cultural representation between themselves and Guinea’s *djembé* masters. In the process I will be invoking the term “culture broker,” described by Richard Kurin in the following way,

Culture brokers study, understand, and represent someone’s culture (even sometimes their own) to nonspecialized others through various means and media. ‘Brokering’ also captures the idea that these representations are to some degree negotiated, dialogical, and driven by a variety of interests on behalf of the involved parties (Kurin 1997: 19).

I will be using this term as a means to examine the various ways in which individuals from within Guinea's ministry of culture, to western musicians and scholars seeking to learn from and promote particular drummers, to the Guinean drummers themselves, all act as agents in this cultural exchange. The terms 'tradition' and 'authenticity' become multivalent as this cultural product is negotiated among all interested parties.

Representation is further complicated by the collaboration of consumers and African artists as both perform the role of culture broker. In this sense amateur percussionists (the main consumers of this music) who study with Guinea's *djembé* masters take on the role of ethnomusicologists representing and preserving what has become urban, neo-traditional, *djembé* music. In reality what is at stake here amounts to the shifting planes in cultural authority. In her own study of collaborations between Yorùbá drummers and German artists and scholars, Debra L. Klein notes that while these collaborations “*reproduced* colonial dynamics, they also *produced* an internationally acclaimed and sustainable [Yorùbá] arts movement” (Klein 2007: 81). Klein attempts to “read power into this complicated story of attraction and mutual desire among people of different cultures” when they enter into collaborative relationships revolving around cultural production and preservation (Klein 2007: 60). It is within the tension between these points of preservation and production that all collaborative musical efforts between the Western culture brokers and Guinean *djembéfolas* exist in the process of transmission. It is for this reason that I have chosen to deal with transmission as a space and a process that reconfigures what is being represented through a negotiation with the receiving population.

Transmission: “Global Imagination” and the new “Location of Culture.”

Music Modernity and the Global Imagination advances the notion that the new global reality marks a critical moment in the history of the world's cultures that engages Westerners and non-Westerners in complex, multiply mirrored ways . . . The making of modern subjectivities in Africa and the West was not determined by mutually opposite positions: of conqueror and conquered, of master and servant. Rather it was determined by an articulation of interests, languages, styles, and images. It is this articulation that I call the global imagination. (Erlmann 1999: 3)

Global imagination as described by Erlmann is central to my approach to cross-cultural musical transmission. Similar to Erlmann, my focus is on music as a form of global-cultural exchange rather than as a commodity dominated by the interests of Western producers and record companies (Erlmann 1999: 6). Confining his inquiry to England, the United States and South Africa, Erlmann has observed that “connections developed among these three countries helped to undermine [the] unilateral, one-way relationships of imperialist domination or post-colonial hegemony” (Erlmann 1999: 9). Through an analysis of various musical presentations given by South Africans in England and the United States (from the late 1800s until the mid-1990s) Erlmann is seeking to uncover:

the extent to which the constitutive categories of the global imagination of the past 100 years – categories that revolve around differences of race, class, and gender – derive from an epistemological symbiosis between African and Western modernities. (Erlmann 1999:4)

Erlmann describes this epistemological symbiosis as it occurred both within and outside of the African diaspora. The collaborations he examined covered everything from the production of tours by the Zulu Choir in the 1890s to musical collaborations between Lady Blacksmith Mambazo and Paul Simon, to dance collaborations between Lady Blacksmith Mambazo and Michael Jackson. The main difference between Erlmann's

study and this one is that the collaboration is taking place within the context of a staged performance or commercial recording. Transmission of *djembé* music takes place in the context of workshops (including pedagogical tools such as videos and recordings) taught by Guinean *djembéfolas* both within Guinea and around the world. It is within this space of transmission that cross-cultural negotiations of a globally-imagined culture take place.

This dissertation adds another perspective to Erlmann and Appadurai's ideas of a global imaginary by theorizing that the neo-traditional *djembé* music coming out of Guinea is a globally negotiated creation of an imagined local culture. Appadurai theorizes that,

The image, the imagined, the imaginary – these are all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: the imagination as social practice . . . the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labor and culturally organized practice), a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility . . . The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order (Appadurai 1996: 31).²⁶

It is my goal to extend Appadurai's use of "imaginary" as a form of negotiation between sites of agency, and Erlmann's theory of global imagination into a different realm of cross-cultural musical transmission. In order to do this I am looking at the drumming workshop (the main sites of transmission) as an intercultural space of transmission. Within this space a new cultural product is continually being created through a negotiation between African musicians and their Western students.

This inter-cultural space of transmission provides an interesting contrast to Homi Bhabha's "interstitial space." This term is used by Bhabha to frame the cultural space

²⁶ In his construction of this definition of the imaginary, Appadurai brings together three older ideas of images: mechanically produced (Frankfurt School), imagined community (Anderson), and the French idea of *imaginaire*.

occupied by borderline (minority) cultures in the West (Bhabha 1994). Bhabha explains that:

The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as a social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, reconfiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The past-present becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living. (Bhabha 1994: 7)

Similar to the subjects located within Bhabha's theoretical framework, Guinean *djembéfolas* living abroad in Europe and the United States exist in an "interstitial space" between their own culture and the Western culture where they earn their living. In addition, they reconfigure their own pasts to reflect a village life which is more culturally cohesive and free of Western influences than is the case in present-day Guinea. However, in contrast to the cultural creations taking place within minority communities Bhabha is framing, the "traditional" music and history of the *djembé* is being created as a collaborative effort between Guinean *djembéfolas* and their Western students. I believe that this invented tradition is grounded in what Svetlana Boym calls "creative nostalgia."

Creative nostalgia reveals the fantasies of the age, and it is in those fantasies that the future is born. One is nostalgic not for the past the way that it was, but for the past the way it could have been. It is this past perfect that one strives to realize in the future. (Boym 2001: 351)

For their part, Guinean *djembéfolas* are acting as *jelis* (griots) for whom history is not a set of verifiable facts (as is believed in Western epistemologies) but a creative contextualization of the present and the future. Their Western students, on the other hand, take the stories and rhythms taught by *djembéfolas* as a fulfillment of their own desire for (and belief in) a culture more pure and "primitive" than their own. The African culture

imagined by both the students and *djembéfolas* is the same even though it serves different social and political ends.

While the subjects referred to in Bhabha's work live essentially in a state of exile either in their own homeland under colonial rule, or as minorities living in the West, both Keïta and Konaté live between two home bases, one in Guinea and the other in the United States for Keïta, and in Germany for Konaté. Neither *djembéfolas* resides in Guinea for more than a couple of months of the year. In addition, while they are in Guinea they both enjoy comforts of living which are denied most of their fellow countrymen. Due to the fact that Keïta and Konaté spend the majority of their year traveling between locations around the world, their example serves to expand the limits of Appadurai's global theory of ethnoscape. Appadurai explains:

By ethnoscape, I mean the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and individuals constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree. (Appadurai 1996: 33)

The cultural ethnoscape created by these *djembéfolas* and their students worldwide is not grounded in a shared race or ethnicity but a cultural/musical practice that they have created as a global community. In some senses the Guinean culture currently experienced by both of these men is very similar to that experienced by the students who attend yearly drum camps at their compounds. When Keïta, Konaté, and their students leave Guinea after the drum-camp season, much of the cultural activity so prevalent at that time comes to a grinding halt. Together, *djembéfolas* and their students have created a portable culture which, while it is based upon the practices of a particular ethnic group from a particular geographical place, does not need that place or ethnic group to flourish. Given

current economic realities, the urban musicians and dancers of Guinea would not continue to thrive without the economic and artistic influences from outside Guinea.

Residing within the intercultural space of transmission are the tools of transmission (recording, notation) and the processes by which their uses are negotiated. The main tools of transmission come primarily from within the Western capitalist paradigm as Guinea's *djembe* music moves from the ephemeral realm of ritual practice to the West as a consumable object. While it would seem on the surface that this music has been reshaped to fit the medium - the western media of recording, notation, and music pedagogy - I argue that within the intercultural space of transmission these tools are used in an ongoing process of cultural negotiation. As Guinean *djembéfolas* become more familiar with Western tools of musical transmission, they manipulate them to represent their ideas of themselves and their music with greater accuracy. Concurrently, as Western students of the *djembé* gain a deeper understanding of this music, they use the tools of notation and recording in new and innovative ways that reflect this new understanding.²⁷ Thus, I am arguing that in the process of transmission, representation is reconfigured as a negotiated, imagined, reality. Through this collaborative creation and reproduction of

²⁷ In this sense I am expanding upon Jeff Todd Titan's theory that states, "Bi-musicality can induce moments of what I call *subject shift*, when one acquires knowledge by figuratively stepping outside of oneself to view the world with oneself in it, thereby becoming both subject and object simultaneously" (Titan 1995: 288). As many ethnomusicologists do, Titan focuses his discussions of bi-musicality on the Western musicians who learn the music of another culture. What I am pointing out here is that the non-Western musicians who teach them also become bi-musical in the process. As a result of their years of experience teaching *djembe* to Western students and their extended stays in Europe and the United States, Keïta and Konaté have, to different degrees, experienced what Titan calls *subject shift*. This becomes evident when I compare their teaching styles with *djembefolas* who have less experience teaching Westerners or those who have never left Guinea.

Guinea's *djembe* culture a new musical genre has been created, one which Eric Charry has labeled "concert *djembe* music."²⁸

Within the process of transmission the "epistemological symbiosis" between Guinean *djembe*folas and their Western students is reinforced in their mutual creation of difference. Musical exchanges between Guinea's *djembe* masters and their Western students are based upon a model of collaboration similar to the one described by Erlmann. In his examination of tours the *African Choir* and the *Zulu Choir* made in to England and America in the 1890s, Erlmann argues that what took place in the context of this global relationship was a:

co-authoring of global identities at home and on the periphery. In other words, the African faith in Western fictions of modernity and progress was worked out through Western assumptions about Africans as they were, in turn, enabled by African stagings of something taken for an African past. (Erlmann 1999: 10)

In the process of transmission, the representation of African culture takes place not as an imposition of Western modernist epistemologies on African artists, but as a collaboration among these Africans and their Western producers and audiences. From Erlmann's perspective the first staged musical encounters were "as much about the invention of Europe as [they were] about the African gnosis of Europe" (Erlmann 1999: 8).²⁹ Through

²⁸ With this foreign interest a new genre of concert drumming has been created, an odd development from an African point of view, given the absence of *djembe* recordings within African markets" (Charry 2000: 193). I will be exploring these points in detail in Chapter 5: The Politics of Transmission: the *Djembe* in Germany.

²⁹ Christopher Miller's close reading of Ousmane Socé Diop's novel, *Mirages de Paris* (1937), provides a viewpoint which complements Erlmann's take on the Western production of Africa. Socé's book tells the story of the International Colonial Overseas Exposition of 1931 from the viewpoint of a West African living in Paris. According to Miller's analysis, "The International Colonial and Overseas Exposition, as it was officially called, can be considered as a form of *state-sponsored hallucination*. No other exposition, no other manifestation of any kind made colonialism more *real* or more *entertaining* for the French public than did the exposition at Vincennes in the summer of 1931. It represents for historians the apogee and apotheosis of French colonial mythmaking" (Miller 1998: 65). The main character in Socé's novel, Fara, dreams/imagines what the Songhay woman who was put on display at the exposition which has "placed physically within a French dream of Africa," might be thinking about - is she dreaming of herself back in

the ongoing (sometimes decades-long) collaborative relationships between Guinean *djembéfolas* and their Western student/culture brokers, both sides are gaining a new understanding of their own musical culture and practices as they are mirrored back and forth in the cross-cultural space of transmission.

Fields of Transmission

There are two distinct communities of patrons within the global *djembé* scene. One community is historically rooted within the African American diaspora and the other is an “aesthetic community” not bound by any racial or ethnic connection to the music (Erlmann 1998: 12-13). There is a complex interplay between the national manifestations of this music brought about through the creation of Guinea’s ballet troupes and the global results of this exposure that have resulted in the creation of two different genres whose historical development was largely divided between diasporic and non-diasporic appropriations of this music. Thus I am looking at two pathways where the *djembé* has entered the global scene. First, it was appropriated through the African American diaspora and second, through aesthetic communities or communities of interest in Europe and later in North America.

Mark Slobin’s exhaustive theoretical treatise entitled “Micro-musics of the West: a Comparative Approach” (1992), provides a means to map the movement of Guinea’s *djembé* into European and American cultural space. First of all, Slobin divides Western cultural space into three spheres: “supercultures” are defined as the constructs

Africa? (ibid.: 82). Miller concludes that, “Her dream is a subtle denial of the exposition’s method (its *voici*) and its purpose, because it emphasizes that the reality of Africa is there, not here. By considering the subjectivity of this woman, Socé has begun to undermine the one-sided organization of mirages at the exposition” (ibid.). While the woman in Socé’s novel is a conscious subject she is not the agent of her representation. This is what makes the exposition a French *hallucination* of Africa rather than a *global imagination* of Africa. In the context of my research African *djembéfolas* are active agents of their own representation even though that representation is altered in the process of cross-cultural transmission.

government and corporate power as well as some of the “less flagrant but more insidious strands of hegemony;” “subcultures” are examined as the ways in which individuals identify themselves in relation to ethnicity and their choices about engagement in particular cultural activities; “intercultures” are understood as networks which connect individuals and groups within specific cultural spaces (Slobin 1992: 15-19; 37-41; 42-49). Each of Slobin’s cultural types is divided into three domains. In order to visualize the possible interactions among these domains I have placed them within the table below.

Types of Culture	Domain One	Domain Two	Domain Three
Superculture	Music industry	The state and its institutional rules and venues.	More insidious strands of hegemony which define the everyday and circumscribe the expressive.
Subculture	Choice	Affinity	Belonging
Interculture	Industrial	Diasporic	Affinity

[Fig. 1.3: Mark Slobin's Cultural Types]

In terms of subculture, Slobin embraces Ruth Finnegan’s (1989) notion of “musical pathways” because musical paths are voluntary even though they are affected by constraints and opportunities that impact on an individual’s free choice (Slobin 1992: 23). The musical pathways of individuals and groups are thus a combination of supercultural, and intercultural influences but are in the end defined by personal and group choice. The two examples of this type of cultural slippage that come to mind are based within the global rap and hip hop scene. As a musical genre originating from within the African diaspora, hip hop has been embraced by diverse diasporic groups from the Asian Americans (Wong 2004: 117-138) to Turkish *gastarbieters* in Germany (Stokes 2003:

297-308). Using Slobin's model, these particular diasporic groups can be also understood to be part of an affinity group (hip hop) from outside their own culture based upon their shared experience of racism from the superculture under which they live. What I like about Slobin's model is that these structures make it possible to foreground the movement of individuals and the particularity of situations thereby avoiding "essentialism and reductionism" (Slobin 1992: 50).

The transmission of Guinea's *djembé* to the West has taken place not only through diasporic intercultural, but also through affinity intercultural. Yet, to theorize the involvement of Euro-Americans, Europeans, or African Americans with this music as a clear division between affinity and diasporic based upon racial terms is to misunderstand the impact that this instrument and music has had on individuals. What I am arguing here is that there is much slippage between diasporic and affinity intercultural groups and that individual choice, affinity and belonging, while affected by race, cannot be defined solely by race or ethnicity.

The way that I have chosen to negotiate the often intersecting pathways by which Guinea's *djembé* has entered the global musical scene is through the "three overlapping spheres of cultural activity" proposed by Slobin: "choice," "affinity," and "belonging." These spheres, as defined by Slobin, allow for interpretations of musical practice on both an individual and group basis, thereby avoiding arguments which make assumptions about individuals based solely upon their race, ethnicity and/or gender.³⁰ That being said,

³⁰ I will be engaging with Slobin's spheres extensively throughout this study as a means to explain the deeply personal choice people have made to be involved in this music. This choice, affinity or sense of belonging is not based upon race, ethnicity or gender at the present moment even though history suggests otherwise. There are currently African-American, all female, and Euro-American ballet groups and concert *djembe* groups alike. An individual's affiliation with either form of *djembe* music currently has as much to do with options available locally than any larger filiations he or she might have.

there are two distinct groups which have formed in reference to Guinea's *djembe* music. One group prefers the music of Guinea's past and current national ballets while the other is convinced that the neo-traditional music taught by Keita, Konate and other retired ballet drummers is the most traditional and authentic.

The *djembe* has touched a racially and ethnically diverse population of aficionados and players whose response and sense of commitment to this instrument varies from the weekend amateur to the devoted professional. Many non-African drummers have found their primary sense of belonging within Maninkan culture.³¹

For example, Joachim Uhl of Ulm, Germany is considered more African than German by both his German and his African friends (Interview 2007). Conversely, African American drummer, Ubaka Hill, is very clear that she does not consider her relationship to the *djembe* to be ethnically African but uniquely American (Interview 2004). The fact remains that the unique circumstances which took place in the 1960s in New York and Conakry are what initially brought the *djembe* to America. Furthermore, the collaboration between Guinean *djembefolas* and German culture-brokers gave birth to the concert *djembe* genre. However, when it comes to the division between the ballet and concert *djembe* genres neither can be defined solely by either European or diasporic participation in 2008. However, Mark Sunkett has noted that the aesthetic choice for a great number of African American percussion ensembles favors the inclusion of dance (Sunkett 1995: 173-174). As a result, the arrival of the concert *djembe* genre from Europe has received mixed reviews from among many of the African American *djembe* players I interviewed.

³¹ Monette Moreno Keita, Mamady Keita's wife, explained in an interview that although she was proficient in the Afro-Cuban drumming which was part of her own cultural heritage, she felt more at home with the *djembe* and fell in love with Maninkan culture as it exists in Guinea. Similarly, drummers such as Alan Tauber, Ryan Edwards, and Helen Bond have created life-long bonds with their Guinean friends and are considered by them to be family. (See also Debra L. Klein 2007: 58-81; and Paula Ebron 2002: 167-212.).

The African American diasporic interest in Guinea's *djembé* music is rooted in the national invention of the ballet. This African American link to Guinea's national ballet comes largely from a perception of this art-form as a symbol of resistance to colonial power (Wilson 1992: 15-18, esp. 17). While tours of *Les Ballets Africains de la République de Guinée* came to the United States in the late 1950s, it was not until Ladji Camara, lead drummer for the ballet, relocated to New York in the 1960s, that African Americans began to take a serious interest in learning to create their own performances using the framework of Guinea's national ballet. During the American civil rights movement, which coincided with the independence movement taking place within West Africa, the formation of the *Afrikan American Ballet* served to highlight the global (diasporic) racial struggle that was exploding at that time in history.

Since the late 1980s and early 1990s a new "aesthetic community" of students has formed from both within and outside the diaspora in support the "traditional" or "village" version of this music taught by ex-ballet drummers Keïta, Konaté and, to some extent, M'Bemba Bangoura. As mentioned earlier, these ex-ballet drummers often speak negatively of the national ballet as a non-tradition, "its just invented music; it is not based upon the real village tradition" (Interviews: Daouda Kourouma 2008; Sékou Konaté 2008; Famoudou Konaté 2008; Mamady Keïta 2007, 2008; M'Bemba Bangoura 2008). Ironically, the ballet made it possible for these musicians to learn traditional music outside their own ethnic groups and local regions of origin. For example, Bangoura, a Susu who lived his entire life in Conakry, learned all of the bass drum rhythms and orchestrations he knows from Malinké drummers in the ballet (Interview: Bangoura 2008). Likewise, Keïta learned most of the three-*dundun* arrangements he knows from

drummers in the ballet who originated from the Hamana region (Interview: Keïta 2007; Keïta's Guinea Workshop: 2008). The self awareness of these musicians to the fact that they are both insiders into the Malinké traditions and outsiders who understand how their culture is perceived in the Western world (through their extended tours with the ballet companies), has helped them to locate themselves somewhere globally among local, national and international representations of their culture. In one way, they have been complicit with the national project in promoting a recognizable Guinean culture based upon traditional music (even though this music is a fairly recent invention). In another way, they undermine this representation by claiming it inferior to the local traditions from which they have come.

As a Western consumer of this music and as an ethnographer, I am aware of a double perceptual move here where the artists promoting these local traditions in the West are selling this music based upon what they perceive Westerners want to hear. It is quite possible that their use of the word "tradition" is mediated through our Western notion of a fixed musical object rather than based upon the local African perception of tradition as a constantly changing music set upon a particular set of cultural practices (Arnoldi 1987). According to George Marcus, there is a change in the nature of "the kind of material sought from and offered by fieldwork subjects who think in terms of their connections beyond the local" (Marcus 1999: 100). One of the goals of this dissertation is to untangle the various layers of representation and perception of the local, national and the global manifestations of this music.

Even though the transmission of Guinea's *djembe* music has proceeded, for the most part, outside of official institutional settings, its transmission has been influenced by

the same institutional practices that initially formed the basis of the discipline of comparative musicology, now known as ethnomusicology.³² I chose to study this phenomenon in Germany, not only because of Germany's historical relevance in the development of the discipline of ethnomusicology, but also because of the German publications of notated music that have found their way into the American *djembé* drumming circles. These published books of rhythms have become somewhat of an *urtext* among American drummers. Where and how did these books gain their authority? What type of drumming scene existed in Germany to create the market for these books? How these traditional *djembé* texts came to be? I was also curious about the cultural exchange that ultimately created them. As essential tools in the transmission process, culturally based ideas about notation and music pedagogy shape the perception and understanding of *djembé* music as it is transmitted in the West.

Framework for the dissertation

This dissertation is not organized chronologically. I have chosen, instead, to work with the material thematically. In this way, each chapter provides a view of Keïta and Konaté from a different global, political, and historical perspective. The themes are based upon issues that arose either during interviews, or in the course of the drum camps and/or workshops.

In this chapter, "Globalization and the Politics of Guinea's *Djembé*," I have begun to establish the connection between Sékou Touré's revolutionary politics and the professionalization and subsequent globalization of Guinea's *djembé*. I have also

³² Similar to the jalis (the term used for *jelis* in the Gambia) studied by Ebron, the culture being sold by Guinean *djembefolas* "is often closely related to that codified and collected by colonial era scholars" [who] "cordoned African 'cultures' – as they imagined them – away from history. Cultures were portrayed as closed, completed traditions, without the dynamism attributed to European history" (Ebron 22, 21).

introduced Keïta and Konaté as the central figures in my study. Finally, I have set-up the theoretical frameworks for “representation” and “transmission” which are central to my analysis of the many political, cultural, and musical elements at play throughout the dissertation.

In chapter two, “The Politics of Representation: Creation and Tradition and the Professional *Djembéfolas*,” I argue that Keïta and Konaté establish their authority as *djembéfolas* through the construction of a false dichotomy between the “creation” of the ballet and the “tradition” of the village-based music they teach. In the context of my analysis of this juxtaposition between “tradition” and “creation,” I provide a more detailed account of the role the *djembé* played in village life. In addition, I trace the history of the formation of *Les Ballets Africains* from its origins in Paris to its eventual adoption as Guinea's national ballet (*Les Ballets Africains de la République de Guinée*). I look at the role of the *djembé* in the ballet from a musical perspective arguing, that many of the techniques developed or “created” in the ballet are also present in Keïta and Konaté’s “traditional” *djembé* arrangements. While this approach spreads the history of the *djembé* and of *Les Ballets Africains* and *Ballet D’Joliba* over several chapters, it also serves to highlight Keïta and Konaté’s changing relationship with these Guinean national institutions. Similarly, I introduce the first three generations of professional *djembéfolas* in the context of the politics of representation in chapter two and then later discuss them in terms of their navigation of the global marketplace in chapter three.

In chapter three, “Tradition and Transmission: Local Realities and the Global Marketplace,” I analyze the global commodification of Guinea's *djembé* music which accelerated after Touré’s death in 1984. I look at the creative ways in which local

Guinean artists have negotiated their roles both within and in spite of Touré's initial social leveling policies. With Touré's death has come an increased freedom to reclaim specific ethnic beliefs, values, and artistic expressions. Ironically, these artistic expressions are being increasingly shaped by a global marketplace which has, for most, become the only source for arts patronage. In this chapter I theorize that changes in *djembé* music, both within Guinea and internationally, are the result of complex negotiations between Guinean artists and international consumers within the ideological space of the "traditional marketplace." This "traditional marketplace" exists in the form of: drum camps, music festivals, and village tours which all took place within Guinea in 2007 and 2008.

Chapter four, "The Politics of Transmission: the *djembé* in Germany," focuses on the negotiations which take place between Keïta and Konaté and their German culture brokers within the inter-cultural space of transmission. Within this chapter I use detailed analyses of notated and recorded versions of Keïta and Konaté's music paired with interviews and participation in classes and workshops, as means to understand the complex relationships that have developed between these Guinean drummers and their German culture brokers in the process of producing these products. In the process I scrutinize the specific partnership between each German culture broker and Guinean *djembéfolas* to find the ways in which individual perceptions and constructions of Africa and African music permeate and dictate not only the grounds for negotiation, but also the resulting musical product.

Chapter Five: "The Politics of Identity: African Americans and Guinea's *Djembé*" is framed historically. Rather than foregrounding my informants, I begin by emphasizing

the enormous impact *Les Ballets Africains* had on the drum and dance scene in New York in the 1960s. I have chosen to frame the initial *Les Ballets Africains de Keïta Fodéba* (1959) and *Les Ballets Africains de la République de Guinée* (1960 onward) appearances in New York within the identity politics of Black Nationalist Movements in the United States. I place the *djembé's* first introduction through Ladj Camara and *Les Ballets Africains* within the context of Black Nationalism, focusing on the convergence of this American movement with Guinea's nationalist revolution. From there I flash to the present where Konaté and Keïta find themselves struggling to understand why so few African Americans attend their classes. To unravel some of the complexity behind their dilemma, I place Konaté and Keïta's arrival in the U.S. within the context of the history of African drum and dance in the U.S. and its culmination with *Les Ballets Africains* and the *djembé*. Keïta and Konaté's current reception by individuals within the African American community is dependent upon each drummer's historical and ideological connection to this mid-1960s - early 1970s movement and the legacy of African American *djembéfolas* and African drum and dance ensembles that exist as a result. The perspectives given by my informants provide an enlightening set of perspectives on the present situation, as some of them find themselves at odds with the remnants of an earlier *djembé* culture in New York.

In Chapter Six: "The Politics of Cultural Authenticity and the Urbanization of Tradition," I provide a snapshot of Guinea's *djembé* today as it becomes a more obvious part of popular culture not only within Guinea but around the world. I use the popular rhythm, *Dununbé*, as an example of the ongoing cross-cultural negotiations which continue to bring the *djembé* into focus in many locations around the world while at the

same time producing a vibrant means of urban celebration within Guinea's larger cities. I also bring into relief the *djembé* communities which have made the globalization of Guinea's drum possible through their loyal patronage of Keïta and Konaté.

Due to the fact that the global demand for *djembé* music coming from Upper Guinea far outweighs that of all other West African counties where this music is played, this dissertation provides an important case study of the successful creation of a globally consumed yet locally created cultural product. I address not only changes that occur when this music is played and recorded in the West, but also changes occurring within Guinea, as a direct result of the globalization of *djembé* music. Through participation in drum camps run by internationally known *djembé* players, observation of rural and urban festivals, and visits to drum building workshops, in and around Conakry, I have been able to witness the financial, social, and environmental impact of the globalization of *djembé* music.

Chapter Two

The Politics of Representation: Creation, Tradition and the Professional *Djembéfolas*

The performance of tradition in West African cultures is a consistently creative process (Barber 1987; Erlmann 1991; Arnoldi 1995; Diawara 1998; Strother 1998; Charry 2000, 2005). From a West African perspective tradition and modernity are not mutually exclusive domains, as was made clear by Yoruban *jùjú* musicians who stated, “our tradition is a very modern tradition” (C. Waterman 1991). For the creator of *Les Ballets Africains*, Keïta Fodéba, the traditions that make up the folklore of a country are neither pure nor static:

In so far as folklore is made up of a country’s traditions, poems, songs, dances, and popular legends, it can only be the reflection of the life of that country. And if this life develops, there is no reason why folklore, which is its living expression, should not develop too. That is the reason why the folklore of present-day Africa is as authentic as that of ancient Africa, both of them being the real expression of the life of our country at two different periods in its history . . . Indeed it would be absurd to confine our folklore only to our own country’s past, for no folklore in the world is entirely pure and free of all mixture. (Fodéba 1958: 173).

Today’s Guinean *djembéfolas*, who have retired from the National Ballet, speak of the “creation” of the ballet as if it were the polar opposite of their present creation of “traditional” concert *djembé* and *dunun* music. Furthermore, they feel the need to emphasize this polarity with their students as well as the researchers who interview them. There are two immediately identifiable factors underlying this constructed polarity: first, this initial generation of professional *djembéfolas* needs to establish themselves as

professional musicians within a Malinké caste structure where the only hereditary musicians are the *jelis* (sometimes called griots); second, they need to establish a system of patronage which can sustain them as professional artists.

The purpose of this chapter is to unravel the politics behind this polarity. Central to these politics are: the retired *djembéfolas* who were initially conscripted into national service as musicians for the ballet; Guinea's first president Sékou Touré; the first director responsible for the creation of the ballet, Fodéba; and the European audiences that created new occasions for performance.

For *djembéfolas* retired from the national ballet the term "tradition" has come to stand for what they consider to be indigenous Malinké music and culture. Conversely, the word "creation" has come to stand for anything which they perceive as modern in the sense that it was created for a European audience. Mamady Keïta explains,

The first thing is for you to recognize that in today's world there are really two professors: there are the young teachers that teach the ballet music that they learned, that truly isn't traditional; and [then] there are the teachers that are the true knowledge holders of the tradition, those that truly know the tradition . . . The ballet takes traditional rhythms and modifies them. And in addition the ballets will create rhythms, and create breaks that don't have names, that have no history.

All traditional rhythms are connected to a [specific] situation. The first thing that comes about is the situation, the second things are the songs for that situation, the third thing is the dance for that situation, and then the rhythm for that situation. In general, the women created most of the rhythms. . . In general, rhythms are usually composed of two accompaniment parts, or three accompaniment parts if there are more *djembés* in the village, there is always one *sangban*, one *kenkeni*, and a *dununba*, or sometimes just the *sangban*, or just the *sangban* and the *kenkeni*, or just the *sangban* and the *dununba* [the students respond to this exhaustive list by laughing]. But you can never play the *djembe* without the *sangban*! That is tradition.

In the tradition we never turn the *dunun* upright and have one person playing five *dununs*. That never happens traditionally. For tradition that [is

considered] noise, but for a show that is very spectacular. That is one difference between ballet music and traditional music. Today the young people, they teach the ballet, the performance, the spectacular, but what is really serious is that in teaching the ballet music, they say that it is tradition. That is the serious part about it, because the students who are going to learn, these students are completely confused. When these students then come to meet a master of the traditional music, they are going to see that they are in a state of confusion. I continue to teach ballet style, and when I teach ballet I simply state and clarify that what I am teaching is a ballet arrangement. And I teach many of my own creations, [Monette adds: “you guys are all learning his pyramid”] but I clearly state, “This is my creation.” I have never said that my creation is tradition. I have never said that a ballet rhythm is a traditional rhythm, because I know the difference between the two. Today’s students really like the spectacular [*le spectacle*: the show] (here Mamady mimics the rolls and slaps of the *djembé* players as they show-off in the ballet) it’s good. As a show it is good. All of that is fine that they like the spectacular but we need to be careful that in modernizing all of these rhythms we don’t lose the tradition. (Class Interview in Ramona CA: April 18, 2007)

Djembéfolas such as Keïta have no problem with the ballet as a source for an appreciation of African artistry, but there is concern that the music, dance and rituals which originated in the village – what they associate with authentic traditions of the Malinké culture – will be lost in the process. According to Sekou Konaté who played in the National Army Ballet from 1979 until 1984,

The ballet was a good thing. Because in the ballet you meet so many people. Through the ballet I met so many people in so many different countries. I got the opportunity to see more countries and more people. It gave me the opportunity to develop good relationships with people from many different places. But the ballet is not good for the tradition. If you have been in the ballet for too long you forget the tradition. If you are attached to the ballet you will forget the tradition. So, you have to always go back to the tradition, even if you are inside the ballet you have to go back to the tradition. (Interview in Conakry: February 29, 2008)

While the ballet is useful as a modern presentation designed for Western consumption, passing on traditional history and rhythms is important for those Guineans of the Malinké ethnic group. In addition, Keïta wants to make sure that the rhythms in the ballet do not

become confused with those originating from inside his own cultural traditions (Keïta and Billmeier 1999: 24). At this point in their careers drummers such as Keïta and Konaté perceive themselves more as carriers of their cultural tradition and representatives of their ethnic group than as representatives of their country.

As self-appointed carriers of cultural tradition, this first generation of professional *djembéfolas* is fulfilling a role similar to the official Malinké caste of professional musicians, the *jelis*. However, unlike the *jeli*, the professional *djembéfola* does not have a defined place in the Malinké cultural infrastructure - something the hereditary musician has always possessed. As a result, the professional *djembéfola* must not only create a role for himself in Malinké society, but also find a means to pass on his knowledge as a professional drummer in an urban setting. If we are to accept, as folklorist Henry Glassie challenges us to, that “tradition is the creation of the future out of the past; a continuous process situated in the nothingness of the present, linking the vanished with the unknown,” then tradition would be the most useful tool for this first generation of professional *djembéfolas* to carve out their place in both Malinké society and on the international stage (Glassie 2003: 176).

All of these drummers began their careers in the village. But after spending a substantial amount of time (for Mamady Keita, most of his adult life) as professional performing artists in the ballet, the option of going back to a truly traditional life as a farmer and village *djembéfola* was simply not possible. Neither was it possible to go back to what must have been a simpler way of playing *djembé* in the eight to ten village festivals held annually. It is possible that these drummers needed to re-create a village

history embellished with their new-found artistic goals and professional musical abilities.

Glassie outlines his thoughts on the creation of history,

History is not the past; it is an artful assembly of materials from the past, designed for usefulness in the future. In this way history verges upon that idea of tradition in which it is identified with the resource out of which people create. (Glassie 2003: 176)

In a process similar to the creation of a national performance art in the ballet, this first generation of professional *djembéfolas* is creating a new musical genre out of the combined materials of village ritual and ballet virtuosity. While Mamady Keïta, Famoudou Konaté, Sekou Konaté, Daouda Kourouma, and Fadouba Olaré all juxtapose their defined tradition against the creation of the national ballet, the two actually have much in common.

By “tradition” these *djembéfolas* are actually referring to their own nostalgia based upon a creative use of elements from their collective past, which at times borders on pastiche. Glassie warns that while tradition and history may carry similar features they are not the same.

History and tradition are comparable in dynamic; they exclude more than they include and so remain open to endless revision. They are functionally congruent in their incorporation of the useable past. But the terms cannot be reduced, one to the other. (Glassie 2003: 176)

I would argue that history and tradition are most obviously “functionally congruent” in West African culture in the person, role, and caste of the griot (called *jeliya* in Malinké). The *jelis*’ continuous reconstruction of the epic of the Mande empire’s greatest warrior and hero, Sunjata Keïta, serves as evidence of the mixture of stability and flexibility in the construction of history among the Malinké. By creating a new musical tradition and using it to promote or preserve a constructed history of village musical and ritual

practices from the past, today's *djembéfolas* are simply following in the footsteps of the *jelis*. While it could be argued that their traditional product is no less a creation than the national ballets; tradition is invoked by these drummers as a tool to claim greater authenticity for their ethnic music as opposed to the ballet which is supposed to stand for the culture of a modern Guinean nation.

I believe that the continuing struggle between national and ethnic identity which is so evident in these politics of representation is not a threat to Guinean nationalism. The *djembéfolas* and apprentices I interviewed were as proud of their Guinean identity as they were of their Malinké or Susu identity. They all stated that the ballet was a good thing for Guinea and for the *djembé*. In addition, they clearly stated that their traditional *djembé* music was from Guinea and that the original *djembé* and *dunun* music came not from Senegal, or Côte D'Ivoire, or even Mali, but from Upper Guinea. Although national boundaries in Africa are artificial and based upon colonial borders, these have been embraced by Guineans since the time of independence (1958). Perhaps national identity has become the most meaningful for these *djembéfolas* now retired from the national ballet because during their years of touring they saw themselves as official ambassadors for a modern African nation. Yet, at this point in their lives it seems that these musicians are renegotiating the conditions of their national-musical identities.

In *Performing the Nation: Swahili Music and Cultural Politics in Tanzania*, Kelly Askew re-examined theories of nationalism and introduced a decidedly African perspective into the prevailing discourse.

Just as Foucault advanced our understanding of power as a diffuse resource available to everyone everywhere (albeit to differing degrees) and never the exclusive domain of some over others, so too should we view nationalism as something engaged in by people at all levels of the

social matrix – even if their engagement takes the form of outright rejection or dismissive disregard . . .

Rather than an abstract ideology produced by some to be consumed by others, nationalism ought to be conceptualized as a series of continually negotiated relationships between people who share occupancy in a defined geographic, political, or ideological space. (Askew 2002: 12)

Negotiation and flexibility are at the core of Askew's model of African nationalism.

Throughout the often tyrannical reign of Sékou Touré's dictatorship individuals who lived within the geographic space called Guinea never abandoned their faith in Guinea nationalism. Similar to *djembéfolas* in the national ballet, they were proud to be part of a modern, independent African state. This did not mean that they felt obligated to agree with or obey decrees set forth by the government. Rather, they defined themselves as Guinean on their own terms.

There were three different types of performing groups that that were initiated by Touré as part of his revolutionary cultural policy: *orchestre*, *ensemble*, and *ballet*. While *ensembles* contained musicians schooled in local traditions playing indigenous instruments, *orchestres* were groups of musicians who played renditions of traditional pieces using Western instruments, or newly composed pieces inspired by epic or folk traditions also played on European instruments (Charry 2000: 251-253). The *djembé* was reserved for use in the ballet, a new form of West African dance theatre invented by Fodeba Keita (Rouget 1956; N.S. Hopkins 1965; Charry 2000). The *djembé*, with its connection to rituals and festivals in the village, has been understood as more of a tool of ritual/theatre than a musical instrument. The concert *djembé* and *dunun* music promoted as the most traditional by older internationally known *djembéfolas* is actually a radically

new innovation. Within this new *djembe* based “ensemble” the most powerful theatrical tool of Guinea’s ballets has been transformed into a musical instrument in its own right.

The *djembe*’s journey from village rituals to national representation.

Before Guinea’s drive toward independence, the *djembe* was not a national instrument but an ethnic one originating in Maninkan cultures. This instrument had the simple utilitarian purpose of leading marriage, initiation, harvest, and naming ceremonies and festivals in a few villages in Upper Guinea. It was played by farmers, not professional musicians, and definitely not by individuals who considered themselves artists. Village festivals were generally overseen by traditional associations and in some cases secret societies. These societies were divided by gender as well as age.¹ The particular society an individual belonged to was determined by the year of their initiation. Youth belonged to societies labeled as *tonw* and elders of the village belonged to *jow* (or *djow*). The essential difference between these two societies was power. *Tonw* societies were “oriented toward collective labor” either in the fields or in the village encouraging youth to become responsible members of village life. Youth in the *tonw* societies also contributed to village life by putting on celebrations and dance parties within the village (Charry 2000: 206). By contrast, *jow* were power associations whose members consisted of only initiated men or women which according to McNaughton focused on three types of activities in the village: “the containment and eradication of anti-social activities, the practice of divination, and the attainment of prosperity and happiness of their members and their clients” (McNaughton 1979: 8). Although all of these societies in the Mande

¹Malinké men and women live very separate lives. As a result, men do not know what takes place within the women’s secret societies and neither do women know what takes place in the men’s societies. This impacts the historical/contextual knowledge that *djembefolas* are able to transmit to their Western students

cultural group used drums, only a portion of them used the *djembe* or a *djembe* and *dunun* type of ensemble.

Regionally the villages of Upper Guinea used the *djembe* in both their *tonw* and their *jow* societies even though there is little documentation about the music which accompanied the masked dances of *jow* societies. Charry explains it in the following way:

In an otherwise highly informative musical account of the associations that were active in Upper Guinea in the early twentieth century, Joyeux (1924: 206-7) devoted only half a page to *Kòmò* with a cursory reference to *Kòmò* flutes. Out of the more than one hundred named rhythms that have been recorded by *jembe* players [from this region], few are related to Maninka *jow*; the most readily identifiable one is simply called *Kòmò*, *Koma*, or *Komodenu* (Children of *Kòmò*). (Charry 2000:207)

The interpretation of Islam practiced by the Malinké living in Upper Guinea may have been tolerant of drumming and dancing for entertainment and work but not for the rituals of the *jow* societies. Mary Jo Arnoldi explains that rituals performed by *jow* societies revolve around “the use and manipulation of *boli*, a power object” (Arnoldi 1995: 22). Arnoldi goes on to explain that *boli* exists when objects such as sculptures, masks, instruments or amulets are infused with *daliluw*. This infusion of spiritual potency is what makes a performance that uses these objects transformative (Scheckner 2003:130). Such a ritual performance will have a permanent effect on the “status and social identity of its participants” (Arnoldi 1995: 22). It is quite possible that these *jow* societies started to die out in the early twentieth century due to the conflict between their rituals and Muslim teachings.² This is one explanation why older *djembéfolas* such as Konaté and Kourouma do not know very many of the rhythms of these societies. A second explanation is that

² Charry states that “although drumming thrives in most Muslim Maninka and Mandinka societies, different contexts may be more or less acceptable to devout Muslims. The least acceptable would be a *jow* such as *Kòmò*, which uses a wooden mask and draws on spiritual forces in direct conflict with Muslim teachings” (2000:208). Also see Peter Mark 1992: 143 and Clemens Zobel 1996.

the *djembéfolas* who have recorded the more than one hundred rhythms Charry is referring to spent very little of their adult life in the village and therefore never became full members of *jow* societies.

The *djembé* was part of Malinké village culture existing across several national boundaries carved by European colonists. By tracing the trajectory of the *djembé* from the villages into the national capital I hope to shed light upon the complex way in which various attitudes toward the use of the *djembé* represent a microcosm of the struggles between national and ethnic identity and between tradition and modernity as Guineans continue to search for their footing on the global stage. Given the central role of the *djembé* in the various masked dances and rituals of rural Guinea, the struggle to integrate these into Guinea's revolution is intertwined with the social acceptance of the *djembé*.

The *djembé's* rise to national prominence had everything to do with the fact that Guinea's first president, Sekou Touré, was Malinké. Yet, Touré's rapport with the rituals and masks associated with his culture and the *djembé* was conflicted at best. Touré's solution to this conflict was to allow masks to be used in national ballet where they could be exploited for their dramatic effect while at the same time banning the village rituals which gave them their cultural power. As Diawara explains:

From the early days of his regime, Sékou Touré banned masked rituals and secret societies on the grounds that they were counterrevolutionary reactions against African movements toward progress and unity. Insofar as every leader in Africa needs a religion or a mythic origin to consolidate his image, Sékou Touré chose Islamic mysticism over the mask's magical powers. He added 'Ahmed,' a shortened version of the prophet's name 'Muhammad,' to his own name. In this way, Ahmed Sékou Touré became the sworn enemy of clans that worshiped masks and statues. (Diawara 1998: 182)³

³ Diawara adds that "Sékou Touré's alleged grandfather Almamay Samory Touré had used Islam to unite several tribes across West Africa in a long and bitter resistance to French colonization" (Diawara 1998:182).

Diawara goes on to note that Touré “deployed a blend of Islam with Marxism-Leninism” not only against France, but also against any Guineans who were perceived by him as “fanatical devotees of masks and tribal idols.” He believed that these individuals and their practices posed a threat to the revolution (ibid.). Local *marabouts* took it upon themselves to confiscate illegal masks found in their villages. But this practice soon led to corruption as these same Islamic leaders became rich traders of African masks and statues in cities such as New York, Paris, and Geneva. Before long there was a ban on all masks, both for ritual use and for foreign export (ibid). However these same masks were employed by the national ballet companies as exotic props and used on a global stage as representations of Guinean nationalism. Underlying these seemingly conflicted political, religious, and cultural moves made by Touré are a complex set of questions about what it means to be African, what it means to be Guinean, and how African modernity could be different from European or American modernity.

During the “anticolonial revolutionary nationalism that followed World War II,” terms such as tradition and culture were endowed with highly politicized meanings (Buell 1994). According to Frederick Buell this set up an entirely new set of contradictions.

In the process of transforming ‘culture’ into a more aggressively politicized term, however, contradictions that we have seen to lie at the heart of its use in nostalgic nationalism – in particular, the participation of global factors and material in the construction of supposedly local cultures – came more to the fore. (Buell 1994: 72)

The nostalgic nationalism that Buell is referring to was created by European countries as a means to connect various cultures to a single national cultural identity. Through *Les Ballets Africains de la République de Guinée*, Touré attempted to create a national culture

by combining traditions from ethnic groups originating in four distinctly different regions of the country. While such an expression of national culture needed to be modern, it also required signs to serve as proof of the successful preservation of pre-colonial traditions. Culture thus became a loaded term, an anti-colonial weapon, which included signs of both modernity and primordialist-tradition. Buell explains the struggle in the following way:

In a way, nostalgia and revolution stood in opposition to each other, and Western-educated anti-colonial revolutionary elites committed to modernization sharply debated the role of primordialist ideology in the formation of new states . . . Moreover, if primordialism was rejected or sharply hedged, as it often was, the problem of detaching modernization from imitative Westernization remained. (Buell 1994: 72)

The anti-colonial nationalist struggles which occurred in Guinea culminated with the task of not only unifying people who spoke as many as twenty-three different languages belonging to a dozen different cultural groups, but also creating a modern performance genre that was not a mere copy of the West. While *Les Ballets Africains de la République de Guinée* was and continues to be a group highly regarded for its artistry and precision, in the process of creating this national symbol Touré only succeeded in further alienating the rural population of Guinea.

The root of the problem with Guinea's national ballets was that they were created in Paris and further formed in the capital with little input from ninety-percent of the population living in rural Guinea. While there have been tours of the villages the focus of these have been to either "sell" the ballet as Guinea's national culture or to acquire more "material" from rural traditions.⁴ Beyond the provision of "traditional" cultural material, rural input into Guinean nationalism has been minimal. Further evidence of this has been

observed by Manthia Diawara who is critical of the way in which Touré dealt with rural rituals, specifically his treatment of masks.

In a way, the surrender of masks' dramatic appearance to the market [and the ballet] system, which turns them into objects for sale, is not so much a sign of the mortification of the masks' spirit as it is an illustration of Sékou Touré's failure to absorb them into the Guinean revolution, to transform their role into the nation-building effort. (Diawara 1998: 181)

Touré's banning of masked celebrations and rituals in the villages and subsequent transfer of ritual objects into the urban market place and the national ballet essentially stripped the masses of rural Guinea of their participation in the process of nationalism. Franz Fanon suggested that the disconnection between the national government and the rural masses is the result of an underdeveloped bourgeois among the elite class of Francophone West Africa. As Fanon suggests:

The unpreparedness of the elite, the lack of critical ties between them and the masses, their apathy and, yes, their cowardice at a crucial moment in the struggle, are the cause of tragic trials and tribulations . . . Instead of being the most tangible, immediate product of popular mobilization, national consciousness is nothing but a crude, empty, fragile shell. The cracks in it explain how easy it is for young independent countries to switch back from nation to ethnic group and from state to tribe – a regression which is so terribly detrimental and prejudicial to the development of the nation and national unity. (Fanon trans. 2004: 97).

This underdeveloped elite class which took over from the colonial administration did so without any knowledge of the nation's economy. Fanon goes on to explain that unlike the bourgeois class in Europe, the elite, Western educated class in Africa does not have a heritage of wealth to invest in developing the economy of the nation. With the mentality of "small-time traders, landowners, and professionals" with a vocational history of networking and scheming, this class, which makes up the new national government, is

⁴ A video series entitled *Dance of Guinea*, 1991, includes ten hours of footage from a three-week tour of five regions of Guinea researching new material for *Les Ballets Africains* (Charry 2000: 462 videography).

unprepared and unable to take the financial risks necessary for industrial development. As a result trade continues to be confined to the capital, and the rural economy continues to stagnate as it did under colonial rule (Fanon trans. 2004: 99-144). The process undertaken to create the national ballet simply mirrored the widening gap between the urban elite and the rural masses of Guinea. This fissure is what is currently being expressed by *djembéfolas* retired from the national ballet as they juxtapose their tradition with the creation of the ballet.

The creation of Guinea's national ballet company stands in stark contrast to the nationalization of *Taarab* which occurred later in Tanzania. Askew observed that the choice of *Taraab* as Tanzania's national music was made due to its overwhelming popularity, not its possibility for success on the international stage (Askew 2002: 279).⁵ The purpose of a national musical genre in the case of Tanzania was to help the population to imagine a national identity.⁶ In the case of Guinea's national ballet the focus was outward not inward. Touré was not as concerned with educating the masses as he was with creating a representation of the richness of Guinea's culture for the rest of the world to see.

The National Ballet should present Africa, make her known and esteemed. Its programmes are not chosen in view of their educational and mobilizing qualities, but rather of the artistic representativeness of Africa and of the life of African peoples. (Touré 1963: 261, n.d.:87)

⁵ As guest presenter of a graduate seminar in Ethnomusicology at the University of Michigan in 2006, Askew shared a story about the failed attempt by a *Taarab* group to present this genre in the context of its first European tour.

⁶ Askew contextualizes this by adding that “[*Taarab*’s] communicative potency and capacity to mask intentions, hide ulterior messages, and hold multiple meanings for different agents in different contexts makes it a powerful vehicle that has been exploited, to varying degrees of success, by government bodies as well” (Askew 2002: 284).

What is clear from Touré's statement is that he is not concerned with teaching Guineans about the many and rich traditions that make up their nation. Touré's entire focus was to present a modern yet uniquely African product as a representation of independent Africa on the international stage. In so doing Touré functioned as both a representative of culture and a national leader.⁷

Another valuable point of comparison is the Ghana Dance Ensemble sponsored by Kwame Nkruma. Developed within the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana, this ensemble was mandated from the start not only as a means of representing the nation, but also for educating the world in the cultural traditions of Ghana. In contrast to Guinea's ballets, the globalization of Ghanaian drumming and dance proceeded as much within the context of the concert stage as it did amongst Western institutions of higher learning. Due to the educational mandate of this ensemble, the chancellor of the University of Ghana brought the GDE's creators, musicians, and dancers in direct contact with scholars and students within institutions of higher learning in both Europe and the United States. This was done as a means of establishing Ghana as a modern African nation with a rich cultural heritage. Unfortunately, the urban-rural divide so evident in Guinea's ballet, manifests itself in Ghana as well in hierarchical structures of authority. In his paper entitled, "Migrating Markers of Authority and the Authentication of Tradition in the Ghana Dance Ensemble," Paul Schauert explores the ways in which Western hierarchical structures, which place the scholar above the practitioner as the authority of tradition, trump indigenous forms of knowledge among dancers and

⁷ For more details on Touré's thoughts about the link between culture and politics, see his essay "The Political leader as the Representative of a Culture," (1963, trans. 1971). Also see the initial discussion on this topic in Chapter One, pages 6-8.

drummers in the GDE. When Schauert interviewed various members of the ensemble about the combinations of indigenous dances that often found their way into performance arrangements, they made it clear that most of these combinations would never happen in their village contexts. Further, when pressed to explain why their fellow ensemble members had not spoken up about these concerns, they explained that “they did not have the necessary credentials” to do so (Schauert 2008: ASA presentation). In the end Schauert concludes that “European-style nationalism, with its demarcated boundaries, has migrated to Africa/Ghana to inform systems of authority which, in turn, serve to authenticate traditions” (ibid.).

While it is possible to lay all of the blame for rural alienation on the African elite in the urban centers, members of secret societies in rural Guinea did very little to cooperate with Touré’s plans for national unity. Keïta, lead drummer for *Ballet D’Joliba* from 1964 until 1984, provides a different perspective on the ballet’s ability to unite the nation. From his point of view the leadership of the villages was at least partly to blame for the failure of Touré’s nationalizing “demystification” plan.

With demystification, Sékou Touré wanted to ensure that the villages gave up their closed, secretive way of life so that the dances, rituals and rhythms could become known in the entire country. But not all the villages were willing to reveal the secrets of their rhythms. Certain problems arose because of that: for example, we have never played the rhythm *Koma* (which is traditionally played for the fetish makers) on stage. Often, only the rhythm and the dance have become known, but not their origins. (Keïta and Billmeier 1999: 23)

The cause of the divide between the tradition of the village and the folklore of the ballet seems to lay in part with the villages themselves. Yet, in their failure to share important cultural secrets, there stands the very real possibility that these traditions which they are trying to preserve may die out without any living memory of their existence. Touré’s

“demystification” plan targeted a very real attempt at national unity. Keïta admits here that one by-product of demystification is its further potential for cultural preservation. While Keïta is clear that the ballet rhythms and dances are not traditional, he seems to acknowledge the ability of the ballet to preserve and relay (in the form of folklore) the stories and history behind the ritual practices which gave birth to these rhythms in the first place.

Many of the masked dances and rituals banned by Touré began to die out even before the various independence movements began in West Africa. Arnoldi observed that some of the lesser masks and dances of the powerful male *Kòmò* secret societies among the Mande were currently being performed as pure entertainment within the largely secular context of yearly masquerades put on by youth associations (Arnoldi 1995: 99-100). While Arnoldi cites the 1950s as the last decade in which *Kòmò* rituals were still performed, Diawara speculates that some of these *jow* rituals died out at the beginning of the twentieth century stating that, “the memory of them survives only through oral traditions” (1998: 183). Either way, Charry notes that “in the late twentieth-century there may be little drumming that is not considered entertainment” (2000: 208-210). Islamic zealots who burned or exposed ritual objects (especially masks) associated with animist practices and *jow* societies in the 1950s have been cited as the main reason for the abandonment of many of these animist rituals (Rouget 1972, 1999; Mark 1992:143; Zobel 1996; Dieterlen and Sylla 1992: 114-115; Arnoldi 1995: 19). Although these masked rituals and dances were clearly not approved of by devout Muslims and some had ceased to be practiced, there must have been enough still in existence to pose a perceived threat to Touré’s idea of a modern revolution.

There seem to be two very different reasons why these masked dances and rituals which were banned in the villages became so central to the ballet. First, by placing these ritual objects in a new non-religious context Touré could effectively drain them of their efficacy and thus their perceived threat to modernity. Second, the ballet was created for the Western gaze and as a result there were expectations of exotic elements.

The formation of national ballet companies: authenticity and artistic freedom.

Originally created in Paris as *Les Ballets Africains* in 1952 as an experiment in African dance theatre by Guinean ex-patriot Keita Fodéba, this group was invited to become the national dance company of Guinea in 1955. Fodéba was educated first in Conakry where he attended primary school and then in Dakar where he attended *École William Ponty*.⁸ Upon graduating with a teaching degree Fodéba moved to Paris in 1946 where he became involved with African theatre. His initial attempt at forming a company resulted in *Le Théâtre Africain de Keita Fodéba* which he founded in 1949.

While these initial productions followed the model he had learned at *École William Ponty*, meaning that all the dialogue and songs were in French, Fodéba decided that he would like his productions to be done in native African languages.⁹ What he soon

⁸ According to Charry, the French set up a two-tiered European-style educational system in West Africa in the early 1900s: these consisted of “local primary schools taught by Africans, regional and urban schools with French teachers, and two schools of higher education one of which became known as *École William Ponty*.” It was this school that exposed African students to European music and culture. Many students who attended this school became “important forces in modernizing” music and theatre in both Guinea and Senegal (Charry 2000: 46-47).

⁹ H.S. Hopkins describes the William Ponty school productions in his 1965 *Présence Africain* article, “Le Théâtre Moderne au Mali,” as follows: “*Pendant les vacances, les élèves devaient prendre recueillir des traditions historiques et des legends locales, puis les transposer dans des pièces en français destinées à être représentées à l’école. Ainsi, dès ses origines, ce théâtre present-t-il un caractère competitive. Parfois, les pièces transposaient une legend; parfois, c’étaient des comédies ou des drames. A cette époque déjà s’était dégagé un autre caractère de ce Théâtre: le mélange de la parole, du chant et la danse. En août 1937, ce théâtre devait connaître son apogée; lors de l’Exposition Coloniale un groupe de trente élèves presenta deux pièces dans un théâtre parisien*” (Hopkins 1965: 163). During vacations, students collected historic traditions and local legends. They then transposed these into French and presented them at school. In this way, from the beginning, theatre presentations were made in a competitive character. Sometimes,

discovered, however, was that that the mixture of cultures and languages in Africa created many problems when attempting to create theatre based upon the spoken word. As a result, Fodéba decided to use music and dance as an avenue for expression because the instruments, costumes and dance styles of many different cultures could be mixed simultaneously to create an engaging stage performance. According to H.S. Hopkins, mini-ballets were already a part of larger theatrical productions, found either at the end of a scene or as an interlude between scenes. Although these were much less elaborate than the full length dance productions Fodéba created, their historical authenticity was crucial to the scene in which they were connected (Hopkins 1965: 181).

In 1953 Fodéba renamed the group *Les Ballets Africains de Keita Fodeba*. Fodéba explains his use of the term ballet in the following manner.

Ballet in its Western conception, is an original choreographic and musical creation. Our popular African dances hardly yet correspond to this. But ballet is 'a form of artistic and cultural expression developed by man in his endless quest for new means of expression, in his yearning to create forms which are ceaselessly renewed according to his genius and abilities,' African dance as a means of expression and of exteriorization can be identified with ballet. That is the reason why we call ourselves the 'African Ballet Company.' (Fodéba 1958: 167)

After its successful Paris debut, the ballet company toured Europe for a couple of years. In 1954 Fodéba brought the company to Africa for an extensive tour of French colonial West Africa. In 1960, after several world tours, *Les Ballets Africains* was invited to become the official national ensemble of the independent Republic of Guinea. During *Les Ballets Africains* first tour of the United States, Fodéba was the director with Ladji

these pieces transposed a legend; sometimes they were comedies or dramas. At this time they were already redeeming (releasing/freeing) another characteristic of this theatre: the mixture of speech, of song, and of dance. And August of 1937, this theatre became known at its peak; at the time of the colonial Exposition a group of thirty students presented two pieces in a theatre in Paris (trans. Flaig: 2009)

Camara and Italo Zambo among the all-star cast. The company did a run of forty-eight performances on Broadway from February 16 until March 28, 1959 to glowing reviews (IBDB). According to Camara the ballet troupe remained in the United States from early 1959 until May 1960. Camara stated that it was only after their return to Africa in May of 1960 that they became *Les Ballets Africains de la Republique de Guinée*, the official national ballet of Guinea (Charry 2000: 252 fn, 15).

Les Ballets Africains: from Paris to Senegal to Guinea and back.

After WWII, General Charles de Gaulle decided that one way to revolutionize France was through culture. To this end he appointed André Malraux as France's first Minister of State for Cultural Affairs. During his ten-year tenure (1959-1969) as Minister of Culture, Malraux created *maisons de la culture*, in a number of provincial cities and worked tirelessly to preserve France's national heritage. One of the mandates of the new ministry of culture was to export French culture abroad to the colonies from Guadeloupe and Martinique, Madagascar and French New Guinea, and all of Francophone West and North Africa. In addition, the cultural contributions of these locations would be celebrated as an extension of a French global culture. Even though France was slowly losing political power over its African colonies, the cultures of Francophone West Africa were embraced as part of the French cultural heritage Malraux was working to preserve. As part of this directive the French government launched, *L'Association de Culture Africains* which was an international association for the promotion of African culture. Two of the larger projects which resulted from this mandate were the creation of the journal, *Présence Africaine*, and sponsorship of the International *Festival d'Arts Negre* in Dakar in 1966.

Les Ballets Africains de Keita Fodéba received funding from the French government through Malraux, which enabled the troupe to tour Europe and North America in 1959. The initial troupe consisted of ex-patriots from Guinea, Senegal, Mali, and the French Caribbean, all of whom were living in Paris. Many of the initial members of the troupe were graduates of *L'Ecole William Ponty* (the French colonial teacher's college in Dakar, Senegal) and were thus familiar with the many theatrical adaptations needed when staging traditional African culture. According to Senegal's first theater director, Maurice Sonar Senghor, as written in his autobiography, *Souvenirs de Théâtre d'Afrique et d'Outre-Afrique: pour que lève la semence, contribution à l'édification d'un Théâtre Noir Universel*, he took Fodéba under his tutelage in 1950 and together they created *Les Ballets Africains* which gave its debut performance in Paris in 1953.¹⁰ In 1958 Maurice Sonar Senghor returned to Senegal with the idea of further creating something theatrical at home. It was not surprising that when Fodéba wanted to re-locate the group from Paris to West Africa it was Léopold Senghor, the president of Senegal, who opened the door and invited *Les Ballets Africains* to set up residence in Dakar. Even after Touré asked the group to become the national performing ensemble of Guinea in 1960, they remained in residence in Dakar. The main reason for this was to retain their French funding. If they had gone to Guinea, the troupe would have lost the funding they received from the French government. Ironically, on their second tour of the United States the group was renamed *Les ballets Africains de la République de Guinée* but its home base was still in Senegal.

In the fall of 1962 regional auditions for the ballet were held throughout Guinea.

¹⁰ This is an interesting interpretation of events by Sonar Senghor. His book, published by *L'Harmattan* of Paris in 2004, is a strange take on history interpreted solely through his own autobiographical recollections.

According to Famoudou Konaté's recollection, the best drummers and dancers of every region were recruited, "indeed really conscripted as if for military service," and sent to Conakry in December of 1962 (Ott 1997: 23). By January of 1963, *Les ballets Africains de la République de Guinée* had permanently relocated to Conakry, Guinea, where it remained under the patronage of Touré. By this time, Senegal's president Senghor had already appointed Maurice Sonar Senghor as director of *Théâtre du Palais* where he created *Le Ballet National de Senegal* using the same format as Fodéba's *Les Ballets Africains*. Maurice Sonar Senghor's positioning of himself as Fodéba's teacher gives the impression that *Le Ballet National de Senegal* was not a copy of *Les Ballets Africains de Keita Fodéba*, created by a Guinean, but that it was an original creation by a Senegalese artist which was then appropriated by Fodéba and claimed for Guinea.

Far from a museum-like presentation, Fodéba's ballet nevertheless attempted to capture the varieties of Guinea's diverse ethnic rituals and art forms. If a choice of choreography came down to a question of aesthetics versus authenticity, Fodéba was known to side with aesthetics.¹¹ Given that the audience in the village context gathers in a circle with the musicians and dancers performing in the center, the first adaptation Fodéba needed to make was visual and spatial. In addition, the audience in the village setting had a participatory role to play in the performance whereas on the concert stage, there is a non-participating audience.¹² Fodéba describes how he met these challenges:

¹¹ "Il dit que Fodéba Keita cherchait l'esthétique de la danse plutôt que son authenticité, en sous-entendant que l'authenticité valait mieux." It is said that Fodéba Keita cherished the aesthetic of a dance more than its authenticity, implying that [for him] authenticity was less valid. (Hopkins 1965: 182. trans. Flaig: 2009)

¹² Music and dance happen in the village setting only when an occasion calls for the entire community to gather. Marriage, Naming ceremonies, and initiations are the most important and therefore the most common occasions where drumming and dancing occur. Outside of these, there are the rituals which take place in the mens' or the womens' secret societies – these occur very infrequently. Regardless, all festivities and rituals that make up cultural life in rural Guinea require the participation of everyone gathered.

On the stage new conditions have to be created by means of different devices in order, on the one hand, to retain the freshness and reality of the dance and, on the other, to destroy the monotony which is quick to arise due to the non-active participation of the audience. That is the reason why we must take our dances only at their culminating point, shorten them and cut out a thousand details which are not important except in the public place of the village. For instance the 'Dance of Possession' easily takes most of the night in the Sudan whereas, on the stage, five or six minutes are quite sufficient in order not to tire a foreign audience. (Fodéba 1958: 176)

In addition, Fodéba explains that the costumes worn by the performers were adapted to convey the impression produced in the village context. In order to convey the different types of garments worn by different types of dancers (more subtly differentiated in the village context), the ballet employs brighter colors and additional ornaments. Hopkins notes that costumes for the ballet were supposed to be inspired by clothing worn in the rural setting, but while traditional hairstyles and amulets, such as cowrie shells were so inspired, "the dresses and pants [worn by dancers] were less inspired" (*les habits et les pantalons s'en inspirent moins*) (Hopkins 1965: 183). Fodéba's aim was to give the audience a taste of authentic African culture on their terms. This included the creation of costumes with which a Western audience could relate and feel comfortable. Fodéba states that a stage presentation of folklore "must have as its aim the creation for the audience of the atmosphere of authenticity and sincerity" (Fodéba 1958: 177). This aim includes some cultural translation.

There were more than a few misconceptions that occurred as a result of translating Guinean culture to the concert stage in the form of a national ballet. In the context of such a ballet the audience experiences what amounts to a ten year virtual-tour of all of the villages in Guinea - for it would take that long for anyone to experience the large number and variety of songs, rhythms, dances, and rituals contained in a single

ballet performance. While the European audience invariably comes away from a ballet performance with an appreciation for the music, dance, and overall cultural riches within Guinea, they are no closer to understanding the realities of daily life for the people of this newly formed African nation. In reality the drums in a village may only be played between four and eight times in the course of a single year; the crucial difference being that music in the village is performed only for certain occasions and the ballet is performed for entertainment.

The music of the ballet was often as foreign an experience for the performers as it was for the audience. The condensed version of rhythms, songs, and dances, from various parts of Guinea, used for divergent sets of occasions, often hundreds of kilometers apart, patched together with a series of signals and solos are what, for the drummer, defines the difference between the ballet and village traditions. When asked about the difference between the ballet and traditional music, Sekou Konaté responded with the following:

Sekou: There is a big difference! The rhythms we play in the village and the rhythms we play in the ballet are not the same thing. This is because the ballet rhythms are created for the ballet [they are newly composed/arranged for the ballet].

Vera: Was it difficult for you to adapt your playing to the style of the ballet?

Sekou: Yes! In the beginning, it was difficult for me to adapt to the system of the ballet because it is very different from the tradition. There is a big difference in how the *dununs* are played, and there is also a big difference in the approach to dance. To play the rhythm with the dancers, the music was completely different, note for note. On the *dunun*, note for note, the music is different. For example, if you take the rhythm Mendiani, the traditional rhythm, it is exceedingly difficult to play. As difficult as it is for someone to learn Mendiani – it was that difficult for me to adapt to playing with the ballet.

The two most challenging aspects of adapting to the ballet consisted of learning all of the newly composed parts made up of signals, breaks, and pre-composed solo passages that

connect one rhythm to the next, as well as learning solo patterns which corresponded directly to the movement of the dancers. In the village context many dances are not choreographed, and for these the *djembé* soloist responds to the dancer's movements in a largely improvisatory way. Also, due to the lack of time given to each rhythm in the ballet context, there is no opportunity to play variations on the *dununs* and no spontaneity in the *échauffement*.¹³ From Konaté's description there can be no doubt that the music and performance of the ballet is very different from what was once done in the village. Yet, while *djembéfolas* complain about the changes the ballet made to traditional music they have employed many of these changes in their staging and recording of "traditional" music. These adaptations are necessary for *djembé* performance to take place on a European concert stage. Ironically, claims on the part of non-Western performers of their link to unchanging traditional practices are equally important to the European audience. It is within this narrow paradigm that today's professional *djembéfolas* have carved out a niche for themselves in the European and American marketplace.

For reviewers of ballet performances staged in Europe, the issue of authenticity always seemed to be in the foreground. In 1960 at *Le Théâtre des Nations* in Paris, reviewers and ensemble directors were primarily concerned with authenticity and realism

¹³ When drummers are playing in the context of a rural or urban celebration there is often an opportunity to intensify the music momentarily through the playing of an *échauffement*. Thomas Ott explains that an *échauffement* causes the rhythm to intensify due to: "the consistently beating pulses ("eighths") of the solo *djembé*; the dense succession of mostly syncopated beats on the *dununba*, sometimes the *sangban* too, while other drums continue to play their figures; a general accelerando and an increased fervor in the playing" (Konaté and Ott 1997: 63). Charry adds that "the dance is considered to 'heat up' or 'speed up,'" and that the "roll used for the vigorous solo dancing is finished off with one of several cadence patterns" called a 'break' in English, or *bloquage* in French (Charry 2000: 223). The purpose of the *bloquage* at the end of the *échauffement* is as a signal for: a dancer to end their solo and a new dancer approach, the group dance to resume, or the beginning of an entirely new rhythm to begin. While *échauffements* and *bloquages* only exist in celebratory rhythms where the dances have a solo section, these techniques are used for almost every rhythm in the ballet both in the formation of introductions and as transitions between different parts of the choreography. They are also used extensively in drum classes for foreigners as a means to begin and end each piece and to signal when each individual drummer has completed their improvised solo.

when judging performances by non-Western groups. The discussant of a public forum on the issue of folklore as it pertains to the Theatre of Nations critiqued the contribution of African ensembles by stating that, “These traditional theatres constitute the only means of artistic expression capable of giving us an authentic image of the society from which they spring” (World Theatre Vol. X, No. 4, 1961: 55). Mr. Abdoulaye (administrator) of the Ensemble Nationale du Niger qualified his ensemble in a similar manner:

You must not expect to see, in these performances, either classical or modern theatre so much as pictures of real life, the day-to-day scenes of a country which show its happiness in dancing and song . . . wishing to preserve our own individual character, we have preferred – rather than recruiting our dancers in the towns where life has been modernized and westernized – to go out into the bush in search of the real thing, the most characteristically African element. (World Theatre Vol. X, No. 4, 1961: 56-57)

Urban Africans are being portrayed here as somehow less African than their rural counterparts. It seems that within the primitivist and essentialist mindset of reviewers at this time the concept of a modern African artist was still quite foreign. In fact, groups that challenged these notions were harshly criticized. Performance ensembles such as the *Peruano Ballet* from Peru had little interest in the idea of folklore; instead they asserted themselves as artists trained in classical dance. While the Theatre of Nations consisted of modern European artistic ensembles as well as ensembles from all over the world, the expectation for non-Western ensembles was that they should consist primarily of representations of traditional culture and not modern arts. These troupes were all listed under the title of Folklore with the expectation that, “they should hold the original folkloric element in respect, that they should not deform costumes, not replace authentic musical instruments by modern ones and that they should also respect original rhythms and traditional steps” (World Theatre Vol. X, No. 4, 1961: 59). From these criteria, the

ensemble from Niger was esteemed for not attempting to present a theatrical performance, succeeding instead by their presentation of “the life of the people in complete integrity” (ibid). It seems that there was a clear divide in expectations between nations considered primitive and those considered modern. The critics call for authenticity translated into a call for difference. They were not interested in seeing modernized traditions that express the current realities in many urban and rural non-Western settings because these were not different enough from Western arts.

While another article about *Le Théâtre des Nations*, co-authored by a panel of African scholars, presents a more balanced perspective on the challenges of presenting traditional practices as representations of ethnic culture in the form of theatre for a Western audience, the tension between acceptance of Western theatrical tools and adherence to traditional forms is still evident within the debate. Traore (Senegal) and Coffi-Gadeau (Ghana) viewed traditional African theatre as “ground level drama” depicting the life of African villages where they “make theatre without even knowing it” (World Theatre Vol. IX, No. 4, 1960: 344-349). Conversely, Botbol (Ivory Coast) believed that, “the African theatre needs to rise above workaday realism to an aesthetic transposition. It needs to graduate out of realism, sometimes even fetishism, from the particular to the universal” (ibid: 350). While Glissant concurred with Botbol, he feared that the imposition of Western structures and techniques would amount to a form of cultural imperialism and encouraged African actors to work out their own techniques (ibid.).

One of Fodéba’s main goals for the ballet was to dispel many of the ideas about Africa that Europeans developed through films and lectures (Fodéba 1958: 164). Rather

than attempting to display a “picture of real life” as the troupe from Niger claimed to, Fodéba unapologetically employed the tools of modern theatre as a means to offer up a modern production of African arts. Fodéba was concerned that Europeans had developed too narrow a view of Africa, a continent with as much or more cultural diversity than Europe. For this reason he decided to create a dance-based theatre company.

To make Africa and all its variety known, we have chosen dance, not only as an excellent means of universal expression but also because, with us, it is connected with all the other arts . . . A characteristic phenomenon of our life, it can become ritual, magic, witchcraft, exorcism, an expression of freedom, morals and sundry sentiments . . . for dance is able to reach into a man’s instincts, and his subconscious powers and express him completely. (Fodéba 1958: 166)

Ironically, elements of witchcraft, magic, and exorcism which Fodéba was seeking to express in the ballet seemed to play into the very stereotypes Europeans had about Africans. It was Fodéba’s inclusion of dances of possession that later brought him harsh criticism from French and African critics alike (Rouget 1956). It simply was not possible for Fodéba to avoid such stereotypes and still be able to represent the lifeblood of Guinean culture which, at the time, was still centered upon these rituals and celebrations. After all, the European image of Africa had already been negotiated long before the occurrence of colonialism.

The root of this crisis of representation in African nationalism, although articulated within the context of the ballet, actually emanates from an earlier time in the history of European and African contact. The “globally imagined” stagings of African culture that were part and parcel of World Fairs and Universal Exhibitions served the singular purpose of creating and reinforcing European identity as something opposite of African primitiveness. Erlmann provides the following explanation:

World fairs in the age of empire turned into major platforms of the global imagination in which the ideas of empire, progress, and commodity all appeared rolled into one. Total events of this sort were predicated upon carefully orchestrated stagings of spaces, actors, and goods that spoke not so much of the world as it is as how the West wished to perceive it. Thus the architectural design and floor plans portrayed a humanity divided by ‘race’ – a concept as deeply instilled in popular Western consciousness as that of ‘progress’ – and a world in which nations occupied fixed places determined by the host country. (Erlmann 1999: 92-93)

Many of the rituals staged by Fodéba represented practices which had been outlawed by Touré in an effort to modernize Guinea. Yet, Fodéba still felt that these were essential representations of the cultural practices of the many ethnic groups which make up Guinea. Africa’s role in Europe’s fiction of modernity makes it impossible for new West African states to express any indigenous religious practice without being labeled primitive. Furthermore, these are the same religious practices which many Africanists cite as the cause of Africa’s failure to modernize (Wright: 1954, 1956, 1957; Fanon 1963; Touré 1963; Diawara 1998). What can, on one hand, serve to reinforce Western essentialist and primitivist notions of Africa can, on the other, be used by indigenous artists to assert their own unique perspective of modernity. By staging elements of these practices both within the ballet and in concerts of *djembé* and *dunun* music, Guinean musicians and dancers can celebrate the traditions of their past while at the same time positioning themselves as modern artists. As such, these artists have become masters at negotiating European expectations and notions about Africa. The polarity between creation and tradition which has been put forward by *djembéfolas* seems to be one such negotiating tool. The closer these drummers can align themselves with rural traditions, the more authority they are given as “authentic” African musicians by their European students and audiences.

The *djembe* in the ballet.

The rhythms of the ballet have been mostly traditional rhythms which are modified, even radically changed, for presentation on the stage; for instance, in regard to tempo, the *djembe* accompaniments or the *dununba* voices. But we also create new rhythms . . .

In a manner of speaking, the ballet transforms tradition into a kind of folkloric presentation, and, in doing so, loses some depth and authenticity. In working with the ballet, a traditional drummer has to revise his playing completely. They play much faster, and one does not know the arrangements. The performances are full of breaks and compositions. During rehearsals, which sometimes are done without dancers, one must quickly learn new rhythms introduced by other drummers. (Keïta and Billmeier 1999: 24)

These two quotes from Keïta, encapsulate some of the ways in which the ballet has changed traditional village music. What Keïta fails to capture, however, are the radical ways in which the ballet has changed not only the livelihood and social place of drummers in Malinké society, but also their approach to “traditional” music even outside the context of the ballet. As a result of his time in the ballet, a drummer such as Keïta has a repertoire of traditional rhythms that extends far beyond his village, his region, and even his own ethnic group. This repertoire of traditional rhythms and the historical knowledge behind them has been learned second-hand, “introduced by other drummers” from within the ballet ensemble. While these rhythms were transformed by the ballet, their traditional forms are still well known to many drummers in this first generation of *djembéfolas*. Were it not for the ballet, many of these rhythms would have eventually died out in their village contexts. Yet their existence in a somewhat museum-like state (frozen in time) within the repertoire of retired ballet drummers could be considered folklore just as easily as the ballet, since many of these rhythms are no longer connected to a living cultural practice. More importantly, were it not for the ballet, there would be

no professional *djembéfolas* lifting up these traditional rhythms as an art-form worthy of their attention as musicians. The ballet put the *djembé* in the spotlight and gave it a place to become a legitimate musical instrument worthy of the attention of a professional musician. This type of attention was not even provided by the *jelis* during its last hundred years of existence in Malinké culture.

The new dramatic role of the *djembé* along with the modification of the *dununba* stand as evidence of the type of visual and spatial choices made by Keita Fodéba as he adapted village rituals and celebrations for the stage. In the context of the ballet, the *djembé* takes center stage and the *dununs* are assigned to the role of accompaniment. The *dununba* used in the ballet is constructed of a large oil barrel instead of wood and stood up on its end. Attached to either side of this much larger *dununba* are two differently tuned *kenkeni*. Since neither the *dunun* nor the *kenkeni* are equipped with bells in this arrangement, one drummer can easily play both parts. This single drummer often wields his sticks with a flair similar to that of an American drum-kit player – adding a further sense of drama to his part. The *sangban* is equipped with a bell and attached to the drummer in the traditional manner with a thin chord. This leaves the *sangban* player free to move about the stage in a dramatic manner as he trades solos with the *djembé* players. It is common to have at up to six *djembé* players in the ballet context, as opposed to a maximum of three in the traditional setting. These players often line up in the front of the stage as they take turns playing dramatic solos which are as much about creating inventive musical phrases as they are about striking dramatic poses as they interact with each other and the audience. As the *djembé* continues to grow in popularity both at home and abroad it is given an evermore significant role to play within the ballet.

One of the vehicles which highlight the *djembé* within the ballet is the Pyramid. A pyramid is an extended instrumental piece which consists of a medley of rhythms and songs connected by extended rhythmic breaks and solos played by the all the drummers, but led by the front line of *djembé* players. The extended *djembé* breaks between rhythms can be anywhere between four to over one hundred fifty beats in length. For each of these breaks all six *djembés* play in unison, reinforcing the dramatic elements of the break through very carefully choreographed handing (which often differs from traditional handing techniques). During his time as lead *djembé* player and music director of *Ballet D'Joliba*, Keïta perfected the art of the pyramid. He has since integrated his pyramid compositions into his teaching as a means of mastering the solo techniques of *djembé* playing. In addition, his pyramids are still being played by the *Ballet D'Joliba* today. Through a musical analysis of sections of one of Keïta's pyramids (taught to the students attending his Mini-Guinea drum camp in Ramona California in April 2007) I hope to highlight some of the modern features of this musical form. In the pyramid written by Keïta there are altogether five different rhythms and songs. I will be examining the first three rhythms and their breaks.

The first thing to note about a pyramid arrangement is the absence of bells in the *dunun* parts. Although the *sangban* player has a bell, he rarely plays the straightforward bell part for the rhythm. Instead he uses his bell as a background pulsation when he solos. The first rhythm of the pyramid, *Kotejuga*, comes from the border region between Mali and Guinea called Wassolon, Keïta's birthplace. Given that the *dununba* is not usually played in that region, Keïta's arrangement of this traditional piece is already an adaptation (see fig.2.1).

Signal

Djembé 1

Djembé 2

Bell Sangban

Bell Kenkeni

Bell Dununba

[Fig. 2.1: arrangement of *Kotejuga* by Mamady Keïta © Keïta and Billmeier 1999]

Nevertheless, when this rhythm is further adapted for the ballet, one player plays a combination of all three *dununs* without the bells (see fig. 2.2).

KOTEJUGA
Sangban + Kenkeni

Dununba

[Fig. 2.2: Transcription of *dunun* part for *Kotejuga* from Mamady Keïta's Pyramid]

In this case the player may choose to leave out the *sangban* presses which accompany the *dununba* on the second and third beats. With the *kenkeni* missing for the first four beats the essential melody between it and the *sangban* is severely compromised. The bell part for the *sangban* is also central to this piece. When these elements are missing it is difficult to distinguish this as *Kotejuga*. Where it not for the presence of the primary

djembe accompaniment part, it would be very difficult to distinguish the identity of this rhythm. Only in the context of the rest of the pyramid where it is accompanied by *Komodaynu*, the song for which this rhythm was written, does it become clear that *Kotejuga* is being played.

The *dunun* rhythm that forms the foundation of the second section of the pyramid is *Sunun*, also from Wassolon region. Again, when we look at Keïta's "traditional" version it is arranged for three *dununs* (see fig. 2.3). When I asked Keïta why he chooses to arrange rhythms from his region with three *dununs* instead of one or two (which is more often the performance practice in that region) he responded in the following manner.

Normally, if there are three *dunun* players, it's not every village that has three *dunun* players, if there are three *dunun* players then you will have the bell as well. The first region is Kouroussa, the second is Kankan, and the third one is Siguri. So above all the adaptation of introducing a *dununba*, and also sometimes the *kenkeni*, for many of the rhythms of the Wassolon region I am the one who created these adaptations, those parts. Why? [I did this] to enrich the rhythm. If you listen to my CD Balandougoukan it is beautiful, it is very original, it is magnificent. But, in seeing the rest of the world that is not from Wassolon and [the way] they love having that bass sound and they love enriched rhythms, for that reason, for those people, for that interest I put a *dununba* part to the rhythm. Because even in Wassolon it is rare that we have three players, but usually we have two, one whose role is to play the *sangban* and another whose role is to play the *kenkeni*. So, the one that is missing mostly is the *dununba* . . . and the bells. But there are some villages in Wassolon that play *dununba*. There is one village that is only about two kilometers away from Balandougou and they do play *dununba*. When I was young [and learning] from my master there were times in Balandougou when there would be a *dununba* that they would play as well. So, for [on] the rhythms where there wasn't necessarily a *dununba* part, I said, "why not enrich the rhythm and put a bass melody into it. In Balandougou you already had a *dununba* and two kilometers away you had a *dununba* (and even today there is still a *dununba* in that village). If you watch the film *Djembéfola*, when they are in the village at [during] the night time festival the rhythm that they are playing there at the end of the film where there is the big fire [Monette

adds, “and the credits are rolling”] there is a *dununba* sound at that point, “kung, kung, kung, kung” that was a *dununba*.

From Keïta’s answer it seems that while the three-*dunun* arrangement is not typical in the Wassolon region, it is not totally foreign either. Yet, his consistent addition of the *dununba* is an adaptation motivated by the European market and not conditions within Guinea.

Sunun

The musical score for 'Sunun' consists of six staves. The first staff is labeled 'Signal' and shows a sequence of notes and rests. The second and third staves are labeled 'Djembé 1' and 'Djembé 2' respectively, with notes and rests. The fourth, fifth, and sixth staves are grouped together with a large curly brace on the left. They are labeled 'Bell Sangban', 'Bell Kenkeni', and 'Bell Dununba' respectively. Each of these bell staves shows a complex rhythmic pattern with notes and rests, and a double bar line with repeat dots at the end of each.

[Fig. 2.3: arrangement by Mamady Keïta © Keïta and Billmeier 1999]

The most interesting thing about this arrangement is that the *sangban* part that forms the foundation of this rhythm has been assigned to the *dununba* (see fig. 4.7). When this arrangement is further modified for the ballet it too is not recognizable as *Sunun* (see fig. 2.4).

SUNUN

A handwritten musical transcription of the 'dunun' part for 'Sunun'. It features two staves of music. The top staff contains rhythmic notation with letters 'S', 'K', and 'S' above the notes, indicating specific drum sounds. The bottom staff contains notes and rests, with some notes marked with an asterisk (*). The entire transcription is enclosed in a large hand-drawn bracket on the right side.

[Fig. 2.4: Transcription of *dunun* part for *Sunun* from Mamady Keïta’s Pyramid]

When all the *dunun* parts are combined to be played by a single drummer the interactive melody which occurs between the bells and individual drums is lost. In addition these ballet versions are played extremely fast which serves to obscure any remaining identifying features the rhythm may possess. Then again, there are few who would be able to recognize these two particular rhythms in Conakry given that they are from a thousand miles north of the capital. The most important point is that Keïta is not concerned about altering the original orchestration by adding or combining *dununs*. For him, it is all part of the creative process of putting on a *spectacle* (show).

The question that comes to mind here is “Which *Kotejuga* or *Sunun* is more authentic, Keïta’s three-*dunun* ‘traditional’ arrangement or the version adapted for the ballet?” The only thing that is clear is that both represent choices which were made for different aesthetic reasons. When reviewers criticized Fodéba for choosing aesthetics over authenticity they were creating a false binary. Their comparison seemed to imply that the aesthetics being chosen by Fodéba were only a result of European influences whereas the authenticity was African. But, who decides what is authentically African? Similarly, one could ask if all these aesthetic choices are evidence of European influence. It is clear from Keïta’s testimony that when a village has a *dununba* and a *dununba* player this instrument is used. The addition of another *dunun* will of course require a new musical arrangement. It seems that from Keïta’s perspective as long as the central rhythm, usually assigned to the *sangban*, is present in some form amongst the three *dununs* the rhythm maintains its essential character. To criticize Keïta for making aesthetic choices based upon the desires of his European audience amounts to an empty

debate in light of the fact that most of the criterion for authenticity come from this same audience.

The most noticeable legacy the pyramid left to all future generations of *djembe* players is the further development of virtuosic techniques. What is evident within ballet is that these were created not so much for the development of the music but for dramatic purposes. One of the most spectacular features of the pyramid is the opening break played by all six *djembe* players in unison. In this pyramid the opening break is 214 beats long (see figs. 2.5 and 2.6). During this time the *dunduns* are used not to supply a complementary rhythm, but to emphasize the tones of the *djembe* part. Unlike a typical *djembe* solo, the break contains an unusually high number of bass tones. This is done for two reasons. First, the visual effect of six players moving their arms between the bass tones at the center of the drum and the mid-range tone and high slap at the edge of the drum is very dramatic. In fact, the hands are choreographed to switch between left and right based upon the visual effect created. This means that players are not bound by traditional hand-alternating techniques when playing with the ballet. The first rhythmic figure: slap, bass, bass, slap, slap, bass (X BB XX B), would not typically be found in either a *djembe* accompaniment or a solo outside the ballet. If this rhythm were found in a more traditional context all the notes would be played by the right hand since they all land on the strong part of the pulse. Given that the stronger bass tones of the *dunduns* effectively drown out the bass sounds created on the *djembe*, in this piece the effectiveness of the bass tones on the *djembe* lay in their visual and dramatic effect rather than their contribution to the overall orchestration of the music. In the dramatic context of the ballet, figures such as these amount to a form of instrumental choreography. I have

The image displays a series of 14 horizontal lines of handwritten musical notation, likely representing a drum break. Each line consists of a series of vertical stems with various symbols (X, R, L, B) placed above or below them, indicating specific drum sounds or techniques. The notation is organized into measures, with some measures containing multiple stems. Annotations include '11'' at the top right, 'roll on Bass' in the middle, and 'transition to SUNUN' near the bottom. At the very bottom, there are two lines of notation with arrows pointing to them, labeled 'SUNUN DUNUN' and 'SONG BEGINS'. A list of notes is provided at the bottom right:

- MAYA-EE is sung here
- Dunun parts for SUNUN
- Djembes Keep the beat on bass tones

[Fig. 2.6: Author's trans. of *Kotejuga* to *Sunun* break in Keita's pyramid 2007]

Aside from the impressive visual effect, there is a sonic drama that takes place when these bass tones and slaps are further supported by the *dununba* and *sangban*. The rhythmic figures in this break are typical in the ballet context precisely because of their dramatic nature.

This rhythmic break has no real musical purpose. Although it functions as a transition from the triplet groove of *Kotejuga* to the duple feeling of *Sunun*, this transition

could have been achieved after the first roll which followed the end of the accompaniment rhythm. Contrary to its role in the village setting, the purpose of the *djembé* in the ballet is not practical but artistic and dramatic. The role of the *djembé* in a village ritual is to accompany the *dununs* and support the *jelis* and dancers. In the ballet this role was extended to include specific rhythmic phrases and signals which guided choreographed group dances and their transitions. It was here in the context of the ballet that the *djembé* found its dramatic voice. Nowhere was that voice more public than in the pyramid.

Shorter transitions in the pyramid are accomplished using signals. In the case of *Sunun* there are two main signals which divide *djembé* solos and the singing of “Maya-ee,” the song that often is performed with the *Sunun* rhythm (see fig. 2.7).



[Fig. 2.7: transcription of *Sunun* signals from Mamady Keïta's pyramid]

Sections labeled “djembé accomp. for *Sunun*” represent the space where improvised solos can take place while the *dununs* continue with the rhythm and the rest of the *djembés* maintain the accompaniment pattern. The song “Maya-ee” also has room for improvisation on the part of the lead singer (see fig. 2.8).

[fig. 2.8: transcription of *Maya-ee* as sung by Keïta, April 2007]

The short and long signals in this arrangement create a balance between the drama of the *djembé* solos and the playfulness of the vocal melody. The additional rolls in the middle section are an example of some of the “techniques,” developed within the context of the ballet, which still delight young *djembé* players and their audiences. The idea of using signals (to aid transitions between sections) is not traditional to *djembé* and *dunun* music any more than is the handing of the rhythmic figures in the extended break. Yet, once these new ideas and techniques entered the *djembé* repertoire they began to filter into other playing contexts as well.

The final item that the pyramid added to *djembé* repertoire is the concept of “techniques.” These are short repeated phrases of virtuosic content meant to show off a *djembé* player's technical prowess. The *Bele Bele* section of Keïta's pyramid highlights these “techniques.” *Bele Bele* is an original composition by Keïta. In the context of the pyramid this rhythm starts with a solo entry by the *sangban* with its bell (see fig. 2.9).

BELE BELE

DOWN KENKENI
BELL
SANGBAN
DUNUNBA

[fig. 2.9: transcription of *Bele Bele* as played by Mamady Keita, 2007]

Due to the fact that this arrangement was written for performance in the ballet, there are no bell parts for the *kenkeni* or *dununba*. The solo *sangban* and bell intro for this rhythm only cycles two and a half times before it is interrupted by the *djembe* signal (see B in figure 2.10). This is the only signal in this section and it is used to announce the *djembe* accompaniment and solo sections as well as the first entry of the song (figs. 2.10 & 2.11).

A) BELE BELE BEGINS w/ ONLY SANGBAN and BELL

B) BELE BELE SIGNAL ONE

C) CLAP AND SING SONG: BELE BELE (SANGBAN and DUNUNBA accomp. no bell)

D) BELE BELE SIGNAL ONE

E) Djembe accomp for BELE BELE + Djembe solos

F)

G)

H)

I)

[fig. 2.10: transcription of *Bele Bele* pyramid arrangement © Mamady Keita]

I1)

J) SING AND CLAP BELE BELE

K) SIGNAL ONE

M) LAST SIGNAL

L) Djembe x solos / Accomp.

NEXT RHYTHMS:
TIRIBA then DENADON

3 times

MULTIPLE TIMES

[fig. 2.11: transcription of *Bele Bele* pyramid arrangement (cont.) Mamady Keïta, 2007]

The signal is also used to introduce the section of “techniques” starting at letter “F.” Each technique, except the last one “I1,” is sandwiched between four beats of the bass. These bass beats are an important place holder for the players to recover from each technique and prepare for the next. In addition, each technique is played a prescribed number of times (three) in order for the players to coordinate themselves. While these techniques have much in common with improvised solo phrases which might be played in the context of a village celebration, their carefully calculated number, prescribed length, and order of occurrence are unique to the situation of the pyramid. This is an example of what Keïta refers to as a “composition.” For *djembé* players from the village the idea of playing prescribed phrases, a specific number of times, would have been entirely foreign. In addition, these “techniques” have more in common with technical exercises than they do with phrases which might be played to punctuate a dancer’s movements. Thus, the “techniques” seem to have the dual function of refining both individual and ensemble playing, as well as displaying a level of virtuosity that would impress the audience.

The song that Keïta decided to use for this composition is a very short, eight beat, call and response (see fig.2.12). The entire song is first sung solo (call) and then in chorus (response). This song's lively nature and rhythmic interest make it the perfect choice for a composition consisting of "techniques." I transcribed it in common time to show how the song lines up with the eight beats of the *sangban* and bell parts where each group of four pulsations represents one beat (fig 2.12). The rhythm of the song and the bell part interlock while the *sangban* part adds an interesting punctuation on the off-beats.

The image shows a handwritten musical transcription. At the top, there are two staves. The first staff is labeled 'BELL' and contains a series of rhythmic pulses, with some pulses marked with an 'x'. The second staff is labeled 'SANGBAN' and contains a series of rhythmic pulses, also with some marked with an 'x'. Below these is a vocal line in treble clef. The lyrics are written below the notes: 'Bele bele naKang te don a Föä - di-lo djin-da -la yiri sa'. The notes are mostly quarter and eighth notes, with some rests.

[fig. 2.12: transcription of *Bele Bele* song as sung by Keïta, April 2007 © Mamady Keïta]

Some of the interplay among these parts is lost in this arrangement, however, due to the fact that the bell is omitted after the introduction. The song is only sung twice through in this entire section. It is clearly the inspiration for this composition but not the focus of it. Here is an example of another contrast between the village and the ballet. In the village setting according to Keïta, "The first thing that comes about is the situation, the second things are the songs for that situation, the third thing is the dance for that situation, and then the rhythm for that situation (Keïta Interview: Ramona, CA, April, 18, 2007). In the context of the pyramid it is the rhythm that is given the primary focus, and with the rhythm the *djembe*.

Outline of Pyramid from Opening Break to the end of *Bele Bele*:

1. *Komodaynu*: sung acappella as call and response
2. *Kotejuga*: *dununs* and *djembé* accompaniment
3. Extended 214-beat break (last 32 beats act as a transition to *Sunun*)
4. *Sunun*: two repetitions of *dunun* parts
5. *Maya-ee* is sung to *dunun* accompaniment.
6. *Sunun*: long signal
7. *Maya-ee* is sung again as in #5
8. *Sunun*: short signal
9. *Djembé* accompaniment and solos
10. *Sunun*: long signal– six roll-4’s – long signal
11. *Maya-ee* is sung again as in #5
12. *Sunun*: short signal
13. *Djembé* accompaniment and solos
14. Keïta’s signature introductory signal
15. *Sunun*: short signal
16. *Bele Bele*: introduction by *sangban* (with bell)
17. *Bele Bele*: signal one: played twice
18. *Bele Bele*: song is sung to *dunun* accompaniment
19. *Bele Bele*: signal one: played once
20. *Bele Bele*: *djembe* accompaniment and solos
21. *Bele Bele*: signal one: played once
22. technique “F” followed by four bass beats: played three times
23. technique “G” followed by four bass beats: played three times
24. technique “H” followed by four bass beats: played three times
25. technique “I” followed by four bass beats: played three times
26. technique “II”: played three times
27. *Bele Bele*: song is sung to *dunun* accompaniment
28. *Bele Bele*: signal one: played once
29. *Bele Bele*: *djembe* accompaniment and solos
30. *Bele Bele*: signal one: played once

The ballet gave *djembéfolas* the tools to re-imagine not only the possibilities of the *djembé* as an instrument, but also new performance possibilities for the traditional music they left behind in their villages. The outline above reveals a completely regimented style of playing unlike anything done in the context of a village ritual. The style of composition used in the ballet opened the door for professional *djembéfolas* to consider traditional music in an entirely different format. The idea that traditional rhythms could be made into compositions with a clearly defined sense of form, much like

European classical music or American popular music, initiated a new style performance which has come to be known as ‘concert *djembé*’ music (Charry: 1996, 2000).

Concert *djembé* and *dunun* music: neo-traditional?

In creating a new musical genre based closely on traditional music *djembéfolas* are taking control of their creative lives. This is true not only on the level of ethnic representation but also on the level of musical creativity. In the context of village celebrations the drummers have very little input. Instead they take their directions from both the *jelis* and the dancers. German musicologist Johannes Beer explains,

At first the griottes stand directly next to the drummers and begin singing whatever songs fit the occasion. After a few seconds the drummers join in. The solo drummer must know all of the songs, as the rhythm depends on the song. There are several songs for every rhythm, so the variety of songs is vastly greater than the variety of rhythms. When a celebration is in full swing, a rhythm seldom lasts more than a few minutes, as the griottes – vying with one another – soon start singing a new song, which immediately entails a change of rhythm. It is thus the griottes who determine the musical course of the ceremony (Beer as quoted by Konaté and Ott 1997: 25).

With the *jelis* in charge there is no time for elaborate introductions or breaks. In addition, the *djembé* soloist must also respond to the needs of the dancers by playing rhythmic “patterns appropriate to the dancers’ steps” (ibid.). There is very little room here for the *djembé* player to be creative musically.

One of the most creative *djembéfolas* teaching and performing today is Famoudou Konaté. Konaté comes from the village of Sangbarella in the Hamana region of Upper Guinea. Konaté’s creativity is not limited to his performances – it permeates his teaching as well. Unlike Keïta, Konaté rarely teaches the same solo phrases for a given rhythm more than once. During his drum camps in Guinea he often has difficulty remembering specific phrases he teaches from one day to the next. Konaté is in a constant state of

creating new music based upon his traditional roots. Indeed, this is quite characteristic for drummers from his region where each rhythm from the *Dununbé* family of rhythms contains a seemingly endless set of possible *dunun* variations. While Konaté's creativity has a greater chance to flourish outside of the restraints of village celebrations, his constant creation of new rhythms is not what makes his music neo-traditional.

The focus on instrumental music along with the coexistence of newly created works with revived traditional rhythms make Konaté's most recent recording unique. All of Konaté's recordings until this one have started each rhythm with the song that inspired its creation. In his previous CD, *Hamana Mandenkönö* (2004), the liner notes included the lyrics to each song in Malinké, German, French, and English. While many of the rhythms that accompanied these songs were Konaté's own compositions, the songs which inspired them all originated from Konaté's village. It seems that with this current recording entitled *Hamana Namun* (2008), Konaté is not only departing from his previous format, but also creating a whole new form of traditionally inspired percussion music. In this most recent release of the CD, Konaté's focus is entirely instrumental.

Thomas Ott describes this CD in the liner notes,

When Famoudou Konaté focuses exclusively on the instruments (with the exception of two pieces), he intends to direct the listener's attention to the music as such. The listener should not be distracted by the rhythm's context or lyrics. Instead the listening experience should be likened to European concert music – concentrating on musical structures and personal perceptions evoked by the pieces. (Interview Ott: 2008)

While Konaté's performances and recordings have been moving toward the aesthetic of European concert music for some time, this is the first recording where the shift seems complete. Konaté has embraced his role as not only the arranger of traditional pieces and songs but as a composer and arranger of instrumental music.

This CD includes three original compositions by Konaté. *Nanfina* is a rhythm based on a love song introduced to Konaté by dancer Mamady Kourouma during his time in *Les Ballets Africains de Guinée*. While there is a *balafon* providing much of the melodic interest in this piece, the *dununs* have also been tuned much lower in order to enhance their melodic qualities. In *Dunun Mayéléman*, the *dununs* and the *djembé* are also very carefully tuned to each other to aid in the creation of a truly melodic basis for the rhythm. To add further sonic interest, Konaté has included various sizes of bells and woodblock drums (*kryn*) to embellish the basic rhythms. In *Soofétama*, Konaté tunes the *kenkeni* to an E (above middle C), and one *sangban* or *kenkeni* to the D a major second below, and a second *sangban* to the B a fourth below the E. The result of this tuning is a clearly recognizable bass ostinato pattern that runs throughout the piece. The combination of the title which means “to do the rounds or go far a walk” with this bass pattern, a solo opening on frame drum complete with a rooster crowing in the background, inclines me to label this as an example of “program music.” Each time Konaté speaks of traditional *djembé* and *dunun* music (from his region of Hamana) to his students he always refers to the rhythm as a melody. With these original compositions he has taken that aesthetic and used it to create a form of percussion music that can stand alone without song or dance.

Alongside these original compositions Konaté has included traditional pieces, some of which he plays without any traces of ballet influences such as intros and breaks. Konaté’s strict adherence to tradition in pieces such as *Kawa de Faranah* and *Kawa de Hamana* stand in a complex juxtaposition to the complete creative abandon in his own compositions such as *Soofétama*. In both the Hamana and Faranah versions of the rhythm of the *Kawa* mask, Konaté starts out with only the *sangban* playing. Given that the

sangban rhythm represents the only difference between these two versions, this introduction seems almost pedagogical. Three of the traditional rhythms, *Tiadian*, *Söma Sandyi*, and *Bara Duu* start with a short *djembé* signal while two others, *Soliwulen* and *Solibasi*, begin with more elaborate introductions on either *djembé* (in the case of *Soliwulen*), or *dununs* and *djembé* (as in *Solibasi*). In addition to these, Konaté has created two medleys which combine rhythms that have the same theme: *Toro* (which includes versions one, two and three); and *Dibon, Kassa et Konkoba Dunun* (which consists of various planting and harvesting rhythms). These extended arrangements both begin with elaborate introductions. *Dibon, Kassa et Konkoba Dunun* begins with a short rhythmic solo played by ceramic drums (played with bamboo sticks) called *tantanen* which then leads into a longer introduction on the *djembé* and *dununs*. The two versions of *Dibon* are separated by an interlude on the *tantanen* drums. There is also a second short interlude which consists of a short vocal chant sung by Konaté. The final rhythm of the medley, *Konkoba Dunun*, is begun after a very short rhythmic break and signal on the *djembé*. The rhythms of this medley take the listener from planting right through harvest and the celebrations that take place after the harvest. The piece ends with a sound-scape played by Konaté on the *djembé* as the other instruments fade out in the background. The dramatic nature of this instrumental piece reminds me of the ballet – it is easy to imagine the dancers interpreting the series of scenes laid out on this track by Konaté.

Only two of the traditional pieces on this CD include a song sung by a chorus of *jelis*. Both pieces, *Solibasi* and *Toro*, are connected to rituals surrounding male initiation. *Solibasi* is a rhythm that is played from evening until the morning of the circumcision itself. The song is sung to encourage the boys to be brave and “persevere” as they enter

this phase of their initiation (Ott and Konaté: 2008). The main focus of this piece is Konaté's *djembé* which provides a rather extended solo introduction. The alternation found on this track between *djembé* solo and the song is also typical in the context of a village celebration. *Toro*, on the other hand, is played as a medley among *Toro One*, *Toro Two*, and *Toro Three*. These various versions represent different generations of initiations and would not be played together during a traditional ritual. First, *Toro One* begins and ends with an elaborate introduction on *dununs* and *djembé*, this same introduction is used as a break midway through the piece. Next, *Toro Two* is played for a brief time. Finally, *Toro Three* is introduced with a solo on *wassamba* followed by a call-and response song sung by *jelis*. The instrument that connects all of these versions of *Toro* is the *wassamba*. This was the original instrument used for this dance which is performed by the newly initiated young men. The mixture between traditional elements and ballet-style innovations help these rhythms stand alone as complete musical pieces.

While it might be appropriate to label this music neo-traditional – due more to the change in performance context and less to the existence of ballet elements – this label is not necessarily useful. Konaté perceives the music he teaches in his classes and the music he records to be traditional. It matters not to him if the pieces in question have solo phrases, introductions and breaks which were composed by him. For Konaté *djembé* and *dunun* music is traditional for many different reasons which are not necessarily defined by the age of a song its rhythm. Both new and old songs can be considered traditional for Konaté. Yet, there are some newer pieces which are more acceptable than others within this category. At times Konaté's use of the traditional label seems as much based upon aesthetic elements as it is on historical connections within the culture. As a matter of

common practice, musicians and drummers from all across West Africa have always combined elements from outside influences. New rhythms are often created as events are added to be celebrated in the urban or village context. What is different about what Konaté (and his sons) and Keïta are doing is that they are creating these new works not for use within Guinea, but for the international market and concert stage. The current evidence of ballet influences in traditional recordings made for the Western marketplace are part of the adaptation necessary as drummers move this music onto the concert stage. To label this music as neo-traditional reflects the bias of our Western fantasy of the existence of a pure cultural product untouched by modern technology or the global marketplace. To think of 'traditional' music as a product unchanged through time is to come from the paradigm of this fantasy. To label the current performances and recordings by Konaté, Keïta, and other drummers as neo-traditional sets up the assumption that traditional music is defined as historically stable and pure. In reality there can be no transmission without some adaptation. If we understand Konaté and Keïta's use of the label 'traditional' for music not defined its by age but in juxtaposition to the folkloric representations associated with the ballet, it stands to reason that the label "neo-traditional" adds no further meaning.

With this new strand of traditional music have come new opportunities for *djembéfolas* to pursue careers as professionals. There is interest in traditional *djembé* music not only for the international concert stage, but also within Guinea in the form of urban celebrations and festivals. Through a combination of these two audiences many young *djembéfolas* have managed to pursue professional careers as full-time *djembé* players and teachers. While drummers such as Keïta and Konaté began their professional

careers in the ballet, many younger urban drummers have managed to form their careers on traditional music alone. Unlike the *jeli* who has an accepted status within Malinké society, those who left their villages in the pursuit of a careers as *djembéfolas* are carving new social and cultural paths for themselves and others who come after them. To be a professional musician is thus not just a matter of establishing viable networks of patronage, it is also about forming a legitimate place for oneself in the community.

The *djembéfolas* as professional musician: three generations of case studies

Through an examination of a sample of professional *djembéfolas* from different generations I hope to demonstrate the many ways in which the new problem of identity as professional musicians is being worked out on a daily basis by Guinean drummers. There are three generations of professional *djembéfolas* I interviewed while in Guinea. The first generation, including Mamady Keïta, Famoudou Konaté, Daouda Kourouma, and Sekou Konaté, began their lives in the village (as apprentices to rural *djembéfolas*) before joining one of Guinea's national ballet companies. I consider this the first generation of professional *djembéfolas* in Malinké history. The second generation consists of young urban men who either came to the capital to seek out a *djembé* teacher in the hope that they might be able to join a touring ballet company, or students raised and educated in Conakry who learned to play *djembé* in school. The third generation is partly the result of a re-awakening to traditional culture that happened in rural Guinea after Touré's death (Diawara 1998). While these young people could become village *djembéfolas*, most of them have chosen come to Conakry and pursue *djembé* as a professional career. On the other hand, the youngest generation of urban *djembé* players who associate themselves

with Keïta, Konaté or Bangoura are also turning to traditional music largely due to the increased foreign marketability this music now enjoys.

The first generation of professional *djembéfolas* began their careers on the international stage as representatives of Guinea. It is clear that even after retirement from the ballet, their focus has remained international and outward looking rather than local. Part of the reason for this is that while they knew that there was a market for *djembé* music abroad they had no assurance that a similar market could be created at home. While *djembé*-based rituals and celebrations were being reconstituted in the village in the mid-1980s, there was not enough currency circulating in rural Guinea for a *djembéfolo* to make a living exclusively by playing for the handful of festive occasions where *djembé* music is required.¹⁴ Things were slightly better in the capital, but it was still not possible for a mature man to support his extended family working as a *djembéfolo*.

Keïta and Konaté left the life of the ballet only once they had been presented with other options. For Keïta all it took to retire from life as a ballet drummer was an invitation to teach at a drum school in Brussels. Conversely, for Konaté, it took two successful teaching and performing tours of Germany before he was convinced that he should retire from *Les Ballets Africains de la République de Guinée*. During the Mini-Guinea two-week intensive *djembé* course in Ramona, California, a student asked Keïta what his profession would be if he had not been conscripted into the national ballet.

¹⁴ According to Arulpragasam and Sahn, "The high rates of inflation and the overvaluation of the currency, moreover, combined with low levels of monetization of some of the more isolated rural communities, led to much trade being undertaken as barter transactions . . . the rural population turned increasingly to subsistence agriculture as a means of protecting their livelihood and avoiding a distorted exchange economy" (Arulpragasam and Sahn 1997: 13-14).

Student: What if you were a *djembéfol*a who stayed in the village, you weren't taken away or didn't have the opportunity to be a performer in the ballet? What if you had stayed and lived your life as a *djembéfol*a in a village? What would be your role in society?

Mamady: Farmer.

Students' response: Laughter.

Mamady: My master spent his whole life in the village as a farmer and *djembéfol*a. But, as a *djembéfol*a you don't earn anything, you don't make any money – nothing. You do all the ceremonies and festivals the people ask you to do – for free. It is not like you ask a price and say, “pay me this or that much and I will come and play at your festivities.” But, in addition, you are happy to do it because you are successful and because the women fight over you. You do receive gifts. Sometimes the people will give you things, not necessarily money but if they are happy with what you are doing they will give you something but it is not anything of great value. You cannot live from only these gifts. You cannot survive on these gifts. If I was still in the village, I would be a farmer and a little *djembéfol*a.

For Keïta the idea of giving up his career as a professional musician to learn farming was simply not an option. The only career he knew was as a *djembé* soloist in *Ballet D'Joliba*. As a result, Keïta sought out a similar position as *djembé* soloist in one of the national ballets of Côte D'Ivoire. After two years of touring with this group he was spotted by the owner of a drum school in Belgium and consequently invited to teach. It was at this point that Keïta launched his international career as a teacher, workshop facilitator and solo performer of traditional Malinké music.

Conversely, Konaté, was not discovered in Europe but at his home in Guinea. Rainer Dörrer, a drum student, was introduced to Konaté through the German scholar Johannes Beer while on a three-month trip to West Africa in search of a *djembé* teacher. Dörrer quickly became Konaté's collaborator and was responsible not only for Konaté's initial introduction to the European market, but also for the initiation of the yearly drum

camps or *stages* (held at Konaté's home in Conakry) which have become the single most important source of income for Konaté's entire extended family in Guinea.

M'Bemba Bangoura, and Sekou Sano are second generation professional *djembéfolas* and ballet choreographers. The pathway was already paved for Bangoura to follow in the footsteps of his teachers Keïta and Konaté and pursue an international career as a *djembé* teacher. Bangoura, however, is careful not to place himself in the shadow of these great, still living, carriers of Malinké *djembé* tradition.

Vera: Can you tell me when you started to play the *djembé*?

Bemba: I started to play *djembé* when I was seven-years old. I started in the school because a long time ago we had a competition with the different schools. So, when I started *djembé*, I started in the elementary school here in Guinea, in Conakry. Conakry won [one?]. That is when I started to play *djembé*.

Vera: And who were some of your first teachers?

Bemba: O.K. Good question. My first teacher was one of the guys . . . I mean, he was not my teacher, we just used to play *djembé* together, like Lansiné Diabaté, Autrelaura Camara. They weren't my teachers but we used to work together.

Vera: At what point did you join the ballet?

Bemba: So, to join in the *Ballet D'Joliba*: so, I was playing in the competition in 1973 and then in 1973, after the festival, they brought me to *Ballet D'Joliba*. But before that I knew Mamady Keïta, I knew Bangoulou Keïta, Lauro Camara, Famoudou Konaté, Koumbouna Keïta, Koumbouna Condé. So, when I came to *Ballet D'Joliba* I was too young [to be a performer]. I was like 13 or 14 years old when I joined *D'Joliba*. So, Mamady Keïta was the lead drummer then of the *Ballet D'Joliba*, so when I came to *D'Joliba* that was when we started to develop myself to be a good *djembé* player, to learn a lot of music from the Mandeng. [It sounds as if Bemba is crediting Mamady Keïta as the one who helped him to develop into a good drummer.] I come from the Susu ethnic group so to learn to play the Malinké music we used to play together. Because Mamady Keïta comes from Wassolon and Bangoulou Keïta comes from Hamana, no Sankana, and Koumbouna Keïta comes from Sankana too;

they are all Malinké but they come from different villages in Guinea. That is how I started to learn to play the Malinké music.

Similar to many of Conakry's urban *djembéfolas*, Bangoura, never having experienced life in a Malinké village, learned all he knows from drummers within the ballet. Still, he considers himself fortunate to have had the opportunity to learn from older drummers steeped in the traditions of their villages (Guinea Interview 2008). It is clear that although he makes reference to Keïta as one of his primary sources for knowledge of traditional Malinké music, he hesitates to call him his teacher. Bangoura feels that he must depict himself as an independent artist in order to carve out a space for himself in the international *djembé* circuit. Rather than follow Keïta to Belgium or Konaté to Germany, Bangoura initially set his sights on Holland before finally settling in New York. He currently divides his time between teaching ballet style dance classes and traditional style *djembé* and *dunun* classes in New York City.

Sekou Sano is the son of retired *Les Ballets Africains* ensemble director, dancer and choreographer, Kemoko Sano, who upon retirement formed a local Guinean ensemble called *Les Merveilles*. Sekou took over *Les Merveilles* as a *djembé* player and choreographer in 2006, after the death of his father, and has been making a subsistence living in Conakry. Sano relies on tours of European and American *djembé* students to supplement his earnings as director of *Les Merveilles*. Having been raised a Susu in the urban context of Conakry, Sano is well versed in the music and dance of the ballet but not the traditional Malinké roots of the music. When I asked him some questions about the history behind a rhythm he was teaching, Sano had difficulty responding and was clearly out of his element. Sano, unlike Bangoura, did not have the opportunity to study with ethnic Malinké *djembé* players steeped in their traditional music. For Sano, his career

begins and ends as a ballet artist. While he is able to eke out a living performing locally in Guinea and neighboring countries in West Africa, he told me that he hopes some day to tour and teach internationally.

Billy Nankouma Konaté, Ibro Konaté, Diarra Konaté, and Fodé Konaté are second generation Malinké *djembéfolas* with similar attitudes toward traditional music but very different career trajectories. All of these drummers are ethnic Malinké. In addition, they are all sons of Famoudou Konaté. While all of his sons were born in Conakry during Famoudou's time with the ballet, the elder Konaté sent each one back to his home village of Sangbarella to live for periods of time (up to two years). When asked about his reason for doing this, Konaté stated that he wanted his boys to understand the culture they came from and to get a good education. To make this possible they not only needed live in Conakry to go to school, but also visit the village periodically to learn about their culture. As a result, each of these drummers was not only initiated in the village, they also experienced many traditional festivals first hand as drum apprentices. Three of Famoudou's sons eventually followed him to Germany, where they collaborated with German drummers (in two cases these individuals became their wives) in establishing drum schools. All three sons have benefited from their father's legacy as a traditional *djembéfolas*. Fodé makes his living within Conakry, playing for wedding and naming ceremonies as well as various other events throughout the city. While Fodé was the only one to stay behind in Guinea, he has also benefited from his father's success through his employment by Famoudou as the individual in charge of his properties in Conakry.

Nansady Keita and Sayon Camara are second generation professional *djembéfolas* who are also associated with Konaté. Both drummers were born and raised in Sangbarella. When they decided to become professional drummers, they had no choice but to move to Conakry. Unlike many other young men who made this choice in the late 1970s early 1980s, neither of them was interested in joining a ballet company. Through their association with Konaté, both drummers have embarked on a career as international performers and teachers of traditional music. While Keita is currently living in England, Camara has chosen to continue basing himself out of Conakry. In addition to their extensive tour schedules, both Keita and Camara also attract many international students to Guinea for their own drum camps. These drum camps take place both in Conakry and Sangbarella.

The third generation of professional or aspiring professional drummers I interviewed is also closely connected with Konaté and Keita. Two of these young men, Sekou Koné and Mamady Kouyaté, grew up near Konaté's village of Sangbarella in the Hamana region of Upper Guinea. The third drummer, Sekou Keita, Mamady Keita's nephew, grew up in Keita's village of Balandougou. The fourth one, Alpha Omar Sidibé (a Susu) grew up in Conakry. What all of these young drummers have in common is a dedication to traditional Malinké music and a rejection of the ballet. They all agree that it is not possible to make a living as a full-time drummer without some support from outside of Guinea. However, each drummer has decided on a different mixture of avenues to make a living as a professional drummer in Conakry.

When I asked Sekou Keita whether or not it was possible to make a living as a *djembéfolas*, he responded in the affirmative. He currently plays with the group

Balandougoukan. This group is often very busy playing weddings in and around Conakry. While these gigs would not pay very much in the village (people just don't have the extra money to "spray" the drummers any more than 100FG or 500FG bills), in Conakry people spare no expense for weddings and naming ceremonies and other family events. Between these gigs with *balandougoukan*, and playing for Mamady's drum camps, Sekou can make a living for himself as a *djembefolas*, but not enough to support a family. Alpha Omar Sidibé concurs with Sekou Keïta but adds the following observations.

It is possible [to make a living]if you have relationships outside of Conakry, people who can bring students to your workshops in Conakry, people who can bring some other basic things that we cannot get here. These people who you know from outside can sponsor you and do your marketing outside of Guinea. If you have such connections outside of Guinea you can live here like a professional even without leaving Conakry. For example, Fadouba Oularé, a big master drummer who worked with Famoudou Konaté in the ballet, he lives in Farana. He has never gone outside of Guinea yet he has some connections and sponsors outside who bring students to him every year. He lives in a village but he lives there as a professional *djembé* player. (Alpha Omar Sidibé: Interview in Guinea, February, 2008)

Both of these two young drummers have benefited from their association with an internationally renowned drummer such as Mamady Keïta; first, by following his example and second, by claiming their connection to him in order to gain authority with foreign students. While Sidibé is attempting to make his entire living as a *djembéfola*, Sekou Keïta has decided to expand his earning potential through buying into the lucrative *djembé* market. While he claims that his first efforts at building a *djembé* were quite disastrous, he has since become one of the official *djembé* makers and sellers for Mamady Keïta's yearly drum camps (Sekou Keita: Interview 2008).

Sekou Koné revealed to me that without these foreign connections, playing for local festivities alone are not always sufficient to be able to make a living.

In Africa we work a lot [many jobs] because of the need for money. In Africa we do a lot of work, we drive cars [taxis], we do electrical work, as well as being drummers. I did all of that work before but I have since stopped to work solely with the *djembé*. That has worked really well for me. Africa is Africa. There are times when playing the drum works really well and then there are times when it doesn't. There can be times when you can go two weeks where there are no celebrations and you don't play the *djembé* at all. You might get together once or twice just to practice but there are no celebrations (festivals) going on. Yet, when you are sick it is the money from playing the *djembé* that makes it possible to get to the doctor (hospital). For clothing it is the *djembé* that gives you the money for that. For food, it is the *djembé* that gives you money for that. Your house, the *djembé* also gives you money for your house. (Sekou Koné: Interview in Guinea, February, 2008)

Sekou Koné has, in the last three years, managed to supplement this income as a festival drummer with classes he teaches both in his village and in Conakry. He recently conducted two months worth of classes for a group of Italian students in his village. He also has taught French students from Europe and students from Japan. Koné also told me that his status has shifted dramatically in his village because of the foreign students he has brought there. These students from the West have made it possible for Koné to devote all of his time to drumming without having to supplement his income with other jobs.

Mamady Kouyaté has not been as fortunate as Koné. As a hereditary *jeli* and drummer, Kouyaté does not teach. Instead, he relies heavily on income from local events and patrons as a singer and *bolon* player, as well as gigs he gets as a *dunun* player for the various drum camps throughout Conakry from January through March. The picture he paints is much more humble than Koné's.

It also works well for me to make a living as a musician and drummer. I don't make a lot of money but I make enough for food. And for this I am happy. For me it is not just the *sangban* that gives me money I also play other drums, I play the *bolon*, and I sing. I am very happy to be able to be

an artist but I continue to learn. (Mamady Kouyaté: Interview in Guinea, February, 2008)

Unlike Koné who has been able to help not only himself but also his village with the income he makes through drumming, Kouyaté cannot even make enough money to put a roof over his head. While he is resourceful enough to stay with friends and other supporters, Kouyaté still has nothing left over should he fall ill and need to pay for medical care. Koné credits the *djembé* for giving him money for hospital care, clothing, food, and lodging, but if we take Kouyaté's example into account it seems that foreign patronage is more responsible for providing these things than the *djembé* alone.

Conclusion

The ballet not only urbanized *djembé* playing, it also made it an art and a profession. In addition, the ballet established channels for Western patronage which have made it possible for *djembéfolas* to pursue their art as a full-time profession. In their struggle to live as professional musicians each generation looks for both local and international sources of income. Even for *djembéfolas* who never leave Guinea, outside connections play an important role in their professional lives. These same foreign connections also help improve the status of the *djembéfolas* within his community, establishing him as a valuable professional who can contribute to the well being of the families within his village. Still, the professional *djembéfolas* is not a *jeli*, he is a new type of artisan who resides outside of traditional Malinké cultural structures.

In the process of creating concert and ballet forms of entertainment, terms such as 'tradition,' 'creation,' and 'authenticity' have become more political and multivalent. Meanwhile these terms hold no particular importance or meaning outside of the Guinean-global exchange which made *djembéfolas* professionals. Between working drummers

within Guinea “it’s all good” (Bangoura 2008: Interview in Conakry). Conversely, in front of Western students each drummer makes claims to greater authenticity and knowledge of tradition than his counterparts. The adaptation of young drummers to this new paradigm of professional life is characteristic of West Africa’s unofficial economy. Similar to the entrepreneurs who sell fabric and carvings in the marketplace, many professional *djembéfolas* have become convincing salesmen of traditional music. In so doing they have tapped into the values of their students and their audience. In the next chapter I will be uncovering the many layers of rhetoric and musical adaptation constructed by *djembéfolas* in their attempt to market “traditional” *djembé* music and Malinké culture to foreign tourists, students, and audiences.

On a deeper level, Keïta, Konaté, Kourouma, and Sékou Konaté feel that the ballet represents a somewhat colonized version of their traditional culture. The fact that it was created in Paris and further developed in Senegal, by a mixture of artists from all over Francophone West Africa, brands it as a "creation" not "tradition" in their minds. For the younger generation, this history is not part of their experience. For them, the ballet represents an opportunity to pursue a career in music without the burden or necessity of belonging to the *jeliya* caste. In present-day Guinea the divisions between village traditions and the ballet are slowly breaking down. In their place folkloric versions of masks, rituals, dances, and rhythms are emerging as forms of entertainment and sources of tourism. These folkloric versions have become the new tradition in Guinea. Yet, as long as Keïta, Konaté, and their followers continue to hold on to a nostalgic vision of traditional Malinké culture, their version of "traditional" *djembé* and *dunun* music will continue to flourish outside of Guinea.

Chapter Three

Tradition and Transmission: Local Realities and the Global Marketplace

Music and Africa come together to form a distinctive niche in the global trafficking of culture as commodity. In the contemporary version of the world-as-exhibition, African musicians travel international performance circuits, offering “traditional” culture and authentic identities for consumers who crave the resources of an imagined homogeneous traditional society. (Ebron 2002: 51)

One of the purposes of this chapter is to investigate the current and historical circumstances which have led to the global commodification of Guinea's *djembé*. Central to this inquiry are the roles played by Keita and Konaté in establishing a lineage of professional, urban-traditional, *djembéfolas*. Patronage networks, established through drum camps in Guinea and workshops abroad are one of the major points of transmission for "traditional" *djembé* music as it becomes a packaged, consumable product.

The commodification of Guinea's “traditional” *djembé* music through cultural tourism has been a team effort among *djembéfolas*, culture brokers, and students. Within the global microcosm of the annual drum camps in Guinea it is possible to track the interaction of these three groups as each influences the transmission of this music as a cultural product. While the brokering of culture and the commodification of tradition started with the *djembéfolas*, it has been further carried on by students who have themselves become teachers. These teachers have since become culture brokers working alongside their *djembéfolas* to bring more students to Guinea on organized trips. The students who come on these trips have in turn become ambassadors of the both the music

and the culture of Guinea. The categories of *djembéfolas*, culture broker, and drum student are not completely self-contained nor are they inhabited by particular groups of individuals. Some *djembéfolas* act as their own culture brokers, many culture brokers are also students, some students become teachers, although not all teachers become culture brokers. The movement of individuals among these categories is both varied and deeply personal.

The theoretical constructs from Slobin's "Micromusics of the West" (1992) and Edward M. Bruner's analysis of cultural tourism of the Maasai in Kenya will serve as points of comparison for my study (Bruner 2001). I will begin with an overview of the current economic situation in Guinea followed by an examination of the ways in which "tradition" has been constructed in the context of the development of professional *djembéfolas* in urban Guinea. Next, I will look at the complex interaction among *djembéfolas*, culture brokers and students in the construction of a tourist industry based upon the *djembé*. Finally, I will look at two performances, one urban and one rural, as examples of the current expansion of this cultural-tourism industry in Guinea.

"Traditional markets:" the globalization paradigm of today's professional *djembéfolas*

After the death of Sékou Touré two systems of arts patronage in Guinea collapsed. Musicians under the Touré regime carried government identity cards which gave them free access to transportation both within Guinea and to locations abroad (Bangoura 2007). In general, artists were a part of Touré's swollen civil service which had created budget expenditures that could not be maintained in the long run. Due to the government promise which assured every secondary school and university graduate a position within the civil service, the government workforce in Conakry swelled to 50% of

the population (Arulpragasam and Sahn 1997: 11-12). By the early 1980s spending had gotten so out of control that a government budget did not even exist (ibid.). In order to immediately redress this fiscal collapse, Lansana Conté (Guinea's second president) introduced an interim economic reform program entitled *Programme Intérimaire de Redressement*, which began the process of creating a working budget between 1985 and 1987. A more elaborate adjustment program, *Programme de Redressement Economique et Financier* (or PREF), was initiated between 1986 and 1988, supported by funds from the IMF and the World Bank (ibid.). One of the first items cut from the budget was funding for the various performing arts groups including: *ballets*, *orchestres*, and *ensembles*. While some groups such as the National Army Ballet were cut entirely and disbanded, others lost a sizable portion of their already inadequate government funding. This second program also included a "large scale devaluation and realignment of Guinea's exchange rate" (Arulpragasam and Sahn 1997: 15). In a very short time devaluation effectively eliminated Guinea's middle class, the other source of patronage for artists of all types in Guinea. The combination of higher prices for basic goods such as rice and gasoline, combined with lower wages for employed work and lower returns for goods created in rural Guinea, left the country with only two remaining classes: the underclass and the elite (Diawara 1998: 155).

Diawara notes that before devaluation, Francophone West Africans were divided in their opinions about the value of globalization. On one hand it was perceived as a continuation of colonization and, on the other, it was embraced as a means for "African artists and entrepreneurs to leave the periphery and join the metropolitan centers of Europe and America" (Diawara 1998: 138). Within the first opinion it was believed that

the government should undertake a protectionist role in the name of national autonomy. This paradigm, rooted in “Fanonian theories of resistance and national consciousness,” initially guided Touré’s isolationist socialist policies; policies which demanded that all goods consumed in Guinea must be produced in Guinea (ibid.). Conversely, the second viewpoint was informed by the paradigm of the West African marketplace which, while it has always been global, has existed as such in a manner that often bypassed official government and corporate channels.

At the present time, traditional markets within Guinea control most of the currency exchange through black-market money changers who have been given immunity by corrupt government officials. In addition, merchandise from all over the world is brought into these markets through unofficial channels, making it impossible for the nation-state to control the flow of goods into or out of the country (Diawara 1998: 142-145). While Arulpragasam and Sahn blame the “severe government intervention” of Touré’s regime for the private sector’s move underground, it is just as likely that the current marketplace is simply operating in much the same way as it has throughout recorded history (Arulpragasam and Sahn 1997: 12-13; Diawara 1998: 142-144). Diawara notes that “what makes these traditional schemes of globalization special is the structural continuity they maintained with contemporary markets” (Diawara 1998: 144). Traditional markets were the backbone of the economy throughout West Africa before colonization. While these markets have always operated on a global scale, they have resisted forms of globalization which are based upon the overt control of the nation by outside forces such as the World bank and the International Monetary Fund, or the more subtle control imposed by international corporations. The lack of accessible roads linking

rural producers to the international port in Conakry has created a great deal of unofficial cross-border trade and smuggling between various rural areas of Guinea and neighboring communities in Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, and Liberia (Arulpragasam and Sahn 1997: 13-14).

The professional *djembéfolas* I interviewed in Guinea operate both within and out of the globalization paradigm based on the traditional marketplace. In a manner similar to merchants in the traditional marketplace, they sell their product both in international locations and within Guinea. In addition, most of them produce their own recordings rather than working with an international record label. Yet, unlike some merchants in the marketplace, they carefully follow international laws which direct them to obtain work visas for the many locations where they teach abroad. Within the paradigm of the traditional marketplace there is a constant cross-influence between buyers and sellers. Because a merchant will only buy what he knows his customers want, he influences the producers of the products he buys. In a similar way, professional *djembéfolas* influence their students by creating a market for 'traditional' music while at the same time making that music fit within the musical tastes of their audience. Within this co-creation of traditional music I hope to reveal a new type of "grassroots globalization" which operates as a global system of patronage (Appadurai 2001: 3).

Tradition for sale: influences of the global market in the construction of tradition

The cross-influences of this “traditional” global marketplace continue to change not only the nature of the ballet but also the role of tradition in relation to it. The ballet as a genre has become its own tradition. At the same time the ballet is currently being influenced by the movement toward “traditional” arrangements promoted by Keïta, Konaté and their Western students. While I was in Conakry in 2006 and 2007, I heard and saw many ballet and percussion groups no different from the ones that existed at the time of independence. The costumes described by H.S. Hopkins in 1965 are still in use today. Many of the pyramid breaks, signals and techniques Keïta taught his students in California and at his home in Guinea are the same ones he composed in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Upon reviewing a video recording from a *Ballet D’Joliba* performance I recorded in 2006, I heard many of the same complete sections of the pyramid taught by Keïta. The original compositions by the first lead drummers of both *Ballet D’Joliba* and *Les Ballets Africains de la République de Guinea*, are being passed down to a new generation of drummers. Even though rhythms continue to be played faster and *djembés* continue to be tuned higher with each generation, the essential dances and rhythmic compositions remain the same. Current ballet drummers have a great deal of respect for both Keïta and Konaté. Their continued influence on the young drummers of the ballet is affecting subtle changes in the instrumentation and rhythms chosen for current ballet performances.

One change is the move back toward a traditional three-player, three-*dunun* set in the ballet. While this arrangement is traditional in upper-Guinea, Konaté’s region, it is not typical for the rest of Guinea or the extended Malinké culture where there are often

only one or two *dununs* and one or two *djembés*. Over half of the local ballets I saw perform in Guinea in 2007 had switched their *dunun* arrangement from one player playing an oil barrel *dununba* fixed with two *kenkenis* on the side, to one assigned player each for the *dununba* and bell, and the *kenkeni* and bell. The *sangban* player with his bell remained, as he was an earlier innovation to the original arrangement of the ballet *dununs* which consisted of one player playing all the parts. Keïta clearly describes this move as inspired by European concert and dance music. When I asked Keïta why he uses the arrangement of three-*dununs* in all of his teaching, recording and performance of rhythms, for which this arrangement is not typical, he stated that it was done to “enrich the rhythm.” Both Keïta and Konaté have made comments about the predominance of the beat and the bass in Western popular music. By adding the *dununba* to arrangements of traditional music, Keïta is catering to European and American musical tastes. The overwhelming interest in the three-*dunun* arrangement among European students, indeed a veritable standardization of it, has now begun to influence the rhythmic arrangements employed by the *Ballet D’Joliba* where Keïta was once the lead *djembéfola*. Rather than being polar opposites, as Keïta and Konaté would have us believe, the two genres are actually moving in a similar direction as European audiences continue to set the parameters for what is considered the most authentic and traditional version of Guinean *djembé* and *dunun* music. These moves back to tradition are multivalent and are motivated equally by ethnic pride and the demands of the global marketplace.

Manthia Diawara's examination of the life and work of carver, Sidimé Laye, provides a larger context from which to understand the politics and artistic compromises required for Guinean musicians such as Keïta and Konaté to enter the global marketplace.

During his pilgrimage back to Guinea in 1996, Diawara met up again with his old school friend, Sidimé Laye. Diawara was surprised to find that his friend, who had been very successful in school, had not become a politician, doctor or lawyer (Diawara 1998: 166). Instead, Laye was making his living as a carver specializing in masks and traditional idols. When Diawara pressed Laye about the reason why he had made this career choice he simply replied, “Very well, then. You, the Maraka boy, have become a white man, and I became a carver like all my family” (Diawara 1998: 167). Laye was clearly separating himself from his perception of Diawara’s Western world by asserting his place in traditional Malinké culture as a member of a “clan of carvers” (ibid). Answering Diawara’s question about the impact of Islam on his carving, Laye explained his creative process in the following way.

I become possessed by the mask I am carving. The finished work sometimes turns out completely different from what I had intended. My father was afraid of visiting these areas of spiritual creativity. He thought he was going mad. That’s why he stopped carving. As for me, I prefer this spiritual moment above all else in the world. I enjoy being lifted out of the present to meet interesting spirits, characters, and shapes that are several centuries old. (Diawara 1998: 168)

Touré’s demystification policy did not impact Laye’s clan in terms of making masks, neither did Islam stop them from connecting with *nyama* (spiritual powers) thus infusing their masks and idols with *boli* (spirit possession). What confused Diawara was that these masks were not being made to be used in rituals but to be sold to foreigners.

Diawara: “Do you respect the spirits that possess your hand?”

Laye: “Oh yes! And they know it. That is why they always visit me.”

Diawara: “But only white people buy the masks. They lock them up in their museums, and they decide what is authentic and what is fake.”

Laye: “That’s all right. Maybe the masks will do a better job of representing us in Europe than African people like you.”

Diawara: "Nonsense! White people use the masks as a sign of our primitiveness. They deny us a role in modernity. That is why they prefer the masks to us."

Laye: "That is not my problem, because I am not dying to be loved by white people. I just want to be paid for my work."
(Diawara 1998: 169)

Laye is modernizing in his own way. He, like so many hereditary artisans, has found a way to continue practicing his local traditional art and make a living in the global marketplace. In fact, he told Diawara that his masks sell for a good price because they are infused with *boli*. In order to manage the tension between the personal value he holds for his art and the means by which he must make a living, Laye has found a way to work both within and around limitations imposed by Touré's nationalist policies by engaging instead with the global marketplace.

Looking at the financial reality that drummers such as Mamady Keïta, Sekou Konaté, Daouda Kourouma, and Famoudou Konaté faced after their careers in the ballet ended, their move toward reclaiming ethnic, traditional, versions of *djembé* music and dance seems motivated as much by economics as it does by politics of representation. In an interview on April 24, 2007 Keïta stated that,

I worked for twenty-three years for my government. I worked like a crazy man. But, at the end of those twenty-three years I looked around and what did I have? Nothing. So I told myself I don't want to die like this. I need to at least prepare for my retirement before I get too tired. So there you go. That was the reason I left Guinea. (Interview Keïta: Ramona, CA, 2007)

The fact that today's *djembéfolas* consistently juxtapose traditional *djembé* music with the creation of the national ballets is not just an issue of artistic license; rather, it has to do with what they perceive as their cultural authority as ethnic Malinké musicians. This authority in turn guarantees them a position of respect within Guinea and allows them to

succeed in the international marketplace. In this sense, Guinea's *djembéfolas* have much in common with Laye.

One of the most outspoken promoters of tradition, Mamady Keïta defines it in the following way,

Tradition is like a mountain it does not modify [Change], it doesn't evolve. Why? Because marriage will always remain marriage therefore you can never change the rhythm for marriage. Circumcision will always be circumcision, and we will never change the rhythm for circumcision. That is tradition.¹

And it is the same for the rhythms that are played for the farmers, workers in the fields, their rhythms will remain the same. They'll never change. Traditionally we have always eaten through our mouth. Anyone who eats with his nose, he is very sick. Do we agree? (Interview Ramona CA: April 18, 2007)

Keïta's view of tradition is understood differently by each of his audiences. Europeans and Americans understand this in a Western historical sense, while locals understand the role of the *jeli* as a culturally appointed historian within all ethnic groups of the Mande culture. It is very important as a Malinké to be connected to the history of the Mande empire; this history is perceived as something fixed and unchanging. I believe that Keïta has simply transferred this way of thinking about history to his perception of traditional Malinké rhythms. At the same time he is appealing to Western ideas of tradition, history, and preservation.

The global interest in "traditional" Africa drumming has become an important topic of study for ethnomusicologists and anthropologists alike. In her book, *Yorùbá Bàtá Goes Global* (2007), anthropologist Debra L. Klein examines the ways in which local

¹ *La tradition c'est une montagne il n'sont modifiait pas il n'evoluaît pas. Pourquoi? Passe le mariage il restait toujours le mariage, donc ou tu ne jamais changer le rythme de mariage. La circoncision restait toujours la circoncision, et ont sont ne jamais changer le rythme pour circoncision. Ça c'est la tradition.*

artists, European and African culture brokers, and Western students have become “unlikely allies” as they participate in and promote traditional African drum music (Klein 2007: 133). In her critique of the artistic relationships forged between Yoruba drummers and Western musicians, Klein asserts that the current interest in traditional African drum music being pushed by Europeans is fueled by the same racializing and essentializing global imaginary that gave birth to the World Beat movement (Klein 2007: 131).²

The point is that different versions of the same global imaginary of The Africa circulate, coexist, and emerge so that collaborative ventures across a huge gulf of difference and misunderstanding seem worthwhile (ibid.)

This collaboration is a process in which both parties have a stake. According to the often quoted statement made by Malian pop star Salif Keita, “they get the inspiration and we get the popularity,” this collaboration can be viewed as a mutually beneficial business exchange “despite different needs and desires” (ibid.). Klein defines this type of collaboration as “antipolitical.” Klein states that “the antipolitics of collaboration is a conscious, at times romantic, effort to create a global movement that produces new imaginaries and material options for everyone in the world” (Klein 2007: 133). In the context of this collaboration there is still a noticeable power structure in place but both parties choose not to acknowledge it. While this is also true for Guinean *djembéfolas*, the romance of creating a global movement of drummers engaged in traditional music provides them with additional inspiration to continue their collaborations.

Internationally acclaimed master drummers must balance their local responsibilities with their engagement in the global marketplace as their tradition and cultures become increasingly commodified. Part of their concern locally is with the

² In her discussion of World Beat, Klein references Keil and Feld’s (1994: 266) analysis of the word “beat” in World Beat as well as Ebron’s (1993: 14-15) views on the popularity of Babatunde Olatunji.

young entrepreneurs looking for a quick entry into what they perceive as a lucrative international market (Klein 2007: 150-153; Keïta Interview: April 24, 2007). Unlike traditional drumming apprentices, this younger generation of drummers is located in urban Guinea where they cater to a local audience made up of native Guineans and international tourists. Some of these young men come from the villages and others have lived in Conakry their whole lives. All of these men have hopes of studying *djembé* from an international *djembéfolo* such as Keïta or one of the current lead drummers of the ballet. They see the fruits of a successful international career in these famous *djembéfolos* and they desire the same for themselves. Unlike their village counterparts they start their apprenticeships much later in life. While a village drummer starts his apprenticeship as young as seven, many of these men are already in their twenties. The central concern of the older *djembéfolos* is for the quality of the traditional product being sold by these young players. They see it as their personal responsibility to ensure that these young men are well educated in the history behind each rhythm they play and teach. In addition, they want to ensure that traditional rhythms are played correctly and without alteration.

Djembéfolo as carrier and teacher of Malinké tradition

The first generation of professional *djembéfolos* is united in their perception of themselves as carriers of Malinké traditional music. Within this role they function as both representatives of their ethnic group to the rest of the world, and as master teachers who have been entrusted with passing on their knowledge of history and tradition to the younger generation of players within Guinea. Keïta explains this in the context of answering a question by an American student about what constitutes a master drummer.

Myself and those who work with me [Daouda Kourouma, Sekou Konaté, Famoudou Konaté, Fadouba Oularé] are trying to preserve the tradition.

There are very few of us that are dedicated to preserving these traditional rhythms. Above all my mission today is to teach the culture and the history so that you don't lose it, so that it is not lost. We can accept that we are born and we will die, but we shouldn't accept that history die. History must remain, we cannot turn [back] the pages of history but let's put it somewhere where it can still be conserved. That is very important.

I also see the young drummers that you referred to in your question. I encourage them in terms of their spectacular performance abilities. But what is a shame is that they don't apply themselves to learning the true tradition. If you were to ask a traditional question to a young *djembe* player very few could answer the question. They might lie, or create some other story, but they will not tell you, "I don't know." Everything he is going to tell you is false. You won't know until you meet one of the true masters, because when you ask that same question to the master you will know that the young drummer was lying. There are a few simple questions that you need to ask a teacher that you might run into. The first question: "What is the name of the rhythm?" Secondly, "What ethnicity does this rhythm belong to?" Thirdly, "And they play this for what reason?" Fourthly, "Where does this ethnic group live, in which country? Or in what region of the country do they live, east, west, north, or south?" The teacher should be able to respond to all of those questions without scratching his head. And "what is the history of the rhythm? Why is it played?" You ask those questions to a teacher and he didn't scratch his head, and he didn't stall or stutter or have to think about it, if they do that then you know there is something wrong.

If you were asking a question to Famoudou, "what is the name of that rhythm?" he tells you quickly without scratching his head. If you ask him, "what ethnic group plays it?" he'll tell you quickly without scratching his head. "Why is this rhythm played?" again, he answers without scratching his head. All of the questions, what region, what ethnic group, he'll answer all of them without scratching his head. He's not even going to take time to think about it. That is a master!

Keïta paints a picture of his cohort of older *djembéfolas* as unified in their aim to preserve traditional music and its historical context.

Indeed, these drummers even have a logo and a website that talks about this "worldwide" mission to preserve traditional *djembé* rhythms (see fig. 3.1).



[Fig. 3.1: DRMT logo created by Mamady Keïta (official website) ©Mamady Keïta]

Below this logo is a statement which is signed by Famoudou Konaté, Soungalo Coulibaly, Doudou N’Diaye Rose, Karinkadjan Kondé, Fadouba Oularé, and Adama Dramé. The statement is aimed not only at *djembe* students, but also at drum teachers, both African and European, teaching the *djembe*. The purpose of this statement is to dispel many of the misconceptions that have developed as a result of the popularity of the *djembe*, especially in American drum circles. The statement includes phrases aimed directly at these drum circle players.

The *djembe* is not a primitive instrument on which one beats in just any way. There is a history behind it, a tradition that is transmitted from generation to generation . . . Alas, many *djembe* players around the world use the instrument only for personal enjoyment. We solemnly ask them here to respect the instrument and its culture, and to respect the traditional rhythms. (Official Website for Mamady Keïta 2009)

Other phrases are clearly meant as a reprimand to the younger generation of *djembe* teachers currently vying for a piece of the international market of *djembe* students.

Today there are thousands of *djembe* “masters” around the world. They call themselves “masters” but they are merely players, sometimes great players, but not masters . . . One doesn’t bestow this title on oneself! Among the Mande people, one receives the title after having passed many tests of technique and rhythm. A master must also have been initiated.

This is very important. Without this step no one can lay claim to this title.
(ibid.)

The most scathing of these criticisms is reserved for the end of this treatise.

Teachers, especially African teachers, should have the courage to tell their students that they don't always know the tradition, that they are sometimes from another ethnic group, that they, themselves, are creating the rhythms. Alas, the lie is often there for commercial reasons. It is not necessary to betray tradition. Otherwise, it will be lost, changed, and it is Africa, in the end, that will lose her soul. (ibid.)

Through statements such as these Keïta and his cohort are clearly separating themselves from the growing number of West African ex-patriots who are currently flooding the international market, claiming to be genuine *djembefolas*. By criticizing other *djembe* teachers they position themselves as the most desirable teachers. In addition, the drummers on this list are not all from Guinea. For example, Soungalo Coulibaly is from Mali, and Adama Dramé from the Ivory Coast. The emphasis on tradition and authenticity is ethnic, not national.

During a class at his home in Conakry, Konaté spoke candidly about his frustration with people, mostly academics, whom he sees as claiming themselves “instant experts,” after only a few months of study. He told the students that he has seen the same situation many times where an individual will come to Guinea for a few weeks or months and immediately publish a book upon returning home. This class discussion was sparked by a question from one of the students about the rhythm, *Kontemudu*. The student asked what “family of rhythms” this piece belonged to. Konaté responded to the student's question by stating that Africans do not understand their music in this way. He stated that the first time he even heard such a question was in 1986 when he took three German students to his village during the first drum camp he ever held. From this point on Konaté launched into a story about one particular researcher's misunderstanding of the rhythm,

Konkoba, one of the few 9/8 rhythms found in Malinké *djembé* and *dunun* music. To demonstrate his point, Konaté challenged two of the *djembé* players from his village (who were assisting at the drum camp) to find the correct placement of the break in *Konkoba*. The two struggled for a while but one was eventually able to place the break correctly into the rhythm. The point Konaté was trying to make with this exercise was that the researcher who had only been to Guinea for a few months thought he knew the secrets of *Konkoba*, when some native African players do not even know these secrets. Konaté followed up this example by talking about people who think that they know *Toro* after only a couple of classes. He stated that there is a *Toro* rhythm for each generation of initiates, and each of these has its own set of *dunun* variations as well. As a means of addressing his frustration with the many misunderstandings about this music, Konaté is currently writing a book to present what he believes to be the truth about these rhythms and his culture.

Although Mamady Keïta's view on tradition is very conservative he is not blind to the reality of change which is occurring within his culture. The following excerpt is taken from a question posed by one of his students while he was teaching in California.

Student: What is your opinion of change in tradition? For example *Sofa* isn't played anymore. What do you think about how tradition is changing?

Mamady: Possibly, on one hand, it is just normal and natural. I understand that it is natural and it is normal that situations and the rhythms that were used for those situations will disappear, as the need for them disappears.

The *Sofa* rhythm that was played in the thirteenth century, when there was tribal warfare, little by little became obsolete: because those warriors themselves died, and there were no more tribal wars because there was unification in the Mandeng. So I don't find it shame or anything like that, I find it normal on the one hand. But, on the other hand, I find it important that the youth continue to preserve the history that at one time in their land

there were these tribal wars and that these warriors actually existed. That history needs to continue to be passed on from generation to generation. Even if they don't play the festivals of *Sofa* anymore, one way of doing that is by preserving the rhythm of *Sofa*.

For example, there is another rhythm that is in the process of disappearing and that is *Moribayassa*. Because, before women didn't know that they could possibly be sterile. And men also didn't know that it was also possible for them to be sterile. In the past Western medicine was not known in the villages. Women and men didn't know that they could be sterile. So, often one of the most important [frequent] prayers women would make for their *Moribayassa* was to have a baby, not knowing any other reason why they weren't able to conceive [have] a baby, that is what they would pray for. But, in the villages today, there are: Doctors With Out Borders; there is the Red Cross; there are places which dispense pharmaceuticals; and often the information is getting through to the women and to the men that if they haven't had a child it is possible that they are sterile. That there are many other reasons why they are not having children, so while in the past they would make their prayer and stay up all night and on the fortieth day after having the baby they would dance the *Moribayassa* to complete their promise, today they are not necessarily doing that because they are more aware of medical conditions that might play a part in their inability to have a baby. That is one example. So similar to the situation with *Sofa*, if the women stop doing their prayers all night long and promising to dance *Moribayassa*, then *Moribayassa* isn't going to be danced anymore. If the situation is no longer there we are not going to play *Moribayassa* [Monette, "because you are not just going to play *Moribayassa* for nothing].

In his answer to this question about change, Mamady chooses to illustrate a change using two examples, one that occurred before colonialism as well as another which has occurred more recently. In both cases he points to the rhythm as an important carrier of historical events or practices. The rhythm *Sofa*, when taught to the younger generation, can be a vehicle to keep the early history of the Mande empire alive in the imaginations of young men. Similarly, young women can be reminded of the trials their grandmothers and great-grandmothers went through in order to fulfill their role as women. In both cases Keïta's main concern is that the history of his culture does not become lost. While much of this history of carried by the *jelis*, there is a portion of it that only exists within the

annual rituals of village life. Once these rituals cease to be practiced the songs, dances and rhythms which accompanied them are all that remain. Coming from a society where print media has never been used as a means of historical preservation, Keita's understanding is that these rhythms can serve a similar role to that of written history. Whereas history as text needs to be read by each generation, Mande rhythms, songs, and dances need to be performed to be remembered.

Conakry's *djembé* scene: new traditions for the 21st century

Two of Keita's colleagues, Daouda Kourouma and Sekou Konaté, focus their concerns about tradition locally within the drumming scene in Conakry. Sekou Konaté communicated to me his perceived role as mentor to young drummers by saying,

When I meet some young men or boys who are playing, and they are making a mistake or transformation of the rhythm, I always take the [drum] stick and show them the correct [traditional] way to play the rhythm. I show them that this is the way to play, if you play it that way you will transform the tradition. (S. Konaté: Interview in Guinea, February 2008)

Both drummers spoke to me of the changes that they have noticed with the rhythm *Dununbé*, a rhythm which has become popular at parties all around the city. *Dununbé*, the dance of the strong man, has a long history in the Malinké culture of Upper Guinea. Given its origin in the Hamana region, the three *dunun* set is central to this rhythm which features the largest drum, the *dununba*. The *djembé* traditionally plays an accompanying role in *Dununbé* rather than a lead role as it does in many other rhythms. While the *dununba* is the creative focus of this rhythm, where experienced players play a seemingly endless number of variations, the *sangban* carries the main rhythmic phrase that identifies this piece as *Dununbé*. Kourouma has noticed that in the process of becoming popular as a party rhythm and dance in Conakry, *Dununbé* has changed.

I have taken notice that there have been some changes from my generation to the present generation. They are doing things differently. Take *Dununbé* for instance, the young people play this rhythm much too fast. This is not good. It is so fast that you cannot properly do the dance. It is not the same dance. This is the dance of the strong man – it cannot be done fast. The younger generation wants to modernize *Dununbé*, so they are transforming the rhythm. For instance, when they play the *sangban* part they cut up the rhythm (because they no longer have time to express the whole phrase). Yet, the rhythm of *Dununbé* follows the *sangban* (is based upon the *sangban* part). If you add to a rhythm or cut a rhythm you change it, you need to play the rhythm exactly as it has traditionally been played. The rhythm of *Dununbé* should not be played too fast or too slow – it should be played in the middle. This is the difference I see between my generation and the present generation. [In addition], the *échauffement* presently being played for *Dununbé*, this phrase is false, it is not part of the *Dununbé* rhythm. It is not a necessary part of the tradition. The younger generation does not know or understand the tradition so they play differently now. Making their own creations, they play differently. They are abandoning the traditions little by little. (Kourouma: Interview in Guinea February 2008)

The speed of this urban *Dununbé* is too fast not only for the *sangban* to complete its rhythmic phrase, but also for the *kenkeni* and *dununba*. Kourouma is not alone in his complaint about the speed at which *Dununbé* is presently played. Famoudou Konaté and Sekou Konaté also voiced this concern to me on separate occasions.

The *Dununbé* dance was historically part of the initiation process for young men. In this group dance the men would whip each other as they danced in time to the music. The object of this exercise was to prove that you were the strongest man in the village by being the last man standing at the end of the dance. In its current version in Conakry, *Dununbé* is danced by both men and women. The absence of whips and the inclusion of women in the urban version of this dance has shifted the focus from ritual to entertainment. However, the element of competition between men is still evident, only now this element takes place between the drummers and not the dancers. All of this competition takes place within the *échauffement* portion of the rhythm. While an

échauffement is a common element in many Malinké rhythms, it is not traditionally present in the dance of the strong man. In the process of its transformation into an urban party rhythm, an *échauffement* was added to *Dununbé*. This part is danced by a solo dancer at the center of the ring and accompanied by one of the many *djembe* players present at the party. The addition of the *échauffement* makes it possible for both genders to express themselves both in groups and as individuals.

The popularity of the *djembé* among young men in Conakry has had a strong influence on the addition of the *échauffement* in *Dununbé*. I noticed that there were many instances during the *Dununbé* parties I attended where the young *djembe* players were so busy trying to show off to each other that they completely forgot their role in supporting the solo dancer. This in turn left many dancers, often female, visibly frustrated as they tried to do their solo dances. After several *Dununbé* parties I began to notice a pattern of predictable behavior among the *djembé* players. If a man was dancing solo, a single *djembé* player would step up and the two would challenge each other. However, if a woman was dancing solo, the *djembé* players would be more inclined to challenge each other, often ignoring the dancer completely. While the younger generation in Conakry may not be particularly well versed in the history of *Dununbé*, or the “correct” way to play this rhythm, I would argue that they have preserved the dance and rhythm in their own way through the creation of a different context for its application.

One of the biggest concerns Sekou Konaté voiced about the younger generation of *djembe* players in Conakry was concerning what he perceived as a misrepresentation of Malinké music and culture. He felt that young drummers seem to lack the patience needed to truly learn the traditions behind the rhythms. Konaté states that,

This generation, if they know just a little bit about how to play *sangban*, *dunun*, *kenkeni* or *djembe* they have big dreams. They don't know all five versions of *Kassa*. They know a little about how to play *Dununbé* and do not really understand how to play *Mendiani*. But with this little bit of knowledge they dream about going to America to make a lot of money very quickly, in order to come back and buy a house, buy a car, all of these things. They are not really attached to the tradition. They do not come to the elders and ask them how to play the tradition. They just play the way they like to play. Take, for instance, the *Dununbé* rhythms, some have as many as twenty variations. Or you take *Kassa* where there are as many as fifteen different variations. When you ask the younger generation about these variations they do not know them. The younger generation does not know how to do these things. They don't come to ask us how to play traditionally, how to play the original way. Instead they always want the fast road to travel and make money and all of that. (Sekou Konaté: Interview in Guinea, February, 2008).

Young men in Conakry have grown up with knowledge of the lucrative market for *djembé* workshops both for tourists within Guinea and for eager students all around the globe. The majority of drumming these young people heard during their childhood and early adolescence took place within the compounds of famous drummers, such as Mamady Keïta and Famoudou Konaté, between the months of December and March— the peak months for annual drum camps across the city. Only the young men fortunate enough to have access to these masters can afford an interest in “tradition.”

M'Bemba Bangoura, a drummer who spent his entire childhood and adolescence in Conakry, provided me with a very clear description of the current reality young drummers face as they attempt to embark on their careers as professional *djembéfolas*.

Vera: Have you seen much change in the *djembé* scene here in Conakry since you were young?

Bemba: It has changed but we [also] have a couple of little problems here because the music in the street: we have street music, we have the traditional music, and we have contemporary music. Many from the younger generation are very good *djembé* players, they have a good slap, tone, and bass, but what has happened is that some of them learned like that [in the streets], they don't study exactly they just learn. Some of them

learn when they go to the dance company. Some of them learn in the street. But it is good. It's good. It's very good because in the culture every [ethnic?] style is coming [to the city?] little by little now.

Vera: So do you find that the younger drummers . . . are you trying to say that the younger drummers understand a little bit less about the music?

Bemba: Yeah!?! [his 'yeah' does not sound convincing.] Some of them, yeah, but not all of them. Some of them. But it is good. It's good because everybody learns in a different way. The way we learn, they don't learn that way. They don't see the older people. So, myself, I am very lucky because I saw the older drummers so I had a chance to play together with them. I had a chance to ask them [questions about the music and the history]. The new generation, they don't have a chance to see the older drummers. So they have a little problem with that.

According to Bangoura's analysis, young drummers simply do not have the financial means to undergo a formal study of this music with an elder *djembéfola*. Unlike rural apprentices, who would study with a master drummer from childhood, these young players do not even begin to play until they are well into their teens or twenties. Whereas rural *djembéfolas* do not require any monetary contributions from their apprentices or their families, professional *djembéfolas* in the urban setting expect to be paid for lessons. Few young drummers have a close enough connection to an internationally successful *djembéfola* to be able to not only study but apprentice in exchange for working at one of the tourist drum camps.

As a second generation professional urban drummer of Susu lineage, Bangoura is not as convinced as Konaté and Keïta that there is a single authentic tradition which needs to be preserved and passed on to the younger generation. In the context of an interview in Guinea, I asked Bangoura what advice he had for young drummers in Conakry seeking to start a career as a *djembéfola*. In the context of his answer I

discovered that Bangoura holds very different views on the ethnic diversity in Conakry and its impact on the *djembe*. Bangoura states that:

It is very good [for a young person to pursue such a career] but for one thing we have so many teachers, he might decide that “I like the way this teacher teaches me,” so you cannot say that this is exactly or that is exactly [what he should do] because a lot of different teachers come from different ethnic groups. There are many ethnic groups, so maybe he might say “I like the way this teacher teaches me,” or he can maybe say that, “this is the best teacher.” because we don’t have any best teacher here. Everybody’s a teacher. The only thing is that he could like the teacher’s discipline or maybe he likes his teacher for another reason, but it is very hard to say that this is the exact music, this is the teacher who carries the [most authentic] music. No one person carried the music here because the music comes from the ethnic groups. So nobody knows when/where the ethnic groups came here from, maybe our grandparents knew that but we don’t know. You understand – exactly. (Bangoura: Interview in Guinea, 2008)

While Bangoura’s lack of an ethnic agenda is in some ways refreshing, he still believes that if the music of a particular ethnic group is taught the instructor should also know the history behind the music. He also agrees with the *djembefolas* of the previous generation that students should be taught the difference between the ballet which he defines as a “state presentation” and village music which he defines as “traditional presentation” (ibid.). According to Bangoura, “The state and tradition they do not go the same way. But it’s good. It’s all good, because everything comes from the creation” (ibid.). Although the presentation of the state and of tradition are still considered different, in Bangoura’s view neither one is more important than the other. For him both expressions have an equally important role to play modern Guinean life.

Some members of the second generation of professional drummers understand their role more as creators of new musical arrangements in traditional styles rather than preservers of historical village tradition. Billy Konaté, whose father, Famoudou, made sure that he lived in the village for at least part of his childhood, proudly follows in the

footsteps of his father by creating new rhythms based upon his experiences in the village of Sangbarella. Billy taught one of his compositions, entitled *Tinbadaba*, during a workshop I attended in Toronto in the fall of 2007. Based upon one of the games and songs of his childhood, this rhythm was transferred from the boxes on which children usually play it to the set of three-*dununs* traditionally used in village celebrations. To this Billy added a set of *djembé* solo phrases and an *échauffement*. The most interesting thing about this rhythm is that it was created not for use in the village, but for the sole purpose of recording and performance in the West. While people of Sangbarella benefit indirectly from the creation of this rhythm (in terms of financial aid which is supplied by Billy and his German students), they do not have the opportunity of integrating this newly created rhythm into their village culture. Similar to his famous father and brothers, who have all made their careers in Germany, Billy enjoys the freedom of creating music which is based upon the nostalgia of his childhood without having to face the harsh realities of life as a village *djembéfol*.

A few members of the youngest generation of professional *djembéfolas* are as conservative in their views as the old *djembéfolas* who have mentored them, while others are simply looking for a quick means to make money from Western tourists. When I asked Alpha Omar Sidibé if he ever thought of playing with one of the ballet companies in Conakry he replied:

First of all the ballet and traditional music are very different from each other. Therefore, what we play here is not ballet style. Almost all the music Baba played before was from the ballet but now he does only this (traditional) music. That which is traditional is reality. This rich tradition, you know, comes from the elders of the culture. This is the basis of traditional music. Therefore what we do here, my passion today, is not with the ballet; it is based here and with *Balendougou Kan*. I have never played with the ballet. I only play traditional music. I like that music best.

Traditional music is very easy to do in one sense. With the tradition you need to know other rhythms, other regions, other villages, other countries because together these make up the tradition. In the ballet it is very different because it is a creation. The tradition – this is our custom. For that I never play in the ballet. (Sidibé Interview: Conakry, 2008)

Sidibé's delineates traditional music as existing beyond the limits of artificially constructed regions and national borders. In addition, Sidibé refers here to Baba or Mamady Keïta as his inspiration and mentor. His first and only exposure to "traditional" music has been through Keïta and his Western *djembé* students. Sidibé explains this in the following manner.

It started in 1993 when Baba (Mamady Keïta) started to bring foreign students here for his workshops. At that time I was just a young boy. When Baba would come and when he used to teach his students I would climb up the tree just to watch and listen to the classes. Sometimes the security guards would chase us away. This is how I grew to love this music, a bit at a time, when I would see Baba playing. (ibid.)

Sidibé's distinction between the ballet and traditional music mirrors Keïta's view. Similarly, he is critical of other young people in Conakry who teach Western students just for the money, native *djembé* players who pass themselves off as *djembéfolas* when their knowledge of traditional rhythms and history is sketchy at best. Sidibé states that:

These people are playing just for money because they see some *djembe* masters who play and organize workshops and they see this as a possible source of income for themselves as well. They copy these workshops and such just to get money, only as a source for making money. They do not know very much and they play very little they just do this to make money. These people misuse the *djembé* and really misunderstand its purpose. (ibid.)

Ironically, when I asked Sidibé what his goals were for the next five years he basically stated that he would like to be a *djembéfola* like Mamady Keïta, have his own workshops, go to the United States, have a house and a car in Conakry, and find a wife. How are the goals of the young people Sidibé criticizes any different from his own? For Sidibé

teaching traditional music is a matter of integrity, something that should not be taken on without a sufficient amount of preparation and study with a master. As a young Susu born in the city, Sidibé has no real ties to Malinké culture and has taken on Keïta's culture as his own.

The training of young urban *djembé* players can be very similar to that of young Western students who study with master drummers such as Keïta and Konaté. Unlike their village counterparts, urban *djembé* players can start their training much later in life which leads many young men to take on a musical career who otherwise would not have the opportunity. Sidibé has learned all he knows from Keïta during the course of his yearly drum camps for Western students. For Keïta's nephew, Sekou Keïta, there was no chance of pursuing a career in traditional music in Balandougou so he came to Conakry as a young adult in search of his uncle. While Keïta initially hired Sekou as a *sangban* player for his yearly drum camp, he was less encouraging when Sekou revealed that his goal was to become a *djembéfola*. A determined Sekou spent the next year mastering all of the rhythms Keïta had taught at the drum camp the previous year. In addition, he spent a great deal of time and effort learning *djembé* solos from Keïta's commercial CDs. As a result of his efforts, the younger Keïta was not only encouraged by his uncle to continue his pursuits as a *djembé* player, but he also invited Sekou to play *sangban* on his CD entitled *Sila Laka*. Sekou is able to make a living through a combination of local gigs with his group *Balandougou Kan*, work with his uncle during the yearly drum camps, and his *djembé*-making business. The only item that Sekou has yet to add to his resumé is teaching. Otherwise, his musical training and career has a great deal in common with the Western drummers who attend the elder Keïta's workshops both abroad and in Conakry.

For Sekou Koné and Mamady Kouyaté their training in traditional music started in the village but their professional aspirations as drummers only took shape once other avenues of employment were exhausted. Koné stopped drumming when he left his village to go find work in Côte d'Ivoire. After a few years working as a cab driver, the war in Côte d'Ivoire forced him to return to Guinea. Similarly, Kouyaté returned to Guinea after work in Liberia became difficult to find. However, rather than returning to their villages, both came to Conakry to work with relatives who were successful drummers. Kouyaté had an uncle who worked for *Percussions de Guinée* with whom he started to play traditional celebrations such as *Dembadon* (Kouyate: Interview in Guinea, 2008). Meanwhile, Koné, who came from a village neighboring the famous Famoudou Konaté's village of Sangbarella, initially found work assisting Konaté with his drum camps. Traditional music is all these two men know; they do not need to juxtapose what they teach with the ballet. Neither of them spend much energy promoting their music, yet, they have no difficulty attracting foreign students. Due to the fact that his foreign students like the traditional atmosphere of a drum camp held in an authentic rural location, Koné teaches as much in his village as he does in Conakry. Conversely, Kouyaté, who comes from a family of *jelis* prefers the life of a performer, focusing his attention on urban celebrations where he stands to make a better living for himself. While other drummers I met in Conakry spent a great deal of time and energy promoting themselves as "traditional" musicians, neither Koné nor Kouyaté were inclined to participate in this strategic posturing. Both really were traditional musicians trained in the village.

Cultural tourism within Guinea: the marketplace for “tradition.”

In analyzing events I witnessed in Guinea as incidents of cultural tourism, it becomes clear that many variables must be taken into account in order to determine the underlying motives and purpose of each of these events. In order to begin unraveling the many interrelated variables of cultural tourism in Guinea, I turn to Edward M. Bruner's analysis of three Kenyan tourist sites/performances, in "The Maasai and the Lion King: authenticity, nationalism, and globalization in African Tourism," as a point of comparison (2001). Each tourist site was staged in a different location, presenting a specific fantasy of Africa, for a predetermined audience. Bruner chose to view each of the three sites historically as parallel to different forms of ethnographic writing (Bruner 2001: 898). Mayers Ranch, with its re-enactment of the village life and rituals of Maasai warriors juxtaposed with a post-performance tea on the lawn of this colonial cattle ranch (established in 1968), can be compared to ethnographic realism, a form of ethnographic writing which was dominant until the 1960s. The dancers who perform are stripped of any signs of their lives as modern men (no watches or jewelry). In addition they remain mute and aloof, distanced from the audience in an effort to avoid revealing their true identity. In this way they occupy a space in the ethnographic present completing a romanticized colonial fantasy for the tourists (Bruner 2001: 884-886; 897-898). Needless to say, the Mayers' ranch was eventually closed by the government who felt that the Mayers were exploiting the Maasai (ibid: 882-883).

The Kenyan national dance troupe, Bomas, established during the 1970s, mirrors the nationalist and civil rights forces which led to ethnographic activism within the discipline of anthropology. Ethnographic activism is primarily concerned with

preservation of culture through museum archives and artistic performance. In this modern high-tech setting, the Maasai warriors exist in the traditional past. Bomas was created in an effort to reacquaint urban Kenyans with their various ethnic heritages while at the same time celebrating the diversity of Kenya's national heritage through the promotion of "ethnic harmony" portrayed in this performance. However, leaving the task of preservation to a group of professional artists can be problematic. Bruner elaborates:

The difficulty was that once the dance troupe was formed the performers began to innovate, and over the years the original tribal dance forms changed . . . At Bomas, traditional dances are placed in such a high-tech setting and the production is so professional that the dances become detraditionalized. (Bruner 2001: 900)

This same agenda of promoting national identity, while at the same time creating a modern, entertaining, and artistic production, has also brought into question the effectiveness of Guinea's national ballets as preservers of tradition.

The most interesting and complex tourist site Bruner discusses is the "Out of Africa" tour at Sundowner. The tour site is located on the Masai Mara Reserve. The tourists stay at a tented camp site where there are screened-in windows, electricity and indoor plumbing. All the staff are Maasai, from the management to the performers, which results in a blurring of the Maasai as modern producers with the primitive identities they depict during nightly performances. The film "Out of Africa" is shown enroute to the camp and tourists are encouraged to experience everything as if they were one of the main characters in the movie. Two of the songs performed are already familiar to American tourists, "Hakuna Matata" and "Kum Ba Ya." While these songs originate in Kenya they have been assimilated into American popular fantasies of Africa. In short, this presentation of Africa is largely based upon American popular culture even though it

is produced by the Maasai themselves. In an effort to address these contradictions, Bruner concludes that:

The Sundowner is an outgrowth of global media flows, electronic communication, and pervasive transnationalism. It is for foreign post-tourists, produced in the style of postmodern ethnography. Unlike Mayers, it rejects the realist genre. Unlike Bomas, it rejects nationalist rhetoric. Postmodern ethnography describes juxtapositions, pastiche, functional inconsistency, and recognizes, even celebrates, that cultural items originating from different places and historical eras may coexist. Contemporary ethnographers no longer try to mask outside influences, nor do they see them as polluting a pure culture. (Bruner 2001: 899)

In terms of the awareness of drum camp participants, I would argue that both of the events I am about to analyze run parallel with postmodern ethnography. However there is a level at which participants choose to suspend their awareness in order to accept the fantasy being presented to them by the producers of these events. As post-tourists these drum camp participants are not necessarily looking for the type of ethnographic realism presented at the Mayers Ranch, but neither have they completely overcome their desire to find something “genuine” and “authentic.” As Bruner accurately concludes, “postmodern tourists, and ethnographers, have not entirely overcome the contradictions of their modernist and colonial pasts” (Bruner 2001: 899). In the cases of the Drum Camps I attended, the *First Annual Festival D’Echange Culturel Nord/Sud* and the tour of Balandougou and its surrounding villages, the success of each tourist production had as much to do with the effectiveness of the producers as with the willingness of tourists to accept the fantasy being presented.

Djembéfolas, culture brokers, and students involved in drum camps interact not only in their creation of a traditional *djembé* repertoire, but also in the establishment of a complex economic relationship with local Guineans. What has resulted from these

encounters is a growing tourist industry which touches the lives of local businesses, markets, artisans and *djembe* players alike. In some cases local communities have become dependent upon the yearly revenue generated by these camps. Many of the women hired to cook for one of these drum camps are able to make enough money during the three-month season of camps to live for the rest of the year. In 2008, after over fifteen years of running a drum camp for Konaté, Rainer Dörrer decided he was “getting tired” of the stress and responsibility of running this yearly event. However, before he finalized his decision to step away from this responsibility, Dörrer made sure that someone else was qualified and willing take his place- if only for the sake of the community that has come to rely on the income generated by the drum camp. Many members of Konaté’s extended family come to Conakry from the village just for these events. Without the income from the drum camp they will have no money for food if their crops fail, emergency medical expenses, or to fund their own wedding celebrations and naming ceremonies in the village.

Erik Cohen, in his groundbreaking article, “The Sociology of Tourism: Approaches, Issues and Findings” (1984), notes that tourism between “metropolitan countries” and “peripheral nations” often creates a type of dependency which replicates “colonial or imperialist forms of domination and structural underdevelopment” and that this type of tourism can lead to “a loss of local autonomy” (Cohen 1984: 375, 385).

Cohen goes on to say that:

Customs and the arts are frequently drawn into the economic domain or “commoditized” (Greenwood 1977) as resources to encourage tourism . . . “Commoditization” does not, in itself, necessarily change customs or the arts - indeed, in some instances it may conserve them in the interests of tourism (e.g. Aspelin 1977; Wilson 1979: 230). (Cohen 1984: 387)

Economic and cultural dependency on tourists is portrayed here by Cohen as a double edged sword. While it challenges local autonomy it can also promote a lively engagement with otherwise unsustainable traditional arts. David Locke outlines similar dilemmas which occur when ethnomusicologists begin to establish deeper relationships with their informants:

By intervening in the political economy of traditional music in Ghana, I have set forces in motion that effect people's lives for better or worse . . . Just as the early anthropologists helped develop new markets for transnational corporations, ethnomusicologists present the music of Other cultures for consumption. (Locke 2004: 183)

In his article, "The African Ensemble in America," Locke emphasizes the "distinctive obligations" ethnomusicologists have toward their "native teachers" because of their role in facilitating a new form of local income based upon cultural tourism and commodification (Locke 2004: 172). The culture brokers and students involved in Guinea's *djembe* scene have put themselves in the same position as Locke has as an ethnomusicologist in Ghana. Many of the culture brokers in Guinea's *djembe* scene take their responsibilities very seriously in spite of their lack of connection to an outside governing body, such as the ethnomusicologists' academy.

What I discovered during my stay at three different drum camps over a two season period was that seemingly divergent issues pertaining to tourism versus pedagogy were not mutually exclusive but were in fact deeply intertwined. Furthermore, the atmosphere and representation of Africa promoted at each camp had as much to do with the viewpoint of the Western culture broker as it did of the Guinean *djembe*folo.

Drum camps and the growth of Guinea's tourist industry

On December 28th, 2006 I arrived for the first time at Guinea's international airport in Conakry. I was coming there to attend M'Bemba Bangoura's three-week drum camp as a *djembe* student. I had never met Bangoura or any of the other students who were coming to Guinea for this camp. I stepped off of the plane and was immediately suffocated by the air, as thick with humidity as it was with pollution. I followed the line of passengers to the customs booths. In a completely wordless exchange, the officer took my passport and visa papers looked over my documents, wrote a few notes, and stamped my passport sending me to the baggage area a few steps away. It took me about as long to find my baggage as it took a female army officer to find me. She immediately demanded that I place my bag upon a wooden table for her inspection. I was suspicious that this was not an official inspection. My suspicion was confirmed when she demanded a monetary gift at the conclusion of her inspection of my bag. I had not been in the country long enough to change any of my Euros into *francs Guinée* and I was relieved when she finally let me go.

These first few moments in Guinea were certainly not very tourist friendly. In comparison, my arrival in Cuba (a popular winter destination for those of us from Canada), though slightly tense due to the military presence at the airport, was much more welcoming to tourists. The passenger demographic was different as well. The passengers on the plane from Paris to Guinea included Guinea nationals or ex-patriots returning from Europe, a couple of Cuban bands, French tourists, and drum-camp students. The two largest groups were the first and the last. Not many people came to Guinea to see the sights or lie on the beach. According to a tourist guide to West Africa which I had bought

at the airport in France, Guinea was definitely not a tourist destination, and travelers were recommended to pass Conakry by in favor of more cosmopolitan cities such as Dakar, Senegal and Bamako, Mali. In spite of these warnings, large numbers of drum and dance students filled these otherwise half-empty flights between Paris and Conakry. This group, which has steadily grown in size since the late 1980s, has become the center of Guinea's tourist industry.

When I arrived in Taouya, at Bangoura's drum and dance camp, I was met by Michael Markus, Bangoura's protégé and tour organizer. Markus was one of the first Americans to organize drum and dance tours to Guinea. A professionally trained percussionist, Markus met Bangoura in New York City as he was beginning to study the *djembe*. As he introduced me to Bangoura, his Guinean assistants, and the other camp participants, it became clear Markus' role was to act as a liaison not only between Bangoura and the students, but between the various camp helpers and the students as well. What became obvious as the camp progressed was that Markus' decisions and words of advice toward the students would serve to color what became a very limited and somewhat controlled experience of Guinea, West Africa.

Most of those who had come to study dance were college students from Wisconsin who had come with their African dance instructor, a long-time student of Bangoura and his former colleagues from *Ballet D'Joliba*. The rest of the students were from Markus and Bangoura's *Magbana Drum and Dance* studio in New York City. There were more dancers than drummers at this camp with two full sessions of dance being offered each day. The drummers were not only fewer in number, they also had the widest range of ability and experience and this created tension right from the start of the

camp. Tensions were, unfortunately, not limited to the drum instruction but pervaded many other issues of personal and group comfort as well. Several students on their first visit to Guinea were expecting or hoping for a relaxing and recuperating trip, a chance to take in the beauty of Guinea's local culture, a chance to relax in the hot African sun. These expectations were challenged on a daily basis resulting in a rift between those who had experienced Guinea before and those who were first time visitors. At times the experienced group along with Bangoura and a couple of his Guinean compatriots formed an alliance in their judgments against these students, judgments which overtly and covertly admonished them for their selfish expectations. A common phrase that was thrown their way was, "What did you expect? This is Africa!" Meanwhile these newer students were simply puzzled that there was a consistent shortage of food when they had all paid for the food as part of the cost of their trip. While there were valid points to be made on both sides I do not want to judge either. What is interesting about these tensions and divisions within the camp is the clear divide between the returnees and the newcomers, not unlike what would be found in a children's summer camp situation. The returnees saw themselves as insiders in their knowledge of Guinean culture and felt it their role to initiate the newcomers. If the newcomers came back the following year it meant that they had passed the initiation both in the eyes of the returnees and the Guinean staff. Had this camp run by Bangoura been my only experience I would have come away thinking that this was indeed a strange form of tourism.

The following winter (2008) I came back to Guinea to attend Keïta's three-week camp. While there was still a divide between returnees and newcomers, status was based less upon survival skills and more on the level of seriousness students had toward their

daily and ongoing studies with Keïta. After my time at Bangoura's camp the year before, Keïta's accommodations felt like a luxury hotel. The rooms had real beds instead of simple mattresses placed on the floor, there was a dining room with tables and chairs for the students, meals were nutritious, and water, pop and alcohol were available for sale on the premises. There was even indoor and outdoor plumbing so that showers could be had with real running water; and there was electricity which came on (most nights) from 7PM until 8AM the following morning. Unlike Bangoura, who seemed bent on his desire to impress upon students the harsh realities of living in Africa, Keïta felt that his students would be more responsive to his teaching and have more energy to apply to their lessons if they were well fed and relatively comfortable.

The entire focus of this camp was drumming rather than dancing, and Keïta ensured that all drum students were sufficiently challenged at their own level. Keïta personally taught a two-hour intermediate class followed by a two-hour advanced class every morning. In the afternoon both groups met together to work with Keïta on one of his pyramids. The culmination of the camp was the performance of the pyramid where each student was given the opportunity to play his/her own solo. Unlike many other events in Guinea, Keïta's classes always started and ended on time. In addition, students were expected to practice and to listen to their recordings (especially of the pyramid) between classes so that Keïta could introduce as much new material as possible in each class. When students in the class were unable to correctly play the material from the day before Keïta would become agitated; he had no patience for students who were there just for a holiday. Keïta designed these drum camps for professional development and thus he expected only serious students with a fair bit of playing experience to attend. There was

even a screening process whereby potential camp registrants were asked if they had mastered certain playing techniques. If not, they were discouraged from attending the camp. The regimented and conservatory-like approach taken by Keïta eliminated any complaints that students might have toward him. At the same time, Keïta's expectations of the students' daily performance at times created a rift between the more serious and focused students and those who were looking for a broader tourist-experience from their time in Guinea. Less talented or experienced students who were earnestly trying to meet Keïta's expectations were at times lumped in with the "tourist-students" and this left them even more discouraged with their own progress.

In contrast to both of these experiences, the third camp I attended (also in 2008) had a distinctively relaxed, rural, and familial atmosphere. This camp took place at the compound of Konaté which was in a much newer, less developed, district on the outskirts of Conakry called Simbaya Gare. There was no running water and very infrequent electricity, but none of the participants found this much of a hardship. Members of Konaté's family always made sure that the premises were clean and that there were buckets of water available for the student's daily showers. If any of these helpers showed contempt for the students, Konaté presented them with the choice of either being pleasant or losing their jobs. As far as Konaté was concerned, we were guests in his home and should thus be treated with courtesy and respect. Unlike Keïta and Bangoura's camps, which were staffed by friends and family members who lived in Conakry, most of Konaté's staff consisted of members of his extended family who came from his village. There were fewer students at Konaté's camp when compared to Keïta's which also led to a more intimate atmosphere. The group of about twenty students was further divided into

three levels for the drum classes: beginner, intermediate and advanced. Seyon Camara taught the beginner class, Nansady Keita the intermediate class, and Konaté himself taught the advanced class. Although Konaté informally tested each student's level on the first day of classes by holding a combined class, he generally left each individual with the final choice of which class they wanted to attend. Konaté's genuinely easy-going nature was not always shared by his students and the culture brokers who ran his camps.

Each culture broker creates a very different experience of Africa for their students. It is through this experience that students put Konaté, Keita or Bangoura into context for themselves. Some of the ideas students develop about *djembefolas* and the music they teach will be directly impacted by beliefs about life in Africa each culture broker holds and their efforts to recreate these within the drum camp experience.

For almost a decade Konaté has hosted two drum camps each year, one organized by his German domestic partner, Uschi Dittmar, and the other by his long-time student Rainer Dörrer. During the last two weeks of the four-week camp run by Dittmar, students take a road trip to Konaré's village. Depending upon the year, there may be a festival or two for students to observe, or very little music making may take place. Either way, Dittmar believes that in order to understand Konaté's music it is necessary for students to become familiar with the music's origin in Konaté's village. Dittmar is a bit of a purist when it comes to her design of the cultural tourist experience. Rather than making sure that from time to time there are items on the menu more familiar to the European student, Dittmar prefers to serve an exclusively village cuisine (even for the two weeks students are residing in Conakry) of only three or so rotating dishes over the course of the one month drum camp. When confronted by complaints about the menu, Dittmar stated the

following: “If you came to Africa for the food, you came to the wrong place. You come to Africa for the scenery, the people, and the music, but not for the food. “If you are holidaying for the food, you should have gone to Paris, or somewhere else in Europe instead” (conversation with Dittmar in January of 2007). Dittmar is quite proud of being a purist and can be quite cross with people who complain about their own creature comforts.

Conversely, Dörrer believes that students should be made comfortable with a mixture of traditional African fare and some more familiar foods. In addition, he does not take students to the village because he feels that they miss too many drum lessons as a result of this time-consuming and difficult trip. Dittmar is not a drummer, and for her the beauty of Africa is to be found in the harshness and simplicity of village life. For Dörrer the tranquility of the daily routine of drum and traditional dance lessons within Konaté’s compound combined with a trip to the island of Rume make for the perfect getaway. Rather than teaching students first-hand about the harshness of life in Africa, Dörrer wants to create a trip filled with exotic pleasures.

Bangoura and his broker, Michael Markus, are completely unified in their desire to create an experience of life in Conakry that does not seek to hide some of the harsh realities of life in Guinea. In the students’ compound there was a regular shortage of water for bathing and washing clothes. There was no working well in this rented compound, so our Guinean staff had to fetch the water from the well in the next compound. There was a regular shortage of food which meant that the last people to come to eat missed out on the meal. The rented compound had no furniture leaving students to sleep on foam mattresses on the floor and eat their meals either sitting on the

edge of the veranda or standing with their plates. The students paid the same price for these inadequate accommodations as students at Keïta's camp did for their "luxury" accommodations. Markus and Bangoura regularly reacted to complaints by stating, "This is Africa. Do not expect the same standards you would find in the United States. There is a shortage of water here so do not expect to get as much as you want." While none of the students expected the same standards they had left behind in America, they were still accused of being unreasonable with their concerns.

In both the case of Dittmar and Markus better accommodations and more adequate supplies were readily available, but these would have cost more money. By leading the students to believe that nothing better existed and that part of their experience of visiting Africa meant that they had to live with some of the same harsh conditions Africans do on a daily basis, organizers spent less money on food and accommodations than students had actually paid for these things. Not only was more money given to the local musicians and camp workers as a result, students were further required to generously tip the helpers by leaving all of their unused *Francs Guinée* (Guinea Francs) upon departure rather than converting these back to American dollars or Euros. The disturbing thing about all of this was that students were forced into giving money to help the locals when they most likely would have done so on their own anyway. Markus and Dittmar's attitudes toward teaching foreigners about the harsh realities of life in Guinea more often than not created animosity between students who believed they had done the right thing and those who felt they had been betrayed. However, all students invariably came away from the experience with their eyes newly opened to both the riches of Guinean cultures and the tragedy of daily life in such an impoverished country.

A last minute attempt by camp workers to receive gifts confused and disillusioned some students, but left a lasting impression on many others. Strangely enough it was this impression, as much as the music and culture of Guinea that drew these students into a stronger alliance with a growing global network of Guinean *djembé* players. Regardless of the apparent lack of resources at the camps run by Markus and Dittmar, students had the resources to get what they needed on a daily basis. The amount of money each student is instructed to bring for incidental items and souvenirs is often more than an average household in Guinea sees in an entire year. For the most part, student-tourists were protected from the level of poverty, desperation, and resultant corruption and crime that existed beyond the safe confines of their drumming compounds. It was not until students began packing up to leave that they were able to witness the desperation in the eyes of their African helpers. Some of the requests for gifts of ipods™ and cell phones seemed rather extravagant given that these individuals had difficulty keeping their families fed. Yet, these items could be sold for a great deal of money in Guinea. Many students responded to these last minute cries for help by continuing to send money to their African friends upon arriving home. Others have started non-profit organizations which fund education and infrastructure both in Conakry and in the villages of their *djembéfolas*.

While in Guinea, student-tourists had their days filled with great music, and vibrant culture. These elements were fore-grounded in the camp experience through daily classes with leading drummers and dancers followed by nightly performances of the finest local and national ballet and percussion groups. In addition, there were side-trips to the island of Rume, known for its incredible beaches, and to an enchanting set of falls just

outside of Kindia. All of the romantic notions of Africa were fulfilled for the students. The result is that many of these students get “hooked” and end up returning each year, sometimes for several months. These romantic experiences are further augmented by attachments that invariably form between students and their new African friends. A new type of cultural network is formed not only among the Guineans and foreigners involved in the camp directly, but also between the students and those over whom they have influence back home. The *djembéfolas* these students study with at the camps spend the rest of their year touring, giving workshops, and concerts in the various locations where their students reside. This in turn inspires more students to make the trip to Guinea. Over the last two decades this patronage network has grown exponentially both in size and scope.

Drum camp students: global patrons of Guinea’s *djembé*

Within my examination of the drum camps run by Keïta, Konaté, and Bangoura, I will be tracing the development and maintenance of a global network of students devoted to the ‘traditional’ Malinké *djembé* and *dunun* music taught by these three *djembéfolas*. In addition, I will be looking at the ways in which different levels of representation, national and ethnic, negotiate with and participate in the *djembé* scene created in Conakry and selected villages for the benefit of foreign student/tourists. The framework I have chosen for these tasks was initially developed by Slobin as a means of analyzing the musical activity of sub-groups within American culture. In his extensive article “Micromusics of the West: A Comparative Approach” (*Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 36, No. 1, 1992), Slobin divides musical activity into three large spheres or domains. Large corporate and governmental structures such as the various branches of the music industry

and national and state departments of culture and the arts are defined by Slobin as “superculture” (1992:15-19). Groups under this label represent hegemonic forces which work to unify large populations for the purpose of either creating the largest possible market for musical products or to encourage patriotism and national identity. In the context of Guinea’s *djembé*, national ballet companies, ensembles and orchestras as well as national music competitions represent the products created by the governmental “superculture.” Smaller, more specifically oriented groups which form as a result of other types of cultural alliance are categorized under the labels of “subculture” or “interculture.” While “subculture” refers to the musical ways in which people choose to align themselves with a particular ethnicity; “interculture” refers to musical networks which connect individuals and groups within specific cultural spaces (Slobin 1992: 37-41; 42-49). For the most part, Slobin confines subculture to a space that exists within national boundaries. Whereas, the category of “interculture” is used to discuss interactions which take place on a global scale.

The particular category of interculture that applies to the global *djembé* community is “affinity interculture.” “Affinity interculture” is used by Slobin to describe grass-roots musical affiliations where transmission takes place face-to-face through performer-audience and teacher-student transmissions (1992: 42-49). I am using “affinity interculture” as a means to examine the growing network of foreign *djembé* players and aficionados who have aligned themselves with the teachings of one or more of Guinea’s “traditional” *djembéfolas*.

“Affinity interculture” is a network which is not defined by a specific ethnic or racial identity held by its members. The drum camps I attended in 2008 with Keita and

Konaté contained large and very diverse groups of students. Konaté's camp had students from Germany, Luxemburg, United States, Canada, Senegal, and London. Keïta's camp had an even more diverse student population which included: three French Canadians (two from Quebec and one from the Maritimes), four Americans, three students from France (one who currently works in Ireland, one who has dual American and French citizenship, and one from Paris), two students from South Africa (one of British decent and one originally from Germany), one student from England, one from Holland, three from Croatia, two from Taiwan, and one from Japan.

The diverse groups of people who make up this "affinity interculture" were initially drawn together by the music but what holds them together in the long run is the charismatic leadership of the *djembéfol* who teaches them. Slobin describes "affinity groups" in the following way:

[Affinity groups] are charmed circles of like-minded music-makers drawn magnetically to a certain genre that creates strong expressive bonding . . . affinity groups locate themselves at a determined point and may even build walls around their musical strongholds. (Slobin 1992: 72-73)

While Keïta and Konaté are good friends and colleagues who greatly respect each other's work, there are few students who study with both drummers. There is definitely a group that subscribes to Keïta's teaching methodology and repertoire and another that follows Konaté's. Those who value Keïta's approach like his overall consistency, the way he divides students into levels, his focus on the development of good *djembé* technique, and his professional certification program. Students who value Konaté do so for his "African" approach to teaching and performance which is very creative but not always consistent. They also value his knowledge and emphasis on teaching the three-part *dunun* melody central to each rhythm. Konaté's laid-back manner of incorporating all levels of

experience and ability into a single class or workshop is a result of his desire to please all of his students. He values the time and money that people sacrifice to come to Guinea and study with him. Unfortunately, individual students who consider themselves advanced sometimes make conflicting demands of Konaté in terms of the pace of his class and the amount of material that gets covered. This causes him a great deal of stress.

Within the “affinity interculture” are two types of ensembles documented by Slobin. “Affinity groups” are, for the most part, non-professional ensembles, while “bands” are “professional or semi professional groups who play for the pleasure of a paying audience” (Slobin 1992: 72). Slobin describes their activities as “bonding” and “banding” respectively. These two types of ensemble provide a valuable framework from which to analyze the tensions that exist between individuals within various sub-groups that invariably form during the course of a three-week drum camp in Guinea. First of all, there are individuals who consider their time at the camp as professional training. These drummers make their living as *djembé* teachers and performers. Their activities therefore fit into what Slobin would call “banding.” Professional and semi-professional drummers who make up this group come to Guinea to collect as much new repertoire as possible with the intention of practicing and perfecting it with their respective professional ensembles once they arrive back home. Members of this group routinely clash with amateur drummers who have come for very different reasons. Students within this group of amateur players or “affinity group” come to Guinea for the intensive experience of playing with trained African musicians. For them the cultural immersion and “bonding” experience of making music together is more important than becoming a great *djembé* player. In addition, many of these same individuals see their trip to Guinea as a holiday –

a tourist experience. While many of members of this affinity group were newcomers, there were also a few who were returnees. Even though there are two distinguishable groups, all of the drummers entered into their relationship with this music through an affinity group – be it a drum circle or a formal class. Those who were particularly smitten with this music decided to devote their lives to it by becoming professionals.

Early on in Keïta's career he saw the need for his European students to have a way of defining their level of playing and progress. As a result he devised beginning, intermediate and advanced classes. When Konaté later came to Europe he had no choice but to adopt this model as well. Clearly there was a division among European students between those who considered themselves as serious drummers and those who simply attended classes for their own entertainment. While the students who played for entertainment respected the difficulty of the music, they did not have the motivation to practice and were less concerned with their overall progress. Meanwhile, serious students desired to learn a large repertoire of rhythms while at the same time perfecting their technique. These students practiced and were genuinely frustrated when they attended workshops where the more casual students might hold them back. Present day drum camps within Guinea draw students from both of these groups. As a result, the situation can become very tense at times as *djembéfolas* try to negotiate often conflicting sets of demands. Acting within their perceived roles as merchants in the global market selling traditional music, successful *djembéfolas* have become model teachers who reflect their students' ideals and demands.³ This in turn has created strong alliances between certain

³ See also, Paula A. Ebron noted in *Performing Africa*, that the desires of Western tourists are backed up by their economic and political power and as a result tourism has shaped "local articulations of culture" (2002: 163)

students and their *djembéfolas*. Yet, far from being mere puppets for their patron's manipulation, each *djembéfolo* has demonstrated the line over which their students should not cross.

During my time at Bangoura's drum camp in 2007, a situation between students and Bangoura escalated to the point where Bangoura refused to teach any more classes. On the morning of Friday, January 4th, the third day of classes, Bangoura held a drum class for all of the students, including the dancers (some of whom had never drummed before). For the previous two classes, the drum students had been working with two other instructors: Sekou Sano, who taught the intermediate group, and Delmundo who taught a small group of advanced students on the roof of the compound. After the joint class, some students approached Markus to ask if they could meet with their original instructors in the afternoon to finish learning the rhythms they had begun working on the day before. When Bangoura arrived back at the compound after lunch, he was angry and told the group that there would be no more drum classes that day. Bangoura told the students that he had planned on teaching all levels together in a large group again in the afternoon but was upset by a few people who were complaining. He continued by saying that if we did not want him as a teacher then he would not teach. After Bangoura left the compound, Sano decided to continue teaching his group *Balakulandjan* (the piece they had started the day before). Two of the dancers (who had drummed for the first time that morning) joined the group but quickly left because the music was too difficult for them.

Among the students, there was a mixture of reactions to Bangoura's afternoon chastisement. One woman, a classically trained percussionist from New York, took Bangoura's outburst personally and felt that he was publically punishing her because she

was the student who had voiced these teaching concerns to Markus, albeit on behalf of the students in her class. Other students were angered by what they perceived as an inappropriate power trip on the part of Bangoura. Still others felt that they deserved Bangoura's anger because they had shown a disrespectful attitude toward him by questioning his pedagogical decisions. Teachers in Guinea are given a great deal of respect by their students whether these students agree with their decisions or not. Collectively, the drum camp participants had stepped over a cultural line, and there would be many consequences to follow that mistake.

For the remainder of the camp, Bangoura did not teach another class. The Monday morning following the incident, Bangoura arrived with a new set of teachers. Sano was assigned to teach the beginner class and a new teacher, Younoussa Camara would teach the intermediate group. Before introducing the class to Camara, Bangoura made a point of singling out the percussionist from New York and another professional female drummer from Quebec by telling them not to give Camara a hard time and to show him some respect. The woman from Quebec, a long time student of Bangoura's, took Bangoura's comments to heart and promised to be respectful. As it turned out, Camara, a young drummer from the current *Ballet D'Joliba*, had never taught a drum class before. It was clear to the students that Camara had been chosen as the new instructor only to teach them a lesson about what happens when they show disrespect to a *djembéfol*a such as Bangoura. After a very long forty minutes repeating a simple accompaniment pattern, Bangoura stepped in and told the young man to move on to the rest of the solo. This type of activity defined the role Bangoura was to take for the rest of the drum camp. From that point on, he functioned as a supervisor, stepping in to correct

either Sano or Camara on the finer points of the rhythms they were teaching, or to point out a more efficient way to teach their students.

The divide between members of “affinity groups” and members of “bands” did not exist within the first drum camps in Guinea. Many of the first *djembe* students who came to Guinea in the late 1980s and early 1990s were already trained musicians. Most became *djembe* teachers upon their return home if only because they wanted to continue to play the music they had learned in Guinea. In order to do this they needed to train drummers to play all of the accompanying *dunun* and *djembe* parts they had learned while in Guinea. For some of these teachers, their initial efforts in training fellow drummers eventually led them to full-time careers as teachers and performers. These initial, smaller, groups of musicians saw their trip to Guinea as a musical exchange. Annegret Baier, who attended one of the first Guinea workshops organized by Rainer Dörrer and Konaté, contrasts her experiences between the first camp which took place in 1989 and the second one she attended in 1997:

The first time [in 1989] it was just unbelievable, it was such a, I was so wide-eyed, everything was wowing me. And we would play, it was a very warm experience. The first time everything was very new and tender and we were welcomed. We would be going to celebrations with Famoudou and sometimes he would stick me on accompaniment drum and Rainer would play and some people would go and some people wouldn't.

The second time [in 1997] I felt more of an O.K. I'm the tourist, here are the people from here. They teach me, I give them money, and that's how I get the information. Rather than . . . at this point I felt really, well I'm a musician. I want to go there to learn but I also want to connect. I don't just want to pay you to give me something, I also just want to sit with you and play with you and just connect as musicians. I didn't get that at all last time. And then there was this other compound that started building, it felt very much like an animosity to Famoudou's house. There were people

from Berlin who bought a big, and built a big dance complex and all that.⁴ It was sort of competition started to come up. It felt really more like it was cultural tourism. You know, really. The tourists were coming and they'd lay out all of their wares. It was just much more innocent the very first time, you know. And when I came back the second time, it was much more like, we're the tourists and you gotta make money on the tourists.

The transition that Baier is describing here reflects the gradual commercialization of drum camps. Konaté was still playing for local festivals within Conakry when he held the first drum camps at his home there. At this time in his life was gradually making the transition from a ballet drummer to a fulltime traditional *djembéfol*. Students who came to study with him were simply invited to participate in his daily routine. When I went to study with him in 2007 and 2008 (over 18 years later), I discovered that, similar to Keïta, Konaté rarely performs in Conakry anymore.⁵

While the division between professional and amateur or “bands” and “affinity groups” developed quite organically, Keïta responded to this phenomenon by creating a system for certifying professional teachers of *djembé*. After studying with Keïta for a number of years through yearly workshops and drum camps, advanced students can ask to be tested by him and become a certified *Tam Tam Mandingue Professor*. In order to become certified students must not only master the sixty-plus rhythms found in Keïta's book, but also know the history behind each of these as well as their cultural application.⁶

⁴ During my visit in 2008 I went to see the elaborate compound that Baier described. It was built by a wealthy German entrepreneur in the 1990s. The compound is staffed with a full-time grounds keeper and a manager of facilities yet it is only used for a couple of workshops each year.

⁵ One of the reasons for this is that Konaté has become too famous locally to be able to perform without the possibility of crowds becoming too large and unruly. Another reason is that, at the age of 68, he gets too tired in the evenings to perform - especially after he has spent the day teaching.

⁶ The following is a statement made about the list of certified teachers published at the end of his book, “Mamady awards a certificate to students who have gone through several years of professional training and who have learned many of the rhythms described in this book from him personally. By giving them this certificate, he also signifies his confidence in their abilities to teach the rhythms and their meanings authentically, using effective teaching methods” (Keïta and Billmeier 1999: 115).

Also included on the test are his twelve *solo origineux*, which were created by Keïta to help students learn more “technical and rhythmic finesse” (Keïta and Billmeier 1999: 107). Keïta wants his advanced students to not only memorize these solos and place them correctly into the overall rhythm, but to be able to devise their own solos using phrases from his *solo origineux* (Keïta 2007: Ramona, C.A. interviews).

Keïta (both alone and through an alliance with his DRTM compatriots) is seeking to regulate the musical practice of individuals and groups by creating a standardized musical product which is then disseminated through a global network. Yet, while the product he delivers is the same in every locality its reception into these diverse cultural settings is quite varied. Nowhere is this more obvious than the first *Festival D’Echange Culturel Nord/Sud*. Through an in depth examination of this festival, held in Conakry in January of 2008, I will unravel and document the roles played by: *Manding Foli* (a partnership between *Tam Tam MandingueBelgium* and *Tam Tam Mandingue Conakry*), the local government in Conakry, and the national government of Guinea in the process of staging this event.

The first annual *Festival D’Echange Culturel Nord/Sud*

There were two performance events which took place in Conakry in the winter of 2008 which serve as examples of the growing dependence on cultural tourism that currently drives Guinea’s *djembe* scene. The largest and most prestigious event of these was the *First Annual Festival D’Echange Culturel Nord/Sud* which took place at *terrain de football de Matam* (the soccer field in Matam) on January 11, 2008. The organization hosting this event was *Manding Foli*, a partnership between *Tam Tam Mandingue Belgium* and *Tam Tam Mandingue Conakry*. Local businesses which sponsored this event

were *Grands Hôtels et Casinos a Bel Air*, (radio station) *Bas VZW*, and *Tam Tam Mandingue*. International troupes were required to pay a fee of 18,000FG (\$4.50 - \$5.00 American) to participate, while Guinea nationals could enter free of charge. The event started shortly after 2:00PM and finished well after midnight the next morning. The second event also involved Keïta but was staged for a more intimate audience. This event entailed to a trip to Balandougou and four other villages in the surrounding area for a select group of Keïta's students. In the context of this village tour the students had the opportunity not only to witness local drum and dance performances, but also to stage their own drum performance in each village.

Music and performing arts competitions in Guinea go back to Touré's revolution. In the previous chapter I outlined the beginnings of similar performing arts competitions in both Mali and Senegal which were founded by national governments with help from graduates from *École William Ponty*. In order to recruit the finest drummers and dancers in Guinea to perform with the national ballet, between 1960 and 1975 competitions were regularly held in Conakry with companies from every region (Keïta and Billmeier 1999: 20-24). Later on competitions were also held for young people who were attending school within Conakry. It was through one such competition in 1973 that Bangoura was chosen to join *Ballet D'Joliba* (Bangoura Interview: Guinea 2008).

As an international competition, *Festival D'Echange Culturel Nord/Sud* was staged for many of the same reasons as these previous national competitions, but there was also an underlying agenda. The organization and seating of the audience made it clear that this event was staged more for drum camp participants than it was for a local Guinean audience. The foreign audience was quite diverse with drum students and

tourists from many parts of Asia, Europe and North America. This group of foreigners was seated under a large canopy right in front of the stage (fig.3.3) whereas the local audience was seated under a much smaller canopy to the left of the stage (fig.3.2). The judges for the competition were seated on large plush chairs in the front row of the foreigners' canopy. On many levels this presentation was designed with a similar mandate to the original national ballet ensembles.



[Figure 3.2: Seating for local Guineans (photo by author)]



[Figure 3.3: Seating for Drum Camp participants and staff immediately behind Monette Moreno-Keïta, Mamady Keïta, and the other judges (photo by author).]

Keïta, the head judge, arrived with four muscular body guards who never left his side. Who was he guarding himself against? Other than foreign drum students wanting autographs, I did not see many people approach Keïta. This led me to believe that the body guards represented more of a statement of Keïta's local stature as an ex-patriot who had achieved international acclaim than any real need for security. This move served to affirm to the international students gathered that Keïta is a "big man" in his own country (Keïta interviews: Ramona, CA, 2007).

While there were two official categories of groups competing, I actually witnessed three different types of performing groups. First were the ballet troupes who had twenty minutes to present a dramatic story through drum, song, and dance. Next, there were percussion ensembles which usually played a medley of three or more rhythms which were interpreted by a small group of dancers. Finally there were the European percussion ensembles which performed a "concert" style of *djembé* music without dancers. None of these European ensembles performed alone. Either the European students doubled-up on the three *dunun* parts while their Guinean instructors played *djembés*, or the European students presented a pyramid on *djembés* accompanied by Guinean *dunun* players. The three European groups I saw during the competition were all from Belgium. The group that played *djembés* performed the same pyramid I had learned from Keïta in Ramona, California in April of 2007. Clearly these European groups – the only international entries – felt that they needed to hire Guinean drummers in order to perform with the competency expected at this type of competition.

Of almost thirty groups who performed twenty-minute segments over the course of ten hours, the winners of the competition were the members of the only group

performing traditional *Susu* music, *Boté Percussion*. While both Malinké and Susu ethnic groups play the *djembé*, Malinké ensembles accompany the *djembé* with between one and three *dununs*, whereas traditional Susu groups use the *boté* drum. The *boté* is experiencing something of a revival in local ballets and percussion groups within Conakry. This is not surprising given that the Susu represent the largest ethnic group in Conakry.⁷ When Keïta invited *Boté Percussion* to perform at the student compound, I understood not only why this group had won, but also the criteria Keïta used to make his decision. This group was incredibly entertaining. The *boté* drummers choreographed dance moves to match their drumming, often swinging their drums around as they played. This combination of drumming and dancing done by the musicians themselves made *Boté Percussion* unique in comparison to the thirty or so other groups competing. More important than the originality and entertainment factors was the fact that this group represented an older tradition presumably unchanged by modernization. Keïta made a point of highlighting this aspect when he introduced the group's performance at the student compound. It seems that Keïta's criterion for choosing this winning group was not much different than that of the European judges at *Les théâtre des nations* in 1960.

Trip to Balandougou and surrounding villages: the continuing urban-rural divide

Entertainment/theatre emerges from ritual out of a complex consisting of an audience separate from performers, the development of professional performers, and economic needs imposing a situation in which performances are made to please the audience rather than according to a fixed code or dogma. (Schechner 1988 (2003 edition): 152)

The above quote is in reference to rituals which are re-enacted for tourists. Schechner gives examples of these from various parts of New Guinea and Bali. In all cases the

⁷ Much of the French spoken in the capital is really a mixture of colonial French and Susu.

intention of the performers and the audience is entertainment. The villages engaging in these tourist performances of re-enacted ritual also maintain a truly ritual version that is not open or accessible to tourists (Schechner 1988 (2003 ed.): 136-143). In Guinea, many of the only living versions of rituals are those which are staged for tourists. This is true not only in urban settings, but also in rural ones.

The culture industry which surrounds the *djembé* is based more in cities such as Conakry and Kindia than it is in villages. Ironically, it is the village music that *djembéfolas* such as Keïta and Konaté are attempting to preserve. Since the *djembé* is only played when there is an actual festival, if a student wished to study this music in the village setting they would need to spend several years in residence there. Knowing this, Keïta set out to create a village experience for a select group of his students. In the winter of 2008 Keïta staged this unique event where he personally invited his professional and advanced students from Europe and America to join him on a tour of Balandougou and the surrounding villages. This event was designed as a cultural exchange meant to encourage the people of these villages to preserve the cultural traditions of their ancestors. The students spent two weeks in Conakry at Keïta's compound preparing for the tour. In that time they were able to learn one of Keïta's pyramids well enough to perform it in the five villages they were going to visit. Amateur drummers and dancers from these villages likewise prepared a performance for their American and European guests.

Ali Thomas, one of the advanced drummers who went on the trip, kindly shared with me the video footage she was able to capture, as well as her own perspective of what actually took place. There was a consistent series of reactions to the performance of the

advanced and professional students in each village that moved from curiosity, to disbelief, to participation and enjoyment. According to Thomas, people within these villages were genuinely surprised that foreigners had not only showed an interest in their music, but also done the work necessary to attain the obvious level of mastery shown in the performance. The students were warmly welcomed in Balandougou and treated to local performances, including a visit by a *Soboninkum* dancer from another village. Thomas said that one of the highlights of the trip was Keïta's revealing of a secret spiritual place just on the outskirts of Balandougou. This was the place which Keïta had only previously revealed to his American wife and adopted son, Mahiri. Keïta took his students there because they had showed their love and dedication to him by coming on such a challenging journey, a pilgrimage of sorts. He rewarded their devotion to him by sharing some of the secrets of his culture.

For Keïta this was not the first dramatic trip back to his village. Twenty-six years after he left (at age 14) to join the *Ballet D'Joliba*, Keïta returned to Balandougou with Laurent Chevallier and his film crew to capture the event. At this point some of Keïta's relatives assumed that he was dead because it had been so long since they heard from him. During the tearful reunion that was captured on film, Keïta appears almost inconsolable as he mourns those who have died during his absence. I was surprised by the depth of vulnerability Keïta allowed Chevallier not only to capture, but also include in the final film. Keïta writes about his intense emotions on the cover-jacket of the commercial video which was later released commemorating this event:

I needed to return to my land.
 I needed to see everyone again.
 26 years of absence!
 It was very important for me that they understand
 that I never forgot them.
 Many people that I love have died since.
 It is for them, for my people, that I needed to return to Balandugu.
 -*Mamady Keïta* (2006)

This (filmed) event was organized for much the same reason as the Balandougou tour of 2008. Events such as these serve to connect Keïta with his village, thereby giving him the necessary authority as a bearer of traditional culture in the eyes of his students and patrons.

Daily life in rural Guinea often contrasts sharply with these events prearranged by Keïta. Two students, from the drum camp that was held immediately following the Balandougou trip for professional and advanced students, went back to visit the village with Keïta's nephew. Much to their disappointment, there was no music taking place at all in the village at that time. During their stay in the village, there were no women or children singing and no festival music of any kind. Not wanting to leave empty handed these students paid a couple of local *jelis* to sing some "traditional" songs into their recording devices. Balandougou has become more of a mining village than an agricultural one, and this has changed the population living there. Mining villages, such as Balandougou contain more transient and ethnically varied populations, making cultural events difficult to coordinate among the various ethnic groups. Conversely, Konaté's village, Sangbarella, is an isolated agricultural community occupied by a single ethnic group. In Sangbarella it is common to find women singing as they work together and children singing as they play together. Many of these songs form the basis for the *djembe* and *dunun* compositions Konaté has recorded, performed, and taught over the years.

While one of Konaté's drum camps always includes a trip to Sangbarella, there is no special performance staged for this annual trip. If the students are lucky there will be a marriage or naming ceremony, but this is not staged for their benefit. For Konaté's students, the village trip represents an opportunity to experience daily life inside the culture which lies behind the music they are studying. Uschi Dittmar, who heads up one of Konaté's yearly drum camps, has no qualms about asking students to take two weeks away from their drum classes to go to the village. For her the village is beautiful in its simplicity while at the same time presenting students with a taste of the sometimes harsh reality of daily life in an African agricultural village. For her experiencing this culture first hand is a necessary component for every student of the *djembé*.

Misunderstandings about the difference between village and urban performance of traditional music continue to draw researchers and players into rural situations with expectations that are far from realistic. Keïta explained the situation to the students in his drum camp in the following way:

Mamady: There is one student of mine in Japan that told me in Conakry, "Hey Mamady, I want to come to Guinea for six months, I want to play everyday, I want to go to the village and get to know everything about the tradition and the culture." I told him, "Being in Conakry for six months and being in a village for six months are two completely different things. In Conakry you can have a party for any reason. But, in the village, as long as there is no marriage happening you are not going to hear a *djembé* being played [at all], as long as there is no circumcision festival organized, you won't hear a *djembé*, as long as there is no harvest/cultivation festival you are not going to hear the *djembé*. During your six-month stay in the village there has to be an event demanding the presence of the *djembé* so don't expect to go to the village, any village, and play the *djembé* every day." Maybe this guy didn't believe me, because he went ahead and came to Guinea for six-months, he went into a village, and during those six months he played the *djembé* three times.

When I saw him again after that time he said, "I didn't believe you but I swear you know your culture." In the village you have to have the

situation, you have to have the event that is going to take place otherwise there is no point in playing the *djembé*. They don't play just to play!
(Interview Ramona, CA, April 18, 2007)

While it would seem to drum camps participants, from their experiences in Conakry, that there are always festivals and occasions for *djembé* music, this is simply not the case in rural Guinea. This is true for two reasons: first, there is no foreign audience in the rural setting to sustain these performances as a form of entertainment; and second, the lack of monetary currency in the rural setting, where most transactions take place on a barter type of system, means that parties and festivities are few and far between. For these reasons I question whether or not Diawara is correct in his analysis of the situation.

Today, like born-again movements, the masked rituals are returning to many villages. And with the zeal and fundamentalism typical of such movements, villagers look nostalgically to the past, when such rituals were pure, complete, and manly. Senior citizens are asked to remember how the rituals were performed: how many masks were used, what dance steps corresponded to which masks, who was allowed to take part and how the rituals differed from one another. (Diawara 1998: 182-183)

It would be very difficult to test Diawara's hypothesis in rural Guinea today. While it is possible that people in the villages are "reconstituting" these rituals as they search for their ethnic identities, it is just as likely that they are responding to the interests of anthropologists, tourists, and musicians who are interested in their cultural traditions. At first glance, it seems that outsiders have more interest in these rituals and their history than many villagers actually do. Given the fact that people from Balandougou and surrounding villages put on a show of traditional culture for Mamady Keïta and his professional students, a show that completely disappeared after the students left; and given that several foreign students have spent up to a year in a village and have witnessed

on average less than a handful of celebrations involving the *djembé*, it is difficult to state unequivocally who initially instigated this interest.

Conclusion

The influence of Western student-tourists on the construction and commodification of Guinea's *djembé* tradition cannot be underestimated. As the only remaining patrons of this music, student-tourists have the financial means to not only support Guinea's professional *djembéfolas*, but also to define the parameters of what is authentic and traditional *djembé* music and culture. As Ebron states,

Tourist desires are not just any circulating dreams; they are backed up with the economic and political power of tourists, the companies that bring them, house them, and entertain them, and the governments that regulate and privilege them. (Ebron 2002: 165)

This is an unequal power structure, the same one which has allowed American tourists to construct the Maasai in their own image of Africa based on American popular culture at "Out of Africa" Sundowner (Bruner 2001). But, to view Guinea's *djembéfolas* as mere puppets of their patrons serves to undermine their role in the negotiation. As I have demonstrated here, there are three types of players which have created this new world for the *djembé*: *djembéfolas*, culture brokers and students. While there are obvious inequalities between these groups, I agree with Ebron who concludes that, "culture as commodity emerges from this unequal but still invigorating negotiation" (Ebron 2002: 165).

While older *djembéfolas* made very calculated and politically motivated moves in their invention of tradition, the younger generation of *djembéfolas* living in Conakry does not know the political history behind the formation of Guinea's national ballets and therefore sees no need to create a separate "tradition." Their concern is focused on the

present and immediate need to make a living and support their families. These young men did not grow up in a Guinea that was completely closed off from the world. They know nothing other than the international marketplace where they purchase their goods, most of which are made elsewhere. For them being Guinean means interacting with the world through commerce and trade. The youngest *djembéfolas* grew up with the reality of Western tourists who came yearly to study the *djembé*. Some of these young drummers gained all their knowledge about traditional music as participants and observers of these drum camps while others simply learned from their friends on the street. For these young men participation in a negotiated tradition created with Western influence is not a concern. They are simply happy to have a means of livelihood and the possibility of living their lives as professional musicians living abroad.

Although Western interest has changed the *djembé* in terms of its importance within Malinké culture and its use around the globe, change is an inevitable part of all cultural expressions and practices. I believe that the type of preservation of traditional music which has been demonstrated here, rather than artificially preserving or stagnating the *djembé* culture within Guinea, as Nettl warns, has actually opened up more avenues of performance (Nettl 1983: 276-277). Furthermore, I agree with Cohen that the transformations which take place as the result of cultural tourism, simply represent an acceleration of the natural process of cultural change which occurs within any community (Cohen 1984: 388). The irony of the process is that in order for traditions to continue, they need to change to accommodate the needs of each new generation.

Chapter Four

The Politics of Transmission: the *djembé* in Germany

Notation mystifies as it projects a version of the unheard musical realm, and in so doing, creates an art object. (Radano 2003: 167)

We are changing this music by our interest in it.
(Interview: Dr. Thomas Ott: 2007)

In this chapter I examine the ways in which lead *djembé* soloists, retired from Guinea's national ballets, have brought their music to Germany through teaching, performing, and recording. I am most interested in the ways in which music pedagogy, notation, and recording are used as tools of musical and cultural negotiation within the intercultural space of transmission (see pgs. 35-41). I believe that the use of, and reliance on, these tools influences the perception and reception of *djembé* music and Malinké culture as it is transmitted by Guinean *djembéfolas* to their students in Germany. The culture brokers involved in this process hail from both inside and outside the academic community. By comparing both popular and academic transmissions, I hope to shed some light on the differences and similarities between the constructions of Africa within the academy and those found within popular culture.

When I arrived at customs in the Munich airport, with my *djembé* drum on my back, a computer in one hand and my suitcase in the other, the customs agent was slightly confused. I told him that the purpose of my trip was to study the *djembé*, a West African drum. In an attempt to make myself better understood, I told the customs agent that I

would be studying with German drummer, Uschi Billmeier. I was coming to study African drum music with a German woman? Why was I not traveling to Africa? These and other questions the agent asked were understandably difficult to answer without going into a lot of detail. I was trying to answer the same questions myself – that was specifically why I had come. The scene, which could have continued in this circular fashion for hours, ended with my being deemed a confused but harmless individual and wished good luck by an equally confused customs agent.

I chose to study in Germany because of the German publications of notated *djembe* music, which have found their way into American drumming circles. These published books of rhythms have become somewhat of an *Urtext* among American drummers. Where and how did these books gain their authority? What type of drumming scene existed in Germany to create the market for these books? I traveled to Germany in order to discover how these texts of “traditional” *djembe* music came to be. I was also curious about the cultural exchange that ultimately created them. My central questions about this process are: How do culturally based ideas about music and music pedagogy affect the transmission of African *djembe* music between cultures? In what ways do the resulting musical products reflect the complex negotiations that led to their creation?

Not only are there differences in musical terminology and pedagogical approach that affect the perception of this music thus transforming it as it is appropriated into a new cultural context, there are also different factors motivating this musical exchange. Through the stories told by Guinean *djembe* masters and transcribed by German culture brokers there exists the creation of a nostalgic African past. This constructed past is equally beneficial to both the German culture broker and the Guinean *djembe*folo. For

example, Thomas Ott's efforts to enhance the German system of music education through the introduction of musical genres from non-literate societies, idealizes Africa as an extra-musical continent where music is innately part of daily cultural embodiment. For Guinean *djembe*folas nostalgia for a pre-colonial, pre-national form of village life provides hope for the future of their cultural heritage. In both cases, an imagined Africa stands for what is missing in daily life for both Guinean *djembe*folas and their German patrons.

Each notation system I encountered in Germany was created for one or two of the following purposes:

1. Popular Transmission: to make *djembe* music accessible to interested amateur and professional musicians outside the tradition.
2. Preservation of Traditional Music: done in collaboration with Guinean *djembe* masters.
3. Musical Analysis: within the profession of musicology/ethnomusicology.

In each case there is a process of translation that takes place. In the act of creating a notated form, this African music is being subjected to European ideas about musical structure and musical form. As V.Y. Mudimbe states,

The fact of the matter is that, until now, Western interpreters as well as African analysts have been using categories and conceptual systems which depend upon Western epistemological order. Even in the most explicitly Afrocentric descriptions, models of analysis, explicitly or implicitly, knowingly or unknowingly, refer to the same order. (Mudimbe 1988)

The very act of notation and analysis imposes this European epistemological order on any non-Western music being studied. Through the combined process of transcription and recording there are changes which are taking place in this music.

While the contested space of intercultural exchange Ott refers to (in the second opening quote of this chapter) is now central to much ethnomusicological discourse, I am

proposing that the process of transmission taking place in Germany provides an example of a much more dialogic exchange between culture bearer and culture broker. One of the most obvious examples of these dialogic collaborations is the listing of culture bearers as co-authors in the two most popular books of *djembé* music published in Germany. In both the case of Mamady Keïta and Uschi Billmeier's book *Mamady Keïta: my Life for the Djembé* (1999), and Famoudou Konaté and Thomas Ott's book *Rhythms and Songs from Guinea* (1997), Billmeier and Ott consulted with Keïta and Konaté during every stage of their book's creation. Likewise, other collaborations involving recording and notation between Konaté and Rainer Dörrer, Keïta and Rainer Arold, involved a series of checks and balances where rhythms were either played back from notations or recordings for final approval by Konaté and Keïta. Even though both *djembéfolas* wield a great deal of influence over the representation of their music and culture, the resulting product, far from a benign dictation, bears the stamp of both authors involved.

One of the most interesting features of notated transcriptions of *djembé* music made by the eight German student/culture brokers I worked with and studied is that only one (Uhuru) attempted to use some form of the standard Western notational system originally invented in Europe. When asked why, many of the transcribers I met explained that African music, especially African rhythm, is fundamentally different from European music. As a result, the notational system used in European classical music would prove inadequate when it comes to expressing the rhythms of *djembé* music. In his chapter entitled, "Magical Writing," Ronald Radano calls this type of repeated reference to notation's inadequacy, "partiality" (Radano 2003:186). According to Radano, "partiality refers not only to perceived limitations of European notation, but also serves to highlight

close proximity of musical and racial difference in the romantic imagination” (ibid.:187). Although Radano is using this term to theorize the objectification of African American music by the American popular music industry in the form of sheet music and printed collections of Negro spirituals, published in the late nineteenth century, I find “partiality” equally applicable to the present context in Germany.

Radano's idea of “partiality” addresses both practical and political issues revolving around the act of transcription. In the nineteenth-century American context addressed by Radano, the limitations of European notation were not yet being tested by composers. By the end of the twentieth century, European and American composers of both acoustic and electronic music had stretched the possibilities of European notation to unprecedented degrees. The European notational system my German informants had available to them was certainly flexible enough to allow for any rhythmic anomaly they perceived in the process of transcribing Keïta and/or Konaté's rhythmic arrangements. In addition, many professional percussionists in the United States and at least one Germany have found a way to create full orchestral scores of *djembe* and *dunun* music from Upper Guinea using only the tools of European notation. If we take as a given that no notational system can adequately depict the all aspects of a musical performance (while at the same time, maintaining some sense of intelligibility for the musician reading it), the choice of which notational system to use becomes not only practical, but also political. On one hand, the use of a European notational system has the potential of imposing a European Epistemology on the music being transcribed. On the other hand, the use of an alternative notational system can have the effect of exoticizing the music being transcribed. Radano adds yet another possibility stating that, "we can observe the transcription of exotic

musics as a disruption of the discursive and textual spaces of European musical supremacy and order" (Radano 2003: 205). In the course of my research with these eight *djembe* student/brokers in Germany I have witnessed the ongoing struggle between beliefs that assume the existence of universal laws of music and assumptions that African music represents an entirely different paradigm. It is within and between these conflicting beliefs that the process of transcription takes place.

From the time of Hornbostel and Abraham's "*Vorschläge für die Transkription exotischer Melodien*," [Suggested Methods for the Transcription of Exotic Music] *Sammelbände der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft*, (1909-1910) there has been a concerted effort on the part of comparative musicologists not only to devise accurate notated analyses of phonograph recordings, but also to investigate the perceptions and practices of musicians and their audiences during the performance of non-Western musics. The combination of these two investigative activities became the means to understand "exotic" musical systems. In 1910, Hornbostel and Abraham stated that "It is most efficacious when the investigator himself learns to perform the songs and instrumental pieces sufficiently well that he can recreate them to the satisfaction of the natives" (trans. George and Eve List 1994: 443). The notated analysis was thus ideally grounded in a full understanding of indigenous styles of performance. When this was not possible, Hornbostel and Abraham advised that in order to gain a secure impression of the piece "one must listen to the complete recording before making notations" lest preliminary sketches of melodic fragments unduly influence the analyst's perception (ibid. 444). In terms of rhythmic analysis specifically, the arrangement of time units into beats of equal length should "only be applied if it can be achieved without appearing

forced” (ibid. 435). This scientific procedural advice was forward-looking for its time and, as a result, still serves as a guideline for transcription practices today.

The limitations of notation and analysis have challenged the study of African rhythm since the time of Hornbostel’s treatise. The main reason for this is that “We can seldom find frames of reference that will assist us in understanding the musicians’ rhythmic intent” (ibid. 435). The purpose of notation in the process of transcription is opposite to that of composition. In composition, notation is a device used to prescribe what a performer is supposed to do in order to realize the composer’s ideas. The composer, as much as possible, attempts to reveal his intentions through the notation. When notation is used to transcribe a performance by a musician, especially when the musician comes from a culture different from that of the transcriber, the intent of the musician constitutes a crucial missing piece of information. Furthermore, most systems of notation are inadequate when it comes to documenting the “manner of performance” of a given sample of music (ibid. 432).

It is possible to address this problem as Charles Keil has done with his theory of “participatory discrepancies.” Keil’s theory was refined through a reactionary debate on the nature of musical syntax. I believe, along with many of Keil’s challengers, that when performative/participatory elements in West African music are closely examined and analyzed (as Keil suggests), they follow a syntactical order understood both by the musicians and their audience (Dane L. Harwood, Eddie S. Meadows, David Locke, Leonard B. Meyer, Ingrid Monson, Christopher Waterman: *Ethnomusicology* Vol. 39, No. 1, 1995; Polak 1998). This belief is based on a different understanding of the nature of musical syntax. Rather than the “macro-process and macro-structure” pictured by Keil

as “a petrified skeleton on which to hang the flesh of actual music making,” Keil’s challengers understand syntax as the series of unspoken, culturally determined, musical practices within which musicians operate on both a macro and micro level (Keil 1987:279). These unspoken syntactical “rules” are what make it possible for musicians to swing together and feel a common groove. I agree with Harwood, Meadows and J.A. Prögler who argue that it is not only possible to embrace both the idea of syntax and process, but “participatory discrepancies” are “affected by the syntactical dimensions of music” (Meadows: 1995). Although musical elements described as participatory discrepancies can only be learned through intensive or long-term study with a native artist, it is possible for these elements to be notated and documented through the invention of other systems (which Keil also suggests in his initial article)(Keil 1987:278-279). As I will demonstrate later in this chapter (see the notation debate), the result is not necessarily practical for the musician to read. In the process of my analysis I challenge assumptions that the scholarly notational systems used by Beer and Polak are more accurate than the popular systems used by Billmeier, Dörrer, and Ott.

Thomas Ott: the *djembé* comes to the academy

The central figure responsible for bringing Guinea’s *djembé* music into the German music academy in the early 1990s was Dr. Thomas Ott, who was a professor of music pedagogy at *Hochschule der Künste Berlin* (Berlin Academy of the Arts) at the time. Ott and his wife lived in the Gambia for two years (in the early 1990s) working on educational reform. During that time he had the opportunity to learn some drum patterns and dances from local drummers. Immediately after Ott returned to Berlin (in 1993), he, along with two of his colleagues and an interested group of students, the set up a program

entitled, “Music from Africa in Berlin Schools.” As a pedagogue, Ott believes that German music educators have much to learn from the way music is taught in non-literate societies. Within the following articles: “*Unsere fremde Musik: Zur Erfahrung des ‘Anderen’ im Musikunterricht*” (Our Foreign Music: On Experiencing the ‘Other’ in Music Education, 1998), “*Der Körper als Partitur*” (The Body as Music Score, 1995) and “*Mit Heinrich Jacoby in Afrika, oder: Was kann unsere Musikpädagogik von einer Schriftlosen Musikkultur lernen?*” (With Heinrich Jacoby in Africa, or: What can our Music Pedagogy Learn from a Non-literate Music Culture? 1999), Ott outlines his theory of music pedagogy which privileges movement and rote learning over the use of notation and music theory as a means for teaching and learning music. Much of Ott’s theory of music pedagogy is based upon his experience as a *djembe* student of Famoudou Konaté. It was this experience of learning *djembe* and *dunun* music through listening and imitation that convinced Ott of the value of developing musicality through movement, rather than music literacy. With this new orientation toward music education, Ott sought to train music students and teachers within the academy in African music. *Djembe* music from Guinea was romanticized by Ott as the means to repair what he perceived as a “broken” system of music pedagogy in German schools.

The creation and recreation of a fixed/unchanging musical artifact through notation, recording, and pedagogy seems to permeate Western musical practice. Ott states that,

In our current system of music pedagogy, it is believed that music theory without musical experience is possible. You teach the system but not the music. So I think this is one basic mistake of Western music education. If you learned, as we all had to learn, the notation at the same time as the execution, this causes all the difficulties we have. The piano is a terrible, terrible instrument, because it makes it possible to perform what you see

in the notation, by your fingers on the keyboard, and the piano does the rest. Your ear must not necessarily be implicated. And in this kind of learning that aural societies offer, the ear is the most important tool. (Interview with Thomas Ott in Berlin, March 2007)

It seems clear that Ott is frustrated by the emphasis on notation in German music pedagogy, yet he is one of the few authors to have published notated transcriptions of *djembé* rhythms and songs for pedagogical use (Konate and Ott 1997). When pressed about this conflict between his ideology and practice, Ott makes it clear that the notation is a memory aid for the teachers he is training and not something that they should even see until after they have learned the music by rote.

I am not using it as a basic book for my teaching because I think that you should teach African music in the African way. It cannot be at 100% or even at 50% the African way when you do it yourself, but it should not be taught with the aid of written material. I think that it is much better to forget that the notation exists and to just be there with your instrument, and your teacher and your colleagues, and then to learn by this different way. Just by following what somebody does and by trying to imitate. Then at the end you can give them the material so that it is not necessary to sit down and to write from your recordings, you have this at the end. Or if someone is just interested to learn more about this music and its context then most of the students I have taught have bought this book at the end. But, I did not offer it to them earlier. I said that this exists but it is not necessary to buy it because what you learn here is maybe enough for you. But, if you want to know more, its o.k. (Ott Interview: March 2007)

Just how does someone like Ott effectively challenge a centuries-old reliance on musical notation? Firstly, Ott insists on teaching exclusively by rote. Students are asked to imitate what they hear and observe. Secondly, the music is not explained in theoretical terms. For example, Ott's students are not told where beat-one resides or whether a particular drum part is on the beat or off the beat. Unfortunately, this alternative pedagogical process seems only to fuel the students' desire for some sort of notational reference. As I later

discovered during my tour of German *djembe* schools, this strong desire to understand the music through notation was not limited to those within the music academy.

There are changes to the music that occur in this process of objectification and subsequent cultural translation. Ott seems to give all the credit for these changes to the culture brokers who work with Guinean drummers. I wish to challenge Ott's assumption that Germans are changing this music. Instead, I would like to examine the situation in Germany in terms of a cultural negotiation in which both parties have something to lose and something to gain through the process of transmitting this music into a new cultural space. In this sense, I am proposing that the acts of notation and recording are inherently political. I am looking at notation and recording not in the simple sense of a continuation of colonial desire, but as a location where ethnic boundaries are decided and cultural differences are negotiated.

In the process of creating a musical object there is a division of roles between the African and the German musicians. The German musicians take on the role of the curator in collecting, examining, and researching the history of each musical object. In this sense the German musician becomes a culture broker – effectively translating the cultural object and its history into a new cultural context. The African musician becomes a culture bearer – a representative of not only his nationality but also his ethnic group. The students who come to learn from the culture broker and/or the culture bearer expect the object to be translated into a musical language that they can understand.

Learning the music of a culture which is not one's own requires a careful negotiation between the foreign artist and his students. The pedagogical process is further mediated for the student by a culture broker who has brought the artist into contact with

the student. But, bringing the culture bearer and the students together is only the beginning of the process. As Richard Kurin states,

Representations of peoples, cultures, and institutions do not just happen. They are mediated, negotiated, and, yes, brokered through often complex processes with myriad challenges and constraints imposed by those involved, all of whom have their own interests and concerns. (Kurin 1997: 13)

All parties involved bring to the negotiation their own pre-conceived notions of the “other” whom they are either teaching or from whom they are learning. Furthermore, they bring their own separate understandings of music to the negotiation table, each attempting to learn from the other. I firmly believe that in the process of this negotiation and mediation the music is necessarily altered. Furthermore, the success of a foreign artist often has as much to do with his skill as a musician as it does with his ability to read the new situation in which he has been placed. He is most successful if he can accommodate his art and teaching to work within the limitations of this new situation.

Historical background: the *djembé* comes to Germany

Interest in the *djembé* was slow to develop in Germany. Although the German public had experienced many performances by West African national ballet companies, there had been very little direct exposure to the *djembé*. What finally peaked German interest in the *djembé* was a concert and workshop by the percussion ensemble “Africa Djole.” German *djembé* master and scholar, Polak explains the scene in the following way,

[In 1978] Fodé Youla and his *jenbe*-based percussion ensemble Africa Djolé marked the beginning of the *jenbe* boom in Germany with a now legendary concert and workshop in Berlin . . . with Africa Djolé, Youla switched to the *jenbe* [from his lower pitched drum from lower Guinea] and added an extra *jenbe* soloist. This different instrument, with greater

soloistic and expressive qualities, was just what the German Afro-percussion and dance scene was looking for. (Polak 2005: 169)

For the first time the *djembe* drum was the center of attention outside of a ballet context.

Stuttgart drummer Rainer Dörrer remembers hearing the sound of the *djembe* for the first time on a recording made of that Berlin concert of Africa *Djole*.

I played drum-set from the age of fourteen. Then at twenty I started to play congas. And then I heard a record from Africa, *Djoli*. So then I wanted to study *djembe* too. But there was no *djembe* at all in Stuttgart, or in Germany. You didn't find a *djembe* in a music shop. No where a *djembe*. You couldn't find anyone who plays *djembe*. So I found one man from Freiberg, Uhuru, he played already *djembe*. He studied with Adama Dramé in Ivory Coast. So I saw him play and I was so fascinated. And when I saw him I knew I have to study *djembe*. (Dörrer Interview: March, 2007).

Like so many other German percussionists, Dörrer began his quest for a *djembe* teacher in Senegal. He was eventually sent to Guinea when, “a dancer [in the national ballet of Senegal] told me, why don't you go to Guinea, the best drummers are in Guinea” (Dörrer Interview: March, 2007). Not all of the drummers teaching in Germany come from Guinea; yet, most teach using the three-*dunun* orchestral arrangement most commonly found in Upper Guinea. Uhuru explains that he has noticed a difference in the *djembe* scene since the first concert and workshop tours he organized for Ivory Coast drummer Adama Dramé in the early 1980s.

So in 1984 or 1983, we had a European tour, leading us to France and the Netherlands and Germany and Switzerland, doing a mixture of concerts and workshops. At that time it was easy, no one asked you which type of *djembe* you were playing. There was no differentiation like nowadays. Now before going to a concert those involved in the hard core Malinke scene will select what type of Upper Guinean style the concert should be: if it fits to their idea of *djembe* drumming, or maybe it is too far away from Hamana or whatever. This is a kind of fundamentalism I cannot deal with. This is awful in my eyes. It is not necessary, music is first music. (Uhuru Interview: March, 2007)

For many German *djembe* students the fixation on Upper Guinea as the center for *djembe* drum traditions came about not only through the influence of this initial Africa *Djole* performance and workshop, but also as the result of two very influential Guinean *djembe* teachers, Mamady Keïta and Famoudou Konaté.

In Germany the popular transmission of *djembe*-based drum music revolves around Keïta and Konaté who are both former drummers of Guinea's national ballets. The German drummers responsible for Konaté's initial entry into the European market were Dörrer and Johannes Beer. These two drummers decided to bring Konaté to Germany after they had spent six months in Conakry studying with him. At this point Konaté was still employed by the ballet. Dörrer described Konaté's first trip to Germany in the following way,

So in the summer of 1987 or 1988 Famoudou stayed at my house. And two drummers came from Berlin, Paul Engel and Sylvia Kronwald, and lived at my house too. So we practiced a lot and we made many small concerts in the street. We had not organized a real concert tour, as time was short to organize real concerts, so we played a lot in the streets. We also organized workshops for Famoudou. So after the three months, Famoudou earned a lot of money. Part of these earnings came from a recording Johannes had made of the traditional parties in Conakry. We sold a lot of these red cassettes. When Famoudou came back to Guinea he had earned so much money, he built a new house outside of Conakry. And then he left the National Ballet because it was a lot of work and they didn't pay him well. (Dörrer Interview: March, 2007)

The relationships that Konaté and Keïta established with their German culture brokers were crucial to their success as international African artists. The cross influences between these master drummers and their German brokers plays a vital part in the form this music takes as it is transmitted to a new cultural context. Some of the same processes used to mediate the teaching of this music in Germany are also at play in the production of a recording.

The first recordings and transcriptions for *djembe* students in Germany

The book and CD produced by music pedagogue, Thomas Ott, and Konaté represents one of the best examples of cross-influences in the mediation of this music. In 1994, Ott returned to the Gambia with a group of students from the *Hochschule der Künste Berlin* for a two-week study trip with drummers he met when he and his wife lived there. Ott stayed an extra two weeks and joined Volker Schütz's group of students who were studying with Konaté.¹ Immediately Ott was impressed with Konaté's "pronounced gift for proceeding methodically" as well as his overall enthusiasm and sense of humor (Konaté and Ott 1997, trans. 2000: 5). At the conclusion of the trips, Ott asked Konaté to come to Berlin to do a workshop with his students at the Berlin Academy of the Arts.

The relationship between Ott and Konaté progressed quickly from teacher and student to culture bearer and culture broker. One of Ott's first impulses was to collect and notate what he had learned from Konaté thus far. Ott explains it in the following way,

My idea was, I had learned ten or twelve rhythms with all these patterns, we should publish something. This was my idea and he agreed that he found it very good. And so we started with this [blue] book. We made a choice of rhythms, eight or so, and the idea was to create arrangements of these rhythms that were consistent with what Famoudou had taught, and to record them in a way that somebody who has the book can follow. So that all the solo patterns are in it, all the songs are in it, all the basic accompanying patterns are in it. In this way, it would be easier for people

¹ From what I can piece together from my interview of Ott in March of 2007 and material from his book *Rhythms and Songs from Guinea* (1997, English translation 2000), is that the first portion of Ott's 1994 trip to the Gambia (made with his students) was organized with drummers he already knew from previous trips. During the second part of his stay he joined one of Volker Schütz's "Trips into the Music of Black Africa" and this is where he met Famoudou Konaté. By this time Konaté was already well known among German scholars specializing in Africa because of the recording of his music which was published by the *Ethnologisches Museum Staatliche Museen zu Berlin* as part of the Museum Collection of Berlin (CD #18). As an ethnologist specializing in the music of Africa, Schütz naturally chose to hire Konaté as the teacher for one of his trips. What is still not clear is why Schütz organized the meeting with Konaté to take place in the Gambia rather than Guinea.

who had just one contact with it, to take the book and recording and to teach the pieces. (Thomas Ott Interview: March 2007)

The impulse to create a book and a recording came about in Ott's mind without a second thought. It was as though this impulse to objectify not only the music but his experience of Konaté's teaching was simply part of his cultural *habitus*. While Ott struggles to challenge the limitations of the German music academy in his scholarship and teaching, he is still influenced in an almost unconscious way by the positivistic foundations of comparative musicology.

Ironically, Ott told me that he never uses this book when teaching this music to his students at the Academy. Ott believes that even though we cannot claim to be able to teach this music in a completely African way, we definitely should not teach it using notation. Moreover, Ott uses this African music as a tool for the students to experience another way of learning music. Ott stated that,

In my opinion everybody is gifted in music but they never had the possibility to work with the potential they have. And it must begin in a very simple way without notation and without concepts. And this is my idea even when I work with students with African music; I try to make them forget what they learned. (Ott Interview: March, 2007)

I further questioned Ott on the notation he used in his book because I had noticed that his was the only book I had seen where the three sounds produced on the *djembé* and the three sounds produced by the *dununs* are written in a modified staff notation (See Figs. 1 and 4). Many *djembé* teachers that I interviewed commented that they find this notation difficult to work with. Ott explained his choices in the following way,

For me it must have been the experience of Famoudou and how he played. He doesn't refer to something as a pattern; I don't think that he even uses this word. For him, rhythm means Lolo or Balakulandjan, it's the whole piece of music. And what we call pattern, he calls melody. He always says, "*la mélodie serait comme ça.*" And I think he's right because these

are melodies. I find it very important that you can understand this as a melody and not only as a group of events that are brought into a time line. (Ott Interview: March, 2007)

Ott explained to me that the notation was designed to capture the sound of this music. In that sense the notation is more of an analytical tool than a visual means of initially learning a rhythm. Ott's choice of teaching methodology and use of notation reflects a strong desire to learn from Konaté a different way of understanding music. The relationship between Ott and Konaté consists of a cultural exchange where each is attempting to learn from the other.

However, Ott is keenly aware of the power differential that exists between himself as a European intellectual and Konaté as an African musician. This concern became clear when he spoke to me about the process of making the recording that accompanies the book. Ott began his discussion of the recording by telling me that the format that he requested for this teaching recording has become the format for all of Konaté's commercial recordings since that time. In Ott's opinion, the spontaneity of the first (festival music) recording Konaté made with Paul Bernhard Engel and Johannes Beer has never been captured again since he made this pedagogical recording for the book.² When Ott questioned him about this, Konaté stated that he believed that the best way to preserve this music in recorded form is by using a structured format for each song. Even in his live performances it seems as if Konaté is creating a new type of traditional music based upon the structured ideas of European concert performance married to a traditional African genre.

² This situation was also encountered by Anne Rasmussen who stated that, "Recordings of Arab music within the past ten years or so suggest that there is an audible move away from the spontaneous live quality of Arab music to the more organized sound of the West" (Rasmussen 2004: 220).

During Konaté's last concert tour in 2004, Augsburg drummer, Thomas Gebele, noticed a change in the way the music was presented.

I heard Famoudou with his Hamana ensemble, three years ago, and it was the first concert where I noticed that they didn't care whether or not people were dancing. They really had the program, Famoudou with his sons, some dancers and some singers on stage, but they didn't care if the people (in the audience) danced. They didn't care at all. I think that Famoudou has changed a little to our European way of listening to music sitting on our ass, and "oh what they are doing is nice, interesting." It is my fear that there is a change in African music. The arrangements grow higher and higher and more excellent. But the dancing, the foundation in African music, it will be lost in the next few years. I have this feeling. (Gebele Interview: March 2007)

The change that Gebele is describing is inevitable when a celebration-music such as this is brought into a European cultural context. This is just one example of the cultural negotiations that create musical changes. It was Konaté who, after being introduced to the European concert stage and recording studio, decided how he wanted to present his interpretation of the traditional music he learned as a drummer in his village. The combined influences of his years as *djembe* soloist in the ballet and as a teacher in Europe opened up creative options for Konaté. It was from within these options that he created a new space for himself as a professional musician.

When Keïta first came to Germany he had already been in Europe for several years and had adjusted to a European style of teaching. Gebele remembers first meeting Keïta at a demonstration concert in Augsburg in 1990 when Keïta was at the height of his popularity in Europe. What impressed Gebele the most about Keïta was,

The clearness of his arrangements, the fast playing with a very clean sound, and also his spiritual connectedness with his *djembe*. When he's playing djembe there is nothing else. (Gebele Interview: March, 2007)

It was also this clean and clear style that impressed Gebele about Keïta's teaching.

I may say that after a lot of experience with African drummers, I really love his structuredness. He's really structured. He plays a rhythm like that and five minutes later he plays it the same way and five years later he plays it the same way. You know what I mean? With other African teachers, in five minutes it's completely different. (Gebele Interview: March, 2007)

Uschi Billmeier,³ who co-authored a book with Keïta in 1999, came to one of these Augsburg workshops in 1992 and afterward asked Keïta if he would to come to Munich to teach there as well. Billmeier was impressed with Keïta for many of the same reasons as Gebele. In the introduction to her book she says,

[Mamady] taught *djembé* in a way that immediately made me desire to be professionally trained by him . . . As a music teacher, I, as well as the other workshop participants, especially appreciated the structured and clear way that he uses to present rhythms and technique. I immediately felt as if I was guided musically; the lessons were not limited to repetition of the patterns he played. Mamady was steering the entire group towards a musical goal. (Keïta and Billmeier 1999: 9)

It seems that Keïta's success in Germany would have a great deal to do with his ability to adapt to European ideas of musical form, and a structured pedagogy.

Billmeier has been a pioneer in the *djembé* scene in southern Germany since the early 1990s. She was the one who brought Keïta to Munich to teach monthly workshops over a span of ten years. During this time she compiled all of the rhythms taught by Keïta in the form of notations and recordings. The result of her collection is the book, *Mamady Keïta: a Life for the Djembe-Traditional Rhythms of the Malinké* (1999), which she co-authored with Keïta. During one of our many afternoon discussions Billmeier surprised me by revealing the fact that she and Keïta edited her notations of the sixty-plus rhythms included in the book over the course of a single weekend. The process for their

³ I came to Germany to study with Billmeier mainly because her book *Mamady Keïta: a Life for the Djembé* (Keïta and Billmeier: 1999), the largest collection of notated Malinké *djembé* and *dunun* rhythms in print, has become the authoritative resource for traditional *djembe* music among American drummers. Her influence on the German *djembé* scene will become evident as this chapter unfolds.

collaboration was quite simple. Billmeier played each of the parts for all of the rhythms she had notated while studying with Keita. She played these parts from her notation and Keita made corrections as they were needed. Keita sat for hours listening to each of Billmeier's notations as she performed the rhythms from them. When a rhythm was incorrect Keita would simply play a corrected version for Billmeier; she would then adjust her notation to reflect Keita's corrected version and play the rhythm again. In this sense, Billmeier was taking dictation from Keita, who presented each rhythm as a fixed musical composition.

While the book goes into a great deal of detail about Keita's culture and life, the rhythms presented are very sparse. Each rhythm in the book is introduced by a brief paragraph about its cultural context. The notation which follows includes only the signal, two or more *djembé* accompaniments, and three *dunun* parts for each rhythm. There are no introductions, solos, or *échauffements* included in the text. When asked about the reason for this sparse notation, Keita stated that he believed students should learn the finer points of *djembé* soloing, *échauffement*, and *dunun* variation techniques directly from himself or another master drummer rather than from a book. The initial book was published as a single volume containing French, German, and English translations of the text displayed in three separate columns. Since its initial publication in 1999, the book has been re-published (2004) in four different languages: French, English, German, and Japanese. Billmeier had no idea when she wrote the book that it would become the most used reference tool for *djembé* rhythms from Upper Guinea.

Over the course of their ten year association, Keita seemed to adopt Billmeier's values as his own. There are points in the text where it is difficult to tell whose voice is

present even though all quotes by Keïta have been set in italics. At the end of their collaborative book, *Mamady Keïta: a Life for the Djembé*, Keïta presents the following advice to future *djembé* teachers.

Until now, the music in Africa has been passed on orally from generation to generation, and the Malinké tradition is no different. But if we are not careful today, tomorrow this tradition will fall into oblivion. Therefore, it is very important to me that the details and aspects of our rhythms are written in this book. People die but what is written remains. (Billmeier quoting Keita 1999: 108)

Keïta's declaration reveals a very European way of thinking about his music as a fixed artifact that can be preserved in a written or recorded form. In working with Billmeier, over sixty basic *dunun* and accompanying rhythms were preserved both in notated form and through a recording that accompanies the book. While Billmeier now admits that these are Keïta's own arrangements, and that some of these arrangements are actually quite modern, the majority of *djembé* players still take Keïta's words of advice to mean that the rhythms contained in this book are the most traditional.

Unlike ethnomusicologists who enter the field expecting their learning to require an intense and sometimes frustrating cultural exchange, many German musicians outside the academy expect foreign musicians to learn to teach in a way immediately understandable to them. Bruno Nettl noticed this attitude among American students as well. He stated that,

In all cases there is an anomaly, an imbalance. They come as students but quickly pretend to become masters. The theory is that intercultural studies are a reciprocal affair, but they proceed to study non-Western music on their own terms. (Nettl 1983: 260)

There seems to be the belief, among the majority of German drummers I met, that they can master this music faster through the use of notation and analysis. When I asked

Gebele whether he would consider studying with a drummer other than Keïta he relayed to me the following story,

When I attended a workshop with a Mali drummer, Sékou Sidibé, I was really shocked because he was so unstructured. He had no science about where in the beginning of a rhythm or where it ends. He only played melody. It's nice if you have ten years of time to stay together with him, but if there is no structure for me its not enough. I have only three to six hours, in the workshop time, to learn the rhythm and I need a structured teacher. (Thomas Gebele Interview: Augsburg, 2007)

Gebele is expressing an attitude that resonates with the majority of the *djembé* students I met in Germany. They want to learn to play this music at a level that is acceptable for them and in a time frame that is less rigorous than the learning of a classical European instrument.

In reality, it is difficult to develop musicality in such a short time. Eric Charry states that:

The time one spends learning the music of a foreign culture (both abroad and at home) rarely approaches the time spent by those who are recognized as being good at it in those foreign societies . . . we may delude ourselves into thinking that our ways of learning are effective. (Charry 2000: 333)

According to Mantle Hood, the basics of musicianship with which Western musicians begin their training cannot be skipped in the learning of other musics (Hood 1960: 55).

As a result of trying to condense the learning process, the majority of *djembé* students I met in Germany play this music, exactly the way in which they learned it, as if it were a fixed composition. Very few students have been able to develop enough confidence within this style of playing to be able to create their own improvisations. The *djembé* players who possessed this confidence were either professional percussionists before they began playing *djembé*, or they had begun their study of the *djembé* during childhood.

In an attempt to teach his *djembe* students about improvisation, Keïta agreed to a recording project with Munich based drummer Rainer Arold in 2004. Keïta recorded solo phrases for twelve different traditional rhythms. In his workshops he calls these *solo origineux*. Keïta explains that, “At some point I formulated so-called *solo origineux* (original solos) for advanced students, which allow them to learn much technical and rhythmic finesse” (Billmeier quoting Keïta 1999: 106-107). The recording Keïta made with Arold of the *djembe* solo for *Djabara* is identical to the version he taught in California in the spring of 2007. Not only are the solo phrases identical but they are also presented in the same order. Although the original intention for the *solo origineux* was to supply drummers with material from which they could build their own solos, the over-zealous attention that Keïta has given to the consistency of these solos in his teaching has resulted in the majority of players simply performing these phrases as if they were a fixed melody. Students responded to Keïta’s attempt at teaching improvisation with their own need for something definitive which they could claim as authentic.

Within the larger *djembe* community, there seems to be some disagreement about what it means to preserve this “traditional” *djembe* music. For example, during a dinner I attended with Konaté’s son Billy Nankouma Konaté, and Billmeier, the conversation revolved around the preservation of *djembe* drumming traditions both within Guinea and elsewhere. According to Billmeier’s point of view, this music is a cultural artifact that needs to be preserved. Similar to many *djembe* students in the Western world, Billmeier’s interest in preserving this culture, although quite sincere, is also somewhat misguided. One question that needs to be asked is, “For whom is this music being preserved?” As a native Guinean, Billy understands his music as a living and changing genre that needs to

be carried on by young African players interested in learning this traditional musical style. According to Billy, preserving *djembé* music means keeping it alive as a contemporary practice even if the repertoire or context changes in the meantime. Similar to his father and brothers, Billy is constantly inventing new rhythms and songs in the traditional style. For him, these new compositions are keeping this music vital.

It is clear from the comments made by these *djembé* teachers and students that the success of a Guinean *djembé* teacher and performer in Germany is tied directly to his ability to read and adjust to their musical and pedagogical values. By the same token, these values have inhibited *djembé* students within Germany from developing confidence in their ability to improvise. Two of the main media/components in which these values have been continually reinforced, in the context of transmission, are notation and recording.

Recording and transcription for analysis

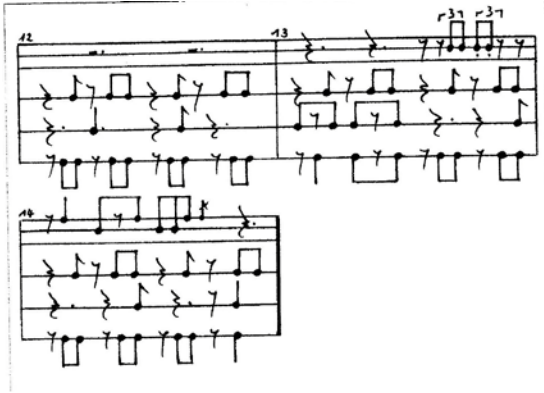
While in Germany, I encountered four distinctly different systems of notation used to document this music. None of the transcribers attempted to use standard Western notation even though there are those who have argued that it would create, in a sense, the most accurate representation of this music in terms of pitch and exact note durations (Kofi Agawu 2000; Interview: Ryan Edwards 2007). Each system seemed to be based upon a set of values held by the transcriber. Some transcriptions exist for the sole purpose of analysis while others are meant to be used as memory aids for students of this music.

The first notations of this music to appear in Germany were published as liner notes to the CD *Rhythmen der Malinke. Trommelrhythmen der Malinke-Hamana/Guinea: Meistertrommler Famoudou Konate mit Ensemble* (1991), the eighteenth of a published

series from the Museum Collection of Berlin. This CD is accompanied by a seventy-four page booklet (half in German and half in French) which outlines not only the history of the artists and the music, but also an in-depth analysis of the rhythmic structure of the music as well as notated transcriptions of three rhythms from the CD. The recording was made by one of Konaté's German students, Paul Bernhard Engel in March of 1990. This recording is compilation of music from a series of traditional celebrations which took place in Konaté's Conakry neighborhood of Simbaya-Gare. As field recordings go, it is very clear; yet it still captures the spontaneity of a Conakry street-festival. The separate tracks were created later in the studio as each piece or part of a rhythm was identified. As a result there are some tracks that are only a minute and twenty seconds long. These rhythms were either not as popular with the party guests or they might have been used as transitions to other rhythms. Johannes Beer notated one of the longest tracks (over six minutes) *Bolonkondo* (see Fig. 4.1).

Notenbeispiel/Transcription 3: *bolokonondo* (13)

The image displays two pages of musical notation for the rhythm *Bolonkondo*. The notation is presented in two systems, one on page 43 and one on page 44. Each system consists of three staves. The top staff uses a rhythmic notation with vertical stems and flags, while the middle and bottom staves use standard musical notation with notes and stems. The notation is divided into measures, with some measures containing complex rhythmic patterns. The page numbers 43 and 44 are visible at the bottom of the respective pages.



[Fig. 4.1: trans. *Bolonkondo* by Johannes Beer © Museum Collection of Berlin, 1990]

Instead of including a transcription of the entire track of *Bolonondo*, Beer notates the first two cycles of an eighty-four pulse rhythmic group which forms the core of this piece. This cycle of pulses is the equivalent of seven measures of 12/8 where the eighth-note is the pulse. Rather than stating the length of the cycle in measures, which would bring up the Western notion of strong and weak beats, Beer prefers to think in terms of pulses. What seems ironic about this is that he has chosen to transcribe the music using bar-lines. By transcribing two full cycles of this eighty-four pulse rhythmic cycle, which is the basis of this piece, the reader can see that, unlike the *sangban* player, the *dununba* player does not play his part exactly the same both times. Had Beer been able to include the entire transcription of this piece it would have been possible to see that the *dununba* player actually creates several different variations of the basic rhythm. Still, this transcription is stronger than the one included in Keïta's *Hamana* CD (see Fig. 4.1a).

BOLO KÖNÖNDÖ

Notation : Michel Weelen © Tam Tam Mandingue

The image shows musical notation for 'BOLO KÖNÖNDÖ'. It consists of two systems of three staves each, labeled K, S, and D. The notation uses various rhythmic symbols, including eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and a '7' symbol. The first system shows a complex rhythmic pattern for all three staves. The second system shows a similar pattern, but the K staff is mostly empty with a few notes, while S and D have more activity. A page number '11' is centered below the notation.

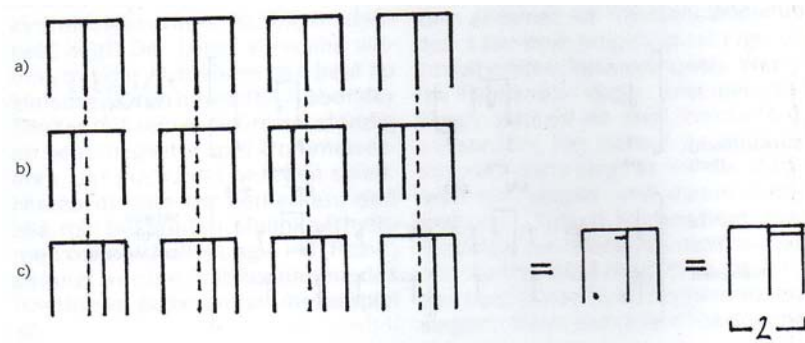
[Figure 4.1a: trans. *Bolokonondo* by Michael Weelen © Tam Tam Mandingue, 1996]

Here Michael Weelen has notated only one cycle giving the reader the impression that the *dununba* part is as fixed as the *sangban* and *kenkeni* parts. These seemingly simple choices about what to include in the notation of these rhythms become even more crucial once these notations are published for teaching purposes.

Within his liner notes, Beer reveals the fact that, when played by the African musicians this music does not really fit into a Western notational system at all. After a thorough analysis of the *Dununbé* rhythm included on the CD, Beer concludes with the following analysis:

Finally, I would like to go into the unique *agogic gestalt* (various nuances) of Malinke rhythms. Collectively speaking, most African music is not strictly metronomic. Yet, another characteristic is that this rhythm is played with a very specific elasticity of time. Throughout the Hamana region, the Malinke handle their 12-pulse rhythms in two different *agogic* ways. The notational example below clearly shows this, whereby they often meticulously alter or displace the even-spaced groups of three pulses I have notated (see a), and instead realize the second of each group of

three pulses as either closer to the first (see b) or closer to the third of the grouping (see c). (Translation by Vera H. Flaig)



After reading this section I wondered why Beer chose not to notate these elements of micro-timing. As a long time student of Konaté, Beer was intuitively aware of the *agogics* which occur in the performance of this music. Yet, he chose to notate each piece as if it had an even pulsation. To the left of his example “c,” he showed two possible ways that this musical anomaly could be notated. Could notating these elements lead to the misinterpretation of them as a compositional device rather than a performance practice?

While a professional musician or scholar may be able to overcome these omissions and additions through their own in-depth study of this music, amateur musicians buying books of notated rhythms cannot be expected to interpret these with the same critical eye and ear. The persistent use of bar lines, long note values which do not accurately reflect the sound being produced by the drum (such as the dotted-quarter notes used in Beer’s transcription), and the misleading use of a system based upon equal pulsations, when published widely affect popular conceptions of this music. This in turn can affect the way this music is played.

Notation for popular transmission

The first pedagogical use of this type of notational system occurred in a published book by Thomas Ott and Famoudou Konaté entitled, *Rhythmen und Lieder aus Guinea* (1997), republished in English for the American market as *Rhythms and Songs from Guinea* (2000). In his interpretation of this system, Ott has chosen to use metrical divisions which encompass an entire musical phrase (12/8 for triplet rhythms and 16/8 for duple rhythms) (see fig. 4.2). Ott chose to use these meters as a means to de-emphasize the idea of a strong beat or a weak beat while at the same time drawing attention to the musical phrase. Regular Western note values are used even though the notes in question do not always ring for the entire duration of the note value. For example, the dotted half notes in the *djembé* and *sangban* parts act merely as a rhythmic place holder. Ott reasoned that it would be easier for a music teacher reading this notation to understand the duration of time between drum strokes if the note values were familiar. Ott's chose to retain Beer's system where the bass, tone and slap on the *djembé* are notated as three distinct pitches. The bass is notated as the lowest, the tone as the middle and the slap as the highest pitch. The three *dunun* drums are scored from the lowest (*dununba*) to the highest (*kenkeni*) as well. What is unique about Ott's system is that he includes the bell parts. The bell parts which correspond to each drum are located above each part, using notation commonly used for the cymbals in a drum kit. This emphasis on pitch was inspired by Konaté who was Ott's main *djembé* teacher. Furthermore, Ott's choice of a metrical organization based upon phrases rather than measures was also a result of Konaté's influence. It is clear from this example that the notation system chosen by Ott,

although based on Western notational principles is influenced by Konaté's interpretation of Malinké tradition.

The image displays musical notation for *Gidamba (Dyidamba)*. At the top, a single staff labeled "Signal" is in 12/8 time, featuring a sequence of eighth notes: a beamed eighth-note pair, followed by four individual eighth notes, and ending with a quarter rest. Below this, five staves are labeled "Accompanying Patterns": "Djembé", "Kenkeni", "Sangban", "Dununba", and "Dununba-Variation (every 5th time)". Each of these staves is also in 12/8 time and contains rhythmic notation using various symbols: eighth notes, quarter notes, quarter rests, and diamond-shaped symbols. Vertical lines connect the notes across the staves to show their alignment in time.

[Figure 4.2: *Gidamba (Dyidamba)* ©Konaté and Ott, 1997.]

The second, and most common, notation used in Germany is called *raster notation* (grid notation). This system is based upon the quickest “common pulse,” also known as the “density referent.”⁴ This system came to Germany as part of the Afro-Cuban music scene in the 1970s. German drummers in the early 1990s agreed that the application of this notation to Guinea’s *djembé* music was the most logical because it had been successfully applied to other percussion music (Interviews: Billmeier: 2007; Gebele: 2007; Arold: 2007). This notation system omits all references to meter (see figure 4.3).

⁴ See Robert Kauffman “African Rhythm: A Reassessment,” *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 24, No. 3, and “What Do We Know About African Rhythm?” by James Koetting and Roderic Knight in *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 30, No. 1. The idea of using the quickest common pulse to notate and analyze African music came about as the result of Richard Waterman’s theory of the “metronome sense” (Waterman: 1952). This idea was developed further by Mantle Hood (“density referent,” 1971) and Ruth Stone (“inner time,” 1984).

Gidamba

The image shows a musical score for 'Gidamba' with six parts: Signal, Djembé 1, Djembé 2, Bell Sangban, Bell Kenkeni, and Bell Dununba. Each part is represented by a staff of rhythmic notation. The Signal part consists of a single line of notes. Djembé 1 and 2 use 'x' marks to indicate specific rhythmic patterns. The Bell parts (Sangban, Kenkeni, and Dununba) are grouped together with a large curly brace and use asterisks to denote accents. The notation is a form of rater notation, which is a simplified system for representing complex African rhythms.

[Figure 4.3: *Gidamba* © Keïta and Billmeier 1999.]

Raster notation was developed in New York City as a means to deal with (or more likely avoid) the metrical confusion caused by the rhythm of the clave in Afro-Cuban music.

German ethnomusicologist/anthropologist and *djembé* master, Rainer Polak explained the history of *raster notation* to a group of students in his *djembé* master-class in the following way,

In the situation from which *raster notation* emerged, in the 1940s, the clave was notated as a pattern which was written as 5/8 alternating with 7/8 metrical measures. In every bar the meter needed to be changed. At the time they thought of the accents, as strong and weak, and notations of African rhythm (at the time) had shown this relationship between beat and rhythm. What they discovered from their music colleagues who were not fluent in reading Western notation but nevertheless gifted musicians is that they could to play these African rhythms, even though they could not read them written in Western notation. As a result there was a move to simplify

the notation. And this was far better. It was not possible for Western music colleagues reading these Western notations to understand what the clave was doing. After changing to *raster notation* the placement of the clave rhythm made sense. (Polak in Munich, March 25, 2007, trans. Vera Flaig)

Example 4.3 above is taken from one of the most extensive books of *djembe* rhythms, *Mamady Keïta: a Life for the Djembe*, by Uschi Billmeier and Mamady Keïta (1999). Billmeier took the original *raster notation* inherited from Afro-Cuban drumming and adapted it for the *djembe* and *dunun* drum orchestra of Upper Guinea. In this notational system the pulses are grouped in threes or fours. The drum strokes are then “hung” on the pulses in which they occur. In *djembe* part, the x’s refer to slaps, note-heads refer to tones and the German “ß” (used in place of a double “ss” in written language) is the symbol for the bass tones. For the *dununs*, the note head symbolizes an open tone whereas the “x” is reserved for the closed tone (where the drumstick stays on the drumhead after the sound is made, thus damping the sound). The star-like symbols denote the bell strokes. Instead of writing the first notes as a pick-up as in Ott’s notation, Billmeier chooses to supply an arrow which points to where the rhythm begins after the *djembe*’s opening signal. In this way, she adheres to one of the central aesthetics of *raster notation* by avoiding any reference to meter.

In the third notational style, regular Western notation is mixed with box notation. This system was developed by the Swiss-German percussionist Stephan Rigert (Fig. 4.4).

MADAN BASIS 4/4

REGION MANDEN.

The image displays eight lines of musical notation for different instruments. Each line consists of a sequence of boxes representing a 4/4 measure. The notation is as follows:

- APPEL:** A sequence of seven 'O' symbols in the first measure, followed by a vertical bar line.
- DJEMBE:** A sequence of seven 'B O O B S B O O B S' symbols in the second measure, with stems below.
- KENKANI:** A sequence of seven 'O O O O O O O' symbols in the second measure, with stems below.
- DOUNDOUM:** A sequence of seven 'O O O O O O O' symbols in the second measure, with stems below.
- GLOCKE SANGBANG:** A sequence of seven 'X X X X X X X' symbols in the second measure, with stems below.
- SANGBANG Variation 1:** A sequence of seven 'O O O O O O O' symbols in the second measure, with stems below.
- SANGBANG Variation 2 (dreitaktig):** A sequence of seven 'O O O O O O O' symbols in the second measure, with stems below.
- SANGBANG CHAUFFER:** A sequence of seven 'O O O O O O O' symbols in the second measure, with stems below.


[Figure 4.4: *Madan* © Stephan Rigert and Drissa Kone, 2000]

Rigert's is an interesting hybrid notational system where standard Western rhythmic notation is super-imposed over shaded boxes that represent the fastest common pulse. By combining these systems he is able to communicate to trained and untrained musicians alike. In the *djembe* part the "B" stands for the bass tone, the "S" for the slap, and the "O" for the open tone. In the *dunun* parts the dot stands for the closed-tone and the "o" for the open-tone. The bell part is written above the *sangban* part with the letter "x" standing for each strike of the bell. The rhythmic figures in the notation are familiar to trained


musicians but their placement within the boxes gives musicians' a new context in which to interpret them. Furthermore, by highlighting the pulse and not the meter, Rigert stays within the popular aesthetic of *raster notation*. Finally, with Rigert's system it is also possible to notate rhythmic figures that exist outside the confines of the regular pulse. Because the system has two layers (the shaded boxes in the background and the rhythms in the foreground) the rhythmic figures are not limited to the confines of the boxes, but can be placed anywhere they occur over the pulsations.

While each notational system analyzed has its own strengths and limitations, all have been invented as a means to transmit *djembé* rhythms, learned from West African musicians, to (adult) German music students. In addition, all of these published notations come with a companion CD. With the combination of recording and notation, it seems that this form of transmission is quite thorough. Yet, the music that results from teaching with these materials completely misses the syntactic/ participatory logic of Guinean or even Malian *djembé* and *dunun* music. Two things are missing: first, the swing which is so evident in this music when played in Guinea is not present in German performances; and second, the dynamic interaction among the *djembé* and *dunun* players is missing. The pedagogical logic inherent in the partnership of the recording and the notation are partly to blame for this result (see Fig. 4.5).

Solo Patterns


Solo 1  (3 x)


Signal

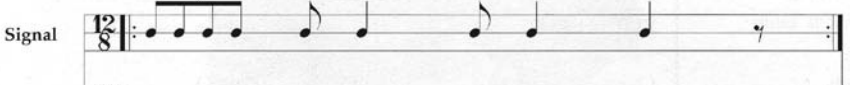
Solo 2  (3 x)


Signal

Échauffement

Djembé  (3 x)

Dununba  (3 x)

Signal  (3 x)

Dununba  (3 x)

[Figure 4.5: *Dyidamba (Gidamba)*: djembe solo ©Konaté and Ott 1997.]

For example, in Figure 4.5 we can see Ott's notation of Konaté's solo for *Gidamba*. On the recording Konaté plays this solo exactly as written, going directly from repetitions of the first phrase, to the second phrase, and then ending with the *échauffement*. The student gets the impression that the solo is a contrived or composed part of the music.

The student would be partly correct in his/her assumption. Konaté does, in fact, invent phrases for students to play in their solos; but, he does not expect students to play these

phrases in a prescribed order. Instead, these phrases are meant to be utilized by students in the creation of their own solos. In addition, the interaction which is commonly found between the *dununs* and solo *djembé* player is notated only in the *échauffement*, not in the solo. As a result, during the *djembé* solo the *dununs* seem to take on the role of accompaniment. In practice, all instruments of the ensemble participate in the improvisation to some degree. Although the *djembé* soloist is leading the ensemble the rest of the players do not remain static in their roles. The presentation of the *dunun* parts as continuous repeated patterns in the notation and the recording gives the impression that these are meant as a simple accompaniment to the *djembé* solo. All of these instances of inaccurate or inadequate representation leave me to question what is really being transmitted here.

These pedagogical representations are commercialized products that are meant to make this music accessible to adult, amateur musicians. It seems that on some level these manuscripts are not being taken as seriously as notated versions of Western classical or popular music. Or perhaps the real problem is that *djembé* music is not being presented in way that obviates its distinction from the Western musical paradigm. Although notation objectifies the music, Radano has observed that when it comes to African American or African music it is an imperfect representation.

While by no means perfect representations, new arrangements were thought nonetheless to supply the public with a semblance of the spirituals' original character. Indeed, their inadequacy and artificiality as second-level mediations amplified their power: the magic of spirituals came forward most deliberately as the inadequacy of notation brought into relief that ineffable quality exceeding the bounds of script. (Radano 2003: 166)

The manuscripts to which Radano is referring were also commercialized products meant for public consumption. These packaged African-American spirituals have much in common with the mediated *djembe* notations I have investigated in Germany. The amateur musicians who consume these musical products, while they desire a connection with this music through performance, are not willing (or perhaps not able) to step outside of their own musical *habitus* in order to do this. In addition, there is a belief that African musicians have an inherent ability to feel and perform complex rhythms. This belief was consistently articulated by both German teachers and students in the *djembe* classes I attended. Rather than engaging in the struggle to hear and replicate the swing, and other syntactic/participatory elements in these rhythms, the students and their German teachers seemed resigned to the performance of a less accurate rendering of the music.

While notation and recordings are useful tools in the transmission of this music, a further dynamic of transmission exists beyond these mediated products. The interaction among Guinean master drummers, Western culture brokers, and their amateur drum students, forms the foundation where transmission actually takes place. I will attempt to get to the heart of these interactions by focusing on two case studies. The first case highlights the complex role taken on by the culture broker as he acts as mediator/translator between the African artist and his Western students. The second case study focuses on the role of the academic as self-appointed curator and preserver of traditional African music. In both cases, I examine the relationship between the music being transmitted and value assigned to notation in the transmission process.

Case study number one: January 23, 2008, Konaté's *stage* in Conakry, Guinea

The French term *stage* was adopted by German musicians who produced the first drum camps in Guinea. I prefer this term to the phrase “drum camp” because it more clearly denotes a time and place reserved for musical training. Each *stage* is facilitated by a Guinean master drummer and mediated by a Western culture broker. These advanced training workshops in Guinea are usually three to four weeks long. The role taken on by the culture broker responsible for the organization and implementation of the *stage* can have a profound impact on the transmission of both musical and cultural information from the Guinean master drummer to the students. The role which German organizer Rainer Dörrer chose to take on during Konaté's 2008 *stage* was that of musical translator.

During my first class of the 2008 *stage* at Konaté's compound in Conakry, I noticed a difference between Dörrer's leadership of the *stage* and the leadership provided by Keïta's wife Monette. While Monette took care of the finances and the running of day to day operations, she left the teaching completely up to Keïta. Even the translation (unlike the Mini-Guinea workshop in California) was done by one of the students. While Monette would teach the beginning class from time to time, this task was usually either done by Keïta or one of the *Tam Tam Mandengue* professors who had not yet left Conakry after the conclusion of their professional *stage*. In contrast to Monette's style, Dörrer took his job as culture broker/ culture translator very seriously. At times his role clashed with and/or interfered with Konaté's teaching.

Unlike Keïta's who teaches each rhythm and solo exactly the same every time, Konaté's is constantly inventing new introductions, solo phrases, and *dunun* variations while he teaches. Even the name of the rhythm can change depending upon the song

Konaté chooses to pair with it. All of this makes the process of transcription and recording quite challenging at times. Konaté is aware of this and, as a result, does not allow students to record his lessons. Instead, he offers them a clean recording of all of the parts, including introductions and solos, once he has completed the lessons on each particular rhythm. For Dörrer, who is trying to both understand the rhythm, and to create a notated version for the students attending Konaté's *stage*, Konaté's creative process can be difficult to negotiate.

Konaté and Dörrer have been working together for almost 20 years. During that time Konaté has become used to Dörrer's need to notate each rhythm as he learns it. At this point in their relationship, Konaté has come to view notation along with recording as an important means of preserving traditional rhythms. During my first class at his compound, Konaté stopped after teaching each solo phrase and instructed Dörrer to write it down. In his advanced years (Konaté is now 68 years old), Konaté sometimes forgets a solo phrase that he has taught the day before and relies on Dörrer to play it from the notation he has written as a reminder of what he taught the day before. It seems that Konaté no longer trusts his ability to remember the phrases he teaches from one day to the next. Since Dörrer has always written down what Konaté has taught him, he can notate the music quite quickly. What I did not realize until witnessing the exchange that took place during this class is that Dörrer has chosen to deal with Konaté's unpredictability by filtering Konaté's music through his own notational system (which he modified from the one taught to him by Johannes Beer) ideas of musical structure rather than attempting to reproduce Konaté's unique rhythmic presentation.

After Dörrer notated Konaté's *sangban* part for *Djala* (including the introduction and the beginning of the basic rhythm) he noticed that the four presses on the *sangban* which come at the end of the introduction lengthened the part from eight measures to nine measures (see Fig. 4.6).

The image shows a handwritten musical score on blue grid paper. The title is "DJALA (Dörrer's first transcription) INTRODUCTION". The notation is written in black ink. The first line shows the introduction, which is 9 measures long. The second line shows the beginning of the *sangban* part, which is 8 measures long. The notation uses 'x' for slaps and 'o' for tones. A legend in the top right corner explains the notation: "Djembe: x = slap, o = tone; Sangban: x = bell or rim, o = open tone, o (with a horizontal line below) = closed tone". Annotations include "SANGBAN → Bell", "DRUM →", and "main rhythm begins here". The *sangban* part is labeled "SANGBAN PART" and "Bell" and "Drum".

[Figure 4.6: *Djala* (Dörrer's first transcription) © Dörrer and Konaté 2008.]

After the class Dörrer discussed this possible “mistake” with Konaté. The following morning, as class resumed, Konaté announced that, based upon Dörrer's analysis, he was going to experiment with various other possibilities which could shorten the *sangban* phrase from its original nine-bars to eight-bars. After exploring several options, Konaté settled on the original version with the four presses as a transition in main *sangban* rhythm. This would have ended the negotiation, but Dörrer seemed determined to regulate the music Konaté was teaching and make it conform to his own ideas.

What is immediately apparent in Dörrer's modified *raster notation* is the existence of bar lines. It seems that in his adaptation of the *raster notation* style, Dörrer was conceiving Konaté's music as metrically organized. In this way, Dörrer's notation stands apart from Beer, Billmeier, or Ott's notations which represent attempts to erase any

reference to meter. It is difficult to identify how much Dörner's inclusion of bar lines truly reflects his perception of the music, as opposed to functioning as an aid to his German students, most of whom were taught standard European notation in school.

Upon closer examination of Dörner's first transcription of the introduction, there is a noticeable symmetry to the music. There are three beats of rest between each of the initial rhythmic motives played by the *djembe* and *sangban*. These rests seem to give the introduction a great deal of forward momentum by lending each strike of the drum a little more drama. The change of rhythmic density which occurs in bars six and seven of this transcription adds further momentum to the introduction. The four presses on the *sangban* at the end of the introduction allow for a shift in this momentum, leaving room for the main rhythm to enter in a relaxed and settled manner.

Conversely, Dörner's altered version (the one that he handed out to students in the *stage*), although "correct" in his mind because of its eight-bar length, is not symmetrical (see Fig. 4.6a).

DJALA (Dörner's altered version)

Djembe: x = slap || d = tone
Sangban: x = hitting the side of drum or Bell
o = open tone || e = closed tone

Intro:

SANGBAN PART

Bell →
Drum →

main rhythm begins

[Figure 4.6a: *Djala* (Dörner's altered version) © Dörner and Konaté 2008.]

The momentum of the first half is not answered sufficiently by the *sangban*. The two presses at the conclusion of the solo do not create enough space to slow down the momentum of the introduction. As a result, the main rhythm enters as if it is tripping over

the threshold between the introduction and the rest of the piece. The issue here is not whether Konaté's traditional music is being accurately preserved. Introductions are not traditional; they are an invention of the ballet that Konaté chose to continue using in both his teaching and performance. What is missed by Dörrer is a deeper appreciation of the syntactical logic of the music from Konaté's point of view. There were more cultural clashes between Dörrer and Konaté as the morning session progressed.

As Konaté was teaching the solo phrases he decided to make some changes from the day before. One phrase (phrase III) was omitted because Konaté felt that it was too awkward. All of the other phrases (with the exception of the first one) were modified to fit better with the *dunun* parts. Dörrer did not react well to these changes because he had already written these phrases out for the students. Rather than letting Konaté work out the solo phrases in his own way, Dörrer continually interrupted Konaté with "suggestions" about how certain phrases could be improved, or at least, closer to the way they were taught the day before. Konaté was initially open to Dörrer's suggestions but, as the class progressed, he became more and more frustrated with Dörrer's constant interruptions. Konaté finally gave up and told Dörrer that he could not teach in this way. He told Dörrer that he cannot constantly stop and analyze the rhythms. Konaté went on to say that he simply knows how to build one phrase into the next to construct a solo which interacts with the *dununs*. He stated that when Dörrer interrupts him with his analysis and suggestions he loses his train of thought and the solo becomes all confused in his mind.

Konaté and Dörrer have very different approaches to music. During the break, I was sitting alone with Konaté and he told me that he has worked with Dörrer for over twenty years and he has always had this problem with him. Konaté said that Dörrer is

always analyzing the music and trying to understand it with his notes. Konaté continued by stating that the music does not work that way. In order to be able to work together, Konaté and Dörrer must balance on the fine line between their understandings. The longevity of their partnership might seem surprising given the polarity of their approaches. But, it also speaks to the deep respect and loyalty they have toward one another. Taken from another perspective, Dörrer's consistent willingness and diligence in learning and trying to understand Konaté's music reveals a great deal of respect for his teacher of twenty years.

These difficult negotiations continued even after the break. While Dörrer was off getting some water for himself, Konaté asked me to remind him of the solo phrases he taught for *Djala*. He seemed relieved that I just played the phrases for him and did not suggest any changes. With very little prompting Konaté was able to remember the phrases and put the solo back together. After he successfully played through the solo he said, "Now I am going to surprise Rainer." When Dörrer rejoined the class, Konaté announced that he was ready to make a recording of *Djala* with the *dundun* parts and the *djembe* solo phrases. But before he could even start one of the German students asked about the inclusion of one particular phrase Konaté had played the day before. After hearing the phrase Konaté thanked the student for reminding him, and he decided to include the phrase in the recording. Again, Dörrer interrupted when the student's version did not match the one he notated the day before.

The final conflict occurred during the recording of this piece. As Konaté was finishing the second solo phrase, one of Dörrer's students encouraged Dörrer to play the third phrase with Famoudou to remind him how it should go. After the break was played

to signal the third phrase, Dörrer began playing the third phrase with Konaté. Konaté was slightly startled by this but played Dörrer's version of the phrase along with Dörrer anyway. While both Dörrer and his student were sincere in their attempt to help Konaté teach with a consistency they were comfortable with, Konaté was hesitant to give up his creative freedom. After decades of creating music for the ballet, the demands for consistency in teaching have always been a struggle for Konaté. While Dörrer has been instrumental in helping Konaté develop a step-by-step teaching style appropriate for his foreign students, Konaté still treats each lesson or workshop as an opportunity to create music. For Konaté, each rhythm must be realized or created in the moment or it is no longer alive.

There is clearly a clash of cultural values at play here. Dörrer is looking for a definitive version of a musical piece, believing that all music functions by the same rules. In addition, he is using notation as a means to understand and translate this music. All of these beliefs and actions are part of Dörrer's German musical training. This is the same system of music pedagogy, which favors the teaching of music notation above musical experiences, being challenged by Ott. Conversely, Konaté believes that music should be in a constant state of creation. Were it not for teaching, Konaté would never play the same set of solo phrases the same way twice. Konaté once told Helen Bond (his American tour manager) that teaching feels like being in prison because he cannot be as creative as he wishes to be. For the most part Konaté and Dörrer have simply agreed to disagree. Konaté has given Dörrer most of the structure that he needs but not at the expense of his own musical sensibility. Meanwhile, Dörrer has learned that, as much as

he wants to believe that the rules for musical rhythm and structure are universal, Konaté will always push him to allow for difference.

Notation for the preservation of traditional performance practices

Within the profession of Ethnomusicology, scholars are often put in the awkward position being transmitters of tradition. Kay Shelemay elaborates that,

The ethnomusicological activity in the transmission of tradition appears to draw on musicological commitments to the preservation of tradition wedded to anthropological concerns regarding reciprocity and social responsibility . . . There are certainly instances where the ostensible informant charges the ethnomusicologist with the responsibility of transmitting tradition. (Shelemay 1997: 191, 198)

German ethnomusicologist Rainer Polak finds himself in just such a position. The celebration music he has studied in Bamako since the early 1990s is rapidly changing as its aging practitioners are dying out. Rather than making any attempt to convince younger drummers to continue playing in this style, Polak is struggling to preserve this music through notation, recording and teaching.⁵ By taking on this role as the preserver of tradition Polak is immersed in a conflict familiar to many ethnomusicologists. Bruno Nettl has observed that,

Preservation and research may conflict. We may impose special field methods on the society we are studying, methods that will provide us with insights. But we must understand that this imposition may somehow distort what is really going on. (Nettl 1983: 276).

Polak's delicate dance between his role as a researcher and his role as a practicing musician becomes obvious during one of his master classes for advanced *djembe* players

⁵ Bruno Nettl states that, "there is no doubt that ethnomusicologists, simply by their interest in certain kind of musical phenomenon, have stimulated the societies they study to keep up, develop, sometimes isolate and preserve these phenomenon in a culturally proper or artificial fashion . . . Ethnomusicologists must be clear about the part they wish to play" (1983: 276-277).

in Germany. There are times when his desire to preserve this African traditional musical practice clouds his scholarly judgment.

The belief that African rhythm is not transcribable has been challenged in the work of Polak and his theory of “microtiming” (Polak 1998). After over a decade of study with celebration drummers in Bamako, Polak invented a notational system which was able to capture the timing practices of these Malian musicians. While Polak’s notational system is not nearly as accessible as *raster notation* from the standpoint of a student, I believe that its functionality for analysis is truly groundbreaking for the profession of ethnomusicology.

A debate which occurred during a master-class taught by Polak serves to highlight the tension felt among teachers between designing a notation useful for reading and teaching versus one which is more accurate for analysis. It is within this debate that we witness the impact of Polak’s theory of microtiming and its influence on the *djembe* community in Germany. His theory and its application have been both challenging and misunderstood by the community of *djembe* teachers in Germany. Within this community there are those who are committed to gaining an ever deeper understanding of this music (most of whom reside within the academy) while others are more concerned with applying their knowledge of Western music theory as a means to shorten the amount of time needed to learn to play, teach, and perform this music. This second group is the most visibly involved in the popularization of *djembe* music in Germany through teaching and publications. Through a close examination of both the academic and public culture brokers and their relationships with their African teachers, I hope to paint a clearer picture of the issues at stake when bi-musical teaching leaves the academy and enters the

popular marketplace. In Germany the relationship between Billmeier and Polak facilitated the entry of Polak's scholarly ideas and notation into the center of the popular *djembé* scene pioneered by Billmeier and her circle of *djembé* playing/teaching colleagues.

During the ten years Billmeier was studying exclusively with Keita, she was convinced that she was learning the oldest and most traditional rhythms of this musical genre. All of this changed when she met *djembé* musician and scholar Rainer Polak. While Billmeier was in the process of publishing her book on Guinean *djembé* rhythms, Polak was writing about micro-timing in the *djembé* music he had studied in Bamako, Mali. The resulting article, "*Jembe* Music in Bamako: Micro-Timing as Formal Model and Performance Practice," first appeared in 1998 in the journal *Iwalewa*, Forum 2, was later published on the internet and widely distributed among *djembé* enthusiasts both in Europe and the United States.

Polak's new theory of micro-timing not only challenged existing perceptions of *djembé* music from Guinea and Mali, but also revealed a notational system which could be used to analyze the syntax underlying the performance of much of the drum music coming out of the Western Sudan region (Polak 1998). In his conclusion, Polak challenged Charles Keil's theory of "participatory discrepancies" (Keil 1995). Polak took issue with Keil's dismissal of musical syntax in favor of a theory of "participatory discrepancies," a phenomenon which takes place when musicians make music together. In his 1995 article in *Ethnomusicology*, Keil asserted that in order to prove the reality of "participatory discrepancies" they should be studied using computer aided analyses (ibid.). Having already undertaken such an analysis of the music of Bamako's *djembé*

players, Polak came to the conclusion that musical practices and musical syntax were not mutually exclusive domains. Polak presented the following argument,

I have tried to describe microtiming practice as a model. This practice, however, does not seem to form an aesthetically or otherwise independent domain. It rather relates to musical form as well as performance context. As for *Jenbe* music from the Western Sudan, at least, inflection of pulsation does not represent a mystical essence of making groove together. It forms an element of style intentionally applied or left out in performance depending upon individual decisions and culturally determined conditions. (Polak 1998: internet version of the article)

During an interview in 2007, Polak stated that he discovered the micro-timing in Bamako's *jenbe* music through a process of trial and error. When he initially attempted to notate the music he was learning from musicians in Bamako, using *raster notation*, he often came up with both a duple and a triple pulsation version of the same rhythm. The problem was that neither version accurately reflected what he actually heard in the music. What he did know was that the micro-inflections in this music had a certain predictable logic to them. With this as his basis, Polak set out to invent a new system of notation where this micro-timing could be expressed.

Case study number two: the notation debate

In the fall of 2006, Billmeier organized a year-long series of master-classes where Polak could teach his system to some of the most advanced *djembé* players and teachers in Germany (many of whom are Billmeier's friends). Although Polak has clearly stated that the music he studied in Bamako among the older, urban festival-drummers is something which emerged and died out all within a twenty to thirty year span, Billmeier is convinced that this represents an older, more traditional style which existed before the invention of national ballet companies. She, along with many other *djembé* professionals in Germany, believes that the Guinean music that they have learned from Keïta and

Konaté is gradually losing its micro-rhythmic elements due to Western influence. During one of Polak's workshops which I attended in March 2007, an extended debate took place among these *djembe* teachers about micro-timing, pedagogy, and notation.

At the mid point of the first day of Polak's master-class (Munich, March 25, 2007), he handed out a sheet where he explained his theory micro-timing and the notation he created to document it. What followed, for the next forty-eight minutes, was a debate over the usefulness of notation as a pedagogical or analytical aid when studying African music (see Fig. 4.7 below). The first half of the debate centered on a comparison between *raster notation* and regular Western notation. The only winning feature placing *raster notation* above Western notation (in terms of its accuracy in representing this music) was the absence of metrical markings such as bar lines. In the end, neither notational system was deemed adequate in expressing the micro-rhythmic elements of *djembe* music.

Ungerade Pulsation und Rasternotation : Zwei mögliche Lösungen für ein Problem sunun Meisterklasse

Patterns

- Jenbe-Begleitung: 4er Pulsation (Handsatz, Schlagzahl), aber stets ungerade (teils sehr ungerade) in Richtung ternär phrasiert
- Dunun Basis: Pulsation ambivalent – sowohl 4er wie 3er zu hören/spüren ist möglich (und sinnvoll)

Lösungsansatz 1 : ungerade Pulsation = ungerades Raster. Spaltenbreite an Pulsationsmodell angepasst. Einsatzpunkt = links im Kästchen, Spaltenbreite = Dauer

1	.	.	.	2	.	.	.	3	.	.	.	4	.	.	.
T	S	S	.	S	T	T	S	S	B	B	S	T			
O	O	O			X		X		X			O			
1	.	.	.	2	.	.	.	3	.	.	.	4	.	.	.

Lösungsansatz 2: Verzogene Pulsation in geradem Raster. Einsatzpunkte zentriert, Verschieben der Symbole = zeitliches Verziehen

1	.	.	2	.	.	3	.	.	4	.	.	1	.	.	2	.	.	3	.	.	4	.	.		
T	S	S	.	S	T	T	S	S	B	B	S	T	T	S	S	.	S	T	T	S	S	B	B	S	T
O	O	O		X	X	X	O	O	O	O		X	X	X									O		

[Figure 4.7: Sunun © Rainer Polak 2007]

When the workshop participants were handed the above sheet outlining Polak's notational system, Polak continued with the following explanation.

I could have written an even pulsation that is played unevenly, where I move the notes within the box, or I could have written this as an uneven pulsation that is played as written where I don't necessarily need to move the notes within the box. Principally these were two of the possibilities. What I have often done is to take the note boxes and shifted some of the notes in the boxes to one side or the other; thus bringing the resultant note closer to one pulse and further from the other. Once I got to know this system better I notated a few pieces like this and could actually read from the notation. I knew what everything meant. There was then the possibility of a system where I could place notes upon the paper and shift them around the pulse [either slightly before or slightly after]. (Polak's *Djembé Meisterklasse* in Munich: March 25, 2007)

The other possibility is that I should write the boxes as uneven. If a note is on the left of the box it is an up-beat. Each box will only be as long as the length of its pulse. Then I have a notation where I must first get used to it, and it is difficult to produce for example on graph paper you cannot easily create these boxes, then for each piece you must create a new template. But, for example one sees better what is meant by this notation - what the music is meant to sound like. For example this exact rhythm can be divided into three longer pulsations OR four shorter pulsations. This is the basic principle of the pulse as either closer or further from the ones around it. Each of the sounds is thus also placed strategically within the box as taking place either at the beginning, middle or end of the pulse. This is the principle and it is very artificial (*künstlich*).

If I would now write this, in a normal notational style, as either a three or a four pulse metrical grouping then I always have the illusion of rhythmic friction or tension (*Vorstellung von Reibung oder Spannung*) and this is not the case. In both processes [the rhythm and the pulse] the rhythm is inflected [pulled one way or the other] and it was because of this that I needed to create a space somewhere in the middle where the rhythm actually strikes. That one does not misunderstand and that one also grasps many layers at once. (Polak's *Djembé Meisterklasse* in Munich: March 25, 2007)

In the upper system of Polak's handout he demonstrates the uneven four-pulsation which exists in the music of Bamako's festival drummers. The shifted second beat creates a shorter time span between the first and second pulse and a longer span of time between

the third and fourth pulse. When he superimposes this over a three-pulsation it becomes obvious that the *sangban* and *djembé* parts fit quite well within that groove. In the lower system of modified box notation Polak uses only dots within the boxes to show where the pulses actually reside when the Bamako drummers are playing. The tones (T), slaps (S) and bass notes (B) of the *djembé* and the open (o) and closed (x) tones of the *sangban* are lined up according to their relationship to these pulses. The two arrows drawn in this system indicate errors in the notation where tones were not lined up properly. The most difficult thing about this computer generated notation is learning how to distinguish among pulses which are situated at the far left-hand side of the box from those in the middle and the far right-hand side. One workshop participant challenged Polak on this issue of practicality.

Student A: For me, I know what you mean, for me the issue is my inability. I read your manuscript as missing the direction of the where the note attack is placed. What I cannot decipher is the specific distance in a given direction the attack occurs. This idea does not make sense to me in normal notation either. Where I do understand your system is after I have listened to the recording a hundred-thousand times and I can hear the placement. Then I can absorb the information. Do you understand what I am saying? I cannot just read it from the paper. I need to constantly go back and forth between the notation and the recording before I can comprehend the notes. My point is that I read only the specific order of the strokes and then I hear the feeling of the rhythm.

Polak: That makes sense to me.

Student A: Maybe that is the point of our earlier discussion, the theory works well but practically the notes don't work for me. For me this has nothing to do with the actual music. This is a writing style. People who know the music or have heard it know what is meant by the notation and can play it exactly as written. But I believe you could not play from this notation if you had never heard the music. If you had never heard one of these rhythms, never played South American music, and encountered this notation for the first time in your life, you could not play from it.

Student C: You are correct! That is true!

Student B: Yes, you cannot understand the music from this alone. But, you can use this as a tool to help you learn it. It gives you something to hang the feeling on.

Student A: I have heard the same piece played by two different orchestras, notated exactly the same way but the result is as different as day and night. They sound that different.

Polak: This is very clear. As far as I am concerned you can learn only from hearing. But, you cannot learn only from notation. It is a combined system. Then the question is what good is the notation? Does it make learning the music better or worse? It is not always the best approach. Some of the masters I worked with, I heard them and immediately notated and then I could play it with more confidence. But that was also music that I could easily write out straight away. And then I was able to play it much faster – the music and the notation worked together. When pieces need to be written out as uneven then it becomes evident that there is a push somewhere in the music. The notation helps you to locate this.

After this debate and explanation Polak could see that the participants of the workshop were still struggling to comprehend his notation. These *djembe* teachers were looking for a practical element to Polak's notational system. In an effort to make his case, Polak called upon an example from Western music, the *rubato*.

Polak: There are problems with every system of notation. It is a given that with every notation, there are some people who need or want to know this or that. There are others who do not even want to work with notation, but that is a different question. It is important that when notation is given that it is a good notation. I don't mean that it is pedantic but that it is simply consistent and precise. And it is not by this exactness [in notation] that we do away with listening to the music. For example, in Western music when there is a *rubato* notated, everybody knows what a *rubato* is, but everybody does not make their *rubato* exactly the same from the start to the finish. It is not only that they make it faster or slower.

Student C: But then should we take the average of 100 different people and try to notate an exact *rubato* just like what you have done with this music.

Polak: Exactly! There has never occurred, in this culture, a consensus about what a *rubato* really is. The tendency is to leave out the swing. The tendency in Germany and America (and everywhere else) is that all the

rhythms are becoming straightened out. If there existed 100 *djembe* teachers in Germany who knew how the music is supposed to go then maybe we could be less detailed about writing the swing into the notation. But only then. And if you wanted to accurately transmit a classical work, a romantic piece, on a massive scale, then it would be better if you notated it very precisely so that the *rubato* is correctly understood. If you just put “*rubato*” over the music then they will not understand. Then the explanation for *rubato* is left in the hands of the musicians – and one does it one way while the other does it differently.

Student A: Then you should include both audio and video with the notation. Then you have covered everything. That is how I find it. You can see it and hear it. Then you transmit exactly what you mean.

Polak: Yes, but then there is always the question, how close is it?

Student A: But then, regardless, you transmit what you mean. Then for me the question is how do people still come up with a different result? That is what I was explaining before.

Polak: But that is what I am doing! I gave you audio and video examples so that you could prepare for the class. I have only introduced the notation to you today. It was not like I gave you this notation ahead of time and only later made audio and video examples.

Student A: Yes, this is O.K.

Polak: There remains the question, how close is this? That people could have the same notation in front of them and yet interpret it differently. Can you understand it or can you not understand it [the notation?].

Student A: For me the question remains. Does it have to be this way?

Polak: To notate in general?

Student A: That we need to add the element of notation to the music. When it is this difficult to read it does not matter how accurate it is.

Polak: This is naturally and interesting question.

Student A: One can see a big difference between classical music, traditional music and concert music yet all are open to interpretation. The composers are aware of this. Yet, there are 80 individuals in an orchestra and they need to play the same. But the basic notation states that they are to play a particular chord and the composer flips out if he hears something else. But with African music everyone plays what they know, what they

have practiced. Then come along three African musicians, three different musicians and each one plays something different.

Polak: Yes. But, let's not confuse the issue here. They each play something different but they all play within the same system.

Student A: Karl Burn also does not play purely by chance [*zufällig*] and Leonard Bernstein, he does not play purely by chance either. They are doing the same as what the African musicians are doing.

Polak: Yes! It is very different when you say that everyone plays differently than when you refer to a musical practice that can be measured. ***Here is the most important point Polak is trying to make about the difference between participatory discrepancies and a definable musical syntax.***

Student A: Yes, that makes sense.

Polak: If you compare ten *djembé* players here in Germany most of them will play the swing in *Djansa* incorrectly. And this can happen when it is consistently taught this way. And the people have no way of knowing that *Sunun* has more to do with *Wassolonka* than *Djansa*. This type of thing happens in every oral tradition. One possibility is to show these practices within the notation to avoid such misunderstandings.

Polak: This is what I have attempted to show with the notation I have supplied for you, for example. Whether this would be appropriate for beginners is the question. Or whether it would be appropriate for publication is another question.

Polak is attempting to notate a stylistic practice not only as a means of studying it scientifically, but also as a means of preserving this practice as it is transmitted between cultures. He is trying to reveal the way these rhythms are felt by Bamako *djembé* players as they perform them. Polak's status as an insider (he has been studying and performing this music in Bamako for over a decade) gives him the tools to explore the element of "inner time" which takes place among musicians performing this music. While many musicologists, from Hornbostel onward, have studied and theorized about the African perception of time, Polak does so as a means to more accurately transmit music from one

culture to another (Jones 1959: 102; Locke 1997, 1982: 223; Stone 1985: 146; Anku: 1997). The question remains, is it possible to use notation as a means to correct the prevailing misinterpretations of *djembe* music? More importantly, what do Guinean master drummers think about this perceived “straightening out” of their rhythms?

During a workshop I attended in Chicago in October of 2004, Keïta made a statement which has stayed with me ever since. He said that, “I spent fifteen years cleaning up the *djembe* drumming in Belgium and Germany. Now it is time to do the same in America.” What is interesting is that for Keïta cleaning up the drumming scene means teaching proper technique and standardizing the rhythms and solos so that there is only one definitive version being taught and played. Ensuring the transmission of micro-timing elements in this music is something that doesn’t seem to concern Keïta very much. In fact, in many of his recordings the rhythms are played so fast that these elements get lost anyway. In this way, Keïta is more influenced by his years in the ballet where virtuosity and showmanship trumped the preservation of traditional rhythms. While these things stand true to Keïta’s pedagogical approach and playing style, I suspect that he does not realize the extent to which Western students misinterpret these rhythms. Although he spends a great deal of time working with students (especially during his Guinea *stages* and Mini-Guinea intensive workshops in the United States) to help them play each rhythm with the absolutely correct sense on timing, he does not concern himself with the possibility that these students may transmit the same rhythm to their students incorrectly. For both Keïta and Konaté their approach to teaching is based on their own learning processes. If students fail to play a rhythm with the correct sense of timing it is understood as a flaw in their musical training rather than a profound difference in musical

perception and experience. This is why when there are professional musicians in the class who struggle, sometimes more than amateur players with very little experience, to play with the “correct” timing, it is confusing to both Konaté and Keïta. When confronted with this situation they are more likely to question the quality of the individual’s musical training than the cultural difference in musical experience. Both men carry on with the belief that with enough practice and attention every student is bound to be able to play the rhythm correctly.

Conclusion

What I witnessed in Munich were the beginning stages of an attempt by musicians to correct a flaw in the transmission process. While this attempt is admirable it could also be considered unrealistic. As some workshop participants clearly stated, the notation alone has very little meaning without a live or recorded example. Is it really possible or even advisable to attempt to control the reception of music as it is transmitted from one culture to another? Polak questions this possibility himself when he asks whether his notational system would be appropriate for publication. Billmeier has spoken to me about her desire to start a professional teacher training program which could certify *djembe* teachers. In this way, students would know which teachers have been properly trained not only to play this music correctly, but also to teach it with an approved pedagogical method. It is possible that a combination of approaches may have to be used to correct the straightening out of these rhythms. Then again, these changes are more likely an unavoidable result of cross cultural transmission.

The reality is that this music has not survived unaffected by the 20 plus years that both Keïta and Konaté spent in the national ballet. In addition, Keïta and Konaté’s

European recordings are becoming extremely influential in the current *djembé* scene in both Conakry and Bamako (Polak 2006). All of these influences have resulted in new avenues of expression for *djembé* players internationally. Before the time of national ballet companies *djembé* playing was an amateur pursuit assigned to one farmer in the village. This individual would play the appropriate rhythms for each celebration that took place. Now *djembé* players are considered professional artists. What once was a simple obligation carried out by farmers has turned into a career option for many talented Guinean *djembé* players.

In the meantime the *djembé* has moved from its place within the ballet company to center stage. According to Polak,

The *jenbe* playing in recording studios, concert stages, drum and dance workshops, and schools, does not simply consist of “traditional” repertoires and styles of local celebration music. The arrangement techniques and transformations developed in the ballet context form a constituent part of the mediation process of *jenbe* music to the West. . . . As dancing is mostly left out and the focus has shifted further toward the music, for instance its arrangements and the lead drummer’s role, *jenbe* percussion music represents a third *jenbe*-related genre, after celebration music and ballet music (Polak 2006: 166).

One of the strongest mediating factors responsible for this new genre is the transmission of this music to German students. The pedagogical negotiations between German culture brokers and Guinean drummers have caused this music to take on a new frame and format. According to Billy Konaté, part of this pedagogical frame is contained in the continued use of signals, intros, and breaks as a means of providing structure for Western audiences and *djembé* students. As was true in Famoudou Konaté’s case, the pedagogical recordings also influenced the format of later commercial recordings, most of which are sold to interested amateurs who play the *djembé*. Finally the treatment of this music as a

fixed form or artifact (created by the process of recording and notation), inaugurated a concert style of *djembé* presentation where the spontaneity of the audience response is less important than the musical artistry of the performers. The *djembé* teachers that were chosen by the public to represent this music in Germany were the ones who were able to integrate Western musical and cultural values into their teaching and performance. As a result, other drummers who play a less teachable style of this music, such as Adama Dramé and Drissa Koné, have not become mainstream in the German *djembé* workshop circuit. As much as German brokers speak about preserving an old tradition, what is actually occurring is the creation of a new one.

Chapter Five

The Politics of Identity: African Americans and Guinea's *Djembé*

Keïta and Konaté are among the first generation of drummers in Guinea's national ballets, yet their involvement with the African American drum and dance scene came over three decades after *Les Ballets Africains* first made an impact in the United States in the early 1960s. The *djembé* scene was already well established in New York and most of the eastern seaboard when Keïta and Konaté first began their workshop tours in the United States in the late 1990s. Within this established community of *djembé* drummers was a legacy of *djembé* masters who had studied with Guinean Ladjî Camara who settled in the U.S. in 1962 after ten years as a drummer for *Les Ballets Africains*, first in Paris and later when the company was in residence in Senegal. For the drummers who remember the beginnings of this American *djembé* drum and dance scene, or for those who had grown up in the context of its culture, Keïta and Konaté's European teaching style of "traditional" Malinké concert-*djembé* would, at the very least, clash with the dance-centered *djembé* culture established here in the 1960s .

The political/historical context for Camara and *Les Ballets Africains* arrival in the United States, especially in New York, had a major impact on the way in which the *djembé* was appropriated by the African American community. In the mid-1960s, support for the Civil Rights Movement was waning as the separatist ideologies of Black Nationalism, the Nation of Islam (1966), Black Power, and the Black Arts Movement

(1965), gained strength. On one hand, African Americans were looking for something more than acceptance and equal rights within an American society founded on European ontologies and epistemologies – especially in reference to religion, literature, and the expressive arts (Sell 2001: 56). On the other hand, by embracing a separatist arts movement there would always be a risk of perpetuating the same racial stereotypes that have limited the creative choices available to Black artists in the past. As Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) stated in his seminal book, *Blues People* (1963), “white Euro-American hegemony has robbed African Americans of their culture” (Crawford 2001: 842). Musicologist Richard Crawford contextualized Baraka’s statement within the ethnic identity politics of the 1960s, which challenged long held ideas about America as a cultural “melting pot” (ibid.) Crawford concluded that:

It is hardly surprising that some black Americans took cultural nationalism as an alternative to the civil rights movement, whose ideal of racial integration was proving a painfully slow way to battle racism. (ibid.)

To Crawford's analysis, I would add that this battle against racism was especially insidious and potent in the arts. African American musicians, dancers, and actors could not escape racial stereotyping by arts critics who praised them when they presented performances relating to or expressing African and/or primitive themes and criticized them when they stepped outside of this narrow box.¹ The Black Power and Black Arts

¹ Much has been written about this, particularly in the field of dance. See: Joe Nash 1988: 11-14; David Krasner 2001: 192-211; Lynne Fouley Emery 1988: 267-268; Richard C. Green 2002: 105-139. Dance reviewers were partly responsible for perpetuating racial stereotypes which in turn fed audience expectations. Emery is not alone in challenging New York Times dance critic John Martin, “dean of American dance critics,” for “doing little to dispel these racial stereotypes” (Emery 1988:267). Green points out that primitivist comments made by Margaret Lloyd in *The Borzoi Book of Modern Dance* were actually “well meaning and complementary in intent” (Green 2002: 122). To this I would add that reviewers who racially stereotyped African American dancers were not necessarily acting in a consciously malicious manner but out of the “racial ideologies” that were the undercurrent of American life at the time. I elaborate more on this issue in my discussion of Asadata Dafora, Katherine Dunham, and Pearl Primus later in this chapter.

Movements inspired a range of responses by African American artists. While some artists, such as Larry Neal and Amiri Baraka, chose to work within a deconstructionist avant-garde of their own design, others, in their search for a distinctly African identity, looked to Africa and the Diaspora for inspiration and creative material.

Each movement which existed under the larger umbrella of Black Nationalism had a particular focus within these identity politics. Larry Neal, a key figure in the Black Arts Movement in New York, described the difference between Black Power and Black Arts Movements in the following way:

Black Art is the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept The Black Arts Movement proposes a radical reordering of the western cultural aesthetic. It proposes a separate symbolism, mythology, critique and iconology. The Black Arts and Black Power concept both relate broadly to the Afro-American's desire for self determination and nationhood. One is concerned with the relationship between art and politics; the other with the art of politics. (Neal 1968: 29)

According to Mike Sell, one of the key differences between these two movements was the way each dealt with mainstream American media.

However, significant differences exist between the performance politics of the two movements. While the Panthers attempted to seduce and exploit the media (and wealthy liberals) by way of outrageous, blatant displays of hypermasculine 'Blackness,' the Black Arts Movement sought to evade white media, tolerant liberal wealth, and Euro-American aesthetic traditions by taking their revolutionary, Afrocentric cultural program to historically African American colleges and urban, geographically distinct, African American communities. (Sell 2001: 56)

According to Sell's analysis, the Black Arts Movement was moving in a distinctly opposite direction away from the earlier Civil Rights agenda. Rather than fighting against a segregated society, they were embracing separatism as a means of controlling both the production and reception of black arts. Within this framework, Black artists performed for Black audiences and were reviewed by Black critics. In the process the Black Arts

Movement re-contextualized the segregated spaces of Black colleges and African American neighborhoods into places African Americans, as a Black nation, could develop “an Afro-centric ‘critical metaphysics,’ a nonobjective, ethnically oriented mode of artistic production and reception” (Sell 2001: 56). Although the central modalities of the Black Arts Movement were avant-garde poetry and theatre, the ideologies expressed by this movement bled over into other performing arts as well. The revolutionary politics of Guinea’s nationalism, as it was performed in *Les Ballets Africains de le République de Guinée*, cut to the very heart of what these movements were struggling to attain; a sense of cultural identity, a sense of nationhood for African American people.

The dramatic presentation of drum and dance in the context of *Les Ballets Africains de Keita Fodéba* stood in stark contrast to similar performances of traditional African music New Yorkers' had experienced in the past. As Richard A. Long so aptly described it:

The actual production almost owed as much to Parisian stagecraft as it did to African tradition and heralded a new genre, African theatrical dance – born outside Africa, but destined to be very influential there . . . The success of Ballets Africains contributed to a widespread movement in the United States, which many called neo-African dance. Inspired in part by ideology but also by aesthetic impulse. (Long 1989: 105)

It was the combination of a barely contained energy and athleticism in the dance, coupled with the dramatic voice of the *djembé* that captured the imagination not only of dancers and drummers, but also Black Power and Black Arts activists in New York. These shows went far beyond the expected anthropological representations of traditional cultural practices. Instead, *Les Ballets Africains* displayed a successful blend of sophisticated Parisian theatre and dance styles inspired and informed by African folklore. The resulting American-based, "neo-African" dance movement Long referred to included both amateur

and professional groups. While it is not surprising that professional groups formed, given the legacy of traditional African dance which has been created and staged by American and African dancers and choreographers in New York since the 1930s, the emergence of amateur, community based, groups signaled a new level of cultural investment in Africa by African American communities.

In the context of *Les Ballets Africains* the lead *djembé* player took center stage playing right beside a particular dancer or set of dancers, entering into a rhythmic dialogue with them. John Martin a dance critic for the New York Times made a point of mentioning lead *djembé* soloist, Ladj Camara, by name, calling him a “fine drummer,” in his review of the first performance of *Les Ballets Africains* in Martin Beck Theater on Broadway (NYT: 2/17/1959). After decades of writing dance reviews, this represented one of the only incidents where Martin singled out one of the drummers in his review of a drum and dance ensemble performance. After watching a great deal of footage of early African American drum and dance performing ensembles, I noticed that the drummers usually stayed either to one side of the stage or at the back of the stage so that the attention of the audience was not distracted away from the dancers. In *Les Ballets Africains* the *djembé* soloist has the drum strapped on and thus becomes another dancer. In this context, the *djembé* functions, not only a musical instrument, but a dramatic prop through which the player expresses his masculinity by challenging the other dancers to a rhythmic dual.

Of all the various types of drums used in American folk and modern dance since Asadata Dafora first introduced traditional African dances to African American dancers in the 1930s, only the *djembé* had the capacity to stand on its own as a solo instrument.

Between its first appearance with *Les Ballets Africains* in 1959 and the opening of the first drum and dance studio devoted to Guinean *djembé* music and dance in 1971, the *djembé* had become the most popular drum used in African American dance ensembles. Along side its appropriation by African American choreographers, the *djembé* also became a ritual tool adopted for use in African American religious ceremonies ranging from Haitian rituals to the initial celebrations of Kwanzaa.² It was also adopted as a symbol of power (particularly male power) by followers of the Black Power Movement.

Unlike drumming styles from Ghana such as *kpanlogo*, which came to the United States via the academy, or from Nigeria, such as Yoruban *dùndún* and *bàtá*, which have appeared among the growing number of American followers of *Santería* and *Candomblé* (diasporic versions of Yoruban Orisha practices), the *djembé* came to the U.S. as part of *Les Ballets Africains de la République de Guinée* representing Guinea's revolution and independence from France. From the beginning, African American exposure to and interest in the *djembé* was not only academic and/or religious, but also political. The introduction of the *djembé* in the U.S. was politically potent because it brought together two important moments in black history: the emancipation of Guinea (followed by the rest of Francophone West Africa) from French colonial rule and the emergence of Black Nationalism in America.

² Kwanzaa is an African American holiday which takes place yearly from December twenty-sixth to January first. This celebration, originally created by Ron Karenga in 1966 as a means for African Americans to reconnect with their African cultural heritage, has its roots in the Black Nationalist movements of the 1960s. The *djembé* was quickly adopted into the ritual celebrations that were created as this holiday developed. For more information about Kwanzaa see the video *The Black Candle* (2008) narrated by Maya Angelou.

Three Decades Later: Mamady Keïta and Famoudou Konaté come to teach in America

When I attended my first *djembé* workshop in Chicago, Illinois, in 2004, there was a strong contingent of African American students and onlookers present to support Guinean *djembé* master, Mamady Keïta. Conversely, when I arrived at my second workshop with Famoudou Konaté in Boston in 2006, there was a noticeable lack of support from the African American community.³ What surprised me about the Boston workshop as that there was only one African American student present in a class of fifty students. Later on in the course of this five-day workshop, I discovered some of the confusion and frustration this lack of support had created for Konaté.

During the second day of classes with Konaté in Boston, one student asked him how he felt about teaching his music to white Americans. Konaté stated, “I have no trouble teaching white Americans, I have trouble with African Americans.” This comment did not make sense to me until Konaté continued with his explanation. Before continuing, however, Konaté made a point of apologizing to N.Y., the one African American student in the class, stating that he knew this young man did not feel the same as the African Americans he was referring to in his statement.⁴ Konaté then continued by explaining that African musicians like himself have no trouble with white students learning their music because the racial divisions and tensions he experienced in the United States simply did not manifest themselves in the same way in Guinea. He continued on to say that his workshops in the United States have always been open to everyone, yet there was only one African American student present at this workshop. When Konaté made this statement about the absence of African American students, he

³ In between these workshops with Keïta and Konaté I studied with my teacher Helen Bond in Chicago.

⁴ In order to protect the identity of the three student/collaborators central to this chapter, I refer to each individual using only the initials of the state in which he currently resides.

was assuming that they should be interested in learning African culture. In the same vein, the student who asked the question was assuming that she should not learn the *djembé* because of her race.

My research with Konaté and Keïta both in the United States and Guinea, over the course of the next two years, revealed a complex situation which I have only begun to unravel in the context of this dissertation. The purpose of this chapter is to use history as a means to come to an understanding of the complex and varied reception Keïta and Konaté have experienced among African American drummers. The absence of support from the African American community is something that both Konaté and Keïta find confusing and disturbing.⁵ While it is not possible to know all of the personal, social, and political reasons for this noticeable absence of African American students from workshops given by Keïta and Konaté, it is possible to contextualize these actions within the thirty-year history of *djembé* drum and dance in the United States. It is only through an understanding of the initial reception and appropriation of the *djembé* by the African American community that it becomes possible to unravel some of the meaning behind these “planned absences” by influential African American *djembé* players from workshops taught by Konaté and Keïta.

In order to understand the broader identity politics behind the initial reception of the *djembé* and *Les Ballets Africains*, I will contextualize this event within the history of African dance in the United States. In this way, I can paint a clearer picture of the cultural landscape which fostered the development of a new genre of African dance in America, inspired by *Les Ballets Africains*. In the context of this discussion I will draw attention

⁵ Between 2006 and 2008 I attended six intensive workshops (of four to ten days in length) and three drum camps led by Keïta and/or Konaté. Of the hundreds of students I met only twelve were African American.

the cross-cultural relationships which were nurtured between American drummers and dancers and their compatriots in Senegal and the Gambia. I will also explore some of the reasons why these cross-cultural relationships were not nurtured to the same extent in Guinea. Concurrently, I point towards the African American jazz scene to identify some of the emerging ideas about African rhythm and African identity which initially influenced the reception of the *djembé*. Finally, I will place three African American drummers who are currently participating in the workshops and drum camps Keïta and/or Konaté within this historical timeline as a means to understand where Keïta and Konaté fit within the complex history of *djembé* drum and dance in America.

The identity politics of Black dance: American – African cultural exchange

One of the first and most important cultural spaces where African performing arts were re-introduced into American culture was through dance. One of the first dancers to bring African dance to the United States was Asadata Dafora, a multi-talented singer/dancer/choreographer from Sierra Leone. Dafora arrived in the United States after serving in the British army during WW II. Although he had initially chosen to stay in Europe after his tour of duty, and had begun to study voice with the hope of becoming an opera singer, he was unable to achieve his goal. What Dafora did achieve was a fluency in Italian, German, and French as well as a firm grounding in European Classical music. Ironically, when he arrived in the United States in 1929, he quickly became an ambassador of West African culture. In fact, he was the first African dancer to present African dance in concert form within the United States (Walser 1999: 163). With a small group of African men of various cultural backgrounds, all living in Harlem, Dafora formed his first performing dance ensemble called “Sholonga Oloba.” In 1933, this group

staged scenes from Dafora's first African 'opera,' entitled *Zoonga*, at Madison Square Garden (Long 1989: 48). After the success of this first performance, Dafora augmented his group through the addition of African American women. Within the year, this expanded troupe put on the first full-length African dance-opera ever staged in the United States, *Kykunkor* (1934), which opened to rave reviews. Given that most of the African American women added to the troupe had no stage experience or knowledge of African culture, Dafora (by necessity) became a teacher not only of dance, but of African music and culture. Over the span of his career, Dafora taught most of the African American dancers who would later become leading teachers and choreographers. Ismay Andrews, Katherine Dunham, and Charles Moore were all dancers who initially trained under Dafora. In addition, Dafora taught Babatunde Olatunji, a Nigerian drummer who would later lead a revival of African drumming in New York. Dafora's student, Andrews, was responsible for training James Hawthorne (Chief Bey) who became one of the most sought after drummers in the American scene in the 1960s and 1970s.

Two African American women, Pearl Primus and Katherine Dunham, became pioneers of African dance in the United States. Both dancers favored an anthropological approach to learning dance, focusing their research on specific dance genres of African cultures. In the process of doing research each dancer also established lasting relationships with the African communities in which they worked. As a result they were not only students of African dance, but, at least in the case of Dunham, teachers of American modern dance styles for their African hosts.

Dunham focused her energy, almost exclusively, on the ritual and folkloric dances of Haiti. Dunham's approach was less sociological and more theoretical than Primus. She

was initially inspired to study African dance anthropologically in the West Indies by Melville Herskovits. In 1936 she received a Rosenwald Travel Fellowship which enabled her to study dance in not only in Haiti, but also in Martinique, Trinidad, and Jamaica for the next eighteen months. Upon the completion of her thesis, "Dances of Haiti: their Social Organization, Classification, Form and Function (1938)," Dunham was invited to become the dance director for the New York Labor Stage (1939) where she began to develop what would become a truly international career. The now famous "Dunham Technique" was something she developed out of her experience and analysis of the dance styles and culture of Haiti in the course of her M.A. thesis work at the University of Chicago. Richard Buckle described the Dunham Technique as "a combination of classical ballet with central European, Caribbean, and African elements" (Buckle 1949: vii).⁶ Interestingly, New York Times dance critic John Martin, who generally praised Dunham's work, was most critical of her dancers or choreography when the balance of technical elements swayed too far toward classical ballet.⁷ In 1962 Dunham invited Guinean *djembéfol*a Ladji Camara to join her company for the production of *Bamboche*. This was an interesting production, made in collaboration with the Royal Troupe of Morocco (Emery 1988: 257; Long 1989: 99). This production included the dance Yanvalou which has become a standard rhythm, still part of the repertoire of American *djembé* players and dancers.

Primus was born in Trinidad (she came to the U.S. as a young child) but she chose to focus the majority of her research on the African continent. After performing some of her African-inspired dances at Fisk University in 1948, Primus was approached by Dr.

⁶ Both Lynne Fauley Emery (1988:257) and Joyce Aschenbrenner (1981: 46) include this description of the Dunham technique by Buckle (1949: vii).

⁷ John Martin, "Dance: a Negro Art," New York Times, February 25, 1940.

Edwin Embree, president of the Rosenwald Foundation, who offered her a very large Fellowship to study dance in Africa. During her eighteen-month trip, Primus was able to study in the Gold Coast (Ghana/Nigeria), Angola, Cameroon, Liberia, Senegal, and the Belgian Congo (Emery 1988: 263-265). This first trip changed the direction of Primus' career, which up until this time focused on the realization of poems of social protest (including some by Langston Hughes) and African American spirituals through dance. Unlike Dafora, who was thrust into the role of cultural ambassador for Africa, Primus chose that role for herself. The first encounter with African culture on African soil inspired Primus to devote the rest of her career to the preservation and promotion of traditional African dances (Green 2002: 120-121). After this initial trip Primus returned to Africa several more times. In 1953 she spent the summer months studying in the West Indies and it was there that she met her husband and life-long dance partner Percival Borde. When Primus returned to Liberia in 1959, for a two year stay, she was named the director of Liberia's Performing Arts Center (ibid.). Between her extensive trips to Africa, and the opening of a dance studio with her husband "Primus-Borde School of Primal Dance" in New York City, Primus managed to pursue doctoral studies in both anthropology and sociology. While Primus spent the majority of her time teaching dance to African American students, she did not approve of artistic segregation, hoping instead that dance could bridge the gap between people of different races and bring them to a deeper understanding of their common humanity (Emery 1988: 266).

The trajectory of Primus's career raises many questions in terms of her rather abrupt shift from an initial focus on social issues (mainly on the topic of civil rights), to the preservation of traditional African music and dance. Richard C. Green notes that in

1945 (after WWII) when the House Un-American Activities Committee began investigating the activities of people they perceived to be communist sympathizers, Primus was one of many artists called before the committee. Referencing Beverly Hillsman Barber, Green stated that, among other things, Primus had her passport temporarily revoked as a result of the committee's findings (Green 2002: 119). While this would provide an adequate explanation for Primus's shift in focus, Green sees her emerging role as ambassador of African arts as highly problematic.

Not unlike the body of land called Africa in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Primus's body represented an (O)ther site for the projection of primitive fantasies . . . As an authentic Negro, the distinction between actor and role collapses in Primus. She is perceived, unlike Tamiris or Graham, as an 'artist ambassador' for her race. (Green 2002: 123)

While Green does not mince words, neither is he alone in his analysis. Emery points out that although Katherine Dunham had earlier succeeded in bringing serious attention to the artistry and professionalism of Black dancers through her "theatrical and beautifully staged" examples of Black concert dance, and Primus brought "a sense of dignity, authenticity, pride, power, and beauty," to African artistry through dance, both "pioneers" were still "caught in the dilemma of the black dancer" (Emery 1988: 267)⁸ This dilemma is rooted in preconceived notions held by both audience and dance critics about what types of dances Black dancers should be performing (ibid.).

The relationships which Primus and Dunham nurtured in West Africa and the West Indies led to significant cultural exchanges on both sides of the Atlantic. In 1959, after several trips to Africa, "Primus was named director of Liberia's Performing Arts Center," a post she held for two years (Emery 1988: 265). In 1966, Dunham was invited

⁸ Emery provides a quote by Lois Balcolm from the November 1944 edition of *Dance Observer* to support her observation of "the dilemma of the black dancer."

by Léopold Senghor to train the dancers of *Le Ballet National de Senegal*. In addition to this invitation, Senghor appointed Dunham to the position of advisor for the first World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (also known as *Festival des Arts Nègre*) held in 1966 in Dakar. The U. S. State Department gave Dunham official status by naming her U.S. representative to the festival. As a continuation of this cultural exchange, Dunham invited *djembé* master, Mor Thiam, to teach in East St. Louis, Illinois at the Performing Arts Training Center for disadvantaged youth, a center she founded in 1960 in partnership with Southern Illinois University (Emery 1988: 257).⁹

The effect of Senghor's invitations to Dunham, and the response of the U.S. State Department cannot be undermined when evaluating Keïta and Konaté's reception in America. It is significant that Dunham received an invitation from Senegal and not from Guinea. The first introduction that Americans had to African Ballet was through *Les Ballets Africains* whose initial director Keita Fodéba and *djembé* soloist Ladj Camara were from Upper Guinea. Later that very same group was invited to become the national ensemble of Guinea *Les Ballets Africains de la République de Guinée*. In 1960, and for several decades following, *Les Ballets Africains de la République de Guinée* made a huge impact on the American dance scene. The fact that Dunham was invited to Senegal and not Guinea was because Guinea was a country closed off to the rest of the world. Members of Guinea's national ensembles could travel all over the globe but it was not safe for artists or tourists to visit Guinea. As a result, most of the African ballet ensembles in the United States more closely resemble those in Senegal than in Guinea.

⁹ Mor Thiam was still actively teaching in the United States in the nineties as is evidenced by Mark Sunkett who lists Mor Thiam as one of his informants at the end of his book, *Mandiani Drum and Dance: Djimbe performance and Black Aesthetics from Africa to the New World* (1995). At the time he wrote his book, Sunkett stated that Mor Thiam, along with his wife Kine Thiam, had taught Senegalese dance and *djimbe* in the United States for almost twenty years (1995:177).

The destination of the majority of “pilgrimage” drum and dance trips is either Senegal or the Gambia. At the present time, Americans do not need a visa to visit Senegal but they do need one to visit Guinea. While there have been more than a few Guinean drummers, such as Ladji Camara and M’Bemba Bangoura to name two of the more significant ones, who have come to teach in America, reciprocity between Guinea and the United States was never established in the same way as it was with Senegal and the Gambia. Outside of the legacies of Camara and Bangoura in New York, the American drum and dance scene has been dominated by a legacy of Senegalese artists for the past thirty years.

Jazz, dance, and drumming: a mixture of African musics and cultures

The introduction of African musical genres accelerated in the United States in the 1940s, because during this decade African students were being invited (in large numbers) to study in America. According to Ingrid Monson,

In 1937 [Paul] Robeson and Max Yergan founded the International committee on African Affairs (CAA). The organization had as its purpose educating the American public about Africa and facilitating study by African students in the United States. (Monson 2000: 331)

This was just one of the many organizations that sprung up in response to the perceived connection between the domestic struggle for civil rights and the anti-colonial and nationalist movements in Africa “in the wake of World War II” (Monson 2000: 330). During this time American jazz musicians were already making pilgrimages to West Africa in search of their cultural roots. However, Monson states that these journeys were not necessarily focused on music. Jazz drummer Art Blakey traveled to Africa in the late 1940s, “did not do so as a musician” instead he went there to study “religion and philosophy” (Monson 2000: 336). As a result it is somewhat safe to conclude that West African drumming did not come to America through jazz musicians such as Blakey. The

African students who came to America in the 1940s were the ones who brought this music with them. Given the fact that they initially attended segregated schools such as Morehouse College in Georgia and Howard University in Washington D.C., it was the African American students in these schools who were the first to be exposed to these expressions of African culture.

In this way, jazz became another site where traditional African music was introduced as an example of a larger African diasporic identity. This move built upon the earlier political goals of bebop musicians in the 1940s. Bebop players, such as Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker, were the first who sought to reclaim jazz as an African American musical genre. According to bebop legend Gillespie, he and Parker were active in playing benefits for the African Academy of Arts and Research. One of the performers that they met along the way was Asadata Dafora from Sierra Leone. Gillespie describes these mixed-genre benefit concerts in the following way,

Just me, Bird, and Max Roach, with African drummers and Cuban drummers; no bass, nothing else. We also played for a dancer they had, named Asadata Dafora. Those concerts for the African Academy for the Arts and Research turned out to be tremendous. Through that experience, Charlie Parker and I found the connections between Afro-Cuban and African music and discovered the identity of our music with theirs . . . we had a ball, discovering our identity. (Walser 1999: 163)

The identity that Gillespie is referring to is not specifically West African or Cuban. Rather, the mixture of music performed at these events revealed a connection between African Americans and the larger African diaspora. It was this larger identity that inspired many jazz musicians to continue mixing African elements into their music.

Much of this musical mixture was further inspired by Babatunde Olatunji, a Nigerian drummer who immigrated to the United States in the 1950s. As he stated very

clearly in his autobiography, *The Beat of My Drum* (2005), the release of his album of African drumming inspired many more collaborations between American jazz artists and traditional African musicians :

The release of *Drums of Passion* inspired many other recording artists, like Herbie Mann, Max Roach, Randy Weston, and Horace Silver, to start using African materials and African styles of drumming in their recordings . . . I recorded an album with Cannonball Adderley, an African piece. I recorded with Horace Silver . . . One musician I deeply respect, from the day I met him in the early 1960s, is Max Roach. (Olatunji 2005: 194-197)

These collaborations between Olatunji and jazz musicians helped move African drumming outside the realm of ethnic African dance and theatre. In this way, Olatunji brought attention to the drum as a musical instrument with its own sonic possibilities. In addition, he brought attention to the larger meaning of Black culture as something that encompasses both American and African realities.

At this point in the 1960s, Olatunji and the jazz musicians with which he worked were increasingly conscious of the value their music held as a political tool. Aside from his collaboration on Roach's "anti-segregation album," *We Insist*, Olatunji also interpreted both the *Drums of Passion* ensemble and their 1959 recording according to their political impact.

Drums of Passion played a significant role in all the social change taking place around that time. It was the first percussion album to be recognized as an African contribution to the music of African Americans. It also came right at the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement. This meant that we were recognized as pioneers in the 'Black is Beautiful' Movement. The whole idea of 'black power' came along at this time too. And so did the wearing of the *dashiki* and natural hair. We found ourselves right in the middle of this, going from one rally to another, sponsored by different organizations fighting for freedom: from the NAACP to CORE to SNCC to the Black Muslims. (Olatunji 2005: 157)

This album was one of the only recordings of African music to ever hit the top ten of the billboard charts. As a result, it became a powerful symbol of African identity for the Civil Rights Movement and Black Nationalism. By the mid-1960s, the majority of *Drums of Passion* performances consisted of engagements at political rallies and conventions. Furthermore, as a means to create better understanding between races, Olatunji, along with some members of the ensemble, also brought African drum and dance to public schools in New York and Boston. This opened up the possibility for Americans of all races and ethnic backgrounds to take up African drumming, something that many of the children in these schools would never have considered before. At least two of these children grew up to become well known professional percussionists themselves: Grateful Dead drummer, Mickey Hart, and feminist frame-drum expert, Layne Redmond (Olatunji 2005: 207; 211).

In the mid-1980s, Olatunji was playing in a club in California owned by the manager of the Grateful Dead. After the show, Mickey Hart came backstage to tell Olatunji that his program in the schools was what inspired him to become a drummer. Shortly after this initial meeting, Hart invited Olatunji and *Drums of passion* to open for their New Years Eve show in New York (1985). The 1980s was the beginning of the “Dead Heads,” a community of fans who followed the band from one show to the next across the nation. The performance of Olatunji and *Drums of Passion* inspired the beginning of the “Dead Head” drum circle, which took place in the parking lot hours before the start of each Grateful Dead concert. These drum circles were based upon the idea of free improvisation, one of the features fans enjoyed most in the Grateful Dead shows. Hart later employed these same ideas in his ensemble *Planet Drum*. As Hart

explained, “The idea was that if I start a rhythmic pattern, you listen to it, you add something to it, each and every one of us adds something to it to make it a complete tune” (Olatunji 2005: 209). By the 1980s, Olatunji had four *djembé* players and two *dunun* players featured in the ensemble.¹⁰ It was not long before the *djembé* became the drum of choice in these “Dead Head” drum circles. The majority of American *djembé* students who study with Konaté and Keïta come from the drum circle tradition that grew out of the “Dead Head” community.

Olatunji's performances, recordings, and teaching put drum rhythms and songs front and center. When *Drums of Passion* performed live there were so many drums, percussion instruments, and players standing on the stage, there was little room left for dancers. Olatunji introduced the possibility of African percussion music as a concert genre. From the beginning, audiences were encouraged to sing along in call and response fashion. Each song and its rhythm was a celebration lasting as much as twenty minutes in performance. In this sense, Olatunji was a catalyst bringing new awareness of the possibilities of percussion-based music to the American public. It was with this new awareness that American audiences received the excitement of African dance combined with the powerful *djembé* drumming of Ladj Camara in *Les Ballets Africains*.

Ladji Camara and the introduction of the *djembé* to the New York Scene

The vitality, sheer energy, and athletic display generated in the performance of Mande music and dance was introduced in the United States during the first performances of Guinean and S n galese national ballet companies during the late 1950s and 60s. Since then, Mandiani has remained a dominant expression of African culture for African Americans and is quickly captivating a broad and diverse global community. (Sunkett 1995: 11)

¹⁰ As a result of his first collaborations with Ladj Camara between 1963 until 1971, Olatunji added *djemb s* and *dununs* to his ensemble.

The main drummer/dancer responsible for introducing African American musicians and dancers to the genre of West African Ballet was Ladji Camara. According to jazz pianist and world music percussionist, Andy Wasserman¹¹ (Camara's biographer), Camara first performed with *Les Ballets Africains de Keita Fodéba* in Paris in 1949 when he was just 16 years old. During that time the company was “multicultural,” made up of members from Senegal, Guinea, France, Haiti, and Martinique. After touring with the company for seven years and recording an album, Wasserman states that Camara returned to Senegal (Wasserman 1998: 2). Although he was born in Norassoba, Guinea (in 1923), Camara chose Dakar, Senegal as his home-base. In 1953, *Les Ballets Africains de Keita Fodéba* arrived in Dakar as part of their African tour and Camara was asked to rejoin the company. When the group appeared for a forty-eight show Broadway run from February 16th until March 28th, 1959, Camara was listed on the program as a dancer.¹² Immediately upon returning home from the 1959-1960 tour, in May, 1960, the group was adopted as Guinea's national ballet and the name was changed to *Les Ballets Africains de République de Guinée*. It is interesting to note here that after touring for two years as a member of Guinea's national ballet, Camara returned again to Senegal to find and marry his wife. When he first joined *Les Ballets Africains* Camara was already living in Paris. After seven years with the company, at the

¹¹ Andy Wasserman is a jazz pianist and percussionist who studied African and Afro-Cuban percussion at Babatunde Olatunji's School of African Music and Dance in Harlem in the 1970s. After an almost three-decade break, Wasserman studied African percussion again but this time with Ladji Camara from 1998 until 2004. It was during this time that Wasserman was able to gather the information that went into this biography published as an article for the *African Music Encyclopedia* (edited by Janet Planet © 1995-1998 as part of the internet website: <http://africanmusic.org/artists>).

¹² Internet Broadway Database (IBDB) contains a digital archive of past programs from performances in theatres on Broadway. The entire cast of *Les Ballets Africains* were listed as dancers so it is not clear if Camara danced or played *djembe* for these performances. His combined skills as a dancer and drummer were what made him an indispensable resource during the formation of the *International Afrikan American Ballet*.

age of twenty-three, he returned to Senegal, possibly to attend school at *École William Ponty*. Given the harsh political climate in Guinea under Touré's leadership, both before and after independence, Camara, like so many other Guinean artists and writers, chose to leave Guinea rather than be controlled or censored by revolutionary politics.¹³

During his first American tour with *Les Ballets Africains de Keita Fodéba* in 1959, Camara already began to establish connections with important African American artists with whom he would collaborate for the rest of his career. Based upon a series of interviews Wasserman conducted with Camara:

In January 1959, Ladji met the legendary drummer Chief Bey. Chief Bey was his first African-American brother. After performing, Papa Ladji would meet Chief Bey at the 'African Room' at 44th Street and 2nd Avenue in Manhattan, New York City. Papa would perform with Chief Bey until at least 4 or 5 in the morning . . . When Papa Ladji [later] started his dance company in the Bronx Denise Bey [Chief Bey's daughter] was one of his first students. (Wasserman 1998: 2)¹⁴

By his own account, Camara wasted no time introducing himself to the key drummers at the center of the African drum and dance scene in New York. One of those drummers was Chief Bey (born James Hawthorne in Yamassee, SC, in 1913)¹⁵ a jazz percussionist who became interested in African drumming and eventually became a member of Olatunji's group *Drums of Passion*. Bey was hired to play for Olatunji's 1959 Columbia release, *Drums of Passion*, and continued to work with Olatunji until the elder Nigerian's death in 2003 (Jenkins 2004). It was probably Bey who initially introduced Camara and

¹³ Three of the most notable Guinean writers who left the country and took up residence in Senegal during Guinea's revolution are: Djibril Tamsir Niane, Camara Laye and Williams Sassine.

¹⁴ Although *Les Ballets Africains* Broadway run did not begin until February sixteenth, information from the ad that was posted in the New York Times on February first lists two shows that were occurring earlier in February: one at Schubert Theatre in Philadelphia from the second until the seventh; and one at the Colonial Theatre in Boston from February ninth through the fourteenth. From Camara's recollection the company must have been conducting rehearsals and doing shows (possibly in smaller venues around New York) as early as January, 1959.

¹⁵ According to his New York Times obituary, James Hawthorne "took the name Bey after joining the Moorish Science Temple, a Muslim sect" (NYT: April 13, 2004).

Olatunji who worked together extensively from 1963 until 1971. Another drummer who Camara performed with was the legendary Afro-Cuban conga player Mongo Santamaria. Aside from drummers, Camara also worked with other jazz musicians: Yusef Lateef, Nina Simone, and Art Blakey. In addition to his musical collaborations, Camara worked with many African American dancers and choreographers including: Alvin Ailey, a classically trained dancer who founded the Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre, a troupe with which he toured through Africa on several occasions;¹⁶ Charles Moore, who later founded *The Charles Moore Dance Theatre*, one of the oldest non-profit Black Arts Organizations in Brooklyn; Katherine Dunham and her *Bamboise Dance Company* in Hollywood (1963); and Pearl Primus and her Haitian dance ensemble called *Constance Santi Dance Company* (Wasserman 1998: 1-4).

In 1971 Camara opened *The Ladji Camara African Dance Studio*, his own African drumming and dance studio, in the Bronx, NY. In March of 1971 *The Ladji Camara Dance Company* performed at the Kennedy Center in Boston (Wasserman 1998: 3). The opening of Camara's studio was largely motivated by the "lack of knowledge of African culture [Camara noticed] among the many guests" who attended his initial American performances with *Les Ballets Africains* (ibid.: 2). In this way, Camara had much in common with Olatunji whose personal mission was to educate African Americans about their rich African cultural roots. Camara took this mission one step further by stating that, "All races can become unified through African culture" (ibid. 3). Although most of his collaborations were with West African, African American, or

¹⁶ The reception the troupe received in Africa was always cold at first but then, after performing a few shows, there was an overwhelmingly positive response. Senegal's president Senghor praised the Alvin Ailey Dancers by stating, "you have discovered how to stylize your passions for a technological era," after witnessing a performance of *Metallics* in Dakar (Dunning 1996: 225).

Caribbean musicians and dancers, Camara (like Olatunji) was happy to teach African music to students of all races.

Camara's emergence as a leader within the African drum and dance scene in New York came at a pivotal point when the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements were "literally under siege and being undermined by covert efforts on the part of the United States government to destabilize and destroy the Black protest movement" (Neal 2006: 625). According to Mark Anthony Neal's assessment, the period between 1968 and 1972 after the election of President Nixon was, "arguably one of the most repressive in twentieth-century American history" (ibid.). As key leaders were either murdered or imprisoned many of the more aggressive organizations such as the Black Panthers, SNCC (Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee), SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Convention) and the Nation of Islam were either eradicated or were waning due to members who were intimidated by these events. In their place sprung up more moderate organizations, such as NAACP, the Urban League, and Operation Push/The Rainbow Connection, aimed at maintaining Civil Rights gains by advocating changes to public policies directly affecting Black communities (Neal 2006: 626). In the context of this shift in leadership and agenda, Camara took on a more cultural and spiritual role within the African American community in New York City. Studios such as Camara's became not only a refuge in these stressful times, but also a place to continue nurturing a sense of cultural unity and strength within the community.

Of all the African Americans working along-side Olatunji and Camara none has been more influential than dancer/choreographer, Chuck Davis. Born in Raleigh, North Carolina, in 1937, it was not until moving to Washington, D.C. in 1957 that Davis

became interested in dance. While in Washington, Davis worked as a medical assistant by day, spending his evening hours dancing to Afro-Cuban music at a local club. It was here that he discovered his passion for dancing and decided to enroll in classes at the local dance studio. In the mid-1960s two events occurred that would change Davis' career trajectory from medicine to African Dance. At the 1964 World's Fair in New York City Davis saw a performance of the Sierra Leone National Dance Company which sparked his interest in studying African dance. At around the same time he met Owen Dodson, the director of the Theater and dance department at Howard University, who encouraged him to enroll in the program at Howard. It was during this time that he was discovered by Olatunji who was in town for the March on Washington. After watching Davis's dance trio perform at the Crow's Toe, Olatunji invited Davis to join his African dance ensemble in New York City. While in New York, Davis had the opportunity to immerse himself in many styles of dance and by 1968 he gathered twenty-five musicians and dancers together to form the Chuck Davis Dance Company.

Most of Davis's work consists of original choreography which is inspired by traditional African forms. However his use of the *djembé* to accompany many of these dances clearly demonstrates the strong influence of *Les Ballets Africains de la République de Guinée*.¹⁷ In a review of a performance by the Chuck Davis Dance Company at Hunter Theater, Don McDonagh stated:

Any resemblance between the Chuck Davis Dance Company and *Les Ballets Africains* is not coincidental. Mr. Davis has chosen to model

¹⁷ The majority of information about Davis is found on the internet. While he is a rather minor figure in the dance world (which explains why there is so little about him in dance literature) he has had a great influence on the African drum and dance scene both the North Carolina and New York.

See: www.answers.com/topic/chuck-davis The information about Davis on this website is based upon an interview with Davis conducted by Rory Donnelly for Contemporary Black Biography, Jan. 13, 2002, and articles from Dance magazine, Sept. 1995, p.87, and The New York Times May 20th & 29th, 2001. Another valuable source for information about Davis' recent work is www.africanamericandanceensemble.org.

himself on this internationally famous troupe, though he has yet to assemble dancers who live up to their standard, he has made a beginning with Monifa Olajorin and Martial Roumain. (Don McDonagh: New York Times, July 18, 1971)

McDonagh continued by stating that the program was heavy with “ethnic African dance material” including one piece by *Les Ballets Africains* choreographer, Italo Zambo. Although Davis modeled his ensemble after Guinea's national ballet, there was no reciprocal relationship with Guinea to sustain Davis’s dedication to its particular ethnic traditions. When Davis began to organize trips to Africa for himself and his dancers, it was Senegal and the Gambia that he chose as his destination, not Guinea. Since 1979 Davis has hosted the *Cultural Arts Safari* in Senegal and the Gambia. This is a two-week trip that includes: four-star hotel accommodations, a guided tour Goree Island, early morning warm-up and meditation, music classes, dance classes, *tye dye* workshops, cooking classes, an ancestral worship memorial day, council of elders conference, and rites of passage for adults. For over thirty years, these trips to Senegal have changed Davis’s approach to African Ballet. The *djembés* and *dunun*s now share the stage with Wolof *sabar* drums from Senegal. In a 1985 performance at the American Dance Festival, a traditional Wolof dance called *Lenjen-go* was accompanied by *sabar* ensemble with *djembé* and *dunun* mixed into it; and *Mandiani* (a traditional dance for young girls from Upper Guinea) was accompanied with three *djembés* and only one *dunun*, which is the way this rhythm has been adapted for performance in the National Ballet of Senegal. The absence of a reciprocal relationship between Guinea and the United States created a situation where the initial impact of *Les Ballets Africains de la République de Guinée* could not be nurtured through cultural exchanges such as Davis's *Cultural Arts Safari*.

One of Davis's continuing legacies is DanceAfrica, a series of yearly celebrations of African dance. The idea of an African dance festival came about when Davis's company was invited to perform at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) in 1977. This festival includes concerts by various dance groups from America, Africa, and the diaspora, as well as dance classes, and an African marketplace. Within two decades of the original festival at BAM, DanceAfrica has expanded to produce similar festivals in Chicago, Washington, D.C., Hartford, CT, Minneapolis, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Miami. DanceAfrica has become one of the major platforms for the continuation of African dance in the United States. The final performance of every DanceAfrica festival is loosely inspired by the model of the African ballet, with short dance performances from each company woven together with a story line at the center. In fact, Chuck Davis often dresses in traditional West African robes and takes the role of the griot who presents the story that weaves the dances together. In 2007 DanceAfrica celebrated its 30th anniversary at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Davis's promotion of African dance, along with his employment of the *djembe* in his own dance creations, did much to popularize its use outside traditional African ensembles.¹⁸

One of the only written accounts of the *djembe* scene in New York comes from Greg Sule Wilson whose book, *The Drummer's Path: Moving the Spirit with Ritual and Traditional Drumming* (1992), records the history of African drumming dance in New York in the 1970s and early 1980s. Wilson's book amounts to a mentoring treatise for *djembe* drummers, outlining his own journey which finally led him to New York, and his stint with the *International Afrikan American Ballet* where he performed from 1978 until

¹⁸ DanceAfrica source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DanceAfrica>

1982.¹⁹ In his book, Wilson describes the International Nights that were organized by his father who was director of foreign students' services in the early to mid-1960s when Wilson was a young boy. Howard University, a traditionally black college, had one of the largest foreign student populations in the country (Wilson 1992: 4). Many of the foreign students came from former British, Dutch and French colonies in West Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. Wilson recalls these cultural nights in the following manner,

Despite the backstage clashes in intercultural confusions, International Night became a reality every year. And there I was, down front, watching as students from Guinea, Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon, Mali, Trinidad, Kenya, India – you name it – wore traditional clothing and sang traditional songs and played traditional instruments, showing pride and independence. (Wilson 1992: 5)

Several African students, who started out in these southern segregated schools, later migrated north to join the well established African cultural scene in New York.

In the 1960s and 1970s there was a growing community of traditional African drummers and dancers active within the New York musical scene. Many of the ensembles were increasingly called upon to perform for civil rights and other political rallies. This was a diverse community made up of both West African and Caribbean émigrés as well as African Americans who began to study this music as part of their cultural heritage. The scene in New York at this time, included many Caribbean, and Jamaican immigrants along with West African students who had graduated from American colleges. This was similar to the demographic of players and dancers in the original *Les Ballets Africains de Keita Fodéba*, the only difference being that these men and women were living in New York rather than Paris. It is not surprising that some of

¹⁹ Among other things, Wilson's book offers aspiring and professional drummers advice about: building the stamina needed to play for extended dance classes or ritual performances; foods a drummer should eat to remain strong; notes on the value of developing a personal spiritual practice as a drummer.

the drummers and dancers in the New York scene, who had initially started with Olatunji, saw more of themselves in this exciting new form of stage production called the African Ballet. With the help and training of Ladj Camara and his students, the *International Afrikan American Ballet* was formed in 1977. This type of performance of African nationalist culture served to align African Americans with the independence movements within West Africa.

It was during Wilson's first years at Oberlin College that the seeds were planted for what was to become a career in African drumming. During the winter semester of 1976, he was able to conduct his winter term project in New York City, studying with Olatunji and Kehinde Stewart in the same studio where Camara, Bey and John Coltrane performed (Wilson 1992: 9). This study trip convinced Wilson that he needed to move to New York and immerse himself in the study of African music. He describes his arrival in the following way:

Within two weeks of leaving Ohio [in 1977] I was studying with the ace students of Ladj Camara and Chief Bey, now part of the International Afrikan-American Ballet: Okulose Wiles, the Ince brothers, and Neil Clark (Harry Belafonte's percussionist) . . . I worked with International for five years 1978 to 1982) dancing, drumming, videotaping, stage lighting, and doing research. (Wilson 1992: 9)

Part of what drew Wilson to study with the students of Camara and their ballet company was the fact that they "had the right drums, the right songs, the right dances, [and] even the right clothes" and the class was run by individuals who "knew the folklore of what they were doing" (Wilson 1992: 67). The biggest adjustment for Wilson was the change from playing conga to playing *djembe*. He had learned a little about the *djembe* from one of his Oberlin roommates who had done his winter term project with Ladj Camara, but

was still surprised when he tried his hand at playing the drum himself while on summer break back in D.C.

So back home in D.C., in the summer of '76, I was - I thought – prepared when I sat behind a *djembé* at Baile's studio on 14th Street and Park Road. As the elder carved a drum shell, I tried my usual conga cup-hand slap on this other goatskin-headed drum. I expected a resonant K-annng! Instead I got something like this: PFFT. It takes a while to learn to relax the right way to play the powerful *djembé* drum. (Wilson 1992: 73)

Wilson would have ample opportunity to perfect his *djembé* technique in the coming years as he went through the grueling apprenticeship program established by the *International Afrikan American Ballet* company in New York City in 1978. This program consisted of Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday night rehearsals where Wilson studied dance and Saturday rehearsals (three-hour morning workshop for male dancer, followed by a three-hour workshop for female dancers), where he accompanied dance rehearsals as part of the drum ensemble. In addition, Wilson continued to play *djembé* for Olukose Wiles's Tuesday night dance classes in Queens. Wilson made his premiere with the company during their DanceAfrica program which ran from May 30th to June 4th, 1978.

By the time Wilson and the *International Afrikan American Ballet* had developed into an international performing troupe there was already a shift in attitude developing between Americans and West Africans. Wilson shares a story of one African American drummer's reception in Africa.

I once heard a story about Balogun (G.R.H.S.) when he went to West Africa. A lead drummer for the Chuck Davis Dance Company, he had been around the African Scene for years and had received much exposure and experience in traditional African drums and ceremony. When he finally crossed the waters and got back home, he played and played, sharing his knowledge of 'the culture' with his brothers in the motherland. They were impressed. They nodded and smiled appreciatively.

And when he was done, they said, ‘That was very good, what you have learned of our traditions. But tell us,’ they asked, ‘what do your people do?’ He had no answer. (Wilson 1992: 17)

Similarly, when president, Sèkou Tourè, came to the United States from the Republic of Guinea, the *International Afrikan American Ballet* performed for him. This drum and dance troupe modeled their performance directly upon the *Les Ballets Africains de la République de Guinée*. Yet, the reception from the West African president was neutral at best. Reflecting on these two events, Wilson asks, “Where is our power? Not in being an imitation of traditional Africa . . . Like it or not, U.S. Africans have been changed from their stay here in the United States; no denying it” (Wilson 1992: 18). While Wilson came to the conclusion that this type of mimetic cultural expression failed to serve African Americans politically, the emerging social and cultural importance of traditional African ensembles within largely African American urban communities could not be underestimated.

The *International Afrikan American Ballet* continued to appear on the DanceAfrica program until 1985, but Wilson left the company in 1982. He provides the following explanation for his departure:

I worked steadily with International from 1977 to 1982. Then the devolution of the company, the changing politics of the day, and my own growth demanded that I rethink my direction. I committed to the Ausar Auset Society [A pan-African religious organization]. (Wilson 1992: 86)

Although Wilson chose not to elaborate on “the changing politics of the day,” the *International Afrikan American Ballet* continued on performing. The political shifts Wilson could be referring to relate not only changes in American foreign policy, but also

a growing awareness of African human rights struggles in mainstream American media.²⁰ Still, the group was not included on the roster at the annual DanceAfrica festival at the Brooklyn Academy of Music after 1985. With African American protest music moving into the mainstream, the political thrust of the *International Afrikan American Ballet* was no longer needed. Similarly, by the 1980s African drum and dance ensembles had become fully absorbed into the mainstream of many African American communities. The number of African American dance ensembles which use the *djembé* has grown exponentially since the *djembé* was introduced by Camara in the late 1960s.²¹ As ethnomusicologist, Mark Sunkett, noted in his research of these groups in the late 1980s and early 1990s:

[Arenas] for African-Americans interested in African dance traditionally [have] been in community centers located in less affluent neighborhoods and African-American communities located within the inner-city area According to several teachers such as Assane Konte, Melvin Deal, Abdulai Aziz Ahmed, and C.K. Ganyo, more often single males and females get involved in African music and dance to find social partners. There are parents who insist on participation by their children in order to enhance their cultural awareness, education and social responsibility. (Sunkett 1992: 116)

It is clear, from Sunkett's observations, that *djembé* based African music and dance programs have become an important social and cultural part of life in urban African

²⁰ In 1985 the hit single, "We Are the World" (recorded to raise support for famine relief in Ethiopia and the Sudan) brought concerns about Africa into the mainstream. According to Mark Anthony Neal the commercial success of "We Are the World" served to highlight the growing commercialization of political events and icons within the Black Power Movement. Neal states that, "The wide availability of Black protest expression in the mainstream mirrored the increasingly mass mediation of the Black protest movement, facilitating the conditions under which modes of political expression and resistance could be conflated with modes of consumption" (Neal 2006: 626-627).

²¹ An internet search of New York and D.C. based African dance ensembles which use the *djembé* revealed the following: Chuck Davis Dance Company (Chuck Davis, 1967); The African American Dance Ensemble (Chuck Davis 1987); Kan Kouran Dance Company (Assane Konte); ERMD African-American dance Ensemble; Bangoura African Ballet; Magbana Drum and Dance (Michael Markus); Maimouna Keita School of African Dance Inc. (Olukose Wiles and Marie Basse-Wiles, 1983); Les Ballets Bagata (Youssouf Koumbassa); Bambara Drum And Dance (Joseph Barns, 1996); Universal African Dance Ensemble (Robert and Wanda Dickerson, 1984); Usaama (Umoja) Dance Company (Karen Love 1995); Farafina Kan (Diallo Sumbry, 2000).

American communities. The most active of these communities are found in New York, New Jersey, Washington, D.C., North Carolina, and Portland Oregon.²² In the end, “mounting financial and administrative pressures” forced *International Afrikan American Ballet* to disband in 1994 (Heard and Mussa 2002:150). By this time many members were anxious to start their own projects. By the mid to late 1980s, ballet-style ensembles had become somewhat of a mainstay in many African American community centers. The emphasis for these community ensembles is social and cultural rather than political.

The shift to a cultural and social emphasis has opened the door for more individuals of different ethnicities to either join existing ensembles or to form independent groups. While classes are attended by a variety of individuals from varied racial and ethnic backgrounds, this has not been the case for performance ensembles (Sunkett 120). During his extensive work with Mande drum ensembles in the United States, Sunkett came to the following conclusion:

Members of the African American community who become involved with a performance ensemble are concerned that their presentations are ethnically specific. The desire, in formal presentations of African music and dance, is that only persons with a demonstrable link to Africa or perceptible African lineage will represent the total body of performers. This claim to an ancestral right is not a prejudicial one. It is rather an act of communal solidarity and cultural awareness. (Sunkett 1992: 120)

Sunkett continues by stating that “African Americans are not alone in the belief that the presentation of this art form is best represented by teachers and performers with an appropriate visual image.” He counts city, state, and national arts organizations among those who support “the presentation of ethnic arts by members of specific ethnic groups.”

²² In Portland, Oregon, in 1982, another ballet company, inspired by the ballet companies of West Africa as well as the *International Afrikan American Ballet*, was founded by Bruce Smith with eight of his students from the African drum and dance program at Jefferson High School. This Oregon group, called *Northwest Afrikan American Ballet*, deemed “one of Portland’s cultural treasures,” is still going strong (Charmaine Warren. *New York Amsterdam News*. New York, NY: Feb. 13, 1993, Vol. 84, Iss. 7, pg. 30).

Of all the professional and semi-professional *djembé*-based ensembles listed on the internet, only three include members who are not African American. Aside from their Guinean leaders (Sidiki Sylla and Ismaël Bangoura), the members in *Jeh Kulu*, a semi-professional ensemble based in Vermont, come from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds. Similarly, *Like Water Drum and Dance Works* of Chelsea, Michigan, has no African or African American members. *Magbana Drum and Dance* in New York City has only one member who is not African American, the group's founder and one of its lead *djembé* players, Michael Markus. Markus, a university trained professional percussionist, had a great deal of difficulty breaking into the largely African American drum and dance scene in New York City. Due to the respect he has earned from his teacher M'Bemba Bangoura, Markus eventually managed to gain the acceptance of his peers. As interest in the ballet-genre continues to grow in communities outside of New York, the number of drum and dance ensembles open to members of all racial and ethnic backgrounds is sure to grow as well.

The intersection of gender and race in African American *djembé* and dance ensembles

Unlike their Euro-American counterparts, African American women were conspicuously absent from *djembé* and *dunun* classes of Keïta, Konaté and Bangoura whether they were held within or outside of an African American community center. According to Sunkett, who has done extensive research in the African American *djembé* and dance community, some teachers explained the gender division of male drummers and female dancers²³ as a social choice, where male drummers join a class or ensemble to meet single, available women in their community (Sunkett 1992: 96). This social impulse

²³ Sunkett notes that whether the dance instructor was male or female there were generally more female than male students in the class. "On some occasions, there were no male dancers participating at all" (Sunkett 1992: 101).

has the effect of reversing the African aesthetic balance between dancers and drummers.

Sunkett explains that:

The perception of male dominated African societies, and the image of a male as lead drummer having control over the dance and dancers, represents a very popular concept among African Americans. Often this scenario is followed in the American ensemble. There is minimal awareness or understanding of female directed or matriarchal societies in Africa. In the relationship between lead drummer and lead dancer, there must be a shared control to a certain degree in order to maintain effective presentation of the music and dance. (Sunkett 1992: 96-97)

Of the drummers that Sunkett interviewed, many commented that “the most satisfying characteristic of the *djembe* is the act of wearing the drum when playing” (ibid. 98).

Given that the *djembe* is carried between the drummers’ legs, Sunkett believes that there are “psycho-sexual implications” to the male drummers’ responses. The final explanation given by Sunkett is that due to their perception of African culture as primitive, many people still look to African culture for traditional male and female role models. “To this end many males in the United States, regardless of ethnic background, have embraced drumming and African culture as symbolic of the traditional male” (ibid.: 99). I would agree with Sunkett that this is not a trait limited to the African American community.

Like Water Dance Works, a Michigan based, Euro-American drum and dance ensemble modeled after the Guinea ballets, was composed of exclusively male drummers and female dancers. So it would seem that drum ensembles engaged as part of a dance company or dance class tend to be exclusively male. Why then, were there so many Euro-American women but no African American women present in drum classes I attended which did not include dance?

It is possible that African American women show so little interest in drumming because they are looking to traditional African cultures for their role models. In West

Africa, women play very few instruments and the ones that they do play are usually employed in the context of female secret societies. While international ballet companies coming out of West Africa have begun to involve female dancers in playing the *dunun*, these women play the drum as part of their role as dancers and not as part of the accompanying drum ensemble (author's observations in Guinea: 2006, 2007). In these cases the *dunun* is used by the dancers as a prop. The drumming is choreographed into the dance and thus becomes integrated into the visual spectacle, contributing very little to the actual musical texture. The only performance by an African group where I have seen women playing the *djembe* was the all-female drum and dance ensemble from Guinea called *Les Amazones*.²⁴ This ensemble, established in 1995, is primarily made up of female police officers from Guinea's capital city, Conakry. Due to the fact that it is an all-female ensemble, instrumental parts usually reserved for male musicians (including: *djembe*, *balafon*, *kora*, and *dununs*) are played by women. These women are not necessarily breaking with tradition because they are playing instruments in an all-female context which could be likened to the use of female musicians in secret societies or in the context of female initiation ceremonies which are barred to men.

There is one New York based ensemble similar to *Les Amazones* led by *djembe* drummer and dancer Edwina Lee Tyler called *A Piece of the World*. Beginning her studies of African percussion with Olatunji and Camara in the 1970s, Tyler was among the first American women to take up the *djembe*. According to a concert revue in the New York Times:

²⁴ Sunkett notes that, "The notion that women should not play drums has been challenged. There are examples from the contemporary Mande culture that show women drumming. One of Dakar's revered drummers, Doudou Ndiaye Rose [who formed an ensemble using all the members of his extended family including the women] has shown this to the world. Other instances of females drumming have been observed in Sénégal with those females born into drumming families" (Sunkett 1992: 135).

Edwina Lee Tyler and a Piece of the World were theatrical and a bit didactic. Like *Women of the Calabash* [with whom they shared the bill], Miss Tyler's quintet sang and played calabashes and cowbell, and on one calypso-inflected tune they used a steel drum. Their specialty, however, was extended drum pieces, with dramatic crescendos and fade outs, that often features dancing by Miss Tyler, and Roberta Stokes and exhortations by Miss Tyler. (Jon Pareles for the NYT: April 6, 1984)

While this ensemble is the focus of Tyler's work, she has also drummed for *Urban Bush Women*, *Lady Gourd Sangoma*, *Merian Soto*, *Ancestral Messengers*, and *Prowess Dance Arts Collective*. All of these groups are also entirely female. In addition, she played *djembé* in the Broadway theatrical production of "Death and the King's Horsemen" which ran from February 13th through March 29th at the Vivian Beaumont Theatre in 1987. What is curious about her role in this production is that the play is set in Nigeria in 1944 but the *djembé* is not at all native to that area. Her *djembé* playing, which has been described by many as extremely dramatic, was used in this production, not as an authentic cultural representation of Nigeria, but for theatrical effect. In addition to these projects, Tyler teaches extensively and also performs as a soloist.

Among the younger generation of African American women who play *djembé*, most were inspired by Tyler while they received the bulk of their training from male master drummers. Nurudafina Pili Abena who has played African drums for thirty years, initially studied African drumming with Olatunji as a child. She has since added the *djembé* to her list of drumming interests studying primarily in Senegal. Afia Walking Tree and her all-female drum and dance ensemble, *Jambalaya*, have studied with male artists who have recently come to the United States from Mali and Senegal. Tonya 'Onye' Lyles, a *djembé* player based in Austin Texas, lists Tyler and Olatunji as her teachers along with: Alseny Sylla, Karuna Warren, Mohamed Camara, M'Bemba

Bangoura, Ibrahim Diakate, Mouminatou Camara, Abdoulaye Diakate, and Moussa Traore (Born to Drum faculty webpage: 2009). There seem to be few road blocks for female African American drummers to study the *djembe*, but they have yet to be included as percussionists within male ensembles. Perhaps the desire to participate fully in their community arts organizations along with the desire to perform is what steers the majority of African American women to choose dance over drumming. According to Sunkett:

Women who are attracted to the drum are usually attracted to the sound. It is rare that females pursue their curiosity for the instrument as performers. Many times those females who do explore this interest decide against playing the *djembe* because of the growth of calluses that can be expected. Usually, those women interested in drumming select the *dunun* which is played with a stick rather than the bare hands. (Sunkett 1992: 120)

I would add to Sunkett's conclusions that most women do not feel comfortable taking a leadership role within a mixed percussion ensemble. If a woman chooses to play the *djembe* she cannot avoid the possibility of that leadership role. The women I have listed here as professional *djembe* players, while they represent the exception in their pursuit of professional careers, still find themselves working outside the mainstream of male dominated ensembles.

One option for female professional *djembe* players is to apply their skills to musical genres outside of African dance ensembles. In fact, one of the most established *djembe* players started out as a jazz percussionist playing conga in several mixed percussion ensembles. Ubaka Hill was introduced to the *djembe* through one of Tyler's performances. Hill began her career at the age of seventeen when she met "a social activist-artist musician, got together an' jammed with him and other musicians" (Hill Interview: 2004). She describes *The Spirit of Life* ensemble which she joined in 1975, as being composed of all men who were much older than she was at that time. Hill, who

played congas at this point in her career, switched her attention to the *djembe* after she heard Tyler perform.

So it took five years for me to see a woman playing drums. And a woman playing like she knew what she was doing. And Edwina was the one in that crowd. . . I took a couple of workshops with her, teaching in Brooklyn at the time. And when I moved back to Brooklyn from Detroit I took a few classes but she has always been an inspiration as a female, an image of a woman drumming. (Ubaka Hill: interviewed in August, 2004)

Unlike Tyler, Hill uses the *djembe* in its traditional ensemble with the *dununs* believing that she needs to honor the West African context of the music she has inherited. Hill describes herself as someone “who came into drumming as a social activist and not as a musician” and her application for drumming is no less political today than it was when she became a percussionist in the 1970s (Hill interview: August, 2004). At that time her focus was African American civil rights, whereas today she uses the *djembe* primarily to empower women to continue the struggles initiated by the feminist movement. To this end she makes most of her living conducting retreats and workshops for women across the country. The majority of her students in these contexts are Euro-American which makes her the target of criticism for some African American women.

Both Tyler and Hill have conducted week-long workshops at the Michigan Women's Music Festival even though their politics about this event are quite polarized. Until the summer of 1995, all traditional African drumming at the festival was limited to “women of color.” The lesbian-separatist politics that founded the ‘festival’ also dictated that “safe spaces” should be created for women with specific physical, social, or cultural needs. The “women of color” tent was therefore reserved for women belonging to visible minorities. Unfortunately, these protectionist policies were impossible to enforce as African American women gathered on the land to perform their own sacred ceremonies

and ritual drumming circles outside of the physical space of the “women of color” tent. Aggravated by the non-African American women who would often come and join these circles un-invited, a policy was adopted whereby these drumming events were recognized as week-long workshops open to women of color only (Morris 1999: 161-164). Tyler encouraged these policies as a means of protecting the cultural space of African American women who were a minority population at this largely Euro-American women's festival. Conversely, Hill believed that drumming should be accessible to all women.

Hill remembers coming to her first Michigan Women's Music festival with an agenda to introduce her music to as many women as possible so that she could come and teach the following year. She explains the process in the following way:

So the first, the women of color workshop performance [in 1994], was on the August Night Café stage. And the women were spilling over the edges, the stage wasn't big enough. And the second workshop [in 1995] that Lisa hired me to do was an intensive and it was for all women. And that was the first time here that I had taught a workshop for all women. And I really liked that, because I want us all - I don't like being exclusive - and I'm still an activist, so my activist mind wants to empower all women and it happens to be through the portal of the drum. So I'm not necessarily trying to get everybody to be a musician - in the mean time, yeah, I would like you to play your drum well and to make music – but it is a portal to self and the empowerment of self. (Hill Interview: August 2004)

It was at the request of festival organizer, Lisa Vogel, that Hill inaugurated the first *Drumsong Orchestra* in 1995. Since her first experiences at the Michigan festival, Hill has grown in her conviction that women should work together as a unified movement if positive change is going to happen.²⁵ While the *Drumsong Orchestra* is open to all

²⁵ Hill stated in an interview, “And I really feel that the strength of our survival is gonna be our unity as women. And then we do our exclusive, deeper healing work because as women of color, the oppression we experience from there, as Jewish women as . . . So my desire, my intention, my work, my legacy is to build unity, remind us of the importance of our unified movement and message and coming together. And to say

women at the festival (regardless of race or ethnicity), in the eight years I played with this group (1998-2004), I noticed very few African American women in attendance. One possible explanation for this is the fact that Hill regularly provides workshops for women in the “women of color” tent in addition to the open workshops in the main drumming tent. African American women are therefore free to choose between these two venues according to their personal politics around drumming in a mixed-race environment.

Three Collaborators: three different interpretations African American culture.

Music provides only the most obvious example of how the specific, local and immediate meanings of blackness are actively produced rather than passively inherited. (Gilroy 1993a: 117)

In the 1960s and 1970s, many African American drummers from Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Harlem as well those living along the Eastern seaboard, developed a strong feeling of ownership and cultural pride when it came to playing the *djembé* (Wilson 1992: 65). In his attempt to explain why some African American *djembé* players have stayed away from Keïta's and Konaté's workshops, one drummer from North Carolina stated, “why would I go to a place to play my instrument, my cultural instrument, something that is culturally close to me, with all these folks who represent the adversary” (Interview with drummer N.C. from South Carolina: Guinea 2008). For N.C., the *djembé* is not only symbolic of his African diasporic identity, but also a politically charged instrument of personal and political power for himself and his community. While N.C.'s personal ideology seems to resonate within the Black Nationalist politics of the mid 1960s to late 1970s, his position was not shared by the other drummers I interviewed.

The African American *djembé* students I met during the course of my studies with both

that the strength of our survival, the strength of the planet, from my point of view is based on the strength of women in unity as women” (Hill Interview: August, 2004).

Konaté and Keïta, complicated the notion of a unified African American sub-culture often put forth within academic frameworks, such as this one. In order to come to an understanding of the way in which each of these individuals relate to Guinea's *djembé*, I needed to look more carefully not only at their individual ideological proximity to the political history behind the reception of the *djembé* and *Les Ballets Africains de la République de Guinée* in the United States, but also to the role identity politics play or do not play in their choice of cultural/musical expression.

The collaborators who participated in this project were introduced to me at drum camps and workshops given by either Keïta or Konaté. Only one of these drummers (N.C.) participates in the larger drum and dance scene which began with Camara in New York. The other two drummers (N.Y. and C.A.), study almost exclusively with Keïta and Konaté. I engaged each of these drummers in several conversations about: (a) what initially brought them to the *djembé*; (b) how they perceive their particular relationship to this instrument as African Americans, (c) what is their musical application for the *djembé*, (d) their personal opinions about the lack of African American presence in the workshops and drum camps of Keïta and Konaté. My goal with this type of analysis is to reveal the complex range of personal and group attachments that exist for each collaborator as he engages with the *djembé* culture created by Konaté and Keïta.

The case of N.Y.: the *djembé* as tool for personal creativity.

I met N.Y. at a six-day intensive workshop led by Konaté in Boston in June of 2006. He and I sat next to each other and became quick friends as we both struggled to learn some of the challenging solo passages Konaté was teaching. The class was quite

large, at almost 50 drummers, with more women than men in attendance. As was explained in the beginning of this chapter, N.Y. was the only African American in the workshop that day. N.Y. was a very easy going and good natured player whom Konaté often called upon to play one of the accompanying parts for the recording that was usually made at the end of each class. He was obviously a very accomplished musician but I was unsure if he was working as a drummer professionally. It was not until my second, six-day intensive workshop with Konaté the following year that N.Y. began to tell me more of his story. He was introduced to drumming through his wife but was initially not very interested. While shopping for a drum for his wife's birthday, N.Y. also found an instrument that he eventually bought for himself, a *quinto* (small conga-type of drum). He enjoyed playing around on this drum and took a lesson with his wife's teacher, but nothing inspired him to pursue drumming more seriously. Two crucial turning points were needed before N.Y. would be able to make a personal commitment to drumming. First he was introduced to the *djembe*, and second, he found the right network of teachers from which to learn and draw inspiration.

In 1991, N.Y. began working with his first teacher, Sanga of the Valley, a Trinidadian who had worked as lead drummer for Olatunji's *Drums of Passion* for seventeen years. After attending a workshop, given by Sanga, N.Y. was invited to join his Tuesday night class in the city. In addition to their weekly class, Sanga's students gathered once a month for a drum party at one of the student's homes and it was at one of these parties that N.Y. first encountered the *djembe*. He describes that initial encounter in the following way:

So, I'm beating my hands up on this conga with no technique on this tough cow's skin, and somebody brings this drum called a *djembe* and I

didn't know (at the time) but this drum is so slack, it's deadlier than dead. But, I'm hitting it and my hands . . . it's soft and it's not hurting my hands and I'm like, "This is great. I can play this all day. I gotta get one of these!" (N.Y. Interview: Boston, 2007)

N.Y. was still thinking about all of this when he encountered the *djembé* again while he and his wife were on holiday in Maine where they attended an African Drum and Dance Performance at a local YMCA. The dramatic interaction between the *djembé* players and the dancers impressed N.Y. and his wife so much that they went back stage after the show to tell members of the ensemble how much he enjoyed the performance. The drummers in the ensemble responded by inviting N.Y. to their open-house jam session the following Tuesday. A little un-nerved by the invitation, N.Y. responded by saying, "we play congas and we don't play very well." To which the drummers replied, "we've got plenty of drums, don't worry about it, just come on by" (N.Y. Interview: Boston 2007). At the jam session, N.Y. discovered that the drummer hosting the session was also a *djembé* builder. Before leaving Maine, N.Y. went back to the builder's house and bought one of the *djembés*.²⁶

In 1992, a new school of African drum and dance, called *Fareta*, opened up on Broadway Ave in New York City. Though it was founded by Guinean drummers, N.Y. described this school as "Africa in the basement of a building." The school included drum classes in *djembé*, and *sabar* as well as classes in Brazilian, Congolese, Senegalese and Guinean dance styles. While N.Y. had learned a little about many different drumming styles from Afro-Cuban and Brazilian to Ghanaian and Guinean from his first

²⁶ N.Y. told the story in the following way, "So now I'm dreaming about this drum. So when I get up I go, 'if I get this drum – which is four hundred dollars - it's time to get serious.' I gotta take lessons, I gotta find Sanga again, I gotta take weekly lessons, bla, bla, bla. So I said, "that's it, I'm getting the drum and here I am, fourteen years later!" (N.Y. Interview: Boston 2007)

teacher, Sanga, his arrival at *Fareta* in mid-1992 launched him into an intensive study of Guinean *djembe* music with Abdoulaye (Aphesa) Bangoura and later with M'Bemba Bangoura. N.Y. describes how the teachers had not yet adapted their teaching style to an American audience:

Let's say we were going to play *Djansa*, they would say give you one part to play and you would play that for 45 minutes. And then they would play something else and you would play it again. And then they'd say, "O.K. see you next class." So you only learn one part. You come back the next week and you learn the next part. Or maybe you'll learn another part from something else. But when they first started teaching they didn't teach whole rhythms, they would teach you a piece of it. (N.Y. Interview: Boston 2007)

There was not only the frustration of learning fragments of pieces, but also the strictness of the teaching that made studying with these Guinean teachers a challenge. N.Y. elaborates:

But then they started changing the way that they taught and the mindset of the way they taught because, you know, most of them came out of the ballet and the way they teach you in the ballet is they teach something and then you play it back and the teacher says, "no that's wrong" and so you play it again, and they yell at you and they beat you with sticks and . . .

Vera: It is pretty rough in the ballet.

N.Y.: Yeah, so they're getting yelled at and then they come here and they say, "why can't you do that" and they yell at their students here. No, you're not going to last. People are not going to come to be abused. First of all, change your attitude. Second of all, give us something of a little more of substance so we don't walk out with only one part. You can't do anything with that! (N.Y. Interview: Boston 2007)

N.Y. persevered in spite of the awkwardness of his teachers who had arrived in the United States only months before joining *Fareta's* teaching staff. While many students might have looked for different teachers, the teaching styles of M'Bemba and Aphesa were not what initially drove N.Y. to study with Keita and Konaté instead.

Brooklyn was full of *djembé* players in the early 1990s and N.Y. would often go and play with these men, many of whom were friends of Sanga. However, N.Y. found their approach to the *djembé* to be quite out-of-sync with his own. While he played to have fun, many of the other players present at these sessions took a much more serious attitude. N.Y. draws the following picture of his experience of the New York scene:

And I would get there and we're playing and I'm thinking wow isn't this great, we're having such a good time. Stone faces. This is serious. This was like, we're talking about something that was almost religion. You don't smile, you just hold the time. This is not fun. That was like the message – like this is work – we are here to provide a service for the dancers and how dare you have fun. So I'm playing and I'm looking at them with their stone faces and I'm like, "this sucks!" Is this really how it works? These guys could really play and I thought that I have got to respect their playing even if I don't respect them. (N.Y. Interview: Boston 2007)

The serious attitude among drummers N.Y. encountered in this session, is an example of the legacy of the ritual approach followed by drummers in *International Afrikan American Ballet*. This approach was reinforced by Wilson in his 1992 publication, *The Drummer's Path: Moving the Spirit with Ritual and Traditional Drumming*.

Music is sacred. It is an integral part of the Way of Life of many traditional cultured around the world; it is the invocation of vital energies that ensure a community's survival . . . Artists and musicians are manipulating power in the form of mood altering sonics and information coded in iconic form . . . therefore 'performing' becomes much more than just having fun, more than a night's gig for earning daily bread – there is a consciousness, a spiritual and social awareness that must be adhered to. (Wilson 1992: xiii-xiv)

The drummers in the session described by N.Y. understood their participation in the ensemble as a serious, spiritual endeavor. For drummers too young to remember the powerful performances of the *International Afrikan American Ballet*, Wilson's book (which is considered the "drummer's bible" by many drummers in New York) became the

means to pass on this powerful legacy to the next generation of *djembe* players. It was not until N.Y. had the opportunity of see a screening of Mamady Keïta's film, *Djembéfola*, that he saw someone who, like himself, found joy in playing the *djembe*. N.Y. describes his reaction to the movie in this way, "Mamady Keïta is having a ball playing. I'm like, 'I want to be like him!' He can play and he's having fun" (ibid.). In September of 1995 Keïta came to New York for a performance and workshops. N.Y. was so excited that he bought tickets not only for himself, but also twenty of his friends.

The day after the performance, workshops were given by Keïta at *Fareta*, the drum and dance studio which was founded by a couple of Keïta's Guinean apprentices. The workshop had not filled up so N.Y. was able to register at the door. While N.Y. was surprised by this, he was even more disheartened by the fact that Keïta did not come back to New York the following year. In fact, after 1995 Keïta did not come to New York again for several years. As a result, N.Y. started driving to Washington, D.C. for these yearly workshops. Below is a portion of our conversation about this issue:

Vera: It's wild that he didn't stop in New York because it's such a huge community.

N.Y.: Well you see he came to New York one other time since (after) 1995. And the workshop filled, at least there were a sufficient number of people there but it wasn't like the number of people that should have been there. That room should have been standing room only and it wasn't. It's like, come on?!?

Vera: Did the center not advertize adequately?

N.Y.: No, no, no. People knew he was there they just didn't want to come.

Vera: That's strange because Mamady is like a premium player.

N.Y.: Yeah it is strange. I was talking to Mamady in D.C. and he asked where I was from and I told him I was from New York. He goes, "Ah, New York. A lotta, lotta master drummers in New York." You know the

ego thing is just like . . . the thing about the ego is that it just stops you learning. Once you get to the point where you don't think that you need to look at anything else, you don't learn anything. You're done. Even with *djembé*, we're doing Guinean *djembé*, but then there's Ivory Coast *djembé*, and there's Malian *djembé*, and each of those has their own different world.

Vera: So his [Mamady's] explanation was that there were just too many proud, master drummers in New York and they just feel like they're above?

N.Y.: Yeah, that was part of it. His feeling was about this whole thing about "master drummers" and how a lot of these master drummers are self proclaimed and so there is a lot of ego. So when he comes to New York it's like he gets a turn out but it's not like it should be. So now he doesn't really go to New York. Now he looks at it like New York will take care of itself. (N.Y. Coffee Shop Conversation: Boston 2007)

The reason it is so surprising that these New York drummers refused to come to Keïta's workshops is that Keïta was the teacher of their instructors. Abdoulaye Bangoura and M'Bemba Bangoura learned everything they know from Keïta. It is common practice to honor elders in the drumming community, yet Keïta was not given the reception that he should expect as the very first *djembé* soloist for *Ballet D'Joliba*. The lack of enthusiasm with which Keïta was greeted on his first solo trip to New York is a cultural anomaly. There must have been other issues which made the drummers break with protocol this way.

As our conversation progressed some of the issues behind the small African American presence in Keïta and Konaté's classes surfaced, but there were still some missing pieces. We began to explore this topic by orienting around the event that took place in Konaté's Boston workshop in 2006:

Vera: One question I wanted to ask you, because last year Famoudou made a statement that really kind of threw me back. What he said, he starts on and he says I don't have any trouble with Africans, I have trouble with African Americans. And I think that what he meant by that is people who

are very possessive of this music and so on. Right after he said that he looked at you and he said, “Sorry.” Because you were with us in the class he felt like he didn’t want to offend you in any way. How did you process that comment? How did you interpret that comment?

N.Y.: Well I think he expanded on it a little bit, if memory serves, what his issue was is number one, generally speaking, he doesn’t have very many African Americans in his class. Like in this case he had, one.

Vera: Yeah, and in Chicago there were more but here there was only you; which is kind of wild when you think about it.

N.Y.: Yeah, generally speaking, he doesn’t have many [African American students] and he would like to have more and he doesn’t understand why they don’t come to class. And on the other side of that he gets complaints from African Americans he runs into saying, “Well, we don’t think you should teach white people. And if you want to do a workshop and you want us to come, come to us.” For instance, Mamady came to do the workshop in New York in 1995, a full class in the city, yet, still mostly white people. A couple of African Americans were there but that was it. What I heard is that up in Harlem a bunch of *djembe* players said, “Well we want to take a class from Mamady too but we want him to come up here.” A couple of years later when Mamady does a workshop, he sets it up in Harlem, not exactly in Harlem but it was uptown in the basement of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, it was like a little work studio down there. So now it’s up. [The attendance was] still mostly white people. [Laughter] It’s like O.K. you said you wanted him to come up and instead of just saying “fuck you,” he said, “O.K. I’ll reach, I’ll try and work with you. So now I’m up here – Where are you?” [Laughter]

Vera: Is there such a loyalty to Ladji and everything that he did that there’s . . . ?

N.Y.: No. No. NO, because it’s really not the sort of thing where it’s one thing or the other, either Mamady or Ladji. Those two times when Mamady came to New York, whenever we saw Mamady, Ladji was there too. So it’s not like there is any enmity between them they’re fine. That’s Famoudou’s concern that African Americans don’t come to his workshops. And he doesn’t know why. And he’s [Famoudou] like, “I want to come to New York, could you set up some workshops?” And I’m like, “No, because I’ve already seen how it works. It’s going to go in the red; and as much as I’d love to have you come to New York, in the long run it would be cheaper for me to just drive to Boston by myself.”

Vera: So is it just the whole, “We’re master drummers,” thing?

N.Y.: It's ego, and it's racial. Yeah, that's basically it.

Vera: The difference between Famoudou, Mamady and Ladji would be that Famoudou and Mamady started out teaching in Europe and came here later. That would be the one difference. Their classes have always been a very different type of demographic.

N.Y.: Yeah. Yeah.

Vera: So is price one of the issues?

N.Y.: **No.**

Vera: That's wild. No wonder Famoudou is confused – I'm confused!

N.Y.: Yeah. I don't get it. I just don't get it. It's like, "Mamady is in New York, why aren't you here?!" In fact what happened is the first time he came to New York he said, "I'm going to do a beginner class in the morning and an intermediate class in the afternoon." And I went, "Nah, I don't need to go to the beginner class, I'm cool." Boy, was that stupid! After that I said, "No no, next time Mamady comes to give a workshop, you take every class he offers, every one." Because he is going to do something different for one, and if for some reason you think that you're not going to learn anything, boy does that get you in trouble. Right?!? If nothing else you learn how to teach; how to break this music down into bite size pieces that people can digest.

It seems as if N.Y. cannot understand the reasoning behind the absence of African American drummers from these workshops any more than I can, at least not on a personal level. N.Y. does not need his drumming experience to be politicized, he does not care who attends the class, he just wants to have fun learning to play the music being taught.

Although N.Y. had many teachers and classes and jam sessions at his disposal in New York, he began to travel extensively in order to study not only with Keïta but also with Konaté. After four years Keïta stopped coming to D.C. and N.Y. needed to make another plan:

By this time I owned the video *Djembéfolá* and I'd watched it a geillion times, and I saw this guy, Famoudou Konaté. I'm like, "wow, it would be really cool to play with him especially since Mamady says in the video,

“his [Famoudou’s] sound is so clean and so pure I wondered if I could ever play like him.” And so I’m thinking, that would be cool to play with Famoudou because he seems like just good energy. I hear that this guy Famoudou Konaté is going to be in Portland Maine. I’m like, “Famoudou’s here?!?” I’m going to go and get into my car and I’m going to drive to Portland, Maine tonight.

At the time of Konaté’s workshop, N.Y. was committed to a three-day gig with his band but he was so excited by the prospect of studying with Konaté that he made the six-hour drive to Portland right after the gig so that he could attend classes on the last day of the workshop. N.Y. hit it off with Konaté right away and gained the nick-name, “New York *Kenkeni*,” because he played that instrument for most of the workshop. The following year N.Y. travelled to Chicago and Boston for five and six-day intensive workshops with Konaté. He has continued to attend at least one or two yearly workshops with Konaté in Chicago, Boston, or Portland, Maine.

N.Y. worked as an illustrator for children's books and magazines but was retired at the time of our second meeting. In his retirement he decided to take his drumming hobby and make it his second career. He was already engaged in playing a number of parties, dance classes, as well as teaching his own drumming classes on the side. But a downturn in the illustration market coincided with an increase in demand for party music so the choice to retire from illustrating seemed obvious for N.Y. The most intriguing thing about N.Y.’s dance band is the way he mixes traditional Guinean drum rhythms with popular music:

N.Y.: What I do is I play with entertainment companies that do weddings, corporate parties and barmitzvas, and other private parties. The set up is this: there’s a DJ who plays taped music, there’s a MC, a couple of dancers, saxophone and percussion. So I am playing along with the sax guy and taped music. My set up is that I have a set of *dununs*, a set of congas which I play, I’m not a conga player but I play congas like a *djembé* player, and I have my *djembé* which I strap on and go out onto the

dance floor and play with the people. In front of the *dununs* instead of a single bell there is a rack with woodblocks and bells and tambourines and cymbals. And I play along with the recorded music and I'm playing usually traditional stuff, sometimes I'll just mimic what the music is doing, so I'll be playing *Djansa* or *Kuku*, *Sunun*, *Morybayasa*, whatever will fit with the music. So people go, "that's cool, what are you doing?" And I'll say, "This is *Djansa* this is from Mali." And people will kind of glaze over and go, "Huh? You're not just banging away?" And I go, "I am a trained professional." [Lots of laughter]

Vera: I love it when people ask you about the rhythms and you explain the whole cultural history and their response is kind of, "That's a little more than I wanted to know." So you fit these rhythms in with . . . ?

N.Y.: With pop music. Let's get loud and shout and . . . Actually, with the song "Shout" "you make me wanna shout" for that part I just play along with the music but where it slows down with "I want you to know . . ." *Yankadi* goes right with that. Then when it gets faster I go back to just playing along with the rhythm. I just do a little *Yankadi* ride on the cymbal, and it goes right with it. (N.Y. Interview: Boston, 2007)

N.Y. has found a creative way to make a living with traditional Guinean *djembé* music outside of an African American ensemble. His distaste for the New York drumming and dance scene has led him down a different path, away from the politically and racially loaded cultural expression of Africa that permeates many African American dance studios and cultural centers.

Although N.Y. never talked about his participation in *djembé* music as a cultural expression of his African heritage, the ease of access he had to classes, jam sessions, and ensembles had a great deal to do with the fact that he is an African American male. The examples of Sanga and the *djembé* players in Maine show that he did not even have to inquire about a class or jam session before being invited to attend. In addition, his easy rapport with both Konaté and Keïta also has something to do with the fact that he is considered an insider by both *djembéfolas*. Rather than pursuing *djembé* as part of a particular musical genre, N.Y. chooses to incorporate his knowledge of the music and the

culture into the context of a multi-cultural dance-band. These combined examples demonstrate that N.Y. has a secure and uncomplicated relationship with his African heritage. In this way, he does not feel protective or possessive about the *djembé*. As a result, he has no insecurity about playing in an ensemble or class attended by non-African Americans.

The Case of N.C.: the *djembé* as a Black cultural inheritance

At the opposite end of the spectrum from N.Y. is N.C., who also started playing the *djembé* in the early 1990s, but in a completely different context. Growing up in a strong African American community in Connecticut, N.C.'s first exposure to drums was at his Baptist church. N.C. is very conscious of his African roots and this comes out in the way he describes his initial attraction to the *djembé*:

N.C.: I don't know. I mean it was just something about it was like, "that is cool. I like that. There was something about it that just spoke to me: the sound of it, the look of it, probably something on a more subconscious level. Because, for many . . . I can speak for drummers that I know, it is very hard for me to think of any who it doesn't apply to . . . the playing of African drums, the involvement in African culture, as an American born African, is directly connected to our history of being in America, the legacy of enslavement, and just a reaching back for the aspects of the culture and the tradition that we know inherently are ours whether it was specifically *djembé* and Malinké or maybe it might have been, you know, umm, the *kpanlogo* in Ghana, or it could have been the various instruments of the Yórùba, Angola or, you know, those areas, we know that our ancestry and the ancestry of Africans in the Americas, North American, South America, Central America, points directly back to West Africa. So there is that sub-conscious speaking to us for drumming. (N.C. Interview: Guinea 2008)

The tone for the entire interview was set with these initial comments by N.C.. I was speaking with him while in Guinea at a drum camp led by Rainer Dörrer, a German student of Konaté, and N.C. had great deal of material to vent during the interview. His frustration with the low level of students and the lack of respect these European students

were showing Konaté created some friction between N.C. and the other students during the camp. During free time between classes, N.C. did not socialize with the other students, choosing instead to spend all of his time away from the compound with our African hosts and Konaté's supporting musicians. N.C. stated on a number of occasions that this trip was somewhat of a home coming for him; so it was understandable that he did not want to spend his time with a bunch of German, Euro-American, and Asian tourists.

After a brief discussion of drumming pedagogy, I asked N.C. why there were so few African Americans who were students of Keïta and Konaté. His response revealed a strong personal investment in the debate surrounding this issue. According to N.C., there are two issues which get played out when African Americans choose not to attend classes held by Konaté and Keïta:

N.C.: This is an ongoing topic in circles of drummers that I go with. I guess it's good to see the topic coming up among other people, Caucasians in particular. One aspect of it is that . . . The first part of what I would call the answer is you have a situation where to a good extent the system that we called slavery very much only ended on paper. The effects of it still abound in many, many aspects in America. One of those ways is the very subtle yet powerful way that Western media, education, religion, the various aspects of that system continue to separate, continue to put out messages and to prevent African Americans seeing themselves and identifying themselves with Africa. Unequivocally, you know, not as hyphenated Africans but as Africans period. The only thing that separates us is the water. One of the things that hit me hard the first time I came to Conakry, came to Africa, was seeing how much alike we really are. You hear about it but to see it, be confronted with it, and see that the only thing different between these folks and me is the language that we speak. I see so many of my relatives, I mean, the spitting image, you know, how they act, how we act, how we respond in situations, it's the same. How we look, we think that we are in the west for 400 years and we somehow look different [but] we look the exact same, the different shades of us, exactly. But, because most African Americans are in public education, attend standardized Christian Churches, pay attention to T.V. and media, and don't take an active part in throwing off their mental ignorance then is

stays and perpetuates itself in very subtle, yet powerful, ways in keeping us from seeing ourselves as African and identifying in very living ways with African aesthetic things, drumming just being one small part of it. And so, depending upon the community, the drumming community could be very, very strong as it usually is in large metropolitan areas, or it could be very, very small (i.e./ the bible belt). It is in pockets where it is strong because you have a few individuals who are there and who keep it going. Whereas you can go not very far from there and people respond by saying, “What is that thing called? Is that a bongo? There is no knowledge of it because it is not something that is propagated. (N.C. Interview: Guinea 2008)

For N.C., lack of interest in African culture stems from what he perceives as an inherent racism present not only in American media but education and religion as well. This is a conspiracy theory that is difficult to argue with especially when N.C. speaks about it so passionately. For N.C., empowerment can only be found in claiming his African heritage. According to N.C.’s interpretation, the lack of interest in African culture, as evidenced by the low African American attendance in Konaté and Keïta’s classes, is symptomatic of a social and political ailment within the African American community brought on by racism.

The second reason that N.C. gives for the absence of African American drummers from Keïta and Konaté’s workshops is also based upon a strong identification with African culture as part of the heritage of African Americans:

The second part of it is that many folks just aren’t going to go to a place to play African drums with all of these white folks there. Some drummers are like, why? What am I going to go there for? Why would I want to go to a place where the appearance is that the person is catering to the Caucasian. Not saying that they are. But it is just in the context of, you know, going back to the first thing: understanding that many African Americans come to drum, come to the *djembe* from a heightened consciousness and understanding of their African culture, and the culture aspect of it, the political side of that, how all that plays in with race in America, you understand this, you know. Now you take that from the point of view of here I am coming from this mental point of view then I go to a place to play my instrument, play my cultural instrument, something that is

culturally close to me, with all these folks who represent the adversary. While we may be friendly on some basis but the system of race in America is still very much alive. I am assuming you know that this is very much the knowledge that we are looking at it from. You know, the system of race is very much alive so this thing is close to me and me going there its like, sure this guy's a master but then there are all these (white) folks sitting around – hmmm? You see what I'm saying? And I can't say that I feel different – but - I go to learn. I go to learn. All the people there aren't bad people, some are, but I am here to learn.

In using a phrase such as “the adversary” to describe the non-African American students present in the class, N.C.'s rhetoric seems to align with the African Nationalist movements of the past. While a comment such as this may seem out of place in the current cultural climate, it is an honest expression of raw emotion and frustration with the disrespect many non-African Americans show for the African heritage of African American drummers.

It is only later in the conversation that N.C. begins to employ a broader perspective using some more concrete examples of behavior by non-African American students that could be interpreted as adversarial or at least disrespectful.

And then you got the cadre of the elder drummers the ones who were here (here meaning in the States) and their drumming beginnings go back to when *djembe* first reached the States. Papa Ladji and that whole group of drummers that he developed and his first students who eventually evolved to be able to teach the next generation so its usually only one or two generations for us from those men to the very root of that drum coming here to the States. At that time, when they were practicing, Caucasians weren't drumming, Caucasians weren't coming to Harlem, going to Brooklyn, the heart of the black community at that time and some parts still now, they weren't comin' up there to study, to play. That may have been going on, on the West coast somewhere but not in New York. And so for them that is how it comes, that is how they've come to it. And so these men, being older than most of the people in the room, they've forgotten more rhythms than those folks have learned, (not in terms of the person teaching, like Mamady or Famoudou). [For them] to have to go into a situation like that . . . they don't have to do it because many of them are established musicians in their own right and have a student body who they go to when the opportunity comes to meet, to play with, to exchange

information with, somebody like a Mamady, Famoudou or M'Bemba, in a cultural setting most times they are there. It goes back to all of that muck of race and politics in the United States which is unfortunate but at the same point in time it's real. So, until some of the bigger issues get resolved, I don't know when its going to kind of look different. (ibid)

Unlike N.Y., who saw the absence of African American drummers from Keïta and Konaté's workshops as a matter of "overblown egos" (p. 279-280), N.C. points out that the elder American drummers in the community should be respected as peers to Konaté, Keïta and Bangoura. It is not that these men are refusing to learn anything new, it is just that they choose to exchange ideas in a more informal manner – as fellow musicians, not as students.

According to N.C., the main issue at stake seems to be the lack of respect *djembe* players coming from outside of the community seem to have for elder African American drummers. During one of Keïta's tours of this region the issue was finally discussed. N.C. described the scene in the following way:

It was a surprise to many of us in 2006 when Mamady came and the issue was put squarely on the table. We were with the person who brought him, after the workshop folks go to the host's house, pardon me I can't think of the name, but in that context where Mamady was there and Caucasians were there and American Africans were there, and the issue got put on the table. It was the first time, at least that I have been a part of, that people really tried to grapple with the situation. Some good issues got put on the table, it got a little tense for a minute but just the fact that a conversation like that happened was good and was quite surprising to all of us. Wow, you know, this is being talked about! And I think just another thing that adds to it is how because of race, from our perspective as African Americans, it seems as though there is very little to no recognition of our contribution to this African art. We made very important contributions to this African art but because of race and how African Americans are viewed culturally and historically, Caucasians seem to be far more comfortable with jumping over the masses [of African Americans] that are already there in their neighborhoods who have been playing for years, many of whom have forgotten more rhythms than they (the Caucasians) will ever know, they (the Caucasians) would much rather jump over them and go across the ocean to Africa to acknowledge that but be totally

unwilling to recognize the founders and the key people in their community who do the same thing. (N.C. Interview in Guinea: 2008)

N.C. goes on to explain that when Caucasians initially started to study the *djembé* they learned from these elder African American drummers. Once more African drummers began touring and teaching, the African American teachers Caucasians had initially been studying with lost their authority as teachers of African culture in the perception of non-African American drum students. While N.C. sees nothing wrong with studying from African master drummers, he feels that there is an injustice with how older African American drummers are now being treated by Caucasians.

I've seen many, many times my teachers and other elders in the community start off, and before any Africans were in the community, the Caucasians were coming to these men to learn and get as much as they can from them. As the *djembé* has now opened up more, it's as though now these same people who were being fed from them, fed from them, fed in terms of teaching and learning, it is as though now they don't even exist. They [the Caucasians] have kind of pushed them aside and now they go to brothers and sisters from the continent. That is a good thing but don't [fail to] recognize the people you started with. Don't not give recognition to them when they guided you in buying your first drum and taught you how to play the thing, and now you've got access to a great source of knowledge coming through the Famoudou's and the Mamadys and all these men and that's great but don't not recognize them. And that, I've seen happen numerous times! It's egregious, it's wrong, it adds a real funky situation to the whole thing. We can only look in our minds and point to the same kind of situation where how the system of race have taught whites to see African Americans as, in the historical term, "three-fifths of people," less worthy, these folks who are the descendents of slaves. All that stuff is still playing into how this situation is playing out. You see what I am saying? (N.C. Interview in Guinea: 2008)

It is this lack of recognition that N.C. feels, "persistently adds tension" between African American drummers and non-African American drummers. Unlike Wilson who saw the tension between non-African American and African American drummers as a matter of

cultural difference, N.C. traces this lack of recognition to racism.²⁷ For N.C., lack of recognition of the African-American contribution to *djembé* drum and dance by drummers outside of the community amounted to a continuation of racial oppression.

The Case of C.A.: the *djembé* as a therapeutic tool.

C.A. is a *djembé* drummer from the West coast who I met at Keïta's Mini-Guinea (10-day intensive drum camp) in Ramona, California in 2007. As an individual who is completing his doctoral work in clinical psychology, C.A. has taken a decidedly therapeutic approach to drumming. C.A. has chosen to bypass any African American or Guinean claims to traditional Malinké *djembé* and *dunun* music in favor of a view that holds this music as a universal representation of the tribal history common to all cultures. It is from this belief/paradigm that C.A. uses the rhythms he learns from Keïta as part of his therapeutic practice.

Starting out as a primarily self-taught drum-kit player in high school, C.A. confessed that it was drumming that helped him through the emotional and psychological turmoil of adolescence. C.A. describes his adolescent drumming experience as “the feeling of being embedded in the rhythm, plus there was something I have to say about the kit about having all of your limbs engaged in making the sounds.” C.A. elaborated

²⁷ Wilson describes his initial impression of a *djembé*-playing man he met at Oberlin: “Adam was familiar with the legendary djembe drum, and he studied percussion in the Conservatory. He had come to Dascomb Hall to find out about the new drummer in town. He even beat my roommate to the place . . . Right then and there, in town only a few hours, with no friends or acquaintances, I began to draw back from Adam. Not because he was white; that was no problem. Kevin, another Euro-American, was my conga practice partner for a while in high school. My problem with Adam wasn't race, it was culture. A culture that up until that very moment, I had not known I possessed. It was nothing conscious, just something absorbed. In my studies to that point I had occasionally been in a drummers' circle, trying to hang, but mainly I stood without that circle, watching and quietly learning. Watching men (and sometimes women) enter that circle and seeing how they did it. Watching them leave - and how they did it. Who spoke, and when. And to whom . . . Adam, running over to find the new drummer in town, showed me that he wasn't acculturated to the protocols of the drum. Therefore, he was potentially dangerous. His act was out of harmony. It demonstrated a yearning beyond discipline, beyond propriety. Dangerous” (Wilson 1992: 65).

that this embodiment of rhythm helped him to connect with his “soul and spirit” helping him to develop his “own kind of connection of feeling” of who he was “on a deep level.” Thus for C.A. drumming has always had an emotional and spiritual purpose. These initial experiences formed the basis for his later use of *djembe* drumming in his psychotherapeutic work with adolescent boys.

C.A. continued to play only sporadically as an adult and was forced to put his drum set into storage when he moved from his home in New York to a condo in Los Angeles. At this point, C.A. turned to his collection of East African drums he (acquired from an earlier trip there) as a means of letting off steam once in a while.

I moved out from New York and I moved into a condo so I couldn't have my drum set there. And I had since gone to East Africa and bought some, not *djembes*, but other drums. I just always had them around and I would just fiddle with them once in awhile. (C.A. Interview: Ramona, California 2007)

The *djembe* started as just another drum in C.A.'s collection, the difference being that it did not come from East Africa but was bought at a Los Angeles music store. It was not until he decided to use the *djembe* for one of his assignments in graduate school that it became an important factor reconnecting C.A. to his adolescent experience of drumming.

C.A. describes the assignment in the following way:

It was a creative assignment that we had to do something that expressed something around the idea of archetypes. And I happened to draw Ganesha, remover of obstacles, so I just decided, “Hey why don't I do some drumming; that would be really cool.” I could just kind of come up with something that expresses that energy of removing obstacles because that's what percussion playing does for me, it gets my energy moving. I lay down that night and I just heard this chant and this rhythm just come to me as I lay there between waking and sleep. I just could not go to sleep. I was awake until 5AM with this thing going through my head. So anyway, I got my *djembe* and I played the rhythm and I sang the chant and it was great. And that was like this reconnection to percussion because I hadn't

really been playing drum set for many years. (C.A. Interview: Ramona, California 2007)

The *djembe* was used in a similar fashion to C.A.'s other hand drums, that is, it was played without any prior training or any particular connection to its actual use in the culture from which it originated. Yet, for C.A. the *djembe* became the catalyst that fueled his desire to learn more about the specific playing techniques and cultural contexts related to African drumming. C.A. explains:

The more I did it [drumming] the more I realized just how good it felt. I started feeling this desire to have a master to really learn how to actually do it because I thought there has got to be some kind of discipline, there has got to be some kind of art form, lineage, tradition or something like that that I could learn from. (C.A. Interview: Ramona, California 2007)

His search for such a teacher led him to Motherland Music, recommended by one of his assistants, where he saw a poster advertizing an upcoming Los Angeles workshop by Mamady Keïta. In order to prepare for the workshop C.A. began studying with an advanced student of Keïta's, Fred Jones, who just happened to be teaching at Motherland at that time. From that point on, C.A. stated that the *djembe* has been "a passion, just a full-on flaming passion."

C.A. has focused his study of African drumming on the specific Malinké traditional repertoire taught by Keïta and Konaté, yet, he feels strongly that drumming itself represents something primal which is universal to all human races. When I asked C.A. how he felt playing music from another culture he answered in the following way:

For me personally it just, and I see it happening for others too, it just takes me back to the sense of my primal self, the earth child who is connected to the earth, connected to the mother, connected to the source. Maybe we were talking about this at lunch or dinner some time but, you know, we all originated from tribal people, black, white, whatever race you're from we were all originally tribal. And this tribal music for me it just resonates in

my bones, that ancient one in my bones just resonates when I play. (C.A. Interview: Ramona, California 2007)

In a similar way, C.A. reflected on his two trips to East Africa not as racial, ethnic, or otherwise cultural homecomings, but as a spiritual connection with an elemental, dynamic place on the earth's surface. He stated that, "I'd never experienced a place where I palpably felt spirit in everything . . . where the mountains, the sky, the animals, the people, the spirit just coming off of everything. I felt like a complete child of the earth, really one with the earth." Similarly, C.A. looks at *djembé* music as a chance to go back to the something primal, or tribal. Stating that, "We're all tribal, we're all primal at our base. Nobody owns any tribal stuff. Indigenous cultures around the world have certain things in common and drumming is one of them" (ibid.).

While C.A. is attempting to live by his belief that the *djembé* cannot be "owned" by those of the African race, he still struggles with issues pertaining to his own racial identity and some of the popular stereotypes that inform that identity. Having just found out from a D.N.A. test that part of his African heritage was from Cameroon, C.A. confided that he would be "really interested" in traveling to this region if he were ever to go back to Africa. C.A. continued by explaining that, although both of his parents are black and have "some slave heritage," there was also some Dutch-Indonesian heritage on his father's side of the family. In fact the D.N.A. test he took showed no African heritage at all on his father's side showing instead a strong German and Dutch biological history. C.A. concluded that "in some ways the idea of race is elusive, it's not as solid as black and white. It's not about skin color. To me we're all mongrels." Ironically, he later admitted that:

With all that being said, it's so funny because I find myself sometimes, if I'm at a workshop where one of Mamady's real good professional white students is jamming on a *dunun* part I'm thinking, "Why's this white guy playing?" [laughter] And you know, I grew up around white people, my background is that I went to a white private school and everything and all of that. So it's second nature to me being with white people but still, once in a while that comes up. "Who's this white guy playing? Who does he think he is?" (C.A. Interview: Ramona, California 2007)

At this point the conversation shifted to a discussion of some of the many great drummers, such as Michael Markus, who possesses no African heritage. C.A. eventually shared his theory that the soul has no race and that when people find a powerful affinity for the music of another culture it is quite possible that they lived within that culture in a previous lifetime. C.A.'s theory seems to conflict with some of his more spontaneous reactions to the white drummers he sees in Keïta's advanced workshops. He is honest that these internal conflicts reveal the lingering racial stereotypes he is trying to overcome.

It is from within this world view or paradigm that C.A. uses rhythms such as *Abondan* (the rhythm for announcing the immanent arrival of royalty), *Sofa* (a rhythm for warriors), as well as various initiation rhythms he has learned from Guinean *djembéfolas* to inspire a sense of self-worth and self-respect in the adolescent boys with which he works. Most of these boys have committed crimes which have left them to serve out sentences as wards of the state. The initiation program which C.A. runs, is modeled after the "bush schools" (which are part of the initiation process) both Keïta and Konaté have spoken about in their workshops. In these "schools" boys are separated from the rest of the village in order to be taught (by men who are elders) the skills and knowledge they will need to contribute to the village as adult men. In addition, each boy is encouraged to find his own unique, "strengths, talents, and gifts" which he will continue to develop and share with the village. C.A. stated that, "these boys are encamped, they are already taken

away from the village, so to speak, so we kind of use that to our advantage” (ibid.). Knowing about the work C.A. does, Keïta was willing to spend extra time with him (during the Mini-Guinea drum camp) in order to teach him *dunun* accompaniments he could later share with “his boys.”

When I broached the question relating to Konaté’s confusion about the lack of participation by African Americans in his workshops, C.A. answered with the detached empathy typical of a psychotherapist. According to C.A.’s analysis:

Well you know you can get black people here in America who look to Africa for a sense of identity because, look at it we’re black people who were brought over from Africa as slaves, there is a legacy of displacement and huge disenfranchisement so where do you get your sense of identity? Being, I don’t know how many generations down the line: I’m not from Africa. I’m an American. I’m as American as any person with pink skin. Yet, I do identify to a certain degree with Africa as well. But I think there is a racial wound, you know. Whenever you get people who are stuck in a militant attitude I think that it’s based in a lot of hurt, fear, and resentment. And so there are a lot of people who just basically hold grudges against white people and are stuck in their old mentality of seeing white people as oppressors. (ibid.)

By stating that he considers himself to be as American as “any person with pink skin,” C.A. obviously does not feel that his race has been a barrier to realizing his full potential in terms of either career or family. Due to his parents’ socio-economic status, C.A. was able to attend the best schools and therefore able realize his dream of becoming a registered psychologist. In fact, C.A. confided that during his high school days in a primarily white private school he was treated so much like the other students that often forgot that he was a “man of color.” C.A. clearly outlines the contrast between the African American community Konaté and Keïta described and his own experience of race:

And of course, if I had this piece of my core identity and [speaking as these people], “These fucking oppressors are going to come and try and take this too? No. that’s not right! Not only that but this African man is going to come and just give this away, this precious, valuable thing, he’s just going to give it away like that?” I can understand how, in their perspective, that’s not right. But it’s too bad that they’re stuck in that limited perspective. And like I say, I look at it more, just going back to the sense of the tribal, the primal, we’re all tribal, we’re all primal at our base. Nobody owns any tribal stuff . . . So how can I as a black American try and claim something, even from another continent, that this is just mine and no one else should have it. Or someone else would say, “Only black Africans and black Americans should have privy to this.” That’s just stupid. Period. [laughter]. (ibid.)

It seems as if C.A. is saying that the continued focus on racial oppression being expressed by this militant group limits them as much as it does the non-African Americans around them. Yet it would be an oversimplification to conclude that the reaction of this group of African Americans to Keïta and Konaté’s racially-mixed classes was fueled purely by their socio-economic reality. The wounds remaining from slavery go deeper than this one issue.

Conclusion

Djembé music represents something different to each of my African American collaborators. For N.Y. it is a fun and creative social outlet; for N.C. it represents his cultural heritage; for C.A. it represents an expression of the primitive and tribal in all of humanity. Each of these viewpoints was informed by what each of my collaborators imagines Africa to be in the context of his life. N.Y. preferred Keïta’s depiction of the “happy African” to the serious nature of some of the *djembé* ensembles he jammed with in New York. N.C. imagined Guinea as his African homeland while at the same time balancing the validity of African American contributions to Guinean *djembé* music and the ballet. For C.A., Africa represented the primitive/tribal ancestry common to all races

on the planet. His outlook is firmly rooted in modernist, evolutionary theories which situate African culture as an example of the lost primitive past of European cultures. Each of these men chose a different version of globally imagined Africa as the prime source of his personal connection to the *djembé*.

To be recognized as African was central only to N.C., yet both N.Y. and C.A. benefited from that recognition when African and African American drummers opened doors for them. Both men were honest about receiving invitations to jam sessions and inside information about the music both of which are rarely shared with Euro-Americans. In addition, C.A. admitted to being surprised when he encountered a Euro-American student who could play the *djembé* with a sense of mastery.

While the central question about why there are so few African American drummers who attend Keïta and Konaté's mixed workshops yielded a different response from each drummer, issues of ownership and authenticity were central to all their responses. N.C. was clear in his conviction that this music belongs to African Americans as part of their cultural heritage. The crux of the matter for him was the failure of non-African American drummers when it came to recognizing the authenticity of music taught by elder African American *djembéfolas*. For many non-African American *djembé* players, authentic African music can only come directly from Africa. Within this position many non-African American drummers and some African American drummers are looking for what they perceive to be an ancient and unchanging cultural product which is pure in contrast to the adaptations and development of the *djembé* in African American culture. Authenticity, in this case, is based on the proximity of the music to perceived point of origin, not on the cultural validity of the group performing it. While C.A. was of

the opinion that no race or ethnic group can claim ownership to music, he still struggled with the inclusion of Euro-Americans as master drummers within this genre.

Taking all of the historical evidence into account it seems clear that the absence of African American drummers in Keïta and Konaté's workshops is not simply an issue of race, even though N.C. has chosen to interpret it that way. Given the fact that Ladj Camara attended Keïta's first workshops in New York, it is safe to assume that there was some support for his arrival within the pre-established scene in New York. What has changed drastically in the last thirty years is the political climate. Young people have many more expressive outlets and opportunities now than they did in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The community ballet ensembles which were initially inspired by *Les Ballets Africains* represent only one of many options vying for the energy of young people. As Sekou Walker, an African American drummer/dancer from the *Northwest African American Ballet* in Portland Oregon, quite plainly stated, "Kids have so many things to choose from now. Boys would rather play hoops these days than dance" (Derrell Sekou Walker: Interview in Guinea, Jan. 13, 2008).

The segregation of Black Nationalist movements was limiting to artists both inside and outside the African American community. Modern dancer/choreographer, Alvin Ailey stated that: "We talk too much of black art when we should be talking about art, just art. Black composers must be free to write rondos and fugues, not only protest songs" (Dunning 1996: 243). From the beginning, Ailey had mixed feelings about the separatist policies of Black Nationalism. He agreed with many of the goals behind the movement but he also wanted to have a more racially integrated company. These same struggles took place when Ubaka Hill challenged the separatist policies of the Womyn's

Music Festival. These types of policies had many positive results, such as providing opportunities for African American women to define their own ritual space. But, in both of these cases, separatist ideologies became more restrictive than useful. As Walker and Ailey observed, all young people deserve the right to choose how they want to express themselves and not be limited by their race or ethnicity. This includes individuals outside of the African American community who desire to learn African drum and dance.

Unlike Europe, the *djembé* scene in the United States has always included dance. While the concert *djembé* approach Konaté and Keïta developed in Europe appeals to individuals who come to drumming from the drum circle tradition started by Olatunji and Grateful Dead percussionist Mickey Hart, it is quite foreign for members and followers of the original *djembé* community established by Camara. As Ryan Edwards of *Like Water Drum and Dance Works* once told me, “this music is designed for dance, there is no reason to play if there is no-one dancing” (Edwards interview: Chelsea, MI, 2007). However, Edwards has also admitted that it took his ensemble a year “to get good enough to have dancers.”²⁸ To play the *djembé* for dancers requires a great deal more commitment and practice than most of Keïta and Konaté’s students are willing to invest. As a result, these two *djembéfolas* can reach a larger market teaching concert *djembé*. On one hand, Keïta and Konaté seem disturbed by the lack of interest coming from the African American community. On the other, it would not necessarily be beneficial for them to prepare ballet-style classes just for this group. Both drummers have managed to be successful, on a global scale, teaching concert *djembé*.

²⁸ This comment came in an article by Edwards in the official news letter of *Like Water Drum and Dance, Calling It Out*, Vol. 2, Issue 10, October, 2008.

While the politically volatile climate in Guinea has not necessarily hampered Keïta and Konaté's international careers, it does explain the absence of African American drummers from the drum camps in Guinea. The reciprocity established by Senegal's first president, Léopold Senghor, with the United States in the mid-1960s has resulted in a long-standing tradition of cultural tourism for African American drummers and dancers. The recent invitations for Americans to attend drum camps run by Keïta and Konaté's European culture brokers (from 1998) have not made an impact on those individuals connected with this more established African American scene. The current political climate in Guinean continues to impede cultural reciprocity with the United States. Due to the recent human rights violations committed by Guinea's current military leadership on September 28th, 2009, Konaté's 2010 drum camp will be held in Bamako, Mali, instead of Conakry, Guinea. Were it not for Guinean artists such as Camara and Bangoura, who settled in the United States, and Konaté and Keïta, who are willing to travel the world as ambassadors of Guinean culture, most Americans would not even consider Guinea as the birthplace of *djembe* music and dance.

Chapter Six

Conclusion: Politics of Cultural Authenticity and the Urbanization of “Tradition”

The micro-politics of transmission: a continuing battle for authenticity

For the purpose of this dissertation, I have looked at the political influences and viewpoints responsible for the representation and transmission of Guinea's *djembé* music. The particular strand of “traditional” *djembé* music promoted by international *djembéfolas* has been brought about as much through the assertion of Malinké ethnic authority over this music as by the process of creating a product fit for the global marketplace. The political heat behind the representation and transmission of Guinea's *djembé* exists within issues of authenticity and ownership, as communities of drummers strive to lay claim to the *djembé*, and in some cases declare their right to teach and perform *djembé* music.

While claims to “authenticity” are negotiated between Guinean artists and their Western culture brokers, these negotiations come with their own set of intercultural complications. One example of such a negotiation was the collaboration between Keïta and Billmeier in their creation of the book, *Mamady Keïta: a Life for the Djembé* (1999). During their collaboration, Billmeier took Keïta's meaning of the word “tradition” as something historically very old and fixed. From her European perspective of notated music, this meant that each of the pieces Keïta taught her had a distinct point of origin in a fixed historical time and place. Billmeier's mission to print a book of the rhythms and

stories told by Keïta was made an attempt to preserve history. When she later (after the book had been published) discovered that many of the rhythms included were Keïta's own arrangements she questioned the validity of the book's original premise. For Keïta, however, there was no conflict with the original premise of the book – for him these versions are “traditional” because they came from him, an authentic *djembéfol*a schooled in the traditions of his culture. Guinean *djembé* and *dunun* music continues to be the overwhelming choice of German students as the most authentic version of *djembé* culture. Although this choice has recently been challenged through the research of ethnomusicologist Rainer Polak, the belief in an ancient, “original” music remains.

In the United States the *djembé* community continues to be divided between those who are interested in concert *djembé* and those who prefer to play in the style of the ballet. Many students outside the African American community have chosen to study with Guinean teachers rather than with the older African American *djembé* teachers within their own localities. Some African American *djembé* players have responded to this perceived disrespect of the profound African American contribution to *djembé*-related arts by boycotting classes held by Guinean teachers where non-African Americans are present. However logical this explanation for the boycott is, it only touches on a small portion of what is actually a very complex dynamic. The profound impact of *Les Ballets Africains* on the African American community from the 1960s onward cannot be underestimated. The African American *djembé* and dance masters who arose from these initial collaborations with West African ballet artists have their own legacy, one which cannot be easily understood by those who were born after the Black Nationalism, and Civil Rights movements. Further work needs to be done to document

the remaining oral history of these powerful and influential African American dancers and drummers.

Cultural misunderstandings are even more evident when it comes to the music itself. As Western students and Guinean *djembéfolas* learn more about each other's musical systems pedagogical recordings and transcriptions reflect more closely the music being negotiated in the intercultural space of transmission. One example of an earlier misunderstanding comes from the transcription of *Dununbé* found in Mark Sunkett's book, *Mandiani Drum and Dance*, 1995 (see fig. 6.1).

Djimbe I
This djimbe accompaniment was adapted by the National Dance Company

Djimbe II
Traditional accompaniment in Guinea for Doundounbé

Djimbe III
Traditional accompaniment

Bell

Kenkenti

Doundoun
This drum will follow the dancer and play a variety of rhythms

Example A.2 *Doundoumba–M’Bemba Bangoura*

[Fig. 6.1: *Dununbé* transcription © Mark Sunkett 1995]

This version is attributed to M’Bemba Bangoura but it differs in crucial ways from any other *Dununbé* rhythms I have studied with either Konaté, Bangoura, or his primary teacher Mamady Keïta. In addition, I have never heard *Dununbé* played the way Sunkett notated it, even on earlier recordings by other Guinean *djembéfolas*. Given that this is one

of the earliest notations of a *Dununbé* rhythm, I attribute these differences to both Bangoura's inexperience as a teacher and Sunkett's lack of experience with this particular type of rhythm from Upper Guinea.¹

Due to the fact that Guinean drummers do not distinguish between weak and strong beats the way Western musicians do – individual drum parts within the *djembe* ensemble are taught as if each one starts in direct reference to the down-beat of the bar. From Sunkett's transcription it is clear that he notated each part exactly the way that Bangoura would have presented it (Sunkett 1995: 51). When compared to Thomas Ott's transcription of Keïta and Konaté's recording of *Dununbé* on their *Hamanah* CD (1993), Sunkett's transcription is missing the “*sangban 1*” part which distinguishes *Dununbé* from other rhythms within the *dununba* family (see fig. 6.2). More importantly, when the parts combine to complete the *Dununbé* arrangement they line up much differently from both Ott's (1998) and Billmeier's notations (Keïta/Billmeier 1999: 40) (fig. 6.3). When placed in the context of their relation to the ensemble, the *kenkeni* and *dununba* parts consistently take place off the beat in all *Dununbé*-type rhythms (figs. 6.2 and 6.3).

¹ Sunkett did all of his fieldwork and study either in the United States or Senegal. The *Dununba* originates from the from Upper Guinean region of Hamana and would thus be outside of his area of study.

NB 1

The image shows a musical score for Dununbé, a traditional West African drum ensemble. The score is written for five instruments: Djembé, Kenkeni, Sangban 2, Sangban 1, and Dununba. The time signature is 12/8. The score is divided into two main sections: 'Grundpattern' and 'échauffement'. The Djembé part starts with an 'Anfangs-Signal' and is marked 'Siap Tom ab 2:10 (2. Teil)'. The Kenkeni part is marked 'Siap Tom ab 2:10 (2. Teil)'. The Sangban 2 part is marked 'Siap Tom ab 2:10 (2. Teil)'. The Sangban 1 part is marked 'Siap Tom ab 2:10 (2. Teil)' and includes a note 'gedämpfter Schlag (Stackspitze auf Fell)'. The Dununba part is marked 'Siap Tom ab 2:10 (2. Teil)' and includes a note 'Glocke Fell'. The score is divided into a 'Grundpattern' section and an 'échauffement' section.

[Fig.6.2: Transcription of *Dununbé* (Hamanah Keïta & Konaté, 1993) © Ott 1998.]

When Ott included this transcription in his article “Rhythmische Vexierspiele: Dununbé – der ‘Tanz der starken Männer’ bei den Malinké in Guinea,” *Musik und Unterricht*, (50), 1998, he was using it to demonstrate the difficulty Western students have with a triple rhythmic organization which sits consistently on the off-beat. He included the *échauffement* (which is all on the off-beat) to emphasize this point (fig. 6.2). To help the Western-trained musician place the up-beat parts, Ott includes a transcription of five of the *sangban* variations on the *Hamanah* recording (fig. 6.2a). The *sangban* plays on the first beat of every twelve-pulse variation phrase. Ott suggests that drum students use this knowledge to orient themselves within the rhythm. Bangoura’s omission of the *sangban*

part from the version he taught Sunkett could explain why Sunkett heard the *kenkeni* and *dununba* parts as emphasizing the down-beat. The *kenkeni* and *dununba* do reinforce each other and could easily be heard as down-beat parts by Western musicians.

Sangban 1 - Varianten

Variante 1
1:14

Variante 2
1:14

Variante 3
1:30

Variante 4
1:45

Variante 5
1:51

Variante 6
2:00

échauffement →

N 92

[Fig. 6.2a: *Sangban* variations for *Dununbé*, from *Hamanah* (1993)© Ott, 1998]

Signal | x x x x x x x x x x x x |

Djembé 1 ||: x x x x x x x x x x x x :||

Djembé 2 ||: x x x x x x x x x x x x :||

Bell Kenkeni { ||: * * * * * * * * * * * * :||

Bell Sangban { ||: * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * :||

Bell Dununba { ||: * * * * * * * * * * * * :||

[Fig. 6.3: *Dununbé* © Billmeier and Keïta 1999]

When Billmeier notated the version included in her book, she had been studying with Keïta for well over ten years. During that time both Keïta and Billmeier had innumerable opportunities to learn about each other's musical systems. When I studied a *Dununbé* rhythm with Bangoura in 2007, he had mastered the art of translation of this music into a Western system of understanding. When he taught the *kenkeni* and *dununba* parts, he had a local Guinean drummers demonstrate them in context with the first *djembe* accompaniment (which is on the down-beat) in order to help the class hear their off-beat nature. In addition, I have had the opportunity of studying many *Dununbé* rhythms with Konaté, who originates from the region of Hamanah. As a result, my notation of the rhythm as it was taught by Bangoura in 2007 closely resembles the *Dununbé* examples notated by Ott and Billmeier.² While notation is often given authority as a type of musical *Urtext* by Western amateur drummers, in this case, its true value lies as a record of cross-cultural negotiations in musical understanding.

Global influences on the urbanization of Guinea's *djembe*

While the resurgence of interest in ethnic cultural identity and expression is taking place in both urban and less isolated rural areas in Guinea, this interest largely takes place on the level of folkloric performance, not as a reconstitution of ritual practice. The most powerful mitigating factor in this resurgence is the growing market for “traditional” African music in Europe, America, and Asia. Young people such as Alpha Omar Sidibé, (see pages 1-2), Sékou Koné, Mamady Kouyaté, and Sékou Keïta (pages 102-105) are hungry for a connection to “traditional” culture. Internationally successful *djembefolas* such as Keïta and Konaté have not only been an inspiration to these young men, but also

² In 1996 Keïta recorded *Hamanah*: a collaborative album of twelve *Dununbé* rhythms with Famoudou Konaté, Sékou Konaté and Daouda Kourouma, all of whom were initially trained as drummers in Hamanah region. His deep knowledge of this style of music comes from these Hamanah musicians.

the catalysts responsible for their entry into careers as professional *djembéfolas*. Both Sékou Koné and Sékou Keïta had to leave their villages to pursue their careers as drummers, careers that were only possible because of their connections with Famoudou Konaté and Mamady Keïta. While their careers were launched in Conakry, their successes have affected positive changes in their villages as well. As Koné continues to bring international students to his village for month-long workshops, he provides a means of income for many individuals who currently work only at subsistence farming. The existence of liquid currency, in turn, makes it possible for village families to hold more elaborate weddings and naming ceremonies. These festivities can then encourage more musical performances in the village, employing the use of both drummers and *jelis*. Urban drummers such as Sidibé have found not only the means to make a living, but also a connection to culture which was missing from their post-Touré, urban up-bringing.

There are many parallels that can be drawn among the musical habitus' of South African migrant workers as studied by Jonathan Clegg (1981), Coplin (1982), Erlmann (1990-), Nigerian migrant workers studied by Christopher Waterman in the context of his work with the musical genre, *Jùjú* (1990: 9), and the migrant *djembé* musicians and drum builders in Conakry. The crucial difference in the case of urban workers in Guinea is that the work they have come to Conakry to find revolves around the *djembé* itself. Most of the men involved in the growing *djembé* scene in Conakry are part of the 73% of men between the ages of 21 and 30 who are officially listed as unemployed (Arulpragasam and Sahn 1997: 114-115). These young men who find work as *djembé* apprentices, drum builders, drum exporters, tour-guides, back-up musicians for established *djembéfolas*, or as performers in the many local and national troupes and ballets, display an ingenuity

similar to what Waterman found in urban Nigeria. Waterman calls these young people “the master syncretizers of modern Africa” (C. Waterman 1990: 9).

Ethnic affiliations no longer dictate an individual’s particular involvement within the marketplace of African folklore in Conakry. While the musicians are usually either Maninka or Susu in ethnicity, most of the drum builders and exporters are Fulani (Interview: Tom Kondas 2007, 2008). Many of the individuals engaged as tour guides, security guards, and drivers during the “drum camp” season (Dec-March) maintain a passable fluency in many languages (German, English, Italian, Japanese and French). Guinea’s urban *djembe* scene differs from the South African and Nigerian migrant music because the music itself is becoming the major source of employment bringing migrant workers to Conakry to participate in the unofficial economy.

The cultural construction of professional musicians in Conakry is an urban construction which is influenced by rural taboos similar to those found by Coplin in South Africa. Coplin notes that “as their professional skills developed, popular musicians often found their work was socially approved while they as individuals were not” (Coplan 1982: 120-121). Many of the celebrations which were initially part of village life have continued in the urban context. However, in an urban setting these celebrations become venues where drummers can make a monetary income not possible in the village. There is simply more disposable income available for individuals and families to hire and pay musicians in the urban context. Yet, drummers from urban and rural areas alike told the same story of the initial reluctance of their families in accepting their career choice. Once these young men began to make a living, their families’ became much more

supportive. Sékou Koné, for instance, is now greeted with a hero's welcome every time he returns to his village.

As urban performers, young *djembéfolas* are often given a kind of rock-star status among young women and boys. Young women react with screams and the spraying of money when they hear their favorite *djembé* player taking a solo. The scene of a concert by *Boca Percussion* in Conakry in 2007 was reminiscent of a 1970s rock concert in the United States. The young *djembé* players in this urban African setting received the same reaction as a lead-guitarist would in an American rock band. For many young people who have grown up in Conakry, the only connection that they have to the traditional music of their own (or any) ethnic culture is through these mediated and urbanized celebrations and concerts. The *Dununbé* parties, which have become central to both marriage and naming festivities, have little to do with the tradition of this "strong man's dance" as it was practiced in the *Maninka* village context. But, largely through the influence of professional *djembé* players, these parties have formed the basis of a new cultural tradition for the mixed ethnicities which live in Conakry. What was once a traditional music played only on specific occasions in the village setting has now become a popular music in its transplanted urban setting. Furthermore, it is by the influence of *djembé* players as culture brokers that traditional *djembé* music is continually being invented.

The creation and performance of traditional *djembé* music and dance has taken place as much within the (globalized) intercultural space of transmission as it has within Conakry. In fact, global imaginings of "traditional" *djembé* music have influenced urban practices within Guinea through the teachings of Keïta, Konaté, their peers and apprentices. From my study of this "global flow" of *djembé* music, I am adding to

Appadurai's definition of an "ethnoscape" by expanding it to include cultural expressions that are traveling not only among dispersed members of a single cultural group, but also among communities of interest whose primary goal is the preservation of a cultural product/practice which is no longer celebrated in its original (village) context. Within his invention of the term "ethnoscape," Appadurai enlarges the idea of diaspora and invites the possibility of ethnic cultural expressions as entities modularly attached to specific ethnic groups but open to other attachments as well. Furthermore, through his use of the term deterritorialization, Appadurai challenges the duality suggested by the opposition between locality and diaspora which has dominated ethnomusicological discourse. This new term allows for the varieties of agency that presently exist for indigenous culture bearers who have left their locality in search of new avenues for artistic patronage. For Guinea's *djembéfolas* the governmental patronage that they initially enjoyed needed to be replaced after Touré's death. Similar to the national ballet, the patronage networks, or audiences for their music, were not located within their own ethnic group but dispersed among the global cosmopolitan centers where they initially performed. Within this dissertation I have expanded on Appadurai's idea of ethnoscape as an arena that includes individuals connected through an invented cultural history and artistic practice in addition to common language or ethnicity.

Among Conakry's contemporary *djembéfolas*, the perception and imagination of their music as a global phenomenon along with their involvement in Conakry's growing tourist trade (which revolves around the many drum camps throughout the city during the dry season), has played out in the glaring differences in the way this music is perceived between the villages and the capital (Conakry). This music is considered backward and

antithetical to modern life in most villages. Most young people are no longer interested in the traditional village celebrations; yet, those who do show such an interest are discouraged from becoming “traditional” drummers (Interviews: Lisza Reutenauer 2008; Sékou Keita 2008; Mamady Keita 2007; Sékou Condé 2008). Meanwhile, in Conakry, there are more young people than ever before forming local ballet and percussion ensembles as evidenced by the first annual *Festival D’Échange Culturel: Nord/Sud* 2008 jointly run by *Tam Tam Mandengue: Conakry* and *Tam Tam Mandengue: Belgium*. For the many young people who participated, an awareness of the global interest in *djembé* music is part of what motivates their involvement. These young men and women perform in the hope that they might get an opportunity to work in the West (Interviews: Sekou Keita 2008; Alpha Omar Sidibe 2008; Sekou Conde 2007). Increasingly, young people in Conakry are also looking toward the new tourist industry which has been created largely through globalized interest in the *djembé* mediated by Konaté and Keita. Not only is this music changed through urbanization, but also, as part of a larger global “ethnoscape,” it has become what it never was before, a professional musical genre.

This case study of the development of Guinea’s professional *djembé* music contributes a unique perspective to a growing body of anthropological writings about ethno-tourism and the commodification of culture (Cohen 1984; Schechner 1988; Hooks 1992; May 1996; Taylor 1998; Nash 2000; Jackson 1999; Ebron: 2002). What is unique about the global *djembe* phenomenon is that the transmission of music is taking place mainly through workshops where western students, taught to drum and dance by African artists, are participating in the art they are consuming. In this way, taking up the study of *djembé* music is very different from the “highly contrived and controlled” way culture is

consumed in ethnic restaurants, for example (Hooks 1992; May 1996). The difference lies in a required willingness by the student/consumer to endure the frustration that comes from learning to play a musical instrument as an adult, while at the same time maintaining a long term commitment to the process of learning. The *djembé* is not, in this case, simply another “exotic” sound existing in the postmodern pastiche of the American drum circle. Rather, it is being consumed as an entire package, a genre of music with a history and cultural context.

Another unique feature of the globalization of Guinea’s *djembé* is the separation of this music from the larger world music industry. As we have seen, the transmission of this music happens, not through slick advertising campaigns but through the formation of a global community that is locally based. The community of *djembé* players manifests as a global aesthetic community formed at the local level within Conakry, but conceived of as a global imaginary. There are ways in which the local *djembé* classes and groups located around the world extends Erlmann's theory of aesthetic community.

In short, aesthetic communities are all those social formations - loose affiliations, groupings, neo-tribes, and cult groups of free floating individuals – that are not anchored in rigid structures of control, habitus and filiation (Erlmann 1998: 12).

What is unique in the case of globalized *djembé* music is that this community is made up of not only *djembéfolas*, Keïta and Konaté, and the young men who learn from them in Conakry, but also Western musicians who have taken up learning the instrument. All parties involved are looking for some grounding in a tradition which no longer exists in its village context. What is no longer *habitus*, or necessarily ethnic affiliation, has become the aesthetic of new urban *djembé* music in Guinea and concert *djembé* music in Europe. There is a resonance between the drummers in Conakry and the *djembé* students

from America, Europe and Asia who come to study with them, as both groups are looking for a sense of tradition and cultural meaning. This neo- traditional music is imagined, negotiated and invented through the collaboration between Guinean drummers and their non-African students. In this respect I have expanded Erlmann's theory of "aesthetic community" as something which can exist on a global scale.

In reality, this musical tradition exists primarily within the hearts and minds of today's international *djembé* masters and their students. The tradition being created is not only musical but historical. Alongside the music being taught, there exists an underlying biographical/historical narrative about the *djembé* and its music that is being proliferated globally by Keïta, Konaté, and their students. This historical narrative is as important to *djembé* enthusiasts as the drum itself and its music. International *djembé* masters, Keïta Konaté, have students all over the world not only because they are two of the finest *djembé* players from Guinea, but also because they have created a narrative in which they and their students have become invested. In this case study, a largely oral history and musical tradition is being "negotiated between sites of agency." As a network built by individuals from within different sites of economic power, I conclude that economic hegemony interacts with the agency of the individuals involved. This has affected not only the musical product (which caters to the needs of a Western market) but the well-being of the communities within Guinea who are largely supported by Keïta, Konaté and their students. In many localities around the world the *djembé* has become a means for building other types of community intimately linked with the one found in Conakry.

Conclusion: Keïta and Konaté pushing the boundaries

There is no doubt that Keïta and Konaté have contributed to a change in many American drum circles due to a new awareness by many *djembe* enthusiasts of the drum ensemble which traditionally accompanies the *djembe* in West Africa, particularly in Guinea. One example of Keïta's influence on popular American culture can be seen in the 2008 Disney movie Beverly Hills Chihuahua. In this movie, the traditional *djembe* ensemble from Upper Guinea (complete with three *dununs*) appeared in scenes which were set in Tijuana, Mexico. These scenes included an American-style drum circle playing on the beach. The film's portrayal of a drumming group playing in the drum ensemble style of Upper Guinea can be explained as evidence of Keïta's influence (both directly and through his apprentices) on the drumming scene in San Diego, where he lived and taught from 2002 to 2009. Given that San Diego is the closest American city to Tijuana, it would not be uncommon for young people from San Diego to be found on a beach in Tijuana, just hanging-out and drumming. This was obviously a common enough occurrence that it ended up as the backdrop to a scene in a Hollywood film. The point to be made here is that the *djembe* and its percussion ensemble from Upper Guinea is becoming part of American popular culture.

A second example of such popularization can be found on a remote island in Japan where Keïta has given extensive workshops since 2005. At one point, Keïta organized a trip to his village of Balandougou for some of the children on the island who had been studying with him for a couple of years. This trip was a major event that consisted of several days of travel. When I saw some of the footage taken during this trip I was impressed by the involvement and support of not only the families of these young

people, but the entire island community. Similarly, the children from Japan were greeted with great enthusiasm by the young people in Balandougou. Young children and youths from Balandougou who had never played the *djembé* before took classes from Keïta right alongside the children who had come from Japan. Scenes such as this had a profound impact on everyone present. The impact of this trip and the cultural exchange it initiated resulted in immediate changes to the island community in Japan. It is traditional for large delivery boats and guests to be welcomed by a group of young people who sing songs of greeting whenever a visitor comes to the island. This tradition has gone on for centuries. Since meeting and studying with Keïta, the young people now welcome boats and visitors by playing the *djembé*.

Keïta and Konaté continue to push the boundaries of the *djembé*, taking it to the most unlikely locations both geographically and musically. At the conclusion of the second week of Keïta's drum camp in Conakry (January 2008) Monette Moreno-Keïta, Mamady Keïta, Ali Thomas, and I sat down and had a conversation about Mamady's tour schedule for the coming year. Monette told us that she did not renew the lease on their house in San Diego because with Mamady's tour schedule she could not justify continuing to pay the monthly rent. With all of their American belongings in storage, the house in Matoto, Conakry has become the new home-base for the Keïta family. The tour for 2008 would take them to Malaysia; Israel; Australia; Croatia; Japan; Taiwan; South Africa; Germany; Belgium; France; Ireland and two locations in the United States (Chicago and San Diego). This tour marks Keïta's fiftieth anniversary as a professional *djembéfol*. To celebrate the occasion Keïta has put together a touring ensemble, a new version of his previous ensemble *Sewa Kan*. Included in the ensemble is his wife Monette

on *djembé* and *kenkeni*. With performances and workshops scheduled at each location the tour promises to be grueling for the fifty-eight year old *djembéfola*.

Similar to Keïta, Konaté also spends the majority of the year on the road. However, being ten years older than Keïta, Konaté no longer performs at each location, preferring the slower pace of teaching instead. In 2008 Konaté spent three months in Guinea, two and a half months touring the United States giving workshops, and the rest of the time in Germany; France; Italy; and different parts of Asia. Though he performs less, Konaté is continually in the process of creating new music for teaching and recording. His 2008 CD, *Hamana Namun*, is his most creative work to date. Consisting almost entirely of instrumental tracks (all of his other discs included the songs which inspired each rhythm), Konaté experiments with different combinations of instruments as well as new tuning ideas for the *dununs*. In this sense, Konaté continues to expand the boundaries of what the *djembé* can do in the hands of an imaginative and talented musician. At the age of sixty-eight Konaté shows no signs of slowing down.

Konaté and Keïta continue to be inspired by their interactions with the *djembé* students and professional musicians they meet all over the world. In addition, young *djembé* players both within and outside of Guinea are benefiting from the trails blazed by these *djembéfolas* both musically and geographically. This dissertation witnesses the beginning of the *djembé* as a globally imagined phenomenon. What was written here only reflects the first fifty years of development, it will be exciting to witness what the next fifty years will bring to this instrument and the global community that has nurtured its masters.

Appendix: the Epic of Sunjata Keita

The Sunjata Epic contains the oral history central to the founding of the Mande Empire by Sunjata Keita in the mid-thirteenth century (approx. 1235).¹ This empire stretched from what is now Mauritania in the north to the northern Ivory Coast in the South, and covered most of the Western part of the continent of Africa (Charry 2000: 2). Contained within this empire, (which existed for almost 200 years) are all the various dialects/ethnicities belonging to the Mande language complex.² The subdivisions of Mande languages are: Mandinka (southern Senegal and the Gambia), Susu (Guinea-Conakry), Kuranko (southeastern Guinea), Maninka (upper Guinea), and Wassulu, Bamana, Xasonka, Soninke (Mali)(ibid.). Within the larger geographical area encompassing the remnants of the Mande Empire is the “heartland of the Mande territory” where the Sunjata Epic has been most consistently retold and passed on from one generation to the next.³ The spiritual, social, and cultural foundations described and defined within the epic still carry a strong cultural influence in this Mande heartland.

¹ Three great empires rose and fell in West Africa: Ghana (founded in the 11th century); Mali or Mande (founded in the 13th century); Songhai (founded in the 15th century) (Duran: 1999:vii).

² In West Africa the names of ethnic groups are often the same as their languages (Conrad 2004: xxxiv).

³ According to Conrad, “the heartland of Mande territory is located in what is now northeastern Guinea and southern Mali” (Conrad 2004: xiv). This is area represents the location where Sunjata fought and won his battle against Sumaworo. Also located within this geographical space are the various locations from which he is believed to have ruled the empire. Among the most complete transcriptions of the epic I have chosen to reference the following for comparison purposes: Gambia (Innes 1974 and 1999), Guinea (Laye 1978), Northeastern Guinea (Conrad 2004), and the southern half of Mali (Johnson 1986, 1992, 2003).

Summary of the Sunjata Epic

The heart of the story revolves around the battles between the tyrannical Susu leader, Sumaworo Kante, and Sunjata Keita who led the revolt of Mande-speaking peoples under Sumaworo's rule. The Susu were previously subjects of the Ghana Empire until they were able to assert their independence in the 12th century. The Susu later extended their domain by incorporating many of the Mande chieftencies as well as those of old Ghana. The successful Mande revolt led by Sunjata effectively put an end to the Susu kingdom and led to the establishment of one of the largest and most powerful empires in West Africa, the Mali (or Mande) Empire, which ruled most of West Africa for almost 200 years (Duran 1999: viii).⁴ The names of the characters in this synopsis of the epic are the ones used in Upper Guinea

The first episode of the epic describes the origin of Sunjata's mother, Sogolon. The story begins with Du Kamisa, the sister of Du-Mogo-nya-mogo (the ruler of Dú and Kiri), who was a great sorceress who turned herself into a buffalo-woman (Belcher 1999: 93). Two hunters encounter her (as a lonely old woman) at the edge of town of Du and proceed to help her by bringing her water and firewood so she can cook. Grateful for their generosity, she reveals to them that she is a buffalo and instructs them to hunt and kill her. They are rewarded as heroes with their choice of a woman to marry. Following the instructions given by the buffalo-woman before her death, they choose an ugly hunched-back woman named Sogolon Condé, the sister of the buffalo-woman. But, when they tried to sleep with her, on their way back to the Manden, she grew porcupine-like quills from her groin. Sogolon was a sorceress who was even more powerful than her

⁴ Conrad asserts that the Mali empire flourished from the mid-thirteenth until the early fifteenth century (Conrad 2004: xiv).

sister. Meanwhile, Sunjata's father, who was the king of Niani, already had nine wives but was advised to take another wife because all of his wives were barren. When these two hunters reached the Manden they were happy to give Sogolon away. Sunjata's father was advised to take the Sogolon Condé as his wife because it was predicted that she would give birth to a great ruler. He was not only successful in overcoming Sogolon's resistance, but some sources even say that Sogolon was revealed to be a very attractive woman once the marriage was consummated (Duran 1999: ix; Belcher 1999: 95-96; Conrad 2004: 9-12).

The second episode begins with Sunjata's childhood and ends with his exile. Sunjata was lame as a child and could not stand or walk. His condition was attributed to the sorcery of his jealous step-mothers. On one occasion, when Sunjata was already seven years old, his mother asked a co-wife for some baobab leaves to flavor her sauce. The co-wife mocked her saying that Sogolon should send her son to get her the leaves. Sunjata overheard the co-wife mocking his mother. Determined not to embarrass her any more, he made several attempts to rise up to a standing position. In the Maninkan version he used his father's walking staffs, even his iron-forged staff, but they all broke beneath his considerable weight. Finally he sent his mother to ask his father's blacksmith to forge him a staff. This staff did not break. Instead, it became a bow. After this he praised his mother and was healed of his affliction. He went into his father's hut and retrieved his "quiver and bow and went out of town" (Conrad 2004: 77). Once Sunjata arrived at the baobab tree he uprooted it and brought it home and planted it in his mother's yard, saying that this way the other co-wives would have to come to her for baobab leaves.

Once Sunjata proved himself not only able-bodied, but increasingly strong, he became a threat to his brother Dankaran Tuman.⁵ Dankaran plotted to have Sunjata killed and he enlisted the nine witches (or sorceresses) of Manden to carry out his plans. The witches were paid with a bull (or ox). Sunjata offered the sorceresses three male antelope (in some versions he offers them nine buffalos) in exchange for the bull if they spare his life. Sunjata, being a capable hunter, delivered what he promised and his life was spared. The sorceresses were so pleased with Sunjata's generosity, they vowed that no female genie, human or wild animal would ever harm him (Conrad 2004: 80). After another failed attempt on his life by Dankaran, Sunjata's mother convinced him to go with her into exile (Conrad 2004: 81-88). While in exile, Sunjata began his training as a warrior and word quickly spread of his extraordinary abilities.

The third episode explains how Sumaworo conquered and ruled the Manden. After the death of Sunjata's father, Dankaran became the new king of Niani. As a gesture of goodwill, Dankaran sent one of his sisters to marry Sumaworo. She came to Sumaworo accompanied by *jeli* Fasaké Kouyaté who was the *jeli* of Sunjata's father, claimed by Dankaran when he became king. Kouyaté found Sumaworo's secret chamber filled with musical instruments. He came upon a *balafon* (a gourd xylophone) there and could not resist the temptation to play it. When Sumaworo caught the *jeli*, Kouyaté began to sing Sumaworo's praises. Sumaworo found the music so wonderful that he refused to let the *jeli* go back to Dankaran. He cut the tendons of the singer's legs so that he could not run away and he renamed him Bala Fasaké Kouyaté. Sumaworo then betrayed Dankaran a second time when he invaded and annexed the kingdoms of the Manden.

⁵ Such sibling rivalry is a common (and culturally sanctioned) occurrence between step-brothers who share the same father but have different mothers (Belcher 1999: 93)

As Sumaworo began his oppressive rule over the Manden, Dankaran was forced into exile (Belcher 1999: 100-101; Duran 1999: ix-x). When Sunjata heard what had happened he began to make plans for his return home to the Manden.

In the fourth episode Sunjata is summoned out of exile to help defeat Sumaworo. Upon the advice of a seer, a delegation is sent to find and bring Sunjata home. When they present their case to Sunjata, he agrees to go back with them but not without his mother. Sunjata's mother is very ill and gathers her children around her to declare her last wishes. After Sogolon dies, Sunjata returns home to find Sumaworo's nephew, Fakoli, has decided to join Sunjata in the fight against his uncle, Sumaworo. Fakoli is out for revenge because Sumaworo has stolen his wife from him.

The Fifth episode depicts the various battles between Sumaworo which lead to his eventual defeat by Sunjata. After losing many battles to Sumaworo, Sunjata realizes that the only way to defeat Sumaworo's obviously superior *nyama* is to find his secret weakness. For this his sister volunteered to seduce Sumaworo as a means of getting him to reveal his secret vulnerability. Sunjata's sister is successful in retrieving the secret, a magic arrow was constructed, and Sumaworo was defeated. The Manden was thus restored to its rightful owner. Under Sunjata the Mande empire became one of the most powerful and long lived (almost 200 years) in West African history.

Sunjata has been credited not only for uniting the various Mande and Susu ethnic/linguistic groups and their kingdoms into a powerful empire, but also for providing the social foundation which has defined Mande societies since the middle ages. He established the following three-part social order: *nyamakala*, who are artisans born into their profession who are known to work with spiritually charged materials; *horon*, the

free-born or nobility; and *jon* who represent the slave class. The *nyamakala* class of society is then subdivided into several different groups which include: blacksmiths (*numu*), leatherworkers (*garanke*), musician/historians (*jeli*), and public speakers who are experts in geneology and the Koran (*fin*) (Charry 2000: 48-50).

Musical instruments in the epic

Sumaworo had a collection of musical instruments, many of which are still in use today among the Mande in this region of Africa. According to Djanka Tassej Condé's telling of the epic:

Sumaworo had all of the musical instruments,
All the musical instruments.
They were all first brought out by Sumaworo,
Except for the Bala.
(trans. Conrad 2004: 92-93)

Among the instruments listed were: *koworo* a six-string instrument with a neck for each string and an open-ended calabash resonator; *donso nkoni* commonly known as the hunter's harp. A six-string instrument with a single neck and calabash resonator covered with an animal skin; *bolon* a four-string (bass) calabash harp historically played in the context of closed celebrations which prepare warriors for battle; *soron* a more extensive harp of 14 or more strings limited to the region of northeastern Guinea; *kora*, the grandest calabash harp, which contains exactly twenty-one strings, was mentioned last in the instrument itinerary because it is the most recent evolution of West African harps. In addition, the *kora*'s use is limited to the hereditary caste of musician/historians, called *jeli* or *jali* (depending upon the region), who are responsible for the continued transmission of the Sunjata Epic. All of the other instruments mentioned can be played by the *horon* or freeborn. The instrument missing from Sumaworo's collection is the *bala*, a xylophone

instrument with rosewood bars which are “attached to the frame by cord wrapped around the ends of the slats rather than threaded through holes in the slats” (Charry 2000: 139).⁶ Similar to the *kora*, the *bala* is an instrument of the *jeliya*. However, the *bala* also has close associations with *numus* (blacksmiths) because it is made by blacksmiths who use the same iron axes to carve the *bala* that they use to carve ritual or ceremonial masks as well. The same iron tools are also used to make *djembés*, which makes the *bala* a unique “pivotal instrument linking not only the worlds of the *jeli* and *numu*, but also *jeli* and drummers” (Charry 2000: 138).

This special “pivotal” place which the *bala* holds in Maninkan culture is mirrored within the Sunjata Epic as told by Guinean *jeli* Djanka Tasseý Condé.⁷ In a part of the epic framed as the completion or maturation of Sumaworo, Sumaworo travels through the unfamiliar bush or forests of Manden (not the bush of Susu) where he witnesses a scene from up in a tree nearby a cave. In this scene, which is orchestrated by a genie, the chief genie enters the cave and proceeds to bring out six male genies, two at a time. Once the group of genies is seated in a circle the chief genie goes back into the cave to retrieve the following: a *bala*, mallets and wrist bells, a small double-headed cylinder drum (*dunun*), and three arrows (which he lays upon the *bala*). Recognizing that this is the only instrument that he does not have in his collection, Sumaworo negotiates with the genie to buy the *bala*. The genie will only sell it in exchange for four people: One for the *bala*; one for the mallets and wrist bells; one for the *dunun*; and one for the three arrows. The

⁶ According to Charry, this distinguishing feature is not found in other African xylophones but is unique to the frame xylophones found in West Africa (Charry 2000: 139)

⁷ While Charry also notes that “Mande oral traditions are unusually explicit about the origin of the xylophone,” he does not go into detail. Rather, he simply states that Sumaworo Kanté, the “Sosso blacksmith sorcerer-king defeated by Sunjata” played the *bala* and that little is said about the instrument before Sumaworo. Similar to many Mande instruments, its origins are attributed to (*jinn*) genies (Charry 2000: 133).

genie makes the deal even more difficult by stipulating that the four people must be close relatives of Sumaworo. Upon returning to Susu, Sumaworo discusses this dilemma with his married sister, Kosiya Kanté, who decides to offer herself to the genies even though it would mean abandoning her son, Fakoli. Moved by the sister's courage and selflessness, the genies agree to give Sumaworo the *bala* and everything with it.

Sunjata Epic as history

When dealing with the Sunjata Epic, questions naturally arise about the value of this epic as a historical reference. Scholars should proceed with caution when attempting to locate specific geographic locations for events within the Sunjata epic. As Conrad aptly demonstrates, even with the consultation of Arabic texts it is often difficult to confirm exact dates and/or geographic locations (Conrad 1994). While the epic does not adhere to the rules of chronology at the center of European historical practice, as a text it provides valuable insight into the enduring beliefs and cultural values of Mande peoples (Jansen 2000: 131-132; Conrad 1994: 264-366; 2004: xvi-xvii). The best example of this is in the way *jelis* construct their history in the context of the epic. Charry documents a “two-tiered ancestry among *jelis*: ” One which projects back to the time of Mohamed providing an important link between *jeliya* and Islam; and another, later tier, which goes back to the first *jeli* ever named, Gnankoman Duwa and his son Bala Faseké Kouyaté who was Sunjata's *jeli*. As a result of this legacy, Kouyaté *jelis* are considered the most pure *jeli* lineage. Unlike other *jeli* lineages (such as Diabaté *jelis*), Kouyaté did not split off from *horon* or any other *nyamkala* branch (Charry 2000: 102-104).

The cultural significance of this epic in the lives of Guinean *djembefolas* cannot be underestimated. Although the Sunjata epic is not located at the center of the story of

the globalization of Guinea's *djembé*, it permeates every stage of the process. It is for this reason that I have included a brief summary of it here.

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