

Mande Music in the Black Atlantic:
Migration and the Affordances of World Music Record Production

by

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Duke University

Date: December 2, 2021

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
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2021

ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This multi-sited (or “patchwork”) ethnography (Tsing 2011, xi; Günel, Varma, and Watanabe 2020; Marcus 1995; Tsing 2015) examines how Mande music is remade in its circulation through world music industry networks of the Black Atlantic. I study how world music record producers work to reconcile ethical, aesthetic, and financial motivations in sound. Turning to Toumani Diabaté’s *Kaira* (1988), an influential world music album produced by ethnomusicologist Lucy Durán, I argue that this recording has been uniquely consequential in defining the sound of Mande music for Global North publics, and then I treat it as a case study to consider the ethics of cross-cultural record production. I show how Durán engages with a politics of invisibility to prioritize the careers of her collaborators, to cultivate ethnographic authority in her recording practice, and to create avenues for broad public appreciation of Mande music traditions, even as she effects alterations on the musical practices she proposes to reflect. Next, I illustrate how one Mande musician’s expressive practice is transformed by his migration to the Southern United States and by his interactions with the music industry in that context. Finally, I present a sonic exposition of twenty-six Mande music recordings that I myself produced as yet another frame in which to consider how Mande music is remade in circulation.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to Jim and Jan (who built the house), to Diali Keba (who opened the door), and to Hillary and Hazel (who make it a home).

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Acknowledgments

Many wonderful thought partners helped bring this work to fruition. I am grateful to my colleagues and mentors at Duke University, particularly Louise Meintjes who offered insight and guidance at every turn. Laurent Dubois was influential in developing my research and creative work in relationship to the Black Atlantic. I benefited in countless ways from my interactions with Raquel Salvatella de Prada, Anthony Kelley, Mark Anthony Neal, Nick Stoia, Steve Jaffe, Deonte Harris, Yun Emily Wang, Sarah Town, Jay Hammond, Joella Bitter, Ayana Legros, Cade Bourne, Cody Black, Quran Karriem, and Carla Hung. Conversations with scholars from other institutions have crucially shaped my thinking, including those with David Font Navarrete, David Garcia, Ryan Skinner, Chérie Rivers Ndaliko, Jonathan Kramer, Tim Lindeman, David Novak, Steven Feld, and Michael Veal.

I benefited from my work with the Departments of Music and African and African American Studies at Duke, as well as the PhD Lab in Digital Knowledge, and received research support from the James B. Duke International Research Fellowship, the Association of Recorded Sound Collections, and the Duke Center for International and Global Studies.

This research was motivated and made possible by a vibrant network of musicians, collaborators, and friends who opened the door for the learning expressed in

these pages: Diali Keba Cissokho, Will Ridenour, Mark Dixon, Kym Register, Beverly Botsford, Ablaye Cissokho, Mamadou Cissokho, Youssoupha Cissokho, Baymor Mbaye, Sidya Cissokho, Sarah Lamharzi, Eric Kuhn, Caique Vidal, Gabriele Pelli, John Westmoreland, Austin McCall, and members of Cakalak Thunder.

I am grateful to the producers and music industry workers who took time to talk with me about their work: Lucy Durán, Ben Mandelson, Chris Eckman, Ian Brennan, Jerry Boys, Nick Gold, Chris Nolan, Jon Kertzer and Jason Richmond. I am particularly grateful to Ben Mandelson for his generosity of time and spirit, and to Lucy Durán for extended conversations and for welcoming me to visit her classes at SOAS.

Finally, I am indebted foremost to Hillary Smith and Jim Henderson who provided their insight, support, and encouragement every step of the way.

1. Introduction

A calabash, halved, dried, and emptied of its contents.

A cow skin, shorn and stretched taught over the gourd's yawning mouth.

Pinned in place with brass furniture tacks, the cowskin head is poised to resonate.

*Three carved kéno wood rods brace the hide against the cut surface of the gourd:
One horizontal rod supports the cowskin head from below, unyielding against pound upon pound
of pressure.*

*The two vertical rods form a subtle "v" shape: a surface on which a player's hands rest as thumbs
and index fingers set to work.*

*A larger kéno pole—the kora's neck—shoots a vertical path straight through two circular holes
cut into the calabash. The neck is anchored at its bottom with a sturdy iron ring.*

*Twenty-one short lengths of string knotted to the iron ring at one end and intertwined at the
other with corresponding lengths of nylon monofilament fishing line.*

*Each of these twenty-one nylon lengths, the kora's strings, pass through a carved and notched
bridge jutting from the surface of the cowskin head.*

*The bridge held firmly in place by the tension of the kora's strings, anchoring it to a wooden pad
wrapped in red cloth that protects the skin head from the strings' acute pressure.*

*The nylon strings of various gauges terminate in corresponding intervals on the wooden neck—
short, thin treble strings cut a direct path, and thick, high-test, bass strings ascend to the very
top.*

*Each of the strings is secured to the kora's neck by the friction of woven hide rings, konso, onto
which the player exerts force upwards or downwards to raise or lower the corresponding string's
pitch.*

1.1 Friction, Tension, and Entanglement in the Black Atlantic

Over the last seventy-five years, the kora has circulated beyond the borders of its homeland in the Mande regions of West Africa. It has been carried through international airports and onto the streets of Paris, London, and New York. The crystalline sounds coaxed from the instrument by *jalis* (or *griots*) stream from stereo systems and concert stages across Europe and North America. The kora has become the quintessential icon of the jali, and the jali a quintessential icon of West African expressive practice.

Presented through recordings and on international stages, jalolu (the plural form of jali) are culture bearers *par excellence*. An audible, tangible link to a storied past. The figure of the griot celebrates Black Atlantic links to West African ancestry. On the other hand, music industry narratives of the griot fix Africa as premodern and disconnected from global circulations of culture. In these contradictory framings, the griot is presented as a prototypical icon, one representative of the past—glorious, or primeval.

For more than 250 years, the kora has been both constructed by the interlocking system of friction, tension, and entanglement I describe in the opening lines. Friction prevents the *konso* rings from slipping and holds the upholstery tacks firmly in place. Tension maintains the pitch of each of the kora's twenty-one monofilament strings and permits the transduction of energy from the string, through the bridge, and onto the

taught, resonating surface of the calabash-cowskin drum. The entanglement of seven materials—gourd, skin, brass, iron, nylon, wood, and cloth—structure and shape the instrument and the performance practice it animates. Should a single element be removed, the instrument loses its structural integrity and come part at its seams. The kora is a delicate and precise tangle of material forces, its history of engagement with the world a tangle of social ones.

Friction, tension, entanglement: each reference energy accumulated through encounter. Friction implies movement and heat. Tension implies strain and discord. Entanglement implies both interwovenness and irresolvability. I offer these analytics here as a means to explore the social forces that produce the terrain for Mande music's engagement with social worlds beyond the geographic boundaries of Mande West Africa, the multi-sites of my study.

The figure of the jali has been produced by the music industry through histories of friction, tension, and entanglement between various individuals, technologies, and publics. World music producers bump elbows with jalis in shaping the sound of the kora. The music industry amplifies narratives, gathering energy through their repetition, that both constrain and afford opportunities to jalis to recast *jaliya* (the jali's craft) for international publics. Griot musicians settle abroad permanently, or pass through for short stays on tour. They find a home in diaspora communities, or they don't. They ply

their ancestral trade abroad, sometimes accommodating their performances to the expectations of those unfamiliar with the nuances of their expressive practice.

In what follows, I examine the interface between Mande musicians, British and American record producers, and the world music industry as “zones of awkward engagement,” the way anthropologist Anna Tsing puts it (A.L. Tsing 2011, xi). I listen for the “missed encounters, clashes, misfires, and confusions” (A. Tsing 2000, 338) that play out in recording collaborations, within music industry discourse, and on the stage. I consider how North-South collaborations in these contexts produce frictions that at times generate novel aesthetic possibilities and acts of solidarity, while at other times (or at the same time) work to constrain and regularize Mande music traditions for international consumption. My study focuses particularly on the kora as the most visible international icon of jaliya.

This project is about how expressive practice is transformed through travel. “The task of understanding planter-wide interconnections,” Tsing writes, “requires locating and specifying globalist projects and dreams, with their contradictory as well as charismatic logics and their messy as well as effective encounters and translations” (ibid, 330). Bob White makes a similar argument in his introduction to the *Music and Globalization: Critical Encounters* collection (White 2012). To understand processes of globalization through the lens of music, White writes, one must attend to “global

encounters—the chance meetings, coordinated misunderstandings, and ongoing collaborations—that bring people of different musical or cultural backgrounds together” (ibid, 6).

In her 2020 monograph, *World Music and the Black Atlantic* (Whitmore 2020), ethnomusicologist Aleysia Whitmore also takes up Anna Tsing’s friction concept in framing her study of the interactions between West African and Cuban musicians, international music industry personnel, and divergent audiences. Whitmore is interested in “the paradoxes inherent in the ways musicians, industry actors, and audiences contest, celebrate and reshape essentialist representations—particularly how musicians strategically position themselves within audiences’ imaginations of the black Atlantic while asserting their own distinct realities” (ibid, 30).

In the context of the world music industry, the creation and consumption of musical cultures are defined by encounters across difference. Tsing writes, “Cultures are continually co-produced in the interactions I call ‘friction’: the awkward, unequal, unstable and creative qualities of interconnection across difference” (A.L. Tsing 2011, 4; as cited in Whitmore 2020, 5). Whitmore elaborates, “Collaboration here is not always a utopian or satisfying endeavor. Individuals’ cultures, politics, and personal perspectives shape encounters in ways that leave participants variously frustrated, content and excited. Compromise most often accompanies collaboration. To understand the products

of collaboration, Tsing notes, we need to examine the creative and at times confused labor behind them" (ibid).

The proceeding work builds upon Whitmore's study, and her engagement with Tsing, as I seek to explore how Mande music is transformed for international publics through its circulation in the Black Atlantic. While some of my research interests overlap those of Whitmore, my work prioritizes performance and the role of recorded sound, while her work is primarily discursive (studying what various actors say about their perspectives). This present dissertation is primarily concerned with how recording studio practice comes to shape embodied expressive practice, and how the expectations of the live music industry work in tandem with those of the recording industry to produce representations of Mande music for international encounter.

My ethnographic efforts take up invitation to study global connection as a patchwork (A.L. Tsing 2011, xi; Günel, Varma, and Watanabe 2020). "These zones of cultural friction are transient; they arise out of encounters and interactions. They reappear in new places with changing events. The only ways I can think to study them," she writes, "are patchwork and haphazard. The result of such research may not be a classical ethnography, but it can be deeply ethnographic in the sense of drawing from the learning experience of the ethnographer" (A.L. Tsing 2011, xi). In what follows, "patchwork" as it may be, I seek to draw a line from my ethnographic experience,

through the worlds where Mande histories collide with music industry ones to produce meaning.

1.2 Overview

This dissertation traces the circulation of Mande music in the Black Atlantic in four chapters. I begin by examining the work of record producers from the Global North who collaborate with musicians from the Global South. Before beginning my inquiry into the international circulation of Mande music in particular, I unpack the dynamics of collaboration found at the interface of musician and world music producer. My first chapter (listed here as Chapter 2), “The Art Which Conceals Art: Transparent Mediation and World Music Record Production,” situates the work of contemporary world music record producers against the backdrop of colonial-era field recordists, examining how their shared strategies and techniques of “transparent mediation” (Brøvig-Hanssen 2016, 2018b) generate ethnographic authority in their recordings. Drawing upon interviews with record producers and recording engineers working in the field of world music (a term I define below), I examine how producers seek to enact a series of ethical commitments through the aesthetic choices they make in the recording studio.

In Chapter 3, “Producing Mande Music: Lucy Durán and the Politics of Invisibility in Toumani Diabaté’s *Kaira*,” I turn to a key “world music” collaboration—between the Malian kora player Toumani Diabaté and the ethnomusicologist and record

producer Lucy Durán—to study their creation of the instrumental kora music album *Kaira* (Diabaté 1988b). This album has played a key role in defining the sound of the kora, and by proxy Mande music, for British and North American audiences. I extend the analysis begun in Chapter 2 to explore how Durán’s and Diabaté’s overlapping histories, aspirations, and aesthetic negotiations contributed to defining the sound of the kora, while also building their international reputations and careers. I introduce *the politics of invisibility* here as an analytic to parse the various ways in which Durán engages with invisibility to fashion an approach to cross-cultural record production that prioritizes the careers of her collaborators and creates avenues for broad public appreciation of Mande music traditions, even as she effects alterations on the musical practices she proposes to reflect.

In my third chapter (listed as Chapter 4), “Jaliya in Transit: The Voice of the Migrant Griot,” I explore the experience and artistry of a jali migrant, Diali Keba Cissokho, as he works to refashion the tools of his *fasiya* (cultural heritage) in the context of life in rural North Carolina. Living outside the context of a thriving diaspora community, Diali creatively adapts practices of jaliya into new forms meant to resonate with audiences largely unfamiliar with Mande expressive practices. This section of my study considers Diali’s interactions with the North American world music industry as a site to investigate how the griot is both celebrated and decontextualized by a music

industry formatively shaped by racialized logics of difference. bell hooks's "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance" (hooks 2012) offers this chapter a frame for conceptualizing how the griot figure's reimagination by the US music industry reflects patterns of white cultural appropriation and consumption. The material for this chapter is gathered from ten years of ethnographic research as a close musical collaborator of Diali's in our band, Diali Cissokho & Kaira Ba. As manager, record producer and booking agent for the band, I was the primary interface for the band's engagement with the US music industry, a position that has afforded me a unique perspective on the dynamics I explore here.

The fourth chapter (listed as Chapter 5) of the dissertation consists of twenty-six recordings (some with a video component) that I recorded and/or produced. Each of the recordings aims to represent, in one way or another, Mande music for international publics. The recordings evidence the techniques and strategies of transparent record production discussed in Chapter 2, the dynamics of collaboration at play in Chapter 3, and all are closely related to the ethnographic research I describe in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, I contextualize each recording with brief descriptions of the objectives and methods I utilized for the recordings, then offer citations indicating where the

recordings may be accessed online.¹ By positioning these recordings alongside my writing, I hope to demonstrate how my scholarship and artistic practice are animated by a practice of research-creation.

Natalie Loveless argues for research-creation as a model of scholarly activity that braids together creative work and scholarly research into a multi-modal form (N.S. Loveless 2015; N. Loveless 2019). Says Loveless, “The interdisciplinarity modeled by research-creation argues for multiple formal outputs that, while sometimes dissonant in terms of their languages, are equally weighted as objects of and contributions to knowledge in the academy” (N. Loveless 2016). I offer the recordings that comprise Chapter 5 as additional formal output that contributes to explicating, beyond the page, the arguments that shape this dissertation. My approach here contributes to the long history of ethnomusicological research that is shaped through participant observation. Whether as a musical apprentice, an educator, a studio engineer, or an audience member in a music scene, rich ethnography is regularly drawn from the collision of research and life experience.

My work as an instrumentalist, producer and recordist has raised and revised the central questions I ask in my dissertation, such as: How does the recording process

¹ In keeping with my commitment to the artists’ intellectual property, I have chosen not to submit the recordings to be freely accessible alongside my written dissertation. Instead, I provide citations that permit the reader-listener to locate the recordings online.

synthesize multiple aesthetic perspectives? What opportunities and constraints are enacted through the creative use of particular technologies? How are expectations for the recording process translated and transformed through that same process? What strategies might a producer enact to engage in cross-cultural recording collaborations in a manner predicated on non-extractive principles? How is an embodied expressive practice altered by recording studio practice? How is it altered by encounters across divergent musical ontologies? These questions arise directly from my experience collaborating over the years with a Mande musician, as well as from performing, recording, editing, mixing, and releasing music from Senegal aimed at international publics.

By including recordings as a chapter in my dissertation I advocate for the scholarly recognition of work about sound in the medium of sound (McKerrell 2021; N.S. Loveless 2015; Durán 2011). The technical and aesthetic sophistication of these recordings evidence skills and capacities for nuanced listening and aural analysis. Aural knowledges such as these are sometimes overshadowed in music studies by written and verbal explication, and by graphical representation in the form of notation. However, engagement with sound and, in ethnomusicology in particular, engagement with sound recordings, forms the epistemological basis for key territories of the field.

Indeed, it is my artistic practice that drew me initially to the research project at hand. I began working with Diali Keba Cissokho, as a bass player and percussionist, shortly after he arrived in North Carolina in 2011. As I describe in Chapter 4, he and I, along with three other musicians, started Diali Cissokho & Kaira Ba, a project that has been proceeding now for more than a decade. Over these years, we recorded albums in the US and in Senegal, played over 250 concerts, and made moves through the world music industry, both in the US and on the African continent. As I occupied roles as the band's manager and producer for recordings and video content, I encountered sticky questions about the US music industry, the ethics of cross-cultural collaboration, how sound and narrative are entangled in world music, and how Diali's expressive practices were impacted by his migration to the US. These questions led (and sometimes forced) me to seek a better understanding of the historical and social forces underlying the issues I encountered in the day-to-day work of engaging on behalf of the band with booking agents, managers, representatives for venues, producers, and other musicians.

So, my personal relationship to the project runs in a reverse chronology to the dissertation's basic outline: It started with my collaboration with Diali Cissokho, moved to an interest in seeking out models for cross-cultural collaboration related to Mande music recordings, and finally took shape in a set of academic research questions concerning world music record production more broadly. I hope that my ethnographic

perspective and investment in the issues motivating these pages, as well as the ways in which I am implicated by my own analysis, come through in what follows.

1.3 Mande Music on the Move

The instrument described in the opening lines above, the kora, originated with the Senegambian Mandinka cultural group based in the Kaabu empire which, in the late eighteenth century, spanned borders of the present-day nation states of Guinea Bissau, southern Senegal, and The Gambia (Charry 2000, 115). Centuries before the Kaabu empire grew to power (and eventually fell around 1867 according to Lucy Durán [Durán 2017b]), jalolu played a foundational role in the Mande cultures derived from the Mali Empire. Stretching through the present-day states of Senegal, southern Mauritania, Mali, northern Burkina Faso, western Niger, the Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, the Ivory Coast and Northern Ghana, the Mali Empire left a lasting impact on a vast swathe of West Africa. Mande ethnic groups flourished throughout this region during the Empire's expansion between 1235 and the mid-fifteenth century (Durán 2017b).

From the earliest days of the Mali empire jalolu (commonly referred to by the more generalized French term, griots) emerged as a distinct class of musician-storyteller-genealogist-advisor-praise singers, whose presence is fundamental to the social structure of Mande societies. Jalolu attached themselves as confidants and advisors to powerful men. For example, Sundiata Keita, who led the expansion of the Mande empire in the

middle of the thirteenth century, was accompanied throughout his life by the jali, Bala Faseke Kouyate, who is cited as the founding ancestor of the Kouyate clan, one of the notable jali lineages.² A renowned warrior and king, Sundiata Keita's legend has been recounted by jalis over the past 800 years, as has the story of Bala Faseke Kouyate.

A collection of instruments—the kora, the ngoli or xalam (a four-stringed lute), and the bala or balafon (a slat xylophone with twenty-two keys)—are the strict purview of the jalolu. Their instrumental practice is passed down from father to son, and, until recent decades, has rarely been practiced outside that hereditary structure. Traditionally, these instruments are played only by men in public, but, as Lucy Durán points out, female vocalists (or *jelimuso*) are among the most revered griots in Mande public life today (Durán 2007, 1999).

While the bala is traced back to the original jali, Bala Faseke Kouyate, stories of the kora's origins typically begin with Jali Mady Wuleng and his discovery of the kora being played in a hollowed-out tree by a *jinn* (one of the powerful spirit-entities cited in early Islamic theology and widely discussed across West Africa [Durán 2017b]). Lucy Durán recounts the story of Jali Mady Wuleng walking through the bush when he heard the faint sounds of “celestial music, and found a jinn playing a large string instrument.

² Eric Charry notes the existence of a widespread belief that Kouyate is the only pure Mande jali lineage, and that all other jali surnames including Diabate/Jobarteh, Cissokho/Sissoko/Suso, Kanoute/Konte, Doumbia, and Kante came to be associated with the profession later (Charry, 99-100). This notion is summed up in the common praise-name line: “jeli ma kuaye bo” (“no jeli can equal Kouyate”) (ibid, 103).

Jali Mady, the story goes, became bewitched by the sound, and managed to trap the jinn, and capture his kora. To this day," she writes, "the kora is considered a 'jinn's instrument' that has been 'on loan' to griots ever since" (ibid).

While the kora's provenance may be more recent, the bala and ngoni trace back to at least the thirteenth-century origins of the Mande empire, and possibly even further back than that (ibid). Different jalis may specialize in the delivery of spoken oration, song, or instrumental performance. However, the cultural power of the griot is the space where these three specialties overlap: the jali's ability to elicit a profound, embodied connection to one's ancestral history. In a 1989 interview Toumani Diabaté explains, "The principal role of the griots is to create unity among people. To help people to communicate and to safeguard our history, the ancient history of West Africa that was never written down. Since the 13th century the griots have handed it down from father to son. They have carried stories and deeds since the time of the [Mali Empire]. So, the griots are the ambassadors and keepers of our culture, the library of West African history" (Wonfor 1989). As Eric Charry writes, jalous are "shapers of the past and the present" (Charry 2000, 91). They recall and interpret the past, revealing for their patrons how Mande history informs the lived present.

Today, griots are often cosmopolitans, at times commenting on social values (see Durán 2017a), at times engaging the world as artists (see Skinner 2015 on *artisyá*). As

social roles occupied by jalolu continue to shift over time, a strong commitment remains among many to perform the roles of cultural historian, reciter of family genealogies, confident and mediator, and accompanist to important rites of passage—the jali practices that have been at the heart of Mande cultures for centuries.

This dissertation is informed by the substantial body of literature concerning Mande music and jalolu (Charry 2000; Skinner 2015; Hale 1998; Tamari 1999; Banning Eyre 2000; Durán 1995, 2017a, 2007, 2013, 2015c; Durán and Furniss 1999; Ebron 2009; B.G. Hoffman 1990; B. Hoffman 1995; Keita 1988; Knight 1973; Maxwell 2008; Huchard 1985; Durán 1999). The research is further informed by scholars who have focused on the mediation of Mande music by the world music industry (Skinner 2015; Charry 2000; Hale 1998; Ebron 2009; Durán 2017b), as well as by scholarship that examines practices of jaliya in Mande diaspora communities in New York City and Paris (Ebron 2004, 2009; Skinner 2004; Racanelli 2011; Van Buren 2003; Knight 1991; Dorsch 2017).

Among these studies, several are particularly germane to what follows. One is Paulla Ebron's article, "Continental Riffs: Praisesingers in Transnational Contexts" (Ebron 2004), which preceded her book *Performing Africa* (Ebron 2009). Ebron explores how the extant nationalisms within the Mande social world, as well as in the diaspora, overlap to "both enliven and contain [griot] music, inviting listeners to hear within certain political agendas" (Ebron 2004, 289). She argues that nationalist belonging

articulates various “imagined communities” (B. Anderson 2006), and examines how communities’ distinct perspectives and political commitments come to bear on how jali music is presented, heard and imagined. Specifically, she examines how three “performative niches...West African state-making, the African American search for roots, and the world-music industry...each generate characteristic ‘structures of feeling,” (ibid, 290) following the concept introduced by Raymond Williams (Williams 1977).

In her examination of the relationship between griots and African American culture, Ebron argues that “to cultural nationalists of the early 1970’s, the West African griot—including the jali—was a figure that could bridge the gap between Africa and African Americans” (Ebron 2004, 294). According to Ebron, griots “were the oral historians who could recover history for those for whom it had been stolen by slavery” (ibid). The griot is thus turned to not for specific cultural-historic knowledge, but instead as a figure representative of a generalized oral knowledge of African provenance.

Ryan Skinner is another scholar whose work is particularly germane to this dissertation. In “Determined Urbanities: Diasporic Jeliya in the 21st Century” (Skinner 2004), Skinner studies how migrant *jeliw* (the Maninka spelling of jalolu) produce and maintain avenues for livelihood and belonging through the application of their cultural practices to life in the West African diaspora communities of New York City. He situates his ethnographic study between the lives of three *jeli* (the Maninka spelling of jali)

immigrant musicians to show how “individuals creatively use and manipulate transnational pathways and infrastructures to sustain and develop social practices” (ibid, 140). Skinner reflects his interlocutors’ life experiences against the broader histories of migration among Mande peoples in West Africa to show how practices of diasporic *jeliya* (the Maninka spelling of jaliya) constitute a distinctive and emergent itinerant culture. Skinner’s study looks beyond “interpreting social groups in relation to localities fixed in space and time” (ibid, 142), arguing that itinerancy is the rule, not the exception, among *jeliw*.

Skinner traces the migration of *jeliw* to the early 1990s in relation to the world music industry, noting that many of the first *jelis* to settle in New York city came as members of West African touring bands, whose trips abroad were facilitated by emerging music industry networks. He draws on the work of Stuart Hall (Hall 1999) and Mamadou Diouf (Diouf 2002) to explore how migrant musicians “remodel” *jeliya* in New York city in the shape of “vernacular modernism.”

Other scholars also address the topic of *jelis* making meaning abroad. In “Diasporic *Jeliya* as Collaborative Trade in New York City” (Racanelli 2011) David Racanelli explores cross-cultural collaborations between migrant *jeliw* and other New York-based musicians as they both build their trade (as musicians) and execute various trades (as in the exchange of cultural knowledge). Racanelli shows that instrumental

performance (*foli*) is prized over the verbal arts among New York *jeliya* because it allows for easier cross-cultural musical collaboration and is considered more accessible to English-speaking musicians and audiences. My work in Chapter 4 offers a compliment to this Racanelli's study by further focusing on how jali song and spoken oration are reshaped by migrant experience. Likewise, Chapter 2 discusses how instrumental virtuosity is foregrounded and co-produced on the kora music album *Kaira* (Diabaté 1988b)

In "Making Manding in the concert hall – Jali pop in Paris" (Dorsch 2017), Hauke Dorsch studies how live and videotaped performances of *jaliya* provide Mande diaspora communities avenues for connecting with their cultural heritage. Dorsch examines these "rituals of belonging" as sites for performance of Mandinka identity (the "doing" of identity, as Dorsch describes it). Dorsch argues that the "schizophonic" gap between a recording and its performative setting doesn't lessen listeners' experience of musical moments as deeply felt expressions of Mande belonging. Nor does inter-cultural and inter-stylistic mixing compromise the music's quality as "deep Mande" expression.

In "Music Out of Africa: Mande *Jaliya* in Paris" (Knight 1991) Roderick Knight describes the Mande migration to Paris in the late 1980s, which claimed the city as "*une province mandingue*." Knight briefly considers musicians such as Salif Keita and Mory Kanté, who had gained significant recognition in the Parisian (and later global) music

industry by that time. However, he focuses primarily on the experience of jelis who either followed their migrant patrons to Paris, visiting on short visa stays to ply their trade before returning home with money in their pockets, or who came to seek out a modest living by performing in restaurants. According to Knight, most of the migrants of this period moved with relative freedom back and forth between Paris and their home country, their travel often motivated by the need to gather funds for a major upcoming expense.

Beyond the field of Mande diaspora studies, the proceeding work also relates to the broader literature surrounding music in migrant communities (Baily and Collyer 2006; Aidi 2014; Schramm 1986; Alessandrini 2001; Baily 1995, 2005; Chambers 2008; Gross, McMurray, and Swedenburg 2013; Kaya 2002; Turino 2010; Chávez 2017; Ebron 2004), scholarship that in turn emerges from a growing interest in the mobility of cultural forms—a field that has gained prominence through decades of scholarship that unsettles the necessary link between culture and particular, localized geographies (Clifford 1994, 1997; A. Tsing 2000; A.L. Tsing 2015, 2011; Feld 2012a; Connell and Gibson 2004; Charry 2012; Clifford 2008).

1.4 Music Circulation and the Black Atlantic

Following the lead of George E. Marcus (Marcus 1995) and Anna Tsing (A.L. Tsing 2015), this dissertation utilizes multi-sited ethnography to explore how Mande

music is remade in circulation. In the first two chapters I study music recordings produced at the interface between Mande musicians, a cadre of London-based record producers, and a global music industry that enables the circulation of music, musicians and meaning through the Black Atlantic. In Chapter 4, I study how one Mande musician's expressive practice is remade by his migration from Senegal to a rural town in the US South. Situated amidst the "diasporic intimacy" (Gilroy 1993, 16; Feld 2012a) made possible by 500 years of Atlantic interconnection, this study considers Mande music beyond its relationship to the African continent by tracing the evolution of its form and meaning as music and musicians travel international routes of circulation.

My discussion draws upon previous research concerned with the role that music circulation plays in shaping expressive practices and mediating value. For example, in *Japanoise: Music at the Edges of Circulation*, David Novak proposes that "circulation itself constitutes culture" (Novak 2013, 17). In his reading, circulation is not "something that takes place *between* cultures," but rather circulation is a site of "cultural production in itself" (ibid). Gavin Steingo explores ways in which the production of kwaito music is shaped by the precarious circulation of mp3 audio samples in South African townships. Faced with the routine breakdown of the technologies of storage and transmission, Steingo argues that in the context of kwaito music, circulation is characterized by immobility rather than mobility (Steingo 2016). Music scholars have variously studied

the transnational mobility of hip-hop (Neff 2013; Shipley 2012; Aidi 2014), of reggae music (Cattermole 2013; Jaffe and Sanderse 2010; Samuels 2004), and of country music (Fisher 2016; S.I. Thompson 1992), for instance, as well as the social lives (Feld 2012b) of particular sound recordings (Feld 2000; Kajikawa 2015), of particular musical instruments (Dubois 2016), and of musical schema and song forms (Stoia 2021).

A key concern among these and other scholars is the relationship between circulation and the production and exchange of social value. Scholars have examined, for instance, the exchange of cloth in West Africa (Sylvanus 2016), the trade in matsutake mushrooms (A.L. Tsing 2015), and the circulation of goods and commodities that wind up in San Francisco Bay Area Indian stores (Mankekar 2015). A particularly relevant example of this kind of inquiry is Timothy Taylor's 2020 study, "Circulation, Value, Exchange, and Music" (Taylor 2020). Working from the premise that contemporary neoliberal capitalism is based on circulation (Lee and LiPuma 2002, 210), and drawing on Karl Marx's 1867 observation that "circulation sweats money from every pore" (Marx 2019), Taylor argues that in the context of music, "circulation creates value" (Taylor 2020, 263). Drawing on Mankekar, Appadurai and Breckenridge (Mankekar 2015; Appadurai and Breckenridge 1988), Taylor claims that the search for value is central to the human desire for meaning, and that one of the prime values of music circulation is

the way it “facilitates people finding others like themselves, forming alliances, fashioning identities” (ibid, 267).

Anna Tsing is wary of circulation as a guiding metaphor to describe processes of globalization. For her, circulation calls to mind “the healthy flow of blood in the body and the stimulating, evenhanded exchange of the marketplace” (A. Tsing 2000, 336). As such, circulation metaphor is used in a simplifying manner to discuss the breakdown of oppressive barriers. “Circulation,” she writes, “is thus tapped for the endorsement of multicultural enrichment, freedom, mobility, communication, and creative hybridity” (ibid, 337). She offers an invitation to “study the landscape of circulation as well as the flows. How are people, cultures, and things remade as they travel?” (ibid, 347).

Novak’s notion of circulation *as* culture and Tsing’s warning against celebrating circulation in an unproblematized manner line up in Paul Gilroy’s conception of “the Black Atlantic” (Gilroy 1993). For Gilroy, the Black Atlantic is a dynamic geography in which culture is restlessly on the move—emerging and taking root across national boundaries. The histories that birthed the Black Atlantic as a region (and its celebrated expressive practices), are tense and frictive: imperial conquest, slavery, disinheritance. Across the Black Atlantic, culture is produced through processes of circulation shot through with histories of violence. These circulations are a far cry from “the healthy flow

of blood in the body and the stimulating, evenhanded exchange of the marketplace” that Tsing dismisses.

Indeed, this is the central conflict that Gilroy works within: that the Black Atlantic has been shaped as a common geography both by a shared history of violence and by the restive persistence (and circulating mutual influence) of expressive culture. Against histories of violence cultural practices persevere, emerge, tangle with others; in the process they are shipped off, danced with, storied, celebrated, incorporated, reframed. The heat of this history is tense, wrought from friction, body against body.

Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Gilroy 1993) proffered an intervention in the longstanding scholarly debate about how best to understand the historical and present-day cultural relationships between Africa and the Atlantic world. Gilroy’s work marks a shift in the ground of this discussion. Theories of embodied retentions of African musical styles in black music of the Americas, enabled by the transatlantic slave trade (Herskovits 1958; Waterman 1952; Oliver 1970; Van der Merwe 1989), were deepened in subsequent scholarship by a focus on the multi-directional circulation of musical aesthetics and philosophical orientations throughout the diaspora (Mintz and Price 1976; R.F. Thompson 1983; Gilroy 1993; Kubik 2008). The circulation of musical aesthetics in the twentieth century and beyond has been facilitated most powerfully by the development of the recording industry, argues Gilroy (Gilroy

1993). This stereophonic geography that Paul Gilroy calls the Black Atlantic transcends the borders of nation states and deepens ways of thinking about the transnational circulation of expressive culture and its local manifestations by focusing on the “routes” of circulation and the re-fabrication of culture. Since the publication of Gilroy’s landmark work in 1993, numerous studies have explored local music practices against the backdrop of the cultural history of the Black Atlantic (Appert 2016, 2018; Feld 2012a; Sakakeeny 2013; Aidi 2014; Jaji 2014; Rivera-Rideau 2015; Perry 2016; Dubois 2016; Veal 2007; Chude-Sokei 2015).

A basic intent of Gilroy’s text is to shape a narrative of the Atlantic world that transgresses nationalism and views of the diaspora that collapse it into an essentialized African past. Gilroy proposes “new chronotopes that might fit with a theory that was less intimidated by and respectful of the boundaries and integrity of modern nation states” (Gilroy 1993, 4). He introduces the image of a ship “in motion across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean as a central organizing symbol for this enterprise and as my starting point... Ships,” Gilroy writes, “immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artifacts: tracts, books, gramophone records, and choirs” (ibid). Gilroy later quotes Peter Linebaugh’s prescient suggestion in 1982, namely that “the ship

remained perhaps the most important conduit of Pan-African communication before the appearance of the long-playing record" (Linebaugh 1982, 116; as cited in Gilroy 1993, 13).

The circulation of music is a primary site for Gilroy's efforts to portray the Atlantic "as a system of cultural exchanges" (ibid). He explores the routes that expressive cultures have traveled through this geography, inflected as they are with histories of colonialism and anti-colonial revolution, each time refashioned to be at once local and connected to a wider pan-African history. For Gilroy, the process of cultural formation through circulation makes an argument against the "purist idea of one-directional flow of African culture from east to west" (ibid, 96).

Following the lead of Amiri Baraka (Baraka 1968), Gilroy postulates Black music as a "changing same" (Gilroy 1993, 101). However, he argues that "the syncretic complexity of black expressive cultures alone supplies powerful reasons for resisting the idea that an untouched, pristine Africinity resides inside these forms, working a powerful magic in order to trigger repeatedly the perception of absolute identity" (ibid). Gilroy's perspective rejects essentialist notions of African retentions in black music while also acknowledging the long shadow of slavery as the shared terrain of Black Atlantic scholarship.

This involves the difficult task of striving to comprehend the reproduction of cultural traditions not in the unproblematic transmission

of a fixed essence through time but in the breaks and interruptions which suggest that the invocation of tradition may itself be a distinct, though covert, response to the destabilizing flux of the post-contemporary world. New traditions have been invented in the jaws of modern experience and new conceptions of modernity produced in the long shadow of our enduring traditions—the African one and the ones forged from the slave experience which the black vernacular so powerfully and actively remembers (ibid).

For the purposes of the present work, I consider the Black Atlantic as a sonic geography: a space that can be charted and navigated by and through sound. Examining how recorded representations of Mande music are created and circulated in the music industry, and how one jali's expressive practice is reshaped by his transatlantic migration, this dissertation's aim is to contribute a series of coordinates to the Black Atlantic sonic map.

1.5 The World Music Paradigm

The present study refers repeatedly to the term *world music*. I use it here to describe music industry networks of the anglophone North that employ this label to organize its promotional and distribution strategies, and internal structures. I do not use the term as a genre marker, or to make any claim about shared aesthetic or stylistic attributes in musical practice. I will offer a brief history of the term, followed by an ethnographic investigation of the key moment that codified it as a music industry concept.

The term “world music” has signified differently in different contexts over the past several decades. It was first taken up within US music departments in the 1960s by scholars seeking to carve out a space for the academic study of music outside the traditions of European art music, and of American and European popular song. Robert E. Brown is credited with having institutionalized the term when he began teaching “World Music” classes at Wesleyan University.³ Even as such courses began to be incorporated into music departments, they typically remained marginal to the standard curriculum. World music courses were most often offered as a single-semester survey of expressive practices from random sites around the world. However reductive this term was in its conception (by piling all of the rest but the West into a single semester), it did afford a toe hold for the growing field of ethnomusicology in the academy, and thus played a role in the ongoing effort to shift academic music studies beyond euro-centric paradigms.

In the 1980s, the term “world music” was taken up by a cadre of independent record label owners, producers, record shop owners and radio presenters in London.

³ Brown was one of the first students of the seminal figure in American ethnomusicology, Mantel Hood, at UCLA, where he served as Hood’s first graduate assistant before he earned his Ph.D. in 1965. In addition to teaching at Wesleyan and SDSU, Brown became the director of the American Society for Eastern Arts in 1973, which he subsequently renamed The Center for World Music. The Center lives on today as a community-based non-profit working to present international music in community and K-12 educational settings (Lapinsky 2005).

During a series of meetings held at the Empress of Russia pub in 1987, this group chose the term *world music* to define a shared publicity strategy for widely divergent international recordings they hoped to promote in London's record shops and on British radio (Toynbee and Vis 2010; Taylor 1997; Frith 2000). Within the fertile music industry of London in the late-1980s, world music quickly gained currency as a marketing tool. In the intervening years, industries sprang up across metropolitan centers of the Global North that focused on recording, presenting, promoting, and selling world music. The Empress of Russia effort, a balance of advocacy and marketing acumen, had the outsized result of industrializing world music as a multi-valent and contested musical genre (Feld 2000), a marketing tool (Frith 2000; Taylor 1997), and a social movement (Jowers 1993). In 2000 Steven Feld lamented the emergence of a single genre that could pull together any and every hybrid or traditional style. For him this turn emblemized "the triumph of global music industrialization" (Feld 2000, 151). Nevertheless, over the ensuing years the global dissemination of music and musicians has been mediated, in large part, by world music networks, as expressed by an industry of record labels (large and small), publicists, managers, agents, festivals, publications, producers, and artists, all pulled together—ambitiously or ambivalently—under the banner of "world music."

Ethnomusicologists have positioned themselves variously in relationship to the world music industry, but it's hard to imagine any who has remained untouched by it.

Steven Feld makes the keen observation in his article, "A Sweet Lullaby for World Music" (Feld 2000), that the ample academic discourse surrounding world music tends to be split between two meta-narratives: the "anxious" and the "celebratory." Stephen Cottrell (Cottrell 2010) asserts that anxious narratives were provoked most acutely among academics by use of traditional music by western pop stars (Meintjes 1990); by popular music artists' appropriation of field recordings (Feld 2000); by creation of synthetic/hybrid styles (Turino 1998; Shim 2006; Neff 2013; Shain 2018); and by the global music industry's commercialization of both hybrid and traditional styles (Taylor 2015, 1997).

A key debate cutting across these themes is how best to view the globalization of music in relation to the world music industry. Understanding the capitalist globalization of music in terms of unequal economic relationships, and of colonial and imperialist histories, has been of key importance to certain scholars. Debate surrounding cultural imperialism has focused on ways in which world music may serve as a "cultural analog of international political domination" (Garofalo 1993). This perspective was most sharply focused on "elite artists" from the Global North who appropriated sounds of the Global South in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Feld 1988; Meintjes 1990). Goodwin and Gore (Goodwin and Gore 1990) nuance the anxious narrative, arguing that World Beat should be understood as an effect of cultural imperialism, rather than as a cause itself.

Martin Stokes, in his literature review, “Music and the Global Order” (Stokes 2004), reminds readers that the prevalent discourses surrounding music and cultural imperialism — those which consider music as “processes of extraction, commodification, appropriation, and exploitation” — are rarely straightforward (ibid, 56). Rather, the appropriation of local musical styles by a global music industry, and by particular artists rooted in the metropolitan centers of Europe and the US, has a counterpart in the local incorporation of Global North styles in the Global South (Shain 2018; Shim 2006; Guilbault 1993).

The “celebratory” view tends to regard the globalization of music as a potentially democratizing force. Scholars have written about the capacity of music circulation to produce hybrid aesthetics and the possibility of new political subjectivities and solidarities. Reebee Garofalo views the globalization of music as a process of transculturation — “a two-way process whereby elements of international pop, rock and rhythm and blues are incorporated in local and national musical cultures, and indigenous influences contribute to the development of new transnational styles” (Garofalo 1993). Similarly, Richard Shain studies the echoes of “tropical cosmopolitanism” in Senegal and Cuba as Afro-Cuban music is reimagined by musicians in West Africa (Shain 2018), while Ali Colleen Neff investigates the

transatlantic resonance of “dirty south” aesthetics in Senegal and the US South (Neff 2013).

The broad category of music that I discuss in this dissertation might be more accurately described as Global South Music Recorded for Distribution in the Global North (GSMRDGN). However, as the networks of circulation for such recordings tend to be grouped together under the industry term, “world music,” I make use of that term instead to describe the networks of distribution, shared recording aesthetics, and approaches to marketing that define this segment of the international music industry.

I wish to take a moment to delve further into the inception of the world music marketing category by drawing on an interview with an interlocutor who played a central role in its development as an industry term. In this context, world music has a remarkably specific time and place of origin: a meeting on June 29, 1987, at the Empress of Russia pub on St. John’s Street in London. Here, a coterie of international music enthusiasts who were working in various roles within the London music industry — as producers, record label owners, musicians, journalists, radio presenters, promoters — met to address a specific question: How might they work together to make international music more discoverable within London’s record shops, and to feature it more prominently in UK magazines and radio?

Ben Mandelson—the musician and producer who, along with Globestyle Records co-conspirator Roger Armstrong, called for the Empress of Russia meetings—acted as the secretary for that meeting, and for the two that followed it that summer at the same pub. Mandelson recorded the meeting minutes, which have since been published on the *fRoots* website.⁴ The thirty-six people who attended the series of meetings treasured and traded in music that was being lost among the monolithic genre markers delineating the bins in record shops: classical, rock, disco, reggae, jazz, folk, etc. Acting at the crossroads of activist and monetary interests, the group represented a range of burgeoning music industry initiatives: the music festival WOMAD and Arts Worldwide, both of whom presented international music in the UK; record labels (and record distributors) such as GlobeStyle, Rogue, Oval, Sterns, New Routes, Earthworks, Hannibal, Triple Earth, Cooking Vinyl, Topic/ Tangent, and World Circuit; and a handful of radio presenters and journalists with an interest in “local music from out there” (as the magazine *fRoots* put it). The group came together around a shared interest in creating a stronger presence for international music within the UK music industry establishment. They had both a philosophical and financial stake in doing so.

⁴ *fRoots* magazine, formerly Folk Roots, has been a key publication for the world music industry. It started as a British folk music magazine in 1979 and by the late 1980s covered a large swath of the international music styles circulating through world music industry networks.

Max Farrar and Yasmin Valli explain that in the UK, multiculturalism as an aspirational concept became commonplace in the 1980s. “The political ethos of multiculturalism,” write Farrar and Valli, was manifested through: “the advocacy of sympathetic recognition by members of the majority ethnic group of the various ‘other’ cultures that compose the society; the promotion of dialogue between these various cultural groups; the implementation of equal rights for minority groups, and the outlawing of discrimination against those groups” (Farrar and Valli 2012). Most relevant to the topic at hand, these authors express the view that the ethos of multiculturalism, at this time and place, sought to celebrate “the differences that emerge as each of the cultures promote their specific features” (ibid, 7). In the multiculturalist climate of London in the late 1980s, a critical mass of music industry professionals came together to formalize their shared affinity for celebrating and promoting a broad diversity of the world’s music.

Sitting with me in 2018 at a café in King’s Cross, London, Ben Mandelson recalled, “It might be that great ideas are like buses, and they come along in threes. There’s lots of stuff that just pops up. It’s the zeitgeist moment where if you had the idea, it’s because the situation drives you to have the idea and therefore likeminded people also have the idea” (Mandelson 2018). Such was the convergence of energies around carving out a more defined space for international music in the UK in 1987.

Mandelson describes the impetus behind the series of meetings as a utilitarian one: to create a shared promotional strategy among the constituent record labels to present (and sell) international music to a broader audience. They identified a shared set of practical goals: printing and distributing browser cards for record shops that could be used to make their releases more readily discoverable by prospective listener/buyers; writing joint press releases about their shared marketing strategy, and hiring a press agent to plug it; releasing a compilation cassette drawn from the label's various catalogues to be circulated with the *New Musical Express* magazine; planning and implementing a world music record chart, managed by Sterns; and publicizing October as "world music month" (fRoots).

Mandelson said that these efforts aimed to get some "collective presence for the content" (Mandelson 2018). At a 2013 gathering of world music industry actors in Montreal, Mandelson described the practical motivation of these initial meetings with typically dry wit: "At that time there were things called record shops. Now you may not remember these, but these are places where you could buy what we call vinyl these days... And when they had them in shops, you had to put labels on the boxes in which the records rested, otherwise you couldn't find them..."(Montreal 2013). Mandelson muses that, lacking such guidance, record purchasing would be like entering "a supermarket where every single tin had no label, and you had to sort of guess by the

look of the tin if it was beans, or if it was soup, or if it was cat food...That could be fun...for a kind of random diet experience. But in music terms, we really needed to have labels on boxes to say: 'in this box you will find the stuff that you are looking for.'" (ibid). Given the debate that has surrounded the term "world music" since its inception, Mandelson is concerned that people appreciate the very narrow aims of the initial series of meetings in 1987. In his telling, the meetings primarily aimed to carve out physical spaces in record bins for a diverse array of international music to be more easily accessed by those interested in buying it.

Mandelson describes that before the advent of the "world music" category, international recordings were often scattered randomly into genre-labeled bins including Rock, Reggae, Folk, and Jazz. The first world music compilation, which emerged from those 1987 meetings, sketched out the types of music that could be lost within this organizational structure. *The World at One* features kora music from Gambia, a Zouk track from the French Antilles, Israeli diva Ofra Haza, the benga band Shirati Jazz, the Spanish flamenco group Ketama, the qawwali singer Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, and more. Summarizing the pre-world music dilemma, Mandelson contends, "basically, the whole world music campaign in '87 was about how to get the sound carrier and everything that implied, into a place where people could find it" (ibid).

The 1987 meeting notes foreshadow debates that would stem from the creation of the world music marketing concept. “We discussed various names for our type of music(s),” Mandelson’s minutes recall, “and on a show of hands ‘World Music’ was agreed as the ‘banner’ under which we would work. Other suggestions were ‘World Beat’, ‘Hot...’, ‘Tropical...’ and various others. It was suggested that all of the labels present would use ‘World Music’ on their record sleeves (to give a clear indication of the ‘File Under...’ destination) and also on all publicity material etc.” (fRoots). Years later Mandelson recalled in Montreal, “we did it on a show of hands, and we had all kinds of curious names that came up. I think that ‘world music’ was the least-worst option in terms of being offensive or not offensive” (Montreal 2013).

The press release written after the first meeting by the record label GlobeStyle described the aims of the world music category this way: “It was agreed that the term WORLD MUSIC would be used by all labels present to offer a new and unifying category for shop racking, press releases, publicity handouts and ‘file under...’ suggestions. This means that you no longer have to worry about where to put those new Yemenite pop, Bulgarian choir, Zairean soukous or Gambian kora records” (fRoots).

Ultimately the cadre of labels pooled £3,500, each label contributing £50 per release they wished to jointly market through the world music initiative. This sum of £3,500 launched the marketing term, “world music,” which has had an outsized impact

over the past four decades. Mandelson reminisced, “When world music started... it was planned to be a three-month or six-month campaign... So, the idea that it would get thirty-two years of juice out of the same orange is pretty good. You know, big orange” (Mandelson 2018). To participants at the three meetings, the collective ethos of this shared publicity strategy ran against the grain of the competitive norms of the music industry. “The industry in the ‘80s was very much about market share,” recalled Mandelson. “You win your share by stopping your rival from getting that share. That’s a classic market model: ‘I have market share. The more I have, the less you have.’ That’s competitive and combative. [Rather,] the world music scene was a collective and cooperative model which said, ‘We can all do this together and together we will have presence, a voice, and a benefit for one will be a benefit for all” (Mandelson 2020). The second press release emerging from the group in 1987 echoed this collaborative sentiment: “Whoever heard of record companies working together rather than competing with each other? Well, this is exactly what is happening this autumn when eleven independent record companies will join together with one common aim – to push, shove and promote WORLD MUSIC into record shops and living rooms all over the U.K.” (fRoots).

Reflecting on this collectivist impulse in 2020 Mandelson said, “Instead of thinking of world music as a genre, which it kind of isn’t...I’m tending now to say world

music is a community." Maybe world music "is the sound that a community makes," Mandelson wonders (Mandelson 2020). Even while arguing for its utility and value, Mandelson frequently champions the importance of challenging the category itself. "I think [world music] has been beneficial to a lot of artists. It's definitely helped careers. It's putting money in pockets. It's given them presence. And if they've got a voice in their head, they have a chance to speak out against it. Say I don't like being called world music because x, y, and z. That's absolutely tops. I'm all for that. That's great. Let them do it. Yeah, they must. Otherwise, you get no multiplicity of voices" (Mandelson 2018).

In the most optimistic sense, the "community" that Mandelson describes as world music seeks to build a world in which many worlds fit (to borrow a term from the Zapatista movement: *un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos*). Both in terms of aim and structure, Mandelson argues, world music sought to create a greater "presence" for varied musical worlds operating on the edges of the music industry. In "Beating New Tracks: WOMAD and the British world music movement," Peter Jowers frames the emergence of world music in Britain as a social movement best understood as a response "in the field of culture to the condition of postmodernity" (Jowers 1993). He argues that collectivities such as the one that coalesced around world music in 1980s London "engender new space and sites for coherent identity formation" (ibid). Jowers points out that the world music movement resembled other social movements of the era: its

structure was non-hierarchical; it contained multiple points of leadership; it was often temporary and ad hoc.

Echoing this social movement framing, Mandelson describes the flexibility of the world music paradigm. To him world music is “an osmotic process...unfixed with boundaries.” He reflects, “when you get categorical—literally categorical—you become exclusive. The more vague it is at the edges, the more permeable it is for things to come in and out. And I see that as a positive, not a negative. I like the ambiguity of the definition. I think that's actually a strength, not a failure” (Mandelson 2020). He continues, “If you say you're in the world music community, you probably are. Some people say ‘We're not world music’. We go, ‘Okay fine. Whatever.’ It's not like being in the Masons...or the Rotarians even. You don't have to pass an exam” (ibid).

Mandelson's account focuses on the narrow aims of the initial world music meetings, yet he is certainly as aware as anyone of the controversies to which this initially limited effort would lead in the years (and decades) to come. “It was not meant to be like, ‘Let's make a genre name that would make thirty years of controversy!’ It was, ‘How can we get a double page spread in *Music Week*?’ It was as simple as that. How can we sell more records? We signed record contracts with artists; therefore, our job was to sell their records. How could we do it?” (Mandelson 2018).

Mandelson's colleague, producer and manager Roger Armstrong, reflects on the role of the profit motive in the creation of the term:

I'm afraid my heart's in commerce. I do think we should sell records and people should get paid for them. And I have first-hand experience of it. Because we put out records and we sold enough, we were able to bring people into the country to tour. The record royalties and the money they made from touring – which at the end of the day didn't add up to a big heap of beans in our terms – that did things like put people's children through school... When you hit that front-line, I'm afraid that the harping about whether it's politically correct to call it world music or not is in my mind so much stuff of nonsense. It makes people money where they need money, and I think it has a value (Laing 2010).

Back in the London café in 2020, Mandelson admitted ambivalence about the future of the world music category. "Some people don't want to use the word 'world music'. It's fine. It will find its own equilibrium. I don't want to be one of the soldiers holding out in a forest in the Pacific with a flag of the emperor. That's not practical" (Mandelson 2020). However, he does point out that the category has fundamentally shaped the terrain on which a generation of international music listeners in the Global North came to know about "local music from out there" (to quote fRoots). "There are people who—if they're 32 and younger—were born after the term world music was coined," he said. "So that's a whole new generation of understanding and thinking...that maybe world music doesn't satisfy. And I think that's okay... But those same people who grew up after the birth of world music, one thing that they had that I didn't have, was that they had the presence of world music throughout their lives... So, they didn't

have to create it and understand why it was necessary. They only had it to admire it or fight against it. It was always there as a concept within the concept box” (Mandelson 2020). He concluded our interview by reflecting on an approaching generational shift, as those who initiated the world music concept near the end of their careers. It’s up to the next generation, he asserted, to work out whether world music remains useful or relevant for the next thirty years. “I’ve played my banjo,” Mandelson says. “I’ve made my record. I played the world music record.” (ibid)

As a marketing term, “world music” has influenced musicians, music scholars, and journalists for nearly four decades. However, the impetus behind the creation of that term is often lost in critiques focused on how the term became a flashpoint for debates around some of the urgent concerns of the intervening decades: globalization, xenophobia, migration, cultural appropriation, and the commodification of culture.

In the wake of the Empress of Russia meetings countless musicians have been offered platforms, some were made famous, others were invigorated; many were disappointed, exploited, appropriated, commodified, and hung out to dry by the world music network. An industry comprised mostly of independent record labels, publicists, managers, festivals, agents, producers and artists, the world music industry remains diffuse, even as it plays a key role in how people encounter international music in the Global North and how Global South musicians build international careers. This history

is the backdrop against which the following study takes place. Each of the characters who enters the stories I tell below has been shaped in significant ways by the histories that flow from the London summer of 1987 and those meetings at the Empress of Russia.

1.6 Anxious Tropes: Academics and World Music Record Producers

Academics frequently position their work in opposition to the world music industries. Scholars writing about the emergence of world music as a concept within the broader music industry describe dynamics of extraction and exploitation that evoke parallel histories of racism, colonialism, and imperialism. World music, in this telling, is fundamentally tied to a process of capitalist globalization and cultural imperialism. In response to this discourse I return to Feld's observation (Feld 2000) of the "anxious" and "celebratory" narratives of world music to argue that when world music producers are discussed by academics, they are often figured to fit anxious cultural imperialist tropes. In the process world music producers are portrayed as foils against which the scholar positions his or her politics—and in the process the producer is made to validate scholarly work as the genuine article (in contrast to the crass, exploitive work of record production and sales). The problem I see with this kind of discourse is that record producers are too often reduced to one-dimensional figures, their body of work made to serve simply as a reflecting pool for scholarly histories of extraction, appropriation, and disinheritance.

Throughout this literature, rarely are music industry actors—and, in particular, record producers—engaged as research subjects (Durán 2014). In this dissertation, I work to take world music record producers seriously as subjects of ethnomusicological concern. They play key roles in shaping expressive practices for international encounter. The work of world music producers reaches the ears of publics within and beyond the academy, both in the Global North and in the Global South. They are central actors in the schizophrenic mimesis (Feld 1996) of Global South music, as world music producers shape representations of expressive practices and narrate them for international publics.

Writing about Herbie Hancock's appropriation of Central African Republic BaBenzélé music, Steven Feld sought to "resist either that snap judgment or the ready-made interpretation in order to scrutinize the complexity of [Hancock's] subject position, to inquire about the musical-political-industrial habitus in which particular acts of schizophrenic mimesis take place, and to locate the discourses which surround their circulation" (ibid, 6). My exploration of the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of world music record producers' work has a similar aim.

World music remains, by and large, marginal both to the mainstream music industry and tends to command relatively modest financial incentives for producers and artists. World music producers often describe being motivated by ethical commitments and often express thinking deeply about the implications of their work. Some bring

extensive ethnographic experience to bear on their work as commercial record producers. Producers also actively manipulate the sound and structure of the recordings they collaboratively create, in keeping with both their personal aesthetic preferences and their opinions about what will sell. World music producers tangle with artists over issues including repertoire, song length, instrumentation, arrangement, and sound color. Songs are trimmed to fit perceptions of a future audiences' expectations. Mistakes are noted, excavated, and discarded. Performances are compressed. Edits elide seamlessly; lyrics are reconstructed and reconfigured to fit a perception of marketability; languages are (re)prioritized; auto tune is applied; rhythms are simplified or stripped away; overdubbed instruments are woven into the mix; buzzing distortions are erased, or amplified, to suit an aesthetic vision; artist encounter is shaped for a foreign audience

A small coterie of ethnomusicologists has focused on record producers (though rarely world music producers in specific) as an aspect of their research. Louise Meintjes' 2003 *Sound of Africa: Making Music Zulu in a South African Studio* is an incisive look through the control room window of a Johannesburg recording studio. Reflected in the glass are revealed a panoply of images, snapshots, moments of interaction, fragments of audio, and glimpses into negotiations over "the electronic manipulation of style" (Meintjes 2003b, 8). Meintjes' ethnography links the aesthetic necessarily to the political in these moments, revealing political subjects wrestling to shape the "sound of Africa"

against the waning days of apartheid. In another example, “Digital Traditions: Arrangement and Labor in Istanbul’s Recording Studio Culture” (Bates 2016), Elliot Bates describes the session musicians, recording engineers, arrangers, and producers who work in the pressure-cooker environment of Istanbul’s studio scene, creating music for TV spots and film scores, as well as for folkloric and popular music releases. Bates’s research is concerned with how tradition is produced, performed, arranged, and engineered in a studio environment, while contending with the “digital aesthetics” of contemporary record production.

Other scholars have taken recording studios as the locus for research into production practices in settings that range from the Austin, Texas studio scene (Porcello 2005), to kwaito music in South African townships (Steingo 2016), techno music in Indonesia (Wallach 2005), pop music in Nepal (Greene 2005), aboriginal recording in Australia (Neuenfeldt 2005, 1993) and in the US (Diamond 2005; Samuels 2004; Scales 2012), samba music in Brazil (Moehn 2005), pop music in Bamako, Mali (Pras et al. 2019). Still other scholars have questioned the gendered experience of female mix engineers in the United States (Sandstrom 2000; McCartney 2003; Wolfe 2012).

As they focus their critical lenses upon music industry actors, only rarely do scholars work self-reflexively to query the ethics of ethnomusicological research. In a profession where academic livelihoods may be tied to the collaborative production of

knowledge (if not music), scholars work in tandem with their interlocutors in the field. Many ethnomusicologists have drawn explicit or implicit distinctions between their own pursuits and the work of their commercial counterparts whose income is not tied to scholarly publication but rather to the sale of records and the brokering of musicians' international careers. As Stephen Cottrell observes in his article on the unstable relationship between ethnomusicology and the music industries, these two spaces are never as neatly partitioned as we might imagine (Cottrell 2010).

Describing the use of commercial recordings by ethnomusicologists, he points out this relationship has at times "been tenuous, with scholars only occasionally relying on commercial recordings to underpin their work. On other occasions it has been more symbiotic, with ethnomusicologists and record companies working in tandem to capture, promote, sustain or generate musical activity in particular contexts; partners in crime, as it were" (ibid). Cottrell's tongue-in-cheek description of the music and academic industries operating as "partners in crime" reflects the generalized anxiety that animates much ethnomusicological writing about music industry workers such as record producers. Academics and music industry workers have made odd bedfellows indeed, as their twin endeavors have tended to share both an intimate proximity and an intellectual distance.

In “World Music Producers and the Cuban Frontier” (Hernandez-Reguant 2012), published in Bob White’s *Music and Globalization: Critical Encounters* collection (White 2012), Ariana Hernandez-Reguant leads the listener on a “historical tour through the kinds of engagements that foreign producers, linked to the emerging world music industry, developed with Cuban music and the Cuban socialist infrastructure in the mid- to late 1980’s” (Hernandez-Reguant 2012, 113). The heart of this scholar’s analysis is an insightful discussion of the ways in which international circulation of Cuban music was reshaped by the Cuban revolution, subsequent US embargo, and the Cold War. The chronology of her study terminates with the creation of the *Buena Vista Social Club* album in 1996. This album was an unexpected hit for World Circuit Records and became the most widely circulated album of the world music industry’s first decade. As a result, this recording has been the subject of a good deal of academic and journalistic reproach and praise. The album was produced by Nick Gold of World Circuit, alongside guitarist Ry Cooder, whom Gold enlisted to work with Juan de Marcos González to assemble a group of elder musicians hailing from the eastern part of Cuba for the purpose of developing and recording a collection of songs drawn from the repertoire of pre-revolutionary-era *son*.

Hernandez-Reguant’s argument excels in its historical treatment of the multiple ways in which shifting geopolitics shaped the circulation of Cuban music, leading to

local incorporation of Cuban music styles in places such as Central and West Africa, even as its circulation was curtailed in the US and Europe during the Cold War. As she develops her argument about foreign record producers such as Ry Cooder, Nick Gold, Ned Sublette, Manuel Dominguez and David Byrne, Hernandez-Reguant at times situates their recordings productively in the context of state relations and the multiculturalist imagination of European and North American world music audiences of the 1990s. However, in setting up her analysis in the opening pages of her article, Hernandez-Reguant sacrifices depth and specificity in favor of anxiously essentializing descriptions of foreign record producers. "Always in search of new frontiers," she writes, "these producers were the contemporary equivalent of old colonial traders, who merged their love of music and adventure with a determination to succeed in an increasingly fragmented market." (ibid, 112). She goes on in this vein:

They were invested in marketing cultural authenticity that only they were able to retrieve, yet often imposed the collaboration of Western musicians and arrangers in order to achieve a sound that would be at once exotic and recognizable. They thrived on cultural difference, making a living as both cultural brokers and business intermediaries... in Cuba they cultivated an image of cosmopolitanism, adapting to local ways and using their individual charms as well as their foreign citizenship strategically to acquire social capital and successfully navigate the cumbersome Cuban bureaucracy, always distrustful of foreigner's motives. These producers often displayed a vague sympathy for the Cuban revolutionary regime so that their business would be perceived as friendly, but not so politically committed as to alienate prospective buyers back home (ibid, 112).

Drawing broad strokes but never fully connecting the dots between these claims and her analysis, Hernandez-Reguant collapses the motivations and impacts of world music producers into one-dimensional figures that fit squarely within the box labeled “cultural imperialist.” She reminds us that that these producers “were neither anthropologists nor members of a diasporic community” (ibid). Here, she rounds out the contours of her polemic by suggesting that academic study and diasporic relations are the only legitimate means for justifying cross-cultural encounters. In her telling, music producers stand in clear ethical and artistic violation—so much so that she deemed direct inquires of them about the nature of their work unnecessary.

Lucy Durán, responding alongside Nick Gold to this article, argued that in Hernandez-Reguant’s analysis, “there is a marked tendency to attribute ‘these foreign producers of Cuban music’ with identical characteristics, thoughts and motives, almost like a kind of old-school anthropological view of the ‘tribe’” (Durán 2014, 134). Durán and Gold went on to discuss their perspectives on the development of the *Buena Vista* album and to lament the disjuncture between academics and world music industry workers. Durán argued for “more critical encounters between the creative industries and academics. Both voices need to be heard, in conversation, discussing processes of production” (ibid, 137). Indeed, in the introduction to the collection in which Hernandez-Reguant’s article appears, Bob White makes a similar argument: That to

understand processes of globalization through the lens of music, one must attend to “global encounters—the chance meetings, coordinated misunderstandings, and ongoing collaborations—that bring people of different musical or cultural backgrounds together” (White 2012, 6).

However, in seeking to pull the narrative back towards the celebratory pole, Durán and Gold don’t interrogate their own work with meaningful critical depth. Rather, between Durán, Gold and Hernandez-Reguant, the tables are spun back and forth, as if caught in the unstable magnetized space between Feld’s celebratory and anxious poles.

To probe further, in her less-than-nuanced opening gloss of the work of foreign music producers in Cuba, Hernandez-Reguant constructs a strawman for an argument that pulls together identity politics, colonial history, and the gaze of musical tourism. While her analysis succeeds in establishing Hernandez-Reguant’s affinity for the cultural imperialism discourse, it falls short in describing the work of these producers with sufficient nuance or depth. While the body of her article offers a very useful perspective on the historical constitution of Cuban music’s international circulation, her writing about producers in specific pulls upon well-established, anxious narratives to reduce the role of record producers to that of colonialist caricatures.

Scholarship such as this treats producers as remote objects of research rather than as research subjects. As Durán points out, neither she nor Nick Gold, both of whom figure in Hernandez-Reguant's narrative, were interviewed for her project. Durán invokes a Malian proverb to criticize this tendency to overlook the experience and perspectives of record producers while simultaneously critiquing their motives and impacts: "If you shave the head of a man, he must be present," she writes (Durán 2014, 135).

In his monograph, *Roots in Reverse: Senegalese Afro-Cuban Music and Tropical Cosmopolitanism* (Shain 2018), historian Richard Shain also leans heavily onto the anxious pole. His treatment of Nick Gold's collaboration with Orchestra Baobab makes claims about Gold's intentions, goals, and business decisions. However, like Hernandez-Reguant, Shain never consulted Gold for his perspective. Shain makes several astute observations about ways in which Orchestra Baobab's visual representation on albums and in promotional materials serves to dehistoricize the group, concluding that Gold's marketing efforts locked "Baobab into a classic 1970's style," thus offering the impression that "Dakar's Latin musicians are stuck in a time warp" (ibid, 128). However, Shain's salient observations are undercut by the ways in which he portrays Gold personally as the lone perpetrator of this dehistoricization. Shain avoids more complicated discussion of the expectations of the international music industry, and of

musicians' participation and self-interest in defining themselves in ways that at times seek to accommodate certain international expectations. An unfortunate effect of this narrow discursive focus is that it limits Orchestra Baobab's agency, portraying them as mere vessels for Gold's conniving business savvy. What is more, in so doing, Shain seeks to establish his own scholarly project as the genuine article by over-stating Gold's influence.

Shain's analysis seems to presuppose that a press photo or an album cover adequately represents a social and historical context. In this case, he confuses the work of a record producer with his own scholarly project. Because Shain's critique is personalized and unsubstantiated, it sacrifices the nuance and complexity of artist-producer collaborations in favor of positioning the his own scholarly project as authoritative.

The irony of Shain's analysis of Nick Gold is that he treats him with the same type of uninformed engagement for which he criticizes Gold himself. "Gold's most useful talent," Shain writes, "was his ability to spin mythic narratives about his performers that resonated deeply with fin-de-siècle European and North American zeitgeists" (ibid, 121). Shain provides for an academic audience the same type of experience that he accuses Gold of providing for world music consumers: an under-researched presentation that relies on well-established tropes. In Shain's writing, the

world music producer is powerful yet naïve, controlling, manipulative, and inescapably enmeshed in the dynamics of cultural imperialism. His critique of Gold taps directly into the anxious ethnomusicological zeitgeist, as Shain positions Gold within his own “mythic narrative.” Just as Hernandez-Reguant described producers such as Gold as “[a]lways in search of new frontiers” (Hernandez-Reguant 2012, 112), Shain presents Gold as having “roamed the black Atlantic to rediscover once famous musicians from the tropical world who now were old and obscure but still spry and spirited” (Shain 2018, 121). Here, on his own authority as a scholar and critic, Shain spins a mythical narrative of Gold as a spectral figure roaming the abstract space of the Black Atlantic in search of musicians to capitalize upon.

As Shain critiques Gold for “converting [Orchestra Baobab] into conduits for tropical nostalgia” (ibid), he himself converts Gold into his own vessel for cultural imperialism anxieties. In contradistinction to the approaches of Hernandez-Reguant and Shain, this dissertation argues that a more robust methodology is needed to understand the fraught relationships between producers from the Global North collaborating with musicians from the Global South. Such a methodology, I seek to demonstrate here, must take world music producers seriously, as subjects of research, rather than dismissing them out of hand by way of anxious cultural imperialist tropes.

In both Shain's and Hernandez-Reguant's rendering, Nick Gold's presence is at once hyper-visible yet slippery, ephemeral, shadowy. He is imbued with an unreality that magnifies him to mythical proportions. Nick Gold's intentions, motivations, and impacts are portrayed to fit the grooves carved out by anxious currents running through academic writing about music industry operatives. His story is told without sufficient grounding in primary or secondary research; as such, the nuance of his work is rendered invisible. In place is an outsized caricature, presented not to make better sense of a figure such as Gold, but rather to signal a set of perspectives on the part of the authors.

In contrast, Alesia Whitmore closely examines the fraught relationship between music industry workers, such as Gold, and the musicians with whom they collaborate. In *World Music and the Black Atlantic: Producing and Consuming African-Cuban Musics on World Music Stages* (Whitmore 2020), this scholar goes to admirable lengths to steer clear of dichotomizing value judgements. Making use of extensive ethnographic research among a constellation of musicians and music industry workers (including Nick Gold), Whitmore calls attention to just how fraught these cross-cultural music industry relationships can be. Her study focuses sharply on the discursive world of a handful of musicians and music industry personnel, as they jostle with one another and struggle to build reputations and careers. She describes world music industry encounters as "a paradoxical space where collaborations both accentuate and bridge the gaps between

skepticism and embrace, between postcolonial power dynamics and counter-hegemonic discourses. While the world music industry is a fraught space filled with colonial undertones, it is also a space where musicians look to break out of postcolonial power dynamics" (ibid, 125). Pulling on the work of Louise Meintjes (Meintjes 2003b, 122) and Paul Gilroy (Gilroy 1991, 126), Whitmore explores how musicians and producers alike make use of "strategic essentialism" in their work, as they by turns challenge and reinforce essentialist notions of Africa and the diaspora.

By taking music industry workers seriously as research subjects, Whitmore's project succeeds in describing aspects of the aesthetic and ethical negotiations that are undertaken by musicians in the context of the world music industry. Set against pre-, de-, and post-colonial histories of Cuba and Mali, Whitmore's study operates on the discursive plane, analyzing what people say about their desires, motivations, and perspectives. Unpacking and contrasting her interlocutors' announced perspectives, she takes pains to avoid dwelling for too long at either the anxious or the celebratory pole. Instead, she recounts the contradictions and tensions bound up in her interlocutors' discussions. Often these dynamics are directly reflected in her own writing, as her sentences become spaces designed to accommodate tension, contrast, and even contradiction.

1.7 Summary

The aims of the proceeding dissertation are informed, most prominently, by invitations issued by Anna Tsing (A.L. Tsing 2011), Bob White (White 2012), Lucy Durán (Durán 2014) and Timothy Taylor (Taylor 2020): invitations to explore the encounters—social, political, artistic, and economic—that shape world music recordings. More specifically, my study seeks to reveal how the sound and meaning of Mande music is remade through circulation. This dissertation demonstrates how the practices of world music record producers are shaped in response to the histories and politics of their field. Focusing on the production of Mande music for international audiences, I explicate how interactions between musicians from the Global South and record producers from the Global North synthesize cultural representations through recorded sound, and how the recordings that present that sound mediate public encounters. Finally, I consider how one griot musician’s expressive practice has been transformed by his migration to the Southern United States—and by his interactions with the music industry in that context. This “patchwork” ethnography (A.L. Tsing 2011, xi) draws on both academic research and professional experience—as an artist-scholar, a sound recordist and producer, and a Mande music collaborator—to explore how Mande music is remade in circulation.

2. The Art Which Conceals Art: Transparent Mediation in World Music Record Production

Reflecting on his recording practice in 1955, ethnographic field recordist Hugh Tracey argued, “The very success of a good recording is perhaps inclined to hide the fact that it is an art which conceals art” (Tracey 1955, 7). Masking mediation by means of mediation itself, recordists and record producers practice record production as the art which conceals art. This art is key to generating the aura of ethnographic authority in ethnographic field recordings and contemporary world music productions alike. Utilizing a host of strategies and techniques, record producers aim to mediate an ideal event, one that provides listeners with the perception of listening in on a moment of musical creation, while also rendering the influence of the producer invisible, inaudible, unnoticed.

Sound recordings are wrought through a series of encounters: between musician and producer; producer and engineer; engineer and sound recording technology; sound recording and playback technology; playback and the interpretative acts carried out by the listener, those interpretations informed as they are by histories of listening (Feld 2015), by media narratives, and by individual predilections, biases, and expectations in the minds of listeners and listening publics.

In “The Industrialization of Music” Simon Frith examines how the development of recording and playback technologies impact listener interpretations of sound recordings. He discusses that the shift to multitrack tape recording in the 1950 and 1960s opened up possibilities for combining recordings from temporally dislocated moments into a single moment (the overdub). Frith writes, “Producers no longer had to take performances in their entirety. They could cut and splice, edit the best bits of performances together, cut out the mistakes, make records of ideal not real events” (Frith 1987, 22). He argues that this move towards the “ideal” recording (rather than the “real”) marked a departure from records produced earlier in the twentieth century — recordings which were “always heard as a more or less crackly mediation between listeners and actual musical events; their musical qualities often depended on the listener’s own imagination” (ibid, 21).

In what follows I argue that the mediation process in sound recording has always sought to present an “ideal” event. Hugh Tracey’s writing demonstrates that even ethnographic field recordings produced in the first half of the twentieth century aimed to present an “ideal” event by offering a heightened experience of a musical moment. Tracey’s imagination was acutely attuned to the possibilities and limitations afforded by the recording technologies at his disposal. He aimed to do the music “more than justice” (Tracey 1955) by creating idealized presentations of musical moments.

Similarly, in “Field Recording and the Production of Place” Tom Western challenges the binary relationship between the studio and the field, arguing that “leaving field recordings out of the conversation about record production perhaps inadvertently feeds into the notion that field recordings are not *produced* at all” (Western 2018, 25). He reads a handbook to field recording published by the International Folk Music Council during the 1950s as a how-to guide for *producing* field recordings. Western further asserts that we are encouraged to hear field recordings as though they “grant us unmediated access to the past” (ibid, 26), while in fact “field recording is a studio art” (ibid, 27).

Confronting the natural limitations of sound recording technology, producers turn to the techniques of music production to create sound recordings that invite the listener into feeling a direct connection with a musical moment – as if transported to another space and time. Production techniques are put into practice even before a musical performance begins: influencing choices around musical instrumentation, altering the timbre of instruments, truncating performances or expanding them, influencing song selection, contributing musical ideas to the arrangement. The process continues with choices about how the music is recorded: deciding on a recording space, choosing and placing microphones, selecting a sound recording medium and its attendant possibilities and limitations. During the tracking phase, producers offer

feedback on performances. Finally, working in post-production, they structure listeners' interpretations by making decisions around equalization and the application of compression and other timbral effects, volume balance and spatial arrangement between the component parts of a mix, the generation of artificial space through the application of reverb and other time-based effects or, again, truncating or expanding sections of the music. These processes are all component parts of what is experienced by listeners, in the end, as the musical event. Writing about the creation of rock 'n' roll recordings, Albin Zak argues that a sound recording has "its own aura and that its time and place as an authentic musical moment is each time that its sounds emanate from the loudspeaker" (Zak 2001, 51). This orientation towards playback as the "authentic musical moment" holds true for ethnographic recordings and world music recordings as well.

However, the stakes of this mediation process are heightened in music recorded in the Global South for distribution in the Global North (what I gloss here under the industry term, world music). World music recordings invite listeners to feel as if they are experiencing not only a specific moment of musical creation, but also one that represents a broader geography: a culture and the artists who inhabit it. Such recordings are often positioned as a window into understanding something about local cultural traditions and musical practices. Most often, world music recordings are co-productions,

created by musicians and producers under the influence of competing aesthetic visions and goals. These recording collaborations play out on the uneven terrain of colonial histories, are created and heard across often divergent aesthetic preferences and goals, and are conditioned by the technologies available in the era where they take place.

In “Listening To or Through Technology: Opaque and Transparent Mediation in Popular Music” (Brøvig-Hanssen 2018b), Ragnhild Brøvig-Hanssen distinguishes between “opaque mediation,” wherein mediation is designed to be recognized as such, and “transparent mediation,” that which is intended to be unnoticed by the listener. “The notions of opaque and transparent mediation,” writes Brøvig-Hanssen, “help to clarify that what is usually at stake is not whether the music is unmediated or mediated, or how much mediation is involved, but rather how the mediation involved in the music is *perceived*” (Brøvig-Hanssen 2018a, 195). Mediation made imperceptible by mediation. This is the paradox of transparent record production.

As Brøvig-Hanssen’s emphasizes, the success of transparent mediation is made manifest through the impression of the listener. Transparent mediation, then, is not inherent to a sound recording but rather operates on the level of listener affect. In the context of transparently mediated recordings, the goal of the sound recording practice is to invite the listener into a direct connection with a (real or imagined) moment of musical creation and, through that process, to render the mediation imperceptible.

Brøvig-Hanssen's studies electronic dance music (EDM), a musical context that calls attention to mediation as a defining characteristic (Brøvig-Hanssen 2016). In contrast to the opaque mediation of EDM, I submit that world music records – and their field recorded forebears – are quintessential sites of transparent mediation.

The present chapter details the techniques and strategies of transparent mediation, from colonial-era field recordist Hugh Tracey to some of today's prominent world music record producers. By studying the practices of ethnographic and world music record producers, we can catalogue the techniques and strategies they use to cultivate, in future listeners, the affective experience of transparent mediation.

The process by which sound, reverberating in space and time is mediated for later engagement is both a technological and social process. As Louise Meintjes writes, "At its simplest, mediation refers to that which is both a conduit and a filter—it transfers but along the way it necessarily transforms" (Meintjes 2003b, 8). Working out from her ethnographic research on the production of mbaqanga music in Johannesburg studios, Meintjes shows that "mediation is a process that connects and translates disparate worlds, people, imaginations, values, and ideas, whether in its symbolic, social, or technological form" (ibid).

The transparent record production strategies that I examine here reflect a series of both aesthetic and ethical principles on the part of world music producers. Producers

often downplay their role as mediators in an effort to prioritize the artistry of their collaborators. This is at once a case of foregrounding the musician's artistry and of underplaying the raced divisions of labor that have long troubled the recording industry. In practicing the art which conceals art, world music producers foreground their collaborators and render their own creative intercessions invisible. In so doing, they provide the opportunity for listeners to ignore the processes of mediation at play as well as the dynamics of power, access and control that are negotiated in cross-cultural recording collaborations. Production, then, is an art which conceals not only the art of the recording process but also the power to select repertoire, to edit performances, to foreground particular sonic elements, and to narrate recordings through the media.

In practicing the "art which conceals art," world music producers occupy an important nexus in the dissemination of musical sounds from the Global South towards the ears of listening publics in the Global North. In this context, producers function simultaneously as artists, collaborators, gatekeepers, advocates, and storytellers. They are overwhelmingly (though not exclusively) white and therefore often bear the weight of colonial and racist legacies. As white sonic arbiters of Black music, their work is set against a fundamentally racialized history of sound's circulation through the Black Atlantic. However, these producers often see their work as operating against the grain of such histories. In contrast to many of their white counterparts working in other sectors

of the music industry, these producers see their goals explicitly as working to rectify historical imbalances of power. To create “some presence,” as world music producer Ben Mandelson put it (Mandelson 2018), for artists from the Global South within the music industry networks of the Global North.

Practicing the “art which conceals art,” world music record producers render their sonic imprint invisible. In the context of world music recordings, this is a key move because it allows listeners to interpret the recording as an authentic reflection of a socio-musical world. As Simon Frith observes in his essay, “The Discourse of World Music” (Frith 2000), “world music labels are highly informative about the musical sources of their releases, about local musical traditions, genres, and practices, but they are highly uninformative about their own activities – the process through which music from Mali reaches a record store in Middlesbrough is not explained.” In Frith’s reading, the record labels specifically work to obscure the role of world music producers. “World music sleeve notes systematically play down the role of the record producers in shaping non-Western sounds for Western ears,” Frith writes, concluding, “When sales emphasis is on local musical authenticity, the creative role of the international record producer is best not mentioned” (ibid, 309). By exploring the role of the producer here, I hope to shed light on how transparent mediation is an important tool that belies the collaborative nature of music claiming to represent the “authentic.”

Scholars have written at length about the *impacts* of music recorded in the Global South for distribution in the Global North, but few have engaged world music producers meaningfully as research subjects. A notable exception is Aleysia Whitmore's monograph (Whitmore 2020). Here, Whitmore makes use of extensive ethnographic research among a constellation of musicians and music industry workers, including the world music producers Nick Gold and Ben Mandelson, to call attention to how fraught cross-cultural music industry encounters can be. Her study focuses on the discursive world of a handful of musicians and music industry personnel who jostle with one another as they struggle to build reputations and careers. She describes world music industry encounters as "a paradoxical space where collaborations both accentuate and bridge the gaps between skepticism and embrace, between postcolonial power dynamics and counter-hegemonic discourses. While the world music industry is a fraught space filled with colonial undertones, it is also a space where musicians look to break out of postcolonial power dynamics" (ibid, 125).

Whitmore briefly discusses how record producers go about co-creating the sound encoded on world music albums. Her work is a helpful launching pad for my ensuing discussion of transparent mediation and the practice of world music record production. Describing the work of one such world music producer, Nick Gold, Whitmore argues that "Gold hopes to erase geographic distance and technological

mediation by helping audiences experience an imagined place and moment of artistic inspiration” (ibid, 69). As I argue, this is the overriding *raison d’être* for world music record producers, dating back to world music’s ethnographic forebearers. To Whitmore, producers such as Gold and his longtime recording engineer counterpart Jerry Boys, work to “ease this distance” by building “a sense of co-presence and closeness to the source by making recordings sound live, unmediated by technology, and spontaneous” (ibid, 69). She elaborates, “In producing liveness and co-presence, Gold and Boys both erase their own mediation and mark sounds as authentic across several axes” (ibid, 70).

The work that follows builds upon Whitmore’s general observations to explore, in detail, how world music producers conceive and enact their practice along both aesthetic and ethical lines. I detail the techniques by which world music record producers technically cultivate the affective experience of transparent mediation in the minds of listeners, and I discuss how this kind of approach to record production activates and reflects a distinctive set of ethical commitments.

The work of contemporary world music producers is historically situated. It responds to the recording practice and the politics of earlier commercial and ethnographic recordings. The work of Alan Lomax in the US South and Hugh Tracey on the African continent have been particularly influential on contemporary world music producers of the Black Atlantic. These seminal figures influenced today’s generation of

producers who at once take inspiration from, and work to define themselves in opposition to these legacies by developing more equitable models of exchange with Global South musicians. Hugh Tracey's 1955 essay, "Recording African Music in the Field," elucidates an archetypal approach to record production. One can draw a through line from Tracey's practice to the work of today's world music record producers. By presenting an analysis of Tracey's recording practice alongside that of contemporary world music producers, I show that the strategies and techniques employed by today's producers have their roots in those of the field's ethnographic forebearers such as Tracey. In both instances, I argue that the aesthetics and ethics of mediation are inseparable, bound together in the producer's practice.

I also go on to engage with academics who have explored how "liveness" is mediated in the recording studio (Porcello 2005; Meintjes 2003a; Auslander 2008; Zak 2001; Frith 1987; Frith and Zagorski-Thomas 2012; Mueller 2014), arguing that world music producers deploy an array of transparent mediation techniques to cultivate the perception of an idealized moment of "liveness" in the minds of listeners. These techniques include simulating temporal continuity; simulating spatial continuity; producing "space" as a third dimension; heightened treatment of the voice; horizontal emplacement in the mix; moving quickly to capture the moment, simulating live performance dynamics; refining repertoire in pre-production; and striving for 'rawness.'

These production techniques encourage world music listeners to perceive an absence of mediation by means of mediation itself, therefore bringing them into heightened connection with a (real or imagined) moment of musical creation, situated in a space and time. I argue that these techniques of transparent mediation are key to the production of authenticity in world music recordings.

2.1 Transparent Production and the Mediation of Liveness

Several scholars have explored the notion of “liveness” as a guiding force in recording studio practice. Louise Meintjes describes liveness as “an illusion of sounding live that is constructed through technological intervention in the studio and mediated symbolically through discourses about the natural and artistic” (Meintjes 2003b, 112). In the context of mbaqanga music in South Africa, “to sound authentically African is to sound live. This is an ideological position sustained by the promotional engine of the music industry and kept alive by African and non-African South Africans in the studio” (ibid). In this setting notions of liveness are historically constituted by discourses surrounding “Zuluness” and “Africanness” more generally. Meintjes writes that indeed, “there is no live mbaqanga sound separable from studio production and virtually no performance practice outside the promotion of recordings” (ibid, 134). Mbaqanga privileges liveness even as it is rarely recorded live. Liveness is an organizing principle in the mbaqanga studio world, one that is enacted through musical gestures (as the

“Sound of Africa!”), in the recording process, and in the discourse among musicians, producers and recording engineers. For Meintjes, these domains of liveness “together produce mbaqanga’s authenticity” (ibid, 131). She argues more broadly that liveness “is a trope of authenticity in a number of technologically mediated musics. Liveness is key to music-makers and to consumers of these musics (scholars, journalists, critics, listeners, and music-makers alike), for the sincerity of the artists and the integrity of their art is seen to be called into question by their engagement with seductive market forces and alienating technology” (ibid, 130).

Also exploring the production of “liveness” in the recording studio, Tom Porcello describes the “Austin sound” in his ethnographic work on practices of record production in the Texas city. He takes up Charles Keil’s concept of “participatory discrepancies” (Keil 1987) to describe how a feeling of “liveness” is cultivated in recordings by allowing for subtle discrepancies in the performance. By prioritizing a single-take performance of the rhythm section before moving on to overdubs, the “Austin sound” is experienced as less sanitized than its counterpart, the “Nashville sound.” Similarly, Austin recording techniques prioritize use of ambient mics to capture the “roominess” of drum sounds in particular, which works to further its “live” sound (Porcello 2005).

In his ethnography of recording practices surrounding the powwow music of the Northern Plains, Christopher Scales makes an observation similar to Meintjes' formulation in *Sound of Africa*; namely, that the aesthetic ideal of "liveness" is a key component of powwow recording, circulating both through sonic manipulations, as well as discursive practices of powwow musicians, studio engineers, producers, and fans. This "live" aesthetic is conjoined to notions of "authenticity" in the powwow music context (Scales 2012, 212-213).

In the jazz music realm, Darren Mueller describes efforts to construct liveness in the context of Duke Ellington's *Ellington at Newport*. He considers two recorded editions of Duke Ellington's famed performance at the Newport Jazz Festival, separated by 43 years in order to "lay the groundwork for understanding the stakes of audio production choices" in the world of jazz. The producer of the 1956 LP, George Avakian, worked closely with Ellington to produce the live album (a new concept in the jazz industry) that would sell, and it did, wildly. The overdubbing of audience noise was key to the construction of "liveness" on *Ellington at Newport*. (Mueller 2014).

Performance studies scholar Philip Auslander is interested in how the concept of "liveness" is communicated through various media. Discussing recordings that are marketed as "live," Auslander argues that the liveness is enacted in the listening experience. "The recording is primarily affective: live recordings encourage listeners to

feel as if they are participating in a specific performance and to enter into a vicarious relationship with the audience for that performance" (Auslander 2008).

The goal of sounding live is "sounding as if captured in the moment of performance" (Meintjes 2003b, 129). Yet, as each of these examples indicates, liveness is interpreted at the point of audition. While the field recordings of Hugh Tracey are indeed spatio-temporally coherent (they were "captured in the moment of performance"), the world music recordings that I discuss below use the techniques of transparent mediation to cultivate a sense of liveness even when the recording adheres different spaces and times into a final product. These practices construct "liveness" along axes of space and time. As with the cases above, discourses related to "authenticity" in world music recordings rely on bringing the listener into affective connection with a moment of (imagined) musical genesis, even when that moment is fabricated through the mediation process.

The techniques of transparent mediation that I detail below are realized through listener's perceptions. The approach seeks to make the recording process transparent in the mind of listeners, to render the producer's hand invisible, and to make the moment "live." Through techniques of transparent mediation, the listener is encouraged to perceive an absence of mediation.

2.2 Transparent Mediation in Colonial-Era Ethnographic Field Recording

In the introduction I discussed the critiques of contemporary record producers by academics as a means of positioning those academics' politics and of validating the authenticity of their scholarly projects. These academic's critiques are undergirded by the well-documented relationship between sound recording and histories of colonial exploitation and extraction (Miller 2010; Garcia 2017; Fox 2017; Reese 2019; Coetzee 2014; Cottrell 2010; Feld 2000). Critiques of contemporary record producers have developed in tandem with critiques of ethnographic field recordists working during the colonial era. The material consequences of these histories inform how scholars and music industry practitioners alike consider the work of cross-cultural collaboration within the music industry today.

The music industry's origins in exoticism and racialized notions of difference (as well as the alignment of such ideologies with colonial projects) have been well-documented by scholars. In *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Miller 2010), Karl Hagstrom Miller examines the parallel manufacture of "race records" and "old time music" in the 1920s, arguing that the sonic color line was both expressive and constitutive of Jim Crow segregation. The segregation of recorded sound under Jim Crow had its parallel in the development of the international recording industry around the same time. Phonograph companies had outposts around the world,

producing local music for local markets. Miller describes that in these settings the recording industry produced a concept of “local” music “as a thing apart” from the West, refusing to record music in the Global South that bore any trace of “Western” influence. By doing so the recording industry reinforced, “the superiority of the West, ... and the Western tendency to hear foreign sounds through the prism of exoticism” (Miller 2010, 186).

The prism of exoticism described by Miller here catches reflection in the figure of Hugh Tracey. Born in Devon, England, Tracey spent the bulk of his life living in Southern, Central and Eastern Africa. Through the mid-twentieth century Hugh Tracey produced recordings both in the employ of commercial record labels and by building a personal archive that became the International Library of African Music (ILAM). He spent the bulk of his professional life as a field recordist, producing some 35,000 recordings across the African continent (Newshour 2016).

The radio presenter turned self-trained recordist and ethnomusicologist lived most of his adult life in South Africa under apartheid. Tracey worked in an explicitly colonial setting, often financed through the South African colonial administration. On the surface, his project was born from an anti-racist impetus: to document and celebrate indigenous music from South and East Africa. However, this framing was undercut both

by Tracey's explicit racism (present in his writing), and by his complicity with apartheid and colonial rule.

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, which has released over 1000 of Tracey's recordings, depoliticizes Tracey's work with ILAM, describing it this way: "Founded in 1954 by Hugh Tracey, ILAM is the greatest repository of African music in the world. A research institution devoted to the study of music and oral arts in Africa, it preserves thousands of historical recordings going back to 1929 and supports contemporary fieldwork." Paulette Coetzee, who conducted research at ILAM, clarifies that "Tracey was part of a mid-twentieth century movement which sought to marshal positive representations of traditional African culture." However, she points out that this project was advanced "in the interest of maintaining and strengthening colonial rule. While his recording project may have fostered inclusion through creating space for indigenous musicians to be heard it also functioned to promote racist exclusion in the manner of its production, distribution and claims to expertise" (Coetzee 2014). She notes that in Tracey's initial planning for the International Library of African Music he sought funding from colonial governments "with the promise that promoting traditional music as a means of entertainment and self-expression for black subjects and workers would ease administration and reduce conflict" (ibid). Through his work Tracey at once challenged "certain common colonial attitudes towards blackness," while never

challenging the fundamentals of “white political or economic supremacy” (ibid). Coetzee concludes, “His interventions on behalf of blackness supported and were presented within a dominant paradigm of white supremacy, rather than fostering its dismantlement” (ibid).

2.2.1 Hugh Tracey and the Art Which Conceals Art

In 1955, penning the article “Recording African Music in the Field,” Tracey reflected on the skills and techniques he had developed as a field recordist (Tracey 1955). Here Tracey discusses everything from microphone placement to a host of physical gestures he used to coax his notion of an ideal performance out his musician collaborators. His essay expresses the puzzles and contradictions that a figure like Hugh Tracey presents. Writing from apartheid South Africa, he embraces racist tropes in his writing about his African collaborators, while also displaying his esteem for them. Tracey believed that their work should be recorded and preserved to the highest technical specifications possible. He writes, “Anyone who has recorded African music will realise that the more primitive the music the more it requires high fidelity equipment to register the nuance of tone which often creates the whole atmosphere of the occasion” (Tracey 1955, 7).

The article also makes clear that Tracey was a dedicated producer who took the artistic aspects of this work seriously, as he describes himself actively conducting and

shaping musical performances. Tracey discusses his efforts to shorten performances so that they will fit on one side of a 78. He lists physical gestures that he routinely used to direct musical performances, for the sake of time, but also to fit his aesthetic preferences. In his writing, Tracey is self-aware of the contradictions embedded in these practices. He writes, "It has been argued that in order to obtain a scientifically exact amount of the music for anthropological purposes no control of the performers, either in time or space, should be allowed. However much one may sympathise with this point of view it would be the equivalent of demanding that every photograph taken for ethnological research should be a complete panorama" (ibid).

In describing the subjective decisions inherent in sound recording, Tracey reflects candidly on his role as a mediator. "The recorder must quickly make up his mind on the relative significance and importance of the repetitions of a phrase," he writes. "I have heard many otherwise excellent recordings ruined by a dilatory performer who got himself into a rut and employed endless repetitions of a dull phrase while he slowly recovered his wits to change to another variation" (ibid). Tracey goes on to suggest a host of physical gestures meant to direct a performer, including the lowering of the hand and bending of the knees in order to conduct the end of a performance.

Tracey's reflections make clear that even ethnographic field recordings, completed with a veneer of transparency, are co-productions between musicians and

recordists that are shaped by the technology employed to make them. As Tracey directs his microphone toward African musicians, making quick (and largely uninformed) decisions about the “importance and relative significance” of musical moments, he exercises power afforded by his whiteness, his presence as a colonial figure, and his access to and control of technology. In photographs from the era, Tracey’s visibility is heightened by juxtapositions: Tracey standing above a seated group, a microphone wielded by an outstretched hand; Tracey’s pressed suits sharp and impractical with their crisp and buttoned-down look; an expression of delight (or is it bemusement?) on his face. Tracey commands the legacies of white supremacy and colonialism as he extends his microphone – no doubt with genuine curiosity – towards his collaborators.

Tracey concludes his essay with an important reminder about the ontological status of any recording. He writes, “A recording, however good, is never the real thing, but a *representation* of the original... When you are presented with a musical situation which has been recorded you must first face the fact that any sound recording is only a partial statement of the whole event” (ibid). Therefore, Tracey argues that one must make artful decisions about how to approach a given recording situation. “The microphone...must be ‘focused’ like a camera to select the salient features of the music and to present them in such a way as to suggest a complete representation of the occasion” (ibid).

For Tracey, a primary task of the producer is to obscure his or her creative intercessions and, in so doing, to invite listeners into a heightened experience of connection with a sound recording. He aims to construct for his listeners a window through which they might imagine peering onto an authentic moment of music making, much like gazing at a museum diorama. He aims to create the impression of a document reflective of an actual performance in a specific moment in time. This goal is achieved by a complement of strategies detailed by Tracey, and later refined by successive generations of recordists and producers. However, the initial thrust carries forward: Tracey deployed technologies and interacted with musicians in a manner aimed at cultivating transparency in his recordings. The processes of mediation by which he generates this artifice remains inaudible to listeners.

Tracey's descriptions center himself and normalize his recording practice. His presence as a field recordist is taken as a given, as is the presumption that his aesthetic preferences and musical knowledge provide an adequate basis for assessing and documenting a given performance. Not only does Tracey not question the stark inequities set forth in these scenarios, he often utilizes white supremacist tropes in his descriptions of his African collaborators. To Tracey, these musicians are "primitive" and "simple" "creatures" in need of being "prodded along" (ibid). Like many who followed

him in the music industry, Tracey hides these dynamics of 'power over' behind discourses related to the power of art and of technology.

In doing so Tracey suggests that his role as a producer was not just that of a technician; rather, producers are artists. He writes, "The artistic sensitivity of the recorder or his 'sixth sense' will determine the atmosphere which he wishes to create in the recording" (ibid). Tracey's next sentence sums up the role of the producer seeking to capture the primary currency of ethnographic recording: authority generated through the air of authenticity. He concludes, "The very success of a good recording is perhaps inclined to hide the fact that it is an art which conceals art" (ibid).

Tracey's "art which conceals art" is a key guiding principle not only for mid-twentieth-century ethnographic recordists, but also for many present-day world music producers. Practicing their craft in colonial or post-colonial contexts, record producers who work across national borders are imbricated in fields of structural and epistemic violence. The efforts of world music producers cannot transcend the historical and political circumstances in which they work. However, many contemporary producers are acutely aware of the shortcomings of figures such as Tracey, and they often seek to define themselves in opposition to those older approaches, his legacy haunting their work.

In this way, formative figures such as Tracey become a reflecting pool for the practice of future record producers. The template stamped by Tracey thus functions both as a reservoir of production techniques and as an archetype against which to define one's own production philosophy.

Tracey practiced the art which conceals art by operating outside the frame, but his presence and perspective fundamentally shaped the recordings he produced. Practices of ethnographic field recording in first half of the twentieth century were reshaped by several factors: by the success of anti-colonial movements; by the development of recorded music industries in post-colonial settings, locally owned and operated; by advancements in technology; and by shifting political and economic contexts (Denning 2015). The development of the world music paradigm in late 1980s London was especially significant in coalescing producers from the Global North who collaborated with musicians from the Global South into an identifiable sector of the international music industry. In what follows I will discuss transparent mediation, as the art which conceals art, as a guiding principle of "world music" recordings.

2.3 World Music Producers and Transparent Mediation

Record production is a subtle, covert activity. The producer is an invisible man. His role remains a mystery.

- Jim Dickenson (Dickinson ; as cited in Burgess 2013)

That's often true of a producer: his role can be very enigmatic and unclear. I've watched people producing records, and sometimes I'm not really sure what

they're doing. Somebody else is the man who controls the tape recorder – the engineer – and if an arrangement is needed, an arranger is brought in. So what is that man sitting in the corner doing?

-Charlie Gillet (Gillett 1977, 54)

Stepping back three quarters of a century from the present, one might draw a through line between the influential mid-century work of Hugh Tracey and this present generation's world music producers. Many of the techniques Tracey developed in his era established an artistic approach that continues to resonate. So too, the history surrounding Tracey undergirded the development of the international recording industry, and indeed the field of ethnomusicology. The ethical questions raised by Tracey's legacy, then, are not far removed from ones that those who work in the space of cross-cultural musical encounter must grapple with, whether as music industry operatives or as academics.

Today's producers work in a different context, with a different set of prerogatives than their colonial-era forebearers. In the context of Cuba, Ariana Hernández Reguant argues that producers such as Nick Gold are "ambassadors of an expanding capitalism" who "came to be seen as the faces of the global economy" (Hernandez-Reguant 2012, 128-129). Reguant positions the work of such producers as inevitably determined by neoliberal capitalist logics. While her point is fair in the most general sense, producers such as Nick Gold are aware of the extractive dynamics of the

previous generation of producers, such as Hugh Tracey, and actively seek to establish the ethics of their work along different lines. While intention here should not be confused with impact, it is worth considering how producers' ethical commitments inform their artistic decisions. Painting world music producers with too broad a brush runs the risk of generalizing their work in a way that fails to capture the nuances and details of their personal perspectives and approaches.

Nevertheless, it is generally true that the work of contemporary world music producers is far more collaborative, and self-aware, than that of the earlier generation of ethnographic field recordists. Albin Zak argues for the creative role of contemporary record producers: "While musicians leave the traces of their emotions, experiences, and the sound of their musical expression on tape, the composite sound image that we recognize as the musical work is fashioned by recording engineers and producers – 'performers' in their own right. They are the musicians' artistic collaborators, and their actions and aesthetic choices, too, are represented in the form of the finished work" (Zak 2001, 17).

Occupying this collaborative artistic space, world music record producers pull on a range of techniques and strategies to accomplish their goals. In what follows I will build on the distinction between transparent and opaque mediation (coined by Ragnhild

Brøvig-Hanssen) to describe how world music record producers seek to cultivate an affective experience of transparent mediation in the mind of their listeners.

Brøvig-Hanssen differentiates between opaque and transparent mediation in her articles, “Opaque Mediation: The Cut-and-Paste Groove in DJ Food’s ‘Break’” (Brøvig-Hanssen 2016) and “Listening to or Through Technology: Opaque and Transparent Mediation” (Brøvig-Hanssen 2018b). She writes, “Mediating technology is imperative to all forms of popular music-editing operations...whether we notice them or not. When we do not, it is because we perceive the technological mediation as *transparent*, not because there is none. Similarly, when we *do* notice those operations, it is not necessarily because there are more of them than usual but because they are used in a way that attracts our attention,” (Brøvig-Hanssen 2018b). She examines the work of electronic music producers whose approach directs a listener’s focus “not only to what is mediated but also towards the act of mediation itself.”

She rightly points out that sound and mediation cannot be separated at the ontological level.

For instance, a given acoustic guitar sound might have undergone the following stages of mediation: after being brought to life through the vibration of the guitar strings, it is first mediated (and affected) by the acoustic guitar’s body, then by the environmental space in which it occurs. It might then be electronically mediated by a microphone, and possibly by a compressor. If it is destined for a recording, it will be further mediated by a mixing console, a computer interface (which involves the mediation of a preamplifier and an analogue-to-digital

converter), then by a computer, and then by processing effects and editing tools. Ultimately, it will be mediated by a certain recorded format (such as LP, CD, cassette, MP3 file and so on). Before the consumer can actually hear it again, it must be further mediated by a playback device, and by speakers, and by the environmental space in which the speakers are placed, not to mention the eardrum. In all these instances, a sound is travelling through (or being processed by) technological mediation, and all these different processes of transmission contribute to the sonic result – it is the sum of all these processes that constitute a sound's identity (Brøvig-Hanssen 2018b, 199).

Brøvig-Hanssen's work focuses on opaque mediation in the production of electronic dance music. I propose to expand on her thinking about transparent mediation as a way of imagining, more broadly, how the practices of world music record producers assert a set of aesthetic and ethical principles. I turn to the words of world music producers themselves to understand why they prioritize transparent mediation in particular contexts and how they cultivate it in practice.

Producers working in the field of world music practice the art of record production in a wide variety of ways: generating hybrid styles through international recording collaborations; producing electronic music that incorporate instruments from dispersed geographies to add originality or flair to particular productions; working with pop stars who pull on local styles to reimagine their own music. The politics and ethics of each of these approaches both diverge and overlap. However, a lineage of world music record producers have drawn on the approach of figures such as Hugh Tracey to work in a way that pulls together commercial and ethnographic motivations. Harkening

back to Tracey's "art which conceals art," this approach seeks to render the record production process transparent by means of the recording process itself. Transparency aesthetics do the work of lending ethnographic credibility to these recordings. In seeking to present such recordings as the *real thing*, transparent mediation works to broker a relationship between the recording process and a listener: one that encourages listeners to feel a direct, unmediated connection to a sound recording as a stand-in for the embodied practice of situated listening within a specific cultural context. In short, the goal of the transparent mediation approach is to shrink the temporal and spatial distance between the listener and an imagined moment of creation.

Transparent productions tend to be recorded in a manner that prioritizes the performances of a musician or group of musicians in the same space; however, producers use a complement of techniques and strategies to give the impression of space-time continuity, even when there is none.¹ Microphone placement is key to creating the sense of a listener situated within the space of the imagined performance. Reverberation effects (both the use of 'natural' reverb through room-miking techniques, and the application of digital or mechanical reverb effects) are carefully manipulated to heighten a sense of immersion in the sound recording. The use of panning in post-

¹ See, for instance, the following chapter on Lucy Durán and Toumani Diabaté's work on *Kaira*.

production is similarly aimed at situating the listener within the “space” generated by a recording.

During the recording process, producers cultivate transparency in a variety of ways. When possible, performers are arranged in a manner similar to how they are accustomed to performing. There is a distinct preference for tracking to happen “live,” rather than through an overdub-oriented process (although the overdub is regularly called upon as a technique). Many of the producers I spoke with consider “imperfection” or a “warts-and-all” approach as fundamental to their practice. They describe a commitment to not “air brushing” their recordings, though they regularly use post-production processes to alter performances.

Once the recording is completed, it coalesces as an object separate from the component parts of its construction. The album’s transparent gestalt works to direct the listener’s attention away from the processes of mediation involved in the recording process—and towards experiencing the recording as a window into a single moment of creation. The recording is an object born with no history. A unitary surface devoid of depth. A work pulled from the past into the present. The logic of immaculate conception at work. As Micheal Chanan writes, the sound recording “conquers time and space” (Chanan 1995, 21).

This unification of the sound recording allows it to be positioned as an authentic object representative of a particular time and space, which in the context of world music often is meant to represent broader social worlds. Transparent mediation plays a key role in brokering the relationship between a listener and her imagination of a sociocultural setting. It also plays a role in vindicating the ethics of the producer's work, for it allows the recording to be positioned as documenting an actual moment in time, rather than as offering a composite picture.

The work that transparent mediation does here shares ground with Louise Meintjes' conception of "liveness" (Meintjes 2003b, 130). The techniques of transparent mediation, which I discuss below, work to draw the listener's attention away from the use of "alienating technology" even as they distance the recorded performance from "seductive market forces" by hiding the producer's interventions behind a transparent veil. While liveness may have an intangible quality for listeners, it is carefully constructed by record producers who utilize specific techniques to cultivate its affective power. These techniques enable the producer to present an "ideal" musical event (Frith 1987, 22) as a "live" one.

2.3.1 The Ethics of Transparent Mediation in World Music

In what follows, I intertwine producers' reflections on the ethics and the aesthetics of transparent mediation because, for these producers, their ethics are largely

enacted through the aesthetic. This presentation, then, is in keeping with how these producers think about their work. I have chosen to focus on the experience of five producers — Ben Mandelson, Ian Brennan, Lucy Durán, Nick Gold and Chris Eckman — each of whom has played a key role in shaping international appreciation of particular regional styles in the Black Atlantic. All five producers tend towards the transparent end of the transparent-opaque spectrum in their approach. More often than not their recordings are geared towards presenting the impression of an actual event that occurred in a specific time and space. However, as I will show here and in the final section of this chapter, which details the techniques of transparent record production, the ideal musical events these producers present for the audience are typically rather far removed from any singular, real event.

2.4.1.1 Ben Mandelson

In the course of a lifetime in music, Ben Mandelson has produced dozens of records, licensed dozens more, worked as a session musician in London and Kenya, and assembled music from around the world for the Microsoft Encarta CD ROM. (You can hear his voice carefully intoning the English example in the “world languages” section: “Hello, my name is Charles. Thank you. Yes. No. All work and no play makes jack a dull boy...”). Ben has toured across Europe, the UK and the United States as a member of the protopunk band Amazorblades, with the London world music mainstays Orchestra

Jazira and 3 Mustaphas 3, as one of Billy Bragg's Blokes, and more recently with the Yiddish Twist Orchestra and Les Triboliques. Along with his GlobeStyle collaborator Roger Armstrong, Mandelson called for the initial series of meetings at the Empress of Russia pub in 1987 that led to the creation of the "world music" marketing term in the music industry. He is a founder of WOMEX, the European world music industry conference that is still thriving more than twenty-five years later. Mandelson plays guitar, banjo, fiddle, oud, bouzouki and other lutes with skill and abandon. He has worn many hats – both in the literal and figurative sense – over the course of a long career in world music. He's a living history of world music in London.

When one encounters Mandelson, it is evident that all of these experiences have been made possible by a commitment to building lasting and meaningful relationships. He listens closely. He is reflective and curious. He wants to understand the world. He communicates with humility. Mandelson's unruly and expressive eyebrows (the word "wizened" comes to mind) express not only his many years of experience but also his humor and verve.

Mandelson has cultivated a mysterious flair during his years in the world music scene. He operated for years under the pseudonym Hijaz Mustapha, during his time as a member and creative force in the rangy London band 3 Mustaphas 3. Their slogan "Forward in all directions!" sums up the band's expansive approach. While Mandelson

argues that world music was conceived as a shared marketing strategy rather than as a musical genre, his groups of that period—Orchestra Jazira and 3 Mustaphas 3—sought to blend local musical traditions into a syncretic style. They were all-sounds-on-deck-type experiments, embracing origin stories of invented Balkan villages (the band was smuggled into London packed in refrigerator boxes); sparkling highlife and soukous guitar lines in one moment, Bulgarian wedding music in the next. On the cover of Orchestra Jazira’s album *Nomadic Activities* (Jazira 1984) the band is arranged across a desert landscape, everyone heading in one direction except Mandelson, who is haphazardly clutching a map, pointing in the opposite direction. “It was a very ludic kind of time,” Mandelson recalls (Mandelson 2020). His work is cut through with playfulness, ambition, and a commitment to pushing towards the edges of his musical horizon.

Mandelson shared that his career as a record producer has largely been the result of a series of happy accidents (though no doubt he downplays his own creative ambition here). “I just fell into this shit. Really. I always fall into stuff. I’ve just fallen into it all the time. Playing, making records, you know. I made a lot of records—quite a lot, I think. Fell into it. Played a lot of gigs. Played quite a few bad ones. Some good ones too. Absolutely. Some amazing ones and some kind of workaday clanging and twanging in Babylon.” (ibid).

In an interview for *fRoots* with Ian Anderson Mandelson stressed “how peculiar it has all been in this fledgling world music business, finding out how many strange connections come about 20 years later. It ain't bad, and I'm still a kid, and funnily enough I still feel about music and playing the way I felt when I was 18 or 20. And records I listened to when I was 18 or 20 like Barrister or Shirati Jazz, all sorts of people, I never dreamed in a thousand years I'd end up going to where they live and producing records with them and making records with them. It's amazing to have had that opportunity. It's wonderful when these things fall into place” (I. Anderson 2001).

When we sat down to discuss his work as a record producer, Mandelson settled on transparency as a way of thinking about his production practice. “Transparent may be a better word, because actually there's so much about the process that needs to be transparent... Unless you want to know what the process is, you tend to try to make everything transparent so that the artists are themselves, but more so” (Mandelson 2018). For Mandelson, heightening the artists' craft is his goal as a record producer. Rather than imposing his own vision, he works to magnify what is already there. “I tend to try to make everything as transparent as possible to let the artist's art art,” he told me (ibid). For Mandelson, a transparent approach allows the artistry of his collaborator(s) to take center stage, and his contributions as a mediating force to recede to the background.

Elaborating this idea of transparent mediation further, Mandelson clarified, “One shouldn’t confuse transparency with mediation. I mean, [even transparent] stuff is extremely mediated. It’s prepared and thought through and delivered just like a package through the mail. So, there’s a lot of mediation going on; it’s just that you might not see the process — let’s say of the tape and the stamps — but it still arrives packaged” (ibid). He then turned to another metaphor, wondering if the “art is to disguise the joints that bolt your art together?” (Mandelson 2020).

For Mandelson, the goal of a transparent approach to record production is to heighten the qualities he finds most essential to artists, to make them “themselves, but more so” (Mandelson 2018). In the final section of what follows I will explore some of the techniques and strategies of transparent record production that producers such as Mandelson deploy in service of “letting the artist’s art art” (ibid). The language he uses to describe this approach harkens back to Frith’s observation that rock music recordings privilege the “ideal” over the “real” (Frith 1987). Mandelson, who came of age in the era of multi-track tape recording, argues that creating the ideal recording is the best way to portray the real. For him, fused together in the process of transparent record production, creating the ideal and the real are one and the same.

Reflecting on Hugh Tracey’s legacy as a producer, Mandelson argues that Tracey was a model for “How to be there and not be there” (Mandelson 2018). The paradox of

being both present and absent in the same instant is the deceit of transparent mediation: it is present by virtue of its ability to remain absent in the minds of listeners. “Sometimes the best producer isn't there. You know, they just go...[silence],” Mandelson describes as he gestures like a magician performing a disappearing act (Mandelson 2020).

Mandelson and Tracey also share ground in their understanding of the recording process as a system of representation. “I mean one thing that [Tracey] says which is very clear... the recording is not the music. It's a representation of the music. I mean in the sense that words on the page are not the sound language makes. It's a key and a guide and a representation, or a template or a pattern, of what you might imagine the sound to be” (2018). Mandelson further quips, “a photograph of a cake is not a cake.” (ibid).

Within the constraints of this representational system, Mandelson works “to do something that represents the artist beautifully,” even when the artist “doesn't quite know how she or he ‘needs’ to be represented.” The scare quotes that Mandelson gestured into the air as he spoke the word “need” speak to a generation's worth of distance between himself and Hugh Tracey. While Tracey fully embraced his position as final arbiter in the mediation processes, Mandelson is more ambivalent. His perspective is informed by his generation's critique of the colonial production project undertaken by Tracey, inseparable, as Diane Thram puts it, from “its inherent paternalism, racism, and white privilege” (Thram 2019).

Mandelson relishes his role as a producer. It has allowed him to shine a little light on the work of some great musicians. Working in a transparent mode has allowed him to let the “artist’s art art” (Mandelson 2018). Aware of the critiques of the world music project (see introduction), Mandelson is satisfied with the role he has played in shaping and sharing sounds throughout his musical life. “I think it's been very beneficial to a lot of artists. It's definitely helped careers. It's put money in people's pockets. It's given them presence,” he said (ibid).

2.3.1.2 Ian Brennan

Ian Brennan grew up in the Bay Area in California and started recordings bands in a laundromat in San Francisco. Doubting his career as a performing musician, Brennan decided he was better off working to help other musicians record their work, whether he “liked their music or not” (Berman 2019). Best-known for his production work on the Grammy-award winning album *Tassili* by the Tuareg band Tinariwen, he has produced a wide variety of recordings, from the American folk singer Ramblin’ Jack Elliot to The Malawi Mouse Boys, and in later years recordings of people incarcerated in the maximum security Zomba prison in southern Malawi.

Brennan credits his sister Jane Brennan as one of the strongest influences on how he thinks about music and his work as a producer. Just fourteen months older than her brother Ian, Jane was born with Down syndrome. Of their relationship, Ian has said,

“music was our language of communicating with one another. I was verbal before my sister was verbal, though she was older. She taught me a way of listening: to listen not to the words, but the spirit” (Markowitz and Font 2020). Jane spent time in a workshop setting with other disabled youth whom Ian came to know through her. Ian told me that those relationships not only impressed upon him the importance of listening for feeling beyond language, but also of valuing the kind of fleeting creative expression that comes from working with untrained musicians. “Just seeing the musicality and the dance and the freedom of those individuals” imparted lessons he’s carried through his life and career as a musician and record producer. Jane and her friends taught Brennan that

beauty has the potential to arise, without warning, from anywhere. That if we are truly in search of inspiration, it serves us to remain open and not reliant on prescribed and predictable outlets. That a famous singer’s greatest hour, might be his least skilled and vulnerable. And, that an amateur’s ability to convey feeling can far exceed any virtuoso.

What is paramount, is the moment. Truth trumps immaculateness any day. And, the most sacred expressions cannot be manufactured and duplicated, but are spontaneous and unrepeatable outside the context of sharing that has given them birth (Brennan 2016, 163).

He works with his wife, the Italian-Rwandan photographer and film maker Marilena Delli Umuhoza, to tell the stories of musicians who face persecution, marginalization displacement, and the threat of violence. They have worked with prisoners at the maximum security Zomba Prison in Malawi, with musicians in the

Tanzanian Albinism Collective who confront social stigma, and with the abaTwa in southern Rwanda.

In 2011 Brennan met Alfred Gavana in southeastern Malawi, along a stretch of highway where Gavana sells skewered mice that he and his collaborators catch and offer to people in the traffic passing by their neighborhood. Brennan asked if he could set up his microphones and record Gavan playing a song. "He played it so quietly it was almost inaudible," Brennan remembers. "But when he came to the chorus, this group of 20 kids that was pressing in, from age 2, to age 18 or so, all kicked in on the chorus in multi-part harmony. And the sun was literally going down, with surround sound and one of the most musical moments I'd ever had in my life" (Arcos 2014).

Brennan treats his work as an opportunity to offer a platform to a multiplicity of human voices. He writes, "How can it be that for decades, hundreds of thousands of 'artists' from cities like Los Angeles, New York, and London have been given deafening megaphones, while entire countries are left unrepresented globally?" (Brennan 2016, 11). His goal is "*not* to give people a voice—they already have one!—but a microphone. A platform internationally to be more widely exposed... It just *might* give them wider—though not necessarily 'better'—opportunities?" (ibid, 86). He and Umuhoza are working to "tip the scales in a slightly more positive direction," Brennan told me (Brennan 2020).

In telling a story through a sound recording, “the ultimate goal is to build empathy,” Brennan argues (Eckman and Brennan 2020). Despite the wide breadth of geographies that Brennan spans in his recording projects, an affective through line connects each of them. He is most concerned with capturing a fleeting moment of emotional catharsis that builds, then dissipates just as quickly, in a musical performance. He described operating under a “first thought, best thought” principle (Brennan 2020). Whereas many commercial recordings tend to be “overcooked” (ibid), Brennan works quickly and as much as possible in the same time and space. He told me, “I’m very interested in trying...to capture something optimally, that happened. And by optimally, meaning I want it to sound as good as possible. But that is always secondary to the emotion” (ibid). He reiterated, “I’m very interested in things that have actually occurred, and most modern recordings are documentations of something that didn’t happen” (ibid).

For Brennan, the emotional resonance of a recording is connected to the feeling of liveness generated by a particular set of recording practices. “The ultimate goal of the process is intimacy,” he said. “I think that what is lacking in most corporate recordings—because we’re listening, for the most part, to things that did not happen. We’re listening to an event that’s been simulated and assembled through multi-track as if it occurred but never did occur in real time” (Brennan 2020). Brennan is drawing on

the lessons offered by his sister. His recording practice is guided by an effort to capture and convey feeling through the mediation process. “Ultimately, any recording technology exists only as a means to convey feeling, and has little to no value, otherwise, in and of itself” (Brennan 2016).

Here, Brennan pushes back against the model of working to create an *ideal* recording (going to back to Frith’s distinction). Rather he identifies himself with the ethnographic model: conducting field recordings that document a moment of musical creation in a particular space and time. He writes, “All recordings are in the end ‘field recordings.’ They document life (... or lack thereof), arising from a specific time and place. If that place is artificial, then the results will often be as well” (ibid, 7). In his public stance Brennan pushes back against what he views as the artificiality of world music, even as his recordings circulate through those same networks. “I do not strive to make World Music records. I strive to produce candid and raw punk and dusty dance-records, ones that come sometimes from remote parts of the globe,” writes Brennan (ibid).

These are the motivations for Brennan’s commitment to transparency in his recording process: he aims to mediate a direct connection between a moment of feelingful musical creation and future listeners, hoping that the ephemeral affect of the moment might withstand the mediation process and connect with future listeners across

time and space. Brennan's approach as a producer prioritizes seeking a moment of musical inspiration and rendering it as transparently as possible. He uses specific techniques that I outline below, to ease the distance between performance and listener.

Like Ben Mandelson, Brennan thinks of his role as heightening the intensity of a performance, bringing the focus directly to the heart of the musical performance. "It's not about trying to make somebody something that they are not, but more of what they really are" (ibid, 85), he writes. "It is the overall Big Picture of a work that needs tending to—to help find the heart of each song, the center, and clear away waste to bring clarity to that narrative" (ibid, 1).

Brennan uses the guise of transparent mediation to shift the emphasis away from his own role as a mediator and towards his artistic collaborators. At the same time, by claiming that his recordings are "live" he obscures the ways in which his practice as a producer shapes the content and the sound of his recordings. Like Hugh Tracey, Brennan's presence as a producer—as expressed in his aesthetic choices and opinions—is carried through to the final mix.

Brennan claims that he aims for total transparency in his practice: "My intention as a 'producer' is to tread lightly. It is my belief that the best production is invisible, adding to and helping shape or even act as a catalyst for the process, but drawing no undue attention to itself. Often this entails an exercise in subtraction, more than

addition, to remove clutter in order to make room for the life to find fuller expression and not be masked by extraneousness... Acting more like a midwife, the end result should not be of the producer's DNA." (ibid, 85).

Brennan works towards his goals by engaging in a production practice that he positions as uniquely *real*. But, like Hugh Tracey, he employs a host of strategies in order to reach for his own *ideal*. When listening to Brennan's recordings, one through line is the foregrounding of the human voice. Instruments are typically mixed further into the background and panned slightly off-axis to one side or the other. The voice is close-miked and placed squarely in the center. The vocal signal is compressed to cultivate the impression of the voice speaking directly to the listener. He writes, "At their best, recordings act as a form of eavesdropping, where it is as if the musician is speaking directly to you, whispering in your ear in a privileged way that rises above ordinary experience and takes on a confessional air" (ibid, 7).

"A good record should place you amid the musicians, as if they are there with you," Brennan reflects. "It should bring you *there*... To this end, different microphones can be the equivalent of lenses for cameras, narrowing or lengthening the field to create a more varied and enveloping experience" (ibid, 168). Recalling Tracey's own ocular analogy ("The microphone...must be 'focused' like a camera to select the salient features of the music and to present them in such a way as to suggest a complete representation

of the occasion” [Tracey 1955, 7]), Brennan describes using different microphones – and presumably different miking techniques – to create an “enveloping experience” (Brennan 2016, 168). Here again, the practice of transparent mediation aims to place the listener amidst the musical performance. The practice of transparent mediation works to open a window, positioning the listener betwixt and between two spaces at once: the moment of creation and the moment of playback. The tools of transparent mediation carve out this liminal space of being in two places at once.

2.3.1.3 Lucy Durán

Lucy Durán works in the lineage of academic field recordists who bring their ethnographic expertise to bear on the recordings they produce alongside their scholarly publishing. However, unlike most of her fellow academics, Durán works with the commercial music industry to make her recordings widely accessible. Employing this approach, she has been a singular force in educating European and American publics about the rich traditions and contemporary expressions of Mande music of West Africa. When one speaks with her about her long career, her commitment to public scholarship becomes readily apparent. Based on her conviction that Mande music – as well as other musical traditions she has engaged – ought to be appreciated globally, she has dedicated her professional life to cultivating diverse means for publics to encounter world music and musicians, Mande and many others.

Durán began her ethnographic research in 1976 when she first travelled to Gambia. She would spend much of the next ten years living in the village of Bansang along the River Gambie, apprenticing on kora with the great jali Amadu Bansang Jobarteh. These formative years of research provided Durán with a strong basis in the Mandinka language and a knowledge of the cultural history and musical repertoire of the Gambian jalolu. She traveled throughout Senegal during these years, but it was not until 1986 that she first visited Mali, where her most influential collaborations would later take place. Durán's work in Mali brought her into the lives of successive generations of jeli families, their resulting collaborations proving pivotal in shaping international knowledge of Mande music.

It is from this basis that Durán became a bridge between her collaborators in Mande West Africa and the wider world. Scholars, music industry workers, and musicians have turned to Durán to share not only her knowledge, but her contacts in Mali and Senegambia. In this way, Durán's presence rests invisibly at the heart of many projects, even those that don't carry her name. After years of living in West Africa, Durán earned her PhD and a professorship at SOAS in London; she has gone on to publish on the role of female singers ("songbirds") in Bamako life, Bamana jeli music, and the role of song in navigating polygamy among co-wives in Mali. Throughout these years, however, her focus has steadfastly remained on projects aimed not just at the

academy, but at a broader public. In this way, Durán's impact as an ethnomusicologist reaches across continents and vocations.

Durán has produced a long list of influential albums that have helped shaped public knowledge of jaliya (the jali's art) abroad, but these recordings have also been influential at home. The song "Cheiknah Demba" from her *New Ancient Strings* production with Toumani Diabaté and Ballaké Sissoko was chosen by Mali's national television station ORTM as their signature tune. The accomplishment she describes being most proud of over her career was knowing that the kora duet she recorded and edited rang out of households across the country at the top of every hour for ten years. Also notable are the three Grammy Award nominations Durán has received for her Mande music productions.²

Durán's production credits include Toumani Diabaté's *Kaira* and *Djelika*; several collaborations including Toumani Diabaté and Taj Mahal's *Kulanjan*, Toumani Diabaté and Ketama's *Songhai* and *Songhai 2*; Toumani and Ballaké Sissoko's *New Ancient Strings*, and an eponymous collaboration between Toumani and his son Sidiki Diabaté. Beyond her work with Toumani Diabaté, Lucy's has produced records with the foremost exponent of the ngoni, Bassekou Kouyate (*Segou Blue* and *I Speak Fula*), jeli vocalist Kasse

² These include "Toumani & Sidiki" by Toumani Diabaté and Sidiki Diabaté (2014), *Kassi Kasse* by Kasse Mady Diabate (2003), and *Segu Blue* by Bassekou Kouyate and *I Speak Fula* by Bessekou Kouyate and Ngoni Ba (2010).

Mady Diabaté (*Kassi Kasse*), and Trio da Kali featuring the Kronos Quartet (*Ladilikan*). In the earlier days of her ethnographic research, she recorded albums for her original kora teacher, Amadu Bansang Jobarteh, as well as Dembo Konte and Kausu Kuyateh.

Her latest work as a producer, Trio da Kali's *Ladilikan*, is a testament to both Lucy's artistic vision and her dedication to building trusting relationships with and among generations of her Mande musician counterparts. Trio da Kali features balafonist Fodé Lassana Diabaté, bass ngoni player Mamadou Kouyate and vocalist Hawa Diabaté's, brought together with San Francisco's Kronos Quartet. Durán decision to unite these artists under the aegis of the Aga Khan Music Initiative reflects an effort to lift up the voices of a new generation of Bamako-based musicians, and to put them into dialogue with one of the great progressive forces in the classical music world.

Durán's production style has made an indelible imprint on the way Mande music is experienced internationally and at home. Her considerable ethnographic knowledge allows Durán to engage deeply with artists in the development and refinement of repertoire during the pre-production phase. She brings her work as a sound archivist to bear, helping artists reflect on how the repertoire they are choosing fits into a longer history of local and international recordings. Over her decades of production experience, Durán describes moving from a "snapshot" approach to one she admits is more "interventionist" (Durán 2018a). As her experience with the music

coalesced over decades, she began to be more comfortable giving voice to her own perspective when collaborating with musicians.

Her intercessions are most apparent in the post-production arena where Durán has developed a unique approach to editing kora music performances. She diagrams the overall arc of the recorded performance, identifying mistakes along the way or sections that she assesses as suffering from a lack of focus. She then works with a studio engineer to remove those passages through a subtractive editing process, resulting in increased motivic density and a format suitable to radio play. The fusion of Toumani's immense instrumental virtuosity with Durán's discerning ear, trained over decades of ethnographic inquiry, has led to a new method for recording and presenting the kora, one that has become standard practice in the years since *Kaira*.

I explore Durán's transparent production techniques at length in Chapter 3: "Producing Mande Music: Lucy Durán and Politics of Invisibility in Toumani Diabaté's *Kaira*."

2.3.1.4 Nick Gold

It is perhaps the most famous accident in world music history. World Circuit record label boss and producer Nick Gold travels to Havana, Cuba, to record a collaborative album with a group of elder musicians from Cuba and a cohort of younger virtuosi from Bamako, Mali. The Malians' visas are held up in processing, so the African

musicians are forced to cancel their trip. Gold improvises. He leans on the local knowledge and professional networks of his Cuban collaborator, Juan de Marcos González, to assemble a wider cast of Cuban revivalists to record an album of pre-revolutionary era *son*. Over the course of three days, González enlists over 20 musicians to contribute to the album.³ Under the musical direction of Juan de Marcos González and the American guitarist and co-producer Ry Cooder, the album is recorded in six days. Overdubs and mixing ensue in Cuba, London and Los Angeles, and the album is released in 1997. *Buena Vista Social Club* would go on to sell more than 12 million copies worldwide (Cantor-Navas 2015), arguably the best-selling world music album in history.

This recording was a turning point in Nick Gold's career. It was the first of many on-location recordings he would produce from Havana to Niafunke and Bamako, Mali. His recordings in the late 1990s and early 2000s would set a benchmark style for the production of transparently mediated world music recordings.

³ The musicians included vocalists Ibrahim Ferrer, Omara Portuondo, Manuel "Puntillita" Licea, Pio Leyva, Carlos Calunga, and Idania Valdés; pianists Rubén González, Roberto Fonseca, Rolando Luna; tres players Compay Segundo and Papi Oviedo; guitarists Eliades Ochoa and Manuel Galbán; laúd player Barbarito Torres; bassists Orlando "Cachaito" López and Pedro Pablo; trumpeter Manuel "Guajiro" Mirabal; saxophonist Javier Zalba; trombonist Jesús "Aguaje" Ramos; percussionists Lázaro Villa, Amadito Valdés, Alberto Valdés, Carlos González, Julienne Oviedo Sanchezm, Angel "Terry" Domech, Roberto García, Hugo Garzón, Angá Díaz, Andrés Coyao, Filiberto Sánchez Jr., and Alberto "La Noche" Hernández.

Gold's presence in world music has been consequential, but he often describes his career as an accident. After studying history in the school of African and Asian Studies at Sussex University, Gold followed his love for record collecting into various record shops around London—one of which, Mole Jazz in Kings Cross, eventually offered him a job as a clerk. Gold describes being fascinated at the time by Black music—“blues, jazz, reggae” (Gold 2018). He was particularly taken by Cuban music and music from West Africa: “I just loved the music from those countries, and the more I dug, the more I became interested, almost to the point where I couldn't cope with much else... I was almost afraid to look elsewhere” (ibid).

He described that in the early 1980s it required some resourcefulness to seek out international music in London. Before Sterns Music was a record label, it was an electrical shop. Gold explains, “they repaired toasters and so forth. And they had records in the back... They basically brought these records in to supply [international] students. So, there were a lot of Ghanaian and Nigerian records. A lot of highlife. And then soukous started, and more and more students came in wanting soukous. So, I would go and buy records there, and in Paris we would go into Barbès... to find cassettes... It was easier to find African music in France” (ibid).

Gold began doing volunteer work presenting music in London primary schools through the organization Community Music (Krüger 2015). He planned to begin a career

in teaching, and was awaiting the start of his teacher's training when Community Music connected him with an arts organization that was expanding its operation to include a record label.

In the late 1980s, Arts Worldwide worked to present international music in the UK. One of the organization's former board members (and fellow record producer), Lucy Durán, recalls that "Back in the early 1980's in London, there were few opportunities to hear any kind of Latin music, so there was only one thing to do—create a circuit for it" (Durán 2014). The organization received a grant from the Arts Council of Great Britain and began organizing tours around the UK for "musicians from around the world who had strong local followings but were little known outside their home ground" (ibid).

Arts Worldwide organized tours for the likes of such musicians as Mhuri Yekwa Rwizi from Zimbabwe, Toumani Diabaté from Mali (this made possible his first trip to the UK), Celina González from Cuba, as well as other musicians from Venezuela, Yemen, Sudan, and Rajasthan. Anne Hunt and Mary Farquharson, the director and co-founder of Arts Worldwide respectively, decided to begin releasing recordings by the artists for whom they booked tours, responding to the demand evident at the concerts they presented (ibid). Arts Worldwide was aiming "to bring the music from a local circuit to the world circuit," as Simone Krüger put it (Krüger 2015). The organization

formed the record label World Circuit in 1986, and Gold was offered the job of overseeing the recording projects. So, it was “almost by accident” (Gold 2018) that he began working with World Circuit. “I just fell into it really,” he recalls (ibid).

At that point in his life, Gold had no experience in the studio. He was an avid record collector and listener, with a growing interest in Cuban and West-Central African popular music. According to Lucy Durán it was recordings by Arsenio Rodriguez and Abelardo Barroso from Cuba, and Orchestra Baobab from Senegal, which first grabbed Gold’s attention (Durán 2014). Gold, however, was on the precipice of a crash course in the arts of record production. When Arts Worldwide brought booked the Kenyan benga band, Shirati Jazz, for a UK tour, they stopped off at Fire House Studio in London to record an album, later released as *Benga Beat* (1987). Gold recalls Hunt and Farquharson asking him to arrange the recording session. “Okay...” he thought, “all my experience was working in a record shop. I didn’t know anything about it [the studio]. I was quite a record collector, so I was interested in records as much as I was into music at the time... [but] I hadn’t put a lot of thought into how records were made” (Gold 2018).

Arts Worldwide brought in a Kenyan producer, Wayne Barnes, who had recorded benga bands at home in Kenya. Gold booked the session at Fire House Studio, a new space recently set up by friends of Gold’s from his time at Sussex University. After all the parties arrived at the studio, Gold recalls, Waynes Barnes “set the band

up... I think it was two electric guitars, electric bass, drums, two voices. And just right from the beginning, miking up the drums, it became very apparent... how much choice there is" (ibid). Gold had assumed that one merely placed microphones in front of the drums to capture the sound of the musician sitting behind them. "But I learned over time that a huge amount of it is... where you put the microphones, how you balance them. Even just the drum kit, you know, it had ten mics on it" (ibid).

"I was just fascinated by this," he continues, "just listening. And for basically an hour you were just hearing 'boom... boom...boom...' just the bass drum. Anyway, I was sort of hypnotized by it. And then when he put the whole thing together, I was just amazed. He said he wanted the recording to be 'dry' [without any effects or other signal processing], and I didn't know what he was talking about... Not a lot of reverb—so it was like it was in a small room—so there was an immediacy to it" (ibid).

Gold recalls that through sitting in on these early sessions, not in the producer's chair but as the facilitator of the recording session, he began to learn how recordings were made. Gold's approach to producing records combined close, in-studio attention to sound; a broad interest in repertoire selection; narrative/marketing expertise; and concern for the overall arc of an artist's career. Ben Mandelson describes Gold's approach as "a very classic old record company style, which is...invest in the artists. Develop a deeper relationship and a deeper understanding that it wasn't one record and

you're out. Let's try, okay, let's try. We'll lose some money on this. It doesn't matter. Let's work it" (Mandelson 2018).

One of the defining, sustained artist relationships of Gold's career has been his work with the late Malian guitarist and singer Ali Farka Touré. Born in 1939 along the Niger River in the Northern Malian region of Tombouctou, Touré grew up and lived most of his life in the village of Niafunké where, by the time of his death in 2006, he was an esteemed local leader and farmer. As a young person, Touré's musical influences ranged from local traditions of the Fula and Songhai ethnic groups, into which he had been born, to regional and international influences he adopted as he came across them. A voracious listener, Touré was influenced by American R&B and blues music, Cuban popular music styles, and guitar playing from Central and West Africa such as highlife and soukous.

Ali Farka Touré's music became intertwined with the project of tracing the roots of American blues to direct antecedents in West Africa. This concept would become an important marketing strategy for Nick Gold, as he went on to develop a working relationship Touré. Gold would produce Touré's album, *The Source*, which for international audiences offered a validation of the burgeoning myth that Touré's music bears similarities to blues music because his playing style was emblematic of stylistic retentions that withstood the middle passage, later to manifest as the blues. However, as

Gerhard Kubik demonstrates, it was Touré himself who incorporated sounds of the blues into his playing. Kubik discusses the ways that Touré aimed to create a musical synthesis in his playing, noting that he speaks or sings in 11 languages — evidence of the breadth of his influences (Kubik 2008, 190). Nevertheless, this narrative proved a useful strategy for Gold and Touré alike in the future development of his career.

Gold and Touré's initial connection followed from a search for the guitar player—unknown in France or the UK—who was featured on those Red and Green albums. The former Arts Worldwide director, Anne Hunt, headed to Mali to seek out Touré after hearing the recordings he made at Radio Mali Studios. Hunt travelled to Bamako with kora player Toumani Diabaté, who by that time had been working in London with Lucy Durán and the WOMAD music festival. Gold describes that when Diabaté and Hunt arrived in Bamako, they headed to the radio station in Bamako and asked them to make an announcement. “If Ali Farka Touré is in Bamako, could he come to the radio station...’ and he was in Bamako,” Gold said, “which was unusual for him because he lived in Niafunke in the North. So, he arrived at the radio station, and [Anne Hunt] met him and invited him to come over. So that’s how I met him – when he came over on the plane” to London (Gold 2018).

Discussing his work with Ali Farka Touré, Gold highlighted the role he played in selecting repertoire alongside Touré for the recordings they made together. This in-

depth pre-production practice would become a hallmark of Gold's production style. "I would sit there, and he'd play a tune," Gold recalls. "And you'd go yeah that's a good one—write that one down, or record it on a little cassette, and then you might get to a time—and this is where we might have had a benign or naught influence—you might get three songs in and go 'OK, can we hear something different?'" Here, Gold acknowledges the influence he had on selecting repertoire for his recordings with Touré: "You'd get into this process where he'd be going 'What do you mean something different? They're all different'" But Gold, unattuned to many of the subtleties of Touré's music, replied, "Okay...two of those sounded quite similar to me." This would spark Touré's interest. "He's very, very sharp, Ali, and he understood these things very quickly. So, he would grab something different. They might have been three Songhai songs, so then he'd do a Peul song, and you'd think, 'Okay that's cool – that's something different. You got anymore?'" Gold described that this co-selection of repertoire would "go on for hours, day over day" (ibid).

Gold's production practice presents most strongly in this pre-production process. He works closely with his collaborators to shape a repertoire that he imagines will attract attention on the international market. By working with musicians over the course of days, weeks, or even months to develop the songs, they arrive ready to present the material with minimal intervention in the studio setting. Gold cultivates the sense of a

transparent production emerging from the moment of studio creation by preparing for it in advance, outside the setting of the studio environment. During this pre-production phase, the musical repertoire is shaped, finessed, and refined to fit Gold's imagination of a future market for the music's release.

2.3.1.5 Chris Eckman

Producer and founder of the Glitter Beat record label, Chris Eckman came of age during the inception of Seattle's grunge scene in the late 1980s. Playing in bands during that time, he worked around the margins of the music industry. Thinking back on how those days in Seattle informed his later engagements with international music, Eckman recalls how the producer Jack Endino's approach to record production made a strong impression on him. There had been Seattle bands in the early '80s, that just went to Los Angeles and paid somebody to do it 'the right way,'" he recalls. "But the thing about that was, it didn't have much to do with what those bands were about. And I think that that was what was interesting about this guy Jack Endino. He was basically audio vérité—taking pictures of what was there... If the singer doesn't sing loud enough, well, he's going to be quiet in the mix. Not a lot of manipulation going on" (Eckman 2020).

Following that transparent approach through to his later work with Glitterbeat, Eckman supposes that "there's probably a historical narrative here" (ibid). He suggests that every generation of producers orient and reorient their work in response to what

has come before them. He says that his own work was responsive both to the influence of rock producers like Endino but also to the work of Nick Gold and other world music producers of that era. Eckman says, "I am a great admirer of what Nick Gold did with World Circuit. His stuff was done phenomenally well. Always. I think a lot of people followed that aesthetic. You know, it was like suddenly, okay, this is what works. And so this is now the 'world music' aesthetic" (Eckman 2020). Eckman points to the ways in which key figures in the history of the international recording industry shape the practice of subsequent producers. Just as is the case with Tracey's practice impacting future recordists and producers, Eckman points out that Gold's outsized influence (due largely to the success of *Buena Vista Social Club*) was a cause for reaction, prompting the reorientation of methods and perspective among other producers.

Eckman went on, Gold's "stuff is very pure, actually... It's always beautifully recorded... It's not going to grab you by the throat and beat your head down, you know. And some music probably should do that. He has the thing that he does, and I have great admiration for him. But I think there had been a blandness that had come across [in those recordings], and a lot of that was the mediation" (ibid). Eckman says that his work with Glitterbeat sought to react against the transparent mediation style that Gold (prominently) developed. "Now we tend to think more in terms of disruption," Eckman reflects, rather than "finding a smooth groove" (ibid). Eckman's production style pulls

upon many of the transparent strategies and techniques that producers like Gold deploy, but he strives to cultivate an impression of rawness. In the following section I will explore how the search for rawness figures as an approach to transparent mediation.

2.3.2 The Money Question

For Gold, a primary aim of his business is to compensate musicians fairly for their work and to operate in a transparent way with regard to finances. His longtime collaborator Lucy Durán describes how “Nick is very ethical in his relationships with musicians... His payment to musicians is very transparent. He’s very meticulous with royalties and contracts and everything like that. He’s very responsible and ethical. And he builds very close relationships. Very trusting relationships. And musicians trust him because they know he pays well” (Durán 2020).

Ian Brennan, who produced the Grammy award winning album *Tassilli*, describes taking no money from the majority of his productions. Brennan described his motivations to me this way:

With recording, the beauty of it, for better or for worse... is that it can endure, you know, the sound can live on and have impact and that's all I care about...tipping the scales in a slightly more positive direction. And so, we don't make money on these projects. I mean, we lose money on them, we try to get back money if we can...to offset the expenses but it's not a living. It would be a shitty living because you can't make a living doing it, not the way we do it (Brennan 2020).

Lucy Durán spoken openly in an interview about the modest financial proceeds she has obtained from records she has produced. The best-selling record she worked on was *Kulanjan*, Taj Mahal's collaboration with Toumani Diabaté that also featured the Malian musicians Bassekou Kouyate, Kassemady Diabaté, Ramata Diakaité, and Dougouyé Coulibaly. She described that as the best-selling record that she produced over the course of a nearly 30-year career. *Kulanjan* "sold 150,000 copies," she recalls. "I made some money on that one. I made \$10,000 on that one. In 2000 that was good money, and boy did I need it" (Durán 2020). A more recent project she curated and produced—the collaboration mentioned above between Trio da Kali from Mali and the Kronos Quartet from San Francisco—received great reviews in the press. However, her cut of the record sales from the project, which she worked on over the course of six years, amounted to £1,500 GBP, an advance on what turned out to be minimal royalties (ibid).

In an interview with Chris Eckman, founder of Glitterbeat Records, he described his record label's policy never to own the master rights to the recordings they distribute. The label licenses the records for a set term, and when that term is up, the rights revert to the artists. This includes records that Glitterbeat finances from the ground up, not only pre-existing records they license. "That's something I felt very, very strongly about, having come out of the music business as an artist," Eckman said. He described that as

an artist he was represented by several record labels over the years, and “transparency is the thing that most of them lacked” (Eckman 2020). So, from the start Glitterbeat was committed to having “unrepentantly artist-oriented contracts. We don't own anything,” he says, elaborating, “we don't own any master rights at all. Everything we have are done on licensed contracts—term-specific license contracts. Once those terms are up, all the rights revert to the artists” (ibid).

Undoubtedly, arrangements become more complicated in the rare instance of an album like *Buena Vista Social Club* that has sold millions of copies. *Buena Vista Social Club* made World Circuit a relatively huge sum of money that they reinvested into other projects which were not nearly as financially successful. Buena Vista’s commercial success led to extensive touring opportunities for the musicians—as well as solo releases, including several on World Circuit. Ultimately, that one album’s commercial success dramatically increased the value of World Circuit as a business entity. In 2018 the conglomerate BMG acquired World Circuit for an undisclosed sum that amounted, according to reporting, to multiple millions of dollars (Worldwide 2018). Nick Gold never collected the teacher’s pension he once imagined he might receive. In exchange for the career path he never trod, Gold got a good deal more.

Produced in 1997, *Buena Vista Social Club* represents a crescendo in the financial viability of transparently mediated world music recordings. The decline in physical

album sales and the increasingly diffuse nature of the digital music market have since that time remade the music industry. Even the most successful world music recordings are unlikely to generate significant revenue today.

“It is not lost on me that I can easily be accused (and probably have unintentionally lapsed into) some of the types of exploitation that I rail against,” writes Ian Brennan. “Due to avenues being very closed to non-English or Spanish music outside of all other, smaller, linguistic areas, there is virtually no money to be found in ‘international’ music (i.e., even the sales of the largest ‘world music’ stars like Youssou N’Dour are feeble compared to most other pop icons). This fact seems to have done little though to dissuade some from harboring great apprehension towards anyone involved in cross-cultural efforts... That most international recordings are labors of love that actually *lose* money for the producer *and* the record companies involved seems to have small bearing on audience members paternalistically suggesting that ‘I hope that at least *some* of the profits find their way to the band somehow’” (Brennan 2016, 391).

2.4 Strategies and Techniques of Transparent Record Production

Ragnhild Brøvig-Hanssen (Brøvig-Hanssen 2018b) identifies several qualities of recorded sound that are most likely to cause a listener to recognize the presence of technological mediation (what she terms “opaque mediation”). “The first is when it disrupts the spatiotemporal coherence of the music,” she writes. She lists two other such

instances: “when it disturbs our familiar way of hearing sound, [and] when it operates at the border between what we understand as being in the music’s interior and exterior” (ibid, 196). Brøvig-Hanssen’s description of music’s interior and exterior refers to the inclusion of sounds associated with mediating technology. (For example, record scratches, the skip of a CD player, tape hiss, a voice processed through a telephone, and the sound of a 78 spinning at the end of a side, might all be examples of the “music’s exterior.”). During each of these moments, the veil of transparency is broken, and the listener is likely to have their attention drawn *towards* the processes of mediation at work.

Flipping Brøvig-Hanssen’s analysis on its head, I propose to examine the techniques and strategies of transparent mediation. I argue that the set of techniques and strategies I outline in the remainder of this chapter define a practice of transparent record production in world music, one that invites listeners to hear *through* mediating technology (as Brøvig-Hanssen would have it) and directly into a (real or imagined) moment of musical creation. This process shapes the musical encounter as “authentic” for listeners, and it works in tandem with narrative strategies aimed at linking recorded sounds with specific cultures of music making. As Aleysia Whitmore observes, world music producers connect sounds “to the local, the original, and the live moment of creative artistry in the minds of listeners” (Whitmore 2020, 70). She further asserts that

“Creating this intimacy requires subtlety... The concealed nature of world music’s mediation hides many of the commercial processes behind the production that make the industry seem disingenuous” (Whitmore 2020, 70).

Whitmore’s description of the “concealed nature” of world music recordings rhymes with Hugh Tracey’s formulation of “the art which conceals art.” I contend that this “concealment” is carried out through a host of specific techniques and strategies aimed at rendering mediation transparent—that is, invisible, inaudible, unnoticed.

2.4.1 Simulating Temporal Continuity

Simulating temporal continuity is a primary technique of transparent record production. Before the record industry transitioned to magnetic tape recording in the 1950s, the question of temporal continuity was not at issue. In the pre-tape era, recordists and producers did not have the ability to cut, edit, or splice recorded sound. However, as Hugh Tracey describes above, producers engaged in a type of temporal mediation by coaching or conducting musicians to shorten or elongate sections of music. The aim of such intervention was often to truncate performances so that they would fit the time constraints of the playback medium.

With the advent of magnetic tape recording, however, it became possible to cut and splice performances, thereby eliding sections of a given performance, cutting from one performance to another, or elongating the music by repeating recorded sections.

With tape machines, this technique is performed by rocking the tape reels across the head as the recordist listens for the edit point, marking the edit point on the tape with a colored pencil, cutting the tape with a razor blade, then adjoining (splicing) that edit together with splicing tape. It is an imprecise and time-consuming process, but one that quickly became commonplace in the heyday of tape recording (the 1950s through the 1980s).

Digital audio recording would revolutionize the editing process. While digital recording technologies were being developed in the early 1970s, the first all-digital album was recorded in 1979 on 3M's digital multitrack recorder. (Incidentally this album, *Bop till You Drop*, was recorded by Ry Cooder, a musician who has figured in this story already). In 1985, Digidesigns released Sound Designer, an audio editing software program that, by 1991, would become the industry standard for Digital Audio Workstations (DAWs): Protools. Protools allowed for digital waveform editing, a process whereby sounds are rendered visually on computer screens. "Waveforms" depict changes in audio amplitude over time and are used as visual aids to assist with a host of post-production techniques, including temporal editing.

Producers creatively engage in temporal editing in three ways: through the elision of sections (cutting), temporal expansion through the repetition of sections (looping), and temporal fragmentation—the compiling of disparate recordings into one

'performance' (a practice known as "comping"). With digital waveform editing, one can, with a few clicks, easily try different editing options, and line up the edits with reliably seamless crossfades. Striving to cultivate a "live" sound, producers typically prioritize maintaining the *illusion* of temporal continuity, even when the recording is created through temporal compression, expansion, or fragmentation.

Musing on the use of temporal editing techniques, world music producer Ben Mandelson said, "You're making a true recording and to make it a true version, you edit it...that's such a paradox. You're making a hyper real version of what's going on to better illustrate what the reality is. But in doing so, you're creating a new thing. It's a paradox," he repeats, in conclusion (Mandelson 2020).

On Toumani Diabaté's influential 1988 album *Kaira*, producer Lucy Durán worked with engineer Adam Skeaping to heighten the motivic density of kora player Toumani Diabaté's performance by editing out sections Durán deemed to be lacking in focus. (I describe this process in detail in chapter 3). The basic intent of Durán's production technique is to temporally compress the performance while maintaining the illusion of temporal continuity. Listening to the original session recordings, Durán carefully diagrammed her ideal, time-compressed version of Toumani's performances. She then sat down with Adam Skeaping in the studio and used digital waveform editing to create shorter cuts that would fit the format of radio play. Few listeners would

imagine that the performances they encounter on *Kaira* are anything but temporally continuous. However, the recording is in reality a collage of temporally disparate moments, strung together in a transparent manner simulating temporal continuity (Durán 2020). Durán understood her job as this project's producer to make Toumani's music "sound as attractive as it possibly could be, without long boring bits" (ibid).

On the topic of manufacturing the impression of temporal continuity, Ben Mandelson muses, "You're making a representation of what happened. So that involves giving people the idea of what happened, even if it didn't actually happen like that. But after a while they will believe it did" (Mandelson 2018).

2.4.2 Simulating Spatial Continuity

Transparent production often involves working to make sounds recorded in disparate spaces sound as if they were recorded in the same space and time. The recording engineer Jerry Boys described working with Juan de Marcos, Ry Cooder and Nick Gold to record *Buena Vista Social Club* in Havana, Cuba in March of 1996. Boys said that the album was recorded primarily in a live manner, over the course of six days. "There were a few at-the-time overdubs of backing vocals...because that was hard to do live," he shared. "And sometimes you wouldn't have the right person in the room singing, [so] you'd get some better people in to beef up a bit. But, you know, we did it

really quickly. There were a few percussion overdubs, but not many. Yes, it was live," Boys concluded (Boys 2018).

Gold described the musicians pressed closely together at EGRAM's Areito studio in Havana when the simultaneous tracking took place. "You've got the whole group as close as they can be together. It's a huge studio. All the musicians are on one end sort of snuggled together," he described (Gold 2018). However, a key exception to this "live" approach was the considerable number of electric guitar overdubs performed by Ry Cooder after he returned with the tracks to his studio in Los Angeles. According to Boys, an electric guitar amplifier was not available at Areito, so he and Gold brought an amp with them from England. However, this amp wasn't functioning properly in Havana. (Boys later determined that one of the speakers had been replaced and, in the repair process, the two speakers were wired out of phase). Boys recalls Cooder being dissatisfied with the amplifier even after it was repaired. Cooder told Boys that he'd record the electric guitar parts when he returned to Los Angeles. "That's fine," Boys remembered thinking. "He's got all his gear there, you know. So off he went" (Boys 2018).

The sound of the electric guitar on *Buena Vista Social Club* was key to the record's commercial success. *Buena Vista Social Club* became a smash hit among people in the United States and the UK, people previously unfamiliar with Cuban popular music, and

for these listeners, the electric guitar provided a familiar timbral signifier—one that was out of place in the context of *son* music from the 1920's, 30s and 40's but reminded the target listeners of American rock and popular music sounds. On *Buena Vista Social*, Ry Cooder's electric guitar worked to bridge the familiar and the foreign.

It was important to Boys, Cooder and Gold that the electric guitars, recorded by Cooder in Los Angeles, sit in the mix in a manner that wouldn't interrupt the spatial coherence of the recording. Cooder and Boys went back and forth discussing how loud the electric guitars should be in the mix, Boys advocating that they should be turned up, and Cooder wanting them to recede to the background (ibid). After Cooder's failed initial attempt at mixing the record, Boys flew from London to Los Angeles to begin work on the mix himself. Following a week of work in Los Angeles, Boys completed the project at his home studio in London.

In total, *Buena Vista Social Club* was created in four discrete spaces: Tracked initially at EGRAM's Areito in Havana, electric guitars were recorded at Ocean Way Recording in Hollywood, with the mix by Boys begun at The Bakery Recording Studio in N. Hollywood and completed at Livingstone Studios in London. By weaving the overdubbed guitars subtly into the mix and blending the four spaces together transparently, the production invites listeners to believe that the recordings reflect a singular moment of creation.

2.4.3 Producing “Space” as a Third Dimension

Most of the [*Buena Vista Social Club*] record is the ambient mics. That’s what the room sounds like. That’s a huge part of the success of that record—you feel amongst it... I remember at the time when it was being played in a pub or a shop or something, people would come in and look to see where the musicians were because it feels like you’re there.

-Nick Gold (Gold 2018)

Producers construct space in music recordings to bring forth a third dimension.

With stereo playback (the most common playback format today), sounds are arrayed from left to right across the stereo field. A z-axis provides a sense of depth through the use of microphone techniques aimed at capturing the sound of a space, and manufactured space in the form of reverberation, delay, and echo effects. As Ben Mandelson said, “You’re basically taking something out of what is effectively in four dimensions, reducing it to three or two dimensions because, you know, you’ve taken it out of its time zone... So you take that dimension off, and you’ve taken the visual off, and you’ve taken the smell off. And you somehow have to represent all of that as a static art form. And that’s hard. That’s really hard” (Mandelson 2018).

In *Echo and Reverb: Fabricating Space in Popular Music Recording 1900-1960* (Doyle 2005) Peter Doyle studies the mono era (thus leaving aside the “horizontal” considerations of the stereo field), to interrogate how reverberation effects can create a “virtual geography, a coherent, highly specific sense of place and space” (ibid, 2) in

recorded music. Transparent approaches to record production make use of reverberation, whether as an analog or a digital effect, or through the choice of microphone placement within a sonic space, to generate a sense of spatial emplacement for the listener. The guiding principle is to allow listeners to imagine themselves in the best seat in the house.

Two contrasting examples demonstrate the creative use of reverberation in generating different modes of transparent listener affect. The first example operates on producer Ian Brennan's premise that "A good record should place you amid the musicians, as if they are there with you. It should bring you *there*," he writes (Brennan 2016, 168).

The manner in which producers Nick Gold, Ry Cooder, and Jerry Boys produced space on *Buena Vista Social Club* provided listeners the opportunity to experience the sonic character of EGRAM's Areito studio, an approach to producing and presenting space that Gold considers to have contributed significantly to the success of the album (Gold 2018). Thinking back on the impact of the recording, Gold claims that the room sound they generated made listeners feel "amongst it," or "like you're there" (ibid). The production trio of Gold, Boys and Cooder knew from the beginning that they wanted the resonance of EGREM's Areito studio to play a starring role in the sonic character of the album. "It's the nicest sounding studio I've ever been in," Gold said. "Indeed, it's the

nicest sounding room for sound that I've been in" (Gold 2018). Cooder, too, "knew about the room," Jerry Boys recalled. "He told Nick...that he wants to be able to hear the room. He wants to sit in the room with the musicians...organize it, and he wanted to hear [on the recording] what he heard out there" (Boys 2018). Boys objected that this is not as easy a task as it may seem. That's "quite a tall story," Boy said, "because microphones never sound the same as your ears, no matter how good they are" (ibid). So, Boys arrived in Cuba with an array of ambient microphones to try out at Areito, hoping to discover a way to capture the sound of the room.

The unique sonic character of Estudios Arieto has an 80-year history in Havana and has been key in defining the sound of Cuban music both on the island and around the world. The musician and recording engineer Ramón Sabat founded Pan-American Recordings (Panart), Cuba's first record label and recording studio in 1943. A six-story colonial building at 410 Calle San Miguel in central Havana became the home of Panart. The sprawling, white stucco building had been in service variously as a tobacco processing plant and a rehearsal space for the Havana Philharmonic before the studio became responsible for capturing and defining the sound of Cuban music recordings for more than three quarters of a century. In 1964 EGREM (Empresa de Grabaciones y Ediciones Musicales), was founded as a nationalized record label and absorbed the assets of Panart. It's main recording space, Areito Estudio 101, is roughly 575 square feet

with ceilings stretching towards 30 feet in height. A thin strip of green paint hovers just below a voluminous, white painted, ceiling. Alternating vertical and horizontal rectangular reflector/diffusers create a checkerboard effect of golden wood tones along each wall. The slats in each of the several hundred wooden panels that line the walls let acoustic energy flow between the wooden slats, diffused into the absorbent material backing them. At the same time, the reflective surface of the wooden slats redirects high frequency sounds back into the space, creating a lively but not overly bright acoustic environment. "The room has a wonderfully warm ambience," Boys says (Evans 2016).

Boys consulted with colleagues who worked as recordists in the classical music and jazz idioms, knowing that the style in which they planned to work more closely mirrored these recording practices than pop and rock production of the time, which was Boys' typical area of expertise. When they arrived at EGRAM, Boys set up a cardioid pair of Brüel & Kjær small-diaphragm condenser microphones. After auditioning those microphones he concluded they didn't adequately capture the room sound because they didn't make it sound "big enough." Instead, Boys landed on a pair of Neumann TLM 170 large-diaphragm condenser microphones set to omnidirectional mode, which he placed on tall stands high up towards the ceiling of the studio in an AB pattern, spaced the width of the studio.

When the musicians arrived and set up in the studio, Boys arranged Cooder in the center of the stereo field created by the ambient mics, attempting to accomplish what Cooder had requested: having the recording reflect Cooder's own aural experience during the recording session. "I'd centered it on where Ry was so...he would hear the same set of stereo," Boys recalled (Boys 2018). He put the bass player in the middle and set the other musicians up in the same arrangement that he planned for the stereo image of the final mix. Boys included close mikes on instruments and voices, which were integral to producing the mix. However, it was the ambient mics, nestled high in the ceiling of Areito that gave the final mix its sonic character. Boys recalls that Cooder struggled to recreate the sound from Areito when he took the tracks back to mix them in Los Angeles. When Boys heard Cooder's initial mix, "It just sounded a bit flat and two dimensional," he commented. "It's like he hadn't used the ambient mics—and it was his idea! It was him pushing for all this," Boys recalled (ibid). Seeking to recreate the sound they had experienced together in the Havana studio, the production trio decided Boys should fly to Los Angeles to take another pass at the final mix. In a small LA studio normally focused on Christian music recordings, they managed to locate the same Amek console the group had used in Arieto. Once the trio got set up and ran the tape through the Amek console, they raised the two channels of the room mics, and there it was: the sound of Areito. The sound they had fallen in love with during the sessions in Havana.

Musicians huddled together, instruments bleeding from one microphone to the next: this recording scenario stood in sharp contrast to mainstream recording techniques of the era that privileged “separation” – whether by musicians playing simultaneously in different rooms, or asynchronously with musicians layering sounds in the overdub format. This simultaneous technique produced in *Buena Vista Social Club* a sound recording that was easily interpreted by audiences as transparent. Listeners were enabled to feel themselves “amongst it,” as Gold said, to imagine themselves as being vicariously present for a moment of artistic creation. Listeners crouched by their stereo speakers, auditioning their way into the bright, airy, wooden space of Areito Estudio 101.

The record producer Joe Boyd agrees with Nick Gold that the success of *Buena Vista Social Club* is due, in no small part, to the use of ambient mics to capture the space of Areito. “I have seen people enter pubs or bars where the *Buena Vista Social Club* CD is playing and look around for the source of the music; they seem startled to be entering a three-dimensional acoustic space. There were many recordings already on the market with similar Cuban singers and material when *Buena Vista* was released. Its success is usually ascribed to Cooder, the film or the brilliant marketing, all of which were certainly relevant. But I am convinced that the sound of the record was equally if not

more important...The recording captures the full sound of the three-dimensional space in which the musicians performed" (Boyd 2010, 209).

That Boys focused the design of the mix around Ry Cooder's auditioning position makes an important point about the intended audience for the recording. His decision places the listener in Cooder's seat in the studio, thus gesturing an invitation towards a white, male, American audience. Jan Fairley notes (in comparing the *Buena Vista* phenomenon with *timba* music in Cuba) "the emergence of two kinds of music: one for people on the island and one for the tourists and foreign consumers who know little about everyday Cuba. The latter is epitomized by the international success of The Buena Vista Social Club" (Fairley and Christie 2016, 112). The point of audition is the American foreigner visiting Havana—the world music emissary from LA. His perspective is the one the audience is invited to inhabit. Cooder's experience in the studio is offered up vicariously to the listener through the production of space in *Buena Vista Social Club*. As J. Scott Oberacker notes, commenting on the eponymous Wim Wenders film (Wenders, Felsberg, and Cooder 2000), "Cooder became the central figure in the narrative constructed by enthusiasts in the popular press, while Wenders' film casts Cooder in what can only be described as an heroic mold" (Oberacker 2008). Oberacker elaborates,

Throughout the film, Cooder is coded both textually and visually as the recognizer of talent and arbiter of musical taste. For instance, in the two concert sequences, each of which functions as a major set-piece for the film, the visual narrative is carefully

constructed around close-ups of Cooder. Various shots of the performers are juxtaposed with shots of Cooder, thus cementing his image as the focal point of each sequence” (ibid).

Boys, Cooder and Gold’s mixing choices organized the space of Areito around Ry Cooder as the focal point, centering his perspective in the album’s sonic and narrative structure.

2.4.4 Heightened Treatment of the Voice

In contrast to the use of space described in the last example, recordist and producer Ian Brennan describes working consciously to minimize reverberation on certain sources, particularly voices, endeavoring to generate emotional intimacy through transparent mediation. “Bass sounds travel the farthest,” Brennan writes. “But it is the high frequencies of the voice that we hear when someone leans in close to whisper. With proximity, the low-end drops away, as does the reflected sound. That is why vocals drenched in reverb—as is the norm with ‘professional’ recordings...actually distance listeners from the source” (Brennan 2016, 97). This conception leads him to work from the premise that “for a voice to truly be foregrounded, present, and intimate, it needs to be as dry as possible. No additional insulation should come between the artist and the listener, but instead the two should be brought closer to each other” (ibid).

Brennan achieves this result by close miking voices and applying little to no reverberation effects. This approach is evident on the album *Funeral Songs* (Fra 2020),

which Brennan produced in northern Ghana with a group of musicians belonging to the Frafra ethnic group. A two-stringed kologo is plucked by a metal plectrum in the middle of the mix—the blunt, gritty attack of the instrument providing a reference point for three voices panned center, left and right. Striking about Brennan’s treatment of the voices here is the immediate, dry quality of each voice. Even when a singer strays from the microphone, little reverberation is audible. (The recording was likely done outside).

The listener is placed in the center of the mix, with one voice straight ahead, one off-axis to the left, and the third off-axis to the right. This use of panning offers a sense of sonic immersion. The lack of reverberation on the voices imbues the recording with a direct, intimate sensibility—one can nearly imagine the heat of the singer’s breath as the voices encircle the listener. Brennan writes, “Rather than dressing up sounds (e.g., voices drenched in delay), what is often needed is to revel in their nakedness and focus attention on what is already present, though ignored. To shine a light *into* the shadows” (ibid, 101). Brennan achieves his end by heightening the immediacy of the voice. Voices are close-miked, mixed in space around the listener, compressed subtly to bring them forward in the mix, and left dry (without reverb) to simulate the proximity of voice to listener.

Jerry Boys describes the process by which he creates the impression of a transparently mediated voice. While “people think what [they] hear is natural, you often

do a lot to make it sound that way” (Boys 2018). He describes using reverberation effects judiciously to avoid the voice sounding “obviously changed” (ibid). He said, “I often put a little tiny bit of repeat echo at about 130 milliseconds, with the top rolled off a bit... Just to give [the voice] a little hint of space. Only 8% mixed in, something like that, on the mix knob.... That just gives you that feeling of being somewhere, without feeling like it’s got reverb on it” (ibid). Boys also makes considerable use of compression on vocals (as do most producer-engineers). Used carefully, this treatment “sounds natural... It just makes us feel like she’s just singing a bit harder” (ibid). With a single vocal track, Boys says, he will often have as many as five or six effects plugins applied to the source.

Whether left almost dry, or subtly accentuated with delay, the voice is carefully treated to impact the listener, to play upon our emotions in a heightened manner. Brennan writes, “At their best, recordings act as a form of eavesdropping, where it is as if the musician is speaking directly to you, whispering in your ear in a privileged way that rises above ordinary experience and takes on a confessional air” (Brennan 2016, 7).

2.4.5 Horizontal Emplacement in the Mix

The technique of horizontal emplacement is evident in several of the techniques mentioned above. In the Buena Vista Social Club recordings, Boys worked to position the listener in Cooder’s auditioning perspective, amongst the musicians. In the case of Ian Bannan’s Fra Fra recording (Fra 2020), intimacy is generated through the panning of

the three singers around the listener as the central focal point in the mix. This example reveals that the listener is the primary subject of the mix, not the performance itself. Thus, listener placement is a key to transparent mediation: the recording conspires to generate an experience of immersion in a sonic world, the listener emplaced through recording, editing, and mixing techniques into a particular auditioning perspective within a musical event.

2.4.6 Moving Quickly to Capture the Moment

Ali Farka Touré would “play a tune in the studio and as the last notes of it died down, he’d then start the next one. It wasn’t like ‘right, next, good take.’ So, he basically recorded the whole record in one go...It was amazing. He claims the 40-minute record was made in half an hour.

-Nick Gold (Gold 2018)

Transparent record production aims to present an illusion of “real” events, even as it operationalizes many of the techniques used to generate the “ideal” events Frith describes in multi-track rock ‘n’ roll recording (Frith 1987). However, world music record producers working towards transparent mediation often eschew the discontinuous process of rock n’ roll record production in favor of a synchronous “live” format. These producers’ approaches are inevitably informed by rock ‘n’ roll recording techniques. (All the producers I interviewed came of age with rock records). In addition

their approaches are also shaped by ethnographic recording traditions, which tend to operate with greater spatio-temporal continuity.

Ian Brennan describes working to keep musicians insulated from the technicalities of the recording process, and to keep the momentum of the studio performance moving forward. He writes, it is best “to almost never make musicians stop. Flow is the goal, not fragmentation and atomizing of experience. Yet, so much recording becomes a fraught-ridden enterprise, with discontinuity being the rule” (Brennan 2016, 104). Similarly, he discourages musicians from listening back to performances in the studio, arguing that it takes them out of the moment. “The switching to and fro, from creator to critic, can wreak havoc on the acquiescence and full commitment that are necessary for profound expressive actions to occur,” he writes. “The duties of performing and reviewing are not only separate roles, but can act at cross-purposes to one another and result in deadlock or worse, backsliding” (ibid, 103). Brennan invoked the Allen Ginsbergism, “first thought, best thought” several times in my 2020 interview with him. He clarifies in writing that at times “a person’s ‘worst note’ is often their most disarming” (Brennan 2016, 103).

Nick Gold described Ry Cooder’s approach to catching the moment in the studio: “He would wait until they were in the pocket, or just feeling good, and then—you had to watch him all the time through the glass cause he would whisper ‘go, go, go,’ and

Jerry would have to not miss it” (Gold 2018). Boys explained the technique to Gold this way, “What Ry noticed was if you said, ‘Right we’ve got it? Now, let’s record’, [the musicians] would immediately stop and start tuning up. ‘Everyone, OK we’re going to record now, tune up...’ And then the rigidity came in.” To Cooder what was most important was “Don’t fuck up the vibe. Got to get the vibe” (ibid).

Ben Mandelson agrees, “I think for performance-based music, you’ve got to go and catch the moment, and nothing must get in the way. Even if the sound is going to end up not as good, it doesn’t matter. Because if it’s a brilliant performance, people will hear through bad sound. If it’s a terrible performance with amazing sound, people will hear the terrible performance much more so!” (Mandelson 2018). Mandelson later reiterated, “You’ve got to catch the moment. Doesn’t matter what else is happening, if you lose the moment you’re fucked. That’s the end of it” (ibid).

2.4.7 Simulating Live Performance Dynamics

Producers describe the comfort of musicians in the recording space as a foremost concern for creating an inspired performance. Brennan says that he makes a practice of not having musicians wear headphones in the studio. “This nakedness besets people to listen in context,” he writes (Brennan 2016, 221). When the musicians are not adjusting to the electronically-mediated condition of headphone listening, they are instead “forced to fall back on old-school technology — gestures, pointing, winks, a nod of the head” (ibid).

As with Boys, Cooder and Gold arranging the *Buena Vista Social Club* musicians into a cluster on one end of the live room at Estudios Areito, Brennan believes that “in whatever manner a band is accustomed to playing, that is how they should be recorded. If they normally sit on the ground, or play autoharp and sing at the same time,” they that’s how they should be recorded, he argues (ibid).

Lucy Durán contends that “musicians in aural traditions play better when they’re facing each other” (Durán 2020). However, musicians who have some experience with studio recording are often interested in exploring the possibilities of technology. She says that the great Malian Wassoulou vocalist Oumou Sangaré “has clashed repeatedly with Nick Gold because she wanted to do everything track by track with the overdubs...And that’s not what Nick Gold likes doing...And I agree with him. He doesn’t feel that it conveys the spirit and the joy and the depth of the musical tradition if it’s an aural tradition” (ibid). This principle structures Durán’s own production practice. She says she likes to keep it “as live a production as possible [with] everybody in the same room as much as possible.” For Durán her work aims to be “almost like a field recording, but a much more produced field recording” (ibid).

Indeed, recordists often chose to be in a non-studio space. Ben Mandelson and Lucy Durán abandoned the studio in Bamako, Mali, for a hotel when they produced *Bajourou* featuring Djelimady Tounkara, Lafia Diabaté, and Bouba Sacko (Sacko,

Toukara, and Diabaté 1993) . Durán described loving the magic of the all-night session in a comfortable space, rather than in the “familiar fug of the studio,” as Hugh Tracey put it (Tracey 1955, 9).

2.4.8 Refining Repertoire in Pre-Production

Nick Gold described the pre-production process in his work with Ali Fark Touré as an important first stage in creating the finished work. For Gold, arriving prepared in the studio allows the session to run more smoothly and facilitates a continuous format amendable to “live” performance (Gold 2018).

Lucy Durán described the pre-production process for *Kaira* taking place over the course of several months while Toumani Diabaté was living at her place in North London. They spent long evenings together in the living room, Durán accompanying Diabaté on kora, and discussing the Malian kora repertoire. Of developing the repertoire collaboratively with an artist, Durán says, “What we work towards has to be agreeable to [the artist] and aesthetically pleasing, and something that hasn’t already been done. Something that will be new and something that has a good story behind it (so you can tell the story about it), and something that involves research so it’s not just superficial” (Durán 2020).

Describing Djelimady Toukara and Bouba Sacko’s *Bajourou* album that he produced with Durán in Mali, Ben Mandelson offered that “most of the time on the trip

was spent getting to know the participants and really thinking about the songs to do...Because when you get to the studio, the studio is the realization point of what you've already discussed. It's not 'oh what should we do, and how should we do it?' You have to go, 'We know what we're doing, we've already talked about that. Let's just press the button and go' (Mandelson 2018).

Listening back to tape from the pre-production sessions (archived at the British Library), one can hear this negotiation taking place in real time: Mandelson encouraging the guitar players to repeat a long, flourishing line. Mandelson singing under his breath to the guitarists, reminding them of a line he had heard earlier in the session. Mandelson quietly suggesting, "Why don't we just start with that together" as the two guitarists loop an introductory phrase. "Mmm, sweet," he says as they draw a song to a close. Mandelson enthusing over Tounkara's humorously exaggerated blues guitar phrasing, which ends in the piece collapsing into laughter (Mandelson and Durán 1992).

This type of pre-production effort creates a recording environment in which a transparent approach can be more easily generated. Musicians and producers arrive on the same page about the repertoire and the plan, allowing the session to be tracked with fewer interruptions and delays.

2.4.9 Striving for Rawness

Rather than attempting to fix flaws and mistakes we can, instead, celebrate them.

-Ian Brennan (Brennan 2016, 191)

World music producers work in a responsive manner to trends and histories in their field. For instance, Glitterbeat head and producer Chris Ekman recalls that by the time he began making records, “blandness...had come across” the sound of records intended for the world music market. “If you go back into the ‘80s, ‘90s, even early 2000s, there was becoming a more homogenized ‘World Music Sound’ – usually with Western producers, very often highly manipulated sounds. One thing that did is that it introduced that sound palette into those cultures, also. That should not be forgotten” (Eckman 2020).

Eckman points out that scholars and journalists typically assume that the more sanitized production style was pushed on artists by the “European or American producer,” that those producers invariably work to make “the whole thing slicker...more commercial, more market oriented” (ibid). However, Eckman says that in his experience, it is often the artists he collaborates with (such as in his work with the Malian artists Tamikrest and Bassekou Kouyate) who push for a “slicker” sound. Of the misimpression that clean aesthetics are the result of a producer’s vision, he said, “I always thought was funny, because [when] I worked with artists like Tamikrest, for example...their number one group in the world is Dire Straits. But not like early, rootsy

Dire Straits, more like stadium rock, late '80s Dire Straits. So, you know, that's their aesthetic" (ibid).

Eckman felt his role often was to push back against the slicker, more opaque approach. He adds that at Glitterbeat, the record label he co-founded and runs, "we tend to think more in terms of disruption than... finding a smooth groove." His role is "encouraging rawness [even when] the artist finds it a little bit uncomfortable actually. And so, it's not like you're meddling — well you are to some degree — but possibly you ending up meddling in a much different way than what is commonly perceived as the role of the 'Western Producer'" (ibid). Rebelling against the "blandness" of earlier world music recordings, Eckman prioritizes the "rawness" of gritty timbres and imperfection in performance. He tries to track the music in as spatio-temporally coherent a manner as possible, and resists getting bogged down in time-consuming overdub processes.

Ian Brennan often has a similar goal in mind. "I gravitate towards transparent and 'warts-and-all' methods," he writes. Brennan's "aspiration is to present artists in the best possible light" by aiming for "a truthful representation — what someone sounds like, not what they *think* they sound like or would like to be. The goal is a fly-on-the-wall sensation" (Brennan 2016, 308). Brennan argues for the value of rawness: "In general, it is the rough edges that tend to be glossed over. But it is these things about ourselves that we disown, that actually give us our distinction and texture" (ibid, 222).

2.5 Conclusions

The creative efforts of world music producers achieve mixed results. Their works have helped to enable the careers of a select number of musicians from various parts of the Global South, creating a more diverse representation of styles and sounds within music industry networks, along lines of language, race and nationality. Thus, the rise of world music has facilitated diasporic dialogue in the Black Atlantic by allowing far-flung diasporas to connect through practices of listening. Cross-cultural collaboration has helped international publics relate to musical, artistic, and cultural contexts beyond the borders of their own nation.

World music producers have also, at times, reinscribed (or generated) cultural stereotypes. They have left the families and communities of musicians behind as the star-system of the music industry prioritizes individual celebrity over collective expression. Ultimately, ethnographic and world music recording projects occupy a vanishingly small sector of the global music industry. The dedicated work of generations of international music activists has not fundamentally restructured the broad and long-rooted inequities fundamental to the music industry. They have, however, succeeded in carving out a wide network for interaction and engagement among musicians and listening publics.

3. Producing Mande Music: Lucy Durán and the Politics of Invisibility in Toumani Diabaté's *Kaira*

This chapter examines the interface between the Malian kora player Toumani Diabaté and the London-based world music producer and ethnomusicologist Lucy Durán. I explore how their collaboration led to the creation of one of the most internationally-recognized representations of Mande music in the twentieth century—the album of solo kora music, *Kaira*, released to critical acclaim in 1988. While Toumani would go on to record his first six albums with Lucy Durán (Durán 2017b), I argue this initial collaboration was the most consequential in cementing both collaborators' international reputations, and in defining the sound of Malian kora music, both internationally and at home. Returning to the frameworks of friction, tension, and entanglement (see Introduction), I structure the following chapter with interspersed narratives and contrasting perspectives as a way of reflecting on how Durán and Diabaté's histories have become intertwined and have generated new artistic possibilities through their years of collaboration.

3.1 Listening Below the Surface of *Kaira*

Kaira opens with a classic from the twentieth-century Mande repertoire, "Alla L'Aa Ke." The track begins with a descending figure, cascading downwards before turning on a dime and running right back up the way it had come. After a final return down to the tonic, Toumani

concludes his nininkali, or prefatory section (Skinner 2015, 78) and begins “Alla L’Aa Ke with a few bars of the classic kumbengo, or accompaniment pattern (0:08)—interlocking bass parts consuming the movement of his two dexterous thumbs, index fingers raking groups of adjacent strings into interlocking upbeat accents.

The technique of “simultaneous kora” presented so artfully by Toumani on *Kaira* has become an aspirational standard for students of the instrument both in Mande West Africa and around the world. Toumani claims his father, the famed Sidiki Diabaté, was the originator of the playing style he employs so influentially. “My father was named ‘king of the kora’ in 1977 at FESTAC in Nigeria,” Toumani explains. “As his first son, I have taken on his role in developing the technique of simultaneous kora playing. That is playing the bass, the accompaniment, and the solo at the same time” (World Circuit Records 2006). Toumani’s own innovations are clearly audible on “Alla L’Aa Ke.” His forefingers sound out an array of improvised melodic inventions in dense sequence, his thumbs never dropping the kumbengo pattern, except in instances when it is altered or suspended for the sake of dynamic effect: building tension through contrast.

Toumani's fingernails activate a sharp attack on the treble strings of the kora, cutting through the mix with sparkling clarity. A subtle reverberation surrounds the instrument, the bass resonance of the kora exuding an enveloping warmth.

The transparent production style of *Kaira* references recording aesthetics honed in the service of classical music recordings. The recording engineer for *Kaira*, Nick Parker, had worked almost exclusively as a classical recordist. *Kaira* emphasize a transparent mediation approach wherein the listener's attention is drawn away from the mediation itself and focused squarely on the performance. The use of effects is minimal. The recording is clear and resonant. The hall in which the recording was conducted is audible in the reverb tails at the end of each track, the sound lingering for a moment in the space before dropping over the horizon of audition. The listener, positioned in the best seat in the house, is invited to hear only Toumani's performance, to imagine sharing in this moment of virtuosic genesis.

Toumani refers obliquely to one of the classic themes from "Alla L'Aa Ke": the phrase cuts through the cyclic texture, and concludes with a brief second statement, as if wrapping up an initial thought (0:16). As Toumani returns to the kumbengo, the tempo jumps ahead slightly, indicating the elision of unknown seconds or minutes of the original performance.

Durán describes that her interventions as a producer are primarily focused upon shaping the repertoire prior to a recording session, and carrying out editing work in post-production. In working on *Kaira*, she diagramed her vision for a compressed, idealized version of Toumani's performance, noting sections she felt should be removed. She sat down in the studio with post-production engineer Adam Skeaping to cut open the surface of the sound recording, remove sections, and join the surface back together with seamless digital crossfades. It's a delicate operation. Nip and tuck, nip and tuck.

Another antiphonal gesture (0:33) and a shift of emphasis in the kumbengo highlights the close intervals struck by index fingers on the upbeat. One minute into the piece the improvised motives reveal themselves in greater density and complexity, one tagging along after the next with only brief moments of kumbengo offered as respite in between. Toumani shifts focus back and forth between the upper register and the low end: rhythmic accents on the bass strings momentarily throw the groove off kilter—like a stylized hitch in a walker's gate. Elaborations in the treble recast the piece's melodic possibilities.

Time compression editing increases the motivic density of Toumani's performance. This editing technique presents his instrumental virtuosity in heightened

form, concentrating it into a distillation. The virtuosity revealed on *Kaira* is a co-production of Toumani's instrument prowess, Durán's discerning ear, and the technological capabilities of the era in which they recorded the album. Making use of digital waveform editing (a now-standard technology that provides visual representations of sonic content to assist in making fine-grained edits), Durán and Skeaping were able to cover their tracks, the process of mediation obscured behind a veil a mediation. The art which conceals art.

Toumani's right index finger launches a syncopated raking against the right-hand row of strings (2:02). A stab of the thumbs calls back as punctuation from the mid-range, sounding as if a string threatens to jump from its notch in the bridge (2:41, 2:57).

The decision to leave in place this expressive plunk of Toumani's thumb on the mid-range string speaks to Durán's desire to author *Kaira* as a "live" performance. "Liveness is an illusion of sounding live that is constructed through technological intervention in the studio and mediated symbolically through discourses about the natural and the artistic. To sound authentically African is to sound live," writes Louise Meintjes (Meintjes 2003b, 112). She argues that this "ideological position" is sustained by the music industry and reproduced in recording studio practice. Durán's choice to

foreground this expressive plunk—a rupture in the texture of the recording—works to affirm the authenticity of the performance. Even as extensive editing compressed and reshaped the arc of Toumani’s performance, this thumping plunk of the kora string verifies (for listeners who notice it) the “liveness” of the recording.

The kumbengo simplifies to a I-V refrain as the tempo rushes ahead. A syncopated figure is struck on a single string: Toumani’s right index finger alighting the upper tonic into a spinning dance step (4:19). A brief stride up to the 9th scale degree, and a descent lands him on a repeated trill between the #4th and 5th, highlighting the tonality of the sauta tuning, a hallmark of “Alla L’Aa Ke” (4:33).

Kalan (heat) continues to build as a line is offered in symmetrical contrast (4:39): jumping first from the downbeat, then to the upbeat, ping-pong between two points of attack until the space narrows to ensnare the melody. The trapped fragment runs itself out in confinement, relinquishing to a moment’s pause on the 5th scale degree (4:48), then shooting down to the lower tonic and restlessly back up a full octave, swiping briefly at the 9th again...a breath, and a retreat back down.

“Like water brought to a boil in a kettle,” writes Ryan Skinner, “hot music makes bodies ‘rise up’ and move; it brings you to your musical feet” (Skinner 2015, 87). He explains: “In Bamako, when ‘music is hot’ (foli ka kalan), it resounds a sonic ideal of textural density — an abundance of notes played in rich polyphony — and rhythmic syncopation — a variously accented and accelerating metrical pulse — that engenders movement” (Skinner 87). The penultimate section of Alla L’a Ke rings out with just the textural density Skinner describes of a live performance of Toumani’s in Bamako.

Several melodic fragments give way to a thumping emphasis in the lower midrange (5:16), and an abrupt shift to a contrasting kumbengo that is most surely an edit. Here, Toumani’s index fingers activate three pairs of adjacent intervals from the original kumbengo but this time set atop dense midrange arpeggios (5:21). With the bass absent except for muted accents, it feels like a suspension of time, this compressed passage building heat and anticipation until a descending line ushers the groove back in with a return to the first kumbengo, and the bass line (5:54). Release.

Here Durán’s editing practice works to further heighten Toumani’s deft manipulation of tension and heat. The recording builds kalan (heat) within each discrete section of the recording. As one section gives way to the next, pent up kalan releases

back into the atmosphere of the recording — the manipulation of energy through contrast. By building anticipation then releasing it back into the texture of the kumbengo, the listener’s attention is led through a series of arrivals, each peak giving view onto a new horizon.

The pairs of adjacent intervals continue to sound in the treble until another sudden shift straightens out the time, most likely another elision (6:19). Here, a syncopated figure dances on the tonic (6:34) before turning down from the 9th to the 2nd and arriving again at the first kumbengo. By this point the tempo has nearly doubled its original pace.

We are drawing near the end now: two statements of one of the classic themes from “Alla L’Aa Ke” (6:52), a formulaic one-octave run up through the scale (7:03), and the track ends, trilling on the tonic (7:07).

3.2 Introducing *Kaira*

Kaira was co-created by the Malian kora virtuoso Toumani Diabaté and a producer, radio presenter and ethnomusicologist, Lucy Durán, who put her ethnographic expertise and networks to work in producing the album. Durán initiated the plan for Toumani to travel to London from Bamako to record *Kaira*. She worked with him to shape its repertoire. She wrote liner notes that built a narrative to accompany the

album's international circulation. Durán also shaped the sound and structure of the recording in key ways. She selected a classical music recordist to make the recording, a decision that presented Toumani's kora playing as if designed for the concert hall stage. She carried out major editing on the tracks—shortening the performances so they would fit the format of radio play. In doing so, she removed sections of his performance that she deemed “noodly” (Durán 2018a). I contend that this procedure increased the motivic density of the performance, heightening the display of Toumani's virtuosity.

Toumani recorded the album with Durán's own kora, which she had brought back from West Africa on a previous trip (Durán 2017b). Durán made another key intercession, insisting that Toumani not sing on the album, thus recontextualizing the kora as a vehicle for solo instrumental artistry. Perhaps it was, in part, Lucy Durán's interventions on *Kaira* that Mande music scholar Eric Charry heard when he noted, “There is something modern about Toumani Diabate's first solo recording [*Kaira*]—perhaps the European-inflected tuning of his kora, the laid-back tempos or other aspects of his musical sensibility, the lack of any vocalizing, or the warm acoustic ambiance of the studio” (Charry 2000, 26).

Notes on the packaging for *Kaira* position the recording as a direct representation of Toumani's art. “This recording was made entirely live and unaccompanied by Toumani Diabate,” reads the rear cover of the Hannibal release. However downplayed

on the CD and accompanying promotional materials, Lucy Durán's production style was key to defining the sound of kora music practice for an international audience. The record label Hannibal, music journalists at the time, and Durán herself modulated the story of her influence on the finished product. Practicing what I term a politics of invisibility, Durán used particular editing practices to render her intercessions on the record transparent. Similarly, in the narrative of the album, she recedes to the background in favor of Toumani's public image. These decisions are at once a case of prioritizing the career of her young collaborator, and of contributing to the aura of authenticity surrounding the album by presenting it as live and unmediated.

In the brief article, "Music Production as a Tool of Research, and Impact," Durán observes, "For professional musicians living and working in Mali, the studio is a site where ideas of creativity, innovation, tradition, ownership, and musical boundaries are played out in intensive and often dramatic ways that impact on the wider musical representations of Malian music both locally and globally" (Durán 2011, 246). Durán herself participates closely in the construction of these musical representations, having produced more than fifteen albums, three of which were nominated for Grammy awards.

As a public figure, Durán is highly regarded in limited sectors of academic and music industry social worlds. At the same time, she is also subject to a degree of

invisibility due to her gendered presence as a female musician and record producer. During the fourteen years she served as host of *World Routes* on BBC Radio 3, Durán gained notoriety as a radio presenter and public scholar. However, the crucial role she has played in introducing international audiences to Mande music has been largely overlooked by music journalists and academics. While figures such as the World Circuit record label's Nick Gold are noted (whether in celebratory or anxious frames [Feld 2000]) as tastemakers, curators and musical explorers, Durán's key contributions to the field of commercial world music record production have often been overlooked.

Unlike many of her counterparts in the music industry, Durán's commercial recording work is underpinned by decades of ethnographic research and writing. Both as a scholar and as a record producer, she aims to bring public attention to the brilliance and cultural significance of Mande music, and to assist the artists with whom she collaborates in building careers in the international music industry. She states that she is "constantly trying to find ways of making this music better known, and giving it a platform" (Durán 2020).

Her several decades of dedicated fieldwork, particularly in Gambia and Mali, have ingratiated her into a formidable network of musician-collaborators. Scholars, record producers, record label workers, promoters, journalists, and musicians regularly

turn to Durán for access to her connections in the region as well as for her extensive knowledge of local personalities, practices and social networks.

Kaira was released during a particularly fertile time in the burgeoning world music industry. At the time of its release, the term “world music” had just been agreed upon by a cadre of music industry operatives in London, including Durán, who elevated the phrase as a unifying marking framework for the diverse array of international musics they were working to promote and sell in record shops and on stages. *Kaira* was thrust into the distribution networks this nascent arm of the global music industry was building, and it soon reached far and wide. The album’s co-producer Joe Boyd, who played the backseat roles of funding and blessing the recording, was a major player in the field of rock music, having previously worked with Pink Floyd, Fairport Convention, Nick Drake, and Toots and the Maytals to name a few.

The public presentation of *Kaira*—as expressed through its liner notes and journalistic writing (which was, no doubt, guided by an accompanying press release)—framed it as a window onto traditional Mande music practice—as an authentic, unmediated, presentation of the artistry of the great kora player, Toumani Diabaté. However, the album was shaped for an international audience by forces beyond the scope of Toumani’s heritage and musicianship. *Kaira*’s production, and its subsequent narrativizing through the music industry, were co-created by Toumani, Lucy Durán, Joe

Boyd, and a broad network of music industry operatives scattered throughout cities in the Global North.

Nigel Williamson, for instance, wrote in the British World Music magazine *Songlines*,

Only a tiny handful of rarely gifted musicians achieve the status of becoming synonymous with the instrument they play...It's about more than mere virtuosity. It's as if these musicians have turned their instruments not only into an expression of their own personality but also, by some miraculous metaphysical transformation, into an extension of their corporeal being in which the music is mysteriously channeled through them. And among these extraordinary names we must count Toumani Diabaté, the wizard of the 21-string West African harp/lute, known as the kora... Traditionally the kora was used to accompany singers but Toumani has also dramatically expanded its scope and — while remaining true to its traditions — has effectively created a new musical language for the instrument (Williamson 2018).

Williamson's praise identifies Toumani's musicianship as unparalleled, and as a single-handed innovator of the instrument. Indeed, Toumani cultivated this reputation through three decades of performance and, crucially, international, and cross-genre collaboration. *Kaira* was the starting point for this process, and the album unquestionably presents his musicianship and imaginative force as an improviser in a succinct and vibrant form. Durán's liner notes speak to the way in which *Kaira* recontextualized the instrument as a vehicle for solo instrumental artistry. "Although the kora traditionally serves as accompaniment to song, Toumani has perfected the art

of solo instrument playing, maintaining a strong basic theme under kaleidoscopic, endlessly flowing and lyrical improvisations on the vocal melody” (Diabaté 1988b).

The album was a singular force in shaping international knowledge of kora music, and of Mande music traditions more broadly, as it circulated more widely beyond West Africa than any kora recording before it, according to Joe Boyd and Lucy Durán (Durán 2018a). Musicians, record producers and music journalists describe the album as having set a new standard for what an instrumental kora music album could be. The recording also influenced a generation of korists at home in Mali.

Students of the kora, both at home and abroad, continue to turn to Toumani’s arrangements and performances from *Kaira* to guide their own developing approach to the instrument. Durán said in an interview that producing *Kaira* “changed the whole direction and the whole aesthetic of where kora music was going.” Toumani’s “success has set the scene for young kora players. Everyone wants to sound like Toumani, and everyone copies Toumani. Everyone does Toumani’s little runs and riffs—his style of improvisation” (Durán 2020).

The album’s wide circulation also bolstered the reputation of Bamako as a center of kora music expression, even though the instrument became popular in Mali only after the second world war. The instrument’s roots go back to the early eighteenth century in Senegambia, and it was Toumani’s father, Sidiki Diabate, who was among the first kora

players to bring the instrument from Gambia to Mali. Toumani's innovations on *Kaira* helped define a distinctly Malian sound for the kora, one that still today overshadows its Senegambian forebearers in terms of international recognition.

In what follows, I study *Kaira* as a key moment in the development of Toumani Diabaté's career, and in the global history of the kora. *Kaira's* wide circulation announced kora music, and by proxy Mande music, to European and North American publics. The transmission lines of the world music concept, activated in London that same year, set the album's arc on a wide trajectory, back and forth across the Black Atlantic. In the intervening years journalists and musicians alike have described the album as designing a template for an international kora music sound.

3.3 *Kaira* in Context

The commercial success of *Kaira* played a crucial role in elevating the profile of Toumani Diabaté as the de facto international ambassador of the kora. Over the past thirty-plus years, Toumani has played major venues around the world and collaborated with a long list of international artists. All the while, he has continued to live at home in his family compound in Bamako. As a foremost innovator on the instrument, Toumani has been praised by audiences from Paris to London to New York to Bamako and Dakar. His reputation has only continued to build since the release of *Kaira*.

While Toumani was growing up surrounded by kora music in the Diabaté's family compound in Bamako, several kora players were paving the way for Toumani's later engagements with European and North American audiences. In 1972, Dr. Anthony King, an ethnomusicologist specializing in the kora (and also the person who first introduced Lucy Durán to the kora) helped organize the Conference on Manding Studies at the London's School of Oriental and African Studies. The conference opened with remarks from Senegal's inaugural president, Léopold Senghor. As Lucy Durán put it, "The list of the some 300 scholars, writers, politicians and musicians who took part reads like a who's who of twentieth-century African scholarship" (Durán 2015b). Several of Anthony King's primary kora-playing interlocutors were present, including Lalo Keba Drame and Sidiki Diabaté. (The latter was invited to give a performance for the Prime Minister at No. 10 Downing Street). Jali Nyama Suso was also present and accompanied the American writer Alex Haley on kora as Haley is said to have announced that he had traced his ancestry, with the help of a griot, to a Gambian relative, Kunta Kinte. This genealogy provided the impetus for his influential novel, *Roots* (Haley 1972).⁴

⁴ *Roots* was twice adapted into a television series. Durán worked as a language and music consultant for the second edition, using her network in Gambia to identify musicians for scenes the production shot there. She also contributed original compositions to the score.

In 1970 Anthony King crossed paths with the anthropologist Herold Gunn in the Gambia. When Gunn returned from that trip with a kora, he was met at the airport by his daughter Susan Pevar and her husband Marc Pevar. Marc Pevar became interested in learning about the kora. The couple worked with King to arrange a year-long fieldwork trip to the Gambia, funded by a grant Susan Pevar received through her undergraduate studies in anthropology at Bryn Mawr College. Along for the ride, Marc took an interest in the kora. On that trip the Pevars first met the jali kora player, Alhaji Bai Konte.

In 1973 Marc Pevar recorded and produced Alhaji Bai Konte's album, *Kora Melodies from the Republic of Gambia, West Africa*, released on Rounder Records (A.B. Konte 1973). Surrounding the release of that album, Bai Konte toured extensively in the United States, including performances at the Newport Jazz Festival, the Philadelphia Folk Festival, and the National Festival of American Folklife in Washington, DC. He appeared on National Public Radio and PBS television. (Terry Gross conducted a lengthy interview and performance with him and the Pevars, along with Alhaji's son, Dembo Konte, in 1980).

Over the years Bai Konte would share the stage with the likes of Pete Seeger and Taj Mahal (Banning Eyre and Nyang 2020). In an article for the Gambian FOROYAA newspaper, Banning Eyre and Hatab Nyang described the scene this way:

Wearing a majestic robe bedecked with gold threads and a stately maroon fez, his first show was at Franklin and Marshall College, near his home base at Lincoln University, Pennsylvania. The standing room only audience was transfixed as if spellbound. The sound of strings plucked and strummed seemed to arise from thin air, filling the packed hall with shimmering cross currents of melody and counterpoint in subtly pulsing rhythms. His face beaded in sweat from intense concentration, Alhaji Bai Konte from Brikama, Gambia, finished with a rousing glissando and stood bowing to prolonged applause... His entire summer flew by just like that. One ovation followed another: New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, National Festival on The Mall, Philadelphia Folk Festival, Mariposa Folk Festival and many more all that summer (Banning Eyre and Nyang 2020).

Following up on the success of the first Bai Konte album, Marc Pevar recorded an additional full-length record with Bai Konte, *Gambian Kora Duets*, released in 1979. The album was recorded in Dakar, Senegal, and featured Bai Konte, along with his son by blood, Dembo Konte and adoptive son, Malamini Jobarteh (A.B. Konte, Konte, and Jobate 1979). Dembo Konte and Malamini Jobarteh would go on to work with Lucy Durán who produced their album *Mandinka Music: Kora Music and Songs From the Gambia (Konte Family 1982)*. Alhaji Bia Konte and Dembo Konte were featured at the ten-year anniversary of the Woodstock festival, performing at Madison Square Garden's Felt Forum in 1979 alongside Taj Mahal, Richie Havens, Country Joe and the Fish, Canned Heat and others (Banning Eyre and Nyang 2020).

After Bai Konte's untimely death in 1983, his son Dembo formed a duo with Kausu Kouyate and recorded *Simbomba* (D. Konte and Kuyateh 1987a) and *Tanante* (D.

Konte and Kuyateh 1987b), both produced by Lucy Durán, as well as a collaboration with London world music group 3 Mustaphas 3⁵ called *Jali Roll* (D. Konte and Kuyateh 1989). The duo toured festivals around the world and even, according to Lucy Durán, caused a “mini riot outside the Africa Centre in Covent Garden, London, in 1987, when members of the African community could not get seats at the sold-out concert” (Durán 2017b).

During the same era, the ethnomusicologist Roderick Knight invited several kora players to the US, including his teacher, Jali Nyama Suso, who came for a residency at the University of Washington in 1971. During this visit, Suso recorded his 1972 release, *Gambia – Mandinka Kora*, for the French Ocora label (Suso 1972). In 1979, Suso would also work on the music for Alex Haley’s 1977 television miniseries, *Roots*.

Such was the increasing awareness of kora music in several different social milieux of 1970s and ‘80s. Academics such as Roderick Knight, Anthony King and Lucy Durán, “bewitched” by the kora, as Durán put it (Durán 2015b), created teaching and performing opportunities in the UK and US as both a way of exposing audiences to the instrument, and a means of offering reciprocal opportunities for their teachers. Alhaji Bai Konte performed for mostly white folk music audiences in spaces such as the Newport Folk Festival. Around the same time that Jali Nyama Suso’s kora playing

⁵ 3 Mustaphas 3 was one of the projects of Ben Mandelson (see previous chapters).

became a musical icon associated with Alex Haley's search for his own Gambian heritage in *Roots*, American artists such as Taj Mahal became interested in the kora as a way of broadening their own musical imaginations to account for their West African ancestry. Ultimately, the world music scene, coalescing in London around the same time, became a springboard for all these West African musicians.

Toumani Diabaté stepped into this context and drew even wider international attention to kora music traditions, at first through his solo work and later through several decades of high-profile musical collaborations. In a 2006 interview with *The Guardian*, Toumani cited his respect for Bob Marley's singular artistic voice as a touchstone for his own career.

When I was young I especially liked Marley because his music had no boundaries; you can hear it everywhere, from Africa to India. I think about where he got his inspiration from, and how he put so many things together, and I still don't know how he did it. I don't have that kind of vitality. But *Kaya* [the 1978 Bob Marley & The Wailers album] gave me the confidence to go slowly, to make an album that does not sell thousands of copies a week but lasts over the decades. The result was my debut album, *Kaira*. Now, if people need a reference on kora music, they go to *Kaira*, and that is very important for me (Hodgkinson 2006).

Toumani recalls that, even in those early days, he was interested in "crossing" (Feld 2000; Meintjes 2017a) into new aesthetic terrain. "In the beginning it was hard for me: even my father [the great kora player Sidiki Diabaté] didn't understand what I was

trying to do. He thought I was changing the tradition, but I was only trying to move it forward. Now everyone is following my style" (Hodgkinson 2006).

Indeed, *Kaira* was an important opportunity for Toumani to announce himself as both the inheritor of ancestral traditions and as an innovator. As Eric Charry observes, "The *fadenya* (competitive) relationship between the great Malian kora player Toumani Diabate and his *ngara* [virtuoso] father, the late Sidiki Diabate, one of West Africa's great kora players, is striking" (Charry 2000, 60). Charry elaborates that by choosing songs drawn from his father's repertoire, but performing them in his own distinctive style, *Kaira* became an opportunity for Toumani to express the heritage running from father to son, while also striking out on his own terms. Ryan Skinner clarifies that "in order to retain a sense of moral legitimacy, the innovatory practice of positive *fadenya* [which Skinner defines as 'father-child-ness'] must be balanced with an acknowledged respect for one's cultural patrimony, or *fasiya*" (Skinner 2015, 89). By titling his first solo recording *Kaira*, Toumani pulled directly on the heritage of his father. As Skinner documents in *Bamako Sounds: The Afropolitan Ethics of Malian Music* (Skinner 2015), Sidiki Diabaté first made a name for himself in the social club and music group Kayiraton, when he moved from the Gambia to the town of Kita in Mali (ibid, 84). Thus, *Kaira* was a declaration that Toumani was picking up the mantel for himself. "When Toumani performs or records the piece 'Kayira,'" writes Skinner of the eponymous title-track, "he

represents a tune for which his family is well known, re-sounding an oeuvre established by his father in Kita in the late 1940's. For those who know this history, much of it part of the collective memory of contemporary Malians, all one needs to hear is the simple, contrapuntal, and polyrhythmic bass line—the kumben of 'Kayira'—to perceive this patrimony" (Skinner 2015, 84).

A passing moment in an interview with Toumani following the release of *Kaira* in 1988 illustrates that international collaborations were being opened up for Toumani by his participation in the world music industry. The discjockey and radio personality, Andy Kershaw, asks Toumani, "Now when you were hanging around in the green room most of the morning before your performance here you got a call from Paul Simon asking you to go and work with him. What do you know about Paul Simon?" (Wonfor 1989). Toumani replies that he had never heard Paul Simon's music, but that he was aware of his name. "He called saying he wanted me to play kora on his next album," Toumani replied. "I'm pleased. It's just what I always wanted when I started playing kora. I wanted to make the kora more accessible...more universal. And little by little I seem to be getting there" (ibid).

Toumani would go on to collaborate with stars in his homeland (including Oumou Sangare, Ali Farka Touré, Salif Keita, Habib Koité, Fatoumata Diawara, Ballaké Sissoko, Kasse Mady Diabate, Bassekou Kouyate, and Kandia Kouyate) as well as with

stars in Europe, the UK, the US and elsewhere: the Icelandic auteur Bjork, Damon Albarn of Blur, Matthieu Chedid (the French pop star who performs under the name “M”), the American bluesman Taj Mahal, the Spanish flamenco greats Ketama, banjo maestro Bela Fleck, trombonist Roswell Rudd, and the London Symphony Orchestra. He has appeared as a studio musician on recordings with Herbie Hancock, Jimmy Buffet, Roswell Rudd, Dee Dee Bridewater and the Ivorian reggae singer, Tiken Jah Fakoly. Some of these collaborations prove more artistically successful than others; however, the sheer breadth of this list speaks to the broad platform that *Kaira* built for Toumani’s international career.

Without diminishing the inventiveness and virtuosity of Toumani’s playing on *Kaira*, it is important to acknowledge several key factors that also contribute to how this album heralded Toumani’s rise as his generation’s king of the kora. These factors spring from the collaboration undertaken by Toumani and Lucy Durán. I contend that the synthesis of instrumental practice, novel technological possibilities, and complimentary listening ontologies produced, in *Kaira*, new ways of hearing the kora. These factors adhere in an acoustic assemblage (Gautier 2014, 22) that shifted how kora music is heard, theorized and practiced, both inside and outside Mande West Africa.

In her role as the producer of *Kaira*, Durán worked closely as an artistic collaborator, shaping the sound and structure of the record. However, in public

presentation of the music, Durán recedes to the background in favor of Toumani's public image. This disappearing act aims to position the album as a transparent (and therefore authentic) representation of Mande musical traditions (see previous chapter). It also functions to affirm a series of ethical commitments on the part of Durán. She is motivated to bring international awareness and appreciation to Mande music and the musicians she considers to be the great Mande artists of the moment. She considers her partnerships with these musicians to be guided by solidarity, enabling her collaborators to build international careers that provide for themselves and their extended familial network. Before attending to the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of *Kaira's* production, and discussing Durán's practice through the analytic of a politics of invisibility, I wish to present an intertwined biographical examination of *Kaira's* two main protagonists.

3.4 Diabaté and Durán's Intertwined Biographies

In interviews Toumani Diabaté regularly describes his kora playing lineage as tracing back nearly eighty generations. Indeed, the jali bala and ngoni traditions established in the thirteenth century alongside the Mande empire do stretch back at least that far, but the kora is of more recent provenance—eighteenth century Senegambia (Cherry 2000; Durán 2017b). In fact, Durán describes that Toumani's father Sidiki believed the kora traced back closer to five generations (Durán 2020). However, the "eighty generations" trope has been a useful narrative resource for Toumani. He uses

this refrain as shorthand to position himself as a uniquely privileged inheritor of the kora playing tradition. And rightly so. However, one needs to go back only a single generation, to his father Sidiki Diabaté, to get a sense of the significance of Toumani's birthright.

A Gambian expatriate who moved to Kita, Mali, in his mid-teens, Sidiki Diabaté was among the first generation of kora players to introduce the kora to Mali (Cherry 2000, 117; Skinner 2015, 199). According to Ryan Skinner (Skinner 2015), he began his work in Mali with the Kayiraton, a youth social club and musical group based in Kita. Moving to Bamako, Sidiki was a founding member of the Ensemble Instrumental National du Mali. This ensemble, a post-independence initiative sponsored by the Malian government to help coalesce a national identity that could transcend ethnic divisions, brought together artists from Mali's six administrative regions (Skinner 2015, 69). Sidiki was one of the legendary kora players of the post-independence generation, and among the first to establish a distinctive Malian kora tradition. During this time the kora gained currency as a "symbol of modernity and cultural authenticity, with kora players feted by presidents and ministers," (Durán 2017b). Ryan Skinner describes Diabaté as a "Musical modernist of his time" who "came of age within and helped define the postwar zeitgeist of peaceful celebration, political protest, and cultural

revolution,” even as he is largely remembered in Mali as one of the “great traditionalists” (Skinner 2015, 84).

Lucy Durán’s life in music also starts with her father, the Spanish composer Gustavo Durán. Like many of the composers associated with the Generation of 1927 in Spain, Durán the elder had a particular interest in Spanish folksong. He was active as a film composer in Madrid in the early 1930s before his music career was brought to a halt when civil war came to Spain. Gustavo Durán became a commander in the Spanish Republican Army, the youngest general to fight on the Republican side (Durán 2020). When Franco’s troops reached Valencia, Gustavo Durán escaped to London where he met his wife, Bontë Romilly Compton. The couple then moved to New York as he began to work with the arts and music wings of the Pan American Union and the Office for the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs. In the years before Lucy was born, the couple was granted US citizenship, and Gustavo Durán began work with the State Department in Havana, then Buenos Aires, before returning to New York City to begin a career with the United Nations.⁶

⁶ Gustavo Durán is also noted to have made an appearance as a character in his friend Ernest Hemmingway’s novel, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940).

Lucy Durán was born in New York in 1948 and recalls that her childhood was awash in music. In a 2011 interview with the ethnomusicologist Carolyn Landau, Lucy Durán recalls that despite a geographically unsettled upbringing, one constant was her father's piano playing ringing out in the living room. The family house routinely was packed with visiting musicians, and Durán recalls hearing music ranging from Bach, to Cuban popular music, to Spanish folksong. "Whatever country we were in," she recalls, "my father always got very involved in local traditional music... The backdrop to my home life was moving around a lot and changing schools, but always being exposed to both classical music and folk music" (Landau 2011).

When her parents relocated again, this time to Greece, Lucy traveled to London to study music, first at Cambridge, then at King's College London. During her studies at King's she began what would become a lifelong practice of conducting fieldwork. Her first undergraduate foray was in Crete. As a graduate student, she spent two months recording Tuareg and Berber music in Libya. This was her visit trip to the African continent. Lucy recalls that a subsequent chance encounter with the kora in London in the mid-1970s altered the trajectory of her life. "I heard the kora and thought I'd died and gone to heaven. I thought it was the most beautiful music I'd ever heard and that's what started me off in researching Mande music" (Landau 2011).

Toumani began playing kora at the age of five. He inherited cultural access to the instrument through his father, though he claims to have never studied with him directly. “My father didn’t teach me to play kora, although generally speaking, the art of the griot is learned from the father. He passes his knowledge on to his sons, and his sons give it to their children” (Prince 1989; as cited in Charry 2000, 60). Again, balancing the tension described by Skinner between *fadenya* (competitive ‘father-child-ness’) and *fasiya* (respect for one’s cultural patrimony) (Skinner 2015), Toumani identifies himself as inheriting this tradition from his father while at the same time announcing his independence from his father. “But I didn’t learn kora from my father,” Toumani continues. “I had it in my blood. I was born into it. My grandfather played the kora, and his father and grandfather before him. But my father didn’t teach me because the kora was already there, waiting for me” (Prince 1989; as cited in Charry 2000, 60).

Instead, Toumani took it upon himself to learn the instrument by listening to recordings. Cassette tapes became his teacher. He studied recordings of his father Sidiki and his great-uncle Amadu Bansang Jobarteh, as well as of other kora players scattered across the Mande region. Without doubt he was also surrounded by music in his family compound as he grew up. Toumani’s musical interests strayed outside the bounds of his cultural inheritance as well. He describes, “I also listened to modern bands like Les

Ambassadeurs⁷ the and the Rail Band, Guinea's Bembeya Jazz, Otis Reading, Jimi Hendrix, Johnny Hallyday, and so on" (Symmetric Orchestra DVD). Toumani describes his musical upbringing as both intensely local, and internationally connected through Black Atlantic music circulation networks. Building from this musical foundation, Toumani "came to believe that a new universal door should be opened for the kora" (W.C. Records 2006).

In his influential ethnomusicological work on Mande music traditions, Eric Charry alludes to the ways in which Toumani was brought up in the flux of cultural transition in Mali. He inhabited a Bamako that was increasingly linked to international currents of technology, aesthetics, and aspiration. Charry writes,

In the home given to his family by the first president of Mali, Toumani Diabate lives in a world of fax machines, cell phones, recording sessions, local night clubs, international tours, electrified jelimuso-led ensembles performing at traditional celebrations, extended family and the obligations therein, high infant mortality, young kora apprentices, respect for the jelis of his father's generation, and the proud legacy of the Diabate lineage of jelis. Like many of his contemporaries, he uses modern technological tools to honor traditional commitments (Charry 2000, 27).

Toumani's upbringing positioned him as the inheritor of nearly eight centuries of Mande music history dating back to the Mali empire's formation in the thirteenth

⁷ Les Ambassadeurs Internationaux was a star-studded group that featured the likes of a young Salif Keita and Kante Manfila. The band fled political unrest in Mali during the the mid-1970s, setting up shop in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, one of the primary recording hubs on the Africa continent during the post-independence era.

century. His *fasiya* also included the inheritance of the esteem held towards his father Sidiki as one of the great Malian kora players of his generation. In addition, imagining himself as inhabiting a world of international musical connections beyond Bamako and Mande West Africa further shaped Toumani's emerging self-identity and his early development as a musician. His feet planted on Mande soil, Toumani peered towards distant horizons.

Durán began conducting ethnographic research in West Africa in 1976, when she first travelled to Gambia. She would spend much of the next ten years living in the village of Bansang, along the River Gambie, apprenticing on kora with Sidiki Diabate's uncle, the great Gambian jali, Amadu Bansang Jobarteh. During these years, Durán developed considerable skill as a kora player and became fluent in the Mandinka language. It was there, in Gambia, that Durán made her first kora recordings. Amadu Bansang Jobarteh, Dembo Konte, and Malamine Jobarteh were among the first jali musicians she recorded.

During these years, Durán married into a Gambian Peul family. Her husband was not from a musical family; they were, rather, wood carvers who manufactured dugout canoes and smaller utensils. "I experienced village life firsthand with them and learned a lot about values... It was very much part of my learning experience," she

recalls (Durán 2020). These years of research and familial life provided Durán with a strong basis of knowledge in the lifeways, values, cultural history, and musical repertoire of the Gambian jalolu, and built a foundation for Durán's future work as a record producer and a foremost scholar of Mande music traditions.

Toumani's first public performance was with the regional ensemble of Koulikoro (a town 60 kms east of Bamako) when he was thirteen years old. By his eighteenth birthday, Toumani was working professionally, heading out on the road with the revered Malian jalimuso Kandia Kouyate in 1983. Kouyate was by many accounts a fiery singer and personality. In her 2007 article, "Ngaraya: Women and musical mastery in Mali," Durán quotes from an interview with Kouyate where she describes a secret technique for unleashing fire from the mouth into the face of a patron who refuses to pay adequately (Durán 2007, 586). Kouyate herself was notoriously unscrupulous with money, at times paying her musicians less than they felt they deserved (Durán 2020).

Performing with one of the "superwomen of Malian music" (Durán 2007) during this time, Toumani no doubt learned substantive lessons about directing an ensemble, navigating the music industry on one's own terms, and the appeal of occupying the spot at the center of the stage.

Durán traveled throughout Gambia and Senegal during her early years of research in West Africa, but it was not until 1986 that she first visited Mali, where her most influential collaborations would later take place. When she arrived in Bamako, Sidiki Diabaté hosted Durán at the recommendation of his uncle, Amadu Bansang Jobarteh, whom Durán had previously lived and studied with in Gambia. “Sidiki totally embraced me as his daughter,” Durán recalls. “So that gave me a lot of credence with the other musicians” (Durán 2020). Staying at the Diabaté compound in Bamako, Durán began establishing the social network that would prove pivotal to her life and work. Her time in Mali brought her into the lives of successive generations of jali families, their resulting collaborations decisively shaping international knowledge of Mande music.

On that first trip to Mali Durán remembers meeting Fanta Sacko, and members of the Rail Band, though Toumani was in Gabon at the time working with Kandia Kouyate. On Durán’s next trip to Bamako in 1987, she spent time with Kandia Kouyate, Bouba Sacko and Kassemady Diabate, all of whom she would work in the future. On that same 1987 trip, she also got to know the teenage kora player, Toumani Diabaté. Impressed by his developing voice as an instrumentalist, Durán invited Toumani to stay with her in London and record an album.

So it was that in 1987 Toumani first traveled to London, where Durán returned the favor of Toumani's father's hospitality and welcomed him into her home in North London. Over the next seven months, Toumani spent long evenings with Durán together in the living room, Lucy accompanying Toumani on kora and discussing the Malian kora repertoire—quite distinct from the Gambian repertoire she knew better at the time. Toumani began gigging around London, playing with rock and jazz musicians, and a group of North Indian musicians who had a particularly strong impact on his playing. "For me, music is like a river," Toumani said in an interview. "When you are thirsty and you approach the river's edge, you can drink only as much water to quench your thirst. You cannot drink the whole river" (W.C. Records 2006). Nevertheless, Toumani's time in London evidently led him to try!

During this time Toumani tasted the many different musical styles that would influence his playing and shape his career as a collaborator. The unique approach he developed as a kora player was influenced by a broad range of musical styles. Durán's recalls that he toured Europe in the early 1990s with a group of Indian Carnatic musicians. She recalls that their approach to improvisation set him on fire. He would come home eager to practice incorporating their ways of turning a phrase inside and out, reconfiguring it to discover the many permutations that melodic phrase might offer. "He was completely riveted by that," she recalls. "All kora players now do that. They've

all taken that from Toumani, who actually got it from the Indians” (Durán 2020). In this way, Toumani’s voice as an instrumentalist became a thoroughly cosmopolitan one. Even as he publicly represents a deep and specific musical heritage, his musicianship is unbounded by that history.

Launching from his first solo album, *Kaira*, Toumani went on to build a lengthy and successful international career. At the same time he has remained dedicated to his patrimonial homeland. He never permanently relocated from Mali, opting instead to continue overseeing the family compound in Bamako, performing with his local groups, and initiating local endeavors such as L’Ecole de Musique de Kirina, a cultural preservation project that provides music and dance education to around 200 hundred young people each week.

By 2008 Durán would describe Toumani as “without a doubt the world’s greatest kora player, and one of Africa’s most remarkable musicians” (Durán 2008). Through her involvement in recording and promoting kora music, Durán became a singular tastemaker in the international circulation of kora music. “When I first became involved with kora music...and started bringing kora players [to London], no one had heard of the kora, honestly. I was constantly coming up against this stereotypical view that African music was all drums. I brought my kora teacher, Amadou Bansang [Toumani’s

great uncle], with his wife and they did something at St. John's Smith Square, and at the end of it a man came up to me and said 'Oh that was a lovely concert, I did love it. Pity the Africans didn't turn up.' And I said 'But they were the Africans,' and he said, 'But where were the drums?'" (Durán 2020).

Based on her conviction that Mande music ought to be known and appreciated globally, Durán has dedicated her professional life to cultivating diverse means for many publics to encounter Mande music and musicians. She worked to find as many avenues as possible to display "the richness of this culture, not [only] the things that are the most commercially viable" (ibid).

Over the course of a sweeping career Lucy Durán has honed her skills in sound recording and production, as well as in radio broadcasting, music journalism, documentary film, and sound archive curation, all the time working as a scholar, teacher, and performer. Most strikingly, she has developed the hearing acuity and sonic imagination to become a signature arranger and producer of international world music recordings, a role yet to be recognized for any female ethnomusicologist.

Building upon this broad and strong musical foundation Durán has become a bridge between her collaborators in Mande West Africa and the world. Durán's quiet presence rests at the heart of many projects, even those that don't carry her name. After years of living in West Africa, Durán earned her PhD and a professorship at SOAS in

London. She has gone on to publish on the role of female singers (“songbirds”) in Bamako life (Durán 1995, 2018b, 1999, 2007), on Bamana jali music (Durán 2013), and on the role of song in navigating polygamy among co-wives in Mali (Durán 2017a). Her writing style, free of jargon and pomposity, has facilitated public dissemination of her knowledge, in the form of copious liner notes, reviews, and articles in music magazines, newspapers, and trade books, as well as in scholarly journals and edited volumes.

Throughout these years, however, her focus has steadfastly remained on projects aimed not just at the academy, but also at a broader public. She is the producer of more than twenty albums, most focused on the Mande regions of West Africa.⁸ If Durán’s renowned World Music radio show, *World Routes* (BBC Radio 3, 2000-2013), displayed her remarkable breadth of knowledge (with Cuba as a second specialty) and reached a diverse British listenership, her superbly conceived and produced Mande music albums transformed the global reach of some of this music’s most celebrated artists. Her long list of influential albums crucially shaped public knowledge of jaliya abroad.

⁸ Durán’s production credits include Toumani Diabaté’s *Kaira* and *Djelika*; several collaborations including Toumani and Taj Mahal’s *Kulanjan*, Toumani Diabaté and Ketama’s *Songhai* and *Songhai 2*, Toumani and Ballaké Sissoko’s *New Ancient Strings*, and an eponymous collaboration between Toumani and his son Sidiki Diabaté. Beyond her work with Toumani Diabaté, Lucy has produced records with the foremost exponent of the ngoni, Bassekou Kouyate (*Segou Blue* and *I Speak Fula*), with jali vocalist Kasse Mady Diabaté (*Kassi Kasse*), and with Trio da Kali featuring the Kronos Quartet (*Ladilikan*). In the earlier days of her ethnographic research, she recorded albums for her original kora teacher, Amadu Bansang Jobarteh, as well as for Dembo Konte and Kausu Kuyateh.

As an ethnographer Durán is committed to accurately representing the cultural legacy shared with her during decades of research and musical learning. In addition to her work as a documentary filmmaker, Durán has worked as a consultant on various film projects in an effort to effect accurate portrayals of Mande musical traditions. She consulted on Mandinka language and culture for the BBC productions “Under African Skies: Mali” (BBC 1989) and “Bamako Beat” (TV 1991) as well as for the History Channel/ BBC 4 remake of *Roots* (History Channel 2016).

In sum, Lucy Durán has been the locus of connection that brings together Mande musicians both at home and in the diaspora, academic researchers, the world music industry, and listening publics. Her body of work as an artist-scholar represents an unparalleled contribution to international understanding of Mande music practice. While conducting scholarly research within the academy, Durán has always maintained her focus on the broadest possible audience. As an ethnomusicologist working expansively in public domains, the precision and depth of her ethnographic knowledge is easily missed. Working in the masculine realms of record production, the extent of her production contributions have yet to be celebrated, even as her male counterparts’ work has often relied on her local knowledge and established relationships. Durán is an exemplar of an ethnomusicologist who has committed herself to serious, long-term

scholarship that succeeds in reaching beyond the walls of the academy — her life a living testament to the rigor, reach and power of public ethnomusicology.

3.5 Producing *Kaira*

As I hope I've persuaded you to see, Lucy Durán has been a pivotal figure in the global circulation of Mande music, though her reputation, well known to Mande music scholars and musicians with ties to the international music industry, has been built quietly and largely behind the scenes. Indeed, her sonic interventions on the records she's produced remain inaudible to most listeners. Nevertheless, her production decisions have shaped how kora music (in the case of *Kaira*) and Mande music more broadly (in the case of others of Durán's recordings) is experienced by listeners, both aboard and at home in West Africa.

Durán asserts that the committed research she has undertaken and the nuanced knowledge she has gained of Mande music traditions shape the way she understands the ethics of her work as a producer. She said, "I can't just be a roadside recordist, which a lot of people have been in the past. Something sounds nice, so I record it and I put it on an album. But do I know what it signifies? Do I know what the history [is] behind that stuff? What are the messages behind that stuff? What does it mean to the people who are listening to it? You can get things seriously wrong," she told me (Durán 2020).

Durán has described her role as a music producer: “Music production can mean different things to different people, and can involve various levels of interaction, intervention and power relations. My own approach could be defined as more editorial than interventionist, although my interest in representing acoustic music could be seen as a form of advocacy” (Durán 2011, 246). She continues, “Artists who are trying to reach broader audiences are often obsessed with what they think the outside market will like—whereas I encourage them to dig deeper into their own roots, and do what they know best. My role is to say: ‘this kind of album has already been made’ or ‘that song has already been recorded in this way—why don’t you try to do something that’s different and that’s individual and that relates to the style your father played?” (Durán 2011, 246). While Durán actively works to shape the recordings she produces, she publicly downplays her creative voice in the process of producing such highly regarded records as those she made with Touamni Diabaté, Ballaké Sissoko, Besskou Kouyate, Trio Da Kali, and Kasse Mady Diabate.

When I asked her to explain her editorial-interventionist framework, Durán recalled having seen a BBC4 obituary program about George Martin in which he observed that “his approach to production was more like a painter who looks at a scene and then interprets it and represents...*re*-presents it in some way, as opposed to someone who’s there with a camera and would just take a reportage snapshot” (Durán

2018a). She recalls that her earliest productions were in the “snapshot” mode—“just put up a couple of microphones, do a soundcheck and record what [the musician] played.” As her practice developed, however, Durán became more directly involved with developing repertoire and shaping performance, both through the recording and in the post-production process.

Durán described her more “interventionist” approach beginning to take shape when she recorded a series of cross-cultural collaborations that brought the Spanish flamenco group Ketama together with Toumani Diabaté and a cast of Malian musicians to produce two albums, *Songhai* (1988) and *Songhai 2* (1994). “So from them on...it begins to be a little more interventionist—more directly interventionist,” she describes. “Like ‘why don’t you try this?’ or ‘I don’t think that works’ or ‘this has already been recorded 100 times by x,y and z.’ So advising on repertoire—more like an A&R kind of person. And suggesting things. And as a result, occasionally having some arguments with musicians” (Durán 2018a). Viewing her work as producer from yet another perspective, Durán recalled a conversation with Glitterbeat record label founder Chris Eckman, in which he argued that the “best producer is a curator” (ibid).

Each of Durán’s collaborations followed in the wake of *Kaira*. As much as a *Kaira* was a turning point in Toumani Diabaté’s career, it was also a turning point in Durán’s.

As was the case with Toumani, the success of *Kaira* was an important building block in Durán's career too.

One of my visits with Durán in London took place at the dining table in her three-story row house in a quiet north London neighborhood. It's the same home where she regularly hosts musicians for short and extended stays as they pass through the city. It's just the kind of space that might feel like a welcome respite to someone travelling abroad, or as a break from the grind of an international tour. It has the well-cared-for feel of a home someone has lived in for decades. A simply appointed guest bedroom on the ground floor has an attached bathroom, and a bright garden stands just beyond the sliding glass doors. Lucy has hosted many of her musical collaborators from Mali and Gambia in this house, just as their families hosted her during her fieldwork in West Africa.

I sat down with Lucy to speak with her about the ethics and aesthetics of her commercial recording collaborations, and specifically about *Kaira*. When I asked her to tell me about recording *Kaira*, she began, characteristically, with a roundabout story, recounting her decades of fieldwork in the Mande regions of West Africa that led her to meeting Toumani at his father's compound in Bamako. Impressed with his playing, Durán proposed to record an album of solo kora music with Toumani.

She approached the Hannibal Records label head Joe Boyd who agreed to do the record. “Nothing ventured, nothing gained,” he told Durán (Durán 2018a). Boyd suggested bringing in a classical music recordist, Nick Parker, for the session — a decision that would have sustained impact on the way kora music has been recorded and discussed by musicians and journalists in the years since.⁹

After Toumani’s arrival in London, he and Durán spent long evenings together in Lucy’s house, playing music and discussing the Malian kora repertoire. During these sessions, they worked together to shape the repertoire for *Kaira*.

A few months before recording *Kaira*, Toumani gave a performance at a music venue on London’s south bank (on June 26, 1987). His performance was captured by an audience member in a low-fidelity recording, that can be heard on YouTube (Diabaté 1987). Toumani’s performance that night illuminates some of the ways in which Durán’s influence on *Kaira*’s production reshaped how Toumani was performing at the time. Most notable is Toumani’s singing during this live performance. On “Alla L’a Ke” (the same song I analyzed at the start of the chapter) Toumani jumps right in with a couple repetitions of the common vocal refrain (translated as: “God has done it. Dear people,

⁹ European art music traditions and Mande music traditions have developed a discursive overlap through musician and journalist narratives. Durán explains, “Exactly. Connections with Bach, and everything. And then you know, in a way I’m going back to that with Ladilikan and Trio da Kali. I’m sort of bringing out the classical side of things, and Toumani developed a whole way of talking about his music, which was partly influenced by our discussion in which I would say, look, this was the classical music of west Africa. And then you know he developed this whole discourse about the Mali Empire” (Durán 2020).

you haven't done it – God has. People can plan, but God decides what happens").

Toumani's vocal performance carries many hallmarks of classic jaliya – the sound has a strident and nasal quality, but his delivery is understated, tender even. He sticks with the vocal refrain, not elaborating with any vocal improvisation, but he sounds confident and relaxed.

In planning for the *Kaira* recording session, however, Durán insisted that Toumani not sing. "He doesn't have a voice," she told me in an interview. "I mean, I don't have a voice, but Toumani *really* doesn't have a voice. So, I had to kind of try very hard in a very nice, polite way to say....'Don't sing!'" (Durán 2020). Toumani would not sing on any of his future releases.

Kaira was recorded in a single, four-hour session. Over the course of the next several weeks, Lucy sat down to review the recordings from the session, notebook in hand. Listening repeatedly to each track, she began to code fragments of Toumani's performance, noting passages that she deemed mistakes, or phrases lacking focus—what she describes as "noodling." Kora music is built on cyclical refrain. These cycles, referred to as the *kumbengo*, are the building blocks of kora music practice. One returns to the *kumbengo*, usually in service of accompanying the voice, before interjecting moments of melodic flourish, known as *birimintingo*. The music is highly elaborated and tends to be

long form, with performances regularly stretching beyond 10 minutes. However, in the setting of an instrumental kora music album designed for the burgeoning world music market, Durán aimed to capture and keep the attention of listeners unfamiliar with Mande music.

She described sensing a need to create short cuts that would fit the format of radio play. “If you’re gonna listen over and over again to an instrumental kora piece, you know, every time you get to that mistake, or that two minute[s of] treading water, you just want to skip it because it gets boring after a while,” she said. Elaborating, “De-noodle him. The thing is: noodly is fine if its live. But you don’t want to listen to an endless plate of pasta weaving around the plate over and over and over again. So, that was what I did” (Durán 2020).

Over the course of many listening sessions, Durán diagramed her ideal, time-compressed version of Toumani’s performance, noting the timecode for sections she felt should be removed. She returned to the studio, this time with post-production engineer Adam Skeaping, and set about editing the performances down to this idealized version.

As Durán remembered, “So if a track was 15 minutes, you know, it would be: cut between minute 4 and 5 (noodly bit, not going anywhere). Or, you know: three mistakes. That kind of thing....But... if there’d be two minutes of just treading water, playing the riff, I didn’t cut the whole thing out... What I’d do, I’d sit there, and I’d listen, and I’d

think: 'how far am I going to be able to listen to this without twiddling the knob and moving to track three?' So, I'd sit there [hums] and I'd try three or four times like that. Sometimes it would be twenty seconds. Sometimes it would be a minute" (Durán 2020).

Durán discussed the importance of visual waveform editing, a technology brand new in that era. Working with visual representations of Toumani's kora playing, Durán and Skeaping were able to make precise edits, eliding sections in a seamless and transparent way. When I asked her about the affordances of this technology, she said, "Well, all I remember was that you could actually see the waveforms, which made the editing easier. Where I had been used to editing by rocking the tape and slicing it" (Durán 2018a).

Constructing the type of concise, idealized performance that Durán and Skeaping put together on *Kaira* would have been impossible in the analog tape era, which required rocking the tape reels across the head, marking the tape with a colored pencil, cutting the tape with a razor blade, then sealing the edit back together with splicing tape. With digital waveform editing, one could, with a few clicks, easily try different options and line the edits up with reliably seamless crossfades.

Durán described Toumani as being uninterested in the editing process, declining to offer input or to sit in on the sessions. However, she narrated the moment when they sat down to listen to the final edit at her house. She recalls, "I didn't tell him what I was

doing, and then I played it to him, and he said ‘Wow! Did I play that well?’” She responded, “‘Yeah you did—you did!’” Toumani, enthusiastic, said, “‘That’s amazing! Just – schwiphht – straight off like that?’” Lucy admitted, “‘No, not schwiphht straight off like that. I edited out some of the mistakes.’” Toumani was satisfied, and concluded, “‘Oh wow, well you did a really good job then’” (Durán 2018a). Durán said that Toumani was enthusiastic about her editing, and that they quickly agreed to release these time-compressed versions as the album *Kaira*.

Writing about her recording of Ballaké Sissoko and Toumani Diabaté’s *New Ancient Strings* in Bamako, Durán writes that “Back in the United Kingdom, all we did was mix the four tracks and do some editing: there were no added studio effects, no extra reverb, or any alteration of the sound whatsoever. It is what you hear” (Durán 2011, 247). Here Durán problematically falls into the trap of positioning the recording as unmediated, or more authentic, on the grounds of the studio procedure. She positions her recording as authentic vis à vis its *liveness*, present because the album was not put together using overdubs and different recording spaces, or other processes that might be considered heavily mediating. However, she does acknowledge, vaguely, that ‘editing’ took place – which can mean a whole range of things from simply trimming the beginnings and endings of songs to cutting out entire portions, or comping (pasting) disparate sections together. One can hear indications of where her editing process elided

sections of the recording (on both *Kaira* and *New Ancient Strings*). However due to her expert use of the techniques of transparent record production that I discussed in the previous chapter, she covered her tracks well.

The type of supreme virtuosity that Toumani Diabaté demonstrates not only on records but also in live settings is without question. However, what I've shown here is that *Kaira* is not simply a reflection of one musician's artistry per se. Rather, this landmark recording is a document of aesthetic collaboration, creative intervention, and novel technological possibility. *Kaira's* finished form was shaped by Durán's subjective and careful listening practice, and her imagination of the listening practice of a future audience unfamiliar with live performance practices in Bamako. It's informed by Durán's deep engagement over many decades with Mande music. Digital recording technologies allowed Durán to craft a heightened display of Toumani's virtuosity by generating intense motivic density on *Kaira*. Further, the album was created in the wake of the world music industry's inception in a London pub that same year, allowing for the album to be recorded and released in a commercially fertile environment, one that would sustain a lengthy and successful international career for Toumani. Throughout this process, Durán's transparent approach to record production (Brøvig-Hanssen 2018b) obscures these multiple inputs by presenting the recording as a single moment in

time. Finally, downplaying Durán's own role in the recording in favor of Toumani's public image is key to presenting the recording as bearing a one-to-one relationship with Toumani's performance practice. This is not to suggest that Durán deserves a share of Diabaté's reputation, but rather to assert the truth that this recording, key to the development of Diabaté's reputation, is a document of aesthetic collaboration, creative intervention, and novel technological possibility. The album is a sonic record of the collision of various actors—human, technological and cultural.

3.6 Lucy Durán and the Politics of Invisibility

Thinking with the framework of a politics of invisibility, I will here examine more closely Lucy Durán's role as a producer. My framework accounts for the ways that Durán's approach to record production positions a set of ethical commitments on her part. It provides a context to acknowledge the ways in which her work as a female record producer is consistently underacknowledged in public discourse, precisely because the field of record production remains as male-dominated as virtually any vocation. Employing a politics of invisibility framework also accounts for the ways in which transparent record production entails a series of deceptions. By constructing a moment of musical performance for the listener, the producer creates something that never before existed, positioned with the pretense of ethnographic authority, as if captured in the real space and time of musical performance. This calculated deception is

fundamental to the transparent record production process described in Chapter 2. For Durán, the goal of exposing musical traditions to a wide audience justifies sonic interventions that reshape recorded music's sound and structure.

3.6.1 Ethics and Invisibility

Academics who write about world music record producers often reduce record producers to one-dimensional colonial caricatures in order to create a foil against which to position the politics of their own authorial voices (see Introduction). These narratives fit producers into well-established anxious tropes rather than treating them with nuance as research subjects.

Durán's work is a distinctive synthesis of ethnographic commitment and public scholarship, asserted through a strong and robust aesthetic perspective. She leverages the commercial music industry to direct financial resources and meaningful opportunities towards her ethnographic interlocutors. She works in public media such as commercial recording, radio, film, and video in order to find a wide audience both for the artistic voices of her collaborators and for her own public scholarship as a curator of recordings and performances, an author of liner notes, and a producer of research-informed content.

For Durán, sound and film are exemplary media through which to present ethnomusicological research. "You reach many more people" than you might with the

written word, she argues, “and also the people you are representing in your work are able to access your work in a way they probably wouldn’t be able to if you were just writing about them” (Halcyon Films 2020). Durán practices an ethics of reciprocity, wherein she works to offer opportunities to her interlocutors in reciprocal exchange for what they’ve shared with her over decades of fieldwork. She queries, “When we do research and when we publish our research, we are producing knowledge. How can you do that ethically and with integrity without involving the artist or the people you are writing about or re-presenting?” (ibid). She strives to find avenues for her interlocutors to further their career aspirations alongside her own.

Durán has also demonstrated a decades-long commitment to making the musical traditions she studies legible to a broad audience. She told me, “I was just constantly trying to find ways of making this music better known and giving it a platform” (Durán 2020). Durán has published multiple scholarly articles about Mande music that contribute knowledge in the context of academic discourse (Durán 2018b, 2015a, 2015c; Durán, Topp-Fargion, and Wallace 2015; Durán and Furniss 1999; Durán 1995, 2007, 2013, 2017a; Amico and Durán 2018). Her work around the role of female griots (or *jalimuso*), in particular, have filled in a void in the ethnomusicology of Mande music. However, it’s her work in the music industry — as a commercial record producer and radio presenter — that has been most far-reaching. Evidence of her commitment and

contributions to the broadening appreciation of Mande music traditions (as well as other musical traditions she has researched and presented) resides in her oeuvre of radio programs (nearly fifty of them), in her album liner notes (at least twenty-five of them), in the recordings she has produced (more than twenty of them), and in her writing for music magazines, as well as in the numerous performances she has curated and staged. In all these ways, Durán is a foremost public scholar who uses her ethnographic expertise to synthesize and present knowledge through widely accessible media. When an academic paper or monograph appears, the spine and cover carry the name of the author, but not those of the interlocutors who likely provided the material for that scholar's analysis. However, when Durán produces a recording with one of her collaborators, it's the artist's name that is foregrounded. This is the politics of invisibility in action—the move in which Durán's involvement recedes to the background in favor of the artist's public persona. Her colleague's authorship is recognized and affirmed, while the raced divisions of labor that have long troubled the recording industry are underplayed. In practicing “the art which conceals art” (Tracey 1955), Durán foregrounds her collaborators and submerges her own creative intercessions. By doing this, she provides the opportunity for listeners to ignore the processes of mediation at play as well as the power dynamics that are present in cross-cultural recording collaborations such as this. Production, then, is an art which conceals not only the art of

the recording process but also the power to select repertoire, edit performances, foreground particular sonic elements, and narrate recordings through the media.

To what extent can an outsider become an expert in an expressive practice to which they were not enculturated throughout their life? Is it ethical for a non-culture bearer to act as an innovator within a musical context shaped over generations within a specific geographic context? Durán's decades of fieldwork built for her a strong foundation of knowledge about Mande music. She presumes this knowledge provides an adequate basis to intervene in recording contexts. Are there firm lines that a white European woman should not cross when presenting West African expressive practice? Louise Meintjes raises a similar set of questions in her discussion of Johnny Clegg, the South African musician known publicly as "The White Zulu." Clegg's decades-long collaborations with Zulu ngoma dancers and musicians troubles easy narratives about white cultural appropriation (within the context of apartheid and post-apartheid eras in South Africa). Working with Zulu musician collaborators, Clegg "rode to fame through his sounds," writes Meintjes (Meintjes 2017b, 156). He also directly challenged the violence of apartheid rule, and built lasting relationships with Zulu collaborators, moving with musicians and dancers between their urban hostels and rural homes. Meintjes concludes that

[Clegg] faces a presumption in the discursive politics of cross-cultural global music making that his relationships to ngoma is to some degree a violation. His nonracial relationships are also, at first, cast into doubt by the measure of being a white South African who has benefited from apartheid's privilege, while playing crossover music in oppressive times. Apartheid's physical violence intensifies the presumption of symbolic violence (Meintjes 2017b, 177).

The anxious discourse that surrounds world music record producers such as Durán tends to position their work as inevitably tied to histories of colonial extraction and exploitation in the music industries. Clegg's reaction to this set of ethical challenges bears some similarity to how Durán seeks to position the ethics of her work. Meintjes writes, "Clegg's response, measured against this discursive position, occurs at the conjunction of music practice, activism, advocacy, academic authority, and global marketing savvy. The interplay among these components of Clegg's career and an attempt to balance them is a search—and an improvisation—as a respectable cosmopolitan, for a 'necessarily ethical response to all forms of injustice' (Feld 2012a, 114)" (quoted in Meintjes, 2017b, p. 177).

Durán navigates an ethical landscape that shares features in common with Johnny Clegg. In her work with Mande musician collaborators, she confronts differences in access to social power that are conditioned by race and colonial history. This fraught collision of past and present creates an uneven terrain on which a collaboration such as hers and Toumani's plays out. By effecting alterations upon representations of Mande

music, Durán pushes towards the uncomfortable edges of what might be considered a responsible ethics of representation. She deems aspects of Toumani's performances on *Kaira* to be worthy of inclusion, or of elision. She writes backing vocal parts for Trio da Kali, records them as guide vocals, and has Hawa Diabaté replace them with her own voice in the studio (Boys 2018). Consulting for the 2016 television remake of Alex Haley's novel *Roots*, Durán composes the music for the rebellion song onboard the slave ship and for the Mandinka Ringshout danced on Kunta Kinte's first Christmas Eve on the plantation, and she produces the music performed at the harvest festival scene set in the Gambia (SOAS 2017). In these settings, Durán exercises her expertise in a manner that moves beyond the promotion of a cultural tradition and in the direction of re-presenting that cultural tradition, filtered through her own artistic tastes.

Violinist and professor Judith Eissenberg writes about observing Durán's pre-production work with Trio da Kali, and with Toumani Diabaté and his son Sidiki, in Bamako in anticipation of their respective recording sessions. Eissenberg was surprised by how self-assured Durán was in shaping repertoire and offering feedback on performances, wondering, "How on earth can [it] be right for her [Durán] to tell them how to play their own music?" (Eissenberg 2013). Eissenberg describes the scene as Durán and co-producer Nick Gold work with Toumani and Sidiki Diabaté to prepare the repertoire for the upcoming recording session of kora duets, later released as

Toumani & Sidiki (and ultimately nominated for a Grammy Award) (World Circuit, 2014).

Toumani has asked that Lucy and Nick produce his new album; he wants Lucy's ear and advice. This is an album with Toumani and his son, Sidiki (named after Toumani's father, who is also a legend). All evening she listens...she and Nick are quite open with their comments; the first few songs Toumani and Sidiki play sound great to me, but both Lucy and Nick refuse them, apparently they are standards that have been recorded by Toumani many times already (however beautifully played) ... in the next few hours, only a few songs make it to the A list. This world music star trusts everything they say, and digs deeper. After a quick chicken and fried banana dinner, we start again. Lucy pulls out her iPod and asks the musicians to listen to some very old recordings she has of another griot. They love the first song, and father and son begin to create their own version. They had never heard this piece before. In 10 minutes it is done, and this song tops the A list. Lucy plays another song that she has collected from her research; it is the first time Toumani has heard this performance as well. Again, we have a hit. The album is coming together. They call it quits after four hours. Toumani, known around the world for his musicianship, goes to Lucy and thanks her for teaching him these old and forgotten kora pieces. (ibid)¹⁰

Eissenberg sums up her reflections on Durán's career this way: "A western woman falls in love with Malian music, dedicates her life to it, and through her

¹⁰ These types of encounters between researchers and interlocutors have a precedent in the field of ethnomusicology. A prime example is the 50-year-long collaboration between the American ethnomusicologist Paul Berliner and his principal mentor, the Zimbabwean *mbira* player, Cosmas Magaya. Their collaboration resulted in the production of several volumes of historical research, recordings, music-theory analysis, and teaching methodologies on the art of *mbira* performance (P. Berliner 1993; P.F. Berliner and Magaya 2020; P.F. Berliner 2019; Records 1977). As is the case in the collaboration between Toumani and Durán, such cross-cultural partnerships through music are often two-way encounters in which both parties are interested in learning from one another. For each party the relationship can become a point of entry into learning about an unfamiliar social world.

commitment and passion, becomes an influence to and resource for the foremost contemporary practitioners of that tradition” (ibid).

In moments such as these, Durán’s interventions as a producer-curator-artist-gatekeeper push beyond the boundaries of ethnographic observation and the project of bringing musical traditions to public light. Durán, through her own artistic tastes and sensibilities, is in the position of defining the sound, shape, and structure of Mande music for an international audience. As Eissenberg observes in the exchange with Toumani, musicians come to rely on Durán’s liminal perspective as an insider, both in the sphere of Mande music and in the international world music industry. Toumani wants to know that his album will be well-received. In the case of *Kaira*, he enthusiastically endorsed Durán’s editing practice, imagining she knows best how to present his art for an audience generally unfamiliar with its typical performance context. In the case of the interaction described here by Eissenberg, Toumani seems to appreciate that Durán suggests songs from her personal recording archive as a means of broadening the scope of his repertoire. In each case, Durán is active in shaping a musical tradition for its international presentation.

In the public narrative of recording projects such as these, Durán’s involvement is systematically downplayed. To acknowledge Durán’s artistic contribution to these projects would have the impact of undercutting the ethnographic authority of her public

scholarship (see Chapter 2). In these instances, Durán practices the politics of invisibility as a means of obscuring her input, disappearing from the narrative of creation so as to not undercut the aura of authenticity surrounding the project she is promoting. By remaining out of the public narrative, Durán is rarely called to account for the fraught ethics of representation bound up in these scenarios.

As Durán's ethnographic knowledge has deepened over decades of research, she has acted with a more liberal hand as a producer, becoming a key force in shaping the sound of Mande music for an international audience. In another example, her work with ngoni virtuoso Bassekou Kouyate, Durán shaped the structure of the ensemble for which he gained international recognition. She explained, "Bassekou had a group of 5 musicians. It was balafon, electric guitar, ngoni, drum kit, and bass guitar... and his wife singing, and they were great! But what made them different from any other group? So, I said, 'Bassekou, drop the bass guitar, drop the guitar, drop the balafon, drop the drum kit, and just have four ngonis.' That was my idea" (Durán 2018a). The active role that Durán played in shaping the format of this ensemble is elided from any media narratives of Bassekou's band and their music. Rather this ngoni ensemble is presented as if it is a traditional configuration. Instead, Durán's intervention—key, in her estimation, to making it possible for Bassekou's band to have a successful international career—recedes into the background. In place, the four ngoni lineup is presented as if a

product of Mande music practice, whereas, in fact, it is a highly unusual ensemble format in Mali.

During the same interview, I asked Durán how she feels about making these types of creative/artistic choices as someone who has studied these traditions closely but is also a relative outsider with respect to them. “Perfectly happy,” she replied. I spurred her on, “Tell me about that.” “Perfectly happy,” she reiterated.

I will only work with musicians who I know well, who’s music I know well. When I started working with Bassekou, I had known him for years. I started working with him on... *Songhai II*. He was on *Kulanjan* with Taj Mahal... *Djelika*,... So, I know Bassekou very well, but I didn’t actually know the Bamana tradition very well. So that was a whole other experience of going out and doing that research...working on finding that repertoire. That was amazing. That was great. That was exciting. It was wonderful. But that only happened because we made that decision for him to just showcase the ngoni as an instrument. And that meant showcasing his own tradition (Durán 2018a).

Here, Durán’s research-creation practice moves back and forth between that of an artistic collaborator (as she influences Bassekou’s artistic approach), and that of a researcher (as her artistic interventions send her back to the field of research). Durán’s practice of the politics of invisibility is key to making this approach work in the public arena. By publicly downplaying her artistic influence, she positions herself as a curator, a broker of careers, and an ethnographic researcher, not as a co-creator who participates in the alteration of the traditions she works to represent.

Over a long career, Durán has succeeded in calling broad attention to the musical traditions she has engaged. As a result, Malian musicians now have placed their own strong imprint upon world music album charts, at the Grammy's, and on European and North American touring circuits. Durán's goal of helping to expose this music to a wide audience has been an unequivocal success. As she has worked in this space of cross-cultural encounter over decades, Lucy Durán has been a key figure in framing, shaping and even structuring international awareness of Mande music. She has stayed in the mix for decades, largely supporting herself through her academic position, but continuing to maintain her network of relationships, and acting an indispensable link in the chain of creative expression that connects Mande music to a global market.

3.6.2 Gender and Invisibility

In my interviews with her, Durán often expressed frustration at being underacknowledged for her work. Indeed, academics and journalists regularly overlook her key contributions in favor of her male counterparts in the music industry, many of whom profit from her years of labor building relationships, listening deeply, and researching cultural history. Take, for instance, her work with the Malian group Trio da Kali and the American string quartet, Kronos Quartet. Durán assembled Trio da Kali, proposed specific Mande repertoire, and initiated the collaboration with Kronos Quartet. She composed one of the songs for their initial record and played a central role in

writing and arranging the music. She wrote and recorded backup vocal parts, which were later replaced with the voice of lead vocalist, Hawa Kassé Mady Diabate (Boys 2018).

Durán was the bridge that allowed the two groups to communicate across barriers of language and musical systems: between Mandinka and English, and between the aural tradition and the written one. “The process of the aural tradition meeting the written tradition was difficult,” she told me, “and that was my role—to make that happen” (Durán 2018a). Trio da Kali is also a testament to Durán’s dedication to building trusting relationships among generations of Mande musicians. Trio da Kali is made up of Hawa Kassé Mady Diabaté, the daughter of one Mali’s great jali vocalists, Kassé Mady Diabaté, whom Durán met and worked with during her early days in Bamako in the late 1980s. Mamadou Kouyate, the bass ngoni player in the group is the son of Bassekou Kouyate (described above), for whom Durán has produced multiple albums. Finally, Trio da Kali is anchored by balafon virtuoso Fodé Lassana Diabaté, with whom Durán has collaborated on several recordings over the years.

However, when the Trio da Kali/Kronos Quartet’s album *Ladilikan* won an award from *Songlines*, the UK’s biggest international music magazine, Durán was left out of the narrative completely. Pronouncing *Ladilikan* the “Best Fusion Album of 2018,” *Songlines* wrote, “the material is smartly chosen and brilliantly arranged by Jacob Garchik.

Ranging from traditional African material to a brace of Mahalia Jackson gospel tunes, producer Nick Gold has done a skillful job in calibrating the different elements to perfection. First violinist David Harrington, who founded the string quartet in 1973, claims the album as ‘one of the most beautiful Kronos has done in 40 years’” (Songlines 2018). Over a few paragraphs, the names of several men are prominently mentioned – the arranger Jacob Garchik, World Circuit label boss Nick Gold, and the leader of Kronos Quartet, David Harrington, but Durán’s name never appears. Here the politics of invisibility operates along lines of gender as Durán’s crucial contributions to the formation and success of this collaboration is simply elided from the media narrative. “I’m invisible as a producer. Because I’m a woman, I don’t exist,” she said (Durán 2020). This process maps onto the systematic invisibility faced by women who work in male-dominated fields such as record production. The immaterial labor of building relationships over decades made *Ladilikan* possible. Without Durán’s network of collaborators, neither Gold, Harrington nor Garchik would have had the opportunity to write and record an album such as this.

Durán’s fieldwork resulted in an extensive network of griot musicians and contacts in West Africa. This social network has been key to her work as a record producer—and also central to the success of other producers who have moved through Durán’s connections to initiate their own projects. The immaterial labor undertaken by

Durán over several decades has not been publicly acknowledged as central to making Mande music better known in the UK and North America. “I don’t think my work in giving [Mande music] a platform has been at all acknowledged,” she said. “And I think probably that has a lot to do with my being a woman. You know like, I must be the tea lady...” (Durán 2020).

If one spends any time with Durán, it becomes quickly evident that she is anything but a “tea lady.” She has a powerful presence, speaks with authority, acts with ambition, commands an audience, shares her ideas freely and confidently. In her early fieldwork days in rural Gambia, she described learning a great deal about the gender values and expectations of village life there. Durán was apprenticing then with Amadu Bansang Jobarteh on kora, an instrument traditionally only played by men. She describes gaining an “exceptional” status in terms of her gender. “Maybe it’s been easier for me to establish relationships because of being a woman and somehow being perceived as less threatening,” she suggested (Durán 2020). Durán’s outsider-insider status and her gender uniquely positioned her as a fieldworker. She has leveraged this positionality over the years to build trusting long-term relationships that have facilitated her scholarly and commercial outputs.

In developing these social networks, Durán leaned on an idiosyncratic Mande musical resource, the song “Soliyo,” which became her “calling card” (Durán 2020). As

far back as the 1970s, Durán heard “Soliyo” as a consistent presence in her fieldwork. The song is the purview of jali vocalists, primarily women, who use it to hail a patron — “calling the horses” into battle on behalf of the patron’s ancestors. “A praise song *par excellence*,” writes Durán, “the song is archaic, and unique, but also ubiquitous. No one but a jali may sing it... At worst, the song is formulaic and predictable; at best, it is an exhilarating vocal tour de force, technically demanding, powerful, improvisational and highly individual” (Durán 2015c). The song is prominently performed in the setting of *sumu*, parties organized for women by women, usually in connection with lifecycle celebrations. Durán routinely attended *sumu*, observing that “when a singer spotted someone special, such as a bride’s ‘godmother’, she would belt out *Soliyo*, which raised the temperature of the event by several notches” (ibid).

So Durán set out to learn the song. The women she was staying with taught her a basic version, which she learned to sing with as much confidence as she could muster. She describes that her “gate-crashing of wedding parties as honorary jali meant that at some point I had to justify my presence to the guests. There was always that moment when all eyes would turn to me as if to say, ‘Well? You’re a *jelimouso*? Prove it!’” (ibid). She would be handed the mic and, much to the surprise of the gathered audience, Lucy would belt out the most inspired rendition of “Soliyo” she could summon. This moment invariably provoked gasps of astonishment, as a white foreigner, for a moment,

embodied this quintessentially jalimuso vocal act. Women pushed money into her hands, laughing. On occasion, she'd "call the horses" for a hostile police officer or border agent looking to coax a bribe out of her. Durán would ask the official his last name then use the song to invoke his ancestors. She describes using "Soliyo" to get out of jams such as these, and at times walking away with cash in her pocket.

This story speaks to the type of thick ethnographic experience that Durán inhabits in her fieldwork, and that she brings to her professional work as an academic and a music producer. Durán leverages "Soliyo" during her fieldwork to assert her knowledge, to position herself in alliance with her jali interlocutors, and to ingratiate herself into social settings. As with her exceptional gender status as a fieldworker in Gambia, these performances of "Soliyo" rely on her position as simultaneously an insider and an outsider. Her participation in the woman-centric space of the sumu is also enabled by her being a female fieldworker. Here, the politics of invisibility operates as she inhabits a liminal gendered space: at once a woman and an exception to local gendered expectations; at once insider and outsider, ready to surprise someone with her rendition of a quintessential jelimouso vocal act, "Soliyo."

3.6.3 Transparent Mediation and Invisibility

Another facet of this politics of invisibility manifests in the sound of Durán's record production style. Her finished recordings obscure her sonic interventions within

the texture of the recording itself, rendering her touch as the producer invisible. This style epitomizes the transparent mediation approach that I discussed in Chapter 2. As we hear in *Kaira*, the recording is presented as spatiotemporally coherent—that is to say it is presented so as to convey an actual, *real* performance. However, as discussed above, Durán conducted an intensive editing process that compressed Toumani’s performances on *Kaira* into short, radio-friendly cuts. Secondly, *Kaira* indexes Toumani Diabaté’s instrumental virtuosity through a hyper-distilled representation. By eliminating passages Durán deemed “noodly,” she increased the motivic density of Toumani’s performance, thus presenting his virtuosity in a heightened form. Finally, Durán’s use of digital waveform editing (novel in the late ‘80s when she produced this album), allowed for these interventions to be carried out under the cover of transparent mediation. Each track is manufactured to convey the impression of “liveness,” performed straight through and uncut. As the liner notes proclaim, “This recording was made entirely live and unaccompanied by Toumani Diabate. There is no double-tracking and there is no accompaniment by another kora” (Diabaté 1988a). What there is, however, is the invisible hand of Lucy Durán subtly shaping the sound and touch of the recording—but steadfastly remaining outside the frame of view.

Durán’s production style has made an indelible imprint upon the way Mande music is experienced, both internationally and at home. Her considerable linguistic and

ethnographic knowledge allows her to engage intricately with artists in the development and refinement of repertoire during the pre-production phase. She brings her experience as a sound archivist and ethnomusicologist to bear, helping artists reflect on how their chosen repertoire fits into a history of local and international recordings. But her creative intercessions are most apparent in the post-production arena, where she has developed a unique method for editing kora music performances, one that has become standard practice in the years since (and one that I practice in the recordings included as the final chapter of this dissertation).

Thinking with a politics of invisibility helps to make sense of the vexed role that a producer like Lucy Durán occupies as she functions simultaneously as an artist, advocate, collaborator, and gatekeeper. Durán practices invisibility in her production style by designing her sonic intercessions to be transparent and inaudible. She consciously “invisibilizes” her role as a mediator and gatekeeper by foregrounding the artists she collaborates with. Finally, Durán is the subject of a discursive invisibility herself due to her marginalization as a female record producer. Durán engages with these invisibility politics as she fashions an approach to cross-cultural record production that prioritizes the careers of her collaborators and creates avenues for broad public appreciation of Mande music traditions, even as she effects alterations on the musical practices she proposes to reflect.

Durán's research-creation practice exemplifies a unique approach to public scholarship that is rooted in ethnographic fieldwork. She leverages her relationships in the international music industry to create career opportunities for her interlocutors. At the same time, she leverages her network of interlocutors to launch or support creative endeavors, all with the goal of increasing public knowledge of Mande music. Like many ethnomusicologists and cultural anthropologists, the currency of Lucy Durán's career is built on her relationships with her colleagues in the field. Operating with an ethics of reciprocity, Durán brings her colleagues' artistic work to the forefront, often disappearing, reluctantly or not, from the public narratives that accompany or respond to it.

3.7 Conclusions

The cross-cultural encounters I describe here have shaped how kora music is appreciated internationally and, as a result, has impacted its local practice at home in Mande. Circulating through Black Atlantic networks, musical sounds and traditions are remade by encounters across difference. Individual personalities, perspectives, and tastes entangle with social histories. These "chance meetings, coordinating misunderstandings, and ongoing collaborations" (White 2012, 6) are often characterized by tension and friction. They generate novel aesthetic possibilities in the heat of encounter.

These encounters and creative interactions undercut simple readings of the ethics of representation in Black music. The production of the album *Kaira* is one example of how cultural traditions are produced “not in the unproblematic transmission of a fixed essence through time,” as Gilroy writes in the *Black Atlantic*, “but in the breaks and interruptions” (Gilroy 1993, 101). The collaboration between Toumani Diabaté and Lucy Durán has reached across geographies, modes of hearing, and ways of knowing the kora to produce a definitive and consequential representation of Mande music for international publics.

4. *Jalikan* in Transit: The Voice of the Migrant Griot

This chapter considers the experience of a *jali* migrant, Diali Keba Cissokho, as he refashions the tools of his heritage (*fasiya*) to build a music career in his new home in rural North Carolina. While the previous chapter was concerned with how recording processes shift practices of Mande music-making, this chapter is about the transformation of expressive practice brought on by the migrant experience. Working outside the supportive structure of an active metropolitan diaspora community, I study how the voice of this migrant *jali* is transubstantiated under the influence of the US music industry in the American South, and how Diali makes creative use of his *fasiya* to affirm his cultural heritage and build a career in the context of cultural and geographic dislocation. This section of my study considers Diali's interactions with the North American world music industry as a site to investigate how the griot figure is both celebrated and stripped of certain expressive capacities by a music industry formatively shaped by racialized logics.

In Diali's migration from Senegal to the US he no longer works within a musical value system based on shared understandings of Mande cultural history, of West African genealogies, and of the affective power of *jali* speech (*jalikan*). Instead, in the US, he works creatively to find other resources to reimagine the *jali*'s art (*jaliya*) in a manner

that synchs with, or at times resists, US music industry regimes of value based, foremost, upon logics of racial difference. I argue that in this context, Diali's art is a surface for journalist, audience, and music industry worker projections of Africa as a source of "fantasy and imaginative play," (Agawu 1995, 384), as Kofi Agawu puts it, their interpretations of his expressive practice springing from a uniquely American investment in the construction and maintenance of racial difference.

In Mande, a great power of the jali is that of a "time-binder" (Hale 1998, 23), his or her ability to shape the past into resonance with the present through a speech act or musical gesture. But in his move to the US, the resources Diali calls upon to accomplish this expressive feat are largely unavailable to him due to difference in language and cultural history, and due to racialized histories and expectations of the US music industry. How then, does this migrant jali refashion the tools of his *fasiya* to challenge or, at times, accommodate those expectations as he works to build a meaningful career in the US music industry?

The basis for this chapter is a decade's worth of ethnographic research-participation through nearly daily collaboration with Diali. He and I developed a close friendship and working relationship through our band, Diali Cissokho & Kaira Ba. Together we toured extensively in the US, made three trips to Senegal, produced records, performed hundreds of shows, attended countless rehearsals. As a result of this

shared experience I have gained insight into Diali's migrant experience in rural North Carolina, and into the workings of the US world music industry. This chapter seeks to synthesize those insights and thus to contribute to the scholarship concerned with Mande music in the diaspora.

The present study builds upon scholarship concerning the social roles and musical practices of the West African griots, and Mande *jalolu* in particular (the plural form of the singular *jali*) (Charry 2000; Skinner 2015; Hale 1998; Tamari 1999; Banning Eyre 2000; Durán 1995, 2017a, 2007, 2013, 2015c; Durán and Furniss 1999; Ebron 2009; B.G. Hoffman 1990; B. Hoffman 1995; Keita 1988; Knight 1973; Maxwell 2008; Huchard 1985; Durán 1999). This chapter engages directly with scholarship that examines practices of *jaliya* (the *jali*'s art) in the diaspora, including the work of Paulla Ebron (Ebron 2004, 2009), as well as of Ryan Skinner (Skinner 2004), David Racanelli (Racanelli 2011) and Tom Van Buren (Van Buren 2003), each of whom take different approaches to studying *jaliya* in the context of New York City's Mande diaspora communities. Likewise, Roderick Knight (Knight 1991) and Hauke Dorsch (Dorsch 2017) describe practices of Mande music as "rituals of belonging" (Dorsch 2017) among West African diasporas in Paris. My research is further informed by scholars who have focused on the mediation of Mande music by the world music industry (Skinner 2015; Charry 2000; Hale 1998; Ebron 2009; Durán 2017b)

I look at an example of a Senegalese jali musician who seeks to reinvent his hereditary role in the context of a migrant setting devoid of a thriving diaspora community. By examining the life and art of the North Carolina resident and Senegalese jali Diali Keba Cissokho, I offer a portrait of a migrant musician working to refashion his cultural heritage in a setting where few people in his life share a common framework for interpreting his art. Seeking to do so, Diali faces the unique challenge of staying (what he considers to be) true to his cultural heritage while interacting with audiences who lack the shared cultural knowledge that enlivens his art form. As I discuss below, additional pressure is placed on Diali by the music industry to perform his cultural heritage as an expression of authentic “Africanness.”

This doubleness—attempting to perform one’s cultural traditions in a setting in which they will not be readily understood—speaks powerfully to the “disquieting psychosocial realities of perpetual dislocation” that Skinner narrates of his interlocutor Balla Kouyaté before he finds his way into a community of Mande migrants in New York City (Skinner 2004). Despite the psychic and practical challenges presented by his dislocation and compounded by his lack of a supportive diaspora community, Cissokho has nevertheless found ways of refashioning his practices of jaliya in the rural North Carolina context into an expressive practice that opens avenues for livelihood, connection, and a poignant enactment of his patrimonial art.

4.1 Figuring the Griot in the White Cultural Imagination

The US world music industry systematically encourages Diali to present his *fasiya* (cultural patrimony) in public performance, even when it cannot be fully understood and appreciated by his audience. His practice of *jaliya* is thus reshaped: stripped of its cultural specificity and interpreted by the music industry as a performance of essentialized Africanness. Longstanding racialized narratives in the US music industry shape perceptions of his expression, and consequently influence his artistry. Aware of the expectations of his audiences and of the industry he works within, Diali at times plays into these tropes, practicing the “strategic essentialism” described by Louise Meintjes (Meintjes 2003b) and Aleysia Whitmore (Whitmore 2020). In other moments, Diali pushes back on these tropes, leveraging his expressive practice to defy audience and industry expectations.

Moments of engagement with the US world music industry illustrate how music industry conceptions of racial difference point to long-standing tropes of the “traditional” and the “authentic” in “African” musical practices. Given the history of white control over the music industry and the ongoing reality of white people being the primary gatekeepers in world music, the white cultural imagination mediates representations of the griot in particular ways.

bell hooks offers the present study a frame for conceptualizing how the griot figure's appropriation by the US music industry is indicative of broader patterns of white cultural consumption. In her reading of white longing for Black culture, "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance" (hooks 2012), hooks analyzes a wide range of sources—stories of sexual encounter, food consumption, advertising, novels and films—to reveal white exploration of racial difference as a quest for pleasure. Similarly, the world music industry works to facilitate (and to profit from) encounters across difference as sites of pleasure. Diali's immigration to the US and his subsequent engagement with the music industry place him squarely within the machinations that hooks describes.

As the geographer Ian Cook notes (Cook 2008), references to hooks's 1992 "Eating the Other" often start and stop with the middle of its first paragraph:

The commodification of Otherness has been so successful because it is offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling. Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture (hooks 2012, 365).

Probing further into hooks's analysis, this initial insight about "livening up" white culture takes on greater substance and depth. She focuses on why white culture is so enamored with figures of the Other in the first place and, in this process of engagement across difference, who is transformed and how. hooks asks us to consider

whether the pleasure derived from consuming difference can “act as a critical intervention challenging and subverting racist domination, inviting and enabling critical resistance?” (ibid, 367). Or, she worries, will cultural, ethnic and racial difference simply be “continually commodified and offered up as new dishes to enhance the white palate?” (ibid, 380). hooks celebrates the power of desire and longing to contribute to personal and social transformation by exploring “how desire disrupts, subverts, and makes resistance possible,” even as she remains skeptical of white investment in cultural transformation.

hooks offers a clear reading of white cultural motivations for seeking out encounters with difference. In her description, “Eating the Other” is a means of assuaging white guilt for white supremacy: conquest, violence, and racial disenfranchisement. At the same time, white consumers turn to the figure of the “primitive” as a means of reckoning with their own alienation, as an imaginative “field of dreams” (ibid, 369). In this context, white publics “desire to move beyond whiteness. Critical of white imperialism and ‘into’ difference, they desire cultural spaces where boundaries can be transgressed, where new and alternative relations can be formed” (ibid, 378).

The music industry derives its power, in part, from harnessing desire and longing through images of sex, power, wealth, celebrity, prestige, and crucially:

difference. Presentations of racialized caricature are foundational to the music industry as agents of desire against which white culture may reimagine and reaffirm its own self-worth. The minstrel show stands paramount as a point of origin for the racialized imagination of the white-run music industry. Tropes stemming from that context continue to plague the US music industry today, even as new paradigms of racial imagination come forward.

Minstrel shows took root in the 1830s as white performers donned blackface masks made from burnt cork to present African American song and dance. The immense profitability and popularity of this form set a template for popular music in the United States. As Karl Hagstrom Miller writes, "From the common use of dialect or malapropisms to represent black speech to the ubiquitous exaggerations of black physical deviation from white norms (often sliding into comparison with the animal kingdom), minstrelsy traded on images of African American difference and inferiority" (Miller 2010, 5). He goes on to argue that minstrelsy became the "primary medium through which nineteenth-century Americans came to understand musical authenticity (ibid)" and, further, that through this process American music became "a form of expression, not only of individual feelings of collective culture but also of essential racial characteristics, capacities, and stages of evolution" (ibid, 6).

This foundational practice of linking musical expression with racialized notions of difference remains at the core of the music industry, even as the terms of engagement shift. As hooks argues, today's instantiations of racialized tropes tend toward images of post-racial multiculturalism rather than toward nostalgia for antebellum life.

The desire to make contact with those bodies deemed Other, with no apparent will to dominate, assuages the guilt of the past, even takes the form of a defiant gesture where one denies accountability and historical connection. Most importantly, it establishes a contemporary narrative where the suffering imposed by structures of domination on those designated Other is deflected by an emphasis on seduction and longing where the desire is not to make the Other over in one's image but to become the Other (hooks 2012, 369).

Thus, in consuming the Other, white culture seeks to relinquish responsibility for the horrors of racism and colonialism by turning towards difference as an object of desire. In so doing, the power of self-definition is stripped away from marginalized people through encounters with difference.

The commodification of difference promotes paradigms of consumption wherein whatever difference the Other inhabits is eradicated, via exchange, by a consumer cannibalism that not only displaces the Other but denies the significance of that Other's history through a process of decontextualization (ibid, 373).

The griot is figured in the US music industry through just such a process of decontextualization. While this process may offer griot musicians a public platform, that platform is attained at the expense of cultural specificity. As hooks writes,

“contemporary notions of ‘crossover’ expand the parameters of cultural production to

enable the voice of the non-white Other to be heard by a larger audience even as it *denies the specificity of that voice* [emphasis added]" (ibid, 373). As I will show, Diali's performance is routinely decontextualized. His art is interpreted as a display of authentic Africanness *par excellence*, but the specificity of his practice is, typically, erased.

4.1.2 From Decontextualization to Schizophonia

Following hooks' argument that the commodification of difference "denies the significance of that Other's history through a process of decontextualization," I wish to show the particular challenges Diali faces in his vocation as a migrant jali in the rural United States. Outside the supportive structure of an active Mande diaspora community, Diali is determined to perform acts associated with his cultural heritage. He conscientiously works to stay true to his patrimony (*fasiya*) and, concurrently, is aware of the currency his heritage has in the US music industry as an "authentic" representation of essential Africanness. At the same time, the shared cultural context that allows for his practice of *jaliya* to be meaningfully interpreted by a public is not typically present among his US audiences. He, his band, and his audience, lack a shared ontological framework¹¹. Thus, Diali inhabits contexts wherein the shared cultural understandings of language, history and tradition that condition meaningful

¹¹ In the sense that Borst (1997) defined ontology as a "formal specification of shared conceptualization."

interpretation of the performance of his cultural patrimony has been split from those very performative acts. These encounters across difference sever his cultural practice from a concomitant interpretation.

Dislocation is a hallmark of migrant experience. However, what distinguishes Diali's experience is the acute twoness of performing his *jalinness* outside a context in which that practice may be understood and reciprocated. This dilemma is heightened in Diali's case, as the music industry expects him to perform his *jalinness* in the absence of the shared understanding required to interpret it as he intends.

Composer and writer Murray Schafer coined the term *schizophonia* to describe the splitting of a sound from its origination. Schafer asserts that he designed the term "to be a nervous word. Related to schizophrenia, I wanted to convey the same sense of aberration and drama" (Schafer 1977, 91). Ethnomusicologist Steven Feld later expanded on Schafer's notion:

Unlike Schafer, I do not use the term principally or simply to refer to the technological process of splitting that constitutes sound recording. Rather, I am concerned with the larger arena where sound recordings move into long- and short-term routes of circulation and patterns of consumption. At stake, then, in the splitting of sounds from sources is the possibility of new social life, and this is principally about the recontextualization and resignification of sounds (Feld 2012b, 41).

My reading of Diali's life as a jali in North Carolina extends the *schizophonia* concept to account for the splitting of an expressive practice from its concomitant

interpretation, one in line with the expression's original impetus. As migrant musicians are expected to perform their cultural patrimony in new geographic settings, the performance assumes new shapes and brokers new meanings for audiences. It can also create a feeling of doubleness for migrant musicians such as Diali, one that calls to mind W. E. B. Du Bois's conceptualization of "double consciousness," which, he argues, shapes Black American life:

Born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (Du Bois 2008, 45).

Diali shares the sense of being a perpetual outsider that Du Bois describes, but he doesn't experience "two unreconciled strivings," as the scholar puts it. Rather, Diali works to superimpose his cultural patrimony onto his life in the United States. "Do you think of yourself as an American?" I asked Diali. "No. To be honest, no," he told me. "I can't be half and half. I don't want that. Because my mommy told me: no matter where you go, stay who you are. Don't ever change. Never, ever. Stick to who you are. Be who you are" (D.K. Cissokho 2021). Diali's stubborn refusal to compromise his cultural identity as Manding, and as a jali, is an act of defiance against assimilation.

It's also a self-understanding that leads him routinely to inhabit the "disquieting psychosocial realities of perpetual dislocation," that Ryan Skinner described of jali migrants in New York (Skinner 2004). Diali remains culturally isolated in his life in North Carolina, unlike the interlocutors that Skinner, Racanelli, Knight and Dorsch describe as eventually finding a sense of belonging within Mande diaspora communities. Diali looks forward to his biannual trips home (postponed for the past two years due to the COVID pandemic), and he is grateful for the small number of Senegalese immigrant friends he has made, spread across central North Carolina. He also acknowledges that he experiences moments of belonging with his band and among his extended family in the US, who have come to learn a great deal about Manding and Senegalese lifeways through their years of relationship with Diali.

4.2 North Carolina Griot

Diali is fond of saying that love brought him to America. He had fallen for his wife Hilary, a native of Pittsboro, North Carolina, when she was studying abroad in Senegal as a college student. She overstayed her student program in Dakar as she and Diali courted. With Diali's oldest friend acting as interpreter, they communicated their growing feelings for one another. Both sensed they were standing on the precipice of a great turning, a moment in which they would become irrevocably transformed as their lives intertwined. Hilary flew to North Carolina to make the announcement to her

family and returned only weeks later with her parents for a wedding in M'Bour. It was a sudden, swift, and consequential joining together.

The wedding was a cause for celebration among Diali's family — both in honoring the new marriage, and as a marker of a significant shift in the trajectory of Diali's familial life. He was about to become one of a handful of his friends and family members who had made it “overseas” (Meintjes 2005, 2003b). As Louise Meintjes describes through the prism of recording studio practice in Johannesburg, South Africa, “overseas” is an idealized term signaling towards a series of expectations about life in the “Euro-American metropolises” (Meintjes 2005).

Diali returns often to the profound ambivalence he felt about this turning point, as it meant relinquishing his daily role as caretaker and provider for his brothers and sisters, a role he had dutifully stepped into with the death of both his parents a few years prior. “I had a hard time explaining to my family that I'm going to America,” Diali said. “They were crying all night. That broke my heart because [my younger sisters and brothers] didn't know their mama and daddy. They only knew me and [my older siblings], Mansatta and Youssoupha” (D.K. Cissokho 2021). But in the end, they supported him. His youngest sister Jabu proved pivotal in his decision to leave, telling him that he had to go and that Diali's other siblings and friends would look after her.

Diali knew this transition would imply an increased set of financial expectations. He will have made it: marrying into a well-resourced American family—a white American family no less. Like many immigrants who support their extended family from abroad, he would owe a great debt to his kin through this moment of transition. The expectations for Diali's success would be high. "Of course you can make more money in America than in Senegal. A musician's life in Senegal is a game. You have to have powerful men who have a lot of money who can push you. If you don't have that connection, it's complicated" (ibid), told me. Diali would encounter challenges navigating the musician's life in the US, but he hoped he'd manage to carve out a space for himself. "Our generation is the competition generation," Diali said. But he remained hopeful: "In America people would see what you've got and push you. They help you. That's the difference" (ibid).

His move to the States entailed a profusion of unknowns: language, food, community relations, practices of religion, the meaning and centrality of family; all these axes on which Diali's daily life turned were flung into an abrupt upheaval. But he was determined there should be at least one through line: his identity and vocation as a jali. He would carry forth the cultural responsibility he had inherited through his father and his grandfather before him. As Ryan Skinner writes, jalolu have long been travelers. "They are mobile, moving between and within fixed locations in search of practices,

ideas, and institutions to resituate, advance, and preserve their hereditary art, *jeliya*" (Skinner 2004, 140).

In leaving the Mande region of West Africa to move overseas, Diali's inherited social practice was to lose the nuance and depth of shared cultural understanding. It would become something new and yet unknown though the process of dislocation initiated by his immigration to the US. Like Skinner's interlocutors, Diali's migration would launch him into "an ongoing separation from intimate social relations and the sense of place, stability, and continuity they engender" (Skinner 2004, 146).

When Diali arrived in Pittsboro, North Carolina, he said that he felt himself at home in the small-town atmosphere. The graveled streets and relaxed pace of life reminded him of the fishing-village-turned-mid-sized-city, M'Bour, that had been his lifelong home in Senegal. He described feeling lucky to be surrounded by his wife's extended family there, several of whom lived in their own rural family compound: brothers, sisters, grandparents and grandbabies all within shouting distance, just a short ramble though the pine forest dividing their respective homes. Diali looked to his new family for connections with local musicians in North Carolina. He was clear that his goal was to adapt his inherited jali role to this new setting of a rural life in the United States. For that, he imagined he would need a band.

Soon after arriving in North Carolina, Diali's wife Hillary connected him with a guitar player she had grown up with. In turn, John Westmoreland reached out to Austin McCall and Will Ridenour, and they linked the chain with me, rounding out a quintet that would sustain a decade-long collaboration. The band often describes our project as beginning in earnest with a bloody baptismal scene. In one of their first encounters, Diali invited Will and Austin over for Tabaski (or Eid al-Adha), a celebration commemorating Abraham's sacrifice of his son Ishmael. Acknowledging Allah's delivery of a ram to Abraham in the wake of his sacrifice, a sheep is slaughtered to mark the occasion. But the bloodletting at that particular Tabaski gathering did not stop there.

That evening, Will and Austin wound up accompanying Diali on djembes, raising the tempo as the party lasted into the night. A few minutes in, the overlapping rhythms gained assurance and structure. The drummers had found the pocket, and Diali was pleased. He caught the attention of everyone in the room as he began to fling his dreadlocks down toward the drumhead, the beads and metals rings woven into his hair sounding a bright snap on the taught surface of the drum. On the third or fourth swing, Diali's forehead contacted the hard edge of the drum, splitting his skin, and releasing a trickle of blood down Diali's nose and into his mouth. Seated behind Diali, Austin and Will were confused by the sudden looks of surprise among the gathered crowd until, suddenly, Diali spun his head back to face them. "Let's go!" he shouted, a fine mist of

blood spraying into the air and settling over their hands as they wrested rhythms from their djembes.

Diali still bears the scar from that night, forever stamped on his forehead. Will and Austin recalled the story to me in gory detail the next day, and I was drawn in. We all gathered later that week, the first meeting of hundreds to follow.

Diali's mother had instructed him that when he formed a band one day, he should name it "Kairaba," a common Manding phrase meaning "great peace." So, the group assumed the name Diali Cissokho & Kaira Ba. We concluded after trial and error that the insertion of the space between the components *Kaira* (peace) and *ba* (a suffix meaning big or great) would encourage a more appropriate pronunciation by English-language audiences. This decoupling was the first concession to an awareness that the band was orienting itself towards an audience who wouldn't understand the meaning of the band's name, much less its lyrical content.

The group began rehearsing several days a week in the living room of Will and Austin's shared apartment. Rehearsals were fragmented between languages: Diali's fledging English, Will's decent French, and the rest of the band slowly picking up musical phrases from Diali's Manding music vocabulary.

During several initial rehearsals John and I both tune our instruments to meet Diali's kora – stretching the bass and guitar strings far beyond their customary tension. This time, the

neck of John's Telecaster keels forward dangerously. It is hard to play in tune with instruments thrown this far out of alignment. We carry on with the rehearsal nervously, waiting to hear a snap. The next day I returned with a Boss TU-2 tuning pedal. We ran a quarter-inch cable out of the piezo pickup in Diali's kora and plugged it into the stomp box. An array of LED lights sprang to life, the illuminations indicating the frequency of each plucked string. The pedal only accepts the absolute pitches of the chromatic scale: 440 Hz displays as A, 466.16 Hz as A#, 493.88 Hz as B, and so on. Lights flash impatiently as Diali works to discipline the kora strings according to the Boss's formula. He was skeptical, but Diali agrees to take the device home and attempt to align his instrument with the A440 scheme his bandmates seemed to prefer. We never look back.

The band became a major source of support for Diali's new life in the United States. The group helped him find work as a performer, encouraged the development of his English language skills, and became a central part of his social life. Over the next ten years, Kaira Ba would record three full-length albums, travel on several occasions together to Senegal, and see one another through relationship breakups, the birth of children, the illness and death of family members – all the mundane and profound vicissitudes of life. We spent countless hours in the rehearsal room and in the van, carving routes that passed through venues in major American cities (Washington DC, Baltimore, New York, Chicago, Indianapolis, Cleveland, Nashville, Atlanta, and Miami) as well as in towns across all across North Carolina: Aberdeen, Asheville, Beaufort,

Black Mountain, Boone, Bynum, Carrboro, Durham, Elon, Efland, Greensboro, Greenville, Hickory, Hillsborough, High Point, Mebane, Moncure, Morrisville, Morganton, New Bern, Ocracoke, Oriental, Pittsboro, Raleigh, Saxapahaw, Silk Hope, Swan Quarter, Wilson...).

Over the course of the next ten years the band played over two-hundred-fifty concerts around the United States, from folk festivals to rock clubs, African Diasporic music festivals, benefit concerts, and even an occasional Oktoberfest or St. Patrick's Day celebration. Alongside these performances, Diali began building a career as a teaching artist—going into classrooms with students of all ages to share songs and stories about his life at home in Senegal, and about his move to the United States. Through this time, Diali began to reshape his patrimonial inheritance as a jali into that of a performing artist and teacher in the United States. He often found himself as the lone West African in social and professional settings; indeed, he frequently found himself as the lone immigrant, or even the lone person of color, in such settings.

4.3 The Voice of the Migrant Griot

At home in Senegal, Diali was raised to practice the jali's art as a means of connecting his patrons and audiences with their patrimonial heritage. Jaliya constitutes a key "structure of feeling" in the Mande cultures of West Africa, Paulla Ebron argues, following Manthia Diawara in picking up on the concept introduced by Raymond

Williams (Williams and Williams 1977; Ebron 2004; Diawara 2009). The speech acts of *jalolu* elicit a powerful feeling of patrimonial connection for those descended from the Mande empire of West Africa. In a moment's utterance, the sounding of a familiar kora *kumbengo*, or a voice's descending melismatic gesture, *jaliya* manifest an embodied connection with the past, with one's *fasiya* or "cultural patrimony," as Ryan Skinner described the Mande concept (Skinner 2015, 78). It is this quintessential *jali* role that Thomas Hale identifies as that of a "time-binder" (Hale 1998, 23): the *jali*'s ability to bend the contours of space-time, aligning the present moment with an embodied connection to the past.

July 2016, Fayetteville, North Carolina

The van was packed up, our performing clothes soaked with the heat of a humid summer afternoon. The band headed down the street towards a West African food stall we'd been promised we would find at the other end of the block. Diali spotted the two men as they walked down the sidewalk, bedecked in fine bazin boubous, bright colors glimmering in the brilliant sun. Smoothly, Diali stepped away and intercepted the pair. "Salaam alaikum," he greeted them. Diali was carrying his kora low beside his body. He had hailed the pair into a ritual interaction. I paused alongside the other band members and watched from the street. Diali asked for the two men's last names. "Oooh Darbo. Sonko," I heard him gush. (Later Diali said he knew that was his moment to "get inside them.") Diali launched into an oration and the men listened, absorbed. Tears came

to one of the men's eyes as Diali pressed forward: He "told them where their ancestors came from. Where they come from. Who's their dad. Who they are. I explained all of that. And it touched them," he reflected later (D.K. Cissokho 2021). Without missing a beat, both men dug into their hip pockets and produced their wallets. Not pausing to consider a sum, each man withdrew a fistful of faded green US dollar bills and pressed the considerable stack into Diali's hand, lowering their eyes briefly towards the sidewalk. Diali tucked the cash into his front pocket. The two men looked up, smiling, nearly giddy. "Jërëjëf." "Thank you." Diali walked back to the group then, smiling as he approached us. Noticing our stunned faces, he said, "That's how it works. Now where is this maafe they promised me? I need a real dinner."

Reflecting on this moment in a later conversation, Diali explained the deep feeling a moment like this can elicit for a patron: "Of course you're human," he told me. "You feel. You say wow, this is where I come from! This is who I am! I'm part of this family!...Yes, you feel proud." That this interaction took place on the hot pavement in North Carolina only heightened the stakes, Diali says. "Especially in America, they don't think they're going to find somebody who can tell them—who can show them—this history...Only griots have that power," he concludes. "Only griots. Because that's our job. That's our responsibility, what God blessed us to give" (ibid).

According to Eric Charry and Lucy Durán (Charry 2000, 49; Durán 2015c), jalolu elicit such feelings in a patron or audience by exercising his or her *nyama*, an esoteric

force called forth by the spiritual power of the jali's birthright (or *dalilu*). Margit Smith, a German kora player and independent scholar who conducted long apprenticeships with kora players in West Africa, describes nyama this way:

For the Mande, nyama is a vital force inherent in human beings, animals, plants, and things in a greater or lesser dosage. Possession, accumulation, and skillful manipulation of nyama guarantee power. Due to its socio-political role, the jali has a larger amount of nyama than other persons. He is known as an expert handler of nyama. The generic name for a jali is *nyamakala*, [literally] the handler of nyama (Smith 2012, 36).

Jalolu leverage this nyama in the exchange with a patron, usually of the "noble" or "freeborn" caste (called *horon*) (Charry 2000, 49), as they instill in their patron feelings of reverence, trepidation, and pride at once. Barbara Hoffman describes,

I have seen many a horon's hand quake as it thrust forth a bill, sometimes accompanied by a verbal plea, "ka nyama bò" (Please take away the nyama). It is, perhaps, even understandable that some nobles resent the fact that the jeliw [the Maninka spelling of jalolu], 'their' jeliw, as they say, have such power over them, power not only to stir them deeply and make them tremble, but to inspire them to part with hard won cash or goods in the bargain (Hoffman 1995, 42).

Reflecting on his interaction with the Gambian men in Fayetteville, Diali recalls, "They gave me *a lot* of money. Yes. It's gonna happen. If they don't have money then, they're gonna go fucking find it right away, bring it. Because that's their blessing" (D.K. Cissokho 2021).

Diali knew well the unique power of jaliya in his life in Senegal—his ability to call forth the patrimony of a horon through a song or an act of speech, and in so doing

be rewarded appropriately. He was raised to understand this reciprocal relationship. But he also had an idea of how his verbal and musical art could be repurposed in unconventional settings. In addition to practicing jaliya in the context of lifecycle ceremonies, holidays, and other significant occasions, Diali had grown up alongside his father performing jaliya for tourists at the hotels that dot the coastline of the nearby towns of Saly and Somone, a short taxi ride from his family's home compound in M'Bour.

Diali asserts that his father, Ibrahima Cissokho, was a personal griot to Léopold Sédar Senghor, the Senegalese independence leader, inaugural president, and poet. Diali's father trained him in the recitation of genealogies and, like Diali, was an accomplished kora player. Diali, like other Mande instrumentalists, says he learned to play kora on his own, not under the tutelage of his father. Eric Charry, Lucy Durán and Ryan Skinner have written about *fadenya*, the Mande term denoting "father-child-ness," or the "assumed rivalry between father and son" (Skinner 2015, 88) Like other kora players such as Toumani Diabaté, Diali describes learning the instrument on his own, without the direct teaching of his father.

Diali readily admits, however, that his father opened the door for Diali's musical engagement with European and American "patrons." His father began producing small koras for the tourist hotels on the *Petite Côte*, and selling them ingratiated he (and later,

Diali) into a network of European hoteliers who offered him work performing jaliya in hotel courtyards as tourists passed through or sat for drinks or dinner. Diali does not see this recontextualization of the hereditary art as betraying the integrity of the practice, though he does recognize that the energy one brings to a hotel performance differs from a time-honored engagement with an informed horon. “When you have a baptême [baptism], for example, and I come to your baptême with my kora.... The emotion is different. The bible I bring to your baptême and the bible I bring to [unconventional settings] is different.” Diali says. The hotel is “*moderne*,” and the “baptême is *traditionnel*” according to Diali (D.K. Cissokho 2021).

In moving “overseas” Diali faced the prospect of curtailing the historically and culturally derived power of his nyama. In this new context, Diali would need to build new avenues for material sustenance, prestige, self-worth and a sense of belonging. In this “modern” space, his practice of jaliya would rely on a new interpretation, an interpretation uninformed by a shared cultural patrimony.

4.3.1 Take 1: Jalikan

Diali rarely plays at lifecycle ceremonies anymore, though he relishes the occasional opportunity to do so. He seldom has a chance to flex his knowledge of genealogies and the great figures of Mande imperial history for people who would understand the gist of the story, much less its cultural import; however, when such an

opportunity arises, he seizes it hungrily. Still, Diali taps into his nyama regularly, bringing audiences to an attentive standstill as he summons immense energy in his performances. What was most manifestly lost in this transition is the power of Diali's speech (or *jalikan*), its meaning evaporating in the linguistic and cultural gulf between himself and his audience.

As the band's song, "Bamba Wotena" arrives at its dénouement, Diali drops to his knees on the stage, the microphone clutched between his hands, joined together as if in prayer. The band brings the music down to a quiet shimmer as Diali's oration turns prayerful. The audience at the Haw River Ballroom in Saxapahaw, North Carolina, is rapt, abruptly silent. Side conversations cease, and all eyes are drawn towards the stage, Diali prostrate upon the woven red rug at its center. Diali had delivered the Manding lyrics for "Bamba Wotena" as he does in each performance: an impassioned celebration of the founder of the Mouride Brotherhood in Senegal, Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba Mbacke (1853-1927).

What the audience doesn't know: Bamba founded the Mouride Brotherhood in 1883 and became one of the most influential public figures of his era in Senegal. His spiritual leadership in the struggle against colonial rule made him a subject of great public admiration among Senegalese and of reproach on the part of the French colonial power structure. At the end of the nineteenth century, increasingly anxious about Bamba's power to raise an army to challenge colonial rule, the French administration

forced him into exile, first in Gabon (1895-1902) and later in Mauritania (1903-1907). His exile prompted legends about Bamba's feats of spiritual power: When he was forbidden from praying on the ship carrying him into exile in Gabon, Bamba broke free of his leg shackles and leaped overboard into the ocean, where a prayer mat appeared and caught him on the surface of the water. When his captors forced him into a furnace, he simply sat down and prepared tea for the Prophet Muhammad. Upon Bamba's return to Senegal, he worked to complete his vision for an autonomous holy city, Touba. The project was finally accomplished in 1963, three years after Senegal gained its independence.

As Diali elucidates the history for the several hundred people in attendance, commanding the audience to appreciate Bamba's powerful legacy, few, if any, understand the meaning or significance of his words. He is speaking across a vast gulf of language and implicit historical and cultural understanding. Still, the audience stands transfixed by Diali's nyama, by the raw spiritual power of the man's speech and physical presence. The air around the audience and the stage tremble with emotional power. Even as Diali has lost the power of rhetoric, he retains profound persuasive abilities. He can still move an audience – at times to tears.

"Bamba Wotenaanaa..." Diali's invocation reverberates off the brick walls of the converted textile mill, its affective resonance acting on the bodies of the gathered crowd.

In the cleaving off of one of the great powers of his *fasiya* (heritage)—his *jalikan*—Diali has to work especially hard to transmit emotion and feeling to his audiences. He sings and orates with tremendous force, pressing the front-of-house engineer’s compressors into service. He gesticulates forcefully with hands and fist. Pacing the stage. Dropping to his knees. Calling out to his band mates, or individuals in the audience by name, demanding that they hear—and *feel*—what he is communicating. He exerts tremendous effort to communicate the emotional resonance of his speech, even while the signification of his language is largely empty of meaning for the gathered crowd.

“Do you ever feel sad that people can't understand your language in America?” I ask Diali. “No,” he replies, “it doesn't make me excited, but it doesn't make me feel bad. They feel it in their bones. They feel it in their body. And that’s what matters.” He says that he learned from his mother the power to communicate affect, and that’s central to how he sees his role as a *jali* and as a performer. Emphasizing the prosodic over the referential, he builds an emotional connection inside of and beyond language. Diali says, “It's there. It’s already there. That's not changing. My mom taught me this secret: When you’re with the audience, it doesn't matter whether they understand, or they don't. Make sure of this this,” she told him: “Communicate with them so they can feel you, even if they don’t know your word. Make sure they are part of you. That’s the secret...

A lot of people don't have that kind of connection..." that uncanny ability to reach from the stage and "*touch somebody*" (D.K. Cissokho 2021).

Diali says this work can be taxing. "Being on a stage, man, it's a lot of work. Especially being the front man. People who back you up, they don't work hard like that. It's like being a doctor inside the surgery room. Five different doctors, everybody knows their part, but the main part is the cutting. And carefully taking stuff out of the body. That's the responsibility I'm taking when I'm at the front. That's my job."

He joked with me, "If I let you take that, you're going to kill that person for sure—and then I'm gonna feel guilty—so I always make sure Jonathan cannot touch this person. It's my surgery and Jonathan can assist. Help me—pass me scissors, a knife. I got it! This person can survive."

"How do you know what to cut? What to cut, what to take out?" I ask.

"Because they tell me."

"How?"

"Like I say, it's a secret mommy gave me," Diali laughs knowingly. No words to explain.

Over time, the band became self-aware of the dilemma of Diali's words being unrecognizable to most of its audience. We regularly encouraged Diali to reign in the long passages of oration, when he would extemporize expertly in Wolof and Manding

about the bearing of a song on our world today. Instead, we structured the music with carefully arranged breaks, melodic and rhythmic flourishes, sudden ruptures in the time that would redirect the audience's attention before returning to the groove and his jalikan.

There it was again – Diali turns his head towards the back of the stage as he yells the drummer's name: "Austin!" Diali had heard the snare drum fill beginning to call the band into the next section of the arrangement, but he wasn't done speaking. The jalikan was flowing. He was bending the past into resonance with the present, and this snare drum was not about to cut him off. "Austin!" He sliced his arm through the air behind his body. Austin returned his sticks to the hi-hat and the understated groove locked the bass and kick drum together, pulling the dynamic back down and leaving space for Diali's oration at the front of the mix.

In an interview, Diali clarified that it is not always the immediate audience he has in mind when he's singing. When he invokes someone in his jalikan, he is often communicating directly with them, not merely invoking their story for the sake of an audience. "Every song has a meaning," Diali says. "Like the song *Bamba Wotena*: I'm singing about what Bamba has done for us. How Bamba suffered for us...How he makes sure we're connected with God. How he makes sure we know our religion. He makes sure we have compassion. He makes sure we know how to help each other... When I'm singing I'm singing to be thankful to Bamba" (D.K. Cissokho 2021).

“So you’re singing to him? Like he could hear you?” I ask.

“Very well!”

“You think he can hear your voice?”

“I don’t think. It’s the truth!”

In Diali’s relocation to the United States, he clings tightly to his ancestral role but has been forced to reshape his practice for an audience largely unfamiliar with the language, histories, aesthetics, and cultural practice of Mande life. Diali deftly manipulates affect in his performance, communicating with great power and expression beyond the limits of language. He pulls on the way his audience imagines his ancestral role as a griot. He makes them feel something they can’t articulate, or understand on the level of signification. He rarely bothers to explain. Instead, Diali harnesses the power of his nyama to communicate with emotional power.

“Feel it! Feel it! Feel it!” He calls from the stage as the music rises to a boil.

Living outside his cultural milieu, Diali’s *fasiya* as a “time-binder” (Hale 1998, 23) has evolved into that of a time-space-binder. He pulls the past into resonance with the present. For a moment, he materializes the Mande world in North Carolina, and announces Pittsboro as part of a story tracing his own patrimony back to the thirteenth-century Mali empire. Rather than living Du Bois’s double consciousness, Diali strives to

unify a single geography. Diali's cries of "Bamba" shuttle a thread across the Black Atlantic, weaving together his ancestral past and his lived present.

4.3.2 Take 2: African Yoga

The band often performs at free outdoor events subsidized by city or foundation funding. Demographic surveys we were asked to fill out as a condition of some contracts indicate that one of the imperatives for booking our band into the venue is to increase the cultural diversity of the venue's programming. In these settings, the band often performs for predominantly white audiences who are generally unfamiliar with African music styles or artists, and even more uninformed about specific practices such as *jaliya*, or popular music styles such as *mbalax* that the band draws upon. In these settings the band is often presented and interpreted as a generic stand-in for "African music."

These settings pose a set of challenges for Diali. How can he build a connection with his audience? Can he provide a point of familiarity for audience members to grasp? As Diali willingly "decontextualizes" (hooks 2012, 373) his expressive practice, the audience fills in the gaps with their own imagination of the griot, of Africa, of Black performance. Diali at times leans into essentializing tropes in order to bridge the gap. He deploys playfulness and humor. He keeps the audience on its toes.

Onstage at the Levitt Amphitheater in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, Diali draws the mostly white, largely middle-aged audience into an unexpected interaction. Midway through the up-

tempo song "Jabu," the band brings the dynamics down, dropping into a halftime mbalax groove, which provides a suitable platform for Diali to address the audience. His eyes glimmer with mischief as he peers out from the stage. "You know, since I moved to America," Diali says, "I've seen a lot of yoga – Indian yoga, Chinese yoga – but I've never seen African yoga." People look puzzled, but Diali instructs the audience to follow him. He places his palm squarely on the top of his head; his hips begin to sway left and right. Much of the audience does as it's told, emulating the movement. Some stand still, arms crossed, or retreat to their lawn chairs.

Once hips sway to his satisfaction, Diali elaborates: "In America, people are always complaining about their back – 'my back hurts, my back hurts.' This is because in America, you are always driving. Need to go to the store? Drive. Need to visit your friend? Drive. Need to go the toilet? Drive. In Africa we walk. Always walking. So, this African yoga – it's good for your back. You follow me, and your back is going to be feeling very good tomorrow. This is a natural medicine. No chemicals." Diali points back to his hips, returning the attention of the audience to the movement. "Listen to the music!" he admonishes. "Get ready!" When Diali calls out the number "One!" the band responds with a firm unison punctuation of the downbeat, and Diali thrusts his hips forward precipitously. The audience's swaying hips dissolve into laughter. A pair of teenagers standing with their parents turn red in the face and swivel away. Diali spurs the audience on, feigning naiveté: "It's good for your back! You're gonna wake up tomorrow morning and say, 'Diali, thank you'." He guides the audience through the routine again, ending

with the sudden hip thrust. This time the audience is mostly game; they give it a shot. Hips thrust forward with varyingly awkward and humorous executions. “That’s the medicine right there for your back – I swear to God.” He ramps it up to a double thrust: “One, Two! – and then “the French version: Deux, Quatre, Six!” Finally, Diali signals the band back into the original double-time groove and the audience is released back into their unstructured bobbing, nodding and dancing.

What to make of this impromptu ritual? Lacking the resources of a shared cultural understanding of Mande history and social practice, Diali turns to humor, playfulness, and tropes of African physicality and sexuality to engage his audience. Displays of masculine sexuality are commonplace in American popular music, so Diali’s act is not particularly shocking to the gathered audience, though it does make some audience members (and band members) noticeably uncomfortable. By linking sexualized movement with Africa (as “African yoga”) Diali engages stereotypes of Africanness. He untethers himself from his hereditary jali role and willingly plays with essentialist notions of Africa (“In Africa we walk”) as a foil against which to joke about American culture (“Need to go to the toilet? Drive.”) He positions the figure of the “African” as a superior physical form – strong, sexually confident, uninhibited. He appropriates yoga as a healing practice, and in claiming yoga as African, recasts that

cultural practice as well. Diali willingly engages in these multiple acts of cultural blurring in order to bridge the gulf between him and his audience.

In so doing, Diali offers his American audience what Kofi Agawu describes as an “all-purpose Africa” (Agawu 1995, 384). In the “The Invention of African Rhythm” Agawu argues that scholars resist studying African cultural traditions in their specificity and complexity, instead falling back on generalized notions of “African” cultural traditions. (Agawu is particularly concerned with the ubiquitous trope of African rhythmicity.) Surely the assembled audience is primed to explore Africa as a source for “fantasy and imaginative play” (ibid).

In his “African yoga” performance, Diali plays with essentializing tropes of African physicality and sexuality for the sake of building a connection with his audience. This momentary embrace of essentialism resonates with Alesia Whitmore’s description of West African and Cuban musicians working to build careers within world music industry networks: “People work to reconcile multiple realities, identities, and desires in order to find spaces between the possible and the actual—spaces where they both break out of and reinforce the status quo,” she writes. Musicians “balance essentialist and anti-essentialist expressions of their identities—in addition to the legacies of colonialist exchange—as they work to build their careers, create fulfilling

performances and musics, and recreate Western ideas about Mali, Senegal, and Cuba” (Whitmore 2020, 6).

Several realities condition Diali’s decision to lean into essentializing tropes. Bereft of his ability to communicate language, history and moral lessons in his own language, Diali reaches for other avenues of connection. He is often portrayed in journalistic writing as a quintessentially African figure (a point to which I return below), and given that Africa has no monolithic culture to reference (it is an almost unfathomably vast continent in terms of language, culture, and musical practice), Diali seizes upon caricatures that have been established over centuries of colonial interaction in order to let the audience’s preconceptions, misplaced as they are, fill in the gaps.

4.3.3 Take 3: The Incident of the Tip Jar and the Kora Calabash (or From Patronage to Playing for Tips)

May 30, 2021. Setting: A backyard birthday party on the outskirts of Pittsboro, North Carolina.

As the band is finishing setting up under the shade of a couple of popup tents, Diali wanders over to the host to ask if she’d put the tip jar on a higher table so it can better be seen by the audience.

Diali tells her, “I need to make some money for my family for my trip back to Senegal in July, so I’m going to do my griot thing.”

“What does ‘doing your griot thing mean?’ she asks, looking a bit apprehensive.

"You'll see later," Diali says.

Midway through the first set, once the music is cooking, Diali turns towards me and shouts: "I'm going to go do my griot thing!"

He springs from his seat as the music plays on, carrying the glass pitcher with a piece of paper reading "TIPS" taped to its side, and heads out into the audience. As Diali moves amongst the crowd, people fumble for their wallets. The tip jar begins filling up. He hands it over and lets the jar begin to circulate through the crowd under its own energy as he makes his way back to the stage. Diali takes the mic in hand and sings his thanks to the audience.

At the conclusion of the set, I observe Diali reach into the tip jar, balling the money into his right hand and thrusting it into the circular hole cut into his kora's calabash body.

"Hey man, what are doing?" the band's drummer Austin asks.

"What do you mean?" Diali replies coyly.

Austin peers down into the hole in the calabash. Seeing green, he grasps some of the cash and pulls it to the surface before dropping it. "You gonna share that with the band?"

No response from Diali. A few minutes later he exits the scene, tips secured in his calabash.

A series of phone calls ensued that evening, layered with a decade's worth of band history. Old hurts rose to the surface. This was another in a long record of moments where misunderstanding – partly informed by cultural difference, partly

informed by personalities, partly informed by circumstance, privilege, and history – surged dramatically to the surface.

Austin said he felt disrespected that Diali didn't share the tip money. Austin often feels disrespected because Diali treats him as a "young brother" – sometimes dismissively, sometimes condescendingly, sometimes dutifully. Percussionist Will shared that he was tired of having to navigate these misunderstandings time and again.

I suggested to Austin that, if it would make him feel better, he should call Diali and tell him how he was feeling. Evidently this was a difficult conversation. Moments later Diali called me in tears: "I'm not going to let money destroy my band and my relationships. You guys are like family to me. Never in my life have one of you said that I stole money from anyone, that I took anything from anyone." Diali clearly felt hurt that Austin had misinterpreted his actions. While Austin may have been careful to say he didn't feel as if Diali had stolen anything, the implication was enough.

I told them both that it reminded me of the sneakers.

I recalled a rehearsal several months earlier. Diali strode over to the door where all our shoes were piled up, spotting the brand-new pair of green and black Reeboks I had bought a few days prior. Diali put them on and wore them out the door. "Hey where you going with my shoes?" I called out after him. "These? Aren't these my shoes?" he had said mischievously.

I let the shoes go. Now every time he wears the shoes, I comment along the lines of, “Hey, nice shoes! Where did you get those? I like them.”

Perhaps this story helps make sense of the Incident of the Tip Jar and the Kora Calabash. In the moment Diali absconded with my sneakers, several layers of our relationship came to the surface. Diali asserted his seniority and sense of entitlement – he as the elder should be entitled to deferral in certain moments. At the same time, Diali’s action invited me into an act of generosity. I obliged by letting him keep the sneakers. Since then, the shoes have become a bond between the two of us, a reminder of our interlaced lives. It was a moment of our becoming more like family and less like colleagues. Diali has always talked about wanting the band to be like a family, and this was a moment where we inched closer in that direction.

I reminded Austin of this story that night, as we talked on the phone, and told him that before Diali had headed out into the crowd he had told me that he planned to “do his griot thing.” I reminded Austin that this is precisely how jalolu have scratched out a living for generations: by willing people to thrust a handful of currency into a calabash. This tradition is deeply instilled in Diali’s sense of self and of cultural belonging. Though it bears a surface-level similarity to the function of a tip jar in American bar band culture, the calabash is wholly distinct in terms of its heritage and cultural significance.

Diali needed money to support his family back home and – looking for an immediate infusion of cash rather than waiting for the paycheck from the gig – put a twist on his patrimonial rite. In that moment, “doing his griot thing” meant leveraging his social position for the material support of his family in M’ Bour. He stepped from the stage and walked into the audience, this gesture gently interrogating the audience:

Do you see what I’m doing up here on the stage? Do you appreciate what I’m sharing with you? Then please reciprocate to the best of your ability.

In this situation, Diali leverages his patrimony in the context of an audience uninitiated about its customs. Unable to engage in the reciprocal rite of exchange, Diali instead puts a twist on it. Not *jaliya* in the proper sense, but Diali “doing his griot thing.” He’s making do, and doing the best he can, given the constraints of the situation.

Later Austin called to say that he had spoken to Diali again that evening and that everything was patched up. He said they discussed this distinction between a griot circulating his calabash and what a tip jar means here in the US. “I told him that in the US the tip jar is for the band. Now I know that tip jars can be something else entirely. I understand now, and I apologized. It just sucks not being in the know about this kind of stuff... not knowing what it means.”

That’s just what the band has worked to figure out over the years: how to come to know one another by negotiating countless misunderstandings, like disappearing

sneakers and emptied tip jars. It's a committed practice of navigating Anna Tsing's "zones of awkward engagement" (A.L. Tsing 2011, xi), the "missed encounters, clashes, misfires, and confusions" (A. Tsing 2000, 338) that make up "global linkages" such as ours.

4.4 Figuring Race and the Griot in US Music Industry Discourse

Seeking to build a performing career for Diali, and for the band, I have observed varying modes through which the music industry understood and narrated Diali and his art. His heritage, artistic strengths, and personality are key; but his Blackness, his "African" heritage, his performing dress, and the fact that his bandmates are all white are often equally, if not more, relevant to the way the industry understands him.

US music industry workers typically have little-to-no context for the specifics of his practice of jaliya. Rather, Diali is often perceived and portrayed as a quintessentially "African" figure, with attending cultural stereotypes related to physicality and spirituality. The music industry has a long history of portraying African figures as irrevocably tied to the past and from a distant and largely unknowable place (Garcia 2017; Miller 2010). In many of the predominantly white spaces Diali moves through, he is taken as a representative figure for "diversity."

Ultimately, Diali's perception by the US music industry is inseparable from America's unique conception and practice of racial ordering. A fundamental belief in the

logic of racial difference often lurks at the core of how music industry workers figure Diali and the band. Even as music industry workers pass the buck, arguing that these racial frames are not of their own making, nor ones they themselves believe in, their sentiments nevertheless express the fundamental ways in which race shapes American perceptions of musical expression.

Following his immigration from Senegal, the identity of “Black” was stamped upon the matrix of Diali’s personhood for the first time. In Senegal, Diali’s overlapping identities—as a jali, as Manding, as a man, as a musician—operated relatively free of considerations of skin color. But in America his racialized identity is central to how he is perceived and interpreted by the world around him, including by the music industry.

Diali often expresses resentment with regard to this newfound experience. During performances he regularly preaches on the unreality of racial difference, promoting a “unity” message that, at times, comes across as naïve to American audiences accustomed to the lived realities of race in America. To live in America is to be subject to a social reality structured around racial difference, with its attendant hierarchies and violence. For Diali, his realization of the American obsession with racial difference was the foundational shock of his immigrant experience. He often references this shock, both in conversation and in performance.

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“When I came to America, what I saw scared me,” he says from the stage at a city-sponsored event in the small, predominantly white city of Hickory, NC. “I almost went back home, but my wife kept me here. She said, ‘Stay’. Before I moved to the US I thought America was a place where people cared about each other, understood each other, loved each other. That’s what I thought.” He raises his arm, bent at the elbow so his gently held fist faces the evening sky. He points to his forearm. “But I found out people care about the color... Black, white, blue—does it have to matter? I thought we were human.”

Diali pauses to consider if he should go on, perhaps recalling the time he was stopped in a gated neighborhood by a resident wanting to know who he was as he was en route to a performance just down the street. Or the difficult conversations he’s had with his son about being teased about the color of his skin at school. He forges ahead and says, “I’m never the kind of person who hangs out after a gig. I go home—my band will tell you—as soon as I’m done, I go home to my family. Once when I was leaving a festival we were playing, the police pulled me over for no reason. I was alone and I barely knew English then. They pulled me out of the car. They looked inside my mouth and searched in my pockets. They wanted to know if I had any weed. I’ve never smoked weed in my life, never drink any alcohol. Swear to God. I promised my mom that. These police held me for like two hours before they let me go home. They did this because I’m Black. Because of my hair. Because of my skin color.” He pauses and looks out at the stunned-looking rural North Carolina audience. “I thought we all came from the same direction. I thought

we all going to the same direction. So why color and skin matter?" He clutches his chest. "I think it's the heart," he says, returning to a more comfortable theme. "Look around at this band. You hear this music? You can't play music like this if your heart is not beautiful. Keep peace and love." Diali lifts his head, signaling the band back in.

The signification of his band's name, Kaira Ba — meaning "peace and love" — is a touchstone for Diali's orations about the unreality of racial difference. However, his aspirations for racial healing are often out of step with his own lived experience of American life.

As I discuss below, the music industry in the US is structured at every turn by an old and abiding interest in mediating racial difference. The dehumanizing caricature of the minstrel show has given way, today, to greater space for autonomy in Black cultural representation, as Black artists and music industry workers have gained greater control of the industry. Within the multi-culturalist imagination of the predominantly white world music industry, interest in African artists often does not subvert the logic of racial hierarchy but simply shifts it into another frame. As bell hooks writes,

The acknowledged Other must assume recognizable forms. Hence, it is not African American culture formed in resistance to contemporary situations that surfaces, but nostalgic evocation of a "glorious" past. And even though the focus is often on the ways that this past was "superior" to the present, this cultural narrative relies on stereotypes of the "primitive," even as it eschews the term, to evoke a world where black people were in harmony with nature and with one another. This narrative

is linked to white western conceptions of the dark Other, not to a radical questioning of those representations (hooks 2012, 370).

hooks articulates the racial ideologies that often underlie music industry interpretations of Diali and his art. His practice of jaliya, and its celebration of a centuries-old Mande heritage, signals to tropes of Diali's "glorious" yet "primitive" past. "Contemporary longing for the 'primitive,'" hooks argues, "is expressed by the projection onto the Other of a sense of plenty, bounty, a field of dreams" (ibid, 369). In his engagements with the music industry, Diali's life and art at times become a surface for the projection of journalists', audiences', and music industry workers' "field[s] of dreams," or as Agawu would have it, "fantasy and imaginative play" (Agawu 1995, 384).

The following analysis of Diali's portrayal in the industry is intersected by a contrapuntal reading of Diali's collaboration with a white American backing band. This complicates and reframes our initial reading of the griot figure in the music industry. Exploring this second layer reveals how the music industry's long-established attitudes of racial essentialism, as mediated by aesthetics, are troubled, and at times confounded by, a collaboration that extends across race, ethnicity, language, and nationality. Seeking to bridge the space of this perceived disjuncture, music industry workers project their conceptions of racial difference as a means of filling the gap.

In 2020, the North Carolina Folk Festival hired the band to film a “livestream” during the COVID-19 pandemic. The festival chose the new Greensboro Rotary Carousel as a backdrop for this performance. The vintage-style merry-go-round created a curious backdrop for the high-production values of the taping. A journalist covering the performance for *O. Henry Magazine* caught the band for an impromptu interview in the parking lot. He asked several questions and snapped a few photographs. After taking a photograph of our substitute guitarist for the day, he asked for Gabriele Pelli’s name and jotted it on his note pad. He paused, puzzled for a way to associate the name with the photo. He mumbled to himself, “I’ll just say white man wearing a suit.” He walked away then, leaving us to consider his presumption of Gabriele’s racial identity (his mother is African American and his father Italian Swiss). Given this interaction, it was unsurprising that the magazine article, when it appeared in print, focused plainly on the journalist’s own perception of an incongruity within the band based on race. His own general conceptions of racial difference shaped his interpretation of the music and structured his descriptions of the scene.

At the announcement, Diali Cissokho (pronounced “Djelly See-so-ko), sporting a colorful tunic in contrast to the black-clad production crew, strides down an embankment to the “stage” with its spectacular backdrop of horses, a majestic tiger and 54 other elaborately hand-carved and painted creatures of The Rotary Club of Greensboro Carousel that opened last month at Greensboro Science Center. Cissokho, a native of

Senegal who makes Pittsboro his home, hoists a kora, an instrument made from a hollowed-out calabash (bottle gourd), and positions it so the strings on its unusually long neck are facing him. Meanwhile the members of his band Kaira Ba, who look like any other dudes you might see in a Southern jam band, take up their own instruments (O.Henry Magazine 2020).

Obliquely narrating racial difference as the frame for the scene, the journalist uses musical style as a substitute for explicit descriptions of his perception of fundamental racialized difference. The author conflates Southerness with whiteness. What else would suggest to him that the mostly white members of the band look like “dudes you might see in a Southern jam band”? Indeed, the whole band wore formal attire. Diali and Will both wore colorful print boubous from Senegal. Gabriele and I both wore three-piece suits (dress pants, coats, vests and all). The drummer Austin wore slacks and a button-down dress shirt. While the journalist appears determined not to mention his reading of the band’s racial configuration explicitly, he alludes to it through proxy language. Whiteness is glossed as “Southern jam band dudes.” He ignores that the percussionist also sported a “colorful tunic,” choosing to use the tunic as a proxy for describing Diali’s Otherness. By setting Diali in contradistinction to the rest of the band, he establishes Blackness as both the outlier and the fetish in this visual representation.

In his telling, Diali is but a visitor to North Carolina, while he is in fact a permanent resident living with his wife and kids in Pittsboro with no intention of

leaving save for brief visits back to Senegal. For this journalist, Diali's "native" home is true home, and it elsewhere. This is but one example of how contemporary music journalism inscribes the segregation of sound through proxies, alluding indirectly to the industry's obsession with racial difference. The above account, written from the perspective of a white journalist enculturated into the field of American racial identity, fails to escape a fundamental belief in racial difference. In writing Diali into this narrative, the journalist's essentializing notions of racial difference further link race with geography: Diali's Blackness affirms his Africanness. The other band members' whiteness affirm their Southernness.

As the band began the work of making a name for itself in local, regional, and national music industry networks, I assumed roles that put me in direct contact with a variety of music industry workers: publicists, music journalists, "talent buyers" (people who book artists for venues), managers, booking agents, promoters. Working as the band's lead producer on our album *Routes* (2018), which we recorded both in North Carolina and Senegal, and as co-producer on the prior releases, I gained insight into the studio process and the ways in which the political and social is navigated through the aesthetic in the context of recorded sound, and how all of that is, in turn, narrated for the music marketplace.

Within the world music industry in the US, performing opportunities are typically brokered by booking agents with longstanding ties to “buyers” representing particular organizations or venues. Performing Arts Centers (PACs) and large music festivals tend to be the most profitable venues for presenting international music. Even the most renowned *jali* artists—such as Toumani Diabaté, Bassekou Kouyate, or Kassé Mady Diabaté (see Chapters 2 and 3)—would struggle to make a national tour profitable without the support of PACs and festivals. The audience for this music is not broad enough to draw productively without the marketing infrastructure provided by these types of performance settings. Such venues rely on a built-in audience, and sometimes season ticket holders, who trust the curatorial instincts at the top of the organization.

The “buyers” who book musicians onto their stage(s) often come to know of international musicians at music industry conferences. These gatherings facilitate commerce between “buyers” (representing venues) and “agents” (representing artists). Music industry operatives regularly attend conferences such as WOMEX in Europe, Folk Alliance in Canada, and in the US the Association of Performing Arts Professions (APAP), Arts Midwest, Western Arts Alliance, and the Performing Arts Exchange, among others, in order to sustain and grow their professional network. A microcosm of these national and international gatherings plays out on the state level, at regional

gatherings such as the North Carolina Presenters Consortium, held yearly in Durham, North Carolina.

By 2014 Diali and the band had created a solid footprint around North Carolina, playing at festivals large and small, concert halls, and in night clubs. The group received positive press write-ups for its first two album release – *Resonance* (2012) and *The Great Peace* (2014). In 2014 the band was nominated for an AFRIMA Award in the category “Best African Group/Duo/Band.” Presented in partnership with the African Union and various music industry actors across the continent, AFRIMA is a yearly award ceremony that aspires to be a space for “the ultimate recognition of African music in the world” (AFRIMA 2021). The AFRIMA committee had discovered the band’s song “Mbolo (Unity)” from the *The Great Peace*; it was circulating on the Internet and broadcast on Senegalese radio. Only later did the AFRIMA committee discover that the group was based in North Carolina and was composed of a Senegalese singer/korist and four white North Carolinians. They were surprised when we alerted them to this fact but allowed us to remain in the running for the award. The band was scheduled to travel to Lagos for the red-carpet ceremony, a plan that was sadly called off due to the Ebola crisis taking hold at the time in Nigeria. In the end, the voting went forward, and Kaira Ba lost in the category to Nigerian R&B identical-twin-brother duo superstars, P-Square.

Nevertheless, the nomination affirmed the creative labor Diali and the band had put into the collaboration.

Despite this international recognition, in the US, the band struggled to break into a larger network of performing opportunities. The group felt we would be well-served by an agent linked to the music industry who might help us grow beyond the band's regional appeal in North Carolina. We began courting a major agent who represents African artists in the US. A friend of the band, who was the buyer at the time for a local music festival, reached out to the agent to gauge his interest. His response:

Thanks [REDACTED], I like them, but three things are a handbrake I'm sorry to say:

1. without a label, I'd be doing the heavy lifting
2. presenters will ask me, "are all members African?" I hate the question but that's what gets asked.
3. Finally, I haven't seen them but you should advise them to play Baltimore next fall...at the PAE conference.

His indication that presenters would want to know if all the band members are African resonated with the fundamental challenge we'd run into marketing the band. On the one hand, Diali's heritage as a griot was a primary story of the band. This narrative is about deep cultural history on the African continent, in its most simplistic telling, a decidedly local story. The agent's concern about the marketability of a trans-Atlantic band stems from a perception that Diali's musical practice is located at a spatial and temporal distance. It is tethered to an elsewhere not of the present moment – a

“centuries-old heritage,” as the media often describes griot musical practice. This agent judges that potential buyers would find Diali’s presence as at odds with that of his white American band. To see an African immigrant musician on stage with white North Carolinians reads not as an unremarkable outgrowth of Diali’s immigrant experience, but rather as a juxtaposition—this interpretation conditioned by engrained cultural conceptions of racial difference.

Undeterred, I worked to get the band onto an off-site “showcase” at the Performing Arts Exchange in Baltimore, as the agent had suggested. The “buyer” for a major local series in North Carolina, another friend of the band, said he’d try his best to bring the agent to our performance at PAE. So, the band made the trip to Baltimore and played the show. I noticed our friend and the agent slip into the venue as we were about to take the stage, but they disappeared before I had a chance to speak with them. So, I followed up by email with the agent later that week and received this response:

Hi Jonathan,
I was there...here's the thing: I'm not the right agent for you. You guys sound great but I don't have the capacity to build your band's live career at this stage of my agent life and commit the resources of time and labor. Your show is great for clubs and festivals but the real money is at PAC's [Performing Arts Centers].

The decision is purely mercenary, financial. This is how the booking world works - you being based here means you will get paid less than a crap band from abroad and I'll make more money selling that crap band for a higher fee. Faced with this choice - and with 2 kids and a wife - I'm going where the easier money is. Sad but true.

Things change and you developing a rabid, loyal, large fanbase changes things most of all. I hope you do and then I'll be able to revisit my decision. Assuming you don't already hate me now and forever.

Thanks, regards. ■■■

Several common points appear in the agent's two emails. First, the explicit concern with financial gain, and more specifically, financial gain with minimal effort. Diali's career was in its relatively early stages and the band hadn't received the type of institutional support from booking agents and record labels that would help it be more widely known. The agent is operating as an individual business entity, and he judged the band to be an unwise investment of his time. What is most striking about his correspondence, however, is the way it articulates his reluctance to represent a cross-national band. The booking agent argues that Diali and his band are less valuable than a band based abroad. As I spoke with other managers and booking agents, I was told in similarly direct terms that the fees garnered for performances from African musicians from the continent are reliably higher than those for artists based in the United States. Representatives from two different management companies told me that it is a particular challenge to market a predominantly white band with an African lead singer. "It's not Europe," one told me. "The American obsession with race is deep" another said (personal communication, WOMEX 2019, Tampere, Finland).

The agent's correspondence further gestures towards the currency of foreign musicians as exotic representation of local musical forms. The "African" musician should come from elsewhere, not from within the borders of this nation, in order to be an authentic representation of the Other. This ideological commitment to privileging cultural purity in relation to "local" music traces back to the very origins of the American music industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Karl Hagstrom Miller argues that notions of authenticity in the American music industry have, since its inception, taken shape through ideologies of race and difference (Miller 2010). In *Segregating Sound*, he examines the parallel manufacture of "race records" and "old time music" in the 1920s, arguing that the sonic color line was both expressive and constitutive of Jim Crow segregation. Operating with early twentieth-century logics of racial difference, Black music was *constructed* as a field entirely distinct from white music. Miller documents how phonograph companies sought to construct racialized genres. Discs of "old time music" and "race music" were presented and numbered contrarily, to allow Southern record distributors to adhere to Jim Crow norms of segregation within white-run establishments. The scouts and producers who recorded music in the US South took measures to maintain the illusion of divergent and discrete cultures (though, of course, the reality was, in many cases, quite different).

The segregation of recorded sound under Jim Crow had its parallel in the development of the international recording industry, which occurred around the same time. Phonograph companies utilized outposts around the world, producing music for local markets. Miller describes that in these settings, the recording industry produced a concept of local music as “a thing apart” from the West, refusing to record music in the Global South that bore any trace of “Western” influence. By doing so the recording industry reinforced, as Miller puts it, “the superiority of the West ... and the Western tendency to hear foreign sounds through the prism of exoticism” (Miller 2010, 186) For Miller, “local music” developed through a “process of erasure” (ibid), in tandem with folkloric notions of distinct customs and folkways.

The disciplines of ethnomusicology, comparative musicology, anthropology and folklore all contributed to the production of racialized “authenticity” through sound, as practitioners built archives of field recordings, which were amassed most significantly during the middle of the twentieth century. These recordings were held by individuals, institutions and record labels, locked away and only selectively released for academic or commercial ends. Intersecting with the business of recorded sound, academic fields of study offered further justification for this sonic demarcation of race by way of studies arguing in favor of distinct and fixed racial and ethnic practices of music-making. Miller makes the compelling argument that these divisions were lines drawn by power, as the

music-making practices of the era were, in actuality, far more heterogeneous (Miller 2010).

Diali's practice as a griot musician in the US is circumscribed by these histories. His performance of jaliya is read as "a thing apart" from American music. His musical expression emanates from a geographic and temporal distance. To consider his collaboration with other North Carolina-based musicians as a natural product of the immigrant experience would be to challenge fixed notions of the "local" and the "authentic." It would be to challenge the American logic of racial difference, and the idea that an essential Africanness rests at the heart of Diali's musical practice.

Writing about the debate over African retentions in Black Atlantic music, Paul Gilroy argues that "the syncretic complexity of black expressive cultures alone supplies powerful reasons for resisting the idea that an untouched, pristine Africanity resides inside these forms, working a powerful magic in order to trigger repeatedly the perception of absolute identity" (Gilroy 1993, 101). Gilroy explicitly rejects the essentialist notion of "pristine Africanity" in Black music. For him,

this involves the difficult task of striving to comprehend the reproduction of cultural traditions not in the unproblematic transmission of a fixed essence through time but in the breaks and interruptions which suggest that the invocation of tradition may itself be a distinct, though covert, response to the destabilizing flux of the post-contemporary world. New traditions have been invented in the jaws of modern experience and new conceptions of modernity produced in the long shadow of our enduring traditions – the African ones and the ones forged from the slave

experience which the black vernacular so powerfully and actively remembers (ibid).

Diali's immigration to the US forged new directions in his musical practice.

While he seeks to remain true to core aspects of his musical heritage, his collaborations with US musicians has brought new form and structure to his patrimonial art.

A narrative built along these lines relies on nuance that was often lost among promoters, journalists and booking agents who said repeatedly that the main obstacle for marketing the band was the ways in which the band's racial configuration posed a problem for reconciling key music industry logics related to "time, space and race," as David Garcia puts in in *Listening for Africa: Freedom, Modernity, and the Logic of Black Music's African Origins* (Garcia 2017, 19). I received the following correspondence in 2016 from a publicist seeking to promote a new music video released by Diali and the band.

Well again man, to be totally honest, it's not exactly on the 'hip side' This could turn into a long email, but to keep it brief...when you mix white guys with African music, it can be quite hit and miss, and more than likely miss... They usually don't have the best response and it's possibly because they're not 'authentic enough'. Again, these aren't my feelings, but ones I've come to hear from a lot of journalists.

Another problem – These types of bands tend to do ok in the 'younger white crowd' whereas our goal at [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] are more geared towards the 'older crowd' which are the guys at the major major publications, know what I mean?

Meanwhile take someone like Noura Mint Seymali. She absolutely KILLS it in the press world, even though they have a white American drummer.

But that music is hard not to like, Mauritanian with American rock elements?

Then you have someone like Janka Nabay, again some white folks mixed in, with an African lead singer. They tend to do well, but that dude is quite eccentric and brings a lot of press himself you know?

Then back to my original hip statement, there is some very weird line between 'traditional' and 'hip' and then the whole miss in between of joining the two. Sometimes something extremely traditional and extremely African does well. Other times it's just TOO traditional and that crowd is very small. Most of the time though [REDACTED], [REDACTED], etc. they're really looking for that 'hip' angle, something new fresh upbeat...

One note on all of this ... remember this is America. An entirely different beast with 'world music' then any other country out there.

White. African. Young. Old. Traditional. Hip. Not authentic enough. The publicist's email presents a tangle of logics that flow from the racialized inheritances of the US music industry. Like any cultural ideology, these logics of "time, space and race" (Garcia 2017, 19) are self-perpetuating forces within the cultural discourse of the US music industry. In contrasting "hip" with "traditional" the agent taps into well-worn tropes of the traditional and the modern. The tradition-modernity binary is topoi in journalistic writing about folk music from around world, a distinction set up to position certain musical cultures as temporally dislocated from the present. Music industry marketing and writing pull relentlessly on this binary trope.

David Garcia argues that “the geographic places where black music and dance were believed to have originated (Africa) and still survived (Caribbean and South America) were separate in every possible way – socially, economically, and temporally included – from the modern city or metropolis” (Garcia 2017, 9). While his study focused specifically on the period between the 1930s and 1950s, it is instructive for imagining how “modernity’s systems of power – time, space, and race” (Garcia 2017, 19) spill into the present. Thinking with Garcia, the publicist’s observation that there is a line between the traditional and the hip (read: modern) speaks to the music industry’s inclination to parse categories of difference along temporal lines.

Diali, in his move from West Africa to the United States, traversed not only the geographic space separating Senegal and North Carolina, but also an imagined temporal distance between the pre-modern and the modern. Some music journalists wrote more carefully about Diali’s cosmopolitan experience, such as when music critic Robert Christgau described the band’s third album *Routes* as “a genuinely and often beautifully syncretic evocation of a double identity.” Christgau’s piece acknowledges the realities of movement and mutual influence, and the specificity of Diali’s migration story as operating against historical time. Diali’s “double identity” as a Senegalese griot and a North Carolinian positions him in just the space the previous publicist described as the “miss” between the traditional and the hip. However, for Christgau, that “syncretic”

“miss” is a productive and creative space, one that eludes an easy narrative within the ossified racial logics of the music industry.

Notions of musical purity (glossed as “traditional” in the publicist’s email above) are directly tied to notions of racial purity in the music industry, articulated through the operating logic of “authenticity.” The publicist’s email makes an honest assessment of the ways in which a multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-national band such as Kaira Ba is likely to puzzle the music industry. The rebuke, “not authentic enough,” suggests that for Diali to present a successful narrative of musical authenticity, he would be wise not to stray from the cultural tradition he was born into. That is to say, he would be wise to keep his musical expressions rooted in the past, not in his present. The implication is that his path through the music industry would be a smoother one were his band mates from the same cultural background as he. This perspective overlooks the realities of migration and the connectivity of today’s world; it fixes Diali’s cultural tradition as a phenomenon of the past, not the present.

4.5 The Griot in the Black Atlantic

Against such misperceptions the band has sought to construct a narrative that would make our collaboration legible to a broader US audience. When we were ready to make our third album, beginning in June 2016, we dreamt big. After a series of discussions we planned a recording to be produced on two sides of the Atlantic, in

North Carolina and Senegal. It would intertwine sounds of these two places, at once distant but connected by the historical, musical, political, and cultural linkages between the two places. We'd focus attention on the two sites from which our musical collaboration springs.

In my role as manager and producer for the album, I set out to reframe some of the narrative blocks described in the preceding sections. I wondered what story this album might tell, and how that story might shape the public narrative of the band. In interviews with other world music industry personnel, they spoke of how intertwined sound and story is in world music record production and promotion. It's often a good story that activates the lines of transmission. The story is what helps the music find the ears of an audience.

Ben Mandelson said that when trying to bring public attention to an artist or album release, "All the journalists will tell you the same thing, which is: 'it sounds great but what's the story?' So, part of your artistic output is the story. It's a terribly important thing, and it's quite tough because some things don't have a story...and some things are just story, and the music is the soundtrack to the story" (Mandelson 2018).

National boundaries are often used to signal towards specific cultural traditions and musical styles. When world music producer and record label head Chris Eckman considers which artists to work with, he's particularly interested in the "idea of place being

something that contributes to what you do. Artists have to have a strong sense of place for me," he said. "That's something that I always loved about roots music...that it came from some place" (Eckman 2020). So, how to tell the story of a project that comes from no single place, but rather from a bipartite geography?

Mandelson describes the challenges of marketing cross-cultural collaborations such as Kaira Ba's. "I think the cards are stacked against you in a cross-cultural project, because people are looking for the successes and failures of the approach, not the result," he said when I interviewed him (Mandelson 2018). Just as the North Carolina journalist cited above took racial difference as the starting point for his article about the band, Mandelson observes that cross-cultural projects are often evaluated based on the ways in which difference is framed and negotiated in sound and story.

Elaborating, Mandelson asserted that when journalists write "about a band who all grew up together in a certain place and play a certain kind of music, [they] don't look for fault lines on the basis of their background because it's not manifest" (ibid). As the story of the journalist above indicates, internalized conceptions of racial and cultural difference surface in how a project is interpreted and narrated. Mandelson went on to describe the hazards of a contrived cross-cultural collaboration:

The other issue with all these cross-cultural projects is that a proportion of them are generated for the purpose of being cross-cultural, not for the purpose of being artists, and they never stick together. They're generated for the purposes of satisfying a grant writing application or a hands-

across-the-sea, cultural ambassadorship thing. You put people together — you're from here, you're from here, you're from here — play together, and let's get something as a symbol of music unifying humankind. That's a pretty tough thing to do (ibid).

Mandelson concludes that “projects by design don't always work. They have to be organic first” (ibid).

The world music producer is impelled to manage a dual imperative: produce a coherent articulation alongside a story that will help the music travel. And this must be done with sensitivity to the how racialized conceptions within the music industry are likely to surface in journalistic and commercial engagements. Reflecting on the disjuncture that journalists, booking agents and managers described reading into the band's Senegal-North Carolina configuration, I resorted to my scholarly interests — and pitched the idea of framing our band's recording as a story of musical circulation in the Black Atlantic.

Since the publication of Gilroy's landmark *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Gilroy 1993), scholars have explored local music practices against the cultural history of the Black Atlantic (Feld 2012a; Dubois 2016; Sakakeeny 2013; Rivera-Rideau 2015; Perry 2016; Appert 2018; Veal 2007). In his coinage of *the Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy celebrates the multi-directional and multi-layered movement of music and culture in the Atlantic world. He argues against the “purist idea of one-directional flow of African culture from east to west” (96) and calls racial authenticity

vis-à-vis musical signs into question. Gilroy's book, and subsequent works drawing inspiration from it, offer capacious models for understanding the African diaspora as a transatlantic "circulatory system" (Sakakeeny 2013)—a fertile and complex geography, always in a state of creative flux and cultural becoming.

A basic intent of *The Black Atlantic* is to reshape our understanding of the Atlantic world in a manner that transgresses both nationalism and a view of the diaspora that tethers the Atlantic world to an essentialized African past. It challenges us to think about Africa not just as a source of cultural material for music in the Americas, but as a node in a great network of cultural exchange. Most famously, Gilroy was more interested in the "routes" along which culture travels and develops than in it being overdetermined by its "roots."

Such a framing lent itself well to the band's recording project—one made possible by Diali's own transatlantic migration. We agreed that we would attempt to convey this narrative through the music itself: In North Carolina we'd record the basic tracks for the album along with overdubs from gospel singers, pedal steel B3 organ players, a string quartet and a horn section. In Senegal, the sounds of soruba and sabar percussion ensembles, talking drum, balafon, singers. The music for the record took influence from a range of styles forged in the Black Atlantic—blues, mbalax, and African rumba (a tradition that itself emerged from the circulation of Cuban 78s to west-central

Africa in the 1920s and 30s). The album would interweave field recordings of the two settings in which we'd recorded, opening with cicadas from a summer evening in North Carolina and closing with nightfall in the quiet streets on the outskirts of M'Bour. The musical repertoire would include Mande classics, original compositions of Diali's, as well as collaborative pieces written by the band.

As the record producer, my aim was both to make audible the specific story of our collaboration, the way it bridges these geographies, and to call attention to the histories and musical legacies that underlie the sounds arising from it. Perhaps presenting a transatlantic narrative might challenge rigid music industry conceptions of authenticity that tether an artist like Diali to exoticism and temporalized notions of tradition, while also attenuating skeptical responses to a collaboration that spans race, language, and country of origin.

In producing the album, I faced an unwieldy set of jobs: making budgets, booking travel, and arranging for musicians to show up (which they often did, miraculously!). I wrote grants and string quartet arrangements, and documented the process with photographs. But mostly, I sought to manage the various aesthetic perspectives voiced by the five of us in the band as well as by dozens of additional musicians with whom we collaborated. The process was a major undertaking and, at times, a joy. Musicians listened closely to one another across time and space and

contributed to something beautiful. The recording brought our split geographies closer as we spent time in Senegal collaborating with Diali's family and musician network there. We dreamt of bringing the full transatlantic ensemble to tour in the US.

In the lead-up to the album's release, I worked with a prominent publicity company to craft a press release that would guide the writing of journalists taking an interest in the album. It was striking how the basic themes of the press release, and at times the verbatim language, were imported wholesale into the several dozen articles our financial investment in the press agency garnered.

Working to assemble the press release, I recorded my thoughts on the Black Atlantic character of our project as audio messages, which I shared with the publicity agent in charge of writing the 1300-word press release. My comments to her demonstrate my attempts to distill an artistic and narrative vision for the album and to frame the project within a Black Atlantic context.

The title of the record, *Routes*, refers to the various paths that have brought our music into being. There is, of course, a larger narrative of exchange between West Africa and North America via the slave trade. But musical migrations continue today, and Diali's story really exemplifies that. And so this musical exchange back and forth across the Atlantic is really what we're trying to get at by the title *Routes*.

I elaborated that we hoped to take Gilroy's framing as a way of shifting the emphasis from Diali's cultural tradition as the sole guiding motivation for the project in order to explore how the music is "shaped by the series of interactions, a series of

exchanges, a series of routes that the music has traveled – from West Africa, through the Caribbean, through the southern United States.”

Here, in seeking to frame the project in a manner that celebrates the transatlantic character of the music, I also downplay the significance of Diali’s patrimonial heritage in shaping the band’s music. The narrative became less about Diali and more about the band as a cross-cultural project. Reacting to the marketing challenges the band encountered in navigating the US music industry, I set out to shift the conversation. I drew on my scholarly interest in the Black Atlantic to find a way out of the essentializing narratives that had constrained Diali and the band’s career. However, the perspective I developed could also be considered as a further splitting of Diali’s musical heritage from the public narrative. The specificity of Diali’s voice (returning again to hooks) was downplayed on this record in order to tell a hopeful narrative of a wider transatlantic migration and collaboration.

4.6 Coda

Diali’s migration to the US has reshaped his expressive practice and indeed the totality of his life in profound ways. Yet, he has clung tightly to his *fasiya*, determined to stay true to the guidance his mom gave him before her death: “No matter where you go, stay who you are.”

Diali remains deeply connected to his friends and family in Senegal. Late night conversations. Trips to Western Union to wire money when a kid is sick, or a holiday is around the corner. He's built a compound for his family in Senegal, and a ten-bedroom house for himself.

But for now, he stays rooted in Pittsboro, notwithstanding the occasional visit back to his ancestral home. He hosts a djembe class at his house in Pittsboro every Sunday (these days featuring his five-year-old son on dunduns). He regularly plays music at a nursing home. He puts his kids to bed at night. He slaughters a goat each year for Tabaski. In any small town in North Carolina, on any given night, he can get an audience to its feet for a round of African Yoga.

Diali often tells the band he has a grand vision. "Inshallah, this dream is going to come true," he says. What's the vision (we always wonder)? "It's a secret," he says. "One day everybody is going to find out."

5. Producing Mande Music: A Sonic Exposition

Practice-based research in ethnomusicology has shaped the historical foundation of the field. Most prominently, such research projects have taken the form of musical apprenticeship as a means of learning about the details of an expressive practice within an ethnographic context (P. Berliner 1993; P.F. Berliner and Magaya 2020; P.F. Berliner 2019; Feld 2012a; Baily 2001; Lemmens 2012). As early as 1960, Mantle Hood proposed “bimusicality” as a key methodological approach in the field (Hood 1960, 1982). While my own approach diverges in certain ways from these models, they nevertheless inform how I pursued researching and writing this dissertation.

Over the years ethnomusicologists have widened the scope of practice-based research to involve participant observation outside of performative and pedagogical settings—for instance, by working in, or observing the goings on of, recording studios (Bates 2016; Bennet and Bates 2018; Pras et al. 2019; Meintjes 2003b; Scales 2012), or by studying commercial practices within record labels or other music industry sites (Taylor 1997; Whitmore 2020). My experience—both as a recordist-producer, and as the primary interface between a Mande musician living in the US and the music industry—has offered numerous vantage points for my study. By including the recordings I produced in these contexts as a component of my dissertation, I join a chorus of scholars who call

for broader academic acceptance of multi-modal scholarship beyond the written word (McKerrell 2021; Durán 2011; N.S. Loveless 2015; N. Loveless 2016, 2019; Carson 2017; Feld and Ricci 2015).

The following recordings were produced and recorded by the author in M'Bour Senegal in November and December 2019, except for the album *Routes* that was recorded in both M'Bour and North Carolina in 2016 and 2017 and the live videos from the Cat's Cradle which were produced in North Carolina in 2018. I present these recordings as evidence of the techniques and strategies of transparent mediation described in Chapter 2 and in relation to my analysis of Lucy Durán's public scholarship, discussed in Chapter 3. This collection of recordings aims to accomplish many of the same goals specified in those chapters, including raising the profile of Mande music and musicians and contributing to collaborators' avenues for livelihoods. The recordings that comprise this chapter were all produced in the context of my relationship with Diali Cissokho (discussed in Chapter 4). He and I traveled together to Senegal on two occasions to produce these recordings. There I was hosted by him at his family compound, and each of the musicians I worked with were drawn from his network of friends and family members in M'Bour.

I will outline the objectives and methods for each of the recordings briefly here, but I wish to invite the reader to become a listener and, in so doing, to use the recordings

to reframe, refract, and reconsider the preceding chapters of this dissertation. In keeping with my commitment to the artists' intellectual property and our agreements, I have chosen not to permit the recordings to be freely accessible alongside my written dissertation. Instead, I provide citations that allow for reader-listener to locate the recordings online.

5.1 Youssoupha Cissokho, *Diassing Jalikunda*

Track Listing:

1. Bambou (4:15)
2. Ngati (4:04)
3. Tamala (4:39)
4. Mamou Sora (4:43)
5. Ndoli (4:27)
6. Douwanie (3:29)
7. Yéyé Kounouwo (3:46)
8. Tougaranke (4:09)
9. Elato Momenla (4:20)

Citation:

(Y. Cissokho 2020)

<https://twelveeightrecords.com/youssoupha-cissokho>

<https://youssouphacissokho.bandcamp.com/album/diassing-jalikunda>

Objectives:

I recorded this album for Diali Cissokho's eldest brother, Youssoupha Cissokho, a korist, singer, and composer who lives in M'Bour, Senegal. He requested that I produce an album for him that he could sell at the tourist hotels and bars where he

regularly performs in the nearby towns of Somone and Saly. Youssoupha expressed hope that this recording would aid him in furthering connections with international audiences and performing opportunities. We agreed that I would record and produce the album and release it on my record label, Twelve | Eight Records. I planned to return to Senegal with the CDs and deliver them to Youssoupha, but the Covid-19 pandemic has delayed that endeavor. Instead, at his request, I shared digital links to the release with Youssoupha and filled orders for the physical CD from my home in North Carolina.

Methods:

We recorded *Diassing Jalikunda* in the courtyard of Diali's home, directly adjacent to Youssoupha's family compound. Over the course of two nights, after the kids had gone to bed and the compound quieted, we dragged two foam mattresses out of bedrooms and propped them against a cement corner of the courtyard. Youssoupha took up a position in a metal chair and I placed six microphones around him. An AKG C414 was used as the vocal mic. A pair of Rode NT5 small diaphragm condensers were spaced as an AB stereo pair pointing towards the bridge of the kora. I placed an Audio-Technica 4050 at a middle distance (approx. 4 feet) facing Youssoupha, and a two-channel Zoom MSH-6 mid-side capsule was placed approximately 12 feet away to

capture the sound of the music reverberating in the courtyard. The tracking was done with a battery-powered Zoom H6, which allowed for multi-track recording that could be mixed later (as there was no wall power at the compound).

Discounting false starts, Youssoupha recorded 25 takes of roughly a dozen songs. As we recorded each, I made notes on the ones I considered to be the strongest performances. I then played the recordings back for Youssoupha, who commented on his favorites. We selected nine cuts to include in the album. We made notes together about mistakes and sections that should be removed.

I completed the mixing several months later in my apartment in London, relying primarily on headphones for reference. For each track, I listened through and referred to the notes Youssoupha and I had generated together as I first worked to edit the tracks. I followed some of the same procedure that Lucy Durán used on Toumani Diabaté's *Kaira* (as documented in Chapter 3). I made use of digital waveforms to identify and remove mistakes. Some tracks had as many as a dozen such intercessions. Stitching the recording back together, I created cross-fades that reliably disguised the edits. Getting the kora to remain present in the mix while Youssoupha sang was a challenge in the mixing process. (His voice is a much louder source than the kora). When I turned up the kora mics, it had the effect of also turning up Youssoupha's voice (though from a distance and off-axis to the microphones). To work around this issue, I used a sidechain

compression technique that automatically compressed the kora mics whenever the vocal mic was activated by Youssoupha's voice. This helped to smooth out the balance between the voice and the kora. The mid-side room mic wound up featuring prominently in the mix, and it highlighted the reverberant quality of the concrete and tile courtyard. (One can hear nocturnal insects on the track, as well as the occasional sound of people moving about the compound while we recorded.) Some digital reverb effects were added to the sources during the mixing process to heighten the listener's sense of immersion in space.

Finances:

All proceeds from album sales have gone directly to Youssoupha Cissokho. I did not seek to recoup any of the costs related to the production and distribution of the album, and Jason Richmond (who had met Youssoupha on our previous trip to M'Bour to record *Routes*) agreed to master the album for free. I considered this to be reciprocal exchange for the hospitality, knowledge, and wonderful music that Youssoupha has shared with me during my several trips to Senegal.

Credits:

All Songs Composed and Performed by Youssoupha Cissokho
Produced by Jonathan Henderson
Recorded, Edited and Mixed by Jonathan Henderson
Mastered by Jason Richmond
Recorded in December 2019 at Dialikunda in M'Bour, Senegal

Released on Twelve | Eight Records on May 11, 2020

5.2 Diassing Kunda de Senegal, “Baye Fall Ye”

Citation:

(Diassing Kunda de Senegal 2019)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UywxnIMgFI4>

Objectives:

During my fieldwork in Senegal, I utilized an action research methodology, whereby I offered to produce promotional recordings and videos for musicians in Senegal in exchange for interviewing them about their goals, aspirations, and musical experiences. The group Diassing Kunda de Senegal was an upstart ensemble consisting of several of my close collaborators in Senegal and a few additional musicians. The musicians expressed a hope that this video recording might further their ability to find work performing in M’Bour and potentially reach an international audience. They were also excited to hear what their music would sound like in recorded form.

Methods:

We struggled to find an adequate location to record this percussion-based ensemble. The concrete block construction typical of buildings in Senegal creates parallel reflections that pose problems for sound recording. We wound up in the rear courtyard

of a friend, King Sene, behind his home and studio. As we waited for all the musicians to arrive, the sun set. King Sene provided a light source from the interior of the building, and we set out to record. I placed a large diaphragm condenser on the dunduns, a stereo pair of Rode NT5s on the three djembe drummers, a pair of dynamic microphones on the soruba (koutiro and touli *accompagnement*) drums. I set an AKG C414 to figure-8 mode to capture the two vocalists on either side of the mic. I made a multi-track recording with the Zoom H6 field recorder and ran the camera at the same time.

In post, I EQ'd each track carefully, panned the sources to match the image on the video, and used waveform editing to carefully separate the two vocal parts, balancing the volume levels and panning them to match the video. While the recording is temporally coherent, the multi-track recording allowed for extensive editing in post that facilitated a clear and dynamic mix.

Background:

“Baye Fall Ye” is a praise song directed towards several of the primary figures of Mouridism, the largest of the four Sufi brotherhoods that predominate in Senegal. The Mouride brotherhood was founded in 1883 by Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba Mbacke (1853-1927), and Bamba would become one of the most influential leaders in Senegal through his spiritual writings and as a result of his leadership in the struggle against colonial rule. At the end of the nineteenth century, fearful of his growing power, the French

colonial administration forced him into exile, first in Gabon (1895-1902) and later in Mauritania (1903-1907). Upon his return to Senegal, Bamba worked to complete his vision for an autonomous holy city called Touba, which was finished and opened in 1963, three years after Senegal gained its independence. The song is named for the Baye Fall, a sect of the Mouride brotherhood founded in the lineage of Mame Cheikh Ibrahima Fall.

Fall, a devoted disciple of Ahmadou Bamba, is remembered for his tireless work building the Mouride movement under Bamba's leadership and is credited with developing the economic independence that continues to be a hallmark of Mouridism. Today, Baye Fall serves as security for Magal, the annual pilgrimage to Touba; members of the sect can be recognized by their signature *ndiange* (dreadlocks) and patchwork clothes. In this song, you'll hear the prominent Mouride leaders named in appreciation: Ahmadou Bamba, Moustapha Mbacké, Serigne Fallou Mbacké, Mame Cheikh Ibrahima Fall, and Cheikh Ndiguel Fall.

Finances:

No money was exchanged in this collaboration. The video is freely accessible online. I carried the expenses of producing the video, which were mostly the investment of my time and the use of my equipment.

Credits:

“Baye Fall Ye” Composed and Performed by Diassing Kunda de Senegal

Produced by Jonathan Henderson

Recorded, Filmed, Edited and Mixed by Jonathan Henderson

Assisted by King Sene

Recorded in November 2019 in M’Bour, Senegal

Featuring:

Bayemor Mbaye (djembe, vocals),

Mor Dioum (vocals),

Ablaye Cissokho (dundun),

Ablaye Mbaye (djembe),

Mamadou Cissokho (koutiro)

Elmer Touré (touli *accompagnement*).

5.3 Sope Serigne Fallou, “Gongui” and “Sen Africa Rythme Bongou”

Citations:

“Gongui:”

(Sope Serigne Fallou 2019a)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8ZZo3Vaqq8>

“Sen Africa Rythme Bongou:”

(Sope Serigne Fallou 2019b)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=veszrwgCar0>

Background and Objectives:

One afternoon during my fieldwork in M’Bour, Senegal, Sope Serigne Fallou processed into the Cissokho family courtyard, calabash lamellophones ablaze. We discussed the possibility of creating a set of promotional videos for the group. They were enthusiastic about the idea. I worked quickly to set up an improvised session there

in the compound. I took down contact information for the musicians, none of whom I had previous met (save Baymor Mbaye, who sat in on the session playing *tama*) and shared the video with them once it was posted online as a link they could access and share freely.

Sope Serigne Fallou consists of three musicians playing instruments known in Senegal as bongou, two tama (or talking drum) players, with the musicians singing in antiphony, following a vocal leader. Bongou are made of calabash gourds with wooden sound tables. Hack saw blades are bolted to a bridge and plucked by the instrumentalists' fingers just above a resonating hole in the sound table. Cut lengths of pipe are slipped over the fingers of the opposite hand and rap against the outside of the calabash. The voices create a dense antiphonal fabric.

Bongou are instruments typically of *wolof gewel* (griots) in Senegal, and are an offshoot of a nineteenth-century Black Atlantic story. A series of slave revolts in 1793 and 1795 were led by Maroon (runaway slave) communities in Jamaica. According to Rachel Jackson, "These events instilled fear into the British administration, who were increasingly anxious of a Jamaican revolt that would mirror the successful Haitian revolution of 1793" (Jackson 2012). In 1795, the British colonial administration responded to these fears by deporting 550 Maroons from Jamaica to Nova Scotia. By

1800, 400 of the same group were sent to Freetown, Sierra Leone, carrying with them a drum and dance style known as *gumbé* (De Aranzadi 2010; Bilby 2011; Jackson 2012).

Jackson writes that *gumbé* gained regional popularity over the course of the next century, at first around Sierra Leone and later throughout fourteen other West and Central African countries (including Senegal). The music was spread by migrant workers who travelled from Freetown across West and Central Africa to work in developing industrial and urban centers (ibid, 134). Jackson contends, “*Gumbé* was popular...because it eschewed specific ethnic associations, was a recreational pursuit, and was secular. *Gumbé’s* flexible nature suited emerging Creole societies where many different cultures, regions, and ethnicities mixed together anew” (ibid).

The handheld frame drums that form the core of *gumbé* developed variations through travel. A derivative of this music came to be known in Senegal as *asiko*, which was popular among Senegalese youth in the 1950s. Conversations with Diali Cissokho and the musicians of Sope Serigne Fallou, as well as with Lucy Durán, lead me to believe that this *bongou* style is likely an offshoot of the broader history of *gumbé* in the Black Atlantic.

Methods:

Working quickly, I arrayed a series of stereo pairs in front of the musicians and a mid-side pair roughly 12 feet away in the courtyard. This approach provided good coverage for the vocals and the rapping of the metal pipe lengths on the side of the calabash. The recording would have benefitted from close miking of the sound tables themselves to capture the bass frequencies from the plucked saw blades. I didn't want restrict the musicians' movement and only had large, cumbersome microphones and stands on hand, so I struck on the compromise of the stereo pairs. I hoped to work with Sope Serigne Fallou to make a better recording on a subsequent trip, but I've thus far been unable to return due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I edited the video and completed the multi-track audio mix at home in London a few months later. The mix is a straightforward arrangement of left to right panning matching the perspective of the video. I did a good deal of corrective EQing to compensate for the sub-ideal microphone placement—cutting the high end frequencies (to attenuate the rapping of the pipe lengths), and boosting the bass frequencies to bring out the thumping of the plucked saw blades.

Finances:

No money was exchanged in this collaboration. The video is freely accessible online. I carried the expenses of producing the video, which were mostly the investment of my time and the use of my equipment.

Credits:

Sope Serigne Fallou performs the songs "Sen Africa Rythme Bongou" and "Gongui"

Recorded December 2019 at Dialikunda, M'Bour, Senegal

Recorded and mixed by Jonathan Henderson.

Mbaye Faye - bongou and vocals

Cheikh Ngom – tama and vocals

Jackson Thiam - bongou and vocals

Alsane Cissé - bongou and vocals

Bayemor Mbaye - tama

5.4 Diali Cissokho & Kaira Ba, "Live at the Cat's Cradle"

Audio-Video Selection List:

Alla L'a Ke (13:48)

Badima (7:30)

Jabu (20:30)

Xarit (9:46)

Citations:

Alla L'a Ke:

(Diali Cissokho & Kaira Ba 2018a)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P0RmAJrV4Gk>

Badima:

(Diali Cissokho & Kaira Ba 2018b)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-J-FoISo0W0&list=RDyUKrB4pupTI&index=6>

Jabu:

(Diali Cissokho & Kaira Ba 2018c)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jGJMcGNNsLQ>

Xarit:

(Diali Cissokho & Kaira Ba 2018e)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yUKrB4pupTI&list=RDyUKrB4pupTI&start_radio=1&t=16s

Objectives:

I produced this series of four “live” recordings for Diali Cissokho & Kaira Ba to synch with video shot by Bruce dePyssler and Bull City Doc Squad for the purpose of creating promotional content for the band. The goal of the recordings was to capture the experience of the band’s live performance in order to reach out to booking agents, promoters, and buyers for venues in hope of finding performing opportunities.

Methods:

I set up a multi-track recording interface at the Cat’s Cradle (in Chapel Hill, NC) ahead of the band’s performance in coordination with the live sound engineer. Using an eight-channel audio interface, I created a series of groups to reduce channels: drum set, percussion, and backing vocals were all reduced into single channels. Other sources were recorded individually. I did a great deal of work in post-production to clean up the recording. EQing instruments, muting sources when they weren’t in use, and balancing them in the mix (including matching the stereo field with the video perspective). I

automated volume for instruments to bring them forward in the audio mix when there were featured in the video.

I also worked to edit out mistakes, cutting out a guitar flub here or there, muting the kora in other places. We re-recorded and replaced all of the backing vocals in order to improve the performance. While this recording was mostly spatio-temporally coherent, these key interventions were recorded in a separate space and time but were rendered transparently as a feature of the original performance.

Finances:

No one was paid for their work on these promotional videos.

Credits:

Sound produced and edited by Jonathan Henderson

Cameras by: Kaylee Sciacca, Thurman Tatum, Autavius Smith, Asia Anderson, Micheal Pearce, Bruce dePyssler

Video Edit/ Post-Production: Bruce dePyssler

Diabel Diom - Dancer

Musicians:

Diali Cissokho - Kora, Vocals

Jonathan Henderson - Bass

Austin McCall - Drums

Will Ridenour - Percussion

John Westmoreland - Guitar

Tony Williamson – Mandolin

5.5 Diali Cissokho & Kaira Ba, *Routes*

Track Listing:

1. Alla L'a Ke (6:51)
2. Badima (4:11)

3. Salsa Xalel (3:58)
4. Saya (4:35)
5. Ma Cherie (4:08)
6. Baayi Leen (4:20)
7. Ndoli (4:49)
8. Story Song (3:37)
9. Xarit (3:16)
10. Naamusoo (6:05)
11. Night in M'Bour (6:04)

Citation:

(Diali Cissokho & Kaira Ba 2018d)

<https://twelveeightrecords.com/diali-cissokho-kaira-ba>

<https://kairabamusic.bandcamp.com/album/routes>

Objectives:

In my role as producer of this album (alongside co-producer Jason Richmond), I aimed to synthesize the creative vision of five core band members as well as the contributions of 30+ additional musicians who lent their artistry to the recording. We intended to make a record that might build a bridge between the band members' homes in North Carolina and M'Bour, Senegal, by intertwining sounds and musical approaches from both places (see Chapter 4). We hoped to make a strong artistic statement while also generating a narrative around the album that would enable to the band to further build its professional profile, both in the US and internationally. As I describe in Chapter 4, we also wanted to create a recording that would affirm the bonds that Diali has established between his communities in North Carolina and Senegal.

Methods:

We recorded the album over the course of nineteen months in three different studios in North Carolina and one that we set up in M'Bour, Senegal. Blending the sounds we tracked in these various settings was a challenge somewhat mitigated by having the same recording engineer, Jason Richmond, work on each of the sessions. Finding a space to record in M'Bour also proved to be a challenge. The typical Senegalese construction style (consisting of rectangular cinder block buildings) would have been a struggle, especially for louder sources, due to the parallel reflections such a space creates. After a great deal of searching, we finally found an octagonal space with a rattan ceiling that proved to be an excellent recording space—as was the building's exterior courtyard (which we used for percussion ensemble overdubs).

We began by recording the rhythm tracks (drum set, bass, guitar, kora, percussion) live in North Carolina, then headed to Senegal for two weeks of recording before a third recording stage, which took place back in North Carolina. Much of the album was constructed piecemeal through an overdub process. We often edited takes together. Vocals (both lead and backing), kora parts, and instrumental solos were commonly comped together from disparate takes, as were passes of the string quartet and horn sections, though both these small ensembles were recorded live. The ensemble

percussion (sabar and soruba) was largely recorded live, as were the drum set, bass, balafon, tama, and accompanying kora and guitar parts.

We wove binaural field recordings into the mix: cicadas in the summer in North Carolina (opening to “Alla L’a Ke”); the main fish market in M’Bour (transition from “Alla L’a Ke” to “Badima”); walks at night around Diali’s family compound (“Night in M’Bour”); traffic noise in the more touristed neighboring town of Saly (end of “Badima”); evening sounds of sabar drums in the distance (“Night in M’Bour”); Islamic students known as *talibe* reciting verses from the Quran from inside an under-construction house (“Night in M’Bour”); the clopping of the horse cart that we used to load out after the recording sessions (end of “Salsa Xalel”); birds chirping in the courtyard on a sunny afternoon (intro to “Ma Chérie”); and a closing recording of Diali’s nephew Mamadou Cissokho singing a composition of his own (the closing moments of “Night in M’Bour”). We imagined these sounds might offer a sense of spatial emplacement that would afford listeners a glimpse of the sonic environment of Diali’s hometown.

Bearing in mind lessons from our previous two albums, we decided to isolate Diali’s kora playing from his lead vocal. This was an unfamiliar approach for him as it required that he first play instrumental accompaniment, then overdub his vocal. It proved challenging for Diali as he is accustomed in live settings to interjecting lines of

kora birimintingo (melodic flourish) between his vocal lines. Structuring the recording this way also meant that the kora track was set at a fixed form, which placed a constraint on the vocals by defining the space in which Diali had to improvise his vocal delivery.

On our previous two records the kora and vocals were performed and recorded live. We decided to separate them on this recording in order: (1.) to shorten the songs; (2.) to reduce the intense bleed of Diali's vocal into the kora mics, which resulted in having to "duck" the kora part every time Diali sang, and (3.) to reduce the "busyness" of the track by having the option of the kumbengo (accompanying part) as a consistent layer.

The process we chose for recording the kora parts consisted of recording two tracks, first a kumbengo part that was recorded live with the rhythm section. Next, Diali recorded one or two birimintingo layers, which consisted of his embellishments throughout the track. After the vocal part was finished and the mix was coming together, we inserted certain choice moments of birimintingo in place of kumbengo (using digital editing techniques) in spaces that would allow the embellishments to shine in the mix. The simpler kumbengo parts were otherwise left in place. An example of this process can be heard clearly in the introduction to "Baayi Leen"; in the first two minutes of this track, many birimintingo parts were edited into the kumbengo.

The kora was recorded with six microphones: two condensers pointing at the bridge, one dynamic mic placed near the hole in the calabash, a ribbon mic near the back of the calabash, and two ambient condensers placed three or four feet away.

Diali's vocals were all recorded in North Carolina except for his duet with Yaye Boye (on "Ma Cherie"), which was recorded live (and in one take) in Senegal. After they did the take, Diali walked out of the room, declaring it done. Occasional pitch correction was applied to vocals parts that were deemed "out of tune" upon playback. Backing vocals were multi-tracked, stacked and panned, in order to achieve a fuller sound.

The ensemble percussion parts added by five of Diali's longtime collaborators ended up being the glue that structured the mixes. We left the initial rhythm tracks (consisting of drum set, bass, djembe/sabar, guitar and kora) intentionally sparse when we tracked them in North Carolina, knowing that the dense percussion parts we planned to record in Senegal would fill in the tracks dramatically. The closing section of "Badima" illustrates what the soruba ensemble sounds like when playing in isolation.

Jason Richmond (the engineer) struggled to mix the 10 or so channels required to record the sabar and soruba ensembles (with close mics, room mics, and ambient mics further away) so that it would properly sit in the mix. In the end he managed to make it come together despite the dense textures. (See for instance "Alla L'a Ke"). One can hear the clarity and weight that we achieved with the sabar drum mix in the hotel courtyard

on the introduction to “Night in M’Bour.” Distant room mics placed to the rear of the courtyard played a key role in making the drums sound properly expansive and resonant.

Additional musical contributions were made in Senegal by three singers (Yaye Boye, Yande, and Ndai Mbaye), by balafonist Sunkare Kouyate, by fula flute player Baba Galle Kante, and by tama player Ibrahima Sene. The tama features prominently on “Salsa Xalel” and “Story Song.” You can hear Sunkare Kouyate’s bala playing on “Salsa Xalel” and Baba Galle Kante’s fula playing on “Night in M’Bour.

At the conclusion of the sessions in Senegal, we returned to North Carolina and carried on with the overdub process. String quartet and horn section parts were recorded in a large auditorium associated with the music department at UNC-Chapel Hill. I wrote the string quartet arrangements by first transcribing kora parts and then developing them from there.

Two of the more unexpected collaborators, bluegrass mandolinist Tony Williamson and country/folk pedal steel player Eric Heywood, made key contributions to the recording. Heywood’s pedal steel on “Saya” compliments Yaye Boye’s and Diali’s plaintive vocals. Tony Williamson’s mandolin solo on “Ndoli” adds richness to the acoustic sound of that track.

Keyboard player Chuckey Robinson added Hammond B3 organ to “Story Song,” building on the gospel-inflected vocals recorded by Shana Tucker and Tamisha Waden, as well as a solo on “Badima.” Alan Thompson’s alto sax improvisation on the “Alla L’a Ke” outro, recorded through a multi-effects pedal, was a last-minute addition that wound up providing a special texture on that track.

We recorded “Ndoli” and “Xarit” after Kaira Ba had returned from Senegal. The band had learned both of these songs during evenings spent in Diali’s family compound. The former is an adaptation of a children’s song that Diali’s parents sang when he and his siblings were children. The latter is a composition by Diali’s brother, Youssoupha, who is credited as the composer. These songs came together very quickly at the Fidelitorium in Kernersville, North Carolina. They were recorded mostly live, with only the backing vocals overdubbed and the instrumental solos punched in. We hadn’t originally planned to include these songs on the album, but the addition of these two spare, acoustic tracks created a nice contrast with the vibrant and kinetic tone that predominates the rest of the album

Finances:

The expenses for producing the *Routes* album totaled close to \$25,000. Major costs included paying for studio time and for engineer, mixing, and mastering fees. The band

bought six plane tickets to Senegal. We paid session fees to eleven musicians in Senegal and thirteen musicians in North Carolina. After the recording was completed, additional costs were paid to the artist and graphic designer who created the packaging, to the publicists who marketed the album, to the manufacturing company who printed CDs and to the digital distribution companies who made the recording available online. We crowd-sourced \$10,000 from the band's fanbase and self-funded the rest of the costs. We have still not recouped all those expenses from album sales.

I released the album on my record label, Twelve | Eight Records, and have an agreement that if the expenses are one day recouped, then the band and the label will split further revenues evenly.

The band imagined this venture as an investment in its future, hoping that the publicity generated by the album would create avenues of opportunity for performance. The low- percentage royalty share from digital music distribution outlets make it challenging for most bands or artists to earn significant income from album sales. However, the potentially wide circulation of digital media (along with attendant video content) remain powerful drivers for a band's ability to court higher-paid performance opportunities. Thus, it was out hope that the expenses associated with this album would prove a worthwhile investment in the band's future.

Credits:

Executive Producer, Jonathan Henderson

Produced by Jonathan Henderson and Jason Richmond
Recorded and Mixed by Jason Richmond
Recorded at Auberge Africa Thiossane (Saly, Senegal) and Fidelitorium Recordings,
Sound Pure Studios, and Moeser Auditorium (North Carolina, USA)
Mastering by Dave McNair
Cover art by Saba Taj

Kaira Ba is:

Diali Keba Cissokho - Kora, Lead vocals
John Westmoreland - Guitar, Charango
Jonathan Henderson - Bass, Percussion
Austin McCall - Drum Kit, Calabash, Percussion
Will Ridenour - Djembe, Sabar, Dunduns, Congas, Percussion

Featuring Senegalese Artists:

Ablaye Daffé - Soruba, Sabar
Ablaye Cissokho - Soruba, Sabar
Mamadou Cissokho - Soruba, Sabar, Guitar, Vocals
Abdou Ndiaye - Soruba, Sabar
Bayemor Mbaye - Soruba, Sabar
Yaye Boye - Vocals
Yande - Backing Vocals
Ndai Mbaye - Backing Vocals
Sunkare Kouyate - Balafon
Baba Galle Kante - Fula Flute
Ibrahima Sene - Tama

U.S. Artists:

Eric Heywood - Pedal Steel Guitar
Tony Williamson - Mandolin
Shana Tucker - Vocals
Tamisha Waden - Vocals
Alan Thompson - Alto Saxophone
Jennifer Curtis - 1st Violin, Solo Violin
Elizabeth Phelps - 2nd Violin
Suzanne Rousso - Viola
Paula Peroutka - Cello
Beverly Botsford - Shekere and Sound Colors

Chucky Robinson - Organ
Lynn Grissett - Trumpet
Andy Kleindienst - Trombone
Jim Henderson - Baritone Saxophone
Sidya Cissokho – Sabar

6.1 Conclusion

In this dissertation I have taken up the invitations issued by Anna Tsing (A.L. Tsing 2011), Bob White (White 2012), Lucy Durán (Durán 2014) and Timothy Taylor (Taylor 2020) to explore the encounters—social, political, artistic and economic—that shape world music industry recordings of Mande music. Methodologically, this dissertation is in line with how Anna Tsing describes “patchwork” ethnography (A.L. Tsing 2011), an idea explored more recently by Günel, Varma and Matanabe (Günel, Varma, and Watanabe 2020). As I made recordings, acted as an agent for and collaborator with a Mande musician in North Carolina, and interviewed record producers about their work with Mande musicians, I sought to utilize the tools of ethnography to ground these experiences in historical, social, and scholarly contexts.

Throughout this dissertation, I have examined ways in which the sound and expressive practice of Mande music are remade in circulation. I began by analyzing how aesthetic and ethical perspectives of world music record producers are shaped in response to the histories and politics of their field. I described various techniques of transparent mediation that world music record producers deploy in order to cultivate ethnographic authority in their recordings. Drilling in more closely to focus on the production of Mande music for international audiences, I examined how Toumani Diabaté’s collaboration with Lucy Durán has shaped public encounters with Mande

music in the Global North. Here, I took Lucy Durán’s work as a case study, both in public scholarship and in the ethics of cross-cultural record production, arguing that she engages with a politics of invisibility to prioritize the careers of her collaborators, to create ethnographic authority in her recording practice, and to build avenues for broad public appreciation of Mande music traditions—even as she effects alterations on the musical practices she proposes to reflect. Next, I considered how one griot musician’s expressive practice has been transformed by his migration to the Southern United States, and by his interactions with the music industry in that context. This chapter focused particularly on the ways in which race is imagined and mediated by the US music industry. Finally, I presented a series of twenty-six Mande music recordings, which I produced, as yet another way of appreciating how Mande music is remade in circulation.

By studying how an African continental expressive tradition (Mande music) is reshaped by Black Atlantic encounters, I attempt to elucidate a perspective that Paul Gilroy largely overlooked in *The Black Atlantic* (Gilroy 1993). Gilroy’s crucial and insightful scholarship is based primarily on his interest in the Anglophone Atlantic world. As Paul Tiyambe Zeleza has pointed out, this interest signals towards “the analytical tendency to privilege the Atlantic, or rather the Anglophone, indeed the American branch of the African diaspora” in lieu of the African continent (Zeleza 2005).

Gilroy's text offered a transformative intervention that creates ample space for scholars of African expressive practices to explore ways in which the Black Atlantic, as a "system of cultural exchanges" (Gilroy 1993, 14), has impacted African music and musicians. My efforts here is to undertake just such a scholarly project.

The present work prioritizes the voices of world music record producers, a social group that is frequently discussed but rarely engaged as ethnographic research subjects (see Introduction). My goal is not to vindicate the ethics of certain world music record producers, nor to uncritically celebrate their accomplishments, but rather to situate their roles as gatekeepers, collaborators, artists, tastemakers, and storytellers more accurately within the world music industry matrix. I am informed in this project by a lineage of cultural anthropologists tracing back to Laura Nader, who in 1972 proposed the methodology of "studying up." She asked, "What if, in reinventing anthropology, anthropologists were to study the colonizers rather than the colonized, the culture of power rather than the culture of the powerless, the culture of affluence rather than the culture of poverty?" (Nader 1972). Through the decades other scholars have refined this approach (Gusterson 1997; Ortner 2010; Messner 1996; Mayer 2008; Priyadharshini 2003). However, the basic outline remains useful to my project: in studying encounters conditioned by colonialism, capitalism and white supremacy, I have found it necessary and fruitful to study the lived perspectives of those who benefit from these histories

(myself included), as well as those who suffer the violence, alienation, and exploitation of today's manifestations of these social forces. Upon close inspection, the presumed binary relationship in world music industry networks between exploiter and exploited (or between the "anxious" and the "celebratory" [Feld 2000]) often dissolves into a more complicated picture.

At any rate, this approach has allowed me to probe the question of what space, if any, exists to remake historical imbalances of power through music industry encounters. Working in colonial or post-colonial contexts, record producers who choose to work across borders have been, and continue to be, imbricated in fields of structural and epistemic violence. The work of world music producers cannot transcend the historical and political circumstances in which they operate. However, my research has shown that world music record producers often seek to shift historical imbalances of power, even though such attempts may have uneven results for both themselves and for their musician collaborators. In this aspect of my research, I have relied on my perspective as a Mande music collaborator and producer to examine how social histories shape the terrain of the music industry today. My own engagement with the industry granted access to several of the key ethnographic settings I explored in the course of the dissertation.

In sum, the aim of this dissertation is to provide specific examples of how Mande music is remade through the circulation of musicians and world music recordings in the Black Atlantic. Presented on disc and on the international stage, jalolu are culture bearers par excellence. They are imagined as an audible, tangible, living point of connection to a storied past. The figure of the griot celebrates Black Atlantic links to West African ancestry; on the other hand, music industry narratives of the griot often fix their expressive practice as premodern and disconnected from global circulations of culture. At times, musicians and producers push against essentializing tropes. In other moments, they lean into them as they work to translate an expressive practice across borders of language, culture, and aesthetic taste.

The story of Mande music is a narrative of many encounters: encounters between disparate ethnic groups, between the social castes of the jalolu and his or her horon (patron), between past and present. As Mande music spills into international networks carved out by the music industry, the defining encounters continue—diverging and multiplying as the music is remade, reimagined, and repurposed by those who are touched by its expressive power.

6.1 Future Directions

I imagine several fruitful directions in which I could continue to develop this project:

- A “sonic review” of collaborations between Black American musicians and Mande musicians that portray the figure of the griot as an expression of the Black Atlantic’s “diasporic intimacy” (Gilroy 1993; Feld 2012a). For instance, *Kulanjan* by Taj Mahal (featuring Toumani Diabaté, Bassekou Kouyate, etc., and produced by Lucy Durán); Eric Bibb’s *Global Griot*; Mighty Mo Rogers and Baba Sissoko’s *Griot Blues*; Herbie Hancock and Foday Musa Suso’s *Village Life*; and Cory Harris’s *Feeling Like Going Home*.
 - Here, I would take up Hale’s notion of the griot as a “time binder” (Hale 1998) to develop an Afrofuturist reading of the figure of the griot in the Black Atlantic as one that works to bridge the historical rupture of slavery. The griot in this context is a time traveler, a key link to an ancestral past, one whose role is to wield the power of speech and music to fuse past, present and future.
- A chapter exploring the social life of Mande music recordings created for the international market and now circulating at home in Mande. I would conduct listening sessions with the musicians I recorded in M’Bour and talk to them about what the recordings have (and haven’t) meant for them. I would use a series of ethnographic vignettes about Youssoupha Cissokho listening back to recordings an Italian producer made in M’Bour around 2010. (The tracks I

played for him immediately brought tears to his eyes). I would follow up on stories I heard (from Lucy Durán and Derek Gripper) about the influence *Kaira* has had on local instrumental practice in Bamako and elsewhere. I would discuss the local significance of “Cheiknah Demba” from *New Ancient Strings*, produced by Lucy Durán and performed by Toumani Diabaté and Ballaké Sissoko, playing as the theme music of Mali’s national television station, ORTM.

- A discussion of the discursive and collaborative overlaps between Western European art music and Mande music. Toumani Diabaté has made extensive use of the metaphor of Mande music as West Africa’s classical music tradition. South African classical guitarist Derek Gripper (who has built a career transcribing and performing kora music arrangements note-for-note on guitar) argues that recordings of jaliya constitute a new iteration of musical scores (ie., the “digital score”), which is taking hold in Mande, complete with the development of canonical composers and performances (Gripper 2015). I would draw on the fact that many of the major international kora music albums were produced in collaboration with classical music recordists and are presented, sonically, as if belonging in the space of a concert hall. The discussion would listen closely to Derek Gripper’s classical guitar/kora recordings, the collaborations between kora

player Seckou Keita and Welsh harpist Catrin Finch, Trio da Kali's collaboration with the Kronos Quartet, and Toumani Diabaté's collaboration with the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

- A study of the life and work of Mamadou Diabaté, a Malian jeli kora player who has had a decades-long international career. In recent years Diabaté has become fiercely critical of the world music industry and has severed ties with many of his one-time collaborators. His pointed perspective would be a useful one to take up in appraising how the world music industry affords opportunities that can then be foreclosed just as quickly.
- An ethnographic study of American-born kora practitioners, including spaces where the instrument is taught, such as the African Drum & Dance Camp in North Carolina. How does kora music practice shift in the hands of non-culture-bearer musicians? What does the expressive practice mean for these musicians, and how do they relate their practice of the instrument to Mande musicians, cultures, and histories?

- A profile of the London-born kora player, Sona Jobarteh. Jobarteh is the daughter of Gambian kora player, Sanjally Jobarteh, and an English mother, Galina Chester. Sona has become the most prominent female kora player in the world and curates her Gambian heritage in particular ways in order to position herself as a leading culture-bearer. Layers of race, nationality, heritage, language, and gender form a complex web in Jobarteh's story.
- In her ethnography, *Markets of Dispossession: NGOs, Economic Development, and the State in Cairo*, Julia Elyachar queries, "What happens when cultural practices and social networks of the poor become raw materials for market expansion?" (Elyachar 2005, 191). Producers such as Lucy Durán and labels such as World Circuit and World Village have tapped specific familial networks in order to find artists to promote internationally. A social network analysis of World Circuit releases, for example, could effectively chart a genealogy, demonstrating how foreign producers, by accessing one or two initial collaborators, move through pre-existing local social networks in order to find other artists to record. It strikes me that Elyachar's question has bearing on how the world music recording industry's use of discrete social networks among jali/jeli musicians has built individuals' careers, sometimes at the cost of creating dissension within families.

I witnessed such a divisive moment firsthand during my fieldwork, when Youssoupha Cissokho's band was in turmoil over disagreements about the equitable (and transparent) allocation of money following their appearance at the 2019 New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival.

Appendix A: Liner Notes for Diali Cissokho & Kaira Ba's *Routes* (2018), Co-written by Diali Keba Cissokho, Jonathan Henderson, and Will Ridenour

Introduction:

This album builds a bridge across the Atlantic, connecting worlds thousands of miles apart but intimately bound by a shared history. Over the course of two years, we recorded *Routes* in North Carolina, USA, and in M'bour, Senegal. The collaboration grew to include 35 musicians, each of whom listened deeply to the others in this musical conversation. Sounds of Senegal intertwined with those of the U.S. South – musicians calling back and forth across continents, drawing each other close though an ocean away.

We hope the sonic world of this recording may offer you a glimpse into the deep and meaningful relationships we've forged through nearly a decade of collaboration. As musicians we work to hear each other's truths and the resonance of shared and differing perspectives. Our dream is that this music contributes to a world that transgresses borders, a world wherein people are free to move as they please, to find fellowship, and to be at home. To those who fight for peace, love, equity, justice and liberation – we dedicate this album to you.

Alla L'a Ke

One of the most widely-played pieces in the traditional kora repertoire, Alla L'a Ke has a deep history among the Mande ethnic groups. It's often the first piece taught to young kora students. My late father, Ibrahima Cissokho, taught me this song is like school for a kora player. It teaches the alphabet of the kora and how to speak its language. When I hear this song I think about my father, who often said, "This is the number one song! Keep it close." In this version of Alla L'a Ke, I sing about my profound disbelief when he passed away. When he died I was so surprised, but I realized I had to accept it. *L'homme propose, Dieu dispose*, as they say: No matter what a person wants, it's God who decides what happens.

A person can choose / but God's decision is everything / nobody can undo it / my father has passed away / it can't be taken back / God, you have surprised me / I didn't know you could do this to me / but Father, I'm back / I'm back playing Alla L'a Ke for you / come back! / I'm singing to the Cissokhos / everybody clap your hands / today is gonna be a beautiful day

Diali Keba Cissokho - Kora, Lead Vocals | John Westmoreland - Electric Guitar |
Jonathan Henderson - Bass | Austin McCall - Drum Kit | Will Ridenour - Djembe | Alan
Thompson - Alto Saxophone | Ablaye Daffé, Ablaye Cissokho, Mamadou Cissokho,

Abdou Ndiaye, Bayemor Mbaye - Soruba, Sabar | Yaye Boye, Yande, Ndai Mbaye - Vocals | Jennifer Curtis - 1st Violin | Elizabeth Phelps - 2nd Violin | Suzanne Rousso - Viola | Paula Peroutka - Cello | Jonathan Henderson - String Arrangement | Jason Richmond - *North Carolina Cicadas* and *M'Bour Fish Market* Field Recordings

Badima

The Mandinka word *badima* means *family* or *relatives*, and in this song I speak to the way music can bring about radical change. It was born from a beautiful but difficult moment at my family's house in M'Bour, Senegal. One year when I traveled home, I surprised all my relatives by showing up unannounced, but when I opened the door, everyone was arguing. I couldn't get them to calm down, so I went to my father's old room and grabbed his kora. I stood in the middle of the courtyard, and my fingers began playing the Badima melody. Everyone stopped what they were doing and gathered around. I remember I was crying and singing at the same time. After that, we all came together and everyone was laughing! Music did that; it's a powerful medicine to change things for the better.

My beautiful family / I'm talking to you / listen to this / arguing is not good / I didn't choose you to be my family, but we are / we have the same blood / God has decided this / so let's stop yelling and come together

Diali Keba Cissokho - Kora, Lead Vocals | John Westmoreland - Acoustic & Electric Guitar | Jonathan Henderson - Bass | Austin McCall - Drum Kit | Will Ridenour - Sabar | Chuckey Robinson - Organ | Ablaye Daffé, Ablaye Cissokho, Mamadou Cissokho, Abdou Ndiaye, Bayemor Mbaye - Soruba, Sabar | Yaye Boye, Yande, Ndai Mbaye - Vocals | Jason Richmond - *M'Bour Fish Market and Saly Traffic Field Recordings*

Salsa Xalel

Xalel means *child* in Wolof. This song asks what kind of world are we leaving for our children? What are they going to inherit from us? Are they softly singing us a song that we need to listen out for? They will soon be the musicians, the teachers, the presidents of this world. How can we show them the right way to live? As for the music, my father always loved to sing and dance the *salsa*, and that always influenced me. In Senegal, we blend classic *salsa* with the most popular national dance music, *mbalax*, using local percussion instruments, koras, balafons, flutes, and traditional singing styles.

*Our children are the future / we need to show them the right direction / there will be a day when
we are no longer here / their feet will soon be where our feet were / each child is precious / we are
not allowed to abandon them*

*In the distance hear them calling Bamba / children of the coming rising sun / what will be the
world they meet tomorrow / if we don't make the peace before they come? / In the distance hear
them singing Bamba / voices of the day that's yet to be / melodies are made of love and sorrow / let
the music wash your spirit free*

Diali Keba Cissokho - Lead Vocals | John Westmoreland - Electric Guitar, Charango |
Jonathan Henderson - Bass | Austin McCall - Drum Kit | Will Ridenour, Sidya
Cissokho, Ablaye Daffé, Ablaye Cissokho, Mamadou Cissokho, Abdou Ndiaye,
Bayemor Mbaye - Sabar | Sunkare Kouyate - Balafon | Ibrahima Sene - Tama | Tamisha
Waden, Shana Tucker - Vocals | Lynn Grissett - Trumpet | Andy Kleindienst -
Trombone | John Westmoreland - Horn Arrangement, English Lyrics | Will Ridenour -
M'Bour Horse Cart Field Recording

Saya

In Saya I tell the story of grasping the reality of death through the experience of losing my mother, MossuKeba Diebate. I wrote this song on the day we buried her. I couldn't believe we put her in the ground, covered with sand. When my family was walking slowly away from the cemetery, I stopped and turned my head back. That was the moment the melody for Saya came into my mind. We continued straight home, and suddenly I had the urge to play kora. I borrowed my uncle's kora, and began to sing this song. It was burning to get out. My family came and gathered around me as I played. We were all able to express our emotions in that moment, listening together and remembering my mom.

No matter what, death is unavoidable / in this world we live in / this is the reality / now I believe it / now I know what it means / I'm singing to the Diebates / my Mom, she has passed / let's be sad and cry / this is all we can do / my Mom, she will never be forgotten

Diali Keba Cissokho - Kora, Lead Vocals | John Westmoreland - Electric Guitar |
Jonathan Henderson - Bass VI | Austin McCall - Shekere | Will Ridenour - Dunduns,
Percussion | Eric Heywood - Pedal Steel Guitar | Yaye Boye - Vocals

Ma Cherie

Ma Cherie was written over a long period of time, and mixes together different stories of relationships and people's experiences of love. Being in love can be hard; it can feel like both a sickness and the cure for itself. When you say "I love you" to someone, what are you actually saying? To me, it is saying that there is something profound inside you that I love, and I want to be a part of it. It's not something about you, like intelligence or beauty. It's something hard to describe that lives much deeper inside.

Nobody can be sure about love / it's so hard to believe / love can make you so sick / you can no longer taste food / meaning is lost / but it's worth the risk / my love, you are inside my heart / when I see you, I'm happy / if I don't see you, I cry, cry, cry / I'm gonna be patient with you / no matter what you believe / I'm gonna make you happy, happy, happy

Fire burns the forest, leaves the trees / my heart flames with sickness and with greed / but it's love that brings me to my knees / Ma Cherie, you set me free

Diali Keba Cissokho - Lead Vocals | John Westmoreland - Electric Guitar | Jonathan Henderson - Bass | Austin McCall - Drum Kit | Yaye Boye - Lead Vocals (first verse) | Shana Tucker - Lead Vocals (second verse) | Ibrahima Sene - Tama | Ablaye Daffé, Ablaye Cissokho, Mamadou Cissokho, Abdou Ndiaye, Bayemor Mbaye - Soruba, Sabar

| Jennifer Curtis - 1st Violin | Elizabeth Phelps - 2nd Violin | Suzanne Rousso - Viola |
Paula Peroutka - Cello | Jonathan Henderson - String Arrangement, English Lyrics

Baayi Leen

This song talks about how judging people without knowing their story is wrong. In 2010, I fell in love and immigrated from Senegal to the U.S. to be with my wife. I had no idea how this would affect my family back home, but they supported me. On visits back to Senegal, I started to notice that some friends were treating me different. The distance of our lives had translated to distance within our relationships. They were judging me and my life in the U.S., without even talking to me or knowing what's going on in my life, my struggles, my successes. They didn't understand how firmly I guard my culture, because it means the world to me. After they took the time to sit and talk to me, they realized it was wrong to judge. It's so easy, but it can be a powerfully divisive force.

*Judging people you don't know is wrong / it's a hurtful thing to do / God doesn't like when a
person looks down on another / when you say beautiful things about another, you will sleep well /
today I'm singing so you will know this / so you can consider not judging other people / because
you don't know their story*

Diali Keba Cissokho - Kora, Lead Vocals | John Westmoreland - Electric Guitar |
Jonathan Henderson - Bass | Austin McCall - Drum Kit | Will Ridenour - Congas,
Karinyan | Yaye Boye, Tamisha Waden, Shana Tucker - Vocals | Beverly Botsford -
Shekere, Sound Colors

Ndoli

Ndoli is a mythical character in Mandinka folklore; he appears when summoned and proceeds to tickle children. It's a children's song and game, kind of like a combination of the "Patty Cake" body percussion song, and a more playful version of the "Bogeyman" stories in the U.S. For generations, parents have been singing versions of this song to their children when they are acting up or feel sad and need some excitement. My mom sang this to me growing up, and now I sing it to my son, Ablaye.

*Ndoli has a deep history / every generation has kept it / our children are gonna see Ndoli next /
Saturday is play day / there's no school / let's play outside while our parents watch / if you find
what I hide, you'll get a baby chicken! / Ndoli is coming!*

Diali Keba Cissokho - Kora, Lead Vocals | John Westmoreland - Acoustic Guitar, Vocals
| Jonathan Henderson - Bass, Vocals | Austin McCall - Calabash, Percussion, Vocals |
Will Ridenour - Djembe, Congas, Vocals | Tony Williamson - Mandolin

Story Song

John composed the instrumental to this song in the desert blues style of northern Mali. The band tracked it live in the studio as an instrumental, but when we were listening to the playback, I felt moved to offer an oration in the control room. They asked me to go into the studio and record my thoughts about how we have collaborated together over these past seven years.

*Listen to these instruments, can you hear them? / do you hear this melody, this music, this voice /
all that comes from our hearts / it's true / listen to this music today / these people I'm playing
music with / we're not the same culture / we're not the same religion / but our heart is the same /
I believe that / the way you are, the way you believe...keep it / but don't judge other people for
what they believe / you can't play music like this if your heart is not beautiful*

Diali Keba Cissokho - Lead Vocals | John Westmoreland - Electric Guitar | Jonathan Henderson - Bass | Austin McCall - Drum Kit | Chuckey Robinson - Organ | Tamisha Waden, Shana Tucker - Vocals | Ibrahima Sene - Tama

Xarit

This song was composed by my older brother, Youssoupha Cissokho. The Wolof word *xarit* means *friend*, and Youssoupha wrote this song to celebrate the power of strong friendships. This rang true to him one day after moving away from his neighborhood. Suddenly he was in a foreign place, by himself, and knew nobody; everything felt uncomfortable. When Youssoupha sings this song at home, people stop whatever they are doing, and they come to sing the choruses at the top of their lungs to celebrate being together. During the verses, he sings the names of some of his childhood friends, so in this adaptation I sing for some of mine.

*Oh how I miss my friends / we were born together / we played together / we grew up together /
this was such a long time ago / I'll never forget it / I remember it like it was yesterday / true
friends are everything*

Diali Keba Cissokho - Kora, Lead Vocals | Tony Williamson - Mandolin | John

Westmoreland, Jonathan Henderson, Austin McCall, Will Ridenour - Vocals

Naamusoo

Among the older generations of Mandinka, giving a woman the nickname *Naamusoo* is a sign of great respect. It's like calling them 'Mom.' It used to be that women were not called by their name right away. Instead, this sign of respect was used first. Sadly, this part of Mandinka culture is fading away, so we call this song *Naamusoo* to keep that tradition alive. In the lyrics I tell the true story of Salimata, a beautiful woman from Casamance who thought herself too good for anyone to marry. She died alone, 22 years young, with nobody to bury her, not even her father or brothers. I contrast her story with that of my Mom, who I call *Naamusoo*.

Salimata was so beautiful / nobody could even look at her / but she died without a husband / it was her choice / she never took any suitor seriously / she always refused them / she took advantage of each man who loved her / Salimata, you died alone / it's a bad idea to act this way / don't see yourself as too good for anyone to love you / women of today, please, don't act like this / look at the example of my mom / she was beautiful and she made the choice to marry / today I am

here because of her / women of today, please, a marriage proposal is a big deal / it means we can live together, and we can die together

Diali Keba Cissokho - Kora, Lead Vocals | John Westmoreland - Electric Guitar | Jonathan Henderson - Bass, Marimba, Dundun | Austin McCall - Drum Kit | Will Ridenour - Djembe, Sabar | Jennifer Curtis - Violin Solo, 1st Violin | Ibrahima Sene - Tama | Lynn Grissett - Trumpet | Andy Kleindienst - Trombone | Jim Henderson - Baritone Saxophone | Ablaye Daffé, Ablaye Cissokho, Mamadou Cissokho, Abdou Ndiaye, Bayemor Mbaye - Soruba, Sabar | Yaye Boye - Backing Vocals | Elizabeth Phelps - 2nd Violin | Suzanne Rousso - Viola | Paula Peroutka - Cello | Jonathan Henderson - String Arrangement, Horn Arrangement

Night in M'Bour

In this collage of sounds from my hometown of M'Bour, we first hear a traditional sabar drum ensemble playing in a courtyard, mixed with fula flute, a side-blown, 3-holed flute made from rattan. Then we hear in the distance faint percussion music from a wedding, which gives way to the chanting of the Koran by kids known as "talibe." These are young kids without a family who live with their *Serigne*, or teacher. During the day they beg in the streets, and at night they begin chanting after dinner and

continue non-stop until 6 o'clock in the morning. After the talibe, we hear the late-night sounds of the courtyard at my brother Youssoupha's house — people hanging out, brewing tea, cleaning the dishes from dinner, and playing kora. The final song, written and performed by my nephew Mamadou Cissokho, quite possibly saved his parents' marriage. He calls it *Wajur*, *parents* in Wolof.

My Mom, my Dad / I appreciate you so much / I miss seeing you together, laughing, eating, hanging out / I hope you can continue that / I love you and respect you / when I grow up, I want you both to be a part of my life / to see who I will become / to be proud of me / so you don't regret bringing me into your lives / Dad, you are a wonderful musician / you have always paid great attention to your kids / you feed us, support us / you have always wanted a better life for your kids

Baba Galle Kante - Fula Flute | Ablaye Daffé, Ablaye Cissokho, Abdou Ndiaye,

Bayemor Mbaye - Sabar | Mamadou Cissokho - Sabar, Acoustic Guitar, Lead Vocals |

Jason Richmond - *Courtyard, Talibe, M'Bour Night and DialiKunda* Field Recordings |

Jonathan Henderson - *Wajur* Field Recording

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