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The Archive
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Producing Music, Producing History:
Exploring the Archive Below the Surface of a Sound Recording

What would it mean for a record to spill its guts?

If we discovered a journal where the album inscribed all its deepest secrets – its fears, anxieties, hopes – what would it say?

Sweeping towards the dustbin the scraps of tape from the cutting room floor, she pauses to consider what these fragments could tell her. What stories are coded into the filament? Voices captured, bodies in motion now frozen, circumscribed, here left by the wayside in favor of some other.

There is a particular magic to encountering a recording. It has the power to bend time and space as it connects a listener through affective encounter to another temporal and spatial setting. As listeners engage with a recording, a narrative takes shape about what or whom we find on the other side of the listening encounter. When the music is that of another era or culture, these narratives manifest as representations of a particular geography: a culture and the artists that inhabit it. In this way recordings contribute to the production of history. While sonic documents are insufficient for representing the complexity of life in another place and time, they do circulate in ways that contribute crucially to understanding "the other." Each recording also bears, to varying degrees, obscured marks of mediation: seamless edits that elide as if made with the sharpest scalpel; lyrics reconstructed and reconfigured to fit a perception of marketability; languages (re)prioritized; auto tune applied; rhythms simplified or stripped away; electric guitars woven into the mix; buzzing distortions erased or amplified to suit an (often alien) aesthetic. While the musician or artist's power in navigating these artistic/market-based decisions ought not be minimized, the key mediating role of the producer in this process should also be thoroughly interrogated.

By exploring an archive constituted through my own process of producing an album intended for the "world music" marketplace, I hope to develop a constructive methodology for understanding the mediation that takes place below the surface of a sound recording. The subject of the this study is Diali Cissokho & Kaira Ba, an international collaboration between Senegalese jeli (griot) kora player and singer Diali Keba Cissokho and four North Carolina musicians (one of whom is myself). The band, based in North Carolina, recorded an album on two sides of the Atlantic over the course of 19 month in 2016-2017, enlisting the contributions of around thirty musicians. In December 2016 the band traveled (with recording engineer, Jason Richmond) to M'Bour, Senegal, set up a studio, and collaborated with some fifteen musicians there. The album was a labor of love and artistic vision aimed at building the profile of the band – a complicated line to walk between friendship, musical integrity, inter-cultural negotiation, and the demands of a music industry that bears the inscriptions of white supremacist capitalism. The band hopes to offer a vision for a world that can transgress borders of nation, race, language, culture and ethnicity, but finds itself bound up in these same dynamics as they order the world in which we live and work.

Perhaps the type of archival analysis I am offering can offer insight into questions of how power moves through the process of artistic mediation in a cross-cultural setting. By seeking to understand the fraught role of the producer, we might learn something about the process by which a performed (i.e., embodied) archive transforms into a recorded one.

Producing Diali Cissokho & Kaira Ba's *Routes*

December 2016
Take 1: Mediating Space

We spent the day driving all over M'Bour looking for an appropriate space to install the studio. Diali took us from concrete room to concrete room, each more square and reflective then the next. We were seeking a space that would offer a sense of openness and air around the sounds we recorded. We needed

something with absorbent materials – we needed a recording studio! We heard about a family way out in the cut who had a large, newly built house, so we drove there. Upon arriving we knocked on the door and were greeting by a surprised and skeptical woman, who showed us in. Once installed in her living room, Diali began a long oration (little of which I understood). Later he told me that he explained the entire history of the band, and the reasons why we had chosen to travel here to collaborate on this recording, a project that was very close to all of our hearts. He talked about his life as a griot in North Carolina, trying to teach people about Senegalese culture and tradition. She listened patiently, finally agreeing that we could use the upstairs. We were thankful. She showed us up and into to the room in question – another square concrete space! It wouldn't do. The next morning Diali rose early and left by himself to visit the mosque to honor the anniversary of his mother's death. While there he ran into an old acquaintance, a musician named Maurice, who now ran a hotel in M'Bour. Diali mentioned the tight spot we were in. Our recording engineer, Jason Richmond, was arriving the following day, but we had yet to find a suitable place to record. The hotelier offered his space to us, at a price. That afternoon Diali and I went there. It was perfect! Octagonal in shape, perched on the third floor with a view of the ocean, it had a woven fiber ceiling and beautiful murals on the walls. Diali was aghast at the price – 300,000 FCFA (about $500 USD) for a week's worth of recording space – but it was just what we needed, so we agreed. Hotel Aubegine became our studio.

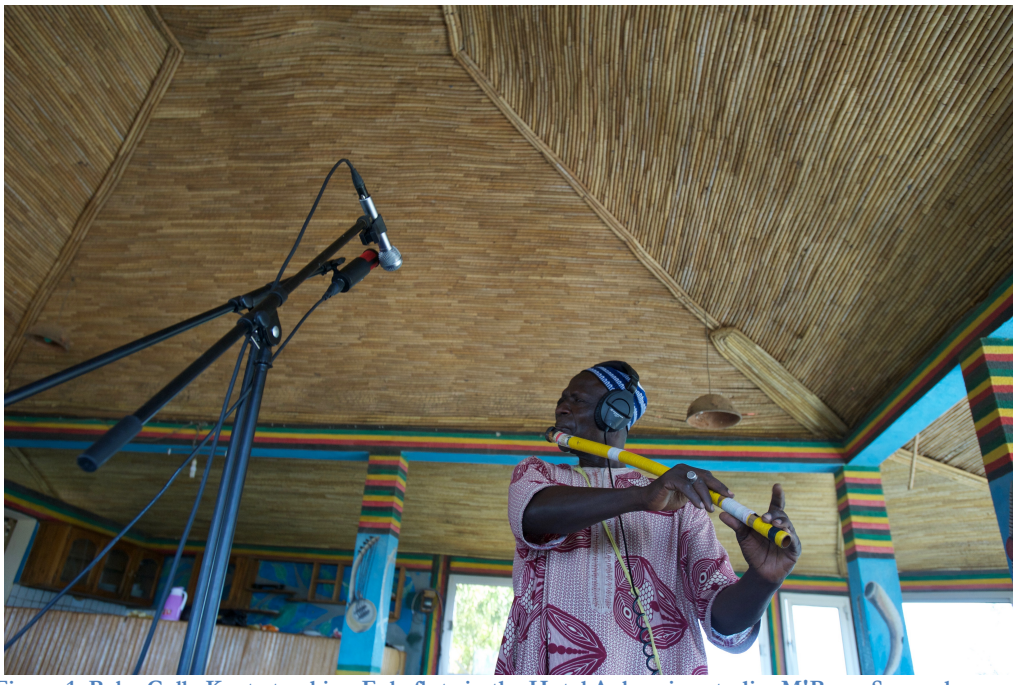

Figure 1. Baba Galle Kante tracking Fula flute in the Hotel Aubergine studio. M'Bour, Senegal, December 2016

Take 2: Technologies of Mediation

We knew something was wrong when we smelled burning electronics. The fuse had blow in the headphone amplifier earlier in the morning. Diali had driven all over town looking for a replacement, finally finding one that would work at the auto mechanic's shop. We had gotten back up and running; however, the fuse had blown a second time. We replaced it again. This time however, something was different. Something was burning. Not good. After some tense moments of problem solving we realized the power inverter was fried. It was not powerful enough to handle the wattage we needed to convert from 220v to the 110v that our US-

made recording gear required. Was this whole trip shot? Six plane tickets, months of planning, lugging all the gear. Now the inverter was smoking. Had we damaged the rest of the equipment? Diali and I walked out to the street, worried, and hailed a beat-up taxicab. I was feeling more than a little desperate. If this trip goes up in smoke, how would we explain it to the people who had invested in the project, to the musicians here in Senegal who had been anticipating these sessions by practicing with the rough mixes and preparing themselves to contribute to this collaboration? It would mean a shit-load of disappointment for a great number of people. We needed a power inverter that could handle the job, and quick. Walking around the area of the central market where electronics were for sale, we saw many things: radios, power strips, extension cords, jumper cables, cameras, televisions, but no power inverters. We walked up to one final market stall and high atop the shelf I spotted our saving grace. The proprietor of the stand saw my eyes grow wide. I nudged Diali. "That's it, man. That's what we need." Diali pointed up to the box. The proprietor was skeptical. "No you don't need that," I understood him to say as he brought it down. I looked at Diali as I held the box in my hands. "Yes it is. This is it, man." Diali tried to look casual. "How much?" he asked. The stall-owner looked down as if considering the matter closely. After a moment he raised his head, wearing a grave expression. "That will be 1,000,000 FCFA (equiv: $1600 USD). Diali's jaw nearly hit the counter. "No, no, no," he replied shaking his head. "We'll give you 5,000" (equiv: $8 USD). The proprietor looked offended. Another few moments and it was settled: 9,000 FCFA (US$15) would work. We agreed gladly, relieved, walking back to the street to find a cab, ready to get back to work.

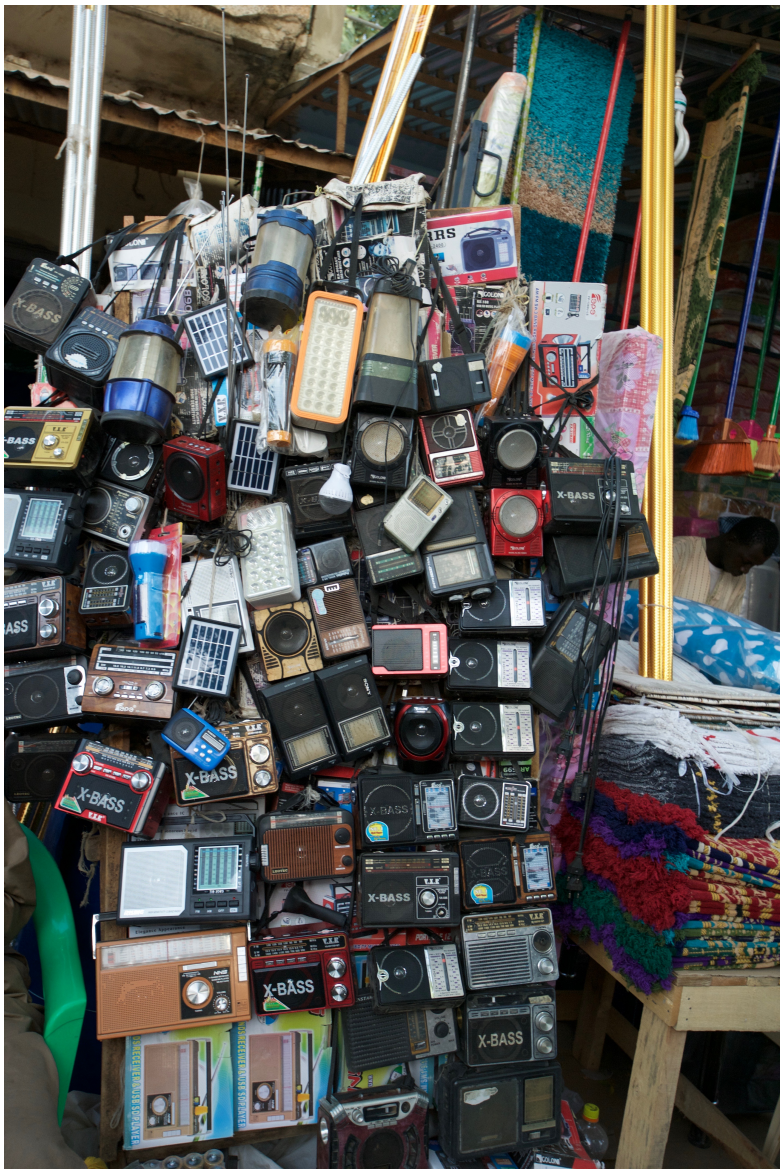

Figure 2. Radios for sale in M'Bour's cental market.

Take 3: Recording the Field

"Where the fuck are they," I whispered to Will with a half-serious tone of exasperation. I thought the plan was clear. We had arrived at the very large and very busy M'Bour fish market an hour earlier to make a recording. John had his acoustic guitar in town, Jason his binaural recording set up installed in his ears. We imagined a short vignette that would serve as the introduction to "Badima:" the listener is led on a walk through the dizzyingly rich sonic environment of the fish market – people hawking their wears, the waves

lapping the beach as men pull brightly painted pirogues (boats) in from the gently churning waters – before arriving on the scene where an acoustic guitar is playing a finger-picked refrain. As the music comes into focus the listener dives into the sound hole of guitar and finds the world of the studio recording waiting within. But it was meant to be a short introduction. John's fingers looked ready to cramp as fifteen, then twenty, then twenty-five minutes had passed since Jason followed Diali off into the melee. Now a sizable group was gathering around us. What are these toubabs [foreigners] doing? Good questions, I thought! Finally, we saw Jason and Diali emerge, walking down the beach towards us, tape rolling. John grimaced but persisted with his part as Jason approached, microphones in his ears, and ducked his head towards the surface of the instrument. Scene.

Take 4: Emotion and the Musical Archive

It was an emotional day hanging out and listening to the recordings passed on to me by an Italian music producer who had previously lived in M'Bour and made recordings during his time there in 2005. Youssoupha, Diali's brother, was visibly moved as I slid the headphones over his ears. His own voice from 12 years earlier slipped into his body. 2005 was the year that both his parents had died. He and several family members (including his brother Khewsou, who had also passed away since then) made this recording in the family compound where he and Diali had grown up. It's amazing how the uncanny sound of a voice saved as an MP3 can transport you to another time. Tears welled in Youssoupha's eyes. When the third or fourth song began playing, he gasped. It was Lamine Cissokho, Diali and Youssoupha's uncle, who was his very first kora teacher in Casamance. More tears, eyes closed, listening intently. The next day I returned with a thumb drive and we dumped the whole collection of music onto the family's laptop computer.

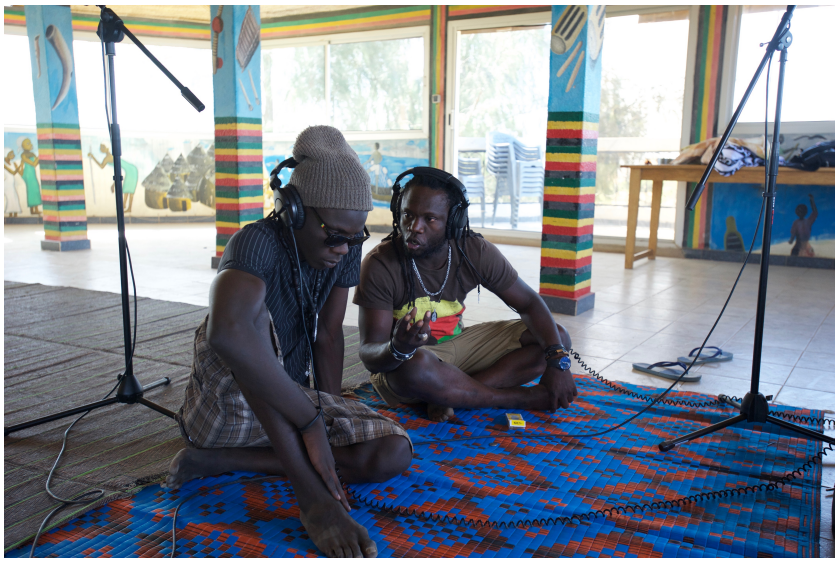

Figure 3 Diali discusses playback with his younger brother, Ablaye Cissokho.

Diali Cissokho & Kaira Ba formed in early 2011 after Diali relocated from Senegal to a small town in North Carolina. He is fond of saying that it was love that brought him to America. He had fallen for his wife, Hillary Stewart, when she was studying abroad in

Senegal as part of an undergraduate program in music therapy. The two had courted during her stay with the help of translators and intermediaries who aided them in professing their growing feelings for one another across barriers of language and culture. When they relocated to Hillary's hometown of Pittsboro, Diali felt himself at home in the small-town atmosphere that he says reminds him of the fishing-village-turned-mid-sized city, M'bour, that has been his life-long home in Senegal.

Upon his arrival in the US, Diali knew he needed to seek out a band. Born into a notable jeli (or 'griot') lineage, his father Ibrahim Cissokho was a personal jeli to the inaugural president of Senegal, Léopold Sédar Senghor. Senghor was so keen to enlist the services of Diali's father's that he offered to build his family a new home in the capital to entice them to move from the Casamance region. Diali was clear that his goal once arriving in the US was to adapt his inherited role of musician-storyteller-historian to the new setting of a life in the United States. Hillary helped him seek out a band, and within a year of his arrival Diali had connected with four North Carolina-raised musicians – percussionist Will Ridenour, drummer Austin McCall, guitarist John Westmoreland, and myself on bass. Diali's mother, Mossu Keba Diebate (herself a talented singer), told him before she died that when he created a band of his own, he should name it *Kairaba*, a Mandinka word meaning "great peace" or "peace and love." So he did. Subsequently the spelling was changed to *Kaira Ba* in an effort to help

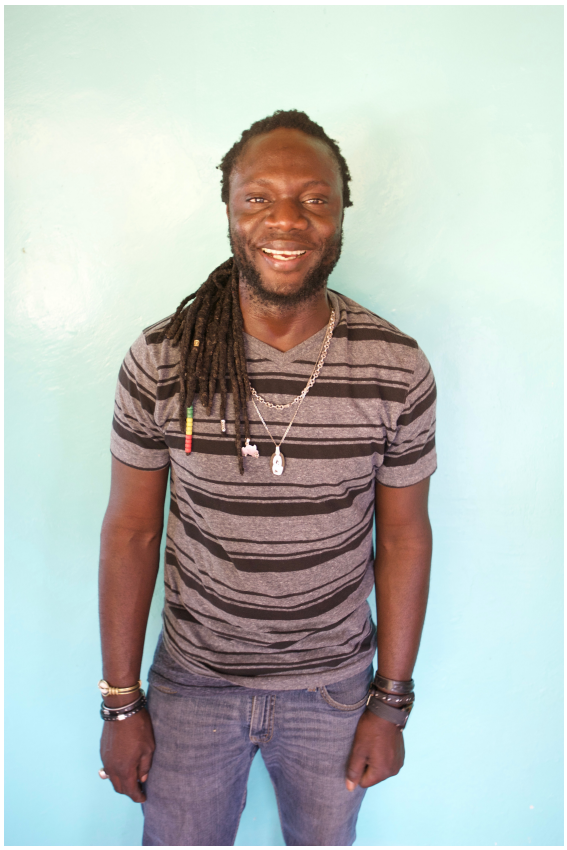

Figure 4. Diali Keba Cissokho, Hotel Aubergine, M'Bour, Senegal. December 2106

English-speaking audiences pronounce the word more effectively (the first in an ongoing series of decisions fraught with the contesting values of cultural and aesthetic integrity, and the desire to make a living as a working band in the US).

Messages of unity, of a world without borders, of the importance of cross-cultural connection and understanding animated the work of the band. Over the course of its first seven years, the band performed 225 shows around the eastern United States (and a few in Senegal), released three albums and travelled twice as a band to Diali's hometown. In 2014, Kaira Ba 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." [1] The AFRIMA committee had discovered the band's song "Mbolo (Unity)" from the 2014 album *The Great Peace* (Ba 2014) circulating on the Internet. It was only later that the AFRIMA committee found out that the group was based in North Carolina and was

Figure 5. Diali Cissokho & Kaira Ba publicity photo. 2013. Left to right: Will Ridenour, Diali Keba Cissokho, John Westmoreland, Austin McCall, the author

[1] https://afrima.org/english/index.php/home

composed of a Senegalese singer/korist and four white North Carolinians. They were surprised, but allowed us to remain in the running. In the end, Kaira Ba lost in their category to Nigerian R&B identical-twin-brother-duo-superstars PSquare.

When the band was ready to make our third album, beginning in June 2016, we decided to dream big. After a series of discussions, we planned to make a record that would be recorded on two sides of the Atlantic, in North Carolina and Senegal, and would seek to intertwine sounds of these two worlds, at once distant but geographically connected by the historical, musical, political, and cultural linkages between the two places. We hoped to build a stronger bridge between our two communities and make a beautiful record, the proceeds of which we could share with Diali's extended family in Senegal. Over the course of nineteen months the band recorded the album in studios both in North Carolina and during a trip to Senegal, where we setup a makeshift studio in M'bour for collaboration with the family, friends, and community members with whom Diali has maintained close familial and ties over his lifetime.

We hoped that this record might serve as an important professional step for the band. Perhaps it could help shift a narrative bind that we had found ourselves in as a mixed-race, mixed-nationality band. We had encountered the narrative wall of "authenticity" over and over again in our seven years together. "Not authentic enough" was the

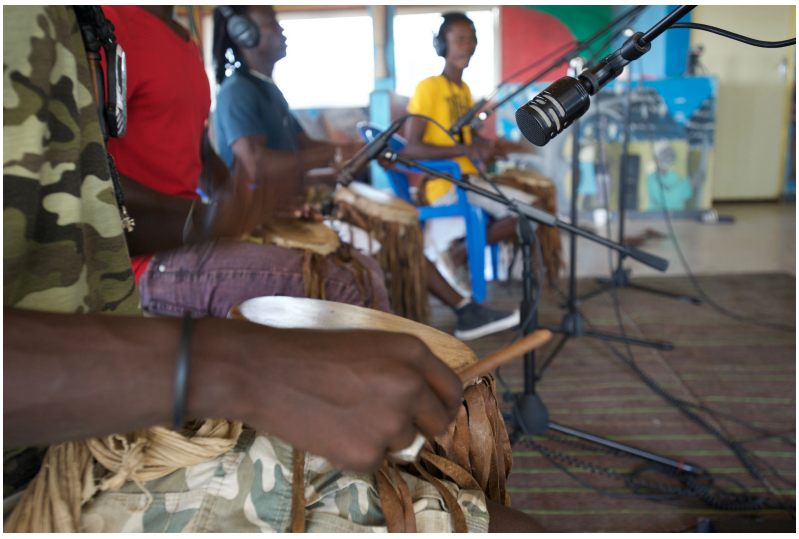

Figure 6. Tracking soruba. Hotel Aubergine. M'Bour, Senegal. December 2016. Left to right: Ablaye Cissokho, Ablaye Daffe, Abdou Ndiaye, Mamadou Cissokho

main deterrent to our movement into the more highly paid echelons of world music venues – performing arts centers and festivals. We hoped that this record could tell the story of the transatlantic collaboration at the heart not only of our history as a band, but of American music more generally. Over those seven years we had worked out a new musical language that spanned several geographies. Our hope was that this album would communicate this complex narrative in a way legible to a broader American audience.

Taking up Paul Gilroy's assertion (Gilroy 1993) of the importance of attending to the routes that culture travels throughout the Black Atlantic region, the band chose the name *Routes* for the album. Here, too, we sought to shift the narrative from a band in-authentically presenting music of African origin to one involved in the complex network of musical cultures that span the Atlantic region from West Africa to the Caribbean and the United States.

After proposing to the band that I produce this record, I moved into the complex role of producer – an ambiguous position that is a fluid nexus of creative vision, close attention to the materiality of sound and the recording process, an eye towards marketing, a mediator (in the interpersonal sense), an administrator, and at times a gatekeeper. Along the way, I

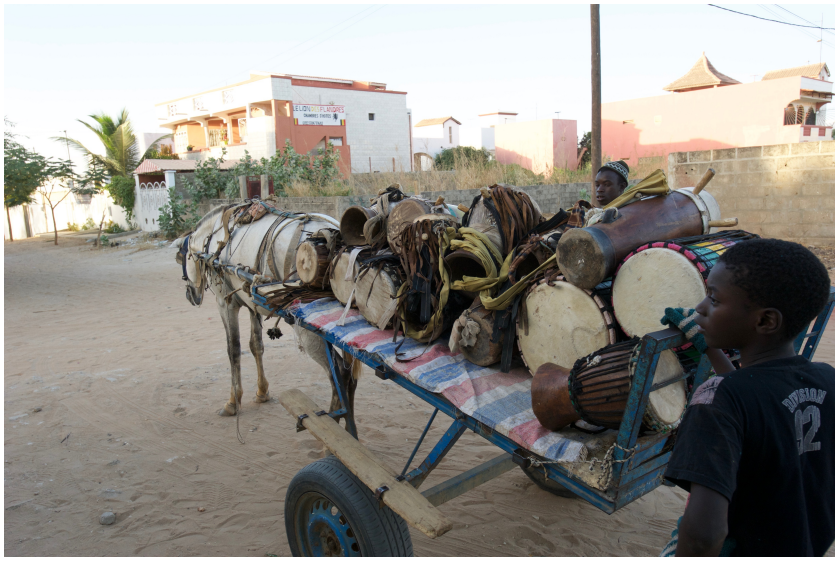

Figure 7. Loading out after the soruba and sabar tracking. Hotel Aubergine. M'Bour, Senegal. December 2016.

collected a wealth of (often fragmented) documents – transcriptions of lyrics, fine-grained notes on mixes, big picture notes on aesthetic visions for the record, budgets, personnel lists, photographs, scraps of unused sounds.

One document from the archives contains a list of responsibilities I imagined handling in my role as producer. The list includes musical roles like "clarifying and documenting arrangements" and "envisioning the approach we will take to recording the album," administrative tasks like creating budgets and scheduling studio time in the US and Senegal, as well as fundraising responsibilities, the creation of horn and strings parts, facilitating band members' input on mixes, booking musicians we hoped would collaborate on the album, etc. Reflecting on the twenty-plus bullet points noted on this list, I realize it was short-sighted. The job ended up spilling over into tasks like photographic documentation, scheduling travel, searching market stalls on the streets of M'Bour for replacement equipment, and, of course, more hours listening to scraps and drafts of recordings than I could ever have imagined. Through this process I found myself very much enmeshed in the problematic of mediation. As Louise Meintjes puts it in her foundational work, *Sound of Africa: Making Music Zulu in a South African Studio,*

> At its simplest, mediation refers to that which is both a conduit and a filter – it transfers but along the way necessarily transforms. Mediation is a process that connects and translates disparate worlds, people, imaginations, values, and ideas, whether in its symbolic, social, or technological form. In the recording studio… the struggle over the shaping of style also converges with economic and political struggles in the music industry. Local practices interface with perceived national and transnational musical trends. Domestic institutional controls, the transnational drive of the music industry, and the music-makers' efforts to find professional, political, and personal voice converge. Musical imaginaries collide with market forces, style jostles with stereotype (Keil 1985], innovation meets repetition, labor meets artistry, image meets sensibility. All these tensions are represented and negotiated in the process of in-studio sound mixing itself, and are literally and figuratively played out in the interaction of sound engineers, producers, and musicians (Meintjes 2003, 8).

I was seeking to manage the various aesthetic perspectives voiced by the five of us in the band as well as those of over thirty additional musicians who wound up playing on the record. Moreover, I found myself seeking to navigate the dual imperatives of expressing a coherent musical vision and telling the story of our transatlantic collaboration in a way that could be legible to a broad audience. I wound up acting as quality control for performances. Things like song length, language choice and instrumentation all contribute to the narrative that a recording conveys, and I (at times consciously, at other times not) sought to help the band craft that story. While working on this project, I was reminded of feedback the band had received from significant players in the music industry prior to the beginning of this recording project. These communications spoke to the ambivalence of the world music marketplace to images of a band like ours.

Figure 8. Soruba players Abdou Ndaiye (pictured center) and Mamadou Cisskho (pictured right) tracking in Hotel Aubergine courtyard

Mediating Music and the Market

To illuminate the complex routes that groups such as ours navigate through the terrain of representation in the context of a capitalist marketplace, this correspondence merits reproducing. Here is a series of emails between myself and a publicist seeking to pitch a new music video of ours to various digital outlets. I've redacted the names of the parties involved.

2/12/16
[redacted] *is sort of tricky. The exact words for this one was:*
"Thanks for thinking of us for this one but unfortunately it's not quite a fit for [redacted]*, "*

I've had a few talks with them about this stuff and they almost always turn down my stuff. Basically the word is HIP. They're looking for HIP African stuff. Hard to explain but if you go to their website you'll kind of see. They rarely have anything traditional at all and even though you guys are far from traditional, you're still not up to their 'hip standards'

This make sense?

Here one can begin to get a sense of the fraught field in which capitalist market logics play out in "world music." The intermediary who authored this email notes that one major media outlet for African music is concerned with presenting work considered "hip" as opposed to "traditional." A logic of modernity is at play here. When examining this particular website, American hip-hop aesthetics prevail among the African artists they choose to present. This pan-African black representation carries a currency of authenticity combined with a contemporary sensibility that creates an allure of difference situated within a familiar pop music milieu. The correspondence continues:

2/24/14
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. Toubab Krewe for example somehow does 'ok' as 'a bunch of white dudes'

But like a lot of the white guy reggae groups I work with, Treehouse!, Dubbest, etc...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 type 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?

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], [redacted], etc. they're really looking for that 'hip' angle, something new fresh upbeat.

Discourses of otherness and authenticity are on display in this correspondence, as is the complex web of representation that can ensnare a band such as Kaira Ba. In hope of gaining some kind of recognition in the musical marketplace, the narrow head of the needle that a band such as ours aims for is revealed to be, in this intermediary's estimation, buried deep within the haystack of representation, temporality and notions of the other—and essentially bound up with the racialized bodies of those creating the music.

Later on, I received an email from a major international booking agent who presents primarily artists from the African continent in the US and Europe. He was responding to our inquiry as to whether he might consider adding us to his roster after our appearance at the Performing Arts Exchange conference in Baltimore, one of the major spaces for live performance brokering in the US.

10/1/15
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.

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. [redacted]

This type of correspondence, common among music industry players but generally invisible to those who encounter the music as listeners, can tell us something about the nature of a music industry built at the confluence of capitalism, coloniality, race, and power – all of which are persistent features of life in the US. In many ways, a band like Kaira Ba speaks back to notions of racial and cultural essentialism by creating a hybrid music that transgresses various lines of difference. It challenges the logic of national borders, the temporalization of African music as essentially bound to a specific time (the past) and a distant location (elsewhere). Our band embodies a story that does not easily slot into an American music industry founded upon racialized notions of difference, as Karl Hagstom Miller documents so well in *Segregating Sound* (Miller 2010).

Figure 9 Diali Cissokho and the author on stage in Raleigh, NC. April, 2015.

In this text Miller demonstrates how the bourgeoning record industry of early twentieth century America constituted "blues" and "country" music as racially distinct,

despite the fact that these styles routinely crossed boundaries of cultural and racial difference. Segregating musical styles as racially distinct was a part of the construction and maintenance of white supremacist notions of the "racialized other" in twentieth-century America. Miller writes that the narrative of "local music" developed through a "process of erasure" (Miller 2010, 186), in tandem with the anthropological and folkloric notions of separate and distinct customs and folkways. He writes,

> The local music paradigm thus reinforces the superiority of the West, the divide between primitivism and civilization, and the Western tendency to hear foreign sounds through the prism of exoticism. Local music was deeply inscribed with the racialism and racial hierarchies of its day. Recent scholars have had a difficult time defining a local culture that does not perpetuate exoticizing tendencies in part because that was what the concept—like the folkloric paradigm developing simultaneous within the academy—was designed to do. (Miller 2010, 186)

The disciplines of ethnomusicology, comparative musicology, anthropology and folklore all contributed to the production of history through sound, as practitioners built archives of "field recordings," amassed most significantly during the middle of the 20th century. These recordings were held by individuals, institutions and record labels, locked away and only selectively released for academic or commercial ends. As record producers and engineers become increasingly skilled at hiding the marks of mediation, this process is more challenging to unpack.

To hear an Alan Lomax field recording of a Mississippi bluesman, or a recording made by Hugh Tracey in the Congo, is to experience a window into that moment, albeit one fraught with questions of power. What circumstances compelled musicians to direct their instruments or voices towards the recording device? What conversations happened between takes that shaped the repertoire recorded on a given day (Miller 2010)? These difficult to answer questions point to the mediation that is inherent in the relationship between musician and sound archivist. However, in the case of Tracey or Lomax, the performance

itself assumes a relatively transparent form. One usually hears the performance in full, from start to finish, complete with the blemishes of a live performance. As techniques such as multi-track recording and digital editing have become commonplace in the later twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries, the process of mediation between performer, producer and listener becomes increasingly complex.

The development of "world music" in the later twentieth century constituted a major shift in how the "west" encountered sounds of the "other." World music, as a marketing category created by the music industry, came into form during a high time for the record industry: the late 1980's and 1990's (Taylor 1997, Feld 2000, Meintjes 1990, Erlmann 1996, Feld 1988, 1995, Keil and Feld 1994). Recordings associated with the world music paradigm constitute a more significantly mediated space by which embodied archives come to be translated into material ones. White North American, European, and South African artists such as Paul Simon, Peter Gabriel, Sting, David Byrne, Brian Eno and Johnny Clegg each played a crucial role in defining the space that came to be known as world music. Their role was that of the cultural translator; through collaboration or appropriation they created a sound that was familiar to western audiences but distinct in the way it sought to offer signifying features of the other. Their work came to be seen as representing progressive politics of internationalism, solidarity, global consciousness, and an aesthetic sensibility that looked beyond the borders of American and European musical practice. However, it has also been rightly critiqued for the imbalances of power and misrepresentation that were hallmarks of the world music these artists created (Meintjes 1990, Feld 2012).

Following this trend, during the late 1990s and moving into the 2000s, producers chasing more "authentic" cultural representations, made records across the Black Atlantic. Many became hits that circulated widely, the most prominent of which was the collaboration between (guitarist/ producer) Ry Cooder and (World Circuit Records owner and producer) Nick Gold alongside a cadre of elder musician from different parts of Cuba. The hit that they brought into being became heard around the world as *The Buena Vista Social Club* (Club 1996). In this case, an idealized image of Cuban elder musicians rescued from a nearly forgotten history circulates as one way of knowing a place called Havana and a group of artists who inhabit it.

Figure 10 Album cover for The Buena Vista Social Club

Music Production and the Politics of Representation

In her foundational work on the studio production of mbaqanga music among Zulu artists and music industry players during the transformation from apartheid to democratic rule in South Africa, Louise Meintjes writes,

> Mbaqanga music recorded in state-of-the-art studios played a significant part in the popularization of Zuluness, that is, in the shaping and circulation of particular images of the Zulu at the height of the Africa-centered World Music boom and in the transition period from apartheid to democracy. Such images were shaped dialectically: they embodied "deep Zulu" cultural values but were constructed interactively by collectivities and interest groups that were professionally, politically, economically, and/or artistically invested in Zuluness (Meintjes 2003, 7).

These Zulu representations took on an urgent significance during the time and space of Meintjes' study, as the narratives circulating globally about Zulu life and culture played an important role in the international narrative around apartheid, and the ongoing movement against it. Her monograph *Sound of Africa! Making Music Zulu in a South African Studio* is a brilliant ethnographic insight into the ways that claims were made to power through the political and aesthetic space constituted within these Johannesburg recording studios. She also offers insight into how the cultural representations created in these settings would go on to circulate within and outside South Africa. Meintjes writes that the recording and mixing process plays out as a dramatized struggle over style. "In their struggle, studio music-makers rework or reaffirm their sociopolitical and professional positions in relation to one another. These negotiations concern the creative use of the studio's technological resources even as they happen through it" (Meintjes 2003, 8).

Lucy Durán, an ethnomusicologist, journalist and record producer whose works is primarily concerned with the jelis of Mali, similarly observes that "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, two of which were nominated for Grammy awards.

In her brief essay, "Music Production as a Tool of Research, and Impact," Duran describes 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 downplays her creative voice in the process of producing a project such as the highly regarded records she made with Touamni Diabate, Ballake Sissoko Besskou Kouyate, Trio Da Kali, and Kasse Mady Diabate[2], her mediating role as a producer remains worthy of consideration.

After recording Ballake Sissoko and Toumani Diabaté's *New Ancient Strings* in Bamako, Mali, Duran wrote that "Back in the United Kingom, 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). At this point in her account Durán problematically falls into the trap of positioning a recording as unmediated, or more authentic, on the grounds of the studio procedure. She positions her recording as authentic on the basis of 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, if only vaguely, that 'editing' took place – which can mean a whole range of things from simply trimming the beginnings

[22] See for instance: Trio Da Kali. 2015. *Trio Da Kali*. World Circuit; Toumani Diabate and Sadiki Diabate. 2014. *Toumani & Sadiki*. World Circuit; Bessekou Kouyate and Ngoni Ba. 2009. *I Speak Fula*. Out Here Records; Bessekou Kouyate and Ngoni Ba. 2007. *Segu Blue*. Out Here Records; Kasse Mady Diabate. 2003. *Kassi Kasse: Music From the Heart of Mali's Griot Tradition*. Discos Corason, EMI Hemisphere; Toumani Diabate and Ballake Sissoko. 1999. *New Ancient Strings*. Hannibal Records; Toumani Diabate. 1988. *Kaira*. World Circuit. (Kali 2015, Diabaté 2014, Ba 2009, 2007, Diabate 2003, Sissoko 1999, Diabaté 1988)

and endings of songs to cutting out entire portions, or comping (pasting) disparate sections together.

In an interview I conducted with Derek Gripper (Gripper 2016), the white South African musician best known for his classical guitar interpretations of Toumani Diabaté's kora music, he explained that through conversation with various music industry actors (Durán included), he came to know that Toumani Diabaté's *Kaira* (Diabaté 1988) was in fact very heavily edited by Durán. He compared this to another Diabaté solo work, *Mandé Variations* (Diabaté 2008). That recording was produced by World Circuit record label owner and producer Nick Gold which Gripper claimed was much less heavily edited. One gets that sense listening to the respective recordings. The tracks of *Kaira* are unusually concise, whereas the songs in *Mandé Variations* stretch on longer and contain more frequent moments of musical uncertainty. This latter example is closer to the manner in which these songs are played in their traditional setting: long and elaborated, with improvisation interspersed amongst recurring refrains. Durán alludes to this in her writing: "My job was to get the best possible performance out of the musicians, to select a repertoire and to push them a little beyond the 'noodly' factor (because *kora* music can be quite 'noodly')" (Durán 2011, 247).

Figure 11 Kaira Ba hosting Toumani, Kasse Mady and Bassekou at Diali's home during their Afro Cubism tour in 2012. Left to Right: Toumani Diabaté, Will Ridenour, Austin McCall, Kasse Mady Diabaté, Diali Cissokho, the author, Bassekou Kouyate, John Westmoreland.

Here Durán does not qualify her use of the descriptor 'noodly' in order to note that this long-form, highly elaborated, extemporaneous improvisational style is a fundamental aspect of the performance practice in its traditional setting, as she well-knows. The implication is that this 'noodly' form would result in a product much harder to sell. Further, Durán avoids offering anything in the way of specifics around the editing process. This is not unusual, however. It is part of the standard practice of studio-workers, who almost without exception seek to lay a veil of mystification over the process. Listeners are intended to encounter the finished product, not to know the details of how it was created.

I agree with Durán when she writes, "not only is the studio the 'new field' (see, for example, Meintjes 2003), the role of music producer and the interactions with musicians in the process of mediating musical creativity can provide unique insights into the aesthetics and dynamics of musical culture" (Durán 2011, 246). However, the manner in which Durán approaches these insights in her article leaves me longing for more. Keeping the studio process shadowed by mystique obscures the mediation and the dynamics of power and choice present in the process. As Durán rightly points out in her article, she played an important role in developing Toumani Diabaté's career beyond Mali, which has led to increased exposure for him and other Malian musicians as well as the popularization of the kora and its centuries-old repertory. While she describes her approach to producing as "more editorial than interventionist," many of the specifics are left to our imagination. What would it be like to understand the process of making a record in a manner that could expose the process to the light of the day, complete with its complications, awkward negotiations, deceptions, and successes? My admiration for Durán and her work only makes me want to know more about how these influential recordings came to be.

Writing about the creation of records, in this case in the context of rock n' roll, Albin Zak first quotes Evan Eisenberg: "studio recordings…record nothing. Pieced together from bits of actual events, they construct an ideal event." Zak then makes his point,

> The often fragmentary instances of music making that are collected throughout the recordings are not bits of actual events…they are complete events in themselves, stages in a process. Each overdub is a step in making – indeed, the discovery of – a work that does not yet exist, and therefore that the recorded moment cannot claim to represent even in part. Rather, each overdub is a generative act that moves the work a step closer to realization. (Zak 2001, 131)

Thinking with Zak here, I would argue that the degree of mediation that takes place in contemporary records changes significantly the way in which we may understand the link between a sonic object and a cultural practice that might come to have been associated with it. It also offers an invitation to challenge the view, all too pervasive, of musical 'others' as fixed in a historical time and place. This manner of attaching people to historical regimes marked as "distant" and "past" may constitute an act of temporal violence, as David Garcia argues in *Listening for Africa: Freedom, Modernity, and the Logic of Black Music's African Origins*. He contends that in seeking to understand "modernity's systems of power – time, space and race " (Garcia 2017, 19), we must attend to the way in which "the practices of listening for the distance and direction from which musical sounds traveled, and then measuring such perceived phenomena according to discourses of national history, psychology, and authenticity, factored deeply in how people oriented themselves in the modern world" (Garcia 2017, 15).

It is crucial, then, that we attempt to unravel the complex dynamics of power at play as these recordings are created and as they travel routes of circulation carved out by capitalist networks of exchange. Gatekeepers such as producers, record label executives, publicists, journalists, then, are weighing both sides of a negotiation: between that of representing an

artistic/cultural practice and that of positioning a commodity for its movement into and through a marketplace. By studying archives below the surface of sound recordings, perhaps we can strip away layers of mediation and uncover stories of power and negotiation, techniques of obscuration, elision or expansion, and group processes of discernment. I'd like to turn to one such archival document in unpacking "Story Song," one of the tracks from *Routes*. The story of its construction speaks to this nexus of cross-cultural collaboration, representation across borders, and the dual imperatives of artistic and market demands.

Producing the Story in Song

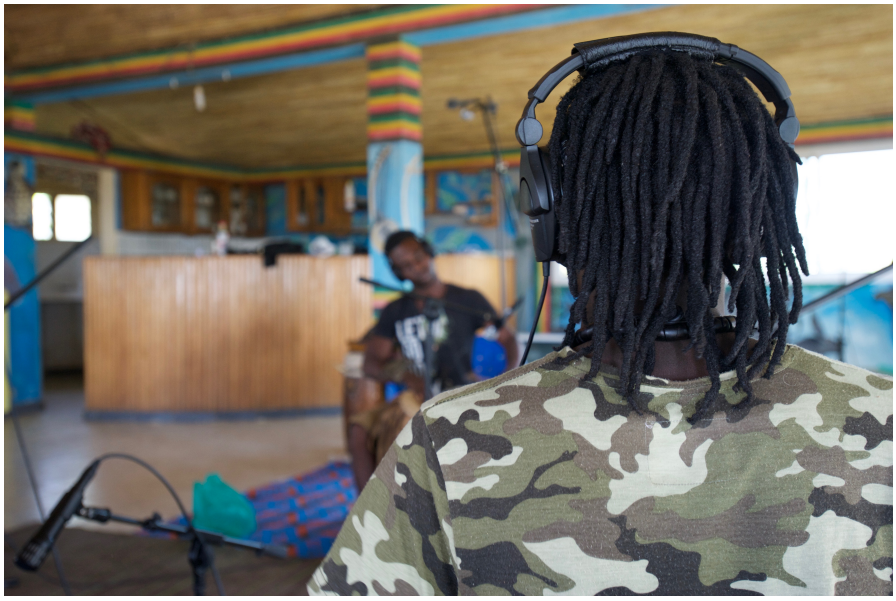

Figure 12. Ablaye Cissokho and Ablaye Daffe tracking soruba

Over the course of the three minutes and forty-two seconds of "Story Song," one hears an English-language oration that speaks to the cross-cultural dynamics present in Kaira Ba's music and history. The song is set over a blues structure likely familiar to American listeners. Diali's vocal oration is accompanied by electric guitar, bass, drums, organ, kora and backing vocals that evoke a gospel singing style. Overall, the track conveys a sanctified tone, offering space for Diali's declamatory oration to find emotional resonance. After an

introduction that features the conversing voices of guitar and kora, Diali's voice enters and begins by inviting the listener into the musical present. He calls out,

Listen to the instruments.
Can you hear this instrument going on?
You hear this melody, you hear this music, you hear this voice.
All of that…Comes to our heart.

Laced into Diali's voice is a southern American accent, which is most audible as he delivers the line "goin' on." This vocal quality strikes a tone that for many American listeners is at once familiar and foreign. The listener is invited into affective resonance with the musical world of the recording. The backing singers enter with a gospel refrain, singing: "It's true; yeah it's true." This refrain serves as an affirmation of Diali's oration, of the affective quality of the music, and as a signifier of authenticity. After a guitar interlude, he continues,

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 hearts: the same.
I believe that.

Here Diali signals towards the cross-cultural collaboration at the heart of Kaira Ba's narrative. It is a statement of solidarity across borders of religion and culture. And again it evokes an aura of authenticity. His voice rises to a pitch when he declares, "We're not the same culture; we're not the same religion," before coming back to a spoken tone with "But our hearts: the same." He emphasizes the word "believe." Once again, the backup singers enter with the refrain, "It's true; yeah it's true."

A kora flourish slips to the forefront, recedes, and Cissokho begins his third stanza:

The way you are –
The way you believe –
Keep it.
But don't judge the other people what they believe.

Here the backing singers come forward in the mix, offering embellishments in their affirmation. The recapitulation begins, “Said it’s true,” then develops into a tight fabric of avowal. Their voices overlap with one another, the track building in emotional tenor and textural density. Finally, as the band begins to settle towards an ending, Cisskho’s voice concludes,

You can’t play music like that [if] your heart is not beautiful.

"Story Song” aims to build a connection with listeners, to bring them into the sonic world of the recording and convey, with the force of authenticity, a narrative of cross-border solidarity and collaboration. A feeling of authenticity is created in part by the track coming across as spontaneous or ‘live.’ So how did this track come to be?

The basic instrumental tracks, consisting of guitar, bass and drums, were recorded live in the North Carolina studio where we began the project. The best of several takes was chosen as the foundation. After adjusting his kora into a tuning that would fit the key of the song, Diali added kora parts as an overdub. At this point the band was still imagining that this song would remain an instrumental. However, as we were listening to playback from the control room, Diali, in characteristic griot fashion, began to orate in Wolof while the recording sounded over the monitors. I asked Jason, the engineer, to

Figure 13 Kaira Ba tracking at the Fidelitorium in North Carolina.

stop the playback and encouraged Diali to go back into the studio to record his oration. After getting set up in the booth, his voice jumped out of the speakers, ringing with emotional clarity. Everyone in the room responded affectively to his words though the significance of the language was lost on each of us, save his cousin Sidya who responded with affirmation during this initial performance.

When Diali came back into the studio, we told him that we were moved by his performance. What does it mean, I asked? After he gave a summary of the themes he was exploring in his oration, and I asked him if he'd be willing to try to convey the same ideas in English, so that our English-language listening base would be able to understand the meaning of his inspired words. Diali agreed, though with some hesitation. English, being his fourth language, is not an entirely comfortable means of communication for him. But he went back into the vocal booth nonetheless and made two long passes over the song in English, sometimes struggling to convey fully the ideas that he wished to. After the session we all agreed that there were many promising aspects to Diali's performance but that it would need to be consolidated into something more concise in order to make the point most effectively. We agreed to revisit his oration and edit it down.

One of the documents from our *Routes* archive details the process by which Cissokho's words were crafted into their final form. The document shows transcriptions of the two versions he sang live, which are 206 and 207 words respectively. The final version appearing on the record consists of 89 words in total. Here is the initial transcription of his improvised Engish lyrics:

Version 2 English:
I have something to tell you guys
You need it… We need to listen to this message carefully.
Because today…So many things happening in the world.

Version 3: English
This is what I want to say,
Like I say everyday:
I am Revolutionary.
In good way.
What I believe today:

Some people believe it, but me Diali, like I say, I am a revolutionary. I don't believe any of that.
What I believe -- equality: same no matter what.
Nobody's better to anybody.
Today… I'm a Muslim… These people I'm playing music -- we're not the same culture; we're not the same religion.
But our hearts -- the same. I believe that.
The instrument we playing today. If our heart is not together, we not going to sound like that, we're not going to bring this kind of sound.
Listen people, nobody is better to anybody.
Can we stop?
Can we stop looking to each other the way we don't supposed to do?
Listen to the instruments. Human play instrument. Human create instrument.
But the instrument, it doesn't mean you have to be this religion and to create that instrument.
Any religion can create this instrument. Please.
Equality is a something God need it, God want it.
People...please, no matter what religion you are -- keep your believing.
Stop please.
Stop. I mean it. Stop! I mean it.
Fight is not good.
Equality.
Me, Diali, I believe equality.
Because nobody is better to any ANY body.
It doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter what kind of skin you have.
But I want to tell this message to people.
How people acting to each other -- that's wrong!
People need to stop.
Today…
Can you hear this instrument going on?
You hear this melody, you hear this music, you hear this voice?
All that…. Come to our heart.
Because we believe what we doing.
The way you are….
The way you believe,
Keep it.
But don't judge the other people what they believe.
Because lot of people, how they reacting to people, how they acting to people, they need to stop!
Nobody is better to anybody.
Who you are, believe who you are.
Where you are, beleis [sic] where you are.
Listen this music today.
These people I'm playing music today. We're not the same religion, we not the same culture.
But…They heart and my heart we all equal and together.
You can't play music like that if your heart is not beautiful.
Please, I mean it, stop.

After transcribing these words from the recording, I coded the lyrics roughly into themes by highlighting the text in different colors. Those groupings, in red, yellow, and blue, are shown below:

Red:
Today… I'm a Muslim… These people I'm playing music -- we're not the same culture, we're not the same religion.
But our hearts -- the same. I believe that.
The instrument we playing today.

Blue:
Listen people, nobody is better to anybody.
People...please, no matter what religion you are -- keep your believing.
The way you are….
The way you believe,

Yellow:
This is what I want to say,
Like I say everyday:
I am Revolutionary.
What I believe today:
Equality.
Me Diali, I believe equality.
Because nobody is better to any

If our heart is not together, we not going to sound like that, we're not going to bring this kind of sound.
Can you hear this instrument going on?
You hear this melody, you hear this music, you hear this voice?
All that….Come to our heart.
Listen this music today!
These people I'm playing music today. We're not the same religion, we not the same culture.
But…They heart and my heart we all equal and together.
You can't play music like that if your heart is not beautiful.

Keep it.
But don't judge the other people what they believe.
Nobody is better to anybody.
Who you are, believe who you are
Where you are, beleis [sic] where you are.

Anybody.
It doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter what kind of skin you have.

After coding for theme, I created a proposal for the comp described at the beginning of this section (a comp is a ubiquitous studio practice where multiple sources or passes are edited into one final form). We all agreed that the words suitably captured the spirit of Diali's message, though we worried it would sound artificial or constructed. Jason and I edited the words together and mocked up a version with the new lyrics in place. After adding tama (talking drum) to the track in Senegal, English language backing vocals and organ in North Carolina, the track took its finished shape. It is remarkable how natural

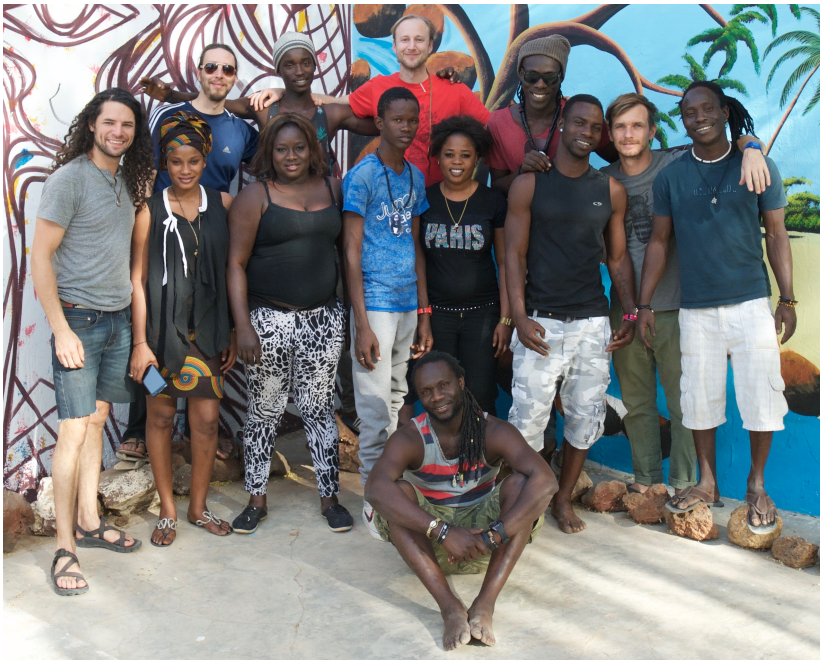

Figure 14. Singers, percussionists, and Diali Cissokho & Kaira Ba gather in the courtyard at Hotel Aubergine.

the track does manage to feel, despite the heavy mediation (certainly the highest degree of intervention and construction present on *Routes*).

This song is but one example from this recording project, which, in turn is but one example of the mediating process that takes place every day between artists, producers and the world music marketplace. My hope has been to offer a way of approaching the archive that exists below the surface of a sound recording to explore how power is mediated through the process of studio production. This is an effort to follow up on Lucy Durán's argument that we "need more critical encounters between the creative industries and academics. Both voices need to be heard, in conversation, discussing processes of production" (Durán 2014, 6). We need specifics, not generalities. Ways of stripping away the layers of mediation found in such recordings; archives that can uncover stories of power and negotiation; techniques of obscuration, elision or expansion, group processes of discernment: Through such work we may begin to understand how power moves in the construction of records, and appreciate more accurately how studio recordings represent particular times, places, and cultures.

Coda: The Recording as Assemblage

Contemporary people engage recordings as a private encounter between themselves and what they think of as a unified object. An mp3 creeps though electric wires connected to tiny speakers nestled within the ear canal, or announced to a listener over a 10-point speaker system arrayed within the cocoon of an automobile. The artifact a listener encounters is imagined as directly linked to the artists whose names grace the digital display on the car dash or the device held in the hand of the consumer.

However, the recording itself is far from unitary. It is, rather, an assemblage of forces, systems, tastes, process points, and inputs that includes the perspectives and labor of many. Producers, record label A&R divisions, musicians, recording and mastering engineers, and the artists themselves bring a recording into being. Record label promotions staff, designers, publicists, and copy editors birth package into a digital form ready to be sent to a processing plant. Workers in CD and vinyl printing houses around the world interpret digital files into physical form. The postal service; print journals; blogs; (rapidly disappearing) record stores; massive profit-motivated digital archives like Spotify YouTube, and Amazon. Each of these actors is one point in the assemblage that brings a record to life and delivers it to the attentive ears of a youth in Pittsboro, North Carolina, or M'Bour, Senegal, or just about anywhere else in the world.

These documents, then, are not a product of a particular time or place, even as they are a part of a process that produces a time and place in the mind of the listener. Seeking to understand the various nodes of this network helps us begin to understand how these recordings--so dearly cherished, so influential in how we know our world--come to be.

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