

Abstract " Poetry, Music and Sound Art: Recent Medial Correlations"

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Farafina goes Spotify: From Griot oral traditions to multimodal representations of contemporary West African music and languages

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For centuries, Griots dominated the oral traditions of West African cultures, combining the professional skills of poets, instrumentalists and singers (Hale 2007). With colonial conquest and the subsequent independence of modern nation states in Africa, these traditional lyricists faced the challenge of adapting to a rapidly changing socio-political environment – a challenge their children and children's children have successfully mastered today.

The proposed presentation will introduce the musical oeuvre of three outstanding West African artists hailing from griot families, namely Tiken Jah Fakoly (Côte d'Ivoire), Habib Koité (Mali) and Sona Jobarteh (Gambia), one of very few female griots and kora players. Not only have they been introduced to the musical art of composing, writing and performing music from an early age, they also managed to transcend the local and transmit their craft to a global, contemporary audience and can thus be considered true "modern griots". This submission will show how West African poetry transitioned from oral delivery to multimodal representations of these artists' music, which today can be heard (sonic representation, as in recordings), seen (visual representation, as in music videos) and read (textual representation, as in CD booklets or on internet platforms). Next to an analysis of both their lyrics displayed on digital streaming sites such as Spotify or Apple Music and the accompanying music videos on YouTube, the presentation will also look at recipients' comments and reactions on social media to evaluate the impact these artists and their creations have.

The presentation will close with a discussion of how the artists' choice to sing in their respective indigenous languages can contribute to an international appreciation of the depth and richness of African musical and poetic output, which in turn can foster positive attitudes towards minority languages and multilingualism, thus contributing to the maintenance of African languages (Yekini-Ajenifuja & Okùnádé 2013). Finally, future lines of inquiry for this understudied field will be suggested.

References

Hale, Thomas A. 2007. *Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music*. Illinois: Indiana University Press

Yekini-Ajenifuja, Isaac & Adé O. Okùnádé 2013. Advocating Music as a Tool for Preservation of Language. *Awka Journal of Research in Music and the Arts* 9, 234-240.