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**Territorial displacement and moral relocation:
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in Mali**

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**Territorial displacement and moral
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von

Dorothea Schulz

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1. Introduction

In his seminal essay on the "work of art in the era of technological reproduction," Walter Benjamin (1963) argued that the properties (and contents) of art do not have a universal or transhistorical validity, but that people's aesthetic valuation of an object, painting or music as works of art changes along with technological innovation and social transformation. Drawing on examples from photography and film, Benjamin showed that new technologies of production, reproduction, and dissemination cleared the path for novel art forms to arrive. Broadcasting created new conditions of consumption and the formerly small circle of "friends of the arts" expanded into mass audiences of consumers. Along with these conditions for artistic production and consumption, definitions of art and its aesthetic perception (Apperzeption) were modified irreversibly (Benjamin 1963: 41).

Benjamin's insights help us understand how oral genres, their properties, social relevance, and their aesthetic perception change when they are recorded and broadcast on radio, television, and audio cassettes. This article concentrates on African oral and musical arts and seeks to understand how these art forms and their social relevance are transformed along with the social context of their production and consumption. Over the past ten years, a number of Africanist scholars have explored the implications of recording and broadcasting on African oral genres originally performed "live" that is, in direct interaction with the audience. Some authors argued convincingly that a song's transition from one medium to another involves changes in the genre's contents and form, but also in the nature and public of the media (e.g. *Passages* 1994). "Both established cultural forms and the new media are transformed in the process of spread of popular cultural forms from one to another medium" (Barber 1994: 23). Further case studies are needed that illustrate how new technologies create favorable conditions for new art forms to emerge, for the formation of new groups of consumers and of

individuals engaged in artistic production. At the same time, we need to explore in more detail how the changing conditions for production and consumption, that is, a new market of art, affect in turn the form, properties and contents of art.

Popular music production in Mali, West Africa, may illustrate some of these processes. A striking and recent development in Mali is that a number of women have become highly successful pop stars and dominate the musical programs of national radio and television, as well as the audio- and video cassette market. The biography of these singers and their songs can be taken as an example to explore the internal restructuration of recorded songs and how, in the transition from a live performed song to a broadcast version, the social significance of both the song and of its public performance are transformed. This article identifies dimensions and dynamics particular to visual broadcasts of women's musical performances in Mali and examines how these properties make music videos an art form distinct from both live and radio broadcast performances. I argue that video-taped musical genres, in comparison to their aural recordings, give more room to multiple, heterogenous and ambiguous meanings that are conveyed through the verbal, musical, and visual texture of the song. Moreover, along with a song's transition from an aural to a visualized broadcast, its internal composition and its significance as a public performance for and of women changes radically.

2. The problem

Many of the women stars of Malian popular music were born into a jeli family.ⁱ The jelis of Mali are praise singers and speakers who, together with a number of other artisan groups, belong to the social category of nyamakala.ⁱⁱ In the 19th century, jeli and other nyamakala families lived in the proximity of wealthy and influential families of free birth, and performed various tasks of social mediation and reputation management on their behalf. Women usually specialized in songs; many songs praised and exhorted their patrons on public occasions and thus substantially contributed to their patrons' public acclaim. Men, in contrast, played most of the instruments, recited family genealogies, and recounted the deeds of legendary ancestors.

The introduction of radio broadcasting in the late 1950s, and of television in 1985 has moved women as performers to the foreground. To praise a wealthy and

influential person on broadcast media or in live concerts in Bamako has become a lucrative business (Schulz *forthc.*). The Malian pop stars have received extensive coverage in both popular press (e.g. Afro Music 1976a, 1976b, Duran 1989, Frossard 1991, Soma 1991) and scholarly publications (e.g. Cutter 1968, Hale 1994, Duran 1994, Diawara 1994, Keita 1995, Schulz 1996). Most authors focus on women singers of jeli origin and their analyses center around the question as to what becomes of a "traditional" singer and her song repertoire when she employs electronic media for her performances. As a consequence, the authors tend to compare traditional, unmediated performances with broadcast performances. The significant differences between aural and audiovisual broadcasting, as well as the diverging trajectories of their production, circulation, and reception, are not accounted for.

In spite of the common focus on differences between unmediated and broadcast performances, the authors come to surprisingly divergent conclusions with respect to the social implications of the new musical production. In contrast to Hale's (1994) and Duran's (1995) enthusiastic accounts of jeli women's significance to Malian popular music, Diawara (1994) and Keita (1995) see the recent success of female singers in a less favorable light. They argue that most of the women who have entered the broadcast media since the 1970s do not longer have the thorough historical and musical training from which jelis of the generation of their parents had benefitted. Also, with broadcast media bringing the musical and visual dimensions to the foreground, the spoken word and its message has lost in importance.ⁱⁱⁱ Both authors thus emphasize the potentially eroding implications of broadcast technologies for oral tradition and establish a dichotomy between an "authentic" oral tradition that is "faithful to the truth" (Keita 1995:190) and its "modern" broadcast version that is produced for rapid consumption, immediate oblivion, void of "textual depth" and thus a "far cry from the old texts" (Diawara 1994:21). The authors thus link the songs' alleged loss of quality to what the authors see as the undermining effects of urban consumer orientation.

Adeleye- Fayemi (1994; 1997) echoes Diawara's and Keita's pessimistic view of the social and moral implications of visual broadcasting, even though she is concerned with a different genre of popular culture. In her analysis of women's images

in Nigerian soap operas, she comes to the conclusion that the visual medium serves to represent women as mere objects of male desire, pleasure, and domination. To a greater extent than in the aural representation on radio, the visual medium of film helps perpetuate patriarchal norms and the ideological subordination of women (Adeleye-Fayemi 1994: 1-2; 1997).

All three authors offer new insights into the ways in which broadcast media transform the relationship between the different dimensions of an art form and of cultural production. However, for two reasons, we should adopt a more favorable perspective on the changes introduced by broadcast media. First, it is certainly adequate to observe that performances are radically altered in the process of their recording, because they lose some of their previous richness. But this alteration only affects the verbal text of the song. It is not evident why the visual broadcasting of the performance should necessarily empty the song of any of its meanings. Friedman and Lash (1992) have pointed out that only in the modern period, the word and the meaning(s) it conveys have become the ultimate criteria of aesthetic evaluation.^{iv} We therefore need to examine whether the juxtaposition of the visual with the aural might not create new, multiple, and possibly competing layers of meaning that go beyond or even contradict the song's verbal message. This finding would challenge the assumption that broadcasting deprives musical genres of their previous complexity and quality.

Second, we should consider whether visual performances are mere sites and projection screens for male desires. This question is particularly pertinent to the Malian popular music market, where women singers range among the most prominent producers of images of womanhood, and women form the major part of the audience. Unless we assume that these female audiences are representatives of a "false consciousness," who, in their reception of images that depict women, subscribe to the objectifying gaze of men on femininity, we will wonder why the performances have such an appeal to female audiences. Thus, rather than simply assuming that female spectators uncritically accept images that celebrate female subjugation, we should examine whether the televised pop music performances serve female consumers to

construct images of self-hood and femininity that depart from the patriarchal norms of gender relations.

The Malian pop stars offer a fruitful line of inquiry into questions of female identity construction in a mass-mediated world, and this for two reasons. First, because these women owe their success to the rise of electronic media, and second, because visual broadcasting provides a radically novel medium on which visions and voices of womanhood may be conveyed. Even more importantly, the analysis of the Malian pop singers' visual broadcast performances allows us to place the investigation of processes of female identity construction in a transnationalized media world.

To pursue this line of analysis, I draw on recent studies claiming that current processes of identity construction, be they individual projects or group endeavors, take place in substantially transformed conditions. With the flow of media images and messages across national borders and along transnational channels of communication, the project of "identification" (Hall 1996:3) is more and more disconnected from the territorial location of the individual (e.g. Featherstone 1990; Appadurai 1991). Moreover, given the transnational flow of people and cultural artifacts, people from various locations on the globe are capable of drawing on a common pool of consumer orientations. Many people thus benefit, although to varying degrees, from a flow of consumer goods and conventions at a global scale to fashion various, multiple, and shifting identities (e.g. Miller 1994; Friedman 1990). The investigation of Malian pop music broadcasts as a resource of identity construction acquires a new salience, if we acknowledge that identities "arise from the narrativization of the self" and that they are "constituted within, not outside representation" (Hall 1996:4). We need to understand whether the women stars present the disjuncture between their territorial origin and cultural identity as a problem, challenge or chance, and whether they offer any counter-projects of identification.

This investigation of the mutual transformation of oral genres and visual media in African popular culture (Barber 1994) is situated in a transnational world of media images. I pay close attention to the ways in which actors and agents of visual media in Africa employ references to a transnational world of consumer orientation. Three

questions guide the following analysis: what new opportunities do electronic media open up for women's capacities to speak for themselves? What new dynamics and meanings does the visual dimension add to broadcast performances? And finally, what resources of identity construction do women employ on a medium on which identification with a place of origin does not suffice to mark one's identity ?

The women pop stars of Mali and their video-taped performances illustrate that visual media open up new opportunities for women to create images of womanhood that are not defined in compliance with or opposition to patriarchal imaginations. Although visual media are used by men as much as they are used by female artists singers, in Mali, women pop singers have been particularly successful in their use of television, because they create a multi-layered aesthetic tension between the visual, textual and aural dimension of the performance. As artists and as women, these stars both embody and celebrate in these multi-dimensional performances the dignity of womanhood. Television performances are a privileged site where the emblems, objects and technologies of an international consumer orientation are integrated into local aesthetic conventions. Local performance styles are enriched and transformed through the visualization of broadcasts and the integration of new resources of identity construction.

This finding shows that processes of increasing transnational connections and exchange of media images do not necessarily lead to the dislocation and dismemberment of identities. Rather, women singers in Mali use media technology to create new meanings and moral orientation for consumers. The visual medium in particular becomes a resource for the pop stars both to emphasize and resolve the tension between an international consumer orientation and a rootedness in a rural Malian environment that is presented as "authentic."

3. The context: songs as "women's special" and the emergence of a broadcast entertainment market

Many women whose songs are currently broadcast on Malian television are of jeli origin. Others are not jelis by birth, but belong to the nyamakala, a social category

that comprises several groups of artisanal specialists, among them blacksmiths (numun), leatherworkers (garanke) and jelis. Still other women stars are of free rank, that is, their ancestors were commoners or belonged to families that derived wealth and influence from warfare and slave agricultural production, and were influential in 19th century Mande society.

Song performances were a specialty of female jeli musicians. During public performances, jeli women inserted songs into jeli men's recitations of their patrons' genealogy and other historical accounts, and elaborated in their songs on specific events recounted by jeli men. Because the recitations and songs referred to the ancestors of the patron family, on whose behalf the performance took place, the women's songs had the effect of enhancing the prestige and standing of the lauded family. Apart from the flattering dimension of jeli women's praise, the songs had also a strongly exhortatory effect. In their laudation of the patron family's glorious past, the singer would exhort the patrons, by comparison to their courageous ancestors, to accomplish similarly exemplary deeds on behalf of the community.

Although women's songs were an integral part of the patron's prestige enhancement, their performances were considered complementary to men's recitations. It is likely that they were not as highly valued as the oral genres that were usually performed by men, such as public speech on behalf of the patrons, the recitation of their genealogy or of local history. To be sure, women and girls of free rank also sang songs, for themselves and in work groups. But only jeli women were expected to perform them at public events. A member of the patron family, who was the subject of a jeli woman's praise, did not always immediately recompensate jeli women for their songs, because these praise performances were seen as a routine service.

Still today, women in rural areas laud eminent members of the community in praise songs. As in former times, a characteristic feature of the songs are, as people call them, their "moral lessons" (ladili), that is the reflections on how an individual should behave appropriately towards her own family, the in-law family, and towards the husband. These observations reflect patriarchal ideals of gender relations in Mande society, because they present the model woman as one who submits without hesitation

to the will of the husband and the in-laws, and endures even unjust treatment with patience. A woman's readiness for endurance and patience will be reflected in her children's exemplary moral disposition. Thus, the moral message of the songs promise to women that their children's success will be a recompense for their compliance with the patriarchal standard of conduct.

Since radio and television were introduced in Mali, in 1957 and 1983 respectively, the ladili songs have become a genre of popular entertainment. Some songs are an exaltation of "being a woman in Africa," others reflect on the difficulties triggered by recent social and economic change, and criticize what the singers present as an immoral and asocial conduct. Similar to the songs that jeli women perform for their patrons in villages, the moral advice is often conveyed by references to exemplary figures or by warnings.

It is striking that over the last 15 years, more and more women who are not of jeli birth enter the market of broadcast music and make a living with songs the public performance of which had been formerly restricted to jeli women. This development shows that public flattery or exhortation of wealthy individuals in broadcast songs has become a lucrative business. The performances of the various broadcast stars vary considerably in rhetorical complexity, the singer's musical and vocal competence, in her dance style, body movements, demeanor, and outfit. Some of them have gained international renown, such as the jeli women Ami Koita and Kandia Kouyaté who are both from the heartland of the former Mande. In contrast, Oumou Sangaré, another Malian pop star, was born into a family of "free" rank.

The most successful pop stars come from southern regions of Mali and almost all pop stars sing in some dialect of Bamanankan or Maninkakan, two closely related languages of the south. This is no coincidence. As a heritage of a higher representation of peoples of the south in the French colonial administration, postindependent national communication policy has promoted southern languages and cultures to the disadvantage of the traditions of peoples from the north. One result is that since independence, the languages of the south have become the predominant languages of national media. Because jeli women from Maninka and Bamana regions of the south

found more easily access to the national broadcast station, it has been easier for them to become trendsetters of music and fashion in the broadcast entertainment market. Thus, supported by broadcast media and national communication policy, Maninka or Bamana broadcast stars have, over the years, become central in promoting southern cultures and musical traditions as "typical" Malian music in the eyes of both national and international audiences.

The pop stars' songs, broadcast in and in-between various musical programs of the national television, are remarkably popular among urban middle and lower class women. Owning a television set is still a privilege that only a middle-class household can afford. Still, women from lower income families have also opportunities to follow the broadcast performances, when they visit friends or neighbours. Women may visit their neighbours with the purpose of watching television, such as on Saturday and Sunday, to follow specific programs that feature the "Top Ten" of the Malian pop stars. On other occasions, women may just sit together and chat, during daytime or at night, while the televised music provides some background entertainment on which the chatting women may occasionally comment. The most successful women stars sing regularly in public concerts in Bamako and some other cities of southern Mali. The audience of these concerts is composed up to 85 per cent of women.^v

The pop stars' popularity among urban women may be puzzling if one considers that their songs express a patriarchal ideal of the relation between the sexes and generations, an ideal that is based on the division of labor and separate domains of responsibility typical of rural society, and is thus far away from the life situation of women in town. Urban women, when asked about the reasons for their enthusiasm, explained to me that they loved the songs for their compelling rhythm and because, as they put it, the songs "gave them moral lessons" by encouraging them to overcome many difficulties of everyday life. However, these explanations are puzzling given the fact that the songs exhort female patience, submission, and obedience, a conduct that the same women who emphasized how much they appreciated the "moral lessons" would refuse to comply with in other situations. Of course, in Europe and the US, too, pop stars often have a large female fan club, even though they might convey in their songs

images of femininity that clearly contradict the everyday experiences of pop star's admirers. Still, the apparent contradiction between the patriarchal morals of the songs and their high popularity among women needs further understanding. The following section examines what images of womanhood the broadcast stars create, and what characteristics they present to women spectators as the constitutive elements of a "Malian womanhood." The focus of the analysis on the complex interplay between visual, musical, and verbal elements of performances broadcast on television.^{vi}

4. The performances

The three songs presented below bear features characteristic and typical of most song performances by the pop stars. Given the broad variety of pop singers with respect to their musical skills, regional provenance, their outfit, allures and body postures, movements, as well as the cultural knowledge on which they draw, it is difficult to define what songs are representative of the pop stars' performances. For this reason, the discussion is based on a comparison between three different singers and their televised song performances. The song "Nene" performed by the jeli Oulé Koninba Kouyaté will be analyzed with special attention to its diverse visual and aural dimensions.^{vii} I will compare Kouyaté's performance to recordings of two other songs performed by two similarly successful pop singers, Niani Diabaté and Oumou Sangaré. The first song is a video recording produced in France and purchasable in video stores in Mali and France. The second and the third song were repeatedly broadcast on Malian television in 1993 and 1994.

"Nene" is a very popular Maninka song, sung by women on various festive and informal occasions in rural localities of southwestern Mali. The singer Oule Kouyaté has arranged some passages of the song to flatter a rich woman from Segou who, on several occasions, had exhibited an extraordinary generosity towards her jeli Kouyaté. Oule Kouyaté employs a dialect of Maninkakan that people from the city understand.

As it is typical of many women's songs, the song is composed of various textual elements. Lines of adulation alternate with reflections on a woman's life situation

in the husband's family. These reflections center around the nature of the relationships that a married woman entertains with the in-laws in her husband's compound: the relations to other women, in particular with the co-wives and the mother-in-law. Another concern is the relationship between husband and wife. The reflections are rendered in the form of blessings addressed to the woman on whose behalf the song is performed: "may God protect you from mean co-wives ! Because a mean co-wife will render your life troublesome." - "May God protect you from a bad husband. Because a bad husband, one who only thinks of other women, will sour your life."

The song also sermonizes about the merits and gratifications of motherhood. It observes that a woman's success is reflected in her children's solidarity, moral disposition, and in their respectful and responsible conduct towards weaker members of the community: "may God give you a successful offspring. May God give you a life full of the peace of an off-spring's harmony. Because one recognizes a woman's value in the harmony that rules among her children." Clearly, the singer's contemplations on womanhood are impregnated with a strongly moralizing undertone. The singer presents women primarily in their role of co-wives, spouses, and mothers.

In Oule Kouyaté's rendition, the original melody and rhythm of the folk song are preserved. The melody is played by the Malian 21-string instrument (kora), electronically reinforced drums, Malian drums (djembe), electric guitars (played like a kora), and a saxophone. Thus, whereas the song's melody and rhythm are reminiscent of conventional Malian musical aesthetics, the musical accompaniment is inspired by the instrumentation of Western rock music.

The video clip features Oule Kouyaté in four different costumes and in front of changing background images. In the most frequently shown scene, Oule Kouyaté is standing next to an enormous arrangement of fountains in France. In two other takes, she is strolling in the streets of the capital Bamako and in the countryside of southern Mali. The fourth scene shows Oule Kouyaté in a recording studio somewhere Europe or the US, where she sermonizes while sitting at a mixing panel.

Oule Kouyaté's outfit changes from one scenery to the next. Three of her dresses are made of an imported fabric, but they are all cut in a Malian fashion. In style

and expenditure, these dresses correspond to the garment of Malian urban women who earn a regular salary. Oule complements this mixture of European and African dress style with various sets of expensive jewelry. The make-up, wig, and the shoes she wears in the streets of Bamako, in the Malian countryside, and in front of the European fountain all reflect a Western consumer taste. Women spectators classified these various consumer articles as "things of the new times" or "things of the times of the whites" by this associating them with Europe and the present times.^{viii} In contrast, spectators characterized the costume in which Oule presents herself in the European recording studio as *fini*, the unmarked category of "fabric." This kind of dress, a combination of shirt and skirt, is usually worn by women during their work in the house and on the field. It is made of an industrial and imported fabric of which less expensive dresses are often made. Most women spectators reacted with great enthusiasm to Oule different dresses and observed that Oule's way of dressing showed her great sophistication.^{ix}

By her outfit, body movements and allure, Oule clearly sets herself apart from two groups of vocals composed of four women singers. The vocals are shown in only intermissions and sing the refrain of the song. The dresses that the first group of women wears identify them as women who live in a rural locality.^x In contrast, the outfit of the second group suggests that the singers are lower or middle-class women of the city. There is yet a third group of women: dancers whose dresses, made of handspun and woven cotton cloth. Spectators referred to these dresses as "things of our customs" by this associating them with farmer girls and their "traditional" dresses.^{xi}

The clothing style of each of the women groups gives clear cues about the women's social identities and their territorial provenance, and unambiguously situates them in a Malian environment. The women of the vocal groups appear to stand for lower and middle class women from the city and the countryside. Oule, on the other hand, presents herself as a woman of superior social and economic standing and a cosmopolitan orientation, because she combines a Malian clothing style and aesthetics with elements of European consumerism.

The body movements and gestures of all women featured in the video-clip were a frequent source of discussion and dispute among the women with whom I watched

the video. The spectators widely agreed that the demeanor of all women performers reflected their self-confidence and dignity.^{xii} In addition, during lengthy and detailed discussions, spectators referred to the performers' allures and movements to classify them into groups of different social and economic standing. Not all spectators appreciated Oule's demeanor to the same extent, but agreed that associated Oule's slow and smooth gestures and body movements with notions of propriety and self-control, all features of a woman of higher social rank.^{xiii} The women of the vocal groups accompany their singing with down-playing body movements and a slight smile in their faces, and thus convey a similar impression of both self-restriction and self-sufficiency. Only the third group of women dances with strong and expressive steps and arm gestures. Their plain and simple dancing style and great smile convey the simplicity, clarity, and happiness of these "women farmers".^{xiv}

"Mamaya" is the title of the second song. In the performance broadcast on television, it is sung by the jeli woman Naini Diabaté. The melody and rhythm of the song are taken from a prominent and highly popular song of Maninka origin.^{xv} In addition to an electronically reinforced xylophon (balafon), Naini Diabaté is accompanied by electronic guitars, a synthesizer, and drums. The guitar players' and drummer's playing technique correspond to the ways in which the Malian drum (djembe) and the kora are played in Bamanan and Maninka localities of southern Mali.

The video features Naini Diabaté in different settings and dresses. In one scene, Naini Diabaté is standing in the middle of a savannah landscape. Another scene shows her sitting on top of an earth heap next to the river Niger and looking across the water. Vegetation, landscape, and the river suggest that these pictures were taken at a location near the capital Bamako. These scenes alternate with recurrent images of a group of women who stand on a little island in the river Niger and dance with slow and controlled gestures and body movements. The background imagery thus locates Naini Diabaté and the women dancers in a rural environment of southern Mali.

Naini Diabaté switches between two dresses both of which correspond to standard Malian outfits. The first is the dlokiba (literally "large clothes"), a dress worn

by rural and urban women on occasions that fall out of the ordinary, such as public meetings and festive occasions. Dlokiba designates a certain cut.^{xvi} It is usually made of an imported cotton fabric (bazin in French) and, depending on the wealth of its owner, ornamented with a more or less elaborate embroidery. Niani Diabaté's second dress is made of an imported, synthetic fabric with elaborate applications. It corresponds in cut, style, and expenditure to an outfit worn by middle-class women in town at their working place. Niani Diabaté combines both dresses with a turban wrapped in a conventional and little ostentatious way. The turban covers her hair entirely, as it is expected from a married woman. Women spectators who commented on her light make-up, her simple watch, plain jewelry and other accessoires often asserted that the simplicity of these elements proved that the singer was an unassuming woman. The spectators' comments also suggest that Niani Diabaté's rhythmic yet restraint body movements evoke the modesty and dignity of a woman of high social recognition.^{xvii} At one point, Niani Diabaté interrupts her floating and elegant hand gestures and points with her forefinger in an admonishing fashion first to the heaven, then to the audience. This gesture, as well as the thinker pose that Niani Diabaté occasionally assumes, highlight some of her statements and enervate the moralizing character of her reflections.

The women dancers echo, in their outfit, gestures, and demeanor, Niani Diabaté's allure of modesty, selfconfidence, and selfcontrol. Their dresses are simple versions of dloki ba made of a synthetic, imported fabric, but without embroidery. The women wear simply wrapped turbans, minor jewelry and no make-up. The dancers' body movements and gestures suggest the women's "balanced" state of mind and their contented disposition.^{xviii}

A common characteristic of the two performances analyzed so far is that both singers combine, even though to a different extent, European and Malian musical elements and fashion styles. Although spectators distinguish between these stylistic elements according to their provenance, they do not perceive them as heterogenous or

mutually exclusive. The harmonious integration of various visual and musical elements in both songs forms the basis of a novel and compelling aesthetic.

The two performances differ in three relevant respects. First, the sermonizing character of the ladili song is more prominent in Naini Diabaté's performance. Second, all scenes feature Naini Diabaté and her female company in southern Mali. Third, all the dresses of Naini Diabaté identify her, in style and expenditure, as a Malian woman. In contrast, Oule Kouyaté's allure and outfit suggest her cosmopolitan orientation. Still, in spite of Oule Kouyaté's explicit emphasis on an European consumer orientation, her provenance and her identity as a Malian woman is not put into question. On the contrary, her apt combination of the diverse fashion elements and territorial backgrounds point to the emergence of new visual aesthetics and to the appeal of new territorial orientations- which pose no threat to an explicit Malian femininity, because the moralistic message of the texts firmly roots the singer in an uncorrupted framework of Maninka morality and tradition.

Since its first broadcasting in 1992, the third song, "Bi furu" by Oumou Sangaré, has been among the most popular hits of the Malian broadcast and entertainment market.^{xix} The Maninka dialect in which Oumou Sangaré sings can be easily understood by listeners from the city.^{xx} The moralizing message of "Bi furu" is more explicit than in the two preceding songs. Oumou Sangaré speaks as a young woman who will soon be married and complains that she has not been properly prepared to accomplish her future tasks and obligations as a married woman.

(..) I am worried about marriage.

People of my times! What shall I do?

My mother has not instructed me how to wash clothes.

My mother has not instructed me how to cook.

My mother has not instructed me how to sweep.

My mother has not instructed me how to pound millet.

I am worried about marriage.

People of my times! What shall I do ?

(..)

These complaints are followed by reflections on how money has destroyed social relations and has enhanced people's greed, reflected in women's incapacity to show love and devotion to their in-laws. Thus, the girl and her incapacity to accomplish the duties of a wife come to stand for the degradation of an "authentic" Malian culture, tradition and custom. This loss of ethics and everyday knowledge is a consequence of what is presented by the singer as the moral and social decay of Malian society, a decay that is contrasted to a better and intact traditional society. In this traditional society, social relationships were harmonious and self-less, and moral superiority was the only gratification women would expect in return for their patient and submissive behavior.

With respect to background imagery, the singers's allures and outfit, there are no striking differences between the visual recording of Oumou Sangaré's song and the two previously analyzed performances. We find the same amalgam of diverse Western, rural and urban Malian fashion styles, musical elements and admonishing reflections on what a woman's appropriate conduct is. A further parallel is that whenever women from the city and the countryside are shown, women spectators see in these images manifestations of the happiness and contented disposition of rural women. In one scene, Oumou Sangaré dresses up as a rural woman and, as spectators asserted, very visibly takes pride in the activities she has to accomplish as a farmer woman: she is shown washing clothes at a river, together with a group of smiling women. In another scene, Oumou Sangaré represents the counter-image to this farmer woman: she is dressed like a middle-class woman, sitting in a dressing room, in front of a mirror, preparing herself for her wedding. While giving her make-up and her wardrobe a last, sophisticated touch, she admonishes the audience about the dangers of a marriage that is only based on materialist considerations and greed for money. Many women responded to my question as to what Oumou Sangaré might have intended to say with these images, that this woman served as a negative example of how dangerous the life of the city was to a woman's integrity. To many spectators, these images reinforce the warnings of her song: women in town are in danger of being corrupted by money, and

they thus risk losing their rootedness in an authentic Maninka moral codex. Thus, in the song text, Oumou Sangaré establishes a more explicit contrast between the morally superior and "authentic" life style of rural women and its counterpart, the materialistic orientation of urban woman.

5. Interpretation

The performances presented so far illustrate that Malian women pop stars construct images of femininity while combining musical, visual and verbal resources. The pop stars' definitions of Malian womanhood are composed of three dimensions. The first dimension is the verbal text which, in its moralizing reflections, celebrates a woman's role as mother, spouse, and co-wife as characteristics of a perfect woman. The second dimension is constituted by the singer's demeanor, body movements, and gestures. The third dimension are the performers' dress and accessoires and the background images; they all suggest varieties in occupation, life situation, and consumer style.

The songs' moralizing definition of a woman's proper conduct are based on the patriarchal norms of behavior of rural Bamana and Maninka societies. Yet, the singers present this code of conduct as an authentic "Malian" ethics. In contrast to this behavioral code claimed to be "authentic" and "Malian," the pop stars draw on emblems of Western consumer culture and on elements of Western aesthetics to define their life style and orientation (European background; dress, facial make-up, hair-dress). At the same time, the background images, musical elements, costumes and dance movements create the impression that the performers, as women, are firmly rooted in an "authentic" rural life style. The images suggest a life-style that is no longer defined by the territorial provenance of the singer, but by reference to her Western consumer orientation. Yet, this deterritorialization is counterbalanced by the singer's positive and emphatic stance towards an allegedly "Malian" code of morality. Her reference to a "Malian" code of morality, then, appears as a localizing strategy that allows the singer to relocate herself in an "authentic" Malian tradition.

Moreover, the pop singers, in their diverse representations of what it means to be a woman in contemporary Mali, give the impression that women in Mali are a "unity in diversity." The moralizing reflections of the *ladili* songs assume a unifying "us" as the ontological basis of womanhood, and thus construct the image of a uniform "Malian" femininity and morality. Clearly, this image of womanhood is made-up of multifarious elements; it is not consistent, but contains many tensions and contradictions. At the same time, all these representations celebrate and enhance the conviction that, to be a Malian woman is a source of pride and dignity.

The songs' sermonizing reflections present any difficulty that a woman may have as a matter of the right or inappropriate behavior. The songs thus insinuate that women farmers and urban women, whether they are of poor background or not, all share the same situation, because they accomplish similar tasks and are confronted with the same difficulties. This discursive, visual and aural representation obscures the substantial economic differences between urban women and women farmers. The moralizing tenor of the *ladili* songs ignores the fact that women farmers play a decisive economic role and bear a heavier working load than most urban women, an economic importance that gives a greater economic independence and marge of maneouver to rural women. Yet, the tenor of equality disregards the fact that women farmers will not be able to afford the consumer articles that are presented in the video clips as emblems of Malian womanhood, and thus, that women farmers' life situation offers them little opportunity to endow their "authentic and rural womanhood with the emblems of a cosmopolitan consumer orientation and the "modern" style of city life.

The songs present disagreements among women in a family a purely "ethical" problem that might be resolved by the right and appropriate behavior. They assume a common female "we" and celebrate the harmony, solidarity, and unanimity among women. However, the frequency in which conflicts between women are mentioned in the songs reveals that women are not as unified as asserted. Yet ultimately, the songs "moral lessons" explain conflicts among women as a result of their different education and "ethical" dispositions.

It seems that the women stars' songs are very popular among urban women because they combine three messages. The first message is that the difficulties that arise for a woman when living in her husband's family are a matter of the right or wrong "ethical" disposition. In this view, the remedy to a woman's difficulties in town are her willingness to be patient and submissive. These norms of conduct, however, are conform to the behavioral expectations, economic importance and space of manoeuver of rural women.

Second, the various sceneries from urban and rural Mali environments and European settings, are combined with references to the ethical dangers of urban life. All of these elements suggest that a modern, "cosmopolitan" life style has disorienting effects for women. However, in their aesthetically harmonious juxtaposition, they suggest that Malian women resolve this tension with elegance and pride. The singer counters the challenge of her displacement from an "authentic" Malian environment, as it is suggested in the background images, by offering a moralizing response to this dislocation.

The third message is conveyed in the compelling combination of visual and musical Malian and Western aesthetics. The pop stars integrate the diverse musical aesthetics into novel and captivating musical and instrumental arrangements. Also, in their ostentively elegant and composed movements, they visually celebrate the dignity of being a woman in Mali, and thus become themselves emblematic figures of Malian womanhood.

Thus, women in the city are enthusiastic about the broadcast stars' moralizing songs, not because they promote patriarchal images of gender relations, but because they convey multiple images of Malian womanhood. The fact that the aural and visual imagery is multilayered, refined and often ambiguous leaves room for the imagination and for the claim that women in Mali can choose among a broad variety of appearances, life situations and orientations to live their womanhood in dignity.

6. Concluding reflections

In the light of these insights, how can we answer the three questions raised in the introduction? The first concern had been to understand the effects that the current flow of media images and technologies along transnational channels have on women's possibilities of artistic creativity and self-expression. In Mali, the transfer of media technology has opened up unprecedented opportunities for women singers to turn a previously unimportant routine service into a lucrative profession. The broadcast stars sell their pop songs as a "moral instruction" by this supplying the market of entertainment music. As cultural bricoleurs on TV, they combine in their visualized performances Malian aesthetics with symbols of a cosmopolitan consumer orientation. The Malian pop stars thus stand in sharp contrast to many women who, as a result of technology transfer, have been marginalized from lucrative economic domains. Compared to many male musicians, women singers in Mali have been more skillful and successful in taking advantage of the new visual medium. The compelling force of the pop singers' voice resides to an important extent in the tension established between the visual images and the text. They combine a Malian "morality" and aesthetics with elements of a cosmopolitan life orientation, and thus enrich their verbal and musical performances through a multilayered visual dimension that conveys various, sometimes contradictory, claims.

This leads us to the second concern of the analysis that is, to explore what new dynamics arise, once a performance is not only aurally, but visually recorded and broadcast. Prominent features of radio performances are the text, instrumentation, rhythmical structure and melodic arrangement of the song. Yet, the decisive criteria for a song's appreciation is the singer's voice and her skills of modulating and changing between different expressive registers.

In a video-taped performance, in contrast, the quality of the voice continues to have considerable weight in listeners' evaluation of a singer. But the newly added visual dimension introduces new criteria of aesthetic evaluation. Dance steps and gestures, allures and demeanor, dresses and accessoires, and the various background sceneries "compete" with the singer's voice and the musical underpinning. This is not to discount the significance of the song's verbalized message. Many casual remarks and

spontaneous reactions by spectators to televised performances show how much they value what they consider the song's "moral lesson." Still, it seems that a new hierarchy between the aural and visual dimensions of a broadcast song emerges: verbal text and the singer's voice are no longer as central to a song's compelling force as they are to aural broadcasts.

Finally, what images of womanhood do the pop stars create on a medium that allows for a growing disjuncture between a woman's cultural identity and her rootedness in territorial origins? Do the pop stars owe their success to the fact that they embody patriarchal expectations and visions of male desire and pleasure?

The pop songs do not account for the substantial economic inequalities among women in Mali; nor do they narrate the different trajectories of women's biographies in Mali. Differences, disagreements, and conflicts between women are presented as an exclusively moral issue. The great popularity of this representation of womanhood among urban women suggests that they fashion their identity as urban women through the common characteristics of an ideal "Malian" femininity and morality. They base their self-perception not on the differences from other women or from men, but on their identity *with* a Malian womanhood. This insight is also supported by the fact that the songs center around the relations among women, not those between women and men.

Given the fact that for many Malian women, everyday life takes place mainly in a women's world, it is little surprising that women, not the relationship between the sexes, are in the center of the pop stars' verbal and visual performances. Still, the importance that is given in Malian popular music to the relationship *among* women should motivate us to explore further the internal tensions and transformations of women's life worlds, and their representation in artistic production.

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ⁱ The plural form of jeli and nyamakala is jeliw and nyamakalaw. Throughout the article, I will treat all Bamanan terms like English words adding the English suffix -s to Bamanan plural forms (for example jelis).

ⁱⁱ In the scholarly literature, the women singers are referred to as either "griots" which is the French term for jeli (e.g. Camara 1976; Hale 1994; Keita 1995) or as jelimusow (=jeli women, e.g. Duran 1995). However, these denominations do not account for the fact that a growing number of the female stars are not of jeli origin. I refer to them as "pop stars" or "broadcast stars" because what they have in common is not their social origin, but that they owe their success to broadcast media.

ⁱⁱⁱ "In this atmosphere, it has been easy for the young griot to do without the long and rigorous training formerly required in the tarik and other disciplines and to rely solely on a beautiful voice, charming looks, and at best a mediocre knowledge of genealogies" (Keita 1995:188).

^{iv} In this, they take up an observation made by Berman (1982).

^v In 1996, I followed several conversations in which men jokingly gave a friend the following advice: if he wanted to find a girlfriend, he should attend to a concert of a woman pop star - but never stay until the end of the concert. Otherwise he would find the entrance hall and parking lot packed with men-waiting for their wives, girl friends, sisters and mothers to appear from the concert to which they attended in groups of women and girls. This joke reflects the commonsense understanding that the audience and followership of the pop stars is female.

^{vi} The focus is thus on the visual, textual, and musical imagery that the pop stars evoke. A detailed investigation of the reception and interpretation of the images by diverse audiences and listeners segments are beyond the scope of the article.

^{vii} My interpretation is based on information collected during discussions among women spectators who commented on the performances. I explored the interpretation of particular scenes and images in individual and group discussions.

^{viii} Tile kura fenw, tubabu tile fenw

^{ix} For instance "this woman really knows how to dress" ("nin muso b'i labè de"). "From the way she dresses you can tell, this is a perfect women ("a parèli cògò ye mun ye i b'a ko nin ye musola kika de ye").

^x "Farmer women's dresses" (barakalamuso finiw)

^{xi} A frequent statement is "These are objects (typical) of our custom." ("Nin ye an ka ladalafen de ye.")

^{xii} "Nin muso dalen b'a yèrè la de" (literally "this woman is really conscious of herself"). Whether this remark is to be interpreted as a compliment or as a criticism depends on the speaker's tone of voice and facial expression.

^{xiii} "This is a woman of propriety" ("Musò sabalilen de do"). "She is disciplined" (A ka jito). "She really appears like a woman of free birth" ("A bè kè hòrnmuso de ye").

^{xiv} "This is a contented woman" ("Musò dafalen de do"). "This is a simple woman" ("Musoin ka nògò").

^{xv} Charry (1996:5) suggests that originally, "Mamaya" denoted a popular music style, "the earliest surviving popular music style that can be documented." A typical feature of this style is that the basis of the music is provided by a xylophon (balafon). Taken together with the fact that listeners today assert that "Mamaya" is the title of a song, Charry's observation implies that only with its recording and broadcasting, a particular version of the "genre" Mamaya was established as a standard version that is, a "song."

^{xvi} It is composed of one skirt, that is a cloth wrapped around the hips, a simple-cut shirt, and finally a large, robe-like garment worn over shirt and skirt.

^{xvii} For instance "from the way she is walking one can tell that this is a decent (respectable) woman" ("a taali cògò ye mun ye, i b'a ko muso munulen de do").

^{xviii} Such as in "She is simple (=not complicated)" ("A ka nògò"). "This is a self-sufficient (literally "complete") woman" ("Musò kika de do").

^{xix} The literal translation of "bi furu" is "marriage today." Since 1992, this song has become a hit on the international pop music market.

^{xx} Oumou Sangaré comes from an area in southern Mali where Maninka and Peul live together and many Peul have adopted Maninka as lingua franca.