

Worksheets

Transcript and Notes: "Toolongjong"

From: *The Griots: Ministers of the Spoken Word*

Side A

Band 1. Toolongjong

Alhaji Fabala Kanuteh, singing and accompanying himself on the balafon.

Alhaji Fabala Kanuteh is one of the most important of the West African griots, and this long narration of the first encounter of the people of the Gambia River basin with the Portuguese slave traders is of considerable historical importance. He is from a long line of Jali - the word for singer/historians in his own language of Mandingo - and at the age of three he was taken by his father to his grandfather's house in Manding to learn his profession. He remained there for twenty-four years, and his exhaustive, detailed accounts are a vital repository of the culture and history of the Mandingo people. He is employed by the president of The Gambia as one of the country's two official singers, and is head of a loosely organized grouping of Jali within the country. He is also considered to be one of the handful of Jali whose knowledge takes in the whole of his people's culture and he has been taken to London to perform for gatherings of the Mandingo people from every area of West Africa. A powerful, dignified older man who has made his pilgrimage to Mecca and earned the title of Alhaji, he lives in the village of Brikama, twenty miles from Banjul, on the flat, hot land south of the Gambia River. He also keeps a compound in Banjul and has a family there as well.

The term "song" is probably misleading; since the Jali narratives are closer to recitations, with interludes of singing and playing on the accompanying instrument. The interlude in most of these narratives are "praisings," that is set phrases praising the patrons of the Jali or great kings of the Mandingo peoples. The instrumental interludes give the performer a moment to rest his voice and also show off his instrumental skill. The Jali, as young beginners, learn the instrument first, then the praising, then finally the long

complicated narratives themselves. Fabala Kanuteh is considered to have lost a little of his virtuosity on the balafon, but there are few of the younger Jali who have his sensitivity and clarity on the instrument. The balafon of the Mandingo Jali is a small, easily portable instrument, generally constructed by the artist himself. It has nineteen wooden keys, with small calabash shells attached beneath them to amplify the sound. It is called a "balanjie," to distinguish it from the larger balafons that are used for dancing.

"Toolongjong" itself is a startling glimpse into the Africa that existed before extended contact with the Europeans, and gives a clear idea of the alteration in the societies which organized selling of slaves caused. Slavery was a solidly established institution throughout Africa, but it was the sudden appearance of the outsiders which set a whole of train of events in motion, and led to the long, complex involvement of Europe and Africa which is still not entirely resolved. It is certainly from narratives like this that we'll see most clearly into the attitudes and responses from the African side of the exchange, and since all of the African cultures involved had not developed written languages these narratives are one of the few sources that we have for knowledge of this kind. "Toolongjong" is particularly interesting in its narration of the sale of the slaves first to the Portuguese, and then by them on to the Dutch. It was a Dutch ship that brought the first slaves to the colony of Virginia in 1619; so this could be an account of the first Africans who came to the American colonies. Mandingo people were among the first to be brought to the southern colonies in large numbers, and they were particularly sought after in South Carolina. With their tall, dignified bearing, and highly developed social skills Mandingoes were, like the Wolloff people who were from the area to the north of them, used as kind of middlemen between the plantation owners and field slaves themselves, and they were often house servants and performed minor clerical duties. Certainly the concept of the Jali and his Wolloff counterpart, the Halamkat, continued in the blues singer, even if the role and the sources of the music itself changed radically. As "Toolongjong" describes, it was Mandingoes who helped establish the distinctive Afro-American culture simply by being among the first to arrive in the new world, and their culture played an important role in the development of what has followed after their arrival, as the African struggled to find some kind of culture that would give them a new concept of self and of society to bridge the distance between their past and the frightening present.

It is possible to follow the narrative of "Toolongjong" by listening to the recitation with the text. The names of the people and the places are generally clear, and the interludes give a moment to catch up with the story. Some Mandingo words which occur and can help in following the performance.

Mansa - king
keme - 100
Walendaya - The Dutch
Jonga - slave

When he describes the building in Jang Jang Bure as a "slaf" house, he is using the English word for slave. The building is a ruined stone structure on the banks of the Gambia River. The places called Jufreh Tenda and Albrede Tenda are also on the Gambia River; although not so far inland as Jang Jang Bure, which is now called Georgetown, but was also called MacCarthy, a name he uses in his narrative at one point, instead of Jang Jang Bure. The description of the drums beating in the villages refers to the signal drums, telling of the king's presence in the area.

Toolongjong is the song that was sung for Sunyetta,
the king of Fuda.

This same Toolongjong was also sung for the great soldiers of
Sunyetta.

This Toolongjong was sung for Musa Molo, the king of Fuladu,
for Seneke Jammeh, this Toolongjong was sung for the Koree Danso,
for the Sang Kala Maran,
this Toolongjong was sung for Mansa Demba of Berending,
this Toolongjong was sung for Wals Mandiba.

Now I will tell how slaves came to be sold to the Europeans.
How it came about is what I'm going to tell.

In that time Mansa Demba was the king of Nomi
and Seneke Jambi was at Bakindi Ke.

There were two wharves, one at Jufreh Tenda and the other at
Albreda Tenda,

and anyone who went there, to Youmi Mamsa, went to the king
there, that is the king Mansa Demba, and to the woman king
called Kodending.

If they got hold of any slaves they took them to Mansa Demba
and sold them to him.

At this time Han Sunyetta was the leader of the world,
he made another king for the village of Sillia,

and made another king at Salum,

and made another king at the village of Baul.

Another king Murujang and Gao.

Before that Satifa Jawara and Fakolly Kumba,
and Komfatta Keying and Nana Jibril, they were the strongest
of Sunyetta's soldiers.

Then the Europeans came from Europe,
and at the time the only Europeans were the Portuguese.

(long interlude of praising)

When the Portuguese came they brought their ship
to Sani Munko and they left the ship at Sani Munko
and raised their flag there.

Mansa Seneki Jammeh, a king, sent people to Sani Munko
to see them.

The messengers arrived at Sani Munko and they found the
Portuguese there and the Portuguese asked them questions.

The first man they saw was Kambi Manneh and the Europeans
asked him what was the name of the place

and he told them "My name is Kambi," and they wrote
the name of the place down, Kambi.

And they came to this place and they found people cutting
these sticks called the bang and the Europeans asked them
"what are you cutting" and they said they were cutting the
sticks called bangjolo, and the Europeans wrote that down
for the name.

Then the Europeans said to Seneki Jammeh "We are looking
for something,"

and Seneki Jammeh asked them "What is it?"

And they told him, "We are looking for slaves."

Seneke then went to Tambana and fought with the people of
Tambana, and fought with the village of Baria,

and then fought with Jokadu Dasalami.

When he had these slaves he went

and sold these slaves to the Europeans.

(short instrumental interlude)

Then he sold the slaves to the Europeans,
and the leader of the Europeans was called Wampiya,
and he took the slaves to the city of Salamki Joya.
He went with the slaves to the Walendaya,
that is to the people of Holland,
and he sold the slaves to the Walendaya,
then the Walendaya took the slaves to America.

(short instrumental interlude)

Then Musa Molo, the king of Fuladu, took four slaves
and gave them to the men called Dikori and Dansa.
He told Dikori and Dansa to take the four slaves
to the place called Youmi Mansa, to Seneke Jammeh,
then the two messengers said to Seneke Jammeh
that we were sent by Musa Molo to bring these four slaves
to you and sell them to you, to sell them to you for
gunpowder and white cloth.
Seneke Jammeh said, "Well it's true we sell slaves
to the Portuguese," then the Portuguese took the slaves
to the Walendaya, the people of Holland,
and the Walendaya took them to America.

(long interlude)

So then they took the four slaves and sold them to the
Portuguese and the Portuguese took them on their ship
and sold them to the Dutch - the Walendaya -
and the Dutch took them to America, and when they got
to America they sold the slaves there.
Then Dansa and Dikori returned to Musa Molo and told him
that they sold the slaves at Youni.
And Musa said, "Is that so?"
Then he said, "I would have taken my army to the people
of Youmi and fought them."
Then Musa went with his people to Kunti Wata, to Mansa Burekamara.
Mansa Burekamara gave Musa Molo 300 and 3 slaves,
and then Musa Molo left again.
He went to Almam Basise of Yani, who was together with
Bamba Esa Jamili,
and each of them gave Musa Molo 300 and 3 slaves.
Then he went to Lyama Banta, to Ngari Sabally of Kachamb.
Ngari Sabally gave him 1000 slaves.
He then went to Jatta Sela at Toro Koto with those 1000 slaves
and when he came to Jatta Sela then Jetta Sela told him,
"I will give you 400 slaves."
And then they went to Samkarangmarong
and he, too, gave Musa 300 slaves.
Then Musa crossed the river.
He left the Jokardu district,
he came to the village of Tambara,
and to the villages of Baria and Darselami,
and he sent a message on to the village of Bakindiki,
and the drum was beating there.
The drum was beating at a village called Berehkolong.
Another drum was beating at Berending and at Jinakibarra,
and another drum at Tubabu Kolomb.

(instrumental interlude)

When they arrived they sent a message to the lady king
Musa Mansa Kodending and to Seneke Jammeh
and another message to Bumyadu
and another message to Berending
and another message to Sangako
and another message to Misseramding
and another message to Missiraba
and another message to Jinakibara
and another message to Jinaki Kajatta,
and they said Musa Molo the king of the east has arrived
and come to visit the king of the west, Mansa Demba.
Then Mansa Demba said, "I will a message to Seneke Jammeh"
and they sent a message to Bakindi Ke.
When the message came to Bakindi Ke the people then
got ready, and they said,
"Musa, we know what you want," and they gave him 100 slaves.
100 young girls. 100 women. 100 young boys.
Money, 100. Gold, 100. Cows, 100. Goats, 100. Sheep, 100.
Musa then said, "If there is to be a war you can see that
it is only because there is something we want to have."
Then he said to the people of Bakindi Ke,
"There is no fight between us."
He told the people, "You have divided your land between the
two villages, Albadar and Jufering,
and these two villages took slaves and sold them
to Sanneh Munkujoyeh. Since you have been doing this,"
Musa told them, "I would like to meet the Dutchmen themselves."
And the people told him that it was the Portuguese who came,
and not the Dutchman himself.
"But when the Portuguese come we will take you to the place,"
then they took the Portuguese to a river place,
the place they called Jang Jang Bure, that is the name
of two brothers there.

(interlude of praising)

Then when Musa Molo came he collected all the people
of Fuladu, from Ndorma up to Santangto Bubu Tabanding.
Up to Santangto Wuruma. Up to Chargel.
He collected them all and he told them,
"Let us build a house at the place of the brothers
Bure and Jang to put slaves in,
and then sell them to the Europeans.
If we build that slave house then we can
sell the slaves when the Portuguese come
with their ships to sell them to America.
Then the people said, "Yes, we're going to do it."
Then they built the house, and up to now
the house is still there,
the kind of house the Europeans used to call
"Slave House."
The building is still at Jang Jang Bure.
At that time when they sold the slaves
the people who caught the slaves for Mansa Musa Molo
were Dikori, Dansa, Malam Buletema, Yungka Mandu,
Kemo Sarata, Funjunga Kemo,
they were the people who got all the slaves,
and Dembo Danso was also among them.

(instrumental interlude)

When the Europeans came,
 when they brought their ship from Portugal,
 the ship used to start its journey from Banjul,
 then it went to Sanemunko Joyo to collect slaves there
 in the presence of Seneke Jammeh, and Mansa Demba Sanko,
 and Samkala Marong, and Wali Mandeba, and Jata Sela.
 Anyone who had slaves they collected them all together
 and took them to the places called Aladabara and Jufure
 to sell them to the Portuguese.
 Then the Portuguese put them in their ship
 and left there and went to Jang Jang Bure.
 When they arrived there they went
 right to the slave house to collect the slaves there,
 and take them to the Dutch.
 Then the Dutch collected them and sent them to America,
 It is because of this
 that slaves were plenty in America.

They call them American Negroes.

(The performance ends with the names of some of the men who captured
 slaves for Seneke Jammeh.)