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▶ **To cite this version:**

Daniela Merolla, Felix Ameka,, Kofi Dorvlo. Researchers as Griots?: Reflections on Multimedia Fieldwork in West Africa. Oral Literature in the Digital Age Archiving Orality and Connecting with Communities , 2, Open Book Publishers, pp.65-90, 2013, 9781909254312. hal-01505751

HAL Id: hal-01505751
https://inalco.hal.science/hal-01505751

Submitted on 13 Apr 2017

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4. Researchers as Griots? Reflections on Multimedia Fieldwork in West Africa

Daniela Merolla and Felix Ameka, in collaboration with Kofi Dorvlo

In the beginning

Daniela Merolla and Kofi Dorvlo started a video documentation project in 2007 on Ewe migration stories and the festival in which these stories are re-enacted, *Hogebetsotso*. Oral sources and archaeological remains suggest that a series of migrations started in the eleventh century and that Ewes settled in Ghana in the early seventeenth century.[1] Oral narratives called *xotutu* recount a flow of people from the town called Notsie (in central Togo) to Ghana. The departure from Notsie is enacted in the *Hogebetsotso* festival ("leaving Hogbe", i.e. leaving the ancestral land) that takes place in several Anlo towns in Ghana. Merolla and Dorvlo's project aimed to investigate what the festival contributes to the discourse of the migration tradition, whether there are other local versions recounted orally and what the present written/oral/new media interactions are.[2] The project

1 The contemporary Ewe settlements span from the bank of the Mono River at the Togo-Benin border to Ghana, where large Ewe communities live along the eastern side of the Volta Lake, and in the area around Keta Lagoon on the seacoast (Amenumey 1997; Gayibor and Aguigah 2005).

2 The performance is an artistic, cultural and social event that constructs meanings and networks including but also going beyond the uttered words. What gets lost in the written transcription are the intonation and gestures along with the eventual

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0032.05

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also envisaged collecting video materials of the Ewe migration stories during the festival in the framework of the Verba Africana series.[3] The *Hogbetsotso* festival is usually held in the first week of November every year. Merolla and Dorvlo had hoped to be participant observers and documenters during the 2007 festival. However, in that year and ever since, the festival has not been held due to disputes surrounding the chieftaincy of the Anlo paramountcy.[4] In November 2007, given the volatile situation in Anloga, Merolla and Dorvlo were not able to visit the area, instead we interviewed Datey-Kumodzie[5] who had been recommended to us as being well informed about the *Hogebetsotso* festival and the migration stories. The interview was different from what we had expected.

At the beginning of November 2009, Felix Ameka, Merolla and Dorvlo were together in Accra, and watched and discussed the interview before

musical accompaniment, the interactions between performer and public, the clothing and scenography, and the context and politics of the performance (Barber 1997; Coulet Western 1975; Baumgardt and Bounfour 2000; Furniss 1996; Görög-Karady 1981; Finnegan 1992; Okpewho 1992; Ricard and Veit-Wild 2005; Schipper 1990). The necessity of new media in documentation and research is strengthened by the changing conditions of oral production in the last decade, for instance on the Internet (Merolla 2002 and 2005). However, while video captures much more than text and sound, it also has limitations with respect to some aspects of the context of performance: the smell, for example. Moreover, the case presented in these pages shows that technology can effect change in what is recorded.

3 The Verba Africana series produces DVDs and CD-Roms for libraries and is freely accessible on the Internet (see Online Sources). It was started by Merolla thanks to the collaboration between Leiden and Naples Universities in 2005. Verba Africana was integrated into the international project "African Oral literatures, new media and technologies" (coordinated by Merolla and Jan Jansen) supported by INALCO (Paris), SOAS (London), the Universities of Hamburg, Leiden, and Naples, the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research and since 2010 by the World Oral Literature Project (Cambridge, UK), the Language Centre of the University of Ghana (Accra, Ghana), the School of Languages of Rhodes University (South Africa), and the University of Bamako (Mali). For information on the project see Online Sources for the Leiden University site. The series is open to all Africanist scholars. The idea underlying the Verba Africana series is that textual content and visual performance are both essential for classification, description and interpretation of the oral genres and their narrative context. The performance of African oral genres, whether classic poems, songs and tales or innovative genres such as hip hop and AIDS theatre, is recorded and integrated to allow the interested public to approach oral literary productions as total events distributed in several layers: video fragments and summaries on the menu, with the possibility to view accompanying material on subpages. Accompanying material includes background information, excerpts of studies and articles, interviews, transcription, translation, presentation and analysis of the context and of visual aspects of the performance.

4 In February 2011, the dispute was resolved and a new Paramount Chief was installed. It is hoped that the celebrations will resume again in November 2011.

5 Dr. Datey-Kumodzie does not use his first name (Samuel) in his recent publications.

Dorvlo and Merolla went on fieldwork to the Anlo area. Merolla and Dorvlo went to carry out their initial research project and made a series of recordings and interviews at Anloga, the capital town of the Anlo area in Ghana, and the centre of the *Hogebetsotso* festival. Among other aspects, they investigated what people thought of the stories and interpretations offered during the first interview. In this case also, some of the answers differed from what we expected. We return to this point below when discussing the relationship between personal and shared cultural knowledge.

Xotutu narratives and the making of the *Hogbetsotso* festival

The Ewe exodus was probably caused by the progressive expansion of other populations, most likely the Yoruba (Amenumey 1997: 15–16; Gayibor and Aguigah 2005: 6–7). Several *xotutu* versions agree that the Ewe moved westward from northern areas in present-day Benin and settled, following successive displacements and subdivisions, in what is nowadays Togo and eastern Ghana. Through genealogies of royal characters, narratives of migrations collected at Tado (along the Mono River) relate that Adja and Ewe peoples came from Ketu in Yoruba country, while narratives collected at Notsie recount another flow of migration from Tado to Notsie. The most frequently narrated story includes the migration from Notsie to Ghana during the reign of Agokoli I, a cruel king who asked the Ewes (then called Dogbos) to kill their elders, to build houses and the city wall with mud and pieces of glass, rock and thorns and to produce "a rope out of clay". The Ewes were able to escape from Notsie thanks to a cunning trick: they left the town walking backwards so that nobody could guess from the direction of their footsteps that they were leaving. In such narratives, Notsie is presented as the Ewe ancestral home. Some versions collected in Anlo-Ewe include the episode of the conflict between Agokoli and Sri, chief of the Dogbos in Notsie, which fuelled Agokoli's harsh behaviour towards the Dogbos/Ewes. Other stories narrate incidents that took place after the Ewe departed from Notsie, such as the episode relating how the right to alternate succession to the Anlo stool (symbol of ritual and political authority) was established between the Bate clan and the Adzovia clan (Aduamah 1965: 5–6, 18–20).

The theme of inter-generational conflict, whether between king and elders or between father and son, is widely encountered in West African

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oral narratives (Paulme 1976: 91–121; Görög-Karady 1995). Similarly, the motif of the "rope of clay" is common in West African and Arabic narratives (Gayibor 1984: 31; Pazzi 1973: 24). In the Notsie narrative such themes are specified and localised. As indicated above, there is an episode in the narrative where the king Agokoli orders the elders to be killed. This episode highlights the political conflict between kingship and *amega* (council of elders) in a system in which the spiritual and political leader was usually secluded from public view and the council was the political power that communicated with the people.

> A young foolish Agokoli seeks to rid himself of the confining advice of his elders by ordering all to be executed. His Ewe subjects, however, are successful in saving a few from death [...] And it is the elders who successfully lead them [the Ewe] out of Notsie when they make their escape. (Greene 2002a: 1035)

If the solution offered in the Notsie narrative re-states the authority of the elders, other stories offer a more ambiguous discourse on seniority. For example, a version collected by Gayibor (1984: 27) recounts that one of the elders became drunk during a celebration and revealed the trick played by Ewe people to induce Agokoli to kill his own son; a revelation that gave sway to the retaliation of Agokoli and the order to kill the elders. According to Sandra Greene, the theme of elderly authority gained particular importance when social, political and economic changes during colonialism jeopardised the social system based on seniority, "Resistance to this change in the authority culture of the area took a number of forms, but perhaps the most interesting was the popularity of narratives that reinforced elderly authority" (2002: 1034).

An intense interaction between oral and written *xotutu* versions has taken place since the colonial period. According to Gayibor (1989) and Greene (2002a), the German missionaries who were active in the area since 1847 promoted not only linguistic standardisation based on the Anlo-Ewe language, but also the idea of a common origin of all Ewes from the city of Notsie. The *xotutu* versions identifying Notsie as the "original home" were known in the Anlo area (present south-eastern Ghana) and became generally accepted since they were used for the reconstruction of Ewe migratory displacements in the missionary school readers.[6]

6 The Ghanaian priest Henry Kwakume offered one of the first full-length versions of the migration story in French translation (1948).

> Ces traditions, lues à travers tout le pays ewe à la fin du siècle dernier et au début de celui-ci [1900] ont fini par s'enraciner solidement dans le cœur et l'esprit de ces jeunes élèves [...] Les jeunes écoliers d'hier sont devenus les veillards qui, de nos jours, nous répètent avec conviction ce que les missionaires leur avaient patiemment appris.
>
> [These traditions read throughout Eweland toward the end of the last century and the beginning of this century (1900) have firmly taken root in the hearts and minds of the pupils [...] the pupils of yesterday became the elders who in our days repeat with conviction what they were patiently taught by the missionaries].[7] (Gayibor 1989: 212; translated by Merolla and Ameka)

The belief that Notsie was the "original home" of the Ewe was further strengthened by both political and religious movements (Gayibor 1989: 212; Greene 2002a: 1035). The Ewe (pre-independence) nationalist movements referred to their common origin when they sought to include all Ewe-speaking peoples into one of the nations to be created after the end of European colonisation. An important moment for the diffusion of such views was the rally organised at Notsie in 1956, on the occasion of the first *Agbogbo* (referring to Notsie's wall) festival, when the authorities—reunited from all the Ewe-speaking areas—decided to harmonise their historical narratives.[8] On the other hand, following Greene:

> The Notsie narrative's popularity was further enhanced during the colonial period among the ordinary and the average in the religion as a result of local efforts to make sense of their own traditions in light of the Biblical narratives introduced by the Bremen Mission. Instead of embracing the notion that they were the children of Ham who had diverted from the path of God and who needed the guiding hand of the missionaries to lead them back onto the road of righteousness, many among the Ewe associated their exodus from Notsie with the Jews' escape from Egypt. The Ewes were not heathens but had been one with the Israelites.[9] (2002a: 1035–36)

7 See, for example, the missionary school reader by Hartter, Spieth and Daeuble (1906).

8 "A cette occasion, tous les chefs réunis confrontèrent leurs traditions [ ] De là naquit également la tendance à uniformisation des récits historiques des differents chefs en ce qui concerne les phases de l'histoire antérieure à la dispersion de Notsie" [On this occasion, all the assembled chiefs confronted their traditions [...] From there was born the trend to standardise the historical accounts of the various leaders concerning the history prior to the dispersion from Notsie] (Gayibor 1989: 212; translated by Merolla and Ameka).

9 Greene mentions a number of authors who favoured this interpretation, such as Mamattah (1979) and Fianu (1986).

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All these narratives of migration, whether orally transmitted or written down, give form to and convey knowledge of the Ewe land and community, crystallising historical processes of identification through migrations, settlements, interactions with, and interpretations by different groups. An example is the re-enactment of the migration journey in the *Hogbetsotso* festival.

The departure from Notsie is indeed enacted in the *Hogbetsotso* festival that takes place in several Anlo-Ewe (Aŋlɔ in Ewe orthography) towns such as Anloga, Anyako, Dzodze and Klikor in Ghana (Nukunya 1997: 106; Anyidoho 2005: 4). *Hogbetsotso* is a recent phenomenon, as it was created in the 1960s.[10] At the beginning, storytelling was included as part of the festival but in the 1980s the organisation chose for a dramatic form, as indicated by Greene:

> In 1978 [...] a clan elder who was widely respected for his knowledge of the oral history of the area, presented a most dignified and moving account of Notsie's history and the exodus that mesmerized those who attended. The audience was sparse, however, and over the years it attracted even fewer interested observers [...] Refusing to abandon the very heart of the festival, the organizers had opted by 1996 to pursue another approach. That year, they invited a drama troupe from Accra to perform the exodus re-enactment. The response was overwhelming [...]. Significantly, to attract such a crowd, the troupe took considerable artistic license in dramatizing the events leading to the exodus. Agokoli was portrayed not as the insensitive tyrant of the well-known Notsie narrative, but in slapstick form as a drunken, lecherous, bumbling ruler who was presented as more an object of amusement than abhorrence. The fact that only a more light-hearted account [...] could draw such an engaged crowd illustrates the extent to which older meanings and memories have undergone yet another set of transformations. (2002b: 27–28)

The power of the Ewe migration narratives as a means to negotiate and create identity is still perceptible in the present, as illustrated by the video interview discussed in this paper, integrating them in the eclectic combination of different forms of knowledge in the contemporary globalised world.

10 In 1962, Anlo developed what became an annual festival commemorating the exodus from Notsie. Named Hogbetsotsoza (from the Ewe words hogbe [homeland], understood to be Notsie; tsotso [exodus therefrom]; and za [festival], the organisers used this particular title because Notsie (or Hogbe) was known to every Anlo who had either been taught or had heard about the history of the Ewes in school or from local traditions. In the first year of its organisation and in all those festivals held since, however, emphasis was placed not on a larger Ewe cultural identity, but rather on identifying and taking pride in Anlo culture (Greene 2002b: 26).

The interview with Datey-Kumodzie

The meeting started with a preliminary exchange on the aims and the publication of the interview. The interviewee explained at the beginning that he obtained his doctorate in Germany on Ewe sacred songs and that indeed he was involved in and knowledgeable about the *Hogebetsotso* festival and the migration stories as he was academically and personally engaged in the religious and philosophical Ewe world of cults and shrines.[11] We asked the interviewee whether he knew what kind of Ewe migration stories were narrated orally and their role and meaning in the organisation and functioning of the *Hogebetsotso* festival. He made it clear that he was the repository of a very special, secret knowledge that no other researcher could reveal and that he was worried about "people tapping and stealing" his knowledge. He then added that he needed to be careful because it was explosive ("volatile") knowledge about the distorted history of the Ewes and how such distortions contributed to destroying the continent of Africa. He told us that he had sent his book on this subject to UNESCO but they had refused to publish it because "they became afraid". We confirmed that we would publish the interview with his name and that the aim of our project was to create materials for research and teaching that were to be distributed through university libraries. As at the beginning he had mentioned that there was much more involved than the migration stories alone, we took his hint and asked whether he would tell us about that too.

At this point he started to explain the meaning of the term *Hogebetsotso*, framing it in a cosmological geography of the Ewe areas of origin and their present location that he presented as not generally known because people would have forgotten the meaning of their language. He also described the kind of dance that re-enacts the central episode of the migration story (the Ewe walking backward from Notsie), interpreting it in a metaphorical and philosophical way. Then he started to sing, using his song to link the origin of the Ewe to the creation of the world by the Mother Goddess. From this point on, with a powerful performance in terms of singing and narrating style, he recounted that human beings had crept out of water after centuries of evolution, "they were dolphins". The first migration

11 Datey-Kumodzie is committed to the Hu-Yaweh cult that is related to the neo-traditionalist religious mission Afrikania (De Witte 2008: 135). He introduced himself as the president of the Sophia Mission during the interview. Datey-Kumodzie's dissertation was defended in 1989.

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started from the Lost Continent of Mu from which the original Ewe speakers spread to the whole world, to India and China, to Mesopotamia, to the ancient Greco-Roman world and Egypt. From Ethiopia, the ancient Ewes migrated to Egypt and from there they went south towards Nigeria. From that point on, his narratives reconnected to the known oral migration stories of the Ewes. However, he added another wave of migration from west to east from ancient Ghana down through present day Gonja, Ashanti and Ga territories before crossing the Volta eastwards to the Anlo area. He claimed that this was the route his family had followed.[12]

During his performance, he repeatedly used etymologies and linguistic connections as evidence for his narrative. He had his story ready and well developed, and we did not need to ask questions to go on. In fact, only a few times did Merolla try to re-address the initial question on the role of the migration narratives in the *Hogebetsotso* (and whether the songs he sang were used during the *Hogebetsotso*) and he did return to it at the end of the interview. As a whole, he executed an impressive performance, alternating between narrative and song.

The interview can be approached from myriad angles. As a performance, it was very rich in gestures, for example, the flowing movement accompanying the narration of the first human beings emerging from water. Overall, the connection of gestures to narrative style is extremely effective and beautiful. We will focus, however, on the content and its impact in relation to the "invention of tradition" argument and the interviewee/researcher relationship in terms of the transmission of knowledge and the possible influence of such narratives in society when diffused through educational channels, as it happened in previous times when missionaries spread their version of Ewe migration stories.

An attempt at interpretation

As explained, the expectation was to interview a scholar narrating and explaining various versions of the Ewe migration story, the development of the *Hogebetsotso* festival, and the interpretation of the narratives in symbolic and philosophical terms.

12 If this is true, it would mean that his family are not "true" Anlo and that they might be called dzideéhlɔme "born into the clan".

Contrary to expectations, the scholar's narrative appears to be a convoluted mix of Ewe cosmological ideas, migration stories, scientific ideas on evolution, historical knowledge of different periods and cultures, and popularising fictional narratives of the Lost Continent of Mu. Moreover, the interviewee's narrative was "Ewe-centric" in so far as the language spoken by the first human beings was Ewe and this language and cosmological knowledge fertilised and left traces in the best known civilisations of the whole world.

Let it be stated clearly that the problem with this interview is not in the mixing of heterogeneous materials or in its ethnocentricity. It is well known that narrative strategies and what is sometimes called the mythopoetic approach make it possible for storytellers to integrate different forms of knowledge from varied sources alongside input from the audience and adapt them to present circumstances. The interviewee's narrative can be read in line with the discussion on the constant process of identity formation and the making of tradition. Linking one's ancestors to major civilisations is a feature of the identity (re)construction and is a response as well to a variety of cultural predicaments, such as political and ideological discussions around nationalism and pan-Africanism, globalising processes in knowledge building, and the need to find/re-state one's location in the mental geography and history that stretch to include the whole world. We also see the linking of ancestors to major civilisations as a brave attempt to find a role for local knowledge—but in a learned and esoteric elaboration—that cannot just be put "aside" because it risks becoming ineffective and futile when segregated in the realm of mythology or philosophy.

Questions and problems

In making the Verba Africana volume on Ewe migration narratives it was decided to include only the less controversial parts of the interview, and present them as video fragments. Problematic parts of the interview are, however, presented in written form accompanying the video. As indicated before, although the problems connected to the selection are linked to the characteristics of the Verba Africana series that address researchers as well as students and the interested public, our experience is connected to the discussion on the theory and methodology of video fieldwork and documentation.

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The first issue encountered was that the interviewee is and presents himself as a researcher, and his position urges us to consider the scientific value of his narrative and whether he is in search of legitimisation, as the initial story of UNESCO's refusal to publish his book seems to suggest.

The ethical and scientific knot is that we intend to publish a video interview that respects the original discourse of the interviewee but at the same time we do not want to be incorporated into his personal agenda by endorsing his complex narrative as scientific, nor do we intend to publicise his agenda or spread it as history among Ewe, Ghanaian and international students and among Ewe people. We wish to avoid falling into the same trap that missionary discourses, through their teaching and preaching, have generated among the Ewe. Last but not least, we are confronted with the interviewee's role and ambition in present day Ghanaian and Ewe society. He presents himself as a pillar, leader and mover of a "Sophia movement"[13] that seeks to revitalise local religious knowledge and to make it accessible for a larger audience; possibly as a viable alternative to Christianity and Islam.[14]

Our scientific problems

Etymologies

In the interview, etymologies are offered as evidence to sustain an elaborate narrative that mingles mythological creation stories, "scientific" evolutionism, popularising narratives and historical knowledge. The narrator claims that the word "amoeba" is the Ewe expression *hamueba* which the Mother Goddess uttered when she saw human beings emerge from water, and links this to the beginning of life. There is a resemblance

13 A religious association related to the neo-traditionalist mission Afrikania that was established in Ghana in 1982 by the former Catholic priest Kwabena Damuah. Damuah intended to make traditional religion "relevant to our times" by revitalising and up-dating it, and giving it national and pan-African dimensions (De Witte 2008: 135, 231). Other organisations that strengthen local indigenous forms of religion are for example the Asomdwee Fie, Shrine of the Abosom and Nsamanfo International (AFSANI) led by Nana Akua Kyerewaa Opokuwaa, and the SANKORE Foundation directed by Faiza Ibrahim Taimako (see Online Sources for AFSANI and SANKORE websites). Together with other similar organisations, these foundations join national and international groups such as the Ghana Psychic and Traditional Healers Association and the National Association of Certified Natural Health Professionals.

14 Note that "local knowledge" in Datey-Kumodzie (2006), and "modern" mythical narrative means pre/other than Christian/Islamic religions and European/Arabic philosophies and science.

but there is no semantic connection to serve as a basis for asserting an etymological link. Similarly, he claims that the term *hogbe* which the Ewes use to refer to *Amedzɔfe* "the place where humans originated" is related to two present day geographical areas in Eweland: the Ho area and what he calls the Gbe area. The unfortunate thing is that the group which he refers to as the Gbe are actually called the Gbi and there is no linguistic reason that could explain the modification from "e" into "i". Elsewhere he links the name Khartoum to an Ewe expression that seemingly sounds like it. In the same way he claims that the Ewes were in Egypt and that Greek philosophy and Roman thought—as well as Catholicism and Buddhism—were all influenced and in fact were off-shoots of Ewe civilisation, and he buttresses this point with some spurious etymologies.

History

The hypothetical reconstruction of world history and Ewe migrations is his personal narrative. It is problematic if understood as "history" in the sense of the academic discipline, as a reconstruction on the basis of historiographic methods. The interviewee refers to accepted "historical facts" as bricks of his construction and as evidence to give legitimacy to his narration. The problem is that he uses these facts freely and not in the historical or archaeological frames to which they belong. Not only is chronology mixed up at times, but there is also the integration of the Lost Continent of Mu in global history. It is worth recollecting that the Lost Continent of Mu was theorised by Augustus Le Plongeon (1896) and James Churchward (1926, 1931). They claimed the existence of an ancient continent which disappeared in the Atlantic Ocean. Today archaeological, linguistic and genetic evidence has lead scholars to dismiss such a hypothesis and to see it as a fictional narrative.[15] Similarly, the idea that the Ewes together with the Akan, Ashanti and Ga would have migrated from Ethiopia to Egypt in ancient times is in the field of speculation if not fiction. The migration of the Ewes from East Africa and Ethiopia specifically, is also a controversial hypothesis that has been refuted by recent research.[16]

15 See Fagan (2006: 23–46).

16 "Some students of Ewe history have tried to push this supposed point of departure [Ketu/Benin] back to Belebele which is in turn identified with the 'Babel' of the Bible. Others have suggested Mesopotamia, Egypt etc., as the point of origin of the Ewes. There is, however, no scientific basis for all these claims" (Amenumey 1997: 14).

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Problematic positions of researchers

The problems encounterd raise several issues for research, some of which go beyond the immediate concerns of authorship. One of the issues is that of "insider" and "outsider" researchers, but it transcends that. Merolla is evidently an outsider, but we are also confronted with different kinds of insiders. The interviewee is an insider who is now both a researcher and a researched, Dorvlo is an insider (as an Anlo) but a researcher, while Ameka is an Ewe insider but an Anlo outsider (as a researcher). Moreover, all the participants in the current discourse about the interview belong to the academic world and in this regard they are "outsiders" *vis-à-vis* Ewe local religious knowledge and migration narratives, although (again) they are differently located: Merolla, Ameka and Dorvlo work in the academy, while the interviewee belongs to it as a PhD holder and an independent researcher, but he has not been an active academic for many years now.

Watching the interview over and over again reminds us of the observations the Ghanaian anthropologist Owusu made some decades ago about early African ethnographies, "frequently, it is not clear whether the accounts so brilliantly presented are about native realities at all or whether they are about informants, about scientific models and imaginative speculations or about the anthropologists themselves and their fantasies" (1978: 312).

As a native speaker scholar, Ameka cannot help but think that the narrative is full of the "imaginative speculations" and "fantasies" of the interviewee rather than "native realities". Ameka is also confronted with the fact that should his name be associated with this story, it would give it a certain legitimacy, while the evidentiary bases of most of the interviewee's claims are often blatantly false, and many lay native speakers can show this to be the case.

Merolla is troubled by the clash between the interviewee's attempt to legitimise his narrative (through etymological evidence, historical reconstruction, and the interview itself) and the researchers' knowledge and standards required to distinguish academic discourse from such a hybrid mixing of creation myths, popularising narratives and scientific/historical knowledge. By selecting the video fragments according to our discourse, "are we simply positivist?" she asks, and unable to give room to difference and alternative cultural constructions?

Both Ameka and Merolla agree that the interview has to be studied and presented as a piece of narrative performance. It is a narrative performance in which the mythopoetic approach deploys itself, but it also appears as a personal mythopoetics built with elements from local—either shared or secret—knowledge. The problem with it is that it has to be understood in the context of a suspended world, as in another world, although the interviewee does not present it as such. If it were presented as a *gli*, a folktale, belonging to a make-believe world, it would have a different status. But it is presented as real/scientific, as knowledge that has to be believed as being truthful and that contends with scientific knowledge for defining and understanding the field of reality. This is the reason why we need to present it in a cautious way when we produce a video documentation intended not only for scholars but also for students and a large public.

Ethical problems

The ethical problem is directly linked to what has been discussed before. We intend to respect our interviewee's discourse, but cannot propose his narrative as such. Not only can we not propose it integrally without enclosing it in comments on the scientific problems mentioned above, but we also cannot avoid selecting the video fragments very carefully, because we offer this as material for students and a large audience who may not yet have the training and the critical stance to interpret this video narrative as a making of tradition.

The selection of the fragment involves another ethical problem as well. As a construction of the researchers' perspective and discourse, it expresses the unbalanced power relationship between the interviewers and the interviewee, given the respective positions in the interview, in academia, and in the present chapter too.

Personal or shared cultural knowledge?

The last point to discuss is whether the interviewee expresses his personal reinterpretation or if it is somehow shared, maybe secret, knowledge among a certain milieu of Ewes. It is evident that his narrative and style is his own. However, interviews conducted in November 2009 in Anloga, traditionally the ritual and political capital of the Anlo-Ewe in Ghana, with

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some educated Ewes (teachers and office workers) show that the idea that Ewes migrated from Ethiopia to Egypt before reaching West Africa is well-known and it is often presented as historical fact. Although there is little archaeological or linguistic evidence for it, as indicated above, in the diffusion of such an idea we might see the influence of a schoolbook such as *Eve Kɔnuwo*, "Ewe Customs", in which the author S. J. Obianim discusses such an origin as a possibility.

As can be seen in the quotes below, in the introduction to *Eve Kɔnuwo*, first published in 1953 with a second edition in 1956, reissued in 1990, Obianim notes that black Africans originate from Sudan near Egypt and the Abyssinian highlands.[17] Perhaps the Ewes, who are also a part of the black race may have stayed in a part of this land […] (Obianim 1990: 2).

Obianim then suggests that the Ewes may also have partaken in the great civilisations of the Egyptians:

> Perhaps the Ewes learnt some things from them, such as pottery, blacksmithing and different kinds of other crafts. Maybe in the area of customs too, they may have observed how the Pharaoh reigned and how his subjects showed respect to him. […] Because of the troubles caused by enemy or hostile people [such as slave traders] all the groups/nations who used to be in Sudan near Egypt and the Abyssinian region migrated from there, and there were only few left. Some of the ones who migrated headed east, and others went west.
>
> The Ewes also headed west. After the fall of the Egyptian kingdom, the Ghana Empire rose in its place with its capital at Walata near Timbuktu. The Ewes were also part of this empire and they got some customs from there also. There is no literature confirming this but there are some signs in our language and practices which show that our ancestors knew something about this kingdom […]. (Ibid.: 2)

After the Ghana Empire, the Mali Empire came in its place and the Songhai Empire also destroyed it: It is clear that the Ewes were also in the Empire. The word for lion in Ewe is *dzata*. It is clear that we gave the name of Mari Dzata to this fierce animal […] (Obianim 1990: 2–3).[18]

17 The quotes are translated by Ameka. It is probably worth noting that the author Obianim comes from Avatime, a mission post of the Bremen mission. Incidentally, the Avatime speak a language called Siya, or Sideme by the Avatimes, which is not mutually intelligible with Ewe. But because of contact with Ewes and also because of the mission schools, almost all Avatime are bilingual at least in Avatime and Ewe. Part of Obianim's knowledge therefore comes from the schooling he received and probably also from the Black renaissance movement and the influential ideas of Cheikh Anta Diop.

18 Mari Dzata is probably for "Mari Djata", one of the names of the hero of the Malian epos Sunjata.

When this kingdom also fell, all the inhabitants dispersed:

> Thus the Ewes also set off northwest until they reached Dahome (now Benin). Here the Ewes divided into two big groups: one part went northeastwards to the Adele region on Dogbo land. The important groups/states that were in this group are the Anlos, the Be, the Agu and the Fon, but the Fon migrated again eastwards into Dahome and established the Fon state. The second big group went southwestwards and divided into two groups: one group stayed in Tado and the other group settled in Notsie. (Ibid.: 1–3)

The influence of schoolbooks is far reaching and goes beyond national boundaries and generation shift. For example, the reconstruction of human history in terms of Ewe worldwide migrations is shared by Togolese Ewes who produced a video summarising the creation and migration narrative of the Ewe, similar to the narrative offered in the interview presented here. Such a video was aired on the Supreme Master Television (28 July 2007) that broadcasts the teachings and actions of their spiritual leader Ching Hai.[19] The video found its way onto the World Wide Web (Figure 1).[20]

Although the aim of the Ewe creation and migration story aired on the Supreme Master Television is unclear, the video appears to assert the centrality of Ewe cosmology and religious/philosophical knowledge in human global history. As in a paper by the interviewee (Datey-Kumodzie 2006), the Ewe/African local knowledge foundation is seen as being central to new technical and spiritual developments in Africa. One wonders whether they do not have the same agenda and whether Dr. Datey-Kumodzie's work was the source of the video.[21]

19 The Vietnamese spiritual woman leader Ching Hai developed her meditation method and esoteric knowledge in the 1980s. She appears to have learnt her spiritual path from Thakar Singh, who had the role of Guru at Sawan Asham in Delhi in the late 1970s. Ching Hai founded the Supreme Master Ching Hai International Association (with headquarters in Taiwan), a corporate entity that has a media empire as well as restaurants and a fashion business worldwide. The Association also undertakes charitable activities. The Association and Ching Hai—as painter and fashion designer—have a million dollar business, but the source of the wealth is unclear according to researcher Patricia M. Thornton. Thornton (2003) writes that the Supreme Master Ching Hai International Association relies on the Internet for self-promotion, recruitment and donation, and it can be seen as a transnational "cybersect".

20 See Online Sources for the YouTube clip Abibitumi Kasa website forum.

21 Recent fieldwork shows that the ideas expressed in the YouTube video and by Dr. Datey-Kumodzie find wide resonance in lectures offered at high schools at Anloga town in the Ewe region (Dorvlo and Merolla's personal observation).

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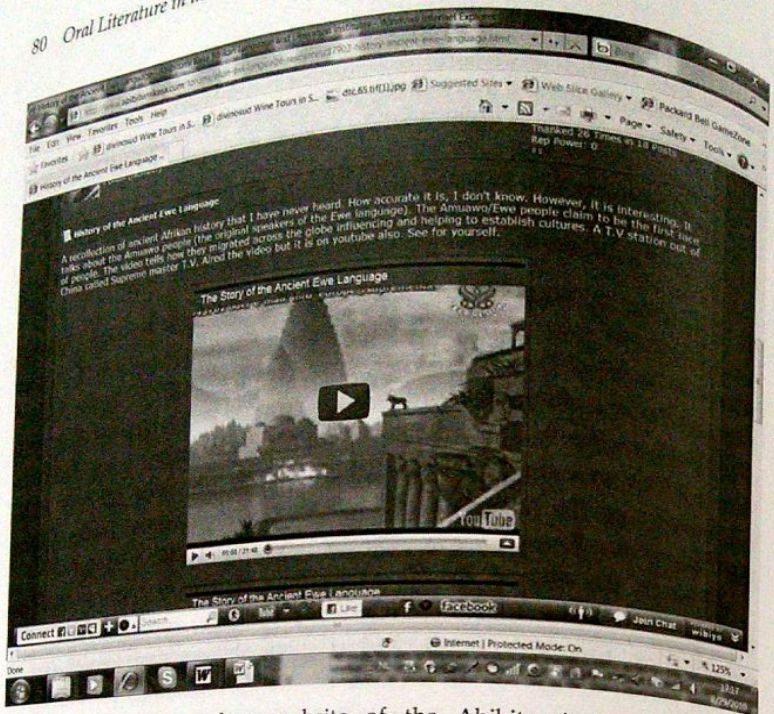

Figure 1. Screenshot from website of the Abibitumi Kasa Afrikan Language and Liberation Institutes, Forum, Thread "History of the Ancient Ewe Language".[22] Image by Felix Ameka and Daniela Merolla, 2012.

Theoretical reflections and open questions

The study of oral genres has shifted attention from the academic process of recreating the text to the interaction of the participants—that is—from the performers to the researchers, in the performance.[23] This shift in focus has progressively involved the discussion of concepts such as giving voice to informants and authorship in the documentation of oral genres. Such a discussion is indeed urgent when we use video recordings, as in the case presented here, because new technologies are not only tools for recording events but also tools that affect and change what is recorded (Gee and Hayes 2011).

22 See Online Sources for the Abibitumi Kasa website.
23 We would like to thank Jan Jansen, Leiden University for this formulation.

On giving voice

Scholars know that the use of video cameras may affect the performance and the context in which they operate. Moreover, the apparent objectivity of video images risks obfuscating perspectives, aims, audiences, and selection processes conveyed by the images. This is quite a confusing and paradoxical situation as we are somehow required to deconstruct our research and video recordings before we have even constructed them.

To summarise our progress so far, we may recollect some effects of the literary analysis of narrative strategies applied to "scientific" writings at the beginning of the 1990s. Anthropologists and historians have used the analysis of perspective and narrative voice very effectively to criticise the way in which classic ethnographies and works of history construct dominant discourses under the guise of objectivity. Anthropologists in particular recognised that informants' voices were subsumed by the researcher's dominant discourse not only in colonial work but also in the recent and most well-intended ethnographies (Appadurai 1991; Augé 1994; Cliffords and Marcus 1986; Crapanzano 1980; Fabian 1983; Geertz 1973 and 1988; Rosaldo 1989 and Rabinaw 1988). Moreover, the very same idea of giving voice to informants appeared to originate in the misconstruction of the disproportionate distance established between subject (researcher) and object (informant) of research. The new approach showed that the seemingly progressive endeavour of giving voice to informants ultimately denied the processes and effects of interactions, negotiations and adaptations taking place in the interview as well as in the process of recording oral genres. On the contrary, recorded interviews and ethnographic writing are rather to be understood as encounter and exchange. A possible resolution may be to pay careful attention to interactions and negotiations and make explicit where the researcher's voice and perspective is constructed and how, when, and where these take the upper hand in the documentation and in the interpretation. As we have seen, however, these indications still leave problems in the recording and video research and documentation.

On authorship

Philosophical and literary studies declared the author "dead" as far back as the 1970s,[24] but questions of authorship and rights persist all the same. New

24 We can extrapolate that in Foucault's approach (1969/1994), intellectual property does

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electronic media—in particular the Internet and World Wide Web—have opened up very animated discussions on authorship and intellectual property, and even fiercer debates as far as copyright and legal issues are concerned.

A well-known case is exemplified by the discussions on authorship as a collaborative enterprise. New media art is usually created in a very strongly collaborative manner, but tensions arise—sometimes with complicated legal consequences—as "occasionally artists mistakenly claw back to individual authorship when in fact, the final work is highly dependent on their deep collaboration with computer scientists, designers and all manner of other talents" (Diamond 2003).[25] Similar tensions traverse the scientific arena, as cooperation between researchers, technicians and people from business enterprises also generates concerns on intellectual property and authorship. The point is to understand the breadth and depth of the collaboration: who has the intellectual initiative and the intellectual property and, obviously, who can claim the property rights, particularly when products are on the market to be sold and bought.

Another discussion of interest here relates to the rights of indigenous people with regard to knowledge and verbal and visual art forms. The question of intellectual property and the rights of indigenous people developed from the experience of expropriation during and after European expansionism and colonialism, when not only lands and resources but also material and immaterial knowledge and arts were exploited to the advantage of museums, universities, international organisations and enterprises, individual scholars and businessmen. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007 states that "Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons" (Article 13). Such rights are also to be implemented in political, legal and administrative ways.[26] This UN declaration is interpreted and fought for legally in terms

not apply to the "author", as the text is created in an intertextual exchange of ideas and writings belonging to a certain period and society: "no individual can be pointed to as the only source of an idea, as it emerges within far too complex a social and cultural milieu to make any individual imputation sensible" (Longo and Magnolo 2009: 835). Barthes (1968/1984) further disconnects text and author and attributes authorship to the reader who constructs meaning, understanding and unity of the text.

25 See also Manovich (2004).

26 Article 11.2 states: "States shall provide redress through effective mechanisms, which may include restitution, developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples, with respect

of intellectual property, copyright and economic proceedings when, for example, the so-called imitation industry exploits "dreaming designs" of Australian aboriginal people for commercial gain without authorisation and without recognising the copyright and economic damage made to the Aboriginal dreamers/artists.[27] It also stimulates projects of cultural revitalisation, such as the *!Khwa ttu: San Culture & Education Centre* created to counter the impact of so-called ethno-tourism, with game resorts making a profit on staged encounters between tourists and San families who—without equitable contracts and respect—are to "act like 'wild Bushmen'" using loincloths and posing and dancing on demand.[28] As summarised by Staehelin (2002) on Cultural Survival,[29] the *!Khwa ttu* project intends to implement "a concept more ambitious than the mere sale of crafts".[30] We read on their website that *!Khwaa ttu* intends:

> Restore and display San heritage, culture, folklore, visual arts, cosmology and languages; Educate the general public about the world of the San; Provide training to the San in literacy, entrepreneurship, tourism, health issues, community development, craft production/marketing and gender awareness.[31]

Although these are well meant projects that one can only hope will work out as planned, we need to remain aware that the concepts of indigenous rights and copyright are problematic. The concept of "indigenous people" in postcolonial Africa is very complex and confounding and we could rather think in terms of minorities/majorities or marginalised/central (governing) peoples who, after all, are the indigenous people in Ghana. If all groups are indigenous, some groups are more marginalised than others

to their cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property taken without their free, prior and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs". Article 13.2 states: "States shall take effective measures to ensure that this right is protected and also to ensure that indigenous peoples can understand and be understood in political, legal and administrative proceedings, where necessary through the provision of interpretation or by other appropriate means". Article 31.2 states "In conjunction with indigenous peoples, States shall take effective measures to recognize and protect the exercise of these rights". See Online Sources.

27 See Wardrop (2002/2007).

28 "Overseas visitors (the new age fauna), filmmakers, and assorted entrepreneurs were invading remote Bushmen communities with demands that San act like 'wild Bushmen' or pose with consumer products in commercials". From the Cultural Survival website (see Online Sources).

29 See Online Sources for Cultural Survival.

30 See footnote 28.

31 See Online Sources for hyperlinks "Evolve" and "Mission and Background" on the !Khwa ttu website.

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and often multi/inter-ethnic elite groups govern.[32] Moreover, the projects mentioned above are framed within the European-developed concept and legal practice of authorship and copyright. Such a frame affects the way verbal/visual genres are re-interpreted and imagined by activists, local people, and international partners alike in terms of art and heritage while undergoing processes of simplification, standardisation, and hybridisation for present aims and constructions.

A challenging question arises when we consider the documentation of oral genres through video and the Internet in light of previous debates: What do "giving voice" and "collaborative authorship" mean in our specific case?

The interview: collaborative authorship vs. researchers as griots

In the case of the interview presented in the Verba Africana series, from a simply collaborative authorship ("collaborative" as in the cases when the interviewee is author together with the interviewers) we have to shift to a more complicated form of authorship, in which interview credits are obviously not a problem, but we as researchers play a decisive, if open, role in the way the discourse is presented.

A more useful framework for looking at this video documentation is that of participant structure introduced by the sociologists Erving Goffman (1981) and its elaborations in, for example, Levinson (1988) and also Hill and Irvine (1993).[33] In this conception there is a principal (who is the source of information or text) and an addressee or recipient. But the principal need not be the one who words the information. It may be done by an animator who "gives the principal his/her voice". This framework has been fruitfully used in the analysis of third party communication or communication involving intermediaries, such as in the analysis of the role of griots. We think our role is that of the animator and in the context of triadic communication in Africa acting like the spokesperson of the principal. In this case, the principal is the interviewee and we, Merolla and Ameka, are the animators or editors who shape and polish, embellish, and retouch offensive language in more palatable language and communicate it through the medium of Verba Africana to the outside world: the addressees. In this

32 See Bowen (2000: 12–16).

33 See Yankah (1995) and Ameka (2004) for its application to triadic communication.

way there is distributed authorial responsibility, although we take the lion's share for the effect and any consequences generated by the content we disseminate. We are thus shielding the principal from any attack. Our suggestion of a participant structure approach to the question of authorship and authorial responsibility might go a long way towards clarifying some of the dilemmas in the area of the so-called collaborative authorship. The dilemma is whether the principal—the interviewee—would agree with this perspective on the situation. By virtue of the fact that we have edited the material and are putting the material into the world we have a certain responsibility, moral or otherwise.

At the end

As Augé writes (1994/1999: 48), "the distance between the investigator and the object of the investigation does not represent a mere bias [...] but rather a constraint" that the researchers should negotiate. The provocative idea of "researchers as griots" distances us from the idea of the egalitarian positioning of researchers and storytellers in research and documentation (Fabian 1990), because it presents the interviewee as the Principal and the researcher as the animator and intermediary between the interviewee and the wider community. It suggests that scholars take responsibility towards storytellers and audience(s) and their three-sided interaction in more complex ways, both scientifically and ethically, than was previously advocated or implemented. The interaction of local and globalising forms of knowledge is an increasing phenomenon in Africa, such as in the present example where all the persons involved in the oral performance and its video documentation belong to the academic/educative field, although with different positions and roles. In such a case, the forms, strategies and aims of the "glocal" (local and globalised) knowledge of the storyteller need to be explained to the audience in a form more mediated and critical than the video documentation of oral genres usually does. The "researchers as griots" thus select the video fragments to mediate (or protect) the communication between interviewee and audience, and only offer the whole text of the interview with explicative comments.[34]

34 We would like to thanks the participants of the conference *Archiving Orality and Connecting with Communities: World Oral Literature Project 2010 Workshop*, CRASSH, Cambridge, UK for the suggestions to use a new format including several video fragments in the same frame, so that different perspectives (also those of the researchers) can be heard. The need remains for the researchers to select and to mediate the communication between

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When we re-read the interview and our selection in light of indigenous rights and new media collaborative authorship, we see that our case opens up an important point: indigenous rights are not individual rights so that no one individual is expected to be a self-appointed advocate for the group. This means that we need to reflect on internal discordances and diversities and to make use of the criticism raised about collectivistic concepts such as tradition and heritage, and to encourage the "grand" institutions to become less populist in their approaches to collaborative work and indigenous rights.

Finally, we think that—notwithstanding (or maybe as a direct result of) the problems encountered—the video documentation of the interview discussed here offers a most interesting contemporary form of local knowledge that is adapted and invented in a creative and esoteric way to respond to social and cultural processes, including the increasing importance and assertiveness of Christianity and Islam in West Africa, nationalism, globalisation and glocalising developments. The presence of a YouTube video with similar content increases the interest related to the oral-written-electronic interactions in ongoing identity negotiations and creations.

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