

Jaliya: The Journey Home

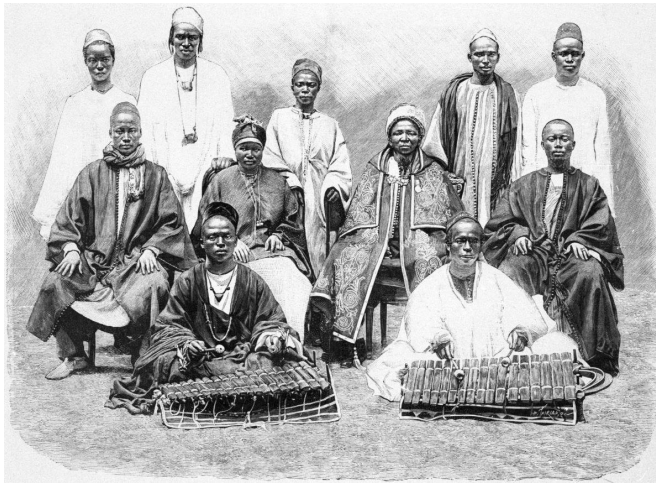
Creator: Lisa Feder

Format: Feature-length documentary

Length: 52 minutes

Synopsis

After twenty years, Famoro Dioubaté a Muslim, West African *jali* musician living in New York City embarks on the long journey home to reconnect with the source of his ancient musical practice called *jaliya*. During his twenty years, he has formed deep friendships across cultures, but has grown disillusioned in Western society's drive for power and wealth at the expense of humanity. We follow Famoro and a small entourage deep into the heart of Guinea, to a village called Niagasola, where we encounter the original thirteenth century instrument



Famoro's grandfather, Jali Konkoba Kouyaté, sits on the ground on the left at the Paris Expo 1889.

called the bala, a wooden xylophone that holds the wisdom of the Manding people. This wisdom, contained in the melodies and words, reinforces Manding values of humility, generosity, courage, and community, and has served to bring people together, despite ethnic differences, for 800 years. Famoro wants to bring the message of *jaliya* into the world to re-valorize his own culture, which is losing its own identity in an increasingly globalized, commercial environment. However, he has a bigger goal as well. After twenty years in America, Famoro sees, as many of us do, that xenophobia and the accumulation of wealth takes precedence over human kindness. Could Famoro find a way to convey the wisdom of *jaliya* on a planetary level? He wants to try.

History

Since the start of the Manding Empire in 1235 CE, *jaliya*, a guarded lineage of specialized musicians, have inspired kings and nobles through music and spoken word to be level-headed, courageous, and just, and to bring their people together around common dignity and respect. Jalis are keepers of an oral-history, sculptors



of sound, and spiritual workers. *Jaliya* is the thread that weaves people together, and it has been adapting for centuries, through colonization and post-colonization. Senior practitioners like Famoro are concerned for the first time, that the pressures of globalization are degrading the core of *jaliya*. They lament that theirs is the last generation of true *jaliya*, and that the time is *now* to revitalize it, lest it should wither away with the forces of globalization.

Timeline

The film crew will follow Famoro in an emotional goodbye with New York, on the plane ride to Conakry, where he will reunite with his daughter and mother (One week). Then the journey into the country begins. The first stop is Kakande, (the name of Famoro's NY-based band) Famoro's grandfather's village where relatives who have never left the village anxiously await Famoro's return. (One week). The second stop is Niagasola, the seat of the Sosso Bala and UNESCO world heritage site, the birthplace of Manding democracy. In Niagasola, he will meet with village elders and keepers of the ancient tradition. The full journey from New York to Niagasola should take three weeks.

Similar Films:

Djembefola (1991): Similarly, *Djembefola* follows Mamady Keita's return to the village in Guinea after 26 years abroad. In his remote Balandugu he has a warm and tearful reunion with friends and relatives who had assumed he was dead.

Back Panther (2018): *Jaliya: the Return Home* is a true-to-life Black Panther movie, in which the key to restoring a healthy society are found in the mother continent in a particular tribe of Africa.

L'Espace Culturel du Sosso Bala (2008): A short documentary by UNESCO about the Sosso bala in Niagasola. (See <https://youtu.be/kHV6zm6FHa8>).

Other Characters

Missia Saran Dioubaté: Famoro's wife, Guinean jali singer in her own right. She has a strong personality. She is modern, bold, and powerful. She will give a concert and hundreds of finely dressed African women will come to give her hundreds of dollars.

Various other New York, Guinea, and Paris-based jali musicians: Abou Sylla balafonist/historian. Mamady Kouyaté, guitarist/historian. Djekoria Mory Kanté, Gbessa Sekou Diabaté.

Sona Dioubaté Famoro's America-Guinean daughter, living in New York. Intelligent, 20 years old, bi-cultural, bi-lingual. Will be sad to see her father leave.

Fatimate Dioubaté Famoro's 23 year old daughter living in Conakry, who resents his long absence, but will be overjoyed to have him return. What will their relationship be like?

Famoro's mother continually begs him to come home to Conakry before she dies. She is demanding and expecting gifts.

Style

This film moves from urban, fast-paced, New York to chaotic jungle of Conakry, Guinea. Then it moves to the colorful and rootsy West African countryside with adobe huts and goats and spirited, wise people. Guinea is polluted and populated. Many people carry out their lives in open view in the city. Guinea is earthy: There are the long, dirt, winding roads, the old tattered robes of the elders' clothing, the animals, the solid trees. It is flashy too. There are people dressed in colorful dyed tunics swaying back and forth as they walk along the sides of streets. Then there are the ancient *jali* instruments, the wooden balafon with gourds, the kora, a stringed harp made of calabash and cowhide, and the ngoni, a primitive bass.

The documentary will be up close and personal. The smaller and less conspicuous the cameras, the better. We can stick close to Famoro through the most intimate moments, with Lisa as a mediator.

Creator



Lisa Feder has a Ph.D in cultural anthropology with an expertise in *jaliya*. Her mission is to bring people together across cultural, ethnic, and religious boundaries, to learn from one another, to tolerate, even celebrate, and sometimes alter our beliefs in order to create a better world for future generations. She has been following *jaliya* for the past fifteen years, drawn to the music and philosophy which contains the key to this very notion of bringing people together. Lisa has conducted research and work in West Africa four times. She currently lives in Paris, France where she continually obtains visas for Guineans friends and family to visit Famoro in the US to

keep the cross-national jali connection strong. She has been marking Famoro's journey through a dissertation (2007), a forthcoming book (2019), and endless video clips and interviews over the years.

Contact Information

lisa@lisafeder.com

+1.917.214.0883

+33.6.50.57.66.27

www.lisafeder.com