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AFRICA

THE
GARLAND
ENCYCLOPEDIA
OF
WORLD MUSIC
VOLUME 1

Ruth M. Stone
Editor

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Yoruba Popular Music

Christopher A. Waterman

General Features

Muslim Genres

Yoruba Highlife

Jùjú

Afro-Beat

Fùjí

"Traditional" and "Popular" Styles

About 30 million Yoruba live in southwestern Nigeria and parts of the Benin Republic and Togo. The term *Yariba* appears in written form in the early 1700s, in Hausa-Fulani clerics' accounts of the kingdom of Oyo, one of a series of some twenty independent polities (including Ile-Ife, Oyo, Ibadan, Ilorin, Egba, Egbado, Ijebu, Ilesha, Ondo, Ekiti). Expansion of the Oyo Empire and its successor state, Ibadan, encouraged the application of this term to a larger population. The spread of certain musical instruments and genres—including the *dùndún*, an hourglass-shaped pressure drum ("talking drum"), now among the most potent symbols of pan-Yoruba identity, and the *bàtá*, an ensemble of conical, two-headed drums, associated with the thunder god Šango—played a role in Oyo's attempt to establish a cultural underpinning for imperial domination.

Inter-Yoruba wars of the 1700s and 1800s encouraged the dispersal of musicians, especially praise singers and talking drummers. We might regard such performers as predecessors of today's popular musicians, since their survival as craft specialists depended largely upon creating broadly comprehensible and appealing styles. Some performers, linked exclusively to particular communities, kin groups, or cults, were responsible for mastering secret knowledge, protected by supernatural sanctions; but other, more mobile musicians, exploiting regional economic networks, had to develop a broader and shallower corpus of musical techniques and verbal texts.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, a pan-Yoruba popular culture emerged, but perceptions of cultural differences among regional subgroups survived. Dialect and musical style continued to play a role in maintaining local identities and allegiances, providing a framework for criticism of regional and national politics (Barber 1991; Apter 1992). Yoruba popular musicians have often drawn upon the traditions of their natal communities to create distinctive "sounds," intended to give them a competitive edge in the marketplace.

In the early 1900s, in and around Lagos (port and colonial capital), syncretic cultural forms—including religious movements, plus traditions of theater, dance, and music—reinforced Yoruba identity. By 1900, the heterogeneous population of Lagos included culturally diverse groups: a local Yoruba community, Sierra Leonean, Brazilian, and Cuban repatriates, Yoruba immigrants from the hinterland, and a

The practice of “spraying”—in which a satisfied praisee dances up to the bandleader or praise singer and pastes money to his forehead—provides the bulk of musicians’ profits.

sprinkling of other migrants from Nigeria and farther afield. Interaction among these groups was a crucial factor in the development of Yoruba popular culture during the early 1900s. Lagos was also a locus for importing new musical technology, and, beginning in 1928, for commercial recording by European firms. Since the late 1800s, continual flows of people, techniques, and technologies between Lagos and hinterland communities have shaped Yoruba popular culture.

GENERAL FEATURES

Performances of most genres of Yoruba popular music occur at elaborate parties after rites of passage, such as namings, weddings, and funerals, and at urban nightspots (“hotels”). Recorded music of local and foreign origin is played, often at high volume, in patrilineal compounds, taxicabs, barbershops, and kiosks. Some genres of popular music are associated with popular Islam, and others with syncretic Christianity; some praise the powerful, and others critique social inequality; some have texts in Yoruba, and others in pidgin English; some are fast, vigorous, and youthful in spirit, and others are slow and solemn, “music for the elders.”

Yoruba popular music fuses the role of song (a medium for praise, criticism, and moralizing) and the role of rhythmic coordination in sound and physical movement (an expression of sociability and sensory pleasure). As tradition is important to Yoruba musicians and listeners, so are the transnational forces that shape their lives. Yoruba popular culture—not only music, but also styles of dancing, televised comedies and dramas, tabloids, sports, gambling, slang, and fashion in clothing and hair—incorporates imported technologies and exotic styles, thus providing Yoruba listeners with an experiential bridge between local and global culture.

The organization of instruments in Yoruba popular music generally follows the pattern of traditional drumming (Euba 1990): an *iyá'lù* ‘mother drum’ leads the ensemble, and one or more *omele* ‘supporting drums’ play ostinatos, designed to interlock rhythmically. In *jùjú*, electric guitars are organized on this pattern. Another practice associated with deep Yoruba (*ìjìnlẹ̀ẹ̀ Yorùbá*) tradition is the use of musical instruments to “speak.” Yoruba is a tonal language, in which distinctions of pitch and timbre play important roles in determining the meaning of words. *Jùjú*, *fújì*, and most other popular genres employ some variant of the *dùndún*, which articulates stereotyped contours of pitch, representing verbal formulas such as proverbs (*òwè*) and epithets of praise (*oríkì*). Imported instruments—such as congas, electric guitars, and drum synthesizers—also serve to articulate proverbs and epithets of praise, though musicians say such instruments are less “talkative” than pressure drums.

In most genres, the bandleader (often called a captain) is a praise singer who initiates solo vocal phrases (*dá orin* ‘creates song alone’), segments of which a chorus doubles. He also sings responsorial sequences, in which his improvised phrases alternate with a fixed phrase, sung by the chorus. His calls are *elé*, the nominal form of

the verb *lé* 'to drive something away from or into something else'. Both the responses and the vocalists who sing them are *ègbè* (from *gbè* 'to support, side with, or protect someone'). The social structure of popular music ensembles is closely linked to traditional ideals of social organization, which simultaneously stress the "naturalness" of hierarchy and the mutual dependency of leaders and supporters.

The practice of "spraying"—in which a satisfied praisee dances up to the bandleader or praise singer and pastes (*lé*) money to his forehead—provides the bulk of musicians' profits. Cash advances, guaranteed minimums, and record royalties are, except in the case of a handful of superstars, minor sources of income. The dynamics of remuneration are linked to the musical form, which is often modular or serial. Performances of *jùjú* and *fújì* typically consist of a series of expressive strategies—proverbs and praise names, slang, melodic quotations, and satisfying dance grooves—unreel with an eye toward pulling in the maximum amount of cash from patrons.

Song texts

Some genres—and even segments of particular performances—are weighted more toward the text-song side of the spectrum, others more to the instrument-dance side. Colloquial aesthetic terminology suggests a developed appreciation of certain aural qualities—dense, buzzing textures, vibrant contrasts in tone color, and rhythmic energy and flow. Nevertheless, Yoruba listeners usually concentrate most carefully on the words of a performance. One of the most damning criticisms listeners can level against a singer or drummer is that he speaks incoherently, or does not choose his words to suit the occasion.

Yoruba song texts are centrally concerned with competition, fate (*orí* 'head'), and the limits of human knowledge in an uncertain universe. Invidious comparison—between the bandleader and competing musicians (who seek to trip him up), or between the patron whose praises are sung and his or her enemies—is the rhetorical linchpin of Yoruba popular music. Advertisements for business concerns are common in live performance and on commercial recordings. Musicians praise brands of beer and cigarettes, hotels, rug makers, football pools, and patent medicines.

Prayers for protection—offered to Jesus, or to Allah, or to the creator deity Eledumare—are another common rhetorical strategy. *Ayé* 'life, the world' is portrayed as a transitory and precarious condition, a conception evoked by phrases like *ayé fẹ̀lẹ̀- fẹ̀ẹ̀* 'flimsy world' and *ayé gbègi* 'world that chips like wood or pottery'. Song texts continually evoke the conceptual dialectic of *ayíníké* and *ayínipadà*—the reality that can be perceived and, if one is clever and lucky, manipulated; and the unseen, potentially menacing underside of things. Competition for access to patrons and touring overseas is fierce, sometimes involving the use of magical medicines and curses. Yoruba pop music stars have often carried out bitter rhetorical battles on a series of recordings. This practice harnesses the praise-abuse principle to the profit motive, because to keep up with the feud, audiences have to buy each record.

Another major theme of the lyrics of popular songs is sensual enjoyment (*igbádùn* 'sweetness perception'). Singers and talking drummers often switch from themes of religious piety and deep moral philosophy to flirtatious teasing, focused on references to dancers' bodily exertions. Many musicians have adopted good-timing honorifics, such as "minister of enjoyment," "father of good order," "ikebe [butt] king." The images of pleasure projected in *jùjú* and *fújì* are related to the themes of praise and the search for certainty. The subject of praise singing is rhetorically encased in a warm web of social relationships: surrounded by supporters and shielded from enemies, her head "swells" with pride (*iwúlórí*) as she sways to "rolling" (*yí*) rhythms.

wákà Usually performed by women and originally intended for the spiritual inspiration of participants in Muslim ceremonies

sákàrà Music for social dancing and praising that is performed and patronized mostly by Muslims; also, a frame drum

gòjé Single-stringed bowed lute made of a calabash and covered with skin

móló Three-stringed plucked lute commonly used in *sákàrà* ensembles in the 1920s and 1930s

àpàlà Yoruba popular music that developed from music performed on *gángan* talking drums to entertain women

MUSLIM GENRES

Performing styles associated with Islam and Christianity have strongly influenced Yoruba popular music. One group of genres—*wákà*, *sákàrà*, *àpàlà*—is associated with Muslim people and social contexts. Though Islamic authorities do not officially approve of indulgence in music, the success of Islam among the Yoruba (as elsewhere in West Africa) has depended on its ability to adapt to local cultural values. Many traditional drummers are Muslims, and some of the biggest patrons of popular music are wealthy Muslim entrepreneurs. Examples of the genres discussed in this section are included on the compact disc *Yoruba Street Percussion* (1992).

Wákà

The Yoruba adopted *wákà* music from the Hausa, probably in the early 1800s. Usually performed by women, these songs were originally intended for the spiritual inspiration of participants in Muslim ceremonies. They were performed unaccompanied, or with hand clapping. In the early 1920s, tin cymbals with jingles (*sèlì* or *pèrèpèkè*) became their preferred accompaniment. Soon after the mid-1940s, drums and other percussive instruments were introduced. By the 1970s, the typical ensemble included five or six singers, a pressure drum (*àdámó*), one or more *àkùbà* or *ògìdò* (conga-type drums, based on Latin American prototypes), a bottle-gourd rattle (*şèkèrè*), and a bass lamellophone (*agídìgbo*). This development appears to have been centered in the Ijebu area. By the mid-1990s, *wákà* had come to be regarded as a specialty of the Ijebu, though Muslims in all the Yoruba subgroups performed and patronized them. The combination of instruments added to *wákà* groups after 1945—*dùndún*, *àkùbà*, *şèkèrè*, *agídìgbo*—and the rhythmic patterns they played on recordings suggest the influence of *àpàlà*, another popular genre associated with the Ijebu.

Though *wákà* songs were first recorded in Lagos in the late 1920s, only after 1945 did professional specialists perform them. Their lyrics increasingly dealt with secular matters, earning the approbation of orthodox Muslims. By the mid-1960s, the producer in charge of Muslim religious broadcasts for the Western State Service of the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation had begun to refer *wákà* musicians to the corporation's music department (Euba 1971:178). *Wákà* bandleaders downplay the Islamic associations of the genre, claiming to have many Christian patrons. Though this stance is in part a matter of public relations, the most popular *wákà* singers have expanded their networks of patronage to include many non-Muslims. Popular *wákà* singers have included Majaro Acagba (popular in the 1920s and 1930s), Batile Alake (1950s–1960s), and the contemporary superstar Queen Salawa Abeni (b. 1965), who has brought aspects of *fújì* into her style.

Sákàrà

A genre of music for social dancing and praising, *sákàrà* is performed and patronized

mostly by Muslims. Oral traditions attribute its origins to Yoruba migrants in Bida, a Nupe town (Ojo 1978:1–4), or to Ilorin, the northernmost major Yoruba town, a prominent center of Islamic proselytization in Yorubaland (Euba 1971:179; Delano 1973[1937]:153). Examples of the genre were being performed in Ibadan and Lagos during or soon after the Great War (1914–1918). Many influential *sákàrà* musicians have come from the Egba Yoruba town of Abeokuta.

The term *sákàrà* denotes an instrument, a musical genre, and a style of dancing. The instruments used in a typical *sákàrà* ensemble include a single-membrane frame drum, with a body consisting of a circular ring of baked clay (*sákàrà*); an idiophone made from a gourd cut in half (*ahá*), or a whole gourd held in both hands and struck with ringed fingers (*igbá*); and a single-stringed bowed lute, made of a calabash and covered with skin (*gòjé*). The ensemble is led by a praise singer, who often also plays the *gòjé*. The *gòjé* shares a melodic line with the lead *sákàrà* drummer and the lead singer, and plays short variations on the melodic line in a highly ornamented style (Thieme 1969:393). The lead drummer cues changes in tempo and style, and plays praise names, proverbs, and slang phrases.

The *móló*, a plucked three-stringed lute, was commonly used in *sákàrà* ensembles during the 1920s and 1930s (Delano 1937:153–157), but was eventually displaced by the *gòjé*. The *gòjé*'s greater volume and penetrating timbre made it the preferred instrument for live performance and recording. During the same period, the acoustic guitar displaced the *móló* in informal, small-group settings. The *móló* has virtually disappeared in Yorubaland (Thieme 1969:387–390).

Sákàrà is regarded as a “solemn” style—a term denoting stateliness of tempo and demeanor, with a philosophical depth of lyrics. It has come to be regarded as a traditional genre, despite its association with Muslim contexts, performers, and patrons. This regard is partly due to singers' eloquence in using Yoruba poetic idioms, and partly to the fact that stylistic features of *sákàrà* associated with Islamic cantillation—vocal tension and nasality, melodic ornamentation, melisma—have been reinterpreted as indigenous traits.

The first star of *sákàrà* was Abibu Oluwa, popularly known as *Oniwáàsì* ‘The Preacher’. In the late 1920s and 1930s, he was recorded by Odeon, His Master's Voice, and Parlophone Records. The biggest star on recordings of the 1940s was Ojo Olewale; in the 1950s and 1960s, S. Aka, Ojindo, and Yusufu Ọlatunji (“*Baba l'egbà*”) competed for supremacy, often engaging in thinly veiled character attacks, preserved on commercial recordings. In the 1960s, youths in towns throughout Yorubaland still performed *sákàrà*, competing on the mass market with styles such as *jùjú* and *àpàlà*. However, by the 1970s, it was regarded primarily as a music for old people, and Yusufu Ọlatunji had been enshrined as the genre's founder.

Àpàlà

This genre originated in the Ijẹbu area, probably in the early 1940s. According to one practitioner, it developed from music performed on *gangan* talking drums to entertain women. It may have represented a conscious effort on the part of professional *gangan* drummers to counter growth in the popularity of *sákàrà* and *etike*, a secular genre of *dùndún* drumming (Euba 1990:441). The effort was successful: during the 1960s and 1970s, as the popularity of *sákàrà* faded, *àpàlà* became the dominant genre of popular music among Yoruba Muslims. Though the leaders of *àpàlà* groups were originally drummers, by the 1960s the most popular and influential bandleaders—Ligali Mukaiba, Kasumu Adio, Alhaji Haruna Işola—were singers. By the 1970s, Işola and Alhaji Ayinla Ọmọwura (an Egba musician) were the brightest stars of *àpàlà* music.

The typical *àpàlà* group includes a lead singer (usually the bandleader) and

The tradition of highlife dance bands originated in the early 1900s in Accra, capital of Gold Coast (Ghana).

several choral singers, two or more drums from the *àdàmò* pressure-drum family (called *àpàlà* drums by some musicians), one or more *àkùbà* or *ògìdo*, an *agidigbo*, and a *ṣèkèrè*. *Àpàlà* varies in tempo, and, as with other styles of social dance drumming, there are specialized styles for younger and older people. *Àpàlà* rhythms are organized along the basic principles of *gangan* drumming: one drummer takes the role of the lead drum (*iyá lù*), others act as the *omele*, and the *ògìdo* and the *agidigbo* anchor the bass. A metal idiophone—an *agogo* ‘iron bell’, or a truck muffler or wheel—plays a repeated timeline. One of the rhythms commonly used in *àpàlà* is *wórò*, a social dance style of drumming that spread throughout Yorubaland during the political rallies of the 1950s.

The lyrics of *àpàlà* fit into the praise song mold. The recorded output of Haruna Iṣṣola, for example, includes hundreds of songs named after benefactors and important personalities (*gbajúmò* ‘a thousand eyes know them’). Many of the human subjects of *àpàlà* lyrics are Muslims, but to attract a larger Yoruba-speaking audience, singers explore topics of broad interest. In 1959, Iṣṣola recorded a song on the Nigerian boxer Hogan Bassey’s bout with David Moore:

L’ójò Sátidé l’Amérikà,
 Máaṣi ojú kejídínlógún ni wón f’arésí,
 Ni naintin-fiftinain-i nijá’bòsí.
 Sé ẹrójú ayé-o?
 Hogan Bassey pẹlú David Moore ni wón mà forí gbárf,
 Níbi tí wón ti níjà l’ójò yẹn.
 Ẹjẹ lódí l’ójú kò rẹni kan.
 Ọkan ò ri ojú inú ló nílò.
 David Moore bá fi ẹrú gba taitulù lọ tempoari.
 Nwón tonra wón jẹ l’ásán nii.
 Kínlún kò ní jà k’ẹran wẹwẹ ta féle-fèle.
 T’órí ẹ bá gbóná, t’o bá tọ gírì alẹ,
 Ẹran t’ó bá lọ débẹ ló mí a yámútù [Hausa word].

On a Saturday in America,
 It was on the 18th of March that the contest was held.
 The fight took place in 1959.
 Do you see the eyes of the world? [Do you see what happened?]
 Hogan Bassey and David Moore, they knocked their heads together,
 Where they were fighting that day.
 He had blood in his eyes, didn’t see anybody.
 Nobody saw him, it is his inner mind that he used.
 David Moore used tricks to take the title away from him temporarily.
 They [the Americans] are fooling themselves: it was vanity.

The lion will not fight; small animals start scattering (when the fight begins).
 If he should get angry, if he should piss copiously,
 Any small animals that go to that place must die.

To explain Bassey's loss, regarded as an international embarrassment for Nigeria, Işola uses a tale about the power of the lion and popular beliefs concerning the efficacy of talismans. Vocalized in a nasal, melismatic style, and supported by interlocking rhythms, his song is at once Yoruba, Muslim, and cosmopolitan.

The golden age of *àpàlà* was the 1950s. By the 1990s, a few groups were still working in cities such as Ijebu-Ode and Ibadan, but *àpàlà*, like *sákàrà*, was no longer a music for youths. The two charismatic stars of the genre, Işola (of Ijebu-Igbo) and Omoṣwura (of Abeokuta), died in the 1980s.

YORUBA HIGHLIFE

The tradition of highlife dance bands originated in the early 1900s in Accra, capital of Gold Coast (Ghana). Before the 1940s, Ghanaian bands (such as the Cape Coast Sugar Babies) had traveled to Lagos, where they left a lasting impression on local musicians. In the 1920s and 1930s, Lagos was home to the Calabar Brass Band, which recorded for Parlophone as the Lagos Mozart Orchestra. The core of the band was martial band instruments: clarinets, trumpets and cornets, baritones, trombones, tuba, and parade drums. The band played a proto-highlife style, a transitional phase between the colonial martial band and the African dance orchestra.

During the 1930s and 1940s, Lagos supported several African ballroom dance orchestras, including the Chocolate Dandies, the Lagos City Orchestra, the Rhythm Brothers, the Deluxe Swing Rascals, and the Harlem Dynamites. These bands played for the city's African élites, a social formation comprised largely of Sierra Leonean and Brazilian repatriates, whose grandparents had returned to Lagos in the 1800s. Their repertory included foxtrots, waltzes, Latin dances, and arrangements of popular Yoruba songs.

The 1950s are remembered as the Golden Age of Yoruba highlife. Scores of highlife bands played at hotels in Lagos and the major Yoruba towns. Bobby Benson's Jam Session Orchestra (founded in 1948) exerted a particularly strong influence on Yoruba highlife. A guitarist who had worked as a dance band musician in England, Benson brought the first electric guitar to Lagos (1948), opened his own nightclub (Caban Bamboo), and employed many of the best musicians in Nigeria. His 1960 recording of "Taxi Driver, I Don't Care" (Philips P 82019), was the biggest hit of the highlife era in Nigeria. During the 1950s and 1960s, many of his apprentices—Victor Olaiya ("the evil genius of highlife"), Roy Chicago, Edy Okonta, Fela Ransome-Kuti—went on to form their own bands.

The typical highlife band included from three to five winds, plus string bass, guitar, bongos, conga, and maracas. Though the sound of British and American dance bands influenced the African bands, the emphasis was on Latin American repertory, rather than on swing arrangements. Unlike *jùjú* bands, highlife bands often included non-Yoruba members, and typically performed songs in several languages, including Yoruba, English, and pidgin English.

By the mid-1960s, highlife was declining in Yorubaland, partly as a result of competition from *jùjú*. Some highlife bandleaders, including Roy Chicago, incorporated the *dùndún*, and in an attempt to compete with *jùjú* began to use more deep Yoruba verbal materials. Musicians such as Dele Ojo, who had apprenticed with Victor Olaiya, forged hybrid *jùjú*-highlife styles. Soul, popular among urban youth from around 1966, attacked highlife from another angle. The Nigerian civil war

jùjú Named for the tambourine, this popular music genre of the Yoruba emerged in Lagos around 1932

aṣíkò Dance drumming style, performed mainly by Yoruba Christian boys' clubs

sámbà Square frame drum that may have been introduced to the Yoruba by the Brazilians

ògìdò Bass conga drum of the Yoruba

(1967–1970), which caused many of the best Igbo musicians to leave Lagos, delivered the final blow. By the mid-1990s, highlife bands had become rare in Yorubaland.

JÙJÙ

This genre, named for the tambourine (*jùjú*), emerged in Lagos around 1932. The typical *jùjú* group in the 1930s was a trio: a leader (who sang and played banjo), a *ṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀*, and a *jùjú*. Some groups operated as quartets, adding a second vocalist. The basic framework was drawn from palm wine guitar music, played by a mobile population of African workers in Lagos (sailors, railway men, truck drivers).

The rhythms of early *jùjú* were strongly influenced by *aṣíkò*, a dance drumming style, performed mainly by Christian boys' clubs. Many early *jùjú* bandleaders began their careers as *aṣíkò* musicians. Played on square frame drums and a carpenter's saw, *aṣíkò* drew upon the traditions of two communities of Yoruba-speaking repatriates who had settled in Lagos during the 1800s: the Amaro were *emancipados* of Brazilian or Cuban descent, and the Saro were Sierra Leonean repatriates (who formed a majority of the educated black élite in Lagos). *Aṣíkò* rhythms came from the Brazilian samba (many older Nigerians use the terms *aṣíkò* and *sámbà* interchangeably), and the associated style of dancing was influenced by the *caretta* 'fancy dance', a Brazilian version of the contredanse. The square *sámbà* drum may have been introduced by the Brazilians (known for their carpentry), or from the British West Indies, perhaps via Sierra Leone. Though identifying a single source for the introduction of the frame drum is impossible, this drum was clearly associated with immigrant black Christian identity.

Early styles

The first star of *jùjú* was Tunde King, born in 1910 into the Saro community. Though a member of the Muslim minority, he learned Christian hymns while attending primary school. He made the first recordings with the term *jùjú* on the label, recorded by Parlophone in 1936. Ayinde Bakare, a Yoruba migrant who recorded for His Master's Voice beginning in 1937, began as an *aṣíkò* musician, and went on to become one of the most influential figures in postwar *jùjú*. Musical style was an important idiom for the expression of competitive relationships between neighborhoods. During the 1930s, each quarter in Lagos had its favorite *jùjú* band.

The melodies of early *jùjú*, modeled on *aṣíkò* and palm wine songs and Christian hymns, were diatonic, often harmonized in parallel thirds. The vocal style used the upper range of the male full-voice tessitura, and was nasalized and moderately tense, with no vibrato. The banjo—including a six-stringed guitar-banjo and a mandolin-banjo—played a role similar to that of the fiddle in *sákàrà* music, often introducing or bridging between vocal segments, and providing heterophonic accompaniment for the vocal line. *Jùjú* banjoists used a technique of thumb and forefinger plucking (*krusbass*) introduced to Lagos by Liberian sailors.

From the beginning, *jùjú* lyrics drew heavily upon deep Yoruba metaphors. In “Association” (recorded by Parlophone in 1936), Tunde King sings:

Agbe ló l'áró; kí ráhùn áró.
 Àtùkò ló l'ósùn; kí ráhùn osùn.
 Lékéléké, kí ráhùn ẹfun
 Ìyàwó àkófé, kí ráhùn ajé
 Òkèlé ẹbà, kí ráhùn oḅé

K'árìrà máà mà jéẹ́ráhùn owó.
 K'árìrà máà mà jéẹ́ ráhùnṣmọ.

The blue touraco parrot is the owner of indigo dye; it doesn't usually complain for want of indigo dye.

The red aluko bird is the owner of rosewood; it doesn't usually complain for want of rosewood.

The white cattle egret doesn't usually complain for want of chalk.

The first wife one marries doesn't usually complain for want of money.

The first morsel of cassava porridge doesn't usually complain for want of soup.

Good fortune, don't let us complain for want of money.

Good fortune, don't let us complain for want of children.

Here, King draws on Yoruba oral tradition to forge a metaphoric correspondence between a natural relationship (birds, bright colors) and a cultural one (beginnings, abundance). Other examples of his style are on the compact disc *Juju Roots: 1930s–1950s* (1993).

After the mid-1940s, *jùjú* underwent a rapid transformation. The first major change was the introduction, in 1948, of the *gangan*, attributed to bandleader Akanbi Ege. Another change was the availability of electronic amplifiers, microphones, and pickups. Portable public-address systems had been introduced during the war, and were in regular use by Yoruba musicians by the late 1940s. The first *jùjú* musician to adopt the amplified guitar was Ayinde Bakare. He experimented with a contact microphone in 1949, switching from ukulele-banjo to “box guitar” (acoustic), because there was no place to attach the device to the body of the banjo. Electronic amplification of voices and guitar catalyzed an expansion of *jùjú* ensembles during the 1950s. In particular, it enabled musicians to incorporate more percussion instruments without upsetting the aural balance they wanted between singing and instrumental accompaniment.

In the postwar period, *jùjú* bands began to use the *agidigbo* and various conga-type drums (*àkùbà*, *ògìdò*). This reflects the influence of a genre called *agidigbo* and mambo music, a Yoruba version of *konkoma* music, brought to Lagos by Ewe and Fanti migrant workers (Alájá-Browne 1985:64). According to *jùjú* musicians active at the time, the *agidigbo* and *ògìdò* (bass conga) provided a bass counterbalance for the electric guitar and *gangan*.

The instrumentation of Bakare's group shifted from one stringed instrument and two percussion instruments (before the war), to one stringed instrument and five percussion instruments (in 1954). By 1966, most *jùjú* bands had eight or nine musicians. Expansion and reorganization of the ensemble occurred simultaneously with a slowing of tempos. Slower tempos and expanded ensembles were in turn linked with changes in aural texture. Western technology was put into the service of indigenous aesthetics: the channeling of singing and guitar through cheap and infrequently serviced tube amplifiers and speakers augmented the density and buzzing of the music.

The birth of later jùjú can be traced to the innovations of Isiah Kehinde Dairo, an Ijesa Yoruba musician, who had a series of hit records around the time of Nigerian independence (1960).

The practice of singing in parallel thirds continued to dominate, but there were notable exceptions. Ekiti Yoruba bandleader C. A. Balogun utilized the distinctive polyphonic vocal style of his natal area, in which the overlap between soloist and chorus produces major seconds and minor sevenths. Many bandleaders produced records with a song in standard Yoruba dialect and mainstream *jùjú* style on the A side, and a local Yoruba dialect and style on the B side. Most *jùjú* singing shifted from the high-tessitura, nasalized style of the 1930s and 1940s to a lower, more relaxed sound closer to traditional secular vocal style and the imported model of the crooner. Tunde King's distinctive style of singing was continued by Tunde Western Nightingale, "the bird that sings at night," a popular Lagosian bandleader of the 1950s and 1960s.

Later styles

The birth of later *jùjú* can be traced to the innovations of Isiah Kehinde Dairo (1930–1996), an Ijesa Yoruba musician, who had a series of hit records around the time of Nigerian independence (1960). His recordings for the British company Decca were so successful, the British government in 1963 designated him a member of the Order of the British Empire. In 1967, he joined *àpàlà* star Haruna Işola to found Star Records. His hits of the early 1960s, recorded on two-track tape at Decca Studios in Lagos, reveal his mastery of the three-minute recording. Most of his records from this period begin with an accordion or guitar introduction, plus the main lyric, sung once or twice. This leads into a middle section, in which the *dùndún* predominates, playing proverbs and slogans which in turn the chorus repeats. The final section usually reprises the main text.

The vocal style on Dairo's records was influenced by Christian singing of hymns. (Dairo was pastor of a syncretic church in Lagos.) It also reflects the polyphonic singing of eastern Yorubaland (Ijesa, Ekiti). His lyrics—in Standard Yoruba, Ijesa dialect, and various other Nigerian and Ghanaian languages—were also carefully composed. By his own account, he made special efforts to research traditional poetic idioms. Many of his songs consist of philosophical advice and prayers for himself and his patrons, as in the song "*Elele Ture*" (1962):

Ọ̀ṣùpá roro, l'ójú òrun todrò,
 Orí mi òmò j'áyé mi todrò.
 Olú sojí òrun, òmò j'áyé mi todrò.
 Ọ̀ba tí ómí pèsé f'èku, òmò j'áyé mi todrò.
 Ọ̀ba tí ómí pèsé f'èyè, òmò j'áyé mi todrò.
 T'ó ńpèsé f'èrà t'ù mí rìn l'álé, òmò j'áyé mi todrò.

Moon shining in the peaceful sky,
 My destiny ["head"], let my life be peaceful.
 King who wakes in heaven, let my life be peaceful.

King that provides for rats, let my life be peaceful.
 King that provides for birds, let my life be peaceful.
 That provides for ants that walk on the ground, let my life be peaceful.

Jùjú continued to develop along lines established by Bakare and Dairo's experiments. The oil boom of the 1970s led to a rapid, though uneven, expansion of the Nigerian economy. Many individuals earned enough money from trade and entrepreneurial activity to hire musicians for neotraditional celebrations, and the number and size of *jùjú* bands increased concomitantly. By the mid-1970s, the ideal *jùjú* ensemble had expanded beyond the ten-piece bands of Bakare and Dairo to include fifteen or more musicians. Large bands helped boost the reputation of the patrons who hired them to perform at parties, and helped sustain an idealized image of Yoruba society as a flexible hierarchy (Waterman 1990).

Jùjú of the 1990s

Jùjú bands of the mid-1990s fall into three basic sections: singers, percussionists, guitarists. The singers stand in a line at the front of the band. The "band captain" stands in the middle, flanked on either side by choral singers. The percussion section includes from one to three talking drums (*àdàmò*), several conga-type drums, a set of bongos played with light sticks ("double toy"), *şèkèrè*, maracas, *agogo*, and in the larger and better-financed bands, a drum set ("jazz drums").

The leader's guitar is tuned to an open triad. He uses it to play simple motifs, which function as the leader's trademark, and cue changes in rhythm or texture. The guitar section also includes a lead guitar, which takes extended solos; two or three "tenor guitars," which serve as *omele* 'supporting instruments'; and a Hawaiian (pedal steel) guitar, which may play solo or add coloristic effects. Melodic patterns come from hymns, Yoruba songs, the old palm wine guitar tradition, and various other sources, including African-American popular music, country, and Indian film music.

Sunny Ade

One star of *jùjú* is King Sunny Adé. Born in Ondo in 1946, he started his musical career playing a *sámbà* drum with a *jùjú* band. He formed his own ensemble, the Green Spot Band, in 1966. He modeled his style on that of Tunde Nightingale, and his vocal sound represents an extension of the high-tessitura, slightly nasalized sound established by Tunde King in the 1930s. His first big hit was "Challenge Cup" (1968), a praise song for a football team, released on a local label, African Songs. In 1970, he added electric bass guitar (displacing the *agidàgbo*), and began to record with imported instruments, purchased for him by his patron, Chief Bolarinwa Abioro. Adé quickly developed a reputation as a technically skilled musician, and his fans gave him the informal title *Àlujànuń Ontígítà* 'The Wizard of Guitar'. One of his earliest recordings, "*Bolarinwa Abioro*" (1967), is a praise song for Chief Abioro:

Jé jé jé jé jé jé,
 Bólárínwá mi, omọ Abíórò
 Okọ Múyibátù mi, jéjé ló l'ayé.
 Bólá r'ó bí Bóláńlé ló b'Adébayò un lẹ ló bí Olálẹ̀yẹ̀ àti Oláwùnmí pẹ̀lú
 Oládoşù.
 Ìpókítá n'ílẹ̀ l'area Ègbádò.
 Bólárínwá-o, l'àwá mbá lọ-o; ibi amí rẹ̀ l'àwá dé yíí-o.
 Má mà yún oko n'ìgbà òjò;
 Má mà f'ẹ̀sẹ̀ kan nini.
 Abíórò, jò-gbòdọ̀-e-e-e,
 Aláyé yẹ̀ ẹ̀-o.

Apart from Fela Anikulapo Kuti, King Sunny Adé—“Golden Mercury of Africa, Minister of Enjoyment”—is the only Nigerian popular musician who has had significant success in the international market.

Gently, gently, gently, gently, gently, gently,
 My Bolarinwa, child of Abioro,
 Husband of Muyibatu, softly, softly, so is the world.
 Bọla that fathered Adebayo has fathered Oláléyẹ and Olawunmi with Oladosu.
 Ipokia is your area, Egbado (region).
 Oh Bolarinwa, we are following you; the place we're going to, that's where we've
 reached.
 Don't go to the farm in the rainy season;
 Don't step on the wet ground.
 Abioro, important person,
 The world is going to be good for you.

In 1972, splitting with Chief Abioro, Adé changed the name of his band to the “African Beats.” The LP *Synchro System Movement* (1976) artfully blended the vocal style he had adopted from Tunde Nightingale with aspects of Afro-Beat, including minor tonality, slower tempos, and a langorous bass. This LP was one of the first long-play recordings to feature a continuous thirty-minute performance, a move away from the three-minute limit of most previous recordings, and toward the typical extended forms of live performances. By 1979, Adé had expanded his band to include sixteen performers, including two tenor guitars, one rhythm guitar, Hawaiian guitar, bass guitar, two talking drummers, *ṣẹkẹrẹ*, conga (*àkùbà*), drum set, synthesizer, and four choral vocalists.

Apart from Fela Anikulapo Kuti, King Sunny Adé—“Golden Mercury of Africa, Minister of Enjoyment”—is the only Nigerian popular musician who has had significant success in the international market. For release by Island Records in 1982, he recorded the album *Juju Music* in Togo, under the direction of French producer Martin Meissonnier. The LP reportedly sold 200,000 copies, impressive for African popular music. Later releases were less successful, and Island Records dropped Adé in 1985. In the mid-1990s, he continued to play to mass audiences in Nigeria, and to make an occasional tour of the United States and Europe.

Ebenezer Obey

Born in the Egbado area of western Yorubaland in 1942, Chief Commander Ebenezer Obey is the other star of *jùjú*. He formed his first band, the International Brothers, in 1964. His early style, strongly influenced by I. K. Dairo, incorporated elements of highlife, Congolese guitar style, soul, and country. His band expanded during the years of the oil boom. In 1964, he started with seven players; by the early 1970s, he was employing thirteen; and by the early 1980s, he was touring with eighteen. He is praised for his voice, and for his philosophical depth and knowledge of Yoruba proverbs. Like Dairo, he is a devout Christian, and many of his songs derive from the melodies of hymns.

In the 1980s, decline in the economy, devaluation of the currency, and increased competition from *fijú* bands put many of the *jùjú* groups formed during the 1970s out of work. Adé and Obey's only serious competitor is Sir Shina Peters, whose album *Ace* was a big hit in 1990. Peters's style represents an attempt to bring dance rhythms from *fijú* music into *jùjú*. The history of *jùjú* provides many examples of strategic borrowing from competing genres.

AFRO-BEAT

Centered on the charismatic figure Fela Anikulapo Kuti (born in 1938 in Abeokuta), Afro-Beat began in the late 1960s as a confluence of dance band highlife, jazz, and soul. Though in style and content it stands somewhat apart from the mainstream of Yoruba popular music, it has influenced *jùjú* and *fijú*.

Fela is the grandson of the Reverend J. J. Ransome-Kuti (a prominent educator, who played a major role in indigenizing Christian hymns). His mother was Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti (a political activist, founder of the Nigerian Women's Union). It is said that Fela received his musicality from his father's family, and his temperament from his mother's. In the mid-1950s, he played with Bobby Benson's and Victor Olaiya's highlife orchestras. In 1958, he traveled to London to study trumpet at Trinity College of Music. While there, he joined with J. K. Braimah to form Koola Lobitos, a band that played a jazz-highlife hybrid. Fela returned to Lagos in 1963, and by 1966 had been voted the top jazz performer in a readers' poll, held by *Spear Magazine*. Though his reputation grew among musicians in Lagos, his music appealed primarily to an audience of collegians and professionals.

The popularity of soul among young people in Lagos during the late 1960s strongly influenced Fela. In particular, the success of Geraldo Pino, a Sierra Leonean imitator of James Brown, caused him to incorporate aspects of soul into his style. A 1969 trip to the United States, where he met black activists, changed his political orientation and his concept of the goals of music making. In 1970, on returning to Lagos, he formed a new group, Africa '70, and began to develop Afro-Beat, a mixture of highlife and soul, with infusions of deep Yoruba verbal materials.

In the early 1970s, Fela's style centered on Tony Allen's drumming, Maurice Ekpo's electric-bass playing, and Peter Animaşaun's rhythm-guitar style (influenced by James Brown's playing). The band also included three congas, percussion sticks, *ṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀*, and a four-piece horn section (two trumpets, tenor sax, baritone sax). Jazz-influenced solos were provided by trumpeter Tunde Williams and the brilliant tenor saxophonist Igo Chico. Like many Lagos highlife bands of the 1950s, Fela's early bands included Ghanaians and non-Yoruba Nigerians. The original Africa '70 stayed together until the mid-1970s, when Fela's increasingly autocratic behavior led Allen and Chico to quit.

Over more than twenty years, the organizational principles of Afro-Beat have remained remarkably constant. The basic rhythm-section pattern divides into complementary strata: a bottom layer, made up of interlocking electric-bass and bass-drum patterns; a middle layer, with a rhythm guitar, congas, and a snare back beat; and a top layer, with percussion sticks and *ṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* playing ostinatos. The horn section provides riffs in support of Fela's singing, and its members play extended solos.

Fela's early recordings included love songs ("Lover"), risqué songs in pidgin English ("Na Poi"), and Yoruba songs based on proverbs and tales ("Alujon jon ki jon"). In the mid-1970s, Fela composed increasingly strident lyrics, attacking the excesses of foreign capitalism and Nigerian leaders. It was then that the textual content of Afro-Beat clearly separated from the mainstream of Yoruba popular music. Fela's political goals—shouted by his trademark slogan, "Music is a weapon"—led him to compose more in pidgin English, to reach a wider international audience.

fùjì Popular genre of Yoruba music in the 1990s; grew out of Muslim practices but also gained a Christian audience

ajísààrì Music customarily performed before dawn during Ramadan by young men among the Yoruba

Records such as *Zombie* (ridiculing the Nigerian military), and *Expensive Shit* (recounting the efforts of police to recover drugs from Fela's feces) established his reputation as a fearless rebel, and consolidated his audience, composed largely of urban youth and members of the intelligentsia.

Fela was first arrested by the Nigerian secret police in 1974. Three years later, the military attacked his compound, the "Kalakuta Republic," and threw his mother from a window, causing internal injuries from which she died. Fela responded with the LP *Coffin for Head of State*, covered with a montage of newspaper clippings reporting his mother's death and funeral. Continued run-ins with the Nigerian government stiffened his resistance to authority.

In the early 1980s, Fela developed a mystical philosophy, based on reconstructed Yoruba religion, Afrocentrism, Egyptology, and the teachings of a Ghanaian prophet, Professor Hindu. He changed the name of his band to Egypt '80. In the mid-1980s, his band included nine horn players (three trumpets, one alto sax, three tenor saxes, two baritone saxes), two guitarists, two bassists, a drum set, three congas, two *ṣẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀*, and around a dozen singers and dancers. His typical composition became longer and more complex—"a song with five movements . . . a symphony but in the African sense" (Fela, quoted in Stewart 1992:117). The sound of the ensemble shifted toward a denser texture. In some subsequent recordings (like *Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense*, 1986), Fela experiments with polytonality: while the rhythm section stays near one tonal center, the horns explore another (a fourth or a fifth away).

Fela's music continues to exert influence on Yoruba musicians, though it achieves far fewer local record sales than *jùjú* or *fùjì*. Fela's biographers have depicted him as a paradoxical figure: a revolutionary traditionalist, a materialist mystic, an egalitarian dictator, a progressive sexist. Yet for all his idiosyncracies, he is as much a product of Yoruba historical experience as King Sunny Adé.

FÚJÌ

This genre, the most popular one in the early 1990s, grew out of *ajísààrì*, music customarily performed before dawn during Ramadan by young men associated with neighborhood mosques. *Ajísààrì* groups, made up of a lead singer, a chorus, and drummers, walk through their neighborhood, stopping at patrilineal compounds to wake the faithful for their early morning meal (*sààrì*). *Fùjì* emerged as a genre and marketing label in the late 1960s, when former *ajísààrì*-singers Sikiru Ayinde Barrister and Ayinla Kollington were discharged from the Nigerian Army, made their first recordings, and began a periodically bitter rivalry. In the early 1970s, *fùjì* succeeded *àpàlà* as the most popular genre among Yoruba Muslims, and has since gained a substantial Christian audience.

The instrumentation of *fùjì* bands features drums. Most important are various sizes of talking-drum (*dùndún*, *àdámọ̀*, and sometimes a smaller hourglass-shaped

drum, the *kà̀nàngó*, two or three of which may be played by a single drummer). Bands often include *sákárà* drums (still associated with Muslim identity), plus the conga-type drums used in *àpàlà* and *jùjú*. Commonly, they also use *şèkèrè*, maracas, and a set of *agogo* attached to a metal rack. In the mid-1980s, *fújì* musicians borrowed the drum set from *jùjú*. The wealthiest bands use electronic drum pads connected to synthesizers.

Other experiments represent an attempt to forge symbolic links with deep Yoruba traditions. In the early 1980s, Alhaji Barrister introduced into his style the *bàtá* drum, associated with the Yoruba thunder god Şango. He named the drum “Fújì Bàtá Reggae.” He dropped the *bàtá* after influential Muslim patrons complained about his using a quintessentially pagan instrument. On other recordings, he employed the *kàkàkí*, an indigenous trumpet, used for saluting the kings of northern Yoruba towns.

Later appropriations of Western instruments—the Hawaiian or pedal steel guitar, keyboard synthesizers, and drum machines—have largely been filtered through *jùjú*. Some *jùjú* musicians complain that *fújì* musicians, whom they regard as musical illiterates, have no idea what to do with such instruments. In fact, imported high-tech instruments are usually used in *fújì* recordings to play melodic sequences without harmonic accompaniment, to signal changes of rhythm or subject, and to add coloristic effects—techniques consistent with the norms of the genre.

Though *fújì* has to a large degree been secularized, it is still associated with Muslims, and record companies time the release of certain *fújì* recordings to coincide with holy days, such as Id-al-Fitr and Id-al-Kabir. Segments of Qur’anic text are frequently deployed in performance, and many *fújì* recordings open with a prayer in Yoruba Arabic: “*La ilaha illa llahu; Mohamudu ya asuru lai* ‘There is no god but Allah; Mohammed is his prophet.’”

Fújì music is an intensively syncretic style, incorporating aspects of Muslim recitations, Christian hymns, highlife classics, *jùjú* songs, Indian film-music themes, and American pop, within a rhythmic framework based on Yoruba social-dance drumming. To demonstrate knowledge of Yoruba tradition, *fújì* musicians also make use of folkloric idioms, like proverbs and praise names. On his 1990 LP and music video *Music Extravaganza*, Barrister borrows from an animal fable to denigrate his rivals:

Tí Àwòkò bá nşeré, kéyè-kéyè má à fòhùn l’eyè oko.
 Àròyè n’işé ìbákà-o; igbe kíkè ni ş’eyè.
 B’ólógbùrò şél’òhùn tó, ó yí foríbalè f’Óba Orin.
 Ati àròyè ìbákà-o, at’igbe kíkè ni ş’eyè,
 B’áwòkò ò m’òrin wá,
 Àròyè kín’ìbákà máa ríwí?
 Igbe kí’eyè owulé ké lásón-làsòn?
 Kíni ol’óbùrò ó fi ohùn orin kọ?

When *Awoko* is singing, all these lesser birds shouldn’t make a sound.
 Incessant yammering is Canary’s work; hoarse shouting is the birds’ work.
 Even the speckled pigeon with a beautiful voice must prostrate before the King
 of Song.

With Canary’s babbling and the birds’ chattering,
 If *Awoko* doesn’t bring songs,
 What kind of babbling will the Canary do?
 What noise would the birds bother to make?
 What song would a speckled pigeon use her voice to sing?

If Yoruba popular music is a product of markets, it is also, in important ways, unlike other commodities. Yoruba musicians and audiences regard music as a potent force with material and spiritual effects.

Awoko, a local bird (known for the complexity and beauty of its call), is Barrister. Canary and Speckled Pigeon are his rivals. The melody to which these words are sung is modeled on that of “*Malaika*,” an East African song, composed by Fadhili Williams, copyrighted by Pete Seeger, and introduced to Nigeria in a cover version by Boney M. (a German-based Eurodisco band).

References to the overseas tours of successful bandleaders are also common. On the 1991 release *New Fuji Garbage Series III*, Barrister opens with a description of his success on a recent visit to London, narrated in the present tense:

We dey for [are in] Great Britain, where we perform for people’s enjoyment.

We dey for Great Britain, where we perform for people’s enjoyment.

Òyinbo [European] people dey dance Fújì Garbage for every corner.

Naija [Nigerian] people dey dance Fújì Garbage for every corner.

Jamò [German] people dey dance Fújì Garbage for every corner.

Akátá [African-American] people dey dance Fújì Garbage for every pub house.

DJs dem dey play [they are playing] Fújì Garbage for British-i radio.

When I dey [dare] sing, people dey [they] dance-i-o.

When I dey sing, people dey dance-i-o.

Later in the recording, Barrister sings the praises of Akeem Ọlajuwọn, center for the Houston Rockets (of the National Basketball Association), describing in pidgin English and Yoruba the art of dribbling:

Baki-ball éré fẹ̀lẹ̀ẹ̀.

Awa gbá sókẹ̀, a tún gbá sílẹ̀:

Baki number 1, baki number 2, baki number 3, baki number 4.

O yára jù bọ̀òlù sínú ẹ̀wọ̀n,

Bí ẹ̀’Akim ọ̀mọ Ọlajuwọ̀n.

Awa gbà basketball.

Basketball is an energetically flapping [cool] game.

You bounce it up, then you bounce it down:

Basket number 1, basket number 2, basket number 3, basket number 4.

You quickly throw the ball into the chains [net],

Just like Akeem, son of Ọlajuwọ̀n.

We receive [dig] basketball.

On another album, Barrister transports the listener to Orlando, Florida, to visit a theme park he calls Destney World and describes the wonders of Western technolo-

gy: "We all entered a big lift; suddenly the lights went out, and all the whites screamed, 'Oh, my mother!'" Verbal snapshots of adventures overseas allow listeners to share vicariously the superstar's transnational movements, and provide a medium for evaluating aspects of life in the West (*ìlú òyìnbo* 'land of the whites').

"TRADITIONAL" AND "POPULAR" STYLES

To draw a sharp boundary between "traditional" and "popular" music in Yoruba society is impossible. The criteria most commonly invoked in attempts to formulate a cross-cultural definition of popular music—openness to change, syncretism, intertextuality, urban provenience, commodification—are characteristic even of those genres Yoruba musicians and audiences identify as deep Yoruba. The penetration of indigenous economies by international capital and the creation of local markets for recorded music have shaped Yoruba conceptions of music as a commodity. Musical commodification did not, however, originate with colonialism and mass reproduction. Yoruba musicians have long conceived of performance as a form of labor, a marketable product. The notion of the market as a microcosm of life (captured in the aphorism *ayé l'òjà* 'the world is a market') and a competitive arena, fraught with danger and ripe with possibilities, guides the strategies of musicians, who struggle to make a living under unpredictable economic conditions.

If Yoruba popular music is a product of markets, it is also, in important ways, unlike other commodities. Yoruba musicians and audiences regard music as a potent force with material and spiritual effects.

Though the foregoing genres of music vary in instrumentation, style, and social context, each invokes deep Yoruba tradition while connecting listeners to the world of transnational commerce. Taken as a whole, Yoruba popular music provides a complex commentary on the relationship between local traditions and foreign influence in an epoch of profound change.

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Musical Life in the Central African Republic

Michelle Kisliuk

Sounds of the City: *Zokela*

Sounds of the Forest: BaAka Pygmies

Conclusion

This essay laces together two musical narratives set in Centrafrique (Central African Republic) in the early 1990s. The introductory narrative focuses on an urban dance music based in the capital, Bangui. The second description, by contrast, addresses the performative, political, and social circumstances within which BaAka pygmies—who live mostly in the rain forest area in the southwest of the country—are negotiating their daily lives.

A link between these two musical domains might at first seem unlikely, but the urban music is in fact stylistically rooted in the Lobaye River region, which overlaps with the home area of BaAka (Aka) and other pygmies (see map). These domains also connect as performances of modernity—how people situate themselves within a changing world. As I shall describe, the BaAka among whom I lived include within their repertory a form that mixes together hymns from various Christian sects, pop-song snippets from the radio, and rhythms and melodies from neighboring Bolemba pygmies (whose lives and culture, unlike BaAka, are relatively integrated with those of their nonpygmy counterparts). BaAka meld all these aspects into a dance form that is about being modern. Concurrently, urban musicians in a collection of bands called *zokela* draw on local song styles—including Bolemba and Mbati pygmy styles—situating their electric sound in regional culture.

I write in the first person here because I want to emphasize that ideas and information about musical performance are by nature embedded within personal experience, bound and defined by moment and circumstance. This viewpoint is particularly appropriate for addressing African performance, intimately tied in most cases to the socioaesthetic moment (Chernoff 1979; Stone 1982). My descriptions are based on several years of research among BaAka pygmies, spanning eight years (1986–1994) and including a two-year stay. The material on urban music in Bangui is culled from the same period.

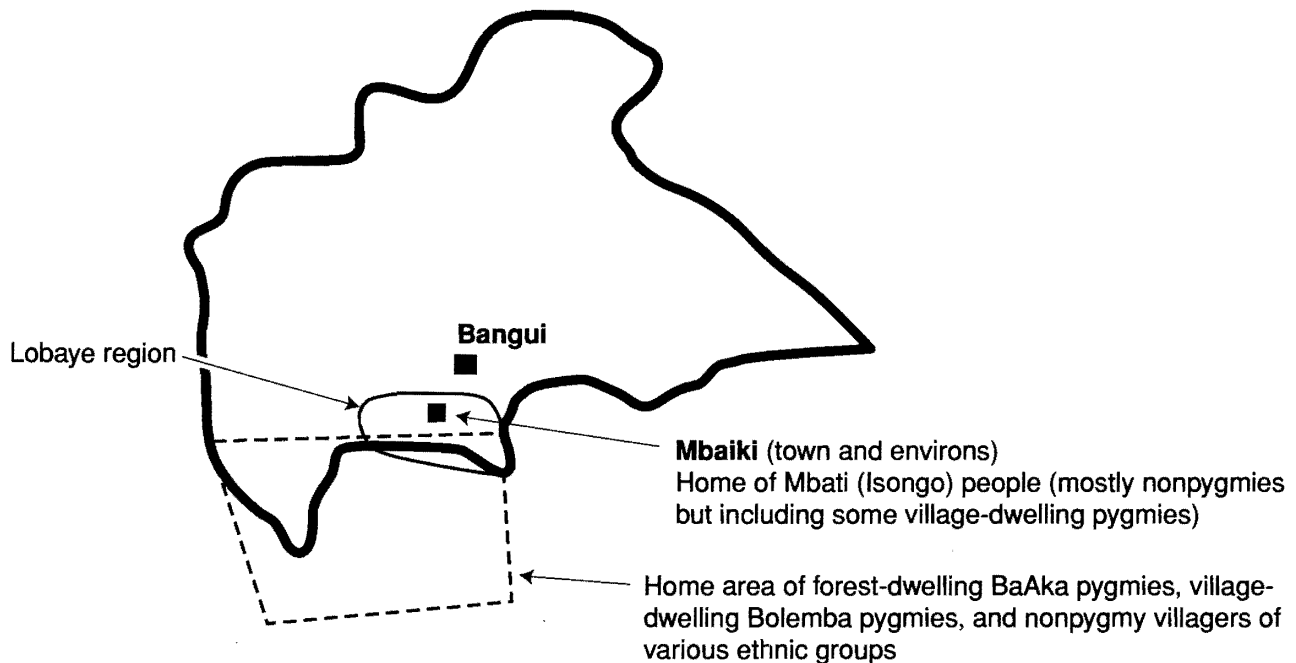
SOUNDS OF THE CITY: ZOKELA

It is a weeknight in Fatima, a section of Bangui. Fatima is the neighborhood where people originally from the Lobaye region tend to gather (the Lobaye river area is in the southwest of the country). In an open-air dance bar, the disk jockey switches

zokela An urban dance music based in the Central African Republic city of Bangui

soukous Urban music style from Zaïre

makossa Urban music style from Cameroon



Central African Republic (Centrafique). This map highlights only areas mentioned in this article. The Central African Republic is bordered to the south by the Republic of Congo, to the north by Chad, to the east by Cameroon, and to the west by Zaïre.

from a current *soukous* hit from Zaïre to a tune by *zokela*—musicians who play and sing in a vigorous style based on multiethnic rhythms, harmonies, melodies, and topical themes from the Lobaye. Though the dance floor had been far from empty before, suddenly just about everybody seated at the little wooden tables leaves beers and sodas behind, grabbing friends to get up and dance *motengene*, the loose, ribcage-rotating, regional dance.

Originally the name of a band, *zokela* has burgeoned into a full-fledged style. On a weekend, those in search of an evening of energetic dancing, social commentary, and proverbs set to the rhythms of the Lobaye might find one of the *zokela* bands playing at a club (only one band would be playing at a time, since three or more bands must share instruments). Inside an open-roofed club, after paying a fee of 500 francs (about \$1.50 in 1996), one would find the musicians and patrons warmed up by about 9:00 P.M. Four singers standing in a row, each behind a stationary microphone, would be trading lead lines and overlapping choral responses with tight harmonies. Occasionally a singer might withdraw, replaced by one who had been waiting casually at the sidelines.

Though overshadowed internationally by neighboring urban musical styles from Zaïre and Cameroon (like *soukous* and *makossa*), musicians from Centrafrique, and the Lobaye region in particular, have been developing their own style of electrified

band music since the late 1970s, and their popularity with the Centrafrican people is high.

This story of the genesis of the *zokela* sound is based on my conversations with members of the original band, and on discussions with Lobayans who form the core of the listening and dancing community for *zokela*.

The origins of *zokela*

Several people I spoke with began the story of *zokela* by recounting an incident from 1981. Musiki, an established rumba-style band from Bangui, was touring the country. For a few days, Musiki stayed in the town of Mbaïki, where they discovered aspiring boy-musicians calling themselves *zokela* (Mbat) ‘noise’—a noise like water gurgling down a stream, or like women ululating at a funeral dance, or, less literally, like the sound of the life-force.

Kaïda Monganga, the leader of the original *zokela*, later narrated his recollections of how *zokela* began (my translation):

I learned music from my mother. When she would take me to the fields, she would sing, so she taught me how to sing. In Mbaïki, at the age of eight I got together with some friends to sing Mbat songs from traditional legends, funerals, and ceremonies—songs that were part of our upbringing—and we also began to interpret music from Zaïre on homemade guitars. This was at the age of about 10, between 1970 and 1974. We were actually imitating the Centrafrican bands who were themselves imitating the rumba style from Zaïre; but as kids, we could not enter the local nightclubs. Then Piros, a composer among us, arranged an interpretation of a traditional song, and each time we would sing it, lots of people would gather on the path to listen, and they would encourage us. We formed two little groups, and after several more years of encouragement we got together as one and decided to choose the name Zokela, meaning in the Mbat language ‘acclamation, joy, heat, ambience, noise.’

One night in Mbaïki, an *orchestre* came to play at a dance bar. They played from 8 p.m. until 2 a.m. And we youngsters, with our little group, we came there to ask them to let us play, but they made us stay outside. . . . We really suffered out there until 2 a.m. But when the evening was over, and the people began to leave, they said “there’s a little group here, you should let them come in and play.” And we went and played only one song, and it was that traditional song. When we played it there was pandemonium, and even though we’d only been allowed to play one song, we were very happy because it was the first time we had ever picked up an electric guitar and mic. Oh! That was the end! Oo-la-la, we were overjoyed.

Everyone who heard the young members of Zokela that night in Mbaïki was stunned that they had captured on modern instruments the insistent and vital sound of ceremonies and funeral dances. Accented by a trap set, the bass guitar and glass bottle (tapped with a stick) caught the texture of village drums. The bass emphasized high-low contrasts (like the open and muted strokes of a low-pitched drum), while the bottle added the syncopated triplets of a matching high-pitched drum. Two lead guitars built on that rhythmic base, playing interlocking, repeating riffs—brighter sounding than in *soukous*—jumping octaves and rolling in cycles like a tumultuous brook.

BACK
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Though this was not the first time a band had tried to integrate musical elements from the Lobaye into an urban sound, it was the first time a group had succeeded in getting the melodies, harmonies, vocal quality, and especially the *motengene* dance rhythms and energy into the music. After the leader of Musiki heard Zokela for the first time (in 1981), he and a financially successful music lover from the

While *zokela* musicians continue to compose their own tunes and lyrics, they are delving progressively deeper into local traditions and creatively elaborating on urban culture

Lobaye invited the young men to Bangui to perform several club concerts there. This exposed the band to the Bangui public, and they exploded onto the cultural scene, soon beginning to play regularly at Club Anabelle, in the Fatima neighborhood. Over the following months, the band struggled to remain in Bangui, all of the musicians living in one house—at least four singers, two lead guitarists, drum set player, and bassist.

Kaïda continues:

In 1982, we were invited to make our first recording, and when we introduced that rhythm, Zokela took Bangui by storm. We wanted to stay in Bangui because that way we'd at least have access to instruments and to repairs. So since 1983, we have been in Bangui.

At that time, we began to expand our repertory, to compose, to create, based on traditional music. But we also began to compose some songs in the national language [Sango], instead of only in our regional languages from the Lobaye, so the people who did not understand would no longer feel excluded, and we were very successful. To attract attention, we costumed ourselves in animal skins, traditional dress—that is, panther skins—and when I came out on stage: boom! the people were very interested.

Since then, the band has remained popular.

Zokela began singing not only about their experience as Lobayains, but also about urban life in Bangui, to which people from all regions of the country could relate. In rhythm, vocal style, and lyric, Zokela voiced the contemporary and complex experience of urban Centraficans, melded with ethnic roots. Nevertheless, the band was at a disadvantage because the government would not aid a group from the Lobaye (birthplace of the deposed Emperor Bokassa), and because their songs, like the traditional forms that inspired them, contained social commentary unlike the beautiful but unthreatening love songs of most of the other rumba-style bands in Bangui.

According to several of the members of Zokela, there was a problem of tribal jealousy. Kaïda recalls, "Some people wanted Zokela to disappear. Even our songs on the radio were censored because we were very successful. They were afraid we would develop our region, and then come again to dominate. We went along for 10 or 11 years with that tribalistic regime [of President André Kolingba], but it seems that now there will be a change. [The new president, Ange] Patassé promised to support Centrafican artists."

While Zokela were staying in Bangui during their initial entrance onto the scene in the early 1980s, several of the more established Bangui bands (including Musiki, Makembe, Cannon Stars, Cool Stars) began tempting the singers to join them—and

they succeeded to some extent because they had instruments and some money. A growing core group of singers and players was so large, there were still many musicians left to fill the places of those who had moved on. As a result, rather than seeing their sound and energy become diffused and destroyed by recruitment from other bands, Zokela not only continued on their own, but infiltrated to varying degrees the sound of most of the other bands in Bangui.

Kaïda continues the story:

We did not have our own instruments, we were renting instruments, and to put up a concert was very expensive. But for us it wasn't just the money, but our future. We needed to make ourselves known on a national level so we could develop as artists. We didn't concern ourselves with earning money; women loved us, and life was beautiful. The important thing was to produce, to perform.

In 1985, a local producer who wanted to work with us approached us. He provided instruments, a makeshift studio, but then he began to want to dominate us. We were the creators of the music, but he wanted everything to pass his approval first. . . . But how could he do that? This was our group; we were the ones who formed it.

So the rest of us, those of us who had brought the music from Mbaïki in the first place, we decided to look for other people to help us. And so those who stayed with that producer for the sake of the instruments formed the subgroup Zokela Motike ['Orphans'], and we became Zokela Original. We were the four founders of Zokela: Mabele, Ilonga, Degoumousse, and Kaïda. The rest went with that producer.

So I took other new singers, and we mounted a coup again, in 1986, and we put out an album [homemade cassette] . . . that was very, very successful. We recorded and toured a lot throughout 1988–89, . . . but we were still renting instruments. Then there was another disagreement within Zokela Motike. Luanza, the head of Motike, decided to break and form yet another Zokela. . . . So I accepted that there be many Zokelas because I wasn't afraid: I know my position; I know the secret of this music. I'm not afraid to share it with the youngsters. . . . So Luanza made "*Zokela National*" in late 1992, and it was very successful, even more so than Motike. And it gave me a lot of pleasure to see the youngsters that we trained.

The members of all the *zokela* groups, despite their conflicts, continue to cooperate, covering each other's songs without hesitation, and by necessity sharing instruments. One of the musicians explained that the reason Zokela keeps splitting off into new bands is that they are all like brothers, having grown up together in the same town, and therefore nobody can really boss anybody else around. Instead of following a leader when conflicts arise, they just split off. This situation accommodates the younger musicians from Mbaïki and elsewhere in the Lobaye who want to be connected with the *zokela*, and has strengthened the style and its influence, moving *zokela* further toward becoming a national style.

In January 1993, a French-owned beer company sponsored an event that the announcers on Radio Bangui called a concert of *la musique traditionnelle moderne* 'modern traditional music' (figures 1 and 2). All three *zokela* bands, plus a potential fourth band, played at this concert, held at the upscale nightclub Punch Coco. The Banguisois audience, of mixed ethnic background, crowded in to hear and see the latest *zokela* compositions and *motengene* dancing, and responded enthusiastically to songs that captured the collective experience of economic and political crisis in the country.

FIGURE 1 Mixed *zokela* bands perform at club Punch Coco in Bangui, 1993. The singers break for an interlude of dancing, while bassist Maurice Kpamanda stands behind them. Photo by Justin Mongosso.



“. . . We go to work in the fields, a long walk away, to survive. I talk to my dead relatives, who can no longer help me; I cry.”—from a *zokela* song

FIGURE 2 Lead *zokela* guitarists and percussionists, with the bottle player seated behind the drum set. The beer company slogan, *la blonde qui fait courir l'Afrique* 'the blonde that makes Africa chase after her', is displayed behind the musicians. Photo by Justin Mongosso.



While *zokela* musicians continue to compose their own tunes and lyrics, they are delving progressively deeper into local traditions and creatively elaborating on urban culture (weaving in references to Christian religious music or advertising jingles), much in the way that the Mbatu songs elaborate and comment on social surroundings. For example, in 1995, a hit by Zokela National—“*Essa Messa* ‘I Call You’”—used several regional languages, plus Sango, to express a proverb whose theme is reciprocal assistance: “During tough times, you can call on a real friend to help you, but I called you and you did not answer.” (This may covertly criticize the government—something *zokela* is known for.) “But what befalls me now will befall you later. If you need my help, I must help you.” The song goes on to name all the musicians in the band, who will be there to help each other.

Another song, “*Exode Rurale* ‘Rural Exodus’,” warns villagers not to leave their fertile earth behind and move to the city. It describes the difficulties of survival in Bangui. But many *zokela* songs—like that first one they played as boys—are modern arrangements of the exact melodies and words of traditional songs. In Mbaiki and in villages throughout the Lobaye, one can hear *zokela* tunes playing regularly on family tape players, while next door at a funeral or a ceremony people may be singing the songs that form the basis of that style. One important difference in the urban musical setting is that musical performance there is dominated by men, while in the village, women have an equal or greater role.

Another *zokela* song, a hit by Zokela Original, is “*Motike* ‘Orphans’” (on CD track 17). The text, in the Mbatu language, laments the difficulty of being musicians:

Zokela nzonga mawa.
 Ngo si mbi ko Bangui ngo ke sio na Isongo.
 Ngo simba tene ngo kpoua na lele.
 Nya kolo eti.

Zokela is unhappy, pitiable.
 We go to work in the fields, a long walk away, to survive.
 I talk to my dead relatives, who can no longer help me; I cry.
 And I have crippled feet [a reference to a guitarist (figure 2)].

As you listen to the audio example, try isolating the bass, played by Maurice Kpamanda of Zokela Original, said to be the only bassist who truly captures village rhythms. The lead singer at the opening of the song is Kaïda Monganga.

Partly as an effort to escape the paralysis of ever-deepening poverty, *zokela's* latest move has been toward what Kaïda calls spectacle—an international pop-show style that emulates *soukous* bands touring from Zaïre. Holding a movable microphone, the lead singer, or “star” (Kaïda himself, in this case), is separated from the “chorus.” And whereas in a club setting the singers dance *motengene* informally, occasionally adding a small choreographed bit to an instrumental interlude (figure 1), the spectacle introduces highly choreographed dance numbers with female dancers.

In the Bangui soccer stadium in 1994, during a spectacle showcasing Centrafrican superstar singers, Kaïda tried to add a folkloric-show aspect to the spectacle. As one of several singers who performed that evening, he brought pygmies from the Mbaïki area to come on stage with him and imitate their forest-dwelling BaAka cousins, whose styles of music and dance differ widely from those of the Mbaty pygmies. Mbaty pygmies normally dance a version of *motengene* as their traditional dance, while BaAka generally do not (the hip swiveling and rib rotating of *motengene* contrasts with the square-hipped chugging and buttock-bobbing steps of most BaAka dancing). During this spectacle, however, the Mbaty pygmies were asked to provide an introduction, wearing BaAka leaves and loincloths, and singing in BaAka style (which they could only approximate). Kaïda himself could then explode onto the stage with his modern sound, spurring the “pygmies” to drop everything and dance *motengene* instead. These Mbaty pygmies were at first so reticent to perform in front of the crowd that the organizers had to get them drunk before they were willing. Their dancing was nonetheless impressive, if unsteady, and the crowd, of mostly urban Lobayans (many of whom do not distinguish between BaAka and Mbaty pygmies), cheered wildly.

This incident highlights both the creative tension and the possible pitfalls when a visceral identification with local roots meets an enticing modernity. Extending that tension, *zokela's* struggle to find footing as a regional, urban, then national style was almost eclipsed here by a simultaneous wish for dramatic impact and international appeal. Kaïda, who had at first refused to give up his autonomy to a producer in exchange for some measure of security, now, even while making explicit the roots of his style, blurred the realities of those roots for the sake of spectacle.

The story of *zokela* resembles that of many urban musics developing throughout Africa. In their very sound, they have been reclaiming and redefining experience in the postcolonial era, first by experimenting with electric instruments and a “modern” sound, then expanding to a national public with a regionally or ethnically based style; then, some of them have leaped toward an international market. But the consequences of an international leap for a music like *zokela*—potent mainly for its localness—are uncertain in the climate of worldbeat.

The music of African pygmies has held a special place in ethnomusicological imagination. The yodeling and hocketing of pygmy singing has served as an icon of social and musical utopia.

SOUNDS OF THE FOREST: BAAKA PYGMIES

The music of African pygmies has held a special place in ethnomusicological imagination. In the writings of Colin Turnbull (1962), Alan Lomax (1976), Robert Farris Thompson (1989), and Simha Arom (1978, 1985), the yodeling and hocketing of pygmy singing has served as an icon of social and musical utopia. Pygmies who call themselves BaAka (sometimes Bayaka, depending on the regional accent) live between the Sangha and Oubangui rivers in the southwestern Central African Republic, and extend as far south as Imfondo in the Republic of the Congo. They live mostly in densely forested areas, and their culture is based largely on hunting and gathering. Since the 1960s and 1970s, however, these pygmies (like most other pygmies of equatorial Africa) have become more involved in farming—either as seasonal laborers for village-based farmers of other ethnic groups, or, increasingly, on their own plots cut in the forest.

I use the term *pygmy* (French *pygmée*) with reluctance. It derives via Middle English *pigmei* and Latin *Pygmæi* from Greek *Pygmaioi* ‘people pertaining to the *pygmé* (the distance from the elbow to the knuckles)’, denoting a mythical dwarfish people, who repeatedly warred with and were defeated by cranes. H. M. Stanley had applied the term to them in 1887, but Paul Schebesta (1933) introduced the term formally, replacing an older term, *Negrillo*. An alternative term, such as *forest people*, while at first preferable to *pygmy*, inadvisedly attaches to a people an essentialized place. (What happens when pygmies move out of the forest? or when the forest recedes?) While awaiting a more neutral alternative, or at least a time when *pygmy* will be free of pejorative connotations, it is preferable to use the term each group uses for itself (Efe, Mbuti, Twa, Baka, BaAka, and others), reserving *pygmy* for general use.

The BaAka whom I came to know best in Centrafrique live near Bagandou, a rural community in the Lobaye region south of Mbaïki, crossing the border with the Republic of the Congo. The Bagandou have a long-standing, hereditary exchange relationship with the BaAka of the region. Various terms have been used to characterize this relationship—*clientship*, *symbiosis*, *parasitism*, *servitude* (Bahuchet 1985:554–555). These conceptions betray the complexity and variability of relationships between pygmies and their neighbors across equatorial Africa. The BaAka term for Bagandou villagers and other Africans is *milo* (pl. *bilo*). By itself, the term simply designates nonpygmy dark-skinned Africans, whom BaAka see as separate and distinct from themselves. When I refer generally to non-BaAka Africans, I use either *milo* (*bilo*), or Turnbull’s term *villagers*.

BaAka dances: *mabo* and *dingboku*

During my initial research (1987–1989), I became familiar with, and participated in, the current repertory of BaAka hunting dances and women’s dances in the Bagandou area (Kisliuk in preparation). I spent most of my time living with one particular

FIGURE 3 The theme of “*Makala*,” the basic melody, from which spring variations, elaborations, and counter-melodies.



extended family, but I also traveled as far as the northern Congo to gain a sense of the flow and exchange of new *beboka* ‘singing, dancing, drumming’ (sing. *eboka*) coming in and out of the area. Below, I describe two of the BaAka dance forms (*beboka*) that I came to know well during that period.

A popular hunting dance

One of the most popular BaAka dances of the late 1980s is *mabo*, a hunting dance. Because it was new (new dances emerge every few years, some survive for generations, and others fade away), I was able to learn the songs. Whereas songs for older dances have been elaborated over the years to the point where the underlying melodic themes often completely drop away (though people still hear the themes in their minds), with new songs, people sing basic melodic themes from time to time, and therefore improvisations and elaborations are easier for newly initiated ears to recognize.

One of the most frequently performed songs at the time is one I call “*Makala*,” the name of an unknown person, probably a deceased BaAka child from the Congo. (BaAka do not actually name their songs, as they have no occasion to objectify them in that way.) I learned to recognize a basic “theme” of “*Makala*” by chance. I was walking along a path with some BaAka teenagers, who suddenly sang out the theme in isolation. I then recognized that theme and others during dances, when I would hear a whole chorus of singers elaborating.

TRACK 18

During a dance in my home camp, several young women gathered by the recorder to play with the level-indicator lights by singing into the microphone. This playful moment makes their various improvisations easier to hear. The basic theme of “*Makala*,” as transcribed into conventional Western notation (figure 3), shows interlocked and yodeled sections. You will be able to pick out this theme on the recording.

Each BaAka dance form has particular rhythms, played on at least two (often three) drums, made from hollowed tree trunks. On each end, each drum has a head made from antelope skin—a type of drum borrowed from Isongo villagers. One drummer will sit straddling a drum, while another man behind him might play a cross-rhythm with a stick on the side of the drum. The basic rhythm for *mabo*, played on the smaller of two drums, is a triplet pattern played steadily with alternating hands, thus implying a three-against-two feeling.

In the following excerpt, adapted from an ethnography of BaAka performance (Kisliuk 1991 and in preparation), I describe a particular instance of how it feels to dance and sing *mabo*:

My senses tingled; I was finally inside the singing and dancing circle. The song was “*Makala*,” and singing it came more easily to me while I danced. As I moved around the circle, the voices of different people stood out at moments, affecting my own singing and my choices of variations. Ndami sang a yodeled variation (*mayenge*) I had not heard before. I could feel fully the intermeshing of sound and motion, and move with it as it transformed, folding in upon itself. This was different from listening or singing on the sidelines because, while moving with the circle, I became an active part of the aural kaleidoscope. I was part of the changing design inside the scope, instead of looking at it and projecting in.

The physical task of executing the dance step melded with the social interac-

dingboku A dance performed by a line of women related by residential camp or clan

mabo A hunting dance that was one of the most popular BaAka dances of the late 1980s

mokondi General name for dances involving BaAka spirits

beboka Singing, dancing, and drumming of the BaAka

tions of looking, listening, smiling, reacting, that kept us all dancing. Since our camp was built on a hill, it took extra effort to dance the full-soled steps while going up or down hill. Running the bottom of my foot inchwormlike across the ground required the sturdy support of all the muscles in my leg. All this while trying to stay loose enough to follow through with my whole body and keep up with the beat. As I continued to dance, trying to refine my step, I noticed more fully the inward and delicately grounded concentration of the movements, like the blue duiker (*mboloko*, a small antelope). Someone cried out “*Sukele!*” (an interpretation of the French *sucre* ‘sweet’).

Suddenly, a few people shouted rhythmic exclamations that suggested a shift to the *esime* (the intensified rhythmic section), and the singing stopped. Tina stepped into the center of the circle and walked in the opposite direction to the one in which we were dancing. He shouted “*Pipi!*” (imitating a carhorn), and the group answered “*Hoya!*” (an exclamation). He continued, “*O lembi ti?* ‘Are we tired?’,” and we answered “*O lembi (o)te!* ‘We aren’t tired!’” As the *esime* continued, people “got down” in their dancing, crying “heeya, heeya” repeatedly on the beat, and sometimes jumping forward with a scoot instead of stepping to the beat.

At one point, the women grabbed the shoulders of those in front of them in line, and began chugging ahead on the beat. I joined in, finding it hard to jump all the way up the hill while staying as close as possible to Ndoko, whose shoulders I held onto in front of me. Someone was behind me, I don’t recall who, but she had to grab my waist because she could not reach my shoulders comfortably. It was unavoidably clear at this moment that I was bigger than everybody else.

A women’s dance

Ongoing, informal negotiation and disputed expectations, as part of BaAka social dynamics, are highlighted in performance. An egalitarian sensibility, coupled with individual autonomy, make for a cultural climate of constant negotiation (Dumont 1986; Turnbull 1962; Moise 1992). In the context of BaAka women’s dances, gendered wills intensify the social fray. *Dingboku* is a dance performed by women in a line (often several lines—of women related by residential camp or clan). They stand linked at the shoulder, and then step forward and back together (figure 4). The subject of *dingboku* is a celebration of women’s sexuality, and some of the songs mock men. But only male BaAka play drums, and therefore drumming sometimes becomes a focus of tension during the women’s dances—even in *dingboku*, which has no drum accompaniment.

In a performance I witnessed, Sandimba and Djongi (two women from my home camp), who knew the dance best, gestured cues to the other women, indicating how they should link up in line and how to proceed. For fifteen minutes within the hullabaloo of chatting, milling around, and extemporaneous drumming, they tried to establish two lines. Finally, throngs of men, and some women, stood aside to watch.

FIGURE 4 BaAka women dancing *dingboku*. Sandimba is at the end of the line, on the left.



When the second line of dancers was ready to begin, someone started a song, “*Ooh Leb.*” Short and syncopated, the phrases in this song established a driving beat, to which the women, in two lines, hopped percussively from foot to foot. The lines repeatedly approached each other and then separated. The line of less experienced dancers got tangled, and Sandimba called out, “*Hoya!*” a signal to end the song, and the group responded unanimously, “*Ho!*”

Then Sambala, a man, stepped in to try to reorganize the women, but they managed to get themselves in line and ready to continue. Sandimba introduced a slower, less syncopated song, emphasizing the dance beat; this intervention helped unify the company. The lines faced each other, an arm’s length apart, and moved together as a unit across the space and back.

Several minutes later, after dancing energetically, the women were tired, and Sandimba called up a final, slower song. The lines faced each other and moved as a group across the space at close range, one line stepping forward, the other backward. This song had no words, only vocables (*eeya oh eeey*), with a lush interlock and harmonious overlap. The central melody, based on three descending phrases that form an asymmetrical repeating pattern, produced a gentle tension and cyclic drive. The performance coalesced now to a solid groove, the slowed stepping and lush harmonies making some of the women seem to fall into a dreamy, trancelike state.

Amid this euphoria, some drummers began to play *mabo* triplets in the background, but actually fell into time with *dingboku*. Maybe the drumming men wanted to participate in this mood, or else they hoped to move the event along into *mabo*. The effect, intentional or not, was to articulate a cross-rhythm that heightened the intensity of the moment.

BaAka responses to missionization

In 1989, some BaAka encountered Christian evangelism for the first time. The most concentrated episode began in late 1988, when American missionaries from the Grace Brethren Church, a fundamentalist sect based in Wonona Lake, Indiana, started a campaign to plant churches among the BaAka of the Bagandou region. This was my first significant encounter with missionaries too, and I was not sure how to react. I tried my best to keep an open mind, believing that most missionaries have good intentions, and often give in positive ways. Besides, I knew of many instances where missionized peoples reinterpret the lore of the missionaries, resulting in a spirited resistance to the “colonization of consciousness” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1989).

Komba Creator god of the BaAka

gano Traditional legends in which Komba, the creator god, is a friend and caretaker

nzapa The term for the Christian God in the Sango language of Central Africa

BaAka in this region (with the Baka pygmies of Cameroon) recognize the creator god Komba, but they cite him mostly as a character in *gano*—traditional legends, in which Komba is a friend (*beka*) and caretaker (*kondja*). Otherwise, I did not hear people refer to Komba except in an occasional exclamation like “Komba’s mother!” or, when someone’s luck was down, “Komba is a bad person.” But once I asked my friend Sandimba if Komba and *nzapa* (the Sango word used for the Christian God) were the same entity. She hesitated slightly, then answered they were. Linking Komba and *nzapa* had likely circulated to Sandimba from BaAka who had been exposed to an evangelist strategy of paralleling Christian beliefs as much as possible with indigenous ones, then “explaining” where indigenous beliefs go wrong.

The god dance

An earlier wave of Christian influence among local BaAka had started about a year before. Cousins from one family had migrated to the west, toward the town of Nola, where they were “converted” by Baptist missionaries. When these cousins came back to Bagandou to visit, they began convincing their relatives to take up *nzapa*. The idea slowly spread through the forest. In the camp where I was living, one evening after a *mabo* had ended, I saw Tina lead some men in a brief burst of preaching and hymn singing. They mixed songs and practices from various Christian sects observable in the village, calling all of it the god dance (*eboka ya nzapa*), and made up their own form of preaching; anyone could decide to play the role of preacher on the spur of the moment.

A common expression I heard while BaAka prayed was *ame* ‘amen’. Diaka *ame* can be glossed as English ‘me’, and repeating “me” at the ends of phrases became part of their version of praying. BaAka children started singing songs about *nzapa* during their play, and a parent sometimes absentmindedly sang along *alleluya ame* ‘alleluia, me’. Early one morning, Sandimba’s boy Mbaka was distractedly singing in falsetto a song with the words *eeya, Malia, oh, na nzapa*, from a local Roman Catholic hymn. When I asked Sandimba what the song was about, she said it did not refer to anything, but was just a song heard around lately.

Nevertheless, during the following coffee harvest season (when many BaAka converged in temporary camps near Bagandou to help with the harvest), little by little rumors began to circulate that some BaAka thought dances like *mabo* were satanic (*ba sata*). Then suddenly some of the most ardent followers of *nzapa* refused to dance and started accusing other BaAka of being satanic. A split developed between those who had been mildly interested before, but were now becoming suspicious of the *nzapa* craze, and those who were following what an increasing number of *nzapa* fanatics were saying.

One weekend early in this heated controversy, I missed a big dance in a neighboring camp because I had to go to Bangui. When I returned, Sandimba told me that during that dance she had challenged the *nzapa* fanatics in front of everybody. She

had told them:

We BaAka have dances, like *elio* [a curing dance], like *monjoli*, *djoboko* [both older dances, associated with spearhunting], *mabo*, *monina* [another women's dance], all belonging to us, to BaAka. But *nzapa* is a *bilo* thing, it comes from far away. It's for the *bilo* because they can read and write, but a Moaka has never written the name of his friend [Komba]. . . . I yelled at them, "You are liars, big liars." I yelled, "Liars, liars!" and the others applauded. We haven't changed our decision.

Sandimba said that after her speech they danced both *mabo* and *dingboku*, but the *nzapa* followers refused to participate. In our camp that evening, we could hear the *nzapa* people having a "god dance" in the distance. From inside a hut, Sandimba grumbled: "That's the *nzapa* of monkeys." Always ready with witty insults, she continued, "They wear clothes like monkeys with tails. They're dirty and always wear the same dirty outfits that smell of urine"—instead of the white robes that some "real" Christians wear.

BaAka traditionally believe in ancestral spirit entities, *bedjo*, some of which are personalized and belong to families, and others of which are more general and nameless (Hewlett 1986:92). As proprietors (*bakondja*) of the forest, *bedjo* play a role in the success of the hunt. Many of the rituals and protocols around the hunt focus on securing their help (Bahuchet 1985:451). Related to the *bedjo* are *mokondi*. Most BaAka understand *mokondi* to be a grouping of ancestral *bedjo* connected to a dance form efficacious for the hunt, or for the purpose of redressing social conflicts within the hunting group. *Mokondi* is also a general name for dances involving any of these spirits, including *edjengi*, a category of spirits. (Elanga, my friend and a respected elder, explained to me that for the dance *edjengi*, each family has its personalized *bedjo*.) One day, my youthful friend Ndanga was sitting next to me looking at a religious pamphlet and casually praying in Sango, reproducing actions he had seen among village Christians and thinking, perhaps, that I might approve of his efforts. To his mumbled monologue, he added the word *Christo*. When I asked him what *Christo* is, he said it is a spirit (*edjo*).

The firstfruits of Balabala's work

The most focused evangelical activity of this period was sponsored by the Grace Brethren Church. I had heard that this project was led by an American woman known locally as Balabala. Balabala devoted much of her energy—in the form of brief but intense appearances—at Dzanga, a permanent BaAka settlement west of the area where I was spending most of my time. As yet unaware of any details, I set out to visit Dzanga—to compare *beboka* repertoires, and to get a sense for the choices BaAka in different areas were making in response to missionization.

At Dzanga, I was shocked by what I saw. The BaAka there had stopped performing their traditional repertory of music and dance (such as *mabo* and *dingboku*). Whereas in neighboring areas BaAka had been hotly debating the value of what the Christians were saying, at Dzanga all of the BaAka had been convinced by Balabala and her Centrafrican evangelists that their own music, dance, and traditional medicine were satanic. BaAka at Dzanga told me proudly—assuming I would approve, since I am white, like Balabala—that they now performed only one kind of *eboka*. Now they would only sing hymns to the Christian god in church. These hymns were not in their own language, but in Sango, which many BaAka, especially women, do not understand.

The church at Dzanga was not quite finished. It consisted of support poles and the beginnings of a thatch roof, but rows of log seats were in place (figure 5). On

I saw the god dance as a means of addressing modernity. These BaAka were claiming any “otherness” that surrounded them and usually excluded them, and mixing it into a form they could define and control.

FIGURE 5 BaAka of Dzanga hold a Christian religious service in 1989. The choir sings at left, while the preachers consult their Bibles in Sango.



Sunday morning, the BaAka of Dzanga gathered in churchlike clothing, wearing it as close to the style of villagers as they could manage. One woman had a matching blouse, cloth, and head wrap in a bright green and white pattern. Other women were not so fancy, but covered their heads with an old cloth. Several men sat at the front of the enclosure: one wore a long, white Muslim gown (*bubu*) and huge sunglasses; another man, the choral director, wore jeans and a corduroy vest, and no shoes. The choir consisted of women and girls, who in enthusiastic harmony sang hymns in Sango.

A Moaka stood in front of the congregation. In Diaka, he told the story of Adam and Eve from Genesis, using the word “Komba” for “God,” as he had likely been instructed to do. Another Moaka, sitting at the front of the church with a copy of the Bible, read a few words haltingly in Sango. A third man, the one wearing the sunglasses, sat next to the preacher with a second copy of the Bible, which he held upside down. The man who had been reading then proceeded to catechize the congregation, asking repeatedly “Who created us?” and they answered halfheartedly “Komba created us.” He continued, “Where did we come from?” There was no answer, just confused murmuring. He repeated, “Where did we come from?” and a voice piped up, unsure, “From earth” (*sopo* ‘ground, earth’). Then the choral director struck up another hymn, to the accompaniment of a homemade guitar—perhaps emulating Balabala, who plays guitar.

I had been traveling (by foot) with my longtime friend and assistant, Justin Mongosso of Bagandou. When the service was over, Justin asked if he could comment. Everyone stayed to listen, expecting, perhaps, that he would constructively critique their praying technique, as the evangelists do. But instead, he began by saying

that he wondered what would happen now that they had stopped using their traditional medicine. Many of the listeners, especially the elders, nodded with concern. Where would they get treatment? There was no clinic anywhere nearby, Balabala was not providing care (we found at Dzanga an especially large clientele for our first aid), and praying was not going to cure them. Why were they abandoning their medicine? They answered that they worried that if they continued, they would die among bad spirits (*sata* and *goundou*). Gone were the vacant smiles of moments earlier. Brows were furrowed, and for the moment, people leaned forward in their seats, listening intently.

Three years later

In 1992, when I next returned to Centrafrique, I saw a somewhat different picture. At the Dzanga settlement, though BaAka were still rejecting BaAka song forms and dance forms, people had begun to significantly recontextualize the Grace Brethren Church material. The BaAka church was no longer standing. Apparently the *nzapa* leaders among them had traveled to Balabala's field school at another BaAka settlement, Moali, and those remaining at Dzanga had not bothered to maintain the church.

The evening of my arrival at Dzanga, the BaAka held a god dance similar to what I had seen years earlier at my home camp, but this one was more elaborate. The dancers, mostly children and teenagers, moved in a circle, using *motengene*-type steps with the singing style and drum rhythms of Bolemba pygmies. Bolemba recreational dances are also emulated by nonpygmy Bagandou teenagers in nearby villages (and by *zokela* in Bangui)—which is probably how these BaAka, in turn, became familiar with the style. Many adults stood by, some joining in the dancing, others watching enthusiastically and singing along. Grace Brethren songs were preceded and followed by Bolemba-style interpretations of hymns from various Christian sects represented in Bagandou village, including Baptist, Apostolic, and even Roman Catholic hymns. They not only blended all that into the same dance, but mixed in Afro-pop snippets in Lingala (from radio tunes from Zaïre and the Congo).

 19

Audio example 19 is an excerpt from this event. The man calling out the solo line sings an alleluia, and adds a few disconnected words in Sango; the chorus responds in Bolemba-style harmonies with an initial alleluia, followed by pygmy singing sounds, which jump large intervals on the syllables *oh* and *eh*.

Confused about this transition from hymns in church to dancing, I asked a man whether, as some claimed, Balabala had taught them this dance. He said yes, and when I asked if she actually dances, he answered in the affirmative, demonstrating by imitating her bouncing movements as she played the guitar to accompany hymns. Balabala and the Grace Brethren do not allow dancing in their religious practice, but since no one was present to enforce a European-style distinction between music and dance, the hymns had become the basis for a new dance form.

As I witnessed this performance, I saw the god dance as a means of addressing modernity. In an effort to reinvent themselves as competent in a changing world, these BaAka were claiming any “otherness” that surrounded them and usually excluded them, and mixing it into a form they could define and control. Three years earlier, the BaAka I had come to know best, unlike those at Dzanga, had been heatedly arguing the validity of the Christian material. But by 1992, the controversy had subsided. My old friend Djolo explained to me then that the god dance is just one among many *beboka*; they could dance their own dances and still pray to god. They had placed the god dance within a BaAka system of value, poised uneasily within a wider, dynamic repertory vying to define an emerging identity.

Though those BaAka most directly affected by the missionaries could be left

without the tools to renew a solid sense of identity with which to construct a future, many BaAka have the resilience to use the missionaries' presence to their advantage. Vast distances, difficult terrain, widely varying reactions, and dynamic cultural trends help subvert the missionary influence. In the most positive possible scenario, the missionary effort will have given some BaAka the foreknowledge to face other challenges ahead—including the depletion of the forest by loggers and farmers, the diminishment of the supply of game, and state pressure to make pygmies conform to an official image of modernity.

CONCLUSION

Scholars, artists, journalists, missionaries, politicians, and profiteers have repeatedly placed African pygmies in a timeless cultural box. Each to a different purpose, and even in dialogue with each other, they have marked the forest people as utopian or backward, savage or sublime. At the same time, urban African bands like Zokela, hurtling into a realm of marketable worldbeat, have faced the prospect of being stripped of regional potency to survive.

The overlapping musical spheres described in this essay illustrate that categories like "traditional," "popular," and "modern" are metaphors for ways of seeing, defined by local politics and creative circumstances. This view of cultural processes can challenge categories that become oppressive if left unquestioned. In a flourishing and ever-changing expressive world, teenagers in Bagandou village enjoy performing the dances of their Bolemba pygmy neighbors, and those village children in turn inspire BaAka pygmies in the forest and *zokela* musicians in the city to interpret similar styles—all to different, though thoroughly modern, rooted, and relevant ends.

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