

music in Luanda and other Angolan provinces during the 1980s.¹

On a more positive note, Moorman writes in an accessible style and the book comes with a CD containing some 15 songs. Yet while the lyrics of many of these are usefully discussed in chapter four, discographic background on these tracks is sketchy or missing entirely. Thus the reader has to turn to pages 257–59 of the book to obtain more information on the various titles contained on the CD and listed on p. xi. And even then, some of the song titles are either missing from the bibliography or spelled differently.

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Rumba Rules: The Politics of Dance Music in Mobutu's Zaire, Bob W. White, Duke University Press, 2008, 300 pp., paperback: 978-0-8223-4112-3.

How could a garbage can produce something so full of power and beauty? This is the question Bob White, arguably the leading scholar of Congolese popular music writing today, asks in *Rumba Rules: The Politics of Dance Music in Mobutu's Zaire*. The garbage can is of course Kinshasa, the capital city of Congo, and like many other African urban centres a festering wound on the continent's body. But White's concern is not with sanitation (or not solely), but with a larger conundrum for which the contrast between Kinshasa's decay and the inexhaustible creative energies of its musicians serves but as a metaphor. It is the intimacy, not to say complicity, of scores of underpaid and disenfranchised musicians with the authoritarian, rapacious regime of Sese Seko Mobutu, who ruled Congo for more than 40 years. But in contrast to Moorman's book, White is not content with locating this uneasy alliance of beauty and brutality solely in propaganda, coercion and nationalist rhetoric. The articulation of power, pain and pleasure is above all felt, experienced and lived in musicians' mundane interaction among themselves and with their audiences.

Three key aspects illustrate the deep and ambiguous ties linking the Congolese popular music of the past half century to Mobutu's regime: *libanga*, *atalaku*, and *ambiance*. The first of these refers to what, at first glance, appears as a specific form of vacuous, spoken flattery musicians pepper their songs with. Yet, although primarily aimed at the rich and powerful, *libanga* are not only a steady source of income for musicians, many of whom depend on commissions from a wealthy clientele and on the practice of "spraying" (gifts of money placed in their pockets or stuck to their foreheads during live performances). In its sheer obsession with and acquiescence to power such verbal flattery also goes beyond the regime's top-down *animation politique* it is modeled on. As White observes, *libanga* are far from being a degraded form of repetitive language. Rather they must be understood as being embedded in a wider moral economy as "a way for musicians to urge those in positions of power to act in socially responsible ways, since *libanga* aims

¹ Gerhard Kubik (1991) "Muxima Ngola – Veränderungen und Strömungen in den Musikkulturen Angolas im 20. Jahrhundert", in Veit Erlmann (ed.) *Populäre Musik in Afrika*, Berlin: Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, pp. 201–72.

to activate patron-client relations and references the fear of abandonment that can exist in economies with structural limits on the redistribution of wealth” (10).

As for the term *atalaku*, it refers to a central figure (other than the band leader) in any Congolese dance band since at least the 1980s. Charged with the task of providing much of the animation of the stage show, the *atalaku* is an instrumentalist playing maracas (usually made of spray cans), a vocalist and a dancer. But above all, he is responsible for stringing together a series of short percussive phrases known as “shouts”. While the combination of roles resonates with more traditional performance styles, and *atalakus*’ preference for spray cans speaks to certain ability to make-do, the “shouts” are indispensable for creating what, in any conversation among Kinois audiences about the merits of a performance, will be called its *ambiance*. Curiously enough, the broader social and political implications of the phenomenon have rarely been studied. White’s discussion of *ambiance*, although far from receiving the same detailed attention as *libanga* and *atalaku*, is extremely important here. Situating *ambiance* in the context of the politics and aesthetics of *ndule*, the live feeling of a concert performance, White sees much of the essence of what constitutes good *ambiance* as being embedded in the dense layering of eroticism and visual effects during live performances (and in video clips). Seasoned readers in Central African arts and aesthetics will recognize the parallels here between how modern *ambiance* and traditional concepts help to break down barriers between spectator and object, performers and audiences, and in this way create spheres for the collective experience of pleasure.

Power, as White rightly observes echoing Johannes Fabian’s influential work, in Central Africa at least, is never stable; it must also be made manifest in performance, especially within dance bands themselves. White provides rich evidence for the way in which bands, on the one hand, are modelled on the authoritarian style of leadership embodied by Mobutu. But, much like other regional styles, Congolese bands’ hierarchical structures also reproduce more traditional patterns of seniority and of the accumulation of rank and prestige through the ability to claim a specific artistic ancestry. In combination with the phenomenon, observed elsewhere in Africa, of band members “splintering” off from a group to strike out with a band of their own, such patterns speak to a certain vitality and resilience in subverting positions of power with new social networks and opportunities for individuation, even if these frequently perpetuate the cycle of authoritarian rule and revolt.

If it is true that writing about the relationship between politics and popular culture in Africa requires an extra measure of sensibility toward the disempowered without, as White astutely puts it, “reproducing a narrative that ends up blaming the victim” (228), the question is to what extent the author of *Rumba Rules* succeeded in this endeavor. While this reader was impressed with the overall gist of White’s account, admiring in particular his sensitivity as a musician and *atalaku* himself toward fellow band members much less famous and fortunate than some of Congolese music’s superstars (or for that

matter, White himself), future studies will have to pursue in greater depth the question posed at the outset: How can musicians under dire political and economic conditions provide sustenance and hope through beauty? How can music expand the networks of reciprocity that have been so blatantly abused by Africa's elites without becoming just another form of escapism?

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Female Voices from an Ewe Dance-Drumming Community in Ghana: Our Music Has Become a Divine Spirit, James Burns, Surrey, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009, 199 pp., DVD, hardbound: 978-0-7546-6495-6.

In the introduction to *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150–1950*, editors Jane Bowers and Judith Tick ask us “How musical is woman?” (1986:13). *Women Making Music* represented an early effort to address questions of gendered musical socialization, to re-examine historical analyses that have not included women, to interrogate the historical and social circumstances that guided women's musical lives, and to illuminate the processes that allow for the continual marginalization of women's voices in the scholarly literature. Since the publication of that seminal text, scholars have explored not only women's musical traditions, but also how musical spaces are the context in which gender ideologies and roles are created, performed, challenged, and embedded in the daily lives of the people who experience them. Drawing from anthropological theory, postmodern ethnographic techniques, gender and sexuality studies and queer theory, writers have addressed the role of the investigator as a subject, as a participant in the study, and as a filter through which culture is experienced. In this review I address a work that dialogues with these discourses and builds new connections between African music studies, gender studies and anthropology.

Female Voices from an Ewe Dance-Drumming Community in Ghana: Our Music Has Become a Divine Spirit by James Burns represents over a decade's worth of field research conducted in Ghana. In this book, Burns addresses the lack of attention paid to Ewe female musicians through an ethnography of Dzigbordi, an Ewe dance-drumming club, or *habobo* in the village of Dzodze in Ghana's Volta Region. According to Burns, the female song leaders of the Dzigbordi *habobo* use songs to address contemporary social problems and to elucidate gender politics. Burns also shows how Ewe dance-drumming continues to adapt to the needs of multiple generations of women living in rural Ghana. Rather than portraying Ewe dance-drumming as ahistoric, it is seen through the eyes of the women in whose lives the musical community is an important contemporary social space; this also serves to demonstrate the adaptability, fluidity and performative nature of “traditional” drumming in Ghana.

Burns attributes the lacunae of studies on Ewe music that incorporate the voices of female musicians to the lack of female researchers conducting studies among the Ewe,