

---

# African Music, Ideology and Utopia

---

*Nick Nesbitt*

In a recent article entitled “Is African Music Possible?” Abiola Irele describes the dilemma of African art music, understood by the author as “a conscious and highly elaborated [musical] form [. . .] bound to the musical language of Europe” (56-57). He depicts in detail the contradictions of a music that, in the face of structural and experiential impediments, “has yet to take root within the contemporary culture of Africa” (56). The article undertakes a wide-ranging description of the ongoing dialogue between “art” and “folk” musics, tracing their intermingling in Western music from Handel and Mozart through Schoenberg, Bartok, and Stravinsky, and in the more recent concert music of the Nigerian composers Fela Sowande, Adam Fiberissima, Akin Euba, and Ayo Bankole. Regarding the former, he concludes that Western concert music has backed itself into a corner of opacity, in which “serious musical composition has come to be understood in certain so-called avant-garde circles in the West in such narrow terms that any work that makes the slightest concession to tonality or that recalls the Romantic convention of musical feeling is rejected out of hand” (66). Not surprisingly, given this argument, the African composers Irele describes appear likewise unable, despite certain limited successes, to articulate a viable musical language using Western musical materials. Lacking workable models of “conscious and [. . .] elaborated [musical] form” from either the West or indigenous cultures, “they are compelled to hover, at best, between the two traditions without achieving a satisfactory integration of both.” Irele’s pessimistic conclusion is that African concert music “which meets a definition of individual art in the Western sense, is not possible” (69). Rightly, I think, Irele refuses to mourn this situation, and instead evokes in his conclusion the dramatic vitality of indigenous African musical expression, both traditional and modern.

In this essay, I wish to expand upon Irele’s suggestion and look to indigenous African musics from examples of these “conscious and highly elaborated [musical] form[s],” while arguing against any rigid distinction between what he terms “art” and “folk” musics. For while Irele calls attention to the “disabling [. . .] opposition” between elite and popular art, and indeed much of his essay is spent demonstrating the intermingling of these categories in Western music, they nonetheless function as discrete limiting categories in the logic of his argument. My point is not to attempt a hollow deconstruction of an argument that is already dialogical to its core, but rather, following Irele, to describe the already complex, dialectical nature of African “classical” (traditional) and popular musics themselves, to pursue this search for a complex, self-reflexive African music beyond the limits of a sterile model of concert music abstractly applied to a vastly different African context. To do so, I will look to two musical fields with which I am familiar in particular. First, traditional Mande music and its ambiguous mid-century mutation from a vehicle of intersubjective communication

within a tradition-oriented community to a rationalized concert music in Fodéba Keita's *Ballets Africains*. Then I will turn to the musical traditions of the African Diaspora, and jazz in particular, to conclude that the compositions, written and improvised, of its most radical practitioners offer precisely the model of a highly developed "art" music that yet retains its viability as an expression of an intersubjective vernacular community unavailable to African composers in canonical Western concert music.

If music as a language is fundamentally nonconceptual, achieving a semblance of logic only in the formal constitution of its material, this withdrawal from unambiguous, rationalized communication never fully realizes its promise. Music speaks of a realm of experience beyond mere exchange, yet this incipient narrative remains a deceitful sleight of hand operated behind the back of every-hopeful listeners; we are always and ever again naive in the face of music, ready to believe its promise of a transcendence of a cynical (post-)modernity. Music remains utopian in its refusal to participate fully in a violent society where unambiguous communication means only the raw assent of the powerless to the dictates of those who happen to be in power today. And yet, this very refusal of music to assent disarms its listeners as a mere image of hope, while music itself becomes an ideological arm of the cynics its idealism condemns. If this paradox is repeatedly observable in the history of music, nowhere, I would maintain, is it expressed so clearly as in the fate of the traditional music of the Maninka.<sup>1</sup> The destiny of this millennial musical tradition in the twentieth century is complexly intertwined with the trajectory of African nationalism, a dramatic example of the dialectic of modernization and enlightenment that is the history of the African Independences and Decolonization. If the Mande *jeli* (griot) traditionally glorified the exploits of powerful patrons in their recounting of the Sundiata Epic, their music, as sociohistorical construct, became all the more profoundly ideological when Sékou Touré called for the creation of Fodéba Keita's *Ballets Africains* as an expression of Guinean nationalism in 1958.<sup>2</sup>

The appearance and transformation of classical African musics, from their practice to their innermost forms, is bound to society. The modifications of Mande music in the twentieth century followed the movements of the society from which it arose, without ever reproducing those movements transparently. Music instead denies its historical character; if it constantly misrepresents itself to us as the immediate expression of nature, whether the cry of a human subject or the rustle of a presubjective noumenal world, it must do so, however, as the mere aesthetic semblance of this nature. The most compelling of these musical utterances, as for example the proto-Impressionistic, blissfully static quality of Beethoven's *Pastoral* or certain moments in Berg's *Wozzeck*, achieve their affective force through a mastery of musical materials that belies any illusion they maintain of raw, unmediated expression.<sup>3</sup>

The development of these compositional forces in Mande music in particular, moreover, is actually historical. Its dynamic transformations arose in response to the overarching historical development of the division

of labor immanent within that society.<sup>4</sup> The very existence of an independent caste of jeli as musician-poet-historians was itself dependent upon a fundamental partitioning of Mande society. This caste system allowed for the appearance and reproduction of fundamentally conservative bards who could devote their entire existence to the tour de force of musical, poetic, and mnemonic expression that is the Sundiata Epic.<sup>5</sup> This division is fundamental to Mande society, with its endogamous differentiation between the free-born nobles (*Horonnu*) and the *Nyamakalalu* artisan class (of which the jeli are a part) who serve them (Charry 48-49). The hierarchical, caste-based nature of Mande society, like the dominant military, masculinist tenor of its traditional culture, has repeatedly threatened to eclipse the imaginative, utopian quality of Mande musical expression.<sup>6</sup> While music by its very nature describes the possibility of human relations beyond those of abstract, anonymous mercantile exchange, the modern stereotype of the venal jeli selling his or her praises to the highest bidder is no anomaly or historical rupture brought on by contact with the West, but is rather logically implicit in a traditional role that merely left this process undeveloped within a habitus of precapitalist exchange.

The rationalization of Guinean music was determined by both this traditional division of labor in Mande society and the novel transformations of Guinean historical experience occurring amidst French colonization. In the colonial period in French West Africa (AOF), the sites of social power both shifted partially to the colonial authorities, while local African leaders adopted and transformed these novel social formations to their own benefit. On the one hand, the French authorities from the Popular Front (1936-39) strove to create a rational African worker, a productive African subject whose behavior followed the means-end logic of mercantile exchange of labor for wages. Though this historical and experiential development was an immensely complex process of interpellation and resistance needing much further research, certain basic tendencies are clear.<sup>7</sup> Already by the 1930s, the forcible recruitment of labor for colonial works projects was widespread throughout the AOF. At the same time, perception of colonized Africans on the part of French administrators began to shift from what one government report termed “a mass reservoir of manpower,” anonymous, passive, and only marginally humanized, to a “community of workers,” (subaltern) human subjects able to transform their environment through conscious labor.<sup>8</sup> Africans were increasingly interpellated (both physically and discursively) as conscious laboring subjects by a French bureaucratic apparatus, in the Ivory Coast and Guinea in particular (Cooper 77-81). The gradual strengthening of the wage-labor model throughout the AOF in this period, coupled with an ideology of an “apostolat du travail,” or “apostolate of work,”<sup>9</sup> helped transform hundreds of thousands of colonized subjects into “income-maximizing individuals” willing to endure physical hardship and exploitation for pay (84).

At the same time, this was no mere passive process. Instead, the creation of this self-conscious worker class rapidly resulted in a questioning of the wage-model of colonial relations and its sacrificial, exploitative

dimensions. The 1930s saw the strengthening of an indigenous trade union movement—spearheaded by figures such as Lamine Diallo in Senegal and Sékou Touré in Guinea—which strove to short-circuit the flow of social power away from the colonizer in an incipient nationalism that culminated in Guinea’s historic 1958 “No” vote against DeGaulle.<sup>10</sup> A decisive 1946 strike in Dakar, and a 1950 strike in Conakry, confronted French colonial officials with a transformed African worker, a worker who could now articulate his or her claim to freedom and just living conditions following the European model of workers’ rights: “The growing development of the working class in organization and consciousness permits it to play a decisive role as the motor and guide of all the proletarian forces of French West Africa,” wrote Diallo in his resolution of strikers’ demands sent to the French Governor-General of Senegal (qtd. in Cooper 229).

Mande music, a fundamentally political and historical music if ever there was one, was itself transformed by these changes in Guinean society. Monad-like, it maintained the image of its aesthetic interiority while simultaneously reflecting, in highly mediated form, the furtive movement of Guinean society towards an increasingly rationalized, bureaucratic society organized around an abstract exchange-model of human relations. With the creation of the Ballets Africains and their subsequent nationalization following independence in 1958, the historical transformation of Guinean society migrated within musical production itself, and the ambiguous dialectic of Guinean modernization played itself out on the world’s stages as Mande music became increasingly an administered, bureaucratic state production.

Much research remains to be done on the formation of Guinea’s Ballets Africains.<sup>11</sup> Certain transformations of traditional Mande music occurring in the process of its nationalization are clear, however. What was originally a participatory music was suddenly called upon by Sékou Touré to adapt itself to the Western stage:

In our African villages [. . .] dances are [. . .] executed in the middle of a ring of spectators who also take part almost as much as the dancers and musicians. On the stage new conditions have to be created by means of different devices in order, on the one hand, to retain the freshness and reality of the dance and, on the other, to destroy the monotony which is quick to arise due to the non-active participation of the audience.

(F. Keita 176, qtd. in Charry 212)

The process of rationalization whose occurrence Max Weber saw at work throughout Western music transformed a rapidly modernizing Mande music as well.<sup>12</sup> The traditional circle of spectator-participants, a visual representation of cyclical, natural time, was broken into the teleological straight line of musicians spread out across a stage before the gaze of Western spectators. Rhythms and dances that traditionally would be performed in highly specific contexts and times (baptism, marriage, initiation, etc.) were extracted from that milieu and choreographers brought them together in new, discrete combinations. This move from an organic

community to the stage, which increased the music's formal structuration, simultaneously undermined its place within a traditional *social* structure as a dynamic, significant communal process. Mande music was suddenly called upon to represent the Guinean nation to foreign audiences around the globe. This process of rationalization occurred within musical structure as well. In a traditional context, pieces generally began with women singing and clapping, and musicians gradually joined them in a gradual process of musical accretion. In the ballet, however, pieces were separated into differentiated units with clear beginnings and ending points that all musicians would acknowledge in concert. Rhythmic breaks played by drummers, which had traditionally only signaled changes to dancers *within* the rhythm, were now adapted to form discrete beginning and ending points.

A dramatic representation of this process is audible when comparing two recent recordings by the Mande percussionist Mamady Keita. The work of Keita, perhaps the best known musician to have come from Guinea's national ballets, dramatically underlines the complex mediations of tradition and modernization at work in Mande music. In his 1999 recording *Balandugu Kan*, Keita's drumming returns to the traditional context of the Wassolon village in Eastern Guinea in which he was born. Traditional songs ebb and flow over two hours with the voices, clapping, and playing of dozens of singers and musicians weaving a complex musical tapestry. In contrast, Keita's 1998 recording *Afō* constructs a highly abstract symphony of traditional Mande rhythms, in which complex rhythmic cues and ensemble passages mark transitions within a single 75-minute "pyramid of rhythms." Here, the human voice is merely one subordinate element appearing furtively within a predominantly rhythmic orchestration. Keita describes in the notes to *Afō* how it represents the culmination of his innovatory work as Artistic Director of Guinea's Ballet Djoliba in the 1970s. His invention of a "pyramid of rhythms" is successful, in my view, since it both extends the process of rationalization of Mande drum music to its limits, while drawing its formal procedures of orchestration from the immanent demands of theatricalization, rather than from any abstract importation of Western musical models. Keita thus operates his complex encounter with the West (rationalization, theatricalization, etc.) immanently, within and through traditional Mande music itself, rather than simply by pasting imported procedures atop traditional models. Whether or not it is Keita's most successful recording (I believe others such as *Mögöbalu* and *Hamanah* better represent Keita's unique exploration and canonization of Malinké musical traditions), *Afō* truly stands as "a conscious and highly elaborated musical structure" (to recall Irele's phrase) that is at once modern and faithful to Mande traditions with which Keita is as familiar as an contemporary Mande musician.

To point to this bureaucratization and rationalization of Guinean music is not to disfigure an archetypal musical immediacy, but instead to describe that music's immersion within the progressive development of human culture itself. Musical expression is inextricable from its technical organization as form, an objective representation of subjective experience

in rhythm, harmony, melody, and timbre. To represent musically human experience is to regain a humanity lost to barbarity masquerading as modernity. The appearance of music, in Africa as elsewhere, amidst rampant dehumanization, and as such music is ambiguously entwined in the antinomies of historical experience. The rationalization of Mande music is itself dialectical, no mere loss of an imaginary traditional wholeness in the face of encroaching Westernization. Keita's work is a compelling demonstration of this dialectic, perhaps unequaled in Mande music in its complex relation to cultural traditions. Laurent Olivier's 1991 film *Djembefola* describes Keita's return, after a twenty-five-year exile in the Ballet Djoliba, to his family and birthplace in eastern Guinea (Balandugu). Along the way, Keita recalls with his mentors the rigorous, military-style training he and his fellow artists received as they sacrificed their private existence to Touré's "revolutionary" Guinean society.

Like the Guinean music they would rework onstage, artists like Keita were themselves extracted from their regions by regional competitions. A text by the Guinean Ministry of Education and Culture from 1977 describes this process in chilling language:

All complexes of a racial, ethnic, or intellectual nature or complexes based on wealth, religion or sex are being systematically eradicated through the educational work of the Party, which guides and organizes all the activities of the people. At all levels, the arts companies draw their members from a variety of occupational backgrounds, and these members freely place their knowledge at the disposal of the people. (73)

The assertion of its citizens' voluntary self-sacrifice to the demands of the "Party" compulsively invokes the violence Sékou Touré visited upon his country in his drive for modernization. Fodéba Keita himself was not merely the founder of the Ballets Africains, but was an archetypal Cold War bureaucrat; as Minister for Internal Affairs (administrative and police affairs) and Defense in Touré's regime, he "created the repressive system which has characterized contemporary Guinea" (Kaba 213). In an ever-increasing process of bureaucratization, the traditionally political nature of Mande music was radically extended in independent Guinea. Arts companies were called upon "vigorously [to] combat [. . .] the colonial complex and backward ways and custom [for] the appearance of the 'new man'" (74). Effectively, this meant that artists such as Mamady Keita were ideological pawns of the Guinean regime. The gap between rhetoric and experience reached new extremes in Sékou Touré's Guinea, and to reread his texts and speeches today is disheartening, to say the least, recalling the betrayed hope and promises of the Independences. "La conscience," Touré wrote, "est un stade, mieux, un moment du processus de la qualification continue de l'homme animal en homme véritablement humain, sujet et objet de l'histoire" 'Consciousness is a stage, better yet, a moment in the continuous process of development of animalistic man into a truly human man, the subject and object of history' (23).

Such facile pieties on the transformative role of Guinean artists, which Touré produced in endless streams of discourse, represent a nadir of philosophical reflection. The hollow recourse to Hegelian language (“sujet et objet de l’histoire”) is one more in the many sacrificial appropriation Touré called for in the pursuit of Guinean development. Mande music, like the rest of Guinean society, joined in the suddenly accelerated march toward national modernization in a millennial process extending back from Sékou to Sunjata. In so doing, music paid a price for this participation like all interpellated members of Guinean society. The sacrifice to political and economic autonomy that was Guinea’s 1958 “No” vote foreclosed the possibility of noncoercive intersubjective experience once the hope for independence became the paranoid consolidation of political hegemony. A precipitously accelerated rationalization, functionalization, and division of labor brought, in the sphere of music as elsewhere, a liquidation of subjective experience and expression. This process paradoxically threatened to dissolve the creative affirmation of traditional culture implicit in the creation of the Ballets Africains into the hollow technical mastery of the hyperkinetic, militaristic virtuosity of the national drum corps.

Perhaps no society ever gives back all it promises in extorting the individual’s sublimation to the social totality. In Touré’s Guinea, however, those unfortunate enough to be caught up in the process of development too often found that it led straight from the policed village to the prison of Camp Boiro. Fodéba Keita, while no political innocent, was himself arrested in 1969 and condemned to death without trial in 1971 (Kaba 213). In his repeated calls for social unanimity, Touré strove to crush any dissenting expression of human particularity; subjects were no longer allowed to remain in conflict within that totality but instead encountered a uniform and violent logic of subsumption to the needs of the State. Sékou Touré’s revolution undertook the total instrumentalization of human relations, where all individuals would serve as “instruments de la Révolution” (Touré, *L’Afrique 1*).<sup>13</sup> Mamady Keita was perhaps the luckiest of those who sacrificed themselves up to Touré’s revolution, for he survived its terror to reorient the rationalizing procedures of which he was a product to Mande cultural tradition itself.

Sékou Touré’s invocations of a “truly human animal” revall the betrayed promise of decolonization, of an autonomous human subject who could draw from within the particularity of his or her own experience the basis of a free social existence. That this freedom remains to be instantiated in postcolonial Guinea, in spite of Sékou Touré’s revolution, is patent. And yet, Mamady Keita, perhaps unique among traditional African musicians, has redirected the forces of reification at work in Guinean culture to further our understanding of that music itself. Since Touré’s death in 1984, Keita, formed by the military life of the Ballet from his induction at age twelve in 1966 into the Ballet Djoliba, has opened a series of schools of traditional Mande percussion across Europe, Japan, and the United States. There, he pursues the rationalization of Mande music, breaking traditional rhythms into their individual elements, making an implicit

pulse explicit to Western ears, performing an encyclopedic analysis of traditional West African music for a global body of students.

This process is visible in his recent publication, *A Life for the Djembe: Traditional Rhythms of the Malinké*. There Keita describes in three languages the origins and cultural heritage of his instrument, and then proceeds to give transcriptions for the individual parts to over sixty rhythms. This process of notation, while objectively a mere mnemonic device, is rejected by many Western students of African musics as a sort of stigmata, serving as a visual representation of the loss of a mythical spiritual totality. Keita, on the other hand, unhesitatingly pursues the rationalizing logic of his musical work. Though his own musical analysis is strictly oral (he relies on collaborators to generate written musical notation), his recourse to transcription as a means of codifying and clarifying his teaching is the logical extension of his rationalization of Mande tradition. Like his recordings, instructional videos, and classes, his book operates a musical reification in the name of tradition, elucidating and systematizing a necessarily protean, multidimensional oral tradition.

Keita's work transforms the traditional Western ethnological classificatory impulse enacted upon African musics. Indeed, Keita is a remarkable musicologist, one who operates not as a transitory Western academic, but instead from within a centuries-old tradition of musical practice. In contrast with every other extended analytical study of indigenous African music of which I am aware, Keita's work is both thoroughly, almost obsessively rigorous, and generated internally, from within the logic of the music he practices, rather than in response to external norms of academic practice. In this respect at least, his undertaking is not unlike Schoenberg's rationalization of Western musical practice. For if the latter abandoned Western harmonic practice in pieces such as his Opus 11 for piano (1900) and then returned to an autonomously generated structural practice (Serialism), he did so not as absolute rupture but rather as a direct outgrowth of the musical tradition he inherited; *Verklärte Nacht* is inconceivable without *Tristan*. Similarly, Keita's rationalization of Mande music is driven by a confrontation between both the inherently logical, binary nature of percussive music itself and the military tenor of postindependence Guinean society, on the one hand, and the utopian character of music that promises a transformation of an alienating, totalitarian society within the recovered subjective immediacy of musical community, on the other. Keita's musical expression mediates the antinomies of Guinean modernity, to combine his childhood initiation into a millennial musical tradition with a classificatory spirit of analysis, preservation, and dissemination.

Music as a social practice promises that we might yet attain the status of free, creative subjects acting within a larger community. Yet this promise necessarily enters into conflict with the interests of a larger (political) community; music is caught between a drive for unhindered subjective expression and experience and the need to sublimate individual satisfaction of drives to the social totality. Music consequently both demonstrates and transcends this contradiction. In the aftermath of the independences,



amidst constantly renewed totalitarianism, music continues to pose the vexed question of human subjects in their coexistence with nature, and the possibility of an emergent nonviolent community. In popular Mande music, works such as Salif Keita's *Amen* (1991) articulate determinate responses to the problem of intersubjective community not merely on an overt thematic level (as song lyrics), but within musical structure itself. The transatlantic encounter Keita's album stages between his complex modernization of Mande tradition and keyboardist-producer Joe Zawinul's dynamic orchestration is compelling and paradigmatic. Though a concrete analysis of the album's musical semblance of intersubjective community is beyond the scope of this article, I would offer this recording as another masterful, immanent example of the "conscious and elaborated [musical] form" Irele leads us to expect from autonomous African musical practice. Music such as Salif Keita and Zawinul's asks how a subject could become objectified as communal intersubjectivity without being a mere ideological deception. At the same time, this questioning of ideology on the part of music itself threatens to become ideological, as mere abstract wish fulfillment, amidst the continued infirmity of overarching, nonmilitarized social relations in West African society.

Yet not to pose such a question critically is to abandon hope to a reality increasingly hardened against the imagination. Whether such critique of society can occur within musical abstraction is now a new question. Within the African Diaspora, music has repeatedly functioned as a primary vector for critical thought within vernacular communities. Jazz in particular has sought to address the problem of autonomy throughout the twentieth century. The historical and social dynamic of jazz challenges Irele's conclusion that the ciris in modern concert music "leaves [African composers] little or no scope for differentiation like that of 19th cent. nationalist music in Europe" (66). Irele asks: "What new dimension of artistic expression can the kora assume in the concert hall?" (70). Despite obvious historical differences, I can imagine a European writer asking, in the 1910s, "What new dimension of expression can the saxophone assume in the concert hall?" at a time when the instrument was in effect limited to Sousa compositions and a few pieces by Berlioz. And yet, because of its presence in marching bands, the instrument fell into the hands of black Americans and became one of the primary tools for social expression of a new, revolutionary language in this century.

Jazz's greatest practitioners constructed a vernacular modernism that precariously balanced the competing demands of immanent social critique and intersubjective communication. Musicians such as Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, and John Coltrane explored the possibility of a productive musical subject capable of recovering autonomy and truth in the objective products of its creation. Together, they demonstrate the examples do exist for African composers of artists whose compositional practice reflects both the developments in Western concert music since Wagner and the possibility of adapting these developments to the imperatives of a vernacular community. Their music belies the traditional division between popular or "folk" and concert/art/avant-garde music. Of course, enormous

cultural and historical differences separate African Americans and those on the continent and militate against any straightforward, uncritical transplantation of modern jazz to African soil. That said, composer/improvisors such as Herbie Hancock, John Coltrane, and McCoy Tyner fluidly incorporate the harmonic material of Debussy, Stravinsky, and Bartok (bi-tonalism, modality, quartal, whole-tone, and diminished harmony, etc.) with an extraordinary rhythmic and expressive dynamism and improvisatory mastery. Cecil Taylor, Muhal Richard Abrams, and Anthony Braxton can easily hold company with the European modernists and postmodernists. And perhaps most impressively for the question at hand, the music of the pianists Abdullah Ibrahim of South Africa and the American Randy Weston has for decades combined the legacy of the vernacular community Duke Ellington invented in his orchestra, the complex harmonic and rhythmic innovations of Thelonius Monk, and the musical imperatives of a wide-ranging African tradition.

This black Atlantic vernacular modernism arose from and protests against society while steadfastly maintaining the concrete musical image of a utopian intersubjective social experience. This music continues to pose, at its highest levels of development, the problem of an autonomous human subject and his or her nonappropriative relation to the natural world. Slavery forced this diasporic community to confront early on the problem of production as unfree labor and dehumanization. In response, fully realized African American music produces the immanent semblance, and perhaps something more than mere semblance, of a free subject in an unfree society through vernacular critique. The music of the African Diaspora calls into question a mechanized, dehumanized, sacrificial subject called upon to postpone eternally self-realization and to labor for others. Jazz is the realization of an intensive labor that is at once autonomous, freely chosen by and for that musical subject, and an objective product existing within a community of others consisting of both musicians and listeners. African music is itself utopian precisely insofar as it poses an aesthetic counterpoint to the violence of society; as such, it undertakes the determinate negation of totalitarian practice. As an experiential counterpoint, music allows for the persistence of differences in which specificity of each element both persists and is transcended. If African political reality still refuses this totality that philosophy describes as the nonidentity of identity and nonidentity, let us not abandon hope, and work actively to cultivate its material likeness within the sound-image of harmony that is African music.

---

## NOTES

1. See Charry for a wide-ranging overview of Mande music.
2. The Ballets were actually created in 1947 by Fodéba Keita in Paris, and were subsequently nationalized by Sékou Touré upon Guinean independence in 1958 (Kaba 202, Charry 211).

3. In *Wozzeck*, Marie's passionate cry over the D minor violin theme at the opening of act 3 ("Herr Gott! Sieh mich nicht an!" "Lord God! Look not on me!") is utterly compelling in its depiction of human suffering, while the chromatically ascending transformations of a basic hexachord that accompany *Wozzeck's* drowning are a famous example of a virtuosic technical representation of nature (Berg 381, 457-62; Jarman 56).
4. As developed in this article, I take the phrase "division of labor" from Adorno's sociology of music, which of course knew nothing of African musics and cultures (Adorno 8). In *Telos*, I examine certain aspects of the complex relation between Adorno and jazz.
5. The often-described critical role of the *jali* as the one figure able to criticize their lord is itself ambiguous, serving in the end to ensure the smooth function of a fundamentally conservative dynasty.
6. Camara describes "une société guerrière [. . .] qui cultive chez l'homme une sévère répression de réactions émotionnelles qui pourraient nuire à l'élan du guerrier [. . .]" 'a warrior society [. . .] that cultivates on the part of men a severe repression of all emotional reactions that could hinder the warrior's fervor.' Camara underlines "l'agressivité que la culture [Malinké traditionnelle] développe en chaque individu—la colère est la seule émotion que l'homme puisse exprimer publiquement—, les conflits de statuts et de personnalités [. . .] enfin les exigences d'une autorité soucieuse de marquer à tout instant de la distance entre elle-même et ses subordonnés" 'the aggressivity that [traditional Malinké] culture develops in each individual—anger is the only emotion that men can express publicly—, conflicts of status and personality [. . .] in sum the demands of an authoritarianism eager to mark at all times the distance between itself and its subordinates' (59, 12).
7. See Cooper for an extended analysis of the historical dimensions of this transformation in French West Africa.
8. "Pour la Commission d'Enquête. Note sur la colonisation européenne et la colonisation indigène en Afrique Noire Française," 1936, Fonds Moutet, PA 28/5/152, ANSOM. Cited in Cooper 76.
9. The phrase is that of the governor of the Ivory Coast during the Popular Front, Mondon. Cited in Cooper 81.
10. See Cooper, ch. 11, for a discussion of the process leading Sékou Touré from trade unionist to nationalist leader of the decolonization movement in the AOF.
11. For further information on the subject, see Charry 211-13; Kaba; F. Keita, "La danse"; and Rouget.
12. The concept of rationalization is notoriously fluid. Weber's discussion of musical rationalization is limited almost exclusively to a virtuosic comparison of harmonic systems in musical history, to the detriment of rhythm, which he mentions only twice, and then in passing, in his study of musical rationalization. Furthermore, his offhand dismissal of putatively "primitive" "negro" musics, though typical of the period (1921), is both racist and utterly simplistic. Throughout this essay, I will see the term in a variety of ways, applying it to the internal structural and formal characteristics of certain musics, the classificatory impulse to organize a dynamic, vernacular musical heritage into discrete canonical categories, and the analytical drive to break down an organic musical practice into readily graspable constituent elements.

13. Writing in 1974, at the height of Touré's repression, Lansiné Kaba concluded: "Guinea under the P.D.G. [Touré's single-party system] is a classic example of what paranoia and autocracy can inflict upon a society and individual freedom. Most of those who had the ability to criticize have been physically eliminated or imprisoned, and this has created a deep sense of insecurity among those who are still living, and has taught them to be prudent. Instead of the question of freedom of expression, in this context, one should rather speak of how to survive, and hence conform to a dogmatic and coercive system designed to exalt *Le Responsable Suprême et Stratège de la Révolution*" (218).

---

## WORKS CITED

- Adorno, Theodor. *Sound Figures*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999.
- Berg, Alban. *Wozzeck*. Austria: Universal Edition No. 12100, 1955.
- Camara, Sory. *Gens de la parole: Essai sur la condition et le rôle des griots dans la société malinké*. Paris: Karthala, 1992.
- Charry, Eric. *Mande Music*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000.
- Chevalier, Laurent, dir. *Djembefola*. Interama Video Classics, 1994.
- Cooper, Frederick. *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.
- Irele, Abiola. "Is African Music Possible?" *Transition* 61 (1993): 56-71.
- Jarman, Douglas. *Alban Berg: Wozzeck*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989.
- Kaba, Lansiné. "The Cultural Revolution, Artistic Creativity, and Freedom of Expression in Guinea." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 14. (1976): 201-18.
- Keita, Fodéba. "La danse africaine et la scène/African Dance and the Stage." *Le Théâtre dans le Monde/World Theater* 7.3 (1958): 164-78.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Afö*. Fonti Musicali 215, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Hamanah*. Fonti Musicali 211, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Mögöbalu*. Fonti Musicali 205, 1996.
- Keita, Mamady, with Uschi Billmeier. *A Life for the Djembe*. Arun, 1999.
- Ministry of Education and Culture of Guinea. *Cultural Policy in the Revolutionary People's Republic of Guinea*. Paris: UNESCO, 1979.
- Rouget, Gilbert. "Les ballets africains de Keita Fodeba." *Présence Africaine* 7 (1956): 138-40.
- Touré, Sékou. *L'Afrique et la révolution*. Paris: Présence Africaine, 1967.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Conférences, discours, et rapports*. Conakry: Imprimerie nationale "Patrice Lumumba," 1969.
- Weber, Max. *The Rational and Social Foundations of Music*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1958.