

## **INFORMATION TO USERS**

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

**The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.** Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

Bell & Howell Information and Learning  
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA  
800-521-0600

**UMI<sup>®</sup>**



## **NOTE TO USERS**

**The audio cassette is not included in this original manuscript. It is available for consultation at the author's graduate school library.**

**This reproduction is the best copy available.**

**UMI**





**Modernity's Spiral:  
Popular Culture, Mastery, and the Politics of  
Dance Music in Congo-Kinshasa**

**Bob W. White  
Department of Anthropology  
McGill University, Montréal**

**A thesis submitted to the  
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**©1998 Bob W. White**



National Library  
of Canada

Acquisitions and  
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Acquisitions et  
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

*Your file    Votre référence*

*Our file    Notre référence*

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-44627-1

**Canada**

# Table of Contents

<b>Preface</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Dedication</b>	<b>xi</b>
<b>Abstracts</b>	<b>xii</b>
<b>List of Figures</b>	<b>xiii</b>

## **Part One: Setting the Stage**

<b>Introduction: Notes From Modernityland</b>	<b>1</b>
---	----------

Music and 'Modernity'  
From Noise to Popular Culture  
Politics in the Mix  
The Methodology of Writing  
Structure of the Thesis

<b>Chapter One: Popular Culture and Politics</b>	<b>33</b>
--	-----------

Theoretical Paths Not Taken  
Variations on a Popular Theme  
    What Popular Culture Is Not  
    What Popular Culture Is  
Popular Culture and Politics  
    'The Turn to Gramsci'  
    Practice and Performance  
    'Modernity' and the Public Sphere  
Anthropology and the Fear of Popular Culture

<b>Chapter Two: Mediating the Colonial Experience</b>	<b>59</b>
---	-----------

No History Without Problems  
Studying the African City  
From Nsasa to 'Kin La Belle'  
    Looking for Leopoldville (1910-1933)  
    Carving Out a Space in the City (1933-1945)  
    The Emergence of an African Public Sphere (1945-1960)  
    The City as a Symbolic Space  
Cultural Politics and the Politics of Culture  
    *Les Petits Blancs*  
    The Politics of Sexuality  
    Masking Ethnicity  
Mediating the Colonial Experience

## **Part Two: The Transformation of *Typique***

### **Chapter Three: Genres and Style**

**113**

- Popular Music and Genre
  - La Musique Moderne*
  - Le Folklore*
  - La Musique Religieuse*
- Three Generations
  - Tango Ya BaWendo*
  - The Big Rumba Period
  - La Nouvelle Vague*
- Two 'Schools'
- Congo-Zaire's Invisible Innovation
  - L'Animation*
  - Atalaku, Animateur*
- Dances and Shouts
- The Re-indigenization Thesis

### **Chapter Four: Made in Zaire**

**157**

- Overview of the Industry
  - 'Modern' Music Industry
    - Commercial Sponsorship
    - Intellectual Property and Copyrights
    - Media and other Para-Institutions
    - Problems With Producers
  - The Bottom Falls Out
- Too Many Intermediaries, Too Few Brokers
  - "Official" Outlets
  - Pirates and Re-Distributors
    - Fighting Pirates with Fire
    - The Re-Distributors
  - "We Eat Behind the Musicians"
  - Music Finances Other Activities
  - Cultural Brokers and Political Economies

### **Part Three: On Being in Music**

#### **Chapter Five: A Strange and Wonder-ful Place 212**

Musicians are Liminal-Critical Characters  
    Power and Praise  
    Musicians and Social Mobility  
Distinction and Personal Power  
    'La Frime' as Conscious Strategy  
    The Peak of Chic and the Esthetics of Big Pants  
    The 'Star Complex' and Less Conscious Gesturing  
Rumors and the Intimate Public

#### **Chapter Six: Becoming a Musician 259**

Becoming a Popular Musician  
Trajectories of Fame  
Women in Music  
Learning to Play  
*Mundele Atalaku*  
    Scoop and Shake  
    I'll Be Ready on Tuesday  
From a Position of Privilege

#### **Chapter Seven: Ndule 296**

Practice is Performance  
*Big Stars En Concert*  
    The Anatomy of a Song  
    Dancing and Shouting  
Blurring the Barrier  
Picturetaking and Spraying  
Praising and 'Throwing'

#### **Chapter Eight: The Micropolitics of Music 352**

Micropolitics and the Ethnography of Power  
A Band is a Hierarchy  
    General('s) Meetings  
    Hierarchy is Elastic  
Splintering and the 'Chef' Complex  
    Why Groups Splinter  
    The 'Chef' Complex  
Singing the Sponsor  
Good Chef, Bad Chef

## **Part Four: The Meaning of Music**

### **Chapter Nine: Live Texts**

**408**

#### Lyrics as Live Texts

Thematics in Popular Music

The Politics of Love Songs

Thematic Signposts

Always Love, Never Just Love

Preachers and Potions

Who Will Cry For Me When I Die?

Knowing and Being Known in the Big City

The Social Geography of Money

Thematic Tropes

#### Genres as Live Texts

Dialogues I: Music Divides

Dialogues II: Music Unites

The Flexibility of Texts

### **Chapter Ten: Modernity's Spiral**

**467**

#### Versioning 'Modernity'

The Feeling of 'Modernity' in Kinshasa

Winking in the Midst of Adversity

#### The Tangled Dance of "Tradi-Modernity"

The Art of Love

Urban Ethnicity

Anchoring the Self

#### 'Tradition' and 'Modernity' Objectified

Modern Things Come in Twos

Magic and 'Modernity's' Incompleteness

The Amazing 'Modernity' Machine

#### Modernity's Spiral

### **Coda: 'Modernity' and Mastery**

**510**

References Cited

520

Recordings Cited

545

Interviews Cited

545

## **Appendices**

Appendix I: Glossary of Terms

548

Appendix II: The Wenge Musica Affair, by Emile Kasongo

549

Appendix III: E-mail communication from John Grinling

553

Appendix IV: Not Just Love, by J.P. Busé and Bob White

558

Appendix V: Listening Guide for "'Modernity's Spiral'" (audio cassette)

561

## **Preface: Kinshasa is Burning**

Whenever things in the field got really tough--when I was forced to sit on the emergency brake in the taxi, when the beer was lukewarm, on the 21st day of the blackout that affected only our side of the street--these were the times when I really had to wipe my brow and breathe through my nose. "Just keep going," I told myself. "No one ever said it would be easy." And this was very true. In fact, of all the people I spoke with before going to do research in Zaire, only two thought it was a good idea. Most reacted somewhere in between dismay and disbelief, with some people seeing it as courageous and others as foolhardy: "it's a dangerous place", "it could explode at any time", "might not be conducive to research". Others simply said, "All the musicians live in Paris. Maybe you could do your research there." After arriving in Kinshasa, however, it became obvious that the music scene was very much alive, and that most of what I was led to believe by well-meaning skeptics was just not true. Kinshasa was not exploding, it was on fire. All the time. And it didn't seem to matter.

As part of the requirements for a Ph.D. in Anthropology at McGill University (Montréal), the field research for this thesis was conducted between May of 1995 and June of 1996, with a return trip in October and November of 1996. In June 1995--after some initial factfinding among Congolese and friends of Congolese in Brussels and Paris--I began the actual field research in Brazzaville in order to ease my arrival into Kinshasa, but also because I wanted to gather information about the distribution networks which are an important complement to the music industry on the other side of the river. Several months after arriving in Brazzaville, I moved permanently to Kinshasa, but I had been there previously on several visits varying from one day to one week. While in Brazzaville I was renting a room from a Zairean family whose contacts in the Zairean embassy facilitated the logistics of my move.

Once in Kinshasa, I continued to conduct research on industry-related issues (especially the informal networks of cassette distribution, see ch. 4), but became much more focused on the activities of musicians and the music lifestyle. It was here that I approached a local music group (General Defao's Big Stars) and underwent an extended apprenticeship, first as a guitarist and later as an *atalaku*, the musician responsible for the shouting during the music's fast-paced dance sequences (see ch. 6).

In Kinshasa I made living arrangements similar to those in Brazzaville, renting a room in the compound of a large family in a middle class neighborhood. Bandalungwa (Bandal-Moulaert) was centrally located and relatively new compared to some of the neighborhoods in the older sections of the city. Living in a Zairean neighborhood gave me access to general cultural information about family relations and the challenges of everyday life in Kinshasa, but it also ensured I was close to the band, which practiced and performed on a regular basis (ch. 7). I made no regular income as a member of the band, in fact on many occasions co-bandmembers called upon me to provide them with money for cigarettes, food and drinks. As I will discuss later (ch. 8), the gifts I made to them only represented a small percentage of what I actually received in return. In addition to the money I brought with me in the form of research funding, I also worked part-time as an English teacher at the Zaire-American Language Institute (ZALI), at that time associated with the American Cultural Center in downtown Kinshasa (Ngombe).

During the last six months of my research I became increasingly involved as a musician and member of the band, and near the end of my research I was approached by UNICEF-Zaire to produce an album containing songs about HIV-AIDS, composed by a number of musicians that I was supposed to select and supervise. UNICEF agreed to match my salary at ZALI and the director at ZALI let me go with her best wishes for a successful project. When it became obvious that the AIDS album could be recorded but not duplicated before my departure, I decided in conjunction with the I.E.C. team at UNICEF that I would take the master with me to Canada, would have it duplicated, and possibly return with the copies of the cassette later that Fall. After a number of bureaucratic hoops and obstacles, and with the fear that Kabila's regionally-based rebel movement might actually arrive as far west as Kinshasa, I returned to Zaire to finish my work on the AIDS album. The duplicated cassettes were supposed to arrive by mail and I was responsible for producing the accompanying music videos, parades and promotional concerts. Unfortunately, in the context of the final months of Mobutu's reign, I was forced to return home before completing the project, and for reasons of political instability and insufficient funding, I have not been able to return to Kinshasa since 1996. The U.N. system only recently declared Kinshasa safe for 'non-necessary' personnel, and this ongoing insecurity probably has something to do with the fact that I have still not laid eyes on the 3,500 cassettes that I am told arrived in Kinshasa but were never distributed.



The arrival of Kabila to Kinshasa obviously disrupted more than my research. As a long-time foe of Mobutu, Laurent Kabila spent most of the last 20 years as a self-proclaimed 'freedom fighter' in the highlands and forests of eastern Zaire. Though he is believed to have been involved in large-scale smuggling activities during this period of internal exile, he was (at least initially) closely associated with the activities of Patrice Lumumba, the first Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Thus Kabila's political trajectory is closely linked with that of Mobutu. The riots which broke out in 1959 signalled a difficult transition to independence (June 30, 1960), but the situation in the Congo would not be qualified as a 'crisis' until the Katanga secession some months later. Following increasing tension between Joseph Kasavubu (the first president) and Lumumba, the newly appointed prime minister was dismissed, and Mobutu (then commander of the newly formed *Armée Nationale Congolaise*) declared that the country was under the control of the army. Lumumba went into hiding but was eventually discovered among his followers in the Kasai region and was assassinated in January of 1961. Attempts at constitutional reforms were only made worse by a series of rebellions which occurred between 1963 and 1965 and the presence of U.N. military forces in Katanga until 1964. In 1965 the army, with Mobutu at its helm, took complete control of the country, and the Second Republic was born.

The period that followed, the long road to political infamy that Young and Turner (1985) have referred to as the 'rise and decline of the Zairian state', was also the period that most influenced the context under which I conducted my research. When Kabila began to sweep across the huge land mass then known as Zaire, no one in Kinshasa really believed he would ever arrive as far as Kinshasa: "He might take Zaire," they said, "but he'll never take Kinshasa." But Mobutu's declining state of health (due to prostate cancer) and the military and financial support of other African leaders in the region (especially Kagame and Museveni), proved these predictions wrong. In the Spring of 1997, Kabila took Kinshasa, and Zaire (once again) became the Democratic Republic of the Congo (D.R.C.).

This brief discussion of political developments in the Congo may be somewhat misleading since throughout the thesis I am much more concerned with the stories of 'everyday people' than I am with the historical 'big men' of Congolese politics. The reader will notice, for example, that I have not devoted a special section of the thesis to Mobutu or Mobutu's policies, many of which have had a significant influence on cultural production in the region. This is a topic I have decided to reserve for post-doctoral research beginning in January 1999.

As Kabila settles into power, many people in Kinshasa are still asking who this man is and what he will do for the Congo. He does not address the nation frequently and when he does (I am told), he does not speak in either French or Lingala, the two main languages which are heard and understood in Kinshasa. Kabila has announced plans for elections in 1999 and since his arrival the local currency has stabilized considerably, but there are growing concerns over questions pertaining to human rights. According to most outside observers, the 'bilan' of Kabila's first year in power is not necessarily reassuring.

From the point of view of most Congolese, a change in leadership does not necessarily signal a change in politics. For musicians, however, having a new leader means having to forge new patron-client relations, and Kabila does not seem to be as dependent as Mobutu was on being the subject of praise through popular song (White 1997). But Kinshasa would have none of this false modesty. As soon as Mobutu was gone, from loudspeakers and radio-cassette players all over the city, musicians could be heard singing the latest 'cri de joie': *Lui de finesse! J'ai vu fantomas! Il a fuit, Il a fuit!* ('Kabila! I saw Mobutu and he was running away!'). As I hope to show in the pages to come, music is a fire that fans its own flames.

Bob W. White  
Longueuil, Québec  
July 8, 1998

## Acknowledgements

In a conversation with Ellen Corin during the final weeks of writing for my thesis, we were discussing some of my concerns about the voice I use in my writing. "Writing a thesis," she said, "is arrogant." I could not have found better words for what I was trying to say. As a counterweight to this arrogance--and in true *Kinois* style--I would like 'to throw' the names of all those who contributed in one way or another to the completion of this thesis.

I think it is appropriate to begin by thanking the members of my committee. Kristin Norget has given me refills on emotional and professional support, and without her reading of my main argument, I think it would have remained politically naïve. Ellen Corin has helped me to fine tune my thinking and has made me aware of things in my writing that I myself did not see. Her ability to penetrate texts, not just for their anthropological content, but for what they say about the person who writes them, has been an ongoing source of inspiration, and her ideas have greatly influenced my thinking (it was in a discussion with Ellen that the title of the thesis was born). John Galaty, my supervisor, came through for me at a time in my student career that had he not been there, I am not sure I would have continued. John helped me make the transition to the anthropologist (or student of anthropology as Dan Aronson used to say) I am today. He has been passionately involved in my work, and throughout my training has saved me from numerous (potentially fatal) mistakes. I should also thank Johannes Fabian, who agreed to serve as a member of my committee at a rather late stage in my training. His writing, not only on popular culture, but also on ethnography, performance and power, has provided me with many of the tools I needed to write this thesis, and I am grateful for his participation.

Before the writing, and even before the fieldwork, there are a number of people who have contributed in one way or another to this final product. Gilles Bibeau has put me in the right places at all the right times. Through him I was introduced to Gerard Buakasa and T.K. Biaya, two Congolese researchers who have enabled me early on to test out many of my preliminary ideas about this topic. Biaya, who is probably in transit somewhere, forced me to think about the dialectics of performance, and reassured me that music really matters (especially in Congo-Zaire). Biaya put me in touch with Bogumil Jewsiewicki at Laval University, who always seems to be at the cutting edge of cultural analysis in Congo-Zaire, and whose comments on my early writing have been very helpful. Eric Worby played a pivotal role in my research and thinking for the short time that he was with us as a professor at McGill (students are still asking why he left). My intellectual debt to him is immense. Nancy Rose Hunt has forced me to ask some of the very difficult questions about the historical aspects of my topic, and her faith in my work has brought me into contact with a fascinating group of people and possibilities. Mike McGovern, apart from being a valued fishing partner, has been a close

friend. He has always signified upon me and my work in a warm critical way, shedding light on problems that are lurking in my blind spots. Mike--and Mike's people--have throughout this process remained totally committed to my work even, when I myself was not so sure.

I have also benefitted from stimulating exchanges with Filip De Boeck, Benetta Jules-Rosette, Dieudonné Mbala-Nkanga, Jan Vansina, Janet MacGaffey, Peter Wade, Ingrid Monson, Timothy Burke, Nathalie LeBlanc, as well as colleagues from McGill: Blair Rutherford, Christina Zarowsky, Patricia Foxen, Audra Simpson, Regina Harrison, Kate Degnen, Lara Tabac, Marc Prentice, Greg Brass, and especially Vinh-Kim Nguyen. While these individuals have not actually seen sections of the thesis, they have offered comments on presentations and writings that led up to the thesis and I am grateful for their input. My intellectual genealogy obviously goes further back than this. I must send a hearty shout out to my professors at the University of North Carolina, especially Bob Daniels, Judith Farquhar, Don Nonini, and my first advisor, Dorothy Holland. Dan Aronson served as my first advisor at McGill, and though we were cut short by his departure, I feel fortunate that my graduate career began by his side. I will always think of him as a model advisor. Peter Johnson (the Dobson Centre for Entrepreneurial Studies) has always been present in my activities, and I am grateful for the support (both financial and professional) which he has made available to me throughout the years.

On the way to Kinshasa there are too many people that I would like to thank. Before I ever set foot in Zaire I met the Bula family of Bukavu. Bula (the father) and I were teachers together in the Comoros Islands and I think my interaction with these wonderful people (whom I had the opportunity to visit in Bukavu just before problems broke out again in Kigali) is a large part of the reason why I switched research areas from the Comoros to Zaire. Thierry M. was my first Lingala teacher (in Montréal) and a close friend with whom I have unfortunately lost contact. His observations as a Zairean who was not 'Kinois' made me sensitive to the tension which exists (especially via music) between people from Kinshasa and the rest of the country. Jerome and Anthuya Deye in Paris put me up (and put up with me) as I prepared to go to the field, as did Didier and Ana in Brussels. Of course Ana and Didier did much more than put me up, they put me in touch with the world which is forever theirs, a marvelous mixture of public and private, a wonderful Belgo-Congolese household with *chats dérangeurs* at every turn, a timeless space with ample food, wonderful music, and stories from the past which inform and reconfirm the present. It was here that I met Jean-Pierre Jacquemin, Césarine Boliya (who set me up with my first fieldhome in Brazzaville), Hans, and Papa Anselme who along with Didier introduced me to the world of urban traditional music in Kinshasa.

Once in Kinshasa, I was fortunate enough to cross paths with a number of different people who made my time in Kinshasa memorable: Ilo Pablo Bakunde (the first Zairean

musician I ever met), Dr. Angelique Kikudi (whose generosity gave me access to local television), Socrates (Bondowe Music), Mampala (COZAPEDIM), Gaby Shabani (Shabani Records), Monica Paslaru (UNICEF-Zaire), the Ingila Family (especially Mama Léontine, Kovo and Pitchou), Mama Leki (God Bless her wonderful soul) and Wivine, (the indefatigable) Mama Odia and Rebecca, José (Chez Maté in Bandal), Vincent Kenis (my co-loc), Landu (the taximan), Delfi, Kizita, John Loftin (P.S.I.), Ya Jean, Père Ekwa, Riva, Cheri Cherin, and Cheri Samba. I should also mention the team at ZALI (now CALI), especially Kyungu, Kanika, Kandi and Janet. In Brazzaville I would like to thank: Lutiya Barazani, his Excellency the Ambassador to Congo-Brazzaville, Sam, M. Ndiaye (Etablissements Ndiaye), Serge Mayembo, Noko, Norbert Bokilo (Bono Music), Abraham Ndinga-Mbo, Abel Kouvouama, Joseph Tonda (Marien Ngouabi University), and my close friends Nicolas Martin-Granel and Frederique (R.F.I.), on mission from Paris. I would especially like to show my appreciation to all the musicians that made themselves available to me as friends and as professionals in their field: Pépé Kallé, Papa Wemba, Blaise Bula, Shora Mbemba, Djuna Mumbafu, 737 Boeing, Boketchu Premier, Ben Nyamabo, Didier Masala, Nyoka Longo, Fely Manwaku, Roger Izeidi, Roitelet, Tabu Ley, Lokassa ya Mbongo, Wendo Kolosoyi, Jean-Serge Essous, L'Orchestre Onkok, Rasta Bob, and LeJeune. Lengi Lenga passed away since I left. We will all miss him.

There are certain people whose involvement in my life and research during my stay in Kinshasa deserve special mention. Hilka and Pieter Remes, whom Lucie and I met on the banks of the Black River (some 150 km) outside of Kinshasa, instantly became our friends and Pieter's research (on orality and rap music among Tanzanian youth) has helped keep us in touch since their return to my home turf on the north side of Chicago. Christine and Steve Krotzer seemed to arrive just in time for my research, and as former Peace Corps volunteers, they not only understood what I was trying to do, but they also supported me through a generosity which enabled me to re-juice from time to time when Kinshasa was starting to wear away at me. Lascony Balloux is probably one of the best research participants I have ever had the pleasure to work with. He is intelligent, dynamic, open-minded and himself curious, all reasons why I wish he was an anthropologist instead of a music promoter, but I think the music industry needs him more. Serge Makobo was invaluable as a research assistant and though we only started working together closely near the end of my research, he provided me with some valuable information and ideas, and I look forward to future collaborations. My friends at the central market (especially Tito) were straight with me, accessible and sometimes protective ('our *mundele*'); when I return to Kinshasa this is surely one of the first places I will set foot.

José Kamwena Boniface is a father of many children and I feel like most of my experience in Kinshasa was lived with or through him. Despite all of his efforts to 'help me with my work', what I remember most about him is the story he told of how he dropped his

pants to dance a dance of joy for his mother-in-law after hearing that he had just become the father of twins. I wish he and Elise the best of fortune and health. Bébé Atalaku gave everything he could so that I could play the maracas and become the first white *atalaku*. “You can’t be an *atalaku* if you don’t master this instrument” he used to say. Lidjo followed in Bébé’s hard to fill footsteps and showed me the side of musicians one rarely has the chance to see: soft-spoken, reflective, and agreeable. His patience with and commitment to my learning made my apprenticeship a wonderful experience. I am most grateful, however, to General Defao, for letting me into the life of his band, and for giving me the space to express myself, not only as an observer of culture but also as a musician. Through Defao, more than one of my childhood aspirations became a reality.

Defao’s then band manager, Chef Maneko, was also one of my closest friends during my stay in Kinshasa. Our occasional nights out to the ‘eglise’ brought us closer and enabled me to see the man behind the ‘chef’. ‘Nakobetayo’, her older sister, and their mother are fortunate to have him in their lives. *Na leli yo, Chef Man*. Lofombo Gode (Papa Kevin), much like Maneko, always felt to me like a kind of soul mate, we often called each other ‘cousin’. Even before we had the chance to collaborate on a musical project, I could tell that this person had a special place in the collective heart of the people of Kinshasa. Besides being a wizard of his instrument and probably the best sound technician in the capital, he is also a good listener and a rich source of information about Congolese politics and culture. *Na leli yo, Mwana Dindon*. General Lonoh Michel has been for me a living ancestor. He is the first person to have written a substantive monograph on Congolese popular music, and he continues to be one of its most profound analysts. The long, hot evenings spent in his house were events in and of themselves and as I look back over my notes, I realize I could have written a thesis about him alone. *Na leli yo, mon Général*.

Manda Tchebwa, throughout my research, was a guiding light. Apart from his contacts in the music industry, Manda has a wealth of information from his own experience and research which gives him a vision of Congolese music which is broader than any Congolese I know. As the body of my writing attests, he has been my most valued professional contact and a source of ongoing inspiration. *Na leli yo Président*. John Grinling and his wonderful wife and children have been involved with my research from the very start, and have pushed it along with undying support, encouragement and unlimited amounts of cold beer and fresh pesto. John is by far the most knowledgeable and the most passionate outside observer of Congolese culture I have ever met, and he is the best *mundele* I know in Africa. His ideas and actions have been present at almost every step in my work, and I yearn once again to crack open a Skol *ondemba* beer to the sound of his sinister, contagious laughter. *Oh, Maracuja! Na leli yo!*

In the preparation of this thesis I received special assistance from Lucille Deschenes (my future mother-in-law), Max Makiadi (*à la ici*), David Macaulay and Matt Bergbusch. Going back a bit I should also tip my hat to Raj Gandesha and Avi Goldberg who together with Matt helped me work through many of the problems and theories which I have attempted to tame in this writing. Titus Moser is across the Atlantic probably typing his acknowledgements just like me and I assume is suffering from an equally bad case of thesis elbow (or in his case thesis toe). Mohamed Aliloiffa has seen me through virtually every step of my professional life (and quite a few key personal steps as well, *n'est-ce pas Mohamed?*) and I am sure this will not be the last important moment we share. Since returning from Kinshasa, I have greatly benefitted from the warm friendship and rich information offered to me by former Zaiko star, J.P. Busé. J.P. and I have collaborated on several projects and his knowledge of his country's music and culture has given me the much needed ongoing contact with Kinshasa that I feared I would lose. Through J.P. I have met various important members of the Congolese cultural community in Montreal, especially Henri Ngaka and Charly Maiwan. J.P. is an intellectual and an artist in the true sense of the words, and I hope to be always by his side.

I also want to thank the wonderful, patient people on the 7th floor of Leacock: Dianne, Cynthia, Sherry, and Robert. Rose Marie (with whom I share not only a birthday) has become for me something between a surrogate mother and a surrogate big sister and I am proud to say to her 'we did it'. In order to conduct the field portion of my research, I received generous financial support from the McGill Graduate Faculty, the Centre for Society, Technology and Development (with money from a Quebec FCAR team), McGill Associates and the Zeller Foundation (Montréal). Without these contributions, field research would have been impossible.

None of this, however, would have been remotely imaginable without the ongoing support and encouragement of my family: the unconditional love of my mother (not only in the form of newspaper clippings) and the initial impulse from my father to be a better American by going somewhere else. Their personal stories (both in their own way very Algeresque) have always served as source of personal pride and as a model which (along with some training from the siblings) has provided me with the impetus to take on this 'little' degree. I hope it is a story that my family will tell. As I prepare to become an American with some Canadian (or Quebecois) mixed in, I think not only of them, but of my new family as well: Lucie, Jeremy, and the Gagnons of Longueuil.

*Na leli yo! Bino Banso!*

## DEDICATION

*This thesis is dedicated to Lucie and Jeremy. Without their love, understanding, and companionship I could never have done what I knew I had to do. Take off the headphones. Turn up the volume. We have a lifetime ahead of us.*



Modernity's Spiral:  
Popular Culture, Mastery and the Politics of Dance Music in Congo-Kinshasa

Abstract

The contagious sound of Congo-Zaire's distinctive popular dance music has made it a kind of 'musica franca' of sub-Saharan Africa. Despite the music's influence outside of its country of origin, virtually no research has been done to explore the history, production and meaning of the musical style. In addition to being a privileged feature of Congo-Kinshasa's cultural landscape, this 'musique moderne' also constitutes a valuable source of information of the way that 'modernity' is ordered and understood in an African context. 'Modernity', I want to argue, is driven by 'tradition', and 'tradition' pulls 'modernity' back into its sphere of utility, resulting in a never-ending, forever-changing, cultural and political spiral. 'Modernism', on the other hand, as a stance or 'way of being' in the world, is used as a means of gaining mastery over the paradoxes and pleasures of 'modernity's' condition. Findings are based on fourteen months of intensive fieldwork (1995-1996) in Brazzaville (Peoples' Republic of Congo) and Kinshasa (Democratic Republic of Congo). I conducted research on three basic units of study relative to Congolese popular dance music: the music industry, the musical style and the audience. By comparing information from these three domains of knowledge, I have attempted to show not only how music in Kinshasa is performed, but how it is produced and understood. The 'modern' idiom through which music expresses itself is interesting in itself, but it also highlights the importance of culture and history to the study of popular culture and politics.

La Spirale de la Modernité:  
Culture Populaire, Maîtrise, et la Politique de la Musique au Congo-Kinshasa

Abstrait

Le son contagieux de la musique populaire urbaine du Congo-Zaire a fait d'elle une sorte de 'musica franca' dans la région de l'Afrique sub-Saharienne. Malgré l'influence de cette musique en dehors de son pays d'origine, il existe jusqu'à présent très peu d'études au sujet de sa production, son histoire et sa signification. Cette 'musique moderne' constitue un aspect privilégié du paysage culturel du Congo, mais elle nous offre également une source importante d'information sur la structure et les effets de 'la modernité' dans un contexte Africain. L'argument principal propose que 'la modernité' est rendue possible par 'la tradition', et que 'la tradition' utilise constamment 'la modernité' pour ses propres besoins, une dynamique qui fonctionne en spirale, toujours sans fin, toujours différent, et à la base autant politique que culturelle. 'Le modernisme', de sa part, une sorte de positionnement social ou 'façon d'être' dans le monde, est utilisé comme moyen de maîtriser les paradoxes et les plaisirs des conditions de 'la modernité'. Les recherches de terrain pour ce projet ont été effectuées pendant quatorze mois de temps entre 1995 and 1996 au Congo-Brazzaville (République Populaire du Congo) et au Congo-Kinshasa (République Démocratique du Congo). Les recherches ont été divisées en trois parties principales: l'industrie de la musique, le style musical, et le public. La comparaison des données de ces trois domaines démontre non seulement comment la musique est organisée en spectacle, mais aussi comment elle est produite et consommée par un grand public local. L'aspect 'moderne' à travers lequel la musique Congolaise s'exprime constitue un sujet intéressant en soi, mais il souligne également l'importance de considérer la culture et l'histoire dans les analyses de la culture populaire et de la politique.

## List of Figures

- 0.1\* Spraycan shaker (li. 'maracas'), p. 6
- 0.2 *Atalaku* with 'maracas' (from Barlow & Eyre 1995), p. 7
- 0.3 Map of Congo-Zaire (from J. MacGaffey 1987), p. 30
- 0.4 Map of Lower Zaire (from W. MacGaffey 1970), p. 31
- 0.5 Map of Kinshasa (from Ngimbi 1982), p. 32
  
- 2.1 Versioning Mamiwata (from Vogel 1991), p. 98
  
- 3.1 Wendo Kolosoy, of Mobutu's *Ordre du Léopard*, p. 130
- 3.2 Wendo with the family of his 'new wife' (laughing, right), p. 130
- 3.3 Rendering of Franco on the front of a record store in Matonge, p. 132
- 3.4 Reddy Amisi, heir apparent of the *nouvelle vague*, p. 134
  
- 4.1 Music and cartoons help to sell beer, p. 163
- 4.2 Mazanza with his first home-made guitar, p. 171
- 4.3 Cloth banner advertising an upcoming concert, p. 175
- 4.4 Lascony Balloux (center) and the salesmen from Ets. Ndiaye, p. 177
- 4.5 The members of COZAPEDIM visiting a cassette outlet, p. 179
- 4.6 Semi-mobile display unit (*étalage*) for sale and re-sale of original cassettes, p. 185
- 4.7 The re-distributors: "We help musicians because we promote their music", p. 192
- 4.8 Home-made pirate cassettes are priced with the consumer in mind, p. 195
- 4.9 Band board for a 'tradi-moderne' group, p. 209
- 4.10 Band board for a 'modern' group, p. 210
  
- 5.1 CD liner notes: 'Lofombo the bass wringer', p. 224
- 5.2 Wenge Musica B.C.B.G. filming the video for 'Pentagone' (1996), p. 227
- 5.3 People follow fashion and fashion follows music, p. 232
- 5.4 Koffi Olomide: "Allure na ngai ça va..." ('I look good...'), p. 236
- 5.5 Papa Wemba: "I am not a slave to sape", p. 236
- 5.6 Singers' hands bob up and down with their own rhythm (*Revue Noire*), p. 240
- 5.7 Reddy Amisi on tour in Congo-Brazzaville, p. 244
- 5.8 Reddy arrives in Dolisie (Congo-Brazzaville), p. 245
- 5.9 The intimate public: writing yourself into local history, p. 246
  
- 6.1 Espace Faignond, 'temple du loisir', p. 266
- 6.2 Most women in music are dancers, p. 273
- 6.3 Doing research? Jotting down notes over a beer, p. 280
- 6.4 Doing research? Lost in the back line, p. 280
- 6.5 Paydirt under the red seed tree, p. 284
- 6.6 Different shakers stand for different genres, p. 287
- 6.7 "If you can play a matchbox, you can play anything", p. 287

\* figure numbers correspond to chapters

- 7.1 A post-colonial moat, p. 305
- 7.2 Memorizing the concert schedule, p. 308
- 7.3 Sleeping before the show, p. 312
- 7.4 Couples dance together until the *seben* begins, p. 316
- 7.5 Dancers venture into the audience, p. 319
- 7.6 The use of space on stage, p. 320
- 7.7 *Les danseuses*: Jeancy, Monique, Mami, p. 319
- 7.8 Male concertgoers: 'maitrise', p. 325
- 7.9 Bleu and the Bleuettes, p. 332
- 7.10 Female concertgoers: singing along, p. 338
- 7.11 "C'mon, Monsieur Bob, you can do it", p. 348
- 7.12 Theo Mbala and the *atalaku mundele*, p. 348
  
- 8.1 The Big Stars in the lobby of Defao's luxury hotel, p. 361
- 8.2 "Fondé! Fondé!", p. 361
- 8.3 Invitation to an inauguration, p. 362
- 8.4 A band is a hierarchy, p. 366
- 8.5 Koyo 'Nzaya' with American flag, p. 332
- 8.6 Roi Pélé: leader of a splinter (Wenge El Paris), p. 362
  
- 9.1 Song lyrics circulate in local magazines (from *Disco* #60), p. 420
- 9.2 Franco and an 'admiratrice' (from *Revue Noire* 1996), p. 441
- 9.3 'Frère Debaba': former 'Choc Star', now he sings the praises of Jesus, p. 461
  
- 10.1 Coco on the phone, p. 515
- 10.2 Poking holes in 'modernity', p. 517
- 10.3 'La guerre contre les moustiques' (Samba in Jewsiewicki 1995), p. 518

## PLEASE NOTE

I have included with this thesis an audio cassette which gives examples of some of the musical aspects which are discussed at various points in the text. Please see the listening guide in the appendix for more detailed information on the content of the cassette.

## Introduction: Notes From Modernityland

'Modernity' and Music  
From Noise to Popular Culture  
Politics in the Mix  
The Methodology of Writing  
Structure of the Thesis

*Music represents the most radical and most absolute form of the negation of the world, and especially the social world, which the bourgeois ethos tends to demand of all forms of art.*

(Pierre Bourdieu 1984: 19)

*La musique zairoise c'est une vieille copine.*

(Achille Ngoy, June 28, 1995)

One of the most important lessons learned from the critical post-World War II scholarship on world systems is the observation that modernity is always and everywhere a global phenomenon. The great thinkers of Western social thought (Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Hegel) had already uncovered some of the underlying mechanisms which led to increasingly commodified forms of exchange, the consolidation of class and state-based political power, excesses in industrial production and urbanization, and the resulting psychological and social alienation which would come to characterize the break between feudalism and the 'modern condition' of the post-industrial West. Despite its richness and depth, however, this body of social theory (by no means monolithic) failed to effectively account for the history of non-Western civilizations and cultures. It is from this blind spot that a new narrative of political economy emerged, one that began to see the history of industrial capitalism intimately linked to Western Europe's imperial impulses and colonial projects (Frank, Rodney, Wallerstein, Wolf).

To a large extent this intellectual movement emerged out of opposition to the apologetics of post-war theories of growth (especially Rostow's brand of Darwinism), which viewed 'modernity' as the story of Western civilization's long road to the "pursuit of happiness". From this point of view, 'modernization'--already a *fait accompli* in the West--is a process that now only occurs in 'traditional' (i.e. non-Western) economies, and if certain nations continue to be plagued with poverty and political anarchy, it is because they lack the necessary institutions or cultural values that will permit this 'development' to unfold. Despite their obvious differences, theories of 'modernization' and those of 'world systems' are remarkably similar in that they see flows of technology and ideas (i.e. 'culture') flowing outward from the West to the Rest. For some, the Western world is at the center of everything 'modern'; it is the 'motor of progress', the 'source' of technological innovation, the 'core' of the New World Order. For others, it is a sugar-coated 'Modernityland' which perpetuates the myth of its own importance by neutralizing

otherness through song ("It's a small world after all...") and fetishizing its role in the creation and perpetuation of a cruel post post-feul world order.

At roughly the same time as these post-W.W. II debates were beginning to emerge, something wonderful was brewing in the Belgian Congo. It was something seemingly harmless, on the surface a mere distraction, and yet something so powerful that it would eventually 'colonize' the rest of the continent. Known outside of the Congo as *soukouss*, Congo music, Congo jazz, *la musique zairoise*, the contagious sound of Congo-Zaire's distinctive popular music has made it a sort of 'musica franca' of Sub-Saharan Africa. It has often been observed that Congo-Zaire's unique brand of popular music and performance is a reflection of Congolese culture and society.<sup>1</sup> I want to take this analysis a step further, however, and show that popular culture (especially popular music) in Congo-Zaire is much more than a 'reflection' of Congolese society and culture. Instead, I will argue that it constitutes a *privileged space* in which issues of profound social and historical importance are held up for debate, and through which Congolese of various persuasions attempt to gain control over the forces of 'modernity'.

The assertion that Congolese popular music is an important social phenomenon is not in itself interesting unless it also attempts to tell us something about Congolese culture or society. But what exactly it tells us is an important question in and of itself. Does it tell us about politics? Does it tell us about identity? Does it tell us about history? The answer to all these questions is 'yes'. It tells us about all of these things, but given the particular idiom through which popular music expresses itself--*la musique moderne*--what I want to argue it tells us about most is the paradox of being 'modern' in Africa's 'modernity'.

---

<sup>1</sup>"Everyone knows that the language of music is the privileged form of expression for the people who live on the banks of the Congo-Zaire river. It is also known that under the hypnotising rhythm of dance, the singer has always constituted the most faithful echo of public opinion and the most accurate reflection of the people's state of mind" (Ndaywel 1993: 1).

## Modernity and Music

The term [modernity] acts as a kind of goad to the academic, it seems to connote some central problem, some fundamental issue, a context for all other discussions, which must be addressed (Miller 1994: 58).

'Modernity' is increasingly perceived as a global historical phenomenon. Not only in the sense that even the most remote places on Earth have been affected by its expansion, but also because distinct ways of being 'modern' seem to be emerging in different places at more or less the same time (Miller 1994). This double meaning can lead to some confusion. 'Modernity' with a capital 'M'--the spread of global capitalism, Western rational thought and material culture--is a global phenomenon which has its roots in the various outcomes of Western Enlightenment thinking: the 'Voyages of Discovery', the Industrial Revolution and the emergence of a democratic public sphere located primarily (but not exclusively) in post-feudal Western Europe (Habermas 1989).<sup>2</sup> 'Modernity', despite all of its technological wonders and reassuring talk about 'progress' (what the Comaroffs have referred to as 'modernity's enchantment'), is also ridden with strife: ever-increasing gaps between the rich and the poor, the escalation of regional and inter-regional conflict, environmental degradation, and the primary marker of the experience of 'modernity', alienation. Thus 'modernity' presents itself not as a potentiality, but as a problem.

'Modernism', on the other hand, is something different. It can be an esthetic mood, a style, or a stance.<sup>3</sup> The 'will to be modern'--Balandier's *passion moderniste*--

---

<sup>2</sup>Here I am echoing Miller (1994), who argues (following Hegel) that 'modernity' is both a cause for celebration and the central problem for humanity since it brings with it not only self-consciousness and the liberation of the individual, but also generalized feeling of cultural and psychological alienation. This paradox--what Adorno and Horkheimer referred to as the "dialectic of enlightenment"--has only been superficially applied to cultural contexts outside of Europe and North America.

<sup>3</sup>Here I am not referring to the use of this term in literary circles, such as to refer to the period of European 'modernist' art (1898-1940) which is usually associated with artists such as Picasso and Dali and writers such as Joyce, Pound, Eliot, etc. There is of course a link between European modernists and African expressive culture (especially evident in Picasso's work, see Clifford (1988), chapter 9), but these are not issues I will discuss here.



often consists in the performance of certain practices or gestures, like the self-conscious poses struck by the *sapeur*, or the way that musicians sing the names of people living in Europe, or the simple act of making a shaker out of a pesticide can [figure 0.1]. The image of this ‘modern’ musical instrument is unsettling. Perhaps it is the initial panic of seeing an aerosol spray can with no nozzle, and holes running down either side. Or perhaps it is the idea of making music with something that is normally used to kill. Or maybe it has something to do with the questions that this image leaves unanswered: Who made this? Why did they use an insecticide can? What did they put inside?

The *marakas* has become a powerful symbol of ‘modern’ music in Kinshasa, mostly because of its association with the *atalaku*, the musical figure whose shouts are often borrowed from ‘traditional’ music, and who has become an indispensable part of every self-respecting ‘modern’ band in Kinshasa (ch. 3, 6) [figure 0.2]. Though the *marakas* is certainly a good example of the ‘modernist’ mood I will be describing in many parts of this thesis, it is not ‘modernism’ *per se* that is my primary concern. The main question I want ask is what are people doing with this ‘modernism’? How are people using ‘modernism’ to position themselves within ‘modernity’? Are they resisting ‘modernity’? Are they grabbing at it? Running away from it? Re-tooling it? Do they see ‘modernity’? And if so, do they care?

The *marakas* is a good example of how ‘modernism’ and ‘modernity’ are tangled up together, one acting like a resource, the other a problem. From the musician’s point of view, adapting imported goods to activate the rhythm of local practice is a sign of resourcefulness and know-how. Through the use of this hybrid creation, the ‘modern’ musician shows his familiarity with Western products and also how he exerts control over their use and meaning. And the choice of this particular type of can (one that is made of a high-quality, durable metal which resonates loudly enough so that it does not need its own microphone in concert) is not a random decision. Most musicians prefer this can over a myriad of other cans (perfume, powdered milk, sardines, etc.), primarily, they say,



fig. 0.1 Spraycan shaker (li. 'maracas')



Fig. 0.2

because it looks as good as it sounds. I want to argue, however, that the maker of the *marakas* uses this 'modern' medium in order to take possession of 'modernity', symbolically (perhaps unconsciously) poking holes in a multi-national corporation and filling it with seeds.

The distinction between 'modernism' and 'modernity' is important to understanding the central argument of my thesis, namely that popular music in an African setting reflects local peoples' attempts to come to terms with the paradoxes of 'modernity'. In the context of popular music and performance in Kinshasa, the problem of 'modernity' takes on special significance. As an urban settlement which was created by industrial colonialism's need for inexpensive abundant labor, Kinshasa is in some sense intimate with 'modernity' (ch. 2), and the history of the city shows a special attachment to various popular forms of entertainment, especially popular music (ch. 3). One element that I hope will emerge from this work is the extent to which the discourses surrounding this highly commercialized form of popular music constantly make reference to the distinction between 'modernity' and its implied other, 'tradition' (see esp. ch. 10).

And at the risk of falling victim to these 'modern' categories, it is perhaps no coincidence that the story I want to tell--one which is compulsively urban--does not take place in the 'world of tradition'. Corinne Kratz, in an article on Okiek initiation ceremonies (1993), has challenged us to ask some of the same questions about the role of 'tradition' in our analysis of African societies. According to Kratz, despite the privileged position of 'tradition' in Western (mostly ethnographic) writing about Africa, it remains a concept which is rarely, if ever, sufficiently problematized:

This certainty ['tradition'] is either contrasted or depicted as with the fragmented anomic of modern life or with the unquestioning obedience to custom or authority or traditional society and set against the social life emerging out of rational calculation. In any case, traditional life is an ideal category, always elusively retreating into the past. Only traces of it are discernible in the present, which is threatened by new influences and changes (1993: 32).

If expressive culture in the form of ritual (i.e. 'traditional') practice is reassuring to the researcher because of the feeling of fixity or 'certainty' which usually accompanies it, then perhaps this is one of the reasons why popular ('modern') forms of cultural expression have received so little attention in anthropology (ch. 1). While we have the impression that ritual *remains the same*, we also have the impression that popular culture *spirals out of control*, changing so rapidly that it can only be described as a self-regenerating monster (see below). Obviously these impressions need to be examined, since ritual practice is always embedded in history, and popular culture, as I will show in the pages to come, operates in the motion of a spiral, but not without patterns and rules (ch. 10). Echoing Kratz, I want to argue that while the literature inspired by Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1983) initial insight has certainly been revealing, it is now time for us to move beyond a notion of tradition-modernity as ideological invention, and ask ourselves the much more difficult (and I think more rewarding) questions about what these 'modernities' actually look like and what these 'traditions' actually do (Appiah 1992; Waterman 1997). The example of popular music in Congo-Kinshasa shows how people constantly draw from 'tradition' to position themselves within a 'modernity' which is increasingly of their own making (ch. 3). 'Modernity', in other words, is right here at home.

## From Noise to Popular Culture

A travers la vision du monde de l'artiste, un spécialiste du beau, du sublime, de la jouissance, est offerte une perspective esthétique sur l'expérience et sur le savoir (Jewsiewicki 1996: 268).<sup>4</sup>

If we are interested in asking the question of how people at the margins of Western 'modernity' understand and come to terms with the rupture that characterizes

---

<sup>4</sup>'Through the eyes of the artist, a specialist of beauty, of the sublime, of ecstasy, we are offered an esthetic perspective on experience and on knowing.'

'modernity' in a post-colonial African setting (Nkashama 1979; DeBoeck 1998a), the answer is that it is often in unlikely places and through public means such as popular culture. Within 'developing' countries popular forms of cultural expression take on a special meaning, not only because people living there do not have as many 'distractions' as people living in the West, but also because it is one of the only outlets of political expression available to the majority of the population (Barber 1987). Unfortunately, anthropology's disdain for anything other than 'elite' or 'traditional' forms of art, together with the increasing compartmentalization of the disciplines of social science and the humanities, has meant that the "colorful bursts of creativity" emanating from popular forms of culture have until recently remained for the most part invisible (Fabian 1978).

This failure to engage with popular forms is certainly due in some part to the nature of the popular culture beast, which Karin Barber (1987) has perhaps not inappropriately referred to as a hydra. In other words, adequate coverage of popular culture requires attention to colonial and post-colonial periods, rural and urban phenomena, an understanding of esthetics as well as processes of commercialization, an effort to account for the multiple readings of popular tropes and texts, and the role of individual agency/experience, and all this in the context of an imposing post-colonial state which is itself imposed upon in various ways by various agencies. Furthermore, popular culture can appear in a wide variety of forms and media (television programs, newspapers, music, dance, theater, religion, rumor, language, and so on). But popular culture is also 'beastlike' in the earthiness of its expression (Mbembe 1992a); it is brash, self-promoting, and vulgar. Fabian describes his first night in the field and his first contact with Congolese popular music:

I was in bed in a room at a mission in the middle of Dendale township [in Leopoldville], trying to get some sleep. Around the square where the mission's building lay loudspeakers from what seemed at least four different bars or dancing halls blasted Zairian music into the night air; each playing a different record yet creating in my tortured head a common effect, a kind of pulse caused by seemingly never-ending repetition of guitar riffs. Here was African life that assaulted me physically, makes its presence painfully felt. I was about to go out of my mind, as the saying goes, when a tropical downpour swept all sound from the square (1998: 82; c.f. Fabian 1990: 79).

The growing academic interest in popular arts has also been registered in the fields of history, sociology, and literary criticism (Mukerji and Schudson 1991), and is most conspicuous in the emerging field of cultural studies (During 1993). Lipsitz has referred to popular culture as “the main event”, since people “talk about what [they] themselves think is important--in their own vocabulary, and through the form they feel to be appropriate” (1990: 4). For readers who have already opened their minds enough to see popular culture as more than epi-phenomenon, I hope that my discussion of popular music will provide them with more material for thought. For those who approach this reading with greater skepticism, I invite them to look past the question of popular dance music *per se* and consider instead what this discussion tells us about politics, power and ‘modernity’ in contemporary Congo-Zaire.

Despite the rich history and relevance of Congolese popular music to everyday life in Kinshasa, surprisingly little has been written on the subject. A small number of genre and biographical works have been published and there are also some literary readings of popular song texts (which I will discuss in greater detail in ch. 3 and ch. 9), but for the most part the history and meaning of the musical style has remained unexplored. Recent academic writing on Congolese popular arts has alluded to music as the most obvious way to access popular experience (Jewsiewicki 1995; Fabian 1998), but its ubiquitousness has kept most scholars (Congolese and foreign) from doing anything more than using disembodied examples of song lyrics as evidence of particular sociological phenomena.<sup>5</sup> My goal is to take on this hydra, respecting its size and complexity, but assuming a certain (very flexible) coherence with regards to its form and meaning.

---

<sup>5</sup>By far the greatest number of documents published on Congolese popular music are written by Congolese themselves. This in itself I believe speaks to the music’s importance to Congolese audiences.

That said, I should clear the air somewhat with regards to the potential pitfalls of my approach to this subject. First of all, I think that most ethnomusicologists will be somewhat unsatisfied with the content of this material, since it is not my purpose to try and describe the technical intricacies of the music (for example the way that rhythm and lead guitars play off each other, or the way that the bass guitar functions as a percussion instrument, or the complex harmonic combinations which characterize the music).<sup>6</sup> Throughout the thesis the reader will notice that I have drawn substantially from ethnomusicological sources, but mainly where their insight could be used as comparative data on questions of social practice or meaning.<sup>7</sup> Instead of walking the fine line between the 'technical' and the 'cultural' (Merriam 1964), I want my position on this question to be clear. The material in this thesis is not only for musicians, and as such it assumes no technical background in music or music training. Instead, I have focused on the sociology (and to some extent the social history) of popular music in Congo-Kinshasa.

While most Congolese and scholars of Congolese culture agree that contemporary popular music is the primary landmark of the urban cultural landscape, several responses to my work have challenged me to have a broader vision of local musical production, especially with regards to religious music.<sup>8</sup> My primary reason for concentrating on popular dance music (besides its overwhelming presence in Kinshasa) is the fact that--more than any other musical style in the Congo--it has been implicated in the complex processes of commercialization and commodification, processes which I believe to be central to an understanding of the experience of 'modernity', not only in Central Africa. As I have discussed elsewhere (White 1998a), Congolese dance music is unique because, as a product intended for foreign audiences (*soukouss*), it represents a moment at which

---

<sup>6</sup>The listening guide for the cassette which is included with the thesis (see appendix) provides some detail on the purely musical or instrumental aspects of the music.

<sup>7</sup>Erlmann's discussion of performance is a subtle critique of traditional approaches to ethnomusicology, arguing that musical performance does not necessarily reflect some kind of 'core culture' (see for example Chernoff 1979) but a instead a set of "changing and conflicting social relations" (1996: 102).

<sup>8</sup>I am grateful to Filip De Boeck for these observations, and I have attempted to address the increasing importance of religious music at several points in the thesis (ch. 3,4,10).



national identity becomes crystallized and objectified for global markets and audiences.

With the exception of some rare recordings of pygmy music (see Cramworld 1998), this is not the case for other forms of Congolese music.

There is also the question of my choice of musicians, since most readers will notice that the bulk of my data comes from those musical groups and artists who during my fieldwork in 1995-1996 were recognizable as local 'stars'. The dozen or so bands that function as full-time professionals in Kinshasa, and whose musicians are recognized as 'stars', represent something of importance to local audiences. And this focus is in part responsible for the feeling throughout the thesis that I am in effect telling the story of the 'winners' (though see ch. 5 and 8).<sup>9</sup> But as a friend of mine recently fired back via e-mail: "“Isn't be(com)ing a Zairean musician all about “self-indulgence” à la Kinois (striving for the places of General Defaos and Papa Wembas) and attaining the peaks of *chique*?” (Pieter Remes, email correspondence, May 22, 1998).

In my research I was not looking for the small, struggling musical groups (see *Revue Noire* 1996) which are certainly more statistically representative of Kinshasa (some estimates put them in the hundreds). My focus limited me rather to working with certain types of groups (those that have large audiences, those that perform and produce music on a regular basis, and those that are exposed to larger, sometimes global political and economic forces) and this most certainly has affected the data collected and the way I interpret it. To a certain extent, this focus must be seen as a matter of expediency, since research budgets and time would not have allowed a comparative study of different musical levels or genres. But the music on which I will focus in this thesis is the music for which the majority of music consumers in Kinshasa express a preference.<sup>10</sup> More importantly, I want to argue that musical styles and personal preferences in this setting are extremely difficult to separate,

---

<sup>9</sup>Thanks go to Mike McGovern for having pointed out this potential problem.

<sup>10</sup>Lacking any systematic data on the question of music preference across social categories, I have based this observation on the number and types of popular music that are sold and distributed in the capital, roughly 75% 'modern' music, 20% religious music and 5% 'traditional' or *folklore* (see ch. 4).

and in my opinion this is partially due to the way that different musical genres are objectified for various strategic ends (ch. 10).

## Politics in the Mix

Few ethnologists have clearly indicated the reasons for their choice, for their adoption of a profession which leads them to uproot themselves from their own civilization in order to confront others very different from it. Still, their eclecticism and their cultural exile always put them in the position of critic with regard to their own society. There is at the basis of such a vocation a dissatisfaction, a need to become involved in radically different modes of existence (Balandier 1966: 8).

I was certainly excited about my research when I arrived to Kinshasa for the first time, but I must admit I was also apprehensive about doing research on music in a country where many people have a hard time getting something to eat (a stance which itself assumes that research on 'development' will somehow decrease poverty or prevent famine). Of the people I encountered, most were pleased--though not necessarily surprised--that I had travelled so far to study their music. Common responses varied ("That's great. You'll see all kinds of things"; "Don't forget to talk about 'traditional' music"; and "The Americans pay for researchers, what is wrong with our government?"), but only rarely did they call into question the basic value of doing research on such a topic.<sup>11</sup> Some Congolese even expressed to me the idea that, following the American model, the promotion of cultural products is the best way to ensure economic and political strength (White 1998a). I guess the only thing I knew for sure before going to the field is that Congolese popular music is

---

<sup>11</sup>It may be that people did not want to insult me by criticizing my topic, although this did happen on a number of occasions. On the first occasion I was jokingly accused of wanting to learn about music production so I could exploit local consumers. I was also teased for having the luxury of being able to do research on music, since as my friend said: "I have to do things that put food on the table". But even these reactions, which I assume were much more common where I was not within hearing range, do not in themselves undermine the importance of music as a subject of inquiry per se.

something which is highly valued (or at least highly debated) by Congolese, and this seemed like a good place to start.<sup>12</sup>

With time I realized that a focus on 'creative responses' to colonial rule and capitalist expansion serve the purpose of relieving our sense of collective guilt with regards to Africa's history of exploitation, and thus that the study of popular culture can potentially cover up more than it reveals. At the same time, however, images of Congolese popular culture, often overflowing with moments of joy, laughter, and beauty, also reflect the dignity and humor which are so often lacking in Western representations of African culture and politics. Hecht and Simone have asked the question whether it is necessary to read the whole of African culture as an indication of a position of poverty:

Within this moralism, if the poor are not struggling against their victimage, they are internalizing the apparatuses of power. Alternatively, they are looked upon as inspirations--the happy poor, living in shit, with a smile on their face and a liberation song in their heart (Hecht and Simone 1994: 145).

My views on these topics have changed somewhat over time. Doing research in the highly politicized context of Mobutu's Zaire was in many ways an eye-opening experience. Even the casual observer or visitor to the region is struck by structural poverty, government neglect and the impact of colonial and neo-colonial forms of foreign extraction in the region. Congolese themselves (like many Africans) are acutely aware of politics and political manoeuvring, partly because most people know that access to state power (via state coffers) is the most effective means of accumulating personal wealth. Thus people in Kinshasa were constantly reminding me that the country's economic crisis is not an economic problem per se, but one that is rooted in politics. I have been further challenged by colleagues and professors who have pushed me to question my assumptions about the conditions under which the production of popular culture occurs, who it benefits,

---

<sup>12</sup>While I have attempted in my research to maintain an inductive stance with regards to my subject matter, I must agree with Bruner (1986), that the process of ethnography inevitably calls up the ethnographer's ideological agendas or narratives. I discuss some of these narratives in Chapter Ten and the final section titled "Coda".

and, in the end, what it means (Part IV). In this sense, my own education has been a process of politicization, one which, although incomplete, I hope is reflected in my research and writing.

Though a great deal has been written about the politics and poetics of ethnographic writing (see below), less theorizing has been done on the politics of doing ethnographic fieldwork or observation (Said 1989).<sup>13</sup> Fabian has gone the furthest in problematizing the way that power relations are activated and perpetuated between anthropologists and their 'informants' (see especially 1990, 1996). Fabian's concept of 'coevalness' (1983) led him to observe later that the process of ethnographic fieldwork, unlike the process of ethnographic writing, in some cases has greater potential for shared time and collaboration between ethnographer and subject. In the particular case of research which is based on performance, "the ethnographer does not call the tune but plays along" (1990: 19). These observations are particularly relevant in the context of a discussion about popular music.

As much as possible, I have attempted in my writing to preserve those moments where it became obvious that I was not 'calling the tune'. Many of these examples come out in Chapters Six and Seven, where I describe the experience of living and working with a band. But there are just as many examples in my life as a musician where I retained complete control, for example with regards to the luxury of being able to choose the band with which I would play (ch. 6). The moments of the field experience which are the most illuminating with regards to the political nature of the researcher's presence also happen to be the most memorable. One day when I was sitting innocently after band practice, taking notes on a bench inside the practice room, the newest singer of the band sat down next to me and began to ask me questions about life in the U.S. From my notes:

---

<sup>13</sup>Among those in the latter category, several standards are often cited, especially Rabinow (1977), Rosaldo (1980). Pratt (1986) has characterized the personal accounts of field experiences (together with their previously published ethnographies) as a kind of ethnographic sub-genre.

"Mr. Bob, excuse me, I know that curiosity is an ugly character trait ('villain défaut'), but sometimes it teaches us something." What a wonderful expression, Makuta's a cool guy, very spiritual. "Go ahead," I say, "What do you want to know?" He asks me some questions, general stuff about the States, Hollywood, Michael Jackson, and then he drops this question out of nowhere: "Monsieur Bob, when you're in the States, do you hang out with people like this?" Wow, what a question! "Actually, no," I answered. "My life is very different here. I like my life here. I used to hang out with musicians, but now I am a musician" (April 27, 1996).

Thinking back on this incident I remember what an impact it had on me. Though in retrospect I am not sure if Makuta's question was a truly 'curious' one as he suggested, or if he was making a subtle comment on the strange fact of my presence among them. Whatever his motivation, what is interesting about this exchange is that the microphone was for once turned back on me. This gave me added perspective on how my presence could be interpreted and/or misunderstood, and how my position in the band could be tied to larger issues of neocolonialism and tension between people of different races and nationalities. But Makuta's curiosity was the rare exception among the people with whom I worked. As I discuss in Chapter Eight, the subjects of my research were more concerned with how I would fit in to their own networks of sociability and exchange, than those from which I came.

## The Methodology of Writing<sup>14</sup>

In the case of anthropology, the determinative context is the mode of interaction--interrogative, cinematic, observational, participatory, etc.--that characterizes the ethnographer's fieldwork and lifestyle. The models of personhood foregrounded or favoured in anthropological analysis are often reflective, not just of the culture, but of the personality and interests of the observer (Jackson and Karp 1990: 18).

For most of its lifespan, anthropology has lived a privileged existence. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, a number of works from within and outside of anthropology began to critically question the premises of ethnographic writing. In a time in which thinkers and writers from post-colonial countries were beginning to make their presence felt on an international basis, these works called into question the authority of Western anthropologists to speak on behalf of people from the marginalized cultures of the world (Said 1978). Not only this, but advances in media technology have meant that anthropologists are no longer the sole authority on cultural diversity. More and more we are faced with a "world of generalized ethnography" (Clifford 1988: 22). In short, what emerged during this period was a 'crisis of representation' (Marcus and Fischer 1986) which called into question the fundamental status of ethnographic authority. Responses to these critiques often focused on trying to find a new language or methodology for representing other cultures: self-reflexivity, literary writing style, and dialogical or collaborative mechanisms, among others.

---

<sup>14</sup>As I will discuss below, throughout my writing I have attempted to integrate certain stylistic mechanisms which reveal the process by which information was gathered and rendered into written text form. Nonetheless, I employed various methodological approaches in the field on which I should elaborate. My initial research plan divided the research into three basic units of inquiry: musical industry, musical style, and audience. Although the finished product does not exactly reflect this three-part division, these categories are still present in the structure and logic of the thesis. For research on the music industry (ch. 4) and for research on the life of musicians (ch. 5-8), I combined participant observation with informal interviews using the snowball technique, but did not use any formal questionnaires. With certain key interviews (hard to get musicians, people visiting from Europe, high-up industry or government officials) I recorded interviews on audio cassette and transcribed the interviews later. In other interview situations I either took notes during the interview or (where a notebook may have altered the flow of conversation) copied notes from memory afterwards. In Chapter Nine, I discuss the methodology of using focus groups and describe how this methodology may be improved for future research.

For the most part, debates about ethnographic writing and ethnographic authority are well-rehearsed and thus I will not discuss them here in great detail.<sup>15</sup> I should comment briefly, however, on how this writing has influenced my work and how I have attempted to come to terms with the very important issues it has raised. Said (1988) rightly observes that despite all the commotion which surrounded the 'crisis of representation' literature beginning in the mid to late-1980s, very few anthropologists actually entertained the possibility of completely abandoning the practice of ethnography.<sup>16</sup> Needless to say, I am not one of few. In fact, in my writing I often make use of the two "ingenious textual strategies" which Said has argued are a way of "deflecting the crippling attacks on ethnographic authority" (1988: 21).

The first is what he calls the 'aesthetic response'. Throughout this thesis the reader will encounter moments of expressive writing whose tone reflects the surprise, wonder, and frustration of conducting research in the field. In many cases these passages are taken directly from my field notes, and they assume a reflexive, almost literary voice which resonates within the space between myself and the people with whom I worked. Given my conviction that good ethnography is just as much art as it is science, I have left these sections in their original form (making some corrections for unclear ideas or gaps in thinking). Ultimately, the reader will judge if they add or detract from the overall project. The second strategy is what Said refers to as the 'pragmatic response'. Arguably, anthropology's interest in practice is nothing more than what it set out to understand from the very beginning, i.e. what human beings do and what they think about what they do. But the comfort which has set in since Ortner's (1984) anthropological anthem does raise important questions: "...as if practice were a domain of actuality unencumbered by agents, interests, and contentions, political as well as philosophical" (Said 1989: 211). I have

---

<sup>15</sup>On ethnographic authority see Clifford (1988) and Crapanzano (1986). On the rhetoric of objectivity, especially in British social anthropology, see Renato Rosaldo (1986). Said's (1989) discussion of these issues is also very illuminating, not the only reason for which is the outsider's perspective he offers.

<sup>16</sup>For a response to Said, see Clifford (1986).

made every effort so that my explanations will illuminate--and not obscure--the important points raised in Said's critique (see ch. 4,5 and 9,10).

The final point that I want to make with regards to writing is the renewed interest in an ethnography which is somehow embedded in "larger impersonal systems of political economy" (Marcus and Fischer 1986: 77).<sup>17</sup> Although the content of this thesis is far from constituting a political economy of Congolese popular music, there are several places in my writing where I have attempted to do just that. As Marcus and Fischer have shown, this very challenging imperative requires that more attention be paid to the role of history, and it is perhaps not a coincidence that the fields of anthropology and history seem to be slowly warming up to the idea of cross-disciplinary research (Burke 1996; Cohen and Odhiambo 1989; Fabian 1996). Not only in the strictly speaking historical section of this thesis (ch. 2), but also in the historical treatment of changes in the music over time (ch. 3,10), I have attempted to show what a historical rendering of popular music might eventually resemble (c.f. Cooper 1987).<sup>18</sup> My interest in history is not only an attempt to counteract the historical 'thinning' which seems to characterize a good deal of writing in the emerging discipline of cultural studies, but also reflects popular discourses in Kinshasa, which themselves constantly refer to the music's 'ancestors' and its glorious past (ch. 3,9,10).

The concerns of political economy are more embedded in my writing. On this point I would refer the reader to my discussion of micropolitics (ch. 8), and the section on the various ways in which 'tradition' and 'modernity' are strategically objectified (in ch. 10). In Chapter Four, I attempt to show how these "larger impersonal systems" have affected local production and performance. While international music distributors and pirates benefitted from the sale of records and cassettes, musicians became increasingly

---

<sup>17</sup>Probably the best recent example of this trend is Anna Tsing's *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen* (1993), in which rich ethnographic material from Indonesia shows how the marginality of local communities is culturally and politically constructed.

<sup>18</sup>In future research I intend to undertake a larger historical project which will focus on popular entertainment in the colonial period (1910-1960) and the emergence of an African public sphere in colonial Leopoldville.



dependent on money that was made 'at the door' (from concert ticket sales), and from patron-based support through performance (ch. 7, 8). These developments (intimately linked to the arrival of cassette technology to the region in the 1970s) inevitably led to certain esthetic and structural changes in the music over time. As I have discussed elsewhere, the issues of political economy become even more salient in discussions of music as a product of the global consumer imagination (Erlmann 1996b; Feld 1994; Meintjes 1990; White 1998a).

I have attempted to correct for the potential pitfalls of ethnographic writing through the use of various stylistic mechanisms. I use the first person in the singular form instead of the plural (as is the case in some European writing, especially French), and as often as possible I try to give the context behind observations and events that assert a position of personal authority. My privileged position as a musician in a local band gave me access to a field of knowledge which I present in different ways at different points in my text. At some moments I am 'speaking about' (Geertz's over the shoulder gaze), at other moments I am speaking 'nearby' (Minh-ha 1992), and at yet other moments in the text I am speaking 'in between' or 'with' the subjects of my research (Ruby 1992; see also Tsing 1993). Despite my attention to these stylistic mechanisms, I disagree with formulations that suggest "better methods" as a 'way out' of the problem of representation, or a 'solution' to the relations of power that structure fieldwork. From my point of view, these problems are part and parcel of the work of anthropology. The most we can hope to do is to constantly expose these relations of inequality and how they become reinforced through our presence. Thus the generous use of field notes in my writing is thus a conscious strategy to 'messify' my text (Crapanzano 1986), calling attention to the way the final text (by comparison) is mediated, and reminding the reader that the data presented is the result of a series of interactions with subjects and not simple 'observation'.

Just like Marx's commodity, so much of what goes into the making of an ethnographic document is obscured by its status as a disembodied object: the subtle play

of power that tolerates the anthropologist's presence; the arguing, negotiating and waiting; the mistakes, erasures, and the sweat; the insecurity, falling asleep and the frustration of not knowing. Written text can only partially convey the messiness of the fieldwork experience. In the following passage, time shifts in and out of focus and events are impressionistic and unconnected. But this is more than just an average journal entry, this is truly (i.e. literally) the stuff that ethnographic texts are made of:

After all the bullshit I've been through today godammit I'm tired. Started at 6:00 am, then 6:45 ready in 25 minutes for Poids Lourds [area of Kinshasa where I was doing research], see Gibuku's face and I get passed around like a rotten jackfruit until I decide I can't take it anymore. I'm so f\*\*\*ing tired I just want to sleep, right now.

[the next morning] Don't even remember writing this, I came home last night and I was totally beat. What a long, drawn out, 'didn't eat all day' day. I was so beat I had to drink warm South African milk and take a rest between each Advil and the Larium that I finally managed to down somehow. I don't know how I mustered the energy to put down my mosquito net. I slept like a rock. Yesterday and the day before yesterday I went with Issa to call his friend the cassette vendor, we'll try again on Saturday. I'm going to finish this industry shit if its the last thing I do. Just give me three weeks and I'll be happy. Last night after a long ZALI day managing people and refusing job applicants, and being in night clubs filming, explaining prostitution to Christine, I left ZALI and went to Manda's place. I think I might have found a good research assistant. Serge is one of Manda's assistants and he seems to be a sharp guy, not too overbearing, but not afraid to ask for what he wants. I'll try to see him soon. Manda and I continued to pick up Ilo Pablo, who changed plans to film today for a trip to Brazza. Manda seemed pissed, Ilo was embarrassed. So we went to Beverly, Jean Pierre obviously has lots of funds. He's paying the Voix de Zaire (television) team every other day it seems. Manda thinks that his other assistants are sharks. I shouldn't have to pay producers for interviews, he says, but maybe musicians. Unless of course Manda comes with me, "Because they're afraid of me", he says (Apr. 14, 1996).

On days like this I was never totally sure if I was doing the right thing. My professional training seemed faint and fragile; research questions slipped through my fingers. As I scanned my notes before writing this introduction, I came across two entries which caught my attention; one carries the caption "Tuesday, June 28", and the next one (immediately afterwards) is labelled "Wednesday, June 28". This error reflects not only the slipperiness of time and individual experience in the field, but also the impression of coherence which results from the process of ethnographic writing.

## Structure of the Thesis

I have divided this thesis into four parts, each of which has two or more chapters of more or less equal length. I will begin by discussing the structure and content of each of these parts, and will conclude this chapter by explaining several points with regards to my use of language and terminology. Those interested in the theoretical aspects of this topic will probably want to focus on Part I (historical and theoretical background) and Part IV (the meaning of music). Readers seeking information about the musical style itself may want to concentrate on Part II (musical genres and the music industry) and Part III (the role of musicians in society and musical performance). Certain chapters are more concerned with historical issues (ch. 2,3) and others are focused on the patterns and structures of symbolic meaning (ch. 5,9,10). An audio cassette with examples of some of the phenomena discussed in my research is included with the thesis. At certain key points in the text I have used the expression "audio cue" to indicate where the reader can stop and listen to an example of the particular aspect that I am describing in the text.<sup>19</sup>

Part One ("Setting the Stage") provides the necessary background information to enable a fuller understanding of the phenomenon of popular music in the Congo. Chapter One, drawing from several theoretical frameworks which are related to the study of popular culture, sets up the argument that popular culture gives us privileged access to understanding the predicament of 'modernity' in an African setting. Here I will elaborate what I mean by my use of the term 'popular' and how I have drawn from various theoretical approaches to illuminate the data from Congo-Kinshasa. Chapter Two, showing a primarily historical focus, looks at how 'the popular' and 'the modern' emerge at more or less the same time in the urban colonial environment, and considers how

---

<sup>19</sup>The cassette is also, however, intended to be stand-alone. Readers not familiar with the musical style may want to listen to the cassette first, referring to the listening guide (see appendix), in order to get a general idea for the sound or mood of the musical style.

colonial cultural policy (or lack thereof) influenced the emergence of popular forms of entertainment, especially popular music.

Part Two (“The Transformation of *Typique*”) is concerned with the specific transformations (economic, political, and esthetic) which have been brought to bear on the structure and form of the musical style itself. The term ‘*typique*’ is particularly interesting because members of older generations use the term to refer to the classic *rumba* style of the 1950s and 1960s (perhaps linked to the Spanish term ‘*tipico*’, meaning ‘authentic’), while for young people in Kinshasa *typique* means the popular dance music of their own era. Thus *typique*, much like *moderne*, is always new while always retaining something old (see ch. 10). In Chapter Three I look at how the primary genres of popular music in Kinshasa differ from each other, but also how they become increasingly entangled over time. It is also here that I explore the as of yet undiscovered phenomenon of *animation* (a state of heightened sensitivity through loud dance music and participation in live performance) and its various components: rhythm, electric guitars, and the *atalaku* (a sort of singing rapper who accompanies all ‘modern’ music in Kinshasa, see also ch. 6). Chapter Four’s emphasis on the music industry shows how musicians have responded to changes in national and global political economies (changing terms of international trade, decaying national infrastructure, and the arrival of cassette technology) by introducing structural and esthetic changes in the production and performance of their music (extended dance sequences, greater reliance on live performance, commercialized praisesinging, etc.).

In Part Three (“On Being in Music”) I present an overview of musical performance and the music lifestyle. The four chapters contained within this part constitute a kind of ethnography of popular musicians in 1990s Kinshasa, and as such are primarily descriptive in nature. Chapter Five sets up the paradox of life as a ‘star’, which is characterized by a permanent state of liminality, and very pronounced gestures of individual and social distinction. Musicians’ gestures of individualism (‘*la frime*’) are shown to reinforce their liminality, but also make musicians objects of desire. Non-

musicians, for their part, create a sense of intimacy with musicians through the creation and circulation of rumors and gossip. Chapter Six explains several trajectories to a professional career in music—including my own—and highlights the importance of the *atalaku* to understanding the relationship between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ styles of music (also see ch. 10). This chapter describes in detail my apprenticeship as a musician in a local Congolese band, and reflects many of the concerns I have already addressed with regards to ethnographic voice and reflexivity in ethnographic writing.

In Chapter Seven I offer a live-time description of what musicians and audiences do before and during a live concert performance, also referred to as *ndule*. Given my position as a member of a band, I describe these events from the musician’s and not the audience’s point of view (on audience see ch. 9). While this chapter is more descriptive than theoretical, it uses ethnographic description to illustrate some of the key concepts which are important to the analytical material presented in other chapters (liminality and notions of the self in ch. 5, the interaction between musicians and sponsors in ch. 8, and the complex play of male-female relations in ch. 2 and ch. 9). This chapter shows that through the performance of popular music, public displays of individual distinction are not only made accessible, but they also become socially acceptable, at least within the context and logic of live music.

Chapter Eight is a consideration of the way that power relations operate at the micro-political level, not only between bandmembers but also between bandmembers and non-musicians. This chapter examines how the hierarchical structure of musical groups is influenced by the process of splintering (‘dislocation’), an internal dynamic which is grounded as much in the desire to be recognized as an individual, as it is in Congolese notions of what it means to be a *chef* (or ‘boss’). Data from this chapter shows that popular music is one of the few domains in which people can express dissatisfaction with authority (not only with bandleaders, but also the with wealthy and politically powerful), and that claims to this effect do not call into question the basis of authority per se, but they

urge leaders and people in positions of authority to make good on unfulfilled promises of social and financial support.

Part Four ("The Meaning of Music") is more analytical than previous chapters and this is fitting given the complexity of its subject matter, i.e. the question of what popular music means to the people who make and consume it. In Chapter Nine I introduce the notion of 'live texts' in order to show how debates about 'modernity' are expressed through popular song: the wonders and dangers of life in the city, the interpenetration of money and love, the increasing presence of death. I also attempt to show how popular music brings people together in certain contexts and pushes them apart in others. In my analysis of song lyrics, I set up a distinction between 'signposts' and 'tropes' in order to show how musical texts can be understood at various levels of symbolic meaning and can be used by individuals in various ways. Here I am concerned not only with lyrics, but also with musical genres, since both are 'brought to life' or 'activated' in various types of social relations outside of the world of music.

Chapter Ten is in some sense the place to which all the other chapters lead, since it houses the primary findings and the central argument of the thesis. By looking at several ways in which 'modernity' and 'tradition' are embodied and entangled in the practice of popular music, my intention is to describe a particular vision of 'modernity' and to reflect upon what this vision reveals about what it means to be 'modern' in a non-Western context (c.f. Miller 1994). 'Modernity', I argue, is driven by 'tradition', and 'tradition' pulls 'modernity' back into its sphere of utility, resulting in a kind of never-ending, forever changing, cultural political spiral. Chapter Nine and Chapter Ten are complementary since in the former I try to examine local conceptions of the meaning of music, and in the latter I develop more fully what can be considered an outsider's view of music's political and cultural significance. The short "Coda" following Chapter Ten is an attempt to tie these two chapters together by proposing that popular music should not be read as a form of

resistance to 'modernity', or even a sort of escape from within it, but an attempt to gain *mastery* over its many paradoxes and pleasures.

The main argument of the thesis can be stated in the following way: In Congo-Kinshasa, the social phenomenon of popular dance music gives us privileged access to understanding the paradox of being 'modern' in contemporary urban Africa, where 'modernity' is seen as a problem, but also as a resource. In this analysis, I set out to show how 'modernity' and 'tradition' are always and already intertwined, and I suggest that if we look closely enough, what we see is a particular vision of 'modernity', one which not only tells us something about the predicament of living on the receiving end of global industrial capitalism, but one which also reflects peoples' attempts to come to terms with this 'modernity'. Through popular dance music, people living in Kinshasa attempt to take hold of 'modernity' and make it their own.

The sub-themes of this argument are woven in at different places throughout the thesis. Issues having to do with gender and especially male-female relations run throughout my work, but are especially present in Chapters Two, Six, Nine and Ten. The question of ethnic identity is first presented in Chapter Two, but is further elaborated in Chapters Three, Nine and Ten. Notions of the self and personhood are set out in Chapter Five, but also addressed in Chapters Seven, Eight, Nine and Ten. And the theme of power--both personal and inter-personal--is present throughout the thesis, though I give this topic special attention in Chapter Eight. Each of these themes builds itself up around ongoing debates and discourses which I argue are grounded in a particular vision of what it means to 'modern' and what should be done about the predicament of 'modernity' in a contemporary urban setting.

Throughout most of the text, I have chosen to place the terms TRADITION and MODERNITY in single quotes ('tradition', 'modernity'). This is as much a reminder to myself as it is to the reader that the use of these concepts needs to be constantly problematized. Nonetheless, the quotes I use will obviously not do the work for me; I

hope that my discussion of these ideas in the body of the text does justice to the concerns I have outlined above. Various other technical mechanisms are used to differentiate between different languages and language registers:

‘ndule’ is a term in another language.

*ndule* is a term in another language, like a genre or important category that occurs often in my writing, e.g. *rumba*.

“Ndule eza fin” is a novel utterance.

(fr. ‘ambiance’) is a French term and (li. ‘ndule’) refers to Lingala. I use ‘kik’ for Kikongo and ‘kis’ for KiSwahili.

(‘ndule’, [without ‘fr.’ or ‘li.’ beforehand]) is a word used in both French and Lingala, e.g. ‘animation’.

a long passage of text in italics without quotes is a reconstruction from long-term memory not taken directly from field notes or a direct quotation placed at the beginning of a chapter

Single quotes are also used for translations, especially in footnotes. When referring to other chapters, if the reference is in the body of a sentence the chapter title will be written out and capitalized (i.e. ‘Chapter Ten’). In the case of a parenthetical reference, I have abbreviated the chapter title for purposes of convenience (i.e. ‘ch. 10’). For plurals I will try as much as possible to use the plural form of the original language (ex. the French and Lingala term *danceuses*) although sometimes this is too awkward, say for example in the case of *atalaku*, for which no plural usage exists, thus I retain the singular form. A full glossary is included in the appendix to the thesis. In terms of section and chapter titles, I have not numbered sections but I have differentiated between them using different types of headings:

**bold** is the first level of headings and is followed by:  
*italics* (second level) and  
 regular (third level)



I should also call attention to my use of the male gender pronoun. While it is true that the vast majority of musicians in the Kinshasa music scene are men, it is also true that women have played an enormous role as artists and sometimes as patrons of music. I myself had limited opportunities to observe women who work in music (though see ch. 7 and ch. 8), but this limitation was also conditioned by the noticeable decrease of professional female musicians in the 1990s (see ch. 6). I have tried to make up for this bias by devoting considerable attention to the way that men and women in the audience relate to each other through music (ch. 9).

Throughout the text, I will refer to the Democratic Republic of Congo (D.R.C.) as 'Congo-Zaire' or 'Congo-Kinshasa', in order to distinguish it from the Peoples' Republic of the Congo, or 'Congo-Brazzaville' with which it shares a common border [figure 0.3]. When I use the term "Zaire", it is to refer to the particular period after independence but before the arrival of Kabila's forces in Kinshasa, corresponding roughly but not exactly to the years of Mobutu's rule. In most cases, I will simply refer to the Congo-Zaire as 'the Congo' and I will refer to the region surrounding Kinshasa to the southwest (formerly Lower Zaire) as Lower Congo [figure 0.4]. Congo-Kinshasa (a former Belgian colony) and Congo-Brazzaville (a former French colony) both gained independence in 1960. Both countries have played their part in the development of the musical style, although Congolese from Brazzaville have increasingly become overshadowed by the towering presence of the music scene in Kinshasa, which has about ten times the population of Brazzaville, or somewhere near 5,000,000 inhabitants [figure 0.5].

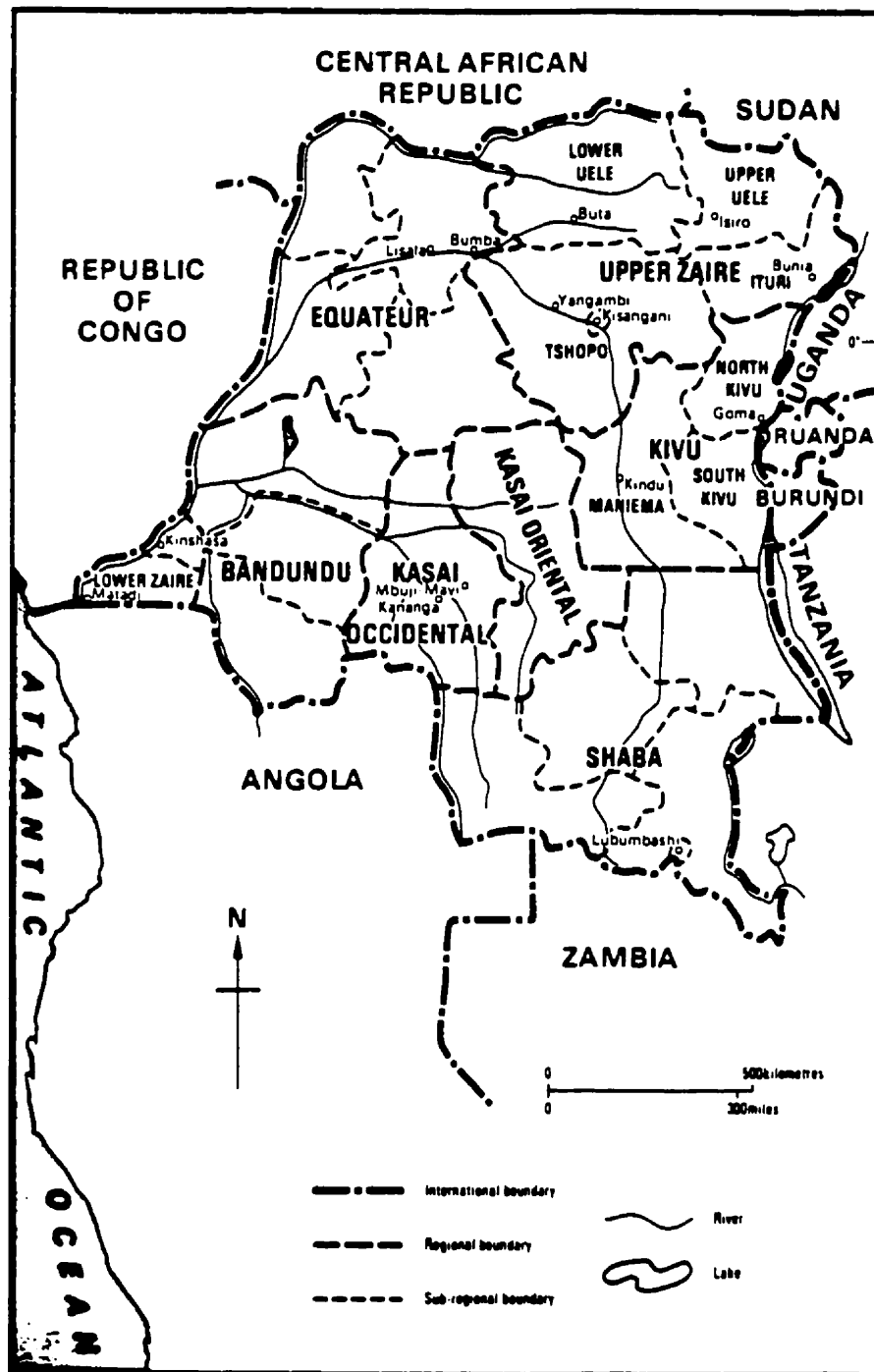


fig. 0.3 Map of Congo-Zaire (from J. MacGaffey 1987)

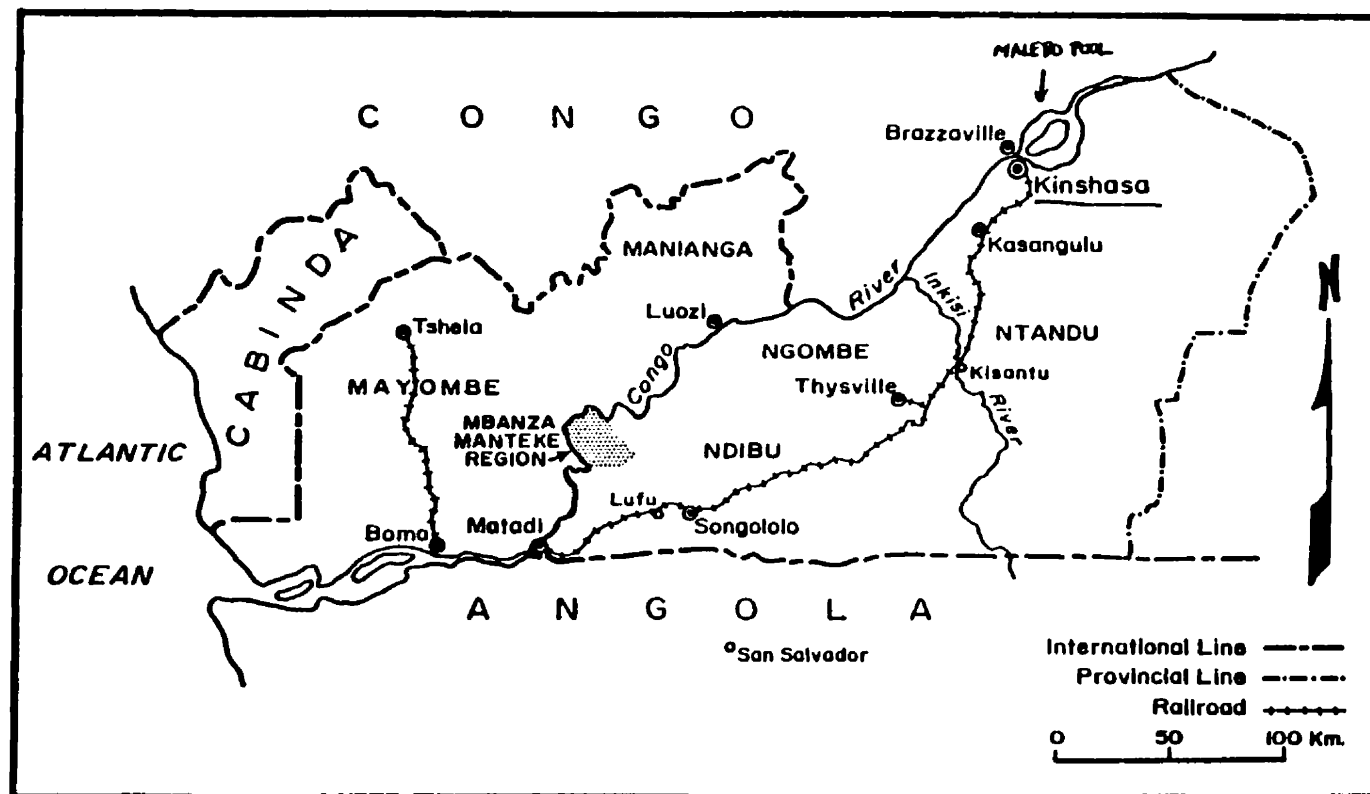


fig. 0.4 Map of Lower Zaire (from W. MacGaffey 1970)

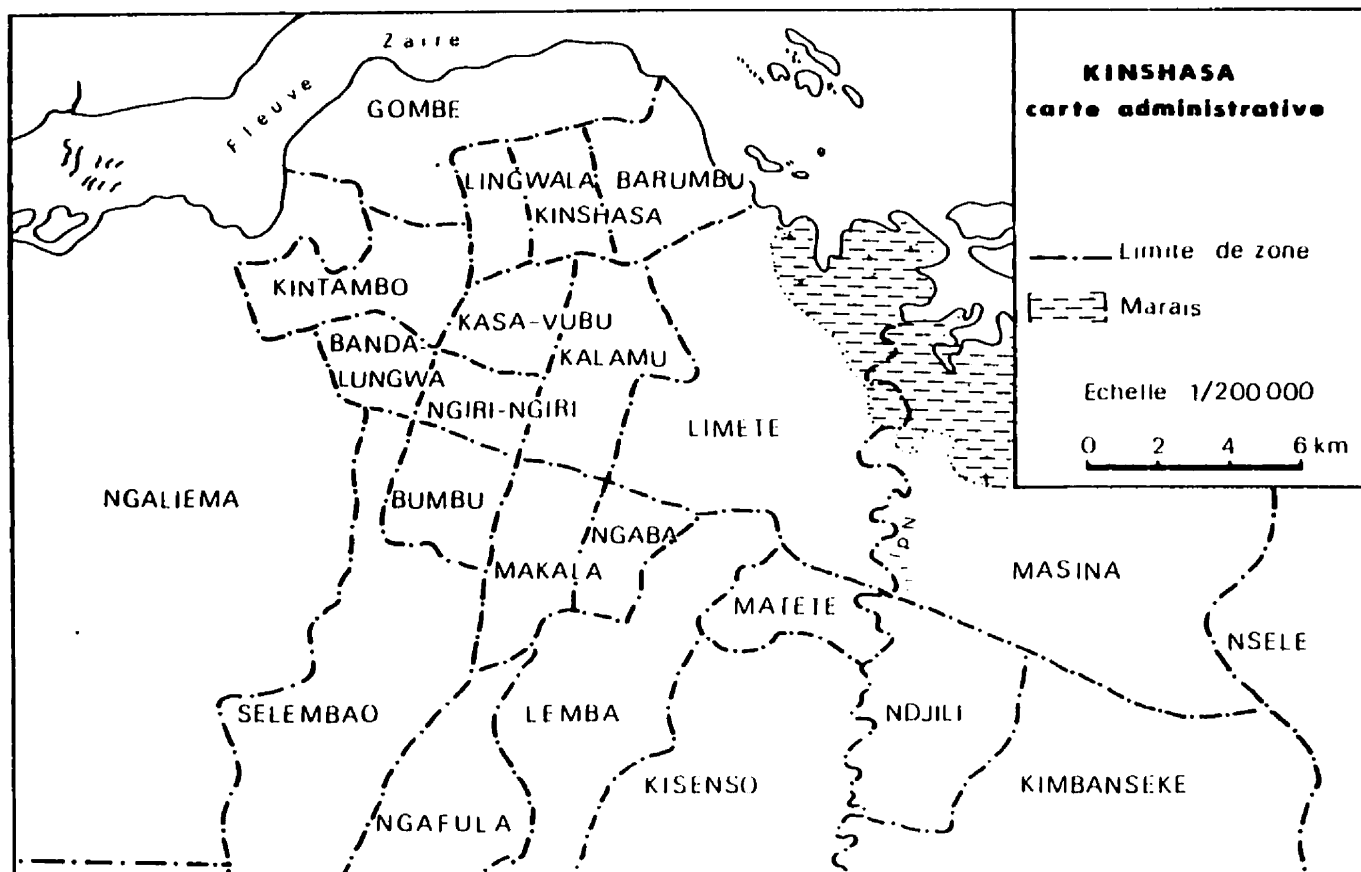


fig. 0.5 Map of Kinshasa (from Ngimbi 1982)

## Part One: Setting the Stage

### Chapter One: Popular Culture and Politics

Theoretical Paths Not Taken

Variations on a Popular Theme

What Popular Culture Is Not

What Popular Culture Is

Popular Culture and Politics

'The Turn to Gramsci'

Practice and Performance

'Modernity' and the Public Sphere

Anthropology and the Fear of Popular Culture

*[Popular culture] is a fugitive category, seemingly ubiquitous and yet always fading as one tries to grasp it.*

(Karin Barber 1987: 5)

*The contemporary cultural production of many African societies--and the many traditions whose evidences so vigorously remain--is an antidote to the dark vision of the postcolonial novelist.*

(Kwame Anthony Appiah 1992: 157)

Judging from most of what has been written on 'popular culture' it would seem that people everywhere are plagued by the problem of defining what is meant by the term 'popular.' At the level of everyday practice, however, this hardly seems to be the case. In the Congo, at least in terms of what I have called 'popular music', the term 'popular' is rarely even used (ch.3). Nonetheless, the bodies of literature which only loosely fit under the heading of 'popular culture' have a great deal to offer the analysis of contemporary culture and human consciousness in an African setting. In the following section I will discuss some of the theoretical signposts of this writing in order to shed some light on the overall argument of my thesis, namely that popular forms of cultural expression give us privileged access to understanding 'modernity' as it is experienced in a non-Western context.

To begin this chapter I will discuss some of the frameworks which may seem appropriate for the study of popular music, but which for various reasons have not proven to be fertile paths of inquiry. This will be followed by a more in-depth discussion of scholarly attempts to understand what is meant by the term 'popular culture', including my own definition which focuses on the three suggestive keywords: public, power, and process. Next I will discuss three different perspectives which have been applied to the study of popular culture in general, and which have influenced my thinking and research on this subject (Gramsci's notion of hegemony, the emerging literature on practice and performance, and Habermas' discussion of the public sphere). None of these perspectives is considered sufficient in and of itself for my problematique. Instead, they each bring something original to larger questions about popular culture and meaning. What they all share to some extent is a common interest in issues having to do with ideology and power. Some are less ethnographic than others; thus the final section of this chapter attempts to link the notion of popular culture formulated above with the field of anthropology, which up until recently has been very reluctant to deal with popular culture and popular forms of expression.

## Theoretical Paths Not Taken

Popular music, the most protean, adaptable, transferable of arts, and the only one to make a noticeable impact on popular audiences outside Africa, was one of the first popular African arts to be seriously studied; but even that was quite a recent development, after many decades in which ethnomusicologists deplored the contamination of authentic indigenous traditional sounds by the infusion of Western rhythms, melodies and technologies (Barber 1997: 1).

Attempts to understand the significance of music in non-western societies are generally grouped under the heading of ethnomusicology and are often associated with research that focuses on the role of music (usually 'traditional music') in relatively isolated classless societies (Merriam 1964; Feld 1990). Early studies in this area set out to catalogue cultural diversity by documenting stylistic and instrumental variation, and often view music as an external expression of a cultural core or cultural sensibility (Chernoff 1979). Although more recent works in ethnomusicology have attempted to locate popular music within a larger social and historical context, relatively little attention has been paid to music as a political or economic phenomenon. The formative years of ethnomusicology were characterized by an almost existential dilemma which pitted esthetics against culture.<sup>1</sup> In his pioneer work *The Anthropology of Music*, Alan Merriam attempted to argue that the field of ethnomusicology should be concerned with "the study of music in culture":

The dual nature of ethnomusicology is clearly a fact of the discipline. The major question, however, is not whether the anthropological or the musicological aspect should gain ascendancy, but whether there is any way in which the two can be merged, for such a fusion is clearly the objective of ethnomusicology and the keystone upon which the validity of its contribution lies (Merriam 1964: 17).

---

<sup>1</sup> Ethnomusicology first began to attract the interest of scholars in the 1950s, especially in the early work of J.H.K. Nketia, Hugh Tracey and David Rycroft. Much of this early work was conducted in Southern Africa, a region which is still strongly represented in Africanist ethnomusicology. Music-related research has been much less common in Eastern Africa and especially rare in Central Africa, despite the richness of musical production in the region.

Before the 1980s, however, there was very little research and writing to bridge this gap. David Coplan's work was an important early step in this direction. His *In Township Tonight!* (1985) is a social history of performance in the South African townships, but it can also be seen as a narrative of the Black experience in South African industrialization (Erlmann 1991). Christopher Waterman (1990), writing about *juju* music in Nigeria, addresses not only the history of the musical style (and its relation to other local styles), but also the social and economic forms of musical organization that reinforce various forms of social inequality and emerging regional identities (Waterman 1990). Veit Erlmann (1991; 1996) has drawn from Marxist perspectives to show how the constraints of industrial capitalism and the creation of urban forms of musical performance have contributed to the emergence of a class-based form of popular consciousness. Studies of this type describe a globally influenced local context in which popular music is more than social or cultural 'icing', but can itself "mirror and shape other social and historical processes" (Waterman 1990: 6).<sup>2</sup> While I share with these studies a commitment to cultural analysis which is grounded in questions of power and history, I have attempted in my account to relate these ideas to a larger body of literature which is concerned with understanding the unfolding and operation of 'modernity' in a local African setting.

Some writing has focused on music as a particular form of cultural commodity, especially on the way that non-Western musical styles are commodified in the form of 'world music' (Erlmann 1996; Feld 1994; White 1998a). The foundational studies of commodity exchange (Marx 1936; Polanyi 1957; Rodney 1974; Braudel 1979; Wallerstein 1979) and the more anthropological studies they inspired (Wolf 1982; Mintz 1985) looked at broad economic and political links which bring together local and regional economies into a global 'world system.' Studies of this sort have tended to portray the flow of

---

<sup>2</sup>Of course qualifications have been made with regards to the explanatory power of music. Whereas many early studies of ethnomusicology assumed an isomorphic relationship between song structure and social structure, later accounts questioned this assumption: "Everything that is socially significant and institutionally real...is not necessarily represented in musical order, occasions, or resources" (Feld 1984: 405; see also Erlmann 1991 and Waterman 1990: 213).



commodities as homogenizing and uni-directional, and as destructive of pre-capitalist societies. In recent years, however, there has been increased interest in the cultural aspects of commodities and commodity flows, an area of research which may prove helpful for understanding the commercialization of cultural forms. At issue here is the very notion of 'commodity', which Appadurai and others have argued should explain not only the production of goods, but also the production of meanings, often for a diverse and diffuse market (Gregory 1982; Taussig 1983; Appadurai 1986; Gudeman 1986; Thomas 1991).

### **Variations on a Popular Theme**

When we add the qualifier popular to culture, we do this because we feel that it allows us to conceptualize certain kinds of human praxis which culture without the qualifier either ignores or makes disappear (Fabian 1998: 1).

The notion of 'popular' cannot be understood independently of the political and social meanings which are already inscribed within it (Barber 1997; Bourdieu 1983; Fabian 1998). The various arms of the state apparatus, via large-scale 'culture industries', take advantage of the fluid nature of the category 'popular' as a rhetorical device to reinforce a position of hegemonic control (Adorno 1991; Adorno and Horkheimer 1993). Their opponents, often romantics, use the term 'popular' to defend the position of the downtrodden and exploited. There are a number of studies which examine the history of the concept of 'popular' (Kitching 1982; Bennett 1986a), as well as an increasing number of sourcebooks on the specific question of popular culture (Motz 1994; Mukerji and Schudson 1991). Given the quality and coverage of these writings, I will not discuss them in detail here. I will, however, discuss the way that certain key contributors to this literature have set out to define and problematize the notion of popular culture. As a framing device for the material presented in later chapters, this section is not intended to be a comprehensive survey of the literature on popular culture. Instead, I have attempted to

focus on certain issues that are particularly relevant to an anthropological line of inquiry and to my larger argument about 'modernity' in an African setting.

### *What Popular Culture Is Not*

Anybody who says 'popular culture' doesn't need to say: 'as opposed to unpopular culture, elite culture, or folk culture, traditional culture, or aristocratic culture,' or whatever. They leave the other bit absent so that it looks fuller as a term than it actually is. But unless we know what it is that it's being contrasted with, we do not get a picture of the whole field of which popular culture is, by definition, only a part (Hall cited in Bennett 1986: 16).

Popular culture almost always implies its other.<sup>3</sup> Most discussions of popular culture--academic and otherwise--begin (or at least are infused) with the belaboured distinction between 'high' culture and 'low' culture, a distinction which is increasingly seen as being based in social politics rather than in some abstract esthetic or intellectual criteria (Barber 1997; Stallybrass & White 1986). Post-modernist critiques have confirmed what we suspected for some time, namely that these two categories exist primarily as social constructs (or perhaps as modes of discourse) and that although late capitalism has witnessed their undoing to some extent, they still exist as social strategies (Bourdieu 1984). Based on a similar distinction between 'elite' and 'non-elite' forms, Adorno and Horkheimer (1993) formulated their argument about the emergence of 'mass culture'.<sup>4</sup> The culture industry, they argued, was responsible for duping the masses under the 'guise of enlightenment'. This 'mass deception' not only stupefies the people, but it also re-conditions them, making subjects and creating consumers. This argument would be both praised and criticized (Hebdige 1993; Middleton 1990), but it is an important building

---

<sup>3</sup>According to Pierre Bourdieu (1983), the term 'popular' refers to everything that is 'non-legitimate'. Compare with Bakhtin's (1984) notion of the 'unofficial'.

<sup>4</sup>Works of art are ascetic and unashamed; the culture industry is pornographic and prudish. Love is downgraded to romance. And, after the descent, much is permitted; even licence as a marketable specialty has its quota bearing the trade description 'daring' (Adorno and Horkheimer 1993: 38).

block in the various strands of cultural critique which attempt to account for the role of the state in their analysis.<sup>5</sup>

The influence of Adorno and Horkheimer (and other members of the Frankfurt School) on the scholarship of cultural politics has led to a certain conflation between mass culture and popular culture (Barber 1997). Over time the terms have become systematized in different ways. One approach views 'popular' or 'mass' culture as something that is imposed on the people and over which the people have no control (e.g. Attali 1985). The other views popular culture as a form of resistance or opposition (e.g. Hebdige 1979). In the first case, mass culture becomes popular culture, in the second the two are diametrically opposed. Whether popular culture is opposed to mass culture or equated with it, popular and mass culture together are often opposed to the categories of 'folk' and 'elite' cultural forms (Barber 1987).<sup>6</sup> The romanticism hinted at in the "oppositional" approach, to some extent a form of populism, has made its presence felt especially in scholarship on Latin America. Rowe and Schelling (1991) present an ideological scheme based on 'romanticist' and 'emancipatory' views of popular culture and García-Canclini (1993) further divides the romanticists into romantic idealists and romantic empiricists. As Barber suggests, the traditions of popular activist theater and populist religious movements in Latin America are important to understanding the history of these terms.<sup>7</sup>

Thus "when the term 'popular culture' is transferred to Africa, it brings with it a history of conflicts, assumptions and problems" (Barber 1997: 8). In Africa, the idea of

---

<sup>5</sup>According to Simon During, Adorno's and Horkheimer's trenchant early critique must be understood in the context in which it was written. As refugees from Nazi Germany exiled in the U.S.A., Hitler's totalitarianism and the American market system tend to be fused in their thought. They were also writing at a time when the American cultural industries, especially film, were still very vertically integrated. The Gramscian 'turn' in cultural studies (see below), as well as the work of Walter Benjamin, took a more nuanced stance with regards to Adorno and Horkheimer's position on 'mass culture'.

<sup>6</sup>Compare these divisions with Raymond Williams' discussion of residual, emergent, and dominant cultures (see 1997).

<sup>7</sup>Barber explains the sub-distinction (from Latin American theater activists) between *popular culture*, meaning "that which serves the people by opening their eyes to the problems of their existence" and *people's culture* or that which emanates from the people but which is a form of false consciousness and thus reinforces the status quo (Barber 1997: 3). Barber has also written about African forms of activist theater (1987).

popular culture is used as a means of straying from an anthropological fixation on tribalism (Fabian 1998: 2). Somewhat reluctantly, Karin Barber (1987) teases out and fixes into place a three-part model of popular culture (traditional, popular, elite) which she argues is the basis for a kind of consensus among Africanist scholars about how to characterize African popular arts (see also Mudimbe 1991). Elite arts are seen as 'complex' and correspond to the mostly European-influenced manifestations of 'high art' such as literature, filmmaking, painting and certain types of music and visual arts. Traditional arts are viewed as "evidence of a rich cultural heritage" (such as masks and other ritual objects), but also include sculpture and bodily decorations which are embedded in social (usually rural) practice. Both elite and traditional art forms are legitimized by Western standards of 'art' (Steiner 1994) and they are patronized or co-opted by the modernizing project of colonial and post-colonial states (Diawara 1992; Mudimbe 1991). Popular culture, according to Barber, is ignored. In the practice of theory, this three-way division often takes the form of a continuum, with two polar opposites (elite and traditional) and a huge unidentifiable "residual category" in the middle (Barber 1987). This status as 'leftover' serves to further marginalize popular culture from academic discussions about 'modernity' and social change. In the following section, I will try to summarize scholarly efforts--not only from Africa--to recuperate this category of cultural knowledge and production.

### *What Popular Culture Is*

In her groundbreaking 1987 article "Popular Arts in Africa", Karin Barber takes on what she calls the 'hydra' of African cultural production and popular arts. This metaphor is apt not only because of the epic proportions of cultural creation in contemporary Africa, but also because of its many faces, or in this case, many heads.

Although Barber's survey is fundamentally concerned with questions of definition and categorization, she must also be credited with close attention to the 'fugitive' or 'ambiguous' nature of the beast (Cooper 1987: 99).<sup>8</sup> In order to tease out certain theoretical themes, in this section I will draw not only from Barber's survey article, but also from several articles which were written in response to it, as well as from recent writing in the field of anthropology, cultural history and cultural studies (c.f. During 1993; Fabian 1998; Mukerji and Schudson 1991).

Most substantive definitions of popular culture refer (at least initially) to the commonsensical idea that popular culture is by definition something that is, simply put, "popular", meaning something that is sought after by a broad cross-section of a particular society or community. This aspect of the definition is attributed varying degrees of theoretical import (Lipsitz 1990; Barber 1987; Bennett 1986a). Those that avoid this basic point of departure do so with good reason, as in the case of Mukerji and Schudson (1991), who opt for an easy and safe 'all-inclusive' definition, or Bennett, who argues for an approach which keeps these terms "definitionally empty in order to fill them politically in varying ways as circumstances may require" (1986b: 8). This definitional emptiness, itself a mystical proposition, echoes Bourdieu's (1983: 1) idea that 'popular' is a "magical expression which is protected from examination" or de Certeau's (1984) "dark rock that resists all assimilation". Roland Barthes (1957) examines the way in which everyday forms and practices are dehistoricized and converted into the myths of bourgeois modernity, an observation which is later made by Stuart Hall: "...popular culture, commodified and stereotyped as it often is, is not at all, as we sometimes think of it, the arena where we find out who we really are, the truth of our experience. It is an arena which is *profoundly* mythic" (quoted in Davies 1995: 135).

---

<sup>8</sup>Granqvist (1990) attempts a similar overview for the region. His analysis calls attention to the importance of cultural forms of expression in non-literate societies, but is clouded by a rather thin attempt to claim popular forms as inherently 'postmodern' because of their multi-vocal nature. Barber (1997) and Fabian (1998) are also important overviews of popular culture theory for the region.

Barber's characterization of popular culture is much more grounded in the concrete. Although she has been accused of constructing a model which is static (Jules-Rosette 1987), Barber's analysis must be seen as one of the first systematic global attempts to classify cultural products in Africa. Barber herself is critical of her model's excessive rigidity, but its emphasis on categories of goods brings to our attention the very neglected questions of production, consumption and commercialization. She details three kinds of popular art forms: those both produced and consumed by the people (what she calls 'fully popular', dance music in Congo is an excellent example), those consumed by the people but not produced by them (imported consumer goods and forms related to government or international development programs), and those produced by the people but not consumed by them (usually forms related to tourism). Each of these three categories has a sub-category which divides the forms into commercial and non-commercial forms. Barber's model can be criticized for not problematizing to a greater extent the role of commercialization (Cosentino 1987), and for tending to favor popular arts as the sole site of innovation and creativity (Arnoldi 1987). Barber herself criticizes her model's tendency to "pre-empt history" (1987a) and agrees with Cooper's suggestion that power must be understood in terms of everyday practice.

In asserting the historic specificity of popular culture in an African setting, Barber is primarily concerned with popular culture's *emergent* quality (c.f. R. Williams 1997):

It is in popular arts that shared understandings are constituted... This, of course, is true to a greater or lesser extent of all art, but it seemed to me that for popular art it is particularly important. Based in emergent classes, which have only a nascent sense of common identity, meeting fleetingly in an environment of alienation and dynamic change, of ruptured ties and new patterns of relationship, popular art is often the only public forum through which all these experiences can be aired (Barber 1987a: 110).

If, as Barber argues, popular arts have their own historicity, can it also be said that they possess a particular style or esthetic? A number of popular culture scholars are skeptical

about this proposition. García-Cancelini (1993) argues that popular culture cannot be reduced to a set of esthetic characteristics since, by definition, it is inherently fluid and non-codified. Despite the fluidity of the category, however, I do think that popular culture abides by a certain logic, one which might be described by Bakhtin's (1984) idea of a 'centripetal' cultural dynamic, or, in more concrete terms, what Achille Mbembe (1992a) has called the 'earthiness' of popular modes of action. Mbembe's discussion of popular parody with regards to the symbolic ritual of the post-colonial state calls up a Gramscian dialectics of power which is consistent with the data I have presented on commercialized praisinging (ch. 8) and the tropic elements of popular song texts (ch. 9).

Hall and Whannel (1967) argue that popular art is highly dependent on the interaction between the performer and the audience, but it is the development of an esthetic of personal style that truly separates popular arts from folk forms (Cawelti 1971; Gamson 1992). The thematic patterns that Barber proposes (rural-urban opposition, urban danger and pleasure, social mobility and misfortune) do not necessarily seem unique to popular arts, but it does seem important to observe that popular artists, unlike practitioners of elite and traditional art, have a high degree of freedom with regards to artistic and professional decisionmaking: "Unofficial [popular] arts ... seem to rejoice in their freedom from the constraints of the official systems of conventions, while at the same time exploiting the possibilities of elements abstracted from both elite and traditional canons" (Barber 1987: 35).<sup>9</sup>

One of the most compelling propositions of Barber's analysis is the suggestion that the categories of popular arts not be seen as empirical classes of products, since "they represent expressive fields with their own centers of gravity, their own characteristic tendencies, pulls of influence, and modes of orientation" (ibid: 19).<sup>10</sup> This passage clearly represents the primary tension in Barber's overall argument. While she very carefully

---

<sup>9</sup>The situation I will describe for Congo, however, (see ch. 4) shows how the decay of post-colonial economic and political infrastructure has meant that popular musicians are far from being free (see also Coda).

<sup>10</sup>This notion of popular culture as 'site' has also been commented on by other scholars of popular culture: García-Cancelini's (1993) "position", Rowe and Schelling's (1991) "dispersed site" and Stuart Hall's "transformations" (1981: 228). See also Barber (1987), Fabian (1998), and Davies (1995).

qualifies the bounded nature of the categories being used to discuss popular culture, there is an underlying quest for structure in her analysis.<sup>11</sup> The argument exposes a definitional anxiety which can be seen as a strength to the extent that it exposes the limitations of Western classification schemes and brings us to the question of indigenous knowledge:

If we ever expect to go beyond the constraints imposed by the tripartite Western model of the arts and avoid an impoverished definition of African expressive forms, we need seriously to investigate how people themselves define specific expressive forms and contexts in local settings (Arnoldi 1987: 80).

"Instead of agonizing about the adjective 'popular'," writes Fabian, "we should concentrate on what it makes appear and known" (1998: 3). Thus what is truly interesting is not determining what is popular and what is not, but looking at how local categories of cultural production inform or reflect the experience of living in a 'modern' African world (ch. 3, 9).

Writing about popular forms of cultural expression is always in danger of conflating popular arts and popular culture (see White 1998a).<sup>12</sup> 'Popular arts' refers to any form of cultural activity or production which is framed in terms of its status as a cultural product or performance. This includes: the performing arts (dance, theater, music, storytelling, comedy), the visual arts (painting, sculpture, handicrafts, cartoons, music videos, whether intended for consumption by locals or tourists), certain forms of popular fiction and film, and certain forms of decoration, including graffiti (houses, taxis, coffins, bodies).<sup>13</sup> These categories (which I will refer to as 'expressive culture') are thus

---

<sup>11</sup>The general feeling I get from what has been written about popular culture is that there is a deep concern with defining and delimiting the notion. Despite the important efforts to see popular culture not as an entity, but as a space or site of cultural critique (see previous footnote), most discussions continue to agonize over what is meant by the term and how it is distinct from other kinds of culture.

<sup>12</sup>Karin Barber has avoided this problem by framing her discussion in terms of popular arts, although she does relate the arts to 'culture' in the larger sense of the term (1987: 16). Fabian explores what it is about popular culture that "causes us to think of it, and talk about it, as an art rather than a science or religion of living and survival" (1998: 92). Geertz's (1983) essay on the relationship between art and culture makes the simple but elegant point that esthetics are just as important in non-Western societies as they are in the West (see also Galaty 1983), and that discussions about art in these societies are grounded not in esthetics for esthetics' sake, but in the political and social realities which correspond to expressive culture.

<sup>13</sup>Barber's comprehensive scheme of categories of popular art forms takes into consideration the fine nuances of art forms which vary according to producer and consumer. The complex category of imported



a sub-set of the larger category of 'popular' culture, which in addition to everything mentioned above, also includes oral-based forms of cultural expression (rumors, sayings, language, jokes), public forms of festivity and competition (carnival, parade, beauty pageants), and everyday practices and gestures which occur outside of a setting framed by the terms 'folklore' or 'traditional'.

This overview (in actuality nothing more than a list) gives us an idea of what popular *is*, but it tells us very little about what popular culture *does*. In order to make this leap, I want to highlight three aspects which are not necessarily unique to popular culture, but which I consider to be more representative of popular culture than other cultural forms.<sup>14</sup> I hope that these aspects illuminate some of the ways in which popular culture differs from culture 'tout court' (Fabian 1998), but most importantly that they attest to popular culture's potential to reveal valuable information about the paradoxes of 'modernity' and of 'being modern' in a Congolese setting.

First, popular culture is **public**. In other words, it is readily available to a wide-ranging audience and used/imagined by a significant proportion of a given society or community. It is not necessarily linked to the poor or the urban, but given the large number of people concentrated in urban areas, and given that many of those people are poor, it is usually they who figure most prominently in its elaboration. It can take the external form of 'traditional' culture or 'folklore' (ch. 10), but it is most often placed in an oppositional or syncretic relation to these forms. Second, and primarily because of its 'public' character, popular culture is a space of social and political negotiation which inevitably becomes entangled in the struggle for **power** (in both material and ideological terms). While it is not always sold (for example rumors or language), I view popular

---

cultural goods (what Barber calls "not produced but consumed locally") I take to be important parts of popular culture but not within the category of popular arts.

<sup>14</sup>Fabian outlines four concomitants of popular culture: it is plural, it occurs in shared time, it is political, and it reveals cracks in received culture theory. I see the last as qualitatively different from the first three, since it addresses the concerns of the anthropologist and not the practitioners of popular culture. Of the four, I am most intrigued by the second (it occurs in shared time), because of the way that it exposes the temporality of the tripartite categorization discussed in most of the writing on popular culture (elite, traditional, popular).

culture in its commercial form as the most interesting for the purposes of analysis because of the complex ways in which commercial culture is related to issues of value and meaning (ch. 4). Third, popular culture is not only an object but also a **process**. The production of popular culture involves individual agency (execution, promotion, distribution), but also processes that are fundamentally social (ch. 7, 9) and profoundly political (4,8). Although popular culture often takes the form of a physical product, its political and social content is more visible when it is seen as a site or a discursive space (Fabian 1998).

### **Popular Culture and Politics**

In the previous section I attempted to bring together ideas from various theoretical streams in order to deepen our understanding of what is meant by the term 'popular culture'. It seems appropriate that an object of study as variable and diffuse as this one should benefit from the collective wisdom of various perspectives. In this section I will use a similar eclecticism to discuss some of the theoretical approaches which give a more political rendering of popular forms of cultural expression: cultural studies and the work of Gramsci, anthropological theories of practice and performance, and the emerging public sphere literature inspired by the work of Habermas. In their own way, each of these approaches has contributed to my thinking on the subject of popular culture, and they each reflect the inseparable nature of popular culture and politics. They are as much frameworks from which I draw inspiration as they are theoretical models (i.e. ideals) toward which I strive. I am convinced that some combination of these approaches can further our understanding of how local discourses of 'modernity' are articulated and activated through popular forms of cultural expression.

### 'The Turn to Gramsci'

These theoretical developments, finally, have been accompanied by a sureness of political purpose as the study of popular culture has been defined as a site of *positive* political engagement by both socialists and feminists in their concern to identify both those aspects of popular culture which serve to secure consent to existing social arrangements as well as those which, in embodying alternative values, supply a source of opposition to those arrangements (Bennett 1986a: xii).

The 'theoretical developments' in Bennett's passage refer to the particular turn of events which would permit the conditions for the institutionalization of the study of popular culture through what would become known as British cultural studies.<sup>15</sup>

According to Bennett, debates in cultural studies during the 1970s were centered around the tension between two conflicting approaches or paradigms within the field.

Structuralism was characterized by a concern to explore how deeply embedded structures affect social practice and meaning (e.g. Saussure's *langue* which dictates the outcomes of *parole*). Culturalism, on the other hand, engaged in a romantic search for authentic values and expressions of subordinate social groups and classes (Bennett 1986a: xii). Bennett argues that structuralism sought to "reveal the obfuscating mechanisms of the dominant ideology" through the analysis of popular cultural texts, while culturalism set out to locate an authentic dominated voice by "interpreting its meaning and amplifying its cultural volume" (ibid: xiv). The two paradigms also corresponded with diverging disciplinary interests, the former being primarily engaged in the area of cinema, television and popular writing, and the latter in history and sociology. The impasse resulting from this difference of opinion, which was as much theoretical as it was political, would only be resolved by the revitalization of the concept of hegemony and what Bennett refers to as the 'turn to Gramsci':

---

<sup>15</sup>Here I am referring to the field of studies which takes its cue from research beginning in the 1970s coming out of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the U.K. For a good summary of this approach see Turner (1992). For a more analytical historical view of cultural studies, see Davies (1995). There are also a number of readers in the area of cultural studies, see especially During (1993).

In Gramsci's conspectus, popular culture is viewed neither as the site of the people's cultural deformation nor as their cultural self-affirmation or, in any simple Thompsonian sense, of their own self-making; rather, it is viewed as a force field of relations shaped, precisely, by these contradictory pressures and tendencies—a perspective which enables a significant reformulation of both the theoretical and the political issues at stake in the study of popular culture (1986a: xiii).

The repositioning which resulted from this 'turn' to the work of Gramsci created a critical Marxist position from which popular culture could be analyzed without falling victim to either the gloomy determinism of mass culture theories or the romantic idealism of the culturalist approach. Gramsci's theory of hegemony (see 1971) enabled cultural analysis to move from a notion of power based on the simple opposition of domination and resistance, to one which viewed power as a complex dialectic of *power relations*, effectively neutralizing the base-superstructure debate which has for so long haunted Marxist critical scholarship (R. Williams 1997). Thus popular culture in Gramscian terms constitutes the "terrain on which the dominant, subordinate and oppositional cultural values and ideologies meet and intermingle..." (Bennett 1986b: 19; c.f. Manuel 1993). For Gramsci, popular culture is neither a simple vehicle for hegemonic power nor a mechanical response to its presence, but a complex space of interpenetration between the two. As Bennett notes for Gramsci:

It is no more possible in the past than in the present to locate a source of popular cultural activity or expression which is not, at the same time, profoundly shot through with elements of a dominant culture and, in some sense, located within it as well as against it (Bennett 1986b: 18).

Thus a romanticized notion of 'resistance from below' no longer has the same magic. Frederick Cooper has observed that "...much of the resistance literature is written as if the 'R' were capitalized" (1994: 1532). Lila Abu-Lughod (1990b) has shown how the human sciences' fascination with the concept of resistance has tended to obscure more detailed understandings of how power actually operates in society and between its

members (see Coda). It is this dialectic aspect of Gramsci's work (also echoed in the writings of Raymond Williams, e.g. 1997) which informs the various discussions of power scattered throughout this text, be they in relation to the state (ch. 2, 4), social forms of authority and differentiation (ch. 9), or embedded in the everyday micropolitics of life as a musician (ch. 8).

### *Practice and Performance*

But I am saying that we should look not for the components of a product but for the conditions of a practice. When we find ourselves looking at a particular work, or group of works, often realizing, as we do so, their essential community as well as their irreducible individuality, we should find ourselves attending first to the reality of their practice and the conditions of the practice as it was executed (R. Williams 1997: 48).

One of the effects of this renewed emphasis on culture as a site of struggle was to render visible a previously neglected area of theoretical inquiry, namely everyday people and practices. If, as Gramsci argued, hegemony depends on the tacit acceptance of 'the people', the question of how and in what contexts this agreement is negotiated becomes a crucial one. Many theorists have looked to practice for answers. Early practice-based approaches took cues from anthropological research which looked at how culture was reproduced through ritual (e.g. Turner 1969), but with time there emerged a focus on the everyday and the ordinary (Barthes 1957; Ginsburg 1980), not only in the form of routines (as in Bourdieu's *habitus*) but also as tactics (de Certeau 1984).<sup>16</sup> According to Sherry Ortner (1984), practice-based approaches in the early 1980s, drawing as much from Marx as from Weber, often set out to better understand the relationship between human action and "the system", or in Giddens' (1979) terms between agency and structure.

---

<sup>16</sup>In an interesting strategic move, Jean and John Comaroff relate research on ritual to the burgeoning field of practice-based anthropology: "As a result, ritual has, for many, become almost synonymous with 'signifying' practice..." (1993: xvi). Marcus discusses practice anthropology as a theoretical movement which pitted itself against the positivist 'high theory' of the 1970s (Marcus 1986: 166).

Following the very provocative suggestion that subjectivity in late capitalism witnessed a gradual shift from the field of production to that of consumption (Baudrillard 1970), much of the literature on practice has concerned itself with what Michel de Certeau (1984) has referred to as 'consumer production', or the production of meaning through consumption (McCracken 1988; Miller 1987; R. Williams 1991).<sup>17</sup> Retooling or 'poaching' the world of goods which is imposed upon them, "users make innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules" (de Certeau 1984: xiv). Thus for de Certeau consumption is a profoundly political process: "The tactics of consumption, the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong, thus lend a political dimension to everyday practices" (ibid: xvii). But consumption practices are not the only means through which de Certeau's 'everyman' attempts to impose his own meanings upon the socio-economic order. Walking in the city, renting an apartment, cooking, and especially speaking, to the extent that they all involve a tactical appropriation of the means of power (buildings, real estate, food, speech, etc.), can also be seen as acts of subversion. In Chapter Ten I will discuss how the symbolic power of 'modernity' is appropriated for use in the production of local popular music.

De Certeau's model of social action, one which privileges the act of speaking or 'enunciation', reflects the influence of Austin's notion of performative utterances. As a corrective to structuralist linguistics, anthropological theories have also looked at the performative aspects of language (Finnegan 1969; Hymes 1974; Kratz 1989) and the social and esthetic aspects of ritual practice (Galaty 1983; Turner 1969). One of the important outcomes of this research was the idea that performance is not simply the enactment of a text, but a complex mode of social production: "Performance *is* the text in the moment of its actualization" (Fabian 1990: 9). Thus the concepts of 'practice' and 'performance'

---

<sup>17</sup>Breckenridge and Appadurai have privileged consumption in much of their work because "in trying to understand the political imaginary of modernity, it is important to engage with the subjective experience of modern life, which is closely tied up with particular sorts of pleasure, desire, and agency" (1995: 5).

share similar roots and parallel histories. Margaret Thompson Drewal, in her important overview of performance studies in Africa, gives a definition of performance which reflects the proximity of the two: "the practical application of embodied skills and knowledge to the task of taking action in everyday social life" (1991: 3).<sup>18</sup>

The primary value of theories based in practice and performance is that they view expressive culture as the product of human labor.<sup>19</sup> Expressive culture is a form of work, not only insofar as it involves physical human labor (finding and preparing materials, collecting and maintaining tools, searching for inspiration and artistic production whether it be in or outside of a performative context), but also to the extent that it embodies complex sets of meaning which can be missed, caught and even reinterpreted by a diverse and changing audience. To understand cultural products broadly defined it is necessary to understand the processes which bring them to life as social facts, namely those of production, distribution and consumption (Barber 1987; Hall 1993; Steiner 1994). In this research, various intermediaries are seen as the agents which move popular culture along from producer to consumer, ranging from simple go-betweens to relatively sophisticated cultural brokers (ch. 4). The fact that popular cultural forms are often commercially mediated allows us to see them as moments of exchange as well as means in the production of social and cultural capital (Waterman 1990; White 1998a).

But understanding these commercial processes does not stop at the point of sale. In fact, as I will argue in Chapter Nine, it is here that a good deal of the interpretive work should begin. The emergence of theories of reception (primarily in literary studies) and the post-structuralist insistence on the multiple meanings generated by texts have contributed to

---

<sup>18</sup>Both Drewal and Fabian (1990) discuss the relationship between 'repetition' and 'practice'. Drewal's analysis focuses on repetition as "re-presentation with critical difference" while Fabian is mostly concerned with how form and content are operationalized through repetition (meaning 'rehearsal'). In the section entitled "Practice is Performance" (ch. 7) I also call attention to the complex semantic shifts in these terms.

<sup>19</sup>The focus on culture as a productive process (both material and symbolic) enables us to avoid two important methodological distortions: first, that of isolating cultural meaning in the study of particular products or texts (as an idealist approach would do) and second, that of mistaking the structure of such a cultural product for the structure of society as a whole (ch. 8). For a good example of this approach, see García-Canclini (1983).

the elaboration of a set of methods which are commonly invoked (see Radway 1984; Hall 1980; DeCerteau 1984), but rarely operationalized. As Barber has shown for Africa, the performative nature of popular arts--combined with various sorts of sub-text and self-censorship--makes 'reading' a very complex undertaking (Barber 1997: 8). And although relatively little research has been done on exactly how African popular texts are interpreted, there is ample evidence to prove that they are in fact interpreted: "... such works are made *in order* to be, and *in the expectation* of being, interpreted" (ibid, original emphasis). In Chapter Nine I will discuss the importance of 'the message' to Congolese cultural production, and in Chapter Ten I will examine how popular music, with meaning condensed in words as well as motion, expresses the paradoxes of a 'modernity' which is largely determined by the nature of its relationship with 'tradition'. The literature on practice and performance is important to my research not only because it has registered an increasing interest in the history of performative genres (ch. 3), but also because of its emphasis on social jockeying and a more systematic treatment of questions of power (ch. 8, 9).<sup>20</sup>

### *'Modernity' and the Public Sphere*

The genie is out of the bottle, and as localities turn into 'sites' throughout the world, particular societies become locations not of pristine cultures, but rather of complex and specific negotiations between history and globality (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1995: 16).

Drawing on the work of Habermas, Appadurai and Breckenridge propose the use of the term 'public' and its accompanying 'public culture' to capture the diffuse and diverse forms of cultural practices and products which characterize modern societies all over the world (1995). Habermas' notion of the 'public sphere', which is based in a post-industrial

---

<sup>20</sup>Important examples of historical approaches to the study of African performance include Coplan (1985), Erlmann (1991; 1996a), Fabian (1990), Ranger (1975) and Waterman (1990). The question of power and performance has been taken up with regards to the state (Averill 1997), social class (Waterman 1990) and external forces such as the world market for music (Erlmann 1996b).



European reading of social and political change, is characterized by the separation of the 'private' from the 'public', and the emergence of a mass media which leads to the depoliticization of public life. Despite the criticisms of Habermas' work, Appadurai and Breckenridge prefer his notion of 'public' culture to the less neutral terms 'mass culture' or 'popular culture': "The term *public culture* thus allows us to describe not a type of cultural phenomenon but a *zone* of cultural debate..." (1995: 5). Public culture, they argue, cannot be understood apart from the processes of globalization (which they have addressed in much of their work, especially the journal *Public Culture*) and without first separating the notion of 'public' from its particular historical association with civil society in Europe.

Appadurai and Breckenridge thus appropriate the term for uses other than those intended by Habermas. In this context, "what is being generated are prismatic structures of modernity, which are peculiar in the shape of the cultural and historical trajectories they bring to the present and thus to the way they refract (or inflect) the worlds they imagine" (1995: 15). In Chapter Nine (and later Chapter Ten), I will look specifically at what is meant by these 'trajectories', beginning from the premise that "what is distinctive about any particular society is not the fact or extent of its modernity, but rather its distinctive debates *about* modernity..." (ibid: 16). Not only does the notion of 'modernity' vary across cultures, but more and more crossing of cultures (i.e. globalization) means that flows of ideas and objects are increasingly complex:

Most societies today possess the means for the local production of modernity, and, as their members move around the world, these experiences inform and inflect one another, thus making even the paradigmatic modernity of the United States and Western Europe (itself not an unproblematic assumption) no more pristine (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1995: 1).

In the case of Congolese popular music, we have a form of popular (or public) culture which tends to cover or obscure signs of political manipulation, commercial modification, and conventional expressions of ethnic identity (ch. 10), and this mystification enables the music to be picked up and dispersed in the form of a

commodified cultural product (White 1998a). As a friend once said to me, “Africa produces warm rhythms and bad news, and we consume them both”. Congolese popular music is a true commodity (both in and outside of the country) because it has taken on a fetishized form that keeps us from being able to perceive the social context and history of its production (ch. 4). If there can exist a body of research on the political economy of culture (García-Canclini 1993; Davies 1995), it might look something like this:

An analysis of art in the age of mechanical reproduction must do justice to these relationships, for they lead us to an all-important insight: for the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual [and I would add the state]. To an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility (Benjamin 1968: 224).

### **Anthropology and the Fear of Popular Culture**

There is a chip on the shoulder of anyone in the academic world who dares take popular culture seriously because he or she does so always in the face of a tradition of high culture and is invariably reckoned by many colleagues alternately shallow or subversive (Mukerji and Schudson 1991: 24).

The proposition of doing the anthropology of popular culture in Africa is highly contentious, not only because popular culture is a relatively new field of inquiry which, because of its association with life in the city and the world of commerce seems more well-suited to sociology than anthropology, but also because anthropology’s special relationship with Africa (even more so than with other regions of the world) has been based on some notion of distilled or ‘pure’ culture, what Fabian (1998) refers to as “culture *tout court*.”<sup>21</sup> For those who feel uncomfortable with the idea of popular culture, to look at it in an African context may seem indulgent given the very urgent project of understanding poverty

---

<sup>21</sup>On the history of Africanist anthropology see Falk-Moore’s recent overview (1994).

and democratic development. I would argue, however, that the study of popular culture, if properly done, addresses precisely these concerns. Not only does it expose the complexity of various hegemonic relations within African societies which tend to perpetuate an ever-increasing gap between the rich and the poor (ch. 2, 4, 8), but it also provides us with a local critique of capitalist development and modernity which assumes individual free will as the basis for social justice and democracy (ch. 10).

Before making a declaration of this order it may be useful to clear the air with regards to the relationship between mainstream anthropology and the study of popular culture. The study of popular culture, contrary to what it may seem, is born of anthropology (c.f. Fabian 1998). The special affinity between anthropology and popular culture has been remarked upon from within and outside of the field.<sup>22</sup> As I will show below, the study of popular culture, far from being oppositional to the canons of contemporary cultural anthropology, may even be seen as a mediating force between two conflicting versions of the notion of culture. One of the shortcomings of this text may be the fact that I often assume the reader, like myself, has a very broad definition of the term 'culture'. While I do not intend to give a history of the concept, it may be helpful to place myself within some of the debates on this matter.

The Boasian definition of culture (wholes are made up of many interrelated parts) was intended as a critique of the evolutionist paradigm which viewed cultural diversity as analagous to biological stages of development. But Boas (and his students, especially Ruth Benedict) also discounted diffusionist theories for their tendency to treat culture in an isolated, piecemeal fashion. The skepticism which Boas expressed with regards to the existence of underlying cultural laws or structures would foreshadow most of the debates that later came to characterize cultural anthropology as a whole. Although the history of anthropological theory since Boas is by no means a simple narrative (see Ortner 1984), it

---

<sup>22</sup>According to Mukerji and Schudson, "Anthropology's catholic approach to the study of human societies has been essential to the revival (in many disciplines) of popular cultural studies" (1991: 18). Fabian (1998) makes an argument for popular culture as a sort of corrective to received notions of classical culture theory.

seems clear from most accounts that following the development of the two reigning post-war paradigms (British and American), anthropology would become divided into two general tendencies, one structuralist and the other culturalist (also 'symbolic' or 'interpretive', compare with Bennett's use of these terms, discussed above).<sup>23</sup> Structuralism's emphasis on stability reflected the view that cultural symbols and myths revealed an underlying coherent set of social and cognitive structures (Lévi-Strauss). Culturalism, on the other hand (the most often cited example being Geertz) viewed social activity as a site in which values and beliefs were produced or worked out, a space in which people could "think out loud" about their culture (c.f. Fabian 1978).

This is where the study of popular culture fits in. Popular forms of cultural expression by their very nature require an integrated, politicized view of culture which combines insights from both theoretical streams. Because popular cultural forms are often implicated in commercial networks of production and distribution, they call attention to important structural processes such as globalization and commodification, or the operation of hegemony at the international, national and local levels.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, the study of popular culture (especially performance or practice-based approaches) gives us privileged access to information about how personal identities are constructed and experienced within these larger global contexts. The focus on the context of production (see R. Williams 1997) represents a unique opportunity to see how these distinct phenomena become articulated through the actions of various kinds of institutions and intermediaries. Not that these aspects are unique to the study of popular culture, but the fact that popular culture is performed, sold and sought after by a large portion of the population (elites as well as non-elites) makes it uniquely suited to accomplishing the objectives of a politicized, holistic anthropology (see Introduction). It is in this sense that popular culture can be seen as a corrective to the

---

<sup>23</sup>For the sake of simplifying my argument, I will not discuss the cultural ecology approach as developed by Leslie White and Julian Steward. In most accounts this approach takes on the status of a third school or tendency (see Ortner 1984).

<sup>24</sup>Here I am obviously using 'structure' in the Marxist and not the Levi-Straussian sense.

problems which have plagued anthropology and other forms of cultural analysis in recent years (Bhabha 1994; Fabian 1998; Hannerz 1992; Marcus and Fischer 1986).

But popular culture is more than just a way of solving academic conundra. It is a way of bringing us closer to the political implications of the work that we do as analysts or observers of foreign, often dominated cultures (Fabian 1998). As early as 1978, Fabian was already formulating an argument about the “conjuring trick” of the social sciences and humanities which rendered popular forms of cultural expression invisible to foreign and local researchers alike.<sup>25</sup> The *idea* of popular culture, then, is something that I think causes a certain amount of fear among people who consider themselves to be experts of culture in the sense of the French term *ethnologie* (that is the set of values, practices and beliefs which are most easily observable in egalitarian, non class-based societies). Not only is popular culture diffuse and difficult to characterize (Barber’s hydra), but it is also “tainted” by its exposure to life in the city and its intimacy with the processes of commercial production. Furthermore, it also represents an area of inquiry which because of its apparent similarity to Western cultural forms (both spatially and temporally) is easily accessed by a myriad of ‘non-expert’ cultural *bricoleurs* (journalists, popular culture critics, folklorists). Whereas in the past, anthropologists had a kind of monopoly on culture (Pratt 1986), popular culture forces us to realize that culture is in fact everywhere, and the increasingly blurry border between ‘real’ ethnography and other forms of cultural analysis (area studies, cultural studies, travel literature, etc.) threatens our perception of ourselves as specialists of ‘culture’. If it is true that popular culture “forces us to rethink the idea of culture itself” (Fabian 1998: 31), then what we are presented with is a very unsettling proposition.

In this chapter I have attempted to argue that popular culture offers us valuable information about vast areas of public knowledge and experience which traditional social

---

<sup>25</sup>Popular music is conspicuously absent from Mudimbe’s (1980) almost 100-page overview of “culture” which was written as a contribution to Vanderlinden’s ‘essai de bilan’ on the state of affairs in Congo-Zaire.

anthropology has tended to ignore, especially in its research on Africa. In the case of highly commercialized forms of popular culture such as Congolese popular music, we have easy access to information about the **processes** by which cultural meanings are produced and disseminated through music, about the embodiment of various sorts of interpersonal and institutional **power** in the music's production and dissemination, and about the emergence of a Congolese **public** sphere which is dominated by music and characterized by various forms of social interaction and new forms of urban consciousness. These points, which are essential to any understanding of the complexity of 'modernity' in an African context, will also be taken up in the discussion of historical issues which I address in the following chapter.

## Part One: Setting the Stage

### Chapter Two: Mediating the Colonial Experience

No History Without Problems  
Studying the African City

From Nsasa to 'Kin La Belle'

Looking for Leopoldville (1910-1933)  
Carving Out a Space in the City (1933-1945)  
The Emergence of an African Public Sphere (1945-1960)  
The City as a Symbolic Space

Cultural Politics and the Politics of Culture

*Les Petits Blancs*  
The Politics of Sexuality  
Masking Ethnicity

Mediating the Colonial Experience

*We chose the wrong colonizer; Belgium has no influence in culture.*

(Manda Tchebwa, personal communication)

*Modern Zairean music exists because of a European presence here. This is something that I want all those who read about our music to understand.*

(Michel Lonoh, personal communication)

## No History Without Problems

Recent historical studies of Africa have expressed some degree of discomfort with the project of representing "African experience" (Cohen & Odhiambo 1989). As I discussed in the previous chapter, studies of popular culture in Africa come at a time when anthropology is increasingly sensitive to the importance--and complexity--of historical data as sources of information about African culture or 'experience' (Erlmann 1996a; Hunt ; Fabian 1996; Jewsiewicki 1992). Johannes Fabian, writing about the emergence of popular theater in Congo-Zaire, has called attention to the unevenness and contingency of popular forms of cultural expression:

... to insist on the attribute 'historical' is to introduce an argument which will allow us to see the emergence of popular theater as one form of a larger struggle for the production and expression of communicable knowledge about life in urban-industrial Africa--factual but also esthetic, emotive, reflexive and so forth. Those forms that did develop to the level of mass media (music, painting, theater) owe their existence, not to a more or less predictable evolution following some general laws or patterns, but to specific constellations, accidents in fact, and to an interplay of personal choices and sociopolitical conditions which have always been ridden with conflicts and contradictions. If it was developmental, this history has been characterized by breaks and breakthroughs more than by stages and transitions (Fabian 1990: 55).

Karin Barber, discussing Ranger's often-cited *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa* (1975), writes that there is a tension throughout his work between using *beni* as a tool to understand social history, and using facts of social history to illuminate the phenomenon of *beni*. If this tension exists in my analysis, it is to some extent a function of the way that popular culture operates, sometimes reflecting social change, sometimes affecting it. Ultimately, I do not see this tension as a handicap, but as an analytical strength.

The scope of this chapter is necessarily limited by the dizzying amount of material that has been written about the various phases of Congolese history (see e.g. Vellut 1974). For the purposes of my overall argument, I have limited my discussion to the colonial period subsequent to the Congo Free State. I will focus on the period from 1910 to



roughly 1960, the period during which the city of Leopoldville (later Kinshasa) became the capital of the Belgian Congo and the period when visible signs of a public, urban culture began to emerge from the contact between Europeans and Africans from various walks of life. In this chapter I will not address the particularities of cultural policy during the Mobutu regime, primarily because the formative years of 'modern' Congolese music occurred under colonial rule (1939-1959). That said, the influence of Mobutuist policy, which manipulated as much as it neglected, should not be underestimated. In Chapter Ten, I address some features of Mobutu's complex *politique culturelle*, and in future research I will attempt to draw comparisons between colonial and post-colonial policy with regards to culture and cultural production in the Congo.<sup>1</sup> My reading of Congolese history is also somewhat biased in its discussion of the colonial trinity (church, state, commerce). While I refer at times to the relationship between the colonial state and various missionary groups or industrial interests (especially in Elizabethville), in this chapter I am primarily interested in the nature of the interaction between the colonial administration and its African subjects in a colonial urban setting.

In order to problematize the relationship between popular culture and politics, it is necessary to examine at least two aspects of Congo-Zaire's recent history, first the evolution of Kinshasa as an urban center and a symbolic space, and second the various forms of social and cultural policy which have been brought to bear on cultural production in the region. Before discussing the particular history of Kinshasa, I will look briefly at some of what has been written about cities and the process of urbanization in an African setting. The specific sections on the evolution of Kinshasa will be divided into three distinct historical periods which correspond more or less with changes in colonial policy, but also changing politics and demographics in the Belgian colonial world.<sup>2</sup> This will be

---

<sup>1</sup>In other chapters I have discussed the effects of Mobutuist policy on the music industry (ch. 4), and the relationship between popular music and 'state-sponsored' music which was intended to promote Mobutu's complex political machine (ch. 9).

<sup>2</sup>Although I am primarily concerned with the case of Kinshasa, some examples from other colonial urban centers will also be used (especially Elizabethville [Lubumbashi] and Stanleyville [Kisangani]).

followed by a brief discussion of the Congolese city as a symbolic space. The second part of this chapter will examine several areas of social interaction during the colonial period in which local and not so local notions of 'culture' and 'modernity' were held up for debate, called into question, sometimes altered, and sometimes fixed in place. In the final section I will examine the possibility that popular culture in the form of music and urban nightlife acted as a mediating force between conflicting views about the virtues of 'modernity' in the Belgian colonial context.

### Studying the African City

For better or worse, the new fabric of African society is the city (Balandier 1985 [1955]: vii).

Africa is most often portrayed as a rural continent. While it may be true that levels of urbanization are lower in Africa than in Asia or Latin America, it is also true that Sub-Saharan Africa has one of the highest *rates* of urbanization in the world.<sup>3</sup> Farming is the most common occupation in Africa and it is probably true that the vast majority of urban Africans have relatives in rural areas, but it is also true that the city takes up a great deal of space in African imaginations. More than just a place to find work or make money, it is a place of wonders and dangers, and it has been so for a long time.<sup>4</sup> Apart from a high concentration of cities in southwest Nigeria, cities (that is more than 100,000) are relatively evenly spread throughout the continent. African cities have certain characteristics in common with cities in other parts of the world: a history of colonial occupation, huge disparities in wealth and standard of living, high degrees of ethnic diversity, elaborate

---

<sup>3</sup>Certain cities in sub-Saharan Africa have registered a 7% rate of change, which means a doubling in size every 10 years. Urbanization levels for the continent in 1960 were estimated at 15%, in 1990 at approximately 30% and are estimated at 40% for the year 2000 (United Nations 1992).

<sup>4</sup>Urban traditions existed well before the arrival of Europeans (Balandier 1968 gives a rich description for the Kongo Kingdom), but urbanism would obviously take on a very different form under the influence of colonial and capitalist development.

informal economic networks, and so on, but the trait which seems to best characterize African cities is the strongly felt presence of rural-urban linkages (O'Connor 1983: 272). As I will discuss later, the distinction between city and country in an African setting may obscure more than it illuminates.

In addition to social anthropology's attachment to Africa as a context in which to understand the functioning of isolated, egalitarian societies, sub-Saharan Africa has also been important to the development of theories of social change and transformation in an urban setting. When Max Gluckman began doing research at the Rhodes-Livingston Institute in the late 1930s, he agreed with Godfrey Wilson (at that time director of the Institute) that anthropology should be concerned with questions of social change in a contemporary African setting, but unlike Wilson he insisted that the study of conflict be central to the Institute's research paradigm. In 1949, after a number of years as director, Gluckman left the Rhodes-Livingston Institute to head the department at Manchester University in England. His commitment to training and an elaborate methodology based on the combination of statistical data and extended case histories had a profound influence on the body of social science researchers which would later become known as 'the Manchester School'.<sup>5</sup>

Although the Manchester school was itself born of post-war British social anthropology, it parted company with the dominant structural-functionalist paradigm, which tended to view urban studies as not only less 'African', but also less interesting (Moore 1994: 40). Infused with a new set of critical motifs (colonial contact, capitalist penetration, cultural pluralism, migration and social change), the Manchester school had become an exciting alternative to the static, decontextualized nature of structuralist analysis. From this perspective, "The culture and social system of urban Africa looked as if it were continuously negotiated, made and remade, sometimes reiterated, sometimes modified..."

---

<sup>5</sup>According to J. Clyde Mitchell, one of Gluckman's most prominent students, the Manchester school was more a 'seething contradiction' than a school per se. "And perhaps the only thing that we had in common was that Max was our teacher, and that meant we wrote ethnography rich in actual cases" (quoted in Werbner 1984: 158).

(ibid: 71). While much of Gluckman's research is generally associated with customary forms of law, later writing in the Manchester school would become known for its analysis of labor migration, for an ongoing concern with detribalization, and for the elaboration of various models of social networks (Epstein 1958; Mitchell 1969).<sup>6</sup> The work of Mitchell, Epstein and other members of the Manchester school would later be criticized for adopting a mode of analysis which ignored colonial domination as the "ultimate frame of reference" (Magubane 1971), and for the presence of an underlying "modernist" master narrative in which Africans are seen as making a gradual transition from 'migrant labour' to 'permanent urbanization' (Ferguson 1990a).

At roughly the same time as the Manchester school, Georges Balandier was conducting urban-based research in French-speaking Africa. Like Gluckman, Balandier was at the center of a network of Africanist scholars (he became the first director of the Centre d'Etudes Africaines at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes in Paris in 1957) and his teaching and research influenced an entire generation of young French scholars (Moore 1994). Balandier himself was well-versed in British social anthropology, especially that of Gluckman and his followers, with whom he shared an emphasis on whole, interrelating systems and on the centrality of contradiction in the analysis of social change (Balandier 1985[1955]).<sup>7</sup> Balandier's work is especially relevant to my research, not only because he spent a lot of time across the river from Kinshasa in Brazzaville, but also because his *Sociologie des Brazzavilles noires* (1955) was one of the first studies to look seriously at African urban practices of consumption and leisure. The research of Balandier (and those that followed him) is also important because it served as a counter-weight to the Manchester school, which, it can be argued, was limited by too narrow a focus on

---

<sup>6</sup>For more detailed accounts of the Manchester tradition than what I have presented here, see Ferguson (1990a), Moore (1994), and Werbner (1984).

<sup>7</sup>Balandier's approach shows striking similarities with work being done by members of the Manchester school (especially Mitchell). According to Copans (in Balandier 1985), Balandier publicly recognized his links to this body of research, but left these references out of his writing as a strategy to keep his work from being dated.

historically unique urban labor arrangements, such those which predominated in the Copperbelt region of southern Central Africa.

The Manchester school's discovery of ethnicity as something that varies according to social context (Mitchell 1956), and its ongoing interest in new forms of urban social organization (Epstein 1958) would set the tone for much of Africanist urban studies to come. Attempts to group urban research under the heading of 'urban anthropology' resulted in the generally uninspired body of research of the 1960s and 1970s which failed to account for social classes, political economy, gender and popular forms of cultural expression (Sanjek 1990). The influence of sociology (especially from the Chicago school) led to tortuous discussions about the definition of the term 'city' and an ongoing concern with the psychological effects of urban life (first articulated by Simmel). Compared to the other sub-disciplines which had emerged in anthropology by this time, urban anthropology "was arguably the narrowest and least influential of all this brood" (Sanjek 1990: 151). Urban research from the 1980s, however, was able to overcome some of the liabilities of previous research, and what we have witnessed since the mid-1980s is a growing interest in the city and a re-integration of urban-based studies into the general body of socio-cultural anthropology (ibid: 154).

Urban social organization in Africa has been shown to come in many forms. Since Little's (1957) important early article,<sup>8</sup> a wide variety of 'voluntary associations' have been identified and described: ethnic associations (Cohen & Odhiambo 1992; MacGaffey 1987), rotating credit associations (Schoepf and Engundu 1991), occupational associations (L. White 1990), sports clubs (Martin 1995), cultural associations (Karp 1980; Ranger 1975) religious movements (Comaroff 1985; Fabian 1971; Ndaywel 1993), traditional healing cults (Corin 1976), and the diffuse set of social and economic networks

---

<sup>8</sup>Little divides voluntary associations into four basic types: tribal unions, friendly societies, occupational associations and entertainment and recreational associations. While his categories are not flawed per se, I take issue with Little's attempt to place the various associational types on a continuum ranging from 'traditional' to 'modern', and by his tendency to view these associations primarily as adaptive mechanisms to life in the city.

most often referred to as the 'informal sector' (Hart 1997; MacGaffey 1991).<sup>9</sup> Of particular interest to my research are the intellectual and social clubs such as the 'cercles culturels' in much of Belgian Africa and the Brazzaville-based "Existos" (forerunners of 'La Sape', Gandoulou 1989; ch. 5) as well as various areas of urban leisure and consumption which have only recently become subjects of serious academic research (Burke 1996; Martin 1995). With regards to music, I have also drawn from a number of recent studies which discuss the evolution of particular performative genres over time (Coplan 1985; Erlmann 1996a; Waterman 1990).

Thus the influence of the Manchester school (and to some extent the work of Balandier) on contemporary urban studies in Africa has been felt in various ways. First, urban studies increasingly focus on social phenomena which are defined in terms other than kinship. Keith Hart, for example, tells the story of how people living and working in Ghana's nascent informal sector developed new networks based on friendship: "Friends are free and they remain free or they are no longer friends" (Hart 1984).<sup>10</sup> Second, following the interactionist strand in the Manchester school (Mitchell 1969), much of the recent work on urban Africa reflects an interest in individual agency and subjectivity. This is true not only of the development literature, which has become increasingly interested in African entrepreneurs and micro-enterprise (MacGaffey 1987), but also of more interpretive brands of anthropological inquiry which have examined African notions of personhood in the context of ritual efficacy and performance (Corin 1998; Kratz 1994). Third, new approaches have given increasing attention to the complex question of rural-urban linkages. Movement between different spheres is motivated by any number of reasons: daily commuting, trips for urban services, home visits, transfer of goods,

---

<sup>9</sup>Janet MacGaffey has recently introduced the term 'real economy': "What has been previously thought of as a marginal sector of the economy is, in fact, the principal means by which it operates" (1991: 7). It is debatable whether informal economic activity can be considered a form of social organization *per se*, although as MacGaffey's work shows (1987; 1991), informal economic networks almost always mobilize complex forms of social organization and solidarity.

<sup>10</sup>On friendship and neighbors in an urban setting, see also Balandier (1955); Cohen & Odhiambo (1987); La Fontaine (1970); L. White (1990).

smuggled items and flows of money (Aronson 1980). In addition to the movement of people and goods, however, it is important to look also at the flows of institutions and ideas (Ferguson 1990a; 1990b; 1992).

In trying to understand culture and social change in an urban setting, there is a strong tendency to become fixated on the city. It is large, dynamic, filled with different kinds of people who have different agendas. It is the center of wealth, literacy, power, national identity and intrigue. It is an analytical question in itself. Anthropology, given its professional association with life in small villages and towns, offers a unique perspective from which to critique approaches which suffer from an urban bias. It is also important to note that many of the processes we observe between African cities and their hinterlands occur in similar ways between African cities and metropolitan centers outside of Africa, primarily Europe and North America. Thus the village is the town's 'bush', the town is the city's 'bush', the African city is the European city's 'bush', and even Europe--in Kinshasa known as *miguel*--has become the 'bush' for those Congolese who prefer to emigrate to *super miguel* (the United States and Canada). In the following section I will look at some of the key moments and movements in the evolution of Kinshasa as a physical and symbolic space, with special attention to the role of music and other forms of popular entertainment.

## From Nsasa to "Kin La Belle"

*Il s'agit d'une leçon majeure même si l'auteur ne la tire pas lui-même. Avis aux 'urbanologues' qui confondent ville et modernité (Copans in Balandier 1985).<sup>11</sup>*

Attempting to re-construct a history of a colonial African city is an extremely challenging task. Nowhere else in the world did colonialism have as strong an impact in such a short period of time. In most parts of Africa--but especially in the Belgian Congo--colonial administrations were preceded by complex networks of commercial trading, Christian proselytizing, and scientific or humanistic research. The interaction which occurred between these 'agents of modernity' (Comaroff 1991) and their African subjects could vary between individuals as much as it could over time. Especially with regards to documentation for everyday events and practices--of central importance to this thesis--the African context presents considerable obstacles to research. In keeping with the focus of my overall argument, I will attempt to outline certain aspects of colonial Congolese history that are important to understanding the emergence of popular urban forms of cultural expression, namely the evolution of a physical and symbolic urban space, and the particular factors (both cultural and political) which brought together people of varying race, ethnicity and gender in unprecedented ways.<sup>12</sup> In this section, I will begin by discussing some of the milestones in the 'official' sphere of colonial policy and initiatives, and will juxtapose them with developments in the area of the 'unofficial' sphere of everyday practice among colonial subjects (c.f. Bakhtin 1984). In order to call attention to the difference between the 'official' sphere of colonial policy and the 'unofficial' sphere of

---

<sup>11</sup>'It is a crucial lesson even if the author does not say it himself. 'Urbanologists' who confuse city and modernity beware.'

<sup>12</sup>In this section I am primarily concerned with the Belgian colonial period beginning with annexation of the Congo (in 1908), although I have more and better data from the middle colonial period (1933-1945) and the late colonial period (1945-1960). This periodization does not represent any natural or universal division, but I have structured the periods in this way in order to highlight the nature of the Belgian colonial policy stance, one which formulated much of its policy in response to changes in urban demographics and politics.



African leisure and entertainment, I have used single spacing, indenting, and smaller fonts to separate the two within the body of the text. In so doing, I do not want to give the impression that these two domains are easily separated or completely independent of each other. Instead, I hope to simulate the feeling of what Balandier has referred to as the “slippages between ‘official’ aspects of society and social practice” (1995: ix).

When Stanley ‘discovered’ the Malebo Pool (which he later named Stanley Pool) in the late 1870s, this huge opening in the river had already witnessed a long history of human settlement and exchange. As early as the middle of the 17th century, European missionaries had begun exploring the region and stumbled upon a series of settlements which lined the Congo River over a distance of “five to six italian miles” (Jerome de Montesarchio cited in Tchebwa 1996: 21). The presence of various tribes and a relatively well-developed regional network of tribute and exchange organized around the Teke chief Makoko signalled a history of inter-regional trade, not only between the Teke (primarily fishers living on or near the river) and the Umbu (mostly agriculturalists who lived in settlements slightly further inland), but also between the Teke and other groups in the region where the Teke acted as intermediaries.<sup>13</sup> After some negotiation with local chiefs, Stanley claimed rights to the region in the name of his primary sponsor (King Leopold II), and in April of 1882 the urban settlement of Leopoldville was born.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup>The Teke (also known as the Tio), the dominant group of the Pool region during most of the 18th and 19th centuries, were able to use their positions as landlords to maintain control over trading networks (especially for slaves) with the Vili from the seacoast and the Bobangi from upriver. As early as the mid-1500s Teke groups from the Pool region were competing with the larger and more well-organized Kongo Kingdom for control of the region (Vansina 1990). Drawing from earlier ethnographic sources, La Fontaine (1970) suggests that the Umbu were in fact overlords of the more river savvy Teke. This is unlikely given the fact that the most powerful chiefs in the region (Nsasa, Ngaliema, Makoko) were Teke (It is also interesting to note that the term ‘umbu’ in modern Lingala usage is synonymous with ‘subordinate’ or ‘slave’).

<sup>14</sup>At the time of Stanley’s arrival, Makoko ruled over most of the region surrounding the Pool (*mpumbu*) from the north side of the river (what is today Congo-Brazzaville). On the southern side (Congo-Zaire), there were two prominent settlements indirectly under Makoko’s rule, Ntamu (today Kintambo) and further east but also close to the water, Nsasa (later Kinshasa). Stanley, who had secured local land rights through a blood partnership with the wrong chief (Ngaliema), was finally able to establish terms for a permanent European presence by negotiating with the proper chiefs (presumably Makoko) and securing permission to establish an outpost in Nsasa (Comhaire-Sylvain 1950: 10). It is from this original settlement that Mobutu would find the inspiration for the word Kinshasa, which was the name he would give to the independent Congolese capital in 1966.

The first phase of Belgian colonialism in the Congo region covers the period between the creation of the Congo Independent State (Etat Indépendent du Congo) in 1885 by King Leopold II and its eventual dismantling by the Belgian government in 1907. Most accounts of this period focus on the atrocities of forced labor and unmonitored resource exploitation under the rule of Leopold II, who would later be the target of international pressure to turn over the territory for administration as a Belgian colony. During this initial period of colonization, agents of the 'Free State' (most of whom were relatively young and less educated) took advantage of the absence of any real restrictions on labor arrangements in order to increase output, especially for products such as rubber and ivory. Those that resisted or refused were often tortured, and many were killed (Friedman 1991). In this chapter I have chosen to focus on the second phase of Belgian occupation--the colonial period *proprement dit*-- during which urban forms of popular entertainment first began to emerge as somewhat discreet, identifiable performative genres.<sup>15</sup>

### *Looking for Leopoldville (1910-1930)*

Although Leopoldville had been officially recognized as an important trading post under the Leopoldian regime, it did not become the Congolese capital until 1923, when it took this status from Boma, southwest of Leopoldville and considerably closer to the Atlantic seaboard. As the last calm waters before 350km of impassable rapids that descend toward the ocean, the Pool area has always been an important strategical location for trading and political expansion.<sup>16</sup> Balandier's (1955) important distinction between

---

<sup>15</sup>In future work I intend to expand this subject into a full consideration of cultural policy and popular entertainment during the colonial period. In order to get information about the exact nature of popular forms of cultural expression as well as popular response to colonial policy, I will make use of publications from the colonial period which featured the writing of colonial figures as well as Congolese (*Le courrier d'Afrique*, *La Voix du Congolais*, *Nos Images*, and *La Croix du Congolais*).

<sup>16</sup>Before the Leopoldville-Matadi railroad was completed in 1898, Stanley used local porters to transport materials by foot from the lower rapids to Leopoldville. The first steamboat used in the Pool was carried piece by piece and reconstructed at Stanley's outpost.

'indigenous' and 'colonial' cities is important in the context of Leopoldville, which despite the presence of several pre-colonial settlements, would not become urbanized until well into the colonial period.<sup>17</sup> In 1910, when the newly established colonial government created the administrative division of *sous-chefferie*, each of the colony's 15 districts was already divided into a large number of *chefferies* (created by Leopold II in 1906).<sup>18</sup> Under colonial minister Louis Franck, the *chefferie* system was intended to give more authority to local leaders, who were expected to be models of traditional authority while at the same time interpreting and enforcing colonial legislation within the boundaries of their jurisdiction. As evidenced by these initiatives, Franck's policies were moving Belgium in the direction of indirect rule, a position that would lead to a great deal of debate in Belgian colonial circles at home and abroad (Vellut 1974: 121), an issue to which I will return later.

At the same time as gestures were being made toward British-style indirect rule, *la politique indigène* of the early Belgian Congo was becoming increasingly centralized in its efforts to expand and standardize the mechanisms of colonial rule. Colonial field officers (especially the lower-ranking *administrateur adjoint* and *agent territorial*) were found to be lacking in education and professional experience, and this was perceived as a threat to public order since field officers had the most contact with local populations (Anstey 1966: 54). Future officers would be required to have a greater familiarity with local geography and customs, and those with higher levels of education (post-secondary) would be given preference. In 1924, the Franck Commission formulated a series of educational reforms which would move toward primary education throughout the colony and universal literacy

---

<sup>17</sup>'Indigenous' here refers to the large, historically well-established cities such as those found in West Africa (for example Timbuktoo). The several villages which surrounded the Malebo Pool probably did not have more than 40-50 people per village (St. Moulin 1976).

<sup>18</sup>The division of *chefferie* was the primary local administrative unit under Leopold II and was under the supervision of a local chief who was chosen by colonial authorities. In theory chiefs were to be chosen on the basis of local legitimacy, but as in much of colonial Africa, this criterion was not as important as the leader's willingness to collaborate with colonial authorities. Eventually the colonial government would move to reduce the total number of *chefferies* from 4,790 in 1933 to 595 in 1945. Changes in administrative divisions would become a regular occurrence in Congolese politics. In the post-Leopold period alone, Leopoldville was designated an urban district (1923), *chefferies* and *sous-chefferies* became *chefferies* and *secteurs* (1933), provinces were made of vice-governancies (1933), and district (provincial) boundaries were changed four times (1910, 1912, 1914, 1933).

in local languages. And in 1925, the *Union Minière de Haut-Katanga* announced a set of housing and social programs which were intended to create a more stable permanent labor force in its copper production facilities in the southeast.

Centralizing measures such as these, and the establishment of the new capital in Leopoldville in 1923 meant that an increasing number of Africans were migrating to urban and semi-urban areas during this period. This initially pleased colonial authorities, who were anxious to prove to their Belgian constituencies and European counterparts that they could make something of the fiscal and social disaster that they had inherited from Leopold II. Landed settlers (who had come to count on inexpensive rural labor) and members of the clergy (most of whom viewed life in the city as sinister and immoral) were less enthusiastic about these developments, and along with other observers expressed their discontent with attempts by the colonial government to free up cheap labor from the countryside.<sup>19</sup> The first important waves of urban migrants were made up primarily of men, in most cases from the Lower Congo region west and southwest of Leopoldville. All Africans arriving in the city were required to register in order to obtain an identity card, which entitled them to live in the African neighborhoods (*la cité indigène*) and an employee card, which made it possible for them to work in the downtown commercial districts (*la ville*). Strict curfews were observed and special permission was required to work in white residential neighborhoods or to leave the city for any extended period of time. These restrictions were more strict for unmarried women, who, as I will discuss later, were forced to pay a special tax which gave them the status of 'femmes vivant théoriquement seule' ('woman theoretically living alone').

---

<sup>19</sup>Many observers argued that despite new methods of recruiting and supervising labor, the basic goals of the Belgian administration had undergone no substantial changes since its original implementation under Leopold's Congo Free State. Given the brutality of the "recruitment activities" under Leopold, it is no surprise that subsequent governments would have difficulty mobilizing labor. Of those that were able to escape the forced labor campaigns of the Free State, most retreated further into the forest or countryside. For an early example of conscientious objection to colonial recruitment policy, see Van der Kerken (1920) and various publications by the *Commission permanente pour la protection des Indigènes* (CPPI), which was originally formed during the Congo Free State (see Anstey 1966 and Vellut 1974).

The exact origins of Congolese popular music are difficult to trace, but most historical accounts explain that the music has drawn inspiration from many sources since its emergence during or after World War I (Bemba 1984; Lonoh 1969). The earliest forms of popular music in the region are thought to have emerged in the colonial labor settlements which were organized around the newly forming industrial centers at the turn of the century. The transport industries of Leopoldville and mining interests in Katanga brought together male laborers and musical traditions from various parts of Africa (cf. Mitchell 1965; Ranger 1975).

In Leopoldville, the majority of African immigrants were from West Africa (Dahomey, Cameroun, Togo, and Senegal) and came as administrative clerks who were educated in the French colonial system or as crewman ("Krouboys") who were employed on regional maritime transport.<sup>20</sup> Musicians from this period remember how they used to marvel at the palmwine guitar style of the West African "Coastmen" (or "Popos") who came to work in Leopoldville and Lower Congo in the 1920s and 1930s. But this external presence did not arrive in a musical vacuum. Local musical traditions had already been transformed through the creation of new urban dance styles such as the *agbaya* ring dance, which was performed in various settings but like other urban-traditional airs was most often seen in public squares on Sunday afternoons. The *maringa*, which was the first form of partnered dancing in the region, was especially popular in the semi-private dancing bars which were beginning to appear all over Brazzaville and Leopoldville. "It is sad to say," wrote a local missionary, "but it is a fact; our people have lost the sense of honest dancing" (quoted in Martin 1995: 132).

[Maringa] bands were at first made up of a *likembe* (thumb piano) which provided the melody; a bottle struck with a metal rod, which took the place of the older gong and supplied the basic rhythm; and a small, skin-covered frame drum, *patenge*, held between the legs which supplied a counter rhythm ... Popularity of the partnered dancing spread like wildfire throughout the Congo region, touching even remote villages by 1935 (ibid: 131).

The primary influence in modern Congolese music, however, is the family of Afro-Cuban music which after World War I was becoming increasingly popular in North America and Western Europe, and which was being marketed in Central Africa as early as the 1920s on 78rpm records bearing the label "G.V." (Gravation Victor). This early latin music had a profound influence not only on the music of Kinshasa, but also on the various *highlife* musics of West Africa and on the "dry" guitar style of urban centers in East Africa and in the Copperbelt region.

According to Kazadi (1979), despite the fact that many Congolese consider Kinshasa to be the cradle of modern Congolese music, there is reason to believe that the musical style actually emerged in different places at more or less the same time. If Kinshasa is today (1995) the undisputed center of Congolese (or even Central African) music, it is due not only to the city's size and cosmopolitan nature, but also to the way that successive governments have used music and other forms of popular entertainment in order to attract or appease labor. Nonetheless, the history of the musical style is intimately linked to the history of Kinshasa. People in Kinshasa often say that the music and the city 'grew up' together and that their special relationship is an expression of what it means to be 'modern' (*évolué*) and urban: "The birth of this popular music, and especially of 'modern' music in our country, is also a corollary of the process of urbanization" (Tchebwa 1996: 55).

---

<sup>20</sup> According to Phyllis Martin, Brazzaville (at that time part of French Equatorial Africa) had civil servants from as far as Guadeloupe and Martinique (1995: 127). She also discusses the Cabindans and Senegalese *tirailleurs* that had probably participated in the construction of the Matadi-Leopoldville railroad. She attributes the distinctive palmwine guitar style (which was an essential influence for early Congolese guitarists) to the Kru of Liberia and Sierra Leoneans also present in Brazzaville during these years. Presumably these same musicians, or at least their musical styles, were present at roughly the same time in Leopoldville.

The word *rumba* comes from Haut-Zaire: 'lumba' or 'rumba' means to paddle, to row, but also to smell nice. It refers to a flower that tenderizes meat. When the meat is tender, the word refers to the odor. It is also used to fight against constipation, usually used for cleaning out your system. 'Lumba' in Kikongo means to copulate. The Bangala took 'lumba' and gave 'rumba' by changing the 'l' to 'r' (Michel Lonoh, Mar. 28, 1996).

According to Gondola (1993), the first African settlements (c. 1912) were built far from white residential areas not only to protect Europeans from the threat of 'tropical disease', but also because of the incessant sound of tamtams. Jewsiewicki (1991) discusses the first forms of urban painting in Elizabethville: "In homes like Lubaki's in the 1920s, the walls might be painted with images of objects or persons, but the only decorations brought in from the outside would have been the illustrations cut from magazines thrown away by whites". Georges Thiry, a Belgian administrator, describes public life in the 1920s:

Sunday, returning from my walk over to the ivory carver's hut [Lubaki's], I see Elizabethville [Lubumbashi] glowing. The bars, the cinemas overflow with blacks. To the bicycle races flock a crowd of clerks, garage mechanics, factory workers, telephone operators from the railroad and workers from the copper mines. In the native quarter victrola play under the canopies, the blacks are putting the last stitches on inexpensive shirts cut out of sacks that once contained Le Soleil brand flour...Negresses called Bonbo Kongolo, Mitonga, Marguerite Avion, Gabrielle Kousou, Isabelle Mwamba, in their Sunday dresses, their long legs in white stockings and high heels, pedal past on bicycle promenades along the road (Thiry quoted in Jewsiewicki 1991).

### *Carving Out a Space in the City (1933-1945)*

Increasing movement toward the cities, especially the large industrial centers of Leopoldville and Elizabethville, signalled a population boom which would have a serious impact on colonial urban planning and social policy. In 1914, Leopoldville had 15,000 people (including Africans and non-Africans), by 1933 that number had risen to 22,000, and at the end of World War II estimates put the population of Leopoldville at nearly 100,000 (Comhaire-Sylvain 1950). This dramatic increase was obviously due in great part to production increases of the wartime effort, but it was also a function of the fact that many women had begun to move to the city to join their husbands. Increased urbanization was a desired consequence of colonial policy, but for many whites it was also a source of concern. The owner of one of the city's leading commercial firms:

No room for so many people. You will see epidemics. Epidemics know no colour line. That's a danger for us. If we can find work for all of them, they constitute more customers for my tinned foods and cotton prints. If not my tinned foods and cotton prints will be stolen, not bought! (quoted in Comhaire-Sylvain 1950: 12).

The sweeping reforms brought about beginning in 1933 must be seen in the context of the colonial administration's attempt to come to terms with the changing demographic structure of colonial cities and towns. The 1933 decree concerning the administrative units of *circonscriptions indigènes* (at that time made up of *secteurs* and *chefferies*) was unambiguous about giving maximum authority to 'traditional' leaders. The central element of this decree was the creation of an entirely new administrative unit, the *centre extra-coutumier* (C.E.C.), which corresponded more or less with the African neighborhoods of the colony's larger cities.<sup>21</sup> In 1934, a local chief and council were appointed for each C.E.C., and each C.E.C. was entitled to raise its own police force. Although this form of indirect rule was intended as a means of 'self-help' through self-government, the colonial administration retained tight control. Not only were C.E.C. councillors and chiefs appointed, but all administrative and judicial decisions were monitored by a colonial representative who was given the right to veto. The spread of C.E.C.'s (by 1939 there were 32 in all) reflected the colonial administration's attempt "both to create practical administrative units and at the same time to create living communities out of atomized, detribalized populations of the towns" (Anstey 1966: 116). Parallel processes were occurring in many sectors of private industry, whose labor stabilization programs had begun to show unprecedented levels of productivity and a substantial decrease in the need for active labor recruitment (ibid: 120).

Debates on the management of the colony, *la question de la politique indigène*, pitted the proponents of indirect rule (especially Franck and Van der Kerken) against those

---

<sup>21</sup>Leopoldville, which had already been declared the colony's only 'urban district', was the only major city where a C.E.C. was not established (see Ngimbi 1982). For description of life in the C.E.C. of Stanleyville, see Pons (1961).

in support of a more direct style of government (primarily large industrialists). The policy of indirect rule as elaborated under Franck was based on the idea of allowing 'native' populations the possibility of changing local customs and practices at their own pace, but it was also a policy that was firmly based in the promotion of racial segregation.<sup>22</sup> Franck's policies were never completely accepted by administrators in the provinces and thus were not applied in any systematic way to African cities and towns. Vellut has noted that the push toward measures of indirect rule occurred more or less at the same time as budget cuts in colonial services and personnel, and that these new policies also coincided with an increase in the surveillance measures and police powers for which the Belgian administration would become so well-known (1974: 125).

Michel Lonoh has described the music of 1930s Leopoldville as a "music which is interested in the city and distancing itself from the village" (Lonoh, Mar. 28, 1996). It was during this period that people (not only musicians) began to 'carve out' spaces of safety and distraction for themselves. The first musicians in Leopoldville to be recognized as professional musicians began playing in the 1930s, animating public spaces and events in the African neighborhoods of the rapidly growing urban centers. Many of these musicians began as members of *maringa* ensembles that played for mixed audiences who came to drink and socialize in the bars or *dancing* that dotted the urban landscape. Eventually they came to be known as groups in their own right: L'Orchestre American, Victoria Brazza, and Melo Congo. When the first recording houses were opened by foreign merchants in the early 1940s, it was these musicians that were recruited and offered individual full-time contracts: Paul Okamba, Wendo Kolosoy, Adou Elenga, Leon Bukasa, Tino Baroza, Emmanuel d'Oliveira, and Lucie Eyenga to mention only a few.

This period also saw the beginning of an important number of social clubs, especially those initiated by women who organized around their common interests in elegance, rotating credit, and popular music (Gondola 1997). These *associations féminines* were remarkable not only because of the still very unequal urban sex ratio (more than 2 to 1 in favor of men), but also because of the free spirited independence which was expressed in their very public display of wealth and *joie de vivre* (Balandier 1955). The first independent feminine association, *Diamant* (Diamond), was formed in 1943. Associations of this type would take on even greater importance after the war, when they became increasingly associated with particular artists or groups, and as membership with the associations became increasingly competitive.

*Femmes libres*. During the colonial and post-independence period, these women were unmarried, had their own money (usually from trading) and were highly sought after by civil servants and businessmen because they were well-known for the degree to which they cultivated what Balandier called the "fine art of love and coquetterie" (1955). But they were also in many cases intellectual companions since they tended to be more well-educated and more well-travelled than the average 'Congolaise'. For many women in Kinshasa today, it is not the fact that mistresses exist, but the fear that they be favored in terms of money and male attention.

---

<sup>22</sup>"Concern with a slow, 'evolutionary' approach to Westernization has been characteristic of much of Belgian colonial policy" (Fabian 1990: 48).



In 1937, the first closed circuit radio station begins to broadcast with a five kilowatt signal from Collège Albert I (today Collège Boboto) in Leopoldville. Two years later they would have to compete with Radio Congoliya which had a larger transmitter (20kw). In May of 1940, feeling the threat of private sector initiatives in music, the colonial government creates Radio Congo Belge, and solicits two transmitters, one 100kw unit from the U.K. and one 50kw unit from the U.S. (Lonoh, personal communication). In 1940, two separate stations are created, one for whites (Radio Belgique, 100kw) and one for Africans (Radio Congo Belge, 50kw). According to Comhaire-Sylvain's exhaustive survey on women living in 1940s Leopoldville, 50% of secondary school students had a radio in their homes and 10% a record player. All the women in her survey liked listening to the radio, but 90% listened for songs and not news.

Close friends dedicated songs to each other on the radio. When a woman has dedicated a song to three or four friends, it is common courtesy for each of them to return her favor within a few days. They can also ask for a record to be played in honor of certain members of the family or for a friend who is travelling or living in another part of the country, even in Congo-Brazzaville. All of this assumes regular listening to the programs and especially the music they play (Comhaire-Sylvain 1968: 92).

A number of state-based efforts in social promotion were attempted in the pre-war period. The *Commission de Protection des Arts et Métiers Indigènes* and the *Association des Amis des Arts et Métiers Indigènes* which were responsible for the supervision of artists and the organization of training centers and regional museums were both created in 1935. Beginning in 1939, the *Salon de la musique* was sponsored but only lasted until 1942. During this period social promotion activities by missionary organizations were more effective, especially the Salvation Army which sponsored well-attended sewing classes for women (Comhaire-Sylvain 1968; Hunt 1990) and training for the region's first full brass band in 1937. Only two years later, thousands of Congolese would hear the first popular music recordings made on Congolese soil.

### *The Emergence of an African Public Sphere (1945-1960)*

Georges Balandier's (1968) use of the term 'elephantiasis' to describe the process of urbanization in sub-Saharan Africa was certainly applicable to post-war Leopoldville, whose African neighborhoods had already begun to suffer from overcrowding and unemployment. Wartime production had made the colonial government and the private sector optimistic about the future, but postwar recession and unemployment together with a fast growing youth population made colonial authorities increasingly nervous about the potential for political instability in the capital. In 1955 Leopoldville alone had more than

300,000 people and on the eve of independence nearly half of them were unemployed (Lafontaine 1970: 37). Those that had not already been rounded up and expelled from the city forcibly were tempted with free travel and a bonus of one month's salary if they agreed to be repatriated (ibid: 12). With nearly one-fourth of the population living in cities, an earlier rural resettlement scheme (*paysannat indigène*) was reinforced and by 1955 it had affected more than 137,000 families (Anstey 1966: 165).

But many urban residents were able to make legitimate claims to their right to stay in the city and their right to fair employment. Striking and union activity in 1945 in both Matadi and Leopoldville (primarily by white workers) was certainly tied to the creation of the Congo's first African labor union, the *Association du Personnel Indigène du Congo Belge* (APIC), in 1946. Two years later the right to strike was recognized and the first provisions for minimum wage were put into effect. In the same year, most likely in response to increasing discontent among educated Africans, the government announced the policy of *immatriculation*, a process which offered special status to the educated Congolese elite who under colonialism had become known as *évolués*.<sup>23</sup> Those who were able to prove (upon inspection) that their education, lifestyle and homes reflected "a state of civilization implying the ability to enjoy the rights and fulfil the obligations laid down in written law" (Anstey 1966: 208) were presented with a *carte de mérite civique* (civic merit card). Those who possessed civic merit cards (*immatriculés*) had the right to be judged in Belgian civil courts (instead of customary courts), to travel with whites on public transport, and to buy goods from white only stores. But as late as 1958, there were only 217 Congolese *immatriculés*. Speaking on their behalf, Belgian missionary Father Joseph Van Wing declared: "The only advantage [to being *immatriculé*] is that of being obliged to pay fines three times higher when we are caught by the police" (quoted in Lemarchand 1964: 42).

---

<sup>23</sup> According to Anstey, the process of *immatriculation* had been defunct since its original appearance in the years of the Free State (1966: 208)

Eventually most Congolese would come to see these policies as empty gestures of rapprochement which only perpetuated colonial rhetoric about an imaginary “Belgo-Congolese Community” (Lemarchand 1964). In 1952, the creation of a special office for African urban housing (*Office des Cités Africaines*) confirmed for many Congolese that the colonial administration was committed to policies of racial and social segregation. Despite the O.C.A.’s stated intention to provide inexpensive, accessible housing to large numbers of city residents, the housing estates that they designed were often far away from the city’s commercial districts, isolated from each other, and for the most part affordable only to white collar workers or elites. Like the Belgian *cordon sanitaire*, which used large green spaces (such as parks, golf courses or gardens) to protect European neighborhoods from the threat of African disease (La Fontaine 1970: 19), state-sponsored housing only pushed a further wedge between Africans and whites. Social legislation with regards to colonial subjects came about on a piecemeal basis, with the right to own land declared in 1953, and the right to buy alcohol in 1955.

When rioting began to break out across the colony, the decree which first made official mention of independence (on January 13, 1959) was too little, too late. Not only did the January decree not specify how or when the transfer of power would occur, but a follow-up decree retained the colonial government’s right to monitor political gatherings (indoor meetings required a special permit) and to censor material which was a “threat to the public order” (quoted in Lemarchand 1964: 45). With help from the Belgian Socialist Party, the multi-ethnic MNC (*Mouvement National Congolais*) led by Patrice Lumumba succeeded in organizing roundtable negotiations with Belgium on the transfer to power and six months later (June 30, 1960), independence was granted, and the Belgian Congo became the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Perhaps mocking Belgian conservatism, the biggest hit of 1960 was Kabasele's "Indépendance Cha Cha":<sup>24</sup>

Independence cha cha, we have won it.  
Independence cha cha, we have taken it.  
The roundtable cha cha, we have won it.  
Independence cha cha, we have taken it.

Although many of the social and public activities later associated with life in the city had taken root before and during the Second World War, it was not until after the war that many of these activities would exist outside the confines of state or church-based supervision. It is in this sense that the post-war period can be seen as one characterized by the development of an expressly African 'public sphere' (Habermas' via Breckenridge and Appadurai 1995). "C'est pourquoi ...la rue est animée par le Kinois. C'est leur domaine. Ils l'impregnent. S'il y a une authenticité kinoise, c'est là qu'elle se manifeste" (Biaya 1997b).

Usually referred to by the name of *spectacles populaires*, the variety entertainment shows which were first formed in the early 1940s became much more common in the post-war period. The pioneers in this area (Exelsior Club, L'Harmonie Kinois, L'Odéon Kinois, and Jecoke in Elizabethville, see Fabian 1990) were all led by a musically inclined charismatic leader (*maître choréographe*), but the entertainment was not limited to music. Each group also had its own chorus and dancers, and some of the younger groups became known for their comedy sketches and humorous improvisation. The most successful variety shows (especially those organized by Maître Taureau, see Gondola 1990) involved female as well as male performers, and in many cases were able to take their show on the road, although they had much more appeal with African than European audiences.

As a more generalized aspect of the emergence of an African public sphere, a large number of voluntary associations began to appear after (or in response to) the rapid increase in urban population growth (Balandier 1955; Comhaire-Sylvain 1968; LaFontaine 1970). Church-sponsored associations were important early influences, especially alumni associations such as the ADAPES (1925) and the ASSANEF (1925). State-based initiatives such as government sponsored sewing clubs or the Association of African Middle Classes (1954) were less successful since they often "take names and ask questions" (Comhaire-Sylvain 1950: 100). By the 1950s, however, many associations were organized by Congolese themselves and although most were required to be registered with the authorities, many managed to evade colonial control. Comhaire-Sylvain's (1968) survey of women in post-war Leopoldville and post-independence Kinshasa gives an idea of the wide array of associational types: professional associations, 'feminine' associations, rotating credit associations (*muziki*, *likelemba* and others) ethnic associations, unions and syndicates, sports associations, youth associations, cultural associations, entertainment associations, organizations for the emancipation of women, first name associations, religious associations, and traditional healing associations.

Cinema also became increasingly common in the post-war period. The first film screenings for Congolese occurred in Elizabethville in 1911. Beginning in 1935, the Catholic film distribution company Luluafilms began operating in Kasai, where they filmed over 100 titles, the most of popular of which was the "Matamata and Pilipili". The *Centre Congolais d'Action Catholique* (CCACC) was founded in 1946 and eventually developed a network between filmmakers in Leopoldville (Edisofilms), Bukavu (Africanfilms) and Kasai (Luluafilms) for the production and distribution of Christian educational films as well as locally produced comedies. The *Cine-Club Congolais* was created in 1950 and in 1951 the first all-Congolese film production was completed, Mongita's "Une leçon de cinéma" (see Diawara 1992). Cinema was perceived not only as a source of entertainment, but also a source of information. One young woman from Leopoldville said she liked going to the cinema because she was able to get "some pointers on love" (Comhaire-Sylvain 1968: 91).

---

<sup>24</sup>A series of related songs came out at about the same time: "Congo Lipanda" (Independent Congo), "Table Ronde" (Roundtable), and the often cited "Ata Ndele" (Sooner or Later).

The open-air cafés that dotted the urban landscape of Leopoldville's African neighborhoods served as political meeting places and spaces of urban sociability (Gondola 1993). It was here that people discussed the local and international news which was made available through mostly colonial-sponsored newspapers and magazines (such as *Le Courrier*, *La Voix du Congolais*, and *Croix du Congo*), but these were also places to have fun. Comhaire-Sylvain's (1950) description of a local bar explains how most of the activity began around 2:00 p.m. and usually lasted until 8:00 p.m. Most of the open-air bars were run by women, often from Kasai, and they attracted men, women and often their immediate family members (including children). *Dancing-bars* were more exclusive, more discrete, and since they operated from the late afternoon until around midnight, they had a mixed clientele that was less family-oriented. Some of these establishments hired permanent bands (e.g. Kashama's O.K. Bar, where Franco's O.K. Jazz was first hired and from where the group took its name) and many of them encouraged young single women to frequent their bars and mingle with the customers (Gondola 1997). Some bars hired a group of women who provided sexual favors in exchange for gifts, money, or drinks.

Sports also took up a large amount of space in public life in the city (Martin 1995; Gondola 1990). In the interwar period Père Raphael committed himself to developing local interest in soccer in Leopoldville. From his base at St. Anne's missionary school, he trained local talents in soccer, water polo, and track & field. In 1949 the first *Championnat du Pool franco-belge* was organized (Gondola 1990). Sports organizations within Leopoldville would separate large sections of the population according to which team they supported. Sports teams can correspond to neighborhood but this is not always the case.

### *The City as a Symbolic Space*

Like others, they were country people, but how soon country people forget. When they fall in love with a city, it is forever, and it is like forever. As though there never was a time when they didn't love it (quoted in Davies 1995: 132).

In most instances, people came on the reputation of [Leopoldville] as the land of plenty, where food and drink never lacked, where men could get beautiful women almost for the asking, where women paraded in wonderful clothes without performing any drudging labour, where everybody was free to choose the work he liked (Comhaire-Sylvain 1950: 11).

Thus far my discussion of the political and cultural evolution of the city of Kinshasa has focused primarily on events and moments in history. I have tried to show how the actions of the colonial state have shaped and been shaped by the movements of everyday people, some of whom were able to carve out spaces for themselves, others who got lost in the system, and still others who died in the process. But it is also important to talk about the city as a part of some collective imagination or set of cultural meanings for the people who use it or live in it. While 'meaning' is elusive and context-dependent, it is also a source of

everyday knowledge which sheds light on the relationship between the 'official' and 'unofficial' spheres which I have tried to juxtapose in my analysis above. As Maximy has argued, Kinshasa as an urban space is the result of a series of imposed meanings and modifications: "... bien que Kinshasa soit un phénomène social sans équivalence dans leur mémoire, elle devient de plus en plus une expression spatiale et culturelle des Bantu, principaux acteurs et usagers permanents de la ville" (Maximy 1984: 191).<sup>25</sup>

The Congolese city is perceived as a place of refuge from the constraints of life in the village under the rule of *Bula Matari* ('colonial authority', literally 'rock crusher'), but many people fled to the city to escape the control of customary authority as well. Perhaps for marginalized members of local communities (sterile women, those accused of witchcraft, ex-slaves, orphans, uninitiated men, etc.) one or both of these conditions held true, but there are just as many accounts which describe the transition to the city as a wondrous adventure which pulls (not pushes) people toward the lifestyle of urban dwelling:

Leopoldville...this name alone in Fwala's ear has a kind of magic resonance which conjures up before his eyes a kind of indefinable, gilded existence. Ah! The pain of the mysterious! When will it be given him to penetrate it? Fwala has already seen many men, some on foot others perched on the tops of laden lorries, joyfully going to Leopoldville. Why should he not therefore also go?...The next day, in the morning twilight, Mama Anna calls her son. But it is in vain. For furtively, during the night, a little bundle under his arm, Fwala has set out along this irresistible road (excerpt from the writing of J. Lutumba, quoted in Anstey 1966: 156).

The idea of Kinshasa as a wondrous, irresistible space was only reinforced by the most characteristic--and yet most intangible--of Kinshasa institutions, that of *ambiance*. Attempts to define this idea in academic terms have mostly failed (although see Biaya 1997a), but it is clearly tied to the complex constellation of urban experience which expresses itself through any one or all of the following: beer, bars, sociability, dancing,

---

<sup>25</sup> 'Even though Kinshasa is a unique social phenomenon in most peoples' memory, it is becoming more and more a cultural and spatial expression of Bantu culture, whose people are the principal actors and permanent users of the city.'

release, loud music, sexual innuendo, spectacle, and humor.<sup>26</sup> Above all else, it is a subjective collective mood which is just as difficult to create as it is to describe. As Kabasele sings, you know it when you feel it:

*Ambience*, you who make us lose control  
*Ambience*, you who give us shivers  
 And take us from pleasure to joy  
 To pleasure and complete abandon  
 When I'm totally tired  
 When my heart is peaceful, by my soul in distress  
 To chase away all these worries  
 There is only one thing: *ambience*

("Ambience", Joseph Kabasele, in Biaya 1994)

Thus it is through *ambience* that individuals experience the city: "Kin-la-belle, pour les intimes, c'est toujours les joies et encore les joies" (Ngoy 1995: 38).<sup>27</sup> It is a place of belonging, a place with which its residents are intimately familiar, or they are not residents. It is the ceaseless, timeless quality of life in Kinshasa which makes the city itself a never-ending song. 'Being from' Kinshasa is not determined by the number of generations that have preceded you (very few people living in Kinshasa admit to not being from Kinshasa), but by your ability to assimilate the language and lore of life in the city (*kinoiseries*), which, once mastered may or may not give access to the essence of being from Kinshasa (*kinicité*).<sup>28</sup> It is interesting the degree to which ethnicity (in the ethnological sense) is not a part of the symbolics of identity in Kinshasa. As I will show

---

<sup>26</sup>Biaya (1997a) has argued that *ambience* in Kinshasa must be understood in historical terms as a response to the frustration which resulted from interracial relations in the Belgian Congo. There have been many attempts to elaborate a formula for *ambience*, most of which reflect a certain phallocentrism and often come in threes: money/women/song, or beer/women/money, or music/beer/women, etc. Biaya's analysis (1994) uses several different formulas simultaneously: first 'mundele/ndumba/ambience' and then 'music/dance/love'. The tendency toward threes (cf Cosentino 1987) is perhaps based in the psychosocial *menage à trois* which Biaya describes as an organizing metaphor for male-female relations in Kinshasa (1997a) or in the Belgian colonial trinity of church/state/commerce.

<sup>27</sup>'Kin-la-Belle, for those in the know, is always joy and joy some more'.

<sup>28</sup>"Our cities, designed like monsters, functioning exactly like monsters, suddenly began creating their own life, knowledge, and philosophy other than the need to consume like in the West—a delirious and delicious reappropriation" (Tansi 1984: 260).

in Chapter Ten, being from Kinshasa is the ultimate expression of being 'modern' in the Congo. Kinshasa is by definition an-ethnic and cosmopolitan, a veritable cosmopolis:

'Across the way', to use a stock phrase, is a real city. Leopoldville lies in a fine mist, lifting a single tall building. From a distance, the comparison with the French capital is still a harmless game...Up close, the inferiority complex of certain Brazzavillians is easy to understand: concrete roads, numerous commercial buildings, modern hotels with noiseless servants and the latest mechanical gadgets; finally, the avenue congested with American cars. Impressions of opulence, speculation, of the bold persistence of a capitalism which is off to a new start, unlike French colonial capitalism, which has surrendered all risks to the public powers. The Congolese Belgians reveal a certain upstart's arrogance: optimism, a sense of superiority, and an unshakable confidence in the future of their system (1966: 180-181).

It is also interesting to notice the way that Kinshasa is symbolically understood through music. For Manda Tchewa, "...la chanson de Kinshasa porte en elle tous les germes de l'urbanité et de la *citadinité*. Le survol thématique auquel nous vous convions à présent, pourrait, de notre point de vue, vous aider à saisir les facettes essentielles de la vie kinoise" (Tchewa 1996: 252).<sup>29</sup> After 'love' (*bolingo*) and feeling (*motema*, lit. 'heart'), the most frequently occurring word in Congolese popular music is Kinshasa. It appears as is or dressed in various disguises: Kisasa, Lipopo, Leo, Kinshasa makambo, Kin, Kinville, Kin la belle, Kin plaisir, Kin Malebo, Kin la joie, Kin kiese. Through song the city is sexualized: "Cette ville a son cœur à Matonge. Toute sa chair et tout son sang, sa sueur, ses odeurs, et surtout son sexe fait de musique et d'interminables rumba (Tansi 1984: 258).<sup>30</sup> It is home to love and feminine charms that are activated through male savoir-faire (ch. 9, 10):

---

<sup>29</sup>... the music of Kinshasa contains all the seeds of urbanity and urban living. The thematic overview which I will provide may, in my view, help the reader understand all the necessary facets of life in Kinshasa'.

<sup>30</sup>'This city's heart is in Matonge. All of its flesh and all of its blood, its sweat, its odors, and especially its sex (in French, 'sexe' also refers to genitals), which is made of music and never-ending *rumbas*.'



Toujours endimanchée, éternellement belle. Chansons de nos orchestres et saynettes de nos artistes célèbrent cette beauté de notre ville, cette passion de la vie heureuse de ses habitants. Kabasele Tshamala, ce vieux chanteur de talent et à la voix angélique, chante Kinshasa comme l'édén aux joies immenses, emballeuses et solliciteuses. Luambo Makiadi évoque les jolies frimousses qui peuplent nos quartiers. Kiamanguana Mateta psalmodie des versets langoureux qui séduisent les jouvenceaux aux gestes élégants et aux accents sensuels. Madiata parle des berceuses aux rondeurs dansantes. Tabu Ley avec sa profondeur innée et jusqu'ici inégalée évoque Kinshasa avec une émouvante nostalgie (Inongo 1986: 38).<sup>31</sup>

Kinshasa is the place that people leave almost solely for the sake of returning:

Boyamba ngai  
Ah nazongi mboka, lelo oyo nazongi  
bana mboka boyamba ngai  
namona pondu wapi  
nakanisi kwanga ya mboka  
ngai oyo na zongi

Welcome me home  
I'm home again, just got back  
Children of the land, welcome me  
Where can I get some pondu [pounded manioc leaves]?  
I missed the kwanga [manioc meal] from home  
I'm finally back

(“Boyamba Ngai”, Docteur Nico, in Tchabwa 1996: 260)

But Kinshasa's uncanny ability to resist disaster and distress could not last indefinitely. When political delinquency compounded the immediacy of acute economic and social crisis in the final years of the Mobutu regime, it was already generally accepted that “Kin-la-Belle” (‘Kin the beautiful’) had become “Kin la poubelle” (‘Kin the garbage can’). The city slowly began to resemble an urban jungle which made meeting even the basic material needs a major if not impossible task. To rise above this task, it became important to have a trickster-like resourcefulness: *rusé, malin, mwana mayi*, article 15. “Je me débrouille” people say, and “Oh, on vit mystérieusement...”.<sup>32</sup> As state structures and market mechanisms fall into further decay, the city is increasingly symbolized as a

<sup>31</sup> ‘Always Sunday, forever beautiful. Our orchestras’ songs and our artists’ sketches celebrate the beauty of our city, the passion its inhabitants have for the good life. Kabasele Tshamala, the veteran singer with an angelic voice sings about Kinshasa like an Eden with endless joys that wrap you up and call your name. Luambo Makiadi evokes the beautiful faces that fill our neighborhoods. Kiamanguana Mateta chants the langorous verses that seduce young men with elegant gestures and sensual accents. Madiata speaks of the women who rock back and forth with dancing full figures. Tabu Ley with his innate depth, until now unmatched, evokes Kinshasa with a moving nostalgia’.

<sup>32</sup> ‘We get by’ people say, and ‘Oh, we live mysteriously...’ On resourcefulness and urban trickster figures in Africa see Biaya (1997a, 1997b), Hecht and Simone (1994), and White (1998b).

place of violence (Biaya 1997b). Devisch (1995) sees contemporary Kinshasa as a kind of moral cesspool in which the poor masses are “seeking to break with the ideals of modernity” and resolve their anomie through the process of Christian neighborhood-based nesting (what he refers to as ‘revillagization’). While no one would contest the importance of new forms of Christian sociability via prayer groups and charismatic churches (Devisch 1996; Ndaywel 1993), it is important to look not only at how *ambience* and ‘modernity’ are rejected, but how they are transformed.<sup>33</sup>

### Cultural Politics and the Politics of Culture

During the early colonial period Belgian colonial administrators were less concerned with the questions of popular arts and culture (considered to be more the domain of missionaries and educators) than with the set of issues having to do with how to govern, how to systematize colonial interventions and how to keep the public order.<sup>34</sup> When cities became more crowded, however, issues of morality and cultural expression were of much more immediate concern, since administrators had to face the threat of urban unrest and African-based political action.<sup>35</sup> According to Jan Vansina, “Unlike the case of other colonies, ‘cultural policy’ in the Belgian Congo was not unified, nor even agreed on. It is a subject in its own right” (personal correspondence, April 19, 1998). One thing that

---

<sup>33</sup>Here I am thinking of the cyclical fashions of youth popular culture and leisure, the most stable of which is popular dance music, but of which there are other more fleeting examples as well: private night clubs (1990-92), barbeques (1992-94), and *kermesse* (1995-1997).

<sup>34</sup>See for example Van der Kerken (1920). Although he was clearly committed to a colonial policy that would take local institutions and culture into consideration, his primary concern was the implementation of a ‘fair and just’ system of rules and regulations. The bulk of his study (almost half of which consists of recommendations) is focused on the legal aspects of colonial rule, especially with regards to the relationship between colonial jurisdiction and customary law, and the collection of taxes. Social and cultural issues are only important insofar as they inform or impede the process of administration.

<sup>35</sup>Jadot (1946) offers an overview of the European interest in ‘art nègre’, specifically the Belgian interest in Congolese ‘traditional’ art.

emerges from my analysis is that colonial policy during the post-war period reflected a concern with the shaping of Africans' lifestyle and cultural practices (Hunt 1990; 1993; 1997; Likaka 1997: 57-70). Consequently, it was during this period that the colonial administration began to take on more responsibility in the area of education and social programs, since many missionaries were stationed in rural or semi-rural areas, and churches based in cities could not alone meet the needs of the entire urban population.

Fabian's (1990) study of popular theater and politics in Shaba provides a revealing history of officially sponsored cultural activities during the peak of the colonial period.<sup>36</sup> According to Fabian, in the mid-1930s the primary mining company (UMHK) and Catholic missions in the region felt it necessary to do something about the growing 'youth problem' in the permanent labor settlements which had been established by the mining company beginning in 1925. When the numbers of young adults reached a certain saturation point, officials at the UMHK's labor office (*bureau du main d'oeuvre indigène*) began to encourage lower-level expatriate employees and (where possible) upper-level African employees to organize cultural and social activities, primarily in the form of scouting, sports events, and artisanal production. Scouting was particularly popular among boys, who in addition to outdoor activities also performed short skits and other forms of theatrical entertainment. The girl guides specialized in singing. In most instances these activities were organized in collaboration with local missionaries.<sup>37</sup> Fabian reports stepped-up colonial activities in the area of culture, especially in the mid-1950s, perhaps as part of a "last-ditch effort" on the part of Belgians of various persuasions to save the colony from what must have seemed like an inevitable (and potentially bloody) move toward independence (ibid: 49).

---

<sup>36</sup>Although Fabian's discussion is primarily concerned with Elizabethville, it offers valuable clues to the activities that were occurring at more or less the same time and in very similar ways in Leopoldville.

<sup>37</sup>In the UMHK archives, Fabian discovered records of scouting activities planned between the UMHK labor office (M.O.I.) and local Benedictine missionaries who were also interested in this form of social promotion. According to Fabian's research, the scouting movement in Leopoldville, which began in 1925-26, was the earliest in the Belgian Congo and was organized by missionaries at the Sainte-Anne Parish. Missionaries were also instrumental in the development of the Belgian *foyers sociales*, which I will discuss in greater detail below.

Following the work of Bauman, Fabian (1998) has argued that the best definition of culture is one which highlights the use of culture as a set of discursive practices. In the African colonial context, given the complexity of conflicting interests and agenda, this position seems particularly appropriate. Policies in the Belgian Congo change over time and according to who is speaking: colonial subjects, missionaries, traders, industrialists, liberal humanists, settlers of various kinds, colonial officers and representatives from the metropole. All of these actors contribute (some considerably more than others) to a set of discourses which are not monolithic, but the result of political pressures, negotiation, and accommodation.<sup>38</sup> The emerging historical literature on colonialism has shown it to be too often viewed as an abstract anonymous force which is simply imposed on unwitting, passive subjects (Hunt 1990; Stoller and Cooper 1997). What I want to argue is that Leopoldville's lively performing arts scene was neither the direct outcome of colonial cultural promotion, nor simply an expression of indigenous initiative (as Gondola has suggested, see 1992; 1993), but the result of a series of imperfect dialogues between the two (c.f. Fabian 1991; Hunt 1994; Martin 1995).

In order to understand the nature and terms of these dialogues, I have focused my attention in this chapter on three aspects of social interaction during the colonial period: gender, ethnicity and race. As I hope to show below, these aspects are not only important areas of inquiry in and of themselves, but they also provide important information about the emergence of Congolese popular music and Kinshasa's particular form of 'modern' urban culture. What ties these separate themes together is their relationship to the colonial state. Belgian colonial policies (often in collaboration with industry and the church) attempted to control many aspects of Congolese society and culture. While there was not a standard, unified policy with regards to culture or cultural production, colonial social

---

<sup>38</sup> "Putting aside any discussion of doctrine, it is important to realize that Belgian colonial policy made considerable efforts to find compromises between very contradictory agenda" (Vellut 1974: 121).

programs clearly affected certain aspects of social life that are important to understanding the emergence of popular music in the region.

Policies concerning unmarried women occupied an important place in the discourse and debates on sexual morality in colonial Leopoldville, and male concerns about female beauty and power become recurring themes in Congolese popular music (ch. 9,10). A discussion of ethnicity during the colonial period bears witness to the ways in which ethnic difference was downplayed in order to detract attention from a system of colonial rule which favored certain ethnic groups over others. This masking of ethnic identity continues into the post-colonial period and is shown to be a necessary condition for the development of an-ethnic 'national' style of popular music (ch. 9,10). And finally the relationship between Congolese musicians and the European (non-Belgian) music impresarios of the 1940s and 1950s calls attention to the fact that certain aspects of cultural activity were either out of the colonial administration's control or considered by the administration to be unimportant. These impresarios acted as the first brokers of Congolese popular music, and their early involvement opened up popular music as one way in which Congolese could experiment and appropriate the 'means of modernity' (Appadurai 1995) for their own needs and desires.

### *The Politics of Sexuality*

"...in its origins Congolese popular music appeared as an eminently male culture" (Gondola 1997: 65).

In Leopoldville in 1910 there were only 10 women for every 100 men. In 1928 the number was 28 per 100, and a steady increase occurred until the beginning of World War II when a huge influx of men brought down only temporarily the proportion of

women living in the city.<sup>39</sup> During the postwar period, when rising unemployment caused many citydwellers to search for livelihoods elsewhere, the proportion of women continued to increase, probably because more and more women were coming to join their husbands, who had become salaried employees in the city. But even at the end of World War II, the ratio of men to women was roughly 2 to 1 and a large percentage of those women remained unmarried (Comhaire-Sylvain 1968).<sup>40</sup> Interestingly enough, these figures showed a marked contrast with Stanleyville (Kisangani), which had much higher marriage rates during more or less the same period (Anstey 1966: 186) and a higher incidence of inter-ethnic marriage than Leopoldville. Presumably the difficulty associated with getting a dowry in Leopoldville was more pronounced, since women there had better access to education and employment (Comhaire-Sylvain 1950: 24), but we must assume that there were other contributing factors as well.

Sex ratios in post-war Leopoldville were characterized by significant variation across ethnic groups or region of origin. Certain ethnic groups (especially those from the furthest away) had relatively balanced sex ratios, but these ratios were thrown off by the overwhelmingly male Kikongo-speaking populations who had long dominated Leopoldville's demographic structure.<sup>41</sup> Despite statistics that showed Kikongo-speaking groups as having the highest natality rates of any group in the city (Comhaire-Sylvain 1950), this did not translate into a male-female ratio that was even remotely balanced for a large part of the colonial period. Various explanations have been put forth. Kongo social

---

<sup>39</sup>Many European companies closed down because of the Great Depression. During this period, the colonial government began rounding people up and sending them back to their villages. Between 1930 and 1935, the male population decreased by one-half, but the female population increased by 8%. By 1934 there were half as many females as males (La Fontaine 1974).

<sup>40</sup>In 1959 there were 78 women for every hundred men and the male-female ratio seems to have more or less balanced out some time in the late 1960s or early 1970s (La Fontaine 1970: 34).

<sup>41</sup>Male-female ratios among Kikongo speaking groups in 1956 Leopoldville: Yaka 7.6 : 8, Mbala 3.4 : 1, Kongo 31.4 : 21.9, Suku 4.3 : 3. Notice that the Kongo group (by far the largest in the capital) has a more balanced ratio than the other Kikongo speaking groups, a phenomenon which can be explained in part by their proximity to Leopoldville. This is the case with the Teke, original inhabitants of the Pool who have a ratio of 1.4 : 1.2 during this period. The same study showed that groups furthest away from Kinshasa had more balanced ratios: Mongo 2.3 : 1.9, Luba 3.1 : 3.7, Budja 2.4 : 2.4, Ngombe 1.9 : 1.5 (Compiled from colonial census data in La Fontaine 1970: 36). Balandier (1955) gives the male-female ratio of Bakongo in Brazzaville of 2 : 1.5 in 1951.

relations are generally believed to give a high degree of economic independence to women, but this generalization is perhaps only a folk rendering of the fact that most Bakongo are matrilineal (whereas in other regions of the country, especially the northeast, patrilineal systems of kinship are more common). In matrilineal kinship, the maternal uncle (mother's brother) often takes on an important role in the care and upbringing of children, sometimes displacing or replacing the role of the biological father. On this basis it would seem that Bakongo women were already pre-disposed to a lesser degree of dependence on husbands (relative to brothers) and thus in this context, the idea of living without a husband may not have been completely unthinkable.

But explanations of this sort fail to tell the whole story with regards to how politics and history operate on gendered colonial subjects. In a fascinating discussion of colonial taxes and 'free women' in Belgian-ruled Rwanda-Urundi, Nancy Rose Hunt (1991) unfolds the history of a women's tax revolt against the peculiar Belgian colonial practice of taxing unmarried women. I will recount the narrative of her article fairly closely because of what it reveals about the politics of male-female demographics in an urban setting. Belgian colonial policy in the interwar period stipulated that polygamous men were required to pay taxes on each additional wife after the first wife and up to the thirtieth. This measure was driven by economic as well as moral reasons, since from the colonial perspective polygamy was not only anti-Christian, but also detrimental to the development of a large urban labor force. Opposition to the tax, especially among members of the clergy, argued that to tax an immoral behavior was at some level to condone it.

In 1950, the colonial government overturned the previous legislation and refused to acknowledge polygamous marriages altogether. Unfortunately, this legislation coincided with a rise in polygamy, especially in rural areas, due primarily to increasingly harsh forced labor requirements imposed by the colonial administration.<sup>42</sup> Congolese

---

<sup>42</sup>For a succinct summary of the arduous and uneven requirements of colonial and missionary labor arrangements in the Belgian Congo, see MacGaffey (1986: 31-38).

educated elites (*évolué* and *évoluant*) argued that this rise in polygamy effectively forced increasing numbers of young men (unable to find wives) and young women (escaping cruel husbands) into the city. At the same time, many men in the city were taking additional wives, but camouflaging them as “concubines” or “supplémentaires” (ibid: 480). After *évolué* groups had made sufficient “noise” about this particularly “nefarious” form of tax evasion, the colonial government responded by imposing a little publicized but very well-known tax on unmarried women. This tax placed all unmarried women in the same category: *les femmes vivant théoriquement seules* (‘women theoretically living alone’). The underlying implication of this category escaped no one: unmarried women are probably prostitutes and thus must be taxed. Taxes of this sort were contested by various groups of women in various parts of the colony, but the majority of women had no means to speak out against this status, one which was as much social as tax-based.<sup>43</sup>

I have recounted this story in detail because I think it illustrates not only the complex relations of power which exist between colonial officials and African subjects, but also between Africans themselves. Hunt’s account shows the extent to which male power (both colonial and Congolese) was brought to bear on women’s independence, mobility and sexuality. The unusual Belgian practice of taxing urban unmarried women was not simply a function of colonial domination, but rather an attempt by various kinds of men in positions of power (customary leaders, urban African elites, missionaries and colonial policymakers) to come to terms with a situation in which the relative scarcity of women gave them a new source of power over men:

“... elle choisit alors qu’elle était choisie, elle cherche à obtenir le plus d’avantages possibles alors qu’elle était source de profit et richesse capitalisée, affirmant ainsi un véritable renversement des rôles” (Balandier 1955: 148).<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup>Hunt’s discussion concludes with the description of a tax revolt by ‘free women’ in which they tossed bundles of protest letters into King Baudoin’s passing motorcade during his visit to Usumbura in 1955. Subsequent to this action, 200 women were arrested, chained, and put in jail. Combaire-Sylvain (1968) refers to a group of women who protested against an *augmented* ‘femme libre’ tax, see below.

<sup>44</sup>...she chooses while before it was she who was chosen, she tries to get as much as she can while before she was the source of profit and capitalized wealth, thus affirming a true reversal of roles.’



"...she attacks the basic structure of the kinship system by denying the authority of men over women, of seniors over juniors" (La Fontaine 1974: 111).

Many observers have noted that the colonial city is the only place where women can obtain property and become upwardly mobile (MacGaffey 1987; Schoepf and Engundu 1991; L. White 1990) and that women's relative scarcity can be considered an advantage: "To some extent, it is true that in the colonial city, the more balanced the gender demography, the less gender relations favored women" (Gondola 1997: 68). It is in this context that we must understand the development of a new liberated female sexuality, one that is intimately linked with the public sphere, especially the worlds of music and popular entertainment.

According to Comhaire-Sylvain, the first feminine associations (*associations féminines*)--Club Américain (1937) and L'Odéon Kinois (1940)--were actually organized by men. The first all-female association went by the name of "Diamant" and was founded by a "mulâtresse" named Antoinette Mongwango in 1943. It seems that Bakongo women were on the whole less represented in these associations than women from other ethnic groups, but most groups included members from various parts of the country. As the end of the war approached, the number of feminine associations began to multiply and the competition between the most well-known associations in Leopoldville was reflected in more stringent membership and increasingly selective recruitment practices:

Les membres devaient être élégantes et savoir se tenir dans le monde. Elles avaient certainement des mœurs libres: il fallait l'argent, beaucoup d'argent. Où le chercher si ce n'est chez les hommes? Mais il ne s'agissait pas de tomber dans la prostitution ouverte, sous peine d'expulsion (Comhaire-Sylvain 1968: 265).<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup>Members had to be elegant and had to know how to carry themselves. They certainly had some sexual freedom: they needed money, lots of money. And what better place to get money than with men? But it was not a matter of falling into open prostitution, this would have resulted in expulsion from the group.'

While not all 'femmes libres' were members of a feminine association, most members of feminine associations were 'femme libres'.<sup>46</sup>

Souvent d'une beauté et d'une éducation au-dessus de la moyenne (elles s'expriment parfois assez bien en français), elles sont aussi plus élégantes que le commun des mortels, portent de plus beaux pagnes, de plus beaux bijoux, de plus belles perruques. Différence essentielle d'avec les prostituées: elles choisissent toujours leurs partenaires tout en leur laissant quelquefois l'illusion d'avoir effectué une conquête difficile. Très au courant de toutes les méthodes anti-conceptionnelles, elles n'ont d'enfants que lorsqu'elles le décident (ibid: 163).<sup>47</sup>

It was these women, whose autonomy was based on the careful manipulation of coquettishness and male desire, who became the subject of scorn in the local press, even after independence. Much of the debate focused on bars where their activities took place. Comhaire-Sylvain discusses an anti-night club campaign that emerged in the local press during her second visit to Kinshasa in the mid-1960s.<sup>48</sup> The contributors to this debate (mostly male Congolese elite), having witnessed an increase in the number of bars--especially in the newer parts of the city--complained that an increasing number of night club-bars were actually "flamingos" (bars with rooms attached) where "immoral things happen all day long" (1968: 99). In 1965, there was a government crackdown which affected bars throughout the city: opening hours were limited to keep daytime bars closed, the location of some bars was declared unacceptable (especially those near schools, social centers or churches), access to minors was prohibited, and there was a limit put on the volume of music. In some cases bars were completely closed down. Comhaire-Sylvain discusses a group of 'free women' who were preparing to protest, not only against tax increases on

---

<sup>46</sup> According to Gondola (1997), a 1958 colonial decree declared that married women who wished to become members of feminine associations required the permission of their husband. Although he does not explain what restrictions were placed on single women, it is clear that colonial policy reflected two social categories for women, wife and *ndumba* (prostitute), and that this policy only reinforced public musical spaces (bars, cabarets, etc.) as the domain of married men and single women (ibid: 75).

<sup>47</sup> 'Often of an above average beauty and education (they often speak excellent French), they are also more elegant than mortal women, they wore nicer wrap-arounds, nicer jewelry and nicer wigs. The main difference between 'free women' and prostitutes: they choose their partners, all the while creating the illusion of a difficult conquest. Very aware of various birth control methods, they do not bear children until they have made a decision to do so.'

<sup>48</sup> The campaign to which she refers occurred mostly in *Présence Congolaise* and *Progrès*, starting in December 1964 (1968: 98).

unmarried women, but also the new restrictions on bars, since, according to them, the bars were the only place they could organize meetings for their association (1968: 162).

Comhaire-Sylvain concedes that given the nature of Congolese society at that time, women in these associations may have been guilty of consumerism and sexual indiscretions, but in the end she argues that their particular form of organization allowed them to advance their own personal objectives without being subjected to male (especially European) control. Their success as *femmes libres* gave them short-term financial security and in many cases opportunities for social mobility. Gondola (1997) takes this argument a step further by arguing that women involved in these associations experienced freedom from male control in general and that their activities constituted a form of symbolic resistance to colonial rule. Unfortunately, his data on these points is less than convincing.<sup>49</sup> Gondola himself shows that certain 'feminine' associations were organized and monitored by bar owners who wanted to attract more male customers. La Fontaine (1974) discusses how some associations entered into promotional agreements with local breweries. In many cases, associations simply negotiated preferential beer prices with bar owners in exchange for their regular presence in the bar. Thus the degree of female autonomy was highly variable and often ambiguous.<sup>50</sup> What is certain, however, is that there existed a coincidence of interests between members of the feminine associations and the predominantly male private bar owners and brewery managers who benefitted from the presence of attractive, unattached women in the urban public sphere.

T.K. Biaya's provocative recent article highlights the important role played by musicians in the development of a particular kind of African urban masculinity. According to Biaya, "...musicians make public the anguish and confusion that affect masculine identity" (1997a: 103). Gondola's suggestive idea of "surmasculinisation" (1997: 95, see

---

<sup>49</sup>There is no convincing evidence, for example, to support his claim that women maintained African style dress as an expression of resistance against colonial rule.

<sup>50</sup>From Balandier's discussion with a local informant: "Their president is a man. You see that tall guy in the blue suit? He runs the 'Shining Star'" (Balandier 1966: 193).

also Biaya 1997a) refers not only to the statistical reality of a city that for most of its lifespan has been predominantly male, but also to the social and cultural forms through which this demographic imbalance has been expressed and understood. In a situation where women were scarce relative to men, and where a significant portion of those women chose to remain unmarried (some very visibly unmarried as in the case of the *femmes libres*), it is not surprising that male identity would become exaggerated through various kinds of public performance. Given the dual presence of colonial domination and a new liberated female sexuality, Congolese men, to put it crudely, had to be more 'manly'. What is interesting, however, is that this particular type of exaggerated masculinity found its most natural voice in music (ch. 10).

By positing a relationship between the historical imbalance in Kinshasa's male-female ratio and the prevalence of lyrics about love and male charm, I do not intend to revive some kind of Malthusian line of reasoning which subordinates culture to demographics. After all, the male-female ratio in Kinshasa has been close to balanced since just before independence. Clearly the characteristically romantic feel of Congolese modern music is just as much a function of politics (since colonial and post-colonial governments were too authoritarian to permit freedom of political expression of any kind), economics (since music about love is the most likely to sell) and cultural values (since expressions of romantic love are not unique to life in the city). Instead, I hope to more accurately reflect the sociological complexity of a popular form of culture which is too often dismissed as epi-phenomenon because of its focus on matters of the heart (White 1997). Balandier's (1966) writing shows not only his own version of male fear in the face of female sexual power, but also the extent to which the politics of sexuality were often worked out through musical performance. Here he comments on the feminine associations which he observed in the 1950s and cites the text from one of their songs:

This surrender to commercial love is not, therefore, devoid of bitterness. But the young women do not linger over these anxieties. They dress in costly fabrics and compete with one another in buying jewelry. They dance. They sing. The provocativeness of their movements gives commercial eroticism a glamour in which our societies are no longer even interested:

Come! Whom do you fear?  
I no longer have a husband  
I married very young  
Thinking there were no other men  
If only I had known!  
Let me love you.  
You're just my type!

(Balandier 1966: 194)

Gondola's (1997) reading of song texts is also interesting in this sense, although I think the songs he discusses are more than examples of a simple critique of social irresponsibility (see ch. 8). Instead I see them as a desperate cry of male hysteria resulting from the realization that women are independent, and from the deep-seated fear that masculinity is turned inside out under colonial rule (c.f. Kroker & Kroker 1991). But these expressions of male fear are not limited to music. An important literature on the images of mystical mermaid figures in popular painting ('mamywata') has called attention to this icon as a symbol of male desire and the arbitrariness of wealth and power (see ch. 9).

Mamywata, much like the elusive *femme libre*, is a woman whom men cannot control, locate or appropriate (Jewsiewicki 1991) [figure 2.1]. Her control over men is complete since in exchange for unlimited wealth, men must promise to remain faithful to her. She is the object of male desire, yet she is unattainable. Her legs are sealed.

This history of sexual tension is important in understanding Kinshasa's reputation as the Central African (if not African) capital of *amour* and *ambience* (ch. 3, 9). As Martin (1995) has observed, this sexual tension often expressed itself in the form of public jealousy or 'love brawls' which are just as common today and which occur between rival women as well as men. One of La Fontaine's informants, a young woman from Stanleyville, sums up nicely the outsider's view of Kinshasa as a sexualized, conflictual



**LA SEDUCTION**  
LA FIDELITE A LA SILE

fig. 21 Versioning Marniwata (from Vogel 1991)

urban space: "Men [in Kinshasa] do not know how to restrain their natural desires, and the women are avid for money. There is a lack of mutual respect, and one might say that there is coexistence and nothing else but a continual conflict of interests between the sexes" (Lafontaine 1971: 132). But in all fairness, our analysis must be careful not to reduce male-female relations to questions of sexuality. While public debates about women during the colonial period were primarily focused on this new type of unmarried, uncontrolled female sexuality, I disagree with Biaya's claims that the colonial administration ignored the role of African wives and mothers in its urban social programs and policies (see Biaya 1994 and 1997a). Hunt's (1997) account of colonial efforts to alter African infant feeding and birth spacing practices shows to what extent the interwar panic over decreasing populations influenced Belgium's concern with nuclear families. Likewise, her rich reading of the Belgian-sponsored *foyers sociaux* (domestic training institutions for African women) clearly illustrates the colonial preoccupation with producing 'proper' wives for an emerging class of *évolués* who were defined (and in turn defined themselves) not in terms of their ethnicity, but in terms of their proximity to the culture of the colonizer.

### *Masking Ethnicity*

Belgian colonial policy (much like most of the policy that would follow independence) discouraged ethnic-based groupings or associations, presumably because this kind of intra-ethnic solidarity was perceived as a threat to colonial authority. Despite this fact, and the fact that "both missionaries and big firms worked hand in hand with the Government" to enforce these policies (Comhaire-Sylvain 1950: 24), it is important to remember that certain conservative elements of the Catholic church saw inter-ethnic marriage as dangerous because it might lead to divorce, or worse yet "des liaisons

multiraciales". According to La Fontaine, at the same time that the colonial government was encouraging inter-ethnic unions throughout the colony, it was also encouraging urban migration from the upper Congo in order to counterbalance the strong Bakongo presence in Leopoldville.<sup>51</sup> This distinction between southern groups ('gens du bas') and northern groups ('gens du haut') would prove to be important in the evolution of political policy and discourse concerning the colonial capital.<sup>52</sup>

In reality, ethnicity in Leopoldville was much more complex than the simple high/low distinction which pervaded much colonial discourse (Young 1965), but there was some truth in opposing the dominant Kikongo-speaking groups (primarily Bakongo, from southwest of Leopoldville) to the rest of the ethnic groups living in the city.<sup>53</sup> Most people from non-Kongo groups came from up-river, especially from the densely populated regions around Mbandaka (and to a lesser extent from Kisangani and various parts of Kasai). The majority of Kongo peoples were cultivators, while groups north of the Malebo Pool very often sustained themselves through a combination of intensive fishing and basic farming. Thus the broadest ethnic categories (people from above/people from below) corresponded roughly to the human geography of the western half of the Belgian Congo. But this distinction was also reinforced by a post-Portuguese European presence (traders, missionaries, administrators) which perceived northern peoples as more receptive to religious conversion and administrative control. Despite the fact that the Bakongo "were

---

<sup>51</sup> Comhaire-Sylvain's (1968) discussion of common ethnic stereotypes in the 1950s sounds similar to those I was hearing in Kinshasa in the 1990s: Bangala women admire Bakongo men as husbands, but Bakongo women would not say the same about Bangala men. Bangala men would say that "a man is lucky to find a woman from among the Bakongo" (39) who are considered to be more submissive than Bangala women and more easily controlled. According to Bakongo men, Bangala women will sleep around for money, and they are considered to be volatile but honest, "she'll kill you to your face". Whereas Bakongo are believed to be less forthcoming, even hypocritical: "The mukongo won't say anything, he'll poison you..." (40).

<sup>52</sup> After independence (and especially due to rebellions and secessionist movements originating in the eastern half of the country) an east-west division will become operative in national politics. For a discussion of this division in relation to Kabila's new government, see White (1997).

<sup>53</sup> This high/low distinction (with some variations) corresponding to north/south geographical barriers has been operative in many colonial settings in Africa, especially West Africa where natural markers such as deserts, savannahs and forests correspond with ethnic differentiation. See Rouch (1956) and Mitchell (1956) for good discussions from newly urbanizing areas in British colonies.



one of the best prepared societies for European contact in Central Africa" (Balandier 1966), it was tribes from the north that would benefit from the preferential treatment of the colonial regime.

As far back as the early years of the Congo Free State, Stanley had begun to refer to certain northern riverine groups as the "Bangala" (literally, 'the people of the river'), but the exact origin of the name is not clear and despite his characterization of them as an "unquestionably a very superior tribe" (quoted in Young 1965: 242), the name has never been shown to correspond to any discrete political or ethnic unit. Nevertheless, the term became reinforced by administrative reports and ethnological surveys in the region. From a very early date, the Bangala were an important part of the colonial *Force Publique* (combined police and military force) and were the preferred recruits for river transport crews. It was probably these same riverine groups that were active in the movement of goods and people from the interior to intermediate points such as the Malebo Pool during the lucrative years of the Atlantic slave trade (Vansina 1990). With the adoption of Lingala (note the root, 'ngala') as the language of the military, this 'artificial ethnicity' (Young 1965) was further crystallized and its close association with the colonial authorities made it a source of contempt especially from the Kikongo-speaking groups who predominated in the colonial capital.

It is important to distinguish between two processes of change which come to bear on ethnic identity and organization during the colonial period in various parts of sub-Saharan Africa. The first is a process I will refer to as ethnic *simplification*, whereby a large number of discrete ethnic groups become known (primarily by outsiders such as colonial administrators) as part of a larger ethnic family or grouping. The case of the Bangala as discussed above is a good example of this. The second process can be described as a form of ethnic *crystallization*, in which closely related clans or sub-units come to be increasingly aware of their commonalities by virtue of their exposure to other

ethnic groups in an urban setting. This is the process which Jean Rouch (1956) has referred to as 'super-tribalism':

Tout au long de cet exposé de l'organisation sociale des émigrants en Gold Coast, nous avons trouvé, contrairement à ce qui est admis d'habitude, que les milieux transplantés, loin d'être 'détribalisés' sont, au contraire, 'super-tribalisés'. La ville, la vie mécanique, n'affaiblissent pas leur cohésion tribale mais la renforcent. Elles ne diminuent pas leur orgueil de race, elles le décuplent. Ce n'est pas une conscience de classe qui naît chez les ouvriers de la Gold Coast, mais une conscience de tribu qui renaît, si toutefois elle avait tendance à disparaître (Rouch 1956: 164).<sup>54</sup>

It is interesting to note the similarity between Rouch's account and that of Mitchell (1956), who was conducting urban research at the same time in the Rhodesian Copperbelt region: "It is in a situation such as this, where neighbors are constantly changing and where people from many different tribes are thrown together, that the distinctiveness of other people becomes apparent" (22). As I mentioned above, Mitchell and his colleagues have been criticized for reifying the concept of 'tribalism' as a part of the liberal humanitarian impulse which drove much of the research associated with the Manchester school (Ferguson 1990a). But Mitchell's early study is revealing for what it demonstrates about the correlation between ethnicity and colonial occupational status, for the emphasis it places on inter-ethnic relations (especially his adapted version of Bogardus's scale of social distance), and as one of the first studies to look at how expressions of ethnic identity vary according to social context.

The two processes discussed above (simplification and crystallization) overlap to a certain extent in the various ethnic-based nationalist movements which occur during the colonial period. Jean Bolikango asserted a "grande ethnie Bangala" in the period leading up to independence when Leopoldville was still very much plagued by the Bakongo-

---

<sup>54</sup> Throughout this analysis of the social organization of emigrants to the Gold Coast, we have seen, contrary to what is usually admitted, that the new social milieu, far from being 'détribalized' is in actuality 'super-tribalized'. The mechanized life of the city does not weaken tribal cohesion, but reinforces it. It does not reduce racial pride, but augments it. It is not a class consciousness which arises among these workers, but a consciousness of tribe, even though this consciousness was already beginning to disappear.' Compare with Waterman's (1990) discussion of pan-ethnic Yoruba identity (see ch. 10).

Bangala opposition (Young 1965: 245). Kongo nationalism was most likely influenced by Kimbanguist religious movement which became widespread in the Lower Congo during the 1920s, but it coalesced under the organization of the pan-Kongo ABAKO party just before independence.<sup>55</sup> The Mongo nationalist movement was heavily promoted by Flemish sympathizers (especially Boelaert and Hulstaert) who urged the formation of a standard Mongo language and even a Mongo state.<sup>56</sup> The Mongo movement was remarkable not only for the emphasis it gave to Mongo expressive culture (especially poetry), but also because a large part of its platform was based on denying its previous association with the those who were classified as Bangala. All of these cases assert the highly political nature of ethnic categories, since, as Jewsiewicki has written, "Through the manipulation of ideology and ethnic identities, 'elites' mobilize the potential of political clientelism for political struggles" (Jewsiewicki 1984: 106).

In Jewsiewicki's terms, then, ethnicity must be understood as a set of practices, but also as an ideological discourse which co-opts cultural icons in arbitrary and self-serving ways. Appadurai (1990) has argued that not only do states use political propaganda and state-run media to domesticate ethnic difference, but also that the rise of nationalist movements in predatory states has led to a kind of mutual cannibalism: "the nation and the state have become one another's project". Though the colonial administration in the Congo was not the only one to discourage ethnic-based associations and other forms of ethnic clustering, it does seem that the general political climate in the Belgian Congo was less conducive to inter-ethnic conflict than was the case in many other African colonies. Of course colonial policies are rarely applied evenly over time and space. A good example is Rwanda-Urundi, where Belgian colonial policy perpetuated a myth of Tutsi superiority to

---

<sup>55</sup>In the Congolese literature, "Kongo" refers to the Kikongo speaking peoples located primarily south and west of the Malebo Pool. "Congo" refers to the administrative unit that was created by Leopold and later ceded to the Belgium government.

<sup>56</sup>Bogumil Jewsiewicki and several colleagues are currently conducting research on the Mongo nationalist movements during the colonial period.

justify rule over the Hutu masses (Le Marchand 1994). The rest, as they say, is history.<sup>57</sup> In the Belgian Congo, the Bangala had actively participated in regional trading networks, they were dispersed over a large area, they had no large-scale royal tradition and since their livelihood was dependent upon fishing, they were less tied to the land than their Bakongo counterparts. The Bakongo were probably perceived by the colonial government as a threat, not only because of their attachment to their land, but also because of their proximity and their sheer numbers relative to other ethnic groups living in the city. It is this masked form of preferential ethnic politics which will also characterize the Mobutu regime, and which will contribute to the formation of an expressly an-ethnic urban identity which finds its highest expression in contemporary popular dance music (ch. 10).

### *Les Petits Blancs*

Everyone has heard of Lumumba's astonishment during his first visit to Brazzaville in 1956, when he was faced with a society where Whites and Blacks, at least on the surface, live together peacefully. (Gondola 1990: 494).

As I will explain in Chapter Four, 'cultural brokers' and their networks are of primary importance to this research, for it is they who manage the material and symbolic resources which constitute notions of taste (and thus value) in a given society (cf Steiner 1994). Brokers of culture during the colonial period in the Congo came in many forms: Belgian missionaries who trained young Congolese singers and dancers (Père van den Boom), Congolese organizers of the *spectacles populaires* and their Belgian collaborators (*Ligue Folklorique Congolaise* of Père van den Bosche and Mongita, and later Maître Taureau), a large number of Congolese musicians, and the mostly Greek local merchants who became the first owners of private recording studios in Leopoldville (Jeronimidis,

---

<sup>57</sup>It is interesting to note that in both Belgian Congo and Ruanda-Urundi colonial authorities tended to side with groups that were primarily non-agricultural.

Papa Dimitriou). Below I will discuss some of the preliminary accounts of the contact between Africans and whites in the music industry, a topic which, once more fully elaborated, may improve our understanding of race relations in general during this period of Congolese history.

Although imported phonographs and sound recordings had been circulating through expatriate communities as least as early as the 1920s, locally produced music would not begin until the establishment of several foreign-owned recording studios by primarily Greek entrepreneurs in the 1940s.

The role played by the music recording houses in the Congo is one of immeasurable importance. The future of our music and the development of African musical arts could only have been suffocated, like so many gifts and innate musical skills brought together by colonization, were it not for the fortunate coincidence that certain merchants felt compelled to benefit from making records, a coincidence which indirectly gave them the title of curator of the 'Congolese musical heritage' (Lonoh 1969: 30).

Throughout most of my writing, I will refer to these businesses as 'studio houses' (*maisons d'édition*) because they served the dual function of recording studios and record labels, not only recording local musicians but also providing them full-time employment and some degree of professional training (fr. *encadrement*). The first of these houses (Olympia) was opened in 1939, but it was not until the arrival of Ngoma in 1948 that musicians would be able to claim full professional status. Under the supervision of Ngoma's owner Jeronimidis, some of the music's early local personalities would be offered employment contracts as in-house musicians, some as individuals (Leon Bukasa, Lucie Eyenga) some as groups (Beguen Band, Le Trio Bow, San Salvador). Other houses would soon follow suit. In 1950 three major studios were producing and distributing records. By 1960, the number had increased to nearly 20 (RFI 1992: 6).<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> Apart from Jeronimidis' Ngoma, Benatar's Opika label (1950) and the Dimitriou brothers' Loningisa label (1950) were also hugely successful during this period. Later studio-labels included CEFA (Compagnie d'enregistrement de folklore africain, 1953) directed by Roger Izeidi, and Antonopolos' Esengo (1957) before multinational firms got involved (Philips, HMV, and others).

Unlike the first musicians to record in Leopoldville, this first generation of professional musicians became skilled at imitating and adapting music from abroad, especially the influential G.V. series of Afro-Cuban recordings that were distributed in Congo-Zaire and throughout many parts of West Africa (Waterman 1990). This change in style was not only a result of their desire to emulate cosmopolitan imported styles, but also a function of the fact that they were employees of people who were in the business of selling records. The studio owners, as the quotation above suggests, were in an ambiguous position in Congolese colonial society. As whites and merchants, they were different from the vast majority of Congolese, who probably viewed them as rich foreigners. On the other hand, they were clearly not Belgian, since many Belgians found popular forms of entertainment crass and imitative and thus not worthy of attention. Perhaps in search of profits, perhaps intrigued by local popular entertainment, these *petits blancs* ('white trash', lit. 'little whites') saw the ease with which Congolese assimilated different musical styles as a financial and professional opportunity.<sup>59</sup>

In some cases, the foreign merchants that owned and operated the early recording houses were themselves musicians and this tended to soften the interaction between Congolese musicians and their employers. "Dimitriou played the accordion; we trusted him," one musician told me (Wendo, personal communication). Very often the studio owner also acted as arranger and sound technician as well. Most musicians from this period with whom I had the chance to speak had positive memories of their interaction with the studio owners. *He was like a father to us*, I heard on a number of occasions, or *We received a regular salary. It wasn't much, but if we ever had problems we could go to see him and he would give us a little something.*

---

<sup>59</sup>Many of the studio owners managed several business ventures at one time (clothes, domestic goods, food, etc.) and music helped them sell other goods that lacked the visibility of music. In addition to selling records, the studio houses published and distributed music catalogs. In some cases these publications were strictly listings of recordings and their artists, but there were also publications which gave biographies of particular musicians or groups. Each house had anywhere from 10-15 catalogs and would often distribute them with the purchase of a record (Lonoh, personal communication).

The whites used to take care of us. Bill Alexander [the Belgian guitarist] invited us to his house for dinner. And that was the time when blacks weren't allowed in the white part of town. Wendo used to buy us things, too. He got his first Cadillac in 1952. It was a car that belonged to Assistant Director of the *Banque Congo Belge*. We had good relations with all them (Roitelet, May 12, 1996).

Jean Serge Essous, one of the original members of O.K. Jazz, vividly remembers Papa Dimitriou, the owner of the Loningisa label. Not only was Dimitriou a musician ("he used to sing in his shop while he sold wrap-arounds"), but he had also taken a Congolese wife, a young woman named Marie Kitoko, who was herself a singer.

He used to come at night with his wife. He used to like the clarinette. 'Okay Franco,' he would say, 'you sit down. Let me listen to the clarinette some.' Sometimes he told Franco and I to do duos with guitar and clarinette. He would come to the studio after closing his shop at 5:00pm. The Greeks were good with people. They spoke good Lingala like the Portuguese. They came to our country to get rich, but the French and Belgians came as administrators (Essous, Sept. 7, 1995).

When competition between studio houses increased, studio owners were forced to offer better terms of employment and better working conditions to musicians. In some cases they would offer expensive gifts (clothes, appliances, cars) in order to keep certain musicians in their 'stable' (*écurie*). Needless to say, relations between musicians and studio owners were perceived by Congolese elites as exploitative, and owners were regularly accused of taking advantage of African talent for commercial profit. According to Thomas Kanza, the first studio owners were profiteers who:

far from trying to improve the artistic quality of Zairean music, were more concerned with the profitability of industrial production. I admire their business sense, but I find regrettable the exploitation of Zairean artists by which they themselves became celebrities. Only a small percentage of profits from record sales was ever given to the artist (Kanza 1972: 43).

And settler responses to Congolese demands for independence reflected a profound defensiveness:

Nothing in the history of the Congolese justifies any sort of rights for them over the country as a whole. They have never created anything, not a motor, not a wheel-barrow, nothing. We have lifted them from cannibalism and slavery. It is we who have unified, pacified and organized the country (settler leader quoted in Anstey 1966: 172).

Approaching independence, the non-Congolese portion of the Belgian Congo made up a very small percentage of the colony's total. Of about 114,000 non-Congolese, almost 89,000 were Belgian, 60% of whom were Flemish (with an especially high percentage of Flemish among the missionary population). Only about 10% of the entire non-Congolese population was given the official status of settler, since colonial policymakers feared the emergence of a class of poor white settlers who might become either burdens or agitators in an already fragile political and economic equilibrium (Lemarchand 1964). To this end, regulations were stringent, requiring guaranteed deposits (*cautions*) for foreign commercial ventures and imposing strict immigration quotas by country. Apart from their limited numbers, one of the reasons that settlers did not represent a strong political force in Belgian colonial politics was the fact that there was an almost equal number of Belgians and non-Belgians among them, and this worked against the possibility of widespread collective action (*ibid*).

According to one informant, Belgians were rarely involved in petty trading or commerce: "They never *came down* into business," I was told. "Belgians were only in the political sector. They would only do public administration. If they were involved in commerce it was only as a *grand chef* ('big boss')." According to this account, Belgians were absent from the nascent informal sector, an observation which seems important because it suggests that Congolese and Belgians were just as segregated in their economic lives as they were in their social lives (cf Balandier's 1955; C.E.C. 1991). As the examples from the early music industry show, however, it was not race alone which limited contact between whites and Africans in the Belgian colonial context. Understanding the early years of professional popular music, and the extent to which it depended on the presence of foreign (non-Belgian) capital, is important to later chapters



which will examine the structures of musical production and how they changed under post-colonial rule (ch. 4). But these vignettes of interracial relations also give hints about musicians' privileged position with regards to some of the tools of 'modernity'.

## **Mediating the Colonial Experience**

The point to be stressed is that the cultural power of colonial states was in fact quite limited: the unwillingness of colonial regimes before the 1940s to spend metropolitan funds, the crudity of forced labor and taxation policies, the necessity of making alliances with precolonial elites, and the instinctive racism of colonial officials made cultural transmission a difficult and contradictory task, and even the transmitted elements, such as Christianity, were constantly being reinterpreted and redefined by the recipients. Colonial states did not impart a consistent language in which to convince their subjects of their hegemony (Cooper 1987: 101).

By definition (ch. 1), popular forms of entertainment (music, dance, theater) most often emanate 'from the people', but because of their widespread public appeal and high visibility they can also be co-opted by state or class-based interest groups (White 1997). For this reason, popular entertainment represents a valuable source of information about the ways in which colonialism was organized and understood (Fabian 1996). A social history of performance can enable us to 'reconstruct' (and I use the term advisedly) the social dialogues which occurred between Europeans and Africans, and between Africans themselves during the period of colonial rule. Despite a number of articles or chapters which have attempted to unravel this complex history (Kazadi 1979; Gondola 1992; Tchebwa 1996) and several book-length studies which are more biographical in nature (Bemba 1985; Ewens 1996), the history of popular culture in Congo-Zaire, especially with regards to colonial cultural policy, remains to be written. In this chapter, I have only sketched out some of the broad lines and themes; I intend to concentrate specifically on this topic in future research.

One of the primary issues I want to explore is the question of how and to what extent colonial control was brought to bear on popular forms of entertainment and public spaces. According to Gondola:

*En dernière analyse, la musique populaire du Congo-Zaire a constitué pour les jeunes citadins Congolais une sorte d'exutoire, un dérivatif à la violence du monde urbain et une des rares tribunes d'expression culturelle exempte de mainmise européenne. Les tentatives coloniales de prise en main, qui réussirent par exemple dans le domaine de la peinture ou le théâtre, échouèrent en musique (Gondola 1993: 166).<sup>60</sup>*

Music especially has been described as an “unedited means of socialization” (ibid) and a space in which Congolese could join together “far from the surveillance of the white colonizer” (Tchebwa 1996: 57). Drawing from Appadurai (1995; also Mbembe 1992a), I want to argue that popular entertainment during the colonial period opened up a politically acceptable space in which Africans could ‘play’ with the forces of ‘modernity’ and colonialism, appropriating and retooling (ch. 10, Coda) the meanings and structures which had been imposed on their lives in an urban setting.<sup>61</sup> It is in this sense that popular entertainment can be seen as a mediating force between the imposition of a heavy-handed system of (Belgian) colonial rule and everyday African experience. Many scholars have commented upon the tight control of social time within the various institutions of the church and the colonial state, which divided urban life into carefully discrete units devoted respectively to education, work, prayer, and leisure (Gondola 1992). Future research will show to what extent this was true of popular music and music-based entertainment.

The Belgian concern with controlling the social and cultural evolution of its subjects led to isolationist policies in many areas of colonial administration. Gondola has argued that the Malebo Pool which separates Kinshasa from Brazzaville acted as a kind of ‘leak’ (1990)

---

<sup>60</sup>‘In the final analysis, the popular music of Congo-Zaire constituted for young Congolese a kind of order, a derivative to the violence of the urban world and one of the rare tribunes of cultural expression which is free of European control. Colonial attempts at control, which are successful in painting and theater, fail in music’.

<sup>61</sup>“On the proposal that popular entertainment opened up a politically acceptable space ... certainly yes, but perhaps more a politically uncontrollable space...and that is certainly not all there is to it” (Jan Vansina, personal communication, Feb. 7, 1998).

or 'bridge' through which musicians travelled back and forth, sharing information about colonial practices and African lifestyle on the French side of the river (1992: 480). Although he refers to colonial attempts to control popular musical performance, it is not clear from his data that the colonial regime ever perceived music or musical nightlife as a social or political force, a fact which is surprising given the music's sheer presence as a 'social fact' (Barber 1987).<sup>62</sup> As Raymond Williams has observed: "There will be areas of practice and meaning which, almost by definition from its own limited character, or in its profound deformation, the dominant culture is unable in any real terms to recognize" (1997: 43). But if popular music was a blind spot for the colonial regime, it was certainly not so for those that would follow. In fact, the performance of dance and music (folklore as well as 'modern') would become the primary focus of Mobutu's elaborate propaganda machine and its primary public strategy, that of *animation politique*.

What does this general historical overview tell us about the relationship between colonial administration and popular forms of cultural expression? Despite its preliminary nature, it suggests certain important findings. With increasingly harsh forced labor and taxation in Congolese villages--even well after the end of the Congo Free State, see Likaka 1997--many young people (especially young men) began to migrate to urban areas in search of a better life. At the same time (especially as World War II approached), the colonial government (in collaboration with the church and large-scale industry) began making concerted efforts to make cities more liveable in the hopes that labor pools would become stable. Because of the nature of Belgian colonial rule, however, the avenues of social advancement open to the vast majority of Congolese were extremely limited. At the same time, men were plagued by the scarcity of women in the city and by the fact that many women chose to remain single. In this context, music became an important arena for social differentiation and the acquisition of personal power through masculinized display

---

<sup>62</sup>His only examples are an indirectly state-sponsored songwriting competition and the jailing of a musician (Adou Elenga) whose 1954 "Ata Ndele" ('Sooner or Later') called for the 'sweeping away' of colonial rule. Admittedly a very confrontational subject matter, Elenga's song was a very rare exception to the general rule of early rumba which was only politically critical through playfulness or sub-text.

(ch. 9,10).<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, it permitted uncensored interaction between women and men, and it seems to be one of the only social spaces in an urban context that was free of colonial control. Obviously the dynamic nature of the colonial economy was conducive to the development of music--the topic of my next chapter--as an important form of urban leisure, but these mostly nocturnal spaces were also the safest (if not the only) places for political organization and imagination.

---

<sup>63</sup>This explanation obviously cannot account for similar situations of female scarcity in other parts urban colonial Africa. For male migration, music and male-female relations in the copperbelt region, see Erlmann (1996: 101).

## Part Two: The Transformation of *Typique*

### Chapter Three: Genres and Style

#### Popular Music and Genre

*La Musique Moderne*

*Le Folklore*

*La Musique Religieuse*

#### Three Generations

*Tango Ya BaWendo*

The Big Rumba Period

*La Nouvelle Vague*

#### Two 'Schools'

#### Congo-Zaire's Invisible Innovation

*L'Animation*

*Atalaku, Animateur*

Dances and Shouts

#### The Re-indigenization Thesis

*For years, I must confess, I resented Zairean popular music until I met it on its own ground. Eventually I became seduced by its power and beauty but I am still privately embarrassed that it took me so long to recognize it as perhaps the richest and most distinctive gift to the continent, and indeed the world, to come from Zaire.*

(Johannes Fabian 1998: 82)

*Ambiancer. v.i. Afrique. Mettre de l'ambiance, de l'animation.*

(Le Petit Larousse Illustré 1995)

The material in this chapter is intended to give an overview of the particular style of popular music which within the Congo is usually referred to as *musique moderne* or *musique typique*.<sup>1</sup> I am interested not only in the style's recent history and the particular characteristics which distinguish it from other genres of popular music, but also in the organizing principles of the musical genre which represent the ways in which 'tradition' and 'modernity' are increasingly entangled over time. While this chapter is not intended as a comprehensive history of the musical style, it will provide general information about how the style has evolved from the late colonial period to the present, information which will form the basis for future research on popular entertainment and the emergence of a public sphere in colonial Leopoldville. Before discussing the musical style itself, I should make some comments about the *genres of writing* which have taken Congolese popular music as their primary focus.

Many accounts of 'modern' Congolese music have made some attempt to discuss the style in historical terms.<sup>2</sup> The most obvious examples are discussions about the origins of the music (Kazadi 1979, Lonoh 1969), which seem to be primarily concerned with showing the hybrid nature of the music and its special relationship with the city (see ch. 2). There has also been some historical scholarship which attempts to look at the relationship between music and the development of an African urban consciousness during the colonial period (Gondola 1992; 1993; 1997). By far the greatest amount of writing has been biographical in nature, not only university manuscripts (many of which were published locally in Congo-Zaire: Luyela 1981; Makengo 1985; Mula 1991; Pwono 1992), but also thorough historical accounts which focus

---

<sup>1</sup>The word 'typique' is the only other term (apart from 'modern' and sometimes 'rumba', although this usually refers to a particular musical period) which was systematically used by people in Kinshasa to qualify the popular music which is discussed in this study. It seemed to be a word that was more commonly used by young people and especially by musicians, but I have also heard older musicians use this term also, in which case they are referring to the *typique* music of Afro-Cuban origin (perhaps from the Spanish term 'típico') which comes from the period that is usually associated with *rumba classique* (1950s and part of the 1960s). I will discuss these generational distinctions in greater detail below.

<sup>2</sup>Barber has observed that through academic writing and promotion, certain genres of popular culture have been associated with certain regions of sub-regions in Africa. Central Africa (including Congo-Zaire) is usually associated with popular painting (Barber 1987: 28), and this despite the overpowering presence of popular music in the region.

on the life and work of certain 'greats' of the musical style (Ewens 1994; Lokole 1985; Onyumba n.d.).

There are several books which combine history and biography to provide the reader with a general overview of the phenomenon of popular music in urban Congo-Zaire. The very first book to take on this mission was the now classic (and very difficult to find) *Essai de commentaire de la musique Congolaise moderne* by Michel Lonoh.<sup>3</sup> In 1985, the (Brazzaville) Congolese Sylvain Bemba published the first book-length study of the musical style. Like Lonoh, his book offers a wealth of detail about the various players and social significance of the music, but it clearly suffers from the need to reclaim the musical style for Brazzaville Congolese.<sup>4</sup> By far the most comprehensive of this genre is Manda Tchebwa's *La Terre de la Chanson* (1996). Although Tchebwa's background is in music journalism and library science, his book has a distinctly sociological feel and shows wider coverage of music-related issues.<sup>5</sup> Although I take some inspiration from these works, my writing is more steeped in anthropological questions of meaning, performance, identity, and power. Apart from some work done by journalists or chroniclers (especially Gary Stewart and Graeme Ewens), my study is the first based on extensive research that is conducted by an outsider and written entirely in English. Young Congolese scholars of various persuasions are increasingly interested in this as a topic, but the networks of supervision and distribution are very diffuse. As I will argue in Chapter 10, it is the very 'modern' appearance of Congolese popular music which has made it of little interest to scholars and researchers from the West.

---

<sup>3</sup>During my field stay I consulted on a regular basis with General Lonoh. Because of his associations with the Mobutu regime he has been forced into internal exile since the arrival of Kabila, and I have not heard from him since my last trip to Kinshasa.

<sup>4</sup>Apart from what it tells us about popular music, Bemba's text is a valuable piece of information about the political context in the early to mid 1980s, especially with regards to the political relations between Congo-Brazzaville and Zaire. A number of pieces have discussed music as a bridge between the two Congos (Gondola 1990; Tchebwa 1996), but little of concrete has been written about the relations of demographic and financial inequality between the two.

<sup>5</sup>Manda was one of my primary collaborators for research on the musical style. His book, although it was somewhat rushed in the final months of preparation, remains a valuable resource for anyone curious about the history and culture of Congo-Zairean popular music.

Apart from these published manuscripts and book-length studies, over recent years there has been a huge amount of information published within the country in the form of music journalism (fr. 'chronique de la musique').<sup>6</sup> The prolific early music magazines which began to be popular in the 1970s ("Disco Hit", "L'As des As", "Super Star") and culturally inclined newspapers (like "Salongo" and "Elima") were mostly concerned with providing a hungry public with information about the private lives of the stars, their comings and goings, and various types of inter and intra-band conflict (ch. 8). Foreign journalists, of which Martin Sinnock (*Beat* magazine) is probably the most knowledgeable, are primarily concerned with providing the 'world music' audience with information about new releases, tours and new trends in the music. Following in the chronicler tradition and just as much tied to the emerging market for 'world beat' music, there are a number of well-researched books which give detailed information about music and artists by region (e.g. Ewens 1992).

Finally there is a less well-known category of writing about Congolese popular music which is more academic in nature and which is primarily concerned with the cultural meanings attached to Congolese popular music. A considerable amount of research has been done on the recurring themes of song lyrics (Onyumbwe 1982; 1983; 1986; 1994a, 1994b; Luzibu 1973; Engundu 1995), but unfortunately these analyses tend to be divorced from the social and political context in which the music is produced or consumed and they invariably tell us very little about the music from an esthetic point of view. By classifying thematic genres, these accounts make implicit claims about the relationship between music and society (often seen as direct and unilinear), but their prevalence in the literature attests to the importance that Congolese give to the music's 'message'.<sup>7</sup> By far the most interesting writing on the subject is that of Ngandu Nkashama, a specialist in comparative literature who has written extensively on music and theater as well. Nkashama (1979, 1992) has attempted to distance himself from the immediacy of

---

<sup>6</sup>Several years ago, Manda Tchewwa founded the *Association des journalistes chroniqueurs de la musique du Zaïre*, presumably now 'du Congo' (the Association of Journalists and Chroniclers of the Music of the Congo).

<sup>7</sup>Tchewwa (1996) has isolated no less than 28 different themes which characterize modern music. In Chapter Nine I will discuss the importance that is given to lyrics and meaning in a local setting in Kinshasa.



biographical or lyrical analysis and has focused instead on the question of how the performance of popular music can reflect and constitute post-colonial consciousness.

Although in some instances I have chosen the stories of individual musicians or bands to illustrate a point, I do not consider this chapter to be a biography or a chronology of the 'modern' Congolese music scene. My goals are different, in some sense more modest, partly because much of the work of chronicling for Congolese music has been effectively undertaken by others, especially Congolese writers themselves (Bemba 1985; Lonoh 1969; Tchebwa 1996). Instead, I have attempted to identify important trends in the musical style over time and to complement these observations with individual stories of celebrity which illustrate or illuminate the overall arguments of the chapter. After a brief overview of the main genres and sub-genres of popular music in Kinshasa, I will consider various historical aspects of the music which come to bear on the analysis of genre in popular culture, namely generational categories, esthetic styles or 'schools', the phenomenon of *animation*, and the complex relationship between 'modern' music and other popular musical styles.

### **Popular Music and Genre**

Before entering into the specific discussion of how generic distinctions are expressed in Congolese popular music, I will discuss several points about what genres do, or more precisely, what people do with genres. In this discussion I will draw heavily from the recent work of Johannes Fabian (1998), which devotes considerable attention to the question of power in its analysis of genres. While the blurring of disciplinary boundaries keeps me from being able to ignore an important body of research on genres from within literary studies, I am primarily interested in the potential of ethnographic analysis because of its potential to show how genre works, and what it includes and excludes (Fabian 1998: 40; see also Kratz 1989).

As Fabian has shown, the process of differentiation of genres expresses concern with classification and thus normativity. "Genre--much like value, norm, standard--embodies cultural injunctions to know what belongs and what doesn't, what is proper and what isn't, what is well crafted and what is *bricolage*." (ibid: 41; c.f. Bourdieu 1984). In Chapter Nine, I will argue that generic distinctions become important as modes of expressing opposition to faceless forms of hegemonic power ('colonialism', 'the church', etc.), but they also give rise to the elaboration of various sorts of power 'from within' (those based on differences of class, gender, religion and age).

I assume (perhaps naively) that genres are identifiable as local categories and are salient in local regimes of value to the extent that they are repeated and named. I also hold that popular discourse about genres (in this case about styles of popular music) is crucial in terms of defining and negotiating identity, not just cultural identity, but also that of gender, class, and the individual (a point which I elaborate in ch. 9). The notion of genre should be distinguished from that of 'style', if for no other reason than the fact that the term 'genre' suggests that the speaker has some special technical or esoteric knowledge of the subject.<sup>8</sup> In my discussion of genres of popular music in Kinshasa, I will distinguish between three 'types' of music which act as genres (i.e. are used as forms of social or esthetic distinction) but which themselves also contain sub-genres: 'moderne', 'folklore', and 'religieuse'.

Apart from the rare occurrence of American or French music popular music (Whitney Houston, Celine Dion, Julio Iglesias, etc.), the vast majority of music that Congolese listen to is created by local artists. As in any country, there are local aficionados of jazz, classical, and country music, but it is extremely rare to hear this music in public. There are three basic types of popular music in Kinshasa: 'modern', 'traditional' and religious. Over the last 50 years, the three have co-existed, with the 'modern' category taking up the most space (both physically and symbolically) in urban centers and especially in Kinshasa (Ndaywel 1993). In fact, this

---

<sup>8</sup>"Style" is a very complex term because it refers to 'personal style' as well as to 'genre'. Throughout most of the thesis I use the term 'style' to refer to the genre of 'modern' Congolese music which is the central focus of analysis, but at certain moments in my writing I also call up the former meaning.

music is so taken for granted, that it was not at first obvious what term I should use in referring to the music.<sup>9</sup> Some people referred to it as *rumba*, although this term seemed to call up images of Congolese popular music in its classical period (especially the 1960s), when the majority of *rumba* rhythms were systematized and popularized. Others referred to “la musique des jeunes”, but such a descriptor was obviously not general enough to refer at one time to various genres of popular music I had set out to investigate and which spanned several generations (ch. 9).

The most common response to my question “What do you call this music?” was to refer to it as “la musique moderne” (or “la musique zaïroise moderne ”), a label which implicitly makes reference to non-‘modern’ music, or what in Kinshasa is most often called *folklore* (fr., li.). The third category, religious music, although it has increasingly been taking more space in the Kinshasa market, is not usually discussed in the same breath. Although like ‘folklore’ it has borrowed from and influenced ‘modern’ music, it is generally opposed to the latter, which is associated by many with moral abandon and youth sub-culture. Below I will give a brief overview of the stylistic contours of each musical style. For the sake of brevity, I will present these genre-based distinctions as ideal types. The overlap between styles in the form of borrowing compositions and personnel will be discussed, but I am primarily concerned with how popular discursive strategies distinguish the styles of music as social and not just musical categories.

Despite the fact that the majority of music heard and consumed in Kinshasa is Congolese music, it was often brought to my attention that one of the music’s primary strengths is its ability to draw from outside influences (Lonoh 1969; Tchebwa 1996). I often found statements of this kind unsatisfying, first because all musics have been influenced by foreign musics, some more than others, but all to some degree or another. Second, because

---

<sup>9</sup>Outside of the Congo in many other French-speaking parts of Africa, this music is simply referred to as *la musique zaïroise*, a strange label given that most other world music styles carry genre-specific (not nationally-based) names (*zouk*, *reggae*, *soca*, *polka*, *salsa*, *isicathmiya*, etc.). Another exception is the globalizing category of commercial music (Top 40) often referred to as “American music”. In White (1998a), I make an implicit connection/comparison between cultural production and national identity in Congo-Zaire and in the U.S.

the act of claiming influences is most often a sort of social positioning in relation to 'tradition' or 'modernity' (ch. 5,9). That said, Congolese popular music, whether or not it has borrowed directly from foreign musical styles, has certainly held certain international figures in high esteem in its musical imagination: Tino Rossi, Otis Redding, and James Brown. James Brown especially marked his era.<sup>10</sup> In 1974, he arrived with the Foreman-Ali 'bout of the century' promotional tour, and for many people this was the first time they saw the Godfather of American soul music ("When We Were Kings"). But before the New Wave period, there were a number of professionally trained European musicians who took it upon themselves to work with young Congolese (Fud Candrix on clarinet and Bill Alexander on guitar are the two most often-cited examples). But some never set foot on Congolese soil. Such was the case of Tino Rossi, the Corsian crooner whose music "turned our generation upside down" (Jean-Serge Essous), and of course the countless Afro-Cuban musicians whose recordings would have such a huge impact on the sound and feel of Congolese popular music today.

### *La Musique Moderne*

Au Congo comme dans tous les pays du continent Africain, la musique se présente sous deux aspects, c'est-à-dire qu'elle revêt deux caractères différents: la musique folklorique, devenue histoire et la musique dite moderne, parce qu'adaptée aux nouvelles conditions de la nouvelle société (Lonoh 1969: 21).<sup>11</sup>

Since the bulk of this chapter (and a large part of this thesis) is devoted to an analysis of the esthetic and social characteristics of 'modern' Congolese dance music, I will limit my discussion here to the basic traits or markers which delineate 'modern' music as a discrete musical category. As with all generic categories of music in this setting, the primary indicators

---

<sup>10</sup>Many early shouts and dance steps were influenced by his music, and the 1970s youth group Sosoliso specialized in James Brown dancing and *animation* styles.

<sup>11</sup>"In the Congo, like in all the countries of the African continent, music presents itself in two forms, in other words it has two different characters: traditional music, now history, and music referred to as modern, because it is adapted to the new conditions of a new society."

of genre tend to be the type of instruments used and the choice of language. 'Modern' music uses Western instruments such as guitars and jazz-style drum kits (bass drum, snare, tom, cymbals, etc.) and as time goes on these instruments become increasingly mediated (electric guitars, microphones with reverb, electronic keyboards, percussion instruments made of insecticide spraycans, etc.). 'Modern' music from Kinshasa is almost exclusively in Lingala, a local African language which results from the extension of military and political control since before the colonial period (ch. 2), and stands for the elaboration of a cosmopolitan urban identity (ch. 10). In the rare cases where Lingala is not used, it is usually substituted by languages which are considered more cosmopolitan than itself (English, French, Spanish).

The stylistic aspects of the music are less tangible but no less important. The centrality of the guitar to the music is perhaps the most obvious. Multiple guitar parts are carefully woven together to create a unique layered sound which bears structural resemblances to the use of counterpoint in Western classical music. In much the same way as has been discussed for African percussion (see Chernoff 1979), guitars play off of each other, exploring various combinations of harmonic and rhythmic depth. Guitars themselves (especially bass guitars, but sometimes rhythm guitars) are compared to drums because of the percussive ways that they are played. The second aspect of importance is the distinctive use of parallel vocal harmonies. Singers, usually three-four in number, will sing harmonies that begin at fixed intervals (thirds, fourths, fifths) up or down from the notes of the primary melody. This layering, together with the already layered guitar gives a thick sound to the music which is often described as "rich", "velour", "full", etc. The more visible markers of the musical style, especially its penchant for high fashion clothing, the importance of dances and shouts, and a distinct two-part song structure, are aspects that I will cover in greater detail below.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup>It is interesting to note that foreign accounts of Congolese 'modern' music emphasize the guitars and the danceability, while local descriptions of the music seemed to be focused on the importance of words and 'message' (ch. 9). Elsewhere (1998) I have described *soukouss*, the sub-genre of Congolese music which is intended for non-Congolese audiences abroad and thus takes on the status of a global cultural commodity like many other genres of 'world music' emanating from Africa (see also Erlmann 1996).

Within the genre of 'modern' music, some individual composers are known as 'poets' or 'moralizers' (see Jewsiewicki's comparison of Franco and Cheri Samba 1991; 1995), but these skills are considered to be expressions of individual talent and are not seen as distinct musical styles. There are also different types of band structures (sole founder, co-founder, nostalgia or cover bands, etc.) but these categories do not make stylistic distinctions either. As I will show below, generic distinctions by generation and by esthetic tendency or 'school' are the most important categories of distinguishing different types of 'modern' music in a local setting. In later chapters (ch. 7, 8) I will describe in greater detail the performance of 'modern' music, which because of its commercial success benefits from a wide variety of performative contexts. The process of 'splintering' (or separation, see ch. 8) and the prevalence of subtle forms of improvisation and audience participation at first seem specific to 'modern' music, but they are equally present in other forms of popular music as well. As I will discuss below, the phenomenon of *animation* and *atalaku* (loosely defined as a kind of Congolese rapper) both draw their inspiration from similar aspects which can be found in various forms of *folklore*.

### *Le Folklore*

According to most accounts, the most important thing about 'traditional' music is that it accompanies important life-cycle events and ceremonies, usually referred to as *circonstances* (fr.,li.) (Tchebwa 1996; Bemba 1985).<sup>13</sup> In Kinshasa, 'traditional' music (*le folklore*, fr.,li.) is often heard at the end-of-mourning funeral parties (*matanga*) which seem to be increasingly commonplace in recent years, but it can also be present at marriages or in urban forms of traditional healing (Corin 1976).<sup>14</sup> Since 'traditional' music usually accompanies

---

<sup>13</sup>Although the rare account of 'traditional' music for pleasure also exists (Lonoh 1969: 20)

<sup>14</sup>I will not discuss what in English is usually referred to as 'folklore music' (officially sponsored ballets, costumed performances of 'traditional' music and dance, etc.). This style of music certainly exists, although it was much more common during the peak of Mobutu's authenticity campaign when it was promoted through the

*circumstances*, it is often performed in the home of the people who have hired the group. In the houses of wealthy families the group will play in a well-landscaped garden or patio. In middle-class or poorer families, the band is usually less well-known and probably organized from individuals in the neighborhood. In this setting musicians play in the front courtyard of the house, sometimes acting as the primary attraction and sometimes providing background entertainment. Musicians can go on playing for hours (and usually do), with those who attend telling stories about how the band "kept playing until dawn".

Where families cannot find a group of musicians who specialize in the music from their home region or ethnic group, sometimes a pre-recorded cassette is used.<sup>15</sup> Folklore groups use 'traditional' instruments which are sometimes adapted for use in an urban setting (strings made from steelbelting in tires, metal containers instead of gourds, electric amplification of some sort); drums more often than not remain unaltered. The songs played by *folklore* groups are very often the same versions of songs that can be heard at similar events in rural areas, but lyrics are often adapted to suit the occasion or to reflect daily situations associated with life in the city. Songs are based on a particular theme and (a usually ethnically marked) rhythm, but do not contain the same section breaks as in 'modern' songs (such as verse, chorus, *seben*, etc.). Voices can be sung in harmony, but it is much more common for singers (and the audience) to sing in unison. Songs are lengthy (up to 45-50 minutes) and usually allow for a great deal of audience participation (handclapping, call and response, spraying money, dancing, etc.). A typical 'traditional' group will have from eight to ten members, with anywhere from four of them playing at any given time. Groups are usually organized around one person, either the most senior or the most charismatic, but not necessarily the primary lead singer.

---

M.P.R. propaganda mechanism known as 'l'animation politique'. While this form of state-sponsored musical performance is interesting as an object of study in itself (ch. 10), it does not in my view qualify as 'popular music'.

<sup>15</sup>In 1995, Radio Matanga, a 'traditional' cassette distributor sold music from 7-8 different ethnic groups in Congo-Brazzaville, each cassette for 3,000 CFA or the equivalent of about \$6 U.S., about twice the price of 'modern' music cassettes. The cassettes were made from live performances and they did not indicate the name of the group or the song titles, only the ethnic label (i.e., Lari, Mbochi, Kongo, Teke, etc.). Commercially recorded *folklore* cassettes are also available. These usually feature a particular group, songs which are modernized somewhat and a sound which is more polished.

Playing *folklore* as a form of public entertainment is a practice that was common in the early colonial period (Martin 1995), but seemed to fade away with the emergence of 'modern' music beginning in the 1940s. In the 1970s, partly due to Mobutu's *authenticité* campaign, *folklore* re-emerged as a form of popular entertainment. Beginning in the 1980s, a number of *folklore* groups were able to find regular contracted employment entertaining customers in the bars and bistros scattered throughout the city.<sup>16</sup> It was from these 'urban traditional' groups (such as Bana Odeon, Kintweni National, a series of groups from Kasai, and Swede Swede, the first group from Equateur) that the category of 'tradi-moderne' was born (see also ch. 10).<sup>17</sup> 'Tradi-moderne' is a highly commercialized style whose song structure and language choice is often similar to 'modern' music but whose melody, thematic content and percussion instruments are usually borrowed from *folklore* (see ch. 10). As is the case with 'modern music', urban consumer tastes for *folklore* has changed over the years. According to Manda Tchebwa, the 1980s Swede Swede phenomenon, inspired by the music and rhythm of Mongo-speaking areas of the Equateur region, was only the last in a long series popular *folklore* groups.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup>In 1995-1996 the most common *folklore* to be heard was that of Eastern Kasai, which was played on a regular basis (four - five nights per week) as live entertainment in several open-air bars of Matonge which were frequented by people of Kasai origin. Music from Bas-Zaïre (Bayombe, Bantandu) could also be heard. Music of this sort, usually referred to as 'urban traditional' music, is usually modernized somewhat (instruments, lyrical content, etc.) in order to cater to a bar-going clientele.

<sup>17</sup>The terms 'urban traditional' and 'tradi-moderne' refer to two different types of musical groups, in the case of the former, 'traditional' music is performed with relatively few modifications, except that it occurs in an urban setting. In the case of the latter the musical structure is modified considerably. Unlike tradi-moderne groups, urban traditional groups have never been able to enjoy any degree of widespread commercial success. The term *folklore* is used to refer to all types of music which are visibly (or audibly) 'traditional'.

<sup>18</sup>The most famous tradi-moderne group to emerge during this period was Swede Swede Boketchu Premier, who in the end of the 1980s enjoyed huge success with their hit "Sundama" and were able to travel extensively and record two albums abroad. From the Swede Swede liner notes: "...But their style quickly evolved into a distinctively urban, modern sound that was the first to cross ethnic borders and age barriers so massively without making any compromise with the prevailing Rumba aesthetics" (Classic Swede 2, 1991, Crammed Discs, Brussels). In the 1990s, interest in tradi-moderne tapered off somewhat although in 1995 the hugely successful Nouvelle Image (with their dance 'kibinda nkoy') billed itself as tradi-moderne.



## *La Musique Religieuse*

While listeners of 'modern' music look down on *folklore* as a less sophisticated, sub-standard form of musical expression, listeners of religious music cast doubt on 'modern' music, primarily because of what they perceive as its questionable moral stance. After 'modern' music, religious music is probably the most visible and the most commercially available form of popular music in Kinshasa. In fact, in recent years, as the country has gone deeper into disrepair, religious music has taken on an increasingly important role, representing for many Congolese an alternative to the post-pillage crisis (Devisch 1996; Ndaywel 1993). Over the last five to ten years, religious music has become increasingly common in a wide variety of performative contexts, not only in a strictly religious setting, but also in funeral parties (*veillées funéraires*), *matanga*, sporting events, holiday celebrations and other public secular events. Apart from its spiritual and inspirational value, religious music is preferred by poor families because it is inexpensive to acquire and reproduce. It is also sought by those of an elevated class status who wish to distance themselves from the stereotypes of witchcraft and backwardness which are often associated with 'traditional' music.

Ndaywel (1993) has divided contemporary religious music into three categories: hymns or choral music (*cantiques*), prayer group music, and commercial religious music (*chansons religieuses mondaines*).<sup>19</sup> The first category has a history as long as the presence of European missionaries in the region. This music remained primarily assimilative in nature until after independence in 1960, when reforms in the Catholic church and the increasing presence of local charismatic churches led to a greater interest in music which strayed from the European ecclesiastical canon. Prayer group music is almost always performed at prayer group meetings

---

<sup>19</sup>Variations on the fanfare ensemble (or mini-marching band) can also be considered a form of religious-based music. Although this genre is less common in Kinshasa, fanfares are used in some local churches (Kimbanguiste, Salvation Army, etc.) and for various types of life-cycle ceremonies. On fanfare music elsewhere in Africa, see Waterman (1990). I have also not discussed the missionary-sponsored dancing choirs for which Père Van den Boom was so well known in the 1970s. The most famous of these groups, "Petits Chanteurs et Danseurs de Kenge", prepared many young musicians for a career in music, among them Reddy Amisi of Papa Wemba's Viva La Musica.

(an increasingly common phenomenon in Kinshasa), which can vary in size (usually between five to twenty-five people) and usually occur in the houses of a particular prayer group member, often the group leader. The music requires no special instruments or equipment, apart from straw maracas filled with bottle caps or a hand-held open-face drum. Songs have catchy melodies and simple lyrics and are mostly sung in unison, with some more musically inclined participants improvising simple harmonies and most members clapping along. Songs of this type are usually interspersed between readings of passages from the Bible and informal sermons pronounced by the prayer group leader. Some songs come from local hymnals and others are composed by prayer group members and circulate from one group to another. Certain churches or religious presses even publish prayer group song books which can be purchased by their members.

Commercial religious music is, in many Christians' view, the least religious of religious musics, not only because it is highly integrated into local networks of commercial distribution, but also because of its structural resemblances 'profane' music. This music is intended for meditation as well as dancing (Ndaywel 1993), a combination which is less problematic for younger Christians, who make up the majority of its consumer audience. Commercialized church music usually takes two forms, 'modern' dance style and American evangelical. Religious dance music borrows directly from the esthetic and song structure of 'modern' Congolese dance music, in some cases even integrating religiously based shouts and dances into the recording and performance of the music.<sup>20</sup> The lead singer--who is as often female as male--is highlighted, but choir-style (usually female) response backup vocals are also important. The preferred performance context is the relatively recent phenomenon of the *veillée spirituelle* (spiritual late-night), an extended evening of prayers, witnessing and sermons which begins and ends with commercial religious music. Events such as these can easily last until daylight, and

---

<sup>20</sup>Many of the songs in this genre use extended choruses, where 'modern' compositions vary between verses and choruses. In most cases they retain the transition to the *seben* (discussed later in this chapter) and the characteristic *cavacha* snare drum rhythm as well as the layered, flowing electric guitars. An artist from Brazzaville in the early 1990s featured one side of his album as a "NON STOP" dance version of his hit song (Philippe Sita, Animation: Zola Nzambi-Zola Mpangi). Despite the emphasis on 'modern' style dancing, live performance is generally more subdued and choreography less elaborate.

partially because of their association with the newly emerging charismatic churches, they often involve acts of heightened spiritualism (trance, speaking in tongues, laying on hands, and so on, see Devisch 1996).

Styles resembling American evangelical music are also widely popular, and since they are generally not intended for dancing they are played heavily on local religious radio stations and on private cassette decks and car stereos. Songs in this sub-genre use American chord and melodic patterns but harmonies resemble local church chorales and lyrics are most often sung in Lingala.<sup>21</sup> Cassettes of both genres (dance and evangelical) are among the easiest types of music to find in Kinshasa. 'Modern' music is now only available at certain key distribution points throughout the city (Matonge, Kitambo Magasin, the main market, etc.), but religious music is available in stores and kiosques all over Kinshasa (on the networks of production and distribution in the local music industry, see Chapter Four). Religious music has even begun to compete with 'modern' music for the position as preferred music among Congolese communities living abroad (personal communication, John Grinling). In Chapter Nine, I will discuss how Christians use musical genre as a form of social distinction, separating Christian music from what they refer to as the 'music of this world'.

With this general overview of popular music genres completed, I will now return to my primary subject of focus, *la musique moderne*. I have tried to show not only what characterizes the various musical genres that are listened to and imagined in Kinshasa, but also to what extent generic categories are imperfect and uneven, and how people use these categories to oppose themselves to or place themselves in particular social formations. In the following sections I will try to address similar issues for 'modern' music. First I will discuss how 'modern' music is divided along generational lines. This means that each musical period is associated with a different genre of music, and most people in Kinshasa use generational markers to identify themselves with the music. Next I will look at the emergence of a two-school esthetic in

---

<sup>21</sup>During my stay in 1995-1996, there were three privately-run religious radio stations. The most well-known, Sangu Malamu (Good News radio), was owned and operated by an American Protestant missionary who was also an accomplished musician and studio engineer, Jim Savarsky. In the mid-1990s he was responsible for producing and promoting some of the religious music scene's most popular musicians.

'modern' music which, during a particular period, formed the primary generic distinction in the music and divided musicians up according to their respective positions in 'tradition' and 'modernity'. Finally I will look at what as an outsider I consider to be the most important generic characteristic of contemporary Congolese dance music--*l'animation*--and will conclude with a discussion of how this development reflects a more than fifty-year process of re-indigenization of popular music forms.

### Three Generations

The use of the French term 'génération' in 'modern' music does not correspond directly with biological generations, but popular discourse (especially musicians' discourse) relates the various generations to each other through an idiom of seniority (li. 'bankolo' or 'bavieux' for elders and fr. 'petits' for juniors). The first generation is usually associated with the wandering guitar minstrels who entertained in popular neighborhoods throughout Leopoldville in the 1940s and 1950s, and is generally believed to be a relatively homogeneous category of musical production. It is not until the second generation of musicians that particular styles begin to develop within the larger category of *rumba*, and by the third generation the music is fully diversified and commercialized, especially in markets within Africa. In the discussion of musical generations I will be particularly interested in groups that either characterize a particular style or those that are considered to be hinge groups between different periods. In order to understand the importance of these changes over time, I have decided to focus my analysis on larger trends instead of individual phenomena or personalities.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup>For more detailed biographical information on particular artists, see Chapter Six.

### *Tango ya BaWendo*<sup>23</sup>

Emerging primarily from the urban centers of the Belgian Congo during the interwar period, Congolese *rumba* drew heavily from the various Afro-Cuban styles which were being distributed through North America and Europe at that time, but also from West African highlife, and from various forms of traditional music in and around the Pool region of Kinshasa (formerly Leopoldville).<sup>24</sup> In its earliest form, Congolese *rumba* was a non-commercialized guitar-based music performed by itinerant solo musicians who wandered the newly-formed urban labor settlements of the French and Belgian colonies.<sup>25</sup> Often with nothing more than a guitar, urban griots such as Wendo Kolosoy, Adou Elenga, and Paul Kamba animated Leopoldville's popular neighborhoods, playing music in the bars and bistros that came to stand for the city's charm and particular *ambiance*.<sup>26</sup> Beginning in the early 1940s, when expatriate entrepreneurs opened the first recording houses (ch. 3), it was this group of roving musicians who became the first to play music on a professional basis, signing contracts as individuals (Leon Bukasa, Lucie Eyenga) or sometimes as groups (Beguen Band, Le Trio Bow, San Salvador). Almost all of the music was written and recorded by local musicians in Leopoldville. 78rpm records, intended primarily for sale on the local market, were mass-produced to provide relatively inexpensive, high quality

---

<sup>23</sup>Literally, "The Time of the Wendos", inspired by the most well-known musician from the period, Wendo Kolosoy [figures 3.1 and 3.2]. This expression is also the title of a film which traces Wendo's life and times (Popovitch and Zinga 1993).

<sup>24</sup>Ingrid Monson has raised the very important question of exactly what kind of music Congolese took to be *rumba*. Although I plan to do more thorough research on the historical relationship between Congolese and Cuban musical styles, my preliminary findings on this subject suggest that Afro-Cuban recordings of various types were relatively available and extremely popular by the time that Congolese started composing and performing non-traditional music of their own (see Martin 1995). More research is required to determine why the label *rumba* in particular became associated with these styles, but it does seem that Afro-Cuban music in general constituted for many Congolese an expression of modernity, a complement to their urban, cosmopolitan lifestyle. It is interesting to compare this account with Wade (1998), who has shown that in 1930s Colombia, *rumba* music was associated with a racialized ethnicity of African origin, and therefore considered by some to be a threat to the formation of a national identity.

<sup>25</sup>Kazadi (1979) raises the question of whether the style emerged only in the Kinshasa-Brazzaville region and then spread to other urban centers, or if it emerged in a number of different places at the same time. What is certain is that Congolese music has been, from its inception, an urban phenomenon. Many musics of the African diaspora (reggae, rap, blues) have begun as urban folk forms and have become hugely successful as commercialized genres. A comparison of these forms in the early stages may prove to be interesting.

<sup>26</sup>On nightlife, music, and male-female relations in the creation of Congolese urban culture, see Biaya (1994). See also Chapter Two on the development of an African public sphere through popular entertainment.



fig. 3.1 Wendo Kolosoy, of Mobutu's *Ordre du Léopard*



fig. 3.2 Wendo with the family of his 'new wife' (laughing, right)

recordings to large numbers of urban consumers. In 1950 three major studios were producing and distributing records. By 1960, the number had increased to nearly 20 (RFI 1992: 6). This increase in productivity, together with the installation of powerful radio transmitters in Leopoldville, permitted large numbers of people outside of the Pool region to listen to this new sound which came to be known in many parts of Africa as "Congo Jazz".<sup>27</sup>

### *The Big Rumba Period*<sup>28</sup>

Advances in technology were not the only reason that this music had begun to be popular in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa. With the basic infrastructure of the industry in place, a new generation of musicians was forming whose musical talent and star quality would soon surpass that of its elders, and before long begin to 'colonize' the rest of the continent. This was the golden age of *rumba*, the era of big-band style orchestras, led by the undisputed patriarch of the genre, Grand Kallé (Joseph Kabasele), and his group African Jazz. Under Kallé's supervision, African Jazz would later provide Congolese music with some of its biggest names, among them Tabu Ley (Seigneur Rochereau) and Nicolas Kasanda (Dr. Nico). None, however, could match the bigger-than-life quality of the "Grand Maître" ('Great Master'), François Luambo Makiadi (Franco), co-founder and leader of the country's most well-known band, l'Orchestre O.K. Jazz [figure 3.3]. A certain rivalry developed between O.K. Jazz and Africa Jazz and was accentuated by the emergence of two distinct styles, or 'schools' of music which corresponded roughly to their esthetic signatures: one was modernist

---

<sup>27</sup>Radio Brazzaville opens in 1943, by the late 1950s Congolese guitar band music had become the craze in Lagos. "Almost everybody loved Congo music. And if you bought a radio set then you bought it because you wanted to learn to tune to Congo-Brazzaville" (Waterman 1990: 93).

<sup>28</sup>Of the three periods I have outlined, this second period is the only one for which I could not identify a commonly used local term. Since most explanations of this period focus on the elaboration of classic rumba and the emergence of large orchestras, I have decided to use the term 'Big Rumba', one which also corresponds with the sound of much of the music from this period.



Fig. 3.3

fig. 3.3 Rendering of Franco on the front of a record store in Matonge



(Africa Jazz), the other traditionalist (O.K. Jazz). Later in this chapter I will discuss how this distinction became systematized.

### *La Nouvelle Vague*

The strength of these two musical 'empires' would not be challenged until the early 1970s, when a new generation of musicians began to emerge with a markedly different style.<sup>29</sup> Taking cues from African-American soul music and from the music of young Congolese studying abroad in Belgium, this New Wave of music (*la nouvelle vague*) made a huge impact on the local music industry in part because its sped-up tempo and innovative dancemanship appealed widely to a growing number of urban youth (Nkashama 1979) [figure 3.4]. During this period, especially after the formation of the youth super-group Zaiko Langa-Langa in 1969, a number of important stylistic innovations were introduced into the music, among them choreographed dancing and the distinct two-part song structure. Many of the groups that followed (Bella Bella, Viva La Musica, Langa Langa Stars, Choc Stars, Empire Bakuba, Quartier Latin, Wenge Musica) claim some ties to Zaiko Langa Langa, and the dynamics between these and other post-*rumba* bands will constitute the focus of my analysis.

The Belgian-based student orchestras of the late 1960s (Belguide, Los Nickelos, Yeye National) were extremely influential in the directions that 'modern' music would take in the years to come. Because of their privileged status in Europe, they were exposed to various styles of European music (French, British, Belgian), but they were primarily influenced by American music of the time, especially African-American soul music such as James Brown, Aretha Franklin, Wilson Pickett, and Otis Redding. Probably the most remarkable aspect of

---

<sup>29</sup>During Mobutu's nationalization campaign (*zaïrianization*) in the early 1970s, management of the large recording studios and record-pressing factories was handed over to Zairean nationals and in some cases Zairean musicians (ch. 4). The artists that benefitted most from these programs were those that had already allied themselves with Franco, Verckys (O.K. Jazz) and Tabu Ley (African Fiesta), who by this time had formed a loosely organized 'music cartel' in Kinshasa, making and breaking careers and exerting control over local networks of production and distribution (Tchebwa 1996).



Fig. 3.4

fig. 3.4 Reddy Amisi, heir apparent of the *nouvelle vague*

their life as musicians was the fact that they rarely had a clear figurehead or musical patriarch in the organization of their groups; in most cases they were groups of young student musicians that were organized around the idea of 'co-founders' ('système co-fondateur'). This organizational innovation would set the tone for many young groups of the Zairean New Wave. Their music circulated freely among members of the Congolese community in Brussels and between Brussels and Kinshasa, and when they returned to Kinshasa during school vacations, their presence caused a great deal of commotion, especially among the hundreds of young people in the capital who had become their devoted fans.

Not until well into this third generation of musicians, however, did the music take on its most commercial form, Congo-Zairean dance music made for export, or *soukouss*.<sup>30</sup> Congolese musicians on tour found that listeners and concertgoers outside of their country often showed a preference for fast-paced dance music. Thus the now well-established two-part song structure, with a slow lyrical introduction followed by a fast-paced dance section, evolved into a song format which focused primarily on the dance section (*seben*). This format, once elaborated and perfected for non-Congolese audiences, eventually became known as *soukouss*, from the French verb *secouer* or 'to shake'.<sup>31</sup> In the mid-1980s (a time of increasing disillusion with the Mobutu regime), a number of *soukouss* musicians were able to establish themselves in Europe, using Paris and Brussels as bases from which they could record and tour on a regular basis. Groups such as Soukouss Stars, Kanda Bongo Man and Loketo made their living by playing not only for Europeans (especially those who had travelled or worked in

---

<sup>30</sup>It is important to emphasize that Congolese music was fully commercialized within Africa before the development of *soukouss*, but as I will discuss below, *soukouss* extended the process of commercialization even further by altering certain stylistic aspects of the music (such as song structure and rhythm) in order to market the music to non-Congolese audiences abroad. For a more detailed discussion of the *soukouss* phenomenon as a form of globalized, commodified 'world music', see White (1998a).

<sup>31</sup>The term originally comes from a dance of the same name which became popular in Brazzaville in the late 1970s. Foreign audiences, upon hearing the name of the dance shouted on the microphone, confused the dance with the musical style and that is how *soukouss* came to be named (Lokassa ya Mbongo, personal interview, Jan. 17, 1998).

Africa and had acquired a taste for the sound of *la musique Zaïroise*), but also for a rapidly growing African immigrant community.<sup>32</sup>

## Two 'Schools'

It was during the second generation of Congolese popular music that the music industry witnessed a considerable expansion in the local demand for music. It is also during this period that popular discourse about the music began to reveal a process of differentiation, a process which was fuelled by the ongoing competition between the two giants of classical *rumba*, Joseph Kabasele (Grand Kallé) and Luambo Makiadi (Franco). This evolution was marked by the differences in their style of music: one was considered 'sophisticated' (Kallé), the other 'from the gut' (Franco); one refined, one *sauvage*; one soft, one noisy; one clean, one dirty; one romantic, one erotic; one for listening, one for dancing; one melody, one rhythm, one modernist, one traditionalist; one *fiesta*, one *ondemba*.<sup>33</sup> But it was also marked in their personal style. Kallé was clean-cut, sharply-dressed and was known to speak French almost impeccably. Franco, on the other hand, had a reputation for being misbehaved, poorly educated, and closer to his roots in the village (Ewens 1994). Popular stories about Kallé usually talk about how strict he was with his musicians, and about the fact that he learned to sing in the church. Franco, it is often said, was from a poor family, and grew up on the lap of

---

<sup>32</sup>In this chapter I will not address the complex debate about the presence or absence of a fourth generation of musicians. As I discuss in Chapter 9, this debate usually takes the form of generation-based social posturing in order to make a case for or against a qualitative break in the musical style. Other accounts (see Tchebwa 1996) insert an additional generation at the end of the second generation (musicians such as Ntesa Daliens, Sam Mangwana, and Dino Vangu) but most popular discourse about the generations places these musicians cleanly within the second generation. It is also interesting to note that instead of using the term 'generation', Tchebwa describes these changes in terms of 'waves', a strategic move which, as he explained to me, kept him from getting caught up in the debate about 'generations'.

<sup>33</sup>These are the names of the two corresponding styles. The label *fiesta* was a popular stylish word at the time and would become permanently associated with the music of Kallé and African Jazz after his protégés Dr. Nico and Tabu Ley Rochereau separated from him to start African Fiesta in the mid-1960s. As I will argue in Chapter Nine, the generic distinction between *ondemba* and *fiesta* can be seen as a subtle form of social positioning.

his mother, who was forced to sell donuts in the nail market just to make ends meet. Franco learned music by sneaking a guitar from the house of its absent owner.

Although I had been hearing people (even young people) talk about the distinction between *fiesta* and *ondemba*, even after several months I found it nearly impossible to distinguish between the two 'schools' or 'tendencies' as they are sometimes called. It was not until I had been told to listen to the lead guitar, especially during the guitar solo, that I recognized the guitar as the place where the two styles are often housed [audio cue 1]. The African Jazz (*fiesta*) guitar of Dr. Nico is light, upbeat, measured and refined. The melody lines he plays are sweet, they rarely repeat and they always resolve. "It makes you want to hold your partner tight" people often say. The O.K. Jazz (*ondemba*) guitar of Franco is heavier in nature. His touch is more aggressive, more repetitive, seems improvised and generally raw. "It makes you want to move your groin" people often say.<sup>34</sup> The association between *ondemba* and dancing is often expressed in terms of a physical release into the rhythm:

Franco was the one who started playing the *seben*. He wanted to play extended solos all the time. When we listened to his *seben* all we wanted to do was dance (Achille Ngoy, Wed. June 28, 1995).

Enter it, the gates are open, the moment has come. It's warm doughnuts all-over, the pulse begins. Hold nothing back, give it your all. It's meant for that, it's meant for that. Roll over and roll again, ohndemba at last is here (John Grinling, e-mail communication, July 25, 1997).

According to most of the people I spoke with about the two 'schools', the majority of today's musicians are from the *fiesta* school: Koffi Olomide, Papa Wemba, Tabu Ley, General Defao, Wenge Musica, Reddy Amisi, Kester Emeneya. The only musicians still remaining wholly in the *ondemba* school are the former musicians of O.K. Jazz, a group which since the death of its leader Franco in 1989, has been considered "an endangered species". The *fiesta* school has the ability to "regenerate itself", I was told, as evidenced by the large number of young musicians that want to continue in the *fiesta* tradition. Despite the fact that very few people will

---

<sup>34</sup>According to one informant, Dr. Nico played his guitar with a regular tuning, but Franco often used an adapted tuning which is known as 'mi-composé', in which the first string on the guitar is effectively doubled by retuning the fourth string.

openly admit to preferring *ondemba*, almost everyone cherishes *ondemba* for its ability to make people dance, and because it represents deeply rooted musical traditions in the region.

A similar ambiguity surfaced in a story told to me by Bholen, one of the guitarists and founding members of the group Negro Succès. By the end of the 1950s, Franco's name was secured as the leader of O.K. Jazz. But he was also well-known as a showman and a lead guitarist (see Ewens 1994; Revue Noire 1996). After having been jailed for driving without a license, he instructed one of his bandmembers to call on Bholen as a replacement, who at that time was playing guitar in the O.K. Jazz recruitment group Vedette Jazz.<sup>35</sup> Upon returning from jail, Franco was impressed enough with Bholen that he asked him to remain with the group. Franco's idea was to have two different lead guitars playing different solo styles at different points in the song. This plan was never fulfilled, but Bholen took the idea with him and some years later when he approached Franco for assistance in forming his own group, he saw his chance to make it happen:

When I came back there was some equipment [musical instruments] that Franco had available. I always had the desire to start up my group again. I went to Franco and said I was interested in the equipment. Franco said "Okay, but under one condition, you have to take in my little brother. He's a good guitarist, he's been training with Papa Noel, but Noel never lets him play. He is a musician after all, he should be able to play." I accepted. *Ton petit c'est mon petit*, I said.<sup>36</sup> I was born in 1936, Bavon [Franco's brother] 1942 or 1943; *c'était mon petit*.<sup>37</sup> I took him in and started showing him what to do. I told him not to play like his brother, but to develop his own style. And this was what I always wanted to do. I wanted to do something new. In music there is no age, even the young musicians can show something to the elders, because in music you have to do new things to keep the succès, if you just imitate you won't have succès.

So we wanted to do something new. I wanted to bring together African Jazz and O.K. Jazz, a fusion of the two styles. You have to understand that Kallé's music was based on romantic love. It was extremely romantic. OK Jazz was considered for people of the lower classes, but African Jazz was for the *évolués*, it was kind of academic, for the intellectuals. O.K. Jazz was a bit ... savage [he hesitated as if he didn't want to use that word], it was barbaric. It was all in the guitar: Franco's guitar was barbaric and Nico's was sentimental. I remember a contest between O.K. Jazz and African Jazz at the Place des Anciens Combattants. They went to see who was the best, and the jury gave the prize to Kallé, and I was very happy. I was pulling for them. But I always wanted to do something new (Vieux Bholen, Thurs., Mar 9, 1996).

---

<sup>35</sup>The practice of keeping an 'orchestre amateur' or training group, was common during this period and still continues today, although more recruitment seems to happen informally through friends or during open-mike auditions in afternoon practices (ch. 6).

<sup>36</sup>"Your protégé is my protégé", literally "Your small one is my small one".

<sup>37</sup>Here 'petit' refers simply to someone that is younger in age.

“Doing something new” is a phrase which summarizes nicely the modernist impulse which I will argue (in ch. 10) characterizes Congolese popular music, and to some extent a wider Kinshasa (if not Congolese) esthetic or ‘way of being’ in the world (Part III). Innovation is valued as a way of staying on top of the music scene (“keeping the success”), but also for what it represents as a gesture of being ‘modern’. “Doing something new”, however, does not necessarily rule out the possibility of “doing something old”, as in the case of Bholen, who was the favored rookie of the O.K. Jazz training band, but who secretly rooted for the rival. According to Nyoka Longo, Zaiko Langa Langa came along with a similar project of fusing the two schools, apparently finishing off what Negro Succès had failed to do (partially because of Bavon’s untimely death in a car accident). The stylistic distinction between the two schools is still recognized, however, but it has been rendered somewhat more complex by intermingling and borrowing between the two schools. John Grinling, a Congolese music collector and connoisseur, has vehemently defended the position that Zairean music is in fact one big school, and that the idea of separate schools is nothing more than urban folklore:

The next step of your training should be ‘forward to the roots’, and that is plain Fiesta. The tree of Congolese music, like the mystic tree, grows with its roots in the sky, and the branches towards the ground: African traditional village ngwomo singing, Spanish paso-doble, Jamaican calypso, West Africa’s steel band and Polish Polka are the roots, up there in heaven, and feed the heavy broad trunk that grows branches in several directions. Ondemba on the left, for the goats, and Fiesta on the right, for the lambs, and then Zaiko and VLM [Viva La Musica] for the young (John Grinling, personal correspondence, Jan. 8, 1997).

## Congo-Zaire's Invisible Innovation

"The first shout was 'good gold, I get soul!' (sic) This shout gave us a feeling of decision and competition. It was like a stimulant!"<sup>38</sup>

It is often difficult to determine the individual aspects or features which constitute a particular style of music. From the musicologist's point of view, it may be the unique layering of guitars or the rich vocal harmonic patterns that characterize 'modern' Congolese music. Historically speaking, it may be argued that the music's origins in and links with Afro-Cuban musical styles is the most salient characteristic. A more sociological or literary perspective might look to the thematic content of lyrics. Given the overall argument of my thesis, however, I have chosen to focus my attention on an aspect of the music which is both more obvious and less remarked upon than any of those mentioned above: *L'animation*. The term itself refers to three different aspects of the music: 1) the fast-paced dance sequence of each song, 2) the action of encouraging people to dance and have a good time and 3) and the emotional state that results from this action, a kind of liveliness or excitement which is often described as 'joy' or 'ecstasy'. As I will show below, understanding the performative and social aspects of *l'animation* is crucial to understanding Congolese popular dance music, but it also provides valuable information about the evolution of the music over time and reflects musical and discursive practices which are concerned with the predicament of 'modernity' in a Congolese setting.

---

<sup>38</sup>According to Mbuta Mashakado, the Zaïko Langa Langa singer/dancer who was most well-known for imitating the dance steps of James Brown, (Super Stars, p. 7, c. 1988)



### *L'Animation*

In order to grasp the meaning of *l'animation* in context, it is necessary to first understand the structure of a typical Congolese song. Song structure obviously varies somewhat from artist to artist and from song to song, but commercial dance music produced in Kinshasa has followed identifiable patterns which have also varied over time. The majority of commercial dance music before 1970 resembled the standard Euro-American popular song format:

verse  
chorus  
verse  
chorus  
solo (with *seben* )

chorus  
chorus

Verses and choruses would alternate and during solo sections the intensity of the improvising instruments (especially the guitar) would lead to a heightened awareness among the people in the audience (see Keil and Feld's discussion of 'groove'). In early Congolese music this solo section, usually referred to as *seben* (from the English word "seven", see below) would be extended and elaborated in order to encourage people in the audience to dance. In the early 1970s the musicians of Zaiko Langa Langa, sensing that their audience had a preference for dancing, began to experiment with a new song structure. This structure, instead of alternating between verses, choruses and *seben*, eventually placed the three in consecutive order and lengthened the *seben* considerably, resulting in a song format that looks like this:

verse  
verse  
chorus  
chorus

(transition)  
*seben*  
*seben*

After a brief introduction, several verses are sung (usually by the lead singer) and it is here that the theme of the song (both musical and lyrical) is first stated. This section of the song, as it is focused on the words and melody, usually sounds soft or slow (people often use the word *sentimentale*). At the end of each verse there is a small vocal break and the guitar fills in with improvised riffs (*solfège*) until the beginning of the next verse cycles around. After several verses (anywhere from two - five), the front line of singers joins together to sing the chorus, which is often more upbeat and lively than the verse. Near the end of a series of choruses, the snare drum and the lead guitar signal a transition that announces the change to the *seben* or *animation* (the fast-paced dance sequence), which will be filled with shouts (some with words spoken and some sung) and choreographed dancing and which will continue until the end of the song.<sup>39</sup>

The change pioneered by Zaiko Langa Langa and later perfected by Zaiko and other groups of the third generation was profound, not only because the *seben* was considerably longer than it had been in the past, but also because its new position at the end of the song led to a clearer separation between words and dance. It was on this basis that almost all music produced after 1975--not only by Zaiko--would adapt the new two-part song structure, a slow lyrical section filled with **words** (verse and chorus) and a fast-paced **dance** sequence (*seben*) filled with choreographed dance moves and “*cris d’extase*” (‘shouts of joy’).<sup>40</sup>

The term *seben*, according to veteran guitarist Lokassa ya Mbongo, is a word that was adapted from the English word “seven”. Early Congolese musicians picked up the term by observing the palmwine guitar style of the West Africans who had migrated to Leopoldville for work (ch. 2), and whose music was interspersed with seventh chords, which are said to have a

---

<sup>39</sup>Pre-recorded songs last anywhere from three-eight minutes. Live songs usually extend the dance sequence and can last anywhere from 8-45 minutes.

<sup>40</sup>There are obviously examples of songs from this period that do not follow the two-part format, especially ballads (like some of the early music by Koffi Olomide), music of older generations that sees itself as ‘protecting the rumba’ (e.g. Bana O.K.), and some ‘crossover’ projects (for example Lokua Kanza and the album “Emotion” by Papa Wemba).

sense of suspense which makes people want to dance. Other descriptive terms are used to designate this section of the song (*chauffée*, *saccadée*, *l'animation*, *partie dansante*, *ambiance*), but of these, *seben* seems to be the oldest and the most common. It is also the only non-French term, and the term most used by musicians. Franco is often given credit for inventing the Congolese *seben*, but given that occurrences of the term appear before Franco began playing professionally in 1956, it was most likely a musical aspect which drew from various sources (Afro-Cuban, local African, West African, etc.). What does seem true is that Franco was responsible for perfecting and popularizing a *seben* which was primarily guitar-based and which associated popular music with release through dance (*défoulement*).

There are several musical aspects which are brought together to make a good *seben*. Primary among these is the rhythm. Although the words sections of songs can (and often do) display a wide variety of rhythms and tempos, the rhythm used for *seben* is remarkably standard across groups and over time. *Cavacha*, the name of the rhythm, is an onomatopoeic term whose origin is explained with two conflicting stories. The first is told by the lead members of the band that is given credit for introducing the rhythm, Zaiko Langa Langa. They contend that while on tour to Pointe Noire from Brazzaville, they travelled via train overnight and after many hours of hearing the churning, rhythmic sound of the run-down railroad engine (*ca va cha, ca va cha, ca va cha*) they had the idea to create this rhythm. The next morning they woke up and decided that this would be their new musical signature.<sup>41</sup> The other version of the story comes from Zaiko Langa Langa's drummer, Meridjo, who is most often credited with popularizing the *cavacha* rhythm. According to Meridjo, he not only popularized the rhythm, but he also discovered it. He explained to me that he first heard the rhythm while he was sitting having a beer and listening to one of Kinshasa's many urban traditional musical ensembles: "It was the rhythm being played on the big drum ('mbonda mama'), but just with

---

<sup>41</sup>For early recorded examples of this rhythm, listen to the 1973 Zaiko Langa Langa recordings "Eluzam", "Beya Mbeya", and "Amoureux Déçu".

one stick. I memorized it, took it home and adapted it to the music we were playing in Zaiko and that's how it was born" (Meridjo, May 14, 1996).

Regardless of the rhythm's exact origin, *cavacha* is the undisputed 'mother' rhythm of contemporary Congolese dance music, and Meridjo is the undisputed *doyen* of *cavacha*.<sup>42</sup> The primary phrase of the rhythm is played on the snare drum. The bass drum plays on every beat, giving a solid, driving feel to the rhythm. Except for fills or scattered crashes and hits, *cavacha* only makes use of the snare and bass drum. There are obviously many variations on this rhythm [audio cue 2.1, 2.2, 2.3]. What is remarkable about these variations is not their number or frequency, but the way in which they implicitly refer back to the original *cavacha* theme (ch. 10). The only songs that escape this rhythm are those that do not play any *seben* at all. This is the extent to which *cavacha* is inseparable from contemporary dance music in Kinshasa. Some groups have signature variations on the *cavacha* rhythm, but there is more variation between songs than between groups. Individual or group style is more clearly identifiable through the other key elements of *seben*, namely the electric guitar and the use of shouts or *animation*.

The distinctive Congolese style of guitar is clearly a defining characteristic of Congolese popular music. Most accounts of the musical style attest to the importance of the guitar's role in creating a sound which is both warm and rich. Bands in Kinshasa perform with three guitars (bass, rhythm, and lead), but as in many popular styles, the lead guitar is the most prominent.<sup>43</sup> The lead guitar carries the melody in the absence of vocals, and during the *seben* it occupies the highest registers of the three guitars. Short, melodic phrases are tied together in flowing, rhythmic combinations which alternate at key points in the *seben* (ch. 7) in order to maintain or increase intensity for an audience. While lead guitarists invariably enjoy more attention from fans (Papa Noel, Dr. Nico, Franco, Manwaku, Rigo Star, Roxy

---

<sup>42</sup>One former Zaiko musician characterized Meridjo's style in this way: "Other musicians they can play American pop music and all that, but Meridjo when he starts his *seben* with his bass drum and his snare, it's all over, you can go all the way to Maluku [a far away suburb of Kinshasa]"

<sup>43</sup>Some groups use a fourth guitar, called *mi-solo*, which plays in the mid-register between rhythm and lead, but can also double the lines of either.

Tshimpaka, Alain Makaba), most musicians will admit that the foundation of Congolese dance rhythms lies in the guitars of the rhythm section. The bass guitar plays heavily on the octave and fifth of the tonic and is often compared to a conga drum (*mbonda*) because of the percussive way in which certain notes are struck [audio cue 3]. The rhythm guitar is the most constant of the three guitars, and although the chord structure of songs is relatively simple (usually I-IV-V or I-IV-I-V), chord positioning and rhythmic complexity make this instrument the most difficult to master (ch. 6). The simultaneity of three or more guitars with distinct but highly complementary partitions gives Congolese dance music a distinct layered sound which is simultaneously raw and mediated.

### *Atalaku, Animateur*

The shouts that are heard in almost all of the 'youth' music produced throughout the 1980s and to the present day ... are indispensable, if not unavoidable, in today's music, hysterical shouts without which there would be no true *ambiance* in a song, on the dancefloor...in our hearts. (Tchebwa 1996: 208).

The term *atalaku* is said to come from a Kikongo expression meaning "look here, look at me" and first appears in common parlance in Kinshasa in the early 1980s. The term itself is not only associated with a particular dance step from that period, but it has also come to be the primary term used to refer to the 'rapper-like' musician who sings and shout during the *seben*.<sup>44</sup> The *seben*'s particular mood of controlled frenzy is maintained---sometimes for as long as 30 minutes---in great part by the *atalaku*, who is passed the microphone when the singers switch from singing to dancing in live performance. The *atalaku* (*animateur*) creates an atmosphere of excitement (*ambiance*) for the audience by improvising a careful combination of 'shouts', melodies, and various other vocal gymnastics which are intended to drive people in the audience and on stage to dance and enjoy the music. In other words, the *atalaku* does *animation* to create

---

<sup>44</sup>The French term *animateur* is also commonly used, especially among musicians. I will use both terms, depending on the particular perspective I want to emphasize.

an atmosphere of *ambience*. The emergence of the musical position of *atalaku* is intimately tied to the presence of urban traditional styles of music in Kinshasa. In the late 1970s, when some of these groups began to perform in the bars and concert venues associated with 'modern' dance music, they immediately attracted the attention of a wider urban audience.

Although shouts have always been a part of popular music in the Congo region, it was not until the mid-1980s that they became used in any systematic way. Most shouts are sung in coded or mystified language (Biaya n.d.), either using obscure expressions from one of the many Kikongo languages in the region or drawing from creative forms of urban slang (on the Kinshasa youth slang "Hindubill", see Tchebwa 1996).<sup>45</sup> Thus it is not uncommon, even with very popular shouts, for people to create their own meanings based on the little they are able to understand. At any given moment there is a pool of favorite shouts which circulate and from which almost all bands will draw to complete their own repertoire of shouts. Since the early 1980s, shouts have gone from being shouted [audio cue 4.1] to being shouted and sung [audio cue 4.2], to being completely sung [audio cue 4.3], finally culminating in the recent practice of some lead singers (Koffi Olomide, General Defao, J.P. Busé) who croon shouts with "care" (*atalaku ya soin*) or "charm" (*atalaku ya charme*).

Today very few bands in Kinshasa perform without one or more *atalaku*. Given the music's emphasis on a lively stage show, the *atalaku* has become an indispensable part of the modern dance band phenomenon, since he is an instrumentalist, a vocalist, and a dancer. The *atalaku* is interesting not only for his shouts and stage antics which make him a sort of live-time trickster (White 1998b), but also because the material he uses very often comes from traditional or urban-traditional music forms (*folklore*). Unfortunately the *atalaku*'s association with traditional music is somewhat of a stigma, and this limits his position within the band hierarchy as well as within society. Following the first *atalakus*, Nono and Bébé Atalaku (Zaiko Langa Langa), only a handful of musicians have been able to make a name for themselves in this

---

<sup>45</sup>Shouts can also be taken from proverbs. For an overview of proverbs in African oral literature and performance, see Fabian (1990).

musical role: Djuna Mumbafu (Empire Bakuba), Ditutala (Choc Stars), Beevans (Quartier Latin), Robert Ekokota and Tutu Kaludji (Wenge Musica BCBG).

The phenomenon of *atalaku* was certainly influenced by Mobutu's elaborate propaganda machine which used 'traditional' music and dance from the various regions of Zaire to sing the praises of the president and his one-party state. In this context, the *animateur*'s role must be seen as fundamentally political (Kapalanga 1989). Other accounts have discussed the way that the *atalaku* is implicated in the violence of youth culture (Biaya 1997b) and patron-client relations (White 1997). If the *atalaku* is often compared to the African-American 'm.c.', or rapper, it is probably because he shouts in a highly percussive manner and combines words and song in an impressive, often improvised, display of verbal know-how.<sup>46</sup> Although the *atalaku*'s art differs significantly from that of the M.C., it shows important commonalities with rap and other musics of the African diaspora and suggests that the resilience of African contemporary music is in part due to its ability to creatively draw from "the past" (Gates 1988). Below I will explain how the *atalaku* emerged from the lively 'urban traditional' music groups which dotted Kinshasa in the 1970s and 1980s.

Kitambo is an urban zone (collective of neighborhoods) located on the southwest end of Kinshasa which is generally known to be the area of earliest settlement in Kinshasa (ch. 2) and still carries with it the image of the "village within the city." It is thus no coincidence that Kitambo has produced a disproportionate number of *folklore* and *tradi-moderne* ensembles, most notably the Swede Swede family of youth music groups which took Kinshasa by storm for the first time in the late 1980s (Tchebwa 1996). But before Swede Swede's contagious *sundama* dance, there was an earlier generation of musicians who pioneered the first real crossovers between 'traditional' music and 'modern'. The most well-known group of this generation, and probably the most prolific, was Bana Odeon. Under the supervision of Kumaye, a Kitambo-based businessman and local community figure, Bana Odeon was one of the first neighborhood *folklore* groups to manage an administrative office and personnel for its

---

<sup>46</sup>Many *atalaku* begin their musical career by animating in local or neighborhood bars.

cultural activities. Taking inspiration from the elder (predominantly Baumbu) musicians of Kitambo, Kumaye and his assistants brought together a large number of unemployed local youth and began to train them traditional dancing (*ballet*) and music. In 1978 the music section of Bana Odeon began to play in local bars, attracting the attention of 'modern' music fans with *folklore*-inspired dance steps and shouts. In 1980 they were named the best new group of the year (*revelation de l'année*) and in the same year were awarded the year's best dance for *zekete*.

According to Bébé, at one time a Bana Odeon singer/percussionist, the band was so popular that even the musicians of Zaiko Langa Langa (at that time the top youth group in Kinshasa) attended Bana Odeon shows on a regular basis. It was perhaps this exposure to Bana Odeon's particular brand of modernized *folklore* that led Sonnerie (one of Zaiko's early frontline singers) to approach Bébé with a proposition in 1982:

The day that Sonnerie came to my house," remembers Bébé, "he said to me 'Bébé, you have to come play with Zaiko. Dress nice and bring that maracas of yours.' I remember that day. They came to get Nono too, we started just playing maracas. We had our own microphones and I was so proud to play with such a big group. It was the biggest day of my life (Feb. 3, 1996).

Bébé and his Bana Odeon colleague Nono (also Manjeku) soon became permanent members of Zaiko Langa Langa and their *folklore*-inspired rhythmic shouts and corresponding dances became Zaiko trademarks. The first shout they popularized would be the same shout from which they eventually drew the name for this newly-created musical position:

Atalaku! Tala!	Look at me! Look!
Atalaku mama! Zekete!	Look at me, mama! Zekete
Zebola ka zebola, na	Zebola, just Zebola and
Zebola dance!	the Zebola dance!

(Bébé and Nono Atalaku, Zaiko Langa Langa, 1982)<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup>This translation is very rough approximation. As I have discussed elsewhere (White 1998b), the exact meaning of shouts such as this one is often intentionally vague and mysterious.



Reaction to Zaiko's innovation was mixed at first. There were those musicians and fans, more purist in nature, who believed that the introduction of *folklore* was a compromise to the rich tradition of modern *rumba* for which Kinshasa had become known. They viewed *folklore* as music that was appropriate in a ceremonial or rural setting, but not worthy of sharing the stage with 'modern' music. Some fans even argued that Zaiko had set itself up for becoming the laughing stock of the capital. Others, however, especially younger Zaiko fans, saw the arrival of the *atalaku* as in a more positive light. "Zaiko had been playing pretty much the same music for 10 years. We brought a breath of fresh air to the music. At first they said all we did was scream and shout, but now they respect us. We were proof that the older generation was dead and buried" (Bébé, Feb. 3, 1996). Both Bébé and Nono would go on to have successful careers with Zaiko, although Bébé's decision to leave the original Zaiko as a member of the now-defunct Zaiko Familia Dei would prove to be a bad one in the long-run.

### *Dances and Shouts*

When all these elements come together (the proper rhythm, guitars and *animation*), and when the mood is right (i.e. the audience is large and there is no rain), there is only one thing missing in order for true *ambiance* to occur, choreographed live dancing. Dancing has always been an integral part of the performance and experience of music in Kinshasa. In the early *rumba* years, however, partnered dancing was the norm. Separated or solo dancing did not begin to occur until the late 1960s or early 1970s when African-American soul music (especially James Brown) began to influence the youth music of the Zairean New Wave. The idea of choreographed dancing became common especially after the arrival of the *atalaku*, when singers were able pass the microphone to someone else on stage and concentrate on their dancing. Shouts certainly existed before the arrival of the *atalaku*, but they were less

systematic and more sporadic, in many cases serving as ads for newly created dances. As dancing became increasingly integrated into live performance, the ability to dance well gradually became an important criterion for performers, especially singers. In many cases performers who were primarily known as dancers would use dance to launch a career in singing (Aurlus Mabele, Defao, Adolphe, Rajakula, and Mbuta Mashakado are the most often cited examples).

As dancing became more systematized, it also became more performative and more excessive (Nkashama 1979), but this did not necessarily mean that the audience was alienated from dancing. On the contrary, the phenomenon of choreographed dancing seemed to be an invitation to the audience to participate in all the latest dances that they were seeing performed in concert. In a live concert setting, performers (especially singers) give impressive displays of their individual and group skills as dancers, but just as much of the excitement of dance (if not more) emanates from the audience (ch. 7). Some members of the audience lose themselves in the music, and dance to their own step, while others are perfectly synchronized with the already synchronized steps which are occurring in front of them on stage. The barriers between artist and audience are already porous (ibid), but this very 'modern' form of dance seems to be simultaneously very 'traditional', not only because audience participation is heightened, but also because 'traditional' forms of music are usually danced in groups and not partnered couples.

Despite the large number of musical groups in Kinshasa, only about ten to fifteen groups are able to find work and play music on a regular basis. This means that the musical community is very small and its members pay close attention to each others' activities. Borrowing between bands occurs not at the level of lyrics or songs, but at the level of dances and shouts, since it is here that the greatest amount of creativity and innovation occurs (ch. 7). Some musicians/groups are well-known for their creativity in this area, and it is usually from

these groups that stylistic innovations radiate outwards.<sup>48</sup> Rajakula Mbuta Mutu, following in the footsteps of his late older brother, is generally considered to be the “maître” of popular dance in Kinshasa. His recently formed music group, Station Japana, is not very well-known for its music, but has a considerable following for its highly skilled and creative dance sequences. Djuna Mumbafu, the *atalaku* of Empire Bakuba, has also been an important creative force in this area. His case is particularly interesting not only because of the long series of successful shouts he has popularized (what he calls his ‘five goals’: *koissa-koissa*, *mitingi*, *madiaba*, *moto*, *bidenda*), but also because he created the dances that accompany the shouts.

But by far the majority of new dances come from unknown musicians. Most well-known bands borrow from up-and-coming bands which have their pulse on youth tastes and fashions, but do not yet have the legitimacy of the larger, more well-established groups. Case in point, Nouvelle Image. This group of musicians took Kinshasa by storm in 1995, only partly because of their unique mixture of modern and folklore styles, and is probably the most borrowed-from group in the mid-1990s. Almost no professional group in Kinshasa has been able to resist their trademark dance/shout, *kibinda nkoy*, which when performed is usually clustered with several other nuggets from their repertoire (such as *zekete* or *zituala* and more recently the hugely successful *dombolo*). In a similar way, Super Choc, also relative newcomers on the music scene, have gained a lot of attention for a highly influential series of shouts, beginning with the crowd pleaser *mandundu* (*tala ba tala*, *cherie I love you*, *munu mwana*). Up-and-coming stars are among the only ones that can afford not to use the material of other groups, since their only hope to succeed is to offer something completely new.

So if this aspect of Congolese popular music--what is usually referred to as *animation*--is so ingenious and so important, then why has no one written about it? Why do people not talk about it? According to Manda Tchebwa, *l'animation* is an aspect of the music that is so prevalent that people tend to take it for granted, yet he himself refers to it in his book as

---

<sup>48</sup>In the 1990s Djuna Mumbafu of Empire Bakuba, Rajakula, Nouvelle Image, and Super Choc. In the 1980s Zaiko Langa Langa and its various offshoot orchestras: Viva La Musica, Langa Langa Stars, Choc Stars, and Familia Dei. In the 1970s Lita Bembo and Zaiko Langa Langa.

epiphenomenon (1996). As an outsider it was the transition from words to music which I found the most striking about Congolese music, but when I tried to discuss this with people in Kinshasa, even the most well-informed musically-minded among the people I frequented, their reaction was most often one of being stunned. They all know that their music is unique and that it is extremely popular in other parts of Africa, but it never occurred to them that this special position might be due in part to the music's unique two-part song structure or that the two-part song structure was in fact unique at all.

### **The Re-indigenization Thesis**

In this final section of this chapter, I would like to suggest the phenomenon of *animation* (meaning both the practice and the resulting mood) as evidence that over time 'traditional' elements of musical structure and performance have been gradually re-inserted or re-integrated into Congolese popular dance music (see also ch. 10).<sup>49</sup> The concept of 'indigenization' is not new in anthropology, but here I am interested in the renewal of *previously existing forms* and I have found useful discussions of this topic in various other writings (Appadurai 1995; Devisch 1995; Meintjes 1994; Mudimbe 1988). Re-indigenization, then, simply refers to the re-integration of aspects which were previously present in expressive cultural forms, and considered to be 'indigenous', but became inactive in the music over a given period. In the context of Congolese popular dance music, the idea of re-indigenization applies not only to the phenomenon of *animation*, but also to the increasing importance of group dancing (ch. 7), the changes in song structure (ch. 10), and the heightened role of praise singing (ch. 8).

---

<sup>49</sup>In a very thought-provoking dissertation on Zairean popular music and experience, Damien Pwono (1992) uses the term 'institutionalization' to talk about a similar set of cultural and political processes that are visible through the study of popular music.

At the level of song structure, the idea of re-indigenization does not appear to hold. Most accounts of 'traditional' music I have collected focus on three aspects of song structure: statement of the theme ('setting up the scene' or 'the call of the singer' etc.), audience participation in response to the theme ('verse', 'chorus', 'response') and dance (*animation*, 'dance', 'spirituality'). In most cases there is also a fourth aspect, that is the return to the original statement of the theme ('conclusion', 'restatement of theme', etc.). Thus song structure presents a picture of a coherent African social world, with the assertion of a social fact (theme), which is validated by the presence of an audience (response), and followed by a period of release into bodily experience (dance). The most important part of this narrative, however, is the re-statement of the theme, in some sense the return to order (Fabian 1990; Achebe 1990).

As I have shown above, what is most remarkable about the structure of popular songs since 1975 is that they do not return to the theme (i.e. lyrics) of the song. The 'words part' (*partie parole*) is followed by the 'dance part' (*partie danse*) and afterwards the song ends. In this sense, the early *rumba* songs were more 'traditional' in structure since they stated the theme, strayed from the theme through *seben* and then returned to it at the end of the song. On the other hand, it can also be argued that the renewed importance of dance in 'modern' music (dance sequences, especially in concert, are usually longer than the other parts of the song combined) can in fact be seen as a marker of 'traditional' music.<sup>50</sup> Scholars of African music have consistently emphasized the importance of dance to understanding musical production and esthetics, but it is the particular way of dancing, in which men and women remain separate and the distinction between musician and non-musician is blurred, that most resembles the performance of music in a 'traditional' setting.

When I asked Zaiko Langa Langa's Meridjo why the song structure changed in dance music, he responded very matter of factly, "The singers needed time to dance" (May 14, 1996). At

---

<sup>50</sup>David Macaulay (1998), writing about dancehall and reggae music in Kingston, has made similar observations about the simplification of song structures in Jamaican popular music.

the time that Zaiko began experimenting with song structure there was considerable competition between Zaiko and Lito Bemba's Stukas Boys, a group that was particularly well-known for its dancing. In order to stay on top of the music scene, Zaiko had to stay on top in terms of dancing, and this could not be accomplished without the extended dance sequences for which Zaiko would later become famous. Meridjo also explained this evolution in terms of the technological change which was occurring at the time. As recording technology enabled increasingly longer songs to be reproduced (first 78rpm, then 45rpm, then 33rpm records), this extra space was not used to add songs, but to increase song length (see also ch. 4). But as Waterman has shown for popular music in Nigeria, the westernization of musical means often enables the indigenization of local forms of musical expression (1990: 84; see also Manuel 1993).

*Atalaks* most often explain their success in music by referring back to the 'traditional' music which they say serves as an ongoing source of creative inspiration. The most common way for the *atalaku* to create new shouts is by attending funeral ceremonies and other events which are accompanied by 'traditional' music in the hopes that he might hear a new musical phrase or proverb which he could then adapt and introduce into 'modern' music. "The inspiration comes from traditional groups," it was explained to me by Yoto Star, one of the co-founders of the original Swede Swede: "Zaire has many dialects, many traditions. I usually go to the *matanga* to get new ideas and then I take it and arrange it. As musicians we always have to do something new." (Yoto Star, August 13, 1995). This activity, usually referred to as 'dipping' (fr. *puiser*), occurs not only with 'traditional' ensembles but also with up and coming 'modern' groups who have an abundance of creative ideas but much less political and economic means than the musicians who dominate the music scene. Many shouts come from watching children play or from other everyday interactions in an urban setting (Bébé Atalaku, personal communication). Thus the most important trait for an *atalaku* is resourcefulness (*être malin*): "Me and Nono we were the first ones," explained Bébé. "We used to go around like this..." (he makes a gesture like someone sneaking around, two hands picking something out

of the air with his eyes wide open). Thus to be a good *atalaku* is not necessarily to be creative, but to borrow in a creative way (White 1998b).

Djuna Mumbafu, *atalaku* and showman extraordinaire of Pépé Kallé's Empire Bakuba, draws not only from other musicians or everyday life situations in the city, but also from a profound knowledge of 'traditional' music and instruments. From my notes:

To be a good *animateur* you have to know the *tumba* [drum]. If you don't know the *tumba*, you won't go far.

So 'traditional' music is important to 'modern' music? I asked.

Oh yeah, especially when it comes to *animation*. If you know traditional you can improvise. I take all of my stuff from *folklore*. (Apr. 22, 1996)

By this he meant that he creates the rhythm of the shout on the 'traditional' instrument and then fills in the words later. 'Traditional' instruments, he says, are his primary source of inspiration. But Djuna also attributes his creativity to being able to store these inspirations (*provisions*):

Monsieur Bob, you have to be smart in this line of work. You need to have lots of *provisions*. [He holds his gut.] The others don't have any *provisions*. [He laughs and seems happy that I'm laughing too.] I have lots of *provisions*, over many years I've saved them up (ibid).

Veteran member of O.K. Jazz Jean Serge Essous has made similar statements about 'traditional' music: "...it remains my main source of inspiration. I immerse myself in it whenever I want to create something new" (quoted in Gondola 1997: 69). And in the words of the Congolese (Brazzaville) musician Chairman: "I have a *rumba* and I always go to a *seben*, because that's what our traditional music like, its all *seben*" (television interview, March 22, 1996). From my notes after returning from the field:

You've got a cradled industry for 20-30 years, totally controlled by foreigners. The musicians even said [that in the recording studio] they just played the songs as long as they were told to play and then they stopped. And then Zaireanization, and everybody was left on their own at about the same time. The baby boom, the James Brown, the Belgians, etc., and you get the Zaireanization of the song structure. They always wanted to have a dance frenzy but the music was modern, it had to be controlled and sophisticated [and it had to fit on a 78rpm piece of wax], now without this foreign influence, Zaireans were left to their own means and over a period of years this is what they came up with (June 15, 1996).

To some extent, the interest that many musicians express in borrowing from 'traditional' forms of musical expression reflects a source of pride in the country's diverse musical cultural traditions. But many musicians, especially those who were active in music during the period when record sales started to decline, also began to see 'traditional' music as one way of holding on to a shrinking fan base. In the next chapter I will discuss the conditions and outcomes of transformations occurring in global as well as national political economies, and how musicians responded to these changes by introducing certain modifications in the performance and structure of their songs.



## Part Two: The Transformation of *Typique*

### Chapter Four: Made in Zaire

#### Overview of the Industry

- 'Modern' Music Industry
  - Commercial Sponsorship
  - Intellectual Property and Copyrights
  - Media and other Para-Institutions
  - Problems With Producers
- The Bottom Falls Out

#### Too Many Intermediaries, Too Few Brokers

- "Official" Outlets
- Pirates and Re-Distributors
  - Fighting Pirates with Fire
  - The Re-Distributors
  - "We Eat Behind the Musicians"
  - Music Finances Other Activities
- Cultural Brokers and Political Economies

*"Modern Zairean Music" refers to this music that is present everywhere, on the radio and on television, this music of the bars that we find in all the cities.*

(Kanza 1972: 16).

## Overview of the Music Industry

The study of industrial formations in Africa, like many fields of research for the continent, is uneven and imperfect. Where industries are not completely ignored, they are too often considered in isolation from larger historical and economic processes, instead being held up as sources of information about 'development' or 'social change'. This situation is even worse with regards to the study of cultural industries. To my knowledge, there has been no academic research on the very rich history of musical production and exchange in Congo-Zaire.<sup>1</sup> Given the widespread extension of distribution networks for Congolese popular music, and the level of production within the country before the arrival of cassette technology, no one would deny the existence of a Congolese music industry. Even those that acknowledge its existence, however, as with the majority of Western academic writing about state and capital formation in an African context, have tended to portray the industry as backwards or dysfunctional (Sinnock 1997).

Recent research on the social history of popular African music has proven to be more sensitive to these issues. Here I am thinking of the work of Veit Erlmann (1991; 1996a) and David Coplan (1985) on the emergence of popular music styles in South Africa, and Christopher Waterman's (1990) writing on *juju* music in Nigeria. Other studies which I have found to be worthwhile as means of comparison include Guilbault (1993) on *zouk* music in the West Indies, and Manuel's (1993) fascinating account of the introduction of cassette technology in India.<sup>2</sup> A number of interesting studies have appeared on the subject of the international popular music industry (e.g. Burnett 1996), and on various forms of popular music in different parts of the world (Frith 1989), but these do not look specifically at the issues relating to industrial development, and none of them has a regional focus on Africa.

---

<sup>1</sup>Although see Pwono (1992), and Tchebwa has begun preparing a manuscript on this subject.

<sup>2</sup>Steiner's (1994) research on art traders in Côte d'Ivoire, although not on the subject of music, provides valuable information about studying the cultural aspects of networks of distribution and exchange. And I have also drawn some insights from Benjamin's (1968) often-cited discussion of the relationship between culture, society and the advent of mechanical reproduction.

Several studies have pointed to the possibility of more systematic comparative research on popular music industries in Africa (Wallis and Malm 1984; Blinkett 1987), an area which certainly deserves more attention than it has received in the past.

In this chapter, I will focus on the relationship between the music industry and various other institutional mechanisms since independence (the state, the informal economy, the media, changes in global markets, etc.) to explain how music is produced, promoted and distributed in local markets.<sup>3</sup> I will begin with a brief overview of the industry since independence and will discuss some of the important aspects of its development over time: the role of commercial sponsorship, the increasing importance of intellectual property and copyrights, the interaction between music and the media (both state-run and private), the ambiguous position of music producers, and the government's nationalization program, which, together with the arrival of cassette technology to the region, led to profound changes in the Congolese popular music industry. Cultural brokers have been important at certain key periods in the past, but networks are increasingly characterized by intermediaries (often pirates and promoters) who pass the product along for small personal profits. Musicians' efforts to change the way that music is produced and performed gives important clues about how people in local economies respond changes in regional and global political economies.

Throughout this chapter, I will draw from the important insights provided by Appadurai's (1986) collection of articles on the social and cultural aspects of commodities, especially how commodities are constructed, distributed and sold over extended and uneven lifespans (Kopytoff 1986). Elsewhere (1998a) I consider the question of how Congolese popular music came to be commercialized and sold as a commodity on the world market for music. Although I do not want to think of these processes as separate from those of consumption, I have reserved my discussion of the use and reception of popular music for Chapter Nine. The most revealing aspect of the data in this chapter is the way in which larger,

---

<sup>3</sup>Chapter Three discusses the nature of the recording industry during the years before independence when the industry was dominated by foreign (non-Belgian) ownership.

political and economic structures have affected not only musicians' ability to make a living, but also the esthetic form and structure of the music.<sup>4</sup> Despite these developments, the music industry continues to thrive in Kinshasa, and every year hundreds of young people try desperately to get their hands on the elusive and fickle beast known locally as 'le succès' (ch. 5).

### *'Modern' Music Industry*

After independence in 1960 there was a steady increase in the number of Congolese becoming involved in the establishment and operation of music-related production and promotion. Roger Izeidi, formerly of Kallé's African Jazz was probably one of the first Congolese musicians to also produce local music. As director of several record labels (CEFA, Paka Siye, Flash, Vita), his visible material gains encouraged other musicians to get involved in the commercial aspects of music: Kallé's 'Surboum' label, Franco's 'Epanza Makita' and 'Editions Populaires', Vicky Longomba's 'Vicklong', the Soki brothers' 'Allez-y Frères Soki' and 'Editions Bella-Bella', not to mention Rochereau's 'Isa'.<sup>5</sup> But musicians' increased involvement in the commerce of their trade, what Tchebwa (1996) has referred to as the 'sacrifice of art to mercantilism', would lead to considerable scorn. According to Sylvain Bemba, the hazardous combination of money and music was to blame for the destabilization of Congo's great *rumba* orchestras and would cause the music to regress considerably (quoted in Tchebwa 1996). In 1974, as a part of Mobutu's nationalization campaign (*zaïrianisation*), Franco was given control of the huge record-pressing factory Mazadis. Like many of the

---

<sup>4</sup>Compare this with Appadurai's (1995) discussion of changes in the structure of the Indian cricket industry, many of which were due to the sports increasing integration into national and international commercial networks. Diawara (1997) examines how changes in urbanization and class relations have made 'griots' in many parts of West Africa concentrate on individual patrons instead of patron families (as was the case in the past). The greater movement of capital and capital goods in the region has meant that griots' source of livelihood is increasingly uncertain and that griots are increasingly perceived as musical mercenaries (ch. 5).

<sup>5</sup>The prolific production house of Verckys will be discussed in the section below on brokers.

industries which were handed over to Zairean ownership during this period, Mazadis enjoyed a short period of relative success, but quickly became plagued by inefficient management and internal corruption (MacGaffey 1987; Schatzberg 1988; Young and Turner 1985).<sup>6</sup> Mazadis was closed in 1986.

The heyday of record production in Congo-Zaire was in the years between 1970-1975 (Tchebwa 1996: 231), with estimates that yearly sales totalled as much as 5,000,000 for the city of Kinshasa alone (Mampala, Jan. 9, 1996). In these years it was not uncommon for certain records to sell as many as 500,000 copies.<sup>7</sup> Producers from that period tell stories about how they could get recordings on the market in the space of three days. Most songs were pressed on 45rpm records, approximately five minutes to a side. Side A contained the 'words part' of the song and side B the 'dance part.' Filling both sides of a record with the same song (instead of two different songs) was a strategy that many producers used to increase record sales: "If the consumer buys a record with two songs he's done well, but if I put only one song on the record they have to buy more records. This was how we sold more records" (Mampala, Jan. 9, 1996).<sup>8</sup> Verckys, the most well-known local producer of the 1970s, remembers the period as one that was beneficial for everyone involved:

As record producers we were able to make good money, and at the same time musicians also saw improvements in their lifestyle. As producers we could even buy cars for our musicians from our general budgets, because during that time we had to fight over the best artists. In the end, we knew we would always make it back (Verckys in Tchebwa 1996: 231).

Ben Nyamabo, co-founder and leader of the group Choc Stars, and himself a producer, echoes Vercky's assessment:

---

<sup>6</sup>'Zairianization' policies were followed by 'radicalization' (1974) in which the state took control of the companies in particular industrial sectors (public transport, construction materials and certain wholesale distributors) and by 'retrocession' (1976) in which certain firms (already 'zairianized' and 'radicalized') were returned to private ownership.

<sup>7</sup>Even in 1966, a hit song such as Tabu Ley's "Mokolo na ko kufa" was capable of selling 2,000 copies per week.

<sup>8</sup>According to Waterman, recording companies in Nigeria would often release records with one side in standard Yoruba and the other in a regional dialect (1990: 95-96).

It used to be easy. When a new artist came on the scene, he only had to be a little good and he became a hit overnight. In the 70s and 80s it was easy to make money. Not anymore. (Ben Nyamabo, May 21, 1996).

Comments from Mampala, also a producer who was active in the 1970s, show how producers' earnings were tied to highly visible forms of social mobility:

With one song I went to Europe, bought a truck, came back with it, and it is [still] in Bas-Zaïre moving merchandise. When I came back I had to buy a car for myself too; I think it was \$1500 US. In those years it was hard to imagine a producer getting around by foot. We made a lot of money in those days because costs weren't high, musicians never asked for a lot of money (Mampala, Jan. 9, 1996).

### Commercial Sponsorship

It was not until the mid-1970s, when the music industry was in full commercial bloom, that various local corporate entities recognized the potential for musicians to promote their products, and began to offer long-term sponsorship agreements to certain musicians.<sup>9</sup> By the 1980s, almost all the big acts in Kinshasa were sponsored by one or other of the city's major breweries [figure 4.1].<sup>10</sup> With the hope that beverage sales would increase if audiences saw their favorite musicians drinking the product, brewery advertising specialists loaded concert locations with brewery paraphernalia, including tablecloths, banners, glasses, backdrops and,

---

<sup>9</sup>Throughout my writing, I use the term 'sponsor' in several different ways. In later chapters, I use the term in an abstract way to describe those individuals, often also fans of the artist, who contribute money to the artist in exchange for privileged access to the artist and/or for some form of public recognition (ch. 7). In this context, 'sponsor' refers to a commercial or corporate entity which offers to assume a certain amount of the artist's professional expenses in exchange for his or her endorsement of a particular product or product line.

<sup>10</sup>Music sponsorship has come from other industries as well (especially local airlines and tobacco companies), but breweries have been the most active in this area. This is probably no coincidence given the complementarity of these two leisure products and the fact that they usually share the same time and space. A special category of sponsor songs which focused on commercial products seemed to be very common even in the first few decades of Congo-Zairean music. Leon Bukasa sang a song about the founder of the Ngoma record label, Tino Mab sang about Fina margarine and a certain Mokoko sang about Bata shoes. Tabu Ley sang for Skol beer, Omo soap and FNMA refrigerators. Franco sang for Primus beer and Kronenbourg beer. Both Tabu Ley and Franco sang songs for Azda, a well-known importer of inexpensive European cars in Kinshasa in the 1970s. Waterman (1990) discusses the case of Franco, who was flown to Nigeria in 1962 for the inauguration of an air transport link between Kinshasa and Lagos.

## OKTOBERFEST

— Nuit Blanche d'ambiance et d'attraction avec vos vedettes du moment

— Venez boire, manger et danser avec:

**TONTON SKOL ET LA SKOL**

**NYOKA LONGO et Zaïko Langa Langa Nkolo Mboka**

**BEN NYAMABO et Choc Stars**

**BOKETSHU Premier et Swede-Swede**

**Le Prince MAKABA et Wenge Musica**

**SANS SOUCI et son Groupe**

— Date : le 30 septembre 1989

— Lieu : A la Fikin (Esplanade)

— Heure : à partir de 16 heures

**DROIT D'ENTREE: 300 Z**

## TONTON SKOL TEMBE NYE



fig. 4.1 Music and cartoons help to sell beer

most importantly, uniforms with logos. In exchange, musicians receive a small sum of money, a certain amount of beer and soda every month (usually 50-100 cases which they can drink or resell), a beverage freezer for their meeting place, and the comfort of having concerts scheduled and promoted throughout the country on a regular basis.<sup>11</sup> Most sponsors instructed musicians to mention the name of the product in a discrete way in between songs, or in passing during the song, but this did not stop some musicians from going overboard: "When they want to sing the name of the sponsor, if it's not too much its okay, but when it's a whole litany it's really embarrassing, it kills the beauty of the song" (Onya, Mar. 14, 1996) Some sponsors had special representatives to verify the form and frequency of the sponsor's message in concert performance: "We gave them latitude, but the slogan had to at least be in its original form" (Bombero, Feb. 21, 1996).<sup>12</sup>

After several years of heavy spending on music as a form of product promotion (sometimes as much as 35% of advertising budgets), the breweries' owners began to realize that people were associating their products with famous musicians, but they weren't necessarily buying more of the product. This, together with early signs of recession at the end of the 1980s, forced the breweries' management to rethink their policy with regards to music sponsorship. Since 1990, breweries have canceled almost 70% of their sponsorship agreements and have reduced their advertising budgets for music by as much as 85%.<sup>13</sup> When I asked a marketing executive at Unibra Breweries why they continue to sponsor musicians at all, he responded: "It's not profitable, but we have to for our image, music goes with beer, beer with music". Corporate sponsorship of music still exists in Kinshasa, although there is a trend toward sponsoring events rather than groups, and smaller amounts of money are spent

---

<sup>11</sup>According to sources at one Kinshasa brewery, Papa Wemba, one of the breweries most high-profile artists, had a contract for 5,000,000 FB (\$16,000-17,000 U.S.) which was spread out over 3 years. 2,000,000 of this money was to be given in the form of money ('cachet') and 3,000,000 would go toward the purchase of a house in Macampagne, one of the city's most luxurious neighborhoods.

<sup>12</sup>One brewery even made use of certain musicians as consultants to help with wording for their production promotion campaigns (Bombero, Feb. 21, 1996)

<sup>13</sup>According to Mr. Bombero, from the marketing division of Bralima Breweries in Kinshasa, the three major sponsors in Kinshasa devoted the following percentages of their budgets to music in 1995: Bralima 5%; Taba Zaire 5-8% and Unibra less than 5%.



by a larger number of sponsors. Thus the musician is increasingly faced with the insecurity of short-term contracts and a multiplicity of sponsors.<sup>14</sup>

One of the reasons for the growing insecurity among sponsors is the perception that popular music is more risky because it draws less crowds than it did in the past: "Where do we have the most visibility?" Explained one brewery marketing specialist, "In the 1970s music was the most important [part of our marketing]. But now with the economic crisis, today it's too expensive. People used to dance outside of Kimpwanza for 30 minutes just to see the musicians" (Bomoro, Feb. 21, 1996). With time brewery promoters have come to see that musicians' popularity is very fragile and this has led them to a marketing strategy which is much more event-based: "We can't be attached to a star because stars come and go, we prefer to sponsor events, not people, but events" (ibid). In recent years, the area of sports and religion, usually organized around large public events, have received increasing attention from the breweries.

### Intellectual Property and Copyrights

In the first few months of 1970, Zaire's new copyrights office (SONECA) was officially opened to serve Congolese artists.<sup>15</sup> In the period from 1970 - 1978 its activities were very unstable, having undergone seven changes in director and nine changes in executive committees. In 1978, the singer Tabu Ley assumed the direction and began to put some order in the daily operations of the office. During his three terms as head of the Soneca, he travelled to Brussels and began negotiations to establish contractual agreements with SABAM (the

---

<sup>14</sup>During my research, the opposite problem was facing musicians in Brazzaville, where the government had recently centralized beverage industries under the control of one company (SCBK). This monopoly meant that the national brewery no longer needed to conduct promotional campaigns to sell its product. This move threatened all of the music groups performing in Brazzaville at that time.

<sup>15</sup>After the formation of the OMPI (Organisation Mondiale de la Propriété Intellectuelle) in 1961, the first Congolese copyrights office was opened under the name of SACO, Société d'Auteurs Congolaises.

copyrights office in Belgium) and SACEM (in France). Tabu Ley was succeeded by a Mr. Engwandu, who would serve as director until the end of 1996, when increasing dissatisfaction with his management forced him to resign. In 1996, Soneca boasted a large member base, with about 90% of its members (almost 3,300 in all) registered as music producers, musicians or singer-songwriters.<sup>16</sup>

As in copyrights offices elsewhere in the world, there are several types of rights for which performing artists can, in theory, expect to be compensated. Producers and promoters must pay for the right to diffuse music (live or pre-recorded) and for a license to reproduce it for sale. Mechanical reproduction rights (DRM) are paid four times per year. Royalty payments are paid two times per year. Amounts issued from the copyrights office to individual artists vary from as little as 1 cent to as much as \$2,000 US per year. According to Soneca clerks, an average amount is about \$50 US per year. Artists who have composed a great deal of music and who are still distributed in various parts of Africa (such as Honoré Liengo, Wendo, Sam Mangwana) can make considerable amounts of money from royalties. Koffi Olomide, who is registered with the French copyrights office, is estimated to make approximately \$5,000 US per year in royalties. Dances and shouts cannot be copyrighted. As I discuss in Chapter Seven, the issue of intellectual property with regards to dances and shouts is a very sensitive one, since these two areas of creation arguably represent the most dynamic field of artistic innovation and creativity (and also creative borrowing) in Kinshasa.

Unfortunately, because of a weak national infrastructure, most (if not all) copyright payments come from copyright offices abroad.<sup>17</sup> Given this reality, and given the fact that the staff of the copyrights office are not paid on a regular basis, the services offered through Soneca are limited and irregular. Thus it is no surprise that most local musicians (especially

---

<sup>16</sup>According to SONECA employees, all *folklore* music belongs to the state. This category includes: traditional art objects, dances, law, and the list goes on. One employee with whom I spoke said jokingly, "Everything that we do comes from *folklore* at one point or another. There's *folklore*, and there is art that is inspired by *folklore*. When you can't identify the author, that's when it belongs to the state."

<sup>17</sup>In 1996, the national radio and television station (then OZRT), had amassed a debt of almost \$150,000 in unpaid arrears to the SONECA. "If the music industry was well organized, it would contribute to economy just like diamonds and copper, it's a gold mine", said one SONECA employee.

young musicians) are indifferent about becoming members. Membership over the years has declined radically, from 390 new members in 1970 to 15 new members in 1993 (and this is not due to a decline in the number of people playing music). From musicians' point of view, to register as a member of Soneca is simply not worth the effort it requires. Those musicians that have the luxury of registering with other copyrights offices can do so only because they have official status in that country where they reside (Koffi Olomide, Papa Wemba, Lokua Kanza).<sup>18</sup>

### Media and Other Para-Institutions

Tchebwa has called attention to the importance of local media in the development of Kinshasa's particular constellation of stars: "La magie des ondes peut désormais 'sacraliser' et transformer même un illustre chanteur inconnu du quartier en une *star*" (Tchebwa 1996: 220).<sup>19</sup> Television, in his view, is a celebrity-maker ('bâtisseur de célébrité, *ibid*). But before television, radio took up the most space in people's everyday lives. Radio has accompanied popular music ever since the installation of the first professional radio transmitter in 1937 (ch. 2), and has always been the most common form of media accessible to Kinshasa's 'grand public' (see Comhaire-Sylvain 1950; 1968). In 1968 the national radio signal was boosted with the arrival of the 600 kw medium wave transmitter known as the *Tam Tam d'Afrique*, and the REZATELSAT satellite network which would ensure clear reception not only across Zaire but in several neighboring countries as well. A lively local press also began to appear at this time. Especially in the period following independence, there was a sense of freedom of

---

<sup>18</sup>In the Fall of 1996, the Zairean Musicians' Union (UMUZA) began organizing a public media campaign against the director of the Soneca for mismanagement of funds and failure to represent musicians' interests. The UMUZA was initially formed in 1972 and went through a series of musician-directors, the most recent of which was Verckys Kiamangwana (Vévé). In 1995-96 UMUZA held an office with one administrative assistant, but to my knowledge did not conduct any activities outside of this function.

<sup>19</sup>'The magic of the airwaves can make sacred, even transform an unknown neighborhood singer into a true star'.

expression which led to the establishment of a wide variety of local publications on news, culture and current affairs (Lonoh, personal communication).<sup>20</sup>

Today Kinshasa has an increasingly varied private media sector. In 1996 there were three private television stations and three private radio stations (two of which were devoted to Christian programming). Most local television sets were also able to receive several foreign channels, such as TV5, CFI and CNN which arrived via satellite.<sup>21</sup> During this time there were a number of music-related television shows that attracted regular viewership from a broad cross-section of the urban population. The show with the largest audience was the weekly music and news variety show, 'Karibu Variétés', hosted in recent years by Manda Tchebwa. Karibu Variétés usually includes news from musicians living or travelling abroad (sometimes via live cellular phone connections), and two-three live studio guests, either musicians or people working in the music industry.<sup>22</sup> The on-air professionalism and serious treatment of music news make Karibu especially attractive to a mature television audience. 'Club Des Stars', a program which targets younger audiences, was one of the first programs to perfect the call-in format, and because the program is filmed with groups of teenagers seated around the announcers, it often attracts a large viewing audience.<sup>23</sup>

Although some television programs take advantage of studio guests and the increasingly ubiquitous talk show interview format, the bulk of television music programming is made up of music videos. After albums are recorded, most professional artists will spend anywhere from three days to several weeks to film the accompanying music videos. The vast

---

<sup>20</sup>For an excellent overview of radio and t.v. programs, and examples of the written press since the late colonial period, see Chapter Ten of Tchebwa (1996).

<sup>21</sup>During the beginning of Kabila's sweep across the country, the Mobutu government prohibited any political programming on these private stations. In the area of music programming and since the arrival of the AFDL, I am not sure what restrictions, if any, have been placed on media in the private sector or to what extent new media outlets have been able to establish operations.

<sup>22</sup>Every week musicians scramble to get a place on Karibu. Those that are promoting new material or who want to announce an international tour are usually given preference, but the shows' producers make it clear that getting on the air is also a question of 'les relations' ('who you know'). Manda Tchebwa on his relationship with popular musicians: "All the big names in Zairean music come here to see me. They come in person because they depend on me."

<sup>23</sup>The national television station also has programming specifically for religious music and *folklore*. The most popular music-related programs on privately owned commercial television stations in 1996 were "Tempete des Stars" and Gaby Shabani's "Top Dix" music countdown.

majority of music videos are not scripted and do not involve any kind of coherent storyline; musicians and fans alike have become accustomed to videos with lip-synching (musicians use the English word 'playback') and choreographed dancing. This type of video is the easiest to produce and the least expensive.<sup>24</sup> The main ingredients for an acceptable music video are a picturesque backdrop (hotel lobby, flower garden, view overlooking a body of water, etc.), several wardrobe changes (preferably European or Japanese high-fashion) and female dancers. Most videos that follow this formula are of great interest when they first appear on television, but because they have no scenario or storyline, they rarely stay popular for more than a few weeks or months.

Music recording studios have existed in Kinshasa since the late 1930s, but their ability to meet the needs of local musicians has varied greatly over time. After the decline of the mostly Greek-owned recording houses of the colonial period, recording studios operated by the state (especially the OZRT's Renapec studio) became the primary outlet for local musicians who could afford to record professionally. During the 1970s, there were also a number of privately-run studios, the most well-known of which was Verckys' famous two-mike backyard studio (see below). Bobongo Studios (owned and operated by a Belgian expatriate in the zone of Limete) became the leading studio during the 1980s, boasting 24-track capability and fully soundproofed multi-room recording and practice facilities. In the early 1990s, when the economy in general was depressed due to the 1991 and 1993 riots, Bobongo declined somewhat in importance and the young singer-songwriter Gatho Beevans opened the first 8-track digital studio (also in Limete). Gatho's studio was soon surpassed by Studio Meko (Limete), which had 24 tracks, all digital equipment imported from the U.S., and a sound engineer who had received his training in South Africa.

---

<sup>24</sup>Camera equipment and crews are scarce, and must be rented on an hourly or daily basis. Professional quality Betacam camera equipment (including cables, lights, and batteries) is rented at roughly \$100/day. Technicians and transport must be paid separately. When I began video filming for the Unicef-Zaire HIV-AIDS project in the Spring of 1996 (see preface), there were only three complete sets of equipment available for the entire city of Kinshasa.

The final para-institution I want to discuss, and perhaps the most important, is nestled behind a remote section of a neighborhood in the zone of Bandal.<sup>25</sup> Its founder, owner-operator and chief technician goes by the name of Mazanza Maurice (Born in Luozi, Bas-Zaïre, on Oct. 4, 1950). Mazanza is a self-trained, self-employed acoustic guitar manufacturer. In business since the mid-1970s, his workshop's name (ALMAZ, 'Atelier Lutherie Mazanza') is the only widely recognized brand of locally manufactured string instruments, and he has supplied guitars not only to some of the Congo's biggest names (Youlou Mabiala, Rigo Star, and others), but has also had photo opportunities with the well-known French musician Jacques Higelin, who returned to France with two custom-made Almaz masterpieces (Conrath 1984). In actuality, all of Mazanza's guitars are custom-made, since he personally inspects each instrument that leaves his shop, and this only after he has completed the technically demanding process of placing the frets. Mazanza reminisces about the first guitar he made:

I made the first one with particle board from Belgian cigarette containers, I think I had a metal saw [figure 4.2]. With money from the sale I bought what I needed to make a second guitar. I used to do this in my free time, especially during summer vacation, then my Dad told me to concentrate on my studies, "Don't mix money and studies," he used to say. After I started repairing imported guitars, I used to fix everyone's guitars, lots of Wendo's musicians would come to see me (Feb. 19, 1996).

By 1967, he was making almost 60 guitars per year and had a team of five assistants. In the same year he placed his first advertisement in a local paper (*L'Etoile du Congo*, August 5). In 1996, he was paying 12 full-time employees, had mechanized every stage of production (with machines he himself designed) except for frets and tuning heads, and was able to produce somewhere between a total 50-60 guitars per month (bass, solo, mi-solo). From Mazanza's point of view what is most important about his story is his personal effort:

---

<sup>25</sup>For the sake of brevity, I have not included any discussion of the importance of bars and bar-owners, though many barowners maintain close relationships with musicians and high public profiles in order to ensure their bar's success (Jean-Jacques Bayonne, Mère Kosala, and much earlier in Brazzaville, Faignond). I should also mention photo kiosques as a relevant para-institution since they photographers with kiosques often specialize in photographs of famous musicians and sometimes offer their services to concertgoers during live performance (see ch. 7).



fig. 4.2 Mazanza with his first home-made guitar

Edison said only 1% of his work was inspiration, the rest was 'transpiration' ('sweat'). He suffered a lot to invent everything he invented. Before concentrating on technical aspects, I have to do administration and place the frets. I sleep at 7:00 p.m., get up at midnight to read the Bible, then I work until 3:00 a.m. and go back to sleep until 5:00 or 6:00 a.m. Sometimes I suffer from being overworked. During 2 years or so I used to forget what I had just eaten (Feb. 19, 1996).

## Problems With Producers

The term 'producer' reflects a certain ambiguity because it can refer both to the person that creates goods or products (as in agricultural production) and to the person that organizes the commercialization of products (as in the case of cinema). In the context of the Congolese music industry, the producer's role resembles the latter. He/she can be seen as 'producing' something (in the sense of the first meaning) to the extent that records or live performances can be separated from the music or the artist which is being featured.<sup>26</sup> In Kinshasa there are two kinds of producers, those that produce concerts and tours (*producteurs de spectacles*) and those that produce albums (*producteurs de disques*), although many producers do both. Given the structure of most popular dance bands (based in individual charismatic leadership, see ch. 8), very few music groups make use of managers, although in some cases producers can act in this capacity (promoting the group, acting as a liaison between the group and the public, mediating internal conflict, etc.).<sup>27</sup>

In most cases, however, the person who is referred to as *producteur* is nothing more than a financier. Although certain producers establish long-term professional relationships with particular groups or artists, very few producers are able to work on a full-time basis. As I have described above, this is due not only to the general decline in the economy and

---

<sup>26</sup>In the past I have used the term 'promoter' to avoid this ambiguity, but in the end I decided to keep the term 'producer' because it most closely resembles the term used in the Kinshasa music scene (fr., li., *producteur*). The term 'opérateur culturel' is also sometimes used, but it struck me as cumbersome and it seems to be a direct translation of the English term 'cultural operator'.

<sup>27</sup>Two examples of producers who act as managers are Jean Pierre Ngombe (Tamaris) who has managed the career of several musicians including his wife Pembey Sheiro, and more recently Gaby Shabani (Shabani Records), who has been creating a sort of 'stable' of up and coming music groups, see below.



consumer buying power, but also to the perception that music can no longer “nourrir son homme” (‘feed its man’) as it could in the mid-1970s.<sup>28</sup> The few producers who are able to devote all their professional energies to music use this commitment as a way to distinguish themselves from less professional part-time producers: “A producer with only money is not a producer” (Bob Maswa, television appearance on *Karibu Variétés*, May, 1996). According to most musicians, a good producer offers more than financial incentive, he also offers guidance, encouragement, and creative inspiration. In practice, however, producers often take advantage of musicians’ lack of familiarity with the commercial and legal aspects of the industry. The musician contents himself to have a good flat fee (‘cachet’) and some pocket money (‘transport’); there is general agreement that most musicians do not know their rights as artists, and that most producers are out to take advantage of this weakness (‘matraquer l’artiste’).

Problems between producers and musicians most often have to do with money. “The musicians used to come to see *me*,” explained Madame Sidony, one of the only female producers in the industry. “They wanted a producer. But I’m tired [of it now]. They’re capricious; they want five out of every ten francs!” (Sidony, Sept. 18, 1995). Eventually musicians’ demands for more money discouraged her from working with big name acts and led her to specialize in less well-known groups that would be easier to finance: “I prefer to work with unknowns, because the big stars ask for everything you’ve got [*les yeux de la tête*]. The small groups are much less complicated; it’s easier to work with unknowns” (ibid). A large part of the producer’s time is spent gathering information about how much various musicians are making from various types of arrangements. When a producer approaches a musician, she must have a good idea of “what the musician is worth” and it is on this basis that she begins to negotiate. Many producers claim that because of their close personal relationships with famous musicians they are able to negotiate special prices (‘prix d’amis’):

---

<sup>28</sup>One well-known music producer in Brazzaville explained to me that producers in Kinshasa are more “débrouillard” (‘resourceful’) than “professionnel”. They prefer ‘quick money’ to ‘long-term investments’, and this mitigates against the emergence of a large pool of full-time professional producers (personal communication, M. Maxime)

"Koffi usually gives me a *prix de famille* [family price]; I've given him a lot of ideas"

(Lascony, Sept. 7, 1995).

Thus at any given time, the most well-known groups can be placed on a differentiated payscale which corresponds more or less with their popularity at the time. Below are various groups' asking prices for a concert performance in the Spring of 1996:<sup>29</sup>

Zaiko Langa Langa, \$6-700  
Koffi Olomide, \$5-600  
General Defao, \$2-300  
Wenge Musica BCBG, \$6-700  
Bana Odeon, \$20-30

But not all groups' rates are fixed. Most groups (such as the *folklore* group below) have different rates depending on the type of event and perhaps more importantly on the person who happens to be soliciting the group's services:

\$300-350 for a party  
\$100 for an individual private show with 'traditional' costumes  
\$50-80 for a funeral ceremony

It is not uncommon for the band's *cachet* to be negotiated up until the minute the show starts. At one concert I witnessed, the entire band (minus the lead singer) was already on stage when the lead singer, having judged that the crowd was too small, signalled from the back of the concert venue for the band to quit playing and leave. This gesture was intended as a public message to the producer that he had not done a satisfactory job with regards to promoting the show. In addition to paying the band, the producer must also cover the costs of promotions (\$1-200 for an average concert), the equipment rental (\$100), and sometimes the rental of the space, although in many cases bar owners make their money from selling beer to ticketpaying concertgoers [figure 4.3].

---

<sup>29</sup>Producers will also rank groups according to their capacity to sell albums: Franco: 130,000 cassettes (maracas d'or), Mayaula: 80,000, Zaiko Langa Langa: 50-65,000, Reddy Amisi: 45-50,000, General Defao: 30,000.



Fig. 4.3

fig. 4.3 Cloth banner advertising an upcoming concert

For the last ten years, the young producer/promoter Lascony Balloux has been one of the most permanent fixtures of the Brazzaville side of the Congolese music industry [figure 4.4]. Even before the music of the Pool region was completely commercialized, there was always a free flow of musical personnel and ideas between the two capitals (Tchebwa 1996; Bemba 1985). Lascony has continued this tradition, especially in his informal capacity as the leading regional expert on questions of music distribution and marketing. As a young adolescent he pursued studies in the area of *action commercial*, which he describes as “bringing the product to the consumer and bringing the consumer to the product.” Lascony first worked on a professional basis as the assistant of Jean Pierre Gombe, the owner and operator of Tamaris Records which was at that time based in Brazzaville.

Under the supervision of Gombe, Lascony set up the first mobile cassette sales system, a system which he referred to as the *démarcheurs* (‘walkers’). Lascony’s ‘walkers’ were equipped with a “Super Cassette” carrying case, matching hat and t-shirts, and a rubberband on the arm for grouping series of cassettes. Vendors would literally pass from door to door, neighborhood to neighborhood, a technique that was completely unheard of for products of this type in Brazzaville. This approach was innovative not only for the way that it attempted to bring the product in direct contact with the customer, but also because vendors were trained in how to present arguments about the issue of piracy. Vendors (mostly young men) were also offered incentive programs in the form of bonuses. Lascony later went on to work with Ndiaye, a Senegalese businessman who (thanks primarily to Lascony) has become the primary cassette producer and distributor in the region. In 1996, Lascony engineered the arrival of state of the art equipment in cassette duplication and packaging technology, a feat which gave Ets. Ndiaye a huge advantage over other distributors in the region, most of whom had become accustomed to duplicating cassettes in Europe.

Perhaps feeling the crunch from Brazzaville’s dominance in the area of cassette distribution, a group of Kinshasa-based producers joined forces in 1996 to form the COZAPEDIM (Corporation Zairoise de Producteurs, Editeurs et Disquaires de la Musique).



Fig. 4.4

fig. 4.4 Lascony Balloux (center) and the salesmen from Etablissements Ndiaye (Brazzaville)

The stated purpose of the Cozapedim was to protect its members from the illegal sale or distribution of their products. After forming a charter and organizational structure for their initiative, several of the members decided to organize a parade-style tour of the 24 zones of Kinshasa in order to register all cassette vendors with their organization, and to raise awareness about the value of cassettes and CDs as commercial and intellectual property [figure 4.5]. Among the initiatives they had planned, they were attempting to put pressure on the government (through the customs division) to raise the price of blank cassettes so that home-made pirate cassette sales would then cost too much to be of interest to consumers. At the same time, they intended to give formal recognition (a badge system) to all cassette re-distributors (see below) as authorized vendors of original cassettes, a status which would assure them preferential prices on original cassettes.

Their campaign, although relatively well-organized and certainly effective in attracting people's attention, seemed to miss an important area of production (mobile vendors) since their goal was to contact and register stationary cassette vendors from all over the city. When I was interviewing one of the group's founding members, we were both surprised to see a mobile vendor pass by the table where we were seated in a local bistro, and the producer was even more surprised when I asked the vendor to sit down because I wanted to see what he was selling. This incident seemed to open up a faint dialogue between the producer and vendor, though it was somewhat constrained by the vendor's mistrust of the producer and the producer's embarrassment for not having discussed these mobile vendors as the primary way in which pirated cassettes are distributed throughout the city.



Fig. 4.5

fig. 4.5 The members of COZAPEDIM visiting a cassette outlet

### *The Bottom Falls Out*

At some point in the 1970s, the bottom began to fall out of the Congolese music industry. I was not fully aware of the truth of this often-heard statement until I was put in a situation where I myself was pushed to answer questions about the current disarray of the industry. Two European development workers were visiting Kinshasa on vacation and asked me where all the 'great music' was sold. From my notes:

As we were crossing the street I was explaining that the music scene is very active but the industry itself is in shambles. 'Victoire used to be full of record stores, now there are less than 5,' I said. They couldn't believe it. 'This is Zaire's 2nd biggest record store,' [Bondowe Records] I told them and they seemed proud to have seen it. I told them about home-made cassettes, and how they dominate the market, and that the bottom of the market fell out with Zaireanization and the arrival of the cassette. I'm not sure how I came up with this, but it seemed to make sense (Apr. 8, 1996).

A number of factors went into the decline of records sales beginning in the mid-1970s. Most explanations of this phenomenon (from producers as well as musicians) hint at the role of the post-colonial state. Mampala explained the situation in these terms:

Since 1986 there's no more infrastructure, it's hard to do business. In 1986 Mazadis closes, and Franco goes to Europe. From then on you have to leave the country. You can still make music, but you can't 'materialize' it. [In Kinshasa] there is plenty of inspiration, but no materialization. Before 1973, we used to sell millions of records. In 1970 it was 1,500,000 per trimester. It's not like that anymore (Mampala, Jan. 9, 1996).

It is not only the general decline in political freedom and economic opportunity which would characterize the economy of the 1980s (MacGaffey 1987: 41), but also the lack of infrastructure, and the inability to maintain the little infrastructure that was already in place. Infrastructure in this context refers to the decaying industrial machinery (such as Mazadis), the dubious copyrights office (which as I discussed above was largely dysfunctional), and the introduction of audio cassette technology in the 1970s.<sup>30</sup> This latter aspect would prove to be

---

<sup>30</sup>On the affects and uses of cassette technology in developing economies, see also Abu-Lughod (1990), Diawara (1997), and Manuel (1993).



the crucial last blow to the already declining industry since audio cassettes could be easily duplicated and distributed through Zaire's already well-developed informal networks of exchange. The introduction of cassettes and cassette players meant that locally produced music would continue to be listened to (perhaps even more than before since cassettes are easily copied and shared or sold), but it also meant that producers found it increasingly difficult to make money from making music. The decline in the number and quality of producers completed the negative production feedback loop, and before long, musicians were leaving Kinshasa *en masse* to make a living elsewhere. Music was still being produced and consumed, but suddenly there was a whole new layer of commercial agents whose presence removed the incentive for music producers and musical artists alike:

The producer doesn't break even, and he gets discouraged. Artists have no more producers. There is a reduction in the sound quality because of cassette pirates and the producer will probably take losses. The problem is with the people that reproduce the music. We need judicial support in order to combat illicit reproduction and diffusion (M. Bassarila, director of the Congo-Brazzaville copyrights office, BCDA, Aug. 10, 1995).

Not only the advent of cassettes, but also the arrival of 33 rpm records on the market made buying records increasingly difficult for the average Zairean. It was no coincidence that during this same period (early to mid-1980s) many groups began touring in Europe, often with the hopes that they could record their music abroad and return to Kinshasa (or to Brazzaville, at its elaborate state-run studios I.A.D.) to have it duplicated and distributed. In the second part of this chapter, I will look specifically at the various types of distributors and re-distributors that move illegal cassettes across the city and throughout the country.

## Too Many Intermediaries, Too Few Brokers

The role of brokers and other types of intermediaries has received little attention in anthropology. Perhaps an analysis of the circuitous and multi-faceted networks which bring together producers and consumers seems too daunting a task.<sup>31</sup> In the context of the following discussion, *cultural brokers* are of primary importance, for it is they who manage the material and symbolic resources that constitute notions of taste (and thus value) in a given society (c.f. Bourdieu 1984). Drawing from Steiner, I see a cultural broker as someone who demystifies demand for the producer and communicates some form of authenticity or cultural identity to the consumer. In Appadurai's (1986) terms, the broker is that person who in effect *makes* taste through activities such as "enclaving" or "diverting". Jules-Rosette (1984) refines the use of the term further by suggesting that brokers do not simply manufacture taste, but that taste is the result of a sort of three-way dialogue between producers, brokers and consumers. Robert Paine (1971) makes a crucial distinction between 'broker' and 'go-between,' showing that some intermediaries influence consumer taste while others simply *read* it. For the purposes of this discussion, I see cultural brokers as those who engage in what I will refer to as the *management of meaning*.

Before arriving to the field I expected that I would find an important number of cultural brokers working in the area of music. Given the preliminary research I had done on cultural brokers and the production of meaning (White 1998a), I was very interested in examining the various ways that expressive forms of culture are adopted and adapted for sale on the market. To my surprise, I found very few people that would qualify as cultural brokers in Kinshasa. In fact, it was even difficult to find full-time producers or promoters working in the area of music. Given the size and vitality of the local music scene, this absence was conspicuous to say the least. With time, what I realized is that the absence of cultural brokers *per se* is

---

<sup>31</sup>Erlmann points out that "musical ethnographies will increasingly have to examine the choices performers worldwide make in moving about the spaces between the [global] system and its multiple environments" (1996: 474).

interesting in and of itself, but it also points to the fact that cultural brokerage in a setting of political and economic crisis such as that of Congo-Zaire, manifests itself in unexpected, constrained ways.<sup>32</sup> The absence of cultural brokers (in the strict sense of the term) was also highlighted by the extremely large number of intermediaries or *re-distributors* in the market for music. It is to this category of industry agents that I now turn.

### *"Official" Outlets*

Obviously not all the music sold in Kinshasa is done on an illicit basis. While "official" outlets for popular music are not nearly as frequent as they were in the 1960s and 1970s, they do still exist and despite (or perhaps because of) their limited number, they continue to exert considerable influence on the local market for music. The primary outlets in this category are located a stone's throw from the heart of Kinshasa's cultural and artistic district, the 'Place des Artistes' at Rondpoint Victoire in Matonge. Only separated by one other store, the two primary music stores (usually referred to as *disquaires*) in Kinshasa face the same direction, offer roughly the same products and have a very similar clientèle. Alamoulé is a bit more upscale with substantial viewing space and an elevated showroom, while Bondowe cultivates a claustrophobic 'music shack' atmosphere which it may be argued adds to the intrigue about what can be 'discovered' inside (c.f. Steiner 1994). It is certainly more common to see famous musicians in front of Bondowe, but this may also be due to the fact that the Bondowe staff is more actively involved in various areas of production and

---

<sup>32</sup>It could also be argued that the Zairean state was the music's primary broker, not only because the Mobutu regime used music and dance as a form of political propaganda (Kapalanga 1989, and ch. 10), but also because of the way it co-opted popular musicians into its sphere of authority (White 1997, see also ch. 9 and ch. 10). Some informants also remember particular periods when foreign music was outlawed by the state (sometime in the 1970s) and when the only local music allowed on the radio was music that sung about the M.P.R. I will pursue this topic further in future research which will attempt to compare cultural policy under the colonial administration with that of Mobutu's one-party state.

promotion.<sup>33</sup> As the primary place of distribution for new releases and hard to get 'oldies' re-releases, these stores are also an important social space (*lieu de rencontre*) in which producers, musicians and fans interact, and scrutinize each other's behavior and practices.

These stores carry all types of locally produced music ('modern', *folklore*, 'religious', and imported styles from Jamaica, West Africa, France, Belgium and the U.S.). Most of what is sold is in cassette format. A large selection of the 'modern' music section is available on compact disc and this is the type of product which is most prominently displayed in the store. They also sell cassettes of music videos, live performance, local comedic theater and imported feature films (mostly Hindi and American action films). Compact discs and video cassettes are the most expensive products (usually \$25 U.S.), followed by 'modern' music original cassettes (\$4-5 U.S.), then *folklore* and 'religious' music (\$2-4 U.S.). In an "extremely good" week, a store of this type would be able to sell up to 500 cassettes. In a "bad" week this figure can go as low as 250. An extremely good product (take for example Koffi Olomide's V12 in 1995-96) could sell up to 30 CDs and 200 cassettes in the same length of time.

In other parts of the *cité* there are not stores but music kiosques. These can be small rented spaces, but are most often booths which are placed on main thoroughfares and are occupied during the peak hours of traffic and 'circulation'. What is most remarkable about these outlets is the extent to which their inventories reflect a growing interest in locally produced Christian music (ch. 3, 9). I found one or two kiosques that sell both 'modern' and 'religious' music, but the vast majority of these remote kiosk locations (there are perhaps 20-30 in all) specialize in the increasingly available and increasingly professional popular religious music.<sup>34</sup> Cassette stands (*étalages*) [figure 4.6] can be found at certain key locations

---

<sup>33</sup>There are several other music stores in Kinshasa, but they do not have near the same selection or customer traffic as these two commercially privileged sites. One is on Kasavubu Street, near the intersection with Croix Rouge, the other is located in Matonge also on Kasavubu. A music store in Gombe (The Music Box) caters to an elite clientele (mostly expatriate) who purchase mainly CDs and are more interested in imported music than local music.

<sup>34</sup>According to rough estimates made in 1996, religious music makes up about 15-20% of the popular music which is sold in Kinshasa at any given time.



Fig. 4.6

fig. 4.6 Semi-mobile display unit (*étalage*) for sale and re-sale of original cassettes

which are both nodes of commercial activity and important transportation hubs (Matonge, the *grand marché*, Lemba, Kitambo Magasin, Bandal, Ndjili, and Masina).

### *Pirates and Re-Distributors*

The spread of Congolese popular music has clearly been tied to new forms of recording and audio reproduction technology, especially cassettes. As with many industries in Zaire, a large percentage of the trade in music happens outside of officially registered economic activity (MacGaffey 1991). During a period of increasing economic hardship, the cassette medium makes music one of the most affordable forms of leisure for Congolese consumers.<sup>35</sup> The market for Congolese music in Europe is considerable, but by far the largest number of cassettes are sold within Africa. My research suggests that much of the music's production is controlled by Africans living outside of the region, primarily in Paris, but also in Brussels and Brazzaville. Production companies such as Syllart Production (Paris), Anita Ngapy & Clesh (Paris), Flash Diffusion Musique (Paris), Camara Sound (Paris), Editions B. Mas (Paris), Tamaris (Paris/Brazzaville), Etablissements Ndiaye (Brazzaville), and Bono Musique (Brazzaville) are owned and operated by Africans (in many cases non-Congolese) whose operations are not hampered by their distance from the Kinshasa music scene.

Distribution, on the other hand, occurs in a much more decentralized fashion, with a multitude of *re-producers* (both local and global) making a living from the sale of pirated audio and video cassettes. In this situation, what we are faced with is not the mass-production of a cultural product, but its mass-distribution. Re-producers, who range from large, commercial-scale (usually international) cassette pirates to homemade cassette copiers and individual itinerant street vendors, can be seen as the key to the music's spread, but they are perceived by

---

<sup>35</sup>In the mid-1990s an original, locally produced cassette cost approximately \$5.00 U.S. and compact discs, where available, somewhere around \$25.00 U.S. Pirated or home-made cassettes could be found for the equivalent of about \$1.00 U.S.

most people (and especially by musicians) as profiteers, since none of the money they earn actually returns to the artist. "The problem with Zairean music is that the artist makes his music and someone else sells it, so he never makes any money. He makes the music but doesn't benefit from the fruit of his labor" (Bruno Kasonga, June 22, 1995).

Before entering into a detailed discussion of the informal exchange networks of the market for Congolese music, I should distinguish between various types of products and players. First, it is important to make a distinction between original cassettes and pirated cassettes. **Original** cassettes are those produced either by the musician or by someone who has obtained a legal licence to reproduce and distribute the finished product. Pirated cassettes usually take one of two forms, what I call the **original pirate** (a cassette which gives the appearance of being an original one) and the **home-made** cassette (which looks like a cassette which has been copied on a home stereo system). Original pirate cassettes (often printed with one-fold, poorly printed color cassette sleeves) are those which are most often sold by large-scale commercial pirates. Home-made cassettes (on inexpensive Korean blank cassettes with song titles written by hand) are the domain of local re-distributors who are also technically pirates, but who deal in much smaller numbers than the internationally-based commercial cassette pirates.

### Fighting Pirates with Fire

Since the mid-1980s when the business of pirating Congolese music was booming in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, there have been considerable efforts in the Pool Region (long considered the capital of Central African dance music) to crack down on the sale of illegally produced cassettes. In response to this pressure, the majority of large-scale cassette pirates have since left their bases in Brazzaville and Kinshasa. All that remains is the

occasional shipment of original pirated cassettes from somewhere in West Africa or Southeast Asia where the pirates have relocated. Despite the fact that most of the large-scale pirates no longer live in the country, producers and musicians still perceive the activities of pirates as a threat to their livelihood. It is also true, however, that some of the industry's most notorious cassette pirates have since become the industry's most important producers and distributors (Syllart, Ndiaye, etc.). And it is often these individuals who speak out the most strongly against the problem of piracy.<sup>36</sup>

Most of the producers I spoke with each had stories about encounters with commercial cassette pirates. Socrates (Bondowe Productions) told the story of what happened to an album he produced for Bana O.K.:

After we did all the work we realized the cassettes had mold in them so we had to redo the product. It cost a lot of money, but what really messes us up is the pirates. I arrested a Guinean guy, a company called EBCI. He pirated ten different albums here, with screws and was selling them for 25,000 NZ [one-third the price of the original].<sup>37</sup> We brought him to court in the end of September. The mistake he made is that he didn't know that BABI [the production company] had a rep here in Kin. He tried to calm me down, 'Oh, my friend, we can work this out, we can find a solution. If we work together, we can make a lot of money,' blah blah blah. We confiscated all his cassettes, 1,547 in the store alone, and had him arrested. The judge wanted us to settle out of court so I told him to pay the money I owed to Bana O.K., \$2,000, and to pay me damage of \$3,000 (Socrates, Dec. 21, 1995).

Similar events happened in Brazzaville where the local copyrights office (BCDA) was conducting aggressive anti-pirate campaigns since 1983 (Bassarila, Aug. 10, 1995). There the first raid on pirates took the form of a city-wide sweep that happened in the space of two-three days and involved not arrest, but steep fines payable immediately. A similar campaign in Pointe-Noire (Congo-Brazzaville's main coastal city) brought in 10,000 pirated cassettes in one day. At a highly publicized international copyrights meeting in Lome in 1991, industry specialists attending the meeting were invited to witness the arrival of an illegal shipment of cassettes from Hong Kong which belonged to a Nigerian named Kinwani. The packaging was

---

<sup>36</sup>One cassette distributor is said to have lured other pirates into buying pirated products and then to have had them arrested for selling illegal goods. This kind of consolidation strategy seems to be common among industry players.

<sup>37</sup>Cassettes with screws are generally cassettes of higher quality and thus are rarely used with pirate productions. Checking for screws is often the best way to determine if the cassette is pirated or not.



ripped open, the cassettes were confirmed to be pirates and they were burned for the cheering crowd (*ibid*). Similar burnings are said to have occurred in Brazzaville and Kinshasa.

While publicity events such as these and a stepped-up surveillance of the commercial pirates certainly seems to have curbed pirate activity in the region, most producers agree that pirates are still present.<sup>38</sup> Pressure from local authorities has meant that they either invest more money in their duplication procedure (to make the cassettes more closely resemble originals) or that they simply sell different pirated products within Congolese borders. Congolese producers, however, are only concerned with pirated cassettes when originals are products of their own. Regardless of their intentions, these campaigns have certainly raised awareness among the general public. Customers approaching cassette vendors will often examine the cassette and its casing to see if they can determine whether or not the cassette is pirated. An astonishing number of potential customers will ask the question directly: “C’est piraté ça?” (‘Is this a pirate?’) The answer, of course, is always no. Various local producers I spoke with even suggested that the anti-pirate campaigns had a tangible effect on consumer buying habits: “People start to like quality now” it was explained to me (Bokilo, Sept. 14, 1995).

But probably the most effective method of dealing with pirates is the increasingly popular approach of pre-sales negotiation. The most-widely pirated artists (Koffi Olomide and Papa Wemba) following the lead of Senegal’s Youssou N’dour, have begun striking deals with local and regional pirates before albums are officially released. The artist authorizes particular pirate producers to copy and sell a certain limited number of pirated cassettes at a significantly reduced price. This gives the artist a guaranteed wide, low-cost distribution of his work and gives the distributor the comfort of not having to worry about being arrested. For some musicians, pirate-based distribution networks are the most reliable and the most inexpensive means of disseminating their music (J.P. Busé, personal communication). As musicians begin to realize that they cannot rely on the state to protect their livelihood or their

---

<sup>38</sup>There are also reports of local police or military (not necessarily responsible for enforcing copyright laws) haphazardly harassing local cassette vendors and threatening to arrest them for selling pirate cassettes unless they agree to pay a ‘cassette tax’ or some other sort of improvised fine.

property, they increasingly seek out solutions such as these, which bypass the intermediaries of the state or commercial elites.

### The Re-Distributors

Although the majority of kiosques and cassette stands are official outlets for cassettes, many of them sell pirated cassettes as well. Furthermore, there is a subset of cassette stand vendors, those who sell at the *grand marché*, that sell only home-made pirate cassettes. In this section I am primarily concerned with small-scale vendors (especially cassette stand vendors) who have enough inventory to remain stationary, but not enough inventory or financial means to merit a kiosk or record store. As I will show below, their actions are an important part of the feedback loop between musicians and consumers, and they play an important (though controversial) role in the music's dissemination across popular public spaces. While large-scale commercially pirated cassettes still exist, their number and frequency has been limited by the anti-piracy campaigns I discussed above, and by the fact that even original pirate cassettes are expensive for the average *Kinois*.<sup>39</sup>

At the end of a long day following around Socrates, the manager of Bondowe Records, I mentioned that I would like at some point to meet some cassette pirates. "You want to meet the pirates?" Socrates asked eagerly. "I'll introduce you to a pirate. When do you want to go?" I suggested that following day and he answered, "10:30 okay?" Socrates was wonderful this way. He was one of these people with a permanent smile on his face and he sometimes chased after his thoughts, which were obviously too quick to verbalize. When he agreed to introduce me to one of the pirates, I did not know exactly what to expect, but I knew it would be good. We arrived at the central market (*le grand marché*) late the next afternoon.

---

<sup>39</sup>In most cases pirated cassettes are only slightly more expensive than locally produced home-made cassettes, usually coming in at 50,000 NZ in 1996 or about \$2 U.S.

Socrates not only had a car but he also had access to a private parking space at the police station a few hundred yards away from the entrance to the market ("The car used to belong to a general", he explained). We walked briskly to the center of a large section of vendors who sold nothing but cassettes. The person we came to see was the only one sitting down, by far the tallest and most well-fed of the group. He was sharply dressed with an American style polo shirt, khakis, several gold chains and large Ray-bans. "Tito, this is Monsieur Bob. He's our friend. He wanted to see how you work." He looked over the rim of his glasses and tilted down his head as we shook hands. Socrates left me on my own and we agreed to meet again in the days to come.

Tito's "specialty", like the other 20 or so vendors with which he shared this section of Kinshasa's central market, was somewhat difficult to characterize. His cassette stand, which was one of the larger ones in the area, displayed not only recent issue and used original cassettes, but also original pirate cassettes, home-made cassettes and used CDs as well. Some of his colleagues specialized in home-made cassettes or in used French and American pop music, but most of the vendors around him combined the sale of different products to make a living from their trade [figure 4.7]. Tito not only had one of the prime corners of the cassette section, but he also had two assistants, a portable radio player for customers to 'verify' their purchase, and a small collection of home-made video cassettes (primarily imported commercial films). He gave me his chair, the only real perch in this part of the market, and although I was embarrassed by the attention my presence seemed to be attracting, I was ecstatic to finally be in the middle of what seemed like the hub of music sales in Kinshasa. Just before 5:00 p.m. (not long after I arrived) several vendors began to pack up their cassettes in the carton boxes behind their stands and dismount the floursack parasols which only partially protected them from the indifferent rays of the city sun.

We agree to go for a beer nearby and as we cross the market I am amazed at the way that Tito moves through this very dense collection of people and things. From my notes:



Fig. 4.7

fig. 4.7 The re-distributors: "We help musicians because we promote their music"

He's a good guy. Speaks friendly to people and very respectful with old ladies. We go to his storage space, we cross the mountain of garbage, the smell of rotting vegetables and tin cans everywhere. We continue past something that he himself called a lake, then down the paved street out of Gombe into Kinshasa [two different urban zones], past a West African vendor to a small hidden *nganda* [open-air private bistro], just after the Kasai freight company. Tito says he prefers *ngandas* to nightclubs. More economical, better ambience. He was obviously a regular here (Jan. 7, 1996).

As usual the cold beer seemed well-deserved and it suddenly felt as if I had passed from work to leisure. Even if I had wanted to speak about the reason for my visit, I am not sure I would have been capable. Instead we talked aimlessly about music and travel and there was no shortage of things to say. After seven or eight large cups of peanuts and just as many beers, Tito helped me find a taxi and we agreed to meet in the market the next day. When I arrive the next day, Tito's assistants are almost finished setting up his stand and Tito sets me up on the perch once again. He seems to have understood that I want to understand how they operate, and that the best way for me to do so is to observe. As the first few customers stroll by his stand, he begins to work his magic: "Good morning, friend, how are you today? What would you like to see?" In most cases the passersby seem to be drawn in against their will. They are usually young men (18-35), carrying a plastic sac with powdered milk or soap, and they stand in front of Tito's displays holding their neck, contemplating Tito's impressive collection of new and used cassettes.

Tito's display usually includes approximately 100 original cassettes (placed facing the customer on a vertical backdrop), about 50 home-made cassettes (kept at the foot of the backdrop arranged with the spine showing in their original cartons) and 4-5 cassettes of 'traditional' music (*folklore*, usually arranged with the home-made cassettes).<sup>40</sup> In this section of the market there are anywhere from 15-20 cassette vendors with stands who have more or less similar displays, although among variety vendors Tito is one of the largest and most prominent. The two vendors that specialize in home-made cassettes are located directly beside Tito and they have 3-4 times the number of cassettes on display, all of which are laid flat on a

---

<sup>40</sup>Tatou records traditional music himself in the *matanga* and marriages he attends.

table arranged alphabetically by artist and name of the album [figure 4.8].<sup>41</sup> Cassette prices vary according to quality and type, but even taking into account price haggling, prices in the beginning of 1996 are relatively standard:

original cassettes:	85-95,000 NZ, a little less than \$4.00 U.S.
used original cassettes:	60-65,000 NZ, about \$2.50 U.S.
original pirate cassettes:	50,000 NZ, about \$2.00 U.S.
home-made cassettes:	30,000 NZ, about \$1.25 U.S.

On any given day, the number of cassettes sold at one stand seems to be about 30. Tito's assistants are also responsible for selling cassettes, but Tito handles the majority of money transactions. Customers are allowed to listen to the cassette before purchasing, but Tito will usually only play sections of songs in order to preserve the batteries as long as possible. His assistants spend most of their time arranging, dusting and manually rewinding (with a pencil) the cassettes that customers listen to, but do not buy.

Although Tito is reluctant to admit it, the business of selling cassettes in 1995-96 Kinshasa is not an easy one. When I asked him about the first cassette vendors in Kinshasa he spoke about them (and the period) with a certain sense of nostalgia:

The old guys that sold cassettes started in 1975 or '76. They were mostly Angolan...Vieux Dokar, Babi, Pele, ...Doyen, Pollin...Geant. When I saw what they were doing that's when I got started. They did well for themselves. They used to make the cassettes at their homes on Trois-Zed [a large thoroughfare]. No competition in those days, 50 Zaires for a 33 rpm! It was good then (Jan. 7, 1996).

Even today the most successful vendors of home-made cassettes are of Angolan origin. These vendors, known as wholesalers (*grossistes*), do not occupy stands at the market but it is from the market that they conduct their primary business. After a week or two of showing up at Tito's stand at different times during the day, I noticed a crowd of mobile vendors huddled around a man holding a calculator and a notepad.

---

<sup>41</sup>Many albums do not have names and thus are referred to by the most popular song on the album.

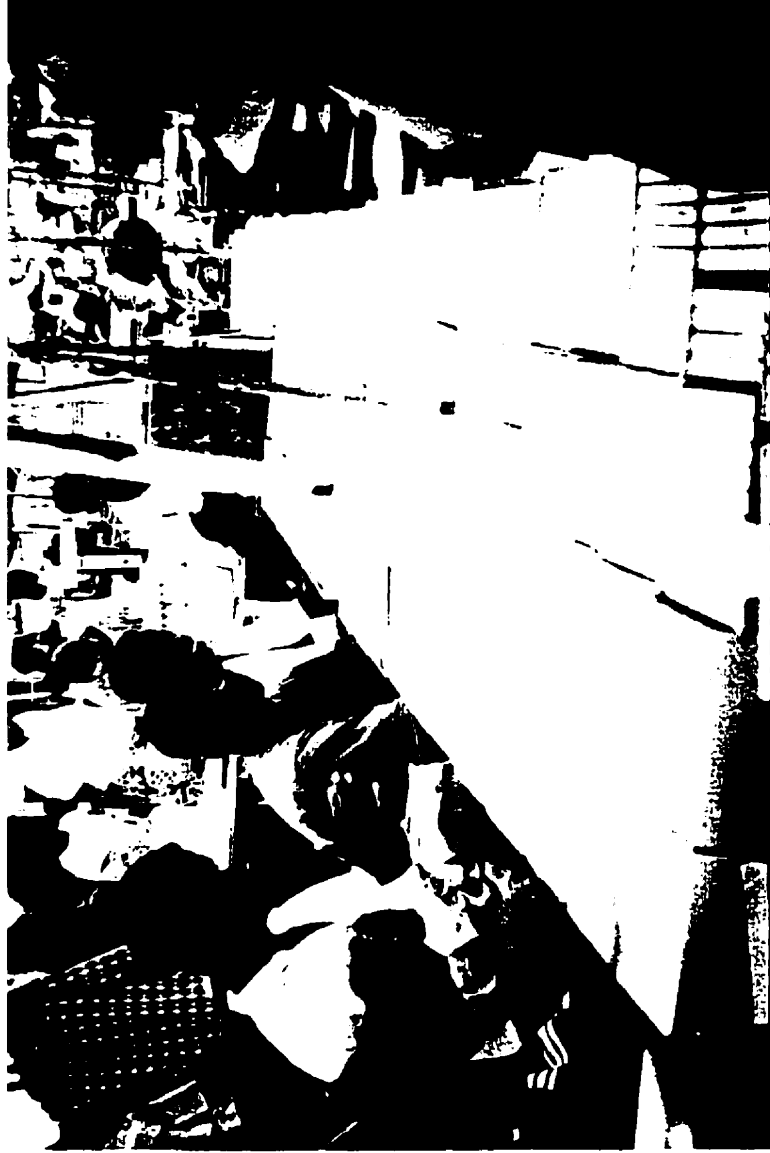


Fig. 4.8

fig. 4.8 Home-made pirate cassettes are priced with the consumer in mind: one U.S. dollar

It is the *grossiste*. He's selling to the mobile vendors and they are all massed around him trying to get their orders filled. I stop for a second to watch over their shoulders. "Oui Monsieur le blanc?" one of the vendors asks playfully. 'Te. Nazo tala kaka.' They chuckle and turn away, repeating what I said in Lingala.<sup>42</sup> I look down and I can't understand anything. There is money going toward the person sitting in the middle, but the exact transaction is blurry. All of this money is coming in and he is clumping it up in his hands. In the opposite direction, cassettes are being distributed. From my notes:

He's handing them out like its Christmas, calling out the name: "Prudence...V12...Super Choc...Avis de Recherche". There's always a taker, but you can't tell which cassette is which, only he seems to know. He goes through the SKC [Korean cassette manufacturer] box with no apparent order. He opens a package of ten, pulls out one cassette at a time (they're not labelled on the spine). Each one of the dozen kids standing around has a clump of bills in his hands. He also has an old sports bag with ripped zippers and tired velcro. He hears the cassette he wants and he waves the 16,000 NZ [about .64 U.S.] in the wholesaler's direction. After each purchase he gets his next 16,000 ready. One vendor has a card in his hand. He's holding it behind his ear so he can get his other shoulder in to see the action. On his card (a ripped section of a SKC cassette carton) he has written the eight cassettes he's looking for and the total amount of money he plans to spend, 135,000 NZ. When it is his turn to buy, the 16,000 leaves his hand and the cassette enters with one gesture. Noah [the wholesaler] is very cool. No arguments, no discussion, just cassettes going out and money coming in (March 7, 1996).

I recognize some of the mobile vendors. My favorite is (ironically) one who calls himself "Le Blanc" and who often works the area around the American Cultural Center where I worked part-time as an English teacher. After a few purchases, he looks down at his money, kind of counting, kind of leafing through it. "Ah, mbongo eza te, nzambe" ('God, there's never enough money'). Noah is still going, one cassette after another. He looks up at me and smiles. I smile back. It looks as if he is going to sell the entire box of 200 home-made cassettes. A vendor named Rasta is standing next to me waiting for his final cassettes. Someone asks who the white guy is and he explains in a calm, self-assured voice, "Aza massa na biso. Aye komona boulot" ('He's a friend. He came to see our work'). I did not know Rasta personally, but we had seen each other around Tito's stand and this was enough for him

---

<sup>42</sup>Exchanges like this one were common in which people who did not know me would address me in French as 'Mr. White Man'. Usually for shock value I would respond in terse casual lingala phrases (in this example "No thanks, I'm just looking") to let them know that I was not a tourist.



to defend me. After he gets his last cassette, he moves over to the area where the cassette sleeves are located. Noah's brother is working with one vendor at a time, selecting the corresponding cassette sleeves which were removed during taping so that the song titles could be indicated. In some cases, there are more cassettes than sleeves and Noah will write the song titles by memory on a spare cassette sleeve.

Mobile vendors and their customers usually identify home-made cassettes by the particular handwriting on the cassette. If they recognize the handwriting as that of one of several wholesalers, they know that the quality of the cassette is to some extent guaranteed. While he is re-assembling his cassettes and sleeves, Rasta turns to me and says,

"These are the best quality. It doesn't matter what the cassette player is like, these always sound good.

That's why we buy from Noah. Either Noah or Serge, those are the two."

"Good cassettes, eh?" I ask.

"Good cassettes, man."

After the last few vendors have left, Noah motions for his brother to bring another chair (for me) and asks me what kind of soda I would like to drink. I sit down and ask him a few questions about what he does. He usually arrives in the morning at about 8:30 and by 10:00 his entire box of cassettes (up to 200) are sold. Those that are not sold are usually special orders that he will hold on to for particular customers. He has a book in which he records special orders and credit agreements with certain regular customers whom he feels he can trust (usually not more than seven-eight people). He explains that he has four people that duplicate cassettes at home (mostly at night) and that he has relatively good cassette dubbing equipment (several tape to tape home stereo units hooked up in series).

After I return to my perch, Tito seems worried that I was gone, but is reassured when I tell him that I was talking with Noah. I sit down and try to figure how Noah makes a living. A package of ten blank cassettes retails for 140,000 NZ or 14,000 NZ per cassette. He can probably get the price down to 100,000 (about \$4.00 U.S.) since he purchases them in large quantities. He sells them for 16,000 NZ, making 6,000 NZ per unit and probably selling 200-250 cassettes every day. At this rate he would make between 1,200,000 -

1,500,000 NZ per day (about \$50-60 U.S.). At \$50 per day (excluding Sundays) he would make around \$1500 per month, or about \$18,000 per year, give or take some for his staff, transport and equipment maintenance. This is a large sum of money considering that the GDP per capita for Zaire in 1992 was \$380 (UNDP 1993). This informal calculation not only gives an idea of the salary of someone who can be considered, at least in local terms, a well-placed re-distributor, but it also gives a general idea about the number of home-made cassettes that are sold on a regular basis in Kinshasa (Noah is one of only about five wholesalers in the capital) and how they circulate.

### "We Eat Behind the Musicians"

Once they leave the *grand marché*, individual mobile vendors are completely on their own. The vendors who remain stationary in the central market are certainly more vulnerable because their inventory is both larger and more valuable per unit (since they sell not only original cassettes but also video cassettes and even some CDs). The vendors that specialize in home-made cassettes are the only true volume retailers. Since their activity is officially recognized as illegal, one would expect them to sell in smaller amounts in the case that they would need to run from police or Soneca raids. In practice, however, raids of this type rarely occur and these vendors display their products like most other vendors, taking up just as much space, if not more.<sup>43</sup> Mobile vendors (*ambulants*), however, are faced with a very different professional situation. Their mobility, which in some sense gives them the advantage to bring their product directly to the consumer, can also be seen as a disadvantage. As mobile merchants, they are much more visible by a greater number of people, especially people in

---

<sup>43</sup>One strategy to avoid being pursued is the fact that they specialize mainly in 'golden oldies' (*merveilles du passé*) which are much less contentious than newly or recently-released albums. I do not know if these vendors work with commercial permits, but I assume that all the vendors in this area are required to pay regular 'tips' (*pourboire*) to local police in exchange for their inattention to the pirate cassettes which are sometimes sold.

positions of authority such as unpaid soldiers or police officers. Add to this the fact that most *ambulants* deal almost exclusively in home-made cassettes (for lack of resources) and what we are presented with is a business which is both risky and unpredictable.

Most mobile cassette vendors are young men between the ages of 15-25 who, having some degree of secondary education, have taken to selling cassettes as a part-time means of generating an income. In fact, many of the mobile vendors I met were also students (some university) and were using cassette sales to pay for their school fees and materials. Mobile vendors are limited in their mobility. Most vendors work in a particular neighborhood and in that neighborhood only. This is important in order for them to establish contacts in the public places where they solicit customers (bars, cafés, retail shops) and also with local authorities. One vendor explained that it is important to work the same territory in case the customer has a problem with the cassette and needs a refund or exchange. For obvious reasons, vendors are usually concentrated in areas which have a high concentration of commercial activity. In some sectors of the city vendors are organized into informal vendor associations (*association d'ambulants*). It is difficult to estimate the number of vendors for the city of Kinshasa, not only because vendors must remain discreet, but also because selling cassettes on the street is a job which many young men do intermittently or when they are in need of additional cash. But judging from certain key sectors, I would estimate there to be from 200-500 mobile vendors in Kinshasa at any given time.<sup>44</sup>

Depending on the neighborhood and the vendor's luck and charm, vendors who sell home-made cassettes can hope to sell up to ten cassettes in the space of one day. In 1996, ten cassettes was considered 'a good day', five-six was about average, at four the vendor begins to get discouraged and there are some days when he can sell one, two, or no cassettes at all. Vendors with more experience remember being able to sell 30+ cassettes in one day. "Before

---

<sup>44</sup>The largest vendor association I found ('Ecurie SKC') was based in Matonge, generally considered to be the most important urban zone in terms of music production and consumption. Members numbered approximately 20 and meetings were held on a monthly or bi-monthly basis. I was not able to attend any meetings of this sort, but I was told that meeting agendas included electing officers, discussing developments in the association's territory and organizing rotating savings.

we didn't even have to move around. People would buy ten cassettes just like that. But that was before the riots. After the riots, the bottom fell out" ('ça a chuté') (Agostino, Mar. 12, 1996). The asking price for home-made cassettes is usually around 50,000 NZ (\$2 U.S., or about three times what was paid), but most vendors will 'let them go' for as low as 30-35,000 NZ. Original cassettes, which at that time could be purchased at the central market for 85-90,000 NZ, would be bargained down from the initial asking price of 120,000 NZ. For a good vendor it was possible to clear (after transport and food) about \$5 U.S. per day, totalling approximately \$100 U.S. per month, which is a decent income for most students in Kinshasa.

Vendors explain that the majority of what they sell is recent releases (*nouveautés*). Most vendors will carry about four-five cartons of cassettes (50 units) and the majority of those will be recent releases (60%). The rest will be primarily 'golden oldies' (*vielleries* or *merveilles du passé*) from either the classic *rumba* years or the early hits of the third generation (Zaiko Langa Langa, Thu Zaina, Los Nickelos, etc.). A particularly good *nouveauté* will continue to sell for about three-six months. A small handful of rare exceptions will continue to sell over a period of years: "Mayaula nous a fait manger" (The record by Mayaula 'put food on our table'). Certain vendors have strategies which enable them to increase their sales. Agostino, a student at the University of Kinshasa, gives credit to his customers. He gives out about 30 cassettes a day, selling 15, giving away the rest on credit and collecting payment on another 15 which were previously given on credit. Agostino is also one of the few vendors to circulate with a portable cassette player, a tool which greatly facilitates sales.<sup>45</sup>

Re-distributors are obviously aware of the fact that their activities are looked down upon musicians and producers. Ilo Pablo, founder of Zaiko Familia Dei and himself a producer, would occasionally summon a roving vendor in order to see what he was selling and to get an idea of what was popular at that time ("ce qui marchait bien"). Most vendors, however, immediately recognizing Ilo Pablo, acted as if they did not hear his call, and

---

<sup>45</sup>The mobile vendors I spoke with seemed to be the most sensitive to differences in consumer buying habits. Several vendors were able to give clear explanations of what kind of people preferred what kind of music, and because their sales depended on a interactive relationship with customers, they often had a finely tuned sense of what was popular (or not) at any given time.

continued nervously in the opposite direction, usually speeding up their pace somewhat. Re-distributors in general, stand vendors as well as mobile vendors, are quick to defend their choice of income-generating activity: "We do a lot of advertising for musicians. If we weren't here, people wouldn't be able to afford this music" (c.f.. Waterman 1990: 151). And in some cases, people would not even be able to find the music, since very often mobile vendors offer hard to find popular music from years past. Tito once told me, "We promote Zairean music much more than the stores do." It is true that re-distributors do not sell anywhere near the same volume of cassettes as commercial pirates, but it can be argued that these local vendors have made it very difficult for legal musical products to be sold at a cost which provides incentive to producers. In the words of one mobile vendor, "Nous mangeons derrière les musiciens" ('we eat behind the musicians').

#### Music Finances Other Activities

Apart from urban mobile vendors, there is a special category of mobile vendors which operates over much greater distances. Often shuttling back and forth between Kinshasa (or other major urban centers) and the diamond-producing regions of Kasai in southern Congo or the borderland area between Congo and Angola, many diamond traders have taken up the practice of buying large quantities of cassettes to sell for seed money for other activities.<sup>46</sup> Throughout my research I collected a series of stories about people that would leave Kinshasa with approximately 5-700 cassettes (mostly originals), a suitcase or two of other hard to obtain consumer goods such as clothes, pharmaceutical products, and electronic equipment, and arrive to urban areas in diamond-trading regions to sell their goods for extremely high

---

<sup>46</sup>For detailed descriptions of the politics and meaning of diamond trading culture in the Angola-Congo border region, see the work of Filip De Boeck (1998a; 1998b).

returns.<sup>47</sup> According to Tito, some of his regular clients would purchase as many as 700 original pirate cassettes and 3,000 home-made cassettes before going on a trip of anywhere from three-six weeks. One such trader, Césaire, would start by buying clothes and cassettes in Brazzaville, and would eventually end up in Angola where he sold his goods for five-ten times the price he paid. With the money earned from this trading activity, he would buy up cheap diamonds (“People don’t know what diamonds are worth. They’re poor and there’s a war going on there.”) and bring them back to sell for huge mark-ups at the diamond counters in Kinshasa. Thus he left with music and clothes, and returned with precious gems. In this context music can be seen as a springboard for bigger business ventures.

But other businesses can serve as springboards for a career in music as well. A number of well-known music producers began their careers by selling cloth or designing clothes. Papa Dimitriou ran a general store in Leopoldville in the 1940s and 1950s in which he specialized in wrap-arounds (*pagnes*) and other kinds of cloth. It was his earnings from this trade that enabled him to invest in one of the first recording studios in the region. Alamoulé (Alamoulé Productions) was first introduced to music when a friend asked if he could use his clothing store space to sell some of his records. This friend later convinced Alamoulé to go into business as a record producer (*éditeur de disque*) and record distributor (*disquaire*), and today Alamoulé owns of the two largest music stores in the capital. Sidony (Sid Music) in Brazzaville began as a cloth retailer and from that occupation saved up enough money to start producing local bands. Serge Mayembo, the owner of an elite clothing store in Brazzaville’s expensive downtown district, first became involved in music through his association with Papa Wemba. According to Mayembo, he was driving Wemba around Italy (where Mayembo had his first clothing store) during a European tour and Wemba bought a suit from him. The first show Mayembo produced (some 15 years later) was Wemba’s 1995 tour of Congo-Brazzaville.

---

<sup>47</sup>One trader told me he could sometimes sell one original cassette for the price of \$50 U.S. Even with uncontrollable inflation in the region, this figure seems high, but I do not doubt that he was able to make three-four times the cost of the cassette (\$12 -\$15) under certain circumstances.

### *Cultural Brokers and Political Economies*

In the Belgian Congo, the first brokers of the musical style were non-Congolese. The owners of the first studio houses (ch. 2) brought together musicians to play in their studios, and in some cases even acted as musical arrangers (especially Papa Dimitriou). But it was not long before several Congolese began to distinguish themselves as cultural brokers in their own right. In this category the most obvious example from the colonial period was the manager-organizer-musician Henri Bowane.<sup>48</sup> According to those that knew him, Bowane had a natural gift for speaking to people and influencing their opinions. Roitelet claims that Bowane was the person who convinced Papa Dimitriou (Loningisa) to go into the business of producing and selling records. He later went to see Antonopolos (Esengo) for the same reason. He also apparently acted as a kind of talent scout for several recording houses. Not only did he discover Franco and the guitarist Dewayon, but also Roitelet and Rossignol. Fitting with his image as a *connaissanceur* of talent, Bowane was known as someone who himself “jouait à la star” (‘played the star’). Memories of Bowane usually describe him sharply dressed and driving around town in a flashy Chevrolet Impala:

Then he [Bowane] comes again, illiterate but very intelligent. If he had been to Harvard he would be president of Zaire, he had Leopoldville eating out of his hands. He came to look for me and Nino, to show us the studio to play with a group of musicians. You had to be very good or very lucky to meet a guy like this (Essous, Aug. 29, 1995).

The most well-known of the Congo’s musical cultural brokers is probably Verckys (Vévé). Most likely the closest thing that Zaire ever had to a media mogul, Verckys was the first Congolese to organize a completely integrated musical industry environment: a 24-track studio, a record-pressing factory equipped with a galvanoplastic unit, a printing press in four colors and the possibility of duplicating cassettes. In addition to his own record label (Editions

---

<sup>48</sup>Initially most well-known as a guitarist extraordinaire and singer-songwriter with Wendo.

Vévé) and musical instruments, he also provided musical equipment for many of the new generation of musicians in Kinshasa during the 1970s. Originally a musician himself, Verckys is known for having brought together some of the best unknown young musicians and molding them into national celebrities (Les Frères Soki, Lipwa Lipwa, and Shama Shama among others) as well as for his entrepreneurial influence on other young groups of the time (Zaiko Langa Langa being the best example). His skill at predicting hit songs, his technical expertise as a self-trained sound engineer, and an acute business sense earned him a good deal of money and a position of privilege in the Kinshasa music scene of the 1970s and 1980s. Since Verckys there have been very few full-time professionals working in music promotion, and this conspicuous absence of indigenous entrepreneurs has had serious implications for the production of music in the region.<sup>49</sup>

For my final example I will discuss a more recent case, that of Gaby Shabani, owner and operator of Shabani Records. Shabani, the son of a military officer and businessman, began working with music while he was living in Germany. After some limited success with importing Zairean music into Germany, he decided to “return to the source” and continue his career in Kinshasa. After eight years in Germany, he had learned a great deal about the music industry and how it operates, at least in a European setting. He became especially interested in audio-visual technology and brought back some technical expertise in audio-visual production. So that when he organized his production company it had a strong emphasis on visual media. His company would focus not only on the production of music videos, but also on video-based advertising for the growing number of private television stations in the city. In terms of musical production, he started to recruit several up and coming young music groups and began to work as a local distributor and concert promoter for several large acts that pass through Kinshasa from time to time. Not only does Shabani work full-time (almost exclusively in audio-visual production), but in 1996 he also managed a team of five full-time employees

---

<sup>49</sup>Verckys has since left music and currently operates an exclusive bakery in downtown Kinshasa as well as a glossy weekly newspaper on culture and politics in the capital.



(administration, promotions, and production), aspects that make his activities unique in Kinshasa.<sup>50</sup>

Despite the fact that Shabani's time is uncomfortably divided between advertising and music, he sees this combination as a necessary strategy for the development of his business: "I earn money quick with advertising, but with musicians I make money long term. They're starting. Shora [one of the first artists he produced] has been on Africa Numéro 1 for about a month now."<sup>51</sup> At any given time he has two-three of his employees working on either music videos or commercial advertisements for television. Technicians working in the studio (on both Beta and VHS Sony editing equipment) can communicate by two-way radio with cameramen and producers who are working on location. In many cases, the advertisements take precedence over music videos since ads are easier to produce and much more lucrative. Shabani also produces a weekly Top 10 video countdown which airs on a local private television station. This program (which is hugely successful) is itself a form of advertising since, as Shabani himself admits, videos are not necessarily selected on the basis of consumer demand: "It's okay for me to do my own show because they use my videos, just like MTV and Virgin Records."

Besides these important organizational and technological innovations, I view Shabani as a cultural broker for the way that he relates to artist-musicians. During one of the days in which I was seated on the couch of Shabani's main office, watching the world go by, I witnessed an interaction that is typical of Shabani's particular brand of cultural brokerage. On this day a young, very nervous female singer from Brazzaville appeared in his office, announcing her intention to move to Kinshasa so that she could devote herself to a career in singing. Shabani asks her to sit down in the chair in front of his desk. He comes out from

---

<sup>50</sup>During my research period, Shabani was for all intents and purposes the only full-time music producer working in the private sector. Several promotion and production houses were organized in the late 1980s, the most notable of which is Yoshad Productions, a company run by Mobutu's son Kongolo (alias "Saddam Hussein"), who was known to use his position as a high-ranking military officer in his father's army to strongarm the local music scene in Kinshasa (see ch. 8).

<sup>51</sup>Africa Numéro 1 is one of the most widely listened to commercial radio stations in Central and West Africa. Based in Libreville, Gabon, this francophone station has benefitted considerably from French private investment and symbolic support from various organizations of the *francophonie*.

behind his desk and pulls with him another chair which he places directly in front of her. He sits down facing her, slightly crouched over, showing more than average interest in her visit. "So tell me about yourself" he begins:

"I'm from Brazzaville. I want to move to Kinshasa. I want to sing." Her eyes are wide with a mixture of fear and determination.

"Why do you want to live in Zaire?" He asked in a leading way.

"For work. I want to sing. I'm staying at the Phoenix hotel."

"Do you have a demo?"

"Yes." She fumbles in her purse. "I recorded six songs..." she is unable to find the cassette.

"Do you sing well?" He is obviously not concerned with the cassette.

"Yes, I do. I really do." She continues to look for the cassette.

"I've never heard you sing," he says as he starts to get up. "Well, I've got to go." He stops and turns to look at her again. "You look like a muluba [an ethnic group from southeastern Zaire]. Are you muluba? You are, aren't you? I'm going to introduce you to Mr. Beya. He's going to get you a spot on his show. Just sit tight."

Shabani's contacts in other areas of the industry enable him to influence the Kinshasa musical landscape by filtering through the scores of would-be stars that appear in his office hoping to have a opportunity to become famous.

Once he has chosen a group behind which he will throw his support, Shabani takes on much more than the role of financier. In 1995-96, the youth sensation *Nouvelle Image*, with their signature dance *Kibinda Nkoy*, had everything they needed to be famous except a producer. Shabani recruited them as one of the bands he would promote and began to make arrangements for them to record their first album. After several weeks in the studio, it became obvious that the recording was not progressing as fast as it could have, and Shabani, who had been present during some of the sessions, told the musicians to leave the studio and come back in a couple of weeks. After listening to the rough mix of the eight songs they had recorded, Shabani decided that four of the songs had to be re-arranged and re-recorded and that one of those songs would feature a guest appearance from Wendo, the grandfather of 'modern' Congolese music.<sup>52</sup> Shabani explained this decision to me: "It's a good idea, eh? Who

---

<sup>52</sup>Wendo had not appeared on record in a number of years. In the early 1990s, he was the subject of a Belgian-produced documentary film and compact disc series (AJC 1993). Although this project was intended as an homage to the artist and the period, it was distributed primarily in foreign expatriate channels and consequently enjoyed limited popularity among Congolese in Kinshasa.

would ever have thought of putting *Kibinda Nkoy* together with Wendo? It's the marriage of the old and the new. It's gonna' sell like baguettes." (c.f. ch. 10). It is this intimacy with the esthetics of production that characterizes the process of brokerage through music. "Gaby is the only producer I know who sits next to musicians," one of his assistants explained to me, "After giving Nouvelle Image the space to do their work, he realized he had given them too much space."<sup>53</sup>

Despite the success of Congolese music in many parts of Africa (Ewens 1990), it is not uncommon in Kinshasa to hear statements about how the music has 'stagnated' or 'no longer has any creativity.' Even the most committed fans of Congolese popular music acknowledge a certain degree of repetition and *monotonie* in musical production of the last 10-15 years. At some level, my discussion of brokers and other types of intermediaries is an attempt to solve the puzzle behind this stagnation. On the one hand, the increase in the number of unofficial cultural operators in the music industry (pirates, vendors and other re-distributors) has cut in on the profits of official operators (distributors, producers, musicians). This increase in illegal activity, as I have shown, is intimately linked to the arrival of audio cassette technology (and especially cassette duplication technology) in the mid to late-1970s. This problem, which is by no means unique to Congo-Zaire, has had a demotivating effect on the people whose energy and creativity fuelled the industry well into the 1980s. "Musicians are tired" or "They don't create anymore" are commonly heard phrases in Kinshasa.

Producers and distributors have responded to this situation by organizing under the auspices of a national association of producers and in conjunction with various copyrights offices have been instrumental in local anti-pirate campaigns. Musicians, I would argue, have responded differently. Instead of becoming involved in the mainly legalistic and political efforts of the producers, they have attempted (perhaps unconsciously) to resolve the problem through their music. Not only have they taken refuge in the increasingly common practice of

---

<sup>53</sup>Shabani, as anyone involved in music production in Kinshasa, has just as many enemies as friends. The Nouvelle Image album was still incomplete when I returned to Kinshasa in the end of 1996. Musicians from the group complained that Shabani "never pays". For more discussion on the relationship between musicians and producers, see Chapters Seven and Eight.

commercialized praisesinging which I have referred to as 'singing the sponsor' (ch. 8), but they have also pioneered in their music a two-part song structure which lends itself much more easily to innovation in live performance than in the studio (ch. 7). Albums tend to be 'thrown together' and songs are composed using familiar musical formulas since studio time is expensive, musicians are under-paid and revenue from cassette sales is not very substantial. In live performance, extended dance sequences take up disproportionate amounts of time, and musicians focus a great deal of their creative energies on creating an atmosphere of excitement (*ambiance*) through high fashion, eroticized female sexuality, and *animation*-driven choreographed dancing. Since producers are irregular and unreliable, many groups do their own promotions through the strategic placement of 'band boards' which can be moved and changed depending on the particular engagement [figure 4.9 and 4.10]. As I will discuss later, these adaptations are often seen as corruptions of the basic integrity of the music (ch. 9).

Thus it can be argued that musicians themselves have assumed the role of cultural brokers, an argument which has been hinted at by other scholars of contemporary African music (Roberts 1972, Waterman 1990). According to Waterman, urban African musicians "forge new styles and communities of taste, negotiating cultural differences through the musical manipulation of symbols" (1990: 9). I myself have discussed how Congolese *soukouss* musicians, in the absence of other brokers for their music, have attempted to broker the music themselves, especially for non-Congolese audiences living abroad (White 1998a). But analyses which focus on musicians as brokers suffer from two weaknesses. First, they tends to 'heroize' local artists, painting a picture of them as a liberating, empowering presence in timeless opposition to the forces of hegemony and oppression (Wade 1998). Second, they ignore the various ways in which musicians are subject to terms and conditions which are not of their choosing and not to their advantage. By this I am referring not only to the power which music producers hold over musicians (for example Shabani's use of sexual power in the example above, or Verckys' ability to entice young musicians with musical equipment), but also to the ways that musicians are neglected (if not persecuted) by national governments and

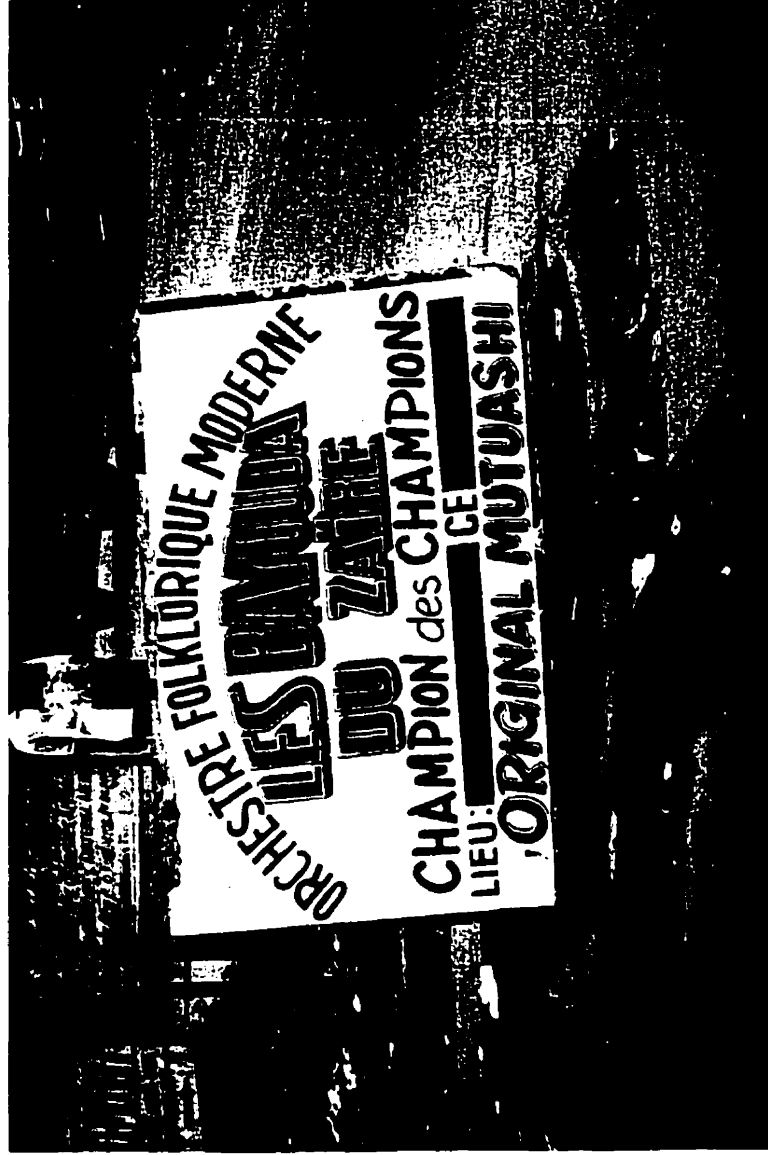


Fig. 4.9

fig. 4.9 Band board for a 'tradi-moderne' group

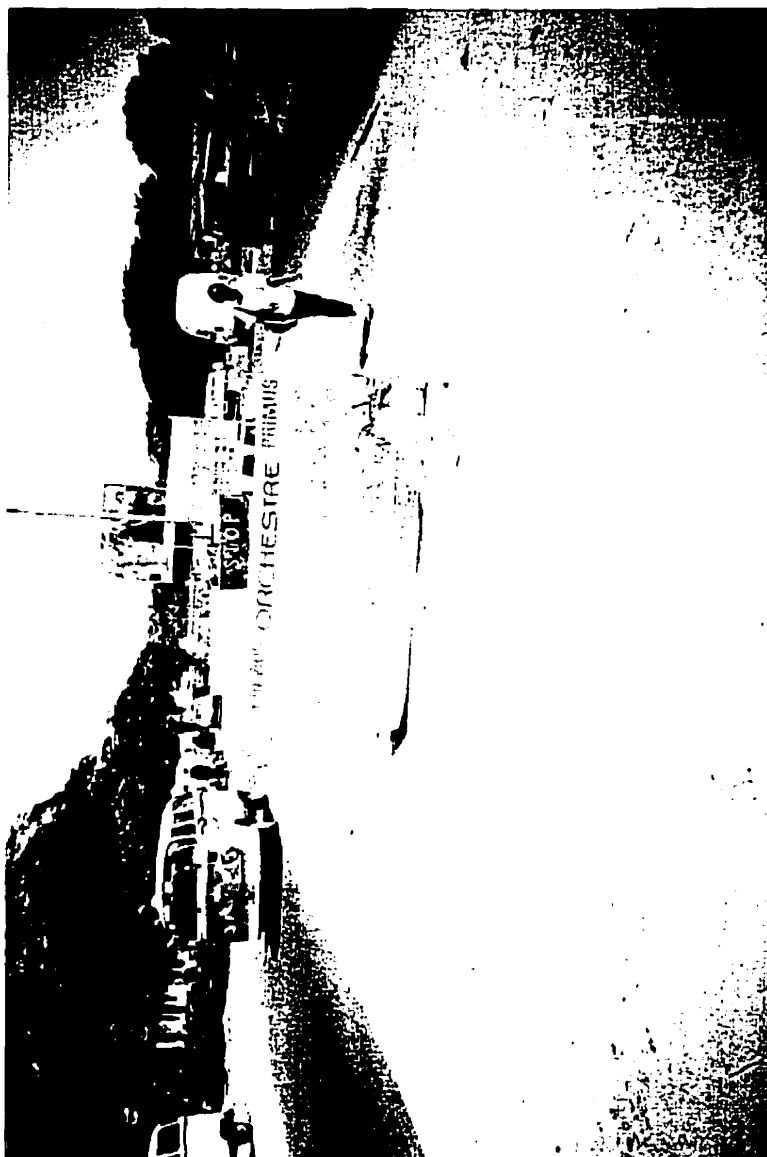


Fig. 4.10

fig. 4.10 Band board for a 'modern' group

manipulated by multi-national corporations in order to feed the 'global imagination' for 'world music' (Erlmann 1996b).

In the following chapters of Part III, I will focus more specifically on the activities of musicians and the music lifestyle, primarily from the point of view of musicians. After a consideration of the ambiguous role of musicians in the Congo (ch. 5), I will look at some specific trajectories of musical careers (ch. 6). This will be followed by the live-time description of musical performance in a concert setting (ch. 7), and a discussion of the inter-personal politics which characterize life in a band in 1990s Kinshasa (ch. 8).

## Part Three: On Being in Music

### Chapter Five: A Strange and Wonder-ful Place

Musicians are Liminal-Critical Characters

Power and Praise  
Musicians and Social Mobility

Distinction and Personal Power

'La Frime' as Conscious Strategy  
The Peak of Chic and the Esthetics of Big Pants  
The 'Star Complex' and Less Conscious Gesturing

Rumors and the Intimate Public

*We're the best, Quartier Latin  
Everybody dances to our music.  
Sometimes the witch is the person right next to you  
The person with whom you share a plate  
You have to keep your eyes open  
In today's world you have to be careful*

(Translated from "Dossier du Jour", Koffi Olomide & Quartier Latin, V12, 1995)

*Thus art suggests a socially codified means of integrating individual experience into an order of knowledge and power that proposes, and sometimes imposes, a way of living, a way of feeling individuality in relation to the globalizing experience that can be inclusive as well as marginalizing.*

(Bogumil Jewsiewicki 1996: 268)



Most of what has been written about African music and society argues that musicians are important primarily because the fruit of their labor (music) accompanies all the important moments in the human life-cycle (Bebey 1975; Chernoff 1979; Tchebwa 1996).

Unfortunately, this argument--one which I think is based in the need to justify a subject which is too often taken as epi-phenomenon (see ch. 1)--misses what is potentially the most interesting aspect of the role of musicians in African societies:

Thus the attitude toward musicians among the Basongye is ambivalent: on the one hand, they can be ordered about, and they are people whose values and behavior do not accord with what is considered proper in the society; on the other hand, their role and function in the village are so important that life without them is inconceivable (Merriam 1964: 136).

In this chapter I want to highlight the very strange, sometimes wonder-ful position occupied by musicians in African societies, one which has been conditioned by their role as social beings who operate simultaneously from positions of social marginality and social power.<sup>1</sup> The liminal status of popular musicians in Kinshasa is manifested in various ways: musicians' association with people in positions of power (ch. 8), the ambiguity of musicians' sexual identities (ch. 9, 10), and their presumed intimacy with witchcraft and other supernatural affairs (this chapter and ch. 10) to mention only a few.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout this chapter I am concerned with the way that African notions of self and personhood are grounded in various forms of social practice, not only in ritual contexts (Kratz 1994), but also in more everyday forms of leisure (Karp 1980), consumption (Burke 1996; Rowlands 1996) and cultural expression (Jewsiewicki 1996). In research on urban healing cults in Kinshasa, Corin (1976) has described the process by which afflicted individuals

---

<sup>1</sup>I use the term 'wonder-ful' (as opposed to 'wonderful') to refer to something that inspires awe or amazement, but that is not necessarily or unproblematically desirable.

<sup>2</sup>Musicians' sexual ambiguity can be seen not only in their generous and systematic use of skin whiteners (a practice which most Congolese only associate with women), but also in the common practice by which male singers and songwriters take on the identity of a woman in order to sing from a female perspective. This practice, which I refer to as 'cross-singing' is extremely common in Congolese music and seems to have become more common over time. Though I have presented this practice as a sign of musicians' sexual liminality, some musicians view it as a means of expressing masculine identity (i.e. the ability to "seduce women" or "touch womens' hearts", see ch. 9). Popular examples include the songs: "Ya Jean" (Madilu Système), "Jerome" (O.K. Jazz) and "Famille Kikuta" (Defao).

become the agents of their spiritual and social healing. Because the *zebola* spirit speaks through the mouth of the afflicted, she is actively involved in the diagnosis of her illness.<sup>3</sup> Drawing from this and related research (Fortes 1973; Jackson and Karp 1990; Lienhardt 1985), I will refer to the notion of “individuation” (an idea heavily influenced by the early writing of Mauss), which attempts to explain the process by which individual identity is “culturally embedded within the formation of collective identity” (Corin 1998: 86).<sup>4</sup> As Corin has argued, individuation is a process which is clearly triggered by modernization, urbanization and post-colonial circumstances, but at the same time it is “not a wholly new phenomenon” (ibid: 102).

The case of African musicians is interesting for a number of reasons. Compared to other social-professional endeavors, there are relatively few barriers to entry into music. Success in music depends not on kinship ties or even on formal schooling, but on musical talent and a highly visible, often narcissistic presentation of self.<sup>5</sup> Musicians distinguish themselves not only by showing that they are ‘modern’ (travel to Europe, designer fashion, imported cars with telephones, etc.), but also through various kinds of ‘traditional’ social mechanisms (such as splintering and the manipulation of patron-client ties, see ch. 8). Success, of course, leads to jealousy and accusations of witchcraft (Bastian 1993; Turner 1969), and this puts the musician in the strangely ‘modern’ predicament of having to explain that he earned his status not through witchcraft, but through his own personal efforts (“*eza nkisi te*”, ‘it’s not magic’, see section on rumors below).

---

<sup>3</sup>Corin’s analysis would seem to answer Karp’s question on the ‘paradox of agency’: “But, Karp observes, such interpretations entail a paradox, for how can a person be dispossessed by another, yet still act as an agent, producing his or her own actions” (Jackson and Karp 1990: 20). I will discuss this in greater detail in the section titled “Anchoring the Self” in Chapter Ten.

<sup>4</sup>Corin distinguishes between theories of the individual organized around the notion of ‘self’ and those which focus on ‘person’. She associates the latter with a European (structuralist?) tradition concerned with the “cultural coordinates of the notion of personhood” and the former with North American scholarship which is often focused on ‘the body’ and individual human ‘experience’.

<sup>5</sup>I will discuss an important exception below, that of the Mande-speaking griots from various parts of West Africa. In many parts of Africa, the most significant social barrier to music is the stereotype of musicians as undesirable (lazy, drunk, promiscuous, poorly educated, and so on). For more on this point, see “Musicians and Social Mobility” below.

This chapter will be divided into two sections. In the first section I will discuss the fundamentally ambiguous role of musicians in African societies, a role which is conditioned not only by virtue of their position as praisesingers, but also by the high degree of social mobility which characterizes their careers, especially in the context of popular music. The second section will examine various ways in which this already very liminal identity is further accentuated by popular musicians' gestures of fame and individual distinction. The exaggerated presentation of self (*la frime*) which characterizes the activities of popular musicians in Kinshasa is considered anti-normative, but because it takes place in the context of music, the tension surrounding individual distinction is diffused. In the final section I will discuss how non-musicians willingly 'write themselves into' this world by circulating and contributing to various forms of knowledge about musicians in the form of rumor.

### **Musicians are Liminal-Critical Characters**

Although Turner's earlier discussion on liminality is primarily concerned with the liminal phase in a ritual context (see Turner's 1967 discussion of Van Gennep's framework), his later work addresses liminality in various (non-ritual) forms and historical contexts (see 1969 for several examples). Thus the traits usually associated with the intermediate (liminal) stage of ritual transformation (sexlessness, anonymity, submissiveness, silence, seclusion, etc.) have been identified in ritual practice throughout sub-Saharan Africa (among the Nuer, Tallensi, and Ashanti), as well as in various forms of social and religious organization in non-African societies (the self-imposed poverty of the Franciscan order, the sacred eroticism of Sahajiya religious doctrine, and the esthetic of 'happening' among hippies). All of these movements shared some element of what Turner refers to as 'communitas', a kind of transformative egalitarian state of

consciousness which can only be understood in relation to 'structure' (ibid: 129). In each of Turner's examples, however, liminality is either a temporary phase of movement toward 'structure' (co-opted by seniors, as in the case of Ndembu ritual) or a normalized state of movement against it (ideological as in the case of millenarian movements), neither of which seems to apply particularly well to the position of musicians.<sup>6</sup>

Popular musicians in the Congo are not liminal in Turner's original (1967) sense, since (as I hope to show below) they are everything that the 'ritually liminal' are not: they are loud, precocious, brash, highly visible and excessively narcissistic. Yet they are certainly 'betwixt and between' (ibid): they are both powerful and weak, masculine and feminine, rich and poor, romantic and vulgar, critical and ingratiating, and of course, 'traditional' and 'modern'. The position of musicians in African societies is characterized by an almost permanent liminal status which is neither completely co-opted by 'structure' (since musicians always reserve the right to criticize) nor completely free to oppose it (since they depend so heavily on elites for various forms of protection and support). And thus the liminality of African musicians is not a phase, or even a state, but a socially defined status, which is dangerous because of its ambiguity and impurity (Douglas 1966; c.f. Galaty 1979). Turner's early writing only hints at these categories:

Bergson saw in the words and writings of prophets and great artists the creation of an 'open morality', which was itself an expression of what he called *élan vital*, or evolutionary 'life-force'. Prophets and artists tend to be liminal and marginal people, 'edgemen', who strive with a passionate sincerity to rid themselves of the clichés associated with status incumbency and role-playing and to enter into vital relations with other men in fact or imagination (Turner 1969: 128).

---

<sup>6</sup>Although Turner's (1969) analysis is primarily concerned with how the 'anti-structure' of liminality tends to reinforce 'structure', he would later re-think this position, conceding that under certain circumstances ritual liminality can also play a transformative function (Drewal 1991: 18). Turner himself seems to have had a tortured history with regards to the role of 'structure' in his analysis (see ibid and Turner 1969).

## Power and Praise

This idea of liminality, one that is based in social-occupational status, is most evident in the literature on the 'griot' phenomenon of Mande-speaking West Africa.<sup>7</sup> Griots, although generally described as praisesingers, serve multiple social functions. They are most important as experts in local and clan-based oral history (Camara 1976), but a considerable amount of material has been published on the social aspects of griot performance (Okpewho 1990), on the influence of griot orality in African literature (Miller 1987), and on the ambiguous social position of griots, who are portrayed alternately as shameless mercenaries in their search for patron-based financial support (Hale 1994; Hoffman 1995) or innocent victims of upwardly mobile merchants and state-based elites (Diawara 1997).

Christopher Miller (1987) explains that in Mande-speaking regions of West Africa (especially what is today Mali), griots belong to a social-occupational category or social class (*nyamakala*) which is considered essential because of the services it provides, but also dangerous because of the natural forces with which its members work (this class includes musicians, verbal artists, smiths and leatherworkers). Described as 'professional loudmouths' (ibid) and 'quintessential spongers' (Hoffman 1995), griots are highly suspect, yet their presence is crucial in a cultural context where "speaking of oneself lacks dignity" (Bazin in Diawara 1997). Griots are 'like women' because "they tend to follow money" and thus "are not to be trusted". They are "objects of resentment, fear and mistrust, but because of their

---

<sup>7</sup> According to Thomas Hale, "*Griot* and *griotte* hold a variety of negative connotations for people in many parts of West Africa as well as for some researchers in the field of oral literature because of their imprecision, their French origin from uncertain sources in Europe or Africa, and finally, the fact that every ethnic group has its own words to designate different kinds of keepers of the oral tradition. *Griot* and particularly its offshoots *griontage* and *griotique* have also taken on negative meanings in France, where, as in West Africa, the terms often signify empty praise, or praise for pay" (Hale 1994: 87). For the purposes of this brief discussion, I will take Hale's suggestion to keep the term *griot*, which has a more positive connotation in the English-speaking diaspora communities (especially in North America), and to use the local term for 'griot' whenever talking about specific regions or ethnic groups. Bebey (1975) suggests that the equivalent of the griot in equatorial Africa is the player of the *mvet* or harp-zither, a musician whose repertoire is more based on epic legends, heroic deeds, and stories about the struggle for power between mortals and immortals. On female griots ('griottes') see Hoffman (1995) and Hale (1994).

ability to manipulate the most powerful force in the world--that of the word--they must also be treated with deference, placated, and bought off" (Miller 1987: 92). Griots use a mystified language infused with *nyama* (meaning 'energy of action') in order to elicit the appropriate response from patrons, nobles, and elites:

Once again, the phrases are for the most part incomprehensible to the listener--another layer. They are uttered very rapidly, at times like verbal gunfire, bombarding the noble with more sound than can be assimilated, causing confusion--another layer. The few images that are seized from the barrage, the name of a great warrior from the noble's clan history, for example, or the name of a famous village, can evoke entire histories heard upon countless occasions in innumerable contexts, so that what is heard is not merely what is said by the griot at the time, but what has been heard on the same topic at different times, in different places. The *nyama* grows thicker. The griot has called the weight of extraordinary achievement from the distant past into the living present of the noble 'descendant', a juxtaposition which invites comparison, thus encouraging the noble to swell with pride at the thought of being on a par with such heroism... (Hoffman 1995: 42).

Among the Wolof the griot was traditionally part of the lowest caste (the last one before slaves) and in the past custom required that he be buried not in the ground but in the empty trunks of dead Baobab trees (Merriam 1964). Griots were buried apart not only because of the relatively low social status into which they are born, but also because they are often considered to have mystical affinities with ancestors and other elements of the spirit world.

Griots are by tradition attached to families; they are family jesters and buffoons... whose duty is to keep the company amused; they are the family bards, who learn and recite the family and national history...; they are family magicians, who must be present at all ceremonies and whose advice must be taken; they are the first to hold the newborn baby and the last to touch the corpse ... they are lower than the meanest servants and often richer and more powerful than the master (Gorer in Merriam 1964: 139).

Thus musicians are perceived as essential (i.e. critical) members of the local community, despite the fact that they usually find themselves at the bottom of the social hierarchy.<sup>8</sup> As Appadurai (1990) has shown, praise can take many forms and serve many functions, even in situations where the person being praised is not physically present (c.f. ch. 8). Praise is not simply a matter of flattery, but also constitutes a form of social distinction--as much for the singer as for the person being praised (Veil 1991)--and above all it is a marker of

---

<sup>8</sup>A number of accounts have noted variants of a proverb which states that life without musicians is unthinkable or unbearable (see Merriam above; Chernoff 1979; Merriam 1982).

social dependence. The practice of praise “could be labeled ‘coercive subordination,’ for in blessing and praising their (potential) benefactors, beggars seek to trap them in the cultural implications of their roles as superiors, that is, in the obligation to be generous” (Appadurai 1990: 101).

In many parts of West Africa, singing the praises of a big man usually entails criticising his enemies or rivals (Waterman 1990) and almost always includes some form of social commentary or general moral guidance, even for those being praised (Chernoff 1979). Vail and White’s (1991) collection of articles about praise poetry in southern Africa shows exactly how the poetic license of music allows the unsayable to be said through song, and other examples of this kind of social critique are not hard to find.<sup>9</sup> If Congolese music has a reputation for being a-political or politically neutral, it is not only a result of more than 30 years of post-independence authoritarian rule, but also because musicians do not want to jeopardize an already fragile source of income and status (ch. 9). For the purposes of this discussion I am interested in musicians as members of a social-occupational category which is both liminal and critical. ‘Liminal’ because they are believed to have special mystical powers, and because their primary occupational activity places them outside of conventional cycles of time, production and reproduction (ch. 7). ‘Critical’ because this liminal place from which they observe society enables them to play the role of moralist-muse without fear of retribution.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup>Here I am thinking of Zimbabwean *chimurenga* music and the Tigrinya rebel music of the Eritrean independence movement.

<sup>10</sup>This is not to suggest that musicians in Africa are free from censorship or political domination. As I have discussed elsewhere (ch. 8), serious obstacles to political expression have meant that musicians are much more likely to criticize musical or sexual rivals than they are to criticize politicians or policy. When criticism does occur, it usually takes the form of masked messages or allegorical sub-texts. Most often, however, thematic expression avoids politically dangerous topics altogether (White 1997).

### *Musicians and Social Mobility*

Much of what I have described for West African griots also holds true for popular musicians in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>11</sup> In Kinshasa people were constantly reminding me that musicians, especially those from the early years, were considered to be roguish, vagabond, poorly educated and ill-mannered. Arguably musicians' position in Zairean society has improved somewhat as the industry has become increasingly professionalized, and as certain stars have become independently wealthy through music. But to this day musicians project an image which often causes them to be cast as "voyous" (fr. for hoodlums), "bon viveurs" (pleasure seekers) or generally undesirable.<sup>12</sup> Most people do not expect that musicians can read, write, or express themselves in French. They are thought to be particularly frivolous with their money, and are likely to spend their final years in a state of abject poverty. Stories abound about how parents attempt to keep their sons away from music and their daughters away from musicians, the implication being that wealth or social status not earned through politics or education is not sustainable and therefore most likely tainted by the ills of witchcraft.

In Chapter Nine, I address as a broader question the ways that music divides and unites people of different ages, religious orientations, and gender. For now, suffice it to say that for a certain conservative minority of the society, popular musicians represent hedonistic, self-indulgent behavior, and a threat to 'Christian' family values. For the majority, however, the outrageous self-presentation and attitude of musicians makes for interesting conversation, and for some people constitutes a regular source of entertainment (see section on rumors

---

<sup>11</sup>Waterman has described the ambiguous social position of musicians in Nigeria, where musicians are 'rich in wives and cars' but are still praisesingers, a role which is widely associated with begging (1990: 22).

<sup>12</sup>Gondola (1992; 1993) suggests that many early musicians were from relatively well-to-do social backgrounds and most had some secondary or post-secondary education. Much more systematic research would be necessary in order to generalize on this point (his sample group is limited to the most well-known musicians of the time, N=9). My informal observations suggest that this is no longer the case among young musicians (both successful and aspiring) in Kinshasa.



below). Even many of those that take issue with the musician's lifestyle (late nights out, promiscuous behavior, drugs and alcohol, etc.) are eager to explain that the musician serves an important role as a social commentator or moralist (ch. 9). The late Franco, co-founder and leader of O.K. Jazz, is often given as the best example. People explain the unashamed social commentary in his music as somehow related to his marginal position in society. Popular accounts of Franco's story usually sounded something like this: *Franco was poor, so he told it like it is. He came from a poor family; he used to sit with his mother as she sold donuts in the Bayaka market. In his songs he used to criticize everyone and everything, to such a point that he was everybody's friend. He gave us music with advice that we could learn from, and that's what matters most about music.*

Any attempt to talk about the the role of musicians in African society must address not only the social position that musicians occupy, but also the high degree of mobility they display (both upward and downward) relative to other social-occupational categories. In fact, given the number of people that attain or attempt upward social movement through music, social mobility may be seen as a defining characteristic of musicians' unique position in contemporary Congolese society. In order to understand this mobility, it is helpful to look at musical careers over time. As with most professions, musicians' success (li. *lupemba*) and ability to live from their trade changes over time, but with musicians, changes are accentuated further by the element of changing musical tastes and fashions. As some musicians are rising up or riding a wave of popularity, others are on the way out or completely forgotten. Such was the case with Charles Mwamba Dechaud, the once famous guitarist/composer of Grand Kallé's African Jazz and the elder brother of the legendary Dr. Nico. From my notes:

It takes three people to find his house. Finally we arrive, it's the house that Nico built. I go in and they confirm that this is Nico's place and they tell me that Dechaud lives out back in what looked like the servants' quarters. Nico's son tells me to go out the same way I came in and knock on the next door over. [I find it very strange that the son does not show me the way.] I walk back into the uncut manioc brush, the door to his 2-room dwelling is open. It reminds me of Mississippi, I knock lightly on the frame of the door and he answers faintly but doesn't move. I knock again, he says "oui", slowly emerging from the back room, gaunt, severe, emaciated. He looks like an old man. "Oui?" he says. "Um..." I'm nervous. "My name is Bob White. I've come to study Zairean music. Everyone told me I have to see you."

He gave me a long series of blank stares as I proceeded to unfold my letters of presentation ... I kept going even though the spiel didn't seem to be going anywhere. He saw me looking at the 8x10 picture tacked to the otherwise bare walls. "You see that picture?" He said. "That's me with the American ambassador. He gave me that guitar, the same one in the chair." I go to admire the guitar up close, it's sitting in the chair upright as if it were a tired faithful companion, now only collecting dust. I got the impression that he never left his house. He said he was sick and that he asked someone for 20,000 NZ for medicine but they never gave it to him, so I instinctively pulled my brand new 10s from my pocket and gave him six of them. He thanked me, told me to come back whenever I felt like it, "We'll do something good," he said. As I was leaving, I felt like I had seen a ghost. These two [Nico and Dechaud] were two of the original members of African Jazz. Look at the difference: one had built an expensive house in a well-to-do neighborhood and the other one lived in it, hidden in the back, completely forgotten (May 12, 1996).

At about the same time that day, Lofombo, one of Kinshasa's brightest rising stars, bass player and musical arranger for Pépé Kallé's Empire Bakuba, was putting the finishing touches on his newly rented apartment in Bandal. Up until now he had been staying at his mother's house with his seven-odd brothers and sisters, one of whom used the house as the home base for his own band. Lofombo was starting to feel the pressure to move out, not only because of his age or the fact that his wife was expecting their first child, but also because the number of people who solicited his advice and services was steadily increasing and he felt the need to live in a neighborhood which had easier access and more prestige than the area of Bumbu, which was heavily populated with people recently arrived from Lower Zaire. More and more people began to recognize him on the street, partly because of the fashionable intellectual look he cultivated (oversized corduroy button down shirts, baggy pants and small round eyeglasses over a partial goatee), but also because he had started appearing in several high profile music projects and was gradually starting to make a name for himself as a studio programmer and engineer.

Moving into a new apartment and singlehandedly arranging the wedding with his high school sweetheart required considerable amounts of money, but these were moves he was expected to do, given that he was already relatively well-known as a professional musician. Lofombo was careful to invest his money in ways that would help his career as well as his image: he had two VCRs (which he used to copy video cassettes), a large screen t.v., three guitars, two guitar effects, two microphones, a double audio-cassette deck and two Roland R-8

programmable rhythm machines, one of which he was putting up for sale. Unlike most musicians, he was saving the car for last. As a first-string musician in one of the capital's top dance bands, Lofombo was able to take advantage of a busy touring schedule, regular paid projects on the side, and the adoration of wealthy fans who sprayed him with money for his humility as much as his ability to make them dance. When his son Kevin was born in the Fall of 1996, Lofombo was well on his way to becoming a 'star' [figure 5.1].

### **Distinction and Personal Power**

The way that most popular musicians carry themselves in public and the attitude they exude, are expressions of the personal style which surrounds their public persona. In true 'modernist' form, many of the terms that musicians use to describe this inner-force are words borrowed from French or English ('style', 'look', 'allure', 'maîtrise', 'charme').<sup>13</sup> All of the visible signs of their 'star quality' (their means of transport, their way of walking, the clothes they wear, the way they wear them, the company they keep, and so on) are tied to an internal power which despite its sometimes outrageous external appearance is supposed to be topped off with a thick layer of 'maîtrise' ('mastery' or self-control, c.f. Thompson 1966). As Friedman (1990a) has eloquently argued, visible expressions of personal style among young Congolese are not symbols of this internal 'well-being' or 'life-force', but concrete manifestations of it: clothes do not make the man, they *are* the man (1990b: 316). The social prestige which results from individual acts of distinction is not the source of personal power, but tangible evidence of its presence.

---

<sup>13</sup>Weber's (1947) discussion of charisma may also be relevant here. Besides the spiritual or cosmological connotation ('a gift of Grace'), his use of the term is also interesting because of the way that it is seen as the basis of social leadership or political authority. I will discuss this further in Chapter Eight.

1- KIN AMBIANCE (LOFOMBO)

2- KINGOTOLO (LOFOMBO)

3- CHERIE MY (SHORA MB)

4- FEMME INFIDELE (SHORA MB)

5- JALOUSIE (SHORA MB)

6- INSTRUMENTAL (SHORA MB)

Distributeur DEB S-MUSIC  
170 rue du Fag Pasan ere  
75010 Paris  
Tel : 42 55 17 42 Fax : 42 56 19 13

Edition & Realisation  
Musilaba Lukusa Boul

PARILUX Confection Zairoise  
60 rue Deseglennere 75018 Paris  
Tel : 42 55 38 39

KIN SERVICE EXPRESSE  
Tel : 42 55 60 49  
Fax : 42 55 60 72

Distribution Internationale  
B. MAS Production  
2-24 ave. Henri Barbusse  
93013 Bobigny  
Tel : 48 10 03 38 Fax : 48 91 13 35

LAUSANNE Amedee  
021/7290669



fig. 5.1 CD liner notes: 'Lofombo the bass wringer'

If any lesson emerges from Bourdieu's (1984) important work on judgements of taste in contemporary France, it must be that distinction (in any society) is a historically and culturally specific phenomenon.<sup>14</sup> Thus the application of Bourdieu's analysis to an African context is intellectually very risky.<sup>15</sup> First, to attempt such a technology transfer would assume a relatively similar class structure between the two countries, and a parallel history of the concept of culture, neither of which is the case. Second, the cultural form with which I am concerned here (popular Congolese music) is one which seems to transcend the social divisions of class.<sup>16</sup> As I argue in Chapter Nine, listeners of Congolese popular music are more likely to distinguish themselves by generation or religious conviction than they are by social class. As such, the claims they make against 'modern' music portray it either as a corrupt form of old-style rumba (i.e. commercialized, incoherent and noisy) or as a socially corrupt form *tout court* (due to its association with loose morals, urban vices, and ungodly living).

Thus the paradox of social distinction in the Congolese setting is not simply that acts of distinction are embedded in Congolese culture and society--for as I have noted above, this is true of all cultures--but rather that they assert individuality by association with a group (see ch. 10).<sup>17</sup> Statements of taste can take the form of unattached individual preference, for example

---

<sup>14</sup>Despite Bourdieu's attempts to appeal to an American audience by inviting them to "join the game" of the cross-Atlantic "search for equivalents" (xii), what emerges most clearly from his writing is that while the mechanism of social distinction may be universal (Friedman 1990a), the particular discursive and symbolic form that it takes is not (see for example his section entitled "Disgust at the 'Facile'", p. 486).

<sup>15</sup>Surprisingly enough, Bourdieu's work has not been taken up in much of the literature on social distinction in the Congo region (see for example Martin 1994 or Gandoulou 1989). Friedman, on the other hand, argues that *La Distinction* is "perfectly suited to Central Africa and especially the Congo" (Brazzaville) (1990a). In my analysis, I have tried to adapt Bourdieu's primary insight--that distinction is a fundamentally social relation and not just a matter of 'self-presentation'--while acknowledging the limitations of his approach, i.e. the underlying assumption that social classes operate the same everywhere (c.f. McCracken 1988). Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* has also been accused of universalizing social structure at the expense of individual creativity and human agency (see for example Friedman 1990a; Kratz 1994).

<sup>16</sup>Bourdieu argues that "nothing more clearly confirms one's 'class', nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music" (1984: 18). The literature on African music and society suggests the exact opposite, i.e. that there is no necessary relationship between socio-economic status and music preference (Barber 1997; Erlmann 1996). In the Congo (and I imagine in many other African countries) it may be possible to argue that people of a higher socio-economic standing prefer 'modern' over 'traditional' forms of music, but my experience has been that 'traditional' forms of music are most often deemed appropriate under certain circumstances, but not under others (see ch. 9).

<sup>17</sup>Compare this with Friedman's discussion of social distinction in the West: "The fact remains, that the western consumer, no matter what his class, seems primarily engaged in the construction of an identity space that is by and large his own product, his own project" (1990a: 121).

'I don't like that music' or 'I don't know that music' (see Bourdieu 1984; Wilk 1994), but it is more common for individuals to distinguish themselves by 'anchoring' their individual identities in external social formations (ch. 9, 10), for example "Moi c'est Zaiko!" ('I'm with Zaiko') or, "J'écoute seulement la musique religieuse" ('I only listen to religious music'). Through the conspicuous display of brand-name designer fashion and a set of gestural cues (both on-stage and off-stage) which mark individuals as belonging to the socially-defined and very elusive category of 'star de la musique', popular musicians (and those aspiring to be popular musicians) distinguish themselves in such a way that many of them end up looking and sounding the same.<sup>18</sup>

### *'La Frime' as Conscious Strategy*

Most professional musicians never leave the house without being properly groomed and well-dressed. They know that if they do not dress well (li., 'ko lata bien'), people will notice, and that dressing well is an integral part of their identity as 'artistes'. They know that as soon as they venture into public, and for a better part of the day, they will be the object of many people's attention and scrutiny. Some people will call to them, some will ask a favor, some will cheer and send the thumbs up. Some will simply stop what they are doing and stare [figure 5.2] . From my notes:

---

<sup>18</sup>Here I will not address the common claims that Congolese music no longer has any inherent value because it has become 'repetitious' and 'monotonous'. Claims of this sort are valid to some extent given the structural decay of the music industry in the last 10-15 years (ch. 4), but as I will discuss later (ch. 10), 'repetition' is also an important part of a musical ethos which distinguishes itself by calling up the past.



Fig. 5.2

fig. 5.2 Wenge Musica B.C.B.G. filming the video for 'Pentagone' (1996)

I was in a really shitty mood this morning when I left the house. No breakfast, no water, no respect. Same old #@!\$%! bullshit. Then I started walking and there was this woman who called out my name: "Monsieur Bob! Monsieur Bob!" Not really calling me as much as acknowledging me: "Monsieur Bob! Atalaku!" Then I smile and wave. Fifty feet later: "Atalaku!", and before I get to the electrician's after Bertin's kiosque there was a third "Atalaku!" from a group of small children. Very interesting, made me feel good. The little kids made the sound of a maracas and the second woman sang "cherie I love you" [a popular shout at that time which was sung part in English] with a kind of funny accent that they think sounds like me (Apr 16, 1996).<sup>19</sup>

On another occasion I found myself seated with Shora Mbemba (leader and founder of the group Super Choc) at an open-air bar in the neighborhood where he lives, and I was soon taken by the way that sound and people quickly filled in the empty space around us. Before we arrived, the bar was almost completely empty. It was 8:00 pm and the music was playing, although not very loudly. There was plenty of movement in the street, but no one had as yet sat down to have a beer. As soon as we arrived, the bartender came out, wiped down the table with a rag and a bottle opener keychain in the one hand and with his other hand placed several glasses down on the table in front of us. He greeted Shora discretely and proceeded to wait beside the table until we were ready to order. After he returned inside, the music changed to Super Choc's latest album and the volume was pumped up to its normal saturated maximum. Shora did not react except to say, almost under his breath, "that's our album."

After the beer was served the flashing lights and sirens attached to the inside of the patio roof began to go off, but this was not what attracted so many young children to where we were sitting. They had started coming close almost as soon as we arrived. They tried to sneak up behind the wall surrounding the elevated terrasse which was overlooking the street nearby. They listened to our conversation and tried to imitate some of our sentences, giggling in between. The bartender would 'shoo' them away from time to time. Those too afraid to get close had formed a two-tiered wall of dance in the distance and were practicing the dance steps that corresponded with the shouts blaring from the loudspeakers. Shora called my attention to the children: "You see the kids? They know all the dance steps." And they did. They could

---

<sup>19</sup>In Chapter Six I will describe the process by which I came to play with a local dance band.



have been his front line. When they saw him pointing in their direction, they picked up the pace, exaggerated their movements and smiled vigorously for our benefit.

Most fans, however, were not nearly so timid in approaching their favorite stars. I remember a taxi ride with Lofombo of Empire Bakuba in which the taxi driver immediately recognized the rising star in his rear view mirror and after agreeing to drop us off on the other side of town proceeded to lecture Lofombo on how, as an up and coming public figure, he should behave with restraint:

"Lofombo, you're very good. Everybody says that you're good. You take your work seriously, you know the latest technology and you can really make people dance with that bass of yours. But I have something to tell you. You have to be careful about how you carry yourself. It's important to stay humble, listen to your fans and most of all don't let it go to your head. Do you hear what I'm saying?" Lofombo smiles and nods in a gesture of acquiescence. "You have a long career ahead of you. It's important not to let it go to your head. Do you hear me, little brother?" He answers without hesitating: "Oui grand frère" (April 30, 1996).<sup>20</sup>

In many cases, popular musicians' popularity goes straight to their heads, altering their ability to see themselves or their actions in an objective manner, and this is when people start to say that musicians 'friment' or 'font de la frime', meaning 'they show off'.<sup>21</sup> 'La frime' can take many forms, some more conscious than others, some taking on the status of a strategy. The bandleader, for example, must not arrive on stage at the same time as his musicians. In most bands, different levels of musicians arrive on stage in roughly the same order that they appear in the band hierarchy: rhythm section (sometimes with the dancers and *atalaku*), second string singers, first string singers, and finally lead singer/star of the band. Similarly, the 'stars' of the band should be the first to leave the concert. Private transportation

---

<sup>20</sup>Events like this were not uncommon. At an academic conference in Ann Arbor, Michigan I witnessed a conversation between a Congolese woman and a well-known Congolese singer in which she criticized Congolese musicians for exploiting the images of African women in popular music videos and challenged him to change his and other musicians' thinking on this practice. Compare with Turner's (1969) discussion of installation rituals in which future chiefs are humbled through insult and abuse before being able to take positions of leadership. These humbling or 'levelling' mechanisms (Goffman via Turner) are intended to counter the tendency of power and success to make people 'selfish' and 'mean'.

<sup>21</sup>The verb 'frimer' corresponds roughly to the cluster of English words 'to show off', 'to bandstand' or 'to be cocky'. It is heard in many different contexts (often inserted in Lingala conversations as well), but is particularly common in discussions about musicians. Among other local terms is the expression 'faire du matuvisme', according to popular accounts taken from the French expression "M'as-tu vu?" or "Have you seen me?"

to and from the concert is standard, tinted windows and Mercedes are preferred, but any car is better than no car at all. Before one concert Defao instructed the junior leaders of the band to arrive at the venue in the band bus well before we would start playing. This he said would ensure that we would not lose any spectators who were skeptical about our arrival, but it also made his arrival more grandiose. At the end of the same concert, the band president pulled me aside and told me to distract the audience so that he, like Defao had done thirty minutes earlier, could slip out of the concert before the show was over.

These strategies are all part of what many musicians refer to as their 'vedettariat' (fr.,li.), or their evolution as a star. Musicians groom their 'vedettariat' in much the same way they groom their hair, carefully constructing an effect or an image which will assure them status and longevity as a 'vrai star' ('real star'). As in any career, musicians are concerned with making the right moves at the right times to be sure that they are on a constant rising path to stardom. One of the Big Stars' singers once asked me if I would consider appearing with him on a local music television program. It was his first time on television and he felt that my presence would help his image in this important début appearance. He already had a small fan club which had formed around him, and he was beginning to compose songs and sing extended solos, all important aspects of any professional singing career. Musicians listen very closely to what is said about themselves and other artists in bars, taxis, and on television and they often scan the local press for references to themselves or their bands (c.f. Jewsiewicki 1991). Many musicians judge their success at any given moment simply by the amount of money they receive during performances or by the number of gifts they receive from fans.<sup>22</sup>

Most lead singers and even some second or third-string singers in Kinshasa's biggest bands have fan clubs which have formed around their persona. In most cases these are people who are already fans of the group but have decided to organize around their special interest in one particular member of the band. Musicians benefit from being able to say that they are

---

<sup>22</sup>According to Ellen Corin, the practice of spraying money is also very common in possession healing cults throughout the region. On spraying and praisingsinging see Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight.

enough of a star to merit their own private fan club, and fan club members probably expect some kind of preferential treatment especially with regards to attending certain shows and private engagements.<sup>23</sup> Several singers explained to me that the fan club's main responsibility is to manifest its admiration for the star, but in some cases the fan club members can even help the star further develop his 'vedettariat', joining together to collect money or clothes which will be given or lent to the star. This activity takes on a very public quality, with members of the fan club hanging banners and conducting caravans (li. 'carnaval', fr. 'cortège') in the star's honor and appearing on local television programs to speak publicly about their commitment to the artist.<sup>24</sup> Most young artists will approach close friends or acquaintances to form the core of their fan club, but some fan clubs (especially for musicians that are already well-known) are formed without the musician's involvement ("A fan club for Langa-Langa Stars formed in Inkisi" [a town some 160 km outside of Kinshasa], *Disco Magazine*, #60, 6th year).

Perhaps the most conscious of strategies associated with 'la frime' has to do with the set of practices revolving around fashion and personal style. As one of Kinshasa's popular music figures particularly well-known for his sense of fashion, Defao invests a considerable amount of time into his dress and appearance. He was one of the first musicians to bleach his hair completely white and not long after he did so, several of his musicians followed suit. He also changes his particular cut on a regular basis. Very often musicians' hairstyles are those that set the pace among young people in the capital [figure 5.3]. In addition, rumors circulate that Defao intentionally stuffs himself with four to five fatty meals per day and that he takes special fattening pills in order to appear more grandiose, more 'chef'.<sup>25</sup> The most striking of

---

<sup>23</sup> An article appeared in Kinshasa music magazine with the following headline: "Gatho Beevans offers a concert for his fan club in Ngaba", *Kin Match*, no. 95, Dec. 19, 1995.

<sup>24</sup> Fan club members are among the most active audiencemembers in terms of spraying money. On some occasions, artists will 'plant' money with key members of the fan club organization, hoping that if others see a musician getting sprayed, they too will be moved to give. Waterman reports a similar phenomenon for *juju* music in Nigeria (1990: 185).

<sup>25</sup> A recent article in a local weekly newspaper published in Kinshasa, has reported on this phenomenon as becoming more widespread in the capital: "The latest fad in Kinshasa. In order to not be suspected of being sero-positive and risk missing a chance at 'making it' in life, young women have found this miracle solution: ingesting pharmaceutical products. On the list are Lo-Femonal pills, Sypradyn, Chemovit and even some 'harder' products intended for fattening pigs" (*Le Soft*, July 11, 1997).



Fig. 5.3

fig. 5.3 People follow fashion and fashion follows music

esthetic alterations practiced by musicians is the use of skin whiteners, what most musicians refer to simply as 'les produits' ('products'). Skin bleaches and skin whiteners have become excessively common in Kinshasa, but young women and musicians are especially notorious for their dependence on these items.<sup>26</sup> Most of the singers in Defao's band will combine two or three skin lightening body soaps with a cream which is applied vigorously and repeatedly immediately after showering. The desired effect: "jaune papaye" ('papaya yellow'). Signs of the wear and tear of these products usually show at certain hard to bleach parts of the body (the ankles, elbows and hands) and long-term use usually leads to a degraded skin quality and a pinkish reddish facial glow. Light or 'lightened' skin is often a prerequisite for being member of the singing front line. During a Big Stars audition, a highly qualified singer (who happened to be dark-skinned) was sent away and told not to come back until he had learned more songs and had "fixed his skin".

### *The Peak of Chic and the Esthetics of Big Pants*

A considerable amount of research has been conducted on the Pool region's fashion youth phenomenon known as 'La Sape'. The term itself comes from the acronym of Brazzaville's 'Société d'Ambianceurs et Personnes Élégantes' ('Society of People Who Are Elegant and Who Like to Have a Good Time'). Members of this movement, or *sapeurs*, hold periodic competitions in the form of fashion shows, but instead of highlighting designers, they highlight themselves, or rather their ability to mix and match the brand names of high fashion which make up their performative repertoire. For the purposes of this discussion, I will only

---

<sup>26</sup>Tchebwa, quoting loosely from Gandoulou: "In the beginning, as much in Zaire as in the Congo, it was women, probably in order to please men, who first started using pharmaceutical products to lighten their skin" (1996: 197). Whether or not this assertion is true, it is a good example of how women become scapegoats of more generalized social problems or issues. In Chapter Eight I discuss how female members of the band are blamed by male bandleaders for being the cause of intra-band conflict.

devote limited attention to the 'sape' phenomenon, not only because its history, organization and meaning have been explored elsewhere,<sup>27</sup> but also because in Kinshasa 'la sape' is less institutionalized than it is in Brazzaville, making it more of an idiosyncratic personal expression than a coherent form of social organization.

In Bacongo, a Brazzaville neighborhood where 'sapeurs' still organize and compete in 'sape' competitions,<sup>28</sup> music from Kinshasa plays a very important role, particularly the music of certain high profile musicians such as Papa Wemba who are known for their commitment to designer clothes and the ideals of 'sape'.<sup>29</sup> Much of the spectacle associated with a 'sape' competition has to do with the cultivation and the careful display of personal style (c.f. Martin 1994; Schoss 1996). Some social science research has looked at 'sape' as a unique urban form of social or political solidarity (Gandoulou 1989; Bazanquisa 1992), but it may also be seen as a highly individualized form of social distinction; 'sapeurs' are part of a movement, but they are also 'stars', or at least aspire to be. Thus it is not only the clothes they wear, but their 'star' mentality which links them symbolically to musicians in Kinshasa. On the other side of the river in Kinshasa, participation in formalized 'sape' organizations or competitions does not exist in the way that Gandoulou has discussed for Congo-Brazzaville.<sup>30</sup> However, musicians

---

<sup>27</sup>Justin-Daniel Gandoulou has written two books on the subject, one looking at the history and organization of 'la sape' in a local setting in Brazzaville (1989) and the other focusing on manifestations of the phenomenon abroad, especially the importance that *sapeurs* give to having been to European fashion capitals such as Paris. Although these works provide some important sociological detail and a general overview of the phenomenon, other writing on the subject has gone further in analyzing the historical, political and symbolic aspects of this unique form of urban social organization (see especially Martin 1994; Friedman 1990a, 1990b; Bazanquisa 1992; Rouch 1989; Tchewwa 1996). Martin looks at the historical relationship between clothes and local notions of individual 'force' or 'power'. As does Friedman, who puts forth a semantic reading of the relationship of style to personal identity and political economy. Bazenguissa argues that 'la sape' must be understood in terms of Congo-Brazzaville's complex history of politicized ethnic relations between the primarily Kikongo-speaking peoples of the south and Bangala ethnic groups from the north who dominated national politics during the period of Gandoulou's study. Hecht & Simone (1994) view the *sapeur* as a challenge to the political order and a class-based state rule (also see Friedman 1990a on this point).

<sup>28</sup>At the time I was writing this chapter, Brazzaville was wrapped up in a struggle for power which according to unofficial estimates was responsible for more than 10,000 deaths in only a period of a few months (personal communication, US Embassy personnel in the region). A large number of internally displaced persons and continued warfare throughout the city have most certainly disrupted the everyday activities of most of the cities' inhabitants.

<sup>29</sup>Despite the fact that several *sapeurs* are remembered for their attempts to be recognized as professional musicians (especially Nyarkos and Djo Ballard of Brazzaville), it seems easier for musicians to *sapeurs* than vice versa.

<sup>30</sup>Some consider the 'kitendiste' movement in Kinshasa to be similar in nature to 'sape' ('kitendi' is a Kikongo word for 'cloth' or 'clothing'). Although I have no data on what this movement may have looked like, I know

in Kinshasa are on the whole very conscious of what they wear and clearly compete with each other (although in a less ritualized manner than the *sapeurs*) when it comes to what they wear and how they look [figure 5.4].

Probably the most well-known *sapeur*, Papa Wemba claims to espouse the values of 'elegance' and 'personal' hygiene which define the 'sape' movement, although he himself has made it clear that he is no "slave to 'la sape'" (Tchebwa 1996: 196) [figure 5.5]. Brazzaville *sapeurs* are resentful of the fact that the press presents Wemba as the 'King of Sape', given the fact that he is not from the neighborhood of Bacongo (or even Brazzaville) and thus not a full-fledged *sapeur* (Gandoulou 1989). But this resentment is tempered somewhat since he promotes the cause by holding ad hoc 'sape' competitions during some of his concerts (RFI 1992) and by virtue of the texts of his songs which refer to the *sape* sub-culture and values:

Na koya na Kin eh, jour yango eh  
Ndako na ngai, eza nango eh  
Bagnole na ngai, eza nango eh  
Na mwa esika ekotisaka  
Mbongo ezanga te, ezanga te, eh eh

The day I come back to Kin [shasa]  
I've got a house there  
I've got a car there  
And a place to put it  
There's always plenty of money

Na kotaka C.F.A., jour ya après oh  
Na kolata na ngai ensemble ya cuiranta  
Bien signé Roco Martino  
Oyo ya Cerruti, griffe yango eh  
Gian Franco Ferri, griffe yango eh  
Gian Marco Venturi, griffe yango eh  
Henri Coco Ferri, griffe yango eh  
Marithé et François Girbaud, griffe yango...

The next day I'll go to Brazzaville  
I'll wear a leather outfit  
With Roco Martino written on it  
This label is Cerruti  
Gian Franco Ferri, this label  
Marco Venturi, this label  
Henri Coco Ferri, this label  
Marithé and François Girbaud, this label...

Na koya na Kin oh oh...

I'm coming back to Kin...

("Proclamation", Papa Wemba in Gandoulou 1989: 214)

---

it was often given the status of philosophy or religion by its members (Tchebwa 1996). An anti-kitendiste pamphlet published by the Centre Protestant d'Éditions et de Diffusion in Kinshasa explains the kitendiste movement as a "religion which was born in the milieu of young musicians" and which spread rapidly "since music is a powerful vehicle for information". According to the pamphlet, *kitendisme*, represents the "fall of mankind" and is to blame for an increase the amount of illegitimate children, sexual slavery, the love of money and human sacrifice (i.e. abortion).



fig. 5.5 Papa Wemba: "I am not a slave to sape"



fig. 5.4 Koffi Olomide: "Allure na ngai ça va..." ('I look good...')



The naming and showing of labels ('griffes') is one of the ways in which 'la sape' manifests itself in the Kinshasa music scene. This practice, though sometimes done with an ironic tone, may be seen as a means by which musicians symbolically insert themselves in the prestigious high fashion lineages ('lines of clothing') in the West. As I discuss in a later chapter (ch. 7), musicians often borrow clothes from each other for concert appearances and it is not uncommon for musicians to receive clothes as gifts. J.P. Busé recalls the first time he received an outfit from another musician:

It was Claude Lengi-Lenga. He was one of the Zaïko [Langa Langa] administrators at that time. I'll never forget him because he brought me back my first suit from Europe. It meant so much to me. If I go back to Kinshasa now and I see Claude is not doing well, I'll go and help him out however I can (personal communication August 25, 1997).

Although very few musicians in Kinshasa refer to themselves as *sapeurs*, they nonetheless cultivate the outward signs and gestures often associated with the movement. A heightened sense of awareness with regards to clothes and clothing labels makes 'les griffes' a common topic of conversation between musicians and much of the language of the *sapeurs* from Brazzaville has been registered among musicians and their fans in Kinshasa (Tchebwa 1996). The conspicuous display of personal style through clothing and the illusion of 'grandeur' created by oversized clothing seems just as common among musicians as it is among *sapeurs*:

Le sapeur prend des fesses bien cambrées et affiche une mine 'aristocratique' assortie d'un ventre qui prend de la rondeur et atteint parfois les proportions d'un 'oeuf colonial'. Cette nouvelle morphologie, à laquelle on doit imprimer une démarche spécifique, oblige le sapeur au 'look grand monsieur' d'adapter sa garde-robe à ce nouveau 'look': un pantalon nettement au dessus de la taille classique, de sorte qu'une fois la ceinture passée à la taille, le pantalon ample gonfle le postérieur du sapeur et met en exergue des 'fesses proéminentes' à la manière des 'nzele' de Kin-la-Belle (ibid: 199).<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup>The *sapeur* has a well-curved behind and gives off an aristocratic air with a rounded belly which sometimes resembles a 'colonial egg'. This new morphology, which is usually accompanied by a special walk, requires the *sapeur* with the 'grand monsieur' look to adapt his wardrobe accordingly: pants visibly larger than the normal size so that once the belt is around his waist, the oversized pants push out his posterior and accentuate his 'prominent buttocks', just like the pretty young women of Kinshasa.

Gandoulou reports that *sapeurs* in Brazzaville prefer not only oversized pants and vests, but even oversized shoes. Is this a function of the fact that outfits are often borrowed or rented (thus rarely a perfect fit)? Or does big clothing somehow make the person bigger?

On sait par exemple que les pantalons larges ont toujours existé et se portent actuellement, indépendamment du génie des Sapeurs. Ces pantalons sont à la mode, et ils correspondent à l'apparence que les Sapeurs veulent se donner. Ils les choisissent deux tailles au-dessus de la leur. Mais, mieux encore, ils les portent bien au niveau, quand ce n'est pas au-dessus, du nombril ; en serrant la ceinture, ils s'arrangent pour faire, en avant et en arrière particulièrement, de remarquables plis (Gandoulou 1989: 155).<sup>32</sup>

But clothing is not simply a language (McCracken 1988), since people obviously do things with clothing. Oversized clothing exaggerates physical presence and gestures (à la David Byrne in "Stop Making Sense", 1983) and the implied link between big clothing and big personality permeates much of live musical performance.<sup>33</sup> Singers remove and replace layers of clothing at carefully selected moments, always in the presence of a 'petit' who is waiting eagerly to be seen assisting in the change. "The clothes look best when dancing" (Ewens 1990: 148) and no one is more aware of this than musicians. One singer intentionally wears his shirt untucked so that in the heat of the dance sequence he can turn his back to the audience, lift the tail of his shirt from time to time, and give the audience a sampling of his ability to isolate particular muscle groups.

---

<sup>32</sup>It is true that big pants have always existed and these days they are worn not only by *sapeurs*. Being very fashionable, they are an important part of the image that the *sapeur* tries to give of himself. They choose [pants] two sizes bigger than their own. But even better, they wear them at the level of, if not above, the belly button. Tightening their belt, they make sure to create, in front but especially behind, a series of spectacular folds in the fabric'.

<sup>33</sup>Compare this with the esthetic of oversized clothing in African-American hip hop culture (Rose 1994).

*The 'Star Complex' and Less Conscious Gesturing*

The distinction I have made in this section between unconscious and conscious action is drawn partially from my reading of Bourdieu's (1977) discussion of 'strategic calculation' which occurs alongside the various manifestations of *habitus*. "...[S]tructured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" take the form not only of socially thinkable actions but also physical gestures that "can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor" (ibid: 53). Although musicians in Congo-Zaire do not constitute a social class in Bourdieu's sense of the term (ibid: 60), the gestures of celebrity which they uniformly display in performative settings (both social and professional) suggest the presence of a social-occupational category similar to those I have discussed for other parts of sub-Saharan Africa (c.f. Pwono 1992).

The bobbing motion which accompanies most performances may be related to the need for the singer, faced with complex harmonic and rhythmic combinations in vocal lines, to become a sort of human metronome.<sup>34</sup> Or maybe it is an ecstatic response: the hands bob up and down--palms open--with their own rhythm, and together with a slight tilt of the head they recall the gestures of 'receiving' common in charismatic Christian churches [figure 5.6]. Regardless of its function, this motion has become a necessary part of most artists' stage presence and (ironically enough) an important expression of individual style. Young aspiring singers bob precociously in the hopes that by doing so they too will be a source of adulation and inspiration. For musicians as well as people in the audience, this motion, repeated hundreds of times every weekend by countless singers, is an outward sign that the musicians are skilled and that the music is 'kitoko' ('good', 'pretty', c.f. Pwono 1992). Other accompanying gestures also punctuate the performance: the way that singers look to the side

---

<sup>34</sup>Chernoff writes: "The musicians themselves maintain an additional beat, as has often been observed, by moving some part of their body while they play, not in the rhapsodic manner of a violinist but in a solid regular way" (1978: 50). According to Richard Waterman, a 'metronome sense', which he compares to a kind of mental dance (1952: 211), allows percussionists and dancers to operate within complex combinations of polyrhythmic meter that change from one performance to the next.



or behind them during other vocalists' solos, the raised eyebrow and the raised arm to signal the transition to the *seben*, the handkerchief delicately dabbing a sweating chest or forehead, the distinctive 'bad boy' walk (exaggerated large steps, head tucked in the neck, arms dangling at the side) and the almost compulsive habit of twisting pantwaists and pulling them above the hips. All of these gestures serve as markers to a captive audience: "Do you see this? I'm a star up here!"<sup>35</sup>

During one of the few weeks I was fortunate enough to have a vehicle at my disposal, I was often approached for help with transportation. One musician, a junior leader in the Big Stars, asked me not if I could take him somewhere but if he could drive. At first I refused, saying that I would be responsible if anything happened. But, as usual, the hot weather and the musician's insistence kept me from being able to respect my decision. As we drove around Kinshasa, it became clear that the singer did not really care where we went: "I just like to drive," he said. Judging from the type of errands we were doing (mostly dropping in on his girlfriends), it appeared obvious that he also liked to be seen. As we returned to the car each time, he would carefully place his wide-rimmed dark sunglasses, look at himself in the mirror, roll down the windows and turn up the music. He drove around at a slow cruising speed, his left arm hanging over the driver's door, slapping hands with adoring friends and fans and stopping to joke with traffic police. "Everybody knows me," he said unpretentiously. In the course of our travels around town I told him that another band had asked me to perform with them. "Don't do that," he said in a coaching tone. "Stay with the Big Stars; we're not like the other groups. We're not *frimeur*".

The popular musician sees himself as somehow different from the rest of the population. He does, after all, get paid to compose and perform music. He is intimately

---

<sup>35</sup>One foreign observer commented to me that musicians in Kinshasa tend to carry themselves as if they were somehow 'above' the audience (Lucie Gagnon, personal communication). Stoicism, maybe more of a stance or a non-gesture, is rarely commented on, but is clearly an important aspect of the gestural repertoire of musicians. John Grinling has commented on this phenomenon with regards to the way audience members dance (in Tchewba 1996: 339) and Chernoff, in a discussion of Congolese popular music and dance, made similar observations: "Even when the shoulders and feet are violently active, the head is stable. If the head is cool, the body is cool" (1978: 149). Thompson (1973) was probably the first to discuss this 'coolness' with regards to African music and dance.

familiar with current events and popular discourse (especially the rumors, expressions and stories which serve as inspiration for his lyrics) but at the same time he is apart from the constraints of everyday time. His view of the world is tainted by a schedule which keeps him up late at night and keeps him in bed late in the morning.<sup>36</sup> In a place where everyone is a musician to some degree (Tchebwa 1996), his special status as a famous musician separates him even more from his peers and contemporaries. The unique quality he has must be reflected in his walk, his talk, and the way that he dresses. This difference was once explained to me by a fellow bandmember: “Etre musicien, c’est pas une vie comme les autres; c’est une vie à part” (‘Being a musician is not a life like other people live; it’s a different world’). From my notes after I had begun playing full-time:

I don’t (I guess) value the work that I do. It feels weird to get paid for playing music, but then I’m the first to admit that this is a tough job, different world, different mindset, different schedule. You’re not the same as other people, you start to believe you’re not the same. This was my experience, anyway, people turning and staring, just staring and finally I could tell myself it’s because of something I did and not just the color of my skin (May 8, 1996).

If it is possible to speak of a kind of ‘star complex’, or an unconscious gestural of ways that musicians in Kinshasa act or speak, the dean of this complex is undoubtedly Koffi Olomide, known by his various ‘star’ personas: Crooner Antoine, Rambo, le Roi du Tcha Tcho, Akram Ojjieh, Schwartzkopf, Moukouloukoulou, Papa Top, Papa Bonheur, Papa Rocky.<sup>37</sup> When I was first introduced to Koffi, I was struck by the carefully placed expensive jewelry around his neck and wrist. As we are talking, Koffi is very distracted. Our mutual friend tries to move the conversation toward me, hoping to help my research: “Koffi, did you know that Bob is an artist too?” Koffi feigns interest: “Oh really? What do you paint?” I

<sup>36</sup>John Blacking has argued that “the essential quality of music is its power to create another world of virtual time” (quoted in Waterman 1990: 215).

<sup>37</sup>Multiple naming is a very common practice in Kinshasa’s music scene. Emeneya, another famous singer, is also well-known for a long series of nicknames: Emeneya, Djo Kester, King, Evala, Malakoze, Ntungu, Grand Pétrolier, Rossignol, Kwa-Mambu, Jésus, L’émérité, Bachelier, Docteur, Ya Mokolo. In a later chapter (ch. 10) I will talk about naming and its implications for understanding the entangled relationship of ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’.

think he was trying to show that he knew that the word 'artiste' did not apply only to musicians. "Actually, I'm a musician. An *atalaku*." "An *atalaku*?" He seemed surprised. "In Lingala? Why didn't you come to play with us?" John cuts in: "He plays with your competition." As the laughing trails off Koffi interjects: "Ah, Monsieur John, you know I don't have any competition." We laughed once more (Koffi less so) and I got the feeling he was very serious. Before long, he was pulled away by another incoming call on the telecel that his *secrétaire personnel* had this time decided not to screen.

Reddy Amisi, 'petit' of Koffi Olomide and protégé of Papa Wemba, quickly became a star in his own right.<sup>38</sup> The subtle cloak of celebrity that settled down around him, especially after his hugely successful second solo album ("Prudence", 1995), has led Reddy to ask many questions about this elusive status to which he is only now becoming accustomed:

"There's a lot of love for musicians," he told me in an interview. "You see the big crowd, everybody screaming, and you realize that it's you that's making them go crazy like this. They want to get close to you to see what you're like in person. They ask themselves: 'What proof do I have that I saw him?' That's why they always want to take pictures. And I can't blame them. Who knows when you'll be back through their town?" (Reddy Amisi, Sep 27, 1995)

And later in the same interview:

I think I have a lot to do [in my career]. When fans wink at me, I ask myself the question: 'How are you going to keep your balance with the audience?' Over a period of five-seven years I have to show the fans that I'm stable, no ups and downs (ibid).

Based on what I had seen of Reddy during his first solo tour, it seemed he was going through the process of learning the gestures of fame, making sense of what it felt like to be a rising 'star', all the time adjusting his image of himself based on the interaction he had with fans and members of the larger public ("I have to show the fans...") [figures 5.7, 5.8, 5.9]. As I left his hotel, I saw a worker buffing the already shiny tile floors and whistling one of the songs from Reddy's latest album. If Reddy himself was there at that moment, I would have been

---

<sup>38</sup>Reddy tells the story of how Wemba did not want to let him into the band until Koffi intervened and convinced Wemba that Reddy had true 'star' potential. Reddy is now the undisputed leading 'idol' in Wemba's entourage.



Fig. 5.7

fig. 5.7 Reddy Amisi on tour in Congo-Brazzaville





Fig. 58

fig. 5.8 The motorcade (li. 'carnaval') to announce Reddy's arrival (Dolisie)



Fig. 5.9

fig. 5.9 The intimate public: writing yourself into local history

convinced that the song was for Reddy's benefit. But Reddy was nowhere in sight; the young man was just whistling one of his favorite songs.

### **Rumors and the Intimate Public**

Apart from the fact that musicians are increasingly dependent on concertgoing audiences to keep their careers afloat (ch. 4), they also feel a great deal of accountability and affection for their fans ("There's a lot of love for musicians...").<sup>39</sup> This complicity between musicians and fans is played out in various contexts. In Chapter Seven, for example, I look at the ways in which audiences and artists interpenetrate each other's space during live music performances (dancing, shouting, picturetaking, and money spraying). But the public also participates outside of the concert setting, especially through the uniquely African institution of 'radio trottoir' (rumor). In the following section I am primarily concerned with how non-musicians 'write themselves into' (Cohen and Odhiambo 1992) this world of fame and glamour by circulating and contributing to public knowledge about musicians.<sup>40</sup> Public knowledge, of course, in order to be convincing, must seem like private knowledge (i.e. first-hand knowledge), and thus stories about the 'stars' of the popular music scene are often told from a personal point of view, and with a suggestion of familiarity or intimacy between the fan and the artist. Through public stories and rumors, non-musicians participate vicariously in the wonder-ful quality of individual fame, fortune, and intrigue.

---

<sup>39</sup>Musicians' relations with fans are obviously not perfect. J.P. Busé tells stories of fans who "just want to get close to you to see what you're like so that they can go and talk shit about you to their friends" (personal communication). Busé's comments are consistent with the personalized rumoring which is the focus of this section.

<sup>40</sup>Obviously these flows of information go in multiple directions, since as Jewsiewicki (1991) has shown in a discussion of popular painting, artists are dependent on their social milieu and social imagination to find ideas for their work.

Despite the importance of rumors and *radio trottoir* ("pavement radio" or "the grapevine") to everyday life in many parts of contemporary Africa, Africanists have paid relatively little attention to socially and culturally constructed forms of heresay. *Radio trottoir*,<sup>41</sup> and the rumors that result from it, have been discussed as a means of understanding social networks and the transmission of knowledge (Epstein 1969), as a modern form of the African oral tradition (Ellis 1989), as a source of information about political events (Ellis 1993) and as one of the many ways in which the politically powerless assert a political voice (Barber 1987; Mbala-Nkanga 1992). But rumor is not the exclusive domain of the voiceless masses, since artists, writers and even politicians draw from and add to rumored knowledge in various ways (Mbala-Nkanga 1992). If other social scientists have steered away from this source of indigenous knowledge, it is probably because information based on rumors is perceived as difficult to obtain and impossible to verify:

I want to suggest that for late twentieth-century academics, the differences between rumor and research reports are great; they are recounted in different media, and they have completely different levels of credibility. But for the subjects of the research and of colonial biomedicine, rumor and our own notions of fact may not have been all that different (L. White 1995: 220).

As Luise White has suggested in her work on prostitution in colonial Nairobi, the analysis of rumors should be less concerned with the credibility of rumors than the social dialogue in which they are embedded:

The purpose of gossiping, rumormongering, and even talking is not to deliver information but to exchange it...the stories examined for this article were taken together. They were not told in isolation nor without contradiction or argument or correction. There was no single established version, no single accurate account. Instead, these stories were told, exchanged, criticized, refined, and laughed at. They were part of public knowledge, a way to argue and complain and worry (L. White 1993: 747).

Following White's lead, I want to argue that a more systematic analysis of rumors would need to look at *rumoring*, i.e. the process of how rumors are produced, legitimated and

---

<sup>41</sup>According to Ellis (1993), *radio trottoir* consists of rumors, jokes, puns, and various sorts of anecdotes passed by word of mouth. In some parts of Francophone Africa, the term 'radio cocotier' is used. I have also heard the expression "bush radio" for some parts of English-speaking East Africa.

spread. According to Ellis (1993), people from all walks of life participate in the production and transmission of rumors, although rumors told by those with social proximity to the rumors' subjects are often accorded special status. He shows how people who tell rumors about political figures in Togo almost never cite their sources and they rarely offer empirical evidence for their claims. But even in a context where the veracity of rumors is not of primary importance, first-person accounts seem to carry more weight: "When rumors were not first person accounts they were frequently told with great thoughtfulness and care, to make them more credible" (L. White 1995a: 220). Thus claims to authority are made either by virtue of the speaker's firsthand experience ("I saw it with my own eyes") or by placing the rumor within a public body of common knowledge ("Of course everyone knows that...").

Rumors in Congo-Zaire also seem to be part of a public dialogue which produces knowledge about social relations and social change.<sup>42</sup> Although life in Kinshasa is filled with rumors on many topics (politics, male-female relations, magic, etc.), I will focus here on music-related rumoring in order to make some tentative observations about the ways that rumors mediate relations between artists and their audiences.<sup>43</sup> Rumors circulate through 'unofficial' channels, not only "bouche à l'oreille" ('mouth to ear') via *radio trottoir*, but also through more 'official' channels such as fan club newsletters, local newspapers, radio and television programs and music/entertainment magazines. In this discussion I will be blurring the distinction between these channels of rumoring, partly because rumors themselves travel back and forth freely between them. Newspapers and magazines, because of their permanence and because of the urgent way they circulate, contribute to the formation of a body of public knowledge about what is happening in the world of music (c.f. Waterman 1990: 23). This, of course, does not mean that all newspapers and magazines contribute

---

<sup>42</sup>In a fascinating article on rumors and commodities in Zimbabwe, Timothy Burke (1998) has argued that people use rumors as a strategy for constructing knowledge about the increasingly alienating relations and conditions of post-industrial capitalist production. According to Ellis, rumors are a "crucial element in the interplay of forces between state and civil society..." (1993: 474).

<sup>43</sup>A few examples from Kinshasa's most well-read gossip tabloid newspaper: "A woman grabs the 'third leg' of her alter-ego and shouts: 'I don't satisfy you anymore?'" (Kin Potins, Nov. 30, 1996), "An I.S.C. professor 'consults' in a Kintambo hotel room" (Kin Potins, Nov. 18, 1996), and "A Tutsi director from B.C.K. poisons his neighbors" (Kin Potins, Nov. 18, 1996).

equally. Of 15-20 regular daily or weekly newspapers in circulation in Kinshasa in 1995-96, about half publish articles on music and of that number about five publish music-related articles (rumors or otherwise) in every issue. Music and entertainment magazines number anywhere from 3-5 in Kinshasa at any given time. They are published less frequently than newspapers, but usually devote approximately 75-80% of their content to music-related stories, the rest being about sports and fashion.

The most common type of information that circulates about musicians has to do with their professional activities. *Salongo*, a culture and news daily, often gives a weekly or bi-weekly roundup of these 'events'. One issue included a full-page spread (one out of eight pages) with four articles carrying the following headlines: "After his stay in Europe, Madilu 'Multi-Système' is Back", "Despite the Departure of Two Key Players, 'Temple di-Ronia' Maintains a Steady Course", "Barring Unforeseen Circumstances, Zaiko Langa-Langa in Kinshasa at the End of this Month", "Big Stars: On the Right Path as They Tour in Zambia" (Gampuende 1996: 4). As some of these headlines suggest, very often articles published about musicians are intended to promote important events such as splintering, tours, or new albums, but this update is nonetheless an important source of information for *radio trottoir*.<sup>44</sup> Once as I crossed the busy bus and taxi terminal in the middle of Matonge (Place Victoire), a middle-aged man stuck his head out of his car window and politely asked me if I knew when Zaiko Langa-Langa was returning to Kinshasa. I told him that I didn't know the exact date, but I thought it would be before the end of the month. He thanked me and drove off.

Rumors about musicians' activities often take the form of things more spectacular. During the peak of its success in the late 1980s, Boketchu's Swede Swede quickly became known as the new darling group of Kinshasa political and commercial elites. As if to confirm this privileged status, rumors still circulate about how the group used to be interrupted mid-show in order to be brisked away and put on a plane which would take them to Mobutu's

---

<sup>44</sup>Music producers and promoters have become stars too: "Under the protection of L'International Desy Production, Zaiko Familia Dei travels to Bangui," (Disco n.d.), "Madame Kouka Sidonie creates SID-MUSIQUE for the promotion of local musicians" (Disco n.d.), "Patrick Mangasa, a true celebrity" (ibid)

residence in Gbadolite for a private performance. Upon arriving, they were apparently showered with gifts and given unlimited access to a new Pajero from the president's private collection of vehicles. A story from Wenge's tour in Belgium:

After the success of their first Euro-American tour, Wenge Musica is now staying in Brussels, where according to rumors in *Kinshasa*, the group is having serious problems. Casa Musicana [the promoter] is no longer able to pay their living expenses and thus they were kicked out of their hotel. In addition, the health of the band's 'animateur' Robert Ekokota is still a source of great concern. At present, he is hospitalized in a clinic in Brussels (Palmares, #515, Oct. 5, 1995: 6, emphasis added).

Rumors still circulate about how Koffi Olomide's limited skill as a dancer (something extremely unusual for popular musicians in Kinshasa) forced him to start taking dancing lessons some years back. Despite the fact that he is still admired more for his singing than his dancing, most people agree that the lessons enabled him to improve considerably.

Newspaper stories about competition between bands and various forms of intra-band conflict, especially splintering (ch. 8), are also very common: "Adamo, Baroza and Malage spit in the face of N'yoka Longo" (Ndule 1995), "Defao Matumona: 'I'll stop moonlighting the day that Ben Nyamabo starts paying me my copyrights in cash'" (Disco Hit 1985), "Likinga appointed president of Zaiko Familia Dei, an unhappy Bimi tries to sell his Mercedes and go into hiding in Europe" (Disco Hit 1985). Magazine articles concentrate on recently departed (or fired) members of bands and the never-ending conflicts which result from changes in personnel: "Nyoka: 'I don't know how Bimi was able to buy a Mercedes'" (L'As des As 1988), "The conflict continues between Ilo Pablo and Nyoka Longo" (ibid), "Nono Atalaku at war with Ditutala" (ibid). In some cases magazines will publish sensationalistic accounts of musicians' lives and later offer the musician an open forum to refute claims or deny accusations: "Debaba: I never asked to join Familia Dei (Disco Hit #147 11th year) or "Fafa of Molokai was never arrested for selling drugs" (Disco # 60, 6th year). In one article, an angry musician responds publicly to comments made by a co-bandmember:

I don't understand what pushes Malembe to say that no musician in [the band] Victoria is paid less than 4,000 Z. Ridiculous! Do you know how much he himself makes at the end of every month? 900 Z! That's why he can't even buy a can of paint for the walls of the room that he was given by the parents of his wife. He doesn't even have any chairs. [He is] a Mario [gigolo] that fled his parents' house to go live in a house that belongs to a woman (Bongo Wende speaking about Malembe Chant, Disco #60, 6th year).

Achille Ngoy, a well-known Congolese writer/journalist who was very active in the Kinshasa music scene in the 1970s explained that as a young journalist he would encourage musicians to make up stories about conflicts between them. "Telling artists to fight," he said, "was a good way to sell papers" (personal interview, June 28, 1995). And scenes of reconciliation between rival or even feuding artists--often staged during concert time--also find a captive audience in the local press: "Playing on the same stage: Zaiko Langa Langa Nkolo Mboka and L'Empire Bakuba" (Ndule 1995), "Wemba and Koffi pals once again: A new record ('Wake Up') to seal their friendship" (Le Soir 1996). The story of Nyoka Longo's very conspicuous presence at Koffi Olomide's 10th anniversary party circulated wildly for two or three days after the event (ch. 7). People speculated about whether this was a hollow gesture on the part of Nyoka Longo or whether it in fact represented a true reconciliation between the two rivals. Another common strategy used by journalists is to give the impression (similar to tabloid publications in Europe and North America) that otherwise private or personal information is being 'unveiled' or 'unmasked' for the reader's benefit: "The whole truth of the Zaiko affair" (L'As des As 1988), "Madilu Système offs his mask and delivers his secrets with Luambo" (Ndule 1995), "Luambo Makiadi's killer unmasked" (Pop Stars 1996). In many cases these 'revelations' are tied to musicians' rumored involvement with some form of magic or sorcery.

Rumors about musicians and witchcraft, or the use of *fétiche* (magic, charms), seem to be less common in written sources, although the journalism interview format almost always includes a question on the subject. Music journalists are unable to resist the topic of magic and this is partly because the questions pertaining to witchcraft are the most likely to arouse interest



on the part of the reader. Musicians for their part have come to expect this topic in most interview situations and as with other types of predictable questions, they often give predictable answers:

*Music Journalist: Other musicians have accused you of using nkisi(magic) to harm your rivals and thus stay on top of the Kinshasa music scene, is this true?*

*Musician: Let me declare once and for all that I have never made use of magic or any such thing in order to get where I am today as a musician. Other people may use fetich, but I have never done so. If I am popular it is because people like my music and because they know that I am a Christian. If other people have bad things to say, it must be because they are jealous.*

Exchanges like this one occur frequently. Musicians know that journalists will ask the question and journalists know that musicians will deny any involvement whatsoever. Fans know that even if it were true, the musician would never admit to having committed such acts.<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, rumors about musicians and witchcraft continue, as if public statements made by musicians only added to the excitement that surrounds the stories (“Emeneya: ‘I discovered the secret of success and its far from *fétiche*’ ” L’As des As 1989). A number of classics in this category are still told, such as the stories about how Verckys (Vévé) was thought to be trafficking in human skulls in order to finance his lucrative music promotions activities in the 1970s. Or how Franco’s long reign as the head of O.K. Jazz was due primarily to “un *fétiche* très fort” (‘very strong magic’) which instilled fear in the hearts of even his greatest rivals. Or how Nyoka Longo’s success as the driving force of Zaiko Langa Langa was the result of a ‘deal with the devil’ which kept him from being able to own a home of his own, or in any way invest the money he was earning.

A look at one case in particular will give some ideas about the dynamics of rumor production and musicians’ response. Reddy Amisi (see above) began to enjoy widespread

---

<sup>45</sup> Musicians who have left “la musique du monde” (‘music of this world’) for “la musique religieuse”, represent an important exception. Musicians in this category often admit to having resorted to witchcraft in the past in order to be popular (“avoir du succès”). Their new identity as Christian musicians is confirmed by their move to renounce these practices, which are seen by Christians as satanic and anti-modern. Ilo Pablo, leader of Zaiko’s most recent offshoot Zaiko Langa Langa Familia Dei, explains that they chose the suffix ‘Familia Dei’ (Family of God) to show that they did not want to be associated with Zaiko Langa Langa Nkolo Mboka, which was often accused of recourse to magic (see also ch. 9). For more on the rise of charismatic churches in Kinshasa over recent years see Devisch (1996) and Ndaywel (1993).

success after a series of tours and the release of his second solo album in 1995. After a concert appearance by Reddy in an elite leisure complex just outside of Kinshasa, a mortal car accident occurred which resulted in the death of several fans who were driving home from the show. Concerned about rumors (some of which were published in the local press) that blamed the accident on Reddy's use of *fétiche*, he called a press conference to clarify his position:

What the media had to say on this subject caused me a great deal of pain and at some point I stopped being myself. I was asking myself: 'What I should do? Why was I being accused? What proof did they have that I was responsible for this accident?' (Kanyinda 1996: 6).

The rumor went something like this: the reason several people died after Reddy's concert is that he commissioned some kind of magic to ensure that his return to Kinshasa (from his base in Paris) would be a big success, but in exchange for his success he had to sacrifice several lives, so he designated his fans.<sup>46</sup> A young man in the neighborhood where I was living had this to say: "I don't like Reddy; he's a witch. Everytime he has a concert, somebody dies afterwards." Thus unsubstantiated rumors become the basis for an interpretation which takes on the status of a generally accepted truth. Apart from the fact that Reddy is known as a thoughtful, sensitive artist, it is still telling that he took these rumors seriously enough to organize a press conference in order to clear the air. In explaining the unfortunate occurrence, he called attention to the fact that accidents of this type had happened in the past and if anyone was to blame it had to be the organizers for not having better security, or municipal authorities for failing to repair streetlamps along the road.<sup>47</sup> In this passage, notice the way that the musician uses his status as a Kinshasa native in order to lend legitimacy to what he is saying:

---

<sup>46</sup>In Chapters Nine and Ten I will discuss the recurring motifs in beliefs about witchcraft. I am grateful to John Grinling for the observation that most stories of witchcraft in music involve some sort of 'deal' or human sacrifice in exchange for the desired ends, usually fame or success (*le succès*). Also on this subject see Berman (1988), DeBoeck (1998a), Geschiere (1997) and Taussig (1980).

<sup>47</sup>Compare Reddy's comments with those of the 'modern skeptics' discussed by Gable (1995), also see Chapter Ten.

I'm a 'mwana Kin' [a son of Kinshasa], in other words a real 'Kinois' who grew up in this city and I know what people are like. People always have to talk about each other and most of the time all they do is speculate... As far as I'm concerned, when people start talking about *fétiche* it's nothing new. Even in your family, if you become someone important because of your own efforts, people will accuse you of being a witch. It's really sad! I am not responsible for the accident that happened...it's always people with bad intentions [mauvaises langues] that are the first to accuse others (N'zanga 1996: 4, my emphasis).<sup>48</sup>

The way that people tell rumors (not only in an urban setting) suggests certain ideas about the role that rumors play in interpersonal relations. First, rumors express the tension of social differentiation. Successful musicians are highly visible and their financial success (often a source of envy) is explained by rumors about what they had to sacrifice in exchange for success. Second, rumors are one of the means through which fans create an appearance of intimacy between themselves and their favorite stars. The sons of a close friend in Kinshasa would often begin conversations with me by saying: "Oh, Monsieur Bob, we just came back from Pépé Kallé's place. He's doing really well" or "I was just hanging out with Wera Son [Wenge Musica]. They have a big show tomorrow night." When I pressed them for more information it became clear that they had walked by Pépé Kallé's house and saw him sitting on the balcony or had been hanging out near Wera Son's car in the parking lot outside of one of Wenge's practices, but apart from that they had no personal contact with the musicians whom they tried to make it seem were close, personal friends. People tell each other bits of information (often rumors) about these public figures in order to create an impression of proximity to the 'stars':

---

<sup>48</sup>Other Congolese artists have attached this idea of 'personal effort' to their professional identities. 'Personal effort' is an idea which is clearly influenced by Christian ideas about the religious value of hard work, but it implicitly refers back to the threat of witchcraft accusations. J.P. Busé, a Congolese singer based in Montréal and Toronto has named his first production company EPERS XYZ (Efforts Personnels XYZ) and DeBoeck (1998a) refers to the Kikwit painter Paepm (Peintre Artiste Effort Personnel Midgi). Achebe (1990) has discussed Tutola's vision of an African work ethic and the dangers associated with wealth that is not earned.

*Defao's a good kid, very responsible. We grew up together in Kisantu.*

*That's just the way Manwaku is, you know he's lived in Switzerland for a long time; even has a Swiss wife.*

*After Blaise got beat up by those goons, he was never the same. It took him a long time before he could start singing again.*

*Koffi likes women too much. The other day he almost kicked Dieudonné out of the band because he caught him running around with one of his new girlfriends.*

*Ben would do anything to have Lidjo in his band. He's already offered him a car and all the outfits he wants.*

The speaker thus creates an illusion of intimacy with the star, since information of this kind, told in this way, could only result from intimate knowledge or firsthand experience.

In a similar way, speakers tend to adapt or 'personalize' stories of events which they may not have experienced firsthand. One such story was based on an odd 'miraculous' occurrence in which a fish, once out of the water where it had initially been spotted, turned into a small human baby and then just as a large crowd was arriving, turned into a young 10-year old girl. According to accounts of people present, local police officers brought the young girl back to their station for questioning, but she was unable to speak, therefore confirming the belief that she was in fact a fish (possibly some form of *mamywata*?). As we drove by the place where this amazing 'fishbaby' surfaced from the water, I thought nothing of the crowd that was spilling over onto the street. But when we stopped for gas not much further down the road, the other people in the car quickly began asking the gas station attendant questions about what had happened. *They found a fish, he said. And then it turned into a baby. By the time they got it to the police station, it was already a young girl, but it still couldn't talk. Who found it? They asked. It was a fisherman, he was just sitting there and it came up out of the water.*

Questions were asked with a seriousness of tone which strangely enough did not seem to contradict the humorous recounting of the tale as we left the gas station. I asked them why something like this would happen and someone answered matter of factly, "C'est un miracle" ('It's a miracle'). When I was dropped off at my destination in the center of the city, I was

surprised to hear the people around me talking about a 'miraculous event' that had just occurred. I asked them if they were talking about the 'fishbaby' and when they nodded yes I answered, "Oh, I just came from there, I saw the whole thing" and I proceeded to tell everything I knew about what had happened. As my story unfolded, I listened to myself telling every detail I could remember, and even adding some details of my own, in order to sculpt something resembling a firsthand account: "So we were driving by and I saw this huge crowd of people in the road. They were all trying to get a look at the fishbaby. Of course she was already a girl, but when they first found her she was a fish. And then a baby." I cannot believe the things I am saying, yet I continue as I seem to have an attentive audience: "She couldn't even speak, so the gendarmes come and take her away. They didn't know where she came from and they were afraid it might cause problems. It's a miracle, a real miracle, eh?" They nodded emphatically.

To this day I am not sure why I felt compelled to tell this story in this way, although I think at some level it had to do with my desire to speak from a position of authority ("I just came from there, I saw the whole thing") about an event that had quickly become a part of Kinshasa's social imagination. But it was also an attempt on my part to effectively *write myself into* the event by relaying information in a way that somehow suggested that I had "been there" (c.f. Stewart 1993). Congolese use the same strategies when they tell stories about their favorite singers or stars. By creating an illusion of involvement, and in some cases an appearance of intimacy with important actors and events, people make themselves part of the strange and wonder-ful world of popular music.

By 'strange' I mean that musicians' highly visible, anti-social behavior makes them truly liminal social beings: they are narcissistic, self-important, impulsive, vain, and ostentatious, *bref* all the things that Congolese tell themselves not to be. But 'strange' also in the sense that despite these anti-social traits, the musician's personal power and charm enables him or her to occupy the imaginations of millions of spectators (both within the country and abroad), and influence the actions of everyday people (ch. 9) as well as those in positions of

power (ch. 8). This hyper-individualism, however, is not wholly 'modern' (i.e. Western), since in this context "the individualist is often regarded as a witch" (Turner 1969: 130) and on many occasions musicians' anti-social behavior is held up for public scrutiny. By 'wonderful' I mean something that is literally 'full of wonder', something in which we see ourselves reflected, but something that is much bigger than the image we have of ourselves, and something that is somehow transformed. This identification with the 'star' is at the heart of Kinshasa's fascination with popular music. As I show in the next chapter, musicians' individual trajectories are of great interest to the general public. I would argue that in musicians' movements--over time, over space and across the stage--people are watching the paradox of the individual's agonistic dance with 'modernity'.

Part Three: On Being in Music  
 Chapter Six: **Becoming a Musician**

Becoming a Popular Musician  
 Trajectories of Fame  
 Women in Music  
 Learning to Play  
*Mundele Atalaku*  
     Scoop and Shake  
     I'll Be Ready on Tuesday

From a Position of Privilege

*Poets are bandleaders who have failed?  
 Something like that.*

(Ayi Kwei Armah 1988: 52)

*I can't let this music get in the way of my research*

(from my field notes, April 8, 1998)

## Becoming a Popular Musician

The previous chapter shows that being recognized as a popular musician in Kinshasa is not only a matter of being a good musician, but it also requires the musician to be a good 'star'. For every well-known popular musician, there are at least one hundred that did not make it, and in many cases it was not for a lack of musical talent. As I discussed in the introduction, the bias in my writing towards 'winners' is due to a number of factors, all of which led me to people who are clearly at the center of the music industry, and who occupy an important place in the public's imagination. The primary goal of this chapter is to give the reader an idea of the trajectory which different people have taken in the process of becoming professional, full-time musicians. The larger questions of what it means to be a musician and what musicians actually do have been addressed in separate chapters (ch. 5 and ch. 7, 8). The individual cases I will discuss below are representative, but by no means exhaustive, and the choices I have made are conditioned by my intention to familiarize the reader with certain musical personalities that are commonly agreed on as musicians who have 'marked their era' ('ils ont marqué leur époque'). Of the four cases below, one is from Brazzaville and the other three are from Kinshasa. With the exception of one (the late Franco), all the musicians discussed began their careers in the early years of the industry and are still playing music either on a part-time or full-time basis.<sup>1</sup> At the end of this section, I will give a brief overview of the role that women have played in popular music and some of the reasons behind their decreasing presence in the music industry of the 1990s.

The rest of this chapter will be devoted to the story of a musician whose trajectory is much less representative of the Kinshasa music scene, but no less revealing. In the Fall of 1995, I began as a rhythm guitarist with General Defao's 'Big Stars', a relatively well-known group that I consider to be representative of the professional music scene of Kinshasa in the mid-1990s. After several failed attempts to adapt myself to local styles of playing guitar, I

---

<sup>1</sup>The examples I have chosen are technically speaking from the same generation. For examples of musicians' trajectories in subsequent generations, see the section entitled "Splintering and the 'Chef' Complex" (ch. 8).



decided to begin training as an *atalaku* (see ch. 3).<sup>2</sup> The description of my transition from outsider to full-fledged bandmember ('membre effectif') is instructive for a number of reasons, not the least of which is methodological. A somewhat personalistic account of my experience as a 'novice with status' (ch. 8) can be seen as an attempt to chip away at the aura of authority which has characterized much ethnographic (Clifford 1988). In an attempt to 'messify' the illusion of coherence which this authority creates, I have set out to show how my own fieldwork experience, itself messy and uneven, was conditioned by a complex set of relations that made me simultaneously powerful and weak. By writing myself 'back into' the ethnographic narrative, my goal is not to paint a clearer picture of 'what actually happened' in the field, but rather to reflect upon the complex relationship between field research and the process of writing, two aspects of anthropological work which are separated as much in real terms as they are in our imaginations. Thus, to frame this section as a separate 'fieldwork account' would run counter to my intentions.

The main reason for opposing stories of how Congolese become musicians and how I myself became a musician is to drive home the point that my status as a foreigner (a status of which I was constantly reminded, see ch. 8) gave me privileged access to areas of practice and knowledge which are inaccessible to most local people who seek them out; a Congolese with my level of expertise in Congolese music would never have made it past the audition. In fact, as I will show below, I did not even have to audition. My participation in a local band thus serves as a concrete example of a larger political problem/process, namely the way that history and global politics have created spaces of privilege for foreigners over locals. Obviously the fact that I was university-educated, and a musician in my own culture were factors in my favor, but I was American (li. plural 'BaClinton'), and even more importantly I was white and male, all factors which were operative and salient in determining my social status in this setting.

---

<sup>2</sup>The terms *animateur* and *atalaku* are used interchangeably. In this chapter I use *animateur* more often since it is the preferred term among musicians.

Apart from these ethical and political questions, the account of my training as a Congolese musician also contributes to a large body of anthropological literature which is concerned with the structures and processes of apprenticeship (in music see Chernoff 1979 and Berliner 1978), which not only examines how knowledge is transferred in culturally specific ways, but also how occupational status and means of livelihood (especially in Africa) are tied up in various forms of professionally based patron-client relations (see ch. 8). What is most apparent from these accounts is that from endless repetition, hard work, and mistake-making emerges knowledge about rules and patterns that are not obvious to the passive observer. Furthermore, with regards to the content and overall argument of my thesis, understanding the technical aspects of the work I was trained to do--that of a performing *atalaku*--is essential, since as I have argued elsewhere (1998b), this liminal 'trickster-like' figure is one of the keys to understanding the complex play of 'tradition' and 'modernity' in a contemporary urban Congolese setting.

### **Trajectories of Fame**

Most Zaireans can tell you stories about the backgrounds of well-known musicians. Everyone knows, for example, that Wendo used to be the engine greaser on the state-run riverboat transport system. Or that Franco used to sit on his mother's lap while she sold donuts in the nail market. Or that Kallé took his musicians to entertain the politicians at Brussels Round Table discussions leading up to independence in 1960. Stories and their detail vary considerably, but the details that emerge from popular versions of musicians' trajectories often correspond very closely with the stories that musicians tell themselves. Many early musicians were workers in colonial agencies or factories, and practiced their music after hours until they were able to work full time as studio musicians on contract. This was the case not only for Wendo, but also for his colleagues Léon Bukasa (who worked at the Union Minière

de Haut Katanga [UMHK]) and Manuel Oliveira (a carpenter whose contacts with West African riverboat workers helped him fine tune his guitar skills). Jean Serge Essous (see below) worked for the Compagnie Française de l'Afrique Occident (CFAO) as well as International Business Machines (IBM), and his long time friend and musical partner Nino Malapet began as a clerk with the Caisse Nationale de Prévoyance (CNP) in Congo-Brazzaville.<sup>3</sup>

Increasing access to education during the period leading up to independence meant that many would-be musicians came from the church-based school systems that predominated in the region. Many musicians give credit to the formal musical training they received as members of the schoolboy choirs that were so common in Catholic schools and churches (Grand Kallé, Tabu Ley and Reddy Amisi among others). The most well-known Zairean musician "qui a été à l'école" ('who went to school') is probably Tabu Ley, who in the 1950s served as secretary at the prestigious Kinshasa private school, L'Athénée Royal de Kalina. Bimi Ombale (Zaiko Langa Langa) and Ntesa Daliens (Les Grands Maquisards) were school teachers before becoming frontline singers, and a large number of the musicians playing with groups during the pre-New Wave in the late 1960s (Los Nickelos, Yeye National, Belguide) were students who played music after school and on the weekends. Musicians such as Reddy Amisi, Koffi Olomide and J.P. Busé (Zaiko Langa Langa) are often cited as special cases of musicians who have completed some post-secondary studies.

Tchebwa's periodization of four waves of Zairean music (1996: 154-171) suggests a process of professionalization of music over time, with musicians increasingly living solely from their work in music. But given the large number of musicians who never 'make it big'

---

<sup>3</sup>As I noted in the previous chapter, Gondola (1992; 1993) has argued that the majority of these early musicians came from relatively well-to-do families and had higher than average levels of education. A larger sample group is necessary to determine whether this is true for musicians of the period in general. Historical data suggests that during the colonial period those Congolese who worked as salaried employees were those most likely to benefit from the social/cultural programs of the colonial government and the various para-colonial institutions of the day (see ch. 2). Informal observations from my fieldwork in 1995-96 suggest that if there is any contemporary correlation between socio-economic status and the choice of music as a career, it would be that most people who choose music are from disadvantaged or even socially marginal socio-economic backgrounds (see ch. 5).

and a decaying local economy, this formulation cannot account for those that supplement their incomes with non-music related activity, or those that are forced to abandon music altogether in order to survive. In some cases, individuals in fields complementary to music (tailoring, comedy, theatre, dance, etc.) are able to mobilize the funds and networks necessary to organize musical groups of their own. This was the case with Aurlus Mabele (Loketo), a *soukouss* musician who started as a dancer,<sup>4</sup> the comedian Ngadio Ngadios (Chic Choc Loyenge) and Jo Ballard, the renowned *sapeur* from Brazzaville. General Defao himself first became known as a dancer, and several young dancer-singers would follow in his footsteps, the most well-known of which is Adolphe of Wenge Musica B.C.B.G.

Detailed stories from several well-known Congolese music figures illustrate the diversity of backgrounds among contemporary musicians. **Jean Serge Essous**, a Congolese (from Brazzaville) and one of the founding members of OK Jazz (1956) came from a family which was relatively well-off during Congo-Brazzaville's colonial period. His father was one of the bicycle-riding male nurses trained by the very selective French colonial administration.<sup>5</sup> Born in Mosendjo in 1935, he remembers the way that singing was used in French colonial classrooms, not only as a source of motivation, but also as a form of discipline. Grammar and history lessons were often put to song, and he still remembers the words to a tune that extolled the exploits of Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza, the 'founder' of modern Brazzaville. Although his parents were not particularly interested in music, Essous remembers being chosen in primary school as the class song leader because he had perfect pitch and because he was so skilled at memorizing the words and melodies of songs. At the age of 10, when he became actively involved in scouting, he continued his interest in music and began to play the penny whistle. In his years as a secondary student at the College Moderne de Dolisie he also participated in the school choir.

---

<sup>4</sup>Defao (Big Stars) is said to have been a dancer first and a singer only later. This is also the case with Adolphe of Wenge Musica BCBG.

<sup>5</sup>See Hunt (1994) for a fascinating description of the male missionary-based nurses in the Belgian Congo.

Upon returning from Dolisie in 1952, he was reunited with some of his old friends from primary school, among them Diaboua Maria Isidore, nicknamed “Lièvre Rusé” (‘trickster rabbit’). Together they formed their first group, Club des Jeunes, which would later become known as Negro Jazz. Although at first the group played for free in various bistros and bars in Brazzaville, they eventually were hired by the legendary Brazzaville man about town and music promoter, Monsieur Faignond. He offered them a contract for four shows per week at his now famous bar (“Chez Faignond”) and it was there that the young group was discovered by the leading musician of the day, Joseph Kabasele (Grand Kallé) [figure 6.1]. Kabasele arranged for the musicians to work, playing and recording music across the river in what was then Leopoldville, and this was the beginning of a long and illustrious career in music. Essous remembers the arrival of Kallé as one of the most exciting moments of his career. “We were so nervous, we thought we were going to be sick” (August 30, 1995).

Essous’s colleague and probably Zaire’s most well-known musical figure, **Luambo Makiadi** (Franco), came to music along a different path. Born in Sona Bata (Lower Congo) in 1938, Franco lost his father at the age of ten and along with his mother and siblings was forced to move away from the village ...

*Luambo leaves school in third grade and embraces the street. The street with its violence, its passion, its contradictions and its broken dreams. With a harmonica stuck to his lips, barefoot, and a wrap-around knotted around his neck, the young Luambo helps his mother on a daily basis to sell donuts in the Ngiri Ngiri market (today Bayaka), the family’s only source of income (Mundele quoted in Tchebwa 1996: 111).*

According to the same source, Franco decided at the ripe young age of ten that he wanted to be a musician, and in 1951 he joined Watama, the group of his neighborhood friend and senior colleague Dewayon. Many stories circulate about how he used to sneak in and steal Dewayon’s guitar while he was out, taking advantage of the time to practice as much as he could before the instrument’s owner returned at the end of the day (Tchebwa 1996: 112).



Fig. 6.1

fig. 6.1 Espace Faignond, 'temple du loisir'

Several years later, Franco was picked up by Henri Bowane, the sharp-dressed musician-manager who had a special talent for negotiating relations between the newly formed studio houses and the burgeoning pool of young talent in the capital (on Bowane, see Chapter 4). Through Bowane, Franco was introduced to Papa Dimitriou, owner of the Loningisa recording label, and it was there that he met the musicians with whom he would later form the legendary O.K. Jazz. During the Congo's transition to independence (1959-1960), many of the original members of O.K. Jazz were forced to return to their home country across the river in Brazzaville (among them Essous), but Franco remained as the undisputed leader of what would become a veritable musical dynasty (ch. 3).

One of the few musicians to seriously challenge the spell that Franco held over fans, **Tabu Ley** (Seigneur Rochereau) would eventually become Franco's greatest rival. Born in Bandundu in 1940, Rochereau was raised as an only child in a family that took its religious commitments very seriously. Like many other musicians, his family moved to Kinshasa only a matter of months after he was born, and it was there that he attended primary school and completed secondary school, earning his diploma in 1959. His parents had hoped that he would become a priest, but he had his sights set on a career in music, and not long after finishing school he was already playing on a professional basis. His early interest in music was fostered by the formal training he received in the Catholic schools he attended as a child, but he took his real inspiration from the popular music figures of the day, especially Wendo, Jhimmy de la Hawaïenne, and Kabasele (Lonoh 1969). By the age of 15, he was already performing in front of an audience and composing his own songs, some of which were passed along to be picked up by Kabasele himself. Michel Lonoh tells the story of Rochereau's first meeting with 'Grand Kallé':

The fated moment finally arrived. It was a true coincidence. Tabu Rochereau runs into Maître Kallé in a café, the café of Cassien in Kinshasa; the young fan introduces himself as the author of several songs in the African Jazz repertoire. Surprised, Kallé invites the neophyte to his house to learn more. It was the beginning of a friendship that would open up Tabu Ley's career as a professional musician (1969: 68).

In order to become a full-fledged member of African Jazz, however, Rochereau must prove himself as a performer, an opportunity he seizes with heroic style:

Once again, Kallé is alone on the microphone without co-singers. The bartenders threaten and insult African Jazz for having signed a contract. As the owners of the bar are concerned, the show must go on. This is when Kallé calls upon Tabu Ley. The young singer holds his own for the entire concert. Showered with flowers, the shouts of encouragement forced Rochereau to follow in the footsteps of his elders (ibid).

Rochereau's combination of talent and good timing will win him the favor of an adoring audience and in 1959 he is invited to join Kallé's African Jazz.

Born in Kisantu (Lower Congo) in 1944, **Kiamanguana Mateta** (Verckys or Vévé) grew up near Kisangani (northeastern Congo) where his family moved after the war, and where his father was a well-known tailor. As he acquired more money and assets, one of the investments his father made was to buy a bar. It was here that Verckys claims he acquired an interest in music, since there was a group of musicians that used to play at the bar on a regular basis. By the time his family returned to western Zaire (because of political unrest during the period leading up to independence), Verckys had already started playing the flute. When he arrived to Kinshasa, he was attending school on a regular basis and had started going to the Kimbangu church because he wanted to learn more about music. He started out playing the trumpet, but due to health problems and his small stature he decided to switch to the saxophone; "the trumpet takes more strength but less intelligence" (Dec. 29, 1995).

His father wanted him to go to Europe to continue his studies, but Verckys decided that he wanted to play music. At the age of 17, his father bought him a first car (certainly a rare occurrence), and gave him some small means with which he could start to do business activities of his own. Verckys apparently struggled at first to settle down with one group. He began with Johnny Bokelo's Conga Jazz, but soon after switched to playing with Kazembe's hotel cover band, Djambo Djambo. "They used to have to put me on a beer case, because I was too short for the audience to hear" (ibid). Although he was a good player at a very young age, he was actually turned away from O.K. Jazz the first time he approached the group for a



position in the band. It was not until two years later, in 1964, only when the Franco was passing through a bar where he was playing, that Verckys would be given an offer to play with Franco: "They were really surprised to see how I played now" (*ibid*).

These short life histories illustrate not only the diversity of backgrounds which are represented in the music industry, but also the importance of individual initiative in musicians' professional development. In the face of obstacles such as family and community disapproval, lack of sufficient financial resources, and stiff competition for a limited number of posts, the musicians that succeeded were those that had the right combination of talent and determination in order to get noticed by those who had already established control of the local music scene. But individual initiative was not enough. Invariably musicians were dependent upon support (financial and otherwise) from others in order to have access to instruments and training, and in order to be effectively recognized as a professional musician (see also ch. 8). Many musicians' self-reported life histories emphasize the presence of someone else (usually older) who acts as a catalyst for the musician to begin playing on a professional basis (Tabu Ley, Reddy Amisi ch. 5).<sup>6</sup>

Popular accounts of these success stories emphasize not only the individual's determination (Franco, Verckys), but also his good fortune, i.e. the 'chance meeting' with his idol which subsequently wins him a place in the band (Tabu Ley, Essous).<sup>7</sup> Another theme that emerges is the arrival to the urban metropolis of Kinshasa. The family of the musician moves to the capital soon after the musician's birth (Tabu Ley) or is for some other reason forced to relocate while he is still young (Franco, Verckys). In some cases, the musician comes to Kinshasa on his own as an adult (Essous, "La Vie Est Belle"). Finally, most accounts make some reference to the musician's education or lack thereof. Life in music is opposed to life in school, and even the capable student opts for the musician's lifestyle (Tabu Ley, Essous). The trajectories of women in music are different from men in that women are

---

<sup>6</sup>Also Vieux Bhole (ch. 3) and J.P. Busé. Compare these accounts with Bebey's story about a Baule man who was brought to music by revelations which occurred to him in his dreams (1975: 20).

<sup>7</sup>Lamy and Mwenze's (1986) "La Vie Est Belle", featuring Papa Wemba, follows a similar narrative.

not able to emerge as celebrities without the association of a male counterpart. It is true that many men also depend on already well-known bandleaders in order to make a name for themselves, but unlike with women, there are also examples where this is not the case.

## Women in Music

Women in Congolese music, in addition to being on the bottom of a male-dominated social hierarchy, have the additional disadvantage of being in a field in which they are greatly outnumbered by men.<sup>8</sup> Despite the fact that most accounts (RFI 1992; Tchebwa 1996) make reference to a tradition of famous female singers in Congo-Zairean popular music (Lucie Eyenga, Abeti Maskini, Mbilia Bel, Mpongo Love, Tshala Mwana, Déesse Mukangi and Abby Surya among others), the number of female artists compared to male artists has always been relatively small.<sup>9</sup> In most cases, their stories are blended in with similar stories told about male artists (Bemba 1984; Ewens 1990) and apart from predictably gendered descriptions of singing style or physical appearance, these accounts tell us little about the particularities of being a woman and a musician:

---

<sup>8</sup>Relatively little has been written on gender and society in Congo-Zaire. Some references to the role of women in the colonial period can be found in Balandier (1955) for Brazzaville and in Comhaire-Sylvain (1950, 1968) for Kinshasa. Later literature discussing 'les femmes libres' of Kinshasa, such as Lafontaine (1974) or Little (1973) is interesting although perhaps less representative of gender or gender relations on the whole. Work done more recently, especially a voluminous list of publications by Brooke Schoepf (see particularly 1991; 1988) and the work of Janet MacGaffey (1987; 1988; 1991) has begun to call attention to the strategies used by women to work around the power of men and male-based institutions. The work of Nancy Rose Hunt, mostly concerned with Belgium's colonies in Central Africa, has looked among other things at the historiography of African women (1989), the politics of domesticity and the domestic sphere (1990) and colonial policy toward unmarried urban women (1991).

<sup>9</sup>Although Tchebwa devotes several pages to women's contributions to popular music, his discussion seems to conflate the contribution of women artists with the inspiration that women have provided for male composers. The RFI collection makes a similar oversight: despite the fact that it devoted one of its four CDs to the 'reines de la rumba', only half of the songs on CD #3 feature female singers or composers. Women artists figure prominently in local music and entertainment magazines (see for example *Ndule* number 1, January 1995), although their presence is often blended in with the recurring motifs of fashion and glamor.

"Les femmes africaines ... possèdent un coffre pour faire sonner leurs voix et sont capables de réchauffer le plus transi des glaçons. Qu'elles se nomment *Abeti*, *Tshala Mwana*, *Mbilial Bel*, *Mpongo Love*..., les chanteuses zairoises savent swinguer et rendre rapidement communicatif le mouvement de leurs hanches" (1996: 152).<sup>10</sup>

Despite the fact that some women become known as independent artists, popular discourse about female musicians tends to couple them with important male musicians who 'discovered' or 'took them in' ('découvrir', 'encadrer'): Mbilial Bel with Tabu Ley (and later Rigo Starr), Mpongo Love with Empompo Loway, Tshala Mwana with Suzy Kassey, etc.<sup>11</sup> Even all-female bands, such as Emancipation and Taz Bolingo, are rarely discussed without some mention of their male organizers or mentors. Female stars often begin as dancers (Tshala Mwana, Yondo Sister) or back-up singers (Mbilial Bel, Déesse Mukangi) behind male front men and some end up as artists in their own right, although in many cases their repertoire consists of material composed by male singer-songwriters.<sup>12</sup> In the early years of studio work women seemed to have considerable freedom with regards to singing their own material (Lucie Eyenga, Mbombo Anne, Ndaye Albertine, see RFI 1992), perhaps partly because their male counterparts were also subordinates in the foreign-owned studio houses and presumably had limited control over women's creative labor.<sup>13</sup>

This is not the case with most emerging female stars in the 1970s and 1980s, who always seem to have a musical strongman behind or beside them. However, as some female artists progress in their career, they gradually take more control over the creative aspects of their

---

<sup>10</sup>African women have a true chest to make their voices heard and they are capable of heating up even the most frozen piece of ice. Whether they are called *Abeti*, *Tshala Mwana*, *Mbilial Bel*, *Mpongo Love*..., Zairean female vocalists know how to swing and how to communicate with the motion of their hips (my translation).

<sup>11</sup>Tchebwa lists about forty female singers over the last 50 years (1996: 150-51). The table he has constructed for this purpose has four column headings: 'année' (year), 'chanteuse' (singer), 'oeuvres célèbres' (hit songs), and 'encadreur' (male mentor).

<sup>12</sup>The March 1995 edition of *N'dule Magazine* includes an interview with Abby Surya in which she explains a personal conflict with Dino Vangu, from whom she claims to have bought the rights for several songs which would appear on her first solo album (*N'Dofumu* 1995: 58).

<sup>13</sup>According to Tchebwa's table, this early period (the 1950s) has a larger number of prominent female singers than any other period (1950s: 15, 1960s: 6, 1970s: 12, 1980s: 11, 1990s: 7). The decrease in the number of prominent female artists over recent decades suggests a trend toward the consolidation of male power in the music industry since independence.

work.<sup>14</sup> Some female artists, such as Mbilia Bel, operate their own production companies and in Chapter Four I have given examples of women working in the field of promotions. Many female vocalists work as independent singers (Déesse Mukangi, Abby Surya), hiring out their services to musicians or groups for studio recording or tours, while others become permanent members of groups, usually taking a place in the front line of singers (the first formation of the Big Stars, Emeneya's Victoria, Wenge El Paris, Bana O.K. and Bozi Boziana's Anti-Choc are the most well-known examples). Bozi Boziana's case is an interesting one since he has trained a number of female vocalists and usually performs with a front line of singers that is all-female. Some female vocalists lead musical groups of their own (Mimi Ciel, Mbilia Bel), but more information is needed in order to be able to say anything about how the structure or management style of these groups compares with bands led by men.

As this discussion suggests, women in Congolese popular music have occupied all the roles that men have (composer, arranger, vocalist, instrumentalist, promoter, etc.), but since the mid to late 1980s most women working in the music industry have been employed as dancers [figure 6.2]. Although some women have become well-known in their own right (see Mayor in *Ndule* #3, 1996), dancers are generally considered to be expendable (or easily replaced) and this has led to high rates of turnover and poor working conditions for most women. Examining relations between male musicians and female dancers may provide insight into relations of power between men and women in the society as a whole. In the following chapter, I will look in greater detail at what happens to musicians (male and female) after they have become integrated into groups and begin working as professional artists. But first I will discuss my own trajectory as a musician in 1990s Kinshasa.

---

<sup>14</sup>Mbilia Bel's hugely successful 1988 album "Phénomène" features six songs, all but one of which are written and sung by Mbilia Bel. One song was co-written with her husband and arranger, Rigo Starr. A young female vocalist by the name of Scola Miel publicly declared having broken a touring contract with Koffi Olomide because "On voulait me limiter au rôle de danseuse. J'ai préféré partir" ('They wanted to limit me to being a dancer. I wasn't going to stick around', *Ndule* magazine, 1995: 34).



Fig. 6.2.

fig. 6.2 Most women in music are dancers

## Learning to Play

Foreign (white) musicians have a long history in Zairean music (Tchebwa 1996). The first whites were influential in early studio recordings, especially with wind and brass instruments (Fud Candrix on saxophone and clarinet; Gilbert Warmant on solovox), guitar (Bill Alexandre), organ & piano (René Pilaeis, John Werk) and especially as sound engineers and protocol managers (Charlie Hénault). In the years leading up to independence, and especially after independence, white musicians become less common in Congolese ensembles, although there are some examples from the 1980s (especially in Wemba's *Viva La Musica* and Boketchu Premier's *Swede Swede*, both of whom have used white dancers in their acts). Apart from those that participate as dancers, most white musicians have played imported instruments or instruments that are assumed to be technologically 'more sophisticated', especially keyboards and guitars. This phenomenon, I expect, is due not only to the shortage of local expertise on particular instruments, but also to the local perception that particular instruments require formal musical training and greater familiarity with 'modern' technology. Given that I had played the guitar since the age of 13, and given the prominent role of the electric guitar in Congolese popular music, I assumed that if I played with a local band, I should play the guitar.

After a long, careful period of reflection about what band would be the most amenable to my presence as a foreign researcher, I finally decided to approach General Defao, the founder and leader of the Big Stars. Not only was his group relatively well-known, but it had a reputation for being less unruly than some other bands, and I thought this would facilitate my research. One evening after a few beers and a few failed attempts to locate the person we had planned to meet, my Swiss friend (John Grinling) and I decided to 'drop in on Defao' unannounced. This was John's favorite way of approaching people, and I think he was tired of me fretting over '*la décision du groupe*'. We get in the car and drive in a direction that John vaguely remembers, somewhere in Ngiri Ngiri near the edge of Bandal, over a footbridge,

past a moat. He asks one person for directions, and we seem to be going the right way. The second person we ask points to a clean white building on the corner. We get out of the car and approach someone sitting in front of the building. "Is Defao here?" "Yes," person number three answers. He takes us around to the main entrance to a hotel. "This is a hotel, isn't it?" Person number three stops at the door, holding it open for us. "He lives in the back". Through the first door, past the reception desk, we ask person number four "Is Defao here?" He answers yes and points us in the direction we are already headed. After a complicated series of twists and turns, we arrive at what looks like a dead end. Out of the door in front of us comes person number five. "Is Defao here?" He takes longer to respond than the rest, fidgeting a bit and then answering with a question "Who is it?" Without hesitating, John replies: "Monsieur John." "One moment, please." He goes in quietly, comes out again a few moments later, closes the door behind him and says, "You can go in now."

Past person number five and there we are, face to face with General Defao, in what seemed to be a living room, although it was hard to tell for sure since the furniture was covered with piles and piles of clothes, all of which were new, some still in their packages. There was barely a place to sit down so we stayed standing up. Defao was very pleasant. He was wearing black and a Chicago White Sox baseball cap, just like in the video I had seen in Montréal. He said he just got back from a year in Paris where he did enough material for three albums and produced two. He also returned with some clothes. In between our awkward, broken bits of conversation, he was talking to the other two men in the room about what items they would take, though I'm not sure if they were buying items or choosing what would be their gift. It was very strange, the three of us standing there: Defao with a big smile on his face, not sure why we were there. John was a bit nervous. He introduced me as his friend: "This is Bob, he's a musician." Defao started talking about their practice time and I asked if I could come the next day. "Pas de problème" Defao said, smiling with a slight underbite and nodding his head.

That week I attended several practices, and before the week was up I received a special invitation from the administrator and lead guitarist of the band, Chef Maneko, who was interested to know what had brought me to Zaire. I told him I was a musician:

*Really? What instrument do you play? He asked.*

*Guitar. I said.*

*Ah, bon? His face lit up.*

*Do you play? I asked, since I did not see him on stage that day.*

*Yes, well, I'm the lead guitarist. Changing the subject: Hey, do you know any blues?*

*Sure, blues, rock, you know, the basic American stuff. I notice a distracted look on his face; I think he wants me to teach him some blues riffs. He sees Montana on his way out, and grabs him before he can leave.*

*Président, this is Monsieur Bob, he's a guitarist.*

*Alright, well this is our chef, the lead guitarist, you can practice a few songs with him and then come play with us. I cannot believe what he just said. I try to keep my cool.*

*Hey, that would be great, I said. I didn't even have to audition. This, I told myself, was the beginning of a long and fruitful collaboration.*

In our first meeting, I explained my research and expressed interest in joining the band, and almost immediately he began talking about setting up a regular training schedule.

Chef Maneko felt very strongly that I should start by learning the rhythm guitar (fr. "accompagnement"), *because that's the base of the music*. he used to say. *There are too many people who think it's really cool to play lead guitar so they go straight to lead, but they never learn the really important stuff like the names of chords or the structure of a song.* At my first training session, Maneko sat me down under a little thatched-roof structure next to his house which served as a kitchen and a hair salon in addition to being a practice space. The first song we started working on was not difficult *per se*, but I became quickly frustrated because there was a small group of onlookers forming around us and I was not at all accustomed to being watched when I practice, especially during the initial phases. On the other hand, I imagine that they were not accustomed to seeing their friend Maneko giving lessons to white musicians, and so they stayed. It was very disconcerting, but I decided that in this case it was my responsibility to adapt. When I finally got past the initial discomfort of being watched doing something I did very poorly, I was able to assimilate a few phrases and begin learning the structure of the song. But my concentration was broken again by interventions from the small crowd that had formed around where I was practicing. From my notes:



There's nothing worse than when you're trying to make your fingers memorize a part and there are a bunch of non-musicians sitting around thinking they're helping you by singing the notes you're looking for (Oct 31, 1995).

Even before the end of this first practice session I understood that this style of guitar playing was substantially different from anything I had ever encountered. On the surface the Congolese guitar playing appears relatively simple because the number of chord changes within any given song is somewhat limited (song patterns such as I/IV/V or I/IV/I/V are the most common). But the elaborate ways in which these chords are exploited (arpeggios, variations and polyrhythmic accents) make playing rhythm guitar in the Congo extremely difficult. In a typical popular song, there may be no more than three or four basic chords throughout the entire piece, but the number of *chord variations* (same chord in a different position or on a different part of the neck) can be anywhere from three to five times that number. In addition, each variation has its own particular set of rhythmic accents, which often runs counter or is complementary to the melody and the parts being played by the other guitars. What I was faced with was the mystical, almost mythical *African polyrhythmic* that I had read so much about (Chernoff 1979; Merriam 1982), and that I thought I was escaping by playing the guitar instead of the drums.

Polyrhythmic elements, which to me seemed the most difficult obstacle to overcome, were generally taken for granted in this setting. The complex set of rhythmic guitar strokes, usually referred to simply as 'battement' ('beating'), were often overlooked in my various teachers' explanations of what I was doing wrong. Instead, their comments usually had something to do with speed at which I was playing, the hand position, or inevitable 'missed notes'. When it became obvious that I was being held up by the 'battement' and not by the notes themselves, the person working with me would almost invariably take the guitar and try to show me by example (as opposed to trying to correct what I was doing through verbal explanation). This rarely worked, however, since the basic problem was one of comprehension: I simply was not hearing the rhythmic pattern which he was playing for me.

In other words, trying to learn the guitar was very difficult, not only for technical reasons but also for social ones. I had hoped that I would be able to work closely with one of the band's numerous guitarists (six in all!), but every time I arrived to practice, either the guitarist had 'stepped out' or he was sleeping. It was not until much later that I realized that the reason it was so hard to learn guitar with them was probably because I never paid them any money. Most of the musicians were working for a monthly salary that amounted to little more than a symbolic gesture and was certainly not enough to pay their living expenses (see ch. 8), but they were afraid to leave. So what did they do? They 'stepped out' and they slept. Why should they do extracurricular training for someone imposed on them from their leader, when they were barely even paid for their work as performers?

Maneko put no pressure on me to learn quickly. In fact, he seemed more concerned that I follow a certain progression of steps and take the time to get each one right. In my case, pressure was usually self-imposed. One day he heard me in the practice room working on a solo part I had taught myself the night before. He came in later, sat down next to me and said, *Monsieur Bob, you're a guitarist with the Big Stars and as a guitarist I have to say that I think you should take things one step at a time*, suggesting that by working on lead parts I was not following the proper order of learning.<sup>15</sup> *You're right. I was just kind of playing around*, I said somewhat nervously. My forays into this forbidden territory were partly a function of the frustration I was feeling with my slow progress on the rhythm guitar. There was very rarely someone with whom I could practice and it was especially rare to be able to practice with a singer. Furthermore, it took me almost three weeks to learn my first song, an inordinate amount of time compared to the one - two hours it usually takes me to master a song in my own musical culture.<sup>16</sup> To learn this guitar was very difficult, almost a full-time job. I used to

---

<sup>15</sup>Lokassa ya Mbongo tells a similar story when, during his training under Dechaud, he inadvertently stumbled upon a minor chord and attempted to integrate it into his composition. "One day I touched an A minor by accident. He looked at me and said who told you to touch an A minor? Who said you had the right to touch that chord? From then on I only played minor chords when I was alone." (June 30, 1997)

<sup>16</sup>By 'musical culture' I am referring to the unique complex of musical structures and feelings which vary from person to person but, which are determined by the realm of musical possibilities in any given time and place. Individual musical tastes and listening practices vary according to personal desire and social milieu, but they are always conditioned by the larger, impersonal forces of cultural industries. With the emergence of 'world

watch Vieux Ladi and Maneko in practice and on stage, overwhelmed by the seemingly endless number of fingerings and positions they mastered, thinking to myself: "No wonder Maneko barely moves on stage. No wonder you rarely see a guitarist who is also a singer. No wonder guitarists don't dance; this guitar requires a high degree of concentration." After some time, my frustration with my lack of progress began to take its toll.

The first time I performed in public was during one of our weekly open rehearsals (see ch. 7). I was very disappointed with my performance (despite a positive response from the crowd) and decided that I would have to do better next time. 'Next time' did not come for a while (almost three weeks), and when it finally did I was much more prepared and somewhat more confident than the first time. This time it was a real concert setting, and I played for the entire length of a 20-25 minute song. At first there was something reassuring about being part of the rhythm section, what musicians refer to as 'the defense'. But I also felt removed. My movement was limited, and I envied the *animateur* whose movement punctuated the stage as his voice did the music. Standing only a few feet behind the dance line, I felt weighed down by my guitar. I was closer than I had ever been to the force of Zairean dance music and the guitar was the only thing in my way [figure 6.3, 6.4].

### ***Mundele Atalaku***

It wasn't long after that I decided to sit down with Chef Maneko and tell him that I was giving up the guitar. I wasn't sure how he would take it, but I knew that if I continued to struggle with the guitar that I would never have enough time to learn what I wanted to learn about the social and cultural aspects of popular music. I needed to play an instrument whose

---

music', these ways of listening are changed, but in many ways they remain the same (Erlmann 1996b). My own musical culture is conditioned by the overpowering North American pop music industry (Top 40 radio, MTV, Rock 'n' Roll, etc.), but complemented with personalized forays into 'alternative' forms which often end up becoming 'mainstream' (AOR, 1980s New Wave, Hip Hop). My subjective position with regards to music and musical culture is also influenced by the fact that I not only listen to music, but also participate in its production.



fig. 6.3 Doing research? Jotting down notes over a beer

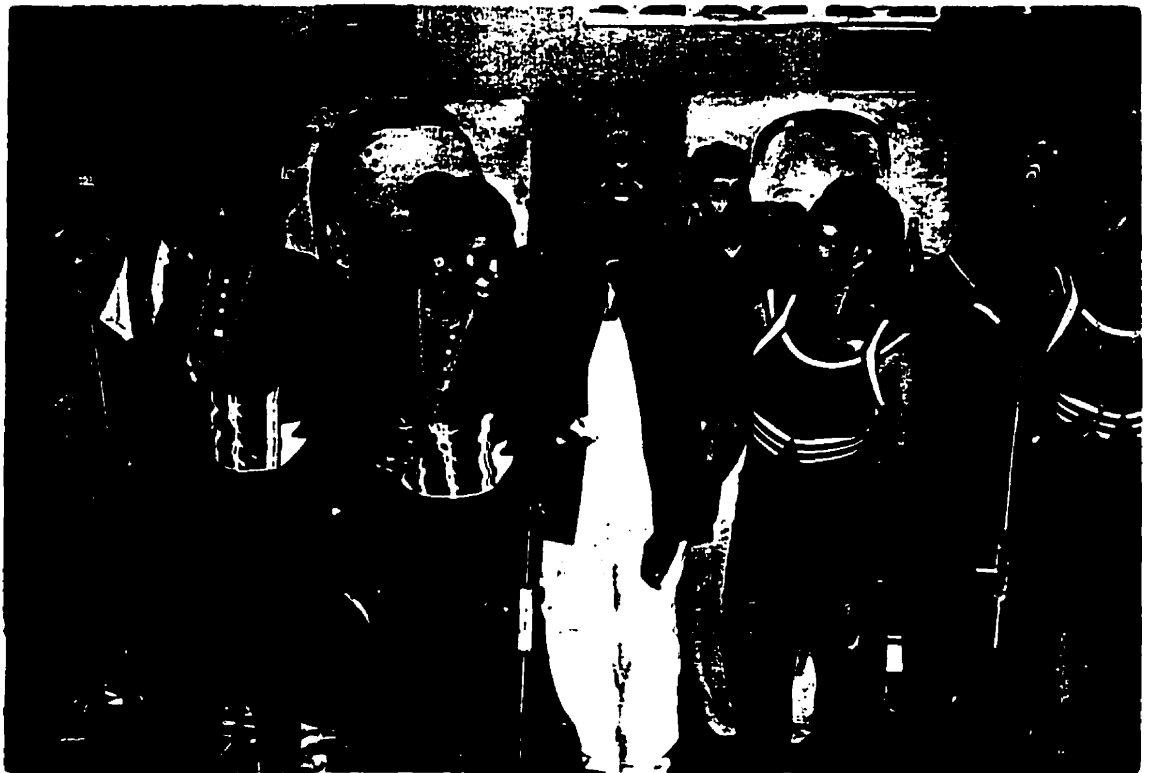


fig. 6.4 Doing research? Lost in the back line

mechanics were simple enough to allow me to focus on the mechanics of other things, primarily the interaction between musicians, and between musicians and the rest of society. The instrument that would allow me to do this was the insecticide spraycan maracas [see figure 0.1].<sup>17</sup> When I broke the news to him he seemed almost excited. I think that he too felt my training as a guitarist was not going as well as we had hoped and my intention to become an *animateur* seemed to strike him with a sense of relief.

Immediately we started talking about the advantages of being an *animateur*. Maneko thought that my experience as a guitarist would give me a considerable advantage, since, as someone who was already familiar with notes and scales, I would be less likely to sing or shout out of key. He also suggested that my presence as an *animateur*, a more visible presence than that of guitarist, would attract more people to concerts, especially because I would become the first non-Congolese to take on such a role. I countered his points by commenting on my impression that the *animateur* does not get the same respect as singers or guitarists. *Animateurs* rarely figure prominently in music videos and concert footage, and despite the fact that most people are familiar with their creations, very few of them are recognized as singers or artists (White 1998b). They represent a paradox because their shouts are an integral part of the expansion of commercial dance music in an urban setting, but they are usually associated with traditional musical styles or 'folklore' (ch. 10). Because of this association and because they often come from very modest backgrounds, they are often stigmatized within band hierarchies. "You have to admit they do strange things on stage," I said, "and it just doesn't seem like people take them seriously." Maneko nods his head in agreement. "Yes, yes, but now we realize that it's not their fault, they're just taken by the moment" [pris par l'extase] (c.f. Nkashama 1979; Bemba 1984: 59). I told him I had made plans to meet with a well-known (then unemployed) *animateur* who lived close to my house and that we had plans to start right away.

---

<sup>17</sup>Berliner's (1978) discussion of maracas or *hosho* players in Zimbabwe calls attention to the fact that people without any specialized knowledge can play this instrument informally, but for those that play with professional *mbira* ensembles, it is an instrument which requires special skills and training.

### *Scoop and Shake*

As planned, Béb  and I met at my place on Saturday. He was so punctual that I wasn't at all ready when he arrived, and this caught me somewhat off guard. He would always arrive when he said he would and I was very encouraged, in this land of broken digital watches and 'my taxi got a flat' excuses, that he could be so reliable. On our first day he had brought his personal maracas so that we could start working. Unfortunately, there was no electricity that day, so it meant that we would have to practice without music. He showed me the first rhythm that I would have to learn and I played it on my leg until I had it close enough to try it on the maracas. I remember the strange metallic feeling of the instrument. It resonated so strongly that I was a bit embarrassed to play it, for fear that it would attract too much attention in the compound where I was living. It was made out of an emptied pesticide spraycan--preferably Mobil, but Raid and Kilit! will also do--with several lines of perforations which serve as sound holes, and a triangular cut in the bottom of the can for inserting the hardened red seeds. B    had already prepared a can for me, but he didn't have any seeds. He explained eagerly: *We have to look for the seeds. The seeds are the most important part. If you don't get the right ones it won't sound right. But it's okay, I know a few places where we can find them.*

The day that we went to collect the seeds, we were strolling in one of Kinshasa's rich neighborhoods and B    played upon his status as Zaiko Langa Langa's first *animateur* to convince the military guards sitting at the bottom of the tree with red seeds that they should let us collect some for my research. We gave them a little tip, and B    made them laugh by telling them that I was his student and that I wanted to become an *animateur*. Suddenly they were very friendly with us. They even pointed to us a place down the road where an old man was already in the process of collecting red seeds and when we arrived, sure enough, he had a pile of shucked red seeds about four feet wide by three feet high. He was so taken aback by

our excited reaction that he let us walk away with a milk carton full of red seeds and he didn't even ask for anything in return. We gave him a couple of small bills anyway, took a picture [figure 6.5] and (very proud of ourselves) started back on our way home. Bébé inspired confidence in me because of the ease that he had in talking with complete strangers, and because of the commitment he had not only to his work, but also to mine. The next time we met we would be able to practice with electricity and two fully functional maracas .

Throughout this process, my friend John remained very skeptical. He was of the opinion that training of this type does not really exist. *People just learn by watching*, he said. And for the most part he was right.<sup>18</sup> Formal training for the position of *animateur* was hard to imagine because most people were busy trying to learn the art of singing or guitar playing. But in the Congo, "tout est possible" as people often say. And so Bébé and I began my training without stopping to analyze. We would get together three or four times a week, start with loud music and two large, cold beers and when the mood hit us we would begin. I would put on an old Zaïko cassette and Bébé would stand up and start playing. It was better, I learned, to practice at my place than at the place where the band practiced (as I did when I was trying to learn the guitar). Although we were surrounded by the comings and goings of the other people in the compound, it was invariably less distracting than being caught up in the spectacle of the musicians' practice space. We worked first on the rhythm from the 'words part', which was very straightforward and basically the same for most songs. For the 'dance part' he made me listen to two rhythms, "numéro un" and "numéro deux".<sup>19</sup> Number one was relatively easy, but it was number two that sounded so typical of Zaïrean dance music and it was number two that was difficult to master. [audio cue 5.1 and 5.2] From my notes:

---

<sup>18</sup>In Berliner's account from Zimbabwe, students of *mbira* learn primarily from spirits via dreams or through a process he refers to as 'indirect teaching'. But they also learn by 'pinching' knowledge from observing more experienced musicians (1978: 132). Although Berliner describes relatively formalized master-apprentice relationships, this kind of indirect learning was very common in his account. In some instances the teacher would leave the student completely on his own and return to see if in that time the student was able to assimilate the new pieces or techniques (ibid: 142). This approach was also used by Maneko during my first few sessions with him on the guitar.

<sup>19</sup>This footnote will include notations of the three rhythms.



Fig. 6.5

fig. 6.5 Paydirt under the red seed tree



It [rhythm #2] comes and goes and it's hard on my arms. But like with the guitar I have to learn to play with my wrist, must do the 'scoop' and the 'shake' with my wrist. Sometimes I get it for two or three complete cycles and Béb  makes that look on his face: smiling, head slightly cocked to the side, hands open in a position of prayer, and he holds it there. I think this means that I've got it. I think I've got it. I've got it ... and then it's gone (Feb 21, 1996).<sup>20</sup>

B    was an excellent teacher. He would let me play more than he does so that I could practice, and so that he could monitor my progress. He was very patient, but he let me know when I was playing incorrectly: *Playing this instrument is very difficult, Monsieur Bob. There are very few animateurs who are able to play like me. Most of these young guys, they don't know a maracas from a microphone. But what they don't understand is that you can't be a real animateur if you haven't mastered this instrument. It's very important.* I would take a break, sitting down in my chair to think about what I was doing. It was hot and I was expending a lot of energy. Then I would watch B    playing. He was so natural, his movement was fluid and his look of concentration could have been easily mistaken for the look of a man in trance. This was food for his soul. When I couldn't take it anymore, I would try to join in and I was unable to get the rhythm. He would egg me on, continuing to play and I would get it back for a matter of 30-45 seconds. It was so fleeting; I didn't see how I would ever be able to generate this rhythm at will, especially in front of a crowd of screaming people.

We would stop and B    would have me do some exercises. He tried to get me to play with only one hand. Impossible. He had me play with a women's prayer maracas and the difference was amazing. *Now this is easy*, I thought. Back to the insecticide maracas. *Easier than before, but still difficult. Try the matches.* I tried, but nothing resembling number two would come from the small box of Leopard brand matchsticks. *No way*, I said, feeling somewhat silly trying to make this rhythm with a box of matches. *Try the insecticide. Try the prayer. Try the Leopard.* He was firing the different instruments at me one after another,

---

<sup>20</sup>From Chernoff's apprenticeship as a drummer: "Your wrist," he told me, "is not as smart as mine, and that is because you have grown up now and your bones are stretched and strong. I have been learning to beat drums from childhood up to this time, and that is why your wrist can't be following mine all the time." I needed what he called a 'cat's hand'. "Did you ever see a cat catch a mouse?" he asked. He waved his hand in front of me. "You see," he said, "very flexible." (1979: 16).

never giving me enough time to get comfortable with any one. *Prayer. Leopard. Insecticide. Prayer. Leopard. Insecticide.* Something about completely unsettling my level of comfort and the feel of these objects in my hands made me more sensitive to the motion I was supposed to be reproducing [see figure 6.6, 6.7]. It was not clear to me if Béb  was doing this on purpose, but it seemed to be working. The last time I picked up the insecticide maracas I went off into an extended long play of at least three minutes which I myself was not able to believe. When I finally lost the rhythm, I threw the maracas on the across the room and burst out in laughter. B b  was so happy that he turned down the music and started to tell me how close I came: *There's very few animateurs who can play like that. You can't be a real animateur if you don't master this instrument. That was great!*

For about two or three weeks we worked rather intensively. Every once in a while we would go out for a beer at night. In the end, I agreed to give him money for his daughter's school fees. And I also agreed to give him money to fix his refrigerator. And I also agreed to give him money for an old friend's funeral. And almost every time we met to work, I agreed to give him 'a little something' for his time. And his taxi money since he couldn't be seen walking (he was after all a star and he had to think about his image). And a beer for his wife so that she would know that he was in fact with me and not with another woman. This seemed to be an important part of our relationship, but I put up with it because B b  was so dependable and such a pleasure to work with. Since his band had not played or practiced in a long time, this meant that he was both more available and more in need of cash than the other professionals I could have worked with. After I learned the fundamentals of the maracas (we spent almost no time on shouts or singing), then I had plans to start working with the *animateur* from the Big Stars so that I would learn the particular shouts from our band and learn them in the particular way that they are performed. Although we remained on friendly terms, I think some tension resulted from the fact that I saw our training period as a finite learning contract, while he tended to view it as an ongoing 'sponsored' relationship in which I made regular contributions to supplement his very irregular income.

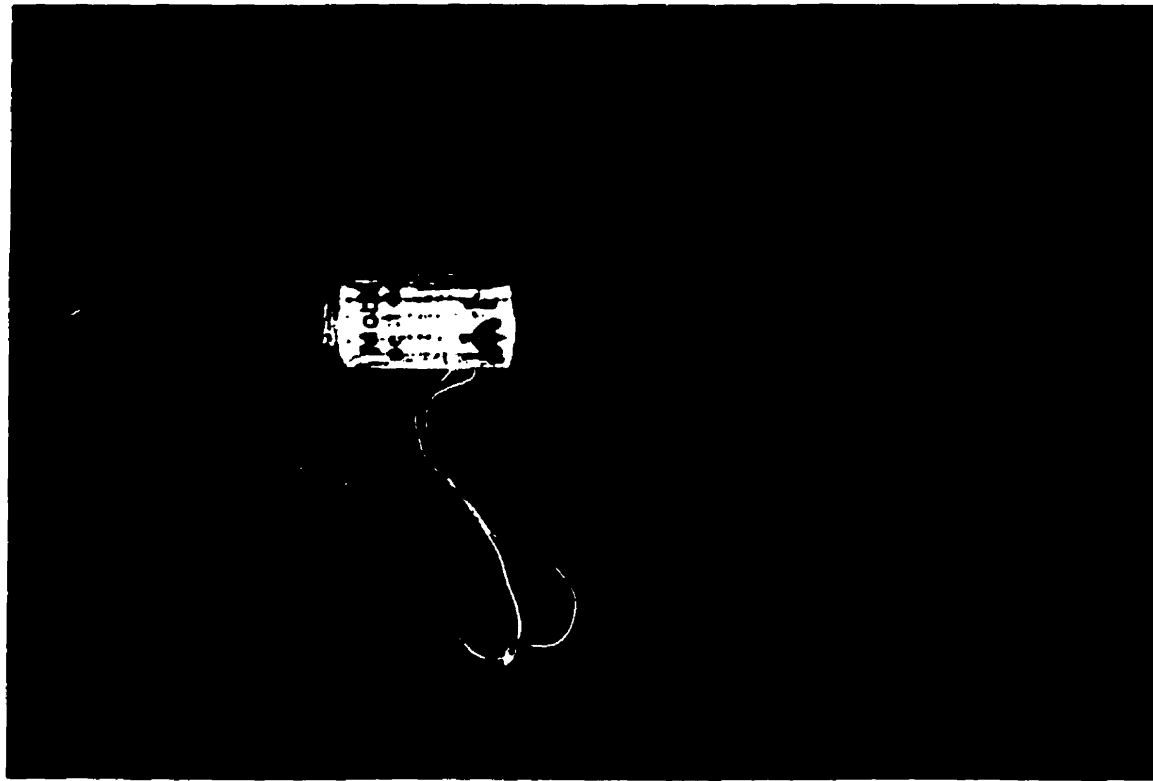


fig. 6.6 Different shakers stand for different genres ('religieuse', 'folklore', and 'moderne')



fig. 6.7 "If you can play a matchbox, you can play anything" (Bébé Atalaku)

### *I'll Be Ready on Tuesday*

Originally I didn't think I would need to have two teachers. It seemed like a good idea to go to someone like Béb  who had a lot of experience, was available, and was generally cited as one of the first people to play as a professional *atalaku*. But as time went on, I began to realize how important it was to learn the skills of *animation* in context. Near the end of my maracas training with B   , we started to work superficially on some other aspects of what I would need to know (shouts, singing and dancing), but everything he showed me sounded like Zaiko Langa Langa, the band where he had made his name. This should not have surprised me, but I knew it meant that if I wanted to be able to continue with the Big Stars, I would have to continue my training from within the band.

This is where Lidjo came in. Lidjo was the senior of three *atalakus* currently working in the Big Stars and was one of the few members that was a part of the original formation of the band in the early 1990s. He had a large head with a gaunt, faraway look that made him seem very severe. The sometimes outrageous color and pattern combinations he wore suggested a latent sense of humor that was never allowed past a very serious expression. Lidjo was the kind of person who made you wonder what he was thinking. To my surprise, he wasn't very good at playing maracas and when I showed him what I had learned with B   , his reaction was somewhere between curiosity, awe and embarrassment. In the end it did not matter; this just meant we could concentrate our efforts on the shouts and dancesteps, aspects with which Lidjo felt very comfortable.

I knew that I was working with a special character when after missing our first rendez-vous (at his house, so he would not miss it), he showed up at my place (all the way on the other side of town) a matter of minutes after I arrived there myself. There were no stories about why he was not there to meet me, or how he had rushed to make it in time. He just showed up at my place with an expression that seemed to suggest that he was ready to start

working. With Bébé, I had started keeping a workbook for such things. As soon as he sat down, we started correcting some of the shouts I had tried to write on my own. Now that he was here, I made generous use of liquid paper, blowing, whisking and dipping again, and I carefully modified incorrect words with a mechanical pencil, highlighting the result with a fat yellow fluorescent marker.<sup>21</sup> Lidjo waited patiently for the liquid paper to dry, sometimes jiggling one leg, sometimes looking around my one-room studio which probably did not fit his image of 'chez Monsieur Bob'.

Seated next to each other on a small couch, we started to go through the shouts in my book one by one. At first it was a bit awkward. Lidjo was not accustomed to reciting his shouts in isolation, although he did not seem to flinch when I first asked him to record his shouts on tape so I could listen to them and practice alone [audio cue 6]. To facilitate practice I began demarcating the rhythm with a hand clap or by patting on my leg, and before long we were flipping through my notebook, jumping around from page to page so that the shouts would occur in a more or less random order. Invariably, listening to Lidjo sing the shout would make me aware of imperfections in my notation system and I would ask him to continue while the liquid paper dried. Then, after listening to him for twenty or so minutes, he told me sing a few. I picked the ones I knew best, and not long after I started singing, his face lit up. His indifferent expression was taken over by a giddy, happy laughter and Lidjo stood up to turn and face me, yelling "Missya Bob!" and offering me a high five. He laughed and worked his faded baggy red jeans up past his belly button, a nervous tick which many musicians had (ch. 5). I don't think it was because my shouts were good; in fact given my limited experience they probably were not good. Rather it was the novelty of seeing a white foreigner singing and shouting the phrases that many Congolese themselves could not (or did not want to) imitate or understand.<sup>22</sup> At the end of a later session, for just a few moments, Lidjo closed his

---

<sup>21</sup>Seeing this on paper was maybe not as foreign to him as I initially thought. As I was to learn later, most *animateurs* jot down ideas or shouts on little bits of paper that they keep in their pockets.

<sup>22</sup>Compare with Stoller's (1995) discussion of 'second contact', in which members of one culture recognize themselves in the expressive practices of another culture. Also on mimesis see Taussig (1993) and Kramer (1993).

eyes to listen to one of my shouts. Just like Béb  in the weeks before, he let himself be carried away by what must have seemed like a strangely familiar unfamiliar sound [audio cue 7]:

*Mama tala Makiese, mama yuma yusile  
Mama tala Makiese yeh yeh, mama yuma yusile  
Mai mayema, sango eh mame, pore eh,  
Sango eh mai mayema, pore eh...*<sup>23</sup>

After Lidjo was sure I had mastered the shout, he would start to sing along with me, a teaching technique I found to be very useful since it gave me the time to assimilate the shout without being constantly corrected. When the harmony was particularly sweet, we would stand up next to each other, facing the audience (my couch) and would shake our open hands in the way that singers often do when they perform (ch. 5). A number of people would later tell me that my shouts had a special unexplainable quality (“ils ont quelque chose de sp cial”), something ‘not Zairean’ that they couldn’t put their finger on, but something they very much liked. Reactions of this type usually came when I expressed my disappointment with the elements in my shouts which kept me from sounding ‘really Zairean’.<sup>24</sup> People said that the imperfections were what made my shouts good; they were different, unique. They were probably also intrigued by the fact that a singer/guitarist would become an *atalaku*, something suprising since most *atalaku* express secret desires to be singers, although the reverse is not true.

We continued to practice like this a few days a week for three or four weeks, eventually accumulating more than twenty pages of shouts and almost, but not completely, exhausting the formal *animation* repertoire of the Big Stars. Lidjo said there were a few I performed particularly well, so I felt that I had learned the pieces enough to start putting them

---

<sup>23</sup>Shout by Edi Gar of Maki Jazz, popularized by Djuna Mumbafu of Empire Bakuba. This is a Kumbu shout singing the praises of the band’s female founder, pleading her to take care of her ‘children’, i.e. the members of the band. Shouts often take the stance of pleading for moral or material support from group’s sponsors (ch. 9).

<sup>24</sup>Although I made a conscious effort to sound ‘Zairean’, comments of this sort were also intended to stimulate discussion about local notions of identity and the authenticity implied in expressions such as ‘vraiment Zairois’ ‘typiquement Kinois’ (Steiner 1994).

into context. Very gradually, at first without my noticing, Lidjo had been getting me used to putting series of shouts together (fr. 'enchaîner'), but we usually never got past two or three before repeating, and as far as I could tell they were not in any particular order. When I prepared myself to ask Lidjo the difficult question of how he decided what shouts to put where in a performance situation, I was secretly worried that this was some kind of 'secret knowledge' which only he and the other professional *atalaku* possessed. To my surprise, however, the answer was not nearly so elusive: "We just follow the record," he said. "Life imitates art" I thought to myself.

Then he proceeded to tell me, from memory, the order of shouts for each song in the Big Stars repertoire. I stopped him at about 20 songs and almost every song had some series or combination of the shouts we had been learning over the past few weeks. When he wanted to remember the shout order for a particular song, he simply sung the last chorus before the *seben* and stared off into the distance as if he was looking at something. I'm not sure if he was 'seeing the song' from the cassette sleeve or if he was imagining the dance steps which correspond to the shouts, motions which he himself had surely gone through hundreds of times in his career as an *atalaku*. Whatever he imagined, it seemed to be accurate, since the shout orders he gave me were consistent over time and they almost all appeared on the record in exactly the order he had given me in practice.

But this did not explain what happened in concert, since very often songs performed live would last 25-35 minutes (compared with six - eight minute recorded songs). "What do you do for the rest of the song?" I asked. "You just improvise," he said. "After you finish the shouts from the album, you add some of the shouts that are 'in' at that time, and then you just shout whatever comes to your mind." In other words, every song performed live contains a certain number of pre-determined shouts (usually three or four, presumably those judged to be popular at the time of the recording), followed by a longer series of shouts, which although they come from a common shout repertoire (ch. 7) can be arranged and exploited in any number of ways. Most often the shouts that fill this free space will be the shouts of the day

("les cris qui ont du succès") and the pre-determined shouts are those that correspond with the time period in which the particular song was released. Even very old songs will be performed with the same original pre-determined shouts, and then they will be brought up to date by the addition of a series of shouts 'du jour'. Some shouts in this category can be exploited for as long as ten minutes, as long as the shout is new and given that it pleases the audience sufficiently. In this way the innovative impulse of modern, commercial dance music will call up its past while at the same renewing itself through the style of the present (ch. 10).

At one of the first Big Stars shows after their return from Zambia, I sat next to the sound engineer and watched every move of the other two *atalaku* as they were performing. My work with Lidjo had made me much more sensitive to what they were doing and saying. I still was not catching everything, but I felt that if I was called onto stage unannounced (a distinct possibility) that I could at least defend myself. But during this show it did not happen. Instead, as I came with my own transportation I was called upon to shuttle Defao back to the practice place after the show was over. With Defao sitting alone in the front and seven or eight band members in the back, most of the conversation happened without me. But at one point Defao turned to me and said, "Why didn't you shout, Monsieur Bob?" I was very nervous, I thought *he* was supposed to decide when I was to sing. Evidently not. "Nako zala pret mardi." I'll be ready on Tuesday, I said, smiling. I hesitated for a moment, but then decided that it would be best for me not to say anything else. Just be ready for Tuesday, I told myself.

On Tuesday afternoon I rushed home from teaching English, changed my clothes and started off to practice. After I arrived, there was very little ceremony. Practice started right in, Montana motioned for me to start shouting, and off I went. From my notes:

It was so strange, I wanted to be worried for my voice, but it kept coming out ... the audience was screaming and someone on the mike introduced me: "Missya Bob, a uti Etats Unis!" ['Mr. Bob, direct from the United States!'] (Apr 1, 1996).

Afterwards it felt different than when I had played guitar the first time with the band. I could see in the other musicians' faces that I had done a decent job. One of the guitarists



approached me and said, "That was really good, you have to come every day. Every day." Even Maneko congratulated me in his own way, with a Fanta orange soda and the butt of a loaf of bread. When Defao showed up for the band meeting he looked at me and asked if I shouted. I smiled and nodded yes. Then he turned to the junior leaders and asked how I did. They all nodded: "A bwaki. A bwaki bien".<sup>25</sup> Defao laughs. "Missya Bob!" he declares, almost shouting himself. "Good, come to the concerts on Friday and Saturday. You're going to sing, you know? We have one show in Masina and the other one is in Ndjili. It's going to be wild ['On va faire du cinéma']. The other musicians smiled and chuckled approvingly. Now it was official. I was truly a Zairean musician.

### **From a Position of Privilege**

Defao had a way of making everyone who came to visit him feel very much at home, regardless of their age or place of origin. He was invariably pleasant but with just enough distance to seem slightly indifferent. Even after I became an official member of the band, as a foreigner I had for the most part no special status compared to other musicians. In fact, as a bandmember I had very little contact or interaction with Defao himself, who as the leader of the group was expected to maintain a certain distance between himself and his subordinates (ch. 8). But my position in the group, first as an observer, then as a rhythm guitarist, then as an *animateur*, was a privilege to which most Zairean musicians, many more talented than I, had no access. This privilege, to be able to choose the group with which I would play, was partly a function of the fact that as an American, I was perceived as a novelty.<sup>26</sup> Defao and his musicians on a number of occasions expressed the view that my presence was a kind of

---

<sup>25</sup>"He shouted. He shouted good."

<sup>26</sup>In the Congo, Americans are described in the following ways: 'powerful', 'not afraid of taking risks', 'rich', 'they like war', 'they're not afraid of anything', 'they know how to sell their culture', 'they know how to impose their will', 'they eat a lot', 'they eat three chickens per day', 'strong', 'crafty', 'conceited', 'meddling'. Although most Congolese have something (negative or positive) to say about Americans, very few have ever had any personal contact with Americans.

publicity stunt that might attract the curiosity of a larger audience or that might increase our chances of getting noticed by important 'producteurs'. Many people outside of the band suggested this as Defao's primary motivation for accepting me in the band.

Another musician expressed some resentment with regards to my choice. Although he was close friends with the members of Wenge Musica, one of Kinshasa's most popular groups at the time, and a talented singer/songwriter in his own right, he struggled to make a living from music. On more than one occasion he tried to convince me that I should go with him and try to join Wenge. *Do you know how many people in this city would give their right arm to have the chance to play with Wenge? There are so many quality musicians that will never even have the opportunity to audition. You're in a special position, don't forget that.* He would extoll the virtues of Wenge, saying how they consistently attracted the largest crowds and how their audience was sophisticated and upwardly mobile. A story like this would invariably be followed by a series of questions asking why I wanted to play with Defao.

I often tried to explain that in my opinion Defao's group represented a very typical Congolese popular dance band. As opposed to Wenge, which was a group based on a structure of four equal co-founders, the Big Stars was made up a large number of musicians organized around a dominant, charismatic figure who was the lead singer as well as the founder of the group. This organizational arrangement was by far the norm among Kinshasa's most well-known groups. The Big Stars worked on a regular basis (four practices and two - four concerts per week) and were known for playing very often in "les quartiers populaires" ('lower income neighborhoods'), a practice which I expected would give me exposure to the way that the majority of people in the city live. The band, which was only started in the early 1990s, was already well-known in Kinshasa, but was only starting to make its name in other parts of the world. When I arrived in Kinshasa, they had just finished their first European tour, and they were starting to get more and more contracts in other parts of Africa, especially Zambia. The band never had a truly big hit song ('un tube'), but when I arrived they had already produced six full-length albums.

As in most groups, personnel changes were common (ch. 8). The leader of the group used suspensions and dismissals to maintain his authority over junior members, but Defao's case was even more complex since the band had undergone two substantial turnovers in the period of a year and a half.<sup>27</sup> Despite the case that Defao's operation was struggling financially, his careful management of band resources meant that the Big Stars was one of the few bands to have its own equipment and practice space (which were occasionally rented to other bands), and the only band at that time to have its own transportation, a bright red Hiace mini-van with large white letters on each side: "BIG STARS EN CONCERT". Thus I saw the Big Stars as a group that was clearly in a period of transition, and I thought this would give me valuable insight into the cultural and social aspects of being a popular musician in Kinshasa, a subject which I will discuss in greater detail in the following chapter. In the end, however, all of these explanations are justifications. What is important is not that I chose one group over another, but the fact that as an outsider I was in a position of privilege which gave me the possibility to choose:

I like them, I just like them. A lot of this had to do with how I view myself; I'm afraid of being in Wenge, afraid I'm not good enough. I can be imperfect in Big Stars, less pressure. I think that's what I need, right? I'm not here to be famous, I'm here to learn about how it works, and I really feel that Defao is typical *typique*. Empire too stable, Wenge too big, Zaiko too old (Mar 27, 1996).

---

<sup>27</sup>The first turnover was almost complete. During the European tour, the larger part of a team of about 25 musicians decided to leave the band and remain in Europe because of conflicts over money with Defao. The second occurred after immediately after a tour, this time across the river in Brazzaville, apparently because several elements in the band had been fighting with each other (see chapter 8). Upon returning from the tour, Defao was so disgusted with his musicians' indiscipline that he fired half of the band and suspended some others.

## Part Three: On Being in Music

### Chapter Seven: Ndule

Practice is Performance

*Big Stars En Concert*

The Anatomy of a Song  
Dancing and Shouting

Blurring the Barrier

Picturetaking and Spraying  
Praising and 'Throwing'

*When "Drum" started to beat himself it was just as if he was beaten by fifty men, when "Song" started to sing, it was just as if a hundred people were singing together and when "Dance" started to dance the half-bodied baby started too, my wife, myself and spirits etc., were dancing with "Dance" and nobody who heard or saw these three fellows would not follow them to wherever they were going.*

(Amos Tutuola 1985: 38)

*In terms of the different forms of audience participation, it is important to talk about the shouts, interjections, and applause that in actually serve two purposes: they express agreement or disagreement with the ideas being expressed, but they can also be meant to compensate, with expressions of joy, the work of the artist.*

(Gzungil Kapalanga 1989: 54)

In some sense music is a profession like any other. It has formal rules, structures, and patterns which are 'made over' by endless hours of individual and collective effort. Ironically, a well-rehearsed final performance gives a certain impression of effortlessness on the part of the performer. But the musical performer is not simply acting out or repeating motions that he or she has been through before. The play of performance--Drewal's (1991) "re-presentation with critical difference"--is one in which patterns of improvisation are recombined to offer the potential of something completely new. In an African setting, where the distinction between 'performance' and 'real life' is particularly blurry (see below), popular culture has the potential to transform social relations and influence emerging forms of social consciousness (Erlmann 1991; Hannerz 1987; Jewsiewicki 1991).<sup>1</sup> The only way to capture this complexity is by resisting the Western objectivist tendency (still very much alive in performance studies) to separate out elements of performance which in practice are fundamentally inseparable (Drewal 1991: 12).

One way around this problem is to experiment with various forms of live-time description, an approach which has proven particularly effective in recent research on popular music (see Erlmann 1996a; Waterman 1990). In this chapter, I will try to show how the elements of live performance are linked together: not only the obvious links between music, dance, orality and vision, but also how performers are linked to the audience--and ultimately to each other--through the frenzy of *animation* and *ambience* which musicians carefully construct with each new song. The bulk of the chapter is devoted to describing what happens during a typical concert setting--what musicians usually refer to as *ndule* --but the description begins before the actual concert, in order to look briefly at the 'practice' of rehearsal and the events leading up to the show.<sup>2</sup> The term *ndule* (slang for 'concert' or 'live music,' but also referring

---

<sup>1</sup>The transformational potential of performance has also been registered for various kinds of ritual practice in an African setting (Drewal 1992; Karp 1987; Kratz 1994).

<sup>2</sup>For the purpose of accentuating the live-time feel, I will use the present tense throughout most of the description to follow. This ethnographic present ties together impressions and events from different times and places, creating a sort of composite (and somewhat artificial image) of the performance of popular music. Nonetheless, there are moments in this description in which I effectively step back from live time to provide supplementary information or analysis.

to a 'party', or a 'good time') is commonly used in discussions between musicians about their work on stage, but it also refers to the heightened sensitivity and excitement which results from interaction with a live audience. Thus *ndule* is an activity, but also a space. In this chapter, different forms of performer-audience interaction (dancing, shouting, taking pictures, and spraying money) are described in order to demonstrate how musicians and audiences penetrate each others' space, and how audience participation in the musical performance makes individual (anti-normative) acts of distinction into socially acceptable forms of behavior, at least within the context of a live performance.

### Practice is Performance

This apparent lack in the ethnomusicological literature is certainly not present because African musicians do not rehearse, but rather because the problem of practice has not been widely noted (Merriam 1964: 161).

"Come and sit down Monsieur Bob." I walked behind the person who was leading me by the hand, a little embarrassed at being pulled through the very tight crowd to the front-row "place d'honneur". I expected that people would look at me and gawk, commenting on the fact that there was a *mundele* (white) in a local band practice in Ngiri Ngiri. For once, to my surprise, they didn't seem to notice me at all; everyone in *this* room was watching the Big Stars. Everytime I looked at the audience, they continued looking at the band. My special seat was the corner section of a beat-up L-shaped locally fabricated living room set which some years ago must have been someone's status symbol. It was a not so lovely love seat covered with faded velvety flower fabric, red and mustard yellow. It was placed against the wall of the practice hall, stage left, just in the right place so that I could alternate between looking at the band and the audience.

I guess at first I expected 'practice' ('répétition') to be the somewhat intimate, exclusive activity that it was in my musical culture (see ch. 6). Most American musicians only

practice with close friends or other musicians present. In this context, practice is not a place for onlookers, but a place for work. It is a place where mistakes are acceptable, but it is the only place. The Big Stars' practice, however, was filled with people who had come for the show. In fact, the band was even charging admission at the door. Many full-time professional band leaders have taken up this activity in order to subsidize the cost of maintaining large bands, which often have upwards of 25 members.<sup>3</sup> Money from 'the door' would sometimes be distributed to musicians to help pay for food and transportation. From the point of view of the group's leader, this 'gesture' permits him to use income from concerts for other (often personal) purposes, and also serves to reinforce his image as a good boss ('un bon patron', see ch. 8). The practice room, which was already half-filled by members and friends of the band, was about the size of a large living and dining room area combined. The performance space itself (including several rows of dancers) took up almost half of the room. A row of seats was placed in a u-shaped formation, some against the side walls near the front, and some facing the band. The space behind the seats was used for standing room.

After I sat down, I gestured hello to Montana (the president of the group), but he was nestled in the opposite corner of the room, sitting behind the mixing board and speakers, remaining somewhat aloof from the spectacle that was going on in front of us. He was dressed in white, all white except for the thick black sunglasses which only further accentuated his white hair. White hair was becoming a bit of a fad with the Big Stars. Defao was the first to completely bleach his hair, and Montana followed suit not long after. Later, other bandmembers would do the same, although they usually only had enough money to bleach one part of their hair, or to partially bleach all of their hair, leaving reddish stripes and patches. Besides the value of bleached hair as a fashion statement, it occurred to me that members of the group must have performed this ritual to express their loyalty to Defao, whose short-cropped cotton top had become one of his trademarks. I motioned to Montana again, and he gestured

---

<sup>3</sup>In the words of the band manager, Maneko: "Practice is difficult because people are there [watching the practice], so I can't really stop the show; they pay their entrance of 5,000NZ [.50 US]. We started at 2,500 NZ [.25 US], but there were just too many people so we put it up to 5,000. Soon we'll have to go 10 or 15, it's a way for us to make a bit of money to get by" (on musicians' salaries and benefits, see ch. 8).

that he would come to see me in a minute, but he never came. At that point in his career he was a young leader in the group, and was gradually becoming a star in his own right; I think it was understood that I was supposed to come to him. After the first song, I started feeling the music take me over as it usually does, but having been in the region for several months I was beginning to make considerable progress with my self-control. In this setting it is not very common for adult men to show physical signs of enjoying the music (foot tapping, head bobbing, snapping fingers in time with the music, etc.) except for in particularly appropriate contexts such as on the dance floor or on stage. From my notes:

You're supposed to be stronger than the music, bigger than the music, more musical than the music itself. You don't follow the music, the music follows you (Oct. 23, 1995).

So I sat. It was difficult because the atmosphere was very intense. The crowd of mostly young men, but also some young children (5-10 years old, both male and female), was in a kind of frenzy, each one alternating between dancing in place and watching the antics of the very spontaneous choreography of the front line. The crowd was advancing slowly, spilling into the singers' performance space and this led Montana to stop the music. *Okay, woah, woah, everybody just chill. You guys have to take it easy, this space [meaning practice space] belongs to someone. You people that come over from Bandal [a nearby neighborhood], this is not Bandal. This is Ngiri Ngiri. Just relax, okay?* Holding on to the microphone, he turns his head back to double check that all the musicians are still in place, then takes the microphone again: *The dancers, where are the dancers? Are the dancers ready?* There is commotion in the crowd, as everyone is trying to locate the person who wants to try out for the band. A young woman, very modestly dressed, stands up, grabs her handbag and pushes her way through the crowd outside of the building. There is more talk inside the steaming room until a few moments later she returns fully undressed in a garrish turquoise and violet body suit which is common fare for female dancers in Kinshasa. Montana brings her to the microphone:



"What's your name?" He asks, sticking the microphone in her face.

"Olga."

"Married yet?"

"No."

"Where you from?"

"Ngiri Ngiri." Montana motions the audience to give her a round of applause. She is not being judged on her oratory skills.

"Okay, okay. Let's go. *Seben!*" He turns to signal the start of the music.

She starts in almost immediately. She understands that chances like this do not present themselves often, and that if she wants to be selected she will have to act fast. She stretches out her arms, puts her hands together in front of her, tilts her head back and starts to shuffle toward the crowd. It is the dance of the day, "Kibinda Nkoy" ('leopard's testicles'). She turns and floats one half of her behind on the fourth beat of every measure. Her hips jerk with a pattern which is difficult to discern, her eyes look to the sky, her nostrils flare. Before very long the crowd starts to react. She drops to the ground face first with her arms in front of her and begins a grinding motion between her pelvis and the cement floor, sending a wave of cheers through the audience. She and her crowd are feeding off each other; even Montana is laughing. Already a half a dozen teenagers have come to place money on different parts of her body; some goes in her body suit, some sticks to her skin where she sweats, the rest makes contact on her forehead and then flutters to the ground in a pile around her. Everyone is on their feet. There is a constant flow of people walking up to lay money (and hands) on her. One young man struts to where she is and places his bill roughly in the area of her genitals, pulling it up between her legs until it reaches her behind where he slaps the bill, letting it fall to the ground.

To all of this, she seems indifferent, so concentrated on her movements that she is almost unaware of the frenzy she has provoked in the audience. Montana rarely looks at her, he is more interested in seeing the reaction of the audience. He approaches the microphone and signals for the music to stop as she gets up from the floor and whisks off the dirt on her behind, not noticing that it is mostly the front that needs whisking. *So what do you think? She's good, eh?* The crowd roars and whistles. *Can she dance or what? Do we take her? What do you think?* The

volume is rising. *Do we take her?* Everyone, especially the teenage boys, yells in unison: 'oui!' *Do we take her?* 'OUI!' *Okay, we'll take her.* The crowd roars again and the dancer clasps her hands together over her head in a victory sign. She made the audition. Montana gives her the same interview as in the beginning, but this time she is smiling. Who knows if they will really give her a place in the band. She went over to the other dancers and they congratulated her with pecks on the cheek. They all had the same look on their face, something similar to the expression of young women competing in a beauty pageant. With that the practice-performance was over.<sup>4</sup>

### **"Big Stars En Concert"**

The band would practice three or four times a week, usually Monday through Thursday from 2:00 - 5:00 p.m. As I have described above, practices are themselves performances since they are usually open to the general public, and as I will describe below performance is a very particular kind of practice. Musicians often give the same energy during practice that they do during concerts, but singers often reserve special outfits and dance steps for these occasions, which occur at night and attract a more desirable audience (usually older and with more expendable income than people that attend practice). On Fridays there are usually shows scheduled, and musicians are given the afternoon off to rest and to find something to wear. Maneko almost never expected to see the musicians on Friday afternoons. "Ils se préparent," he would say. 'Getting ready' usually meant doing the rounds of friends and neighbors necessary to find a Versace paisley silk shirt, or a D&G leather beret, or a pair of Girbaud blue jeans, or an American t-shirt with something written in large letters across the chest. It does not have to match anything else, it does not even have to be a good fit. It only

---

<sup>4</sup>For whatever reason, the young woman never returned to dance with the band.

has to be new or *look* new. One item will do; one item is enough to show that the musician has fans and that his fans have nice clothes. In most cases, musicians borrow items of clothing from friends, but there are also stories of people who buy expensive clothes and rent them out as a source of secondary income (see Gandoulou 1989a). Maybe this is the 'getting ready' that Maneko refers to, since if you want to rent something you have to get the money together first.

All musicians are expected to report to the practice space by 10:00 p.m. the night of a show. Everyone knows that we probably will not leave before midnight, but most of the musicians manage to arrive by the pre-arranged time. This is where the waiting begins. Some musicians do their waiting in the practice room; the non-guitarists play guitar for bad would-be singers who do not care that there is someone sleeping in the corner. In the doorway to the practice space there is always someone standing with a James Dean pose; this is a space reserved for someone who had spent a lot of time 'getting ready'. The *batêtes* ('junior leaders') are almost never visible. They are getting ready in their own space, the last ones to get ready, getting ready to make an entrance before an exit. They are what everyone is waiting for.

Outside of the practice space, even at 10:30 p.m., there is coming and going. This is Kinshasa. Ngiri-Ngiri. Home of legendary Zairean singers Sam Mangwana and Kester Emeneya and the *quartier célèbre* of popular painter Cheri Samba.<sup>5</sup> The pharmacy is still open. The old woman selling baguettes and peanuts is still there. There are still children everywhere, not only the regulars from the immediate surroundings, but also those that took the long way to the pharmacy or those who chose to buy their bread in front of the Big Stars practice space because of the ongoing spectacle it provides. The river of mud caused by poorly maintained run-off ditches is still there, *en permanence*. Permanently, but it is always new, adapting to changes in the environment such as the rain and the tire tracks of brutal taxis. It is clearly part of the spectacle. We watch as people of all types try to find their way across

---

<sup>5</sup>On Cheri Samba, see Jewsiewicki (1993, 1995) and on Samba, Ngiri Ngiri and other popular painters in Kinshasa, see Dumon and Jacquemin (1989).

this baby Congo River; *pousse-pousse* (handcart) drivers, mothers with babies, soccer players returning from a match, vendors from the nail market, nighttime girlfriends, unemployed civil servants, an American musician. All of these people, but never Defao. Defao is the only person in the neighborhood that never has to cross this post-colonial moat. There is a special mudless path from his studio apartment to the practice space and if ever he wants to go somewhere else, Ebolo the driver will pick him up in the big red van which reads "Big Stars En Concert".

The people most adept at coming away clean from the mud river are the musicians. Not only because we cross this post-colonial moat every day several times a day, but also because it is important, given how much time we spend 'getting ready', that we cross it carefully and with some degree of composure [figure 7.1]. But no one ever complains about the mud river. Maybe, like myself, they think it cannot be real, and that it will not be there tomorrow. Or maybe it serves as a kind of divider between musicians and the rest of the world. During the long wait in the practice space, on the musician side of the river, the dancers pull down their tight body dresses, still well above the knees, and began to put on the flashy costume jewelry that Defao has provided with their matching outfits. The outfits are an important part of Defao's stage show, which is known for its dancing. Many groups encourage their *danseuses* to dress alike, but Defao's dancers are fully outfitted: bumble bee body suits in black, with yellow striped sleeves and sports numbers on the chest, black imitation leather hi-top Doc Martens boots, Heavy D gold chains with customary bobbing pendants, and blood red lipstick for the face. For weddings they wear high heel shoes, red slacks with a wide vinyl belt, elegant longhair wigs, and a loose, brightly colored flower-design blouse. Despite frequent personnel changes, the outfits always seemed to fit.<sup>6</sup>

11:30 p.m. rolls around. Midnight. 12:19. It seems like we will never leave. When I ask Maneko what time we should be ready, he invariably says "soon". Important information

---

<sup>6</sup>Maybe all the outfits were elastic. Or maybe he just bought smalls and mediums to torture his mostly male audience. Or maybe he chose the dancers according to their measurements.



Fig. 7.1

fig. 7.1 A post-colonial moat

like this is left vague on purpose. If the musicians know exactly what time we are leaving, they will go off in search of matches or to visit someone and will most likely be late. In all honesty, we do not need to know. We are worker bees, musician ants on duty, and if Chef Maneko does not inform us of a time and place, it is because we do not need to know. So we continue to wait. The Big Stars van will take us where we need to go and will bring us back. It is so routine that often we do not know the name of the bar or club where we are scheduled to play. After all, Kinshasa has so many. 12:42. Finally Montana emerges from the darkness, and in very little time the red van is packed sardine-tight ("Mama na ngayeee -- to komi Thompsons!"<sup>7</sup>), and we are off across the mud river to some unknown, faraway destination that will probably not look all that different from Ngiri Ngiri.

I am usually offered one of the spaces in the front with Chef Maneko, but sometimes I travel in the very back with Theo, who sits next to me hoping to trick me out of my sweat towel. Once the junior leaders have given the order, it is important for everyone to get into the van. Not nearby or next to the van, but *inside* the van. This enables Maneko to count heads and to make sure everyone is present. If someone is absent, everyone stays in the van, which at this point (an excruciating eleven minutes later) is already a steambath. But we cannot leave the van. If we leave the van, someone else will stray away and make us all wait again. The *zoba* ('jerk') that shows up late has some lame excuse about a missing shoe or malaria or something, and he gets sufficiently reprimanded by Chef Maneko and abused by the rest of the band so that he will probably not let it happen again. We are off, probably still to make a stop or two for gas, or to pick up a stray bandmember and the Montana's new girlfriend. Once we begin moving, the windows are down and the air is once again bearable. Morale rises quickly as everyone, even those who were sleeping, seem to catch a long-awaited second wind. One of the *atalakus* in the far back is making people laugh by changing the words to a popular shout: "eh-uh-eh a simbi movate" ('oh yeah, she uses skin whiteners'). We are so tightly packed that

---

<sup>7</sup>'Oh mother of mine, we're packed in like Thompsons' (a small fish which has become something of a staple food in Kinshasa because of its low price and availability).

we cannot see outside of the van, but we know that we are turning heads. Even at 12:45 a.m. We are the Big Stars and we are going 'en concert'. The red van says so.

We arrive to the place where we are supposed to play, and one by one we descend from the vehicle. There is a large crowd milling outside the bar, watching our arrival [figure 7.2] These are the people who are not able to get in the bar for their age or lack of money, but will surely find some way to see the show, probably from a nearby tree or the roof of the bar. Locally they are known as *ngembo* ('hanging bats'), a term which many adults use to describe themselves in the years when they first became interested in music.<sup>8</sup> One of the barefoot children that should have been in bed a long time ago reads the writing on the side of the van in a long, exaggerated voice: "Biiiiiiiiiiiig Staaaaaaars en Coooooonceeeert" and his companions repeat the mystical sounds, each laughing and trying to sound more French than the one before. A few people in the crowd will yell out names as we saunter past: "Defao!" "Montana!" "Atalaku!" We try to pretend we do not hear them. Maneko is standing at the door with the doormen, pushing us through and sometimes calling out our names so the producer's assistant can make sure we are on the list. Once inside, it is very different. There is breathing room. The crowd is well-dressed, 18-31, mostly male and much better at concealing their excitement at our arrival. Depending on the number of warm-up bands scheduled to play before us, we may have to wait anywhere from thirty minutes to an hour and a half before we actually start playing. We are sitting off or back stage, with the *batêtes* hidden out of sight. It is 1:07 a.m. We continue to wait.

Most of the places we play closely resemble each other. They all have different names ("Le Destin", "Chez Ya Pecos", "Bonbon Sucré") and the layout is sometimes different, but everything else about them makes them seem amazingly similar. There is a poorly painted white façade with a small metal door that always makes the interior seem spectacular for the first few seconds. Most bars are open air, with some part of the bar covered in case of rain.

---

<sup>8</sup>Tchebwa also translates this term as 'curious' and provides a nice picture of 'ngembo' from the 1950s in action (Tchebwa 1996: second page of third picture set).





Inside there are larger than life beer bottle labels painted on the walls and brewery product flags that were strung up during the last beer promotion, and that no longer flap in the wind. There are locally produced welded metal chairs, made with 1/4" metal rod and a square foot of thin sheet metal for the seat. No arm rest means one size fits all. They are not comfortable, but with the quality of local music, they don't need to be, since most people will spend a better part of the night on their feet dancing. When there are no more metal chairs, there are always plenty of plastic beer crates, and these are actually more comfortable than the chairs. The stage is usually at one end of the bar, more or less elevated, almost always too small for the 15-16 musicians that occupy it at any given time.

The cigarette boys who rove around the bar are much more than cigarette boys. On their heads they carry cardboard display units that overflow with every imaginable type of midnight snack and late night utility: cigarettes, gum, bubble gum, mints, coffee drops, lollipops, caramel pops, chocolate candy bars, chocolate cookies, fruit candies, fruit filled candies, hard-boiled eggs, tissues, toothpicks, matches, nailclippers, keyrings, scissors, razor blades, a complete assortment of local natural stimulants (cola nut, *kitamata*, *biolongo*, and *pili pili* among others) and on rare occasions, you can even find everyone's favorite anti-stimulant, condoms. More remarkable than the mobility of these roving vendors ("vendeurs ambulants") is the way they move:

Entre deux transactions, le jeune "phaseur évolué", orphelin ou simple paria de la société kinoise, s'arrête un moment devant un bistrot du quartier qui distille du *madiaba* à fond la caisse. Le temps pour lui d'exhiber quelques pas de danse (*mayeno* ou autre *moto*), à la manière de la tête d'affiche de *Zaiko Langa Langa* ou de *L'Empire Bakuba* avec qui il rivaliserait facilement la palme de meilleur danseur de la saison. Histoire de rôder sa forme. C'est aussi, dans un sens, sa contribution --gratuite-- à la théâtralité de la cité (Tchebwa 1996: 331).<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup>"Between two transactions, the young "sophisticated streetkid", orphan or more simply pariah of Kinshasa society, stops for a moment in front of neighborhood bar that is playing *madiaba* (a dance step) full blast. Just long enough to demonstrate a couple of dance steps (*mayeno* or *moto*), in the manner of the frontmen of *Zaiko Langa Langa* or *Empire Bakuba* with whom he could easily compete for the title of best dancer of the year. It's a matter of trying out his technique. It is also, in some sense, his contribution--free of charge--to the theatrical nature of the popular neighborhoods."

The bands that play before the Big Stars are neighborhood groups ('petits groupes du quartier') which are not yet well-known except by friends and locals from the immediate neighborhood.<sup>10</sup> Sometimes two local bands will play, the most local (i.e. the least polished) playing first. Playing "with" Defao is a big chance for groups that have little or no access to professional equipment and producers, but many young musicians take this to mean that they have already attained stardom. By imitating the gestures of fame (delayed entrance on stage, large clothes and sunglasses, shouting names into the microphone), warm-up bands seem to lose their sense of time. In theory they are expected to play two or three songs in order to open the evening ('lever les rideau' or 'open the curtain'), but in many cases one of the young singers pleads with Chef Maneko, who, having a very big heart, chooses to ignore the beginning of their next song. It is 1:26 a.m. More waiting ...

During all of this waiting, many of the musicians will simply find a chair or a crate in a space nearby, and will curl up to sleep. Before becoming a part of the band, I found this habit surprising. It seemed to me that sleeping on the site of the performance (albeit in a discretely chosen spot) made the band look tired and overworked. But as I became more involved in the band's regular work schedule, sleeping on site made more sense to me. From my notes:

Getting ready for a concert is weird. It takes a lot of mental preparation. You have to have your mind clear. You're going up to perform for four to five hours straight, you've got to be in shape, and there's so much waiting, so you sleep. It's difficult to deal with the schedule. You know you'll be getting home with the sunrise, that your sleep clock will be off until Thursday of the next week at which time you start to get ready to do it again. So you sleep. It's 1:30 a.m., you only slept for three hours the night before, so you sleep.

The bandleaders never seem to comment on this practice, in fact they sometimes do it themselves. To a large extent the need to sleep is due to the demanding schedule of full-time

---

<sup>10</sup>Tchebwa estimates the number of neighborhood bands ('orchestres des jeunes') to be at between 600-700 (1996: 173,192). Other estimates I heard go as high as 3,000 (personal communication, Zachary Bababaswe), which would be the equivalent of one group every two or three square kilometers. This estimate is probably high and most likely includes all types of music groups, not just those playing 'la musique moderne'. In any case, neighborhood bands have limited exposure in the sprawling urban center that is Kinshasa. My questions about the bands playing before us usually fell to deaf ears. No one seemed interested and no one, not even Chef Maneko, knew who the band was. "Un petit orchestre du quartier," he would invariably answer ('some group of kids from the neighborhood').

practice and performance. Hours of missed sleep accumulate and during the most irresistible moments of the night (from 11 p.m. - 2 a.m.), accompanied by the pulsating, saturated sound of an endless rumba rhythm, the human body falls into a deep satisfying state of abandon [figure 7.3]. When I first experienced this deep sleep myself, I woke up to the most wonderful second wind (or was it third?) I have ever experienced. It was, in fact, the silence that woke me. The second warm-up band had the plug pulled, and it was time for the main attraction. It is 1:48. Showtime. [audio cue 8].

We are much quicker to start than the warm-up bands. It is a combination of the long wait and the fact that we have done this so many times before. The guitarists know the knobs with their eyes closed and are able to tune discretely without the audience noticing. They begin with an instrumental piece ('*musique de variétés*'), often the same piece at the beginning of every show. It has several tempos and complex transitions which show off the skills of the instrumentalists and also help to wake up the last few sleepers backstage. It is short, two-three minutes, and as soon as it is finished, the band president saunters on stage and signals the start of the first song. He is decked out in a large 3-piece suit and thick black sunglasses which cover his temples as well as his eyes. His two other singers follow close behind. They pull up their pants around their waist as they prepare to take the mike. Everyone is very stiff and serious. There are three singers and four microphones, hinting at the imminent arrival of the star and leader of the band.

He won't actually arrive on stage until the second or third song. This is standard practice with most bands. The lead singer is the reason that everyone came and he must be given out in careful doses if the group wants to maintain its precious fan base. For similar reasons, he will also be the first one to leave, usually a full half-hour or 45 minutes before the rest of the band. It is 2:08 a.m. and the music for his entry song "*Famille Kikuta*" -- the closest thing the Big Stars have to a hit this year -- is well underway before he arrives on stage. It has a cyclical introduction that can go on until all of his buttons are buttoned and his bleached white hairs in place. Then, with all eyes front and center, he floats up to the

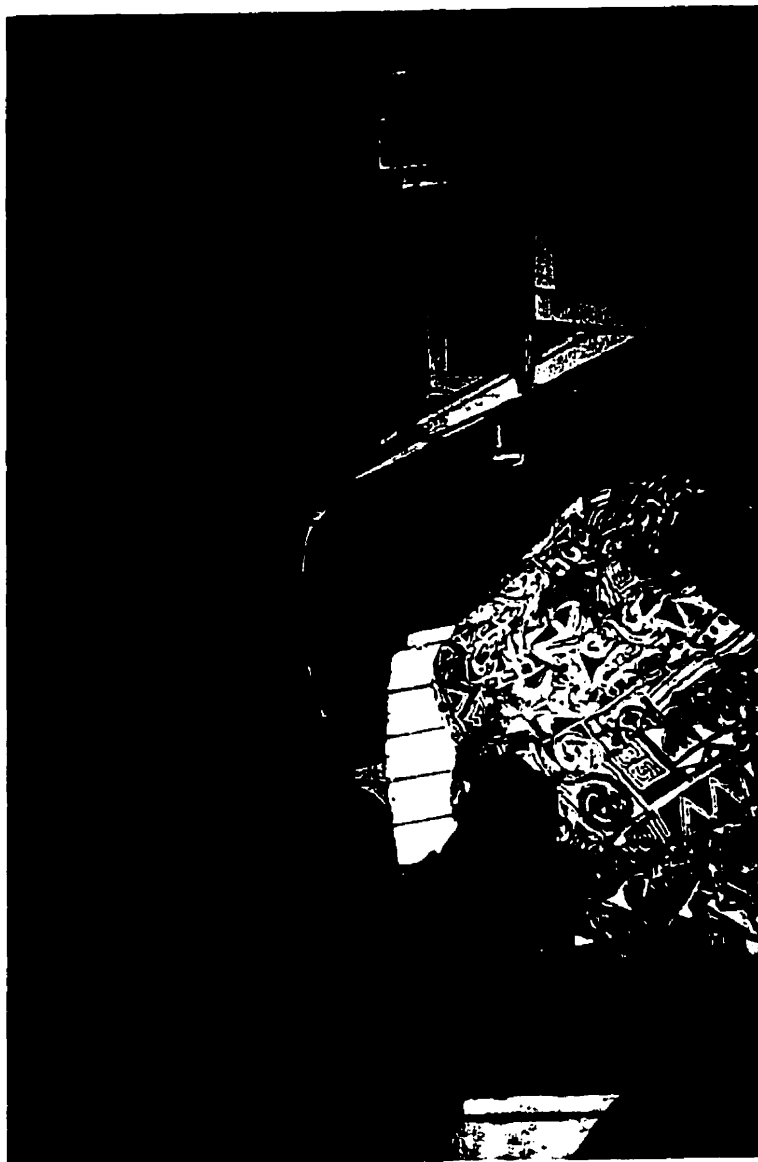


Fig. 7.3

fig. 7.3 Sleeping before the show

microphone and removes it from the stand, pushing the cord aside gracefully just in time for the beginning of the next cycle. This exciting moment of showmanship always gives me goosebumps. A strange, misplaced pride swells in my throat and just like the barefoot kid outside of the bar I have to say his name out loud: Deffffffffff Deeeeeeefaaaaaaao! He stands out on stage like a three-dimensional character against a two-dimensional background. He is the real thing. He has finally arrived. "Fondé!"<sup>11</sup>

As he begins to sing, the audience is completely transfixed until the first fan approaches with money in his hands, and places it purposefully in each of Defao's front pockets. Defao continues singing completely unphased. The next fan approaches with one big bill and slips it into Defao's hand as he yells something in Defao's ear. He probably told Defao his name, hoping Defao would sing his praises that night, or told Defao how great he thinks he is ("Def, na sepli na yo trop!" 'Defao, you're the best!'). The next fan follows closely behind and from a wad of bills in his left hand begins to shell out money onto the floor at Defao's feet. He finishes the wad, gives Defao a civil servant head butt on the side of his head and struts back to his place in the crowd.<sup>12</sup> By this time there is a constant flow of people to coming on stage to lay hands and money on Defao's person. Sometimes ignoring their attention, sometimes smiling and showing gratitude, he continues his song despite the people that are floating around him, putting things in his pockets, speaking in his ear, striking poses with him (see below). When the transition to the dance part comes he has a few seconds of freedom, as they can see him repositioning himself on stage. But after Defao's famous 'wall of dance' is up and running, the crowd is once again all over him, usually two at a time, totally oblivious to his music or words.

---

<sup>11</sup>Short for 'fondateur' or 'founder', the term that most bandmembers use when addressing Defao.

<sup>12</sup>Men in Kinshasa often greet each other by bumping gently the corners of their foreheads, alternating sides as they shake or hold hands. This form of greeting, which uses the same gestural motion as kisses on the cheek common in many parts of Europe, seemed to be most common (or at least most pronounced) among men in positions of wealth and power, such as wealthy businessmen or well-placed civil servants.

## *The Anatomy of a Song*

For the most part, song order in concert is improvised.<sup>13</sup> After finishing a song, the bandleader (or president in his absence) will think briefly and 'call' the next song to be played.<sup>14</sup> In most cases he will announce his decision to the guitarists, one of which will repeat the information to the other musicians (drummer, singers, and keyboard player). The only other interaction which occurs between the bandleader and the rest of the band are the elaborate dance sequences in the final part of each song. Songs usually last from 20-30 minutes in concert. The two and sometimes three-part song structure (see ch. 3) which lasts five-eight minutes on pre-recorded material is lengthened primarily in the final part of the song, the *seben*, or fast-paced dance part. Audiences depend on hearing the words and melodies of the artist they have paid to see, but a large part of the live concert experience is the unpredictable extended dance sequences which take place as much in the audience as they do on stage.

Most songs start with a slow, lyrical introduction followed by a series of verses ('couplets') where vocals predominate. Percussionists (conga player, *atalaku*, drummer) punctuate with relatively simple rhythmic patterns so not to detract from the singer or the lead guitarist, who trade the melodic phrases back and forth throughout the verse. During this part of the song, the dancers are off-stage, and the co-singers are off-mike but still on stage, each moving within his own space.<sup>15</sup> Each singer dances in a way that suggests he is conscious of the fact that he is on stage, but completely unaware of the people around him. He sways back

---

<sup>13</sup>Benetta Jules-Rosette (1975) offers a detailed account of similar interactions and decision-making processes for songs used in the Maranke Apostolic church of the Kasai region of Zaire where she conducted research.

<sup>14</sup>As Berliner has described for the performance of *mbira* music in Zimbabwe (1978: 111), a cyclical song structure means that the group leader 'calls' the end of a particular song when he sees fit. In order to signal the 'end' of the song, most bands in Kinshasa use a standard musical motif or tag which is usually sung by the *atalaku*. In *Zaiko Langa Langa*, for example, the *atalaku* will roll a long, loud 'r' into the microphone after having seen the leader's signal to end the song.

<sup>15</sup>I have used the term 'co-singer' instead of 'backup singer' since the latter usually refers to completely secondary musicians who complement the lead singer but never take the lead or sing solos themselves. In Zairean music, co-singers, although usually part of a hierarchy, often have the opportunity to sing alone, at which time other singers (including the lead singer) will back off from the microphone. Their position on stage (four microphones equally spaced of equal importance), also reflects their unique place in the band.

and forth easily and punctuates his private dance with a series of personalized gestures: spin, dip, handclap, push up the sunglasses, pull up the pants, tuck in the shirt. His movements are individual moments of expression, narcissistic and consciously un-coordinated with the rest of the front line. Then, when the vocals require three and four-part harmony, he moves up to the microphone, letting go of his individual identity to once again become part of the powerful front line ('attaque-chant'). Here their movements are somewhat more coordinated.

Constrained not only by complex harmonies but also by long, lyric-filled melodies, co-singers bob up and down in time with the beat, their bodies becoming human metronomes (see ch. 5). Their hands alternate, first upturned and outstretched shaking loosely, and then brought in to cross the chest, in a gesture which has come to signify the modernist passion of the popular singer. Except for the percussionists, whose instrument requires some degree of upper body movement, the other musicians stand still as they play.<sup>16</sup> Whether the stoicism of the instrumentalists is a question of temperament (as in Thompson's 'aesthetic of the cool') or simply a result of the concentration required to play Zairean music, their relative motionlessness stands in stark contrast to the singers and to the usually very excited crowd in front of them.

During the slow part of most songs, people dance together in couples [figure 7.4]. A particularly slow or romantic song will lead most couples to dance 'collés-serrés' (literally 'stuck together tight'), with her hands around his neck, and his hands around her waist, very attached at the hips:

*"En effet, l'on va danser ensemble, ou personne n'y va. Les noctambules considèrent embarrassant d'être le seul couple sur la piste ... vraiment ridicule, presque humiliant. Tout le monde vous regarde, ce n'est pas entraînant. Les danseurs préfèrent bouger en foule, serrés collés"* (Grinling quoted in Tchewwa 1996: 339).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup>There are some exceptions. Certain well-known guitarists (Boeing 737 and Lofombo from Empire Bakuba, Alain Makaba and Burkina Faso from Wenge Musica BCBG, the young lead guitarist from Brazzaville's Extra Musica) are appreciated for their occasional forays into the dance section, their animated dance moves, and their facial expressions during performance.

<sup>17</sup>Actually, people dance together or no one dances at all. Nightlifers consider it embarrassing to be the only couple on the dance floor ... truly ridiculous, almost humiliating. Everyone looks at you, it is not very stimulating. People prefer to dance in a large group, close together.'



Fig. 7.4

fig. 7.4 Couples dance together until the *seben* begins.



If the song is more upbeat, or as the verse moves into a more upbeat chorus, less intense couples will separate, either liberating their upper bodies, or separating their bodies altogether but keeping their arms in place. It is usually during the chorus that tension builds, leading up to the transition to the *seben*, where couples almost without exception separate completely and begin their own personal variations on the most well-known dance steps of the day.

Et qu'est-ce que danser? L'exubérance, tout simplement? Pas du tout. L'homme, par exemple, se meut avec retenue et maîtrise de soi. Même quand il excelle, c'est avec mesure, le visage presque grave, qu'il se manifeste sur la piste ... La femme ondule, balance le bassin, tandis que l'homme la conduit avec nonchalance. Puis, à un instant plus ou moins précis, parfois au battement près, les couples se séparent. C'est le *seben*. Les femmes en profitent pour rattacher le tissu de leurs pagnes, d'un large mouvement qui appelle les regards ... [e]lles veulent éviter aussi que le vêtement ne se dénoue, ne se détache à l'étape la plus animée et la plus rapide de la danse (ibid 339-340).<sup>18</sup>

As the end of the chorus draws near, the dancers and the *atalaku* come closer to the stage and the instrumentalists back up to make space for the *seben*. Every stage has a number of layers. The backstage is usually made up of a ring of observers, cousins, friends, and sound engineers. The 'defense', which basically corresponds to what we call the rhythm section (percussionist, drummer, keyboard player, and guitarists), forms a kind of human backdrop for the movements of the dancers and singers. Defense musicians have limited movement not only because of the limited space of rented or improvised podiums but also because of the ever-encroaching backstage. Singers perform in two layers, the first of which is the domain of the co-singers. They are always a little bit off the microphone, even when their responses are required as a counterpoint to the lead singer's displays of vocal virtuosity. During many songs the lead singer and his co-singers occupy the front line together. In other songs, the lead singer takes up the entire front line himself, and the co-singers do not approach the microphone until the chorus or later after the transition into the dance part of the song. In front of the front line is a kind of 'avant-scène', which is almost exclusively used by dancers,

---

<sup>18</sup> And what is dancing? Simply exuberance? Not at all. The man displays composure and self-control. Even when he excels it is with some reserve, his expression very serious, that he appears on the dancefloor...The woman sways, swinging her pelvis, while the man leads her in a nonchalant way. Then, at a more or less precise moment, sometimes within a beat, the couples separate. It is the *seben*. Women take this chance to retighten their wraparound with a large gesture that attracts attention ... but they also want to keep their clothes from coming undone during the fastest and most animated part of the song.'

who occasionally move there from tightened positions in the front line to perform with greater ease, sometimes as soloists [figure 7.5]. The *atalaku*, the most flexible of the musicians in terms of the use of space, goes back and forth between all of these layers, spending most of his time between the defense and the front line, but also making strategic advances into the 'avant-scène', especially to interact with the *danseuses* during the *seben* [ 7.6].

The magic of the *seben* is due in part to the fact that it tends to creep up on the audience. Musicians, intimately familiar with the structure of each song and with the cues in the chorus (both vocal and instrumental) that lead them into the *seben*, are comfortable enough with the transition to be able to mask its arrival. But from the perspective of the audience, the chorus spills into the *seben* almost unintentionally and the accompanying increase in intensity often leads to excited reactions from the crowd. At this point, if there was any space left on the dance floor, it will soon be filled. From the point of view of the musician, the transition, although not as unexpected, is just as exciting. After the singers have finished the last lines of the chorus, the lead singer will step away from the microphone and raise his arm, sometimes looking around to make sure all the musicians are prepared for the change.<sup>19</sup> The lead guitarist then kicks off the *seben* with a guitar riff which is slightly accelerated, and is soon joined by the drummer's snare, the *atalaku*'s maracas (which is now acting as a rattle) and the on-mike scream of one of the singers or the second *atalaku*. It is in this space of about 30 seconds that the song changes from words to motion, with the guitarists playing fast-paced non-stop and the singers falling into a formation of choreographed dance, that will continue joyously until the end of the song.

---

<sup>19</sup>The image of the raised arm as a symbolic gesture of authority in Congo-Zaire has been discussed by Jewsiewicki (1991). In a concert setting this motion adds to the feeling of suspense which leads up to the *seben*.



fig. 7.7 *Les danseuses: Jeancy, Monique, Mami*

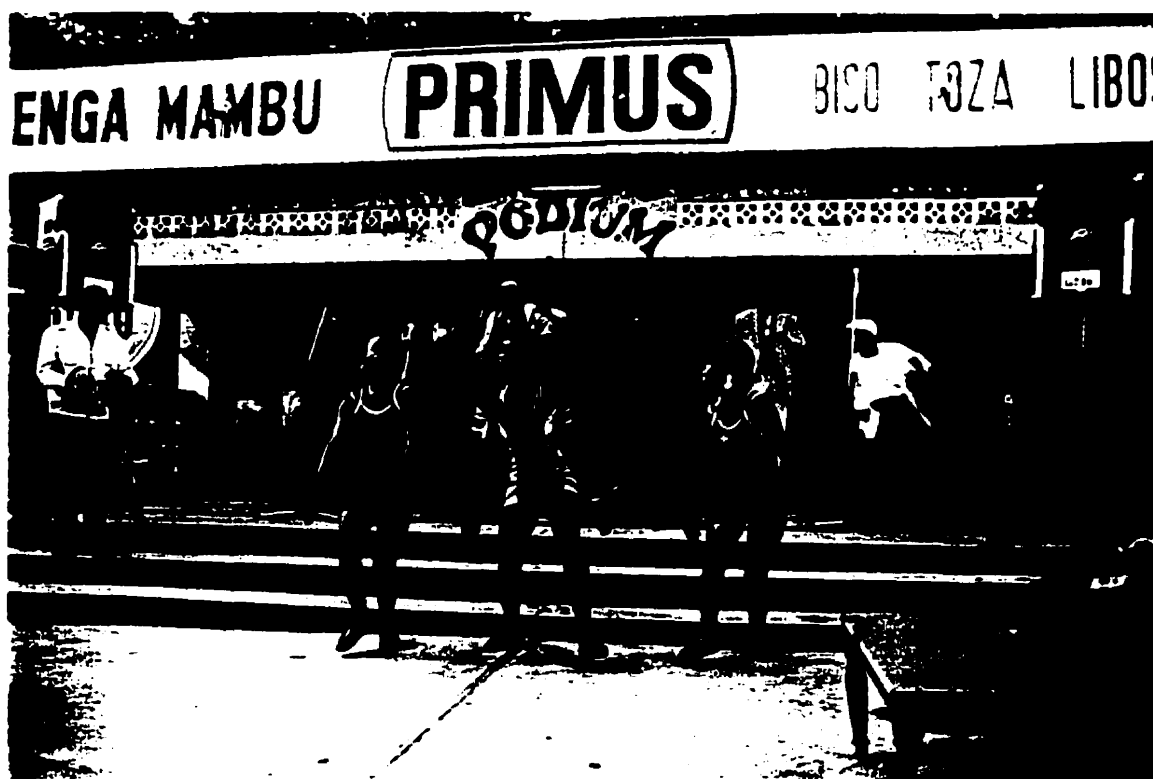


fig. 7.5 Dancers venture into the audience

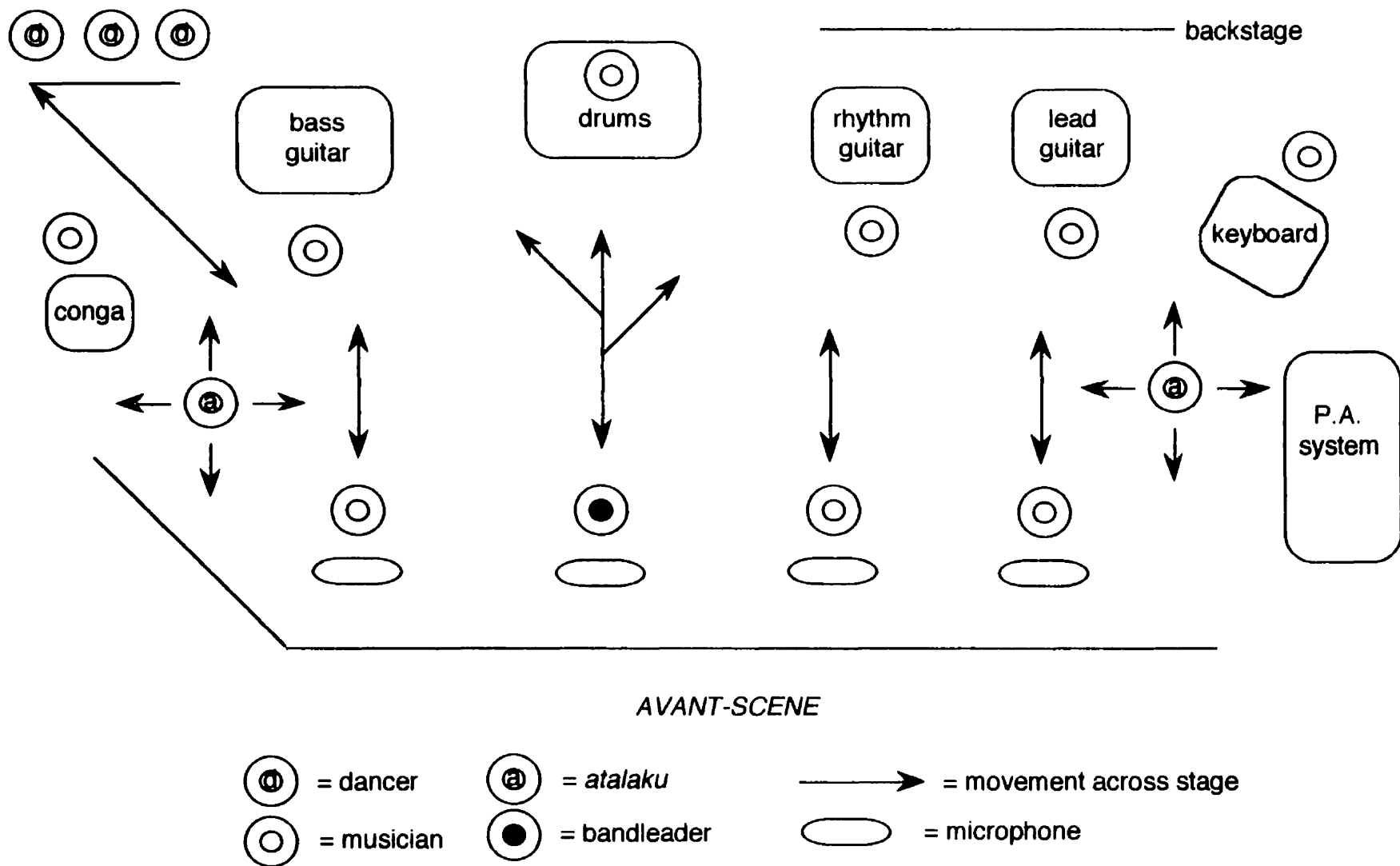


fig. 7.6 The use of space on stage

## *Dancing and Shouting*

Shrill voices that shoot right through your heart; slightly oily bodies devilishly clad in printed silk shirts and litany-marked suits saunter onto a stage that's too small in wastelands or working class houses transformed for the night; mostly male bodies on the dance floor waiting for the middle of the night and gallons of beer before starting to dance, alone, dancing till delirium to an endless seething hypnotic rhythm all through a night that may have no day. Deafening music is everywhere, dance and electric guitars playing endlessly. Everyone dances, the middle class, the beggars, the madmen (Pivin 1996: 1).

The *seben*'s mood of controlled frenzy is maintained in great part by the *atalaku*, whose job, having taken the microphone from one of the singers, is to encourage people to dance through a careful combination of shouts ('cris'), sung-shouts ('chants-cris') and the vocal gymnastics which make up his bag of tricks. As I will discuss below, an intimate relationship exists between shouts and dances, and at the center of this dynamic is the *atalaku*. As in the previous parts of each song, the *atalaku* has a great deal of flexibility during the *seben*. He is an instrumentalist, playing the maracas as an important complement to the driving rhythm of the snare drum. He is a vocalist, using the microphone to both sing and shout. And he is a dancer, sometimes leaving aside the microphone and the maracas to join the front dance line, and sometimes dancing solo or together with the *danseuses* in the 'avant-scène'. Thus the need for two and sometimes more *atalaku*; while one is shouting, the other can continue playing the maracas. Occasional call and response shouts require that both *atalaku* shout at the same time. In order to do all this, and to maintain the energy of an extended *seben*, which can last as long as 40 minutes, the *atalaku* must have incredible stamina. After the instrumentalists, the *atalaku* is the first musician on stage as he accompanies the band with high-energy shouts, dance moves and maracas during the instrumental *variétés* music at the beginning of the show. He is on the microphone for at least two-three times as long as the singers, and during technical problems (such as instrument failure or blackouts) he will usually continue shouting even if his microphone stops working. It is he who "chants the hysterical shouts which are supposed to punctuate the music and direct the dance steps and physical contortions" of live performance (Tchebwa 1996: 206).

Although it is commonly believed that the *atalaku* is responsible for 'calling' dances and shouts, this is rarely the case. The succession of dance steps is determined by a number of actors and factors in the musical environment of any given performance. Firstly it is important to remember that dances are almost always accompanied by shouts. The motion of the dance does not always correspond directly with the content of the shout (for example Djuna Mumbafu's *moto* or *kibinda nkoy* from Nouvelle Image), but in most cases the two have an automatic association. There are examples of shouts that become more well-known than the dances that accompany them (for example Super Choc's *mandundu*, Edi Gar's *makiese*, and *bizelele* sung by Nono of Zaiko Langa Langa). When shouts of this type are picked up by other groups, dances from the group's own repertoire are substituted. As discussed earlier (ch. 6), each song has a series of pre-determined shouts (usually three or four) which come directly from the album on which the song was released. After the pre-determined shouts/dances have been exhausted, anywhere from three to ten additional ones will be added to complete the song in concert. The exact number will depend on those that are chosen (since some last longer than others) and on the point at which they are chosen (some *seben* are shortened if the mood or *filingi* is not right).

In most bands, the most senior singer will take on the role of dance line leader. In this capacity it is he who decides or 'calls' the next dance step which in turn signals the next shout. But his decision is constrained by a number of factors, most important of which is the structure of the song. Partitions within the *seben* correspond to motifs from the lead guitar and thus partition length and transitions between partitions are usually determined by the lead guitarist. Most dance line leaders will call a change in step upon hearing a change in partition or upon seeing the lead guitarist's signal to the instrumentalists to prepare for such a change. Apart from this technical/structural constraint, the dance line leader is also constrained by dance fashions of the day. It is his job to manage dance sequences in such a way as to be not only entertaining, but also accessible, since many members of the audience dance what the band is dancing. Certain key dances of the moment ("les danses qui font succès" or "les

danses qui marchent”) must be used sparingly so as not to wear them out, and well-timed in order to maintain a certain level of excitement throughout the performance.

The dance line leader is also responsible for organizing the *danseuses*. Female singer-dancers, present in the music since the days of the vaudeville-style variety shows of the 1940s (see Fabian 1990), were first used in ‘modern’ *rumba* by Tabu Ley Rochereau, who along with his “Rocherettes” conquered the Olympia theatre in Paris in 1970. Since then, female singer-dancers have become for the most part dancers and their now ubiquitous presence (both in videos and in concert) plays upon female eroticism and male desire (Biaya 1994; Chiwengo 1997). *Danseuses* are almost never on stage during the first parts of songs.<sup>20</sup> Invariably they wait backstage, preparing themselves to appear during the transition to the *seben* or during the *seben* itself. Their placement and their movement on stage is directed by the leader of the dance line (either the lead singer or the most senior singer on stage at that time), but in the case of an extended dance sequence (usually in the ‘avant-scène), the head *danseuse* can make decisions with regards to particular dance steps and positions.

*Danseuses* do not appear on every song. This is probably intended to tease the mostly male audience as much as it is to leave enough space for the singers to show their own skills as dancers. When *danseuses* do appear, it is usually in groups of two or more, preferably dressed in similar or complementary outfits and dancing in unison [figure 7.7]. Compared to male dancers (most often singer-dancers), who joke with each other and exaggerate dance steps to please the audience (‘mettre l’ambiance’), *danseuses* are generally more subdued in their expression. They are admired for having a full figure (“Regardez cette santé!”) and for their ability to isolate and control the movement of particular body parts, especially the hips and buttocks. Occasionally *danseuses* who smile or maintain eye contact as they dance are appreciated for their charm (“aza na charme”), but most dancers prefer to charm with their hips, maintaining a concentrated, indifferent expression during performance. After their

---

<sup>20</sup>One exception being during weddings, where female dancers are encouraged to dance with other musicians or guests during classic *rumba* numbers.

arrival on stage, individual *danseuses* can break away from the small group for dance solos, ideally to wander into the audience to tease audience members and solicit money. Some groups will have a large number of *danseuses* (anywhere from eight to ten) and will designate a special place in their show to introduce them to the audience one by one, a kind of live catalogue of the women that the band has to offer a predominantly male audience [figure 7.8].

The dance solo is an opportunity for each *danseuse* to be noticed for her individual skills as a dancer, but it is also a chance to make extra money. During solos the *atalaku* helps the *danseuses* along by improvising the shouts which correspond roughly to the dances they are using. The *atalaku* pays very close attention to the dancer's moves, since she will often use a step of her own or something completely improvised. He fills in the gaps by improvising shouts spiced with her name: "Mami Mami e-eh oh, tala Mami Mami e-eh oh!" or "Jeancy! azobina! eza danzé! azobina!"<sup>21</sup> Like some singer-dancers, she often has pre-determined cues that tell the drummer to accent certain gestures. One dancer shakes her hands above her head to signal a full-arm downward motion that will end in the slapping of her rear; the drummer gives her two hits on the snare drum. Another dancer needs cymbals for her footwork and the kickdrum for her hips. These highly personalized solos, however, are usually not more than a prelude to something else. Dancers know that their best chance of making extra money is through attracting (not only male) attention on the dancefloor, and the best way to do this is through erotic gesturing.

Monique, nicknamed 'B-52', is the tallest of the dancers and her graceful, slow movements match what appears to be very a demure demeanor. Her solo, however, is far from demure. After a rushed series of standard steps and breaks, she cuts the beat and walks calmly to the center microphone stand. She places the microphone on the ground and calmly carries the stand out to the middle of the 'avant-scène'. Still holding on with one hand, she circles the stand until her back is facing the audience. With very little ceremony she works

---

<sup>21</sup>"Mami, Mami! Would you check out Mami, Mami!" or "Jeancy! She's dancing! She's dangerous! She's dancing!"





Fig. 7.8

fig. 7.8 Male concertgoers: 'maitrise'

both hands down the length of the microphone stand, and starts to wind her rear in slow, exaggerated figure eights that seem to be dictating the rhythm of the music. All except the distinguished guests in the single ring of front-row seats are now standing on their toes, anxious to see what will be her next move. Through her skillful and suggestive gestures, the microphone stand goes from being a horse, to a scratching post, to a fire hydrant. The audience is delirious and has already begun to spray her with money.

She leaves the microphone stand alone and begins to focus her energies on a live subject, having already spotted a wealthy-looking older man who up until now has shown no signs of being impressed. Only a few feet from his face, she turns her back to him, doubles over with her hands at her ankles and begins to move her rear at almost exactly eye level. He can remain straight-faced no longer, and finally cracks a smile. His friends on either side of him are howling with glee and encourage him wildly to pay something for his not so private dancer. But before he can reach his wallet, she has already changed positions. She is now hovering above his lap, facing the band in a semi-squat, forcing him to acknowledge her presence as a professional. After she senses the bill that has been placed nervously in between herself and her elastic body suit, she jumps up, claps her hands and turns to face him. Now she rejoins the rhythm already in progress, and dances a dance of joy with her hands behind her head and her hips all over. She does not look at him directly, but her continued close attention acknowledges his importance relative to the rest of the audience. He is obliged to shell out more money before she agrees to move on.

Not all dancers will venture this far into the audience, but those that do will often perform similar acts of solicitation.<sup>22</sup> Mami, a short stout dancer with a fake Madonna beauty mark and overpainted feline eyes, was known for a dance called 'the Cupid'. As she stepped through the *seben*, she would pantomime the removal of a love arrow from her quiver, draw it in her imaginary bow and roam around the dancefloor in search of a target. Once the target

---

<sup>22</sup>In the Big Stars, six of the eight *danseuses* used similar tactics on a regular basis. Informal observation suggests similar ratios for other bands as well.

was chosen, she would send him the arrow and carefully work her way to where he was sitting, zigzagging a slow, deliberate path across the 'avant-scène'. Mami's finale usually ends up with her standing on the armrests of a distinguished man's chair, slightly bent at the knees with her pelvis dancing circles around his field of vision. The acrobatics of the cupid dance make Mami extremely popular with the audience, but her 'Coca-Cola' is also a crowdpleaser. After having placed an empty coke bottle in the middle of the dancefloor and having circled it several times with a suggestive, low shuffle, Mami holds the bottle in between her legs and starts to work the crowd. With one hand behind her head and the other holding the bottle in a loose, bobbing motion, she shuffles slowly toward the audience members that are the most-well dressed or have the greatest number of beer bottles on their table. Sometimes before she arrives they are already forming a line in front of her. They want a chance to dance this moment of erotic humor and apart from some money, they each also bring their own bottle.

*Danseuse* solos are ecstatic high points of concert performance and as such they are relatively short compared to the total amount of time devoted to dance in a concert; in some concerts, these extended solos do not even occur. A variation on the *danseuse* solo is the group dance solo in which individual bandmembers (sometimes the entire band) are pushed by fellow bandmembers into the 'avant-scène' to display their dancing skills. Male dancers usually display agility, technique or humor while *danseuses* combine technique with a touch of eroticism. This variation is relatively common (occurring in one of every five Big Stars' concerts), but by far the most common dance formation is the loosely choreographed line of dance performed by the 'attaque chant'. Their movement, coordinated by cues from the dance line leader, is tightly synchronized, but individual dancers vary motions or add accents to underline individual style. This dance line can also include the participation of the *danseuses* (either in between the singers or in front of them), and in full force can involve as many as

sixteen people: eight *danseuses*, five singer-dancers, and three *atalaku*. This is what I have referred to as Defao's 'wall of dance'.<sup>23</sup>

Defao has always been known for his skills as a dancer, in fact in the early years of his career he was more well-known as a good dancer than as a good singer. As leader of the Big Stars, he has managed to continue this tradition through the 'wall of dance', which fills the stage during the majority of his performances. In the far back, the defense is moving gently, slightly changing the backdrop behind the 'attaque chant' which is five - seven people wide and moves like a Chinese dragon: together, individually. In front of the singers are two lines of four *danseuses*, loosely synchronized but dancing a step which is completely different from the male dancers behind them. In this complex formation, the lead *danseuses* will turn her head back periodically to see what the singer-dancers are doing and from time to time she will call the same step for her team. When the dozen or so dancers finally synch up, it is music for the eyes. Time seems to stop and the stage floats under the weightlessness of the band. There are shouts of joy from the center that match the volume of the *atalaku*, who by now has worked up a full sweat from singing and dancing at the same time. The layered effect of this 'wall' means that the spectator always has something new to look at, and in many cases it is not clear who will tire first, the dancers or the audience.

During all of this dance spectacle there is often just as much activity taking place in the audience. Almost all of the dance steps performed by the front line are recognized and followed by most members of the audience. Even if audience members are too far back to see exactly what is being danced, they can hear the corresponding shouts over the P.A. system and they can see the people in front of them all dancing in a more or less similar fashion. In addition to following the dance steps, many audience members will also sing along with the

---

<sup>23</sup>The 'wall of dance' phenomenon is less developed in other well-known groups; most groups have anywhere from one to four *danseuses*. Groups such as Empire Bakuba, Zaiko Langa Langa and Super Choc will have on occasion large *danseuse* troupes, but this requires considerable resources and preparation. Two groups in particular, Rajakula's Station Japana and the group of the Geneva-based musician Jolino, have begun to experiment with even larger group dance formations (eight - sixteen dancers apart from musicians), but this style of performance is limited to large stage shows and music videos due to the space it requires. There is also a variation which involves several female dancers dancing on either side of the lead singer, a variation which is particularly common in Defao's stage show.

shouts. Of course people participate to varying degrees. Some people position themselves immediately in front of the singers and try to impress the musicians by following the dance sequences and shouts very closely. Others know the dances and the repertoire very well and do not even need to look around before changing steps. This category of audience member (more often female than male) will sometimes join the front line on stage, either dancing directly with the lead singer or together with the lead singer and *danseuses* in the middle of a song. Some people dance the easiest or most obvious dances and do freestyle for the rest of the *seben*, while others simply stand up with an oversized beer bottle in hand, unable to control the urge and dance in place, standing in front of their chair.

It is 5:00 AM. Day breaks onto an orchestra of an endless song. The dance floor is full of rhythm, riveting the bodies. Shapes sleep on chairs and benches, others are still moving. The saturated music saturated everyone's weariness a long time ago. To never stop dancing, to never stop sleeping in the only possible home: music (Revue Noire 1996: 2).

Due to the frenetic pace of musical creation in Kinshasa, the most popular dances (li. 'bapas basala succès') are constantly changing. Only a small number of dance steps earn the distinction of staying on the market for more than a year (Djuna Mumbafu's *moto*, and the suggestive *mayeno* being good examples) and even fewer are considered good enough to be picked up and used by musicians other than those who created them (Rajakula's *kitisela*, Nouvelle Image's *kibinda nkoy* and the 1997 rage *dombolo*). Relatively well-known dance steps that never attain this level of popularity may last for three to six months (about the same time as the album or music videos are getting played) and are automatically associated with their creators, but are not picked up for use by other musicians (Djuna Mumbafu's *bidenda*, Defao's *simbaka motema*). Thus there are probably no more than about one dozen recognizable dance steps with shouts which circulate around Kinshasa at any given time.<sup>24</sup> And this does not mean they all share the same popularity; some are on their way up, some

---

<sup>24</sup>This tendency to draw from a common pool of material and the fact that often the same dances/shouts are used in different songs is one reason why Zairean music is often considered repetitive or monotonous. On repetition and difference, see Drewal (1991) and the discussion in Chapter Ten.

have plateaued and some are on their way out. Almost all bands draw from this common pool of dances and shouts to complement their own repertoire, but as a general rule the number of borrowed dances should not surpass those created by members of the band, and in most cases borrowed dances are adapted to have the band's own personal signature.<sup>25</sup> As I have discussed in Chapter Four, many musicians feel pressure to include at least some of these popular dances/shouts in order to maintain their fragile fan base.

Looking at how dance steps spread is helpful in understanding how dance styles change so rapidly. Music videos have a prominent place in television programming (especially on non state-run television stations, see ch. 4) and dancing is the key element of most videos. But before dances make it onto the television screen, they have already circulated throughout the city in bars and live concerts. Some dances are created by spectators and picked up by musicians for performance, while others are the result of 'creative borrowing' between musicians.<sup>26</sup> Occasionally musicians will arrive to band practice with a new step they want to try out. The step will be shown to a fellow musician or stage companion, and if enough musicians from the dance line express interest, the step may be used in the concert setting. But new ideas can also be tested during live performance in a concert setting.

This was the case with a dance that began to emerge in May of 1996. It was brought to the Big Stars by Bleu, one of the band's singers. During one of the band's first shows on tour in Lower Zaire, Bleu stepped back from the microphone, standing still, and looked around the stage. Taking advantage of a temporary calm in the dance line, he lunged forward with his

---

<sup>25</sup>There are of course some exceptions. Nostalgia groups such as Afrique Alliance and Mathieu Kuka's Afrique Ambience make very little use of choreographed dances and their accompanying shouts. Although Bana O.K. has been influenced by the multi-part song structure and 'animation' of the New Wave movement, the dances they use are of their own creation and reflect the taste and age of their mostly older audience (see the album "Cabinet Molili" 1994). Another important exception is the music of Viva La Musica (led by Papa Wemba), the only well-known band to systematically refuse to use other group's dances and shouts. "We want to do something different," Wemba once told me in an interview. Other well-known bands such as Empire Bakuba and Zaiko Langa Langa, both renowned for their creative energy in this area, are more and more forced to give in to pressure from fans to use the shouts/dance steps created by the 'petits orchestres'.

<sup>26</sup>Musicians, especially singers and *atalaku* are constantly on the lookout for new dance steps. Ideas for new steps or moves are usually drawn from folklore presentations, dancing street vendors, or from watching 'les petits orchestres'. It is very common for musicians to boast that they 'discovered' a dance or a shout in such and such a place, suggesting that creativity can also be measured by the artist's ability to identify and adapt the creations of others.

arms tight to his side and took three giant steps, each with a rhythm of their own, independent of the pounding backbeat. All eyes were on him as he started to shuffle backwards with his shoulders shrugged and a huge smile on his face. His hands were spread out, with his wrists on his hips and his fingers stretched out like feelers. No one in the band was quite sure what was happening, but everyone seemed to like it. A few minutes later he lunged forward again, and the musicians egged him on as they began to realize that this was not a freak occurrence, but a new dance step. The *atalaku* identified the step as a variation of a new dance for which he knew the shout (*mobondo sabina*) and he began to shout accordingly. After Bleu had performed a few cycles of the step, various members of the band joined him in the 'avant-scène' to try it out, each with his or her own version of the step. The newness of the step, together with the catchy shout, made it a great source of interest for the band. From my notes:

This dance, this Bleu dance with the Monty Python silly walk, this dance is taking over our shows ... we did what seemed like at least a 45-minute *seben* just to elaborate the new step. The best is Bleu, with his *Bleuettes* [figure 7.9]. Theo dances it pretty well, even Mamy and Jeancy have their own little version. It's a dance "qui a fait plaisir"; nice to watch, very cyclical. *Kitisela* is dead, dead and buried (May 6, 1996).

As this brief observation suggests, the dance usually begins as a root idea or motif and then is elaborated by various members of the band, each adding his/her own personal variation to the theme (c.f. Fabian 1990; Gates 1988; Rose 1994). This particular dance and shout combination was borrowed from another band but was adapted and elaborated in live time, and would later become an integral part of the Big Stars show. Before too long, the dance completely overran the previous most popular dance (*kitisela*) in terms of the amount of performance time it occupied. This case serves as a good example of the way that dance styles spread between musicians and between bands.<sup>27</sup>

I have given some information about how dances and shouts are borrowed, but this does not address the question of why they are borrowed. As I suggested above, stylistic

---

<sup>27</sup>The dance described above as well as the one to follow it, were both acquired during the band's tour of Lower Zaire.



fig. 7.9 Bleu and the Bleuettes



fig. 8.5 Koyo 'Nzaya' with American flag



innovation in Zairean music occurs mostly in dances and shouts. Song structure, although having changed gradually over the last 30 years, has shown relatively little variation within the last decade. Lyrics also have been very formulaic; musicians express the fear of losing an already precious local consumer base as a reason for not straying too far from standard themes about love and male-female relations.<sup>28</sup> Thus dances and shouts are the most effective way for local musicians to express their creative impulse and to distinguish themselves in a highly competitive milieu. Dances and shouts are inexpensive to create, they are highly mobile, easy to remember and impossible to copyright (ch. 4), all factors which make them central to the dynamic of music production and consumption.

It is generally believed that well-known musicians, tired and lacking inspiration, actively seek out fresh ideas from younger less-experienced music groups or musicians (*"ils puisent tout le temps chez les petits orchestres"*). Stories abound about how well-known musicians exploit young 'paroliers' ('wordboys' or 'lyricists') in order to beef up their material and add to their repertoire.<sup>29</sup> But there are also many examples of less well-known musicians, even non-musicians, offering ideas to the stars. The Big Stars repertoire of shouts/dances, totalling approximately 30 during the time of my fieldwork, was composed of the following: ten of the current band's creation, eight from up and coming groups (Nouvelle Image, Super Choc and Rajakula), seven from Defao's previous band (Choc Stars), and four from various unknown neighborhood groups. Part of the reason that well-known groups are able to 'borrow' from less well-known groups is that less well-known (and unknown) groups have no recourse in the event that well-known groups are able to profit from their creative energies. Established musicians enjoy performing the shouts and dances they 'borrow' from younger groups, but they also see borrowed material as a strategy to please increasingly young audiences, and as proof of their adaptability to new trends and tastes.

---

<sup>28</sup>Elsewhere I have addressed the issue of masked messages or politically driven sub-text in modern Congolese music (White & Busé 1997). On this topic, see also Fabian (1990, 1998) and Onyumbé (1994).

<sup>29</sup>The most well-known example is Koffi Olomide, who actually began his career as 'parolier' for Papa Wemba. Tabu Ley also apparently supplied lyrics to Grand Kallé before joining African Jazz (Lonoh 1969: 68)

## Blurring the Barrier

In Europe you all go out and watch a show, but here we go to be a part of the show. I went to see Wemba last night and didn't even notice what color he was wearing (Gaby Shabani, personal communication).

Music, shouts, dances, and the visual overload of live music performance penetrates the personal universe of the people who make up the audience. The corporeal and sensual experience of loud music, alcohol, and large numbers of dancing bodies enables individuals to penetrate the strange and wonderful world which musicians occupy (ch. 5). But the flow of information and experience is not uni-directional. People in the audience also penetrate the space of the musicians. Various kinds of identification strategies (singing along with shouts, taking pictures with the artist during performance, placing money on the artist in various ways, etc.) enable the non-musician to participate in the performance and at some level to identify with the musician's personal power and dangerous gestures of individual distinction. The symbolic space that separates them, often no more than a slightly elevated stage and set of four microphone stands, is porous, and the ease with which members of the audience arrive on stage blurs to a certain extent the distinction between stars and fans.

During one of my first concerts as an *atalaku*, I was singled out by a member of the audience who in between songs was standing at the foot of the elevated stage in front of Defao and yelling: "mundele! mundele!" ('white person! white person!'). After two or three songs her voice became louder and more insistent, to the point that Defao could no longer ignore her. He looked down and put his hand behind his ear to signal to her that she repeat what she said. "What's that? What? You want the *mundele* to dance? What? Oh you want to *dance* with the *mundele*?" The crowd around her claps and cheers and the musicians on stage laugh an embarrassed laugh. "What's your name?" Defao asks. "Linda? Linda? Linda Linda? What?

Oh, Linda MUSA! Okay Linda Musa, come up here."<sup>30</sup> She scuttles around to the side of the rickety podium and rushes up the steps to find a place on stage immediately next to me. I try to remain cool, act non-chalant, not totally sure if I should dance with her or continue playing my maracas. My indecision did not seem to bother her as she was only half-dancing, busy trying to take in everything she was experiencing. She stayed on the stage until well into the *seben* and eventually had to be asked to leave the stage by one of the security guards. I thought that would be the end of the story.

At the end of the song, however, Defao called Linda back to the front of the audience and asked her to offer some money for her '*mundele* husband'. He turns to me on the microphone and asks me if I will take her as my wife. For the sake of the show, I grin and nod 'yes' and Defao, through the power invested in him as leader and founder of the Big Stars, declares us *mundele* and wife. Then he goes back to Linda: "C'mon Linda, now you have to pay." The crowd is making a lot of noise; laughing, commenting, cajoling Linda to take some action. She is young and does not seem the type to want for words, but this time she is stuck. She tries to convince Defao that she already gave some money to the band but he says it was not enough. "Maybe you need some advice from your husband -- *mundele! mundele!*" Defao calls me over, "come and give your wife some advice." I approach the microphone, not totally sure that I understood what was being said. I pause and I feel hundreds of people waiting to see what I am going to say. "Mwassi na ngai," the silence is broken. "Il faut to yokana bien."<sup>31</sup> One of the singers is doubled over with laughter and the rest of the musicians are chuckling in place. I continue: "Do you love me? Yes? Okay, good, then listen. Did you already pay something? How much?" The audience is so loud I can only see her mouth making the word '*beaucoup*'. "Wife, you've betrayed, you were supposed to pay in dollars!" I laugh together with the band and the crowd (including Linda), and as I step away from the microphone the next song begins.

---

<sup>30</sup>It is very common for musicians to pacify unruly elements of the crowd through this type of accommodation. For example, members of the audience who drink too much and either want to dance on stage or sing with the singers will be invited on the stage, introduced and will be given a short period of time to 'do their thing'. This strategy is not only entertaining for the larger public, but it also tends to disarm any potential troublemakers.

<sup>31</sup>"Wife of mine...it's important that we get along well."

This example shows how interaction between musicians and fans can be completely spontaneous, but more predictable forms of interaction also occur in concert. While waiting for musicians to change places or tune their instruments, Defao will often take the microphone and jokingly appease the audience by talking about how late he intends to stay: "Okay, the music is gonna' keep coming. We're going to play until ... 6:00 in the morning ..." Short pause.<sup>32</sup> He looks back to see if the musicians are ready. When he sees they are still fumbling with the guitars he continues to stall for time on the microphone. "We're here until 7:00 in the morning and we're going to play all your favorite songs [someone whispers something in his ear]. Okay, no problem whatsoever, we're going to keep going until 9:00 this morning ... [he turns again] ... you guys are a great audience, the music is gonna keep coming...". On some occasions he will take requests from the audience. The songs requested do not vary much from a set of three or four Defao hits, but this strategy gives the impression of accountability to fans and creates an atmosphere of audience participation which heightens spectators' awareness of the performance. There are also instances where audience members will be invited to sing the words to one of his well-known songs or to play along with the band as a guest musician (usually guitarist or *atalaku*).

Near the end of one of our shows, due to a power outage, all of the equipment and lights in the area where we were playing went completely dead. Suddenly we felt the darkness around us and the full pounding sound of our fifteen-piece electric band was reduced to its naked humanness, the drummer and the *atalaku*, the only two musicians that don't need electricity to play a *seben*. Despite this slight technical difficulty, they continue to play. The *atalaku* is unsure at first but when he sees that the drummer has no intention of stopping, he puts his microphone back in the stand and continues shouting without it. He approaches the edge of the stage to get closer to the audience and starts to lead them in a Big Stars shout which they are sure to know: "Otoki te! Okozuwa mosolo te! Otoki te! Okozuwa mosolo te!"<sup>33</sup> A

---

<sup>32</sup>'Tozali kokoba, se kokoba. To kobeta ti... six heures du matin...Vraiment to sepele trop...to kobeta tiiii tongo'.

<sup>33</sup>Literally, "If you don't sweat, you don't get paid."

fitting shout given the *atalaku*'s commitment to work, even in almost impossible conditions. The crowd answers back for each response section and then he gives them a chance to do it on their own, "Otoki te! Okozuwa mosolo te!" They are each and all yelling at the top of their lungs, almost drowning out the drummer who is experiencing the closest he will ever come to a drum solo. Unexpected occurrences such as this one are important to understanding why African audiences are so attached to live performance. From my notes:

Everybody was happy. Despite the rain, which was relatively heavy, we continued playing. At first I didn't think we would last but then all of the sudden I said: "This is wonderful. I'm with a Zairean band playing *rumba* in the rain, and the show was as hot as any I had seen." What a great moment. Kabosé would come over and provoke me into dancing. Chef Man would just sit there playing his solo, stoic like the night. Ladi would smile, always with a slight delay (you can't smile in the middle of a Zairean chord change). Defao turning to look at me with a glimmer in his eye. I felt very happy and very lucky (Apr. 11, 1996).

The rain that began to fall was a moment of intimacy shared between musicians and fans, and neither it nor the blackout were able to stop the show. As the show finally came to an end at around 5:00 am, the musicians hustled off stage into the mini-van waiting nearby and the final few musicians off stage were accosted by fans who had been trying since midnight to get a picture with someone from the band: "Massa, eza pona carte moko. Carte moko, pardon!"<sup>34</sup>

### *Picturetaking and Spraying*

For fans at this particular concert picturetaking was rendered very difficult by the elevated podium which is commonly used in larger, outdoor concert settings. Access to an elevated podium is limited to a small set of stairs on either side, and this means that bouncers and security guards are more effective at controlling crowd flows onto the stage [figure 7.10]. It is much more common for concerts to be held in small, open-air concert bars which have

---

<sup>34</sup>"Hey, can we get a picture? Just one picture, please?"



Fig. 7.10

fig. 7.10 Female concertgoers: singing along

stages set back from the dance floor but only rarely or slightly elevated. In this setting the atmosphere is much more intimate: the crowd is smaller, the audience is physically closer to the band, and there are fewer obstacles to entry on stage. Thus, when pictures are taken, they are not taken *of* musicians, but *with* musicians. In most concert settings, fans will simply walk on stage, stand next to the star or musician of their choice and have their picture taken together with him/her in the middle of a song or dance number.

As soon as the lead singer arrives on stage he is usually bombarded with members from the audience who want a picture ('une carte') with their favorite 'star'. The flow of audience members is not continuous, but at particular moments (immediately after the star arrives on stage and at the beginning of subsequent songs) the stream of people wanting to pose with the star is unbroken and can easily last the entire length of a song (up to 30 minutes). People approach the stage on an as-ready basis and tend to stagger themselves, waiting at the edge of the stage until the previous fan has finished. Neither does there seem to be any particular type of person taking pictures; women seek pictures as well as men, rich as well as poor. It does seem that women are more likely to take pictures in groups of two or three and men usually take pictures alone. It is also more common to see younger than older people, but this might be a function of the makeup of the concertgoing public, already relatively young. In some concert situations, picturetaking can get very unruly and security guards either stop pictures all together or try to get people to form a single-file line on either side of the dancefloor. When the 'avant-scène' is too crowded, some security guards will stand near the musicians in front of the microphone stands and act as a turnstyle for one or two people to come on stage at a time.<sup>35</sup>

Regardless of the number of people wanting pictures, the process itself is very cumbersome on stages which are already too small. The fan arrives on stage, usually with a very self-conscious strut, places him or herself immediately next to the star he/she wishes to

---

<sup>35</sup>Security guards and bouncers have been known to float around the stage looking to make money by charging eager fans a price to get a picture with the star or to ensure that the star sings the fan's name.

pose with, and proceeds to try to look natural. Young men will often put on sunglasses or adjust their clothes before the picture is snapped. Older more distinguished types will place an arm around the star's shoulder or freeze a handshake in the style of heads of state during photo opportunities. Women will stand close to the star, usually one on either side, with the star's arms wrapped around their waists or shoulders. Pictures are taken by independent photographers who move from concert to concert in search of people who want photo-souvenirs of their evening; a kind of visual autograph. For the price of about \$1.00 (U.S.), the photographer will take a snapshot of you with the star, he will take down your name and address, collect a partial payment for his services and deliver the picture to your home in person at which time you can pay the difference.<sup>36</sup> Despite the fact that most concerts have two or three different freelance photographers working simultaneously, picturetaking is a complicated process. Photographers rarely have equipment which is reliable enough to take pictures in rapid succession (flashes re-charge slowly, winders get stuck, etc.) and since they have very few repeat customers, there is always some discussion once the customer is on stage about who has been commissioned to take the picture.

The musicians, especially the lead singer who is most often at the center of this commotion, are amazingly tolerant. Sometimes they stop what they are doing (singing or dancing), and sometimes they continue, completely oblivious to the people around them. Singers are more likely to stop what they are doing during the dance section of the song, since the other singers present can continue to dance while the picture is being taken. Fans, however, usually prefer to arrive on stage during the first part of the song. At this point, there are usually fewer people on stage and the fan has a better chance of getting a 'good' picture (i.e. with the singer singing or a private shot of just the fan and the singer). This part of the song is also easier for photographers since the dancefloor is not yet full. When asked how they feel about this practice, many musicians agree that it is indeed a great nuisance and tends

---

<sup>36</sup>Some photographers will also take more standard 'concert photos' at certain concerts, focusing primarily on well-known singers or stars, since these photos can be sold later as individual prints to the general public.



to upset musicians' concentration, but they insist that it is important to the fans and thus should not be discouraged (see end of ch. 5). Especially in touring situations, where fans rarely have the chance to interact with their favorite stars from the capital, musicians are noticeably lenient. Perhaps they see photographs as an important part of their ongoing efforts to maintain popularity and a positive public image, or perhaps they view it as a manifestation of their personal power (ch. 5). A free flow of people on stage and unlimited, free photo opportunities may also create an atmosphere which encourages more members of the audience to come on stage and place money on or around the artist (spraying). Although people wanting pictures and people offering money are generally not the same people, there is some overlap between the two, especially given that spraying and picturetaking activities occupy roughly the same time and space in most concert performance situations.

The practice of spraying is always its most intense immediately after the star finally arrives on stage. Spraying, as well as picturetaking, occurs with varying levels of intensity throughout the show, but is less common as the evening progresses.<sup>37</sup> Given difficult economic times, money offered to the musician on stage is often a symbolic gesture of appreciation. Larger single bills are preferred since they lend greater prestige, but it can also be effective to shower the musician with a large number of smaller bills, since most will fall to ground and remain invisible to most spectators. Most fans will give an amount somewhere between the equivalent of .75 cents and \$1.00 (U.S.), about the equivalent of a bottle of beer. Amounts can be larger, but more significant sums of money are usually given to the musician in private, either before the show or at the musician's home, as part of an ongoing patron-client relationship (I will discuss this in greater detail in ch. 8). Amounts can be kept discrete by simply placing the money in the musician's pocket, or directly in one of his hands. More conspicuous displays of money (especially those done in foreign currency such as U.S. dollars or Belgian Francs) will be spread or slapped on the musician's sweating forehead. Musicians

---

<sup>37</sup>Waterman (1990) discusses the phenomenon of spraying for Juju musicians in Nigeria, arguing that spraying is uneven throughout most performances and that spraying serves three primary purposes: repayment of debts, reinforcement of various types of relations, and the negotiation of social status through the public display of wealth.

that get sprayed by many people at one time will often let all of their earnings drop to the ground and pick them up at the end of the song.<sup>38</sup>

During one performance a young man dressed in flashy sunglasses and an oversized American t-shirt began to make repeated trips to the microphone to lay money on Defao. Each time he sprayed Defao with 5,000 NZ (the equivalent at that time of about .50), which seemed like a lot given the fact that this was only a practice, and that he had already returned to give money several times. After his 5,000 NZ notes ran out, he began giving 1,000 notes at which point Defao approached the microphone and started to tease, speaking to no one in particular: *Okay, thank you, thank you. Thank you for your support. Please keep the money coming, especially the red ones* [the 5,000 notes are red, 1,000 are green], *the green ones are okay but we really prefer the red ones.* The young man immediately stands up and protests: *But I gave 12,500! The green ones were worth 12,500!* Defao backs off a bit from what he intended as a harmless joke: *Okay, thank you, thanks friend.* When the young man returns to give money again, Defao stops the music and has him come and introduce himself on the microphone. He says his name in a deep voice, kind of bending over and bobbing as he repeats it. People start to laugh and when he returns a fourth and a fifth time, they laugh even harder. It is not clear if they know him and are laughing because they see him interacting with Defao or if (like me) they find something very exaggerated and narcissistic in the way he carries himself every time he repeats the action of laying money upon Defao. *Général! 'Hitachi'! C'mon Général, 'Hitachi'!* he yells out the name of his favorite Defao song from his seat at the front of the crowd. Defao consults with his lead guitarist, flashes one of his charming underbite smiles in the direction of the young man and says: *Next song, okay?*

Spraying comes in many shapes and sizes. Women will spray money on the forehead or chest of their favorite singer in the band, a gesture which is sometimes taken as a come-on by male singers. The *danseuses* also spray their favorite singers or the junior bandleaders, but it is

---

<sup>38</sup>Money dropped at the feet of the lead singer will usually be picked by his personal assistant or by the stagehands or engineers closest to the stage.

rare to see other members of the band spray each other. Sometimes close friends or regular fans of the band with sufficient means will spray sections of the band (for example the singers, the guitarists, the *atalakus*, etc.) or on special occasions the entire band. And obviously some musicians will get generously sprayed by close friends that are visiting from *poto* (Europe) or who happen to be in the audience that night. Singers are without a doubt the most heavily-sprayed among all the musicians.<sup>39</sup> Much to the pleasure of the non-singers in the band, I used to joke that the problem with singers is that they stand between the rest of the band and the audience. Musicians tell stories about singers, especially lead singers, who are capable of making as much as \$100 U.S. per night just from spraying, some all at one time. In addition to singers, the lead guitarist, solo dancers (both male and female), and *atalaku* are also regular recipients of sprayed money.<sup>40</sup>

One of my own experiences with spraying culminated in an on-stage frenzy which left me with my pockets full, but feeling a bit disoriented. It was a small concert bar show in a remote neighborhood in Kinshasa. I had already finished two songs only playing the maracas, so that when my co-*atalaku* passed me the microphone I felt sufficiently warmed up. Before long there was a steady flow of people walking quickly toward me, some from the side of the stage, some from straight on, others coming out of nowhere. They were sticking their hands in my pockets, putting things inside my shirt, opening and closing my hands and rubbing pieces of paper across my by now very sweaty brow. A young woman took the sweat towel that I always kept close by and wiped my forehead before slipping a small wad of bills in my already fully stuffed shirt pocket. It was a wonderful feeling to be at the receiving end of all this positive attention, but while it was happening, I was not quite sure how to react. After the song was over some of the musicians were slapping their pockets and giving me the thumbs up gesture for having made so much money. Judging from the number of requests I had for beer

---

<sup>39</sup>Waterman has also discussed the privileged position that singers, especially praisesingers, occupy in popular music styles in Yoruba speaking areas of Nigeria (1990: 157). On the distinction between singers and instrumentalists in popular music in general, see (Frith 1989).

<sup>40</sup>According to Waterman's account of *juju* music in Nigeria, spraying accounts for at least 50% of band's earnings on an average night (1990: 185). During one show I was given a counterfeit \$100 bill. Strangely enough I found the bill in my pocket after the show, crumpled up together with bunches of Zairean bills.

and soda, everyone in the band thought I made a killing: *C'mon Monsieur Bob, I saw you out there, you're rich!* Chef Maneko assured me that it was my money and I should do with it as I saw fit. *If you want to give some of it to the other musicians*, he said, *I don't think they would turn it down*, and on the nights I made money this is usually what I did. From my notes:

And why did those people give me money? ... People who come on stage in Zaire to take a picture with Defao do what every American wants to do with Michael Jackson, but can't, they participate in the phenomenon ... There are certainly some who do it to show off that they have money and taste, but there are those (like that woman who sprayed me dancing) that do it because they're taken by the moment, like I was taken the first time I saw Simaro [leader of the group Bana O.K.] ... I just wanted to be a part of his thoughts (May 8, 1996).

### *Praising and 'Throwing'*

Les Kinois aiment être chantés (M. Bomboro, Bralima Breweries, Feb. 21, 1996)<sup>41</sup>

'Lancer quelqu'un' (li. 'ko bwaka' in Lingala), literally 'to throw' someone, is the term most commonly used to describe what musicians do when they sing the names of people either on recordings or in live performance.<sup>42</sup> Any musician that has access to the microphone, meaning primarily singers and *atalaku*, has the opportunity to sing someone's name. Names to be sung will usually be inserted in the spaces between lines of verses or in between verses and choruses. They are often shouted with a slight rising tone and sometimes accented with tremolo at the end. Names can be sung or shouted, although in concert they are usually shouted. Since sponsors themselves can take many forms (ch. 8), the names 'thrown' in a concert performance vary considerably: the promoter, a rich acquaintance, a businessman, a young man who just got paid, a soldier, a political figure, a social club, a group of friends and so on. It is also common for musicians to throw the names of other musicians and friends

---

<sup>41</sup> 'People from Kinshasa love to be sung'.

<sup>42</sup> The French term 'immortaliser' is also used. On patron-client relations between musicians and various kinds of 'sponsors', especially in recordings and outside of performance, see Chapter Eight.

present, although this should be seen more as an expression of solidarity than as something which is related to sponsorship *per se*.<sup>43</sup>

While waiting for the show to start, the Big Stars were huddled into an empty schoolroom nearby the stage where we would be playing later that evening. Feeling a bit cramped, I decided to go outside of the building to get some fresh air. Ebolo, the chauffeur, asked me to buy him something to drink. After I gave him some money, he said I could sit in his seat in the van which was parked nearby the schoolroom. I climbed in the van, happy with my new seat which was more comfortable than the cinder block I had given up in the schoolroom. Kabosé [one of Defao's co-singers] was in the passenger's seat and my arrival woke him up from a very light sleep. "Monsieur Bob," he said, stretching his arms and squinting his eyes. "Kabosé," I answered. This was the extent of most conversations between band members. Kabosé turned to look out of his window to see three young men approaching the van. They each greeted him, "Boni massa?", and shook his hand. They each had on oversized cheap sunglasses and garrish combinations of oversized mix-matched garments that gave away what they were trying to cover up. They wanted Kabosé to 'throw them', their names that is, they wanted him to sing their names on the microphone. I tried not to be too obvious, but I could not believe what was going on in front of my eyes.

Kabosé remained very calm, which made me think that this kind of thing probably happens all the time, and Kabosé was not even the lead or number two singer. One by one they slipped a series of bills under his hand which was open with the palm facing downwards. He would close his hand around the money, nod his head in a slight gesture of deference and place the money in his coat pocket before putting up his hand for the next young sponsor. After the transaction was complete, he tried to memorize each of their names. They gave priority to their nicknames: "Moi c'est Dieudonné, dit 'Ninja Force'" or "'Jackson le Grand

---

<sup>43</sup>Musicians calling out each others names or nicknames is common in many African musical styles (Berliner 1978: 126; Waterman 1990). In the early years of Congo-Zairean music, shouts of peoples names were almost exclusively made up of other musicians. In live performance in the 1990s, lead guitarists and drummers are most often those who become immortalized on the microphone. Defao, for example, had the habit of creating special shouts for certain lead guitarists: "Burkina Faso! [his name] Faso na Faso-we!" As Berliner suggests, this practice has a stimulative effect on musicians while they play.

Américain', prénom Serge" or "Pompidou, seulement Pompidou". As Kabosé was trying to memorize these self-imposed layers of identity, he looked over at me and started to laugh, realizing that I was following what was going on. With the three names down pat, Kabosé reached out to shake each of their hands and closed the transaction: "Bon, bapetits -- abo ... merci, anh?" And they for their part: "En tout cas, ya Kabosé, biso tozali na yo. Vraiment to sepeli na yo trop, vié."<sup>44</sup> He reassured them that the show would be starting soon and they were off, laughing and patting each other on the back. Kabosé lets loose a big sigh and turns to me, obviously wanting to explain:

"Oh Monsieur Bob! [He laughs nervously]. Vous savez que c'est comme ça la musique ici au Zaïre. Les gens veulent qu'on les chante et on est obligé. Vraiment c'est une situation très difficile." He had a hint of embarrassment in his voice and I found it interesting that he was aware that this kind of thing may not happen in other countries.

"C'est la crise," I offer.

"Ah oui," he answers, still somewhat embarrassed but proud to be conversing in French.

"Ils ont donné combien?" I ask.

"Pas beaucoup vraiment, mais qu'est-ce que je peux faire? C'est la seule façon que je peux faire un peu d'argent." (Apr 11, 1996)<sup>45</sup>

At the same show, Defao is seated at a V.I.P. table away from the crowd under a parasol which is protecting him from the light drizzle falling down around us. "Monsieur Bob," he motions for me to join him. "Fondé," I answer. As I take a seat, I am immediately presented with the ice-cold soda which I was craving just a few minutes before. I ask Defao where the drink came from. "From the producer" he answers matter-of-factly. A young man approaches Defao and whispers something discretely into his ear. "Bon, tokeyi. Monsieur

---

<sup>44</sup> Alright kids, so... thanks, eh?" And they for their part: "Kabosé, you're our favorite singer. We think you're the best, man." The term 'vie', short for 'vieux' or old man is commonly used in addressing someone older, someone with whom the speaker is relatively familiar. This term is operative even in situations where the person being addressed is actually very young.

<sup>45</sup> "Oh Monsieur Bob! [He laughs nervously]. That's the way it works here. People want you to sing their name and you have to do it. It's not easy." He had a hint of embarrassment in his voice and I found it interesting that he was aware that this kind of thing may not happen in other countries.

"These are hard times," I offer.

"That's for sure," he answers, still somewhat embarrassed but proud to be conversing in French.

"How much did they give you?" I ask.

"Not that much, but what am I supposed to do? It's the only way I can make a little money."

Bob, let's go. We're going to eat." He positions his sunglasses to where they will be least likely to catch the rain and he starts off with a very deliberate strut toward the room where we will be eating. As soon as I finish downing my soda, I scurry to catch up with him, bobbing slightly to imitate his walk. We enter a building structure with a full table setting and plates full of different kinds of food. Two members of the promoter's team pull back our chairs for us and invite us to sit down. As one of the band's *atalaku*, I was not used to this kind of pre-show activity. For once I was fortunate enough to see how the 'star' was treated by the sponsor of the show and it was very different from the experience of the rest of the band. Even the most senior musicians did not eat with Defao. "Il y en a assez pour tout le monde," Defao declares in a mocking decadent tone. "Il faut manger jusqu'a sa pleine ..." he stops chewing to think for a moment, "son plein." he corrects himself and then continues chewing.<sup>46</sup>

I asked him about the producers for the show and he explained to me that they took care of everything. In most cases, the producer arrange for the locale, publicity for the show and ticket sales. In addition to V.I.P. freebies for three-five of the artist's personal guests, he gets a pre-arranged sum of money ('cachet') which is independent of ticket sales; the risk of the show is assumed by the producer (ch. 4). I want to ask Defao why he works with so many different producers, but before I can get the question out, two members of the production team approach us at the table to make sure everything is okay. After Defao assures them that everyone has had plenty to eat, the two assistants turn to me and hand me a small piece of paper with a list of names that I am expected to sing once I take the microphone [figure 7.11]. I was taken aback at first and tried to explain that I was very nervous because this was to be my first full appearance with the band. "I don't think I can do that. You see this is my first real show with the band and since I'm new I really have to concentrate on what I'm doing up there ..." It was one of those wonderfully rational Western explanations that wasn't going anywhere. One of the assistants looks at me with a blank stare and then looks at the paper again; he was obviously not accustomed to getting this kind of response to his request.

---

<sup>46</sup>"There's enough for everyone," Defao declares in a mocking decadent tone. 'Eat as much as you like'.



fig. 7.12 Iheo Mbala and the *atalaku* *mundele*

- KANA - MANA  
 - IZABELLE  
 - APOZIAIRE  
 - MUTINGA - NDO  
 - IAPA - MANA  
 - GUTUINE - KAYO  
 - WIVA - ~~EN~~ ENENGA

fig. 7.11 "C'mon, Monsieur Bob, you can do it"



With all eyes on me, I decide to take the paper, looking at the names and thinking maybe I can choose a few. He comes close to me and says in a soft, manipulative tone, "C'mon Monsieur Bob, you can do it". His colleague approaches and begins to add syllables to his name: "My name is 'Master Dadi, His Excellency the Grand C.E.O.', it's not hard. Then there's Diego, but you have to say 'Diego Diegoni, the Mega Shege from Oshwe'. And then there's Serge..." I cut him off, explaining that I would only be able to take a few names. I promise them that I will at least say their two names, in short form, and they both seem satisfied. After they were gone, I turned to Defao and said, "I've never done this before." He laughed a hearty laugh and in a loud congratulatory voice said, "Monsieur Bob!" He licked his fingers and dipped his hands in the bowl of warm, soapy water being held for him beside his seat. I asked him if this happens all the time, and he said he usually gets so many requests that he ends up giving most of them to the *atalaku*. Upon which he effortlessly pulls out another list of names from the pocket of his jacket and hands it to me. "Is this for me?" I ask nervously, a lump forming in my throat. "You have to throw them," he says, not really answering my question. "Merci," I muttered. It was all I could think to say.

At some point during the show I clumsily pronounced the two names I had promised to 'throw'. No one on stage or in the audience seemed to notice, perhaps it was because I was doing it out of obligation, instead of as an expression of joy or as a result of an ongoing relationship with the people whom I was praising. Dadi and Diego, however, sought me out later in the show to thank me for acknowledging their presence, and judging from their reactions, they were both very pleased. By penetrating the musician's space--not only his stage, but also his pockets, and his words--individuals engage in a process of identification which gives the impression of participating in the musician's distinction. In a socio-cultural context such as this, where the act of individual distinction is anti-normative, individuals who assert their identity in isolation of pre-existing social institutions and networks put themselves at great risk: risk in terms of their social reputation, but also because gestures of individualism are often associated with the practice of witchcraft and sorcery (Turner 1969; Bastian 1993).

Acts of social distinction through the performance of popular music are not only socially accessible (anyone can be 'thrown' as long as they have some money), but they are also socially acceptable, since they are spoken (or sung) through the voice of someone else [figure 7.12].

## **NOTE TO USERS**

**Page(s) missing in number only; text follows. Page(s) were microfilmed as received.**

**351**

**This reproduction is the best copy available**

UMI<sup>®</sup>

## Part Three: On Being in Music

### Chapter Eight: The Micropolitics of Music

#### Micropolitics and the Ethnography of Power

A Band is a Hierarchy  
 General('s) Meetings  
 Hierarchy is Elastic

Splintering and the 'Chef' Complex  
 Why Groups Splinter  
 The 'Chef' Complex

Singing the Sponsor  
 Good Chef, Bad Chef

*While it is generally accepted that this is the most potent music to come from Africa it is fair to say that the reputation of Zaire concerts and artists is not good. This has been principally caused by poor concert promotions and continued poor public relations and the unreliability of many of those working in the business. If Zaire music and culture is to be taken seriously on a global level and in particular if contemporary Zaire music is to be accepted internationally then it is time for all of us working within the Zaire music infrastructure to start presenting a more positive image of the Zaire musician and his work. I would suggest that it is time for the Zaire musicians to curtail their criticisms of their former bandleaders and rivals with their tales of greed and jealousy and to get on with proving their own worth by concentrating on their music.*

(Martin Sinnock 1997: 38)

*Proper performance of African music requires the respect and enjoyment of the organization of power.*

(John Chernoff 1978: 167)

*Et puis, cela ne saute-t-il pas aux yeux: dans notre tradition africaine, il n'y a jamais deux chefs, il y a parfois un héritier naturel du chef, mais quelqu'un peut-il me dire qu'il a jamais connu un village africain où il y eût deux chefs?*

(Joseph-Désiré Mobutu 1971: 11)

In the previous chapter I discussed how strategies of identification in a live concert setting give concertgoers the impression of participating in the performance of musicians' particular form of distinction. The paradigmatic example of this interaction with the artist is the practice of 'throwing', in which musicians sing or shout the names of individual audience members in exchange for some kind of compensation, usually money. The instances I described were for the most part spontaneous, as in the case of Diego and Dadi, or the young men that asked to be 'thrown' by Kabosé. But what happens when these relations of exchange are taken outside of the performative context and cultivated under different conditions over a longer period of time? It is this question that will inform my reading of 'micropolitics' in the context of popular music in Kinshasa.

In the Congo (or at least in Kinshasa), individuals attempt to improve their social status by attaching themselves to people in relative positions of social prestige and political power. Individuals on the receiving end of these advances, while they are not likely to admit as much, are also attaching themselves to the identities of others, since positions of privilege are necessarily defined by their relationship to subordinates. Thus positions of power are expressed not as fixed coordinates, but as moments and manifestations of social practice. This means that, depending on the situation, individuals can find themselves in a position of relative power or in a position of subordination. Musicians are a good example of this ambiguous position, since they are the object of adulation on the part of countless fans, but they are also dependent on the audience for various forms of patron-based support in order to maintain a lifestyle consistent with their positions as public figures.

One of the interesting elements to emerge from the data in this chapter is the extreme degree of formalism which characterizes inter-personal relations among musicians, and between musicians and outsiders. In some circumstances, this formal quality takes on a quasi-ritual status. But what does this formalism mean? And what is its relationship (if any) to local notions of power and prestige? In order to answer these questions, I will look at the way that power is wielded and negotiated in various contexts, first within the band hierarchy itself, and

then in between members of the band and certain kinds of patrons or 'sponsors'. Examining the mechanics of power in various fields of action will allow me to argue that it is not the presence of social differentiation per se that Congolese find problematic, but rather the abuses that often result from this differentiation. I do not want to argue that the music scene, or worse yet a particular musical group, is a scale model or microcosm of social and political relations in Congolese society in general (though with some qualifications, I think this case could be made). Rather, I want to show that through popular music individuals (musicians and non-musicians) activate certain kinds of power relationships which are consistent with local cultural notions of authority, but which also reflect attempts to assert new identities and forge new types of social relationships.

After a brief discussion of some of the key theoretical issues pertaining to the study of micropolitics and power in everyday forms of practice, I will begin by describing the hierarchy which orders social relations in a typical musical group. The bulk of this chapter will look at how an ethos of 'big man' leadership (what I have referred to as the 'chef complex') is reinforced through certain formal mechanisms such as band meetings, the veiling of organizational hierarchy, and organizational splintering within musical groups. Next I will examine how these relations of power are operationalized between musicians and non-musicians of various types, and the final section will attempt to tease out some general ideas about local notions of authority, and the meaning of the concept of 'chef' as they are expressed through 'modern' popular music.

## Micropolitics and the Ethnography of Power

The politics of popular culture is micropolitics, for that is where it can play the greater part in the tactics of everyday life (Fiske 1989: 56).

The topic of 'micropolitics' is often hinted at without ever occupying a central place in social scientific analysis.<sup>1</sup> Put somewhat crudely, I take 'micropolitics' to mean the diffuse set of political structures, institutions, and relations which operate between individuals or between individuals and institutions, primarily those outside of the conventional units of macro-political analysis (i.e. the Western nation-state and its variants).<sup>2</sup> In trying to understand these issues, my research has benefitted from the rich body of literature on indigenous notions of power and authority in an African context.<sup>3</sup> While I am primarily concerned with leadership in a contemporary urban context (i.e. popular music), the central argument of this chapter assumes a certain coherence in political culture and political practices throughout the Congo region. I have also drawn inspiration from the study of charismatic leadership (Weber 1947) and personalistic rule (Ellis 1993), an area of scholarship which is especially important in understanding political processes in Congo-Zaire since independence (Young and Turner 1985; Willame 1992).

---

<sup>1</sup>'Micropolitics' is employed or implied in any number of studies: those which look at the individual faced with impersonal institutions of various sorts (DeCerteau 1984; Foucault 1978; 1983), especially the state (MacGaffey 1991; Mbembe 1992), those concerned with relations between social classes (Bourdieu 1984), the reactions of peasants to various forms of authority (De Boeck 1996, 1998a; Scott 1985), the reaction of indigenous peoples to encroaching capitalist economies (Taussig 1980; Nash 1979), political differentiation within indigenous or tribal societies (Gluckman 1949; Turner 1957), and political relations between them (Evans-Pritchard 1940).

<sup>2</sup>Hecht and Simone (1994) define 'micropolitics' as the set of local cultural/political responses to an absence of 'real' government. Micropolitical activities, they argue, undermine the process of development, but also point to a unique African ability to survive in and adapt to an increasingly globalizing world. I find this definition interesting, especially in the case of the Congo where survival has become a high art (MacGaffey 1991), but problematic because it tends to view the state as the primary determinant of culture and cultural change (cf. Mbembe 1992: 23).

<sup>3</sup>Especially De Heusch (1972), Kopytoff (1971, 1987), and Packard (1981). Sahlins (1985), though not about Africa, is interesting because it argues for a reading of kingship in broader social and historical terms than those usually put forth in works on the structural analysis of myth. This historical or sociological emphasis (one which is evident early on in much of the writing by Gluckman and the Manchester School), is one aspect I have found particularly helpful in more recent studies such as De Boeck (1994) and a collection of articles edited by Arens & Karp (1989).

Following Achille Mbembe's recent work on politics in post-colonial Africa, I want to argue that "to account for postcolonial relations is thus to pay attention to the workings of power in its minute details, and to the principles of assemblage which give rise to its efficacy" (Mbembe 1992a: 4). While my analysis of 'micropolitics' is focused on power relations at the inter-personal level (i.e. musicians and their patrons), it must be acknowledged that micropolitics and macropolitics are processes which intersect and interact in complex ways (Marcus & Fischer 1986). Bayart's (1993) work on power and the post-colonial African state is important insofar as the author attempts to create a space for dialogue about the specificity of political action and meaning in an African context (c.f. Kopytoff 1987), although his analysis (like that of Mbembe) is primarily concerned with relations of power between individual subjects and the state.<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this chapter, I am especially interested in Mbembe's notion of 'convivial tension', which suggests that power is not monolithic or uni-directional, but fundamentally dialectic in nature.

As I discussed in Chapter One, Gramsci is often credited with the elaboration of the notion of power not as object, but as a dialectic of social relations. Gramsci's theory of hegemony, which makes the crucial distinction between power and force, would eventually enable cultural analysis to move away from the dichotomy of 'domination' and 'resistance' implied in most of the writing influenced by the Frankfurt School theorists (see Adorno and Horkheimer 1993). Thus micropolitics in Gramscian terms (a 'moving equilibrium') is interested not in the 'ruler' or 'ruled' per se, but in the complex interaction which occurs between the two.<sup>5</sup> Michel Foucault, who is best-known for his "emphasis on the body as the place in which the most minute and local social practices are linked up with the large scale organization of power" (Dreyfus and Rabinow: xxvi), is also remembered for his detailed

---

<sup>4</sup>DeBoeck (1996) offers an engaging analysis of the relationship between Mobutu's one-party 'authentic' state and various systems of 'customary' leadership in Zaire's southern provinces. His discussion of national (and global) politics as dialectics is especially relevant to the concerns of this chapter.

<sup>5</sup>I am referring to Mbembe's discussion of 'ruler' and 'ruled', which despite its similarity with a Gramscian notion of dialectical power, does not refer directly to Gramsci's writing on this subject.



attention to rituals of power (e.g. Foucault 1978).<sup>6</sup> His work is an attempt to elaborate an analytics of power (rather than a theory), arguing that power expresses itself diffusely through social relations and various kinds of ideologically informed discourse.<sup>7</sup>

In this chapter I want to suggest a link between the study of micropolitics and ethnographic discussions of power, looking not only at the social organization of power, but also how power is performed and challenged. Fabian's *Power and Performance* (1990) is especially relevant to this discussion since he examines the uses and meanings of power among performing artists in a post-colonial African setting. His explorations into the theatrical rendering of the Luba axiom "power is eaten whole" expose the connection between power and eating in many African societies, and suggest a cultural idiom in which power is conceived of as whole and embodied in persons (1990: 25).<sup>8</sup> In this study he explains not only how artists fix into place and subvert hierarchical social formations, but he also looks at how their decisions about content are influenced (and co-opted) by local and national political interests.<sup>9</sup>

Despite their differences in focus, each of these approaches challenges us to view power as a set of social relations that are grounded in both history and culture (Karp 1989). Combining the insights of Gramsci with the methodological approach of Fabian, I will describe various fields of action in which superiors and subordinates (musicians and bandleaders, female musicians and male musicians, musicians and 'sponsors') are tied up in social relations of power which are perceived as complementary or mutually beneficial as long as those in positions of power are perceived as just and generous. What this analysis suggests

---

<sup>6</sup>According to Dreyfus and Rabinow, Foucault's 'microphysics of power' seeks to locate power in spaces--both physical and imagined--which he refers to as 'disciplines': prisons, clinics, academia, etc (ibid: 110).

<sup>7</sup>Cooper (1994) has challenged Foucault's notion of diffuse power by arguing that power in colonial societies in Africa was more concentrated in social and spatial terms, making it "arterial" instead of "capillary". Power, he argues, is always "in need of a pump to push it from moment to moment and place to place" (1994: 1533).

<sup>8</sup>On metaphors of eating or consumption in African political discourse, see also Mbembe (1992), Bayart (1993), Schatzberg (1993), Cohen & Odhiambo (1989) and the writing of various African literary figures, especially Wole Soyinka, Sony Labou Tansi and Ayi Kwei Armah.

<sup>9</sup>Sally Falk Moore's (1996) discussion of post-socialist Tanzania is another example from which I have drawn some important ideas, especially her notion of 'mini-fields of political action' which together enable her to propose the existence of an 'overarching causal coherence' in local level politics. In this chapter I have also made use of Appadurai's (1990) micropolitical insights on the relationship between praise and notions of self in contemporary India and Erlmann's (1996a) study of migrant laborers and *isicathamiya* music in South Africa.

is not an ethic of social levelling or egalitarianism, but a plea for superiors to take action with regards to unfulfilled social obligations and responsibilities.

### A Band Is A Hierarchy

Given the large size of most professional musical groups in Kinshasa (usually between 15-25 members), some form of hierarchy within groups might not seem surprising.<sup>10</sup> Hierarchy in this setting is usually expressed through an idiom of seniority which conflates age and size: “C’est un petit, il connait rien” (‘He’s a kid, he doesn’t know anything’). The use of the term ‘petit’, remarkably condescending to a North American ear, occurs with astounding frequency in discussions about the life history of musicians and musical groups (see ch. 6). The term refers more often to age than to size, although size (meaning ‘popularity’ or ‘professional renown’) is also important given the fact that hierarchies of success can operate independent of age or generational order. Through the utterance of such a commonly heard phrase the speaker places himself within a group of ‘vieux’ (‘elders’, but also experts, holders of knowledge, finesse and expertise), and opposes himself to the unrefined state of youth and inexperience.<sup>11</sup>

But seniority is also expressed through the metaphors of space and time: “Bavon c’est après. Lui il m’a trouvé ici” (‘Bavon was later. When he started I was already here’). In other words, by virtue of the fact that the speaker was already present when the new artist

---

<sup>10</sup>As I am primarily concerned with the working structure of the musical group, my focus in this discussion will be on hierarchies of a professional nature. In this context, professional hierarchies are more operational than those based on social class or ethnicity. The role of gender in these hierarchies is more complex, an issue to which I will return later in this chapter. Erlmann (1992) discusses many of the same issues in his work on Zulu migrant workers in South Africa and Waterman (1990) has examined band structure and hierarchy among *juju* musicians in Nigeria.

<sup>11</sup>Another common formula uses the name of one musician to refer to a group of musicians or generation (i.e. “Les Reddy”, which refers to a singer named ‘Reddy’ and those with whom he began playing music). Statements using this form usually serve the purpose of locating individual band members within a generational or professional hierarchy.

began or arrived ('He found me here'), the speaker can make special claims on knowledge or seniority based on physical prior presence (c.f. Kopytoff 1987). This kind of pre-emptive claim is very common in discussions about musical innovations, especially those related to music technology. Different musicians claim credit for having introduced new instruments, such as the electric guitar or jazz drum kit (see Tchebwa 1996), and the matter never seems resolved: "C'était moi le premier". Statements about "being the first" to do something express the speaker's priorness to younger generations (links with the past) but also his/her ability to influence them (links with the future). In statements such as these, discourses of hierarchy use time, both past and future, to legitimate or obscure relations of power.

But relations of power are not only expressed in language, they are also embedded in the organizational structures which order the activities and movements of musical groups. Most working groups in Kinshasa are formed around a charismatic leader/virtuoso, often a lead singer whose band carries his name: Koffi Olomide et Quartier Latin, Madilu et son Multi-Système, Bozi Boziana et Anti-Choc, Les Big Stars de General Defao, Super Choc de Shora Mbemba, Raja Kula et Station Japana, Gatho Beevans, etc.<sup>12</sup> This charismatic leader, usually having separated from a previous group to form his own, surrounds himself with younger less well-known musicians ("des petits") who are not likely to question his authority and who are willing to work for very little money. His status as a leader, as with all leaders, is contingent on the presence of a certain number of followers (in this case musicians), and the longevity of the group is tied to the leader's lifespan (Weber 1947).

The band with which I conducted the majority of my research is a good example of charismatic leadership. Defao himself is more than just the band's leader, he is the band's founder, and most members of the band address him as "Fondateur" or "Fondé" for short. He lives, eats, and sleeps apart from the rest of the band. He consults on a regular basis with the

---

<sup>12</sup>There are several important exceptions: Wenge Musica BCBG, Nouvelle Image, and of course Zaiko Langa Langa. These groups and many others are associated with the Zairean New Wave (see ch. 3), a movement which saw the emergence of a new style of band structure, one which was organized around a group of leader/founders instead of just one. There are also a number of highly prominent bands whose leaders are recognizable by the public despite the fact that the band doesn't carry their names. Such is the case with Pépé Kallé (Empire Bakuba) and Lutumba Simaro (Bana O.K.).

senior members of the band, but rarely travels with them, and never socializes with them outside of the work context. These senior members, or *batêtes* as he calls them ('heads'), are not his friends, they are his most loyal and skilled workers and most importantly they serve as a buffer between himself and the everyday problems of the rest of the band.<sup>13</sup> His authority as a leader, which is based not only on his skill as a gifted singer/dancer but also on his ability to provide for his musicians, is reinforced by the very careful distance he keeps between himself and the almost 40 official members of his band [figures 8.1, 8.2].<sup>14</sup>

Nonetheless, the *batêtes* have considerable control over daily operations, especially the administration of band practice, personnel decisions and disciplinary measures. Defao himself usually showed up to concerts well after the band had started playing, and he would often miss practices all together (ch. 7). This gives the *batêtes* quite a bit of artistic and administrative responsibility and freedom. The most important of these junior leaders is the second lead singer, the group's lead singer when Defao isn't there. Soon after Defao returned from Europe (following a large turnover in musicians), Montana was given the title of 'President d'Orchestre'. In a special inaugural ceremony, he was presented to the public and from then on would simply be known as "Président" [figure 8.3]. As president, Montana was able to make decisions regarding the choice of musicians (ch. 7), on-stage activity in Defao's absence (the movement of *danseuses*, the length and order of songs and dance sequences, choices with regards to who will play at any given time, and start/end times) and certain other high-level decisions. Special requests from musicians for money, medical leave/expenses, or explanations for disciplinary violations are considered by the president (usually in conjunction with the 'chef d'orchestre'), unless they are serious enough for the bandleader to intervene. The president and the 'chef d'orchestre' were nonetheless required to give Defao periodic reports, especially in the case of any disciplinary actions taken.

---

<sup>13</sup>The *batêtes* included the band president, the band manager, the practice manager, the head doorman/bodyguard, and two of the front line singers (see below).

<sup>14</sup>Figures 8.1 and 8.2 represent one of the rare moments off stage when I saw Defao having fun with his musicians. These pictures were taken in the lobby of a luxury hotel while the band was on tour in Lower Zaire. What the pictures do not show is that Defao was the only one to have a room there.



fig. 8.1 The Big Stars in the lobby of Defao's luxury hotel



fig. 8.2 "Fondé! Fondé!"



fig. 9.6 Roi Pélé: leader of a splinter (Wenge El Paris)

## *Invitation*

Mr, Mlle, Mme

FSBE

*A l'occasion de la nomination de Mr MONTANA KAMENGA Claude au poste de président de l'Orchestre BIG - STAR du Général DEFAO, un concert est organisé en son honneur ce dimanche 22/10/95 de 17h. à 00h. sis rue Monkoto no 201 zone de Ngiri - Ngiri vers Bandal.*

**Soyez les bienvenus.**

fig. 9.3 Invitation to an inauguration

The 'chef d'orchestre' ('band manager'), in this case also the first lead guitarist, acts mostly as an administrator.<sup>15</sup> The duties of the band manager include: maintaining an inventory of the equipment, monitoring band members' progress and attendance, arranging logistics for concert and touring engagements, distributing money earned at the door during band practice, and putting into writing any official decisions and correspondence made by the band (disciplinary action, contracts, travel arrangements, and so on). The band manager is by far the busiest member of the band, and is free to make most decisions concerning administrative issues. High-level decisions (such as suspensions or the choice of musicians for important shows or tours) are made between the band manager and the band president, although it seems that the band president has the ability to veto most decisions. Ultimate veto power lays with the bandleader, who for the most part lets the junior leaders run the band as they see fit, but always reserves the right to intervene.

Below the president and the manager is a third level of authority. The practice manager ('chef de répétition'), who often decides song order and listens for musical mistakes during practice, is in this case the first rhythm guitarist. In addition to public practices (ch. 7), he is also important in overseeing private band practices, which are usually devoted to the composition songs or musical arrangements. As rhythm guitarist, he is the musician most keenly aware of the structural aspects of the music, especially song structure, the relative volume of instruments, tuning and arrangements. The practice manager reports to the band manager and sometimes makes decisions for the band manager in his absence. After the practice manager comes the dance manager ('cheftaine des danseuses'), who reports directly to the band president. Since dancers are usually female, this post is almost always occupied by a woman.<sup>16</sup> She is usually one of the senior dancers, but is also chosen on the basis of her reliability ("elle est sérieuse") and low profile ("elle est calme"). The dance manager is

---

<sup>15</sup>Not to be confused with managers in the North American music industries who are not members of the band but act as commercial agents or brokers for the band.

<sup>16</sup>Some bands have special dance coaches (Lambio Lambert, the well-known dancemaster for the Viva La Musica family) and in some cases the *animateur* will serve as a sort of dance supervisor (Djuna Mumbafu of Empire Bakuba).

responsible for choreography and dance practice, only some of which happens outside of band practice, and basically enacts the decisions made by the band president or bandleader with regards to who will dance, when, and what they will wear. Dancers and musicians interact freely, but dancers usually stay together in groups of two or three. Later in this chapter I will discuss how the *danseuses* are marginalized in predominantly male, male-run bands and how they often become scapegoats in the resolution of conflicts between bandmembers.

A fourth layer of hierarchy exists at the level of the musician-members of the band. At each musical post (lead guitar, drums, tenor voice, etc.) there are anywhere from two to four qualified musicians whose skill level or seniority dictates who will play and how often. The most senior or most skilled musician has status as the 'titulaire' ('titled' or 'first-string') musician and because of this status will have more time on stage than the other musicians in his category. For especially high-profile (and thus shorter) concert appearances such as t.v. appearances, political rallies, wedding or funeral ceremonies, the 'titulaire' will play the entire engagement. The 'titulaire', however, despite his privileged status, does not himself decide when he will play. It is rather the president or the bandleader that will decide who will play for any given engagement. The back-up musicians for any given post, usually referred to as 'doublures' ('doubles' or 'second-string'), are completely at the mercy of decisions made by higher ups and feel extra pressure when they are called upon to play, since they only have limited opportunities to practice in a full performance situation. They must remain on stand-by at all times, and they usually stay close to the 'titulaire' in order to gain his respect and learn from his experience.

The rest of the group is made up of non-artists. The sound engineer ('ingénieur de son') usually has two assistants and in most cases reports directly to the band manager, but in his absence can also take orders from the practice manager. The sound team is responsible for moving, setting up and operating all sound equipment (sound board, amplifiers, microphones, speakers, cabling, etc.). As the only bandmembers with any knowledge about operating often unreliable equipment, they are present at all live engagements and most (if not all) band



meetings. They are sometimes assisted by two doormen, whose main responsibility is to control crowd flows, not only during shows, but also during practice. As full-fledged members of the band, they are paid small regular salaries and their transport is also provided, although before and after shows they are required to travel with the equipment. The senior doorman, in this case a former soldier in the Zairean army (FAZ), often acts as a personal bodyguard to the Defao, and in some circumstances is consulted as a member of the *batêtes*. Apart from the bodyguard, the only non-artists that mingle with the senior members are the band doctor (actually more of a nurse), and the band driver who both enjoy a privileged position close to senior bandmembers during concerts and tours. Some bandleaders will also have a public relations specialist ('attaché de presse'), who facilitate relations with members of the press or a personal assistant ('secrétaire personnel'), who also enjoys close contact with the upper end of the band hierarchy.<sup>17</sup>

What this brief description of the band structure illustrates is the extent to which hierarchy and discipline order the activities of musicians and musical groups [figure 8.4].<sup>18</sup> Defao's stage name ('Le Général') and the common use of the Lingala term 'soda' (soldier) to describe musicians suggest an organizational metaphor based on the military, but the band structure is also described in terms of a sports organization. 'Titulaires' (first-string) dominate show time while 'doublures' (second-string) wait for a chance to play. The singers, occupying the front part of the stage, are referred to as the 'attaque-chant' ('offense') and the instrumentalists, situated behind the singers, are called 'la défense'. Despite the apparent similarities to other forms of social organization, however, the previous chapters in this part of the thesis attest to the fact that the structure of a modern dance band is a unique form unto itself. Later in this chapter, I will use everyday examples of social interaction to show how bandmembers tug at the structures of power but how these structures nonetheless maintain a certain elasticity.

---

<sup>17</sup>It is often not clear whether these special members are given a place of privilege because of their technical skills or because they are close personal friends of the musicians.

<sup>18</sup>Compare this with Turner's discussion of motorcycle and youth gangs in the United States, which, despite a relatively small number of members, displayed a very highly structured social hierarchy.

**bandleader**

**#2 singer (band president)**

**lead guitarist (band manager)**

driver

doctor

**# 3      #4      #5**  
**singer   singer   singer**

**rhythm guitarist**  
**(practice manager)**

**bass player   keyboard player**  
**second-string singers   second-string guitarists**

*atalaku*

percussionist

sound men

doormen

dance leader

dancers

**fig. 8.4** A band is a hierarchy (The Big Stars)

### *General('s) Meetings*

Despite the fact that the *batêtes* have considerable control over artistic and administrative matters, many decisions remain clearly within the control of the bandleader. Decisions of this type tend to be long-term or strategic in nature. Defao, for example, maintained a busy working schedule for the band by booking concerts in low-profile events and densely populated, low-income neighborhoods (Kinshasa's *quartiers populaires*). The Big Stars often played at local bars in Bumbu, Masina, Ndjili and other neighborhoods with high percentages of unemployed young men (ch. 7). When I asked Defao why he tended to favor certain neighborhoods in scheduling concerts, he answered that it was not necessarily a matter of choice. Because of the lack of producers, he explained, he was forced to play where demand was the greatest. To produce shows with his own money would be too expensive and too risky. Financial matters are for the most part decided by the bandleader. In Defao's case, instead of buying a house or an expensive car, as most well-known musicians do, he decided to invest his money into a band vehicle, a red Hiace minivan ('combi'), which could transport both band equipment and musicians whenever the band played.<sup>19</sup>

Decisions regarding band size and the number of musicians in training ultimately lay with the bandleader. Most bandleaders judge it necessary to keep a large number of musicians on call in case of sickness, absence or suspension. But keeping two to three active musicians per post is a constant reminder to the 'titulaire' that he must be careful to keep his position, and to the 'doublures' that they have a long way to go before being able to play on a regular basis. Second and third string musicians, as full members of the band, are expected to be present at all times. Since they pick up band-specific songs and techniques as they go along, the need

---

<sup>19</sup>Koffi Olomide, probably the most popular musician in Congo-Zaire, owns a large private home in MaCampagne, one of Kinshasa's most posh neighborhoods, and in 1995 bought a luxury V12 Mercedes which inspired the title of his 1996 album "V12". His bandmembers however have no regular transportation and he himself has been known to gas money from certain 'sponsors'. The leaders of Wenge Musica B.C.B.G. almost all own large houses in high-rent districts and have personal luxury cars, but still rent the equipment with which they play concerts on a regular basis.

for special training time is almost eliminated. In order to even be accepted as a second or third string musician, it is necessary to learn some part of the Big Stars repertoire in advance (usually five to ten songs initially). With regards to auditioning and selecting musicians for certain key posts (especially singers and lead guitarists), the bandleader plays a more important role. From my notes:

At the last meeting, Defao noticed that one of the singers we had just auditioned was sitting in the back of the room.

"What are you doing here?" Defao asked in a strong tone.

"Sorry, Chef, I thought I was in the group."

"No," he said, "you haven't even presented your credentials yet. When you can sing six or seven songs perfectly you come and see me. You're just sitting there listening to everything we say. This is a private meeting you know." He gets up and the bodyguard motions him to leave with a gesture of very fragile authority. As the embarrassed singer passes by the general, the general repeats what he had said, half smiling:

"If you know seven or eight songs to the note then you come see me ... before you know nine songs don't come to see me, do you hear me? And come looking nice, good and yellow!" [a reference to the recruit's dark complexion] (Nov 17, 1995).<sup>20</sup>

Under certain exceptional circumstances, the bandleader will intervene to fine tune technical aspects of the music. During one practice (actually after the practice had finished and the band meeting had begun), Defao called up his first and second singers to the microphone to 'fix' (li. 'ko bongisa') one part of a particular song. This type of correction would always be done with a scolding tone, and was most likely intended to embarrass the musician since it occurred in the presence of the entire band. The day that this reprimand occurred with Defao's first and second singers it became very clear that no one was free from being reprimanded. On another occasion, Defao ordered the new drummer to sit behind his set where he was instructed to play several variations of the dance rhythm he used during the fast part of each song. "Trop de fantaisies," Defao said ("too many frills"). After identifying the rhythm he

---

<sup>20</sup>Almost all band-related matters are discussed in Lingala, although as I have discussed earlier, Lingala in Kinshasa (and musicians' Lingala is no exception) is heavily spiced with words borrowed from French, English, and Kikongo.

was looking for, Defao instructed the drummer to play that rhythm *and that rhythm only* for the dance sections (*seben*) of the entire Big Stars repertoire.<sup>21</sup>

Most reprimands will happen during band meetings, which occur in varying lengths immediately following band practice. After practice, there is usually a short period of milling around and cooling down (15-45 minutes). Then when either the junior leaders or the bandleader see fit they call all the musicians back into the practice room. If the bandleader intends to attend, the junior leaders will call the meeting to order first and the bandleader will enter after everyone is seated and quiet. As he enters, usually with some degree of ceremony, members of the band stand up, and after he has taken his seat, bandmembers can once again sit down. Meetings usually last from one to three hours and cover a variety of topics. Most meeting time is taken up with assessments of individual performance either during practice or during concerts. From my notes:

The meeting was unbearable today. Two hours of reprimanding and housematters: Ladi out of tune. If it continues, one-month suspension. Sati out of tune, if it continues, one-month suspension. Theo, don't just babble all the time. Sedjo if you can't sing the shout, leave it for someone else. Makou, tres bon. Maneko, get the dancers in order, redo "Pitié Mon Amour", its too messy. Bob [the bass player], play bass with some guts, vary your lines more, and so forth and so on (Apr 11, 1996).

Every time a musician is called on, he/she will stand up and remove any head gear. It is very rare for musicians to respond to criticisms from the bandleaders. They are supposed to listen, express a certain amount of humility and fix their mistakes ('bongisa mabe'). It is not uncommon for the bandleader to use humor to humiliate or embarrass members of the band. The audience is captive: *Mamie*, Defao addresses his favorite dancer. *Stand up. You've been dancing very well but everyone in the band is dying to know why you haven't slept at home for the past three nights.* Laughter erupts in the room. She gives a coy response and Defao goes on to Serge, who came to practice wearing American-style whitewater rafting sandals.

---

<sup>21</sup>The correction of musicians in this way would almost never happen outside of a private band meeting. On a few occasions during practice, a song poorly executed would be started over after discrete comments were made to the musician(s) at fault. Musicians making mistakes during concerts would usually be reprimanded in between songs with backs to the audience, or during the song if the mistake was considered serious enough (out of tune guitar, rhythm too fast, etc.).

*What are you wearing on your feet? What? Shoes?! Those aren't shoes, those are beachwear. I don't care if they make you look American, don't wear them again.*

After all individual feedback has been given, and before moving on to administrative matters, the leader of the meeting usually asks if anyone in the room has any questions or concerns. This part of the meeting, usually near the end, can sometimes seem the longest, because it is the only chance that musicians have to bring up comments about band policy, intra-band conflict, or musical aspects when they have the full attention of the bandleader and the other members of the band. Questions range from clarification on scheduling to comments on equipment, to special requests for medicine or sick leave. Most concerns are taken seriously and everyone who wishes to speak is given an opportunity. Afterwards there are announcements of upcoming schedules, and for certain shows particular line-ups must be announced (for example a wedding which does not require the full band). Then there must be time allowed to distribute transport money and sometimes salaries. At the end of every meeting the band president claps his hands together twice to signal the meeting's end. In the following section, I will explain in detail a series of events that threatened the hierarchical logic in the band, but that were turned to the leaders' advantage in order to maintain a sense of stability and order.

### *Hierarchy is Elastic*

One day while I was sitting talking with Maneko in his yard, Kabosé approaches Maneko and says: *Listen, I was talking with Fondé [Defao] and he said 'I'm asking you all to leave Serge behind. Leave him behind.* His voice was very determined and he had an out-of-breath look on his face, just having been entrusted with transmitting this very important information. Serge was one of the first-string singers that sing next to Defao. First, and almost always positioned next to Defao, was his number two man Montana. Next

was Bleu, who though not very active in band politics was a respected member because he was the only musician who had been to Europe with Defao. He had also contributed several songs to the band's repertoire, an important distinction in itself. After Bleu was Kabosé, a young, eager and very disciplined singer that seemed to enjoy considerable favor from Defao for his focused vocal energy and strong stage presence. Last was Serge, probably the most 'showboat' of the four, known mostly for his acrobatic skills as a dancer and sometimes outrageous outfits and hairdos.

Apparently Serge undermined band protocol by bringing an auditioning singer directly to Defao instead of first going to the other senior members of the band (Montana and Maneko). All of the junior leaders agreed that this was unacceptable. Kabosé was especially insistent that this transgression should not be tolerated. After a short consultation among themselves and a short visit from Defao to confirm what he had said to Kabosé, it was decided that Serge would not be allowed to travel on the next tour, a two-week trip to Zambia. Not only was the severity of the punishment striking (touring is a true privilege for the status and access to new social and financial networks that it offers), but also interesting was the fact that Defao had requested that a relatively high-level decision of this nature be taken by someone other than himself. Eventually I came to realize that this was a common strategy for other bandleaders as well.

Upon return from the Zambia tour, there were rumors that Defao had suspended some musicians for a period of two weeks due to what he called "l'indiscipline". Apparently one of the dancers was sleeping with a producer, and this led to a series of public brawls between several bandmembers. After the suspensions were made, Defao refused to discuss the matter any further and band practice was temporarily suspended. When he finally decided to discuss what had happened, he called a special meeting with the junior bandleaders. His primary concern seemed to be that the band was getting too large:

"We need to clean up the band. It's so big it's starting to look like a born-again church," he said.

This prompts Maneko to speak:

"Fondé," he begins, "I have been with you for a long time, I have been with you since nineteen eighty..." he tries to calculate the exact year.

"Eighty three," Defao is starting to get impatient.

"That's right, 1983. Ever since 1983 I have been with you and since then it seems like things have changed. When I say things have changed I mean that ... well..." he's waffling.

"If you want to play," Defao cuts in, "then we just start playing. You guys go and make a list and when the list is finished then we start practice. All you have to do is choose the musicians that you want to keep and get rid of the rest."

"I don't know, excuse me Fondé," starts the bodyguard, "if you ask my opinion, I don't know, to me it just seems like... if you have to cut certain people ... there are some people that..." Defao cuts in again:

"Fine, so give me another idea." The junior leaders all have a blank stare on their face. Montana's usual stern expression becomes nervous and childlike as he tries in a last ditch effort to explain what the others weren't able to.

"Fondé, excuse me, only you know what is best for the group, but some musicians have been with you for a long time." They all agreed that it was important to get rid of some dead weight, but at the same time it was difficult to exclude certain senior bandmembers, some of which had been involved in the conflict. By this time Defao had become very frustrated with the timid stance of his junior leaders.

"Look," he said, "you have to change something in what you're saying. You say this is my band, but it's not my band, it's our band. I can't fix things by myself. we have to fix things together. It's not my band."<sup>22</sup>

And with that he got up and started to leave the room, leaving everyone speechless. The musicians stood up and started out of the room as if by moving they could somehow shake it off. What had just happened was unbelievable. Everyone knew it was *his* band. He formed the band. He brought it to Europe. He was the star. From my point of view, he was either trying to give the impression that his band was organized in democratic fashion, or he was afraid to take the responsibility of downsizing a band which everyone realized was getting much too large to manage. The way Defao explained it to me is that "I choose the junior leaders, the rest is their responsibility." The junior leaders, however, seemed truly uncomfortable with their responsibility. They all knew that Defao had certain people in mind, and they knew who those people were; it seemed that they had no choice but to eliminate them from the band. After the meeting, Maneko had a worried look on his face, and it was not because of the malaria attack he felt coming on. He began to express his frustration with what they had been asked to do. "How

---

<sup>22</sup>Waterman (1990: 160) gives examples of how band captains in Nigeria attempt to portray their relations with musicians as egalitarian: "I'm a leader, not a boss. A boss commands. I don't command" and "We're all musicians".



can we make a decision like this?". Apparently they had already been threatened by one of the dancer's brothers (a soldier) who was upset because he heard rumors his little sister was going to be kicked out of the band.

At the band meeting the next day the air was very heavy. It had been almost two weeks since the band had practiced and no one was quite sure what to expect. The musicians were called into the practice room, and Montana, taking over in Defao's absence, was curling a piece of paper in his hand as he began to speak. He began by talking about what happened in Zambia, saying that music requires a certain amount of discipline. Not just on stage, but all the time: *You have to have 'maîtrise' (self-control), and too many people in the band have lost their 'maîtrise'. Those of you who are having problems with your post, go and fix it, he said, and when you have your 'maîtrise', then come back, but first you need your 'maîtrise'.* Without addressing them directly, he was speaking to the people who were about to be cut. He handed the curled paper to the bodyguard who uncurled it and began to read it out loud: *Montana, Maneko, Kabosé, Bleu, Charles, Didier, Sedjo, Theo, Monica, ...* and so on until the list was finished. After a few moments of silence, he curls up the paper. Trying to look tough through a cold sweat he says: *If your name is not on the list, the meeting is over.* Those whose names had been announced smiled nervously and looked around, the others quickly took their belongings and began to leave the room, some scurrying, some sauntering defiantly.

One by one each of the musicians that had made the cut were called up to see his/her new monthly salary, presumably more money than before, for most probably somewhere around 500,000 NZ or about \$20. This salary was obviously not very much, but most musicians saw their *position* in the band as a source of wealth, not only for the prestige associated with being in successful group, but also for the possibility of one day being recognized as a famous musician apart from the group.<sup>23</sup> As a part of his concluding words, Montana gave advice to the remaining members that they should not let this go to their heads.

---

<sup>23</sup>Zaire's real GDP per capita in 1992 was \$380 U.S., placing it at 127 of 140 countries on the United Nation's Human Development Index (UNDP 1993).

They still had to prove themselves worthy and capable, especially since some of the remaining musicians were second-string, and thus had just been promoted. Then he began to reprimand the *danseuses* for being the root cause of the indiscipline. *Their presence only causes problems* ('batiaka desordre'), he said, not addressing them directly. *First they have their little conflicts between themselves and then before you know it's affected the whole band. They will have to be very careful if they want to hold on to their jobs.* The three remaining dancers held their heads down. One of them was fighting back a smile and received an elbow jab from her neighbor.

After the meeting, the senior members had different perspectives on the situation. Kabosé was afraid he was going to be attacked by angry family members of the people who were cut. Montana was convinced this was some kind of strategy on the part of Defao, a way to scare people into shaping up. He felt sure that eventually most of the musicians would be allowed to return. Maneko still seemed unresolved on the issue. *It's very difficult. We tried everything to change his mind.* This certainly was not the first time that Defao had enforced disciplinary measures. In fact, he was gaining a reputation for giving excessive suspensions to members of the band.<sup>24</sup> This time, however, it was different; people were not being suspended, they were being cut. None of the members excluded from the group were prohibited from approaching Defao for a chance to return to the band, but to be successful they would have to appeal through many intermediaries on many occasions, and would have to find some way to prove their commitment to Defao.<sup>25</sup>

And so it seemed that Defao had somehow imposed his will without ever asserting his power (see discussion above on Gramsci). Whereas at first I saw his position as a way of

---

<sup>24</sup>Although suspensions happen in most bands on a regular basis, there is some effort to hide their occurrence. Suspensions that turn into dismissals invariably become important local news items. According to Roitelet and Roger Izeidi the practice of suspensions was also common in the 1950s under the supervision of Kabasele in African Jazz (personal communication, May 12, 1996).

<sup>25</sup>It is common practice for suspended musicians to make a request through the band manager that his/her suspension be lifted ('faire un recours' or 'demander la réintégration'), otherwise the suspension will last indefinitely. If the initial request is refused, the suspended musician will usually try to activate other social networks (friends of the bandleader, important personal friends or family members, etc.) to make a case for themselves. Musicians who are excluded from the band altogether have to go through the same steps, but their reintegration process is longer and much more difficult to secure.

trying to seem more fair or democratic, the more I thought about it, the more this explanation seemed unsatisfactory. Clearly, the band had gotten out of hand. It was too large to transport, to feed and to organize, but most of all it was too large to trust. From his point of view, musicians were out of control (*maîtrise*) and they were disrespecting his authority by causing public disorder. Something had to be done, but drastic cuts made by Defao himself would make him look cruel, so instead he gave this responsibility to his junior leaders. While he tried to give the impression that they were free to choose, in fact their choices were very limited. By forcing the senior members to take action, he was able to downplay his own role in the decision to 'clean up the band'.

I would argue, however, that Defao's strategy in this situation was not only about displacing blame, it was also about testing the loyalty of his musicians. Several days after the cuts were made, Defao appeared at practice to discuss the rumors he had begun to hear that many people were unhappy with the recent changes.

"This band," he said, "is like a business. We are not friends or brothers, we are musicians in a band. And in a band, just like in a business, work is work. Montana is not my friend. Maneko is not my friend. That's just the way it is. I understand there are some people who are not very happy with the changes that have been made, so I wanted to hear what you all have to say on this matter. One by one. Do you think the band should stay like it is or do you think we should bring back the people who were cut? That is the question I want to ask you today."

The musicians began to wriggle in their seats a bit. Everyone most likely had their own thoughts on the subject, but to express them like this, in front of Defao, made them very uncomfortable. Defao began going around the circle:

"Monica? Stay like it is or bring them back?" She doesn't respond. She is looking at the ground.

"Didier? Stay like it is or bring them back?" Didier is one of the newest members in the band. He looks like he won't be able to answer, then he says:

"I think the band is better the way it is." Defao seems happy, he goes on to the next person.

"Theo? Like it is or bring them back?" Theo is obviously nervous. He is playing with his hat.

"I don't think everyone should come back, just certain people."

"Just certain people?!" Defao's tone rises. "You see? Do you see how hypocritical these people are?!"

Sedjo, what do you say?" He says the same thing as Theo. "Look at this!" Defao continues.

"Why are you people afraid to say what you really think? Who do you think you're going to offend?"

The answers that followed were even less elaborated than those that came before. Defao continues going around the circle, but his point has already been made. Those that think like him are sincere, and those that do not are hypocritical, and thus not to be trusted. By forcing each member of the band to state his/her position, Defao was able to publicly flush out those members of the band that valued their friendship with excluded bandmembers more than his authority. These members, along with those that had been cut, were a threat to his authority since their loyalty obviously lay elsewhere. In the end, however, Defao's rule was not cruel. Once his point was made, life in the band continued as usual, and eventually the vast majority of the musicians that were cut found their way back to the band. Perhaps this was all an exercise in reinforcing his authority.

It is interesting how loyalty tests such as the ones discussed above tend to reinforce relations of power and structures of hierarchy. Given the opportunity, most people in organizational hierarchies will exercise power that is passed their way, although not in the same way or for the same reasons. Certain individuals will exercise the power with a certain sense of satisfaction, as they begin to visualize themselves one day occupying positions of power (as in the case of Serge's suspension). Others, less ambitious and perhaps less secure, will simply follow orders for fear of losing their current place in the social-professional order, even if it means sacrificing other social ties. Hierarchies maintain a certain elasticity, since superiors place the semblance of power in the hands of subordinates who pull the hierarchy back into place, some because they enjoy the feeling of power, and some to protect their means of livelihood. Not only does this extension of power serve the leader by helping him distinguish between the loyal and the non-loyal, but it also gives the general impression of a diffuse, always present authority which is most effective at curbing dissent (Foucault 1978).<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup>Under Mobutu, power was diffused in the form of propaganda groups such as the CVR (*Corps des volontaires de la République*) and the neighborhood watchdog 'comités' which worked together closely to rally support at a grass-roots level for the only official party, the M.P.R., and its 'Guide.'

## Splintering and the 'Chef' Complex

L'évolution de la musique zaïroise, au fur et à mesure de sa modernisation, aura été marquée par une constante: la *dislocation* des ensembles musicaux. Phénomène social très caractéristique à la musique zaïroise. Il s'opère souvent par scissiparité (Tchebwa 1996: 173).<sup>27</sup>

When the pressure on this elasticity is too great, or when the hierarchy is no longer elastic, then the organizational structure breaks down and splintering occurs. Splintering is what happens when one or more members of a band decide to leave the leader of the band, and strike out to form a band of their own. There are many terms (mostly French) used locally to describe the phenomenon of splintering; 'scission,' 'dislocation', and 'déstabilisation' are the most common. Statistically speaking, splintering accounts for only a small percentage of the bands created in Kinshasa every year. In real terms, however, a large percentage of Kinshasa's most well-known bands have either resulted from or been victims of splintering.<sup>28</sup> Some bands, such as the early *rumba* orchestras (O.K. Jazz and African Jazz) and later groups formed since the New Wave period (Zaiko Langa Langa, Wenge Musica B.C.B.G., Super Choc etc.) were born of themselves, drawing influences from many sources but launching their efforts independently of other more well-established groups. The trend of splintering is explainable in part by the fact that musicians usually prefer to depend on the reputation of already established musicians in order to make names for themselves (see ch. 10 on 'anchoring'). But it is also true that the authoritative grip that older, more well-established musicians maintain on the music scene makes it exceedingly difficult for musicians to succeed as independent groupings (see ch. 4).

---

<sup>27</sup>The evolution of Zairean music, throughout its modernization, has been characterized by one constant: the dislocation of musical groups. [Dislocation is] a social phenomenon characteristic of Zairean music, which usually operates by way of fission." The *Petit Larousse Illustré* (1995) defines 'scissiparité' as: 1. Means by which unicellular organisms lengthen and divide into two identical cells that can then separate. 2. Means of asexual multiplication by which certain multi-cellular animals...separate in two or more parts, each one capable of generating the parts that they are missing" (Larousse 1995: 922).

<sup>28</sup>The most important exception being Empire Bakuba, which in 1997 celebrated its 25th anniversary, an amazing milestone given the longevity of most dance bands, and one which easily makes this group the most stable musical organization in the history of Congo-Zairean popular music.

While the use of the term 'scissiparité' ('fission') suggests more resemblance between the original and the offshoot than is usually the case, Tchebwa's description above captures the fragility of Congo-Zairean band structure and confirms the impression of even the casual observer that bands seem to splinter as effortlessly as single-celled microscopic organisms.<sup>29</sup> Musicians leave their leaders for any of a variety of reasons (money, problems with women, artistic differences, etc.), but in many cases these reasons are screens for the fact that the musician feels he has learned enough and that he is good enough (i.e. he has enough fans) to merit a group of his own.<sup>30</sup> Thus it is possible to talk about a kind of fission in which elements of the organism separate to form distinct independent organisms, while still retaining something of the original, usually some part of the group's name (Tchebwa 1996: 175, see below). The opposite process, however, that of fusion, rarely occurs. If musicians attempt to re-join a band they have left, they invariably do so on an individual basis and not as a unit. They are usually put on probation before being able to take back their normal full-time position, as in the case of Defao's musicians discussed above.

Tchebwa has offered a number of reasons for the phenomenon of splintering, among them: the desire for individual recognition as a star, the absence of fair and transparent financial management, the need for artistic renewal, and the deliberate destabilization of groups by older musicians who feel threatened by up and coming stars (1996: 173-175).<sup>31</sup> These various factors seem present in most accounts of splintering, but are difficult to separate out since they tend to occur together and overlap. Below I will give three examples of splintering that reflect three types of change in the structure of a musical group.

---

<sup>29</sup>Perhaps in a similar vein, Bayart (1993) has suggested the use of 'rhizome' instead of 'root' as an ordering principle for understanding relations of power. In this model, like that of popular music, change results primarily from structural factionalism.

<sup>30</sup>Musicians leave as individuals or in larger numbers to form other groups. Informal observation suggests a pattern of either individuals or of a larger group of 3-4 departing musicians. I can think of no example in which two musicians left a group together to form a group of their own.

<sup>31</sup>Tchebwa refers to a sort of cartel during the 1970s which was made up of the giants of the music business at that time (Franco, Tabu Ley and Verckys) and which literally 'broke' certain up and coming groups that did not submit to their symbolic and political authority in the music industry. Interestingly enough, he does not refer to problems associated with male-female relations, an issue to which I will return later.

Zaiko Langa Langa, the flagship group of the Zairean New Wave in the 1970s, has undergone enough splintering to be considered a true clan. Originally formed in 1969, Zaiko's first line-up remained stable only until 1974 when its first offshoot (Isifi Lokole) separated with a substantial number of its singers and musicians. Five years later (1979) a similar process occurred, but this time the splinter group held on to part of the original group's name, calling itself Grand Zaiko Wawa. Two years later (1981) another large departure of musicians (together with a series of musicians from the 1974 separation) formed one of the Kinshasa's most prolific splinter groups ever, Langa Langa Stars otherwise known as Les Sept Patrons ('The Seven Bosses'). At this point the original group (Zaiko Langa Langa) was still in tact despite the numerous changes in personnel and structure. Each splintering led the original group to recruit new musicians and personalities, and by the mid-1980s, Zaiko was again large enough to merit another full-scale 'dislocation.' This is where the current case begins.

A valued friend and informant, J.P. Busé, was one of the musicians recruited by Zaiko Langa Langa during the early 1980s in an effort to compete with various rival splinter groups that challenged Zaiko's dominance during this period. According to Busé, he was selected by the leaders of Zaiko in order to gradually replace Likinga, a singer who was very important in the early years of Zaiko, but who had become less reliable as a regular bandmember. When Busé approached the bandleaders to propose a song for an upcoming album, he was refused on the grounds that he was not yet an 'official' member of the group. This response came as a great surprise to him since he had already been singing and touring with the band for quite some time. He says that this incident led him to pursue a solo career:

**I saved up all the money I could, never spending it on cars and clothes like most musicians did, and when the album was finished, I took a picture of me and Nyoka taken during a Zaiko concert and I put it on the cover of the album with the title 'J.P. Buse and Popolipo [the guitarist] of Zaiko' (August 25, 1997).**

Busé's tone in telling this story suggests a certain sense of satisfaction with having used Zaiko's name and image to his own advantage. Within a matter of months, J.P. decided to leave the band and use his savings to start a band of his own abroad.

What followed was a series of events which led to the musicians' discovery that the leaders of Zaiko were hiding information from them with regards to money that was being earned (primarily through copyrights), and the fact that the band had been registered as a private enterprise under the name of one of the band's leaders. When the musicians in Zaiko tried to call a general meeting to clarify matters, the bandleaders refused, fearing that their mismanagement was in the process of being 'démasqué' (Busé's words, *ibid*). After numerous failed attempts to get the leaders to speak, many musicians stopped attending practices and performances in protest. In response, the leaders called a general meeting and all members not present were publicly fired ('revoqué') from the group. This, as Busé explains, meant war ("c'était la guerre"). With help from various sources of financial support, several members of the band (Ilo Pablo, Lengi Lenga, Bimi Ombale, and Mazaza) rounded up a significant number of dissatisfied Zaiko musicians and left the group to form a group of their own, Zaiko Langa Langa Familia Dei.<sup>32</sup> Busé put off his plans to form his own group in order to join Familia Dei, but eventually also became discouraged with the lack of transparency which characterized management in the splinter group. During a Familia Dei tour to Canada in the early 1990s, he left the group and decided to stay in Montréal to pursue further studies and a solo career in music.<sup>33</sup>

Général Defao is himself a distant member of the Zaiko clan. He was first discovered by Mwanaku Felix, the wizard guitarist and co-founder of Zaiko Langa Langa who splintered from Zaiko to form Grand Zaiko Wawa in 1979. Defao remained with Manwaku until 1983 when he decided to join forces with the newly formed Choc Stars, a splinter of Langa Langa

---

<sup>32</sup>Ilo Pablo, one of the driving forces behind this splinter group, explained to me that the suffix Familia Dei was chosen so as to create an image which was separate from the original Zaiko, which was known for being involved in 'ungodly' practices, especially the use of 'fetish'.

<sup>33</sup>Busé has since produced several albums and also has plans to begin producing other musicians. From Montreal, where we met, I have been able to follow his career very closely and this contact has enabled me to develop a wider network of associations with Congolese living in various cities in Canada and the U.S.



Stars, which was itself a splinter of Zaiko. Ben Nyamabo, co-founder and eventual leader of Choc Stars, explained that Langa Langa Stars basically had two 'cliques' within it, a division that was caused by opposing views about the role of Verckys (see ch. 6), a well-known producer/musician who was involved with the group in some capacity as producer (Ben Nyamabo, May 21, 1996). After leaving the group and later returning from abroad, Nyamabo joined with the anti-Verckys clique and together they formed the group Choc Stars.<sup>34</sup> After some years as member of Choc Stars, Defao moved to make a group of his own and this group was called The Big Stars. According to Nyamabo, Defao left not only because he wanted to be 'chef' but also because like many other musicians, "they always think we're taking their money" (ibid). Nyamabo claims that he learned of Defao's departure one day while listening to the news on the radio.

The final example I will give comes from a group which although in operation for many years, did not begin to enjoy widespread success until 1994-95, with the release of a demo tape and a shout-dance which took Kinshasa by storm and is still relatively popular. Super Choc de Shora Mbemba (no relation to Choc Stars) is a group that went through various periods of recruitment until a fully developed line-up of musicians allowed it to become recognized locally as an important 'orchestre de jeunes'. In 1995 the group featured a well-accomplished lead guitarist, about six relatively well-known singers and an *atalaku* who was personally responsible for an important number of shouts that were circulating around Kinshasa at that time (see ch. 7). Success did not come easy, but once it began, the band's leader Shora Mbemba started to feel that things were moving too quickly. In the same year, with the help of Shora's brother Lofombo (bass player for Pépé Kallé's Empire Bakuba), they released their first CD, and in the next year (1996) they released their second full-length album which immediately began to sell like 'comme des petits pains' ('like hotcakes') in Kinshasa and abroad.

---

<sup>34</sup>Again we see a group retaining some part of the original name ('Stars') for use with its new formation.

In mid-1996 the band was offered a contract to tour Europe with their primary producer acting as an intermediary for the tour promoter who would manage the tour itself. Shora was very excited, since touring abroad is the last step in being acknowledged as an 'orchestre confirmé' ('a successful group'). He became reluctant, however, upon learning that the promoter in Europe had a reputation for operating tours on a shoestring budget and for neglecting musicians after they arrived.<sup>35</sup> Already well into negotiations with his producer in Kinshasa, Shora called into question the terms of the contract and his producer became nervous that Shora was preparing to back out. Although it is not clear whose idea it was, some of the senior members of Shora's group together with Shora's Kinshasa producer joined together in an attempt to salvage the contract by forming a different group. Suddenly Shora was faced with situation which would seem insurmountable given the number of musicians that had left. The dissenting musicians made a series of rather unconvincing claims about management practices in the original group,<sup>36</sup> Shora blamed his producer for planting the idea in his musicians' heads and eventually the promoter cancelled the tour all together, because he was not sure that audiences would pay for shows if Shora was not present. Both bands attempted to resume a regular concert schedule after the separation, although the new group seemed to have somewhat greater difficulty finding engagements. Shora, someone who already had extensive experience in activating the social networks required to run a band, reformed his group in a matter of days, and soon after was playing on a regular basis with a completely new line-up of musicians.

The groups I have discussed above are all groups from the New Wave period or later. This is not to suggest that splintering did not occur before that time. Thus I have chosen the above examples not to characterize a period or single out particular groups, but to highlight certain aspects of band relations and to suggest the presence of an internal dynamic in the

---

<sup>35</sup>Tour promoters are generally expected to provide musicians with food, lodging, transportation and some sort of buffer between themselves and the general public (see ch. 4).

<sup>36</sup>My own personal experience with the group suggested that money matters were always handled in collaboration between Shora and several of the groups senior members and always in the presence of the concert promoter in order to avoid any later accusations of the mismanagement of funds.

Congolese music industry which encourages a tendency toward splintering. In each case, the structure of the splinter determines to some extent the structure of the new groups that result from it. Zaiko has evolved over the years into different series of two rival groups, although the various splinter groups have proved less successful in the long term. Defao's splinter group constituted in effect a 'one-man show,' which he has managed with varying degrees of success but which seems to be in a steady upward swing. Super Choc represents a particularly interesting case given that the group's founder was able to re-form his group almost from scratch after having been victim to the departure of a large number of musicians.<sup>37</sup>

### *Why Groups Splinter*

The single most common reason given for splintering is some sort of conflict over the management (or mismanagement) of funds.<sup>38</sup> Musicians who are dissatisfied with their leader will say, "he doesn't pay well" or "he doesn't do anything for us" or "we've got nothing!" And they cannot help but observe the high level of comfort and material goods enjoyed by their leader. "He's got tons of money, but we never see a cent." Waterman explains a similar phenomenon among juju musicians in Nigeria:

You can imagine some of his boys, they didn't have house, they have no accommodation, some of them sleep in the vehicle, and he doesn't care. If somebody in his position—I mean, by the money he has taken to buy his Volvo, right? He was riding Volvo, two Volkswagen Beetles, and that big civilian bus, and that other *dango* [van], all at his disposal. I mean, what does he need all those five cars for? He should have spent that money to see that his boys are properly settled in one place (Kola Oyesiku in Waterman 1990: 163).

---

<sup>37</sup>In the appendix, I have included a newspaper clipping which discusses the most recent and most unexpected 'dislocation' to occur in a number of years, the case of Wenge Musica B.C.B.G in the Spring of 1998 (appendix II). With this new division, there are now four different 'ailes' ('wings') of Wenge in Kinshasa.

<sup>38</sup>Waterman shows that the distribution of money is a common focus for gossip and recrimination, and the most frequent cause of group break ups among *juju* groups in Nigeria. His informal observations suggest that more than 50% of band earnings are kept by the band captain for his own purposes (1990: 159).

Defao explains his relationship with his then bandleader, Ben Nyamabo:

"En ce qui me concerne, je vous fais savoir que je ne pourrai jamais laisser le 'nzonzing' aussi longtemps que Ben ne me payera sur le champ mes droits d'auteur. Mais si je continue à les toucher par tranche, vive le 'nzonzing'." (Kingunza n.d.: 17).<sup>39</sup>

In many cases, the bandleader puts the band charter as well as any original compositions of the band in his name, making himself in effect the sole beneficiary of the musicians' creative efforts. Because of bandleaders' secrecy with regards to such questions, it is difficult for musicians to know if their incomes represent a fair percentage of the band's total earnings. Stories of splintering constantly refer to the lack of trust in social-organizational relations, but more research is necessary to examine how these elements can jeopardize long-term professional relationships and encourage a tendency toward splintering.<sup>40</sup> But musicians also keep secrets from bandleaders.

When bandmembers hire out their services to other musicians or other bands, it must be done discreetly so as not to cause tension between the musician and his colleagues or bandleader. This activity is known in Lingala as *zonzing* (roughly equivalent to the English 'moonlighting.'), a term that usually refers to short-term contractual agreements made between already professional musicians, most often but not always for studio recording sessions. The opportunity to do *zonzing* is highly sought after, not only for the money, but also for the prestige associated with being solicited as an individual performer. Listening to the way that musicians talk about *zonzing*, I often had the impression that there is a special value associated with this kind of work. *Zonzing* is prestigious because the best musicians are solicited this way, and it is also viewed as a type of 'ruse' (de Certeau 1984) or 'coup' (MacGaffey 1991;

---

<sup>39</sup> "As far as I'm concerned, I should let you know that as long as Ben doesn't pay me my copyrights all at once I will never stop doing 'zonzing' (moonlighting). If I continue to get them in small amounts, long live 'le zonzing'."

<sup>40</sup> Very little social science research has been done on the theme of trust, one which seems particularly appropriate for understanding social relations in an African context. For one such attempt see Hart 1988.

White 1998b) which enables the musician to work around the often oppressive power structures put into place by a band hierarchy.<sup>41</sup>

Popolipo, the famous guitarist-arranger of Koffi Olomide's Quartier Latin, recorded with Koffi on his early albums under a pseudonym ('Polo') in order to avoid problems with the leaders of Zaiko Langa Langa, the band he was playing with at the time.<sup>42</sup> Well-known instrumentalists are often solicited (Lofombo and Boeing 737 from Empire Bakuba, Lokassa ya Mbongo, Ngouma Lokito and Daly Kimoko of Soukouss Stars), though because they are instrumentalists they are better able to hide their identity than well-known vocalists (Dindo Yogo, Sam Mangwana, Papa Wemba). One musician explained to me that the only way he could make a living was by doing *zonzing*, but he said that if his bandleader found out, he would probably be suspended or fired from the band. In some cases *zonzing* is an effort to secure an additional source of income, but it can also be an attempt on the part of the musician to forge new working relationships so that one day he might start a band of his own.

As hinted in the discussion of hierarchy and elasticity (above), conflicts between women and men (and the resulting conflicts between men) are also often at the root of inter-band conflict. Most women in the music industry participate as dancers, and despite this subordinate position in the band hierarchy, in some situations they are given special treatment.<sup>43</sup> This may take the form of preferred seating on buses and trains or 'more suitable' accommodations (i.e. cleaner or closer to site of performance). But this preferential treatment is often based on the woman's ability to 'charm' those that provide for her: either members of the promotion team, senior bandmembers or the bandleader himself.<sup>44</sup> One band manager

---

<sup>41</sup>See the story of J.P. Buse and Zaiko Langa Langa discussed above.

<sup>42</sup>Eventually Popolipo left Zaiko to join Quartier Latin as a permanent member. After more than ten years with the group, Popolipo recently decided to rejoin Zaiko Langa Langa.

<sup>43</sup>I have not discussed the role of women as musicians in any detail primarily because their importance in the music industry seems to have declined over time (see ch. 6). This question is obviously an interesting one in and of itself, but limited access to data in this area led me to concentrate more on women as dancers (ch. 7) and as spectators (ch. 9).

<sup>44</sup>As I suggested in Chapter Seven, female dancers are an important part of most bands' strategy to attract as many concertgoers as possible. Well aware that those most often with money are men, bandleaders try to outdo each other with regards to the sensuality or outrageousness of their dance show, knowing that men (especially young men) are more likely to spend their money where there are women involved. The Big Stars, which usually had six to eight *danseuses* is a good example.

whom I interviewed stated very clearly that any woman who wants to dance with their band has to 'pass through him first', meaning she has to provide sexual favors in order to get the job. He explained that most new dancers were required to 'pass through' not only him, but also several other junior bandleaders, each threatening her with expulsion and public embarrassment if she did not comply. Stories about conflicts between famous musicians over dancers abound in the popular press and in public rumors. One young dancer became well-known as the "objet de la discorde" (object of disagreement) between two famous musicians (Mayor 1996: 49) and it was suggested that her untimely death was the result of their rivalry, perhaps by way of witchcraft.<sup>45</sup>

Because incidences such as these are relatively common, bandleaders often warn musicians against getting involved with dancers (perhaps to protect their own claims on women's sexuality?).<sup>46</sup> Musicians themselves often say, "Ah no! Dancers are dangerous" or "Watch out for AIDS!", an expression that musicians say to each other in a joking tone when dancers walk by or leave the room. Not only are dancers perceived as being 'loose' or 'easy' (Makobo 1996: 17), making them prime candidates as carriers of STDs, but they are also blamed for being at the origin of most conflicts between members of the band. Bandleaders claim that "female dancers only cause trouble." They rarely explain exactly what dancers do, but imply that their capricious nature and licentious behavior creates a general atmosphere of 'indiscipline' that is very hard to control with a large group of young, sexually active males. The fight that broke out between musicians in the Big Stars (see above) was somehow related to the fact that the dancers were sleeping with non-bandmembers while the band was on tour. One of the leader's assessments of the situation highlighted the dancers' role: *It's a mess.*

*Everything's a mess and it's all because of the dancers. The dancers have to understand that*

---

<sup>45</sup>I have argued elsewhere that relations between politicians and musicians are also mediated through women (White 1997). In Kinshasa there is a series of stories about politicians taking the girlfriends and wives of famous musicians and vice versa. These stories, I would argue, are not only about male desire for women, but also about male desire for power, since success with women is commonly associated with male virility.

<sup>46</sup>This warning, however, may be nothing more than a claim to leaders' control over female sexuality. One group found an innovative solution to this problem by putting into effect an official band policy that restricts bandmembers from dating or having sexual relations with the same women. "If I like her and she doesn't like me, then the other musicians can't go after her" (Lokassa ya Mbongo, Jan. 17, 1998).

*they are not musicians, they are dancers, and if they don't start to act like it, they'll have to look for work somewhere else.*

As these comments suggest, intra-group relations between men and women are ordered by several hierarchical oppositions which operate simultaneously: seniority over inexperience, musician over dancer, male over female. It is expected by bandmembers or even by people outside of the band that musicians and dancers be involved in romantic or sexual relations. Because of the low social status often accorded dancers, however, musicians keep relations they have with them very discreet, preferring to be seen in public with non-bandmember companions. The bandleader, band president and sometimes frontline singers will bring girlfriends (not wives) with them to certain concert engagements. On tour, when musicians are away from their home community, it is very common for musicians to seek out local women during their stay. And there seems to be a preference among many musicians for women who are securely established or independently wealthy. One senior musician told me a story about a woman he fell in love with while on tour in Zambia:

Wow! She is so beautiful that woman! I swear Monsieur Bob, you've never seen a woman like this before. I think I love her. She has a huge car. She comes and picks me up and takes me anywhere I want to go. A woman with ... with real class. Lots of money and she only speaks English, not a word of French. I wrote a song for her, but I need you to translate some parts of it into English for me so she can understand what I'm saying. What do you think? (Mar 27, 1996)

When I asked him what his wife would say if she found out, he explained that the wife of a musician has to be very understanding. "That's the way musicians are," he explained, implying that interacting with women is part of the musician's profession: "It's something she has to respect. After all, I'm an artist." While wives of musicians would almost never be seen at concerts, in the case of Defao, the wives of his singers and his own sisters helped him before certain performances, especially in the preparation of food and clothes.

Thus some women provide for men's domestic needs, and different women provide for their sexual needs (Schoepf and Engundu 1991; L. White 1990). The sharp distinction

made between different categories of women means that women are either sought after or brushed aside, either glorified or villified, either 'good girls' or 'bad girls' (Bell 1987).<sup>47</sup> In Chapters Nine and Ten I will discuss this dynamic in greater detail, but here I have attempted to show some of the ways in which women, especially those involved in the world of music, find themselves at the mercy of male desire and contests for power. In this setting, male-female relations must be understood in the context of various socially accepted (though highly debated) forms of polygyny, especially the Congolese practice of taking on 'official' mistresses, referred to ironically as '*deuxième bureaux*'. The issues discussed in this section are not new in Congolese society (see ch. 2), and they highlight the extent to which female sexuality can be an expression of personal power vis-à-vis men (see ch. 7) as well as an instrument of male domination.

### *The 'Chef' Complex*

Splintering as a general aspect of African social organization is often invoked in the early social anthropological literature on political organization in lineage-based societies (Evans-Pritchard 1940; Turner 1957). Lienhardt, writing on social structure in Dinka society, explains the conception of segmentation based on group size: "It became so big, so it separated" (1958: 116).<sup>48</sup> While Sahlins (1961) argued that the idea of segmentary lineages should be used to describe only particular lineage-based societies (especially the Tiv and the Nuer), Kopytoff has put forth an argument which suggests political segmentation as an important part of a pan-African set of cultural principles (1987: 15). In his edited volume of

---

<sup>47</sup>The way men talk about women reflects this separation of roles: 'Mama ya bana' (mother of the children), 'chérie' (sweetheart), 'femme' (wife or concubine), '*deuxième bureau*' (mistress), 'ndumba' (prostitute), and the list goes on. As I discuss in Chapter Nine, women also have categories for men.

<sup>48</sup>Compare this with J.P. Busé's assessment of the splintering that occurred in Zaiko Langa Langa: "It was so big that everybody knew something was going to happen. They just didn't think about where they were going" (August 25, 1997)



works on what he has called the "African frontier," Kopytoff reaffirms what other observers have noticed elsewhere:

Anyone familiar with the routine workings of African social organization will recognize these events. An elder is accused of witchcraft, a disgruntled group of siblings feels mistreated by their deceased parent's successors, a chief's son loses the struggle over succession, an adventurous hunter or trader goes out in search of new game or profits--such people are forever leaving their settlement, accompanied by their brothers, sons, nephews, other relatives, retainers, and adherents. They move beyond the edge of the village, 'into the bush'... Here, they set up a compound, or a hamlet, or a mini-chieftancy of uncertain autonomy, or join a settlement already established by others like them" (ibid: 6).

Kopytoff attributes this internal dynamic to several factors: the tension between discourses of hierarchy and egalitarianism, witchcraft accusations and jealousy, factional struggles over succession, and although less common, inter-tribal conflict. Bayart, referring to Hirschmann's 'exit option', has discussed how the ease with which people separate from their communities is fuelled by the perceived abundance in land (1993: 22). But Kopytoff's analysis also refers to the "general value of 'being first'" (1987: 22), which is obviously linked with the status of being senior and thus being a 'chef' ('boss' or 'chief'). Lienhardt writes that "each man wants to found his own descent group, a formal segment of the subclan which will for long be remembered by his name..." (1958: 118). Thus not only group size or population density, but also ambition seems to play an important role in the splintering of corporate units.

The common desire to become 'chef', a term which loosely translates as 'boss', is evident not only in music, but also in churches, businesses, schools, and politics, among traffic police and customs officers, even at the level of the household. Fabian discusses how power in Luba country is perceived as something that is "constantly to be acquired because it is always in danger of being lost" (1990: 66). As an outside observer of Congolese culture, I always had the impression that there were 'chiefs' everywhere I turned: 'chef de répétition', 'chef d'orchestre', 'chef de service', and outside of the music world just as many 'directeurs', 'présidents' and 'sous-chefs', etc. But this 'chef complex', if I can call it that, is always in relation to an equal and opposite impulse to be recognized as a subject:

A hierarchical ethic means that one finds it normal to be at either side of a culturally sanctioned hierarchical relationship...Psychologically, it means that one is both comfortable about exercising authority and not discomfited by subordination to authority. In the realm of values, it means that one prizes both one's standing over others and one's being attached to a superior power--hence the inherent value that was usually granted to chieftanship and kingship in Africa. To be under no one at all, and dependent on no one, was to be utterly without status, in effect, to be like a slave (1987: 36).

I want to argue then that there is a self-perpetuating tendency toward splintering because splintering suggests the possibility of becoming a 'chef', and in African societies one of the most important forms of prestige comes from leading others:

Most important for rising above other men in power in prestige, [the Yoruba] constructs a loose gathering of followers and partisans who have incurred obligations of variable weight to rally around him in times of personal conflict or for the purpose of political competition" (Aronson 1980: 157-8).

Material wealth is sought after and remarked upon, but the truly wealthy are those that have been able to activate social relationships and demonstrate wealth in people.<sup>49</sup> What is interesting is that in contemporary urban settings such as Kinshasa, where land is scarce and people are not, 'big men' or 'chefs' are still judged by the value and number of people that surround them. I will return to this question to consider it in greater detail, but first it is necessary to present a brief discussion of the nature of relations of power between musicians and their mostly non-musician patrons or 'sponsors'.

---

<sup>49</sup>Speaking of 'traditional African societies', Kopytoff has argued that "... African groups had an almost insatiable demand for people and jealously guarded those they already had" (1987: 43).

## Singing the Sponsor

And what our people like here is that when you are playing either you name them somewhere, you call them, you tell them where you have been knowing them...Let's say you speak what they understand. Well, they will like you (*juju* musician quoted in Waterman 1990: 113).

Throughout this research I use the term 'sponsor' in several different ways. As discussed in Chapter Four, the term 'sponsor' refers to a commercial or corporate entity which offers to assume a certain amount of the artist's professional expenses in exchange for the artist's endorsement of a particular product or products.<sup>50</sup> But I also use the term to describe those individuals, often also fans of the artist, who contribute money to the artist in exchange for privileged access to the artist's performance and private life and/or for some form of public recognition. I am reluctant to use the word 'patron' in this context since conventional discussions of patron-client ties refer to a set of relations between a 'big man' and a series of subordinates at varying levels of dependence over an extended period of time.<sup>51</sup> In the case of Congolese popular music, this model is not a good fit since most musicians have a large number of sponsors, some stable and wealthy, but the majority of which are short-lived and/or low-paying (ch. 7).

It is important to underline the fluidity of the social category of sponsor. Sponsors can be fans of the artist, and they often begin that way, but over time certain fans become more involved in the career and activities of the their favorite musicians, and eventually take on the

---

<sup>50</sup>A special category of sponsor songs which focused on commercial products seemed to be more common in the first few decades of Congo-Zairean music. Leon Bukasa sang a song about the founder of the Ngoma record label and a certain Mokoko sang about Bata shoes in the 1950s. In the 1970s Tabu Ley sang for Skol beer, Omo soap and FNMA refrigerators. During the same time period, Franco sang for Primus beer and Kronenburg beer. Both Tabu Ley and Franco sang songs for Azda, a well-known importer of inexpensive European cars in Kinshasa in the 1970s. See Chapter Four for a discussion of the relationship between popular musicians and large-scale commercial sponsorship in the 1990s.

<sup>51</sup>Scholars of African art have made particularly important contributions to our knowledge about the relationship between African artists and their patrons (see in particular the journal *African Arts*), more recently with special attention to the relationship between African artists and Western art traders or collectors. Steiner (1994), drawing from earlier work on African tourist art (especially Jules-Rosette 1984) offers a good overview of these issues with regards to the African art trade in Côte d'Ivoire and to some extent in West Africa more generally. Fabian (1996), Jewsiewicki (1995), and Jules-Rosette (1992) discuss the role of the patron in the context of popular painting in Zaire. In addition to Waterman (1990), the extensive literature on the politics of griot praise and performance (see ch. 5) in West Africa is also pertinent. Barnes (1986), LeMarchand (1981) and MacGaffey (1987) have discussed the role of political patronage in various parts of post-independence Africa.

role of *mécène* (French for 'sponsor' or 'benefactor').<sup>52</sup> The main thing that distinguishes this type of sponsor from other sponsors is that they continue to cultivate relations of exchange outside of the concert setting.<sup>53</sup> A large proportion of the people praised by musicians are what I would call 'one-time' sponsors, meaning they support musicians on a very irregular basis (the sponsors I discussed in Chapter Seven are good examples of this kind of sponsorship). Because one-time sponsors are so common relative to other kinds of sponsors, success in securing sponsor-based support depends not only on the musician's ability to maintain good relations with sponsors, but also on his ability to get as many sponsors as possible (Waterman 1990; Diawara 1997).<sup>54</sup>

As discussed in chapter 5, praise serves various social functions. It is a form of social recognition for those whose deeds or accomplishments stand out in the community, but in many cases it is a form of social distinction, as much for the musicians as for the person being praised. 'Throwing' (the most common type of praise in popular Congolese music) and more elaborate forms of praisingsinging appear at first to be completely different forms of musical practice, but they tend to have similar results, and thus it may be more accurate to view them as different points on a continuum. Individuals in the audience give money and come back with a fragment of prestige (such as a personalized song or a snapshot), just as those who continue to sponsor musicians after the show. Apart from the obvious mutual benefits of the

---

<sup>52</sup>There are relatively few terms (apart from 'mécène') to designate this role as a social category. When I asked musicians about the wealthy-looking people that often came to visit Defao outside of practice and concert settings, the answer I received was "He's a friend of Defao's" or sometimes "He gives money to Defao". Terms of address used with sponsors were more elaborate: "Président", "Vié", and "Ya X" ('ya' followed by the sponsor's name). Except for 'President', these terms were similar to terms of address used in general for people of higher social status.

<sup>53</sup>In some sense the bandleader is the ultimate sponsor for musicians. The bandleader does not give money (or at least as much money) as other sponsors do, but he provides musicians with the crucial social capital to learn and practice their trade. In practice this observation seems to hold true, since in concert the person whose praises were most often sung was Defao himself.

<sup>54</sup>On several occasions the Big Stars were hired to perform at private events such as weddings or political meetings. Private engagements, however, required Defao to adapt his repertoire to a highly varied audience, often adding songs with which the musicians were not completely familiar. A Kinshasa wedding we played began with a series of old *rumba* favorites from the 1950s, many of which the younger musicians in the band did not know how to play. At another private engagement in Matadi, Lower Zaire, Defao was asked to compose a completely new song using lyrics which would sing the praises of the event organizers, members of the local Mobutuist Youth League (FROJEMO).

praisesinging arrangement (musicians get financial support and social prestige, sponsors get social prestige), praise for the wealthy and powerful is also a means of activating certain types of social relationships and responsibilities, and as I will argue later, it can also be seen as an impulse to keep bad leadership in check.

In Congolese popular music it is not uncommon for entire songs to be devoted to individuals, although even important sponsors are rarely cited alone (see also Keil 1979: 125). In the following example, the sponsor of the song, who also happens to be the producer of the album, is not the sole object of praise. The names of people being ‘thrown’ are placed in bold [audio cue 9]:

**Zingzong, Jean Pi Wable**  
**Allo Télécel...**  
**Maneko, Alpha Luambo**

Nalinga nalinga lelo yo na moni  
 Na tambola na bamboka bapaya  
**Shabani Records**, atonda bonzenga

Sagesse na bolamu nani a bosani yo  
**Shabani Records**, atonda sentiment

Papa abota yo kitoko  
 Mama abota yo kitoko  
 Nani alingi kotia tembe amona **Shabani**?

Kumbanga na **Air Zaire**  
 Kumbanga na **Air Zaire**  
 Noki na kobela, o yambaka ngai (2x)

**Maneko Tchebwa**  
**Ya Makiona Poulet**  
**Papa Samir à Kisseville**

Na tambola na mokili, nanu na mona te  
 Na tambola na mokili, nanu na mona te  
**Shabani** (2x)

**Many Makiadi Isangala**  
**Ilunga Mwana Boude**

Kumbanga na **Super Zaire Papa Mbemba**  
 Kumbanga na **Air Zaire Papa Kikunda**  
 Kumbanga na **Air Esperance Saddam**  
 Ngai na mona Paris, na mona Brussels  
 Nga na koma ba Londres na zonga Kinshasa

Bananga eh **Papy Kintukaho**  
 Mokolo nini nga na ko mona **Atos Senan**?  
 Mokolo nini nga na ko mona **Major Jacques**?  
 Mokolo nini nga na ko mona **Maté ya Air Zaire**?  
 Mokolo nini nga na ko mona **Papa Wemba**?  
 Mokolo nini nga na ko mona **Ya Lemoso**?

Na tambola na mokili, nanu na mona te  
 Na tambola na mokili, nanu na mona te  
**Shabani eh** (2x)

**Jimmy Lipasa, toujours soigné**  
**Jean-Marie Nzoiba**  
**P.D.G. Gaby à Kin Services**

*"Shabani", Super Choc de Shora Mbemba, Mandundu (1996)*

**Zingzong, Jean Pi Wable**  
**Hello Télécel...**  
**Maneko, Alpha Luambo**

I've loved so many times, but today I saw you  
 I've been all over the world  
**Shabani Records**, he's full of charm

Wisdom and goodness, who can forget you?  
**Shabani Records**, he's full of feeling

Your father made you good-looking  
 Your mother made you good-looking  
 Who would ever doubt **Shabani**?

Send me on **Air Zaire**  
 Send me away on **Air Zaire**  
 Before I fall ill, believe me (2x)

**Maneko Tchebwa**  
**Ya Makiona Poulet**  
**Papa Samir à Kisseville**

Travelled the world, never seen anything like him  
 Travelled the world, never seen anything like him  
**Shabani** (2x)

**Many Makiadi Isangala**  
**Ilunga Mwana Boude**

Send me on **Super Zaire Papa Mbemba**  
 Send me on **Air Zaire Papa Kikunda**  
 Send me on **Air Esperance Saddam**  
 So I can see Paris, see Brussels  
 Set foot in London, and go back to Kinshasa

Oh friends, **Papy Kintukaho**  
 When will I see **Atos Senan**?  
 When will I see **Major Jacques**?  
 When will I see **Maté ya Air Zaire**?  
 When will I see **Papa Wemba Ekumani**?  
 When will I see **Ya Lemoso**?

Travelled the world, never seen anything like him  
 Travelled the world, never seen anything like him  
**Shabani eh** (2x)

**Jimmy Lipasa, always looks good**  
**Jean-Marie Nzoiba**  
**P.D.G. Gaby from Kin Services**

This example is interesting because of the way that different sponsors' names are embedded within the text, creating a complex layering of praises and appeals. The subject of the line "Send me on Air Zaire", Shabani, is understood to be the main target of praise. By asking Shabani to send them on an Air Zaire plane, however, the singers are in effect flattering two sponsors at the same time. Thus, this song is a particularly good example of the multiplicity of sponsors to which I have referred above.<sup>55</sup> People whose names are cited come from a wide variety of social and professional backgrounds, and individual names can be sung or spoken--sometimes even shouted--depending on whether they are inserted in between lines of verses or in between verses and choruses:

---

<sup>55</sup>See also Chapter Four on the increasing number of one-time producers.

Yo mwana popi nga "asala kala"  
 Yo mwana popi nga "le muanga ntama"  
 Etumba ya yo na nga  
 Napona ebundeli nini?  
 Nakokoka olongi na yo ngai d'avance  
 Douceur ya regard na yo  
 Ekoki po nakweya elinga!  
 Mokongo soki opesi nga o abreger vie na nga  
 Nakoma jouet na yo!

**M.C. Rogers**

Zemi ya la joie lelo ebote mawa  
 Kingo ya cherie oya mayaka ekomi ya bijou  
 Ba promesses ya bolingo na mayi ezindi  
 Eleko ya bana mamelo est bien revolue  
 Na yeba ata magie na revivre le passe  
 Sentiment y'amour ebetisi motema nkake  
 Moto akobika te

**Aimee Likobe  
 Willy Carlos  
 Eddy Lukunku  
 Youla Bol's  
 Ignace Moleka  
 Ibrahim Shako**

*From "Etat Civil", Koffi Olomide, V12 (1995)*

You're the doll, I'm the veteran  
 You're the doll, I'm the man of the world  
 In the battle between you and me  
 What weapon should I choose  
 You're out of my league  
 The sweet way you look at me  
 Is enough to knock me out  
 When you turn your back on me, you cut me short  
 I'm nothing but your toy!

**M.C. Rogers**

Pregnant joy gave birth to sadness  
 Her pearl neck only wears gold now  
 Promises of love drowned in the water  
 She's not a schoolgirl anymore  
 If I only had the magic to relive the past  
 This love strikes lightning in my heart  
 I'll never get over it

**Aimee Likobe  
 Willy Carlos  
 Eddy Lukunku  
 Youla Bol's  
 Ignace Moleka  
 Ibrahim Shako**

In other cases names are woven into the body of the text:

Soki on o signa na motema  
 Tika kosalaka ye ezala zala  
 Ayoka kokoma chien mechant  
 Koswa-swa moto tout na nzela  
 Ekathaka tshaka nga à l'aise  
 Stephanie Steffi tshaka nga à l'aise  
 Don Pierrot Mavungu salaka vrai  
 Droit d'aimer ezali tika nalinga yo

If you've taken this love with all your heart  
 Don't leave it alone, far from you  
 Or else it will become a rabid dog  
 Biting people all over the place  
 Ekathaka make me feel fine  
 Stephanie Steffi make me feel fine  
 Don Pierrot Mavungu be good to me  
 I was meant to love you, let me love you

*From "Aspirine", Koffi Olomide, V12 (1995)*

The names of friends and sponsors can be cited at different points in a song, but by far the greatest number of names are found in the dance sequence, or *seben*, of each song. The following excerpt is a good example of how 'throwing' can take on a special status of its own, sometimes occupying more space than the lyrics or even the shouts:



**Alpha! Alpha! Alpha Mbiya!  
Lomasa, Lomasa Mamwene  
Oui! Oui! Vyeme Kallé, Vyeme Kallé, Vyeme Kallé!**

(Shout)

**Dingo! Tsiatala! Demoche, Herison, Bana Holande**

(Shout)

**Le champion, Ericson Etsimba na Holande  
Oprevoika Matondo Sib  
Na Holande, Masluz à Matadi**

(Shout)

**Tata Mapasa, Yio Mandela  
Valisse! Valisse! Le Grand Varisse! Grand Varisse! Ma!  
Mother said: "Super Wax! Holandesa..."**

(Shout)

**Dembi Kwanza, Kwanza Dembi eeh! Dembi!  
Violenne, Violenne Pampa, Violenne, Mbiya  
Violenne Pampa, Alain Mbiya, Na mputua  
Stick your neck out, in Brussels!  
José Kasasa ... Jeancy Feda  
Vieux Bolyte Achebo achebo!  
Garçon songdage, Hypo! ooh! Hypolite! Achebo, Achebo  
Mère Sophie, Papa Do, Papa Do, Mère Sophie  
Willy Montand, Mère Godard, Ya Vieux Bakelele**

(Shout)

**Steve Bimbo, aller-retour, Kinshasa, Paris...  
Oh! Sigo Shabani, Alain Shabani  
Winetu le Grand, Stone na Suisse!  
Didier Somata, Didier Somata na Liege!  
Sergosse Edumbi, mukili pamba pamba  
Max Wada, Henriette na fédéraille, Henri Michel**

Tired yet? No! Tired yet? Not yet!

**Merci Merci Sharufa na Reference Brussels,  
Ha ha ha, Big Stone**

*From "Alain Mbiya", Général Defao, Dernier Album (1995)*

For outsiders and non-speakers of Lingala, 'throwing' often goes unnoticed since names of people and lyrics tend to blend together. Congolese audiences, however, and musicians in particular, pay a great deal of attention to the names that are cited, especially those

that occur on a regular basis.<sup>56</sup> Some artists are more active than others when it comes to citing peoples' names in their music, and many artists are known to write songs which will only receive titles once a potential sponsor has agreed to pay for the song.<sup>57</sup> When I asked one of my musician friends about the title of a song he had just composed, he told me: "Right now, I just call it 'Leah', but the title will change as soon as someone buys it." Thus citing peoples' names can be seen as a strategy which musicians use to sell more records:

Obviously promoting someone's name is a form of marketing. When I immortalise Mother Malou or Sadara, this means another sales circuit for me. These women have a lot of influence so that people who know them won't hesitate to buy the album as soon as it is available (General Defao cited in Makobo 1996: 3).

In a concert setting, the singer or *atalaku* will choose the names he 'throws' according to whom he sees in the audience, but people in positions of high influence are sung even in their absence (especially on albums) since it is generally assumed that word will get back to them. Mobutu's son Kongolo (alias 'Saddam Hussein'), probably the most often-sung figure since the late 1980s, was rumored to have followed very closely the bands that were singing his praises and those that were not. Those that did not sing his name in concert and on recordings would be threatened with physical violence and often be faced with serious obstacles to their professional activities (having the plug pulled mid-concert, being denied access to promotional networks, etc.). According to one Kinshasa musician: "Si tu le chantes pas--donc le passeport!" (If you don't sing his name, he'll have your passport!).

---

<sup>56</sup>Some of the most common names cited since the beginning of the 1990s: Saddam Hussein (Mobutu's son), Manda Tchewa (t.v. announcer), Bolowa Bonzakwa (t.v. announcer), Alain St. Pierre (radio announcer), Jean-Jacques Bayonne (nightclub owner and music producer), George Weah (football player), Mutombo Dikembe (basketball player), Alain Mbiya (music promoter), Eric Kenzo (music promoter), Bob Maswa (music promoter), Gaby Shabani (music promoter), Mère Kosala (bar owner), Africa #1 (radio station in Libreville) and Antenne A (radio station in Kinshasa).

<sup>57</sup>The most extreme example I have heard of citing occurs in a live version of Kester Emeneke's "Enfant de maman" (1993), which according to Serge Makobo contains the names of more than 80 different people (Makobo 1996). Of the eight songs on one of Defao's recent albums, seven carry the names of individuals, suggesting in many cases that the songs were purchased by wealthy fans. Most albums produced in the last 5-10 years have at least one if not several songs with individuals' names as titles. The money that musicians received in exchange for composing songs depends primarily on the musician's popularity. I have heard of individual songs being purchased for as little as \$100 and as much as \$3,000 US.

While Mobutu's propaganda machine lost considerable steam in the 1970s and 1980s (Willame 1992), his son Kongolo continued to promote the family name through his activities as director of the private promotions company, Les Productions Yoshad. Kongolo's steel grip on the Kinshasa music scene throughout the 1990s was maintained not only by rumors about the financial assistance he provided the groups under his supervision, but also by the threat of force that he played upon as a high-ranking military officer in his father's army (Biaya 1997b).<sup>58</sup> According to J.P. Busé, members of the military often befriended the musicians of Zaiko Langa Langa because of the young women that flocked around the band, and the musicians cultivated friendships with soldiers as a source of physical protection. Gode Lofombo, the bass player for Empire Bakuba explained: *I know all the soldiers and they all know me. I can go anywhere even late at night and I'll never run into problems. As long as you sing their name they'll protect you; they just want people to hear their name* (personal communication).<sup>59</sup>

One *atalaku* I spoke with said that during the peak of his career anywhere from 15-25 people would visit him per day. They would each come to give him sums of money so that he would sing their names later that night in concert: "Sometimes if the leader came into a lot of cash, he would give us each a cut, but we made a lot of money on our own. \$10 here, \$20 there, I would put it in my pockets and it would start to add up." Some musicians actively seek out money in exchange for citing names. One artist had a reputation for approaching people who were known to be wealthy and offering to sing their name in exchange for a "little something". I asked him if it was bad to approach people in this way:

---

<sup>58</sup>On relations between musicians and the military, see also Waterman (1990)

<sup>59</sup>In May of 1997, Lofombo was shot three times by soldiers of the AFDL, the new ruling party in Congo-Kinshasa. Elsewhere (White 1997) I have talked about the increasing tension between the military and civilians (especially musicians) in post-Mobutu Kinshasa, and how the singing of praises was temporarily disrupted by the change of regime.

No, he said, if you sing them you can make lots of money. Once I made \$150, just like that. "Is it a good way to make money?" I asked. No no, not for the money, he hesitates for a minute. You see, Bob, the important thing is friendship ("les relations"), these are people you already know. They help you, like a friend who always buys you beer or helps when you need money for your daughter. Then when I see him I'm happy and I want to sing his name (Feb 21, 1996).

By playing on the vanity and the emotions of patrons and fans, musicians are able to improve their access to both social networks and financial resources.<sup>60</sup> In effect selling space on their records and in their live performances, musicians have turned shouts and songs into a form of social advertising:

Koffi [Olomide] does a line of business, throwing names. 'Kin Service Express', a mailing enterprise, certainly gets high returns on the money they paid Koffi to loudly mention their name in a number of songs, adding sentences such as "En toute confiance" ['service you can trust']. Songs as billboards (John Grinling, personal correspondence).

Koffi also prints the names of the people he cites alongside lyrics in his CD liner notes, something other artists would surely do if they had enough money for liner notes. With the money earned from these informal agreements, he is usually able to pay a significant portion of the costs associated with producing his albums.<sup>61</sup> Fans in Kinshasa have mixed feelings about 'throwing'. In general, older people tend to be more critical of this practice (ch. 9), viewing it as a corruption of the music's content and a shameful gesture of upward social mobility. But many people are aware of the extent to which musicians are dependent on financial support from their fans: "For a musician in Zaire, it is people that are at the center of his preoccupations. What could be more normal than for him to immortalize a brother, a friend or a benefactor?" (Makobo 1996: 2). This very *Kinois* view of commercial praisesinging

---

<sup>60</sup>Apparently one of Defao's biggest fans/sponsors advanced him the money so that he could buy the mini-van which serves as transport for the band and its equipment.

<sup>61</sup>The same has been said of the musicians of Wenge Musica B.C.B.G., who during their Spring 1998 tour were soliciting potential sponsors directly in between songs during concerts: "You know we're in the studio and we're going to finish soon, so come by and see us. Our friends know how it operates. Don't miss your chance ('bozala mbala'). The cost: \$1000 U.S. a 'throw'.

does not go uncontested (ch. 9), but its prevalence among music listeners echoes Appadurai's observation that "[p]raise is measured by the 'community of sentiment' it evokes and creates, and not by the authenticity of the link between the private (or idiosyncratic) emotions of the praiser and the object of his or her praise (Appadurai 1990: 107).

### **Good Chef, Bad Chef**

The real inversion takes place when, in their desire for splendour, the masses join in madness and clothe themselves in the flashy rags of power so as to reproduce its epistemology; and when, too, power, in its own violent quest for grandeur and prestige, makes vulgarity and wrongdoing [délinquance] its main mode of existence (Mbembe 1992a: 29).

Throughout this chapter, I have discussed some of the key moments of musical practice and performance in order to demonstrate how various types of superiors and subordinates are tied together in a "zombified" micro-political embrace. In this context, subordinates 'toy' with power not in an effort to resist authority, but because of their fascination with authority's 'grandeur' and their desire to appropriate it (ibid; DeBoeck 1996: 99). Political unrest is most likely to occur when the link between political negligence and widespread poverty becomes explicit, as in Mobutu's announcement to proceed with 'democratization' measures, or his oft-repeated maxim "If you're going to steal, just steal a little". Thus it is not the presence of a political big man or 'chef' which is at issue here (as is often the case in Western, especially liberal humanitarian political discourses), but rather the ability of the 'chef' to live by the law, and to live up to his responsibilities as 'provider' (Schatzberg 1993). The question is not "Why is there a big man?", but "Is he behaving like a big man?"<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup>This point has been eloquently argued by Max Gluckman: "But in certain types of society, when subordinates turn against a leader thus, they may only turn against him personally, without necessarily revolting against the authority of the office he occupies. They aim to turn him out of that office and install another in it." (1965: 28).

As a foreigner in an all-Congolese band, a novice with pre-configured social status, it took me some time to come to terms with my own position as a 'big man'. In retrospect, the signs of this status were quite obvious, and they manifested themselves in the form of everyday petty requests from different members of the band: "Monsieur Bob, sombela ngai sucré." "Monsieur Bob, simba ngai, pardon." "Monsieur Bob, ata shimbok eza te?" and the award-winning dramatic performance of Koyo the drummer: "Monsieur Bob, j'ai faim."<sup>63</sup> Of all the characters that asked me for things, Koyo was by far the most memorable. He was short and skinny and had a sad expression on his face that became sad and hungry when he tilted his head to the side and held his stomach, trying (as he often did) to get lunch money from me. On one occasion I gave Koyo some small bills, hoping this would be enough, but he continued, this time switching to Lingala for added emphasis: "Nzaya Monsieur Bob." I doubled what was in his hand and he looked up at me again with the same face, "Monsieur Bob, nzaya." I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Unlike most people with whom I had contact, who would try as much as possible to detract attention from the transaction itself, Koyo was holding the transaction up in my face. I squinted and held my mouth open with an incredulous look, staring him straight in the eyes until we both broke into laughter, which for me was a great source of relief.

Following this incident, Koyo continued to ask me for things, but his requests had taken on a new meaning for me. I began to see them less as a threat and more as part of a social game: Could he get money from me? Could I keep my cool (*maîtrise*)? Could I show mastery (*maîtrise*) of the gestures of giving and taking in this highly charged interracial encounter? The humor which had laid bare the underlying relations of power between us continued to inform our interactions, eventually developing into our own inside joke, a running parody of patron-client micropolitics: he would feign suffering, I would call him

---

<sup>63</sup>"Monsieur Bob, buy me a soda." "Monsieur Bob, please, help me out." "Monsieur Bob, not even one measly cigarette?", and Koyo the drummer: "Monsieur Bob, I'm hungry." The vast majority of the Congolese with whom I came into contact (even those who held a certain degree of power over me, Defao for instance) addressed me Monsieur Bob. Perhaps because of its ubiquity in my daily interactions, the power of this term of address did not strike me until well after I had returned from the field.

Koyo Nzaya ("Koyo the Hungry"), and then I would proceed to buy him an orange soda. Gradually I came to realize that I had taken on the role of a small-time sponsor [figure 8.5--Koyo chose the backdrop himself]. I gave money because I had money, and what I received in return was ongoing confirmation of this privileged status. This was an important lesson to learn. It was important that I learn to disarm the feeling of panic which I often experienced in situations such as this. *Why is she asking me for money? If I buy him a coke I'm going to have to do the same thing for everyone. I can't start doing this, I don't have this kind of money. What will happen if I say no?* These are the thoughts that would run through my mind. It was a challenge to view charity not as a sign of the other's weakness, but as a manifestation of resourcefulness or a cultural mechanism of social control.

Mechanisms of social control have been studied in various contexts in the anthropological literature on Africa: Radcliffe-Brown's discussion of joking relationships (1940), Turner's (1969) accounts of status elevation and ritual reversal, and Fabian's (1990) discussion of Luba proverbs about leadership and social responsibility. More directly relevant to this discussion, Vail and White's (1991) extensive research on praise poetry explores the common element of poetic license that permits 'traditional' musicians to speak out against the abuse of power (c.f. Gluckman 1965). But what happens to poetic license in the elaboration of commercialized forms of cultural expression? Vail and White's model, though very seductive, is unable to shed any light on this subject because it is based in a binary conception of power which allows for the possibility of two types of artistic expression: "a tradition of rejection" on the one hand (63) and "royal praise" on the other (155).<sup>64</sup> The missing link in their analysis, a notion of power as a social dialectic, limits them from being able to see what popular forms of praise have made so clear. First, singers of praise are neither completely free of power nor completely co-opted by it, but both. Second, and this is the key point I want to

---

<sup>64</sup>Music, because it exists in its own time and space, offers a context in which the limits of social propriety are exceedingly flexible, but poetic license is never complete, especially in the context of popular music which depends so heavily on sub-text and masked messages (Onyumbwe 1994; White 1997). As Mbembe has argued, "...whether the encounter is 'masked' or not is of little consequence. What is important is that, as a specific trajectory of domination, the postcolony strikes precisely in its earthiness and verbosity" (1992: 10).

make, to praise those in a position of power is fundamentally a call to social action and a reminder of social responsibility.

As I will discuss in the next chapter, lyrical tropes in popular music express exasperation ('na lembi', 'I'm tired'), refusal ('na boyi' - 'I refuse'), and social rupture ('na ko suka wapi' - 'what will become of me?'), but they do not exist in a social vacuum. A close examination of the way these tropes are heard and used shows that gestures of praise implicitly urge those in power to take action with regards to the poor and less fortunate (Appadurai 1990; Burke 1996: 186). De Boeck (1996) discusses a similar trope, the Lingala expression 'kozanga esika' ('to lack a home' or 'to be without a place', see also Nkashama 1992). Instead of seeing this theme as an expression of individualism in response to the disillusion of colonial and post-colonial political neglect (De Boeck 1996: 95), however, I would argue that like many of the praise-shouts of the mid-1990s (kibinda nkoy, mandundu, tsidi muna kake, and so on), this is a coded plea to those in positions of economic and political power. It is not a Western-style self seeking a new 'modern' identity, but a disoriented and melancholy public denouncement of *les responsables*, a reminder of 'African tradition' and the way that things are supposed to be.<sup>65</sup> Yet this plea is not simply nostalgic or backward looking. Through the 'star system' of the 'modern' music industry, and through practices such as 'throwing' and 'spraying', Congolese are constantly redefining their relationship to power in a globalizing, modernizing world.

The practice of splintering in 'modern' musical groups signals not only a long-standing 'tradition' of turning its back on bad leadership (Kopytoff 1987), but also a renewable 'modern' resource in the form of individual distinction and the deep pleasure of dance [figure 8.6]. Compare this with Fabian's discussion of images of power in popular theater:

---

<sup>65</sup>In French spoken in Kinshasa, the meaning of this term plays on the semantic shift between someone who is in charge ('responsable du bureau') and someone who provides for others ('je suis un responsable de famille'). In popular discourse about national politics, it is not uncommon to hear people in Kinshasa blame politicians, especially the president, for a vast array of social psychological problems including the habit of lying to foreigners, libertine values/promiscuity and the tendency toward splintering in social organization.



Verbally they grumble and complain; when they pass to action it is to drink, sing, and dance, and have a good time. Revolt becomes an orgiastic feast, and the greatest challenge to the chief's power is put up by a refusal to take his orders seriously. The celebration away from the village in the fields comes close to the traditional way of deposing a chief, which was simply to move out on him and leave him with an empty village (Fabian 1990: 285).

This refusal to be taken seriously is the African dictator's deepest fear and thus he sets out to "colonize languages and sounds" (Mbembe 1992b: 130). While he is 'waiting for hegemony', popular culture goes on without him:

South of the Sahara the key problem for the dominators is to find the dominated and then force them to settle down in a domestic social space where they can be further dominated and exploited. Whilst waiting for this hegemony, some of the process of historical production evolves elsewhere in a remarkable burst of activity (Bayart 1993: 253).

But the dominated do not rebel in revolutionary fashion (Gluckman 1965; Scott 1985). It is the "Yes, Massa", the "Ndiyo, Bwana", the "Oui, Chef" that both satisfies and infuriates the despot, because he knows that once his back is turned, the dominated begin to laugh:

There is no official policy which is not immediately deciphered in the back streets, no slogan which is not straightaway parodied, no speech which is not subjected to an acid bath of derision, no rally which does not resound with hollow laughter (ibid).

Thus for the powerful, hegemony is the ultimate goal, but in this context the force of ideas is not enough. When the basic conditions of shelter, food and freedom are neglected, the only way to keep an appearance of order is through repression. This reality was painfully obvious to anyone who saw Kinshasa at the end of Mobutu's reign, after the riots, and in the wake of *la démocratie*.<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup>In local popular discourse, *la démocratie* refers to the period during which Mobutu announced 'democratization' measures through the promise of multi-party politics. Mobutu's failure to take quick action led to large-scale rioting in 1991 and 1993. Since that time, the term *démocratie* has come to mean disorder ('pagaille') and political anarchy.

In Kinshasa, and after returning from the field, I often asked the question, "What does it mean to be a 'chef'?" One musician answered that being a 'chef' requires a certain degree of authoritarian behavior:

People in Zaire want to be led poorly. If as a leader you're not hard, they call you *yuma*, or someone who is afraid and weak. They need a strong leader with a strong hand ... [they think that] a 'chef' is someone who dictates the law of the land ['dicter la loi']. We learned this from Mobutu, that's the way he used to talk. If you listen to him talking to his subordinates, it sounds like he's always angry, but this is the only way that people will respect you (J.P. Busé, Aug 25, 1997).<sup>67</sup>

"What does it mean to be a 'chef'?" Another musician replied: "To be a 'chef' is an agreement, otherwise we would call him a 'house'. But he's a 'chef' and we decided that. People that do strange things will be punished". "And a bad 'chef'?" I ask. "That's easy," he says. "A bad 'chef' is a 'chef' that doesn't obey his own laws" (Lokassa ya Mbongo, Jan. 17, 1998). Thus a 'chef' must be just and strong (Balandier 1967). He must be charismatic (i.e. divine) in order to lead his people, though it is the people who determine what is meant by divine (De Boeck 1998a). Finally, and this is what emerges most clearly from the lyrics of popular music, he must be generous. He must justify, both symbolically and through his actions, the social differentiation and distance from which he benefits. He must acknowledge the privilege which has been bestowed upon him by giving something back to the people (Appadurai 1990; Waterman 1990). And if this generosity comes in the form of money, that is fine. Because the people take cash, foreign exchange, and personal checks.<sup>68</sup>

Becoming a 'chef', then, is itself a form of individuation, and is often closely associated with becoming a 'star' (ch. 5). When a singer becomes recognized as a 'star' in his own right, it is commonly believed that he should strike out on his own and start a new band for which he will be the 'chef', and the cycle of personalistic leadership continues. It is the

---

<sup>67</sup>Compare these observations with recent political analyses which describe the 'soft authoritarianism' of certain post-independent African states (e.g. Senghor's Senegal or Museveni's Uganda).

<sup>68</sup>In Chapter Nine, I discuss the symbolic value of money in several contexts, especially the way that money marks spatially organized social relations and the way that money and love are conflated and debated through expressions of romantic love in popular music. On the idea of money as a sign of male responsibility and affection, see Chapter Two ("The Politics of Sexuality").

possibility of one day realizing this dream that keeps most singers in a situation of bad working conditions, low pay, and subservience to the leader of the band. In the following chapter, I will look more closely at the ethos of popular music by examining the recurring themes and tropes of popular song texts. What this chapter will reveal is not an ethic of egalitarianism, but a plea to various types of *responsables* (leaders, bosses) to make good on unfulfilled social promises.

## Part Four: The Meaning of Music

### Chapter Nine: Live Texts

#### Lyrics as Live Texts

- Thematics in Popular Music
- The Politics of Love Songs
- Thematic Signposts
  - Always Love, Never Just Love
  - Preachers and Potions
  - Who Will Cry For Me When I Die?
  - Knowing and Being Known in the Big City
  - The Social Geography of Money
- Thematic Tropes

#### Genres as Live Texts

- Dialogues I: Music Divides
- Dialogues II: Music Unites
- The Flexibility of Texts

*The data that make up the contents of modern Zairean music are so complex and contradictory that potential researchers are embarrassed to make any kind of conclusive statement. In reality, Zairean music disconcerts researchers.*

(Mbayu wa Laziri 1989: 444)

*Décidément le quotidien est un livre qui se laisse feuilleter à volonté...*

(Ndaywel 1993: 1)

The largest number of publications written about Congolese popular music fall into one of two broad categories: biographical information about particular musicians and the thematic analysis of lyrics (ch. 3). The prevalence of these two aspects--especially in the work of Congolese writers--attests to the importance attributed to charismatic figures and the words and meanings of the songs they write. When I asked people why they thought popular music was important, the answer was surprisingly standard: "ça nous donne des conseils" ('it gives us advice') or "ça nous apprend quelque chose sur la vie" ('it teaches us something about life'). While foreigners are often drawn to Congolese music for its danceability (White 1998a), for the majority of Congolese the true value of their music (*lokumu*) is to be found in its message (Kanza 1972: 21). This is not to suggest that dancing is not important. On the contrary, dance is a crucial part of the experience of *ambiance* and *animation* (ch. 3). But dance--especially the eroticized exhibitionist dancing which most foreigners associate with the music--is usually taken for granted by Congolese when discussing the music's social significance.<sup>1</sup>

I do not want to stop, however, at the simple observation that the meaning of popular music is important to the people who listen to it. Instead, I want to argue that we must also consider how people access meaning through music, and how they adapt it for use in various everyday social worlds (Averill 1997; Erlmann 1996a). Not only do Congolese use song to convey messages which would be considered too crude or too direct in spoken form (c.f. Vail and White 1997), but they also position themselves on various flexible social axes (gender, age, religious convictions, etc.) by identifying themselves or distancing themselves from particular musical groups or genres. Although social positioning of this kind is by no means unique to the Congo (see ch. 5), I will attempt to show how the form it takes is historically and culturally particular. Thus one of the primary goals of this chapter is to determine (to the

---

<sup>1</sup>Obviously dancing does not occur without commentary. Both men and women talk about the dancing skills of individual performers and the emphasis which most music videos (and live concerts for that matter) give to choreographed dancing is always a lively topic of discussion. Female dancers are especially scrutinized by female spectators. What is interesting is that in discussions about the value and meaning of the music, dance rarely plays a prominent role. When it is discussed at all, it is either to criticize female eroticism or the excesses of youth (see below). At the risk of setting up a false dichotomy between music, dance and song, I want to argue that Congolese themselves distinguish between these different aspects of the music, at least at a performative or discursive level (c.f. Tutuola 1985).

extent that this is possible) what music means to different kinds of people, and how these shifting meanings are used in the creation and maintenance of various kinds of social and cultural identity (Guilbault 1993; Lonoh 1969; Waterman 1990).

This chapter will be divided into two parts. First, I will present a broad overview of the narrative themes which are representative of Congolese popular song texts, either because of their frequency or constancy in the music over time. A discussion of lyrical tropes will show how certain ideas or expressions cut across thematic lines, introducing themselves in a variety of contexts, and functioning independently of the basic narrative structure of the song. As opposed to the first section of this chapter, where I am primarily concerned with what popular music says about people, in the second section I am interested in what people say about music--especially genres of music--and how these statements can be seen as subtle gestures of social jockeying which are used to negotiate the limits of social boundaries and cultural categories. Throughout this chapter, I use the notion of 'live texts' to refer to texts that act as repositories of meaning which can be activated for various forms of individual and social distinction. Texts of different sorts--whether they be song lyrics or musical genres--exist in and of themselves, but they are made 'live' (i.e. brought to life) when people attach them to personalized statements about cultural values and individual and group identities.

### Lyrics As Live Texts

Though African popular culture produces written and printed texts, it never ceases to speak with a live voice (Fabian 1998: 125).

Je ne chante plus, je parle, je prêche. Si vous faites du bien, je le dirai, si vous faites du mal je le dirai également, sur la place publique (Franco quoted in Onyumbé n.d.: 12).<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>'I don't sing anymore, I speak, I preach. If you do good things, I'll say it. If you do bad things, I'll say that too, in front of everyone.'

The various scholarly attempts to understand the important role played by audiences in the production and meaning of expressive culture do not form a cohesive body of literature.<sup>3</sup> Here I am thinking not only of literary criticism's interest in readership and reception (e.g. Barthes 1975), but also cultural studies (and media studies)' attention to audience (e.g. Hall 1993), and certain semiotic studies of the processes of spectatorship (Jules-Rosette 1987).<sup>4</sup> Without drawing directly from these fields of study, my analysis benefits from some of their basic insights: that the interaction between artist and audience is just as interesting as the artistic product itself (see ch. 1), that the meanings of expressive culture are multi-faceted and do not necessarily correspond with the artist's intention, that in many cases the interaction between artist and audience has the potential to influence (even transform) the creative process, and that audience's uses of expressive culture constitute a separate domain of cultural and social practices, which are informed by the artist's creation, but not necessarily determined by it.<sup>5</sup>

What seems to stand out in African readings of expressive culture is not their value as sources of entertainment, but rather what they offer spectators in terms of moral instruction, or message. Writing about popular painting in Shaba, Fabian has shown how popular forms of cultural expression are valued for their ability to make people think: "Genre pictures were valued by urban Africans, not because they were the 'genre of the people'..., but because the images expressed and evoked memories and made statements about colonial history and present predicaments" (1998: 61, see also Fabian 1978; 1996). Jewsiewicki's work on the artistry of Cheri Samba has called attention to the painter's role as social critic: "Without the

---

<sup>3</sup>I take 'expressive culture' to mean the totality of 'artistic' forms of cultural expression which include: music, dance, film, oral expression, painting, sculpture, literature, poetry, certain forms of ritual and ritual-based art forms, certain games and sports, and popular culture in its various forms (see ch. 1). Compare with Raymond William's (1997) notion of 'creative practice'.

<sup>4</sup>The literature on consumption and identity may also find a place in this discussion. For a good overview see McCracken (1988) or Miller (1987).

<sup>5</sup>I have particularly benefitted from the anthropologically minded studies of Biaya (1995), Jewsiewicki (1993) and Jules-Rosette (1975; 1984), all of which focus on the interaction between artists and audiences. The influence of this writing on my work is perhaps most evident in my discussion of audience participation in live performance (see ch. 7).

slightest bit of embarrassment, Chéri Samba gives, if not imposes, his advice and his opinions on everyone" (1995: 26).

The parallels between Samba and the popular musician Franco are striking (Jewsiewicki 1991), not only in the moral content of their work, but also in the careful way that they combine words and moods. While many outside observers have commented on the moralizing tone of African popular arts, I want to argue that a moralizing narrative style should not be mistaken for a limited mastery of esthetic form, or worse yet, a naïve form of pedantry. Instead, it must be understood as an integral part of how popular arts are valued and what African audiences and artists expect from each other. Singer Reddy Amisi: "People want to identify with the singer. A singer- songwriter should do his own thing, but like a writer and a politician, he should educate. We have to educate young people so they don't make the same mistakes" (Wed. Sept. 27, 1995). In this setting, music (just as painting, theater and oratory) is only "good" insofar as it gives people something to think and talk about. It is in this sense that lyrics of popular songs can be seen as live texts.<sup>6</sup>

Much has been written about the lyrics of Congolese popular music. In most writing, song lyrics are not important in and of themselves, but are used to illustrate or complement a particular point or theme (Martin 1994; Gandoulou 1989a). Nonetheless, there are some in-depth analyses of particular song texts as ideal types (Gondola 1992, Olema 1984; Mbala-Nkanga 1997), and an increasing number of analyses which look at larger social questions or problems as expressed through popular song (Engundu 1995; Fabian 1978; Onyumbé 1982a, 1982b, 1983, 1994). Finally, there have been a number of attempts to classify the thematic categories of song texts (Lonoh 1969; Tchebwa 1996; R.P.C. 1984). By far the most prolific writer in this area is Tshonga Onyumbé, a Congolese scholar who has published writing on various subjects and on various themes related to Congolese music. He recently began a series of biographies of the most well-known Congolese popular musicians, and is the only person

---

<sup>6</sup>Fabian discusses how the well-known musicologist Hugh Tracey, when recording a song of Bosco, asked the musician to omit the lyrics in order to bring out the artistry of his guitarwork. I agree with Fabian when he writes: "In its own context, popular music is essentially narrative" (1978: 331).



to my knowledge to have compiled a list of 'modern' popular songs which can be considered to be representative of popular tastes and consumer listening habits over time.<sup>7</sup>

Thus my analysis of lyrics can only be seen as a complement to a rich body of literature which already exists. I have used some song texts which have been printed and translated elsewhere, but I also draw examples from my own music collection, which is more representative of popular music in Kinshasa over the last ten years. One of the shortcomings of many attempts to analyse the lyrics of popular music is the tendency to posit a direct relationship between lyrical content and social reality (writers often argue that the presence of song lyrics about a particular subject attests to its social importance). I want to take this analysis one step further by arguing that popular music is not only a reflection of social worlds, but a determining factor as well, a point which is now becoming well-documented in much of the literature on performance in Africa (Erlmann 1996a; Fabian 1978; Kratz 1994; Waterman 1990).

This part of the chapter is based on the distinction between two primary units of textual analysis: signposts and tropes. By 'signposts' I mean the thematic units that organize the narrative structure of song texts, those elements that appear frequently in lyrics (e.g. money, female beauty, life in the city, etc.) and that can be easily identified by an 'average' listener. The idea of 'trope' is somewhat more complex. 'Tropes' refer to sustained, systematic expressions which cut across and are to some extent independent of the narrative structure of song lyrics (as in the common musical phrase, 'na leli yo' or 'I cry for you', see below). Tropes are different from signposts because they situate structures of feeling simultaneously within linguistic, cognitive and social arenas (Fernandez 1991; R. Williams 1997).<sup>8</sup> Despite

---

<sup>7</sup> Although Onyumbé obscures the process by which he chose the 130 or so songs which make up his primary collection, many of the songs correspond with the preliminary list I have compiled (for a sampling, see "Recordings Cited"). The main criteria which I proposed were identifiability by a large cross-section of the population living in the capital, and the likelihood that the song text will easily elicit discussion or debate on matters of social, cultural or political importance. For the purpose of my analysis I have also benefitted from the large number of Kinshasa-based music publications that print lyrics of popular songs on a semi-regular basis (especially *Disco Hit*, *Super Stars*, and *L'As des As*).

<sup>8</sup> The tropes I discuss below seem to have the ability to 'hook' listeners or engage their interest in the lyrics of the song. It also seems that tropes (especially in comparison to signposts) often play a perlocutionary function.

the fact that they occur more often than signposts, tropes are not commonly remarked upon in popular accounts of the music's thematic content (see below). In this sense they remain coded and unexamined, silently evoking powerful cultural symbols which are suggestive and meaningful in themselves.

The theme of 'love' is particularly interesting because it is often used as both a signpost (e.g. 'conjugal love', 'romantic love', 'love of God') and a trope (e.g. 'love makes me dizzy'). As I will argue later in this chapter, the theme of 'love' in Congolese popular music acts as a kind of 'master trope' through which other tropes are expressed and elaborated, sometimes occurring alone and sometimes accompanied by other tropes or signposts. Pwono's (1992) discussion of song texts (while it does not call attention to the distinction I am making here) shows the variety of ways in which love is used to speak about different kinds of social interaction and processes (c.f. Tsing 1993). In the following section I will discuss five key signposts which I have identified for the musical style, namely: male-female relationships, magic, death, the city, and money. My choice of these signposts is based on my own personal listening, but also on the choices of the lyric-based music literature which I have discussed above.

### *Thematics in Popular Music*

The majority of song texts I will be using are taken primarily from 1970s, 1980s and 1990s Kinshasa. As I have discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, popular music was being recorded and played as early as the 1930s, but I have chosen more recent recordings since they are more readily accessible and because they more accurately reflect the period under study for this research. Song texts from the early stages of professionalization (especially the 1940s) are often more limited in scope: lyrics sing about the names of particular dances

("Merengue Scoubido"), the talent or charm of bandmembers ("Succès African Jazz"), or countless examples of female beauty ("Marie Louise"), aspects which signal a very pronounced male bias.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the vast majority of song texts from this period are much shorter than recent compositions, a factor which was primarily due to the constraints imposed by foreign control of the industry and the limitations of recording technology of the time. In many cases, song texts from this period consist of nothing more than a repeating chorus. I do not want to suggest that these early songs are of less interest historically or sociologically.<sup>10</sup> On the contrary, their characteristic optimism and 'feelgood' esthetic combined with conspicuous cultural borrowing (many songs were sung entirely in Spanish) are an important window on life in a colonial African city, and will figure prominently in future research in which I will look at popular culture and the emergence of an African public sphere in the colonial period.<sup>11</sup>

More extensive historical research may show how the thematic in lyrics vary over historical periods (for one attempt to do so, see Luzibu 1973), but my preliminary findings suggest that there is more variation between artists than there is over time; many of the themes I will discuss below were just as common in 1996 as they were in 1946. The real problem in working with song texts is not periodization, but representativeness. In order to avoid the problem of deciding which song texts or signposts are chosen to best represent the musical style, most writers have taken to the Western impulse of categorization. The first attempt to do

---

<sup>9</sup>This is not to suggest that later periods do not reflect the same bias. As the examples in this chapter show, the majority of popular songs (even those sung by women) are written by men, a fact that is rarely remarked upon in the analysis of song texts. One Congolese (male) friend explained to me that this is part of the reason that women consume as much music men (if not more) and certainly helps us understand why women seem to pay more attention to the content of lyrics than men do. In Chapter Five I discuss briefly the phenomenon of 'cross-singing', or the common practice of male singers taking on a female voice to sing about issues or problems from a 'woman's' perspective (for an example of such a text, see "Always Love, Never Just Love" below).

<sup>10</sup>"Dans un tel contexte [colonial] ambigu, les thèmes de la musique Congolaise étaient d'une révoltante naïveté; leur quotidienneté était relative au surgissement d'un type nouveau d'homme sous-évalué: déceptions amoureuses, désirs anodins, rêves d'un simulacre de bonheur, mythes avortés de puissance, pressentiments pénibles de la mort toujours proche." (Nkashama 1979: 95).

<sup>11</sup>Obviously not all of the early Congolese music is as innocent as my characterization would lead to believe. Here I am thinking of the often cited anti-colonial anthem "Ata Ndele", see Gondola (1992) and other subtle critiques such as Roitelet's "Sala mbongo, Kudia mbongo" ('Make money, eat money') or Wendo's "Bokilo Mabe" ('Evil Mother-in-law').

so was Michel Lonoh's influential early monograph (1969). Here he divides popular song texts into three basic types: *sujets éternels* (timeless themes), *sujets particuliers* (other themes) and *nature*. Luzibu's (1973) analysis, which points to a general diversifying trend in lyrics beginning around independence, focuses on women, politics, and money.<sup>12</sup> A Congo-Brazzaville sponsored publication on Congolese popular music divides thematicity into the seemingly innocent categories of youth, love, and the Congolese woman.<sup>13</sup> Onyumbé's most general attempt to categorize song texts comes in his (1986) article about 'socio-economic' problems in popular music. He includes the themes of clothes, food, rent, pleasure, parasitism, unemployment and prostitution. In a later article (1988) his list includes themes that are concerned in one way or another with family: marriage, polygamy, promiscuity, prostitution, procreation, hospitality, solidarity, inheritance, respect for adults, death and respect for the dead.<sup>14</sup>

The most exhaustive scheme, however, is that proposed by Tchebwa (1996). I will present it in its entirety, followed by that of Lonoh (1969), which will serve as a basis of comparison:

---

<sup>12</sup>Unfortunately, Luzibu's analysis is limited by a reductionistic association of theme with historical period and is blinded by the heady politics of the early Mobutu years: "During the period leading up to independence, themes were limited to individual exuberance. The lack of freedom of expression explains this limitation. But as soon as 1960 arrives, people feeling liberated from the constraints of colonialism will lay claim to this event. Finally feeling at home in their own country, they will begin to sing about real social problems. They are free to express their opinion. With freedom of expression re-gained, musicians are then able to speak about society and its problems in their songs" (Luzibu 1973: 540). For a much more nuanced discussion of the relationship between politics and music, see Onyumbé (1994).

<sup>13</sup>This rarely cited document, compiled by the Ministry of Education in Brazzaville, is nothing if not enigmatic. The stated purposes of the publication are to "vulgarise" Lingala, "a Congolese language" and is intended as a complement to previous Lingala-based grammars and lexicons published by the same service. A series of songs are presented, each with the original Lingala lyrics, a French translation, line-by-line analysis of the lyrics, a vocabulary list, and a grammatical analysis. Not surprisingly, the text ignores the politics of language within the country, cultural politics vis-à-vis the West (Congo-Brazzaville was at this time socialist), and especially relations between Congo-Brazzaville and Zaire. The reader will notice the remarkable way in which political propaganda is framed with pictures of records and headphones, and the song titles (such as "Tolanda Nzela", 'Let's Follow the Path'), which have nothing to do with the subject of Congolese women hinted at in the section title.

<sup>14</sup>Elsewhere, Onyumbé has focused his writing on particular social issues or topics, the role of women (1982), money (1983), politics (1994b) and political sub-text (1994b). Nonetheless, the cataloguing urge is still very present in his work. Together with Bogumil Jewsiewicki, he recently began compiling and transcribing a collection of more than 300 popular songs in chronological order since independence.

### Themes in Urban Music

- 1.1 Kinshasa in song
- 1.2 Sound mazes of the "ville-plaisir"
- 1.3 Creativity and getting by
- 1.4 *L'Ambiance*
- 1.5 Nostalgia
- 1.6 Money-Love-Women
- 1.7 Women and Money
- 1.8 Marriage
- 1.9 Peddling
- 1.10 Feminine Charm
- 1.11 Love and the Heart
- 1.12 Death and Funerals
- 1.13 Diatribes and Rivalry
- 1.14 Mysticism
- 1.15 Prostitution
- 1.16 Men-Women-Money
- 1.17 Urban Adventures
- 1.18 Senile Delinquency
- 1.19 Passionate Love
- 1.20 Feminine Beauty
- 1.21 Social Hierarchy
- 1.22 Married Life
- 1.23 Society
- 1.24 Religious Beliefs
- 1.25 Travel
- 1.26 Ecology
- 1.27 Promiscuity
- 1.28 Signs of the Times

*(from Tchebwa 1996)*

Lonoh's categorization reads less like an inventory:

### Substance or Common Themes

#### A. Eternal Themes

- 1. Love
- 2. Marriage and Married Life
- 3. Morality (Deontology, Ethics)
- 4. Life, or Man in Society
- 5. Death, or the End of Man

#### B. Other Themes

- a. The "Made in Congo" Method (political praise)
- b. The Immortality of Art and the Periodicity of Politics
- c. Propaganda
  - 1. Propaganda: Politics, Heros, Political Parties, My Country
  - 2. Advertising: Musicians and Their Groups, the Milieu, Bars/Cafes
  - 3. Imaginary Characters and Satire

#### C. Nature

*(from Lonoh 1969)*

The most obvious difference between these two categorizations is that the first is a simple list of recurring themes, while the second has grouped recurring themes together in particular ways. A closer look, however, reveals the extent to which Lonoh's analysis is grounded in politics. His greater sensitivity to the political and economic aspects of cultural production (propaganda, commercialization, satire) must be understood in the context of his professional training (like Mobutu, journalism and the military) and his proximity to the Mobutu regime.<sup>15</sup> Another point which emerges from this comparison is the degree of slippage between thematic categories (especially in Tchebwa's breakdown). In reality, the idea of separating out certain themes and identifying them with particular songs is a difficult undertaking, not only because most songs are polyvocal and polysemic, but also because different people can use the same song in very different ways.<sup>16</sup> In fact, as I will argue later in this chapter, the degree to which a song text is open-ended is an important factor in determining the song's popularity.

Previous attempts to generalize about meaning in popular Congolese music, despite a great deal of careful research, tell us very little about how lyrics from popular songs are understood and used. In order to fill in this gap, I have proposed that the lyrics from songs be analyzed as 'live texts' from which people draw and to which they add insights of their own. These texts are 'live' not only in the context of live performance, where artists and 'sponsors' interact freely, and texts are modified according to who is present in the audience (ch. 8), but also in everyday practice, where song texts are 'activated' by non-musicians. Reprinted lyrics circulate in the local press and become a source of symbolic capital for those who have the

---

<sup>15</sup>Lonoh was one of the original 'compagnons de la révolution'.

<sup>16</sup>Both Barber (1987) and De Boeck (1996) have discussed the idea of 'surplus' meanings in African expressive culture, an idea which resonates with Mbembe's (1996) notion of 'simultaneous multiplicities' of meaning. Kratz has called attention to the way that studies of symbols rarely distinguish between information from 'specialists' and various sorts of 'non-specialists'. Nor do they distinguish between the language of songs, prayers, or speeches (see Kratz 1990). My analysis of song texts suggests that the 'language' of song differs in important ways from other performative genres (and from everyday forms of speech), but further research is necessary to show exactly how these differences are operationalized. Studies which look at recurring themes across genres or media (c.f. Fabian 1978) may show how symbols interact or overlap in unpredictable ways.

money to purchase them and the schooling to read them [figure 9.1]. Catchy phrases (usually shouts) are picked up by politicians and commercial advertisers to win public support, and the same phrases are deformed and reformulated in the play of popular discourse.<sup>17</sup> Women sing songs in public to criticize negligent husbands and to challenge their rivals, channeling potentially explosive emotions through the safe, indirect means of popular song.<sup>18</sup>

### *The Politics of Love Songs*

Any discussion of African popular music must necessarily deal with the various layers of meaning which make the analysis of lyrical content such a challenge. In the previous chapter I examined the way that relations of political subordination are embedded in the Congolese practice of 'singing the sponsor' (ch. 8), whether that sponsor be a commercial entity or an individual 'patron' in the form of a political figure or 'homme d'affaire'. Elsewhere I have focused on the subtle play of self-censorship and political sub-text in popular music (see below; also Onyumbé 1994), arguing that 'political' songs are not only those that sing about politicians.<sup>19</sup> In this sense, lyrics in Congolese popular music are clearly 'political', but they are also 'de-politicized':

---

<sup>17</sup>Emeneya's self-promoting battle cry "Ya Mokolo--Aleki Bango" (Big Boss--Better Than the Rest) was quickly dropped from his repertoire as soon as it became common currency in presidential propaganda for Mobutu. One of Kinshasa's major breweries picked up the musical interjection "Movement Eza Côté Oyo" ('The Movement is on This Side') for its 1996 beer campaign. Young Congolese entertain each other by creating meanings for the cryptic shouts which circulate wildly in Kinshasa despite the fact that most people do not know their original meaning (White 1998b).

<sup>18</sup>During my stay in Kinshasa, it was very common for people passing me in the street to begin singing as soon as they approached me and stop soon afterwards. I never asked anyone about this, but it seemed to occur most often with young men and boys. I was rarely able to understand what they were singing, but this practice clearly had an element of playful teasing.

<sup>19</sup>Recordings prior to the 1990s tended to reserve 'political' content for specific 'political' songs. Thus the excitement around independence produced "Table Ronde", "Merengue Président", and the most often cited "Indépendance Cha Cha". Later recordings began to take the form of praise songs for particular politicians ("Colonel Bangala", "Mobutu Médiateur", "Mobutu Candidat na Biso") or political platforms ("Indépendance 28 Novembre", "Votez Vert", "5 Ans"). Franco was particularly well-known for this type of political praisingsinging; his 1975 release *10ème Anniversaire* is made up almost entirely of songs about the M.P.R. and Mobutu. For an overview of politics in the music of the Mobutu years, see Onyumbé (1994).

# Chantez avec vos Favs



**TITRE** : MA BIBI  
**COMP.** : Lukombo Shumitta  
**ORCH.** : Grand Zaiko Vewe  
**EDITIONS** : Pety Center

Bolingo na biso ah mama ah Nzambe  
ve mei avebi manao mama ezalaka se  
bove soki motema milingana bilobila  
pe songu songu ezanga te lokola na  
pesi molimo pe motema na kwisa  
nionso lokola mopepe oyanga na Bi  
bi na nse va motema bakasala bako  
lombe nionso pamba motema mulin  
gaka se mbala moko ranga nga na  
decider se libala (x2)  
- Oo oh ah mama butika nga na ve  
tovanda ah nzambe (x2)

## REFRAIN

Bibi ve Bibi ve (x2)  
kolandaka te masenginya va bato  
niamu ova nga motema ova nga motema  
na mipezi na vo po te lokola  
libala bosembo

## SOLO SHUMITA

Na mipezi na vo oh na mikabi  
solo na motema vika ndr tokum-  
bana ee mama a ah

## SOLO JOE EL

Ivon na Paris. Mundava na suisse.  
Kuru Mpa alesi somo oh bolingo

## SOLO JOE NICKEL

Liki leki bolingo naombe atindeli  
biso suka aliance va la vie ve

**TITRE** : Massassi Calculer  
**COMP.** : Pepe Kallé  
**ORCH.** : Empire Bakuba  
**EDITIONS** : EMPIRE BAKUBA

Mazaza ya bini moko o  
Maziki 100 kilos va bini moko  
Les-Les wapi bini bamama



## INTRO

Ivoilela Abidjan Yamboukouku  
Massassi Calculer

## SOLO

O nga mwana babuva kustiana  
nalinga luano n'Empire Bakuba  
O Fuga Fuga wapi Ben Matita

## ANIMATION

Nkuku vo Yo  
Wakatende Tende  
Bena mwa Munene Munene  
Bena mwa Yampanga Yampanga  
Baluana Mumpala Mumpala  
Mama Wampaka Wampaka  
Nausa Kambela Kambela  
Nausa Mulembwa Mulembwa

**TITRE** : Mansanga  
**COMP.** : Djo Nolo  
**ORCH.** : Anti-Choc  
**EDITIONS** : VEVE

## SOLO DJO NOLO

Mhote va pamba zlati nga vta-

ment mobimba na nga ah lokola  
rumba  
Lisolo va pamba atie mbeto na  
motema na nga mpe zlati kuna  
Natuni na bato bayebai nga azali  
mopeva sima mikola akosonga na  
ve

## CHOEUR

Napezi sango na Kinshasa sango  
Nlongwe Kinshasa ekuti Congo  
soki bomoneti nga mwasi akongala  
lokola solili ve ve ve  
Noveba te ve wana vanga nalingi  
Noveba te ve wana na kobala a a a

## SOLO BOZI

Bokende Mama Yemo botala nde-  
nge balati platre na kungo aleka na  
boulevard ve b'accidents kaka kaka  
batu ba confirmer que se azali  
leki va lucifer mais ngai vo o vta-  
nient nalingi ve e

## SOLO DJO NOLO

Mais kombo apei nga kombo na  
ve Mama Mansanga. Mansanga ma-  
ma.

## CHOEUR

Mansanga Mansanga Mansanga Nanga  
Nanga Mansanga ye ve ve  
Nanga Mansanga Mansanga a

## SOLO DJO NOLO

Mwasi kitoko o o o demarche ya  
mbisi - Eh Mansanga namileli e e e

## PAROLE

Allo, Allo Mansanga soki ozali  
koyoka ngai kobukana te mokolo  
avaki chez ba peres na meres na  
biso o o o ndako mobimba eton-  
di na solo ya jardin d'Eden natuni  
ye malasi kolani nini ye apokola a  
songozi malasi kolani nzambe aka-  
bela ye e e e tango abumaki misa  
na paradis



Joe Nolo, on le pointe déjà comme révélation de l'année 1986

4 DISCO

**TITRE** : Yatama  
**COMP.** : Fernand Mabala  
et son Ensemble

Ah ova bolingo va musika nga lelu  
nalembo cherie atindeli nga mukanda  
mali nga motema mawa mawa  
Yatama o yatama o yatama o Ya-  
tama e e e bini bolingo tulapanaki  
nga na vo cherie po esukela bini  
mabe buve te mama mania  
Mama mama o Eyalu na vo o mama  
vo o o oh pour un vjour aussi bref  
na Poto yobandi kotindila nga min-  
kanda te okolela obarisi kotindila  
nga mikanda vo ozali na pasi obandi  
kotindila nga minkanda na roiga  
onki na CFA



Yatama o o ma cherie  
Ben si tu pieurs moi je pieurs au-  
ssi si tu pieurs beaucoup beaucoup  
moi je pieurs aussi nous finirons  
dans un désespoir a e e e  
nous finirons dans un désespoir pour  
notre amour yatama o o ma bini  
amir e e e

A yo Yatama o tika kolela ululaku  
nga ngai nipe naluluka yo wana bu-  
lingo kobosana te  
Lokola na mabele ekutamaka te  
Moto na mobumbu avongelaka wa  
ve cherie Yatama o o nga na Para  
mosika vo na CFA mama mawa  
e e (x2)

fig. 9.1 Song lyrics circulate in local magazines (from Disco #60)



From one perspective, the depoliticization of lyrics can be seen as a result of people's need to escape a state of political oppression and economic crisis, and it is also true that political messages are often nested in seemingly apolitical forms through the use of metaphorical language and political sub-texts (Fabian 1998; Onyumbé 1994). But as some cultural critics have observed, perhaps the a-political *is* the message (Hebdige 1979; Mbembe 1992a), not only because declarations of love can be considered subversive (Abu-Lughod 1990; Fabian 1978) but also because the silence surrounding politics speaks a great deal about the limitations on freedom of expression in authoritarian regimes (compare with Averill 1997 and Ndaywel 1993).

Most *soukouss* musicians strictly avoid political content in their music. They prefer to sing about matters of the heart partly because lyrics of a political nature would be lost on an audience which is primarily non-Lingala speaking. But musicians are also concerned about holding on to a fan base which they believe would turn its back on music with politically engaged lyrics... In many cases musicians sing about love because "this is what people want to hear", especially female fans, who are highly valued by musicians because it is believed that women often influence men to buy cassettes and CDs [which is not surprising given the fact that the majority of singers are men]. While it is probably true that many musicians sing about love out of personal pleasure, the tendency to avoid political themes at some level has to do with the fact that most musicians depend on patrons and fans in order to supplement their incomes as musicians ... It is in this sense that commercial dance music must be seen as profoundly political.

(from White 1998a)

In this context, musicians have to 'watch' what they sing, not only to avoid censorship, but also to attract and maintain as many fans as possible. From my notes:

He also tells the story about how Koffi (Olomide) expressed his reluctance to participate in a Red Cross benefit by giving the explanation that he had to be very careful about being associated with politics. "I'm known as a singer who sings about love, not politics. If I start singing about the effects of war in Africa, then I'll have to talk about prisoners of war and all that (Nov. 2, 1995).

While most musicians are busy trying to win the favor of those in power (or simply trying to keep out of their way) others have put themselves directly in the den of the 'leopard':

Franco, a colossal figure of the Kinshasa music scene and close friend of Mobutu, learns that one of his girlfriends has been seduced by Kengo Wa Dondo, former Prime Minister of Zaire and long-time ally of Mobutu. In response, Franco puts out a song ("Hélène") in which he insults his ex-girlfriend's genitals, her hygiene, and her skills as a lover. Kinshasa is scandalized and within two days Franco is jailed by Kengo.<sup>20</sup> Upon learning of this, Mobutu frees Franco from jail and awards Kengo with a demotion. This time Franco records "Tailleur" (1987), a song intended for Kengo in which he sings the story of a tailor who believed himself important until his boss took away his needle and thread. Cheri Samba's painting "The Arrest of a Musician" (Jewsiewicki 1995: 25) is said to be inspired by Franco's tale:

The arrest of a musician that sings names forbidden by the state:  
 Marie Jeanne, Marie Jeanne  
 If I don't see you, my heart goes 'goun'! 'goun'! 'goun'!  
 Marie Jeanne, the girl from Zaire  
 Marie Jeanne, the girl from Matonge.

When the well-known singer Tabu Ley first learned that Mobutu had seduced his wife Théthé, he was just returning from a tour in Europe. For the sake of revenge, Tabu Ley seduces Mobutu's wife and afterwards composes the song "Balabala" ('the street') in which he sings about a woman so easy to seduce that she is like a street because everyone can "pass through"

(Taken from White 1997: 21).

Thus song texts about male-female relations are probably the most effective way to sing about the relations and abuses of political power (Fabian 1998; Sahlin 1985). Examples such as the ones cited above are good illustrations of how song texts are 'made live' and how popular song is used to mediate and influence various social and political outcomes.

---

<sup>20</sup>On the life and times of Franco, see Ewens (1994). Debbonvapi Olema's dissertation at the University of Montréal is concerned with the thematic content of Franco's music. According to Olema (1984) this is not the first time Franco was arrested. In 1974 he was jailed for having strongly criticizing the excesses of Kinshasa's nascent bourgeoisie in a song called "Cherie Bondowe". In the late 1980s several musicians were arrested for obscenities in their music (*ye tutana, ye tutana, yango na yango*). On the arrest of early musicians such as Adou Elenga, see Gondola (1992).

## *Thematic Signposts*

In this section I will discuss a set of five themes or signposts which characterize the thematics of 'modern' Congolese music. While the set of signposts I have selected is by no means intended to be an exhaustive list, its individual elements are certainly representative of popular music in Kinshasa since independence. Unless otherwise indicated, all transcriptions and translations of songs are my own. In some cases, I have used other sources (both written and oral) to verify my work. Some texts will be longer to show how different themes appear together, interact and overlap, and some will be shorter to focus the reader's attention on particular themes or thematic units. Comments surrounding the lyrics are not intended to bring closure to the texts, but to suggest possible interpretations. I have decided to include the original versions of song texts, not only so that the (Lingala) reader can examine the way that I have translated these texts, but also so that he/she may identify other signposts and tropes which have escaped my analysis.<sup>21</sup>

### *Always Love, Never Just Love*

We're just like you Americans; we always sing about love (Papa Wemba, Jan. 7, 1996).

Fabian's (1978) early article on popular culture in Africa, probably one of the first systematic attempts to explore tropes of meaning in popular forms of cultural expression, focuses on a 'central theme'--the male-female relationship--in three different expressive media (popular religion, popular painting, and popular music). For Fabian, the frequent lyrics about

---

<sup>21</sup>Song titles in parentheses are intended to refer the reader to other relevant examples. I understand that most readers will not have access to many of the recordings I am referencing. Additional references to song titles have been included with Congolese readers in mind.

pain and suffering in male-female relations constitute a symbolic artistic trope which is specific to the medium of music, the 'love-complaint' song:<sup>22</sup>

Popular song evokes, above all, a mood of resignation; longing, regret, and suffering are some of the concrete ways in which this is expressed. Love-complaint songs are sentimental and nostalgic, attitudes that betray either a lack of resolution or a certain powerlessness, or both (ibid: 327).

While this 'mood of resignation' is certainly common in contemporary popular music ("Zekere"; "Diva"), there are other common moods in which the narrative centers around the protagonist's intentions to do whatever necessary to win the heart of his/her loved one ("Eluzam"; "Manzaka Ebende"). Total surrender is a declaration of love:

Bisika nyoso nakokende  
Ata batongi ngai  
Nakotika te nasi nandima  
Makala mpo na yo  
Nandima buale po na yo

Wherever I go  
No matter what they say  
I'll never let go, I've made up my mind  
I'll even go to Makala [prison] for you  
Whatever it takes to keep you

("Onassis ya Zaire", Zaiko Langa Langa, 1971, in Tchebwa 1996: 297)

Ata bafingi se ngai  
Ata bamoni se ngai  
Likambo te ya ngai na yo  
Pete na mosapi

Even if they insult me  
Even if they accuse me  
No problem for us two  
[You'll have] a ring on your finger

("Pete na Mosapi", O.K. Jazz, ibid)

Female beauty and charm is one of the most common themes in Congolese popular song ("Julienne Importée", "Kitamata", "Marie Louise"). Men's ability to identify and describe these traits in women invariably leads to disorientation and vulnerability (c.f. Guibault 1993: 161):

<sup>22</sup>The use of the word 'complaint', which carries a negative connotation (c.f. 'to whine', 'to bitch', 'to gripe', etc.), does not seem to fit with local readings of this narrative position. The trope of sadness (suffering, sorrow, heartbreak, heartache, pain, and blues), which appears in musics all over the world, is most often associated with African-derived musical forms (especially blues, country, and other kinds of 'sorrow songs', see W.E.B DuBois 1994), but it is certainly not unique to African music or musics of African origin.

Balola elongi namona  
 Pusa pembeni natala yo  
 Omanga naye zoba po nalingi yo  
 Tambola moke ngai natala  
 Seka moke mino pembe emonana  
 Ngai nayoka nzoto po nalingi yo  
 Bakanga yo suki ya maboko  
 Nzela nzela tango tokobima  
 Otala moto noki nakufa na zuwa  
 Omanga naye zoba po nalingi yo

Turn so I can see your face  
 Come closer so I can look at you  
 Omanga you make me stupid with love  
 Walk a bit so I can look [at you]  
 Smile a bit to show your white teeth  
 I can't control myself I love you so  
 They braided your hair by hand  
 When we go out I want everyone to see you  
 If you look at another man I'll die jealous  
 Omanga you make me stupid with love

("Omanga", Afrisa International, 1980, in Tchebwa 1996: 266)

Banda jour mama a botaki ngai  
 Nazalaki kozela yo  
 Boni otikeli ngai goût ya mafuta ya nzoi?  
 Boni okati noki oyo ya ngai bonheur?  
 Nani akoki ondima azanga  
 Elok'oyo alinga à l'infini?

Since the day my mother gave birth to me  
 I've been waiting only for you  
 Why did you leave me with this taste of honey?  
 Why did you cut short my happiness?  
 Who can stand to be without  
 The thing they love infinitely?

("Fouta Djallon", Koffi Olomide, 1995)

As I discussed in Chapter Two, women are also scorned for immoral behavior, such as pursuing material goods and threatening the stability of others' marriages:

Ngai Marie na zuaka mingi  
 Ata mobali ya Kapinga asombeli ngai mobylette  
 Ayebi ba boutons afongolaki  
 Tango perruque ebimaki ngai nazuaki

Me (Marie) I get all kinds of things  
 Kapinga's husband even bought me a moped  
 He knows what buttons he opened  
 When wigs were popular I got one too

("Quatres Boutons", O.K. Jazz, 1964, in Onyumbé 1983)

Thus women are perceived as evil (Beck 1992; Mekacha 1992), always in search of money, and therefore not to be trusted ("Mathinda Mathi"). Because of their beauty they are high in demand and unattainable like the mamiwata mermaid:

Ah mamiwata  
 Elle vend sa beauté et son corps sexy  
 Elle vend sa beauté aux enchères  
 Elle vend sa beauté sans problème en Zaïre, en CFA...  
 Elle ne fait qu'exposer son corps, ses gestes  
 En les proposant aux enchères au plus offrant  
 Cette façon de se maquiller, de marcher, de danser  
 Elle maquille bien sa face, toujours bien parfumée

Ah mamiwata  
 She sells her beauty and her sexy body  
 She sells her beauty at the auction  
 ...without any problem, in Zaires, CFA, ..  
 All she does is show her body, her movements  
 By offering them to the highest bidder  
 Her way of wearing makeup, walking, dancing  
 She makes herself up and she always smells nice

("Mamiwata", Mayaula, in Tchewba 1996: 289)

Despite this mistrust and disillusionment, the situation of unmarried women evokes sympathy from male songwriters who compose songs from the female perspective ("Ngai Marie Nzoto Ebeba"; "Mpo Ngai Ndumba"; "Ekonda"), but in some cases the text remains ambiguous with male critique. According to the perspective of this male-generated text, as long as women are not married, they cannot lead happy, normal lives. The woman in this narrative compares herself to the other women around her, and concludes that life as a single woman has left her behind. Her body grows tired of having to actively pursue a source of income and male attention (often conflated), and the light of day is equated with suffering. Her life seems to have taken the wrong path, but it is not clear who is to blame [audio cue 10]:

Nzambe talelanga likambo oyo  
Mutu mobimba ngai na lali te  
Na miyokeli nzoto na ngai mawa  
Baninga baziwa bomengo, ngai na retard  
Mibali balingaka ngai, mibali ya batu  
Uta nga na banda vie na bomwana  
Nanu ngai na zuwa mobali na nga moko te...

Allah talelanga likambo oyo  
Makolo ya nani oyo nga nalanda  
Baninga baziwa chanceux, bango ba zuwa  
Na butu mokolo moko etutani na mobali  
Ngai na bwaka loboko, mbetu na mbetu  
Ngai na koma komikwanya tango nyoso  
Na miyokeli kitoko na ngai mawa, oh mama...

Nzambe talelanga likambo oyo  
Vraiment na lembi na bayer o la vie  
Po na zuwa mbongo ya collier il faut na senga  
Po na zuwa mbongo ya monganga il faut na senga  
Po na luka mbongo ya taxi il faut na senga  
Soki na sengi te, pasi na pasi  
Vraiment soki na bimi te, pasi na pasi  
Soki na bouger te bafamille pasi na pasi, oh mama...

Allah talelanga likambo oyo  
La vie oyo ngai nabandi kolanda  
Nalingi butu eya nalala natika ko kanisa  
Soki tongo esali problème na problème  
Batu ba nyongo mbongo muziki mbongo makelemba  
Na lembi kokosa na bayer oyo la vie  
Soki na tali na guarderobe  
Bilamba na teka na bwaka nzoto, oh mama...

Nzambe talelanga likambo oyo  
La vie ya kimwasi pasi na pasi  
Na miyokeli nzoto na ngai mawa  
Bana po nabota tata na tata  
Batata yango ba sundola bana  
Hopitale, Minervale ya bana kaka ngai  
Na lembi na sengi na mokili na limwa, po na bosana...

Oh God look at my situation [problem]  
Everyone is sleeping except me  
I'm so very unhappy  
My friends are all happy [rich], I'm left behind  
The men that like me all belong to someone else  
Ever since I was a young girl  
I've never had a man of my own

Oh God look at my situation  
Whose footsteps am I following?  
All my friends are lucky, they have theirs  
At night she kicks him in her sleep  
I throw my arms everywhere, nothing but a mattress  
I'm always itching somewhere  
I'm so very unhappy

Oh God look at my situation  
I'm fed up, I can't take it anymore  
To get money for a necklace I have to ask  
To get money for magic, I have to ask  
To get money for a taxi, I have to ask  
If I don't ask, problems and more problems  
If I don't go out, problems  
If I don't move some, problems for my family

Oh God look at my situation  
This life I've begun to lead  
I want night to fall so I can sleep and stop thinking  
When the morning comes, it's nothing but problems  
Everywhere I turn someone is asking me for money  
I'm tired of lying, I can't take it anymore  
If I look in the closet  
I've sold everything I own

God look at my situation  
The life of a single woman is nothing but problems  
I'm so very unhappy  
All of my children with different fathers  
And the fathers neglect their children  
Hospital and school fees I have to pay myself  
I'm tired, I just want to disappear, to forget

("C'est Dur la Vie d'une Femme Célibataire", O.K. Jazz, 1991)

Life as a couple is also plagued with problems, and love eventually goes sour ("Matata ya mwasi..."; "Eswi Yo Wapi?"; "Aruna"; "Fouta Djallon"). Jealousy is an ongoing source of conflict, and men use the threat of leaving to maintain the upper hand:

Oyebi mwasi oyo ngai nakendeke na ye  
 Nalembi kotunaka ngai likambo oyeba  
 Mokolo okorépéter lisusu  
 Nzambe Marie, na koti ya yo pembeni

You know the woman I was walking with  
 I'm tired of talking about things you already know  
 The day you ask me again  
 I swear, Marie, I'm going to leave you

("Gare à Toi Marie", O.K. Jazz, 1967, in Onyumbé 1988: 159)

What women find unacceptable is not the presence of multiple partners *per se*, but a flow of material goods and resources which is imbalanced in favor of rivals (Schoepf and Engundu 1991). Since affection is often expressed through money and gifts ("Quatres Boutons"), sharing a man with another woman means sharing financial resources and jeopardizing financial security:

Libala a bombanda bolingo partagé oh chérie  
 Na kokoka te ngo libala a bombanda  
 Soki boye tokabola likwela divorcer chérie

Marriage with a rival means shared love, cheri  
 I can't take it anymore having a rival  
 If that's the way it is, let's get a divorce

("Bombanda Compliqué", Mayaula, 1978, *ibid*)

Thus the majority of Congolese songs continue to be about love and other matters of the heart. The sacred trinity of Congolese popular music-- 'motema' ('heart'), 'bolingo' ('love'), and 'chérie' ('loved one')--has remained in tact since the music's early professionalization period beginning in the 1950s (see ch. 2, 3). But as I have tried to show above, 'love songs' are not only about 'love'.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup>Marshall Sahlins has shown that Hawaiian love songs are not just about 'love', or 'sex', but also about the political economy of the region: "We can see why Hawaiians are so interested in sex. Sex was everything: rank, power, wealth, land, and the security of all these" (1985: 26).



## Preachers and Potions

When things between a couple are not going well, the use of witchcraft (*fetish*) is both an explanation for the problems and a potential solution. In Chapter Five I explained some of the rumors that circulate about musicians' use of *fetish*. The success that popular musicians have, not only in their professional lives but also in their love lives, is often explained in terms of the force of his/her *nkisi* (magic, charms). While almost all musicians are suspected of resorting to *fetish*, they almost never admit as much. The only exception being those musicians that turn to Christian prayer and denounce their 'satanic' practices of the past (Frère Débaba formerly of Choc Stars, Mopero of Shama Shama, Bimi formerly of Zaiko Langa Langa, to mention only a few). From my notes:

Talking with Defao this afternoon. He said he's never done *fetish*. Never. "Maybe the doormen do it, but not the musicians." "But you guys pray?" I asked. "Of course, we have to pray. We have to glorify him [God], but *fetish* ... it's not good. When I was in Choc Stars, we had the line up of all the stars. To get that going again is very difficult, Carlyto is a preacher, Debaba is a preacher ... Everybody does religious music now (April 11, 1996).

The majority of popular musicians have remained well within what many Christians call 'la musique profane' ('profane', i.e. 'modern' music). Nonetheless, many musicians integrate Christian references and language into their texts, some internalizing religious discourses ("Sauve Qui Peut"; "L'Espoir en Christ"; "Démocratie"), and others taking a more critical stance ("Frère Edouard"; "Voisin").

Christianity, however, remains powerless with regards to matters of the heart (at least between those out of wedlock). Many young people consult ritual specialists (*nganga*) to determine their chances for long-term companionship, and in some cases love medicine (*nkisi ya bolingo*) is used to influence the relationship's outcome (Graeber 1997; Little 1973; Raymaekers 1960-61; Taussig 1993: 52-57). Rivals are a constant threat and the best way to combat them is by protecting the self through magic:

Asengi basokola ngai na masanga ya mbila  
 Makasu misatu, bougies misatu  
 Bachance ezonga ngai na nzoto  
 Mbanda aleki ngai na nyoso  
 Aleki ngai na mbongo, asombi lopango  
 Atongi ndaku na Mont Ngafula

The [*nganga*] told me to wash in palmwine  
 Three cola nuts, three candles  
 To get back my good fortune  
 My rival beats me at everything  
 She has more money, she bought some land  
 She built a house in Mont Ngafula

("Amba", Lipwa Lipwa, Tchewa 1996: 285)

But mystic means are also used for the purposes of eliminating the competition:

Nganga atuni Kato "Nasala nini?"  
 Kato alobi "Nganga boma Marie"  
 Ayokaki Catherine boye  
 Alobi na nganga "Tika kobanga"  
 Na kofuta yo mbongo okosenga"

The *nganga* asks Kato "What do you want me to do?"  
 Kato says, "kill Marie"  
 He heard what she said  
 She said to the *nganga*, "Don't worry  
 I'll pay whatever it takes"

("Catherine", O.K. Jazz, 1964, in Onyumba 1988: 174)

In a strangely frightening text about witches and their *nkisi*, Bavon Marie-Marie (Franco's younger brother) seems to foreshadow his untimely death only a matter of months after this song was released. What is striking about this text is that Bavon calls into question the immortality of witches and charms, but not their existence (c.f. Gable 1995). He expresses a tired feeling, most likely because his newly earned fame occasioned fears of increased witchcraft against him:

Ndoki pe akufaka  
 Nkisi pe epolaka  
 Malamu boboma nga nakufa  
 Na lembi ngai mwana moto

Witches die too  
 And charms go bad  
 I'd rather you kill me  
 I'm so tired...

("Maseke ya Meme", Négro Succès, 1968, in Tchewa 1996: 287)

## Who Will Cry For Me When I Die?

Indeed, life has itself become, in the words of the actors, *cadavré, sinistré, déclassé, épavé*. *Mboka ekufi*, 'the country has died' was a frequently heard expression in Zaire, and it still is in the new Congo (De Boeck 1998a: 4).

Death has become banal in contemporary Congo-Zaire (ibid). The difficulty of access to basic health care and the general decay of health-related infrastructure in Kinshasa (Devish 1996) have only been made worse by the complexity of public health threats, the most well-publicized of which is HIV-AIDS (Hunt 1997; Schoepf 1993). Funerals, funeral processions and funeral parties are increasingly common sights, and people passing by, if they say anything at all, speak under their breath: "Nzambe-oh..." ('Dear God...'). The increasing presence of death in the city struck me before I had begun my first full day in Kinshasa. From my notes:

When I asked Serge to draw a map of Kinshasa, he hesitated at first. He started by putting dots where all the zones (neighborhoods) were. When he had the initial of each zone in place, organized roughly in relation to one another, he then filled in their names. Then, speaking out loud, he said "cimetière" as if he was trying to decide where to place the cemetery. There was some discussion and then he carefully placed a cross near the bottom of the map. He filled it in and said "Tu sais c'est quoi?" He was not testing me, as much as trying to make sure his map was unmistakably clear. I said, "It's either a church or a cemetery." "Voilà," he said, and the others nodded. Then he drew a second and a third, carefully filling them in so I would be sure to understand what the symbol stood for. Then he was finished. No stadiums, no schools, no intersections, no statues, streets or night clubs, just zones and cemeteries. "Okay," he said, "what else do you want to see?" (July 24, 1995)

Before arriving to Kinshasa, I had heard a great deal about the importance of the end-of-mourning funeral parties which are known locally as *matanga*. These events generally attract a great deal of interest, not only as sites of spiritual renewal and family reunion, but also as social spaces in which individuals and groups from different socio-economic categories gather to observe each other and participate in various forms of sociability and distinction (Balandier 1955; Comhaire-Sylvain 1968; Pwono 1992). Nonetheless, very few of my

friends and informants followed through on my suggestions that we attend these ceremonies together, perhaps because people (in theory) only attend *matanga* where they are familiar with the family, or perhaps because the increasing number of *matanga* has led to a certain degree of funeral fatigue. As De Boeck has observed, "... 'there aren't enough tears left to mourn the dead', for they have simply become too numerous" (De Boeck 1998a: 21). Surrounded by the living dead, people in Kinshasa are trapped in a state of anomie and are increasingly faced with their own mortality. Death represents a kind of release through which individual identity is socially acknowledged ("Profitez"). Dying is perceived as a desirable end insofar as it makes possible a new kind of life:

Mokolo na kokufa nkake ekobeta  
Kadi olobelaka bato maloba na ngai ya suka  
Moto nangai bakamata basala monument  
Soki mopaya aye balobela ye nsango  
Bambanda bakosepela basi ngai na tiki  
Bafamille bakosepela biloko ngai na tiki  
Binemi bakoloba: Apusa lofundo  
Eembe ya soso matanga te  
Nalapa nzembo, nalapa makanisi  
Mabele!

The day I die thunder will boom  
Kadi tell everyone my last words  
Take my head and make a monument  
If a foreigner passes, tell him my story  
My rivals will be happy with the women I leave behind  
My family will be happy with the things I leave behind  
My enemies will say: "He was too conceited"  
No one mourns for a dead chicken  
I'll never sing again, never think again  
To the ground!

("Mabele", O.K. Jazz, 1974, in Mbayu 1989)

Thus death is seen as a form of personal justice for the poor. Not only does it equalize differences based on race and class, but it also exposes the vices of greed, self-centeredness, and irresponsibility:

Your money can't protect you from death,  
In the face of death, we're all poor  
If you're mean, people will criticize you [after you die]  
Rich people only come to give money  
And then they leave the *matanga*  
The poor people stay the whole time

(Funeral song by l'Orchestre Onkok, no title)

Mokolo na kokufa nani a kolela ngai?  
 Na koyeba te o tika namilela  
 Liwa ya zamba soki te liwa ya mboka  
 Liwa ya pasi soki te liwa ya mayi o mama

The day I die who will cry for me?  
 I will never know, just let me cry for myself  
 Will I die in the forest or in my village?  
 A painful death or a drowning? oh mama

Mokolo na kokufa  
 Ngai moto ya pauvre  
 Nakanisa Aïda mwasi oyo nabala  
 Nakanisa kaka bana oyo nabota  
 Nasepela kaka pasi ya mokili ezali kotikala  
 Mokolo na kokufa

The day I die  
 Me, a poor man  
 I will think of Aïda, the woman I married  
 I will think only of my children  
 I will be happy to leave the suffering of this world  
 The day I die

Mokolo na kokufa  
 Ngai moto ya mbongo  
 Nakanisa falanga mingi oyo na tiki  
 Nakanisa lopango na bacamigno  
 Nakanisa bana na ngai na tika na Poto  
 Mokolo na kokufa

The day I die  
 Me, a rich man  
 I will think of all the money I leave behind  
 I will think of my properties and my vehicles  
 I will think of my children living in Europe  
 The day I die

Mokolo na kokufa  
 Ngai moto ya kwiti  
 Nakanisa copo ya masanga na ngai  
 Nakanisa mingi kaka suka ya sanza  
 Tango na melaka ngai na baninga  
 Mokolo na kokufa

The day I die  
 Me, a drunkard  
 I will think of my glass of beer  
 I will think only of my end of the month  
 When I drink with my friends  
 The day I die

Mokolo na kokufa  
 Ngai mwasi ya ndumba  
 Nakanisi nini kaka perruque nangai  
 Nakanisi nini kaka bilamba na ngai  
 Na kolela kaka African Fiesta etikala mama  
 Mokolo na kokufa

The day I die  
 Me, the prostitute  
 What will I think of? Only my wig  
 What will I think of? Only my clothes  
 All I will miss is the African Fiesta I leave behind  
 The day I die

("Mokolo na Kokufa", African Fiesta National, 1966, Onyumbé 1988: 224)<sup>24</sup>

In this text, the death of the individual which goes unnoticed (Mbala-Nkanga's 'desperate cry', 1997) represents the death of society. People die alone, in some cases surrounded only by their personal belongings or the memory of their favorite band. With prospects for death as dismal as this, there only remains one choice for life: *le plaisir*.

<sup>24</sup>Onyumbé's (1994) analysis discusses a series of rumors that circulated after this song was released which related the song to the Pentecostal public hangings which occurred on June 2, 1966 and which, like the song, involved the stories of four individuals of varying backgrounds.

## Knowing and Being Known in the Big City

The symbolic value of the city of Kinshasa (ch. 2) can only be understood in the context of the city's particular combination of music, alcohol and heightened male-female interaction which is commonly referred to as *ambience* (ch. 3). This perpetual state of "feti na feti", for which Kinshasa is known far beyond its borders, is best illustrated from the perspective of a new arrival.

O Kisasa makambo  
Mikolo nyoso feti na feti  
Na sala ko boni?  
Lipopo na yoka nsango  
Ekomi ngai awa économie ekufi  
Olobi ngai na kanga motema?  
Bilongi oyo ndenge na ndenge na tiya wapi?  
Na tiya mwa lomeya na posi  
Ekobima ngai awa na kozonga weli weli  
Cheque na ngai boyi esila kala  
Bipayi nadebaka bakanga pointage kala  
Mboko moko kombo ebele  
Kisasa, Kini, Malebo, Lipopo, Léoville

Oh Kinshasa land of stories  
Everyday a non-stop party  
What am I to do?  
Lipopo that I've heard so much about  
Now all my savings are spent  
How can I resist?  
How can I remember all these faces?  
The little money I had in my pockets  
Will slip away and I'll return home with nothing  
My checkbook is long-since finished  
No more credit anywhere I go  
The city with so many names  
Kisasa, Kini, Malebo, Lipopo, Léoville

("Lipopo ya Banganga", African Jazz, 1962, Tchebwa 1996: 255)

Each person claiming *Kinicité* (literally 'Kinshasaness') knows that this status is not dependent on family history or acknowledgement by the state. It is a social category which is worked out in the streets and in the bars (Biaya 1997b; "Amicale Lipopo"), and which manifests itself through certain collective gestures of belonging which are grounded in the ecstasy of music and dance:

Kin kiese Kin kiese  
Biloko ngeli ngeli  
A okamata loboko osimba motema  
Obina choquer molunge ekosila  
Elengi ya Zaiko suka te

Kin kiese, Kin kiese [city of joy]  
Everything is shaking just right  
Put your hand on chest, touch your  
Dance wild and you'll forget about the heat  
The joy of Zaiko is endless

("Kin-Kiese", Zaiko Langa Langa, 1977, in Tchebwa 1996: 256)

Thus membership in this very large club is based on social forms of knowledge and practice. To be from Kinshasa it is not necessary to have been born there (although that certainly helps), but it is necessary to speak the local language ('Lingala de la rue', 'street Lingala'), to know the city and its whims, its neighborhoods, its gossip, and its inside jokes. These are the things that Kinshasa is made of: *les Kinoiseries*. And knowing Kinshasa is an important start, but it is also important *to be known in Kinshasa*. "Lui, il me connait" ('He knows me') is an often heard expression. It is this tone of self-importance—very natural for people in the music business (ch. 5)—that for many non-Kinois is the primary characteristic of what it means to be from Kinshasa (White 1997). Recent arrivals (*broussards*, literally 'people from the bush') try to hide their true identity ("Nyama ya Zamba"), but in the end they are always exposed:

Bilingalinga tango nyoso  
Okomi lokola fula fula  
Matete, Yolo, Ngaba, Masina  
Lipopo o mboka monene  
Zone tuku mibale na mine  
Okosilisa ndenge nini?  
Okosukisa mbula nini?

You love all over town  
You're just like a *fula fula* (public bus)  
Matete, Yolo, Ngaba, Masina (neighborhoods)  
Kinshasa is a huge place  
Twenty-four zones  
How will you do them all?  
How many years will it take to finish?

("Laissez-tomber", Franc Lissan, 1981, in Tchebwa 1996: 289)

### The Social Geography of Money

Money is a favorite topic of conversation in Kinshasa. Most people try to keep abreast of the *taux du jour*, since fluctuations relative to foreign currency can in some cases make or break financial careers. Moneychangers (*cambistes*) are set up in strategic parts of the city. They are usually women (over 30 years of age) who work in small groups where potential

customers drive by and who are protected by a man or group of men who provide security. Before Kabila's arrival in the Spring of 1997, inflation rode out of control and the preferred local currency became the American Dollar, culminating in Mobutu's famous 'prostate' money (referring to the cancer that would eventually take Mobutu's life). Since then, the national government has attempted to stabilize the currency (at about 130,000 NZ per \$1 U.S.) and Kabila has announced plans to issue a new local money in the summer of 1998 (the Congolese Franc). More so than across the river in Brazzaville (where currency is tied to the French Franc Zone), money is constantly exposed. Mobile street vendors line their fingers with small bills and organize them in a kind of web or fan in one of their hands. Bricks of money are exposed in piles at gas stations and sometimes left unattended. From my notes:

Waiting for a ride with a big bag of money. Just received my first pay. 9\$ an hour, 8 hours, that makes 72 dollars. It seems like a lot, could be enough for one month, 767,736 NZ. A beer costs 9,000, a taxi 2500, a chicken 40,000. I don't know how people do it. Ndolo suggested to carry your money exposed; it's safer than to carry it in a bag or in an envelope so they know you don't have any foreign currency (Oct. 13, 1995).

I would also argue that this careless way of handling local currency (dollars are very rarely exposed) is in part due to the fact that it is perceived as having no value: people throw it around, they write on it, they insult it ("Eza mbongo te", 'this isn't money'), and they part with it easily. From my notes:

If people are impulsive with money it has to be related to the fact that the value of their money is decreasing on a daily basis. If your money was worth less and less every day, would you want to hold on to it? So a lot of people change large sums into francs or dollars, or better yet they just spend it (ibid).

I do not want to enter into a discussion of whether or not social classes (in the Marxist sense) exist in today's Congo, because I am not sure what this information would tell us about everyday life in the post-colony. One thing is clear: people differentiate themselves through visible forms of material consumption (cars, clothes, jewelry, food, supporting family



members and friends, etc.) and this consumption requires money ("Bana Lunda"; Biaya 1985; MacGaffey 1995; see ch. 5). Although money is considered to be a problem in and of itself, in popular song it is most often linked with the larger problematic of male-female relations ("Deux Problèmes"; "Diva"). "Money and women constitute the poles around which all problems gravitate, all the material and chimeric hopes of this world during a lifespan" (Onyumbé 1983: 110):

Makambo mibale ebomi mokili mobimba	There are two problems in this world
Liboso nde likambo ya falanga	The first is the problem of money
Ya mibale likambo ya basi...	The second is women...
Likambo ya mbongo na basi eboma mboka	Money and women ruin everything
Bananga mibali, Tokebaka la vie est un combat	Friends, be careful, life is a combat

("Makambo Mibale", Bantous de la Capitale, 1968)<sup>25</sup>

Men without money hope that their devotion and commitment will compensate for what they are lacking in financial terms

Pitié toi mon coeur	Have pity on me, sweetheart
Je travaille nuit et jour pour ton seul bonheur	I work day and night only for you to be happy
Sitôt le matin je me réveille	Early in the morning I rise
Devant ta photo je me recueille	In your picture I find the strength
Je pars pour travailler	I leave to go to work
Ce soir je vais revenir...	I will be back tonight...

("Pitié", Afrisa International, 1972, Tchabwa 1996: 318; see also "Vie ya Mosolo")

But they fear that their social status will keep them from loving whom they choose:

Dit Ofela mama, Ofela mama ...	Oh Ofela, Ofela...
Fiancé naye ya liboso a koma ministre	Her first fiancé, today he is a minister
Oyo ya mibale ye wana a koma lelo docteur	Her second one is a doctor
Oyo ya misatu akoma homme d'affaires	Her third is a businessman
La misère divise, baboti bayo balingi nga te	Misery divides, your family won't have me

("Ofela", O.K. Jazz, 1984; see also "Amba")

---

<sup>25</sup>From a painting by popular visual artist Cheri Cherin: "Les femmes alimentent nos plaisirs et nos dépenses" ('Women feed our pleasure and our spending', John Grinling, personal collection).

The geography of love is mapped onto physical space, and social status is determined as much by school or neighborhood of residence as it is by family history or place of origin. In this text, the urban poor ask the question 'Do we not have the right to love?':

*Bien que l'amour soit le symbole  
d'un sentiment partagé, être aimé  
n'est jamais le signe d'un bonheur parfait*

Bakeyi liboso ya kolinga moto  
Bakoma kotuna "ovandaka wapi?"  
Biso tovandi na Malweka  
Nani a kolinga biso?  
Mingi baboya bango se bango  
Mosika eleki, bangungi baleki  
Taxi baboya kokoma

Basusu liboso ya koloba oui  
Bakoma kotuna "otangaka wapi?"  
Biso to buka biki mwa kala  
Nani a kolinga biso?  
Tika tokosa ata kokosa  
Ngai nazali gradué  
Ngai nazali licencié  
Ngai nazali ingénieur, mpo balinga nga

Mosusu liboso ya kolinga moto  
Bakoma kotuna de quelle famille es-tu?  
Biso famille ezanga griffe  
Nani a kolinga biso?  
Nzambe ya mfumu bandela mokili oyo  
Otonaka moko moko soki nani a kolinga  
Ko botama lisusu na famille ya pauvres...

Although love is the symbol  
Of a shared feeling, to be loved  
Is never the sign of perfect happiness

Before they can love someone  
The question they ask is: "Where do you live?"  
We live in Malweka  
Who will love us?  
So many refuse us, they keep to each other  
It's so far away, so many mosquitoes  
Taxis refuse to go there

Others at first will say yes  
But then they have to ask "Where do you study?"  
We haven't studied for some time  
Who will love us?  
Let us lie, we just want to lie  
"I'm a university student"  
"I've graduated"  
"I'm an engineer," just to be loved

Others before they love someone  
They have to ask "Who is your family?"  
Our family doesn't have a designer name  
Who will love us?  
God created this world  
Ask the people one by one who would want  
To be born again poor...

("Feux d'amour", J.B. Mpiana, 1997)

### *Thematic Tropes*

Thus far I have discussed a number of narrative themes which are common enough to be considered signposts for understanding popular music in 1990s Kinshasa: male-female relations, magic, death, life in the city, and money. I have also hinted at the presence of a master trope, which, for lack of a better term, I will simply refer to as 'love'. The trope of

'love' in various forms occurs throughout the music, but usually appears accompanied by some other complementary theme(s). Thus, magic is used to win someone's heart or to defend oneself against a romantic rival. Life in the city is both desired and feared, because it is in the city where 'love' runs free, but 'love' can also lead to death, not only from sexually transmitted diseases but also from financial ruin. Money is seen as a problem in itself, but it is most often presented as a prerequisite for 'love' and so forth and so on.

Obviously the notion of 'love'--already a very diffuse, vague concept--is more at home in the discourse of popular music than it might be in other domains of public life (say for instance politics or religion, though see Fabian 1979), and some of the signposts I have outlined above (death, for example) are not concerned with 'love' anymore than other accompanying themes. Looking through the lens of a highly variable master trope such as 'love', we can see how different themes overlap within individual texts. At the same time, the song texts discussed above point to a larger, perhaps more revealing set of secondary tropes which are not only common in fixed song texts, but also in the novel 'live' utterances of improvised singing and shouting. Below I will give a brief explanation of each trope, some possible explanations of its sociological importance, and several examples of the various forms it takes.<sup>26</sup> I have included some lengthy passages from song texts in order to show how tropes are loosely linked to larger narrative structures. And at the end of this section I will present one song text in its entirety to show how tropes and signposts repeat and play off each other within the body of a particular musical performance. As in Chapter Two, I have given this section a different formatting structure in order to highlight certain aspects of the subject matter. In this case single spacing and bolded characters are used to call attention to the way that tropes operate differently from signposts within the context of a song.

---

<sup>26</sup>In many cases tropes take the form of shouts (see ch. 3, 6), but not all shouts are tropic. Engundu (1995) argues that certain shouts act as counterpoints (she uses the term 'antiphony') to the main body of lyrics in the song. My observation of live performance suggests that shouts are carefully chosen in order to please or excite members of the audience (ch. 7), but do not seem to respond to the lyrics of the song. The choice of shouts in studio recordings, however, may reveal a dialectic relationship between lyrics and shouts.

*Na komi zoba* ('I've become stupid')

The word 'zoba' (stupid, idiot, imbecile, etc.) refers to a state of mind which is characterized by disorientation or the loss of self (Nkashama 1992), and is very common in musical declarations of love [figure 9.2]. Disorientation often takes the form of dizziness and is also evoked in the expressions 'kwiti ya bolingo' ('dizzy with love') and 'na langwe na yo' ('I'm drunk with love for you') which became popular during the emergence of the music-based youth sub-culture of 1970s Kinshasa (see Nkashama 1979):

**Kwiti kwiti e bouger nga bongo  
Na perdre équilibre mwana maman  
Zongela motema consoler motema**

Dizzy drunkenness moves me around  
I lose my balance young girl  
Give me my heart back and make it better

**Miso evimbi ngai na kolela  
Motema ekomi na mawa  
Pasi e pasi kaka po na yo**

My eyes are puffed with tears  
My heart is full of pain  
All of this suffering for you

("Sacramento", Zaiko Langa Langa, 1976, in Nkashama 1992: 485)

**Motema nanga ebebi, papa  
Oh ma Elisa akeyi, eh souffrance  
Ezwi nga lelo pasi ya bolingo mama  
Ezwi nga lelo pasi ya bolingo chérie**

My heart is broken  
My Elisa is going away, oh suffering  
These love problems have done me in  
These love problems have done me in

**Maladie ya bolingo ezanga dokotolo  
Monganga lelo nga nasuki  
Kasi nameli te, na langwe te  
Se kwiti ya bolingo**

There is no doctor to cure this illness of love  
I've seen all the traditional healers  
But I haven't drunk a thing, I am not drunk  
It's the dizziness of love

("Kwiti ya Bolingo", Papa Wemba, 1996)

*Pasi na pasi* ('Pain and suffering')

The term 'pasi' (also 'mpasi') corresponds to a cluster of ideas referring to emotional pain, suffering or hardship. In popular music, 'pasi' is most often used in the context of love--'pasi ya bolingo' ('love problems') and 'pasi ya motema' ('heartbreak')--and is sometimes accompanied by the related term 'mawa' ('pity' or 'sadness'). After references to the heart ('motema') and love ('bolingo'), this cluster of meanings is probably the most commonly occurring trope in contemporary popular music:



Franco et une admiratrice, 1964 - Photo Depara

fig. 9.2 Franco and an 'admiratrice' (from *Revue Noire* 1996)

Lusiya eh Lusiya eh Lusiya eh  
Lusiya eh Lusiya eh motema na ngai  
Coco abeleli yo

Oyo pasi mawa Pasco  
Oyo pasi mawa Risco wa Tuluka  
Mawa ezala  
Tango mosusu namona yo  
Ata motema mozokaka to mobetaka  
Tika kolanda b'amies na yo  
Dit Aimé ba kokosa yo  
Tika kolanda b'amies na yo  
Naleli...

Lusiya eh Lusiya eh Lusiya eh  
Lusiya eh Lusiya eh sweetheart  
The elders call you from far away

All this pain and suffering Pasco  
All this pain and suffering Risco wa Tuluka  
I'm so sad  
Whenever I see you  
My heart is broken and beats for you  
Don't listen to your friends  
Listen Aimé, they will lie to you  
Don't listen to your friends  
I'm crying...

("Lusiyana", Général Défao, 1990)

'Pasi' can also refer to financial hardship and other kinds of difficulties:

Nzambe talelanga likambo oyo  
Vraiment na lembi na bayer o la vie  
Po na zuwa mbongo ya collier il faut na senga  
Po na zuwa mbongo ya monganga il faut na senga  
Po na luka mbongo ya taxi il faut na senga  
Soki na sengi te, pasi na pasi  
Vraiment soki na bimi te, pasi na pasi  
Soki na bouger te bafamille pasi na pasi

Oh God look at my situation  
I'm fed up, I can't take it anymore  
To get money for a necklace I have to ask  
To get money for magic, I have to ask  
To get money for a taxi, I have to ask  
If I don't ask, problems and more problems  
If I don't go out, problems  
If I don't move some, problems for my family

("C'est Dur la Vie d'une Femme Célibataire", O.K. Jazz, 1991)

'Mawa' can also occur alone, in this case evoking a more melancholy state of sadness and regret. In many instances it is accompanied by the French terms 'soucis' ('worries') or 'souffrances' ('suffering'), and the Lingala term 'kolela' to cry:

Ngai awa nakoma se kolela  
Chérie na ngai akeyi na ye  
Atiki ngai na ngambo  
Na kolelaka souci ya lolango  
Mawa ezwi ngai

All I do now is cry  
My baby has gone away  
She left me with nothing but problems  
I'm going to cry  
Sadness has taken me

Na kotindela yo bolingo  
Sango yango ayebisa Beda na Suisse  
Baminga bayeba natikali awa monzamba  
Loboko na litama  
Mawa ezwi ngai, ah ngai  
Mawa ezwi ngai, ah ngai

I'll send you my love  
Tell Beda in Switzerland  
My friends know I'm here still unmarried  
My head in my hands (literally: 'hand on cheek')  
I feel so sad, poor me  
I feel so sad, poor me

("Riana", Choc Stars, 1986)

*Na leli yo* ("I cry for you")

This expression is exceedingly complex because the main verb ('kolela') has various meanings, not just 'to miss someone', but 'to cry *for* someone' (often implying death), and also to admire or praise someone ("Na Leli Yo na Nzembo"; "Djaffar").

Taken alone, it is an extremely common trope, but it is also one example of a larger set of tropes through which friends, lovers and patrons are integrated into the texts of popular songs (see ch. 8). With the stock phrase beginning "Nga na lela ..." musicians simply insert the name of whomever they wish to acknowledge or call attention to. In many cases, several names are listed one after another:

Nazalaka na ndako ya mobali Bijoux mpamba nalata te Elamba ya fête se nadebaka Soki ayoki nde sango na ngai ebataka mindondo Toswanaka tobundaka tolobana na miso ya bato <b>Kilo na biso bato wapi?</b>	I used to be married But now I don't even have cheap jewelry My party dress is borrowed When he hears things about me it causes problems We argue, we fight, we talk in front of everyone What happened to our respect?
Lokumu wapi yango oh mama? Na kolaka na bisengo lelo ebongwani nde bapasi <b>Nani aya kokabola na ngai ye mawa?</b> Na kolaka na bisengo lelo ebongwani nde bapasi <b>Nani aya kokabola na ngai ye mawa?</b>	Is there no honor [value, respect]? My happiness has turned into problems Who can share this sadness with me? My happiness has turned into problems Who can share this sadness with me?
<b>Nga nalela nani?</b> Nga nalela Evama Dala Nga nalela Stany ya Tembo Nga nalela Koregiari Nga nalela Papa Wemba	Who will I cry [sing] to? I'm crying to Evama Dala I'm crying to Stany ya Tembo I'm crying to Koregiari I'm crying to Papa Wemba

("Sango Pamba", Viva La Musica, 1990)

And a common variation on this theme:

<b>Bananga ch Papy Kintukaho...</b> Mokolo nini nga na komona Atos Senan? Mokolo nini nga na komona Major Jacques? Mokolo nini nga na komona Maté ya Air Zaire? Mokolo nini nga na komona Papa Wemba? Mokolo nini nga na komona Ya Lemoso?	Oh friends, Papy Kintukaho When will I see Atos Senan? When will I see Major Jacques? When will I see Maté from Air Zaire? When will I see Papa Wemba? When will I see Ya Lemoso?
---	--

("Shabani", Super Choc, 1996; see also "Full Option")<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup>Other formulas for citing names of important people include: "Tuna Willy Beya" ('Ask Willy Beya'), "Wapi Jos Munde?" ('Where is Jos Munde?'), "Tokutana epai na Beverly" ('Let's meet at Beverly's').

The practice of naming people is central to many African musical styles (ch. 5). Naming is a form of praise and a way of soliciting ongoing support, whether it be emotional, political or financial. To pronounce someone's name is to call that person to act upon his or her sense of social responsibility (ch. 8).

It is also extremely common for the narrative to include names of social roles: *yaya* (older brother or sister), *leki* (younger brother or sister), *bandeko* (brothers), *baninga* (friends), *mwasi na ngai* (wife), *mobali na ngai* (husband), *bapapa na bamama* (elders), *mama ya bana* (mother of my children), etc. This pattern is often used as a linguistic filler to complete sentences, but can also lend a sense of immediacy or intimacy to the text.

*Nani a kosunga ngai?* ('Who will take care of me?')

The melancholy tone of the formulas discussed above ('*pasi*', '*na leli yo*') is also evident in a series of expressions which reflect an underlying fear of abandonment ("Feux d'amour"; "Orphelin"; Mbala-Nkanga 1997). The poor and the underprivileged find their voice in lyrics which sing about the precariousness of daily survival in Mobutu's Zaire, and the shouts of dance music cry out for the recognition of their plight:

Eh kibinda kibinda kibinda nkoy eh  
Na koliya wapi?  
Eh kibinda kibinda kibinda nkoy eh  
Na kolala wapi?  
Eh kibinda kibinda kibinda nkoy ey  
Na kosuka wapi?

The leopards' testicles (repeats)<sup>28</sup>  
Where will I eat?  
The leopards' testicles (repeats)  
Where will I sleep?  
The leopards' testicles (repeats)  
What will become of me?

This feeling of abandonment is most acute in relation to love:

Bakeyi liboso ya kolinga moto  
Bakoma kotuna "ovandaka wapi?"  
Biso tovandi na Malweka  
Nani a kolinga biso?  
Mingi baboya bango se bango  
Mosika eleki, bangungi baleki  
Taxi baboya kokoma

Before they can love someone  
The question they ask is: "Where do you live?"  
We live in Malweka  
Who will love us?  
So many refuse us, they keep to each other  
It's so far away, so many mosquitoes  
Taxis refuse to go there

("Feux d'amour", J.B. Mpiana, 1997)

And is only made worse by the constant threat of sexually transmitted diseases:

<sup>28</sup>This is a translation I heard on a number of different occasions and I assume (since the leopard is a traditional symbol of power in many parts of the Congo) that this shout was directed at all those in relative positions of responsibility or privilege, not just Mobutu.



Papa boni nzoto esili yo boye?  
Batu bakomi koloba ezali kindoki  
Kindoki te, *maladie du siècle*

Ngai mwana na ye bi nini ozali kobela  
Nani a kosunga ngai ndenge o salaki?  
Kindoki te, *maladie du siècle*

Papa otiaki Kinsasa na moto papa  
Pona nini o mibombaki te?  
Papa amona mwasi aleka na quartier  
A pesa rendez-vous ba kutana na coin

Nani a kofutela ngai minerval papa?  
Lelelele lelele ... pasi oh  
Papa otiki biso bana na pasi

Papa why are you always so sick?  
People are starting to say its witchcraft  
It's not witchcraft, it's the illness of the century

Me [a child] I know why you're sick  
Who will take care of me like you used to?  
It's not witchcraft, it's the illness of the century

Papa you can't take care of so many people  
Why didn't you protect yourself?  
When women pass in the neighborhood  
He makes a rendez-vous to meet on the corner

Who is going to pay for my school fees, Papa?  
Lelelele, lelele .... nothing but problems  
Papa you've left us children with problems

Expressions of abandonment are accompanied by pleas for protection and support. In this type of statement, a patron or family member is implored to 'keep an eye on' those in need ('talaka' from 'kotala', to watch). This example comes from a series of shouts occurring during the dance section of a song:

[Shouts names of friends and sponsors]

Eh Mandundu talaka bana ce  
Badi Mandundu talaka bana oh  
Yo Mandundu talaka bana oh  
Lelo to kobomba te  
Lelo to kobimisa  
Lelo to koyeba  
Lelo to komona

Mandundu please watch over our kids  
Oh Mandundu please watch over our kids  
Yes Mandundu please watch over our kids  
Today we have nothing to hide [money?]  
Today we're going to say everything  
Today we're going to find out  
Today we'll see

[shouts names of lead guitarist and bandleader]

Munu mwana dilayi dadila mame  
Tala mantsanga muna meso  
Mandundu kala ye ngangwe  
Mandundu kala ye ngangwe

[kik] All I can do is cry  
Look at the tears in my eyes  
Mandundu be careful  
Mandundu be careful

Tala batala, mona bamona  
Tala batala, mona bamona

They'll see, they'll see  
They'll see, they'll see

[Shouts names of friends and sponsors]

Tout le monde! Maboko likolo eh!

Everybody! Put your hands up in the air!

("Mandundu", Super Choc, 1996)

*Tika ngai. . .* ("Let me be...")

The desire to be left alone is considered profoundly anti-social, primarily because of its association with witchcraft (ch. 5,7,10). Thus when this desire is expressed in popular music, it almost always takes an object: "Tika ngai na kanisa" ('Let me think'), "Tika ngai na lela" ('Leave me alone to cry'), "Tika nga na banza" ('Let me daydream'), "Tika ngai na zala boye" ('Let me be that way'). But left alone from what? The criticism of others? Malicious rumors ('songi songi')? The pace of life in the city? The colonial government? The answer is not totally clear.

Mbokoyo mboka ya makambo dit  
Mbokoyo suka mboka ya matata  
Osala malamuni bamoni yo mabe  
**Botika ngai na pema**

This place is full of problems  
This place is too much, nothing but hassles  
You do something good and people say it's bad  
Let me have some breathing space

(repeats)

**Botika nga na pema na pema na ngai**  
**Tika nga na vanda o na vanda na nga**  
**Bo tika nga na banza fololo ya ngai**  
Bo tika nga na ye o to vanda  
**Bo tika nga na cherie e to vanda na ye**  
**Bo tika nga na mama to vanda**

Just leave me some breathing space  
Let me sit down, sit down by myself  
Let me think about my flower  
Let us sit down together  
Let me and my honey sit down together  
Let me and my woman sit down

("Bo Tika Nga na Vanda", Beguen Band, 1952)

A similar determination is expressed in the recurring phrases "na boyi" ('I refuse') and "na lembi" ('I'm fed up'), both of which signal that personal limits have been reached, and that some action must be taken in order to avoid separation or splintering (c.f. ch. 8). But it may be argued that they also speak to the desire for freedom from social control and state-based forms of oppression in the practice of everyday life ("Dixième Commandement", "Liberté", "Mokili Etumba"; Fabian 1998; Jewsiewicki 1991).

Ngai yo nga mawa mama  
Ngai yo nga mawa Yves Makamu  
**Tika lelo oyo na kenda po pasi**  
Elki awa  
**Nani akoyambela ngai?**  
Ngai moto oyo na meseni na matongi  
Na keyi po pasi bwale bolingo elingi boye

Oh I'm so sad  
Oh Yves Makamu I'm so sad  
Just let me go, it hurts so much  
It's too much  
Who will be there for me?  
I'm become used to insults  
I'm going because love wanted it this way

**Na boyi na boyi na boyi**  
**Na boyi o tindelaka nga maloba ya bolingo**  
**Na boyi na nga**  
Na pesaka yo motema na ngai nyoso

I refuse I refuse I refuse  
I don't want you to send me love words anymore  
I refuse, I won't accept  
I've given you all my heart, past

("Yves Makamu", Reddy Amisi, 1995)

<b>Na lembi na kobongana na lembi</b>	I'm tired of trying to work it out
<b>Na lembi na kobongana na lembi...</b>	I'm tired of trying to work it out
<b>Likolo nyoso se kofingaka ngai na lembi</b>	Every day you say bad things about me, I'm tired
<b>Likolo nyoso se kotindelaka ngai maloba mabe</b>	Every day you say mean things to me

(“Na Lembu”, Mbilia Bel/Bana O.K., 1997)

To give the reader an impression of how signposts and tropes interact within the larger narrative of a single song, I have reproduced the following text in its entirety [audio cue 11]. This text also illustrates the way that some tropes and signposts are repeated and dispersed throughout the performance of a particular song. In this text the tropes of suffering (‘pasi’) and disorientation (‘na komi zoba’) are particularly present, but there is also repeated mention of a number of signposts, especially love (‘bolingo’), the heart (‘motema’), magic (‘magie’) and death (‘liwa’).

Lobela ngai ngo bolingo motema  
 Esali pasi na makanisi ngai nakokondo  
 Na mituni na motema  
 Eloko oyo bolingo ewuta wapi mama?  
 Ekobandaka na kolula ekoti pema  
 Sima esimbi nzoto mobimba  
 Ekomi kosala ngai zuwa lokoso na motema  
 Kolinga moto asimba te

Nayebisi na hato oh po bayeba  
 Ndenge nalingaka yo mon amour  
 Beauté ekota yo nani akela yo?  
 Nazwii éperduement oh nabebi  
 Linga ngai tolingana oh motema  
 Ngai naponi yo oh motema  
 Nasengi mingi te deflsa nga motema  
 Na simba yo mwa moke

Oyo suka ya beauté nasala nini?  
 Naye zoba ima, eloko oyo ezanga soni  
 Ezanga mbula, ezanga miso mama,  
 Nakomi lokola zoba, lokola mwana  
 Abotami se lelo oyo  
 Nyoso se po yo bolingo  
 Poupée ngai nakufa pamba mama

Na yembi na nzembo lelo po oyeba  
 Yo se motema na ngai ma chérie  
 Ko kosaka ngai te noki te na miboma  
 Elongwe nde bolingo ekoma magie

Na boyi nazangaka yo ata ngonga moko  
 Nalingi natalaka yo lokola tala-tala,  
 Poupée na ngai oh ma belle  
 Lipasa na nga suka beauté

Chorus:

Pasi ya bolingo ezalaka nde somo  
 Moto soki olingi ye alingi se souffrance  
 O kokoma kizengi okomi komisambuisa  
 A mama o kosalaka ngai boye te  
 Mama pardon kokomisa nga bongo te

Solo:

Ngai nalingaka yo osala ata mwa geste  
 Mwana ngai nakomaka neti mwa yuma  
 Chérie kitoko na yo epesaka ngai trouble  
 Okotela ngai mwa magie na azoto?  
 Tala ndenge ngai nakomaka zoba zoba  
 Soki oseki ngai nakomi se gentil gentil  
 Osala nini po nakoma se kondenge mama  
 A mama okosalaka nga boye te  
 Eh, pardon kokomisa nga bongo te

Talk to me, honey  
 It hurts just to think about it, I'm losing weight  
 I ask myself deep down inside  
 This thing called love, where does it come from?  
 At first it starts with my breathing  
 Then it takes over my whole body  
 It makes my heart go overboard with jealousy  
 I don't want anyone to touch you

I told everyone so that they would know  
 How much I love you my dear  
 You're full of beauty, who made you?  
 I'm totally disoriented  
 Love me, let's love each other  
 I've chosen you to be my woman  
 I'm not asking for much, just loan me your heart  
 Let me hold you

After this beauty, what is a man supposed to do?  
 I've dizzy with love, love has no shame  
 It has no time, no eyes  
 I've become like an idiot, like a baby  
 That was just born  
 Everything for you and your love  
 Doll, I could die just seeing you

I'm singing this song so that you'll know  
 You're my sweetheart, honey  
 Don't lie to me, or I'll surely die  
 This is not love anymore, its magic

I can't do without you, even one hour  
 I want to look at you like I look into a mirror  
 Oh my doll, oh my belle  
 My twin, no one is more beautiful

The pain of love is great  
 If you love someone they'll make you suffer  
 It will make you stupid, embarrass yourself  
 Oh, girl, don't do this to me  
 Please, girl, don't bring me to this

I love you, just give me some sign  
 I've become a worthless weakling  
 Honey, your beauty makes me confused  
 Did you cast a spell on me?  
 Look at how stupid I get  
 If you smile at me I become sweet and docile  
 What do you do to make me like this  
 Oh, girl, don't do this to me  
 Please, girl, don't bring me to this

## Chorus

Nzoto ya chérie **epesaka ngai nde malade**  
 Nzoto ya mama engengaka lokola mwinda  
 Soki atele mi wana ngai **nakufi**  
 Soki afacher **nakomi komilelalela**  
 Omoni ndenge ngai **nakomaka zoba zoba**  
 Soki oseki ngai **nakomi se gentil gentil**  
 Osala nini mpo **nakoma se kondenge?**  
 Ah mama okosalaka nga boye te  
 Eh chérie kokomisa nga bongo te

Her body makes me shiver all over  
 Her body reflects like a light  
 When she stands up, I die  
 If she's angry, I just start to cry  
 Look at how stupid I've become  
 If you smile I become sweet and docile  
 What do you do to make me like this?  
 Oh, girl, don't do this to me  
 Please, girl, don't bring me to this

## Chorus

Chérie pesa nga mwa bisou na litama  
 Mwana ngai **na bosana liwa ezalaka**  
 Chérie suwa ngai mwa moke na litoyi  
 Mwana ngai na bosani que la mort **ezalaka**  
 Omoni ndenge ngai **nakomaka zoba zoba?**  
 Omoni ndenge ngai **nakomaka trouble?**  
 Omoni mayi **etangaka nga na miso?**  
 Ah mama kosalaka nga boye te  
 Ah pardon kokomisa ngai **zoba te**

Chérie, give me a little kiss on the cheek  
 With you I forget about death  
 Chérie, bite in my ear a bit  
 With you I forget about death  
 Do you see how stupid I've become?  
 Do you see how confused I've become?  
 Do you see the tears that fall from my eyes?  
 Oh, girl, don't do this to me  
 Please, girl, don't bring me to this

## Chorus

Mama, matisa bolingo esika nalingaka  
 Wana esika nga **namonaka b'angelu**  
 Mama matisa bolingo esika nalingaka  
 Wana esika nga **namonaka ba mwinda**  
 Mama matisa bolingo esika nalingaka  
 Wana esika ngai **nakomaka kodiembela oh**

Love me like I love to be loved  
 That place where I start to see angels  
 Love me like I love to be loved  
 That place where I start to see bright lights  
 Love me like I love to be loved  
 That place where I start swing back and forth

Omoni ndenge ngai **nakomaka zoba zoba?**  
 Omoni ndenge ngai **nakomaka yuma yuma?**  
 Omoni mayi **etangaka nga na miso?**  
 Ah mama kosalaka nga boye te  
 Ah pardon kokomisa ngai **zoba te**

Do you see how stupid I've become?  
 Do you see what a weakling I've become?  
 Do you see the tears that fall from my eyes?  
 Oh, girl, don't do this to me  
 Please, girl, don't bring me to this

## Chorus

Attention, kitisa, kitisa, kitisa oh bloqué  
 Matisa, matisa, matisa oh bloqué

Bring it down, bring it down, bring it down, stop!  
 Bring it up, bring it up, bring it up, stop!

## Chorus

("Kita-mata Bloqué", O.K. Jazz, 1986)

Two aspects emerge from this analysis. First, and perhaps most obvious, is the melancholy tone which characterizes many of the texts discussed above.<sup>29</sup> This recurring feeling of sadness, anxiety and regret has often been remarked upon for other musical styles of African origin, but it usually remains unexamined or is explained away as an 'African' esthetic with its origins in some kind of universal 'Black experience' (Appiah 1992). The case of Congolese music represents an interesting paradox because the 'mawa' of song lyrics is countered by the 'esengo' ('joy') of exuberance ('animation') and release through dance ('ambiance') (see ch. 3). Further research is needed to determine how these 'songs of sorrow' (DuBois 1994) are experienced by the individual, and to what extent the Congolese case of dualism represents an exception. Second, almost all of the tropes described above involve clearly articulated statements of individual experience. The singer expresses feelings of pain, suffering, fear, disorientation and emotional fatigue. These flashes of individual consciousness run counter to Western representations of Africans as undifferentiated members of homogeneous social collectives (Lienhardt 1985; Jackson and Karp 1990; Corin 1998). Lyrics from songs reveal not only information about the individual experience of the paradoxes of 'modern' life in Africa, but also how these paradoxes affect inter-subjective relations as well.

### Genres as Live Texts

Ethnographic sources have often called attention to the way that song is used for social ends: Mitchell's (1956) analysis of competition, solidarity and play in his writing on the Kalela dance in the Copperbelt, Evans-Pritchard's (1940) cattle praise songs among the Nuer, and Merriam's (1982) examples of fieldworker protest songs sung by young women among the Bashi are only a few examples. This work draws on Austin's performative notion

---

<sup>29</sup>Given the high degree of sexual imagery and innuendo in this song text, it may be considered less representative than many of the other examples I have given. Nonetheless, it is interesting to see how the tropes present in the song fit into patterns of sexualized (mostly male) language.

of language which makes a distinction between statements that *say* things and statements that *do* things (see also Finnegan 1969; Galaty 1983; Kratz 1989, 1990). In this section of the chapter I am primarily interested not with the lyrical content of popular music per se, but rather the categories or genres of popular music and how they become 'live texts' which people of different persuasions put to use as means or markers of social difference.

Recent research on popular culture, not only in Africa, has called attention to the difficulty of making associations between social class and the consumption of music (Erlmann 1996a; Barber 1997; Macaulay 1998). In the first place I am reluctant to discuss class categories at all, since social classes in the Congo are not as clearly defined as they seem to be in Europe or in North America (Bourdieu 1984). But if by social class we mean socio-economic standing (and not social class in the Marxist sense), then it is relatively easy to show that the preference for music does not vary greatly between rich and poor, between educated and illiterate, or between occupational groups. There are, of course, some exceptions. Certain musical groups (especially less well-established groups) have greater appeal in poor neighborhoods and among young audiences (in 1995 the Big Stars, Super Choc, Nouvelle Image, Station Japana), but these same groups also play for more elite crowds. Well-established and well-educated musicians (such as Reddy Amisi and Koffi Olomide) have a much higher proportion of listeners from the upper end of the socio-economic spectrum, but this does not keep them from being extremely popular among other sectors of the population. As I will discuss below, the greatest differences in listening habits can be seen in between generations, and in between people of various religious convictions.

The most striking element of music use in Kinshasa is that most people listen to the same genre of music (assuming of course that the category of 'modern music' can be seen as a genre, see ch. 3). Within the genre people may be devoted to a particular group or artist, but anyone who listens to 'modern music' will support others' claims about the value of the music as a whole, even though they might not like the same groups or artists. Thus people differentiate themselves by association with particular groups. For example, a high proportion of Koffi

Olomide's fan base is made up of (mostly young) women. Defao, on the other hand, attracted very few women to his concerts, although this may be a function of the fact that he generally performed in poorer neighborhoods and for much less money than Koffi (it is not common for women to attend concerts alone). Women are more valued by musicians as consumers of music, not only because it is believed that they listen more carefully to lyrics, but also because they push their boyfriends and husbands into buying particular products.<sup>30</sup> A music producer in Brazzaville explained to me the way he chooses the albums he will distribute:

I listen together with my friends to the demos that people give me, sometimes with my wife. It's women who choose songs better than men, because they follow the words. While women are at home cooking, they listen to the words (Sept. 13, 1995).

To gain a more systematic understanding of the ways that various audiences make use of popular music for personal and social ends, I began to organize informal focus group activities which would address some of these issues (c.f. Burke 1996). In some situations, focus groups were pre-organized and participants were aware ahead of time that I wanted to talk about music and that our meeting was organized for the purposes of my research. In other circumstances, focus groups were the result of spontaneous social exchanges in which I encouraged people to continue along particular lines of questioning, and recorded as best I could the context and the content of the exchanges that were unfolding in front of me.<sup>31</sup> In

---

<sup>30</sup>Women are also generally believed to be the primary consumers of religious music. One of my informants estimated that for every 100 cassettes that are sold in Kinshasa in 1995, approximately twenty are religious. Of those twenty, he estimated that 15-18 were bought by women.

<sup>31</sup>Below I will give two examples of focus group sessions that occurred during my stay in the field. Most focus groups that I conducted more or less resembled the examples I describe below.

The first focus group occurred while visiting friends in Limete, a relatively well-off neighborhood located near the geographical center of Kinshasa. Myself and a friend (Rasta Bob) were looking for a group of musicians who often performed at bars in the neighborhood. After asking several people who could not help us, we decided to stop in at the house of Rasta Bob's childhood friend who lived in the neighborhood and whom he came to visit from time to time. Our conversation began with them catching up on neighborhood news and, as usual, the conversation turned to music. Our host (and another visitor of his who, like others present, was probably between 25-35 years old) commented on the new album by Wenge Musica, and Rasta Bob, having several close friends in Wenge, made very clear his opinion about the importance of the album and the group in general. Upon which our host's other visitor began to argue that Wenge was highly overrated and that by no means did the group constitute a break into a fourth generation, as most (young) Wenge fans often argue. Here the discussion exploded, and a friendly conversation quickly became a heated debate. I seized the occasion, taking notes rigorously and planting questions at certain moments in the debate, which continued for at least an hour and a half before we realized that we needed to leave. The three Congolese that participated in this



future research, I will undertake more systematic focus group interviews, consciously bringing together different types of people (and sometimes similar types of people) to recreate the social dialogues about music which are so common in everyday life in Kinshasa.

For the purposes of this section of the chapter, my intention is to show how different types of people associate or disassociate themselves with certain types of music, thus taking on musical categories as highly personalized public identities. I will describe this process by first looking at two ways in which groups of people distinguish themselves from each other through musical categories (one within the genre of 'modern' music and one which completely rejects it) and will conclude this chapter by looking at how in different circumstances people come together under a larger sense of common identity which is usually expressed in national or regional terms. Thus some people are calling up nostalgic images of glorious musical pasts, while others look toward the proliferation of American-style evangelicalism--and its accompanying musical forms--as a progressive 'modernist' sign of overcoming temptation in 'modern' Congo-Kinshasa.

---

spontaneous focus group were clearly from more or less similar socio-economic backgrounds (upper middle class) and roughly the same age. I did not gather information about education, ethnicity or marital status.

A second example comes from a focus group which was much less spontaneous. I had organized a meeting of employees of the national tv & radio station (at that time *La Voix du Zaïre*) in order to begin compiling a list of important 'hit songs' since the 1950s. I organized our first meeting time one week in advance, choosing a time that fit with everyone's schedule and I explained to each of the participants that I wanted two things: to begin compiling a list of hit songs since the 1950s, and to encourage an informal discussion about changes in the music since that period. At our first meeting, I explained briefly the path (professional and personal) that had brought me to Zaïre to study Zaïrean music and what questions/issues were driving my research in the field. The group present was all over the age of 50, with two women and two men, three of which seemed of modest socio-economic standing and one of which (judging by her dress and speech) held some degree of social status over the others present. All four were civil servants employed at the national radio/t.v. station. The person who had put me in contact with the focus group participants (Manda Tchabwa) was seated nearby reading a paper while we spoke. It became obvious that each participant had his or her own views about what constituted a hit song ('un tube', 'a big hit', 'a song that I remember', etc.), but in about 20% of the cases we considered there was unanimity. The most interesting observation to result from this focus group (and one that should not have surprised me at all) was that all of the participants had much more detailed knowledge about music from the period during which they were young adults. Compared to people their age not involved in music or the media, they knew a considerable amount about 'young peoples' music', and were interested in its evolution, but overall were less well-informed about it than people younger than them. Unfortunately, I did not record these sessions or gather any demographic data on the participants.

*Dialogues I: Music Divides*

Popular music in Kinshasa seems to transcend the social barriers of age, ethnicity, gender, class and race; in Kinshasa almost everyone listens to and has some familiarity with 'la musique moderne'. Nonetheless, there are some groups of people that only listen to certain kinds of 'modern' music, and other groups that refuse to listen to any 'modern' music whatsoever. In this section, I will discuss two ways in which people use musical genres or categories of music as a means of distinguishing themselves from other members of society. The two cases I will present are different in at least one important way. One is an example of an internal judgement of popular music (members of older generations condemn young peoples' music) which does not deny the value of popular music in general. The other constitutes an external, exclusionary critique (Christians' condemn all non-religious music) which refuses to condone 'modern' music, regardless of its lyrical or esthetic content. Despite this important difference, the two cases are similar in the way that people use musical genres as 'live texts' and gestures social distinction.

Given the importance of popular music in everyday social relations, the particular way that people identify with the music is everywhere and always a very serious matter. From my notes:

This is not the first time I've been sitting in my room overhearing a discussion next door about music. I don't understand everything, but I know that Kovo [a 23-year old male who lived next to me in the compound where I rented a room] and his friends are talking about music. I've never heard them get together and talk about football, maybe a coincidence, maybe I only have ears for conversations about music, but when these guys get going they really go off. "Wera Son is 62". [They are having a discussion about the age of the musicians from their favorite group, Wenge Musica]. "No, Masela is 62. I know what I'm talking about." They spice their arguments with snippets of melodies to make their point, all talking at the same time. About an hour later, they come into my room and Kovo asks me who is a better musician, Papa Wemba or Kris Kross [an American rap duo!]. I think for a minute and answer diplomatically, "I don't know Kris Kross's music, but Wemba is a veteran, he's been around for a long time and he knows what he's doing." "That's all I wanted to know" he says, clapping his hands and marching off triumphantly. At the same time his friends, who were listening from next door, roar in protest (Jan. 5, 1996).

The young people in this anecdote obviously hold more or less similar views about the importance of the music which they spend so much time discussing. If they disagree, it is generally on the details (age of musicians, musical expertise, etc.). Certain individuals among them stand out by showing more nuanced knowledge of the music and more intimate familiarity with musicians' personal lives and stories (see ch. 5). When young people are in the company of older people, however, their position changes somewhat. One day Kovo joined me to visit an elderly friend of mine in the neighborhood. When the conversation turned to music, the man openly condemned young peoples' music for its lack of coherence, its aggressiveness and its unashamed eroticism. He turned to Kovo and asked somewhat aggressively, "Why do you like this music?" With an embarrassed smile and looking downward in a gesture of submission, he answered: "It's good music; it's new (fr. 'actuelle')". The elder man threw up his arms and turned to me: "You see, they can't even explain. They don't understand anything." The elder man's position on young people's music is strikingly similar to that of Gondola:

*La musique, on le voit, a perdu dans le chaos des indépendances sa fonction socialisatrice et sa capacité à se tenir à la lisière de la tutelle politique. Elle est aujourd'hui entraînée dans l'engrenage de la production commerciale qui laisse peu de place à la véritable création. Aussi, la plupart des musiciens se contentent-ils d'emprunter des sentiers cent fois battus, se plagiant les uns les autres, au son des mêmes rythmes et des mêmes thèmes (l'amour sexuel, encore et toujours). Il fut un temps, par exemple, où l'orchestre Zaïko Langa Langa (sic) sortait un album tous les mois! Pour ce faire, le recours aux pratiques magiques et la consommation de narcotiques, pour activer l'inspiration et fidéliser le public, demeurant la règle (Gondola 1993: 167).<sup>32</sup>*

This statement is interesting for a number of reasons. First, it is written by a respected Congolese scholar (one of the most well-known historians of popular music), and the moralizing tone he takes (one which is common in Congolese writing about popular music, see Kanza 1972; Lonoh 1969; Nkashama 1992; Tchebwa 1996) is consistent with the moralizing

---

<sup>32</sup>Music in the chaos of independence has obviously lost its socializing function and its capacity to keep a safe distance from political tutelage. Today it is swept up in the system of commercial production which leaves very little room for true creation. Furthermore, most musicians satisfy themselves with borrowing from well-beaten paths, plagiarizing each other with the sound of the same rhythms and themes (sexual love, again and always). There was a time when Zaïko Langa Langa put out one album every month. To do this, resorting to magic and drugs in order to activate inspiration and rope in the public was the rule.'

tone of musicians in the production of popular song texts. Second, it is interesting to note the pêle-mêle assortment of factors that explain changes in the music over time:

commercialization, laziness, drugs, sex, and witchcraft. Similar explanations are offered by the Congolese literary critic/popular historian Ngandu Nkashama. In his reading of youth music as 'rupture', he argues that the inspiration of previous musical generations is "spent" by political and economic decay, and this degradation is reflected in the structure of musical texts:

[Les mélodies] expriment toute une certaine *dépense* de la véritable valeur de productivité et de créativité. L'écart manifeste entre la symbolique et l'expressivité textuelle renforce ce sentiment de 'panique soudaine'. On pourrait même observer qu'il n'y existe plus de texte construit en séquences narratives, ou en fragments récitatifs. La chanson évolue en spirales, à la manière d'un conglomérat de clauses elliptiques (Nkashama 1992: 481, emphasis added).<sup>33</sup>

According to Nkashama, the loss of integrity in contemporary popular music is due not only to psycho-social alienation (ibid: 480), but also to the increasing penetration of global capitalism (Nkashama 1979). Music is corrupted by these dual forces and in their wake nothing remains except noise:

[Cette musique] se limite parfois à des hurlements et à des rugissements primitifs et elle devient insaisissable en tant que cantique ou mélodie. La prolifération des instruments les plus bruyants, les plus cassants et les plus cacophoniques, l'utilisation abusive des sonorités et des percussions, tout cela a fini par réduire la voix à des chuintements. Et la parole, premier élément de la chanson, est devenue un rôle à peine audible sinon un borborygme confus (Nkashama 1992: 488).<sup>34</sup>

Compare these statements with those of people with whom I spoke in Kinshasa:

Our artists don't work anymore. The effort to create something new ['recherche'] no longer exists. Now music has plateaued, because there's no innovation anymore. Big stars get their ideas from Poto-Poto [the popular neighborhood in Brazzaville] (Galoukossi Tambu, Aug. 4, 1995)

They don't do any research like they used to (Bokilo Norbert, Sept. 14, 1995).

---

<sup>33</sup>Melodies express the 'spent' nature of the true value of productivity and creativity. The manifest gap between symbolics and textual expressivity reinforces this feeling of 'sudden panic'. One could even observe that there no longer exists a text which is constructed in narrative sequences or recitative parts'.

<sup>34</sup>'Young peoples' music limits itself at times to primitive howling and roaring, and it becomes incomprehensible as hymn or song. The proliferation of instruments which are noisy, loud and cacophonous, the use of abusive sound systems and percussion instruments, all of this in the end reduces voices to a faint hiss. And the words, the most important part of the song, become a barely audible groan if not a unidentified gaseous belch.'

Distinguishing himself on various fronts, singer-songwriter Sam Mangwana gives his views on 'la musique des jeunes':

It's my way of thinking. I try to tell young musicians that they have a lot to learn. Look at young musicians today, there are no more percussionists. No one is interested in the Tam Tam, no one is interested in the saxophone or trumpet. Everybody wants to dance in front and exhibit his hip movements. But that's not music, it's pornography. We should use music to pass on moral values [manières de vivre], to make our culture shine, to educate the masses. It seems like music has become a means of fulfilling peoples' fantasies, it's hideous. I want to ask young people, all the authorities, and the media to stop this pornographic music [chanson pornographique], it does not honor us at all (interview with Ladji Ntongo, *Afro-Vision*, Dec 1997 - Fev 1998: 45).

Thus members of older generations view 'la musique des jeunes' as repetitive, morally bankrupt, no longer based in text, but fixated on dancing, drugs and eroticism.<sup>35</sup> Descriptions of the music of their own youth take the form of nostalgia:

Des jeunes gens fredonnaient les joies et les tristesses avec les mélodies envoûtantes de Bombenga ou de Rochereau. Et les mélodies consolait. Les harmonies de l'amour se chantaient avec des trémolos de Sangana ou de Mujos. Une manière de complicité de l'imaginaire, qui faisait s'articuler les fureurs du coeur, avec les stridulations des guitares hawaïennes de Nïco (Nkashama 1992: 479).<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup>Not only by certain Congolese, but also by outsiders, Congolese music is often criticized for being too 'repetitive'. In Chapter Seven, I discussed the *creative borrowing* of shouts and dance steps which are mostly responsible for this impression. Recent work in the area of African diaspora and performance has begun to look seriously at this feature as an esthetic trait of Black musics in general (and art, see Vogel 1991): 'sampling' in North American hip hop (Rose 1994), 'versioning' in West Indian, especially Jamaican styles (Hebdige 1987; MacAulay 1998), and the 'changing same' of Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* (Gilroy 1993). For Tricia Rose, facile criticisms of the repetition in Black music reflect racist standards of esthetic critique that "apply and naturalize dominant cultural principles" (1994: 72). Thus the torturous debate on sampling in contemporary African-American music is based on Western notions of intellectual property and plagiarism, but the terms of this debate do not make sense in the context of African-derived musical styles. As Margaret Thompson Drewal (1991) has shown, the transformative dynamic of African performative traditions is *dependent upon* repetition, what she refers to as "re-presentation with critical difference" (1991: 38). Black music taken on its own terms would most likely view creative borrowing from the *past* as a means of valorizing or contesting an inherently political social *present* (Mudimbe 1991). On repetition and 'rehearsal' in African performance, see Chernoff (1979), Drewal (1991), Fabian (1990), Jules-Rosette (1975).

<sup>36</sup>Young people used to hum [their] joys and sadness with the bewitching melodies of Bombenga or Rochereau. And melodies could console. Harmonies of love were sung through the tremolo of Sangana or Mujos. A sort of imaginary complicity, one that articulated the furies of the heart, [occurred] with the striding movement of Nïco's Hawaiian guitar.'

While older people view 'la musique des jeunes' as a corrupt form of classical *rumba*, it is still considered a descendant of the *rumba* tradition. From the perspective of seniors, young musicians are to be commended to the extent that they acknowledge their musical ancestors (ch. 3,10; Tchebwa 1996), but they are inevitably guilty of straying too far from *rumba*'s basic essence.

This is not the case for listeners of religious music (*la musique religieuse*). For many practicing Christians, 'modern' music is not music at all, but "the business of the devil" ('une affaire de Satan'). It is perceived as disrespectful, hedonistic and immoral, and it erects artificial barriers between life on Earth and the "Kingdom of God", and strictly opposed to the music of Christians:

Cependant, l'on nous fait savoir que c'est seulement lorsque cette musique [religieuse] est jouée par des chrétiens qui vivent une vie de foi, de pureté, de prière et de sainteté approfondie qu'elle arrive à anéantir tout raisonnement orgueilleux dressé contre Jésus de Nazareth et toute muraille bâtie pour empêcher les hommes à le rencontrer. Elle permet aussi de capturer tout esprit rebelle, de le guider vers Dieu afin de les amener à obéir au Christ de tout leur cœur (Kinguza 1990, Disco Hit #147).<sup>37</sup>

In the insecurity of 'post-pillage' Kinshasa (early 1990s), religious participation began to take on new meanings and proportions (Ndaywel 1993). In this period of proliferating prayer groups and "veillées spirituelles" (ch. 3), Christian piety is defined in opposition to *la musique profane* and the world of *ambiance*:<sup>38</sup>

It is in this way that with an ever-changing rhythm, ['modern' music] continues to celebrate only this-worldly themes, not realizing that the Zairean of Zaire, faced with the enormously difficult task of subsistence, is no longer concerned with leisure (Ndaywel 1993: 4).

---

<sup>37</sup>It has been made known to us that it is only when this [religious] music is played by Christians that live in faith, purity, prayer and deep saintliness that [this music] can erase all forms of pride used against Jesus of Nazareth and all walls constructed to keep men from meeting Him. [Religious music] also makes it possible to capture all rebel spirits, and to guide them toward God in order to bring them to obey Christ with all their heart.'

<sup>38</sup>Practicing Christians also refer to 'modern' music as 'la musique du monde' ('music of this world') and 'la musique mondaine'.

The following account, though not written by a Congolese, captures well the urgency of attempts by Congolese Christians to distinguish their music from ‘profane’ music:

These Kinshasa bands, which have become popular throughout West and Central Africa, create the ambience of an oneiric and fleeting universe which the public attempts to prolong by spending entire nights in the bars immersed in the music’s melodies and rhythms. *The very volume of the music and the play of lights contribute to making a euphoric atmosphere that drowns out the frustrations of the day, and the discriminations of age, income, class, and ethnic differences.* Affluent youngsters, married men and unmarried women take pleasure in this temporary world, and through the consumption of beer, dance and games of seduction, they tangibly experience personal release and fulfilment (Devisch 1995: 620-621, emphasis added).

Compare this account of an imagined bar/nightclub with the same author’s description of a charismatic healing church in Kinshasa:

These more ludic, effervescent moments, with drumming and passionate singing, called animation, enact a community life where the freedom and idiosyncrasy of the individual are reaffirmed, at least in terms of appearances ... *They offer a vision of an imaginary world and a euphoric atmosphere drowning out the frustrations of urban life and the discrimination of age, wage, class and ethnic differences.* It is this very combination of order and euphoria, reference to Christian ethics and the sensual experience of release and fulfilment, that contributes to a very body-centered and communitarian construction of a moral community (Devisch 1996: 567-568, emphasis added).

In both cases, music “drowns out” the frustration of modern life in the city and the resulting feeling of *communitas* overcomes social division.<sup>39</sup> But from a Christian point of view, these two experiences are completely different: in the case of the church, ‘euphoria’ enables a reconstruction of “moral community”, while in the nightclub it is a fleeting moment of false consciousness and temporary pleasure. The social positioning on which these accounts are based is very similar to the reactions of the Christian music listeners I spoke with in Kinshasa: “Je n’écoute jamais cette musique là. C’est pas bon.” (‘I never listen to that music. It’s not

---

<sup>39</sup>Notice the use of the term *animation*, a term which I have discussed in Chapter Three as a defining characteristic in the development of ‘modern’ dance music. Pwono (1992) discusses in greater detail the social and musical links between ‘modern’ and ‘religious’ musical styles.

good.’) and “La musique profane, je ne connais pas ça. C’est pour Satan” (‘Profane music, I don’t know anything about it. It’s Satanic’).

Thus the moral high ground of religious music is a form of social distinction in which the pious borrow from the profane, but continually reject any association between the two [figure 9.3]. In my first visit with a church-based music group, I noticed during their performance that a number of people in the congregation were dancing wildly, with large, ecstatic gestures that made me think of the dancing I had seen in many live concerts. I asked one of the bandmembers if this kind of dancing is acceptable during religious ceremonies. He answered hesitating: “...It’s okay to dance because they’re happy with God,” somewhat embarrassed. When he saw that I was not opposed to the idea, he began to expand further, sitting me down to show me a passage from the Bible:

Praise the Lord!  
 Praise God in His sanctuary; Praise Him in His mighty firmament!  
 Praise Him for His mighty acts; Praise Him according to His excellent greatness!  
 Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet; Praise Him with the lute and the harp!  
 Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes!  
 Praise Him with loud cymbals; Praise Him with clashing cymbals!

(*The New King James Version*, Thomas Nelson 1985)

“You see?” he said. “It’s right here in the Bible!”

To make a case for music as a social space in which people of different persuasions set out to distinguish themselves in various ways is relatively straightforward. In the two cases I have discussed above, people oppose themselves to mainstream manifestations of popular culture (‘la musique des jeunes’ and ‘la musique profane’) in order to assert some form of priorness or moral superiority (c.f. Wilk 1994). Similar arguments could be elaborated for the way that women express a preference for ‘sentimental’ music, or the way that some music listeners identify themselves *fiesta* as opposed to *ondemba* styles of music (ch. 3). Despite a general acknowledgement of ‘traditional’ music as something of value (one which has certainly been influenced by Mobutu’s *authenticité* policy), most people only deem this style of music





fig 9.3 'Frère Debaba': former 'Choc Star', now he sings the praises of Jesus

appropriate in certain settings (especially funerals and funeral parties). As I discuss in the next chapter, 'traditional' music can only become commercially successful when it takes the form of something completely different.

### *Dialogues II: Music Unites*

There are more than 300 ethnic groups, a big equatorial forest and it's not even exploited yet. One group talks and the other doesn't understand. Each one has its own way of playing, but we all come together on a corner, where we play music for everyone, and there is one language that reunites us, Lingala. That it is our advantage. When you're in Lubumbashi, you'll hear another music, but when we play *soukouss* it reunites everyone (Lokassa ya Mbongo, Jan. 17, 1998).

Scholars have increasingly become aware of how popular culture can lead to a crystallization of national culture and cultural traits (Appadurai 1995; Guibault 1993; Waterman 1997). For Charles Keil, the very act of naming a musical genre may be considered a declaration of cultural consolidation (1985: 126). In the case of Congolese popular music, this observation is particularly salient because Congolese music is one of the few musical styles in Africa which is truly 'national': "The transcendence of Rumba, once arrived in Africa, will clearly identify it with the Zairean nation. From this moment on, we can say that 'modern' Zairean music is born." (Kanza 1972: 41).<sup>40</sup> As I have discussed elsewhere, African stereotypes about Congolese are strikingly similar to the way that Congolese musicians are often described (White 1998a). One young woman with whom I spoke in Brazzaville told me: "Zaireans are different, the Congolese are boring. Zaireans, even during the economic crisis you can't believe it, they dance like they have no problems at all" (c.f. Appiah 1992: 157).

Especially since Mobutu's infamous *authenticité*, many Congolese talk about a coherent 'national culture' which takes its strength in part from the Congo's high degree of

---

<sup>40</sup>I am grateful to Pieter Remes for this observation.

ethnic diversity. Given the success of Congolese dance music in other parts of Africa, many Congolese view this culture as a precious resource which must be promoted, protected, and utilized:

Our music has a special power of conquest (Socrates, interview Dec. 21, 1995)

I was initiated by them [his musical predecessors], that's why I answer to the call today, because they are no longer around. We're here to carry on the torch so that Congolese culture shines at an international level, that's why we live abroad (Sam Mangwana interview with Ladji Ntongo, Afro-Vision, Decembre 1997 - Fevrier 1998: 44).

Some headlines from recent music magazines published in Kinshasa:

"Tshala Mwana defends Zairean music in London" (Super Stars, n.d.)

"Zairean music sought after in Africa" (L'As des As, October 1990)

"Taz Bolingo surprises the Zambians" (L'As des As, October 1990)

"Papa Wemba the biggest star in the West Indies" (Disco, # 60, 6th year)

Clearly, the relationship between music and identity, especially national identity, is not a simple one (Wade 1998). Music in its most commercial form has the potential to contribute to the crystallization of a national identity, or what Waterman (1990) refers to as 'pan-ethnic' identity. Despite the fact that most people in Kinshasa perceive *soukouss* (see White 1998) as inauthentic, this music has given non-Congolese a hook on which to hang perceptions of what it means to be Congolese. Character traits of Congolese musicians become generalized into national stereotypes. Congolese are perceived by other Africans as 'very cool in their ways' (i.e. good dancers) and 'really good-timers' (Chernoff 1979: 149), but also as hedonistic, promiscuous and not hard-working, traits which are often used to describe musicians. The *ambiance* (party atmosphere) and *frime* (cockiness) often associated with Congolese music has come to stand for the country itself. A Congolese music promoter I spoke with explained the stereotypes he encountered while travelling in various parts of West Africa: "You work?"

they said, 'We thought you guys didn't work. We thought you just sing and dance all the time.' They must think we eat music." (M. Socrates, Dec. 21, 1995).

### *The Flexibility of Texts*

Thus at one level music serves to bring Congolese together under a national, imagined identity (Anderson 1983). At another level, however, music is used as a form of social distinction (Mitchell 1956; Bourdieu 1984) and different types of people can be opposed to each other, each trying to distinguish themselves from within the same expressive milieu. Such is the case with senior musicians, whose status as living ancestors of popular music depends to some extent on juniors' recognition. Women and men are similarly opposed through music. Women enjoy songs which sing about male irresponsibility and female suffering ("C'est Dur la Vie d'une Femme Celibataire"; "Mario") and men enjoy songs which criticize women as capricious or mercenary ("Quatres Boutons"; "Mamiwata") or songs in which men win over the love of a beautiful woman ("Marie Louise").

This brings me to my final point. Meaning in popular Congolese music (if not African music in general), is characterized by its 'open-endedness'. Open-ended not only because directness of speech can sometimes lead to censorship and even imprisonment (Onyumbwe 1994; Mbala-Nkanga 1997), but also because the most successful examples of expressive culture in this setting are those that give people something to talk about: something on which they can disagree, take positions, side with one another and express their identity, whether it be individual or social, clothed in 'modernity' or steeped in 'tradition'. These layers of meaning are masks which protect individuals as they engage in various kinds of serious, critical play (Drewal 1992; Likaka 1997).

The best example of this play of meaning is also the song which I would argue is the most talked about song in the history of Congolese popular music, "Mario" by Franco's O.K.

Jazz. The song itself has appeared in at least three completely different versions (or “episodes”), each one using more or less the same music but with different words. It attracted a great deal of attention at first, not only because it was long enough to take up an entire 33 rpm record by itself (Ewens 1994), but also because it addressed the very sensitive topic of older women and younger male gigolos. Gondola’s reading is a straightforward analysis of the text as a “disturbing and captivating love story between a middle-aged woman and her younger male mate” (1997: 77). In fact, from Gondola’s point of view this very controversial song is an example of how the limitations on freedom of expression under the Mobutu regime led musicians to explore the “last artistic frontier: day-to-day life” (78).

Dieudonné Mbala-Nkanga, also writing on Franco’s “Mario”, has argued that in fact Franco’s lyrics must be understood in more strictly political terms. According to Mbala-Nkanga, the song “Mario” constitutes a masked critique of political elites who take advantage of other people’s money (i.e. embezzlement of national funds), thus forcing the majority of young, able men into compromising positions of emasculated dependency. The two readings are substantially different, one claiming that the text reflects an avoidance of ‘political’ issues, and the other arguing that the song addresses head on (albeit through the use of metaphor) the political uses and abuses of power in the Zairean post-colonial state. And these are only two potential readings, scholarly interpretations which from the point of view of many Congolese are not structurally different from other accounts which circulate via Kinshasa’s legendary ‘radio trottoir’.<sup>41</sup>

By finishing with this example I want to call attention to the way that popular songs function as live texts, bringing people together, pulling them apart, and providing a staging area in which various kinds of competition and solidarity are activated in the complex

---

<sup>41</sup> According to local accounts in Kinshasa, the original version of the song was censored by Mobutu, who took it as a personal affront since his wife (who apparently enjoyed the song immensely) was known to have several younger lovers. Instead of recalling the first version, Franco issued a second version, this time with different words, which he called “Réponse ya Mario” (‘Mario’s Answer’). After this unprecedented gesture, all of Kinshasa attempted to figure out why Franco had changed the words, and what political machinations served as the background for his decision. Even today, almost ten years after Franco’s death, people are still talking about the meaning of this series of songs.

processes of identity formation. Good songs are good to think, and in order to think about a song its meaning must necessarily be open-ended or flexible. This does not mean that songs are valued to the extent that they are ambiguous, but that song texts must be open-ended to some extent in order for different kinds of people to find something of personal or social value. As I have suggested above, texts which remain *flexible* reduce the risk of political persecution, but open-ended texts are also more conducive to the play of tropes which is particularly characteristic of African expressive culture (De Boeck 1994; Kramer 1993).<sup>42</sup> My attempts to impose a coherent order on this vast and rapidly changing world of meanings (as in my analysis of signposts and tropes) is in the end subverted by an audience-based approach which looks at how people pick up musical texts (both lyrics and genres) and infuse them with meaning as part of a larger project of social and individual distinction.

Nonetheless, the tropes and signposts I have discussed above are clearly related to other themes that have emerged from my analysis in previous chapters: the plea ('na leli yo') for people in positions of power to act in socially responsible ways (ch. 8), the dizzying effects ('na komi zoba') of life in 'modern' Africa where the poor are increasingly left to fend for themselves ('pasi na pasi', 'nani a kosunga ngai?', and the particular ways in which individual identity is embedded in social dialogues about male-female relationships ('motema', 'bolingo') and Kinshasa's unique form of urban ethnicity. In the following chapter, I will discuss how these same themes contribute specifically to our understanding of the way that people experience 'modernity'.

---

<sup>42</sup>This aspect of the music is even further accentuated by the fact that Lingala, a Bantu language which has been simplified (some think created) by an ongoing missionary and colonial presence, shows a lot of semantic shifting.

## Part Four: The Meaning of Music

### Chapter Ten: Modernity's Spiral

#### Versioning 'Modernity'

The Feeling of 'Modernity' in Kinshasa  
Winking in the Midst of Adversity

#### The Tangled Dance of "Tradi-Modernity"

The Art of Love  
Urban Ethnicity  
Anchoring the Self

#### 'Tradition' and 'Modernity' Objectified

Modern Things Come in Twos  
Magic and 'Modernity's' Incompleteness  
The Amazing 'Modernity' Machine

#### Modernity's Spiral

*In this view, what is distinctive about any particular society is not the fact or extent of its modernity, but rather its distinctive debates about modernity, the historical and cultural trajectories that shape its appropriation of the means of modernity, and the cultural sociology ...that determines who gets to play with modernity and what defines the rules of the game.*

(Appadurai and Breckenridge 1995: 16, original emphasis)

*C'est difficile de rester soi-même.*

(Manda Tchewa on the subject of globalization)

## Versioning Modernity

Whether in reactionary romanticisms or in Futurist celebrations of the new, whether in a confident optimism in the ameliorative capacities of modern science or a nostalgic longing for the unalienated, unhurried--and, by now, unfamiliar--traditional sense of community, much of Western thought about intellectual and social life is predicated upon an understanding of what it is to be modern, and on reactions, whether positive or negative, to the fact of modernity (Appiah 1992: 107).

It is not difficult to argue that the whole world has been affected by 'modernity', especially given the current intellectual fascination, both inside and outside of academia, with globalization. Globalization, after all, with its specific brand of late capitalist multinational corporatism, is the most logical extension of 'modernity', in which the only true universals are money and a fetishized notion of individual free will. It is less common, however, to argue that the whole world is 'modern', or (even less common) that 'modernity' can mean different things in different places. Thanks in part to the critical Marxist scholarship of the 1970s, we are beginning to understand 'modernity' not only as a *condition* but also as a *process* (Miller 1994: 58), one that includes both core (the industrial West) and periphery (the industrializing Rest). For some, this globalizing 'modernity' conjures up images of the decay of local cultures and finely woven social fabrics of custom (Devisch 1996; Friedman 1991), while for others it is an empowered, creolizing present which enables people to benefit from and make use of various individual and group identities (Hannerz 1987; B. Williams 1991).

Based on my data, I could certainly make the observation that what is happening in Congolese popular music is an example of the 'modernist passion' (Balandier 1955), in which Africans express their will to be modern through Western language, dress, and various kinds of consumer goods. While this observation may be true, and while I do believe that the markers and symbols of 'being modern' are important to people in Africa, in the end I am afraid that this line of reasoning perpetuates the Western myth of 'modernization' which assumes that everyone else in the world wants to be modern "like



us" and that the propensity for Western goods is a naïve attempt at mere imitation.<sup>1</sup> Thus we have to be careful about reading Congolese practices through Western notions of what it means to be 'modern'. As Sally Falk Moore has argued, "It is easy for the observer to play Thorstein Veblen in town and in the bush" (1996: 587).<sup>2</sup>

Daniel Miller (1994) has criticized a large body of writing which takes 'modernity' as its primary subject but which he argues fails to see 'modernity' as something culturally (and thus historically) contingent. As Miller points out, discussions of modernity are usually framed by a set of descriptive traits which presumably characterize the 'modern condition': some form of social disintegration, the compression of space and time through advances in communication and transport, increasing urbanization, the transformation of social relations through capitalist modes of production, ever-increasing rates of technological innovation, heightened individualism, and so on. He is inspired by the work of Hegel, who argued that modernity is both a cause for celebration and the central problem for humanity, since it brings with it self-consciousness, but also alienation (Adorno and Horkheimer 1993). Thus alienation is seen as a defining characteristic of the modern condition.<sup>3</sup>

Miller does not engage with the very prickly question of post-modernity, arguing that even without this debate, the problem of modernity is "more often invoked than described" (1994: 291). Nonetheless, Jameson's post-modernist manifesto on 'late capitalism' is important to my argument insofar as it sees art as something embedded in the social and economic fabric of society (1984: 54), and Harvey's (1989) analysis offers some insight into the crucial distinction between 'modernism' and 'modernity' which I set out in the introduction. In the end, however, I must agree with the Comaroffs that most of

---

<sup>1</sup>Western social thought, which has placed itself at the center of an epic tale of Progress (Comaroffs 1992; Mudimbe 1988; Said 1978), views modernity as "the terminus toward which non-Western peoples constantly edge—without ever actually arriving" (Comaroffs 1993: xii).

<sup>2</sup>A reference to Veblen's early study of leisure and conspicuous consumption.

<sup>3</sup>Elsewhere Miller (1987), drawing heavily from Hegel's notion of objectification, has made a compelling argument for the idea that processes of consumption in late capitalism actually have a reversing effect on the process of alienation, since the mass consumption of commercial goods permit the formation of new identities, both individual and collective.

the writing on post-modernity is primarily valuable for what it tells us about modernity (1993: xi).<sup>4</sup> According to Miller, "The universalizing tendencies of theories of modernity do not easily juxtapose with the relativising imperative of ethnographically informed anthropology" (ibid: 11; cf Moore 1996). And this is the inspired moment in Miller's work, the proposition that locally informed ethnographic research can potentially lead us to the comparative study of modernity (Miller 1993: 68).

In this chapter I want to argue that if we look closely at commercial dance music in the Congo, what we see is a particular vision of 'modernity', one which not only reflects local dreams and aspirations, but one which also tells us something about the predicament of living on the receiving end of global industrial capitalism. Congolese debates about 'modernity' maintain the distinction between 'traditional' and 'modern' but, unlike Western discourses, fail to see anything unnatural about the two occupying the same historical and symbolic space. In fact, as I will argue in this chapter, Congolese 'tradition' and 'modernity' feed on each other in a never-ending spiral through which they are mutually displaced and transformed. In this context, the challenge is to keep the self together ("rester soi-même") in the face of adversity which seems to be coming from all directions, and whose source is increasingly difficult to identify (De Boeck 1998a). The production and performance of popular dance music gives us important insight into how social actors understand and refashion their place in an ever-globalizing local world.

My first impulse in organizing this chapter was to write one section about the 'traditional' aspects of music and one about its 'modern' aspects, but I soon realized that

---

<sup>4</sup>A number of recent articles on post-modernity and expressive culture have managed to engage in critical discussions of these issues in an African setting. Here I am thinking of Karin Barber and Christopher Waterman, who claim to have identified all the defining characteristics of post-modern esthetics in a 'traditional' local genre of praise poetry in Yorubaland (in Miller 1995). Nkashama has written several articles (1979; 1992) about the esthetics of youth dance music and the very post-modern root metaphors of *vertige* and *rupture* which are consistent with my own findings on the musical style, and Filip DeBoeck's (1998a) very engaging discussion of death and memory in the Lunda region of the Congo attempts to formulate an approach based on the analysis of crisis. In her article about local level political action in post-socialist Tanzania, Sally Falk-Moore falls victim to the trap of the post-modernist debate. By framing her argument as a larger discussion about the 'post-modern question', she abandons her very rich data and by the end of the article we are left with the uninspired conclusion that we should question the "appropriateness of models grounded in European history" (1996: 604).

this structure was artificial and clumsy, so I decided to write one section about how 'traditional' music is 'modern' and another about how 'modern' music is 'traditional'. Unfortunately, this approach did not capture the complexity either. In the current version, I hope to show how 'modernity' and 'tradition' are always and already intertwined, and how this symbiotic play reflects the way in which people attempt to gain mastery over the rupture of life in a 'modern' African world (De Boeck 1996; Jewsiewicki 1991, see Coda). The first section of this chapter sets out to describe this entanglement through the musical trope of 'tradi-modernity'. This will be followed by a description of how 'tradition' and 'modernity' are objectified and variously put to use (not only by those in positions of relative power), and the final section will attempt to draw together material from various sources, using the notion of mastery to explain how 'modernity' in a Congolese setting moves in the form of a spiral. But first I want to give a brief description of daily life in the 'modernity' of Kinshasa, and some of the possibilities for expressing this particular way of 'being in the world'.

### *The Feeling of 'Modernity' in Kinshasa*

Musicians, and all the noise and ceremony that usually accompanies them, have always represented an in-between category in African societies. I have already discussed the complex social position of the popular musician, who is simultaneously dependent on various forms of sponsorship and socially free with regards to consumption and social movement (ch. 5). Even in the colonial period, musicians were among the very few categories of Africans that were allowed to be in the European neighborhoods after curfew, since they were often hired to play music at private parties and events in the elite parts of town. Thus popular musicians have an intimate relationship with 'modernity'. But their

visible presence in an emerging African public sphere (ch. 2) has also made them vulnerable to the whims of various forms of colonial and post-colonial authority. Through this very 'modern' form of cultural expression, they embody the voice of a people trying to forge their own past in an ever-modernizing entangled present.

In Kinshasa, the visible signs of modern life do not seem out of place. As in most world cities of more than 5,000,000 people, there is a surplus of automobiles, billboards and neon signs, tall buildings, satellite dishes and cellular phones (Hannerz 1996). People tolerate the particular mixture of exhaust and urban dust that results from too many years of political neglect. Most accept the fact that their earning potential is not enough to enable them to pay for shared private taxis (fr. 'transport commun') so instead they wait, often for hours, to get a space in one of the large transport trucks known locally as 'fulafula' (from the English 'full', Godard 1985). People often say, "Mboka ekufi" ("the country is dead"), and "Kinshasa la Belle" is now referred to as "Kinshasa la Poubelle" ('Kinshasa the Garbage Can'). But despite the difficult conditions of city life in 1990s Zaire, people from Kinshasa are very proud to refer to themselves as being *Kinois* (ch. 2, 9). Being in, and especially from, Kinshasa is a status symbol and a sign of peoples' place in 'modernity': Kinshasa is 'poto mwindo' ('the black man's Europe') and in Kinshasa "you can get anything you want".<sup>5</sup>

As in cities all over the world, people in Kinshasa show their 'modern' colors through a whole series of culturally determined markers such as language (Lingala with elements of French mixed in is the language of choice, see ch. 9,10), dress (women combine high heels with three-piece "traditional style" dresses made of local or imported wax cloth; men wear dress slacks, dress shirts and imported leather shoes) and education (apart from politics and music, this is still the primary means of social status and advancement). The way they travel through the city (by foot, by taxi, or in a private car

---

<sup>5</sup>This formulation (at least implicitly) always stands in relation to the city's Other, the country (Williams 1973), a point which I will discuss in greater detail below. Fabian (1990), writing about colonial Elizabethville, argues that while ethnic-based humor was popular in this period, it was more focused on the distinction between city and country than on ethnic markers *per se*.

with chauffeur, c.f. De Certeau 1984) and the particular neighborhood they call home (people who live in the posh neighborhoods of Binza or Gombe--*la ville*--usually let this fact be known, while those from the poor areas of the city tend not to draw attention to their place of residence, ch. 9) are symbols of class status, but they are also markers of 'modernity'.<sup>6</sup> Though neighborhoods in Kinshasa today are much more organized along social than racial lines, it is still the case that living in *la ville* is the most visible marker of modern status in contemporary life in Kinshasa. The 'truly modern' are those that actually leave Kinshasa altogether, presumably to somewhere in Europe or North America (li. 'poto'), almost always with a glorious return in mind (Gandoulou 1989).

Music is everywhere in Kinshasa. It occupies a special place in the urban landscape, animating households, storefronts, taxis and bars, and dominating various kinds of local television. Despite the city's double passion for music and things 'modern', however, it is rare to hear contemporary popular music that comes from anywhere outside of the country.<sup>7</sup> When asked why this is the case, most people respond with answers about the language barrier with foreign musics, or the fact that "we grew up listening to this music; it's all we know". Given commonly held beliefs about how Africans show a uniform preference for foreign, imported goods (Geschiere and Rowlands 1996; Warnier 1993), the case of Congolese popular music is striking:

Zairean music should be an explosion, but instead it ends up being like an implosion. It's crazy. It's a music that is profoundly commercial and hyper-sellable, but it is only interested in itself (M. Gilbert, May 14, 1996).

---

<sup>6</sup>As I discuss in Chapter Two, urban zoning dating from the early colonial period separated the city into two distinct sectors, *la cité* (popular neighborhoods for Africans) and *la ville* (elite neighborhoods for Europeans). During this period, one of the main thoroughfares between African and European neighborhoods was a long, tree-lined road on which traffic was forbidden after dark. Today this road cuts through Kinshasa's elite golf and country club and serves a primarily decorative purpose.

<sup>7</sup>As I suggest in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, Congolese are clearly aware of foreign musical styles and have been for a long time, but in the public sphere of contemporary Kinshasa, non-Congolese music is rarely heard. Based on informal observations, Congolese are more likely to listen to 'Western' music in domestic spaces or Western-style restaurants. Compare with Devisch's (1995) suggestion that people in Kinshasa are more 'Western' in public than in private.

Manda Tchebwa has explained this cultural self-sufficiency in terms of an internal cultural esthetic which is somehow born of itself:

When a guitarist creates something, he doesn't refer to the outside, he refers to his own esthetic, a Zairean esthetic. He feels at home (Tchebwa, personal communication).

If Congolese listen primarily to Congolese music it is not only because of the elaborate inward-looking cultural politics of 'Mobutisme' (see Kapalanga 1987), which promoted local music by banning foreign music and through the nationalization of local industries (Young and Turner 1985), but also because the average Congolese did not have a standard of living which would permit the luxury of free will with regards to musical choice. As one informant told me, "We didn't have a record player. We had to listen to the radio."<sup>8</sup>

Thus history and politics have been such that within national borders, but especially within Kinshasa, the only 'modern' music that people listen to is their own home-grown brand of already African Afro-Cuban music, *la musique Zaïroise moderne*. Foreign tunes from the U.S. and France are sometimes heard in luxury hotels, and locally produced religious music is rapidly gaining a significant audience (ch. 3), but in Kinshasa the term *musique moderne* refers specifically and exclusively to local popular dance music. Popular music in the Congo, as much a visual as an aural experience, carries with it all the accoutrements of musical 'modernity': electric guitars, music videos, microphones, fancy cars with mobile phones, romance, flashing lights, world tours and high fashion. While I am interested in how 'foreign' commodities are used by people in Africa, this discussion is not to be taken as a rehearsal of the cargo cult phenomenon. Instead, I will discuss how people invest 'foreign' goods with entirely new meanings (Burke 1996; Norget 1996; Rowlands 1996; Vogel 1991). Congolese popular music certainly makes use of foreign objects as a part of an elaborate system of signification, but as I will argue below, this

---

<sup>8</sup>Presumably this refers to the period during which the only radio to broadcast was the state-sponsored station.

'modern exterior' is only the most visible aspect of a complex set of social processes and lived practices.

### *Winking in the Midst of Adversity*

This period, it's a period of crisis. We're stagnating. People are trying to find themselves. With the shock caused by modernism, everyone winks at the past in order to situate themselves somewhere (Ntondo 1997: 44, interview with Sam Mangwana).

In Kinshasa, most people with whom I discussed popular music were impressed but not surprised by the fact that I travelled all the way from North America to study Congolese music and society. For many people my presence simply confirmed what they already knew about their music: it is good and it is 'modern'. In fact, what they found the most surprising is that more research had not already been done about what they referred to as "the only music to have colonized the rest of Africa". The average *Kinois* is extremely knowledgeable about popular music, especially its history. In this land of a million informants, it is very common to hear stories about particular musical figures, their personal histories, pet peeves, and personality quirks (ch. 5). But one is just as likely to hear sophisticated analyses of the musical style's various 'ancestors' and how 'modern' music borrows directly from 'traditional' music or *folklore*.

Thus popular discourse on music in Kinshasa reveals important areas of local knowledge about the complex interaction between 'tradition' and 'modernity'. In discussing the articulation(s) of 'tradition' and 'modernity' in an African setting, I am tempted at first to use a model in which successive layers of modernity are superimposed upon a social body with a 'modern' exterior and a 'traditional' underneath.<sup>9</sup> But in this

---

<sup>9</sup>Devisch implies that Congolese are 'Western' in public and 'African' in private, a variation on the identity in layers theme which he attributes to mission education and cash economy (1995: 594).

model, 'modernity' resembles an oversized dreamcoat (see ch. 5) that Africans don as part of a larger strategy to prove their capacity to be 'modern'.<sup>10</sup> Certainly the other-directed presentation of self occurs in Africa as it does anywhere, but as Friedman has shown, this model is based on the Western distinction between external appearances and an essentialized internal 'self', and thus is not able to account for what he refers to as an African notion of 'life force':<sup>11</sup>

And while the borderline narcissism involved in this may have been such that the dandy was relatively bound to the 'gaze of the other' for his own well-being, this entire world of activity occurred and occurs again today in a larger universe in which appearance and being are quite distinct from one another, i.e. where there is, in principle, at least, a 'real person' beneath the surface. Such is not the case for the Congolese, where, tendentially, appearance and being are identical -- you are what you wear. Not because 'clothes make the man' but because clothes are the immediate expression of the degree of life-force possessed by a person, and life-force is everywhere and always external (Friedman 1990b: 316).

I am also skeptical about a model which argues that people say one thing (i.e. "we are modern") and *do* something different (such as the practice of witchcraft). As I will show below, people have a much more sophisticated understanding of the play between 'tradition' and 'modernity'. If the simultaneous presence of things 'modern' and things 'traditional' is viewed as something of a paradox by Western social thought, it is primarily because the Enlightenment's creation myth has made 'tradition' and 'modernity' mutually exclusive (i.e. you cannot be modern *and* practice witchcraft).<sup>12</sup>

In the Congo, modernist discourses and practices call upon and sometimes contradict the non-modern. The past is always present and people 'wink' at it in order to position themselves within a modern here and now (Geertz 1973). Without ignoring the undeniable feeling of rupture which characterizes 'modernity' in Africa and its various

---

<sup>10</sup>Jameson (1984) discusses the post-structural critique of hermeneutic models of depth, many of which assume a subjectivity based on false consciousness. See also Appadurai (1995), and Magubane's (1971) response to Mitchell (1956).

<sup>11</sup>For an earlier treatment of 'life force', especially with regards to religious practices and cosmology, see Tempels (1959). On 'life force' and power objects, see Gwete (1986) and various references in Jewsiewicki (1996).

<sup>12</sup>Fabian has referred to this process as the 'denial of coevalness' (1983), or the "refusal to think tradition and modernity as contemporary" (1998: 71).



'alibis' (Comaroffs 1993), I will draw upon recent writing which argues that the historical extension of 'modernity' has not reduced the world to sameness (Appadurai 1990; Comaroffs 1992). At the same time, however, we must be warned against the danger of using "scattered examples of the cultural flows dribbling from the 'periphery'... as a way of dismissing the 'grand narrative' of capitalism ..." (Ferguson and Gupta 1992: 19). It is precisely this inattention to global historical processes that I have attempted to avoid in my writing (ch. 2, 4, 6, 8). More precisely, I have tried to show how popular music represents one instance of actors strategically objectifying 'modernity' and 'tradition' in an attempt to come to terms with the dis-integration and alienation which characterizes life in the post-colony.

### **The Tangled Dance of Tradi-Modernity**

Modern Congolese music, like that of civilized countries from all over the globe, now takes part, thanks to the development of radio and electronics, in our everyday life; we live it every day. It has entered our social and economic lives like perfume or toothpaste. It has impregnated the rhythm of our work and leisure. We cannot do without it (Lonoh 1969: 7).

In an attempt to tease out an understanding of the ways in which 'tradition' and 'modernity' are tangled up together, I constantly found myself separating the two and then proceeding to show how they were separable only in theory. It was in listening to one of my favorite music cassettes that I found a way out of this academic predicament. Swede Swede, as I discussed in Chapter Three, were one in a long series of urban traditional groups whose music is often referred to as 'tradi-moderne', a term which accurately reflects the ambiguous nature of the hybrid style for which they have become known. Listening to the music of Swede Swede (Boketchu Premier) [audio cue 12], the listener is struck not only with the fact that the instruments on this very 'modern' sounding album are

by definition 'traditional', but also that the song structure alternates between 'traditional' *folklore* (no break between verse and chorus, call and response, etc.) and 'modern' ballad (see for example Boketchu's remake of Wendo's "Marie Louise"). For the musicians of Swede Swede this structural ambiguity (all shouts, no guitars) is not a paradox, but the music's primary selling point. It is not 'traditional modern' music or 'modern traditional' music, but 'la musique tradi-moderne' (c.f. Waterman 1997). In the following sections of this chapter, I will discuss three cultural fields which reflect a similar hybridity: male-female relations, ethnicity and notions of the self.

### *The Art of Love*

Na kende pe na poto na zonga nde Lipopo  
 Julienne azali importée ya paradis terrestre  
 Na kende pe na poto na zonga nde lipopo  
 Numéro na ngai na lingaka Julienne

I've been to Europe and back to Leopoldville  
 Julienne is imported from heaven  
 I've been to Europe and back to Leopoldville  
 The one for me is Julienne

("Julienne Importée", African Sukisa, 1968)

We do not usually associate love with Africa. Not only because it is one of those topics, along with popular culture (Fabian 1978) and emotion (Lutz & Abu-Lughod 1990), that often gets relegated to the status of epi-phenomena, but also because Africa was one of social anthropology's great laboratories for working out scientific theories of kinship, early state formation, ritual, and now development (Moore 1994). Where women were not invisible they were nothing more than signs of modernity's alterity: the rural, the ritualesque, the natural (Comaroffs 1993: xxviii). Where relations between the sexes were discussed, they were either manifestations of social exchange through marriage, or examples

of exotic sexual practices and ritual (Bryk 1939).<sup>13</sup> This left very little room for love, which from the point of view traditional social anthropology was not in itself a legitimate object of scientific inquiry.

Social anthropology has also contributed to a commonly held Western misconception of male-female relations in Africa as being mechanically based in the authority of 'tradition' and 'custom'. In an urban environment this is obviously not the case. In fact, what you see in Africa, much more so than in Western countries, is a variety of relationship forms between the sexes (van den Laar 1995). Women's roles in these relationships include the concubine, the wife, the co-wife, the arranged wife, mistresses of various types and of course, the girlfriend.<sup>14</sup> Men in 1980s Kinshasa were placed in one of three social categories: *le chic* (the young well-dressed man that you want to be seen with), *le choc* (the love of your life, your true prince charming), and *le cheque* (the older and necessarily more wealthy "sugar daddy"). As I have suggested in previous chapters, an ethnographic analysis of male-female relations might look to culturally-specific ideas of reciprocity (ch. 7,9), and the importance of magic to contesting and rekindling love (ch. 9), but would also benefit from a more detailed examination of the nature of male-female relations over time, and how these relations are influenced by changes in economics, politics and demography (ch. 3).

Understanding the nature and history of gender relations in an urban context is extremely important for the topic I have addressed in this thesis. In urban African contexts, especially that of Kinshasa, men and women are brought together and torn apart in ways that make life in the city a place of wonder and charm, but also a place of politicized sexual tension. Nowhere is this more evident than in popular music. An examination of the lyrics

---

<sup>13</sup>This brief overview does not account for work which has been done on interpersonal relations in African marriage, here I am thinking particularly of the rich ethnographic analyses of Meyer Fortes (1949), and E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1974), but also Fabian (1978; 1979) and Parkin (1987). There have also been several studies of love and passion in African society, although they are relatively obscure in anthropological circles: Jankowiak (1995), Little (1973), and van der Laan (1995).

<sup>14</sup>The numerous categories of women described by Comhaire-Sylvain (1968) are telling: *concubine*, *prostituées régulières*, *prostituées clandestine*, *prostituées occasionnelles*, *femmes libres*, *femmes faciles*. La Fontaine (1974) adds two more social categories: *femmes libres sérieuses* and *vedettes*.

of popular songs (ch. 9) shows how women are both glorified as objects of beauty and denigrated as licentious and opportunistic (Gondola 1997; Onyumbwe 1982; Tchebwa 1996). Men's symbolic authority comes from their ability to distinguish between the two. Male charm and the ability to seduce through song is an expression of urban sophistication, a manifestation of Balandier's "passion moderniste" (1966), in which men compete for status as the most 'romantic' or the most 'séducteur'. As I will argue below, much of the discussion about women is primarily of interest for what it reveals about men.

One thing that is clear about modern life in Kinshasa, even without access to the music, is that love matters a great deal. Of course it is not always just love (ch. 9), since love comes in many forms, and since there are many examples of how the idiom of male-female relations is used to cover up political protest and disillusion with authoritarian rule (Fabian 1998; Jewsiewicki 1995; Mbala-Nkanga 1997). In Chapter Three I relate this fixation on matters of the heart to the demographics of male-female relations during the colonial period, and elsewhere I have argued that this phenomenon can also be seen as a form of popular response to powerlessness in a setting of extreme authoritarian rule (White 1997). Certainly a fixation on love and sex can be perceived as something subversive, since both are centered on personal gratification at the expense of the interests of the group.<sup>15</sup> Musicians in Kinshasa prefer to sing about male-female relations partly because they are concerned about holding on to a fan base which they believe would turn its back on music with politically engaged lyrics, but also because they feel that lyrics with political overtones may have an adverse effect on their ability to attract and maintain various kinds of desperately needed patron-based support (ibid).

Apart from these material and objective explanations for the prevalence of lyrics about love in popular Congolese music, I also want to argue that expressions of romantic

---

<sup>15</sup>Lila Abu-Lughod (1990) has written about how Bedouin love poetry reflects changes not only in local level micropolitics but also in national and international political struggles. In these various settings, love poetry, which is increasingly distributed on cassette, threatens elders' control and authority over sexuality and marriage among youth.

love are an integral part of a discourse of being 'évolué' or 'modern'.<sup>16</sup> This observation would not seem surprising to someone familiar with early Congolese *rumba*, which is best-known for singing the praises of female beauty, charm, and elegance (ch. 9). Jean Serge Essous, one of the founding members of Franco's O.K. Jazz once told me the story of one of his schoolmates who was renowned for his 'cahier de parole' (a notebook of song lyrics). Essous explained that during the colonial period, having a personal collection of song lyrics was one way of "being modern" ('évolué'):

[We used to do] serenades for girls; it was a very romantic time. We wrote letters and poetry for our girls, those were the days. Now young people don't care at all. We used to go with our cravates and whisper in our girl's ear. This is how we used to have fun, by professing our love. And the best poetry came from songs (Essous, Sept. 7, 1995).

Several people explained to me that this emphasis on love and romance was a unique aspect of popular music and was directly related to life in the city. "In the village people never sang about women", one informant explained to me. "It wasn't until people arrived to the city that they realized the woman was a precious thing." Fascinated by this observation, I began to ask other informants, especially musicians from urban traditional groups, if they knew any examples of 'traditional' songs about love or which glorified the beauty of women. Each of the musicians I asked knew several songs in this category. The best example is the story of a young man who sees a beautiful young woman from another village and wonders how he might find the money to marry her:

I saw a young girl walking the other day  
Her rear was round like the bowl on her head  
And her breasts had not yet been suckled  
She was so beautiful, I want to marry her  
How can I find the money to marry her?

(Orchestre Onkok, traditional love song from the Bandundu region)

---

<sup>16</sup>And not only among Congolese, as this passage from George Simmel shows: "If we move further down the scale of development we find that certain insects produce a sound that consists of one and the same sharp, rhythmically repeated note in order to enchant the female; in contrast, the more highly developed birds produce love songs whose rhythm is quite subservient to the melody (1990 [1900]: 487).

Obviously, romantic love was not a creation of the modern city (see Balandier 1968: 230). Despite the fact that male accounts of popular music in Kinshasa go to great lengths to prove the important role that women have played as a source of inspiration for male musicians, I want to argue that male statements about women are in fact statements about men. Describing a musician from the 1950s, Tchebwa writes:

Bukasa reveals himself as a platonic admirer of the Congolese woman (*Clara Badimwene, Louise Mungambule*...[titles of songs inspired by women]) that he places carefully on the pedestal of Venus. *Kitambala*, written in 1955 is one of his seductive works that magnifies feminine beauty in its multiple meanings...it is hard to find an artist more capable of magnifying woman with so much poetry and dream in his song (Tchebwa 1996: 77).

This passage is very revealing. Men are manly insofar as they are able to illuminate or activate female beauty. The real man is he who is able to identify the beauty which lies latent in every woman (à la Valentino, Don Juan, Hugh Hefner, etc.). It often appears that men are actually singing not to women, but to each other, in order to impress each other with their skills as a lover and a connoisseur of female beauty. Another passage draws from more standard ideas of male charm and virility. Note the attention given to the 'guitar' in this passage:

...when from the most popular bars in the city, he [Franco] pinches his guitar, numerous young women shake their multi-colored wraparound in his direction as a form of homage and gratify him with looks capable of derailing a full-speed locomotive (Kande in Lonoh in Tchebwa 1996: 113).

The attempt to attract female attention is certainly not unique to the Congo, but particular strategies do seem to vary somewhat across cultures. Congolese male singers are praised for their vocal sensibility and men often sing in high soprano or falsetto registers. Songwriters show their prowess through the art of seductive lyrics, and musicians in general are often said to be extremely sexually active and thus exceptionally

good judges of female beauty. This is not an esthetic of rugged Marlboro manliness, but one of sophistication, charm, and an appreciation of romance and seduction as high arts (Tchebwa's "l'art d'aimer"). Thus musicians are liminal socially (ch. 5), but also sexually [compare figures 5.0 and 9.2]. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the peculiar male practice of singing from the woman's perspective (see ch. 5.9). Answers to my questions about this practice were consistently thin. Some musicians said: "I do that because women like it" or "Women can identify with songs like that". Others had not even noticed this pattern and were not able to comment on it at all. The silence and discomfort with my questions on this matter suggest something deeper. Perhaps singing from the point of view of a woman is a male attempt to appropriate female power and identity (ch. 3), a proposition which would be consistent with the musician's role as a socially and sexually liminal (ch. 5).

### *Urban Ethnicity*

Contrary to the stamp given to it by certain commentators, art in African cities has gradually evolved as people have attained a new social status, an urban way of thinking. This gives art an urban quality and predisposes it to all the transformations of the world of the city. Artists embrace modern things and distinguish themselves through a modernist spirit, one which is both superficial and eminently open to new influences (Lonoh 1969: 8).

Sakombi Inongo, a long-time Mobutu ally and well-known journalist and popular historian of the city of Kinshasa once referred to Zaire's largest city as the "melting pot in which Zaire's modernity was forged" (in Tchebwa 1996: 55). The use of this metaphor is interesting as it not only suggests a relationship between modernity and loss of ethnic identity, but at the same time aligns itself with the American historical model of multiculturalism, one which is taken by many Congolese to be the ultimate expression of cultural and political modernism. In this section I am primarily concerned with how

popular music reflects a particular discourse of 'modernity' which rejects conventional ethnic labels in favor of a cosmopolitan urban identity.<sup>17</sup> In the context of Kinshasa, this urban identity is so pronounced that in some situations it actually takes on the status of a separate ethnic category.

As a student of Africanists who had chosen relatively clearly defined ethnic groups as subjects of their research, I think I felt some degree of pressure to 'have a people' to study when I left for the field. I tried to locate the particular roots of the ubiquitous Zairean dance rhythm. Whenever I gathered information about particular musicians I always asked about their ethnic background, hoping to identify some pattern. But some time went by and I still had not identified the elusive ethnic group that was to be 'credited' with the success of modern Zairean dance music. Then one day, when I was chatting with a friend in a local bar (the best place to do research), he began to tell me about his family and how when they first arrived to Kinshasa from Lower Zaire in 1950, they would constantly tell people that they were "Kinois" ('from Kinshasa'). My friend:

I don't know why, but people who live in Kinshasa for more than one generation, you can't tell what region they originally came from. They all speak with the same accent, they all speak 'Kinois'. It's the same way with music, he explained. I don't know why, but Zairean music is actually Kinshasa music, I don't know why (Paul, Feb. 23, 1996).

These comments express a feeling of wonder at Kinshasa's uncanny ability to erase or cover up ethnic identity.<sup>18</sup> In fact, it is very common to hear people in Kinshasa use the term 'kinicité' to describe the set of cultural and psychological characteristics (popular music,

---

<sup>17</sup>Abner Cohen's (1974) collection of articles is a nice overview of the issues relating to ethnicity in an urban environment, not only in Africa. Much like Mitchell (1956), Cohen views ethnicity as a "form of interaction between culture groups operating within common social contexts" (1974: xi). As I discussed in Chapter Two, ethnicity can also be a means for the extension of state control (c.f. Tsing 1993). My reading of urban identity in the form of 'kinicité' (ch. 2.9) has also been influenced by the work of Ulf Hannerz on cities (1980) and process of cultural creolization within urban spaces (1987).

<sup>18</sup>Devisch refers to the "the almost obsessive desire to erase every trace of being rooted in the originary space, the natal village" (1995: 601). Likewise, Fabian (1998) claims to have found very few traces of ethnicity in his ongoing research on Congolese popular painting. See also Braeckman (1995) who speaks of Mobutu's 'anti-ethnicity machine'.



debrouillardisme, appreciation of fine clothes, beer and amorous relations, etc.) which typify modern life in Kinshasa. When popular songs are sung in languages other than Lingala, the intention is to celebrate not ethnicity, but ethnic diversity (Fabian 1998: 75).

It was only through the building of close personal relationships that I found people more willing to talk about their mother tongue or the village where they were born (the village being synonymous with 'tradition' and thus antithetical to 'modern' life in the city). I also began to realize that despite most people's negative responses to my questions, there are in fact certain neighborhoods in Kinshasa which have concentrations of particular ethnic groups. And my experience as a member of a local dance band made it clear that I had actually been learning linguistic terms and musical rhythms that were specific to a particular area of Lower Zaire. Furthermore, I discovered that the majority of the bandmembers, including the bandleader and star, were all members of the same ethnic group, the Bantandu, located in and around the town of Kisantu.<sup>19</sup> There was ethnicity all around me, but the expression of ethnic identity was used sparingly and in some sense strategically (Galaty 1982; B. Williams 1991), and despite my efforts, I was completely unaware of it well into my fieldwork. From my notes:

Why doesn't this music have a culture? Its not a genre like 'zouk' or 'reggae', it's just 'Zairean music'. When you watch videos what you see is a bunch of people dressed up in really nice clothes, dancing in front of gardens and luxury hotels and cars. When you look closely, it's gutsy to be modern. The exterior is modern, it all takes place in the city. The video itself is an expression of modernity. These people are so 'modern'! I guess that's what I wanted to write about, but I'm feeling a bit lost (February 19, 1996).

---

<sup>19</sup>I was told by a number of informants that this was also the case with Franco's O.K. Jazz. Seventeen of his twenty-five musicians in the 1980s were from Lower Zaire. While ethnic clustering seems to be common (Super Choc, Nouvelle Image, and others) it is not always the case, take for example Wenge BCBG or Koffi Olomide's Quartier Latin which are more homogeneous. Compare this with Fabian's observation that "The economics of popular music alone, the market for its commodified products and the patterns of consumption, preclude ethnicity from becoming a determinant of this form of popular culture" (1998: 74).

As I think back on my original research proposal which was mostly concerned with cultural commodities, brokers and the processes through which ethnicity is picked up and altered for sale on the market, I am amazed at the progression that my research has taken. In fact, what I have observed in Congolese popular music -- and perhaps in Congolese culture more generally -- is a series of subtle gestures which cover up conventional representations of ethnic identity, drawing attention instead to everything that is 'unethnic', or 'anethnic', or as Waterman (1997) has suggested, 'pan-ethnic' (see also Leblanc 1997).<sup>20</sup> Maybe this is part of why Congolese music has been so hugely successful in the rest of Africa, but only seemed a flash in the pan in mid-1980s Paris, London and New York. Even during this period, most foreigners attending Zairean music shows were people who already had some previous contact (imagined or real) with Africa and Africans. In some sense, this modernesque presentation of self can never really sell in the West on its own terms. From Benetta Jules-Rosette's research with African sculptors of tourist art:

Tourists want to have a feeling that they have actually been in Africa...[T]hey don't want to see me in a tie. That they can see in their own country. That's why they are more impressed here by the Samburu and the Masai, and also the animals. They are especially interested with the elephant and most of the animals which are not available in their country (quoted in Jules-Rosette 1994: 354).

While in some cases this mimetic function is a source of fascination for the West (Lips 1966; Stoller 1995), it is also disturbing in its proximity (Kramer 1993; Taussig 1993). Congolese popular music, as a style that expresses itself through mostly 'modern' means, does not fit in with the way the West has imagined--in Mudimbe's (1988) terms 'created'--African art. It fails to capture the "global imagination" (Erlmann 1996b) because unlike most African music it is 'inauthentic': it has changed its bongoes for jazz drums, its

---

<sup>20</sup>This is not to suggest that ethnicity in an urban setting is not important. People organize in formal and informal associations which are based in cultural or ethnic identity (rotating credit associations, cultural preservation societies, NGOs, sports teams, etc.) and rural-urban ethnic-based ties are maintained in complex ways. For recent work on rural-urban linkages and culture in an African setting, see MacGaffey (1991) and Ferguson (1992). For a discussion of ethnicity and contemporary African art, see Vogel (1991).

cora for an electric guitar, its grass skirt for Gianni Versace. For Westerners it is not an exotic daydream, but a nightmarish imitation of the West. It is Africa's appropriation of 'modernity'.

### *Anchoring the Self*

Atalaku! Tala!	Look at me! Look!
Atalaku mama! Zekete!	Look at me, mama! Zekete!
Zebola ka zebola, na	Zebola, zebola and
Zebola dance!	The zebola dance!

(Bébé and Nono Atalaku, Zaiko Langa Langa, 1982)<sup>21</sup>

One of the most common reactions I encountered to my proposed research on music was the comment that I might be wasting my time in Kinshasa since, as was repeated to me many times, "all the musicians have left the country". After only a few weeks in Kinshasa it became obvious that although indeed some of the more prominent musicians had left, the music had remained. While most musicians dream of being able to leave Kinshasa--either to take their show on the road or to benefit from better salaries and the status of living abroad--the vast majority are unable to do so. This situation became even more pronounced in the 1990s with the country's economic crisis and the post-Shengen immigration policies of the EEC. Of the musicians who have managed to leave, only those that return to Kinshasa on a regular basis have been able to maintain a

---

<sup>21</sup>This translation is a very rough approximation. As I have discussed elsewhere (ch. 3), the exact meaning of shouts such as this one is often intentionally vague and mysterious. This particular shout was the first shout that the very first *atalaku*s used upon entering the 'modern' music scene, and it was from this shout that their newly created musical position gained its name. The link between the birth of the *atalaku* and *zebola* spirit possession cults is not an imagined one. According to Ellen Corin, *zebola*-inspired music and dance was appropriated by the colonial state as a part of its public display of cultural diversity on special political occasions. A similar process occurred with urban traditional or *folklore* groups under the Mobutu regime, and it was from one of these groups that the first *atalaku* emerged as professional 'modern' musicians (Mbala-Nkanga 1997). On *zebola* spirit possession cults and the displacement of the self, see Corin (1976; 1998).

significant fan base among audiences at home. Papa Wemba is a permanent resident of France, but he invariably plays to overflowing crowds during his bi-annual two-three week tours of the Congo. Koffi Olomide, arguably Kinshasa's biggest star, maintains one residence in the wealthy Kinshasa neighborhood of Binza and an apartment in Paris, where he does most of his recording. Artists gain prestige among home audiences for living or travelling abroad, but must always keep "one foot" in Kinshasa (c.f. Erlmann 1992).

Popular discourse about stars' movement is focused on the importance of staying close to the 'source' of the Kinshasa sound (fr., 'les sources', li. 'basources'), one which is seen as emerging out of the city's particular mix of 'ambience' and post-*démocratie* crisis (Biaya 1994; Jewsiewicki 1991; Devisch 1995). Musicians who spend more than four or five years outside of the country without returning are said to be putting their careers at risk, since such a long period of time keeps them from being able to stay in touch with what is happening in the Kinshasa music scene.<sup>22</sup> In fact, it is commonly known that successful musicians living abroad return to Kinshasa in order to pick up the latest dance steps and shouts before sending their albums to market. As I discussed earlier (ch. 3, 7), dances and shouts follow a complex path to the public imagination, usually being created by urban traditional groups, picked up by young, relatively unknown modern groups, and finally validated ('borrowed') by famous artists as soon as the new material has proved popular among audiences in Kinshasa.

In this context it is easy to understand the importance that people in Kinshasa, especially musicians, give to returning there on a regular basis in order to 'replenish' at the 'source' of musical and cultural creation. Getting to Europe (or somewhere else) is important, but the return is what truly counts (Gandoulou 1989a; Rubango 1997). Many musicians release their albums in Kinshasa (even if in limited numbers) before releasing them elsewhere:

---

<sup>22</sup>Pépé Kallé, in an interview with a reporter from *Newsweek* had this to say: "People who move to Europe lose their identity...I need to stay close to the people for inspiration" (Hammer 1995: 54).

Kinshasa is like a trampoline. When someone sells a lot [of records] there, the echoes go everywhere and it helps sales abroad. People hear about it and that makes them want to buy it. Koffi can't even sell 1,000 CDs in Kinshasa. But it doesn't matter if they don't buy it there, it's Kin (J.P. Busé, personal communication, my translation).

It is not clear whether this strategy is a way of testing the product before sending it to markets elsewhere or some means of validating the music as 'authentic'.<sup>23</sup> In any case, most musicians (even those living abroad) are looking toward Kinshasa, where local audiences are said to be the most demanding of audiences anywhere in the world.

This way of speaking about Kinshasa in spatial terms as a 'source' of cultural knowledge often occurs alongside other discursive practices which use a temporal metaphor and emphasize the role of musical elders or 'ancestors':

The route taken by a younger generation of Zairian musicians in need of free expression deviated from their predecessors. Yet, although they claimed the older generation was one foot in the grave, the new generation did not entirely throw out the rumba. On the contrary, they revitalized the dance by injecting more specifically African and wider international influences (Biaya 1995: 8).

In television and press interviews, most musicians do not have to be pushed to discuss their position vis à vis their 'grands'.<sup>24</sup> In this excerpt from a recent interview, Sam Mangwana reckons his identity as a Central African and as a product of those musicians that came before him:

*Afrovision:* You are the headliner of Ngwomo Africa [African music festival held annually in Kinshasa], what state of mind are you in as the activities for the festival begin?

*Sam Mangwana:* For me it is a great joy to accept the invitation. You know, brother, I'm part of this Central African culture and in some ways we are unstoppable because we have brought so much [to African music] with our know-how. Myself, I was initiated by the big names in Zairean music: Tabu Ley put me on the right track and I always had the late Kabasele Tshamala 'Grand Kallé'; Nico I got advice from him too and especially Vicky Longomba is a singer that I like very much...Mujos, Kwamy and many others. I was taught by them and that's why I agreed to be here today (Ntongo 1997: 44).

---

<sup>23</sup>J.P. Busé has suggested that this is also a way to make some money from the album before the cassette pirates get hold of it.

<sup>24</sup>Compare with Gandoulou's (1989a) discussion of 'petits' and 'grands' among *sapeurs*.

Musicians talk about their 'spiritual ancestors' (Tchebwa 1996; see also Jewsiewicki 1991 on popular painters) not only to appease them in this life and the hereafter (Kopytoff 1971), but also because creating a sense of intimacy with the 'greats' effectively makes oneself a 'great' as well. The heritage or legacy which they have been handed is a form of inheritance, something of value to be called up and contested. In this context, history is a sign of being modern, not because it has been transcended (Dirks 1990), but because some part of it has been retained or somehow re-formulated. It is in this sense that people "anchor" themselves as individuals within a collective social past (Corin 1998).

The tension between individual and collective identity is most obvious in the process of naming. The *atalaku* cites the names of people in positions of authority, in effect soliciting symbolic support in the form of money (ch. 8) and simultaneously distinguishing himself as a 'star' (ch. 5). Musicians manage individual and group identities through a complex series of stagenames, nicknames, and group names whose meanings are rarely lost on an attentive public. Tchebwa (1996) has shown how band names reflect young musicians' desire for legitimacy and recognition, citing more than twenty young music groups which have winked at Papa Wemba by using the word 'musica' (an allusion to Wemba's now famous Viva La Musica) in their name (see ch. 8). Thus naming can be an act of personal power, but it remains ambiguous, since naming also has associations with rumor and various kinds of accusation and divination. And after people die, their names can live on to be contested. In reference to a former colleague's attempts to monopolize the memory of Franco and the legacy of O.K. Jazz, Sam Mangwana (himself one of Franco's most important side men) had this to say:

I accept that I am the heir of our elders who have passed on because I was initiated by them. But to be heir is not an exclusive right. We have the privilege to say today we are heirs of this and that because we are conscious of it. No one can claim that I am the only heir of Lwambo Makiadi Franco; the cultural heritage that Franco left us belongs to us all (Mangwana in Ntongo 1997: 45).

Musicians' comments about their predecessors clearly show that the force of the individual is rarely asserted by itself. Reddy Amisi on the subject of his bandleader Papa Wemba:

Reddy is Papa Wemba's son. Everything that I do amounts to nothing more than the work of those that have come before me in Viva La Musica. I respect Papa Wemba, my boss, as well as the values of our group. Just between you and me, Papa Wemba can't always give us everything. At our age, with the responsibility that we have, I think it's important that we be able to take care of our own needs. We can't depend on him for everything [literally 'put everything on his head']. He has his own problems to take care of. And so, it's up to us to play the game. Personally, I think that he's brought us all over: to the States, in Africa, to Japan, etc. So if you see me playing concerts in my own name, understand that this is the reason why. I will always be faithful ['fidèle'] to Papa Wemba. I am not the mastery of my destiny. Everything that I do is blessed by him (quoted in Prezio 1996: 2).

In order to make a claim about his artistic authority, the musician has to reconstitute his filiation and call upon the social-musical line from which he descends. This claim to belonging also legitimates the value of the musical secrets with which he has presumably been trusted. So what is important is not the 'influences' of the music per se, but the individual's position relative to those who are seen as gatekeepers of the music. If a musician cites the names of his 'grands', it can be seen as an attempt to assert his individuality without falling victim to the anti-social hyper-individualism of life in the 'modern' West. But even when he remains humble, he is reminded of the normative order, as in the case of the taxi driver who lectured Lofombo about not getting a 'swollen head' (ch. 5). Thus, the individual seeks to distinguish him or herself through membership in a group:

The issue is to find a new inscription within the collective order, where traditional references are both interiorized and reshaped in the context of a new personal and collective re-positioning (Corin 1998: 32).

Lienhardt (1985) has argued that individuals in Africa do not lose individual identity as members of a group, but instead view group membership as an additional source of

personal or individual power (c.f. Arens and Karp 1989). The expression of individual identity in Congolese popular music is obvious not only in the self-promoting gestures and actions of musicians (ch. 5), but also in the structure of the music itself, which leaves a large part of every song--the *seben*--for individuals to "dance however they want", as one Congolese explained it to me (see ch. 7). In this performative moral universe, the self is clearly tied to society, but not in a way which necessarily pre-determines fate over human agency (c.f. Fortes 1959). The following passage is an excerpt from an e-mail correspondence I recently received from a friend living in Kinshasa:

Kutino helps me a lot to understand. You know, the immensely popular preacher. I heard him saying, wisely, it seemed, for once: "Prayer is not enough to achieve fortune and success, nor either is plain Faith in God. No. When you ask for something, you have also to work and help it happen..."

"That's good" I thought, for Kutino is famed for having said: "What is a Ssangyung, or a Mercedes, for God, who gave us the Holy Spirit...to give us a Mercedes, for God, is nothing." To please us, we expect him to say what you and I do believe: "Trust in God... but tie your horse." To believe in God almighty is not quite good enough. Tie your horse too, if you want it to be there in the morning. We all have to work, or act at least, to gain what we hope for...

You do know enough to recognise magic: Represent what should happen, trust God's infinite power, and go ahead. It works. It's future's recipe. How better be modern than through the mighty power of religion and magic. During the gatherings of some charismatic congregations, seers will enter in a trance, and use imaginary portable phones to speak to distant spirits, or get guidance from a leader who travelled abroad. Modernity...? Modernism...? (John Grinling, May 15, 1998).<sup>25</sup>

My answer to the questions at the end of this passage are 'yes' and 'yes'. People in Kinshasa use all the means at their disposal to make the best of a very difficult world, one which is driven not only by the need to eat, but also by the desire to 'be someone'. Through various modernist objects and gestures (the evangelical cellular phone, the Mercedes, the *marakas*), people are attempting to take hold of a 'modernity' which is

---

<sup>25</sup>In the appendix ("Tie Your Horse") I have included this email correspondence in its entirety. I hope that Grinling's observations will give some support to my discussion of the self (especially as it relates to the question of agency), but I also see his email an example of how my thinking on these issues has been conducted over large spaces and time periods and how, in many cases, academic insight is the result of shared experience.



everywhere present yet forever out of their reach (DeBoeck 1998b). In the following section, I will discuss how local conceptions of 'tradition' and 'modernity', are operationalized or 'put to use' for everyday (and sometimes not so everyday) forms of political and social action.

### 'Tradition' and 'Modernity' Objectified

In 1964, Franco's O.K. Jazz recorded what seems to be the definitive guide to being 'modern' in what was then Léopoldville [audio cue 13]. The column on the right is made up of responses to the singer's calls in the column on the left:

(Spoken)

Camarade, ça va?	<i>Moi pas savoir camarade.</i>
Anh? Tu comprends français?	<i>Moi pas connais français, tu le connais?</i>
Oyebi Lingala?	<i>Moi te pas yebi te Lingala te.</i>
Allez, on va prendre un verre...	<i>Moi bois pas, tu bois beaucoup?</i>

(laughs and music starts:)

Ah ah Léopoldville	<i>Moi comprend pas français</i>
Ah ah Brazzaville	<i>Moi comprend pas français</i>
Ah ah Ilondo?	<i>Moi parler pas lingala</i>
Ah ah Vis-à-Vis	<i>Moi comprend pas lingala</i>
Tu bois beaucoup eh	<i>Tu bois beaucoup</i>
Tu bois beaucoup eh	<i>Tu bois beaucoup</i>
Tu comprend français?	<i>Moi pas comprend français</i>
Oyebi lingala?	<i>Na yebi te</i>
Nayebi te o	<i>Na yebi te</i>
Lingala te o	<i>Lingala te</i>

("Tu Bois Beaucoup", O.K. Jazz, 1964)<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup>Novice speakers of Lingala such as myself are encouraged to insert French words where they do not know the words in Lingala. On occasions when I did the reverse (using Lingala words in French), the response invariably was one of unexpected surprise and pleasure. An English translation of this song would look something like this:

Hi friend, how are you?

Me not know friend

This text is interesting not only for the way it props itself up through the parody of what it perceives as rural backwardness (Ferguson 1994; Hannerz 1990; Jackson and Karp 1990; Williams 1973), but more specifically for the way it sees knowledge as a marker of being 'modern'. This 'camarade' knows nothing, not French, Lingala, the city of Brazzaville or Leopoldville, he does not even know how to drink ('tu bois beaucoup'). He is drunk with the wonders of the city, and he serves as a foil to the 'vrai Kinois', who is knowledgeable and elegant (ch. 2, 9, and above). It is in this sense that 'modernity' is objectified and activated as a social strategy. The examples I discuss below will show how the same can happen with 'tradition' and not only for social, but also political ends.

### *Modern Things Come in Twos*

Zaiko is unique, the traditional influence is there but it's minimal, it's subtle. It's the *atalaku*, it's the rhythm (M. Augustin, May 14, 1996).

The chauffeur is weird. It's both the most modern part (dance part is what sells soukouss, electric) and the most traditional. It's so damn good because of the shouts and the buttshaking and the incessant please-don't-ever-stop rhythm (fieldnotes, Dec. 9, 1995).

---

Oh! Do you understand French?	I don't know French, do you know him?
Do you know Lingala?	Me not know Lingala not
Come on, let's have a drink	Me not drink, you drink lot?
Ah ah Léopoldville	I no understand French
Ah ah Brazzaville	I no understand French
Ah ah Ilondo?	I no speak Lingala
Ah ah Vis-à-Vis [local bar]	I no understand Lingala
You drink a lot	You drink a lot
You drink a lot	You drink a lot
Do you understand French?	I no understand French
Do you know Lingala?	No I don't
No I don't	No I don't
Not Lingala	Not Lingala

With the formation of the youth supergroup Zaiko Langa Langa in 1969, the Zairean New Wave rushed in and it was not long before the leaders of the second generation began to feel threatened (ch. 3). According to Nyoka Longo, one of the founding members of Zaiko, they believed that the only way to break the steel grip of the second generation on the local music scene was to create something completely new, something that would be different from either *fiesta* ('modernist') or *ondemba* ('traditionalist'), the two main 'schools' or 'styles' which dominated the music scene for most of the 1960s. Thus they attempted to combine the two-school esthetic into one (Nyoka Longo, May 14, 1996). Zaiko's integration of the two schools would occur gradually over time, so gradually in fact that very few members of the group today are able to explain the transformation themselves. And it would occur in a number of different ways, each time keeping intact a basic dual form by drawing from the esthetics of 'traditional' performance to make something new. The examples I give below will show how this hybridity became systematized in musical esthetics and structure.

The most important stylistic innovation associated with Zaiko is the development of a unique two-part song structure which was only hinted at by previous generations. As I discussed in Chapter Three, much of the popular dance music before 1970 allowed some space for singing and some for dancing.<sup>27</sup> Song formats wedged an intensified dance section (*seben*) in between choruses before returning to the words to end the song. Musicians of the new generation, however, began to experiment with song structure in order to have more time to perform the choreographed dance steps which had become such an important part of their stage show. The extended dance section at the end of each song (*seben*) is often compared to the performance of 'traditional' music, in which particular songs go on for long periods of time and are accompanied by continuous dancing, singing and shouting. This new two-part song structure suggests a clear separation between

---

<sup>27</sup>The two-part song structure also corresponded to two kinds of dancing (partnered and solo). To combine these two parts in the same song is a striking example of re-indigenization (ch. 3).

*words* and *dance*, but clearly the two parts cannot be easily separated, since in many cases the actual tempo of the song never changes, and some musicians even insert several *mini-seben* during the words section in order to heighten the suspense of the transition.

The particular rhythm that emerged at the same time as this two-part song structure was also a product of the Zaiko milieu. The *cavacha* rhythm was pioneered by Zaiko in the early 1970s (ch. 3) and is still (with certain variations) the only rhythm that is used to accompany the dance section of almost every 'modern' song that is produced and performed in Kinshasa today.<sup>28</sup> It is not clear if the *cavacha* rhythm was inspired by the churning, rhythmic sound of a railroad engine (as the lead singers of the band claim) or by one of Kinshasa's many urban traditional musical ensembles (as the band's drummer claims). But regardless of whose story is closest to the truth, it is interesting to note that one account is inspired by 'modernity' (i.e. the train, c.f. 1996a), and the other by 'tradition'.<sup>29</sup> In both cases, the story tells just as much about the resourcefulness of the person who had the idea as it does about the origin of the rhythm.

The final innovation with which Zaiko is credited I consider to be the most fascinating, not only because the creation of this new category of musician draws so clearly from various sources, but also because it was in this capacity, as an *atalaku*, that I became socialized as a Congolese musician. When the first musicians were recruited from an urban traditional band to perform on stage with Zaiko Langa Langa (White 1998b), they were hired to play their special brand of spraycan maracas, but also to shout the short, rhythmic, sometimes rhyming phrases that were used by urban traditional groups during their performances at important life-cycle events such as weddings and funerals.

Following the popularity of their first shout ("Atalaku mama!"), these hybrid musicians were given the name *atalaku*, and over time the term became used to describe

---

<sup>28</sup>For early recorded examples of this rhythm, listen to the 1973 Zaiko recordings, "Eluzam", "Beya Mbeya", and "Amoureux Decu".

<sup>29</sup>Wendo Kolosoy, considered by many to be the grandfather of modern Congolese music claims that the engines of the steamboats he worked on inspired him rhythmically as well (Popovitch).

this brand new, in some sense very old category of musician. Although *atalaku* were mostly recruited from urban traditional groups, many musicians explain that the practice of shouting over music was also influenced by the shouts and stagershow of the African-American soul hero, James Brown. Singers from Zaïko explained to me that not only did the *atalaku*'s shouts and dance steps attract a larger (and considerably younger) audience, but his presence also gave the singers the ability to leave the microphone during the *seben* and devote all of their energy to the complex choreographed dance steps which came to embody the particular expression of exhibition and 'vertige' associated with Kinshasa's rapidly growing youth culture (Nkashama 1979). Thus the *atalaku*, now a necessary part of every self-respecting Congolese dance band, fuses 'traditional' and 'modern' music, taking cues from *folklore* as well as African-American soul.<sup>30</sup>

### *Magic and Modernity's Incompleteness*

What do we see? The state of being "between-two-cultures" continues. We do not oppose it. But the spectre of Europeanization haunts us. On the other hand, it is not a question of wearing yesterday's treebark or using the poorly smithed brass spear against the West's atomic bomb; the universal carries us along with it (Mavunza in Lonoh 1969: 90).

Anthropology has certainly played an important role in reinforcing the idea that witchcraft in its various forms (magic, sorcery, spirit possession, etc.) is a defining characteristic of social structure in 'traditional' or 'primitive' societies, especially in Africa. More recent scholarship has begun to look at witchcraft as one of the contexts through which to understand Africa's particular forms of modernity and the accompanying dynamics of post-colonial cultural contradictions. Witchcraft is "called on to counter the

---

<sup>30</sup>Louise Meintjes (1994) has shown how *mbaqanga* music from South Africa has forged symbolic links with African-American soul music as an expression of its particular form of modernity through music (see also Coplan 1985). According to Meintjes, *mbaqanga*'s modernity can also be seen in the particular way that its practitioners use and celebrate new musical and recording technologies.

magic of modernity" (Comaroffs 1993: xxv), mediating the encounter with the market (Janzen 1982; Geschiere 1992) and various types of authority (Geschiere 1987; Gottlieb 1989). Ritual healing, instead of being conservative, is increasingly seen as a site of experimental practice and transformative action (Comaroffs 1993; Corin 1998; Stoller 1995) and a source of information about larger historical and political processes (Bastian 1993; Gable 1995). In previous chapters (5, 9), I have discussed the way that popular accounts of witchcraft mediate social relations in an everyday urban setting, especially with regards to music. Here I am interested in witchcraft as a sign of 'tradition' which is misleading, because its very presence (and in some situations prominence) signals the incompleteness of 'modern' beliefs about agency and causality (see Appendix III).

In Kinshasa it is generally assumed that popular musicians (especially those who are successful) make use of magic at some point or another in their career. Yet in public forums such as television or newspaper interviews, the use of magic or witchcraft is categorically denied. As I discussed in Chapter Nine, some musicians break that silence when they become members of born-again Christian churches. Surprisingly, their testimonies (fr., 'témoignages') are not focused on a denial of the power or force of witchcraft, but on their newfound commitment against its use (Ndaywel 1993). Clearly magic remains a part of the moral universe. Gable (1995), in an article on the invention of ritual tradition in Guinea-Bissau has shown not only that some people do not believe in spirits, but also that those who *do* believe in spirits have surprisingly 'modern' ideas about them (i.e. you should not deal with spirits because you cannot see them, and spirits must be held accountable for their failure to act responsibly). If Congolese popular musicians deny any involvement with witchcraft it is not because they are embarrassed by their belief in it, but because to practice witchcraft is considered anti-social, selfish and unpredictable (ch. 5).

Lyrics in popular songs refer constantly to the dangers and wonders of charms (*nkisi*) and other supernatural interventions (ch. 9). In this context music is a constant

reminder of 'modernity's' incompleteness. Magic and related beliefs in the supernatural are not opposed to a rational belief in science (Appiah 1992), rather they are seen as one of many strategies that are brought to bear on the making of 'modern' worlds (De Boeck 1996):

Naluka nganga nzambe	I can look for a priest
Alekisa ngai tubela	So he can heal me through confession
Alekisa ngai tubela	So he can heal me through confession
Nakomi kolembé libala ya téléphone	I'm tired of marriage on the telephone
Naluka nganga nkisi	I can look for a shaman
Akangela ngai mpungu	So he can fix me a talisman
Akangela ngai mpungu	So he can fix me a talisman
Nakomi nde kosuluka libala ya allo	I'm weak from long-distance love

("Bolingó ya téléphone", Los Nickelós, 1970)

Magic is important not only in explaining misfortune (Evans-Pritchard 1976), but also in explaining *good* fortune, especially others' good fortune, since success can often lead to accusations of witchcraft (Bastian 1993; Geschiere 1997). The assumption that musicians who become rich and powerful must have used witchcraft becomes particularly salient in the Mobutu years, where political careers were made just as easily as they were broken, and the arbitrariness of money and power could only be explained by tales of fortune-granting mermaids.<sup>31</sup>

In the chaotic, unpredictable world of post-colonial, post-Cold War Congo, magic becomes the only recourse that everyday people have to gain some control over their destiny. In fact, most people believe that successful politicians are to be feared because their success in politics could not have occurred without the skills of a highly talented ritual specialist (li., kik., *nganga* or fr., *fetisheur*).<sup>32</sup> *Fetish* is certainly not guaranteed to work, but in many cases it is more attractive than the standard Christian formula of faith, good

<sup>31</sup>On Mami Wata spirits in Congolese popular painting see Fabian (1978, 1996); Jewsiewicki (1991, 1993, 1995, 1996). On references to *mamiwata* figures in other parts of Africa, see Hecht & Simone (1994); Drewal (1996); Kramer (1993). See also Chapter Two.

<sup>32</sup>Stories about Mobutu's interventions abound in Kinshasa. The most well-known has to do with is early discovery of an extremely powerful *mamiwata* spirit that would accompany him throughout his military and political career.

intentions and perseverance (though see Ndaywel 1993). If it is performed by the right person, it can lead to success in politics, love, money, and music (ch. 5). Of course there is always a price: in order for the magic to be effective, it is necessary to sacrifice some part of the family or personal identity (De Boeck 1998a; Gottlieb 1989; Onyumba 1983). In macabre Faustian deals with 'modernity' (c.f. Berman 1988), individuals are said to get success 'sur crédit' (on credit), by promising to offer a sacrifice at some later date. The longer they procrastinate, the more likely they are to become seriously ill or go insane.

### *The Amazing Modernity Machine*

A fable that was touched up and modernized to evoke a marriage between Mobutu and his followers:

Ye ye ye ye Mobutu  
 Ye ye ye ye Sese  
 Ye ye ye ye MPR  
 Who can take me away from Sese?  
 That person over there can't  
 Sese has rebuilt Zaire  
 Sese protects Zaire  
 Why would I leave his side?

(quoted from Kapalanga 1989: 137)

The subtle winking gestures of popular music stand in stark contrast to the heavy-handed cultural policy in the post-colonial African state (Bayart 1993; Mbembe 1992a). Mobutu's particular brand of CIA-backed pan-Africanism was the inspired expression of high modernity which on October 27, 1971 declared a return to traditional African values ('recours à l'authenticité') as the center of its politics and the most tangible proof of its coming of age as a modern nation-state. On this day, later to become known as "Trois Z" ('the day of the three z's'), Mobutu renamed the river, the currency and the nation, and Zaire was born. The very modern (i.e. colonial) practice of (re)naming, albeit in an 'authentic' form, would be a recurring theme in Mobutu's post-colony. Cities, towns and



provinces would be given 'traditional' African names. European proper names were outlawed and Mobutu himself added a 'kilometric' series of honorifics to his own identity, bringing him increasingly closer to divine status.<sup>33</sup> At the same time that he constructed an image of Zaire as a modern nation made up of one people ('les Zairois') and more than 350 distinct ethnic groups, he also imposed non-Western 'traditional' dress and 'authentic' political models which used the metaphor of the family to legitimate their authority (Schatzberg 1993).<sup>34</sup> This amazing "anti-ethnicity machine" (Braeckman 1995) used mythologized notions of 'traditional' culture to hide an ethnic-based system of rule which was obvious even to the most politically naive.

The sphere of cultural production during these years was also subjected to Mobutuist 'modernism'.<sup>35</sup> In 1974 the Institut Makanda Kabobi (I.M.K.) was created in order to ensure that civil servants, the military, and the public at large were properly indoctrinated with the new official state ideology: 'Mobutisme'. The M.P.R.'s primary propaganda organ (M.O.P.A.P.) popularized the institution of 'animation politique' ('political mobilisation'), i.e. the performance of political rallies centered around music, dance and theater whose form retained the esthetics of folklore but whose content sang the unconditional praises of the one-party state. But 'modern' Zairean music was also co-opted by the state. The political praisesinging of the classical *rumba* period would evolve into a particular brand of commercialized praisesinging, of which the primary figure was Mobutu's

---

<sup>33</sup>Mobutu's post-authenticity name (Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga, roughly translated 'he who leaves fire in his path and instills fear in the hearts of men') was often complemented with various political titles such as 'Tata Moko', 'Président-Fondateur', 'Papa Mukonzi', 'Général' and later 'Maréchal'. Musicians naming practices also combine the 'traditional' practice of multiple naming with particular names that seem to mark modern status (ch. 5). Gilles Bibeau's exegetical reading of Mobutu's names--which draws from personal knowledge of the language spoken in Mobutu's home region--differs significantly from the common popular translation (given above). Bibeau has also suggested that Mobutu chose his name in consultation with various ritual specialists from this region.

<sup>34</sup>M.P.R. policy required all members of the party and civil servants to shed western suits and ties in favor of the Mao-inspired 'abacoste' leisure suit uniform ('abacoste', short for "à bas le costume" or 'down with [Western] suits'). At one point pants were also outlawed for women.

<sup>35</sup>Ellen Corin has suggested that Mobutu's 'animation politique', which often included large-scale choreographed dance sequences and formulaic call and response 'shouts' most likely influenced the dancing and shouting of modern dance music (personal communication). This view is echoed in Mbala-Nkanga's (1997) discussion of Bana Odeon, a group which was heavily influenced by the authenticity politics of the time, and in Pwono's (1992) discussion of popular musicians and politics.

son Kongolo, otherwise known as 'Saddam Hussein' (ch. 8). Thus all of 'tradition' and 'modernity' was contained in Mobutu's macabre cultural politics and personalistic rule. Commercial cultural production and mass media combined with the traditional esthetics of praisesinging to give this modernity a disturbing, albeit distinctive, local flavor.

Mobutu's authenticity campaign was so effective for so many years partly because of the way that it carefully manipulated popular opinion. It rested on an anti-colonial, anti-modern platform that for many Congolese made perfect sense, given the public contempt which was building against the colonial regime in the period leading up to independence. The rhetoric of authenticity in Zaire was founded on the principles of self-sufficiency, dignity, and 'traditional' cultural values (especially with regards to the indivisibility of chiefly power). Despite the fact that Mobutu spoke out strongly against the forces of foreign investment and neo-colonialism ("Notre Ami Mobutu", 1992), he was clearly supported by foreign governments (primarily the U.S.) who saw him as an important ally in the fight against the advance of communism in the region (what could be more 'modern'!). Mobutu's Zaire was a strange mixture of 'tradition' and 'modernity', a 'tradi-moderne' nation-state which he consolidated through dancing bodies, pounding drums and the never-ending call to obedience, "Salongo, alinga mosala" [audio cue 14].<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup>'Salongo, he likes to work'. The *chanson fetish* of Mobutu's authenticity campaign, this song was sung every Saturday morning when the entire population of Kinshasa was expected to leave their homes and work together to clean the public areas and streets of the capital. Despite the authoritarian nature of Mobutu's rule during this period, public works such as these and Mobutu's anti-colonial stance were for many people signs of Mobutu's commitment to the nation: "We had our own neighborhood dance troupe and every time we played we got free drinks. I felt like I really adored the chef; I was very happy to sing Mobutu" (Damien Dimonekene, March 21, 1996). See also White and Busé (1997).

## Modernity's Spiral

La chanson [Congolaise] évolue en spirales, à la manière d'un conglomérat de clauses elliptiques.<sup>37</sup>

(Nkashama 1992: 481)

'Modernity' and its various 'instrument-effects' (capitalism, colonialism, Christianity) have figured prominently in the literature on Africa.<sup>38</sup> The studies of the Manchester school (see ch. 2) were the first attempts to critically analyze the effects of the 'modern' urban lifestyle on 'detribalized' African populations. These writings did not go uncriticized (see Magubane 1971), however, and for good reasons they remain among those most closely associated with the colonialism (Asad 1970). Marxist formulations of the 'modern condition' introduced the concepts of 'dependency' and 'underdevelopment' (Rodney 1974) and later the idea that different modes of production overlap or 'articulate' in historically and culturally specific ways (Godelier 1977). The potentially very fruitful concept of articulation was obscured not only in the 'labored' discussions of modes of production, but also in a conception of cultural and political flows as fundamentally uni-directional and homogenizing (Hannerz 1987). Although they can be accused of reifying the categories of 'traditional' and 'modern' forms of exchange, the first attempts to explore indigenous responses to capitalist development (e.g. Taussig 1980) laid important groundwork for studies that would examine 'modernity' through the lens of locally shaped institutions such as Christianity (Comaroff 1985), exchange (Hutchinson 1997; Shipton 1988) informal sector trade (De Boeck 1998b) and the market (Geschiere 1992).

Increasingly we are becoming aware of the wide range of possible responses to the historical 'advance' of modernity. In a discussion of post-modern religiosity among the Luunda of southwestern Congo, DeBoeck (1998a) has described how some groups--even within the same society--tend to withdraw from modern life while others engage in a

---

<sup>37</sup>'[Congolese] song evolves in spirales, in the same way as a conglomerate of elliptical conclusions.'

<sup>38</sup>Here I am drawing from Ferguson's (1994) discussion of Foucault on instrument-effects.

symbolic, hyper-embrace of the 'modern'. What these two positions have in common, he argued, is the denial of the present, but this denial does not necessarily constitute a form of 'resistance' (see Coda). Instead of talking about paradigms of resistance, he argues, we should be concerned with paradigms of resilience (DeBoeck 1996). Jewsiewicki (1991) has argued that popular painting in former Zaire is not an example of resistance to 'modernity', but an attempt to take control of it, and Stoller shows how mimesis in various forms of cultural expression can be seen as attempts to appropriate the power of the colonizer (1995: 85). One imitates something in an attempt to master it (Lips 1937; Taussig 1993), much in the same way that Congolese artists during the colonial period used foreign technology and cultural icons to decorate interior domestic space:

And I notice that the modern blacks have observed and reproduced on their walls, often with great ingenuity, the trains and their mysterious whistles, the river steamers and their national flags, the planes, some with one board, others with two, as the Congolese say: the bicycle that leaves on the earth an endless cord, the telephone with its Hello Hello...I discover too, reproduced on the walls, elephants and wrist watches, leopards and garters, pairs of scissors, faucets, watering hoses, in short the thousand and one inventions that embellish a great city bazaar in Europe (Thiry quoted in Jewsiewicki 1991).

I find this idea of *mastery* (which I will discuss in greater detail in the Coda following this chapter) compelling primarily because it suggests that power is never monolithic (ch. 8). The term itself implies not a passive state of being or a reflex response, but a complex dialectic of power relations as much characterized by domination as by desire (Burke 1996). Nancy Rose Hunt (1993) has described how Africans in the eastern Belgian Congo constituted themselves and a particular 'modern' mood through the mastery of letters and dreams which were filled with bicycles, colonial uniforms and other things 'modern'. In this context 'modern' objects act as signs of power (Jules-Rosette 1994), and people appropriate these signs as a form of social distinction (Bourdieu 1984), often using various

forms of cultural and social 'play' (Appadurai 1995).<sup>39</sup> The notion of mastery appears in various forms, but everywhere it suggests a dialectical, transformative relationship with modernity:<sup>40</sup>

As such, the diamond diggers' 'taming' of diamonds and dollars is not (exclusively) related to notions or practices of resistance against 'modernity' ... Rather, 'taming' is presented here as a form or action to appropriate and transform 'modernity' ... (DeBoeck 1998b: 21).

Thus the idea of a local or indigenous version of modernity is slowly coming into focus (Appiah 1992; Miller 1994; DeBoeck 1998b).<sup>41</sup> Timothy Burke (1996) has accessed one such 'modernity' by examining the meanings attached to consumer goods (especially hygiene products) in colonial Zimbabwe. Elsewhere he has argued that rumors about commodities represent a strategy for the production of knowledge about "the relations and conditions of economic production that occur under capitalism" (Burke 1998). Michael Rowland's discussion of contemporary Cameroon suggests that an African 'modernity' is rooted in group-based forms of consumption and a particular African individualism in which consumer fantasy is "inevitably bound up with a responsibility to others" (1996: 212). A process resembling Devisch's 'villagization' does seem to be occurring in various areas of the public sphere in Kinshasa (see ch. 3 on 'reindigenization'), but unlike Devisch

---

<sup>39</sup>Also on 'play', see Corin (1998), Drewal (1992), Ellis (1993), Gates (1988), Mbembe (1992b), and Tsing (1993). The rich literature on rituals of inversion also offers important insight on this question, see Bakhtin (1984); Barber (1987) and Turner (1969).

<sup>40</sup>'Modernity' is reworked or reconfigured (Watts 1992), refashioned (*Africa* 1996), reinvented (Bayart 1994), retooled (White 1997), re-enchanting (Devisch 1996), redirected (*ibid*), re-figured (Corin 1998), personalized (Geschiere 1992), decolonized (Appadurai 1995), hijacked (*ibid*), appropriated (Falk Moore 1996; Comaroff 1985), domesticated (Geschiere and Rowlands 1996), tapped (Stoller 1995) tamed (DeBoeck 1998b) possessed (Jewsiewicki 1993) captured (*ibid*) and cannibalized (Jewsiewicki 1991).

<sup>41</sup>Miller (1995) and Breckenridge and Appadurai (1995) have used the visual metaphor of a glass prism to describe how particular cultures hold up cognitive and discursive structures to the sometimes blinding, sometimes wondrous light of modernity and how these structures refract or filter light in various unpredictable ways. This analogy is limited, however, not only because the effects of prisms are necessarily visual (and thus visible, unlike many processes of cultural change) but also because the designs that they produce are beautiful to behold, but you cannot 'do' anything with them.

I have tried to show that local understandings of this process are not based on the opposition of a 'Western modernity' and an 'African tradition'.<sup>42</sup>

I am more likely to agree with DeBoeck (1996) who, referring to his earlier research on Luunda healing practices, argues that the ability to "absorb outside forces" is a fundamental part of 'traditional' (i.e. pre-colonial) political and therapeutic practice.<sup>43</sup> DeBoeck's analysis suggests not a simplified form of religious or political syncretism, but a doubling-up or cumulative 'adding on' of strategic gestures:

On the contrary, the adopted symbols and markers referring to the regime are viewed as an alien symbolic surplus added to the traditional symbols of political authority, thereby empowering the titleholder's traditional basis of authority (1996: 86).<sup>44</sup>

Thus cultural responses to 'modernity' often take the form of strategies. In his comparative research on Hawaii and Congo-Brazzaville, Friedman (1990b) shows that cultural identity takes on different "underlying projects". For Hawaiians, cultural identity is "something that has to be re-established, and it is thus organized, as it is in the West, as a search for roots" (355). For Congolese, however, modern identity is viewed as a "reinforcement of the inflow of health and wealth from the West via 'supernatural' controls" (ibid). In both cases, cultural paradigms take on a mediating role in situations where the self and the community are both in danger.<sup>45</sup>

By suggesting that popular culture has the potential to mediate between 'tradition' and 'modernity' (e.g. my discussion of 'reindigenization' in ch. 3), I do not want to suggest that the extension of 'modernity' and its accompanying ills is not a problem.

---

<sup>42</sup>Devisch is unclear as to whether he sees Kinshasa's newly-emerging charismatic churches rejecting modernity altogether (1996: 581) or attempting to somehow divert it for their own ends (ibid: 563; see also Geschiere and Rowlands 1996).

<sup>43</sup>Compare with Bayart's notion of 'extraversion' (1993: 21) and Turner's (1969) discussion of outsiders in the performance of kinship ritual. See also Bibeau (1996) on the themes of foreigners and other outsiders in Yoruba therapeutic healing and in the writing of author Wole Soyinka.

<sup>44</sup>Compare with Jewsiewicki on esthetics in African art: "Knowledge is often attached to art objects like medicine bags are attached to a statue; they themselves are charms that confer this value onto the piece of art" (Jewsiewicki 1996: 268).

<sup>45</sup>On mediation and modernity, see Leblanc (1998) on the rise of Islamic youth associations in Côte d'Ivoire and Meintjes (1994) on tropes of 'liveness' in South African *mbaqanga* music.

Given Africa's simultaneous alienation from 'tradition' (à la Fanon) and marginalization within global history (à la Rodney), it is difficult to see the continent's present condition as anything other than an 'impasse' (Mamdani 1996) or a 'space of marginality' (Mudimbe 1988: 4). DeBoeck (1998a) offers a compelling example of what a post-modern analysis of crisis might look like, contributing to our understanding of how local and non-local forms of power are brought to bear on the rules of the global game (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1995). But in the end the question remains: How do people reconcile this precarious position in everyday worlds where life must go on? In my writing, I have tried to answer this question by looking at various forms of social practice which can be seen as attempts to come to terms with the commodification and fragmentation of post-colonial identities (Devisch 1995; Martin 1995).<sup>46</sup>

The true danger to avoid is that of mistaking the *markers* of 'modernism' for the problem of 'modernity'. A recent article by Peter Geschiere and Michael Rowlands (1996) is a good example. In the opening section of the article they call attention to the problematic nature of externally imposed Western models of thought:

Africa's problems with modernity are related to the powerful and enduring impact of Western discourse on 'development'. Despite all critiques, it still seems difficult to go beyond this unilineal vision, in which the 'modern' as something external is self-evidently opposed to a local 'tradition' (552).

The 'unilineal vision' to which they refer could just as easily describe the previous paragraph in the article, which equates 'modernity' with a desire for Western consumer goods:

Jean-Pierre Warnier's remark, in his study of entrepreneurs in west Cameroon (1993), that 'le goût des Camerounais pour tout ce qui est importé plutôt que produit localement est légendaire' is true of many if not all African countries. Achille Mbembe (1992a) forcefully demonstrates that the popular masses are as intent as the elites on participating in the consumerist rituals of new forms of wealth and power (ibid).

---

<sup>46</sup>In a recent article on memory and death in post-colonial DRC, DeBoeck implicitly refutes his earlier writing on therapeutic healing (1991) and micro-political culture (1996) which I would classify as 'integrationist' or 'anthropology with a happy ending': "It seems to me, however, that in reality a 'synthesis' is rarely reached. Instead, the syncretism encountered often offers a staggering reflection of post-colonial fragmentation rather than a solution to these manifold ruptures" (1998a: 12).

Just as an overemphasis on 'individualism' (see De Boeck 1996) obscures any effort to understand local concepts of individual-group dynamics (Moore 1996), so an uncritical notion of 'consumption' keeps us from being able to see what 'modernity' may look like in a local setting. By concentrating on local fields of cultural practice, how these fields are contested, and how they change over time, I have attempted to show that 'modernity' in an African setting is much more than a set of goods or even peoples' attempts to acquire them. But as Geschiere and Rowlands' article attests, these categories are deeply entrenched in our thinking and in the way we speak. My own attempt to distinguish between 'modernity' and 'modernism' (see Introduction) is surely victim to the same slippage. If anyone is sensitive to this entanglement, it is Congolese themselves, and the only conclusion they can draw is that the rules of the global game are not of their choosing:

We are horrified by the absolute. What we need is not Western alienation nor especially its excesses that accuse us and keep us from being recognized in a world without recognition, without scruples. What we need is neither a treebark belt around the waist, nor a wooden spear, nor "ngola" the earthen red paint smeared on by dancers, nor the traditional canoe, nor the raffia cloth in the sessions of the United Nations (of course nothing keeps us from doing so...) But we have the noble mission, the ultimate, imperial duty to conserve these things, to show them to the rest of the world, to reconfirm the black soul which is struggling with the illogical position of mediating between negro-African and Western civilizations. Euro-African cultural "combinat", until proven otherwise, only benefits the West. (Mavunza in Lonoh 1969: 90)

Popular forms of cultural expression and signification are one way that people are able to "debate the merits of modernity" (L. White 1993: 772; see also Burke 1996; Jewsiewicki 1996), and very often such formulations are grounded in subtle forms of culturally-based political critique (Hunt 1997). In the context of African music, the debate on 'modernity' often revolves around the issue of literacy:



The author has said: 'Our musicians have not benefitted from proper musical training; we should congratulate them for having come so far'. This is so true that they deserve praise and recognition. But their commercial success of today should serve as a trampoline to even greater successes; or better yet to learn to read and write music. To know the fine detail of instrumental technique and its various applications. It is only through a perfect knowledge of music that they can truly appreciate our musical heritage (Momote in Lonoh 1969: 8).

In this passage, the 'trampoline' of commercial production can lead to 'perfect knowledge', in this case knowledge of self ('heritage'). Thus 'modernity' is valued not for its own sake, but because of its ability to *activate* 'tradition' (c.f. Kanza 1972).

The knot of meaning (De Boeck 1994) which is represented by the complex structures and discourses of 'tradition' and 'modernity' is difficult to untangle. In light of the data I have presented above, what we seem to be faced with is a 'modernity' whose dynamic is driven by 'tradition', but this 'tradition' is also in motion. As it moves, it brings modernity with it, changing its position slightly, and in the process transforming them both. 'Tradition' incorporates elements from the outside, but not like a sponge, for a sponge is not selective, and after the absorbed liquid is evaporated, the sponge dries out and returns to its original dried form. The movement of the 'modernity' I have tried to describe is more like a spiral, always coming back to a tradition somewhat modified. Africa's particular historical position as bearer of the torch of tradition, as the most "other" of modernity's others, yet the most diasporically dispersed (Gilroy 1993), has made it home to a particular vision of modernity. This vision is not the *pêle-mêle* mixing of 'old' and 'new', but a careful juggling, an agonistic dance, an ongoing dialogue in which 'tradition' and 'modernity' are seen not as essential qualities, but as strategies in a world that is otherwise slowly tearing apart.

## Coda: 'Modernity' and Mastery

*Continuously under construction, being invented, is a locally formed version of how to proceed, individually and collectively. The attempt is to bring the new objects and the new rules of the political game under control.*

(Moore 1996: 588)

*One has to watch them very carefully, otherwise no song would be recognizable, they change everything!*

(The words of a Belgian missionary school teacher explaining her embarrassment for the undisciplined behavior of her Congolese students. Quoted in Comhaire-Sylvain 1950: 88)

In Alan Merriam's (1962) foundational work on anthropology and music, he outlines some of the functions of music in society:

emotional expression  
aesthetic enjoyment  
entertainment  
communication  
symbolic representation  
physical response  
enforcing conformity to social norms  
contribution to stability and continuity of culture  
contribution to the integration of society

(From Alan Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music*, 1962)

Reading down this list I am left with an empty feeling. All of the items on the list seem to make sense: music is a means of emotional expression; music is a form of symbolic representation; music contributes to the maintenance of culture. But in the end this list is a list, with all that lists imply and obscure. For Nietzsche, music is "a realm of wisdom...from which logicians are excluded" (1993), and according to Bourdieu "Music is the 'pure' art par excellence. It says nothing and has nothing to say" (1984: 19). Unlike these interpretations, my analysis shows that music does not defy sociological explanation--perhaps bringing me closer to Weber's (1958) discussion of the relationship between Western music and rationality--but that it does require specialized tools and specialized attention, especially when it attempts to study the meaning of music as a set of social practices in non-Western cultures.<sup>1</sup>

In this 'coda'<sup>2</sup>, I want to return to the question I initially posed in my introduction: given the privileged status of 'modern' music in Congo-Kinshasa, what does this

---

<sup>1</sup>"As Weber's sociology of power and bureaucracy is concerned with the irrational (repressive and anti-democratic) implications of modern rational organization, so his sociology of music is concerned with the inevitable failure of music theory to provide a coherent, and thus meaningful, account of music and the value conflict that underlies this failure. Music thereby serves to focus reflection upon the agonistic nature of human culture in general" (Edgar 1995: 86).

<sup>2</sup>A musical term referring to the brief musical conclusion at the end of a musical composition or movement.

important feature of the cultural landscape tell us about Congolese society and culture? The simple assertion that Congolese music is important in the lives of many Congolese does not explain what this 'modern' music means to those who listen to it, perform it and oppose it. Put simply, why are people coming together around popular music? Below I will discuss some of the possible answers to this question.

*Music as escape.* Joshua Hammer, a reporter for *Newsweek* who was in Kinshasa at the same time that I was conducting my field research, explained music in Kinshasa by saying that Congolese "take refuge in their music" (1995: 53). This is the most obvious and perhaps the most tempting explanation for popular dance music. But explanations of this type usually cannot account for what people are escaping from, nor the reasons why some people escape through music and others do not. Furthermore, given the recurring themes of pain and suffering in musical texts (ch. 9), does it make sense to talk about music as 'escapism'? In the context of popular music, it seems that people are not forgetting their pain and suffering, but using music as a space in which they can announce it (Barber 1987; Fabian 1978). As Camerounian ethnomusicologist Francis Bebey put it (1975), "We were taught to say that music is the art of combining sounds in a pleasant manner. For Blacks, we should say: music is the art of singing about life, whether pleasant or not."

*Music as resistance.* Abu-Lughod (1990) has written about how the human sciences' fascination with the concept of resistance has tended to obscure more detailed understandings of how power actually operates (for a good example, see Gondola 1992 or Vail and White 1991). Echoing these concerns, Mbembe (1992a) has argued that a more nuanced understanding of power and power relations, especially in post-colonial African societies, must go beyond the simplistic binary categories of domination and resistance. Frederick Cooper has observed that "What is being resisted is not necessarily clear, and 'colonialism' sometimes appears as a force whose nature and implications do not have to

be unpacked" (1994: 1532).<sup>3</sup> I disagree with Said's (1988) claim that James Scott's (1985) early work on resistance in effect 'gives away' the secrets of the weak. Much of the writing on rituals of inversion calls attention to the fact that 'ruler' and 'ruled'--as much in renaissance Europe (Bakhtin 1984) as in 'traditional' Africa (Turner 1969)--are acutely aware of the fact that they penetrate each others' worlds, and not only through ritual (Tsing 1993). In my discussion of micropolitics (ch. 8), I have attempted to show how simple models of domination and resistance fail to capture the complexity of how power is created and perpetuated at the level of inter-personal relations.

*Music as freedom.* Perhaps more interesting is some recent literature which returns to the question of freedom. Abu-Lughod (1990a) argues that through 'subversive' poetry about love, young Bedouin men find temporary freedom from controlling elders. Fabian (1998) has suggested that African popular culture in general represents the possibility of moments of "collective freedom" that are otherwise denied. Nkashama (1979; 1992) argues that the music of the Congolese *nouvelle vague* was characterized by a certain 'release' through dance, though his larger argument is more concerned with the structural elements which reproduce the feeling of 'rupture' and 'vertige' in the post-colonial subject. And Tchebwa suggests that music be seen as a form of freedom through self-defense: "La chanson est dotée ici d'un pouvoir libérateur. Elle est même considérée comme le dernier rempart, la dernière bouée de sauvetage à laquelle l'homme s'accrochera quand il aura tout détruit" (1996: backcover).<sup>4</sup> While I find these accounts much more challenging than those which focus on escapism or resistance, the data I have presented suggest that some forms of popular culture (especially those which are more commercial in nature) are characterized by as much by constraint as they are by freedom, individual or collective (esp. ch. 4, 7, and 8).<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>See also Brown (1996), Hunt (1989), Ortner (1995) and Rabinow (1986).

<sup>4</sup>'Music clearly has a liberating power. It is even considered as the last shield, a lifejacket which we grab on to when he has destroyed everything else'.

<sup>5</sup>Most discussions of freedom fail to sufficiently problematize the distinction between freedom as constraint and freedom as empowerment, or what Miller refers to as the 'freedom from' and the 'freedom to' (1994: 72), though see Fabian (1998: 20).

### *Mastering 'Modernity'*

To conclude my discussion of 'modernity' and 'modern' music in the Congo, I will take the example of a music video produced by General Defao in the first weeks of my research with his group. In this particular video clip ("Georgina"), one of the singers is wearing a designer suit and a pair of gold-plated dark sunglasses. He is holding a cellular phone and is pretending to have a conversation. The singer's pretention (invariably a source of laughter for most Western viewers) can be read in two ways. One, he is trying to make himself 'modern' through the display of technology which is an expensive luxury item and therefore a symbol of status. Two, his gesture is a form of mimicry in which he parodies the excesses of a state-based sumptuary sphere whose ostentatious wealth is dependent on the presence of multinational capital and foreign technology. I would argue that both of these readings are true. What I would add, however, is that the playfulness of such a gesture (Congolese audiences laugh too, although perhaps for different reasons) gives the individual an impression of mastery over forces which are perceived as not only distant and dangerous, but also as desirable (Appadurai 1995). But popular music is only one of the ways in which people make 'modernity' happen (see Appendix III) [figure 10.1].<sup>6</sup>

If in fact popular music enables people (non-musicians and musicians alike) to 'try on' or 'play with' 'modernity', to what extent can this mastery be considered a kind of transformation? According to some recent Africanist scholarship, mastery can be seen as a sort of transformation of self through the digestion or incorporation of the other (De Boeck

---

<sup>6</sup>This figure is a picture of Coco, the landlady of the compound where I lived and rented during my stay in Brazzaville. One day when I passed by where she was sitting, she noticed the camera I was carrying and asked me to take a picture. She asked me to wait, however, just long enough for her to put a scarf on her head and to bring the telephone out on the porch for the picture. People watching the picture being taken laughed furiously as Coco quite convincingly invented an imaginary conversation with Paris in exaggerated broken French. It did not seem to matter that she was talking to a dialtone. What was important about this moment was the way that she used the telephone to place herself vis-à-vis 'modernity'.



Fig. 10.1

fig. 10.1 Coco on the phone

1996; Geschiere 1997; Jewsiewicki 1991). Popular culture also has the potential to transform social relations and often accompanies the emergence of new forms of social consciousness and new types of sociability (Barber 1997; Burke 1996; Erlmann 1996; Fabian 1996). Unfortunately, mastery through popular culture is always incomplete and does not occur without struggle and debate; people poke holes in 'modernity' and refashion it for various local purposes [figure 10.2], but they are also left with the feeling of fighting a losing battle against the various 'pests' of 'modernity' [figure 10.3]. In the context of popular music, the idea of mastery enables us to see how certain 'modes of popular action' (Bayart 1993) respond not only to local agents of domination such as bandleaders, sponsors (ch. 8) and various state-based elites (ch. 9), but also the larger impersonal forces of global technology, capital (ch. 4) and, ultimately, 'modernity' itself (ch. 10).

Pioneer folklorist and musicologist Alan Lomax once wrote that "...the primary effect of music is to give the listener a feeling of security, for it symbolizes the place where he was born..." (quoted in Chernoff 1979). This very early formulation of music as an expression of spatial or cultural identity is confirmed to a certain extent by my discussion of popular music and identity (ch. 9,10). But I have also tried to show how personal and collective identities are not historically pre-determined. As I discussed in Chapter Nine, much of the literature about expressive culture in Africa (not only music) emphasizes the importance of how meanings are produced. Through popular music, people in Kinshasa are involved in a "struggle for the possession of the sign" (Hebdige 1979: 17), and the nature of the sign itself is what is up for debate.

At an otherwise unmemorable moment of my field research, a young man with whom my friends and I were sharing a beer, turned to me and caught me off guard with a pointed, challenging question: "Excusez, Monsieur. I would like to know what it is exactly that you find of interest in our music." I was stunned at first by his question, but after some thought it occurred to me that what I had always found the most compelling



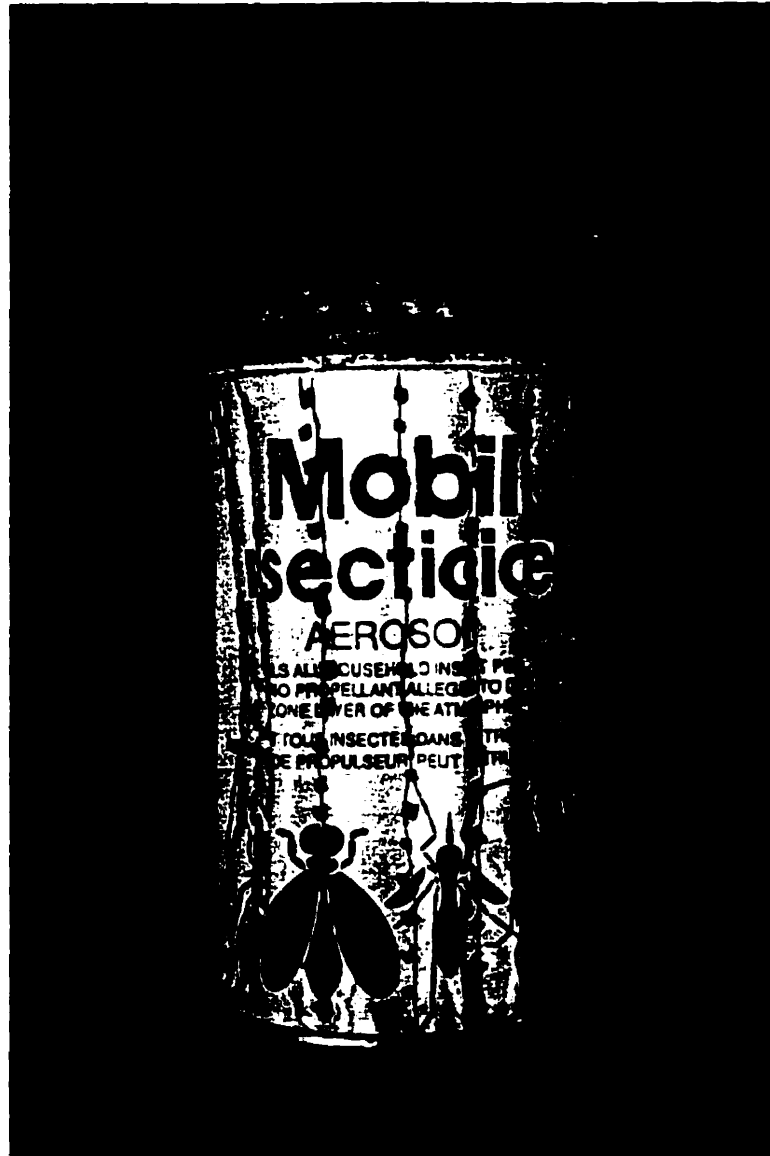


fig. 10.2 Poking holes in 'modernity'



CHERIE, TU TUES CEUX DE  
DROITE PENDANT QUE  
MOI, JE ME BATS AVEC  
LES GAUCHISTES

JE LE FAIS MON AMOUR  
J'EN AI DEJA TUE DEUX  
MAIS IL ME SEMBLE  
QU'ILS RESSUSCITENT

EN AFRIQUE, LA MALARIA TUE PLUS QUE LE SIDA. SURTOUT CHEZ LES PETITS ENFANTS. LE VIRUS DE LA MALARIA S'APPELE  
'MOUSTIQUES'. CE VIRUS SEMBLE ETRE TRES PUISSANT QUE LES BLANCS ET LES NOIRS QUI VIVENT EN AFRIQUE

fig. 10.3 'La Guerre contre les moustiques' (Samba in Jewsiewicki 1995)

about Congolese popular music--that aspect which preceded and superceded all others--  
was the feeling it evoked in me:

I explained that I had been a fan for a long time and that I was impressed to see the impact of this music in other parts of Africa. He seemed impatient with my answer and gestured for me to get to the point. I said: "Look, personally, there's something that happens to me when I hear the transition to the *seben*. There's something special in those thirty seconds of transition, something that invades you, something inexplicable, something that takes over your body and fills you with joy. That's what I like about Zairean music. That's why I keep coming back" (Nov. 23, 1995).

He thought for a minute and then nodded. "Bring us some more beer over here," he called out at the waiter. The tall, cold beer in front of me made me think he was happy with my answer, but not because it was the *right* answer. It is certainly possible that the other people around the table (and he himself) identified and agreed with my take on *la musique zairoise moderne*, but that did not seem to matter. What was important was that I had an answer. My perspective, that of a foreign observer of Congolese popular music, was only one of many. The fact that I was able to offer a comprehensible analysis of the music's effect confirmed for the people present not only that Congolese music is an object worthy of academic inquiry, but also--by virtue of its ability to transcend ethnic and racial boundaries--that their music is fundamentally and irreversibly 'modern'.

## References Cited

- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1990a. Shifting Politics in Bedouin Love Poetry. In Lila Abu-Lughod and Catherine Lutz (eds.), *Language and the Politics of Emotion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 1990b. The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power Through Bedouin Women. *American Ethnologist* vol. 17.
- Achebe, Chinua. (1990). Work and Play in Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. In *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays*. New York: Doubleday.
- Adorno, T.W. 1991. *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*. Edited with introduction by J.M. Bernstein. London: Routledge.
- Adorno, Theodor and Max Horkheimer. 1993. The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception. In Simon During (ed.), *The Cultural Studies Reader* New York: Routledge.
- Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities*. New York: Verso.
- Anstey, Roger. 1966. *King Leopold's Legacy: The Congo Under Belgian Rule 1908-1960*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Appadurai, Arjun (ed.). 1986. *The Social Life of Things*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- . 1990. Topographies of the Self: Praise and Emotion in Hindu India. In Lila Abu-Lughod and Catherine Lutz (eds.), *Language and the Politics of Emotion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 1995. Playing with Modernity: The Decolonization of Indian Cricket. In Carol A. Breckenridge (ed.), *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Appadurai, Arjun and Carol A. Breckenridge. 1995. Public Modernity in India. *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Appiah, Anthony Kwame. 1991. *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Arens, W. and Ivan Karp. 1989. *Creativity of Power: Cosmology and Action in African Societies*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Armah, Ayi Kwei. 1988. *The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born*. London: Heinemann.
- Aronson, Dan. 1980. *The City is Our Farm*. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman.
- Arnoldi, Mary Jo. 1987. Rethinking Definitions of African Traditional and Popular Arts. *African Studies Review* vol. 30 (3), September.

- Asad, Talal (ed.). 1973. *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*. London: Ithaca Press.
- Attali, Jacques. 1985. *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- Averill, Gage. 1997. *A Day for the Hunter, A Day for the Prey: Popular Music and Power in Haiti*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Bakhtin, Michael. 1984. *Rabelais and His World*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press.
- Balandier, Georges. 1966. *Ambiguous Africa: Cultures in Collision*. Translated by Helen Weaver. New York: Pantheon.
- . 1967. *Political Anthropology*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- . 1968. *Daily Life in the Kingdom of the Kongo*. Translated by Helen Weaver. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- . 1985 [1955]. *Sociologie des Brazzavilles noires*. Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques.
- Barber, Karin. 1987. Popular Arts in Africa. *African Studies Review* vol. 30 (3), September.
- . 1987a. Response. *African Studies Review* vol. 30 (3), September.
- . 1997. (ed.). *Readings in African Popular Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Barlow, Sean and Banning Eyre (with Jack Vartoogian). 1995. *Afropop! An Illustrated Guide to Contemporary African Music*. Edison, N.J.: Chartwell Books.
- Barnes, Sandra. 1986. *Patrons and Power: Creating a Political Community in Metropolitan Lagos*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Barthes, Roland. 1957. *Mythologies*. Paris: Editions du Seuil.
- . 1975. *The Pleasure of the Text*. Translated by Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Bastian, Misty. 1993. 'Bloodhounds Who Have No Friends': Witchcraft and Locality in the Nigerian Popular Press. In Jean and John Comaroff (eds.), *Modernity and Its Malcontents: Ritual Power in Postcolonial Africa*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Baudrillard, Jean. 1970. *La société de consommation: ses mythes, ses structures*. Paris: S.G.P.P.
- Bayart, Jean-François. 1993. *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*. New York: Longman Publishers.

- Bazanquiza, Rémy. 1992. La Sape et la Politique au Congo. *Journal des africanistes* 62 (1).
- Bebey, Francis. 1975 [1969]. *African Music: A People's Art*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.
- Bell, Laurie (ed.). 1987. *Good Girls, Bad Girls*. Toronto: The Women's Press.
- Bemba, Sylvain. 1984. *Cinquante ans de musique du Congo-Zaire: (1920-1907): De Paul Kamba à Tabu Ley*. Paris: Presence Africaine.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1968. *Illuminations*. Edited by Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken.
- Berliner, Paul. 1978. *The Soul of Mbira: Music and Traditions of the Shona Peoples of Zimbabwe*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bennett, Tony. 1986a. Introduction. In Tony Bennett, Colin Mercer, and Janet Woollacott (eds.) *Popular Culture and Social Relations*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- . 1986b. The Politics of 'the Popular' and Popular Culture. In Tony Bennett, Colin Mercer, and Janet Woollacott (eds.), *Popular Culture and Social Relations*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Berman, Marshall. 1988. *All That is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Bhabha, Homi. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Biaya, T.K. 1985. La 'Cuistrerie' de Mbuji Mayi (Zaire): Organisation, Fonctionnement et Idéologie d'une Bourgeoisie Africaine. *Genève-Afrique*, vol. 23 (1).
- . 1994. Mundele, Ndumba et Ambience. Le vrai "Bal blanc et bal noir(e)". In Gauthier de Villers (ed.) *Belgique/Zaire: Une histoire en quête d'avenir*. Institut Africain-CEDAF. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- . 1995. Urban Zairian Dance 1950-1990: From Sacred Performance to the Erotic Esthetics of the Nightclub. unpublished manuscript.
- . 1997a. Les paradoxes de la masculinité africaine moderne: Une histoire de violences, d'immigration et de crises. *Canadian Folklore* 19 (1).
- . 1997b. Kinshasa: Anomie, 'ambiance' et violence. In Georges Héroult and Pius Adesanmi (eds.), *Youth, Street Culture and Urban Violence in Africa*. Proceedings of the International Symposium Held in Abidjan, 5-7 May, 1997.
- . 1996. L'Etranger dans le théâtre de la guérison. *Nouvelle Revue d'Ethnopsychiatrie*, no. 29
- Blewett, Robert A. and Michael Farley. 1998. Institutional Constraints on Entrepreneurship in Kenya's Popular Music Industry. In Anita Spring and Barbara McDade (eds.), *African Entrepreneurship: Themes and Realities*. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press.

- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Social Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 1983. Vous avez dit 'populaire'? *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*. no. 46 mars.
- . 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Braeckman, Collette. 1992. *Le Dinosaur: Le Zaïre de Mobutu*. Paris: Fayard.
- Braudel, Fernand. 1979. *Civilization and Capitalism 15th-18th Century: The Wheels of Progress (Volume II)*. Paris: Librairie Armand Colin.
- Brown, Michael F. 1996. On Resisting Resistance. *American Anthropologist* 98 (4) Dec.
- Bruner, Edward. 1986. Ethnography as Narrative. In Edward M. Bruner and Victor W. Turner (eds.) *The Anthropology of Experience*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Bryk, Felix. 1939. *Dark Rapture*. New York: Walden Publication.
- Burke, Timothy. 1996. *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- . 1998. Cannibal Margarine and Reactionary Snapple: A Comparative Examination of Rumors about Commodities. Forthcoming in the *International Journal of Cultural Studies*.
- Burnett, Robert. 1996. *The Global Jukebox*. New York: Routledge.
- Camara, Sony. 1976. *Les Gens de la Parole*. Paris: Mouton & Co.
- Cawelti, John G. 1971. Notes Toward an Aesthetic of Popular Culture. *Journal of Popular Culture*. 5 (2).
- Chernoff, John Miller. 1979. *African Rhythm and African Sensibility: Aesthetics and Social Action in African Musical Idioms*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Chiwengo, Ngwarasungu. 1997. Congolese Women in Popular Fiction, TV, and Politics. Paper presented at conference: Politics, Culture and Youth in the New Congo, Ann Arbor, Michigan, Oct. 26-28.
- Clifford, James. 1988. *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- . 1994. Diasporas. *Cultural Anthropology*. vol. 9 (3).
- Cohen, David William and E.S. Atieno Odhiambo. 1989. *Siaya: The Historical Anthropology of an African Landscape*. Athens: Ohio University Press.
- . 1992. *Burying SM: The Politics of Knowledge and the Sociology of Power in Africa*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

- Comaroff, Jean. 1985. *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Comaroff, John and Jean. 1991. *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*. vol. 1. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- . 1992. *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- . 1993. Introduction. *Modernity and Its Malcontents: Ritual Power in Postcolonial Africa*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Comhaire-Sylvain, Suzanne. 1950. *Food and Leisure Among the African Youth of Leopoldville (Belgian Congo)*. Communications from the School of African Studies. Capetown, South Africa: University of Capetown.
- . 1968. *Femmes de Kinshasa: Hier et Aujourd'hui*. Paris: Mouton & Co.
- Conrath, Phillipe. 1984. "Higelin L'Africain". *Liberation*, vendredi 14 décembre.
- Cooper, Frederick. 1987. Who is the Populist? *African Studies Review* vol. 30 (3), September.
- . 1994. Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History. *American Historical Review*, December.
- Cooper, Frederick and Ann Laura Stoller. 1997. *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Coplan, David. 1985. *In Township Tonight: South Africa's Black City Music and Theater*. New York: Longman Publishers.
- Coquery-Vidrovitch, Catherine. 1993. La Ville Coloniale: 'Lieu de colonisation' et métissage culturel. *Afrique Contemporaine*, numéro spécial, 4e trimestre.
- Corin, Ellen. 1976. *Zebola: Une Psychothérapie Communautaire en Milieu Urbain*. *Psychopathologie Africaine*, XII (3).
- . 1998. Re-figuring the Person: The Dynamics of Affects and Symbols in an African Spirit Possession Cult. In Michael Lambek and Andrew Strathern (eds.) *Bodies and Persons: Comparative Perspectives from Africa and Melanesia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cosentino, Donald. 1987. Omnes Cultura Tres Partes Divisa Est? *African Studies Review* vol. 30 (3), September.
- Cramworld discs. 1998. New release of music of the Pygmies of the Ituri rainforest. Brussels.
- Crapanzano, Vincent. 1986. Hermes' Dilemma: The Masking of Subversion in Ethnographic Description. In Clifford and Marcus (eds.), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.



- Davies, Ioan. 1995. *Cultural Studies and Beyond: Fragments of Empire*. New York: Routledge.
- De Boeck, Filip. 1994. Of Trees and Kings: Politics and Metaphor Among the Aluund of Southwestern Zaire. *American Ethnologist*, 21 (3).
- . 1996. Postcolonialism, Power and Identity: Local and Global Perspectives from Zaire. In Richard Werbner and Terence Ranger (eds.), *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*. New Jersey: Zed Books.
- . 1998a. Domesticating Diamonds and Dollars: Identity, Expenditure and Sharing in Southwestern Zaire. In P. Geschiere and B. Meyer (eds.), *Globalization and Identity* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- . 1998b. Beyond the Grave: History, Memory, and Death in Postcolonial Congo/Zaire. In R. Werbner (ed.), *Memory in the Postcolony: African Anthropology and the Critique of Power*. London: Zed.
- De Certeau, Michel. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- De Heusch, Luc. 1982. *The Drunken King or the Origin of the State*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles. 1988. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* London: Athlone.
- Dembour, Marie-Bénédicte. 1992. La chicote comme symbole du colonialisme belge. *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 26 (2).
- Devisch, René. 1995. Frenzy, Violence, and Ethical Renewal in Kinshasa. *Public Culture*, 7.
- . 1996. Pillaging Jesus: Healing Churches and the Villagisation of Kinshasa. *Africa*, 66 (4).
- Diawara, Mamadou. 1994. Mande Oral Popular Culture Revisited by the Electronic Media. *Passages*, 9. Evanston: Northwestern Program in African Studies.
- Diawara, Manthia. 1992. *African Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Dirks, Nicholas. 1990. History as a Sign of the Modern. *Public Culture*, 2 (2) Spring.
- Douglas, Mary, 1966. *Purity and Danger*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Drewal, Henry John. 1996. Mami Wata Shrines: Exotica and the Construction of Self. In Mary Jo Arnoldi, Christraud M. Geary, and Kris L. Hardin (eds.), *African Material Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Dreyfus, Hubert L. and Paul Rabinow (eds.). 1983. *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

- Drewal, Margart Thompson. 1991. The State of Research on Performance in Africa. *African Studies Review*, 34(3) December.
- . 1992. *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- DuBois, W.E.B. 1994. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Gramercy Books.
- Dumon, Dirk & Jean-Pierre Jacquemin. 1989. "Maîtres des rues". Brussels: BRT-Cobra Films.
- During, Simon (ed.). 1993. *The Cultural Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge.
- Edgar, Andrew. 1995. Weber, Nietzsche and Music. In Peter R. Sedgwick (ed.), *Nietzsche: A Critical Reader*. Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell.
- Ellis, Stephen. 1989. Tuning in to Pavement Radio. *African Affairs*, 88 (352).
- . 1993. Rumor and Power in Togo. *Africa*, 63 (4).
- Engundu, Walu. 1995. Anonymous Oral Discourse: *Radio Trottoir*, Pavement Radio in Kinshasa, Zaire. Summer School Proceedings on Popular Culture. Utrecht: CERES/CNWS.
- Erlmann, Veit. 1991. *African Stars: Studies in Black South African Performance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1992. "The Past is Far and the Future is Far": Power and Performance Among Zulu Migrant Workers. *American Ethnologist* 19 (4).
- . 1996a. *Nightsong: Performance, Power and Practice in South Africa*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- . 1996b. The Aesthetics of the Global Imagination: Reflections on World Music in the 1990s. *Public Culture*, 8.
- Epstein, A.L. 1958. *Politics in an Urban African Community*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Evans-Pritchard, E.E. 1940. *The Nuer*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- . 1976. *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Ewens, Graeme. 1990. *Africa O-ye!* London: Guinness Books.
- . 1996. *Congo Colossus*. Norfolk, England: Buku Press.
- Fabian, Johannes. 1971. *Jamaa: A Charismatic Movement in Katanga*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- . 1978. Popular Culture in Africa: Findings and Conjectures. *Africa*, 48(4).

- . 1979. Man and Woman in the Teachings of the Jamaa Movement. In Benetta Jules-Rosette (ed.), *The New Religions of Africa*. Norwood, N.J.: Ablex.
- . 1983. *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- . 1986. *Language and Colonial Power: The Appropriation of Swahili in the Former Belgian Congo 1880-1938*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 1990. *Power and Performance: Ethnographic Explorations through Proverbial Wisdom and Theater in Shaba, Zaire*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- . 1996. *Remembering the Present: Painting and Popular History in Zaire*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 1998 (forthcoming). *Moments of Freedom: Anthropology and Popular Culture*. University Press of Virginia.
- Fabian, Johannes and Iona Szombati-Fabian. 1980. Folk Art from an Anthropological Perspective. In Ian M. Quimby and Scott T. Swank (eds.), *Perspectives on American Folk Art*. New York: Norton Publishers.
- Feld, Steven. 1982. *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics and Song in Kaluli Expression*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- . 1984. Sound Structure as Social Structure. *Ethnomusicology*, 28 (3).
- . 1994. From Schizophonia to Schismogenesis: On the Discourses and Commodification Practices of "World Music" and "World Beat". In Steven Feld and Charles Keil (eds.), *Music Grooves: Essays and Dialogues*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Ferguson, James. 1990a. Mobile Workers, Modernist Narratives: A Critique of the Historiography of Transition on the Zambian Copperbelt (Part One). *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 16 (3), Sept.
- . 1990b. Mobile Workers, Modernist Narratives: A Critique of the Historiography of Transition on the Zambian Copperbelt (Part Two). *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 16 (4), Dec.
- . 1992. The Country and the City on the Copperbelt. *Cultural Anthropology*, 7 (1).
- . 1994. *The Anti-Politics Machine: 'Development', Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Ferguson, J. and A. Gupta (eds.). 1992. Space, Identity and the Politics of Difference. *Cultural Anthropology*, 7 (1).
- Fernandez, James W. 1986. *Persuasions and Performance: The Play of Tropes in Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

- \_\_\_\_\_. 1991. *Beyond Metaphor: The Theory of Tropes in Anthropology*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Finnegan, Ruth. 1969. How to Do Things With Words: Performative Utterances Among the Limba of Sierra Leone. *Man* vo. 4 (4).
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1970. *Oral Literature in Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fiske, John. 1989. *Understanding Popular Culture*. Winchester, MA: Unwin Hyman.
- Fortes, Meyer. 1949. *The Web of Kinship Among the Tallensi*. Oxford University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1959. *Oedipus and Job in West African Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1973. On the Concept of the Person Among the Tallensi. In *La Notion de la Personne en Afrique Noire*, G. Dieterlen (ed.). Paris: C.N.R.S.
- Foucault, Michel. 1978. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Pantheon Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1983. The Subject and Power. Afterword in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (eds.). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Friedman, Jonathan. 1990a. The Political Economy of Elegance: An African Cult of Beauty. *Culture and History*, 7.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1990b. Being in the World: Globalization and Localization. In Mike Featherstone (ed.), *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalism, and Modernity*. London: Sage Publications.
- Friedman, Kajsa Ekholm. 1991. *Catastrophe and Creation: Transformation of an African Culture*. Philadelphia: Harwood Academic Publishers.
- Frith, Simon. 1989. *World Music, Politics and Social Change*. New York: Manchester University Press.
- Gable, Eric. 1995. The Decolonization of Consciousness: Local Skeptics and the "Will to Be Modern" in a West African Village. *American Ethnologist*, 22 (2).
- Galaty, John G. 1979. Pollution and Pastoral Antipraxis: the Issue of Maasai Inequality. *American Ethnologist* 6.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1982. Being "Maasai"; Being "People of Cattle": Ethnic Shifters in East Africa. *American Ethnologist* 9.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1983. Ceremony and Society: The Poetics of Maasai Ritual. *Man* 18(2).
- Gamson, Joshua. 1992. The Assembly Line of Greatness: Celebrity in Twentieth-Century America. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 9 (1).

- Gandoulou, Justin Daniel. 1989a. *Dandies à Bacongo: le culte de l'élégance dans la société congolaise contemporaine*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- . 1989b. *Au Coeur de la Sape: Moeurs et aventures de Congolais à Paris*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- García-Canclini, Nestor. 1985. *Transforming Modernity: Popular Culture in Mexico*. Translated by Lidia Lozano. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. 1988. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *wink*
- . 1983. *Art as a Cultural System. Local Knowledge*. Basic Books.
- Geschiere, Peter. 1997. *The Modernity of Witchcraft*. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia.
- Geschiere, Peter and Michael Rowlands. 1996. The Domestication of Modernity: Different Trajectories. *Africa*, 66(4).
- Giddens, Anthony. 1979. *Central Problems in Social Theory*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gilroy, Paul. 1993. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Ginsburg, Carlo. 1980. *The Cheese and the Worms*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Gluckman, Max. 1949. The Village Headman in British Central Africa. With Mitchell, J.C. and Barnes, J.A.. *Africa* XIX, 2 (April).
- . 1965. *Custom and Conflict in Africa*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Gondola, Ch. Didier. 1990. Kinshasa et Brazzaville: brève histoire d'un mariage séculaire. *Zaire-Afrique*, Nov-Dec 249-250.
- . 1992. Ata Ndele...et l'indépendance vint: musique, jeunes et contestation politique dans les capitales congolaises. In Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch et al (eds.), *Les Jeunes en Afrique*. Paris: Harmattan.
- . 1993. Musique moderne et identités citadines: le cas du Congo-Zaïre. *Afrique Contemporaine*, numéro spécial, 4e trimestre.
- . 1997. Popular Music, Urban Society, and Changing Gender Relations in Kinshasa, Zaire (1950-1990). In Maria Grosz-Ngaté and Omari H. Kokole (eds.), *Gendered Encounters*. New York: Routledge.
- Godard, X. 1985. Quel mode de transport pour Kinshasa? *Politique africaine* 17.

- Gottlieb, Alma. 1989. *Witches, Kings and the Sacrifice of Identity or The Power of Paradox and the Paradox of Power among the Beng of Ivory Coast*. In W. Arens and Ivan Karp (eds.), *Creativity of Power: Cosmology and Action in African Societies*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Graeber, David. 1997. *Love Magic and Political Morality in Central Madagascar*. In Nancy Rose Hunt, Tessie P. Liu, and Jean Quataert (eds.), *Gendered Colonialisms in African History*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Gramsci, Antonio. 1971. *From the Prison Notebooks*. Translated by Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Granqvist, Raoul (ed.). 1990. *Signs and Signals: Popular Culture in Africa*. Umea Studies in the Humanities. Stockholm: UMEA.
- Gregory, C.A. 1982. *Gifts and Commodities*. New York: Academic Press.
- Gudeman, Stephen. 1986. *Economics as Culture: Models and Metaphors of Livelihood*. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Guilbault, Jocelyne. 1993. *Zouk: World Music in the West Indies*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Gwete, Lema. 1986. *L'Art et le Pouvoir Dans les Sociétés Traditionnelles*. Kinshasa: Institut des Musées Nationaux du Zaïre / PNUD-UNESCO.
- Habermas, Jurgen. 1989. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Hale, Thomas. 1994. Griottes: Female Voices from West Africa. *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 25. Fall.
- Hall, Stuart. 1981. Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular'. In Raphael Samuel (ed.), *People's History and Socialist Theory*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- . 1986. Popular Culture and the State. in Tony Bennett, Colin Mercer, and Janet Woollacott (eds.) *Popular Culture and Social Relations*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- . 1993. Encoding, Decoding. In Simon During (ed.), *The Cultural Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge.
- Hall, Stuart and Paddy Whannel. 1967. *The Popular Arts*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Hammer, Joshua. 1995. A Medicine for Misery. *Newsweek*. December 11.
- Hannerz, Ulf. 1980. *Exploring the City*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- . 1987. The World in Creolization. *Africa* 57.
- . 1990. Cosmopolitans and Locals. In Mike Featherstone (ed.), *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalism, and Modernity*. London: Sage Publications.
- . 1992. *Cultural Complexity*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- \_\_\_\_\_. 1996. *Transnational Connections*. New York: Routledge.
- Hart, Keith. 1988. Kinship, Contract and Trust: The Economic Organization of Migrants in an African City Slum. In Diego Gambetta (ed.), *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations*. New York: Basil Blackwell.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1997. Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana. In Steiner and Grinker (eds.), *Perspectives on Africa*. Cambridge, MA.: Blackwell.
- Harvey, David. 1989. *The Condition of Post-Modernity*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Hebdige, Dick. 1979. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. New York: Methuen.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1993. From Culture to Hegemony. In Simon During (ed.), *The Cultural Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge.
- Hecht, David and Maliqalim Simone. 1994. *Invisible Governance: The Art of African Micropolitics*. Brooklyn: Autonomedia.
- Hobsbawm, Eric J. and Terence Ranger (eds.). 1983. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hoffman, Barber. 1985. Power, Structure, and Mande 'Jeliw'. In Conrad and Frank (eds.), *Status and Identity in West Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Hunt, Nancy Rose. 1989a. Placing African women's history and locating gender. *Social History*, vol. 14 (3) October.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1990. Domesticity and Colonialism in Belgian Africa: Usumbura's *Foyer Social*, 1946-1960. *Signs*, 15 (3).
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1991. Noise Over Camouflaged Polygamy, Colonial Morality Taxation, and a Woman-Naming Crisis in Belgian Africa. *Journal of African History*, 32.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1993. Colonial Fairy Tales and the Knife and Fork Doctrine in the Heart of Africa. In Karen Tranberg Hansen (ed.), *Colonial Encounters with Domesticity*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1994. Letter Writing, Nursing Men and Bicycles in the Belgian Congo: Notes Towards the Social Identity of a Colonial Category. In Robert Harms (ed.), *Paths Toward the Past: African Historical Essays in Honor of Jan Vansina*. Atlanta: African Studies Association Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1997. "Le bébé en brousse": European Women, African Birth Spacing, and Colonial Intervention in Breast Feeding in the Belgian Congo. In Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (eds.), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hutchinson, Sharon. 1997. The Cattle of Money and the Cattle of Girls Among the Nuer: 1930-1983. In Steiner and Grinker (eds.), *Perspectives on Africa*. Blackwell.

- Hymes, Dell. 1974. *Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Inongo, Sakombi. n.d. *Regards sur Kinshasa*. Kinshasa: Les Editions Réunies.
- Jackson, Michael and Ivan Karp. 1990. *Personhood and Agency: The Experience of Self and Other in African Cultures*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Jacquemin, Jean-Pierre (ed.). 1991. *Racisme Continent Obscur: Clichés, Stéréotypes, Phantasmes, à Propos des Noirs Dans le Royaume de Belgique*. Brussels: CEC/Le Noir du Blanc.
- Jadot, J.-M. 1946. La Colonisation belge du Congo et l'Art nègre. *Bulletin des Séances*. Bruxelles: Institut Royal Colonial Belge.
- Jameson, Frederic. 1984. Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. *New Left Review*.
- Jankowiak, William (ed.). 1995. *Romantic Passion: A Universal Experience?*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Janzen, John. 1982. *Lemba (1650-1930): A Drum of Affliction in Africa and in the New World*. New York: Garland Publishing.
- Jewsiewicki, Bogumil. 1984. Les pratiques et l'idéologie de l'ethnicité au Zaïre: quelques réflexions historiques. In Jewsiewicki (ed.), *Etat Indépendant du Congo, Congo Belge, République Démocratique du Congo, République du Zaïre?* Québec: Editions SAFI.
- . 1991. Painting in Zaire: From the Invention of the West to the Representation of Social Self. In Susan Vogel (ed). *African Explores: 20th Century African Art*. New York: Center for African Art / Munich: Presto.
- . 1996. De l'art africain et de l'esthétique: valeur d'usage, valeur d'échange. *Cahier d'Etudes africaines*, vol. 141-142, XXXVI-1-2.
- . 1992 (ed.). *Art pictural zaïrois*. Série Les Nouveaux Cahiers du CELAT, no. 3. Québec: Editions du Septentrion.
- . 1993 Cheri Samba and the Postcolonial Reinvention of Modernity. *Callaloo* 16 (4).
- . 1995 *Cheri Samba: The Hybridity of Art*. Series Editor Esther A. Dagan. Montréal: Galerie Amrad African Art Publications.
- . 1996. Zairian Popular Painting as Commodity and as Communication. In Mary Jo Arnoldi, Christraud M. Geary, and Kris L. Hardin (eds.), *African Material Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- . 1996. De l'art africain et de l'esthétique. *Cahiers d'études Africaines*, 36 1-2
- Jules-Rosette, Benetta. 1975. Song and Spirit: The Use of Songs in the Management of Ritual Contexts. *Africa*, XLV.



- . 1984. *The Messages of Tourist Art: An African Semiotic System in Comparative Perspective*. New York: Plenum Press.
- . 1987. Rethinking the Popular Arts in Africa: Problems of Interpretation. *African Studies Review*, vol. 30 (3), September.
- . 1992. What is 'Popular'? The Relationship Between Zairian Popular Painting and Tourist Paintings. In Bogumil Jewsiewicki (ed.), *Art pictural zairois*. Série Les Nouveaux Cahiers du CELAT, no. 3. Quebec: Editions du Septentrion.
- . 1994. (on visual artists and tourists). In Lucien Taylor (ed.), *Visualizing Theory*. New York: Routledge.
- Kanza, Matondo ne Mansangaza. 1972. *Musique zairoise moderne*. Kinshasa: Publications du C.N.M.A.
- Kapalanga, Gazungil Sang'Amin. 1989. *Les Spectacles d'animation politique en République du Zaïre*. Louvain-la-Neuve: Cahiers théâtre Louvain.
- Karp, Ivan. 1980. Beer Drinking and Social Experience in an African Society: An Essay in Formal Sociology. In Ivan Karp and Charles S. Bird (eds.), *Explorations in African Systems of Thought*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- . 1987. Laughter at Marriage: Subversion in Performance. In D. Nyamwaya and D. Parkin (eds.), *Transformations in African Marriage*. London: IAI.
- Kazadi, Wa Mukuna. 1979. The Origin of Zairean Modern Music: A Socio-Economic Aspect. *African Urban Studies*. Winter (6).
- Keil, Charles. 1979. *Tiv Song: The Sociology of Art in a Classless Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Keil, Charles and Steven Feld. 1994. *Music Grooves*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Kitching, Gavin. 1982. *Development and Underdevelopment in Historical Perspective: Populism, Nationalism and Industrialisation*. New York: Methuen & Co. Ltd.
- Kopytoff, Igor. 1971. Ancestors as Elders in Africa. *Africa* 41(2).
- . 1986. The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process. In Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- (ed.). 1987. *The African Frontier: The Reproduction of Traditional African Societies*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Kramer, Fritz. 1993. *The Red Fez: Art and Spirit Possession in Africa*. New York: Verso.
- Kratz, Corinne A. . 1989. Genres of Power: A Comparative Analysis of Okiek Blessings, Curses, and Oaths. *Man*, 24.

- . 1990. Persuasive Suggestions and Reassuring Promises: Emergent Parallelism and Dialogic Encouragement in Song. In *Journal of American Folklore* vol. 103.
- . 1993. "We've Always Done it Like This...Except for a Few Details": "Tradition" and "Innovation" in Okiek Ceremonies. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 35(1).
- . 1994. *Affecting Performance: Meaning, Movement, and Experience in Okiek Women's Initiation*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Kroker, Arthur and Marilouise. 1991. *The Hysterical Male: New Feminist Theory*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Kuyu Mwissa, Camille. 1993. *Musique et régulation des relations entre les sexes à Kinshasa*. thèse du doctorat, Université Paris I.
- La Fontaine, J.S. 1970. *City Politics: A Study of Léopoldville, 1962-63*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 1974. The Free Women of Kinshasa. Prostitution in a City in Zaïre. In J. Davis (ed.), *Choice and Change: Essays in Honour of Lucy Mair*. New York: Humanities Press.
- Lamy, Benoit and Mwenze Ngangura. 1986. "La Vie Est Belle". Brussels: Lamy Films.
- Le Blanc, Marie-Nathalie. 1998. Between Modernity and Tradition: Rituals of Islam as Negotiation and Renewal Through Knowledge. Paper presented at CASCA/AES Joint meetings, Toronto, May 7-9.
- Le Marchand, René. 1964. *Political Awakening in the Belgian Congo*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 1994. *Burundi: Ethnocide as Discourse and Practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Lienhardt, Godfrey. 1958. The Western Dinka. In Middleton and Tait (eds.), *Tribes Without Rulers*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- . 1985. Self: Public, Private, Some African Representations. In M. Carrithers, S. Collins, and S. Lukes (eds.), *The Category of the Person*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Likaka, Osumaka. 1997. *Rural Society and Cotton in Colonial Zaire*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Lips, Julius. 1937. *The Savage Hits Back*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Lipsitz, George. 1990. *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Little, Kenneth. 1957. The Role of Voluntary Associations in West African Urbanization. *American Anthropologist*, 59.

- . 1973. *African Women in Towns: An Aspect of Africa's Social Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lokole (various contributors). 1985. *Hommage à Grand Kallé*. Editions Lokele.
- Lonoh, M.B. 1969. *Essai de Commentaire sur la Musique Congolaise Moderne*. Kinshasa: S.E.I./A.N.C. in collaboration with the Zairean Ministry of Arts & Culture.
- Luzibu, Basilua. 1973. L'évolution de la mentalité zaïroise perçue dans sa musique. *Zaire-Afrique*, Nov. #79.
- Macaulay, David. 1998. *The Poetics and Politics of Cultural Identity in Jamaican Popular Music*. Ph.D. Dissertation in progress. Montreal: McGill University.
- MacGaffey, Janet. 1987. *Entrepreneurs and Parasites: The Struggle for Indigenous Capitalism in Zaire*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- . 1991 (ed). *The Real Economy of Zaire*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- . 1995. Ostentation in a Clandestine Setting: Young Congolese and Zairian Migrants in Nganda Bars in Paris. *Mondes en Développement*, Tome 23 (91).
- Magubane, Bernard. 1971. A Critical Look at the Indices Used in the Study of Social Change in Colonial Africa. *Current Anthropology* vol. 12 no. 4-5.
- Makobo, Serge. 1996. Les noms dans la musique Zairoise: tous, ils sont des sponsors. *Ndule Magazine*, volume and page number unspecified.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1984 [1922]. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.
- Mamdani, Mahmood. 1996. *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary African and the Legacy of Late Capitalism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Manuel, Peter. 1993. *Cassette Culture: Popular Music and Technology in North India*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Marcus, George and Michael Fischer. 1986. *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Martin, Phyllis. 1994. Contesting Clothes in Colonial Brazzaville. *Journal of African History* 35.
- . 1995. *Leisure and Society in Colonial Brazzaville*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Marx, Karl. 1906. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. New York: The Modern Library.
- Maximy, René de. 1984. Le pragmatisme kinoïse: authenticité ou aliénation?. In Haeringer (ed.) *From Caracas to Kinshasa*. Paris: ORSTOM.

- Mbala-Nkanga, Dieudonné-Christophe. 1992. 'Radio Trottoir' in Central Africa, *Passages* 4.
- . 1997. "My Twelve Children": A Father's Desperate Cry for Social Justice. Paper presented: Politics, Culture and Youth in the New Congo. Ann Arbor, Michigan, Oct. 26-28.
- Mbayu wa Laziri, Baruani. 1989. Lecture pédagogique d'un texte de la musique zaïroise moderne: "Mabele" de Lutumba Ndomanueno (O.K. Jazz). reference information not indicated.
- Mbembe, Achille. 1992a. The Banality of Power and the Aesthetics of Vulgarly in the Postcolony. *Public Culture*, vol 4 (2) Spring.
- . 1992b. Prosaics of Servitude and Authoritarian Civilities. *Public Culture* (5) 1.
- . 1996. La "Chose" et Ses Doubles dans la caricature camerounaise. *Cahier d'Etudes africaines*. XXXVI-1-2
- McCracken, Grant. 1988. *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character to Consumer Goods and Activities*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Mekacha, Rugatiri. 1992. Are Women Devils? The Portrayal of Women in Tanzanian Music. In Graebner (ed.), *Sokomoko*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Meintjes, Louise. 1990. Paul Simon's *Graceland*, South Africa, and the Mediation of Musical Meaning. *Ethnomusicology*, Winter issue.
- . 1994. Mediating Difference: Politics in the Production of Zulu music in Johannesburg. Paper presented at the African Studies Association meeting in Toronto, 4-7 November.
- Merriam, Alan P. 1964. *The Anthropology of Music*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- . 1982. *African Music in Perspective*. New York: Garland Publishing Co.
- Middleton, John. 1990. *Studying Popular Music*. Philadelphia: Milton Keynes.
- Miller, Christopher. 1987. Orality Through Literacy: Mande Verbal Art After the Letter. *The Southern Review* Vol. 23 Winter.
- Miller, Daniel. 1987. *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- . 1994. *Modernity: An Ethnographic Approach*. Providence, R.I. Berg Publishers.
- . 1995. *Worlds Apart: Modernity Through the Prism of the Local*. New York: Routledge.
- Minh-ha, Trinh. 1992. *Framer Framed*. New York: Routledge.

- Mintz, Sidney. 1985. *Sweetness and Power: the Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York: Viking Press.
- Mitchell, J.C. 1956. *The Kalela Dance: Aspects of Social Relationships among Urban Africans in Northern Rhodesia*. Rhodes-Livingstone Papers #27. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- . 1969. *Social Networks in Urban Situations*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Mobutu, Joseph-Désiré. 1971. A la Recherche de Notre Authenticité. Message du Président de la République au Parti Frère du Sénégal. Kinshasa: Ministère de l'Information (République Démocratique du Congo).
- Moore, Sally Falk. 1994. *Anthropology and Africa: Changing Perspectives on a Changing Scene*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.
- . 1996. Post-Socialist Micro-Politics: Kilimanjaro, 1993. *Africa* 66 (4).
- Motz, Marilyn F. et al (eds.). 1994. *Eye on the Future: Popular Culture Scholarship into the Twenty-First Century*. Bowling Green State University Press: Bowling Green, Ohio.
- Mudimbe, V.Y. 1980. La Culture. In J. Vanderlinden (ed.) *Du Congo au Zaïre, 1960-1980: Essai de bilan*. Bruxelles: CRISP.
- . 1988. *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- . 1991. "Reprendre": Enunciations and Strategies in Contemporary African Arts. In Susan Vogel (ed.) *Africa Explores: 20th Century African Art*. New York: Center for Africa Art.
- Mukerji, Chandra and Michael Schudson. 1991 (eds.). *Rethinking Popular Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Mwanyimi-Mbomba, Mandjumba. 1989. *Chronologie générale de l'histoire du Zaïre (des origines à 1988)*. Kinshasa: C.R.P.
- Ndaywel è Nziem, I. 1993. La Société Zaïroise dans le Miroir de son Discours Religieux (1990-1993). *Cahiers Africains/Afrika Studies*, vol. 6. Brussels: CEDAF/ASDOC.
- Ngimbi, Mbumba. 1982. *Kinshasa 1881-1981: 100 ans après Stanley. Problèmes et avenir d'une ville*. Kinshasa: Editions Centres de Recherches Pédagogiques.
- Ngoy, Achille. 1995. *Zaire. Sans Visa*. Guide to World Music Industry. Paris.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. 1993. *The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music*. Translation by Shaun Whiteside and Michael Tanner. Hammonds Worth: Penguin.
- Nkashama, P. Ngandu. 1979. Ivresse et Vertige: les nouvelles danses des jeunes au Zaïre. *L'Afrique littéraire et artistique*, 51.

- \_\_\_\_\_. 1992. La chanson de la rupture dans la musique zaïroise moderne. In Marc Quaghebeur and Emile Van Balberghe (eds.), *Papier blanc, encre noire: Cents ans de culture francophone en Afrique centrale (Zaïre, Rwanda, Burundi)*. Bruxelles: Editions Labor.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1995. La *radio trottoir* et les aspects socio-linguistiques des formes informationnelles. Summer School Proceedings on Popular Culture. Africa/Asia/Europe. Utrecht: CERES/CNWS.
- Norget, Kristin. 1996. Beauty and the Feast: Aesthetics and the Performance of Meaning in the Day of the Dead in Oaxaca, Mexico. *Journal of Latin American Lore*, 19 (1).
- Ntongo, Ladji. 1997. La piraterie c'est le SIDA de la musique en Afrique centrale. Interview with Sam Mangwana. *Afro-Vision*, December 1997 - February 1998.
- Nyamwaya, D. and D. Parkin. 1987. *Transformations of African Marriages*. London: IAI.
- O'Connor, Anthony. 1983. *The African City*. New York: African Publishing Company.
- Okpewho, Isidore (ed.). 1990. *The Oral Performance in Africa*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.
- Olema, Debbonvapi. 1984. Société zaïroise dans le miroir de la chanson populaire. *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 18(1).
- Onyumbé, Tshonga. 1982a. La femme dans la musique zaïroise moderne. *Zaïre-Afrique* Feb. #162.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1982b. Nkisi, nganga, et ngangankisi dans la musique zaïroise moderne de 1960 à 1981. *Zaïre-Afrique* no. 169.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1983. Le thème de l'argent dans la musique zaïroise moderne. *Zaïre-Afrique* Fev. #172.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1986. Les problèmes socio-économiques dans la chanson Zairoise moderne. *Zaire-Afrique* #205.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1988. La société à travers la chanson zaïroise moderne. In Jewsiewicki and Moniot (eds.), *Dialoguer avec le Léopard*. Québec: Editions SAFI.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1994a. Urban Music and Public Rumor: Popular Expression Against Political Authority in Zaire. Seminar presentation at the Institute for Advanced Study & Research in the African Humanities, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1994b. La politique dans la musique zaïroise urbaine. Mbandaka: (unpublished manuscript).
- \_\_\_\_\_. n.d. Franco Luambo Makiadi. Mbandaka: (unpublished manuscript).
- \_\_\_\_\_. n.d. Tabu Ley Rochereau. Mbandaka: (unpublished manuscript).
- \_\_\_\_\_. n.d. Joseph Kabasele. Mbandaka: (unpublished manuscript).

- Ortner, Sherry. 1984. Theory in Anthropology Since the Sixties in *Comparative Study of Society and History* 26 (1).
- . 1995. Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37.
- Packard, Randall. 1981. *Chiefship and Cosmology: An Historical Study of Political Competition*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Paine, Robert. 1971. A Theory of Patronage and Brokerage. in *Patrons and Brokers in the Arctic*. Robert Paine (ed.). St. John's: Memorial University.
- Polanyi, Karl. 1957. *The Great Transformation*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Pons, V.G. 1961. Two Small Groups in Avenue 21: Some Aspects of the System of Social Relations in a Remote Corner of Stanleyville, Belgian Congo. In Aidan Southall (ed.), *Social Change in Modern Africa*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Popovitch, Mirko and Kwami Zinga. 1993. "Tango ya Ba Wendo", Brussels: Editions Ti-Suka.
- Potter, Russell. 1995. *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-hop and the Politics of Postmodernism* Albany: SUNY Press.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. 1986. Fieldwork in Common Places. In James Clifford and George Marcus (eds.), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Prezio, Mac. 1996. Reddy Amisi: Je ne suis pas maître de mon destin. Unpublished document written from a press conference.
- Pwono, Damien M. 1992. Institutionalization of African Popular Music in Zaire. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh.
- Rabinow, Paul. 1977. *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 1986. Representations are Social Facts: Modernity and Post-Modernity in Anthropology. In James Clifford and George E. Marcus (eds.) *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Radcliffe-Brown. 1940. On Joking Relationships. *Africa* 13 (3).
- Radway, Janice. 1984. *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature*. Chapel Hill: University of Carolina Press.
- Ranger, T.O. 1975. *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Raymaekers, P. 1960-1. 'Prédélinquance et Délinquance Juvenile à Léopoldville'. *Matériaux pour une Etude Sociologique de la Jeunesse Africaine du Milieu Extra-Coutumier de Leopoldville*. Institut de Recherches Economiques et Sociaux. Leopoldville: Univ. de Lovanium. *Notes et Documents*, no. 1.
- Revue Noire. 1996. Special Issue on Kinshasa. #21 June, July, Aug.
- RFI (Radio France International). 1992. Rumba Cha-Cha: Musiques des deux Congos (1950-1960). Compact disc liner notes. Paris: RFI.
- Roberts, John Storm. 1972. *Black Music of Two Worlds*. New York: Praeger.
- Rodney, Walter. 1974. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press.
- Rosaldo, Renato. 1980. *Ilongot Headhunting, 1883-1974: A Study in Society and History*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- . 1986. From the Door of His Tent: The Fieldworker and the Inquisitor. In Clifford and Marcus (eds.), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Rose, Tricia. 1994. *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press/University Press of New England.
- Rouch, Jean. 1956. Migrations au Ghana (Gold Coast). *Journal de la société des Africanistes* XXVI: 1 and 2.
- Rowe, William and Vivian Schelling. 1991. *Memory and Modernity: Popular Culture in Latin America*. London: Verso.
- Rowlands, Michael. 1996. The Consumption of an African Modernity. In Mary Jo Arnoldi, Christraud M. Geary, and Kris L. Hardin (eds.), *African Material Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- République Populaire du Congo. 1984. *La chanson Congolaise*. Brazzaville: M.E.N./I.N.R.A.P.
- Rubango, Nyunda ya. 1997. Other Voices, Other Images: Congo/Zaire Diaspora Speaks Out. Paper presented at: Politics, Culture and Youth in the New Congo, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Oct 26-28.
- Ruby, Jay. 1992. Speaking for, Speaking About, Speaking With, or Speaking Alongside. In *Visual Anthropology Review* vol 7 (2), Fall.
- Sahlins, Marshall. 1961. The Segmentary Lineage: An Organization of Predatory Expansion. *American Anthropologist*, vol. 63.
- . 1985. *Islands of History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Said, Edward. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon.



- . 1988. Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors. In *Critical Inquiry* vol. 15 (1).
- Saint Moulin, Léon de. 1976. Contribution à l'histoire de Kinshasa (II). *Zaire-Afrique* Nov. # 109.
- Sanjek, Roger. 1990. Urban Anthropology in the 1980s: A World View. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19.
- Schatzberg, Michael. *The Dialectics of Oppression*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- . 1993. Power, Legitimacy and Democratization in Africa. *Africa* 63 (4).
- Schoepf, Brooke G. 1993. AIDS Action-Research with Women in Kinshasa, Zaire. *Social Science Medicine* vol. 37 (11).
- Schoepf, Brooke and Walu Engundu. 1991. Womens' Trade and Contributions to Household Budgets in Kinshasa. In Janet MacGaffey (ed.), *The Real Economy of Zaire*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Schoss, Johanna. 1996. Dressed to 'Shine': Work, Leisure, and Style in Malindi, Kenya. In Barbara Hendrickson (ed.), *Clothing and Difference*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Scott, James. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Shipton, Parker. 1989. *Bitter Money: Cultural Economy and Some African Meanings of Forbidden Commodities*. AES Monograph Series, No. 1. Washington, D.C.: AAA.
- Simmel, George. 1990 [1900]. *The Philosophy of Money*. New York.
- Sinnock, Martin. 1997. Congo-Kinshasa Encore. *Beat* vol. 16 (4).
- Stallybrass, Peter and Allon White. 1986. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. London: Methuen.
- Steiner, Christopher. 1994. *African Art in Transit*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 1997. The Invisible Face: Masks, Ethnicity, and the State in Côte d'Ivoire. In Steiner and Grinker (eds.), *Perspectives on Africa*. Blackwell.
- Stoller, Paul. 1995. *Embodying Colonial Memories: Spirit Possession, Power, and the Hauka in West Africa*. New York: Routledge.
- Stewart, Susan. 1993. *On Longing*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Tansi, Sony Labou. 1984. Le sexe de Matonge. *Autrement*. Hors-Série 9.
- Taussig, Michael. 1980. *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

- . 1993. *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*. New York: Routledge.
- Tchebwa, Manda. 1996. *La Terre de la Chanson*. Brussels: Duculot.
- Tempels, Placide. 1969. *Bantu Philosophy*. Paris: Présence Africaine.
- Thomas, Nicholas. 1991. *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture and Colonialism in the Pacific*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Thompson, Robert Farris. 1966. An Aesthetic of the Cool: West African Dance. *African Forum* 2 (2).
- Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. 1993. *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an Out-of-the-Way Place*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Turner, Graeme. 1992. *British Cultural Studies: an Introduction*. New York: Routledge.
- Turner, Victor. 1957. *Schism and Continuity in an African Society*. New York: Humanities Press.
- . 1967. *Forest of Symbols*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- . 1969. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Tutuola, Amos. 1985. *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. London: Faber & Faber.
- UNDP. 1993. *Human Development Report: 1992*. New York: United Nations.
- Vail, Leroy and Landeg White. 1991. *Power and the Praise Poem: Southern African Voices in History*. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia.
- Van de Laar, Irene. 1995. "True Love Exists No More: Confusion About Choosing a Partner, Love and Marriage Among the Young in Senegal. Summer School Proceedings on Popular Culture. Utrecht: CERES/CNWS.
- Van der Kerken, G. 1920. *Les Sociétés Bantoues du Congo Belge*. Bruxelles.
- Vansina, Jan. 1990. *Paths in the Rainforest: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Vellut, J.L. 1974. *Guide de l'étudiant en histoire du Zaïre*. Kinshasa: Editions Centre de Recherches Pédagogiques.
- Vogel, Susan. 1991. Introduction: Digesting the West. In Susan Vogel (ed). *African Explores: 20th Century African Art*. New York: Center for African Art / Munich: Presto.
- Wade, Peter. (forthcoming). Music, blackness and national identity: three moments in Colombian History. *Popular Music*.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel. 1974. *The Modern World System*. New York: Academic Press.

- Wallis, Roger and Krister Malm. 1984. *Big Sounds from Small Peoples: The Music Industry in Small Countries*. New York: Pendragon.
- Warnier, Jean-Pierre. 1993. *L'Esprit d'entreprise au Cameroon*. Paris: Karthala.
- Waterman, Richard. 1952. African Influence on Music in the Americas. In S. Tax (ed.), *Acculturation in the Americas*, vol. 2. Proceedings of the 29th Intl. Congress of Americanists. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Waterman, Christopher. 1990. *Juju: A Social History and Ethnography of an African Popular Music*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- . 1997. "Our Tradition is a Very Modern Tradition": Popular Music and the Construction of Pan-Yoruba Identity. In Karin Barber (ed.), *Readings in African Popular Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Watts, Michael and Allen Pred (eds.). 1992. *Reworking Modernity: Capitalism and Symbolic Discontent*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.
- Weber, Max. 1947. *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- . 1958. *The Rational and Social Foundations of Music*. Translations by Don Martindale, Johannes Riedel, Gertrude Neuwirth. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Werbner, Richard. 1984. The Manchester School in South-Central Africa. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 13.
- White, Bob W. 1998a. Commodities in Motion: Congolese Popular Dance Music on the World Market. (in press). *Rethinking Commodities: Anthropological Views of the Marketplace*. Society for Economic Anthropology Series. New York: University Press of America.
- . 1998b. Modernity's Trickster: 'Dipping' and 'Throwing' in Congo-Zairean Popular Dance Music. Paper presented at ACASA Triennial Conference on African arts, April 9-12, New Orleans.
- . 1997. Singing the Sponsor: Popular Music and Micropolitics in Mobutuland and After. C.A.A.S. Working Paper Series, #44, pp. 1-30, October. Center for Afroamerican and African Studies: Univ. of Michigan.
- White, Bob W. & J.P. Busé. 1997. Not Just Love: Self-Censorship and Sub-Text in Congo-Zairean Popular Dance Music. Multi-media presentation given at University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, Center for AfroAmerican and African Studies Oct. 25-28.
- White, Luise. 1990. *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- . 1993. Cars Out of Place: Vampires, Technology and Labor in East and Central Africa. *Representations*, 43 Summer.

- . 1995a. Tsetse Visions: Narratives of Blood and Bugs in Colonial Northern Rhodesia, 1931-39. *Journal of African History*. 36.
- . 1995b. 'They Could Make Their Victims Dull': Genders and Genres, Fantasies and Cures in Colonial Southern Uganda. *American Historical Review*, December.
- Wilk, Richard. 1993. Local Producers and Global Consumers: Emerging Linkages in the World System as a Challenge to Economic Anthropology. Paper presented at SEA annual conference, Durham, New Hampshire.
- Willame, Jean-Claude. 1992. *L'Automne d'un despotisme*. Paris: Editions Karthala.
- Williams, Brackette F. 1991. *Stain on My Name, War in My Veins*.
- Williams, Raymond. 1973. *The Country and the City*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- . 1997. Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory. In *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays*. New York: Verso.
- Williams, Rosalind. 1991. The Dream World of Mass Consumption. In Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson (eds.), *Rethinking Popular Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wolf, Eric. 1982. *Europe and the People Without History*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Young, Crawford. 1965. *Politics in the Congo: Decolonization and Independence*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Young, Crawford and Thomas Turner. 1985. *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.

## Recordings Cited

Here I have included songs that are referred to in appendices as well as the body of the thesis. The name of the singer/songwriter (where known) is written after the title of the song. The name of the group (where relevant) is in parentheses after the name of the singer/songwriter. The city and record label (where known) refer to original recordings, (R)=reissued recording. Where exact date is not known, I use the term 'circa' (e.g. 'c. 1956')

- "Alain Mbiya". Général Defao. Defao Productions: Kinshasa. 1995.  
 "Amba". Nyboma (Lipwa Lipwa). Editions Vévé: Kinshasa. 1974.  
 "Ambience". Kabasele (African Jazz). Cited in Biaya (1994).  
 "Amicale Lipopo". Tabu Ley Rochereau (African Fiesta National). Editions Vita: Kinshasa. 1966.  
 "Amoureux Deçu". Zaiko Langa Langa. c. 1976.  
 "Aruna". Docteur Nico (African Fiesta Sukisa). c. 1968.  
 "Aspirine". Koffi Olomide. Sonodisc: Paris. 1995.  
 "Ata Ndele". Adou Elenga. Anthologie musique zaïroise moderne. c. 1976 [1954] (R).  
 "Bana Lunda". J.B. Mpiana. Simon Productions: Paris. 1997.  
 "Beya Mbeya". Zaiko Langa Langa. c. 1980.  
 "Bobima Zamba". Tabu Ley Rochereau (African Fiesta). Editions Flash: Kinshasa. 1963.  
 "Bokilo Mabe". Wendo Kolosoy. Sowarex: Brussels. 1993 [c. 1952].  
 "Bombanda Compliqué". Mayaula Mayoni. 1978.  
 "Boyamba Ngai". Docteur Nico (African Fiesta). Cited in Tchebwa (1996).  
 "Cathérine". Luambo Makiadi Franco (O.K. Jazz). 1964.  
 "C'est Dur la Vie d'Une Femme Célibataire". Franco (O.K. Jazz). Esperance: Paris. 1991.  
 "Cinq Ans". Luambo Makiadi Franco. 1970.  
 "Colonel Bangala". Luambo Makiadi Franco. 1974.  
 "Coupe du Monde". Ndombe Opetum (O.K. Jazz). Sonodisc: Paris. 1994 (R).  
 "Deux Problèmes". Doris Ebuya (Empire Bakuba). B. Mas Productions: Bobigny. 1995.  
 "Diva". Koffi Olomide & Quartier Latin. Editions Espera: Brussels. c. 1989.  
 "Dixième Commandement". Papa Wemba (Viva La Musica). Ets. Ndiaye: Brazzaville. 1994.  
 "Djaffar". Madilu Système. Ets. Ndiaye: Brazzaville. c. 1994.  
 "Ekomba". Reddy Amisi. Productions Syllart: Paris. 1995.  
 "Eluzam". Evoloko (Zaiko Langa Langa). Anytha Ngapy: Brazzaville. (R).  
 "Eswi yo Wapi?". Mbilia Bel with Tabu Ley Rochereau (Afrisa International). 1983.  
 "Etat Civil". Koffi Olomide. Sonodisc: Paris. 1995.  
 "Feux d'Amour". J.B. Mpiana. Simon Productions: Paris. 1997.  
 "Famille Kikuta". Général Defao & the Big Stars. Defao Productions: Kinshasa. 1995.  
 "Fouta Djallon". Koffi Olomide & Quartier Latin. Sonodisc: Paris. 1995.  
 "Frère Edouard". Madilu Système. Ets. Ndiaye: Brazzaville. 1994.  
 "Full Option". Pépé Kallé (Empire Bakuba). 1997.  
 "Gare à Toi Marie". Luambo Makiadi Franco (O.K. Jazz). 1967.  
 "Georgina". Général Defao. Productions Defao: Kinshasa. 1995.  
 "Indépendance Cha Cha". Kabasele (African Jazz). 1960.  
 "Jerome". Simaro (O.K. Jazz). c. 1978.  
 "Julienne Importée". Nico Kasanda (African Fiesta). c. 1969.  
 "Kin-Kiesse". Nyoka Longo (Zaiko Langa Langa). Editions Vévé: Kinshasa. 1977.  
 "Kinshasa". Wendo Kolosoy. Sowarex: Brussels. 1993 [c. 1948].  
 "Kita-mata Bloqué". Josky Kiambukuta (O.K. Jazz). Disques Esperance: Paris. 1989.  
 "Kongo Dipanda". Léon Bukasa. c. 1959.  
 "Laissez-tomber". Franc Lassan. Editions Kina Rama Sélection: Kinshasa. 1981.  
 "L'Espoir en Christ". G. Madjuku (Empire Bakuba). B. Mas Productions: Bobigny. 1995.  
 "Liberté". Luambo Makiadi Franco (O.K. Jazz). Productions Alamoulé: Kinshasa. c. 1980.  
 "Lipopo ya Banganga". Joseph Kabasele (African Jazz). Surboum African Jazz: Kinshasa. c. 1957.  
 "Lusiyana". General Defao. Cited in Les As des As (1990).

- "Mabele". Lutumba Simaro (O.K. Jazz). Editions Populaires: Kinshasa. c. 1984.
- "Makambo Mibale". Mountouari Kosmos (Bantous de la Capitale). c. 1984.
- "Mamiwata". Mayaula Mayoni. Editions Tamaris: Paris. 1978.
- "Manzaka Ebende". Zaiko Langa Langa. Saga Productions: Combs La Ville. 1994 (R).
- "Marie Louise". Wendo Kolosoy. Sowarex: Brussels. 1993.
- "Mario" (original version). Luambo Makiadi Franco (O.K. Jazz). Alamoulé: Kinshasa. 1985.
- "Maseke ya Meme". Bavon Marie-Marie (Négro Succès). 1968.
- "Matata ya Mwasi na Mobali Ekoki Kosila Te". Franco (O.K. Jazz). Alamoulé: Kinshasa. ?. (R).
- "Mathinda Mathi". Tabu Ley Rochereau. Editions ISA: Kinshasa. (R).
- "Merengue Président". Nico Kasanda (African Fiesta Sukisa). c. 1967.
- "Merengue Scoubidou". Nico Kasanda (African Fiesta Sukisa). c. 1968.
- "Mokili Etumba". Boketchu Premier (Swede Swede). c. 1991.
- "Mokolo na Kokufa". Tabu Ley Rochereau (African Fiesta National). 1966.
- "Na Kamwe". Verckys Kiamanguana. Editions Vévé. c. 1977.
- "Na Leli Yo na Nzembo". J.P. Busé. EPERS XYZ: Montréal. 1997.
- "Na Lembi". Mbilia Bel/Bana O.K. 1997.
- "Ngai Marie Nzoto Ebeba". Luambo Makiadi Franco (O.K. Jazz). 1964.
- "Nyama ya Zamba". Roy Innocent (Orchestre Cobantou). 1968.
- "Objectif 80". Luambo Makiadi Franco (O.K. Jazz). c. 1973.
- "Ofela". Lutumba Simaro (O.K. Jazz). c. 1986.
- "Omanga". Tabu Ley Rochereau (Afrisa International). Editions ISA: Kinshasa. 1980.
- "Onassis ya Zaïre". Evoloko (Zaiko Langa Langa). Editions Vévé: Kinshasa. 1971.
- "Orphelin". Reddy Amisi. c. 1991.
- "Papa Plus". Koffi Olomide & Quartier Latin. Sonodisc: Paris. c. 1993.
- "Parking ya Bababa". Koffi Olomide & Quartier Latin. Sonodisc: Paris. 1995.
- "Pitié". Tabu Ley Rochereau (Afrisa International). Editions ISA: Kinshasa. 1972.
- "Po Ngai Ndumba". Tabu Ley Rochereau (Africa Fiesta National). 1967.
- "Pentagone". Wenge Musica B.C.B.G. Syllart Production: Paris. 1996.
- "Pete na Mosapi". Luambo Makiadi Franco (O.K. Jazz). Editions Populaires: Kinshasa.
- "Profitez". Reddy Amisi. Productions Syllart: Paris. 1995.
- "Quatres Boutons". Luambo Makiadi Franco (O.K. Jazz). 1964.
- "Révélation Bolingo ya Nzambe". Zatho (Los Nickelos). Editions Paka Siye: Kinshasa. 1966.
- "Riana". Ben Nyamabo (Choc Stars), Productions Choc Stars: Kinshasa. c. 1986.
- "Sala Mbongo, Kudia Mbongo" Roitelet. RFI: Paris. 1992 (R).
- "Sango Pamba". Ping Pong (Viva La Musica). Gina Kiaku Production: Kinshasa. c. 1990.
- "Sauve Qui Peut". Koffi Olomide & Quartier Latin. Productions Kamara Sound: Brazzaville. 1990.
- "Savoir Vivre". Lofombo Gode (Empire Bakuba). B. Mas Production: Paris. 1996.
- "Shabani". Super Choc de Shora Mbemba. Shabani Records: 1996.
- "Songi Songi". Tabu Ley Rochereau (Africa Fiesta National). Editions ISA: Kinshasa. 1969.
- "Succès African Jazz". Tabu Ley Rochereau (African Jazz). Sonodisc: Paris. c. 1959(R).
- "Table Ronde". Joseph Kabasele (African Jazz). Sonodisc: Paris. c. 1959 (R).
- "Tango ya Ba Wendo". Luambo Makiadi Franco (O.K. Jazz). c. 1974.
- "Tika Ngai na Vanda". De Piano (Beguen Band). Editions Ngoma: Kinshasa. c. 1953.
- "To Yebe Nganga na Bino". Docteur Nico (African Fiesta Sukisa). Editions Sukisa: Kinshasa. 1967.
- "Vie ya Mosolo". Zaiko Langa Langa. Saga Productions: Combs La Ville. 1994 (R).
- "Voisin". Madilu Système (O.K. Jazz). 1990.
- "Votez Vert". Luambo Makiadi Franco (O.K. Jazz). 1970.
- "Voyage Mboso". Adolphe (Wenge Musica). Wibe Production: Kinshasa. c. 1991.
- "Voyage na Bandundu". Luambo Makiadi Franco. Productions Alamoule: Kinshasa. c. 1978(R).
- "Ya Jean". Madilu Système. c. 1990.
- "Yves Makambo". Reddy Amisi. Productions Syllart: Paris. 1995.
- "Zekere". Koffi Olomide & Quartier Latin. Sonodisc: Paris. 1995.

## Interviews Cited

Below is a list of the formal interviews I conducted, most of which I recorded on audio cassette. In addition to the name of the person interviewed and the date, I have also included where the interview occurred and what language or languages were used. The interviews are organized chronologically.

Bruno Kasonga. June 22, 1995. Brussels (French).  
 Achille Ngoy, June 28, 1995. Paris (French).  
 M. Galoukossi-Tembo (I.A.D.). August 6, 1995. Brazzaville (French).  
 M. Bassarila (B.C.D.A.), August 10, 1995. Brazzaville (French).  
 Yoto Star. August 13, 1995. Kinshasa (French).  
 Jean Serge Essous. Starting on August 29, 1995. Brazzaville (French/English).  
 Norbert Bokilo (Bono Music). September 14, 1995. Brazzaville (French).  
 Me. Sidony, September 18, 1995. Brazzaville (French).  
 Reddy Amisi. September 27, 1995. Brazzaville (French).  
 M. Socrates. December 21, 1995. Kinshasa (French/Lingala).  
 Kiamangwana Verckys (Vévé). December 29, 1995. Kinshasa (French).  
 Papa Wemba. January 7, 1996. Kinshasa (French).  
 M. Mampala. January 9, 1996. Kinshasa (French).  
 Mazanza Maurice. February 19, 1996. Kinshasa (French).  
 M. Bomboro. February 21, 1996. Kinshasa (French).  
 Jerome Onya. March 14, 1996. Kinshasa (French).  
 Damien Dimonekene. March 21, 1996. Kinshasa (French).  
 Roger Izeidi and Roitelet. May 12, 1996. Kinshasa (French).  
 Meridjo Beluba. May 14, 1996. Kinshasa (French/Lingala).  
 Nyoka Longo. May 14, 1996. Kinshasa (French).  
 Ben Nyamabo. May 21, 1996. Kinshasa (French).  
 Tabu Ley Rochereau. September 26, 1996. Montreal (French/English).  
 Lokassa ya Mbongo. June 30, 1997 and January 17, 1998. Montreal (French).  
 Charlie Hénault, May 9, 1998. New Orleans (French/English).

## **Appendix I**



## Glossary

*Words not otherwise designated are words that are used in both Lingala and French.*

- animateur:** the musician who sings and shouts during the dance part of recorded and live performance in order to encourage members of the audience to dance as well
- animation:** the activity undertaken by the *animateur*, the state of heightened sensitivity or excitement which results from the dance part of each song
- article 15:** Kinshasa slang for being resourceful or 'fending for yourself'
- atalaku:** Lingala term for *animateur*, the two are used interchangeably
- baguette:** drum stick
- biolongo:** a licorice flavored stimulant that is often sold in bars with cola nuts and other stimulants
- bwaka:** (li.) 'to throw', as in to 'throw the name of someone', what musicians do when they acknowledge the presence of someone important in the audience
- caisse claire:** snare drum, the drum placed horizontally directly in front of the drummer, in between his legs
- cavacha:** the rhythm that has become associated (and is used) with all 'modern' Congolese dance music
- danseuse:** female dancer
- défense:** the rhythm section of a dance band (bass, drums, rhythm guitar, keyboards, maracas)
- deuxième bureau:** mistress or second wife
- CEC:** (fr.) 'centre extra-coutumier', refers to sections in Congolese colonial cities that were separated from parts of the city where whites and other settlers lived
- FAZ:** (fr.) 'forces armées zaïroises', the Zairean Armed Forces under Mobutu
- fétiche:** a charm or magical item which can protect oneself or do harm to others
- fiesta:** the 'modernist' school of Congolese 'modern' music, best exemplified by the groups that followed in the tradition of Kallé's African Jazz, especially African Fiesta
- filingi:** the 'feeling' or mood which is created by a virtuoso musician who plays with emotional or passionate intensity
- FROJEMO:** the Mobutu Youth League
- gamme:** a guitar
- gendarme:** police officer
- kinzaki:** (li.) the 'knack' or gut feeling required to be successful in Kinshasa
- kitamata:** (li.) an up and down movement
- Leo:** Kinshasa
- Lipopo:** (li.) Kinshasa
- lupemba:** (li.) financial, political or musical success
- madeso:** (li.), literally 'beans', but also refers to monthly salary or source of income, which often times comes from bribes
- mbonda:** (li.) conga drum
- miguel:** Europe, see 'super-miguel'
- MOPAP:** (fr.) Mobutu's political propaganda office, responsible for 'animation politique'
- moto:** (li.), literally 'fire', a successful dance step in 1990s Kinshasa
- mouvancier:** those committed to the ideals and practices of the ruling party under Mobutu (M.P.R.)
- MPR:** (fr.) 'le Mouvement Populaire de la Revolution', the Popular Movement of the Revolution'
- mundele:** white person, foreigner
- ndoki:** (li.) witch
- ndule:** (li.) live concert, performative event
- ngembo:** (li.) literally 'bat', or young people who watch concerts from outside of the venue
- NGO:** (eng.) non-governmental organization, in French 'organisation non-gouvernementale'
- nkisi:** (li.) magic, charm, or medicine, see also 'fétiche'
- nganga:** (li., kik.) medicine doctor, ritual specialist or traditional healer

**nouvelle vague:** the new wave, refers to the young musicians of the 1970s Kinshasa

**nzele:** (li.) girl or girlfriend

**ONATRA:** (fr.) Office Nationale du Transport (National Transport Office), under Mobutu

**ondemba:** (li.) see 'fiesta', the 'traditionalist' school of Congolese 'modern' music, best exemplified by the music of Franco and l'Orchestre O.K. Jazz

**OZRT:** (fr.), 'Office Zairois de Radiodiffusion et Television', under Mobutu

**parolier:** lyricist or 'songboy'

**pondu:** ground cassava leaves steamed and cooked with bits of fish

**pousse-pousse:** locally produced metal carts with two tire wheels to transport various sorts of goods

**poto:** (li.) abroad, Europe

**radio trottoir:** system of rumors or heresay

**RDC:** (fr.) 'République Démocratique du Congo', Congo-Kinshasa

**RPC:** (fr.) 'République Populaire du Congo', Congo-Brazzaville

**rideau ya ndako:** (li.), literally 'curtains of the house' or first wife

**rumba:** term for the Afro-Cuban dance style which is also used to refer to Congolese 'modern' music

**seben:** fast-paced dance sequence in the middle or end of each song

**soukouss:** the term for Congolese 'modern' music outside of Kinshasa, a sub-genre of Congolese 'modern music played primarily in Paris

**super-miguel:** (li.) the United States, see 'miguel'

**tango ya ba Wendo:** (li.), literally 'the time of the Wendos', i.e. the first generation

**Thompson:** the most common type of edible fish found in Kinshasa, something that is numerous or common

**tube:** a hit song

**UMHK:** (fr.) 'Union Minière du Haut Katanga'

**variétés:** popular music or Western 'cover' tunes

**vedettariat:** professional trajectory as a star or 'vedette'

**vié:** (li.) for 'vieux', old person or elder, term of address for people of respect

**Voix du Zaire:** (fr.) alternate name for O.Z.R.T.

**yuma:** (li.), stupid, weak, wimpy

**zoba:** (li.), stupid, disoriented, dizzy, lost

## **Appendix II**

## **Affaire Wenge Musica : L'immaturité des musiciens à la base de l'imbroglio**

(Article by Emile Kasongo L. from the Congolese newspaper *La Société* in May 1997)

La nouvelle est tombée comme un couperet le week-end dernier: l'orchestre Wenge Musica BCBG s'est disloqué ou en voie de l'être. En fait, cela n'a fait que confirmer un malaise qui couvait au sein de cette formation dite leader de la quatrième génération, vécu près de six mois.

De frustration en frustration, le groupe, tout en se produisant, s'est scindé en deux blocs où l'on retrouvait d'un côté, un J.B. Mpiana tout feu tout flamme, et auréolé par son dernier album "Feu de l'amour" qui caracole au hit parade national et même à l'étranger, et Werra Son dit le roi de la forêt.

Après une petite enquête de notre part, l'on est arrivé à la conclusion qu'au-delà de ce "conflit" entre les deux amis d'hier, il s'est agi surtout, outre le problème de leadership, de celui de la distribution des revenus. Tous nos enquêtés sont unanimes : J.B. comme Werra sont tous deux de mauvais gestionnaires qui partagent difficilement avec les autres. "Alain Makaba ne s'était-il pas installé à Londres parce que floué lors de l'enregistrement de l'album Kin Ebouger en 1991 ?", à relevé un des donateurs du groupe qui à requis l'anonymat.

En outre, il y a eu d'autres frustrations et d'autres querelles puériles. Lorsque par exemple J.B. Mpiana et son "groupe" se réclament de "Bana mindele " (entendez de petits blancs), Werra et sa "compagnie " rétorquent qu'ils sont des Japonais. Et cela par extension à la guerre sans merci qui a toujours existé entre l'Occident et le pays du Soleil levant surtout en matière commerciale.

Et on arrivera à la fameuse réunion du mercredi 3 décembre dernier à l'InterContinental où les violons ont refusé de s'accorder entre les deux parties. La suite, on la connaît : un monde fou de fanatiques a envahi l'avenue Dimbaboma à Bandal-Moulaert, le siège de Wenge "originel" pour protester contre la dislocation.

Raphael Ghenda veut jouer au sapeur-pompier Pépé Kalé, André Kimbuta, Adios Alemba, Ben Nyamabo, Adam Bombole, Epape Pim's, Tabu Ley, le "Vieux" Wendo Kolosoy, Bozi Boziana... tous ces grands noms de la musique ainsi que sympathisants et autres donateurs ont très mal digéré ce qui venait d'arriver aux jeunes gens de Wenge Musica. Ils ont multiplié des conseils pour dissuader J.B. Mpiana qui a la majorité des musiciens à savoir Alain Makaba "Internet", Blaise Bula, Alain Mpela, Fi-Carré, Aimélia, Toutou Caludji... et Werra Son qui n'a que Didier Masela le fondateur de Wenge et Adolphe Deminguez " Papa Mobimba " dans leur aventure.

Mais piqués par on ne sait quelle mouche, ces gens ont continué à faire la sourde oreille. En tant que Ministre de tutelle, M. Raphaël Ghenda refuse de voir le porte-étendard de la quatrième génération de la musique congolaise s'écrouler. C'est ainsi, qu'il a pu mettre ensemble le lundi 7 décembre dans son cabinet les deux tendances afin de trouver un compromis.

Et le Ministre de l'Information et presse et Affaires culturelles a bien fait de réunir autour de lui d'autres artistes musiciens comme Tabu Ley pour convaincre les jeunes gens de Wenge à transcender leur différend. La démarche de Raphaël Ghenda a été très bien accueillie. Déjà, au sortir de cette réunion, on a senti une certaine modération dans les deux camps qui se sont promis de se retrouver incessamment toujours autour du Ministre Raphaël Ghenda. Selon le Directeur de Cabinet de Raphaël Ghenda, M. Onokoko qui a rendu public le compte rendu de cette rencontre, "il existait de sérieux problèmes au sein de l'orchestre dus à l'absence de concertation, mais il n'était pas encore question de parler de scission. En outre, il a été demandé aux musiciens de ne pas se laisser distraire à un moment où on a besoin de l'unité pour la reconstruction nationale". Pour Tabu Ley qui a présidé la deuxième partie de la réunion, "les musiciens avaient pris la décision sans tenir compte de l'impact que Wenge musica avait tant sur le plan national qu'international. Néanmoins, il y avait de quoi espérer, car les deux ailes ont, sans contrainte, exprimé la volonté de rester ensemble, pour continuer à faire plaisir à tout le monde". C'est pour la première fois, a-t-il souligné, qu'un orchestre Kinois au bord de l'éclatement se détourne de cette voie.

Si la médiation de l'ancien Ministre de l'Information, Aubin Ngongo Luwowo avait échoué dans l'affaire OK Jazz, d'aucuns estiment que M. Ghenda qui connaît bien les milieux des artistes musiciens pourra réussir sa mission qu'un membre de son cabinet considère comme étant celle de tous les Congolais.

### *Papa Wemba et King Emeneya : de boucs émissaires*

La crise latente qui a éclaté dans l'orchestre Wenge Musica a été commentée dans plusieurs sens. Au lieu de réconcilier J.B. et Werra dont les rapports n'étaient plus au beau fixe, d'aucuns, par manque d'arguments, ont tout simplement cherché des boucs émissaires. Et ils ne sont pas allés les chercher très loin. Il s'agit de Papa Wemba Ekumani et de King Emeneya Mubiala "Ya Mokolo". Papa Wemba, on lui reproche sa participation dans l'album "Feu de l'amour" et son soutien inconditionnel à J.B. à qui il aurait recommandé de considérer Wenge comme son bien. Quant à Emeneya qui a séjourné au pays après une absence de près de 7 ans, on dit qu'il a envenimé la situation en appuyant Werra dans son bras de fer avec son ami "Mukulumpa wa Bakulumpa".

Et pour les défenseurs de cette thèse, Papa Wemba et Emeneya seraient jaloux de la montée fulgurante de Wenge. D'où, il fallait à tout prix casser cet orchestre comme ce fut le cas avec l'orchestre Sosoliso du Trio Madjesi au milieu des années 70.

Cependant les vrais critiques de la musique congolaise réfutent ces allégations. Et pour cause? Au jour d'aujourd'hui, il n'est plus un secret pour personne que Papa Wemba est devenu une star de renommée internationale. Les contrats qui tombent sur sa table l'attestent bien. En outre, on a vu Papa Wemba remercier des chanteurs de talent tels que Redy Amisi et Stino "l'As de la Chorale " et monter Viva La Musica Kinshasa avec de jeunes gens sortis de l'anonymat et emballer tous les mélomanes dans l'album "Nouvelle écriture". Aujourd'hui, en terme de vedettariat, Bendo Son par exemple, n'a pas à envier un musicien de Wenge.

Quant à Emeneya, à moins d'avoir la mémoire courte, ce musicien émérite a toujours eu horreur de la division. Plus d'une fois, on a vu le géniteur de "Nzizi" prodiguer des conseils aux jeunes gens de Wenge pour saisir l'opportunité qui s'offre à eux de bien gérer le succès dont ils jouissent actuellement.

Quand Marie-Paul rit sous cape Le malheur des uns fait toujours le bonheur des autres, dit-on. En tout cas, ce vieil adage semble se confirmer en ce qui concerne Marie-Paul, le chef de file de Wenge El Paris. Pour le numéro un de l'autre Wenge, les J.B., Werra, Didier Masela et autres Blaise Bula sont encore des enfants, dans la mesure où ils ont vite fait de se séparer pour fuir son orchestre qui d'ailleurs n'a pas de concurrent.

Pour Marie-Paul, ce qui arrive aux autres était prévisible. Il soutient l'avoir dit depuis décembre 1996 dans son album "Armagedon" dans lequel il disait "tout le monde doit partir". Et les faits semblent lui avoir donné raison, affirme-t-il. Eu égard à l'hostilité qui a toujours existé entre Wenge El Paris et les amis de J.B. Mpiana, ce qui arrive aux "Ange adorables" ne peut que contenter le "Roi Pélé".

En tout état de cause, ce qui est advenu à Wenge Musica est à imputer à la folie de jeunesse de tous les musiciens de Wenge Musica BCBG qui n'ont pas bien géré leur succès. Au contraire, ils ont prêté l'oreille aux commérages de Kinshasa, au lieu de privilégier le travail dont dépendent leur avenir et l'union du groupe. Toutefois, rien n'est encore perdu définitivement avec l'implication du Ministre Raphaël Ghenda de ramener les uns et les autres à la raison.

## **Appendix III**

From: ONUSIDA\_KIN@KINPOST.CCMAIL.compuserve.com

X-SMTP-Posting-Origin: arl-img-5.compuserve.com (arl-img-5.compuserve.com [149.174.217.135])

Date: Fri, 15 May 1998 13:40:30 -0400

Subject: One. Read first

Sender: ONUSIDA\_KIN@KINPOST.CCMAIL.compuserve.com

To: "INTERNET:bwhite1@po-box.mcgill.ca" <bwhite1@po-box.mcgill.ca>

MIME-Version: 1.0

X-MIME-Autoconverted: from 8bit to quoted-printable by arl-img-5.compuserve.com id NAA05374

Cher Bob,

Hadn't I told you how much I was looking forward to read and reread your manuscript during Easter Holidays. Then, as the time for leisure sped by, I eagerly waited for the holidays to end, the ceaseless remue-ménage, the children's demands, the chores, the errands, so I may at last find a few hours in the isolation of my Kinshasa house to explore your writings.

So instead of the unassailable critical fortress I wanted to erect, you're going to have a dog's breakfast : a little bit of everything, old and new, small and big, edible and not.

You had asked me what I read first. Naturally "So Many Musicians, So Little Time" (Catchy title rooted in the "so many women, so little time" gross slogan), to taste the gossip, the anecdotal, the personal, what in many magazines comes under "Our society".

I also cringed through "The Micropolitics of Music", that ought to be renamed "Big Fuss with Little Stars". Any extrapolation into the universal based on your sole personal experience would seem to me about as good as a Rasta monologue on metaphysics after a fourth beer, pathetically peevish and self centred.

Christina, from CALI, mercifully settled a quandary that did keep me puzzled. She showed me what I suspected, the stunning "Universal Treasure of Pedantic Quotes", the book you, and others, keep hidden. It must be on the Web too. An endless list of buzz words presented the way you do ... "femmes libres" (Lafontaine, 1974. Little, 1973)

So you all just trust nobody will ever want to look up, no more than you ever did, or that the references referred to are indeed meaningful. Strange academic mores, not much better than name dropping by JosÉ's son claiming having had a deal with some celebrity after just seeing from a distance his empty car.

Before Christina's eye opener, I had wondered if you get paid for throwing the names of your Academia colleagues, like Koffi does. Or is it similar to what people do here, go to as many funerals as possible, hoping that many will come in turn to yours.

Than the hilarious example "lesbians" (Malinowsky 1917, White 1996) might well come true.

Many many years ago, when I was a student, we were expected to provide not only precise titles, but edition and number(s) of the page(s) quoted. For possible reference. Who from your readers is supposed to know what actually is discussed and spoken about in "wounded foot"



(Pascal Sinyamoni et alia, 1786) ? Not even you.

This reference mania could have brought Lewis Carrol to add a hilarious chapter on "Alice and the Pundits", reminding me of that group of old friends who knew all their jokes by hart, and numbered them to speed up delivery. They would crack laughing just by saying "...18..."

I'm now taping some Grand Kalle for you, the pleasure of endless and celestial rumba. Bandal side of the river. I'll rap the cassettes in sweet picture of me high on Gin. Look at it closely, before attempting anew to make a fool out of me.

First : "Obligant" has a simple and precise meaning you failed to get. L"obligance" is selfless kindness that calls for reciprocation. Koffi is kind to create kindness. It does not compare to gracefulness, kindness for free. It is more the art of the vendor, or that simplest magic, whereby you mimic something to see it happen. You will agree : from Djuna to Simaro, from MaOka Munan to Tabu Ley, Reddy Amisy to Mbilia Bell, all are sweeter than life.

Have I told you this one on causality ? Every body knows that Africans can make things happen in ways unconnected to the process we name "causality". For us, nothing happens without an understandable cause. Future is the result of causality. If you do this, this will follow. Isn't it the purpose of Science at least, even Sociology...

Keep in mind that I argue with you on quite a few things, credentials to start with. And what makes future. Africans have a way to get things happen. To start with : happiness.

Modernity is one of several ways to identify future. You and I have been taught that future is room for improvement, creation, for what's "new !", like was crunchy peanut butter 30 years ago. Man, I belong to the days when we had nothing but the smooth and boring form. Progress has to foster modern taken from nowhere.

Kutino helps me a lot to understand. You know, the immensely popular preacher. I heard him saying, wisely, it seemed, for once : "Prayer is not enough to achieve fortune and success, nor either is plain Faith in God. No. When you ask for something, you have also to work and help it happen..."

"That's good" I thought, for Kutino is famed for having said : "What is a Ssangyung, or a Mercedes, for God, who gave us the Holy Spirit... to give us a Mercedes, for God, is nothing."

To please us, we expect him to say what you and I do believe : "Trust in God... but tie your horse." To believe in God all mighty is not quite good enough . Tie your horse too, if you want it to be there in the morning. We all have to work, or act at least, to gain what we hope for.

If you or I dreamed of a Mercedes, we would not pray God for it. No. I would look for a rich woman, and drive hers like a gigolo, or maybe waste my savings. I would tie the horse. You would get it as first prize in a white atalaku's tournament.

So I was eager to hear more from Kutino. Listen how it came. "If you want I child, for example, pray for it, sure, but go and purchase also the crib, the milk bottles, the curtains, the clothes, for you trust God will give that child. If it is a Mercedes you want, do not just ask God for it. Better look around for any key, and sit upon a chair. Than fiddle with that key, turn it and start the motor, go vroum, vroum... You have to work on it. And for money, do as I do : get you some paper, and cut it in pieces. Put them in your pockets, or bag, and go out shopping. When you see what you want, a television, or a freezer maybe, shuffle those papers in your pocket. The money will come.

You do know enough to recognise magic : Represent what should happen, trust Gods infinite power, and go ahead. It works. It's future's recipe

How better be modern than through the mighty power of religion and magic. During the gatherings of some charismatic congregation, seers will enter in a trance, and use imaginary portable phones to speak to distant spirits, or get guidance from a leader who travelled abroad. Modernity... ? Modernism... ?

Nobody craves any more to be modern. The inamovible Algerian director of Jeune Afrique, Beshir ben Something (BBY), commented on progress, by stressing weaknesses in developed societies : obesity, abuse of drugs, population ageing and the probable extinction of our society. BBY is obviously right.

Any youngster, when asked, prefers to die young. Old age for what ? Each of us would rather live poor and happy, than old, alone, neurasthenic until a belated death.

What is being modern ? And how does one get there ?

Two cassettes, the picture, clippings and diverse letters are in your mail. Koko Roy's pigmies felt you missed them, so they are giving you a second chance. All for you. One cassette is called "Grand Kalle's Greats", and the other is a pot-pourri of what makes people dance.

Kwacha kwacha, of witch you will hear quite a lot, is easy. It is Moto ≠ l'envers. Instead of the inimitable rhythmic giving away at the knees, you just bob up (You are gifted, from birth) accompanied by some peculiar posturing of fingers, ...details. Loi and "Position de tir" is somehow more complicated. It's based on Dombolo, including what looks like a loose Marxist salute.

So much for now. It is 2000h, and I am off for the classique Sunday evening at Mate, for the oldies like me. Enjoyable, for sure, specially if Manda shows up, now he lives nearby, in Bandal.

So long  
John

PS. Here is my thinking on putting money back in your pocket.

Autre signe d'attention ≠ autrui, donc de politesse : ne pas remettre

dans sa poche l'argent que l'on veut donner à une femme. Sortir un billet de cent dollars, alors qu'on voulait en donner vingt ? Remettre dans la poche, calculer ? Il y a là toute la différence entre l'amitié et la prostitution. Mesurer son don quand on a tout reçu ? Comment récompenser l'amour d'une femme ? Une femme qui aime donne qui elle est. Le contenu de tes poches, de ton coffre même, est peu de chose comparé à la valeur de son amour.

Celui qui, par amour, a bâti le Taj Mahal, s'il ne s'est pas ruiné, il l'a construit pour rien.

Tout donner, comme Jésus, c'est le langage que la femme entend. Il vaut par conséquent mieux savoir ce que l'on a en poche, et sortir le bon montant. Le montant juste, ou le compléter. Mais ne jamais remettre dans sa poche de l'argent qu'on a montré.

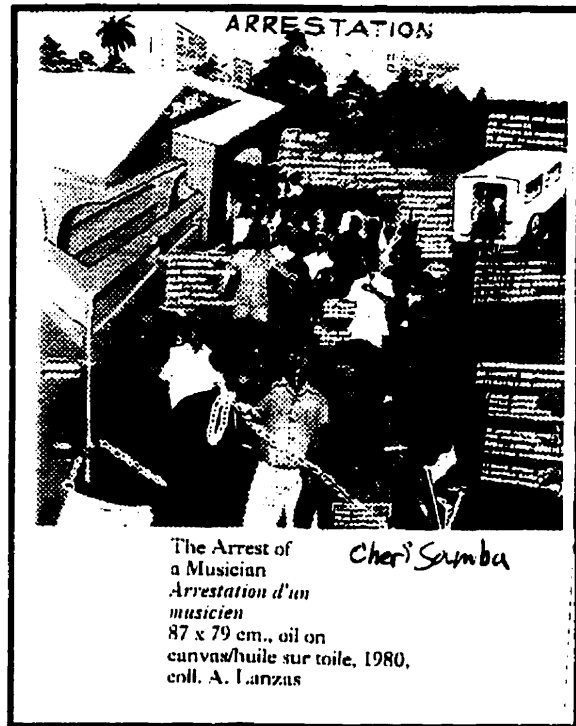
Ce qui distingue l'avarice de la générosité, c'est que la générosité jamais ne compte. Il faut toujours, et en tout, tout donner. En amour surtout. Sans réserve aucune, ni réticence, ne rien garder. "L'amour, c'est pouvoir tout dire" (Mme DaŌnov, personal communication, 1970).

## Appendix IV

## Self-Censorship and Sub-Text in Congo-Zairean Popular Dance Music

Despite a romantic veneer, Congo-Zairean music is profoundly political. Not only the for the way it 'throws' the names of (or praises) people in positions of power, but also for the way that it quietly takes shots at them through the use of sub-text and metaphor. Most musicians in Kinshasa don't worry about being censored; they censor themselves by writing love songs which will not offend politicians or potential patrons. For those that cannot resist the temptation to write songs which are critical, the consequences can be serious.

In this presentation, we invite you to explore various tensions: the music is joyful but the words are full of sorrow and loss, the images reinforce mainstream history's fixation on 'big men' yet all of the talking heads are voiceless, the text you are reading is informative and authoritative but it tells you nothing about the music's "power and beauty".



Eventually I became seduced by its power and beauty but I am still privately embarrassed that it took me so long to recognize it as perhaps the richest and most distinctive gift to the continent, and indeed the world, to come from Zaire" (Johannes Fabian, *forthcoming*)

{ Clearly, he was in love with being in love. But the most important thing to remember about Kabasele is his faithfulness to truth, his constancy in a praxis which is inalienable, incorruptible. }  
This is what makes his music political.

(Yoka Lye Mudaba in Manda Tchebwa, *Terre de la Chanson*, 1996)

### "Para Fifi"

(Kabasele, 1954)

Felicité, oh Loulou, heart from paradise  
Your beautiful face, my guardian angel  
When you look at me, honey, I lose myself

{ After love, it is political propaganda and publicity that prop up the stars of today. }

(Michel Lonoh, *Essai de commentaire sur la musique congolaise*, 1969)

2

### "Salongo"

(M.P.R., c.1970)

A simple song which picked up steam after Mobutu's return from Maoist China. Salongo is an imaginary 'good citizen':

*Salongo, eh eh, Salongo, he likes to work...*

{ Of course, political censorship was such that certain confessions had to be expressed through enigmatic language, sub-texts, in the form of charades in metaphoric poetry. }  
Thus music multiplied images of dry land, love-parched soil and inclement skies.

(Ngandu Nkashama, *Papier blanc encre noir*, 1992)

**"Kashama Nkoy"**

(Tabu Ley, 1969)

Tabu Ley laments the loss of a young student named Kashama ('nkoy' means leopard) who was eliminated by the government and never heard from again:

*Friend, village friend, school friend, work friend, I have cried my eyes dry.  
I know everyone must die some day, but why did you leave me now all alone?  
If you see Lumumba, what will you say? That we didn't take care of you?*

3

{ In the end, whether the encounter is 'masked' or not is of little consequence.  
What is important is that, as a specific trajectory of domination, the postcolony  
strikes precisely in its earthiness and verbosity. }

(Achille Mbembe, *The Banality of Power...* 1993).

**"Tailleur"**

(Franco, 1987)

After being jailed for recording an obscenely insulting song about the woman that left him for a politician, Franco is released by Mobutu who quickly demotes the politician in question (Kengo wa Dondo). Franco writes this song ("tailor") to remind Kengo that he wasn't really boss:

*Why do you always doubt what people tell you? All I said has come to pass. The owner of the  
needle took back his needle. What will you sew with now? You talked too much; they've set you aside.  
But you can keep talking if you like. Keep making all those important decisions. Now we're even.  
I know what I'm saying, they took away your air conditioner and your fan. I know what I'm saying,  
now you'll really have problems with mosquitoes.*

4

{ The men of politics have inspired our musicians who dedicated to them a  
countless number of works }

(Cyrille Momote in Lonoh, *Essai de...*, 1969)

5

Pierre Mounkali was the victim of political assassination. His son Max wrote a song in which he assumes his father's voice and struggles with the fact that he will never see his son again. After this song was released Max was forced into exile.

**"Humanité"**

(Max Mounkali, c.1965)

*The boat I'm in will only stop when I get to where I'm going. I see so many places. I'll be gone forever.  
I get off in America. I'm a slave, working other peoples' fields. Oh God, the black man has suffered so.  
It's crushing our hearts and dividing our families. They started with the MauMau and now they're killing  
all the Congo's gods. Today they've taken me from my son. It hurts so much I can't speak it. So many  
thoughts in my head. I'll never see my home again.*

**"Lokito Ya Mbongwana"**

(J.P. Busé, 1997)

After the arrival of a new government in 1997, J.P. Busé is approached and asked to write songs of praise. Instead he composes "Waves of Change":

6

*The liberators have come to bring hope and light to peoples' hearts.  
You can't wash your face with your finger; we need to work together.  
If we want things to change, we have to change the way we think.  
The people must love their ruler and the ruler must love his people.*

## Appendix V

This document is intended as a guide for listening to the audio cassette included with this thesis. I have left pauses in between most selections on the cassette in order to make it easier for the listener/reader to stop and start the cassette as he/she sees fit. Some of the songs on the cassette are also found in the text, but this is not true in all cases since some examples are important primarily for their musical aspects and some for their texts. Certain information about the songs/artists occurs in both the listening guide and the body of the thesis. I have not edited for this repetition so that the listening guide can be used independently of the thesis. Numbers to designate audio cues do not correspond to chapter numbers, but after each entry I have indicated the section in the body of the thesis which covers the specific aspect being discussed.

**Cue 1 "Julienne" (Dr. Nico, African Fiesta Sukisa) – see "Two 'Schools'" in Chapter Three**  
Nico is known as the quintessential 'fiesta' guitarist. His solos are light, upbeat, and airy. You will notice that he plays in major tones and scales which give his solo work a Western or 'modern' sound. Compared to Franco (cue #2), Nico's solos are more varied in their melodic structure (i.e. they are less repetitive). Apparently Nico rehearsed many of his solos, unlike Franco who was known for improvising, even in the studio (Hénault, May 9, 1998). Listen to the way the solo guitar interacts with lead singer, coming in and out of focus. Together they constitute a kind of loose dialogue.

**"Coupe du Monde" (Ndombe Opetum, O.K. Jazz) – see "Two 'Schools'" in Chapter Three**  
This example is a nice contrast to Nico. In fact in popular discourse about different musical styles ('les tendances') the two are often opposed. This song was recorded some time after Nico's song, but it shows the way that Franco's guitar developed separate from his 'fiesta' counterparts. Franco's guitar work is usually more raw, gutsy, and repetitive. In his solos, he tends to play clusters of notes together, repeating a small number of clusters but varying rhythm and sequence. Notice also that the chord progression is the same throughout the song, unlike Nico's song which has many changes and breaks. The bass guitar is playing more punctuated, sometimes syncopated notes, acting as sort of percussion instrument (cue 3); this style of bass guitar is closely associated with Franco's traditionalist school (also referred to as *asondemba*). The guitar solo is a classic Franco *seben*: sped-up tempo, rising intensity resulting from the interplay of the two guitars, the horn section and the speaking voice all add to this mood. Franco's esthetic in song composition is a good example of what I refer to as the 're-indigenization' of the musical style (see also Pwono 1992 on 'institutionalization').

In the next set of cues (2.1 - 2.3), try to distinguish the different nuances of rhythm by listening to the snare drum (often sounds like the engine of a railroad train), which is where the motion and core rhythm is housed in most contemporary Congolese dance music.

**Cue 2.1 "Pentagone" (Wenge Musica) – see "'L'Animation'" in Chapter Three**  
This selection picks up in the middle of the transition to the dance part of the song (most often referred to as *seben* or 'animation'). Listen especially to the snare drum. Wenge has one of the best drummers in the industry (Titina) and have been reintegrating live drums (as opposed to sounds from drum machines) into their recordings. This cue gives a feeling for how different shouts are brought together ('enchainés') in the dance part of a song.

**Cue 2.2 "Mandundu" (Super Choc) – see "'L'Animation'" in Chapter Three**  
The snare drum in this cue is somewhat different. Each group plays roughly the same song structure (words in a verse, then a chorus, then a transition to the dance part), but the particular way they manage each of these sections gives a great deal of room for personal or group-based identification. Most groups, for example, have a particular variation on the basic dance rhythm (known as 'cavacha') and that is the rhythm that they use for many of the dance sections of their songs.



**Cue 2.3 "Showtime" (Empire Bakuba) -- see "L'Animation" in Chapter Three**

Djuna Mumbafu is one of the most well-known *atalaku*, but he is also recognized as a humorist and master showman. In the beginning of this selection there is an police officer (or immigration officer) trying to get information from someone who is newly arrived to Kinshasa but who doesn't speak Lingala. "What country are you from?" yells the officer, "Where are you from? What's your name?" The scene degenerates and the song begins. The level of this recording is noticeably better than much of the production coming out of the Congo (recorded in Switzerland). Again the particular accent of the snare drum is different and this selection offers a good example of the transition to the *seben*, with a slight break and the entry of solo guitar.

**Cue 3 "Savoir Vivre" (Empire Bakuba) -- see "L'Animation" in Chapter Three**

Lofombo is known as a kind of wizard of the bass guitar (see figure 5.1). In this song (his own composition), he shows the way he has mastered a combination between Western slap bass and the way that bass instruments are used in a 'traditional' setting in his home region of Lower Congo. Part of the tension that his playing creates comes from the way that he throws in notes like punctuations or afterthoughts. Notice also how the song gradually speeds up in anticipation of the *seben*.

In the next set of cues (4.1-4.3), I want to call the listener's attention different kinds of shouts, and the way that shouts are combined within the body of a song. In these selections there are also some good examples of the shaker I have referred to in my discussion of the *atalaku* (figure 0.1, 0.2, 10.2).

**Cue 4.1 "Eluzam" (Zaiko Langa Langa) -- see "Dances and Shouts" in Chapter Three**

This is what early shouts sounded like. I have taken the example from Zaiko, because they are often credited with bringing shouts more systematically into music, even before they recruited the first *atalaku* in 1982. These shouts are shouts in the pure sense of the term: no singing, sound improvised.

**Cue 4.2 "Etagé ya Suka" (Koffi Olomide) -- see "Dances and Shouts" in Chapter Three**

Good example of the 'hype' style shouting emerges in the 1980s. Notice how the *atalaku* switches back and forth between the stag and the audience. Koffi begins as a 'crooner', having a reputation for being a bad dancer and beginning in the late 1980s, especially with this album, starts to integrate dancing and shouting into his recordings and live performances. As far as his dancing is concerned, he became embarrassed when the public learned that he had started taking lessons to improve his moves.

**Cue 4.3 "Famille Kikuta" (General Defao) -- see "Dances and Shouts" in Chapter Three**

Defao doing what he does best, singing with charm. More and more Defao has become interested in imposing his soft singing voice on *seben* where most of the shouts occur.

**Cue 5.1 (no title) -- see "Learning to Play" in Chapter Six**

According to Bébé Atalaku, this rhythm was indigenous to the Teke people living in the Pool region. From my experience it was not as common as the one in 5.2 below, and was sometimes used in the 'words' part of songs leading up to the transition to dance.

**Cue 5.2 (no title) -- see "Learning to Play" in Chapter Six**

Listen to the other selections on this cassette to see how this basic rhythm recurs throughout the music, and especially how it interlocks with the rhythm of the snare drum.

**Cue 6 (no title) -- see "Learning to Play" in Chapter Six**

This is a recording from one of the meetings with the *atalaku* from the Big Stars (Lidjo) who took me on as an apprentice. Notice that Lidjo wants to go on to next shout but I ask him to do each one twice for my own practice, calling the tune literally. He is giving me the series of shouts from a song called "Famille Kikuta" (cue 4.3).

**Cue 7 (no title) -- see "Learning to Play" in Chapter Six**

This strange moment is me recording a shout which I had dreamed up and hoped might be eventually be used with the Big Stars. Needless to say, it never saw the light of day.

**Cue 8 "Pitié Mon Amour" (General Defao) -- see "Big Stars en Concert" in Chapter Seven**

This is the kind of song with which Defao would often open his performances. This song, like a 564 number of his recent recordings, takes the form of a dialogue between a husband and wife. The person who paid to have the song composed is also the subject of the song. In this song we here Defao singing the names of some of his sponsors and also some good examples of how singers increasingly sing their own shouts on recordings as well as in concert.

**Cue 9 "Shabani" (Super Choc) – see "Singing the Sponsor" in Chapter Eight**

Probably one of the best examples I have found of the way that musicians 'sing the sponsor' (White 1997). I have reprinted the text in its entirety in Chapter Eight.

**Cue 10 "C'est Dur La Vie d'une Femme Célibataire" (O.K. Jazz) – see "Always Love, Never Just Love" in Chapter Nine**

I have done a more textual analysis of this song in Chapter Nine. An extremely rich text. Like Cue 2, the basic chord progression does not change. As I suggested in Chapter Three, this is a form of coming back to 'traditional' song structures and esthetics. Notice also the relationship between the guitars and the horns and the between the different guitars. This is a good example of the layered or interlocking guitar style for which Congolese music is most well-known. At the end of this song you hear why some people think Franco invented the *seben*. It is a guitar sound that (as it was explained to me) "incites people to dance" by "getting them in the gut".

**Cue 11 "Kita-mata bloqué" (O.K. Jazz) – see "Thematic Tropes" in Chapter Nine**

This song is especially noticeable for the recurring tropes of disorientation ('zoba') and total romantic devotion. The shaker is prominent at one point in the song. Notice also the two-part song structure. When the music changes, what we have is an excellent example of the intensity of the *Tout Puissant* O.K. Jazz (the All Powerful O.K. Jazz). Also a good example of how older, more respectable bands like O.K. Jazz have been influenced by the shouts and rhythms of musicians of the New Wave: "Kita! Mata! Kita! Mata!" Congolese listeners will also remark upon the vulgar nature of some of the lyrics near the end of the song (bite my ear, take me there to the place where I see bright lights, references to dogs, etc.).

**Cue 12 "Ekokola" (Swede Swede Boketchu Premier) – see "The Tangled Dance..." in Chapter Ten**

This bare minimum sound is different from Swede Swede's other album ('Mokili Etumba'). Notice that in addition to 'traditional' drums, they also use a 'modern' drum set with cymbals and a snare drum. The introduction of the harmonica into Swede Swede's music is remarkable given that this instrument is somewhat rare in Kinshasa, where it conjures up images of the 'modern' West (via African-American blues and A.O.R rock) but also strikes a 'traditional' note which has a hypnotising effect on listeners. The shouts in after the transition to dance section are straight out of 'modern' music performance, which themselves draw heavily from *folklore*.

**Cue 13 "Tu Bois Beaucoup" (O.K. Jazz) – see "Urban Ethnicity" in Chapter Ten**

A parody of a non-Kinois arriving to the city for the first time. The humor in this song is created by exposing the country bumpkin's ignorance. This song is also an example of the imperfectness of the division between 'fiesta' and 'ondemba' styles. O.K. Jazz, in theory not 'fiesta', sounds very 'fiesta' on this song.

**Cue 14 "Salongo" (O.K. Jazz) – see "The Amazing 'Modernity' Machine" in Chapter Ten**

The quality of this selection is sub-standard but the content makes it worthwhile nonetheless. This is an excerpt from Franco's 1970 33rpm release dedicated to singing the praises of the M.P.R. and Mobutu. The person speaking is Franco himself and interestingly enough he is imitating Mobutu. This kind of officially sponsored parody is a good example of what Mbembe (1992a) has referred to the 'intimacy of tyranny'. This particular song dates from the colonial period when the original words referred to the fact that Congolese had become victim to the forced labor campaigns of the Belgian colonial regime. The song is invested with new meaning under Mobutu who uses it as an official state anthem which glorifies the values of hard work for the country and the regime. See Busé and White (in appendix).

At the end of this cassette I have included some examples of local radio stations. For information on local radio (and other media in Kinshasa), see Chapter Four and Tchewwa (1996).

