Entrepreneurship, Style, and Spirituality in Benin's Jazz and Brass Bands

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Abstract

The dissertation examines how contemporary Beninois musicians reconfigure their music in post-colonial networks of power and economics locally and internationally, particularly through the interplay of entrepreneurship, musical style, and spirituality. Literature in ethnomusicology has dealt with relationships between musical style and spirituality in West Africa, and recent literature in anthropology has explored the marketing of culture. Scholarship on these topics has tended to separate the aesthetic from the material, so that while musical style and spirituality are analyzed together, they are often removed from cultural economy and popular music. This dissertation responds to gaps in the literature by bringing analyses of aesthetic and material issues into conversation in an analysis of jazz and brass band repertoires that cross boundaries between religious and commercial, popular and traditional, and local and international.

In the dissertation, I explore how musicians creatively root their musical practices in Benin's musical traditions, and also market their own representations of these traditions abroad. In the first half of the project, I outline the historical background for Benin's music traditions. I begin in the first chapter with the kingdom of Allada and the founding of the empire of Danxome in the 17th century. I follow the arrival of *vodun* deities in the Danxomean court, and the founding of the dynasty in Porto Novo. The second chapter examines the effects of colonialism on religious and musical practice in Benin, and the changing values attached to these practices. In the third chapter, I discuss the development of *musique moderne* and musical genre in Benin

after 1960. The second half of the dissertation is composed of several case studies. In the fourth chapter, I draw on ethnographic interviews and participant observation in Benin, France, and New York City to focus on the Gangbe and Eyo'nle Brass Bands' adaptation of specific Beninois popular songs and styles. The fifth chapter focuses on the creative choices and production strategies in several Gangbe and Eyo'nle compositions, particularly through an analysis of which components of language, spiritual meaning, and musical style are available to the bands' different audiences, forming “hidden” and “public” transcripts. The dissertation contributes to broader issues within African Studies, particularly regarding relationships between history and ethnography, and to understanding the production of meaning and social change within an increasingly complex and geographically diverse African diaspora. More broadly, this project seeks to be a part of a more global orientation for jazz studies that recenters Africa and African musicians as producers of meaning about race and identity.

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Glossary of Key Terms

Republic of Benin – the nation established in 1990 by democratic assembly
People's Republic of Benin – the communist republic established by General Kerekou in 1975
Dahomey – the French colony established in 1897, as well as the independent state 1960-1975
Danxome – the Fon empire that ruled southern Benin from 1600 until French colonization in 1897; its capital is Abomey
Xogbonu – the rival empire of the Gun ethnicity located in Porto Novo
Oyo – the Yoruba empire in present-dy Nigeria, that engaged frequently in conflict with Danxome in the 19th century

Cotonou – Benin's economic center; an African metropolis; center of the *moderne* music scene
Porto Novo – Benin's seat of government and official capital; center of Gun ethnic identity
Abomey – the capital of the old Danxomean empire; the center of Fon ethnic identity
Ouidah – known as the "cradle of vodun"; the port by which many enslaved people departed and where diverse cultural traditions continue to be practiced
Allada – the ancestral origin of the Fon and Gun peoples, a town located in south central Benin

Egungun – the "revenants," returned ancestors in colorful, full body masks. *Gbon* is their music.
Vodun – spiritual practice focused around deified ancestral figures and natural forces
Zangbeto – the masked "guardians of the night" which watch over Porto Novo. *Kaka* is their music.

Nago – the ethnicity of Yoruba residents of Porto Novo and eastern Benin
Fon – the ethnicity of the people in Abomey (Danxomean empire)
Gun – the ethnicity of the people in Porto Novo (Xogbonu empire)
Toffinou – the ethnicity of the Yoruba-descended people who have long inhabited the lagoon region around present-day Cotonou
Torri – the ethnicity of the original inhabitants of eastern Benin, prior to Yoruba and Gun settlement

Zenli – traditional funeral style of Danxomean royalty; now played for funerals around Abomey
Djegbe – traditional style using minimal instrumentation of two bells for funerals of dignitaries in the Porto Novian region; originates from court music; has slow and fast versions
Kpezin – local drums made of clay or iron used in *zenli* and other styles, which Gangbe use in their percussion section
Masse gohun – popular traditional style derived from drumming for the vodun Sakpata, made famous by Porto Novian singer Yedenou Adjahoui
Gbon – traditional style of Yoruba origin featuring the talking drum; typically accompanies the *egungun* masks
Kaka – the music of the *zangbeto* night watchmen, characterized by the dry cracking of sticks and many interlocking bell patterns
Gan – the iron bell, struck with a wooden stick and used to keep the timeline in many traditional Beninois styles; a style may call for one or more bell parts of various shapes and sizes

Introduction

> In the age of dispersion and circulation, [African] creativity focuses on the relationship, not to the self or the other, but to an opening [*intervalle*]. Africa itself is thus imagined as a great opening, an inexhaustible citation, subject to many forms of combination and composition. The reference is no longer made to an essential singularity, but to a new capacity for bifurcation. (Mbembe 2010:225)

This project examines how jazz and brass band musicians in Benin reconfigure their music in post-colonial networks of power and economics locally and internationally. By deploying a combination of symbolically rich, local traditional musics and international, diasporic styles like jazz, these musicians make meaningful musical choices to achieve their artistic and economic goals. An important background for these choices lies in the centuries-old *vodun* practices associated with traditional drumming, dancing, and singing, which experienced a renaissance in the early 1990s (Forte 2007, Sutherland 2002), and are now part of an active and sometimes contentious public discourse in civic and religious communities (Tall 1995a, Ogouby 2008). *Vodun* music, the representation of traditional Beninois culture, and jazz performance have become mediums of exchange used for a variety of commercial, artistic, and discursive purposes in the recording industry in Cotonou and in Europe.[1]

I understand music making as a form of social action, based in a set of meaningful decisions that connect intention, desire, tradition, and the future. Musicians deploy such creative action to a variety of progressive or conservative ends, including reconfiguring industry power and economic relationships, creating shared experience, constructing difference, valorizing traditional practices, and demonstrating the mastery of modern forms. My project here is to explore the ways in which Beninois jazz and brass band musicians anticipate the consumption practices of local and international audiences, and manage the public and private representation

[1] See Comaroff and Comaroff 2009.

of their ethnic identities and histories, in order to achieve artistic and professional goals. Globalization and neoliberalism are the latest incarnations of colonial and imperial systems of power in which corporations have replaced states and kings as patrons of the arts (Taylor 2007). In globalization, access to the "international" is no longer figured simply on the strength of national identity (Edwards 2001), but on the ability to market and brand that national identity through processes of production and consumption, and to endow signs and symbols with strategic value.

To reach various listening audiences, contemporary Beninese musicians deploy a hybrid complex of musical signs and symbols. They consume American jazz, African popular music, and Beninois traditional musics, in order to create products for other consumers, objectifying the culture they themselves inhabit. The result is an entrepreneurial process of "self-distancing and self-recognition" (McLuhan 1994:57 in Comaroffs 2009:25) as Beninois musicians, like many Westerners, come to define themselves by what they consume, and present this self-assembled hybridity to the world market for its consumption and critical evaluation (the assigning of *value*). They seek to achieve a variety of professional goals in reaching their audiences, including valorizing Benin's traditional culture, religion, and history in an international context, reconnecting Benin's history to that of the African diaspora, and gaining membership in the global community of modern jazz as serious practitioners. The project of recognition for the status of Beninois traditional music confronts a long history of colonial denigration of local religious and musical practices as provincial and even demonic (see chapter two).

The project of valorizing the tradition has a double aspect. On the one hand, it seeks the world's respect for the uniqueness of a cultural tradition and its music, an appreciation of difference and cultural particularity. On the other hand, valorizing the tradition means just that,

evaluating it, objectifying it, commodifying it so that it can be weighed and compared against other cultural commodities. The paradox of valuation in a market economy is that "value" is always material, always comes with a price tag. Other types of non-monetary value, such as sacred value, ethical value, artistic value, or pure prestige, are not incentivized in the same way. Valorizing the tradition requires a close *identification* with that tradition along with an *objectification* of that tradition that demands some level of self-conscious distance from it. As Taylor (2007) writes, the commodity structure of globalization allows identities and traditions to be deployed flexibly as the context demands, resulting in strategies and tactics of improvisation and opportunism when necessary (see chapter four).

A Brief History of Dahomean Music Studies

There have been few studies of popular music in Francophone West Africa, and none on popular music in Benin. There are historical reasons for this. While English-language scholarship on Africa exhibits a growing interest in popular music, it has focused on Anglophone countries, leaving out diverse portions of the continent that have been inflected by different colonial histories and their associated international networks. French-language scholarship, on the other hand, has continued to focus primarily on traditional music in Africa, while remaining skeptical of popular music's academic status and value. By situating this study in Benin, I explore a Francophone site with longstanding and contested relationships with Europe, and with foreign influence more generally, which makes it an advantageous site from which to provoke such questions.

A further reason for the lack of literature on Benin's popular music lies in the French colonial administration's policies discouraging cultural intermixture when it came to the imported dance orchestras, holding onto their power by enforcing a separation between the elite,

educated, largely Christian *evolué* class and the *indigène* (Collins 1992, Ronen 1975). While they were interested in the natives' social structure, administrators were largely silent on the impact of colonization and cultural intermixture. Early ethnographies revealed an interest in "pure" tradition, and anxieties surrounding its loss through culture contact, concerns which form the background of French ethnomusicology's inheritance, consciously or not.

There is a body of scholarship that might be termed "Dahomean Music Studies," that began in the 1950s and centers around traditional expressive forms in southern Benin. One of the first and most prolific contributors is the French ethnomusicologist Gilbert Rouget (1985, 1996, 2001, 2014)[2] particularly his recordings and transcriptions of royal court music in Porto Novo and *vodun* ritual, which he collected throughout southern Benin in the years leading up to independence in the 1950s and early 1960s. These are important resources for understanding how performance practice in the royal courts and in *vodun* ceremonies has changed over time. A study by the scholar Clement da Cruz (1954) in the journal *Études Dahoméennes* helpfully lists all of the traditional ensembles and their functions as they existed at that time, providing historical context for royal orchestras in Abomey. The renowned Ghanaian music scholar J.H. Kwabena Nketia (1971) has published on the chronology of the royal orchestras in Abomey, which he bases on da Cruz's account. Several Beninois scholars have also contributed to research on traditional music, for example the linguistic anthropologist Albert Akoha, whose recent work (2011) gives translation and analysis of the court songs of Behanzin, the last king of Danxome. The musicologist and theater scholar Bievenu Koudjo wrote his dissertation on music and language in Fon and Gun popular song (1989). I build on Koudjo's (1988) analysis of the Fon concept of *gbe* (voice/sound/resonance) and its relationships to local language classifications of

[2] See Borel 1988 for an interview with Rouget.

style and expression.

In research on Beninois popular music, a great deal of work is taking place outside of the academy. In the past ten years, record collectors have begun to mine the resources of Cotonou's dusty old LP bins, and have started to do some of the work of documenting Benin's popular music history since independence. Samy Ben Redjeb's label Analog Africa, based in Germany, has released a series of compilations focused on funk, Afro-beat, and other *vodun*-influenced popular music from the 1960s and '70s (Redjeb 2009a, 2009b, 2008a, 2008b). There has been some interest in Benin's popular music in journalistic circles since the appearance of the Gangbe Brass Band on the international scene in the mid-1990s. The group has been featured, along with Lionel Loueke and Angélique Kidjo, on the radio program *Afropop Worldwide*, and reviewed twice in the *New York Times*. *Afropop Worldwide* recently aired a program on the generations of Beninois popular musicians who have "transformed traditions," including Sagbohan, Angelique Kidjo, Tohon Stanislas, and Jomion & the Uklos, shortly after Jomion moved to the U.S. (Greenstreet 2014) Francois Romain and Jean-Baptiste Miel (2006) contributed a short article on Beninois groups employing *vodun* music in the *Rough Guide to World Music*. In particular, they mention Le Roi Alokpon, Sagbohan Danialou, and Denagan Janvier Honfo, a vocalist based in Germany. The fact that more information on these musicians is concentrated in popular media sources reveals much about the patronage structure supporting these artists' music, which is financed through trade, marketing, and consumption, rather than via institutions of art, education, or the state.

Relative to the recent nature of writing on popular music in Benin, scholars have been fascinated by its history, art, and religion for some time. Particularly relevant to my project are the anthropological studies of Melville and Frances Herskovits (1933, 1938), which chronicle

their research on Dahomean religious belief, ritual, and practices, and, more recently, the work of art historian Suzanne Blier (1995) on *vodun* sculpture and religious practice going back to the slave trade. There is much written on *vodun* practice in general, from outsider and insider perspectives. The most helpful of these is the Beninois pastor and theologian Laurent Ogouby's (2008) *Les Religions dans l'Espace Publique au Bénin*. The most comprehensive general historical accounts (though now in need of updating) are Dov Ronen's (1975) *Dahomey: From Tradition to Modernity* and Robert Cournevin's (1981) *La République Populaire du Bénin*. For more recent historical context, Camilla Strandsbjerg's *Religion et Transformations Politiques au Benin* (2015) is a good guide.

A large part of my project is concerned with historicizing contemporary musical practice, drawing out the complex colonial back story of how Beninois life has come to be the way it is, post-independence and post-socialism. My historical approach in the first three chapters is especially informed by the perspectives of my musician informants on history, who treat Africa as an archive, like Mbembe's (2010:225) *intervalle*, “a great opening, an inexhaustible citation, subject to many forms of combination and composition” (see epigraph). Thus my investigations into Dahomey-Benin's histories of trade, religion, music, and politics are motivated by an interest in present practice's relationships to those histories. Musicians' use of these histories raises questions about ownership and the objectification of their traditions, and those of their ancestors and neighbors. As I will show, “using” Africa's archive does not deny these traditions their aesthetic or spiritual power, but rather magnifies them and gives them new life through their recontextualization.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995:23) writes that the social process of history involves people in their various capacities as *agents* (in the structural positions of musicians, producers, listeners,

consumers, politicians, priests, parents), *actors* (particular individuals in specific contexts), and *subjects*, "voices aware of their own vocality." I am interested in the ways in which all three of these human capacities have contributed to the development of contemporary music in Benin, especially how individual actors like musicians leverage their own structural positions and those of others – the ways in which they turn their agency into action – calling attention to the Africanization, individualization, and sonorization of the reflexivities of modernity.

The history of interaction between spirituality and politics in Benin provides crucial background for understanding the use of *vodun* music in contemporary recordings and performances. *Vodun* practice is intertwined with the traditional political and spiritual power of the Danxomean empire, which ruled from the 17th century up until French colonization in the late 19th century (see chapter one), giving *vodun*'s contemporary significations a superfluity of meanings centering around ethnic hegemony and its critiques. The links between *vodun* and power, both monarchical and now democratically elected, extend from precolonial Danxome up through colonization and missionization (Ballard 1999), the independence era, the socialist period and the present day, and plays out in a rich musical environment of overlapping traditional, popular, and religious styles. The number and variety of different musical styles in Benin represents an incredible cultural wealth caught up in a constant process of change.

As a colony that gained independence under conditions of contested loyalties (Ronen 1975, Anignikin 1986, see chapter two), Benin and its musicians took a different trajectory than that of other former French colonies in the 1960s, placing the focus on music imported from outside the country, from other parts of Africa and the diaspora, to France to New Orleans to Cuba (see chapter three). The anti-traditional regulation of culture under the Marxist regime of General Kerekou in the 1970s and '80s discouraged music drawing on local Beninois traditions. I

show that with economic liberalization and a renewed environment of cultural pluralism in the 1990s, Beninois musicians focused on using their own traditional music and an increased mastery of jazz to shift the discourse surrounding these foreign imports to recenter their active participation and communication with the wider world.

Theoretical Background: Entrepreneurship, Style, Spirituality

I focus this study around three thematic areas, which have emerged from my interviews and observations over time: cultural entrepreneurship, style, and spirituality. I integrate discussion of these elements in the chapters that follow, but I would like to separate them for a moment here in order to provide some definitions and reflections on their scholarly contexts.

By cultural entrepreneurship I mean practices of innovation aimed at generating "wealth" from cultural activities. The goal of such innovations, often through the creation of new commodity forms, is to create sustainable livelihood for both producers and consumers of cultural products. Without the protection or patronage of the state or a corporation, the entrepreneur assumes responsibility for the risks and rewards of his or her ventures. Entrepreneurs play a two-sided game, trading some amount of economic risk and lack of protection for the potential rewards of freedom, innovation, and value. In their collection on cultural entrepreneurship in Africa, anthropologists Ute Roschenthaler and Dorothea Schulz (2015:2) write that "cultural entrepreneurs" are

> ...individuals who quickly perceive the chances of the moment and seize novel opportunities to initiate new forms of generating income in the realm of cultural production. What distinguishes entrepreneurs and their initiatives from that of other inventive individuals is that they purposefully take chances in situations of uncertainty, when failure seems to be as likely an outcome for their activities as does success.

Drawing on Michel de Certeau's (1984) concept of "tactical logic," I extend this characterization to include brass bands' musical practices of improvisation and experimentation as well (see

chapter four). In neoliberal development-speak, entrepreneurship has been hailed in Africa and other parts of the world as a way out of poverty that trains people to participate in market economies, as well as a kind of missive to "cast down your buckets where you are." Cultural entrepreneurs in Benin have taken this endeavor seriously as they market their country's music and culture, which is, in the absence of minerals or oil, they argue, their greatest natural resource. The "wealth" which is entrepreneurship's object is often monetary, although the musicians in this study trade in other forms of capital, too, such as respectability, exposure, and awareness, as they juggle multiple trade partners at once.

Entrepreneurship has been a subject of recent interest in anthropology and ethnomusicology. In Jean and John Comaroff's *Ethnicity, Inc.* (2009), the authors advance the idea of the "ethno-preneur," the cultural broker who blurs consumption and production practices to market a culture that he or she simultaneously inhabits. Jesse Weaver Shipley (2013) explores celebrity and entrepreneurship in *Living the Hiplife*, his ethnography of Ghanaian popular music. He argues that the genre of hiplife "produces an aesthetic and moral configuration that celebrates entrepreneurship," which he understands as a kind of "self-making" which responds to the ethos and realities of economic liberalization (4-5). Shipley suggests that the "informal economy" (an older formulation referring to the entrepreneurial sphere) has long existed in Ghanaian culture, but that it was pressed into service as state-run networks of patronage ended in the 1980s (53-7). Jocelyne Guilbeault (2007) examines entrepreneurship in Trinidad's carnival musics in *Governing Sound*. She uses the term "musical entrepreneurship" to refer to independent "projects that deal with music as commodity in capitalist markets and aim to make profits" (7). Guilbeault (2007:8) highlights "entrepreneurship as a distinctive target of governing as well as a mode of self-conduct," suggesting an important link between governance, its anxieties and

responsibilities, and the practices of the entrepreneur.

Without official patronage, entrepreneurs face the challenge of establishing the legitimacy of their ventures and products, which has sometimes led both consumers and policy makers to dismiss entrepreneurial practices as materialistic “self-promotion” or “hustling.” Societies ignore entrepreneurship to their detriment; economic theorists have recently argued that the entrepreneur's importance is undertheorized – and undervalued – in an framework that emphasizes capital and labor without fully understanding the role of innovation (Baumol 2010). This manifests in Gangbe and Eyo'nle Brass Bands' music and self-representations in their frequent redefinitions and revalorizations of their projects and goals as they adapt to changes in politics, global economies, and audiences.

Entrepreneurship has usually been understood to be an individual endeavor. Practices of collectivity, on the other hand, introduce additional complications which are crucial to understanding the trajectories of groups like Gangbe and Eyo'nle. Collective entrepreneurship spreads out the risks and rewards of “going it alone,” affording a protection which economists point to as one of the secrets of business success and longevity (Mourdoukoutas 2011, 1999). Sharing risks and rewards means that producers do not have to take on the sole responsibility for their venture's success or failure. They seek to engage consumers in “buying-in” to the larger benefits of the project, and so to expand their markets and limit their liability at the same time. Collective entrepreneurship opens producers, however, to risks like dissent and misunderstanding among collaborators, which can limit flexibility and adaptation in time sensitive situations. As officially registered Beninois “*associations*,” Gangbe and Eyo'nle have most succesfully engaged practices of collective entrepreneurship as a united front which they deploy in the face of unequal dynamics of power and economics. Sharing the risks and rewards

of their projects has sometimes led to friction over the groups' goals, but their overarching project of turning Benin's traditions into various kinds of wealth (material and immaterial) has kept them together.

This entrepreneurial project of transforming and marketing culture takes place in multiple economic and aesthetic spheres; one of the more complex and culturally situated of these spheres is that of musical style. I see style as defined both by specific sonic qualities such as rhythm, timbre, texture, and voice, and by the social positions, values, and felt experience of its creators and other social actors. Style, as a path through a field of possibilities, is situated precariously between the relative social fixity of genre and the singular, momentary presence of each of its iterations. These "repetition[s] with difference" (Snead 1981) constantly respond to previous statements in the style's expressive sphere, revising and recreating its contextual relationships – the "dialogic overtones" which are essential to understanding "the whole of the utterance" (Bakhtin 1986:92). For Steven Feld (1988:107), style constitutes the stuff, both the substance and the process, of sounding social life. In his reflections on "the Kaluli groove," he writes that

> Style is the very human resources that are enacted to constitute the reality of social life in sound. Style is itself the accomplishment, the crystallization of personal and social participation; it is the way performance and engagement endows humanly meaningful shape upon sonic form. Style is an emergence, the means by which newly creative knowledge is developed from playful, rote, or ordinary participatory experience. Style is the way an internalization and naturalization of felt thoughts and thought feelings guides experience.

Feld's formulation recalls Michel de Certeau's (1984:47) concept of style as "a way of walking through a terrain," emphasizing that style is centrally a doing and a making, the process of iteration that traces the sensory quality of movement itself, what Feld (1988:82) calls the "feel of moving sound."

In the first three chapters, I trace stylistic change in Benin through a historical discussion

of genre, culminating at the end of the third chapter in an analysis of genre categories like *sacré*, *populaire*, *traditionel*, and *moderne*. I consider how these categories arose from colonial typologies of class and religion in the 20th century, and the bearing they have on contemporary performance practice and its representation and marketing. I continue this discussion in the fourth chapter as I examine how Gangbe and Eyo'nle Brass Bands deploy these styles in their recordings and live performances in pursuit of their entrepreneurial goals. For these musicians, styles like *masse gohoun* and *gbon* are defined through a combination of social context, cultural history, and "feel" – produced by an interactive complex of melo-rhythmic patterns of timbre and texture.[3] When culturally informed Beninois listeners identify a style, they typically begin with the bell pattern, then narrow their definition through the bell's relationship to the support drum patterns (here sometimes classifying the subdivision as duple or triple), and lastly direct their attention to the type of lead drum – *kpezin*, *gbon*, or *kpawhle* – and the individuality of that drummer's phrasing. Then they would offer contextual details about the style's place of origin, its ancestral history, its spiritual and ethnic associations, and key innovators in the style, like Yedenou Adjahoui in the case of *masse gohoun*. As John Chernoff (1981:124) writes, "style is another word for the perception of relationships."

One way of understanding style in Beninois culture is through the Fon language concept of *gbe*, meaning sound or voice (Koudjo 1988), which categorizes styles based on their use of spoken or sung language, rather than their *sacre* or *populaire* performance context. This is the *gbe* of "Gangbe," meaning "the sound of the bell," from the Fon proverb "*Gan jayí mo nɔ gbɛ gbè*," meaning "The sound/voice (*gbe*) of the *gan* cannot stay silent." This framework suggests a relationship between style and *resonance* as a model for music as communication.

[3] See Meki Nzewi's work for further exploration of melo-rhythm.

A large part of this study concerns what happens to musical style in *changing* contexts. In Gangbe and Eyo'nle international musical projects, locally oriented concepts of *sacre*, *populaire*, *traditionel*, *moderne* – or even *gangbe* and its emphasis on the resonant power of the bell – encounter global genres like "world music" and "jazz." As Bakhtin (1986:66) writes, "The transfer of style from one genre to another not only alters the way a style sounds... but also violates or renews the given genre." There is an area of productive overlap between Bakhtin's understanding of sounded style and Koudjo's *gbe* (sound/voice). Beninois bands' stylistic interventions have certainly "violated and renewed" genres on both sides of the African-European border, as neither "world music," "jazz," nor *sacre* or *populaire* is adequate to contain their recontextualizations (see chapter four). The transfer of a style like *masse gohoun* from its genres of *populaire* and *traditionel* in Benin to "world music" in Europe means that it will sound differently, stretching, redefining, and even breaking the definitions of each generic category.

In my analysis of the role of various modes of spirituality – Afro-Christian, *vodun*, ancestral – in Gangbe and Eyo'nle's strategic projects, I seek to take seriously the prominent role of spiritual practice in the lives of these musicians and their communities, and the ways that religious institutions and ritual contexts inform their conceptions of musical genre, style, and experience, and their marketing of culture. I prefer to use the term "spirituality" and "spiritual practice" when speaking of the fluidity and connectedness that transcends specific religious institutions and teachings. It seems particularly appropriate to use spirituality as a framework in Benin's environment of religious pluralism and intercultural exchange. *Vodun* practice is also characteristic in its lack of dogma and openness to incorporating new beliefs (see chapter one). When I refer to a specific religious group rather than spirituality in general, I will use "religion" or "religious practice" or the name of that community.

One important context for Gangbe and Eyo'nle's creative practice and entrepreneurship is independent Afro-Christian churches such as the Church of Celestial Christianity, and the Cherubim and Seraphim. Chapter two explores the histories of these churches in Dahomean nationalist movement in the 1930s and '40s, and their relationship to ancestral *vodun* liturgical practice. These churches' worship services are characterized by the adaptation of traditional *populaire* music styles like *djegbe*, *masse gohoun*, and *zenli* that were frowned upon in worship in more Euro-centric, elite Protestant and Catholic churches. Many of Gangbe and Eyo'nle's members came of age, and learned to play music, in one of these independent Celeste or Cherubim communities, which, I argue, inflects how they think about the communicative, experiential, and political power of music, along with the mobility, mutability, and pragmatic uses of traditional *vodun* repertoires, and the relationship of professional musicians to traditional culture in general. Churches like Celestial Christianity have a pragmatic relationship to traditional African culture, seeking to preserve links to past expressive practices and styles, while transforming them into something useful for present needs. In these churches, international brass bands find a model for culture, spirituality, and traditional music as powerful tools for political and economic transformation.

Throughout the chapters that follow, I trace the histories of music and spiritual practice in Benin, and their deployment by brass band musicians. I begin by establishing some historical background, beginning in chapter one with the foundation of the empires of Danxome and Xogbonu in the 17th century, and the intertwining of *vodun* spiritual and musical practices with conquest and control. I then trace the effects of colonial missionization on ancestral and *vodun* practices in chapter two, considering the role of independent churches and new *vodun* communities in the Dahomean nationalist movement. In chapter three I follow the status of

spirituality in Benin after independence, including its regulation and suppression during the socialist period, and its renewal and branding during neoliberalism in the 1990s. The fourth and fifth chapters consider how Gangbe and Eyo'nle draw on these histories of religion and spirituality in their music, whether composing pieces that feature *vodun* or ancestral styles like *gbon* or *zenli* or referencing the rhythms of Celeste churches like *ahwangbahun*.

Recent literature in anthropology and ethnomusicology has opened the conversation on spiritual practice and cultural economics in Africa. For example, Jean and John Comaroff (2009:136) write that the characteristics of ethnic branding, or "Ethnicity, Inc.," also appear similarly in the branding of divinity, "commodifying the numinous essence" of religion. Literature in ethnomusicology has focused less on the economic aspects of spiritual practice in Africa, and more on spirituality's relationships to musical style and experience, for example in Christopher Waterman's *Juju* (1990), and Steven Friedson's *Dancing Prophets* (1996) and *Remains of Ritual* (2009). But Ryan Skinner's work on Afropolitan ethics in *Bamako Sounds* (2015) is a good example of a study that brings together spirituality with a wider consideration of the economics of musicians' lifeworlds, which is also central to my approach.

The "*marche de religion*" in Benin has been studied in detail by the Beninois sociologist Hippolyte Amouzouvi in his book *La Religion Comme Business en Afrique* (2014). Taking the motivations, strategies, and objectives of social actors as his primary focus, Amouzouvi examines the proliferation of new Christian and *vodun* communities that flourished in the open cultural climate in the '90s in Benin as examples of a society negotiating transitional values around spirituality and materialism. While his data and analyses are insightful and I share his interest in social actors' strategies and objectives, in my view Amouzouvi loses an opportunity when he brackets anthropological and phenomenological notions of spirituality as a vital societal

force, and the associations and meanings of its structural and ritual aspects. While religion in Benin may be big business, it is not only business; and to say that its international brass bands make their and their neighbors' spiritual practices the object of their entrepreneurial projects is not to say that those practices do not maintain their experiential power (and spiritual efficacy) for the musicians. This power transfers unpredictably and productively across contexts, and continues to enliven felt relationships to local identity, belonging, and ancestral spirits.

The diaspora seen from West Africa is primarily about ancestors departed, opening the relevance of this study for recent scholarly interest in the study of new African diasporas (Okpewho and Nzegwu 2009). The musicians in this study are located in a site with historical ties to the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and seek to participate in the African diaspora through their musical practices, even as they remain based in that diaspora's multiply iconic homeland.[4] Thus these musicians argue musically[5] for the place of Cotonou and Paris as important outposts on the Black Atlantic (Gilroy 1993). I explore the disagreements among different Beninois musicians about how they imagine their participation in this diaspora, musically and religiously.[6] In analyzing my multi-sited research, I show how what goes on internationally in music studios, at concerts, and in global economies affects what happens at home in Cotonou, and how local cultural politics in Benin affect how bands represent its traditions abroad.

Part of Gangbe and Eyo'nle's project of imagining themselves in diaspora involves

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[4] Elizabeth McAlister (2012) writes about a similar phenomenon among Haitian roots (*rasin*) musicians who use *vodun* music to "imagine themselves in diaspora." Like the *musique de recherche* community in Benin, these musicians in Haiti have also undertaken their own ethnographic research to obtain access to *vodun* music.

[5] This formulation intentionally provokes the question of whether music can make arguments, and whether it can create and participate in its own discourse. I follow Ingrid Monson's (1996) concept of "music as discourse" as a way of understanding how jazz musicians and audiences together construct experiences of music as a language that is "saying something." But to argue in a scholarly context for the discursive interventions of music and musicians can risk conflating the musicians' agency with that of the scholar, or even erasing the multiplicity of interpretations that a given piece can stimulate in the world. I write more about this in later sections on the Fon concept of *gbe*, voice-resonance, which goes out into the world and continues resonanting long after its initial point of origin.

[6] See Brent Hayes Edwards' (2003) discussion of such disjunctures, which he refers to as *décalage*.

participating in a modern jazz networks. This project addresses interdisciplinary jazz studies in important ways, as it seeks to open up the purview of jazz scholars to creative communities outside of the United States, especially those with strong connections to the roots of the music in West African culture. Studies of jazz in Africa have been limited to a few well known examples like Ghana, Ethiopia, and South Africa. Jazz musicians and critics sometimes think that "African jazz" is a misnomer, since in Africa "jazz" can be used to describe any musical group that incorporates foreign influence into their sound. But with this attitude often comes the assumption that African musicians, with a few exceptions, have not attained the level of mastery necessary to participate in virtuosic styles like bebop, which has become the universal measure of acceptability in conservatory jazz programs. I have found that many musicians in Benin are particularly aware of this bias, and incorporate modern jazz harmony, bebop language, and a self-conscious blues sensibility into their musical products in an effort to speak directly to a "jazz cosmopolitan" audience, and out of a desire to be perceived as "authentic" by that transnational cosmopolitan community (cf. Feld 2012).

An important next step in this research will involve the younger generation of jazz musicians that followed and overlapped the careers of Gangbe and Eyo'nle Brass Bands I discuss here. This includes the gospel-jazz group Jomion and the Uklos, led by former Gangbe trumpeter Sam Gnonlonfoun, now based in New York City; the Afrofunk group Viviola, founded by former Gangbe trumpeter Magloire Ahouandjinou along with his brothers Didier and Aaron, resident in Benin after two summers of touring in France; and freelancers such as the jazz drummer Josaphat Honnu, a student of Jean Adagbenon, and the bassist Manu Falla, who have both moved to Belgium to play music. All of these musicians have had to deal with the legacies of the brass bands that preceded them on the international scene, which have forced them to refashion

themselves and their music in order to open audiences' expectations to greater stylistic flexibility beyond the brass band format and traditional styles. In order to be recognized for their accomplishments in modern jazz, these groups and individuals have had to distance themselves from the national image of Benin and its burdens of representation. They have had varying degrees of success in confronting this challenge. Many of these jazz musicians look to the example of Beninois guitarist Lionel Loueke, who gained fame through his association with Herbie Hancock, and has made his career in the U.S. on a path marked more “African” than “Beninois” than the brass bands that came up at the same time in the 2000s. I collected interviews with this generation of jazz musicians throughout my fieldwork, and look forward to writing more about their musical and professional strategies in the future. Their individualism and stylistic freedom offer important considerations for the conclusions I make in this study.

Field Notes

The jazz and brass band musicians in this study are based in Cotonou and Porto Novo, the country's twin capitals which are situated an hour apart via *zemi-jahn* motorcycle taxi on the southern coast, one the economic center and the other the seat of government (see figure 1). The musicians I worked with belong to a “community of practice” which is distinct from that of pop and rock musicians in Cotonou in a number of ways. They have a significant amount of musical training and mastery, on brass instruments, concert band percussion, and in music theory and solfege, received from relatives in military or police orchestras, or from their own participation in church-centered brass bands or *fanfares.* Many have studied jazz improvisation, composition, and theory at institutions in France, Canada, or other parts of West Africa, such as Niger and Cote d'Ivoire. They speak fluent French, and depending on where they grew up, several local languages, including Fon, Gun, Yoruba, Adja, and/or Mahi. Intellectual and philosophical debate

is a favorite activity, which meant that over time my questions joined in broader intellectual conversations that the musicians were already engaged in amongst themselves. A frequent discussion my presence prompted among the musicians was whether scholars of Beninois music should be doing "*musicologie*" or "*ethnologie*," these two domains taken as mutually exclusive, with musicology perceived as preferable and less tainted by colonial pasts (see chapter two for more on the colonial heritage of ethnography in Dahomey).

Figure 1

Most of the musicians grew up in Christian communities, participating in music at one of several independent African churches such as Celestial Christianity or Cherubim and Seraphim. A few grew up in *vodun* communities and later converted to Christianity. In pursuit of the projects in the genre they describe as "*tradi-moderne*" music, many of these musicians have undertaken systematic research into traditional *vodun* religious music, the source of contemporary rhythmic styles employed in independent churches and brass bands. Their aspirations are mostly international, as in Benin audiences are appreciative but small, and engagements are low-paying. The chief mode of travel for these musicians is the format of the African brass band, with groups like Gangbe Brass Band and Eyon'le Brass Band making regular appearances on the European summer festival circuit. The latest generation of jazz musicians

coming of age in the 2000s resists the brass band format, preferring to work as individual freelancers, or to form new fusions like the Afro-funk ensemble Viviola, formed in 2014, and the jazz-gospel group Jomion and the Uklos, formed in 2012.

This study covers fieldwork spread out over a period of nine years with the community of professional jazz and brass band musicians in Benin's southern region. I first visited Benin in the fall of 2007 for two months during a year long trip to Africa as a Thomas J. Watson Fellow. My memories of my first encounters are vivid and telling. My first contact in Cotonou was Didier Ahouandjinou (1980-), the youngest son of the late, great police orchestra director Henri Ahouandjinou. Didier, an accomplished and busy jazz pianist, was constantly on his way from a studio session to a gig to another session, or on his way back home to Porto Novo in a *sept-place* shared taxi to sleep for a few hours before getting up and doing it all again. I first met him in front of the Cathedrale de Saint Michel on one of Cotonou's busy downtown streets. I brought my trombone. I had just come from two months spent in Accra, Ghana, and had been given Didier's contact by an Ewe trombonist there, Eli Gas. Didier arrived by *zemi-jahn* motorcycle taxi, with his keyboard slung over his shoulder. As I joined him on the back of the *zem*, which now carried a load of three people and two instruments, and we zoomed away, I watched as he narrowly but expertly avoided crashing his instrument into surrounding traffic.

Didier agreed to send a few of his musician friends to see me at my hostel, including several trombone players. This was how I met his brother Aaron Ahouandjinou, who is now the trombonist with the jazz ensemble Viviola. We had some trouble understanding each other at first (my French, my appreciation for Beninois expressions, and my fluency in Fon have all improved a lot over the past nine years), but we played some music together, the bebop blues “Billie's Bounce.” Aaron seemed to find this acceptable. I explained what I was doing in Benin. Well,

truthfully I didn't yet know what I was doing in Benin, but I told Aaron that I was interested in talking to jazz musicians about their relationship to traditional music. He looked interested, and we made plans to go to Porto Novo the following day to meet the rest of his brothers.

In order to avoid the series of transfers from *zemi-jahn* to *sept-place* to *zem* again, Aaron took me and my trombone on the back of his *keke* (motorcycle), and hired a *zem* to carry my suitcase on the hour-long trip to Porto Novo, which we attached with several bungee cords. When I climbed onto the back Aaron's bike, he turned around and said, “That's exactly where I put Roswell.” Roswell? “Roswell Rudd was here?!” I said. Rudd, an American avant-garde trombonist I admired, had been there to record an album with the Gangbe Brass Band, *Trombone Tribe*, which came out in 2009. I found a strange excitement in discovering that I shared this esoteric connection with Aaron and his brothers, perhaps because I was drawn to signs of familiarity, but also because it offered a glimpse into the breadth of their international networks.

We arrived at the Ahouandjinou family's house in Dowa, the neighborhood just north of Ouando, the large market in Porto Novo. A small plaque next to the gate reads “Henri Ahouandjinou,” the name of their father, the director of the national police orchestra, who passed away in 2006. Aaron's brother Rock, who later became the sousaphonist with the Eyon'le Brass Band, was on his way out the front gate on his motorcycle. Behind him sat his brother, the gospel singer Chretien, now Eyo'nle's snare drummer; the two of them balanced a mattress on their heads. They pulled out into traffic, grinning, and Aaron followed them, waving. “Where are we going?” I asked. “Oh, your apartment is ready,” he said. “I didn't think it would be ready until tomorrow, but we can go there now.”

This characterized the warm musician's welcome I received throughout my work with the Ahouandjinou family, who went out of their way to help me in my work whenever possible, in

spite of their busy schedules filled with gigs and family obligations. I did not know it then, but many of my research connections over the years that followed would extend like spokes on a wheel from the Ahouandjinou family's compound in Dowa, to which I returned many times in various states of celebration, frustration, and exhaustion. This also framed the kinds of information I had access to as my time in the field went on. I remained close to musicians' lives and work and, through building trust, enjoyed a great deal of access to their process and interactions. This alliance meant, however, that I sacrificed some access to the lifeworlds of the musicians' audiences in Benin and in Europe (see chapter five). The closeness of these working relationships and my identity as a musician also set up the expectation early on that I would not seek out critical distance while we were spending time together, but had to find the time to write and reflect on my own.

When I joined the Gangbe Brass Band on tour in 2014, for example, they insisted that I play on their concerts (with minimal or no rehearsal) rather than film from the audience, which refused me the power to move back and forth between levels of interiority. While Gangbe offered me complete admission to their internal world of practice and experience, this came at the price of nearly complete closure of the distance between us, which I had to mediate by taking time away on my own. The reader will observe the effects of these dynamics in the chapters that follow, particularly in the candid nature of the interview materials, and my efforts to let the musicians speak for themselves. I am always there, of course, in constructing these conversations, and in seeking to balance the multiplicity of musicians' perspectives with my own analyses.

Rock became my first research assistant, and helped me to make initial contact with vodun priests, Celeste churches, the military police orchestra in Porto Novo, and musicians in all

areas of expertise around Porto Novo. He arranged for me to study *sakra*, a flexible-tone drum used in Yoruba styles like *gbon*; knowledge about *sakra* is less spiritually controlled than knowledge about the *gbon* talking drum, and so risked less controversy. With Didier I visited jazz clubs in Cotonou, and met his friends Josephat Honnou, the virtuosic jazz drummer, and the bassist Manu Falla. Both have since moved to Brussels. I joined them at the now defunct jazz club Repaire de Bacchus's jam session one night. Sam Gnonlonfoun, then one of Gangbe Brass Band's trumpeters, also sat in. Bayo Agonglo (d. 2015) from Benin's renowned salsa band Black Santiago was there playing drums. We played the jazz standards “Afro Blue,” “The Preacher,” “Cantaloupe Island,” “Work Song,” and “All Blues,” all in a strangely comfortable mix that felt like Afro-Cuban 12/8 and New Orleans second line grooves wrapped into one.

Then, one night Didier took me to meet the oldest Ahouandjinou brother, Gangbe Brass Band's trombonist Martial, at his house. Didier had arranged for me to meet Martial and several other members of Gangbe, whom I had recognized from their performance in 2006 when I was a student at Oberlin College. It was surreal to encounter these familiar faces in a dim, tin-roofed room in Cotonou. I had been interested in the group when I heard them in the U.S., but there was still a lot I didn't know about them. There was a lot I didn't know about Beninois music in general, as Aaron and Didier reminded me often in the days before I left Benin to continue my fellowship journey to Mali.

I returned to Benin during the summers of 2010, 2012, and 2013, and for eight months in 2014-15. In 2010 as I prepared my Master's thesis (Politz 2011), I spent time in France with Gangbe Brass Band while they were on tour, and two months in Benin working in the Mono region with several different *vodun* drumming ensembles, and in Porto Novo with Aaron, Jeremie, and Didier Ahouandjinou, then members of Togni Music Concept who would later form

Viviola. I also began studying the Fon language with a teacher in the U.S. In 2012, I focused my two-month trip in Abomey, where I began working with Constant Legonou, a research assistant who was trained by the art historian Suzanne Blier in the 1990s. I knew that I wanted to develop some technique on an instrument besides trombone in order to better understand and internalize Benin's rhythmic practices. Legonou introduced me to my drum teacher Etienne Mechonou, a priest and drummer for the *vodun* Sakpata, *nesuxwe*, and *toxosu* from king Kpengla's line. I also studied with the master drummer Clement Hunto, whose ancestors generations ago were captives of war under king Agadja. I was able to attend two ceremonies for Sakpata that year.

In 2013, I hosted Jomion and the Uklos – consisting of Sam Gnonlonfoun and his brothers Jean, Mathieu, and J.B. - at Harvard University, where they performed with the Dudley House Jazz Orchestra, sponsored by the Committee on African Studies at Harvard and the Departement de Fonds de l'Aide a la Culture in Benin. That summer, I went back to Cotonou, interviewing musicians such as Sagbohan Danialou, Jean Adagbenon, and les Freres Guedengue. I made a short trip to Abomey, and reconnected with Mechonou to learn more drumming repertoire for the *vodun* Sakpata.

In the summer of 2014, I spent two months with Gangbe during their summer tour in France, joining them on trombone for eight of their tour dates. I then moved to Benin for eight months, spending the fall in Cotonou as Gangbe completed the last few tracks for their album *Go Slow to Lagos* (2015), and continued my study of Fon with a local teacher through the French Cultural Center. I returned to Abomey in December, where I continued to study drumming for Sakpata, and observed two ceremonies for *tovodun* and one for *nesuxwe* (both spirits of royal princes). After the New Year in 2015, I attended the Fete de Vodun in Ouidah, as well as the first annual brass band festival held at the Ahouandjinou's family compound outside of Porto Novo,

where I assisted with jazz and brass clinics organized by Rock and Magloire Ahouandjinou. I also recorded interviews and concerts with Eyon'le Brass Band and the jazz ensemble Viviola. I returned to Abomey at the end of the dry season, and observed the annual ceremonies for the kings at the royal palace, overseen by king Agboli-Agbo. In August 2016, I spent a week with Eyo'nle on tour in France, and three weeks in Cotonou, Porto Novo, and Abomey conducting follow up interviews.

Outline of Chapters

In the first chapter, I explore narratives of the ancestral foundations that Gangbe and other groups reference in their songs. I begin with the 17th century roots of Adja culture in Allada in what is now southern Benin, including its early splintering into the Fon and Gun ethnic kingdoms of Danxome and Xogbonu and the assimilation of *vodun* into Danxomean culture. I show that this history involves internal migrations and conflicts, along with the constant influence of international encounter and exchange. The historical narrative that Gangbe's songs point to reveals embedded practices of hybridity and self-making that challenge received notions of static or homogeneous "traditional" civilization. In undertaking this detailed historical account, I seek to provide a rich context for the practices of Beninois brass band musicians, who reference songs and stylistic repertoires from these ancestral traditions, and sometimes specific key historical events, to situate themselves within the interlocking pasts of their families, their villages and towns, their country, and the international community.

In the second chapter, I extend this historical narrative to examine the impact of colonialism on Beninois society in the first half of the 20th century, particularly through education, religion, and constructed social class, and later through ideas of cultural authenticity promoted through colonial ethnography. These notions of culture were based on concepts of

cultural particularity and difference that reflected and supported the French's claim to cultural superiority in Dahomey. The “civilizing” mission of the French, and later their attempts at “development,” emphasized old social divisions and created new ones, despite their rhetoric of cultural unity. I also examine how the French state and the Catholic church colluded to regulate traditional spiritual practices like *vodun* worship and performance. A key component of this chapter is the role of new Afro-Christian and *vodun* communities in the anti-colonial Dahomean nationalist movement in the 1930s and '40s, which was cut short by the beginning of World War II.

The third chapter looks at the development of popular music during and after independence (1950-present), particularly through the lens of style and genre. The chapter opens with a discussion of genre in 20th century Benin, particularly the development of what is known as *musique moderne*. I then chronicle the beginning of the movement of “modernize” Beninois music, beginning with jazz and highlife musicians like Ignace de Souza in the 1950s and continuing through the salsa and Congo music wave of the '60s to the first “tradi-modern” projects of Sagbohan Danielou, Yedenou Adjahoui, and Orchestre Poly-Rythmo in the 1970s. I consider the effects of Benin's political upheaval through the 1970s and '80s and the relationship of musical practice to government economic policy. I conclude with an exploration of the 1990s cultural renaissance that gave birth to the international brass band movement in Benin, and consider how it enacted dual aspects of what Achille Mbembe (2010) calls “Afropolitanism.”

In the fourth chapter, I examine the trajectories of two ensembles, the Gangbe Brass Band and Eyo'nle Brass Band, and their professional tactics and strategies in the international music business. I show how these musicians mobilize their interpretations of their country's musical history and culture as a strategic commodity in the international market to achieve a wide variety

of intersecting entrepreneurial and artistic goals, which reflect a growing understanding of consumption practices in the West. Drawing on theories of globalization (Taylor 2007), "ethno-preneurship" (Comaroffs 2009), and "tactical logic" (de Certeau 1984), I trace the ways that Gangbe and Eyo'nle's growing production knowledge enabled them to take greater control of their aesthetic and economic practices as they strategically targeted different segments of their audiences.

The fifth chapter discusses the specific musical materials and methods that Gangbe and Eyo'nle Brass Bands deploy, improvising and adapting with different ingredients, in order to reach multiple audiences and ensure the viability of their professional careers. I focus on their use of different language cues in English, French, Fon, and Gun, and their choice of certain rhythmic styles with cultural and spiritual connotations that meaningfully reference other musical contexts. I suggest that the bands move back and forth between public and hidden transcripts in order to make their music accessible in certain ways for general audiences, while protecting a sphere of social critique and cultural particularity for various cultural insiders. A close reading of several of their compositions shows that they create their music for audiences deploying multiple interpretive frames, depending on the cultural and aesthetic knowledge to which those audiences have access, for example jazz, Afrobeat, and the Beninois styles, spiritual traditions, and languages. The groups' music allows for many of these frames to overlap in listeners' interpretations and enjoyment, and so posits a model for participation that can encompass a multiplicity of insiderships and outsiderships of different kinds.

Chapter One:

Cultural Hybridity, Power, and Value in Danxome: History Woven and Unwoven (1300-1900)

The history of the present-day Republic of Benin is complex, involving a series of internal migrations and conflicts, along with the constant influence of international encounter and exchange, centuries before the beginning of the colonial period, when histories of cultural misture usually begin. This history reveals deeply embedded practices of hybridity and self-making that challenge received notions of static or homogeneous "traditional" civilization. Untangling the famously deep and overlapping rhythmic traditions in this part of Africa demands a reckoning with the complicated histories of royalty, power, religion, and ethnicity that grew to be intertwined with them. In undertaking this detailed historical account, I seek to provide a rich context for the work of jazz and brass band musicians in Benin, whose practices of cultural entrepreneurship include references to songs and drumming repertoires from these ancestral traditions, and key historical events, to situate themselves within the interlocking pasts of their families, their villages and towns, their country, and the international community, in order to create cultural capital.

Before the Republic of Benin became a modern nation state, or a French colony called Dahomey, the empire of Danxome[7] was the most powerful force in the region. As the center of the Fon royal lineage, the empire's capital of Abomey is home to some of the area's oldest cultural practices. In this chapter, I outline the origins of the Danxomean empire in the early 17th century through links between vodun practice, traditional power, and the early commodification of culture. Because of its role as a slave trading kingdom, and as a source of African diasporic

[7] I will use the Fon spelling Danxome (pronounced "Dan-ho-meh") to refer to the precolonial empire that ruled what is now southern Benin until the end of the 19th century, while reserving the term Dahomey ("Dah-ho-may") for the French colony that existed 1894-1960, which incorporated a much larger territory, including the Bariba lands to the north.

culture in the Americas, Danxome has been one of the most intensively studied West African civilizations by historians of economics, art, religion, and politics. Danxome's own oral historians also provide rich accounts of the kingdom's important conquests, personalities, and cultural contributions. The histories of Allada and Ouidah, because they merged in the 18th century under the control of Danxome, have received less attention. “Everything you find in Abomey, you will find in Ouidah,” Gangbe's percussionist Crispin Kpitiki (France, 6/5/14) told me, referring in particular to vodun deities and their associated repertoires, emphasizing the influence of growing cultural hegemony in the southern region, especially in the Ouidah-Allada-Abomey corridor. Scholars have also studied the dynasty of Xogbonu, or Porto Novo (Rouget 1996, Tardits 1958), emphasizing its close ties to Yoruba culture and its own historical trajectory beginning in the late 17th century. Porto Novo's rivalry with the historically hegemonic Danxome is one important context for my studies with musicians from Porto Novo or its surrounding villages, many of whom learned to play music in the city's civic and religious institutions.

My primary goal in this chapter is to present a set of themes in Benin's precolonial history – cultural hybridity, the spiritual foundations of offical power, and the commodification of cultural difference – which form the background for 20th-century cultural entrepreneurs' retrospective valorization of tradition, royalty, religion, and “national” culture. First, I argue for the hybridity of the Danxomean empire's self-made origins, and the practices of conquest, appropriation, and control leading to its self-representation as culturally hybrid throughout its expansion. This hybridity-at-the-origin mirrors brass bands' portrayal of Benin's cultural pluralism in the neoliberal era. Second, I make links between official power and religious practice that were established through the institution of *vodun*, to the extent that the royal leadership and the beliefs of their subjects became mutually dependent on one another. To this

end, I argue that it is through these processes that Danxomeans came to value, and even internally commodify, the empire's culture and art over time, often for political purposes.

Throughout, I argue that, in the absence of an extensive written tradition around performance practice for the *vodun*, the key to a history of musical style, including some fairly precise dating, lies in studying Danxome's conquests and its accompanying religious changes. This is particularly relevant for developing an understanding of the relationship between contestations of Fon cultural hegemony and performance practice among other ethnic groups such as the Yoruba and the Gun. These relationships are revealed in local inflections of culture, performance practice, and power in cities like Ouidah and Porto Novo. I recover the histories of the peoples whom Danxome conquered and incorporated into their empire, including those who resisted participating in the slave trade or being enslaved. This holds particular relevance for the survival of cultural practices that existed outside of Fon hegemonic control, especially for the 20th century music scene's relationship to Dahomean-Beninois tradition and to the relational meaning (historical, generic, and spiritual) of specific styles as musicians transform them in different cultural contexts over time.

In examining the international history of the Danxomean empire's involvement in the slave trade, I highlight the contested nature of the power dynamics that developed between African leaders and European traders. These dynamics, centering around trade, war, and religion, defined how Danxome situated itself early on in a global economy and in relation to foreign culture. This set the stage for relationships of economic dependence and interdependence that continued after the slave trade was abolished in the nineteenth century, when Danxome was colonized by the French.

History, Religion, Power: A Review of the Literature

The existing literature on the Danxomean empire juggles sources of several types, oral and written, African and European. Among the primary historical accounts of Danxome's history is W.J. Argyle's *The Fon of Dahomey* (1966), who based much of his historical ethnography on the oral accounts of the son of king Behanzin, the last king of Danxome before French colonization. In French, there is also Robert Cornevin's exhaustive *Histoire du Dahomey* (1962). Both of these sources also draw on the royal chronology provided by the colonial administrator Auguste Le Herisse in his *L'Ancien Royaume du Dahomey* (1911), who was the first to record Danxome's official royal history. The work of the American anthropologist Melville Herskovits (1938) on religion, customs, and kinship in Dahomey, including his *Dahomean Narrative* (1958) and *An Outline of Dahomean Religious Belief* (1933), is among some of the most important work done, not just on Dahomey, but in anthropology in general. He writes a great deal about vodun practice, and a little bit about music.

The art historian Suzanne Blier (1989) reexamined Herskovits' field notes and suggests that he may not have spoken to as many different informants as he suggests, and that he may have been won over by the power and hegemony of Fon oral histories to the point of excluding other non-royal ethnicities from the narrative. She sets out to correct this oversight in her examination of *bocio* protective sculptures (Blier 1995), which she sees as representative of minority psychological practices, outlets for anxiety in an environment of extreme uncertainty due to slave raids and the centralization of Danxomean power. I pursue this concern with minority histories outside of the official royal accounts further in my account here. Another art historian, Edna Bay (2008, 1998), has focused her publications on the role of royal women, the queens and princesses of Danxome, in constructing royal power, and later the phenomenon of

ancestral *asen*, which commemorate the deceased.

The perspective of Maurice Ahanhanzo Glele (1981, 1974) adds a particularly interesting angle to the historical discussion. Glele, who completed university in France and resides in Paris, is a descendant of the 19th century Danxomean king Glele. He is the author of two histories, one (1974) focusing on the early history of the segment of Adja peoples who migrated from Allada to found Danxome, and a second (1981) dealing more broadly and analytically with the relationships between religion, culture, and power in different African societies. More recently, the anthropologist Camilla Strandsbjerg (2015) has picked up this theme in her analysis of religion and political transformations in Republic of Benin since independence.

Other histories have focused more on the political and economic practices going back to the early foundation of Danxome, for example Dov Ronen's (1975) *Dahomey: Between Tradition and Modernity*, which considers the roots of Benin's postcolonial political and economic structures in Danxomean traditional power, and in the lack of a strong national movement in the years leading up to independence. This is effectively balanced by a more recent publication by the Beninois scholar Sylvain Anignikin (2014) on the origins of Dahomey's national movement in the 1930s. Patrick Manning's (1982) *Slavery, Colonialism, and Economic Growth in Dahomey, 1640-1960* makes the case that Danxome's economy was based in commodity exchange from its foundations, and so was primed for its large role in trading in slaves with the Europeans, but that this trade ultimately led to the economic downfall of the region under French colonialism. I argue that an understanding of the international economics and history of the slave trade is important context for the the power dynamics of musicians' relationships with foreign markets in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

Historians have taken divergent perspectives on Danxome's slave trading activities. One

of the outstanding histories of the slave trading era in the Danxomean region from an African perspective is the Nigerian scholar I.A. Akinjogbin's (1967) work *Dahomey and Its Neighbors*, which locates the roots of the slave trade in the breakdown of African social institutions of hereditary rule, largely instigated by European traders' manipulations of the internal political affairs of Allada and Danxome. Akinjogbin's account is unique in coming from a deeply Yoruba orientation, which views all of the Adja-Fon peoples as forming part of a historico-cultural unity with Yorubaland, and he consistently draws comparisons with the Oyo empire and Yoruba sociality. Akinjogbin mixes an unprecedented, exhaustive study of European written sources (in French, English, Spanish, and Portuguese, with the assistance of French photographer and vodun convert Pierre Verger) with a critical treatment of oral accounts from the son of king Glele, then resident in Paris, to provide a more vivid picture of the dynamics that may have characterized relationships between Africans and Europeans during this time. Robin Law's (1991) study of the West African slave coast argues for the mixed role of the Danxomean empire in the slave trade chiefly through a careful study of European sources, while, for reasons unknown, he dismisses oral accounts as unreliable. He parts ways with Akinjogbin on a number of issues, including the investment of African leaders like king Agadja in the slave trade, arguing that they did in fact go out of their way to benefit from the trade and to ensure that slaves were available for European buyers, even if Agadja tried to control the trade more closely on his own terms. My account takes more from Akinjogbin's perspective, which is valuable for the weight he places on perceptions of royal legitimacy as a determining factor in the kingdom's rising and falling prosperity across different periods.

In the history of vodun practice, I have found the work of Beninois pastor Laurent Ogouby (2008) helpful in reconstructing accounts of the history of vodun through many different

historical eras. Other Beninois scholars have treated this thread from a theological angle (Adoukonou 1980, Alladaye 2003), or from the perspective of contemporary religion and the market (Amouzouvi 2014). My account negotiates some of the disagreements between these approaches, seeking to find a middle ground between the phenomenological and the economic. When it comes to music history, there are a few sources that have proved especially helpful in reconstructing historical performance practice. One is Clement da Cruz's (1954) article in *Les Etudes Dahomeennes*. Using oral histories from Abomey, Ouidah, Porto Novo, and surrounding villages, da Cruz provides a catalog of traditional instruments, their construction, and, crucially, their organization into orchestras for royal, religious, and popular occasions. The article also offers some history linking these ensembles to the reign of particular kings and the practices of particular vodun temples. J.H.K. Nketia's essay (1971) on the connections between music and power in West Africa cites da Cruz for the examples from Danxome.

The French ethnomusicologist Gilbert Rouget's work is also helpful for the time that he spent in Abomey, Porto Novo, and Ouidah in the 1950s and '60s, especially his research with the king's court in Porto Novo (1996), and his documentation through photography and audio recordings of vodun ceremonies in Abomey from the 1950s (2001). While Rouget writes little of people's experience of music in Dahomey, his research is highly valuable for historical details and his consideration of sound quality and timbre. His article (1964) on drum language in Fon and Gun contexts is insightful, along with his writings on court music in Porto Novo and Abomey, available in English (1971). The Beninois musicologist Bienvenu Koudjo (1988) has productively pursued the themes of Rouget's drum language article in his work, which fleshes out Fon and Gun concepts of language (Fon: *gbe*), poetry, and the word in popular song.

Many of Rouget's recordings are available, now digitized and online, through the Musée

du Quai Branly in Paris. Further, there is the work of the French photographer, vodun priest, and world traveler Pierre Verger, known as “the messenger,” for his communications and frequent trips between Bahia, Brazil and then-Dahomey. It was Verger who led Rouget to Dahomey and inspired him to begin working there. Some of Verger's (1957) findings are published in an interesting collection of praise songs for various vodun, both Fon and Yoruba, collected in Dahomey and in Bahia, while his other work focuses primarily on trade relations between 19th century Bahia and Danxome.

More recently, the Beninois linguistic anthropologist Albert Akoha (2011) has conducted significant research on court songs and Fon language in Abomey. Akoha comes primarily from a linguistic and literary perspective, but combined with observations such as Koudjo's (1988, above), more syntheses become possible around concepts of music and language. I have also been informed by the work of the Beninois-Yoruba literary scholar Olabiyi Yai (2007, 1993) on the dynamism between “tradition” and creativity in Yoruba culture. My approach joins these scholars in their interest in interrogating practices around language, music, and the transmission of tradition in southern Benin's many cultures.

Alladanou: Roots of the Danxomean Empire

Oral histories in Danxome are historically among the most carefully controlled due to the court institution of the *kpanlingan* reciters of history, who memorized sung, official sanctioned accounts of the kingdom's past. The practice was instituted by the king Ouegbadja in the 17th century, and errors in recitation could be punished with death. According to these royal historians, the primary inhabitants of southern Benin prior to the 13th century lived in two groups: one in the west on the Allada plateau, ethnically Ayizo (or Aïza) and Torri, and another on the Ketou plateau to the east, primarily Yoruba people who had arrived early on from the Oyo

empire and the city of Ile-Ife (see figure 2). Sometime around the year 1300, the first Adja-Fon settlers arrived in the western region, possibly from among the settlers in Ketou, and settled the city of Adja-Tado in present-day eastern Togo, integrating themselves with the existing population of Ayizo farmers. An origin in Ketou suggests possible Yoruba origins for these first settlers, at least in part, as do the Adja-Fon people's origin stories, and their early conceptions of kingship and ancestral lineage (Argyle 1966).

<Figure 2 here>

As the origin stories go, the first royal ancestor (*tohwiyo*) Agasu was born in Adja-Tado of the union of a woman (in some accounts the princess Aligbonon) and a leopard, who first appeared as a man from the east. This founding union represents a profound moment of intercultural hybridity-at-the-origin in Fon-Adja collective memory, a hybridity which I argue continued to be woven into the fabric of Danxome's self-making as time went on. It is also worth noting the violent, gendered character of this mythical, original hybridity, which depicts the Adja princess as embodied cultural capital itself, or, put another way, as property to be appropriated and assimilated into the capital holdings of the lineage. The princess is the archetypical representation of a *vodunsi*, a vodun devotee, or "wife of the vodun," who is possessed – physically and spiritually – by a vodun spirit, in this founding story the shapeshifting leopard in the forest – a "man from the east," suggesting a Yoruba man with unknown spiritual power. The link between hybridity, sexuality, and power continues throughout the Danxome-Dahomey-Benin's narratives of identity and cultural reproduction into the 21st century (see chapters four and five). Robin Law (1991) suggests that Danxome's origins in Adja-Tado and later in Allada were fabrications circulated as official history in the 18th century in order to give authenticity to the ruler's bloodline, and to legitimize king Agadja's conquest of Allada and Ouidah and his son

Tegbesu's rule. But the mythical circumstances of Agasu's birth are linked to the later development of the Danxomean monarchy's culturally hybrid appropriations in important ways.

The first ancestor Agasu's name means "the panther," and royal descendants today venerate him as a *tovodun*, an ancestral deity. Among his offspring was Adjahouto, who killed the king in Adja-Tado and moved east to found the kingdom of Allada, in present-day south-central Benin, sometime prior to the 1560s.[8] The royal descendants of Adjahouto still perform ceremonies each year at his tomb in Allada. It is these ceremonies for the ancestors, particularly for royal ancestors based on smooth lines of natural succession from father to son, that Akinjogbin (1967) flags as the signs of a traditional social system in good working order, which he relates to the Yoruba *ebi* system.

Allada (called Ardra or Great Ardra by the British) is a name with great mythological resonance for the cultural unity of southern Dahomey-Benin, and for the African diaspora as well. It represents a shared place of origin for all peoples of Adja descent, among them the Fon in Abomey, the Gun in Porto Novo, and the Hweda in Ouidah – along with the Mina and the Ewe in present-day Togo. These links were especially resonant for those of royal ancestry in Abomey, Allada, and Xogbonu, who to this day refer to themselves as the "Alladanou," those from Allada.[9] As I describe below, the historical patterns of dispersion radiating out from Allada, along with other cultural practices, especially religion and language, unite this band of people across contemporary national boundaries along the southern coast. In Cuba and Haiti, religious practices of "Arara" and "Rara" trace their roots, and names, back to the ancestral kingdom of Allada (McAlister 2002).

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[8] Portuguese maps from the 16th century already indicate the existence of Allada around 1570, and slaves of "Arara" origin are recorded in South America as early as the 1560s (Law 1991), suggesting that the Allada kingdom was founded sometime prior to this date, and that the trans-Atlantic slave trade was already underway when it enters the written record.

[9] See Gangbe Brass Band's track "Alladanou" on their 2001 album *Togbe* ("Ancestors")

Adjahouto, the founder of Allada, had two sons, Dogbari and Dako, who, after a quarrel, left Allada in 1610 to settle to the north in the city of Agbome, later called Abomey by the French. Written records show that the Portuguese were already buying slaves from Allada by this point and intervening in the kingdom's internal affairs. Akinjogbin (1967) suggests that the quarrel between Adjahouto's sons was a result of disagreements over Allada's relationship with the Europeans: who should profit from the trade, how it was to be controlled, or whether to engage in it at all.

According to the oral record, Dako took charge of Abomey in 1625 and began the project of expanding Abomey's territory. By the time of his death, Abomey controlled an area of about five miles' radius. It was this expansion that earned Dako the title of "palm-tree planter," the founder of the Abomean dynasty, although it was Dako's son Ouegbadja who is typically considered the first true king of Danxome. Dako brought the royal orchestra of *adjohun* with him from Allada, which was originally played only for royal funerals (da Cruz 1954:44). At this time, religious practices centered around the veneration of the *tohyiwo*, the royal ancestor, and the *tovodun*, familial ancestral deities.

The Foundation of Xogbonu (Porto Novo)

> *Alladanou we mi gigɔ mitɔn ɖie.*
> People of Allada, this is our return. (Gangbe Brass Band, "Alladanou," 2001)

According to myth, another of Adjahouto's sons, Te-Agdanlin, left Allada around the same time as Dako to establish a new kingdom in the southeast, at the place the long-time Yoruba inhabitants called Adjatche or Adjashe, and which the Portuguese were calling Porto Novo. Law (1991) disputes this early arrival date of Adja-descended people in Porto Novo, putting it some 75 years later, around 1688, based on the accounts of Portuguese settlers already in the city at the time. Akinjogbin (1967) dates the arrival of the Adja in Porto Novo even later,

around 1730, after the conquest of Allada and Ouidah, making the Adja settlers seem more like refugees from Allada who fled the Danxomean invasion. It was these people who became known as the Gun, from the Yoruba exonym "Egun." In my view, the early 17th century date (1610) could be a revisionist move by oral historians in Danxome emphasizing the cultural unity of the southern Adja-Fon region, in order to justify Danxomean control of the area and reinforce a collective Danxomean identity that included all of these neighboring cultures.

The settlers from Allada gave Porto Novo the Adja name *Xogbonu*, which is the name by which it is known to most of its Gun residents today; it is called the "city of three names," representing its hybrid Adja-Gun, Yoruba, and Portuguese roots (Xogbonu, Adjache, and Porto Novo, respectively). The kingdom in Porto Novo developed separately from the one in Abomey, as the Gun kings developed a strong, cooperative relationship with Portuguese traders. The kingdom came to represent an important area of resistance to Fon hegemony, and was a key mediator between Abomey and the Oyo empire. Like Danxome, the king in Porto Novo claimed a direct line of descent from Allada, insisting that visitors address him as "the king of Allada" (Rouget 1996). It was ultimately the Roi Toffa (1874-1908) of Porto Novo who signed the treaty with the French in 1894 that allowed them to overthrow the dynasty of Danxome.

The Reign of Ouegbadja: Making Danxome

Back in Abomey, Dako's son Ouegbadja (1650-1680) took over a vastly expanded kingdom. His reign was an important one, as he instituted many social changes, particularly around the role of captured peoples in the kingdom, and the regulation of vodun practice. Ouegbadja became a culture hero in the colonial era and gave the empire of Danxome ("in the belly of Dan," the serpent *vodun*)[10] its name. Ouegbadja found ways of centralizing his power,

[10] The connection to the vodun Dan, the serpent sacred to the Hweda lineage in Ouidah, is an interesting one, and historical sources have not concluded exactly what the connection might be. It would seem that if the Danxomean kings were to claim origins in Allada, they would choose a deity from that line rather than from the

such as importing the practice of the Annual Customs from Allada, in which he required his subjects to pay tribute to him and for sacrifices to be given to the ancestors. Since the Danxomeans believed in the interpenetrability of the physical and the spiritual world, for them the ancestors continued to live on in death in a powerful way, and required blood sacrifice in order to keep them alive, powerful, and protecting the kingdom. These sacrifices also created a link to the ancestral lineage of Allada in order to legitimize the power of the Danxomean kings. Argyle (1966:11-12) reports that many Dahomeans told him that it was Ouegbadja who "made the country." The Grand Customs were held several years after the king's death, when he was instituted as a *tovodun*, and a large number of sacrifices were made at that point.

The question of whether Ouegbadja's reign truly represented a new and revolutionary form of power in the region has been the subject of some debate among historians. Law (1991) has suggested that Danxome simply copied its system of hierarchical rule from Allada, and that its style of rule was nothing new, although its military might, especially under Agadja, was unprecedented. But Akinjogbin (1967), in line with my interviews with oral historians like Gabin Djimasse in Abomey (12/6/14), suggests that Dako's departure from Allada represented a truly significant break with traditional lineage and the link to the ancestors, which became a constant source of anxiety that the Danxomean monarchs dealt with through greater displays of power and control that shored up their image. Thus despite its extensive and detailed mythico-religious campaign to reconstruct its links to the ancestors, Danxome did not derive its royal authority from a legitimate ancestral line based on the central unit of the extended family, as did the kingdom in Allada and their Yoruba-descended ancestors.[11] Instead Danxome over time perfected

offshoot in Ouidah. More research might provide further information.

[11] The links between Porto Novo's royal lineage and Allada were in fact more credible than Danxome's, since after Danxome conquered Allada in 1724, the royal family fled to Porto Novo and no one remained on the throne in Allada. The founders of the Danxomean empire simply left in the early 17th century, splitting off from the royal lineage and leaving the reigning king in power (Akinjogbin 1967).

its rule by force, and created an empire through the allegiance of the king's individual subjects, many who were captured through warfare or had been inhabiting the region before the leaders' arrival. These individuals did not need to be born into a specific family group in order to belong to the developing Danxomean collective, whose sense of belonging was much more expansive, even cosmopolitan, than the traditional family-oriented structure they left behind.

Danxome did represent a revolutionary relationship between spirituality, culture, and power, especially when it came to cultural hybridity, a relationship which may have existed before in Allada, but which expanded to the level of state policy as Danxome's influence grew. As Gabin Djimasse explained to me, Ouegbadja made his culturally heterogeneous kingdom of captives work by basing his power in the appropriated spiritual traditions of his subjects, drawing comparisons to American imperialism.

> [Ouegbadja] revolutionized power. This power completely replaced what had been there before him. He understood that he had to rely on foreigners like himself. So when he brings people here who were not from here, these people owe him everything. He has the right to life or death over them... And very early they understood that this worldly power wouldn't have any force if it didn't rest on *religious*, spiritual power. So they organized, they institutionalized something that civilizations older than Danxome hadn't had the chance to do... [the institution of vodun as state religion]
> I have often said, they behaved exactly like the United States of America, Europeans who left for a new continent imbued with new knowledge and new discoveries from Europe. And later, they took the independence that they had from the beginning. It's exactly like these people, what Danxome did. They knew how to take what was interesting from the Ghanaian side, what was interesting from the Yoruba-Nigerian side, and then that's it. It could be *art*. It could be *religion*. It's the same thing. (Abomey, 12/6/14)

Through his sponsorship of drumming ensembles supporting his power, Ouegbadja was also Danxome's first great patron of drumming styles like *adjogan* and *dogba*, which he deployed in order to reinforce his power. Nketia (1971:8, 12, 17) writes that music was often a tool for social control throughout West Africa's history, and it reflected the hierarchical

organization of the leaders who were its patrons. Rouget (1996:339), writing about the king's court in Porto Novo, says that court music was so important because "the king could never rule without it. It enforces his power, because he controls the instruments whose power is recognized." According to Clement da Cruz (1954), Ouegbadja was the first to institute the *kpanlingan*, the official reciters of royal history, who, accompanying themselves on the *gan* (iron bell), began institutionalizing and committing to collective memory the founding myths of Danxome's royal ancestors. Da Cruz writes that the king borrowed this custom from the Awessou people who originally inhabited the area around Abomey. Herskovits (1938:36) reports that Ouegbadja issued each cult-house a single *assan*, a time-keeping shaker used to summon the presence of the *vodun*. Once a year, at the Annual Customs, the *assan* were collected and taxed to ensure the priests' allegiance to the king. This reflected the general hierarchy of Danxomean life, although the king's control of religious practice diminished at the edges of the kingdom as one traveled further away from Abomey.

Vodun: Drawing Water From the Source

O vi ma yon do ani kadie	You must have your own child.
Naye ce vi ma yon do ani kadie ce	Mama, it's very bad not to have your own child.
Ohan ya hi do mewenu a ce	Singing in the right time
Ohan adja hi me	Singing when you are feeling good
Ohan manlan Agadja manlan Tegbesu	Singing the praise names of Agadja and Tegbesu
Towe vi ma yon do ani kadie ce	You must have your own brother.

(Gangbe Brass Band, "Ajaka," 2001)

The term vodun refers either to the set of cults devoted to different divinities, or to the divinities themselves. Vodun fall roughly into one of three categories laid out by Robert Sastre (1970),[12] the first being "ethnic," as in the case of the royal *tohwiyo* (founding fathers) and *nesuxwe* (princes) or the familial ancestors *tovodun*. Another set are "inter-ethnic," as in the case

[12] Sastre, a Frenchman, was the Bishop of Benin's western disocese of Lokossa, in the Mono region, from 1972 until his passing in 2000.

of the “great” vodun like Lisa (the twin of creator god Mawu, sometimes associated with Jesus Christ), Hevioso (the god of lightning and iron, sometimes called the older brother of the Yoruba god Ogun), Legba (the trickster, linguist, and mediator of the physical and the spiritual, also the missionaries' choice for a “devil”), and Sakpata (the god of the earth and smallpox, a healer who both gives life and takes it away). Sastre's third category of vodun are “contemporary,” as in the case of imported or charismatic “new cults” like Mami Wata (the sea) or Tron (the kola nut), the majority of which arrived in the 1940s with migrant workers from Ghana. There is some crossover between the categories, as in the case of the vodun Dan, the serpent, who is the ethnic vodun of the Hueda people in Ouidah, but also the child of Mawu-Lisa in the inter-ethnic pantheon. Many “great” vodun originally had specific ethnic origins, such as Fa from Oyo, Hevioso from Hevie, and Sakpata from Dassa.

One of the vodun's material manifestations is in their possession of *vodunsi*, the “wives of the vodun,” women and some men who are devoted to a given divinity in the way a wife is devoted to her husband. When the vodun inhabit these initiates, they are drawn to the drums and dance their signature dances, which identify them to insiders. The details of the ceremonies for each vodun vary depending on what offerings that vodun requires and how it relates to its devotees. Importantly, each vodun has a separate repertoire of songs and characteristic chants associated with it, and specific rhythms and calls that are played by the drumming ensemble. Vodun may also be represented through paintings on the walls of temples, or as power objects, first called “fetishes” by the Portuguese, which form shrines and altars for sacrifices made to the deity. Over time, the layers of materials poured out on these figures form a kind of assemblage that becomes a permanent part of the vodun itself. In this way the layers of material that build up over time give an enduring and constantly renewed material reality, a life in this world, to the

spiritual being, through these outpourings of devotion from its followers.

The word *vodun* has been in use since the time of Allada, as it first appears in print in the the 1658 Aja-language section of the *Doctrina Christiana* from King Philip of Spain, where the translators use it as the lower-case "god," contrasting with Mawu for the proper noun "God." Scholars have much speculated on the etymology of the word *vodun*, searching throughout the Adja language family, looking for resonances in the term's use in Ewe, Fon, Adja, and Gun (see Pazzi 1976, Segurola 1963, Blier 1995, and Politz 2011:16-18 for further discussion). The consensus points to a constellation of meanings surrounding the term *vo* as "emptiness, hole, opening," and *dun* as "to draw water, to take rest." Vodun is, in this etymology, an invitation to drink deeply, to draw water – life, rest, peace – from the source, from the encounter with the unknown, opening oneself to divine mystery. The resonance of the first syllable, *vo*, meaning hole or opening, also points to the Fon expression *A mɔ nu jɛ mɛ*, you-saw-thing-fallen-inside, meaning "You have seen inside of the thing," or "You understand." As I explore below, this linguistic conception of knowledge and the unknown also makes reference to the "hole in the ground" where various peoples in the region locate their ancestral origins. Vodun shrines, where sacrifices to the vodun are made, are frequently located in holes in the ground.

According to one story, the *vodun* arrived in Danxome under the reign of Agadja (1708-1728). Hwandjile, a woman from "Adja" - presumably meaning Allada or going back even further to the city of Adja-Tado – brought the vodun so that "women could give birth to human beings, and animals could give birth to animals," regularizing cultural reproduction by regularizing biological reproduction;[13] read: inter-familial disputes (such as those between co-

[13] This reading also aligns with Akinjogbin's (1967) concept that the Danxomeans knowingly went against natural order by leaving Allada, and they needed to make amends in order to legitimize their succession and their connection to the ancestors. "Women giving birth to goats and goats giving birth to men" could be a mythical stand-in for the natural order having been upset by the establishment of an extra-lineal kingdom being set up in Abomey, one which needed the intervention of the vodun to heal and set it back on the path to normal cultural

wives) over succession could be resolved, and the kingship passed on. In this telling, the arrival of the vodun enabled Agadja, heretofore childless, to father an heir to the throne (Herskovits 1958:167). It was in this way that, according to myth, Hwandjele gave birth to the future king Tegbesu. Whether or not the historical details of this story are correct – as we can see many possible inconsistencies, especially given that the vodun seem to have been venerated even in the time of Ouegbadja prior to Agadja's reign – it does reveal an important link between the arrival of the vodun in Dahomey, gender and cultural reproduction, and vodun's interdependence with the power of the monarchy.

According to Herskovits (1958:167), all of the great vodun arrived in this way, including "Sakpata, Hevioso, Ogu, Lisa, Dan, Aido-Hwedo, Fa, and Legba," as well as the ancestral vodun nesuxwe and tovodun. Although some later accounts tell that Sakpata did not appear until the reign of king Guezo in the first part of the 19th century, the colonial administrator Le Herisse (1911:128) reports that there was a smallpox outbreak during Agadja's reign, and the king sent emissaries to Dassa to the north to consult their healing deity Sakpata. But because of the kings' suspicion of the cult's power, "they allowed them no drums, and forbade themselves to marry a *sakpatasi*," until the somewhat spectacular revival of the cult's performances under Ghezo and Glele a century later (ibid.) I would argue that while Sakpata may have been part of vodun practice under Agadja in the 18th century, it seems likely that the drumming repertoire known as *sakpatahun* did not develop until the 19th century (see below for my teacher, vodun priest Etienne Mechonou's interpretation). The arrival of Hevioso under Agadja at this point coincides with some historical details surrounding Agadja's conquest of Ouidah and the appropriation of the god of the nearby village of Hevie, which gave its name to Hevioso.

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reproduction.

This story of the vodun's arrival under Agadja also confirms a detail reported by da Cruz (1954:46), who says that it was Tegbesu's mother, the queen Houandjile, who instituted the orchestra for Lisa, the twin of creator god Mawu. It was around this time during the early 18th century that the narrative knitting together of the various divinities – the beginnings of a kind of theology of the vodun pantheon – started to take shape. It is no coincidence that it was also during this period in the 1720s that Abomey conquered the cities of Allada and Ouidah, giving them unhindered access to the coast and the trade route. The story's citation of Queen Houandjile's "Adja" origins may reflect the increased cultural assimilation imposed under Agadja and his son Tegbesu, and the subsequent politico-religious ideology that had to be woven in order to reconcile the various deities incorporated from conquered peoples. This myth-making creates a much more unifying story than the literal narrative of assimilating the practices of war captives into the existing religious structure. As I discuss below, the Danxomean kings relied on cultural hybridity and assimilation as a method of control for "making the kingdom."

Vodun often contributed to the king's consolidation of power. Herskovits (1938:35) reports a similar process in the importation of the Fa divination system[14] to Dahomey under the reign of Agadja: the king "borrowed" the system from Nago-Yoruba traders[15] with the intention of discrediting the local *bokonon*, who had fallen into disfavor. Individuals may consult Fa at any of several life stages, and the diviner will interpret the signs[16] formed by the toss of 16 cowrie shells, which may fall either up or down, giving any one of 256 combinations. The colonial administrator Bernard Maupoil (1936) has written extensively on the system of interpretation of Fa signs, work that would not have been possible after independence, given the secrecy

[14] See chapter three for a discussion of the relationship between Fa and *se*, the Fon conception of destiny.
[15] Several sources mention the Arab or "far eastern" roots of Ifa (Mercier 1954:200, Norman 2009:192).
[16] The signs are called *odun* in Yoruba, sometimes just *dun* in Fon, a possible alternative etymology for the word *vodun*.

surrounding this sacred and protected information.

Stylistic Origins: *Zenli* and *Sakpatahun*

The funeral repertoire of *zenli* developed under king Agadja around the time the *vodun* arrived in Abomey. It began in the 18th century as a style played on a limited set of instruments (without the *gan* bell and the *assan* shakers): two calabashes of different sizes and tones turned over to resonate in pails of water that played the accompanying rhythms; and a large gourd which both kept time and played lead parts with a flat, flexible paddle, producing a deep vibration. This paddle resembled the fan used to seal the tombs of the ancestors, according to the modern zenli artist le Roi Alekpehannhou (Bohicon, 12/7/14). “Zen” is the fan, and “li” the tomb. Gabin Djimasse (Abomey, 12/6/14) suggested that zenli received a great deal of patronage under king Agonglo (1789-97), who borrowed the style of drumming from the repertoire for Fa divination, and called on it to resolve his problems with procreation.

Zenli continued to be played in this style until the reign of king Guezo (1818-58), when the king requested that his son, the future king Glele, organize a zenli orchestra for the funeral of his close friend Tometin. Glele decided to introduce some innovations into the zenli formula to surprise his father. A few days in advance of the funeral, he brought in a couple of *kpezin*, drums made of clay with skin heads that are capable of producing a great variety of timbres at great volumes, from deep resonances to sharp cracks (see figure 3). He taught the orchestra a new rhythm, adding the *kpezin* along with *assan* and *gan*, to go along with the old one played on the large gourd and the calabashes. Glele's father was very pleased with the rhythm when he heard it on the day of his friend's funeral, and called it *zenli blibli*, a zenli that was much more majestic and moving than it had been before. Guezo requested that this style be played at his own funeral. This new style of zenli became popular throughout the region of Abomey for funerals around the

late 19th century.

Figure 3: Kpezin

After independence in 1960, a new generation of musicians introduced further innovations into the genre of zenli, each claiming a personal style and documenting their work through newly available recording technology. Some of these artists were Hozeme Gaugin, Dougamase, Kluvo Ekonso, Deme Pierre, and Akpinkpa, who was Alekpehannhou's mentor. Akpinkpa specialized in love songs in zenli style, although he did not produce many recordings. Gradually, it became possible to sing about any topic, not just memorializing the deceased, in a zenli album.[17] For Alekpehannhou's part, he focuses on bringing joy to his zenli renditions, insisting that only one song per album be on a funereal topic. He has also introduced different

[17] See chapter four for a discussion of the contextual resonances of *zenli* in Gangbe's recording of the popular royal song "Ajaka."

bell sounds into his music, like the twin bell borrowed from certain vodun repertoires, giving it a distinctive stamp. Alekpehannhou is certainly the most prolific zenli artist in history, having produced over forty albums since the 1980s, when he still worked as a high school French teacher. A particularly eloquent improviser when he sings in Fon, he is well known for his music videos, which make use of traditional imagery to bring his language to life, and are ubiquitous on Benin's ORTB television station. The poetry of Alekpehannhou's songs is the subject of several doctoral dissertations currently in progress at the Universite d'Abomey-Calavi.

The Sakpata cult, whose *vodun* represents a king who had died of smallpox, was among the most feared by several monarchs, because of its power over life and death;[18] in fact, according to Argyle (1966), it was prohibited for Sakpata temples to be located within the city of Abomey itself because this *vodun* might see the earthly Abomean king and become offended at his arrogance. According to my teacher Etienne Mechonou (5/28/13), Sakpata came to Abomey under the reign of king *Guezo* (1818-58) from *Dassa* after this vodun was captured in war, clarifying the difference between two historical threads, the first of Sakpata's origins in Dassa in the 18th century, and the second of the 19th century development of the cult's public performative aspects. According to Mechonou, there was a rhythm played for Sakpata in Dassa, a village north of Abomey near Savalou mostly inhabited by Nago people, but the Fon people changed it later when it came to Abomey. And king Guezo, who was highly respected by Africans and Europeans alike, did died of smallpox.[19]

Minority Histories: A Spirituality of Resistance

Danxome's history of cultural appropriation has subordinated the fact that many minority cultural and spiritual practices survived the kingdom's efforts to assimilate them completely (see

[18] Sakpata is known as Assojano in Cuba, Sagbata in Haiti, or Saint Lazare in the Catholic pantheon of saints.
[19] See chapter five for an analysis of Gangbe's use of *sakpatahun* in their composition “Assidida.”

Blier 1995). Many of the musicians I worked with come from minority groups, like the Gun, Nago-Yoruba, and Toffinou, and bring these traditions to their recording projects. Paul Mercier (1954:214) writes that "if certain cults...were to some extent kept in the background, it was because their power overshadowed the prestige of the monarchy. The kings did, however, define and modify, in areas recently conquered, the relative status of cult groups, reserving the highest place for the specifically royal cults [*tohyiwo* and *tovodun*]." Herskovits (1938:36) speculates that, as Danxome expanded its influence in the 18th century, it exercised its control most strongly in Abomey, Allada, and Whydah, but in small villages, spontaneous worship and possession were beyond the purview of the monarchy.

Histories of ethnic minorities provide a closer look into the cultural pluralism and contestation, located largely in religious practices, that existed going back to the 17th century. Argyle introduces the idea that the mythical origins of each of the 30 or so clans that made up Danxome's subjects may provide some clues to their historical relations, since they were located outside the purview of official royal history, and thus less well documented. He writes, "The concentration on the kingship has obscured the fact that Danxome was composed of peoples whose cultures differed in some important respects" (Argyle 1966:195). He divides the types of clan into two: first those with a founder who came down from the sky (cf. Herskovits 1958:136) or up from the ground; and second those with origins in the offspring of the union of humans with animals or plants, like the royal lineage of the Danxomeans. The first kind have no *tohwiyo* – no royal ancestors – and instead worship great *vodun* like Mawu-Lisa, Heviosso, Loko, or Sakpata, who they take as their founders/creators (Argyle 1966:196).

Argyle suggests that the clans in the first of these groups were the original inhabitants of the Abomean region, because mythological accounts continually cite the arrival of newcomers,

new material goods, and, at some loosely historicized point of intervention, the arrival of new forms of political organization (Argyle 1966:196-7, also cf. Gabin Djimasse's account above). In some accounts, the acculturating activities went both ways, as the original inhabitants (or new captives) introduced Abomeans to the worship of the great *vodun*, and the resulting combination of belief systems formed the beginnings of the Danxomean pantheon as it was subsequently passed down (ibid. 197). The power of the monarchy worked to incorporate still more belief systems through the spoils of conquest, and then to homogenize these systems as much as possible, but many traces of their outsider traditions remain, particularly in the case of borrowed Yoruba traditions like Ifa (Fa) divination and the egungun masks. It may be that the chief alternative to official Danxomean history exists in the mythological accounts of the cults of the lesser *vodun* that were established among the original inhabitants of Abomey.

To be sure, there was resistance to the centralization of Danxomean power, and those peoples who were not captured or sold into slavery fled, forming pockets of resistance throughout the region. A few such examples are the Hweda who escaped the conquest of Ouidah and formed camps to the east and west of the city, periodically attacking the Abomean occupiers; the Tofin who built villages around Lake Mokoue; the Weme, who took refuge in the river valley, giving their name to the river and Benin's most eastern province; and the Gun who moved east and settled in Porto Novo and Badagry (in contemporary Nigeria) (Manning 1982:40). It is largely musicians from these minority communities, especially the Gun, the Yoruba, and the Toffinou, who have been the most actively engaged in “tradi-modern” projects that modernize Benin's traditional music, as in the examples of the Ahouandjinou and Gnonlonfoun families.

The dynasty in Porto Novo exercised its own systems of control, participating in the slave trade during the 19th century, and, according to Rouget (1996), using ancestral religious practices

to reinforce the court's power long into the 20th century, during the reign of king Gbefa (1946-1976).[20] One of Porto Novo's specialties was the *zangbeto* secret police ("guardians of the night" in Gun), directed by the king's *migan*, or minister-executioner. *Zangbeto* are spirits covered in raffia which patrol Porto Novo at night to catch witches and spies. The *zangbeto* secret society uses *kaka* drumming for their ceremonies, played with many interlocking bell patterns and the distinctive dry, cracking sound of bamboo sticks, which Sagbohan Danialou modernized in the early 1970s (see chapter three).

Aside from governing the Adja-descended Gun residents in the city of Porto Novo itself, the Xogbonu kings also controlled several ethnically diverse surrounding regions, including the Toffinou to the west, on the shores of the lake that now forms northern extreme of the metropolis of Cotonou and the neighborhood of Sainte Cecile; the Tori and Pobe to the north; and Badagry to the east, now in western Nigeria. All of these groups, with the exception of the Gun in Badagry, were among the original Yoruba-descended inhabitants of the region. The 19th century population of the city of Porto Novo also consisted of two other important ethnic groups, one the Brazilian returnees, mostly Catholic and educated, whom I discuss at greater length below; and the other the Nago-Yoruba merchants, who were nominally Muslim, but continued their *orisa* practices, which have many direct analogs to *vodun*. Porto Novo's connections to Yoruba culture through these Nago residents, and through the cultures of the surrounding regions controlled by the monarchy, have brought Gun and Yoruba musical practices very close over time. This history is part of important background to the traditions practiced, for example, by the Gnonlonfoun family, gospel and jazz trumpeters and percussionists who are ethnically Toffinou, and in the Tori village of Avrankou, where I worked with several percussion ensembles.

[20] After independence, Gbefa was the last king of Porto Novo, as he did not leave an heir and the line was abandoned.

Buyers and Sellers: The Slave Trade

> "Triangle trade. There were buyers and sellers. How can you have a buyer without a seller?"
> (Sagbohan Danialou, Porto Novo, 1/13/15)

Me de ke yi dju de me à	He who who makes a journey
Me jo gbo na	Always comes back.
Me de ke yi mo ji kaka	He who goes as far away as possible
Me jo gbo na	Always comes back.
Togbo gni to agbolonu eéé	My grandfather Agbolonu
Jo yi apu ji éee	Went to the sea.
Porte du non retour eéé	The door of no return, and so
A mi mu gbò ló	He never came back.
É té kpo	He dared.
Devi o chi ho me bō nui so same	They sold their children.
É té kpo	He dared.
Devi o chi ho ablo ni so same	They sold their children for second hand clothes.
É té kpo	He dared.

(Gangbe Brass Band, "Porte du Non Retour," 2008)

An understanding of Danxome's role in the slave trade is indispensable for placing Benin's contemporary relationship between culture, economy, power, and globalization in historical context. Slavery became so important to the kingdom's economy over time, and so defined its relationships with its neighbors and with Europeans, that it is not possible to consider Danxome's history without it. The history of the region in the slave trading era is situated relationally in several directions, and must be reconstructed drawing on many different sources and perspectives, from royal to spiritual, cultural, and economic.

The first Europeans to arrive in the Bight of Benin were Portuguese traders in the 1480s headed for Ijebu and Benin kingdoms – the modern nation's namesake (see chapter three) – in contemporary Nigeria, and the port of Lagos. It was too difficult to land on the shores near Grand Popo west of Ouidah, so it was not until the mid-16th century that traders began exploring this area surrounding the Mono River. Allada was the reigning kingdom at this time, and the Portuguese started a steady trade in slaves from there around the 1560s. The trade sharply increased in the first part of the 17th century due to increased demand in Brazil and Sao Tome for

labor on the sugar cane plantations, and the involvement of the Dutch beginning in the 1640s (Law 1991:116-21). The British, Dutch, Portuguese, French, and Spanish all competed for the rights to trade in Allada, until, in the 1680s, all of the major European trading powers obtained permission to set up forts in Ouidah. Ouidah was declared a neutral port, accessible to all of the traders.

Historians have treated the role of Africans in the slave trade from many different perspectives. Akinjogbin (1967) has suggested that king Agadja conquered Allada and Ouidah in the 1720s in order to control the coastal slave trade, to reduce or to eliminate it, or at least to make sure that Danxome was not strong-armed into obtaining captives solely to satisfy European demand. I would add that Agadja had other interests in fighting to the coast, including taking control of the center of the traditional ancestral lineage in Allada, and having the power to dictate the terms of Danxome's European trade himself. But the record shows that while he did then manage to monopolize the slave trade, Agadja was ultimately not able, or willing, to stop it, and his successors expanded the trade even more and developed new ways of catching slaves and raiding villages, tying the economic fate of the kingdom directly to the international trade in slaves.

Slave trading worked rather well as a source of income for some time under Agadja's successor Tegbesu, and the slave trade continued to be profitable even when Danxome became a protectorate of the Oyo empire from 1730-1790. But Tegbesu prioritized the slave trade over agriculture and maintaining Danxome's army, and the supply of slaves ultimately became difficult to maintain, especially under Oyo rule; Akinjogbin (1967) reports that after Tegbesu, king Kpengla (1775-89) was forced to begin raiding neighboring Yoruba villages like Ketou. Economic reality truly began to set in with the abolition of the slave trade in the 19th century,

which began with the British in 1807. Historians agree that, in addition to the injustice, violence, and exploitation that the slave trade demanded, and the mistrust that it produced between kin, it was also a profoundly unsustainable enterprise for the Danxomeans, as it depopulated the region (Manning 1982, Akinjogbin 1967), leaving few laborers to produce agricultural crops. It also tied Danxome's economy too closely to external political factors out of its control, such as the legality of the slave trade, and the control of the trade by Europeans. In fact, it nearly broke the kings' social contract with their subjects as economic times became more and more trying at the close of the 18th century. This would change, though, with the fall of Oyo.

As the political status of slavery became more complicated, anti-abolitionist travelers to Danxome in the 19th century like Burton (1863), Skertchly (1874), and Forbes (1851) wrote vividly of the kings' enthusiasm for the slave trade, and their brutality and practices of capital punishment, in an effort to persuade other Europeans that slavery was not a universal moral problem, but a common cultural practice that was good for the economy. Portraying the kings as brutal also allowed anti-abolitionists to make the argument that trading captives into slavery was better than leaving them at the hands of the Africans. Such accounts multiplied after the resurgence of Danxome's power under king Guezo (1818-58), since the collapse of the Oyo empire in the 1830s allowed Danxome to capture many more Yoruba people. It is these politically motivated European accounts that contributed to the perception that Danxome's rulers loved slave trading for the sake of violence itself. More likely, the kings saw the slave trade as a means to financing the growth and armament of the kingdom and thus legitimizing their own power. But the long term economic consequences indicate that they lost more than they gained in the exchange.

Another line of argument makes the case that Danxomean kings never sold their own

people into slavery, but only those captives of war whose services the kingdom did not require as priests, drummers, wives, artisans, or as sacrifices to the ancestors. King Kpengla (1775-89) went on record, speaking to Archibald Dalzel, then governor at Ouidah:

> Your countrymen therefore, who allege that we go to war for the purpose of supplying your ships with slaves, are gravely mistaken... In the name of my ancestors and myself I aver, that no Dahomean man ever embarked in war merely for the sake of procuring wherewithal to purchase your commodities... We do, indeed, sell to the white men a part of our prisoners, and we have a right to do so. Are not all prisoners at the disposal of their captors? … You have seen me kill many men at the Customs... This gives a grandeur to my Customs, far beyond the display of fine things which I buy.... (Ronen 1975:23).

Kpengla reveals a thorough understanding of the economics of slavery as they functioned from the perspective of the Europeans. He is aware of their priorities: the purchase of commodities, the demand for free labor. But Kpengla presents a different set of priorities here. The value of human life for him has one real value, over and above any goals tied up in material wealth or labor: that of *serving the ancestors* and thus increasing his power and the power of the kingship, both earthly and spiritual. For him, everything revolved around the *tohwiyo*, the ancestral founder of the lineage. In this way he ensured his control over the kingdom by incorporating captured peoples into the clan, either through sacrificing them to the ancestors or by putting them through a lengthy initiation process to becomes *vodunsi* (wives of the vodun), thus ensuring their integration into Danxomean society. It is also worth noting that slaves were scarce during Kpengla's reign in the 18th century, as compared to those in the 19th century, when many Yoruba captives were taken.

The kings were also known to allow particularly skilled artisans, such as those who joined the *hunto* or royal drummers, literally “drum (*hun*) masters/fathers (*to*),” craftspeople, tradesmen, or particularly powerful or feared *bokonon* priests, to install themselves and their practices alongside the others in Danxome, a practice of “keeping your friends close and your

enemies closer," so to speak. This was the case with my second drum teacher Clement Hunto's Yoruba ancestors, who were captured in the 19th century and brought to work for the court in Abomey. It was in this way that such a great diversity of vodun came to Danxome; each arrived at some point as the god of a conquered people. Gabin Djimasse described to me the process of cultural appropriation, beginning under king Ouegbadja in the mid-17th century, as intimately tied to Danxome's consolidation of power and conquest:

> Abomey was the capital of the old kingdom of Danxome, the all powerful slaving kingdom. "Slaving" is an allusion to many conquests. And in the course of these conquests, the kings of Danxome would bring back to Abomey everything that they found interesting in the villages and cities that they would conquer. Everything interesting, everything that is art... And when they realize that you have, that you specialize in an art, a savoir-faire, that you have some knowledge, that existed already in Danxome, they put you in the care of those in charge of this knowledge in Danxome. You will complement it.
> But if they realize that what you brought didn't exist at all, they set you up, they build you a house, they give you children and wives, and young people, so that you can put your knowledge in the service of the kingdom. It's after having selected all these people that they select those who have a remarkable skill that they need.
> It's among those left that they choose those who can be subjected to trade, to be sold. The kingdom of Danxome never discarded things of value. Never. One could be sold as a slave, or killed for insubordination against royal authority. Otherwise, if you have a value, you are preserved. (Abomey, 12/6/14)

An important point in Djimasse's account is that the kingdom of Danxome had its own system of valorizing the cultures, religions, and talents of those they captured, based on difference, and in some cases on spiritual power. If, as Djimasse suggests, some captives were deemed so valuable for the culture they carried that they would not be sold to slave traders, then this practice can be understood as one of the main sources of Danxome's cultural hybridity through appropriation, often the violent appropriation of land and culture. Seen this way, this hybridity was in fact primarily a method of control, a strategy of enforcing a centralized power based in the king's ability to assimilate any number of beliefs and cultural practices into his ruling cosmology. As I

will show in the next chapter, the power to define difference and sameness, and to produce or suppress hybridity – their coexistence, a contradiction in terms (Young 1995) – is in essence the power to control a society's epistemology, its definitions of what is true and what counts as knowledge.

Historical evidence suggests that statistically speaking, slaves departing the major ports at Ouidah and Porto Novo were largely Adja (Fon, Hweda, or Gun) in ethnicity (Manning 1982), with a smaller number of Yoruba departing in later years.[21] It may have been that the majority of slaves were Adja in origin because Allada was the primary power in the region and maintained more regular relations with Europeans during the 17th century. After the conquest of Ouidah in 1727, Danxome became a protectorate of the Oyo empire, along with many other areas with Yoruba links including Porto Novo, Ketou, and Abeokuta to the north. It was likely through Danxome's involvement in wars with Oyo in the 19th century, most prominently under king Ghezo (1818-58), that Yoruba captives started to form the majority of the number of slaves being sold, which was by this point was declining overall.

19th Century Danxome: From Slave Trade to Slave Labor

Segala ma do wen wé	My destiny, I will send you to tell the others.
Kpoli gala ma do we we, ba yi houé éé́é	I will send you with a message and I will go back.
Segala, Segala ma do wen wé	My destiny, I will send you to tell the others.
Ahwan é gbà ketu, bo gbà kanã	The battle vanquished Ketou and Cana.
É kpo tó de vo à!	There is no other region that will resist us.
Leader: É gba ketu, bo gbà kana	If we have won Ketou and Cana,
All: É kpo tó de vo à!	There is no one left.
Abeokutà we gni tó e kpo e	All that remains is Abeokuta, which we will vanquish,
Bo mi na gba, ba yi houè é	And go back home.

[21] The later 19th century waves of Yoruba slaves, while smaller in number, may have had more influence in the Americas because they arrived in countries where slavery had not yet been abolished, like Brazil and Cuba, fresh from Africa, and reinforced these areas with more contemporary traditions. Many of these Yoruba people would also still have been alive when slavery was abolished in the Americas. It would make sense, then, if Adja-Fon influence (people from Allada, Ouidah, and Abomey) ended up being more prevalent in certain areas like Haiti, because it would have been based on the practices of older, 17th and 18th century Africans, and these earlier generations would have experienced abolition at an earlier date and would not have encountered the waves of Yoruba people who arrived in the later period.

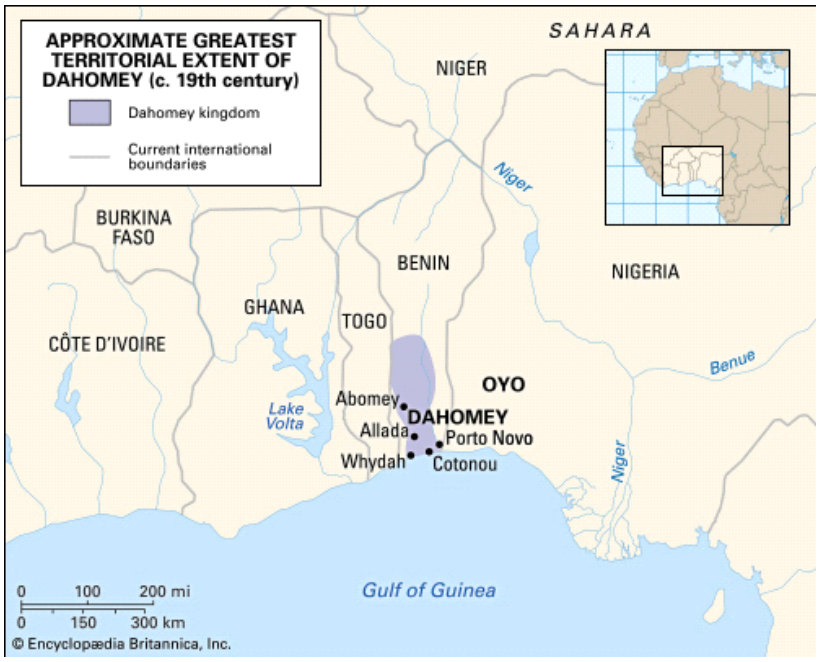
Segala, Segala ma do wen wé My destiny, I will send you to tell the others.
(Gangbe Brass Band, "Segala," 2005)

As the trans-Atlantic slave trade declined, Danxome began shifting its economy, beginning in the 1840s, toward the "slave-labor" mode of production, specializing in goods which could be produced by slaves working domestically and sold internationally, especially palm products such as palm oil (used for making soap by the British), palm kernels (made into margarine in Germany), and palm wine (*sodabi*), which was invented during this period. Palm products were also popular in Brazil, so the Europeans did not have complete control over the market. The scale of production and demand for these products led to the exploitation of a great number of enslaved Africans working in Danxome during this period (Manning 1982:51).

Danxome did not quickly abandon the slave trade, however, despite efforts by the British to establish a treaty with King Guezo, and Europe continued to seek ways to control the African economy. By the 1850s, Guezo was still at war with the Yoruba to the north in Abeokuta (the wars which strengthened Sakpata practice in Abomey, and of which Gangbe Brass Band sings in "Segala"). As a result the British allied with another Yoruba stronghold, the Egba, and in 1852 colonized Lagos, blockading Danxome's coast for six months and interfering with their palm oil trade. The British alliance with the Egba against Danxome became the determining factor in establishing the colonial boundary between French Dahomey and the British protectorate of Nigeria. It was also during this time that a smallpox epidemic swept through Danxome, which eventually took Guezo's life. By the time king Glele took the throne in 1858, Danxome's economy was under serious threat (see Figure 4 for reference). The French continued to exert their influence on Porto Novo, and in 1882 they established their protectorate there, signing a treaty with the king Toffa (1874-1908), which he hoped would allow the kingdom of Porto Novo to rise above Danxome with the support of the French. It was this alliance that ultimately

allowed the French to conquer the mighty empire of Danxome in 1894. The conflict lasted for two years, during which king Behanzin (1890-1894) burned the city of Abomey to the ground and fled into the bush. The French eventually captured him in 1896 and sent him into exile in Martinique, and later in Algeria.

Figure 4



Behanzin today is lifted up as an anti-colonial hero for having resisted against the French for two years. He is the focus of the climax of many palace ceremonies in Abomey, and his legacy continues to live on in oral tradition as well as ritual practice. Danxome was one of the last African empires to fall to the French army in West Africa, largely due to their highly trained fighting forces. Today a large statue depicting king Behanzin, with his hand raised to stop the intruding French forces, stands in Place Goho in one of the major intersections in Abomey.

Early Missionization

The history of Christian missionization in precolonial Danxome is sparsely documented,

as the kings largely resisted the influence of foreign religion until the beginning of colonization, except when it benefited them politically or economically. The first Catholic missionaries arrived in Danxome in the mid-17th century. Fearful of Abomey's encroachment on trade on the coast, Toxonu, then king of Allada, sent an emissary to Spain in 1658 requesting the sending of Christian missionaries and the establishment of trade relations. The Spanish did send eleven missionaries from the Capuchin order in 1660, along with a letter and a (rough) translation of the catechism into the Adja ("Ardra" or Allada according to the Spanish) language. Tellingly, the missionaries found that the king was more interested in a commercial relationship than in converting to Christianity, especially when he learned that Christianity did not allow him to continue practicing polygamy, and venerating the ancestors and the vodun (Law 1991:124, 153, Ogouby 2008:39-40). Within two years, all but two of the missionaries had died, and the survivors returned to Spain with reports of Portuguese speaking Christians at Allada (Law 1991:153).

Attempts to convert King Abangla of Ouidah in the 1680s ended similarly. He had considered being baptized, and the French sent two Capuchin missionaries to see him. They stayed for three years, but opponents, possibly from the temple for the serpent Dangbe, Ouidah's major ethnic vodun, burned down their chapel, and Abangla had a change of heart (Law 1991:154-5). Due to the opposition and considerable political power of institutions such as vodun temples and the veneration of ancestral traditions, Catholic missionization made very little progress during the 17th and 18th centuries in Danxome.

Les Brasiliens

The first sizeable community of practicing Catholics in the region was a wave of Brazilian ex-slaves who returned to Danxome in the 19th century, especially those who left

following the massive revolt in Bahia in 1835, and settled in Ouidah, Porto Novo, and Lagos. Some were of mixed European and African heritage, while others were Portuguese. They formed a community of literate, Christian merchants who kept mostly to themselves in the so-called "Brazilian quarters." Many of these Brazilians, some freed slaves themselves, worked as middlemen between king Guezo and the clandestine slave trade to Brazil, and also to Cuba. The Brazilians made a mark on Dahomey-Benin's soundscape through their Afro-Brazilian traditions, which fused Yoruba and Adja traditions with some of their own 17th century Portuguese practices, while introducing new sounds from other parts of Africa like Congo and Angola. Among the most prominent of these traditions is the *bouriyan*, a parade genre of drumming associated with elaborate masks that is frequently performed in Ouidah.[22]

A Catholic mission school was opened in Ouidah in 1861, primarily to serve the Brazilian community there, headed by Father Francesco Borghero, a priest of Italian descent who had been sent by the Catholic church in Lyon, France.[23] Drawing on Borghero's journals, Martine Balard (1998:23) outlines the details of the priest's initial encounter with king Glele in Abomey, which appears to have been something of a competition in ceremonialism, with each man trying to outdo the other in a show of performative protocol. Among other demands, Borghero, apparently reacting to the ubiquitous Legba shrines to the trickster vodun outside many palaces and homes in Abomey, insisted that all "fetishes" and "superstitious objects" be kept out of his sight wherever he passed (ibid.) Ronen (1975:29) reports that the mission in Ouidah was struck by lightning in 1871, which residents of Ouidah attributed to the disapproval of Heviosso, the vodun

[22] According to J. Lorand Matory (1999), it was the Brazilian returnees to Lagos, in particular, who contributed most prominently to the historical construction of Yoruba nationalism and cross-Atlantic cultural dialog through the "Lagosian cultural renaissance of the 1890s." An interesting topic for further research would be whether such Yoruba nationalism was also a subject of discussion among Brazilian returnees in Ouidah and Porto Novo in the same period.

[23] These missions also increased literacy in Ouidah and Porto Novo, much of it cross-linguistic, as missionaries were required to teach in Portuguese, English, French, Yoruba, and Fon.

of thunder and lightning, toward the new mission. Local resistance was so strong that the missionaries were forced to leave for the next 20 years, when colonization began. Throughout these transitions, Abomey continued to maintain a defiant resistance to Christian conversion, and maintained a reputation as the last bastion for anti-European religious sentiment into the 21st century.

Protestantism began to have some influence in Porto Novo, through the work of English Methodists, beginning in 1843. Importantly, Porto Novo felt the influence of mainline British Protestant missions more than other parts of southern Benin over time, with missionary activity in Nigeria increasing when it became a British colony in 1900. These Protestant churches formed the foundation for independent African churches like the Celestial Church (l'Eglise de Christianisme Celeste) and Cherubim and Seraphim that were founded in the late 1940s and are still very active. I discuss them in more detail in chapter two. The independent churches later formed an important zone of resistance to Catholicism, and indeed, to French colonialism more generally.

Another result of the intense Christianization of Porto Novo, through the presence of the Brazilians, Protestant missionization, and the independent churches, was that traditional practices for vodun outside of the royal palace were gradually abandoned, to the point where, in 1958, Claude Tardits reported that he knew of only one group that still practiced the annual sacrifices for the ancestors. The new cults for Tron, Mami Wata, and Goro, which arrived in the 1940s from Ghana, still attract many followers in the Mono region the the north and west of Ouidah (see chapter two). This was quite a different situation from that in Abomey, where Christian missions had much less effect, and vodun practices for the old great vodun Sakpata, Hevioso, and Legba, along with the ancestral tovodun and the royal ceremonies for past kings

and the nesuxwe princes, still take place every year.

With French colonization beginning in 1894, the “double colonial-missionary phenomenon” made Catholic missionization impossible to ignore, especially since Catholic schools were charged with the education of a new class of colonial subjects. The colonists' denigration of traditional practices for the vodun as anti-Christian, anti-modern, diabolic, and superstitious targeted the ancient social structures, so painstakingly reinforced throughout Danxome's history, tying together vodun practice, the ancestors, and the kingship. As the theologian Adoukonou (1980:94) writes, the arrival of colonial religion introduced “a profound contradiction and tensions at the heart of the formative traditional Fon social principles.”

Conclusion

This chapter has explored several themes in precolonial Danxomean history which form important contextual background for later music practice in Dahomey-Benin. The Danxomean empire used control over cultural hybridity as a way to define their power and cultural identity as capable of encompassing and appropriating many different traditions. It thus established the foundations for ideas about the commodification of cultural traditions in ritual performance and spiritual practice, and the valorization of culture and culture bearers' lives in Dahomey-Benin. Danxomean leaders struggled with European slave traders for economic power, and ultimately lost much of their influence when the slave trade was outlawed and they shifted to producing products with slave labor. These dynamics of global economic interdependence set the stage for debates over contested independence and autonomy in the colonial era, as I discuss in the next chapter. These economic dynamics form the backdrop for brass band musicians' later interventions in power exchanges in international music markets.

Precolonial Danxome's valorization of tradition, royalty, religion, and national culture

continued to resonate throughout the 20th century. In the next chapter, I deal with the effects of French colonization on the development of education, social class, and religious practice,which form the background for the development of brass bands in religious communities, and for contested definitions of musical genre later on. I focus on the development of colonial ethnography, and the role it played in educating a generation of Dahomeans regarding notions of constructed cultural authenticity, which underpinned the Dahomean national movement which began in the 1930s.

Chapter Two

The Anthropology of Colonialism: Ethnography, the National Movement, and the Making of Authenticity in French-Ruled Dahomey (1900-1960)

From its ancestral foundations up through the colonial period, Dahomey adapted to dramatic political and economic changes. Throughout regional conflict, fluctuating cultural demographics, transformations of vodun practice, the slave trade, and economic transition, the region fought to keep its economic independence, and to divert efforts at cultural imperialism into ever more layered religious, political, and creative hybrid adaptations. In this chapter, I show how French colonization broke down traditional social structures around kingship and *vodun* practice, and impacted Dahomean attitudes regarding culture, religion, and socio-economic class in ways that resonated throughout music-making practices and the fluctuating valorization of traditional culture in the second half of the twentieth century. Anti-colonial resistance in independent African churches and new *vodun* cults formed important background for counteracting the effects of colonial domination beginning in the 1920s, while the Dahomean national movement's internal conflicts over loyalty, commerce, and ideology made the transition to independence difficult.

Compared to the precolonial period, the historical literature on colonial Dahomey is less developed, belying the complexities of writing about this period of cultural intermixture and the unspoken holdovers of ideologies of cultural purity. While the writings of colonial administrators and missionaries in the early 20th century provide more information than had been previously been available on local practices, they present this information within the structures of a colonial ethnology that employs historically specific conceptions of “ethnicity” and “culture.” These notions of culture were based on concepts of cultural particularity and difference that reflected

and supported the French's claim to cultural superiority. For administrator-ethnologists like Maurice Delafosse (1870-1926) and Auguste Le Herisse (1876-1953), the ultimate goal of "understanding" the Dahomeans was to transform them more effectively into modern subjects.

Colonial class binaries, in their false homogenies of the elite, educated *evolue* and the native *indigene*, failed to disguise social divisions in the real Dahomey. Some of these tensions preexisted colonization, like those between rival kingdoms, and between royal and slave classes. But many of these divisions were created and encouraged by the structures of colonial education and discourse themselves. The southern region of Dahomey, notwithstanding old rivalries, had been largely united around a common Adja culture, but the northern Bariba people had up until this point had little cultural interaction with their southern neighbors, or with Europeans for that matter. Not surprisingly, the first revolts against the colonial state took place in the north in the Atakora and Borgou regions, where French influence had been felt only sporadically until this point.

Bariba society was structured quite differently from the Danxomean south. Spiritual practice was not as central to the Bariba, although the ruling class, known as the Wasangari, participated in the *bori* cult which is widespread across the sahel region in Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Nigeria. The Wasangari shared leadership amongst themselves over another noble class, the Batomba, who were artisans and traders; the Fulani nomadic herders, mostly Muslim; and the Gando, the slaves of the Wasangari. Colonization destroyed this social structure, scattering the Fulani and the Gando, and causing infighting among the Wasangari leadership, which Ronen (1975) argues inspired the creation of hierarchies were none had been necessary.

The French also divided the Dahomeans, through religion and education, into social classes that had not existed before colonization: the *evolué* and the *indigène.* Teachers and

administrators encouraged the elites to see themselves as separate from the “native” population, occupying a privileged place at the vanguard of Africa's cultural evolution. Thus the population was divided by language, by education, by religious worship, by socialization, and by music and dance as well. By keeping the categories of European and African, elite and vernacular, rigidly separate, the administration throughout the French colonies was able to control the colonized populations and prevent them from obtaining the numbers or the information necessary to organize resistance. The effects this had on the development of music were profound, but would take some time to become apparent.

In this chapter, I analyze the effects of the French state in controlling and transforming Dahomey's culture through education, religion, and politics, and the contexts in which the people of Dahomey were able to act in oppositional or cooperative strategic response. I give particular attention to two areas where Dahomeans negotiated the terms of new colonial power relationships: independent African churches and traditional chieftaincy. Activity in these areas beginning in the 1920s laid the groundwork for the Africanization of colonial traditions that took place after independence and in the brass band movement. I argue that Dahomey's position as a highly resistant, politically active colony with few natural resources other than its coastline, along with its relatively late incorporation into French West Africa,[24] gave it a unique status which made it difficult to govern and routinely forced concessions from the administration. I consider the role of early ethnography in the colonial project of French West Africa, and the ways this was inflected locally in Dahomey. I look to the story of the French missionary Father Aupiais, and his polysemic “Renaissance Africaine” project, for the light it sheds on the ambiguities and in-betweenness of colonial encounters. I examine internal conflicts over

[24] French West Africa included all of present-day Burkina Faso, Mali, Senegal, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, and Togo, with its capital in Dakar.

entrepreneurship, culture, and ideology in the Dahomean nationalist movement in the 1930s, along with the rise of new forms of religion and politics in the years during and after World War II, and how such institutions complicated the first steps toward independence.

There are several sources that have been particularly informative on the colonial period. Patrick Manning's (1982) economic study offers great insights on the transitions of the 20th century, particularly around the role of the French state, and the uneven transition to capitalism. Another cluster of sources around the role of Catholicism as an intermediary has proved particularly helpful, including some sources from the archive of Father Francis Aupiais, which have been recently very well curated (Balard 1998, Beausoleil et al 1996). Martine Balard's work (1998, 2007) does an excellent job drawing out the religious back story from the point of view of Christianity, economics, politics, and social class in France during the 19th and 20th centuries. Dov Ronen's (1975) analysis of Dahomey's transitions from precolonial kingdom to French colony to independence is also helpful for his emphasis on cultural continuity and the importance of religion through this era of cultural transformation. I have also drawn on James Genova's (2004) work on mimicry and colonial cultural policy, which has been especially useful for unpacking the construction of authenticity in French West Africa from a broader discursive perspective. The Beninois historian Sylvain Anignikin's (2014, 1986) work on the Dahomean national movement in the 20th century has also been important to my understanding of Benin's nationalism and decolonization in historical context.

Early French Rule

Ye no do, do Africa vile no bio nu gbawu
Amo, nubioto ma hu we de
A na mi nayi
A ka so te mi na do
Ajoto a na gble we do
(Gangbe Brass Band, “Noubioto,” 2005)

They say that African people beg a lot
But, the beggar has not sinned.
You give me, I take.
You don't give me, I will tell.
The thief, you are the one doing wrong.

While the French conquest of Abomey in 1894 was a huge defeat for the traditional monarchy and ancestral legitimacy to the throne, it resulted in limited immediate changes in social life for rural inhabitants of what was now colonial Dahomey. For those oppressed under the Danxomean empire as forced laborers, French colonization at first seemed to be merely the substitution of one set of social controls for another. Proponents argued that the French placed restrictions on slavery and capital punishment, but this rhetoric of French salvation failed to acknowledge the truth: that no inhabitant of Dahomey enjoyed the constitutional rights held by French citizens.

In the first few decades of colonization, roads, railroads, and a few public schools were developed using the revenue collected from the imposition of a "head tax," but some one-third of this revenue was sent out of the country to France, effectively stripping Dahomey of a great deal of its economic output over the course of the colonial period (Manning 1982:162). The effects of taxation were significant, requiring many households, which had previously relied mostly on trade in barter or in cowrie shell currency, to take on additional work in order to pay the tax in francs. The effects of this policy in terms of economic dependence continue into the present day, as the scarcity of income in CFA currency remains a chronic problem while local systems of more informal credit and exchange are still functional.

Soon after conquering Abomey, the French divided up the Danxomean empire, placing protected royal leaders in power in each *canton*, formed from the reconstituted kingdoms of Allada, Ketu, Abomey-Calavi, Savalou, and Tado, while placing Behanzin's brother Agboli-Agbo on the throne in Abomey. But a French administrator soon replaced each of these leaders, and Agboli-Agbo was exiled in 1900. During my time in Abomey, the royal family still recognized the royal line of Glele, and held ceremonies for the royal ancestors each year.

The French governed the economic center of Cotonou and the port of Ouidah themselves. Cotonou was a small Toffinou village before the French began their administration, but underwent heavy development during the colonial period and became the center of industrial activity, and now, in the 21st century, an African metropolis. In 1905, the French incorporated Dahomey into Afrique Occidentale Francaise, whose capital was in Dakar, and this remained the governmental structure for most of the rest of the colonial period. Dakar's cultural policy, particularly regarding contructions of African authenticity, assimilation, development, and autonomy, became one of the main sites of ideological contestation in the colonial period, as power relations shifted between the educated *evolues*, traditional chiefs, and colonial administrators.

Some authors, like Akinjogbin (1967), have argued that the division of Danxome into *cantons* and the substitution of French administrators for traditional rulers represented a complete breakdown of traditional Adja social structure, destroying the connection with the ancestors in Allada that the Danxomean kings had so painstakingly constructed, and on which they had staked the legitimacy of their rule. But how successful were the French in this endeavor? Dividing their conception of power into sacred and secular realms, the French misunderstood the real spiritual power that the Danxomean ancestors continued to wield in the world. Ronen (1975:49) writes that, since the French assumed that the European category of kingship applied to someone as powerful as the Danxomean head, that kingship in Europe was the same as kingship in Danxome, so

> ...breaking down the kingdoms and stripping the heads of their titles was thought to be equivalent to the elimination of traditional authority, thereby making way for the easy substitution of French colonial authority. *These administrative and political measures, however, disrupted the traditional system only where and when the religious function of those responsible to the "holy places" in Abomey and Allada was threatened, and, later, when the dual roles of the village chief*

> (tohosu) – *traditional plus representative of the colonial authorities in the eyes of its inhabitants – came into conflict*. (emphasis original)

Thus the disruption of traditional power was most effective in the places where, as I discussed previously, it had been fragilely constructed around royal lineage: Abomey and Allada. Traditional spiritual authority outside of the ancestral kingdoms was more difficult to break, since it tended to lie in the worship of the great vodun like Hevioso and Sakpata rather than the royal cults of tohyiwo and nesuxwe. This was because these vodun practices, the heritage of minority peoples who had been conquered under Danxome, remained under the authority of village chieftaincy. Their power remained strong until the French tried to break the nationalist movement that began in the 1920s, and when a new political elite, educated in Catholic schools, came to rise above the traditional chiefs. It was precisely the connection between the spiritual and the political that the French authorities failed to see, in large part because they saw only *political* authority in the kings and chiefs, failing to grasp how effective their spiritual power was among the people. In the larger historical picture, the groundwork for future, postcolonial Africanizations of colonial traditions was laid in these early years of French rule. The style of colonial rule under the French certainly functioned quite differently from the Danxomean monarchy, which, while absolute, depended from its foundation on its subjects' allegiance and ancestral piety to legitimize its power. The colonial state, on the other hand, did not govern from the will of the governed, nor did it govern in their interests. The interdependency that Dahomeans had come to expect from their rulers was gone.

The concept of rule by military might or force was a familiar one, though, and in the view of many Dahomeans, the task was more to negotiate the terms of this new sovereignty than to transform its hierarchical nature. In the early years of French rule, Dahomeans had a limited number of contexts in which power might be negotiated, one being the church and missionary

schools, and the other traditional chieftaincy. Ironically, it was in both of these spheres that the colonists found ways to create new class structures among the Dahomeans, effectively dividing them from one another through religion, education, and culture.

Missionary Education

The Catholic church had had a significant presence in precolonial Danxome through the community of Brazilians, and with the establishment of the mission at Ouidah in the 19th century. After colonization, the French West African administration passed a law to nationalize and secularize the school system in 1904. The Catholic missions later protested, and in 1912 the law was changed to allow different educational policies in each colony. The Catholics were allowed to keep their schools open as long as the administration could standardize the curriculum, which they did in 1914 (Ronen 1975:63-4). The relationship between the administration and the church was complicated, since, on the one hand, the church opposed the commercial interests, political gamesmanship, vices, and excesses of the secular state, while the state mistrusted the church on the principle of keeping religion out of government.[25] These dynamics expressed conflicts that already existed in France around this time between church and state, especially with the increasing modernization, secularization, and urbanization that was taking place there around this time, so it is not surprising to see them played out in mirror-image in the colonies (Balard 1998).

On the other hand, the administration and the church needed one another in order to carry out their work and to maintain their authority in Dahomey. The clergy educated and trained the African elite on whom the administration depended as collaborators, employees, and assistants, and also had local language skills and trust established through years of residence in rural areas

[25] The French, like the Dahomean kings, recognized the power of religion to affect the terms of power and sovereignty. Enlightenment France preached liberation from this power, while the Dahomean rulers embraced it.

that state officials in the city would never achieve. Yet the missions' security in the country, in turn, depended on the state's protection and infrastructure.

The impact of Catholic education during the colonial era cannot be underestimated. Indeed, among musicians in contemporary Benin, education, especially private education, is the determining factor in an ensemble's hierarchy, more than place or circumstances of birth, economic status, or ethnic group. While some of the tactics of the colonists may have attacked traditional spiritual practices materially in destroying vodun shrines or placing regulations around ceremonial drumming and dancing (see chapter one), the most profound social changes were instituted at the psychological level through the missionaries' education system. Some two-thirds of schools in the first half of the 20th century were mission schools (Ronen 1975), and the public schools were often late in opening or unreliable because of lack of funding or other bureaucratic obstacles. The Catholic schools became a marker of class difference, as they were preferred by upper class families, especially the Brazilians. The most well off families in this period were the descendants of Brazilian and Portuguese traders who moved back and forth between 19th century Danxome, Cuba, Brazil, and Europe, trading in slaves and palm products. Names associated with Portuguese heritage or well known Brazilian traders like da Souza, Quenum, and Adjovi signaled high class status, as they do in Benin today.

The missionaries focused on drawing their African students out of “fetishism” and “superstition,” leading them to become the (spiritually, economically, intellectually) Enlightened subjects that the colonial state required. The students in the mission schools were to become subjects of modernity, simply put. This meant speaking exclusively French in the classroom. Schools still teaching in Portuguese were closed. French remains the exclusive language of instruction in schools run by both the church and the government in Benin to this day, and

students can be rapped across the knuckles for speaking their native languages in the classroom. The missionaries also imposed other codes of behavior, regarding dress, and restrictions on playing traditional drums and dancing, which they perceived as overtly sexual in nature. They did come with the hope that a new kind of Christianity informed by African "custom" would emerge, but for the first 20 years of French rule, the Catholic church did everything it could to eliminate African custom from its educational system (Balard 1998).

Traditional Chiefs

Another key factor in establishing interactions with the new state were chiefs or heads of family known as *daa*, whom the French installed to govern villages and towns. They were able to maintain many traditional social structures, including vodun practice and veneration of the ancestors. Ronen (1975:55) writes that the colonial government's collaboration with local chiefs meant that, up until World War I, "tribal sentiment and attachment to ancestral customs remained very significant. This happened because the administrative structure, though not by design, *did* leave intact the important elements of the traditional system." While this arrangement protected religious and kinship structures, alliances between the traditional chiefs and colonial administrators rested on Dakar's regard for the constructed difference, authenticity, and "purity" of African tradition, which they used as a way of justifying underdevelopment, domination, and economic inequality (Genova 2004:94).

The Dahomean National Movement

When finances became tight for the French during World War I, they imposed new head taxes on the Dahomean population, increased prices on imports, and began recruiting soldiers for the *Tirailleurs Senegalais* infantry force among the population. This was part of the program outlined in the colonial minister Albert Saurraut's "La Mise en Valeur des Colonies Francaises"

(1923), in which he argued for the moral and ethical imperatives for the economic development of the colonies, and making them profitable to France. These policies inspired some of the most widespread revolts of the colonial era. These rebellions took place at all levels of society, from fishermen on the coast to agricultural workers in the river valleys and in the Bariba lands in the north, who were outraged at the new taxes and French economic policies in general (see Anignikin 2014). The landed and commercial bourgeoisie, and the elite intelligentsia, began producing and distributing anti-colonial literature, confirming the colonial administration's suspicions of their radical potential. The most dramatic of these incidents involved the events in Porto Novo in 1923, when, in response to attempts to withhold taxes from wages, residents closed down markets, refused to pay any taxes for six weeks, and the workers went on strike. The French responded by burning the nearby lake village of Afotonou, and sending the leaders of the strike to exile in Mauritania. In the hopes that it would make the colonies easier to govern, the French West African leadership in Dakar instituted councils in each colony, each composed of eight to sixteen members who were given French citizenship. With councils established in Allada, Abomey, and Ouidah in 1919 and in Cotonou in 1924, this began the separation of an elite class of Francophilic, educated, largely Catholic Dahomeans who would eventually take over political power (Ronen 1975, Anignikin 2014).

A series of outbreaks of bubonic plague and influenza in the 1920s led to the creation of the region's first independent African church, the Cherubim and Seraphim, in 1925 (Tall 1995b, Waterman 1990). Modeled on the Nigerian Protestant missions, this new church was created out of necessity to offer healing to those afflicted by disease but who feared traditional healers, whom they associated with superstition and witchcraft. Musically, the church was also key in developing an early type of “tradi-modern” music, through borrowings from Brazilian street

drumming, *bouriyan* from Brazilian returnees to Ouidah, and Nigerian *assiko*, a Christian genre of street drumming that came to Lagos via Brazilian and Sierra Leonian ex-slaves. In Nigeria, the independent churches employed *dundun* and *gangan* talking drums for the lead parts, because the *bata* were seen as too closely associated with *orisa* practice (Waterman 1990). In Benin today, the *gbon*, another talking drum, plays this role. This mix of styles in the independent churches was a major ingredient in the formation of the brass band scene in Benin in the 1990s, as I write in chapter three. The church of the Cherubim and Seraphim became very influential as African Christianity began developing its critique of both Catholicism and vodun traditions; it would be the model for Celestial Christianity in the 1940s, which I discuss below.

The chiefs and heads of family (*daa*) remained powerful sources of authority during World War I, but mostly limited their activities to traditional and family-oriented ceremonies. Some were nominated by the people in their villages, while others, often ex-slaves, were appointed by the administration. The traditional chiefs had been given powers by the colonial administration to collect taxes, and thus many had fallen into corruption and nepotism. They also were known to engage in exploitative labor practices. These traditional chiefs, and their complicity with the colonial state, became the focus of the growing Dahomean national movement's explicit critique in the 1920s. The state responded by increasing support to the chiefs, providing them with a yearly salary and giving them *secretaires*, or administrative assistants, some of whom came to be locally very powerful (Manning 1982:269).

Reconnaissance Africaine: Ethnography in Colonial Dahomey

In order to support their strategies of domination, the colonial administration sought the expertise of ethnographers to inform them about local institutions and customs so that they could more effectively control the population. Genova (2004: 94-5) argues that ethnography,

particularly the research of those like administrator Maurice Delafosse, was used by the French administration to define what was authentic about African culture and to provide standardized curriculum for teaching in rural schools. However, seen from the perspective of Dahomey, colonial ideology and cultural policy were not as uniform across French West Africa as scholars portray them, especially when it came to cultural authenticity.

In Dahomey, a group of students educated in the Catholic mission school in Porto Novo adopted ethnography for their own purposes as they negotiated their way through the complex terrain of colonial power dynamics. Benin's Catholic schools were under the leadership of Father Francis Aupiais, who headed the mission school in Porto Novo from 1904 to 1926, where he trained Dahomeans to teach religion. Father Aupiais (1877-1945), a missionary and an ethnographer, was a fascinating, counter-cultural figure in Dahomean history. He took an alternative approach to his mission work, setting out to convince his French colleagues that the Dahomeans had intrinsic dignity, that their practices were not ignorant by nature, and that their culture promoted values that they shared with Christians, such as honesty and the preservation of family life. He based many of his arguments for traditional culture in the “non-individualism” he perceived lying at the basis of Dahomean social structure (Balard 1998). Aupiais saw in the people of Dahomey, and in their veneration of the ancestors and of the vodun, an intense, perhaps even “primal” religiosity that inspired him. Yet his apologies for Dahomean culture sometimes approached a kind of idealized primitivism that portrayed the Gun people in a problematic pre-lapserian innocence, incapable of *any* human weakness.

Like many socially aware French Catholics, Father Aupiais was disturbed by the secularization of French society, which had its roots in the Enlightenment in the mid-18th century. Indeed, the political situation in France by the 19th century had led to marked conflicts

between tradition and modernity as rural residents, many of them socially engaged Catholics, clashed against modernizing cities over religion, work, and the profit motive, among other issues (Balard 1998:27-9). These same issues and insecurities played out in the 20th century in the French colonial administration's uneasy relationship with the church and its division of Dahomey's people into elite and peasant classes, mapping the French class system onto the colonies. The colonies served as one of the ways in which France worked out its identity crisis, enacted in its own fashion of self-writing, by casting the Africans as the flip side, the "antipodes," to use the Comaroffs' (2012) term, of whatever lurked beneath the surface of their own societal problems.

Aupiais was unique in incorporating local languages into his curriculum at the school in Porto Novo, and teaching the history of Dahomey based on the recitations of the Abomean *kpanlingan*, going back to the kings of Allada. He was also known to bring the fabrication of traditional masks into the classroom, like those for the Nago-Yoruba people's ancestral *guelede* (Balard 2007). In both its intense historical awareness and its appreciation of vernacular African languages, this heightened focus on traditional culture bears a close resemblance to the project undertaken by "tradi-modern" brass bands and jazz ensembles in the second half of the 20th century.

Still, Aupiais found evangelizing among Porto Novo's Gun population to be very difficult, in large part because of their strong attachment to their traditional religious practices. Knowledgeable about the dramatic conventions of vodun ceremonies, he wrote a sacred drama in the Gun language about the Miracles of the Middle Ages and the Miracle of Epiphany (complete with Dahomean magi, the "three kings" who come to visit baby Jesus from afar), distributed it as a pamphlet, and had it performed by Gun actors, the Beninois religion scholar

Jerome Alladaye (2003:147-8) writes. Aupiais called the venue “Reconnaissance Africaine,” which also hosted exhibitions of Dahomean art, documentary film screenings, and national conferences. In 1925, he established a journal with the same name, and Aupiais's student, the Dahomean writer Paul Hazoume, published his early work there. A whole generation of Aupiais's Porto Novian students, in fact, became interested in ethnological writing, of which Hazoume's (1938) semi-fictional *Doguicimi*, about a rebellious woman in precolonial Danxome, is only the most well known (see Riecz 2004). Other ethnologies from this group deserving of study are Maximilien Quenum's[26] (1938) *Au Pays des Fons* and Julien Alapini's *Les Noix Sacrées* (1950), a biography of a Fa diviner.

Hazoume's *Doguicimi* is an interesting example of the appropriation and Africanizing of a colonial tradition, in this case, ethnography, for the purposes of writing a history of Danxome (Aggarwal 2015, Riesz 2004), a history that was his to write, and also not quite. Hazoume himself was from Porto Novo, not Abomey, yet he chose this ancient kingdom as a representative for his semi-fictional account, giving himself one step of remove from the account, objectifying a culture he inhabited, to paraphrase the Comaroffs (2009). The book is based on Hazoume's 25 years of ethnographic conversations with elders and oral historians in Abomey, an outright refusal of the colonial historical archive albeit through an appropriated ethnographic lens. His account takes place during the reign of the 19th century Danxomean king Guezo at a time when the kingdom's lavish way of life – whose sights, sounds, and tastes are described in vivid detail – was threatened both by the end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and through conflicts with neighboring peoples like the Mahi and the Oyo empire.

Hazoume chose a strong, anti-authoritarian female figure, Doguicimi, a woman outside

[26] Note the prominent Brazilian name.

the royal family who is the wife of Prince Toffa, for the central figure in the narrative, a significant writerly invention that reveals much about Hazoume's position, and the radical ethnography he practiced, as literary scholar Kusum Aggarwal (2015) writes. When Toffa is killed in battle, Doguicimi accuses king Guezo of having orchestrated her husband's death in order to protect secrets about the king's accession to the throne. Guezo pardons her for her defiance, but she continues to criticize him publicly. The king (uncharacteristically) treats her with compassion, and then Toffa's body is returned to Abomey and Doguicimi insists on being buried with him. Hazoume portrays Doguicimi as a revolutionary model of African womanhood, by turns humble and proud, but still fiercely loyal, while he represents Guezo as generous and understanding of Doguicimi's grief. This makes for an account of 19th century Danxome that is profoundly inflected by Hazoume's colonial Dahomey as it grappled with the inheritance of French rule, the strength of tradition, and the speed of changes in leadership, gender politics, and definitions of culture.

But back to Father Aupiais and his notion of "Reconnaissance Africaine." "Reconnaissance" has several potential meanings in French: 1) gratitude, 2) recognition (of identity), 3) admission, 4) recognition (of independence, rights), 5) (Military) reconnaissance, exploration and information-gathering. This polysemic title could refer to "African recognition," that is, recognition *for* Africans from Europeans for their culture, their religion, or just possibly a recognition of their personal rights. It could refer to "African recognition," that is, recognition or gratitude *on the part of Africans* of the "gifts" that the European missionaries have provided them, the gifts of "civilization." I think the productive question about the nativity play is, indeed, as to the many possible identities of the magi, the consummate Others from afar, and the unknown quality of the gifts they bring.

But the military reference of “reconnaissance” is just too disturbing to ignore, because, as Alladaye (2003:123) notes, it was one of the roles of missionaries to *provide information* to colonial authorities about the communities in which they worked. Alladaye (2003:148) remarks that, while Aupiais' stated objective in these exhibitions was always to “bring out the 'profound religiosity' of blacks” in order to demonstrate that they *did*, in fact, have rich spiritual lives, Aupiais said in an interview with the French *Petit Marseillais* in 1926 that the goal of the institution was in fact “to intensify French propaganda” (Alladaye 2003:148).

“Reconnaissance Africaine” is, in sum, an accurate encapsulation of many of the ambiguities and contradictions of the missionary encounter with traditional religion in Dahomey, even while it bears the marks of Aupiais's assertions of anti-colonial cultural “rehabilitation.” As Jean Comaroff (1985:149-150) writes, “In such colonial encounters...the interaction between formerly distinct systems is not merely one of contrast but of contradiction; the confrontation occurs within a global order of relations, in which the respective parties wield unequal powers of control and determination.” Thus, Aupiais may have sought to portray deep Gun religiosity, but he also revealed his hand in the reconnaissance, as it were. His status as a missionary, as a Catholic, as a Frenchman, is always already there. Where he makes his arguments for the redeeming qualities of Dahomey's people and culture, he makes them on *universal* terms, just as other missionaries made their arguments for African ignorance on universal terms.

Aupiais's work in Dahomey led him to remarkable compromises in his catechism, such as accepting the practice of polygamy, arguing that it provided more support for the institution of motherhood and thus was better for their children and the livelihood of the family. He even went as far as to justify human sacrifice in certain religious contexts where it was believed that those sacrificed would go on live in a spiritual world similar to and constantly in contact with the

physical one (Balard 2007, 1998). He drew the line at practices of forced labor, however, and made his criticisms explicit.

So Aupiais lived these contradictions, these antithetical positions that the mind can somehow maintain by fits and starts. He was exiled to France in 1931 because of disagreements with church leadership regarding his unorthodox pedagogy, not surprising given that he parted ways with his religious brothers on more issues than not, and that his student Paul Hazoume had become actively involved in the Dahomean national movement. But it was to Aupiais that the Dahomean elite looked for guidance as they formed the first proto-democratic institutions following World War II, since, as their teacher, he had earned their intimate trust, and in some ways he shared some responsibility for their developing political philosophy.

World War II and Dahomean Political Parties

The Great Depression had dramatic effects on Dahomey, to the point where currency virtually dropped out of circulation. Divisions started to appear in the national movement, as the intellectual elite, led by Paul Hazoume and the publication *Phare du Dahomey* (Beacon of Dahomey), accused the merchants' association of capitalist hypocrisy. The merchants argued that the elites' investment in the politics of African authenticity had meant ignoring real material development issues, including support for entrepreneurs and economic and political autonomy, and that the elites' communism was imported and unfit African ideology. These debates foreshadow contested notions of culture and entrepreneurship among Beninois musicians in the 1990s (see chapter four). The elites saw themselves as a part of France, a privileged African "Quartier Latin," and a valuable part of France's empire. In 1936, the offices of the merchants' publication *La Voix du Dahomey* (Voice of Dahomey) were raided by the French administration, and they sought to prosecute the paper for possessing confidential documents, a charge of which

they were eventually acquitted. But this, along with the beginning of World War II, marked the end of a fertile period of anti-colonial agitation (Anignikin 1986). This situation in Dahomey contrasted with the environment elsewhere in French *evolue* discourse, for example in the journal *La Depeche Africaine*, where writers used colonial ethnographic research to argue for the incompatibility of Marxism and African collectivity (Genova 2004:140-1). The difference in Dahomey lay in the leftist orientation of the educated elite, who in the 1930s became more and more attracted to communist ideals.

When war broke out in Europe in 1939, the state again began using forced labor to obtain export crops, and suspended local elections. In this environment of extreme scarcity and hardship, the Dahomean population was nevertheless strongly in support of the French against the Nazis, and the African elite drew even closer in their identification with French nationalism. Many Dahomeans and others in France's colonies served in the allied armed forces, and some of them gained French citizenship for their service. Some of them became longtime residents of France, and studied at university there. The Dahomean national movement essentially disappeared, subordinated to the allegiances of wartime, and it would never truly rise to its former strength (Anignikin 2014). When independence came in 1960, it would be on France's terms.

After World War II, the French administration made dramatic changes in their previous colonial policies of cultural assimilation and the production of economic value. This change occurred globally, too, as the world's united front against Nazism and fascism altered the ways in which Europe saw the colonies. The new phase emphasized “development,” which later generations saw as in fact an excuse for *under*developing the colonies, especially those that had not yielded significant economic returns. Having few natural resources to be mined, Dahomey's

contributions to the French empire were, on the surface, largely immaterial – the intellectual wealth of doctors and scholars, and the strategic advantage of the coastline next to Nigeria, which provided a path to the interior and Niger's minerals.

New Religion

One of the chief developments during the 1940s on the cultural front was the arrival of new vodun cults from Ghana, such as those for vodun Tron (kola nut) and Mami Wata (the goddess of the sea). Emanuelle Kadya Tall (1995b) writes that these cults came through the influence of Christian Science among Protestants in Ghana, and traveling fishermen brought the cults with them, first to Ouidah. They bear a strong resemblance to the Aladura churches in Nigeria, which have also become influential in Benin. Fittingly, many of these cults make use of Ghanaian coastal genres of drumming like *agbadja* for their ceremonies, which shares some common roots with other genres from the Adja-Fon cultural region. Others draw from "traditional popular"[27] genres from the villages around Porto Novo, like *djegbe*. Often urban youth had not been incorporated into the new structures of colonial education, and had moved to the city for work, separating themselves from village family support systems. Tall (1995a) writes that these new cults gave urban women and young men an outlet for a critique of the colonial state and the church, without needing to confront the patriarchal structures of the older vodun practices, whether royal, ancestral, or inter-ethnic (see also Bay 2009). In contrast to older, ancestral or inter-ethnic vodun practices, these new cults were particularly focused on targeting witchcraft, and promised a more individual orientation that met followers' needs for intervention in such areas a fertility, material wealth, and protection from spiritual attack in the forms of illness and accident. The Tron communities in particular became patrons of specific styles of

[27] As I discuss in the next chapter, "popular" in the context of traditional Beninois music refers to the habitual musical language of the region, the "music of the people," rather than contemporary commercial music, which is referred to as *la musique moderne*.

popular drumming, like those from the fishing villages in the Mono region on Dahomey's western seashore, like *agbadja*.

There were new Christianities springing up in the post-war period as well, with the formation of the Christianisme Celeste Church, founded in 1947 by Samuel Bileo Joseph Oshoffa, the son of a Methodist minister from Nigeria, who received a divine revelation to create a church to be the "last boat" to bring mankind to salvation (Ogouby 2008). The Celeste church is highly visible in Benin and Nigeria today, as crowded busloads of the white-clad faithful travel the roads between Cotonou, Porto Novo, and Lagos. The communities are known for incorporating aspects of vodun practice and other traditions into its worship services. This includes a focus on individual revelation and material prosperity that echoes some of the issues treated in the new vodun cults like vodun Tron and Mami Wata.

The Celeste church, along with the Cherubim and Seraphim church, have been incredible patrons of music, sponsoring brass bands and choirs, and producing many excellent musicians who have crossed over to mainstream success. The independent churches' reputation for the use of "vodun" melodies and rhythms lies in their kinship with the use of styles like *agbadja* and *djegbe* in 1920s cults for new vodun like Mami Wata, Tron, and Goro, and not with the more protected rhythms for royal, ancestral, and inter-ethnic vodun like *nesuxwe* or Sakpata. The Celeste church makes use of many "popular traditional" styles, too, like *masse gohun*, *djoglissohoun*, and *ayo kpede kpede* (Rock Ahouandjinou, 3/1/15, Porto Novo). The definition of "vodun" performance practice changes over time, and meant something specific at the time the Celeste church was founded in the 1940s, which impacted the way musicians understand sacred and secular music relationships into the late 20th century. "Vodun" can mean many different things to different people, and cut across several different valences of social class, religious

practice, and historical context.

New Politics

What happened in French politics after the war led to a much more liberal Assemblée Generale that made one of its chief goals giving more personal rights to colonial subjects, within the French system, of course. France established proto-democratic institutions, giving each colony two representatives, one for French citizens and one for non-citizens. In 1945, Father Aupiais was elected unanimously for Dahomey's first post, although his death later in the year prevented him from serving, and one of his former students, Sorou Migan Apithy, won the second. Apithy was later elected president.

It wasn't long before the electoral committees took the shape of political parties, beginning at first with just one: the Union Progressiste Dahoméenne (UPD), originally founded by Apithy in 1946. Following this brief initial unity, Dahomean politics splintered as parties began forming along regional boundaries in later elections, the largest representing Cotonou/Abomey (UPD, now ethnically Fon), Porto Novo (Union Francaise, which Apithy joined, Gun), and the Groupement Ethnique du Nord (Bariba). It was as if Dahomey had separated into its precolonial kingdoms, the commercial, Dahomean nationalist Fon; the intellectual, French-allied Gun; and the marginalized Bariba: “groupement ethnique” as political party. Ronen (1975:102-3) writes that “Had enough seats been provided, each household would vote for its head, following a direct line descending from the ethnic group, groups of villages, and the village community.”

But there were only two slots for representatives to the French Assembly, and three party candidates. This resulted in what became known as the Crisis of 1951 in which Apithy and the northern candidate, Hubert Maga, swept nearly all the votes, leaving the UPD candidate Emile

Zinsou, of the original Dahomean nationalists, with no influence at all. The traditional chiefs had very little influence in this election. Yet, in something of a replication of traditional hierarchical power structures among the three kingdoms, regional power sharing among ethnic groups has been a major issue in every election in Benin ever since.

The acknowledgement of citizenship and representative democracy in France's colonies left only a few steps to independence. On June 13, 1960 Dahomey successfully negotiated its independence in Paris. Hubert Maga won the election in December later that year. Most Catholic missionaries decided to stay and work with the new government. But the timing of independence for Dahomey came some twenty years after the height of its national movement, and without resolving any of its very real problems of governance and economy, ranging from internal regional and class divisions to dependence on the colonial infrastructure for trade and education. The years after independence demanded a great deal of experimentation and problem solving, and yielded unusual results, as I discuss in the next chapter.

Conclusion

Throughout the colonial period, Dahomey continued to adapt to political and economic changes. French colonization broke down traditional social structures, and impacted Dahomean attitudes regarding culture and religion, although control of traditional religion and culture was never complete. Anti-colonial resistance in independent African churches and new vodun cults created important models for Africanizing colonial traditions, as did the practices of insider ethnographers like Paul Hazoume. In politics, especially beginning in the 1930s, the national movement's internal conflicts over commerce and ideology made the later transition to independence difficult.

In the following chapter, I show how musicians in independence-era Benin started

looking to a version of these histories for inspiration, and representing it to themselves, to the country's leaders, and to the international sphere. Early generations in the 1950s were self-consciously “modern” to the point of making no obvious connection to traditional expressive practices, preferring to focus on Afro-diasporic musics like salsa, or African genres popular in France, such as Congolese soukous and Ghanaian highlife. Later on, when the new nation became a Marxist state, a fusion of Afrobeat and local rhythms took center stage. It was a new phase in the process of sifting through the various heritages left to the post-independence generations, the beginning of Africanizing their colonial heritage.

Chapter Three

Making la Musique Moderne: Musical Genre and Cultural Renaissance in Post-Colonial Benin (1960-2015)

Independence gave people in Dahomey-Benin an opportunity to re-envision their relationships to traditions of music and spirituality, and to the wider world. In order to better understand this process, I explore in further detail the worlds of musical and extramusical discourse that limited and enabled musicians' creative interventions. Like precolonial music traditions, the *musique moderne* of 1970s Dahomey-Benin, developed into a body of discourse which jazz and brass band musicians since the 1990s frequently reference in terms explicit and implicit.

In this chapter, I examine the development of the *musique moderne* scene in Dahomey-Benin – centering around genres like salsa, soukous, jazz, highlife, and later reggae, funk, and Afrobeat – from the 1960s through the 2000s. I begin with definitions of style and genre categories like *moderne*, *traditionel*, *sacre*, and *populaire* among Beninois musicians. I argue that the development of the *musique moderne* scene follows a trajectory through three phases, from exterior-oriented, with a focus on outside musical practices in the 1950s and '60s; to interior-oriented, with focus shifting to local musical practices and isolationist economic policy in the 1970s and '80s; and lastly to the projection of the interior toward the exterior beginning in the 1990s. I locate the beginnings of the scene in Cotonou and Porto Novo after independence, when the *musique moderne* scene was mostly focused on sounds from outside of Benin, from the Americas and other parts of Africa. Through exploring the development of the brass band (or *fanfare*) in the national military police orchestra in the 1970s, I argue for its status as an indigenized "Beninois tradition." I go on to analyze how musicians' "*modernisation*" of

traditional repertoires like *kaka*, *tchinkoume*, *masse gohoun*, and so-called "sato" starting in the mid-'70s gave them opportunities to recreate, reimagine, and curate their country's history and culture, especially around the representation of vodun practice and performance. These processes had intense political resonances in the second half of the 20th century, due to heightened suppression of religious practice under the Marxist-Leninist administration from 1974-1990, and the renewed interest in traditional practices as heritage commodities in the post-socialist period after 1990. I argue that the Afropolitan resonances of this '90s entrepreneurial cultural renaissance recall moments of both independence-era Afro-centrism and earlier formulations of Negritude authenticity, while setting the stage for groups like Gangbe and Eyo'nle's global transformations and uses of Benin's music traditions.

Defining Genre in Contemporary Beninois Music

Contemporary definitions of musical genre in southern Benin grew out of the cultural environment of the 1990s, with its complex divisions of religion, ethnicity, and social class, inherited from colonialism and missionization, and further inflected by Marxism and then economic liberalism. In spite of some recent fluidity and cross-over between genre categories, I found that the surrounding discourse of types has been slow to change, and carries a lot of historical ideology along with it. Genre categories among musicians in southern Benin revolve mostly around the binary categories of *traditionel* and *moderne*, which seem to fall neatly into colonial systems of social control based on class (the *evolué* and the *indigène*). There are, however, plenty of nuances and contradictions within these distinctions in the discourse employed among contemporary musicians (cf. Kpangnouian, Avrankou, 4/2/15).

The category of *traditionel* is usually separated into the *sacré* and the *populaire*. *Traditionalistes*, like my teacher Etienne Mechonou in Abomey, rarely use the word *musique*, nor

the loan word in Fon, *musiki*, in referring to the repertoires they play; they prefer, when speaking Fon, to refer to these activities as *hun* (dance-drumming, drum, or *hunxixo*: rhythm or heartbeat), or in French, *tam-tam* (drum, lit. "tom-tom" as opposed, in the French etymological imagination, to the more distinguished and oriental *tambour*, which is never used in Benin). More cosmopolitan musicians might invoke the term *musique*, when thinking and speaking comparatively, as in "*la musique traditionelle beninoise*" (cf. Rock Ahouandjinou, Porto Novo, 3/1/15).

Musicians' concepts of *le traditionel* or *la tradition*, when referring to performance practices, are discursively stable, perhaps even rigid, when compared to the diversity of practices that these terms cover. Such genres could be defined to a certain extent by their instrumentation, usually *hun* – typically a lead *hundaxo* and two small support drums, *hunvi* – bells (*gan*), and rattles (*assan*); and certain styles of vocal delivery, especially praise singing, social commentary, pentatonicism, and nasal tonal quality executed in the poetic, proverbial registers of Fon, Gun, Yoruba, Mina, or Mahi language (see Aaron Ahouandjinou, Porto Novo, 6/29/10). Yet the primary marker of differences between genres remains *performance context*, over and above any particular formal characteristics. The performance of traditional repertoires usually takes place in a ceremonial context, whether for *vodun* rituals, or for life ceremonies such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals. It may be recorded and broadcast on television or radio, but it is seldom presented in a concert setting.

Le sacré, as in "*les rythmes sacrés*" or "*les rythmes du couvent*," refers to repertoire for *vodun* ceremonies or for secret societies, including both secret repertoires for initiates only, and the drumming, dances, and songs performed for the public portions of the initiates' coming-out ceremonies. Musicians generally agree about what constitutes repertoire of *le sacré* and its

boundaries and origins, especially concerning those genres widely recognized for their ceremonial role, such as *kaka* for the *zangbeto* in Porto Novo, *agbehun* for the *egungun* in Ouidah (elsewhere known as *gbon*), and *agbotchebou* for Sakpata in Abomey (Sagbohan, Porto Novo, 1/13/15). These *sacré-traditionel* repertoires can also be found in other "sacred" contexts (note the intentional use of the English sense of the word), such as in the liturgies of Afro-Christian churches like l'Eglise de Christianisme Celeste and les Cherubim et Seraphim (S. Gnonlonfoun, New York, 7/23/14). But, importantly, in these church contexts, they are not considered *sacré* from the point of view of a *traditionaliste* because *the context is not appropriate*. In the worship contexts of independent African churches, the *populaire*, the *sacré*, and even the *moderne* coexist, as brass bands and choirs interpret a mix of *vodun*-derived styles, highlife, salsa, and gospel. While definitions of the *sacré* and *la musique profane* may be rhetorically rigid, the variety of musical experiences and practices that can register across this divide is expansive. Vodun music may register as part of "sacred" experience for Christians from traditional backgrounds, and features prominently in Celeste services, while it is "profane" for *both* evangelicals and strict traditionalists. Congo music, on the other hand, may bring primary associations of commercial "modern" (read: foreign) music for traditionalists, but it is the foundation of many common evangelical gospel styles used for worship services. What does the sacred sound like? It all depends where you come from.

Musicians also challenge generic distinctions when they take *vodun* styles out of the temple ("*sorti du couvent*") to *populariser*, *moderniser*, or *developper* them, as many innovators describe various aspects of the process (Dehopumon, France, 6/5/14; Adagbenon, Cotonou, 11/14/14). This was a common practice, especially after the 1970s, when *vodun* repertoires were being suppressed and performers sought out new consumer patrons for support. One example is

the case of *kaka*, the repertoire for the *zangbeto* which Sagbohan Danialou has *modernisé*, as I mentioned earlier. In this case Sagbohan engaged in both the *popularisation* (read: secularization, brought out of the *couvent*) and *modernisation* (adaptation for drum set, horns, and amplified bass and guitar) of *kaka*, although the vocal style and percussion elements remained relatively the same. And musicians now perform *agbotchebou* for enthusiastic audiences at weddings, baptisms, and parties not associated with the *vodun* Sakpata.

The Gangbe Brass Band has also adapted many *sacré* styles, including *agbotchebou*, *agbehun*, and *kaka*, for new instrumentation, and sometimes in original compositions. Their and other brass bands' work, like Eyon'le, falls into the category of *tradi-moderne*, “feet in the tradition, head in the modern” (R. Ahouandjinou, Porto Novo, 3/1/15). There is a lot to say about this formulation, for starters in terms of possible resonances with Cartesian body-mind dualism, the lower body being associated with dance and direct experience, and the head with rational thought, which we might take as an inheritance for European philosophy. But this is not enough. The feet play an important role in dance for the vodun, where the steps, and indeed the footwork, of *vodunsi* intitiates convey secret codes and identifying information about the particular vodun the *vodunsi* is incarnating. So the feet remain rooted in the steps, the codes of the past, the continuity of traditional knowledge. To continue to ground this interpretation in tradition, Fon cosmology associates the head with *se*, or destiny, and diviners say that *se* sits on someone's head, much in the manner of a mask sitting on the one who wears it, driving or possessing him or her. So to have one's “head in the modern” may imply a linking of the modern with a traditional conception of destiny and deeply grounded identity.[28]

[28] See Maupoil (1936:378-82) for a detailed discussion of the four Fon terms employed for “soul” as understood by the *bokonon*, experts in Fa divination: *ye* (that which leaves the body when a person dies and, if they've lived well, becomes *kuvito*, or *egungun* in Yoruba); *wesagu* (something like a “conscience,” which reports a person's good and bad deeds to Mawu when he dies); *lido* (the reflection of god, Mawu, in a person, which returns to Mawu when he dies); and *se* (which stays with a person even when they transition into a new spiritual state, a

Funeral genres such as *zenli* make up a category of styles that most musicians now consider mostly *populaire*, although their association with ceremonies for the departed gives them some measure of *sacré* status. *Zenli* was once reserved only for royal funerals in the time of king Agadja, and has since migrated further into less reserved repertory practice, to where it now approaches the ubiquity of a popular genre (Alekpehanhou, Bohicon, 12/7/14).

Within the category of the traditional, *le populaire* could have strikingly divergent meanings, depending on the perspective and the context. The popular, for many Beninois musicians, refers to the large body of publicly accessible repertoire like *tchinkoume*, *masse*, *djegbe*, and *agbadja*, that is part of the habitual soundscape of southern Benin, but has left its exclusive associations with spiritual practice for long enough that the average Beninois listener has forgotten the genre's ritual origins, as in the case of *tchinkoume* and *masse gohun*. This touches on some sense of what might be, in other cultures, considered "populist," or "people's music." In fact, this sense of populism extended throughout many of my interviews with traditional and modern musicians. When asked who they expected to appreciate their music, for whom they were performing, composing or recording, the most frequent response was, emphatically or thoughtfully, "the people" (*le peuple*) (i.e. Jean Adagbenon, Cotonou, 11/14/14).[29]

These *populaire* styles are ubiquitous at the frequent public celebrations much enjoyed in Benin, including funerals, weddings, baptisms, confirmations, political events, anniversaries, and birthdays, at which well known artists like Sagbohan Danialou still perform regularly. An artist may thus be able to make a career between the *populaire*, the *moderne*, and perhaps even the *sacré*, if they have the skill to make these transitions artfully and navigate the extra- and inter-

destiny that is unchanged even by death).

[29] See Charles Keil (1985) on "People's Music Comparatively," and the role of class hegemony in economies of status in folk genres.

musical nuances to the satisfaction of their audiences. I often encountered characterizations of a style as *populaire* if a performer wanted to emphasize its general or ordinary status, followed usually by the affirmation, "*C'est pour les rejouissances*," a reference to the wide category of celebrations that might take place in a village context (Kpangnouian, Avrankou, 4/2/15). Perhaps this label was also invoked if the musician did not know the origins of a style, or preferred to hide their knowledge of its spiritual origins.

On the other hand, *tradi-moderne* musicians with music theoretical training, like those in Gangbe and Eyo'nle Brass Bands, often classify traditional rhythms on structural terms, with the categories "*binaire*" and "*ternaire*" (binary and ternary). This distinction serves their purposes of integrating the rhythms into their jazz and *variété* arrangements, and of identifying homologous genres in other cultural contexts (cf. Mathieu Ahouandjinou, Porto Novo, 3/6/15). It also allows them to defer questions of the styles' traditional sacred or secular performance contexts by classifying the rhythms structurally. There are cultural if not religious associations carried by these binary-ternary distinctions, however, as the Adja-Fon side of the rhythmic equation tends to emphasize ternary rhythms (frequently conceptualized in 6/8, as in "*le six-huit africain*"), while the Yoruba-Nago side carries more binary subdivisions. There are, of course, many variations and exceptions within these generalizations, but musicians discuss the distinction on these terms often enough to deserve mention.

In the United States, the context with which I am most familiar, notions of popular music are constructed chiefly against notions of "the classical," which works as a marker of relative cultural status and social class associations. This is also the case in Anglophone African contexts with a developed art music discourse, such as Ghana and Nigeria. But in the context of southern Benin, this notion of the classical does not have the same influence. Here, the category of the

populaire is always also necessarily *traditionel*, and is constructed most prominently not against the classical, but against the reserved repertory of the *sacré*. In Benin *la musique du peuple* is, and seems on track to always be, Afro-traditional. After that there are only two kinds of *musique traditionelle*: *sacré* and *populaire*. Thus the category of *musique populaire*, here counterintuitively, does not include the works of Angélique Kidjo, James Brown, Jimi Hendrix, Fela Kuti, Ella Fitzgerald, Manu Dibango, Count Basie, John Coltrane, Bob Marley, Africando, or any other rock, pop, or jazz, as it would in the typologies of the Anglophone world.[30] That would be *musique moderne*.

The *moderne* music scene in Benin includes a huge variety of genres, many falling under the aforementioned category of *variété* (or "variety"), including salsa, Congo music, afrobeat, highlife, pop, hip hop, rock, reggae, gospel, and jazz. The chief marker of the *moderne* as a genre in Benin is foreign, usually Western, influence, especially in the form of amplified instruments, the drum set, and horns. Brass bands might be considered to fall under the umbrella of *musique moderne*; indeed some producers in France and Benin have expressed surprise that I would be interested in studying an "imported music." In a catch-22, some elite Beninois also expressed distaste when they learned I was interested in village drumming, traditional singers, and funeral-style *fanfares*, explaining that these people had no training in music, were not disciplined in their practice, and were not worthy of study. In this way, the local consumer class rejects both projects which sound too *traditonel* and those which sound too *moderne*. Often, the only criteria by which Beninois consumers positively evaluate local music is whether it has achieved any status (or made any money) abroad, much to the frustration of many musicians (J.B. Gnonlonfoun, New York, 5/24/16). Brass ensembles range from the ubiquitous *fanfares* that play for church

[30] See Bode Omojola's (2006) *Popular Music in Western Nigeria*.

services, funerals, weddings, and baptisms using the usual military snare and bass drum, to those that have taken on a more self-consciously tradi-modern orientation that might be accurately described as "retrospectively traditional." Indeed, the brass band has become a postcolonial tradition in Benin.

The performance contexts for *la musique moderne* are various, including small, elite clubs and bars in Haie Vive which feature salsa, reggae and jazz, and large stadium concerts like those at Stade de l'Amitié that program pop, gospel, and hip hop artists (*artistes*, a category of musician that signals status in the music business, obtained through making recordings and music videos, performing at home and abroad, and developing a public celebrity persona). The Centre Culturel Français, operated on the grounds of the French Embassy in Cotonou, is one of the biggest patrons of modern music in Benin, programming many Benin artists, as well as African musicians from elsewhere in francophone Africa and France, throughout the year. It is common to find traditional popular or sacred musicians, especially drummers and percussionists, crossing over to the modern scene, or working both sides of the traditional-modern divide. "*J'ai fait le moderne*," Etienne Mechonou often told me, filling me in with vivid stories of years spent gigging with salsa, afrobeat or jazz groups in Cotonou, and traveling to Europe and parts of Asia to perform.

Moderniser la Tradition – Traditional Futures

The *modernisation* of traditional music may, on the one hand, mean challenging genre categories with traditional music that crosses over into the modern context. But for some musicians, modernizing the tradition means refining traditional repertoires so as to locate that music within a *traditional future*, introducing innovations in order to keep them alive through creative engagement. There is, of course, always an underlying assumption in such projects that

the tradition *needs* to be "improved," "developed," and "worked on," that in its "raw" form it is not comprehensible, not palatable to the imagined audience. Musicians will also sometimes use the term "valorizing" [*valoriser*] when they talk about the process of developing the tradition, especially in the context of the post-1990 cultural renaissance and marketization (Dehopumon, France, 6/5/14; France, 6/12/10). The French *valoriser* means most directly, "to increase the value of" or "to give more esteem or merit to," but it can also imply development, purification, embellishment, expansion, and even new creation.

In interviews, musicians frequently drew on mineral extraction metaphors of exploitation, purification, and the increased value of cut gemstones. As Crispin Kpitiki (France, 6/5/14), a percussionist with Gangbe, told me, "Gangbe's work is to take sacred rhythms in the *couvents*, to go looking for this product in the *couvents*, and we refine [*peaufine*] that, we improve it, we synthesize it, and we put it behind Gangbe to take it to the international level." *Modernisation* might entail simplifying the rhythmic texture, reducing it to its most essential parts so as not to overwhelm an outside audience with "*trop d'information*," "too much information" (Martial Ahouandjinou, France, 6/15/14). And even for a local audience, many modern musicians feel the need to "improve" the tradition, to professionalize its performance practices and hone its forms and techniques, to make them cleaner, better.

Those involved in *musique moderne* often encounter difficulties with the rhythmic heterophony, for example, of traditional folk drumming groups, which push and pull on the pulse, introducing variations in micro-timing that do not align with strict metronomic time, such as that used in a click track for studio recording. "*Ce n'est pas carré*," musicians will say of the texture of the village drumming ensemble. "It's not squared off." Lead drum players like Jean Gnonlonfoun (Brussels, 6/23/14), who plays the *gbon* talking drum in a variety of traditional and

modern contexts, often have to adapt the characteristic “talking” phrases they have learned to fit with the four-bar hypermeter of jazz and *tradi-moderne* brass bands. Sometimes this means they compromise the semantic meaning of the patterns to fit them into the new, blended style. Other modern musicians grapple with the nasal, gritty timbre of traditional singing, which does not blend smoothly in background choruses, by bringing in singers more experienced in gospel style singing in order to get a sweeter sound.

Ultimately, Beninois musicians struggle with the associations of *la musique moderne* with inauthenticity, and seek out ways to redefine it in relation to traditional practices. In fact, *la musique moderne* does much of the work of retrospectively inventing Benin's music traditions through its intertextual echoes of traditional music and cultural practices. Implicit in the project of the *valorisation* and *modernisation* of a tradition is always a control over the representation and ownership of that tradition, and the construction of its history, its content, and its value.

The Beginnings of a Music Scene in Dahomey

The policies of the French colonial administration acutely affected the development of modern social dance music after independence. By the 1950s, education and missionization had created large cultural divisions between social classes, and constructed ideologies of difference between African and French culture. These ideas of difference had been reinforced by elite Africans' involvement in colonial ethnography projects in the 1930s, and their education of rural colonized populations in the definition of “authentic” African culture, always in binary opposition to European (see Genova 2004).

Ideologies of difference played out materially in the opportunities that were available to African musicians during colonization. While musical mixtures were not explicitly censored under the French, the colonists brought their own musicians to staff marching bands and dance

bands, and did not allow African musicians to join. Dahomeans could form their own groups, but they needed the sponsorship of a church or school, or from local political leaders, to obtain instruments, meaning that early groups were dependent on the patronage of religious or political institutions (Harrev 1992). There was more cultural and musical mixing between the colonizers and colonial subjects in British colonies like Ghana and Nigeria; the British, for example, employed African musicians alongside their own players in marching bands (Martin 1991, see Rumbolz 2000 on Ghanaian brass bands).

Beginning in the 1950s, brass and wind musicians in Dahomey began to play their instruments in church-sponsored "*fanfares*," like those in the Methodist and independent Celeste churches, where they learned basic solfege and choral harmony. At first, they played for Christian funerals, Sunday worship, and other religious ceremonies. Others who picked up rhythm section instruments, like the electric guitar, bass, or the drums, were self-taught. They imitated the recordings that travelers brought back to Dahomey from France or that were later available in record stores in Cotonou, such as Congolese soukous, Cuban salsa, and American jazz and r&b. These musicians and their audiences were primarily focused on sounds from outside of Dahomey during the '50s and '60s.

This exterior-oriented intermusical ethos is exemplified in the career of Ignace de Souza, (1937-1987), a trumpet player from Cotonou. He formed the band Alfa Jazz in 1953, which played highlife in the style of the Ghanaian trumpeter E.T. Mensah, along with a few ballroom dance genres like the bolero and the foxtrot. In 1955, de Souza left for Accra, where he formed the band the Melody Aces, and became an expert highlife musician, while sharing his love of Congolese soukous with the Ghanaians (Collins 1985, Moncadas 2015). In the years after independence, "Congo music," carried by the sounds of the iconic guitarists Franco and

Rochereau, was the most popular music across West Africa. In Dahomey, this pan-African music trend merged with a developing local Dahomean salsa scene featuring artists like Gnonnas Pedro and El Rego y Los Commandos. Ignace de Souza returned to Cotonou after independence in 1966, and formed the now famous salsa institution the Black Santiagos, drawing on the young drummer Sagbohan Danialou (1951-), a multi-talented individual of whose long musical career I will write more about later.

Music for the Revolution

Politically, the post-independence years were tumultuous. French-Beninois music producer Wally Badarou (1955-), the child of Beninois physicians, was a teenager at the time, and remembers hearing "the military rendering of traditional chants" on the radio each time there was a coup. "To the teen I was, these pieces had an incredible impact, both frightening and seductive, because they meant trouble, power and roots, all at the same time," he said (Badarou 2010). Hubert Maga (1916-2000), representing the Bariba-led party of Dahomey's northern provinces, won the first elections in 1960. His administration was overthrown nonviolently three years later by Cristophe Soglo (1909-1983), after union protests against Maga's spending excesses and frequent international travel made his power untenable. Soglo's administration was followed by three more coups in the decade that followed (Ronen 1975).

As Wally Badarou describes, a military musical tradition grew up alongside these political changes. The military police station in the capital of Porto Novo formed a band, Orchestre National du Jazz,[31] in 1962. Nestor Hountondji (1939-2014) was a young officer at the time, and joined the Orchestre National after his activities as a saxophonist and recording artist, then under the alias Dji-Nesto, were discovered (Hountondji, Abomey, 8/8/12). Hountondji went

[31] The group also recorded under the name Black-Dragons.

on to develop a long career as the beloved artist known as Babaake, continuing to release albums as a vocalist and social commentator right up until his recent passing. The first several coups sidelined the Orchestre National in 1963, but they were the prototype of what would become the Volcans de la Capitale, the *gendarmerie*'s premiere dance band, known for their legendary horn section.

General Mathieu Kerekou (1933-2015), who had been a commander under President Maga, took over in 1972 in a military coup. Kerekou was born in the northern Atakora province in Bariba country and attended military schools in Senegal and Mali before serving in the military under Maga. At first, Kerekou defended Dahomey's government against outside influence, saying that the new country would not "burden itself by copying foreign ideology... We do not want communism or capitalism or socialism. We have our own Dahomean social and cultural system" (LeVine 2004:145). Yet by 1975 Kerekou had officially converted the country to a Marxist-Leninist orientation, and aligned with the People's Republic of China, as a rejection of French economic influence. He renamed Dahomey the People's Republic of *Benin*, taking this name from the all-powerful kingdom that ruled mid-Western Nigeria beginning in the 12th century, an empire that *predated* both Danxome and the formidable Oyo by two centuries. This was Kerekou's way of wiping the national slate clean, as if Danxome and the Adja-Fon hegemony of the south had never existed. Revolution meant a total break with the past, a complete cultural transformation of the country.

Kerekou's administration was responsible for laying the groundwork for the Beninois brass band tradition. The new government reinvested heavily in the Orchestre National de la Gendarmerie (which recorded as les Volcans de la Capitale) in Porto Novo. The administration originally requested a military *fanfare*, but when the *gendarmes* learned that the Volcans could

play *la musique moderne*, modern guitar and horn-based dance music, they bought the group a whole new set of equipment (Moncadas 2015). On the Volcans' self-titled albums of 1974, 1975, and 1976,[32] the same message appears from the *gendarmerie*'s *commandant*, Captain Leopold Ahoueya: the group's personnel turned over completely in 1973 with an influx of young graduates of the CAP (Certificat d'Aptitude Professionelle) program in music, and in this year through a "special investment," they were able to buy a completely new set of "ultra-modern and electric instruments of high quality."

The Volcans' albums provide an important archive for the new sounds produced in this era, both for their relationship to the politics of the time and for their stylistic resonances.[33] What did Kerekou's revolution sound like? Les Volcans' first album (1974) still carries the imprint of the 1960s Congo music movement; it includes two relaxed, Congo-inspired tracks, a "kossa" or "slow" track called "Sabira," and a soukous employing a locally popular song, "Agba N'Gba." But their 1976 album is quite different, full of Afrobeat dance grooves and vocal call and response sections between the leader and the female chorus that suggest a kinship with Fela Kuti's music. The first side contains two tracks, "Le Benin Socialiste" and "26 Octobre 1976 à Lokossa," both references to the new administration.[34] "26 Octobre" begins with call and response spoken chants, like those before a traditional Ewe drumming ensemble begins ("Kiniwe!" "Eya!") or like those at a political rally. Sung commentary on the event is sustained

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[32] The group's full title on the cover: "Les Volcans de la Gendarmerie, Republique Populaire du Benin," with the appellation "Orchestre National" in the upper corner. All three albums are on the Satel label.

[33] I am grateful to several record sellers in Abomey, among them Nestor Hountondji's son, for providing me access to these materials. I am also highly indebted to the work of the German record collector (and Gangbe Brass Band fan) Nicholas Moncadas and his blog "Orogod" (orogod.blogspot.com), which organizes and digitizes a huge quantity of these older LPs for easy reference. *Oro* refers to a powerful Yoruba secret society whose relationship is restricted solely to men. Whether Moncadas intends to imply that his record collecting has similar secretive, patriarchal qualities, I can only speculate.

[34] It seems there was a pressing error in making the record, and "Tukla Se Vo" and "26 Octobre 1976 a Lokossa" were reversed. According to Sam Gnonlonfoun (New York, 1/20/16), this was common during this period when records were pressed in Anglophone Nigeria.

over a moody sustained percussion and synthesizer ambiance, before the band heads into a slow 12/8 groove. The title of this song is a reference to the celebrations at Lokossa, in Benin's western Mono region, that Kerekou's regime organized on October 26 and 27, 1976, marking the anniversary of his ascent to power three years before.[35] The rest of the second side of the album is similarly rooted in '60s-style highlife and soukous guitar grooves. One track, “Messi We Nu Mi,” features an incredible synthesizer solo, one sign of what the Commandant called the band's new “ultra-modern” equipment. The sound of the synthesized keyboard against the acoustic sounds in the rest of the band is striking, and suggests something of how exciting new technologies like synthesizers, electric organs, and guitars were: the sound of the “moderne.” It was important for Kerekou's revolution to be *moderne*, which meant moving into an African future, still recognizable but also transformed by technology.

On the second side, the track “Tukla Se Vo” creates an uncanny moment of cross-cultural resonance, demonstrating that the Africanization of global musical and religious influences was already well underway by the 1970s. The lyrics in Gun are set to a melody based on a well known American folk-gospel melody, “Will the Circle Be Unbroken,” suggesting that the Volcans were as much influenced by Protestant hymnody as they were by Afrobeat, soukous, or traditional African song. The hymn's music is attributed to the American composer Charles Gabriel (1856-1932) of Iowa, and was first published in 1907. It has become a standard in American country-folk music through popular recordings by Johnny Cash, the Carter Family, and the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, not to mention its ubiquity at New Orleans second line parades and brass band funerals. The song's original American English lyrics make reference to the Christian promise of eternal life and the hope of seeing loved ones “by and by, Lord, in the sky,”

[35] Because of fears that these celebrations would lead to further instability in the region, the United States intelligence community was paying attention, as evidence by a cable from the Bureau of African Affairs that was declassified in 2006. See https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/1975COTONO01628_b.html

which, comparatively speaking, is not that far from a hybrid conception of old Danxome's ancestral *tovodun* (see chapter one). The new lyrics in Gun, however, refer to a different Christian message, the anti-materialist concept of "storing up treasure" in heaven rather than on earth. I first became aware of the existence of the Gun lyrics through the Beninois gospel-jazz group Jomion and the Uklos' performance of "Tukla Se Vo" in three-part harmony to the chord changes of the gospel song "This Little Light of Mine," when we played together in New York City in September 2015.

Brass Band Beginnings: Indigenizing Colonial Traditions

Aside from their political importance in this era, les Volcans also represented a crucial first step for the development of Benin's *fanfares* in the 1970s. The conductor, flutist, and trombonist Henri Ahouandjinou (1943-2005), who trained in the CAP (Certificat d'Aptitude Professionel) vocational music program in France, was the first director of the *gendarmerie* orchestra, beginning around 1972 (Martial Ahouandjinou, 11/22/15). Later, when the *gendarmerie* needed brass players in the 1980s, le *père* Ahouandjinou began recruiting his sons, training some eight of them on trombone, trumpet, and baritone horn, and in music theory. These brass players later formed the core of several of the most prominent of Benin's brass bands in the 1990s and 2000s: Gangbe Brass Band, Eyo'nle Brass Band, Viviola and Onala, and Togni Music Concept. Martial, the eldest son, considers the *gendarmerie* to have been Benin's first *fanfare*, or brass band, followed soon after by a wave of new bands in Porto Novo's religious institutions, first in the Protestant church Atinkame, then in the Celeste church at their Porto Novian *paroisse mère* (mother parish), and finally in the Cherubim and Seraphim church, with the *fanfare* Imole Christi. [36]This last group was the band that later trained many of Gangbe's past and present

[36] While Martial maintains the his father's *gendarmerie* orchestra was the first of Benin's *fanfares*, I suspect that there were earlier examples in Protestant and independent churches with missionary connections in both Benin and Nigeria.

members, such as trumpeter Sam "Jomion" Gnonlonfoun, sousaphonist James Vodounnon, and saxophonist Lucien Gbaguidi, in the 1980s. These bands shared the responsibilities of playing for the wide variety of weddings, funerals, and baptisms that took place, playing a combination of hymns and popular songs. Today, the traditional *fanfares* are ubiquitous throughout southern Benin on any given weekend, and it is difficult to spend time in any city or village without hearing the *fanfares* processing along any major route, calling listeners out of their homes to join in.

In addition to rhythms from local *vodun* ritual and *populaire*[37] contexts, brass bands in churches in Porto Novo showed a special affinity for the style of *assiko* that had circulated in Yoruba Christian communities in Nigeria beginning in the 1930s, which drew from the street drumming of Brazilian returnees to Lagos in the 19th century (see Waterman 1990).[38] Thus some of the sounds that later became so iconically "Beninois" were actually already globally Afro-diasporic. Benin's 1970s *fanfares* were reaching out to the diaspora in space and time, foreshadowing later generations' decisive turns to locations like New Orleans.

The Beninois brass band has developed the status of a decolonial tradition, one that takes the instruments of the colonizer and turns them around as vehicles for traditional songs and rhythms that praise the ancestors and the old kingdoms. As Mathieu Ahouandjinou (Porto Novo, 3/6/15), trumpeter in Eyo'nle Brass Band, told me,

> This style of music is part of the *fanfare* tradition that we have in Benin. Because after the army, the fanfare experienced a big transformation, because it's already the musicians in the army who have the traditional rhythms with the army's fanfare instruments. That's how it became a part of Beninois culture, a Beninois tradition... It's one of the ways we've overthrown colonialism.

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[37] See the end of this chapter for a discussion of the *populaire* in the context of the *traditionel*.

[38] Nigerian Christians preferred *assiko* to *bata* drums for Christian celebrations, because they had a neutral religious connotation, while the bata were associated with *orisa* worship. *Assiko* also carried a positive aspirational class orientation through its association with the Brazilians.

Mathieu's observations resonate with Andrew Apter's (2007:145) conclusion that, in processes of decolonization, "colonial practices are indigenized." Decolonization takes place in the Africanization of academic disciplines such as sociology, philosophy, or musicology; literary genres such as ethnography or the novel; and musical genres like military and church brass bands, gospel chorales – and the reappropriation of French terms for music genre: *moderne*, *traditionel*, *populaire*, *sacre*.

Analagous decolonization takes place in colonial languages such as French, English, or Portuguese, which each have their own local discourse practices and language communities. Speakers of Africanized foreign languages employ styles of communication that are uniquely inflected by colonialism but which have become African, too. Over the course of generations of practice, Beninois French speakers have found the most useful overlaps across the multiple systems, for example, in developing practices for a wide range of speech genres and registers, including formal occasions, public debate, and firey argumentation, allowing them to speak Fon, Gun, Adja, Yoruba, or Bariba through the formal structures of French. Where the French will not bend to the African language, the speaker may break it to fit. This reflects what Nigerian art historian Chika Okeke-Agulu (2014:89-91) calls the "subjective pragmatism" of independence-era artists whose ideas of "natural synthesis" enact the "purposeful blending of distinctive, disparate, yet mutually entangled heritages in order to live meaningfully and authentically in a contemporary postcolonial and unapologetically modern society." It is this phenomenon that produces expressions in Beninois French like "*Tu es entrain?*" meaning approximately "Are you in the middle of something?" But a European French speaker would never say it this way. "*Tu es entrain?*" comes from the Fongbe "*A dewu a?*" meaning literally, "Are you up against the wall?" - more precisely, are you so up against the wall [*wu*] that you are completely stuck [*de*] to it, and

have merged with it? The felt and embodied solidarity of the Fon cannot be lost, so Beninois French speakers bend the French, like a piece of found metal, to fit.

It is common in scholarship to celebrate the hybridization or "syncretism" of these creative practices of indigenization. But the indigenized academy, the indigenized Christian worship service, the African brass band, the discourse of musical genres – these are not just exotic hybrids, dialects or ethno-philosophies. They are phenomenological realities that are personalized, embodied, and lived at the level of the individual, inflected by each person's profile of education, social class, religion, family structure, psychology, genetics, desires, beliefs, love, power, agency, and action. Groups of such individuals acting together in discourse communities – congregations, music ensembles, university departments, governments, age groups – are joined in affinity through shared experience in some areas, but their experiences and creative paths are highly personal, subjective, and individual. Representing the diverse experiences of such heterogeneous groups is challenging, both for the groups' members and for analysts; it is only through processes of disagreement, debate, breakage (*brisage*), alienation, sacrifice, and compromise, that any of these indigenized practices can be expressed collectively at all, as chapter four discusses.

"Sato" Music and Poly-Rythmo

By the 1960s and '70s James Brown records were arriving in Dahomey-Benin, which had serious implications for worldwide funk. Inspired by Brown's single "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag" and its innovative new groove, Orchestre Poly-Rythmo formed in 1965,[39] creating their own style of Afrofunk. Led by singer and saxophonist Clement Melome (1944-2012), with guitarist Bernard "Papillon" Zoundegnon (d.1981) and Amenoudji "Vicky" Joseph on

[39] The group was originally called Sunny Black's Band, and then Orchestre Poly-Disco in 1968.

percussion, Poly recruited the Afrobeat master Vincent Ahehinnou on vocals and arrangements, and Leopold Yehouessi (d. 1982) on drums. Poly-Rythmo came of age along with Kerekou's revolution, releasing some great Beninois Afrobeat composed by Ahehinnou, especially on their first few albums, beginning with the first, *Azanlokpe* "Le Tour de Mariage" (1973) for Albarika Store records.[40]

In the mid-1970s, Poly began taking their Afrobeat arrangements and introducing vodun rhythms, a mix which Melome called "*sato*" in order to disguise the music's spiritual roots (Redjeb 2009). The term *sato* actually refers not to a genre of music but to a large drum, over six feet tall, played to announce the deaths of kings in old Danxome, which has nothing to do with vodun. (I observed the playing of the *sato* drum, by six different drummers in costume in coordinated dance patterns, at a funeral for a much beloved politician in Abomey in July 2012.) "Sato" became the term in the politically charged 1970s to refer to any modernized vodun style, as a way to avoid offending vodun practitioners and to elude the attention of Kerekou's administration. Record jackets also referred to the genre as "special pop." See Poly-Rythmo's 1974 album *Le Sato* on Albarika Store label for examples, like the track "Gan Tche Kpo."[41]

While the Marxist government's rhetoric was anti-vodun, the bands of the 1970s had to negotiate with the pragmatics of the soundscape that belonged to them and their listeners, a shared sonic phenomenology which still hinged on rich vodun sounds that moved people spiritually, physically, and emotionally. This is a great example of the aesthetic impact of what sounds *do* to listeners, how they act on them, accessing past associations, sensory profiles that

[40] After Ahehinnou left Poly in 1978, the group had a number of soukous compositions by guitarist Papillon that were popular in Benin. The death of the group's core members in the early 1980s, along with economic difficulties in Benin, caused the band to go on a long hiatus until the French radio producer Elodie Maillot rediscovered them in the late 2000s. Having never played outside of Africa before, the band, reunited with Ahehinnou, embarked on a critically acclaimed tour of Europe and North America in 2010, and now continues to perform actively, in spite of the recent loss of founder Melome.

[41] Here I am thankful to Samy Ben Redjeb's excellent compilations of music from this era, released and licensed through his label Analog Africa. See *The Vodoun Effect* and *Echos Hypnotiques* (2009) for more examples.

are not easily changed by a few years of political rhetoric. The indexical relationship of sonic sign and signifier and its imbrication in people's habitus build up over lifetimes. To make audiences in Benin move, especially in the south, it would have to be *vodun* music under another name. So without naming them as such, Poly-Rythmo and others mixed new styles like soukous, salsa, highlife, and Afrobeat with what they knew from village ceremonies – because these were the rhythms that *worked*, that accessed the audience's operative acoustic pragmatics. In short, these were the rhythms that brought people together, and that inspired them to dance, that *worked on them*. In order to create a music that would sound national, that would sound "Beninois," without offending either the sanctity of traditional practice, or the radical secularity of the new administration, and without abandoning the acoustic pragmatics of the audience, the Poly-Rythmo musicians found a way down the middle that traded in a very careful hybridity, accessing "national" sounds, mostly with ritual roots, while calling them something else and singing the praises of the revolution.

The great drummer Sagbohan Danialou was the first to record so-called "sato" rhythms with his modernized version of *kaka*, the rhythm from Porto Novo played for the *zangbeto*,[42] king Gbefa's "guardians of the night." In 1973 Sagbohan released the track "Zangbeto" with Ignace de Souza and Black Santiago on an album of the same name. He hybridized this kaka sound with jazz in 1975 on his album *Danialou Sagbohan & Les Astronautes* (under the musical direction of El Rego), with the track "Mina Gan," which features a beautiful trumpet solo. The other side is "Missi Mi," an Afro-Cuban track. It is on the label Tropiques Satel (standing for "Societe Africaine de Techniques Electroniques").

Satel is today the biggest distributor of recordings in Benin. The company put out their

[42] "Zan": night, "gbeto": man, person

first release in 1970, and opened a pressing plant on the highway between Cotonou and Porto Novo in 1973. The other two main labels operating during this era were the relatively small Echos Sonores du Benin, and Albarika Store, which by the end of the 1970s grew to have the best recording studio in the region. Albarika, founded in 1968 by Adissa Seidou (1929-1988), turned out to have a big role in promoting many artists' careers, as they had the widest distribution of any of the labels, and this gave them the visibility to take risks on artists from other regions, like Super Star de Ouidah, and Super Borgou de Parakou from the north. Many artists came from other parts of Africa to Albarika Store to be backed by Benin's greatest bands, Black Santiago and Orchestre Poly-Rythmo (Redjeb 2009).

In addition to Sagbohan and Poly-Rythmo, the artist Stan Tohon became well known toward the end of the 1970s for "modernizing" traditional rhythms. Tohon (1955-) created "Tchink System" in 1978, a ensemble that performed a modern, funky, electric version of the traditional *tchinkoume* style which originated in Mahi country north of Abomey, where centuries ago it was a ceremonial genre for funerals. Oral tradition tells that Alokpon,[43] a Mahi noble and captive of war under king Kpengla (1775-89), originally brought tchinkoume to Abomey (Djimasse, 12/6/14). The style shares with early versions of *zenli* the *sinhun*, the water drums made with calabashes overturned in water, and the big gourd drum called the *gota*. Modern versions of zenli have replaced the *sinhun* with the *kpezin* clay drums, as I discussed in the previous chapter. In interviews, musicians like the jazz drummer Jean Adagbenon (Cotonou, 11/14/14) often cited tchinkoume as an ancestor of African American funk. Tohon's "Tchink System" became popular in the late '70s, although he began spending more time in Europe in the 1980s and became successful as a hip hop and reggae producer as he explored the connections

[43] The contemporary *tchinkoume* artist le Roi Alokpon has taken on this 18th century musician's name.

between these genres and the older style of *tchinkoume*.

Other innovations during this time were less focused on "modernizing" the tradition, and more on creating new traditions. Yedenou Adjahoui (1930-1995), a beloved Gun singer from the village of Avrankou, outside of Porto Novo, also gained much celebrity in the '70s and '80s for his neo-traditional recordings in Avrankou's characteristic style of *masse gohun*. Playing *masse gohun* today, whether in a brass band or in a folkloric group dedicated exclusively to that style, will typically summon a very direct association with Adjahoui. He was intitiated at the age of 12 in the vodun cult for Sakpata, and was known for weaving spiritual themes into his eloquently improvised lyrics. As his lead drummer Honkonnou Kpagnouian (Avrankou, 4/2/15) explained to me, Adjahoui began with the already well known traditional rhythms of *djegbe* and *djoglissohoun*, before he began working on *masse*. His major innovations were to introduce additional accompaniment parts on the *alekele*, and the *kpezin* lead drum, which worked in call and response style with Adjahoui's vocals. Adjahoui recorded for the label Albarika Store in Cotonou from 1969 to 1974, but in order to avoid any potential problems with Kerekou's administration, recorded his numerous albums in the 1980s in Lagos. He established a large following in the Badagry region of far western Nigeria, where many Gun people still reside. Adjahoui was known for being very critical of Kerekou's cultural policies. He happily labeled his style *folklorique*, and became a pioneer by popularizing traditional styles through recording with reverb-heavy voice and minimal percussion, without adding electronics, guitar, drum set, or horns. His student and later rival Dossu LeTriki (d. 2010) continued Adjahoui's work in developing *masse gohun* and other music played for the *egungun* secret society (Moncadas 2015).

Playing for the Revolution

Poly-Rythmo became the national orchestra for Kerekou's regime beginning in the mid-1970s, and they and other groups in this period were frequently required to perform in revolutionary uniforms and to sing praises to the government. It was uncomfortable, at best, and the penalties for disobeying were arrest, imprisonment, or torture. Poly-Rythmo went along with the program, even though this began to affect their ability to work outside of Benin. In a 2005 interview, Vincent Ahehinnou said, "Many of our compositions had strong political messages related to the revolution. Praising socialism, agricultural efforts and fallen heroes, and insulting capitalism. So obviously it was difficult to get invited by countries who were opposed to our ideology" (Redjeb 2009:29). When I met with Ahehinnou (Cotonou, 1/26/15), he offered a different perspective on Poly's relationship to Kerekou, saying that Poly-Rythmo supported the revolution, but "politics has no effect on the arts," because politicians don't understand art; they don't have the passion and the vision to change it. He said that artists, on the other hand, are willing to take risks and act "irrationally" in the market, and that's what it takes to change music, and to make change with music. Ahehinnou also discussed Poly's use of *vodun* rhythms. Each time I used the word *traditionel*, he corrected me. "C'est du *folklo*. *Traditionel* doesn't mean anything." The term *folklo* or *folklorique* has independence era resonances with cultural nationalist rhetoric in other areas of Francophone West Africa, such as Senegal and Guinea. As Ahehinnou went on to explain, the importance of Poly's rhythmic intertextuality for him was less about the styles' rootedness in a particular local vodun tradition, and more about the resonances that those Beninois rhythms had with sacred rhythms in the diaspora, especially Cuba. The relative value of these traditions for Ahehinnou – *vodun* in Benin and *santeria* or *ocha* in Cuba – projects a diasporic modernity that takes serious ownership of the representation of global black cultural heritage. There is also the relative status of Cuban music in Benin, which in the 1960s

and '70s was a greater marker of high social class than *vodun*, and carried greater aesthetic autonomy than the historical and ethnic fixity of specific local styles

Poly-Rythmo got a break when, with the support of Kerekou's administration, they played at FESTAC ("Second World Festival of Arts and Culture") in Nigeria in 1977 alongside Zaire's Franco and Rochereau, and Fela's Afrika '70. This was the year of Fela's album *Zombie*, which satirized the Nigerian government's goosestepping soldiers. To the dismay of Fela and his entourage, Poly-Rythmo did very well, coming in second to Rochereau. Poly released an album to commemorate their success, *Special Festac 77*, which brought them tours in Cote d'Ivoire, Congo, Burkina Faso, Angola, and Libya (Redjeb 2009).

Regulating Vodun

Under Kerekou's secular, Marxist state, vodun was officially outlawed in 1976 as a "backwards and demeaning" practice that was holding the country back from modernization as "the source of obscurity and evil" (Ogouby 2008:26). Kerekou named "feudal" and "sorcery-related" practices as the particular targets of this new regime. This represented an even more organized, direct affront to vodun practice than had been levied under French colonialism. The government closed vodun temples and limited ceremonies, which they perceived as a waste of time and resources that could be better spent building the Republic, to the period between November and March. Imported religions fared about the same, as the administration secularized and nationalized Christian and Muslim schools, and prohibited public worship services. As a northerner of Bariba ancestry, Kerekou's outsider position gave him a particular analytical precision with regard to his southern countrymen; thus he targeted vodun as an institution intimately tied to the power of the ancient empire of Danxome, connecting the kingship to ancestral lineage and to the domination and assimilation of captured peoples and their cultures,

as chapter one discussed. Kerekou knew this connection very well, and tried to use it to his advantage.

Vodun – in fact, all religions – were marks of the "feudal" era, Kérékou said, and he believed the only way to break down regional factionalism and to create a united Benin was to break down the south's vodun institutions. Tall (1995a:197) notes that the language of the 1976 legislation was particularly aimed at the Abomean ancestral dynasties that were tied to vodun, and toward new Christian communities, like the Église de Christianisme Celeste, that drew on the resonance of vodun signifiers of music and ritual that won the new African churches so many converts. The new cults for Tron, Goro, and Mami Wata that had arrived in the 1920s were less persecuted during this period, given their tendency to hold smaller, more private gatherings.

Agricultural labor was the primary mode of patriotism Kerekou imagined for the new Benin. The administration required citizens to greet one another in the street with the phrase "Ready for the revolution!" (Kidjo 2014), and to sweep the streets every Saturday morning from 8 to 10 a.m. The government also imposed an 11 p.m. curfew that shut down the live performance scene. In a 1975 interview in Ghana with John Collins (1985:63), Ignace de Souza said that he had left Benin because "the type of politics our people are doing in Dahomey will not permit bands to do anything good." The 1972 takeover also caused many of Benin's intellectuals, many of them doctors returned only ten or 15 years before from posts across the French empire, to flee the country, most seeking refuge in Paris.

Kerekou rewrote the constitution in 1977, now allowing for freedom of religion, but prohibiting the population from preaching against the Republic "under the pretext of defending a religion" (Ogouby 2008:26). Kérékou's main goal was to rehabilitate certain traditional medicinal practices, attempting to make a distinction between practitioners of vodun religion,

whom he saw as dangerous and anti-modern, and practitioners of traditional medicine, who filled an important gap in treating the population where Western medicine was not available. The assumption was that the two groups, the priests and the healers, were part of two different systems, when they were in reality inseparable and often represented by the very same individuals (Tall 1995a).

Some historians have observed that the effects of Kerekou's religious regulations were not as far-reaching as the received narrative might suggest. The Catholic church, for example, reacted to bans on public masses by encouraging followers to hold small worship services in their homes, and by creating over 70 new, smaller parishes during the time that Kerekou was in power (Amouzouvi 2014). Vodun temples adopted a similar strategy, and continued to conduct initiations, but significantly reduced the amount of time that one had to spend in training, sometimes only keeping individuals only for a few days to teach them secret songs, chants, and dances. They focused their energies on the internal aspects of the cult rather than on the public celebrations. Thus one of the effects of the regime's cultural policies is that religious practices became more individualized and private, and less collective out of necessity.

In the 1980s the regime began to unravel bit by bit, in large part because its isolationist economic policies did serious damage to the country. Kerekou sought the support of Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, and converted briefly to Islam. The government grew lax in its enforcement of its cultural policy, and religious practices of all kinds began to crop up again, even outside of the approved calendar months. It all came to a head when the country's public school teachers went on strike in 1989, demanding that Kerekou renounce Marxism. He gave in and handed power over to a national conference which rewrote the constitution in 1990, establishing a five-year presidential term, with a two-term limit. Democratic elections were held in 1991, and Nicephore

Soglo (1935-), an economist who studied in Paris and worked at the IMF and the World Bank, was elected president of the Republic of Benin (Ogouby 2008).

Present day opinion on Kerekou's legacy varies, earning him the nickname, “the chameleon,” a particularly ironic reference since one common symbol for the vodun Lisa is the chameleon, which often appears in temple paintings. Kerekou was the first leader on the African continent to voluntarily cede power to a democratic system. He became a born again Christian, and Benin elected him president in 1996, and again in 2001. He became a believer in democracy, and established strong ties with the United States and neoliberal policies of “good governance” and economic reform. As Camilla Strandsbjerg[44] (2005:73) writes, “Kerekou exchanged Mao's 'little book' for the Bible,” turning from the ideology of one era's global power, to another, American evangelicalism. More on this later.

Supporters argue that despite his oppressive cultural and economic policies, Kerekou was the major force in creating national unity in Benin, especially with regard to the political and cultural integration of the north and the south. Also, a retrospective look at the regime's educational policies in the 1970s and '80s reveals that they were much more supportive of vocational education, including modern musical training, than the 1990s curriculum which followed, which did away with the vocational model in favor of a focus on math and science, in line with a similar shift in the West around the same time (cf. Adagbenon, Cotonou, 11/14/14). The music education provided in the public schools under Kerekou offered the opportunity for all students to study a musical instrument like saxophone, drum set, piano, or guitar and play in *variete* ensembles one day of the week.

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[44] Also see Strandsbjerg's 2000 article for an exploration of continuities between Kerekou's conception of political power *vis a vis* religion and ancestral power in Danxome, and her recent book-length study of religion and political transformations in Benin (2015), which features a subtle graphic of a chameleon climbing on the edge of the cover.

His educational policies aside, Kerekou's rule in the '80s certainly made life difficult for working musicians, and many chose not to sing the revolution's praises and to make their lives in a place where it was easier to make music. Angelique Kidjo (1960-), now an international star with two Grammy Awards and a residence in Brooklyn, grew up in Ouidah listening to James Brown and Aretha Franklin. She had already released her first album *Pretty* in 1981 in Cotonou, with her older brothers backing her up in the rhythm section. But she writes in her memoir (Kidjo 2014) that after her father turned down a position in Kerekou's administration and Kidjo refused to sing at political rallies, her family began to receive threats and their activities were under official surveillance. Afraid for her parents' safety if she stayed, Kidjo left Benin in 1983 to make her career in Paris. Kerekou's administration had mixed effects on the development of music and culture in Benin, as he was a significant patron of certain traditions and educational policies, while repressing other practices.

Vodun Renaissance

> I learned that there had been buyers who came to buy. And when they arrived to buy, if there were no sellers, could they have bought? So there were sellers too. There were buyers, and there were sellers. I say, whose fault is it? Whose fault? Is it the seller, or the buyer? There was the buyer. If there had been no seller, he would not have had products to sell. You see? It's both of their fault. That's my philosophy. So when Kerekou thought of all that, [the song “Commerce Triangulaire”] was for Kerekou. And now we have to reconsider, even those who come back, there is reconsideration. That's what we have. There is the Door of Return. (Sagbohan Danialou, Porto Novo, 1/13/15)

With the transition to democracy and the opening of Benin's economy in the early 1990s, President Soglo (1935-) sought to transform the status of vodun in the country. His primary objectives were to restore vodun's links to traditional leadership, which also turned out to be an excellent way of mobilizing electoral support (Tall 1995a); to celebrate vodun connections with the African diaspora across the Atlantic, especially Brazil, Haiti, and New Orleans (Sutherland 2002); and to make vodun into a national symbol of pride by creating a national Fete de Vodun

every January 10 in Ouidah. The constitution of 1990 provided that the Republic of Benin has three official religions, Christianity, Islam, and vodun, and two official languages, French and Fon (Ogouby 2008).

With the first installation of the festival known as *Ouidah '92*,[45] the tourist industry rebounded in Benin, strongly buoyed by a renewed interest among Afro-diasporic descendants from the Americas in making a return journey to the former slave port. Benin's historical and religious links with Brazil and Haiti received renewed attention, as practitioners of vodun, *candomble*, and orisa from across the world came to Ouidah to perform ceremonies of reunification. In 1995, UNESCO sponsored the construction of the "Porte du Non Retour" (Door of No Return) on the beach, a monument to the captives sold into slavery throughout Ouidah's history. The construction of the nearby "Porte du Retour" (Door of Return) followed in 2006, commemorating the ceremonies of reconciliation between Benin and the diaspora held in that year. The events of the inaugural Ouidah festival formed an evocative backdrop for the formation of Benin's contemporary brass bands in the 1990s. Many brass bands shared the festival's disaporic orientation, its critiques and artful memorialization of slavery, and its new forms of cultural nationalism.

The vodun renaissance of the '90s summoned echoes of Leopold Senghor's *negritude*, but with an eye to the consumption practices of the neoliberal market. Achille Mbembe (2010:221-2) writes of two moments of "Afropolitanism" in the history of 20th century Atlantic Africa. One was "properly postcolonial," which centered around Africans' "writing of the self" (see Mbembe 2002), that sought to repay a "debt with regard to the future by virtue of a glorious past," but became "an experience of *consuming* time, so chronophagie" (222, my emphasis). In my view,

[45] The first festival was actually held in February 1993 because of financial issues.

this intellectual moment, which took place largely in literature and politics elsewhere in West Africa in the 1950s and '60s, had already arrived among Benin's elite, largely in the ethnology of students of Father Aupiais like Paul Hazoume and Maximilien Quenum, in the 1940s, leaders of the Dahomean national movement that was cut short by World War II.

The second moment of Afropolitanism, according to Mbembe (2010:224), "corresponds to Africa's entrance into a new age of dispersion and circulation," the establishment of new African diasporas around the world, and thus a decentralization of the sites for the production of African creativity. Mbembe (225) writes that, in this later Afropolitan moment,

> The object of artistic creation is no longer to describe a situation where one has become an itinerant spectator of his own life because he has been reduced to impotence as a consequence of accidents of history. To the contrary, it is about witnessing a broken man who, slowly, stands up again and frees himself of his origins... In the age of dispersion and circulation, [African] creativity focuses on the relationship, not to the self or the other, but to an opening [*intervalle*].[46] Africa itself is thus imagined as a great opening, an inexhaustible citation, subject to many forms of combination and composition. The reference is no longer made to an essential singularity, but to a new capacity for bifurcation.

This era of decentralized circulation and production of ideas about Africa, and especially of Africa's new cultural commodities, arrived in Benin with democratization and cultural renaissance in the 1990s. Here is Africa as *intervalle*, *decalage*,[47] a prism, a point of reference that appears only to split and shatter focus, neither the self nor the other but the polysemic "intertextual gap" between them (Briggs and Bauman 1993), an endless library of source material, indeed, an *archive* that can be constantly recombined in ever newer forms of creativity. Yet, not having had a real nationalist movement in the 1960s, Benin's relationship to its history oscillated in the early 1990s between a new conception of culture as a natural resource, and an older, postindependence-style romanticism of the past. I see Benin having a double moment at

[46] See my discussion of the imagery of sacred holes and emptiness in vodun cosmology in chapter 1, pp. 14 and 20.
[47] Cf. Brent Hayes Edwards 2003

Ouidah '92, having both of Mbembe's Afropolitan moments at once.

Recalling the language of an earlier era, President Soglo wrote in the edited volume that accompanied the first festival in 1993 that vodun is "not only a religion... but also a source of inspiration that has given birth to literature, theater, music, and plastic arts whose value is universally recognized," and that the festival was "the beginning of the response to Afro-pessimism, a challenge launched at the future and the youth," "a hymn to joy and to the cultural products of negro-African inspiration" (Presence Africaine 1993:7-8). Artists in all media prospered during this time, and the government supported new works specifically celebrating Benin's vodun heritage. This was the first time that Benin's leaders treated vodun and its practices as *art*, as something deserving of a global audience's *aesthetic* appreciation. This was a significant expansion of vodun's habitual "use value," where it had worked for the monarchy as spiritual and political regulator and unifier. I might argue, too, a la Baudrillard, that even vodun's "use value" in old Danxome had the markers of symbolic exchange, and prefigured this commercialization in the 1990s (see chapter one). Now vodun fully entered into the realm of "exchange value," giving it a "value added" aspect, creating surplus value out of encounter, a value derived from contact with difference that could be traded for money or access in the "New World Society."[48] Benin thus summoned vodun to stand for a modern, culturally heterogeneous nation state that sought to leverage Beninois identity and Beninois cultural products in the liberal market.

Vodun was placed in a curious position during the 1990s, suddenly endowed with positive value and immense representational weight where before it had been the source of shame and derision. Soglo and the festival organizers clearly saw this value as a universal one, and took the

[48] See Ferguson 2002.

opportunity to use Benin's heritage as a cultural commodity in order to court the West's interest in difference, branding, authenticity, and the construction of diasporic narratives of connection. It is important to note that there was a great deal of symbolic machinery being put in place during this time, much of it on the French colonial model, to support the production of culture for Benin, and the recreation – some called it the "rehabilitation" – of its history. And these processes of production were, from the start, tied into the (real and perceived) consumption practices of the target audience abroad.[49]

Indeed, I might argue, to follow Timothy Taylor (2007), that through their consumption, the audience for *Ouidah '92* and for the cultural products that followed had as much influence in the creation of those products as the producers themselves. And what did this audience want? They wanted connection, and they wanted to be able to buy it. To follow the thinking of the Beninois festival organizers, the diasporic returnees, especially the white-clad priests from Brazil, represented the ancestral spirits from the past – those taken away on slave ships – and prefigured the foreign cultural tourists of the future (cf. Sutherland 1999). This inaugural "ethno-preneurship" (Comaroffs 2009) of vodun arts, represented a "commercial," rather than a "religious commission" for an audience of cultural tourists (Rush 1997:134, see also Forte 2009). It became the source of a great deal of controversy among Benin's religious communities.

Criticisms came from many directions. For starters, the festival was problematic from a historiographic standpoint in its portrayal of a timeless, decontextualized slave journey pitched at international tourists. But perhaps this was all to the good if it exposed an international audience to Benin in a positive light. The socioeconomic state of the country was collapsing as Soglo began his presidency, and some charged that he was more concerned with cultural and global

[49] The Departement de Fonds de l'Aide a la Culture was created in 1991, its mission "the stimulation of artistic and literary creativity and the spread of Beninois culture at the international level" (Ministere de la Culture).

matters than with the internal economic problems of Benin. Anti-witchcraft opponents said that Soglo's health problems during the campaign had been due to a ritual poisoning, and he was hosting the *Ouidah '92* festival to appease his enemies (Tall 1995a:196). Others, especially members of the Catholic Church, accused the president of using state resources to promote propaganda for vodun, although Soglo himself was a Catholic.

Some vodun practitioners complained that only the newer cults that came to Benin from Ghana during the 1940s were recognized, while the ancient clan-based cults were left out (Tall 1995a:198, 202). The new cults, like Tron, Goro, and Mami Wata, felt very self-righteous about their place at Ouidah because, as I discussed previously, they claimed some credit for supporting the independence movement before World War II, and saw this moment of the Ouidah festival (and not 1960) as the moment when their work came to fruition. The leader of these new cults, focused on the battle against witchcraft and the promise of personal material prosperity, was the chairman of the National Community of Vodun Cults in Benin, Sossa Guedehoungue (c.1910-2001),[50] who had the backing of Soglo's government. The local ancestral cults in Ouidah, such as those for Dan, were represented by the chief Daagbo Hounon Hounan, who reigned from 1974 until his death in 2004 (Tall 2014). It was Daagbo Hounon Hounan whom the Gangbe Brass Band consulted for the authorization to perform and develop vodun rhythms and songs in 1996; this speaks to his status among one group of musicians giving him the power to make such authorizations regarding the international circulation of sacred musical materials. It also says a great deal about *vodun* and its pragmatics as a signifier whose meaning (the value of the signified) constantly overflows its bounds, becoming an ur-site for the production of multiple meanings – of identity, of constructed authenticity, of religious and cultural nationalism, of

[50] Guedehoungue is the father of the four brothers who form Les Freres Guedehoungue, the neo-traditional recording ensemble formed in 1998.

cultural pluralism, of internal politics, and of global economies of culture, belief, and difference.

Fete du Vodun 2015: An Ethnographic Account

When I attended the Fete du Vodun in Ouidah in January 2015, the controversies surrounding government support and two rival factions within the vodun community were ongoing. I attended the festival with Jean Gnonlonfoun, an expert *gbon* lead drummer and former member of Gangbe Brass Band. He was visiting Benin from Belgium, where he now resides with his family. His insights were fruitful as we walked around Ouidah that day.

In the past, there had been a single centralized celebration at Ouidah, but now the central, government-sponsored version of the festival moved to a different city each year in order to avoid the appearance of favoring one place. And since 2009, President Yayi Boni's government (elected 2006) had been giving some money to all of the different *vodunon* priests in different localities and from cults new and old, so that each one could host their own celebration on January 10.[51] During my visit, it became apparent that the Ouidah celebration had splintered into two events. One, as per tradition, was on the beach, conducted since Sossa Guedehounge's death by leaders of the new vodun cults, among them in 2015 the nephew of the late *houngan* (head *vodunon*) Daagbo Hounon Hounan. This celebration involved government endorsement, a big sound system, many political speeches, several hundred people in attendance, and a few different spaces for drumming and dancing, mostly for the vodun Dan.

The second event was led by the *vodunon* who had been chosen in 2004 by Fa divination to be the rightful heir to the vodun kingship, Daagbo Hounon Hounan II, the elder chief's son. He wore his father's tall felt hat, decorated with different colors of glitter and the silhouette of a

[51] See Tall (2014) for the important role of the Tron priest known as Gbediga in mediating financially between various vodun sects, going back to Ouidah '92. The political significance of these financial distributions is enormous, as they balance power between cults for ancestral vodun, ancient natural deities, new anti-witchcraft cults, and the revived male-oriented Yoruba secret societies such as *oro* and *egungun*. Dividing these funds is essentially the national government's way of keeping all of these forces in check, giving each one its due.

priest outlined in cowrie shells on the front, along with flowing robes of many colors. This celebration took the form of a procession throughout the city of Ouidah itself, from one vodun temple to the next, from fateful Fa to the creator's twin Lisa, where the priests gave sacrifices and said prayers. The significance of visiting Lisa's temple, especially in Ouidah, highlights this vodun's role as the male half of the creator twins Mawu-Lisa in Fon cosmology. Tall (2014) notes that the empire of Danxome borrowed both from the matrilineal family system of the Akan in the west and from the patrilineal family system of the Yoruba in the east. This reflects many of the "family" relationships among deities in the vodun pantheon, such as those between sisters, brothers, and fraternal twins of different genders. According to Herskovits (citation), Lisa was brought to Abomey by Queen Houandjile "from Adja," suggesting that this member of the Mawu-Lisa creative partnership emphasizes Abomey's cultural (and patrilineal) roots in Allada-Ouidah, Adja country, emphasizing the Adja-Fon roots of the pantheon over the Yoruba side.

Drummers accompanied the procession, playing *kpohun* and *Sakpatahun*, and brass bands followed them, playing *gbogbahun*, the bass drum mimicking the lead drum's characteristic phrases. The procession ended, after several hours of marching and dancing in the hot, sandy streets, in front of one of the major temples for Dan, the serpent, where the assembled people, numbering a very vocal one hundred or so, formed a large circle. The houngan, dressed in shining wax-cloth robes of many colors, stood in the center of the crowd, where he poured out gin, *sodabi* (palm-wine), and soft drinks on the ground and recited prayers. Then the first drumming group started playing, jumping into one style, stopping, and starting another. They traded back and forth like this with a second group until the first group took over and began playing continuously for several hours. This arrangement of two alternating drum ensembles resembles what I observed at the royal ceremonies at the palace in Abomey in March 2015,

where two orchestras, one playing *agbadja* and one playing *houngan*, switched off for different parts of the ceremony. But the atmosphere at Ouidah was completely different. Whereas in Abomey, the ceremonies took place at night, and the several hundred attendees sat in hushed silence as the events unfolded with precision, at Ouidah the events took place in the middle of the day, and a carnival atmosphere prevailed, with many attendees milling around on the outskirts of the circle, chatting, and paying attention to the ceremony intermittently.

Several female dancers dressed in raffia skirts, their bare torsos covered in white or yellow powder, came out in pairs to dance in front of the drummers. Both drumming groups were playing *Sakpatahun*, keeping the bell and the support patterns constant, but the lead drummers interjected phrases from other styles that "called out" to other vodun, especially *ogede* for the *egungun* or "revenants," and *kpohun* for Dan and for Tron, the new kola nut cult. This information was not available to all of those in attendance. "You have to know what to listen for," Jean Gnonlonfoun told me. "Not everyone here is noticing it. But the dancers and the initiates will appreciate it."

Musical Style in Benin Post-1990: Gospel, Jazz, and *Variété*

While Kerekou's cultural policies made things difficult for musicians in the 1980s, theaters in Cotonou like the Cinema Vogue had begun programming live music again in the middle of the decade, booking secular acts mostly performing *variété*, meaning anything from Congo music to afrobeat to jazz to salsa, as long as it wasn't religiously oriented. Many of these same musicians also performed for weddings and funerals with local *fanfares* to make money. Things changed with the election of President Soglo, the opening of the economy, and the religious renaissance.

Foreign investment came flooding in, particularly from Nigerian evangelical churches

("*les evangeliques*"), many of them with conservative institutional and financial ties to the United States. They bought out most of the theaters in Cotonou and began to program gospel music, running a campaign against *la musique profane* (Sam Gnonlonfoun, New York, 7/23/14). This constituted an attempt to reconstruct not only Cotonou's religious soundscape, but also ideologies of the sacred more generally, through their rhetorical opposite, "the profane." The definition of the difference between sacred and secular music, however, was (is) more often based on lyric discourse than on any formal musical characteristics, and these theaters continued to resound with the sounds of classic Congo music and even some old (and new) vodun rhythms in the name of Jesus. African American gospel music also exploded in popularity around this time in Cotonou and Porto Novo, a subject worthy of its own dissertation-length analysis.[52] The new evangelical churches were not necessarily out to eliminate any specific musical sounds from performance, but they used the rhetoric of musical categories to institute new forms of belief about lifestyle, and the creation and organization of wealth.

The religious renaissance of the 1990s also led to a transformation in the spiritual economy of Christianity, just as it had with vodun. The Beninois religious studies scholar Hippolyte Amouzouvi (2014) writes that this era represented a new "*marchandisation*," or "marketizing" of religion, where spiritual practice began to mimic business practice, and large mega-churches began to grow. These new forms of Christianity brought with them new evangelical discourses that profoundly marked spiritual and economic life (see Strandsbjerg 2005). Promising individual prosperity and success in both this life and the next, this new discourse set a new standard for what people could expect from their religion.

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[52] When I visited jazz and brass band musicians at their homes in Benin, they were as likely to be watching DVDs of American gospel artists popular with conservative evangelicals in the U.S. (I discovered some incredible new music this way) as they were to be listening to modern jazz, which they also listen to regularly. The New Orleans rock-funk trombonist Troy Andrews (Trombone Shorty) is also a huge favorite.

Foreign investment also came in from European tourists and expatriates, mostly French and Belgian, who began establishing and patronizing clubs and live music venues. They founded a series of jazz clubs, like So What, la Gare, and Repaire de Bacchus, in Cotonou's central Zongo neighborhood and on the bourgeois strip known as “Haie Vive” (a *francesgbe*, French language, approximation of “high life,” the Ghanaian popular music style), that sustained a lively music scene long into the 2000s. The *variété* musicians, no longer able to play secular music in the theaters since they were bought out by the evangelicals, moved over to the new clubs and found a welcoming audience there, made up of educated, musically literate European and Beninois listeners who appreciated jazz and knew something about traditional African music, or at least wanted to know more. More tourists meant more travelers bringing jazz records and materials on jazz improvisation to Benin, and there was a small community of passionate young musicians hungry to learn.

Conclusion

Since independence, musicians and audiences in Benin developed a new conception of *la musique moderne*, constructed through complex relationships with politics, religion, international music trends, and Benin's own historical cultural wealth. In the 1990s, Benin transitioned to democracy and a liberal economic model, creating a new emphasis on national culture and developing a conception of Africa as a source or *archive*. With the renaissance of *vodun* art and practice, projects modernizing traditional music began to appear in new contexts and on a greater scale.

This included the use of *vodun* rhythms and percussion textures in the growing jazz movement in Cotonou, and the rise of new brass bands, like Gangbe and Eyon'le. These brass bands distinguished themselves from those playing for funerals, weddings, and other public

ceremonies by replacing the bass drum and snare drum with traditional percussion instruments like the *kpezin*, experimenting with improvisation and diasporic genres such as jazz, and creating meticulously layered, multi-part arrangements and original compositions. In this new phase, tradi-modern artists and groups began carving out space for an Afro-modernity in which it would be possible to imagine professionalizing and developing their traditions within the parameters and on the terms of their own culture. The battle for this Afro-modernity is ongoing and contested from within and without, as pressures from local and international markets and economic realities, along with multiple, competing aesthetic-ethical systems and desires, combine to make musical and professional decision-making a challenge. Defending a grounded modernization of the tradition that operates on vernacular terms makes space for individual and collective creative action that strives to be outside of the aesthetic control of the market, while still achieving visibility and livelihood for the musicians and the music. I will make these processes the focus of my next chapter.

Chapter 4

Developing Production Strategies for Globalization in Gangbe and Eyo'nle Brass Bands

> Whether it's in the domain of music or literature, the question is no longer of knowing what essence has been lost: it is knowing how to establish new forms of the real – forms free flowing and mobile. It is no longer about returning at all cost to the first scene or recreating in the present the gestures of the past. If it has disappeared, the past has not, however, left the field. It is still there, in the form of a mental image. We scratch out, we rub out, we replace, we erase, we recreate the form and the content. We proceed by false connections, by discrepancies, by substitutions and montages – the conditions for achieving a new aesthetic force. (Mbembe 2010:224-5, my translation)

In this chapter, I examine the trajectories of some of the ensembles that emerged from Benin's post-1990 religious, cultural, and economic renaissance. I focus in particular on the group with which I worked the most closely from 2010 to 2016, the Gangbe Brass Band. I follow their development from the mid-1990s up to the present, through the production of several albums, international tours, and changes in personnel and management. Throughout, I show how these musicians have mobilized their interpretations of their country's musical history and culture as a strategic commodity in the international market to create cultural capital, reflecting a growing understanding of consumption practices in the West. I also discuss the development of the Eyo'nle Brass Band, an ensemble which has taken a different direction than Gangbe in their emphasis on local Gun, Torri, and Nago rhythms from Porto Novo (rather than on the national representation of all of Benin), “trad-jazz” influences, standard *fanfare* instrumentation, and collaborations with French folk musicians.

I draw on several approaches to understanding the interplay of identity and commodification, from “ethno-preneurship” to consumption and production practices, and their deployment through “strategies” and “tactics” from different positions of power. In their book, *Ethnicity, Inc.*, Jean and John Comaroff (2009) outline a theoretical framework for understanding

ethnic branding and the commodification of cultural identity. While it might seem that these processes would degrade the vitality of cultural traditions exposed to the market, the Comaroffs (2009:26) point out that "the intensive marketing of ethnic identity... also appears to (re)fashion identity, to (re)animate cultural subjectivity, to (re)charge collective self-awareness, to forge new patterns of sociality, all within the marketplace." This constantly reforming identity, whether national, ethnic, or religious, becomes an object of economic value, laying plain the "complicity between culture and commerce" that is a "dark secret of modernity" (23). In this way, "ethno-preneurs," as the Comaroffs call them (50), capitalize on their cultural wealth and confront some of the patterns of economic interaction that have long marked cross-cultural encounters.

Musicians engaged in these ongoing refashionings of identity often engage in overlapping consumption and production practices. In *Beyond Exoticism*, Timothy Taylor (2007) develops the idea of *consumption* as integral to processes of identity making. This is one of the characteristics of globalization, which he defines as the "recent regime under which nonwestern peoples are dominated and represented by the West" (113-4). Globalization, in contrast to imperialism, is marked primarily by the power of corporations overshadowing and in some cases replacing the power of the State. The corporation's power rests on the creation of new commodities, among them new forms of difference created through the "fabrication and valorization of sign-values" (114). Creating identities through consumption is, for Taylor, distinct from older, modernist processes of "self-fashioning," in which "selves" are made out of people's relationships to their Others (120). In my view the two processes share a family resemblance, offering two different generations' views on the concept of personhood; modernity's "self-fashioning" is committed to a stable, unitary conception of personhood defined against what it is not, while "identities" are fluid, relative, and may be performed or flexibly deployed.

Where once every experience was reduced to a "text," in the era of globalization everything is a "product." In this way, neoliberal economics reterritorializes difference, with money translating more and more identities, cultures, traditions, and experiences into marketable universals (Young 1995). Taylor (2007:139) points out that in globalization, consumption and production begin to resemble each other, citing Michel de Certeau's (1984:xiii) characterization of consumption as a type of production. This point has particular relevance in the case of Gangbe and Eyo'nle brass bands, as the musicians are consumers of African and foreign music traditions, and producers of "identity commodities" for audiences at home and abroad, which the audiences then make use of in their own performances of fluid selves.

Taylor is particularly focused in his work on *Western* consumption as it is exported, appropriated, and imitated throughout the world. But this consumption, and its associated identity-making, reads differently from different positions of power. I find the practice theory of Michel de Certeau helpful in thinking about how agency and power play into consumption and production practices like Gangbe's. For de Certeau (1984), everyday practice is deeply oriented around the ways in which people "make use" of the materials they have available to them. He writes that the observer might learn of such everyday uses in the "trajectories" traced by the users' choices, rituals, and patterns, such as Gangbe's path through the music business. But de Certeau points out that such lines only "trace out the ruses of other interests and desires" that the path alone cannot reveal (xviii). For this reason, he makes a distinction between "strategies" and "tactics" (xix). "Strategies" refer to calculations in cases where subjects are clearly distinct enough from their environment – that is, they have enough power – that they can act upon it from outside. (This shares some aspects with the modernist "self-fashioning" described above, which relies on a stable self as a base defined against Others.) "Tactics," on the other hand, refer

to decision-making where the line between the actor's agency and the environment is unclear; de Certeau writes, “The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance” (xix). In these cases, the means available to the actor are not entirely his own; he must steal, beg, and borrow to achieve his ends, and even his own person may at times be the territory of others. Being at the mercy of *time* and other forces outside of the actor's control, *tactical* logic relies on opportunities, improvisation, the constant manipulation of events, and reaction to changing conditions to make the best use of the materials at hand. Gangbe's decision-making processes over the course of their career have many of the characteristics of de Certeau's “tactics,” although as they have gained production knowledge over time, they have learned to be more “strategic.”

Gangbe: Consuming Culture, Producing Culture

The genesis of the Gangbe Brass Band took place in an environment of diasporic encounter. In 1993, the year of the festival at Ouidah, the Rebirth Brass Band of New Orleans made a visit to Cotonou, and offered a master class at the American Cultural Center. They encountered a young group of musicians who called themselves the Sigale Brass Band, friends who had met playing together in the Cherubim and Seraphim church *fanfare* Imole Christi in Cotonou. They would later become the Gangbe Brass Band. Among them were trumpeter and arranger Sam Gnonlonfoun and his brother Jean on lead percussion, the trombone and baritone horn player James Vodounnon, and trumpeter Athanase Dehopumon. Benoit Avihoue and Joseph Houessou filled out the percussion section on bass drum and snare drum, and Aristide Agondanou and Willy Benni joined the trumpets. During the group's early years, the musicians mostly saw each other when they came together to back established stars like Sagbohan

Danialou, Stan Tohon, and Gnonnas Pedro. Some still held day jobs, like Depohumon, who worked for the railroad. When the Sigale members played for Rebirth at a master class during their stay in Cotonou, the New Orleanians were impressed with Sigale's covers of funk and Afrobeat tunes, and their jazz arrangements of popular songs from Benin. Rebirth made one suggestion, however: that the group exchange their military-style bass drum and snare drum for local percussion, to give the group a uniquely "Beninois" sound. In other words, the impetus for Gangbe's move to emphasize authenticity and Beninois particularity came from the African diaspora in America, and from New Orleans, a city with its own history of Afro-diasporic connections and relationship with identity marketing. Dehopumon (France, 6/12/10) remembers,

> So it was then that we started, not to abandon the bass drum and all that, but to create a formula for a more spectacular show based on Beninois musical and cultural research, giving value [*valeur*] to our cultural instruments realized by Beninois artists. It was a question of breaking a taboo, because these traditional instruments, we don't use them in just any way, and even to make them, we needed an authorization. So through our artistic work, we were able to give value to our traditional rhythms through this encounter between these traditional instruments and the brass.

Later he added, "Instead of playing well known popular melodies, we worked on them, we gave them some structure, and we worked the songs in. And instead of just playing the bass drum and the snare drum, we can *valorize* the traditional percussion" (France, 6/5/14). Dehopumon's language of value and valorization is provocative; the object of these value-making processes for is clearly traditional Beninois "rhythms" and the instruments that produce them. His emphasis on of *spectacle* is also important here, revealing his sensitivity to audiences' emphasis on the visual aspects of Gangbe's presentation. While a local *fanfare* might be able to make a living producing music for specific ceremonial occasions, in Dehopumon's account Gangbe felt that, to break through in the international market, they needed to work up their stagecraft, showcasing virtuosic dance (not mentioned here but a highly visible element in Gangbe's shows) and percussion solos,

because these elements exemplified their cultural particularity and, they hoped, rendered it more legibile and distinctive.

So Gangbe began the project of researching local rhythms to present to the international market in the brass band format. To them, the concept of a "brass band" was different from a *fanfare*, which only played locally for funerals and other functions. A brass band, on the other hand, was headed for the international market. Gangbe's first task was to distinguish themselves from the locally oriented *fanfares* by producing more advanced arrangements, and introducing more jazz improvisation. Vodounnon (France, 6/5/14), who now plays sousaphone, recalls,

> So at the beginning, the goal was to distinguish ourselves from the funeral *fanfares*. Because there was a lot of that, funeral *fanfares*, there was a lot from the Garde d'Honneur de la Gendarmerie, of which [Martial's] dad was the head at one time. So there were *fanfares* like that, shows for weddings, funerals, celebratory occasions. So we really wanted to set ourselves apart from that, not to look like a wedding band. And we started out playing instruments like them, snare drum and bass drum, but it wasn't the same style. We already wanted to play a little like the real brass bands that did covers [*réprises*]... We had things like that, funk covers... even jazz standards. It's things like that that we covered, but in our way. So over the course of years, we said, we can already start to work on songs from *chez nous*. So we started introducing [Beninois] popular songs.

Dehopumon (France, 6/5/14) explained that, on their first two albums, Gangbe was particularly concerned about their reception with the local audience in Benin, so they recorded more "*populaire*" songs that are well-known, for example "Alladanou" and "Ajaka" on *Togbe* (2001) and "Segala" on *Whendo* (2004). "Why *populaire*?" Dehopumon said. "To convince [the local audience] that *starting with what exists, we could show something which had never existed*." Gangbe's early emphasis on popular songs is similar to a jazz musician starting their set with a standard, to set the table, to establish aesthetic ground rules, knowledge, and credentials in the tradition before offering any original contributions. On their more recent albums, like *Assiko!* (2010) and *Go Slow to Lagos* (2015), the group has recorded more "*compositions*," or original

songs for which they have written the melodies, lyrics, and arrangements. Dehopumon's comment reveals an important argument about their relationship to familiar genres of song in Benin, to a culturally specific knowledge and practice of the *populaire*, or "popular song."

Most of these *populaire* songs take their origins in the court styles of Xɔgbónu or Danxomɛ, and their words describe the victories of the kingdom's warriors, although they may be rewritten and recontextualized. They have entered the realm of the *populaire* gradually over time, beginning slowly at first, prior to colonization, with the performance of court songs in the homes of royal dignitaries in town, and in other cases, the "coming-out" ceremonies of new *vodun* adepts which were open to the public. Then with missionization, and the regulation of *vodun* practice and royal power in the 20th century, some of these styles found their way into Christian worship, as was the case with *adjogan*, the style of the royal court in Porto Novo that underlies the track "Alladanou." A similar process has taken place with *agbotchebou*, the style from Sakpata ceremonies which is now played widely for parties and celebrations, and which Gangbé deploys on their most recent album on the song "Assidida" (2015). The style of *zenli* was originally reserved for royal funerals in Abomey, but is now played for funerals in many different contexts, and has been popularized as *zenli renove* – a genre filled with topical songs of love and joy by the singer Alekpehanhou (Bohicon, 12/7/14).

Vodounnon remembers that the group was playing mostly local music festivals and in bars, until they created the arrangement for "Ajaka," a song from Abomey's royal court done in *zenli* style, and people in Benin started to pay attention. He said,

> It's a song that's sung for the different kings of Abomey, for the praises of the kings of Abomey who made war against Nigeria, for example. And it's a really sacred song for the kingdom of Abomey. And when we took that, that's what we call "Ajaka." So as soon as we worked on that song, people said, this is perfect.

After the group was invited to play at a festival in Mali in 1997, they caught the attention of a

French band called L'Ojo, who recorded a demo for the group in Bamako, and brought it to Contre-jour, the Belgian production company led by world music veterans Michel de Bock and his wife Genevieve Bruyndonckx. When Contre-jour offered to record Gangbe's first album, the musicians decided to devote themselves to the group full time; Dehopumon quit his job at the railroad and started to take management classes.

Gangbe also sought to diversify the types of rhythms that they could play by recruiting new members from different regions of Benin, aiming eventually to represent a majority of the country's musics. The group sought out saxophonist Lucien Gbaguidi of the Mahi city of Savalou, and the two Porto Novian brothers Martial and Magloire Ahouandjinou, on trombone and trumpet respectively. Martial and Magloire are the eldest sons of Henri Ahouandjinou, the director of the Orchestre National de la Gendarmerie in Porto Novo. In 1998, the pair had just returned to Benin after spending six years studying jazz at the Centre de Formation et de Promotion Musicale (CFP) in Niamey, Niger, a project of the European Development Fund that has since closed. After two years of study, Martial was asked to stay at the center to teach piano and music theory, and Magloire taught trumpet. Their reentry to Benin was difficult, as they had lost touch with the scene and many musicians were jealous of the opportunities they had in Niger. But Gangbe recruited them unreservedly, and the Ahouandjinous agreed.

There remained the problem that, aside from Jean Gnonlonfoun and Lucien Gbaguidi, none of Gangbe's musicians had grown up with or been initiated into vodun practice, so their representation of these sacred genres, which in the 1990s bore the musical burden of representing Benin's Afro-religious nationalism,[53] would necessarily be limited to Jean and Lucien's experience. Jean and his brother Sam are the sons of a celebrated Cherubim pastor and gospel

[53] See chapter 3 for a more detailed analysis of the cultural climate in Benin in the 1990s.

singer in Cotonou, but through their family's roots as Toffinou people, an offshoot of the Yoruba, Jean was initiated into the *egungun* society during his youth and learned to play for their ceremonies. Gbaguidi, while raised in vodun temples in Savalou in Mahi country, has in more recent years become a prominent pastor in the Celeste church in Cotonou. The other members, having largely been trained in the *fanfares* of independent African churches, knew only the cultural side of vodun music, the part that is accessible in the public portions of the ceremonies for new initiates, and not the secret spiritual knowledge of dance steps, praise names, and chants that are reserved for insiders.

Gangbe's members took on the challenge of researching their own heritage of songs and rhythms, and bringing their discoveries back to the group. In this way, the responsibilities of bringing in new songs to arrange and giving them some historical and cultural context was shared among all of the group's members. Since many members came from different ethnic and geographic backgrounds, from Fon to Gun to Mahi to Toffinou, from Savalou to Abomey to Porto Novo to Cotonou, this project brought together new cross-cultural understanding of the various traditions coexisting within Benin. The research aspect of their project also placed Gangbe's members in the position of ethnographers of their own culture, oriented as consumers of new songs and traditions, objectifying their culture from within, and also as producers charged with the representation and marketing of those traditions to a broader, international audience. The research process, with its dual practices of consumption and production, became one of the primary ways in which Gangbe's members created a marketable identity for themselves, especially as they moved into increasingly international markets.

Culturel and Cultuel

There remained the problem of spiritual legitimacy. Gangbe did not want to run into

trouble with vodun religious authorities for using sacred repertoires without permission. So in 1999 they went to see the head priest (*houngan*) of the ancestral cults in Ouidah, Daagbo Hounon Hounan the elder, to ask for his blessing. Dehopumon (France, 6/12/10), who was raised mostly in the Celeste Church in Porto Novo, describes the encounter:

> The whole group, we made an appointment, and we went to Ouidah. It was an extraordinary moment for us. It was one of those occasions that marked all of Beninois youth when it comes to music. Because young musicians, music groups, have never gone to see where the secrets of vodun are kept, to tell them, "We have the intention of using the rhythm to share it with people outside." Because if we start speaking French or English, it's because others accepted to share their culture with us. And why shouldn't we share our culture with others? And then the old priest said, "You get that idea out. That's a good idea."
>
> Then the priest invited the musicians who usually play these instruments in the *couvents*, to play them for us. They played, and we recorded, and they gave us more explanations beyond what we already knew. Because we don't come from that family, it was necessary to explain certain things to us. The prohibitions, they told us why there are these certain prohibitions. What [dance] steps are reserved for women in traditional ceremonies in the *couvent*. Because in the *couvent*, women have an extraordinary power. To make big decisions in the *couvent*, it's not the great priest, but there is a consultation with the queen mother, to tell them, this, this, this. You shouldn't do like this. How you think about doing it. So the queen mother must also respond to these questions. So we had this meeting to understand the function of the cultural system in the *couvents*. Then we left with a great blessing from the priest, the *feticheur*.
>
> And we went on to ask others from other regions, since Gangbe is a reference group for Benin, and more broadly for Africa... So in Africa people are starting to look to us as an example. And that makes us so proud... We have to keep working, so it can go further, do more and better.

It is clear that Dehopumon thought of Gangbe's project as one carrying great representative weight, and that the group took their research very seriously as a *cultural* endeavor. In 2013, Gangbe returned to Ouidah to visit the *houngan*'s successor and to receive his blessing for their new album *Go Slow to Lagos* (2015). The meeting was documented on film by the French filmmaker Arnaud Robert, and appears in his documentary *Gangbe!* (2015)

Gangbe was not the only group to have the idea to modernize vodun-based rhythms in the

1990s, although they were the only group at the time to do it as a brass band and for an international audience. The sons of the vodun chief Sossa Guedehounge formed a group in 1998 called Les Frères Guedehounge, which focused on recording their versions of sacred vodun drumming and chants which they had learned from their early childhood. Their music videos depict scenes of mysticism and spiritual power, such as the preparation of medicines and the effects of supernatural forces like lightning and storms, while the four brothers dance in the white garments of initiates for Lisa, Mami Wata, or Tron. [example] While as initiates the Guedehounge brothers did not have the problem of spiritual legitimacy, they faced other issues in getting their music across to a Beninois market. As Bertin "Prince Agba" Guedehounge (Cotonou, 5/22/13) told me,

> Artists didn't have the courage to do traditional music, especially from the *couvent*. There was fear, for two reasons. The first reason is that we told ourselves that when you go with traditional music, it's like you are not an artist. It's *folklo*. To be an artist is to do hip hop, to rap, to sing; it's the drum set with a guitar, piano, all that. If we go into the traditional with the same drums from the village, it's nothing different. Now the second reason is that people were afraid to go back into the music of the *couvent*, it's true. Colonialism made people afraid to tie themselves down, [to say] it's *me* who plays vodun music, you see? It's like it's diabolic, according to what colonization and that time put in people's heads.
>
> So our goal is, with all the instruments we have in the *couvent*, all of that, it's a way of saying, we can bring something more to our music in working with the music of the *couvent* with modern influences, because we shouldn't live in a world that stays closed off, no. We have to open ourselves to others. We also have to add some other influences so that it can pass everywhere. It's music – there is not in reality one music that is purely vodun. We can only do the cultural part. And with these rhythms, we can send the message to help people understand that we are singing about everyday life, and that in reality everyone is together. We are drummers. We do that, in all its forms.

Bertin's account covers a lot of ground, including his incisive point about the levels of relative status afforded to traditional music in comparison to *moderne* or *tradi-moderne* modes which mix in just enough difference "so that it can pass everywhere," as he says. This recalls Taylor's

(2007:126) discussion of the "softening" of difference that takes place in order to lower the accessibility threshold for consumption. Ultimately, even for the Guedehounges, who are fully initiated into vodun practice, it was also the "cultural," and not the religious aspects of the music that were available to be recorded and performed for a wider audience. Gangbe also practiced a similar emphasis on the *culturel* (cultural) over the *cultuel* (religious) that seems to be the same as those of relative insiders. As Gangbe's trumpeter Magloire Ahouandjinou (France, 6/12/10) put it,

> Today, the thing has been desanctified [*desacralisé*]. The music of vodun continues to exist, but more often in a cultural [*culturel*] context than in the cult [*cultuel*] context. That's to say that every person has his perception of things today. For us, we all come from vodun parents, but today we are all Christian. We use the melodies and rhythms that come out of our culture. And that, our culture, is exactly vodun. But we use these melodies and rhythms in the *cultural* form. Those who use it for vodun worship [*culte*], that's different. Every person has his conception of how to use it.

Magloire was careful to note the cultural-national status of vodun, while defending each person's individual right to their own relationship with its religious aspects. This is reflective of a widely practiced and highly effective strategy (or perhaps a more improvised "tactic," to use de Certeau's (1984:xiii) characterization of calculations made "on the wing") to avoid interpretations that totalize musicians' beliefs or aesthetics, and it came up repeatedly in my interviews. The importance of vodun, and indeed of traditional repertoires in general, for Magloire, was the link to cultural *continuity*. He went on to say,

> We want to show people what this music entails [*comporte*]. It encompasses a melodic wealth [*richesse*], a rhythmic wealth that has not changed. Whether from the side of culture or the cult, that hasn't changed. The rhythms are the same, the melodies stayed the same and are expressed in the same manner, because the manner of expression also counts. But we bring all this richness to the world, plus a little bit more.

Togbe

Gangbe released their first CD *Togbé* (“Ancestors”) in 2001 with the Belgian company Contre-jour. Contre-jour sent Daniel Bourin, an engineer who had worked with the renowned Cameroonian bassist Richard Bona, to Cotonou to record the album. *Togbé*, Gangbe's most traditionally rooted album, is a rich mix of sounds representing different aspects of southern Benin's unique soundscape, with a particular emphasis on the city of Porto Novo. Porto Novo, the home of Aristide Agondanou and the Ahouandjinou brothers, is well represented on tracks like “Tagbavo,” a *masse gohun* piece in the style of Yedenou Adjahoui, which is augmented with Sam Gnonlonfoun's lush brass arrangements, an *akonhun* “body percussion” section, and the group's soaring vocal chorales. Other tracks summon the Porto Novian soundscape as well, including “Alladanou,”[54] which is *adjogan*, a royal court style named for king Toffa's minister charged with European relations (see Rouget 1996). There are also two *kaka* tracks on the album, “Gbeto,” which is an hommage to Porto Novo's *zangbeto* or “Biliguede,” as they are playfully called here, and “Gangbe Vile.”

Many of the tracks on *Togbe* reflect Jean Gnonlonfoun's percussion expertise in Yoruba-derived sacred genres, especially *gbon* (on “Ekui Nawo” and “Ema Dja”), which is played for the *egungun* in Ouidah and Porto Novo. There is also “Aou Whan,” which is an *akpala*, the Muslim counterpart to the popular Nigerian-Brazilian Christian *assiko* drumming style, which is often associated with Nago Muslims in Porto Novo (aside from being one of the major contributing ingredients in Fela's Afrobeat). All three of these tracks feature Jean's masterful *gbon* and *gangan* talking drum playing, accented by brass hits. The synergy between Sam's brass arrangements and his brother Jean's lead drum playing is part of the special energy that holds this

[54] Recall that “Alladanou” refers to all the peoples of Fon-Adja-Gun descent in southern Benin, those who migrated from the kingdom of Allada in the 17th century and are united by related languages and cultural practices. The term was used particularly by the royals among the settlers in Porto Novo to legitimize their connections to ancestral kingship (cf. Politz forth.)

album together.

"Ajaka," the track that first made Gangbe famous in Benin, is also included on this album. It's in the style of old *zenli* from Abomey, and the song itself is a royal song of the king's court that is still well known today. It addresses the importance of having children to increase the power of the kingdom.

O vi ma yon do ani kadie
Nanye ce vi ma yon do ani kadie ce

How good it is to have your child [*vi*]
How very good it is to have your own child [lit. If a child is not the best thing, then what is?]

Ohan ya hi do mewenu a ce
Ohan adja hi me

Singing [*han*] in the right time [in the present, *mewenu*]
Singing when you are feeling good

Ohan manlan Agadja manlan Tegbesu
Towe vi ma yon do ani kie ce

Singing the praise names [*manlan*] of Agadja, the praise names of Tegbesu
It's very good to have your own child

"Ajaka" speaks to the link between biological and cultural reproduction, the source of the Danxomean kings' anxieties over succession and the *continuity* of culture, values which continue to structure practices around marriage and child bearing in the present. Singing the praise names of the great kings of the past, the song says, brings immediately to mind each person's desire to create his own legacy through his children. "Ajaka" unites procreation and cultural (re)production in the past with the present and the future. The Beninois guitarist Lionel Loueke has since recorded the song as "Vi Ma Yon," a duet with Angelique Kidjo, on Loueke's album *Mwaliko* (2010), and Gangbe re-recorded the song as "Le Petit Souris" on their most recent album (2015).

Gangbe's solution to the challenge of incorporating local percussion was creative. In many of the styles they adapted on *Togbe*, at least six percussionists would normally be required to cover each and every call and response part. And on the pieces that used rhythms typically played in *fanfares*, like the bass and snare drum, these instruments had to be re-converted into their traditional percussion counterparts. Gangbe had only three percussionists, Jean Gnonlonfoun, Benoit Avihoue, and Joseph Houessou. So each drummer had to cover multiple parts. Avihoue especially became very good at playing different parts on an eclectic kit. At first, he played only one of the *gan* (bell) or *assan* (shaker) parts, depending on the style. But when for the second album Contre-jour requested more grooves that Europeans could easily dance to, Avihoue introduced the calabash as a bass drum, which he played with his right hand, while playing *gan* with his left hand, and hi-hat with his left foot (to cover the *assan* shaker parts). Gnonlonfoun covered the lead talking drum parts on *gbon* or *dundun*, and Houessou played the support parts on *kpezin*, or covered other lead parts on the *kpawhle*.

When Gangbe went on tour to Europe and North America in 1999, 2002, and 2006, and to France in 2010, they had to figure out how to carry this percussion sound with them. They brought the calabash and the *gbon* as hand baggage, and the *kpawhle* as checked luggage on the plane with them, since they are all relatively durable and made of wood, skins, and gourds. The clay jar *kpezin*, however, was a problem. These drums had never been designed to travel, tying their unique sound to their place of origin for many centuries. The group had a blacksmith solder three *kpezin* of different sizes together, and mold fitted iron coverings coverings for them out of old car body parts. The result was something that sounded like *kpezin* but resonated even more as the metal vibrated at different frequencies. This was truly Gan-gbe, “the sound of metal.”

“Gangbe” means “the sound/voice/call [*gbe*] of iron [*gan*].” *Gan* (also *gankeke*,

gankogui) is the iron bell that keeps time in Fon-Adja-Ewe musics. In explaining the meaning of their name, Gangbé frequently cites the proverb which says "*Gan jayí mo nɔ gbɛ gbè*," meaning "The sound/voice (*gbe*) of the *gan* cannot stay silent," referring to the *gan*'s obligation, once struck, to resound, to produce *gbe* – voice or *resonance* (Sam Gnonlonfoun, New York, 7/29/16).

Marketing Vodun

Contre-jour, which specializes in producing world music acts, marketed Gangbe's tours explicitly on the basis of their relationship to Benin's cultural heritage, specifically vodun. The company subordinated the particularities of the members' religious and ethnic affiliations to establish Gangbe as a distinctive brand to maximize the value produced by encounter, to give Western audiences the perfect mix of difference and familiarity. In the logic of globalization, culture is always already cultural difference, which with the right framing can be marketed to consumers and translated into capital. Consider these excerpts from the press discourse surrounding Gangbe's 2002 appearance at Joe's Pub in New York City:

> Picture the sound of military brass bands, voodoo ritual chants and rhythms, scratchy American jazz records, with a dash of Fela's Afrobeat, and you can almost hear Gangbé Brass Band... In an effort to maintain traditional Beninese rhythms and share them with a wider audience Gangbé sought permission from voodoo priests and from their ancestors to use certain chants and rhythms. (International Music Network)

> New Orleans and Lagos both seemed equally close to Benin when the Gangbé Brass Band made its euphoric New York debut. The band has the world in its grasp; its music leaps among the many ethnic traditions of its home, Benin, and beyond to Africa and the New World's African diasporas, segueing from traditional voodoo rhythms to jazz without missing a syncopated beat. (*New York Times*, Pareles 2002)

> In the band's dizzyingly gorgeous horn lines, rolling vamps carry sunny African chorales, and polyrhythmic voodoo grooves host harmonies that slide in all directions at once. (*Time Out New York*, Mercer 2002)

The touchstones in all of these excerpts are references that audiences are likely to *identify* with in

some way. Clearly marketing Gangbe has been as much, if not more, about the identities of the Western consumers themselves as about the identities of the musicians on stage, reinforcing the Comaroffs' (2009:29) observation that "under the impress of the market, human subjects and cultural objects produce, reproduce, and refashion each other." Keywords in the *Times* lede: New Orleans, Lagos, Africa, diaspora, voodoo, jazz, syncopated. And the review "leaps" between these points of reference to a greater extent than Gangbe's music does, which tends to *fuse* its influences rather than jumping from one to the next. Not surprisingly, the history, musical specifics, and deeper implications of these connections are not laid bare in the promotional materials. That's not the point, which is to familiarize the consumer with the aspects of the group's music that they might find appealing, whether for their domesticated difference (New Orleans, jazz, diaspora), or their unknown, exotic possibility (voodoo). Lagos and New Orleans are the focus of the *Times* lede, placing the emphasis on the foreign aspects of Gangbe's music rather than their use of traditional styles, which comes later. In such a frame, caught between the influences of others, Gangbe is left with only "traditional voodoo rhythms" to represent Benin here.

When I interviewed Togni Music Concept, a gospel-jazz group from Porto Novo formed by the younger Ahouandjinou brothers Aaron and Jeremie, they also pointed out that vodun is not all that Benin has to offer, and does not totally define its culture, nor does it represent the true depth and variety of its traditional music. As trombonist Aaron Ahouandjinou (Porto Novo, 6/29/10) said,

> ...[V]odun is a cult. It's like a religion. But it's not the way of life [*mode de vie*]. It's different. What concerns vodun, the priests, the adepts... We are from Benin, from Dahomey, as it was. Our way of life is not vodun. Vodun exists here. It's a pole of attraction in Benin. It's one part of the culture in Benin. But it's not only that. There are people here in Benin, for example – all of the animist cults in Benin are not called vodun, in fact. Vodun is the most well-known. It's had more

> success than me, and I'm a bit jealous, but that's ok. [laughs]
>
> There are a lot of people. We have our way of life that is in common with the people of vodun. We are all Beninois, so we have the same way of life, we eat the same things, we speak the same language, we dress in the same way, we go to the same schools, the same market. We used to build with wood. Now we build with cement. That's how we've lived, right up until today. There are still Christians who live in this environment, in houses of beaten earth. All that is part of our culture. When you go into a house of beaten earth, it's not necessarily a house of vodun.

Aaron's last statement leads to a particularly important point: that traditional *structures* ("ways of life," earthen houses, family religious histories, or musical structures like bell and support patterns, or lead drum phrases) do not dictate present individual *practices*. Indeed, structures – histories, genders, occupations, spiritualities, economies – are both *things that we live in*, and things that *inhabit us*. A structure is a mask to be danced – like those for the guardians, the *zangbeto*; the ancestors, the *egungun* or the *gelede* – a mask to be fully inhabited and embodied, its style and potential exploited, wrestled with to the fullest. In this way agents and structures, the dancer and the mask, culture workers and their ever-changing identities – *they possess one another*, holding each other, locked always in dance, in mutual embodiment.

While Aaron and other musicians frequently resist its associations, vodun as ur-sign was in the 2000s *the* major component of Contre-jour's marketing campaign with Gangbe. While the members come from all regions of Benin, including the north, and they sing in several of Benin's local languages, including Fon, Gun, Mina, Yoruba, and Ewe, it is more often the exoticism of vodun that comes to stand for the whole of Beninois traditional culture and national identity in the press. This reveals the extent to which the meaning of commodified identity is really a mutual creation between performers, audience, and mediators such as producers and journalists.

This problem of representation is rather typical in the world music arena. Thinking back on Gangbe's initial interactions with Contre-jour, Martial Ahouandjinou (France, 6/15/14)

reflected that

> There was always this problem when we were with [Contre-jour]: Do you want to be jazz, or do you want to be for the whole audience? They always asked this question... If we want to be jazz, they are not the right people for us. So, if we want to be world music, there they can try to make a path for us. So, as Africans, not having, which is to say – in order to have access to the world market, we absolutely had to go through those who were already in a wide network. To get into this network, it's not easy.

Contre-jour means “against daylight” in French, and refers to a photographic technique in which the camera is pointed directly at a source of light, creating a backlighting effect where any figures in the shot are silhouetted, the details of their features paradoxically becoming darkened in the glare of the light. In fact, according to trumpeter Aristide Agondanou (Cotonou, 8/9/16), Michel de Bock's original background was not in music production, but as a lighting engineer. To expand the “contre-jour” image a bit, consider photographer Michael Freeman's (2007:74) evocative description of the technique in his handbook on photographic lighting:

> Shots into the sun tend to be low on detail but rich graphically and atmospherically. Provided that you can control the flare and contrast to your liking, contre-jour (as it's sometimes called) is the lighting condition that gives the best opportunities for unusual and unexpected imagery. The extremely high contrast makes exposure judgment an issue, and while some highlights will almost inevitably be blown out, underexposure is often a safer option, provided that there are possibilities for doing something graphic with the image rather than documentary – a silhouette, for instance.

Through the process of marketing Beninois cultural particularities such as vodun, it seems that Contre-jour does exactly what its name indicates. The bright light of the market, of commercial representation, casts Gangbe and other of Contre-jour's clients, in silhouette. Contrary to the Comaroffs' (2009:20) assertion that “mass circulation reaffirms ethnicity – in general and in all its particularity – and, with it, the status of the embodied ethnic subject as a source and means of identity,” in Contre-jour's model the individual ethnicities of Gangbe's members – Fon, Gun, Toffin, Mahi – are hidden, known to exist should one approach more closely, but strategically

out of view in the photographer's lens. Ethnicity (i.e. “Fon”) is hidden in favor of nationality (i.e. “Beninois”), or more probably, the most superficially embodied *race* (“African”), which is easier for foreign audiences to understand without getting into ethnographic details.

Some might argue that ethnicity was created and sustained by colonial-era ethnography[55] to begin with, so why should Contre-jour make Gangbe's image about cultural particularity if to do so would be to fall into old typologies? It's true that generalizations and misunderstandings about ethnicity (“Fon” or “Gun”) are just as problematic as similar generalizations about nationality or race. But it does raise the question as to whether Gangbe's *musique de recherche* would not have been better served through a presentation that provided more cultural information than simply passing references to vodun and approximate lyrical summaries. If Gangbe's project was truly to “valorize” Benin's music traditions, then why not place them in their cultural context more explicitly? Because Contre-jour was primarily interested in *monetizing* the value of the traditions Gangbe represented, they needed to translate their unfamiliarity into something that consumers could understand and would buy. So, the signs of Africa: in dress, in *bazin* wax cloth, in the codes and voices of local languages, in percussion, in eclectic brass arrangements, in vocal harmonies, in the discourse of tradition. The nation of Benin comes under the sign of vodun, never mind the names of individual familial ancestors subsumed under this banner, nor the individual identities of Gangbe's members, and their particular religious backgrounds. The countless, rich and contradictory realities of everyday life – independent African Christianity, the holism, reality, and liveness of experience, the felt continuities of history – are pushed to the side because they provide too much information, because they make desire for difference too complicated. Contre-jour's strategy, and it truly is a

[55] See chapter two for more details on the development of ethnography in Benin in the 1930s.

strategy in de Certeau's sense, has been to preserve only the simplest, smoothest, most marketable signs to be packaged and sold. For Gangbe's part, the band members were divided about how much they should concede to this process, for while they were aware of its drawbacks in representation and creative control, they were anxious to earn a living from their work, and enjoyed the opportunities it provided.

Whendo: Roots and Rhizomes

Following Gangbe's 2002 tour, Contre-jour brought them to Belgium to record their second album, *Whendo* (Roots). Considered by most fans and critics to be the band's strongest album, *Whendo* takes listeners on a musical tour of the West African coast extending out from Porto Novo, making connections to different styles of popular music from neighboring countries, with a strong Yoruba influence, and to New Orleans and the blues as well. But the conditions of the album's production revealed some telling tensions. After observing how audiences had responded to the band's performance, Contre-jour requested that the album focus on more easily danceable beats. In response, Gangbe introduced the calabash in the percussion section to provide a clear – though still acoustic – "four-on-the-floor" beat for Western listeners. This created conflict with the artistic sensibilities of arranger Sam Gnonlonfoun (New York, 10/5/16), whose adventurous modern jazz arrangements had been the focus of the first album. He remained committed to keeping a more flexible harmonic orientation in his arrangements on *Whendo*, even if the rhythms were more dance-focused. Jean Gnonlonfoun (Brussels, 6/24/14) also noted that on this album he learned how to alter his lead drum phrases, which repeat characteristic linguistic phrases, so that they would fit the four-bar hypermeter that the dance rhythm imposed. In these cases, the meaning of the lead patterns is lost, and he linked the patterns to the movements of the dancers in the band and in the audience instead. Contre-jour

chose an “intern,” Renaud Carton, as sound engineer, who quickly found rapport with the band. “With him, maybe because they told us he was an intern, we had an easier time communicating with him,” said Martial Ahouandjinou (France, 6/15/14). “He accepted our ideas. He allowed us to record live in a garden, so we recorded some pieces like that... With [Renaud], we had the best recording experience.”

Whendo is an exciting album to listen to, with a much clearer mix than *Togbe*. The addition of Martial and Magloire Ahouandjinou, on trombone and trumpet respectively, yielded more improvised solos, giving Sam Gnonlonfoun a great deal of flexibility in his arrangements, which are thickly orchestrated and harmonically adventurous. The trumpeters Willy and Aristide Agonadou were no longer in the group at this point. The album continues *Togbe*'s project of tapping into Porto Novo's rhythmic traditions, here represented in the *masse gohun* of “Yemonoho,” borrowing again from the work of Yedenou Adjahoui; the *djegbe* of “Jesu Ohun,” a vocal feature for Crispin; and the *awangbahun* of “Gbedji,” which is the characteristic rhythm of the Celeste Church known as “the rhythm of (spiritual) battle,” and was reportedly revealed by divine revelation to the church's founder Joseph Oshoffa.

But an additional stylistic trend emerges in discussing and listening to the album with Gangbe's members. On *Whendo*, the band starts to place Porto Novo in a broader regional context, carrying the listener up and down Benin's coast to Yoruba cultural rhythms like *gbon*, ubiquitous in Ouidah but also in Nigeria's popular music culture; *akpala*, the Nigerian highlife that is an ingredient in Afrobeat; and *agbadja*, the rhythm of the fishermen in Benin's western Mono region. The opening track “Noubioto” is in *gbon* style, Jean Gnonlonfoun's specialty as a lead drummer and initiate for the *egungun*. *Akpala* tracks include “Johodo” and “Glessi,” and an Afrobeat tribute track to Fela Kuti in “Remember Fela,” an arrangement of his “Colonial

Mentality." "Oblemou" sets a popular *agbadja* song for brass, drawing out the continuities between this style from the Mono region and pan-African salsa. And in a *tour de force* of cultural signifiers, "Segala" takes a popular song of the Danxome court describing the triumphs of the Amazon female warriors over the Yoruba empire of Oyo and places it over Porto Novo's own specific style of *zenli*; like a jazz head, the court song bookends a blues solo section based on the American jazz pianist Oscar Petersen's "Night Train," which Sam Gnonlonfoun learned from a German volunteer who briefly led a big band in Cotonou in the 1990s.

These expansions in Gangbe's listening and imagining outline a sonic, rhythmic, and cultural path across Benin's southern coast, and point beyond it, out to the west and the east. Gangbe clearly locates *Whendo*'s "roots" not just in Porto Novo and Abomey's royal and church styles, but in Yoruba sacred traditions for the *egungun*, Yoruba popular traditions like *akpala* and Afrobeat, and in the rhythms of the West African coast more generally. In this album, Gangbe is starting to think about their music, and to hear it and perform it, not just through its local histories, but increasingly through its regional and even diasporic connections. These roots move and map not just down and deeper into the past, but also *out* rhizomically, tracing present, intra-African networks of identity, solidarity, and sound.

The emphasis on Yoruba culture is key, because it brings out the strong influence of these traditions in Benin's Fon and Gun-hegemonic culture. The history of Yoruba-descended Beninois people is complex, as many of the peoples of the Oueme valley who settled before the founding of the region's major kingdoms, such as the Toffinou and the Hwla, were protected from Danxome's violent conquests by Xogbonu's sphere of influence. Jean Gnonlonfoun (Brussels, 6/24/14) spoke about his family's migrations and Yoruba roots in this way, taking it up to their 21st century travels in Europe and America:

> Yoruba [people] have been migrating to Benin for a long time. One brother settles, and the other moves on. You will hear a different story if you go to Porto Novo, if you go to Ouidah. Everyone has their own interpretation, but they are from the same family. The Gnonlonfoun came to Cotonou from Nigeria. We are called the Toffinou, those who came by the lagoon. Now there will be the Belgian branch of the Toffinou. I stayed here, now my brothers are in your country, in New York, so the Gnonlonfoun are settling there. Maybe they will sing songs about us too.

Art and Economy: Assiko!

Gangbe's first two albums reveal relatively little of the economic and aesthetic anxieties that surrounded their next project. Gangbe embarked on a long tour to Europe and North America in 2006, crossing the United States by road in their tour bus. Gangbe's relationship with Contre-jour was still amicable in this phase, although signs of strain were starting to appear. Contre-jour typically took in around 6,000 or 7,000 euros per night for a Gangbe show, of which the group was paid a maximum of 1,000 euros to divide among the nine members (Aristide Agonadou, Cotonou, 8/9/16). This fact was well known among the musicians, and some accepted the situation on the grounds that they were not there only for the money, but also for the art and for the experience. Others were unhappy with the arrangement, since they wanted to defend music as a professional career that should pay a living wage. These differences within the group created tension with Contre-jour, which defended their own business interests and overhead costs. After the 2006 tour, two of Gangbe's founding members, arranger-trumpeter Sam Gnonlonfoun and lead percussionist Jean Gnonlonfoun, left the group over these differences. In 2008, the stock market crashed in New York, and its effects started to become clear as the U.S. and Europe slid into recession. The following year, Contre-jour significantly reduced Gangbe's touring schedule, as many of the usual music festivals in Europe went on hiatus.

The post-2008 economic crisis threw into question many of the identity-making consumption practices on which Western capitalism depends, and specifically the world music

boom in Europe and North America going back to the 1980s and '90s. Conservative cultural politics in France had already curtailed visas for African artists beginning in the 2000s, but the 2008 crash and the accompanying crisis in employment and consumer confidence was a significant blow to production companies and music festivals across Europe. As Timothy Taylor (2007) and other cultural theorists have noted, many of the West's practices of identity-making are profoundly tied to consumption. When those consumption practices are threatened, the makeshift identities they support are revealed in all of their fragility.

When Gangbe went into the studio in Vidolee, Belgium to record their third album, *Assiko!* (Now's The Time) (2010), Contre-jour was determined to make a product that would sell. They chose a sound engineer with a rock and pop background, and while he allowed the group to record their arrangements as they liked, he removed the bell parts on many tracks in post-production, believing there was “too much information” for a Western audience. Martial Ahouandjinou (France, 6/15/14) said of the experience:

> As soon as we played something, [the engineer] started to act like an arranger. We play something, and he tells us, no, it's wrong, when he's hardly heard the thing, because it's not what he's used to hearing. So when it's outside of his habits, he says it's wrong. And [Michel] liked listening to him... It was the album that became the most expensive, and the most catastrophic as a recording: *Assiko*... He took out all the bell parts on the album, and this when Gangbe is characterized by the bell!... They wanted a product to sell, and they needed their hands free to transform the product how they wanted... They needed to have arguments to sell the product in the way they thought it would work.

Revealing some of the differences of opinions among the group's members, Athanase Dehopumon (France, 6/5/14) also mentioned the adaptation of rhythms for a Western audience, but he emphasized this as a necessary component of Gangbe's project, and one that is part of their broader attempts to appeal to an international audience:

> You have to adapt the music to international conditions, but all the time staying connected to your culture, your musical identity. It's not because the market or the

> producer demands something that we will disconnect ourselves from our identity, that we won't use percussion and start to use a drum set, guitars, no. We want to stay in our brass band concept, but bringing in some modifications. Because Beninois rhythms, traditional rhythms, in themselves, are extremely complicated for Westerners. So if we must bring a Westerner into our music, this poses a problem. How to proceed? To allow a foreigner to get into our music, this is the work we're doing.
>
> This is why certain people, when they listen to Gangbe's different albums, they find that we have left a lot of things behind. Even our friends in L'Ojo at given times, they told us that. And we told them, it's not to distance ourselves [from the tradition]. We simplified [rhythms] to allow people to get in. Because when you make a house, and you put several doors in, people don't know which door to use to go in. You need a main door. To welcome people, and when they are settled now, they are used to the system, now we can add two or three doors. We are in this process.

According to Dehopumon, Gangbe made other concessions to foreign audiences, such as reducing the number of verses they sing in a song so as not to alienate listeners who don't understand local African languages like Fon, Gun, Mina, and Yoruba. The more time Gangbe spent working in the international market, the more they started to understand their audiences' listening practice and patterns of consumption, enabling them to adapt their music for that audience by emphasizing more easily translatable aspects such as instrumental interludes and dance showcases. For Dehopumon, these more accessible aspects of the performance should ideally bring the audience to pose questions about the music's cultural context.

> We kept the essential, we said, ok, there will not be more than two verses, and the choruses will come a certain number of times, after that the brass come in and increase the energy to give *joie de vivre* to those who want to dance, and then the piece finishes with the introduction. So this way it's more legible, more understandable. Even if the person doesn't understand the language, as soon as they hear the piece, they will say, where does that come from? From what country? From where? What are they saying? And we can explain.

Other accommodations for a Western audience included shortening the length of songs to a maximum of four minutes for short attention spans and concert programs with strict time limits, a stark contrast to the long vamps and improvisations characteristic of performances in West

Africa, especially those typical of Fela Kuti's Afrobeat performances.

Assiko is a very different album from *Whendo*. Without the bell patterns on many of the tracks, the highlife and Afrobeat tracks, like “Nikki,” “Se,” “Beautiful Africa,” and “Rakia,” begin to resemble each other in feel. With the departure of lead percussionist Jean Gnonlonfoun, the *gbon* talking drum parts no longer animate the breaks with rhythmic energy and chatter. The removal of these key rhythmic components reveals just how important they are to determining the identity, origin, and distinctive characteristics of each style. The effect is one of particularity subsumed by the superficiality of genre. Without Sam writing the arrangements, the horn lines are more riff- and blues-oriented and the harmonies less adventurous, taking away much of Gangbe's commitment to chromatic experimentalism and moving them toward the modal sound they have cultivated in later periods of their work. Where *Whendo* imagined Gangbe's “roots” in Porto Novo within a rich, regional network of specific, linked, cultural identities along the West African coast and its diasporas, *Assiko* concedes the plurality of these identities to the simplifying exigencies of the market.

While *Assiko* did not do well as an album, Gangbe has kept the stronger compositions in their live set rotation, in many cases returning them to their original arrangements including the bell parts Those pieces that have outlived *Assiko*'s short shelf life to earn more permanent spots in the live set have been those that have kept their distinctive qualities; for example, on “Sofada,” which Gangbe still performs frequently, percussionist Benoit Avihoue tries his hand at playing *gbon*, the only track on the album with the instrument. Other more long lived compositions feature the vocal improvisations of Crispin Kpitiki, such as on the a cappella “Memeton,” and “Yonnatche,” an older, elaborate Afrobeat arrangement of Sam Gnonlonfoun's which the group rearranged for their 2015 album as “Les Vrais Amis.” “Miwa” has also survived

to be performed live; its distinctive rhythm, known as *kpanou gbe* (sometimes called *gangbe*), is played for family ceremonies by senior women in Porto Novo households on plates perforated with iron rings, which Gangbe iterates on bells and cymbals. Here is at least one example of the "sound of iron" - *gangbe* – that was not removed from the album.

The topics on *Assiko* are more serious than on past albums. Gangbe still performs "La Porte du Non Retour," an *agbadja* composition addressed to the kings of old Danxome that asks questions about what happened during the slave trade, and where their ancestors have gone. The song captures *Assiko*'s thematic mood; the album, subtitled "Now's the Time," is lyrically a call to action and awareness on a set of heavy social issues, like AIDS ("Sida"), the slave trade ("La Porte du Non Retour"), the treatment of women ("Rakia"), and mistrust among friends ("Yonnatche"). "Beautiful Africa" is a call to recognize the wealth of Africa as the "cradle of humanity," through the rapped explication (a style of expression known as *ragga* in Benin) in French of several "signs of Africa": cultural practices such as ethnic scarification and everyday onomatopoeic game play. On this track Gangbe goes to great lengths, breaking lyrical meter and stylistic frame, to ensure that they include explicit cultural details – on an album whose production seemed designed to gloss over or even eliminate them.

With *Assiko* finished and over budget, and the recession worsening in Europe, Contre-jour recommended that Gangbe stop touring for two years to recuperate costs. In 2013, Gangbe booked their own tour of Nigeria, Cape Verde, and France, became the subjects of acclaimed filmmaker Arnuad Robert's documentary *Gangbe!*, and in 2014, decided to part ways with Contre-jour entirely. Dehopumon (France, 6/5/14) recalled the difference of marketing philosophy between Gangbe and Contre-jour, using the agricultural image of a merchant going to market:

> ...[O]ur record and management company separated from us, because they found that there was a crisis, there were no more jobs. So the company wanted us to stay in Benin and for us to wait two years. We told them, no. Our music always has the possibility to be sold. It's not because there is a crisis on the market that the merchant can't go to the market to sell. Maybe the product which is worth five francs, he can sell it at two, three, or four francs. But he's not going to say because there is a crisis, I'm not going to the market. It makes no sense. But the record company didn't understand and made their decision. We said, no problem. We keep going. So that's how the road is laid out now. Last year, we organized the tour ourselves, without the power of a manager... So that's why I say that Gangbe has grown up. Gangbe is moving up. Every year Gangbe grows in age and experience. It gains authority, and musical knowledge also.

Even before the recession and Contre-jour's decision to cut Gangbe's touring schedule, some members like Martial Ahouandjinou (France, 6/15/14) had been frustrated with the company's control over the band's music, but didn't feel he could speak up because he felt they needed Contre-jour's network. When the company started complaining about the band's performance, that it had gotten away from its roots, he was surprised because Contre-jour had been the ones making the modifications and suggestions. This ultimately contributed to Martial's decision to leave the company. As he related,

> We met a black American in Chicago. When we played, we played at Hot House in Chicago. When we finished playing, he approached us.... He said, guys, where you are, it is not easy for someone who has black skin to be there without a white hand. So always try to keep this white hand with you, otherwise, you will know music very well, but you will always stay in your corner and play for your people over there. So having understood this advice... we saw what we wanted to defend, but for fear of being dropped [*renvoye*] from the company, we shut up.
>
> I remember one discussion, when we had finished an evening, people really reacted, they applauded, they bought a lot of CDs. But Genevieve, Michel's wife, thought that we hadn't played well.... I said, but Genevieve, let me tell you that we had a product here before you started marketing it. And this product traveled before you took us on. So you shouldn't be transforming this product.... And the group thought I spoke up and this would caused us to be dropped, or that they would be prejudiced against our group now. So a lot of my colleagues didn't follow me.
>
> As William James said, “Every truth is a deferred error.” … I agree with him because I already saw how this can trap me.... They were right when they said that

> we had changed and modified the music to the point where no one recognized it anymore on the albums. I pulled back. I only did what they told me. And at the end, I was one of the people who stood up and said we should leave the company.

Martial's evocative image of the "white hand" necessary for success in the music business speaks to beliefs held broadly among musicians in Benin and realities in histories of power and music production across the world. Ultimately, Gangbe found that they needed Contre-jour to break into the world music market at first, but after some time, they had learned enough that they were ready to take more control of their creative work.

L'Afrique Dans les Oreilles and 2014 Tour

The next phase of Gangbe's career, and the phase which I observed the most closely, was marked by several significant changes in business strategy. To begin with, the group entered into an agreement with the small French non-profit organization L'Afrique Dans les Oreilles ("Africa In Your Ears"), founded in Lyon in 2010 by Sylvain Dartoy, to organize their 2014 summer tour. The organization's stated mission is "the promotion of African cultures and their resonances, in street art, concerts, and youth audiences," through "atypical, pluridisciplinary creations: music, dance, street shows, theater, stories, puppets..." (lafriquedanslesoreilles.com 2016). The agreement with Gangbe rested on open book accounting, and Dartoy's self-professed "militant" strategies as an advocate for education about African music and culture (Lyon, 6/26/14). It helped that Dartoy is a musician himself, a guitarist and kora player who plays in the area with three Burkinabe musicians. Dartoy is a vocal member in the activist "Zone Franche" network in France, whose mission is to promote the free circulation of musicians across international borders. They seek to do this particularly through the easing of artist visa regulations, which the organization describes as "the minimum condition for developing inter-cultural dialogue" in its "World Music Charter" (zonefranche.com 2016). Further aspects of the mission include

supporting the enforcement of UNESCO cultural policy, and special support for live music and audience interaction, new artists, and lesser known cultures and traditions.

Dartoy's approach to booking Gangbe's 2014 tour turned away from large world music festivals to focus on street festivals in provincial France where Gangbe could present both in "*ambulatoire*" or marching format, and in concert format on stage. This gave the group an opportunity to interact closely with community residents, share meals, and occasionally talk about their music. The pay was significantly lower than what Contre-jour had negotiated for Gangbe's larger tours, but Gangbe kept a greater proportion of the proceeds, and made education and interaction a priority. I observed several of these "province-to-province" initiatives in the summer of 2014. They were a contemporary reminder that the ideology behind the formation of France's overseas empire was formed in the romantic image of the French provinces and their signature products, characteristic dialects, and rural charm, all of which had to be protected from "over-development." Sometimes I played trombone with Gangbe as they marched through town, and I shared meals with the band and the local residents. The residents benefited immensely from these encounters with the band members. When else, after all, would they have a chance to participate in such music again? Gangbe was also enthusiastic about their role in the encounter, although it was clear, too, that this was an experiment for them, a gingerly first step in their renaissance. Other performances were centered around workshops with students in local schools, or residents in group care facilities.

Gangbe's only stop in Paris during the summer of 2014 was on June 1 at Le Petit Bain, a small club sunken along the docks of the Seine. The band was fresh off an overnight flight from Benin, exhausted, and feeling candid. They had just finished playing "Porte du Non Retour," whose lyrics in French and Fon tell the story of the trans-Atlantic slave trade from perspective of

the “Door of No Return” in Ouidah. Taking the microphone in one hand, his trombone in the other, Martial Ahouandjinou explained to the crowd that the song was about history. “*Your* history,” he said, gesturing to the half-filled hall. “But we're not here to talk about that,” he laughed, and raised his arms to summon the beginning of the next tune.

“*Mais c'est à vous aussi*,” said a voice in the dark. “But it's yours too.” The band squinted into the spotlights, looking for the speaker, hidden to the side of the stage. Knowing gestures circulated, the rolling of eyes, the clearing of throats.

Martial quickly took control: “*Oui, c'est à nous aussi. Mais vous savez, nous ne sommes pas venus chercher la guerre. L'argent oui, mais pas la guerre.* Yes, it's ours too. But you know, we didn't come here looking for war. Money, yes, but war, no.”

The subject of the trans-Atlantic slave trade is not easily or frequently discussed in France, much less raised by the formerly colonized from a commanding position in a public venue. Martial pointed out first that the history of slavery and colonization in Africa is just as much a part of French history as it is a part of the well known African narrative, and encouraged the French in the audience to take responsibility for their role. The voice in the dark, privileged and unmarked in his obscurity, yet intimately familiar, deflected Martial's pointed assignment of responsibility (*à vous* can indicate blame as well as ownership), recentering the complicity of Africans themselves in the slave trade. It is a subject which resonates in a particularly sensitive way with Beninois descendants of the Danxomean empire. The exchange between Martial and the unseen Frenchman reveals so much about the mutuality of the colonial project, the double complicity of Africans and Europeans in creating and imagining systems of shared benefit founded on injustice.

“*Nous ne sommes pas venus chercher la guerre. L'argent, oui, mais pas la guerre*.”

Money, but not war. Martial's implication is serious: that from his perspective the French did, in fact, come to Danxome looking for war, and worse. Martial suggests that Gangbe's project, and indeed their musical interventions on French territory, transfer historical conflict to another domain, economy. Transposing conflict to the economic realm, the concept of a "trade war," is one of the classic *strategies* of globalized power in the 20th century, and Martial's comment situates Gangbe's project firmly in this discursive world.

Go Slow to Lagos

Gangbe also set out in 2014 to record another album, this one self-produced, and on their own terms. In *Go Slow to Lagos* (2015), the band returns to their artistic roots in a tribute to the music of Fela Kuti. They began recording parts of the album in France in early 2014 with the veteran producer, virtuosic keyboardist, and longtime Gangbe fan Jean-Philippe Rykiel. The band completed the recording in Cotonou at Studio Herman Rey at the end of 2014. Stylistically, the album foregrounds several Afrobeat and juju tracks, such as "Yoruba," which uses a political text from the Nigerian musician and playwright Hubert Ogunde, and "Les Vrais Amis," a rearrangement of the song "Yonnatche" from 2005's *Whendo*. Both songs speak about the lack of solidarity between brothers from the same culture, and implore the group's compatriots to act fairly and wisely in their dealings with one another.

Apart from these Afrobeat tracks, the album is, rhythmically and culturally speaking, much more about the *road* to Lagos, its sights, sounds, and and various obstacles, than it is about Fela's legacy or a Lagosian sense of place. Gangbe exposes the listener to a greater variety of traditional popular rhythms from southeast Benin than in previous albums, reflecting the changing soundscape of sacred rhythms that have been increasingly modernized in Benin since the 1990s. There is the *zangbeto*'s *kaka* on "Akwe" (Money), *djegbe* on "Ashe" - a call for young

people to thank and respect their elders, and *agbotchebou* – the rhythm for the *vodun* Sakpata – on “Assidida” (The Wedding). Gangbe also rearranges previous compositions in “Kpagbe,” 2005's “Miwa” in *kpanougbe* rhythm; and “Le Petit Souris,” which was their *zenli* hit as “Ajaka” from 2001. In between are the typical *elezo* and highlife tunes that have become the group's staples, with “Muziki” and “Biouwa.”

In focusing the album on the “go slow” (a ubiquituous West African expression for “traffic jam”) on the road to Lagos, Gangbe highlights a short section of the West African coastline with exceptional cultural richness and a long history of European and intra-African contestation. This road is only about 100 km long, but crosses several major historical, national, and cultural boundaries, including those between French and British ex-colonies; between Fon, Gun, and Yoruba cultures, each with their own histories of conflict going back at least to the 19th century wars with their neighbors in Oyo; and between Protestant, Catholic, *vodun*, and Muslim communities on both sides of the border. There are shared histories, too, such as that of Methodist missionization and the many independent African churches generated from its roots. These differences and connections spill out in the sounds of each locality's rhythms and musical practices, in the *djegbe*, *elezo*, *zenli*, and *agbotchebou* of each family, shrine, and church. These are the sounds Gangbe knows and the rhythms they play the best.

After the difficulties of *Assiko*, *Go Slow to Lagos* is a return to Gangbe's musical traditions in all of their locality and specificity. Contre-jour's biggest mistake was to underestimate the international market's demands for exclusivity and authenticity, in an attempt to make Gangbe's music conform to more dance-oriented world music. Dehopumon (France, 6/5/14) described the band's new orientation as they toured and assembled the new album:

> Everything we do is based on a traditional foundation. So I see that the project is still there. Since we left Contre-jour, we have gone back a little bit into traditional

> music, without trying to put together the old Gangbe. So that's the work we're doing now. And I think there is a new market for that. Because when we play, and you see people's reaction, the reaction of everyone who listens to us... It's true, when it's not good, people won't tell you that it's not good. But when you play, you yourself with your eyes, you can already see a little what your music does. So there is always hope.

The opportunities Dehopumon describes, opportunities to observe to communicative power of their music firsthand, multiplied particularly as a result of Sylvain Dartoy booking the group in an increasing number of intimate street festivals, giving them a chance to know their audience more closely and engage in more interactions with local people in France.

Developing Production Knowledge

Appadurai (1997:41) writes of several different kinds of knowledge involved in the movement of commodities: the knowledge needed to produce the commodity, often technical; and the knowledge needed to consume the commodity, assumed to be primarily ideological. Gangbe's case reveals how the market increasingly demanded the expansion of their production knowledge, exceeding the technical and moving into ideology and cultural psychology, requiring them to anticipate market demands, and manage their representations of traditional, national, and ethnic identities: the constructed mythologies that are usually the purvey of advertising. Their audience, in turn, found that the knowledge required to consume Gangbe's product exceeded the ideological or interpretive, crossing into the technical, social, and aesthetic-embodied realms.

As Appadurai (41) writes, “it may not be accurate to regard knowledge at the production locus of a commodity as exclusively technical or empirical and knowledge at the consumption end as exclusively evaluative or ideological. Knowledge at both poles has technical, mythological, and evaluative components, and the two poles are subject to mutual and dialectical interaction.” Appadurai marks another kind of special production knowledge as particularly valuable: the knowledge of the market, knowledge of audience and consumers. This is the

production knowledge that Gangbe gained more and more over the course of the 2000s and early 2010s, and gradually were able to deploy to their advantage as they took more control of their business and creative activities. Contre-jour at first provided this production knowledge and gained the economic benefit from their position, but as Gangbe grew more savvy, the company's services were no longer needed. Appadurai (1997:43) notes that "large gaps in knowledge of the ultimate market by the producer are usually conducive to high profits in trade and to the relative deprivation of the producing country or class in relation to the consumers and the trader." This is true particularly when geographic and cultural distances between producers and consumers are great, and thus "the negotiation of the tension between knowledge and ignorance becomes itself a critical determinant in the flow of commodities" (41).

What Gangbe's case shows is that with continued exposure and interaction, cultural distances between producers and consumers may diminish over time. The musicians become increasingly expert, and more and more capable of understanding foreign audiences and making music that suits their tastes, depending on that audience's interest in a wide variety of ideological and technical factors. An interested and invested audience, too, will over time seek out or develop the consumption knowledge necessary to engage with the music that attracts them. As I quoted Dehopumon (France, 6/5/14) above, "when you make a house, and you put several doors in, people don't know which door to use to go in. You need a main door. To welcome people, and when they are settled now, they are used to the system, now we can add two or three doors. We are in this process." This is all to the benefit of music as communication, and reflects larger trends in "the sharing economy" which remove, work around, or redirect the traditional roles of the producer, the record executive, and other middlemen, agents, and corporations. But these new economies – the "gig economy" and the "sharing economy" - raise just as many questions

about the rights and protections of laborers within these networks. Gangbe's members have been divided about working with a non-profit, concerned about the financial sustainability of their enterprise even while they are pleased to have representation that gets them work.

Eyo'nle Brass Band: Rejoice on Earth

While Gangbe was transitioning to new management and preparing *Go Slow to Lagos* in 2014, another ensemble in Benin was starting to make their move. The Eyo'nle Brass Band, founded in 1998 in Porto Novo by trumpeter Mathieu Ahouandjinou (brother of Martial and Magloire), began as a *fanfare* that played locally for funerals, and gradually expanded to become a project that emphasized traditional rhythms, which the band's members felt that young people were neglecting in their preferences for foreign music (Mathieu Ahouandjinou, Porto Novo, 3/6/15).

Through a collaboration with the established French gypsy-folk band Les Ogres de Barback, Eyo'nle began traveling to Europe in 2008 and in 2014 joined Les Ogres on their 20th anniversary tour. After many years of performing together, the two groups developed a common repertoire that drew from both Beninois and French folk traditions and the wide ranging, multi-instrumental expertise of both ensembles' members. In 2014, Eyo'nle released their first album, *Africa Night*, which they recorded in one day at a studio in Paris. I followed Eyo'nle in 2015 during the brass band festival they host yearly in Porto Novo, and briefly during their 2016 tour in France.

Because of their close collaboration with Les Ogres, Eyo'nle took a different path from Gangbe. In part because of visa restrictions, but also because of personal and ideological commitments, Gangbe had always remained based in Africa, touring abroad for at most three months at a time. Eyo'nle, on the other hand, applied for residency in France to support longer

tours beyond the validity of a usual artist visa. The group's members spend approximately nine to ten months of the year on the road in Europe, and two to three months at home in Benin. Their 2014 tour with Les Ogres set them up with an expansive network of venues and local promoters that they utilize to self-manage their booking each year. Eyo'nle has never worked with a production company or a manager from outside the group. Sousaphonist Rock Ahouandjinou (Mathieu's brother) is in charge of the band's booking and logistical arrangements. Eyo'nle works extremely hard, often playing several weeks of one-night engagements stretching from France to Germany, Belgium, and Switzerland, with long drives in between. Their connections with festivals and promoters are close, personal, and longstanding.

Some Gangbe members maintained that staying in Europe for too long would create too much distance from Africa, and from the original objectives of their project. As Athanase Dehopumon (France 6/5/14) put it after some members of the group left to settle in Europe, “Leaving the group to stay in the West is not the solution. You have to build Africa somewhere, and you have to stay in Africa to build it.” But Eyo'nle's members fastidiously obeyed Europe's immigration laws, and succeeded in securing permanent residency, which opens many more opportunities for state support and freedom of movement.

Musically, Eyo'nle is a very different ensemble from Gangbe. Musical director and arranger Mathieu Ahouandjinou locates his influences more in the accessible harmonies of New Orleans “trad-jazz” and blues, than in the modern or avant-garde jazz traditions that inspired Sam Gnonlonfoun. Eyo'nle collaborations with French groups like Les Ogres have also left a lasting musical impression, most significantly in the Beninois group's intimacy and comfort with French popular song, and their experienced study of how to work a European audience. Rock Ahouandjinou (Porto Novo, 3/1/15) maintained that Eyo'nle's music is “more traditional” and

“more authentic” than Gangbe's, because of its links to the funeral tradition of *fanfare* bands in Benin, ironically, the sounds from which Gangbe originally wanted to distance themselves (cf. James Vodounnon, France, 6/5/14). Eyo'nle's name means “Rejoice on earth” in Yoruba. Rock explained that brass instruments are frequently played for occasions of mourning in Benin, as is the case in the *fanfare* tradition, and that Eyo'nle wanted to change this association by showing that brass instruments could also express joy. He made the association with traditional ritual contexts that channel this spirit of joy particularly well:

> In Africa, in Benin, especially in the [*vodun*] *couvents*, you have joy. When an adept comes into the *couvent*, it's joy. They dance, they celebrate. It's very animated... And for the coming-out, it's joy again, when you come out of the *couvent*, the day, the end of your ceremonies, it's another kind of joy, and different music... Because here, for an engagement ceremony, there is animation. For a baptism, there is animation. This is to explain that in our tradition, it's joy. And Eyo'nle tries to show that the sun, the sun of Africa, of Africa's culture, is in Benin. All the richness of Benin is in the culture. We don't have resources, nothing, but we have an immensely rich culture. (Porto Novo, 3/1/15)

One of the major differences between Eyo'nle's sound and Gangbe's is in Eyo'nle's continued use of bass drum and snare drum. Recall that Gangbe committed to using local percussion, using eclectic kits of adapted *kpezin* drums, along with calabash, bell, and hi-hat, as I wrote above. Eyo'nle's bass drum player Bonito Assogbah does occasionally play *kpawhle* and *gbon* talking drum, but more often the group grounds the diverse local rhythms in their repertoire entirely through the subtleties of Christian Ahouandjinou's snare drum grooves, which must capture the interlocking patterns of up to six different drum parts on different parts of the snare drum. The result is something resembling an undulating New Orleans second-line groove, sputtering and kicking, starting and restarting, never the same from one moment to the next. For their 2016 tour, Eyo'nle added calabash to their group with the young percussionist Laurence Ahouandjinou, the daughter of Gangbe trumpeter Magloire.

Where Gangbe took on the project of creating a *national* representation of Benin's music traditions abroad, Eyo'nle took the liberty of representing only themselves and the traditions they know from Porto Novo and the surrounding area. This includes the rhythms of Gun, Toffinou, and Nago-Yoruba cultures, as well as their modernized forms as they are performed at celebrations and in the Celeste church. The number of rhetorical positions available to them is thus significantly expanded, a benefit of arriving on the scene after Gangbe had paved the way.

Empreinte du Père

The specifically Porto Novian cultural context comes across particularly strongly on Eyo'nle's 2015 album *Empreinte du Père*, an homage to the Ahouandjinou brothers' father Henri, the national *gendarmerie* orchestra director who passed away in 2006. The album is distributed on the world music label Irfan, but was self-produced by Eyo'nle and recorded in one day in Cotonou with no overdubs. *Empreinte du Père*'s 16 tracks are filled with the sounds of Porto Novo's *fanfares*, churches, and popular rhythms. There are the rhythms of the Celeste church on "Caiman Blues" (Caiman was Henri's nickname), "Kpedo Na Hounto," and "Miwa Yisse," particularly the rhythm *ahwangbahun* ("war rhythm") which was revealed to the church's founder Samuel Oshoffa by divine revelation. The track "Oklounon" ("Lord God") is a Celeste liturgical song setting the Biblical story of Elijah praying for rain.[56] There are also several *kaka* tracks, including "Haladja" and the Yedenou Adjahoui song "Assevi," which recall close associations with the Toffinou people in the Oueme valley surrounding Porto Novo (Rock Ahouandjinou, France, 8/6/16). Other rhythms like *agban* and *efe* come specifically from the Torri and Toffinou villages surrounding Porto Novo, for example the renowned drum-making town of Adjarra. There are the usual highlife, *djegbe*, and *elezo* tracks, including "Do Re Mi," a

[56] See 1 Kings 18:41-19:8.

manifesto for making the economics of a musicianly life work (see chapter five).

While *Empreinte du Père* reveals a deep commitment to the local sounds of Eyo'nle's corner of Benin, the album also shows where they have traveled, tracing their eclectic trajectories through sound, the signs of connections, relationships, tactics, projects. “Cargos Blues,” a deep *masse gohun* track sung by lead vocalist and trombonist Jean Ahouandjinou, brings out the ternary feel of a slow blues in a tribute to the *cargos*, the heavily laden motorbikes that transport *gazoil* (low quality gasoline) throughout Benin and Nigeria. There are covers of two popular French songs on the album, “Le Temps ne Fait Rien a l'Affaire” by George Brassens and Serge Gainsbourg's “Le Poinconneur de Lilas,” the latter in Benin's traditional Adja rhythm *migan*. The band tips their hats to Fela Kuti, too, in their version of his song “Water Get No Enemy,” and to their French companions Les Ogres in the ska-highlife mashup, “Ces Tonnes des Gens.”

By 2015, Eyo'nle was able to benefit significantly from the ground broken by Gangbe, and from Les Ogres de Barback's touring network. This gave them access to a different kind of freedom to experiment with the traditions they felt closest to, from Porto Novian traditions to French popular song and North American trad-jazz and blues. As Rock Ahounandjinou (Porto Novo, 3/1/15) explained, the group also took very seriously some advice from his father Henri, shedding light on an additional meaning of the title of the album *Empreinte du Père* (Imprint of the Father):

> [Our father] told us, it's easy to come up, but it is difficult to stay. Because when you advance in Beninois traditional music, when you go out to the West, they will try to change it [*de la denaturer*]... Don't ever let them. No one should be touching our music. If the person came to look for you, it's because he likes it. And now he'll think that the audience you want to play for, that this audience doesn't like this music... If you have the chance to get out, play your music, try to make people understand it. When the person understands the music, it can pull them in, and afterwards, if they listen, listen regularly, they will end up liking it.

> Play your music, stay with your concept...
>
> The tradition, the culture, African Beninois music, that's your identity. When you go to play, they will say the lines [*courbes*] are strange. That's how we sing in the tradition. That's the line we sing in the *couvents*. Don't ever change it, because that is your wealth. When you do something else, you are exporting another culture, it's not your culture you are exporting in that moment. That's what Eyo'nle tries to do. And it was on this advice that we made our motto, "feet in the tradition, head in the modern." Whatever we do, we will have our feet *in the tradition*. We can use modern instruments, but you have to feel the tradition.[57]

By remaining independent, collaborating with supportive European musicians, and staying close to their foundational musical conception, Eyo'nle carved out a space for themselves to learn from the experience of Gangbe and other African musicians, and to keep producing their music the way they want to. This demands more labor of the group's members as they take on various roles of promoting and managing the band, but it pays them back in creative control.

Conclusions

In the 1990s and the decades that followed, Benin's international brass bands deployed a multitude of strategies and tactics based in their growing understanding of consumption practices in the West. With continued exposure to Western audiences and music business practices, they were able to use this production knowledge to "valorize" and market their country's distinctive musical history and culture as a strategic commodity, and to create more economic and intellectual space for their projects. Gangbe and Eyo'nle sought out ways to exercise their agency more freely, whether through keeping control over recording projects in post-production, working with management on an open book basis, increasing their interaction with audience members, or taking over management and production themselves. The musicians constantly used "tactics" in the territory of other, taking advantage of opportunities and changing circumstances to collaborate and exchange with European and Afro-diasporic musicians, to create larger

[57] See chapter three for more discussion of the local inflection of the terms *moderne* and *traditionel*.

markets, for themselves, their work, and their culture. As they continued these activities, they gained more agency and power and were able to be more "strategic" about their goals.

The careers of Gangbe and Eyo'nle grew out of the cultural renaissance in Benin in the 1990s following democratization and the liberalization of the economy, as I discussed in chapter three. In this period, Benin re-entered the world economy after the isolationism of the 1970s and '80s, and found that international power dynamics had changed radically. With the end of the Cold War, many African countries found they had to reconfigure conceptions of identity and value that had been derived from their place as territorial outposts in the war between the West and the Soviet bloc (Piot 2010). The new world order was a capitalist one, and value – including national value – derived from the production of new commodities, from new secondary products from manufacturing, to the commodified difference of ethnicity, religion, and culture (Comaroffs 2009, Taylor 2007). In this system, the value of a nation, a person, or a tradition hinged on having something to sell. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, Benin's brass bands participated in the national and international project of reconfiguring and revalorizing their country's traditions in order to establish a place for themselves, and a place for Benin, within a changed global world order (Ferguson 2002), which manifested itself, among other ways, in the changing dynamics of the world music industry. Gangbe's acquisition of production knowledge over time traces their ongoing renegotiation of the terms of these capitalist markets and their place within it.

Gangbe and Eyo'nle took the opportunity to inscribe into their international representations their experiences with ethnic and religious pluralism in Benin. They invite audiences to listen in on the contested, centuries-old histories of rival empires, slave trading, lesser-known music cultures like those of the Nago-Yoruba and the Toffinou, the confluence of vodun religious practice and independent African church liturgies – the histories of ancestors

very much alive (see chapter one). These musicians captured something of their own moment as well, coming out of the 1990s environment of cultural renewal in Benin. In this way they participate in the mobility and dispersion of Mbembe's second “Afropolitan” moment, as I discussed in chapter three. In albums like Gangbe's *Whendo*, they connect with networks of identity and solidarity across the West African coast and in the Americas. These networks spread out geographically and diasporically, and down and deeper into time. This works as a reminder that the diaspora seen from West Africa is always about ancestors departed, those family members separated by space, time, and the thin film between this world and the next. The 1990s was a unique moment in Benin's history which enabled a portion of its music community to listen retrospectively, to think aloud in brass, drums, and song about where the global forces of postcoloniality, socialism, and commodity capitalism had left their generation as artists and as world citizens.

Throughout their experiences working abroad, Gangbe and Eyo'nle adapted their strategies and tactics based on the audiences they encountered. Some of their songs imagined local Beninois audiences familiar with popular songs, rhythms, and histories, while others relied on a diasporic, cosmopolitan listenership making aesthetic, social, and embodied connections transnationally. Some compositions and arrangements were designed to reach multiple audiences at once. In the next chapter, I focus more closely on several Gangbe and Eyo'nle songs in order to better understand how their music functions as a tool for communication, and how its interpretation hinges on the development of particular kinds of knowledge about cultural production and consumption.

Chapter Five

Tomatoes and Onions: Style, Language, and Hidden Transcripts in Brass Band Compositions

> The concept of culture I espouse... is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun. I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. (Clifford Geertz 1973:5)

In this chapter, I explore the musical materials and methods that the Gangbe and Eyo'nle Brass Bands deploy in pursuit of their artistic and professional objectives. These objectives include communicating with multiple audiences in the West and in Africa, and paying tribute to Benin's music traditions and ancestral heritage by "modernizing" key styles and performing them at a high level. I argue that some of these entrepreneurial strategies, like the use of brass instrumental features, improvised solos, blues forms, and lyrics in French and English, constitute a "public transcript" legible (and audible) to a general, global audience; others, like the adaptation of rhythms with traditional spiritual and ethnic associations, and lyrics in Fon and Gun that confront practical material realities and power dynamics, form a coded, "hidden transcript" (Scott 1990). These public and hidden transcripts often coexist within a single song, and address power relations both internationally and locally. What is hidden and what is public are contingent on the overlapping and recombinant knowledges – the languages, styles, and aesthetic frames – available to individual listeners and segments of the bands' audiences. While over time Gangbe and Eyo'nle honed their production and consumption knowledge for greater success with international audiences, they also artfully advanced other agendas of representation and critique through their music at the same time. In the past I have analyzed Gangbe's "Segala" and "Porte du Non Retour" for their jazz references and diasporic connotations (Politz 2011). Here I extend these interpretive frames (Feld 1984) in order to bring out the details of the bands'

compositional practices, particularly in brass arrangements, song texts, and rhythmic adaptation. Attending to these compositional elements reveals a great deal about the bands' relationships to other musics like jazz, to traditional oral genres in Benin, and the results of their stylistic transformations for different groups of listeners. Their treatment of these styles, along with the tone of their lyrics, reveals much about their construction of the relative value of specific religious, class, and gender identities.

I begin with Gangbe's "Noubioto" (The Beggar) from *Whendo* (2006), exploring the band's adaptation of the Yoruba rhythm *gbon*, used for the *egungun* secret society in Ouidah, and the Gun lyrics' interrogation of the stereotype of Africans as beggars. Then I examine Eyo'nle's "Cargos Blues" from *Empreinte du Pere* (2015), focusing on French and Gun lyrics which explore diasporic connections between the blues and the rhythm of *masse gohun*. I also analyze one of Gangbe's blues pieces, "Fie Mi Djeyi" from *Go Slow to Lagos* (2015), and consider the anti-war composition's innovative use of the rhythm *djegbe* along with the album's models for social criticism and artistic independence. Lastly, I discuss two songs that reflect in Fon and Gun on the economic difficulties of providing for a family as a musician: Eyo'nle's "Do Re Mi" (2015) in *djegbe* style, and Gangbe's "Assidida" (2015), which adapts the rhythm *agbotchebou* for the *vodun* Sakpata.

Throughout my analyses, I work from an understanding of cultural interpretation in which social actors make meaning through assembling and reassembling the cultural materials available to them into systems of contextually oriented signs (sounds, events, styles,[58] movements, languages) which make connections with other signs in other contexts (see Geertz 1973, Silverstein 1993). These signs may rely on existing connections between contexts, or they

[58] Style: "a non-textual move or attitude," "a way of walking through a terrain" (de Certeau 1984:47).

may communicate, create, or embody new meaningful contextual relationships. This is true in the case of Gangbe and Eyo'nle's use of styles like *gbon*, *masse gohun*, *djegbe*, and *Sakpatahun* – and their choices of language registers – which point to other performance contexts with spiritual, ethnic, and diasporic connotations, or in other cases create and enact the relationships themselves.

"Noubioto" (The Beggar)

"Noubioto"'s hidden transcripts are multiple, each addressing a different kind of power dynamic, whether between French and African listeners, or between Fon and Gun, Toffinou, and Yoruba cultural histories. While the public transcript for the album *Whendo* and its supporting tours were primarily about the marketing of generic and exotic "*vodun*," and Benin's joyful reunion with the diaspora through jazz (see chapter four), its opening track's lyrics and rhythmic groove play with an alternative narrative revealing the plurality of traditions and tensions within Benin's cultural makeup and national identity, and the uneven terms of their engagement with the West. In her analysis of Art Blakey's relationship to the African diaspora, Ingrid Monson (2000:348) writes that music "remains a 'hidden transcript' in [James C.] Scott's sense, because (despite its public visibility) it takes an insider audience to map the indexical relationships among the sound patterns, the specific historical circumstances to which they respond, and their specifically black cultural and spiritual implications." The invitation to different audiences' interpretations, and even to the different possible interpretations for a single audience member, is a source of the enjoyment created by such multivalent compositions.

The track that opens Gangbe's album *Whendo* (2006), "Noubioto," sets the stage for the band's aesthetic project in this period of their career. It contains many invitations to the general music listener, including the stacked brass riffs that split, converge, and then set up melody with

rhythmic punches that catch the offbeats of the underlying groove. These riffs become familiar to the listener in their repeated variations (2:00). The lead vocalist outlines the verse twice, and the chorus responds in rich harmonies that could be heard in a Celeste church choir. The pulse is clear and danceable, with a distinctly perceptible downbeat, four beats to the measure, and four-bar melodic phrases. The group slips playfully into a brief section of hocketed onomotopeias and body percussion (*akonhun*) (2:21), an irresistible invitation to dance, before they transition into another iteration of the second brass riff, moving into the final section (2:44). Here the listener will recognize the names of various African countries in the vocal part as the trumpet solo (2:58) comes in behind, along with more horn backgrounds. The group ends together in a punchy, rhythmic unison. These aspects of the piece's sonic profile are widely accessible.

Knowledge of the Gun language opens more nuance in the piece's meaning, first of all in its lyric content. Martial Ahouandjinou, who created the Gun vocal melody and text, introduced "Noubioto" in French this way at a live performance in Dijon, France: "This piece is about those who have taken from Africa. It is about all of Africa, about giving Africa its due" (6/28/14). I translated the Gun lyrics with the assistance of Saturnin Tomeho.

Oje miton bo wa se xo de (x2)	Come out and listen to this story
Gbetole bo wa se xo de (x2)	Everybody, come out and listen to this story
Verse:	
Ye no do, do Africa vile no bio nu gbawu (x2)	They say that African people beg a lot
Amo, nubioto ma hu we de	But, the beggar has not sinned.
Chorus:	
A na mi nayi	You give me, I take.
A ka so te mi na do	You don't give me, I will tell.
Ajoto a na gble we do	The thief, you are the one doing wrong.
Final section:	
Africa vile na mi mo xolodo?	People of Africa, how do you see this story?

Le Benin, Senegal, le Congo, Liberia, le Togo, le Mali.

Martial directly addresses the "thieves" who he says are more to blame for Africa's problems

than its beggars (*noubioto*, "thing-ask-person"). In framing the song this way, he calls out global forces like Western economic imperialism, neo-colonialism, and the corruption of African leaders, which contribute to economic inequality, asking listeners to find fault with those who are stealing, not with those who are begging. Aside from speaking directly to the thieves, Martial also addresses Africans from all parts of the continent, asking how they ("*Africa vile*," children of Africa) understand these dynamics and bringing them into the conversation. As an opening track for *Whendo*, "Noubioto" sets up its frame, speaking to two different audiences, both to the "*ajoto*," thieves, and to the *Africa vile* – beggars and kings alike. It also sets the stage for the song and the album, with the opening invitation, "*miton bo wa se xo*," "come listen to this story," framing *Whendo* as an act of storytelling, a parable.

"Noubioto"'s use of the Yoruba rhythm *gbon*, a triplet-based feel peppered with enlivening talking drum chatter, accesses traditional religious and ancestral histories with links to folk theater. In Benin, *gbon* is played for ceremonies for the *egungun* ancestral spirits (known as *kuvito*, "the children of death," in Fon or *les revenants*, "ghosts," in French). The *egungun* link the living with the spiritual world of the *orisa* and the *vodun*. As the Nigerian ethnomusicologist Bode Omojola (2012:19 from Adedeji 1981) writes, the origins of *egungun* masquerade performance go back to 17th century Oyo under the king Alaafin Ogbolu. When the practice expanded beyond the palace, itinerant performers known as *alarinjo* developed, specializing in acrobatic dancing, masking, and *bata* drumming. In Yoruba culture, *egungun* masqueraders are known for their role as public critics of wrongdoing in the community (Veal 2000:130 from Adedeji 1967). Modern Yoruba theater groups adopted this performance tradition in the 20th century, weaving together traditional mythology, chants, songs, and storytelling. The Ghanaian ethnomusicologist and composer Akin Euba (2000:211-2) notes that "Yoruba folk opera"

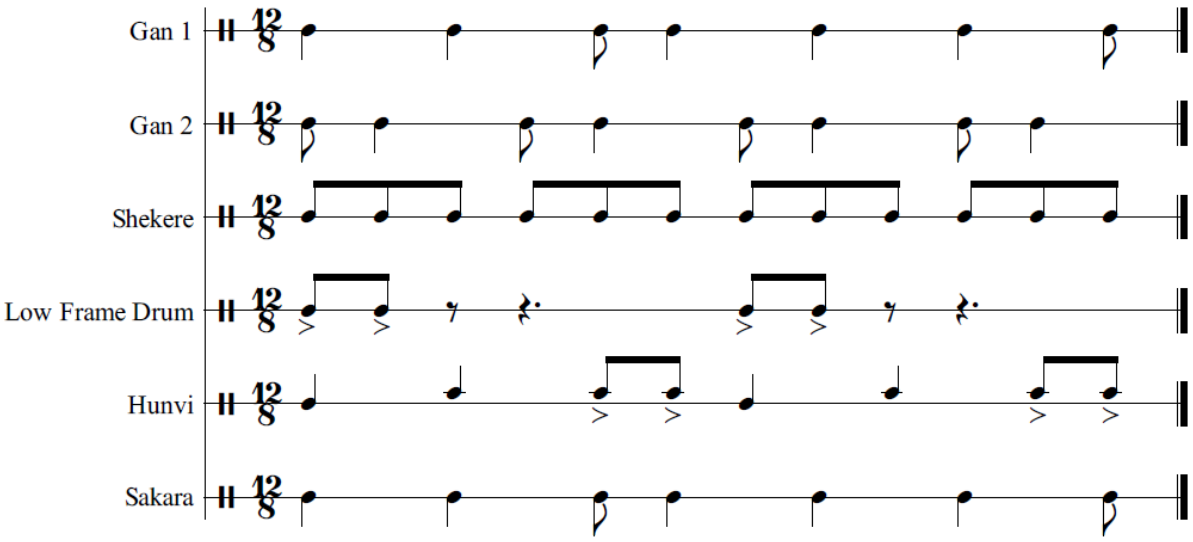
borrows some of its "techniques of theatrical production" from European stagecraft, and some of its musical styles from the "neo-African church" (the word for "show" or "play" in modern Fon is *kantata*, from "cantata"), while remaining rooted in Yoruba performance conventions. The form was first popularized by the playwright Hubert Ogunde in the late 1940s.

The presence of *egungun* ceremonies in Benin is tied to Danxome's histories of conquest and appropriation. Many Oyo practices, including *egungun*, came to Benin with Yoruba captives, including religious practitioners and drummers, during wars with the kingdom of Danxome in the 19th century (see chapter one). Art historian Joel Noret (2008:28) points out that the "Yoruba-ness" expressed in *egungun* practice in 20th century Dahomey-Benin grew in strength and unity as the power of the Fon monarchs fell to the French, constituting the resurgence of an ethnic minority suppressed under Danxomean rule. Early manifestations of *egungun* practice in Dahomey-Benin may have been associated with slavery, but as the tradition was reclaimed by new generations of Yoruba descendants, the stigma of slavery turned into nostalgia for a pre-slavery (and pre-colonial) past. Scholars such as Christopher Waterman (1990), J. Lorand Matory (2004), and J.D.Y Peel (2000) have noted the constructed and relatively recent production of Yoruba identity as an elision of historical ethnic diversity, creating a single identity tied to pan-African, diasporic solidarity and traditional masculinity. When Gangbe's members claim this late 20th and early 21st century Yoruba identity, they claim an identity that is already transnational, self-aware, and performative – a flexible, empowered way of being for young musicians in Benin with Yoruba family heritage.

In Benin, the *egungun* dance to the rhythm *gbon*, not *bata*, as they do in Nigeria. The ceremonies are governed by male secret societies, particularly in Ouidah and Porto Novo; Jean Gnonlonfoun (6/24/14, Brussels), who plays the *gbon* talking drum on "Noubioto," is an initiate.

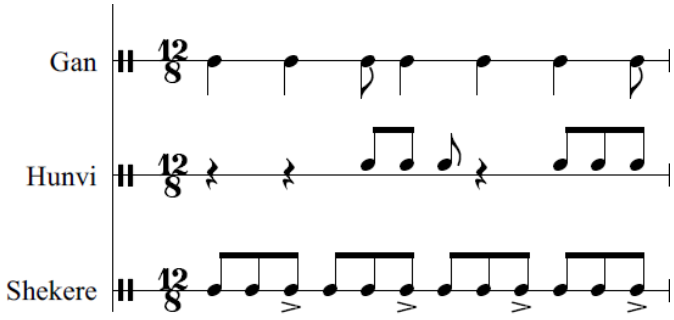
His family is Toffinou, among the original Yoruba-descended inhabitants of the lake region around modern day Cotonou (see chapters one and four). Jean explained that the style of *gbon* on this track is "already modernized, with some parts missing." Unpacking what Jean means by "modernized" requires several levels of analysis. He is primarily describing a process of genre transfer from the *traditionel* to the *moderne*, which means that Gangbe takes *gbon* as it is practiced in its ceremonial context, with several different bell and drum patterns, and prepares it for transition to the *moderne*, i.e. global popular styles of jazz and world music, by simplifying it and smoothing it out, preparing it for transport. This process also protects the ritual authenticity and spiritual power of the ceremonial style in all of its complexity and richness. Further complicating the matter, definitions of which *gbon* styles are "original" are contested, depending on the person's place of origin. Jean looks to Ouidah for his definition, because "Ouidah has everything, the same cults as Abomey, and all the cultures that the slaves brought before they left for the Americas" (1/17/15, Cotonou). He defines authenticity not through preservation, but through *connection*, most importantly with the diaspora. Jean introduced me to a group from Ouidah specializing in *gbon*, along with the Brazilian traditions of *bouriyan* and *palma*. Their *gbon* style used two curved metal bells, each playing a different pattern, a shekere (bead-covered gourd), a small, circular *sakara* frame drum, one medium hand drum *(hunvi),* a large square frame drum, and the *gbon* talking drum (9/10/14, Cotonou, figure 5).

Figure 5: *Gbon* pattern from Ouidah group



Gangbe creates the texture of *gbon* in "Noubioto" with four different percussion parts: the bell (*gan*) playing the standard pattern, the support drum (*hunvi*) playing a regular pattern, the shekere beaded gourd playing the triplet pattern I observed in the Ouidah group, and Jean on *gbon* playing improvised passages. Compared to the group from Ouidah, Gangbe does not use the second bell pattern, the *sakara* drum, or the lowest square frame drum, although Gangbe's *hunvi* captures in one part the essence of the Ouidah group's low frame drum and support drum patterns (figure 6).

Figure 6: Gangbe's *gbon* pattern



The result is a swinging, shuffling, triplet-feel that propels “Noubioto” forward; it connects its message to ancestral ritual practices in the context of a contemporary Beninois-Yoruba identity, while remaining flexible enough for the arrangement's jazz-swing feel to come through, and for outsiders to find the beat. From an insider perspective, *gbon* serves Gangbe's general project on *Whendo*, since it references a practice recognized in Benin (and by UNESCO) as proudly and counter-hegemonically traditional; the *egungun* have played a role in resisting the power of Fon royal lineages, and in resisting Christian missionization (Euba 2003). It connects Gangbe's project to the past through the ancestors, and thus to the diaspora and to jazz histories and trajectories, coming full circle. “Noubioto”'s “modernized” *gbon* groove allows Gangbe to represent the nation of Benin as pluralist, rooted in traditional religiosity, and connected to regional and transnational African identities, while making their performance, if not the full content of the cultural history, available to a broader audience.

The fact that the lyrics are in Gun rather than Yoruba or Fon locates “Noubioto” precisely in Martial Ahouandjinou's home of Porto Novo, while the *gbon* feel links it to the Toffinou-Yoruba heritage of Jean and his brother, arranger and trumpeter Sam Gnonlonfoun. Martial situates his style of critique deliberately within storytellinging framing conventions recalling traditional folk theater. He is authorized to call out the thieves and speak to the life of the beggars, bringing this “hidden transcript” to light for Gun speakers, because he does it within the context of a “story” (*xodoto*). This works as an analogy for *Whendo* (Roots) as an album, as well. Certain kinds of social commentary and truth telling are more permissible when presented in musical or metaphorical form, because the possibility, indeed the composers' careful preservation, of multiple interpretations means that they are not in danger of being held to a single political statement. Some audiences, after all, will not understand the semantic content of

the lyrics, nor the cultural and historical connotations of the *gbon* groove. Strategies of ambiguation serve another purpose here, in making the music accessible to multiple audiences, and expanded markets, depending on the interpretive frames available to them.

"Cargos Blues"

The third track on Eyo'nle Brass Band's album *Empreinte du Pere* (2015), "Cargos Blues," brings to the fore the bands' explicit representation of their place in the musical African diaspora. A true 12-bar blues, the song plays on European audiences' expectations of African and African American performance styles, all over a slow, 12/8 *masse gohun* groove. The vocal is delivered in French in trombonist and lead singer Jean Ahouandjinou's powerful, gravelly timbre, spread over his expansive range, and in melodic stylings more akin to B.B. King than Yedenou Adjahoui, the creator of *masse gohun*. Behind Jean, the backup vocals in Gun overlay sacred and secular black traditions in a gospel-inflected chorus, bringing back reminders of God's faithfulness in the midst of hardship, and suggesting that this spiritual connection was also part of the blues's core characteristics.

Lead (French): Le blues à l'origine	The blues at the beginning
était chanté comme ceci, écoutez:	Were sung like this, listen:
Backup (Gun): Je te ke mi gbon adousii gbon	Even if they talk about me left and right,
amion me, mile kpoto messiya si awa me	We are in the arms of the Lord God.
Lead: Nos ailleurs deportés étaient partis	Others of us deported left
avec ceci comme cela	With this or that
Backup: Je te ke mi gbon adousii gbon	Even if they talk about me left and right,
amion me, mile kpoto messiya si awa me	We are in the arms of the Lord God.
Lead: Le blues a suivi des transformations, est	The blues went through transformations, is
chanté comme ce que vous connaissez aujourd'hui	Sung as you know it today
Backup: Je te ke mi gbon adousii gbon	Even if they talk about me left and right,
amion me, mile kpoto messiya si awa me	We are in the arms of the Lord God.
Lead: Dans les plantations de cacao, du café,	On cocoa, coffee, and sugar cane plantations
et du canne a sucre.	
Backup: Je te ke mi gbon adousii gbon	Even if they talk about me left and right,
amion me, mile kpoto messiya si awa me	We are in the arms of the Lord God.
Lead: Le blues, le blues, le blues	The blues, the blues, the blues.

[Trumpet and trombone solos]	[Trumpet and trombone solos]
Lead: Le blues transmet l'histoire du passé,	The blues transmit the story of the past,
Les vieux le chantaient.	The old people used to sing it.
Backup: Je te ke mi gbon adousii gbon	Even if they talk about me left and right,
amion me, mile kpoto messiya si awa me	We are in the arms of the Lord God.
Lead: Ca s'appellait le blues chez nous	That was called the blues *chez nous*
C'est *masse*, c'est *gogohun*.	It's *masse*, it's *gogohun*.
Backup: Je te ke mi gbon adousii gbon	Even if they talk about me left and right,
amion me, mile kpoto messiya si awa me	We are in the arms of the Lord God.
Lead: Le blues, ah oui, j'aime le blues.	The blues, oh yes, I love the blues.

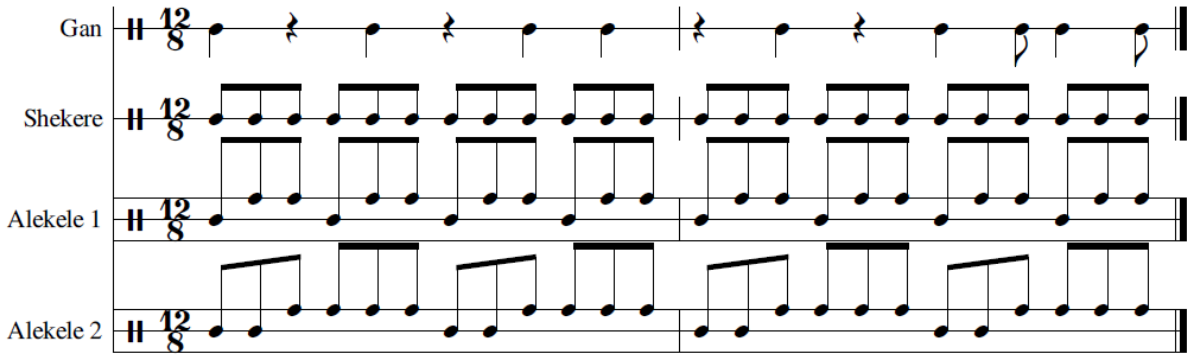
(Gun translated by Rock Ahouandjinou, 1/12/17; French translated by the author)

There are two slightly different takes on the same story going on in this song, one in French and one in Gun. The French lyrics bring Eyo'nle's diasporic vision, including connections to specific Beninois rhythmic styles like *masse* and *gogohun*, into the public sphere, and are accessible to Francophone audiences in Europe and in the diaspora. The Gun lyrics keep part of the transcript hidden from these audiences, particularly its sacred aspect. Each time the backup singers repeat the line, "*Je te ke mi gbon adoussi gbon amion me, mile kpoto messiya si awa me*," Jean Ahouandjinou picks it up and weaves it into his improvised response, leading into the next line of text in French. In doing this, he brings his blues lyricism together with the gospel chorus, showing their unity, the presence of the sacred in the history of the blues and the presence of the hidden transcript in the public.

Another aspect of "Cargos Blues" that escapes an audience of outsiders, despite its explicit mention in the lyrics, is the rhythm of *masse gohun*. As discussed in chapter three, this style was created by the beloved Porto Novian singer Yedenou Adjahoui in the 1970s, based on the ceremonial court style of *djegbe*. *Djegbe* originally used only two bells and the shekere to accompany vocalists, but Adjahoui added the small *alekele* drums, and borrowed the lead drum *kpezin* from the style of *zenli* to create *masse gohun*. Today there are many traditional ensembles devoted exclusively to *masse gohun*, whose slow and dignified triple feel is popular for life

ceremonies like funerals and weddings. Figure 7 shows the *masse gohun* groove of the group Djidjoho Nissou, led by Adjiton Hanbladji (1/17/15, Cotonou). Not shown here are the large, one-headed drum called *tumba* and a *gota* box drum, which support the lead drum *kpezin* as it improvises.

Figure 7: *Masse gohoun* groove from Cotonou group

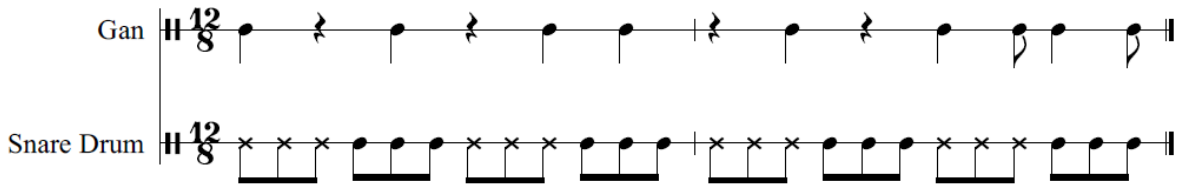


Masse gohun, along with *djegbe* and local highlife variations like *elezo* and *akpala*, are popular choices for Afro-Christian church worship music, particularly since they carry African traditional, rather than foreign, "modern" associations, and, crucially, because they do not carry any associations with *vodun* or *orisa* worship, which the new churches denounce (despite *djegbe*'s often forgotten court history) (Rock Ahouandjinou, 3/1/15, Porto Novo).

Eyo'nle represent their version of *masse gohun* using reduced instrumentation: a bell, a snare drum, and a bass drum. Unlike Gangbe, they do not use traditional instruments like the *kpezin*, but keep the military-style instrumentation common in Benin's *fanfares*. The bell (*gan*) lays out the characteristic long cycle for *masse*, which corresponds to two measures of the blues form in "Cargos Blues." The snare drummer Chretien Ahouandjinou plays a triplet pattern, alternating between the rim and the head of the drum, while the bass drummer Bonito Assogbah

plays the role of the lead drummer, improvising periodically behind the vocalist and using his left hand to manipulate the timbre of the drum, much in the way that a *kpawhle* drummer would with one hand and one stick. Figure 8 shows Eyo'nle's basic *masse* groove, with its characteristic bell pattern playing back and forth between triple and duple feels.

Figure 8: Eyo'nle's *masse gohoun* groove



That Eyo'nle would point to *masse gohun* as an antecedent or analog form of the blues is provocative.[59] For some musicians, *masse* represents something uniquely Beninois that other countries do not have; the jazz drummer Jean Adagbenon has modernized *masse gohun* into what he calls *mass-go*, in an effort to brand the style as Beninois (11/14/14, Cotonou). But the argument for the style's diasporic connections is complicated. Eyo'nle's international version of *masse* is dramatically reduced compared to its present-day expression in ensembles in Benin. *Masse* as such did not exist prior to its creation and popularization by Adjahoui in the 1970s, except in its predecessors like *djegbe*. But part of the argument that Eyo'nle lays out in the lyrics to "Cargos Blues" is that "*Le blues a suivi des transformations*," that is, it went through changes in the course of its diasporic journey, just as music in Africa has over time. In this sense, *masse gohun* is a lot like the blues – not only in its formal properties and slow triplet feel – but in its relationship to a pragmatic spirituality, and the music's ability to invoke this religious power, whether through Christianity or *vodun*, to overcome the worst of circumstances. The blues and

[59] Gerard Kubik's (1999) exhaustive study of the roots of the blues in Africa argues that many traditions throughout sub-Saharan Africa share close relationships with the blues, positing a point of origin in Senegambia.

masse gohun are all about transformations, the ongoing "modernization" of traditions, and changing bad situations for the better. Eyo'nle sees the blues as an example of what Beninois music can do as well, if it can adapt to changing conditions and make use of the strength of its traditions. Explicitly invoking blues references also allows the group to argue for their membership in the Afro-modernity of the diaspora.

According to Rock Ahouandjinou (8/6/16, France), the title of "Cargos Blues" is a reference to the *cargos*, the motorbikes heavily laden with plastic jugs of low-quality *gazoil* that criss-cross the coast of Benin, especially going back and forth to Nigeria, where oil is more plentiful. Considering that this region between Porto Novo and the Nigerian border is home to *masse gohun*, it makes sense that this blues would be that of the *cargos*. The reference ties the song into intra-regional networks of trade, linking cultural and material economy, which are themselves implicated in global networks of domination through Nigeria's oil politics. Given the song's topic, the title also reads as commentary on human "cargo" and the slave trade, implicitly drawing parallels between the exploitation of the past and the exploitation of contemporary globalization. These references to trade and domination are not immediately available to an outsider audience.

Compared to Gangbe's "Noubioto," or even more blues-oriented Gangbe tracks like "Segala" or "Fie Mi Djeyi" (see below), "Cargos Blues" makes more of its project explicit to outside listeners, placing stylistic clues in the French lyrics and making obvious stylistic blues and "trad-jazz" gestures in the introduction and solo calls. Since they arrived on the international scene later and benefited from Gangbe's trailblazing, Eyo'nle can afford to give up some of the strategies – like singing exclusively in African languages and using only indigenous drums – which their older compatriots used to curate their cultural difference and represent a more strictly

defined version of Benin's traditions. For Eyo'nle, the project is less about how to maintain, market, and valorize their collective difference as Beninois, and more about how to communicate their experience as individuals to different audiences by finding cultural common ground. The search for such common ground is only possible in an environment of relative safety, security, and economic and aesthetic freedom, which Eyo'nle fought for by managing and producing themselves, and by learning from Gangbe's example.

Still, Eyo'nle protects certain traditional religious aspects of their presentation for insiders in coming in and out of their local language. Like "Noubioto"'s hidden transcript of Yoruba ritual practices expressed through *gbon*, "Cargos Blues" keeps this aspect of spiritual experience protected in the Gun-language background vocals. Although Eyo'nle's spiritual language is Christian-oriented rather than *vodun*-oriented, it is still reserved through language for cultural insiders. Beninois musicians often perceive the French public to be overwhelmingly secular and unreceptive to spiritual messages, which would be another reason for them to keep this aspect of their narrative in the hidden transcript. The message hidden in the margins of the blues story is one of hope and solidarity: that no matter what happens, African people and their descendants will pull through; God did not fail their ancestors, nor will he fail them in the present.

"Fie Mi Djeyi" (Where Are We Going?)

Like Eyo'nle, Gangbe Brass Band also deals with blues materials in several of their compositions. I have written about "Segala" from *Whendo*, which nests the Oscar Peterson melody "Night Train" between verses of a popular song detailing Danxome's conquests (Politz 2011). Another of Gangbe's blues-oriented compositions is "Fie Mi Djeyi" (Where Are We Going?) from their 2015 album *Go Slow to Lagos*. After a short brass introduction, the song begins with vocalist and percussionist Crispin Kpitiki delivering his original song in Fon with the

simple accompaniment of two bells, forming the texture for the rhythm of *djegbe*. Midway through the track, the band goes into a blues section featuring a horn soli (like a jazz "shout") that then forms the background for a trombone solo.

Lead: Fie we mi je yi, mi je yi	Where are we going, we going,
Kpo awhan (togan, tukla) xo lokpo, je je je?	With all this war (leaders, problems)?
Chorus: Awhan na gba mi e we a,	Is war going to start
Gba mi so meyu tome? (x4)	Because we are an African country? (x4)
Lead: Awhan zo bo ya lo sukpo (rep)	War has added to people's misery. (rep)
Ma yon de nu lento kuku	Innocents are dying.
Xome vono to a xu be le	The poor are getting sick.
Xo e mi le mo bo do yeme	The places where we slept,
Xo e ne le ekpo we ye ka ta kpo keun	They totally destroyed them.
Chorus: Awhan na gba mi e we a,	Is war going to start
Gba mi so meyu tome? (x2)	Because we are an African country? (x2)
Lead: Yovo e sin awhan e wa e	What is this whites' war
De me lekpo e	That doesn't give us peace?
E sin ayiha vo ya	Does it give you peace?
Congo e sin awhan e waye ne	Congo's war,
Beme lekpo e, sin ayiha vo ya	There is no peace.
Bo kan se Togo e sin awhan e waye	Go ask about Togo's war.
Beme lekpo e, sin tu kan vo e	There is no peace.
Cote d'Ivoire we e sin awhan e way e	And Cote d'Ivoire's war.
Beme lekpo e, sin tu kan vo e	There is no peace.
Un kan se Libye, Libye e sin ahwan e way e ne	I ask about Libya, Libya's war.
Beme lekpo e, sin gbigo vo e	We have lost our life's breath.
Chefu de l'etat a dokpa nu to vile bo	Heads of state, you have made life difficult for the country's people.
Vlimu, vlimu, vlimu, agua go!	
Chorus: Ho vo ya!	Can't rest!
Awhan do a tome ho vo ya! (x2)	With war, you can't rest! (x2)
Hikpe hikpe!	
Misse mini mi	Hey, let's go!
Ete we do jijo kpo awhan kpo?	What are we doing with all this war?
[Trombone solo]	[Trombone solo]
Out chorus:	Out chorus:
Do je gan lon ji e a ee	The time has come
Awhan de ma na wa	When there will be no more war

Awhan de ma na wa	There will be no more war
Bo so na tohodo dogbe de (x2)	The guns will not fire. (x2)
Bo yokpo le na towezun kpei ye	The youth will not go running.
E sogbe	It's ready.
Gidigi kplia kplia	Let's go.
Mi gbe awhan ho	We reject war.
Medo file	Those who are here,
Mi do sise	Are you listening?

Like “Noubioto,” “Fie Mi Djeyi” calls out social ills and holds individuals responsible. Its audience is different, though, as its “we” (*mi*) is addressed to the residents and leaders of “*meyu tome*,” of Africa, in their fight against the “*yovo sin awhan*,” the “whites' war.” “Fie Mi Djeyi” draws its authority from the context created by *djegbe*, which places the song's critiques within a traditional ethical framework based in the style's dignified associations with court ritual. *Djegbe* is popular in contemporary sacred contexts, such as for Afro-Christian funerals and wakes, as I observed in performances and discussions with the traditional dance-drumming ensemble Wadugbe (10/5/14, Avrankou). The style gives “Fie Mi Djeyi” the authority of history and the presence of the spiritual, especially as it moves into its transcendent, gospel-inflected chorus at the end, imagining a time when there will be no more war.

Gangbe's trumpeter Athanase Dehopumon (6/5/14, France) said of the song:

> There is a piece we started working on that will be on the next album which we call 'Fie Mi Djeyi,' which denounces war, which denounces politicians who don't work to put an end to war – the different wars on the planet Earth. To begin with, it's a purely traditional rhythm [*djegbe*] on which you don't normally play any instruments, but we put some instruments on this rhythm. And we reduced the percussion that we could have added to this rhythm. There were many bells we could have played, but we reduced it and synthesized it to harmonize with the instruments. When we play this piece in particular – anyway, me in particular, I'm happy to play it because it is a very strong text, and it's an arrangement that is fluid and says something. So that's one reason why I say I think we're making progress.

The importance of *djegbe* for Athanase lies in its traditional “purity,” which he links to its ability

to communicate a message, to "say something." *Djegbe* resonates in this way for many Beninois who grew up in the Celeste Church around Porto Novo, as Athanase did.

Athanase's characterization of Martial Ahouandjinou's arrangement as "fluid" points to the solo section's innovative synthesis of the *djegbe* bell patterns with a chord progression that draws out the chromatic subtleties of a more complex blues form. Unlike Eyo'nle's "Cargos Blues," which placed explicit references to the blues and traditional jazz in the foreground, "Fie Mi Djeyi" plays with less obvious references to modern jazz, bebop, and progressive variations on blues forms. Martial's arrangement self-consciously places Gangbe in conversation within a modern jazz diaspora. "Fie Mi Djeyi" seeks to win space for the group with jazz communities and audiences, while staying linked to the underlying rhythmic structure of *djegbe*. The form is not easy for listeners unfamiliar with the rhythmic framework to follow; throughout the track the repeating four-beat pattern of the *djegbe* bells encourages listeners to feel a duple subdivision, giving the vocal sections a 3/2 feel with six large pulses, or three four-beat bell cycles, to each lead, chorus, or horn phrase. But in the solo section, the harmonic rhythm rests on a triple division of the 12/8 which the instrumental parts only imply at first, evading the listener. The *assan* shaker starts playing dotted quarter notes during the trombone solo, though, which emphasizes the harmonic rhythm (see figure). For a brass band to take on complex chord progressions is always challenging without a chordal instrument to lay out the harmony, but Martial's horn line clearly outlines the chromatic subtleties of the changes clearly and stylishly plays back and forth the duple and triple feels (figure 9).

Figure 9: “Fie Mi Djeyi” blues section

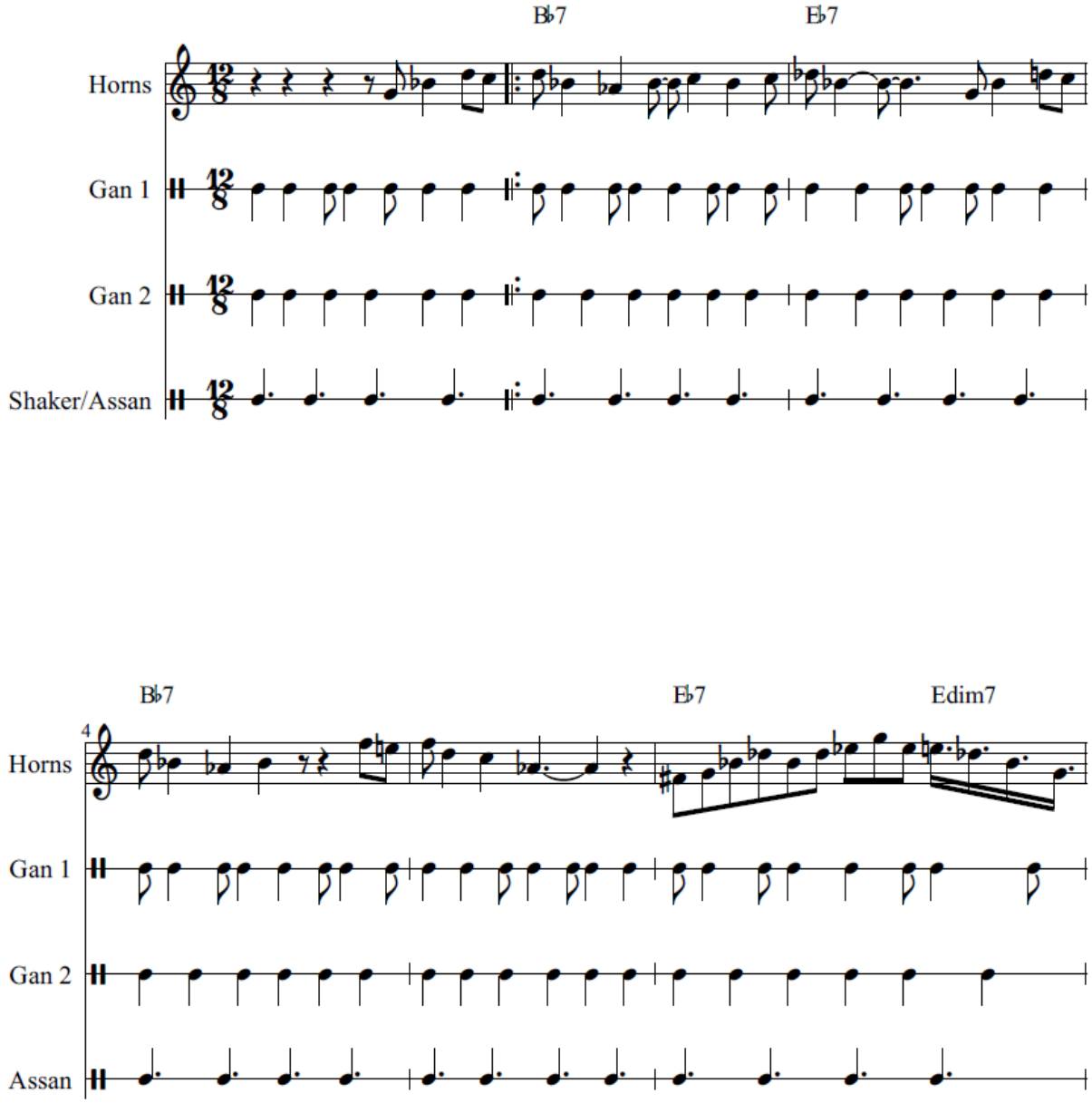
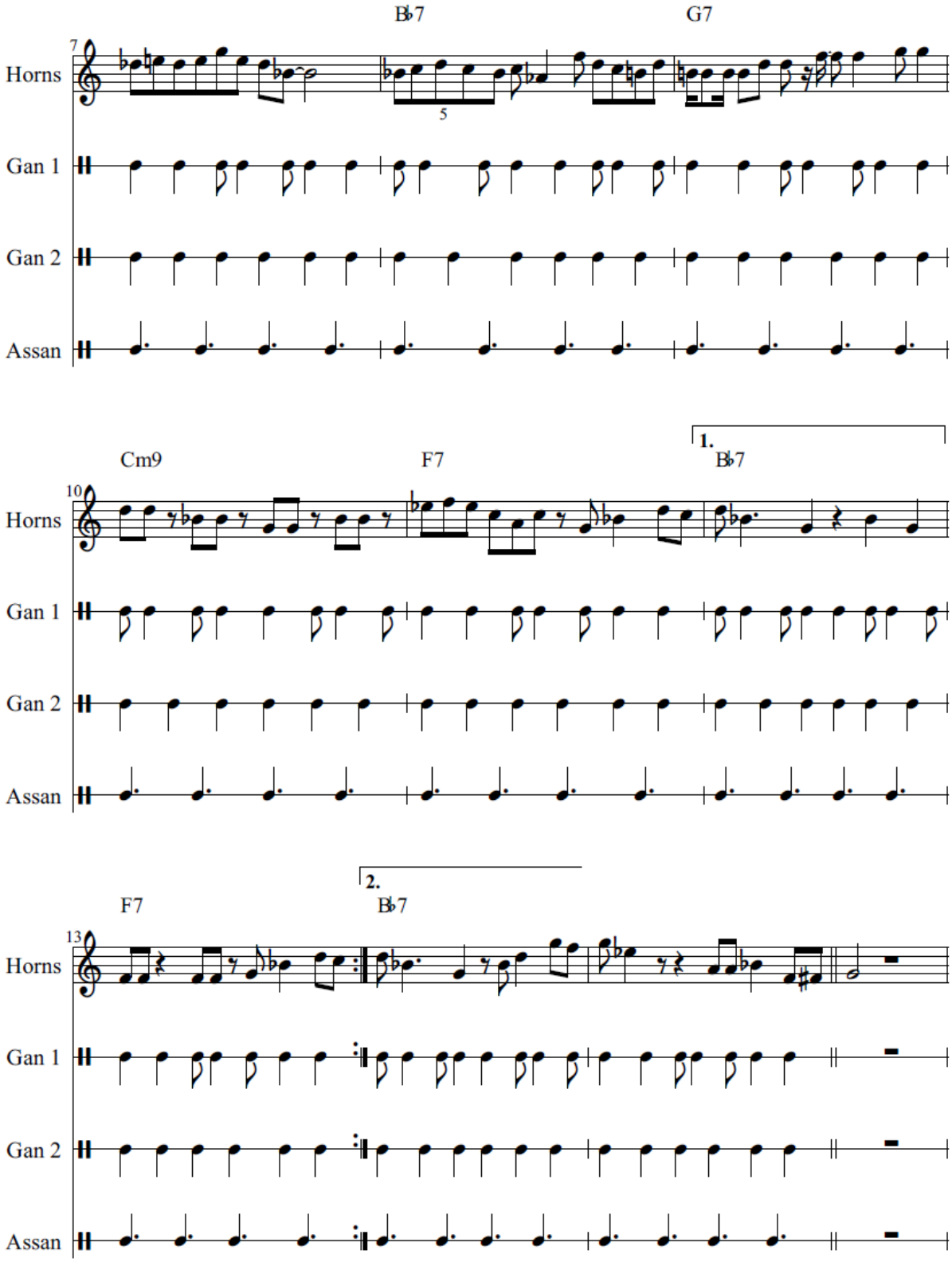


Figure 9 (page two)



By the time Gangbe recorded *Go Slow to Lagos* in 2014, they had already left Contre-jour and joined L'Afrique Dans Les Oreilles, renewing their commitment to their artistic independence. A track like “Fie Mi Djeyi” addresses an almost entirely insider audience, whether they are insiders to Fon language, *djegbe* rhythm, and its expressive history; or insiders to modernized blues forms, bebop, and virtuosic improvisation – two groups which do not commonly overlap. A general audience may appreciate Crispin's vocal virtuosity and the melodic contours of the horn lines, but the deeper cultural meanings are not available to them.

Seen more broadly, “Fie Mi Djeyi” participates in *Go Slow to Lagos*'s overarching ethos of aesthetic and political resistance. The public transcript of the album is primarily about Gangbe's admiration for Fela's legacy, and it invokes Fela's spirit in the Afrobeat sonorities of tracks like “Vrais Amis” and “Miziki.” This much is available to most audiences through listening to recordings and Gangbe's public interviews. Less immediately obvious to general audiences may be Fela's ideological presence in the album, expressed through Gangbe's renewed resistance to accommodating outside listeners, which echoes Fela's outspoken, anti-colonial militancy. His politics of resistance are certainly in play in the opening track of *Go Slow*: Gangbe's arrangement of Hubert Ogunde's political song “Yoruba Ronu” (Yorubas, think!) from his banned 1964 play, which lampooned the post-independence manipulations of the politicians in power. Michael Veal (2000:131) argues that Ogunde's critical satire was an important model for Fela's “abuse-singer” persona, and his rejection of praise singing for money, which he thought compromised his critical freedom. Gangbe looks to Fela as an example for his music, but also for what he represents for them as a modern defender of African culture and public conscience. In making this album, Gangbe denounces the demands of the market and turns their critical lens on Africa's leaders. In “Fie Mi Djeyi,” they present their anti-war, anti-colonial

message in a *djegbe*-jazz vehicle built for whoever cares to listen and engage with their music on its terms.

"Do Re Mi": Get Out of My Way, The *Fanfare* Is What Feeds Us

Eyo'nle reserves parts of their music for insider audiences, which they manage alongside their commitments to engaging with European audiences, as in "Cargos Blues." The insider-oriented components of their project are particularly clear on their track "Do Re Mi," a *djegbe* composition from *Empreinte du Pere*. The piece addresses local skeptics of their way of life by laying out an explicit argument in Gun for the viability of music as a profession, defined according to middle-class values of community, wealth, family, and Afro-Christianity. European culture and institutions are more supportive of professionalization in the arts than their Beninois counterparts; this, along with the song's language register, suggests that its argument addresses socially conservative Beninois listeners. The accompaniment is minimal, the two characteristic *djegbe* bell parts punctuated periodically by handclaps and onomotopeic vocal play. This style of *djegbe* is faster and more dance-oriented than Gangbe's on "Fie Mi Djeyi." Slow and fast *djegbe* versions are both deployed at funerals and other ceremonies depending on the moment in the liturgy (Rock Ahouandjinou, 8/4/16, France). "Do Re Mi" is the longest track on the album, at eight and a half minutes long, and covers a great deal of thematic ground.

Kini we	Are you ready?
Eya!	Let's go!
Kini we kini we	
Kini we ajota	
Lead: E dogbe nyen ma di gan gon kpali kpali	Lead: When it calls, I have to be there.
E dogbe nyen ma di gan gon wa	When it calls, I cannot say no.
Fanfa un dogbe un ma di gan gon agbele	When the fanfare calls, I have to be there.
Chorus: Uh huh, do re mi wa mi le	Chorus: Uh huh, *do re mi* is what we do.
Uh huh, la si do wa mi le	Uh huh, *la si do* is what we do.
Fanfa un dogbe ye ma si gan gon.	When the fanfare calls, I have to be there.

Lead: Nyegbe dogbe nyen ma si gan gon kpali kpali
E dogbe nyen ma di gan gon
Fanfa un dogbe un ma di gan gon agbele

Chorus: Uh huh, do re mi wa mi le
Uh huh, la si do wa mi le
Fanfa un dogbe ye ma si gan gon.

Lead: E dogbe nyen ma di gan gon kpali kpali
Mathieu Ahouandjinou wa dodo bo a de xo we, djegbe un do
Ye no do fanfa manyi azon kpali kpali
Nyen ka na do xo de de go

Egnon, e dogbe nyen ma di gan gon kpa muziki
Dogbe, nyen ma si gan gon tenye to me

Chorus: Uh huh, do re mi wa mi le
Uh huh, la si do wa mi le
Muziki un dogbe ye ma si gan gon.

Naysayer:
Ye do fanfun gbe we mi do
Chorus:
Lalo!
Naysayer:
Ye do muziki gbe azon we da.
Chorus:
Gbawu!
Naysayer:
Gbe mi na wa e xe bo na xen xwe
Chorus:
Gbawu!

Lead: Ah, mi gbe e we xo avo do go ce
Chorus: Ah, se wa kpon gbo
Lead: O un do un xo moto na mima
Chorus: Ah, se wa kpon gbo
Lead: Fanfa lo wa xo ayingban le na mina
Chorus: Ah, se wa kpon gbo
Lead: A ji me vi le do ble do xwegbe

Chorus: Ah, se wa kpon gbo

Lead: It just begins, and I know I have to be there.
It calls me.
When the fanfare calls, I have to be there.

Chorus: Uh huh, *do re mi* is what we do.
Uh huh, *la si do* is what we do.
When the fanfare calls me, I have to be there.

Lead: When it calls, I have to be there.
Mathieu Ahouandjinou, come listen to this story, I'm speaking *djegbe* [our language]
They say that the fanfare is not work.
I will say something about it.

So, when the music calls, I have to be in that place.

Chorus: Uh huh, *do re mi* is what we do.
Uh huh, *la si do* is what we do.
When the music calls me, I have to be there.

Naysayer:
They say the fanfare is a band of fools.
Chorus:
False!
Naysayer:
They say this music life is an illness.
Chorus:
False!
Naysayer:
That our life cannot support a family.
Chorus:
False!

Lead: Ah, but we say this is what clothes me.
Chorus: Ah, come and see.
Lead: Ah, I bought my own car.
Chorus: Ah, come and see. [hand claps enter]
Lead: The fanfare bought me land.
Chorus: Ah, come and see.
Lead: You will see the kids doing well at home.
Chorus: Ah, come and see.

Chorus: Uh huh, do re mi wa mi le	Chorus: Uh huh, *do re mi* is what we do.
Uh huh, la si do wa mi le	Uh huh, *la si do* is what we do.
Fanfa un dogbe ye ma si gan gon.	When the fanfare calls me, I have to be there.
[Onomotopeias]	[Onomotopeias]
(in Torri)	(in Torri)
Ago se na fanfare jen bie xo do dunu	Get out of my way, the fanfare is what feeds us
Lead: O hagbe avo ni yo tchon	Lead: This is the cloth [*avo*] you cover yourself with.
Hagbele avo we e nu do no gbeto nugbo nugbo	Brothers, you need clothes from somewhere.
Do ji jon wa gbe na wa a,	In joyful times,
Chorus: Hagbe avo ye no tchon	Chorus: Brothers put on the cloth.
Lead: O vi egbe gbe ga wa na we	Lead: When a child is born,
Chorus: Hagbe avo ye no tchon nagbeton	Chorus: We cover him in our traditional cloth.
Lead: To ma o ji jo we gbe na we	Lead: Your friends are the cloth you cover yourself with.
Chorus: Hagbe avo ye no tchon	You put on the cloth.
Lead: Ma do no gbe ga wa gbe na we	When you have a good life,
Chorus: Hagbe avo y no tchon agbe ton	You put on the cloth.
Lead: Mathieu o ji jo wa gbe na we a	Mathieu, your friends are the cloth you cover yourself with.
Chorus: Hagbe avo y no tchon	You put on the cloth.
Lead: Jean Gratien, o ji jo we gbe na we	Jean Gratien, your friends are the cloth you cover yourself with.
Chorus: Hagbe avo y no tchon nagbeton	You put on the cloth.
Lead: Asi lo o ji jo we gbe na we a	My wife, your friends are the cloth you cover yourself with.
Chorus: Hagbe avo y no tchon	You put on the cloth.
Lead: Alikaliste oji jo wa gbe na we a	Alikaliste, your friends are the cloth you cover yourself with.
Lead: Egnon, o han no do gigo nu gbeto	Lead: So the group gives people honor [*gigo*]
Chorus: O han na do	Chorus: We give thanks.
Lead: O gbe we no do gigo na gbeto	Lead: Friends give people honor.
Chorus: O han na do	Chorus: We give thanks.
Helele kpe no do gigo	My friends give me honor.
Helele kpe no do gigo na gbeto	Friends give people honor.
O han na do	We give thanks.
Lead: Enyon, o gbe no gigo na gbeto eya	So, we give people honor.
Chorus: O han na do	Chorus: We give thanks.
Lead: Simon do gigo na gbeto ee	Lead: Simon said friends give people honor.
Chorus: O han na do (x2)	Chorus: We give thanks.
Helele kpe no do gigo	Friends give people honor.

O han na do	We give thanks.
Lead: Eyo'nle kpe no do gigo na gbeto. Chorus: O han na do (rep)	Lead: Eyo'nle gives people honor. Chorus: We give thanks. [hand claps reenter]
[Onomotopeias] (in Torri) Ago se na fanfare jen bie xo do dunu	[Onomotopeias] Get out of my way, the fanfare is what feeds us
Lead: E dogbe bleo kpe se we me mi na yi xwe Hagbe bleo kpe je we Cyprien, ma kpe se mi na yi xwe Christophe, ma bleo kpe se we Ahouandjinou muchachos, bleo kpe se we Mi na yi xwe	They say we will go home peacefully. Brothers, go home peacefully. Cyprien, we will go home peacefully. Christophe, it's in peace. Ahouandjinou brothers, go peacefully.
Jesu do hun we Chorus: Bleo kpe se Bleo kpe se mi na yi xwe (continues) Lead: Jesu we du baba mi de Aklunon to nu we ya O gigonon Jesu we du baba mi de (x2) Simon Jesu do xu e wema	The blood of Jesus Peacefully Peacefully we'll go home. Jesus and our Father Almighty Lord All powerful Jesus Simon, Jesus is in you.
Wen do mi bo doto Tovole no ya yoni ami kpe Egnon, mi bo a se xo bo Tovole no ya yoni ami kpe	So listen Everyone Come and listen Everyone
Jesu (Meklunon) lwa ho lu Asi e do te bo mi mo an Hagbele o ku ma deme Ete o sin avo si sa xo we mi mo a Gigo no Jesu we biou wan tche me Chorus: Bleo kpe se mi na yi xwe (rep)	Jesus (the Lord) is great Brothers, there is no death. Why would you worry, you see, The strength of the Lord Jesus is with us. And we'll go home peacefully.

Eyo'nle lays this text out over the texture of *djegbe* style, invoking the respectable court and independent church associations mentioned previously. There are notably no brass instruments on the track, which is unusual for Eyo'nle; on “Do Re Mi,” they lay down their horns to pass an important message and to focus on showing how strong their rhythmic roots are.

Eyo'nle makes the argument for the professionalization of their art through traditional

definitions of success, particularly through the image of the *avo*, the ceremonial wrap or cloth which people don in moments of celebration to show their status. The lyrics make the case for the *fanfare* itself as an *avo*, a *pagne* or wrap that covers a person, honoring him and showing his status. This outlines a concept of wealth based in the *fanfare* as an association that defines a person's community and his identity as a successful member of society. Although the wealth of this association may be immaterial, the group also points to the material successes that their work has afforded them, allowing them to buy cars and land, and to care for their families. Eyo'nle thus seeks to extend traditionally rooted, middle class status – itself constructed through colonial histories, as I wrote in chapter two – to the brass band tradition in Benin. They defend their artistic practice against critics who associate their work with *vodun* or witchcraft by declaring their faith in Jesus Christ, and against those who argue that music is not a real job by outlining its material benefits for the welfare of their families, lyrically arguing for their membership in a prosperous, respectable Christian *evolue* class by accepting its standards for legitimacy. For those who are skeptical of brass bands because they represent foreign influence, Eyo'nle argues lyrically and sonically for their place within the tradition as a community of individuals seeking livelihood: through the imagery of *avo* (the traditional cloth) and *gigo* (the honor, weight, or greatness of a person), and through a *djegbe* texture that places the song within a village context outside of Porto Novo. They assert in Torri language, *Ago se na fanfare jen bie xo do dunu*, “Get out of my way, the fanfare is what feeds us” (lit. what buys us food).

Eyo'nle's arguments about materiality speak to the definitions and expectations of professional success in Benin, which Gangbe's Athanase Dehopumon (6/5/14, France) observed:

> ...The local audience, the Beninois audience likes the group, too, it's just... The status that our group has, people think that we are not well housed. In principle, Gangbe with its status, should have a big place, big vehicles, big planes, private jet, and everything. But that's not our primary objective. You have to build a

> career first. In Benin, people don't have this idea. What can you build in your career? People don't know. For them, you make music, and people enjoy it, and it stops there. To build a career.
>
> Imagine that when you make music, you bring it to the market. It generates money, and in the money it generates you have to guarantee at least an insurance for retirement, a guarantee to be able to travel each year to sell this music, to participate in festivals, and everything. So we are in this logic, always about the next day, preparing our retirement, putting in place an infrastructure that can welcome or house Gangbe, in order to say, this is the space for Gangbe Brass Band. For that, we have to keep working, have partners who support us, who come to help put these infrastructures in place. So that's why I say that the Western audience enjoys and always asks for more, and the Beninois audience is unsatisfied. They are waiting to see us sitting in a big house to see *things*. But we are hoping to get there one day.

The Beninois audience in Athanase's telling may seem overly influenced by the individualism and materialism of the "prosperity gospel" that is widespread across evangelical and independent Christian churches, and in new *vodun* communities in Benin (see chapters two and three). But they are also pragmatically observing the economic realities and global dynamics of the exchange. These bands perfect and polish their performances to a high level, and travel abroad to represent Benin and its music traditions, but business conditions are such that their product does not yield the value that audiences at home think that it should have. European audiences, according to Athanase, are content to consume and enjoy the bands' products and performances, while Beninois audiences do not recognize the endeavor as successful unless it accumulates visible wealth.

"Do Re Mi" reveals much about Eyo'nle's economic and artistic orientation, and local audiences' expectations. A Western audience would understand very little of its message or stylistic orientation, although they might appreciate the onomotopeias for their cultural difference and rhythmic complexity. As a counterbalance to this insiderness, on *Empreinte du Pere* "Do Re Mi" comes immediately after "African Brass Music," a bright, brassy highlife

composition by Rock Ahouandjinou. In contrast with “Do Re Mi,” “African Brass Music” is the most externally oriented of Eyo'nle's recorded pieces, and presents a simplified version of their mission in English to international audiences, a public transcript for the insider narrative outlined elsewhere:

We come from Africa, we are going far.
Please join for the nations with African brass music.
Please join for the nations with Eyo'nle brass music.

“African Brass Music” is set in an upbeat, generic highlife feel (*elezo* in Benin's terminology), further emphasizing its outward looking invitations to familiarity. Eyo'nle performs “African Brass Music” on their live set in Europe, often as an opening or closing piece. On the other hand, I have never seen them perform “Do Re Mi” live. The status of its wider reception is unclear, but all of the Beninois listeners I played it for found its arguments convincing and understood why they were necessary.

“Do Re Mi” responds to oppositional local discourse on the viability of musical professionalization and livelihood with arguments that root Eyo'nle's creative project in traditional conceptions of wealth, personhood, family, and Afro-Christian faith, and with sound and style cues that legitimize their expressions within a respectable register of spirituality and history. In summoning these cultural materials to convey their message, Eyo'nle demonstrate their fluency not just in deploying stylistic and linguistic references to point along existing lines of signification to other contexts, but in creating new relationships between styles and contexts in ways that signify artfully and reflexively.

“Assidida” (Getting Married)

Gangbe also addresses the challenges of making a living in their song “Assidida,” the second track on *Go Slow to Lagos*. The public transcript of the song is summed up in the album's

liner notes, which provide phonetic transcriptions of each song's lyrics and short summaries (not line-by-line translations) in French and English. The summary provided for “Assidida” places the meaning in a positive light: “The hardest thing is not to marry but to make every effort to feed one's family and ensure one's couple stays strong and lasts long.” A closer look at the lyrics in Fon, created by percussionist and lead singer Crispin Kpitiki, reveals commentary on the difficulties of domestic economics, along with implicit satire on the transactional quality of married life.

Chorus: Assidida man nyi hode	Getting married is not the problem
Nusonu sin we ve akwe (x2)	Putting food [lit. sauce] on the table is expensive.
Ve akwe e nusonu sin ve akwe (x2)	Expensive it is, food is expensive.
Assidida man gni hode	Getting married is not the problem
Nusonu sin we ve akwe	Putting food on the table is expensive.
Lead: Tu vas donner l'argent, matin, midi, soir.	You will give money, morning, noon, and night.
Vi na je awutu na we	Your child will get sick.
Asi na je awutu na we	Your wife will get sick.
Ene lekpo akwe we!	All that is money!
A mon non wa nude e	If you don't work,
Fie a na hin akwe lo son?	Where will you get money from?
Hagbe wiwe dewe	Brothers, do not worry.
Ani donon lin nu kpon (x2)	Don't be preoccupied.
Akwe non to akwe dogo	Money brings more money,
Hin to non fon to hinje	And power brings more power.
A na xo togbe na yao	You will buy the bride earrings
Bo na xo lessi na yao	And you will buy the bride clothes.
Bo na xo slipu na yao	You will buy the bride lingerie
Bo na xo bazin	And you will buy the bride waxcloth.
Nu na jo to asi non we	There will be needs in your father-in-law's house.
Bo na jo no asi non we	And there will be needs in your mother-in-law's house.
Ene lekpo akwe we	All of that is money.
A mon non wa nude e	If you don't work,
Fie a na hin akwe lo son?	Where will you get money from?

[Shift to *Sakpatahun* rhythm]	[Shift to *Sakpatahun* rhythm]
Togbe yao ton lo (ze wa)	The bride's earrings (bring it)
Afokpa yao ton lo (ze wa)	Bride's shoes
Soutien yao ton	Bride's brassiere
Togbe yao ton lo (ze wa)	The bride's earrings (bring it)
Atcho oke yao ton lo	Bride's purse
Tchigan yao ton	Bride's gowns
Togbe yao ton lo	Bride's earring
Awu yao ton lo	Bride's clothes
Afokpa yao ton	Bride's shoes
Kpivi yao ton lo	Bride's suitcase
Alo gan yao ton	Bride's ring
Chai ni yao ton	Bride's necklace
[Back to *agbotchebou/adanhun* rhythm]	[Back to *agbotchebou/adanhun* rhythm]
Chorus: Ve akwe e nusonu sin ve akwe (x2)	Expensive it is, food is expensive.
Assidida man gni hode	Getting married is not the problem
Nusonu sin we ve akwe	Putting food on the table is expensive.

Crisipin's text complains, on the one hand, of the pressures placed on breadwinners, but it also engages in male solidarity as the singer reassures his brothers that "Money brings money," and "Power brings power." He lists the numerous things that wives demand of their husbands, as if they expect them to continue making traditional dowry payments even after they are married. Women in Benin often respond to fluctuating income streams from their husbands by tightly controlling other aspects of their relationships, including sexual activity, childbearing, and family obligations, especially when it concerns polygamy, a common practice in Benin. The laughing and teasing reactions I observed during rehearsals of "Assidida" reflected an appreciation of the irony and humor of the text, especially of the section in which the chorus issues multiple, commanding responses of "*Ze wa*," or "Bring it" (Cotonou, 11/19/14).

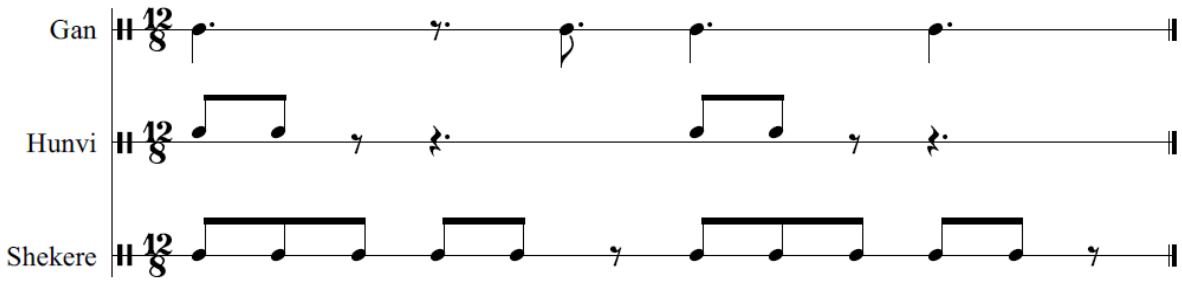
The more superficial elements of this topic, like providing for one's family, are accessible to a general audience. The song's one line in French, "*Tu vas donner l'argent, matin, midi, soir*," could read in many ways for a Francophone audience, including an interpretation in which the

audience is the addressee: that *they* are the ones to be giving the money. But for Fon speakers, the song references deeper ambivalences and culturally situated, gendered power relationships, which take on additional meaning given Gangbe's experience in the global music market. This text sits at the intersection of international and domestic economic concerns. “Assidida” shows that under globalization, changes in the world economy impact livelihood at what would once have been considered the global periphery, and that such impacts extend to the strain placed on social structures, including gender and family. The song deals with these impacts through humor and reminders of bonds of solidarity between income providers. As a whole, the song takes family responsibilities seriously, but points out that the pressures to provide come from all directions, including from their wives' extended families, and the transactional material expectations they have for their son-in-laws. The target of “Assidida”'s critique is less the demands of their wives and families in particular, and more the economic structures surrounding traditional marriage. Part of their critique is also directed at the rising cost of living, which in Beninois public discourse is often linked to the inequalities of postcolonial international trade relationships.

“Assidida” breaks new ground stylistically for Gangbe. It is the first time the group recorded a track in the style of *agbotchebou*, a rhythm which is used in ceremonies for Sakpata, the *vodun* of the earth and of smallpox. Athanase Dehopumon (Cotonou, 11/12/14) noted that it is the first time that the group used “*superpositions*,” as he called them, a reference to the arrangement's transitions between *agbotchebou* and a related rhythm, *Sakpatahun* (“drum or rhythm for Sakpata.”) Gangbe's arrangements in the past have stayed with one rhythm per song, but “Assidida” is the first to move from one to another. The most dramatic of these transitions takes place at 3:06 as the horns enter a section with new harmonic material.

Agbotchebou and *Sakpatahun* situate "Assidida"'s satirical standpoint on traditional marriage and domestic economy within a context of place, social class, and religion: a village, Abomean *vodun* context. Of the styles Gangbe adapted in the past, *agbotchebou* is the most closely associated with current *vodun* practice, and it was only beginning to be popularized at the time Gangbe was recording *Go Slow.* This follows the pattern of several other rhythms which have moved from the sacred to the *populaire* since the 1970s, such as *zenli* and *kaka*, as I discussed in chapter three. *Agbotchebou* is now commonly performed at wakes and funerals, especially those going late into the night. Sometimes sacrifices are still performed for Sakpata before an *agbotchebou* performance (Abomey, 3/21/15). See chapter one for more detailed information on the history of the *vodun* Sakpata.The sounds of *agbotchebou* and *Sakpatahun* link "Assidida" to a traditional authenticity associated with *vodun* practice. But it is difficult to determine Gangbe's attitude toward this traditional village religious context, especially given the satirical nature of the song's lyrics. Gangbe's use of the rhythms in "Assidida" transforms them significantly in comparison to their performance in religious ceremonies as I observed them in Abomey. For example, the rhythm that Athanase calls *agbotchebou* more closely resembles another rhythm played for Sakpata ceremonies called *adanhun*, especially in its bell (*gan*) pattern and support drum (*hunvi*) patterns. Figure 10 shows the primary rhythmic matrix at the beginning of "Assidida," which falls into place during the brass introduction starting at 0:15. I have not included the lead drum (in this case *kpawhle*) improvised phrases and calls here becausethey mostly align with and respond to the vocal phrases.

Figure 10: "*Agbotchebou*" groove from Gangbe's "Assidida"



When the chorus enters at 1:11, the support drum (*hunvi*) shifts its phrasing to the upbeats (figure 11).

Figure 11: Second section groove on "Assidida"

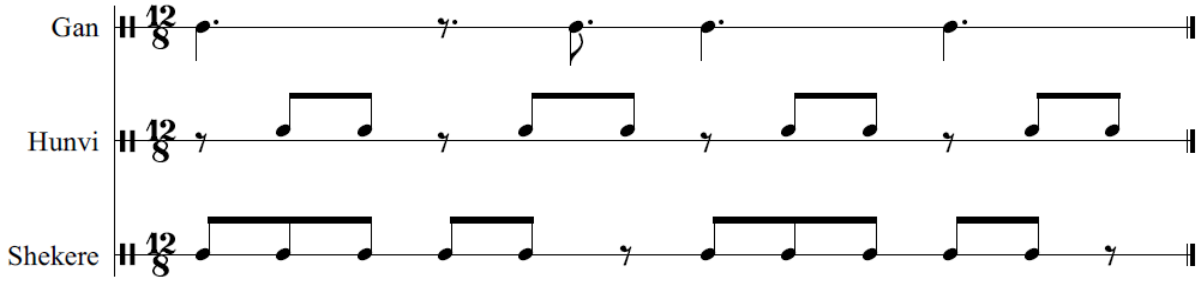
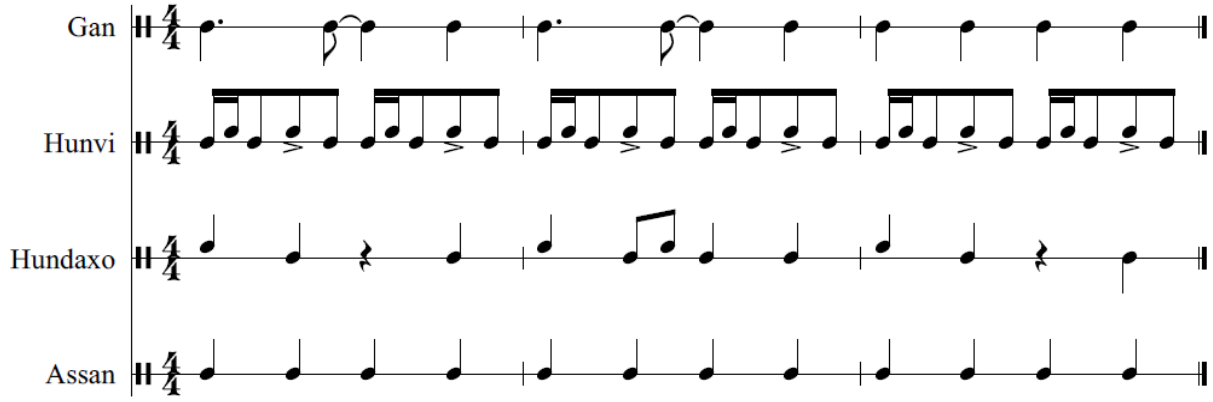


Figure 12 shows the typical groove for *adanhun* as I heard it in Abomey, which, of the rhythms for Sakpata, is most similar to Gangbe's opening texture. I include a typical lead drum (*hundaxo*) pattern here.

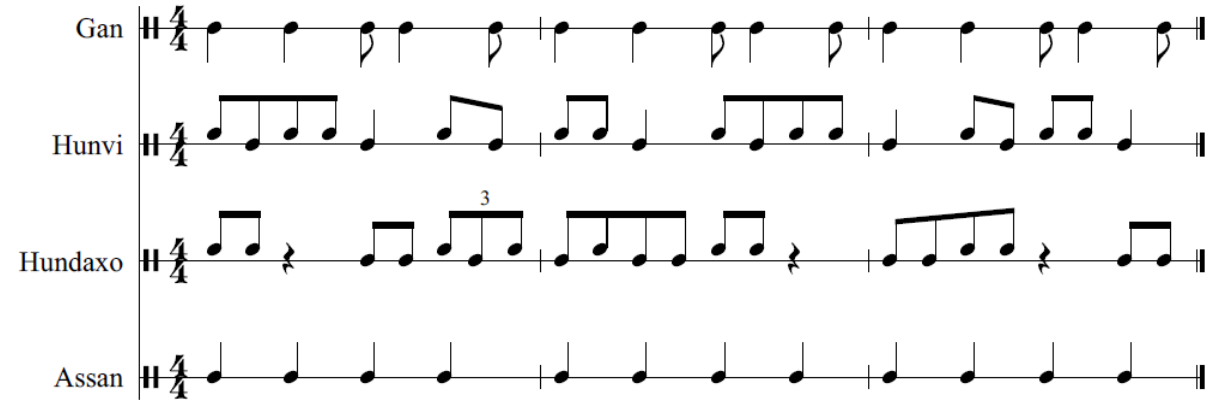
Figure 12: *Adanhun* groove from Abomey



The biggest difference between Figure 12 and Figure 11 it is that Gangbe's is a one measure cycle, while the *adanhun* from Abomey takes three measures for the *hunvi* and the *gan* to come around and line up. While the bell patterns are comparable, Gangbe's groove uses a triple subdivision, while the *adanhun* from Abomey works with a duple feel.

Compare the feel on "Assidida" to the *agbotchebou* used in ceremonial contexts (Figure 13), which is significantly different from Gangbe's groove:

Figure 13: *Agbotchebou* for *vodun* rituals in Abomey



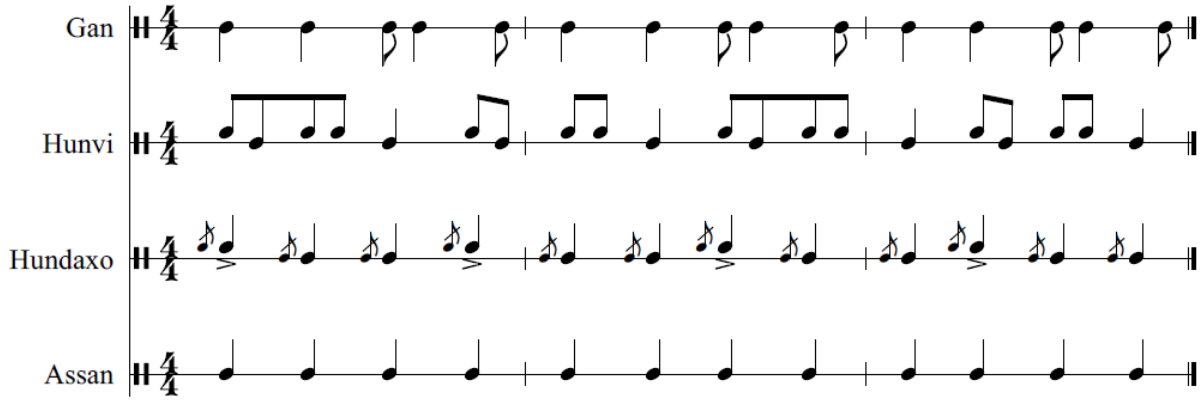
This is also a three measure pattern, with a different *gan* pattern than Gangbe's groove. If Gangbe's opening texture makes reference to a rhythm for Sakpata, I suggest that it is an

adanhun adapted to triple feel, and not *agbotchebou*.

As Sakpata priest and drummer Etienne Mechonou teaches, there are five rhythms that are played for Sakpata ceremonies: *Legbahun* (for Legba, the trickster and *vodun* of the crossroads), *agbotchebou*, *bossuhun* (a slow rhythm sometimes linked to *bossa nova* in the Americas), the quick and driving *Sakpatahun*, and lastly *adanhun*, the "*tam-tam de fureur*," or "drum of rage" that marks the arrival of the *vodun* spirits when they possess their followers in dance. A ceremony for new Sakpata initiates typically lasts several days. *Legbahun* always opens the ceremonies each day to make sure that Legba does not cause any mischief during the proceedings; *agbotchebou* is played late at night, and *bossuhun* as dawn begins to break. *Sakpatahun* and *adanhun* are played only on certain nights when the new initiates come out to dance. During a given evening ceremony of several hours, one would hear *Legbahun*, *Sakpatahun*, and *adanhun*. The late night ceremonies with *agbotchebou* are not open to the uninitiated (Mechonou, 5/28/13, Abomey).

Figure 14 shows how *Sakpatahun* would be played for a ceremony in Abomey. This also matches the version of the rhythm I heard played in Ouidah during the Fete de Vodun (1/10/15).

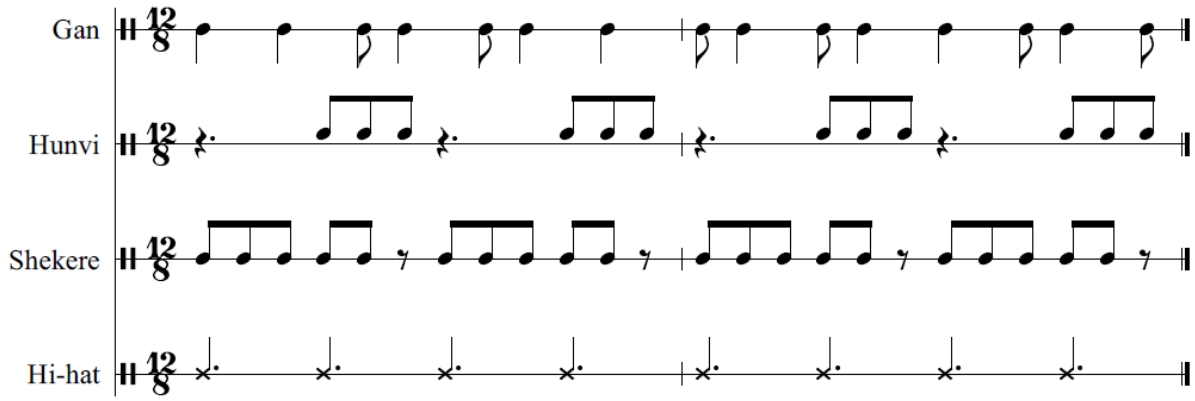
Figure 14: *Sakpatahun* for Abomey ceremony



Gangbe's rendition of *Sakpatahun* on "Assidida" (3:06), shown in Figure 15, maintains

the traditional bell pattern, but stretches it to fit two and four-bar swing phrases, dissolving the three-bell-cycle phrase structure that is normally linked to the support and lead drum patterns. This is similar to their treatment of *djegbe* in "Fie Mi Djeyi," which I discussed earlier in this chapter.

Figure 15: Gangbe's *Sakpatahun* groove on "Assidida"



By making these adaptations to *Sakpatahun*, Gangbe creates entry points for non-African listeners to follow the beat in four, and displaces the bell patterns so that they line up with swung horn lines. These transformations were challenging for Gangbe's percussionists, because they required them to break the polyrhythmic, three bell cycle pattern that characterizes *Sakpatahun* in order to fit them into a 4/4 swing framework. It took about two months of rehearsals from September to November 2014 before "Assidida" was ready to record, and much of that time was spent working on the percussion texture.

I would like to emphasize that I compare Gangbe's groove to these ceremonial percussion textures not as a test of authenticity, but in order to better understand how the group relates to the traditions and practices they reference musically, and which they name in interviews. Their relationships to these traditions offer insight into the connotative and affective qualities those

practices suggest for specific segments of Beninois society. As former Gangbe percussionist Jean Gnonlonfoun (1/17/15, Cotonou) explained, definitions and taxonomies of style in Benin can be highly subjective and contextually oriented to a given religious community, place, or leader: "Each person, each lead drummer, gives his own version of a style. It's personal. You put together tomatoes, onions, the same ingredients, and you come out with a different dish, but everyone stills knows what's in it. I can play Jean's *kaka* and everyone will still know it's *kaka*. You can recognize each person's contribution if you really know the style."

Gangbe's adaptations of these rhythms – *agbotchebou*, *adanhun*, and *Sakpatahun* – create associations with traditional, village religious practice, associations that are mediated by Gangbe's transformations and recontextualizations. For Gangbe, *vodun* performance styles like these signal many things, including rural authenticity and new trends in Beninois popular music styles like *agbotchebou*. But these styles for Sakpata also refer to something contested: *vodun*, a familiar, internal Other still operating at the edge of the mainstream. The religious pluralism of the 1990s notwithstanding, *vodun* remains associated with colonial *indigene* class positions, a status which Afro-Christian churches have reinforced in their condemnation of the practices. Such resonances are legible to many different audiences in Benin, from Christian to *vodun*, men and women, and urban and rural listeners. All of these elements may not be apparent to every member of the audience, but (male) Fon-speaking aficionados of jazz and traditional music would be entertained.

In "Assidida," Gangbe places their transformations of these Sakpata rhythms alongside Crispin's song text critiquing traditional marriage and domestic economic pressures. I posit that "Assidida" elicits laughter because it mocks the true and familiar condition of family members who put economic pressure on their husbands and son-in-laws, and implies that such pressures

stem from the families' beliefs in traditional, transactional conceptions of money, marriage, and gender roles. Gangbe's hidden rhythmic transcript adds another, unspoken, sociological level to this critique, mocking these attitudes about marriage and money as associated with rural class positions. Such statements are not permissible in everyday discourse, especially at the level of criticisms of traditional culture and social class. Gangbe is thus able to address several levels of analysis with the song, bringing the impacts of global economics to bear on local gender, family, and class relationships.

Conclusions

Gangbe and Eyo'nle deploy many musical materials and methods to pursue entrepreneurial goals like communicating with multiple audiences in different languages, maintaining their professional careers at home and abroad, and developing and "modernizing" Benin's music traditions. To these ends, both bands make use of public and hidden transcripts to communicate selectively with different parts of their audiences. The same song may address different audiences simultaneously in different ways, through brass instrumentals, percussion textures with specific cultural resonances, language cues, and references to jazz and the blues. The hidden transcript is frequently the space where the bands make critiques of power, whether between the West and Africa, or within African culture.

The reasons for placing information in the hidden transcript are varied, but in the case of Gangbe and Eyo'nle it is frequently to protect that information, which may confront dynamics of power in ways that would be unacceptable or even dangerous in public, as in Gangbe's "Noubioto" and "Fie Mi Djeyi." The protected information may also address internal divisions between the groups' members or between segments of Beninois society that do not portray their culture positively for outsiders, so this information is protected to present a unified front in

public. Examples of this include Eyo'nle's “Do Re Mi” and Gangbe's “Assidida.” In other situations, the information is protected so that its spiritual power will not be compromised, preserving it as a tool for future resistance. Information may also be protected as an inside joke to reinforce bonds of solidarity within the in-group.

A particularly powerful hidden transcript is contained in each piece's rhythmic style. Whether it is *gbon* making reference to the special histories of Yoruba descendants in Ouidah and looking out to the diaspora, the links constructed between *masse gohun* and the blues, the respectability politics of *djegbe*'s court and Afro-religious history, or the complexities of Gangbe's representations of rhythms for Sakpata, style has a story to tell. For de Certeau (1984:47, 65), style is “non-textual” and does not follow the laws of discourse. Indeed, style contains many ideas in hiding that have not been objectified by language, but which trade in myth and personal and cultural subjectivity.

My analyses reveal how Gangbe and Eyo'nle express their relationships with traditional musical materials, global and local economic dynamics, and with the African diaspora, relationships which different listeners will interpret in different ways depending on their access to certain interpretive frames. The bands' music addresses posited insiders and outsiders of various kinds, but in reality there are few absolute insiders or outsiders, only people with access to certain forms of knowledge, and others with access to different interpretive frames. The groups have honed their production strategies over time with exposure to the international music market, but not all of their projects reach their desired ends or are interpreted in exactly the ways they might hope. Their music sometimes does work in the world of which they are not aware, opening their music and meaning to multiple interpretations for whomever might be willing to engage and listen.

I argue that my interpretations reveal much about my own position as a performer, listener, and ethnographer. I come to this music as a performer, which gives me the benefit of the experience of playing with both Gangbe and Eyo'nle for various lengths of time, and as an ethnographer, which gives me access to privileged information I gained by asking targeted questions of the musicians and their associates, and by observing cultural performances. I also have access, as a Westerner, to ideas about how outsiders may interpret their music, and as a jazz musician, to some of the aesthetic conversation that Gangbe and Eyo'nle seek to join in that community. Some of these perspectives are available to parts of the groups' audiences, but not all of them, and these knowledge gaps have a significant effect on their music's reception.

I am sensitive, too, to the ways in which my knowledge will always be partial, and the extent to which every informant and audience's knowledge is, too. To know a rhythm is to have lived with it; drummers from Ouidah do not play *gbon* in the same way that it is played in Porto Novo, or Abomey, or in Nigeria, for that matter. Members of Gangbe and Eyo'nle have come and gone on the basis of disagreements over business practices that are at their base also aesthetic questions about how to represent the tradition musically in the face of conflict. Some believe in the prominence of the brass, others in foregrounding the percussion and the dance. Some take issue with representing *vodun*, while others promote it. The biggest challenge with understanding how their music signifies is grappling with it as a collective representation (Hountondji 1990, 1996).

My analyses facilitate conversations and the sharing of information across locales in Benin and in the world that would likely not take place in another context. My interpretations are several among many possible readings, which, seen and heard from other places and with the benefit of other experience and interpretive frames, could open different perspectives using the

same materials. What I have tried to do here is outline the nature of the materials available, and provoke conversation on topics of style, interpretation, and cultural knowledges.

Conclusion

Gan jayi mo no gbe gbe. (The voice of the gan cannot stay silent.)

The paths of Gangbe and Eyo'nle Brass Bands' members have shown how these musicians act as cultural entrepreneurs who make strategic commodities of stylistic materials and spiritual traditions. Through their self-representations and musical compositions, they have created new forms of cultural capital, which they have marketed to diverse audiences in the West and in Africa, and across listenerships divided by culture, social class, and aesthetic and spiritual practice. The historical contexts for the valuation and politicization of traditional music and spirituality go back to the foundations of the Danxomean empire in the appropriation and assimilation of the religious and artisanal practices (and practition*ers*) of conquered peoples. Musicians in Gangbe Brass Band make these roots the subject of several of their self-aware recordings of popular songs, like “Alladanou,” “Ajaka,” and “Segala.” Musicians' marketing of authenticity finds historical precedent in the development of ideologies of difference under French colonialism, manifested in early ethnographies which later inspired Negritude-era writers, and in typologies of genre separating the sacred and the secular, the modern and the traditional.

In the first three chapters, I outlined the historical background for Gangbe and Eyo'nle's musical interventions. I began with precolonial Danxomean history to illustrate the empire's control of cultural hybridity as a way to define its power and cultural identity. This established a framework for the commodification of culture and culture bearers, particularly the spritual practices of Yoruba captives. The slave trade provided income for the kingdom until the 19th century when it was outlawed, revealing how Danxome's imbrication in global political economics. While the French colonizers worked with traditional leaders, colonization ultimately broke down traditional social structures, and introduced new divisions in religious institutions,

education, and social class. Early ethnographies laid the foundation for the politicization of culture and the constrution of ideas around African authenticity. Beginning in the 1920s, anti-colonial resistance in independent African churches and new vodun cults formed important background for counteracting the effects of colonial domination. In the end, the outbreak of World War II and national movement's internal conflicts over loyalty, economics, and ideology made the transition to independence difficult.

After independence, the suppression of spiritual practice and isolationist economic policies under Benin's Marxist administration made it difficult for musicians to promote their traditions in the international market. But in the context of economic liberalization in the 1990s, brass band musicians sought to make their livelihood curating traditional stylistic and spiritual materials for international audiences, while seeking recognition and connection in transnational, Afro-diasporic networks like modern jazz, New Orleans brass bands, and Afrobeat. Since independence, a new conception of *la musique moderne* developed in Benin, as musicians and audiences worked out their relationships to politics, traditional spirituality, international music trends, and Benin's own historical cultural wealth. In the 1990s, Benin moved to democracy and a liberal economic model, creating a new emphasis on national culture and looking to their culture as a source for an Afropolitan national identity. With the renaissance of *vodun* art and practice, projects modernizing traditional music began to appear in new contexts and on a greater scale. Musicians encountered new challenges after the global economic crash of 2008, which pushed them to adapt their economic strategies to changing market conditions and consumption practices.

As I showed in chapters four and five, musicians in Gangbe and Eyo'nle learned to negotiate creative and professional control of their music and their production, as they moved

from “tactical logic” to more strategic practices informed by experience and changing politico-economic conditions. For example, they began choosing their own recording engineers, and using studios in Cotonou as well as in France. They also started taking over aspects of management themselves, or working with non-profit organizations on an open book basis. The musicians learned how to make music that would appeal to multiple audiences, offering accessible beats but linking them to symbolically rich local performance traditions, singing in Fon and Gun and occasionally in French or English, and working to hone their arrangements to please of jazz aficionados, world music audiences, and Beninois fans. In addressing these audiences in their music, the bands manage public and hidden transcripts, which play on audience's divergent interpretive knowledges, inviting them to experience the music at their individual entry points, depending on their language proficiencies, cultural knowledge, and listening practices. This process demonstrates Gangbe and Eyo'nle's skills in deploying music as a tool of communication, which developed over time as they learned more about their audiences and the contexts for their work.

This study deepens understanding of the processes of cultural transformation that take place when entrepreneurs take the relative immateriality of musical style and spiritual practice as the objects of commodification in neoliberal markets. The potential for these transformations ranges widely, from developing new musical forms and genres and enabling new forms and patterns of livelihood, to injecting creativity and mobility into structures of historically embedded power and control. In examining present and past French networks of international trade dynamics and cultural politics, this study advances knowledge of the differences between French and British colonial policy, especially as they impacted musical and spiritual practice in Dahomey in access to intercultural music performance and attitudes about cultural purity.

Examining these histories brings to light the transnational, “glocal” nature of systems of power, past and present. Globalization is in this view an intensification and acceleration of forces long present in world networks of exchange. In engaging in multi-sited fieldwork in Benin, France, and New York, I have situated brass band musicians' professional activities in a context that contains a sustained consideration of their associations with locally rooted traditions, while making clear the broader Afropolitan networks that they call out to. This commitment demands an approach to historical investigation that does not lose sight of that history's meaning for social actors. I have found Achille Mbembe's concept of Africa as *intervalle*, an open archive subject to many forms of recombination, to be a fertile one in considering how musicians in Benin relate to their history.

Another major contribution of this study is in calling the attention of interdisciplinary jazz studies to traditions and practices of musical innovation outside of the U.S., and arguing for more inclusive definitions of the study of jazz that transcend the conservatory-bound reification of bebop. Benin's brass band traditions, and its jazz and *musique moderne* scenes, offer fruitful cultural geneologies with great potential for comparative work, especially with jazz in other parts of the world, within Africa, and with other popular music traditions like hip hop. As Gangbe and Eyo'nle's paths show, such work requires significant engagement ethnographically, historically, and musically, but it sheds light on the value of examining culture, creativity, and economics within a broadly conceived jazz studies.

The trajectories of these Beninois musicians suggests to ethnomusicology the importance of analyzing musical style via theories of music as communication and as resonance, based here in the local concept of *gbe* (voice-language-sound). Stylistic analysis, as scholars have noted over the past 20 years, demands engagement with the sonic aspects of music types, their feels

and textures, as well as with their social aspects in areas like history, spirituality, and politics, as well as the genres in which they participate, what Bakhtin calls their "dialogic overtones." In Beninois culture, it is difficult to separate the identity of a rhythm from its place of origin. While individual styles have over time moved in and out of particular genres, including sacred, secular, and modern performance contexts, Beninois listeners continue to associate rhythms with their village soundscapes, often through associations with language, or with spiritual practice through ritual associations. Transposing styles from one genre to another entails the reorganization of definitions for both the genres and the style itself, as is the case when musicians move a style, like *sakpatahun* or *zenli*, from the *sacre* to the *populaire*, or from *traditionel* to *moderne*, world music, or jazz.

For the growing field of studies in innovation and entrepreneurship, this work contributes to better understanding of the social and economic conditions that provoke and encourage entrepreneurial activities, and musical entrepreneurs' role in creating new forms of cultural capital transnationally and in making their livelihoods sustainable. Gangbe and Eyo'nle's stories advance knowledge of the relationships between cultural entrepreneurship and spiritual concepts of destiny (Fon: *se*) and divine providence, expressed in *vodun* and Afro-Christian pragmatics. For entrepreneurs and artists themselves, this research offers productive practical examples of brass band musicians' adaptive strategies in approaching diverse markets, which have contributed, in the case of Gangbe, to their reputation among musicians in Africa and in the world as pioneers in the field.

In chapters four and five, I told the story of Gangbe and Eyo'nle's entrepreneurial and musical paths through the music industry. I focused on their process of learning about Western consumption practices as they won space for their "ethno-preneurship," deploying tactical logic

in the territory of the other, where they could not yet be strategic in their approach. I discussed how the bands learned from one another and negotiated conflict within their membership and with European structures of management and production over representation and creative control. These accounts contribute to a better understanding of the bands' historical moment, coming out of the post-Cold War, post-socialist period in Benin and working out what it meant for them to participate in capitalist markets' definitions of difference and value. I argue that the bands' knowledge of their audiences grew over time, but that each individual audience member or musician's knowledge of aesthetics, languages, and cultural frames is partial, so multiple interpretations result.

This aligns with the Fon concept of style as *gbe*, or sound-voice-resonance, as in the epigraph to this chapter, the proverb that gave Gangbe its name: "*Gan jayí mo nɔ gbɛ gbè*," meaning "The sound/voice (*gbe*) of the *gan* cannot stay silent." This proverb reveals a relinquishing of control over the effects of a sound (or an action) once it is released into the world, a kind of grappling with the indeterminacy of audience reception and the nature of artistic work in general. Once struck, the *gan* will continue to resonate, just as Gangbe's music inspires unforeseen, ongoing reverberations and interpretations in their listeners. The proverb contains an acknowledgement of both the power and the limitations of Gangbe's art, and encapsulates the spirit of their attempts to maximize their effectiveness within these conditions.

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