TRANSFORMING VÒDÚN

MUSICAL CHANGE AND POSTCOLONIAL HEALING IN BENIN'S JAZZ AND BRASS BAND MUSIC

SARAH POLITZ

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To all of my teachers,
here and there, now and then.

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Fon Language Pronunciation Guide

The following phonetic sounds are common in the Fon language, but may be unfamiliar to some readers.

ɖ a soft d sound produced with the flat of the tongue striking softly the roof of the mouth
ɛ a short "e" sound, as in the English words *bed* or *fret*
gb a consonant sound produced by the touching of the middle roof of the mouth and the tongue, immediately followed by the opening of the lips
kp a consonant sound produced by the touching of the back roof of the mouth and the back of the tongue, immediately followed by the opening of the lips
ny pronounced phonetically, the same as the Spanish ñ
ɔ pronounced "aw," as in the English words *fought* or *law*
x a hard, fricative "h" sound produced in the back of the throat

Tonal Markings

The Fon language uses five different tones. The most common are high, mid, and low tones, while two others, modulated low-to-high and modulated high-to-low, are less common. They are marked in this book as follows:

Á high tone
À low tone
A mid tone
Ă modulating tone (may be low-to-high or high-to-low)

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IPA Spellings

Wherever possible, IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) spellings have been used for Fon words. In certain isolated cases, French phonetic spellings were retained for ease of identification.

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INTRODUCTION

In the Forêt Sacrée in Ouidah, Benin, there is a baobab tree that was once a Hweda[1] king. Or, perhaps more accurately, the tree still is this king. Oral histories tell that, in a moment of supreme improvisation and spiritual force, the king transformed himself into this sacred plant in order to escape from Italian missionaries during the seventeenth century, demonstrating his mastery of the intersection between the physical and the spiritual worlds and the truth of their interpermeability. He has become *vòdún*,[2] a spirit, and the tree is a shrine that receives offerings and gives wisdom, prescriptions for the problems in the world that teach how to turn one thing into another in the pursuit of greater physical and spiritual health, well-being, and balance.

This book is about how Beninese jazz and brass band musicians transform Benin's cultural traditions, especially the ancestral spiritual practice of vòdún and its musical repertoires, for international contexts of performance. An important starting point for understanding these creative processes lies in these musicians' lived experiences. Through their transformations of Benin's cultural and spiritual traditions, musicians increase their value and signifying potential in the world and performatively "work through," "act out," and reclaim colonial narratives about the devaluation of African culture (LaCapra 2001, 22, in Visser 2015, 254). Their music is thus a site where they counter monolithic or dismissive conceptions of African culture with the multiplicity and depth of Beninese traditions and make interventions in global networks of economic and social inequality. Music and ritual offer powerful tools for undertaking these projects because of their flexible relationship to time and ability to deploy the poetic properties of historical symbols. They also make space for the ongoing and incomplete nature of postcolonial healing in a world that is still filled with neocolonial violence in unjust policies and racist actions. So the healing that these musicians undertake for themselves and for others does not take "recovery" as its goal, but finds music and ritual to be pragmatic tactics for surviving in a still-healing world (see Lloyd 2000).

In this introduction, I briefly present the historical contexts, spiritual prac-

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tices, and economic systems that have shaped the use value of vòdún and its traditions over time in Benin, before introducing the transnational community of jazz and brass band musicians that is the focus of this study. I then lay out a framework for understanding these musicians' relationships to Afro-modern space-time, performance, and diasporic livelihoods. I suggest that their approaches enable them to claim the value of African culture, of cultural continuity, of grounded spiritual practice, and economic autonomy—*and* the modernist sensibilities of jazz and other Afro-diasporic creative forms that tie Benin into global networks of economic and cultural interdependency. This is reflected in their projects in developing their own professionalization as musicians, and in increasing the value attached to vòdún practice and music in a way that allows their creative healing power to continue working in the world. In these projects, musicians push for the possibility for themselves and other African musicians to inhabit more than just a few, racially oriented subject positions. The final part of the introduction discusses the multiple dimensions of cultural transformation that musicians engage, and sometimes blend, in adapting to contextual factors. The transformation of personal and collective experience, especially of postcolonial trauma and the associated value systems attached to African culture, is central to this discussion. From a spiritual perspective, I consider the usefulness of concepts of personhood, destiny, and temporality from Fon culture as performative, open-ended models for understanding how musicians represent cultural multiplicity and value through their work. Musicians' transformative processes extend from transitions between forms of value—the material, the immaterial, and the metaphysical—each embodied, enacted, and experienced in spiritual and economic ways—to the production of new forms of Afro-modernity that seek to challenge and correct the modern West's multiple temporal and spiritual ailments.

Benin and Vòdún: Shifting Temporalities of Value and Resistance

A large part of the experience that Beninese musicians bring to their creative work in the transformation of cultural value and associated healing processes lies in the historical formation of the Republic of Benin, a nation whose people belong to multiple ethnic and religious traditions, and which has transitioned through several different political phases as a network of empires, a French colony, a socialist state, and a democracy. This process has unfolded through

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a series of overlapping temporalities, which, while presented chronologically here, musicians and audiences may experience in combination in other temporal organizations.

Throughout Benin's history, vòdún music and practice has been a primary location for the formation and contestation of cultural cohesion.[3] Yet it has been misunderstood and misrepresented in media across the world, and indeed at times in Benin, as a backwards system of superstitions and witch doctors that holds Beninese society back from joining the modern world. The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have seen the circulation of unsubstantiated rumors about vòdún communities and practitioners among Afro-Christian and Christian evangelical communities in Benin, many of which repeat and build on colonial-era fears about indigenous spiritual practices and the unknown, for example, that vòdún communities are centers for the spread of AIDS and sexual abuse, that vòdún practitioners steal babies in the night, and that vòdún secret societies plot the ritual killings of politically unpopular figures.[4]

Vòdún refers to the indigenous spiritual practices, primarily of the Fon, Gun, Adja, and Ewe peoples in Benin and Togo, that connect the physical world to the spiritual world of the deified ancestors and forces of nature (the sea, thunder and lightning, the earth, healing and illness, iron and war). The two worlds are interpermeable and affect one another. Both deified ancestors and these natural forces are referred to as vòdún. Vòdún practice includes ceremonies for initiation, purification, worship of the ancestors and other spirits, the naming of newborns, and funerals, all which include drumming, song, dance, prayers, historical recitations, and animal and food sacrifices. Any person can become vòdún when they die, when their *sɛ*, or that part of their soul that is their "destiny" in the broadest sense, transfers from their body into a spiritual force, usually with physical manifestations. Particularly powerful people, such as kings and priests, can transform themselves into physical manifestations such as trees, animals, shrines, or natural events upon the end of their human lives. They also possess vòdún practitioners through dance and music during ritual ceremonies, and can communicate with the living in this way. Royal *vòdún* are a particularly important connection to lineage and cultural continuity within Fon and Gun societies, which center around the leadership of divine rulers. Vòdún's outlook on cultural contact, whether African or European, has been one of assimilation, syncretization, and multiplicity, constantly bringing new ideas and influences into its pantheon as cultural transformations take place, as was the case particularly with Yoruba culture as well as Islam

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and Christianity.[5] Vòdún as a philosophical system thus contains the tools for navigating contradictions and contested worldviews.

The precolonial kingdoms of Dànxɔmɛ (ethnically, Fon, in present-day Abomey) and Xɔgbónu (ethnically Gun, in present-day Porto Novo) were the first nation-like formations that consolidated ethnicity, power, and culture in ways that produced allegiance and membership among their subjects. Often, the power of these kingdoms over their subjects, especially over conquered peoples, was enforced through ritual initiation to vòdún practice, and through the capturing of neighboring people's drummers and vòdún priests to assimilate their religious practices into those already practiced in the kingdom. Less well documented but of perhaps even greater importance are the uses of vòdún practice by Yoruba-descended ethnic minorities such as the Toffin and the Hwla against the hegemony of the major kingdoms' centralized power. The complex interplay between individual, royal, and divine agency in these settings is characteristic of how vòdún practice textured peoples' experience in this era, and how these musical histories have continued to be inflected for Beninese musicians in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Vòdún music and practice, and their associated skills, were highly valued transcultural capital for building the precolonial kingdoms. The slave trade was also a factor in the kingdoms' consolidation of power as they sought to control trade with Europeans, and sent their prisoners of war away to what they considered the next life, across the ocean.[6] Beninese musicians often invoke musical references and metaphors from this precolonial period as a way of showing their ties to African tradition and Beninese culture, or of working through cultural memories of the slave trade.

The arrival of French colonialism, the fall of the Dànxɔmɛan empire in 1897, and the creation of the French colony of Dahomey brought major changes to systems of royal power and culture, including vòdún music and practice, although this process was uneven across different parts of the region. Christian evangelical activities had been largely unsuccessful in the attempts of Italian and Portuguese missionaries in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and Dànxɔmɛ fought hard against the takeover of the French, one of the last such empires to fall to colonialism. But with French occupation and the institution of a system of Catholic education in the early twentieth century, social changes began to take hold, even though the precolonial capital of Abomey has remained resolutely resistant. As part of their civilizing mission, it was the policy of the Catholic Church to suppress vòdún practice wherever they could, as a threat to the creation of morally autonomous, modern subjects, including asso-

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ciated activities like traditional drumming, dancing, healing, and divination, and the speaking of African languages like Fon and Gun in mission schools. For some educated Dahomeans, then, vòdún practice came to be negatively associated with a lower class, uneducated experience. There are accounts, however, of missionaries researching and incorporating indigenous culture and religion in their teaching, even if these efforts relied on ideas of African or Dahomean culture as unified and homogeneous.[7] Colonial ethnographers' writing contributed many of the concepts that invented African tradition as an object during this period.[8] It was in this period that many of the binary constructions one hears in Beninese musicians' discussions were put into place: traditional, modern, sacred, popular, evolved, refined, authentic, original, pure.

An anticolonial movement began to grow in the 1930s, but was divided into factions, and faded with the outbreak of World War II. New independent African churches such as the Celestial Church of Christ and the Cherubim and Seraphim Society were founded in this era, and, through their adaptations of vòdún-derived musics for Christian liturgy, represented one outlet for working within but against the colonial system. Beninese musicians draw, implicitly and explicitly, on many of the experiential metaphors of this period in their work, for example ideas of artistic modernism, distinctions (and overlaps) between sacred and secular music, values associated with cultural purity and hybridity, implicit divisions of social class in Beninese (then-Dahomean) society, and the competition within the national movement over socialist and capitalist ideologies.

After independence from France in 1960, transformations of vòdún music increased, and the metaphors for music making multiplied, with influence from jazz, salsa, funk, highlife, Afrobeat, and other African and Afro-diasporic styles. The Beninese trumpeter Ignace de Souza founded the Black Santiago orchestra during this period, inspired by the highlife musician E. T. Mensah of Ghana and Louis Armstrong's visit to Ghana in 1956, which de Souza attended. Things changed quickly in Benin, though, with the rise to power of General Mathieu Kérékou, a military man from northern Benin who trained in Dakar, in 1974, and the institution of a Marxist-Leninist government modeled after the People's Republic of China in 1976. The new country was named the People's Republic of Benin. This was around the time many of the musicians in this book were born. For its supporters, this government represented a rejection of the economic power of the West, especially France, and a step toward African autonomy of government and trade.

Understanding the powerful symbolic links between vòdún practice and

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the precolonial Fon kingdom in Dànxɔmɛ, and the role religion in general had come to play in resisting state authority of many kinds, Kérékou suppressed not only vòdún practice, closing many temples and restricting the months of the year when ceremonies could be performed, but also shuttered the houses of worship and schools of Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims. Kérékou was a great patron of popular music, however, especially the Orchestre de Poly-Rythmo, whose adaptations of vòdún music with communist lyrical messages marked an important point of inflection in the history of transforming vòdún music and experience in Benin. Many musicians also fondly remember Kérékou's vocational programs in music education, artisanal crafts, and agriculture in public schools during this era. Metaphors for creating and interpreting music during this period were wide-ranging, but the most salient included the multiple musical genres in play in processes of transformation in the '60s and early '70s, and as time went on strategies for bringing sacred genres into the secular, popular sphere in order to gain patronage and avoid persecution.

With the institution of democracy, the opening of the economy, and the rewriting of the Republic of Benin's constitution (allowing for vòdún as one of the country's three official religions) in 1990, a golden era began for musical creativity and entrepreneurship, based in the strength of the country's cultural and religious pluralism. The end of the Cold War reset many African countries' relationships with the world, and many, like Benin, found themselves in a position of needing to be their own advocates for resources and for recognition. Music became a part of this process in a big way in Benin; because of the isolation of the communist period, much of the cultural nationalism that other African countries experienced around independence in the 1960s was displaced to this era for Beninese people. The 1990s, when many of the musicians in this book formed groups and established themselves musically and professionally, was a period of cultural renaissance in Benin with a renewed focus on the national heritage (and exchange value) of vòdún traditional religion, on Benin's Afro-diasporic connections, and its place in international markets. The institution of the annual Fête de Vòdún now takes place every January 10, and the past few Beninese presidents have taken this as an opportunity to perform their connections to what is perceived as grassroots, everyday, authentic culture. The sudden turn to neoliberalism, like Marxism before it, has had mixed effects for musicians, as they are encouraged to be entrepreneurial and creative with their music, but within set parameters of national identity and the reestablishment of ties with producers and audiences in the colonial metropole in

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France. Their involvement in these national projects of revaluation and recognition has been an important context for their own professionalization in learning to create cultural value for vòdún music and practice in ways that give them space to be multiple and flexible, alive and improvised, and to do the work of social and cultural healing.

Jazz and brass band musicians draw on the musical and experiential metaphors of each of these periods in different ways and at different times. They may serve as tools to navigate unpredictable terrains abroad, as the echoes of precolonial, colonial, and independence-era pasts exert their influence, requiring the resistant or selectively cooperative tactics of a previous era. In other scenarios the variety of metaphors represented here can play out in disagreements, jealousies, conflicts, and contestations between musicians about individual and collective representation, arguments that bring vòdún back to the center of processes of social formation for individuals, for musical groups, and for the Beninese people. The music of jazz and brass band musicians is an important site for the working out and processing of many historical ruptures of the past several centuries that have resonated globally and locally.

The period of the 2000s and onward marks an era in Beninese music with new metaphors and experiences, particularly those of mobility and migration. While Beninese musicians had been traveling and relocating in previous eras, often in an effort to avoid political persecution, local Beninese politics in the 1990s, as well as changes in immigration policy in Europe and North America, made mobilities of various kinds more attainable for musicians. These experiences with life abroad have also become a part of musicians' projects of curating audience experiences, professionalizing themselves musically, and cultivating increased cultural value for vòdún.

Jazz and Brass Band Musicians

The jazz and brass band musicians in this study—the members of Gangbé Brass Band, Eyo'nlé Brass Band, and Jomion and the Uklos—come from the southern part of Benin, particularly the cities of 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. Some musicians have resided in this region for their entire lives, with periodic international forays for tours, while others have the reverse arrangement, having moved their residences abroad in France, Belgium, or New York,

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while making periodic trips home to Benin, if they have the means and legal status to do so. Many musicians aspire to this kind of mobility.

The musicians I worked with form a "community of practice" that 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 solfège, 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 Côte d'Ivoire. They have smartphones and reliable internet access, and listen widely on YouTube and other platforms to modern jazz from several different eras—especially to bebop, hard bop, and postbop, to African American gospel, and to salsa and Cuban jazz and timba. They speak fluent French and, depending on where they grew up, one or two local languages, including Fon, Gun, Yoruba, Adja, and 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 among themselves. A frequent discussion my presence prompted among the musicians was whether scholars of Beninese music, and I in particular, should be doing "*musicologie*" or "*ethnologie*" (an older French academic formulation), these two domains taken as mutually exclusive, with musicology perceived as preferable and less tainted by colonial pasts. The American concept of "ethnomusicology" is unfamiliar in Benin, and has taken some explaining. Based on my description, musicians usually called this discipline *la sociologie de la musique*, or music sociology.

Most of the musicians grew up in Christian communities, participating in music at one of several independent African churches such as the Celestial Church of Christ or the Cherubim and Seraphim Society. A few grew up in vòdún 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 vòdún 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 Gangbé 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 has started to expand beyond the

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brass band format, preferring to work as individual freelancers like drummer Joza Orisha and bassist Manu Falla, 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 2008.

This study covers fieldwork totaling sixteen months over a period of eleven 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 yearlong trip to Africa as a Thomas J. Watson Fellow. During my fieldwork I interviewed musicians from the Gangbé Brass Band (formed in 1993), the Eyo'nlé Brass Band (formed in 1999), and Jomion and the Uklos (formed in 2008), as well as former members of these bands, many of whom have gone on to form their own groups. Interviewing current and former members meant that their accounts of events often differed in important ways, revealing to me many of the fault lines that have made the artistic and pragmatic realities of these projects so difficult. I also interviewed musicians from the previous generation of popular musicians, such as Sagbohan Danialou and Vincent Ahehinnou of Orchestre Poly-Rythmo. I combined the accounts I recorded in these interviews with participant-observation in performance and rehearsals, historical research, and translations and musical analysis of specific songs to develop my understanding of the connections between postcolonial trauma, healing, and experience that make up this book.

My memories of my first meetings bring me back to the practical realities of being a musician in Benin. 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 a trombonist there, Eli Gas. Didier arrived by *zemijahn* motorcycle taxi, with his keyboard slung over his shoulder. As I joined him on the back of the *zem*,[9] 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

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had some trouble understanding each other at first (my French, my appreciation for Beninese expressions, and my fluency in Fon have all improved a lot over the past 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, which we attached with several bungee cords, on the hour-long trip to Porto Novo. When I climbed onto the back of Aaron's bike, he turned around and said, "That's exactly where I put Roswell." Roswell? "Roswell Rudd was here?!," I said. Rudd (1935–2017), the American avant-garde trombonist, had been there to record an album with the Gangbé 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 and their enthusiasm for collaboration.

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 Eyo'nlé Brass Band, was on his way out the front gate on his motorcycle. Behind him sat his brother, the gospel singer Chrétien, now Eyo'nlé'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.

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Figure 1. Didier Ahouandjinou, left, and Chrétien Ahouandjinou, right, with their mother outside their home in Porto Novo in 2010. Photo by the author.

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. 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 Gangbé Brass Band on tour in 2014, for example, they insisted that I play on their concert rather than film from the audience, which refused me the power to move back and forth between levels of interiority. While Gangbé 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 con-

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structing 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 vòdún 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 (Joza Orisha), 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 Gangbé Brass Band's trumpeters and now the leader of Jomion and the Uklos, 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, Gangbé Brass Band's trombonist Martial, at his house. Didier had arranged for me to meet Martial and several other members of Gangbé, 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 Beninese music in general, as Aaron and Didier reminded me often in the days before I left Benin for Mali on that first trip, and much of it was grounded in the daily experiences of Cotonou, Porto Novo, and Abomey, as I explored in the years that followed. These experiences, I discovered, were always overlapping and exchanging with ideas about life abroad, of musicians' diasporic lives.

Diasporic Lives

My field research, and the dimensions of musical and cultural transformation that became the focus of my analysis, stretched across several different contexts of time and place. Musicians inhabit these different temporal and cultural spaces, fill them with their presence, and those times and places inhabit them

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as well, fill their senses and their bodies, while they are there. These contexts extend from Benin (home) and its histories, traditions, memories, and present realities, to tours (work) in France, Switzerland, Italy, the United States, Brazil, and Haiti, to more or less permanent periods of residence (sojourn) in Lyon, Brussels, or New York City, all various waystations and outposts of African diasporas old and new. As I worked in Benin, I constantly encountered the pull that these musicians felt to various elsewheres (*yovotomɛ*, or the whites' country, in the Fon language[10]), whose constraints (structures of racism and exclusion, unpredictable immigration policies, global economic inequality) and promises (of recognition, financial success, and access to new technologies) criss-cross musicians' daily living at home, and then take on their full, unmediated force in their travels abroad. Rather than conducting my fieldwork exclusively in Benin, I followed the direction of these pulls, following tours in France with the Gangbé Brass Band and Eyo'nlé Brass Band, and the international moves of jazz musicians to New York, Brussels, and Lyon.

The concept of an "elsewhere" has usually been applied from the standpoint of the European metropole to the colonies on the periphery. The usual usage was in full view when Gangbé performed in 2010 at the annual Escales d'Ailleurs (Stopovers Elsewhere) festival in Plaisir, France, along with several other of their then-management company Contrejour's acts from Morocco and Senegal, and, fascinatingly, a Texas two-step band from Austin. But "elsewhere" works just as powerfully, though differently, from a Benin-centric perspective that sees "over there," beyond the sea—in Europe, America, and in diasporas old and new, material and spiritual—as the most operative elsewheres, opposite the rootedness of home.

It's worth pausing to explain more about the context of my field research. I conducted fieldwork in multiple locations, or sites, moving back and forth between continents, performance contexts, and cultures, which taught me much about the nature of African diasporic lives in the twenty-first century. I learned to appreciate spiritual, musical, and familial networks that transcend national and temporal boundaries, that connect the migrations of ancestors to the present and to the future. I learned that the reproduction and projection of these spiritual traditions and their music onto the international stage did nothing to diminish their power, but rather increased it significantly. The surplus of meaning and value produced in these transformations is one of the processes of production that diasporic workers engage to accomplish their diverse goals. I learned that the circulation of people and musical styles between these different locations was a matter of supreme everydayness for these musicians, just as

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customary as their moves back and forth between processions, liturgies, diplomatic occasions, stage performances, recording sessions, intellectual debate, teaching, and workshops at home in Benin. I also became aware of the ways that this mobility was often filled with risks, uncertainties, and threats of violence that were themselves disturbingly commonplace.

My own experience as a trombonist, practicing improviser, and performer of sacred music came into play as I worked with these musicians, as I participated in many of their rehearsals and performances. It became clear to me how important it was that I shared certain experiences, both past and present, with the musicians I worked with: being on tour, living on limited resources, confronting ambivalence about the value of music as a profession, resisting the commodification of music and defending musical labor, working as a church musician in gospel and liturgical styles, working as a popular musician in salsa and dance bands, the discipline of practicing one's instrument, and having to advocate for jazz and improvised music in competition with classical traditions in music institutions, on the one hand, and popular music in commercial venues, on the other. The fact that I was willing and able to join Beninese jazz and brass musicians in their performances, especially my ability to adapt quickly to specific rhythmic and tonal frameworks, was extremely important to the musicians, and reinforced to me how important it was to the success of this project that we all took the time to share those experiences together.

Participating in performances gave me access to the experiences necessary to bring out many of the "musicianly concerns" that fill this book, for example, interests in style and genre, resonance and communication, and techniques for improvisation. My awareness of the intersections—and sometimes altercations—between musicians' creative agency and social structures like immigration politics and policy, colonial histories, diasporic connections, working conditions, and institutionalized racism came in less direct ways and over a greater period of time: through regulations and applications subverted, managers fired, contracts canceled. These, too, are musicianly concerns.

My role as a performer demanded that I constantly negotiate different levels of exteriority and interiority as I embraced participating in performance in some contexts while resisting it in others, seeking out time to document performances, to write, to read, and to reflect. In the dynamic of my fieldwork relationships, my participation in performance was sometimes the only option available to me, as musicians insisted that I play with the band as a condition of interviewing them or gaining admission to performances. My participation in this way was a necessary corrective to the uneven power dynamics between

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myself and these musicians that none of us could ever completely ignore, my whiteness and my Americanness being just two of the most prominent markers of my privilege. While we shared many musical experiences throughout and prior to the time we spent traveling together, we were all painfully aware of how our divergent experiences—of access, of relative safety, and of deep-seated structural inequalities—separated us quite dramatically.

The fact that I recorded performances and rehearsals, did interviews, and asked lots of curious questions set me apart from the other members of the band; but they supported my project, were enthusiastic about it, and were excited to see it published—just as excited as they were to have me perform with them. Part of this was the general opinion that Benin's musical traditions needed to be documented and preserved before they disappeared, but my focus on musical change was well received, too.

While we shared skills and experience in brass and jazz performance, and in the struggles of life as a musician, our differences had much to do with the ways we were treated by others and by institutional structures. They were black Africans in Europe and New York City, subject to a matrix of misunderstandings and "economies of racedness" that made them vulnerable to exploitation and attack (see Weheliye 2005). Here their particularity as Beninese or as Francophone or as Fon or Gun people, or as Christians or vòdún practitioners, disappeared when decisions by authorities were made on superficial first impressions. I was an outsider in France and in New York in other ways, but carried the privilege of white skin. I could "pass" as French or Belgian, or even as a New Yorker, in some limited ways. I did not need a visa to enter Europe or the U.S., while they needed special visas to allow them to work as artists, usually obtained a year in advance. Our experiences with security on the road were fraught in differently gendered and raced ways; for example, we all needed safe, trusted transportation and housing for after the show, but achieving that sometimes resulted in different solutions for them and for me, as our individual security ultimately depended on how the local culture interpreted our respective differences. Being a woman *and* white *and* a foreigner in Europe made me something of a curiosity for musicians and audiences alike, and band members celebrated my differences as signs of the universal appeal of their music. My Americanness, my undergraduate jazz degree, and my graduate studies in ethnomusicology increased my value all the more for my perceivedly greater authentic connections to jazz (compared with Europeans) and the status my formal education in music carried in a Beninese context that is highly stratified along educational, religious, and class lines.

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It became clear to me over time that the jazz and brass bands I worked with took on greater risks with their travels than I did; their right to explore and experiment, to represent themselves as something more complex and open-ended that challenged people's preconceptions, was something they had to fight for, while mine was often granted as a matter of course. Their experiences with the working out of postcolonial trauma met them at every turn, while I could more often choose when I wanted to deal with my different personal or cultural traumas, keeping them at arm's length. Musicians' fight for the right to experiment manifested itself most prominently in the transformations of their experiences through music, ritual, healing, and professionalization.

Experience, Postcolonial Trauma, and Multiplicity

Experience

> Experience is not simply what happened. A lot may happen to a stone without making it any the wiser. Experience is what we are able to do with what happens to us. (Achebe 1975)

Experience defines us, makes us who we are, shifting and refracting the biological and historical determinacies of our birth. Yet humans also have the ability to transform those experiences through memory, healing, narrative, and performance. Musicians' experiences—variously, as Beninese, as ethnically Fon, Gun, or Mahi people, as Christian or vòdún practitioners and participants in ritual, as wide-ranging listeners, as ethnographers, as artists, as entrepreneurs, as workers, as composers, as improvisers, as intellectuals, as advocates, as immigrants, as diasporans, as spouses, parents and children, as black men, and sometimes women, in Europe and North America, as students and teachers, as French, Fon, Gun, and Yoruba speakers and as postcolonial subjects, as travelers, as inheritors of royal, ancestral African traditions, as citizens of the world—represent the resources they draw upon to engage in the creative transformations of traditions like vòdún music and practice.

I use musicians' experience as the primary frame for my analysis, first, because this was an important element in the discourse of the Beninese musicians I spoke to. They frequently spoke, in French, about their "experiences" abroad, or their "experiences" as Africans. Several Beninese musicians I spoke with, in discussing how they managed the multiple systems of value they

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encountered, cited the Yoruba proverb that says, "You receive three educations/ experiences in your life: in your parents' house, at school, and in the world"; this comes with heightened signification considering that, in Benin, traditional African values are typically instilled in children by parents at home, while "school" is invariably a school with ties to Christianity and French culture and language, and "the world" can refer both to Beninese or African society and to a broader global community.

The French word *expérience* can mean "experience" in the English sense of confrontation, contact, or witnessing of specific facts or events transpired, as well as the development of knowledge and expertise. These are the experiences—of joy, strength, wealth, and connection, as well as of dispossession and betrayal—that Beninese musicians transform to share with their audiences, and to facilitate processes of healing postcolonial trauma. This usage is best exemplified by trumpeter Magloire Ahouandjinou, a former Gangbé Brass Band member and leader of the Afrofunk ensemble Viviola. He said, "You see, we are in politics [*la politique*], a very positive politics, to communicate and—as I told you, we are not young musicians—to share more easily our *experience*, so we can explore the world more with our music. So that's it, a little bit. That's the politics" (Porto Novo, Benin, 3/30/15).

Unlike in English, the French *expérience* can also refer to an "adventure," or an "experiment," the latter word taken from the same root as the English "experience." So when Beninese musicians spoke to me about their "experiences," at times they also invoked this other meaning; their experiences—particularly abroad—were thus often framed as experiments, or forays into the unknown in pursuit of new knowledge. A good example of this usage is in the statement of Gangbé Brass Band sousaphonist James Vodounnon, who said, "The market doesn't want experiments/experiences [*des expériences*]; it wants business" (Bouchemaine, France, 6/5/14). Many musicians I spoke with who had lived abroad in Europe would use the term this way in saying "*Je ne veux faire plus d'expériences*," meaning "I don't want to have/make any more adventures/ experiments," or, after returning home, "*J'ai fait une expérience là-bas*," "I had an experience over there." The sense of value and risk that musicians placed on this experimental quality of experience offers a provocative way of thinking about the many kinds of improvisation that they deploy in their music and their lives as musicians, which I explore later on. It is important to recognize, too, something that is often overlooked, that the freedom implied in this kind of experience/experiment—the freedom to try and fail and try again, to find one's way in a process of exploration and discovery, to engage the therapeutic

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potential of ritual and improvisation—is a privilege that is not afforded automatically or equally to every person, some receiving it without having earned it, while others must fight for it with everything they have.

In this research, I have found it helpful to move away from culture as object and toward experience, by which I mean the ways that musicians move through a changing matrix of particular places, temporalities, and modalities of feeling, understood through place, time, and metaphor.[11] While the formulation of "experience" may give the impression that musicians receive the events and inheritances of their lives passively, or that they are somehow defined only by their pasts, it is important to remember that moves back in time to "relive" an experience are also moves forward. When musicians process these experiences through performance, music, ritual, and improvisation, they take that cyclical remembering and place it in a new context of future-oriented *survival*, into the work of living, into livelihood. This is especially true if experience is also always experiment, too. Even the most traumatic experiences, while never erased, can be transformed into personal strength and incisive social critique, something that the Eyo'nlé Brass Band connects directly to Afro-diasporic healing and transformation through the blues on their 2015 album *Empreinte du Père*. Experience is a productive way for getting around binary oppositions between agency and social structure, while opening the discussion to the quality and texture of musical performance, perception, and embodiment. It also opens a way into understanding the many forms of knowledge that any individual carries in their person. Musicians carry the history of these forms of knowledge in their bodies, in their embodied memories of vòdún and Afro-Christian dance, religion, healing, divination, spiritual transformation, and language, and in their lived experiences with travel, immigration, and inequality, in ways that challenge the static notions of culture often produced by scholarship on Africa.

If experience is primarily about how individuals move[12] through different contexts of space, time, and modalities of feeling, then to study musical experience must be centrally to study musical *change*, which is why transformation is the subject of this book. One of music's powers is to change the experience of time, making possible the imagination of alternative returns and realities, and skipping forward to futures that are sometimes at the edge of verbal description. To do this, musicians must ensure that the traditions they transform maintain their real-time connectivity to the liveness of experience in performance, even as that music is entexted and commodified by larger social and economic forces.

This temporal frame is particularly relevant for understanding how Beni-

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nese musicians intentionally situate their work within diasporic contexts across gaps of time and space, and for how they grapple in their music with related processes of trauma, remembrance, and healing. A major objective of this book is to show how vòdún as a spiritual tradition, as a repertoire of religious music, and as the object of transitioning cultural values has been a vessel for musicians' creative transformations across historical and cultural contexts. Thus, since the late twentieth century, Beninese jazz and brass band musicians have continued a long heritage of adapting living traditions—themselves hybrid and dynamic, built for travel—to increasingly modern and mobile presents.

Musicians' transformations of music and culture intervene in economies of cultural value—spiritual and material, past and present—and, relatedly, in the incomplete project of healing colonial trauma individually and collectively. This creative labor of transformation and healing is social, which demands that it grapple with the heterogeneity of values and value constructions cross-culturally across African, Euro-American, and historical Afro-diasporic cultures, and within Beninese communities at home and in diaspora. The project is also performative, that is, it takes place in real time through music and dance, and so engages with these transformations in a way that avoids being pinned down, and can maintain seemingly contradictory positions in fleeting moments of experimentation, provoking multiple interpretations among audience members.

Postcolonial Trauma

My understanding that trauma and healing were key to Beninese musicians' projects of transformation was something I came to over a long period of time spent moving back and forth between musical analysis, translation, transcribing and reading interviews, and examining historical accounts, oral and written. I did not ask musicians explicitly about trauma and healing, and they only occasionally discussed it in those terms. But my awareness of the psychological, spiritual, and historical ramifications of these musicians' projects really began to coalesce as I translated and analyzed song texts about slavery, interethnic wars, and traditional spirituality, and as I gradually came to recognize the connections between the associated rhythms, their contexts, and their meanings as they were transformed in performance. My growing language skills in Fon and Gun were central in this process, in which I was assisted by my Fon teacher, Saturnin Tomeho, in Harvard's African Language Program.

When I looked back at my interviews with these connections between

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music, trauma, and healing in mind, I started to read musicians' accounts differently. In discussing the effects of colonialism on their individual and collective experiences, the musicians I worked with described feelings of frustration with the postcolonial government in Benin, which they felt was corrupt, elite, and self-serving, and which, for them, reflected Europe's overly secular and materialist aesthetics and values. They vented about the inequalities of immigration policies that required them to follow complex rules about maintaining residency permits in Europe, while Europeans could easily obtain visas to visit Benin whenever they wanted. The musicians spoke about the animosity they felt for the French, because "they are the ones who colonized us," often emphasizing that they preferred to work with Americans for this reason (although they remained silent on the neocolonialism and cultural imperialism of the United States). They chafed against the French language and against economic dependency; as Viviola pianist Didier Ahouandjinou said,

> We had independence in 1960. August 1, that's 50 years. But I say we're not free yet. . . . Because what do we do when we need their help? When you are free, you don't need anyone. When you are free, that means you are capable of doing your own for yourself. So we're not really free yet. Economically, especially. . . . Because a lot of us are trying to make music that is like French music. Because if you compose a song in our own language here, you have the rhythm in your blood, you really master your language, you master the traditional melodies. . . . So we're not really free. We're forced to sing in French, which is not necessarily our language.[13] (interview, Porto Novo, Benin, 6/28/10)

By contrast, however, in talking about their approaches to representing their experiences and brass band traditions, most musicians emphasized the great joy they wanted to project when bringing others into their performances. As sousaphonist Rock Ahouandjinou said, in explaining the name of his group Eyo'nlé, which means "Rejoice on earth" in Yoruba: "In church, when you hear the brass, it's for sad songs, to accompany a death, it's for melodies of farewell. For us in Africa, in Benin, even in the vòdún temples, even more in the vòdún temples I'd say, it's about joy. When an initiate comes into the temple, it's about joy. We make them dance. We party. And there is liveliness [*animation*] in the temple" (Porto Novo, Benin, 3/1/15). Even in discussing the tragedies of the slave trade, sometimes musicians pointed out the great music that was born out of these forced migrations and cultural intermixtures. For example, Magloire

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Ahouandjinou said, in describing the piece "Walkin'" he wrote for his group Viviola, "Walking could have a lot of explanations, but we oriented our walking toward the walking of slaves. Because in the song, we say, they walked to Brazil in chains . . . and they were strong with their walking, and the walking went on to the point where the chains were smashed" (interview, Porto Novo, Benin, 3/30/15). In each of these examples, music and movement became powerful outlets—what Kenneth Burke called "equipment for living"[14]—for transforming traumatic experiences into something else, into survival, into living and livelihood. Musicians described the process of these interactions with neo/postcolonial experiences, their transformations, and the ongoing processes of creative labor that they open into with language like "*Je me débrouille*," or "*Je m'en sors*": "I am coping/getting by," or "I'm dealing with it."

This book takes seriously the damaging psychological effects of colonialism, recognizing that, for many, the healing process remains incomplete, ongoing, and uneven. Postcolonial trauma was and continues to be a protracted process, not experienced as a single, shattering event, giving it qualities that are acute and chronic by turns, reexperienced in the everyday violence of the neocolonial long after independence. Postcolonial trauma is also a form of particularly cultural trauma, experienced at the individual and the collective level (see Alexander et al. 2004). Music and ritual are particularly evocative tools in addressing this trauma, because, through repetition, they replicate its temporal slippages, stimulating memories of the past, bringing participants into a shared reality, and facilitating the emergence of as-yet-unexperienced futures. In reaching out to diasporic musics like jazz, salsa, and reggae, the musicians in this book also transpose this temporal flexibility across space diasporically. Ritual is a particularly important tool for addressing colonial trauma because of its pragmatic understanding of power, especially in its use and transformation of historically grounded symbols and their poetic properties, a power of which the musicians in this book are well aware. For this reason, ritual continues to be the site of much influential cultural innovation (see Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, xxi). These symbolic properties of ritual make it particularly suited to intervening in the terms of cultural and semiotic value, as is the case with Beninese musicians' use of vòdún signs and repertoires.

Postcolonial trauma studies is a growing field, primarily within literature, which is beginning to confront the Euro-centrism, secularity, and linear temporalities of trauma's disciplinary roots in psychology (see Visser 2015).[15] In his work on trauma healing in African literature, J. Roger Kurtz (2014, 430) suggests that African cultures, through rituals of mourning, reconciliation, and other

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expressive practices, contain vast resources for reknitting together the wounds of social and cultural trauma. Drawing on scholars in peace and conflict studies, Kurtz (2014, 430) cites three key elements in trauma healing processes:

> Models of trauma healing suggest that breaking free from the effects of trauma involves three elements: (1) establishing a place of safety and groundedness, however provisional, for those caught up in trauma, (2) the acknowledgement of trauma victims of their losses, along with an understanding of the causes of their trauma, and (3) the forging of new connections and relationships that can ultimately result in a transformed sense of purpose, meaning, and identity.[16]

For musicians, the first crucial element of "establishing a place of safety and groundedness" can take many forms. The brass band itself is one place of safety, as are religious communities, whether churches or vòdún temples, places where members are protected from physical attacks and epistemic violence, whether from colonization and cultural devaluation, or from racism and injustice. Songs, stories, and rituals themselves can also form powerful, although temporary, safe spaces where healing practices can start to grow. These safe spaces are places where members of these communities can stabilize themselves to prepare to confront the social realities and present conditions of their traumas. The last step in trauma healing that Kurtz mentions, "the forging of new connections and relationships" and the transformation they make possible, is also key for these musicians, as they find that the healing of postcolonial wounds must ultimately open out into relationality, with African diasporas old and new, and with other parts of the world.

Often these steps in trauma healing do not proceed in such a linear fashion, however, as it is common for safe spaces (bands, religious communities, songs, stories, rituals) to be infiltrated by the devaluations and denigrations of neocolonial actors, or by betrayals and divisions within the communities themselves, many, such as social class, ethnicity, culture, and economics, with their roots in histories of colonization. The second step, the acknowledgment of the causes of postcolonial trauma, is also often slowed through the silencing of the truth about colonial histories in African societies as well as in the West, silences that Beninese musicians confront powerfully by singing about these narratives in their music. Based on these musicians' experiences, confronting the realities of past and present traumas is often one of the most difficult and painful steps in postcolonial healing. The new connections and transformations that are so

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necessary to the third step of the healing process have also been suppressed in Benin's past through state policies that promoted economic isolationism and prevented musicians from traveling, or through divisions between Benin and the African diaspora, relationships that are in an ongoing process of reconciliation. These are just a few of the challenges musicians confront in making healing actually work with their music.

For postcolonial societies like Benin, the process of healing has been multifaceted, as it must grapple with both the remembrances and present realities of the violence and structural inequalities that colonialism imposed, as well as with things repressed, unknown, indeed sometimes unspeakable. Scholars like Mbembe (2010a) and Fanon (1961, 16) have written of the feelings of guilt that are frequently a hidden part of colonial trauma. In Mbembe's provocative account, this guilt is wrapped in Africans' complicity in their own subjugation through their desire for the material wealth and shared fantasies of colonialism. But for Fanon this guilt is a false guilt, which the colonizer instilled, the feeling that the colonized is always potentially culpable for some unknown offense or unpaid debt. Crucially, for Fanon, the colonized people never in fact accept this guilt, and instead turn to violent action.

By way of response, *Transforming Vòdún* suggests that there are a multiplicity of individual experiences and responses to colonialism, and that music and ritual are one powerful outlet for social action. The Gangbé Brass Band sings about feelings of postcolonial guilt and complicity in their song "La Porte du Non Retour" (The Door of No Return, referring to the monument to the slave trade in Ouidah, Benin, on their 2008 album *Assiko!*), in which they call out African kings, and, by extension, contemporary African leaders, for their participation in the slave trade and the economics of personal rather than collective gain. They set this composition to the *agbadja* rhythm common to Ouidah and the new vòdún cults along the Mina and Ewe coast to its west. This healing process is psychological and spiritual, but often manifests itself in economic and material terms. Music's duality as temporally ephemeral and sonically material make it a particularly powerful translator between these spheres of experience.

This book's case studies show how crucial it is to understand that musicians' engagement of these healing processes extends to material practices, including their own individual and collective professionalization as artists, and making vòdún practice into a valuable product. These processes of value creation and professionalization are so central because they directly intervene in the specific traumas of colonization: the devaluation of African culture, sign systems, and musical-spiritual practices of healing; the associated loss of self;

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waves of forced migrations, betrayals, and family separations; and the colonizer's seductive promises that these were always the necessary price for material success in the modern world. Colonialism grounded the violence of these traumas on the racist assumption that colonized people had nothing to give but themselves, setting up a never-ending cycle of social debt (see Gordon 2008).

The musicians in this book talk about the connections between economics, their multiple selves, and the healing power of music and ritual in interviews and rehearsals, in song lyrics, and in discussions of musical representation, creative agency, and entrepreneurial practice. Musicians' project of showing they can have both authentic, complex selves and successful careers as musicians goes to the core of this historical and contemporary trauma. As the musicians in *Transforming Vòdún* attest, the healing process never really ends, and living into the resulting dynamic, existential ambivalence requires creative outlets—writing, music, art, ritual—as tactics for survival.

Multiplicity

An understanding of multiplicity—of identity, of culture, of experience—is key to countering colonial and neocolonial narratives about African culture as a unified, unchanging object that overdetermines African people as "tribal," provincial, and definitionally debilitated by melancholic postcolonial conditions, poverty, and internal conflict. Beninese jazz and brass musicians' experiences contain multiplicities of several different kinds. While most of these musicians grew up in the 1970s and '80s in Benin, many different eras have infiltrated and impacted the events of their lives, which become "a combination of multiple temporalities" (Mbembe 2001), containing overlapping elements of many previous eras, from the precolonial Dànxɔmɛ, Xɔgbónu, and Oyo empires from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, to the twentieth-century French colony of Dahomey, to independence in 1960 and the creation of the People's Republic of Benin, followed by the Cold War, democracy, and neoliberalism. While I work diachronically through the cultural and musical metaphors of each of these periods in the opening chapters, it is with the aim of understanding how they come together synchronically—and often "out of order"—in jazz and brass band musicians' experiences before and after the turn of the twenty-first century. Each of these eras carried and carries its own embodied experiences, values, and interpretative frames regarding relationships between tradition and modernity, purity and hybridity, international and transnational exchange, religion, economics, and music. These different "regimes of value"

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have each affected the symbolic value of vòdún music and practice, and African precolonial culture more broadly.[17] These are the conditions in which Beninese musicians intervene, the parameters around which they structure their creative work. I extend this historical analysis in the second part of the book to the case studies of Beninese musicians making music at home, on tour or residing in France, and living in diaspora in New York.

These musicians' experiences are also multiple in the sense that they are diverse, highly individual, and in that many of the ideas their music provokes about the place of the self, entrepreneurship and collectivity, ancestral religion, and relationships with Europe and North America are hotly contested among Beninese people. Further, this group of musicians draws their inspirations and interpretations from a wide range of sources, cultures, places, and times, from the royal-ancestral and the divine, to the French folkloric, the blues diasporic, and the jazz modernist, deploying references to each strategically and contextually. This book reflects these musicians' approaches in its multi-sitedness, extending from Benin to new and old African diasporas in France, Belgium, and New York, and in its open theoretical nature, which seeks the best interpretive tools appropriate to the context, no matter their cultural or disciplinary provenance.

Musically, Beninese musicians select from a variety of cultural influences. These extend from Benin's sacred and popular music traditions like the cracking sound of bamboo sticks striking in *kàkà* repertoires for the vòdún *Zàngbétɔ* that guards the city of Porto Novo at night; *ahwangbahun*, the "rhythm of battle" revealed to the Celeste Church's founder Joseph Oshoffa; agbadja, the rhythm that greets Mina fishermen as they head home along Benin's southwestern coast; to more recent African genres like Afrobeat and highlife, to Afro-diasporic examples like jazz, funk, reggae, salsa, and New Orleans street grooves, to covers of French *chansons* and Bulgarian brass band standards (Jean Gnonlonfoun, interview, Brussels, 6/23/14). They may also choose to deploy, depending on the context, any of the interlocking interpretive frames that Benin has inherited and assimilated through its history as regional imperial power, French colony, Marxist state, and neoliberal democracy. Musicians may thus shift the metaphors they use for music depending on the context, sometimes advocating for a view of music as ritual, healing, or communication, and at others as art, symbolic system, or cultural commodity. At other times they combine these metaphors, finding cross-cultural analogies between them. These metaphors become strategies and tactics for navigating a complex field of business, political, spiritual, and artistic relationships in the world. Musicians' objectives

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may shift as well, as they adapt to changing conditions and revise their pragmatic view of what is possible within the given system.

These musicians know from experience that narratives of cultural homogeneity are highly constructed, and that there is no single African or Beninese philosophy, culture, or aesthetic.[18] Instead, they describe a constellation of individual practices across the fields of religion, education, language, politics, performance, and economics that vary from person to person and within one person's experience from one moment to the next. Often when I would press them on the details of a cultural generalization about Beninese music, they would begin with the qualifying statement "*Je suis pan-africain*" (I am pan-African) before going into a more detailed description of how each individual person interprets the tradition based on their own experience within this pan-African solidarity. For example, former Gangbé trumpeter Magloire Ahounandjinou told me, "Every person has his perception of things today. . . . Every person has his conception of how to use [vòdún melodies and rhythms]" (Plaisir, France, 6/12/10). And Gangbé saxophonist Lucien Gbaguidi described his view of individual experience and practice this way: "In church, it's the same rhythms and everything, but we take out 'vòdún' and put in 'Christ.' But elsewhere we still have vòdún. We give a place to each thing" (interview, Plaisir, France, 6/12/10).

Dimensions of Cultural Transformation

Transformation seems to be the most appropriate way to describe the processes that Beninese jazz and brass band musicians engage in moving experiences and value between different forms and domains. Musicians' processes for creatively transforming the musical materials and value orientations of vòdún practice are many, and by turns political, spiritual, artistic, and entrepreneurial. Musicians spoke about musical and experiential transformation explicitly in both negative and positive terms, as I write below. Transformation has a paradoxical aspect, wherein on the one hand it represents a complete change in physical form, a metamorphosis, while on the other there are a certain set of intriguing properties that remain unchanged, even by trauma, death, or colonization.

A common theme across musicians' strategies of transformation lies in their use of their personal and cultural experiences as tools to bridge gaps, to enact transfers, adaptations, and translations. Such processes include genre transfers, which productively trouble distinctions between the traditional and modern and sacred and secular musical forms of significant times and

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places in Benin and its diasporas. They also include the creation of new forms of cultural value, most often through the changing contexts and locations of performance and cultural exchange. The recontextualization and reorchestration of vòdún music repertoires for recording, stage performance, and teaching is a primary example.

Music has a particular ability to combine and hold multiple, often contested elements in momentary, experimental unities with a dynamic temporal frame, and to affect changes of physical resonance on performers and listeners, which gives it a particular power to express the affective feeling of emergent experiences that surpass existing language. Music, dance, and ritual belong to the expressive sphere of Beninese culture that, even when blended with Christian practice or Western instruments, maintains many of its connections to the texture of indigenous experience as it relates to sound, embodiment, and affect (see Appiah 1992, 7–8). This is an important part of these Beninese musicians' work as their music makes way for the performance and understanding of more different subject positions within prescribed social categories like African, intellectual, musician, immigrant, or Christian.

Central to this discussion are the creative processes that musicians deploy, grounded in their experiences, to transform vòdún music and traditions into new forms of cultural value. What is the nature of this creativity? In the traditional culture of southern Benin, music, creativity, and improvisation have their origins in the forest spirits called *aziza*, the flute-playing creatures who are the inventors of music. Creativity comes from these spirits, and so sits at the confluence of the agency of humans, spirits, and the natural world. This coincides with a conception of creativity as a form of human agency, and all social action as both creative and habitual, that is, it is the product of individual and collective agency *and* of personal, cultural, and social histories and traditions (Ingold and Hallan 2007). Improvisation—creative performance in real time, as in the king become baobab tree—is a fruitful model for understanding the multiple nature of creative agency, and reflects well these musicians' approaches to experience as experimentation, as well as their flexible temporal orientations. From a neoliberal perspective, markets have a tendency to reterritorialize such forms of creativity, to monetize and commodify them on terms other than those of the producers. So creative work must also grapple with this constant threat of co-optation. Beninese musicians confront and carry disparate ideas about how creativity is defined and valued at home and abroad, which often revolve around the contested roles of the individual and profit. This is especially true considering the country's varied politico-economic histories. The relationship

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between creativity and economic hardship is also a key one to consider as part of this discussion, as it is often situations of economic crisis or extreme inequality of power and resources that inspire radical forms of creativity. In this sense, we can understand more deeply the close connection between cultural trauma, healing, and the economics of creative labor, and the ways that musicians' work intervenes and adapts, as I write more below.

A central question for this book has to do with how musicians' and listeners' creative processes offer tools for creating a dialogic relationship with existing social structures and identities, playing off them as materials to create the conditions for further possibility. I intend for improvisers to hear themselves in these discussions, as we have plenty of practice in creatively manipulating temporal and signifying systems. Focusing on musicians' creativity and experience offers important insight into the ways that these individuals negotiate and even incorporate social constraints and multivocality in their improvisations and adaptations.

Spiritual Transformations

One productive way of understanding the power of transformation between material and immaterial forms is through Benin's spiritual traditions, whether the indigenous practice of vòdún, or Africanized Christianity or Islam. The transformation of family ancestors, historical figures, and natural phenomena into vòdún spirits (or Christian or Muslim saints) reveals a spiritual world that is thoroughly interpermeable with the physical, and which embraces a multiplicity of forms and symbols that plays out in performative real time. Ancestors who departed across the sea centuries ago make this transformation as well; so the concept of diaspora—old and new—seen from a Beninese perspective must necessarily include this spiritual dimension. Vòdún practice enacts these metaphysical transformations in embodied real time in possession by deities like Hevioso and Sakpata and the masquerade of the *egúngún* (Yoruba, Fon: *kuvitɔ*), when deities of ancestors and powerful divine forces inhabit the bodies of devotees through dance and dress, communicating messages and directives of a social and moral nature in codes of melo-rhythmic drumming, movement, and sacred language. Traditions and social roles similarly inhabit social actors, who trace paths and act out scripts that intertwine their own agency with the working out of history and culture in their lives.

Vòdún practice has been the site of conflict and contestation between Europeans and the people of Benin (formerly Dahomey), and among Beninese peo-

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ple themselves, for centuries. Vòdún challenged many of the goals of European colonization, including the formation of modern, rational, Christian subjects, and French, Italian, and Portuguese evangelists for the Catholic Church in seventeenth-century then-Dahomey identified the practice early on as a threat to their mission. Behanzin, the last king of the Dànxɔmɛan empire, fought hard and long to keep French colonization at bay, and while he ultimately lost, the strength of Dànxɔmɛ's vòdún practices has made the royal capital of Abomey a holdout against Christian influence throughout the political changes of the postindependence and postsocialist periods.[19] And prior to Christian evangelization, vòdún was a site for the playing out of interethnic conflicts among the people of then-Dahomey, through the assimilation of rivals' deities, priests, and drummers (see Blier 1995). Thus contemporary musicians' use of vòdún as a site for creatively crafting and transforming identities in an environment of contestation has a long history.

The imaginings of the African diaspora from West Africa are shot through with the legacy of the departure of these transformed ancestors to other shores, or to the next life, opening the relevance of this study for recent scholarly interest in the study of new African diasporas (Nzegwu and Okpewho 2009), and joining recent scholarship that "includes and inscribes Africa as a constitutive locus rather than viewing it as a 'source' for diasporic populations and practices but not an active participant" (Jaji 2014, 6). 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 homeland.[20] Thus these musicians argue musically[21] for the place of Cotonou and Paris as important outposts on the Black Atlantic (Gilroy 1993). I explore the disagreements among different Beninese musicians about how they imagine their participation in this diaspora, musically and religiously. The process of reconnecting with the African diaspora through music often encounters disjunctures, what Brent Hayes Edwards (2003) refers to as the gaps of translation, space, and time with the term *décalage*, whether in ideologies of African culture and aesthetics between diasporans and Beninese musicians, or within communities of Beninese musicians themselves. That these splits and disagreements occur along the fault lines of ideological debates of past eras over economics, politics, and traditional culture suggests that the transformations musicians engage bring to the fore long-standing divisions within pan-Africanist movements.

Transformations of a spiritual nature serve as powerful images for understanding the transfer of value from one domain to another, whether it is from

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the traditional to the popular, or the spiritual to the material or monetary, and importantly, how Beninese musicians enact, live, and experience these transformations. Their experiences with these transformations set up real felt relationships with the overlapping temporalities of past, present, and future, and can help musicians and listeners to better understand how each time period acts on the others, as ancestral spirits work in the present, enlivened by present practice, and constantly bringing new futures into being. Spiritual transformations reveal musicians' realities to be continuously creative and experimental, and in dialog with multiple human and nonhuman agentic forces. Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000, 16) writes that, in his reading of Indian postcoloniality, "being human involves the question of being with gods and spirits," which are not just "social facts" to be recorded and analyzed, but bring larger social forces beyond human control into the reality and the texture of lived experience.

Divine agency is important in daily life in Benin. For example, in the central markets, where produce, housewares, and all manner of materials are sold, it is common to see a shrine (often covered with metal caging and curtains for protection) to Legba, the trickster deity, linguist, and god of the crossroads, who captures the indeterminacy of the market environment with his capricious nature and bestows business windfalls on those who seek his favor with offerings. Another relevant example is the Fon concept of *sɛ*, or destiny, which captures the dialectical relationship between human and divine agency in Fon culture. Diviners, or *bokɔnɔn*, say that *sɛ* sits on one's head, much in the manner of a mask sitting on the head of one possessed by its spirit, in a codetermining dance between the structures of tradition and ancestry (and biology?) and the agency of the individual, a concept Daniel Reed (2003, 2018) has explored fruitfully. To learn about one's *sɛ*, or destiny, one consults a *bokɔnɔn* diviner, who uses the Fa (from Yoruba *Ifá*) divination system of 256 symbolic cowrie shell combinations to communicate with the deity Fá (a vòdún spirit with its own repertoire of songs and rhythms) and provide information about the person's spiritual orientation now and in the future. The lyrics of several brass band compositions and folk song arrangements I analyze center around the concept of *sɛ* and deploy it strategically.

In focusing on vòdún in the creative transformations of Benin's music traditions, and in the title of this book, I am being deliberately provocative. Some might accuse me of airing "dirty laundry," particularly in discussing vòdún in the context of postcolonial trauma. The representation of Benin as the "vòdún nation" was exemplified by a government-supposrted marketing campaign that began in earnest in the 1990s, including the creation of the Ouidah '92 fes-

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tival, now the annual Fête de Vòdún, itself the site of contestation among vòdún communities, and between vòdún communities and Christians in Benin. With the end of Kérékou's socialist, antivòdún government in 1990, the opening of the economy, and the institution of a democratic constitution (with three official religions: Christianity, Islam, and vòdún), the value of vòdún rose again, now with a neoliberal twist. Thus, while vòdún is a powerful cultural symbol in Benin, many Christian Beninese musicians and audiences object to its use as a national symbol, or, indeed, as an interpretive tool. They argue that vòdún as religion does not represent all of Benin's citizens, particularly Christian and Muslim adherents. Many of these same people are quick to recognize, however, that vòdún music, songs, rhythms, and worldviews infuse many of these other religious practices in varying degrees of explicitness, part of the process of "popularization" of vòdún repertoires outside of reserved rituals that took place in the mid-twentieth century. Musicians refer to these popularized uses of vòdún music as "*culturel*" as versus their "*cultuel*" (religious) use in vòdún ceremonies. This discursive emphasis points to one of the important transformations of genre that musicians sometimes deploy in presenting vòdún as *secular* culture accessible to nonbelievers rather than *religious* practice restricted only to the initiated.

Many Beninese jazz and brass band musicians were raised, and indeed trained on their instruments, in independent African churches like the Celestial Church of Christ and the Cherubim and Seraphim Society, where vòdún songs and rhythmic styles appear frequently in worship, usually with altered, Christian texts in local languages. This offers these musicians a model for an Afro-modernity that, while open to multiple interpretations and dimensions of transformation, stays in touch with the textures of African ancestral experience while assimilating and transforming colonial religious practices as an indelible mark on African history. This is a claim to a shared heritage that elects not to separate African from European cultural influences, but sees all expressive tools as potentially valid and useful, depending on the context. Thus, while in practice vòdún music is a central part of the national musical culture in Benin, naming and representing those connections is often highly contested.

Transformations of Value

Musicians' improvised strategies of transformation appear in many forms across the various sites I examine in Benin and the Beninese diaspora in Europe and North America. One of the primary metaphors musicians, especially brass

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band musicians, used to describe their projects of transformation was that of *valorization* (Fr. *valoriser*, *valorisation*). Key to these processes is the transformation of *cultural capital* from one form to another, for example in the commodification of traditional rhythmic textures, styles of dance, and religious symbols. This is where transformative strategies participate in networks of cultural production and reproduction, always change with a signal difference. One might expect that the mechanical or industrial reproduction of vòdún traditions would diminish the power of their aura, which could lead to secrecy and protectionism;[22] but these musicians and their spiritual leaders have found that, in neoliberal markets, the reproduction of their traditions paradoxically multiplies their power and influence in the world by opening additional contexts of interpretation (see Comaroff and Comaroff 2009).

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 Beninese 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 Comaroff and Comaroff 2009, 25) as Beninese 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. Importantly, the project of recognition for the status of Beninese traditional music confronts a long history of colonial denigration of local religious and musical practices. Thus, the economic and professional aspects of these musicians' projects are central to their relevance for responding to histories of colonial trauma and the devaluation of indigenous spiritual and cultural practices in ways that allow them to flourish and to continue to change and adapt.

The project of valorizing vòdún music and practice 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; it always comes with a price tag. Other types

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of nonmonetary value, such as sacred value, ethical value, artistic value, or pure prestige, are not incentivized in the same way, and musicians must work harder and be more creative to cultivate these forms of value as well. 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.

In addition to Euro-American audiences, musicians also make music for the ancestors and for the vòdún, engaging the ritual healing powers of these traditions. They also make music for themselves, and for the communities they belong to in Benin, in France, or in New York City, who will have access to the more insider-oriented aspects of the music. These audiences often have different ideas about the transforming value of vòdún music and traditions. Some Beninese might object to their representation in the first place, because, on the one hand, they may believe vòdún traditions should be protected from commercialization, or because, as conservative Christians, they believe they have negative spiritual power. Others may find them to be welcome reminders of home, whether of Benin when they are abroad, or of village life when they are in the city in Cotonou. Black diasporic listeners such as African Americans, Afro-Europeans, or Afro-Caribbean people, depending on their interpretive frames, have their own complex set of expectations about how vòdún should be valued, transformed, exchanged, or received, including ideas about the perceived homogeneity of African culture, experience, and aesthetics.

A certain amount of indirection in musicians' musical and discursive strategies makes it possible to navigate some of these conflicting desires and expectations among audiences, in an effort to cultivate the most recognition possible for the traditions with the fewest concessions of creative agency. However, sometimes these diverse audiences force musicians to make difficult choices and sacrifice one approach over another. Thus, while addressing the devaluation of indigenous culture through transforming vòdún traditions and enacting postcolonial healing is one of the musicians' goals, ultimately, this process takes place in an environment of interacting agencies and requires the acceptance of a certain amount of indeterminacy, unfinishedness, and multiplicity, which has led many musicians to their pragmatic outlooks on the results of their work.

Negotiating Afro-Modernity

In the spiritual and material transformations that Beninese musicians engage in their music, they must negotiate with dominant economic and aesthetic ide-

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ologies of modernity, which uphold the legacies of coloniality and postcoloniality. The struggle for these musicians is to find a place for their music to be recognized within this modernist economic and aesthetic framework while still maintaining its ties to African ways of life, liveness, and livelihood. In so doing they seek to create new forms of Afro-modernity (see Hanchard 1999). One way of thinking about this is through what Achille Mbembe (2010a, 28) calls "a critique of time," in which "dance, music, celebrations, trance, and possession" productively disrupt modernity's linear temporalities by introducing ritual loops and slippages into participants' experience through references to precolonial repertoires or through reaching out to diasporic listeners and styles. But the constraints posed by modernity's economic and aesthetic structures are significant, and musicians find they must make some concessions, deploying their creativity and craft, along the way. Philosopher Walter Mignolo (2018, 373) suggests that thinking of modernity as always tied up with coloniality, thinking of it as the indivisible "*modernity/coloniality*," does actually have the power to disrupt some of the key assumptions of Western cosmology about time, history, and sign-signified relationships. It is in this sense that I understand these musicians' use of terms like "*moderne*," that to be modern is also to be entangled in coloniality.

When jazz and brass band musicians spoke to me about their creative process of transforming their experiences, identities, and Benin's music traditions, they used a few specific terms to describe it. In addition to language about *valorization*, they characterized the process as one of "modernization" (Fr. *modernisation*), which, in a Beninese musico-technical context, refers specifically to the addition of foreign instruments like brass and drum set to the African drums and bells, and usually the standardization or "squaring off" of percussion patterns' usual temporal pushes and pulls to fit a recording studio click track.

I observed that this "modernization," for some musicians, meant presenting the music's spiritual origins in vòdún in a secular-cultural framework. Sometimes this was because the musicians believed that presenting the music as "cultural" rather than "spiritual" (*culturel* versus *cultuel* in French) gave it more transcultural accessibility for mixed audiences of religious and nonreligious audiences abroad; musicians also talked about their desires not to represent the music as vòdún-related because of their own Christian beliefs. In other contexts, such as when speaking to listeners or fans who were particularly interested in vòdún practice, culture in Benin, or in making a visit to the country, or sometimes for music producers, journalists, or researchers looking for an angle, musicians would actually foreground the music's spiritual roots,

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emphasizing the narrative that all of Benin's traditional rhythms derive from vòdún rhythms originally, and drawing connections between spiritual practice and their creative projects. Sometimes the same musicians would use one strategy in one set of circumstances, and another for a different context, improvising, ducking and weaving, and adapting depending on the scenario. Thus "modernizing" these musical traditions could mean secularizing them, which musicians referred to as a process of "popularization" (Fr. *popularisation*), or genre transfer from the sacred to the popular realms, as took place in the 1960s and '70s in Benin. Modernizing might also call, alternately or simultaneously, for the creation of cultural commodities, creating new value from religious or cultural transformations. This oscillation between the representation of the sacred and the secular guises of Benin's musical traditions, depending on the context, reflects the improvisatory and tactical nature of these musicians' creative practice. It is a creativity that is highly contextual—temporally, semiotically, socially, and culturally.

Through their music and professional lives, the Beninese musicians in this study situate themselves intentionally within networks of jazz and Afromodernism, and in so doing articulate their imaginings of the diaspora from an African perspective, including, importantly, their own place in it. This linking of their membership in the African diaspora with the aesthetics and techniques of modernity is key to these musicians' understanding of their professional projects. Jazz, as a professional network, as a style with a certain amount of cultural capital, and as a set of musical and improvisatory techniques, allows these musicians to make several different kinds of claims.

On the one hand, jazz allows these Beninese musicians to make a claim to membership in a global, Afro-modern community of artists and audiences, with all of the elite status, performance opportunities, and financial benefits that this entails. This aligns with what cultural studies scholar Alexander Weheliye (2005, 145), in his discussion of global hip hop and "sonic Afro-modernity," calls "performing diasporic citizenship," a challenge to standard constructions of the nation-state, or Elizabeth McAlister's (2012, 39) description of Haitians "imagining themselves in diaspora." In its Afro-Christian form, diaspora seen from this perspective can work as a spiritual paradise, a "city of God" that stretches across boundaries of nation, place, and time.

On the other hand, Benin's special relationship to the African diaspora historically through slavery, trauma, and spirituality, along with Benin's distinctive local instruments, rhythms, and melodies, allows these musicians to make a claim to their *difference* within this membership, enabling them to manage

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their participation in what Weheliye (2005) calls "economies of racedness," as they seek to make space for a way of being black in the world as well as African, or indeed, as Nago, Gun, Toffin, Maxi, or Beninese. This is a key distinction that brings out Beninese musicians' gradually acquired expertise in combining their legibility as Afro-diasporic artists in the world music market—and the complexity of their blackness—with their cultural difference as Beninese culture bearers, as they play on Western modernity's essentialist paradoxes of race and culture. At its most powerful, Afro-modernity lays claim not only to the elite status of the creative productions of the African diaspora, but, as the just inheritances of colonialism, to the intellectual products of "European" modernity as well (Agawu 2003).[23] This Afro-modernity is a decolonial intervention, a healing corrective, a prescription or ritual instruction, for the received narrative about modernity and its peripheries.

There has been a tendency for jazz studies and discussions of diaspora to treat Africa as an unchanging homeland in a kind of eternal past, as "source material" for the modern innovations of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Make no mistake, Africa is an archive, and one with deep historical wealth. But it is an archive in a state of constant change, a *networked* archive that self-updates, downloading and uploading new material at fiber optic speed. The work of Beninese musicians shows the extent to which the present and presence of African experience is making itself known in transformations of sound and embodied practices, and in movement through time and space that constantly cross new boundaries. Indeed, Beninese musicians' translations of their experiences for various audiences often entail the *entexting* of those experiences as recordings, lyrics, liner notes, concerts, and street performances, although musicians have a tendency to build various kinds of resistant orality into these texts as a way of keeping the experiential—liveness—in the foreground.

Transformation is a way for postcolonial musicians to grapple with ruptures of many kinds; it is a ritual enactment, a processing and working out, of a whole series of events in history and in recent memory—the slave trade, colonialism, postindependence coups, democracy, and neoliberalization—that have fundamentally changed the existential outlook of life in Benin and for Africans in the world. Transforming genres and identities becomes an experiment in bridging these various gaps—between here and there, then and now, inside and outside. Importantly, the experiences that emerge from these experimental transformations are themselves complex and multiple; wading into the symbols of traditional culture and colonial trauma does not lead to a return to some fictive unity or total recovery, but instead opens out into

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more experiments, more translations, more diverse experiences—the work of living, of survival.

Because performance happens in embodied real time, musicians' acting out of these transformations has a particular temporal orientation that depends on the strengths and risks of tactical logic and improvisation—musically, politically, and professionally. Live music performance, including dance, song, and audience interaction, makes these translations *materially embodied and temporally present* in ways that alter and attune—for a demarcated time—participants' phenomenological experiences of history, tradition, power, and selfhood. One of the primary references for creating these transformations of experience and felt membership for these musicians has been through jazz and Afro-diasporic connections.

This book is concerned with how Beninese jazz and brass band musicians engage processes of transformation—transfers between genres, forms of cultural capital, experiential contexts, and language systems—in the production of their various identities—national, diasporic, global, and modern. Many of these processes of transformation involve improvisation and flexible ideas of temporality, semiotic meaning, and identity formation. I have tried to take a comparable approach in the writing of this book, which, as text, is at its base a *recording* of an improvised line of thought, a record of a path through a terrain, which, in spite of its linear constraints, seeks to reflect and communicate some of the temporal and semiotic flexibility, some of the textured experience and transformative play, that these musicians embody so well.

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PART I

MULTIPLE TEMPORALITIES

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CHAPTER 1

HISTORY AND HEALING IN VÒDÚN

Practice, Power, and Value

Because of precolonial histories of kingdom-building and interethnic conflict, and colonial histories of vòdún denigration and suppression, ancestral traditions like vòdún evoke wide-ranging and often contradictory affective associations among musicians and listeners, depending on an individual's social and even temporal positionality. Thus, for jazz and brass musicians in the 2000s and 2010s, vòdún music and practice at times represent a sense of familial and community connection, or even an orientation toward anticolonial, pan-African resistance, resilience, and pride. At other times, and from other positions, these same practices inspire feelings of ambivalence, alienation, suspicion, anger, and shame.

Vòdún practice is the place where precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial traumas play out, the place where the tears in the social fabric are sewn back together to make survival—to make life—possible again. By denigrating these practices as superstitious, backward, diabolical, and antimodern, indeed by suppressing them and even rendering them formally illegal, the French colonists undermined the foundations of Dànxɔmɛan social cohesion and interethnic contestation.

Music and ritual are particularly powerful media for working through these conflicting feelings, as they allow for multiple experiences simultaneously, providing the flexibility necessary to make sense of these divided selves. But this same power also makes music and ritual sites of extreme vulnerability and indeterminacy, which can be co-opted by actors coming from a variety of different positions, which is why vòdún practice comes with so many restrictions, taboos, and so much secrecy.

The dynamics of global economic interdependence established in nineteenth-century Dànxɔmɛ set the stage for debates over contested independence and cultural autonomy in the colonial era. The empire's valorization of tradition, royalty, religion, and national culture, too, continued to resonate throughout the twentieth century as traditional authenticity was continually

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reconstructed. Thus, French colonization's effects on the development of education, social class, and religious practice are equally as powerful a factor in understanding jazz and brass band musicians' attitudes about vòdún music and practice, as well as their thinking about the relative status and value of specific traditional, modern, and "tradi-modern" music genres.

The relationship of the jazz and brass musicians in this study to the Republic of Benin's histories of power, religion, ethnicity, and music is complex. On the one hand, these musicians see the expressive traditions associated with vòdún religious practice as foundational connections to precolonial African values and ways of life, especially ideas about peace, healthy sociality, royal lineage, sovereignty, and the legitimacy of African rule. They see these traditions as thus useful for their anticolonial resonances. They see vòdún rhythms as the source of all Beninese traditional and popular music, and vòdún religious practice as the origin of incredible spiritual power deserving of respect, whether this power is used for good or evil.

On the other hand, these musicians are also acutely aware that the social cohesion that vòdún initiations facilitated, especially in kingdoms like the powerful, ethnically Fon Dànxɔmɛ (today the inland city of Abomey), was founded upon hierarchical control and violence.[1] This violence manifested itself in the wartime capture and subsequent forced cultural assimilations of people of other ethnicities, many of them drummers, vòdún priests, and women. Some captives were sold as slaves to the Europeans in order to increase the wealth and defenses of the kingdom, tying its economic well-being to global politics and economics. As I show, this violence was founded on the kingship's anxieties about cultural and biological reproduction, revealing a particular gendered subjectivity that was deeply concerned with projecting strength and longevity, while hiding its dependence on violence and control to make this happen.

This critical perspective on vòdún and official power reflects these musicians' particular positionalities as representatives of non-Fon ethnic groups like the Gun, the Hweda, the Toffin, the Torri, and the Maxi,[2] who managed to survive or escape Dànxɔmɛ's conquests in the past and are now based largely in the cities of the southern coast in Cotonou and Porto Novo (Xɔgbónu). Each of these ethnic groups has its own familial traditions of vòdún worship that have existed in varying degrees inside or outside of the boundaries of royal control. Many of these musicians grew up in working class communities, practicing one of these local or familial forms of vòdún, and later converted to Christianity, most often in an independent African congregation like the Cherubim and Seraphim Society or the Celestial Church of Christ, which blend Christian

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and vòdún liturgical materials. Thus, while vòdún music has historically been a tool for enforcing cultural hegemony and control, it has also been an important site of resistance to the inheritances of Fon ethnic hegemony, through its expression in the musics of these ethnic minorities and new Afro-Christian blends. Trombonist Aaron Ahouandjinou (interview, Porto Novo, 6/29/10) of the Onala Brass Band[3] explained that, while as a Celestial Christian he does not practice it, vòdún comes in many forms and carries many names in Benin; depending on the ethnic and village context it could also be referred to as *aziza* or *yehwe*, for example. *Aziza* refers to the forest spirits that are the source of all divine creativity, including musicians' ability to improvise and compose. *Yehwe* is similar in its usage to vòdún, as a flexible term for god or deity.

These musicians' perspectives, and especially their sensitivities to past and present power relationships, have led me to a focus on vòdún's politico-spiritual economy, by which I mean the ways that its music and other practices have been instrumental in the formation of political and spiritual power and value in Benin before and after colonization. These formations of power have rested on the kingship's use of vòdún to try to heal the traumas produced by ethnic conflict through the possibilities of cultural pluralism, even as this strategy also ultimately enforced Fon cultural hegemony. In this chapter and the next, I show how this historical analysis reveals much about why these musicians are so conflicted about the place of vòdún in their work and in Benin's national imaginaries, while also believing that vòdún music and practice must be an essential part of any project that seeks to represent Benin.

Vòdún: Drawing Water from the Source

Some background on vòdún practice is helpful here. Through my studies with vòdún drummers and practitioners in Abomey, I learned that the term *vòdún* refers either to the set of cults devoted to different divinities or to the divinities themselves. As a cosmology, it represents a way of understanding how power, spiritual or political or both, works in the world, and a set of tools for intervening in those power dynamics in a real way. Central to a vòdún-based view of the world is the idea of moral equilibrium, that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction, which underlies indigenous forms of justice and the maintenance of social cohesion.

The vòdún can be understood within three categories, the first being "ethnic," as in the case of the royal *tohwiyo* (founding fathers) and *nesuxwe* (princes)

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or the familial ancestors *tovòdún*. Another set are "interethnic," as in the case of the "great" vòdún 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). A third category of vòdún 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 and were involved in then-Dahomey's nascent anticolonial movement. Many "great" vòdún originally had specific ethnic origins, such as Fa from Oyo, Hevioso from Hevie, and Sakpata from Dassa, before they were captured with their people and incorporated into the pantheon in Abomey (Sastre 1970).

One of the vòdún's material manifestations is in their possession of *vòdúnsi*, the "wives of the vòdún," women and some men who are devoted to a given divinity in the way a wife is devoted to her husband. When the vòdún 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 vòdún vary depending on which offerings that particular vòdún requires and the style of its relationship to its devotees. Importantly, each vòdún has a separate repertoire of songs and characteristic chants associated with it, and specific rhythms and calls that are played by the drumming ensemble. Other physical representations of vòdún include murals 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. These shrines may be kept in a temple or in a covered hole in the ground. Over time, the layers of materials poured out on these figures form a kind of assemblage that becomes a permanent part of the vòdún 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 *vòdún* has been in use since the time of Allada, as it first appears in print in the 1658 Adja-language section of the *Doctrina Christiana* from King Philip of Spain, where the translators use it as the lowercase "god," contrasting it with Mawu for the proper noun "God." Scholars have much speculated on the etymology of the word *vòdún*, searching throughout the Adja language family, looking for resonances in the term's use in the Ewe, Fon, Adja, and Gun languages (for further discussion, see Pazzi 1976; Segurola 1963; Blier 1995;

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Figure 2. The shrine for the familial vòdún in drummer and priest Étienne Mechonou's residence in Abomey. Photo by the author.

and Politz 2011, 16–18). The consensus points to a constellation of meanings surrounding the term *vò* as "emptiness, hole, opening," and *dún* as "to draw water, to take rest." Vòdún 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. It offers a source of power that can intervene in the anxieties and ruptures of human life, offering relief, through the promise of a greater understanding of the spiritual connections that cross boundaries of time, place, and generations. 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."

According to one story reported by Melville Herskovits (1958, 167), the *vòdún* arrived in Dànxɔmɛ[4] under the reign of King Agadja (1708–28). Hwandjile, a woman from "Adja"—presumably meaning Allada or going back even further to the city of Adja-Tado—brought the vòdún so that "women could give birth to human beings, and animals could give birth to animals," regu-

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larizing cultural reproduction by regularizing biological reproduction;[5] this could mirror the resolution of interfamilial disputes (such as those between co-wives) over royal succession. In this telling, the arrival of the vòdún enabled Agadja, heretofore childless, to father an heir to the throne.[6] It was in this way that, according to myth, Hwandjile gave birth to the future king Tegbesu. In essence, this origin story places vòdún at the center of the restoration of social order through ritual, healing the rifts caused by interfamilial and interethnic disputes, and ensuring the continuity of the royal line.

Dànxɔmɛ: Histories of Contestation

Dànxɔmɛ was not the only kingdom in precolonial Benin, but it was for a long time the most powerful, and it invested a great deal in the maintenance of its histories, especially its narratives of legitimacy. Because of its role as a slave trading kingdom, and as a source of African diasporic culture in the Americas, Dànxɔmɛ has been one of the most intensively studied West African civilizations by historians of economics, art, religion, and politics, for example in the work of anthropologist Melville Herskovits, art historian Suzanne Blier, and ethnomusicologist Gilbert Rouget. Dànxɔmɛ's own oral historians also provide rich accounts of the kingdom's important conquests, personalities, and cultural contributions, usually through the lens of official royal sanction. The histories of the neighboring kingdoms of Allada, Ouidah, and Xɔgbónu are linked to Dànxɔmɛ's through histories of lineage, schism, competition, and conquest. Particularly important is Dànxɔmɛ's conquest of Ouidah in the eighteenth century.[7]

While the value and power associated with vòdún music and practice were intertwined with the power dynamics that developed between rival kingdoms and between ethnic groups, vòdún's politico-spiritual economics also shaped and were shaped by the contested nature of the power dynamics that developed between African leaders and European traders. These dynamics, centered on negotiations of trade, war, and religion, defined how Dànxɔmɛ 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 Dànxɔmɛ was colonized by the French.

For followers of vòdún and other ancestral practices of southern Benin, one of the most effective ways of enacting social healing is through the ritual and musical telling of history, through multisensory *narrative*. Because it enacts and

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reenacts the process of making sociality and trust among peoples, the telling of history is a sacred, ritual act in southern Benin's ancestral traditions. The institution of the *kpanlingan* royal historians by King Ouegbadja (Wegbaja) emphasizes just how central the telling of these historical narratives were to the making of the kingdom, a protonational formation. As I observed at the ceremonies I attended in Abomey, the *kpanlingan*'s sung storytelling, accompanied by the rhythms of the *gàn* double bell's timeline, typically opens ceremonies for the vòdún or the royal ancestors, then is followed by drumming, dancing, and singing to bring the vòdún spirits or ancestors to inhabit the bodies of their followers through possession.

The *kpanlingan*'s opening of the ceremony is highly political and performative, regulated with great attention to the accuracy of the stories passed down through word and song in order to seal over those stitched up places and make sure that the story does its work in restoring social order, in feeding the ancestors, in making peace. In the past, a *kpanlingan*'s error could be punished by death, because the performative act of speaking and singing the powerful names of past kings, the names of the deities they have become, has real spiritual effects in the world. The spoken word itself has incredible power. Uttering these spirits' names brings to life their politico-spiritual power, and the histories of their control of their subjects, and their resistance against European colonization.

The task of my narrative here is analogous: to invoke the powerful ancestral names of the past in order to enliven the wisdom they may offer in the present, to pay my respects, and my dues. I owe a debt to these histories, and so does the rest of the world. Debt, I have found, is a good heuristic for postcolonial work, and it is debt—social, cultural, material, and spiritual—that came to define Dànxɔmɛ's relationships with the Europeans over time.

Examining Dànxɔmɛan historical narratives reveals a great deal about how anxieties about wealth, power, lineage, and sexual and cultural reproduction were linked to religious and musical practice as the kingdom sought to establish its legitimacy.[8] One of the originary sources of the Dànxɔmɛan kings' insecurities was that they were not the first inhabitants of what is now Abomey; rather, they migrated there after a split from the kingdom of Allada. This fissure alone is the source of much conflict and anxiety in Dànxɔmɛ's history.

The primary inhabitants of southern Benin prior to the thirteenth century lived in two groups. One was in the west on the Allada plateau, ethnically Ayizo (or Aïza) and Torri (like the ancestors of former Gangbé members Sam, Mathieu, Jean, and their younger brother J. B.), while the other was on the Ketou

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plateau to the east, primarily Yoruba people who had arrived early on from the Oyo empire and the city of Ile-Ife. Historians of the region estimate that 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 (Argyle 1966, 4).

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 shapeshifting is a marker of extraordinary spiritual power, and reflects the great awe and respect that Adja and Fon culture place on the ability to transform oneself between different manifestations (and between different species!). This founding union represents a profound moment of intercultural hybridity-at-the-origin in Fon-Adja collective memory, a hybridity that continued to be woven into the fabric of Dànxɔmɛ's self-making as time went on.

The violent, sexualized power of this mythical, original hybridity is also key, as the Adja princess is depicted 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 *vòdúnsi*, a vòdún devotee, or "wife of the vòdún," who is possessed—physically and spiritually—by a vòdún spirit, a "man from the east," suggesting a Yoruba man with unknown spiritual power. This founding story is highly suggestive of the ways that Dànxɔmɛan rulers sought to reenforce their legitimate connections to the royal bloodline in the Adja princess and to explain their own possible foreign, non-Tado links from Yorubaland.

The first ancestor Agasu's name means "the panther," and royal descendants today venerate him as a *tovòdún*, 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.[9] 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 (rather than through coups and assassinations), that the Nigerian historian I. A. Akinjogbin (1967) flags as the signs of the kingdom's good politico-spiritual health, which was disrupted by the pressures placed on the kingdom by trade with the Europeans in slaves and other goods.

Allada (called Ardra or Great Ardra by the British) is a name with great mythological resonance for the cultural unity of southern Dahomey-Benin,[10] and for the African diaspora as well. It represents a shared place of origin for

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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 and Ghana. These links were especially resonant for those of royal ancestry in Abomey, Allada, and Xɔgbónu, who to this day refer to themselves as the "Alladanou," those from Allada. 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 2012). Thus, references to Allada in myth or song, as in Gangbé's "Alladanou" below, index the possibility of a unified identity for the linked languages and cultures of Benin, Togo, and Ghana's coastland, as well as their connections with the African diaspora, even as such references trace over the historical competitions for authenticity, power, and cultural dominance that have shaped these communities' relationships through the centuries.

The story goes that 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. 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 (Wegbaja) who is typically considered the first true king of Dànxɔmɛ.

Dako brought the royal orchestra of *adjohun* with him from Allada, which was at that time played exclusively for royal funerals (da Cruz 1954, 44), ensuring that members of the royal family would be deified as vòdún after their deaths, extending their power beyond the living world. At this time, religious practices centered around the veneration of the *tohwiyo*, the royal ancestors, and the *tovòdún*, familial ancestral deities. These musical and spiritual practices reinforced the legitimacy of the kingship as the true link to Allada, even though the leaders of the rival kingdom of Xɔgbónu saw themselves as equally legitimate.

The Foundation of Xɔgbónu (Porto Novo)

In my experiences living and working in Porto Novo (Xɔgbónu in the Gun language) during my fieldwork, several musicians' lives and cultural affiliations

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reflected their pride in their Porto Novian roots, especially for those, like the Ahouandjinou family, among the founding members of the Gangbé and Eyo'nlé Brass Band, who come from Gun royal lineages. This was often reflected in the cultural and emotional distance they practiced from Abomey and Fon culture in general. They and other Porto Novian musicians also reflect the city's strong connections to Yoruba culture in their musical experiences, and its historical openness to European religion in their blended Afro-Christian liturgical practices. Several Porto Novian musicians were wary of the amount of time I spent in Abomey studying the Dànxɔmɛan kingdom and studying vòdún drumming; Gangbé Brass Band trombonist Martial Ahouandjinou expressed something of the histories of rivalry between the two cities, saying obliquely, "I don't think it's a good idea for you to spend too much time up there [in Abomey]" (personal communication, March 2015).

The kingdom of Xɔgbónu in Porto Novo has its own origin story. According to oral history, another of Adjahouto's sons, Te-Agdanlin, left Allada around the same time as Dako, in the early 1600s, 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. It was these people who became known as the Gun, from the Yoruba exonym "Egun." The settlers from Allada gave Porto Novo the Adja name Xɔgbónu, 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 Adja-Gun, Yoruba, and Portuguese roots (Xɔgbónu, Adjache, and Porto Novo, respectively).

Like Dànxɔmɛ, the king in Xɔgbónu claimed a direct line of descent from Allada, insisting that visitors address him as "the king of Allada" (Rouget 1996). The royal ceremonial practices of *adjogan*, performed by the king's wives, recounted through song, drumming, and dance the story legitimizing Xɔgbónu's ancestral lineage.[11] Gilbert Rouget (1996, 339), writing about the king's court in Xɔgbónu, 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."

The Reign of Ouegbadja: Making Dànxɔmɛ

Back in Abomey, Dako's son Ouegbadja (Wegbaja) (1650–80) took over a vastly expanded kingdom. His reign was an important one, as he instituted many social changes, particularly related to the role of captured peoples in the king-

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dom and the regulation of vòdún practice and music. These changes were especially key to creating social cohesion, because the previous generation's split from Allada meant that Ouegbadja, and those who came after him, suffered from a chronic insecurity about the legitimacy of their power and their lineage. It was Ouegbadja who gave the empire of Dànxɔmɛ ("in the belly of Dan," the serpent vòdún)[12] its name. He became a culture hero in the colonial era, adding layers of detail and symbolic weight to the stories of his legacy. Argyle (1966, 11–12) reports that many Dahomeans told him that it was Ouegbadja who "made the country."

One of Ouegbadja's successes was in finding ways of centralizing his power, including through music. Through his sponsorship of drumming ensembles, Ouegbadja was Dànxɔmɛ's first great patron of drumming styles like *adjogan* and *dogba*, which he deployed in order to reinforce his power through giving honor to the ancestors in Allada, the ancestral source. 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 (see Nketia 1971, 8, 12, 17). Paradoxically, this social control sometimes served to heal cultural divisions, but at other times this stitching together of social ties could be just as violent as the forces that separated people in the first place.

Ouegbadja's reign represented a new and revolutionary form of power, grounded in ancestral spirituality as state religion. My interviews with oral historian Gabin Djimasse in Abomey (12/6/14) suggest that Dako's departure from Allada represented a truly significant break with traditional lineage and the link to the ancestors. According to Djimasse, Ouegbadja stitched together his culturally heterogeneous kingdom of captives by basing his power in the appropriated spiritual traditions of his subjects, those who already lived in the Abomean region, and those captured in Dànxɔmɛ's conquests:

> [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 Dànxɔmɛ hadn't had the chance to do [the institution of vòdún 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

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> new discoveries from Europe. And, later, they took the independence that they had from the beginning. It's exactly like these people, what Dànxɔmɛ 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)

Djimasse's account evocatively describes Dànxɔmɛ's approach to cultural assimilation, and its strategic use of hybridity, particularly through the incorporation of the religious practices of conquered peoples, to create social cohesion and hegemonic power. Thus vòdún lies at the heart of Dànxɔmɛ's project of self-making in this era, including all of its attendant anxieties and revisions, as well as the relations of power it created with those in its sphere of influence, particularly those of other non-Fon ethnicities.

The kings were known to allow particularly skilled artisans, such as those who joined the *huntɔ* or royal drummers, literally "drum (*hun*) masters/fathers (*tɔ*)," craftspeople, tradesmen, or particularly powerful or feared *bokɔnɔn* priests, to install themselves and their practices alongside the others in Dànxɔmɛ instead of being sold into slavery. This was the case with the family of one of my drum teachers, Clement Hunto, whose Yoruba ancestors were captured in the nineteenth century from the Oyo empire and brought to work for the court in Abomey. It was in this way that, over time, such a great diversity of vòdún came to Dànxɔmɛ; each arrived at some point as the god of a conquered people. Gabin Djimasse described to me the process of cultural appropriation, beginning during Ouegbadja's reign, as intimately tied to Dànxɔmɛ's consolidation of power and conquest:

> Abomey was the capital of the old kingdom of Dànxɔmɛ, the all-powerful slaving kingdom. "Slaving" is an allusion to many conquests. And in the course of these conquests, the kings of Dànxɔmɛ 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 specialize in an art, a savoir-faire, that you have some knowledge, that existed already in Dànxɔmɛ, they put you in the care of those in charge of this knowledge in Dànxɔmɛ. 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.

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> It is after having selected all these people that they select those who have a remarkable skill that they need.
>
> It is among those left that they choose those who can be subjected to trade, to be sold. The kingdom of Dànxɔmɛ 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)

Djimasse's account here provides key information about the status of musicians as artisans in the Dànxɔmɛan system, prized as skilled laborers, culture bearers, and powerful spiritual practitioners, structural roles that eclipsed the value of their humanity alone. In essence, Dànxɔmɛ's system of valorizing the cultures, religions, and talents of those they captured was grounded in the value of religious and cultural difference.

In this context, then, hybridity—and its stitching together—was 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. 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, something the French colonists also exploited to their benefit during the early twentieth century.

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)

The slave trade is one of the major traumatic events in southern Benin's historical relationships not only with the Europeans and their descendants but also with the African diaspora, and in divisions of mistrust between Beninese people of different cultural backgrounds. Whether their ancestors captured and sold slaves or whether they themselves fled to safety, Beninese people grapple with the history and memories of the slave trade in one way or another. Music, ritual, and art in various forms are helpful in working through these traumas, in sewing up the wounds, but the scars remain, often hidden away. The lasting effects of the traumas of the slave trade are spiritual and emotional, but they are also economic. Slavery became so important to Dànxɔmɛ's economy over time,

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and so defined its relationships with its neighbors and with Europeans, that it is not possible to consider the kingdom's history without it.

Because of the difficulty of landing on the shores near Grand Popo west of Ouidah, it was not until the mid-sixteenth 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 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.

The role of Africans in the slave trade has understandably been a contentious issue in historical research, particularly since this issue traces the lines of the traumas of betrayal, guilt, and complicity that were made even more acute during the colonial experience.[13] 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 Dànxɔmɛ was not strong-armed into obtaining captives solely to satisfy European demand. 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 Dànxɔmɛ became a protectorate of the Oyo empire from 1730 to 1790. But Tegbesu prioritized the slave trade over agriculture and maintaining Dànxɔmɛ'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 nineteenth 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 Dànxɔmɛans, as it depopulated the region (Manning 1982; Akinjogbin 1967), leaving few laborers to produce agricultural crops. It also tied Dànxɔmɛ's economy too closely to external political factors out of its control, such as the legality of the slave trade and the control

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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 eighteenth century.

Zɛnlí and *Sakpatahun*: Reinforcing and Contesting Power through Music and Ritual in Eighteenth-Century Dànxɔmɛ

Vòdún often contributed to the king's consolidation of power, and music was instrumental to this process. Herskovits (1938, 35) describes this taking place with the importation of the Fa divination system[14] to Dànxɔmɛ under the reign of Agadja in the early eighteenth century: the king "borrowed" the system from Nago-Yoruba traders[15] with the intention of discrediting the local *bokɔnɔn*, who had fallen into disfavor. Along with the importation of Fa divination came its associated musical repertoires, which developed into the style of *zɛnlí*, which reinforced the king's power as it came to be used in royal funerals.

The funeral repertoire of zɛnlí developed under King Agadja around the time the vòdún arrived in Abomey. This is the style that appears in Gangbé Brass Band's 2001 piece "Ajaka" (on the album *Togbé*), later recorded in 2015 as "Le Petit Souris" (on *Go Slow to Lagos*). It came out of a context of musical and ritual innovations inspired by anxieties about lineage and the longevity of the Dànxɔmɛan kingdom. This is a song of the Dànxɔmɛan royal court, which Gangbé adapted for brass and percussion in the traditional zɛnlí style for royal funerals. The song speaks about the importance of producing heirs to continue the power of the kingdom, and to continue cultural continuity and reproduction. For contemporary Beninese listeners, the song inspires national pride for ethnically Fon histories, for the precolonial past, and for the heritage of the Dànxɔmɛan empire in Benin. Gabin Djimasse (Abomey, 12/6/14) suggested that zɛnlí 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.

O ví má yɔn ɖ'ani kaɖíe	You must have your own child.
Nayé cè ví má yɔn ɖ'ani kaɖíe ce	Mama, it's very bad not to have your own child.
Ohan ya hi dó mewènu a cé	Singing in the right time
Ohan adja hí mɛ	Singing when you are feeling good

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Ohan mánlán Agádja mánlán Tegbesu	Singing the praise names of Agadja and Tegbesu
Tɔɛ ví má yɔn ɖ'ani kaɖíe ce	You must have your own brother.

(Gangbé Brass Band, "Ajaka," *Togbé*, 2001)

Zɛnlí began in the eighteenth century as a style played on a limited set of instruments (without the *gàn* 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 that 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 zɛnlí artist le Roi Alekpehannhou (Bohicon, 12/7/14). "Zɛn" is the fan, and "lí" the tomb.

Zɛnlí 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 zɛnlí orchestra for the funeral of his close friend Tometin. Glele decided to introduce some innovations into the zɛnlí formula to surprise his father. A few days in advance of the funeral, he brought in a couple of *kpèzìn*, 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. He taught the orchestra a new rhythm, adding the *kpèzìn* along with *assan* and *gàn*, 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 *zɛnlí blibli*, a zɛnlí 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 zɛnlí became popular throughout the region of Abomey for funerals around the late nineteenth century.[16] (See chapter 3 for a transcription of zɛnlí rhythms.)

The power of vòdún music and practice was not limited to the royal court, however; in fact, sometimes powerful vòdún from outside the royal pantheon served to counteract and contest the power of the monarchy. The Sakpata cult, for example, whose vòdún represents a king who had died of smallpox, was among the most feared by several monarchs, because of this vòdún's power over life and death.[17] In fact, according to Argyle (1966), it was originally prohibited for Sakpata temples to be located within the city of Abomey itself because this vòdún might see the earthly Abomean king and become offended at his arrogance. Some accounts tell that drumming for Sakpata was at first not allowed in Abomey because of this vòdún's incredible power.[18]

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Figure 3. Étienne Mechonou, vòdún priest and drummer for the royal house of Kpengla, during a lesson on *sakpatahun* in 2013 in Abomey. Photo by the author.

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The drumming, dancing, and singing that accompanied vòdún ceremonies in Dànxɔmɛ were integral to the kingdom and its subjects' understanding of spiritual efficacy and political power. The rituals would not function without the music's power to summon the vòdún, and so changes in musical style corresponded with changes in religious practice and reflected the contested power relationships that vòdún worked to negotiate. While vòdún music and practice were tools for the Dànxɔmɛan kings to reinforce their power and legitimacy, the worship of other vòdún outside of the royal court could also be a powerful way of contesting royal power and Fon cultural hegemony.

Vòdún and Resisting Dànxɔmɛan Hegemony

Dànxɔmɛ's history of cultural appropriation has obscured the fact that often the cultural and spiritual practices of other peoples survived the kingdom's efforts to assimilate them completely.[19] A majority of the musicians I worked with come from non-Fon ethnic groups, like the Gun, Nago-Yoruba, and Toffinou, and bring these traditions to their recording projects. Histories of ethnic minorities provide a closer look into the cultural pluralism and contestation, located largely in musical and religious practices, that existed going back to the seventeenth century. The French anthropologist 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 [*tohwiyo* and *tovòdún*]." Herskovits (1938, 36) speculates that, as Dànxɔmɛ expanded its influence in the eighteenth century, it exercised its control most strongly in Abomey, Allada, and Whydah (Ouidah), but in small villages, spontaneous worship and possession were beyond the purview of the monarchy.

In oral histories, clans' origins seem to fall into one of two categories: first, those with a founder who came down from the sky (for one account, see 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 Dànxɔmɛans. In my interviews with Gabin Djimasse, he explained 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 inter-

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vention, the arrival of new forms of political organization. In some accounts, the acculturating activities went both ways, as the original inhabitants (or new captives) introduced Abomeans to the worship of the great vòdún, and the resulting combination of belief systems formed the beginnings of the Dànxɔmɛan pantheon as it was subsequently passed down (Argyle 1966, 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 égúngún masks. It may be that the chief alternative to official Dànxɔmɛan history exists in the mythological accounts of the cults of the lesser vòdún that were established among the original inhabitants of Abomey.

There was certainly resistance to the centralization of Dànxɔmɛan 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 Weme, who took refuge in the river valley, giving their name to the river and Benin's most eastern province; the Gun, who moved east and settled in Porto Novo and Badagry (in contemporary Nigeria) (Manning 1982, 40); and the Toffinou, who built villages around Lake Nokoue, the best known of which is Ganvie, where they were led by a vòdún spirit in the form of a crocodile who now protects the village.[20] It is largely musicians from these 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, and which I discuss in this book's case studies.

Many of these Gun- and Yoruba-descended communities were protected by the influence of the nearby dynasty in Xɔgbónu. One of the Gun kingdom's specialties was the *zàngbétɔ* secret police ("guardians of the night" in Gun), directed by the king's *migan*, or minister-executioner. Zàngbétɔ are spirits covered in raffia that patrol Porto Novo at night to catch witches and spies. The zàngbétɔ secret society uses *kàkà* drumming for their ceremonies, played with many interlocking bell patterns and the distinctive dry, cracking sound of bamboo sticks, which drummer Sagbohan Danialou modernized in the early 1970s. Those communities that were protected by the Xɔgbónu empire were able to keep their local traditions and practices, while adopting the Gun empire's resistance to Dànxɔmɛan cultural hegemony.

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Missionization and Resistance

The spiritual practice of vòdún was also a central site for contesting European power during the precolonial period. This is essential for understanding the ways that these religious traditions and the values attached to them have continued to serve as primary places where problematic relations of cross-cultural power are worked out.

The kings of Dànxɔmɛ, Allada, and Ouidah largely resisted the influence of foreign religion until the beginning of colonization, except when appearing to consider conversion benefited them politically or economically. The first Catholic missionaries arrived in the region in the mid-seventeenth 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. 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 or venerating the ancestors and the vòdún (Law 1991, 124, 153; Ogouby 2008, 39–40). Within two years, all but two of the missionaries had died (likely of malaria), 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, but with perhaps more direct spiritual intervention. Abangla had considered being baptized, and the French sent two Capuchin missionaries to see him. They stayed for three years, but opponents from the temple for the serpent Dangbe, Ouidah's major ethnic vòdún, burned down their chapel, and Abangla had a change of heart (Law 1991, 154–55). Due to the opposition and considerable political power of institutions such as vòdún temples and the veneration of ancestral traditions, Catholic missionization made very little progress during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Dànxɔmɛ.

Thus, the first sizeable community of practicing Catholics in the region was actually formed by a wave of Brazilian ex-slaves who returned to Dahomey-Benin in the nineteenth century in especially large numbers following the massive revolt in Bahia in 1835; they 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. These Brazilian returnees were instrumental in transforming the religious and cultural character of Dahomey's southern cities. The Brazilians made a mark on Dahomey-Benin's

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soundscape through their Afro-Brazilian musical traditions, which fused Yoruba and Adja traditions with some of their own seventeenth-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, and which I documented in several video recordings with the assistance of Jean Gnonlonfoun.[21]

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.[22] 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 vòdún outside many palaces and homes in Abomey, insisted that all "fetishes" and "superstitious objects" be kept out of his sight wherever he passed (Balard 1998, 23). 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 vòdún of thunder and lightning, toward the new mission.

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 of Christ (l'Église de Christianisme Celeste) and Cherubim and Seraphim Society that were founded in the late 1940s and are still very active. The independent churches later formed an important zone of resistance to Catholicism and, indeed, to French colonialism and culture more generally, especially through their use of vòdún-derived music and ritual, continuing these practices' role in negotiating power and the maintenance of social ties.

Nineteenth-Century Dànxɔmɛ: From Slave Trade to Slave Labor

The reasons for mighty Dànxɔmɛ's fall to the French have been much discussed by historians. A central factor was Dànxɔmɛ's economic dependence on the

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global trade in human lives, one of the primary points of origin for postcolonial trauma in Dahomean-Beninese society. Dànxɔmɛ was so economically dependent on the slave trade that its abolition in the nineteenth century was a serious threat to its power and sovereignty and resulted in increasingly desperate tactics to capture slaves, including a shift toward raiding Yoruba villages.[23] By the end of the nineteenth century, it became evident that this dependence on the slave trade was ultimately the source of Dànxɔmɛ's weakness. In their attempts to heal this historical trauma, then, Beninese jazz and brass band musicians find that they must confront not only Europeans' hypocritical justifications for slavery and later colonization but also African leaders' complicity in these traumas and their outcomes for global power relations.

As the trans-Atlantic slave trade declined, Dànxɔmɛ began shifting its economy, beginning in the 1840s, toward the "slave-labor" mode of production, specializing in goods that could be produced by slaves locally and sold internationally (Manning 1982, 51). These practices of forced labor created further fissures, resentments, and inequalities within southern Beninese society. Dànxɔmɛ did not quickly abandon the slave trade, however, despite efforts by the British to establish a treaty with King Guezo, and Europeans continued to seek ways to control the African economy. The French continued to exert their influence on Porto Novo, and in 1882 they established their protectorate there, signing a treaty with King Toffa (1874–1908), which he hoped would allow the kingdom of Porto Novo to rise above Dànxɔmɛ with the support of the French. This alliance, along with Dànxɔmɛ's weakened economic state, opened the way for the French to conquer the once powerful empire in 1894. The conflict lasted for two years, during which King Behanzin (1890–94) 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.

Behanzin today is lifted up as an anticolonial hero for having resisted 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. Dànxɔmɛ 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.

With French colonization beginning in 1894, the "double colonial-missionary phenomenon" was no longer an ad hoc operation that could be set back by illness, lightning, or misfortune, but one that made the occupation and

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transformation of Dahomey an explicit and systematic goal. The colonists' denigration of traditional practices for the vòdún as anti-Christian, antimodern, diabolic, and superstitious targeted the ancient social structures, so carefully and intentionally reinforced throughout Dànxɔmɛ's history, tying together vòdún practice, the ancestors, and the kingship. As the theologian Barthélemy Adoukonou (1980a, 94) writes, the arrival of colonial religion introduced "a profound contradiction and tensions at the heart of the formative traditional Fon social principles." Yet as resistance to colonization gathered strength, it became clear that this break with the ancestors, as devastating as it was, would never be entirely complete.

Vòdún and Colonial Power

It was and is the nature of colonial power, being founded in its own insecurities, to maintain impossible contradictions of policy and action. The colonial project sought, for example, to say that traditional African cultural practices like vòdún were, by turns, a diabolical, powerful threat to Christian life; then without value, power, or history and worthy of shame; and soon after, the subject of colonial ethnographic studies that reconstructed the value and authenticity of these African traditions on European terms.[24] All of these were attempts to justify a power relationship that was ultimately untenable and self-destructive. The Enlightenment ideal of universal human rights clearly did not extend to the subjects of France's colonies. The contradictions and the resulting violence that formed the core of the colonial project were reflective of Europe's own insecurities about the scarcity of resources in the face of the transition to modernity and industrialization, insecurities that they projected in mirror form onto colonies like Dahomey.

Beginning in 1894, French colonization sought, with uneven results, to break down traditional social structures around kingship and vòdún practice, the very places where Dahomey's[25] Adja-descended people had over arduous centuries constructed the social fabric that held them together across differences of ethnicity and power. These colonial interventions impacted Dahomean attitudes regarding culture, religion, and socioeconomic class in ways that have continued to resonate throughout music-making practices and the fluctuating valorization of traditional culture into the twenty-first century. Yet anticolonial resistance continued to be strong in Dahomey in the 1920s, '30s, and '40s, especially in the form of new independent African churches and new vòdún cults,

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which became important sites for counteracting the cultural effects of colonial domination.

Assessing the long-term cultural effects of colonization is difficult because they seem so complete in some areas, like language, education, and the law. At the same time, in other areas, like music, dance, and ritual, many African expressive systems have continued to develop and change on their own terms and in dialog with precolonial histories and traditions, as well as with the traditions of the African diaspora.[26] Yet these traditions, too, have been refracted through colonial ideologies of cultural authenticity. The new divisions of social class that colonization created had particularly deep effects on Dahomean society, culture, music, and religious practices.

While the French state was adept in its campaign to control and transform Dahomey's culture through education, religion, politics, economics, and the law, the people of Dahomey also had multiple outlets to act in oppositional or cooperative strategic response. Vòdún already acted as a form of resistance to colonization in early encounters with Europeans. A central feature of the colonial project was the French state's legal support for the traumas of rapid and violent cultural change, particularly in education and religion, which explicitly undermined the value and self-determination of African traditions like vòdún and local languages. As time went on, Dahomeans negotiated the terms of new colonial power relationships, for example, in the creation of independent African churches, which were the sites of new adaptations of vòdún-based music, ritual, and healing. Activity in these areas beginning in the 1920s laid the groundwork for the Africanization of colonial traditions, like Christianity and brass bands, that took place after independence.

Early French Rule and the First Revolts

The French, with little regard for ethnic divisions, included within the boundaries of the colony of Dahomey a large expanse of territory to the north that was not part of the culturally unified Adja south. These northern regions were inhabited by the Bariba people, along with several other ethnic groups, who 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 south. Spiritual practice was

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not part of state power for the Bariba as it was for the kingdom of Dànxɔmɛ, although the Bariba ruling class, the Wasangari, participated in *bori* spiritual practices, which are widespread across the Sahel region in Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Nigeria.

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 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.

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 twenty-first century, an African metropolis. In 1905, the French incorporated Dahomey into Afrique Occidentale Française, 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 constructions 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 *evolués*, traditional chiefs, and colonial administrators.

The division of Dànxɔmɛ into cantons and the substitution of French administrators for traditional rulers was a blow to the foundations of the traditional Adja social structure, uprooting the connection with the ancestors in Allada that the Dànxɔmɛan kings had so carefully cultivated, and on which they had staked the legitimacy of their rule. But, in music and spirituality especially, the effects of colonization were not complete. Dividing their conception of power into sacred and secular realms, the French misunderstood the real spiritual power that the Dànxɔmɛan ancestors, and the vòdún in general, 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 Dànxɔmɛan head, thus kingship in Europe was the same as kingship in Dànxɔmɛ, so

> breaking down the kingdoms and stripping the heads of their titles was thought to be equivalent to the elimination of traditional authority, thereby

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> 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 in original)

Traditional spiritual authority outside of the ancestral kingdoms was more difficult to break, since it tended to lie in the worship of the great vòdún like Hevioso and Sakpata rather than the royal cults of *tohwiyo* and *nesuxwe*. This was because these vòdún practices, the heritage of minority peoples who had been conquered under Dànxɔmɛ, remained under the authority of village chieftaincy, which still existed outside of the French state structure. 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 most powerful area of the colonial state's interventions in local religious practices was in the colonial justice system, particularly the system of courts known as the *indigenat*, which tried cases involving the indigenous population separately and using a different set of laws from those involving the French. This was a particularly serious affront to traditional knowledge systems, where indigenous systems of justice based in community-oriented values and specific cosmologies of moral equilibrium were a central part of the social order. Under the French, "*fetishisme*," that is, traditional religious practice, was made officially illegal, as were the activities of traditional secret societies like the zàngbétɔ and *oro*.

There is archival evidence of the persecution of vòdún priests in the "Religion" section of the Archives Nationales in Porto Novo.[27] These files specifically contain documents from the 1915 pursuit of a vòdún priest named Zonou-Aissou on charges of "*fetishisme*," after the priest fled Ouidah to avoid being involuntarily conscripted into the French army to fight in World War I (Archives Nationales, "Religion"). The archives also show that other vòdún or

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Afro-Christian religious activities, particularly public demonstrations involving drums and dancing, were subject to a system of regulations and permits (often called "*autorisation de tam-tam*," or "drumming authorization") throughout the 1930s, '40s, and '50s (Archives Nationales, "Religion"), similar to the regulations imposed on second line parades in early twentieth-century New Orleans and carnival in the Afro-Caribbean.

These regulations reflected the colonizers' anxieties about the power of these traditions and the expressive practices deployed in their public demonstrations, perceiving, quite correctly, that these were affronts to the colonial project that, due to their performative and encoded nature, constantly challenged the form and function of the law. This was a crucial piece of the guilt and devaluation that developed for many colonized Dahomeans surrounding traditional culture: the feeling that they could always be prosecuted or caught for practicing vòdún without authorization, that if they could practice those traditions that it was only with the permission of the state, and that ultimately those traditions were of lower value and should be the source of shame and judgment.

While colonizers denigrated local culture by destroying vòdún shrines or placing regulations around ceremonial drumming and dancing, the most profound social changes were instituted at the psychological level through the missionaries' education system. The Catholic schools became a marker of class difference, as they were preferred by upper class families, especially the Brazilians. 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. 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.

Colonial class binaries, in their constructed homogenies of the elite, educated *evolué* and the native *indigène*, further complicated many of the preexisting divisions of ethnicity and power that already existed in Dahomey. Colonial teachers and administrators encouraged the educated elites to see themselves as separate from the "native" population, occupying a privileged place at the

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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. By keeping the categories of European and African, elite and vernacular, rigidly separate, and by defining cultural authenticity as cultural purity, the administration throughout the French colonies was able, for a time, to control the colonized populations and prevent them from obtaining the numbers or the information necessary to organize resistance.

The Dahomean National Movement

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,[28] gave it a unique status that made it difficult to govern and routinely forced concessions from the French administration. It became clear to Dahomeans early on that the colonists' ambitions were economic as well as political. 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 Sarraut's *La Mise en Valeur des Colonies Françaises* (The Development [or Placement of Value] of the French Colonies) (1923), in which he argued for the moral and ethical imperatives for the economic development of the colonies, making them profitable to France. Words like "mise en valeur," "development," and "value" were all characteristic of the doubleness of colonial rhetoric.

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, to the north, where the Bariba 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 anticolonial 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 and refused to pay any taxes for six weeks; the workers went on strike. The French responded by burning the nearby lake village of Afotonou and sent the leaders of the strike into exile in Mauritania.

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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 heightened the separation of an elite class of Francophilic, educated, largely Catholic Dahomeans who would eventually take over political power (Ronen 1975; Anignikin 2014).

An important site for the development of the Dahomean national movement in the domain of culture was in independent African churches. A series of outbreaks of bubonic plague and influenza in the 1920s led to the creation of Dahomey's first independent African church, the Cherubim and Seraphim Society, 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, influenced by the colonial denigration of traditional African practices, feared traditional healers, whom they associated with superstition and witchcraft.

Musically, this new church (or "healing society," as members preferred to call it in its early years) 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* squeeze 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, and several key brass players, particularly in the Gnonlonfoun family, got their musical start in this community. The Cherubim and Seraphim Society became very influential as African Christianity began developing its critique of both Catholicism and vòdún traditions; it was also the model for Celestial Christianity later in the 1940s.

During the Great Depression, divisions started to appear in the national movement between the educated elites and the merchants' association over matters of communist ideology. The merchants argued that the elites' investment in colonial politics of African authenticity and intellectual exceptionalism had meant ignoring real material development issues, including support for entrepreneurs and economic and political autonomy. They also argued that the elites' communist approach to anticolonial resistance was imported, antibusi-

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ness, and unfit ideology for Africa. These debates foreshadow contested notions of culture and entrepreneurship among Beninese musicians in the 1990s.

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 elites 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. During World War II, the Dahomean national movement essentially disappeared, subordinated to the allegiances of wartime, and it never truly rose to its former strength (Anignikin 2014). When independence came in 1960, it was on France's terms.

New Vòdún, New Churches

While the Dahomean national movement was sidelined politically and economically during and after World War II, cultural resistance to colonization continued to flourish in new vòdún communities through music and ritual as practices were adapted for new realities by a new generation of participants. One of the chief developments during the 1940s was the arrival of new vòdún cults from Ghana, such as those for vòdún Tron (kola nut) and Mami Wata (the goddess of the sea). These cults came through the influence of Christian Science among Protestants in Ghana, and traveling fishermen brought the cults with them, first to Ouidah (Tall 1995b). 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"[29] genres from the villages around Porto Novo, like *djègbè*.

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. The new vòdún from Ghana were also new to the city, so to speak, and represented access to a broader, intra-African spiritual network of healing and prosperity. 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 vòdún practices, whether royal, ancestral, or interethnic (see Tall 1995b and Bay 2008). In

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contrast to older, ancestral, or interethnic vòdún 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 as fertility, material wealth, and protection from spiritual attack in the forms of illness and accident—needs for the realities of working in modern cities and modern economies. The Tron communities in particular became patrons of specific styles of 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 postwar period as well, with the formation of the Celestial Church of Christ, 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 Celestial Church of Christ was highly visible in Benin during my fieldwork, 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 vòdún practice and other traditions into their worship services. This includes a focus on individual revelation and material prosperity that echoes some of the issues treated in the new vòdún cults like vòdún Tron and Mami Wata.

The Celestial Church of Christ, along with the Cherubim and Seraphim Society, have been incredible patrons of music, sponsoring brass bands and choirs, and producing many excellent musicians who have crossed over to mainstream success. Notably, the independent churches make more use of vòdún-related styles like agbadja and djègbè from the cults for the newer vòdún like Mami Wata, Tron, and Goro than they do the protected rhythms for royal, ancestral, and interethnic vòdún like *nesuxwe* or Sakpata, which were still tied into hierarchical networks of control and long-standing ritual regulations. This reflects the new church's constituency, usually nonroyal, often non-Fon ethnic minority individuals who migrated from rural to urban settings for work. The Celeste Church makes use of many "popular traditional" styles, too, like *massɛ gòhún*, *djoglissohoun*, and *ayo kpede kpede*, which are common in the recreational performances of public life ceremonies and seasonal festivals (Rock Ahouandjinou, Porto Novo, 3/1/15).

These transformations of vòdún music and practice strengthened religious communities outside of officially sanctioned areas like the royal courts of Dànxɔmɛ and Xɔgbónu and the Catholic and mainline Protestant churches. By the mid-twentieth century in Dahomey, "vòdún" was a flexible constellation of practices that responded to the evolving needs of Dahomey's popu-

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lation, including pressures from urbanization, the rapid social and cultural changes brought on by colonization, and social class aspirations. The ancestral practices of the royal courts continued, and the educated elite remained largely tied to Catholic worship and schooling; but the new churches and new vòdún cults of the mid-twentieth century offered more contemporary and less hierarchical models for spiritual intervention, which reflected experiences of regional migration and the desire for class mobility. These new religious forms also revealed the creative potential for combining practices from Christianity, Islam, and the vòdún of other neighboring parts of Africa. The liturgical music of these communities brought all of these experiences together, and became the expression of a new social class of urban working people, neither *evolué* nor *indigène*. Making space for this other class position, this other way of being, was a particularly powerful counter to colonial religion and class binaries, and it was out of these communities that much of the postcolonial music scene developed in what later became Benin.

Multiple Temporalities

"Every age, including the postcolony," Achille Mbembe (2001, 15) writes, "is in reality a combination of several temporalities." These multiple temporalities are omnipresent when doing history and ethnography in postcolonial contexts. I found that to experience history in a postcolony like Benin-Dahomey-Dànxɔmɛ is to become accustomed to, but never quite make peace with, these slippages. To look back and listen to the music of precolonial Dànxɔmɛ, its power dynamics, spiritual systems, vulnerabilities and contradictions, is also to confront the frames that colonial- and postindependence-era actors used to construct and reconstruct this past for their own projects. The writing and reenactment of precolonial Dànxɔmɛan histories speak back to colonization, even as this writing cannot escape the reality that in a postcolonial world no knowledge, no language, no narrative, no value, category, or method entirely escapes being colonized. So the telling itself—the speaking of these names, the singing of their songs—reopens the seam of old traumas so that temporal boundaries can again be crossed, and things can again be made whole, for a time.

The music and ritual practice of vòdún underwent dramatic transformations during the formation of the Dànxɔmɛan empire, during French colonization, and through the emergence of new forms of blended Afro-Christian liturgies. Throughout these changes, these spiritual practices have remained an

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outlet for the performance and commodification of emerging identities. These practices have for hundreds of years acted as mediators for the reconciliation of personal and collective trauma. 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. Anticolonial resistance in independent African churches and new vòdún cults created important models for Africanizing colonial traditions, while a complex and divided Dahomean national movement subordinated its needs to support the French in World War II.

The postwar acknowledgment of citizenship and representative democracy in France's colonies left only a few steps to Dahomey's independence. On June 13, 1960 Dahomey successfully negotiated its independence in Paris. Hubert Maga won the election in December, later that year. 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 uneven results for the turbulent decades that followed in the '70s and '80s.

In the following chapter, I show how musicians in independence-era Benin started looking to these precolonial and colonial histories for inspiration, and representing it to themselves, to the country's leaders, and to the international sphere. Early generations of popular musicians 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. It was a new phase in the process of sifting through the various heritages left to the postindependence generations, the beginning of Africanizing their colonial heritage.

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CHAPTER 2

MAKING LA MUSIQUE MODERNE

Cultural Renaissance in Postcolonial Benin

Independence from France in 1960 gave people in Dahomey-Benin an opportunity to reenvision their relationships to traditions of music and spirituality, and to the wider world, as they sought to work through and transform the inheritances of colonial trauma, particularly in the musical manifestations of hierarchies of social class, aesthetics, and economic and spiritual value. In order to better understand this process, this chapter explores in further detail the worlds of musical and extramusical discourse that set the conditions and possibilities for the creative interventions of musicians like Sagbohan Danialou, Orchestre Poly-Rythmo, and the brass and jazz musicians who followed them in the 1990s.

This chapter examines 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. Like precolonial music traditions, the musique moderne of 1970s Dahomey-Benin developed into a body of musical and rhetorical discourse that jazz and brass band musicians since the 1990s frequently reference in terms explicit and implicit. I show how 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. Each of these phases constructed its own particular understanding of the relationship between the sacred, the secular, and the economies of musical modernity.

I locate the beginnings of the musique moderne scene in Cotonou and Porto Novo after independence, when it 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 orches-

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tra in the 1970s, I argue for its status as an indigenized, new Beninese tradition that made possible new conditions of multiplicity, transformation, and growth in Beninese musicians' lives and livelihood. Musicians' "*modernisation*" of traditional repertoires like *kàkà*, *tchinkoume*, *massɛ gòhún*, and so-called *satɔ* (the term used for popularized vòdún music) starting in the mid-'70s gave them opportunities to begin reshaping the musical and political discourse that Benin inherited from colonialism, especially around the representation of vòdún practice and performance. These processes had intense political resonances in the second half of the twentieth century, due to heightened suppression of religious practice under the Marxist-Leninist administration from 1974 to 1990, and the renewed interest in traditional practices as heritage commodities in the postsocialist period after 1990. The Afropolitan resonances of this '90s entrepreneurial cultural renaissance recall moments of both independence-era Afrocentrism and earlier formulations of *négritude* authenticity, while setting the stage for brass band and jazz musicians' global transformations and uses of Benin's music traditions.

To understand better the particularities of musique moderne and its development, at the end of this chapter I briefly discuss the discourse of musical genre I observed during my fieldwork in the late 2000s and early to mid-2010s.[1] On the surface, this discourse appears to replicate colonial, binary typologies of traditional and modern, sacred and popular, or the dualism that separates the mind and the body. However, in practice Beninese musicians bend these terms to suit their own ends in drawing out distinctions and overlaps between internal and external cultural influences, and between ethnic and interethnic musical repertoires.

The discourse and practice of musical genre is one of the places where colonial traumas of cultural devaluation and social divisions might be passed down and reproduced in postcolonial generations. It is also a site for musicians' healing interventions and transformations as the terms of meaning are redrawn in subtle ways. Musicians' interventions must contend with the multiple dimensions of colonial trauma and the many forms of reconciliation it demands. These include the healing of relationships with past and present colonizers—the French and the neocolonial West more broadly—but also between African leaders and citizens, as well as between continental Africans and the diasporas of slavery and the new African diaspora of migration. Many of these negotiations of trauma and healing play out for musicians in conversations and creative musical activities centering on the back-and-forth relationship between inside and outside cultural influences and the corresponding embrace or rejec-

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tion of various forms of social and economic exchange with the diaspora and the wider world.

The Beginnings of a Music Scene in Dahomey

The policies of the French colonial administration acutely affected the development of modern social dance music in the years leading up to and immediately following Dahomey's independence in 1960. As discussed in the previous chapter, colonial ideas of binary difference and hierarchy between European and African, or educated and indigenous social classes, religious practices, and music genres had been replicated in colonial systems of religion and education. By the 1950s, education and missionization had created large cultural divisions between social classes and their cultural practices, mentalities that were passed on to postindependence generations and gradually transformed and repurposed for the healing and reconciliation of colonial traumas as time went on. As musicians like Sagbohan Danialou articulated in their music beginning in the 1970s, healing colonial traumas demanded a reckoning with their multifaceted nature, addressing the ruptures colonialism created not only between the colonized and the colonizer but also between African leaders and their citizens, and between Africans and the diasporas of slavery and later, mobility and migration. Dahomey-Benin's successive postindependence governments each took different approaches to addressing this task spiritually and economically, pushing the outside world away, then inviting it in, always negotiating the terms of exchange. The jazz and brass band musicians whose creative work grew out of the democratic transition after 1990 joined in this task of healing, negotiation, and the transformation of experience and value.

Ideologies of "*moderne*" and "*traditionel*" music played out practically 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,

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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 Celestial Christian churches, where they learned basic solfège 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, associating cultural value with cosmopolitan, "modern" African and Afro-diasporic styles.

This exterior-oriented intermusical ethos is exemplified in the career of Ignace de Souza, (1937–87), 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 Luambo Franco and Tabu Ley 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 Santiago, drawing on the young drummer Sagbohan Danialou (1951–), a multitalented individual of whose long musical career I will write more about later in this chapter.

Music for the Revolution

Politically, the postindependence years were tumultuous. French-Beninese music producer Wally Badarou (1955–), the child of Beninese 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,

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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 (1909–83), 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,[2] 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, interview, Abomey, 8/8/12). Hountondji went on to develop a long career as the beloved artist known as Babaake, continuing to release albums as a vocalist and social commentator up until his death. 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 premier dance band, known for its legendary horn section.

General Mathieu Kérékou (1933–2015), who had been a commander under President Maga, took over in 1972 in a military coup. Kérékou 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, Kérékou 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 Kérékou 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 midwestern Nigeria beginning in the twelfth century, an empire that *predated* both Dànxɔmɛ and the formidable Oyo by two centuries. This was Kérékou's way of wiping the national slate clean, as if Dànxɔmɛ and the Adja-Fon hegemony of the south had never existed, while invoking the authority and mythology of an older historical African kingdom (with no cultural connection to Dànxɔmɛ). This was in line with Kérékou's thinking on traditional culture, which he considered dangerous when construed as sacred, but which he embraced when presented as secular, noneth-

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nic Africanness. For Kérékou, revolution meant a total break with the past, a complete cultural transformation of the country that imposed strict policies of secularity on vòdún, church, and mosque religious practices, disrupting connections with traditional culture, at least politically, and introducing policies of economic protectionism in Benin's trade relationships with Europe and other countries. These policies had detrimental effects on Benin's economy and its connections with precolonial culture and religion, but they failed to account for the strength of citizens' attachments to traditional forms of aesthetic expression and the ways that these were already being transformed in Afro-Christian worship, for example. Kérékou's revolution presented itself as the one final split from the past that would forever determine Benin's future, leaving behind ethnic divisions and superstition and moving forward into a nationally unified, socialist future.[3] But in a postcolonial situation, rupture with the past is seldom a singular event, but more often one of a series of splits in mentality, politics, ideology, and temporality that build up and replay through processes of traumatization, guilt, repetition, denial, and healing and reconciliation.

While it repressed religious musical practice, Kérékou's administration was a great patron of musique moderne, and musicians in the 1970s found ways to keep the traditional and the sacred alive within it. In fact, Kérékou's administration was responsible for laying the groundwork for the Beninese 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,[4] 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." This investment is evident on the cover of their 1974 album, which shows the group posing with their horns, electric guitars, and amplifiers, and a new electric organ in the center.[5]

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.[6] What did Kérékou's revolution sound like? Les Volcans' first album (1974) still carries the imprint of the 1960s Congo music

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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.[7] "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 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 Kérékou's regime organized on October 26 and 27, 1976, marking the anniversary of his ascent to power three years before.[8] 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 "ultramodern" 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."[9] It was important for Kérékou'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," which, comparatively speaking, is not that far from a hybrid conception of old Dànxɔmɛ's ancestral *tovòdún*, or of local conceptions of diasporic relatives who have gone on to another land "beyond the sea." The new lyrics on

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the Volcans' album in Gun, however, refer to a different Christian message, the antimaterialist concept of "storing up treasure" in heaven rather than on earth. This aligns with the anticapitalist ethos of this historical moment in Benin, while, paradoxically, maintaining links to Christian scripture and gospel song, subtly suggesting some of the internal contradictions of Kérékou's policies. The song continues to be commonly performed in church settings in Benin, as I discovered through the Beninese 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 at the Silvana club in New York City in September 2015, bringing this message of spiritual value into a concrete diasporic context.

Brass Band Beginnings: Indigenizing Colonial Traditions

Aside from their political importance in this era, the group les Volcans de la Capitale 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, telephone interview, 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: Gangbé Brass Band, Eyo'nlé Brass Band, Viviola and Onala, and Togni Music Concept. Trombonist Martial, Henri's 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 Society, with the *fanfare* Imole Christi.[10] This last group was the band that later trained many of Gangbé's past and present 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

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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 vòdún ritual and *populaire* 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 nineteenth century (see Waterman 1990).[11] Thus some of the sounds that later became so iconically "Béninois" 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 Beninese 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'nlé 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 Béninois culture, a Béninois tradition. . . . It's part of the undoing of colonialism.

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*, *sacré*. This decolonization through the transformation of music and discourse opens the site of postcolonial trauma and, when done sensitively and artfully, can aid in processes of healing through the integration of past, present, and future experiences, slowly bringing the memories and inheritances of painful experiences into the ongoing project of living and surviving, of livelihood.

Analogous decolonization takes place in colonial languages such as French,

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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, Beninese French speakers have found the most useful overlaps across the multiple systems, for example, in developing practices for a wide range of contexts, including formal occasions, public debate, and fiery 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.[12] It is this phenomenon that produces expressions in Beninese 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 Fongbè "*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 Beninese 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 peculiar, postcolonial 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, cohorts—are joined in affinity through shared experience in some areas, but their experiences and creative paths are highly personal, subjective, and individual. Indeed, as Kwame Appiah (1992) has effectively pointed out, there can be no true hybridity unless the constituent parts are themselves understood from the perspective of multiplicity: brass instruments do not represent any kind of essential Europeanness any more than vòdún is the only way of understanding Africanness. 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.

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"Satɔ": Modernizing the Music of Vòdún

Much of the innovative work that laid the foundations for "modernized" fusions of vòdún with funk and jazz took place during the tumultuous 1970s period. Inspired by James Brown's single "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag" and its innovative new groove, Orchestre Poly-Rythmo formed in 1965,[13] creating their own style of Afrofunk. Led by singer and saxophonist Clément Melome (1944–2012), with guitarist Bernard "Papillon" Zoundegnon (d. 1981) and Amenoudji "Vicky" Joseph on 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 Kérékou's revolution and the rise of Fela Kuti in neighboring Nigeria, releasing some great Beninese Afrobeat composed by Ahehinnou, especially on their first few albums, beginning with the first, *Azanlokpe "Le Tour de Mariage"* (1973) for Albarika Store records.[14]

In the mid-1970s, Poly began taking their Afrobeat arrangements and introducing vòdún rhythms, a mix that Melome called "*satɔ*" in order to disguise the music's spiritual roots (Redjeb 2009). The term *satɔ* 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 Dànxɔmɛ, which has nothing to do with vòdún. (I observed the playing of the *satɔ* drum, by six different drummers in coordinated dance patterns, at a funeral for a much beloved politician in Abomey in July 2012.) "*Satɔ*" became the term in the politically charged 1970s to refer to any modernized vòdún style, as a way to avoid offending vòdún practitioners and to elude the attention of Kérékou's administration. Record jackets also referred to the genre as "special pop." See Poly-Rythmo's 1974 album *Le Satɔ* on the Albarika Store label for examples, like the track "Gan Tche Kpo."[15]

The Marxist government was a great patron of Poly-Rythmo, even though the official rhetoric was antivòdún. Bands like Poly had to negotiate with the pragmatics of the soundscape that belonged to them and their listeners, which still hinged on rich vòdún 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 are not easily changed by a few years of political rhetoric. To make audiences in Benin move, especially in the south, it would have to be vòdún 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

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worked. 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 "Béninois," without offending either the sanctity of traditional practice or the radical secularity of the new administration, and without abandoning the embodied memories 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 *satɔ* rhythms with his modernized version of kàkà, the rhythm from Porto Novo played for the vòdún zàngbétɔ,[16] 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, doing little to disguise the music's ritual origins.[17] He hybridized this kàkà 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, possibly by Ignace de Souza. The other side is "Missi Mi," an Afro-Cuban track. It is on the label Tropiques Satel (standing for "Sociètè Africaine de Techniques Electroniques").

Satel is today the biggest distributor of recordings in Benin. The company put out their 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 (1929–88), 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 cities, 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, an ensemble that performed a modern, funky, electric version of the traditional tchinkoume style that originated in Mahi country north of Abomey, where centuries ago it was a ceremonial genre for funerals. Oral tradition tells that Alokpon,[18] a Mahi noble and captive of war under King Kpengla (1775–89), originally brought tchinkoume

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to Abomey (Gabin Djimasse, 12/6/14). The style shares with early versions of zɛnlí the *sinhun*, the water drums made with calabashes overturned in water, and the big gourd drum called the *gota*. Modern versions of zɛnlí have replaced the *sinhun* with the *kpèzín* clay drums, as I discussed in chapter 1. 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 Benin 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 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 (1930–95), a beloved Gun singer from the village of Avrankou, outside of Porto Novo, also gained much celebrity in the '70s and '80s for his neotraditional recordings in Avrankou's characteristic style of massɛ gòhún. Playing massɛ gòhún 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 initiated at the age of twelve in the vòdún cult for Sakpata, and was known for weaving spiritual themes into his eloquently improvised lyrics. As his lead drummer Honkonnou Kpagnouian (interview, Avrankou, 4/2/15) explained to me, Adjahoui began with the already well-known traditional rhythms of *djègbè* and *djoglissohoun*, before he began working on *masse*. His major innovations were to introduce additional accompaniment parts on the *alekele* and the *kpèzín* lead drum, which worked in call and response style with Adjahoui's vocals, transforming the older traditions in order to highlight the virtuosic delivery of his political and spiritual messages. Adjahoui recorded for the label Albarika Store in Cotonou from 1969 to 1974, but in order to avoid any potential problems with Kérékou'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 Kérékou'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 massɛ gòhún and other music played for the *egúngún* secret society (Moncadas 2015).

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Playing for the Revolution

Poly-Rythmo became the national orchestra for Kérékou'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 with producer Samy Ben Redjeb, 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 (interview, Cotonou, 1/26/15), he offered a distinctly different perspective on Poly's relationship to Kérékou, 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. The adaptability, improvisation, and tactical logic he refers to here have, in fact, been crucial to the entrepreneurial practices of many Beninese groups engaged in musical and social change.

Ahehinnou also discussed Poly's use of vòdún 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, for him the importance of Poly's rhythmic references was less about the styles' rootedness in a particular local vòdún tradition, and more, and this is key, about the resonances that those Beninese rhythms had with sacred rhythms in the diaspora, especially Cuba. The relative value of these traditions for Ahehinnou—vòdún 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, as musique moderne, in the 1960s and '70s was a greater marker of high social class than vòdún, and carried greater aesthetic autonomy than the historical and ethnic fixity of specific local styles. Deferring questions about vòdún's local roots to diasporic connections

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is thus an astute rhetorical move, because it works to transcend the ethnic partisanship of Benin's political economy in favor of a broader pan-African and pan-Afrodiasporic vision.

Poly-Rythmo got a break when, with the support of Kérékou'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 Côte d'Ivoire, Congo, Burkina Faso, Angola, and Libya (Redjeb 2009).

Regulating Vòdún

The question of the status of vòdún in the decades after independence continued to be fraught politically as Benin wrestled with the task of how to be autonomous, African, and future-oriented in this new situation. Under Kérékou's secular, Marxist state, vòdún was officially outlawed in 1976 as a "backwards and demeaning" practice, "the source of obscurity and evil," which was holding the country back from modernization as (Ogouby 2008, 26). Kérékou named "feudal" and "sorcery-related" practices as the particular targets of this new regime, believing that with modernization had to come a totalizing secularization. This represented an even more organized, direct affront to vòdún practice than had been levied under French colonialism. The government closed vòdún temples and limited ceremonies, which it perceived as a waste of time and resources that could be better spent building the republic, to the dry season between November and March.[19] 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 unaffiliated with the ancestral practices of southern Benin, and as a career military officer educated in Dakar, Kérékou was a cultural outsider to southern Benin. This gave him a particular analytical precision with regard to his southern countrymen. He targeted vòdún as an institution intimately tied to the power of the ancient empire of Dànxɔmɛ, connecting the kingship to ancestral lineage and to the domination and assimilation of captured peoples and their cultures. Kérékou knew this connection very well, and tried to use it to his advantage.

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Vòdún—in fact, all religions—were marks of the "feudal" era, Kérékou said, and he believed the only way to break down regional and ethnic factionalism and to create a united Benin was to break down the south's vòdún institutions. Tall (1995a, 197) notes that the language of the 1976 legislation was particularly aimed at the Abomean ancestral dynasties that were tied to vòdún, and toward new Christian communities, like the Church of Celestial Christianity, that drew on the resonance of vòdún 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.

Kérékou's government embraced relationships with the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union, while refusing trade relationships with France, and with Europe and the West more broadly. This represented an alignment of Benin's interests as an African country with global socialist movements in a way that repudiated Western capitalism, pushing away the influence of the country's former colonizers. So this was a vision of an African future for Benin that was anticolonial in an economic sense but also, culturally speaking, antitraditional, indeed antireligious. While the 1950s and '60s had been a period of looking outward, to the West and the African diaspora, for aesthetic and economic value, in the 1970s Kérékou created an environment that looked to be completely self-sufficient, indeed antiglobal, in its outlook, which focused on the protection of African labor and resources, lifting up national unity over cultural and ethnic particularity. It was this revolutionary vision that led Kérékou to charge forward into the future, believing that the past, colonialism and tradition both, was best quickly forgotten.

Agricultural labor was the primary mode of patriotism Kérékou 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 fifteen years before from posts across the French empire, to flee the country, most seeking refuge in Paris.

Kérékou rewrote the constitution in 1977, now allowing for freedom of religion, but prohibiting the population from preaching against the republic

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"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 vòdún religion, whom he saw as dangerous and antimodern, 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). Healing, it turned out, was something that Kérékou was not going to be able to ignore.

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. Kérékou 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 Kérékou renounce Marxism. He gave in and handed power over to a national conference that 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 had studied in Paris and worked at the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, was elected president of the Republic of Benin (Ogouby 2008).

Present-day opinion on Kérékou's legacy varies, earning him the nickname "the chameleon," a particularly ironic reference since one common symbol for the vòdún Lisa is the chameleon, which often appears in temple paintings. Kérékou 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[20] (2005, 73) writes, "Kérékou exchanged Mao's 'little book' for the Bible," turning from the ideology of one era's global power, to another, American evangelicalism.

Some historians have observed that the effects of Kérékou'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 seventy new, smaller parishes during the time that Kérékou was in power, signs of the beginnings of Benin's strong tradition of religious entrepreneurship

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(Amouzouvi 2014). Vòdún 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 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.

Supporters argue that despite his oppressive cultural and economic policies, Kérékou 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, even though this unity was an extension of the colonial boundaries imposed by the French. 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 that 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 (Jean Adagbenon, interview, Cotonou, 11/14/14). The music education provided in the public schools under Kérékou offered all students the opportunity to study a musical instrument like saxophone, drum set, piano, or guitar and play in *variètè* ensembles one day of the week.

His educational policies aside, Kérékou'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 Kérékou'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. Kérékou'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. This era was just one step in Benin's path of healing and working out the traumas and divisions of colonization, a process that took a more global and diasporic turn as the country moved toward democracy and neoliberal economics in the last decade of the twentieth century.

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Vòdún 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 Kérékou thought of all that, [the song "Commerce Triangulaire"] was for Kérékou. 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, interview, Porto Novo, 1/13/15)

Sagbohan Danialou's reflections on his 2001 song "Commerce Triangulaire" allude to a conversation about guilt, blame, and the complicity of African and European involvement in the slave trade that is an extremely sensitive topic in Benin, guaranteed to arouse divisive feelings in people. It also pinpoints what postcolonial theorists like Achille Mbembe (2010a) and Frantz Fanon (1961) consider to be one of the most difficult parts of the postcolonial healing process, the confrontation of the colonized people's feelings of guilt. This guilt for Mbembe is tied to Africans' or their relatives' actual colonial-minded actions in the past or in the present, but, as Fanon would say, it was the nature of colonization to make the colonized feel interminably guilty, unworthy, and indebted for anything and everything, a guilt that the colonized had to reject in order to engage in anticolonial social action. It seems Sagbohan comes down on Mbembe's side here, counseling his countrymen to take responsibility for their participation in injustice and to stop blaming everything on European colonization—a fraught political position indeed, especially following Kérékou's regime and the transition to democracy. Making a key connection to the multidirectional nature of the postcolonial healing process, Sagbohan relates these debates about the blame for the slave trade, which characterizes the contemporary postcolonial relationship between Africa and Europe, with Benin's necessary reconciliation with the African diaspora, making clear why reaching out to diasporic styles, aesthetics, and spiritual communities is such a powerful and meaningful choice in Beninese music during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

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 vòdún in the country. His primary objectives were to restore vòdún's links to tradi-

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tional leadership, which also turned out to be an excellent way of mobilizing electoral support (Tall 1995a); to celebrate vòdún connections with the African diaspora across the Atlantic, especially Brazil, Haiti, and New Orleans (Sutherland 2002); and to make vòdún into a national symbol of pride by creating a national Fête de Vòdún every January 10 in Ouidah. The constitution of 1990 provided that the Republic of Benin has three official religions, Christianity, Islam, and vòdún, and two official languages, French and Fon (Ogouby 2008).

With the first installation of the festival known as Ouidah '92,[21] the tourist industry rebounded in Benin, 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 vòdún, *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 diasporic orientation, its critiques and artful memorialization of slavery, and its new forms of cultural nationalism.

Recalling the language of an earlier era, President Soglo wrote in the edited volume that accompanied the first festival in 1993 that vòdún 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" (Présence Africaine 1993, 7–8). Artists in all media prospered during this time, and the government supported new works specifically celebrating Benin's vòdún heritage. This was the first time that Benin's leaders treated vòdún and its practices as *art*, as something deserving of a global audience's *aesthetic* appreciation.

Vòdún 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 opportunity to use Benin's heritage as a cultural commodity in order to court the West's

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interest in authentic African culture and 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 re-creation—some called it the "rehabilitation"—of its history.[22]

The vòdún renaissance of the '90s summoned echoes of Leopold Senghor's *négritude* in its celebration of the value of African culture and identity, but with an eye to the consumption practices of the neoliberal market. Mbembe (2010b, 221–22) writes of two moments of "Afropolitanism" in the history of twentieth-century Atlantic Africa. One was "properly postcolonial," which sought to repay a "debt with regard to the future by virtue of a glorious past" (2010b, 222. This earlier Afropolitan orientation consumes the African past in an unsustainable way that damages its liveness in the present, depriving it of its true healing and corrective functions, fixing it in a museum case. The second moment of Afropolitanism, according to Mbembe (2010b, 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 (2010b, 225) writes that, in this later Afropolitan moment,

> 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*].[23] 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's emphasis on the importance of recovering a sense of agency and multiplicity, of overcoming the sense of victimization and the "impotence as a consequence of accidents of history," corresponds quite well to the critique Danialou offered in "Commerce Triangulaire." This second Afropolitan moment 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*, *décalage*,[24] a prism, a point of reference that appears to materialize only to split, shatter focus, and change form, neither the self nor the other but the productive space between them, an endless library of source material, indeed, a densely networked *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

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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 Ouidah '92, having both of Mbembe's Afropolitan moments at once, attempting to fix vòdún as a cultural commodity and allow it new life as a healing force.

To follow the thinking of the Ouidah '92 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 (see Sutherland 1999). This inaugural "ethno-preneurship" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009) of vòdún 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 matters than with the internal economic problems of Benin. Antiwitchcraft 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 vòdún, although Soglo himself was a Catholic.

Some vòdún 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 a sense of justification 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 Vòdún Cults in Benin, Sossa Guedehoungue (ca. 1910–2001),[25] 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

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Hounan whom the Gangbé Brass Band consulted for the authorization to perform and develop vòdún rhythms and songs in 1996, evidence of the status and respect that Benin's musicians afford him.

When I attended the Fête du Vòdún in Ouidah in January 2015, the controversies surrounding government support and two rival factions within the vòdún community were ongoing. I attended the festival with Jean Gnonlonfoun, an expert gbon lead drummer and former member of Gangbé 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 in 2006) had been giving some money to all of the different *vòdúnon* priests in different localities and from cults new and old, so that each one could host their own celebration on January 10.[26] 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 Guedehoungue's death by leaders of the new vòdún cults, among them in 2015 the nephew of the late *houngan* (head *vòdúnon*) 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 vòdún Dan.

The second event was led by the *vòdúnon* who had been chosen in 2004 by Fá divination to be the rightful heir to the vòdún 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 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 vòdún temple to the next, from fateful Fá 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 vòdún's role as the male half of the creator twins Mawu-Lisa in Fon cosmology. Tall (2014) notes that the empire of Dànxɔmɛ 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 vòdún pantheon, such as those between sisters, brothers, and fraternal twins of different

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genders. According to Herskovits (1958, 167), Lisa was brought to Abomey by Queen Hwandjile "from Adja," suggesting that this member of the Mawu-Lisa creative partnership emphasizes Abomey's cultural (and patrilineal) roots in Allada-Ouidah, Adja country.

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 vòdún, especially *ogede* for the *egúngún* 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." This made especially apparent the ways that the music accompanying the ceremonies worked to communicate and mediate the subtle differences between the difference communities in attendance across the festival.

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

These changes in the politics and value of vòdún in the 1990s paralleled a similar (re)sanctification of the musique moderne scene in Cotonou, which opened up during this period to support a large community of gospel music performers. While Kérékou'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 Congolese 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.

As the Ouidah '92 festival demonstrated, the transition from socialism to democracy had had dramatic effects on the structuring of relationships between sacred musical practices (vòdún or Christian) and their economic value. In the 1990s foreign investment came flooding into Cotonou, 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 (and is) more often based on lyric discourse than on any formal musical characteristics, and these theaters continued to resound with the sounds of classic Congolese music and even some old (and new) vòdún rhythms in the name of Jesus. African American gospel music also exploded in popularity around this time in Cotonou and Porto Novo.[27] 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 led to a transformation in the spiritual economy of Christianity, just as it had with vòdún. The Beninese 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

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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.

In terms of secular musique moderne, particularly jazz, foreign investment came in from French and Belgian tourists and expatriates, 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 *francesgbè*, French language, approximation of "highlife," 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 Beninese 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, some of whom formed the brass and jazz groups that are the subject of the chapters that follow here.

Defining Genre in Contemporary Beninese Music

The definitions of musical genre I encountered in southern Benin in the 2000s and 2010s 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 by economic liberalism. Genre categories among musicians in southern Benin revolve mostly around the binary categories of *traditionel* and *moderne*, which, on the surface, 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 (Kpangnouian, interview, Avrankou, 4/2/15), suggesting that this is an area of important contestation around musical and cultural ideas. Musicians categorize musical practice in Benin in four locally situated, sometimes overlapping ways: *traditionel*, *sacré*, *populaire*, and *moderne*. I will explore them each briefly to give a sense of the usage I observed during my fieldwork.

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Traditionel

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 béninoise*" (for example, 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 the 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 vòdún 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.

Sacré

The category of *traditionel* is usually separated into the sacré and the populaire. This separation might seem like a replication of colonization's separation between the church and the state, but it has some important resonances in vòdún practice. *Le sacré*, as in "*les rythmes sacrés*" or "*les rythmes du couvent*," refers to repertoire for vòdún ceremonies or for secret societies, including both secret repertoires for initiates only (see Rouget 1996) and the drumming, dances, and songs performed for the public portions of the initiates' coming-out ceremonies. The public aspects of these ceremonies represent the first step toward what has been the progressive *popularisation* of these sacred styles beginning even before colonization. This "coming-out," the joyful, sonorous *sortie*, of new

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initiates and of sacred rhythms, encapsulates well some important themes of the interior and exterior aesthetic, political, and spiritual spaces that underlie definitions of musical genre from a traditional Beninese perspective, both *sacré* and *populaire* and *moderne* and *traditionel*. The inside is the space of the family, of ethnicity, of learning and formation, of the secret and of the preservation of lineage; while the outside—the populaire or even the *moderne*—is the space of the ethical, of values, of risk and exchange, where vòdún spirits intervene in the affairs of the world, possessing initiates to offer commentary and correctives on daily life. One of the powers of the healing function of *la musique traditionel* is precisely this, that it takes place and occupies sonic space on both sides of this sacred/popular, private/public divide.

The distinction between sacré and populaire is founded first on a respect for the reserved quality of vòdún ancestral music and practices. But importantly, this distinction can also correspond to values attached to the preservation of specific ethnic traditions—Fon, Gun, Yoruba, or Toffin, and many other minority ethnicities with their own vòdún-related traditions. This might reflect attitudes or resentments about historical patterns of cultural imperialism, as in Abomey's conquests of the kingdoms in Ouidah and later Oyo, and their tense peace with Porto Novo. So to say that a music is sacred is to say that it is proprietary not only to a specific community of practice but also to the ethnic group whose ancestors' afterlives those practices preserve. The sacred is often about *lineage* and cultural continuity. To say that a stylistic repertoire has become popularized is to say that it has been moved out of this reserved realm and into the interethnic, secular sphere, often along with changes in instrumentation and performance context. This is one of the ways that Beninese musical society preserves ethnic difference while allowing shared experiences across these divisions. This process has been extended to dramatic effect in brass band and jazz musicians' transformations of these repertoires for audiences outside of Benin beginning in the late twentieth century.

Beninese musicians generally agree about what constitutes the repertoire of *le sacré* and its boundaries and origins, especially concerning those genres widely recognized for their ceremonial role, such as kàkà for the zàngbétɔ guardians of the night in Porto Novo, *agbehun* (also known as gbon) for the egúngún ancestral masks in Ouidah, and *agbotchebou* for the vòdún of the earth 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 the Celestial Church of Christ and the Cherubim et Seraphim

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Society (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 vòdún-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. Vòdún music may register as part of "sacred" experience for Christians from traditional backgrounds, and features prominently in Celestial Christian services, while it is "profane" for *both* evangelicals and strict traditionalists. Congolese soukous 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 vòdún styles out of the temple ("*sorti du couvent*") to *populariser*, *moderniser*, or *developper* them, as innovators describe various aspects of the process (Dehoumon, France, 6/5/14; Adagbenon, Cotonou, 11/14/14). This was a common practice, especially after the 1970s, when vòdún repertoires were being suppressed and performers sought out new consumer patrons for support, as described in the sections that follow here. One example is the case of kàkà, the repertoire for the zàngbétɔ that Sagbohan Danialou has *modernisé*. In this case Danialou engaged in both the *popularisation* (read: secularization, brought out of the *couvent*, or temple) and *modernisation* (adaptation for drum set, horns, and amplified bass and guitar) of kàkà, 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 vòdún Sakpata.

The Gangbé Brass Band has also adapted many sacré styles, including *agbotchebou*, *agbehun*, and kàkà, for new instrumentation, and sometimes in original compositions. Their and other brass bands' work, like Eyon'le's, 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 of European philosophy. But this is not enough. The feet play an important role in dance

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for the vòdún, where the steps, and indeed the footwork, of *vòdúnsi* initiates convey secret codes and identifying information about the particular vòdún the *vòdúnsi* 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 *sɛ*, 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]

Populaire

Within the category of the traditional, *le populaire* could have strikingly divergent meanings, depending on the perspective and the context. The popular, for many Beninese musicians, refers to the large body of publicly accessible repertoire, like *tchinkoume*, *massɛ*, *djègbè*, 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 Beninese listener has forgotten the genre's ritual origins, as in the case of tchinkoume and massɛ gòhún. This touches on some sense of what might be considered "populist," or "people's music,"[29] which has particular resonances in Benin due to the socialist government's policies regarding music in the 1970s and '80s, which sought to break down ethnic divisions in order to create national unity. 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).

These *populaire traditionel* 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 intermusical 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*," "It's for celebrations/rejoicing," a reference to the

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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, musicians with music theoretical training, like those in the Gangbé and Eyo'nlé 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 (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 between these terms often enough to deserve mention.

In the United States, the context with which I am most familiar, notions of popular music are primarily constructed 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.

Moderne

The *moderne* is a marker of many things, but in Beninese music it signals most fundamentally the influence of the outside, usually Western world. Here the

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"outside" of the vòdún ceremony, the coming out of new initiates, takes on a global, even Afro-diasporic, form that, on its surface, appears to operate exclusively in the secular world of modern commercial music, even if its sacré past continues to create resonant effects in listeners, as the end of this chapter explores. 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 transformations of the *moderne* usually come 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 Beninese 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 that sound too *traditionel* and those that sound too *moderne*. Often, the only criteria by which Beninese consumers positively evaluate local music is whether it has achieved any status (or made any money) abroad, much to the frustration of many musicians, who describe this attitude as replicating colonial attitudes and traumas of devaluation that rely solely on European judgment for the attribution of cultural or socioeconomic value (J. B. Gnonlonfoun, New York, 5/24/16). Brass ensembles range from the ubiquitous *fanfares* that play for church services, funerals, weddings, and baptisms using the usual military snare and bass drum, to those that have taken on a more self-consciously *tradi-moderne* orientation. 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 that feature salsa, reggae, and jazz, and large stadium concerts like those at Stade de l'Amitié that program pop, gospel, and hip hop artists. 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*," the Abomean vòdún priest and drummer Etienne Mechonou often reminded me, filling me in with vivid

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stories of years spent gigging with salsa, Afrobeat, or jazz groups in Cotonou, and traveling to Europe and parts of Asia to perform.

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. This is something of an answer to Beninese listeners who see a contradiction in terms between the *moderne* and the *traditionel*. 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 (Dehoumon, 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 or purified gold. As Crispin Kpitiki (France, 6/5/14), a percussionist with Gangbé, told me, "Gangbé'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 Gangbé 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 character-

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istic "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, Beninese 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. These processes of transformation confront colonization's traumatic devaluations of African culture and humanity that resulted in class-oriented divisions and hierarchies of value between *sacre* and *populaire*, *traditionel* and *moderne*. Beninese musicians and audiences replicate some of these traumatic splits in their postcolonial discourse about religion, aesthetics, and music, as in their use of metaphors of extraction and mind-body dualism. Yet because musicians remain grounded in their felt experiences with music and religion, this discourse and the musical practices that it refers to also represent opportunities where musicians can bend colonial ideologies of aesthetics and purity to their own ends, showing that cultural pluralism does not have to erase individual ethnic or religious particularity, that it is possible to be both traditional and future-oriented, and that the sacred has an important place even in a secular modern outlook.

La Musique Moderne

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. This was one of the major ways that social actors in Benin—musicians, listeners, leaders—worked through the traumatic experiences of colonialism as they used sites for the replication of colonial ideologies and binaries, such as musical discourse, as opportunities for bending their meanings toward local realities of ethnic identity and sacred experience. Through the socialist period in the 1970s and '80s, Kérékou's administration experimented rather unsuc-

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cessfully with pushing both the Western world and vòdún ancestral traditions away through policies of extreme secularism and economic protectionism, but supported music education and the National Police Orchestra, which trained many of the brass band musicians who began working internationally in the late 1990s. 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 vòdún art and practice, projects modernizing traditional music began to appear in new contexts and on a greater scale.

Understanding the musical innovations of the postindependence era in Benin as part of a process of working through the traumatic inheritances of colonialism sheds light on how, sometimes in spite of the politics of the day, musicians like Sagbohan Danialou, Orchestre Poly-Rythmo, and Yedenou Adjahoui addressed their interventions to the specific traumas of colonization: the devaluation and diabolization of African traditions like vòdún and its music; the ideological binarism that said that the modern and the traditional, and the sacred and the secular, were not compatible; the tragic history of the slave trade and the resulting rifts with the African diaspora; and the constant questioning of the Beninese people's very humanity through the cultivation of ongoing ending psychological cycles of culpability, indebtedness, and dependence. Musicians in this era instead embraced the power of vòdún music styles to speak to the Beninese public and to send messages about the strength of ancestral culture and its compatibility with modernity and modern music styles, as well as their connections with the African diaspora. They held that, even if the socialist administration saw it as a threat, Benin's wealth was in its people, in its culture, and in its spirituality—and in their ongoing liveness and multiplicity.

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PART II

TRANSFORMING VÒDÚN

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CHAPTER 3

GANGBÉ BRASS BAND

Producing Vòdún, Producing Livelihood

Yé nɔn ɖɔn, ɖɔn Africa vílɛ nɔn biɔ nú gbáwú	They say that African people beg a lot
Amɔ, nubiɔtɔ mà hù we ɖé	But, the beggar has not sinned.
A ná mi náyí	You give me, I take.
A ka sɔ tɛmi ná gbɔ	You don't give me, I will keep my peace.
Ajotɔ á ná glé hwè do	The thief, you are the one doing wrong.

Gangbé Brass Band, "Noubiotɔ," *Whendo* (2005)
(trans. Saturnin Tomeho and the author, 2016)

Gangbé'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. I had arrived in Paris few days before to begin two months of research with the band. Gangbé was fresh off an overnight flight from Benin, exhausted, and feeling candid. They had just finished playing "La Porte du Non Retour," the agbadja piece from *Assiko* whose Mina-language lyrics tell the story of the trans-Atlantic slave trade from perspective of the Door of No Return in Ouidah. Here the agbadja style represents the sounds of these coastal fishing villages on Benin's southwestern, Mina coast.[1]

After playing "La Porte du Non Retour," 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.

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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 that resonates in a particularly sensitive way with Beninese descendants of the Dànxɔmɛan empire. The exchange between Martial and the unseen Frenchman reveals 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 Dànxɔmɛ looking for war, and worse. Martial suggests that Gangbé's project, and indeed their musical interventions on French territory, transfer historical conflict to another domain, economics. Transposing conflict to the economic realm, the concept of a "trade war," is one of the classic strategies of globalized power in the twentieth century, and Martial's comment situates Gangbé's project firmly in this discursive world, where reconciliation for slavery and colonialism necessarily involves discussions of some kind of material compensation, of reparations. The long-lasting ramifications of colonization have led to the tabulation of mounting material debt for African countries like Benin, continuing the colonial narrative that Africa has nothing of value to exchange except for human labor. What is not accounted for in global economic tables are the spiritual and ethical debts of Western countries and African elites, which continue to rise in reverse correlation with Africa's material debts, as Martial's commentary and the song "La Porte du Non Retour" make clear. Music, religion, and art are areas where these spiritual debts are recorded and periodically brought into consciousness, opening the complex potentials of healing postcolonial trauma in terms both spiritual and material.

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A closer look at the Mina lyrics to the song offers insight into the nature of the transformations undertaken by ancestors departed across the sea, sent into life in diaspora or in the next world.

[in Mina]	
E nu jo looo (x2)	It came to pass: [i.e., “once upon a time”:]
Me de ke yi ju de me a	He 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 gnĩ to agbolonu eee	My grandfather [ancestor] Agbolonu
[second time: *Togbo gnĩ to agbome to eee*]]	[second time: My grandfather Agbome]
Jo yi apu ji e	Went to the sea.
Porte du non retour eee	The door of no return, and so
A mi mu gbo lo	He never came back.
E te kpo (x2)	He[?] dared
Devi o chi ho me bō nui so same	To sell his children.
E te kpo	He dared
Devi o chi ho ablo ni so same	To sell his children for bottles of wine.
E te kpo	He dared
E te kpo (x2)	He dared
Devi o chi ho chu yi so same	To sell his children for frippery.
E te kpo	He dared
Devi o chi ho aha ta yi so same	To sell his children for drinks.
E te kpo	He dared

(trans. Chams Linkpon and the author, 2010)

According to Segurola’s ([1963] 1968, 266) *Dictionnaire Fon-Français*, the word *ji*, which Chams Linkpon interprets generally here as “the sea,” could also refer to “the spirit who inhabits the upper regions (*jixue*), and who commands the rain,” “the rain” itself, “the sky,” or “thunder.” Segurola adds that *ji vodu* is one way of referring to “Xebioso” (Hevioso), the vòdún of thunder. This sheds interesting light on the imagining of ancestral departures as expressed in this lyric. The line “My grandfather Agbolonu / Went to the sea” takes on a

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number of possible meanings. One, that this ancestral figure "went to the sea" in the sense that he left on a slave ship. But another, more revealing, that "going to the sea" has a more spiritual connotation, implying a transition in physical state. This ancestor not only made a geographic shift in leaving Africa, but in the imagination of the lyricist, he also joined the natural elements, representing the end of his physical life. This is a particularly compelling reading, given the belief in vòdún cosmology that ancestral vòdún became vòdún by shifting shape and transforming into a natural figure, such as the sea, a tree, a leopard, and so forth. The ocean here becomes highly symbolic of the spiritualization of ancestors departed in the slave trade.

This meaning is obscured in the liner notes to *Assiko*, which gloss the meaning of the piece in terms that emphasize alternately the tragedy of slavery and the cultural innovations of the enslaved people:

> Slavery is a plague that has ravaged the African continent. African cities and villages have been stripped of their working hands. For this traffic in humans one can easily point the finger at white traders but African kings also exchanged the children of their soil for goods: mirrors, tissues, liquor or silver. The title "Door of no return" from Ouidah in Benin and the Island of Goree (Senegal) is sung as a memento of what must be remembered lest we forget the lessons. It also illustrates the pain of the slaves who were deported never to return to their families. On the other hand, one can also say there is a good side to everything; these slaves without a voice also played dance puppets and expressed themselves through songs in the fields and houses of their masters. In this way, our cultures slowly mixed with those of the "host" countries, leading to the birth of different rhythms and musical styles like Gospel, Blues, Swing. (Gangbé Brass Band 2008)

In this chapter, I examine the first of several case studies of Beninese musicians who transform their musical experiences and traditions for specific contexts and audiences, in this case, the Gangbé Brass Band, the group with which I worked the most closely from 2010 to 2016. The group's processes of transformation have entailed several phases over the course of their career, as they have honed their skills in defining themselves as creative professionals and as African artists, and in improvising strategic approaches to the various constraints with which international work in music has confronted them. In the first phase, the band set out to distinguish themselves from the church repertoires and perceived amateurism of funeral *fanfares* (as local Beninese brass bands are called)

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by performing a more eclectic blend of funk and jazz covers.[2] With their growing awareness of international audiences' interest in vòdún and other ancestral traditions, in this first phase they also undertook the project of representing the multiplicity of music repertoires used in these spiritual contexts, which required them to do field research in their own communities, while also learning about the traditions of neighboring ethnic groups.

The project of then transforming these traditions for different contexts of performance and recording has demanded that Gangbé's members develop a toolbox of creative interventions. These include musical techniques like crafting new instruments or adapting old instruments for travel, or in adapting styles, arrangements, and musical languages for the requirements of recording technology; they also include tools for making performances accessible to a broad audience, like shaping song structures, instrumental passages, improvised solo sections, and dance and drumming showcases. Some of the interventions Gangbé has developed defend the open-ended qualities of their music against the flattening tendencies of the world music market. In their performances, they place the focus on liveness, improvisation, the orality of African languages, and dance to animate the processual temporalities of traditions like vòdún music, which retains its living presence through its links to tradition and ancestry. Importantly, Gangbé has learned how to make these interventions in material as well as aesthetic terms, ever cognizant of the resonances of postcolonial cultural conflicts in the economic sphere. They have confronted a host of structural and situational constraints as they have developed these skills. In the face of such constraints, it is important to remember that *waiting* is also an intervention—a strategic choice to engage the power and opportunities of *time*—one that improvising musicians understand well.

Liveness and livelihood are important, interlinked concepts for groups like Gangbé in negotiating with the constraints of recording, performing, and curating Beninese music abroad. Louise Meintjes (2003, 109–45) has noted the association of liveness with a constructed African authenticity, particularly in recording contexts. This liveness includes specific bass-heavy, acoustic-sounding timbres, as well as a flexible and spontaneous relationship with time, which reflects what, for Meintjes's black South African performers, represents African identity in sound. In an international jazz context, liveness is similarly constructed as authenticity through the use of improvisation and a focus on performance itself as a ritual act of communication and transcendence (Jackson 2003). Scholarly attention to "livelihood," the means of securing the necessities of life, is also growing as a way of understanding

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African musicians' multiple and overlapping ethical, spiritual, and economic goals (Skinner 2015). This chapter shows that, in Gangbé's experiences, the values of liveness—the real time authenticity of performance and its ritual meanings—and livelihood—the ability to make an ethical, professional, and sustainable living—are deeply linked.

The careers of groups like Gangbé grew out of the cultural renaissance in Benin in the 1990s following democratization and the liberalization of the economy, as the previous chapter discussed. In this period, Benin reentered 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 cultural 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 (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009; Taylor 2007). In this system, the value of a nation, a person, or a tradition hinged on having something to sell, an environment rich with both potential and risk for cultural entrepreneurs. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, groups like Gangbé 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). Gangbé's acquisition of production knowledge over time traces their ongoing renegotiation of the terms of these capitalist markets and their place within it. For these musicians, redrawing the terms of cultural value has offered an opportunity for self-determination and self-definition using a more flexible and multiple conception of selfhood than in previous eras, while actors with more limited views of African music pose the risk of reentrenching old essentialisms.

Processes of ethnic branding and representation can be extremely complex. While it might seem that these processes would degrade the vitality of cultural traditions exposed to the market, the experiences of musicians like those in Gangbé suggest that such processes may in fact give these traditions longer and more dynamic life through continued innovations.[3] In this way, "ethnopreneurs" capitalize on their cultural wealth and confront some of the patterns of economic interaction that have long marked cross-cultural encounters (see Comaroff and Comaroff 2009, 50). Such processes create productive tears in

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systems of signs and value, and demand high levels of adaptation and creativity if entrepreneurs wish to keep the parameters of these transformations on their own terms.

Understandings of self-making through production and consumption can sometimes overlook the important role of systems of power as they impact everyday practice. For Michel de Certeau (1984), everyday practice is oriented around the ways in which people "make use" of the materials they have available to them. For Gangbé, these materials include the totality of their lived experiences, as well as cultural memory, the archive of ancestral tradition, and the full library of colonial culture, musics, and instruments. De Certeau writes that an observer might learn of such everyday uses in the "trajectories" traced by the users' choices, rituals, and patterns, such as Gangbé's path through the music business, or their creative practices as improvisers, composers, and arrangers. But he 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.

"Tactics," on the other hand, refer to decision-making where the line between the actor's agency and the environment is unclear: "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" (de Certeau 1984, 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. He must essentially be willing to take on different guises, poses, or *masks* depending on the circumstances; he must consent to having multiple personalities. 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. But it is important to understand that there is agency and play here, too, in lying in wait, in experimentation, in the cultivation and celebration of indeterminacy, and in gradually learning the rules of the game. Gangbé's decision-making processes over the course of their career have many of the characteristics of de Certeau's "tactics," although as they have developed their production knowledge through experience over time, they have been able to blend more "strategic" options into their music and business practices.

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Gangbé: *Musique de Recherche*

The genesis of the Gangbé Brass Band took place in an environment of diasporic encounter. In 1993, the year of the first 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 *fanfare* Imole Christi in Cotonou. They would later become the Gangbé Brass Band. Among them were trumpeter and arranger Sam Gnonlonfoun and his brother Jean on lead percussion, the trombone and baritone horn player (and later sousaphonist) James Vodounnon, and trumpeter Athanase Dehoumon. 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 "Béninois" sound, and, in a sense, decolonize the instruments of the colonial brass band. In other words, the impetus for Gangbé's move to emphasize African authenticity and Beninese 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. Using traditional instruments and rhythms, especially those from vòdún practice, was a tricky proposition within Benin's local spiritual politics, though. Dehoumon (Plaisir, 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 Béninois musical and cultural research, giving value [*valeur*] to our cultural instruments realized by Béninois 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.

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There is a lot to notice in Dehoumon's choice of words, as he emphasizes "musical and cultural research," "giving value," and the creation of "encounter." His emphasis on *spectacle* is also important here, revealing his sensitivity to audiences' emphasis on the visual aspects of Gangbé's presentation. While a local *fanfare* might be able to make a living producing music for specific ceremonial occasions, in Dehoumon's account Gangbé felt that, to break through in the international market, they needed to work up their stagecraft, showcasing the liveness of virtuosic dance (not explored here but a highly visible element in Gangbé's shows) and percussion solos. These aspects of performance did several kinds of work for the group: the visual aspects of dancing, drumming, and dress exemplified their cultural particularity and, they hoped, rendered it both more legible and distinctive. These elements also did not require audiences to understand the local languages Gangbé used in their songs, but instead immersed them in experiences that they could interpret in many different ways, even participating in dancing in whatever ways they could.

When I interviewed Dehoumon again several years later, he described the process of transforming traditional popular songs in this first phase of Gangbé's development, saying, "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" (Bouchemaine, France, 6/5/14). Dehoumon's language of work ("*On les a travaillé*," "We worked on them") and of value and valorization is provocative. This is where the group's creative interventions take place. The object of these value-making processes is clearly traditional Beninese "rhythms" and the instruments that produce them.

To refer to these "rhythms" as fixed objects in the sense of American English can be misleading. In the Fon language, the word *hun* refers to rhythmic style, the drums that produce that style, as well as the practice of dancing, drumming, and singing as a whole, including tonally oriented melodies and their resultant textures, akin to what the Nigerian ethnomusicologist Meki Nzewi (1997) refers to as "melo-rhythm." This is, broadly speaking, what is meant by "rhythm" in referring to Beninese traditional music, rather than the sense of "a rhythm" as a discrete entity. When musicians like Dehoumon speak about their work in French, they often go back and forth between "instruments," "styles," and "rhythms," where in Fon, they might just say *hun*, which can refer to all of these concepts. For example, in an interview I conducted with Dehoumon and percussionist Crispin Kpitiki (6/5/14), Dehoumon spoke French, and Kpitiki, who is less fluent in French, spoke Fon while Dehoumon translated into French.

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Wherever Kpitiki used the word *hun*, Dehoumon stopped to think about how to translate it based on the context, either as "rhythm" (*rhythme*), "style" (*style*), or "drum" (*tam-tam*).

So Gangbé 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. Gangbé's first task was to distinguish themselves from the locally oriented *fanfares* by producing more advanced arrangements and introducing more jazz improvisation. James Vodounnon (Bouchemaine, France, 6/5/14) 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 [Beninese] popular songs.

That the practice of "covering" funk and jazz tunes was so important to Gangbé's early self-definition, as Vodounnon describes, reveals something of how they sought to orient themselves in relationship to "modern" Afro-diasporic music, as well as their commitment to developing their original artistic contributions to established repertoires and traditions. Dehoumon (Bouchemaine, France, 6/5/14) explained that, on their first two albums, Gangbé 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 *Togbé* (2001) and "Segala" on *Whendo* (2005). "Why *populaire*?" Dehoumon said. "To convince [the local audience] that *starting with what exists, we could show something which had never existed*" (his emphasis). On their more recent albums, like *Assiko!* (2008) and *Go Slow to Lagos* (2015), the group has recorded more "*compositions*," or original songs for which they have written the

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melodies, lyrics, and arrangements. Dehoumon'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."

Gangbé'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.[4] Aziza, the vòdún of musical improvisation and creativity, offers a similar model for understanding the relationship of individual creativity to tradition. Gangbé's members often referred to percussionist and sometimes lead singer Crispin Kpitiki with the title "Aziza" for his ability to improvise melodies, rhythms, and topical lyrics to fit the situation at hand. As the Beninese literary scholar Guy Mediohouan (1993, 250, my translation) writes:

> In all of southern Benin, singers, which is to say poets, have their god, Aziza Nubode, also the god of hunters, inventor of music and author-composer-performer of this first song:
>
> '*Aziza kun kwe bo malan gbe e Azwi gbe na nyo Aziza vi Nubode kun kwe bo malan gbe e Azwi gbe na nyo*,'
>
> Meaning, 'Aziza plays the flute to pay homage to the forest. Azwi [Rabbit = Aziza], the hunt will be fruitful. Nubode, Aziza's child, plays the flute to pay homage to the forest. Azwi, the hunt will be favorable.'
>
> Before all musical performance, the singer-poet invokes Aziza and pays him homage in music via a proprietary rite called *avalu* (in Fon) or *avalé* (in Gun).

The musician is thus possessed by Aziza, the source of creativity, a good sense of time or rhythm, memory, and pleasing timbral quality of sound, filling the musician's body with this deified power. The image of a musical performance as a "hunt" is evocative, too, of the idea of a *musique de recherche*, an experimental music of "research" or "searching." Here the individual receives credit for his creativity only through his association with the agency of the divine, which can discursively obscure the ways that the individual profits from his creativity or intertwines his or her own agency with the divine.

Most of these populaire songs take their origins in the court styles of Xɔgbónu or Danxomɛ (see chapter 1), 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 secular populaire gradually over time, beginning slowly at first, prior to colonization, with the performance of

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court songs in the homes of royal dignitaries in town and, in other cases, the "coming-out" ceremonies of new vòdún adepts, which were open to the public. Then with missionization, and the regulation of vòdún practice and royal power in the twentieth century (see chapter 2), 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" (see Politz 2018a [*EM* article] and Musical example 1). Thus, the king of Xɔgbónu (Porto Novo) now makes three stops on a usual Sunday: at the vòdún temple and at the Catholic church, both where *adjogan* is performed in his honor, and lastly at the mosque, where many of the city's Yoruba residents worship.

Agbotchebou, the style from Sakpata ceremonies that is now played widely for parties and celebrations, and which Gangbé deploys on their most recent album on the song "Assidida" (2015), has made a similar transition into the populaire sphere. The style of zɛnlí was originally reserved for royal funerals in Abomey, but is now played for funerals in many different contexts, and has been popularized as *zɛnlí renové*—a genre filled with topical songs of love and joy by the singer Alekpehanhou (Bohicon, 12/7/14). Zɛnlí is a special example, because it had been traditionally reserved for royal funerals, since all kings become vòdún when they die, one of the most powerful forms of ancestral deity.

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, which 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 Gangbé's first album, the musicians decided to devote themselves to the group full time; Dehoumon quit his job at the railroad and started to take management classes.

Voice
Al-la-da-nou we mi-ton gi-go di-e. Al-la
Bells
B♭ Trumpet
Baritone Horn

Musical example 1. The opening of Gangbé's arrangement of "Alladanou."

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Gangbé 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 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. Gangbé recruited them to come back to Cotonou, and the two brass players agreed.

There remained the problem that, aside from Jean Gnonlonfoun and Lucien Gbaguidi, none of Gangbé's musicians had grown up with or been initiated into vòdún practice, so their representation of these sacred genres was necessarily limited to Jean and Lucien's experience. Jean and his brother Sam are the sons of a celebrated Cherubim and Seraphim pastor and gospel singer in Cotonou, but through their family's roots as Toffinou people, an offshoot of the Yoruba, Jean was initiated into the egúngún ancestral masking society during his youth and learned to play for their ceremonies. Gbaguidi, while raised in vòdún temples in Savalou in Mahi country, has in more recent years become a prominent pastor in the Celestial Church of Christ in Cotonou. The other members, having largely been trained in the *fanfares* of independent African churches, knew only the "cultural" side of vòdún 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 (see Rouget 1996 for more on the music of vòdún initiation).

Gangbé's members thus took on the challenge of researching their own heritages 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 interethnic understandings of the various traditions coexisting within Benin. Knowledge of this cultural wealth and diversity strengthened Gangbé in its project of gaining recognition and value for vòdún and other Beninese traditions, taking charge of

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colonial histories of spiritual devaluation and ideologies of cultural homogeneity. Gangbé was well positioned, then, to undertake the project of representing the multiplicity of Benin's music traditions in all of their different ethnic and religious aspects, even as they confronted the reductive tendencies of international markets and cultural encounters.

From *Cultuel* to *Culturel*: The Sacred and the Secular

There remained the problem of spiritual legitimacy; all of Gangbé's members—Christian, vòdún, and in between—took the negative spiritual and social effects of misusing vòdún tradition very seriously, particularly if they were accused of profiting from protected collective resources. 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. The group learned a great deal about the inner workings of vòdún communities, particularly about the prohibitions initiates must follow, the rhythms and dance steps reserved for devotees, and the special role of women as *vòdúnsi* (wives of the vòdún, as male and female devotees are called) and as powerful leaders at the upper levels of the priesthood—serious considerations for Gangbé's all-male membership. The priest taught them how to protect themselves and how to manage the spiritual power of the traditions they planned to work with. Dehoumon (Plaisir, France, 6/12/10), who was raised mostly in the Celestial Church of Christ in Porto Novo, described the encounter with Daagbo Hounon Hounan:

> 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 Béninois youth when it comes to music. Because young musicians, music groups, have never gone to see where the secrets of vòdún 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 cer-

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

Gangbé was not the only group to have the idea of modernizing vòdún-based rhythms in the 1990s.[5] The sons of the vòdún chief Sossa Guedehoungue formed a group in 1998 called Les Frères Guedehoungue, which focused on recording their versions of sacred vòdún 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. While as initiates the Guedehoungue brothers did not have the problem of spiritual legitimacy, they faced other issues in getting their music across to a Beninese market. As Bertin "Prince Agba" Guedehoungue (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

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> 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 vòdún 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 vòdún. 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. Ultimately, even for the Guedehoungues, who are fully initiated into vòdún 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.

Gangbé 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 Gangbé's then-trumpeter Magloire Ahouandjinou (Plaisir, France, 6/12/10) put it:

> Today, the thing has been desanctified [*desacralisé*]. The music of vòdún continues to exist, but more often in a cultural [*culturel*] context than in the religious [*cultuel*] context. That's to say that every person has his perception of things today. For us, we all come from vòdún 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 vòdún. But we use these melodies and rhythms in the *cultural* form. Those who use it for vòdún 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 vòdún, while defending each person's individual right to their own relationship with its religious aspects. This is a good example of how musicians in groups like Gangbé

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defend the open-endedness of their culture, their creative practice, and their collective representations. 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") among Gangbé's members to avoid interpretations that totalize musicians' beliefs or aesthetics, and it came up repeatedly in my interviews. Magloire is careful to point out that he employs a *secular* concept of culture for Gangbé's project here, while also allowing for the spiritual importance the music holds for practitioners. The importance of vòdún, and indeed of traditional repertoires in general, for Magloire, was the link to cultural *continuity*:

> 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.

For Magloire, Gangbé's music might undergo stylistic transformations and exchanges with other cultures, but importantly its connection to local forms of expression—and the *value* this holds—remain intact.

Togbé

Gangbé 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*, Gangbé's most traditionally rooted album, is a rich mix of sounds representing different aspects of the band members' experiences growing up in and actively researching southern Benin's soundscapes as they have shifted from sacred to popular genres. Porto Novo, the home of saxophonist Aristide Agondanou and the Ahouandjinou brothers Magloire and Martial, is well represented on pieces like "Tagbavo," a massɛ gòhún piece in the style of the beloved Porto Novian singer 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 sounds of Porto Novo as well, including "Alladanou,"[6] which is *adjogan*, a royal

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court style named for King Toffa's minister charged with European relations (see Rouget 1996; Politz 2018a). There are also two kàkà tracks on the album: "Gangbé Vile" (The Children of Gangbé) and "Gbeto," which is an homage the secret society for the zàngbétɔ, the vòdún that watch over Porto Novo at night, called by their nickname "Biliguede" here.

Many of the tracks on *Togbé* reflect Jean Gnonlonfoun's percussion expertise in Yoruba-derived sacred genres, especially gbon (on "Ekui Nawo" and "Ema Dja"), which is played for the egúngún masking spirits 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 album together.

"Ajaka," the track that first made Gangbé famous in Benin, is also included on this album.[7] It is in the style of old zɛnlí from the center of Fon culture, the precolonial capital of Abomey, and the song itself is a royal song of the king's court that is still well known today (see musical examples 2 and 3).

James Vodounnon remembers that the group was playing mostly local music festivals and in bars until they created the arrangement for "Ajaka" and people in Benin started to pay attention. Note that Vodounnon attaches the label of "sacred" to this zɛnlí song, because of its associations with the kingship:

> 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. (Vodounnon, Bouchemaine, France, 6/5/14)

The lyrics of "Ajaka" address the importance of having children to increase the power of the kingdom:

O ví má yɔn ɖ'ani kaɖíe	You must have your own child.
Nayé cè ví má yɔn ɖ'ani kaɖíe ce	Mama, it's very bad not to have your own child.
Ohan ya hi dó mewènu a cé	Singing in the right time

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Ohan adja hí mɛ	Singing when you are feeling good
Ohan mánlán Agádja mánlán Tegbesu	Singing the praise names of Agadja and Tegbesu
Tɔɛ ví má yɔn ɖ'ani kaɖíe ce	You must have your own brother.

(Gangbé Brass Band, "Ajaka," *Togbé*, 2001,
trans. Saturnin Tomeho and the author, 2016)

Mid Bell
Lower Bell 1
Lower Bell 2
Double bell

Musical example 2. *Zɛnlí* rhythm as played in Abomey (see Agoïnon 2013).

Gan

Musical example 3. *Zɛnlí* bell pattern as played on Gangbé Brass Band's "Ajaka" (*Togbé*, 2001).

"Ajaka" speaks to the link between biological and cultural reproduction, the source of the Dànxɔmɛan kings' anxieties over succession and the *continuity* of culture, values that continue to structure practices around marriage and childbearing 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 their own legacy through their children. The rest of the song encourages listeners to dance and move their hips. It bears mentioning, however, that the differing expectations of men and women's labor in this process of cultural reproduction are noticeably silent in the song's lyrics, even though subsequent verses begin with an address to either "my mother" or "my father." Producing offspring with partners of different ethnicities, often Yoruba-descended women captured in war, was also a common way of creating cultural cohesion through assimilation in the time of the Dànxɔmɛan empire, as chapter 1 describes. This context gives the song additional resonance for understanding how Dànxɔmɛ's style of power allowed for cultural pluralism while enforcing its hegemony in the region through patriarchal domination, similar to the Dànxɔmɛan origin story of the violent union between the Adja/Fon princess and the man/leopard

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from the east. Gangbé's arrangement of "Ajaka" thus unites biological reproduction and cultural reproduction in the past with the present and the future.[8]

Togbé's use of traditional Beninese drums and percussion instruments demanded some creative adaptations in the rhythm section. In many of the styles Gangbé adapted on *Togbé*, 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 reconverted into their traditional percussion counterparts, which meant it was no longer possible to perform them while walking. Gangbé had only three percussionists at the time, Jean Gnonlonfoun, Benoit Avihoue, and Joseph Houessou. So each drummer had to cover multiple parts in order for there to be enough money to pay everyone, and for the music to maintain its complexity. Avihoue especially became very good at playing different parts on an eclectic kit. At first, he played only one of the *gàn* (bell) or *assan* (shaker) parts, depending on the style. But when for the second album, *Whendo* (2005), 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 *gàn* with his left hand, and hi-hat with his left foot (to cover the *assan* shaker parts). Jean Gnonlonfoun covered the lead talking drum parts on gbon or *dundun*, and Houessou played the support parts on *kpèzín*, or covered other lead parts on the *kpawhle*.

When Gangbé began touring internationally in 1999, they had to figure out how to make this complex percussion section mobile enough for air travel. 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 *kpèzín*, however, was a problem. These drums had never been designed to travel, tying their unique sound to their place of origin, indeed to the composition of the land itself, for many centuries. The group had a blacksmith solder three *kpèzín* of different sizes together, and mold fitted iron coverings for them out of old car body parts. The result was something that sounded like *kpèzín* but resonated even more as the metal vibrated at different frequencies. This gave special meaning to Gangbé's name, which means "the sound of metal," literally "the sound/voice/call [*gbè*] of iron [*gan*]." The band's name comes from the proverb that says, "*Gan jayí mo nɔ gbɛ gbè*," meaning "The sound of the bell will not be silent once struck," a reference to musical materiality and causality that reflects the spiritual and physical effects of Gangbé's music.

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Constraints

In their project of creatively transforming musical traditions like vòdún, and maintaining their links to liveness, health, and multiplicity, Gangbé encountered a host of constraints. These extended from the economic structures and networks of the world music industry as they had been established, primarily in Europe, since the 1980s, to the often reductive "interpretive frames" that producers and audiences were already accustomed to for African music and African musicians.[9] These left just a few, stock subject positions available to new groups like Gangbé entering the scene, which they had to work to expand. Most audiences and producers knew little about vòdún or Benin's culture, and so part of Gangbé's communicative task, as they discovered over time, was to educate these publics about their country's traditions of mind, body, and spirit—sometimes explicitly, but more often implicitly through demonstration, performance, and the cultivation of encounter, curiosity, and environments of experimentation. Vòdún is especially prone to misunderstanding in the world marketplace, as one of the primary symbols in European and Euro-American imaginings of black alterity. Gangbé also engaged tactics of watching and waiting in order to assess the situation and gain more knowledge of their audiences, and, as time went on, they learned where to situate their interventions so that they could have more influence.

The Belgian production company Contre-jour, which specializes in producing world music acts, marketed Gangbé's tours explicitly on the basis of the group's relationship to Benin's cultural heritage, specifically vòdún. The company subordinated the particularities of the members' religious and ethnic affiliations to establish Gangbé as a distinctive brand, giving 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. Gangbé's members were interested in this entrepreneurial endeavor to a point, but they were also wary of the risks of misrepresenting or oversimplifying Benin's traditions. Consider these excerpts from the press coverage of Gangbé'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 tra-

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> ditional 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. (*Theater Mania* 2006)

The touchstones in all of these excerpts are references that are likely to be familiar to general European and North American audiences. The marketing of Gangbé on the basis of vòdún is not just Contre-jour's project, but one that listeners and audience members participate in as well, and in which their existing tastes and literacies play a central role. The market can be an unpredictable place for something like vòdún when made into a cultural object. 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 Gangbé'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 consumers 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 Gangbé's music rather than their use of traditional styles, which comes later. In such a frame, caught between the influences of others, Gangbé is left with only "traditional voodoo rhythms" to represent Benin here.

Contre-jour and the media's focus on vòdún as calling card for Gangbé and for Benin is further complicated by the fact that the spiritual practice's status and value is contested at home. I discussed the issue of vòdún representation in Benin's popular music with Togni Music Concept, a gospel-jazz group from

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Porto Novo formed by the younger Ahouandjinou brothers, Aaron and Jeremie.[10] Trombonist Aaron Ahouandjinou (Porto Novo, 6/29/10), a follower of Celestial Christianity, pointed out that vòdún 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:

> Vodun is a cult. It's like a religion. But it's not the way of life [*mode de vie*]. It's different, what concerns vòdún, the priests, the adepts. We are from Benin, from Dahomey, as it was. Our way of life is not vòdún. Vòdún 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 vòdún, in fact. Vòdún 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 vòdún. We are all Béninois, 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 vòdún.

Aaron emphasizes the cultural unity of Benin in order to set off his point about religious multiplicity. In other conversations, Gangbé members emphasized that, from a music historical standpoint, *all* rhythms in Benin are vòdún-derived, even if the lyrics of the songs have been transformed for Christian worship. A syncretic spiritual orientation would support this view, too, with the idea that all music ultimately comes from divine origins. But Aaron's last sentence 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 of the night, the zàngbétɔ, or the ancestors, the egúngún or the *gelede*—a mask to be fully inhabited and embodied, its style and potential made manifest, wrestled with to the fullest (see Reed 2018). In this way agents and structures, the dancer and

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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 often resist its associations, vòdún was in the 2000s *the* major component of Contre-jour's marketing campaign with Gangbé. 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 vòdún as cultural object that comes to stand for the whole of Beninese traditional culture and national identity in the press, an invented unity that the Beninese government often supports as well. This reveals the extent to which the symbolic valence of such traditions is really a mutual creation between performers, audience, and mediators such as producers, journalists, and government officials.

This problem of representation is rather typical in the world music arena. Thinking back on Gangbé's initial interactions with Contre-jour, trombonist Martial Ahouandjinou (Houdelaincourt, France, 6/15/14) reflected on the limited options available to the group in terms of networks of musical genre:

> 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, 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 and saxophonist Aristide Agondanou (Cotonou, 8/9/16), Michel de Bock's original background was not in music production, but as a lighting engineer.[11] 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

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> 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 Beninese cultural particularities such as vòdún, it seems that Contre-jour does exactly what its name indicates: "something graphic . . . rather than documentary," as Freeman says. The bright light of the market, of commercial representation, casts Gangbé and other of Contre-jour's clients in silhouette. The Comaroffs (2009, 20) assert 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," but this seems not to have been the case in Contre-jour's representation of Gangbé, or, at least, not exactly. At stake is the contextual orientation of the term "ethnicity": Contre-jour certainly reaffirmed "blackness" and "Africanness" in their representations. But did they reaffirm ethnicity in the local, African sense? As in an overlit photograph, in Contre-jour's model, the individual ethnicities of Gangbé'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 (e.g., "Fon") is hidden in favor of nationality (e.g., "Béninois"), or, more probably, the most superficially embodied *race* ("African"), which is easier for foreign audiences to understand without getting into ethnographic details.

For a group like Gangbé, the balance between education and entertainment is a difficult one. How can they teach audiences about the multiplicity of their cultures and their music while also making it fun and accessible? It is easy for the nation of Benin to come under the sign of vòdún, leaving to the side the names of individual familial ancestors subsumed under this banner, the individual identities of Gangbé's members, and their particular religious backgrounds. In Contre-jour's strategy, the countless, rich and contradictory realities of everyday life—independent African Christianity, the holism, reality, and liveness of experience, the felt continuities and contradictions of history—provide "*trop d'information*," too much information, as Gangbé's members would describe it, essentially, because they make desire for difference too complicated. For Gangbé'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,

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and enjoyed the opportunities it provided. As their experiences with working, recording, and performing abroad went on, they learned about other strategic ways they could intervene in these dynamics through their creative work.

Whendo: Roots and Rhizomes

Following Gangbé'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, many of them reflected in the stylistic transformations undertaken by Gangbé's arranger, Sam Gnonlonfoun. 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, Gangbé 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 Sam Gnonlonfoun's artistic sensibilities (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 (Houdelaincourt, 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 *Togbé*. 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

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and harmonically adventurous. The trumpeters Willy and Aristide Agonadou were no longer in the group at this point. The album continues *Togbé*'s project of tapping into Porto Novo's rhythmic traditions of sacred origin, here represented in the massɛ gòhún of "Yemonoho," borrowing again from the work of Yedenou Adjahoui; the djègbè of "Jesu Ohun," a vocal feature for Crispin; and the *ahwangbahun* of "Gbedji," which is the characteristic rhythm of the Celestial Church of Christ 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 Gangbé'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 piece, "Noubiotɔ," is in gbon style, Jean Gnonlonfoun's specialty as a lead drummer and initiate for the egúngún.[12] The lyrics to "Noubiotɔ" speak about the economics of blame between Africans and Europeans (see epigraph to this chapter). *Akpala* tracks include "Johodo" and "Glessi"[13] and an Afrobeat tribute piece to Fela Kuti in "Remember Fela," an arrangement of his "Colonial Mentality."[14] "Oblemou" sets a popular agbadja song for brass, drawing out the continuities between this style from the Mono region and pan-African salsa.[15] And in a tour de force of cultural signifiers, "Segala" takes a popular song of the Dànxɔmɛ 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 zɛnlí (*zɛnlí de oueme*, named for the Oueme plateau).[16] Like a jazz head, on "Segala" the court song bookends a blues solo section based on the American jazz pianist Oscar Peterson's "Night Train," which Sam Gnonlonfoun learned from a German volunteer who briefly led a big band in Cotonou in the 1990s (see Politz 2018b).

These expansions in Gangbé'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. Gangbé clearly locates *Whendo*'s "roots" not just in Porto Novo and Abomey's royal and church styles, but in Yoruba sacred traditions for the egúngún, Yoruba popular traditions like *akpala* and Afrobeat, and in the rhythms of the West African coast more generally. In this album, Gangbé started 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

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Musical example 4. *Gbon* as played in Ouidah (from field recording 9/13/14).

Musical example 5. *Gbon* as played on Gangbé's "Noubiotɔ" (*Whendo*, 2005).

into the past but also *out* rhizomically, tracing present, intra-African networks of identity, solidarity, and sound.

Art and Economy: *Assiko*

Gangbé's first two albums reveal relatively little of the economic and aesthetic anxieties that surrounded their next project. Gangbé embarked on a long tour to Europe and North America in 2006, crossing the United States by road in their tour bus. Gangbé's relationship with Contre-jour was still amicable in this phase, although signs of strain were starting to appear. The group often felt that they were underpaid, 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 (Aristide Agonadou, interview, Cotonou, 8/9/16). These differences within the group created tension with Contre-jour, which defended its own business interests and overhead costs. After the 2006 tour, two of Gangbé's founding members, arranger-trumpeter Sam Gnonlonfoun and lead percussionist Jean Gnonlonfoun, left the

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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 Gangbé's touring schedule, as many of the usual music festivals in Europe went on hiatus.

The post-2008 economic crisis threw into question the sustainability of many of the consumption practices on which the world music boom in Europe and North America had depended going back to the 1980s and '90s, and on which Gangbé's early career had been modeled. 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. These constraints pushed Gangbé to develop more flexible, improvised approaches to their entrepreneurial projects in order to adapt their music to the conditions at hand, while still defending its vitality and liveness.

The economic anxieties of the moment manifested themselves in specific ways in the recording studio, for example. When Gangbé went into the studio in Vidolée, Belgium to record its third album, *Assiko* (Now's the Time) (2008), 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 postproduction, believing there was "too much information" for a Western audience. Martial Ahouandjinou (Houdelaincourt, 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 Gangbé 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 opinion among the group's members, Athanase Dehoumon (Bouchemaine, France, 6/5/14) also mentioned the adaptation of rhythms for a Western audience, but he emphasized this as a necessary

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component of Gangbé'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 Béninois 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 Gangbé'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 Dehoumon, Gangbé 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 Gangbé 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 Dehoumon, these more accessible aspects of the performance should ideally bring the audience to pose questions about the music's cultural context. In this view, Gangbé's music is designed to facilitate encounter, and to provoke conversations about Beninese culture, using their performances' entertainment value to open opportunities for education and exchange.

> 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

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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, in 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 Gangbé's commitment to chromatic experimentalism and moving them toward the modal sound they have cultivated in later periods of their work. Where *Whendo* imagined Gangbé's "roots" in Porto Novo within a rich regional network of specific, linked, cultural identities along the West African coast and its diasporas, *Assiko* sounds more like a testament to the loss of these connections, which is reflected in the topical subjects the album covers as well.

The topics on *Assiko* are more serious than on past albums, dealing with betrayal and mistrust, primarily within African communities. In live shows, Gangbé still performs "La Porte du Non Retour," an agbadja composition addressed to the kings of old Dànxɔmɛ 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," whose chorus declares, "I don't always know who my real friends are.") "Beautiful Africa" is a call to recognize the wealth of Africa as the "cradle of humanity," through the rapped

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explication (a style of expression known as *ragga* in Benin) in French, rather than in Fon or Gun, of several "signs of Africa": cultural practices such as ethnic scarification and everyday onomatopoeic game play. On this track Gangbé 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 silence them otherwise.

Live performance has turned out to be the space where the Gangbé musicians have been able to reconfigure the reductive stylistic transformations they experienced with *Assiko*. While *Assiko* did not do well commercially or critically, Gangbé 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 Gangbé 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 that the group rearranged for their 2015 album as "Les Vrais Amis." "Miwa" has also survived to be performed live; its distinctive rhythm, known as *kpanougbe* (sometimes called *Gangbé*), is played for family ceremonies by senior women in Porto Novo households on plates perforated with iron rings, which Gangbé iterates on bells and cymbals. Here is at least one example of the "sound of iron"—*Gangbé*—that was not removed from the album.

With *Assiko* finished and over budget, and the recession worsening in Europe, Contre-jour recommended that Gangbé stop touring for two years to recuperate costs. In 2013, Gangbé booked their own tour of Nigeria, Cape Verde, and France, became the subjects of acclaimed filmmaker Arnuad Robert's documentary *Gangbé!*, and in 2014 decided to part ways with Contre-jour entirely. Gangbé's decision to represent themselves at this juncture revealed much about the production knowledge they had gained over their previous three albums and subsequent tours. Dehoumon (Bouchemaine, France, 6/5/14) recalled the difference of marketing philosophy between Gangbé and Contre-jour, using the agricultural image of a merchant going to market:

> Our 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.

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> 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 Gangbé has grown up. Gangbé is moving up. Every year Gangbé grows in age and experience. It gains authority, and musical knowledge also.

Even before the recession and Contre-jour's decision to cut Gangbé's touring schedule, some members like Martial Ahouandjinou (Houdelaincourt, 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:

> 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 [*renvoyé*] 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 cause 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

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> 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, which leads many to hesitate to strike out on their own. In his account, Martial provides an insightful description of his strategies as he realized where this mentality had led the group, and he began to wait for the right time to act. Ultimately, Gangbé 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 work, along with all of its creative risks.

L'Afrique Dans les Oreilles and 2014 Tour

The next phase of Gangbé'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 nonprofit 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), giving Gangbé more chances to experiment with links to the music of Yoruba folk theater, as they did on some pieces on *Whendo* (like "Noubiotɔ"). The agreement between L'Afrique dans les Oreilles and Gangbé 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 intercultural dialogue" in its "World Music Charter" (zonefranche.com 2016). Fur-

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Figure 4. Gangbé Brass Band performing in Angers, France in 2014. Photo courtesy of Festival Bouche à l'Oreille.

ther 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 Gangbé's 2014 tour turned away from large world music festivals to focus on street festivals in provincial France where Gangbé 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, emphasizing the educational aspects of their project. The pay was significantly lower than what Contre-jour had negotiated for Gangbé's larger tours, but Gangbé 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 "overdevelopment." Sometimes I played trombone with Gangbé as they marched

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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? Gangbé 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.

Go Slow to Lagos

Gangbé's 2014 European tour marked the beginning of a period of rebirth for the band, and they took this opportunity to reframe critically their relationships with producers and audiences. Gangbé 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 recentered their Afro-centric, anticolonial political position 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 Gangbé fan Jean-Philippe Rykiel. The band completed the recording in Cotonou at Studio Herman Rey at the end of 2014, much of which I observed and participated in. 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.

The lyrics to another of the album's Afrobeat songs, "Miziki," written by vocalist and percussionist Crispin Kpitiki, express the core of Gangbé's healing mission very well, connecting it to the ritual role of music in Benin's traditional culture. Crispin sings:

Chorus: (in French)	
Miziki guerit souci o	Music heals worries
Miziki guerit la maladie	Music heals illness
Verse: (in Fongbè)	
Àwú blá zángbè	On the day of mourning
Ayá jè zángbè	On the day of joy
Miziki jɛn wè yé nɔ hò	We still play music

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Awú wlé zán hùnhwè zándé gbè	On the day of preparation for a ceremony [*hùnhwè*]
Miziki jɛn wè yé nɔ hò	We play music
Fête de l'independence de	On the day of independence
Muziki jen we ye non ho	We play music.[17]

Apart from these Afrobeat tracks, the album is, rhythmically and culturally speaking, much more about the *road* to Lagos, its sights, sounds, and various obstacles (particularly the Nigerian border), than it is about Fela's legacy or a Lagosian sense of place. Gangbé 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 zàngbétɔ's kàkà on "Akwe" (Money); djègbè on "Ashe"—a call for young people to thank and respect their elders; and *agbotchebou*—the rhythm for the vòdún Sakpata—on "Assidida" (The Wedding), about the economics of domestic married life. Gangbé also rearranges previous compositions in "Kpagbe," 2005's "Miwa" in *kpanougbe* rhythm; and "Le Petit Souris," which was their zɛnlí hit as "Ajaka" from 2001. In between are the typical *elezo* and highlife tunes that have become the group's staples, such as "Biouwa," the latter of which includes my trombone solo.

After the difficulties of *Assiko*, *Go Slow to Lagos* is a return to Gangbé's musical traditions in all of their locality, specificity, and multiplicity. Dehoumon (Bouchemaine, 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 Gangbé. 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 Dehoumon describes, opportunities for audiences to observe the communicative power of Gangbé's music firsthand, multiplied particularly as a result of Sylvain Dartoy booking the group in an increasing

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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.

In focusing the album on the "go slow" (a ubiquitous West African expression for "traffic jam") on the road to Lagos, Gangbé 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 nineteenth-century wars with their neighbors in Oyo; and between Protestant, Catholic, vòdún, and Muslim communities on both sides of the border. So in this album's musical styles, and in its brass arrangements, too, Gangbé brings out the sonic imprint of a "go slow" traffic jam in all of its loud, honking competitions between individuals, cultures, and politics—a wry celebration of Africa's multiplicity. There are shared histories along this road to Lagos, 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 djègbè, *elezo*, zɛnlí, and *agbotchebou* of each family, shrine, and church. These are the sounds Gangbé knows and the rhythms they play the best. On this, their first self-produced album, Gangbé made clear what they had demonstrated from the beginning of their work on *Togbé* in 2001: that the foundation of their creative process and of their successful self-promotion lay in deepening their knowledge of themselves, their experiences, and those of their African neighbors on the continent and in the diaspora. Part of Gangbé's growing awareness has been the knowledge of difference within networks of solidarity, that contestation and multiplicity can be sources of strength as well as roadblocks to coalition building.

Gangbé's music has participated in a growing awareness, especially through economic shocks and other challenges on a global scale, that while the powers of the world are unevenly distributed, in reality we all depend on one another for our health, well-being, and continued livelihood. If the dance of zɛnlí or of the egúngún masks captures something of Beninese culture's negotiation between individual and divine agency in embodied, temporally flexible form, one way of understanding Gangbé's project is that they have been trying to teach their audiences how to dance together—with their fellow Africans, their diasporic relatives, or even with the descendants of those their ancestors oppressed.

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Liveness and Livelihood

In the 1990s and the decades that followed, Beninese brass bands like Gangbé deployed an emergent set of strategies to defend the liveness of their own cultures and those of their African and Western neighbors, as well as their own livelihood as musicians. The Gangbé musicians sought out ways to exercise their agency more freely, whether through keeping control over recording projects in postproduction, working with management on an open book basis, increasing their interaction with audience members, or taking over management and production themselves. Musically, they sought ways to foreground their live performances when they did have control of the production of their recordings, keeping cultural continuities with the open-endedness and multiplicity of Beninese traditions through dance, connections to key spiritual repertoires, and an awareness of economies of spiritual and material wellness. The musicians took advantage of opportunities, changing circumstances, and flexible temporalities—including waiting for the right moment—to collaborate and exchange with European and Afro-diasporic musicians, to create larger markets, for themselves, their work, and their culture. Through cultivating experiences of encounter with their audiences, they insisted that the audience members take on attitudes of curiosity, experimentation, and risk-taking in order to learn more about the cultures in which Gangbé grounded their performances. In making traditions like the music of vòdún into transformative, educational, challenging experiences for their audiences, Gangbé shows the value of their traditional culture, talking back to colonial policies that did everything possible to remove that culture's power, and offering a recalculation of the terms of material and spiritual indebtedness in the postcolonial world.

Gangbé's increasing knowledge of globalized music markets ultimately enabled them to intervene in the representation of Benin and its musical and spiritual traditions, as well as the representation of their own individual ethnic and regional identities. Even in early albums for Contre-jour like *Whendo*, the group inscribed their experiences with Benin's ethnic and religious pluralism into their musical representations. This is a musical vision that insists on representing Benin's cultural diversity internationally, and that pushes back against the essentializing power of the market and oversimplified advertising and media portrayals. In doing this, Gangbé invites 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 vòdún religious practice and independent African church liturgies—the his-

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tories of ancestors very much alive. 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 Achille Mbembe's (2010b) second "Afropolitan" moment of mobility and dispersion. In albums like *Whendo*, they connect with networks of identity and solidarity across the West African coast and in the Americas. These networks spread out like rhizomes 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.

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CHAPTER 4

EYO'NLÉ BRASS BAND

Transforming the Blues

In Benin, brass instruments are typically played in local *fanfares* for funerals and other ceremonial occasions. Indeed, funeral processions throughout West Africa, whether they use brass bands or percussion ensembles or both, are primary sites for the often very public transformation of grief and trauma into survival and future life, which accompanies the spiritual transition of the departed. In their music, the Eyo'nlé Brass Band places the focus explicitly on the sense of joy that brass instruments can convey. Eyo'nlé's name means "Rejoice on earth" in Yoruba. Rock Ahouandjinou made the association with traditional ritual contexts that channel this spirit of joy:

> In Africa, in Benin, especially in the [*vòdún*] couvents, you have joy. When an adept comes into the *couvent* [temple], 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. . . . This is to explain that in our tradition, it's joy. And Eyo'nlé tries to show that 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, interview, 3/1/15)

Like the Gangbé Brass Band, for the past few decades the Eyo'nlé Brass Band has been engaged in healing, entrepreneurial projects that seek to valorize their musical and spiritual traditions abroad while maintaining connections to liveness and livelihood. The groups differ, though, in subtle but significant ways—in their business strategies, their musical aesthetics, their spiritual orientations, and their approaches to representing music and ethnicity. Eyo'nlé, for example, represents a more localized vision of Beninese music based in Porto Novo in contrast with Gangbé's project of national representation. Eyo'nlé's members

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also selectively collaborate with French musicians, articulate relationships with French and Afro-diasporic music cultures, and occupy space as legal residents of France. Through these approaches, Eyo'nlé shows that there are many different paths through postcolonial healing, whether through nationalism or ethnic particularity, vòdún or Afro-Christianity, collaboration and contestation, rootedness or mobility. Healing the wounds of colonization continues to demand that these musicians separate themselves from former colonizers' ideologies of modernity and secularism. Frequently, though, this separation leads to a transformation that recasts European influences and colonial histories through the lens of Beninese conceptions of wealth, diaspora, and spirituality, which is particularly clear in Eyo'nlé's music. What remains constant for all of these musicians is the urgency of maintaining the liveness of these traditions—their continued, dynamic, and creative life and connections to ancestral practices—and making livelihood for themselves and their families.

Eyo'nlé's project suggests a few important things about the nature and challenges of postcolonial healing processes through music, particularly when it comes to cross-cultural connections and mobility. Eyo'nlé has confronted these challenges by emphasizing, for example, that they define themselves through musical and personal relationships with music and musicians abroad, and that they must be free to move internationally in pursuit of their work. They have also made choices in their career that have allowed them even greater agency in their self-representations than Gangbé has, such as managing themselves exclusively, actively cultivating themselves as independent entrepreneurs, prioritizing their live performances over recordings, and protecting certain aspects of their traditions from foreign audiences. I will explore each of these strategies through an examination of Eyo'nlé's music and professional path.

While Gangbé's project has been one of representing Benin's cultural diversity on a national scale, through research and self-study of vòdún and other traditions, Eyo'nlé has kept their focus on the members' own local musical traditions from the Gun, Torri, and Nago cultural areas in and around Porto Novo—the areas whose populations were targeted by Dànxɔmɛ's slave raids and sometimes succeeded in escaping and founding independent settlements. The people in these areas have also developed specific spiritual and musical traditions that are distinct from the royal traditions of Dànxɔmɛ or the royal court of Xɔgbónu in Porto Novo. This is especially true in the blending of independent Christian traditions like the Celestial Church of Christ and founder Samuel Oshoffa's *ahwangbahun* style with the new, postwar vòdún practices like Mami Wata and vòdún Tron, typically worshipped with styles like *elezo*,

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a form of highlife found in Benin and Togo. Thus, while the market may put pressure on groups like Eyo'nlé to bend their representations to accommodate a narrow idea of Beninese nationalism or generalized pan-Africanism, as a group they have chosen to represent themselves and the music they know best, the music of resistance to slavery, which serves as a counter to dominant Fon- and Dànxɔmɛ-centric narratives about Benin.

Like Gangbé, the members of Eyo'nlé, many of them born in the 1970s and '80s, sit at the fulcrum of dramatic processes of cultural change. Many of their parents were born into vòdún traditions and converted to Christianity later, and so the sounds of worship for the Yoruba deity Shango or the kàkà rhythms for the zàngbétɔ masks continue to resonate in the lived memories and experiences of these musicians, even if they are equally familiar with Celestial Christian music and liturgy. Eyo'nlé has paired this emphasis on African locality and particularity with explorations with French- and Roma-inspired brass bands and more blues-oriented "trad-jazz" styles from New Orleans (in contrast to Gangbé's more modern or avant-garde jazz sensibilities). In making these diasporic and cross-cultural connections more personal, localized, and individual, Eyo'nlé has had some success with resisting the pressures to create homogeneous collective representations of Benin, Africa, or black diasporic music in general.

Eyo'nlé, which arrived on the international scene in 2008, several years after Gangbé, made the choice to emphasize specific local references that reflect the experiences of its members: rhythms from their home of Porto Novo, standard Beninese funeral band or *fanfare* instrumentation (bass drum and snare drum rather than traditional percussion), as well as references to France and New Orleans. Eyo'nlé's experience also shows that their cultivation of outside repertoires has not diminished the value of their music, but has instead opened new opportunities for them. As with many of these groups, cultural exchange seems to renew or productively to transform traditions rather than to destroy them. The spirituality that Eyo'nlé foregrounds is an Afro-Christian one, rooted in the music and liturgies of independent African churches like the Church of Celestial Christianity and Afro-diasporic Christianity, but one that makes traditional Beninese forms of wealth in people, culture, and community central to its expressive outlook, as they make clear in their song "Do Ré Mi" (see below).

Balancing the goals of transforming and valorizing traditions to gain recognition and make a living, on the one hand, and protecting insider cultural knowledge, on the other, has required Eyo'nlé to develop some innovative techniques. Some of their strategies, like the use of brass instrumental features, a focus on improvised solos, blues forms, and lyrics in French and English,

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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 the local languages of Fon and Gun, form coded, "hidden transcripts," as political scientist James C. Scott (1990) refers to forms of resistance that are, for the most part, hidden from those in power. 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 different kinds of knowledge that are available to individual listeners and segments of the bands' audiences.

The Eyo'nlé Brass Band, founded in 1998 in Porto Novo by trumpeter Mathieu Ahouandjinou, began as a *fanfare* (local brass band) that played 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-Armenian folk band Les Ogres de Barback, Eyo'nlé began traveling to Europe in 2008 and in 2014 joined les Ogres on their twentieth anniversary tour.[1] After many years of performing together, the two groups developed a common repertoire that drew from both Beninese and French folk traditions (both classic *chansons* and street theater and circus repertoires) and the wide-ranging, multi-instrumental expertise of both ensembles' members.

Eyo'nlé's 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'nlé has never worked with a production company or a manager from outside the group, although they do employ an administrator under their direction who organizes their bookings. Sousaphonist Rock Ahouandjinou (Mathieu's brother, and one of my research assistants) is in charge of the band's booking and logistical arrangements. Eyo'nlé 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 long-standing. In 2015, Eyo'nlé obtained permanent residency status in France with support of several local officials, and spend most of the year there working while returning occasionally to Benin, as Rock explained:

> We started all alone, without a manager. We did our negotiations on our own, I did the festivals in Benin, and Mathieu sent out the materials. So in France we met people who wanted to work with us, but who always

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> ripped us off. We are lucky in that the organizers prefer to talk with the artists rather than the managers. So we have a thick address book that lets us monopolize everything. It's true, there are managers who impose things on musicians. And we've been on the market for managers many times to sell, and we never appreciated the expressions we heard: "Where did you find that?" [talking about a musician or a group]. We are not a product. And we revolted and really realized what was going on because we had les Ogres de Barback behind us.
>
> They helped us to understand that the manager works for us, we don't work for them. So we say what we want, and it's his job to go out and find it for us. Because what they want to sell there, *we* are the ones who create it. Because we know the market, and that's what we have worked for. We know that it's accessible to the market and it will sell. So we gather everything we deserve so that we can head in the right direction. That's the battle we are fighting today. (Rock Ahouandjinou, phone interview, 6/29/21)

Eyo'nlé collaborations with French groups like Les Ogres have left a lasting musical impression, most significantly in the Beninese group's intimacy and comfort with French popular song and their experienced study of how to work a European audience. They have become adept at facilitating audience participation through singing, especially with the more familiar French songs in their repertoire, like Serge Gainsbourg's "Le Poinçonneur de Lilas" (The Ticket Puncher at Lilas Station) and "Le Temps Ne Fait Rien à L'Affaire" (Time Doesn't Change Anything), both on their *Empreinte du Père* (2015).

I witnessed one culmination of this skill set in Eyo'nlé's 2018 program on tour in France, called "Valse à Cotonou," a project that seeks to make Beninese rhythms more accessible to French audiences by presenting the rhythms' most essential aspects in arrangements of well-known French *chansons*.[2] Rock Ahouandjinou pointed out that the "Valse," the waltz, is in 3/4 time, which makes it a natural fit for many of Benin's ternary rhythms. While they experienced a unique synergy with the flexible multi-instrumentalists in les Ogres, Rock said that Eyo'nlé has often encountered challenges in collaborating with French musicians:

> The problem is that [foreigners] don't understand Beninese music. There is too much information. They try to play it and learn it, and they cannot. There are too many rhythms. So that is the work we are trying to do for the music of Benin. To make it *identifiable*, so that when you hear it, it's easy to

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> hear, it's easy to learn. There is also the fact that our music doesn't have an identifiable sound, like *mbalax* in Senegal. I think traditional music in Mali is a bit like ours in that outside audiences will not necessarily understand it, but they have done some work to make it accessible for everyone.
>
> We thought about this for a long time, what to do, because we have this question often from professors at French conservatories, they are not able to play our music, to find themselves in it. They find that what we are doing is rich and beautiful, but they are not able to copy it. Take the *fanfare*. We play *fanfare* with bass drum and snare drum. Even these two rhythmic instruments already bring a lot of elements. It's not light [i.e., it is heavy with complexity]. So it's because of all that that we have thought and thought and thought. . . .
>
> Now we're starting this project Valse à Cotonou, to, how to say it, to do this conception of rhythms from our home in Benin. And when we're well settled in it, we can put out something palatable. . . . So we have this work to do about rhythms from Benin, so now people are starting to understand a bit. (Rock Ahouandjinou, phone interview, 6/29/21)

It is significant that Eyo'nlé's project of transforming Beninese rhythms to be more accessible to French audiences is taking place primarily through live performance, rather than through new recordings. While Eyo'nlé is proud of their two albums, Rock maintained that their live performances are much more at the heart of the group's mission: "We make albums because we need to have them, but the live show, that's where we do the work" (personal communication, Annemasse, France, 8/6/16). Putting more emphasis on their live shows enables Eyo'nlé to adapt to their audiences in real time, and to keep in touch with the essential qualities of liveness in their traditions.

Another of Eyo'nlé's choices was to keep the use of the bass drum and snare drum. Gangbé's strategy has been to use local percussion, using eclectic kits of adapted *kpezin* drums, along with calabash, bell, and hi-hat. Eyo'nlé'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. You can

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hear this in a track like "African Brass Music," which is in *elezo* style, a kind of highlife from Togo and southwestern Benin.

Eyo'nlé took the approach of representing primarily 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 Celestial Church of Christ. Rock Ahounandjinou (Porto Novo, 3/1/15) explained that the group took very seriously some advice from his father, Henri, the director of the national gendarmerie orchestra who passed away in 2006:

> [Our father] told us, it's easy to come up, but it is difficult to stay. Because when you advance in Beninese traditional music, when you go out to the West, they will try to change it [*de la denaturer*]. . . . Don't ever let them. . . . If the person came to look for you, it's because he likes it. . . . Play your music, stay with your concept.
>
> The tradition, the culture, African Beninese music, that's your identity. When you go to play, they will say the lines [*courbes*] are strange. . . . Don't ever change it, because that is your wealth. . . . 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.

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

Empreinte du Père

The specifically Porto Novian cultural context comes across strongly on Eyo'nlé's 2015 album *Empreinte du Père*, an homage to the Ahouandjinou brothers' father, Henri. The album is distributed on the world music label Irfan, but was self-produced by Eyo'nlé and recorded in one day in Cotonou with no

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Figure 5. Eyo'nlé Brass Band at home in Porto Novo. Photo courtesy of Mathieu Ahouandjinou.

overdubs. *Empreinte du Père*'s sixteen tracks are filled with the sounds of Porto Novo's *fanfares*, churches, and popular rhythms. There are the rhythms of the Celestial Church of Christ like the church's founder Samuel Oshoffa's *ahwangbahun* (battle rhythm), and several kàkà tracks, which are associated with the Toffinou people in the Oueme Valley surrounding Porto Novo and zàngbétɔ masking societies (Rock Ahouandjinou, Annemasse, France, 8/6/16). Other tracks pay tribute to the band's local influences in compositions by the Porto Novian singer Yedenou Adjahoui, who was known for creating the rhythm *massɛ gòhún* and delivering particularly beautiful, virtuosic vocals in the poetic register of the local Gun language. There is a Fela Kuti tribute with Eyo'nlé's intricate arrangement of "Water No Get Enemy."

Aside from these local references, the strongest sounds on the album come from Eyo'nlé's grounding in blues forms and aesthetics, particularly in Mathieu Ahouandjinou's trumpet playing and arranging and Jean Ahouandjinou's vocals. The band's members combine this blues expressivity with specific spiritual and musical connections. Examples include the blues piece "Houngan" (the term for a head vòdún priest) and "Caïman," the French word for "crocodile," Henri Ahouandjinou's nickname,[3] which draws on a mix of *ahwangbahun* and highlife/*elezo* that one might hear performed for the contemporary

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vòdún of the ocean, Mami Wata in Benin's coastal communities to the southwest. Then there is "Yeye We," a blues-oriented Celestial Church of Christ song in the Yoruba rhythm of *efe* from the town of Adjarra outside of Porto Novo, sometimes performed for the *orisa* Shango. Lastly, there is "Cargos Blues," a particularly rich piece that I will analyze in further detail to bring out its connections to African and Afro-diasporic spiritual economies through the blues.

"Cargos Blues"

Across cultures, the blues has for a long time been a site of working through trauma and healing, a ritual function that jazz frequently embodies, too. Eyo'nlé's piece "Cargos Blues" exemplifies this well.[4] This composition in *massɛ gòhún* style 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. The piece brings to the fore the band's explicit representation of its place in the musical African diaspora. A twelve-bar blues, the song plays on European audiences' expectations of African and African American performance styles, all over a slow, 12/8 *massɛ gòhún* groove. The vocal is delivered in French in Jean Ahouandjinou's powerful, gravelly timbre. 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 has long been a part of the core characteristics of the blues.

Lead (French): Le blues à l'origine	The blues at the beginning
était chanté comme ceci, écoutez:	Were sung like this, listen:
Backup (Gun): Jɛ tɛ kɛ mi gbòn adousí gbòn	Even if they talk about me left and right,
amion (mɛ), mílɛ kpòtò messíya sín awa mɛ	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: Jɛ tɛ kɛ mi gbòn adousí gbòn	Even if they talk about me left and right,

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amion (mɛ), mílɛ kpòtò messíya sín awa mɛ	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: Jɛ tɛ kɛ mi gbòn adousí gbòn	Even if they talk about me left and right,
amion (mɛ), mílɛ kpòtò messíya sín awa mɛ	We are in the arms of the Lord God.
Lead: Dans les plantations de cacao, du café, et du canne à sucre.	On cocoa, coffee, and sugar cane plantations
Backup: Jɛ tɛ kɛ mi gbòn adousí gbòn	Even if they talk about me left and right,
amion (mɛ), mílɛ kpòtò messíya sín awa mɛ	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: Jɛ tɛ kɛ mi gbòn adousí gbòn	Even if they talk about me left and right,
amion (mɛ), mílɛ kpòtò messíya sín awa mɛ	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 *massɛ*, c’est *gogohun*.	It’s *massɛ*, it’s *gogohun*.
Backup: Jɛ tɛ kɛ mi gbòn adousí gbòn	Even if they talk about me left and right,
amion (mɛ), mílɛ kpòtò messíya sín awa mɛ	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)

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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’nlé’s diasporic vision, including connections to specific Beninese rhythmic styles like *massɛ* and *gogohun*, into the public sphere, and are accessible to Francophone audiences in Europe and in the diaspora. This enacts the part of the postcolonial healing process that insists on recognition for the value of African culture where such value was denied in the past, and in this case connects it directly to diasporic relationships. So another part of the healing process is private, reserved for insiders; the Gun lyrics keep this part of the transcript hidden from these audiences, particularly its sacred aspect. Each time the backup singers repeat the line, “*Jɛ tɛ kɛ mi gbòn adousí gbòn amion (mɛ), mílɛ kpòtò messíya sín awa mɛ*,” meaning “Even if they talk about me left and right, we are in the arms of the Lord God,”[5] 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 tosgether 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 likely escapes an audience of outsiders, despite its explicit mention in the lyrics, is the rhythm of *màssɛ gòhún*. This style was created by the beloved Porto Novian singer Yedenou Adjahoui[6] in the 1970s, based on the much older ceremonial Xɔgbónu court style of djègbè. Djègbè originally used only two bells and the *shekere* (shaker) to accompany vocalists, but Adjahoui added the small *alekele* drums, and borrowed the lead drum *kpèzín* from the style of zɛnlí to create *màssɛ gòhún* (see singer Anice Pepe’s account of this transition in Agoïnon 2013). Today, there are many traditional ensembles devoted exclusively to *màssɛ gòhún*, whose slow and dignified triple feel is popular for life ceremonies like funerals and weddings. Here is the *màssɛ gòhún* groove I recorded from the group Djidjoho Nissou, led by Adjiton Hanbladji (Cotonou, 1/17/15).

Musical example 6. *Massɛ gòhún* groove recorded from the group Djidjoho Nissou (Cotonou, 1/17/15).

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Eyo'nlé represent their version of *màssɛ gòhún* using reduced instrumentation: a bell, a snare drum, and a bass drum, keeping the military-style instrumentation common in Benin's *fanfares*. 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. Here is Eyo'nlé's basic *massɛ* groove.

Gan
Snare Drum

Musical example 7. Eyo'nlé Brass Band's *massɛ gòhún* groove on "Cargos Blues."

That Eyo'nlé would point to *màssɛ gòhún* as an antecedent or analog form of the blues is provocative.[7] Eyo'nlé's international version of *massɛ* is dramatically reduced compared to its present-day expression in ensembles in Benin. *Massɛ* as such did not exist during the slave trade prior to its creation and popularization by Adjahoui in the 1970s, except maybe in its predecessors like djègbè. But part of the argument that Eyo'nlé 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 order to stay fully alive.

In this sense, *màssɛ gòhún* 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 vòdún, to overcome the worst of circumstances. The blues and *màssɛ gòhún* are all about transformations, the ongoing "modernization" of traditions, and transcendence—changing bad situations for the better. Albert Murray, who wrote *Stomping the Blues* (1976), understood this definitively homeopathic quality of the blues, that it is, at its core, "equipment for living" (see Murray 2016).[8] If the blues is equipment for living, a tool, a technique, then perhaps the healing spiritual technologies of vòdún are as well.

Eyo'nlé sees the blues as an example of what Beninese music can do 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. But even as Eyo'nlé searches for common musical ground, they protect certain traditional religious aspects of their presentation for insiders in coming in and out of their local

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Figure 6. Romuald Hazoumé, *Cargo*, 2013. ©2022 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

language. "Cargos Blues" keeps spiritual experience protected in the Gun-language background vocals. Although Eyo'nlé's spiritual language—"we are in the arms of the Lord God"—is Christian-oriented rather than vòdún-oriented, it is still reserved through the Gun language for cultural insiders. 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. This is because of the strength of transformative traditions like the blues and other rituals to heal and to create and sustain new life.

According to Rock Ahouandjinou (Annemasse, France, 8/6/16), the title of "Cargos Blues" is a reference to the *cargos*, that carry *gazoil* back and forth across the coast of Benin to and from Nigeria. These containers are the subject and material of many artworks by the Beninese artist Romuald Hazoumé (see fig. 6). The *cargos* vehicles, weighed down with overspilling gasoline canisters, often explode violently during traffic accidents, making the discarded containers a ubiquitous and haunting site along Benin's roadways.

Hazoumé uses these gasoline containers centrally in his work, styling them

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Figure 7. Romuald Hazoumé, *La Bouche du Roi*, 1997–2005. ©2022 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

as various types of African masks, to represent the economic, spiritual, and human costs of the slave trade and the ways in which its legacy is ever present and material in Benin's postcolonial present. This is particularly evident in his 2005 installation "La Bouche du Roi" (The Mouth of the King) for the 200th anniversary of the abolition of slavery, in which he arranges dozens of these containers into the shape of a slave ship, accompanied by video of the *cargos* motorbikes transporting gasoline, audio of names in local languages heard from beneath the masks, and video of egúngún mask performance (see fig. 7).[9] By giving the containers individual characteristics, Hazoumé's work rehumanizes them, reconnects them with their spiritual nature. The masks are humans and spirits, present and past. While giving a visitor a tour of his Porto Novo studio, which is filled with these jerry cans, in the documentary *High on the Hog*, Hazoumé says, "what is very important here is how we survive" (Wash 2021).

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This reference to the *cargos* in Eyo'nlé's "Cargos Blues," along with its lyrical references to the blues and the slave trade, ties this song into intraregional networks of trade, linking cultural, spiritual, and material economy, which are themselves implicated in global networks of domination through Nigeria's oil politics and its impacts on Benin. The song tells the story of transformation, of survival, through a blend of French and Gun lyrics that continue to enact this process of making life and livelihood through music and ritual. These connections likely escape most of Eyo'nlé's European audiences, but add layers of complexity and depth to the song's historical resonances and are key to understanding its blues-oriented power for healing.

"Do Ré Mi"

In Eyo'nlé's "Do Ré Mi," a djègbè composition from *Empreinte du Père*, the group shows how central professionalization and economic success are to their healing creative projects, even as they stay in touch with Afro-Christian and traditional spiritual principles.[10] This song addresses local skeptics of brass band musicians' 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. Here Eyo'nlé articulates a vision of the brass band as a source of economic and artistic support, as well as a safe space for enacting the members' spiritual and material healing projects. The focus here being all on the message, the accompaniment is minimal, the two characteristic djègbè bell parts punctuated periodically by handclaps and onomatopeic vocal play. Djègbè is a style deployed at funerals and other ceremonies depending on the moment in the liturgy. It was originally a style of the royal court in Xɔgbónu, and it is the style that Yedenou Adjahoui transformed into his famous *massɛ gòhún* (Rock Ahouandjinou, Annemasse, France, 8/6/16). At over eight minutes, "Do Ré Mi" is the longest piece on the album, and covers a great deal of thematic ground.

Kíní wè	Are you ready?
Éyá!	Let's go!
Kini wé kini wè	
Kini wé ajota	Is everyone ready?
Lead: É dógbè nyen ma di gán gòn kpálí kpálí	Lead: When it calls, I have to be there.

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É dógbè nyen ma di gán gòn wá	When it calls, I cannot say no.
Fanfare hun dógbè nyen ma sin gán gòn ágbélé	When the fanfare calls, I have to be there.
Chorus: Uh huh, do re mi wa mí le	Chorus: Uh huh, *do re mi* is what we do.
Uh huh, la si do wa mí le	Uh huh, *la si do* is what we do.
Fanfare hun dógbè nyen ma sin gán gòn.	When the fanfare calls, I have to be there.
Lead: Nyín égbé dógbè nyen ma di gán gòn	Lead: It just begins, and I know I kpálí kpálí have to be there.
É dógbè nyen ma di gán gòn	It calls me.
Fanfare hun dógbè nyen ma sin gán gòn ágbélé	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.
Fanfare hun dógbè nyen ma sin gán gòn.	When the fanfare calls me, I have to be there.
Lead: É dógbè nyen ma di gán gòn kpálí kpálí	Lead: When it calls, I have to be there.
Mathieu Ahouandjinou wa dótó bo a se xó we,	Mathieu Ahouandjinou, come listen
djègbè nɔ ɖɔ	to this story, I'm speaking *djègbè* [our language]
Ye nɔ ɖɔ fanfare manyín azɔn kpálí kpálí	They say that the fanfare is not work.
Nyen ka ná dò xó dé dé gò	I will say something about it.
Egnon, é dógbè nyen ma di gán gòn kpa muziki	So, when the music calls, I have to
Dogbe, nyen ma si gan gon tenye to me	be in that place.
Chorus: Uh huh, do re mí wa mi le	Chorus: Uh huh, *do re mi* is what we do.
Uh huh, la si do wa mí le	Uh huh, *la si do* is what we do.
Muziki hun dógbè nyen ma sin gán gòn.	When the music calls me, I have to be there.
Naysayer:	Naysayer:

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Yé dɔ fánfùn gbɛ we mí dó	They say the fanfare is a band of fools.
Chorus:	Chorus:
Lálo!	False!
Naysayer:	Naysayer:
Yé dɔ muziki bé àzɔn we gă?	They say, is music work?
Chorus:	Chorus:
Gbáwú!	Of course!
Naysayer:	Naysayer:
Gbé mĭ ná wà é xe bó ná hɛn hwĕ?	Can we support a family?
Chorus:	Chorus:
Gbáwú!	Of course!
Lead: Ah, mí gbé e we xɔ avɔ dó okɔ ce	Lead: But we say this is what clothes me [lit. what puts cloth on my neck].
Chorus: Ah, se wá kpɔn bó	Chorus: Ah, come and see.
Lead: O un dɔ un xɔ mótoò na mìma	Lead: Ah, I bought my own car.
Chorus: Ah, se wá kpɔn bó	Chorus: Ah, come and see. [handclaps enter]
Lead: Fanfare lo wɛ xɔ ayingba lɛ ná mìma	Lead: The fanfare bought me land.
Chorus: Ah, se wá kpɔn bó	Chorus: Ah, come and see.
Lead: A jì mɛ ví lɛ tò blɛo to hwégbè	Lead: You will see the kids doing well at home.
Chorus: Ah, se wá kpɔn bó	Chorus: Ah, come and see.
Chorus: Uh huh, do re mí wa mi le	Chorus: Uh huh, *do re mi* is what we do.
Uh huh, la si do wa mí le	Uh huh, *la si do* is what we do.
Muziki hun dógbè nyen ma sin gán gòn.	When the music calls me, I have to be there.
[Onomatopeias]	[Onomatopeias]
(in Torri)	(in Torri)
Ago se na fanfare ján míɛ xò dó ɖúnú	Get out of my way, the fanfare is what feeds us.
Lead: O há we gni avɔ ye nɔ tchión	Lead: Friendship is the cloth [*avo*] you cover yourself with.

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Hagbelɛ o há we gni avɔ bo	Brothers, you need clothes from somewhere.
Ye nɔ dó ná gbetɔ nugbo nugbo	Indeed, clothes are what humans need.
O jì jɔn hò un wá biɔ na we ma,	In joyful times,
Chorus: O háwe gni avɔ ye no tch	Chorus: Brothers put on the cloth.
Lead: O vie kpón gbe ga wa biɔ na we ma	Lead: When a child is born,
Chorus: Hagbe avɔ ye no tchión	Chorus: We cover him in our traditional cloth.
Lead: Thomas o ji jɔn hò un wá biɔ na wa ma	Lead: Thomas, your friends are the cloth you cover yourself with.
Chorus: Hagbe avɔ ye no tchión	You put on the cloth.
Lead: Ma do no gbe ga wa biɔ na we ma	When you have a good life,
Chorus: Hagbe avɔ ye no tchión agbe ton	You put on the cloth.
Lead: Mathieu o ji jɔn hò un wá biɔ na we ma	Mathieu, I wish you peace of mind.
Chorus: Hagbe avɔ ye no tchión	You put on the cloth.
Lead: Jean Gratien, o ji jɔn hò un wá biɔ na we ma	Jean Gratien, your friends are the cloth you cover yourself with.
Chorus: Hagbe avɔ ye no tchión nagbeton	You put on the cloth.
Lead: Asinou lo o ji jɔn hò un wá biɔ na we ma	Asinou, your friends are the cloth you cover yourself with.
Chorus: Hagbe avɔ ye no tchión	You put on the cloth.
Lead: Alikaliste o ji jɔn hò un wá biɔ na we ma	Alikaliste, your friends are the cloth You cover yourself with.
Lead: Egnon, o há nɔ do gigo na gbɛtɔ	Lead: So the group gives people honor [*gigo*]
Chorus: O ha un ná dó	Chorus: We give thanks.
Lead: O gbé we nɔ do gigo na gbɛtɔ	Lead: Friends give people honor.
Chorus: O ha un ná dó	Chorus: We give thanks.
Helele kpe no do gigo	My friends give me honor.
Helele kpe nɔ do gigo na gbɛtɔ	Friends give people honor.
O ha un ná dó	We give thanks.

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Lead: Egnon, gbɛ nɔ do gigo na gbɛtɔ eya	So, we give people honor.
Chorus: O ha un ná dó	Chorus: We give thanks.
Lead: Simon do gigo na gbɛtɔ ee	Lead: Simon said friends give people honor.
Chorus: O ha un ná dó (x2)	Chorus: We give thanks.
Helele kpe nɔ do gigo	Friends give people honor.
O ha un ná dó	We give thanks.
Lead: Eyo’nlé kpe nɔ do gigo na gbɛtɔ.	Lead: Eyo’nlé gives people honor.
Chorus: O ha un ná dó (rep)	Chorus: We give thanks. [handclaps reenter]
[Onomatopeias]	[Onomatopeias]
(in Torri)	
Ago se na fanfare ján míɛ xò dó ɖúnú	Get out of my way, the fanfare is what feeds us
Lead: É sògbè bleo kpe sɛ wɛ mí ná yì hwé	They say we will go home peacefully.
Hagbe bleo kpe sɛ mɛ	Brothers, go home peacefully.
Cyprien, kpe se mi na yi xwe	Cyprien, we will go home peacefully.
Christophe, bleo kpe sɛ mɛ	Christophe, it’s in peace.
Ahouandjinou muchachos, bleo kpe sɛ mɛ	Ahouandjinou brothers, go peacefully.
Mí ná yì hwé	
Jésú dó hún he ma	Jesus is on board, so
Chorus: Bleo kpe se	Peacefully
Bleo kpe se mi na yi xwe (continues)	Peacefully we’ll go home.
Lead: Jésú we dù bàbà mi sè ma	Jesus and our Father
Aklunɔn tò hún he mɛ	Almighty Lord
O gigonɔn Jésú we du baba mi sɛ ma (x2)	All powerful Jesus
Simon Jesu do hún he mɛ ma	Simon, Jesus is in you.
Wen do mi bo doto	So listen
Tovole no ya yoni ami kpe	Everyone
Egnon, mi bo a se xo bo	Come and listen

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Tovole no ya yoni ami kpe	Everyone
Jésú (Meklunon) lwa ho lu	Jesus (the Lord) is great
Asiá e tɔn dó te mi mɔ	His flag is waving, can't you see?
Hagbele o kú ma démɛ	Brothers, there is no death.
ɛtɛ we sìn avɔ sìsaà xó do yé te yà	Why would you worry, you see,
Gigonɔ Jésú tín t'àwhan tche mɛ	The strength of the Lord Jesus is with us.
Chorus: bleo kpe sɛ mi na yi xwe (repeat)	And we'll go home peacefully.[11]

Eyo'nlé lays this text out over the texture of djègbè style, invoking its respectable court and independent church associations for their intended audience of conservative Beninese listeners. This is clearly an insider conversation, and I have not heard Eyo'nlé perform this piece abroad. This suggests that some of the healing process, perhaps especially conversations about economics and status within African communities, needs to remain in the hidden transcript in order to do its job, in order to facilitate those conversations in a protected space. My translating this song from Gun and Torri, while conducted in collaboration with Rock Ahouandjinou and Saturnin Tomeho, is in some ways a transgressive act, but it reveals so much about the linkedness of economics and spirituality in postcolonial healing processes, which would not be as clear without this insight.

Eyo'nlé makes the argument for the professionalization of their art through traditional definitions of success, particularly through the image of the *avɔ*, the ceremonial wrap or cloth that people don in moments of celebration to show their status. The lyrics make the case for the *fanfare* itself as an *avɔ*, 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.

The message of "Do Ré Mi" speaks to Eyo'nlé's orientation toward business strategies and cultural aesthetics, which carve out a middle way that makes value with African traditions while still respecting their views about wealth and community. While material profit is one aspect of Eyo'nlé's mission, and one key component of the postcolonial healing process, this song reveals that their project also entails the invocation of alternative forms of wealth, either as

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means to other ends or as ends in themselves. One of these alternative forms of wealth may be defined through the immaterial connections that musicians create between people—these connections being a form of investment or wealth storage, a kind of "wealth in people."[12]

In "Do Ré Mi," Eyo'nlé creates a moment of self-conscious reflection on their craft as musicians and their spiritual and economic projects. They seek to extend traditionally rooted, middle-class status—itself constructed through colonial histories—to the brass band tradition in Benin. They defend their artistic practice against critics who associate their work with vòdún 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 *evolué* class, it bears mentioning, by accepting its standards for legitimacy. For those who are skeptical of brass bands because they represent foreign influence, Eyo'nlé argues lyrically and sonically for their place within the tradition as a community of individuals seeking livelihood: through the imagery of *avɔ* (the traditional cloth) and *gigɔ* (the honor, weight, or greatness of a person), and through a djègbè texture that places the song within a village context outside of Porto Novo. They assert in the Torri language, *Ago se na fanfare ján míɛ xò dó ɖúnú*, "Get out of my way, the fanfare is what feeds us" (lit. what buys us food).

Eyo'nlé's arguments about materiality speak to the definitions and expectations of professional success in Benin, which Gangbé's trumpeter Athanase Dehoumon (Bouchemaine, France, 6/5/14) observed:

> The local audience, the Béninois audience likes the group, too, it's just . . . the status that our group has, people think that we are not well housed. In principle, Gangbé 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 Gangbé, in order to say, this is the space for Gangbé Brass Band. For that, we have to keep working, have part-

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> ners 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 Béninois 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 Beninese 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 vòdún communities in Benin, or of capitalism in general. But they are also pragmatically observing the economic realities and global dynamics of the exchange, and their integral place in healing and rectifying economic inequalities. Bands like Gangbé and Eyo'nlé 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 Beninese audiences do not recognize the endeavor as successful unless it accumulates visible wealth.

While "Do Ré Mi" is clearly intended for a local audience, in their other music Eyo'nlé has done a great deal of work to make their music accessible to outsider audiences, intentionally singing in French and even sometimes in English, transforming Beninese rhythms to make them more understandable for European audiences, and emphasizing instrumental solos that do not need to be translated. On *Empreinte du Père*, "Do Ré Mi" comes immediately after "African Brass Music," a bright, brassy highlife composition by Rock Ahouandjinou that is the most externally oriented of Eyo'nlé's recorded pieces. "African Brass Music" 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'nlé 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'nlé performs "African Brass Music" on their live set in Europe, often as an opening or closing piece.

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In their projects of postcolonial healing, Eyo'nlé has learned to negotiate the complexities and demands of their different audiences. Local listeners in Benin expect their music to be legitimized spiritually and economically, while for foreign audiences Eyo'nlé needs to translate and transform their music strategically in ways that allow some of its meaning to transfer and be valorized in a different context. Eyo'nlé's musical strategies suggest that postcolonial healing processes cannot take place in individual or ethnocentric isolation, but instead require the participation of both Beninese listeners and European listeners in valorizing these traditions and this project, and that they may ultimately need to work together to make this happen. Eyo'nlé suggests that postcolonial healing processes need to make Europeans a part of the process, need to teach them how to participate in these transformations of form and value, how to apply these musical medicines, even as the Eyo'nlé musicians protect parts of their experience for cultural insiders in local languages and spiritual references. They keep these parts of the tradition and of their healing work private.

There are many lessons to take from Eyo'nlé's career thus far. The band's professional path reveals the important place of movement and migration for making their healing projects possible; essentially, they need to be able to move freely in the world to make this work happen, which their permanent residency status in France facilitates. Their emphasis on the local Gun, Torri, and Yoruba traditions of Porto Novo shows that musical, spiritual, and economic healing does not necessarily have to bend to the exigencies of nationalism or monolithic depictions of African culture, but can stay in touch with individuality and multiplicity. For Eyo'nlé ethnic difference is not necessarily "ethnic conflict." Eyo'nlé has found that preserving survival, livelihood, and liveness cannot take place in isolation or separation, but must occur in contexts of constant connection that reforge international connections with communities abroad, making their healing project one that calls for global participation while holding space for individual difference. They extend this call to Afro-diasporic communities whose traumas are ongoingly reenacted in music like the blues, as well as to former colonizers, insisting that their accountability and participation in the healing of their own traumas are essential to the larger project of trying to move forward, together, into a more connected way of being.

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CHAPTER 5

JOMION AND THE UKLOS

Hwedo-Jazz and Vòdún in the New African Diaspora

The previous two chapters explored the transformative processes of the Gangbé and Eyo'nlé Brass Bands as they have traveled through and sometimes settled in Europe. The third and last case study offers an opportunity to see and hear how another group, the Beninese jazz-gospel group Jomion and the Uklos, has engaged the process of transforming vòdún and Afro-Christian music in their move from Benin to New York City, a journey that has impacted them in different ways than their compatriots in other places. This group's relationship with their new home began more precariously and with more uncertainty than those of Gangbé and Eyo'nlé in France, but their objectives in this new place have ultimately been more permanent, facilitated by the relationships they have built with already established, contemporary Afro-diasporic religious networks in the U.S.

Migration has a complex relationship with postcolonial trauma, as trauma and structural inequality can necessitate migration, while the dislocation of migration can in turn introduce new traumatic experiences, even as it offers the potential for new beginnings and opportunities for experimentation and growth. Jomion and the Uklos' migration experiences in the United States highlight the open-ended and unfinished nature of healing postcolonial trauma in these contexts, because although migration can offer new opportunities, these musicians have found that there are few places in the world that have escaped the effects of colonization, particularly racism and structural inequality. What is more, in the United States these musicians encounter the legacies of slavery and American racism in a different way than they have in Europe, and these realities can produce traumas of their own.

While it is uniquely inflected by postcolonial conditions, migration is a cultural practice that goes back hundreds of years in West Africa. Indeed, percussionist Jean Gnonlonfoun (personal communication, Brussels, 6/23/14) spoke about the migration of his Gnonlonfoun brothers to New York as part of a long tradition:

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> Yoruba 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.

What Jean does not emphasize is that each of these historical migrations within the African continent came with its own traumas and social ruptures that required healing through ritual, sacrifice, and music and dance; the realities of postcoloniality and globalization have now created conditions that urgently require these ancient cultural skills of migration and transformation for survival. In this process, musicians' use of transcultural capital, often in the form of spiritual, musical, and cultural connections, forms an important tool for transforming trauma that allows them to cross borders and change modalities strategically.

In the case of Jomion and the Uklos, their migration to the United States has represented a significant break from their home and culture in Benin, because of the legal and practical difficulties of travel, but this has been mitigated by their support systems among family members and new connections with musicians and diasporic religious communities. In processes of trauma healing, it seems that migration can play a role in every stage, either as the source of new trauma, as an awakening or reawakening to the realities of colonization, or as a safe space that leads to new connections in the world, or all of these at different times.

In addition to fieldwork I conducted in Benin from 2007 to 2016, I spent two summers in New York City, in 2014 and 2015, observing performances with Jomion and the Uklos, and attending church services at the Cherubim and Seraphim community in Brooklyn where the band lived. I have conducted follow-up interviews in person and by phone in 2018 and 2019.

Spiritual Networks and Transcultural Capital in the New African Diaspora

In 2013, when I was musical director of the graduate student Dudley House Jazz Orchestra at Harvard University, I arranged for Jomion and the Uklos to

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perform on our spring concert as part of their U.S. tour.[1] My involvement in this first step of the group's diasporic journey places me as a major actor in their network of resources, the significance of which I only became aware of as time went on. I now see that I somewhat played the role of an "accidental hub" in this particular network, which, however unplanned, turned out to be an important one nonetheless.[2]

When the three brothers who form Jomion and the Uklos—Sam, Mathieu, and J. B.—arrived in Cambridge from Benin to play with the Dudley House, there was some uncertainty about the length of their visit. Beyond their few performances scheduled at Harvard and the Shrine in Harlem, their path was unclear. Their visitor's visas allowed them to stay for six months in the U.S., and to return as many times as they liked within a three-year period. Their brother Jean joined them from his home in Belgium for the performances at Harvard and the Shrine, and then returned home.

After staying at a series of friends' houses in the Beninese community in New York for several weeks, Sam, Mathieu, and J. B. made contact in Brooklyn with a Nigerian congregation of the Cherubim and Seraphim Society, the Afro-Christian community of healing and worship to which the brothers belonged in Benin, and where their late father was pastor and choir master. The church members were impressed by the brothers' obvious musical skills in percussion, gospel singing, and trumpet and keyboard, and invited them to stay in the residential part of the church building in exchange for providing liturgical music for Sunday services and music lessons for the children in the congregation. This arrangement continued for about two years, until the brothers obtained green cards through marriage, in one case to a member of the congregation, the child of Nigerian immigrants to the U.S.

The case of the youngest brother, J. B. (b. 1983), is indicative of how far such networks and opportunities have taken him. He completed his GED (rather than wading into the bureaucracy of obtaining and having translated the transcript of his degree in American studies from the national university in Benin), before receiving his green card, and then earned his associate's degree in music from Queensboro Community College. At the time of writing, he was working as the music director for a Nazorean Evangelical congregation of primarily Nigerian immigrants in Brooklyn, teaching West African drumming and dancing at Stony Brook University, and was enrolled in the bachelor's of music program in jazz voice at the City College of New York.

Jomion and the Uklos was formed in Cotonou in 2008 after brothers Sam and Mathieu Gnonlonfoun's departure from the Gangbé Brass Band following

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disputes over the group's business model. They were sometimes joined by their brother, percussionist Jean Gnonlonfoun, who had stayed in Belgium after leaving Gangbé. To this configuration, Sam and Mathieu added their younger brother J. B. on keyboards, and sometimes Sam's adult daughter Rose on vocals. They recorded a self-produced album in Cotonou, *Yokpolé* (The Youth), in 2008.

Jomion and the Uklos' journey to New York City faced them with a new set of challenges and opportunities. For one, the existence of a large community of Anglophone, Christian African immigrants, particularly Nigerians who shared Afro-Christian religious traditions with the Beninese group, offered a new set of possibilities for transformation, connection, and survival, from legal status to spiritual and moral support. American audiences, especially those familiar with Afro-diasporic musics like jazz, gospel, and reggae, also gave the group a wide variety of stylistic possibilities to work with. So while the United States has at times been a traumatic environment for these musicians because of its legacies of slavery and racism, connecting with African Americans and other members of diasporas old and new, especially through spiritual community and music, has also been an important and meaningful network in this new place.

I focus on the sacred music of independent Afro-Christian, "Aladura" communities like the Cherubim and Seraphim Society, which draw deeply on ritual and musical genres from Nigeria and Benin. By "Afro-diasporic religion," I mean spiritual practices, including Christianity and vòdún, that Africans and their descendants continue to cultivate in their new places of residence, and that connect them transnationally to other practitioners and other culture bearers, and that often help to resist their cultural assimilation into the West.[3] These spiritual communities have formed important safe spaces for these musicians as they have negotiated the terms of their transition to American culture, places in which they have been able to build foundations for their lives and livelihood. I focus on a handful of individual musicians in New York City, in part because Benin is a small country and its diasporic community is similarly small[4] as well as relatively recent,[5] compared to the large numbers of Nigerians, Ghanaians, Senegalese, and Malians who have resettled in the city over the decades.

The music of Afro-Christian liturgy accesses a broad religious network, which provides immigrant musicians with a wide range of resources and services from housing and employment to contacts with other African immigrant communities, especially Nigerians, whose Yoruba culture and Afro-Christian liturgical practices overlap with Benin's. As Jacob Olupona and Regina Gemignani write, African immigrant religious communities often provide members

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with social services including "communal links, religion, new institutions, and social support structures," for example, assistance with covering burial and funeral celebration costs (a frequent function of social aid societies in Africa and the diaspora), as well as support for the transmission of cultural values and skills, including music making, to subsequent generations (Olupona and Gemignani 2007, 35, 37). As I have observed in the case of the Uklos, diasporic religious contacts can lead to marriages, educational and employment opportunities, and social and material support in difficult times. The churches provide what Olupona and Gemignani (2007, 38) call "emerging forms of patronage" for the ongoing development of indigenous music traditions for African listeners, that can take the place of state or family networks of support back home. In these churches, Beninese musicians find crucial support for transmitting African values to their U.S.-born children, resisting the hegemony of Western culture, managing experiences with racism and discrimination, and maintaining their holistic health and well-being, which is especially important given their often very restricted access to medical and mental health resources.

It is helpful here to recall Roger Kurtz's (2014, 430) work on trauma healing in African literature, and the three-part model for trauma healing that he articulates:

> Models of trauma healing suggest that breaking free from the effects of trauma involves three elements: (1) establishing a place of safety and groundedness, however provisional, for those caught up in trauma, (2) the acknowledgement of trauma victims of their losses, along with an understanding of the causes of their trauma, and (3) the forging of new connections and relationships that can ultimately result in a transformed sense of purpose, meaning, and identity.[6]

For musicians, the first crucial element of "establishing a place of safety and groundedness" can take many forms. In the case of Jomion and the Uklos and other jazz and brass band musicians, the band is one place of safety, as Eyo'nlé expressed in their song "Do Ré Mi" about the social function of the brass band as a "covering" or protection. The religious community, whether the church or the vòdún temple, has been another equally important safe space for musicians like the Uklos group, a place where they can stabilize themselves before confronting the social realities and ongoing traumas of their past and present. The realist outlook that this second step of acknowledgment demands is important as well, and can be particularly difficult for migrants, because the traumas of

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separation from home and new experiences of racism and alienation abroad are ever present. These global, present realities can in turn trigger unhealed postcolonial traumas, particularly those of devalued culture and personhood. Recognizing these past and present traumas, and understanding them within their social contexts, is an ongoing challenge for many migrants. The last step in trauma healing that Kurtz mentions, "the forging of new connections and relationships" and the transformation they make possible, is also key for these musicians, as they find that the healing of postcolonial wounds must ultimately open out into relationality, with African diasporas old and new, and with other parts of the world.

For Jomion and the Uklos, diasporic life has necessarily been an intensely spiritual experience, one which has been consistent with their spiritual and musical lives in Benin. Their abilities as liturgical and popular musicians represent important forms of transcultural capital that have helped them to valorize their skills and experiences in new contexts by cultivating forms of value that are both material and immaterial. These spiritual connections and the value they create are central to understanding how these musicians have continually worked to heal themselves and others through their work.

The Uklos' experiences are one case study in the transnational and interconnected nature of the "new African diaspora" in different parts of the West, connections that are formed centrally through religion and music. In the framework of Paula Zeleza (2005, cited in Reed 2016), this contemporary diaspora is characterized, in contrast to the historical diaspora of forced migration, by several factors, including large variations in experience (especially differences in social class, vocation, religion, gender, and education), fluid national identity and mobility in transnational networks, and especially voluntary displacement in response to global flows of labor and capitalism.

For Beninese musicians, the question of this "voluntary displacement" is complex, because while the Republic of Benin has largely been peaceful throughout the development of its popular music, especially since the coming of democracy in 1990, it has suffered immensely from government corruption and the effects of global economic inequality, both of which are inheritances of colonization, magnified by the rapid pace of globalization. Musicians in Benin also suffer from ongoing attitudes among their compatriots that devalue music and culture, especially those rooted in vòdún traditions, which means fewer opportunities and patrons for them in Benin. So while musicians may leave Benin voluntarily, there are many factors beyond their control that might inspire such a move, and many of them are the result of Beninese society's

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postcolonial traumas. Migration can be one way of addressing these traumas, as musicians seek new forms of life and livelihood for themselves and their creative work.

The case of Jomion and the Uklos also aligns unevenly with Zeleza's characterization of this "new diaspora" in other ways. The group came to the U.S. as a family rather than as individuals, and strategically structured their lives in religious and cultural community. They join a long history of immigrant groups in Brooklyn,[7] which have maintained cultural institutions that engage in the work and the practice of making diaspora, reinforcing ties with home culture and modulating processes of assimilation. As musicians specializing in specific forms of sacred music, all of the individuals in this study bring specialized forms of what Kiwan and Meinhof (2011, 8–10) call "transcultural capital": the languages, musical skills, and social capital that individuals bring with them, which have value—sometimes amplified by distance, difference, and scarcity—across different cultural contexts, and which they can trade for other forms of value, material or immaterial. This may, for example, enable them to connect with other African Christian immigrants through the currency of their liturgical music, or give them the tools to leverage their difference strategically as they market their difference outside of the African community.

The Uklos' integration into the community of African Christians in New York City has been facilitated in part by the thriving evangelical movement in the United States and its West African connections. This evangelical movement exists in Europe, but as part of a more secular culture. The social formations of diaspora in Jomion and the Uklos' world are various and overlapping, extending from the expanding, transnational, concentric circles of Aladura practitioners, to African Christians, many of them Pentecostal, and to Christians worldwide, as well as to "jazz diasporas" (Braggs 2016) in their interactions with transnational jazz communities and repertoires in Africa and New York.

Thinking about diaspora in spiritual, in addition to ancestral and geographical, terms offers insight into an aspect of its nature as a transnational social formation that, like global religions such as Christianity, Islam, vòdún, or orisha practice, aspires to reach across boundaries of nation, time, and into the metaphysical. For believers in Aladura communities like the Cherubim and Seraphim Society, spiritual beings like angels and demons cross international borders easily and on a regular basis, with no visa required. This spiritual aspect of diaspora connects Beninese immigrants, whether Afro-Christian, vòdún, or orisha practitioners, to their spiritual communities at home, as well as to other nodes in the diasporic web across the world, connecting Beninese individuals

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residing from New York to Brussels to Dubai to Shanghai. It is this spiritual aspect of diasporic migration, especially in its global manifestations and their intersections with transformations of cultural meaning and value, that makes it such a powerful tool in transforming postcolonial trauma, in producing continued survival, life, and livelihood.

This closeness of religion and culture is a characteristic of life in Benin and in many parts of Africa, whether ancestral-traditional, Christian, or Muslim, and it serves as a reminder that the original meaning of the term "diaspora" is both cultural and religious in the dispersion of the Jewish people.[8] In both the Jewish diaspora and the Beninese diaspora, it seems that spirituality and ancestry are both crucial components in the formation and maintenance of diasporic ties and experiences. The foundations of these spiritual connections for Jomion and the Uklos began with their family.

Jomion and the Uklos and the Order of the Cherubim and Seraphim

Jomion and the Uklos' musical and diasporic journey began on the outskirts of Cotonou, Benin's largest city. Sam, Mathieu, and J.B.'s father, Casimir (born circa 1920 in Cotonou, then the administrative center of French-ruled Dahomey), was a renowned pastor, gospel singer, and musician in the Cherubim and Seraphim Society. He was born and raised in an ethnically Toffin family on the edges of Cotonou's lagoon, Lake Nokoue. One hundred years later this area, known as Sainte Cecile for the large Catholic church in its center, is a bustling suburb of a massively urbanized and sprawling Cotonou.

The Toffin people were the original inhabitants of the lake around Cotonou, going back to the 1300s, before the Fon people migrated to the region in the 1600s and established the Dànxɔmɛan empire. These Toffin people, the Toffinou, were the target of Dànxɔmɛ's slave raids and some managed to escape. The indigenous religious practices of the Toffin people are focused on the divinities of each family's lineage, called *tovòdún* (ancestral/parental/father vòdún), which are venerated through music (drumming, bells, shakers, dancing, and singing) and offerings in private shrines kept in the family's home. Particularly auspicious occasions calling for divine blessing include the birth of a child, a marriage, or a death in the family. The divinities also might be called upon in the event of a serious sickness, or in cases of infertility or mental illness. These are divinities primarily of the ancestors of each family's lineage, in con-

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trast to the larger vòdún communities that are attached to the royal ancestors or interethnic vòdún such as Hevioso (thunder and lightning), Sakpata (smallpox and healing), or Legba (the trickster and linguist).

Sam and his brothers frequently recount the story of their father Casimir's conversion from traditional vòdún practice to Christianity, a story that underlies Sam's identity as a musician. Well into his fifties, despite having married several wives, Sam's father had not been able to start a family, which is a source of great shame in Beninese culture, as revealed in the histories and anxieties of royal succession throughout Adja, Fon, and Gun culture. Casimir had tried making sacrifices to the ancestral vòdún and consulted diviners, but had no results. He had heard about the Cherubim and Seraphim Society, which had been active in Benin for several decades as a healing and prayer circle after its founding in Nigeria in 1925 after a split from the Methodist Church (Adogame 2004). He began to study their techniques of healing, prayer, and music, converted to Christianity, and was ordained a pastor in the community. He was already an excellent drummer trained for vòdún ceremonies, and brought his talents to the Cherubim liturgical music, which was based in the traditional music he knew well. He prayed that if God would give him a child, he would consecrate that child to the church as a musician. A short time later, Casimir's first child, Sam, was born in 1970. His parents gave him the second name "Jomion," which in Fon means "born on the left side," or "born on the ritual or spiritual side." Sam became a church musician from a young age, and learned to play percussion, drum set, and trumpet when brass bands, or *fanfares* in French, became popular in Benin later in the 1970s. The circumstances of his birth meant that his family regarded his existence, and his musical talent especially, as a gift from God, giving the respect he earned an additional spiritual dimension.

While Aladura churches like the Cherubim and Seraphim Society in Benin and Nigeria denounce traditional religious practices like vòdún and orisha worship, along with divination and witchcraft, Aladura liturgical music draws directly on pre-Christian percussion repertoires used for traditional rituals like newborn naming ceremonies, marriages, and funerals, which continue to take place in Aladura members' homes. In Benin, these repertoires include styles that musicians have incorporated into brass band, jazz, and gospel music, like gbon, played for the Yoruba-derived egúngún masquerade, and *akonhun*, played for traditional life ceremonies, especially those in ethnically Toffin families like those of the Jomion brothers. Thus, the New York churches' patronage of liturgical music also paradoxically provides support for the ongoing growth

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and development of traditional African expressive forms (with alterations to the lyrical texts to remove mentions of vòdún), even if the churches denounce their associated beliefs.[9] Aladura churches have, in fact, maintained key aspects of Yoruba cosmology in their interpretation of the Bible, for instance in the mutual permeability of the divine and earthly realms, the belief in the power of good and evil spiritual beings such as prophets or witches, and faith in the efficacy of ritual to make real change in the world (see Adogame 2007, 2004; Dada 2014). The Cherubim and Seraphim Society is itself based in a resonant image that exists in Yoruba and Fon cultures in Nigeria and Benin: the divinity of twins. In Fon cosmology this appears as the male-female, two-in-one creator spirits of Mawu-Lisa, and in the analogy of the Cherubim and Seraphim, the twin spirits or angels reflecting the glory of God in the Old Testament (personal communication, J. B. Gnonlonfoun, New York, 1/2/19).

During Sam's childhood, the music of the Cherubim and Seraphim liturgy was based primarily around acoustic, percussion repertoires coming out of vòdún ritual contexts, like gbon and *akonhun*. In the 1980s, the churches began to incorporate modern instruments like electric keyboard, bass, and drum set. As Sam's brother Mathieu (b. 1976) explained, for him and his family, the pre-Christian percussion repertoires for vòdún are fundamental to Beninese, and indeed human, identity: "Everything we play in church today, it comes from vòdún. When you say *rhythm*, it's not Jesus who brought rhythm. Rhythm was already there from the time God created the universe. And the first humans were vòdún practitioners. Everything we play in church and we say 'Jesus, Jesus,' that was played in the vòdún temples. You know, you go to China or Japan, and they have their shrines, too" (Mathieu Gnonlonfoun, telephone interview, 1/16/19). The link that Mathieu makes to a more cross-cultural sense of ancestral, pre-Christian religion here is significant to understanding how the members of Jomion and the Uklos relate to Benin's indigenous culture and religion. Sam reiterated the connection: "Today now we mix everything. We say Jesus. We don't deny it. But the base of African culture itself, it's what our ancestors gave us. And that's what we have transformed in the church now. We feel Jesus underneath, but in fact there is nothing about Jesus when you talk about the rhythm" (Sam Gnonlonfoun, telephone interview, 1/11/19). Sam makes a subtle and complex distinction here between religious belief and African culture, which continually affect one another as they are transformed in different contexts.

While Sam's father converted to Christianity and became a pastor in the Cherubim and Seraphim Society, he spent the first fifty years of his life as a fol-

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lower of vòdún, and was an accomplished drummer in traditional ritual styles. He encouraged his sons to continue researching and learning traditional vòdún repertoires alongside the music they were playing in church, in addition to the jazz and other popular music they learned playing in *varieté* orchestras. As Sam explained, "In Benin we don't play musics in specific circumstances to say this is spiritual music, and that's worldly music. We play all music for joy. If you want to be a musician, you need to know all different kinds of music" (Sam Gnonlonfoun, telephone interview, 1/11/19). It is this stylistic flexibility, moving between faith communities, styles, and genres, which came from their father's spiritual and musical eclecticism, that provided Sam and his brothers with the comparative outlook that has fueled their openness of spirit, creative projects, and pedagogical strategies since they left Benin. Sam's point about the fluidity of sacred and secular genre classification in Benin is important for its own sake, and is particularly insightful when understood within the music history of the colonial period in Benin, when vòdún practice and music were explicitly denigrated by the Catholic Church.[10] Sam's comment also points to the source of his and his brothers' ability to learn new music traditions like jazz, gospel, or reggae, and to transform them creatively in a way that makes their connections to Benin's indigenous music traditions sound highly intuitive.

Creating "Hwedo-Jazz"

The Gnonlonfoun brothers' musical approaches have been the product of multiple eclectic influences, ranging from jazz to gospel to other Afro-diasporic musics. As Sam grew into his teens, he discovered he was adept at listening to and transcribing melodies, at first from a series of Louis Armstrong cassettes that his teacher Ignace de Souza had brought back from a trip to Ghana (Sam Gnonlonfoun, telephone interview, 6/28/17). He joined the salsa group Black Santiagos in the late 1980s after de Souza's passing, and in 1993 became one of the founding members of the Gangbé Brass Band. Their debut album *Togbé* (Ancestors) is filled with Sam's trumpet solos and progressive, harmonically advanced arrangements of traditional vòdún songs and rhythms, along with some Cherubim hymns, for brass, percussion, and vocals. Mathieu also played trumpet in the group, while J. B. was still in high school.

I first met Sam at a jam session in Cotonou in 2007, when he was still with Gangbé, and we exchanged contacts. After he and Mathieu left the Gangbé Brass Band, they formed their own group, with J. B. on keyboards, called

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Figure 8. Sam and Mathieu Gnonlonfoun performing at Harvard University's Dudley House in 2013. Photo by the author.

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Jomion and the Uklos. Their name, drawing on Sam's traditional name of "Jomion" (born on the left/ritual side), also contains another significant spiritual reference. As Mathieu explained, the "Uklos" is a contraction of the Fon phrase "Mawu klɔ," meaning "God is great" (Mathieu Gnonlonfoun, telephone, 1/16/19). Sam thought that the phrase would be too difficult for *yovolɛ* (white people, singular *yovo*) to pronounce, so he shortened it. (His ambition to take the music to audiences outside of Benin, and his understanding of this mission within a spiritual framework, was clearly present from the group's inception.) The "U" that stands in for "God" in Uklos is also a reference to the chanting practices of Eckankar, a religious movement popular in Benin that was founded in the U.S. in 1965, influenced by the Hindu concept of dharma as well as by a belief in the power of the Holy Spirit. Followers of the Eckankar movement chant "hu," the name of God, during their meditations, which is the inspiration for the "U" in "Uklos" (Mathieu, telephone, 1/16/19). Sam became familiar with Eckankar practices through a community of practitioners in Cotonou in the 2000s.

When the opportunity came to invite Jomion and the Uklos to play at Harvard in 2013, I did not hesitate. We created new arrangements for the Dudley House Jazz Orchestra, a jazz big band of Harvard graduate students and community members, of two of the Jomion group's compositions from *Yokpolé*, "Sonayon," which calls for listeners to "wake up," and uses the gbon groove for the egúngún,[11] and "Ayi," meaning "spirit," a *bossuhoho* piece of Sam's. *Bossuhoho* is a style that the brothers created based on *akonhun* vòdún styles that are usually played for Sakpata, but which can be played for a range of divinities. The name of this new style, *bossuhoho*, is a diasporic play on words: "Bossu" and "Bossa" are common names given to twins in southern Benin, so *bossuhoho* is the "twin" of Brazilian "bossa nova," that is, *bossuhoho*, meaning "old bossa" (Jean Gnonlonfoun, video call, 3/17/21).

The Dudley House band also performed jazz standards with the Uklos, like Duke Ellington and Juan Tizol's "Caravan" and Art Blakey's arrangement of Dizzy Gillespie's "Night in Tunisia," that worked smoothly with the Uklos' 6/8 polyrhythms, recalling at the same time Ellington's, Tizol's, Gillespie's, and Blakey's musical imaginings of Africa in the mid-twentieth century. The concert at Harvard opened several new nodes and networks for the Uklos and for myself as well. Many members of Boston's Beninese diaspora attended the concert, along with interested parties from the Nigerian community, local jazz musicians hailing from around the world, faculty from the Berklee School of Music and Harvard's Center for African Studies, and even a delegation from a

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Beninese government agency, the Département de Fonds d'Aide à la Culture, who sat in the front row and danced at every available opportunity.

The Uklos' move to New York City was a difficult transition, and it would have been much more difficult without the support of the Cherubim and Seraphim Society in Brooklyn, which provided them with housing, employment, and networks of social support among the Nigerian immigrant community. While New York's small community of Beninese immigrants is primarily based in the Bronx, Jomion's religious connections with the Nigerians in Brooklyn opened their access to a much larger and longer standing community of African immigrants, many of them middle-class U.S. citizens and green card holders who were already experienced with American immigration and education systems, and had already encountered the particular forms that racism takes in the U.S. These experiences had honed these community members' knowledge and resilience in negotiating with the difficulties of life as an immigrant in the U.S., knowledge that they shared with the brothers in the Uklos.

The Cherubim and Seraphim community also formed an important connection to the spiritual and musical traditions that the brothers had grown up with in Benin, even if the emphasis in the New York church was more on Yoruba and Nigerian hymns. The discipline of the church's gatherings reminded the brothers of home, too, as Mathieu (telephone, 1/16/19) remembered: "When we were at home, our father was very strict about church. You have to be at the chorale on time. If you are not on time, they won't give you money for lunch! . . . If you are connected to something and you leave where you are, and you go somewhere, that thing follows you. So that's the connection that made it so everything we have done up until now passed in the wake of the church."

As the brothers spent more time in New York, they began to adapt their music. For mainstream American audiences, they began introducing more Bob Marley covers (especially "Turn Your Lights Down Low," which they originally learned for a Valentine's Day show), jazz standards like Charlie Parker's "Barbados," spirituals, and blues. The more they played for the Nigerian Cherubim churchgoers, the more their gbon and *bossuhoho* gave way to Yoruba popular genres like *akpala*.

When at several points I asked Sam about his personal and musical goals in New York, each time he explained his vision for what he calls "hwedo-jazz." "Hwedo" refers to the interethnic vòdún Dan Ayidohwedo, the pluralistic image of the snake eating its tail, forming the arc of a rainbow, that has become the symbol of vòdún as a global and national religious tradition (see fig. 2). Sam articulated it again in an interview more recently: "I wanted to give this name

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Figure 9. Dan Ayidowhedo sculpture at the entrance to the Forêt Sacrée in Ouidah, Benin. Photo by the author, 2007.

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to the combination of Beninese culture that I want to develop here. *Hwedo* is the rainbow. And then all the rhythms from Benin and from other continents that I want to mix. I said 'hwedo-jazz' because the connection with jazz is always there" (telephone, 1/11/19). This encapsulates Sam's vision for both rooting his musical projects in Beninese tradition, explicitly framed around vòdún, and situating those projects within an Afro-modern framework that creates and maintains ties with the jazz diasporas in the world.

This image of "hwedo-jazz" is a good example of the creativity that Sam and his brothers bring to their diasporic projects, as well as a reminder that, in practice, "diaspora" functions less often as a noun than as a verb or an adjective. Diaspora is something that people *do*, something they *claim* and *create*.[12] As Mark Slobin (2012, 99) writes, it may be more appropriate to speak of "diasporic stances, projects, claims, idioms, and practices" than of diaspora as an independent object. Like healing postcolonial trauma, making diaspora is an open-ended, ongoing activity that is never totally complete.

Choosing to do the work of making diaspora demands creativity, innovation, and resilience, as well as a certain amount of transcultural capital. For postcolonial Africans, the healing power of finding their spiritual and musical cultures to be valuable across cultural contexts can be immense, because it offers daily, practical evidence of the hollowness of colonial ideologies of African cultural inferiority. Even so, the United States is a particularly complex context for making diaspora, because of the country's legacy of slavery and its long and layered history of immigration. For Jomion and the Uklos, making diasporic connections through their music with other Beninese people living abroad, with other African immigrants, and with members of the older, historical African diaspora, such as African Americans and Afro-Caribbean people, has been a crucial component in their professional musical networks, as well as in their ability to grow and work on their spiritual healing projects. New contexts mean the creation of new musical forms, new collaborations, and the cultivation of and adaptation to new audiences.

Several Jomion and the Uklos compositions speak to the spiritual needs experienced while voyaging in *yovotome* (the white man's world). Sam's composition "Daka," in the Yoruba style of *akpala*, tells the story of the group's former trombonist on their first trip to Belgium in 2010. When the trombonist fell ill with malaria and spent almost all of the tour in the hospital, Sam wrote the piece whose lyrics declare, "All of your sorcery will fail. No witch will triumph here." Mathieu's composition "Wen si non," in a hybrid style of funk and djègbè, an ancestral style for the royal vòdún in Porto Novo, Benin, speaks to a frequent focus of Cherubim and Seraphim prayers, and of Beninese culture

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more broadly: the bearing of children. The lyrics to this song proclaim, "If you want to have children, pray, be positive, and live your life correctly."[13]

Music is just one component of culture that these musicians use to connect with others and to resist assimilation to Western culture. In my conversations with the Uklos, they also emphasized the importance of maintaining their foodways, language, religion, and herbal medicinal practices as a way of avoiding becoming "colonized" by American culture, especially its individualism, consumerism, and unhealthy diet and exercise habits. This commitment to maintaining connections with Beninese ways of life is very important to these musicians' health and holistic well-being, particularly when as new immigrants they did not have access to health care or mental health services. The religious communities that supported the Uklos aided them in navigating many practical needs common to immigrants to New York, from obtaining housing, bridging social divides, finding marriage partners, or securing employment, to navigating the immigration and education systems, systemic racism, health challenges, and intracommunity divisions of class, religion, and politics. These communities formed safe spaces from which the musicians could build their lives, negotiating with the various forms of structural power they encountered, and finding new connections to strengthen them on their journey.

The Uklos found that survival in this new context has sometimes entailed a confrontation and movement between different systems of value, construed culturally, generationally, or spiritually.[14] For example, choosing to do the work of diaspora can also mean situating individual goals within the welfare of a broader religious or cultural community, or both; it is a choice to live in relationship rather than in isolation. This is reflected poignantly in J. B.'s *kpanlogo*-highlife[15] composition "Mi ni non kpo" (Let's Stay Together),[16] which, he explained, was inspired by the Brooklyn Cherubim and Seraphim congregation's motto "Working together always works" (J. B., personal communication, New York, 1/2/19). He added, "Sometimes you have to make a sacrifice to be together with your family or your community. You may have to sacrifice your interest or your personal goals. It is better to be together." These communitarian values are often at odds with American culture's predominantly individualist understanding of modern selfhood and the demands of a competitive capitalist labor market, so some immigrants choose to lead more individual lives separate from the Beninese community in order to get ahead and protect themselves from community obligations. J. B.'s lyrics to "Mi nin non kpo" describe these tensions between community and individual in evocative and spiritual terms, making it clear that healing requires transcending jealousy and division, and must be undertaken collectively. The last line puts this project quite succinctly:

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"Let's stay together to heal [*jla*] Benin," a project that J. B. explained extends beyond his home to "this country [the U.S.], this family, this world" (New York, 1/2/19). *Jla* is the Fon word meaning to "heal, repair, or to build," J. B. added.

Verse (in Fongbe):	
Papa wɛ dɔ nami dɔ tenkpon bo do towe	Papa told me that I should strive to get my own
Eman yin món whɛgbe nan tin	Otherwise there could be problems
Maman wɛ dɔ namí dɔ mi tenkpon bo do	Mama told me that I should strive and
miton tuntun	struggle to get my own
Na whɛgbe flinflin ni monten dó nòn lá.	So that all those problems will be far away.
Mende gɔhò, bɔ huvɛ ka sɔ to mende hù	When someone's stomach is full, and his brother is hungry
Mende dó akuɛ bɔ mende mansɔ dó	When someone has money, and his brother
dékpékpé	doesn't have any
Wɛ hen azé akùnnā dowá biɔ famille mɛ lé	This brings up jealousy and sorcery [*azé*] between friends of the same country
Mende dó mendé mandó wɛ non hen	When someone has, someone else doesn't,
whɛgbe wá	that's what creates the problem
Wɛzón papa dó tò kanhò yɔkpɔ eton	That's why papa is trying for everyone to have
lɛ ní mon nù bo mon dù	his own
Mende gɔhò, bɔ huvɛ ka sɔ to mende hù	When someone's stomach is full, and his brother is hungry
Mende dó akuɛ bɔ mende mansɔ dó	When someone has money, and his brother
dékpékpé	doesn't have any
Wɛ hen azé akùnnā dowá biɔ tò tche mɛ lé	This brings up jealousy and sorcery [*azé*] between fellow citizens of my country
Mende dó mendé mandó wɛ non hen	When someone has, someone else doesn't,
whɛgbe wá	that's what creates the problem

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Mi bò àtchírí nà mìnònzò mi men kpó	Support each other so that there will be peace
ní dó tin jijoho	among you.
Interlude 1 (in Yoruba):	
Ijo le mi o majo	I will dance.
Erin le mi o marin	I will laugh.
Edumare tida mi lare Otá mayo	God [Edumare] has justified me. Enemies, don't laugh yet.
Interlude 2 (in Fongbe):	
Mi nín non kpo bó	Let's stay together
Mi nín non kpo bó do bayi tɔvi nonvi	Let's stay together to be in brotherhood
	[lit. from the same mother and father]
Mi nín non kpo bó	Let's stay together
Mi nín non kpo seà	Let's stay together
Mi nín non kpo bó do jla Benin to dó (our country)	Let's stay together to heal [*jla*] Benin

Reflecting on the relationship between the Cherubim and Seraphim communities and postcolonial healing, J. B. (phone interview, 1/4/22) was hesitant to draw a direct connection, but he said, "The damage that colonialism did to the culture went deep. And I didn't know for a long time. But it is really only now that we are beginning to tell people and talk about this. Because for people in Benin, a lot of things happened with colonialism, and it seemed like it was good, or it was normal. We are just beginning to talk about it." While it is clear that many of the Uklos' healing projects remain profoundly in process, these musicians have many tools for survival and transformation with which to confront present and future challenges.

Healing and Migration

Beninese musicians like Jomion and the Uklos deploy Benin's sacred music traditions, both vòdún and Afro-Christian, as transcultural capital to make connections with other Africans and Westerners, to curate new forms of both individual and communitarian selfhood, and to enliven constantly their relationships with African culture, spirituality, and new and old Afro-diasporic

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Figure 10. Jomion and the Uklos, left to right: Mathieu, J.B., Rose, and Samuel. Photo courtesy of Odilon Bassan.

communities from this transnational perspective. These forms of transcultural, spiritual capital are tools for transforming postcolonial trauma, a complex process in the context of global migrations. Connecting with Afro-diasporic religious communities through music gives these musicians the ability to navigate the challenges to their culture and personhood that come from racism and pressures to assimilate to mainstream American society. These musicians' deployment of these sacred music traditions, and their fusions with jazz, reggae, and other Afro-diasporic styles, reveal that ongoing processes of healing postcolonial traumas of cultural devaluation and disconnection from diasporic community ultimately find their fullest expression in these safe spaces that foster experimental approaches to music and living, making possible new connections with others.

Across the three case studies of Gangbé, Eyo'nlé, and Jomion and the Uklos, it seems that as Beninese musicians have moved further away from Benin, settling temporarily or permanently in Europe or in the U.S., they in fact find that the value of their traditions increases, both for their audiences and for the musicians themselves, who find an increased need for healing, connection, and livelihood as they migrate. These examples show just how central the spiritual perspectives of the contemporary African diaspora are in processes of postcolonial healing, especially in the face of the very real challenges the world presents.

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CONCLUSION

Trauma, Translation, Transformation

The world has changed a great deal since I conducted the research for this book, indeed even since I completed the dissertation in 2017. The COVID-19 pandemic has made the chronic crises of access to health care, vast holes in the mental health system, environmental degradation, and the legacies of racism across the world more glaringly obvious than ever before. Working musicians across the world, including in Benin, have experienced the complete disappearance of their sources of livelihood, and are only now tentatively beginning to travel and play concerts again. The pandemic has left scars—parents and elders lost, everyday problems of health, wellness, and security left untreated and unnoticed. In 2021, we have seen the United States' withdrawal from the war in Afghanistan and the commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the attacks of 9/11. Trauma is on the tip of everyone's tongues, as we struggle to understand how we can ever get back to "normal"—socially, culturally, mentally, musically.

But trauma is not unique to the COVID era. The protests in Ferguson, Missouri in 2015 made it clear that America's racial trauma continued and continues to burn unhealed. Earlier, Deborah Wong (2009, 4) reflected that "we live in a time of trauma," bringing the wars that followed 9/11, police violence against black Americans, and North American cultures of commemoration into a discussion of how ethnomusicology can hang on to hope. Timothy Rice opens his article on "Ethnomusicology in Times of Trouble," saying, "I do not know when the world fell apart," words that now sound ahead of their time (2014, 191). It seems we have known for some time that trauma has come to define the time we live in. The question is whether it will define us.

I have found the experiences of the Beninese jazz and brass musicians in this book—of Gangbé, Eyo'nlé, and Jomion and the Uklos—to be deeply sustaining in thinking about how trauma can be understood, confronted, and continually transformed, and the unique resources that African spiritual practices offer to this process. This book has considered how each of the case studies addresses

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the specific traumas of colonization in Africa, particularly in Benin: the traumas of culture, knowledge systems, and personhood devalued, the imposition of a mounting sense of debt and shame, and the creation of fresh divisions of ethnicity, class, gender, and politics, all enforced structurally through education, language, religion, and law. The spiritual resources of vòdún and Afro-Christian ritual, music, and practice have for centuries now been central to resisting the power of colonization in all of its domains, especially in religious and sensory experience, and in healing the traumas of colonial dispossession, of putting society back together, stitching up its seams. In postindependence and now postsocialist Benin, brass bands have been a particularly rich site of transformation as they cross boundaries of traditional, popular, sacred, and modern, creating new combinations and possibilities for collective representation, improvisation, and individual expression. This is a space where musicians deploy improvisational tactics and play as they enact transformations between spiritual and material worlds, making life and livelihood for themselves, their ancestors, and their descendants.

In his essay "The Education of a British-Protected Child," Chinua Achebe writes that "colonialism was essentially a denial of human worth and dignity" and adds that "the great thing about being human is our ability to face adversity down by refusing to be defined by it, refusing to be no more than its agent or its victim" (2009, 22–23). Achebe finds Igbo culture to be an immense resource in facing the adverse realities of colonization, particularly the value it places on what he calls a "middle ground." He writes, "The middle ground is neither the origin of things nor the last things; it is aware of a future to head into and a past to fall back on: it is the home of doubt and indecision, of suspension of disbelief, of make-believe, of playfulness, of the unpredictable, of irony" (2009, 6).[1] I see and hear this spirit of indeterminacy and self-awareness in the interventions of jazz and brass band musicians from Benin, in their commitment to liveness, their transformations of historical and spiritual musical symbols, and in their willingness to jump into experiences with travel and exchange in different parts of the world. Achebe (2009, 23) emphasizes, too, that this middle ground, "where the human spirit resists an abridgement of its humanity . . . was to be found primarily in the camp of the colonized, but now and again in the ranks of the colonizer too," similar to the way that the members of Eyo'nlé Brass Band has made communicating with French audiences and musicians, former colonizers and their descendants, a central part of their mission.

Trauma studies is currently engaged in a set of significant questions about the nature of trauma in postcolonial, cross-cultural contexts, particularly in the

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relationship of trauma healing to language, narrative, and time. In pinpointing these problems, it may be helpful to recall trauma theory's recovery model, generally summarized in three stages. These stages do not necessarily proceed in linear fashion, but can and often do coexist and recur, although this is not always acknowledged in the psychological literature. In her now classic book *Trauma and Recovery*, psychiatrist Judith Herman ([1992] 2015, 155) writes that "the central task of the first stage is the establishment of safety. The central task of the second stage is remembrance and mourning. The central task of the third stage in reconnection with ordinary life." Applying a similar three-part model from peace and conflict studies to postcolonial literature, J. Roger Kurtz (2014, 430) points out that the safety established in the first step may be extremely provisional. In the second step, he emphasizes that it must entail the "acknowledgement" of losses, the frank recognition of the social realities of the trauma. The third step, he writes, consists of "the forging of new connections and relationships that can ultimately result in a transformed sense of purpose, meaning, and identity."

As the case studies show, Beninese jazz and brass band musicians engage with each of these steps through their music. This may be in the creation of safe spaces in bands, religious communities, or in the songs and performances themselves. These musicians engage in mourning, remembrance, and acknowledgment in the musical articulation of the social realities of colonization in stories about the slave trade, postcolonial inequalities of power and resources, and the power of music and ritual to heal. And they are involved in reconnecting with the world through their explicit efforts to make and remake relationships with the music, whether with the African diaspora or with former colonizers in Europe.

However, each of these steps in the process of trauma healing are under constant threat for these musicians. They may go long periods without being able to work in a safe space, because of economic hardship, societal instability, or health issues. They may be threatened when they travel abroad, and their mobility may be severely restricted, preventing them from forming new connections and reintegrating themselves into a new stage of livelihood. Their experiences show that they have developed a wide variety of approaches to negotiating these challenges.

The second step of remembrance, mourning and acknowledgment, seems to be the most fraught, however, and this is where I believe much of Beninese musicians' healing practices are centralized, and where they are at their most complex. In trauma studies, there remain many questions about whether

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trauma (in any cultural context) can in fact be translated into language or narrative, and, if it is even possible to translate trauma, whether doing so has a therapeutic or destabilizing effect on the subject. For example, Cathy Caruth's (1996) influential work in *Unclaimed Experience* maintains that, because trauma is "unspeakable," trauma narrative leads only to increased indeterminacy and in fact constitutes a violation of the embodied, nonlinguistic nature of the traumatic experience. Judith Herman ([1992] 2015, 177) represents an alternative view, emphasizing that verbalizing the trauma narrative is indispensable to the recovery process, even if the individual at times "may spontaneously switch to nonverbal methods of communication, such as drawing or painting." (Herman gives no discussion of the potentially sonic aspects of trauma or traumatic memory, only the visual.) While she is insistent about the need for survivors to verbalize trauma narratives, Herman is clear that they cannot be ahistorical or decontextualized, writing that such narratives must be "oriented in time and historical context." Postcolonial literary scholar Irene Visser (2015, 256) suggests that Herman's model provides an opening for postcolonial trauma studies because it specifically invites cultural and historical context in the construction of the narrative. Yet I also see potential in Caruth's model, particularly in its allowance for the space between knowing and not knowing, for partial knowledge, and for narratives that come in sometimes unexpected forms.

The work of the Nigerian poet and literary scholar Ogaga Ifowodo (2013) is instructive in this debate about trauma narrative. In discussing trauma in postcolonial African and African American literature through the lens of psychoanalysis, Ifowodo argues that staying in touch with trauma's social realities is key—indeed, as they often are, expressed in the symbolic. Ifowodo (2013, 69) points out that a realist perspective that is grounded in trauma's "social location" considers all knowledge partial and subject to review; not knowing is a fundamental part of the search for knowledge and indispensable to the speaking of truth that must begin the healing process. In Benin, this "not knowing" is a central part of vòdún cosmology, which encourages followers to draw life and strength from the power of divine mystery, the unknown, the indeterminate. Spirituality and local religious traditions are largely missing in contemporary trauma theory that focuses on trauma narrative from a secular perspective.

What does it mean for trauma narrative, particularly as expressed in music or ritual, to be grounded in trauma's social location? In Benin, this means that it must deal with the realities of Benin's particular colonial experience: the suppression of local languages like Fon, Gun, and Yoruba; the denial of the worth of an ancestral tradition like vòdún and all of its associated sensory experiences

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in dance, ritual, narrative, and song; the imposition of guilt and shame on the cultural identity of the colonized; the atrocities inflicted by the slave trade; and the institution of systems of globalized debt. These are the areas that trauma narrative must confront, in all of their spiritual, sensory, and economic dimensions, if it is to have a healing effect in this particular context, and Beninese jazz and brass band musicians have clearly recognized this in their music.

At the same time, grounding practices of trauma healing in Benin's cultural and historical context also requires holding space for the temporal flexibility, orality, and multimodality of sensory experience that characterize Beninese indigenous expressive culture. This means that a linear narrative alone will not accomplish the task. Consider the ways that history and social cohesion were maintained in Benin's precolonial times. The professional reciters of history, the *kpanlingan* in the Dànxɔmɛan royal palace, are *singers* of history, accompanying themselves with the timeline patterns of the double bell. The conventions of these rituals require that these stories of origin, rupture, and repair be *performed*, that they be alive, sonically and temporally textured with the bell's cycles. Vòdún over the course of Benin's history has always been the place where social order is restored and trauma ongoingly healed because it brings participants into a fully embodied experience of dance and song, repeated at regular intervals across the years and the seasons. It is helpful to recall Achille Mbembe's (2010a, 28) observation that literature, along with "dance, music, celebrations, trance, and possession," are all instances of the African "critique of time," "when memory, imagination, and forgetting become entwined to such an extent that the distinctions between the symbolic and the real, the individual and the collective, are abolished."

Musicians' transformations of vòdún musical repertoires for international travel in musical form intervene in the traumas of cultural devaluation that marked the colonial era, while maintaining their liveness and producing livelihood for musicians. So for the Gangbé Brass Band, Eyo'nlé Brass Band, and Jomion and the Uklos to sing about the slave trade, colonial relationships, and the value of their music, and for them to do so through spiritual repertoires of transformed and transforming song and dance, is to use a modality that is both socially grounded in the realities of colonization *and* open to the indeterminacies of trauma narrative itself. In this way, working through trauma in culturally situated music has the potential to find Achebe's (2009, 6) "middle ground," of improvisation and self-awareness, in between Caruth's and Herman's respective positions on narrative. In postcolonial contexts, it seems, a little bit of both approaches, the indeterminate and the grounded, is necessary.

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To bring back Achebe's words, the middle ground is "the home of doubt and indecision, of suspension of disbelief, of make-believe, of playfulness, of the unpredictable, of irony" (2009, 6).

What is at stake in these conversations about trauma narrative is the question of trauma's translatability, from one person's experience to another's, across cultures, or from one person's past experience to their present reality. The problem of trauma's translatability takes on crucial importance in postcolonial contexts, where language itself—French, English, Portuguese—is a site of postcolonial trauma, as local African languages were systematically suppressed and denigrated in colonial schools. It may be that colonization intervened so deeply in language ideologies that, for many Beninese people, both colonial languages and indigenous languages are too deeply implicated in the split to verbalize trauma on their own, making other modalities like music, dance, and ritual necessary for healing practices.

As the case studies have shown, translation is a central facet of these musicians' processes of musical and material-spiritual transformations, which calls attention to the intense *labor* of moving expressive forms between languages and sign systems. These labors of translation are evidence of the many kinds of unseen, open-ended "care work" these musicians have undertaken in their musical and healing projects.[2] Examining their processes of transformation also brings to light the indeterminacy, temporal and semiotic multiplicity, and breaks (see Moten 2003) that come with translating aesthetic concepts and experiences between cultures. And while Beninese musicians' translations of their experiences for various audiences often entail the entexting of those experiences as recordings, lyrics, liner notes, concerts, and street performances, they maintain various kinds of resistant orality—of liveness—into these texts as a way of keeping the experiential in the foreground.

Such gaps of translation have for some time been central to scholarship on the productive indeterminacy and multiplicity of postcolonial experience itself. Consider Achille Mbembe's (2010b) invocation of the Derridean notion of *intervalle* in considering the felt distance of time and space between the African past and present, or Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2000, 17) observation that the place of former colonies within global capitalist modernity is not one of transition or "evolution" toward modernity, but more accurately "a problem of translation." Brent Hayes Edwards (2003) approaches this conclusion as well in his analysis of the gaps of translation (or *décalage*) between Anglophone and Francophone parts of the African diaspora during the Harlem Renaissance.

Trauma has long vexed anthropologists precisely because it seems to

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escape language (Pillen 2016). If people cannot verbalize trauma, how can we know about it? So much of ethnographic research and writing itself entails the work of translation, whether between languages or between cultural concepts and communities.[3] I myself did not become aware of the importance of trauma to these Beninese musicians' experiences until I began to improve my abilities in the Fon language, and began to translate song lyrics. Only then was I able to hear the trauma narratives tucked into the musicians' interviews I had done. Even then, can I ever really understand someone else's trauma, especially if their experiences differ significantly from my own? I would have to say, no, never completely. But translation is seldom finished or complete, and that is the space where we as musicians and ethnographers do our work. If trauma is untranslatable in any complete sense, the case studies in this book show the myriad ways in which it can undoubtedly be transformed. As Jean Gnonlonfoun of Eyo'nlé Brass Band sings in "Cargos Blues," "*Le blues a suivi des transformations*," "The blues underwent transformations," in the course of its travels in the diaspora.

The nature of postcolonial trauma, and the reality of constant threats of retraumatization to safe spaces, demand that musicians engage what I think of as "special sensory arts" that circumvent modernity's tendencies toward linearization, textual fixity, and binary categorization, for example between sacred and secular, or spiritual and material domains. These special sensory arts enable musicians to ground their healing practices in the cultural and social contexts of colonization's trauma, while also allowing for the multiplicity, liveness, and indeterminacy that characterizes Beninese expressive culture. Some of these arts, explored in this book, are improvisation, genre transfer, dance, the creation of new spiritual commodities, migration, and all forms of translation and transformation. Often these transformations take place in the adaptation of musical materials for new contexts and new mobilizations. Recall the Hweda king who transformed himself into a sacred tree, *loko*, to escape the Italian missionaries, or how the Gangbé Brass Band wrapped their clay *kpèzín* drums in iron so that they could travel with them to Europe.

This technique of moving between the spiritual and material worlds is a type of translation that could be described as "transmutation," the translation between sign systems, between modalities of being (Severi 2014, citing Jakobson 1959), or perhaps it is a form of "transduction." Ana Maria Ochoa Gautier (2019, 267) explores this idea in her afterword to the *Remapping Sound Studies* volume (Steingo and Sykes 2019), citing Adrian Mackenzie's (2002, 18, in Helmreich 2007, 633) description that "to think transductively is to mediate between

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different orders, to place heterogeneous realities in contact, and to become something different." Attending to the musical and entrepreneurial techniques of Beninese musicians offers us opportunities to see just how much creativity, work, and care they put into these ways of thinking, music-making, and healing, even when their own backs are constantly up against the wall.

Special sensory arts are required for processes of trauma healing precisely because of modernity's grip on expressive culture, on signification itself. Postcolonial healing processes must grapple with this reality as well as the traumas of the past, and so must contain at some level a critique of modernity and its orders of temporality, economy, and secularism. It is these traumas, of modernity's and colonization's semiotic fixities, that postcolonial Beninese musicians find they must confront.[4] That these musicians' interventions take place at the level of intersemiotic translation, or translation between media and across sign systems, is particularly effective in addressing this. Walter Mignolo's (2018, 373–74) words are a helpful reminder of the close relationship between modernity and coloniality:

> *Modernity* is not a decolonial concept. It belongs to the European social sciences and humanities, . . . a type of storytelling based on assumptions and regulations about story-building that defines and is still defending the contours of Western civilization (the European Union and the United States). However, *modernity/coloniality* is a decolonial concept. The compound concept undermines, from the *lifeworld* of colonial legacies, one of the basic assumptions of Western cosmology-philosophy: that concepts denote, that there is a one-to-one correlation between words and things. (emphasis in original)

Interventions at the level of signification are necessary if postcolonial healing practices are going to succeed. This is why Benin's postcolonial project needs music, in all of its materiality and ephemerality, and why it needs the special sensory arts of spiritual traditions like vòdún—because these traditions contain the technical knowledge of transformation, of fundamentally shifting the terms of power and signification.

Postcolonial trauma in Africa, and particularly in Benin, offers a glimpse into a set of specific traumatic experiences that disrupt any simple understandings of power in the world: the traumas not only of those who were betrayed by their own but also the traumas and insecurities of those entrusted with power—both former colonizers and African leaders. These contexts also show

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the immense resources of resilience and creativity that come from indigenous culture and spirituality. For followers of vòdún and Afro-Christianity in Benin, postcolonial and neocolonial imbalances of power are conditions that exist within a moral universe that sees the art and practice of the mind, and the art and practice of the body, as parts of a unified whole. The material and the immaterial worlds are interpermeable, and, in the hands of skilled practitioners, moving substance from one realm to the another is a creative art that can change the terms of engagement entirely.

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Glossary

Abomey—The capital of the old Dànxɔmɛan empire; the center of Fon ethnic identity.

agbadja—Common style of traditional, recreational drumming associated with the fishing villages in the Mono region in southwestern Benin, and extending across the coast of Togo and Ghana into Mina and Ewe lands.

adjogan—Sacred traditional style of drumming, singing, and dancing performed for the ancestors in Abomey, and before that in the ancestral home of Allada.

akpala—popular Yoruba street drumming style, often associated with Muslim communities and sometimes the influence of Brazilian returnees to Benin.

agbehun—The "rhythm of rage" played at the culmination of ceremonies for Sakpata in Abomey and the surrounding regions.

agbotchebou—Vigorous style of traditional drumming which is a popularization of *sakpatahun*, the style played for the *vòdún* Sakpata.

ahwangbahun—The "rhythm of battle" created by Samuel Oshoffa, the founder of the Celestial Church of Christ, for use in church liturgies.

Allada—The ancestral origin of the Fon and Gun peoples, a town located in south central Benin.

assan—The shaker or rattle played in a wide variety of traditional musics in southern Benin. Also has ritual significance with sacred sound and ancestral communication.

Benin, People's Republic of—The communist republic established by General Kérékou in 1975.

Benin, Republic of—The nation established in 1990 by a democratic assembly.

bokɔnɔn—Diviner specializing in reading the signs of Fá.

bossuhoho—Style created by the members of Jomion and the Uklos based on *akonhun* music for *vòdún* ceremonies. The name roughly means "old bossa," a play on the Brazilian bossa nova.

Cotonou—Benin's economic center; an African metropolis; center of the moderne music scene.

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couvent—The French word for "temple," often referring to the place of worship for a *vòdún* community.

Dahomey—The French colony established in 1897, as well as the independent state 1960–75.

Dànxɔmɛ—The Fon empire that ruled southern Benin from 1600 until French colonization in 1897; its capital was Abomey.

djègbè—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.

egúngún—The "revenants," returned ancestors in colorful, full body masks. Gbon is their music.

elezo—The Beninese term for "highlife" music, as it is called in Ghana and Nigeria.

Fon—The ethnicity of the people in Abomey (Dànxɔmɛan empire).

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.

gbon—Traditional style of Yoruba origin featuring the talking drum; typically accompanies the egúngún masks.

Gun—The ethnicity of the people in Porto Novo (Xɔgbónu empire).

hun—The Fon term for all the activities related to rhythm, drums and drumming, dancing, and singing.

houngan—Head *vòdún* priest.

kàkà—The music of the zàngbétɔ night watchmen, characterized by the dry cracking of sticks and many interlocking bell patterns.

kpanlingan—The royal historians of Abomey who recite in song the great deeds and events of the past with the accompaniment of the bell.

kpèzín—Local drums made of clay or iron used in zɛnlí and other styles, which Gangbé uses in their percussion section.

màssɛ gòhún—Popular traditional style derived from drumming for the vodun Sakpata, made famous by Porto Novian singer Yedenou Adjahoui.

miziki—The Fon term, loaned from French, for "music" in approximately the Western sense of the word.

Nago—The ethnicity of Yoruba residents of Porto Novo and eastern Benin.

nesuxwe – The vòdún of the royal princes in Abomey.

Ouidah—Known as the "cradle of vòdún"; the port by which many enslaved people departed and where diverse cultural traditions continue to be practiced.

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Oyo—The Yoruba empire in present-day Nigeria, which engaged frequently in conflict with Dànxɔmɛ in the nineteenth century.

Porto Novo—Benin's seat of government and official capital; center of Gun ethnic identity.

tchinkoume – style of traditional music originating in the royal court of the Mahi (or Maxi) people of Benin.

sakpatahun—Style of traditional drumming and dancing played for the *vòdún* Sakpata.

Toffinou—The ethnicity of the Yoruba-descended people who have long inhabited the lagoon region around present-day Cotonou.

tohwiyo—*The ancestral vòdún* venerated in Abomey as founding fathers of the lineage.

Torri—The ethnicity of the original inhabitants of eastern Benin, prior to Yoruba and Gun settlement.

tovòdún—*Familial vòdún* in Abomey, usually venerated in a shrine within the family house.

vòdún—Spiritual practice focused on deified ancestral figures and natural forces.

vòdúnon—*Vòdún* priest.

vòdúnsi—The "wives of the *vòdún*," or *vòdún* initiates, followers.

Xɔgbónu—The rival empire of the Gun people located in Porto Novo.

zàngbétɔ—The masked "guardians of the night" that watch over Porto Novo. Kaka is their music.

zɛnlí—Traditional funeral style of Dànxɔmɛan royalty; now played for funerals around Abomey.

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Notes

Introduction

1. The Hweda kingdom ruled Ouidah until it was conquered by Dànxɔmɛ in the 1720s.

2. See below for a fuller description of the *vòdún* spiritual tradition. I will note here that vòdún in Beninese contexts is not to be confused with other related traditions of the historical African diaspora such as *voodoo* in New Orleans, or *vodou* (sometimes also spelled *vòdún*) in Haiti, which have their own histories and connotations.

3. For a deeper examination of the connections between vòdún and politics in Benin, see Camilla Strandsbjerg's (2015) research.

4. See chapters 1 and 2 for a deeper examination of how these perceptions of vòdún came to be associated with social class.

5. See Dana Rush's (2013) work exploring the ways that vòdún has incorporated the practices and deities of neighboring cultures. Drawing on Edouard Glissant's Antillanité, Rush makes connections between vòdún's eclectic cultural outlook and traditional proverbs about the interminable, nonhierarchical roots of the Beninese *agbégbé* vine. See especially her chapter 2, "Vodun's Rhizome."

6. See Akinjogbin (1967) for a fuller account of Dànxɔmɛ's relationships with its neighbors.

7. See, for example, the work of the missionary Father Francis Aupiais, described well in Martine Balard's (1998) history. Aupiais was known to have taught in local languages in Porto Novo, and also brought Yoruba *gelede* masks into the classroom as teaching tools.

8. A good example of this kind of research would be that of the colonial-era administrator Auguste Le Hérissé (1911).

9. *Zem* is short for *zemi-jahn*.

10. *Yovotomɛ* means literally "the white man's country," and refers in a local Beninese village imaginary to a land of snow and winter that can only be reached by an airplane journey. In this frame, *yovotomɛ* is the source of Europeans' power, where they create their special technologies (like cell phones, laptops, and the internet). It is frequently referred to in daily conversation as "la-bas," or "over there," a place, but also not a place, that occupies its own special space-time over there, beyond the sea. It forms an imprecise though intriguing foil to the Afro-diasporic concept of

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"Guinen," where many Haitian vòdún believers hope to go when they die, a paradisiacal return to a spiritual African homeland.

11. I have been inspired in my thinking by the framework of Timothy Rice (2003) for an experiential model for music research based in place, time, and metaphor.

12. See Grandt (2018) on "Afro-kinesis" and the importance of embodied, temporal, and spatial movement and migration in these processes.

13. All interviews were conducted in French and translated into English by the author, except where otherwise noted, for example, when the interview was conducted in Fon or Gun and translated with assistance.

14. This phrase has also been used to describe music as well as literature by a variety of scholars, including those in jazz studies who hear connections to the blues and history. See Burke (1941) 1974 and O'Meally 1994.

15. Trauma is a subject that ethnomusicologists are beginning to explore in a preliminary way in terms of war, genocide, and gendered and racial violence (Rice 2014; Daughtry 2015; Wong 2009, 2017), while in more localized studies, healing has been the preferred term of analysis (Friedson 1996; Jankowsky 2010; Barz and Cohen 2011).

16. Kurtz points to the work of Judith Herman (1992) and Carolyn Yoder (2005) for these models of trauma healing.

17. See Appadurai (1986) 1997.

18. Understanding these experiences in all of their multiplicity follows the work of African philosophers like Kwame Anthony Appiah (1992, 2018) of Ghana and Britain and Paulin Hountondji (2002) of Benin, who have pointed out the roots of representations of cultural unanimism in Africa in colonial ideology.

19. See Balard (1998) on resistance to Catholic missionization through vòdún, and Glele (1981, 1974, 1969) on Behanzin and the history of Dànxɔmɛ.

20. Aleysia Whitmore's (2020) research has made important contributions to this diasporic musical conversation, focusing on connections between Cuba and West Africa. See also related directions in Richard Shain's (2018) work.

21. 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 chapters on the Fon concept of *gbè*, voice-resonance, which goes out into the world and continues resonating long after its initial point of origin.

22. This would be Walter Benjamin's (1935) view.

23. Jean and John Comaroff (2012, 6) make clear that modernity is and has always been "a world-historical production," "the product of north-south collaboration to begin with."

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Chapter 1

1. In the Fon language (Fongbè), the adjective "Fon" is not used by itself, but always applied to language (*gbè*) or people (Fonnu, i.e., the Fon people). The usage of "Fon" as a noun to stand for "Fon person" is an artifact of colonial French. The same goes for "Gun."

2. The "x" in written Fon is pronounced as an "h" sound, so "Maxi" is sometimes written "Mahi."

3. Onala Brass Band also performs as the Afro-funk ensemble Viviola, under the leadership of former Gangbé Brass Band trumpeter Magloire Ahouandjinou. The group existed in a previous formation as Togni Music Concept (see Politz 2011).

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

5. This reading also aligns with Akinjogbin's (1967) concept that the Dànxɔmɛans 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 extralineal kingdom being set up in Abomey, one that needed the intervention of the vòdún to heal and set it back on the path to normal cultural reproduction.

6. See chapter 6 for an account of how this story of spiritual intervention in male reproduction manifested in the birth of Sam Gnonlonfoun and his spiritual identity as "Jomion."

7. When I described my interest in beginning my research into vòdún music in Abomey, Gangbé's percussionist Crisipin Kpitiki, a native of Ouidah, told me, "Everything you find in Abomey, you will find in Ouidah" (France, 6/5/14), referring in particular to vòdún deities and their associated repertoires, emphasizing the influence over time of Dànxɔmɛ's cultural hegemony in the southern region, especially in the Ouidah-Allada-Abomey corridor.

Scholars have closely studied the dynasty of Xɔgbónu, or Porto Novo (Rouget 1996; Tardits 1958), emphasizing its close ties to Yoruba culture and its own historical trajectory beginning in the late seventeenth century.

8. These include those reported to the colonial administrator August Le Herisse (1911) and later reproduced in the work of historian Robert Cornevin (1962), as well as accounts by King Behanzin's son, recorded in W. J. Argyle's *The Fon of Dahomey* (1966), and the historical narratives recorded in Melville Herskovits's (1938) *Dahomey: An Ancient West African Kingdom*.

9. Portuguese maps from the sixteenth 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

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sometime prior to this date, and that the trans-Atlantic slave trade was already underway when it enters the written record.

10. See Sarah Politz, "'People of Allada, This Is Our Return': Indexicality, Multiple Temporalities, and Resonance in the Music of the Gangbé Brass Band of Benin," *Ethnomusicology* 62 (1) (2018): 28–57.

11. For more on *adjogan*, see Politz 2018.

12. The connection to the vòdún 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 Dànxɔmɛan kings were to claim origins in Allada, they would choose a deity from that line rather than from the offshoot in Ouidah. More research might provide further information.

13. See Mbembe 2010a on the hidden but ever-present guilt and sense of indebtedness that colonization instilled in its subjects.

14. Individuals may consult Fa at any of several life stages, and the diviner will interpret the signs formed by the toss of sixteen cowrie shells, which may fall either up or down, giving any one of 256 combinations. The signs are called *odún* in Yoruba, sometimes just *dún* in Fon, a possible alternative etymology for the word *vòdún*.

15. Several sources mention the Arab or "far eastern" roots of Ifa (for example, Mercier 1954, 200).

16. After independence in 1960, a new generation of musicians introduced further innovations into the genre of zɛnlí, 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 zɛnlí style, although he did not produce many recordings. Gradually, it became possible to sing about any topic, not just memorializing the deceased, in a zɛnlí album. For Alekpehannhou's part, he focuses on bringing joy to his zɛnlí renditions, insisting that only one song per album be on a funereal topic. He has also introduced different bell sounds into his music, like the twin bell borrowed from certain vòdún repertoires, giving it a distinctive stamp.

17. Sakpata is known as Assojano in Cuba, Sagbata in Haiti, or Saint Lazare in the Catholic pantheon of saints.

18. 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 vòdún was captured in war. According to Mechonou, there was a rhythm played for Sakpata in Dassa, a village north of Abomey near Savalou mostly inhabited by Nago-Yoruba people, but the Fon people changed it later when it came to Abomey. Sakpatahun has been popularized since the early 2000s as the secular, celebratory drumming style of *agbotchebou*, and Gangbé Brass Band created a composition in *sakpatahun* style on "Assidida" (The Wedding), from their 2015 album *Go Slow to Lagos*.

19. In her excellent study of ritual sculptures called *bɔ* or *bɔciɔ*, art historian Suzanne Blier (1995) writes about the ways that the spiritual practices of ethnic

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minorities worked as outlets for the anxieties and instabilities that Dànxɔmɛ's conquests and trade in slaves created.

20. See the 2021 Netflix series *High on the Hog* (episode one) for a detailed oral history of the Toffinou people's arrival in Ganvie and its spiritual associations (Wash 2021).

21. 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.

22. 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.

23. The later nineteenth-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, seventeenth- and eighteenth-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.

24. Some of these colonial-era ethnographers were French, like Maurice Delafosse, Auguste Le Herissé, and Gilbert Rouget. Others were indigenous Dahomeans trained in cultural ethnography through colonial education, such as Paul Hazoumé, the Porto Novian missionary student and author of the semifictional *Doguicimi* (1938), an account of a rebellious woman in precolonial Dànxɔmɛ (see Riecz 2004). Other ethnologies from this group deserving of study are Maximilien Quenum's *Au Pays des Fons* (1938) and Julien Alapini's *Les Noix Sacrées* (1950), a biography of a Fa diviner (for more, see Aggarwal 2015).

25. Here I will begin to use the French spelling of Dahomey, referring to the colony, rather than the precolonial kingdom of Dànxɔmɛ.

26. See Kwame Appiah's reflections on the partialness of cultural colonization in his book *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (1992).

27. The archivists do not have a section for "Music."

28. French West Africa included all of present-day Burkina Faso, Mali, Senegal, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, and Togo, with its capital in Dakar in what is now Senegal.

29. As I discuss in the next chapter, "popular" in the context of traditional Beninese music refers to the habitual musical language of the region, the "music of the

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people," rather than contemporary commercial music, which is referred to as *la musique moderne*.

Chapter 2

1. I have been inspired in my thinking on discourse and genre by the work of Mikhail Bakhtin (1986) on speech genres, especially his analysis of styles that move from one genre to another, which transform but also retain aspects of their previous selves, contexts, and expressive registers.

2. The group also recorded under the name Black-Dragons.

3. Kérékou's religious-political strategies during the revolutionary era were similar to those practiced by Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana during the 1950's and '60s (see Rathbone 2000; Addo 1999), and by Fidel Castro in Cuba in the 1960s (see Bunck 1994).

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

5. At the time of writing, the album cover image was available via rateyourmusic.com, https://e.snmc.io/i/1200/s/fc21e64aa01396d96e0cf992e78de3e1/3863402

6. 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 Gangbé 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 membership is restricted solely to men. Whether Moncadas intends to imply that his record collecting has similar secretive, patriarchal qualities, I can only speculate.

7. It seems there was a pressing error in making the record, and "Tukla Se Vo" and "26 Octobre 1976 à 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.

To listen to "26 Octobre 1976 à Lokossa," see https://soundcloud.com/bissap/orchestre-national-les-volcans-de-la-gendarmerie-26-octobre-76-a-lokossa

The full album is available for listening here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7-aLbCWm7YI

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

9. The members of the Gangbé Brass Band recall this combination of synthesized and acoustic sounds in their collaboration with the French keyboardist Jean-Philippe Rykiel on several tracks on their 2015 album *Go Slow to Lagos*.

10. While Martial has maintained that his father's *gendarmerie* orchestra was the

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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.

11. 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.

12. This reflects what Nigerian art historian Chika Okeke-Agulu (2015, 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."

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

14. 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.

15. 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: Echos Hypnotiques* (2009) for more examples.

16. "Zàn": night, "gbétɔ": man, person

17. To listen to "Zangbeto," see https://soundcloud.com/orogod/orchestre-black-santiago-1

18. The contemporary tchinkoume artist le Roi Alokpon has taken on this eighteenth-century musician's name.

19. To my knowledge, the administration never gave a public reason for choosing these months, which fall during the longer of Benin's two dry seasons, when many annual vodun ceremonies take place, especially in Ouidah. It could be interpreted, however, to exclude the usual time when the Annual Customs for the royal ancestors in Abomey takes place in late March or early April, which is at the end of the period of *harmattan*, the hot wind that comes in from the Sahara.

20. Also see Strandsbjerg's 2000 article for an exploration of continuities between Kérékou's conception of political power vis à vis religion and ancestral power in Dànxɔmɛ, and her 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.

21. The first festival was actually held in February 1993 because of financial issues.

22. The Departement de Fonds d'Aide à la Culture was created in 1991, its mis-

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sion "the stimulation of artistic and literary creativity and the spread of Béninois culture at the international level" (Ministère de la Culture).

23. See my discussion of the imagery of sacred holes and emptiness in vòdún cosmology in chapter 1, and of *intervalle* as a (diasporic) gap in time and space in my article in *Ethnomusicology* (2018).

24. Cf. Edwards 2003.

25. Guedehoungue is the father of the four brothers who form Les Frères Guedehoungue, the neotraditional recording ensemble formed in 1998.

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

27. 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.

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 *kuvitɔ*, or egúngún 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 *sɛ* (which stays with a person even when they transition into a new spiritual state, a 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.

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

Chapter 3

1. To listen to "La Porte du Non Retour," see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CmSj5Wa2juM

2. For more on amateur brass bands in Benin, see Lyndsey Hoh's (2018) excellent research.

3. Jean and John Comaroff (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."

4. Another comparison might be to opening a vòdún ceremony with a song for Legba, the trickster, calling out his praise names and those of his pantheon to ensure that he will not cause *hannya hannya* (chaos) during the proceedings that follow.

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5. Recall that other Beninese musicians had experimented with these adaptations in the 1970s, such as Sagbohan Danialou, Orchestre Poly-Rhythmo, and Yedenou Adjahoui.

6. 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 seventeenth 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.

7. To listen to "Ajaka," see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dxk3k0_AsNI

8. The Beninese guitarist Lionel Loueke has since recorded the song as "Vi Ma Yon" (My Own Child), a duet with Angelique Kidjo, on Loueke's album *Mwaliko* (2010) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojuRxIO3c6c), and Gangbé rerecorded the song as "Le Petit Souris" (The Little Mouse) on their most recent album (2015) with the French producer and keyboardist Jean-Philippe Rykiel on synthesizer. To listen to the 2015 version, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4fQKt9MGIY4

9. Steven Feld's (1984) concept of "interpretive frames" refers to audiences' expectations regarding aesthetics and performance practice, but also to the ways that listeners elect to make sense of different kinds of music, variously, as art, entertainment, political vehicle, religious devotion, and so forth.

10. Togni Music Concept has since become the Afrofunk group Viviola with the addition of trumpeter Magloire after his departure from Gangbé in 2012.

11. De Bock declined to be interviewed for this project.

12. Listen to "Noubioto" here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kwhJKGWO-II

13. Listen to "Johodo" here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1Ut3PwMJAA; listen to "Glessi" here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6UhUFgN_vjY

14. Listen to "Remember Fela" here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vkXlUUi3U-Q

15. Listen to "Oblemou" here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uN7y-AsgxjY

16. Listen to "Segala" here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ruTdKaICixI

17. Translated by J. B. Gnonlonfoun and the author, 2020.

Chapter 4

1. It has become common for Beninese brass bands to collaborate with Western musicians and groups, especially for recording projects like the Gangbé Brass Band with the Belgian band Jaune Toujours or their album with trombonist Roswell Rudd. Eyo'nlé has so far been the only group to actually tour with their collaborators, however, thus benefiting from les Ogres' vast network of contacts.

2. As this book went to press, Eyo'nlé had just released a new album by this name. Listen to selections from *Une Valse à Cotonou* (2022) here: https://soundcloud.com/eyonle/sets/une-valse-a-cotonou. The album is available on Spotify and YouTube Music, among other platforms.

3. The crocodile is a significant figure in Toffinou spiritual cosmology, because

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this animal was said to have helped the Toffinou to escape slavery by carrying wood for their new homes on Lake Nokoue on its back. More generally, the crocodile is associated with the *tohosu* water spirits and the flows and movements of rivers. Animals associated with water carry knowledge, wisdom, and access to the truth. See Blier 1995, 236.

4. To listen to "Cargos Blues," see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gCzAD1keRvU

5. This Gun lyric also captures a hybridization of divine reassurance in Afro-Christian theology in Benin: although one may be assailed and under siege by spiritual forces from all sides (reflecting the mistrust that frequently characterizes spiritual conflict, whether within vòdún or Christian communities or between them), one is still protected by the God the Creator. The word used here for "Lord God" is the Fon-French *messi*, literally meaning "master" or "teacher" (as in schoolmaster), which is full of its own colonial Christian education overtones.

6. In International Phonetic Alphabet spelling, Yedenu Ajaxwi.

7. 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.

8. "Equipment for living" is from literary theorist Kenneth Burke (1941). Murray frequently deployed this concept in writing about the blues, and Robert O'Meally (1994) has productively explored the concept in his writing on Ralph Ellison and the "boomerang of history."

9. The British Museum purchased the work in 2007 and it remains part of its permanent collection.

10. "Do Ré Mi" is available for purchase on iTunes, as is the full album for *Empreinte du Père*.

11. Translated by Rock Ahouandjinou, Saturnin Tomeho, and the author, 2017–18.

12. See Hennings 2007 and Forrest 1994 in Röschenthaler and Schulz 2015, 5. The idea of alternative forms of wealth resonates with the work of the Nigerian historian Moses Ochonu (2018) on African entrepreneurship (or "entrepreneurial Africans," as he ultimately chooses to call them). In Ochonu's framework, musicians and other professionals are social entrepreneurs who combine problem solving, value creation, and social service to create human and social value through diverse and overlapping networks, in many cases making valuable products of exchange and cross-pollination themselves, or making new commodities of spiritual and musical traditions. Understanding brass band musicians as social entrepreneurs places them within what Ochonu (2018, 8) calls the "professionalization of Africa's multiple social vocations" that is currently taking place in many different parts of the continent.

Chapter 5

1. The event was produced in partnership with Benin's Département de Fonds d'Aide à la Culture and Harvard's Center for African Studies.

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2. Nadia Kiwan and Ulrike Hanna Meinhof (2011, 7) point to several different kinds of "hubs" in diasporic networks, including "human hubs," "spatial hubs," "institutional hubs," and "accidental hubs."

3. Good examples of studies that consider music and religion in diasporic communities include McAlister 2012, Skinner 2008, Shelemay 2006, and Velez 1994.

4. The Beninese community in New York numbers in the hundreds. However, precise numbers are difficult to obtain because many of those in these communities are undocumented (Association des Béninois à New York, New Jersey, et Connecticut, personal communication, 2014).

5. Benin's protectionist socialist government did not allow its citizens to travel freely outside the country from 1975 to 1990.

6. Kurtz points to the work of Judith Herman (1992) and Carolyn Yoder (2005) in peace and conflict studies for these models of trauma healing.

7. See DeSana and Shortell 2012 for more context on Brooklyn's immigration history.

8. Mark Slobin (2012, 102) writes productively about this connection in his consideration of the usefulness of diaspora as a term. James Clifford's (1994) oft-cited article "Diasporas" also makes the Jewish connection explicitly.

9. Another interesting effect of the churches' patronage is to provide support for African musicians in performing live music, which is particularly significant within a larger music culture that emphasizes deejaying and "playback" for social events among African communities in New York City (Sam Gnonlonfoun, telephone interview, 1/11/19).

10. I am reminded, too, of Albert Murray's reflections on the "Saturday night and Sunday morning" function of the blues, which, in African American culture, reflects a continuity between sacred and secular music and worldviews.

For more on the Catholic Church and vòdún in the colonial period in Benin, see Balard 1998.

11. Thanks to Michael Heller for writing this arrangement of "Sonayon."

12. A rich example of this kind of formulation of diaspora in New York City is in Su Zheng's (2010) book *Claiming Diaspora: Music, Transnationalism, and Cultural Politics in Asian/Chinese America*.

13. These compositions were created after the group's arrival in New York, and have not yet been released on an album.

14. See Ryan Skinner (2015) on intersecting spheres of moral value, which he calls "Afropolitan ethics."

15. *Kpanlogo* is a traditional rhythmic style from the coast of southwest Benin, extending into Togo and eastern Ghana, that has been popularized and blended with highlife.

16. See here for a recording of "Mi Ni Non Kpo": https://youtube/cNKMulEY3rw

Conclusion

1. See also Richard Jankowsky's (2007, 2010) use of Michael Herzfeld's (1997) concept of the "militant middle ground" in his consideration of a radically empirical approach to studying trance.

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2. See an emergent literature in jazz studies on community and "care work," particularly with influential women in jazz scenes (Blais-Tremblay 2019), responding to feminist theories of care ethics. For more on care ethics in musicology, see William Cheng's *Just Vibrations: The Purpose of Sounding Good* (2016).

3. Ethnographic work can also be traumatic for researchers themselves as they move across cultures, locations, and temporalities, and deal with the challenges of self-care and exposure to the traumas of others.

4. See Badmington 2003 for more on the "trauma of modernity," specifically applying this concept to the process of "rewriting" modernity in postmodernity and humanism in posthumanism.

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