

BOOK REVIEW

Nomi Dave. *Revolution's Echoes: Music, Politics and Pleasure in Guinea*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019. 208 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$ 27.50. Paper. ISBN : 978-0226654638.

In 1968, the Republic of Guinea launched a Socialist Cultural Revolution which involved the active participation of musicians. Over time, “The Revolution” became synonymous with the entire rule of Guinea’s first president, Sékou Touré (1958–1984). As Nomi Dave elucidates in her book *Revolution's Echoes. Music, Politics and Pleasure in Guinea*, “The Revolution” of Sékou Touré continues to reverberate in Guinea today. However, the meaning of “Revolution’s echoes” is much broader ; the book analyzes not just contemporary echoes of the era of Sékou Touré, but also how Guinean citizens have revolutionized their relationship to aesthetics and sound from the 1960s to the present day.

In this book, Nomi Dave investigates how musicians and their audiences invest the idea of being Guinean with meaning and feeling. To accomplish this, she analyses stories of individual people with whom she has had close interactions. This ethnography relies on interviews and participant observation conducted between 2009 and 2016 ; it also benefits from Nomi Dave’s previous experience as a lawyer and humanitarian in Guinea in 2002 and 2005. Her research reveals a paradox ; musicians and their audiences take pleasure in musical praise of leaders who often violate their rights, and sometimes have a negative effect on their lives.

The book is divided into six chapters. Following the French historian Odile Georg, the first chapter (“Agents of the Revolution”) explores the development of popular nationalist music during the 1960s and 1970s, when state-sponsored musicians such as the members of Bembeya Jazz National were recruited to represent the nation’s modernity. In Chapter Two, “City of Musicians” (referring to Conakry), Dave revisits the Bembeya Jazz National forty years after their period of glory (in 2009), questioning the legacies of “The Revolution” for them. Chapter Three, “Sweetness and Truth,” examines the materiality of voice in *jeliya* performance, while Chapter Four, “Warriors for Peace,” explores the polyvalent silence of the musicians and their audiences toward growing state violence in 2009. It outlines a new

© The Author(s), 2022. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of the African Studies Association.

musical genre mainly performed by young men called Soso music. Chapter Five, “The Risks of Displeasure,” focuses on the aesthetics of pleasure after the implosion of the military junta and the democratic elections in 2010. These social changes brought about new types of song production, with the emergence of explicit protest songs, and the author highlights the relationship between *jeliya* and these new forms of musical performance. Chapter Six, “Blue Zones,” investigates a series of “Ebola concerts” which were organized at the end of the epidemic crisis in 2015 by President Alpha Condé. Here the author questions the ambivalence of young artists inventing “new” music and the new sport venues dedicated to youth in Guinea, called “blue zones” and sponsored by the French media conglomerate Vivendi (led by Vincent Bolloré).

Since the Socialist Cultural Revolution, the Guinean state has been elaborating smooth strategies to “sound change” (metaphor from the author), which include change from a colonial period to a postcolonial one in the 1960s, change from an authoritarian system to a system supposed to be democratic in the 2010s, and change from an Ebola period to a post-epidemic period from 2015 to 2017. The political uses of music are a common subject of research, but the originality of Dave’s approach lies in the fact that she focuses on the experiences of the citizens. From an epistemological point of view, Dave seeks contradictions, polyvalence, and complexity instead of fixed categories within musical perceptions and public positions. She considers pleasure to be a source of theoretical formulation. To her, this is the only way to understand why people act the way they do within the context of an authoritarian state. The beautiful and the ugly are interconnected, and contradictory positions coincide. A musician can alternate between praising a president and accusing him, directly. Just as “The Revolution” of Sekou Touré has never been a coherent and consistent project, the positions of artists and citizens are not always coherent or consistent. Musical performances have always been the scenes of moral and aesthetic, collective and individual, continuous revolution.

Claire Clouet 

Georg-Simmel centre (EHESS-CNRS)

Paris, France

claire.clouet@ehess.fr

doi:10.1017/asr.2022.10

If you liked this, you may also enjoy :

Rhodes, Willard. 1962. “Music As an Agent of Political Expression.” *African Studies Bulletin* 5 (2): 14–22. doi:10.1017/S0002020600040415.

van der Geest, Sjaak and Nimrod K. Asante-Darko. 1982. “The Political Meaning of Highlife Songs in Ghana.” *African Studies Review* 25 (1): 27–35. doi:10.2307/523990.