

VOLUME!

Volume !

La revue des musiques populaires

15 : 1 | 2018

Varia

Tsitsi Ella JAJI, *Africa in Stereo: Modernism, Music and Pan-African Solidarity*

Mumbua Kioko



Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/volume/6250>

DOI: 10.4000/volume.6250

ISSN: 1950-568X

Publisher

Association Mélanie Seteun

Printed version

Date of publication: 5 December 2018

Number of pages: 183-185

ISBN: 978-2-913169-45-6

ISSN: 1634-5495

Electronic reference

Mumbua Kioko, "Tsitsi Ella JAJI, *Africa in Stereo: Modernism, Music and Pan-African Solidarity*", *Volume !* [Online], 15 : 1 | 2018, Online since 05 December 2018, connection on 13 January 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/volume/6250> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/volume.6250>

L'auteur & les Éd. Mélanie Seteun

and Switzerland or with perspectives on popular music studies that are unique to these countries.

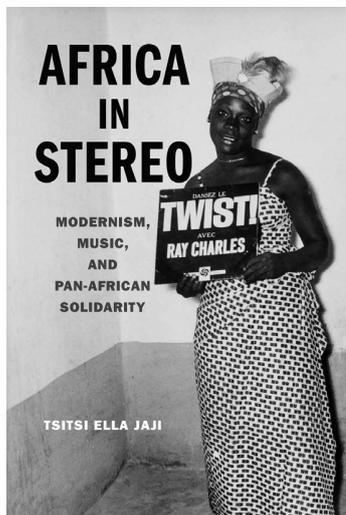
Fourth, the decision to include a large number of very brief chapters on aspects of “German popular music” is double-edged. The editors are well-aware of this, saying that “it quickly becomes clear how fragmented and fragile such a kaleidoscope of assorted perspectives has to remain if one does not wish it to become a multi-volume compendium” (3). While this approach has the advantage of underscoring the multiplicity of popular musics, the individual chapters are too fragmented to be truly inclusive and remain too short to provide elaborate discussions and contextualizations.

Despite these drawbacks, the book does offer fascinating studies of artists and genres that have been marginalized in popular music studies, including West German heavy metal, Frank Farian, Helene Fischer, Modern Talking, and the Hamburger Schule, to name only a few. It stands as an important contribution to the study of popular music from German-speaking countries, the historiography of popular music studies in these countries, and the continuing project of legitimizing this discipline in the academy.

Tsitsi Ella Jaji, *Africa in Stereo: Modernism, Music and Pan-African Solidarity*, Oxford University Press, 2014

By Mumbua Kioko

Africans of a certain age may well remember a time when Bob Marley’s “Buffalo Soldier” was a big hit. Blaring from shops on noisy streets through the hustle and bustle of urban routines, the song’s danceable rhythms seemed to come from many places. This was not only an urban phenomenon, however. Children in rural areas too knew that there was a Buffalo Soldier “in the heart of America, fighting on arrival, fighting for survival.” Whether they were herding sheep and goats or standing on street corners looking for something to do, people found things to engage them in Bob Marley’s well-known song released in 1983. Tsitsi Ella Jaji begins her new book *Africa in Stereo: Modernism, Music and Pan-African Solidarity* by citing Bob Marley’s “Buffalo Soldier” and noting its popularity in Africa. In placing “Buffalo Soldier” at the core of *Africa in Stereo*, the author seeks to exemplify the transmission of music from the African diaspora (transatlantic) back to Africa and to demonstrate the sense of solidarity that emerged from



shared musical referents. For Jaji, “listening ‘remotely’ over the radio and at a geographic remove left some complexities opaque, mistranslated and even untranslatable” (2). While “Buffalo Soldier” grabbed the attention of many Africans, the lyrics, in many ways familiar, were also unfamiliar. It was understood that the song was about resistance, but many questions remained about its intrinsic meaning. An eerie feeling that there were Africans living under oppression in far off lands loomed large, but the specifics proved elusive. Jaji has therefore, fittingly anchored *Africa in Stereo* around the phenomenon of “Buffalo Soldier” as a way to illuminate the very real dialogue between Africa and the diaspora through music.

Africa in Stereo raises the bar with new insights into both the sonic and visual realms of art. Transcriptions, performance, poetry, print and new media formats elucidate how Africans on the continent and in the diaspora have been engaged in a continuous dialogue and exchange of cultural particulars throughout the twentieth century. A major

contribution is the author’s willingness to move beyond a particular village or ethnic group (conventional units of ethnographic analysis) and focus instead on South Africa, Senegal and Ghana, drawing from an interesting array of archival materials to highlight and tease out the forces that made the impulse towards solidarity between Africa and the diaspora possible. *Africa in Stereo* avoids bold and blunt claims that might apply continent-wide; in their place, the author formulates positions about Africa’s relationship to the diaspora in distinctive ways that echo both multinational and transnational sentiments. Further, however, Jaji debunks the notion of Africa as a point of origin and calls for an understanding of the continent as a “constitutive component” of the diaspora (7).

The book is organized into six chapters and a companion website. Chapter 1 outlines the concept of “stereomodernism” and challenges the idea that modernization in Africa was the inevitable result of a process of structural and historical change. Stereomodernism gives more agential capacity to Africans involved in a “self-conscious experience of being modern” (4). The next five chapters are organized chronologically and are predominantly situated in one or another of the three countries. Through various aesthetic readings, Jaji explores the “transnational black cultural currents that shape local artistic production” in order to draw out the transformative aspect of stereomodernism (*ibid.*). Chapter 2 explores transcription under the rubric of “sight-reading” and how it fostered close ties between Africans and their African American counterparts. The idea of transcription extends beyond musical notation and marks writing broadly as a tool for building transnational ties. Chapter 3

discusses Léopold Sédar Senghor's ideation of Negritude and his meditations on jazz as expressed in his poetry and prose essays. Jaji recasts Senghor's Negritude alongside the World Festival of Negro Arts in 1966, which was foundational in the realization of Negritude. Jazz is brought into a web of reportage between Africans and African Americans thinking through the notion of "blackness" and "soul."

The focus of Chapter 4 is on women as consumers in the era of radio and print media. Jaji applies the term "sheen reading" to the act of flipping through glossy magazines as a part of social significance. The active realization of modernity for African women conjured in the glossy magazine covers and pages, invites the reader into a kind of imagined future without the rigid restrictions of forces like the oppressive apartheid regime. Chapter 5 deals with the historicizing and memorializing of tragedy as given by the transatlantic slave trade. The chapter traces the experiences of African Americans encountering slave memorial sites in Ghana for the first time. Chapter 6 situates piracy as a tool by which users hack into the archive of media exemplifying transnational black solidarity.

Africa in Stereo provides a fascinating analysis of sonic, visual, performance and print media forms that speak to the notion of transnational black solidarity. It should appeal to students of music, film, literature and African & African American studies. For music scholars, the chapter on transcription is particularly exciting and innovative because it uncovers the practice of writing in Africa in nuanced ways throughout the twentieth century. It incorporates African languages in the body of writing such as

John and Nokutela Dube's *A Zulu song book* and represents the importance of studying African music alongside African languages.

While the author has brought to light several subtle connections that affirm an ongoing conversation between Africa and its diaspora, the notion of transnational/black solidarity is not necessarily a new concept emerging from a tragic history of separation, domination and colonization. *Africa in Stereo* is a timely intervention in an already unfolding dialogue between Africa and the diaspora.

Chérie Rivers Ndaliko, *Necessary Noise: Music, Film and Charitable Imperialism in the East of Congo*, Oxford University Press, 2016

By Mumbua Kioko

In recent years, Western media has been criticized for its persistence in rehashing negative images of Africa, especially images of war, poverty, and fly-ridden starving children. The notion that there is some political and economic gain for the West in keeping Africa poor is disturbing to many. Chérie Rivers Ndaliko's new book,