The Politics of Silence: Music, Violence and Protest in Guinea

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Abstract. In this article, I consider the factors that lead musicians in Guinea to largely refrain from political critique and rarely express dissent. Representations in the popular and academic literature often emphasize music as a site for resistance, while young Guinean musicians speak of themselves as "warriors for peace." Their reactions to political violence in 2009, however, were muted and cautious. I argue that this stance stems from long-standing norms of silence and guardedness in Guinea, while musicians in the Guinean diaspora protest from a physical and cultural distance.

In the summer of 2009, the West African country of Guinea was on edge. A *coup d'état* the previous year had been greeted enthusiastically by a public ready for change, with the new leader dubbed "Obama Junior" (Howden 2008). Nine months later, however, as the regime grew increasingly unstable and violent, popular anger simmered. Delayed elections and the familiar signs of demagoguery had aroused passions, and by late August 2009, the sounds of dissent could be heard throughout the capital city, Conakry. From radio call-in shows to street protests to genial debates in neighbourhood courtyards, demands for democracy were being voiced. Yet, in this environment of contestation, as conversations on street corners and in the private media echoed the growing crisis, musicians remained largely silent.

In this article, I consider the factors that lead musicians in Guinea to largely refrain from political critique and rarely express dissent. Representations in the popular and academic literature often emphasize music as a site for resistance, and it has recently been argued that, for musicians, "it is impossible to remain silent" in the face of conflict (Muršič 2011:95). Yet this is precisely what has happened in Conakry, not just in 2009 but over the past half-century. As I describe,

musicians in the city overwhelmingly maintain a cautious and conservative stance towards state politics. Across genres and generations, their songs most often accommodate state power, rather than openly defy it. While this stance is being increasingly challenged today, it remains deeply rooted in local cultural aesthetics of silence and guardedness, intertwined with the long legacy of authoritarian rule in postcolonial Guinea.

In the following pages, I explore these dynamics in the wake of the 2009 political crisis, comparing the responses of musicians in Conakry versus those in the Guinean diaspora in Paris. I am interested here in ways of thinking of Guinean youth, examining official representations of young people in the post-independence era, as well as discourses and practices surrounding youth-oriented Guinean music today. Young people have consistently been framed as transformative agents, while musicians in particular face expectations to stand up and protest. Yet protest is a fraught practice for young musicians in Conakry, who must contend with a politics of caution and silence that imbues local realities. In contrast, musicians in the diaspora operate within a set of conditions where protest is currency. These examples do not represent a binary between complicity and resistance, however. Moving beyond simplistic characterizations of African people as heroes versus victims, I show how young musicians in Conakry use silence, quietness, and inarticulation as tactics of playful evasion to balance their aspirations and needs. Silence thus represents not just the denial or lack of voice, but a particular strategy of communication and being in an authoritarian state.

Ideological Views On African Music

In a recent op-ed piece in the *The New York Times,* the sociologist Sujatha Fernandes writes that "[d]uring the recent wave of … protests against illegitimate presidents in African countries like Guinea [. . .], rap music has played a critical role in articulating citizen discontent over poverty, rising food prices, blackouts, unemployment, police repression and political corruption" (12 January, 2012). The social ills listed here are familiar to those who know Guinea; the reference to dissident Guinean hip-hop, less straightforwardly so. Fernandes' piece reflects pervasive assumptions about the political nature of Guinean, and more generally, African, music. While no examples of Guinean protest rap are provided, the author imagines that local music making must surely be the torch-bearer for recent political shifts. Yet, this is not necessarily the case. This is not to fault Fernandes' important scholarship on global hip-hop and its socio-political dimensions. Rather, my aim is to note the prevalence of a certain view of African music, and the ideological impetus behind it.

Scholarly interest in politically engaged music has a long history. In the twentieth century, Marxist cultural theorists of the Frankfurt School debated

the possibilities of political art and music capable of countering authoritarian government and "obedience" to commercialized pop (Adorno 2002:460). Later theorists, such as those of the Birmingham School and the British New Left, emphasized the political nature of popular art, music, and style, while rejecting hierarchies between high art and pop culture (Williams 1977; Hall & Jefferson 2006 [1977]). Since the 1960s and 1970s, scholars and commentators in the West have been increasingly interested in the music of protest and dissidence, with much work arguing for "the oppositional potential of many genres of popular music" (Shepherd 2001:8).

This view is particularly prevalent in discussions of African music. While European and North American music journalists today often bemoan the lack of protest music at home, they celebrate the fact that "in Africa it never went away" (Camwath:18 January 2011). Recent accounts of an African Spring have focused in great deal on the role of young musicians, from Senegalese rappers to Ivorian reggae singers, as home-grown champions of change. The notion of African people standing up for themselves in the face of seemingly insurmountable problems comes as a relief from prevalent discourses of Afro-pessimism, while music offers an ebullient soundtrack to this process. Moreover, African music is portrayed as inherently progressive, embodying the hopes of a continent simply by its existence. Thus, international NGOs abound with initiatives supporting Music for Social Change in Africa, while music festivals routinely promote the healing sounds of African drums and dances.[1]

Within ethnomusicology, volumes such as *Sounds of Change:Social and Political Features of Music in Africa* (Thorsén 2004) detail "the symbols of resistance and alternatives" in African music. Scholarly studies often focus on oppositional elements such as veiled critique in song lyrics, or music as a vehicle for poetic licence or personal and collective empowerment (see e.g. Allen 2004; Plageman 2012; Vail & White 1997). It must be stressed that such inquiry provides valuable insight into the processes of African music and a much-needed counterweight to the many negative portrayals of Africa. Yet, at the same time, this approach only tells half the story. As Karin Barber noted in 1987, much African popular music is in fact conservative and misogynist, and scholarship needs to acknowledge this fact. Barber continues her argument by suggesting that much conservative African music might actually have progressive or oppositional undertones (1987:8–9). Writing almost thirty years ago, she ultimately affirms the scholarly preoccupation with protest. Yet her point that we must understand music in all its complexity is an important one. This view is reflected in recent ethnomusicological approaches that pursue a less idealistic view of music, in Africa and elsewhere. As Marcello Sorce Keller argues, "music easily becomes divisive, discriminating, a potentially belligerent symbol of oversimplified, one-piece identities which, the less they allow nuances, the more they are prone to conflict" (2007:113). At the same time,

he acknowledges that "these two implicit and widely held misconceptions about music, a) that it is a universal language, and b) that it fosters feelings of human brotherhood, are quite hard to die" (ibid:114).[2]

Singing the State

In postcolonial Guinea, official representations have long championed music as a vehicle for social change, a view that stems directly from nationalist discourse in the post-independence era. In 1958, the country became the first French colony in Africa to gain its independence. Its first president, Ahmed Sékou Touré, was a former labour unionist and fiery critic of European imperialism. Influenced by Marxist ideology, Touré called for an ongoing struggle to transform the Guinean self from colonial subject to free agent. Music and performance played a key role in this process to create revolutionary consciousness and a new social order for the postcolonial era. Seeking both the legitimacy of and freedom from the past, Touré promoted revolutionary Guinean music as a cosmopolitan mix of traditional and modern elements, all re-worked in service of the postcolonial state.

Guinean music has long been dominated by *jeliya*, a form of vocal artistry performed by hereditary musicians known as *jelilu* (Mn. sing. *jeli*) or griots. One of the key features here is singing the praise (*ka fasà fö*) of particular individuals. This practice involves the singing of an individual's attributes and family name, at times tracing his/her genealogy back through the centuries to the founding of the Mande Empire that dominated much of West Africa from the thirteenth to seventeenth centuries. It is thus a highly personal form of honouring someone by situating him or herself within the narrative of a glorious Mande past. In the post-independence era, Sékou Touré mobilized this cultural resource by encouraging musicians to adapt Mande musical traditions to the modern moment. As has been well documented, state-sponsored musicians in the new nation transposed traditional Mande melodies to imported instruments, such as electric guitar, trumpet, saxophone and drum-kits, and often accompanied by Cuban rhythms (Charry 2000; Counsel 2006; Dave 2009; Harrev 1992). Moreover, lyrics were adapted to promote the president's personality cult.[3] Thus, through the 1960s and 1970s, state-appointed dance bands sang nationalist pop songs lauding the virtues of Touré and his regime, including praise songs to governmental literacy and agricultural campaigns, the national airlines, the national fruit juice distributor, the army, the party, and the president's wife.

During the Touré era, musicians who conformed to such state demands for "revolutionary" realism in music were sponsored and generously supported.[4] Similarly, in return for singing the name of a powerful person, musicians today are rewarded with money and gifts, sometimes extravagantly so. Because of this

close interplay between money, music, and power in jeli praise performance, praise-singing is a long-standing subject of moral anxiety and debate in Guinea, and elsewhere in the Mande world (see Roth 2008; Schulz 2001). Yet musicians of all ages and backgrounds rely on the patronage of the ruling elite, and thus, from jelilu to hip-hop stars, they turn to praise-singing as an important economic and professional strategy.[5] Jeliya remains, however, both the most prestigious form of praise, and the one most tainted by a sense of moral weakness.

Stars and Hopes

In answer to the dominance of and anxieties surrounding jeliya, a new urban traditional genre has emerged in Conakry over the past fifteen or twenty years, performed mainly by musicians from the minority Susu ethnic group.[6] The genre, commonly referred to as Susu music, is closely associated with two popular neighbourhoods in southern Conakry, and the two bands that take their names: *Etoiles de Boulbinet* (Boulbinet Stars) and *Espoirs de Coronthie* (Hopes of Coronthie). While Espoirs de Coronthie has the largest following, and has found success in France, Etoiles de Boulbinet is the original.[7] I first heard Etoiles de Boulbinet perform on a wet Saturday evening during the middle of the rainy season in 2009. The band had a weekly gig at Glonglon, a tiny open-air bar tucked away in southern Conakry. On my first visit there I arrived to find a dozen musicians playing under a leaky tin roof. Etoiles de Boulbinet struck me immediately for the sheer variety of instruments they played. Since the late colonial era, Guinean popular music has most commonly been performed on imported instruments, and today is dominated by the sounds of electronic keyboards and drum machines. The innovation of neo-traditional Susu music has been to create urban dance music that foregrounds a varied mix of traditional instruments. While electric guitars and drum-kits are used, the sound prominently features layers of instruments representing all four of Guinea's regions, many of which had not been previously played together. These include the *kongoma* (a lamellophone from the coastal region), *bolon* (bass-harp, hunter's instrument from northern Guinea) and various types of percussion from the south-eastern forest region.

The use of the kongoma illustrates this innovation. Susu musicians have adapted the instrument, a large, percussive three- or four-key lamellophone, by playing it in a dried calabash gourd rather than in the heavy wooden resonating chamber in which it had previously been played. This change in form allowed for cheaper distribution and easier transport of the instrument, which greatly increased its popularity among young musicians. In a recent video for the single, "Cinquantenaire," Etoiles de Boulbinet has further adapted the kongoma by electrifying it within a large, guitar-shaped resonating chamber, which the

Figure 1. Demba Diallo (kora) and Alya Camara (bolon), two musicians from Etoiles de Boulbinet.

player holds at the neck with one hand while plucking the keys with the other. Such changes as these add visual excitement and modernise the group's style, while suggesting new uses for older instruments.

The sounds of Etoiles de Boulbinet and other Susu groups signal a significant shift in the texture of urban music in Conakry, characterized by the distinctive timbres of *bala* (xylophone), *kora* (harp), bolon, kongoma and various percussion instruments. Furthermore, the popularity of these groups has led to a recent surge of interest in traditional instruments among young musicians in Conakry. Guinean hip-hop and reggae musicians, for instance, regularly contract out kora and *jembe* (hand-drum) players to accompany them in concerts and recordings. Today one is more likely to find traditional instruments in such settings than among the many jeli ensembles and bands playing on any given day around the city. While musicians from the Touré-era dance bands tend to describe their music as modern, many young musicians often stress their sounds as representing tradition (*namouni*).

In this way, the traditional has become a marker of distinction for many young musicians in Conakry, who see it as a means of articulating an alterna-

Figure 2. A Mande neo-traditional group, Etoiles de Mandingue, performing in Conakry. The kongoma is on the left.

tive modernity from that expressed by jelilu (cf. Shain 2002). In part, the turn towards local instruments represents a practical solution to an economic problem. Many Touré-era musicians told me how difficult it is to find and maintain Western instruments in Guinea today. Brass instruments are increasingly rare, while electric guitars and bass are prohibitively expensive for most people. But, besides the practicality of local instruments, made relatively cheaply and through easily-sourced materials, their use also represents an aesthetic and ideological choice. With their technology and materials, imported instruments suggest Western modernity, resources and wealth, while Guinean instruments—often made from vegetables, wood, and dried animal skins—imply an older, local identity. Played together, these instruments create a thick, buzzy texture, distinct from the synthesized sound of much jeli pop music. Many of these instruments, including bala and bolon have gourd or tin-sheet resonators attached to achieve a buzzing effect, while shakers and rattles add to the percussive density. Such a drone is common in many types of African music, but often runs counter to European and North American preferences for a cleaner sound (Berliner 1981:11; Charry 2000:139, 217; Turino 2000:342). By retaining the buzzing resonance of

traditional instruments, groups like Etoiles de Boulbinet distinguish their sound as African and local (cf. Font-Navarette 2011).

Moreover, traditional instruments are closely associated with history, myth, social organization, and a particularly local understanding in which many musicians take great pride. The bala, for example, is a legendary instrument at the very heart of the epic of Sunjata Keita, founder of the Mande Empire. According to the epic, Sunjata's rival, the Susu sorcerer king, Soumaoro Kanté, gained his powers through a magical bala that was given to him by *jinn*, or spirits. After Soumaoro's defeat, Sunjata took possession of the *Sosso bala*, as this original instrument is known (Camara, L. 1978). Today, the bala is still revered for its mystical powers, and, as the bala player Youssouf Condé told me, a sheep must be sacrificed on the day a new instrument is first tuned, in order to control its powerful force (personal communication, 8 September 2009, Conakry).

Not all young musicians with whom I spoke were aware of all the origins and myths surrounding the bala and other instruments. Yet, with their local histories and identities, these instruments are an enormous source of pride. As Alya Camara, a bolon player with Etoiles de Boulbinet told me, "I love the bolon because it is a traditional instrument. It speaks to us of our African customs, and today many people like that here" (personal communication, 11 September 2009, Conakry). Similarly, the jembe player, Gali Camara, said that "I prefer old instruments. They're what our ancestors used to play [and] people, young people, come to hear us. That tells you something" (personal communication, 7 October, 2009, Conakry). Statements such as these reveal an awareness of the creative and political potential of local instruments. Like most music in Conakry, the urban-traditional Susu genre is a seamless mix of old and new, local and foreign. Thus, when these musicians speak of their traditional sound, they are actually referencing a modern, cosmopolitan tradition (cf. Waterman 1990). Yet with their distinctive instruments, members of Etoiles de Boulbinet and similar groups set themselves apart as young musicians doing something different from their elders. I will return to this question of youth and youth-oriented ideologies below.

First, a brief return to Glonglon. The crowd responded with enthusiasm to Etoiles de Boulbinet's performance. Each piece started with a solo on either kora or bala, usually a fast, descending melodic line that would settle into a steady cycle as the other instruments joined in. The musicians would then alternate between slower, melodic passages during which a succession of singers would take the microphone, and loud, faster tempo passages during which a member of the audience, or indeed one of the musicians, might jump up to dance. As the music heated up, the singer would periodically shout "*Climatiseur*!" ("Air conditioner!") to cool down the instrumentalists so that he could resume singing. By the time I left, well past 3:00 a. m., the music, and the rain, showed no signs of abating.

Ideologies of Youth in Guinea

In their edited volume, *Resistance through Rituals*, Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson write of the moral panic that greeted the rise of youth culture in 1950s Britain (2006). As the markers of social order began to change in the post-war era, anxiety coalesced around young people, particularly working-class youth, who were seen to symbolize the degradation of traditional values and institutions. Hall, Jefferson and others describe the tension between moral entrepreneurs, who saw their role as protecting the status quo, and the youth whom they identified as responsible for social breakdown (Clarke et al 2006:56). Young people came to stand for the uncontrollable edges of society who were actively pushing against authority to transform the social landscape to their liking.

At around the same time that this discourse took hold in Britain, an inverse view was actively being promoted in Guinea. As in many socialist countries, the Guinean government carefully cultivated its relationship with young people, who were championed for precisely the same reasons that they were seen as a threat in Britain and the United States. Revolutions need agents who are willing to overthrow the status quo in favour of a new future. In Touré's Guinea, youth became the "key collective protagonist" of this narrative (Straker 2009:37). Yet, unlike the spontaneous and decentralized youth subcultures of which Hall and Jefferson write, Guinean youth in the post-independence period were strictly organized and educated under party doctrine. In both these contexts, youth, as conceived in the moral-political discourse, is a category imagined by the state and dominant groups. In post-independence Guinea, the category was evoked in a moral opposition between the past and the future. Yet, the complex and at times contradictory practices of young musicians in Conakry today frustrate such framings.

In Sékou Touré's Guinea

Sékou Touré was thirty-six when he became the first president of Guinea, a young leader in a gerontocratic culture. Throughout Guinea, power and authority have traditionally been accorded to old men. In Mande society, the principle of *fasiya*, which John Williams Johnson translates as father-lineage-ness, obligates younger people to accord their elders respect and deference (1999:11). Touré sought to subvert such age-based hierarchies by promoting young people and re-drawing the lines along which authority was understood. One of his first acts within months of coming into power was to create a party youth wing, the *Jeunesse de la Révolution Démocratique Africaine*, open to anyone "between the ages of 7 and 40" (Ministry of Culture & Education 1979:59). With such an inclusive age range, Touré hoped to create as broad an identification of youth as possible, incorporating all Guineans of a productive age. He devoted large portions of his

books and speeches to this category, underlining their centrality to his program. For example, in his 1967 work, *L'Afrique en marche*, he writes, "Placed at the centre of African history, African youth are not only the active hyphen between the continent's past and future, but also a vivid part of our common present, an important element of our fighting forces, the living symbol of our hopes, and the spokesperson of our people's legitimate aspirations" (1967:556).

Through such flattering language, Touré framed youth in the post-independence period as icons of African revolutionary progress and modernity. Yet underneath this rhetoric of agency and action was a strategic assessment of young people as empty vessels and able bodies ready to be fuelled by revolutionary fervour. As the group least associated with the past, young people were most receptive to the future and a rejection of older ways. Touré recognized their energy and zeal as the necessary engine of his Socialist Cultural Revolution, both materially and ideologically.[8] Young people were charged with re-educating the older generation, thereby inversing traditional structures of power and removing the authority of elders.

Touré's evocation of young people as agents of change referenced not just revolutionary ideology, but also local social ideals. A number of commentators have described dialectics of power in this part of the world between young and old, in which gerontocracy exists in dynamic opposition with the constant challenge of youthful innovators (Bird and Kendall 1980; Johnson 1999; McGovern 2013; Skinner 2009). In Mande culture, this tension is framed in the polyvalent concepts of *badenya* (mother-childness) and *fadenya* (father-childness). These concepts relate most directly to relations in polygamous households where children share the same father but have different mothers. Beyond this context, however, these terms relate to broader social tensions between solidarity and loyalty to the group (badenya) and competition and rivalry (fadenya). Young people are obligated by principles of deference and loyalty to their elders, yet they are also expected to push at the social boundaries in order to innovate and challenge the existing order. According to Mande ideals, this dynamism creates both social continuity and change.

Touré sought to channel this dynamic opposition, at once allying himself on the side of young people and aiming to secure their compliance with his absolute rule. He stressed young people's duty to discover their individual and collective talents, thereby appropriating their energies for revolutionary purposes. At the same time, through language full of paternal sentiment and counsel, he marked a clear hierarchical distinction between himself and his subjects:

> Our youth has become a politically committed youth because it is aware of its responsibilities; an organized youth, a youth united around a revolutionary programme. It has become an impassioned youth, an active youth that knows that the value of its existence is measured by the sum of useful activities accomplished by a

> man or a people for the growth, the expansion of all the elements of the individual and the people's happiness (1967:582).

Sifting through the typically dense and florid rhetoric, what is clear here is Touré's paternalistic tone, aimed ultimately at keeping young people in check by reminding them of their duty. Moreover, by repeatedly affirming the undifferentiated category of youth, Touré makes them the object of his discourse, thus striking a careful balance between camaraderie and hierarchy.

As Michael McGovern argues, Touré sought to replace gerontocratic traditional rule with a "dictatorship of the youth" (2013:174). His aim was not to ease intergenerational tensions in Guinea, but rather to exploit them. Young people were pitted against their elders in a transformative struggle to rewrite the rules of authority and power. Yet, while the Touré-era discourse was often framed as an opposition between old and new, past and future, young people today are growing up in a more diffuse environment where there are many forms of power and influence. Respect for one's elders is still a vital social principle, but the traditional patriarchal hierarchies that threatened Touré do not bind contemporary youth to the same degree. Musicians from the younger generation today do set themselves apart from their elders and often frame their music as oppositional and anti-establishment. Yet, a closer examination reveals both rupture and adherence with past practices.

In Guinea Today

What is striking about the vast majority of young male—and occasionally female—musicians in Conakry is that, across ethnic and generic lines, almost all wear their hair in dreadlocks. Dreadlocks have become an important expressive form for these musicians, conveying a number of identities and messages. As John Clarke argues, style is an important means by which to understand sub-cultural identity, embodying the ways in which a particular group sees itself and expresses its difference from others (2006 [1977]:151). Dreadlocks operate as such symbols. First, they signal youthful rebellion with the social norms. In Guinea, short hair for men is a sign of respectability, cleanliness, and health, reflecting Islamic emphasis on hygiene and personal grooming.[9] In the past, one would only have seen the socially marginal wearing their hair in long, matted locks. Today the look is common among musicians in Conakry, although less so among other young people. Young musicians thus set themselves apart as daring and rebellious.

Dreadlocks also have another important signification, referencing Rastafarianism and reggae music. Young men and women with dreadlocks are commonly referred to in Conakry as Rastas, even though the vast majority of them are practicing Muslims. Moreover, most that I encountered were only incidentally involved in reggae, focusing instead on neo-traditional Susu or Mande music. But

the reference provides a key marker of identity for young musicians in Conakry today, serving as a visual link to a global black youth culture. Through such a look, young musicians allude to an identity well beyond Conakry, thus demarcating a break from a purely local and particular tradition. Like Cuban music in the mid-twentieth century, reggae-culture provides an alternative way for young people to express their modernity, one with roots outside the Global North and in historical black global experience.

Although hip-hop suggests a similar draw on young people's imaginations, reggae remains the more popular musical genre and reference point in Conakry.[10] Local hip-hop artists proliferate, and while the generic boundaries are blurry, reggae nonetheless has the edge. When I asked friends why this is the case, I was often told that reggae music is about Africa and about African problems. People often cited songs, such as Bob Marley's "Zimbabwe," to show that the genre speaks directly to African people, while also evoking a wider diasporic identity. Despite its Jamaican roots, reggae is seen as pan-African rather than tied to any particular country, whereas hip-hop is considered to be first and foremost American. Lisa McNee argues that this popularity for reggae exists throughout francophone West Africa. McNee cites the example of the Ivorian reggae singer, Alpha Blondy, whose

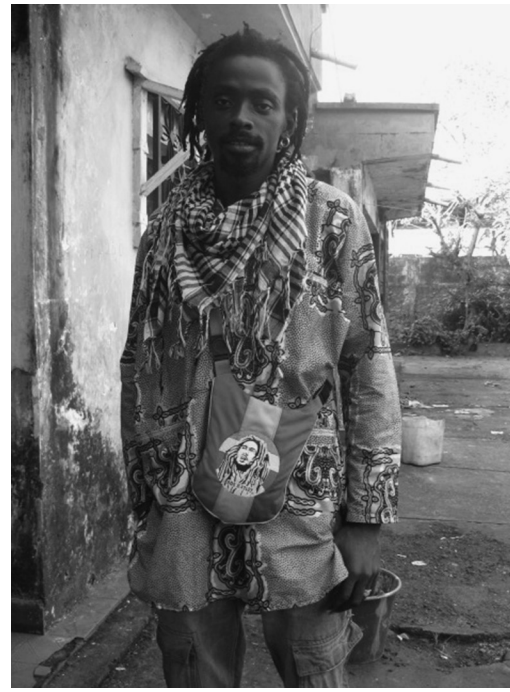

Figure 3. Cheick Kouyaté, a jeli and member of a neo-traditional group.

political lyrics have made him a hero of young people throughout the region. She contends that reggae resonates with West African youth because it is essentially a "contestatory music" (2002:240). It is primarily the outspoken political stance of reggae music that makes it so popular.

This explanation certainly corresponds to the statements of young musicians in Conakry. Even though they do not necessarily perform reggae music, many readily identify with the outspoken and oppositional voice of stars such as Marley or Alpha Blondy. In this way, dreadlocks suggest a political as well as cultural stance, linked to ideals of youthful protest and resistance. Thus, as Mohammed Branco Camara, one of the lead singers from Etoiles de Boulbinet, said, "Young musicians, young artists, we're the real warriors for solidarity and peace in this country. When there's a problem, we stand up. We tell people, Stop. Ethnocentrism isn't good. War isn't good. We're all Guineans" (personal communication, 18 September 2009, Conakry). Similarly, Balla Kanté, a young jeli singer engaged in urban traditional forms, told me, "I think that music can really help our country, can unify it, because there's still ethnocentrism in our country and everyone wants power, so young people were divided. But today, thanks to music, music is beginning to ease young people [. . .]. Music is helping our country through the crisis. And that same music is undoing the political crisis" (personal communication, 5 September 2009, Conakry).

Branco and Balla both describe a landscape where young Guinean musicians are able and willing to stand up and express their views freely and for the collective good, echoing the ideals promoted by Alpha Blondy and others. Yet, while their statements reflect ideals of democracy, accountability, and the political agency of young people, it is less clear that they represent lived reality in Conakry today. When I asked Branco and Balla for examples of songs or lyrics, for instance, both suggested to me that they were speaking in general terms rather than in reference to specific cases. My own observations during fieldwork were that very few songs by local musicians, young or old, critically examined the political issues of the day. While a flood of praise songs across the musical spectrum greeted the new military regime in 2009, there were rarely any examples of musical critique or opposition to the regime.

This is not to say that the music of Susu and other youth-oriented genres is not topical. Most fans, in fact, told me that they enjoy neo-traditional Susu music because of its relevance to everyday life in Conakry. While jeliya emphasizes history, the past and the high politics of the Mande Empire and modern state, Susu music often speaks to the low politics of the street today. Many songs do offer praise to politicians and powerful figures, but others celebrate love, family, and the vitality of urban life. Most notably, however, these songs also evoke the struggles of ordinary people. An example is the song, "Törè" ("Suffering"), by Espoirs de Coronthie. Recorded in Paris, the musical texture is cleaner than

urban traditional songs recorded in Conakry, with a minimalist arrangement of kora and acoustic guitar, and no buzzy resonance. The Susu vocals, however, paint a vivid portrait of urban poverty in Conakry:

Guiné dimédi sara mati bara gbo to sogué	Today there are so many young girls who sell [in the markets]
Guiné dimédi sara mati bara gbo to sogué, Y'Alla	Today there are so many girls who sell [in the markets], oh God
Kouyé nou yiba nde plateau rafé marché	Early in the morning they fill their trays to take to the market
Kouyé na so sexy kangré sac tongo, törè gbalou	At night, the sexy take their handbags because of suffering [i.e. they prostitute themselves]
Di ma bari ma, baba mé hebé, 10,000 khafé	They have children without fathers for the sake of 10,000 [Guinea francs]
Könö törè moufan	Truly suffering is hard

Similarly, the Etoiles de Boulbinet song, "*Cinquantenaire*" ("Fiftieth Anniversary"), expresses dismay at Guinea's lack of economic development after fifty years of independence:

Won ma économie, la Guinée 50 ans akhalan sonö	Our economy, Guinea, is fifty years old, things must move
Nan féma fo khon kha pièce don né	Why, because we have to use our coins
Nan féma fo khon kha pièce don né utilisé	Why, because we have to use our coins [i.e. our coins have no value because of inflation]

Songs such as these recount in vivid terms the hardships of poverty on the postcolonial citizen. Such portrayals would have been impossible during the Touré era, when music was required to convey optimism and pride in the postcolonial state. Today, however young Susu musicians are not afraid to sing directly about social problems and the difficulties of life in Conakry. Yet, while they foreground questions of economics, these songs largely overlook issues of politics, corruption and violence. No one is named in these songs, no leader or party is singled out as accountable, and in this way, the songs offer stirring critiques of the situation rather than of those who are responsible. In a highly personal musical and political environment, one in which musicians routinely sing the names and stories of individuals, these songs are deliberately left impersonal.

In this way, musicians from Etoiles de Boulbinet and other Susu groups reflect and shape a guardedness that has long dominated Conakry's musical and political landscape. Bob White notes that in Kinshasa, music often addresses social hardship through "plaintive love songs, [which] enable musicians to show sympathy for the situation of the average *kinois* without putting themselves at

political risk" (2008:178). Similarly, in Conakry, Susu musicians connect with their audiences through songs of suffering while nonetheless keeping direct political criticisms unspoken. Despite their discourses of resistance, these musicians exhibit the same caution as their older counterparts.

Yet, there are also different forms of contestation at work here. For one, by singing about the hardships and joys of everyday life, these musicians directly speak to urban youth, rather than their parents or grandparents. They also engage in praise-singing, which, as noted, is the primary means by which most musicians in Conakry survive. But the songs of Etoiles de Boulbinet, Espoirs de Coronthie, and similar groups also provide voice to a generation of young people who are otherwise not directly represented in forms such as jeliya or the jeli dance music of the Touré-era bands. Moreover, the foregrounding of traditional local instruments represents a break from past practices, suggesting new sounds and ideas. While bolon and kongoma add a distinctively local feel to the music, visual references to reggae and Rastafarianism also add a global, youth-oriented outlook. In addition, urban traditional music is primarily Susu. While music in Conakry has long been dominated by the Mande genre of jeliya, the new urban traditional genre adds new references and voices to the city's soundscape, offering an alternative to the political and cultural dominance of Mande. Susu music incorporates Mande instruments such as bolon and bala, as well as jeli models of praise-singing, but it is also distinctly set apart, through language, style, instrumentation, and the background of the musicians themselves. While jeliya and its variants are close to the political centre, Susu position themselves as an alternative to this "musical hegemony" (White 2008:62).

While pushing socio-political boundaries in their sounds and style, however, these musicians studiously refrain from addressing or critiquing state politics. As I describe below, such a politics of silence has long shaped musical practice in Conakry, stemming in part from local norms of opacity and secrecy, which were given new urgency under Touré's rule.

Singing Peace, Not Politics

The backdrop to this story is one of extreme volatility and violence. In the months after a coup d'état in Guinea in December 2008, the military regime that had come into power quickly lost public support due to its brutality, corruption, and excess. While the coup leader, Moussa Dadis Camara (known locally as Dadis), initially claimed to represent a brief transition to civilian rule, he soon assumed the role of dictator. Journalists and foreign diplomats were excoriated for asking about elections, while the army's privileges, power, and abuses multiplied daily. As the population grew restless with discontent through the summer of 2009, this situation became increasingly untenable. Although it was

still Ramadan, traditionally a time of no political or musical activity, the first protests against the regime were held in Conakry's suburbs by late summer. The government responded by blocking all text message services, which had been used to mobilize demonstrators. Liberia and Senegal sent their presidents to Conakry to negotiate with the president and reach a peaceful solution. The government organized a number of well-known musicians to entertain the visiting dignitaries and show their unwavering support. Opposition politicians began making increasingly vocal statements about their plans to contest President Dadis' rule. The regime paid young people and women to march down the main thoroughfare in town while chanting pro-army slogans.

This pattern of political call-and-response intensified over the next few weeks as the regime grew increasingly defensive, and expectations were high that *something* would happen after the end of Ramadan. As the holy month drew to a close, four opposition parties announced plans to hold a joint rally on the 28th of September, an important date in the Guinean calendar, marking the anniversary of Guinea's vote of independence from France in 1958. The rally was to be held at the National Stadium, 28 September, named in commemoration of the 1958 vote, and opposition supporters were called there to join together in a show of popular discontent against the military regime.

On the morning of 28th September 2009, I awoke to the sound of thirty or forty anti-government demonstrators cheering and marching on the street below, calling out *Democracie!* and *Non à Dadis!*. From the balcony of the flat where I was staying in downtown Conakry, I could see that the center of town was quiet—shop fronts closed, street vendors and taxis absent, no noise or movement except for the military vehicles that regularly sped past, and the groups of youthful demonstrators marching towards the National Stadium. Thousands of people from across Conakry were converging at the stadium and, over the course of the next few days, my flatmates and I heard reports of what took place there. As the rally was underway later that morning, government soldiers surrounded the stadium and opened fire on the unarmed civilians inside. At least 156 people were killed in the ensuing massacre, while countless others were beaten and brutalized by soldiers, who sexually assaulted women, arrested opposition leaders, and allegedly gathered the bodies of the dead to be burned at their military camp.[11]

The massacre of 28th September left Conakry momentarily paralyzed in shock, and over the next few days, as the markets slowly re-opened and people emerged onto the streets, the city felt eerily subdued. Most businesses remained closed and few people could be seen outside after sunset. Many friends living in the outer suburbs of Conakry later told me that they spent several days indoors, not wanting to encounter the soldiers who were rampaging through their neighbourhoods looking for those involved in the demonstration. Yet while sporadic protests did take place in the following days, within a fortnight signs of popular

dissent seemed to have died down, as the city's inhabitants struggled to resume their day-to-day lives.

In the aftermath of the massacre, it seemed that anger and a desire for change were everywhere—they were just not broadcast publicly. Two weeks after the 28th, for example, the popular reggae star Takana Zion, accompanied by members of Etoiles de Boulbinet, gave a concert at Rogbané beach, a favourite meeting place for young people in Conakry. Takana Zion is the most popular reggae musician in Conakry today and a huge crowd gathered to hear him. Throughout the afternoon concert, audience members shouted out their requests for "Crazy Soldiers," a song that Takana had released the previous year that had criticized the military for its daily abuses of power. Each time a yell could be heard for "Crazy Soldiers," however, the musicians demurred, repeatedly calling instead for the audience to "unite." As one of the musicians later told me, "We sing about peace, not politics (personal communication, Dembo Diallo, 8 October 2009). This distinction, commonly evoked among musicians in Conakry, reflects the desire to avoid overt critique, to dispel any obligation to criticize. Thus, as the political crisis has intensified in recent years, songs about peace, unity, and reconciliation have often served as indirect praise for the government, implicitly exhorting Guineans to accept their lot with the incumbent regime rather than to agitate for change.

Similar moments of conspicuous silence abounded. Despite the anger and grief that many young musicians whom I knew expressed privately after the massacre, no songs were written in protest, no mention was made of the event. Some months after the event, Espoirs de Coronthie did release a statement condemning the massacre, but this was done on the group's MySpace page, in French, rather than through song and in local languages. Moreover, at Etoiles de Boulbinet's Saturday night gig a week after the massacre, a table of uniformed soldiers sat near the stage. At one point in the evening, one of the musicians took the microphone and began singing their praise in a mixture of French and Susu: *I nu wali! Merci!* Thank you, Guinean Army! The soldiers responded with cheers and dancing, tucking folded Guinean francs into the singer's collar.

The Politics of Silence

We can understand reactions (or lack of reactions) such as these in a number of ways. For one, musicians in Conakry are largely dependent on the patronage of elites to support themselves financially. While Susu and other younger musicians discursively position themselves against the ruling powers, they nonetheless hope for support from the country's rich leaders. Maintaining amicable relations with the ruling authorities is thus both an important financial and professional strategy, while a prolonged state of emergency is simply not

economically sustainable for musicians reliant on fees from live performances and ceremonies. In addition, fear of violence leads musicians—as well as other Guinean people—to keep a low-profile in the public sphere. Surrounded by armed soldiers and symbols of military force, public expressions of anger are incompatible with maintaining personal security and safety. Living with a long history of violence and repression, from the Touré period to today, musicians and others in Conakry know to situate their feelings within a strategy of survival.

Yet beyond economic and physical survival, these responses can be understood within a broader frame, one that I term a politics of silence in postcolonial Guinea. Cultural aesthetics in Guinea have long valued discretion and concealment, as illustrated by the Mande proverb, *Kuma te kunan ceba min könö, ko te diya wo la*: "An intelligent man keeps the words inside him" (literally, a man whose stomach cannot suppress words will never succeed at anything). According to this idea, words must be carefully controlled, while remaining silent is an indicator of moral strength (Camara, S. 1992:253). Aesthetics of discretion, ambiguity, and secrecy are intimately connected to social and cultural practice in this part of the world. Rather than being openly discussed, truth and knowledge are found hidden away in the "underneath of things," as Mariane Ferme has described (2001:6). And while local ideals permit jelilu to transgress these norms and speak freely, political exigencies in postcolonial Guinea have dictated otherwise. In the post-independence period, Guinea's first president, Sékou Touré, exploited norms of secrecy to cultivate a climate of paranoia and suspicion where Guineans were told to be constantly vigilant and to denounce traitors among them. In this atmosphere, as one friend told me, it was prudent to hide what you know. The violence of his regime, as in 2009, thus became a public secret (cf. Taussig 1999), one which musicians—along with other Guinean people—had to knowingly conceal.

In this context, silence has become an important means for musicians in Conakry to accommodate the authoritarian state and to manage their lives and careers in a highly volatile context. By muting their political voice, by remaining guarded and cautious in their lyrical practices, musicians are not simply subjugating themselves to authoritarian rule. Rather they are reconciling their aspirations with the precariousness of local realities. Thus, despite the discourse of resistance among young musicians, despite their self-identification as warriors for solidarity and peace, they also understand the need to keep the words inside them.

Silence and secrecy are not fixed norms in Guinea, but they have shaped the history of practice in local musical and political culture. Through my research, for example, I found strikingly few instances of musicians either in the past or today who dissented against the ruling regime, whether directly or through veiled critique. Young musicians today express their aspirations to speak out, yet they

must balance these desires with recognition of the prevailing cultural and political norms. They maintain silence—and sometimes even sing praise—as a gesture of guardedness and discretion, while simultaneously performing other stances, through their matted hair, their old instruments and their rebellious political speech. These various acts strike us as contradictory, or perhaps as strategically calculated, yet they can be read as creative ways in which musicians remain open to the possibilities around them. My sense is that in presenting themselves as rebellious local rastas, these musicians are engaged in performative play. Their acts of praise-singing and political silence are thus couched within layers of sound, style, and behaviour that allow multiple interpretations from listeners.

Silence thus does not simply mean an un-thought void or submission, but rather a deliberate polyvalence, an involute space in which to purposefully avoid being pinned down. My approach in this regard builds on theoretical and ethnographic approaches that seek to understand the very meanings that silence conveys. As Keith Basso notes in his work on Western Apache culture, silence is often a culturally guided decision and must be interpreted as such (1970). A number of studies have looked in particular at women's silence, building on Edwin Ardener's discussion of mutednesss. In his essays, "Belief and the Problem of Women (1975a) and "'The Problem' Revisited" (1975b), Ardener argues that dominant groups define the appropriate language and means of expression, setting the expressive rules by which others find themselves bound and thus muted or inarticulate. More recently, Michael Herzfeld has examined the ways in which Greek women use silence as an expression of irony as well as a means of protecting themselves from social censure (1991), while Hélène Neveu Kringelbach similarly explores the quiet, unspoken transgressions of women's participation in Senegalese *sabar* dance performances (2007). Further, Kay Kaufman Shelemay suggests that the public silence of Syrian Jewish women exists in fluid relation with their private musical lives, whose affective power should not be underestimated (2009). In these examples, silence exists as a dense presence, both intensifying and complicating existing structures of power.

While much social scientific work deploys voice as a metaphor for inclusion and participation, silence tends to be framed in opposition, as a metaphor for exclusion or marginalization.[12] By exploring the space of silence, however, anthropological and ethnomusicological studies provide more interesting ways to read it than as either submission or resistance. Among young musicians in Conakry, silence is a choice actively made and deliberately maintained in order to play between categories, to create possibility and imagine multiple ways of being. In this way, these musicians maintain a "coolly realistic" sense of their social circumstances and their audiences (Eagleton 1991:36), whether angry young fans or soldiers with cash to spend.

Diasporic Dissent

A few weeks after the 28th September massacre, three well-known Guinean musicians based in Paris released the song, "*Manguè Wouléfalè*" ("Chief Liar"), a scathing indictment of the military junta, using a powerful local insult in its title. The song, with slow, off-beat rhythm guitar, hissing hi-hats and vocal harmonies, follows a fairly standard reggae format, with added bala (xylophone) and some call-and-response. The reggae singers Alpha Wess and Alseny Kouyaté provide alternating solos in French, while the singer Bill de Sam adds a spoken word section in Susu. His story recounts a traditional morality tale about a man named Moussa, adapted here to refer to the junta president Moussa Dadis Camara. While this section offers a veiled metaphorical critique, the passages in French are more direct, with forceful words against the military regime:

Tu nous as dit que	You told us that
Tu es venu pour libérer le peuple.	You came to free the people
On ne te croit pas, on ne te croit plus.	We don't believe you, we don't believe you anymore
Un chef d'état qui tire sur sa population	A head of state who shoots his people
On ne le croit pas, on ne le croit plus.	We don't believe it, we don't believe it anymore
Il faut quitter le pouvoir.	You have to step down.

The accompanying video for "Manguè Wouléfalè" shows the musicians prowling and bouncing along the streets of Paris, or standing before graffitied urban walls as they sing directly into the camera. Interspersed with these scenes are two contrasting sets of images. The first features footage of Guinean demonstrators in Paris, marching along the streets in anger while wielding anti-military slogans and banners demanding *Non à Dadis!* The second set of images features shocking pictures from Conakry, captured on mobile phones on the day of the massacre and in the following week, and documenting the abuses committed by soldiers outside the national stadium. Shots of bloodied bodies and corpses wrapped in white muslin are juxtaposed with pictures of armed soldiers in camouflage uniforms and green military berets. While the scenes in Paris are glossy and infused with color, those from Conakry are grainy, rough, and muted, suggesting rushed, amateur attempts to testify to the violence. With these incendiary images and lyrics, "Manguè Wouléfalè" offered a bitter attack against the government, directly addressed to the leader of the military regime.

The contrast between Alpha Wess' song and musical responses to the violence within Conakry is striking. While "Manguè Wouléfalè" pointedly denounced the military regime, musicians in Conakry either continued to support the regime, as did Etoiles de Boulbinet in their Saturday night gig, or remained largely silent, as did Takana Zion. This difference can be understood when one considers the everyday pressures confronting local musicians to accommodate the regime.

Musicians in the diaspora, on the other hand, sing from both a physical and cultural distance, where not just the threat of violence and poverty, but also the norms of guardedness, exert less influence. Moreover, diasporic politics often emphasize protest, as reflected by the months of continuing demonstrations against the regime in diasporic communities in Europe and North America. Songs like "Manguè Wouléfalè" thus correspond to public action in Paris, New York and Montreal, as well as to the expectations of the World Music industry, which I discuss below. As such songs travel via YouTube and other media, however, musicians within Conakry face further expectations to similarly exert their voice. Young musicians in particular are caught between competing expectations as their fans consume music from other, less guarded places. This process creates tensions for musicians and consumers alike. One Guinean friend told me, for example, that the images of violence shown in Alpha Wess' video were from Rwanda, even though distinguishing features of Conakry life are clearly visible. Such a reluctance to accept the images as local, resonates however, with longstanding norms to keep state violence opaque and unsaid. At the same time, the circulation of such images, and the direct and pointed criticisms against the regime, inevitably ups the stakes for musicians in Conakry.

Musical Heroism

Anthropological approaches to politics and power have long drawn attention to the everyday acts of resistance undertaken by dominated groups. Key studies here emphasize the hidden transcripts of the dominated, the subtle strategies that they employ to defy their social inequality in quietly subversive ways (Scott 1990; see also, Scott 1985; Ong 1987). The notion of resistance thus provides a way to read seemingly ordinary behavior in overtly political ways, to infuse everyday actions with heroic and oppositional intent. As a result, as Robert Young notes, resistance is a form of behavior that scholars have often "celebrated for its own sake," for the righteousness that it implies (2001:355).

Beyond anthropology, musicians and music commentators have also been drawn to this idea. As Martin Stokes observes, the "romance of resistance" has often lead World Music stars to present themselves as political rebels on the international stage (2004:61). Thomas Turino cites the example of the Zimbabwean guitarist, Thomas Mapfumo, who has been celebrated in the World Music press more for his politics than for his music. Political activism during the *chimurenga* liberation struggle in the 1970s became key to Mapfumo's international commercial success: "Worldbeat fans—white, liberal, college types—wanted a musical hero [. . .]. Mapfumo was quite possibly pushed to emphasize a political point in foreign interviews, largely due to the orientation of his foreign interviewers and his awareness of the desires of his worldbeat audience" (Turino 2000:339).

African musical heroes such as Mapfumo capture global imaginations attuned to stories of African dictatorship and corruption. African people are often portrayed as the world's underdogs, and the story of political resistance by the weak against the powerful provides a seemingly irresistible narrative within which to contextualize songs. The recent success of the Broadway musical *Fela!*, based on the life of the Nigerian afro-beat pioneer Fela Kuti, attests to this desire to find activism and oppositional politics in African music, even though most music from the continent is in fact in support of incumbent regimes (Englert 2008; see also Barber 1987; Nyamjoh & Fokwang 2005).

The situation is further complicated by World Music discourses. Representations of the Susu group, Espoirs de Coronthie, illustrate the tendency to portray African youth music as a site for resistance and political opposition. As well as being enormously popular in Conakry, Espoirs de Coronthie has also achieved success in Europe, where the band spends several months of each year touring the continent and recording. European commentators often fixate on the rags-to-riches story, narrating a rather essentialized view of the group. A brief review of Internet commentary on Espoirs de Coronthie reveals this preoccupation: "In their home country, Guinea, the musicians of the band, Les Espoirs de Coronthie, are a phenomenon. In Coronthie, a slum of Conakry, music is a huge priority, offering one of the few chances of escape from poverty and misery (Africa Festival 2010). Similarly, the website for the 2011 Roskilde festival in Denmark states:

> In Guinea, hip hop is not the only soundtrack of the ghetto. The ancestor's instruments and musical patterns have been taken up by the poverty-stricken youth. Yet, the feeling is different. Just listen to Les Espoirs De Coronthie who make the ancient instruments vibrate. They play their spartan koras, balaphones [sic] and bongos with the same proud self-confidence and love as other, more privileged townsmen play their turntables. Three singers in front complete the impression of a new West African star ensemble with equal parts musical glow and social indignation (Roskilde Festival 2010).

Such descriptions are not entirely divorced from reality; most people in the Coronthie neighbourhood do live in poverty (although I could not state that they equally live in misery) and the music of Espoirs de Coronthie does depict the realities of the urban poor. But this music also speaks of love, religion, and football. Of the songs on their recent album *Tinkhinyi*, there are as many praise songs to powerful and wealthy individuals as there are songs recounting the hardships and joys of everyday life. Praise songs to government ministers and businessmen do not fit the heroic narrative that draws in World Music audiences, however, and these aspects of the music are largely overlooked. Instead, the poverty and alleged politics of these musicians are fetishized and thus commodified (cf. Ryan 2011).

As Stokes and Turino observe, such representations often encourage musicians to promote a certain image and ideal. For example, when I asked Kandia

Kouyaté, the kora player for Espoirs de Coronthie, about common descriptions of the group in the European media, he told me that "[O]ur music speaks of politics. People need to work honestly and African leaders need to stop manipulating the people" (email, 1 July 2010).

It should be noted that the impulse to speak out does not originate in Europe. Guinean musicians in Paris are able and implicitly encouraged to sing against the regime because of the politics of the diasporic and World Music markets, yet their desire to do so is not therefore European or foreign. As noted above, Mande social dynamics envision a push-and-pull between young and old as they vie to shape the social world. Moreover, a changing climate in Conakry today demonstrates that local people wish to have a say in their politics. While expressions of an oppositional voice have long been silenced in Conakry, both through censorship and self-censorship, over the past few years, residents of the city have begun to publicly express opposing points of view. While the threat of political violence and instability remains, a recent flood of political commentary and oppositional voices on radio airwaves and private newspapers shows a public hungry for new perspectives and ideas. As Michael McGovern argues, this change crystallized around the time of Guinea's fiftieth anniversary of independence in 2008, when public anger at government corruption hit new highs (2010). One friend in Conakry suggested to me that perhaps there was finally enough distance from the Touré era for Guinean people to be able to critically examine their past and its legacy in the present. At the same time, new technologies, such as the Internet and mobile phones, are allowing increased contact with members of the Guinean diaspora and the emergence of thriving political commentary through blogs, news websites, and similar forums. This new atmosphere of debate and dissent represents a significant challenge to the long-standing norms of silence and guardedness.

Musicians in Conakry have recently begun to enter the fray, singing about economic failure, corruption, and a desire for change. Thus, as public opinion in Guinea shifts from a spiral of silence (Noelle-Neumann 1974) to a spiral of voice, young musicians are being drawn to the growing vocal minority. Yet, as I have shown, their songs remain largely impersonal, lyrically describing citizen's frustrations while avoiding naming those who are responsible.[13] These songs are in contrast to the pointed and explicit critiques of recent street protests, growing radio and newspaper commentary, and diasporic songs such as "Manguè Wouléfalè." Moreover, even those musicians who have occasionally expressed political critique, such as Takana Zion, nonetheless largely inhabit an ambivalent space of caution in which they are able to skirt back-and-forth between stances, thus avoiding facile categorization, as the example of Takana's concert shows.[14] By framing young Guinean musicians as resistance heroes, however, World Music discourse emphasizes one aspect of their practice while denying others. Yet, as Anne-Maria Makhulu et al. have recently argued, the

socio-cultural practices of African people are often deliberately polyvalent as they seek to maintain an "open stance" to the volatile world around them (2010:8). Recognizing this polyvalence allows us to understand the complexity and interplay of actions, ideas, sounds, and words of young Guinean musicians engaged in a guarded, elusive poetics of accommodation.

Conclusion

In this article, I have considered the experiences and subjectivities of musicians who accommodate rather than resist the exercise of state power, even in the face of violence and crisis. Younger Guinean musicians often speak of themselves as actively resisting state politics and power. Positioning themselves as an alternative to the perceived moral and political complacency of their elders, their self-representations emphasize ideals of contestation and protest. Yet, these ideologies of resistance are often a reflection of the aspirations of many young musicians in Conakry, rather than of their lived practices.

The argument that I have made in this article is simply that young Guinean musicians—like all people—speak and act in many, at times contradictory, ways. The problem arises when we try to categorize them as either resistance heroes or victims of oppression. Susu musicians in Conakry are keenly aware of the social conventions and of the economic and political pressures they face. Unlike musicians in the diaspora, they largely choose not to address or attack political leaders directly, and at times, accommodate the figures and structures of authority. Yet, rather than framing this accommodation as a cold, hard calculation, I see these musicians engaged in a form of play, as they seek to balance competing expectations and desires about their art. Mixing praise songs or silence with the stylistic idioms of youthful protest, they perform a deliberately complex and ambiguous act, which purposefully eludes any one particular framing. Musicians in the diaspora, on the other hand, take a more seemingly heroic stance through their musical dissent, while also accommodating the desires of diasporic and World Music markets. In both cases, music interacts in complex ways with political aims and aspirations.

Growing interest in applied ethnomusicology has lead in recent years to a renewed emphasis on the instrumentality of music as a force for socio-political change. Yet, in order for such applied scholarship to be effective, we must first overcome the prevalent assumptions about music's inherent capacity for good. Examining the role of music and silence in supporting or accommodating violent regimes challenges us to take a more nuanced view. The Guinean example shows us not that music *cannot* be a force for change but rather that music plays many and sometimes conflicting roles in politics, as in human life in general. In the desire to create a tidy narrative of musical heroism, I have described how certain musicians are pushed and push themselves into certain boxes. Yet, rather

than accepting such categories, I argue that we should examine the ways that musicians are already engaged in "powerful and imaginative gestures of [. . .] survival" (Gikandi, 2010:xvi). Their choices, shaped by a number of economic, political, and cultural factors, may not always conform to our own political sensibilities and desires, but nonetheless we need to understand them.

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Notes

1. For example, the Canadian NGO Youth Challenge International has a number of initiatives related to this theme. See *http://ycicanada.wordpress.com/2010/07/13/afrofest-music-for-social-change-in-africa/*.

2. A number of recent studies have sought to overcome these biases by examining the role of music in war, violence and conflict (see e.g.; Fast and Pegley 2012; O'Connell, El-Shawan Castelo-Branco 2010; Pieslak 2009).

3. Examples include Bembeya Jazz's 1969 recording *Regard sur le Passé* (Look to the Past), which celebrates Touré as the grandson of the 19th-century Guinean resistance hero, Almamy Samory Touré; *Waraba* (Lion), a 1971 Bembeya Jazz recording, metaphorically alluding to Touré's strength and leadership; and Balla et Ses Balladins' 1970 *Homme de l'Afrique* (*The Man of Africa*), a twenty-minute praise piece to Touré.

4. This term, clearly borrowed from Soviet socialist realism, appears often in official documents from the 1960s and 1970s, yet is never defined. In general it serves as a catch-all phrase referring to art that promotes Sékou Touré.

5. During my fieldwork in 2009, for example, praise songs to the military regime (the CNDD, or National Commission for Democracy and Development) included "CNDD" by the *jelimuso* Hadja Aminata Kamissoko, "CNDD la mansaya", "CNDD" by the singer Aubin Théa, and "La Nouvelle Guinée" by the reggae artist Johanna Barry. In addition, a number of hip-hop, break-dance and urban traditional groups, including Etoiles de Boulbinet and the rap group Instinct Killers, held a Day in Support of the CNDD concert in Conakry in May 2009.

6. Susu is a southern Mande language group, comprising Conakry and the surrounding region. In line with common usage in Guinea, I distinguish here between Susu and Mande music, culture, and ethnicity, although they are in fact intimately related.

7. Recent recordings by both groups include Espoirs de Coronthie's albums, *Tinkhinyi* (Wountanara, 2008) and *Justice* (Fougou Fougou Faga Faga, 2012), and Etoiles de Boulbinet's album, *Guiné Khé é Ma Gnakha* (2008 [no label]).

8. The Guinean Cultural Revolution, inspired by the Maoist model, was officially launched in 1967, and served primarily to intensify Touré's personal rule over the country. Within Guinea, the entire period of Touré's rule, from 1958 to 1984, is often referred to as the Revolution.

9. In Senegal, dreadlocks are often worn by members of Islamic Sufi sects, such as the Baye Fall order, but this form of practice is not common among Guinean Muslims.

10. A number of reggae artists in Conakry told me that they chose the genre because it is the most popular among Guinean young people today, and my own observations of radio play, concerts, and Top 10 lists further support this claim.

11. Report of the International Commission of Inquiry mandated to establish the facts and circumstances of the events of 28 September 2009 in Guinea, United Nations Security Council document S/2009/693. The Commission concluded that the events constituted a crime against humanity

12. The notion of voice is arguably the most common metaphor in contemporary human rights discourse, and thus studies on voice often emphasize speaking out as the ultimate act of agency, while silence suggests coercion and censorship. Joseph Slaughter, for example, frames silence as a violation or an absence of human rights (1997), while Gayatri Spivak writes of colonized and postcolonial subjects as occupying both the margins and the "silent, silenced center" (1988:25).

13. Such songs include Phaduba Keita's "Le Voyageur" (The Traveller), which describes migration and exile as the only means for economic security. See Will Ross, "Guinea's Musicians Echo Decline, BBC News, 20October 2008, *http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7677120.stm* (accessed 9 April 2013). More recently, in 2011, the jeli Sékouba Bambino collaborated with the Senegalese reggae star, Tikan Jah Fakoly, to release "Unité en Guinée," calling on politicians to unite Guineans rather than exploit ethnocentric discourses. In the same year, Espoirs de Coronthie released "Justice," calling for an end to political crisis and violence.

14. Takana's more recent positions further illustrate this tendency. In the run-up to democratic elections in 2010, Takana campaigned against Alpha Condé, the eventual winner and current president, declaring that he would never live in Guinea under a Condé presidency. In 2011, however, Takana publicly recanted, blessed Alpha Condé as the "father of the nation", and travelled with and performed for him on a diplomatic visit to Brazil. Yet by March 2013, he had tacked back, releasing a scathing and forcefully direct indictment of Condé's tenure, "Takana Mix Alpha Condé." Reports also suggest that he is no longer living in Guinea. As this history demonstrates, Takana's musical protest has been a complicated affair.

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