

Introduction

The act of silent reading is a curious process consisting of multiple interior openings and exterior closings. As we open our books, open our eyes, and open our minds to enter the imaginative space of the text, we close ourselves off from the people around us and limit our interactions with the space we inhabit. To the eyes of an observer, the silent reader appears generally silent and still. Even so, as the reader's eyes flit across page after page, the observer may notice changes in the reader's emotional responses and facial expressions, as a brow furrowed intensely in concentration relaxes into a smile or an eyebrow raised in uncertainty eases into an understanding nod. Unable to access the sights, sounds, and sensations experienced in the imagination of the silent reader, the observer experiences a sense of disconnect that can only be reconciled by drawing the reader's attention away from the text.

It was during the summer I spent in Keur Momar Sarr, a small village in northern Senegal, that I fully realized the complex nature of the silent reading process, the ways in which it connects readers to imagined communities in other places and other times while momentarily separating them from the people and circumstances in their respective heres and nows. Prior to my departure, I spent the year reading the works of legendary Senegalese writers like Ousmane Sembene, Aminata Sow Fall, and Mariama Bâ, trying to get a sense of what I was about to experience, particularly regarding Senegalese linguistic and cultural practices. As a student of French, I wanted to know how French, the official language of Senegal, operated in relation to the country's six

national languages,¹ as well as how the official language was perceived by Senegalese citizens. As I read, I was struck by the sounds evoked in many of the novels. In addition to the unfamiliar sounds of untranslated words transcribed from African languages including Wolof, Bambara, and Arabic, my ears perked up to evocations of the sounds of West African drumbeats, folktales, and songs as well as representations of the sounds of heartbeats, footsteps, and dance steps. As a reader, I found myself listening to the books as I read them, not in a word-for-word subvocalization way, but in a manner by which I tried to anticipate the noises, languages, rhythms, and musics I would encounter and experience during my time in Senegal.

I was so excited to learn more about Senegalese music that upon my arrival in the village, I asked my hosts, Mama Gaye and Ndeye Fatou, who the musicians in the village were. After giving the matter some thought, they informed me that there were no musicians in the village. On that first night, gathered around an abundant platter of *ceebu-jën*,² I was surprised and confused by their response. How could there be no musicians in the village? Registering my apparent disappointment, Mama Gaye directed me to go out the next day in search of Natou Fall, a popular radio DJ at the Keur Momar Sarr radio station, one of a growing number of rural radio broadcast centers in Senegal.³

The next morning, using the limited Wolof I knew, I set off in search of Natou Fall. It didn't take long to find her. She lived at the other end of

1. Senegal's official language policy is explained in the New Constitution approved in 2001: "La langue officielle de la république du Sénégal est le français. Les langues nationales sont le diola, le malinké, le poular, le sérère, le soninké, le wolof et toute autre langue nationale qui sera codifiée" (Government of Senegal 2001, Article 1). (The official language of the republic of Senegal is French. The other national languages are Diola, Malinké, Pular, Serer, Soninké, Wolof, and any other national language to be codified.)

2. Often called the national dish of Senegal, *ceebu-jën* (*ceebu* = rice; *jën* = fish) is made with fish, vegetables, and rice (and is very delicious!).

3. Created in 1996 through a joint initiative between the Senegalese government and the Agency of the Francophonie, the rural radio program established rural radio diffusion sites in Bakel, Bignona, Joal-Fadioiuth, Keur Momar Sarr, and Koumpentoum. The stations broadcast programs in local languages to keep people informed about current events and social problems on local, national, and international levels. They also offer instructional and entertainment programming according to the needs and desires of the local community. As Mbangnick Ngom affirms, the rural radio stations are successful in that they connect residents of different villages in the region, notifying villagers about social programs, regional development, and special-interest group meetings (Ngom 2004). According to Abdoulaye Sidibé Wade, Catherine Enel, and Emmanuel Lagarde, rural radio can also play an important role in information dissemination about health (Wade, Enel, and Lagarde 2005).

the village in a compound just off the main road. As she welcomed me into her home, I was introduced to the five generations of women who lived there. Natou was a member of the middle generation—a mother and grandmother, a daughter and granddaughter. Aside from the women and children, there were only three men living in the compound. With difficult economic conditions in the village, most of the men worked in the nearest cities—Louga, Saint-Louis, or Dakar—or abroad in countries like Italy and France. In spite of the hardships she and her family faced, Natou always welcomed me into her home with a smile and, more often than not, a heaping bowl of food. During that summer, I became her homonym. In this respect, she gave me her name, and people in the village began referring to me as Natou. I would spend afternoons with Natou and her family, drinking tea and chasing the shade beneath the large tree in the courtyard of the family compound. It was here, in her home, that I learned so much from her about music and about life. I also learned that there *were* musicians in the village—that everyone in the village made music in one way or another, even though they weren't designated as such in the cultural context of Keur Momar Sarr.

It's been many years since that summer in Senegal, but even so, when I return to the works of Sembene, Sow Fall, and Bâ, I hear familiar sounds resonating from the pages of their novels, and it brings back memories of experiences I shared with friends and strangers in another place and another time. But it's not just their books. There are other novels written by writers from other places and other epochs filled with vibrant rhythms, musics, and sounds that convey comparable resonant sensibilities. As a reader and a critic, I am intrigued by these *texted*⁴ sonorities, in particular, by the multiple questions and possibilities they present. Why do writers translate, transcribe, and transpose⁵ sounding musical, rhythmic, and otherwise noisy phenomena in their books? What are the linguistic, aesthetic, sociocultural, and political implications of this process? But most importantly, what can we as readers learn from listening to the books we read?

Although the role of music and orality in novels has been the subject of critical inquiry (e.g., Fox 1995; Kazi-Tani 1995; Julien 1992; Melnick 1994; Tro-Deho 2005), literary scholars tend to place emphasis on the human

4. In this study, I am proposing the verb designation “text” and its derivative forms “texting” and “texted” to characterize the multiple processes of translation, transcription, and transposition that authors implement in presenting musical, sounding, and otherwise noisy phenomena in the frame of a written narrative.

5. Transposition is the double process of translating information from one language to another and transcribing oral information into a written form. In “The African Writer as Translator: Writing African Languages through French,” Kwaku A. Gyasi provides numerous examples of transposition from the works of Ahmadou Kourouma, Chinua Achebe, and Henri Lopès (Gyasi 2003).

voice, and more specifically, the messages contained in the songs and stories performed by singers and storytellers. Little emphasis is placed on the role of musical instruments, the sounds they produce, the feelings they evoke, and the messages they communicate. Even less emphasis is placed on the everyday noises represented in the novels, the contextual cues they provide, and the commentaries they sometimes offer. It is my aim to rectify this critical oversight, at least in part by exploring the connections among resonant representations of sounds, rhythms, musics, and languages in a selection of francophone novels from West Africa and the Caribbean. My design is to elaborate upon current theories about rhythm and music in novels as I investigate the aesthetic and linguistic functions of texted sounding phenomena and consider their implications in sociocultural and political domains. The novels selected for this study are Senegalese writer Ousmane Sembene's *Les bouts de bois de Dieu: Banty mam yall* (*God's Bits of Wood*); Ivoirian writer Ahmadou Kourouma's *Les soleils des indépendances* (*The Suns of Independence*); Senegalese writer Aminata Sow Fall's *L'appel des arènes* (*The Call of the Arenas*); Guadeloupean writer Simone Schwarz-Bart's *Ti Jean L'horizon* (*Between Two Worlds*); Guadeloupean writer Maryse Condé's *Traversée de la mangrove* (*Crossing the Mangrove*); and Martinican writer Patrick Chamoiseau's *Solibo Magnifique* (*Solibo Magnificent*).⁶

Before beginning a discussion of rhythmic and musical phenomena in the novels selected for this study, it is important to consider multiple definitions for the terms "rhythm" and "music." Moreover, it is necessary to address the question of why rhythm, often considered as a component of music, is regarded as a category in its own right for the purposes of this study. The separate designation is attributable to the problem of defining what rhythm is and what rhythm is not in domains of lived experience and across academic disciplines. In this respect, in considering the questions, *What is rhythm?* and *What is music?* artists and critics from multiple academic disciplines, sociocultural contexts, and linguistic backgrounds provide different definitions for the two terms, and subsequently envision divergent relational configurations between the concepts of rhythm and music.

This problem is conflated when discussions of rhythm and music take place outside of North American and European cultural and critical

6. The English titles given are those of the published translations. As of press time, *L'appel des arènes* had not been translated into English. Unless otherwise specified, all translations of quotations are mine. In citing the works selected for this study, I employ the following abbreviations: *BBD* for *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*; *Soleils* for *Les soleils des indépendances*; *Appel* for *L'appel des arènes*; *Ti Jean* for *Ti Jean L'horizon*; *Mangrove* for *Traversée de la mangrove*; and *Solibo* for *Solibo Magnifique*.

contexts, or even beyond the divides that separate disparate socioeconomic classes. As Kofi Agawu points out in “African Music as Text,” many African musical pieces have been oversimplified or misread by Western critics and anthropologists, who have tended to assert strict categorical separations between functional and contemplative forms of art (Agawu 2001, 8). Such strict divisions effectively create a taxonomic hierarchy that places Western contemplative or art music above the diverse ordinary and extraordinary musics created in non-Western cultures and by working-class citizens around the world. For Agawu, the terms “contemplative” and “functional” are far from mutually exclusive. Rather, analysis of “the social or ‘extra musical’ context[s]” of formal and informal performance pieces adds meaningful dimensions to an individual’s reception, perception, and interpretation of the musical piece in question (8). As Agawu later affirms, some of these same critics fail to recognize the complex nuances readable through an understanding of African music as “text” or even as an “activity of meaning construction . . . essential to all participants” (8). He further points out the exoticization tendencies that traditionally dominate Western or Northern criticisms and commentaries of non-Western musical phenomena, calling for a reenvisioning of how critics from various academic disciplines interpret music locally and globally. Perhaps Agawu’s holistic approach to understanding African and other “otherized” forms of non-Western music will inspire critics and listeners to challenge the relevance of the binary categorical divides used in many Western critical frameworks that essentialize and polarize categorical notions including but not limited to Occidental versus Oriental, oral versus written, or contemplative versus functional, and to simultaneously open their ears, minds, and bodies to a broader understanding of the multiple forms and functions of rhythm and music in the world.

This problem is further complicated by linguistic and sociocultural factors that influence peoples’ understanding of what is referred to in English as rhythm and music and in French as *rythme* and *musique*. As Charles Keil points out, in many Sub-Saharan African languages, there is no direct translation for the word “music” (Keil 1979, 27), and as Kofi Agawu indicates, there is often no exact equivalent for the word “rhythm” (Agawu 2003b, 21). This is not to say that the concepts of rhythm and music do not exist in African musical contexts, but rather that they are referenced and described using different terms. This explains why, on my first night in Keur Momar Sarr, when I asked my hosts, Mama Gaye and Ndeye Fatou, who the musicians in the village were, they informed me that there were none. Confused by their response, at the time, I was unaware of the linguistic and cultural differences at work.

Although French is the official language of Senegal, many Senegalese

citizens do not speak French,⁷ particularly in rural locations like Keur Momar Sarr. In rural areas, people tend to speak their maternal languages at home with their families. Some of these languages, including Mandingué, Bambara, and Balanta, are minority languages that are not represented by the Senegalese government as national languages. For those minority language speakers who do business outside of their villages, a vehicular language is often utilized for the purposes of communication and commerce. Generally speaking, Wolof is the preferred vehicular language in northern Senegal (the part of Senegal north of the Gambia), and Dioula is the preferred vehicular language in southern Senegal (the part of Senegal south of the Gambia), although other languages like Serer, Pular, Malinké, and Soninké are preferred in specific subregions. Although French remains the official language of secondary and university education, in recent years, the Senegalese government has encouraged a shift away from French to Senegalese languages in elementary education, particularly in rural areas where residents are less likely to speak French.

In Keur Momar Sarr, there were Pular-speaking and Wolof-speaking families, but Wolof seemed to be the primary vehicular language in the village. I lived with the Gaye family and spent much of my time with Natou Fall and her family. Although different members of the families represented multiple ethnic groups (Gaye is a Lebou name,⁸ Fall is a Wolof name, and Sarr—the family name of Natou's husband—is a Serer name), they all spoke Wolof at home for one reason or another. By contrast, the Sow family, who lived across the street from me, was Pular-speaking. Although some of the Sow family members—particularly Sokna, who had completed high school in the city and dreamed of attending a university—easily transitioned between French, Wolof, and Pular, many of the women in her family only spoke Pular.

On that first night, as I inquired about the music and musicians of Keur Momar Sarr (in French), I failed to realize that Mama Gaye and Ndeye Fatou were processing my question as Wolof-speakers in a Senegalese cultural context. For them, the French word *musicien* or the English equivalent *musician* translated as the Wolof word *gewel*, a word used to characterize professional musicians in Senegal—who traditionally belong to a specific social caste (*gewel*) and are regarded as “socially and ethnically distinct” from nonhereditary musicians (Cogdell Djedje 2000, 142). Although there

7. Whereas 80 percent of Senegalese citizens speak Wolof as a maternal or foreign language, about 15 to 20 percent of Senegalese speak French. Although this information is published in book form (see Leclerc 1992), the most up-to-date information is available on Leclerc's Web site, *Aménagement linguistique dans le monde*, at <http://www.tlfq.ulaval.ca/axl>.

8. As a group, the Lebou are typically Wolof speakers.

were, in fact, many nonhereditary musicians and music-makers in Keur Momar Sarr—including Mama Gaye and Ndeye Fatou themselves—there were no members of the *gewel*, or *griot*, social caste residing in the village at the time, which is why they responded as they did to my question.

The *gewel*, or *griot*, social caste is present in other West African regions as well, but referred to using different lexical terminology. For instance, among the Malinké peoples Kourouma describes in *The Suns of Independence* and the Bambara peoples Sembene portrays in *God's Bits of Wood*, the term *jali* (or *jèli*) is preferred. Nonetheless, this does not prevent non-*gewel* or non-*jèli* from performing what could be referred to or received as music by singing, dancing, playing instruments, beating out rhythms on drums and other everyday objects, or even engaging in public musical performances. In fact, as Ruth Stone points out, in certain regions of Mali, home of the Bambara characters of *God's Bits of Wood*, nonhereditary musicians, or non-*jalolu* (plural for *jali*), “play a particularly important role in the traditional making of music” (Stone 2000, 118).

This brings us back to the problem of musical terminology as a cross-cultural phenomenon, particularly with respect to non-Western musical philosophies, theories, and practices. Oftentimes, the Western (also referred to as Northern, Occidental, or Continental) lexicon proves insufficient in characterizing Eastern (also referred to as Southern, Oriental, or World) music lexicons. Rather than endorsing a hegemonic one-size-fits-all approach to international music practices and theories, it is important to recognize the different ways of designating and describing music and musical phenomena in a variety of linguistic and sociocultural contexts. In *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions*, Kofi Agawu emphasizes this point, insisting on the need to examine the nuances of multiple African lexicons when discussing African rhythmic, musical, and performance phenomena: “[T]he need to understand African musicians on their own terms and in their own languages, and to attempt to excise layers of European assumptions that might have impeded our understanding of African musical practice remains pressing” (Agawu 2003b, 21).

Francis Bebey presents a similar opinion in *African Music: A People's Art*, characterizing what Agawu refers to as “pressing” as one “crisis” among many: “The tendency to neglect the study of vernacular languages is another of the crises facing the African musician” (Bebey 1975, 122). When the issue is examined from the lexical frameworks of West African languages such as Wolof, Bambara, or Malinké, it becomes readily apparent that languages like English and French offer no ready equivalents for African musical terminology. On this note, Bebey suggests that although the Duala people of francophone Cameroon “have adopted the word

musiki from the French *musique*, they also have their own words to define specific forms, such as *elongi* (song) or *ngoso* (chant), but these can by no means be considered generic terms” (12). In another example from Senegal, the Wolof term *mbalax*, used to designate specific styles of what Ruth Stone describes as “percussion-based music, mixing Cuban rhythms with *kora*-based traditional melodies, sung in a high-pitched style” (Stone 2000, 360), remains untranslatable in English and in French. Among other examples, the *bara* Sembene prominently presents in *God’s Bits of Wood* (which Sembene simply defines as a “Bambara dance” [BBD, 28]), and the *bàkk* Sow Fall repeatedly evokes in *L’appel des arènes* (which Sow Fall defines as “poems declaimed by wrestlers” [Appel, 27]) are not interchangeable with existing English or French musical terminology.

The untranslatability of culturally specific songs and dance beats is equally apparent in Creolophone-Francophone texts and contexts. Throughout *Solibo Magnificent*, for example, Chamoiseau repeatedly incorporates the names of Caribbean songs and dances—including *lafouka*, a Creole term used to describe a partner dance driven by the hips in which dancers dance in close proximity to one another (*Solibo*, 60), and *zouc*, a Creole term for “party” used to define an Antillean musical genre characterized by a transmusical blend of Caribbean rhythms and lyrical stylings combined with African guitar styles and American funk (*Solibo*, 55). With rhythms and lyrics born out of the Caribbean islands, dances and genres like *lafouka* and *zouc* are significant in that they convey a local cultural aesthetic performed in the space of the islands and around the world. As Jocelyne Guilbault points out, *zouk* (an alternative spelling for *zouc*) and other traditional Creolophone genres are significant in that they are typically sung in Creole languages, which have “been totally rejected or at best ignored for generations” (Guilbault 1993, 11). In view of contemporary Creole language policies and practices, Guilbault adds, “It is only recently that public use of Creole has not been scorned” (12).⁹ Although, as Guilbault suggests, the Creole lyrics and rhythms of *zouk* “seem to have brought Creole speakers together one way or another,” she opens the genre to larger questions of identity (202). As such, Guilbault sets forth what she

9. In 2000, France passed the Loi d’orientation pour l’outre mer (Orientation Law for Overseas), which states: “Les langues régionales en usage dans les départements d’outre mer font partie du patrimoine linguistique de la Nation. Elles bénéficient du renforcement des politiques en faveur des langues régionales afin d’en faciliter l’usage” (Government of France 2000). (The regional languages in use in the overseas departments form a part of the linguistic patrimony of the Nation. They benefit from the reinforcement of policies in favor of regional languages which facilitate their use.) Whereas in the past, students in Guadeloupe and Martinique were not allowed to speak Creole in schools, today many Antillean schools are promoting Creole language and cultural activities in their curriculum.

refers to as “the ultimate challenge,” asserting that it “remains to agree on the definition of the Antillean/Creole identity that is being promoted through *zouk*” (202). By interweaving the vibrant sonorities of Caribbean dance beats and songs into their novels, writers like Chamoiseau, Schwarz-Bart, and Condé are taking up this challenge, creating transpoetic spaces in their novels in which individual and collective identities are (re)negotiated and (re)configured.

Such inconsistencies—lexical, cultural, or otherwise—render it difficult to make sweeping generalizations about African and Caribbean musical practices, further emphasizing the need to consider sociocultural and linguistic factors when exploring texted rhythmic and musical phenomena presented by West African and Caribbean writers. Agawu insists on this premise in “Defining and Interpreting African Music,” in which he addresses linguistic and sociocultural factors in local and global contexts in view of the conceptualization and ensuing problematization of the term *music*. Although Agawu emphasizes African musical practices in his discussion, his ideas extend conceptually to embrace the musical phenomena of interlinguistic African Diaspora communities in the Americas and the Caribbean.

Like all acts of naming, the blanket application of “music” betrays an exercise of power; it is those who construct or manipulate metalanguages who are positioned to exercise linguistic, political, or institutional power over those whose lived realities form the objects of research . . . The lesson . . . is not to interpret the absence of a ready equivalent for “music” as a deficit or lack, but to recognize—indeed celebrate—the many nuanced ways in which thinking African musicians talk about what they do. (Agawu 2003a, 2)

As Agawu explains, the lack of a direct translation for the English word “music” in many Sub-Saharan African languages opens the field of sonorous possibilities rather than limiting it. For this reason, whenever possible I choose to privilege terms presented by the writers in West African or Caribbean Creole lexicons, but nonetheless apply the broader term “music” in discussing “musical” phenomena in general. Even so, at this point, the question of how to define music remains.

In approaching this question, ethnomusicologist John Blacking’s conception of music, as “sound that is organized into socially accepted patterns” (Blacking 1973, 25), reminds us that the reception and perception of musical phenomena is open to interpretation. While at first glance, Blacking’s definition seems to provide a fluid and adaptable working model that recognizes the specificity of variable sociocultural factors, there are still lingering questions, particularly in view of the following criteria:

What constitutes a social group? Who is involved? And, how many people must conceptualize and endorse a sounding pattern as “music” before it is widely acknowledged as such? Must a social group be representative of a culture or subculture at large, or can one person define sonorous arrangements, however haphazard, as music? Can two?

Somewhat ambiguous and open to interpretation, Blacking’s definition is particularly intriguing when coupled with John Cage’s ideas about the everyday noises that can be experienced as music or incorporated into the production of musical performance phenomena. What Cage describes as possible music or components thereof—“The sound of a truck at fifty miles per hour. Static between stations. Rain” (Cage 1961, 3)—much like the sounds of respiration, the noises of footsteps, and the sonorities of people working, defies the social conventions prescribed in Blacking’s model, insisting instead on the importance of the individual subjectivities of the composer and/or listener rather than the collective acknowledgment of a social group. For Cage, music, or at least what is referred to in English as “music,” lies in the ears and the mind(s) of the creator(s) and the beholder(s).

In addressing the multiplicity of possible conceptualizations of the term “music,” it is crucial not to limit the scope of this investigation to questions of what music is or what music is not. Rather, it is important to take note of the multiple manifestations of musical phenomena and the possibilities therein, while simultaneously recognizing and respecting the fact that what resonates as music to one set of ears may not be received as such by another. Regardless of whether such discrepancies are attributable to linguistic, sociocultural, or individual aesthetic factors, the problematization of the term “music” exposes the need to regard textured musical phenomena through alternative categorical lenses.

This is where the term “rhythm” enters the critical equation. Inextricably bound to studies of linguistic, musical, poetic, and biological phenomena (among others), rhythm, like music, is defined inconsistently by different people. Perhaps this is why, when linguist G. Burns Cooper poses the question, “What is rhythm?” he parenthetically responds to himself with the phrase “(Who’s asking?)” (Cooper 1998, 16). Although equally problematic, the term “rhythm” is useful in that it can be applied to the domains of both music and literature, bridging the divides that often separate the visual work of reading from the aural work of listening.

In *Éléments de rythmanalyse* (*Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*), Henri Lefebvre goes so far as to combine the activities of seeing and listening, deeming them both indispensable in assessing the reception and interpretation of everyday rhythmic phenomena:

Rythmes. Rythmes. Ils révèlent et ils dissimulent . . .

Aucune caméra, aucune image ou suite d'images ne peut montrer ses rythmes. Il y faut des yeux et des oreilles également attentifs, une tête et une mémoire et un coeur. (Lefebvre 1992, 52)

[Rhythms. Rhythms. They reveal and conceal . . .

No camera, no image or series of images can show its [everyday] rhythms. Equally attentive eyes and ears are necessary, a head and a memory and a heart.]

For Lefebvre, such quotidian rhythms are perceptible in music and in texts, but also in marketplaces, on street corners, or in any physical setting or geographical location. Experienced as “la temporalité vécue,” or “lived temporality” (33), for Lefebvre, rhythm presents itself in everyday moments and in everyday ways—not just in the texts people read, not just in the music people listen to, but in the events and noises that shape their experiences as autonomous subjects in relation with the world. Since, in discussing sonorous texted phenomena, this study explores musical material not only as produced by human voices or musical instruments, but also the commonplace rhythms created by people, their bodies, their tools, and their environments, it is appropriate to consider rhythm as an entity in itself—both as a component of and as a complement to music. As such, in the interest of tolerating categorical and aesthetic ambiguities and of respecting multiple theoretical and sociocultural perspectives on rhythmic and musical phenomena, the terms “rhythm” and “music” are treated as distinct yet overlapping designations throughout this study.

In considering the roles music and rhythm play in the aforementioned novels, it is important to explore the ways in which music is represented in contemporary francophone narratives. Whether characterized by the sounds of traditional African instruments such as the *balafon* (a type of wooden xylophone) and the *kora* (a type of string instrument often characterized as a cross between a harp and a lute), traditional Caribbean instruments such as the *tambou bèlè* (a large tam-tam played with the hands and feet that provides the base rhythms in traditional drumming ensembles) and the *tibwa* (two wooden sticks used to strike the side of a drum or a horizontally situated bamboo chute on elevated supports), Western instruments such as the guitar and the clarinet, or human voices and body movements, sounding rhythmic and musical phenomena recognizably factor into the structure of the novels selected for this study and many others as well.¹⁰ A musicality resonates from the spaces of these texts, evoking

10. Although Francophone novels comprise the focus of this study, some Anglophone examples include: Ghanaian writer Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Haitian writer Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, and American writer Toni Morrison's *Jazz*, among others.

a multiplicity of cadences, voices, and sonorities that evoke the rhythms of songs and dances and everydayness, the soundtracks as it were, that accompany the lives of characters representing diverse peoples from different parts of the world. Implicitly and explicitly inscribed in the frame of the novel, this musical presence audibly resounds at multiple levels, filling perceptive and imaginative ears with intricate layers of rhythmic polyphony.¹¹

In addition to multiple texted representations of harmonies, euphonies, and cacophonies, vocal and instrumental polyphonies comprise meaningful dimensions in the novels selected for this study. Through the incorporation of vocal and instrumental polyphonies, writers create sounding forums in which the sonorities of multiple realities and imaginaries coincide and interact, creating spaces for communication and collaboration that impact the negotiation and configuration of autonomous identities. Although typically evoked to describe simultaneously resounding melodic components produced by human voices and other nonpercussion instruments, in some instances, the term “polyphony” can be used to characterize the multiple pitches and tones produced by idiophones (self-sounding percussion instruments) and membranophones (drums). In *African Polyphony and Polyrhythm*, Simha Arom explains instances of “polyphony by way of polyrhythmics or hocket . . . created by the interweaving, overlapping and interlocking of several rhythmic figures *located on different pitch levels* in a specific system” (Arom 1991, 307). Although his model of “polyphony by way of polyrhythmics” deals primarily with aerophone horns and whistles, it is also conceivable for pieces performed on idiophones such as the *balafon* and the *mbira* (a type of hand piano), and membranophones such as the *tama* (or “talking” drum) that are tuned to different pitches and tones. As musicologist J. H. Kwabena Nketia observes, “Limited manifestations of polyphony (many-voiced or multi-part music) occur in African instrumental traditions” (Nketia 1974, 122). In describing such traditions, Nketia cites Malinké xylophone music, a genre associated with the Malinké characters Kourouma presents in *The Suns of Independence*, as one such prominent example of polyrhythmic polyphony (123). As we will later observe, these percussive polyphonic moments are

11. Evocations of musical instruments play an important role in francophone poetry as well, particularly in the works of Senegalese poet Léopold Sédar Senghor (see “Que m’accompagnent koras et balafong [guimm pour trios koras et un balafong]”), Guyanan poet Léon Damas (see “Ils sont venus ce soir”), and Senegalese poet David Diop (see “Coups de pilon”). In their works, each poet incorporates the resonant sounds of musical and working instruments in promoting local linguistic, sociocultural, rhythmic, and musical aesthetic values while evoking the problematic histories of slavery and colonialism, and protesting the injustices of discrimination and racism.

meaningful in that they ignite dynamic interactive sounding spaces in which social identities are performed and negotiated.

In *Awakening Spaces: French Caribbean Popular Songs, Music and Culture*, Brenda F. Berrian equally acknowledges the polyphonic possibilities of polyrhythms in Antillean instrumental music, particularly in her discussion of membranophones. In describing the primary percussion components of Martinican folk music, the *tambou bèlè* and the *tibwa*, she notes, “the first is for the rhythm, and the second for the melody” (Berrian 2000, 212). By recognizing the multiple layers of interwoven percussion-driven rhythms and tonalities in multiple genres of Antillean music, Berrian approaches percussion music as a complex spectrum of interacting sonorities complete with melodic potential, rather than as a linear series of rhythms. Using conventional musical notation, the former would be transcribed both horizontally and vertically, visually representing the richness and depth of polyphonic rhythmic music, whereas the latter would be transcribed horizontally but not vertically, visually suggesting the absence of melodic components. Rather than limiting drummed music to simple horizontal transcriptions, some Antillean musicians have tried to resolve this problem by including scripted onomatopoeia to accompany their rhythmic musical notations. For example, in *Notes techniques sur les instruments tibwa et tambou dejanbe* (Technical notes on the *tibwa* and *tambou dejanbe*) produced by the Danmyé-Kalennda-Bèlè Music Association of Martinique, onomatopoeia representing drum sounds are included in the musical score in the same manner as vocal lyrics. The transcriptions—which include *bang bang tin tin*, *be doum be doum*, and *mache asou i tann* for the *bèlè* drum, and *tak pi tak pi tak tak tak* for the *tibwa*—provide drummers not only with a sense of the rhythm, but also with a sense of the drum tones and sounds the composer has in mind (Musique Danmyé-Kalennda-Bèlè de Martinique 1992, 57, 54).

For the purposes of this study, the term “polyphony” is appropriate in characterizing the interplay among the multiple overlapping tones, sonorities, and cadences produced not only by human voices and musical instruments but by percussion instruments, human body movements, and everyday objects presented in the texts. In discussing *God’s Bits of Wood*, *The Suns of Independence*, *L’appel des arènes*, *Ti Jean L’horizon*, *Solibo Magnificent*, and *Crossing the Mangrove*, it is important to examine the polyphonic and polyrhythmic aspects of the texted sonorous phenomena and the intermingling rhythmic and musical elements, specifically in view of their intertextual and extratextual implications.¹² Before assessing the

12. It is important to note that the analysis of polyphony and polyrhythms in Francophone literature has prominently figured into the critical body of work on the poetry of Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor (see Kubayanda 1982).

multiple roles music and rhythm play in these novels, it is important to define and explain the theoretical concepts that are incorporated throughout this text. Chapter 1, "Rhythm and Transcultural Poetics," lays the theoretical groundwork for discussions of transpoetic transcultural phenomena, specifically as manifest within the frame of the novel. The first part of this chapter deals with notions related to rhythm and music in the novel, approaching questions concerning the definition of rhythm, the function of rhythm, and the ways in which writers text rhythm and music. The motifs of texted rhythmic, musical, and otherwise noisy elements are further explored, particularly in view of how texts resonate to readers on sonorous (auditory) and/or meaningful (interpretive) levels. Focusing attention on the familiar sounds of footsteps, heartbeats, and drumbeats, and those of the quotidian sonorities produced through working, dancing, and other forms of music making, multiple aesthetic, linguistic, political, and socio-cultural aspects of transpoetic transcultural phenomena in critical and literary texts are analyzed and interpreted. Further attention is directed toward examining the significance of drums and drumming, particularly in view of how texted sounding drumbeats function as allegorical devices and transpoetic mechanisms. In this capacity, the ubiquity of drums and drumming not only transforms the structure of the novel, filling it with a sense of rhythmic sensibility and vibrant musicality, but also bursts hegemonic hierarchies operating outside of the texts, changing the ways in which writers and then readers negotiate, configure, and interpret autonomous identity constructs performed both inside and outside the frame of the text.

After considering rhythmic transpoetics in light of reader reception theories that address questions of individual subjectivities and cultural specificities, the notions of *transculture* and *transcultural space* are addressed in the second part of chapter 1. In examining what constitutes transculture or what occupies transcultural space, it is important to respect the equivocal nature of the terms, to appreciate the pure and possible in-between-ness, above-ness and across-ness that the prefix *trans* designates. Nonetheless, in discussing these concepts, we must insist on devising precise definitions that resist the tempting traps of ambiguity, yet still accurately reflect the complexities of the terms. A consideration of diverse theoretical approaches accompanies the discussion of transculture and transcultural space, with particular attention being focused on the ideas of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (the Rhizome), Édouard Glissant (the Relation), and Paul Gilroy (the Black Atlantic). In discussing these theories, the primary focus involves a consideration of questions of identity in connection with the concept of transcultural transpoetics, namely: How do writers and readers reconcile autonomous individual identifications with preexisting

collective identity constructs? What roles can rhythm and music play in this process? How does the work of transcription influence the formation and transformation of texted rhythmic and musical elements? And, how do linguistic, political, sociocultural, and aesthetic criteria figure into this rhythmic and musically centered identificatory model?

Although each writer, much like a composer or a musician, creates a distinct texted soundscape in each of his or her respective works, points of correspondence and commonality connect the texts in spite of spatial and temporal contextual differences. The organization of chapters in this book is intended to maximize such points of congruity, specifically in light of prominent themes presented in each novel. Although the rhythmic and musical motifs provide the principal focus of this study, particularly in the discussion of texted transpoetic transcultural spaces since they provide a *fil rouge* (a guiding thread; literally, a red thread) in all of the novels, it becomes important to provide a basis for distinction among the works. As a means of highlighting such stylistic and operative particularities, the works are considered in relation to central themes—advocacy and social activism, journeys through space and time, and death and mourning—which respectively serve as the themes for chapters 2, 3, and 4.

In chapter 2, “Rhythm and Reappropriation in *God’s Bits of Wood* and *The Suns of Independence*,” we will explore texted rhythmic and musical elements in Ousmane Sembene’s and Ahmadou Kourouma’s classic literary works. Published in 1960 and 1968 respectively, *God’s Bits of Wood* and *The Suns of Independence* both confront questions of language, identity, and authority in the eras immediately preceding Senegalese and Malian independence (as portrayed by Sembene), and following Ivoirian independence (as portrayed by Kourouma) in the aftermath of French colonialism.¹³ Focus is directed toward analyzing multiple written representations of rhythm and music in Sembene’s and Kourouma’s works. Moreover, the possible connections among the scripted sonorities of songs, dances, and other everyday cadences are explored, specifically in regard to the lexical localization strategies and stylistic musicalization techniques that both writers employ as an effective means of conveying local sociocultural and aesthetic conventions. After comparing Sembene and Kourouma’s views on language, orality, writing, and the Francophone establishment, focus shifts toward questions of resonance and representation in view of socially committed writing, political reappropriation, and identity configuration in the postcolonial era.

In chapter 2, I also define and discuss the notion of *instrumentaliture*,

13. The official date of Senegalese independence is August 20, 1960; of Malian independence, September 22, 1960; and of the independence of Côte d’Ivoire, August 7, 1960.

a new term presented in this book that I define as a phenomenon through which the sonorities of instrumental music and the sounds of everyday instruments and objects are presented in the frame of written literature. Much like *oraliture*, a process through which oral genres are translated and transcribed in written literature, instrumentality designates the space of the text as a transpoetic space, in which written, oral, and musical styles intermingle. Nonetheless distinct from oraliture, instrumentality is significant in that it creates a space for communication and exchange that lies beyond the confines of oral and written languages. Breaking free from the binary tendencies that attempt to distinguish categories such as oral and written, Occidental and Oriental, and traditional and modern by placing them in opposition to one another, instrumentality occupies an in-between classificatory zone, allowing for increased negotiation, communication, and exchange across geographical spaces and historical epochs. The implications of such identificatory possibilities become especially interesting when staged in the frame of a transpoetic transcultural literary text. In addressing questions of identity as examined in novels by Sembene, Kourouma, Sow Fall, Schwarz-Bart, Condé, and Chamoiseau, instrumentality provides a significant component—in function and in form—for assessing the implications of the designation of the text as a transpoetic transcultural space.

In chapter 3, “Rhythm, Music, and Identity in *L'appel des arènes* and *Ti Jean L'horizon*,” texted rhythmic and musical motifs and the theme of real and imagined journeys through space and time are explored in view of questions of identity as elicited by Senegalese writer Sow Fall and Guadeloupean writer Schwarz-Bart. Published in 1973 and 1979 respectively, *L'appel des arènes* and *Ti Jean L'horizon* both consider questions of language, culture, history, and identity in postcolonial Francophone contexts. In spite of the disparate geographical and temporal settings, in both novels, the protagonists embark on important identificatory journeys, traversing real and imaginary spaces, and subsequently confronting questions of collective and individual identification at home and abroad.

In discussing *L'appel des arènes* and *Ti Jean L'horizon*, it is important to consider the inventive identificatory models Sow Fall and Schwarz-Bart present in the prose of their respective novels. Since both models develop a reassessment and reinterpretation of tree-based identificatory systems, they are examined in view of the organic and abstract relational configurations discussed in chapter 1: Deleuze and Guattari's Rhizome, Glissant's Relation, and Gilroy's Black Atlantic. Moreover, these models are also explored with regard to the notions of the transpoetic and transcultural, which is accomplished through the analysis of the texted rhythmic and

musical motifs that are prominently featured in *L'appel des arènes* and *Ti Jean L'horizon*.

In chapter 4, "Music and Mourning in *Crossing the Mangrove* and *Solibo Magnificent*," we continue our examination of transpoetic transcultural phenomena as expressed in francophone novels, this time focusing on the negotiation of identity through music and mourning. In Chamoiseau's and Condé's works, published in 1988 and 1989 respectively, readers are immediately confronted with the death of a mysterious figure whose identity is posthumously reconfigured through interrelated processes of music, memory, and mourning occurring throughout the frame of the narrative. Nevertheless, Chamoiseau's and Condé's identificatory investigations are not limited to negotiating posthumous identities for the deceased characters. Rather, through the work of remembering and the music of mourning, Chamoiseau and Condé approach questions of identity not only in view of the dead—Solibo Magnificent in *Solibo Magnificent* and Francis Sancher in *Crossing the Mangrove*—but also in view of the living. As characters in *Solibo Magnificent* and *Crossing the Mangrove* assemble fragments of collective and individual memories in mourning and investigating the mysterious deaths, they are simultaneously compelled to confront questions of identity in twentieth-century Antillean cultural contexts. In analyzing Martinican-born Chamoiseau's and Guadeloupean-born Condé's respective texts, attention is focused on rhythmic and musical representations as elicited through the tasks of memory and mourning. Significant in function and in form, such rhythmic and musical manifestations, operating in the transpoetic transcultural space of the text, engage characters and readers in an ongoing process of communication and exchange through which collective and individual identities are questioned, negotiated, and (re)configured by autonomous subjects in a relational context.

In discussing the selected ensemble of works, considerations of texted representations of percussive performance traditions and innovations comprise a meaningful part of the rhythmic and thematic analysis. In assessing the roles of percussion instruments in *God's Bits of Wood*, *The Suns of Independence*, *L'appel des arènes*, *Ti Jean L'horizon*, *Crossing the Mangrove*, and *Solibo Magnificent*, it is important to note that, although the characterizations of percussive devices, drums, and drumming display similar tendencies from one text to another, their rhythms distinctly resonate in each work. Furthermore, despite the presence of multiple metaphors and common functions, the drum resists classification as a universal signifier. Fluid rather than fixed, the drum is an emblem of possibility, manifest in its capacities for communication and interaction. The allegory of the drum can be expanded in considering the roles sounding elements

play in literary texts. Through the exploration of representations of the rhythm, music, and otherwise noisy phenomena in the novels selected for this study, we will establish transpoetic, transcultural, and transmusical links that connect the texts in ways that transcend the limits of historical, sociocultural, linguistic, aesthetic, and geographical contexts and criteria. Serving as points of transaction, communication, and exchange, these links provide a basis of commonality, but in no way connote or support the limits of homogeneity.

Through the incorporation of prominent rhythmic and musical structures in their texts, Sembene, Kourouma, Sow Fall, Schwarz-Bart, Chamoiseau, and Condé establish the frame of the novel as a transcultural transpoetic space. Simultaneously functioning as aesthetic and linguistic devices, texted rhythmic, musical, and otherwise noisy phenomena can reinforce or provide alternatives to lexical localization strategies, aiding writers in positioning themselves among the diverse and divergent voices of the global Francophone community. Opening a zone where transcultural exchange and communication take place and in which autonomous identities are affirmed, these writers create vividly sonorous texted worlds filled with vibrant rhythms, musics, songs, and dances. In chapters 2, 3, and 4, we examine the rhythmic and musical soundscapes of Sembene's, Kourouma's, Sow Fall's, Schwarz-Bart's, Condé's and Chamoiseau's novels, analyzing how each writer imbues his or her text with audibly resonant potential. More importantly, however, we explore how and why these sounding techniques play such a significant role in each of the novels, addressing, in particular, the question of what happens when the freedom and possibility of rhythm and music resonate from within the textual interface of the novel.

The main objective of this study is to establish a framework for the designation of transpoetic and transcultural phenomena in a selection of Francophone novels from West Africa and the Caribbean. In shaping the argumentation, critical components from a variety of academic disciplines including anthropology, musicology, philosophy, and literary criticism are considered. Texted representations of rhythmic and musical phenomena are further examined as presented in each of the selected novels. Whether manifest in quotidian biological, mechanized, and musical rhythms, or sonorous melodies, euphonies, polyphonies, and cacophonies, through the course of this analysis, my aim is to explain how such sounding components significantly contribute not only in promoting local aesthetic values and cultural sensibilities in the works of Sembene, Kourouma, Sow Fall, Schwarz-Bart, Condé, and Chamoiseau, but also how they open resonant spaces for autonomous identity appropriation and configuration from within the transpoetic transcultural space of the text.

Simply put, in their works, Sembene, Kourouma, Sow Fall, Schwarz-Bart, Condé, and Chamoiseau designate forums for sounding off. That is to say, they infuse their works with intricate layers of sounding phenomena as produced by human voices and human bodies as they interact with the sounds of nature, instruments, and machines. Charged with intensity and emotion, sounding off is a way to respond to injury, injustice, and inequality in an attempt to make one's voice heard among many. Although typically associated with the voice, sounding off also manifests itself in other sonic ways as conveyed through the sounds of instrumental music and body movements, among other things. More than a narrative technique or aesthetic device, sounding off is an art through which writers air their grievances concerning socioeconomic and political dominance hierarchies and/or their frustrations in dealing with aesthetic and cultural conventions. They do this not only through the messages conveyed by the transcribed or transposed voices of themselves or their characters, but also through texted incorporations of the rhythms and sonorities of local languages, songs, dances, and noisy quotidian phenomena. Beyond aesthetic and thematic considerations, sounding off has important political and critical implications as well. As writers translate, transcribe, and transpose resonant sounding phenomena into the frames of their texts, they succeed in creating alternative spaces for identity configuration and negotiation, ones that lie beyond the limits of Western critical paradigms. In doing so, they activate a necessary critical shift that effectively decentralizes the discussion of identity in postcolonial and contemporary global frameworks, displacing the purported authority of the Western critical tradition and opening the conversation to multiple possibilities and perspectives among local and global networks. Moreover, writers like Sembene, Kourouma, Sow Fall, Schwarz-Bart, Condé, and Chamoiseau invite their readers to participate in the critical dialogue, to sound off in turn by responding with their own noisy acknowledgments, questions, and reactions. Perhaps this book represents my own way of sounding off in response to the calls set forth in *God's Bits of Wood*, *The Suns of Independence*, *L'appel des arènes*, *Ti Jean L'horizon*, *Crossing the Mangrove*, and *Solibo Magnificent*.