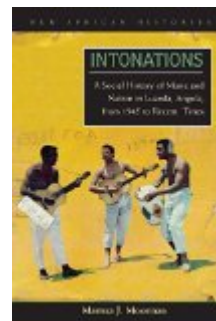


Marissa Jean Moorman. *Intonations: A Social History of Music and Nation in Luanda, Angola, from 1945 to Recent Times.* Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008. xxv + 290 pp. \$26.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8214-1824-6.



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Up until now, the history of Angolan nationalism has generally been told in two major ways. The first primarily takes into account the nationalist armed struggle, particularly the urban and cosmopolitan tendency led by the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola - Party of Labour (MPLA). This is the line, for instance, that has been naturally embraced not only by the MPLA ideologues, but also by revolutionary authors and a great deal of Western scholars. The emphasis here is put on the contribution of armed warfare towards the achievement of Angolan independence. The other approach stresses the importance of diplomacy, and focuses on the whims and intricacies of international relations. In this body of literature, Angola's path to independence is explained as part of a broader process that involved the pressures brought to bear by international organizations, such as the UN and the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and by the vested interests of Cold War contenders and domestic politics in metropolitan Portugal.

What Marissa Moorman does with her book, *Intonations: A Social History of Music and Nation in Luanda, Angola, from 1945 to Recent Times*, is to forcefully argue for a new paradigm. Using Benedict Anderson's study on nationalism as a paramount theoretical reference, Moorman proposes a "culturalist" approach to the emergence of nation and nationalism in Angola. She primarily distinguishes the nation as a political formation from its cultural references, and "nationalism" from "nation" by creating a framework that, taking a cue from Anderson, she calls "cultural sovereignty." By applying this concept to the Angolan case, she attempts to extricate the formation of the Angolan nation from the nationalism of the armed struggle and locates it as a phenomenon that emerged almost autonomously in the slums of Luanda, whose inhabitants were in the process of forging an idea of national culture. However, for Moorman, unlike Anderson, what propelled the circulation of ideas and cultural artifacts (such as music records) was not print capitalism, but what she coins "sonorous capitalism."

The idea implicit here is that Angolan music, or the music made by Angolans, produced during the period of late colonialism and circulated through the air waves and vinyl, was the harbinger of the formation of Angolan consciousness, or *Angolanidade*.

The book is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 deals with the relationship between the *musseques* (or shantytowns) and the formation of a specific urban culture, i.e., *Angolanidade*. In chapter 2, Moorman explores the intersection between this urban culture and nationalist and clandestine political activities. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 dwell more specifically on the circulation of music, including the role of women in the context of this urban popular culture; the meaning and interpretation of lyrics and their association with daily life; and the technological media that served as vehicles for the circulation of this music: radios, turntables, and vinyl records. In the last chapter, Moorman successfully demonstrates how *Angolanidade* remained autonomous from political nationalism, and the ways in which the failed military coup of May 27, 1977 (which resulted in the deaths of many thousands of Angolans) was the consequence of the clash between the MPLA leadership and the people involved in the production of *Angolanidade*. However, for Moorman the disjuncture between politics and national consciousness continues to drive the dissidence of many Angolan singers, such as the *kuduristas*.

Moorman locates the formation of the nationalistic consciousness in the *musseques*, i.e., the shantytowns “where the majority of Africans (as well as a small number of poor whites) in colonial Luanda found housing when they came to the city to enter the labor market” (p. 28). Moorman goes against the grain of the work done by colonial social scientists, who portrayed the *musseques* as places of “urban malaise” (p. 36). She successfully makes the case for *musseques* being places of creativity—relying mostly on her extensive gathering of testimonies of local informants—where “the

musical tradition of rural areas met and mixed with European tradition to form a unique new urban popular music” (p. 54). However, the lengthy elaboration on “*musseques*” also serves a strategic purpose. Moorman seeks not only to contrast slums with asphalt city, looking from center to the periphery, but, more importantly, to build a context of “anti-colonial ethics” rooted in the *musseques*, that starkly contrasts with the hegemonic mindset based upon colonial ideology and the tenets of lusotropicalism.

For Moorman the constitution of this “other space,” à la Mikhail Bakhtin, suspended from colonial rule, gravitated around the production and circulation of music. However, this raises a question that Moorman unsuccessfully comes to grips with: why is it that the music by which Angolans produced their difference and authenticity vis-à-vis metropolitan Portuguese also formed part of colonial mechanisms of control, since it was produced by Portuguese recording houses and diffused by means of colonially sponsored radio broadcasts? How was it possible that the formation of this “sonorous capitalism” bypassed the capitalists themselves who were the most important instigators of the recording and diffusion of Angolan music?

Moorman’s avoidance of dealing with race is more noticeable as she shows a particular sensibility with regard to gender issues. Often she refers to “Africans,” or “Angolans,” without however attempting to characterize each category. One assumes that “Angolans” were blacks, since there is a clear intention to eliminate whites from this narrative. However, what is lacking here is an explanation as to why whites—who were also amongst the most enthusiastic consumers—were so interested in music made to a great extent by blacks. Moorman is correct when she suggests that an idea of “folklore” was the key to whites’ interest in this kind of music. What is interesting here is that their fascination with Angolan “folklore” did not clash with lusotropicalist precepts,

since, to put it differently, the use of folklore was exactly the triumph of Lusotropicalism. Moorman refers to the fact that many Angolans, even those who were enthusiastic listeners of the music from the *musseques*, did not master enough Kimbundu to understand the lyrics. So for them, as for Portuguese, Angolan music was also folklore.

Intonations is nonetheless a pioneer work, in the sense that it blends culture and politics in a very challenging and innovative manner. Through its description of places, and its attempt to recast the voices of those who played a role in that important period of Angola's recent history, the book provides a precious glimpse of the golden age of Angolan music. That age, which was crucial for the formation of modern Angola, was characterized by a vigorous expansion of the urban fabric, a notable cultural dynamic, and the formation of a unique consciousness which manifested itself in the Angolan music of which Marissa Moorman gives such a rich and detailed account.

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