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## Le Grand Kallé and African Jazz – “Independance Cha Cha”

Simon Zagorski-Thomas

### Introduction

Although it could be told in many ways, I’m going to tell the story of this song as a story about power. The story of the Independance Cha Cha provides a lens through which I want to explore some of the nuanced ways in which music can reflect different manifestations of power. Obviously it is a song about gaining independence from colonial masters. It also tells a story of how Congolese musicians sought out a musical language that was both cosmopolitan and modern and yet avoided ceding power to the normalised European colonial tropes of ‘cosmopolitan’ and ‘modern’. It also embodies some of the tensions within the Democratic Republic of Congo in the middle of the twentieth century: of class, gender and education, of the urban / rural divide.

The Independance Cha Cha was written in 1960 by Joseph Kabasele, a.k.a. Le Grand Kallé, during the Round Table discussions in Brussels at which it was announced that the Belgian Congo, a colony for over 75 years, would become an independent state later that year. As such, it is clearly a song about indigenous citizens exerting power and taking back control of their country. Kabasele and Vicky Longomba had been invited by Thomas Kanza, who had been the first African citizen of the Belgian Congo to graduate from the Louvain University near Brussels and was, in 1959, working for the European Economic Community. This gesture harked back to the tradition of praise songs and the importance of music in the social mechanisms of Congolese cultures. Indeed, the lyrics in the verses of the song are a list of the organisations and people involved in the Congolese delegation at the Round Table. This tradition of ‘important’ people being immortalised in song is an important trope in folk music and this way that power was embodied in musical practice crystallised even further from the 1970s onwards with the practice of *mabanga*, of paying a musician to mention your name in a performance as an indication of your prestige. And so it was that Le Grand Kallé and African Jazz played each night at the Plaza Hotel in Brussels for the edification of the delegates and the entertainment (mixed with surprise) of the Belgians. They wrote and recorded the ‘Independance Cha Cha’ to celebrate this momentous event. The beginning of the 1960s was a point at which many ex-colonies in Africa were gaining independence from their European masters and the record became a pan-African hit that boosted Kabasele’s

status from being a Congolese star into an international one. Immediately after the release of the single *Le Grand Kallé* and *Africa Jazz* toured in both France and West Africa <sup>i</sup> and the song was played extensively on radio stations in these ex-colonies <sup>ii</sup>. As Alain Mabankou wrote in *Libération* in an article relating to both its importance and poignance, “Qu'est-ce qu'une révolution si elle ne se fait pas en chantant?” [What is a revolution if it is not done by singing?]<sup>iii</sup>

But the story of this record and the events that led up to it are not simply about a reversal of the power structures in the Belgian Congo. As the events that played out before and after the Round Table exemplify, the notion of gaining independence is seldom as simple as one group of people taking power away from another. While the relatively (for the time) liberal Belgian government may have been motivated on ideological grounds to solve the developing crisis in the Belgian Congo by granting independence, the Belgian economy was still highly reliant on its ownership of Congolese industries and resources. The owners of those interests and the many other international companies, particularly US ones, that had invested heavily in the region were not about to cede those interests and profits to the new national government and the Congolese people. At the same time, the Congolese delegation, as the long list of organisations mentioned in the song testifies, was far from being a homogenous group. They were divided on regional, religious, ethnic and ideological grounds and as soon as the Round Table was over their bitter disputes and unholy alliances bubbled over into violent disputes, fuelled by foreign interests including both the Soviet Union and the CIA. This was the moment when Patrice Lumumba, the first elected prime minister of the new Democratic Republic of Congo, was imprisoned and then murdered. As with many of the discussions on this subject, Gary Stewart's *Rumba On The River* <sup>iv</sup> has been a key text for providing chapter and verse about the development of Congolese popular music in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## Power

If I am going to tell the story of this song as a story about power then I had better start by clarifying exactly what I mean by power. The perhaps slightly arcane definition I am going to start with is “the perception of the potential for an action or behaviour”. A lot of the metaphors we use for power relate to a position or a state of being, but they are fundamentally concerned with the ability to do something. However, we do not need to exercise a power in order to have it. If you or I perceive that I have the power to behave in a particular way then whether or not I exert the power you are still likely to alter your behaviour based on the perception that it is a possibility.

While theories of power such as offered by Bourdieu<sup>9</sup> are mostly concerned with the circumstances and mechanisms through which some affordance is granted – money, knowledge, connections, superstition etc – they tend to think of these things as sociological ‘black boxes’ rather than exploring the psychological mechanisms. In this chapter I want to discuss how some of these cognitive processes work and how they are reflected in the musical culture behind this song.

It may seem a bit of a leap from Congolese music practice to the idea of social class but one of the enduring divisions in the story of Congolese rumba as well as more modern musical forms is the distinction between musicians from a more rural ‘village’ background and those from Léopoldville / Kinshasa where the recording industry emerged. In most parts of the world the distinction between those brought up in an agricultural tradition and those who live in towns and cities creates cultural and behavioural distinctions that emerge from ones based on working practices and economics. The process of learning through doing as an apprentice participant rather than a formal education separated from the professional practice you are learning is one such distinction. Learning as a participant encourages non-verbal or tacit knowledge which is less likely to be questioned or changed than ‘book learning’ or even

practical training that is based on verbal explanation. This tendency to preserve traditional ways of working often extends into ways of behaving and believing as well. The musical traditions of the villages tended to be more conservative and, being embedded in the daily life of a small community, they were more part of everyday culture. In the city, music was a business and a business of entertainment and, as such, musicians in the city lived on the edge of respectability and were also always looking for new trends to mark them out as different from the rest of the crowd. Of course, not everyone who moved to the city had the resources or the drive to ensure that their children could participate in the processes of formal education. While urban conglomerations provided better opportunities for social mobility, they also created concentrations of competition and those who didn't succeed in those circumstances faced not only similar privations as those in the rural areas but also a lack of the social infrastructure and sense of community which those smaller groupings could provide and which had built up over generations.

### **Évolués and Bills**

Joseph Athanase Tchamala Kabasele was born in 1930 in Matadi, the main seaport for the Belgian Congo around 150 kilometers inland from the mouth of the Congo river just before it becomes unnavigable to larger vessels. When he was still a baby his parents moved to Léopoldville and his family can be seen as an example of what both the Belgians and the Congolese called *évolués*, the disturbingly eugenics-related term for the more educated, lower-middle class black Congolese. Although the term relates to them being more 'evolved' than the rest of the native population, the Belgians restricted the education of their colonial population. They provided a limited amount of secondary school and technical education to create a class of clerks, railway workers and nurses who spoke French but it wasn't until 1954 that the Congolese were allowed to go to university. Kabasele's uncle, Joseph Malula,

had taken another route to being an *évolué* by entering the catholic priesthood and, much later, he became a cardinal. The *évolués* of the city certainly looked down upon the less educated citizens of the villages and the urban working class but it was also true that being a musician was not a suitable profession for a respectable *évolué*.

Victor Longomba Besange Lokuli, commonly known as Vicky Longomba, was the other vocalist on “Independance Cha Cha” and was born in Kinshasa in 1932. At that time Kinshasa was the name of a blacks-only suburb of Léopoldville and only after independence became the name of the whole city. Vicky was another who went through enough school to get a job as a clerk before he started to make a living as a musician. Charles Mwamba, a.k.a. ‘Dechaud’ (born in 1935) and Nicolas Kasanda a.k.a. Docteur Nico (born in 1939), the two guitarists on the recording, were brothers and were born in a village near Luluaborg (now Kanaga) in the central province of Kasai. They followed a rural tradition of taking their surnames from other relatives and so Charles was named after his uncle and Nico after his grandfather. Both of their parents were musical but they also aspired to get away from the rural life and give their sons an education in Kinshasa. Against their parents’ wishes the two boys took up the guitar and started to hang out at Opika studios near the zoo and the river in Kinshasa. Charles ran away from home for two years when he was 14 and lived and worked with a well-known singer called Jhimmy who was successfully making records for Opika at the time. Nico was better behaved and although he too started to work at the studio in 1952 and played on some of Kabasele’s early recordings, he graduated as a technical teacher from the Leopold II Institute in 1957 before he became a full-time musician. So all of these musicians, as well as Roger Iziedi, one of the percussionists on the record, had come from aspirational families where they were being brought up to be *évolués* before they rebelled. Despite this rebellious streak and their rejection of their families’ life choices there was still a strong sense of difference and class distinction when they mixed with musicians who came

from backgrounds that were more avowedly rural or working class and therefore usually less educated.

One of the most famous Congolese musicians in international terms in the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was François Luambo a.k.a. Franco. He was born in 1939, eighty kilometres south of Léopoldville. Franco's father died when he was ten leaving his family in poverty and his mother took the family to Kinshasa. His older friend Paul 'Dewayon' Ebengo taught him guitar and Franco played his homemade guitar in the Bayaka market in the city to encourage customers to buy his mother's fried cakes. Dewayon worked in a textile factory at night and neither of them went to school. In 1950, when Franco was 12 and Dewayon was 16 they formed a band and spent the next three years scratching a living until Henri Bowane signed them up to the house band at Loningisa Studios. By the late 1950s the two most popular groups in Léopoldville were Le Grand Kallé's (Kabasele's) African Jazz, and Vicky Longomba and Franco's group, OK Jazz.

Although it is too simplistic to characterise African Jazz as *évolué* and OK Jazz as the more 'village' or working-class band, there is an element of truth to this. In the late 1950s a subculture started to emerge that reflected the values of this working-class sector of urban society. They were disaffected youths who drew on the imagery of populist international cinema, particularly American cowboy films but also Indian Bollywood films. They were known as *Bills* (after Buffalo Bill) or *Hindoubills* (to combine the Indian and western imagery), dressed in checkered shirts, jeans, neck scarfs and cowboy boots and often had a penchant for marijuana. Franco, as the main song writer and guitarist for OK Jazz, was a young man who fitted this demographic and some of the photographs of the band from this period show them in neck scarfs and checkered shirts in contrast to the famous photographs of African Jazz in suits and ties. We should recognise all the complexities and ambiguities that make this narrative something that needs to be treated with caution but Vincent Luttman,

a UK guitarist who works with Congolese musicians in London, says “Musically Kabasele’s African Jazz appealed to the sophisticated or educated Congolese, whereas Franco’s OK Jazz appealed to the masses on the street.”<sup>vi</sup> It is also true, though, that these individual musicians didn’t define their identity through the lens of a single category such as *évolué* or *Bill* or that these social categories came from a single homogenous group of people. In both instances, for example, there would be people who would consider themselves members of that group because it accords with who they already think they are and others who are there because they aspired to be that kind of person. That might include those who are enculturated as *évolué* but who aspire to the ‘coolness’ of the rebellious insouciance of a *Bill* or a working class kid who aspires to the sophistication of the *évolué*. We can see these types of complexity in musical subcultures from Punks and 2<sup>nd</sup> wave Mods/New Wave in 1970s UK to Gangsta and progressive lyrics in hip hop in 1980s USA and ‘slack’ versus ‘conscious’ lyrics in 1990s Jamaican Ragga.

It may seem that at this moment at the start of the 1960s in Congolese rumba that the sophistication and education of the *évolués* is riding the crest of the cultural wave, and, indeed, Le Grand Kallé and African Jazz were closely associated with Patrice Lumumba who was seen as an intellectual and someone who could lead the *évolué* beyond their past role as the servants of the colonials. However, in a few short months Lumumba would be dead and, as Luttman puts it: “After the assassination of Lumumba on September 7, 1960, Kabasele’s career declined markedly over the next few years. Whether that’s a coincidence or otherwise is not for me to say”<sup>vii</sup>. Franco and OK Jazz, who maintained a populist stance during the elections, managed to increase their national and international popularity under the one-party Mobutu regime.

When Thomas Kanza invited Kabasele (from African Jazz) and Vicky Longomba (vocalist with OK Jazz) to go to Brussels for the Round Table, Longombe did invite Franco but he



turned it down, saying he was busy with OK Jazz. However, Vicky and Antoine ‘Brazzos’ Armando (guitarist with OK Jazz) did go and so it begs the question as to whether Franco had a different reason for declining. So Kabasele, Nico, Dechaud, Iziedi, Vicky and Brazzos, along with a conga drummer called Pierre ‘Petit Pierre’ Tantula, were the band who went to Brussels under the title of Le Grand Kallé and African Jazz and who recorded ‘Indépendance Cha Cha’. If we do consider Congolese musical society in the simplified and schematic form of *évolués* and *Bills* for a moment, then moving into the world of the colonial masters would represent a clear tipping of the scales of power in favour of the *évolués*. Those who chose to go to Brussels would have to be confident that they would be perceived as behaving in the right way on the international stage and that would be much more likely if you had an *évolué* background.

Didier Gondola<sup>viii</sup> has argued that the development of the *Bill* subculture is as much about gender politics as it is about class. He suggests that the notion of masculinity that was embodied in the *évolué* culture was perceived by *Bills* as an emasculation of the Congolese man. The masculinity portrayed in Hollywood’s wild west and Bollywood’s wild east was much more attractive to the young men in the townships of Léopoldville than the European-style, catholic, monogamous and obsequious role of the *évolué* – especially given that the rewards of the latter were restricted and not open to everyone who ‘applied’. As we have introduced gender politics to this discussion, an important part of this song’s story and its relationship to the narratives of power is the total absence of any female characters.

Immediately after the second world war in Léopoldville there were twice as many men as women as it was much more difficult for women to find work in the city. And if music was not considered a respectable profession for a man in this environment, that was doubly true for women. Once the extended sexual rituals of music were removed from the strict social control of a tight-knit community and made into a commercial activity, the

parallels with prostitution also came to the fore. Of course, male participation in the transactions of heterosexual prostitution has seldom met with the same social disapprobation or ostracism faced by female participants and the same has been true in many cultures with its metaphorical counterpart in music. Léopoldville in the 1950s is only one in a huge list of places and times in which a woman singing as a profession was considered a sign of promiscuity and low morals. The two most famous female singers – and there is no evidence of professional women instrumentalists to be found in Congolese popular music until the 1970s – were Pauline Lisanga and Lucie Eyenga although both Gary Stewart<sup>ix</sup> and Vincent Luttman<sup>x</sup> list several others. The inequalities of power between the sexes had prompted women in Léopoldville to organise themselves into associations called *moziki* – mutual self-help groupings with names like Violette, The Rose and Elegance – and these were active in the music industry as much as everywhere else. Gondola points to what he calls ‘the Janus-head’<sup>xi</sup> of the *Bills*’ attitude to women in that it was often both protective and predatory and which embodies the all-too-familiar notion of women as property. The place where women do feature prominently and frequently in Congolese rumba of this period is, of course, in the song titles and lyrics – from ‘Marie-Louise’ by Wendo Kolosoyi, and ‘Para Fifi’ by Kabasele to Negro Jazz winning over the audience at the club *Chez Faignond* by ‘shouting out’ to the Violette *moziki* who used the club as their unofficial headquarters. However, ‘Independance Cha Cha’ has a clear message about gender and power in that, for a song about the serious business of politics, all the ‘shout outs’ are to male politicians and male-run political organisations. The chorus lyric in Lingala which says ‘Independance (cha cha) we’ve won it’ is sung by male voices and the ‘we’ that gets named in the verses are all male.

## Networks of Power

So far I have focused on examples of power that exist between two individuals or groups but, of course, life is always more complicated than that. The relationship between the *évolués* and the *Bills* (or other rural and working class Congolese) was always constructed and negotiated in relation to the third party: the Belgians. The economic clout of the colonial power and the tight social control they exercised on all Congolese created as much tension between the *évolués* and the *Bills* as it did between either of those groups and the Belgians. As Renton, Seddon and Zellig<sup>xiii</sup> point out, even the act of granting independence was done as a kind of passive-aggressive exercise of power. The Belgians announced at the Round Table in February 1960 that the Congolese would become independent on June 30<sup>th</sup> that year – an astonishingly short timescale given that they had made little attempt to prepare for this eventuality before that. Both Patrice Lumumba, leader of the Mouvement National Congolais, and Joseph Kasavubu, leader of ABAKO (a party promoting the interests of an ethnic subgroup, the Kongo people) asked the Belgians privately to delay independence and install an interim government. The Belgians refused; a power play that in retrospect seems designed to cause trouble for the new regime before it even began. Of course, the way that the history of oppression had played out meant that none of the Congolese leaders could be seen to be begging favours of the former colonial power, and especially not to be seen to be admitting that they weren't ready for power and needed help. Given that Congolese people had spent the previous year or more in both active and passive revolt against the colonial rulers, there was no way for this story to be told other than through the lyrics of the chorus of this song: "Independance Cha-cha to zuwi ye!" (Independence [cha cha] we've won it!). It is hard to believe that the Belgian government was not deliberately sowing the seeds of discord between the *évolués*, who were set up to be the obvious inheritors of the government, and the

majority of the rural and working class population. The only other possible explanation seems to be an astonishing level of incompetence or naivete in the Belgian ruling class.

Another network of power that is important in regard to the creation and distribution of this track is the recording industry. Although all the musicians who wrote and recorded this song were Congolese and it is their names which will remain associated with it for as long as it is listened to, the power behind the industrial process was European. It is a strange quirk of history that all of the studio and recording companies that helped to establish the Congolese music industry – and there were around half a dozen important ones – were all Greek-owned. Greek entrepreneurs owned a lot of the independent small trading companies in the Belgian Congo and once the recording of local music was proven to be profitable by one of them, Nicolas Jeronimidis and the Ngoma studio, it set a precedent that others followed. However, the recording was only one step in the industrial process. American, Dutch, German and Swiss companies produced the recording technologies – initially microphones and either a disc-cutting lathe or, later, a tape recorder. Most of the record pressing was done in Europe at pressing plants in Belgium, France or Holland. In addition, the Belgian-owned radio stations in the Congo and the Greek and Belgian-owned record shops produced yet another layer of ownership of the fruits of this musical enterprise.

The question of how those fruits were distributed between the various participants in this network is, on the one hand, a simple matter of capitalism. On the other, it is reliant on the distribution of power between those participants. While economics thinks of price as being determined by the costs of supply and the level of demand, it is perhaps less common to think of the distribution of profits in an economic enterprise being determined in the same way. The musicians are more in need of money than anyone else in the chain of supply and their demand for that profit means that they are prepared to ‘pay’ more for it i.e., receive lower profits. In the case of each of the suppliers, the less that this individual transaction

contributes to their overall well-being – i.e. the smaller a part it is of their turnover – the lower will be their demand i.e., they will want to pay less for it by receiving higher profits in return for their outlay. In basic terms, if I need the money for my survival or comfort more than the person I am bargaining with then they will have the power to negotiate a disproportionate share of the profits in any transaction.

‘Independance Cha Cha’ was recorded in a Brussels studio associated with the Gramophone Company but they were not interested in the recording and let Kabasele sell the rights to the Belgian company Fonior who owned a studio in Léopoldville and had been releasing Congolese music already. No details of the profit split are available but it was normal practice for the performers to receive a small one-off payment and for the composer and/or owner of the recording to split the profits with the label. Of course, the distributors and the retailers would also be taking a substantial cut of the wholesale and retail prices. Although it was a hit across Africa in the early 1960s as many former colonies achieved independence, I can find no reliable figures about the number of sales.

The final network that I want to discuss is a more global musical and technological one. Much has been written about the transfer of African musical practices to the Americas and the Caribbean as part of the slave trade. Sara McGuinness<sup>xiii</sup> has written about how Victor and the Gramophone Company went into partnership after the Wall Street Crash of 1929 to market Latin American music in Africa, including several discs of Cuban *son* labelled as *foxtrot/rumba*, and how these ‘GV series’ records sparked a trend for Cuban music in the Belgian Congo<sup>xiv</sup> – with Kabasele being one of the principal players. Interestingly, the sales of the GV series must have been relatively insignificant in the early 1930s when they were first released because of the tiny number of record players in Africa at the time. Even radio didn’t come to Léopoldville until 1937 but radios were also pretty scarce. In 1939 Radio Congolia was launched, which like the early bantu radio stations in

South Africa involved broadcasting the station through permanent outdoor public address systems as well as wirelessly<sup>xv</sup>. While this didn't increase record sales for the labels, it did produce advertising revenue for the radio stations and the demand for Latin music increased. As prosperity increased, so did the ownership of radios and record players among the black population and the interest in new Cuban music was sustained.

In 1957 Kabasele recorded 'Baila', a version of the new Cuban *chachachá* dance craze that was sweeping Latin and North America and other groups followed the trend. While the power or influence of other musical styles on Congolese musicians was in part driven by the levels of exposure that companies such as Congolia and the Gramophone Company could create, the economics of taste were (and remain) an unpredictable business. While it has been said many times that the popularity of Cuban music in the Congo flows from the recognition of the influence of African slaves on its development, it is much harder to explain why Cuban *son*, Jamaican *reggae* and US *jazz*, *gospel*, *blues* and *funk* have all had different levels of influence in different African countries. How much these influences are a matter of taste and how much they are affected by levels of exposure is beyond the scope of this discussion, but both of those forces are expressions of power, either on the micro-, individual level of taste or the macro-level of international company policies. Bob White has proposed another factor in the adoption of what was, after all, the relatively sanitised Afro-Cuban rhythms of songs such as The Peanut Vendor on the GV Series. He says:

"Listening to this music was pleasurable in part because it represented the possibility of being cosmopolitan on terms that made intuitive and aesthetic sense to Congolese audiences... many Congolese comment on the fact that Afro-Cuban popular music was seen as thoroughly "modern"... perhaps it was simply because only people from a certain social category in Leopoldville had access to the phonographs required to play such music".<sup>xvi</sup>

“Afro-Cuban music was so attractive to Congolese musicians and audiences not only because of the way that it sounded, but also because of what it stood for. It provided urban Congolese with an alternative to a particular form of cosmopolitanism —Belgian colonialism—that was strict and stiff, if not cruel”<sup>xvii</sup>

This way of adopting a form of cosmopolitanism that carried the cache of western approval and modernism and yet also side-stepped the problem of valorising the culture of your colonial masters is a way of not ceding power to the Belgians. An inverted form of this phenomenon can also be found in the ways in which ‘village’ Congolese music, which suffered from the colonial stigma of being primitive or not *évolué*, was assimilated into Congolese popular music like ‘Indépendance Cha Cha’. As we noted earlier, both Dechaud and Nico came from this ‘village’ background with these ‘traditional’ and ‘folk’ resonances in their musical language. The sound of the guitar may have been modern to Congolese because of the frequently heard *tres* (a Cuban guitar-like instrument) on the GV series records, but it also had traditional resonances with lute-like instruments that were part of Congolese musical heritage. The patterns that were used on these instruments and, perhaps even more tellingly, on the *likembe* or thumb piano, form the basis of the Congolese guitar techniques that early users of the guitar, like Wendo Kolosoyi, developed and later masters such as Franco and Docteur Nico honed to perfection<sup>xviii</sup>. Creating a modern and cosmopolitan musical style that incorporates these tropes from traditional African forms is another way of taking some control and power. The muted rhythm guitar lines that Dechaud is playing behind Nico’s more melodic and ringing *tres*-like and in some places jazz inflected lines, provide a direct connection between the sound of ‘Indépendance Cha Cha’ and the traditional music of the *likembe*.

In much the same way, the popular singing style of Tino Rossi, a French-Corsican with a tremulous light counter-tenor voice who gained fame in the 1930s and 1940s, was both

popular and influential in Léopoldville, and both Le Grand Kallé and Vicky Longomba adopted some of those mannerisms. Importantly, though, they were also a way of inflecting traditional Congolese singing styles with a recognisable modernity that was decidedly un-Belgian. So while the more Cuban two-part harmony of the chorus, which is sung in a combination of French and Lingala, has a semi-military precision in the way that it follows the slightly march-like *chachachá* rhythm, the verses with their references to Congolese *griot* praise singing are like a sinuous African vocal melody with the tone of Tino Rossi.

## Conclusion

Going back to my definition of power as “the perception of the potential for an action or behaviour”, I have looked at the kinds of individuals and groupings of individuals involved in the making of ‘Indépendance Cha Cha’ who were engaged in this type of ‘perception of potential’, i.e., either had or did not have, and either exercised or did not exercise, power. I have also looked at the circumstances in which those decisions about actions and behaviour were made<sup>xix</sup>.

Even when discussing individuals, our brains are busy categorising them—village or urban, *évolué* or *Bill*, black or white, male or female, rich or poor. Indeed—categorising is a fundamental characteristic of human intelligence: we wouldn’t fall into the category of human if we didn’t have a highly developed capability for creating categories. There’s a great deal of interesting writing on the theory of categorisation<sup>xx</sup> and my whole thesis hinges on whether you agree with the implicit definitions I have employed to select and propose my categories and the ways in which those definitions contain implicit assumptions about causality. Within science and technology studies, one of the vital concepts in theories of the social construction of technology is the *technological frame* and with it the associated concept of



*interpretative flexibility*. Put crudely, these ideas outline the fact that technological innovation is influenced by the subjective interpretations of participants: their thoughts on what the pressing problems are, what the function of existing technology is, and how those problems might be solved. Of course, these ideas apply both to the participants in the development of a particular innovation, and the participants in the analysis themselves. The sociologists and historians who developed these theories, such as Wiebe Bijker, Trevor Pinch and Thomas Hughes<sup>xxi</sup>, were also challenging themselves to exercise *interpretative flexibility* and not to restrict themselves to a particular *frame*. It is a formalisation of the age-old problem of avoiding getting stuck in a way of thinking or form of interpretation.

Returning to the making of ‘Independance Cha Cha’, my analysis constitutes what we might call a *musicological frame*: a set of decisions that serve to define the questions I am asking about the piece. As I have mentioned, I am using the notion of affordances for action or behaviour as a way of defining power and I have also chosen to categorise the participants and causality in a variety of ways listed above. I could have chosen a different tack – perhaps foregrounding creativity and authenticity and categorising participants using more conventional musical divisions (instrument played, type of musical education etc). This particular *musicological frame* is, therefore, an ideological choice. It is ideological in terms of the questions it chooses to ask rather than in terms of whether the internal logic of the answers are skewed by subjective bias (although others may judge that it is skewed in that way as well). Given that this chapter was set in motion by a study day funded by the O’Connell Initiative for the Global History of Capitalism at Fordham University, it perhaps makes sense that the ideological slant of my research question leans towards the power relationships that set this particular moment of musical activity in motion. It also, perhaps, makes sense that the thrust of my argument is about social forces rather than individual

creativity – although, of course, that is not to deny there is an equally powerful narrative about those individuals as unique musical identities.

In that spirit of exploring musicality through the lens of social forces, what better way could there be of using music to express the taking back of control of your nation after over 75 years of colonial rule than through a series of musical metaphors and symbols that simultaneously express a new form of cosmopolitanism and modernity while also harking back to your ancient musical roots? Of course, this lovely, infectious tune also references the gender inequalities of the time through the total absence of a female. It reminds us of the complex and divisive social structures that these musicians embody and foreshadows the tragic events that followed-on almost immediately from this jubilant expression of hope and confidence and led to a long, violent and painful narrative where all these themes of power, inequality and resentment were played out. As Alain Mabanckou<sup>xxii</sup> points out, the joy of this song foreshadows the disillusionment that the post-colonial period was going to bring to many African states: “Independence in this song by Grand Kallé celebrated first and foremost the departure of the white man, the right of Africans to manage their continent themselves. The dances and the joy had made us forget that disillusionment would come very quickly” <sup>xxiii</sup>. However, its resilience as an optimistic symbol can be seen in its use by Congolese B-One TV in their celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence in 2010<sup>xxiv</sup> and by Afro Fiesta / Playing For Change on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary.<sup>xxv</sup> Le Grand Kallé’s career as a performer was not so resilient and, after Rochereau and Doctor Nico left the band in 1965 to pursue their own careers, he retired from singing and moved into management and promotion.

## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Tshonga Onyumbé, “KALLE Jeef Ou Joseph Kabasele Tshamala Biographie et Œuvre d’un Chanteur Congolais.”

<sup>ii</sup> Mazzoleni, “The Music of African Independence.”

<sup>iii</sup> Mabanckou, “Indépendance Cha-Cha.”

<sup>iv</sup> White, “Congolese Rumba and Other Cosmopolitanisms,” 19.

<sup>v</sup> White, 29.

<sup>vi</sup> e.g. Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind*.

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- vii Garbin and Pambu, *Roots and Routes: Congolese Diaspora in Multicultural Britain*.
- viii Gondola, *Tropical Cowboys: Westerns, Violence, and Masculinity in Kinshasa*.
- ix Stewart, *Rumba on the River: A History of the Popular Music of the Two Congos*.
- x Garbin and Pambu, *Roots and Routes: Congolese Diaspora in Multicultural Britain*.
- xi Gondola, *Tropical Cowboys: Westerns, Violence, and Masculinity in Kinshasa*, 116–48.
- xii Renton, Seddon, and Zeilig, *The Congo: Plunder and Resistance*.
- xiii McGuinness, “Grupo Lokito: A Practice-Based Investigation into Contemporary Links between Congolese and Cuban Popular Music.”
- xiv Djebbari, “Cultural Diplomacy in the Cold War: Musical Dialogues between Cuba and West Africa, 1960-1970.”
- xv Wiederroth, “Radio Broadcasting for Blacks during the Second World War: ‘It Could Be Dangerous ..’”
- xvi White, “Congolese Rumba and Other Cosmopolitanisms,” 19.
- xvii White, 29.
- xviii Pwono, *Institutionalization of Popular Music in Zaire*.
- xix Clearly, these participants range from named individuals to national groupings such as ‘the Belgians’ and the affordances that define these various forms of power range from economics and education to race and gender. And within those definitions of power and affordance there are implicit and explicit assumptions about causality. When I assert something such as ‘The inequalities of power between the sexes had prompted women in Léopoldville to organise themselves into associations called *moziki*’ I am ascribing that organisational activity to what seems like a single cause. Of course, the ‘inequalities of power between the sexes’ are not a single cause, they are a categorical grouping of phenomena which I am choosing to enlist and which would be difficult to delineate in an uncontroversial and detailed manner. There may also have been other more positive and communal causes of the women in Léopoldville’s organisational proclivities, and statements like these throughout my essay should be seen as general and pragmatic rather than absolutist. They construct a simplified and schematic representation of reality rather than a description and, as such, invite the reader to consider whether it is useful to interpret this phenomenon ‘as if’ this schematic representation were ‘true’.
- xx Mabanckou, “Indépendance Cha-Cha.”
- xxi see for example Pinch, Bijker, and Hughes, *The Social Contruction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology*.
- xxii Mabanckou, “Indépendance Cha-Cha.”

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<sup>xxiii</sup> “L’indépendance dans cette chanson de Grand Kallé célébrait d’abord et avant tout le départ du Blanc, le droit des Africains de gérer eux-mêmes leur continent. Les danses et la joie nous avaient fait oublier que la désillusion arriverait très vite” Mabanckou “Indépendance Cha Cha”.

<sup>xxiv</sup> A Youtube video of the 2010 B-One TV special can be seen at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qrNXD5qhSZI>

<sup>xxv</sup> A Youtube of the 2020 Playing For Change performance in South Africa can be seen at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bhM2IY7FM4>

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