

Matamoros's case studies and methodologies highlight the complexity of analyzing dance costumes while simultaneously revealing the potential of what close attention to costumes can contribute to dance scholarship, thus offering a springboard for further theoretical inquiry into the interrelation between dance, costume, and the body.

Linden J. Hill
Stanford University

Work Cited

Mitra, Royona. 2020. "Costuming Brownnesses in British South Asian Dance." In *Futures of Dance Studies*, edited by Rebecca Schneider, Janice Ross, and Susan Manning, 471–488. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

INFINITE REPERTOIRE: ON DANCE AND URBAN POSSIBILITY IN POSTSOCIALIST GUINEA

by Adrienne J. Cohen. 2021. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 216 pp., 42 illustrations. \$105.00 hardcover, ISBN: 9780226762845. \$35.00 paper, ISBN: 9780226781020. \$34.99 PDF, ISBN: 978022678167
doi:10.1017/S0149767723000098

Amongst many photographs of Guinean dancers in motion throughout Adrienne J. Cohen's *Infinite Repertoire: On Dance and Urban Possibility in Postsocialist Guinea*, a photograph capturing a bowl of loose Guinean francs stands out. It is accompanied by Cohen's description of the practice of "spraying" money, which she emphasizes as an integral part of *sabar*, a social dance deriving from Senegal and performed at festivities in Conakry, Guinea. Cohen notes that a distinguished attendee of *sabar* is chosen to unleash bills by dishing them into a bowl as part of the self-fashioning performance of opulence, which the dance fosters. Guinea's socioeconomic precarity postsocialism marks this moment of bill spraying as paradoxical. Privately, the author explains, the chosen guest often begrudgingly completes the task, given lack of funds. Yet publicly, this role in the dance is performed in a luxurious demeanor that resists narratives of economic vulnerability.

These moments are deemed excessive by the author: "By actively probing the threshold of a positive quality (i.e., when does bigness become too much?), these manifestations of excess perform ambivalent public feelings at the heart of the lived experience of political-economic transformation and demonstrate how embodiment can be central to an anthropology of precarity" (129). Cohen attends to the nuanced ways in which dancers act as cultural players who articulate these paradoxical and ambivalent affects with their dancing bodies in response to large-scale transitions in Guinea.

As its title suggests, *Infinite Repertoire* invests in Guinean dance practices as a site of expansive, itinerant possibilities and asks critical questions about how dance practices become semiotic tools for molding and articulating shifting "social norms and political subjectivities" after socialism in Guinea (xii). Cohen's research is based on living and dancing in Conakry, and she employs primarily ethnographic methods supported by additional archival research to focus on two distinct research sites: troupes and ceremonies. Troupes are institutions with formalized training that create dances for the stage and are also referred to as ballets, whereas ceremonies are quotidian festivities celebrating social rites of passage and unfolding in homes and on the street. Part 1 of *Infinite Repertoire* articulates the entanglement of dance and state power, including how the socialist state turned to ballet as a political tool, as well as how troupes lost state support postsocialism, fueling dance as a site to express both longing for political pasts and ambivalence toward dramatic economic and political shift in Guinea. The second half of the book turns to ethnographic observation to explore how the ceremonial dances *dundunba* and *sabar* express the reconfiguration of political subjectivity and social structures in Conakry amidst such national transformation.

Throughout *Infinite Repertoire*, Cohen turns to embodied and social aspects of Guinean dance sites to demonstrate paradoxical orientations toward a shifting political scene in Guinea. She illuminates how, on the one hand, an elder generation of socialist-trained dance artists faced the constraints of working under state power, and on the other hand, their contemporary sense of nostalgia for this period is heightened by the postsocialist

privatization of ballets and the stripping of state support. Part 1 sets the stage by outlining the entanglement of ballets and the Guinean state under Socialist president Sékou Touré, who ruled through the Parti Démocratique de Guinée (PDG) following independence from French colonialism in 1958.

The first chapter, “Why Authority Needs Magic,” articulates the ways in which Touré turned to the embodied and non-textual form of ballet for its abilities to generate “resonance,” which Cohen emphasizes as the ability of dancers to “command space and feeling beyond the dimensions of their individual bodies” (32). Touré’s particular distrust of literate communities, including political rivals and intellectuals, led him to invest in troupes as a way of communicating propaganda to illiterate communities often overlooked in political messaging. Ballets, which were often framed as “apolitical,” also allowed avoidance of direct ideological communication to the Guinean population. Cohen details the ways in which artists who worked under Touré’s presidency felt a sense of loss postsocialism, as well as how ballets became sites for performing and teaching this feeling to new dancers as artistic practices and social communication on and off the dance floor centered this theme of loss and nostalgia.

Cohen then analyzes the social structures, which materialized over time within Guinean ballets as an expression of shifting attitudes toward postsocialist transformation in Guinea. As ballets were privatized after the end of socialism, ballet directors who were primarily responsible for artistic direction and choreography began to feel pressure from younger dancers who had sought funding internationally and returned to Conakry to teach. Cohen articulates the ways that the pedagogical approaches of directors shifted: they often withheld information so as not to give away their expertise in the face of steeper competition from a younger, internationally trained generation who had previously not existed in the artistic ecosphere. She then notes the ways in which discipline and authority are intertwined in the practice of ballet, specifically in offstage moments. She also illustrates both gerontocratic and patriarchal hierarchies, including how the beating or verbal abuse of particularly women students is considered a form of payment for directors and how primarily masculinized subjects in the

directorial role turn to oratory to perform command in post-rehearsal speeches.

Throughout the third chapter, “The Discipline of Becoming: Ballet’s Pedagogy,” Cohen reads enactments of refusal—such as dancers walking out or mocking directors—that unfold across social dynamics within these pedagogical systems of authority, ultimately arguing that the site of ballet is one of concurrent hierarchy and individual negotiation. In doing so, Cohen elucidates ballets as a vital cultural indicator of how Guinean subjectivities are negotiated postsocialism. She convincingly notes how the postsocialist turn to a less authoritarian democracy has simultaneously introduced financial precarity, demonstrating how these authoritative performances are tied to a sense of political security.

The second half of *Infinite Repertoires* articulates how artists utilize dance practices to reconfigure sociopolitical subjectivities in the contemporary moment. Cohen’s ethnographic observations of ceremonial dance practices specifically focus on dundunba and sabar ceremonies, which she notes as “the frontier of aesthetic innovation for Conakry ballet practitioners” (83). She particularly narrates the ways that these more quotidian, street-based gatherings are “spaces where artists explore unspoken and sometimes not-yet-conscious feelings and potentials that shape the social life of the city” (83). Cohen outlines dundunba as an originally rural form performed in a circle with a drum and characteristic references to a powerful masculinity. She notes the “pump” as a central motion in dundunba ceremonies, in which dancers lunge “from side to side” as they “‘pump’ their arms while puffing their chests and flexing their biceps” (85). The “pump” is exemplary of the ways in which dundunba is a dance “capable of both producing and indexing power—physical, esoteric, and sociopolitical” (90). As dundunba has increasingly been performed in the urban site of Conakry, artists have drawn on the metaphysical powers harnessed in rural areas of Guinea. This has unfolded as the Guinean government has implemented demystification campaigns attempting to decrease mystical powers associated with rurality. As dundunba has increasingly been practiced in urban settings, the dance once associated with masculinity is additionally being danced by women who perform a remixed

possibility for gendered relations in Conakry. By attending to these nuanced transformations within dundunba, Cohen illuminates how dancers shift expectations of gendered and urban subjectivities in Conakry.

Next, she details the intergenerational debate surrounding the practice of gigoteau, an improvisational form within dundunba performed by younger generations of dancers that often contains “lewd or comedic gestures” (110). Cohen outlines the ways in which elders denounce the practice because it allows younger generations to stray from past repertoires. Particularly critical, as Cohen notes, are the paradoxical ways in which elder generations are tethered to core steps that they deem as authentic despite those steps deriving from their own past remixing of rural practices. These reconfigurations underscore questions of how deference, inheritance, and cross temporal cultural transmission are constructed by and expressed through Guinean dance.

Cohen’s articulation of paradoxes continues as she notes how the practice of sabar, which “coincided with economic liberalization and the opening of national borders after 1984,” displays the negative feelings experienced by dancers through this economic uncertainty (125). She traces the ways in which they perform excess by utilizing hypersexuality, electronic amplification, and gestures of opulence (bill spraying) under conditions of precarity. She defines excess as “*too much* of a desired quality, not the quality’s opposite” (129) and tethers the ways subjects perform excess within the practice of sabar to Conakry’s affective landscape of “becoming global in a way that is both vulnerable and hopeful” (140). The title of Cohen’s project, *Infinite Repertoire*, is emphasized in these final three chapters as she explores the ways that dance has become a telling site for how contemporary cultural producers in Guinea infuse continuity of the past with new configurations of affect, embodiment, and subjectivity amongst elevated economic and political change.

A particular strength of *Infinite Repertoires* is Cohen’s tracing of multivalent and irresolute affects and performances of subjectivity through sites of dance. She makes a compelling case for embodied repertoires as revelatory of Conakry’s complex sociocultural temperature amongst a postsocialist transition. Her attention to choreographic practices is complimented by her inclusion of offstage and quotidian moments, acts of

sarcastic mimicry or the tone of oration. Cohen’s project could have been bolstered by more nuanced articulation of how her own positionality as a white, non-Guinean dancer may have affected the contours of the very ambivalent articulations that she highlights. However, her primarily ethnographic methodology is also one of the project’s central strengths as the observations it mobilized illuminated interactions and phenomena unfolding on- and offstage that strengthened Cohen’s overall argument. *Infinite Repertoires* joins literature outlining contemporary African dance in postcolonial settings, including H el ene Neveu Kringelbach’s *Dance Circles: Movement, Morality and Self-Fashioning in Urban Senegal* (2013); Amy Swanson’s “Ambiguous Masculinities: Gender and Sexual Transgression in Contemporary Dance Works by Senegalese Men” (2019); Catherine Cole’s *Performance and the Afterlives of Injustice* (2020); Mlondolozzi Zondi’s “Venus and the (R) uses of Power: Nelisiwe Xaba’s *They Look at Me and That’s All They Think*” (2020); Sabine S orgel’s *Contemporary African Dance Theatre: Phenomenology, Whiteness, and the Gaze* (2021); and Ketu H. Katrak’s *Jay Pather, Performance, and Spatial Politics in South Africa* (2021). Dance studies has a critical need for further research on contemporary African dance practices, and Cohen’s work makes indelible marks in this lineage by illuminating the particularity of postsocialist transition in Conakry, an under-represented city in the field of African dance studies. As Cohen notes, “By inheriting and interpreting such semiotic repertoires, young Guinean artists build continuity into change and have afforded dance a central position in the contemporary city” (144). Cohen’s research contributes to understanding how articulations of transforming sociopolitical affects and subjectivities can be traced outside of the formal boundaries of political activity, especially through dance’s uses, practices, and iterations.

Danielle Ross
Northwestern University

Works Cited

Cole, Catherine. 2020. *Performance and the Afterlives of Injustice*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

- Katrak, Ketu H. 2021. *Jay Pather, Performance, and Spatial Politics in South Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Kringelbach, Hélène Neveu. 2013. *Dance Circles: Movement, Morality and Self-Fashioning in Urban Senegal*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Sörgel, Sabine. 2021. *Contemporary African Dance Theatre: Phenomenology, Whiteness, and the Gaze*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Swanson, Amy. 2019. "Ambiguous Masculinities: Gender and Sexual Transgression in Contemporary Dance Works by Senegalese Men." *Dance Research Journal* 51 (3): 47–65.
- Zondi, Mlondolozzi. 2020. "Venus and the (R) uses of Power: Nelisiwe Xaba's *They Look at Me and That's All They Think*." *The Drama Review* 64 (2): 18–27.