



DISCOnections

Popular Music Audiences
in Freetown, Sierra Leone

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DISCOnnnections

Popular Music Audiences
in Freetown, Sierra Leone

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*For My Lovely
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&

*To the Memory of
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1939-2009*

*“when things change,
it is a good thing”*

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ABBREVIATIONS

AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
APC	All People's Congress
CSA	Cassette Sellers Association
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FBC	Fourah Bay College
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MDC	Music and Disco Center
NASLA	National Association of Sierra Leonean Artists
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPRC	National Patriotic Ruling Council
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
OAU	Organization of African Unity
PMDC	People's Movement for Democratic Change
SLBS	Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service
SLPP	Sierra Leone People's Party
SSL	Statistics Sierra Leone
UN	United Nations
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

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(1) Introduction

This thesis is about the patterns of social connection and disconnection that the consumption of music helps to shape, to (re)create, and to defy in Freetown, the capital city of the West African country Sierra Leone. As a conceptual gateway for this thesis I draw on the expressive and playful metaphor from sociomusicology that “interacting sounds constitute the abstraction ‘music’ in the same way that interacting people constitute the abstraction ‘society’” (Keil 1998: 303). Hence, I aim to explore the connecting and the competing disseminations of sounds and people, the conjunctures of music practices and social affiliations, and the diverse intersections, interactions and contradictions between music and society in Freetown’s past and present.

It is a truism that music unites and *connects* people; music dissolves boundaries of otherness; music is used to shape, to assert and to express communal and collective identity. In creating aural spaces in which members of society congregate, whether physically in discos, music halls, on the street or in rather virtual spaces created through radio broadcasts or the circulation of cassettes, music does function to integrate society. While taking part in a music performance, whether live or recorded, by dancing, by singing, by listening collectively or individually, people share experiences of sounds and grooves. Music is, in this sense, indeed bringing about a “pattern which connects” (Small 1995).

By the same token, music also separates, divides and thus *disconnects* people. These divides can be due to deliberate efforts of one social group to set itself off from other – by affirming, exploring and celebrating opposed senses of who they are via music tastes and associated fashions, behaviors, ways of speaking, and other forms of expressive affiliation-markers. However, divisions can be as well delineated along the subtler boundaries between people who – without any implied efforts to create, subvert or reinforce social alliances or divides – just listen to certain music and those who do not, between people who attend a concert and the vast rest. Aural congregations produce inclusions and connections just as they produce exclusions and disconnections.

The connections and disconnections music creates between people do not necessarily follow the connections and disconnections that people create and draw between lines of spatial, social, economic, political, generational, gender, religious, ethnic or “racial” divides. Music can both *transcend* lines of spatial, social, economic etc. divides and *reinforce* them. As people listen to different sorts and sounds of music and attend different sorts of music events, they continuously connect with and disconnect from each other, thereby both crossing and reinforcing lines drawn along spatial, social, economic etc. divides.

In her seminal study of leisure in colonial Brazzaville, Phyllis Martin coined the notion of “communities of taste” (1995: 2). While an individual might always face certain restrictions that constrain the forms of leisure activities through which his/her tastes can be expressed, such as access to time and money on an individual level or the accessibility of recreational spaces on a communal level, the expression of taste, as Martin argues, nevertheless remains within a realm of ongoing contestation of given restrictions. In fact, taste might be seen as a means that in itself creates realms in which restrictive orders embedded in spatial, social, economic etc. structures and divides are being contested and suspended. Whereas other main forms of leisure activities that shape and express taste, for example fashion, art, sport or food, often tend to coincide with the preferences of others in a given social group, as defined by variables such as generation, class or gender, the “social space of music’s appeal”, as Theodor Adorno writes (1975: 79-80; *my trans.*), remains to a large extent “at the sheer booty of taste”. Music tastes transcend social and other boundaries easier. Communities of music taste might thus be understood as yielding forces

that have the potentiality to nullify the limitations of given societal structures, be it on a local, a national, a regional, or even on a global scale.

In the setting of Freetown's highly dispersed and to large parts impoverished and illiterate urban society, the connecting and boundaries-crossing quality of music sounds takes on particular significance. Music can easily traverse across and nullify spatial, social, economic etc. boundaries. For identifying with, dancing or listening to music, one has neither to actually possess its materially embodied devices (of a cassette, CD, computer, sound system etc.) nor does one have to have much of a qualifying knowledge about its forms or medium. Unlike other manifestation and "materializations" of (popular) culture, for example, film, theatre, sport or literature, the consumption of music is relatively free of preconditions. Participation in and "appropriation" of music are potentially possible wherever and whenever musically-patterned sounds dwell in and resonate across space. The social spaces, in turn, that music persuasively creates, be it physically (in discos, music halls etc.) or rather virtually (through radio broadcasts, the circulation of cassettes etc.) are potent sites for shared expressions and experiences of a commonly created but otherwise dispersed reality of Freetown's urban life. In this manner music is often providing the only public forum through and in which a nascent sense of a common identity can be found and manifested.

However, while music tastes and associated practices of music consumption are prone to transcend divides drawn along societal boundaries – and thus to *connect* otherwise divided groups of people –, various social forces and factors are in turn prone to reaffirm given societal boundaries within the realms of music tastes and practices – and thus to *disconnect* groups of people. In much of the recent literature on popular culture, the sociological category of "class", mainly defined by parameters of employment and education, is ascribed a central role in determining the musical tastes and practices of a given social group, or class (e.g., Pieper 2008, Witte & Ryan 2004). Pierre Bourdieu, in his extensive study of (French) taste formations, even describes music taste as the primal affirmation of class: "[N]othing more clearly affirms one's 'class', nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music. This is of course because [...] there is no more 'classificatory' practice than concert-going or playing a 'noble' instrument" (1984: 18). Thus, as class is a considerable element in the formation of a given social group's music tastes and practices, a group's music tastes and practices are, in turn, considerable elements in this very group's attempts to transcend their confined categorization to a social class. In this thesis I aim at exploring these, as well as other, potentially paradoxical conjunctures of music practices and social affiliations.

Readjusting perspectives

With regard to the past two decades of studies on Freetown's society, scholarly attention was widely subjugated to Sierra Leone's eleven-year-lasting war (1991-2002). This focus on violence and despair strongly neglected other, utterly prominent social and cultural dynamics of Freetown's society during the period of war as well as in the post-war years. While I do not intend to deny the effects of Sierra Leone's undoubtedly brutal war, I nevertheless propose to put its contemporary significance into an adjusted perspective. During six months of fieldwork in Freetown, which I conducted from August 2009 to February 2010 and which form the empirical foundation of this thesis, I found what might be called a fatigue with both the topic and the topos of war that people – Freetonians and Sierra Leoneans – expressed to me in manifold blunt and subtle ways. After some eight years have passed since the declaration of peace in January 2002, Freetonians appear – rightfully as it is – fed up with being associated with and confined to the dreads of "their" war. Whether this war fatigue stems from a (psychologically and morally questionable) repression of unwanted scars and memories or from a (psychologically and morally

understandable) moving on from passed scars and memories is not at stake here. Unlike many other researchers who recently entered Sierra Leone's "field", I was not in Sierra Leone "to search for the remains of a war" (van Gog 2008: 26). Rather, I was there to look beyond the scars and memories of the war. And what I found was that – despite the still perceptible scars and memories of past's dreads – a somewhat "ordinarily" turbulent but thriving urban life recaptured all spheres of the city and its people.

In this thesis I attempt to capture some of these dynamics of a turbulent but thriving urban life as they are made manifest on the intersections between the aesthetic domains of music and the social domains of Freetonian life. For this, I adapt a cross-disciplinary approach in which I critically combine analytical and methodological elements of the social science and humanities. By seizing upon concepts and methods from studies on, among others, popular culture, music, sociology, anthropology, and philosophy, I aim to calibrate Freetown's social polyphony with its musical counterpart.

The main question I will be dealing with throughout this thesis is: how patterns of music consumption reinforce, reflect and defy patterns of social connection and disconnection. In other words: why does music both unite and divide people, and how?

In a sense, the question can be answered with a most trivial and trivially short answer: because humans simply are like that. In all spheres of society and human life, people cooperate and contend, they come together and come apart, they connect with some and disconnect with others. And as music is played and listened to by people, the same dynamics apply in the spheres of human's music lives.

However, music does its (social) uniting and dividing in specific ways. In this thesis, I propose a longer and more thorough answer to this question; or rather: I propose an apposition of related (and not always answered) questions and reflections about music's specific ways of uniting and dividing.

Chapter synopsis

I have organized this thesis in four main parts, which I in turn divided in altogether nineteen chapters. With the end of this short, first introductory chapter, I continue with *part one*. Therein I unfurl a more in-depth introduction into my field of research, that is: Freetown and its sounds, music and society (ch. 2), my main theoretical standpoints (ch. 3), and my methodological framework and practices (ch. 4). In order to examine the intersections between patterns of music consumption and patterns of social dis/connections, I adopted a combination of a historical and of a thematic approach, which I develop in parts two and three respectively. Thus in *part two*, I set forth a historiography of Freetown's changing social relationships and the concurrent, interspersed developments and changes in the city's music life. This part is structured along a chronological order, in which I trace back various main stages in the changing interplay between Freetown's society and its music from the first days of the colony in the late 18th century to the very "ethnographic present" of my fieldwork in early 2010 (ch. 5-11). The presentation and discussion of these long-established socio-musical "templates" will then serve as a foundation for the subsequent thematic discussion of contemporary Freetown's social dynamics in the realms of music. Thus in *part three*, I delve into various musical as well as "extra-musical" factors and forces of social dis/connection as I observed them during my fieldwork. I begin with a theorizing approach towards several central aspects of socio-musical dis/connectivity (ch. 12). Thereupon, I map out the broader contexts and a tentative typology of (mainly but not only) collective practices of music consumption (ch. 13-15). In the following four chapters (16-19), I turn towards

the ethnographic centerpiece of this thesis and present and discuss several main aspects and dynamics of social dis/connections in present-day Freetonians' practices of collective music consumption. I conclude this thesis with the short *part four*, in which I propose what I call – with reference to Ato Quayson (2003) – a *calibrated* reading of a relationship central to contemporary Freetown's musical and social domains, that is: the intriguing relationship between dreams and reality (ch. 20).

PART I

THE MUSIC/SOCIETY NEXUS

SOME INTRODUCTORY REFLECTIONS
AND OBSERVATIONS



(2) Introducing the City and its Sounds

Freetown sounds

As I sit on my flight back to Sierra Leone from a visit to Ghana, a Nigerian trader sitting next to me starts cursing about Freetown. "This place is such a noise! When I come to Freetown I cannot hear my own thoughts." As I tell him that I am doing a study on popular music in Freetown, he laughs at me: "So, you are studying noise." Asking him whether the megalopolis Lagos was not much louder and noisier, he denies emphatically: "No, Lagos is different. In Lagos the noise is making sense. It is a very big city, so it has to be loud. Freetown is small, but it is so noisy."

The opinion the Nigerian trader had about the sounds of Freetown was not an exception. Most expatriates and visitors I talked to share similar perceptions. They perceive Freetown as loud and noisy. In their opinion, music is not making much a difference in Freetown's sonic environment. Rather, music is considered to be noise itself, to add noise to the noise. A young Chinese merchant whom I visited at times in his electronics shop downtown once burst out raging: "Their music is no music. Loud tam-tam", after which he started to simulate what he perceived to be "their music", droning unmelodiously "bum-bum-bum-bum-bum". In a conversation about Freetown's music scene I had with a musically inclined Canadian NGO-worker, she connected the city's noise to the sparse use of playing with the volume in the music she heard around town. "People here don't know how to play with timbre and dynamics. No crescendo-decrescendo-crescendo, it is just always loud. Fortissimo forever. Just like the city." Similarly, a Frenchman, employed on a short-termed and lucrative contract by a human rights organization, remarked to me, "The music here is all just noise."

Noise is the sound of the Other, as a German saying, ascribed to Kurt Tucholsky, goes. Noise is a difficult concept to define. And as difficult a concept it is, as telling it is about the relationships of humans to the world, and to its sounds. In the broadest sense, the "sounds of the world" can be categorized along three lines: pleasant and wanted sounds such as music or intimate voices, unpleasant and unwanted sounds such as noise or hostile voices, and potentially neutral sounds. Besides being a counterpart to silence, noise can be understood as a sonic antipode to music. The lines of demarcation, however, are most flexible, relative and, to a decisive extent, socially- and culturally-defined. Different cultures have different ways of dealing with sounds and with the respective meanings sounds are ascribed. These differences are conveyed in, for example, the sonic components of religious rites and their respective handling of silence, sounds and, at times, noise. According to the respective religious and cultural codes of procedure, moments of silence and moments of sounds and noise can mark the difference between the sacred and the profane or between different religions as such. The liturgical practices of European Roman Catholics, for example, are structured along alternating moments of unified praying, solemn singing and devout silence. During the services of various expressions of African Christianity, on the other hand, loud music, often played on electrified instruments, is alternated with ecstatic praying and singing, as for example in Nigerian Aladura churches or in independent spiritual churches across West Africa.

Sounds bring about identity, sympathy, confidence or hostility. In the search for pleasant sounds and the attempt to avoid unpleasant sounds, and in the underlying processes that define what a pleasant sound is and what an unpleasant sound is, different cultures of sound emerged. The dichotomizing and reciprocally excluding categories of music and noise, and the understanding of what music is and what noise is, of what our (non-noisy) music is and what other's (noisy) music is, "speak" of these socio-cultural negotiations of the meanings of sound. Before delving into Freetonians' (emic) understandings and negotiations of the meanings of (musical) sounds – whose various dimensions form the centrepiece of this thesis –, I will first continue exploring the intriguing nature of music's alleged counterpart: noise.

The main difficulty in defining noise in a generally applicable way follows from the subjective character of its perception. What one person may perceive as noise at one moment, another person may perceive as music or pleasurable sound, while the respective perceptions may well reverse in the following moment and with the following sounds. Christopher Small gives a lucid and concise definition of noise as “unwanted sounds – sounds, that is, whose meaning we either cannot discern or do not like when we do discern it” (1998: 121). Noise can be thus understood as an audible perturbation to our sense-and-meaning-making of the world. Our sense-and-meaning-making of the world, in turn, is thoroughly shaped and influenced by the experiences we make throughout life. Because members of the same social group shape and create the world they share with each other, the experiences made by members of this group tend to be broadly similar and to reinforce one another. Their sensual and reflective means to make sense of the(ir) world and its experiences are structured along similar lines.

These matters lead to the cornerstone of modern sociological thought, that is: collective identity formation. As this (somewhat burdensome) column of sociological theory and inquiry (along with its long history of changing approaches and conceptualizations; see, e.g., Cerulo 1997) only indirectly touches upon the agenda of this thesis, I will, at this point, deal with it in a most cursory way. Two elementary approaches towards collective identity formation can be discerned, and (again, cursorily) combined. On the one hand, following the position of social constructionism, it is shared assumptions about the world and its relationships moulded and mobilized in accord with reigning cultural scripts and centres of power against which a collective’s members found, or “construct”, their “we-ness” and which holds them together. On the other hand, following a Durkheimian tradition, it is the very *acting-together* of the respective collective’s members which creates their shared assumptions about the world and its relationships and which binds the group together. The underlying processes follow a dialectical pattern. Each individual acts, more or less at least, according to the experiences made in the world of the social group he or she belongs to. These acts and experiences, in turn, shape and create the world of the respective social group.

Outsiders, either short-term visitors, expatriates, or newly arrived research students, are prone to misunderstand, or just not to see – and hear –, the messages and meanings transmitted in a given expression or sound. Their assumptions about the world and its relationships stem from another context, from other collectives’ binding constructs and acts. Among the potential perturbations to their sensual and reflective attempts to understand the new context, its relationships and meanings, *audible* perturbations are probably the one’s which are most prone to occur. As Adorno notes (1975: 68), the organs of our two most prominent senses, the eye and the ear, are marked by a deciding anthropological difference. The eye is covered by the lid. We need to open it and direct our vision to the stimuli we want to perceive. The ear is open. Rather than directing its attention to stimuli, we need to protect it from them. While sight is an active sense, the sense of hearing is passive. The process to adapt the ear to a context of new sounds might thus require either more time or more active attempts than the processes required to adapt the eye to a context of new sights.

In the course of my fieldwork, I experienced this process of audible adaptation and understanding in a very conscious manner. During my first weeks in Freetown, I stayed in a cheap brothel-cum-hotel downtown, right next to Freetown’s most bustling intersection, the so-called PZ. In terms of sounds, the area appeared to me as one big sonic havoc; an anarchic adaptation of the *Musica Universalis* reified by the confusion of humans and animals, of trolleys, cars, motorbikes, busses and trucks. Watching the street and its continuously self-rearranging maze of people and objects, the chaotic structure appears to have some sort of inherent equilibrium that keeps its movements in seamless motion; a spectacular urban ballet choreographed by the indiscernible forces of collective actions. As I joined in the performance myself, I could not keep with the rhythm, stumbled, bumped into people, and got hit by passing cars’ side-view mirrors. At any time of the day and of the night, PZ’s central roundabout is packed with vendors and hawkers selling the

universe of items available in the country. Some two dozen music sellers frame the roundabout with their stalls full of dusty cassettes, pirated CDs, and movie collections. Each has his stall equipped with a stereo playing out latest hits. Despite their close proximity, some stalls stand right next to each other, everyone is nevertheless playing his music at full volume. The interfering musical sounds harmoniously join the cacophony of the place. Together with the sounds of honking cars, the odd police siren, the muezzin's crier, the sort of white noise produced by various parlours broadcasting European football matches, and the generators fuelling their transmissions, the area around the roundabout resembles the scenario of a rampant competition for audible attention. Around PZ, Freetown's urban symphony appears indeed to be played in steady fortissimo.



Downtown Freetown's spectacular urban ballet, January 2010

However, soon my perception of the city began to change. I started to familiarize myself with the streets and places in downtown Freetown which, together with its surrounding neighbourhoods, became my main research sites. I began to understand the basics of central Freetown's urban ballet and learned to sidestep passing cars and people at the right moment. I also started to accustom myself to Freetown's sounds and to broaden my horizon about their diverse forms and manifestations. Different areas have different converses of producing and handling the ratio of sounds and silence. Each area has its own modulation of acoustic codes and restraints. The respective sounds mirror processes of social convergence and demarcation. Sonically discrete environments *mark* environments of different social realms and functions. And vice versa, each socially defined and distinguished space has its own, distinguishable sounds and its distinct relation of sounds and silence. The cacophony of the trading hubs around PZ has its complement in the rather quiet residential areas, which all in turn have their own sonic specifics. In fact, the noise of PZ seems rather an exception to Freetown's general sonic environment than the rule. In many parts of town, the prevailing sound is, actually, a sound of relative silence. In the most densely populated part of Freetown called East Side, an area stretching east of PZ all the way towards the fringes of the peninsula, this is particularly striking. In the East Side, inside some of West Africa's most congested urban space, the city is a remarkably quiet place.

On a map of Africa, Sierra Leone appears as a small splodge on the western edge of the continent. On a map of Sierra Leone, Freetown conveys the same impression. Even in terms of Sierra Leone's relatively small geographic size, Freetown occupies a relatively small area on the western outskirts of the country. Within this small area, the East Side occupies about one third of the city's geographical space. However, according to the 2004 population census, about two-thirds of Freetown's population lives in the East Side, making up about one-tenth of Sierra Leone's total population.² The area is fiercely congested. Given the density of lives lived next to each other, the quietness that marks the sonic environment of the East Side is in fact striking.



Sierra Leone in Africa



Freetown in Sierra Leone

A main reason for the rather unexpected quietness in the densely populated East Side is, on the one hand, the undersupply of public electricity and, on the other hand, the costs of electricity. According to local media, Freetown holds the unofficial, inglorious title of being "the darkest city in Africa, if not the world". Measured by real wage, electricity in Sierra Leone is estimated to be more expensive than in any other country of the world (Alie 2006: 221). Generally, the power supply in Freetown, as in other parts of the country that actually are on the electrical grid, is poor. In the East Side it is particularly bad. There, electricity is virtually absent. Because of the unreliable or inexistent service provision, many who can afford it rely on private power sources. These are mainly so-called "Kabbah Tigers", Chinese-produced generators running on diesel that are amongst the most notorious sources of loud (and noisy) sounds in Freetown. The Kabbah Tigers, however, growl only around areas and places where people can afford to pay for the fuel to run them. These are, mainly, business centres and trading hubs, the more affluent western parts of Freetown, and particular areas where drinking parlours, dancing spots, bars, clubs and their various hybrids agglomerate. In the East Side most households are not able to afford neither the fuel to run a generator nor the generator itself. Here, Tiger-run sources of electrified, loud sounds are limited to spots of trade and amusement. After the prompt setting of the sun at seven pm, the East Side obscures its sight. And as the lights are and stay off, so do many sources of loud (and noisy) sounds.

In the situation of deficient and expensive supply of electricity, loud, electrically amplified sounds, in particular music played out loud on stereos, become a rarity. Being a rarity, the presence of

² In the 2004 census, the estimate for Sierra Leone's total population is 4, 976,871, for Freetown 772,873, and for Freetown's East Side 451,509 (see Statistics Sierra Leone 2006a).

loud, electrically amplified sounds takes on the role of a social marker. When music is played out loud, it speaks of three main possible contexts of its emission: wealth, business or a special occasion. Either somebody just can afford to pay for the loud sounds, that is, for the respective medium and the required electricity, because he or she has the financial means to do so (whether this “wealth” is permanently or temporarily is of secondary concern); or somebody just has to afford it because his or her business requires electricity (e.g., selling cold drinks) or music (e.g., selling music) or both (e.g., a dance bar); or a special occasion (e.g., a marriage) leads to the suspension of the norm when loud, electrically amplified sounds are rare. Once one or several of these factors apply, the music is often, if not always, played in full volume.

Whether in a small drinking spot or a larger dance bar, at a private gathering or during public events, in a tiny shop selling “miscellaneous” or at bustling PZ, if there is a stereo playing music, the music is played either in full volume or close to the fullest. In many instances, the music’s loudness appears – at least to the newbie’s perception – to contradict the function of the place, to disturb rather than to attract potential guest or to please present ones. This putative contradiction struck me for the first time during a visit in a small bar in the West End of town, where I perceived it to be particularly salient. The bar is famous for its goat soup. Particularly on weekends it attracts many to come by and eat. The place is a rather ordinary “chop bar”, a rudimentary concrete structure with a tin roof, a couple of plastic tables and chairs, and a kitchen separated by an improvised wooden wall. People come here to eat, mainly, to eat goat soup, to chat a bit while eating, and to leave again after having eaten. As I was told by my companions, once the goat soup was finished, people did not come any more and the place remained empty until the next day and soup. The goat soup bar is about goat soup, and nothing indicates that somebody would come here to dance or listen to music. At the goat soup bar music is nevertheless played at a deafening level. Two large speakers frame the small space while the cook serves simultaneously as a DJ. As I asked him why he played the music that loud (which I in fact perceived as a disturbingly noisy volume), he replied with another question, asking me if I did not like the music. The other present customers, including my Freetonian companions, showed not a whiff of nuisance but ate and chatted apparently unhampered by the loud sounds.

This sort of misunderstanding is paradigmatic. In the first place, it speaks about my very own initial misunderstanding, or misinterpretation, of Freetown’s socio-sonic relationships and its “economy of sounds”. What I, as a newbie, perceived as an outright audible perturbation to the meaning-and-sense-making in the (for me new) world of the goat soup bar, was an accustomed and known sonic reality to the bar’s other guests. In the following weeks, I asked the same volume-question in several other places which struck me by the apparent contradiction between their function and the sonic and musical environment that was deliberately created therein. All answers I received were tellingly vague, such as: “because we like it”, “for people to hear”, or “why not?” The loudness and (what I perceived as) noisiness was not perceived as too loud, noisy or disturbing. In fact, during the seven months I spent roaming about Freetown’s places of music consumption, only in two instances I saw people complaining about the volume of the music: one time, at a vernissage at the British Council where a local DJ played for an audience comprised mostly of Freetown’s expat community; the other time, at a casino night in an expensive hotel where a Freetonian band provided the musical background to the monthly gambling-meeting of Freetown’s Chinese community. In Freetown, Tucholsky’s (musical) “noise as the sound of the Other” assumes a storybook character.

As Freetown’s music volume-phenomenon bears no, or not many, explanations when approached with emic accounts, some tentative etic descriptions might be put forward. Music, it might be thus alleged, is played out at full volume once it is played out loud at all because it attracts attention and envious, creates curiosity, signals (however factual) wealth, action, life, trade, exchange, encounter, and special and exceptional occasions. And the louder it is played, the clearer and further it sends out and emits these meanings. The connection of loud music sounds

to contexts and settings of wealth, business and special occasions also points towards a possible explanation for many outsiders' perception of Freetown as notoriously noisy, as these are mainly the contexts and settings in which many expats and other foreign visitors stay in and move about. We might, furthermore, speak of a sort of adjusted technological imperative – according to which that what *can* be done (technologically) inevitably *will* or even *ought to* be done (Ozbekhan 1968) – and translate it into Freetown's music-volume realms: once the (music) technology and its prerequisites (mainly electricity) are available, people will inevitably make *full* use of it. Not least, the loud play of music serves the fairly pragmatic reason to drown the (unmusical, noisy) sounds of the diesel generator which, in many instances, fuels the musical sounds.

As loud music is confined to wealth, businesses or special occasions, Freetown's overall soundscape contradicts a general development brought about by urbanisation and industrial technology. As Raymond Schafer (1993) argues, before the dawn of industrial and technological revolution loud sounds, as well as loud music, were confined to exceptional happenings (e.g., a festivity) or indicated them (e.g., an alarm). Sonic environments were relatively "simple" and, for the most part, relatively mute and "natural". At the dawn of what Kofi Annan called the "urban millennium" (UN 2005) and its concomitant rise and spread of new media and technologies, humanity produced, and experienced, an ever-increasing complexity of its sonic surroundings and an ever-growing array of artificially amplified (and potentially noisy) sounds. In this process, music too began to lose its exceptional character. New technologies and media made music increasingly available, present and loud. Walking through public spaces in basically any bigger town in the world, sounds of music approach us through the open windows of houses and passing cars, through speakers discreetly mounted in shops, malls, elevators and waiting rooms, or through our neighbour's earphones in a bus or subway. Despite Freetown's rushing urbanisation and growing technologization, the undersupply of electricity halts this trend. With the non-ready availability of electricity, music too becomes less available. Its presence reverts to exceptional happenings. Freetown, seen in its soundscape as a whole, represents a form of silenced – or muted – urbanism.

Musical minds

The more time I spent in Freetown, the more I strolled around, met, visited and talked to people, and the more I listened, the more I became aware that, despite the general rarity of hearing much loud music on the streets, music was nevertheless all around. Where there were people – and there were always people –, there was music. The music was with the people. On the one hand, it was there rather quietly, unobtrusively in its volume. Since many Freetonians cannot afford to have stereos or to pay for the electricity to run them (given the exceptional case that electricity is available at all), the most common music devices are small, battery-run radios and the increasingly affordable mobile phones capable to play music, which both produce only fairly moderate volumes. On the other hand, music was there silently, literally in silence. It was *inside* the people.

I met Emanuel³ at a barber's shop, a decidedly quiet place. We were both just sitting at the bench next to the barber without actually waiting for a haircut or shaving. As so many of my interviewees, Emanuel lives "off Kissy Road", the main, ever-traffic jammed street cutting across the East Side. He is in his mid-twenties. Since he earned his high-school diploma seven years ago, he tries to find the means to establish his own business. He stays with his mother and is currently without any job. It took us only a few sentences before our conversation turned to music. Emanuel is a music encyclopaedia. His knowledge about music is astonishing. He is up to date with

³ The names in this thesis may or may not have been changed.

virtually all musical trends and styles that currently exist in Freetown, which is a vast number. He knows about local musicians, about major developments in West African popular music, about new and old hits in the US, about past and forthcoming concerts and parties, he knows the songs, the artists, and many lyrics, which he is very fond of reciting and commenting upon, along with the respective melodies. When I asked him where he got all his knowledge about music from, he had to think long for an answer. According to his own estimate, he is not much passionate about music. He obviously likes music and listens to it, but he is not spending much money on it by buying records, going to parties or to concerts. The music he knows about, he says, he somehow just knows, from friends, from the radio, from the street. A couple of weeks later, I visited him at his home, a tiny one-and-a-half rooms-construct attached to a bigger house. There I found that Emanuel possesses exactly one CD, a pirated compilation of love-songs which he cannot play because he has no CD player. What he has, in terms of music devices, is a small radio and the mobile phone on which he used to play music before its speaker got raddled. The rest of his music, the astonishingly comprehensive knowledge about artists, songs, lyrics and melodies, is within him, inside him, in his mind.

Emanuel was no exception. I encountered this sort of “musical mind” with many more, especially young Freetonians. What struck me most about it was the apparent disproportion between people’s vast knowledge about music, on the one hand, and the small or inexistent amount of music people possess, on the other hand. Their “possession” of music was imagined, so to say, tangible – in talks and expressions – but immaterial.

This is, of course, not quite true. Music is not just in people’s minds, if it is there at all. Speaking of imagined or immaterial “possession” of music (with or without inverted commas), I am making inexact, if not false, use of language. Emanuel did not compose the songs himself. First, he heard “his” music *on the outside*, on the streets, or on the radio, or from friends or others. Before his music became “his” music it was someone else’s music. Someone composed the songs, someone recorded them, someone put them on tapes and CDs, someone sent them across the channels of local or global music dissemination, and yet someone else sold or played them on Freetown’s streets or radio waves, which marked the link in the long chain in the social production and dissemination of music where Emanuel finally got (to hear) it. What form of “property” does Emanuel, and we, hence possess “having” music? Do we “possess” music after purchasing a record? Do we “acquire” music while listening to the transient sequence of patterned sounds played out during a performance or from our radio at home? Is music “there”, somewhere? Where is music, and, above all, what is “it”?

Music – similar to noise – is difficult to grasp. The question what music is and what it is not is as old as thinking about music itself. To name but a few (German) examples in the overarching attempts to define “it”: some approach music as a rational science based on numbers and algorithms, thus as pure theory (Leibniz). Others see it as pure praxis (Novalis). Yet others emphasize music’s nature as an outright expression of our connectedness to the transcendental (Schopenhauer); as the concurrence of Apollonian and Dionysian ethics and aesthetics (Nietzsche), or as a coherent expression of society’s contradictions and paradoxes (Adorno). With regard to the libraries devoted to intriguing and ingenious arguments about the “nature” of music and their likewise intriguingly ingenious counter-arguments, we might conclude that, actually, music is not to grasp at all, not coherently at least. Bourdieu, writing about the inscrutable nature of art (as “a sort of symbolic gymnastics”), framed the following trenchant sentences about music’s particular ineffability: “music, the most ‘pure’ and ‘spiritual’ of the arts, is perhaps simply the most corporeal. Linked to *états d’âme* [...] it ravishes, carries away, moves. It is not so much beyond words as below them” (1984: 80).

Being a phenomenon “below words”, definitions of music are inevitably of a provisional character – tentative trials and prostheses. Following an arbitrating approach, it might be stated that some

tentative definitions of music are useful for some purposes while others are useful for other purposes. As my purposes mainly aim at the realms of music audiences, at how people relate to music, and at how people relate through music to each other and to their world(s), I will – in the following chapter – propose and combine three main approaches towards a tentative definition of music, with particular regard to music's role in society. (1) I propose a short phenomenological perspective on music's "mode of being". (2) I enrich this phenomenological perspective with some anthropologically- and sociologically-inspired reflections about music. (3) I put forward a first, tentative definition of *music in Freetown*, informed by my own ethnography, and juxtapose this emic notion of Freetonians' music with several perspectives and insights from the neuro- and evolutionary-science's approaches towards music.

(3) Music and Society – A Preliminary Theoretical Outline

A brief phenomenology of music

Looking back at the centuries-old discussions about an understanding of music, Polish phenomenologist Roman Ingarden (1962) makes a curtly but fundamental shift in the theorizing approach towards music. Rather than engrossing the mind in long reflections about the aesthetic value of music, either in itself or in comparison with other forms of artistic expressions, Ingarden proposes to look, first and foremost, at the ontological structure of music, its mode of being, and the relations this being is founded in.

Musical sounds, it can be argued in line with Ingarden's approach, occur in two basic realms. (1) In the physical realms of the material world, where waves of oscillating pressure generate audible phenomena and where living organisms perceive these phenomena, produce and play with them by breathing, singing, whistling, speaking, moaning, screaming, by beating on membranes, blowing air through holes, plucking strings, and by potentially every movement and action they do. (2) In the mental realms of the processes in the mind, where a constant stream of consciousness restructures the perceptions of the physical world and its sounds and orders, enriches and manipulates these perceptions with emotions, thoughts, memories and imaginations.⁴

This somewhat blunt dualism between world and mind and the places sounds occupy in it raises the question exactly where, and how, these sounds are then organized into a form recognized as music. For a sound by itself – whether actualized as a physical phenomenon or as a mental occurrence in the streams of mind – does not make any music yet.

A brief answer is that, in physical realms, sound occurrences are organized into a form recognized as music when people sing, clap, whistle, play instruments, perform concerts, record albums etc. In mental realms, the organization takes place within the processes and acts of consciousness in which, on the one hand, perceived sound occurrences (of singing, clapping, whistling, the play of an instrument, a concert, record etc., as well as "natural" sounds like, e.g., a bird's "singing") are recognized and *labeled* as music. On the other hand, sound occurrences may as well be thought of or imagined in acts of consciousness, which subsequently may then again lead to a creative act of

⁴ Of course, this division of (musical) matter and (musical) mind baldly invokes the materialist's critical exclamation. Rather than trying to introduce any sort of Cartesian music-dualism, I use this division to emphasize the distinctiveness of sounds outside the mind and sounds inside the mind. Whether mental qualities are (ir)reducible to physical qualities (or not) is not at stake here.

material organization of sound occurrences (by, e.g., singing the imagined sounds or by or playing them on an instrument). In other words, we can *do* music, we can *perceive* music, and we can *imagin*e music.

By stating that sounds become music when people play music or when people perceive or imagine sounds as music, this short answer risks, on the one hand, to fall into tautologies. On the other hand, it fails to explain the link between the physical and the mental realms.

Ingarden provides a more profound answer. By assigning music an "intentional existence" (1962: 104; *my transl.*) he argues that music simultaneously combines both realms while it also transcends them. Music cannot be identified solely with its material components (e.g. the individual sound event, the lives, times and acts of performers and listeners, the particular instrument, concert, record etc.), nor with its "mental concretisation" (ibid.: 103; *my transl.*) formed in the perceptions of its respective performers and listeners. Music is, in this way, more than the sum of its (material and mental) parts, for its respective parts are linked by yet another element: intentionality. Intentionality, in turn, is not a mere mental act. It necessitates a phenomenon it can be directed at and enabled by, in this case – sounds. Following Edmund Husserl's paths, Ingarden thus extends the critique of the representational theory of mind (in which mental acts are understood as mere representations of the physical world) to musical realms. Music is not a mere object of the physical world, in which we have sounds, musicians, composers, listeners, instruments, concerts, records etc. A sound by itself does not make any music yet, nor does a musician, an instrument, concert, record etc. Neither is music a mere adjusted consciousness of the physical world, in which we have musicians, composers and listeners' consciousness of sounds, concerts, records etc. The one necessitates the other. For sounds to become music, the idea of music is required. For the idea of music, sounds are required. In other words, music is created through, on the one hand, a multitude of acts of consciousness, "mental concretisations", by performers and listeners that perceive sounds to be music, and, on the other hand, through the very material form and manifestation of music in sounds in which the form itself becomes a means for the mental concretisation, for the *intentionality* or "aboutness" of sounds as music. Similarly to Wittgenstein's debunk of a private language (1984), it can be thus stated in line with Ingarden's reasoning that a thoroughly *private music* cannot exist. Sounds become *musical* sounds in the "sound-games" played by society. Music, just as language, is intrinsically social.

Musicking

With this phenomenological and fairly, or very, abstract understanding of music as a product of intentionality, Ingarden clears the way to approach music by its relational character. Music, in this approach, is established as a relation between world and mind, between sounds and their perception, between material forms and mental concretisations, and, not least, between people. What holds the musical world and its constituting relations together in its inmost folds is: intentionality. However, at the same time Ingarden falls into what Small calls "the trap of reification, or thing-making" (1998: 61). Reification is, in the first place, a linguistic or semantic phenomenon, or problem. It stems from the convenience of having nouns that enable us to talk about concrete acts and relationships as if they were a thing. From acts and relationships we do and experience in the world, we create abstractions. The acts, relationships and experiences of loving, for example, become the abstract love. This, by itself, is a normal and rather unproblematic means to ease thought and speech and the meanings it is meant to communicate. Though, once we aim at defining a reality's phenomenon, reification can easily seduce us to come to think of the abstraction as more real than the reality it represents.

The abstract "music" might be thought of as a major example for this seductive and delusive power semantics hold over reality. The use of a noun to describe the category of humanly organized sounds of a musical kind swiftly precipitates the idea of music as a thing, entailing conceptualizations of music as untouched by time and social change. Small (1998) argues that the tendency to think of music as a thing, to presume an autonomous "thingness" of music, characterizes most scholarly attempts to explain the nature and meaning of music. Presuming that the meaning of music resides in the sound object itself, scholars thus put the prime focus on music's however tangible objects and materials – the musical work, its score or transcript, and its lyrics. By this, the attention is distracted away from other elements that make humanly organized sounds into a form recognized as music. For music, according to Small, "is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do" (ibid.: 2). Music is action, a performance in which all those present are involved – those who play the music, if present at all, just as those who listen and dance (read: perform) to it. To omit the trap of reification, Small introduces a new word: the verb *to music*, with *musicking* as its participle, and its definition: "To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing, or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing" (ibid.: 9). Consequently, the meanings of *musicking* are not to be found in the music itself, in music's sound objects, but are generated and negotiated wherever, whenever and however people *do it*.

Small's theoretical and methodological turnabout implies four main positions in the further conceptualization of music. (1) *Performance* "does not exist in order to present musical works, but rather, musical works exist in order to give performers something to perform" (Small 1998: 8). What makes the sounds become music is the countless number of mental and physical acts involved in its creation in play and its recreation in perception. The emphasis is thus to be put on the action of art, the art of creation and recreation, rather than on the created art object itself. (2) The *form* in which one partakes in the act of musicking, whether actively as a musician or as an allegedly passive listener, is not a prime concern. What matters primarily is the act itself. This does not lead to the odd assertion that there is no difference between somebody who performs in front of a crowd and somebody who listens to the performance as part of the crowd. There certainly is. But both *activities* bear their respective meanings, and both are parts in the grand act of intentionality at work that makes sounds become music. (3) When the *meanings* of music reside not in musical "materials" themselves but in people's perceptions and the ideas they ascribe to them, then (potentially) every listener creates his and her very own meanings and interpretations. To speak of music's meaning is thus to speak either of one's own meanings taken from and ascribed to the music, or about other people's respective meanings taken from and ascribed to the music, or about nothing at all. (4) Consequently, music and its meanings are never above *time and space* but radically context-dependent. To ask the question what the meaning of music is in itself is to ask a question that has no possible answer. Questions that will lead us closer to the meanings of music are: What does it mean when those people are musicking at this time and in this place?

Returning to the abovementioned case of Emanuel, we might thus once again pose the question where and what "his" music is if he does not "posses" it (im)materially? With regard to the above-evolved concepts of music as created by intentionality (Ingarden) and as a performative act (Small), we might state that Emanuel (re)created and (re)performed music in the relationship he established with me during our conversations. Our shared intentionality and understanding of certain songs imaginatively (re)created sounds of a musical kind and brought music "to the fore". Songs which both of us have before perceived, listened to, and recreated as mental concretisations came back in the form of shared imaginings. The music was thereby neither solely in him, nor was it solely in me, nor was it just outside us. Rather it was established in the relationship *between* him and me and the world. Emanuel was thus musicking with me: he was

acting, performing, imagining, understanding, sharing and behaving – for musicking is also, and maybe even primarily, behavior.

The questions of who musics with whom, where and when necessarily lead to the social realms in which music is played, perceived, and given its meanings. Alan Merriam (1964: 27) points towards the importance of these realms by defining music as socially-accepted patterns of sound and behavior. Since music inevitably takes place within social actions, and eventually is social action, it involves the behavior of individuals and groups of individuals. As a unique form of behaviors in which sounds are organized into a phenomenon recognized as music, it demands the social concurrence of people who decide what it is and is not, and what it can and cannot be. Herein, too, lies the fundamental and defining distinction between, as listed by Richard Waterman, “what is music and what is not music, between what is proper music and what is improper music, between what is our music and what is someone else’s music, between what is good and meaningful music and, and what is bad and inept music” (1963: 86), and, as we might add as the maybe most fundamental distinction, between what is noise and what is music.

Though, the relation between social concurrence and musical behavior is not marked by a one-sided imposition of socially-accepted patterns on sounds. The process is in fact strikingly dialectical. And it is no coincidence that it follows the same pattern of dialectical processes in which individuals simultaneously shape and are shaped by the realities of the social group(s) and its world(s) they belong to, as described above. Sociocultural concepts shape the perceptions of sounds as music while music, in turn, feeds back upon the concepts held about sounds as music. Given the significant features in the processes of musicking – play, performance, invention, improvisation, imagination –, the spaces which music occupies in society are marked by a realm of constant change of both sounds and behaviors. Kofi Agawu dubbed this realm the “hollow space” in which “active listeners and interpreters are invited to play, to invent, to dream, and inevitably, to lie” (2001: 7). Society, apprehended as music audiences writ large, is thus in a constant process of negotiating, and re-inventing, the meanings of music(ing); while, in turn and simultaneously, the realms created through musicking function as spaces to negotiate, and to re-invent, the social meanings shared by its performers and participants.

Music/dance

Music, as the evolutionary sciences are teaching us, is inherent to human nature. Every normally endowed human being is born with the gift of music (or: *to* music) no less than the gift of speech (or: to speak). Music is inscribed into our species’ evolutionary history, and it makes us, so it is alleged, a most distinct species (e.g., Cross 2003b). Our closest biological kin, the great apes, are noticeably unmusical fellows (Williams 1980). So are, supposedly, all other species.⁵ In every human culture, on the other hand, there is music. Or, as formulated more technically by John Blacking: “every known human society has what trained musicologists would recognise as ‘music’” (1995: 224). On a broad (or “deep”) scale, music thus connects, or even “unites”, humanity. The human capacity to music is universal; similarly is the human capacity to perceive and distinguish musical sounds from non-musical sounds universal, potentially at least. As trenchantly put by Adorno (1975: 186): music is indeed a universal language, and yet – as he quickly adds – it is no Esperanto.

As much as music connects and unites the human species in dissociation from the rest of our planet’s living creatures, as much does it also bear the potentials to disconnect humans from each other. Music is, simultaneously and paradoxically, a universal and non-universal phenomenon. Ian

⁵ There are, however, also theories that question the unmusicality of the animal world; see, e.g., Martinelli 2008 & 2009.

Cross therefore proposes the odd-sounding term “musics”, for musics “resonate with the histories, values, conventions, institutions and technologies that enfold them; musics can only be approached through culturally situated acts of interpretation” (2003a: 19). And these acts – and behaviors – “unveil a multiplicity of musical ontologies, some, or most of which, may be mutually irreconcilable: hence a multiplicity of ‘musics’” (ibid.).

Against this (conceptual) background of a multiplicity of simultaneously connecting and disconnecting musics, we may now turn towards our particular case; that is: Freetown’s music and Freetonians’ musicking – along with its particular ontology, its particular culturally situated acts of interpretation, its particular associated behaviors, imaginations, shared intentionalities, and socio-musical conventions. The deeper-layered (and complicated) histories, institutions and technologies in which Freetown’s music is enfolded in will be discussed at length in the second part of this thesis (ch. 4-11). At this point I attempt to map out a basic category by which Freetonians partition sounds into non-musical and musical sounds; in other words, a category that defines Freetonians’ music. A short anecdote from my fieldwork serves well to illustrate the contours of that defining category.

Agnes and Angela, both in their early twenties, are two students from Freetown. I was introduced to them through a friend, who also took me to their room at the college dormitory. As usual, I was particularly interested to find out about their musical preferences and practices. When I asked them about their music, Agnes handed me over her laptop on which, as she said, I could find all their music. While all I found was, for Freetonian standards, a fairly unexceptional selection of recent and up-to-date music hits from the US, the Caribbean, and Anglophone Africa, one track protruded from the rest of Agnes and Angela’s music collection and struck my attention: Beethoven’s “Fifth Symphony”. As I asked the girls if they liked Beethoven, I received a puzzled look in return and was asked to play the music. After some view moments of listening, Agnes laughed at me, asking whether the name of the music was really Beethoven since that is a dog’s name. After a few more moments of amused bafflement, she then asked me to turn it off, adding: “You call this music? How do you dance to this?” Neither she nor Angela had ever before listened to it, at least not consciously, and certainly not with the thought or association of music on their minds.

The fragment of Beethoven’s symphony came into Agnes’ music collection as a pre-installed demo song on her computer. That Agnes associated the name Beethoven with a dog was probably because she saw the Hollywood movie starring a St. Bernard with that name. While these two points touch upon related and relevant aspects as well (e.g., of technology- and media-related developments and of new channels of music dissemination in contemporary Freetown), the main point for our current concerns lies in Agnes and Angela’s bafflement about Beethoven’s sounds and their explicit refusal to call them “music”. Apparently, the sounds did not fit the concepts and conventions Agnes and Angela hold about music, even though they avoided to dub them “noise” (as did the abovementioned Nigerian, Chinese, Canadian and Frenchmen and -women with regard to Freetonian music). Beethoven was, so to say, “out of the frame” which defines their ideas about *musical* sounds and which separates these from non-musical sounds. And that frame – erected and formed by the social (and sonic) realities Agnes and Angela share and co-create with their Freetonian contemporaries – was calibrated on one deciding feature: *danceability*. A main, and most probably *thetmain*, defining characteristic of music in Freetown is thus: *to dance to it!*

It is, however, not the question whether Agnes and Angela *always* have to dance to patterns of sounds to call them music. The question is whether music is something which is *potentially* danceable. By definition, by Agnes and Angela’s definition of music, that is the case. And maybe this is already the closest we can get to a common denominator for socially-established and shared conventions that define what Freetonians would accept as music and what not. Of course there are exceptions. On the one hand, Freetown’s soundscapes bear (as we will see in the

second part of this thesis) a strikingly broad diversity of different musical genres, styles, traditions, influences, and – by this – also of music-defining conventions. In a later period of my fieldwork I also encountered Freetonians who were most familiar with Beethoven and the Viennese classics and who, despite not attempting to dance to it, referred to it even as their favorite music. On the other hand, there are (again: of course) genre-differences that Freetonians establish and apply between different forms of music. Within these different genres, not all patterns of sounds of a musical kind that fall into the superordinated category of music are necessarily defined by being danceable. Hymns and sacred chants, played, sang and listened to in Freetown's churches, are among the clearest – and in fact few – examples of patterned sounds of a musical kind which must *not always* and not necessarily be danceable in order to be labeled (Freetonian) music. Depending on the denomination and on the respective occasion, the ratio of non-danceable church songs during the service might be fairly high while certainly no Freetonian participant would not *not* call them music. However, the inflationary spread of Pentecostal sects in Freetown – whose services are characterized by highly danceable and outright ecstatic songs and music – further narrows down the already narrow genre of non-danceable church music.

As I asked Agnes and Angela whether all music has to be danceable in order to be music, they agreed upon that this must not be the case. There is, also within their conventions, space for non-danceable music as well. In fact, indirectly they also recognized Beethoven as some sort of music, speaking of it as “your music” – that is: mine, hence: the Other's music – but not theirs. From here, we might continue by stating that, from Agnes and Angela's point of view (and complemented with Cross' vocabulary), there are three main categories of music. On the broadest scale, there is the category of *musics* of the world, with all their multiplicities and mutual irreconcilabilities. On the scale of Agnes and Angela, there is the broad category of *their* music as discerned and implicitly defined against the Others' music(s). Within this category in turn, there is yet another multiplicity of sub-categorizations as done by Agnes and Angela and many other of my Freetonian informants and which, with some exceptions, aggregates around the trait of being danceable music.

So, what is it about dance and music? Coming back once again to Cross, it is intriguing to note that he – as a musicologist with a strong inclination towards cognitive science – treats dance as indistinguishable from music as well: “music and dance are simply two sides of the same coin” (2003b: 80; see also Cross 2006 & 2007). According to Cross and other scholars of a neuro-musicological orientation (e.g., Benzon 2001), music and dance are inseparable in terms of their evolutionary origin and, consequently, in terms of their allocation of the activities in the brain that take place during acts of music/dance. As Cross writes:

Indeed, the necessity of a link between music and overt action [i.e. dance] is obscured in the (fairly recent) social practices of western art-music which involve drawing clear distinctions between ‘active’ performer and ‘passive’ audience, and by very recent technological developments that enable ‘music’ to be ‘caused’ by purchasing a phonographic roll or downloading an MP3 file. (2003b: 79)

William Benzon, in turn, adds to it: “much if not all of music's neural substrate will be found in structures that evolved to serve other behaviors” (2001: 46). Quoting Jude Trama, he continues: “There is no music nervous center in the brain, no grossly identifiable brain structure that works solely during music's cognition.’ [...] brains make music by using old structures and systems in a new way” (ibid.). The connection of music and dance and the ability to do “it” thus evolved from our evolutionary raw material in relation to our evolutionary needs and deeds. Three main lines of thought and theory which attempt to explain the evolutionary evolution and function of music/dance underpin that statement.

(1) Music is said to have evolved from early human's courtship rituals and was thereby intrinsically connected to dancing practices. Geoffrey Miller (2003), for example, sees music/dance as a ritual that symbolizes evolutionary survival capabilities. A young Stone Age man who danced and sang

untiringly and impressively thereby paraded his creativity, intelligence and physical fitness. This sort of musicking courtship attracted the Stone Age's womankind and propelled the continued existence of musically-inclined offspring.

(2) Music/dance is also said to reinforce the cohesion and creation of social groups. Cross and Iain Morley, drawing in turn on Steven Brown, write that music is a

'suite of traits that favor the formation of coalitions, promote cooperative behavior towards group members and create potential for hostility towards those outside the group'. Music supports these traits through the opportunities that it offers for the formation and manifestation of group identity, for the conduct of collective thinking (as in the transmission of group history and planning for action), for group co-ordination through synchronization (the sharing of time – between members of a group), and for group catharsis, the collective expression and experience of emotion. Ultimately, [...] music is a type of 'modulatory system acting at the group level to convey the reinforcement value of these activities for survival'. (2008: 63)

The act of musicking together is thus a fertile source for the creation of collectivity and of a collective's cohesion of emotional coordinates. Benzon developed a theory about musicking as not only a (abstract) bonding force of social beings but also of the very physical brain structures and neural formations. Through musicking our heads and bodies align with the heads and bodies of others. Benzon speaks of musicking as a "medium through which individual brains are coupled together in a shared activity" (2001: 23), a means for "interactional synchrony" (ibid.: 25). (I will revisit Benzon's ideas in a later part of this thesis; ch. 15.) Dance plays a central role in these synchronizations. In a similar line as Benzon, William McNeill, in his exploration of dance as a form of *Keeping Together in Time*, writes:

Moving together rhythmically for hours on end can be counted upon to strengthen emotional bonds among those who take part. [...] Far larger bands than any existing today among chimpanzees or other great apes could therefore come into being. [...] What we may think of as the human scale of primary community, comprising anything from several score to many hundreds of persons, thus emerged, thanks to the emotional solidarities aroused by keeping together in time. (1995: 27)

(3) Yet another line of thought suggests that rather than, or – as I would argue – besides, music/dance being a *cause* of social cohesion, it *signals* social cohesion achieved by other means. Edward Hagan and Gregory Bryant's write that "for humans and human ancestors, musical displays may have [...] functioned, in part, to defend territory (and perhaps also to signal group identity), and that these displays may have formed the evolutionary basis for the musical behaviours of modern humans" (2002: 25). They propose that the amount of time a group needed to create and practice music and dance corresponds with the quality of the coalition of the respective group performing them, indicating how much time they have devoted to preparation of their skill and thus of their preexisting bonding and cohesion. Reviewing Hagan and Bryant's work, Cross and Morley write that the view of musicking as a means *exclusively* for signaling cohesion (and not also for its promotion) "ignores all factors consequent on emotional bonding and the loyalty engendered by a mutual emotion experience. An individual may already have established their credibility within a group [...] but this provides no indication of their likelihood of doing so, or of to whom they will direct their assistance" (2008: 64). In other words, while groups certainly display music/dance skills *after* established bondings that does not imply that new and more refined bondings (and couplings) will occur within the dances of these already bonded groups. People who already know each other and who already are close may well get to know each other better and become (much) closer during collective dances.

Taking together these three lines of argumentation and the concepts about music evolved further above, it becomes clear that – at least on an analytical level – it is indeed very difficult to discriminate between music and dance and to disentangle them. Both are deeply personal (as every musicking participant potentially evolves his and her own ways of hearing, listening and interpreting "it") *and* highly social (as it is in the social realms that conventions about what music is are established in the first place); furthermore, both serve the coordination of different

individual mental and physical functions *and* the coordination of a social group's promotion and signaling of mental and physical bonding.

Thinking about *music* along the individual/collective trajectory: we can and do perceive patterned sounds – first and foremost – alone. We experience sounds as music in the narrow space between our ears and in the realms of our corporal being confined in our bodies – thus: a thoroughly *intimate* experience. At the same time, however, these experiences and perceptions of sounds as music are founded in the nonfinite spaces outside our ears and bodies. That is: in the universes of our social worlds where humanly organized forms of sound occurrences are created and engendered by human's shared intentionalities and founded on social conventions about these sound occurrences as music – thus: a thoroughly *social* (or socially founded) experience. Listening to music, musicking, can be thus termed a form of *social intimacy*, or *intimate collectivity*.

Thinking, in turn, about *dance* along the individual/collective trajectory: it is true that people can and do dance alone. However, in most cases they do not. It simply does not make much sense to dance on your own (apart maybe from some rehearsal of dancing steps, thus as a form of preparation for the collective act of dancing). By and large people dance in some kind of collective setting, be it a religious ritual, a social ceremony, a street parade, or a night club. However, even though dancing occurs mainly in collective settings, every participant of the collective dance produces his and her own individual moves. Through the dance moves they produce, each dancer expresses and displays his and her own individuality – thus: an *individual* form of expression (of individuality). And yet, all individual traits and expressions of each dancer are coordinated along the line of collectively perceived patterns of sound occurrences, which the collectivity perceives and labels as "music". There is thus – beyond or underneath the fragmented pattern of individual dance moves – a common and combining pattern (of perceived sounds) that coordinates the proceedings, that adjusts and aligns the respective individual movements into a common, collectively expressed groove – thus: a *social and collective* form of expression. Parallel to the act of listening (as a form of social intimacy), the act of dancing can be thus termed a form of *collectively embraced individuality*, or *individually engendered collectivity*.

Agnes and Angela's premise of danceability for sounds to be labeled music, which speaks of the broader Freetonian conventions held about sounds as music, can be said to follow a (analytically) consistent and consequent line of thought. Music's emergence is difficult (if not impossible) to explain without reference to some form of dance. The emergence of dance, on the other hand, is difficult (if not impossible) to imagine without reference to some form of music. The concept of music Agnes and Angela as well as many if not most other Freetonians express – both verbally and in practices – transcends the artificial and (from an evolutionary point of view) fairly recently evolved divide between music and dance in a ludic and somewhat self-evident way.

(4) Revisiting Methods of Socio-Sonic Inquiry

(Re-)Inquiring Africa's socio-sonic fields

Much of the recent, sociologically-inclined music research in African studies is based on two main paradigms:

(1) The first paradigm evokes the claim that music "reflects" the wider cultural, social, political, economic etc. realities and institutions it is produced and consumed in. Music is assumed and approached as a form of multi-layered "text" that can be interpreted as a social chronicle. Music, in its various musical idioms and especially in its verbal expressions, is then taken as a reflection of prevalent social discourses and realities and, furthermore, as a representation of broader societal traits and structures – a societal "mirror". The underlying epistemological stance of that paradigm can be summarized in the assertion that: as music is "done" by society, music "speaks" of society.

(2) While this first paradigm can be found in many socio-musical studies concerned with socio-musical fields outside Africa as well, the second paradigm might be regarded as a sort of specifically Africanist' paradigm in music studies. This paradigm draws a significant distinction between music produced locally and music produced elsewhere. Karin Barber, in her influential essay on *Popular Arts in Africa*, explains the importance of this distinction by stating that art "produced by the people themselves [...] has a better claim to express some aspects of their own attitudes or experience" (1987: 108). While this claim might be valid in analytical terms (as it somewhat eases the endeavour to read society through its own music), it carries the fallacy to restrict the "readings" to this very locally produced music and thereby to disregard music that often has a much wider African listenership – that is: non-locally (or "globally") produced music.

These two paradigms – to approach music as a societal mirror and to confine music's mirroring to locally produced music – yield several methodological shortcomings and analytical fallacies. The commonly implemented mode of a "mirroring"-interpretation is structured along a line which might be described as reaching (and reading) from the inside-out: one looks at "what is in the music" (the *inside*) to deduce from it "what is (alleged) to be in society" (the *outside*). Beside the risk of producing tautological circles and thriving on a fairly simplistic mode of mimesis – since one is prone to find in the music only what one has already found, or been searching for, in society (and the other way round) –, there are at least four main problems at stake.

(1) The first problem concerns the enigmatic quest for music's *meaning*. The "inside-out" mode of reading music in (its) relation to society – thus of reading society through (its own) music – is premised, again: more often implicitly than explicitly, on yet another well-established paradigm in the study of music which suggests that the meanings of music are to be found *in* the music itself. This idea might be well suitable for the rather narrow hermeneutic modes of musicological analysis (in which the strictly *musical*/parameters of music are analysed; e.g., harmony, melody, riff, beat). For any sociologically-oriented music analysis, however, the concept of music's intrinsic meanings proves delusive. Its utilization is nevertheless as widespread as unchallenged and particularly visible in Africanist' studies dealing with so-called "political music". In these "socio-political music studies", which in fact form the bulk of Africanists' music-related studies, notions are coined such as music as "the means of expression of the marginalized masses" or the somewhat self-contradicting idea of music as "the voice of the voiceless" (see, e.g., Englert 2008). In regard of musical expressions, this sort of political function-lens was obviously inspired by musicians' potential and ability "to sing what cannot be spoken" (Agawu 2001: 4), their granted *Narrenfreiheit* to criticize the establishment.

Whereas these approaches towards music have their due rationale, first and foremost by pointing out the socio-political relevance of musical expressions, they speak of several conceptual and methodological fallacies. Too often music is confined only to its (politically relevant) lyrics, at the expense of its vital characteristics of non-verbal sounds, performance, and play. Likewise, the focus put on ideological and political contents (of musical lyrics) often obstructs a more heuristic view on the broad range of ideological stances inherent in musical expressions and their social interpretations. These might, and often do, range from explicit class-conscious critiques, to a more or less tacit support of the status quo, and through to the probably most common characteristic of serving entertainment purposes and of "thus" being above political frays, which in fact bears ideological implications, too. Frequently, though, the whole range of these stances is displayed within the work of a single artist. In a similar manner, music's meaning-generating instance is ascribed predominantly to the musicians and their intentions, leaving aside the dimension of audiences' perceptions, ideas and actions. Consequently, the understanding and interpretation of music's social meaning is often confined to a contextualized reading of its lyrics, supplemented by a sketch of the artists' biographies and attitudes.

Beside the rampant fetishization of the (musical) word, the respective approaches are grounded in the concept that by interpreting the musical expressions, thus by reading the *music's* meanings, one could further interpret, or rather interpretatively deduce, from them the "expressions of the masses", that is: a society's prevalent social discourses, local experiences, concerns etc. In other words: the meaning-generating and meaning-constituting factor is allocated on the side of the music. However, while the musical meanings might well be found therein, any extra-musical and especially *social*/meanings of music – and that is, in the end, what sociologists of music are dealing with – are not. Music's social meanings are allocated within the respective sides of the society they are generated in. The analyst's proclamation that a musical piece *speaks* for the masses unveils as a rather dubious claim of the analyst him/herself to interpret the music for "the masses".

(2) These matters lead straight on to the often over-stretched quest for music's *representation*, that is: for its level and dimension of social representationality. In the "inside-out" and "reading society through (its) music"-approaches, it is implicitly argued that a musician in fact does speak for his/her society. S/he does that by, firstly, being – a representative – part of the respective society and its discourses, and, secondly, by bundling prevalent social discourses through the disseminating – and representational – power of the microphone and the mass-produced and consumed channels through which his/her music is spread across society (making it in fact a monologues relation, as the artist echoes back on society its own discourses). Following this line of reasoning, the "inside-out" reading mode implicitly assumes that, since the musician does represent society, the analyst does as well unveil social meanings (or their representations) by looking at the musician and reading his/her music.

The argument, as well as its debunk, is redundant. Whoever the musician might speak or sing for, thus "give representation to", in the end it is – again – the analyst who reads the representation as a representation of "the masses". The meaning- or, in this case, the representation-generating factor is allocated first on the side of the music (and its musician), from which (and whom) the analyst then alleges to deduce other, social meanings and representations. The bounding of the socio-musical field is, once more, left with the analyst who decides which meanings are socially meaningful and which representations speak of (or represent) which social realms, discourses, experiences, concerns etc. Gayatri Spivak's (1988) critical metaphor of the (academic) ventriloquist who speaks for the "subaltern puppet" here takes on a particular inflection, raising the rhetoric question whether the subaltern can *sing?*

(3) However, the most practical problem affects the very empirical heart of many if not most socio-musical studies concerned with the social meanings of music in Africa and reveals the two

above-evolved issues vigorously; that is: the (socio-geographic) *places* of origins of the music in relation to the (socio-geographic) place of the studied society. Driven by the (implicitly assumed) premises of the "inside-out" reading mode, by its underlying paradigms, and by the consequent urge to read society through its own music, a too obvious reality is, too often, left unmentioned: at least for the last four or so decades, the music of many societies in Africa is, to a (often very) large percentage, not the music produced *to* the respective society but coming from the outside. Any attempt to either allocate the music's meanings in the music itself and to deduce from it social meanings or to take a musician's stance as a representational case for prevalent social discourses and meanings collapses along with all of its pre-assumptions. What can we – sociologically – learn about the Freetonian society from, let's say, Celine Dion's music, which had an undeniable resonance in that Freetonian society, by looking at Mrs. Dion's lyrics and her representational social and discursive affiliations?

(4) The last problem concerns the intricate notion of "*popular*" in popular music – the academic genre to which much of the recent sociologically-inclined Africanist' music studies are assigned to. For this, we might return to Barber's influential treatise of that matter (1987). Therein, she defines the "popular" art as a relational concept with fluid and shifting boundaries whose meanings oscillate between, traverse across, and coalesce with what other Africanist "populists" often defined as "traditional arts" and "elite arts" (ibid.: 9-12). According to Barber, for the "popular" art to become popular it has "to appeal to people, it has to plug in at some level to popular consciousness [...]. It is the capacity to pick up popular aspirations, fears and anxieties, give them concrete expressions and communicate them" (108). This communication process, Barber continues, "is fragile, and full of risks, divisions and fragmentations." (110). And since this fragmented communication, which lies at the very heart of the popular art, is taking place mainly on the side of the audiences, Barber concludes that we "should build up a more detailed picture of the 'publics' to which different popular genres are *directed*." (ibid.; *my emphasis*)

The key term, and in fact the problematic and analytically incoherent one, is "directed". While Barber evidently points towards the importance of the audiences, she somehow misses to take the final, resolute step and to allocate the "popular" *within* these audiences. Instead, she sticks to the apprehension of the "popular" in popular art by looking at the artefacts, and not at the populace that make these artefacts popular. This becomes plain in her formulation that the "popular genres are *directed*" to the populace, which implies, firstly, that they already are popular before they reach "their" populaces, and secondly, that – at least theoretically – the audience is in fact not a required force in the processes that constitute popular art.

Especially with regard to popular music arts in contemporary urban Africa, in many cases the respective (musical) art-itself is, as noted above, not directed *at* Africa nor is it directing anything particular *to* Africa. The bulk of these arts is produced elsewhere. What is directing – and directed – are the audiences who chose from the ever-growing array of globally transmitted and available media and arts. I would thus propose to modify Barber's attempt to define the "popular" in popular art (and music) "by the relationship between performers and audiences" (1987: 47). It is in fact defined by the crucial notion of "relationship". However, this relationship in turn is mainly established by the audiences whose relational complement might rather, or better, be described as an imagined performer; something, or somebody, whose significance – the "capacity to pick up popular aspirations, fears and anxieties" – is constituted mainly on the side of the audiences, and not by the performer.

Seizing on Barber's work once more, I do agree with her that for the study of popular arts in Africa (as elsewhere) the "methods of aesthetic criticism must be conjoined, and not at a superficial level, with those of social science" (1987: 5). What I partly disagree with, though, is her conclusion that we thus need to ask "by whom and by what means, in what circumstances, under what constraints, in whose interests, and in accordance with what conventions, these arts are

produced (ibid.; *my emphasis*). Rather, I argue, we need to ask primarily, though not exclusively, by whom, by what means, in what circumstances (...) these arts are *consumed*.

These four, briefly scrutinized problems in Africanist' socio-musical studies all point towards one main analytical volte-face that is to be eked by one main methodological volte-face. Analytically, the idea of music's intrinsic meanings has to be abandoned (at least for any study outside strictly musicologists domains, in which already enough "meaning-battles" are being fought) so to clear a space for the more sociologically relevant questions of what it means when this music is performed, played and (especially) listened to at this time, in this place, and with those people taking part in it – thus for the social meanings of music. Methodologically, a similar space is to be cleared for a social group other than socio-musical analysts to account for the consumption and interpretation as well as for the meaning-generating and -constituting processes of music. Rather than listening to the musicians and their music, the sociologically-oriented researcher of music has to listen to people listening to their music. While the respective results are prone to be much more fractured, confusing and contradicting, they might – thereby – come much closer to the actual (fractured, confusing and contradicting) role music plays in society.

Clifford Geertz, drawing on Ludwig Wittgenstein's discussion of the meaning of words (as an effect of the *use* of words), derives the following sort of methodological advice for the study of meaning in the ethnographic field: "meaning is not intrinsic in the objects, acts, processes, and so on, which bear it, but [...] imposed upon them; and the explanation of its properties must therefore be sought in that which does the imposing – men living in society. The study of thought is, to borrow a phrase from Joseph Levenson, the study of men thinking" (1973a: 405).

Borrowing, and adjusting, in turn that phrase from Geertz, we might state that the study of music (and its meanings) is the study of men (and women) musicking.

Networks and methods of inquiry in Freetown's socio-sonic fields

In line with the concepts evolved above, the methodological orientation during my fieldwork in Freetown was structured along a line which can be described as reaching from the *outside-in*. I looked at what is in society (music's social "outside") and evolved, from there, my investigations into the realms of society's practices of music production, dissemination, and, primarily, consumption (society's musical "inside"). In more technical terms: Unlike most researchers in the (Africanist') field of study of music and society, who make music their independent variable and reconstruct the social world(s) around it as the dependent variable, I attempted to construct the social world(s) first – as my independent variable(s) – and, from there, to explore the places, roles and meanings of society's music as the dependent variables.

This approach resulted in one main sort of "methodological imperative", that is: my main fields of inquiry were *not primarily* in the realms of social music production and consumption but in the much broader – and much vaguer – (primarily non-musical) fields of everyday life and everyday life encounters. In other words, in order *not* to narrow down my groups of informants to those who do attend certain places of music consumption (bars, clubs, parties) and who already expose certain musical preferences and practices – thus, in order *not* to begin in the musical "inside" –, I "assembled" my groups of informants (primarily but not exclusively) outside the places of music consumption and then and from there explored their musical preferences and practices.

My field research took place between early August 2009 and mid-February 2010. With the exception of a short trip to Ghana in mid-October, I spent my whole fieldwork period living right in the geographical heart of Freetown: during the first weeks in downtown Freetown and, from

the second month onwards, at the Fourah Bay College (FBC) located at Mount Aureol in central Freetown. It was also from these two locations that I got into my first main groups and networks of informants. Although I widely expanded the scope and range of my informants in the following months, the people and groups of people whom I encountered as a neighbour and on a day to day basis remained at and formed the very heart of my pool of informants, and friends.

These main groups consisted of four distinguishable and internally only loosely connected networks of people. (1) Various loosely associated groups in downtown Freetown including street hawkers, street traders, shop owners, their kin and associates, whom I encountered (and befriended) in the first month of my stay downtown. (2) Various similarly loosely associated groups of students from the FBC as well as other groups based at the FBC campus (including lecturers and other employees, kin and associates), through whose networks I also got involved into various other, non-student circles of young(er) and old(er) Freetonians outside the college vicinity. (3) A smaller and narrower circumscribed group of befriended work-associates in central (but not downtown) Freetown who work in different low-income jobs (including phone-credit sellers, hawkers selling food and drinks, and money changers). (4) A loose network of friends, neighbours, and work and school colleagues from around Freetown's Kissy Road in the East Side, to which I was introduced through Emanuel (the young Freetonian mentioned above).

As the composition of these groups and networks of informants resulted from my own (more or less accidental) place of location and from sorts of rather arbitrary encounters, they were not assembled in accordance with any sort of standardized sampling method but, on the contrary, represent a very non-standardized sample of informants. However, while these groups of informants were assembled by somewhat arbitrary and accidental "methods", they nevertheless represent a fairly cross-sectional range of socially differentiated, and sociologically differentiable, groups of Freetonians; including a wide ranging scope in terms of variables like, for example, age (from thirteen to seventy years of age), education (from illiterates to Sierra Leone's intelligentsia), occupation (from un-, under- and semi-employed to highly trained and paid professionals), and representing both genders, various religious denominations (mainly Muslims and various branches of Christianity), various places of origin (in and outside Freetown), and areas of living (all three main areas in Freetown: East Side, Centre, West Side). It is, however, noteworthy that about half of my informants and interviewees from these four as well as from other groups count among to the economic category of the un-, under- and semi-employed – meaning: doing "something" for money but not every day and without (any sort of) regular payment – and that about the same proportion is living in Freetown's impoverished East Side.

Commencing from (or from inside) these four groups and networks, I applied what is often referred to as "snowball sampling" and interviewed my way through various junctions and nexuses of these groups and networks, being handed on from friends to their friends, to colleagues, school and college mates, relatives, neighbours and so forth.

At the same time, I was also actively seeking, firstly, for groups and informants outside my established networks. In most cases, however, this "outside" remained a vague presumption as I regularly discovered links created through people whose contacts and acquaintances appeared to "cut across" all groups of my informants. Secondly, I also strived for data collected from informants with perspectives and positions different than that of "mere" music consumers and audiences (mainly music sellers, producers, distributors and musicians). For this, I followed three separate paths:

(1) The first path was simply to stroll around different areas of Freetown, to react to the reactions caused by my presence (which were usually frequent and manifold), to engage people in conversations, and – usually after a first established contact – to conduct interviews with them. Although this method exceeded the "snowball sampling" in arbitrariness (turning into some form

of “snowfall sampling”), the encounters, contacts and interviews resulting from this practice often proved most satisfying as the scope of my overall data-sample grew with almost every new encounter. The topic of music, with which I started most conversations with my arbitrary encounters, thereby proved particularly fruitful as a sort of discursive “doorway” to other topics about extra-musical and non-music-related realms and experiences.

(2) In order to gather wider and more embracing data about Freetonians’ musical practices and preferences, I also conducted interviews with a fair number of musical “intermediaries” (Shuker 1998: 67), including music producers and distributors, official and clandestine street sellers, retail sellers, and wholesalers, radio, TV and club DJs, concert and club managers, as well as with musicians, both active and retired. While musicians were, to some extent, a good source of information too, I mainly strived for the insights of what I refer to as “music duplicators and replicators”, that is: sellers and radio DJs who, in many cases, form the intersection between, on the one hand, music production and import and, on the other hand, (mass) music consumption. For these interviews I employed a more systematic sampling method and attempted to visit and interview as many of Freetown’s radio DJs and important sellers as possible. The, to large parts, centralized and monopolized structures of official music production, distribution and sale in Freetown (and Sierra Leone) significantly eased the access to and coverage of the latter group of sellers. So did the similarly centralized structures of unofficial and illegal music reproduction and sale (meaning: pirates). With regard to Freetown’s main music media channels, radio and TV, the task was more challenging. While I was lucky enough to find one of my most devoted key informants in the music chef of Sierra Leone’s national radio and TV broadcaster (Mohamed Bangura *aka* King Millan), the access to Freetown’s mushrooming private radio stations was complicated already by the sheer number of DJs and stations, of which I managed to visit about half of the existing ones.

(3) Finally, I also “recruited” informants and interviewees in what might be broadly described as “places of collective music consumption” – meaning: various types of music bars, night clubs, concerts, parties and other kinds of music-related festivities and events. This “sampling method” proved a two-edged device: On the one hand, it contradicted my “methodological imperative” of *not* approaching the music/society nexus through an inside-out “reading” mode but to do it the other way around. On the other hand, however, it was particularly at more exclusive and expensive parties, clubs and concerts that I could gain access to more “exclusive” sections and informants of Freetown’s society and music audiences. While, in several instances, this sampling method yielded fruitful encounters and interviews as well, generally it turned out the most difficult and painstaking as places of collective music consumption are anything but appropriate settings for the conduct of interviews (mainly because of the music and “noise” volume) or for approaching potential interviewees (as most visitors are preoccupied with activities other than explaining their activities; e.g. dance, flirt and other pleasures).

My actual data-collecting techniques can be divided into four categories:

(1) In my first and central method I followed Charles Keil’s appeal to scholars working on music “to dance more and footnote less” (2005: 2). In more technical terms, this methodological device resembled what Barber calls “participatory interpretation of human experience” (1987: 65). While Barber is therewith referring to the researcher’s possibility to participate in the production of popular culture (in her case in a Nigerian TV-series) so to gain in-depth understandings about the cultural practices in question from the side of the artists and producers, I attempted to do the same within the sites of audiences and consumers of music. Whereas the practical and theoretical proximity to the method of participant observation is obvious, it is the notion of *experience* that sets Barber’s concept apart from the techniques of participating while observing (and vice versa). Margret Drewal interprets this method “in short” as “being there, and being there with others, and being there completely involved with them in whatever performance, implicating myself in its

very production." (1991: 34) Citing Michael Jackson, she further distinguishes it from participant observation by describing it as "joining without ulterior motive and literally putting oneself in the place of the other persons: inhabiting their world" (Drewal 1991: 34), so that participation, at least for the very moment, becomes an end in itself – hence: utter experience.

(2) These (utter) experiences then served as the main foundation for my second main method: participant observation – which I understand as a distinct technique for data-collection, not as a general description of ethnographic work (DeWalt & DeWalt 2000). It was also from the systematic and "semi-systematic" recording of data (from unsystematic samples), compiled through the acts of participating and observing, that I collected the bulk of my overall fieldwork data. At times, however, the combined methods of joining for utter experiences *and* for purposive (ethnographic) experiences caused certain misunderstandings among my informants. For example, after some four months of almost daily encounters and many long conversations with my informants group of befriended work-associates in central Freetown, I had compiled whole biographies about them, worked out long lists of their music practices and preferences, recorded them singing and narrating folk tales to me, took portraits of them, and had their worries, concerns and dreams firmly inscribed into my long-term memory. Despite all that (data gathering), a week before my departure three members of the group approached me in a sort of aggrieved manner and asked why I had never conducted any interview with them. As much as they knew and were aware of my purposive (ethnographic) motives, of me taking notes and pictures, making recordings, and endlessly badgering them with questions about their lives, worries and dreams, apparently I was not perceived as a "proper scientist" who sits down with his interviewee and questionnaire and gets to the point by asking pre-formulated questions.

(3) In many other instances, particularly with informants whom I could not meet on a daily basis, I employed, firstly, (slightly) more formal interview techniques and, secondly, what Robert Levy and Douglas Hollan (2000) call "person-centred interviewing", for which I adopted a (slightly) more "proper scientific" appearance as well. The former interview technique consisted mainly of semi-structured interviews, which I predominantly conducted with the groups of Freetown's music "intermediaries", duplicators and replicators. I employed the latter technique of person-centred interviewing mostly for the interviewing of arbitrarily sampled interviewees. This method was primarily meant to unveil the complex and shifting interplay between the more individual realms and the more socio-cultural, collective ones. In my fieldwork practice, person-centred interviewing implied to approach the interviewee as both an informant (an expert witness about society) and as a respondent (an object of study in him- or herself). In this oscillation between respondent and informant modes, the conflicts, coherences, contradictions and drawn and blurred boundaries between the person-in-itself and understandings of her/his external contexts were meant to be illuminated. My particular focus was thereby put on the respective person's perceptions, ideas and meanings ascribed to music practices, as well as on the person's experiences, preferences and concepts of music in its various dimensions as related to the person him/herself and to otherwise experienced or imagined ideas held about music.

(4) Finally, I also conducted several group interviews, of which some were set up in a more formal setting while most simply occurred "in the heat of the moment" – which I then documented via notes and recordings. In line with Arnold Wolfe and Margaret Haefner (1996), this particular method of data collection proved a prime means in order to "clear a space for a living social group other than critics to account for its consumption of a media text in a group members' 'own words' and to investigate what a media audience understands of a text" (Wolfe and Haefner 1996: 136). As these discussions occurred predominantly in rather informal and (for my concerns) extemporaneous situations and settings, it was mainly – and unfortunately – during these most informative encounters and discussions that the language barrier became most palpable and impeding. While I have had a sort of research assistant, mostly I relied on his – invaluable – expertise and assistance during my regular excursions into Freetown's night life while

I conducted almost all of my (daytime) interviews alone. About halfway through my fieldwork period, my passive Krio – the lingua franca of basically all Freetonians – became good enough in order to conduct interviews by asking questions half in “broken Krio” and half in English and by receiving (and understanding) answers given in Krio. However, in many instances my interviewees felt (or appeared) comfortable enough talking in English. In cases in which this was not the case, I encouraged my counterpart to speak in Krio and looked for translation of central interview passages (that I did not understand) afterwards. In the dynamics and settings of informal and often most vibrant group discussions and “interviews”, I often failed to follow and was lost (in the conversation or in its translation).

PART II

FROM CLASS TO MASS

FREETOWN'S MUSIC AND SOCIETY
IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

