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Cross-fading the City

Expressive Sociability as Relational Politics in Gulu, Uganda

ABSTRACT Widely discussed among scholars of cities in Africa is the need to conceive these cities as relational formations, but rarely is the sensory addressed. Scholarship on urban soundscapes has tended to emphasize aesthetic and technological practices without grappling with their aural political import. This article brings together these conversations in order to address the intersections of urban sound and politics in a small Ugandan city. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in the city of Gulu, the author examines how young Acoli men use aural, expressive social practices to sonically rework the city and their place in it. Referencing the work of ethnomusicologists, anthropologists, and critical theorists concerned with sound, the author argues that practices of "expressive sociability" elaborate a relational politics of city-making vis-à-vis their intimate exchanges that cross-fade with urban street soundscapes. This work aims to amplify the importance of ordinary aural practices to conceiving political valences of relational life in global south cities. KEYWORDS soundscapes, intimacy, relational politics, global south cities

Over the course of the night, the small wireless speaker changed hands but always remained at the center of the gathering. Inserted into the handheld speaker was a flash drive; playing from the speaker was a selection of syncopated beats, no lyrics, downloaded from the Internet. Around the speaker huddled a ring of young men, some listening for the beat and trying out their rhymes—freestyle—others (like me) listening in for the fun of it. Taking turns, these guys raise their voices to match this beat or the next one, alternating between Acoli idioms and English ones. The handheld speaker remained at the center—until its charge ran out and the battery died. It's a cool, rather ordinary Gulu Saturday night in February 2017, and we're hanging out in the shadows just across the road from Complex Studio in the city's Nakasero neighborhood.[1] In a few months, the owner of this plot would put iron sheets around the perimeter, creating a physical barrier between the property and the open space of the street. No one seemed to know the owner's precise reasons for erecting this barrier—did they plan to build? did they fear encroachment?—but in effect the barrier would prevent hangs like this one and manifest, in a small way, the city's changing urban topography.

Someone presses Play—or maybe Next—and a beat starts. Acapela raises his voice into the ring of friends, singing a chorus. Judas comes in to rhyme a verse. Another guy tries his flow as far as his mouthful of "greens" (slang for khat, called *miraa* in Gulu) would allow, then breaks off. Guys are excited. I sip a Tusker. Judas comes again, "I love her so much, when I love something, I put my heart in it, who confess first, me or you?" Acapela, now

in Acoli, jumps in with a chorus.[2] Judas picks up, freestyling. Other guys try it out, Jah Remedi starts, gets tongue-tied, drops out, Black Mcee picks up, rhyming with jokes that make the ring erupt with laughter. Next—a new beat. Judas comes in, "It's a kind of game," he starts, before switching to Acoli. Acapela on the chorus again. These two are dominating the freestyle session. In the background I hear Black Mcee "mmmm" feeling J's rhyme. Laughter erupts again—this time it's Acapela making jokes.[3]

The group is caught up in camaraderie and fun and enfolded in its sounds.[4] Listening back to my audio recording of this gathering over a year later, what is amplified is the playfulness, the lyricism, the jokes, the laugher, and the fun that unfolds as these friends show off their vocal abilities. In the thick of the hang, the sounds that seem to matter most are the voices of friends and fellow young men raised in response to a set of digitally produced and broadcast beats. If, as R. Murray Schafer has dubbed, the "sounds that matter" are an environment's soundscape, these vocalized expressive acts are critical, material aspects of Gulu's urban soundscape.[5] As sounds that matter, these vocalized sounds bind the double meaning of "mattering" as that which has physical substance and that which has significance. I suggest "expressive sociability" as a way of naming how such vocalized expressive acts also help substantiate intimate relations, such as friendships. These ordinary aural exchanges cultivate a sense of intimacy, thereby affording particular ways of being and being together in the city. To the extent that moments of expressive sociability enable connectedness to each other in/and the city, might they also register a sounded micro-politics of urban relationality? And what happens when these feelingful registers become more widely circulated in the streets as popular music?

In this article I explore what shared expressive moments between these music artist-friends have to do with the soundscape of Gulu, Uganda. I am interested in how their expressive sociability, as it unfolds with/in the streets of Gulu—distinct from, but also connected with and adjacent to, the sung vocal performances that happen inside Gulu's music production studios—makes the city a place that feels like theirs, a place that feels livable. Feeling, here, takes on multiple registers, including feeling sound (a sensation), feeling a sound (as in deriving enjoyment, an aesthetic pleasure), feelings of self-worth or pride (an affective register), feelings of expression (a practice of the voice), and shared feelings (of being together, connected, belonging).

To explore these ideas, I first elaborate this idea of expressive sociability as it relates to the particular settings and experiences of this group of friends. I then situate my argument in relation to literature about urban soundscapes, sounded politics, and the materiality of intimacy. African studies scholar Xavier Livermon has drawn attention to the ways in which "the feel of the city is reflected in its sound" through the example of circulations of kwaito music in Johannesburg.[6] While I am not focused on a specific genre or its particular circulations through the space of a city, I build on this formulation, seeking to expand both the kinds of sounded "feeling" at play and how they matter. I then return to the shared moment with which this paper opened, lingering there before juxtaposing it with another hang not long before. I connect these friend-centered gatherings with the sound practices of Gulu's "distribution centers," which daily (when there is electricity to power them) broadcast the music of local artists into the streets.[7] I take these expressive

moments between artist-friends in the streets and in-studio expressive practices as part of a shared sound system and tease out the ways in which these aural encounters manifest the relational city beyond this particular group of friends.[8] To do so, I describe one particular song, "Pe Abiye," by the Gulu-based dancehall artist Rakas Topa, which directly engages the politics of becoming a city. Finally, I conclude by offering some reflections on how this addresses intersections of sound and politics in/of a city.

EXPRESSIVE SOCIABILITY IN THE STREETS OF GULU

Judas and Acapela and the rest of these guys are part of a group of friends in Gulu, Uganda, who identify as music artists and emcees, a group I hung out with as part of my ethnographic field research in Gulu between 2016 and 2018. For the core members of this group, friendship entails meeting daily to swap stories, share food or *miraa* or liquor supplies, and discuss the day's happenings. These face-to-face hangs and shared resources contribute significantly to sustaining the intimacy of their friendships. Swapping stories, airing thoughts, discussing goings-on all name ordinary daily practices of expressive sociability, which, like shared food and drink, serves as a resource for sustaining life(-together) in the city. Like any social world, this group of friends is not seamless; some hang with each other more frequently than others, some have a more established reputation as artists than others, some are regarded with more or less respect, and while all speak Acoli or Luo, some have spent more or less time living in Gulu itself.

Theirs is a group for whom friendship builds on the shared experiences of a generation. As young men, they share a set of experiences that include growing up in town neighborhoods, where life was structured by different forces than their parents' generation—and different sounds. All of these guys are part of a generation of young people born in the late 1980s and early- to mid-1990s and whose coming of age occurred in a particular moment in Gulu's history. This set of experiences includes growing up male and Luo (Acoli) during northern Uganda's 20-year civil war; growing up in working-class families in the early years of structural adjustment in Uganda, with newly privatized public enterprises and high unemployment rates; growing up in town as a lived place, rather than somewhere you go only to make or spend money;[9] and a certain experience of choosing paths other than the ones their parents expected of them, drawn to music instead of more conventional professions, though some of them hold down day jobs as well as record music.

In addition, they are part of a generation and social world for whom "schizophonic" sounds—sounds separated from their source—were popularized in Gulu via the circulation of cassette tapes.[10] These young men grew up not only hearing the nostalgia-tinged voices of their parents and grandparents bemoaning town life and reminiscing about life in their villages but also sharing their parents' listening practices that regularly summoned village-elsewheres from within town vis-à-vis the sounds of nanga, the adungu, and Lingala played live or, starting in the 1990s, on radio.[11] The circulation of cassettes not only introduced them to new sounds—the sounds of funk and hip-hop and R & B and reggae—but also to the idea that they too could record music, setting many of them on

that path. When I was with them, hanging on verandas or in passageways, our conversations would frequently turn to their shared passion and profession, music—perhaps a new song they were working on or an upcoming performance or discussion of how to better promote the northern Ugandan artists—but not always. Regardless of a particular day's participants or topics or vibe, these daily gatherings and aural exchanges affirm the shared struggles and relationships that exist between them.

Expressive sociability offers one way to grasp an ordinary sounded politics that might otherwise go unnoticed for the ways they are part and parcel to everyday social interactions. With the term "expressive sociability" I am building on work that traces how expressivity is used to create social relations and make places.[12] Recent ethnographic accounts such as those by Alex Chavez and Emily Yun Wang demonstrate how migrants, or those otherwise dispersed, make a place for themselves and cultivate collective belonging through everyday expressive practices.[13] These works point toward the need to consider sound practices in relation to, but not limited to, expressly musical forms—a commitment I share. As Chavez writes in his ethnography of Mexican migrant musicians, "an opening emerges where everyday people give form to a tactile and fleeting expressive world that erupts in moments of congregation. . . . This is what rests behind the music."[14] In connecting Gulu artists' vocalized, sung expression with other ordinary aural exchanges, I want to probe this emergent opening as it unfolds in relation to forces of urbanization on the African continent. While these aural exchanges are momentary, over time they cultivate enduring relations and perform a kind of "soundwork" that opens avenues for making the city livable.[15] How might the intimate—and therefore affective and political—ties afforded by expressive worlds enable reprieve or respite from the lived struggles of life in the city?

INTIMATE SOUNDSCAPES

In arguing that these voices, raised in response to a set of beats broadcast from a small, handheld speaker, are critically "sounds that matter" in/of a city, I am expanding R. Murray Schafer's meaning of the phrase. With his development of soundscape studies, Schafer suggests an integrative but also curated approach to understanding acoustic environments, but his writings about soundscapes are marked by a curious absence of human voices. This absence has been noted elsewhere as a limitation of the concept.[16] Steven Feld, for example, has addressed this absence through a theory of "acoustemology" that connects vocalized expressive culture, sense of place, and acoustic ways of knowing and dwelling.[17] People, however, are not absent from Schafer's curation of soundscapes so much as situated primarily as listeners. He acknowledges, for example, that certain sounds, which he calls "sound marks," are communal and carry special meaning to the people of that community.[18] Matt Sakakeeny builds on this idea in his study of the soundscape of the city of New Orleans in order to attend to the politics of urban, joyous, racialized "displays of expressive culture."[19] New Orleans jazz parades, Sakakeeny points out, are not only sound marks, an acoustic feature of the city's soundscape, but also a meaningful political feature and way of "staking claim" to the city in which the musicians live.[20]

Judas, Acapela, and their group of friends, like the jazz musicians Sakakeeny describes, certainly feel the effects of imbalanced power that structures life in Gulu, and their expressive practices may well elaborate a politics. These are not, however, well grasped through the juridical language of "staking claim." For one, bifurcations between public/private and individual/society do not operate elsewhere, across the global south, as they are presumed to operate in the liberal humanist political thought that informs so much of Euro-Western political practice. As Michael Birenbaum Quintero has pointed out, the field of sound studies remains critically limited if it "assumes a rational, liberal, state-centered political frame for sounded practice." These ideas not only situate the state as authoritative body but also assume listeners identify as "citizens-individuals."[21] Vocalized expressive practices, as resources shared between friends, articulate an investment in engagement and togetherness rather than in the "respectful withdrawal" of liberalism.[22]

For scholars of Africa, attention to cities as "deeply relational" formations is similarly motivated by a commitment to thinking about cities in the global south outside hegemonic Euro-American theoretical frameworks.[23] In cities across the continent, the salience of densely relational affiliations generates an array of relational modes including the provisional, the flexible, the improvised, the rhythmic, and the sticky. This attention to various relational modalities strives to generate frameworks through which global south cities can be conceived and appreciated on their own terms.[24] Thus far, however, these relational modes have been limited by a lack of attention to their sensory registers. Building on this research, my work seeks to account for ordinary intimate moments and aural exchanges within an urban sound world and to amplify their significance in the relational city.

Intimacy offers a theoretical frame that amplifies the constitutive role of the sensory—touching, hearing, feeling, smelling, and so on—to the relational. This notion of "intimate soundscapes" is informed by a cohort of feminist and critical theorists who have considered intimacy as a material as well as a social force with multiple, varied political valences.[25] As these writers emphasize, intimacy suggests modes of relational life that are lived and feelingful, but also caught up in fields of power. Feminist anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli's attention to intimacy in settler colonial imaginations has shown that casting the intimate as the other to the public or social sphere operates as a mode of governance, while feminist scholar Ara Wilson points out that the affective work entailed by intimate relations can articulate with or against the physical and immaterial systems of capitalism.[26] Drawing together these concerns with the productive soundwork of expressive culture, the intimate soundscapes concept names an aural politics of place in the city.[27]

The airtime music receives and the routes it audibly travels (or efforts to silence it) offer one way to trace urban social formations. Writing about Johannesburg, Xavier Livermon provokes consideration of how "the feel" of a city is "reflected in its sound."[28] He explores music as "a form of urban social memory," narrating stories about the circulation of kwaito music in relation to a newly mobile generation of Black youth.[29] Livermon shows how kwaito maps the city in new ways through its broadcast from automobiles, in nightclubs, and at festivals. Although Livermon does not explicate the various ways these inflect "the

feel" of the city, his stories narrate multiple kinds of feeling that include the feelings of intimacy between friends and stranger sociabilities, of playfulness and joy, of sharing food and drink, and the physical movements of dancing. While I am not focused on the circulations of a single musical genre (like kwaito) through the space of a city, I share Livermon's interest in how sound co-articulates the feelingful and the political.

The urban sound world of Judas, Acapela, and their fellow artist-colleagues suggests a need to expand on the kinds of feelings at play and why they matter. The feelingful sounds of their friendly gatherings not only reflect and circulate a form of urban social memory but, moving out of a representational register, also serve as a creative resource for placing themselves and the city "in the mix"—the concept Alexander Weheliye uses to describe the forms through which sonic Afro-modernity emphasizes "combinations" as much as or more than "the individual parts."[30] In Gulu, expressive practices and music-making are practices mostly done together with others—social practices. They do not unfold isolated within the private space of the studio, itself a densely social place, but in between, while out and about, and outside in the streets as well. As a creative resource, these expressive practices invite attention to the ways in which making music and making cities unfold together. Weheliye has suggested that understanding reproduced sounds and their media as "events" rather than "copies" amplifies repetition of difference over a hegemony of representation.[31] Rather than treat music as an object, I understand music as a sounded "event" voiced and listened to, often repeatedly, and significant for the ways in which it can and does remake peoples' relations to one another.

(CROSS-)FADING AS RELATIONAL POLITICS

Let us return, then, and listen again. In the opening scenario, a gathering and a freestyle session unfold in the evening hours, after dark, just outside of a popular recording studio in Gulu called Complex Studio in the neighborhood of Nakasero.[32] A group of friends who are mostly rap emcees (Acapela is the lone R & B vocalist among them) are gathered at the roadside and engaged in a freestyle session where they take turns raising their voices into the circle. I specifically do not call it a battle, for while there are certainly investments in proving skilled lyricism—investments we might call reputation or sense of pride—it was not a competition in the sense that produces winners and losers. All the same, the play of words, vocal styling and control, and vocalized responses received from listeners around the circle suggest that these, too, are expressions of masculinity and manhood.[33]

As I listen further to the recording of this gathering, my attention shifts as my body had shifted in the flow of the evening. We are on the outer edge of the group now, chatting, laughing. I can hear a car drive by—while some guys keep freestyling. As I listen, one beat sounds familiar, and I realize it ended up recorded to one of Judas's studio albums that year. Then the music stops a moment, and other sounds rush into my Sony PCM-M10 stereo mics, the playback of which I am now listening to attentively: the rise and fall wrrrrring of motorcycles as they pass, the murmur of voices at a not-so-far distance as people walk by on foot, and loudspeaker music bleeding in from the distribution center just down the road. Judas plays another beat; others are now tired. The tall

guy jumps in with some rhymes. Next. Acapela plays a dancehall rhythm, Judas raps, "This is freestyle, I'm not alone—I'm with my man Acapela. . . . "

The camaraderie and fun mask the sounds of the city. In the midst of the freestyle session, the city is present audibly, but at the periphery, having *faded* from the center of attention. The recording reveals what in the moment I had not fully noticed, for I too had been caught up in listening and enjoying the evening. These friends are gathered together in the streets at the center of the city—yet the city itself has, in a sense, receded. This fading enacts a politics of audibility, one that operates less by silencing than by shifting one's attunements more or less in relation to each other. Friends fade in, city fades out. *I'm not alone, I'm with my man Acapela.* It is here where it may be helpful to juxtapose this opening scenario with another.

We are again in front of Complex Studio, only this time, I am sharing a small wooden bench on the veranda with Judas and two other rap emcees, Black Mcee and Jah Remedi. It's early evening and people's comings and goings unfold in front of us as we sit facing the roadway. This time the wrrrrring of passing motorcycles, voices raised to greet us as familiar people walk by, and music broadcast from loudspeakers nearby enfold us as we talk. Nakasero is active this time of day, with both those returning to their homes to rest or prepare supper and those on their way to hang out in or by way of the streets. Complex Studio sits on a dusty side road, just around the corner from a betting place, Top Bet, which is usually lined with the motorcycles of bodaboda drivers trying their lucky hand. Lining this recently paved road (Cemetery Road) to one side is a block of lockup shopfronts, including the GaaGaa bus station and a spare parts shop, and to the other side, a series of free-standing kiosks and mud-wattle homes lining the edge of the old Muslim/Hindu cemetery.[34] Across the road from Top Bet are two portable metal structures, one of which is a barbershop, with a media distribution center on its stoop that provides a soundtrack for those in the vicinity, as long as there is electricity, and offers cell phone charging when there isn't.

This night as we sat and talked, Remedi began quietly airing his frustrations with having completed university with a diploma in information technology (IT) but now struggling to find a job in which he can utilize that skillset:

> When you finish, you can't find a job, so you've (or your parents have) put all this money into studies, with nothing to show, and no way to make money. It would have been better to take that money and use it to invest in starting your own small business, at least. They tell you to go be creative and do something for yourself—but with what capital? At least those school fees could have been used as capital to start something.

His was a common struggle among Gulu youths who, raised to value education, began to question its value in the face of no job prospects.[35] The conversation then shifted, and Judas and Remedi began to tell me about the Nakasero of their childhood: "This is home. It's where we grew up together," they reminisced. In those days, the place was not good, they narrated matter-of-factly, "It used to be rough, there were some guys around who liked to . . . roam the streets, but they have died, from AIDS and stuff." Judas narrates— then clarifies: "But the place is now okay." Remedi echoes, "Yeah, now it's okay here, not

like those days. And people just like this area, so many people come this side." His words observe a shift, from a time when people would warn you to avoid Nakasero to a time when Nakasero has become a "happening" place in Gulu.[36] At last, Remedi confesses, "I have to pass this side every day; if I don't pass here, I just feel like eh, like something is off," describing a palpable sense of affection to a place that daily draws him back. *This is home.*

In this second, more subdued exchange, the material difficulties of the city and its histories come to the fore, *fading in*. Not only sonically, as the sounds of the city enfold us, but also in our conversation, in which Gulu, and Nakasero in particular, are revealed as difficult places— but also places to which these young men have enduring, affective attachments.

Listening with and across these two intimate exchanges between friends, we witness different relations to Gulu "in" sound. In the first, the city fades out but does not disappear, while the sounds of a social gathering fade in, enfolding the group in its sounds; in the second, the city fades in, becoming the central focus of the group's attunements. By activating relational combinations rooted in sonic intimacies, even while the forces of racial capital continue to impinge on their lives vis-à-vis Gulu's urbanization process, this group of artist-friends effectively tune out and turn down or tune in and turn up the city. This fading manifests an urban relational micro-politics. As Tara Rodgers has shown in her conversations with other women in electronic music, there is not only one way to fade a sound mix, but many—and the choices made about how to fade matters acoustically and conceptually.[37] While, generally, a cross-fade enacts "a transition during which one sound or element of a mix fades out, and another fades in," how this unfolds is particular and entails temporal attunements.[38] As one producer admits to Rodgers, "The idea's very simple: fading in, fading out, crossfade. But it's another question to do it in the right time, at the right moment, in the right proportion."[39]

Listening in to these intimate soundscapes, Gulu emerges as a place that unfolds "in the mix"—through a series of cross-faded aural layerings that matter more and less in relation to each other. A relational city, either way you fade it. While for Schafer, soundscapes, like renderings of landscapes, take form through distinctions between "figure" and "ground," what I have described here does not take shape through the bounded contrasting of objects so much as a layering of possible combinations—more and less difficult, more and less enjoyable, more and less welcoming, at different intervals and occasions.[40] Attuning to these (cross-)fadings opens up attention to the ways in which expressive sociability serves as a means of tuning out the city and thereby reworking one's place in it.[41]

STREET MUSIC

Musicking and socializing intermix in the streets of Gulu.[42] Friendly bouts of freestyling— such as the scene I opened with—and other ordinary hangs exhibit expressive sociability as part of both creative practices of music-making and social practices of fun-making (often during evening and nighttime hours) that daily emerge from and unfold in the streets. And, for those artists actively recording tracks, the final phase of making music usually entails moving a song *back* into the streets after it has been recorded, mixed, and mastered in one of

Gulu's production studios. Among Gulu artists, making a track "move," i.e. disseminating it widely and audibly, is the final step to its creation. Rather than distribution and circulation as separate processes from production, the creation of a new track includes figuring ways (or trying) to make your sound move around town.

Media distribution centers are a mediating force in this mix-up between musicking and socializing for the ways these centers determine what is (or isn't) made audible to the people and passersby of Gulu. Also known as burning centers, a name that speaks to the legacy of their emergence during the period when CDs were the dominant format in Gulu, media distribution centers occupy a prominent and usually loud feature of Gulu's soundscape. Most start playing music mid-morning, and some as early as 8 a.m. During morning hours the volume is often kept at relatively soft levels; as the sun climbs higher, so also these broadcasts crescendo, becoming more energetic in style and in volume later in the day and into the evening, and then they decrescendo again at day's end. For the guys (and it is almost always young men) who operate the many distribution centers that pepper town, broadcasting music into the streets is both a way to support local artists and to attract customers to their small-business endeavors.

For artists, these music broadcasts matter as a pivotal way of getting their songs heard and their artistry appreciated. These songs are "street music," respected Gulu-based music artist Jeff Korondo told me one day in an informal conversation at his own studio.[43] As he explained, these tracks are "just for the streets, nothing else, few of them are even getting shows. It's just for playing around the streets." His words evidence the relative *im*mobility of music produced by global south artists[44]—much of the music produced in Gulu's studios stays within Gulu (though, increasingly, social media serves as another key dissemination platform). I adopt Jeff's concept of street music as a helpful shorthand for describing music produced in Gulu's studios and broadcast into the streets of Gulu from distribution centers. However, while Jeff speaks of the recordings in a diminishing way (using "just" to qualify their circulation) to emphasize the relatively small reach of these audio tracks, I wish to consider them from another perspective.

I take up "street music" as a concept that names a powerful *popular* circulation of vocalized (sung) expression. In Gulu, a popular song is one that moves—one that is heard, broadcast, requested, amplified in the streets around town—and one that sounds repeatedly. A popular track is one that gets a lot of airtime: you will hear it projecting into the streets of the central business district, from the speakers of distribution centers or sound system suppliers. You will hear it in certain nightclubs at certain times around town. You will hear it—levels blaring—from street drives announcing upcoming performances and you will hear it in the crowd at these same shows. And you will hear it, at lower volumes, playing from cell phones. You might even hear it on the local FM radio. While many artists do dream of their music taking them beyond the streets of Gulu or northern Uganda, at the same time it remains true that making a "hit," one heard in Gulu's streets, effectively establishes the artists' popularity.

I want to graft this meaning of popular music, drawn from Gulu's music scene, onto another—one inspired by the work of Sylvia Wynter who, drawing on the work of Amiri Baraka, posits the popular as a way of registering "the movements of people who are

logically excluded . . . with their exclusion being indispensable to the reproduction of the present order."[45] It is the popular, rather than the protest genre, that in Gulu registers shifts in affective-political feeling and opens possible avenues for making the city livable, and sometimes vibrant. Making a track move not only implies making it audible to a listening city (however partially or unevenly)—it means making your listeners move and moving your listeners.

For example, toward the end of 2017 the song "Pe Abiye" was arguably the most popular track in town. Sung by Gulu-based dancehall artist Rakas Topa, "Pe Abiye" (translated as "I Will Not Accept") could be heard playing at all times of day across Gulu's airwaves.[46] On the track, Rakas raises his warm voice over an Afro dance beat to create a pop tune that is both catchy and emotional. The track could be heard playing from speakers on all corners of town, on the radio, at nightclubs like Pier A2, especially on "Luo Night," and even at BJz Bar & Grill, whose deejays admit that local artists only receive airtime "when really hitting." Rakas won Artist of the Year at the northern Uganda music awards the following year, in part for this song.

> Am from far, I came to town to change my life, because I want to work hard so that tomorrow, I'll be like Kakanyero. I want to be like Juma Jamie, who works in Mega FM, I want to be like Milton Obote, who even led Uganda, I want to be like Tempra Omona, who sang even in Kampala, I want to be like Nelson Mandela oh Mandela . . .
>
> I will not accept, I will not accept
>
> I will not accept, I will not accept
>
> People who want me to go back to the village, I will not accept.

As he sings, Rakas vocalizes a shared affective and political response to the underbelly of ongoing processes of urbanization in Gulu. The combination of meaningful lyrics, Rakas's warm vocal timbre, and an intense dancehall groove yield a track that is at once a lament, a protest or refusal, and a praise song for luminary urban figures.[47] The song's lyrics, sung in Acoli and here translated to English, carry a message felt powerfully at this moment, a time when people across Gulu were increasingly being told by municipal, division, and local government officials: If you cannot afford to build a "permanent" structure for your home, go back to the village. If you can't develop this piece of land according to "city" standards, sell it, and go back to the village. These messages were at the time being conveyed to many residents for whom coming to the city was, the generation before, a choice by force of war. With these feelingful qualities, the song resonated with the felt experience of many in Gulu encountering these material historical forces in everyday ways, while also moving them physically, drawing them in, making them dance.

At the time, the track ("Pe Abiye") sounded a vocalized register of affective, historical, and political alignments that were significant in shaping Gulu's urban worlds and their livability. As a theoretical frame, "register" draws on work by Lila Ellen Gray in Portugal that helpfully focuses attention on the affective worlds manifest through the urban song genre fado.[48] More specifically, Gray writes about music that moves in ways such that it becomes (of) a political movement—but that would not traditionally be understood as "protest

music." Unlike what Gray describes in Lisbon, "Pe Abyie" did not catalyze protests—as addressed above, in Gulu movement "from song to street" is not necessarily transgressive in the way she describes it is in Portugal.[49] In Gulu, popular music is street music, through and through. And yet Gray's attention to the ways in which "emergent aesthetic, expressive, and sensorial" aural elements have the ability to shift "politics of belonging" without necessarily being legible as a protest song in the generic sense is helpful also to figuring a politics of popular music.[50] "Pe Abiye" was massively popular because it was catchy, registering sounds that mattered emotionally, physically, and socially.

CONCLUSION

Among these young men in Gulu, friendships are solidified through shared experiences, hangs, sounds, jokes, beverages, foods, and more, all of which are also embodied ways of intimately, materially engaging the city. While the city is a difficult place, sometimes devastatingly so, certain sounded events of expressive sociability matter in ways that offer some respite or reprieve. What matters in these moments, as their stories and practices emphasize, are the ways these aural exchanges affirm one another in the process of people going about life in the city. Not because these resolve the difficulties of city life, and not to say tiffs and tensions between these men don't arise (they do, sometimes to blows), but because being together, aurally, in these ways feels good and makes life enjoyable.

My attention to expressive sociability in this article enables attention to the soundwork performed daily, and therefore repeatedly, through intimate relational practices—as well as the ways these aurally cross-fade to more or less enfold Gulu residents. In Gulu, practices of sung expression, whether playfully among friends or as broadcast in the streets, amplify a particular set of aural practices that register an everyday relational politics of being together. If practices and expressions of feeling afford important, everyday ways of forging friendships, building reputations, and offering respite, these same practices manifest intimate soundscapes and suggest ways of remaking relations to the city. In these moments, and through these relations, the city becomes elaborated through the ebb and flow of pleasurable, sounded feelings. Rather than shared meaning or juridical claims-making, these feelingful events register an aesthetic sensibility with an intensity of lived experience, sensation, or affect. As a relational politics, these practices operate through often-subtle shifts in orientation that shape the city and one's place in it. ■

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1. Here and throughout this article I use "Gulu" to specifically indicate the municipality of Gulu, rather than the district of Gulu. Gulu was officially upgraded from municipality to city status on July 1, 2020.

2. Acoli is the primary language of Gulu. Acoli also names the people who speak this language and who live, historically, in this part of northern Uganda, as well as parts of South Sudan. I choose the spelling *Acoli* rather than *Acholi*, the colonial misspelling (there is no H in the Acoli language, but C sounds like the English-language "ch").

3. You can listen to the music of Judas Rap Knowledge and Black Mcee here: https://www. reverbnation.com/judasrapknowledge and https://www.reverbnation.com/blackmcee. Or visit the YouTube channels of Judas and Jah Remedi: https://www.youtube.com/channel/ UCMxk_WxY9V9BAN0gvtJ2kbg/featured and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= KiJi4O0Q95U.

4. See Timothy Ingold on how the body becomes "ensounded." Timothy Ingold, "Against Soundscape," *Autumn Leaves: Sound and the Environment in Artistic Practice* (2007): 10–13.

5. R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 12.

6. Xavier Livermon, "Sounds in the City," *Johannesburg*, eds. Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 271–84.

7. What I'm calling a distribution center has several names. Others call it a burning center. Specific distribution centers go by their owners' names. These are kiosks set up with a computer and speaker system that store, supply, and broadcast digital music, and increasingly video and film. While they started with burning CDs and DVDs, these days MP3 is the primary format for music, transferred to USB flash drives or mobile phones.

8. By "sound system" I mean to indicate a set of technologies for projecting sound as well as the sets of purposes and socialities entailed with them. See Michael B. Quintero, "Loudness, Excess, Power: A Political Liminology of a Global City of the South," in *Remapping Sound* Studies, eds. Gavin Steingo and Jim Sykes (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 135–55.

9. This matters for many reasons, but especially given that, in Ugandan histories, the Acoli— infamously disinclined to leave their villages and move into town to labor for the British—had long resisted pressures to enter the money economy. For a long time even after independence, Gulu Town remained a commercial place rather than a place people stayed, a home place. For Judas and Acapela's generation this began to shift.

10. Schafer, 90.

11. The nanga is a type of trough zither, or the music played with it; the adungu is a three-stringed bow-harp; and Lingala is a loose term for Congolese music. I use the Acoli spelling for nanga; elsewhere in Uganda there are other variations on this name, for different instruments, spelled ennanga (south-central Uganda) and enanga (western Uganda).

12. Steven Feld and Keith Basso, eds. *Senses of Place* (Sante Fe, NM: School of Advanced Research Press, 1996); Marcus Anthony Hunter, Mary Pattillo, Zandria Fr. Robinson, and Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, "Black Placemaking: Celebration, Play, and Poetry," *Theory, Culture & Society* 33 no. 7–8 (2016): 31–56.

13. Emily Yun Wang, "Sung and Spoken Puns as Queer 'Home Making' in Toronto's Chinese Diaspora," *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* (October 2018): 50–62.; Alex Chavez. *Sounds of Crossing: Music, Migration, and the Aural Poetics of Huapango Arribeño.* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

14. Chavez, 33.

15. Michelle Hilmes, "Sound/Soundwork," in *Keywords in Media Studies,* eds. Jonathan Gray and Laurie Ouellette (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 180.

16. As David Samuels, Louise Meintjes, Ana Maria Ochoa, and Thomas Porcello have written: "In Schafer's chronicle of the soundscape, the human voice is progressively drowned out by modernity." David Samuels, Louise Meintjes, Ana Maria Ochoa, and Thomas Porcello, "Soundscapes: Toward a Sounded Anthropology," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39, no. 1 (2010): 329–45.

17. Steven Feld, "Acoustemology," in *Keywords in Sound*, eds. David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 12–21.

18. Schafer, 10.

19. Matt Sakakeeny, "'Under the Bridge': An Orientation to Soundscapes in New Orleans," *Ethnomusicology* 54, no. 1 (2010): 3.

20. Ibid., 1–27. Sakakeeny's formulation is that these unfold not only vis-à-vis people's everyday practices and ritualized expression but also through interactions with uneven structures of power (p. 16).

21. Quintero, 137.

22. Ibid., 145.

23. AbdouMaliq Simone and Edgar Pieterse, *New Urban Worlds: Inhabiting Dissonant Times* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 154.

24. The relational city has been explored as sets of ordinary associations (Makhulu 2015, Robinson 2006), as imbrications of geography and sociality (Quayson 2014), as plays of in/visibility (De Boeck and Plissart 2014), as a series of im/material encounters (Larkin 2008), as multi-plicitous and "in motion" (Nuttall and Mbembe 2008), as infrastructural and provisional (Simone 2004), as amalgamations of human and nonhuman elements (Mitchell 2002), and as trans-local and "worldly" (Simone 2001). See Anne-Maria Makhulu, *Making Freedom: Apartheid, Squatter Politics, and the Struggle for Home* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015); Jennifer Robinson, *Ordinary Cities: Between Modernity and Development* (London: Psychology Press, 2006); Ato Quayson, *Oxford Street, Accra: City Life and the Itineraries of Transnationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); Filip De Boeck and Marie-Françoise Plissart, *Kinshasa: Tales of the Invisible City* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2014); Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe, eds., *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); AbdouMaliq Simone, "People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg," *Public Culture* 16, no. 3 (2004): 407–29; Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); AbdouMaliq Simone, "On the Worlding of African Cities." *African Studies Review* 44, no. 2 (2001): 15–41.

25. See Ara Wilson, "The Infrastructure of Intimacy," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 41, no. 2 (2016): 247–80; Juno Salazar Parreñas, "The Materiality of Intimacy in Wildlife Rehabilitation: Rethinking Ethical Capitalism Through Embodied Encounters with Animals in Southeast Asia," *Positions: Asia Critique* 24, no. 1 (2016): 97–127; Brenda Chalfin, "Public Things, Excremental Politics, and the Infrastructure of Bare Life in Ghana's City of Tema," *American Ethnologist* 41, no. 1 (2014): 92–109; Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism,* 6th ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Samuel R. Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York: NYU Press, 1999).

26. I understand cities to be one such physical and immaterial system.

27. I understand aurality to conceive both a relationship through which affective/political ties are established and the means through which this relationship becomes recognized. See Ana Maria

Ochoa Gautier, *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

28. Livermon, 271.

29. Ibid.

30. Alexander Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 32.

31. Ibid.

32. Nakasero is the most populated neighborhood of the Labourline District of Gulu, historically significant because it was established as laborers' quarters for urban migrants by the British. This is a history I go into further in a longer version of this paper.

33. Louise Meintjes, *Dust of the Zulu: Ngoma Aesthetics After Apartheid* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).

34. In late 2016, these mud-wattle homes were marked with red X's by municipal and division officials, indicating that they were slotted for demolition and should be evacuated. The cemetery is colloquially known as "the old Muslim cemetery," though some elders insist that it was originally a Hindu burial place.

35. With an estimated 75 to 80% of Uganda's population under the age of 30, this is something of a national challenge, not only specific to Gulu. However, the especially high value placed on education among Acoli adds pressure to this dynamic. While I don't delve into it here, this situation may be thought of in relation to a vast anthropological literature on "precarity." See, for example, Anne Allison, *Precarious Japan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

36. One could usefully compare the transformation of Nakasero into a happening place in relation to gentrification processes in working-class city neighborhoods elsewhere. As David Novak describes in relation to South Osaka, these are happening in relation to neoliberal forces, practices of economic investment, and government policy, though of course in ways that dovetail with the historical and cultural circumstances of particular creative communities. See David Novak, "The Arts of Gentrification: Creativity, Cultural Policy, and Public Space in Kamagasaki," *City and Society* 31, no. 1 (April 2019): 1–25.

37. Tara Rodgers, *Pink Noises: Women on Electronic Music and Sound* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

38. Ibid., 285

39. Ibid., 58.

40. Schafer, 9.

41. Others have written about ways of reworking one's place in the city through sound. See, for example: Joseph Schloss and Bill Bahng Boyer, "Urban Echoes: The Boombox and Sonic Mobility in the 1980s," in *The Oxford Handbook of Mobile Music Studies*, eds. Sumanth Gopinath and Jason Stanyek (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Shuhei Hosokawa, "The Walkman Effect," in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne (New York: Routledge, 2012), 104–16; Michael Bull, "The Audio-Visual Ipod," in ibid., 197–208.

42. Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2012).

43. You can listen to some of Jeff's music here: https://www.reverbnation.com/jeffkorondo.

44. Gavin Steingo and Jim Sykes, eds., *Remapping Sound Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019); Gavin Steingo, "Sound and Circulation: Immobility and Obduracy in South African Electronic Music," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 24, no. 1 (2015): 102–23.

45. Sylvia Wynter, "On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Reimprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of Desêtre: Black Studies Toward the Human Project," *A Companion to African-American Studies* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons, 2006), 117.

46. To listen to the song and view its video (filmed and produced in Kampala in 2018) see Rakas Topa, "Pe Abiye," YouTube, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_BQEu560dwA (accessed June 30, 2020).

47. Kakanyero is a wealthy businessman who owns several buildings in Gulu. Juma Jamie is a respected radio personality and music promoter in Gulu. Milton Obote was president of Uganda from 1966 to 1971 and again from 1980 to 1985. Tempra Omona is an Acoli vocal artist famed for having lived in the United States for many years before returning to Gulu around this time.

48. Lila Ellen Gray, "Registering Protest: Voice, Precarity, and Return in Crisis Portugal," *History and Anthropology* 27, no. 1 (January 2016): 60–73.

49. Ibid., 62.

50. Ibid.