

## The Representation of Music in the Novels of Chinua Achebe, Aminata Sow Fall and Zora Neale Hurston

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Alassane Abdoulaye Dia

Department of English

Université numérique Cheikh Hamidou KANE

BP 15126 Dakar-Fann Dakar, Sénégal

Email: alassaneabdoulaye.dia@unchk.edu.sn

### Abstract:

This paper explores the multidimensional concept of musical representation in the African and African American novel with a focus on the works of Chinua Achebe, Aminata Sow Fall and Zora Neale Hurston. It analyzes how music conveys meaning both within and beyond linguistic frameworks. It contributes to the philosophical debates surrounding whether music can represent anything beyond its popular concept as means of entertainment. The study delves into the role of metaphors, symbols, gestures, and embodied cognition in musical understanding, arguing that listeners often credit narrative or emotive content to musical structures. Drawing on the examples of these prominent writers, the paper highlights how musical motifs can evoke movement, emotion, or narrative arcs without requiring textual elements. Finally, the paper concludes that music as a representational system operates through dynamic, non-verbal analogies to human experience; it challenges, to some extent, the notion that representation requires fixed semantic content.

**Keywords:** Music, folklore, aesthetics, rhythm, oral tradition, song

African and African American literatures have been shaped by a constant dialogue with traditional cultural forms among which music stands as a foundational pillar. Far from being confined to an aesthetic or entertaining function, music plays a structuring role in the narrative and symbolic architecture of literary works. In both African and African American societies, music is more than a mere art form; it is a language, a repository of memory, a ritual and social act, and a medium for communal expression. It preserves the traces of oral tradition, passed down through generations, and lies at the heart of everyday life, religious practices, social struggles, and expressions of identity. This is particularly apparent in the works of these novelists: the Nigerian Chinua Achebe, the Senegalese Aminata Sow Fall, and the African American Zora Neale Hurston.

These different writers give music a significant role in their novels. Through aesthetics rooted in orality, they weave musical elements—songs, rhythms, traditional instruments, or gospel—into the fabric of their novels. Music becomes a symbolic carrier of social cohesion, a voice of the ancestors, a means of resistance to overcome some psychological situations. It also appears as a mode of expression through which collective memory is extolled within the novel.

From this perspective, it is relevant to ask the following questions: how does music, as a cultural code and narrative device, contribute to the structuring of the African and African American novel? What role does it play in the literary projects of these authors? How does it build the connection between tradition and modernity, orality and textuality? This study proposes to examine the semiotic, symbolic, and aesthetic functions of music within a representative corpus of the afore-mentioned literatures. It comprises Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), Aminata Sow Fall's *Le Jujubier du patriarce* (1993) and *Douceurs du bercail* (1998), and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) and *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939). Through a comparative and interdisciplinary analysis, drawing on narratology, anthropology, and semiotics, to some extent, the study highlights the role of music as a revealing force for identity and aesthetic choices.

Building on the theories of cultural intertextuality (Kristeva, Bakhtin), orality (Walter Ong) and the poetics of orature (Pio Zirimu), the objective of the study is to show that music is not only a textual motif, but an active principle in the construction of meaning. It operates simultaneously as a structuring element of the narrative, to some extent, a dissident voice, and an embodied memory. For Anne Mila (2006), "music in the African novel is analyzed as an extension of the poetic, touching the reader's senses through an aesthetic of textual musicality". In the African American field, spirituals and gospel are studied as forms of resistance and consolation during slavery. William T. Powell (2004) recalls that negro spirituals were both songs of survival and secret codes between slaves. In the twentieth century, gospel, born in urban black churches, became a music of liberation.

Indeed, in the corpus of this study, music stands as a means of revalorization of the oral tradition. One can go along with the general opinion which sustains that music in the texts of African authors is strongly linked to its role in traditional society. It is an element in the survival of "oral culture". In other words, "writers and poets want to safeguard their traditional values". However, it is not as apparent in one work as it is in another but very symbolic in terms of aesthetic value as it proves to be very expressive. Therefore, it is important to notice that its presence—or absence—in some novels (notably in Achebe's and Sow Fall's later works) can be understood in light of the sociocultural transformations their societies have undergone, marked by modernization, urbanization, and postcolonial political crises.

This paper, thus, seeks to demonstrate that music, in African and African American literatures, is not a mere folkloric backdrop, but a fully realized mode of expression, a space for re-creating reality, and a symbolic weapon of cultural reappropriation. It is an instrument of narration, subversion, and memory, and it allows writers to assert a literary voice rooted in tradition while remaining resolutely contemporary.

One might, then, ask to what extent does music, as a cultural expression rooted in oral tradition, constitute an aesthetic, symbolic, and narrative lever through which African and African American writers pen their works within a dynamics of memory, resistance, and identity construction? This paper seeks to argue that in the novels of Chinua Achebe, Aminata Sow Fall, and Zora Neale Hurston, music—be it traditional, religious, or epic—music functions as a matrix of meaning that organizes

the narrative while serving as a channel for collective memory. Its recurring presence, ritual intensity, emotional charge, or occasional absence are closely tied to the historical, social, and spatial context of each work. It appears as a major cultural indicator that reveals both a deep anchoring in orality and the authors' desire to revalorize a distinctly African or African American aesthetic feature within the novel.

Indeed, the study of music in African and African American literatures has given rise to a range of works that intersect literary aesthetics, cultural anthropology, colonial history, and postcolonial criticism. Far from being a mere decorative element, music emerges as an identity vector, a site of memory, a form of "written orality", and a full-fledged narrative strategy. Celestine Chukwuemeka Mbaegbu emphasizes the fundamental role of traditional African music as a "vehicle of emotions" and a "total art form," combining instruments, voice, and ritual function. According to Mbaegbu, music is not merely expressive; it is embedded in African social life and belief systems, which makes it a legitimate and powerful literary substance:

African music on the other hand is unique in itself. It is any sounds produced by playing indigenous African instruments like the wooden drum *Ekwe*, and other major and minor wind instruments like the *Ogene*, the *Udu*, the *Flutes*, and the *Oyo*, etc. African music also includes any sound produced by the Africans with their mouths popularly known as the "African Voices". The most important thing about any type of African music is that it has beauty of form and is intended to communicate some emotion. (Mbaegbu 2015, 177)

This view aligns with the ideas of Amadou Hampâté Bâ who saw oral arts as the foundations of collective memory in Africa. In fact, the inclusion of songs, rhythms, and musical utterances in the African novel has been explored by Paul Zumthor (1983), who speaks of "voices in the text" and the survival of oral performance in written storytelling. For scholars, music in the African novel is an extension of the poetic, which appeals to the reader's senses through an aesthetic of textual musicality. In the African American context, spirituals and gospel songs have been studied as forms of resistance and consolation during slavery. William T. Powell (2004) reminds us that Negro spirituals were both survival songs and coded messages among enslaved people. Gospel, which emerged in urban Black churches in the 20th century, evolved into a liberating force. Zora Neale Hurston, rooted in the Harlem Renaissance tradition, draws from it to integrate scenes of ritual singing, "call and response," and musical performance into her narratives, emphasizing the link between spirituality, suffering, and emancipation.

As for Chinua Achebe, music is inseparable from folklore—the oral, mythological, and ritual heritage of Igbo culture. Scholars such as Biodun Jeyifo and Kwame Anthony Appiah have shown that the postcolonial African novel often acts as a "site for the transcription of the oral world," where drums, songs, and dances function as identity markers. This process of "orature"—a term popularized by Pio Zirimu—serves to de-westernize the novel's aesthetics by grounding it in endogenous systems of representation. Thus, researchers have emphasized that music acts as a structuring poetic principle

in these novels. It permeates the syntax, infuses the narrative with lyrical tonality, and alters the reader's reception of the text.

Music plays a central role in the novels under study. Mbaegbu defines it as follows:

The term music means sounds made by playing instruments or singing. *Chambers Universal Learners Dictionary* defines music as the art of arranging and combining tones or sounds in order and often together to make a complete unit which has beauty of form and which is intended to communicate some emotion. (174)

In fact, music is deeply embedded in African and African American societies, where it remains a rich cultural legacy. It plays a fundamental role in these societies as both a unifying force and a vehicle for communication. According to Mbaegbu (2015), music occupies a particular and important place in African culture: "The most important thing about any type of African music is that it has beauty of form and is intended to communicate some emotion." (177)

This aspect reflects a highly significant cultural code in the lives of African peoples. While each society has its own culture, music remains a universal art form and one of the most widely shared cultural elements across the globe—hence its ubiquitous presence in world literatures. The underlying idea is that every culture uses music according to its own realities and cultural context. As a living art, music exists in all societies and functions as a force of social mobilization and cohesion. It has undergone many developments over time, with different musical forms emerging from the historical evolution of peoples. One may distinguish between traditional music, religious music, and modern or popular music. However, the latter is not fundamentally different from the traditional kind, as it often represents a modernization or industrialization of earlier forms—essentially a transformation or adaptation across time and space.

In the African context, Mbaegbu identifies various types of music and their respective functions:

Mother Africa can be said to be a land of diverse music, and any type of African music plays a vital role, hence the existence of such, because Africans believe that the purpose of anything gives meaning and existence to the thing itself. Mother Africa hosts three categories of music among which are traditional, popular and classical. Traditional music includes all traditional or folk music that serve as media of expression of African people's culture. (179)

In this analysis, I focus primarily on traditional and religious music. Popular music is largely absent from the novels under study. It is worth noting that the term "folklore" is often trivialized and misunderstood. In Senegal, for instance, folklore is commonly associated with fantasy, flamboyance, dance, leisure, and other light-hearted aspects of culture. However, music remains a central and serious component of folklore.

In this paper, I am concerned with music as an art form and as a legacy of oral tradition. All three writers—Chinua Achebe, Aminata Sow Fall, and Zora Neale Hurston—highlight the cultural

dimension of their works through an aesthetic and poetics shaped by music. It is important to note that traditional music predominates in the African novel, while Hurston's fiction is more marked by religious music, particularly Gospel and Spirituals. This difference is contextual: the type of music used by each author corresponds to their socio-historical background.

The presence of music in the African novel is not surprising. As an artist of their communities, writers use music as a backdrop to the novel. Accordingly, Chinua Achebe offers a folkloric portrayal of Igbo culture through the use of traditional music. This representation is particularly apparent in his first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, where he shows how music unites the people, strengthens social bonds, and animates the community. Music functions as a driver of social cohesion and cultural vitality. A relevant illustration is the New Year's celebration in *Things Fall Apart*. In Chapter Six, Achebe depicts a vivid folkloric scene during the second day of the New Year marked by a traditional wrestling match. On this occasion, musicians are vital to the festivities. The narrator describes the scene in a lyrical and poetic tone:

The whole village turned out on the ilo, men, women and children. They stood round in a huge circle leaving the centre of the playground free. The elders and grandees of the villages sat on their own stools brought there by their young sons or slaves. Okonkwo was among them. All others stood except those who came early enough to secure places on the few stands which had been built by placing smooth logs on forked pillars. [...] There were seven drums and they were arranged according to their sizes in a long wooden basket. There, men beat them with sticks, working feverishly from one drum to another. They were possessed by the spirit of the drum. [...] At last the two teams danced into the circle and the crowd roared and clapped. The drums rose to a frenzy. The people surged forward. The young men who kept order flew around, waving their palm fronds. Old men nodded to the beat of the drums and remembered the days when they wrestled to its intoxicating rhythm. (Achebe 1958, 33)

This passage reveals how music operates through both drummers and wrestlers. Their actions are driven by the emotional force of music. As the narrator tells, the drummers become "possessed" by the music in the heat of their performance. This effect is emphasized when the narrator observes that, during the break, the drummers became "ordinary human beings" again: "The drummers stopped for a brief rest before the real matches. Their bodies shone with sweat [...] They became ordinary human beings again, talking and laughing among themselves and with others who stood near them." (Achebe 1958, 34)

This passage from the novel conveys a crucial idea: in the midst of their performance, the drummers show, to some extent, a kind of energy that seems unnatural. Thus, it becomes clear that there is a magical power embedded in this type of music. This is noticeably different from popular or modern music, which has been spreading and dominating the global music scene in recent decades. Traditional music, on the other hand, contains a multitude of cultural codes that are deeply tied to specific circumstances. It also carries a certain mystery and acts as a catalyst—it drives the individual beyond conscious awareness.

A particularly striking example occurs when Okonkwo is overtaken by the rhythm of music during the funeral of the elder Ezeudu in Chapter 13 of *Things Fall Apart*. The narrator recounts it tragically in the following lines:

The drums and the dancing began and reached fever heat. Darkness was around the corner, and the burial was near. Guns fired the last salute and the cannon rent the sky. [...] All was silent. In the centre of the crowd a boy lay in a pool of blood. It was the dead man's sixteen-year-old son, who with his brothers and half-brothers had been dancing the traditional farewell to their father. Okonkwo's gun had exploded and a piece of iron had pierced the boy's heart. (86)

The narrator depicts a funeral ritual in which clan members dance to the tune of traditional music. By accident, Okonkwo kills the deceased person's son. This tragic event marks a turning point for him, as the music possesses him to the point of transgressing a sacred norm. He has to pay for this abominable act. Thus, he will be in exile for seven years. The narrator stresses that: "the only course open to Okonkwo was to flee from the clan. It was a crime against the earth goddess to kill a clansman." (87)

Music, then, emerges as an essential cultural component during key life events. It is celebrated as a ritual and exerts, somehow, an uncontrollable effect on the individual; it possesses the soul and dominates it. This echoes what Jean Paul Sartre said about music in black culture: "It is rhythm that cements the multiple aspects of the black soul (...) it is the *tam-tam*, jazz, bouncing rhythm of these poems that figures the temporality of negro existence" (Sartre cited by Sacharewicz, 2019, 47). This dimension of music is emphasized by the poetic and lyrical tone of the narrative. In the above-mentioned funeral scene in *Things Fall Apart*, the narrator lingers on the impact of music, evoking the reader's passion or compassion, depending on the context. In festive moments, music takes on a poetic and lyrical tone that reflects the joy and entertainment of the event; while in ritual contexts, such as funerals, its magical or supernatural dimension transforms it into an instrument of possession. Such a portrayal by Achebe draws directly from Igbo folklore, which he celebrates and revalorizes in his art. As a matter of fact, the novel displays it through a lyrical and poetic register. Many events and cultural practices in *Things Fall Apart* exemplify this phenomenon.

By contrast, this aspect of music is less noticeable in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*. It appears only occasionally—for instance, when Ikem recites a poem by David Diop or during the celebration of Elewa's child's naming ceremony. This is understandable given the novel's context, which conditions the presence of music as an aesthetic element. The sociocultural atmosphere in his first novel differs significantly from that of the last one. The setting is not the same. *Things Fall Apart* is anchored in a traditional society where oral culture lies at the heart of African civilization, especially in rural folk culture. *Anthills of the Savannah* is set in an urbanized, modern environment where the sociopolitical concerns overshadow the space by music occupies traditionally.

Given its themes and context, the presence of traditional music as an element of folklore would be disconnected from the central message of *Anthills of the Savannah*. Indeed, the novels

span two very different historical moments. *Things Fall Apart* refers to the precolonial and early colonial periods—circa the 1850s—while the latter novel focuses on the post-independence era, i.e., after the 1960s. This temporal gap may explain the absence of this cultural *décor* in Achebe's later novel, which is a political satire employing other forms of folklore without relying heavily on music.

As for Aminata Sow Fall, the physical setting influences the novel's content and context. It is in *Le jujubier du patriarce* that this connection is more clearly manifested. Traditional music plays a dominant role, particularly through the figure of Naani, an artist-character. In addition to the musical *décor*, there is a strong presence of traditional epic songs recited during specific rituals or gatherings. These songs serve the same cultural and spiritual purpose as traditional music.

In traditional ceremonies, the *griot* (traditional artist) is always at the forefront. He gets the audience to reconnect with the most cherished components of their cultural heritage. Through soft, evocative music, he catches the attention of the public. It brings culture to life and reaffirms the value of traditional society. Naani, in his dual role as artist and protagonist, never fails in his mission to connect people to their history and to safeguard the tradition of which he is the living memory. The passage below is one of the most beautiful moments in the novel that captures this role vividly:

Later, everyone gathered in the central square of Babyselli, under the soft light of the moon preparing to retire. Naani sat in the middle for a memorable vigil. His hoarse yet still bewitching voice, despite his age, covered Babyselli. He announced that he would enter the epic of Foudjallon through the twelfth gate, where Guéladio bids farewell to the hunt after Dioumana flees into the belly of Tarou the whale. Naani plucked his *xalam* and his voice sailed into the sleepy night. (*Sow Fall 1993*, 122)

The griot's art contributes to the poetic imagination of the writer. Naani engages with the people through an art form that is precious to him and vital for the survival of culture. As an artist, he takes on the responsibility of preserving tradition. The cultural watch he holds with the folks, fascinates the audience. It come out that he is a gifted performer; well-admired by the entire community of Babyselli.

The following sentence tells a lot on the importance of music: "*Naani plucked his xalam, and his voice rose into the night under the watchful moon.*" (123). It evokes the great moments of oral tradition, when the griot would connect with the community during a cultural watch, allowing the audience to recall their ancestral history. This scene, in which the narrator portrays Naani with his musical instrument before his audience, recalls the thoughts of the famous Senegalese musician Baaba Maal, who comments on the *griot's* role in African oral tradition in his song *Taara*:

African, my brother [...] listen to your music!  
It is the voice of our gods and of our ancestors.  
In the evening, during our cultural performances, our griots,  
after a moment of deep reflection,  
play the tune of a Taara on their guitars. (my translation)

In this artistic practice, traditional music and the song as an oral genre go hand in hand as they are intrinsically linked. Music accompanies the voice and gives rhythm to words. However, the song alone can fulfill both roles, since it is composed of melodic elements that carry musicality through its poetic and lyrical nature. This melodic and lyrical character of the song expressed through assonances and alliterations, provides the song with a sort of magical power. These phonetic devices enhance the musical dimension and drive the listener or reader into a world of musical poetry. To this end, the song lulls the individual and possesses them, just as music does. At this level, the reader is exposed to what Anne Mila calls “sensory imagination”.

Music, as a strong link in African oral culture, has been transmuted from oral to written form into a different modern form, one that is a priori unsuited to the written medium. It is no longer aural, no longer a matter of hearing but of seeing. Paradoxical as it may seem at first glance, this integration of elements from the oral tradition into writing, through poetry and the novel, appeals to the reader’s sensory imagination. (Mila 2006, 44)

The song, therefore, becomes a musical embodiment of the *word* and its implication in the novel gives the narrative a poetic, lyrical, and melodic character, whether rendered in prose or in verse. Thus, when reading the songs embedded in the novels of Achebe and Sow Fall, one gets into an exercise of mimetic performance or epic recitation. In this way, the text moves the reader and takes them to feel emotional effects. The reader becomes active, journeying into a lyrical realm marked by rhythm and traditional poetry, where the *magical word* takes over.

The verses below from *Le jujubier du patriarche* are a relevant example of this phenomenon. While still immersed in the world of fiction, the reader becomes an indirect participant in the action. They sing and, in a sense, dance, mimicking the verses of the epic song.

When the night is dark, the beasts bristle,  
When the night is pitch-dark, the sated lion  
Becomes the absolute master of woods and lands,  
Of thickets and clearings.  
From the Oualo to Boundou,  
From Mali to Ouagadougou,  
And on the coast where golden sands shine,  
Tekkrour, Macina, Mandingue—  
The night sleeps among the beasts. (Sow Fall 1993, 164-165, my translation)

This epic song is melodic. Its musicality occurs through a lyrical and rhythmic structure accentuated through assonance and alliteration. These literary devices appear in the repetition of vowels and consonants such as “u,” “w,” and “e,” which describes the rhythm and tone of the performance. This effect becomes more vivid in the voice of the singer who can give the song a poetic

dimension, creating a melody that resonates through the vocal cords. Alliteration, on the other hand, is evident in the repeated use of the consonant “b”. This consonant produces a deep, resonant tone because its articulation involves the vibration of the vocal cords.

In contrast with Achebe and Sow Fall, Hurston foregrounds this cultural dimension of music in both of her novels. Yet, what Achebe and Sow Fall share with Hurston is their combined use of traditional songs and music. Hurston emphasizes more on religious music—commonly referred to as *Gospel* or *Spirituals*. These musical forms are central to the works of African American writers and are part of the cultural heritage of slavery. William Powell underscored this point in his address at the College Music Symposium in May 2004:

The Negro Spiritual, regarded as the first American folk music, grew out of the experiences of the American Negro slave in the South. It functioned as a means of self-encouragement, and it was used to communicate with other slaves via coded messages. Spirituals and other slave songs were preserved by oral tradition since literacy was unlawful for slaves. Although many songs were lost, song collectors notated the basic sketch of the music they heard. Several black institutions emerged after the Civil War, and choral groups from these schools provided another means of preserving and demonstrating the spiritual, but in concert settings.

Powell explains how the Spiritual gave birth to Gospel. The Spiritual emerged during the time of slavery, particularly when enslaved African Americans were suffering on plantations. It became a form of relief, helping them endure hardship. In composition, the Spiritual is a melodic song that allowed the enslaved to momentarily forget their suffering. It was also a coded form of communication among slaves, designed to elude the understanding of their masters. The Spiritual was thus a deeply powerful form for the Black community—even without the accompaniment of musical instruments, which is often the case with Gospel. While Gospel evolved from the Spiritual, it has since become commercialized and modernized. Gospel is typically performed with a choir and often outside of church settings. Rebecca Brite also provides a useful historical overview of both musical forms:

Spirituals are sacred folk songs from the American South created by enslaved people. Their composers remain unknown. They lend themselves to collective interpretation, often structured as a dialogue (call-and-response) between a leader and the group. Concert Spirituals emerged from traditional Spirituals, with choral and solo arrangements based on the original melodies sung by slaves.

Black Gospel music originated in the 1920s, in Black churches in Northern U.S. cities where its influence remains strong. Every Gospel song has a known composer, who fuses the musical elements of Spirituals with those of the blues, allowing room for improvisation and accompaniment on piano, guitar, or other instruments.

While Gospel emerged from Spirituals and the blues, the Spiritual continues to exist as a parallel cultural force. (Brite <http://voices-paris.com/repertoire/spirituals-et-gospel>)

Brite’s analysis facilitates the understanding how each musical genre appears in Hurston’s fiction.

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the Spiritual is present. During a political campaign, Davis delivers a poetic recitation. It is, in fact, a religious chant—a prayer articulated in poetic form. This is not surprising, as this type of music has evolved to resemble *Gospel* in form, having undergone multiple transformations and variations. This is evident in Davis's performance, which the narrator describes as follows:

While Davis chanted a traditional prayer-poem with his own variations. Joe mounted the box that had been placed for the purpose and opened the brazen door of the lamp. As the word Amen was said, he touched the lighted match to the wick, and Mrs. Bogle's alto burst out in:

We'll walk in de night, de beautiful light  
Come where the dew drops of mercy shine bright  
Shine all around us by day and by night  
Jesus, the light of the world. (Hurston 1937, 43)

This moment is symbolic. Though less frequent in the novel, it is very symbolic and represents a ritual practice of the African American community. What is striking here is how Hurston stages the scene: the Spiritual merges with Gospel, which is performed differently. In this scene, a lead vocalist begins the chant and is followed by a chorus. The narrator emphasizes this performative dynamic: "*They, all of them, all of the people got up and sung it over and over until it was wrung dry, and no further innovations of tone and tempo were conceivable*". (Hurston 1937, 43)

This religious chant evokes the role of traditional and sacred music among African Americans. Though not apparent in the novel, Hurston highlights its symbolic and affective power. The *call-and-response* structure appears again in another chant, performed after the death of a mule:

'What killed this man?'  
The chorus answered, "Bare, bare fat."  
'What killed this man?'  
"Bare, bare fat."  
'Who'll stand his funeral?'  
'We'!!!!'  
'Well, all right now.' (Hurston 1937, 58)

This performance highlights the tradition of the Spiritual through a *call-and-response* mode, revealing a dialogic structure between leader and chorus that embodies a collective cultural expression rooted in African heritage.

The Gospel, on the other hand, appears more in *Moses Man of the Mountain* with a different version and presentation from those of the Spiritual. For instance, after Pharaoh's death, the former slaves rejoice by performing a little singing act. One person begins in solo, and a choir follows. The narrator describes it in the following passage:

They made a song on that and danced it off. A man with a good voice got out in the center of the ring and sang. 'Old Pharaoh's dead!' And the chorus answered, 'How did he die?' And the solo man went to dancing and said: 'Well, he died like this!' and he danced that off. Then he sang another part and everybody went on dancing and shouting. (Hurston 1939, 193)

In this novel, Hurston ironically shows the celebration of the king's death through an exceptional performance of Gospel music. This time, the practice of this musical genre is richer and more modern. The Gospel is celebrated in the novel with its distinct characteristics. The lead vocal announces in solo, then the choir follows with refrains accompanied by dance and hand claps. The narrator comments on it, providing the details of the scene:

They sang that over and over and danced on it until they got tired. Then, Miriam took the cymbal and some women went behind her, and they went all over the camp singing: "Oh Miriam played the cymbal over the Red Sea Miriam played the cymbal over the Red Sea Miriam played the cymbal over the Red Sea. Oh, Miriam played the cymbal right over." (Hurston 1939, 194).

This performance, though ironic, in the triumphant celebration of the king's death, shows a fundamental aspect of African American culture through music, which is not only a means of appeasing suffering but also of rejoicing. In *Moses Man of the Mountain*, the Gospel performance is accompanied by a choir, dances, and musical instruments such as cymbals and harps. This representation of music through Gospel is recurring in the novel as the Hebrew people engage in their struggle against the oppressor. It is a long march toward freedom during which the Hebrew people praise God by singing Gospel, which serves as a catalyst. Ultimately, the Hebrews emancipate themselves and reach the Promised Land, where they receive God's blessing with the help of Moses, their guide.

This type of music appears more when the Hebrew people liberate themselves and rejoice. The audience is enthusiastic with musical instruments such as tambourines, cymbals, harps, etc., which depict the cultural setting of this people who have just witnessed God's glory. Often, one can feel through this music both the melancholic and sarcastic tone of the novel. Despite the variations and modifications that Gospel has undergone, it has not lost its cultural and artistic meaning within the African-American tradition.

In a nutshell, music is symbolically present in the works of these authors and plays a role as both a comforter and a cultural catalyst. It remains at the heart of tradition and energizes the cultural life of the Black people. Its symbolic presence in the novels reflects the writers' enthusiasm to showcase their local color. It is also a means of rooting the work in the oral tradition, which communicates a cultural depth through elements that allow traditional music to convey its message to society. This is what each of the authors tries to show by relying on their own oral tradition, which leads to view music not only as a powerful means of consolation but also as a revealing and reconciling art. What is also notable in this musical symbolism is that the setting can influence the context and content of the type of music to be showcased. As often said, man is defined by the environment, or the environment

determines man. The representation of music in the work also responds to a specific context. This context is determining and even influential for the writer as an artist and spokesperson for his people.

One can thus observe in Achebe's and Sow Fall's works that music does not appear in their second novels in our corpus. This exception might be due to the context, which conditions the thematic focus of their creative writings. Hurston's exception can be understood through the fact that both of her works are intertextually based on the same theme. These works complement each other in the interpretation of their aesthetic significance. They are produced in a literary context where the Harlem Renaissance movement held significant importance.

The study of the representation of music has demonstrated that it occupies a symbolic place in the aesthetic, narrative, and symbolic construction of the African and African American novels studied. Drawing from oral tradition, Achebe, Sow Fall, and Hurston have made use of diverse musical forms (epic songs, gospel, spirituals, traditional rhythms), integrating them into the narrative space not as decorative elements, but as engines of memory, resistance, and cultural revalorization.

Music, whether accompanying ritual scenes, catalyzes collective emotion, or structures narrative progression, and asserts itself as a language of interiority and identity. In Achebe's works, it reactivates the connection between text and ancestral tradition, reviving the drums and communal celebrations that unify the clan. In Sow Fall's fiction, it is carried by emblematic figures such as the griot—the voice of cultural heritage. In Hurston's narratives, gospel and spirituals serve as tools of spiritual expression and resilience, underscoring their central role in the African American culture inherited from slavery. However, the relative absence of music in some more modern works such as *Anthills of the Savannah* or *Douceurs du bercail* may imply that its narrative integration is conditioned by spatiotemporal context and thematic focus. The postcolonial or post-independence urban novel lends itself less naturally to musical folklore than rural narratives steeped in oral tradition.

Ultimately, music operates as a living memory within the African and African American novel. It anchors the text in the people's history, makes ancestral voices resonate within contemporary writing, and invites the reader into a sensory and symbolic immersion. By transcending genres and centuries, it transforms literary matters into poetic performance that preserves, transmits, and re-creates the heritage of oral civilizations. The novel thus becomes a space for dialogue between past and present, between voice and writing, between the individual and their community.

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