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Kilindini Docks: a case of 'mondo music'? Inventing the discovery of a manufactured 'African' sound.

Guglielmo Bottin
University of Milan
guglielmo.bottin@unimi.it

Abstract

This paper examines a case of ethnoforgery in postwar Italian popular music represented by the 1957 song "Kilindini Docks" and the 1959 album 8 African Ritual Songs. Presented as vernacular African music, these recordings were instead composed and arranged by Italian musicians and accompanied by a fabricated ethnographic narrative. Contributing to ongoing debates about cultural representation and the politics of musical invention in transnational popular music, this study sheds light on the songs' production, international dissemination, and reception, revealing how pseudo-African musical elements were strategically employed to construct a veneer of authenticity that was marketed globally for decades and remained largely unquestioned.

KEYWORDS: Italian popular music, exoticism, forgery, invention of tradition

"Kilindini Docks" and *8 African Ritual Songs*

In the late 1950s, a collection of music purporting to feature traditional African melodies and rhythms emerged in the Italian popular music industry. These songs were quickly "exported" to Europe and the Americas, recorded by international artists in several languages. Drawing on archival sources, discographic analysis, and historical research, I first examine their origins and initial distribution in Italy, where the songs were first released as singles before being collected on an LP. I then consider their various international adaptations in different languages and markets. Finally, I discuss ethnic stereotyping and the construction of (in)authenticity in exotica music in Italy and abroad, trying to understand this collection of pseudo-African songs in the context of the calypso craze, often accompanied by ethnic stereotyping and the colonialist practice of manufacturing a "traditional" sound representative of a territory or a people. This peculiar musical

corpus is discussed within broader trends of exoticism and colonial nostalgia, in which the simulation of cultural otherness becomes a tool for the global marketability of popular music.

Between 1957 and 1958, the song “Kilindini Docks” (the title, subsequently abbreviated in KD, refers to the harbour of Mombasa) was released by the Franco e i G5 group (1957) as part of a four-track EP titled *Calypso n°2 – Canti dei Caraibi*, as well as by Johnny Dorelli (1957) and by Flo Sandon’s (1957a, 1957b, 1958), the latter accompanied by Federico Bergamini’s orchestra and vocal ensemble, Quartetto Radar. Considering Bergamini’s pivotal role in this case study, which I will soon explain in detail, Sandon’s was likely the earliest recording. It was part of a “new series of original afro-calypsos”, as advertised by the Durium label on Italian magazine *Musica e Dischi* (1957), a project that involved Bergamini directly. KD was then recorded by several other artists (more on this below) under the alternative titles "Kuli Song", "Madi-Madi Song" and "Kuli Na Killin Deni Doks".

A few years earlier, Sandon and Bergamini recorded “El Negro Zumbón” (“the Black joker”). The song was imitative of the samba/bajon rhythm and was composed by Armando Trovajoli for the film *Anna* (1951), in which Sandon's vocals are lip-synched by Silvana Mangano in a dance scene that became very popular at the time (Corbella 2019). Sandon’s subsequent involvement with pseudo-African and Caribbean music was probably encouraged by the commercial success of the song, which was made into a million-copy single marketed by MGM Records (Mangano 1953), sometimes with the title “Anna (The Baión)” (1).

At the end of 1957, “Kilindini Docks” was recorded by Perez Prado and released by RCA in the United States, Italy and France (Prado 1957a, 1957b, 1958). The song was described by the US music press as “a stirring ritual type number with a hauntingly consistent beat” (*Cash Box* 1957: 14). A German adaptation, titled “Kuli-song”, was done by Greek singer Leo Leandros (1958) with entirely different (and quite problematic, even for the time) words in the refrain: “Kuli macht Arbeit für den weissen Mann … bis er nicht mehr kann” (Kuli makes work for the white man … until he can no more). In 1959, a French version of KD was recorded by Ivorian chanson singer John William (1959) and released in the same EP together with songs from the film *Black Orpheus* (1959). In all the versions, the lyrics are clearly those of a dockworker’s shanty (“oh mister captain/oh mister boatswain”). The opening verse could have some Swahili words “Madi nakwenda Kilindini Docks” (Madi is going to KD). In Johnny Dorelli’s version, the name “Madi” is replaced by “Kuli”. This change is retained in the French translation (by Jacques Larue), “Kuli conduit moi” (Kuli leads me) as well as in the German recording, while some other international cover versions have “Madi”.

In 1959, *8 African Ritual Songs* (8ARS), a 10” LP by Flo Sandon with Federico Bergamini’s orchestra, was released to the Italian market by Durium (Flo Sandon’s 1959). Aldo Locatelli’s liner notes accurately describe the content of the album and the story behind its recording. Between 1957 and 1964, Locatelli provided Durium with notes to almost 80 albums. In addition to writing song lyrics and promotional texts, he was the head of the label’s press office (*Cash Box* 1960: 43) and a journalist for *Avanti!*, the newspaper of the Italian Socialist Party (Paleari 2000: 14). I have translated and quoted the liner notes to the 8ARS album in their entirety, as they include details that seem worthy of interest. Please note that this is a relatively literal

translation; I have left the language, and ethnic stereotypes present in the original text unchanged, as they convey the culture of the time:

> This collection of ritual songs is the result of the painstaking study of a passionate Africanist. During twenty years in the Dark Continent, through the mysterious regions of Congo, Mijurtinia, Madagascar, witnessing the rituals of the Pygmies of equatorial Africa and the mysterious and hostile Maasai tribe, Lecorde, with the help of a few tribal headmen, managed with rudimentary recordings to immortalize these musical motifs of Negro ritual dances. It was not until several years later, with the help of the musician Lorenzi, that these Negro songs took on a more precise shape and were produced in their present form. The passion and artistic insight of the singer Flo Sandon, an admirable interpreter of these ancient African dances, and the contribution of a well-trained and tightly knit choir of male and female voices, made it possible to create in these recordings the atmosphere of mystery and primitive mysticism that precisely characterizes Negro ritual songs. The melodic lines remained original, as did the rhythms, which were obtained with specially made instruments in order to reproduce as faithfully as possible the unknown environment in which they originated. These are songs of hunting, love, dedicated to the moon, sun, rain, fire, and the basic elements of primitive African life. Some words were deliberately left in the original Shilluk, Ma'di, and Bantu dialects, while some words from the modern English spoken by African tribes (Pidgin English) were added to make some passages more accessible to our white mentality. Here are the songs collected in this microgroove recording, one of Durium's finest achievements: “Kilindini Docks”, a song of the longshoremen of Mombasa harbour; “Invocation to Kabbia”, a propitiation ritual of Mau women; “Masaj Are Lion Killers”, a Maasai hunting song; “Jambo Hippopotami”, a Pygmy song heard in the forests of Lake Kivu; "Rain, Pain and Sun", the ritual of the Katanga rubber tree carvers; “The Nagana” an exorcism song against the tsetse fly, traditional in Equatorial Africa; “Majunga Crocodiles”, song of the Malagasy crocodile hunters of the Grande Île; “Marombo”, a Kikuyu love song. These are the songs of the tribes of the Pygmies, Bushmen, Hottentots, Fang, Yoruba, Dinca, Maasai, Dama, Galla [Oromo], Bashoto, Ma’di, Rwanda, Baronga, tribes of different origins and civilizations, but all united by a great passion for song and dance. An active contribution to the complex realisation of these songs was made by Maestro Federico Bergamini, who curated the arrangements, conducted the orchestra and personally supervised the construction of special musical instruments designed by Lecorde to obtain the special sound effects necessary for the best interpretation of the compositions (Aldo Locatelli in Flo Sandon 1959, my translation).

Therefore, this diverse corpus of songs was brought to us by Lecorde, an Africanist (perhaps an ethnomusicologist?), who collected this music from various places in Africa that are geographically quite distant from each other. Then, as stated in the liner notes, “with the help of musician Lorenzi” those songs were rendered in a more professional way by the orchestra and choir directed by Federico Bergamini who “personally supervised the construction of special musical instruments”. On the LP, the copyright is given to Lecorde and Lorenzi, as is customary for new versions of folk songs. The 1957 version of “Kilindini Docks”, released by Franco e i G5 on Columbia Records, is listed as “elab. Lorenzi-Lecorde”, meaning that it was their “elaborazione” (adaptation) of a traditional song in the public domain. On all other releases, however, they are credited as the original lyricist and composer. The truth is that Lecorde and Lorenzi are simply the pseudonyms of Aldo Locatelli and

Federico Bergamini. These aliases are duly registered with copyright societies in Italy and abroad (2). This does not necessarily mean that they wrote these songs all by themselves: for all we know, the album could still consist of traditional African melodies. In 1941, Locatelli had been a soldier stationed in Ethiopia and Somalia (Grazzini 1961). In any case, we can be sure that Lecorde is a pseudonym he had previously used for Caribbean-themed songs such as "Ea, Canastos! (Reno 1955) and "Calypso Romance" (Dorelli 1957). Locatelli (3) must have had some knowledge of (or at least a passion for) Africa since he later published a book on African legends (Locatelli 1973). Some of the stories in the book seem to deal with the same topics as those in the 1950s songs ("The Nagana", "The sacred hippopotamus"). Thus, when he wrote about Lecorde in the liner notes for the Sandon recordings, Locatelli was actually self-describing as a "passionate Africanist" with an (imaginary) experience of "twenty years in the Dark Continent." The publisher is Peer Music, previously known as Edizioni Musicali Southern Music, a branch of Ralph S. Peer company, established in New York in 1928. The Italian office was created shortly after World War II, in 1947 (4).

FIGURE 1. Front and back cover images of Flo Sandon's *8 African Ritual Songs* (1959).

Lead vocalist Flo Sandon does not only sing these "ritual" melodies in her own style, but she sometimes tries to imitate a pseudo-African voice, using a variety of so-called "hot" timbres with pidgin-like pronunciation. Examples of this are the vocalizations at the beginning of "Kilindini Docks", the sudden pitch jumps in "Marombo" (when singing the word "Kikuyu" at 0:35, 0:53 and 1:29) and the overall delivery of "Majunga Crocodiles". The latter is only vaguely similar to some Kikuyu songs recorded by Hugh Tracey (2014) but is more reminiscent of a *son-pregón* with French lyrics (5). When she recorded this album, Sandon was very popular in Italy, having won the Sanremo music festival competition in 1953 (Baldino 2024). Early in her career, in addition to Italian songs, Sandon recorded many songs from US movies and musicals, (Sandon's 1947a, 1947b). She was one of the first Italian artists to sing in English, French, and Spanish and was praised for her "modern" and "international" style (Tomatis 2019: 94). On the 8ARS album,

the vocal ensemble Quartetto Radar (uncredited on the album but duly credited on the single releases) often engages in call-and-response exchanges with Sandon, but they do not indulge in attempts to sound exotic, maintaining a "standard" vocal delivery without even trying to hide an Italian accent. The arrangement of "Rain, Pain and Sun" includes the pre-recorded soundscape of a thunderstorm, on top of which Sandon sings in (broken) English "on the plantation it pours down / trees fall [?] to shed all their tears / our clothes are all soaked / what a pain for the poor weeping trees / what a feeling in our heart for this / till the sun will still glow far away", with the choir answering her "finally rainbow will come / oh yes at last rainbow has come" (Sandon's 1959).

International circulation and re-recordings

These allegedly traditional songs were also recorded by African American artists such as Eartha Kitt (1959) and Vickie Henderson, who released KD with the more pidgin-sounding title "Kuli Na Killin Deni Doks" (Henderson 1957, 1958, 1959, 1967). Early in her recording career, Henderson made an EP for the Durium label, accompanied by Quartetto Radar and Bergamini's orchestra. Again, the liner notes were written by Locatelli:

> We first met Vickie Henderson a few years ago on the stage of an Italian theatre ... in that wonderful ensemble picture that the great director Katherine Dunham had created for our entertainment. Yet among so many feline and statuesque beauties, among so much colour, among so much grace, we immediately had an almost unconscious attraction to the tapering, lanky, very black and very sweet young lady who could dance beautifully and sing with instinctive grace (Locatelli in Henderson 1958, my translation).

Dunham, a dancer and choreographer who developed and popularized the Afro-American concert dance, had academic training in social anthropology and carried out ethnographic fieldwork in the Caribbeans. Between 1943 and 1962, her company toured Europe three times (Clark 1982). It is possible that Locatelli thought "Kilindini Docks" was a good fit for Henderson after seeing her perform in Dunham's show, as he described in the liner notes. Henderson recorded KD with Rene Bertschi's orchestra, The Continentals, in Switzerland, where she had then relocated (*Vickie Henderson, une chanteuse noire à Genève* 2017).

FIGURE 2. Vicky Henderson's "Kuli Na Kenda Killin Deni Doks" (1957). FIGURE 3. John William's recording of "Kilindini Docks" (1959).

Another song from 8ARS, "Jambo Hippopotami", recorded and popularized by Eartha Kitt, was also released as instrumental cumbia by Venezuelan organist Tulio Enrique Leon (1963). Additional international versions of Locatelli and Bergamini's "African" music include German-language *Schlager* songs "K,abbia" ("Invocation to Kabbia") and "Wenn der Regenbogen kommt" ("Rain, Pain and Sun") recorded by Bibi Brown (1959) and Heidi Prien (1960) with lyrics adapted by Kurt Hertha, Klaus Alznet and Klaus Bradtke. Italian American pop singer Peggy March (Margaret Annemarie Battavio) recorded two different arrangements of "Kilindini Docks" (March 1964, 1965). The second version has a more swinging rhythm and, at about 1-minute in, it breaks into cheerful bridge section that is absent in the previous recording of 1964 which in turn is more like the Italian version, complete with pseudo-African cries and percussion.

FIGURE 4 and FIGURE 5. The 1964 and 1965 version of "Kilindini Docks" (Madi-Madi song) recorded by Peggy March for RCA Victor.

Peggy March's recording of KD is referred to as the "Madi-Madi song". Credits are given to Dutch songwriters Jackie Javellin (Casper Koelmann) and Hanna Koelmann-Rolff, with no mention of Lecorde or Lorenzi (CCE 1966: 1784). While the lyrics in Peggy March's version differ only slightly from those in Flo Sandon's, it is possible that, since the 8ARS album was originally marketed as a collection of traditional music, other writers felt it was legitimate to register the song with copyright societies as their own adaptation of what they believed to be public domain material. In a 1988 interview with the record collectors' magazine *Goldmine*, Peggy March said:

> "Kilindini Docks" is a song I did in Holland when I was 18. Holland wanted me to record something different. They did not want to use any of my German recordings. They wanted to do something for them in English. They played this song for me, and my response was: "This is weird! You really want me to do this?" They said, "It's a great song, we think it's really special and it's different." Well, I am always into different so I thought it might be fun to do. And it was. It was brought out in Holland, and now it is on several compilations, in Germany and elsewhere, and on CDs. I loved doing it, because it was different, it was in English, and it was released only in Holland. To this day, I have no idea how well it sold! (Gari 1988: 24)

TABLE 1 – comparison of the verses in Flo Sandon's and Peggy March's versions of "Kilindini Docks".

Flo Sandon's (1957)	**Peggy March (1964)**
carry and carry, go carry the cable carry and carry, go carry the cable	deep in the jungle, along the riverside men keep on working, morning to the night
carry and carry, plenty of English's trunks carry and carry, plenty of English's trunks	Kerry and Gary can't carry that cable you can hear them singing sad and lonely songs
oh mister captain, sun is very warm oh mister boatswain, Madi's no longer strong	oh mister captain, that sun is very warm oh mister boatswain, my heart's no longer strong

Exotica's inauthentic authenticity

Instead of creating their own pseudo-African music from scratch, Locatelli and Bergamini could have easily drawn music from the many actual vernacular recordings circulating at the time, such as those published in the Smithsonian Folkways series or Columbia's World Library of Folk and Primitive Music (6). In Italy alone, in the late 1930s about 300 pseudo-ethnographic recordings of traditional music from African territories related to the country's colonial endeavours, such as Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia, were released by Columbia Records (Chiriacò 2024: 46-49). In terms of popular music, East Africa – the area where Locatelli/Lecorde claims to have collected most of these songs – had recording studios and pressing plants since the early 1950s, and by 1957 there were almost 50 record companies in Kenya alone (Graham 1992: 148). In 1959, Alan Lomax declared that Africa was "the best-recorded continent musically speaking" (Lomax 1959: 952), meaning that in the 1950s more recordings had been made of African music of any other indigenous music. All in all, inventing the discovery of

a "ritual African sound" and the backstory of the "passionate Africanist" seems to be a ploy to give cultural value to an otherwise commercial project. The 1959 liner notes also contradict the 1957 advertisements for the same recordings, which described them as "new" and "original," not adaptations of traditional African music (*Musica e Dischi* 1957: 23). The story of Lecorde's discovery was retold in 1967 for a program on Italian public radio, which aimed to present the influences of traditional African songs in Western popular music:

> Today, the Euterpe I satellite transmits melodies that are still popular in Central African countries. They are songs of hunting, of love, songs with which Africans ask the elements to be favourable and to keep away misfortune. As primitive as the cues and instruments of these peoples are, their music often has astonishing sophistication; so much so that many of the rhythms of the Pygmy tribes, Bushmen, Maasais, Hottentots, etc., are now studied by modern ensembles and incorporated into the most advanced forms of pop music. Today's program, devoted entirely to the music of the Dark Continent, is divided into two parts: in the first we will hear some ritual songs of African Negroes performed by singer Flo Sandon's, who after studying them with the help of a passionate Africanist, decided to sing them herself with a choir of male and female voices. With the help of maestros Lecorde and Lorenzi, and through the arrangements of Federico Bergamini, she kept the rhythms intact and used the original instruments to recreate as faithfully as possible the environment in which these songs were born. The dialects are also largely retained. In the second part, more songs from Central Africa are brought to us by Chaino, an African singer now living in the United States, but born into a mysterious Central African people that was destroyed by an opposing tribe and of which he is the sole survivor (*Radiocorriere* 1967: 59, my translation).

The latter story is also fictional: Chaino was the stage name of Philadelphia-born percussionist Leon Johnson (1927-1999). Similar to Locatelli and Bergamini, Chaino and his producer Kirby Allen devised a marketing plan that included a mysterious African backstory and exotic imagery, claiming that Chaino was “the only survivor of a lost race of people from the wilds of the jungle in a remote part of central Africa where few white men have ever been” (Ankeny 2024; Adinolfi 2008: 105).

As for 8ARS, although it now seems highly unlikely, we cannot be certain that Locatelli and Bergamini did not take their melodies from actual traditional music. But even if that were the case, the story of Lecorde finding "ritual" songs in remote regions of Africa and reporting on the efforts to render them (to quote again from the 1959 liner notes) "as faithful as possible to the unknown environment in which they originated" in order to create "the atmosphere of mystery and primitive mysticism" but in a "more precise form" by "well-trained" musicians remains very suspect. While it is completely anachronistic to apply an eighteenth-century poetic theory to the exotica trend of the 1950s, it seems that these attempts to recreate (or invent) an African sound consist of representations that can only be satirical or elegiac in a quasi-Schillerian sense (Schiller 1985: 332). This after-the-fact authentication process is, in fact, reminiscent of Schiller’s description of the sentimental approach, where “in the state of culture … the poet must elevate reality to the ideal or, what amounts to the same thing, represent the ideal” (329). Locatelli and Bergamini’s music is thus “sentimental” and modern, whereas a more

spontaneous and naïve approach would have been "confined merely to imitation of reality" and" in a state of dependence on experience, which the sentimental does not know" (331, 362).

> In 1973, more than 15 years after the release of Lecorde's and Lorenzi's "original Afro-Calypsos", the US label Afro Request, specializing in allegedly "genuine" African music, rebranded Flo Sandon's 1959 recordings with the title *African Tribal, Ritual and Love Songs* (Bergamini 1973). In this compilation, the "fake" songs recorded in 1957-1959 are complemented by "real" Ghanian and Nigerian music, such as "Akee Akasu Kane" (Ghana Black Star Band 1972) and "Oni Mogbin Koko" (Bashorun 1971), as well as the Swahili love song "Malaika". In the album we also find "Marghareta", another pseudo-African song by Locatelli (Lecorde) and Marcello Minerbi (Obras). The recordings of "Malaika" and "Marghareta" were in fact previously released in Italy by Durium (Malaika 1971). On the Afro Request LP cover we see a black model representing a "tribal" warrior woman. An abbreviated, (broken) English version of Locatelli's 1950s Italian liner notes is provided on the back: "This selection of African Ritual songs has been gathered together by an impassioned specialist of Africa, Lecorde, during his twenty years stay on the Black Continent, in the mysterious regions of Congo and Madagascar […] [words] in Pidgin-English were inserted to make certain parts more understandable to the Western mentality" (liner notes to Bergamini 1973).

FIGURE 6. Cover of the 1973 Afro Request compilation album.

Truly fake music. Fabricating cultural otherness.

To find out if any of these melodies had a traditional origin, I sent the 8ARS album to scholars specialising in African music. The songs were also circulated via the International Council for Traditional Music mailing list. So far, no one has contacted me to point out any traditional music. Instead, Barbara Alge, a German ethnomusicologist, recognised the melody of an Austrian Schlager, ″Kabbia″: one of the “African” songs written by Locatelli and Bergamini and recorded by Bibi Brown (1959) and Heidi Prien (1960). She also confirmed that the 8ARS album sounded more like Latin-American popular music than traditional African folk material.

This music is thus probably just as “African” as “Mambo Italiano” (written by Bob Merrill) or “That’s Amore” (by Harry Warren and Jack Brooks) are “Italian”, and the fact the latter were also popularized by Italian (Renato Carosone, Carla Boni) Italian-American (Dean Martin) and Turkish-Italian singers (Darío Moreno) does not make them less Tin Pan Alley-esque. These songs included lyrics in “Italian pidgin English”, just like Locatelli used a made-up pseudo-African English (or French, in the case of “Majunga Crocodiles”).

The effect of foreign sounds replacing native music in “traditional” places such as post-war Italy (as it was seen from a US perspective) is described in the mandolin-laden introductory verse of “Mambo Italiano”: “A girl went back to Napoli / because she missed the scenery / the native dances and the charming songs / but wait a minute, something's wrong!” (Clooney 1954). But what is “wrong” there exactly? The loss of a local tradition or the appropriation of a foreign one? Were Italians “stealing” the mambo from the Caribbeans or was that a process largely controlled by the US music industry that was expanding its market in Italy?

Some scholars have suggested that a desire for the exotic emerged in consequence of Italy’s encounter with American popular culture after WW2 (Goodall 2013: 230) and that the calypso craze was just one example of the ascendency of the US media industry on Italy’s cultural production. This influence was evident in the same exotic references and colonial imagery that were already used in North America (Caparoso Konzett 2017) and one might be tempted to dismiss Sandon's "8 African Ritual Songs" as Italy's response to U.S. exotica albums, such as Les Baxter's "Ritual of the Savage." The latter, however, did not offer a fake ethnomusicological backstory, on the contrary, its liner notes invited the Western listener to imagine a fantasy world: “Do the mysteries of native rituals intrigue you? Does the haunting beat of savage drums fascinate you?” (Baxter 1951). Instead, Sandon’s album does not appear to be simply a case of homogenization or globalisation of exotica; it could also be a process of re-negotiating and circulating Italy’s own cultural difference.

However we want to look at this, the “8 African Ritual Songs” project seems to be part of a different (still clearly colonialist) strategy of inventing “traditional” music and having it arranged, performed and recorded by Italian musicians. This repertoire, in turn, could be "exported" through cover versions by international singers, with royalties (almost always) going to Locatelli, Bergamini and Peer, their US music publisher.

In 1950s Italy there were several cheeky songs that contained blatant ethnic stereotyping such as “Sugarbush oh mia zulù” and “Bingo bango bongo”, the Italian versions of Fred Mitchell’s “Sugarbush” and Hilliard and Sigman’s “Civilization” (Masiola 2015), as well as original songs about “Brazilian beaches, Mexican calypso and Creole beauties, alongside countless songs about toreadors, pampas, Dutch tulips, Chicago gangsters and African tribes” (Prato 1988: 199). However, KD and 8ARS appear to be part of a different strain. Stylistically, they clearly diverge from the exotic, orchestral and Les Baxter-esque music of the same period, such as Tak Shindo’s *Mganga!* (1958) or Edmond De Luca’s *Safari* (1958).

The popularity of imported “exotic” repertoire and, perhaps, the availability of ethnomusicological recordings may have suggested Locatelli and Bergamini that they could create their own “African” songs. A song like KD sounds inspired by calypso hits, such as Belafonte’s “Day-O (Banana Boat)”, that Sandon recorded with Bergamini and Quartetto Radar around the same time (1957c), but, in KD and 8ARS, all Caribbean references and Spanish-language puns, that were rather common in Italian songs at the time (Tomatis 2019: 93), are replaced by pseudo-African ones.

Of course, the very idea that music and songs – whether “real” of “fake” – can represent a territory or a people is generally a cultural construction. Furthermore, the creolization, on the one part, and the exoticization, on the other, of Black Atlantic music are widespread phenomena rather than isolated occurrences (Forsdick 2015, White 2012). Consequently, a discourse on the "fakeness" of this pseudo-vernacular repertoire is only relevant when songwriters and artists claim authenticity and tradition as a means of giving face value to their music (7). The 8ARS album, particularly in its liner notes and Sandon’s vocal delivery, endeavours to construct a form of third-person authenticity that, in Moore's theory of authentication in popular music, refers to the conveying of the impression of representing a tradition of musical performance (Moore 2002).

Taking all of this into account, the album represents an instance of ethnoforgery from a variety of perspectives: "What makes the forgery a forgery is the degree to which the forgery claims its authenticity, and whether it attempts to pass as a legitimate documentation or representation of another culture" (Reddell 2013: 89). With a little stretching and approximation, we could also classify this project as a case of sonic syncretism, a term used by Michael Denning to describe complex and multicultural articulations of popular music:

> [D]istinct vernacular languages or idioms, each of which was marked by characteristic instrumentation and repertoires, rhythmic timelines and harmonic cadences, vocal timbres, and articulations … not simply imports, imitations … each of them embodied a particular articulation of African, Arabic, Asian, European, and American musics. These sonic syncretisms cannot be understood as either the simple adoption of exotic sounds and rhythms, as in European philharmonic orientalism, nor as the continuation of the aristocratic or folk traditions of Africa (Denning 2015: 107).

Representations of Blackness in postwar Italian popular music

Some may even see these 1950s songs as a covert reactivation of Fascist Italy's violent colonialism in Africa, a historically late and territorially limited phenomenon marred by hardship and defeat (Ben-Ghiat and Fuller 2005). As I mentioned earlier, a newspaper article from the 1960s confirms that Locatelli experienced this firsthand as a conscript stationed in Ethiopia. There he was imprisoned by the British Army in a concentration camp (Grazzini 1961). The legacy of colonialism played a role in the idealisation of Italianicity, contributing to emergence of Italy's own pseudo-whiteness that denied being racist while it often naturalised the other as inferior (Giuliani & Lombardi-Diop 2013). The designation of Italians as "white" is a relatively recent cultural construct, whereas historically they were not generally perceived as such, particularly in the United States (Guglielmo and Salerno 2003). Italianicity was developed to include people of darker skin tones who did not conform to the Anglo-Saxon ideal of hegemonic whiteness. A "discourse of blackness … predicated on a knowable, visible, and performing subject" (Fleetwood 2011: 6) was not evident in Italy at the time and, after the collapse of the fascist regime, the word "race" appeared in the laws of the newly formed Italian Republic (1946) only in the phrase "without distinction of race", to reject discrimination based on ethnic or cultural affiliation. Claims about the absence of racism against people of African descent circulated in the popular discourse of the 1950s and 1960s, which instead focused on the racism directed against Italian southerners (Deplano 2016: 96).

> The Italian bourgeoisie so far has not been racist only because they have not had the opportunity. In Libya and Eritrea the Italians generally were not racist because they were underclass people from Calabria and Sicily. The petty bourgeoisie has not had a chance to prove itself racist, but it is. I could tell by the attitude toward my films. Public opinion turned against me out of some indefinable racist hatred, a hatred that, like all racism, is irrational. It could not accept underclass characters. (Pasolini in Stack 1969: 30).

Representations of Africa in Italian popular music began in the late 1800s, well before the fascist era (Bussotti 2015), but African songs became very popular in the 1930s and entertained Italian audiences when the regime was moving to occupy Ethiopia. Such popular recordings are indeed prior examples of constructing the exotic through sonic and musical imagery. However this music was not attempting to sound "African": they were clearly the songs of occupiers, not of the occupied (Tamburini 2022).

In the late 1950s, the production of pseudo-African music could also be seen as a way of creating a commercial repertoire of seemingly vernacular songs to "colonize" the international music market without having to resort to established Anglo-American styles or stereotypical "Italian melodies" (8). In this sense, Locatelli and Bergamini's goal was to create songs that could be successfully "cosmopolitan" (as evidenced by the numerous international cover versions) without having to conform to what was normally expected of them as Italian songwriters.

Conclusions

When I first encountered Flo Sandon's *8 African Ritual Songs*, I sought to determine whether they were really based on traditional African music, and if not (as I suspected) what cultural, commercial, and ideological mechanisms were at play in their creation and dissemination. Through historical evidence, discographic and musicological analysis, we can conclude that these were not vernacular songs or melodies but carefully constructed instances of exotic ethnoforgery.

According to musicologist Phil Ford, exotica is "pictorial music" and can therefore be "representational, though not necessarily narrative" (Ford 2008: 110). Ford goes on to suggest that scholars should be careful when engaging in analyses of exotica: “when intellectuals handle this music with the hermeneutic equivalent of tongs and a HAZMAT suit, they are in a sense *not hearing it at all*. The moment we insist on the interpretive priority of colonialism and commodification, fun time’s over” (129) and as is often the case in discussions of "world music" or the authenticity of non-Western music recorded for Western audiences, there appears to be no clear distinction “between good engagement with the ethnic Other and a bad exoticism” (128). The driving forces behind the creation of this music go beyond mere aural appeal. Exotica is often based on a generic notion of "otherness" and Western listeners must participate by positing their own "civilized" self-identity against which to cast the "tribal" otherness.

With this in mind, I propose to consider 8ARS – as well as other LPs like Chaino’s *Jungle Mating Rhythms*, complete with a paratextual apparatus and imagery aimed at locating the songs’ origins within “primitive tribes” – as *mondo music*, in reference to the genre of 1960s mockumentary films depicting exotic places and bizarre cultural customs (9). Like these recordings, those movies claimed to be authentic, while most of the scenes were in fact completely staged. Yet, this inherent fakeness was nonetheless one of the key features of the genre (Moliterno 2014). Novelist J. G. Ballard explained that “[I]t didn’t matter if they were faked – a more or less convincing simulation of the real was enough and even preferred … we prefer a partly fictionalised reality onto which we can map our own dreams and obsessions” (quoted in Goodall 2006: 13-15).

On the songwriting royalties side, Locatelli and Bergamini appear to have taken advantage of the way most copyright societies deal with traditional music. When a work is deemed of public domain, such as vernacular folk songs, it is the arranger of the song and the adaptor of the lyrics (as well as their publishers) that are entitled to royalties. Therefore, the statement that these songs were found in Africa did not diminish Locatelli's and Bergamini's copyright shares.

While these pseudo-traditional songs have been recorded by several artists and have been successful on the international market, bringing profit to their authors, it is ironic that they have also been "stolen" by others who have single-handedly decided that it was not necessary to give any credit to the Italian authors, since this material was initially presented (and therefore later considered) as “folk music” that anyone could translate, rearrange, appropriate, and make money with. Locatelli was no stranger to predatory copyright practices, having managed to get himself officially recognized in Italy as the author of the lyrics to The Champs’ surf-rock instrumental hit, “Tequila” – lyrics consisting of a single word! – earning a sum that today would amount to nearly 100,000 USD (Corriere della Sera 1960, 2).

TABLE 2 – Commercial recordings of Locatelli and Bergamini's "African" songs. Vickie Henderson's 1957 version of KD is titled "Kuli Na Kenda Killin Deni Docks" and labeled as "calypso-afro". John William's "Kilindini Docks" has French lyrics, while Leo Leandros ("Kuli-song"), Bibi Brown's and Heidi Prien's are in German. Peggy March's version is entirely credited to Jackie Javellin (Casper Coleman), with no mention of the Italian writers.

	1957	1958	1959	1960	1963	1964
Kilindini Docks	Flo Sandon's Franco e i "G5" Johnny Dorelli Vickie Henderson	Perez Prado Leo Leandros	John William			Peggy March
Jambo Hippopotami		Flo Sandon's	Eartha Kitt		Tulio Leon	
Rain Pain and Sun			Bibi Brown	Heidi Prien		
Invocation to Kabbia		Flo Sandon's	Bibi Brown	Heidi Prien		

The 8ARS project illustrates how pseudo-authenticity was mobilized to create a commercially viable repertoire that could circulate internationally, often under the guise of folk tradition. The fabricated backstory of a "passionate Africanist" collecting "ritual songs" across the continent served as a marketing tool to lend both cultural legitimacy and exotic appeal to music that was, in fact, composed and arranged by Italian musicians hiding behind pseudonyms. It also reveals broader dynamics of postwar songs, including the legacy of colonialism, the influence of North American calypso and exotica trends in Europe, and the strategic use of sonic syncretisms by "peripheral" musicians to position their work within global markets. Ultimately, Locatelli and Bergamini's case invites us to critically examine how vernacular authenticity can be constructed, claimed, and marketed globally over decades and sometimes never fully debunked.

To this day, the rights to their "African ritual songs" are managed by Peer Music and Pleasant Music Publishing Corporation. The *African Tribal, Ritual and Love Songs* compilation, originally released by Afro Request in 1973, was remastered and uploaded to music streaming services in 2022. "Kilindini Docks", along with all the songs in Flo Sandon's 1959 album, is also included in the compilation *World Music Africa, Vol. 4*. On the front cover, a subtitle assures the listener that this is "authentic music from Africa" (VV.AA. 2006).

Endnotes

1. The song was subsequently recorded by Perez Prado as well as by Latin-American artists: "El negro zumbón was the model on which the performance and composing of baions in Chile was based, published in score in the mid-fifties and in guitar songbooks until the early sixties" (González 2015: 201).

2. "Kilindini Docks; Kuli-Kuli, m J Lorenzi, pseud. of Federico Bergamini, lyric by Lecorde, pseud. of Aldo Locatelli. Milano, Edizioni Southern Music, 23Sep57, EFO-54020" (CCE 1957: 1270).

3. Not to be confused with the Italian painter by the same name (Aldo Locatelli, Bergamo 1915 – Porto Alegre 1962) whose work, coincidentally, folklorized Blackness in Brazil (Morrison 2021).

4. Peer Music is currently "largest independent music publisher in the world, with 39 offices in 32 countries and owning or administering over 1 million copyrights", https://www.peermusic.com/aboutus/companyhistory

5. Cuban *son pregón* is a popular music genre that has its roots in the cries of street vendors advertising their goods and services. One of the earliest examples is "El Manicero" (the peanut vendor), which became an international hit in the 1930s (Diaz Ayala 1988).

6. In the 1950s Alan Lomax and Hugh Tracey edited several LPs of traditional African music, including *British East Africa* and *French Africa*, roughly the same areas mentioned in Locatelli's liner notes (Sandon's 1959).

7. The value of debating the authenticity (versus the fakeness) of these songs was questioned by ethnomusicologist Stephanie Alisch, whose observations helped streamline my argument. In this case, as in Chaino's, a discussion of alleged authenticity seems particularly relevant because it is explicitly mentioned by the creators of this pseudo-vernacular music and used as a marketing ploy.

8. This was suggested by Sebastian Klotz when I presented this research at the Humboldt University in Berlin in May 2024, at the invitation of Mark J. Butler.

9. I would like to thank Maurizio Corbella for this idea.

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