

Popular Music and Politics in Africa – Some Introductory Reflections

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‘Popular culture’ is a broad term, especially if the meaning of ‘culture’ is understood as referring to “[...] whatever is distinctive about the ‘way of life’ of a people, community, nation or social group.” (Hall 1997: 2) However, for the purpose of this collection of articles, a useful distinction is between cultural practices such as drinking, eating, sports, fashion or religion and those forms of popular culture which are, in a more narrow sense, artistic cultural expressions, encompassing different genres such as music, theatre, dance, visual arts and literature. As Barber (1997: 1) points out, music is the first form of popular culture in Africa which has been (noticed and) studied outside the African continent. (cf. Fabian 1997 [1978]: 18) The still rather strong focus on music in the study of popular culture is also reflected in this special issue which is almost exclusively dedicated to this genre.¹

Popular culture has long been regarded as an unworthy subject of academic study (cf. Fabian 1997 [1978]: 18, Street 2001: 302, Marchart 2008: 11) – an attitude which was upheld perhaps even more strongly by academics in Africa as Wa Mungai (2008: 58) notes with reference to Kenya. This rejection was largely based on a perception of popular culture as “trash”, as an inferior kind of culture. (cf. Newell 2002: 3, cf. Hobsbawm 1995 [1994]: 514) Scholarly discussions of popular culture in Africa have for long revolved around the question of ‘authenticity’; especially with regard to popular music the introduction of musical elements from Western musical styles has often been viewed as a loss of it. (Kirkegaard 2002: 13) But also artists of other genres in the field of popular culture have been accused of imitating

¹ Our starting point for this special issue was the 2nd AEGIS conference held in Leiden in July 2007 where Daniela Waldburger and I led a panel titled “Popular culture and politics - alternative channels of expression” which was dedicated to the analysis of different domains of popular culture such as music, video, theatre and rumour. However, the contributions published here have their focus on popular music with the exception of the articles by Ludl and Ricard which make also reference to theatre. I am very thankful to Daniela Waldburger for her support throughout the editing process of this issue.

Western culture in their artwork, thereby allegedly contributing to the ruin of what their critics perceived as “true” African culture. (cf. Fabian 1997 [1978]: 18)² In this issue I see no need to take up this debate because I agree with Barber who proposed “[...] to listen to what these genres of ‘popular’ art say, without assuming that we already know that they demonstrate *either* an on-going cultural McDonalidization *or* a continuing resistance to assimilation.” (Barber 1997: 7, emphasis in the original)

What I want to take up here, however, is the debate about the relationship between popular music and politics in the African context.³ Before I outline how this topic might be approached, I want to discuss some of the aspects which different authors have emphasised in their attempts to define what constitutes the ‘popular’ in the African context where popular culture has often been discussed in terms of what it is not: neither “wholly ‘traditional’”, nor “‘elite’ or ‘modern’” (Barber 1997: 8) – both concepts which do not exist in such absolute ways and which are thus of little help to understand what constitutes the ‘popular’ in African cultures.

There is no generally accepted definition of popular culture in the African context and some of the approaches offered in the literature are in fact quite contradictory (cf. Martin 2000: 169, 171). This is reflected also in the contributions to this issue whose authors do not share a uniform understanding concerning the meaning of “popular culture”.⁴

² In the case of popular literature, writers of popular novels were for example criticised for containing references to American popular culture or for being “soapy” as well as for creating “simple binary oppositions between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ characters” (Newell 2002: 5). Newell notes that critics often failed to grasp the function of novels for the readers they aimed at and the broader context in which they were situated.

³ The political dimension of song is obviously not a phenomenon which is anyhow limited to the African continent. For a discussion of “popular culture as political communication” in the European and North-American context see the so-titled special issue of *The Public* edited by Lisbet van Zoonen (2000). See also the numerous works by John Street (1997, 2001, 2004 among others) and Street/Hague/Savigny (2008) for discussions of popular music and politics outside of Africa.

⁴ Ludl for example refuses to use this term, preferring the term “cultural expressions” instead (cf. Ludl in this issue).

What makes 'popular culture' popular?

"The very definition of popular culture is political, sanctioning some forms of culture and marginalizing others." (Street 2001: 302)

For some scholars the terms popular culture and mass culture can be used as synonyms. (cf. Hall 1997: 2) As John Street (2001: 303) has pointed out, such equalization of 'popular culture' with 'mass culture' does not really work out because "high culture is just as much a product of mass production as popular culture; or to put it another way: some 'popular' culture emerges from small independent production companies and achieves minuscule sales."⁵

To use the "mass aspect" as a defining characteristic of popular culture is even more problematic in the African context where, as Newell (2002: 4) notes, consumption patterns with regard to some genres are such that for example also popular books are consumed only by a small minority of the population.⁶ With regard to music, however, the mass factor is of course more relevant as - even though few may actually buy music on the market - it certainly reaches out to the so-called masses through the media, first and foremost the radio, but also television and increasingly also the internet.⁷ The liberalisation of radio and TV helped facilitate the emergence of new forms of popular culture which did not have space on the usually state-controlled media. HipHop-inspired music which emerged in many African countries in the 1990s is a case in point here.

Due to the fact that the 'mass' aspect is of little use with regard to some genres of popular culture, Newell proposed to re-settle the term 'popular' for the African context. (Newell 2002: 4, cf. Ogude/Nyairo 2007: 7) She suggested conceiving of the "popular as the part of African creativity which is non-elite, unofficial and urban." (Newell 2002: 4) But are these aspects really of more use in grasping the nature of popular culture in Africa? Does

⁵ Street (2001: 303) gives the example of the *Three Tenors*, classical musicians who stand as much for high culture as for mass production.

⁶ However, it has also to be kept in mind that in Africa books are usually handed from one reader to the next and thus tend to have a much larger readership than one might suspect given the low numbers that get printed.

⁷ Similar to books, also television reaches many more people through shared usage. Internet is still a mainly urban phenomenon.

the conception of popular culture as a site of creativity by the non-elite mean that the individuals who create pieces of popular culture need to be members of the so-called 'masses', the marginalised majority of the population, in order to qualify as 'popular artists', or is it rather a question of who they speak to, who constitutes their audience? And what does non-elite mean after all?

Can the educational level serve as a measure whether one is viewed as elite or not? The historian Eric Hobsbawm observed a quite strict divide between the consumers of popular culture and high culture in Great Britain and noted education as the main divisive factor: "If one did not want to join the middle classes one did not bother about seeing Shakespeare plays. Conversely, if one did the most obvious means being to pass the requisite exams at secondary school, one could not avoid seeing them: they were the subject of examinations." (Hobsbawm 1995 [1994]: 509) But while this observation might be valid for class-divided Britain, it seems less certain that it is also of relevance in the African context. In the case of HipHop-inspired music for example, in Senegal just as in Tanzania, it were precisely young people from the small Tanzanian upper-class who had enjoyed the privilege of higher education and access to cultural productions from outside the country who created this new form of music who few would hesitate to characterise as popular culture (cf. contributions by Reuster-Jahn, Englert, Ludl and Ricard in this issue).

Does this mean then that the decisive factor is rather generation than education? As de Boeck and Honwana (2005: 1) noted, creative and innovative forms of popular culture are "often the exclusive" domain of the younger generation. Youth are certainly at the forefront of incorporating global influences into their cultural products which are therefore also often viewed as part of youth culture.⁸ While the emergence and/or liberalisation of media such as TV and internet have contributed to cultural expressions by young people becoming increasingly global, this has not led to

⁸ Just as popular culture, youth culture can be defined in different ways: ranging from cultural expressions in a more narrow sense which are actively being created by young people, to a broader concept which encompasses also cultural forms such as behaviour which is being created and upheld by the young. (cf. Wulff 1995: 10) Definitions of the term youth are equally complex, but in the social sciences youth is commonly understood as a social category which is constructed in discourse and which does not adhere to strict biological age limits. (Bourdieu 1993, cf. Bayart 1993)

uniformisation. Instead their expressions take “different forms in different locations as processes of domestication re-contextualize and reshape them to address local concerns.” (de Boeck/Honwana 2005: 12, cf. Frederiksen 2000: 29)⁹ However, despite youth playing an important role in processes of production and consumption of popular culture, it is certainly too narrow to conceive of popular culture/music as a domaine of the young.

Similarly, it seems too narrow to characterise popular culture in Africa as an urban domaine as Newell and others have done. (cf. Newell 2002: 6) While it is certainly true that urban areas are largely the sites of popular creativities - especially those which succeed in reaching a broader audience - the reception of popular culture can hardly be limited to the urban sphere. With technologies spreading, the gap between rural and urban is decreasing, an observation that holds true at least in terms of the consumption of popular music. (Fabian 1997 [1978]: 18, 25)

Hobsbawm (1994: 501) noted that technologies revolutionized the arts by making them omnipresent, thereby also changing the impact they could make. He further observed that the impact of commercialized cultural forms such as popular music - which had become omnipresent in the public sphere in Europe as in other parts of the world since the 1960s - was much stronger than “[...] the impact of the ‘high arts’” which he perceived of as „occasional at best”. (Hobsbawm 1994: 513) Can impact thus be viewed as a characteristic aspect of popular culture though some of its forms only achieve “minuscule sales” as Street (2001: 303) has noted?

Talking about impact, it is important to be aware that the meaning of cultural products resides in their receptions (Street 2001: 304, Olwage 2008: 7), and that the responses from the part of the audience might differ from the responses the artists expected. For Kirkegaard (2002: 14) the essence and the quality of being a popular art form, are to be found in the ability to be used by audiences, sometimes “disregarding all fine thoughts”. She ascribes this ability especially to music which is dispersed more easily and more widely than other cultural products – making it on the one hand more accessible but on the other hand also more vulnerable in the sense that it is “open to misuse, misinterpretation and broad generalisations.” (Kirkegaard 2002: 14, cf. Barber 1987: 4)

⁹ Youth are not only often in the forefront of cultural production, they also form the largest group of consumers of popular music.

If neither the aspects mass production, lower level of education, youthfulness, urbanness and impact seem to work as criteria to distinguish popular culture from other forms of culture, might it be possible to understand popular culture as an aesthetic category showing distinct stylistic features as some scholars have claimed? (cf. Ogude/Nyairo 2007: 7, cf. Barber 1997: 5) Van Zoonen (2000: 14) for example has noted - albeit not with reference to Africa - the schematic syntagmatic and paradigmatic structures as well as popular cultures' focus on individual situations and its genderedness.¹⁰ I rather agree with John Street (2001: 303) who notes in reference to Simon Frith that aesthetics is another category which does not help us to define popular culture for "[...] it is not clear that any neat aesthetics divide can be drawn between popular and serious culture. The values of complexity and difficulty can apply to both". As he observes "[A]nd yet the distinction persists." This insight makes him argue that the definition of what constitutes popular culture is actually itself "a product of politics", with some forms of culture being identified as worth of study and reflection by academy, while others are not. (Street 2001: 303, cf. Barber 1987: 11) Also Philipp Tagg (in: Editors of *Popular Music* 2005: 136) points in this direction when he notes that "[...] "'popular' was a historically necessary label qualifying the undemocratically excluded."

A more positive definition could probably point at the relative openness of popular culture - openness in the sense that entry barriers are relatively low and access to it not overtly institutionalized. (cf. Barber 1987: 43) The relatively low entrance barriers on the side of the production of popular music have been even more decreasing with the emergence of HipHop-inspired musical forms which do not require the performers to learn an instrument and new technologies which make it relatively cheap to produce. In his discussion of new forms of popular music in Ghana, Collins (2002: 72) points at the positive effects of "democratisation" of the music as the possibilities of cheap production enabled many youth who had not been able to do so before to enter the music scene. And also Frederiksen (2000: 29) emphasises the ability of popular culture to work as a space in which the marginalised can participate: "Young people and particularly young

¹⁰ She notes that the "syntagmatic, paradigmatic and personalised characteristics of popular culture have an unmistakable gender dimension to them. Thus in syntagmatic terms, women are very seldom the actors that move the step forward; [...]"(Van Zoonen 2000: 8)

women make use of the popular culture discourses. The discursive spaces opened up by the narratives are relatively free from the barriers which otherwise keep out women and the poor. In that sense the new media contribute significantly to the establishment of a democratic public sphere.”

The politics of the popular

“The politics of popular culture are also the politics of fun.” (Street 2001: 303)

Because of the structural features of popular culture as schematic, personalised and gendered it has often been condemned as “a politically conservative and intellectually debilitating force” (Van Zoonen 2000: 8, cf. Street 2001: 307) Also in one of the first contributions on popular culture in Africa, Johannes Fabian (1997 [1978]: 26, emphasis in the original) noted that academics at that time feared that popular culture would “lead to a surreptitious denial of the *political* processes of class struggle and its neocolonialist suppression” because it would offer escape of the exploitative reality.

This understanding of popular culture as a sort of “opium of the masses” stood quite in contrast to the picture of popular culture as a counter-hegemonic force which has been nurtured since the mid-1960s by leftist scholars such as Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart, Edward Thompson and Stuart Hall, who “stood for the idea that culture could be politically progressive, rather than a form of social control.” (Street 2001: 308) At the *Center of Contemporary Cultural Studies* (CCCS) in Birmingham, Cultural Studies was developed as a transdisciplinary discipline whose interest lay in the political dimension of popular culture.¹¹ Many studies conducted at the CCCS focused on sub-cultures which were perceived as sites of resistance. Thus, historically, the concept of popular culture was closely tied to European (especially British) working class culture. (cf. Marchart 2008: 31, 251)

¹¹ For Cultural Studies in the British tradition the interest in politics and the analysis of power relations through forms of popular culture stands in the foreground, whereas the *Kulturwissenschaften* which developed in the German-speaking countries rather continue the tradition of „Hochkulturwissenschaften“. (Marchart 2008: 22)

However, the conception of popular culture as a tool for political articulation of the oppressed was of course not confined to Europe. Hobsbawm notes that in general, the role of artists (whether categorised as 'popular or not) was different in countries with communist and other forms of repressive regimes such as the Apartheid-regime in South Africa, because in these countries artists enjoyed the "sense of being needed by their public" as "[...] in the absence of real politics and a free press, practitioners of the arts were the only ones who spoke for what their people, or at least the educated among them, thought and felt." (Hobsbawm 1994: 506) Barber (1987: 7, 1997: 5) observed that it was in Latin America where the understanding of popular culture as the means of expression of the marginalized masses was developed further, especially with regard to popular theatre where activist/theorists such as Augusto Boal became influential far beyond the sub-continent.

With regard to Africa this perception of popular culture as an empowering counter-hegemonic force certainly shaped the perspective of many scholars, to the extent that the „resistant“ character of popular culture was sometimes taken as a defining characteristic – a problematic conception. Popular music might sometimes be able to shape a country's politics as was most recently the case in Kenya where the song *Unbwogable* played a crucial role in the election campaign of the opposition in the 2002 elections (Nyairo/Ogude 2005: 226). But the fact that popular music can shape politics does not justify the assumption that it necessarily has to work as the 'voice of the voiceless'. That this is not the case is probably most clearly shown by the example of the role of music during the era of apartheid in South Africa where music helped constitute apartheid just as it helped "take apartheid apart". (Olwage 2008: 8)

While popular music certainly can be understood as a field of political discourse (cf. Nyairo/Ogude 2005: 225), it is less helpful to conceptualise it "as a platform for debate and action against the élite's dominant ideology" (Chirambo 2002: 103) as done all too often in studies on popular music in Africa. There is a tendency among Western-trained researchers to study popular culture for its potential to contribute to social change, usually neglecting the large corpus of art which does not live up to these expectations (Barber 1987: 8) – or making only short references to the existence of works who seem not to deserve detailed analysis because of their lack of critical content. Increasingly though, African artists and writers

reject to be viewed through such a functional lense which does not do justice to their creative abilities. The Kenyan writer Wa Ngugi¹² recently expressed it as follows: “But let me also say this – that I do not know what it means to be a political writer. Perhaps more than anything this designation has been used to take the African artist and the writer out of what he or she produces. The friendly critic thus says - the African artist is functional; the African writer is political. Yet, the imagination cannot be moved by ideology otherwise it simply gives the ideology a different form.” (Wa Ngugi 2008)

With regard to the ‘authenticity debate’, Barber (1997: 7) has pointed at the irony in the attitude of “wealthy Westerners exhorting Africans to recover and adhere to their own cultural traditions and resist Western corruption”. She further noted the political significance of this attitude which shows that “Westerners of whatever ethnic origin seem to need an Other who is, in one sense or another, a lost cultural Self.” In analogy to Barber I would argue that it cannot be the task of Western trained researchers to judge African musicians by the extent and way in which they involve themselves in political debates in their countries; in other words: to make the critical content of music a measure for the extent to which the respective music deserves to be considered as “popular music”.

This does not mean that popular culture should not be viewed as a *possible* site for the expression of political criticism and the conceptualisation of political change but that a less dogmatic approach allows for a much more comprehensive - even though also more contradictory - picture of the many forms the relationship between popular culture and politics can take. As stated before, popular songs with political contents - expressed more or less explicitly - have certainly played a role in different moments in history in various African countries. However, a look at the contents of popular music shows that songs which are critical of political situations, especially in the countries of their writer’s origin, are rather rare.¹³ Based on their case study

¹² Mukoma Wa Ngugi is the author of *Hurling Words at Consciousness* (poems, 2006), *Conversing with Africa: Politics of Change*. He is also co-editor of *Pambazuka News*, the “weekly forum for social justice in Africa” (www.pambazuka.org). (Wa Ngugi 2008)

¹³ Nyamnjoh and Fokwang (2005: 264) note that musicians tended to take up political themes which were situated outside their respective countries and were rather of Pan-African nature (such as the anti-colonial struggles in Southern Africa or the exploitation of Africa by the French and the West).

of Cameroon, Nyamnjoh and Fokwang (2005: 264) argue that songs which comment on social virtues or social ills, or songs which are in praise of the political regime are much more frequent than explicitly political songs - an observation which can also be extended to other African countries. Furthermore, it often are the same musicians who write political praise songs at one occasion and songs in which they criticise aspects of the political system or attitudes of the elites at another, thus making it difficult for the critic to upkeep neat categorisations of 'good' and 'bad' musicians in the sense of 'critical' and 'uncritical' or even 'pro-establishment'.¹⁴

In many studies concerned with the political in popular music the analysis is confined to its lyrics, which actually reduces the song to a piece of poetry. By neglecting other aspects such as rhythm and arrangement, the analysis of the political dimension remains necessarily incomplete¹⁵: "Few questions are asked about how music achieves its effects, and why some music is more politically potent than others. Such questions need to be asked if we are going to understand the politics of popular culture."¹⁶ (Street 2001: 310, cf. 304) Street suggests that "a piece of music is chosen not because it 'fits' the political agenda, not because it takes the 'correct' line, but because it also works as music", and concludes that "[P]ut simply we have to understand the pleasure and the fun if we want to understand the politics." (Street 2001: 310)

Apart from looking at how popular culture is used to express political views, it is also necessary to look at the role of the state in the politics of popular culture (Street 2001: 302). As Nyamnjoh and Fokwang constate: "much remains to be known about the relationship between music and

¹⁴ The Malawian singer Lucius Banda discussed in Chirambo (2002) is an example in case.

¹⁵ Usually, the focus on lyrics is due to the fact that few cultural and social scientists writing about politics and popular culture possess the skills to conduct a profound analysis of the musical aspects of songs. This is also true for the contributors to this issue in which the politics of the music is admittedly also a neglected aspect.

¹⁶ Nyairo and Ogude (2005: 239) remind us that politics can also lie in the structure of a song, stating with reference to the song *Unbwogable* "[M]uch of its politics lies in its structure, for we find this same dismembering of the past, the defamiliarization of what we 'know', in the logic underlying the coining of the term 'Unbwogable'. This fusing of tongues - English and Luo - is a testament to a new Kenya, one that breaks with the earlier constructed Kenyan past in the sense of separate ethnic identities, and instead attests to the multiple and fluid identities that are increasingly defining postcolonial, particularly urban, Kenya."

politics, and on how musicians, politicians and political communities all strive to appropriate each other in different ways and contexts.” (Nyamnjoh/Fokwang 2005: 253) Many political regimes throughout Africa have responded with repression to pieces of popular music which they perceived as containing criticism, fearing that the music would otherwise become a site for resistance.¹⁷ This has happened for example in apartheid South Africa as demonstrated by Anne Schuhmann in this issue.

Popular music is not only subject to censorship but also to interpretations, and sometimes interpretation is the basis for censorship. This was the case with the song *Unbwogable* by the Kenyan duo Gidi Gidi Maji, which was originally not intended to be political by the artists but was read as such by politicians whose reaction, i.e. censorship, made the political reading of the song common place: “[I]n trying to censor the song, the regime of the day gave a decidedly political interpretation as the only viable reading of the entire text.” (Nyairo/Ogude 2005: 232)¹⁸ One strategy used by artists to escape forms of repression such as censorship is to frame their criticism in more subtle ways, using means of language such as metaphors, slang and irony (cf. Nyamnjoh/Fokwang 2005: 263, cf. Barber 1987: 61) - an aspect which is noted in several contributions to this issue.

Responses by the state other than repression include the strategy of appropriation - a strategy which political powers in many parts of the African continent have used in their attempts to seek or maintain themselves in power. (e.g. Martin 2000: 180) Especially in the decades following independence, many African governments used music as a tool for Nation-Building and development (cf. Nyamnjoh/Fokwang 2005: 263). In this context the practice of transforming ‘traditional’ songs into ‘propaganda’ songs was often used - a practice which is however far from outdated in contemporary Africa; and it is certainly not a phenomenon limited to ‘traditional’ songs but also occurring with songs that can be categorised as ‘popular’. In this regard, I draw once more at the example of

¹⁷ Street (2001: 303) notes that the fact that regimes bother to censor popular culture is the best proof that it is nothing trivial.

¹⁸ Increased interest in songs which have been censored is a well-known phenomenon also outside the narrower political context. Examples are songs which become popular with young people because they have been marked with the “Parental Advisory - Explicit Lyrics/Content” tag which aims to inform parents that the language used in these songs is considered offensive for minors.

Unbwogable - even though in this case the song was not appropriated by the ruling regime but by the opposition of that time (2002), the *National Rainbow Coalition* (NARC). Its sponsors let produce versions of the song which they perceived as more “national” in order to make it appeal to more Kenyans. This meant removing part of its Luo elements and replacing them with elements from other Kenyan languages such as the Gikuyu, Masaai, Kamba, Luhya or Kalenjin. (Nyairo/Ogude 2005: 240)¹⁹

While the explicit use of popular songs or the remixing of songs through politicians or political parties is not that common after all, appropriation of popular music by politics in the sense of inviting musicians to play at political rallies is rather frequent and examples are numerous (Nyairo/Ogude 2005: 240ff., Chirambo 2002: 120, Fabian 1997 [1978]: 26). Musicians react differently to invitations by political parties, with some of the artists rejecting these appropriations and others viewing them as “an ideal opportunity to attain greater social recognition and respectability” (Nyamnjoh/Fokwang 2005: 253) - an aspect which is also discussed in the contributions by Englert and Reuster-Jahn in this issue.

There certainly are more aspects concerning politics and popular music which have not been mentioned here and this special issue obviously does not offer an exhaustive discussion of the object. It contains though, some detailed case studies which stand as examples for ways in which the topic of popular music and politics can be tackled, ranging from historical (Schuhmann) and socio-political approaches (Englert, Ludl) to approaches grounded in applied linguistics (Reuster-Jahn).

In the first article in this issue, “*The Beat that Beat Apartheid*”, Anne Schuhmann takes a historical perspective when she traces the role of music in the resistance against apartheid in South Africa. The next two articles both focus on contemporary popular music in Tanzania – albeit from different perspectives. In “*Bongo Flava and the electoral campaign 2005 in Tanzania*” Uta Reuster-Jahn offers a detailed case study of Bongo Flava

¹⁹ The use of several languages in one song is however not just related to political aims but also used as a commercial strategy, in order to appeal to a broader audience. A well-known example from Tanzania is the female Bongo Flava superstar Lady Jay Dee who uses besides the Tanzanian national language Swahili and English also languages spoken in the Democratic Republic of Congo (e.g. Lingala) or South Africa (e.g. Zulu). (cf. Englert 2008: 53)

songs which played a role in the most recent elections that brought Jakaya Kikwete to power. Her study is mainly based on song lyrics which she herself had transcribed in Swahili and translated into English. The complete lyrics are presented in full in the appendix which can be accessed online.²⁰ In “Ambiguous Relationships” Birgit Englert discusses in what ways Bongo Flava can be said to have impacted on Tanzanian politics and in this respect analysis the strategies of young “underground” artists and the emergence of two young politicians on the political scene. In “**To skip a step**” Christine Ludl discusses how new representation(s) of migration, success and politics are reflected in two domains of popular culture, i.e. Senegalese rap and theatre.

The issue is rounded up with an essay by Alain Ricard who, in “*Le ‘taarab est comme le concert party...’*”, takes a comparative view on three different genres of popular culture, i.e. Concert Party, Taarab and Bongo Flava.

Finally, it remains to hope that this issue provides some interesting insights for those who are new to the study of popular culture in the African context as well as those who are familiar with this field.

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