

# Translocal Popular Culture.

## Foreword

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The topic of this special issue “translocal popular culture” can refer to quite different phenomena: to popular culture that emerges first as the result of translocal flows, as well as to popular culture that is practiced and consumed in translocal spaces and thereby becomes subject to various transformation processes. The contributions that are gathered here refer to translocal popular culture in both senses and in some cases a neat distinction is not possible in any case.

The concept of translocality closely relates to that of transnationalism which from the 1990s on aimed to overcome the limitations of methodological nationalism inherent to many migration studies (Wimmer/ Glick Schiller 2002, de Jong/ Dannecker 2018). Translocality on its part emerged somewhat later with the intention to overcome the limitations of transnationalism which were closely tied to its presupposed relevance of the “nation” (Greiner/ Sakdapolrak 2013: 3). The concept of translocality serves to capture the sense of local-local connections across national boundaries (Brickell/ Datta 2011: 10) or within nation states, as Ogone (2015) argued with regard to the internal Kenyan Luo diaspora. Further, translocality is also usefully employed in historical contexts that precede the existence of nation states. Freitag and von Oppen (2010: 12) stipulated that - viewed from a historian’s perspective - transnationalism appears to be merely a special case of translocalism. (cf. Englert 2018: 544). Translocality is thus the overarching concept that provides - together with the notion of popular culture<sup>1</sup> - the common ground for the contributions to this special issue. Nevertheless, some authors chose to refer to transnationality where this concept proved the better option.

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<sup>1</sup> Popular culture is another term that has been defined in many different ways by scholars of many different backgrounds. I have dealt in depth with the various attempts to define “the popular” in relation to “culture” in an introduction to another special issue of *Stichproben* (cf. Englert 2008).

This issue contains contributions on different popular culture practices in the domains of film, music and dance as well as social media that either emerged or were transformed in translocal spaces or shaped these in one way or another. Further, following Hall's (1997: 2) notion of popular culture as "whatever is distinctive about a 'way of life' of a people, community, nation or social group", one contribution also deals with Rastafari culture, a popular culture which actually emerged historically as the result of translocal relations.

In "**Movies on the Move**", Daniel Künzler looks at transnational video film flows and the emergence of local video film industries in key hubs for the physical distribution of video films in major cities of *Kiswahili*-speaking East Africa in the broader sense. He explores the similarities and differences between the different places, thereby contributing the first broader comparative study to the literature on film translation in East Africa.

In "**Encountering Chinese Modernity**", Wei Lei offers a case study on China as one big actor on the East African TV and film market that has emerged rather recently. She focuses specifically on the development of Chinese television drama on the Tanzanian media market and discusses why it has become so popular. Wei Lei argues that the Chinese government uses television productions to convey a favourable image of China to the East African public and discusses the strategies it uses to achieve this end as well as the reactions of Tanzanian audiences.

In recent years, the tremendous growth of social media users in most African countries has brought about manifold changes in the field of popular culture. On the one hand, products of popular culture, be it music, video or photography, are increasingly distributed via social media channels such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram. On the other hand, the various forms of interaction on social media can be considered as popular culture practices in their own right. Thus, especially, yet not exclusively, for researchers working in the field of popular culture, the various social media channels have become valuable archives that host sources of many different kinds and also allow insights into the reaction of audiences (cf. Englert 2016).

In "**The Illusion of Being a Free Spirit**", Claudia Böhme discusses mobile phones and social media specifically with regard to their role in migration processes. She argues that these act as "migrant essentials" and that this holds especially true for people living in liminal or in-between spaces like

refugee camps. Drawing on the cases of two women based in the Kakuma refugee camp in North-Western Kenya, Böhme shows how social media offers new spaces through which some refugees can act out an identity beyond the refugee label in order to imagine and create their own future.

The following two articles are an outcome of the research project “Popular Culture in Translocal Spaces: Processes of Diasporisation among Comorians in Marseilles and Cape Verdeans in Lisbon” which I led from 2014 to 2019.<sup>2</sup>

In “**On Notions of (In)Visibility and Diaspora Space**”, Hanna Stepanik focuses on the popular Cape Verdean musical style Batuku as it is practiced in Lisbon, Portugal. Batuku is primarily practiced by women and in her analysis, Stepanik opens up debates regarding assumed dichotomies such as ‘visible’ and ‘invisible’. Stepanik stresses the need for an intersectional approach when analysing notions of (in)visibility and shows how *Batukaderas* challenge the romanticisations and silences which confront them through their practices.

Katharina Fritsch who conducted her research as part of the same research team also takes an intersectional approach. Albeit her research took place in Marseille and focused on negotiations of Franco-Comorian diaspora in cultural practices. In her article “**Kulturelle Mobilisierungen ,frankokomorischer Diaspora**”, Fritsch analysis the practice of Twarab which is a key community-related practice in Marseille as well as the talent show *Etoiles Rasmi* which was a singular event that took place in 2013.

Finally yet importantly, this special issue features a report on the All-Africa Rastafari Gathering (AARG) that took place in Shashemene in Ethiopia in November 2018 and that can be considered as a popular culture event. Dominik Frühwirth contextualises this specific event by providing an overview of the history of Rastafari Repatriation to Ethiopia that is at the heart of the Rastafari movement and relates to the return of descendants of enslaved Africans back to Africa. This report on the international gathering in 2018 offers insights into the continuous presence of Rastafari culture in Ethiopia and other African countries and the issues around which current debates centre.

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