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The Politics of Marginal Forms: Popular Music, Cultural Identity and Political Opposition in Kenya

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Abstract

In the contemporary world, discourse on global cultural flows and related outcomes has moved to the center stage in scholarly research and activist realms. In this discourse, especially that related to fundamental world views on globalization and to the links between different communities of the world, the space that popular music occupies is very central. This is because popular music has always subverted the notion of national boundaries, transcended and transformed them into new conduits and spaces that allow for the emergence of new identities.

While there is nothing particularly new about the foregoing global trend, its significance in cultural and political debates, at least in Africa and Kenya in particular, has scarcely been appreciated. Little attention has been paid by scholars to an interesting dimension of popular music as a means of making history, interpreting reality and also as a medium that is directed at transforming the present reality in order to realize a better future for the people. At best scholars have treated popular music merely as a debased culture produced only for entertainment and whose aim is to render the audience passive and mindless in the corporate search for the lowest common denominator of acceptability and appreciation.

This paper focuses specifically on the Kenyan context to contest the foregoing position. Its argument rests on the axiom that whereas it has become normal in the writings on civil society, democratization and so on, to emphasize forms of cultural expressions that are perceived to be avowedly more understood in political circles than others, the space of popular music cannot be under-estimated. It is beneath the dialectics of production and consumption of this popular music

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with all its contradictions that the fertile intellectual arena on its potent marginalization could be resuscitated. The paper, addressing popular music from a historical perspective, takes into account its dynamic interplay as an aural percept, experience, social practice, individual and cultural expression and as a means of creatively adapting to perceived material conditions to reveal the complex and vital role of popular music as a system for the enactment and negotiation of emergent patterns of identity under conditions of pervasive social, political and economic change.

Résumé

Le discours sur les mouvement culturels mondiaux et leurs conséquences occupe désormais une place centrale au niveau de la recherche universitaire et du milieu activiste. Dans le cadre de ce discours, plus particulièrement dans le cadre de celui portant sur les opinions fondamentales internationales concernant la mondialisation, et les liens entre les différentes communautés du monde, la musique populaire occupe une place centrale. Ceci s'explique par le fait que cette forme de musique a toujours bouleversé la notion de frontières nationales, transcendant celles-ci et les transformant en de nouvelles voies et en un espace favorisant l'émergence de nouvelles identités.

Même si la tendance mondiale dont il est ici question, ne présente aucune nouveauté particulière, il demeure que son importance au sein des débats culturels et politiques est à peine considérée, en Afrique, et au Kenya, en particulier. Les universitaires n'ont accordé que très peu d'attention à la musique populaire, en tant que moyen permettant de 'faire' l'histoire, d'interpréter la réalité, mais également un moyen permettant de transformer la réalité présente, de sorte à réaliser un meilleur futur pour les populations. Au mieux, les universitaires ont considéré la musique populaire uniquement comme une forme de culture dépréciée, uniquement destinée au divertissement, et qui rend son audience passive et hagarde, dans le contexte de recherche collective du plus petit dénominateur commun d'acceptabilité et de reconnaissance.

Cette contribution porte sur le contexte kenyan et cherche à remettre en question la situation décrite précédemment. Même s'il est devenu normal, dans les écrits portant sur la société civile, la démocratisation etc., de mettre en exergue les diverses formes d'expression culturelle considérées comme étant mieux comprises dans les cercles politiques que dans les autres milieux, l'espace occupé par la musique populaire ne doit cependant pas être sous-estimé. C'est en-dessous de la dialectique de la production et de la consommation de la musique populaire, avec toutes ses contradictions, que le terrain intellectuel fertile relatif à la marginalisation de cette forme de musique peut être restitué. Cette contribution, qui analyse la musique populaire à partir d'une perspective historique, tient compte de son interaction dynamique, en tant que percept oral, mais également en tant qu'expérience, pratique sociale, expression individuelle et culturelle et moyen d'adaptation créative aux conditions matérielles, ceci pour révéler le rôle complexe et vital de la musique populaire comme système de promulgation et de négociation

des formes identitaires émergentes, dans un contexte de profonds changements sociaux, politiques et économiques.

> What do you think an artist is? An imbecile who has only his eyes if he is a painter, or ears if he's a musician, or a lyre at every level if he is a poet, or even, if he's a boxer, just his muscles? On the contrary, he's at the same time a political being, constantly alive to heartrending, fiery or happy events, to which he responds in every way... (Pablo Picasso, quoted in *Art and Power: Images of the 1930s).*

Rethinking interdisciplinary approaches: An introduction

In his classic text, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, P. Chatterjee has observed that subject-centred reason that was characteristic of the post-enlightenment modernity erroneously claimed for itself a singular universality by asserting its epistemic privilege over all other local, plural, and often incomprehensible knowledges. This approach, the author cautions, intolerantly concealed the virtues of the fragmentary, the local and the subjugated ways of unmasking what lies at the heart of modern rationality and research. This argument raises two concerns that form the benchmark from which this paper proceeds.

On the one hand, there is the need to transcend subject-centred entities in our unending search to understand the universality of human experience. This need is particularly pertinent in African contexts where interdisciplinary focussed approaches seem to have managed to challenge the previously held misconceptions and generalisations about the African reality. This distinct nature of interdisciplinarity is forcing a radical rethinking and reformulation of knowledge away from traditionalist approaches on discourses of domination to what Homi Bhabha has characteristically called 'an in-between hybrid position of practice and negotiation' (Bhabha 1989). Part of the importance of this 'fragmentary' point of view lies in the fact that it resists the drive for a shallow homogenisation and struggles for other, potentially richer definitions of discourse.

The second issue which emanates from Chatterjee's caution and which relates to the first one is the need to explore alternative sources of information. In this paper, an attempt is made to tap the 'virtues' of interdisciplinary approaches and to reflect on the interface between popular music and politics. Attempting to pay attention to a dimension of popular music as a means of making history and interpreting reality, the paper charts ways in which the dialectics of its production and consumption could be tapped in interpreting a political reality. In so doing, we challenge and pose two related issues. The first is the challenge to scholars who have treated popular music merely as a debased culture produced for entertainment and whose aim is to render the

audience 'passive and mindless' in the corporate search for the lowest common denominator of acceptability and appreciation. The quotation with which we begun this section couldn't capture this challenge any better. The second challenge revolves around the need to take into account the dynamic interplay of popular music as an aural percept, experience, social practice, individual and cultural expression and as a means of creatively adapting to perceived material conditions. Our argument is that it is only by doing this from a historical perspective that the complex and vital role of popular music as a system for the enactment and negotiation of emergent patterns of identity under conditions of pervasive social, political and economic change could be understood. The focus here is on the link between popular music and politics in Kenya during the multiparty era, which is defined as the post-1990 period.

Popular music in Africa as a marginal form? Some contextual reflections

In the contemporary world, discourse on global cultural flows has pushed the study of popular music to centre stage in scholarly research and activist realms. This is because popular music has always subverted the notion of national boundaries, transcended them and transformed them into new conduits and spaces that allow for the emergence of new identities.[1] But, while emphasising the centrality of popular music in scholarly circles, sight is not lost of the fact that the definition of the concept popular music itself has continued to elicit countless definitions. The uniting component in these definitions however is that they focus upon the means of its production, distribution and consumption. According to Street (1997) and Barber and Young (1997), popular music is a form of musical entertainment that is mass-produced or one that is made available to a large number of people. Availability may be measured by the opportunity to enjoy the musical production or by the absence of social barriers to the enjoyment.

Although there appears to be an appealing formality about defining popular music in terms of the mechanisms that organise its production and consumption, the definition raises problems in its failure to say anything about the character of music itself or even the various contexts in which music is produced and enjoyed. Our concern here is about the concept of music in Africa, and Kenya in particular. Here, music as a creative art form continues to play an important role in the lives of the people. Music and life are indeed said to be inseparable (Nketia 1975). There is music for many of the activities of everyday life, as well as music whose verbal texts express the African's attitude to life, his/her hopes and fears, his/her thoughts and

beliefs. In most Kenyan communities in particular, music is markedly utilitarian and is nowhere limited to situations of leisure. Music serves to fulfill the social, political, economic, religious and other inter-related aspects of the culture of the people. These aspects of life have continually been changing within different time contexts. In the same way, new musical forms are composed and transmitted in time and space, and adapt to the changing socio-economic and political conditions and have thus helped to create new identities.

In examining the link between popular music and politics in Kenya, we assess the role played by popular music in the political process as a means of political mobilisation and resistance as well as a means of articulating and maintaining identities thereby providing alternative readings of history that is usually ignored in various intellectual discourses. This alternative reading is expressed by the fact that music cuts across race and class and derives its character from both the already thematised and other interactions, which makes music a process of several forces. The paper will specifically look at the extent to which music has been used to conscientise people on the various facets of the political process including, educating voters on voting arrangements, warning them against election malpractices, supporting the manifesto of particular parties or individuals and so on. In this way, popular music will be portrayed as a powerful tool used to report on current affairs, to exert political pressure, to spread political propaganda and reflect and mould public opinion. Have studies on popular music in Africa and Kenya paid attention to these perspectives or is it that the study of popular music occupies a marginal position in the analysis of politics?

To be fair, there have been many differing views by social and developmental scientists on the role of popular music in relation to the expression and consolidation of political power. Some, like the structural functionalists see all art and music, not just the popular variety, as part of the tension managing mechanism regulating the values and 'needs' of society. Opposed to these so called 'consensus' models are the Marxist-influenced conflict theorists who treat popular music and art as an ideological tool used by the ruling class or group to hold power or hegemony (see Collins 1992). Within these contending perspectives one can clearly envisage a dual role for popular music. On the one hand, there is the hegemonic role of popular music associated with social and bureaucratic control – that which seeks to maintain the political status quo. On the other hand, one can also discern the anti-hegemonic, decentralising or what Bigsby (1976) has called 'emancipatory' or 'apocalyptic' role of popular music.

As we have already observed, within the context of Africa there has and continues to be an intimate connection between popular music and politics. However as Collins (1992) observes, the recent history of African popular music throws more light on the anti-hegemonic side of popular music for obvious reasons. Specifically, Africa has been faced with the hegemony of the colonial and neo-colonial powers, and some local popular musicians have attempted to overcome the resulting 'cultural imperialism' in various ways. The latter include the indigenisation of their music, the utilisation of the music of the New World and, finally, the continued use of the African tradition of using music to voice protest and social conflict. These ways continue to be used and incorporated in the various political processes but have remained latently unacknowledged.

The scholarly literature concerning African popular music has continued to grow tremendously over the last two decades. Richly detailed and lucid accounts on the development of music in Africa, making use of historical, ethnological and musicological data have received various appraisals.[2] Despite such studies being dominated by broad approaches, in itself an indication of the efflorescence of diverse popular musical traditions on the continent, their analysis of the contextual dynamic interplay between popular music and political life in Africa has been commendable. They have sought to address the most persistent theoretical questions that have preoccupied most scholars in the study of music, and popular music in particular concerning the relation of music to the aesthetic and ideological needs and aspirations of individuals, ethnic groups, classes or nations of people. Popular music in Africa, therefore, as an experience, as a social practice, as an individual and cultural expression, and as a means of creatively adapting to perceived social, political and economic circumstances, plays a complex, yet vital, role in society.

The important role played by music as a creative art in Kenya's political process cannot be over-emphasised. Popular music has been appropriated (by both its producers and consumers) to fulfill the political functions of reporting on current affairs, exerting political pressure, spreading propaganda and reflecting and moulding public opinion. In this sense, various musical texts have acted as major cultural resources that serve in spreading the ideas of unity, nationalism and a peoples' right for self determination as well as carrying within them messages on their grievances and aspirations.[3] As Karin Barber has suggested:

> If we take (popular) art forms simply as social facts, and examine the network of relations through which they are produced and consumed, we may already be uncovering important but unnoticed aspects of the societies in which they flourish. Popular arts penetrate and are penetrated by political,

> economic and religious institutions in ways that may not always be predictable from our own experience (Barber 1986:2).

Popular art, of which music is part, therefore cuts across and indeed penetrates various facets of life as it struggles to establish a particular view of the world, one that, in various significant ways, challenges the conventions of the dominant common sense. In the sense that it uncovers important but hitherto unnoticed aspects of life, popular music provides what Scott (1990) has appropriately called the 'hidden transcript'. This hidden transcript is one in which is written 'the anger and reciprocal aggression denied by the presence of domination'.

Political opposition and the politicisation of music in Kenya

In Kenya, like elsewhere in Africa, music and song in particular have historically been part of the political process, that which struggles to establish a particular view of the world. Thus, as opposed to the old European image of traditional Africa and its music as only geared towards social cohesion and static equilibrium (Collins 1992), Kenyan music has been in the forefront in expressing a people's identity within the context of social, economic and political change. This way, Kenyan music has been able to discount the various erroneous negative ideological concepts associated with African music – including 'primitive' and 'tribal' – which were mainly created by the colonialists who wanted to create passive subjects without their own history.

There is a great deal of evidence to show that Kenyan historical cultures have regarded performance genres and song in particular as powerful, integrated and to some degree autonomous modes of social action in political contexts.[4] Since time immemorial, and more precisely in the traditional African society, songs drawing on various themes served as major repositories of information on particular societies and their way of life, history, beliefs and values. It was common, for instance, for deliberate attempts to be made especially by elders, to educate the young people through songs at initiation camps and other social events. It was during such occasions that songs stood out as important components in the dissemination of specific societal values relevant to the young peoples' responsibilities in the days ahead. This education through songs was, however, not restricted to the youth. Songs were equally a central avenue employed for the transmission of information germane to the formal or ordinary activities in the life of society. It was common, for instance, to find songs being employed in the making of announcements, proclamations, expressing gratitude or appreciation to benefactors, warning, advising, boosting and performing other numerous social, economic and political functions that cut across various age groups. Indeed, as a source of

pleasure and information, music's greatest attribute in the traditional society lay in its ability to transcend the various age, gender, class and other related social divisions.

In this context, therefore, the argument that the use of music or song as a form of communication is a recent phenomenon does not arise. It was common in the African traditional communities to communicate through this form as it was with everyday speech. Indeed in certain circumstances, for example, when people wished to complain or cast insinuations, they found it more effective to do so through song than speech. War songs, songs of praise, songs of insult, challenge or satirical comment were overtly used as politically effective weapons of spreading ideas to the people, maintaining and stabilising the political structures and also moulding public opinion. What needs to be emphasised is that song was seldom performed for its own sake. It was also invariably accompanied by dance, mimes or drama to make its appeal effective. On the other hand, given its varied roles in serving communal or personal, and recreational or ritual functions, songs were performed on an enormous variety of instruments to achieve the desired communicative and affective latent effects. Such instruments for the sake of convenience have been classified in the following families; chordophones (stringed instruments), idiophones (shaken instruments), aerophones (wind instruments), and membraphones (drums). It is these instruments that give the songs of a given repertoire their musical content and some kind of unity or coherence (Nketia 1974).

Music making therefore was, and still is, not simply an exercise in the organisation of sound. It remains a powerful symbolic expression of the social, political and cultural organisation, which reflects the values and the past and present ways of life of the human beings who create it. The unity and coherence of various songs have affected their character, content, production and consumption over a historical period of time. Their ability to produce and articulate people's feelings make songs important sources of political thought and action within the various Kenyan communities. Indeed as Street (1997) has observed, music makes us know who we are through the feelings and responses that it exposes us to, and which in turn shapes our expectations and preferences. This argument is reinforced by Frith and Horne (1987) who claim that by knowing what we are, we develop a kind of identity, which is a founding aspect of politics. According to the same authors, people's sense of themselves always comes from the use of images, symbols and a whole series of responses which they come to identify with and which also distinguish them from others.

Behind the foregoing arguments is the thought that if politics is the site within which competing claims are voiced and competing interests are

managed, there is an important question to be addressed: why do people make such claims or see themselves as having those interests? The answer is that they are the consequence of us seeing ourselves as being certain sorts of people, as having an identity, which in turn establishes our claim upon the political order. There is a need to re-examine this statement in the light of political opposition in Africa and Kenya in particular.

According to Berliner (1962 and 1978), although it is now a time-worn cliché that music is an important constituent element of African culture closely associated and integrated with the daily being of the African, the statement has rarely been applied to political activities in African societies. Although the situation seem to have changed a little since Berliner made these observations, the scenario becomes more striking if compared to other parts of the world. In the West,[5] for instance, the power and ability of popular music to focus a people's passion and express defiance has been noted and extensively investigated. We have only to recall the propaganda machines of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia to remember the ways in which the machinery of culture and popular music in particular were deployed to legitimate a political order and to orchestrate popular sentiment. Harker (1992) has indeed aptly captured the manner in which the state in the West still tries to make popular music a device for securing deference and marginalizing dissent. The state continues to draw upon music's ability to move people by encouraging compassion and charity. Although neither of them was directly organised by the state nor related to politics, the mega-events of the 1980s were the most dramatic examples of the use of mass mediated popular music in conscious raising and mobilisation of masses of people. These events included 'Live Aid', 'Band Aid', 'USA for Africa', 'Farm Aid', 'Amnesty International Tours', and 'Nelson Mandela Tributes'.[6]

Perhaps the Mandela 'concerts', 'tributes', or 'festivals' as they have variously been called, have a direct link to the African context and politics in particular. In their very choice of the theme, the Mandela 'concerts' which were staged first on 11 June, 1988 and then on 16 April 1990 in Wembley stadium in London, had been organised to champion the release of Mandela from prison. The imprisonment of Mandela who was the chief architect of the black liberation struggle in South Africa was considered officially illegal by most of the countries that broadcast the concerts. By their conception therefore, the 'concerts' emphasised and indeed internationalised the marriage between music and politics. Far from merely being events to express solidarity with Mandela's tribulations, they provided an avenue through which people articulated their thoughts and feelings about the political phenomenon related to the need for the release of Mandela. Through the 'concerts', music was made available to a large number of people whom it afforded an opportunity

to enjoy and articulate their political feelings. Thus from the pleasures of popular music, people became engaged with politics through the feelings it articulated, the identities it offered, the passions it elicited and in the responses it prompted (Street 1997:14). It is no wonder that after his release and during his attendance, on 16 April 1990 of the second 'Mandela concerts', Mandela noted thus:

> Over the years in prison I have tried to follow the developments in progressive music... Your contribution has given us tremendous inspiration... Your message can reach quarters not necessarily interested in politics, so that the message can go further than we politicians can push it... we admire you. We respect you, and above all, we love you (quoted in Garofalo 1992:65).

In these words Mandela seems to sanction and amplify the linkage between music and politics and emphasize the key ways in which music becomes—through the uses that it is put and through the judgements made of it—a form of political activity. Popular music as is argued makes us feel things, allows to experience sensations that are both familiar and novel. It does not simply echo our state of mind and our emotions but also gives us terms to articulate them (Street 1997). In articulating our emotions therefore, popular music links us to a wider world. Let's focus specifically on the Kenyan context to show how popular music has been employed for political purposes and more so by opposition politicians and their parties.

Ethnic or national identity: The case of Kenyan music in the multiparty[7] era

The popular music scene in East Africa and Kenya in particular is often said to offer a contrast when compared to that of other parts of Africa in the sense that musicologists have made great headway in the study of both traditional and urban music (Graham 1988:235). This perceived success story notwithstanding, a great deal of information about the origin and historical development of music in the country and the contextual functional imperatives of actual recordings is still lacking. There is particularly a lacuna in the study of music, both secular and gospel, that addresses the issue of the link between politics and music. In classifying the political songs of the current Kenyan repertoire, this section identifies and discusses three main categories. First are the traditional African songs that continue to be incorporated as voices of protest and social conflict. Second, are the borrowed or adapted songs or what Collins (1992) calls the 'indeginised' styles. Third is the use of church or religious hymns in political protest. We look at each category separately.

i) Traditional African Adaptations

In terms of traditional styles, we take cognisance of the fact that while examining the music of Kenya we need to note that it exhibits all the variety in style and instrumentation that one would expect to find in a country comprising numerous ethnic groups. These ethnic groups include the Kikuyu, Luhya, Luo, Kamba, Kalenjin, Maasai, and Samburu among others. These ethnic groups have evolved more or less similar social contexts of music, which embrace all the events and occasions with which music in Africa is associated – from ritual ceremonies to work songs, praise songs, recreation, lullabies, children songs, love songs and popular entertainment (see Nketia 1974).

As earlier observed in the paper, songs specifically associated with the various facets of government are numerous among the particular ethnic groups within Kenya. However, although the earlier traditional songs are still being incorporated in commenting on aspects of the Kenyan political process, contemporary songs appear more direct and forthright in their statement on policy, goals and platforms than the older ones. Praise songs for instance, which in traditional Kenyan communities were used to extol the virtues of greatness of the chief or elder and thus contribute toward maintaining their authority, and stabilising the government, are still in vogue.

Specifically in terms of praising, there were a number of artists from regions and political classes that supported the ruling elite and mainly the party in power, the Kenya National African Union (KANU). Various songs were produced and recorded in support of the political status quo, the party candidates and its policies. In comparative terms, the ruling party functionaries and the political system in general directly and indirectly supported these artists. At the height of the campaign for the multiparty elections in 1992, for instance, one artist Joseph Kamaru, from the Kikuyu ethnic community was seen by the ruling party as an important vehicle to deliver the Kikuyu votes. He would appear at all KANU rallies in Central Province, where he attracted and entertained thousands of people who would probably have had no other opportunity to watch him perform live.[8] His recordings were constantly played on the national radio and television station, the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC). The same can be said about the Muungano National choir, conceived by the former president Daniel Arap Moi as a mass choir in 1989. However, instead of being a national choir, it became more of a state house project singing praise songs to the former head of state. Though they composed songs to educate the people on the need to vote, especially during the 1992 elections, their focus was on the need for people to support KANU during the elections. It is in this context that the following composition was conceived:

Kura imefika Haa. 'The voting period is here with us'
Kupiga kura jamani 'My people, voting'
Ni haki yako. 'It is your right'

Alongside the Muungano National Choir was a host of other choirs belonging to institutions, individuals and churches. Perhaps, the other most notable group worth mentioning in relation to their role in singing praise songs was the Prisons Choir. Individuals such as a primary school teacher from western Kenya, J. Wasonga produced among other hit songs 'Tawala Kenya' (Rule Kenya). 'Tawala Kenya' remained in vogue for close to a decade and was often played on the state radio during every year's national holiday. Its message went as follows:

Tawala Kenya tawala 'Rule Kenya Rule'
Tawala Kenya tawala raisi Moi tawala 'Rule Kenya Rule President Moi Rule'
Tunamsifu Moi 'We praise Moi'
Tunampongeza Moi 'We thank Moi'.

These praise songs were however in no way limited in focus to the former president Moi and the former ruling party, KANU. They also extended to opposition leaders and their parties. Within the songs one can make out the transformation from the traditional role of song or music. The songs have been adapted and transferred from the figure of the chief or elder in the traditional context to that of the political leader and the party. By a simple substitution of names and variations of text for instance, the old songs are given a new meaning to meet current situations in a rapidly changing world. This is a remarkable example of cultural continuity and homogeneity.

On the other hand songs of insult have provided, just as they did in the traditional setting, an effective medium of social control and political influence. Public figures, both in the ruling party and the opposition are constantly subject to scathing criticism, ridicule, and reprimand. It is significant however to note that the relevance of the ethnic configuration in the way in which praises and insults in the songs are qualified. Indeed, ethnicity remains a fundamental force in Kenyan politics, a fault line along which elites mobilise and compete for power. The significance of the ethnic cleavage in the transition to multiparty politics both in 1992 and 1997 was clear with the re-enactment of the conflict over national identity and representational institutions. Political parties in Kenya today, as they were in 1992 and 1997, are as narrowly based on ethnic coalitions as they are organised under ethnic leaders. Apart from KANU and the now ruling National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) parties that claimed a countrywide representation,[9] other parties formed after the re-introduction of multiparty politics are organised under ethnic lines. The former Democratic

Party (DP) was popular among the populous Kikuyu, the National Development Party (NDP) among the Luo, and FORD Kenya among the Luyia (mainly the Babukusu). Since the December 2002 elections these parties have merged into the NARC party.

The significance of these categorisations to the production and indeed the consumption of popular music is clear. Artists from ethnic groups and political classes that identify themselves with opposition parties produce songs that are critical to the political system in power. The recently released hit song 'Unbwogable' by musicians Gidi Gidi and Maji Maji is a case in point. The song, which became a household hit in the opposition 2002 campaign, praises a number of prominent Luo politicians who had been involved in the struggle against the former Moi regime. Noting that they are 'Unbwogable' (apparently a Luo anglicised word meaning 'unshakeable' or 'unscareable'), the song became a major rallying point for opposition campaigns in Kenya. It also became synonymous with the anti-Uhuru Kenyatta campaign that challenged Moi's nomination of Uhuru Kenyatta as the preferred political heir. The song not only became popular on the opposition campaign trail but also on the various FM radio channels. Interestingly the song was hardly played on the national radio station, the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation.

'Unbwogable' is not the only song that criticised the former KANU regime. Most of the other songs commented on politically sensitive issues such as massive corruption and mismanagement of public funds by the central government under KANU. Others directly related the people's problems like poverty, lack of access to education, poor governance and saw a hope in positively changing their lives in people's participation in elections and the subsequent change in the political status quo. Such compositions usually received innumerable challenges from the former political system in power that overly restricted their composition and transmission. Apart from such music not being played on the national radio station and its artists being detained or harassed for producing 'subversive' productions, the songs mainly remained in local languages.

Opposition politicians in Kenya were also on the forefront in harnessing the advantages of music in passing out their messages to the audiences. Partly in recognition of its traditional role and partly because of its pervasive nature, politicians increasingly borrowed the techniques and skills of popular entertainment to communicate their message and promote their image. Most politicians in Kenya borrowed from the traditional idioms or specifically from the popular hits of the past, called 'Zilizopendwa' in Kiswahili (or those that were famous or liked) to transmit their messages. In so doing they also creatively retained the original form of the songs but changed the words to

suit the political situations. Three examples from Raila Odinga, Mukhisa Kituyi and Otieno Kajwang, prominent former Kenyan opposition politicians and now in government, will suffice here.

In the run up to the 14 October 2002 KANU nominations for instance, Raila Odinga, an ardent critic of the Uhuru Kenyatta for President campaign emphasised his political position to the crowds at various rallies through the song:

> *Kasarani siendi tena* (X3) 'I will not go to Kasarani Again'.
> *Kuna shida mingi huko* 'There is a lot of trouble there'.

In this song which Raila adopted from a popular oldie by Fadhili Williams 'Majengo siendi tena' ('I will not go to Majengo again') he communicated his unwillingness to go to Kasarani stadium to sanction the nomination of Uhuru Kenyatta as Moi's preferred candidate. Indeed he emphasises his position by stating that 'Kasarani itakuwa Kisirani' (Kasarani will be Confusion).

For his part, Mukhisa Kituyi also borrowed the form of a popular oldie by John Mwale to emphasise the fact that Uhuru Kenyatta was not his own man and was being fronted by politicians who had in the past ruined the Kenyan economy. Mukhisa's song, which was relayed in kiswahili says 'Nyuma yake Arap Moi, Kando yake ni Biwott na pembeni ni Sunkuli...' ('behind him [Uhuru Kenyatta] is Arap Moi, Beside him is Biwott [Nicholas] and Sunkuli [Julius]'). In this song therefore Mukhisa, like Raila, deployed the language of popular song in his political campaigns.

Otieno Kajwang in turn successfully transformed the 'KANU Yajenga Inchi' ('KANU builds the Nation') song into 'KANU Yavunja Inchi' ('KANU breaks or destroys the country'). These examples are not isolated ones and nor are they restricted to opposition politicians. What is clear however is that the politicians are increasingly trying to use the advantages offered by popular culture to create a constituency for their parties, programmes and policies.

ii) The indigenisation of sounds from the outside

Another interesting dimension of Kenyan popular music, like that from other parts of the world, within the multiparty period was the increasing hybridisation of its sounds. Kenyans have been employing externally generated sounds and influences for their own political purposes, by first initiating and then assimilating them into their own cultural experience. This has been due to the constant state of flux and a number of external influences that continue to alter the trend in the development of Kenyan popular music. According to Collins (1992), the indigenisation of African music can be linked

to three factors: the geographical diffusion of western ideas, the cultural tenacity of traditional music and the emergence of nationalism.

Among other influences, the overwhelming impact of the music from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and its political role perhaps deserves more detailed consideration here. Although music from various parts of Africa as far apart as South and West Africa and as near as Tanzania and Uganda has been significant, the Congolese influence is very noticeable. Equally, music from regions outside Africa has continued to enjoy a lot of popularity and hence also inform and impact greatly on Kenyan popular music. The latter categories include music from Jamaica and other Caribbean countries, the USA, Europe and even Asia. Class, gender, age and other social differences are in the forefront in defining the enjoyment dynamics of particular types of music. It is especially common to find, for instance, western pop influence favoured mostly by the urban youth. It is out of all these varied characteristics in terms of styles and sounds that any serious analysis of Kenyan music and its functional imperatives can be made. Here I look at the Congolese influence in more detail.

The arrival of Congolese musicians and bands in East Africa and Kenya in particular did not begin in the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed since the 1960s and 1970s Congolese musicians from DRC had begun leaving their country in large numbers, to escape civil unrest and perhaps more important in personal terms, to establish solo careers away from the domestic dominance of Franco Makiadi and Rochereau. Those who opted for Kenya found appreciative audiences and a number of record companies, both large and small, willing to release their material. On the other hand, with Kenyan governmental censorship of local musicians and music, non-Kenyan African musicians who settled in Nairobi dominated the scene (Wallis and Malm 1984:93). In time therefore, and as one author argues many of these bands adopted specifically Kenyan idioms while their growth in popularity greatly helped to undermine the development of a Kenyan national band (Graham 1988:240). These Congolese bands and musicians included Baba Gaston of the L'Orchestre Baba National, Samba Mapangala and Orchestra Virunga, Les Mangelepa and Super Mazembe among others.

The popularity of these Congolese bands and musicians did not just lie in their borrowing of Kenyan idioms, but also on the refined nature of their music and the topical choice of their themes. More important also was the main language they used in their music – Lingala. This is a Bantu language which is tonal, primal sounding, and has a melody that is easy to sing along with. Indeed as Ewens (1994:223) has remarked, the language simply sings itself. The singing along notwithstanding, the words in Lingala are easily comprehended by a large section of the Kenyan Bantu speakers. On the other

hand, its mix with Kiswahili, the national language, makes the appeal of Congolese musicians resounding and immediate to the entire Kenyan population. Indeed in many social places and other entertainment spots, Lingala music has continued to act as a bridge among diverse audiences since its advent on the Kenyan music scene. For the Kenyan youth, the Congolese musical rhythms, together with the brisk dancing styles of its singers and dancers and also the 'pornographic' aspect of their themes has been a major source of attraction.

Practically, then, Congolese bands and musicians based in Kenya acted as link points in creating a space for the appreciation of Lingala music. Indeed when famous Congolese bands and musicians based in Europe and DRC, including Franco Makiadi, Koffi Olomide, Zaiko Langalanga came to stage shows in the country, they were met with thunderous receptions. The country had not only become the prime promotion spot for music from the DRC, but equally the most profitable market for the same music. Various musical rhythms such as 'kwasa kwasa', 'Ndombolo', 'Mapuka'and 'Kiwanzenza' have increasingly gained ground in the local musical space.

Partly because of its proliferation, Congolese music, and its associated artists, has been considered as a compelling avenue through which political messages could be transmitted to the population in Kenya. Various artists and their music have been co-opted directly or indirectly in the political process and thus have acted as major rallying points that cut across ethnic, class and gender categorisations.

Congolese music does not penetrate the Kenyan market unpackaged. Some numbers, like 'Mobutu' by Franco and TPOK Jazz, although composed in the early 1980s with clear messages supporting the Zairean dictator Mobutu Sese Seko, were appropriated in support of Kenyan President Moi. More directly Congolese 'songbird' Mbilia Bel, then with Tabu Ley's Africa International band, recorded a praise song, 'Twende Nairobi' ('Let's go to Nairobi') for Moi, an excerpt which is reproduced below:

Twende Nairobi 'Let's go Nairobi'
Tumuimbie baba Moi 'To sing for the father (of the nation) Moi'.

Apart from the songs that praise the regime in power and the incumbent president, the ruling party KANU directly incorporated Congolese artists in the campaign process. During the 1992 multiparty campaigns, for instance, the ruling party and its youth wing YK 92 lobby group hired the services of a Kenyan based Congolese musician Samba Mapangala and his popular compatriot the late Pepe Kalle to campaign for the party. The two traversed various parts of the country strewn in KANU T-shirts, spreading the party's

ideals and urging voters to participate in the elections and ensure that they voted for the KANU party.

On the other hand, the opposition parties similarly found favor in Congolese music. Various 'Lingala' music choruses that sounded close to 'chibili chibili' (meaning 'two two' in various Kenyan Bantu languages) were appropriated by opposition sympathisers to signify change. The latter group considered the 'chibili chibili' chorus, championed by Congolese artists such as Arlus Mabele, Dally Kimoko and Koffi Olomide, to symbolise the two-finger salute for pluralism. Especially in the early 1990s, when such choruses were re-enacted during political rallies or campaigns the opposition sympathisers accompanied it with flashing the two-finger opposition party symbol.

iii) Religious Songs and Political Discourse in Kenya

Although Kenya is home to a multiplicity of religious orientations and worldviews, Christianity, African traditional religions, and Islam tend to dominate the spiritual credoscape. Of the three, Christianity seems to have succeeded on a wider scale in capturing the popular imaginations of many Kenyans. Some scholars (see Chitando 2002) argue that this overwhelming popularity of Christianity is due to its association with modernity and the colonial project. In this section, we use examples from Christianity and Christian or gospel music in particular to demonstrate the extent to which they have been incorporated in the political discourse in Kenya. This is not by any means underplaying the significant role played by the two other religions and indeed others in the political process.

Christian or gospel songs, just like the traditional African religious songs, have historically carried within them political messages. Indeed before the multiparty era in Kenya, a number of scholars have demonstrated the manner in which religious songs were significant in the Kenyan political struggle. Ogot (1977) and Kinyatti (1980) for instance have demonstrated how religious songs and hymns were actively employed as a mobilising strategy to raise morale among Africans during the Mau Mau war of liberation. Such hymns sought to forge a common identity between the combatants and the peasant supporters, as well as to articulate the goals of the struggle. In the post-independence period, such songs and hymns shifted from the militancy of the war to the struggle for peace, unity and development. As politicians began to exhort the nation to redefine its national goals and aspirations, artists became an important component of this nation building effort. They produced various songs through which they urged Kenyans to unite, support their leaders and pull together towards national development.

In the Kenyan multiparty context in particular, gospel musicians have continued to play a significant role in spreading Christian and also politically

related messages to their audiences. Besides the direct Christian themes, most gospel musicians in the country also continued to articulate varied socio-economic and political issues concerning the general life in society. Specifically in terms of politics, the gospel songs have been directly incorporated to emphasise particular political concerns by a number of political groupings, parties and individual politicians. In this case, the form in the gospel songs was maintained but the words were changed to suit particular political situations. In doing this, the various groups and politicians succeeded in demonstrating their contextual sensitivity and creativity. One example will suffice in demonstrating this aspect.

During a public rally organised by the then opposition NARC party at the Uhuru park on October 2002, the Kiswahili song 'Yote Yawezekana bila Moi' ('Everything is possible without Moi) was exploited to serve a political agenda. The song, a direct derivation from a Christian song 'Yote Yawezekana kwa Imani' ('everything is possible by faith'), was transformed by merely substituting the words 'Kwa Imani' ('By faith') with 'Bila Moi' ('Without Moi'). In the song, the opposition politicians who included the current president Mwai Kibaki and their supporters emphasised the fact that Moi was at the centre of all the political and economic ills afflicting the country, including bad governance, poverty, corruption, and the constitutional crisis, to mention but four. To them, the only way to get over these problems was to remove Moi and indeed his entire system and KANU from power.

It is significant to note that this song, 'Yote Yawezekana bila Moi', became what one may call 'a national anthem' for opposition political rallies. The song was employed by politicians (and specifically Members of Parliament) in different forums – including parliament. Indeed at one time in October 2002, before the dissolution of the August house, it required the intervention of the speaker of the national assembly to stop opposition MPs from singing the same song. This is just one of the many examples in which the opposition in Kenya increasingly employed the medium of gospel songs to win popular support and to advance their political goals and aspirations. Operating within the context where songs were utilised to impart ideas concerning political programmes and to elicit a commitment to specific aspirations, the opposition in Kenya found it necessary to employ this technique.

Conclusion

The Kenyan musical space, like that of other African countries, offers a striking example of a field where contestations between ethnic and national identities are expressed. In this paper we have shown that such contestations, usually ventilated through traditionally adapted styles, indigenised forms and religious discourses have become a characteristic feature of the country's political

landscape. Especially within the multiparty era in general, and among opposition groupings and parties in particular, political commentary has come to find an easy medium through music. Various musical productions have continued to play a key role in conscientising the masses, reporting on current affairs, exerting political pressure, spreading propaganda, and moulding public opinion. Given that politics is a site within which competing claims are voiced and competing interests managed, the production and consumption of music have captured the feelings, thoughts and actions of various Kenyan peoples. Through praise, insult, satire, elevation, rejection, degradation, abuse, and deceit, the creative and dynamic sensitivity of music to the various political developments has been demonstrated. It is in the music's or precisely the songs' flexibility in adapting to different contexts and the versatility of the artists and politicians that its relevance has been ensured through a wide transmission. Thus, as a major cultural device, music has been central in the construction of ethnic and national identities involved Kenyan politics. Like other forms of cultural expression and protest such as strikes, demonstrations, letters, newspapers, armed rebellion and many more, the relevance of music needs to be privileged in trying to understand the universality of the human experience in Africa. Only through this can we, as Chatterjee argued, unmask what lies at the heart of modern rationality and research.

Notes

1. The ideas and debates on music and globalisation were well captured by the 2000 CODESRIA African Humanities Institute on transcending boundaries held in Legon, Ghana and Northwestern University, USA. The author would like to express his appreciation of the incisive debates that were initiated under the able directorship of Professor Koffi Anyidoho.
2. See the works of Nketia 1974 and 1988, Coplan 1985, Barber 1986 and 1997, Collins 1986, Waterman 1986, Wallis and Malm 1984 and 1992, Kidula 2000, Graham 1992 among others.
3. Several scholars have underscored the role of popular culture in nation building and particularly in the electoral process in Africa. See for instance, Lange 1995, Olaniyan 1997, and Bateye 1997.
4. Nketia 1974 and Waterman 1986 among other scholars have aptly demonstrated the fact that various historical cultures in Africa have regarded music as a powerful a tool in political contexts. While Nketia's work traverses several African cultures, Waterman particularly singles out for discussion juju music within the Nigerian context.
5. We use the concept 'West' here to refer to both the European and American worlds.
6. For an in-depth analysis on these events including their organisation and mobilisation see Garofalo 1992.
7. Although the multiparty era is often projected by some analysts to have commenced in the early 1990s, we are aware that multiparty politics in Kenya

began during the struggle for the country's independence and was evident at the early years of independence. What we refer to here is basically the re-introduction of multiparty politics.

8. Apart from Kamaru being featured prominently during performances at KANU campaigns and other party functions, his music was regularly played on the KBC radio and television thus allowing him to reach out to a wider audience.
9. Whereas KANU as a ruling party claimed to have a nationwide representation, there were regions and districts in Kenya where the party did not win a single parliamentary seat during the 1992 and 1997 multiparty general elections.

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