

01.02.2021
31.01.2022

RESEARCH SECTION "ARTS & AESTHETICS"

Rethinking the "Informal" and Mainstreaming African Popular Arts and Entertainment

Summary

In this project, we engage with a variety of entertainment forms such as stand-up comedy, hip hop music, spoken-word poetry and musicalized histories and biographies as popular entertainment 'forms' that are reshaping the cultural economies of African urban centres. Though the appeal of these forms cut across social and literacy strata, often drawing a huge congregation of consumers at performance sites, they are often categorised as 'popular arts', a term of informality that obscures their capacities and promotes a reluctance of the academy to engage with them as repositories of social knowledge. Forms perceived and categorised as 'informal' can have significant decolonising imports for a new understanding of the African entertainment economy. They can also enrich the methodological and theoretical reviews entailed in the ACC project of reconfiguring African Studies. We therefore propose to collate, characterise and archive these resources to enable access to them as a first step in the effort to rein them in for widespread scholarly engagements and subsequent inclusion in African studies curricula.

Key questions

Three dominant questions guide our investigation:

- How do we understand and account for the relationally resilient and subversive behaviour of 'informal' entertainment forms being consumed by a vast audience of transverse social, linguistic and literacy strata in African urban domains?;
- How are the varieties of euphonic, visual and performative renditions that are flourishing in African cities constituted as relational and reflexive afterlives of the African everyday? How are these 'forms' reshaping the arts and aesthetics economies of the African urban spaces?;
- How do arts and artefacts aid cultural transfer and travel and offer a pathway for a new awareness of kinship and transnational connections in Africa?

Methods and concepts

To underscore the ACC focus on relational multiplicity, we focus on two national contexts, Nigeria and Burkina Faso, as research sites. Two factors account for this. 1) Giv-

en that a video/film culture that has come to underline Africa's contribution to global screen theory and practice is already firmly rooted in these contexts, it would be productive to follow that trail in order to establish the possibility of other 'informal' arts gaining a comparative and reflexive cultural and structural cachets in the same domains. The project adopts a conceptual mesh of "Aesthetic Realism" (Barber, 2014), the "African Everyday" (Newell and Okome, 2014, Balogun, Gilman, Graboyes & Iddrisu 2019) and Forster's Recuperation, reapplied in a new context and taken as Recollection to understand Africa as a space where "social exchanges are transformed at very short notice into cultural forms" as part of the "evidence of a distinct episteme" (Newell and Okome, 6). Our project hopes to show the data we gather challenge received knowledge and conceptualisations of the continent and its people.

Vision and Contribution to the Cluster's aims & goals

Our overall objective is to interrogate 'informalisation' by showing the capacity of 'informal' forms to delineate and express Africa's everyday experience of a multipolar world and the multiple material and non-material conditions of its people. Therefore, we seek to produce an archive of the resources described in their primary or digitised forms in an open-access form for research purposes. We hope to 'decolonize' the African Studies curriculum by providing a variety of materials for framing an African-oriented African Studies programme. When properly examined and analysed, the ways that new expressions in oral hues, which are circulating in local soundscapes and the viral spaces, challenge the scribal authority of print culture can contribute significantly to the Reconfiguration of African Studies.

Further Links / key references

Balogun, Oluwakemi M., Lisa Gilman, Melissa Graboyes & Habib Iddrisu 2019. *Africa Everyday: Fun, Leisure, and Expressive Culture on the Continent*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press.

Barber, Karin, 1987. "Popular Arts in Africa", *African Studies Review*, 30,3, 1-78.

Barber Karin, 2014. 'Foreword' in *Popular Culture in Africa: The Episteme of the Everyday*, eds. Stephanie Newell and Onokome Okome. New York & London: Routledge.

Forster, Till. 2014. "On Creativity in African Urban Life: African Cities as Sites of Creativity and Emancipation" in *Popular Culture in Africa: The Episteme of the Everyday*, eds. Stephanie Newell and Onokome Okome. New York & London: Routledge.

Kahora, Billy 2012. "Take Another Look" in *BBC Focus on Africa*, October to December, 16-17.

Krings, Matthias & Onokome Okome 2013. *Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimensions of An African Video Film Industry*. Bloomington: Indiana UP

Newell, Stephanie & Onokome Okome, 2014. "Introduction: Popular Culture in Africa: The Episteme of the Everyday" in *Popular Culture in Africa: The Episteme of the Everyday*, eds. Stephanie Newell and Onokome Okome. New York & London: Routledge.



OLUWATOYIN OLOKO-JAMES
LECTURER IN AFRICAN THEATRE AND DANCE,
FILM AND GENDER STUDIES



DR. PETER ONI
SENIOR LECTURER IN PHILOSOPHY



DR. ADAOBI MUO
LECTURER IN LITERATURE AND GENERAL
STUDIES, NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
NIGERIAN LANGUAGES, ABA



JOHN OLATUNDE MARIASE
UWA
DEPT. OF ENGLISH,
UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS

PROJECT TEAM



DR. PATRICK OLOKO
LITERARY AND CULTURAL STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS, NIGERIA



PROF. DR. LUDOVIC KIBORA
INSTITUT NATIONAL DES SCIENCES
DE LA SOCIETE,
OUGADOUGOU



DR. FEYI ADEMOLA-ADEOYE
LINGUISTICS