

Reconfiguring the City: Contemporary Youth Performance and Media Entertainment in Gaborone

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Abstract

Urban youth and their creative energies form part of the discourse of urbanization in Africa. Their participation in reconstructing, accessing, and animating the African urban landscape is evident in contemporary media entertainment and popular culture forms such as music, song, dance, theatre, and mass media entertainment. This article seeks to examine contemporary performance and cultural formations that invoke cultural memory to construct the urban landscape of Botswana's capital city, Gaborone. In particular, the article examines youth expressive art forms such as Hip hop and other trans-border musical genres, popularized traditional music, and new media entertainment culture. These performances elaborate African syncretic forms that underscore the power of African popular culture to navigate various social spaces and transform social identities. Urban youths use these performance forms to demonstrate how innovative practices could be used to interrogate social and political realities in the post-colonial space, including unemployment, poverty, xenophobia, migration, and HIV/AIDS. Using the notion of 'urban noise', the article teases out a strategy of critique that articulates the various ways that the youth navigate the African city—which is Gaborone in our case.

Introduction

In contemporary African societies, the youth play an increasingly visible role in generating the urban experience, and continually extend the zones of creativity that popular culture provides. Through the processes of popular culture and urbanisation, youth performers navigate and reconfigure the African city in a variety of ways. In Botswana, this occurs through the economies of music production and consumption, media entertainment, and cultural heritage revivals. Contemporary genres of music and performance forms such as Hip hop and Kwaito articulate the dynamics of appropriation and self-fashioning to create a distinct urban African landscape. In comparison, popularised traditional music works through a symbolist aesthetic, echoing and mapping new trajectories of Botswana cultural formations. The currency of these appropriations of indigenous performance traditions is to enact cultural integrity. Through these revisionist practices, performers signal a desire for African recuperation. Media entertainment which deploys dramatic representations offer a cacophony of sounds that is inextricably linked to the market, reflecting changes in the city of Gaborone's infrastructural landscape and human geography. The city's industrial economy is currently characterized by a boom in foreign industries typified by warehouse stores such as Chinese products, and West African (Nigerian and Ghanaian) hair salons and material culture. This is best expressed by Botswana's slapstick comedian and radio personality, Michael 'Dignash' Morapedi, who acoustically conceptualizes this urbanized cosmopolitan city space by dramatizing stereotyped identifications of Botswana, Asian, (white) South African, Ghanaian, and Nigerian entrepreneurs, proprietors, and media celebrities in their everyday encounters with ordinary citizens.

Gaborone is Botswana's capital and the largest city in the country. It lies in the south-eastern part of the country, approximately 15km from the South African border post at Tlokweng. The city derives its name from Kgosi Gaborone of the Batlokwa who led his group into the area in the 1880s (Denbow and Thebe 2006:15). Gaborone, which was established as the capital in the early 1960s as Botswana was being prepared for independence, is often described as one of Africa's fastest growing cities. It has a population of approximately 227,000 people out of the country's total of slightly above two million people (Botswana Population and Housing Census 2011). Gaborone is the administrative,

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economic, and industrial centre, and hosts the Southern African Development Community (SADC) headquarters, major commercial businesses, tourist centres, the University of Botswana and most of the country's tertiary institutions. With its fast growth in population size, infrastructure, industrial and commercial development, Gaborone emerges as the iconic city that epitomises Botswana's urban economy. Additionally, as the largest urban centre that hosts local and international cultural festivals, theatre festivals, and entertainment concerts, Gaborone is the noisiest urban space and the best tuned site for popular culture in Botswana.

The materials used to corroborate the arguments in this essay were collected from CDs bought in the city of Gaborone and from Radio Botswana programmes. Altogether 11 Hip hop and Kwaito songs, six re-traditionalized songs, and 10 episodes from Michael Morapedi's pre-recorded CD entitled 'Now We're Talking with Dignash Vol. 1' were collected. The sampled texts are the ones that most evidently and saliently elaborate the process of urbanization through popular culture. A restriction in the scope of the materials was made to interrogate urban performance particularly in the city of Gaborone.

Youth and the Politics of Urban Noise

African cities are inscribed with the history of cultural disruption through colonization and globalization. Most African cities are redolent with post-colonial legacies of racial and/or ethnic tensions, economic challenges, underdevelopment, unemployment, loss of cultural memory, and experiences of displacement and migration. At the same time, African cities are characterised by the 'global characteristics of transnational flows of capital and labour, and of cultural diversity' (Kruger 2001:4). Even more pointedly, African cities are imbued with the creative synergies of denizens who often perform their agency in the public sphere, and demonstrate a sense of self-assertion against state hegemonic instruments. As Toyin Falola (2005:3) correctly observes, African cities frequently demonstrate 'the limitlessness of creative energy, and the power of the state to attempt to curtail the energy... Cities reveal the energies, the rebelliousness, and the ever-expanding desire to extend the cultural and political space beyond the reach of the state'.

The surge of energy in African cities is prevalent in the city of Gaborone as manifested through youth expressive cultures. Gaborone youth creatively construct various identities, strive to empower themselves economically, claim access to the public city space, reinforce the value of cultural and ancestral memories, and interrupt the state's homogenising technologies. The city of Gaborone is further characterised by the general ambience of anxiety and uncertainty, a condition that echoes African performance scholar Loren Kruger's description of the city of Johannesburg as a 'city on edge' (Kruger 2001:1). Inscribed with a similar historical baggage of the post-colony, the urban space of Gaborone presents scenes and sounds of crime, critiques of corruption, and negations of the city's geopathology, albeit on a smaller scale than Johannesburg in South Africa. Geopathology, according to performance critic Una Chaudhuri, is 'the problem of place... and place as problem' (Chaudhuri 1995:55). The African city's geopathology is manifest as a lack. For instance, Gaborone city figures as the site of privation and deferred dreams, as it offers very little to Botswana local youth who have to contend with socio-economic predicaments such as unemployment, few tertiary institutions, poverty, and the threat of the AIDS pandemic. The youth strategically tap on popular culture to respond to these urban conditions. They wrestle to contain the city's geopathology and the adverse effects on its citizens through their urban sound aesthetics and acoustic technologies. This occurs through the creation of resistive sonic spaces in the city, including street markets at the centre of shopping malls, public transport sites, night and day clubs, community cultural centres, internet outlets, and churches. A cacophony of sounds fills up the African city space—street trading, voices of customers and shoppers either talking amongst themselves or speaking on cellular phones in different languages, automobile horns, drivers and conductors of minibuses begging and beckoning to passengers, church bells and sacred music. Added to these are street musicians and performers, music playing in stores and under

trees, hawkers under the shade of gazebos playing loud music of all genres from different regions of the world and shouting out at the tops of their voices to passing potential clients, and shoes navigating the concrete floors—all competing and claiming access to the city. A particularly salient and noise-saturated space in the city of Gaborone is famously dubbed Ko-Setlhareng-Dot-Com (At-The-Tree.com), where young music entrepreneurs advertise and sell music from Botswana and other parts of the world. Located in the city's old Main Mall, Ko-Setlhareng-Dot-Com is the noisy hub of Gaborone youth culture, entertainment, and music marketing. Urban youth use this space to sell recorded music by local and international musicians and to stage live promotions of their music products. Thus, Ko-Setlhareng-Dot-Com functions as the urban environment that elaborates French scholar and political economist Jacques Attali's 'political economy of music' (Attali 1985). At this noisy site of material exchange, Gaborone youth performers negotiate their space in the city's commodity market and partake in the country's structures of economic and cultural production.

Youth use music as a marketable commodity that enables them to participate in the global market economy of music consumption. More importantly, they use music and performance to preserve and circulate cultural heritage and to reinforce the value of collective cultural memory. They achieve this through technological modes of production and exchange—CDs and DVDs, as well as non-technological 'traditional' forms of knowledge preservation and circulation—street trading and performance, and equivocations of the cultural and national imaginaries of public demonstrations that recall Botswana's traditional judiciary and conciliatory principles. The non-technological accessing of public space in this instance summons the proverbial principles that *ntwa kgolo ke ya molomo* (the greatest war is fought verbally, or through the mouth), *mmatla-kgwana ya gaabo ga a swe lentswe* (if you seek what is legitimate or rightfully yours, your voice does not crack). These proverbs valorise noise that functions as resistance. They echo noise transactions that reinforce conciliation in order to mediate chaos. The non-technological processes of constructing, conquering, and claiming the public city spaces facilitate the use of youth noise strategically to wrestle conditions of economic precariousness that the youth encounter in the African urban landscape.

In his seminal work, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, sound ethnographer and critic Murray Schaefer (1977:182) identifies the various meanings of the notion of noise as 'unwanted sound', 'unmusical sound', 'any loud sound', and as 'disturbance in any signalling system (such as static)'. The experience of noise in the context of Botswana conforms to these definitions. However, there are layers of nuance in the local meanings and interpretations of the word. The word for 'noise' in the Setswana language (Botswana's most subscribed to indigenous national and official language) is *modumo*. It is worth noting that the Setswana language makes no distinction between the words 'noise' and 'sound'. For example, we can talk of *modumo wa dinonyane* (the noise/sound of birds), and *modumo wa dithekisi* (the noise/sound of taxis). Additionally, the word *modumo* (noise) is not inherently negative in meaning as compared to the English word 'noise' which often carries negative connotations. We can talk of *modumo wa meropa* (the noise of drums), *modumo wa go tsoma* (hunting noise), and *modumo wa lenyalo* (the noise of a wedding ceremony) all of which figure predominantly as pleasurable experiences.

In addition to the definitions of noise identified by Schaefer, the Setswana word *modumo* (noise) resonates with the following subtleties:

- 1.) An excruciating sound, similar to Schaefer's 'unwanted sound'. For example, *o tsositswe ke selelo se se bothoko sa ngwana* (she was woken up by the piercing cry of the baby). Notably, the singular form *modumo* (noise) can also assume a plural form, *medumo* ('noises'), as in *go letse go tsogile medumo ya banana mo motseng* (there were a lot of noise of young people throughout the village last night. For example, noise of entertainments, ceremonies, and festivals).

2.) Pleasurable experience, as in *modumo wa maphothophotho* (the noise of a waterfall).

3.) Echoes of a rumour, for example, *modumo wa dikgoberego le mekubukubu* (the noise of impending political chaos).

4.) The quality of being a delinquent, for example, *motho yole o modumo; o tla a go itaya tsebe* (that person is delinquent, he/she will ‘rupture your ear’, meaning they will lead you astray).

Discontentment, for example, *modumo wa ikuelo ya banana* (the noise of discontented youth).

4.) Cosmological indications, as in *modumo wa kotlhao ya badimo* (the noise of angry ancestors seeking veneration). In traditional, preliterate Botswana society, tragedy was thought to occur as a result of cosmic imbalance, which indicated the displeasure of ancestral spirits (*badimo*) and God (*Modimo*). Ritualized sacred noise by worshippers was thus necessary to counter-balance the ancestors’ noise and to appease them.

The different nuances of noise, as ‘unwanted sound’, ‘unmusical sound’, ‘any loud sound’, a ‘disturbance in any signalling system’, ‘pleasurable experience’, ‘echoes of a rumour’, ‘discontentment’, ‘delinquency’, and as ‘cosmological indications’ are traceable within the urban landscape of Gaborone. The ubiquity of these acoustic experiences in this city space underscores the importance of tuning into African cities in order to interrogate the connection between African popular culture and the urban experience.

Following sound theorist Schaefer (1977), popular culture critic Tricia Rose (1994), and drawing on the symbolic articulations of noise in the Botswana cultural imaginary, this article theorises youth popular culture as urban noise. This term refers to a sound that operates as a strategy of critique to reinforce acts of self-assertion, survival, and exchange within an urban landscape. In this context, the notion of noise is not pejorative; instead it symbolises creative power. The notion of urban noise resonates as the economy of productive noise. To echo Jacques Attali (1985), urban noise refers to noise produced, bought, and sold as part of the structures of urbanization. The sonic environment of the African city is characterized by a cacophony of urban noises—soundtracks that symbolize creativity, sonic events that function to interrupt economic precariousness, and acoustic signals that articulate a sense of identity and self-affirmation. This article traces and explores these innovative sonic geographies.

Reconfiguring the City

The performance of youths in urban centres such as Gaborone conform to what performance theorist Joseph Roach terms ‘surrogation’, the process through which culture reproduces and recreates itself (Roach 1996:2). In *Cities of the Dead*, Roach theorises performance as being commensurate with memory and history. The performance of history and memory in Roach’s theoretical formulation manifests through social actors’ acts of ‘surrogation’, the social process in which memory operates as substitution. Youth creators of popular culture elaborate the notion of surrogation, understood as the re-inhabiting of social bodies by successive generations, as a way to navigate the city. Roach’s critical formulation of ‘performance’ underscores the role of collective cultural memory in constructing the African urban landscape.

Gaborone urban youths’ popular cultural repertoires are dominated by satirical commentaries, appropriations, and revived traditional forms. Popular performance by the urban youth takes form in three processes, being satirical ethnic stereotyping, cross-border and/or cross-Atlantic cultural appropriations, and strategic re-traditionalisation. Performers privilege storytelling techniques in their articulations of city problems such as HIV/AIDS, privation, and other challenges encountered in the

African city space. These urban youth acts elaborate what Barry Truax terms ‘acoustic community’, because they are created by a community that is unified by memories of privation, survival, and attempts to conquer the city (Truax 1984).

The youth acoustic activities resonate with localized experiences of place and noise in Gaborone. The experiences of place invoked in the youths’ performances reflect memories of privation and moral degeneracy, but also signal a desire to reconstruct the city environment. A good illustration is a Hip hop song by artist Thabo Rantao entitled ‘Charlie’s Blunders’. Constructed and staged as a performance narrative, this song tells the story of a man called Charlie who ‘acted like a vampire’ every time he saw an attractive girl. While engaging in sexual encounters with his multiple partners, Charlie contracted AIDS, which he spread to the girlfriends. Eventually, he ended up in a relationship with two best friends, Christina and Rosina. On discovering the relationship with her friend and her HIV status, Christina committed suicide. We learn from the lyrics that other than Charlie, Rosina kept a ‘sugar daddy’. The story concludes, to Charlie’s horror, with the discovery that the ‘sugar daddy’ is Charlie’s father. Subsequently, the characters die from contracting HIV/AIDS. Against this narrative backdrop, Hip hop singer Rantao throws a cautionary note concerning the adverse results of alcohol abuse and having multiple and concurrent sexual partners. Reckless behaviour destroys individuals and families, seems to be the message of this song. This message is reinforced in the chorus:

Tse di maswe, re di fokotse (Let’s minimize all bad things)
Tse di maswe, re di divose (Let’s divorce all bad things) (US Embassy 2010)

The subject matter of the lyrics is the need to abandon noisome attitudes and behaviour. On the one hand, youth performers acoustically populate the city with inscriptions of anxiety; on the other, they echo the desire to overcome the social concerns and economic conditions that frame the city. As an active social agent and creative social critic, youth performer Rantao offers a re-articulation of cultural value. He calls forth the cultural principle that a long life, morality, and civility are more valuable than vanity. Performance of memory here is recuperative because the artist interweaves indigenous knowledge with innovative urban aesthetics to advise city dwellers. The youth urban performer surrogates the elderly as a custodian of cultural and/or moral knowledge and experience. This scenario of surrogation—whereby the city takes the place of the rural as the site of moral guidance, and Hip hop culture substitutes traditional and bodily forms of knowledge—gets trafficked through popular culture.

Popular performance by the youth functions to construct identity, to reflect individual and collective experiences, and to perform African cultural memory. To borrow from cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz, youth music, song and dramatic enactments ‘are not merely reflections of a pre-existing sensibility analogically represented; they are positive agents in the creation and maintenance of such a sensibility’ (Geertz 1973:451). When culture is conceived as ‘the structures of meaning through which men give shape to their experience’ (Geertz 1973:17), then popular culture offers the most efficacious ways through which urban youth give shape to the experiences that they encounter in the city. The major preoccupations of the acoustic repertoires from Gaborone youths are money, alcohol abuse, sexual immorality, and decadence. The noisy landscape of the city is intensified by the excessive use of alcohol and the desperate need for money. In their performances, urban youth, particularly urban Hip hop artists, privilege innovative forms that function to interrupt these attitudes. More pointedly, the city is often characterised as the social wilderness in Botswana popular consciousness. The city is the transient elsewhere. It is perceived as a site that cultivates detachment, chaos, and loss of traditional values and social mores (Rapoo 2011). Young girls are often constructed as embodiments of this wilderness city imaginary, as they are depicted negatively as the key agents of social disorder. Throughout most Hip hop narratives and song lyrics, girls are persistently perceived as ‘going wild’ with older men for money, glamour, and alcohol. A good illustration of this gendered

representation occurs through the lyrics of the song 'Mirror, Mirror' by a Hip hop group called Treff. Stylistically, the song is a narrative that uses the techniques of story-telling:

Mirror, mirror, on the wall, ain't I the craziest of them all?
Ruri, ruri (truly), you are what you see; and what you see is what you get.
Eish, ngwana wa batho (poor thing) she's been used; no turning back, but damn, she's been used.
O letse nageg (she spent the night out), o tshaba go ya lapeng (she's too scared to go back home).
But we all know, *maropeng go a boelwa* (it's always wise to go back home).
She looks in the mirror, she feels so bad,
She can't even believe it, she feels like crap.
The dude wakes up, *o a turna oa mo tshega* (he turns and laughs).
O tshwerwe ke babalase (He has a hangover); doesn't even know her name, weekend special, now she regrets,
Maikwatlhao ngwana wa morago! (This can only give birth to deep regret)
Chorus: I don't really need to say much in the 'hood',
I don't really see much in the mirror in the 'hood'. (US Embassy, 2010).

This song gives shape to the experiences of female youth in Gaborone city. It 'narrativises' a city neighbourhood characterised by anxiety, uncertainty, and chaos because of the threat of poverty and moral degeneracy. Notably, the lyrics for this song elaborate gendered representations in African popular culture. The female characters in the song remain passive victims of male sexual advances and conquer. They also succumb to the enticing of older men who offer them money and then use them, only to either abandon them afterwards or pass the HIV virus on to them. There is no demonstration of a sense of female assertiveness in these archetypal African city girls. The song also plots the narrative of the stereotypical African male aggressor; the predator that mercilessly chews on its prey. Additionally, the male in the lyrics commit sexual crimes with seeming impunity. This construction is significant in that it echoes the notion that in the Botswana cultural imaginary, sexual infidelity was sanctioned for women, but endorsed for men. Traditionally, chastity was naturalized for women, whereas promiscuity was not censurable for men. Through the lyrics of the song, the African city reproduces and exacerbates stereotypical perceptions of African femininity and masculinity.

Yet, this song demonstrates the enabling features of popular culture in the African city. The city figures as the site of access for the youth group to make their commentary about issues such as irresponsible sexual activities and the scourge of HIV/AIDS. Within the city, youth construct innovative urban aesthetics, as demonstrated in the interweaving of narrative strategies (the 'mirror, mirror' device) with self-constructions of the youth performer as a social mirror that reflects on issues of social morality. This performance is an act of surrogation in which the youth co-opt the space of moral advising to empower urban audiences. In this scenario, youth performers animate the interplay of popular culture, city 'wilderness', and urbanization.

The Comedic Acts of 'Dignash' Morapedi

Michael 'Dignash' Morapedi is a slapstick comedian and radio personality for the privately owned Duma FM in Gaborone. He has also worked at other private radio stations in Gaborone. As a local entertainer, Morapedi, who is popularly known as Dignash, gains access to the city through the local radio station. His performance culture includes live skits, phone pranks played on unsuspecting audiences, and rehearsed and recorded comical dialogues. Morapedi's noise trajectory is marked by satirical comments that lampoon government blunders, pranks that resonate with sexual innuendoes, parodies of ethnic and racial stereotypes, and farcical representations of serious issues such as

exploitation, corruption, and economic crime. Other remarks that reverberate comically in Dignash's popular performance are targeted at the urban youth. In particular, he often comments on the rampant lovers' murders or 'passion killings,' as such crimes as popularly known in Botswana. His other prevalent noise is directed at Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe, who, according to Dignash 'holds everyone in his country to ransom'. Dignash thus keeps his ear close to the ground and projects political equivocations, social observations, and moral lessons to city denizens in the country and in the southern African region.

Dignash uses the dramatic performance of comic ethnic stereotyping to access the city of Gaborone. He casts and impersonates Chinese, West Africans, and South African entrepreneurs in their everyday encounters with ordinary Botswana citizens. In constructing the city denizens, Dignash situates African expatriates as agents of moral degeneracy within Botswana city spaces who are likely to corrupt local citizens, particularly young people. His critique of the moral implications of substance abuse, xenophobia, corruption, and exploitation is placed squarely on men, particularly those from West Africa, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. For instance, in one episode, Dignash parodies the use of an indigenous African root that is believed to have aphrodisiac properties. In this episode, the caricatures are of a Malawian man who sells the drug to an innocent but adventurous Botswana man:

Dignash (as Jonas): Is this Ndoka?

Ndoka: Yes.

Jonas: I heard from some guys, they phone me and say about this thing, for men, eh, if you want to 'hammer' nicely. (They laugh) So tell me, how does this work, this thing?

Ndoka: Basically, what you do; you take it 2 hours before. It's from the roots. It's in powder form, OK?

Jonas: OK.

Ndoka: So, it takes time to go into the blood. You can put it in coke, or tea. Take it, maybe in the office while you wait to knock off.

Jonas: I can take it in the office?

Ndoka: Yes, you can take it in the office, it's not a problem.

Jonas: You mean if I take it in the office, and my secretary pass by, I'm not going to— (They laugh). So you use it yourself?

Ndoka: Me, I've used it, but not often because you can get addicted.

Jonas: You use it on your wife?

Ndoka: (Laughs) On whoever! (Morapedi 2005).

Through this comical performance, Dignash brings to the public stage the stereotypical perception of the depraved alien man who corrupts the city of Gaborone.

In order to access the city, Dignash makes use of acoustic technologies, including radio recording and broadcasting paraphernalia. Dignash gains access to the city through these 'technologized' or 'mediatised' dramas. His mediated cultural formations get transmitted through acoustic signals over the radio, phone, cellular-phone, the internet, and archived through DVDs and CDs, all of which he uses to access the city. Recurrent motifs in Dignash's urban narratives are corruption and encroachment. In this aspect, Zimbabweans are in close proximity to Dignash's sonic grasp, as they figure predominantly as illegal immigrants, robbers, and desperate clients who offer bribes to corrupt Botswana immigration officers. The satirical aspect of Dignash provides him with an opportunity to engage notions of city 'invasions', as seen through the idea of Zimbabwean illegal immigrants crawling over the landscape of Gaborone, and encroaching on other legitimate city dwellers. He also articulates landscapes of exploitation, corruption, xenophobia, and linguistic and cultural authenticity. Dignash's urban noise renders these predicaments intelligible and manageable through the economies of humour

and popular culture. As an active social agent, he asks us to reflect on the circuits of exchange and belonging in contemporary African cities. Arguably, his performance articulates the view that in the current moment of globalization, everyone can gain a sense of belonging by participating in the global market economies of material, economic, and cultural exchange.

Kwaito Soundmarks

Another salient example of youth popular performance from urban Africa is Kwaito music culture. This is the musical genre that intersects the musical landscape of Hip-hop, House music, R&B, and indigenous African musical sounds. It has been influenced by the aesthetics of American Hip hop and youth culture. Kwaito music originated in the South African townships in the 1990s, and became popularized by black South African youth. It emerged as part of the township culture which became part of the mainstream South African popular culture. This music genre and culture has since spread across the borders of South Africa to other countries in the region, including Botswana, gaining localised distinctive sonic features on its paths.

Kwaito music operates as the acoustic channel of Botswana youth popular culture. Youth in the city of Gaborone inscribe the city with Kwaito 'soundmarks'. According to Schaefer (1973:274) a soundmark refers to 'a community sound which is unique or possesses qualities which make it specially regarded or noticed by the people in that community'. An emblematic example of a Kwaito soundmark that keeps reverberating throughout the city of Gaborone is '*O icheke*' ('keep yourself in check'). This phrase is the title of a song by a Kwaito artist named VS. The phrase has now become part of the city conversational and written discourse, and figures as a soundmark that competes with the city landmarks for the domination of the urban landscape. *O icheke* billboards currently dominate the city, mapping Kwaito artist and song creator VS's success in accessing the city. It is also used in a variety of speech acts, including warnings, as in '*o icheke*, when you practice drunken driving', and advertising, as in '*o icheke*' not to pay exorbitant prices for things that you can get for less in other stores. Even more importantly, the '*O icheke*' soundmark has been adopted by the Ministry of Health as a slogan to encourage people to 'break the chain of the virus,' throughout the Ministry's AIDS awareness campaigns. In this scenario, popular culture meets public health to produce the urban landscape.

Further, the *O icheke* song articulates the precarious conditions of the city and expresses notions of Botswana femininities and masculinities. The lyrics and video for this song offer a statement concerning how popular culture simultaneously reinforces and challenges gendered stereotypes. The song offers a significant reversal of the constructions of men and women depicted in the Hip hop songs discussed above. The lyrics target older men who date young girls—designated as '*ma-fourteen*' in urban centres around Botswana. The term '*ma-fourteen*' approximates teenage 'gold-diggers' and figures as another soundmark that echoes throughout the city. The *ma-fourteen* emerge as assertive female figures who deliberately traffic in their bodies in order to conquer the city. '*Ma-fourteen ba tla a le kgaphisa*' (*Ma-fourteen* will fix you; teach you a bitter lesson), warns the singer. The lyrics echo the narrative of young urban girls who subvert the normalized perception of women in the Botswana collective cultural imaginary as docile. The city that the song articulates is progressively being taken over by assertive albeit 'corrupt' city girls.

Strategic Re-Traditionalisation

Musical appropriations of indigenous Botswana songs, folk traditions, and cultural repertoires offer another illustration of popularised urban formations. African theatre scholar and performance critic David Kerr (1998:33) uses the notion of 'cultural engineering' to refer to these mediated performance practices of cultural revival. Here, urban youth use revivalist aesthetics to navigate the city and to construct their identity. The youth privilege the live circulation of African culture and performance traditions. These culturally-innovative forms work through the logic of juxtaposition. Urban youth

interweave traditional dance choreographic designs, indigenous sounds and linguistic varieties, praise poetry, 'Western' musical instruments, and elaborate costumes to create urban repertoires. Their performances call forth Botswana cultural knowledge and systems of thought to interrogate current moments and social realities in the urban environment of Gaborone. In this context, the indigenous past and the reconfigured modern space intertwine.

Many of the youth cultural revivals that resonate in the city are subsidised by the Ministry of Youth, Sports, and Culture. Cultural performance here gets co-opted by the state to construct a homogeneous national and/or cultural identity. This is the identity that gets packaged for tourists and showcased to welcome official visitors to the country during what might be termed 'touristic repertoires'.

The urbanised sonic technologies of the youth cultural revivals get zoned within the realms of popular culture. The notion of 'urbanization' here is retraced not to the initial encounter of the African city with Western industrial and technological forms, but to the recuperation of non-technological verbal and corporeal articulations of the older generation. The popular performances of a local youth group called Culture Spears offer emblematic instances of these recuperative urban cultures. In one song, the group appropriates the traditional folk narrative of a man called Kulenyane to the urban stage in order to strategically comment on the dangers of multiple sexual partners and the threat of AIDS. By framing the discourse of advice within the urban environment for city dwellers, the youth performers become active agents of a cultural memory which operates as guidance. Evidently, these performances are significant sonic acts of African agency and recuperation which mark the city.

Cultural revitalisations also echo the changes in the human geography that manifests in Gaborone city, and how it affects cultural practices and expectations. A popular and emblematic instance is a song titled '*Mama ntshware*' by Culture Spears. To quote:

<i>Mama ntshware nna ke sia le Matebele!</i>	(Mama I'm running after foreigners)
<i>Ee ke a rata go nna gaufi le mawatle!</i>	(I'm excited about living next to the Oceans)
<i>Ga ke batle 'bo-ching-chong'</i>	(I don't like the 'ching-chong') (accent)
<i>Ke batla go bua 'twing-twing'</i>	(I fancy speaking with the 'twing-twing' (foreign accent))
<i>Lejeremane le siame</i>	(A German man is fine)
<i>Lepotokisi le siame</i>	(A Portuguese man is fine)
<i>Lefora le siame</i>	(A French man is fine)
<i>Ke tle ke bua 'twing-twing'!</i>	(That way I'll speak the 'twing-twing' (accent)!

(Culture Spears, 2012)

In this song, the artist casts a persona who is interested in inter-racial marriages, as opposed to conforming to the cultural expectations of marrying a local Botswana man. The lyrics and the accompanying video animate female assertiveness and the power to choose a marriage partner, albeit through elopement with a man from the West. In this scenario, the artist draws attention to how the city landscape expands through race, language, cultural exchange, and popular culture.

Conclusion

'Cultural expressions', writes Johannes Fabian (1978:25) 'are not evidence for how a culture 'works' (or 'functions', or 'determines action'); they only show how perceptions, experiences and problems, are being 'worked out' in an open, never-ending process'. Youth in the African city use popular culture to 'work out' the experiences, problems, contradictions, and hopes for Africa, thereby elaborating the symbolic and social capital of popular culture. Through their deployment of expressive cultures,

youth in contemporary Africa counter the stereotypical perception of the post-colonial space from one of depravation to that of possibility. Urban youth operate within the realm of this landscape of possibility. A good illustration is offered by Hip hop artist Zeus in his song, entitled 'I am'. He asserts:

I am the ruler of my destiny/ I am boundless energy/I am Infinite possibility/
Chorus: I am strength; I am struggle; I am success; I am progress
The last days are upon us/War, hunger and plague; evil's upon us;
I am either a part of the problem or solution
I make a promise that the future harbours the hopes and dreams of my forefathers
The mountain I climb till I scale the peak
Chorus: I am strength; I am struggle; I am success; I am progress! (US Embassy 2010).

Gaborone youth cultural expressions engage the processes of urbanization and globalization through performances of cultural memory and/or recuperation, identities in transformation, social incorporations of the 'Other', and enactments of possibilities. The youth popular cultural formations examined in this article elaborate 'gestic' sonic events which are used, in Brechtian terms, to suggest social critique (Brecht and Willett 1964). They invoke creative acts of survival within landscapes of privation and negate the encroachment of degeneracy upon urban Africa. Youth popular cultural expressions in this essay are conceptualised as critical and strategic articulations that 'illuminate the contradictions and internal differentiations' (Fabian 1978) that characterise the socio-political and economic landscape of Gaborone. These acts –simultaneously creative and resistive –turn out to be the urban noise that energises the African city.

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