

Paul Ugor (Ed.). *Youth and Popular Culture in Africa: Media, Music, and Politics*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press. 2021. 405 pp.

Edited by Paul Ugor, associate professor at Illinois State University, this book has brought together multiple authors to address a topic that seems fundamental to understanding the dynamics of civic and political participation in different contexts. Published in 2021, the book aims to discuss the various strategies of youth intervention in the political landscape in Africa, based essentially on practices that are linked to culture, art, and the development of new media technologies (p. 4). The authors discuss in a unique way the narrative that, throughout time, has been produced in the general literature about the idea of “popular” culture in Africa (p. 5), thus showing that there is a connection with the creativity and imagination that often only young people can produce, whether through fiction, painting, music, poetry, or even everyday practices. This book is essential in the contemporary context, characterised by the expansion of the new media (p. 11) and the abundance of communication resources, which contribute to the emergence of new political actors, many of them young people. In other words, it intends to discuss how young people produce and create popular culture through art and media, by considering youth political activism in a changing society marked by multiple challenges, mainly economic, which mostly affect young people in Africa (p. 12).

Written by eighteen authors, it is a book that throughout more than 400 pages interrogates how young people can reinvent and reappropriate the advantages offered by the technological networks available in different cultural spaces and under different socio-economic and political conditions (p. 17). To answer this question, the book divides its main argument into three parts, making a total of fourteen chapters. The first part comprises five essays that illustrate how Afro hip-hop as a popular youth culture can be a critical response to local powers and structures as well as to globalised neoliberalism (p. 24). In the second part, the authors share different case studies on how digital tools have become al-

lies of popular culture and youth civic engagement (p. 26). In the third and last part, the book seeks to establish a direct relationship between popular art and the everyday political culture of young people (p. 28). Each of these parts is composed of chapters that despite being written by different authors, have the similarity of making a unique and rich contribution to the literature around youth political participation through digital media and culture in Africa (p. 30). This empirical richness finds its main foundation in the profile of each of the authors who contribute to a wider debate about what it means to participate in politics. Considering the protests of the Arab Spring as an important event that affected many countries since 2011, especially in North Africa, I argue that this book is a great contribution to thinking about young people, technology, and politics through art, without necessarily focusing on conventional political practices such as elections or participation in political parties.

In the very first chapter (pp. 37-62), Bamba Ndiaye discusses the trajectory of one of the initiatives, which became known as *Y en a marre* (I am fed up). It is a civic movement created as a response to the environment of generalised violence which affected Senegal in 2011. The author explains how this movement acted by relying on art and hip-hop as a form of political intervention in the digital space. The following chapter (pp. 63-87), written by David Kerr, addresses how rap and hip-hop were developed in the suburbs of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, showing how they contributed to creating an awareness of civic participation among young people. The author argues that young artists are excluded from traditional media because of their social and political criticism, and adopt new strategies to share their expectations anchored on digital platforms. In the third chapter (pp. 88-110), Ty-Juanna Taylor combines popular music, youth, culture, and identity in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. Using a musical style called *coupé décalé*, a popular and well-known style of music, the author shows how it allowed young people to forget through art the difficulties that they face in everyday life, such as war, unemployment, or economic instability. Moving on to Sierra Leone, Ibrahim Banguara proposes a discussion on the uses of popular culture, specifically rap and hip-hop, in influencing the political environment in the context of what the author calls post-war and social and political crises (pp. 111-131). For his part, Paul Ugor discusses (pp. 132-159) the evolution of youth consciousness around hip-hop in Nigeria, highlighting that it is part of a cultural history influenced by historical contexts such as the United States, although local young people try to revolutionise a past identity by new cultural methods, always seeking to show an image that is not repeatedly one of disgrace or delinquency that has always been associated with young people.

The sixth chapter, which is part of the second part of the book, is dedicated to demonstrating practical experiences of how digital media have changed the political engagement of young people. James Yékú explains how new media, especially Instagram, has become an alternative space for youth culture. The author studies young people in Nigeria, where the notion of “infra-politics” is mobilised, to explain that young people have changed the way they engage in formal politics (pp. 163-187). Chapter seven was written by Kwabena Opoku-Agyemang and discusses flash fiction to demonstrate the usefulness of considering transgressive or illicit relationships as crucial parts of Ghanaian society in an online space (pp. 188-207). Chapter eight, written by Austin Bryan, provides an analysis which I find interesting because it addresses a topic that the book does not explore much, which is the dimension of cultural activism in sexual matters among young people in Uganda, especially because it is taboo debate in many African societies. In other words, it is a passionate chapter in the way it addresses cultural bias, popular homophobia, but also how young people have struggled, using social networks, to challenge the dominant discourses on sexuality and gender identity (pp. 208-234). Jendele Hungbo wrote chapter nine. Addressing the case of South Africa via the #RhodesMustFall movement, the author explains how young people, in particular students, mobilised through Twitter to protest the perpetuation of a historical culture of unequal oppression represented by the Cecil Rhodes statue at the University of Cape Town (pp. 235-254). The last chapter of the second part is written by two authors, Godfrey Maringira and Simbarashe Gukurume. The authors show that Zimbabwe represents a field of political participation undermined by years of oppression perpetrated by the ruling ZANU-PF party over many years. However, despite this context, young people manage to escape political control and through social media carry out actions of resistance, protest, and relevant civic participation (pp. 255-275).

The third and last part of the book has four chapters, where the different authors make the connection between popular culture and the everyday life of young people. To begin with, Adeline Masquelier analyses the process of politicisation of young people in Niger, particularly urban young people who seek to exercise their political participation through art and artistic dress fashion (pp. 279-306). Adrienne Cohen proposes in the twelfth chapter the analysis of a group of young dancers, musicians, and cultural directors in Guinea-Conakry to show that in a controversial context and multiple crises, young people can create innovative solutions to escape violence and a growing economic crisis (pp. 307-326). In the thirteenth chapter, Connie Rappo discusses cultural practices of Botswana’s youth, highlighting that this segment of the population has been us-

ing culture to document, monitor, and change Botswana's political and social landscape in a spectacular way (pp. 327-351). Finally, Kristi Kenyon, Juliana Coughlin, and David Bosc return to the South African case, but this time to discuss the #FeesMustFall movement, an act of protest by students against the rise of tuition fees in South African universities. The emphasis of the three authors is to illustrate how the campaign succeeded through digital platforms (particularly on Twitter), especially in drawing a new youthful consciousness in the "born free" generation (pp. 352-383).

Although it is understood that this is a book based on specific case studies, it is not an easy exercise trying to deal with youth as a homogeneous concept. In fact, it is a term that is difficult to perceive and analyse, as there is no single African youth. Further debate on the concept and how it is applied in the different chapters could have been an interesting exercise, as there is no single perspective of youth, and the context in which they live and grow up determines much about how they will think and engage in politics. In addition to that, even if the countries studied are relevant, the preference for English- and French-speaking countries limits a broad understanding of other realities that could have been informed by the contexts of Lusophone countries such as Angola and Mozambique, for example. In fact, I advocate that analysing youth and politics implies crossing different realities as well as the use of combined methods.

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