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Powerful Aesthetics

By Aisha Deme & Jenny Mbaye

In Senegal, hip hop is a sentinel for the social and political interests of the people. It does so via committed activism, the actions of its participants on the ground, and what it does best: the music and its messages.

From «Fass», a popular area in Dakar, Xuman is one of the pioneers of this movement, a key player for over twenty years, and quite popular among Senegalese youth. His success comes from his dedicated activism, his eloquence in denouncing a perverted system, his brilliant capacity to describe the society, and his distinctive way of doing it all with humor, subtlety and fine details of his own.

With such an explosive cocktail, the hip hop star initiated the «Journal Rappé» (JTR) in April 2013, with another hip hop pioneer Keyti. JTR is an innovative and creative concept in which the two artists produce a show that covers a selection of national and international news. Born on YouTube with no sponsors, and before being aired on the second TV channel in Senegal (2STV), the JTR has gained the support of the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) and has been launched in Ivory Coast in 2015. Institutional politics in Senegal generally don't aim at laying the ground for an informed political debate; rather, they are more preoccupied with and focused on partisan interests. As such, the JTR uniquely fills in a considerable gap between the official politics and a great part of the population by providing a fun and alternative political reflection. Appropriating the political debate and informing the broader population through distinctive critical lenses, it renders public debates accessible, especially to the youth (in Senegal and abroad) that are huge hip hop lovers.

Xuman's parodies have become crucial pieces of the JTR: powerful aesthetics whereby the artist goes even further into the derision of national politics. This episode is about Karim Wade, the former President Ablaye Wade's son who, appointed «super minister» by his «powerful» father, was recently sentenced to six years in prison for wrongfully acquired properties. Xuman couldn't have chosen a more powerful song than the one of Stromae to tell the story of a «fallen prince», to whom the father dreamt and literally planned to offer the country on a silver platter. It

was unthinkable for son and father that one day the people could hold him accountable. His astonishment, his unconsciousness, and his arrogance, are wonderfully staged in this parody, a parody that is just *formidable*!

Humor Is Key

By Jenny Mbaye & Aisha Deme

How can popular music move citizens in an aesthetically appealing, though still critically engaging way? Parodia: Greek term for a counter- (para) song (oide). To resonate with the general public's sense of humor,

satiric imitations need familiar references. The recipe that Senegalese rapper Xuman uses in this parody is a mix of global sounds with a discursive and body performance distinctively situated in time and place. Hence he resorts to the musical product by the internationally-acclaimed Stromae: the *métisse* figure of pop music, an unintentional subject of African pride, a reflection of its diaspora and composite European heritage. Stromae's song in particular, whose video clip went viral, shows him wandering and drunk, lamenting the loss of his girlfriend. The soundtrack is popular and its chorus is now familiar to many (see chapter «Loneliness», page XXX).

But for a parody to be effective, the context must be recognizable. Appropriating the global hit about a fallen man, Xuman polemically references a quite local and specific reality: the one of a fallen political prince (we still have those on our dear continent!) on his way to his trial for «wrongfully acquired properties» during his mandate as minister under his father's presidency. The performer uses past events in his discourse: Karim Wade's fall was real, and the ingratitude and lack of understanding from Senegalese people, as well as the jealousy of a previous political opponent—now president—are the reasons behind his descent. Dressed up as a businessman after a nightlong party, with archival footage surrounded by Wade's «great works» (hotels and roads), Xuman humorously mocks the once-upon-a-time political heir, blaming Senegalese people for forgetting about him and what he accomplished for Dakar: the city «looked like trash and, thanks to me, it's more beautiful now.» They should not have judged him on the amount of money he spent, for «what matters is the result» and as such,

he should be rewarded. The fallen prince, son of a presidential king, was wonderful, formidable, but misunderstood, as the parody ironically states.

Xuman's performance shows how humor is key here. He is fun to be serious, light to be deep, and through the joking about the absurdity of that delusion lies a thoughtful critique of the persisting disconnect between people and their governing representatives. The powerful aesthetics of a satiric video clip effectively denounce derailed political legitimacy and accountability.

Jenny Mbaye is Lecturer in Culture and Creative Industries at City University London. She works on entrepreneurship and social transformation in West Africa through urban cultures and music economies.

Aisha Deme is the cofounder of Agendakar.com, a portal exclusively dedicated to Senegalese art. She has a strong passion for arts and culture and is very connected to its diverse operators in Senegal.

Parodying the Gospel of Prosperity

Zimbabwe now boasts of a new crop of millionaires: men of the pulpit who made their money by preaching the gospel of prosperity in one of the numerous charismatic Pentecostal churches. In that context, music has become an effective discourse for hegemonic constructions of the current social and political order.

By Tendai Chari

Like many Third World countries, Zimbabwe has experienced an unprecedented increase in the number of evangelical churches preaching the gospel of prosperity, particularly at the beginning of the new century. According to David Bishau's essay «The Prosperity of the Gospel» (2013), what is preached is also known as the «the health and wealth» gospel. These prosperity gospel churches are mainly led by youthful, charismatic, and flamboyant pastors (prophets) who promise their congregants redemption and material prosperity. They use the gospel as a tool for fighting poverty which is regarded as a barrier to «living a full Christian life.» Inevitably their message has struck a chord with many poor people (and the rich who want to increase their wealth) in Zimbabwe against the backdrop of the more than decade-long economic crisis. According to the prosperity gospel, poverty is a curse from God and tithing or giving is revered. That makes—as they say—perfect sense because the Bible teaches us to give so that we receive. It is common to see congregants being classified according to the amounts that they give. Those who give more occupy a special position (both literally and metaphorically) in the church. However, the prosperity gospel has been received with mixed feelings; some argue that it is the solution to the growing poverty, while others accuse prosperity gospel churches of exploiting the vulnerable in a society that dreams of becoming rich. In «The Curse of Prosperity Gospel» (published in the Zimbabwean newspaper *The Herald* 2015) Wafawarova argues that:

«Today's prosperity gospel fuels greed, it focuses in getting as opposed to giving. It is a selfish materialistic faith with a veneer of Christianity. [...] It is an elaborate scam meant to railroad unsuspecting followers into parting with the little