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Book Review

Fibian Kavulani Lukalo, *Extended Handshake or Wrestling Match? Youth and Urban Culture Celebrating Politics in Kenya*, Discussion Paper 32, Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2006, 66 pp. ISBN 91-7106-568-7 (electronic) (Available online at <http://www.nai.uu.se>)

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This discussion paper is a study of the emergence/re-assertion of urban based youth in the public political sphere in Kenya. It explores how existing urban popular spaces have provided avenues for the youth to express their fears as well as their hopes in times of changing political developments in Kenya.

The study is divided into four sections including the introduction prefaced on the very first page with the Kenyan national anthem, itself an embodiment of the hopes and dreams of Kenyans at independence in 1963. At the beginning of each section is a proverb, perhaps to summarize what is contained therein. In the background, the author sets out various attributes of popular culture (a term Lukalo uses interchangeably with urban culture) including music, politics, Kiswahili language, cartoons and religion as basis for discussion, and around which she defines her study objectives.

Chapter one takes the reader deep into a discussion of the definition of youth, KANU's political manipulations of the youth, including the formation of money-guzzling YK92 and related political commentary on Kenya's political situation using cartoons. Alongside this is also a brief analysis of the history of music in Kenya, covering people such as Jean Bosco Mwenda, Eric Wainaina and Congolese musicians in Kenya. The chapter also discusses political praise-singing and the role of the national broadcaster Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) as a state mouthpiece for the then ruling party, KANU.

This is followed in chapter two by an analysis of the role of religion in Kenya's politics, including how former president Moi painted a picture of himself as an ardent religious person. The author counteracts this with a

discussion of corruption in Kenya as presided over by the same Moi, which led to the temporary withdrawal of donor funding. This corrupt situation provides a strong theme upon which Eric Wainaina composed his hit song *Nchi ya Kitu Kidogo*. Finally, in chapter three, Lukalo offers a textual analysis of the song *Nchi ya Kitu Kidogo*.

There is much to commend in this study. But in spite of its title and promise, it becomes clear upon reading the text that the author simply set out to analyze Wainaina's song *Nchi ya Kitu Kidogo* (literally translates into 'a nation/country of something small', 'something small' refers to bribery or corruption) as an example of the new spaces urban youth utilize to comment on emerging wanton corruption in Kenya. This is handled fairly well in the last chapter. The rest of the work, basically bedrocked on secondary data, can be considered a background that builds up a case for the latter analysis. In this background, the author provokes the reader with various ideas, thoughts and questions for further reflection.

There are problems, nonetheless, with the study approach to youth, urban culture and politics in Kenya. In the background, the author handles many important issues that play a crucial role in understanding Kenyan political situation during the time of President Moi. Some of these are not exhaustively discussed leaving the readers hungering for more. Indeed, even the English rendition of the Kiswahili version of the national anthem leaves a slightly different meaning. It is also not clear whether the section on the so-called praise singers Boniface Mganga and David Zalo was an interview or not, since it is not indicated in the footnotes or reference sections. At this point the author also mentions the fact that the praise singers benefited to the extent that they contributed to the plundering of the economy. This might be so, but he author fails to demonstrate how.

The other small issue is about the flow of thought in the work, especially in chapters one and two. For example, it is after discussing several important issues relating to the youth that the author decides to offer a couple of definitions of 'youth'. This mars the flow of thought since definitions by their very nature clarify the frameworks of analysis before the full discussion of the content of issue at hand. Also, the same explanations of youth are not conceptualized with a view to capturing the situation in Kenya. The use of the term 'in the late 2000s...' which is employed severally in the text, takes the reader beyond the period of publication 2006 and above. One would also expect that a discussion on Mau Mau songs as previously initiated by Maina wa Kinyatii be given special position and emphasis in the background since the songs have direct links with Kenyan politics at independence. However, they come much later and are mentioned in passing.

Given the fact that the text is a 2006 publication, the reader expects more about the current situation. The difference in youth experiences during the earlier government and the present Kibaki one. This is, however, not captured and the study stops in the year 2002 after the electoral defeat of the KANU government. The tone of the study is in past tense. The assumption one gets is that the youth fought a good fight and now their problems are over. This perception could have been avoided.

The title of the work leaves the reader with a lot of expectations, especially so, on urban culture. Although quite a good discussion is made of newspaper cartoons (whose dates of publication could have been included given that most are archived and available on the internet) and the role of religion in politics, the study heavily focuses on music and, as a result, is limited in its understanding of the concept of urban culture. It is also not clear what the difference is between urban culture and popular culture, terms that are also interchangeably used in the text.

Furthermore, it might be obvious to Kenyan readers, however, it is not clear upon reading the text who Eric Wainaina is and why his song is important to deserve the emphasis and prominence that Lukalo gives it. Also, although Moi was an authoritarian leader and Wainana's song was a critique of Moi's government, Lukalo fails to explain why and how the song escaped the censorship that was so characteristic of Moi's government.

At any rate, *Extended Handshake or Wrestling Match?: Youth and Urban Culture Celebrating Politics in Kenya* presents a compelling and stimulating discussion of the discourses on youth in relation to drugs, sex, militia etc. It is poised to be a key text for readers in popular culture, music, politics and youth studies.

