EXHIBITING 'THE POPULAR': URBAN CULTURES AND GLOBALISM IN POSTCOLONIAL WEST AFRICA

KINSEY KATCHKA

Introduction

SINCE the 1970s, scholars have paid increasing attention to popular art and culture and produced a growing body of literature about it. One striking characteristic of this literature has been that in it, generally speaking, popular art has been characterized as antithetical to institutions. Yet, in recent years, 'popular' African art associated with urban life and processes of globalization has been incorporated into major exhibitions in a number of leading cultural institutions; in other words it has been institutionalized. For example, objects of urban material culture from the African continent have featured in: *Africa Explores: Twentieth Century African Art*, at the Museum of African Art, New York in 1991; *Ingénieuse Afrique: Artisans de la récupération et du recyclage*, at the Musée de la Civilisation, Québec in

1994; *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, at the Fowler Museum of Cultural History, Los Angeles in 1995; *Recycled, Reseen: Folk Art from the Global Scrap Heap*, at the Museum of International Folk Art, Sante Fe in 1996; *African Voices*, at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History in Washington DC from 1999; and *Transformations: The Art of Recycling*, at the University of Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum from March 2000 to September 2002.[1] If, as many scholars addressing such themes as museums and representation argue, the critical examination of exhibitions offers insights into their broader historical context (e.g. Clifford 1988: 10), what can we learn from the recent institutionalization of African popular art in museums?

Of these exhibitions, I focus here on one particularly salient example, *Ingénieuse Afrique* and, especially, on its primary host institution, the West African Ecopole in Dakar, Senegal. First exhibited in Québec in 1994, *Ingénieuse Afrique* was toured to a number of venues in West Africa before opening at the then newly founded West African Ecopole in Dakar in 1996. It remained there until it was toured again, to Europe, in 2001. Through an examination of this community-based museum and its exhibitions, including *Ingénieuse Afrique*, I attempt to demonstrate how popular art mediates local and global experiences. However, that all this takes place in a formal, institutionalized forum calls into question many common definitions of the term 'popular'.

Towards Defining 'Popular Art'

Scholars have long debated definitions of the popular. A brief overview of the academic discussion regarding the concept suggests its complexity, as well as the ideologies that are at stake. Karin Barber has problematized the concept, stating that 'popular arts is a category that seems to be characterized, above all, by its inclusiveness and its apparently infinite elasticity' (Barber 1987: 5). I use the words 'popular' and 'art' here, but acknowledge that neither is easily defined. In this essay I am concerned with popular images, that is, those that are visible in public spaces to a diverse population in the course of their daily lives; what might also be called 'everyday', 'quotidian', 'vernacular' images. 'Art' I define as the creativity brought by individuals to everyday life. This may include individual creations, collective projects, and impromptu assemblages of existing items. Since the 1980s, studies of urban popular art have been used to counter conventional notions of art, whose institutions and practices have, for the general public, been exclusive rather

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[1] For *Africa Explores*, see Vogel 1991; for *Ingénieuse Afrique*, Gendreau (ed.) 1994; for *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, Cosentino (ed.) 1995; for *Recycled, Reseen*, Cerny and Seriff (eds) 1996; for *African Voices*, <http://www.mnh.si.edu/africanvoices/>; and for *Transformations*, Coote, Morton, and Nicholson 2000.

than inclusive (Willis 1990). Popular urban art, however, is closer to the everyday reality of urban life than so-called 'high' art, with which few people regularly engage. Studies of popular art respond to 'official' history and experience, which has been well publicized, fully recorded, and made by the powerful few, but made possible by the 'aggregate struggles, actions, and reactions of the obscure minority of African people' (Barber 1987: 3). Stuart Hall (1981: 238) refers to 'the people versus the power-bloc', that is, popular forces versus official powers. He contends that the popular is a site of resistance to the power-bloc, and is constrained by it. Tony Bennett (1986: xv) offers a similar perspective, stating that the popular is 'structured by the attempt of the ruling class to win hegemony', and by official opposition to it.

Both Johannes Fabian (1978, 1996) and Barber (1987) have examined the notion of the popular with specific reference to African art, applying the 'people versus the power-bloc' paradigm to African colonial experience. Fabian's 1978 article 'Popular Culture in Africa: Findings and Conjectures' was published when popular culture was first emerging as a legitimate area of study, prefiguring its spread and development throughout the humanities and social sciences. According to Fabian, the term 'popular culture' has certain connotations, though no clear definition. These connotations include: (1) its urban context; (2) its historical context of colonization and decolonization; (3) its status as a popular expression of the masses (in contrast to both modern élitist and traditional 'tribal' culture); and (4) its suggestion of processes occurring 'behind the back' of established powers and accepted interpretations, and its challenge to accepted beliefs in the superiority of 'pure' or 'high' culture. Barber (1987) has reiterated some of Fabian's criteria for defining popular art, as have a number of other scholars in the field (see, for example, Brett 1987; Jewsiewicki 1986; Jewsiewicki (ed.) 1992; Jules-Rosette 1983, 1992; Szombati Fabian and Fabian 1976). Unconventional art is to be found in cities throughout Africa, and scholars have begun to examine it in greater detail in studies of popular painting (Bender 1988; Jewsiewicki 1989, 1995), wall murals (Diouf 1992), religious imagery (Roberts and Roberts 2003), tourist art (Ben-Amos 1977, Graburn (ed.) 1976, Jules-Rosette 1984), and *recyclia*—that is, art made with found materials (Gendreau 1994), all of which provide insights into popular art and urban experience.

Frequently, popular imagery may be seen to illustrate cultural diversity, incorporating as it so often does multi-ethnic and international references. Barber (1987: 13) asserts that in contrast to art labelled 'traditional' or 'ethnographic', popular art is modern and urban-oriented, and represents a culture that can be recognized by its unofficial character and novelty. The implication, then, is that popular arts are novel because they 'combine elements from the traditional and the metropolitan cultures in unprecedented conjunctures, with the effect of radical departure from both' (ibid.); and while some see this deviation as a regrettable corruption of the authentic culture, others welcome it. Barber notes that, regardless of

the perspective taken, one thing is clear: while traditional arts are discussed as recognized objects of study in their own right, popular arts are only discussed with reference to their differences from traditional forms.

Where 'élite/fine' art is the point of reference, popular art acquires a definition relating to the absence of certain qualities. Elite arts are 'complex', while popular arts are expressive forms in which artists attempt to resolve life's complexities (Priebe 1978). Even as scholars have argued for the legitimacy of the study of popular culture, they have maintained the conceptual dichotomy between 'élite/fine' arts and 'popular' creativity, a division that parallels socio-economic class distinctions. While many scholars have, in the last twenty-five years, attempted to redress the imbalance between the study of 'high' culture and the 'popular', these studies may instead have served, unwittingly, to reinforce—or at least maintain—the distinction between the two. That is, to study and discuss one in opposition to the other reinforces the boundary between them, when in practice it may be more fluid.

Though this brief account of popular culture is by no means comprehensive, it summarizes some of the fundamental concepts I took with me to the field in 1994. However, I now find myself questioning the distinctions between fine and folk, high and low. These artificial distinctions did not seem to me to apply to the Senegalese art, artists, and museums I encountered. For the purposes of this article, therefore, I employ the term 'popular' as it is used by the people I worked with in the field. In this context, 'popular' was most frequently used to distinguish it from 'official' culture sanctioned by the state. While this distinction is a debatable one, my purpose here is not to dispute terminology. Instead, I defer to the local voices—of government officials, politicians, development workers, museum personnel, artists, and others. The term 'popular' was used by everyone, but the way it was used varied from situation to situation.

Exhibiting 'The Popular'

The exhibition *Ingénieuse Afrique* opened at the Musée de la Civilisation in Québec in 1994. A co-production of the Musée, several partner institutions in Bénin, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Senegal, and the development organization ENDA Tiers Monde (Environmental and Development Action in the Third World), the exhibition then travelled to each of the partner countries before arriving in Dakar. Though *Ingénieuse Afrique* is by no means the only exhibition to feature African popular art, with its venues in Canada, Bénin, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Senegal it has reached the widest and most truly international audience. In addition, it has recently been toured to a number of European venues.

Ingénieuse Afrique comprises objects made throughout Africa from such recycled materials as wire, sheet aluminium, and plastic bags. Aluminium cans are

transformed into oil lamps, car tyres into sandals and buckets, telephone wire into baskets; all of which both facilitate and enliven daily life (Gendreau 1994). The curators of the exhibition identify several characteristics defining the African propensity for what they call *récupération*. The first consists in people's capacity to integrate diverse materials and cultures. With integration comes adaptation and ingenuity, revealing impressive technical skill and creative insight (ibid.). A window on creativity in the so-called 'informal sector', *Ingénieuse Afrique* demonstrates that through individual and collective creativity, industrial and household refuse can be transformed into engaging, and often useful, creations. Within these objects, socio-cultural and economic realities are inscribed and people's creativity and resourcefulness clearly illustrated. Rather than displaying the objects as purely, or even primarily, aesthetic items offered to visitors with little interpretative guidance, in *Ingénieuse Afrique* the relevance of the objects to contemporary economic and environmental concerns is made explicit. Urban populations throughout the world have developed creative approaches to difficult economic and environmental conditions—*Ingénieuse Afrique* provides material evidence of this ingenuity.

In 1996 *Ingénieuse Afrique* opened at the West African Ecopole, where it anchored the Museum's active community programme. Indeed, recycling is a central aspect of the Ecopole's work, not just in *Ingénieuse Afrique* but throughout its activities—in its permanent exhibitions and in the studios around the central courtyard where artists work, usually surrounded by several young apprentices. Here visitors may observe the production process as well as the finished product. In 1996 and 1998–99, the main studios in which young people were working were devoted to the production of: *fil de fer* or wire sculpture; *mallettes*, that is items, such as briefcases, constructed from discarded sheet aluminium; *tolerie*, lamps and model cars and planes etc.; *tricoterie en plastique*, crocheted plastic bags; and *poupetrie*, dolls. In 1999, new studios were installed for the production, among other things, of pottery and *couture* (i.e. dressmaking); while studios for maskmaking, *tressage* (hair braiding/styling), and computer repair are planned.[2]

Among the artists represented in the on-site exhibitions are the children who are the focus of the Ecopole's many social and educational programmes. The Museum features children's artwork reflecting health concerns (such as AIDS awareness) and environmental themes (such as pollution and recycling). In the Ecopole's classrooms, local children take part in music lessons, health and environmental education classes, and other programmes. Throughout the Museum there are artworks on display illustrating the themes and awareness conveyed in the on-site

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[2] Except for music-related activities, Ecopole's studios are characterized by strict gender divisions: *poupetrie, plastiques, couture* for girls; *mallettes, tolerie, fil de fer* for boys. Despite this, as a woman I was welcomed into the *fil de fer* and invited to the *mallettes* studio with little questioning by the adults as to the suitability of this, though some of the children seemed to note that I was 'crossing gender lines'.

social programmes, such as environmental action, labour rights, and health education.

Children are not just trained in skills and how to 'make do' (Roberts 1996) with minimal resources, but also how to be citizens (*education à la citoyenneté*)— both citizens of local cultures and citizens of the world. For example, the indigenous age-based hierarchical system is apparent in apprentice–master relationships in which children earn responsibility over time. In learning what the Museum's programmers call *réflexion civique* ('civic reflection', that is, learning to be good and responsible citizens), children effectively learn to be members of society, who they are, and how to act (Karp 1992: 4). Following their training, apprentices are encouraged to take their skills back to their home neighbourhoods in order to train others. As Amadou Ba, the artist in charge of the Ecopole's *atelier mallettes*, explained to me in an interview in 1998, the Ecopole provides assistance initially, helping apprentices to establish themselves and to locate readily accessible materials. In returning to their home neighbourhoods they effectively create a network of Ecopole-trained artists throughout the city.

As its very name suggests, the Ecopole and its exhibits are based on the ecomuseum concept, which implies an attempt 'to incorporate the museum into the real world, the familiar environment in which people live...and work' (Bellaigue-Scalbert 1985: 194). Indeed, it was designed with a plurality of domains in mind: familial, educational, professional, associational, political, and imaginary (ibid.). As a public institution, the Ecopole links these different domains, providing a central space for a city-wide network of art, culture, and education. As the nexus of many groups, individuals, and agendas, the Ecopole provides a forum for exchange among people in the community and other visitors. Programmes in neighbourhoods throughout Dakar are co-ordinated by the Ecopole, while its *animateurs* assist neighbourhood associations in realizing their development projects, either helping them directly or putting them in touch with those who can.[3]

The Ecopole is a project of ENDA Tiers Monde (Environmental and Development Action in the Third World), a Dakar-based non-governmental organization and partner of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). ENDA was established in 1972 in response to the perceived limitations of the structural adjustment programmes of other development organizations, which focused primarily on modernizing rural areas rather than addressing the problems of industrializing cities. ENDA focuses on grassroots projects in urban environments, working with people directly involved in the popular urban economy. While ENDA's headquarters is in Dakar, the organization has branches

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[3] The Museum itself is staffed primarily by Senegalese, usually from the local neighbourhoods. In accordance with ENDA's commitment to working with people from the local community, those working on site are primarily native Dakarois. Similarly, while the founding executive director of ENDA was a European, the rest of the executive committee members are from the Sahelian region.

worldwide, with regional offices in Bénin, Brazil, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, India, Madagascar, Mali, Morocco, Nicaragua, Tunisia, Vietnam, and Zimbabwe. In each region, ENDA emphasizes the ideal of participation, and ENDA teams work closely with local populations in conceiving and executing projects.

The Ecopole in Dakar is intended to provide a forum for encouraging creativity and resourcefulness, while reinforcing community ideals and bettering the urban environment. In the context of the Ecopole, this means creating an environment where individuals learn professional skills and interact with a distinctly global community. Through its many programmes, the Ecopole strives to communicate to its diverse audiences contemporary skills relevant to urban life. The assumption throughout the Ecopole project (and throughout ENDA in general) is that there are advantages for urban communities in being linked to the international community, and that those connections are a source of strength and possibility. Drawing on significant local resources, ENDA attempts to redefine attitudes and approaches to work, learning, and environmental preservation. ENDA asserts that it is 'the young and the poor themselves, who normally have no say, who should conceive and carry out their own development strategies. For it is their knowledge and art of survival, despite a lack of resources, that hold the keys to success.... Why rely on outside models when the answer lies within?' (de Ravignan 1998: 60). In a city where global contacts have been available primarily to people of greater means, development projects such as the Ecopole serve to offset inequalities and to address discrepancies based on class: 'One important concern [is] to find ways for members of the popular urban economy to contribute to the social welfare and take part in a structured economy without being subjected to the taxes of the formal structure' (ENDA 1996: 5).

The Ecopole exists as a resource for all the residents of the city, but its programmes are designed with particular reference to young people, artisans, and women. As Amadou Diallo, a Senegalese member of the ENDA committee that planned the Ecopole, said to me in an interview in 1999:

> Especially with the young artisans...they were saying that they lacked a space for meeting and dialogue. Finally we decided that it wouldn't be possible to have a place in each neighbourhood, so we established a central common space where artisans, women, and children can come to understand each other, to discuss.

The intended audience for the Ecopole is not just the city of Dakar, however. On the contrary, the Ecopole's mission encompasses a much wider area; its name is, after all, the *West African* Ecopole. Situated in Dakar, the Ecopole is centrally located in various respects: locally, within the city itself; regionally, in West Africa; and globally, as historically Dakar was a major point of entry into the African continent. Beyond the regions, the Ecopole's reach also encompasses the global;

although there are no formal visitor studies, the Museum's guest book includes the names of numerous international political personalities and financial partners. Among the prominent names I noted were Pal Pataki of UNESCO, the Mayor of Nantes, and the United States of America's Ambassador to Senegal and his wife. In an interview with Mamadou Ndiaye, one of the Ecopole's *animateurs*, in 1999, I was told that the number of visiting tourists was increasing, though no specific statistics were available.

At the Ecopole, objects and processes are juxtaposed in a manner to engage diverse audiences, so that a tourist from the United States can identify with an object as readily as a child from the local community.[4] The objects here take on many different significances. As Michael Ames (1992: 144) has argued:

> The object as commodity, as artefact, as specimen, as art...these are different ways of seeing the same thing. They are all properties or values of the object, all phases in its life. Values may be imposed by those wishing to possess or appropriate the object, and others asserted by those claiming moral jurisdiction.

By incorporating visual culture, recyclia, and the creative process as part of its domain, ENDA identifies itself as an advocate of resourcefulness, hard work, and environmental preservation, assimilating these aspects of local community into its global development project.

At the Ecopole, popular art provides a forum for exchange among diverse participants, including artists, schoolchildren from a range of socio-economic backgrounds, museum personnel, tourists, development workers, and the occasional scholar. As suggested by Clifford (1997: 8), one can focus on this museum as 'a place where different cultural visions and community interests are negotiated'. The Ecopole engages visitors in its exhibition space, workshops, studios, classrooms, and shop. There is an emphasis on process and practice and on the experiential and participatory, rather than the contemplative. This may in part reflect the way art in general is experienced in Senegal, where both art and its creation are more a part of daily life than they are regarded as being in the European tradition. The Ecopole's participatory format also brings to mind Fabian's and Barber's assertions that a determining factor in defining popular art is the process. In the Ecopole's programmes, the creation and exhibition of popular art are integrated into development programmes so that social, creative, and economic processes are conflated.

In *Ingénieuse Afrique* in particular, and in the Ecopole in general, artworks are presented as intimately connected to urban experience, a connection seldom acknowledged in exhibitions of African art despite the rapid urban expansion that

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[4] In the on-site shop, visitors may purchase items made by both resident and affiliated artists. Most purchasers are from 'industrialized' countries—expatriates, visiting partners, overseas volunteers, and tourists.

has characterized African nations since the colonial period. The didactics of *Ingénieuse Afrique* suggest as much: objects are identified by their city or country of origin (rather than their ethnic group, for example), highlighting cities and states as the defining units of contemporary experience. The relevance of the urban environment is made explicit: the context of creation is one of severe financial constraint and deteriorating environment, and the exhibition foregrounds art's potential role in economic and social development.

While the Ecopole is not the only museum in Dakar, it stands in marked contrast to the others, which exhibit either 'fine' art or ethnographic collections. Such institutions as the Musée de l'Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire (IFAN), established during the colonial period, were based on Western models and located in affluent neighbourhoods. By contrast, the Ecopole exhibits an alternative conception of heritage, culture, and history that incorporates local urban experience. At this point it is important to note that the publics of the Musée de l'IFAN and the Ecopole are not mutually exclusive. Instead, each museum has a different unifying concept: at the Ecopole, the public shares a common urban experience, whereas at the Musée de l'IFAN, the commonality is a nationalist one.

Amadou Diallo explained to me how they decided upon the museum format for their development programmes:

> We thought it would be particularly interesting to find a place to encourage the knowledge unique to [local] children and artisans. Working from there, we decided that the city of Dakar is one where there is only really one museum. Today, that's the Musée de Dakar (IFAN) and people don't go there because it's simply too traditional. It hasn't become contemporary with its surroundings. That is, what one finds in the museum isn't what people experience from day to day.

Responding to this void, the Ecopole provides a forum for the display and creation of urban popular art, and for demonstrating people's creativity and resourcefulness.

In a 1993 critique of West African cultural institutions, a number of African and Africanist museum professionals asserted the need for museums to deal with not only traditional 'rural' ethnography, but also the 'diversity and rapid change in social and cultural conditions and the material culture of today's urban centres' (Ardouin 1993: 24). Claude Daniel Ardouin stated that 'museums must integrate urban cultures into their sphere of activity in order to reflect the reality and dynamics of contemporary culture' (ibid.). To do so, his colleagues Abdoulaye Camara, Pierre Bour, and Mbaye Guèye suggest, it is necessary: to involve 'people and representatives of civil society' to better implement programmes that suit the 'aspirations of the community'; to create an 'informal dimension' to museum activities to facilitate relations with the diverse public; to present the museum as 'a genuine cultural and educational resource'; to diversify means of expression in

exhibitions (for example, through the use of multimedia); and to increase co-operation between schools and museums (Camara, Bour, and Guèye 1995: 43). Though Camara, Bour, and Guèye do not provide specific examples, the Ecopole is clearly in line with this emerging museum philosophy.

Though I never heard the Ecopole identified as an ethnographic museum *per se*, it could be considered to be a modern version of one, redesigned for a contemporary urban and international audience and diverging from traditional ethnographic museums established during the colonial period. However, though the Ecopole is organized around cultural exhibits and related programming, its staff employ the term 'popular' rather than 'traditional' or 'ethnographic'. In her discussion of the open-air museum at Niamey in Niger, Anne Gaugue (1997: 125) considers the term *populaire* as a postcolonial substitute for *ethnographique*. Gaugue cites one museum professional in Africa who refuses to call such institutions *musées d'ethnologie*. Despite the fact that they would be called that in Europe, in parts of Africa at least, 'ethnography' has negative connotations, 'synonymous with studying savages'. In place of *musée d'ethnologie* (ethnographic museum), then, the term *musée d'arts et traditions populaires* was implemented. Given this derivation, the term 'popular' is synonymous with 'ethnographic', though in the context of the Ecopole, the term 'popular' is given a more contemporary interpretation.[5]

Institutionalization of Popular Art

Despite the elusiveness of a satisfactory definition of 'popular culture', the underlying assumptions noted by scholars are clear: representations of Africa and its history have not included the experience of the majority of African people living in urban environments, and popular creative expression offers a counter-discourse. In this context, scholars have defined popular culture in part by its opposition to institutional structures. However, the integration of popular imagery into such institutional environments as the Ecopole calls this into question.

In the earlier discussion of the definition of popular art, three characteristics were identified: (1) its urban context, (2) local audiences, and (3) response to oppression. However, closer inspection of popular art exhibitions and their host

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[5] The museum at Niamey represents an earlier example of an African open-air museum, and is characterized by similar ideas. However, closer comparison of the Ecopole and the Musée National in Niamey reveals important differences. As Gaugue argues (1997), museums in Africa are historically linked to nationalism. This is the case with the Niamey museum, based on nation-building goals as part of state policy. Unlike the museum at Niamey, the Ecopole is not affiliated to the Senegalese state, and instead draws support from the international organization ENDA. While the discourse surrounding the museum at Niamey emphasizes nationalist goals, that surrounding the Ecopole does not.

institutions suggests that these criteria need to be reconsidered. For instance, in the last twenty years the increase in scholarship and exhibitions focusing on popular art have brought it to international audiences. Popular artists are no longer necessarily anonymous; nor are they addressing a uniquely local audience.

As popular art is created by and for the populace, it has been characterized by opposition and resistance to modern/élite culture. As argued by Barber (1987: 10–11), popular arts are seen mainly in terms of their 'evasion of, or departure from, the two well-established, recognized artistic categories...popular artists do not generally belong to the clearly visible institutional structures through which traditional and elite artists usually operate...their work, correspondingly, is not disseminated through recognized official channels'. Barber considers popular art as an 'unofficial' channel of communication for those denied access to official media, constituting a subversive 'subterranean' discourse (ibid.: 3; see also Jules-Rosette 1983). However, this paradigm of 'the popular' in opposition to 'the official' proves to be problematic where popular art has been institutionalized.

Instead of being a site of resistance or hegemonic constraint, the Ecopole is a site for negotiation, exchange, and possibility. The Ecopole was established on the premises of creativity, inclusivity, and possibility offered by popular experience, and it would seem that in place of 'the people versus the power bloc' one finds an alliance between them. The continuing study of popular art in Africa must take into consideration how these changes affect the development of various artists' work. If popular art comes from opposition to a dominant structure, will academic, political, and economic support take away its empowering qualities?

But perhaps this question is too closely dependent on the theory of the popular as a response to domination. In his ethnography of Nigerian highlife music (*juju*), Christopher Waterman (1990) succeeds in creating a conception of 'popular' as dynamic as the subject-matter at hand. Rather than adhering to the traditional/popular/élite triadic model, Waterman suggests that the diverse and dynamic popular expression of cities is an adaptive strategy, and that the heterogeneity and unpredictability of urban life creates unique possibilities, as well as liabilities (ibid.: 4). In short, city life and popular creativity are correlated with choice, transformation, and appropriation. Central to this discussion is the idea that urban experience is encoded in style and creative expression, such as *juju* music. He presents a popular art form existing alongside both 'traditional' and 'élite' forms, using each as a resource. Here, Waterman compellingly illustrates the fluidity of popular arts that Barber (1987) suggests, and successfully explores the 'popular' without depending on references to traditional and élite, thereby creating a space in which popular creative expression and institutional structure are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

The collaboration of UNESCO and ENDA at the Ecopole illustrates the pervasive local–global dynamics of everyday African urban life. In recent years, social scientists have been increasingly concerned with theories of transnationalism

in relation to the reality of such contemporary lived experience (Appadurai 1996, Clifford 1997, Hannerz 1996, Wolf 1996). In taking up such concerns, however, it is important to retain a focus on everyday life and local populations (de Certeau 1984, Habermas 1989), while taking global influences into consideration (Miller 1995). At the turn of the twenty-first century, one must consider the impact of international policy at the local level. Barber asserts the need for the study of local creative environments, for they may 'uncover important aspects of the society, since popular arts penetrate and are penetrated by political, economic, and religious institutions' in ways that may not be predictable from our own experience (Barber 1987: 1–2). Here, the exhibition of popular art demonstrates the collaboration and economic interdependence that characterizes contemporary African experience and its global reality.

Conclusion

Since the colonial period, the governing administrations of Francophone African countries have emphasized cultural policy, manifested in such institutions as IFAN. Despite their ailing economies, the independent nations are still committed to the arts. Today, however, national and international policymakers emphasize art's importance in socio-economic development rather than in the development of a nascent national identity. Creativity itself is not the only aspect of art: in Africa, museums are regarded as potential development tools, with broader social and cultural objectives than in Western practice. The West African Ecopole serves as a contact-point for individuals and institutions, economy and society, cities and citizens, and provides a 'meaningful' structure accommodating the local–global dynamics that are a part of everyday reality.

Many recent cultural development projects are characterized by increasing collaboration among international, national, and local actors. I consider this the most significant aspect of the exhibition of popular art. Since the 1990s, various international organizations have initiated programmes to encourage local artists, thus inextricably linking local experience to the global community. Global agencies use popular art as a vehicle for communicating development concerns to diverse audiences. These dynamics have significant impacts on the creation, reception, and scholarly study of popular art, even before scholars arrive at any clear understanding of what 'popular' is.

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