

SOUNDTRACK OF A NATION: TRACING ZAMBIA'S POLITICAL JOURNEY THROUGH MUSIC FROM 1960–2016



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ABSTRACT

This study examines the intersection of political music and Zambia's socio-political evolution from 1960 to 2016, focusing on three key political eras: the anti-colonial struggle, the one-party state, and the multiparty democracy. Employing a qualitative methodology, it integrates historical and case study approaches, analysing archival records, interviews with 12 stakeholders (musicians and politicians), and six significant political songs across Zambia's political transitions; United National Independence Party (UNIP) Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) and Patriotic Front (PF). Drawing on Gramsci's Cultural Hegemony Theory and Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action, the research reveals political music's dual role as a tool for power consolidation and resistance. During the anti-colonial era, songs like *Tiyende Pamodzi* united people and inspired liberation. Under the one-party state led by Kenneth Kaunda (KK), music promoted African Humanism and national identity while critiquing governance, as in P.K. Chishala's *Common Man*. In the multiparty democracy era, songs such as *Donchi Kubeba* and *Dununa Reverse* addressed corruption and governance, shaping public sentiment and influencing elections. Beyond reflecting socio-political shifts, political music has mobilised collective action and fostered democratic transformation. Despite challenges like censorship, musicians used figurative language and symbolism to amplify marginalised voices and critique oppressive systems. This study underlines the transformative power of political music in cultural production and societal change, advocating for artistic freedom and its integration into education to sustain its role in promoting accountability and democracy in Zambia.

Keywords

Independence, Political evolution, Political music, Socio-political, Zambia's political eras

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Introduction

Zambia's political and musical history is deeply intertwined, reflecting the nation's journey from colonialism to independence and its post-independence evolution (Mwila & Kalinde, 2024). During the pre-independence colonial era, music served as a vital tool for resistance and unity. Traditional songs, dances, and chants were repurposed to inspire nationalism and mobilize support for freedom movements such as the United National Independence Party (UNIP) and the African National Congress (ANC) (Masiye, 2021). Indigenous music such as *akalela* played a significant role in fostering solidarity across Zambia's diverse tribal groups, reinforcing a collective aspiration for independence (Namuyamba et al, 2018).

After independence in 1964, music transitioned from a medium of resistance to a tool for nation-building. During the (UNIP) under President Kenneth Kaunda, music became a vehicle to promote African Humanism, unity, and patriotism. Songs like *Tiyende pamodzi* symbolised collective action, while establishing cultural institutions showcased Zambia's diversity, reinforcing a shared national identity (Lamba, 2023). The intertwining of music and politics during the UNIP reign remains a fascinating chapter in Zambia's history as music played a crucial role in shaping political consciousness, mobilising social movements, and fostering a shared national identity in Zambia. Chitwansombo songs and President Kaunda's strategic use of music was pivotal in reinforcing the nation-building process and affirming leadership. Music went beyond entertainment, becoming an essential tool for political expression and unity in the struggle for independence and post-independence efforts (Lamba, 2023; Bitter, 2023).

During the one-party state era from 1973 to 1991, music became both propagandistic and celebratory under Kaunda's leadership (Lamba, 2023). It was used to promote loyalty to the UNIP ideology and Kaunda's humanist philosophy. However, music also served as a subtle platform for dissent, with compositions like "*salaula*" reflecting societal struggles and growing public discontent (Hansen, 2000). The return to multiparty democracy in 1991 brought a new role for music in Zambia's political landscape (Musiker, 2020). It became an effective tool for political campaigns, with the MMD utilising campaign anthems such as "*the hour has come*" to celebrate change under Frederick Chiluba (Lamba, 2023). As economic reforms led to societal challenges such as unemployment and inequality, musicians increasingly used art to address these issues, signalling a critical shift in public sentiment (Mulolani, 2019).

The PF era, spanning from 2006 to 2016, saw music playing a central role in political mobilisation (Lamba, 2023). Campaign songs like "*Donchi kubeba*" and "*Dununa reverse*"

became synonymous with political movements, reflecting voter aspirations and frustrations. These songs showcased the growing influence of music in Zambia's electoral politics (Chibike, Muzhingi, & Semba, 2024). Zambia's musical heritage is deeply rooted in traditional drumming, dance, and folk songs, which have long preserved oral histories and cultural identity (Gwerevende, & Mthombeni, 2023). The emergence of genres like Zamrock in the 1970s, blending traditional sounds with modern influences, further reflected the complexities of post-colonial identity (Avignon, 2024). For the study, political music conveys explicit political messages rooted in contemporary political contexts (Turino, 2008; Shuker, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

While music in Zambia has played a significant role in the nation's political evolution (Kalobwe, 2021), a paucity of comprehensive studies analyses its multifaceted role in shaping and reflecting Zambia's political identity. Existing literature often focuses on specific periods or events, neglecting an integrative view that spans the colonial era to contemporary times (Masiye, 2021).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to trace Zambia's political journey from 1960 to 2016 through the lens of music, exploring how music has been used as a tool for political expression, activism, and social commentary.

Research Questions

- i. How has music reflected Zambia's political conditions from 1960-2016?
- ii. What socio-political themes are dominant in political music in Zambia from 1960-2016
- iii. What are the perspectives of musicians regarding music's role in Zambia's political landscape?

Significance of the study

This study explores how music has reflected Zambia's political landscape over five decades, preserving history and documenting socio-political evolution. It highlights music's role as a tool for political communication, advocacy, and public mobilization, with musicians acting as agents of change by challenging injustice, promoting unity, and shaping discourse. By analysing recurring themes like liberation, governance, and corruption, the study reveals how

music mirrors and influences societal dynamics while emphasizing the importance of protecting artistic expression as a cornerstone of free speech and democracy.

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

This study focuses on traditional and popular music forms linked to political movements, governance, and national identity within Zambia's political and musical context from 1960 to 2016. Its scope is limited to this timeframe, excluding subsequent developments. Constraints include restricted access to archival materials, historical recordings, and interviews from earlier periods, which may limit the depth of historical analysis. Additionally, the focus on musicians and politicians as case studies narrows the study's applicability, limiting its generalisability.

Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by Antonio Gramsci's Cultural Hegemony Theory (El Aidi & Yechouti, 2017) and Jürgen Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action (Habermas, 1985). Gramsci's framework provides a foundation for investigating how music has been utilised by political figures, such as Kaunda, to assert dominance and cultivate ideological conformity, particularly through the promotion of African Humanism (Muwina, 2018). It also facilitates an examination of how musicians have either supported or resisted these hegemonic narratives through their artistic expressions (Hess, 2019). Habermas' theory, on the other hand, offers a perspective for analysing music as a vehicle for dialogue between political leaders and the public, enabling discourse, fostering unity, and critiquing governance (Humphrey, 2023). Together, these theories allow the study to contextualise music's dual role as both a tool of power and a medium for resistance, while underscoring its lasting impact on Zambia's cultural and political trajectory (Humphrey, 2023).

Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony elucidates how dominant groups employ cultural elements, such as music, to secure consent and reinforce their ideological supremacy. This theory is instrumental in examining the role of music in mirroring Zambia's political conditions, particularly as a means of perpetuating hegemonic ideologies across various historical periods. Furthermore, it provides insights into the socio-political themes embedded in Zambia's political music, highlighting the dynamic tension between hegemonic narratives and counter-hegemonic resistance. Gramsci's approach also sheds light on musicians' roles as

cultural agents, whether through alignment with or opposition to prevailing political ideologies, thereby enriching the understanding of their contributions to Zambia's political landscape.

Complementing this perspective, Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action emphasises the role of music in fostering political dialogue and critique. His emphasis on communication as a tool for mutual understanding and resistance to authority aligns with the analysis of music's role in political discourse and activism. This theory facilitates an interpretation of music as a communicative medium, reflecting and critiquing Zambia's political realities. Moreover, it provides a lens through which to view the socio-political themes in political music as contributions to broader conversations on governance, unity, and resistance. Habermas' framework further supports an exploration of musicians' perspectives, particularly regarding how their work fosters dialogue between leaders and citizens or challenges political systems. By integrating Gramsci's focus on dominance and resistance with Habermas' emphasis on dialogue and critique, the study captures the complexity of music's function as both a mechanism of control and a channel for dissent.

Literature review

Music has long served as a powerful tool for political expression and societal transformation globally, influencing national identities, revolutionary movements, and government ideologies (Garratt, 2019; Knights, 2016). Its role as a political instrument is evident in various historical contexts, where it has supported and challenged political regimes (Howard, 2016). During China's Cultural Revolution, music was used as propaganda to spread party ideology, while traditional forms were censored to align with Communist values (Chen, 2022). Similarly, in South Korea in the 1980s, music became a medium of dissent against the authoritarian regime, highlighting its role in articulating opposition to political repression (Lee, 2023). In Russia, music played a central role in both artistic expression and political control under Soviet rule (Tomoff, 2006; Davidson, 2019), while in India, songs like "*Vande Mataram*" became symbols of resistance during the independence movement, continuing to reflect political dynamics post-independence (Ramnath, 2012; Booth, 2013). The African American civil rights movement in the 1960s also exemplifies music's role in political movements, with anthems like "*We Shall Overcome*" stimulating collective action for social justice (Ogbar, 2019). These examples accentuate music's dual role as both a tool of power and a form of resistance, shaping national identities and political discourse (Kumar, 2019; Edensor, 2020). However, building on these examples, argument can be raised as to whether the power of music lies in its ability to traverse

boundaries of ideology and culture, providing a means of engagement that resonates with collective identities and localised struggles while adapting to shifting political landscapes.

In Africa, music has similarly functioned as a powerful medium for political expression and social change (Kakegawa, 2024). It has been used to communicate political messages, engage in resistance, and mobilise communities, often reflecting and shaping political struggles (Onyebadi, 2017; Agawu, 2003). Artists like Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela in South Africa, and Fela Kuti in Nigeria, used music to critique government corruption and advocate for societal transformation (Klein, 2011; Euba, 1992). The rise of hip-hop in Africa further illustrates music's role in speaking out against issues such as poverty and inequality (Sithole, 2017). Music in Africa has deep ties to colonial legacies, with songs like Zambia's "*Tiyende pamodzi*" and the chant "*Kwacha ngwee*" serving as symbols of liberation and national pride (Nchindila, 2008; Masiye, 2021). Music continues to shape political discourse, as evidenced by its role in Zambia's 2016 elections and in Zimbabwe's post-independence celebrations (Kalinde, 2024). From these developments, it is evident to state that African political music operates as both a historical archive and a dynamic force blending traditional and modern elements, encapsulating the struggles and aspirations of communities while inspiring contemporary dialogues about governance and justice in order to maintain their relevance in evolving political contexts.

Masiye (2021) connects Zambian political music to broader African liberation anthems, highlighting both shared themes of resistance and the distinct political, cultural, and colonial histories of each nation (Lamba, 2023). We contend that the intersection of shared themes and localised narratives enhances the power of political music, as it bridges collective struggles while reflecting the unique cultural and historical contexts of each movement. Political music's enduring relevance reflects the inherent adaptability of music as a medium of communication and resistance (Garratt, 2019), allowing it to remain an essential tool for both historical reflection and contemporary activism.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach to examine how music functions within political contexts, emphasising the motivations behind its use and its capacity to mobilise and energize audiences (Gonzalez, 2024). Rooted in relativist ontology and subjectivist

epistemology, the research investigates how political knowledge is constructed, contested, and transformed through music.

A relativist ontology acknowledges that reality is shaped by diverse cultural, experiential, and educational contexts, highlighting the subjective nature of musical and political experiences (Willig, 2016; Xu, 2024). This perspective highlights the socially constructed nature of musical meaning and its role in shaping political perceptions (Hesmondhalgh, 2013). Complementing this, a subjectivist epistemology posits that knowledge about politics and music is created through human interactions, framing music as a tool for embedding and challenging political ideologies (Williams, 2020; Kakegawa, 2024). This lens is used to analyse how power dynamics influence the creation and reception of political music in Zambia (Mulolani, 2019).

The study also considers musical ontology, exploring how music conveys political messages, shapes consciousness, and drives social action (Gonzalez, 2024; Knights, 2016). Music is viewed not merely as a reflection of reality but as an active participant in shaping it, influencing political ideologies and societal change (Levinson, 2011).

Finally, axiology, the study of values, informs the analysis by considering how cultural values and personal biases affect interpretations of music's political role. This critical approach examines music's influence within specific cultural and historical contexts, offering insights into its power as a medium of political expression and transformation (Kulinska, 2016).

Research design

The study utilised case study and historical research designs to analyse the role of music in Zambia's political discourse from 1960 to 2016, focusing on its use in political expression, mobilization, and identity formation. Data collection incorporated both primary and secondary sources, including archival records, newspapers, audio recordings, and interviews with individuals involved in Zambia's music and political scenes during this period. Participants included political musicians, defined as creators of music with explicit political messages shaping discourse (Turino, 2008); general musicians, whose work indirectly reflects political themes; and politicians, who engaged with or responded to political music (Street, 2013).

Sample size, sampling techniques and procedures

The study employed a sample of 12 participants, including four political musicians, two general musicians, and six politicians, selected using the principle of saturation to ensure no new insights emerged with further data collection. Participants were identified through purposive sampling to ensure expertise in political music, supplemented by snowball sampling, which facilitated additional recruitment through referrals from initial respondents. This approach ensured a focused and informed sample.

Data generation technique

The study employed structured interviews with musicians and politicians to explore their motivations, roles in political music, and its societal impact. Documentary analysis of six political songs from the UNIP, MMD, and PF eras examined the evolving role of music in Zambia's political discourse.

Data analysis

The study used thematic and content analysis to identify recurring themes, examining songs for content, musical features, and political messages. Data triangulation from interviews, FGDs, and song analysis ensured credibility and validity.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, this study employs rigorous qualitative research practices to uphold credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is established through triangulation, combining data from diverse sources, including archival records, interviews with 12 stakeholders (musicians, politicians, and cultural commentators), and an in-depth analysis of six emblematic political songs that span Zambia's political transitions. Member checking was conducted to validate the interpretations of interview data, ensuring alignment with the perspectives of participants. Transferability is achieved by providing rich, thick descriptions of Zambia's political epochs, contextualizing the role of political music within broader socio-political and cultural frameworks. Dependability is reinforced through a detailed audit trail, documenting the research process, methodological decisions, and analytical procedures, allowing for replicability. Finally, confirmability is addressed by maintaining reflexivity, where the researcher critically examines potential biases and ensures that findings are grounded in the data rather than personal or theoretical preconceptions. By adhering to these principles, the study provides a robust, nuanced analysis of the interplay between political music and

Zambia's socio-political evolution, offering insights that are both contextually grounded and methodologically sound.

Ethical considerations

The study prioritized ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, transparency, and adherence to principles that safeguarded participants' rights and ensured objectivity.

Findings and discussion

The findings from interviews, focus group discussions (FGD), and the analysis of political songs in Zambia highlight the profound connection between political music and the nation's socio-political history. When integrated, the main themes that arose from the three empirical data sources were; music as a reflection of Zambia's political conditions from 1960 to 2016, musicians as political activists and social commentators, the role of musicians as agents of political expression and activism, historical and socio-political themes in music and perspectives of musicians on music's role in Zambia's political landscape.

1. Music as a reflection of Zambia's political conditions from 1960-2016

Zambian political music serves as a mirror of the country's evolving socio-political landscape, transitioning through distinct eras, each shaped by unique historical and political dynamics. From its origins in the anti-colonial struggle to its role in multi-party democracy, political music in Zambia reflects historical materialism's premise that cultural production is deeply rooted in material and social conditions (Weber et al., 2023). This evolution stresses the complex interplay between music, power, and resistance discussed as follows:

1.1. The Anti-colonial era and early independence (1960–1972)

During the pre-independence and early independence periods, political music embodied the ideals of liberation, unity, and the fight against colonial oppression. Songs like "*Tiyende pamodzi*" were symbolic of collective action and national identity, fostering solidarity among Zambians as they sought freedom from colonial rule. Participants in this study emphasised the significance of music during this time:

Participant C: "*During KK's era, music encouraged strength until liberation and addressed issues like slavery.*"

Participant U: “Songs such as ‘Tiyende Pamodzi’ during KK era called for building the nation.”

Artists like Alick Nkhata and bands like Bzone 6 created music that reinforced KK’s vision of unity and nation-building. As Koloko (2022) and Masiye (2021) note, music during this era was a revolutionary force, encapsulating the aspirations of a newly independent Zambia while challenging colonial legacies. From a Habermasian perspective, music acted as a medium of communicative action, fostering dialogue among diverse groups united by a shared goal of independence.

1.2. The UNIP one-party state (1972–1991)

Under Kaunda’s one-party rule, political music took on a dual role: it was both a unifying force and a tool for state propaganda. Kaunda’s government strategically used music to promote state ideology, with songs like “*Tiyende pamodzi*” becoming national anthems for unity and rural development initiatives. However, this era also saw the emergence of subtle critiques of state policies, as highlighted by songs like P.K. Chishala’s “*Common man*”, which articulated the struggles of ordinary citizens under UNIP’s rule.

Participants noted this evolution:

Participant B: “Political music evolved with changing times, expressing the people’s frustrations under each government.”

Participant F: “There was a historical progression from Kaunda’s liberation music to Chiluba’s focus on economic reforms, Sata’s populism, and a mix of support and opposition under Lungu.”

This duality aligns with Street, (2015)’s analysis, which emphasises how music under authoritarian regimes serves as both a consolidator of state power and a subtle avenue for dissent. The appropriation of music for propagandistic purposes mirrors global trends, as seen in China’s “red songs” during the Cultural Revolution (Cheng & Cheng, 2019). Habermas’ theory provides further insight, as music during this period acted as both a vehicle for top-down communication (state propaganda) and a platform for bottom-up critique (citizen resistance), demonstrating its dual role in political discourse justice (Humphrey, 2023).

1.3. The Multi-Party Democracy Era (1991–2016)

The transition to multi-party democracy in 1991 marked a significant shift in the themes and functions of political music. Under Frederick Chiluba's MMD government, music began addressing issues of economic reform, corruption, and governance. Songs like *"Donchi kubeba"* and *"Koswe mu mpoto"* became emblematic of public critique during subsequent administrations, reflecting growing public dissatisfaction and demands for accountability. This shift is evident in participants' reflections:

Participant Y: *"Music played a significant role in shaping public perception and generating enthusiasm during political transitions."*

Participant Z: *"Music provides a platform for expressing political aspirations and fostering unity during elections and transitions."*

During Michael Sata's PF administration, populist themes dominated political music, as songs like *"Dununa reverse"* galvanized support and influenced electoral outcomes. This aligns with the observations of Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe (2015), who note that music's emotional resonance can shape public opinion and mobilise civic participation.

Under Edgar Lungu, political music reflected mixed narratives of support and dissent, addressing socio-economic challenges, governance issues, and electoral dynamics. The continued prominence of hip-hop and rap as platforms for youth empowerment and social critique, as highlighted by Fadil (2022), highlights music's evolving role in amplifying marginalized voices and challenging dominant power structures. Habermas' communicative action framework underscores the role of music as a medium for dialogue, not only between citizens and political leaders but also within society. Political songs functioned as tools for deliberative democracy, enabling marginalised voices particularly those of the youth to challenge dominant power structures and advocate for social justice (Gill, 2022). The rise of hip-hop and rap as platforms for socio-political critique during this period further illustrates this dynamic (Ndaliko, 2016).

1.4. Historical materialism and the role of music

Zambian political music's evolution highlights its dialectical function as both a reflection of socio-political conditions and a catalyst for change. From fostering unity during the independence movement to critiquing governance in the Third Republic, music has consistently navigated the tensions between cultural autonomy and institutional co-optation.

This dynamic aligns with Marxist and CT perspectives, which view cultural production as both a site of resistance and an instrument of state control (Chilufya, 2017; Lamba, 2023).

During the one-party state, state-sanctioned songs reinforced hegemony, while critical compositions like *"Common man"* exposed contradictions within the system. In the multi-party era, music became a more pronounced tool for advocacy and reform, addressing corruption, inequality, and social justice. This progression mirrors global patterns, as seen in protest music movements in the United States and Africa (Deaville, 2018; Ndaliko, 2016). Gramsci's and Habermas' theories collectively illuminate the dialectical nature of political music as both a reflection of and a catalyst for socio-political change. Gramsci's concept of hegemony highlights how music has been used by political elites to assert dominance, as seen in Kaunda's African Humanism (El Aidi & Yechouti, 2017).

2. Historical and socio-political themes in music from 1960-2016

The findings collectively demonstrate that political music in Zambia from 1960 to 2016 was deeply intertwined with the nation's historical and socio-political conditions. Several dominant themes emerged:

2.1. Liberation and resistance

Participants' responses stressed the role of music as a vital tool for political resistance and a voice for the voiceless during Zambia's pre-independence era. Music became a unifying force, articulating the populace's aspirations for freedom and encouraging participation in the liberation struggle.

Participant Y highlighted how pre-independence music was instilled with themes of liberation, emphasizing, *"During the pre-independence era, political music contained themes of liberation which called for political actions among freedom fighters. Songs of liberation and calls for independence were common to encourage citizens."* This demonstrates how music was not merely entertainment but a political weapon that amplified the collective voice against colonial oppression.

Post-independence, the resistance theme evolved. Participant D noted, *"My music is a form of resistance against oppressive systems and leaders, and I believe it's essential to use art to challenge injustice and promote change."* This reflects the continuation of music's resistance narrative in addressing governance and systemic oppression, even after Zambia attained independence.

In agreement with Lamba (2023), it is evident that music not only responded to historical events but also actively shaped public consciousness. As Participant X observed, *“Political music documents history and reflects the social and political movements through music,”*. In this sense, music became a historical archive that mirrored Zambia’s socio-political transitions, from colonial rule to post-independence struggles and revolutions.

2.2. Economic reforms and corruption

The findings highlight how political music transitioned in post-independence Zambia to address governance, economic reforms, and corruption. Under Kenneth Kaunda, music largely celebrated liberation achievements, but as governance challenges emerged, music shifted towards critiquing policies and exposing corruption.

Participant F noted this transition, stating, *“There was a historical progression from Kaunda’s liberation music to Chiluba’s focus on economic reforms.”* This progression reflects how music adapted to evolving political contexts, addressing themes of privatisation, economic inequality, and public dissatisfaction with government policies.

Participant V further emphasised the growing critique of governance through music during the multi-party era, remarking, *“From the one-party state to multiparty democracy, political music became more charged, reflecting societal dissatisfaction and critique of corruption and oppression.”* These critiques often resonated with public frustrations, giving music the power to mobilize citizens and demand accountability.

Moreover, Participant W noted, *“Political music mirrors political tensions and significant events, addressing themes like corruption, freedom of speech, and social justice.”* This aligns with how artists used their platforms to amplify issues such as the suppression of freedom of speech, economic mismanagement, and the need for systemic reforms.

2.3. Democracy and governance

As Zambia transitioned to a multi-party democracy, political music became an essential medium for reflecting public sentiment, fostering civic engagement, and shaping political narratives. Participant A observed, *“Political music reflected the political ideologies, reforms, and struggles of each era, from liberation movements to post-independence reforms.”* This highlights the adaptability of music in addressing the changing political landscape.

Music served both as a platform for praise and a medium for criticism, depending on the governance style of the era. Participant E aptly summarised this evolution, noting, *“Political music evolved from liberation struggles during Kaunda to economic concerns and democracy under Chiluba, praise and criticism during Sata’s rule, and mixed responses during Lungu’s era.”* This dynamic role of music reflects its ability to respond to governance structures, celebrate progress, and hold leaders accountable.

The democratic era also saw music being used to foster civic engagement, as Participant C pointed out, *“Music is an easy tool for politicians to mobilise audiences and support their movements.”* However, this duality where music could both inspire movements and be co-opted for political agendas reveals the complex relationship between music and governance.

2.4. Liberation and resistance

During the pre-independence period, music was a powerful symbol of resistance and unity, rallying support for the freedom movement. Participant Y explained, *“During the pre-independence era, political music conveyed themes of liberation, inspiring political action among freedom fighters. Songs advocating for independence and calling for collective action were common to motivate citizens.”* Zambian political compositions like *“Munshitaya caca”* embodied societal aspirations for unity and liberation from colonial rule. These early works illustrate the principles of historical materialism, demonstrating how music reflects the prevailing material and social conditions, uniting communities around anti-colonial sentiments (Rice, 2010; Schreiber, 2019; Masiye, 2021).

2.5. Governance and accountability

Music shifted focus post-independence to critique governance failures, economic mismanagement, and corruption. It became a vehicle for public critique, empowering citizens to engage with national issues. With the advent of multi-party democracy in the 1990s, political music in Zambia took on a new role, critiquing leadership and state policies on governance and economic inequality. During Chiluba’s presidency, music began addressing economic reforms, corruption, and promoting accountability. The third republic era saw songs like *“Koswe mu mpoto”* and *“Donchi kubeba”* emerge as critiques of governance, spotlighting corruption and social justice themes. This transition parallels Soukous music’s critique of corruption in Central Africa (Rijmenams, 2021) and South Korea’s *“trot”* music, which articulated public dissatisfaction and advocated reform (Lee, 2023).

2.6. Democracy and civic engagement

As Zambia transitioned into a multi-party democracy, music evolved to reflect the complexities of governance, articulate public aspirations, and serve as a platform for dissent and political mobilization. With the advent of multi-party democracy in the 1990s, political music assumed a critical role in addressing leadership challenges, state policies, and socioeconomic disparities. Participant V observed, *“From the one-party state to multi-party democracy, political music became more charged, reflecting societal dissatisfaction and critique of corruption and oppression.”*

During Chiluba’s presidency, music emerged as a tool to critique economic reforms, expose corruption, and advocate for accountability. Songs like *“Commonman”* and *“Koswemumpoto”* tackled issues such as governance, inequality, and corruption, amplifying public grievances and fostering a collective demand for transparency. Musicians viewed their work as essential to promoting civic responsibility and political awareness, underscoring their role as cultural commentators and agents of change. These findings align with Scammell (2016), who highlights how political music can stimulate public discourse and catalyse calls for accountability in transitional democracies.

3. Perspectives of musicians on music's role in Zambia’s political landscape

The findings from the study reveal that musicians in Zambia perceive political music as a multifaceted tool that transcends mere entertainment, serving as an essential medium for political expression, advocacy, and civic engagement (Mwila & Kalinde, 2024). Below is an integration of the findings and discussion, focusing on the insights shared by the participants and their alignment with existing literature on music’s political significance.

3.1. Music as a platform for advocacy and social justice

Musicians view political music as a platform to address pressing issues such as governance, corruption, and economic inequality. This perspective is evident in statements such as Participant A’s assertion that *“Music empowers marginalized communities to share their narratives, providing a platform for the voiceless to be heard.”* Similarly, Participant D emphasised that music could challenge harmful narratives, inspire change, and promote equality.

This aligns with Scammell (2016), who highlights music's transformative potential in shaping political consciousness and advocating for social justice. By using their platforms to critique

social and political systems, musicians position themselves as key actors in fostering accountability and promoting reform.

3.2. Emotional engagement and collective identity

Musicians highlighted the emotional power of political music to unite diverse socio-economic groups and foster a shared sense of identity. Participant A noted that songs like *"Tiyende pa modzi"* evoke pride and unity, creating a collective sense of responsibility for Zambia's future. Similarly, Participant D reflected on how political songs channel frustration and anger to mobilize citizens toward action: *"When we hear songs about our shared struggles, it reminds us that we're not alone. That sense of unity is powerful."*

This observation resonates with Sacks (2007), Nowell (2010) and Kalinde (2024), who emphasize that music connects disenfranchised populations through shared emotional responses, creating social bonds essential for mobilising social movements. Political music's ability to evoke pride, fear, and hope amplifies its impact, driving civic engagement and collective action.

3.3. Strategic messaging for targeted audiences

Participants acknowledged the strategic use of music to appeal to specific socio-economic groups. For instance, Participant E mentioned that political music often targets low-income groups, who are more likely to participate in elections. Participant F emphasised: *"Every political song that is composed usually targets different groups, or else it will never appease anyone."*

This targeted approach aligns with the findings of Nchindila (2008) and Mwila & Kalinde, (2024), who highlight the strategic role of political music in electoral campaigns. By tailoring messages to resonate with the experiences of different demographics, musicians amplify their influence on public sentiment and voter behaviour.

3.4. Resistance against oppression and censorship

Musicians expressed their roles as agents of resistance against oppressive systems, often navigating challenges such as censorship and persecution. Participant C shared an account of receiving threats after releasing a politically sensitive song, while Participant D recalled a fellow musician being jailed for inciting public disorder. Despite these challenges, Participant D asserted: *"It won't silence me."*

This resilience reflects the dual function of political music as both a form of resistance and a means of circumventing state control. The use of figurative language and symbolism, as highlighted by Participant B, allows musicians to critique systems while mitigating the risks of censorship. Filene (2000) and similarly describe how music balances overt resistance with subtle messaging to navigate political constraints.

3.5. Historical reflection and continuity

Political music serves as a medium for preserving historical narratives and linking the past to the present. Songs like *"Twalelala pa nsokaa"* evoke memories of Zambia's liberation struggles, fostering pride and reflection on collective achievements. Participant C emphasized that these songs: *"Remind us of our history, our struggles, and our achievements as a country."*

Agawu (2003) and Nzewi (2007) similarly highlight music's role in preserving historical narratives and inspiring social movements. By connecting present struggles to past victories, political music reinforces a sense of continuity and collective identity.

3.6. Mobilising for democratic change

Musicians perceive their work as integral to Zambia's democratic evolution, using political music to inspire voter engagement and advocate for accountability. Songs like *"Donchi Kubeba"* and *"Koswe mu mpoto"* exemplify how music critiques governance, exposes contradictions in political rhetoric, and mobilises citizens for electoral participation. Namuyamba et al. (2018) affirm that political music significantly shapes electoral discourse and public opinion.

An examination of political music for democratic change raises important questions about its nature and impact as participant A stated: *'Our music can sway voters and inspire change, contributing to the country's political landscape and social fabric'*. Does it primarily have the potential to inspire positive change or could it perpetuate misinformation or divisive narratives, highlighting the need to examine this duality (Edensor, 2020). Additionally, the sustainability of its influence warrants scrutiny: does political music create lasting political awareness and engagement, or is its effect largely confined to short-term events such as elections or protests (Garratt, 2019 & Masiye, 2021)? These considerations are crucial for understanding the broader implications of political music in mobilising democratic change.

Conclusion

In conclusion, from 1960 to 2016, political music in Zambia has served as a transformative force, shaping and reflecting the nation's political evolution. During the independence era, it unified diverse communities in the struggle against colonial rule, while under Kaunda's UNIP, it became a vehicle for disseminating state ideology and promoting African Humanism. In the era of multi-party democracy, political music took on a new role as a medium for critique, reform, and civic participation, reflecting the changing dynamics of Zambia's political and cultural landscape. Anchored in Gramsci's Theory of Cultural Hegemony and Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action, this study highlights the dual function of political music as both an instrument of authority and a tool of resistance. It has amplified the voices of the marginalized, fostered a sense of collective identity, and acted as a catalyst for socio-political transformation. The insights of Zambian musicians further illuminate its dynamic potential, showcasing its strategic deployment to address governance, corruption, and social justice issues while mobilizing audiences across socio-economic divides. Despite persistent challenges such as censorship and political persecution, political music has proven resilient, maintaining its role as a platform for public discourse and dissent. Through its ability to bridge cultural divides, challenge dominant ideologies, and inspire societal change, political music in Zambia emerges not only as a reflection of the nation's historical journey but also as a driving force in shaping its democratic aspirations and cultural legacy.

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