

BLOOMSBURY ENCYCLOPEDIA OF
POPULAR MUSIC
OF THE WORLD



VOLUME XII
GENRES: SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

samples, rhythms and melodies inspired by these genres or make use of instruments such as talking drums, slit drums, *mvet* (a string instrument), flutes or the xylophone-like *balafons* and *mendzans*. However, there are also clearly cosmopolitan influences that include African popular music such as Congolese *rumba* and Nigerian highlife, in addition to different forms of European and American popular music such as rap, reggae and ragga.

Neither music labels nor the Cameroonian audience significantly distinguish sub-variants of Cameroonian rap music. As a rough etic distinction, however, there are two broad variants. In the first variant, instruments are recorded. The bass guitar is rather melodic and less central to the beat. The rapping is sometimes close to spoken words or accompanied by melodic singing and acoustic or electric guitars. Many songs by Bantou Pô-si, Koppo, Teek, S-Team and Lady B and earlier songs of Negrissim are examples of this variant, which was more common in the 2000s than after 2010. A second and more common variant of Cameroonian rap music is less based on instruments and is instead computer-produced. Both bass and percussion are used as beats over which rappers rhyme, accompanied by rather sparsely used melodic elements. Some recent productions of this variant are increasingly inspired by contemporary developments in US and European rap music and electronic music styles such as dubstep. Artists such as Krotal, in his newer productions, Jovi and Stanley Enow deliver more complex raps including Auto-tune effects over sophisticated rhythm and bass patterns. Thus, Cameroonian hip-hop continues to evolve.

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Hip-Hop in Gabon

Since the end of the 1980s Gabon has emerged as one of the main areas of hip-hop creation in Francophone Africa. The country has hosted major media programs, festivals and shows including the annual festival Gabao Hip-Hop. Although Gabon is not known internationally for having created a specific local genre inspired by hip-hop – along the lines of *bongo flava* in Tanzania (Perullo 2005, 2007; Englert 2008) or *hiplife* in Ghana (Shiple 2013) – a

significant number of rappers have adopted Gabonese rap as a nationally identified form. Contemporary Gabonese rap (called *gaboma* rap) is eclectic, drawing from several subgenres of rap and from other musical genres, but it is nevertheless composed of some traceable linguistic, musical and textual features such as the use of the local slang Toli Bangando and the description of ordinary life in the slums of Libreville, the country's capital and largest city, called *mapanes*.

1980s: The Arrival of Hip-Hop in Libreville and Democratic Transition

Rap music in Libreville represents the most famous and popular Gabonese expression of the diverse disciplines that constitute the hip-hop cultural movement. In this coastal city, the adoption of hip-hop culture and rap music has built on a long history, going back to the colonial era, of the appropriation of African-American and African-Caribbean musical genres, from the playing of *beguine* and *salsa* in the first dance clubs up to the huge success of soul, funk and disco in Libreville orchestras and nightclubs in the decades after independence (1960).

The end of the 1980s saw the arrival of new sounds and oral practices in the streets of Libreville, where young citizens were gathering in dance troupes and organizing dance competitions around the rhythms of Michael Jackson's hits and the diverse urban dances coming from the Republic of Congo. Part of young people's fondness for urban dances and aesthetics was inspired by the discovery of US and French rap music, which Gabonese youth first tried to copy and recite, before writing their own poetry.

The first rap groups that appeared during this period were deeply influenced by the sociopolitical upheavals that disrupted the country. On the one hand, the content of the first rappers' songs was clearly an expression of the rebellion taking place in Libreville's boroughs. For this generation, rap music was the first media of expression to criticize directly the malfunctions of the Gabonese government. On the other hand, the explosion of rap in Libreville's scenes and media would not have been possible without the development of new rights and freedom of expression that came about following the upheaval and the rebellion in 1990 against increasing poverty.

The mid-1980s had brought an unprecedented economic crisis that jeopardized the life conditions of

Gabonese people and increased criticism of a political elite that had monopolized control and resources since independence. With the oil crash and the growth of unemployment, the urban zones saw the rise of deprived neighborhoods and slums called *mapanes* and *matitis*. Gabon had implemented austerity measures and suffered the social consequences of structural adjustment plans – specifically, loans from the IMF and the World Bank designed to reduce the economic crisis and which were contingent upon those economic adjustments. The regime of the Bongo family, which had held power since 1967, was considered responsible for this crisis and was condemned by opposition parties, syndicates and students. The latter criticized corruption, authoritarianism and the unequal ethnically based system of wealth distribution that the single party, the Parti Democratique Gabonais (PDG), and Omar Bongo imposed. A wave of opposition parties arose, and a movement of strikes was set up among workers and students. As this intensified among all the sectors of activity, it led to a general strike and to popular protests, pillaging and violent repression. The extent of the social crisis forced Omar Bongo and the PDG to recognize the fundamental rights of the citizens – such as freedom of movement and expression – and to organize a national conference in March 1990. This conference gathered together the single political party and the opposition groups and led to the re-establishment of multiparty rule in May 1991 and to a new constitution.

During this troubled period of social instability, the transformation of political life and the opening up of Gabonese society a new freedom of expression facilitated the appearance of the first rap groups in Libreville's boroughs. Motivated by a desire to express their quest for change and inspired by identification with expressions of revolt shared by young people around the world, several rap groups emerged, led by two progenitor groups in particular. The first, Si'ya Poossi XI, a quartet from the working-class city of Owendo, located south of Libreville, discovered hip-hop culture through a friend who brought cassettes and CDs back from a visit to France. The group's name refers to an English-language hip-hop concept (also used in other countries, such as Italy) the posse, that is, the hip-hop 'crew,' but in the Fang language it means 'the land to knock down.' Through their

sound systems and performances on street corners they popularized rap music in Libreville's boroughs. After their victory at a competition organized by the French Cultural Center (CCF) they also released the first cassette of Gabonese rap in Libreville. With this cassette, *Seyougame*, and with their subsequent CDs, Si'ya Poossi X exerted a strong influence on the production of an underground rap scene, using their lyrics to describe the precarious daily life of ordinary citizens.

The second pioneer group of Gabonese rap originated in a very different social class. V2A4 (short for the French 'Vis tout et fort' or 'live everything and strongly'), comprised two students who went to study in France, where, in 1990, they recorded the first-ever CD of Gabonese rap music to be successfully broadcast in Libreville. The lyrics offer a crude depiction of the corruption to be found in Libreville and the necessity of political transformation, calling for an 'African revolution.' The group embodied a paradox, however, as one of its members was the son of the defense minister and the other belonged to a business family. The fact that these young people were directly descended from the country's elite led to discussions regarding authenticity and the class identity of rap music, and about what some rappers viewed as the 'intrinsic' distance that rap music should have between itself and the 'system.' Since the emergence of these two contrasting groups, hip-hop music in Gabon has continued to be marked by such class issues and by ambiguous relationships with authorities. The rap network has in effect reproduced the broader connection between politics and music in Libreville, demonstrated since the 1960s by the use of musicians and bands during campaigns (for the promotion of political personalities or parties), and by the ubiquitous presence of members of the presidential family and ministers of government in local music labels.

After these first two groups emerged, a local scene rapidly grew in Libreville, thanks to concert halls and media outlets that hosted rappers, such as the radio program *Les rappers de la côte ouest africaine* (Rappers from the West African coast). Broadcast in many French-speaking African countries from 1991 to 1993 by the international radio channel Africa n°1, this program offered rappers one of the first broadcasting vehicles for self-expression.

Meanwhile, competitions in rap music and hip-hop were organized in a concert hall named Cabaret des Artistes, contributing to the attraction of new devotees to this music. Nevertheless, the older generation considered the adoption of rap music and hip-hop aesthetics to be an imitation of Western culture and an expression of young 'outlaws' with no respect for social order, and state institutions did not support rap events and other hip-hop activities – that is, breakdancing, DJing, graffiti.

1990s: The Second Generation and the Growth of Rap Music Production

From the mid-1990s a second generation of rappers witnessed the real explosion of hip-hop in Gabon, thanks to support from some journalists, promoters, producers and studio owners who between them set up concert venues, home studios and radio programs devoted to rap music. This emerging rap scene progressively gained autonomy from other musical markets in Gabon, created its own audience and found a place in official media. The main rap groups from this period, including New School, Hay'oe, Movaizhaleine and Raaboon, were composed of young urbanite males from the middle and lower classes. Many rappers from these groups are still active in the rap scene in the late 2010s, and are famous both locally and abroad. Some have become state-employed workers or have entered politics.

Since the beginning of Gabonese rap in 1990, female rappers have been a rarity. Obligated to confront masculine control throughout the diverse steps of the production, along with a gendered logic of patronage that often contributes to the exclusion or the belittling of women, women in the rap scene are often reduced to the role of groupie, dancer and/or object of male consumption (Aterianus-Owanga 2013). Hip-hop lyrics often assert homophobic and conservative visions of gender identities. However, a few women, such as Naneth and Tina, have succeeded in making a name for themselves in hip-hop networks. Between the reproduction of accepted standards of womanliness and the transgression of social orders, they adapt diverse local and global models of womanliness in order to call some gender inequalities into question.

In the second generation of rap, lyrics are influenced by several contexts. One subset condemns corrupt

African governments and neo-colonial relationships that link Gabon and Africa with France – and more broadly with the former colonizing countries. This tendency, sometimes presented as a ‘pro-black’ message, corresponds with the denunciation of the French military presence and French directors in major companies. These rappers blame the racial inequalities and implicit social hierarchies that are still observed in ordinary life in Libreville, French education and public educational institutions in Gabon, or in the broad range of intimate relations involving material or money exchange. This criticism resonates more broadly with the description of the poverty of Libreville *mapanes* inhabitants and with the expression of anger against social inequality and government corruption. The depiction of Libreville’s bars, parties and nightlife also plays an important part in rap texts.

Two songs remain core emblems of the 2000s golden era of rap music in Gabon for its fans. ‘Aux choses du pays’ (The Things of the Country), released by the duo Movaizhaleine in 2000, quotes a chorus from the Gabonese singer Pierre Claver Akendengué and samples traditional harp sounds. The lyrics describe in poetic terms all the popular ways of being, beliefs, social practices, and relationships that constitute these Gabonese ‘things of the country.’ This track is usually correlated with another hit from that same period, released by Raaboon, the other main group from the second generation, ‘Vie de haine’ (Life of Hate), that describes the dirty conditions of ordinary life, economic inequality and young people’s desire for upward mobility and wealth. These two groups of the second generation, Raaboon and Movaizhaleine, are emblematic of the anchoring of rap music in the popular street life in Libreville, and they confronted each other during the most important event of this era: the ‘Clash Raaboon / Movaizhaleine.’ In hip-hop culture, the notion of clash refers to a duel between two performers and to a performance competition including dance, rap, DJing or verbal sparring. In this case, the clash was between the two main groups of the Libreville rap scene at the end of the 1990s, each of which performed its song in turn in front of the crowd. After three songs each, Raaboon emerged victorious by measurement of the length and volume of the applause. In 2000 this event, sponsored by large companies, gathered thousands of young people for

the first time in rap history in Gabon, demonstrating the huge presence of rap as a phenomenon in urban life.

At the same time, rappers from the first and second generations have also rapidly asserted their desire to perpetuate the inheritance from previous musicians and from traditional practices of the elders, who considered the appropriation of rap music to be an illegitimate copy of Western culture, and ‘gangster’ music. On the contrary, many rappers considered hip-hop to be the product of a common black culture descended from oral African traditions. For them, the mission has thus rapidly become to ‘Gabonize’ and localize rap music, and also to be recognized by the rest of the hip-hop community and by international markets. This attempt to construct a typical Gabonese rap style was expressed in a desire to rap in local languages, sample traditional instruments, and express claims focused on the rights of African and black people, involving what some call a *posteriori* a ‘pro-black movement.’ With the advice of their elders from the group Si’ya Poossi X, who were the first to produce original beats, several artists learned the techniques of beatmaking and created their own instrumentals, sometimes with samples from previous recordings of Gabonese tradi-modern musicians or traditional instruments.

The multifaceted rap style that has arisen from this attempt to ‘Gabonize’ rap music is characterized by a deep heterogeneity and by all the tensions that surround the issue of national identity in Gabon (Enongoué 2001; Rossatanga-Rignault and Enongoué 2006; Tonda and Bernault 2009). Still, it is possible to identify several main subgenres with some common features. The first one, which can be called ‘popular *gaboma* rap music,’ is anchored in the way of talking and daily life in Libreville’s slums; while the second one comprises proponents of a tradi-rap genre who use symbols and instruments of religious and oral traditions and call for a return to roots.

Gaboma’s Toli Bangando and Body Language

One important element of localization for Gabonese rappers lies in the use of Toli Bangando, a slang born in Libreville’s slums and *mapanes* and still deeply connected to this territory. Used mainly by young men, it mixes English, French, vernacular Gabonese words and other African languages present

in Libreville, similar to the use of Camfranglais in Cameroon (Kiessling 2005) and Nouchi in Ivory Coast (Schumann 2009). In this generational urban slang, *toli* means talking, and *bangando* refers to the young boys who hang out on the streets. The word *gaboma* belongs to this urban slang and is used by the young people to express their 'alternative nationalism' (Kiwana 2014).

This linguistic creation attests to the sociolinguistic situation in urban Gabon, where no common language is shared by the different ethnic groups of the population. Contrary to Senegal or Congo, where African national languages are shared across the population, French is the only vehicular language commonly used by all the population in Libreville and in many Gabonese cities (Auzanneau 2001; Moussounda Ibouanga 2008). In comparison with Senegalese rappers, who have built a part of their style on their ability to rap both in Wolof and in French, Gabonese rappers often express frustration and a feeling of acculturation because they do not have their own language and feel doomed to use the linguistic legacy of the former colonizer. In reaction to this situation, Toli Bangando allows them to distinguish themselves from the French, and to create a generational marker; at the same time, contrary to vernacular languages, it protects them from ethnic or 'tribalist' presumptions (Bernault 2003) that can sometimes appear when rappers intend to rap in their mother tongue (Aterianus-Owanga 2013). This idea is often connected to the trope of the 'rapper-as-griot' asserted by different African and African-American rappers (Tang 2012; Sajani 2013; Aterianus-Owanga 2015).

Since 2000 Toli Bangando has had a strong presence in rap songs, and rap songs themselves have influenced the creation of new words and expressions in Toli Bangando. The main representatives of Toli Bangando are the rappers of the third generation that has appeared since 2000, such as F.A.N.G., the duo 241 or more recently the duo Tris and NG Bling. The slammer Le Wise (in Toli Bangando, 'wise' means clever or clear-sighted), who won the Slam Cup in Libreville in 2010, became so famous with his Bangando description of Gabonese daily life that he was hired by President Ali Bongo to record videos and slam tracks recounting the success of the president's politics of 'emergence' (see, for example, Le Wise's video 'Pog official,' promoting the economic

success of the city Port-Gentil). Slam is a kind of urban poetry competition invented in the United States in the 1980s; in Gabon, it has been spread by rappers and rap producers and is deeply connected to hip-hop culture and rap music. Famous rappers of the second generation are also known for their use of Toli Bangando. For example, the group Movaizhaleine released a track presented as a dictionary of Toli Bangando ('Le bilangom,' 2008).

In addition to this linguistic aspect, *gaboma* rap music also marks its anchoring in Libreville's popular life through particular dance moves. Invented in bars and nightclubs in Libreville or in hip-hop dance troupes, these dance moves associated with hip-hop music in Gabon play an important part in the animation of hip-hop shows and in audience appreciation of rap music videos. Since 2009 Gabonese towns have seen the appearance of several ephemeral urban dances linked to hip-hop rhythms that have nearly become national urban dances, similar to what *coupé décalé* has been for Ivory Coast, *ndombolo* for contemporary Congo or *azonto* for Ghana. *Ntcham*, *ndem* and *jazzé* are the main urban dances that have recently created enthusiasm among young Gabonese dancers and, consequently, rappers; most of them are a mix of pop dance and *bôlo*, a preexisting urban Gabonese solo dance performed both on the floor and standing up, characterized by little steps, movements of the bust and swaying hips. A distinctive feature of these dances is the movement of the arms around the body, which often symbolizes the demonstration of elegance, dress code and the boasting of the dancer. For rappers, the dance dimension of their music and their ability to 'divert' people in bars and nightclubs have become main criteria, transforming partly local rap music into an 'entertaining music,' corresponding to marketing and political factors.

Inventing Religious and Oral Traditions in Tradi-Rap Music

Another part of the creation of rap in Gabon has oriented music around a 'back to roots' identity project that affirms Gabonese traditions, leading to the incorporation of local instruments, and sometimes to the showcasing of ritual practices on stage. Some artists belonging to the Fang ethnic group, the demographic majority in Gabon, have, for example, employed *Mvet*, which is the name of a

musical instrument and also of a mythic epic (often also written *mvett*) that relates the origins of the world and the Fang people. *Mvet* poetry is traditionally sung in a guardhouse by initiated men (called *mbome mvet*) accompanied by the four-stringed harp-zither called *mvet* (Zame Avezo'o 2013). The epic *Mvet* has been appropriated by many artists in order to transform it from the oral to a written form, as in *The Mvett* written by Tsira Ndong Ndoutoume (1970, 1983, 1993). Since the beginning of rap practice in Gabon, *Mvet* poetry performance has constituted a core domain of inspiration for rappers from the Fang ethnic group, sampled to create typical instrumentals and beats. In 2010 Okoss, the grandson of the famous writer and *mbome mvet* Tsira Ndong Ndoutoume, recorded a rap album with his group 241 that reproduces oral recordings of his grandfather's *Mvet* and samples extracts of his texts.

Several artists produce rap songs and music videos in which they stage these traditional instruments or dress codes, and others have strived to create rap adaptations especially anchored in local provinces or ethnic groups, such as 'rap ikoku.' *Ikoku* is a traditional festivity dance celebrating fertility from the Punu ethnic group in South Gabon. A southern rap group of the early 2000s named Communauté Black popularized a rap genre based on the *ikoku* rhythm with great success in their province and among national audiences.

However, one group is especially known as the progenitor and most successful example of this kind of 'tradi-rap': Movaizhaleine. This duo unites a rapper and beatmaker from the north of Gabon with a rapper and singer from the south of Gabon who emerged in the 1990s. It has rapidly become very famous for the political engagement of its texts, its inspired depiction of symbolic, political and social life in Gabon, and its musical style, mixing electronic hip-hop beats and reggae rhythms and employing traditional instruments such as the *mvet* or the harp used in traditional religious rituals, the most famous of which is the *bwiti*. The *bwiti* is a male initiation society that developed from rituals of ancestor worship and originated in the south of Gabon but spread to a large western area of the country with many variations and syncretism with Christianity. Despite the fact that missionaries fought and demonized the *bwiti* and other traditional initiation societies during

colonization, since independence the *bwiti* has become one of the main elements of the construction of a national heritage and an authentic precolonial culture (Mary 2005; Bonhomme 2007).

The two performers who make up Movaizhaleine are both initiated members of this secret society and their singular rap style is known for the core place they dedicate to the *bwiti* and its symbols. They employ *bwiti* initiation as a metaphor for their quest for knowledge, inviting their audience and their fans to 'know themselves' and to return to traditional ways of talking, behaving, thinking and playing music. For example, the harp *ngombi* plays an important part in their staging and in the ideology that they intend to promote; this instrument is placed at the center of the stage during several moments of their scenes, and it is presented as a feminine character transmitting her message through the vehicle of the rapper's voice. This staging is then inspired by the traditional harp symbolism that is considered to be the voice of a female mythical ancestor (Bonhomme 2014) in the *bwiti* ritual and central in the rituals of several other initiation societies (Sallée 1978, 1985). In several songs, members of Movaizhaleine present themselves as members of the 'harp community' and they are frequently presented locally as authors of a so-called 'rap *bwiti*.' Thanks to this style, they were the most famous Gabonese rap group in African festivals and rap music networks in the first decade of the twenty-first century, touring in several other African countries and working with peers including Didier Awadi and Daara J., who are also involved in the promotion of a 'conscious' hip-hop with a pan-African message. Several contemporary rappers are continuing with this staging of *bwiti* on the rap scene.

Twenty-First-Century Transformations of Rap Music in Gabon

Around the turn of the millennium, the tremendous growth of enthusiasm for hip-hop drove some wealthy individuals, promoters and sponsors to invest in new means of production in this burgeoning musical market. Some big labels were created at the beginning of the 2000s, under the oversight of individuals close to the presidential family (such as AFJ, EBEN, Promedia and, later, Mayena Production). The new structures that have supported the coming of the third generation of rappers have thus promoted

a close relationship with authorities. The arrival of private producers and funding sources, linked to the broader emergence of big markets for hip-hop music in African countries (mainly in Nigeria, Ghana and South Africa), has allowed the construction of a stronger system of production of rap and R&B, the upgrading of sound and video productions, and the growth of entrepreneurship among rappers and hip-hop artists (beatmakers, dancers, DJs).

Furthermore, since the election of Ali Bongo in 2009, rap networks and systems of production have gone through many transformations. During the political shift that followed after the death of Omar Bongo in June 2009 and his 42 years in power, rappers played an important part and were the main artists involved in the campaign for the presidential elections. Several rappers from the group Hay'oe, Tina and other famous rappers produced a song that became very popular among young people and that expressed their claims to the future president. Initially apolitical and directed toward a hypothetical candidate in the presidential elections, this song entitled 'La parole aux jeunes' [Young People May Now Speak] was used in favor of the candidate Ali Bongo as soon as the official campaign started, and these rappers officially asserted their support of him. They participated in Bongo's campaign meetings all over the country, and they even invited him on stage to do a rap performance during a huge rap show in Libreville in August 2013. This collaboration and this performance by Ali Bongo helped him gain a new image, positioning him close to young people's interests and musical tastes (Aterianus 2011). Consequently, Bongo's relationship with the hip-hop community has allowed him to modernize the image of the state and to assert that his election could be synonymous with a change, although his candidacy was criticized by opponents and by some citizens as a perpetuation of a dynastic system.

After Bongo's election, one rapper (Massassi) and a rap producer (Joe Da Crazy Boy), both of whom were engaged in the campaign, were promoted to the position of project executives (*chargés de mission*) in the government. Also, new radio stations and recording studios were created and have provided new funding for hip-hop activities. International hip-hop celebrities are often invited to Libreville for big shows, whose costs lead to some criticism

among underground artists. Still in deep connection with the political elites, some rappers have also been increasingly involved in helping to promote the president's program or to perform as music entertainers. While underground rap activities tend to decrease and informal censorship leads to the erasure of some of the direct criticism expressed against the source of the country's social and political crises, the huge success of popular R&B from the United States and Nigeria has driven a growth in 'mainstream' and commercial music dealing with gender issues, fun, quests for material wealth and symbols of success or fame. Nevertheless, in the diaspora, through social networks or informal labels and systems of production, some rappers and slammers maintain a critical stance concerning Gabonese society and governance. In 2016, on the edge of the presidential elections, several rappers (such as Keurtyce E., Movaizhaleine, Buung Pinz, or Saïk1ri with his track 'Mister Zero') actively denounced in rap songs and public marches the authoritarianism of Ali Bongo's regime and his candidacy for a second presidential mandate.

Whether in one or the other part of this multifaceted and sometimes conflicted movement, different groups and individuals use rap music as a vehicle to debate their diverging conceptions of national identity, political commitment and society. Considered renegade music in the 1990s, in the late 2010s rap and hip-hop music are presently recognized as the musical expression of a generation that appeared with the democratic transition and have grown up with the sociopolitical transformations consecutive with the privatization of the state and the structural adjustment plans. Hip-hop has become, for members of this generation, a medium to connect themselves to the elders and to local traditions, to invent new national identifications, to create new musical careers or to access local celebrity, and to enter into a dialog with broader black cosmopolitanism and pan-African claims in the Black Atlantic.

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ALICE ATERIANUS-OWANGA

Hip-Hop in Kenya

In Kenya, hip-hop is the one of the most popular musics among urban youth. In many contexts, hip-hop comprises the following elements: MCing (rapping or chanting rhyming lyrics that are accompanied by a strong rhythm), beatboxing (the art of producing drum beats, rhythm and musical sounds using one's mouth, lips, tongue and voice), DJing, breakdancing and graffiti art. In Kenya, however, the most widespread forms of hip-hop involve rapping and DJing, with only a few manifestations of graffiti art and breakdancing that happen in controlled spaces (such as sponsored hip-hop events in Nairobi at which artists are provided with canvases). Since a majority of artists depend on computer-generated beats for their music, there is no culture of beatboxing. Kenyan hip-hop themes focus on the experiences of the artists and their immediate locale/context. The music is composed primarily in Sheng (a mixture of Swahili and English), appeals mostly to younger audiences (under 35 years of age) and seeks to highlight the experiences of the socially, politically