



Echoes of power: An analysis of political themes in selected political songs in Zambia

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to analyse the themes of political songs from various political eras in Zambia. A total of 12 participants; 6 musicians and 6 politicians were sampled purposively and by use of snow ball sampling for the study. A case study design was used for aligning the study influenced by the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theory. The study found that political songs in Zambia frequently address themes such as leadership critique, corruption, political mobilisation, national unity, socio-economic issues, and cultural heritage. Key determinants shaping these compositions include the political context, campaign strategies, historical and cultural significance, media influence, and public sentiment. Characterised by rich figurative language, these songs function as influential tools for political communication, social mobilization, and cultural expression within the Zambian society. Overall, the findings suggest that Zambian political songs play a significant role in shaping public opinion, promoting a sense of national identity, and encouraging civic engagement. By addressing socio-political issues through metaphorical language, media influence, and cultural heritage, these songs both reflect and shape the socio-political landscape in Zambia.

Keywords: Political songs, lyrical content, themes, content analysis, Zambia

Introduction

Political songs have long been essential in conveying societal and political messages, reflecting and shaping political movements and ideologies across different times and cultures (Nchindila, 2008, Koloko, 2012^[23, 32], Agawu, 2003 & Nzewi, 2007). Scholars offer diverse perspectives on the concept and societal role of political music, viewing it as a tool for both advocacy and reflection. Turino (2008) defines political music as compositions explicitly designed to address political issues, while Shuker (2017) describes it as a vehicle for protest and social commentary, often seen in genres like folk, rock, and hip-hop. This music tends to convey overtly political messages, yet Wai-Chung Ho (2012) questions the extent of audience engagement with music on a political level, suggesting that not all listeners interpret it as political. Some scholars argue that political music's identity extends beyond content, influenced by cultural associations, as seen with the censorship of Western pop music in the Eastern Bloc (Trupej, 2017). Themes of cultural identity and representation are also central, with Kusters (2017) emphasizing music's role in reinforcing political ideologies. Stylistically, political songs often employ figurative language, such as satire, similes, and metaphors, to enhance relatability because they resonate with listeners, making messages more accessible (Manderson, 2000 & Dobrovol'skij & Piirainen, 2021). However, Bloch and Bloch (1998) argue that metaphor and symbolism deepen listener engagement with the socio-political context.

In pre-independence Zambia during the 1960s, music played a pivotal role in uniting freedom fighters and fostering solidarity, as Namuyamba *et al.* (2018)^[31] highlight. It became a powerful tool of political rhetoric, deeply intertwined with themes of nationhood and patriotism (Makumba, 2018). Beyond its cultural significance, music served as a means of inspiring the masses to challenge colonial authority during the independence struggle (Masiye, 2021; Chilufya, 2017)^[27]. However, the extent to

which music drove real political change, as opposed to merely symbolizing the independence movement, warrants critical examination. In the early post-independence years under UNIP era, music continued to play a significant role, aiding in the consolidation of Zambia's national identity and fostering unity among its citizens (Kaira, 2015; Chilala, 2016; Mwanza, 2013). Similarly, during the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) era, the interplay between music and politics became even more pronounced. Music functioned both as a platform for dissent and a tool for state propaganda, as seen during Frederick Chiluba's rise to power in the 1990s (Namuyamba *et al.* (2018)^[31].

Throughout Zambia's political history, music has articulated popular grievances and reflected public sentiment, but its effectiveness in shaping political outcomes, beyond rallying support, remains unclear (Simungala, Jimaima & Mwansa, 2023)^[40, 41]. Songs like "*Donchi kubeba*" encapsulated public dissatisfaction with the ruling party, yet the extent to which music drove political reform or influenced governance remains a subject of inquiry (Cheeseman & Hinfelaar 2010)^[5]. Ultimately, the role of music in Zambian politics raises critical questions about its function as either a transformative force or a populist tool for political messaging.

During the Patriotic Front (PF) era, political music played a prominent role in rallying support and amplifying party messaging. Artists produced music that directly critiqued the government "*Donchi kubeba*" while "*Dununa rivesi*" supported PF leaders, especially former president Michael Sata and his successor Edgar Lungu. Music was strategically used as a tool for campaigning, with party-aligned musicians performing at rallies, spreading PF ideologies, and promoting national pride (Almeida & Martín, 2022)^[2]. The association with popular musicians helped PF resonate with grassroots supporters, who viewed the music as a form of solidarity with party aims (Lamba, 2023)^[24].

In contrast, the United Party for National Development (UPND) has used political music to symbolize its commitment to change, particularly in addressing corruption and promoting economic recovery. The song “*Koswe mumpoto*” by Pilato in 2017, was a critique of the PF government’s governance, economic challenges, and alleged abuses of power. Pilato’s song which metaphorically critiqued the then-ruling PF, demonstrated how music became a medium for resistance and political critique under the PF regime (Cheyeka, Mwale & Chita, 2022) [6]. Since coming to power, UPND continues to use music like “Nankale, and Twendeko forward” at rallies and in public communications to express party achievements and goals, the need for Hakainde Hichilema (HH) to continue with his leadership albeit with a greater emphasis on accountability and transparency, aligning with its promises of reform (Mubanga, 2021).

Aim

The aim of this study is to analyse the themes and lyrics of political songs across various political eras in Zambia, viewing them as a form of discourse that mirrors and shapes Zambia’s socio-political realities.

Research Questions

1. What recurrent themes are prevalent in political songs from 1960 to 2016?
2. What lyrical composition strategies are employed in political songs from 1960 to 2016?
3. How is metaphor, symbolism, and cultural references utilised in political songs from 1960 to 2016?

Theoretical framework

This study was grounded in the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theoretical framework, which provides a robust methodology for deconstructing the linguistic and rhetorical strategies employed in political songs in Zambia (Thatelo, 2022). CDA was selected for this study because its analytical constructs are well-suited for examining music as a form of language within its social and political context. In line with the study’s objectives, CDA offered analytical tools to explore the recurrent themes, lyrical composition, and rhetorical strategies used in political songs across different political eras in Zambia (Sahmeni & Afifah, 2019). This framework enabled a detailed analysis of the linguistic structures and discursive strategies embedded in the lyrics, revealing the underlying power dynamics and ideological constructs that these songs embody. By applying CDA, the study could assess how political songs function as a form of discourse that reflects and reproduces socio-political realities, particularly through their use of metaphor, symbolism, and cultural references (Zienkowski, 2019) [44] in accordance with the study’s second and third objectives.

Statement of the problem

Political songs have been influential in conveying socio-political messages, shaping public opinion, and reflecting Zambia’s socio-political climate across different eras (Lamba, 2023 & Jennings, Muzhingi, & Semba. 2024) [16, 24]. Despite their prominence, there is a lack of comprehensive analysis on the content as a medium that mirrors and reinforces Zambia’s socio-political landscape. scholarly works on political music in Zambia have in most cases delimited their works to specific cases such as Banja

and Walubita (2022) [3] whose focus was on the content of election campaign 2016 prior to 2016b presidential and general elections while Simungala, Jimaima & Mwansa, (2023) [40, 41] only addressed the lyrics contained in “*Dununa Reverse*” which was politically charged. This research aims to fill this gap by exploring the themes and messaging of Zambian political songs across various historical periods.

Significance of the study

This study has broad significance beyond academia, with important implications for Zambia’s education sector, music industry, and communities. Integrating its findings into curricula can deepen students’ understanding of Zambian history, politics, and culture, fostering interdisciplinary learning. For musicians, the study provides insights into political songwriting, enabling music to serve as a tool for social change. Additionally, the research empowers communities with historical insights, cultural appreciation, and support for informed civic engagement and advocacy.

Literature review

This literature review presents the historical background and development of political songs in Zambia.

1. Historical context of political songs in Zambia

Zambia’s independence struggle was closely linked with political activism, where music emerged as a key tool for mobilization and resistance (Masiye, 2021) [27]. Mwakikagile (2009) [30] notes that nationalist movements, particularly the UNIP under Kenneth Kaunda, effectively used songs like “*Tiyende Pamodzi*” to rally mass support. However, viewing music merely as a vehicle for expressing the desire for freedom oversimplifies its role (Nchindila, 2008) [32]. The emotionally charged lyrics not only fostered unity but also conveyed strategic political messages, reinforcing party loyalty (Masiye, 2021) [27]. However, Mwakikagile’s work does not fully explore how these songs acted as instruments of both control and resistance. The significance of music in Zambian politics evolved post-independence. Banja and Walubita (2022) [3] argue that during the 2016 elections, music functioned as a means of advocating specific political actions while expressing partisan loyalties. Their analysis connects political campaign songs to the functional theory of political campaign discourse but raises questions about the extent of their influence on political outcomes versus reinforcing existing biases. While their findings are compelling, they may overlook broader cultural factors that also shape voter perceptions. Silongwa and Lubungu (2023) [40] broaden this analysis from the 1950s to 2021, emphasizing music’s dual role in fostering regime change and communicating political dissatisfaction. Their work suggests that music transcended entertainment, acting as a medium for political agency. However, it prompts critical inquiry into whether music has shifted from grassroots mobilization to a tool for propaganda manipulated by political elites. Understanding how political actors use political songs to sway public sentiment is crucial in comprehending its role in political power dynamics.

2. Thematic content and artistic expression in political songs

Political songs are vital in shaping societal conditions, offering insights into power dynamics and ideological

narratives. Steinfelds (2013)^[42] emphasizes their dual role as mirrors of political discourse and tools for persuasion and resistance. Street (2013)^[43] points out that political songs articulate themes ranging from national identity to calls for reform (Knights, 2016)^[21]. In Zambia, this tradition has persisted through both nationalist movements and the evolving political landscape. However, the thematic content of these songs is complex. Political songs can serve as instruments to reinforce or challenge dominant power structures (McDonald, 2013)^[28]. Redmond (2014)^[37] and Mwakikagile (2009)^[30] suggest that themes are shaped by specific political contexts, such as independence movements. While Mwakikagile emphasizes songs' unifying role, Clarke (2011)^[8] argues that themes initially employed against colonialism were later co-opted by post-independence leaders like Kaunda to solidify their power, highlighting the dual nature of political themes. In Zambia, themes of resistance against authoritarianism and social inequality are integral to political movements (Nicholls, 2014)^[33]. Silongwa and Lubungu (2023)^[40] note the pivotal role of protest songs in challenging regimes from the 1950s to 2021. However, not all protest songs directly call for action; some use metaphor and satire to critique the status quo (Hill, 2018)^[15]. Esteve-Faubel *et al.* (2019)^[11] caution against overestimating protest songs' impact on political change, noting that their effectiveness often relies on broader socio-political contexts. Jolaosho (2019) asserts that emotional resonance alone may not dismantle entrenched elites without organized movements backing them. Moreover, the thematic evolution of protest songs post-independence highlights a paradox. Music that once resisted colonial oppression transformed into a medium critiquing domestic governance (Lipsitz, 2023)^[25]. This shift reflects the dynamic relationship between political power and music. As political landscapes change, so do protest songs' targets, illustrating the fluidity of resistance themes (Carey, 2020)^[4].

During the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) era, themes reflecting power struggles became prevalent. Cheyeka (2016)^[7] notes the ideological nature of songs during the 2016 elections, critiquing neoliberal economic reforms. Yet, songs glorifying leaders can serve as propaganda, obscuring the negative consequences of their policies (Nchindila, 2008)^[32]. This necessitates a critical assessment of how power themes in political songs either challenge or reinforce the status quo.

Symbolism and cultural references are also vital elements in political songs (Kalinde, 2024; Oloko, 2017; Kalinde, 2016)^[17, 18, 35]. These devices allow for indirect political commentary, often connecting contemporary issues with historical narratives (Dor, 2015)^[10]. However, their effectiveness hinges on audience accessibility and interpretation (Moore, 2016)^[29]. Cultural references can also be appropriated by political leaders to legitimize their rule, complicating the relationship between music, politics, and identity (Kalinde, 2024; Knights, 2016)^[18, 21].

3. Literary and oratorical analysis of political song lyrics

The intersection of music and politics, particularly through lyrical analysis, highlights music's rhetorical potential (Garratt, 2019)^[13]. Padgett's (2021) analysis of Childish Gambino's "This is America" reveals the layers of symbolism in both the lyrics and the accompanying video,

highlighting the critique of racial injustices. This raises the question of music's effectiveness as a political tool (Rios, 2021)^[38]. The complex symbolism may resonate primarily with those already engaged with the issues, posing a challenge for broader mobilization.

In contrast, Nkoala's (2013)^[34] examination of South African struggle songs illustrates the power of simple, direct rhetoric in political music. Struggle songs were accessible and participatory, fostering a collective consciousness (Shelemay, 2011)^[39]. In Zambia, "*Tiyende pamodzi*" embodies this effectiveness by distilling complex political ideas into emotionally charged phrases, appealing to a wide audience (Genovese, 2023)^[14]. However, it is crucial to consider the socio-political context in which these songs emerged. They were produced during direct political struggles, raising questions about their effectiveness in less urgent environments (Kazachok, 2023)^[20]. The analysis of campaign music in Zambia highlights another dimension of political songs' potency (Namuyamba *et al.*, 2018)^[31]. Campaign songs reflect candidates' values but can oversimplify complex issues (Garratt, 2019)^[13]. The emotive power often relies on vague themes, which can reduce political debates to emotional appeals (Vermeulen & Kalinde, 2016)^[17, 19].

The disconnect between artists' intentions and the political appropriation of their work complicates the use of campaign music (Martiniello & Lafleur, 2008)^[26]. Instances of artists objecting to their music being used politically indicate that songs' meanings can be reinterpreted, often beyond the artists' control (Wiencek *et al.*, 2018). This raises questions about the implications of lyrical complexity, as techniques like metaphor and repetition can enhance emotional impact but also risk oversimplification (Way & McKerrell, 2017). The Zambian song "*Donchi Kubeba*" employs metaphor to critique past political failures while offering hope for change (Cheeseman & Hinfelaar, 2010)^[5]. Such metaphors can be powerful yet may be abstract for broader audiences (Kovecses, 2015). Repetition can amplify emotional resonance but can lead to simplification, reducing political ideas to catchy slogans (Koch, 2017; Kalinde, 2016)^[17, 22].

Methods

The study employed a qualitative methodology embedded in a case study research design, underpinned by the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theory. This combination enabled an in-depth, contextualized exploration of each song, providing a comprehensive understanding of their political messages, themes, lyrical composition, strategies, and use of figurative language. The study was conducted in Lusaka, Zambia and encountered limitations in especially with having FGD with politicians who opted for interviews only. Further, some musicians declined being part due to fear of being victimised pertaining to songs they had composed which resulted into using snow ball sampling that was not planned for.

Sample Size

The sample comprised 12 participants, equally distributed between political and general musicians (6) and politicians (6) in Lusaka.

Sampling Procedure

Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were utilized to select participants. Purposive sampling strategically

selected individuals with specific characteristics relevant to the research question (Gall *et al.*, 2007) ^[11]. Participants were chosen based on their expertise in political music, ensuring an engaged sample. Snowball sampling further enhanced the sample's relevance, where initial participants referred additional experts who met the research criteria (Parker *et al.*, 2019) ^[36].

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection involved face-to-face in-depth interviews with five politicians and five musicians, with phone interviews conducted for one politician and one musician outside Lusaka. These methods empowered participant voices by prioritising their experiences, providing rich qualitative insights into political songs.

Data Collection Instruments

In-depth interview guides and a Focus group discussion (FGD) guide were utilized to collect data from the twelve participants.

Credibility and trustworthiness

This study achieved credibility through source verification, contextual analysis, and critical examination of Zambia's historical context from 1960 to 2016. Trustworthiness was ensured through thematic analysis, triangulation, and rigorous coding, yielding insights into the experiences of individuals involved in political music (Creswell, 2014) ^[9]. By employing diverse data collection methods, the study enhanced credibility and trustworthiness.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved organizing and interpreting collected data to elucidate the phenomenon (Akinyode, & Khan, 2018) ^[11]. Thematic analysis was applied to interview and focus group data, as well as historical data from political songs and secondary sources. Key steps included data

organization and thematic coding to identify recurring patterns and themes related to political music in Zambia.

Ethical Consideration

Permission was obtained from the Zambia Musicians Association (ZAM) and relevant political authorities prior to the study. Participants were informed of their voluntary involvement and the option to withdraw at any time. Their identities were kept anonymous by using general identity names as musicians and politicians.

Findings and Discussion

1. Themes in political songs

The findings from interviews and FGD with both musicians and politicians indicated that the themes in political songs have evolved significantly between 1960 and 2016. These themes encompass liberation, corruption, critique of leadership, political mobilization, unity, party principles, policy agendas, and core values. Participants noted that these themes are often conveyed through song lyrics, emphasising the party's position on key issues.

Five musicians observed that, during the UNIP era, songs like "*Common man*" critiqued Kenneth Kaunda's leadership, specifically his unfulfilled promises to address social and economic inequalities. A total of 10 participants of which four musicians and six politicians referenced "*Tiyende pamodzi*," emphasizing its portrayal of themes of national unity, patriotism, and cultural identity. Furthermore, politicians highlighted that songs such as "*Koswe mumpoto*" and "*Donchi kubeba*" were widely utilized during the Movement for MMD and PF periods to mobilize supporters, campaign, critique the government, and expose corruption. Both participants emphasised that in all the eras, both ruling and opposition political parties use political songs whose themes either exposes the unacceptable practices or support the government of the day. Participants offered the following perspectives on themes contained in political parties as illustrated in the table below:

Table 1: The recurring themes found in the five selected songs

Songs	Themes				
	Critique of leadership and corruption	Political mobilization and campaigning	National unity and patriotism	Social and economic issues	Cultural identity and heritage
<i>Koswe mu Mpoto</i>	✓	✓		✓	
<i>Common Man</i>	✓	✓		✓	
<i>Dununa Rivesi</i>		✓			✓
<i>Donchi Kubeba</i>	✓	✓			
<i>Tiyende Pamodzi</i>			✓		✓

The findings reveal that Zambian political songs reflect socio-political shifts over time, aligning with CDA's view of discourse as both a reflection and instrument of ideological power (Zienkowski, 2019) ^[44] Mwakikagile (2009) ^[30] highlights how cultural products, such as music, document and shape African socio-political realities. Through evolving themes, Zambian political songs offer a unique narrative and critique, acting as cultural texts that mobilize sentiment and shape public consciousness (Sahmeni & Afifah, 2019). Early independence-era songs under UNIP, for example, critique post-independence leaders like Kenneth Kaunda with songs like "*Common man*" serving as counter-discourses, challenging Kaunda's

governance. Knights (2016) ^[21] suggests music reflects and responds to power dynamics, resonating with CDA's view of discourse as both product and agent of power. Themes in political songs during the Kaunda era encouraged resilience and unity, aligning with UNIP's national cohesion agenda (Masiye, 2021) ^[27]. This is in line with Steinfels (2013) ^[42] posits how music historically reinforces solidarity in politically charged contexts. In addition, themes in "*Tiyende pamodzi*", emblematic of national pride and identity, illustrates CDA's perspective on discourse constructing social identity. Cheyeka (2016) ^[7] highlights patriotic songs' role in promoting shared identity and reinforcing state ideologies through the themes therein.

This song shapes collective consciousness and reinforces Zambia’s unity under the UNIP agenda, aligning with CDA’s focus on discourse in identity formation.

During the MMD and PF eras, political songs increasingly carried themes of critique and mobilization, often targeting government corruption. Nchindila (2008) [32] observes how political songs shifted from post-colonial unity to resistance against corruption and inequality themes, reflecting CDA’s view of discourse as resistance. Songs like “*Koswe Mumpoto*” and “*Donchi Kubeba*” exemplify music’s ability to challenge dominant structures and rally public dissent.

The findings suggest that themes in Zambian political songs shift in response to political developments, with a notable transition in focus from external colonial critiques to scrutiny of domestic governance after independence (Masiye, 2021 & Lipsitz, 2023) [25, 27]. Music also serves as a platform for disseminating political ideologies and anti-corruption themes, as Redmond (2014) [37] notes in his study of African political movements using music to challenge authority. CDA emphasizes how discourse both sustains and challenges power, with themes in political songs acting as counter-discourses that align with public sentiment against government failures. Kalinde (2024) [18] and Street (2013) [43] supports this, arguing that music is both descriptive and transformative within cultural history, echoing CDA’s focus on discourse reshaping social reality. Through varied themes, Zambian political songs both capture public aspirations and actively shape collective consciousness and social resistance.

2. Determinants of political song composition

The findings from musicians and politicians indicate that determinants of political song composition in Zambia range from strategically utilising lyrical composition and a range of musical techniques to connect deeply with public concerns, hopes, and socio-political issues. Participants added that the lyrics employed in political songs are very

catchy in order for for the songs to be memorable (Kalinde, 2024; Vermeulen & Kalinde, 2016) [17, 18, 19].

Central to these determinants was the intentional use of relatable language and culturally resonant themes that mirrored the lives and ideologies of the electorate. By choosing lyrics that directly addressed societal challenges, these songs quickly captured the attention of listeners, particularly when their themes reflected voter demographics or pressing political issues. Further, results indicated that the resonance of these songs with audiences was amplified through repetitive short phrases (ostinato) rhythms and melodies tailored to appeal to a wide audience, enhancing their popularity (Kalinde, 2016) [17].

In addition, politicians emphasised use of figurative language, especially metaphors and symbolism, became crucial tools for circumventing censorship and engaging listeners on multiple interpretive levels (Kalinde, 2024) [18]. Participants mentioned that symbolic elements, such as animal and object metaphors, were often employed to subtly represent political figures and actions, allowing musicians to convey criticism or support without directly naming individuals (Kalinde, 2024) [18]. Songs like “*Dununa reverse*” and “*Koswe mumpoto*” are prominent examples, using these techniques to both reflect public opinion and communicate political ideologies in ways that challenged or endorsed specific leaders and policies.

Both participants echoed that external factors, such as political climate, financial sponsorship, and societal challenges, influenced composition of political songs. Musicians attributed to the fact that they often incorporated their personal experiences and the broader public’s concerns to ensure that the lyrical themes resonated with the collective emotions of their audiences. Politicians stated that by recognising the power of music to mobilize and unify voters, they shaped these themes, aligning song content with their ideological goals and pay attention to the selection of lyrics which will be appealing to them and the audience.

Table 2: Summary of key lyrics and strategies used in composition of s political song of five selected songs.

Song	Excerpts/Key lyrics	Composition strategy
<i>Common Man</i>	<p>“<i>wemufyahis wewa tufyala niwe</i>” (you are our father “<i>tatuleikuta ubwali bulecepa</i>” (we are getting satisfied nshima is little) “<i>mayo trade union, utulandileko. Batulundileko indalama, pantu umutengo wafintu naunina</i>” (Our mother trade union speak on our behalf they increase our salaries)</p>	Emotional resonance and relatability: representing the struggles of ordinary citizens, fostering empathy and connection with everyday Zambians facing economic hardship
<i>Tiyende pamodzi</i>	<p>“<i>Tiyende pamodzi ndi mtima umo</i>” (Let’s move together with one heart) “<i>Tioloke Limpopo</i>” (we cross river Limpopo)</p>	Unity and Mobilization - emphasizes collective action and unity, encouraging listeners to align with a shared purpose and national vision.
<i>Koswe mumpoto</i>	<p>“<i>Batupela cabbage ati awe cabbage iyoo</i>” (we have been given cabbage) “<i>Batupela nyamasoya twalya kofye panono twakashya</i>” (we have been soya chunks it’s too much) “<i>Kwaisa king cobra</i>” (there comes cobra snake) “<i>koswe incito yakwe kwiba tabomba</i>” (the work of rat is stealing not working) “<i>Kubwendo bwakwa king cobra kwalingila ba koswe nomba</i>” (in the snake’s hole a rat has entered) “<i>Mwe bantu please bukeni moneni tembeba ni koswe</i>” (people wake up this a mouse and not a rat)</p>	Symbolism and Satire- to represent corrupt or undesirable political figures, allowing critique without directly naming them.
<i>Donchi kubeba</i>	<p>“<i>Don’t kubeba wilalila ashii</i>” (be quite don’t cry) “<i>Panunka untuntu ntuntu</i>” (something fishy is smelling) “<i>Don’t ku beba na penta ne linso</i>” (dont tell them he has painted an eye) “<i>Cilongoma catulika</i>” (someone’s hole is exposed) “<i>Umucele wasampauka walepuka</i>” (bag of salt is torn)</p>	

<p><i>Dununa reverse</i></p>	<p>"Adada munalemba " (daddy you had endorsed) "Batila icidunu cilalisha abanike tabasangwako cabe" (the game of ball makes one to cry, young ones do not participate) "bola naikosa" (the game is tough) "grade 7 seventeen times per hour, five times ulepona cabe" (you are always failing) "Nakwela bus zinalakwe, double decker, kalusa sangaikwele" (I got on a double decker bus a looser cannot get on it)</p>	<p>Irony and humour – song is a satirical take on political direction, using humour and irony to reflect public disillusionment with the status quo.</p>
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This study demonstrates how composition of Zambian political songs strategically use lyrics and musical techniques to reflect and influence socio-political discourse. Anchored in CDA, the findings show that political songs serve as powerful sites of resistance and ideological reinforcement, employing symbolic and culturally resonant themes to shape public sentiment (Fairclough, 1992). By aligning language, structure, and themes with the lived experiences of the electorate, these songs resonate deeply with their audience, echoing Nchindila’s (2008)^[32] assertion that effective musical communication relies on cultural intimacy.

The use of repetition in Zambian political songs, such as in “Dununa reverse” and “Koswe mumpoto”, is particularly impactful. Repetitive phrases and ostinato rhythms amplify emotional resonance, fostering unity and collective identity among listeners (Bibian, Koch, 2017)^[22]. However, while repetition makes songs memorable, it can simplify complex political ideas, reducing them to slogans. This balance between accessibility and depth highlights the dual function of repetition in music, as argued by Way and McKerrell (2017), where inclusivity may come at the cost of ideological depth.

Figurative language, including metaphors and symbolism, adds another layer of sophistication to Zambian political songs’ composition. CDA theory emphasises that figurative elements allow for multiple interpretations, enabling musicians to critique governance or support ideologies imperceptibly (Fairclough, 1995). Animal and object metaphors, as seen in “Koswe mumpoto”, enable composers to bypass censorship while engaging audiences on deeper levels. These strategies align with Namuyamba *et al.* (2018)^[31], who observe that metaphors in Zambian music effectively balance critique with cultural sensitivity.

The external political climate also shapes these compositions. Politicians capitalize on music's mobilizing power, using it to align with ideological goals and connect with the electorate. This finding aligns with Masiye (2021)^[27], who highlights how Zambian political songs intertwine personal experiences with public concerns, creating shared emotional landscapes that resonate during periods of

uncertainty. The ability of music to reflect societal challenges, as noted by Way and McKerrell (2017), reinforces its role as a unifying force and a vehicle for ideological expression.

3. Use of figurative language in political songs

Participants revealed that in Zambian, political songs from 1960 to 2016, figurative language particularly metaphor, symbolism, and cultural references has been strategically employed to articulate complex political messages. Both participants affirmed that metaphors like those in “Donchi kubeba” and “Koswe mumpoto” serve as powerful devices for critiquing political practices and conveying political sentiment in a way that engages the public while safeguarding artists from direct censorship. These metaphors often reflect specific socio-political grievances or aspirations, transforming abstract issues into relatable critiques that resonate widely with audiences (Kovecses, 2015). Musicians stressed the cultural relevance of these metaphors amplified by their alignment with collective Zambian experiences, which helps solidify these songs as rallying points for political expression and mobilization.

Further, it was established from both participants that symbolism and cultural references further enhance the impact of these political songs by connecting them to national identity and shared historical contexts (Kalinde, 2024; Oloko, 2017)^[18, 35]. Songs such as “Tiyende pamodzi” draw on collective experiences of the independence movement and the ability to foster unity through clear, accessible messaging. Politicians said that the use of animals and culturally resonant objects as symbols helps deepen emotional engagement by representing political figures and ideologies in indirect ways, allowing musicians to subtly critique or endorse specific leaders and policies. Musicians added that the use of animals and objects builds collective memory by embedding political narratives within culturally resonant symbols, making them easily interpretable and relatable to listeners, a perspective supported by Kalinde (2016)^[17] and Way & McKerrell (2017), who emphasize the role of cultural symbolism in reinforcing shared political and social identities.

Table 3: Case Study of Figurative Language used in 5 selected Political Songs

Songs	Figurative language		
	Metaphors and similes	Cultural References	Symbolism
Koswe mu Mpotu	"Kubwendo bwakwa king cobra kwalingila ba koswe nomba"		"Kwaisa king cobra" "koswe, mumpoto, Kubwendo"
Common Man	"trade union,		"ubunga, amashitolo
Dununa Rivesi	"Adada munalemba " "grade 7 seventeen times per hour, five times ulepona cabe"		"icidunu" "bola naikosa" "Nakwela bus zinalakwe, double decker"
Donchi Kubeba	"Cilongoma catulika" "Don't ku beba na penta ne linso"		
Tiyende Pamodzi		"tiyende pamodzi, ndimtima umo"	"Tioloke Limpopo"

From the findings, it is established that Zambian political songs use figurative language not just for emotional appeal but as a strategy for dialogue. The CDA suggests that figurative language in political music does more than entertainment instead it shapes perceptions and reinforces or disrupts political ideologies (Fairclough, 1992). Metaphors and cultural references, such as those in “*Donchi kubeba*,” work on both conscious and subconscious levels to deepen audience engagement and facilitate understanding, as argued by Garratt (2019) [13]. However, this strategy carries the risk of oversimplification, as pointed out by Kovecses (2015), whose findings indicate that while metaphors foster connection, they can also abstract complex political issues, potentially limiting their interpretive depth and accessibility. Furthermore, the reliance on symbolism, especially animal metaphors, reflects what Way and McKerrell (2017) describe as the power of figurative language to reveal discrepancies between political rhetoric and reality. The songs’ use of symbolic critique allows artists to bypass censorship while engaging the audience in multiple interpretative layers, which builds both emotional resonance and critical awareness. However, as Jolaosho (2019) and Padgett (2021) emphasize, while these figurative techniques can raise awareness, they may fall short of mobilizing substantive change without structured political action. CDA lightens this dynamic, revealing how these rhetorical devices balance between emotional resonance and ideological critique, stressing both the power and limitations of figurative language as a vehicle for public engagement and political discourse.

Conclusion

In conclusion, political songs in Zambia from 1960 to 2016 encapsulate a rich drapery of socio-political narratives, offering insights into the nation’s evolving landscape. Recurrent themes such as resistance against colonial rule, national pride, anti-corruption, and governance critiques reflect the shifting aspirations and frustrations of Zambians over time. These songs serve as both mirrors of public sentiment and tools for shaping collective identity stressing the dual role of discourse in reflecting and influencing societal change.

The lyrical composition of these songs showcases deliberate strategies that resonate deeply with the populace. Through the use of relatable language, repetition, and rhetorical techniques, musicians amplify public sentiment and foster a sense of unity. The interplay between musicians and political figures further emphasizes the songs’ roles as mobilizing tools, transcending mere entertainment to become instruments of ideological reinforcement or challenge.

Metaphor, symbolism, and cultural references emerge as powerful tools within these compositions, enabling musicians to navigate sensitive political contexts while engaging audiences emotionally and intellectually. By implanting cultural symbols and figurative language, the songs not only critique governance but also strengthen the collective consciousness of Zambians. However, as CDA highlights, these symbolic elements, while fostering awareness and reflection, may oversimplify complex issues, necessitating broader political action for substantive change.

Implication of the study

The study's findings suggest that Zambian political songs not only echo but actively shape public consciousness and ideological discourse, highlighting music's dual role in reflecting socio-political realities and mobilizing collective identity and resistance within the nation's evolving political landscape.

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