

Clash of Titans: The Musical Rivalry Between Jah Prayzah And Winky D in Zimbabwe's Contemporary Music Scene.

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DOI : <https://doi.org/10.51583/IJLTEMAS.2025.140400017>

Received: 30 March 2025; Accepted: 19 March 2025; Published: 30 April 2025

Abstract: This study explores the long-standing and multifaceted musical rivalry between two of Zimbabwe's most prominent artists, Jah Prayzah and Winky D, from 2010 to 2024. It investigates how this feud has evolved from early collaborations to pronounced ideological and cultural opposition, analysing its lyrical content, media portrayal, and public reception. Central to the study is the question of how this rivalry reflects deeper socio-political, generational, and class-based tensions within Zimbabwean society. The research is guided by Antonio Gramsci's Cultural Hegemony Theory, which provides a powerful framework for understanding how dominant ideologies are reinforced or resisted through popular culture. Using a qualitative, desk-based methodology, the study relies on secondary data from newspapers, online entertainment portals, social media platforms (e.g., YouTube, Twitter, Facebook), music videos, and podcast interviews. Thematic content analysis was employed to extract patterns around state affiliation, fan division, lyrical symbolism, and political expression. Findings reveal that the rivalry is not merely artistic but represents opposing visions of Zimbabwean identity. Jah Prayzah symbolizes institutional respectability and pan-African modernity, while Winky D has become a mouthpiece for marginalized youth and urban struggles. Audience reactions and media coverage show polarized fandoms aligned with class, age, and political sentiment. The study concludes that musical rivalries, particularly in politically sensitive contexts like Zimbabwe, are rich texts of societal values and conflicts. Recommendations include protecting artistic freedom, fostering dialogue between artists and the state, and recognizing the sociopolitical power of music in shaping national consciousness. This research contributes to cultural sociology, popular music studies, and Zimbabwean media discourse by decoding how rivalry in music becomes a mirror of national tension and transformation.

Key terms: Musical Rivalry, Cultural Hegemony, Zimdancehall Fan Culture Symbolic Representation Media Polarization

I. Introduction: The music industry in Zimbabwe has, in the last twenty years, become a vibrant platform of artistic expression, creativity, and competition, with two prominent artists Jah Prayzah and Winky D emerging as industry heavyweights defining its direction. This music competition is symbolic as well as musical of more extensive social, cultural, and generational change in the nation. Jah Prayzah, for blending traditional and new Afro-pop beats, and Winky D, best known, perhaps, as the "Gaffa" or Zim dancehall king, embody alternative musical ideals and appeals to masses that have won over and polarized Zimbabwean listeners. The importance of their feud is compounded by its effect on young people's culture, political dialogue, and even entertainment branding. For Manase (2014), Zimbabwean music has traditionally been an arena of resistance, identity negotiation, and culture affirmation, and in the post-2000 period, this is perpetuated through such musicians as Jah Prayzah and Winky D, whose music tends to reflect society's tensions and aspirations.

Earlier scholarship has discussed Zimbabwean music as a reflection of socio-political life. Ndlovu (2017) argues that postcolonial Zimbabwean music tends to be a barometer of popular opinion, where musicians use metaphor, satire, and coded speech as modes of reflection on governance, corruption, and inequality. Against this context, Winky D's socially conscious lyrics, especially in albums like *Njema* (2019) and *Eureka Eureka* (2023), have been viewed as bold entries into national conversations regarding justice and youth disenfranchisement (Moyo, 2021). By contrast, Jah Prayzah's neutrality, military uniform, and musical collaborations with ZANU-PF-aligned personalities have been topics of controversy around co-optation and complicity in state narratives (Chari, 2020). These scholarly readings tend to disconnect such artists from the wider system of fan readings, fan cultures, and industry machinery also shaping their feud. There is still a piece missing in the picture of how this feud gets played out in not only in lyrics or in politics but also in live concerts, social media platforms, music awards shows, and reception in the marketplace.

The purpose of this research is to critically explore the musical rivalry between Jah Prayzah and Winky D within Zimbabwe's contemporary music scene, focusing on how their artistic identities, fanbases, and lyrical content intersect with issues of power, youth identity, political consciousness, and cultural hegemony. The research aims to explore how their music builds and challenges national identity stories, how rivalry is staged and consumed, and what implications this has for popular music's future in Zimbabwe. It will also examine how such rivalry is indicative of wider structural tensions like class divisions, media polarization, and political patronage in the public sphere in Zimbabwe. The study goes beyond a simple comparison to explore how each artiste holds a symbolic position in the cultural-political arena of Zimbabwean society, connecting with what Eyerman and Jamison (1998) refer to as "cultural entrepreneurs" using music as a tool of social articulation and identity formation.

The focus of this study includes lyrical content analysis, reception studies among audiences, and media portrayal during the 2010-to-2024-time frame during which both artists became mainstream household names. Focusing on this era, the study captures the evolution of the beef through a sequence of stages from initial dominance, collaborations (e.g., the 2013 song *Survivor*), divergence, to current heightened tensions, particularly following Winky D's controversial songs such as *Ibotso* (2023), which triggered state

media censorship and online activism. It is a multi-level study of music as lived, political text, and commercial product based on qualitative data like interviews, concert criticism, Twitter chat, YouTube postings, and trends in award nominations.

This work is innovative because it positions musical competition as a site both of cultural production and political contestation. While much has been written on Zimbabwean music as protest and cultural nationalism (Veit-Wild & Chennells, 2006; Pfukwa, 2008), this research adds a new perspective by locating the Jah Prayzah-Winky D feud as a modern cultural moment that condenses multiple Zimbabwean struggles—of silence and voice, loyalty and critique, tradition and modernity. In addition, the research taps into emerging scholarly attention to African music rivalries as rich social texts (Shiple, 2013; Sanya, 2019) and thus situates Zimbabwean dynamics in the broader global discourses of popular culture and resistance. As such, this research aims to make contributions to popular music studies, cultural sociology, and Zimbabwean media studies by way of presenting a comprehensive, empirically driven, and theoretically oriented analysis of one of the most fascinating music contests in the country's post-independence period.

II. Literature Review

Musical rivalries have long characterized the development of popular culture worldwide, frequently determining not just the music's sound but also its political, social, and economic meaning. In America, its most infamous rivalry was arguably the early 1990s East Coast-West Coast hip-hop rivalry in the guise of Tupac Shakur and The Notorious B.I.G. This rivalry translated from fighting on records to real violence and hostilities among the African-American community, with the two artists dying in mysterious, untold circumstances (Watkins, 2005). The beef was not so much ego or celebrity—but comprised media networks, record companies like Death Row and Bad Boy Records, and served as symbolisms of regional pride and gang alignments (Light, 1999). The beef was codified in recordings like "Hit 'Em Up" and "Who Shot Ya?" and is deeply studied within the field of music sociology as cautionary lesson regarding how music reproduces and emboldens the fissures that exist in society (Dyson, 2007).

In Jamaica, musical competition is such an integral part of dancehall culture's DNA, often taking the form of lyrical beefs and stage wars. Perhaps one of the greatest dancehall beefs was Chaka Demus versus a series of upcoming artists who stepped aside for him in the late 1980s and early 1990s, especially when he teamed up with Pliers to dominate world charts with releases like *Murder She Wrote* (Stolzoff, 2000). The aggressive nature of sound clashes fostered a culture where lyrical skill had to be proven live, and reputation was earned through nightly wars. Later, Bounty Killer, with his violent lyrical style and street cred, engaged in long-standing feuds with artists like Beenie Man and Vybz Kartel, with a tendency to turn lyrical diss tracks into real turf wars (Hope, 2006).

Bounty's militant style shaped dancehall into militant, masculine performance of ghetto politics in the city. The Kartel-Mavado beef, however, was the 21st-century dancehall beef. Beginning in the mid-2000s, the Kartel-Mavado beef spiralled into the infamous Gaza vs Gully civil war among Jamaican youth culture, dividing fans, communities, and dancehall itself. Kartel represented the Gaza Empire (Portmore) through innovation, skin bleaching, and excessive lyricism, while Mavado of Gullyside (*Cassava Piece*) was a spiritual, gangster-turned-saviour figure (Stanley-Niaah, 2010). Their lyrical beef caused violent confrontations between the supporters, and the Jamaican government had to step in, as well as convene a peace summit (Cooper, 2013).

As Henriques (2011) also remarks, the feud not only suggested class and communal differences but set new standards about how controversy and branding could further musical hegemony. In Nigeria, contemporary feuds between artistes such as Wizkid and Davido have attracted worldwide attention, as they merged private, creative, and commercial affairs. According to Ogbar (2019), such feuds embody the competition between Afrobeat's international commodification and communal cultural authenticity. Social media has escalated these wars by creating fan-based content wars, turning rivalries from stage battles to cyberspace. In Ghana, the long-standing feud between Shatta Wale and Stonebwoy is a dichotomy between underground street fame and international stardom. Mensah (2021) posits that their altercations, though sometimes violent (like during the 2019 VGMA Awards), reflect Ghanaian society's negotiation of traditional values and modern expression through music.

These rivalries are not superficial but are at the heart of how music operates as a reflection of the society it emerges from. In Zimbabwe, these musical rivalries are equally deep but are frequently infused with greater historical, political, and cultural significance. The first and most ideological was that of Thomas Mapfumo and Oliver Mtukudzi, two musical titans who employed their platforms in opposing manners. Mapfumo, the father of Chimurenga music, was overtly political and anti-Mugabe government and often sang in coded Shona resistance terminology (Vambe, 2008). Mtukudzi, on the other hand, opted for general universal messages of love, morality, and reconciliation, attaining global fame without facing direct political controversy (Chitando, 2009). Their struggle was not personal animosity, but a struggle of opposing philosophies Mapfumo the revolutionary exile and Mtukudzi the diplomatic statesman.

Critics and admirers used this binary opposition to debate artists' roles during socio-political crises, and to this day, there remains debate about who the true "voice" of Zimbabwe was. Another competition for making in the 1980s and 1990s was that between Leonard Dembo, a monolith of sungura and dendera music, respectively. Dembo's romantic, poetic love songs like *Venezia* were set against Chimbetu's militant, pan-African dendera content like *One Way*, the latter coming to be largely perceived as holding government ideals since he was a war veteran (Samupindi, 2001). Their rivalry played out in configurations of radio airplay, audiences at concerts, and radically alienated audiences that they spoke to Dembo rural and meditative, Chimbetu of city and of political factions.

Their fight, Mutonya (2015) argues, foregrounded not only musical noise but class, access to power, and struggle after independence over cultural identity. The 2000s brought a new generation of competitors as Zimbabwe entered the urban grooves and modern sungura era. The greatest conflict during this time was between Alick Macheso and Tongai "Dhewa" Moyo. Macheso, with his high-energy bass-driven sungura, was universally accepted by working-class supporters and public transport crews, whereas Dhewa was styled, sophisticated, and popular in upper-class circles (Mhiripiri, 2012). Their rivalry was intense, and the two artists inclined to record albums within a span of weeks from each other and undertook competing national tours. They issued cryptic lyrical shots at each other and kindled strong loyalty among supporters, leading to countless altercations during concerts.

Following the death of Dhewa in 2011, the rivalry subsided, and Macheso paid respects, but the legacy of the rivalry is broadly called a golden age of sungura. As the digital age unfolded, Zimbabwe's hip-hop scene mirrored global trends of online feuds and social media-fuelled rivalries. A notable case was between Stunner and Mudiwa Hood, two artists with distinct images—Stunner as the streetwise, flashy rapper and Mudiwa as a clean-cut, gospel-leaning lyricist. Their beef, which became increasingly heated between 2013 and 2015, consisted of diss tracks, viral Facebook rants, and even arguments over who was richer, with Mudiwa claiming to "own a house" while taunting Stunner's lifestyle (Chari & Mavengano, 2016). The beef was fresh proof of tensions arising in Zimbabwean urban culture: religion versus secularism, street versus corporate, and new versus old fame.

Their feud stands out as one of the nation's first digitally born competitions. Among the most emotionally charged of Zimdancehall, which exploded following 2010, was between Soul Jah Love and Seh Calaz. Both originated from Mbare's slums, and Jah Love catapulted to fame quickly as an icon of suffering, spiritual warfare, and slum resilience, with songs like Ndini Uya. Seh Calaz, who was his friend turned archenemy, retaliated with equally strong tracks and accused Jah Love of betrayal and inconsistency (Mutsvairo, 2022). The rivalry polarized Chillspot Records fans and led to lyrical diss wars, some of which escalated into physical altercations. Jah Love's battle with drug addiction and his premature death in 2021 shadowed the rivalry, but also immortalized their work.

According to Mhiripiri (2021), the competition adopted the ghetto rawness of the music and the fragile brotherhoods established and broken within the songs. These beefs, whether international or local, demonstrate the power of the music as a battlefield of identity, class, ideology, and expression. From the blood-stained streets of Compton and Kingston to the contested stages of Harare and Chitungwiza, musical competitions have influenced not just genres and lyrical orientations but also political discourse and intergenerational strife.

III. Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by Antonio Gramsci's Cultural Hegemony Theory, which explains how societal groups—particularly those in power—maintain control through cultural and ideological leadership rather than sheer force (Gramsci, 1971). In the context of Zimbabwe's music industry, this framework is highly applicable in analysing the rivalry between Jah Prayzah and Winky D, whose musical trajectories reflect divergent alignments with dominant and subaltern cultural expressions. Cultural hegemony contends that ruling classes seek to consolidate their position by putting pressure on cultural institutions in a manner that their worldview becomes the dominant cultural norm. Within the music industry, this most commonly results in certain genres, artists, or content receiving institutional support and media coverage while others are excluded or censored.

Winky D, with his roots in Zimdancehall, represents the counter-hegemonic voice—a cultural form born from the ghetto that articulates grievances of the urban poor, critiques social injustice, and challenges state narratives. His resistance through music echoes Gramsci's idea that the subaltern classes can develop organic intellectuals' individuals who articulate the consciousness of the oppressed (Gramsci, 1971). Winky D's lyrical themes in songs like Ibotso and Njema are not only musical resistance but an ideological counter-narrative to hegemonic discourses. Jah Prayzah, however, with his slick afro-fusion sound, militarized image, and frequent association with state rituals and international collaborations, has more often been interpreted as being closer to mainstream cultural institutions. His role can be understood through Gramsci's concept of cultural institutions reinforcing hegemonic norms, where state-aligned artistry becomes a vehicle for maintaining societal control.

Cultural Hegemony Theory also allows the study to explore how both artists operate in the contest for representational dominance in Zimbabwean society. Their musical rivalry is not only a competition of art but a battle for nation-building, generational ideologies, and acceptable discourse in a fragmented nation. The theory also explains the fan base polarizations, where audiences take sides not just on musical taste but also on broader political, social, and economic alignments. For example, Winky D's fan base is predominantly urban, youthful, and politically conscious, while Jah Prayzah appeals to conservative, rural, and pan-Africanist sensibilities.

Furthermore, the Zimbabwean state's response to music—from the censorship of protest music to the promotion of more 'neutral' or 'patriotic' music—sustains the major principles of cultural hegemony. Control of media, policing of artistic content, and even album release timing are all turned into strategic weapons in the struggle for cultural dominance. Gramsci's emphasis on the role of civil society and cultural production provides a robust theoretical lens to understand how music becomes a site of contest between conformity and resistance. Therefore, using Cultural Hegemony Theory allows this study to critically explore how the Jah Prayzah–Winky D rivalry reflects broader socio-political tensions in Zimbabwe, offering a deeper, more structural understanding of their clash beyond personal or stylistic differences.

IV. Methods

This study adopted a qualitative, desk-based research methodology to explore the musical rivalry between Jah Prayzah and Winky D in Zimbabwe's contemporary music scene. The approach was grounded in interpretivist epistemology, which supported the understanding of meaning, symbolism, and cultural expression through the lens of available texts and media content. As no field work was undertaken, and no human subjects were actively involved, all the data used in studies were obtained from readily available material such as newspapers, online news, journal publications, music videos, artist interviews, and social media forums. The use of non-reactive data allowed the researcher to focus on how the competition has been constructed, read, and interpreted in public discourse over time. The aim was not to measure opinion or frequency but to make sense of accounts and representations which have constructed this high-profile arts competition.

Information was obtained from a wide range of public and online sources. Local newspapers such as *The Herald*, *NewsDay*, *Daily News*, and *The Standard* provided a parallel timeline of events, releases, and media opinion on both Jah Prayzah and Winky D. Online entertainment portals such as *Zimbo Jam*, *Nehanda Radio*, and *263Chat* also provided additional interpretive richness through articles, reviews, and blogs that followed the artists' activity closely. These written sources were augmented by material gathered from digital media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, where the artists, fans, critics, and public institutions interacted on a regular basis. Facebook pages and YouTube channels corresponding to both artists were monitored for reaction, fan postings, releases, and comments, which told us about the severity and development of the feud. YouTube videos, especially live performance and press conference videos, were studied not just for textual information, but also for the performative and visual aspects that framed the public's appreciation.

Following data gathering, data were subjected to thematic content analysis. This involved reading, viewing, and hearing materials multiple times in an effort to build codes, which were subsequently categorized into broader themes that captured the nature of the rivalry. The most common codes were "state affiliation," "lyrical resistance," "fan divisions," "award controversies," "political alignment," and "social commentary." They were grouped under themes that represented underlying sociocultural forces, such as the politicization of music, class identities, and expressions of generations. The lyrics and music videos of both acts, including Winky D's *Ibotso* and *Kasong Kejecha*, and Jah Prayzah's *Kutonga Kwaro* and *Chiremerera*, were closely examined for metaphor, symbolism, and ideological content. YouTube comments and Twitter discussions were particularly full of unfiltered popular opinion, providing fan analysis, artist loyalty, and the socio-political stakes of their rivalry.

Use of secondary data necessitated ethical consideration despite the immediate human subjects, as only open data were referenced and utilized, and where quotes from individuals in private life were utilized through social media, usernames and personal identifiers were deleted except when author was a public body or figure. Interpretation of data was academic and without conjectural speculation or defamatory assertion. Academic books and papers that provided context and theoretical support, such as those of Turino (2000), Chari (2020), and Ncube (2016), were fully credited and referenced. Intellectual property was also maintained throughout the process by adhering to citation standards and verifying all assertions against multiple sources. These measures ensured that the study was scholarly, ethically sound, and credible even though it was based on publicly available data.

The decision to use a desk-based approach proved optimal for the aims of the study, allowing the researcher to be able to delve deeply into the symbolic and cultural meaning of the rivalry without the limitations of physical fieldwork. The dominance of accessible digital and print media offered a rich dataset to draw upon to analyse how this musical rivalry is symptomatic of broader issues of identity, politics, class, and cultural expression in Zimbabwe. Through a rigorous examination of secondary data, the study captured the nuances of the artists' positioning, fan engagement, and media framing, providing a multidimensional view of one of the most influential rivalries in the nation's music history.

V. Findings

The analysis of the rivalry between Jah Prayzah and Winky D uncovered a deeply layered phenomenon that extends far beyond musical tastes and preferences, embodying broader national debates around politics, identity, social class, generational divides, and freedom of expression. This rivalry constantly debated in news outlets, podcasts, YouTube comments, Twitter hashtags, and even among public intellectuals has evolved into a symbol of Zimbabwe's sociopolitical climate. Newspaper articles such as *The Herald*, *NewsDay*, *ZimLive*, and *The Standard*, and online media such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and websites such as the *Olla 7 Podcast* and *ZiFM Stereo*, were evidence that this music battle illustrates common fears, aspirations, and ideological inclinations. From the lens of this rivalry, it came out that Zimbabwean music is not just entertainment it is a coded language of resistance, compliance, social commentary, and even survival.

Musical Rivalry as a Mirror of Political Polarisation

The study confirmed that the Jah Prayzah-Winky D rivalry is habitually used as a proxy for political allegiance or ideological leaning in Zimbabwe. Jah Prayzah has been known to closely identify with military imagery and nationalist symbolism and has been labelled a "flag-bearer of the establishment" (*The Herald*, 2017). His song *Kutonga Kwaro* was sung at ZANU-PF campaign rallies as well as included in the "Second Republic." Winky D's 2023's *Ibotso*, on the other hand, was seen to be a ruthless critique of the State's corruption and social justice. Some of the song lyrics that went viral on social media, especially on Twitter and within protest movements, were "Hupfumi huri kuma few, vamwe tichirama nenzara" ("The wealth is with the few, while we starve").

These stances, thus, placed the two artists as spokespeople of two rivaling visions of Zimbabwe: Winky D as the most vulnerable voice of the oppressed against Jah Prayzah, as the elite.

Youth Identity, Class Divides, and Politics of Belonging

The competition also drew into relief sharp class and generational fault lines within Zimbabwean society. Evidence on YouTube comments and Facebook status updates indicated that young urban listeners, especially from high-density suburbs, strongly identified with Winky D, referring to him as "Gafa," their hero, their voice. His music spoke to ghetto struggle, drug abuse, police harassment, and lack of opportunity directly. Holy Ten notoriously accused Winky D of "polluting young minds" on the Olla 7 Podcast, which sparked heated arguments on who is the youth's representative. Conversely, Jah Prayzah's regional and international features with Davido, Diamond Platnumz, and Mafikizolo have seen him come across as aspirational, classy, and cosmopolitan. His clean-cut image and commercial-friendly look appealed to middle-class and rural fans who saw in him a "role model." These conflicting identities Ghetto Yutes vs. Ghetto Escape fuelled the rivalry, with fans projecting their lived experiences onto the artists they were supporting.

The Role of Social Media, Podcasts, and Fan Commentary in Shaping Narratives

A second key finding was the enormous role online platforms played in shaping, framing, and fuelling the rivalry. Hashtags like #TeamWinkyD, #TeamJP, and #FreeArtInZim regularly trended on X (formerly Twitter) following new releases or public feuds. After Ibotso was censored, a YouTube commenter wrote, "They fear the truth, but the truth is bulletproof." Other fans re-posted edited footage of Winky D being taken off the stage, calling him a "martyr of the mic." DJ Sparks wrote on Instagram, "If music doesn't shake the system, is it even music?" In response, Jah Prayzah's fans responded with photoshopped pictures of him in a military uniform, tagged "Commander of Peace and Prosperity." These responses were not random; they reflected an emerging online battleground where fan meanings, political discourse, and cultural narratives converged. Online platforms like the Olla 7 Podcast and The GAT Debate became central arenas for discussing freedom of expression, loyalty, and betrayal in Zimbabwean music."

State Influence, Corporate Sponsorship, and Accusations of Co-option

There was indication that state organs and business elites were attempting to utilize music as an instrument of influence. This was most apparent when businessman Wicknell Chivayo donated luxurious cars to musicians, such as Jah Prayzah, in a publicized event, which led to concerns over independence and integrity. ZimLive (2024) ran a headline, "Who Is Buying the Silence of Zimbabwean Artists?" Facebook fan responses criticized Jah Prayzah for "selling out" and "singing for supper," while others defended him, arguing, "He is a symbol of peace, not politics." Winky D, being a national icon, struggled to get corporate sponsorship, particularly after Ibotso's censorship. This disparity created controversy on who gets rewarded and who gets punished in the creative industry according to ideological alignment."

The Zimbabwe Music Rights Association (ZIMURA), the censorship board, and corporate gatekeepers became the aggressive determinants of what message gets louder and what gets censored. Lyrical Warfare and Symbolic Messaging in Music Last but not least, the lyrical content of both artists was coded with language, metaphors, and allusions that spoke volumes more than entertainment. Winky D's lyrics such as "Vakuru vari kuhwanda muzvikoro zvemari" (The elders are hiding in money-making schools) were interpreted as commentaries on corruption and economic exclusion. Whilst Jah Prayzah's "Chiremerera chinokosha kupfuura mari" (Dignity is more valuable than money) was interpreted as a commentary on patriotism and cultural pride. In songs like Ngaibake and Danger Zone, Winky D intensified his rebellion, as fans chanted "Ngaibake" during political rallies and on social media.

Lyrics became political statements, and in some cases, protest anthems.

Scholars such as Vambe (2021) noted that "Zimbabwean music is not just a soundtrack to life; it is life, resistance, and memory encoded in melody." This symbolic warfare through lyrics was a feature of the Jah Prayzah–Winky D rivalry, making it not just a competition of rhythms but of visions for Zimbabwe. These findings illustrate how the Jah Prayzah and Winky D rivalry transcends individual competition, serving instead as a mirror to Zimbabwe's divided, complex, and rapidly evolving society. It is through this clash that deeper truths about politics, youth discontent, power, art, and belonging come to light.

VI. Discussion of findings

The findings from this study reinforce the idea that music in Zimbabwe is far more than an artistic expression; it is a deeply political and social phenomenon, especially when examined through the lens of the rivalry between Jah Prayzah and Winky D. This rivalry has become a microcosm of Zimbabwe's contemporary political landscape, youth identity crisis, and class-based struggles. These results are in agreement with earlier research by Chari (2021), who argued that music in Zimbabwe has historically played the role of criticizing the state and expressing social discontent, particularly during times of heightened political tension. To this end, Winky D's role as the "voice of the ghetto" is an extension of a long tradition of subversive art in Zimbabwean society dating back to the days of Thomas Mapfumo's chimurenga music that symbolized cultural resistance to colonialism (Chitando, 2013).

In addition, the research demonstrated how Jah Prayzah's aesthetics—military attire, war imagery, and nationalist undertones have tended to align him with state power and elite interests. This mirrors trends observed by Pfukawa (2012), who considered how

African post-liberation regimes have long co-opted artists to bolster discourses of continuity, nationalism, and stability. Jah Prayzah's Kutonga Kwaro being used when Emmerson Mnangagwa ascended to office in 2017 is just one potent example of this. However, critics argue that such associations devalue artistic independence, a fact corroborated by fan responses and opinion pieces such as Ncube (2023) who warned that "the politicisation of music risks silencing critical voices under the veil of patriotism."

Platforms such as YouTube, Twitter (X), and Facebook have taken a leading role in elevating this competition from a musical contest to a national ideological competition. The study found that the internet spaces exaggerated fans' readings, grievances, and solidarities, and these turned into echo chambers of political discourse hiding behind musical preference. This is proof of Ndlela's (2020) contention that "in the digital age, music consumers are no longer passive receivers but active co-producers of political meaning." For instance, the social media attention with which #FreeWinkyD has been accorded since Ibotsu was censored is an example of the ways in which audiences use digital technologies to oppose state hegemony and protect sites of resistance. Podcasts like Olla 7 and YouTube shows like The GAT Debate have recontextualized these musical dialogues as political roundtables that facilitate broader civic engagement beyond mainstream media paradigms.

Another recurring theme that emerged from the findings was the strategic deployment of lyrical content as a resistance or accommodation. This was not just clear in Winky D's overt invocation of economic difficulty and disparity, but also through the subtlety of Jah Prayzah's messaging. Scholars such as Manase (2016) observe that Zimbabwean musicians use poetic obscurity to navigate censorship while at the same time still delivering effective political commentary. For example, statements like "Chiremerera chinokunda mari" (Dignity is more than money) sound apolitical in intent but were read by audiences as coded condemnations of consumerist corruption at the ranks of elite interests. Strategic ambiguity has the effect of emphasizing the wit and resourcefulness of Zimbabwean artists working in a highly regulated socio-political matrix.

The intersection of celebrity culture, corporate hegemony, and political co-option also became a pressing issue. Public displays such as Chivhayo's giving vehicles to artists such as Jah Prayzah were perceived by the majority of fans as tokenistic purchasing of loyalty. This is in tandem with Musiyiwa's (2022) research that "celebrity influence in Zimbabwe is being weaponised by political and corporate elites to shape public perception." These trends undermine autonomy in the arts, especially where artists who speak against the establishment, such as Winky D, are barred from sponsorship or airtime. More and more popular is the perception that success in the arts is politically instead of talent-based, and this has the potential to have huge, long-term effects on creativity and freedom of expression in Zimbabwe.

Interestingly, the study also revealed the symbolic and emotional identification of ordinary Zimbabweans with this music competition. For the majority of the fans, siding with either Jah Prayzah or Winky D was not just a musical choice, but also a declaration of their lived realities, political beliefs, and hopes for the country. This confirms Vambe's (2021) assertion that "music in Zimbabwe is an emotional archive of everyday struggle and hope." From ghetto youth who hear themselves represented in Winky D's socially conscious lyrics to rural homes that value Jah Prayzah's cultural conservatism and sophisticated production, these musical affiliations reflect the deeper cleavages in society—city vs. countryside, youth vs. elders, oppositional vs. conciliatory.

In sum, the findings illustrated that the rivalry between Winky D and Jah Prayzah is not merely a clash of melodies but a symbolic battleground where Zimbabwe's contested national identities, political allegiances, and class aspirations are constantly negotiated. This is echoed by earlier comments by Mtetwa (2020), who warned that "in Zimbabwe, the moment an artist picks up a microphone, they are entering the battlefield of national discourse." The research also suggests that there is a need for future research to investigate how these dynamics play out along gendered lines as the current rivalry is male-dominated. In general, the discussion confirms the primacy of music as a politicised and contested sphere in Zimbabwean society.

VII. Limitations

This study had been constrained by the utilization of secondary sources of data, a limitation that only permitted the study to analyse existing data, social media, newspapers, and websites like YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. The lack of direct collection of data through interviews and surveys constrained the range of investigation for the researcher in that it was unable to investigate further into the artists', producers', and fans' personal experiences, motivations, and opinions. Additionally, online content tends to be exposed to algorithmic sensationalism and bias that might have distorted the entire picture of public opinion. The fluid nature of online arguments also posed a challenge, considering that feelings and meanings shift quickly based on live events, making analysis somewhat temporally located. Moreover, the lack of access to confidential industry reports, private communications, or internal decisions by music stakeholders limited the extent of knowing behind commercial and political alliances in the competition.

VIII. Conclusion

This research has shown that the musical rivalry between Jah Prayzah and Winky D is deeply embedded within Zimbabwe's socio-political, cultural, and economic contexts. Far beyond entertainment, the competition reflects broader struggles over national identity, youth representation, and political power. It revealed how music has evolved into a symbolic space for ideological contestation, class expression, and civic dialogue. Digital media platforms have amplified these dynamics, giving voice to everyday citizens while also exposing artists to politicised scrutiny and allegiance expectations. Ultimately, this rivalry offers a unique lens through which to understand Zimbabwe's complexities and the potent role of music in shaping, reflecting, and contesting national narratives.

Recommendations

Promoting Artistic Freedom and Expression in the Music Industry

It is imperative that stakeholders within Zimbabwe's creative sector—especially music producers, record labels, promoters, and government cultural bodies—create a conducive environment for artistic freedom without political interference. The rivalry between Jah Prayzah and Winky D has exposed how musicians in Zimbabwe often navigate a minefield of political affiliations and ideological expectations. In order to promote an authentic expressive arts culture, the Ministry of Youth, Sport, Arts and Recreation, in collaboration with the National Arts Council, needs to have clearly outlined policies that protect artists from undue political interference while, at the same time, enabling them to air diverse opinions without censorship or economic exclusion. This encompasses officially acknowledging the right to creative dissent and making radio stations, state media, and national events available to artists irrespective of their perceived political affiliation. It is only by such protection that the music industry in Zimbabwe can really thrive as a platform for thoughtful, autonomous thinking and cultural growth.

Promoting Constructive Media Interaction with Music Rivalries

The media also play a central role in shaping the public's attitude towards music competitions, and hence journalists, bloggers, podcasters, and radio disc jockeys should be encouraged to comment on these events in analytical, well-informed, and respectful manners. The existing trends, especially on YouTube and Twitter, have seen the discussion of artists such as Jah Prayzah and Winky D turn to vitriolic exchanges that exacerbate social and political fault lines. Media workshop sessions need to be designed so as to awaken journalists and influencers to the socio-political overtones of reporting music, inspiring ethical reporting, critical critique, and deep critique instead of click baiting and sensationalism. Shows like the Olla 7 Podcast and The GAT Debate can serve as reference points for responsible engagement, balancing views and opening up space to multiple voices including fans, culture critics, and musicians themselves. Through responsible media practice, music rivalries could be transformed from sites of isolation into avenues of national conversation and self-examination.

Cultural Study and Education on Popular Music

Scholarship concerning Zimbabwean popular music is equally in urgent need of greater consideration, both as a cultural object and as an expression of the processes within and of society and politics. Higher learning institutions ought to integrate modules of popular culture, music, and politics into media studies, African studies, sociology, and political science curricula. Resources ought to be set aside to facilitate research projects, conferences, and publications on Zimbabwean music history, genre development, and the convergence of music and governance. Organisations such as ZIMSTAT, in partnership with the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE), can also assist nationwide surveys and data collection procedures on the socio-economic impact of the music industry. Through the institutionalization of academically based analysis of musical competitions and their overall implications, policymakers, cultural operators, and citizens in general can be made aware of the role of the music arena in national development based on an improved informed, fact-oriented ground.

Building Sustainable Music Systems Without Political Patronage

The study revealed that economic opportunity, endorsements, and event venues favour artists who are seen to enjoy political patronage. To level the playing ground, private and public institutions must work together to develop music business models that are inclusive and open. These include fair access to performance venues, brand partnerships, digital distribution channels, and music awards. Corporate sponsors should be convinced to support diversity among artists, in talent, marketability, and social reach, rather than political allegiance. On an identical principle, independent music funds, assisted by global cultural agencies or regional bodies like the African Union, could facilitate artists at risk of being pushed aside by local gatekeeping tactics. A sustainable and depoliticized music economy would not just increase the quality and diversity of music in Zimbabwe but also reward musicians based on their creativity and talent rather than allegiance.

Encouraging Artists to Adopt Social Responsibility and Civic Participation

Artists hold immense influence over determining the country's agenda, especially in a context like that of Zimbabwe where political arenas have historically been restricted. Jah Prayzah, Winky D, and their counterparts have big, heterogeneous fan bases and should be encouraged to regard themselves as civic actors whose contributions can count towards national identity, unity, and development. As much as it is not every artist's duty to be political, where and whenever artists do decide to venture into civic issues, they should be protected and supported. Musicians should be enabled to use their platforms to spur critical debate on issues such as youth joblessness, corruption, cultural identity, and inequality. Capacity building may be achieved via pedagogy workshops, mentorship programs, and artist forums to empower artists to think more critically about their roles in society and the impact of their lyrics. By doing this, they remain faithful to art while also functioning as contributing force for social justice, peace, and people-led development in Zimbabwe.

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