

The production of stardom and the survival dynamics of the Zimbabwean music industry in the post-2000 crisis period

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Abstract

Since the late 1990s, Zimbabwe has been going through a difficult economic and political crisis. Many businesses have shut down or have relocated to South Africa and other countries. The music industry has not been spared the myriad problems that have affected all Zimbabwean sectors. However, the industry endures against all odds and seems to be creating its own stars and hits, while continuing to attract significant media attention. This article demonstrates that due to piracy and poor payment of royalties by recording companies, live performances have become the mainstay of musicians' income and livelihood. In the business environment of live performances, intermediaries such as promoters and venue owners have made attempts to extract as much as they can from proceeds. Nonetheless, the musicians have become inventive and intelligent users of the media in order to maximize publicity. Government policies have either boosted or presented obstacles to the music industry. This article also shows that the star and hit system has only benefited a minority of musicians, whilst many continue to live in distress and have often been forced to subsidize their art through other sources of income. The Zimbabwean star system is created with very little contribution from recording companies, who do not believe in allocating resources to marketing and promotion.

Keyword(s): music policy; music promoters; political economy of music; recording companies; stardom; Zimbabwean music industry