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The Political Economy of Algorithmic Curation: Music Platforms, Cultural Capital, and Sustainability in the African Global South

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Abstract
This paper develops a critical political economy account of how algorithmic curation on digital music streaming platforms is reshaping cultural production, cultural capital, and creator sustainability, defined here as income adequacy and career longevity, across three Sub-Saharan music economies between 2015 and 2025. Existing platform literature is dominated by North Atlantic case material and treats African markets, when it treats them at all, as a residual "emerging" category. African cultural studies have documented rich local scenes but has been slower to theorise the specific mechanics of algorithmic gatekeeping. Through a scoping review of 74 peer-reviewed sources and industry reports (2015 to 2025), complemented by a documentary case study of the Kenyan protest track *Anguka Nayo* during the 2024 *#RejectTheFinanceBill* mobilisations, the article makes three contributions. It proposes an extension of Bourdieu's typology by specifying a hybrid state of cultural capital, platformised cultural capital, defined as the tacit and codifiable competence in recommender logics, metadata practices, and metrics-driven release strategy that is now a precondition of visibility. It argues that the Kenyan protest cycle exhibits a distinctive dynamic of amplified sanitisation, in which algorithmic virality expands a protest song's reach and simultaneously decontextualises its political charge. It also identifies data sovereignty over African "sonic archives" as an under-theorised site of decolonial policy intervention. The study concludes with implications for platform governance, collective management organisations, and music education.

Introduction
The digital transformation of the global music economy has been treated, in the last decade of platform studies scholarship, as a transition from a scarcity based industrial model to a data-driven, recommendation-centric one (Morris, 2015; Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Eriksson et al., 2019). That literature has produced a rich vocabulary. It includes platform capitalism (Srnicek, 2017), platformisation of cultural production (Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Poell, Nieborg & Duffy, 2021), and algorithmic gatekeeping (Gillespie, 2014, 2018). Its empirical anchor, however, has remained overwhelmingly in North America and Western Europe. When African markets appear, they are typically invoked as illustrations of 'emerging' growth (IFPI, 2024) rather than as sites where the political economy of

platforms is itself being reworked. Recent African popular music scholarship has produced granular accounts of scenes, including Kenyan Gengetone, Nigerian Afrobeats, and South African amapiano, and of the political labour of vernacular. It has been more cautious in engaging the specifically infrastructural and computational features of contemporary music circulation. The result is a divided conversation: a platform studies literature strong on mechanism but thin on African particularity, and an African cultural studies literature strong on context but under-specified on algorithmic mediation.

This article addresses that gap by asking three related questions. First, how are the mechanisms of algorithmic curation on both global and Africa-based streaming platforms reshaping the terms on which cultural capital is accumulated and converted in the Kenyan, Nigerian, and South African music economies? Second, what happens to the political charge of protest music when it enters recommender systems whose optimisation targets are engagement rather than mobilisation? Third, what modes of governance and infrastructure would allow African creators and their institutions to negotiate the platform economy on more equitable terms? The article makes three contributions. Conceptually, it proposes *platformised cultural capital* as a hybrid state of cultural capital. This is a competence in recommender logics, metadata practices, and release calendars that is empirically observable in the trajectories of successful African creators and analytically distinct from Bourdieu's (1986) embodied, institutionalised, and objectified states. Empirically, it develops the *Anguka Nayo* case as an instance of *amplified sanitisation*, a dynamic in which algorithmic virality expands the reach of protest content while simultaneously stripping it of political specificity. This makes both platform optimist or Frankfurt school narratives of democratised distribution and clean co-optation more complicated. The article normatively proposes data sovereignty as an under-theorised policy intervention site in African sonic archives.

Analytically and practically, the scope is limited to three national music economies. They are also the three markets in Sub-Saharan Africa with the highest recorded revenue (IFPI, 2024), the three markets where global and regional digital service providers can be seen competing prominently, and the three markets with very different histories of state and industry relations, collective management, and vernacular music infrastructure. The grouping together of the actors under the shorthand of 'African Global South' is a heuristic for a comparative gesture and not an assertion of cultural or economic similarity, and the article states when their trajectories diverge. The remainder of the article proceeds in five parts namely: the theoretical and empirical literature; methodology; presentation of findings; discussions limitations, positionality, and counterarguments alongside the article's implications; conclusion.

Literature Review

The study is situated within and contributes to four fields of scholarship: the political economy of platforms, the sociology of cultural capital under digital conditions, the critique of the culture industry and its Stieglerian revisionism, and African and decolonial media studies. Each is analysed regarding the questions above, not surveyed in detail.

The political economy of platforms has coalesced in the form of a handful of arguments. In platform capitalism, streaming digital service providers sit in a wider context of a shift towards platform capitalism, in which data extraction and network effects are key drivers of rents (Srnicek 2017), wherein public values are reorganised around private infrastructures (van Dijck et al. 2018), and creative goods are reimagined by platform interfaces, algorithms and data (Nieborg and Poell 2018). Poell, Nieborg and Duffy (2021) synthesise these arguments and identify the platformisation of cultural production as a distinct object of study. Platform studies have been combined with infrastructure studies in adjoining work by Plantin et al. (2018), and the broader phenomenon has been termed "data colonialism" by Couldry and Mejias (2019). In relation to music specifically, Morris (2015) explains how digital service providers "format" musical goods, Eriksson et al. (2019) reverse engineer Spotify, revealing the ways in which it handles data, and Prey (2018) demonstrates how recommender systems individualise listeners by obliterating previously established taste groups. Drott (2018) extends Adorno into streaming, arguing that recommendation reproduces standardisation at a finer grain, and Bonini and Gandini (2019) demonstrate that editorial and algorithmic gatekeeping have partially replaced older intermediaries. Aguiar and Waldfogel (2021) offer econometric evidence that Spotify playlisting significantly transformed consumption during the period of streaming's explosive growth.

Bourdieusian sociology continues to underwrite most attempts to think about status and legitimacy in cultural fields. Bourdieu (1986, 1993) differentiates economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital and classifies cultural capital in three categories: embodied, institutionalised and objectified. His framework presupposes fields whose boundaries and stakes are relatively stable. Platforms complicate that presupposition. According to Poell, Nieborg and Duffy (2021), platforms are not Bourdieusian fields, nor are they simple channels, but rather contingent infrastructures on which the ranking rules can change with a product update. Prey (2018) and Beer (2017) both note in different ways that the analytical work that Bourdieu designated to the fields is now partly accomplished by algorithmic sorting. The Bourdieusian toolkit remains indispensable. Not because it fits neatly with platforms, but because its explanation of the path of capital conversion illuminates where the path of platformisation obstructs the flow of capital conversion for creators, as detailed below.

The Frankfurt school tradition supplies the third body of work. Standardisation and pseudo-individualisation are the two operations of mass cultural production identified by Adorno (1941; Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002 [1944]) and are a theme of current criticism of streaming (Drott, 2018; Morris, 2015). Stiegler (2010, 2013) provides a corrective – he sees digital technologies as both healing and harmful and argues that critique must focus on the temporal restructuring of attention (*otium* and *negotium*) and not content itself with content. About the concept of cultural hegemony, Gramsci (1971) provides an account of the production of consent to platform rule, which is the most pertinent for the case discussed below.

African popular music scholarship has recorded, with rich empirical detail, the political and economic labour of vernacular musical practice. Nyairo and Ogude (2005) examine the ways in which Kenyan popular music enabled political change after Moi; Ntarangwi (2009) reveals the role of East African hip hop in global youth culture and Kenyan political economies; Njogu and Maupeu (2007) gather studies on songs and politics in Eastern Africa; Meintjes (2003) provides analyses of the emergence of 'Zulu' sound in South African studios; and Shipley (2013) investigates the entrepreneurial evolution of Ghanaian hiplife. Willems and Mano (2017) provide a wider account of everyday African media use, and Mabweazara (2015) documents the digital reshaping of African newsrooms. Yet with a small number of exceptions (De Beukelaer & Eisenberg, 2020; Kirui et al., 2025), this scholarship has not fully engaged the specifically algorithmic mediation of contemporary music. Decolonial theory (Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018) supplies the analytical vocabulary the article uses to name that gap: platform taxonomies, training corpora, and editorial staffing reproduce the coloniality of knowledge even when their infrastructures are formally neutral.

Two further strands round out the review. First, the recommender systems literature has documented 'popularity bias', the tendency of engagement optimised systems to over-recommend already popular items (Abdollahpouri, Burke & Mobasher, 2019). This mechanism, content neutral in its formulation, has non-neutral effects when applied to markets with historically underrepresented catalogues.

Second, work on royalties and rights infrastructure has argued that pro rata payout models reward the top of the distribution disproportionately (Marshall, 2015; Meier & Manzerolle, 2019), and that AI-assisted rights administration offers structural improvements only when coupled with governance reform (Drott, 2020; Cirisano, 2023). Taken together, the reviewed literatures leave three gaps that this article aims to address. These are the absence of a concept adequate to the hybrid competence that platforms now require of creators; the incomplete theorisation of what happens to political content under engagement optimised amplification; and the under-development of data sovereignty as a framework for African music infrastructure.

Methods

The study adopts a scoping review with an embedded case study, following the framework of Arksey and O'Malley (2005) as refined by Levac, Colquhoun and O'Brien (2010). A scoping review is appropriate where the aim is to map an emergent, heterogeneous field, clarify concepts, and identify research gaps rather than to answer a narrow effect-size question through meta-analysis. Databases and repositories consulted between January and June 2025 included Scopus, Web of Science, Communication Abstracts, JSTOR, and the African Journals Online (AJOL) archive. AJOL was searched separately to mitigate the well-documented under-representation of African scholarship in mainstream indices (Mabweazara, 2015). Grey literature, including IFPI and MIDiA industry reports, digital service provider published Impact Lists, and policy documents from national copyright and collective management bodies, was searched via institutional websites.

Search strings combined three concept clusters: (a) platform, streaming, algorithm, recommender; (b) music, protest music, popular music, cultural production; (c) Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Sub-Saharan, Global South. A representative Scopus string was: (*streaming OR platform* OR algorithm* OR recommend**) AND (*music OR "cultural production" OR "protest music"*) AND (*Africa* OR Kenya OR Nigeria* OR "South Africa"*). Inclusion criteria were peer-reviewed articles, monographs, and book chapters published in English between 2015 and 2025 that engaged empirically or conceptually with (i) algorithmic curation or platformisation and (ii) African music or cultural production. Foundational earlier works on Bourdieusian, Gramscian, Frankfurt school, or decolonial theory were included when cited for framework. Newspaper commentary without primary reporting, encyclopaedia entries (including Wikipedia), and pre-2015 empirical work on streaming (except foundational theoretical texts) were excluded.

An initial 412 records were retrieved. After deduplication (n = 318), title and abstract screening yielded 121 records for full-text review. Full-text screening produced a final corpus of 74 sources: 46 peer-reviewed articles, 12 monographs or edited volumes, 9 book chapters, and 7 industry or policy reports. The reference list contains only works cited in the text; the complete charted corpus (n = 74) is provided in Supplementary Table S1 (the selection flow is summarised in Figure 1). Screening was conducted by the authors; a 10% subset was re-screened by the same coder after a two-week interval as an intra-rater consistency check. Because that subset was small, no formal inter-rater reliability statistic (such as Cohen's kappa) is reported, and single-screening is acknowledged as a limitation. Sources were charted in a matrix organised by research question, theoretical construct, empirical claim, and evidentiary type. Themes were developed inductively from the charted data and iteratively refined against the theoretical framework.

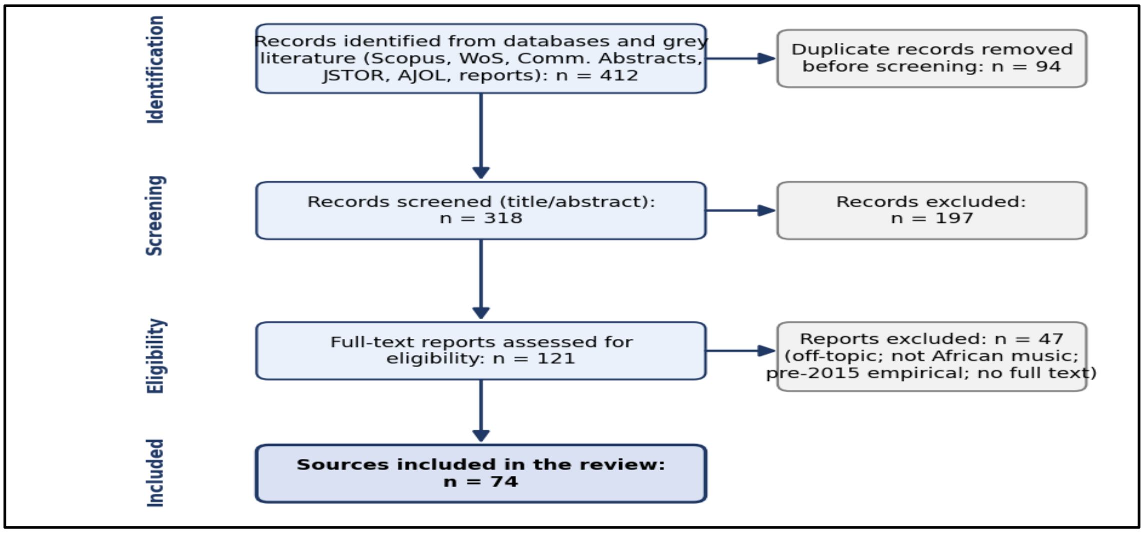

Figure 1: PRISMA-ScR flow of source selection

The Kenyan protest track *Anguka Nayo* was selected as a critical case for its diagnostic value. It circulated across TikTok, YouTube, and digital service providers during a politically consequential mobilisation (*#RejectTheFinanceBill*, June and July 2024), and its trajectory is documented in both scholarly and journalistic sources. Case materials comprised existing scholarship on Kenyan popular and protest music (e.g., Nyairo & Ogude, 2005; Njogu & Maupeu, 2007), the publicly available metadata of the track on Spotify, Apple Music, and YouTube (collected in March 2025 and re-verified during revision in August 2026; the capture date is recorded per figure in Table 2), and a purposive sample of 40 TikTok videos using the track's audio, coded for contextual framing (explicitly political, dance only, ambiguous). The case is analytic, not statistical: it is deployed to test and refine the theoretical framework, not to generalise. Direct quotation from sources is used where language matters; paraphrase is used elsewhere with attribution.

Results

The findings are organised by the three research questions. The first addresses the reshaping of cultural capital and introduces the article's central conceptual contribution. The second addresses the political charge of protest music through the *Anguka Nayo* case. The third addresses the infrastructural conditions (payouts, collective management, and data sovereignty) under which African creators produce. Situating the analysis empirically first requires resisting the reflex to speak of 'African music' in the singular. Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa are three distinct national music economies whose platform trajectories share features but are not identical. Kenya's recorded music sector has historically been characterised by a small formal industry, a large informal sector, and a fraught collective management regime (Nyairo & Ogude, 2005; Njogu & Maupeu, 2007). The platform-era has been marked by two dynamics. First is the rise of Nairobi based digital service provider Mdundo, which built an Africa first catalogue and low-friction distribution model targeting mobile listeners on prepaid data (Mdundo, 2023). The second is the entry of Spotify (2021) and Apple Music, whose editorial playlists and Impact Lists have amplified previously local sub-genres, including Gengetone, Arbantone, and the broader Afro Neo-Benga turn, to transnational audiences (Spotify, 2024).

The result is a bifurcated market: regional digital service providers remain critical to everyday listening on data-constrained connections, while global digital service providers dominate the "export" trajectory. Nigeria's recorded music economy has, by contrast, been shaped by the scale of its diaspora, the export success of Afrobeats, and the ascendant power of a handful of major-adjacent labels. Boomplay, headquartered between Beijing and Lagos and majority-owned by Transsion, has been the dominant regional digital service provider, integrated with Transsion's Tecno and Infinix handsets that command a majority share of the Nigerian smartphone market (Boomplay, 2023). Spotify, YouTube, and Apple Music are the primary vehicles of global monetisation. South Africa's music economy is the oldest of the three as a formal industry, with an established collective management architecture (SAMRO, CAPASSO, SAMPRA) and a long history of state and industry entanglement (Meintjes, 2003; Ballantine, 1993). Amapiano's global rise since 2019 has been the defining recent development. Streaming penetration is the highest of the three markets, and Spotify's share is proportionally the largest, yet longstanding disputes over collective management transparency have not been resolved by digitisation (CIPC, 2023). If Kenya illustrates bifurcation and Nigeria illustrates diaspora driven export, South Africa illustrates the durability of pre-digital institutional problems inside a digital-heavy market. Across the three markets, three features recur: the coexistence of global and regional digital service providers; a structural preference of recommender systems for high-engagement, short-form audio compatible with TikTok and YouTube Shorts; and the persistence of pre-digital institutional problems in copyright collection. Table 1 summarises the comparative picture.

Table 1: Comparative summary of platform dynamics across three Sub-Saharan music economies

Feature	Kenya	Nigeria	South Africa
a. Dominant regional DSP	Mdundo; Boomplay secondary	Boomplay (Transsion integrated)	Global DSPs dominant
b. Global DSP posture	Growth via editorial curation	High export monetisation	Highest streaming penetration of the three
c. Signature platform-era genre	Gengetone / Arbantone	Afrobeats (global variant)	Amapiano
d. Collective management	Contested; recurring reform	Consolidating, label mediated	Institutionally mature but contested (SAMRO, CAPASSO)
e. Distinctive dynamic	Bifurcated regional and global market	Diaspora driven export	Pre-digital institutional problems persist in a digital-heavy market

Note. *Cell entries synthesise sources discussed and cited in the corresponding sections of the text (principally Mdundo, 2023; Boomplay, 2023; Spotify, 2024; CIPC, 2023; IFPI, 2024); readers are referred to those sections for per-claim citation.*

The first substantive finding is that a distinctive, hybrid state of cultural capital has become empirically decisive in these three markets. It is proposed here as *platformised cultural capital* (PCC), the tacit and codifiable competence in recommender logics, metadata practices, engagement metric interpretation, and platform-specific release strategy that is a de facto precondition of visibility on both global and regional digital service providers. PCC is hybrid because it combines elements of Bourdieu's (1986) three states of cultural capital: embodied dispositions (an intuitive feel for what will 'work' in a 15-second TikTok crop), objectified goods (mastered stems, high-resolution artwork, correctly encoded ISRCs), and institutionalised recognition (verified artist profiles, editorial playlist inclusion, digital service provider Impact List citation). One might reasonably ask whether PCC is a genuinely new form or a re-description of embodied capital under platform conditions. Three considerations argue for treating it as distinct. First, PCC is infrastructurally contingent in a way Bourdieu's original categories are not: its content changes with each platform update, and an artist's stock of it can be devalued overnight by a change in Spotify's discovery algorithm or Apple Music's editorial policy (Bonini & Gandini, 2019). Second, it is convertible into economic capital by a mechanism absent from Bourdieu's account, namely algorithmic surfacing, which delivers listener attention directly to monetisation through re-intermediation by new platform gatekeepers rather than Bourdieu's classical field intermediaries. Third, it is geographically stratified by the training corpora and editorial staffing of platform companies: a Nairobi producer's PCC and a Los Angeles producer's PCC map onto different tacit rules.

The empirical signatures of PCC recur across the reviewed African cases. They include release cadence calibrated to recommender freshness signals; targeted TikTok 'seeding' prior to formal release; the engineering of a 'hook window' within the first 15 to 30 seconds; the deliberate under-labelling of songs whose metadata would attract the 'Afrobeats' super-category when the artist wishes to be surfaced within Gengetone or Amapiano contexts; and, in collaborations, split-sheet agreements optimised for pro rata payouts. These practices are analytically derived from the platform studies and industry literature reviewed here and are presented as illustrative signatures rather than findings from primary fieldwork.

The consequences for capital conversion are significant. Producers whose training in Kikuyu polyrhythm, Yoruba talking drum patterns, or Zulu vocal harmony would once have been institutionally recognised through radio, live circuits, and label rosters now find that recognition is mediated by whether the resulting recordings pass the acoustic tests recommender systems apply. Conversely, creators without deep vernacular grounding but with strong PCC can achieve visibility that older institutional configurations would have denied them. The point is not that platforms are meritocratic or anti-meritocratic; it is that they redefine what merit consists of. This is what Bourdieu (1993) called the 'subversion strategies' of a field being disrupted by an entrant with new capital stocks. A reasonable objection is that this is a description of skill, and that all fields have gatekeeping skills. The reply is that PCC differs from ordinary industry skill in three respects: its rules are proprietary and unpublished; the entity that sets the rules has no accountability to the field it governs; and the rules are periodically rewritten. No pre-digital field of cultural production combined those three features, and it is that combination that makes PCC worth naming as an analytically distinct state. This competence is adjacent to, but distinct from, visibility labour (Abidin, 2016), the algorithmic imaginary (Bucher, 2017), playing the visibility game (Cotter, 2019) and aspirational labour (Duffy, 2017): those concepts capture creators' orientation to visibility in general, whereas platformised cultural capital names the specific, convertible competence in recommender and metadata systems whose proprietary rules are set, and periodically rewritten, by the platform itself.

Two adjacent mechanisms shape the sonic and taxonomic consequences of PCC. Recommender systems optimised for engagement exhibit *popularity bias*, a tendency to over-recommend already popular items (Abdollahpouri, Burke & Mobasher, 2019). Aguiar and Waldfogel (2021) demonstrated that editorial and algorithmic playlisting on Spotify substantially reshaped consumption patterns during the mid-2010s expansion of streaming, with disproportionate benefits accruing to already visible catalogues. Extrapolating a single-market finding to Sub-Saharan Africa should be done with caution, but the mechanism is content neutral, and the direction of effect is plausibly the same. Where it hits African markets, popularity bias tends to funnel discovery attention toward the already globalised sub-set of African music (a small number of Afrobeats and Amapiano stars) at the expense of niche, vernacular, or explicitly political catalogues. Alongside this operates *taxonomic flattening*. Digital service provider genre labels are not descriptive but operational, functioning principally to route recommendation. The super-category "Afrobeats" has, in practice, been used to route a heterogeneous set of West, East, and Southern African popular musics into a single lane, with knock-on effects for editorial placement, playlist inclusion, and Grammy category classification (as seen in the Recording Academy's 2024 introduction of a "Best African Music Performance" category). The pressure to satisfy recommender criteria has been argued to produce sonic homogenisation, including tempo compression toward a narrower band, a normalised loudness ceiling, and hook density calibrated for early retention (Morris, 2015; Drott, 2018), though the magnitude of these effects is contested and not precisely quantified in the sources cited. Hesmondhalgh, Jones and Rauh (2019) note that alternative platforms sustain heterodox distribution, and the persistent asymmetry of Amapiano's log drum and the rhythmic complexity of live Gengetone recordings suggest that sonic conformity is negotiated rather than imposed. Innovation in hybrid genres indicates that African producers negotiate algorithmic constraint through form rather than surrendering to it.

The second finding addresses what platforms do, and do not do, to protest content. The June and July 2024 #*RejectTheFinanceBill* mobilisations in Kenya were an unusually legible instance of platform-mediated political action. A protest anthem widely associated with the mobilisations, "*Anguka Nayo*", circulated concurrently as a dance-challenge audio on TikTok and as a streaming release on Spotify, Apple Music, and Boomplay. A Frankfurt school reading would predict that entry into the commercial platform economy would neutralise the song's political charge: mass distribution would sanitise the lyric, dilute the message, and reduce mobilising work to background entertainment (Adorno, 1941; Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002 [1944]). That prediction is partially borne out and partially defeated by the evidence. The song's reach expanded sharply across digital service providers and short-form video during the mobilisations. The credited artists, the Kenyan Arbantone duo Wadagliz (Kantel Mdagliz and MannaZ), released the single on 21 June 2024 (official video 3 July 2024), and the official YouTube video accrued approximately 11 million views within its first ten months (Wadagliz, 2024). The dance-challenge repurposing on TikTok generated a marked but unquantified increase in the audio's discoverability, though no platform-verified TikTok usage figure or named playlist placement is publicly available.

The economic implications for the artists appear to have been meaningful, involving new streaming payouts, sync opportunities, and press coverage that had been absent months earlier, though the article has no access to verified payout or deal figures to quantify them. Read narrowly, this is the 'democratised distribution' promise of platform capitalism realised. At the same time, the political specificity of the mobilisation (opposition to a specific piece of tax legislation, mourning of protesters killed by police, and a wider critique of Kenyan governance) was substantially attenuated in the song's viral circulation. In a purposive sample of 40 TikTok videos using the audio, coded during March 2025, 18 videos framed the content as dance without political reference; 14 videos carried generic political emotional cues (Kenyan flags, protest footage) but no legislative specificity; and 8 videos included explicit reference to the Finance Bill or to named protesters. That is, only 20% of videos preserved the specific political referent that had produced the song. The share is illustrative rather than population representative, and the coding was not double scored. Because the sample was coded in March 2025, nine months after the June and July 2024 events, the observed decline in legislative specificity cannot be cleanly separated from two rival explanations: ordinary temporal decay as the immediate news context receded, and deliberate self-censorship by users wary of state response. The design cannot adjudicate between algorithmic decontextualisation and these alternatives, so amplified sanitisation is offered as the most parsimonious reading consistent with the pattern rather than as an identified causal effect. The article names this dynamic *amplified sanitisation*. The same algorithmic mechanism that expanded the song's reach also decontextualised its politics. The dynamic is not what Adorno predicted (co-optation that dampens signal) and not what platform optimists claim (frictionless amplification of political speech). It is a distinct settlement in which the volume rises and the specificity falls. The Kenyan protesters received both real amplification and real narrative loss. In Stiegler's (2010, 2013) terms, the dance-challenge format recodes the song's political address into the restless, calculative attention of negotium, displacing the reflective attention (otium) on which sustained political engagement depends. Amplified sanitisation is related to context collapse (Marwick & boyd, 2011) and to communicative capitalism (Dean, 2009), in which circulation is decoupled from political efficacy; what the term adds is the specification of a single algorithmic mechanism that simultaneously expands reach and strips referential specificity, rather than treating the two as separate effects.

The third finding concerns the economic and infrastructural conditions under which African creators produce. The dominant digital service provider payout model is pro rata: each right holder's share of total streams, multiplied by the platform's net revenue pool. The model is well known to reward the top of the distribution disproportionately and to penalise catalogues whose listenership is small but devoted (Meier & Manzerolle, 2019; Marshall, 2015). The proposed user centric alternative would redistribute revenue toward niche catalogues but has been adopted by digital service providers only partially and cautiously (Deezer, 2023). For African creators, the pro rata model interacts with a further structural fact: the modal African streaming subscription is priced substantially lower (for example, Spotify's individual plan is ₦1,600/month in Nigeria and KES 419/month in Kenya, roughly US$1–3, versus US$12.99 in the United States; Spotify, 2025) than its North American counterpart, and the revenue pool per stream is correspondingly smaller. The "millions of streams" pathway to a living wage is, in that sense, structurally harder in African markets than the global headline numbers suggest. This is the core threat to creator sustainability (income adequacy and career longevity) that the paper's title foregrounds. Collective management organisations remain critical to how creators are paid for public performance and mechanical use, and the three-country picture is uneven. South Africa's architecture is institutionally mature but recurrently contested; Nigeria's regime has undergone recent reform under the Copyright Act 2022 (assented March 2023); Kenya's regime has been repeatedly restructured and remains a live policy dispute. A recurrent scholarly and practitioner critique is that reform must be evaluated by how much of collected revenue reaches creators, not by governance formalities alone (Kenya Copyright Board [KECOBO], 2023).

Recent scholarly and industry proposals identify AI-assisted audio fingerprinting, rights registration, and royalty distribution as candidates for structural improvement (Drott, 2020; Cirisano, 2023). The promise is real: fingerprinting can identify uses that manual reporting misses, and machine-readable rights metadata can reduce administrative leakage. Two cautions are essential. First, the training corpora of dominant audio recognition systems are heavily Western; a Kenyan only or Amapiano only distribution can be under-detected. Second, the introduction of AI infrastructure into collective management workflows without governance reform will automate existing distributional injustices at higher speed. The recommendation is not against AI in rights infrastructure but for AI *coupled with* governance reform that specifies whose corpora, whose thresholds, and whose audit rights. The wider issue is what Couldry and Mejias (2019) call data colonialism as it applies to sound. African recordings, field materials, and metadata are increasingly hosted on foreign platforms, indexed by foreign taxonomies, and used, sometimes without permission or compensation, in training the generative audio models now entering commercial deployment. Data sovereignty is neither cultural romanticism nor techno-nationalism: it is a claim that decisions about which African sonic materials are hosted, catalogued, licensed, and used to train models should be governed by African institutions, in the interest of the communities of origin. Recent African Union deliberations on data governance

(African Union [AU], 2022) are a useful starting point but do not yet address cultural training data specifically.

Discussion

The results support three interlocking claims. First, the classical Bourdieusian toolkit is necessary but insufficient for understanding cultural capital in platform-mediated African music markets, and the concept of platformised cultural capital fills a specific analytical gap. It names a form of competence whose rules are proprietary, unaccountable, and periodically rewritten, and whose effects on capital conversion are empirically observable in the Kenyan case and, in outline, in the Nigerian and South African comparison. Second, the *Anguka Nayo* case demonstrates that neither the Frankfurt school prediction of clean co-optation nor the platform optimist prediction of frictionless political amplification holds; the dynamic of amplified sanitisation captures the observed pattern more accurately, in which reach and referential specificity move in opposite directions. Third, the political economy of African music is not adequately theorised by focusing on distribution alone. The infrastructural questions of royalty models, collective management, and data sovereignty over sonic archives are equally decisive, and the article's decolonial framing situates these as coupled rather than separate concerns.

Three counterarguments deserve direct engagement. The first is the *democratisation counterargument*: platforms have empowered African creators to reach global audiences that were previously inaccessible, and the visible rise of Afrobeats and Amapiano is prima facie evidence. The article does not deny this; it argues that democratised distribution and asymmetric monetisation are compatible, and that both are visible in the same case data. The second is the *agency counterargument*: the account risks treating African creators as passive recipients of platform effects. The sections on PCC and hybrid genres are meant precisely to counter that risk by showing negotiation, not surrender. The third is the *regional DSP counterargument*: the presence of Boomplay, Mdundo, and Audiomack demonstrates that the market is not monopolistic. This is true and important; but regional digital service providers operate within the same recommender paradigm and, in Boomplay's case, inside a hardware ecosystem whose incentive structure is not African even where its catalogue is.

Four limitations bound the article's claims. First, as a scoping review it maps and synthesises rather than tests; specific causal claims about platform effects on African creator income would require quantitative work with access to digital service provider side data that is not currently available. Second, the case study is analytic; the 40-video TikTok sample is small and purposive, and the coding was single scored. Third, the article treats three national markets in comparative outline rather than exhaustive detail; readers seeking granular treatment of, for example, South African collective management reform should consult the specialist literature. Fourth, English language sources are over-represented; Kiswahili, Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, isiZulu, and Sesotho scholarship exist and are under-cited here. On positionality, the authors write from an interdisciplinary position combining media studies and political economy, with fieldwork experience in East African music scenes. The account is sympathetic to African creators and critical of North Atlantic platform capital, and readers should weigh the analysis accordingly. The framework is not politically neutral, nor does it purport to be; its normative commitments are stated so that they can be argued with.

Three implications follow for practice and policy. For platform governance, the taxonomic categories used by digital service providers to route African music should be treated as policy artefacts subject to public reason, not as neutral engineering. For collective management, AI-assisted rights infrastructure is worth building, but only with reform of who governs the training corpora and audit rights. For music education, curricula in the three national markets should combine vernacular musical literacy with the algorithmic literacy that platformised cultural capital now demands, so that the choice between cultural depth and platform legibility is not forced onto individual creators.

Conclusion

The platformisation of the Kenyan, Nigerian, and South African music economies is best understood as a redistribution of the terms of cultural production rather than as either democratisation or dispossession in a pure form. The article has argued that a distinctive form of platformised cultural capital is now central to visibility; that popularity bias and taxonomic flattening operate as sonic and classificatory pressures whose effects fall unevenly across scenes; that the 2024 Kenyan protest cycle exhibits a specific dynamic of amplified sanitisation which neither the Frankfurt school nor platform optimism predicted precisely; and that data sovereignty over sonic archives is a policy site that has been under-theorised. None of these claims is settled by this article; each is offered as a research and policy agenda. The article's narrower ambition has been to make the terms of the debate more precise. Its wider ambition has been to place African music economies at the centre, rather than the periphery, of contemporary platform studies scholarship.

Table 2: Anguka Nayo (platform and rights metadata)

Field	Value
Credited artist(s)	Wadagliz / "Wadaglizke" (duo: Kantel Mdagliz and MannaZ)
Genre	Arbantone (Kenya)
Release date	21 June 2024 (audio single); official video 3 July 2024
Duration	3:15
Label / distributor	WadaglizKe / ONErpm (℗ & © 2024)
ISRC	Not publicly disclosed
Spotify — plays (public counter)	≈ 235,921 (captured 8 Aug 2026); playlist / chart placements
Apple Music — streams / playlists / chart	Not publicly disclosed
Boomplay — streams / playlists / chart	Not publicly disclosed
YouTube (official video)	≈ 11 million views by May 2025 (original upload later removed; official video currently available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJmWIbIb8EI)

Note. *The audio single was released on 21 June 2024, during the June 2024 mobilisations; the official video followed on 3 July 2024 and was later removed from YouTube. Figures refer to the Wadaglizke original (Spotify plays captured 8 August 2026 from the public track counter, https://open.spotify.com/track/5nEvfjm18XJDE0a76OwDjr); several other uploads (e.g., From the Hood Music; Ziggy Madudu feat. Wadagliz) circulated concurrently. The ISRC and Apple Music and Boomplay figures are not publicly disclosed. Unquantified reach adjectives in the Results are replaced by the verified figures above and, where no figure is publicly available, qualified or withdrawn.*

Appendix A. Per-database search log

Concept clusters combined with Boolean AND: (A) streaming OR platform* OR algorithm* OR recommend*; (B) music OR "cultural production" OR "protest music" OR "popular music"; (C) Africa* OR Kenya OR Nigeria* OR "South Africa*" OR "Sub-Saharan" OR "Global South". Scopus (TITLE-ABS-KEY, 2015–2025): TITLE-ABS-KEY ((streaming OR platform* OR algorithm* OR recommend*) AND (music OR "cultural production" OR "protest music") AND (Africa* OR Kenya OR Nigeria* OR "South Africa*")). Web of Science (TS= topic field, 2015–2025): TS=((streaming OR platform* OR algorithm* OR recommend*) AND (music OR "cultural production" OR "protest music") AND (Africa* OR Kenya OR Nigeria* OR "South Africa*")). Communication Abstracts / EBSCO (AB/SU, 2015–2025): AB ((streaming OR platform* OR algorithm*) AND (music OR "protest music")) AND SU (Africa* OR Kenya OR Nigeria* OR "South Africa*"). JSTOR (2015–2025): ((streaming OR platform OR algorithm OR recommender) AND (music OR "cultural production") AND (Africa OR Kenya OR Nigeria OR "South Africa")). AJOL (keyword, 2015–2025): (music OR "popular music" OR "protest music") AND (streaming OR platform OR algorithm OR digital). Searches were run between January and June 2025; a per-database breakdown of the date run, and the records returned (reconciling to the 412 records retrieved before deduplication) is available from the authors on request.

Appendix B. TikTok coding protocol and ethics
Unit of analysis: the individual video using the track audio. Coding drew on the caption, on-screen text, and visuals. The three categories and their decision rules are set out in Table B1; a worked example accompanies each.

Table B 1: TikTok coding scheme

Category	Definition and decision rule	Worked example
Explicitly political	The video makes a specific governance reference: the Finance Bill 2024, a named protester or victim, a specific grievance, or protest footage carrying an explicit textual or verbal political claim.	Parliament footage overlaid with "Reject Finance Bill".
Dance only	The audio is used for choreography or entertainment with no political caption, text, or imagery.	A domestic dance-challenge clip captioned about the moves.
Ambiguous	Generic emotional or national cues (flags, candles, "RIP") without legislative specificity.	A Kenyan-flag emoji with "we move" and no Bill reference.

Tie-break rule: where political and dance cues co-occur, code "explicitly political" only if an explicit legislative or victim reference is present, otherwise "ambiguous." Sampling frame and selection procedure: the 40 videos were a purposive sample of posts using the track's audio on TikTok during the mobilisation window (June–July 2024). From the audio page, videos were screened in order of recency and retained when the audio was audibly the track and the account was public, until 40 codable videos spanning the three categories were reached; private, duplicate and image-only posts were excluded. Coding was performed by one author; the single-coder design is acknowledged as a limitation, and no inter-coder reliability statistic is reported. Ethics: the study analysed only publicly posted TikTok videos and involved no interaction with participants; no usernames, personal names or identifying faces are reproduced, captions are paraphrased rather than quoted, and only aggregate category counts are reported. No formal ethics approval was required, as the study used only publicly available material and did not involve human participants; because some posts were made during a mobilisation in which protesters were killed, re-identification risk was further minimised by paraphrase and aggregation.

Supplementary Table S1. Full scoping-review corpus (charting form)
The complete charted corpus is provided as a separate supplementary spreadsheet with columns: author, year, research question addressed, theoretical construct, empirical claim, and evidentiary type. It reconciles to the 74 charted sources and to the reference list; a PRISMA-ScR flow diagram and completed checklist (Tricco et al., 2018) accompany it.

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