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Abstract
The rapid emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) has instigated a perceived crisis within the music industry, challenging existing norms of authenticity, creativity, and copyright. This study analyses the dominant discourse surrounding this crisis and proposes an alternative framing from the perspective of African musicology. The study, anchored in postcolonial theory, critiques the universalist legal and aesthetic concepts (individual authorship and copyright), which act as hegemonic cultural constructs, and the African communal ethos, a philosophical paradigm where musical creativity is understood as a participatory, functional, and socially embedded practice, offers a contrasting ontology of music-making. A systematic review of literature was conducted to synthesise and analyse scholarly articles, legal reviews, and industry reports that were published up to July 2025. The selected literature was thematically analysed to identify and compare the core tenets of the classical individualist paradigm with the African communal ethos paradigm as it surrounds the creation and ownership of music. The findings reveal that the perceived crisis is dependent on the Western constructs of the solitary genius and the unchanging musical work, both of which are incompatible with the AI. Conversely, the African communal ethos, which is characterised by its emphasis on collective creation, social function, and performance as an experiential event, offers a more robust and adaptable framework to counter the perceived notion of crisis. This comparative analysis highlights the core differences between these two approaches while focusing on authorship, creativity, ownership, and authenticity. Finally, the findings suggest that the perceived crisis in AI music is not an inevitable technological outcome, but rather a cultural reflection of neo-colonialism. By embracing African musicological viewpoints, therefore, this crisis could be reevaluated. This article concludes by proposing the notion that AI should not be viewed as a threat to human creativity but as a powerful tool to enhance collaborative and inclusive forms of musical expression.

Introduction

The proliferation of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) has ignited a cultural discourse of crisis in the global music industry (Boateng et al., 2025). Digital platforms such as Suno, Udio, and Stable

Audio now allow users to produce complete musical compositions from simple text prompts. This technological advancement has been criticised by academicians and industry players as a significant threat to artistic integrity and intellectual property (Nayar, 2025). This narrative of a cultural crisis casts AI as an antagonist to human creativity, challenging the traditional foundational principles that have governed musical creation and commerce for centuries (Nowland, 2025). Technological anxiety is not a new narrative to the Global North. In the 1880s, the introduction of technologies into popular music, such as the phonograph, which detached music from the context of a live performance, resulted in similar cultural anxiety. Similarly, synthesisers and Digital Audio Workstations (DAWs) introduced hostility among music purists who deemed these tools unnatural and/or phoney, even as new genres flourished (RaNa, 2024). Each of these threats to the soul of music was folded into the music-creation toolkit. The contemporary responses to the development of AI, therefore, reflect a pattern of cultural anxiety in the Global North regarding technological advancement.

This study posits that the current state of panic surrounding AI-generated music is not the inevitable consequence of technological progress, but the result of a hegemonic Western legal and aesthetic paradigm being pushed to its limits. Historically, this paradigm has leaned heavily on the Romantic notion of a sole original author, protected by a framework of personal copyright designed to commercialise individuals' creativity (Sethi, 2025; Williams, 2019). While Western copyright law includes mechanisms to address collaborative creativity, such as joint works and works made for hire, these legal constructs remain deeply anchored in consolidating proprietary ownership and commercial rights. Generative AI fundamentally disrupts this ecosystem. By autonomously bridging the gap between a programmer's code and a user's prompt, AI complicates the direct link between human intention and creative output (U.S. Copyright Office, 2025). Ultimately, the current crisis is not simply a human-versus-machine one. Rather, it is the friction between an emerging, highly collaborative technology and a rigid cultural paradigm struggling to adapt its traditional concepts of authorship and originality to the digital landscape.

This study aims to reframe deliberations on AI in music by proposing African musicology as a critical alternative paradigm. It posits that the African communal ethos, a philosophical stance that prioritises participation, social function, and collective creation, provides a more adaptable, resilient conceptualisation for utilising AI in music-making. By contrasting this communal way of thinking with Western, primarily commercially driven perspectives, this study illustrates that the crisis of AI music is largely a cultural construct of the West, arising from the rigidity of its commercially driven paradigm, rather than a universal technological threat. To think about this construct differently, AI can be seen not as an enemy of human art but as a powerful tool for advancing African musicology. With the proper framing, AI can support more socially inclusive and collaborative forms of music-making. This goes beyond the confines of Western copyright and artistic integrity concerns, which stem mainly from commercialised authorship, and helps illuminate how AI can aid communal creativity.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in postcolonial theory as its analytical tool to examine Western legal and aesthetic concepts concerning copyright (Bowrey, 2007). Postcolonial theory is particularly useful for highlighting concepts such as communal consideration and inclusivity (Sethi, 2025). For example, Western exportation of intellectual property (IP) law can be seen as "Cultural imperialism" (Bowrey, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2023). This is furthered by the fact that it was an instrument employed to dismantle or delegitimise Indigenous knowledge systems that emerged beyond Western geographic parameters in the colonial era (Kirui et al., 2025; Sethi, 2025). This critical lens is therefore vital to understanding current AI governance. The instantiation of the Western IP approach as regulations

governing AI music technologies, without critical engagement, can preserve historical power dynamics, leading to a new technological neo-colonialism (Ali, 2024; Collins & Grierson, 2024; Eke & Reyes-Cruz, 2024). A postcolonial lens will critically interrogate how AI systems, mostly conceived within colonial frameworks, can (re)produce and sustain existing global inequities, hindering equitable development (Dugeri, 2024; Eke & Reyes-Cruz, 2024).

Juxtaposing Ontologies of Music

The dominant Western model of music is built on foundational concepts that lack communal, traditional practices and promote a copyright legal framework that treats creative output as private, commodifiable property (Bowrey, 2007; Williams, 2019). This conception of the artist as a uniquely gifted individual creating masterworks through innate talent is a relatively recent social construction, solidified during the Romantic movement and powerfully embodied in the figure of Ludwig van Beethoven (Williams, 2019). This mythos has shaped everything from popular music criticism to IP law, centring the idea of a fixed, static musical "work" as an object of ownership (Williams, 2019). The legal corollary to this ideology is modern copyright, which originated with Britain's Statute of Anne in 1710 and was later standardised globally through agreements such as the Berne Convention, thereby establishing the author's ownership of their ideas as a legal monopoly (Association of Research Libraries, n.d.).

In stark contrast, many African musical cultures are anchored in a communal framework in which music is regarded as a participatory, functional, and socially embedded practice (Agawu, 2011). This analysis, while recognising the wide variety of musical cultures on the continent, is built on well-known principles of communalism articulated by leading African musicologists. Agawu (2011) refers to music-making in many traditional African societies as engaging in a "thoroughly communal activity" motivated by a desire "to join rather than divide" (Agawu, 2011). Music is not, as they say, “art for art’s sake”, but is intended to be functional, fundamentally woven into society, while also being a storehouse of indigenous knowledge, collective memory, and social philosophy (Kuwor, 2025; Ampene, 2024). This view is supported by Mapaya (2014), who also laments the exogenous quality of Western members of academia who study African music mainly for Euro-American audiences, and calls for a form of musicology we will call African musicology that centres African epistemologies and worldviews.

Nzewi's study points to the strong human-centredness of African music, seeing it as a spirit force" motivating and overseeing humane relations, and musical practice rooted in a deep philosophical and metaphysical ponderings (Nzewi, 2025; Oehrle, 2009). This is echoed by Kirui et al. (2025), who share that in African epistemologies, knowledge is not abstract data, but is embodied, enacted, and experienced through performance. The verification of musical knowledge does not rely on a static text; it is rooted in effective, meaningful performance through community aesthetics and the acknowledged consent of master musicians who embody living tradition. Within this ontology, music is viewed not as a stagnant object or product but as an active process and action, or as a notion of musicking (Brabazon, 2024). This basic conceptual distinction is at the heart of the conflict, as AI, as a process-oriented technology, is more congruent with the African understanding of music as events than with the Western understanding of music as primarily a commercial object to be commodified and sold.

Methodology

This study is a systematic literature review which was conducted and reported in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines. This framework was selected to conduct a transparent, rigorous, and replicable approach to identifying,

selecting, and synthesising the relevant literature. The scope of the review was defined by inclusion and exclusion criteria, as described in the minutes (Table 1). These criteria were established to delimit the review to high-quality, relevant literary artefacts published during the rise of generative AI.

A comprehensive search was conducted in five key databases: Web of Science, Scopus, ProQuest, PubMed, and IEEE Xplore. The search strategy combined keywords from three separate conceptual groups using Boolean operators. The groups were: (A) Technology: "AI music", "generative music", "artificial intelligence music", "algorithmic composition"; (B) Western Concepts: "copyright", "authorship", "authenticity", "intellectual property", "artistic integrity"; and (C) Alternative Frameworks: "African musicology", "communal creativity", "postcolonial", "indigenous knowledge", "ethnomusicology". A sample search string is: ("AI music" OR "generative music") AND (copyright OR authorship OR authenticity) AND ("African musicology" OR "communal creativity" OR postcolonial). To minimise bias, the article selection process occurred in two stages. First, both authors independently screened the titles and abstracts of all records against the eligibility criteria. Divergence from the eligibility criteria was based on discussion and consensus. The second stage involved reading the full texts of the articles retained for final inclusion. Each included article underwent a quality assessment that evaluated the rigour of the argument, the clarity of the theoretical framework, and its contribution to the literature on the topic.

Table 1: Eligibility criteria

Criteria	**Inclusion**	**Exclusion**
Publication Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, legal reviews.	News articles, blog posts, non-scholarly publications.
Date Range	2016–2025. This period was selected to capture the literature following the significant rise of deep learning-based generative models.	Publications before 2016.
Language	English.	All other languages.
Subject Matter	Must explicitly address conceptual, legal, or philosophical implications of AI in music, copyright, authenticity, or communal creativity.	Purely technical AI papers; studies on AI in other art forms without connection to music.

The findings from the selected literature were synthesised using thematic analysis. This process was guided by the paper's theoretical framework, which juxtaposes the Western individualist paradigm with the African communal ethos. Themes were developed inductively from the literature but organised deductively into two overarching categories that reflect this central theoretical dichotomy, allowing for a structured and comparative presentation of the results.

A Thematic synthesis of the literature

This section presents the synthesised findings from the systematic literature review, organised into two primary themes that reflect the central paradigms under investigation. The presentation is descriptive, with interpretation reserved for the discussion section.

a. AI as an antagonist to authenticity and ownership

The Western legal system considers generative AI a disruptive technology that has created a "crisis" of foundational concepts of creativity and ownership (Zavada, 2024; Legis Music, 2024). The centre of

this dispute is the human authorship doctrine, which is foundational to U.S. copyright law and has been consistently upheld by the U.S. Copyright Office (USCO) (U.S. Copyright Office, 2025). USCO rulings have clarified that merely instructing an AI to create something does not qualify for copyright protection, and the human must have sufficient creative control, as demonstrated by selection, arrangement, or material alteration of the output (Fishman, 2025). This standard tends to place most AI-human output interactions in a cloudy "grey area," which is a source of risk for creators. As Ying et al. (2024) proclaim, "without a clear standard, these products run the risk of being misappropriated without attribution or compensation" (p. 40). A secondary legal battle is over what data may be used to train AI models. The core, yet unresolved, issue is whether using large amounts of copyrighted content to train a model constitutes fair use or mass infringement. This question of unauthorised reproduction of data forms the legal basis for the bulk of suits against AI creators ongoing today (p. 187). This grey area poses further risks of AI systems "accidentally infringing on existing copyrighted works when sourced from datasets consisting of the limitless content from the internet" (Ying et al., 2024, p. 40).

Beyond the legal debate, current literature explores a profound philosophical anxiety regarding the authenticity of AI-generated music, often described as a perceived lack of 'soul' (Brabazon, 2024). The prevailing Western notion of authenticity is based on a supposedly first-person conception, where music is authentic only when it represents an artist's sincere expression of their inner self and lived experience (Coulter, 2017). Detractors critique AI music as 'soulless' because an algorithm has no 'self' to express, no genuine feelings or emotions, and lacks intentionality (Brabazon, 2024). Research studies illustrate how powerful this belief system is: listeners often cannot reliably distinguish human-composed from AI music in blind studies, and simply knowing that music is AI-based diminishes its perceived quality and emotional impact. Some scholars have termed this the audio uncanny valley, in which the tension between hearing human-like and non-human-like listeners invites a state of existential estrangement (Brabazon, 2024).

b. African musicological frameworks of collective creation

The literature on African musicology presents a contrasting ontology of music that is not predicated on individual authorship or the static art object, but on communal participation and social function. The literature, drawing from scholars such as Agawu (2011), Nzewi (2025), and Kirui et al. (2025), consistently defines music in many African traditions as a process and an experiential event rather than a fixed object (Agawu, 2011; Nzewi, 2025; Kirui et al., 2025). Music-making is described as a "thoroughly communal activity" deeply integrated into the social fabric, characterised by participatory structures such as call-and-response that blur the line between performer and audience (Agawu, 2011). In these contexts, musical knowledge is understood to be embodied and enacted through performance (Kirui et al., 2025). The validation of this knowledge comes not from its originality in the Western sense, but from its "effective, meaningful performance, answerable to community aesthetics and socio-cultural functions" (Kirui et al., 2025).

In direct opposition to Western notions of individual property rights, the literature describes models of collective stewardship and community ownership of cultural expressions. Music, for example, is commonly seen as a collective cultural good that is owned by the community and used as a collective resource rather than by an individual creator (Sofola & Owoaje, 2025). The model of communal ownership is often at odds with the individually possessive interests in IP under the Western model law. As a result, there are concerns that applying those laws globally perpetuates a colonial history that offers little protection of indigenous knowledge and may increase the risk of appropriation, especially in the digital age, where cultural products can be easily removed from context and commodified (Dugeri, 2024).

Discussion

This section interprets the synthesised findings through the study's theoretical framework. It juxtaposes the two paradigms to articulate the paper's central argument that the AI music 'crisis' is a matter of cultural perspective, and it explores the broader implications of this reframing for technology, governance, and artistic practice. To begin, the thematic analysis reveals a stark contrast in how AI is perceived depending on the underlying cultural ontology of music. The "problems" that define the crisis in Western discourse—such as blurred authorship, the lack of a single identifiable creator, and the absence of authorial intent—are largely non-issues within a framework that values collective, participatory, and functional creativity. The Western paradigm, which conceives of music as a noun (a fixed, copyrightable *work*), is fundamentally challenged by a technology that operates as a process. In contrast, the African communal ethos, which understands music as a verb (a form of *musicking* or a social *event*), is conceptually far more compatible with AI's generative nature.

The heightened anxiety in the West is arising from the violations of rules and myths in the AI music ecosystem. If an algorithm can produce a work of music, it undermines the notion of the artist as an isolated genius. If the work cannot be copyrighted because there is no human authorship, the economic model of music as private property is violated. So, the crisis is not with the technology itself but rather an artefact of a specific, rigid cultural paradigm that fails to classify a phenomenon that violates its foundational definitions. Table 2 presents a comparative summary of these different ontologies and the modality for AI.

From the perspective of African musicology, we can reconceptualise AI not as a rival but as a new, nonhuman player in a collective act (Nolan, 2022), thereby opening new opportunities for technological development and creative potential. Instead of an AI built to imitate a composer's individual genius, we could build one that supports collective creation. For example, AI could create complex polyrhythmic structures for a drum within the ensemble, respond to a call-and-response by serving as a responsive musical partner, or act as a digital archivist who re-presents the melodies of ancestors to inform contemporary re-interpretation and improvisation. In this way, AI is no longer a rival to the musical artist but a powerful tool for collective engagement, reflecting the African conception of music as a process of "simultaneous doing" (as cited in Blum, 2017).

Table 2: Comparative summary of different ontologies and the modality for AI

Concept	Western Individualist Paradigm	African Communal Ethos	Implication for AI
Authorship	Singular, human "genius" as originator.	Collective, participatory, and emergent.	AI as a threat to human authorship vs. AI as a new non-human collaborator.
Creativity	Sincere expression of an author's inner self.	A socially functional and embodied process.	AI's lack of "soul" and intent vs. AI as a functional tool for social creation.
The 'Work'	A fixed, static object of art ("art for art's sake").	A dynamic, experiential event; a process.	AI output as an inauthentic, uncopyrightable object vs. AI as a participant in a creative event.
Ownership	Individual, commodified property (Copyright).	Communal stewardship and collective resources.	AI challenges the foundations of copyright vs. AI output as a potential communal resource.
Authenticity	Tied to the author's intent and originality.	Judged by its efficacy in social performance.	AI as "inauthentic" due to lack of intent vs. AI's output judged by its use-value in a performance context.

The uncritical global adoption of Western copyright regimes for regulating AI music will lead to a form of algorithmic colonialism (Ali, 2024; Collins and Grierson, 2024; Dugeri, 2024). Algorithmic colonialism is rooted in corporate, profit-driven agendas and represents a means of regulating culture through technology (Ali, 2024). AI models are primarily trained on music datasets sourced from the internet, and most of the music in these datasets comes from the Global North (Mehta et al., 2025). This could presage a future of "cultural homogenisation" in which AI systems reinforce the supremacy of Western musical forms and aesthetics (Mehta et al., 2025). Also, this creates a new "data-extractivism" exploitation paradigm, a situation that happens when they take or use culturally relevant Indigenous music without consent or proper compensation. This is just like the colonial civilisational systems that exploited the African resources for huge profits (Dugeri, 2024). This practice detaches musical works from their cultural and spiritual context, commodifying them and eroding their social significance (Dugeri, 2024). To disrupt this, we need a decolonised means of internationally regulating AI that does not adopt a Western-centred approach to advancing equity, including consent, data sovereignty, and community-participatory processes that centre Global South communities and prioritise implementation (Eke and Reyes-Cruz, 2024).

Brooks and Anderson (2025) argue that Afrofuturism offers an alternative philosophical and aesthetic perspective that counters technological determinism. As a cultural movement that intersects imagination, technology, the future, and liberation, Afrofuturism posits technology not as a coercive instrument of oppression but as a tool for the creative process of liberation and world-building (Brooks and Anderson, 2025; Okoye, 2024). African creatives are currently using AI as a collaborator to create unique artistic universes and co-author the story of our future. This adoption is clearly demonstrating how technology can be engaged on its own terms to forge alternative, liberatory futures (Afropunk, 2025).

Limitations of the Review

This study has limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the systematic review was limited to English-language literature, which may have excluded significant scholarly contributions from non-Anglophone regions and non-Anglophone perspectives. Second, the study is centred around a conceptual and theoretical synthesis. The study did not incorporate empirical studies collected from musicians, developers, or communities engaging with AI music technologies. Empirical work is a necessary next step for firmly situating these theoretical arguments within lived experience.

Conclusion

The perceived crisis of authenticity and ownership catalysed by AI-generated music is not a universal, socially determined, technocentric inevitability. It is a cultural manifestation of a hegemonic Western paradigm wrestling with its fundamental precepts: the individual genius and proprietary ownership of music, and a technology that inherently contradicts them. The greatest contribution of this article is the critical reframing of this crisis in much the same way the comparative, postcolonial framework above supports. In comparing the Western paradigm of individualism to the African model of communalism, it becomes clear that a collectivising, non-human-harnessing of music is existentially harmful to an alternative music based on participation, social function, and communal collaboration. By framing the current crisis as one of perspective rather than technology, this approach unlocks new conceptual pathways for AI to enhance global musical traditions. However, while the exploration of AI in music shows much promise, this optimism must be circumscribed by a sobering awareness of the trap of algorithmic colonialism, which risks stabilising historical power inequities unless a commitment to decolonise AI development is given precedence.

While we have shifted from the theoretical to the practical, this article ends by proposing a form of predictive agenda for future research:

a. There is an emerging need for more ethnographies documenting how artists and communities from other-than-Western traditions are currently using, modifying, and conceiving of AI music tools. Studies like these could yield valuable empirical insights into the cultural contexts and cognitions surrounding these technologies beyond the prevailing Western narrative.

b. Future research on the design/creation of culturally-unique AI music tools, and moving beyond models trained to mimic Western forms of composing, and design/create systems based on the characteristics of communal creativity; an AI which engages call-and-response, builds polyrhythmic underpinnings, or collaborates in improvisation.

c. Develop new models of IP frameworks and licences around stewardship and collective ownership. Discover new types of Creative Commons licences or other legal models to structure and frame the governance of AI-sourced cultural products, recognising collective rights and enabling equitable benefit-sharing.

In the end, AI can and should be seen not as a natural threat to human creativity, but rather as a dynamic, novel tool. By transcending the prescriptive model of the Western individualist paradigm with a more collaborative, inclusive, and socially accountable model, the global music world can emerge from this transition not as a crisis of collaboration but as an opportunity to compose a more just and variegated sound world.

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