

When Museveni sings, Mao, Besigye dance

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The fun at rallies is obvious but do the issues still matter?

At 43, the Democratic Party's Nobert Mao is the youngest of the eight presidential candidates. So it seemed to make sense when he bragged about being the candidate for the 'young'.



But that was long before the oldest candidate, the incumbent President Yoweri Museveni, 66 second after Bidandi Ssali 73, hooked up with a bunch of youthful rappers and, apparently quite incidentally, struck a cord among the youth. We are talking about the President's now famous '*U want another rap?*' campaign anthem.

'*U want another rap*' is a studio-reworked version of spoken Ankole folk-poetry

called *ekyevugo*. Museveni was meeting a group of young rappers when he first publicly recited the nursery rhyme. Sensing their excitement he reportedly asked them; "you want another rap?" The banter was studio re-mixed; possibly by Steve Jean's Fenon Records (Nothing is official there).

Of course Museveni's singing, or chanting if you like, is not as feisty as say, Burundi President Pierre Nkurunziza's performance as lead singer of his *Komezza Gusenga* choir and his famous dancing of the popular *Ndombolo*.

But Museveni's rap was nominated in the Best Hip-Hop single category of this year's Golden Awards

and it is quite common to see excited crowds dancing to it in clubs and home parties. Many more people have adopted it as their phone ringtone. The President is now fondly called “sevo” to rhyme with the song chorus, “*ye Sevo*”. Crowds get quite wild when it is played at Museveni’s National Resistance Movement (NRM) party campaign rallies.

It is not music with a political message, unless one reads it with the inflection on “rap” to mean “a beating” and that Museveni is asking if the opposition needs another beating. This interpretation has gained some currency because of the first lines of the song: *Mp’enkoni mp’enkoni mp’enkoni (Give me a cane, Give me a cane)*.

It is the general popularity of the song that has the public, musicians, scholars and politicians reacting; some with their own ideas around music.

Dancing

Moa’s relative youthfulness is still an advantage – in a different way. His jig is effortless as he swings to the beat of his anthem: *Ffe tugenda ne Mao*.

But it is Museveni’s most formidable and third-time challenger, Col. Dr. Kiiza Besigye who shows that to win votes this time, if a candidate cannot sing, at least they must dance.

Besigye has shorn his toughie-look and is to be seen dancing away to his campaign anthem, *Besigye Waffe*. The song was composed and is usually sung by a man identified only as Adam, who is said to be an orphan from the place where erstwhile allies Museveni and Besigye fought as rebels, Luwero. Clad in his sky-blue linen shirt with a mic in one hand and a key in the other, the retired colonel has perfected a routine that involves smiling at crowd, kicking right foot forward, stooping, moving forward, and abruptly throwing hands in the air with head bent backwards.

Even Uganda Federal Alliance (UFA) candidate, Beti Kamywa, who campaigns in the traditional but bulky wrapper, the gomesi, was shown on TV dancing to the sweat-drenching Acholi *dingi dingi* while canvassing for votes in northern Uganda.

Opposition politicians have taken to playing popular songs like Ronald Mayinja’s *Tuli ku bunkenke* (We live in tough times) and *Landlord*, which they claim is a strong critique of the movement government. *Landlord* apparently is the king of Buganda, Kabaka Ronald Muwenda Mutebi and the song is a direct

attack on the recently passed land law, which in many Baganda's view is a government scheme to rob the kingdom of the land it owns. It also critiques the central government's deliberate tactics to hold back Buganda's assets such as the 9000Sq miles of land, rental arrears worth billions that it owes to the kingdom plus autonomy to run its own affairs.

Fun dominates the campaigns as Hilary Kiyaga a.k.a Dr Hilderman's *Amelia* and Edris Musuuza a.k.a Eddie Kenzo's *Stamina* rule the rallies.

But there are more sober songs like Kyagulanyi Ssentamu a.k.a Bobi Wine's *Akalulu Tekatwawula* which calls for harmony among voters even as they pay allegiance to different political ideologies.

Historical role



This is not the first time music would be playing a central role in African politics.

In fact, the Uganda Peoples Congress candidate, Olara Otunnu relieves the ancient music glory of his party with its 20th century anthem; the '*Oho mama, the UPC, the congress of the people*'.

During the 2002 Kenya general elections, a group of Luo-musicians called Gidi Gidi Maji Maji of artistes Adonijah Jahd and Joseph Ogidi was cited for popularising the opposition message of change with its song "*Can you bwogo me*".

"Bwogo" is a Luo word meaning "scare" and the song became popularised as "Unbwogable", which became the defiant anthem of the opposition coalition that kicked President Daniel arap Moi out of power after 24 years of rule.

Joseph Walugembe, the Director National Theatre is excited that the "President (Museveni) is now a participant in the music industry".

“His song adds value to the entertainment industry,” says Walugembe, “His rap shows that art and culture are gaining a better rank on the national agenda.”

But Eddie Yawe, a vocalist with the popular Afrigo Band who is campaigning for a local government post on the opposition DP ticket, is unhappy by Museveni’s desire to copyright the song. He says good music is for the benefit of all but not individuals.

“He is using music for his personal agenda. He wants votes.”

Wafula Ogutu, the Spokesperson of the opposition Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) describes Museveni’s rap as “crap”.

“Young people need jobs but not songs,” he says.

Josephine Namutebi, a final year student of social work and social administration at Makerere University, said Museveni’s rap entertains people and provides momentary escape from their troubles.

“It is good when the President sings,” she continues, “people will be happy at that time but job scarcity will go on, bad roads are the order of the day, poor healthcare...”

The big question of course is whether rapping will deliver Museveni the vote?

Vote winner?

Anita Desire Asaasira, a Music, Dance and Drama lecturer at Makerere University says music is a sophisticated strategy in the campaign.

“Music is one thing that brings people together,” Anita says, “because when you say Baby Cool (musician) will perform live at a rally, even those who are not politically motivated will attend a rally.”

She says songs speak to composers and audiences in fundamental ways and, in the process shape perspectives, change attitudes and question authority. Anita’s concludes; “Ugandan musicians are players in this game”.

Mzee Zadok Adolu-Otojoka , the renowned former senior lecturer in music at Makerere University, also

says the rap is good for Museveni's campaign and may impact on the vote.

“Marriage of rhythm and instruments draws crowds to the singer,” he says, “When one admires the singer then it is likely he or she may get attracted to the person, thus votes.”

The opposition sees value in the mirth surrounding a campaign conducted against a backdrop of what they call widespread poverty. They spew out statistics indicating that 400,000 students graduate every year yet only 8,000 get employed. They are counting on youth disgruntlement to defeat Museveni's rap.

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