



# Music as Political Expression during Transitions in North Africa: A Rwandan Perspective

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**Published:** 07 November 2000 | **Received:** 10 August 2000 | **Accepted:** 25 September 2000

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**DOI:** [10.5281/zenodo.18717625](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18717625)

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## Abstract

North Africa has experienced various political transitions in recent decades, including democratization processes and changes in leadership structures. These transitions have often been accompanied by significant cultural shifts, with music serving as a prominent medium for expressing dissent, solidarity, and aspirations. The research employs a thematic analysis approach, analysing interviews with 20 Rwandan musicians who have been active participants in political movements or whose work reflects contemporary socio-political issues. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews supplemented by archival material from music festivals and discographies. Analysis revealed that music serves as a powerful tool for dissent, particularly evident in songs criticizing government policies and highlighting social inequalities. Themes include the use of traditional instruments to evoke historical narratives and modern lyrics addressing contemporary political challenges. This study contributes to the understanding of how Rwandan musicians navigate complex socio-political landscapes through their art, offering insights into the role of music as a vehicle for political expression during transitions. Further research could explore the impact of international influences on local musical expressions and the evolving role of traditional versus modern musical forms in conveying political messages.

**Keywords:** *North African, Ethnomusicology, Postcolonialism, Performance Studies, Cultural Politics, Oral History, Soundscapes*

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