

The Song, and Rapper, Inspiring Mozambique's Youth Uprising

“Povo no Poder,” or “People in Power,” by the rap star Azagaia, has become the unofficial anthem of the protests over a disputed election.



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Tavares Cebola reported from Marracuene, Mozambique, and John Eligon from Johannesburg.

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The young men huddled around a parked car, bobbing to a beat that thumped from the speakers. It was an energetic and catchy rap ballad — one that, these days, is instantly recognizable on the streets of Mozambique.

“Povo no Poder! Povo no Poder!” the men sang along, repeating a refrain that also was emblazoned on the black T-shirts they wore in Marracuene, a town about an hour outside of Maputo, Mozambique’s capital.

“People in Power,” as the song’s title translates in English, has become the unofficial anthem of a mass uprising that has consumed this southern African nation over the past few months, with the phrase showing up on protest placards, in chants and on clothing.

Tens of thousands of Mozambicans have taken to the streets to reject a presidential election that they believe was rigged by the long-governing party, Frelimo. Daniel Chapo of Frelimo was declared the winner with 65 percent of the vote, but protesters denounced the result as fraudulent. Many have rallied behind the top opposition candidate, Venâncio Mondlane.

Chaotic demonstrations have descended into looting, vandalism and tires burning in the road. More than 250 deaths have been reported as the police and military have clashed with protesters.

Yet, Mozambicans continue to protest in the streets en masse, with many of them — particularly young people — turning to “Povo no Poder,” the prescient song by the rap star Azagaia, as a guiding light.



Azagaia - POVO NO PODER (Versao estudio)



Born Edson Amândio Maria Lopes da Luz, Azagaia stood out for lyrics that bluntly criticized the government — a risky move in a nation where the state has been known to crush the slightest whiff of dissent. (His music has been censored on state media.) That fearlessness is what inspires many to push through the danger and chaos of the current upheaval, activists say.

After Azagaia died last year following an epileptic seizure at age 38, young people flocked to the streets to pay tribute to him. Those tributes turned into processions in which the youth aired their grievances — and were eventually squashed by police tear gas.

Cídia Chissungo, 28, a rights activist who organized some of the marches, said the anger over that experience has in part fueled young people now protesting the election results. In some ways, Ms. Chissungo said, Azagaia wrote the playbook for the youth uprising, with lyrics speaking to the very issues that have stirred public anger.

In “The March,” he rapped about how the poor are overlooked by the political elite.

“Woe to Us” criticizes the government’s failure to help the people of the oil-rich northern province of Cabo Delgado, which has been upended by an Islamic State-backed insurgency for several years.

And “Sell the Country” castigates the government for selling out the country to oil and gas interests.

But no song has captured the imagination like “Povo no Poder,” which he released in 2008 amid huge protests over rising costs of food and public transportation. Although that was 16 years ago, it was almost as if Azagaia had predicted how the situation would play out in Mozambique today.

In the song, which he raps in Portuguese, he says:

This government really won't change, no

There will be a tragedy, yes

Even if they come with tear gas

The strike is full of oxygen

They won't stop our performance

I will fight, I won't abstain.



Supporters of Mr. Mondlane demonstrating in Maputo last month. Alfredo Zuniga/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

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