

Ch. 4
Key Issue 3

Liberia's Starving Rappers

From: Vanessa Gezari

MONROVIA, Liberia—Jonathan Koffi, known to his fans as Takun J, wore fake diamond earrings and a rhinestone-studded D&G necklace that was missing most of its bling. One day in March, he and several other Liberian rappers gathered around a plastic table next to a blazing strip of asphalt in downtown Monrovia. Only a flimsy umbrella separated us from the punishing midday sun, and the musicians sweated into their do-rags.

They were members of L.I.B. Records, one of Liberia's most popular rap outfits, which is not a record label in the traditional sense but a group of like-minded artists who sometimes perform together. Unlike the American rappers they admired—50 Cent, DMX, Jay-Z—their lives lacked any hint of glamour. Most were in their 20s and lived at home. They walked everywhere, because in Liberia, even a rapper with three simultaneous radio hits couldn't afford a bicycle. On nights when he ran out of food, Takun J told me that he ate hot cereal with sugar before bed, just to have something in his stomach.

In economic terms, they had a lot in common with almost everyone else in their country, where 80 percent of the population lives on less than \$1 a day, and the unemployment rate hovers around 85 percent. They also shared an experiential bond with the earliest practitioners of American hip-hop, who rapped about urban poverty, violence, and desperation because they had lived it. "You know how it was like around '92, '93 in the States, around Tribe Called Quest, there wasn't no money in the game," said Buckay Bantoe, an L.I.B. rapper who wore a Kasafarian knit cap over his dreadlocks. "But say, like around '96, '97, when Puff Daddy, certain people started comin' in ... the game took a turn. That's how it's going to be here. That's how I see it. It's going to take off."

Like their American counterparts, the L.I.B. rappers grew up on Big Daddy Kane and "Rapper's Delight" and graduated to the Yo-Yang Clan and the Roots. During Liberia's 14-year civil war, they fled the country or hid in their homes to avoid being killed or conscripted by rival factions. Now, they are trying to create a uniquely Liberian musical genre in a place where no one seems able to agree on the definition of a national culture. It's hard to go anywhere in Liberia without hearing music—church choirs belting out gospel songs, rocked-up spirituals blasting from big outdoor speakers, or tiny radios playing reggae—but most of it isn't Liberian. Artists from Ghana and Senegal are popular, and kids wear T-shirts emblazoned with the faces of Eminem and Tupac Shakur.

The L.I.B. rappers call their music "hip-co," the "co" being short for "colloquy." This is the Liberian vernacular, broken American English with bits of indigenous tongues thrown in. It's the language of the street, and Takun J and the other L.I.B. rappers choose subjects that resonate with ordinary people. "If we see politicians doing crooked stuff, we going to speak about it," Bantoe said. "We not going to let nobody stop us from speaking truth in our music."

Takun J is 26, idealistic, and earnest. He sees music as a way of countering injustice because, he told me, "The musician is also a politician." When we spoke, he was working on a single about police corruption. In Monrovia, poorly paid traffic cops routinely stop drivers for imaginary violations and demand bribes. The song went, in part:

*Policeman coming, the policeman running
The policeman can take stiles when he see money ...
The policeman not fair, policeman not right
Policeman judge your case, brother you fit be scared!*

The song includes a plea to President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf to crack down on corruption or face public outrage. Even though he believes his songs can alter the status quo, he alludes to another widely held view:

*Policeman not shamed, policeman can't change
Oh when you look at him, tell me how he will change? ...
Tell me now my people, tell me who we will trust ...
The police that we got, that doing that kind of stuff?*

Takun J and the other L.I.B. rappers have plenty of listeners, but they're not making money. There is only one distributor for full-length albums in Liberia, they told me, and whenever they have enough material for a CD, they sell the songs, rights and all, for several-thousand dollars. They don't have much negotiating power, because the distributor is the only game in town. "It's like we in slavery," Bantoe said. "We working hard, and he just buying it for little or nothing." They make a little money playing live, but sometimes money is not the point. I watched them perform for free one afternoon on a beach in Monrovia. The sky was silvery, and dozens of boys stood knee-deep in the water, laughing and splashing each other with giant plumes of white spray. The L.I.B. rappers launched into a song about a pretty girl whose number they wanted, and a crowd of teenagers quickly fanned around them, pressing uncomfortably close. They listened intently and a little desperately, like people who suspect that it may be a long time before such pure enjoyment comes their way again.

Vanessa Gezari covers foreign and national news for the St. Petersburg Times. She traveled to Liberia on an International Reporting Project Fellowship at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

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Using technology to improve economies

A Vodafone case study

The impact of technology on developing countries

Over the last 20 years or more, mobile telecommunications and the internet have made great leaps forward. Vodafone is a market leader in opening up access to people and information around the globe 24 hours a day. The connectivity provided by mobile phone technology supports economic development. Its impact on a developing country like Kenya has been extremely positive. Many families live in vast, remote areas of the countryside. Installing landlines over those distances is expensive and difficult.

Families are often separated as the main earners are forced to live and work in the townships in order to earn enough to keep their families. Many are self-employed small farmers or trades people such as plumbers and builders. For small businesses, better access to mobile technology means that they can advertise to a wider audience and do not have to rely for work on word-of-mouth. They can be sure that clients can contact them with ease.

Vodafone in partnership with Safaricom also recognised the need to improve the movement and security of money to allow small businesses to grow. As a solution, Vodafone set up M-PESA (literally 'mobile money') working with funding from the Financial Deepening Challenge Fund (FDCF). This is a UK fund established to aid international development. A mobile network is quick and easy to install and less expensive to run than landlines. M-PESA provides a simple, secure, low-cost money transfer system:

- A customer goes to an accredited M-PESA 'top-up' shop and, in return for cash, has credit registered on their phone via the M-PESA system (rather like a pay-as-you-go top up).
- The customer receives a text message to confirm the transaction. They can either store this on their phone until needed or they can forward it to someone else. When needed, the credit can be converted back into cash at any registered M-PESA agent or even via an ATM (cash) machine.
- Vodafone takes a small commission on the transfer.

There are over 2,200 M-PESA registered agents in petrol stations, supermarkets and other retail bases across Kenya and five million subscribers. The service has lots of benefits. For example M-PESA has helped small businesses such as taxi drivers by enabling them to receive money for fares without having to drive around with lots of cash in their cars. The service was particularly helpful during a recent conflict in the country as it helped people to transfer money safely. M-PESA has also been used to buy everyday items, as well as to pay the rent, send funds to other people or buy phone airtime. It has even been used to pay school fees, as secondary schooling is not 'free' in Kenya. By providing safe, secure transfer of money, Vodafone's M-PESA system has:

- helped small businesses become more financially secure
- provided a safe way for wage earners to send money back home to their families
- solved the problems of carrying around large amounts of cash.

Following these achievements in Kenya, Vodafone has extended M-PESA into other emerging markets including Tanzania and Afghanistan.



Developing Countries Obsessed With Social Media

Added by Mona Salman on February 15, 2014.

Saved under Technology

Tags: developing countries



Even though the U.S. might be the place of origin for Facebook, America's use of the Internet, particularly social media is quite limited compared to the social media obsession found in developing countries.

According to statistic results of Pew Research Center; Philippines, Russia, Egypt in addition to 14 more developing countries outperform the U.S. in the matter of the capacity of Internet users who log on to social network web sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn. The Pew Research Center report also detected the access of people living in third world countries to the Internet is not limited to computers and laptops, but also smartphones are popular and used by many people. However, the use of smartphones is limited to texting as well as capturing and exchanging photos.

The reason why social network is becoming obsessive is because life has become increasingly stressful especially in developing countries. With the social, political and economic unrest, people have been trying to breakout of the confinements in real life. People use social media to connect with old friends, find new partners, generate ideas, share views openly with no restrictions, talk about sensitive topics that deal with politics and religion. It is also used as a method to share videos, images as well as news. Perhaps this justifies when people in the developing nations get online, the Internet becomes part of their daily lives.

Analytics demonstrated Egypt as the the highest among third world countries in the use of the Internet, particularly social networking websites, with the rate of 88 percent people accessing

the world wide web. Russia and the Philippines came in second place with a proportion of 86 percent of Internet users using mainly social media websites. Although the percentages show that people in developing countries are on good terms with technology and advanced communicating methods, they still show a harmful impact on personal levels.

Social media is a double-edged weapon that has its advantages and disadvantages. In spite of the fact that social media plays a vital role in socializing, entertaining, enlightening and reuniting people, the excessive use of it, manages to destroy family bonding as some reports suggested that one of five marriages were ruined by Facebook. Moreover, it tends to become an addiction and thus, time consuming. According to recent studies, people who are obsessed with social media tend to spend an average of eight to 10 hours per week on social networking websites. Besides ,some of these websites do not provide enough privacy and security. In fact the most potential risk of social media is hacking. Incidents of profiles and accounts being hacked are common issues. In addition, the lack of social interaction could result in people becoming introverts and may cause serious stressful mental diseases. Last but not least, over-using social media will significantly diminish face to face interaction and body language communication skills.

To sum it up, social media is a very essential form of communication that should be practiced by everyone. However, obsessive use of social media by developing countries will transform it from being a human friendly social technology to become a destructive power for human relationships.

By: Mona Salman

Sources:

Social News Daily

Yahoo News

Live Science

Read more at <http://guardianlv.com/2014/02/developing-countries-obsessed-with-social-media/#OjZzKuoQA5IeBqcP.99>



Cracking the 'Great Firewall' of China's Web censorship

Hacking Past China's Web Censors

By Paul Wiseman, USA TODAY

HONG KONG

If an Internet user in China searches for the word "persecution," he or she is likely to come up with a link to a blank screen that says "page cannot be displayed."

The same is true of searches for "Tibetan independence," "democracy movements" or stranger sounding terms such as "oriental red space time" ??? code for an anti-censorship video made secretly by reporters at China's state TV station.

It's a reflection of the stifling, bizarre, and sometimes dangerous world of Internet censorship in China. The communist government in Beijing is intensifying its efforts to control what its citizens can read and discuss online as political tensions rise ahead of this summer's Olympic Games.

Fighting the censors every step of the way is an army of self-described "hacktivists" such as Bill Xia, a Chinese-born software engineer who lives in North Carolina. Xia and others are engaged in a kind of technological arms race, inventing software and using other tactics to allow ordinary Chinese to beat the "Great Firewall of China" and access information on sensitive subjects such as Chinese human rights and Tibet, the province where pro-independence sentiment has boiled over in recent months.

Invoking the hit science-fiction movie *The Matrix*, Xia has compared what he does to giving Chinese Web surfers a "red pill" that lets them see reality for the first time. He spends long nights struggling to outfox an opponent ??? the Chinese government ??? that is arguably the world's best at controlling what its people see.

"They are very smart," Xia says. "We have to move very quickly."

To Americans and other Westerners, it might seem odd that Internet censorship is still possible at a time when YouTube, satellite TV, and online chat rooms produce an overwhelming flow of real-time news and data. Yet authoritarian regimes from Cuba to Saudi Arabia, to Pakistan rely on a mix of sophisticated technology and old-fashioned intimidation to ensure that dissent can be repressed, even in the Information Age.

No one does it quite like China, which has proved that old-school communist apparatchiks could tame something as wild as the Web. China has the world's "most sophisticated" Internet filtering system, according to the OpenNet Initiative, an academic cooperative that tracks censorship issues.

At the heart of China's censorship efforts is a delicate balancing act.

Unlike ^{subject} communist North Korea, which bans online access to its general population, China is encouraging Internet usage as it rushes to construct a modern economy. This year, the number of Internet users in China surpassed the USA for the first time, hitting 233 million by the end of March. However, China's government does not tolerate opposition and is wary of the variety of views and information the Web brings.

Last month's pro-independence riots in Tibet, and the accompanying furor that followed the international relay of the Olympic torch, have led Chinese officials to step up their Web censorship. News articles and video clips concerning Tibet were banned for several days. Xia expects the censorship will tighten further in the coming months because "many human rights organizations will be trying to get their voices heard" during the Olympic Games.

"There will be lots of news out there," says Xia, who admits he had little interest in politics until the Chinese government banned the spiritual group Falun Gong in 1999 and started persecuting its members. Xia is a member of the group.

"Lots of unexpected things are going to happen," he says.

Forbidden words, stories

The most basic tool at the Chinese government's disposal ??? and, perhaps, the one most easily circumvented by dissidents ??? is to ban access within China to websites such as Voice of America or to certain stories that contain sensitive words and phrases. For example, several recent USA TODAY stories about Tibet are currently blocked within China.

Other censorship methods are more blunt. This month, Hu Jia, an activist on AIDS and other issues, was sentenced to ??? years in jail for articles he wrote for Boxun.com, a U.S.-based Chinese-language website that is banned in China. At least 48 cyberdissidents are behind bars in China, according to Reporters Without Borders.

Chinese officials with the Ministry of Information Industry, the State Council Information Office, and other agencies declined to comment on why China restricts content on the Internet.

Past explanations by the government focus on the need to prevent "harmful" content such as pornography and terrorism from reaching citizens.

Even those "hacktivists" who live outside the country apparently face risks. Peter Li ??? a Chinese-born, Princeton-educated computer specialist ??? says he learned that two years ago when he answered the doorbell at his home in suburban Atlanta.

Three men burst inside, beat him, bound him, and gagged him with duct tape, he says. Speaking Korean and Chinese, they ransacked his filing cabinets and hauled off his two computers. They ignored a TV, a camcorder, and other valuables.

The FBI and the local Fulton County, Ga., police still have not found the men responsible for the attack. But Li, who like Xia is a practicing member of Falun Gong, says it was an attempt by the Chinese government to shut him up.

"I know it wasn't a simple robbery," he says.

The Chinese government has denied any involvement in the raid on Li's home.

There are a range of other methods China has used to suppress information. Among them:

???Creating bottlenecks. In The Atlantic magazine last month, journalist James Fallows noted that Internet traffic to China is channeled through three computer centers ??? near Beijing, Shanghai, and the southern city of Guangzhou.

In the USA, by contrast, the Internet is designed to avoid traffic jams by allowing information to flow from as many sources as possible. By building in chokepoints, Fallows wrote, "Chinese authorities can easily do something that would be harder in most developed countries: physically monitor all traffic into or out of the country."

???Checking Internet traffic for subversive material. This is done in much the same way police dogs sniff airport luggage for illegal drugs. The Chinese install "packet sniffers" and special routers to inspect data as they cruise past the chokepoints. If the detectors spot a Chinese Internet user trying to visit a suspect website ??? say, one run by Falun Gong ??? they can block the connection.

A frustrated user might get a message saying: "Site not found." Similarly, Web users can be stopped from leaving subversive comments in online forums. Sometimes they get notes back warning them to behave or apologizing for technical problems.

???Demanding self-censorship. Chinese authorities hold commercial websites responsible for what appears on them. In Beijing ??? where Internet controls are strictest ??? authorities issue orders to website managers through cellphone text messages and demand that they comply within 30 minutes, according to a report last fall by Reporters Without Borders.

When the Internet portal Sina altered the headline of a state media report on the economy, the government accused it of "inciting violence" and excluded it from interviews with important officials for a month. The website NetEase fired two editors after they published a 2006 poll showing that 64% of 10,000 participants would not want to be reborn as Chinese.

???Issuing propaganda. Authorities in the southern boomtown of Shenzhen created two cute cartoon cybercops ??? the male Jingjing and the female Chacha ??? that pop up on websites to remind Internet users they're being watched. The Beijing Youth Daily newspaper quoted a security official admitting that the big-eyed cartoon duo were designed "to intimidate."

Chinese officials also order websites to reprint official propaganda such as a report encouraging Internet users to abide by online etiquette.

???Getting outside help. China has policed the Internet with assistance from U.S. firms. Cisco Systems, for instance, supplied the original routers China used to monitor Internet traffic. (Cisco has said it didn't tailor its equipment for the Chinese market.)

Google created a censored search engine for China. Outside China, users who search Google Images for "Tiananmen Square" get pictures from the 1989 pro-democracy protests that ended in a crackdown that left hundreds dead ??? and included the iconic photograph of a lone man staring down a line of Chinese tanks. Inside China, users get only tourist images of Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City across the street.

Yahoo turned over e-mail that authorities used to jail a Chinese journalist who leaked information about China's attempts to censor coverage of the anniversary of the Tiananmen crackdown.. (The companies say they had to comply with Chinese law.)

Despite China's strategies, sophisticated Internet users in the country "can pretty much get as much information as (they) want," says Jeremy Goldkorn, the Beijing-based editor of the China media website danwei.org. "But what (the government does) is make it difficult, so the ordinary person is not going to bother."

Censorship loopholes

In 2002, Xia formed a company ??? Dynamic Internet Technology ??? to wage cyberwar on the Chinese regime. He created Freagate, a software program that finds holes in the firewall and takes Chinese Internet users to banned websites, undetected.

Xia also sends millions of e-mail messages into China for customers such as Voice of America and the activist group Human Rights in China. The e-mails contain links to forbidden sites at an ever-changing list of temporary Internet addresses, part of an effort to stay a step ahead of Chinese censors.

Traffic on his network of "proxy" websites picked up in February, when heavy snows blocked traffic and shut train service in southern China, Xia says.

The Chinese government was reluctant to admit anything had gone wrong, so frustrated travelers turned to renegade websites to get practical information on weather conditions and rail service.

Even so, Chinese authorities constantly are finding new ways to plug the holes Freagate finds or to otherwise stymie Xia's efforts. He figures has upgraded Freagate 20 times. "We're gradually getting faster and faster" at fixing problems with the software when Chinese users report them, he says.

Chinese Internet users also use decidedly low-tech methods to evade official attempts to censor their e-mail or online commentary.

They will, for instance, try to throw off the cybercops by inserting spaces or punctuation marks between characters ??? much as spammers in the USA try to beat e-mail filters by offering "Free V i@gra!"

The authorities try to update their list of banned terms ??? now running into the hundreds ??? to include those with creative punctuation.

Rebecca MacKinnon, former Beijing bureau chief for CNN, spotted the way some cheeky Chinese Internet users stayed ahead of the censors. Whenever their edgy comments were purged from a website, they'd joke online that they'd "been harmonized" ??? a sarcastic reference to Chinese President Hu Jintao's calls for a "harmonious society." Soon, the censors caught on and added "harmonized" to the blacklist.

The Chinese term for "harmonized" is he xie??? which sounds the same as the Chinese term for "river crabs" but with a slightly different intonation. Now, Chinese online chatter frequently includes references to river crabs ??? the latest code for censorship, says MacKinnon, who studies the Chinese Internet at the University of Hong Kong.

Xia says he's confident the "hacktivists" can win their cat-and-mouse game with the Chinese authorities. After all, he says, the Chinese zodiac favors rodents in 2008: "It's the Year of the Rat."

Contributing: Calum MacLeod in Beijing

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Several high-profile tech companies have launched global initiatives to increase access to technology by children and young people in the world's poorest countries, pouring millions of computers and educational materials into ICT training programmes.

Computer giant Dell runs its own computer hardware and literacy programme called Youth Learning, which initially launched in India and is now operating in 15 countries across the world.

"It's our belief that access to technology brings young people into contact with the broader world, opening up access to education and vocational training in a very cost-effective way," says Deb Bauer, director of Dell Giving.

"What we've learnt is that it isn't enough to simply provide the hardware, it's the quality the wrap-around services - the teacher training, maintenance of technology, reliability of power, which provides the long-term benefits and this is one of the learnings we've been taking forward."

The potential of mobile technology as an educational tool is also steadily growing.

Mobile phone technology in developing countries now accounts for four out of every five connections worldwide. In a recent report by the GSMA into m-learning, more than half of all young people surveyed in Ghana, India, Uganda and Morocco who had accessed the internet, had done so on a mobile device.

Duncan Clark, a British tech investor and founder of e-learning company Epic Group, goes further when he says he believes that mobile technology has produced a "renaissance of reading and writing" among young people across the world.

"[Mobile phones] will, I think, be the single most important factor in increasing literacy on the planet. Why? Every child is massively motivated to learn to text, post and message on mobiles. The evidence shows that they become obsessive readers and writers through mobile devices," he says.

"Texting is a significant form of literacy, introduced by youngsters, on their own, spontaneously, rapidly and without tuition."

Mobile phones are also proving effective tools in engaging and mobilising children and young people to engage in economic, social and political spheres.

The Text to Change (TTC) project in Africa recently launched the Voice Africa's Future project, which aims to engage 150,000 young people across Africa by asking them to text what they think the future of their own countries should look like. In Ghana last year, a community of young people formed a netizens community and set up a hashtag on twitter - #GhanaDecides - to try and involve more young people and eligible voters to get involved in the general elections.

Yet the wholesale embracement of the idea of reaching young people through technology has also proved problematic.

"In fact, despite all the big-name sponsors and tech-led education initiatives there have been rather disappointing results in efforts to integrate ICTs into education systems," says Kenny.

"There needs to be a massive training programme put in place alongside any kind of imported initiatives as you don't suddenly get a whole bunch of kids from slums in India applying for jobs at Microsoft and Google just because they've had one computer in the classroom."

The darker side of internet use and issues over privacy and safety of children and young people in developing countries is also a concern.

Unicef's upcoming research into children and young people's use of ICT's exposes the lack of data and research on protecting children's safety online in developing countries compared to developed countries such as the UK or US.

Initial research findings reveal that up to a quarter of children in urban areas and one in every five children in rural areas surveyed in Vietnam had shared personal information such as their phone number or name of their school with someone online. In South Africa, more than 70% of users on an online social networking site talked to strangers at least once a week. In Vietnam 49% of urban children

had been exposed to indecent content online, while 20% of rural children reported having been bullied, threatened or embarrassed online.

"Technology has the potential to be a huge force for good but it is not a silver bullet, a fix-all solution to how to fix the education and employment problems for young people in developing countries," says Kenny. "Yet one thing is clear - it will undoubtedly play an increasingly important part of millions of young people's lives across the world."

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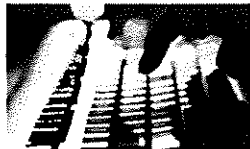


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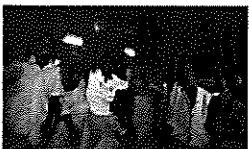
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