

# Music in Unification and Resistance: Song and Artistic Performance since Land Reform in Zimbabwe

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**Abstract:**-Song and artistic performance have long been dominant discourses in liberation struggles across the globe. Southern Africa, the United States of America, Ireland, and Latin America are just a few examples of where lyrics of freedom and artistic performances, used as a means of unification and resistance, have entered popular culture and the political imaginary during and well after times of struggle. In Zimbabwe similar trends are evident as several indigenous performing groups have used song and artistic performances to express their life aspirations in view of the new obtaining economic environment after the land reform of year 2000. This paper discusses how song and performance constitute a space of assertion and how performances of liberation have been translated into an expressive tool well after the attainment of political independence. The paper also discusses how song and artistic performance has adjusted to the opening and/or closing of space (temporal, geographical, psychological, and symbolic) within our indigenous traditional societies.

**Key words:** artistic performance, land reform, resistance, struggle, unification.

## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses what characterises the song and artistic performance arena in Zimbabwe since the adoption of the land reform programme at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The authors' lived experiences as music educators, traditional music festivals performances and as music critiques before, during and after the land reform, dialogue with practising artists, music and dance festival directors and administrators inspires and informs the study.

## II. BRIEF BACKGROUND OF LAND REFORM IN ZIMBABWE

The land reform of 2000 was a government program of land re-distribution with a special focus on redressing the colonial racial imbalances with regards to land ownership. During the colonial period from September 1890 up to April 1980 the country Zimbabwe, then Rhodesia was governed by the colonial administration of Britain, beginning with a movement called the Pioneer Column. The Pioneer Column was a militant and an intelligence force under the leadership of Cecil John Rhodes of the British South Africa Company (BSAP). The BSAP was overseeing the daily affairs in the country on

behalf of the Queen of England who reigned over the entire British Empire and all its colonies.

During the colonial period millions of indigenous Zimbabweans lost their fertile and arable land mainly to British farmers most of whom were 2<sup>nd</sup> World War veterans who were compensated with arable land in Zimbabwe. The black Zimbabweans were then forced to relocate to small, draught prone and dry regions of the country referred to as the Communal Reserves thereby creating and leaving behind vast space for the white farmers. In the process the indigenous black people lost a great part of their wealth and cultural heritage. In addition, several pieces of legislations were passed to legitimate the exercise which greatly disadvantaged the indigenous people. For example, pieces of legislation were passed which made it an offence for the black people to own vast pieces of land. In the communal reserves, people were expected to destock and have only a limited number of cattle so as not to strain the limited available grazing land. Also, there was a hut tax which was a form of taxation which forced the native people to pay their taxes in money on a per household or hut basis. According to Moyana (1986) in Rhodesia by 1901 the hut tax payable annually was £1 and was imposed by Proclamation No. 18. In 1910 it was superseded by flat-rate poll taxes payable by individuals and this was burdensome on African indigenous men who inherited elderly widows and relatives according to their African customs. All this was against the wishes and expectations of the indigenous black Africans who were known historically for having large families. They too had extended families and as well as owning large herds of cattle which also served as their form of wealth within their communities. Zimbabwe got her political independence after nearly a century of colonial domination by its erstwhile colonial master, Britain.

This period was also characterised by several wars of liberation by the indigenous people to secure freedom. These wars were referred to as Chimurenga 1 (*Liberation War 1*), Chimurenga 2 (*Liberation War 2*) and the subsequent Chimurenga 3 (*Liberation War 3*) which came after the attainment of political independence in April 1980 and in which the Land Reform was rolled out in year 2000. It must

be noted that all wars of liberation were premised on the need for equitable land distribution amongst all who live in Zimbabwe. In the first war of liberation the indigenous people did not conquer as the British had sophisticated war strategies and weaponry. It was during this war when the legendary spirit medium of Mbuya Nehand are fused to be baptised by the Christian Missionaries and gave a profound prophecy that even if the colonial government were to kill her, she was not defeated as “My Bones Shall Arise” and surely they arose in the subsequent wars and unification and resistance that characterised and culminated in the land reform (Moyana, 1986).

The second war of liberation saw the black nationalists emerging more victors. Many lives were lost on both fronts of the Rhodesians as well as the liberation war fighters with many of the casualties being on the former. This then encouraged the Rhodesians to negotiate a peace settlement which was to be convened at the Lancaster House Conference in 1979. The Lancaster House Conference was still premised on the need for an equitable land redistribution exercise. Now that the white farmers had been on the land for nearly a century and have made several improvements on the land, land redistribution was to be tied to some form of compensation. It was agreed that only Britain was to be responsible for the compensation of its farmers who had made some improvements on the vast pieces of land they held. The ‘willing buyer willing seller’ strategy was also adopted to help in the land redistribution. This development led to a peace settlement which then culminated in political independence for Zimbabwe on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April 1980.

It cannot be overemphasised that the essence of the War of Liberation in Zimbabwe was mainly the quest for land. There are clear publications outside the area of music and dance performance that show that the period after independence from 1980 to the beginning of land reform saw very little being achieved as far as land redistribution was concerned. It was evident that the willing buyer willing seller concept had greatly failed as no land had been made available for the landless blacks after nearly two decades of independence. In addition, the departure of a Conservative government in Britain impacted on the previously agreed upon terms and references. The former colonial administrator’s new Labour government brought with it profound changes too as it later emerged that the new administration was not fully committed to some obligations with their former colonies, hence were not willing to be responsible for any compensation including that of compensating the British farmers in new Zimbabwe. This then left the Zimbabwean government with little or no option but to embark on the land reform program as a way of bringing finality and closure to the land issue. It resulted in many former white-owned lands being distributed to landless black Zimbabwe.

### III. MUSIC IN UNIFICATION AND RESISTANCE

During the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> wars of liberation, song and dance played a critical role in developing consciousness amongst the masses. It was through song and dance that specific war messages were transmitted from the masses to the freedom fighters and vice versa. This was mainly through night gatherings called *Pungwes* (all night music and dance gatherings). *Pungwes* were critical in sharing the liberation war ideals, aims and objectives, updating the masses on the developments on the war front and to a greater extent served as recruitment points too. In general, they were private platforms used for mass engagement and mobilisation. The masses were an important element within the liberation struggle as without them the freedom fighters, also referred to as the guerrillas were like ‘fish outside the water’.

Several youths received liberation teachings through the commissariat wings of liberation war movements and many made decisions to support and join the freedom fighters during these gatherings. Particularly critical for this discussion *Pungwes* too served as an entertainment arena for both the freedom fighters and the ordinary masses or ‘*povo*’ as they both got an opportunity to share some lighter moments without a very difficult war situation where death was always imminent. The music that was performed was centred on themes that resonated very well with war ideals. It was through the medium of music and dance performances that the communities got to reflect and share coaching points meant to bring about desired change for their lives in the war situation. Pongweni (1982) acknowledges the ideological role played by music during the liberation struggle.

The music was so functional that it was more of a way for the masses of showing solidarity with the freedom fighters. Many songs were composed during the liberation struggle and some of the compositions have stood the test of time as they are still popular today as evidenced by the frequency they are played by both military bands and other contemporary music bands in Zimbabwe. Some of the song examples include *Nziradzamasoja*,

#### Stanza 1

Kunenziradzewmasojadzekuzvibanadzo

Tereraimitemoyosenenziradzakanaka x2

#### Chorus

Tisavetinatorazvinhuzvemassyedu

Dzoreraizvinhuzvosezvatogwakumuvengi

Tauraizvinetsikakuruzhinjirwevanhu, kuti mass  
inzwisisezvakanangamusangano

#### Stanza 2

Bhadharazvamunotenganenziradzakanaka

Mudzorezvinhuzvesezvamunengematora x2

Chorus

Stanza 3

Tisaitechoupombwemuhondoyechimurenga

Tisanetsavasungwavatinengetabata x2

Chorus

Stanza 4

Awa ndiwomashokoakataurwakare

naivovaMaovachitidzidzisa x2

Another song is MbuyaNeHandakufavachitaurashuwa,

*MbuyaNeHandakufavachitaurashuwa*

*KutiMucharachetenyikaino*

*Shoko rimweravakatiudza*

*Toragidiuzvitonge*

Literal translation:

AmbuyaNeHanda even in her death

That we shall own this land

One word that she emphasized is

Take the gun and liberate yourself.

Another one is #Zimbabwe yakauyanehondo,

*Zimbabwe yakauya ne hondovakomana,  
yakauyanehondovakomana, nehondo*

*Chaminukawakauraiwanehondovakomana,  
wakauraiwanehondovakoma, nehondo*

*Nehondo, nehondovakomana, x3 Nehondo*

Literal translation:

Zimbabwe came through a protracted war

Liberation war heroes like Chaminuka and Nehanda also lost their lives through the same war.

Some of the common songs are: *Mhururukuendanekudzoka*, *Changuchimwechimwana*, *chakasarakuhondo* just to mention a few. Similar themes have been explored through the medium of more recent music genres that identify with the youth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century for example, *Ndiriroja*, *handinamushapanondinogaramubhoyisikayi* by Extra Large, and others. Some of the songs have transcended through other musical genres like choral music and the traditional *mbira* music. The songs addressed themes that resonated well with liberation war ideals that hovered around determination, sacrifice, selflessness and courage amongst others. In all these songs compositions the need for land remained pivotal for it was only through the possession of land that the children of Zimbabwe were to unleash their destiny.

It is believed too that those who had lost their dear lives in the liberation wars were never to rest in eternal peace unless and only until the land of Zimbabwe was to be returned to its rightful owners.

#### IV. THE 75PERCENT AND 100 PERCENTLOCAL CONTENT POLICIES IN BROADCASTING

The advent of independence brought much awaited happiness amongst the citizenry. To many it was a time to rejoice and fulfil all the aspirations that the masses had for a very long period. This was not to be easily realised though as they were many hurdles to be overcome in the newly independent state.

While there has been significant development in the arts and culture sector, it can be argued that most of the policies and legislations of colonial Rhodesia excluded cultural activities of the indigenous masses. Seda (2004) points out that these policies and legislations included National Galleries of Rhodesia Act (Chapter 312) of 1974, the Welfare Organizations Act (Chapter 93) of 1967 and The National Arts and Foundation Act which was derived from the Charter of the Arts Council of Great Britain (1967). The National Arts Foundation Charter was silent on issues that concern traditional music of the indigenous people while encouraging the performance and development of orchestras and other music activities of Western origin like ballroom dance and ballet. Seda observes that, "in colonial Rhodesia, cultural and social life had been marked by forced separation, prejudice and cultural polarization" (2004:136). He further notes that this resulted in very little attention being paid to indigenous traditional musical activities at central government and policy making level (2004:136). Chifunyise affirms this by saying in the narrowly exclusive Rhodesian colonial cosmology, dramatic and other cultural modes of expression of black Africans were firmly situated outside the boundaries of art or culture and this resulted in loss of respect and decline in traditional music practices amongst the local people (1995:23).

Upon the attainment of political independence, the newly transformed Zimbabwe Broadcasting Services which was formerly the Rhodesia Broadcasting Services did not have much to offer to both listeners and viewers alike as far as indigenous broadcasting content was concerned. In the first two decades of independence the broadcasting on the national radio and television was influenced by western art forms as it was dominated by the broadcasting of western content materials. It seemed not easy to overhaul broadcasting content in the shortest possible time given the long colonial era that the country was coming from.

The advent of the land reform ushered in a new era where fast track reforms were adopted in an endeavour to redress the colonial imbalances even in the area of cultural consumption. While land reform seems to be concerned more with agricultural land and human settlements patterns, its roll out wave had a huge impact not only in land distribution but also other sectors which identify with the common man like the

creative arts, particularly music and dance performance, poetry, literature, broadcasting and sculpture. These areas of the art were quick to explore various themes that identify with this national program. The Ministry of Information, Media and Publicity under the stewardship of Minister Jonathan Moyo adopted the 75% local broadcasting content policy which was then subsequently upgraded to 100% local content on all the four broadcasting channels namely Radio 1, Radio 2, Radio 3 and Radio 4. The Ministry of Information, Media and Broadcasting oversees all the operations of all the national broadcasting houses in Zimbabwe. In addition, the broadcasting house which was based in the capital Harare was then fragmented into four units each with its own special focus areas and were decentralised and then posted to different regional cities within the country namely Bulawayo in Matabeleland Province and, Gweru in the Midlands Province. The policy was met with mixed reactions by people of different age groups. Seasoned radio announcers and personalities resigned en masse from radio and television service. To some extent this brought some negativity to the national broadcaster as some listenership and viewership was lost. This loss was then compounded by the corporate world who also felt short changed by the national broadcaster as some did not identify with the new paradigm shift in the way business was now being conducted.

The new paradigm shift had its own benefits as it can be noted that the 75% and later upgraded to 100% local content policy gave the emerging indigenous artists a lifeline as they started to receive airplay on the national broadcaster. It can be argued that some of the productions from the local artistes were not comparable in quality to those from the diaspora as they lacked sophisticated gadgets to do their recordings. This then might have dented both radio and television reception in the society in general as the people did not approve of the poor programming and content materials. This was all a result of the land reform and its associated fast track spirit in redressing colonial imbalances.

It must be noted that since independence Zimbabwe did not have any private players in the area of broadcasting. This then meant the audience had no immediate alternative in the event of a showdown at the national broadcasting houses. The turn of the century coincided with the information technology and communication boom within the country. With a perceived decline in quality at the broadcasting houses, the country experienced a boom in satellite transmission platforms. Several households switched to Digital Satellite Television (DSTV) platforms which offered programmes mainly from the diaspora. Popular amongst many were the SABCs from neighbouring Republic of South Africa and BTV from Botswana amongst others. Whilst these broadcasting platforms offered the much-needed variety, they then facilitated a disconnection between the national broadcaster and the masses as the general public expected quality works and programming a feat which was no mean feat for the underfunded and ill-resourced national broadcaster.

In addition, the outbreak of piracy resulted in several musical recordings from the diaspora being cheaply available to the general masses. Ordinary citizens could access musical works from outside the country mainly Europe and the West.

#### V. MUSIC IN MASS MEDIA

It can be noted that even with a renewed thrust in the national broadcasting houses, the consumption of musical products through various mediums that make up the mass media gave rise to the notion of acculturation. Acculturation remained alive as several satellite radio stations emerged with some broadcasting from outside the country. This too was coupled with a mushrooming of private players within the mass media as newly found media houses started to provide the public with both daily and weekly newspapers. Newspapers together with other forms of mass media can serve as mediums of acculturation as they publicise dramatic profiles of foreign artists which will be distanced from reality. This publicity then will be followed by the consumption of the profiled artists' artistic products hence the possibilities of acculturation as listeners and viewers identify with their chosen artists.

During the land reform some newspaper houses lost their operating licences after falling out with the government authorities. This amounted to some newspaper publications getting closed thereby depriving the general masses of alternative views on topical issues, news and reporting styles of their choice. This to some extent generated considerable resentment amongst the populace to the socio-political narrative that the government presented through the mass media

#### VI. THE EMERGENCE OF NATIONAL GALAS

The period leading to and during the land reform marked the emergence of National Galas which were held under the stewardship of the Ministry of Information, Media and Publicity. National Galas were music and dance showcases which were held to celebrate the specific national events on the Zimbabwean political and social calendar. These events include the national Independence day, Heroes Day, the 21<sup>st</sup> Movement that was meant to celebrate and mark the birth of the then President Robert Mugabe, Mzee Bira, Mdala Wethu held for the celebration of the life and death of Zimbabwe's former vice Presidents Simon Muzenda and Joshua Nyongolo Nkomo respectively, Unity Day Bash amongst others. The musical galas were framed around selected national events like Independence Day, 18 April; Mdala Wethu, 01 July (the commemoration of the Late Vice President Joshua Nkomo); Heroes Day, 11 August; Mzee Bira, 20 September (the commemoration of the late Vice President Simon Vengai Mzenda); Unity Day, December 22 and others.

The main essence of these musical events was largely to do with reminding the youth and general population of the hard-won independence that the children of Zimbabwe were supposed to guard jealously regardless of the surmounting

economic hardships that they were going through. Music has remained a vibrant expressive tool in transforming identities and aspirations well into the post-colonial era.

There are notable artists who became synonymous with the music galas while others got fame through the medium of national musical galas. These include artists like Cde Chinx Chingaira, Simon Chimbetu, Andy Brown, Tambaoga, The Third Generation, Sister Flame and others. One thing in common is that the above-named artists and others composed popular songs with related themes around unification and resistance in the post-independence era. We have artists who decided to frame their music careers around the cause of the liberation struggle in the post-colonial era and for some it is alleged by music critiques that it costed them their popularity which they had built over many years. These were patriotic sons and daughters who decided to give their music careers for the pursuance of the liberation ideas in the Third Chimurega. These include artists like Thomas Mapfumo who has been living in exile for the past decade and came back home recently in 2018 upon change of administration in Zimbabwe, the late CdeChinx, Ambuya MaDube, Andy Brown, Simon Chimbetu amongst others.

It can be noted that seasoned artists like the legendary Thomas Mapfumo continued singing about injustices and corruption especially those fanned by leaders in government. It can be noted that his music still stresses the need for complete removal of all the colonial residues within the contemporary post-colonial period we currently live in. When he did the same during the liberation struggle it resonated well with the black nationalists who led at the liberation war front. Upon the attainment of independence, he noted some perpetuation of manipulation and exploitation of the ordinary people by those who were in power and this time around it did not resonate well with those in positions of authority. It subsequently resulted in forcing himself in self-exile in America where he had continued to compose and sing about the new form of exploitation and ill governance in Zimbabwe.

The music showcased in the national galas embraced a wide variety of genres so that the events could attract people from different backgrounds. National music galas are public platforms through which artists and the audience interact as they remember the sacrifices that were made for the country to be free. The events are usually broadcasted live on the national broadcasters for the home audiences to be part and parcel of the national commemorations. The national galas were effective in mobilizing people together to dialogue amongst themselves issues that are pertinent to their daily living in the contemporary era.

#### VII. THE ZIMBABWEAN MUSIC INDUSTRY AND THE CURRENT MUSIC PERFORMANCE CONTEXT

The Zimbabwean music industry is slowly growing and showing potential of further growth largely informed by the amount of creativity that the upcoming artists have been showing over the years. To confirm its growth are several

music festivals that are held annually attracting both foreign artists and audiences like the Harare International Festival of the Arts, Intwasa Festival, Chimanimani Arts Festival, Neshamwari Traditional Music and Dance Showcase, Jerusalem Mbende Dance Festival, Shoko Festival, The Chibuku Road to Fame music competitions and others.

The current performance context is characterised by both old and new art forms. The upcoming artists have managed to invent and popularise new music genres, for example, Dance Hall, and Urban Grooves music. The young generation today do take pride of their old traditional music like the *mbira* and several traditional dances. The quality of music compositions and their subsequent recordings are improving each day and in the long run might translate into improved programming and improved content materials for the broadcasting houses in Zimbabwe and beyond.

Zimbabwean artists are now making collaborations with other foreign artists thereby improving their international presents, appeal as well as their curriculum vitae within the music industry in general. The new cultural policy advocates for a well-developed creative sector having noted that the arts have the potential of generating employment thereby making significant contributions to the gross domestic product of the country. The arts too are an effective means of marketing the country to the outside world as tourists usually enjoy the consumption of cultural products during their excursions.

#### VIII. CONCLUSION

The new performance context is embrative of different musical forms hence gives hope to artists as they always try new form of arts. The land reform led to new ways of thinking as it marked a renaissance in the way we view performance frames as people generally started interrogating conventional ways in their everyday lives that include the arts.

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