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REVIEW ESSAY

MUSIC IN ZIMBABWE

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Zimbabwean music is an integral part of the country’s very rich and proud heritage. With music accompanying individuals from the cradle to the grave, it occupies an important place in the cultural life of the people of Zimbabwe. However, Zimbabwean music has not consistently received due scholarly attention. The material available tends to be fragmented in outlook. The success enjoyed on the highly competitive international market by some Zimbabwean musicians and groups such as The Bhundu Boys, Stella Chiweshe, Rozalla Miller, Thomas Mapfumo, Oliver Mtukudzi, Albert Nyathi and others has helped to generate considerable scholarly interest. In addition, the pioneering efforts of the late outstanding musicians and teachers, Dumisani Abraham Maraire and Ephat Mujuru in introducing mbira music and its spirituality to North American audiences instigated curiosity and further interest in the country’s music. It is in such a context that Thomas Turino’s book has to be appreciated. Turino’s book is an important and sensitive contribution to an area where much more work urgently remains to be done, especially in the light of the rate at which death has robbed the country of many of its talented musicians from the mid-1990s.

Turino’s book is well researched and documented, apart from being theoretically challenging and provocative. He sets out to “clarify the continuities and parallel cultural effects of colonialism, nationalism and cosmopolitanism” through the specific case of Zimbabwean music. In case readers expect his book to be the definitive guide to the history of music in the country, Turino realistically argues: “... here is not a single local ‘history of music’ in Zimbabwe but rather multiple histories that

depend on the subject positions and varied experiences of the actors involved.”

Chapter One of the book examines the impact of social identities on indigenous musical practices, with Turino insisting that the social locations of individuals have a marked bearing on how they regard indigenous music. In particular, he seeks to explode the colonial decline/nationalist revival trajectory by illustrating how it has been mediated by cosmopolitan and nationalist discourses. While accepting its general validity, Turino asseverates that it is a partial view of the complex development of music in Zimbabwe.

In Chapter Two, Turino explores music and dance in Mbare, 1930-1960. He highlights how indigenous music and dances were dominant prior to the rise of urban-popular styles. The chapter describes the various traditional dances that include jerusarema, shangara, muchongoyo, mbakumba, dhinhe, dandanda, njari and mbira. Against any overarching emphasis on a homogenous “Zimbabwean traditional dance”, Turino underlines the fact that the various rural regions and groups in the country have had their own dances and instrumental traditions. The Murehwa Jerusarema Club is provided as a case study to illustrate the tensions defining Zimbabwean identities and music. Chapter Three traces the relationship between the settler state and indigenous music during the Federation years. It is a historically sensitive chapter that, however, condenses themes that would have merited separate treatment, as contended below. On the basis of his interviews with members of the Murehwa Jerusarema Club who cited their performances for white audiences as high points of their careers, rather than any explicitly nationalistic performances, Turino debunks the notion of nationalist fervour instigating a cultural revival in Zimbabwe. Could it be that as a white researcher the respondents were telling Turino what they thought he wanted to hear?

Turino also discusses the importance of radio recordings and broadcasts in the 1950s and 1960s, African music in the schools, Kwanongoma College of Music, municipal social and recreation programmes and the role of the churches in Chapter Three. For Turino, it is dangerous to assume that there are any “cultural insiders”, without paying attention to specialisation and professionalism. Thus, “... being ‘African’ or a black Zimbabwean does not guarantee knowledge of indigenous African arts.” With this bold declaration, Turino seeks to

2. Ibid., 17.
3. Ibid., 34.
4. Ibid., 68.
5. Ibid., 101.
insulate himself against any "wisdom in the blood" argument and to create space within which he, a "cultural outsider", has an equal – if not greater – right to study and interpret Zimbabwean music. Presumably, knowledge of indigenous African arts lies with interested indigenous people, ethnomusicologists and other specialists.

In Chapter Four, Turino explores the emergence of urban-popular vocal music, school choirs, the "concert" tradition and the pioneering efforts of Kenneth Mattaka and the Bantu Actors, as well as De Black Evening Follies. He emphasises the extent to which class considerations influenced the attitudes of those blacks that enjoyed "concert". Urban jazz bands and ballroom dancing also receive coverage in this chapter. His inclusion of items from African Parade creatively highlights how the emerging black middle class approached African artistic products during the colonial period. Considerable space is also accorded to August Musarurwa and how his music became internationally known.

How the nationalist black leaders in Zimbabwe harnessed the emotion generated by music in the late 1950s and early 1960s forms the basis for Chapter Five. Central to Turino’s concept of nationalism is the contention that the African nationalist leadership in Zimbabwe was cosmopolitan as many of them had received mission education, while a good number had studied outside the country. Robert Mugabe’s contribution to the development of mass cultural nationalism in the early 1960s is acknowledged, with Turino underlining the vitality of music. In this chapter, he draws attention to the role of music at the nationalist rallies, with an informative description of the cultural activities that were lined up to celebrate the founding of ZAPU in 1962. Turino succeeds in showing the centrality of music, dance and other "traditional" cultural practices to the nationalist parties in Zimbabwe. While acknowledging that the project may not have attained spectacular results, he notes that the nationalists "did further the process of fortifying pride and interest in indigenous arts and culture among the portion of the population that had not been socialized in indigenous lifeways."

In Chapter Six, Turino revisits the chimurenga songs of the 1970s. He notes the ambivalent attitude that the nationalist parties had towards Christianity and draws attention to the fact that many of the mobilisation songs were based on Christian hymns. Thus, "Of the musical resources used for ZANU’s and ZAPU’s chimurenga songs, however, approximately

6. Ibid., 139.
7. Ibid., 149.
8. Ibid., 165.
9. Ibid., 188.
50 percent of my sample are Christian hymns.” Turino helpfully examines the composition and style of the chimurenga songs, as well as providing excerpts of his interview with Comrade Chinx, a veteran composer and performer of these “songs of struggle”. His eye for detail is evident in his observation that gradually the notion of “nation” was replaced by that of the party, ZANU-PF. In some of the ZANU songs, the party was singled out as the “main political and military protagonist in Zimbabwe’s present and future”, thereby highlighting the internal contradictions within the nationalist movement. On the whole, Turino succeeds in locating the significance of the chimurenga songs in ZANU’s propaganda efforts.

Turino eschews simplistic, straightforward historical narrations of music in Zimbabwe. After following the thread of indigenous music and dance between 1930 and 1960, tracing the nationalist efforts to exploit the emotion generated by music in the early 1960s and the chimurenga songs of the 1970s, in Chapter Five, Turino takes his readers back to the 1960s. This is a compact chapter in which the author provides valuable information on some of the early acoustic guitarists who might otherwise have been forgotten. It is perhaps Turino’s most original contribution to the discourse on music in Zimbabwe. He describes the linkage between Zimbabwean jīt and South African styles and terms such as jive, marabi, and tsaba-tsaba. Through interviews with some of the strategic actors, Turino offers a detailed account of the significance of guitarists to the development of music in the country. Important cultural workers like Mattaka, Jacob Mhungu, and others come alive in Turino’s pages. He also traces the influence of Congolese music since the late 1950s, alongside highlighting the effects of “youth culture” and other bands of the 1966-1970 period.

In Chapter Eight, Turino traces the careers of some of the most prominent musicians in Zimbabwe. Focusing on the 1970s, he provides valuable information regarding the early careers of Thomas Mapfumo, Zexie Manatsa, Oliver Mtukudzi, Jonah Sithole and Susan Mapfumo. With references to Jordan Chataika and some early electric “mbira-guitar” music and jīt, this chapter is also important for its historical details. The second half of the 1970s witnessed the blossoming of various musical and social trends that began as early as the 1940s and 1950s, Turino argues.

10. Ibid., 203.
13. Ibid., 245.
In his conclusion to this chapter, he restates the basic contention of the book that no simple congruency existed between the use of indigenous music and nationalist texts among the various actors.

The trends characterising popular music in Zimbabwe after 1980 preoccupy Turino in Chapter Nine. He surveys the socialist and capitalist ideologies adopted by the nascent state, while paying attention to the ideological impact of the ruling elite on cultural production in the country. Turino strongly argues that the formation of the National Dance Company in 1981 was shaped by the African-American dancer and choreographer Kariamu Welsh-Asante based on cosmopolitan rather than local aesthetics. Turino briefly describes the entry of some local artists on the international music market and the popularity of mbira. Explaining the dominance of mbira in reviews of Zimbabwean music, Turino identifies its inherent attraction for people with cosmopolitan aesthetics and the lasting influence of Paul Berliner’s book, Soul of Mbira. In conclusion, he reiterates the importance of class and ideology among the black elite and how this has had a significant bearing on musical performances in Zimbabwe during both the colonial period, as well as after 1980.

**TURINO’S CONTRIBUTION TO THE HISTORY OF MUSIC IN ZIMBABWE**

As noted above, Turino’s book is a welcome and timely contribution to the history of popular music in the country. He combines archival material, fieldwork and theory in an effective and challenging manner. The translations from the vernacular are accurate, while most of the significant cultural workers receive their due attention. His passion is undoubted and his analytical rigour is appreciable. Turino’s work complements existing works and locates Zimbabwean music in its larger context of cosmopolitanism and capitalism. His questioning of the preoccupation with mbira is incisive, as is his identification of the effects of the nationalist ideology on artistic production in Zimbabwe. His book is a detailed, informative and valuable repository of the country’s history of music.

There are however, problematic issues that emerge from Turino’s narrative. As with much of the available literature, it tends to focus on developments in Harare and its immediate environs, at the expense of other regions and cities. As Caleb Dube rightly observes, the production of much popular music has occurred in towns like Mutare (e.g. the Runn Family), Gweru (Ebony Sheikh), Kwekwe (Wells Fargo), Victoria Falls (Mandebvu), Masvingo (Tafara Madondo Sounds), Bulawayo (Solomon

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Skhuza, Black Umfolosi) and others.\footnote{Caleb Dube, “The changing context of African music performance in Zimbabwe”, *Zambezia*, 23 (ii), 1996, 101.} To this end, Turino’s focus on established stars and the impact of broadcasting, for example, is close to what earlier writers like Fred Zindi\footnote{Fred Zindi, *Roots Rocking in Zimbabwe* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1985).} have observed. For a phenomenon as understudied as Zimbabwean music, there is need to cover as many regions as is possible, as well as exploring other types of music in the country.

Turino also overstates the distinctiveness of the Zimbabwean (Hararean) middle class, its distance from the indigenous peasants, and its cosmopolitan outlook. In a number of places (pp. 42-45; p. 353) Turino observes a wide chasm between the black middle class and the lower (black) classes. He cites the case of his middle-class African neighbours in Harare, especially younger people, knowing little about the indigenous arts and cultural activities in nearby ‘high-density’ townships. Turino is convinced, following Ruth Weiss, that the black middle classes now have more in common with whites than with lower-income blacks and that they have become part of the same cosmopolitan cultural formation (p. 316). This glosses over the gulf that exists between the black and white races in Zimbabwe.

The persistence of indigenous cultural values amongst the so-called black middle class poses a fundamental challenge to this interpretation. Although it has some analytical merit, the rural-urban dichotomy is often a false one, especially in the Zimbabwean context where there is constant movement of people and ideas across these conceptual and physical spaces. In addition, musical tastes often transcend class positions, thereby problematising Turino’s basic assumption that social location largely determines cultural production and consumption patterns. For all its ideological posturing, Zimbabwe’s middle class has remained “traditional”, “African”, “indigenous” and “submerging” due to the harsh economic realities and the continued grip on industry and commerce by the white minority. Mimicry in terms of musical tastes and pretended ignorance of “primitive arts” has not changed the status of blacks in Zimbabwe, despite Turino’s optimistic evaluation.

Probably due to the specific nature of his “subject position”, Turino offers a very limited treatment of the roles of the churches, municipalities, and private companies in the promotion (or regression) of African music during the colonial period. While acknowledging that of all the arms of colonialism, missionaries have received a lion’s share of blame for the direct oppression of indigenous Shona music and dance (p. 113), he proceeds to “fast-track” his discussion by noting the overwhelming nature
of the available material. Turino admits that the literature regarding the missionary impact on indigenous practices is so copious that "one hardly knows where to begin" (p. 113). As a result, he offers a partial examination of this significant theme.

In addition, Turino makes a rather sweeping generalisation concerning the status of women in Shona society. He writes, "In Zimbabwe generally, and certainly in indigenous Shona societies, women are extremely subservient to men" (p. 81). He cites the example that women go on their knees and clap hands when greeting or serving their husbands or fathers, and also maintains that women are legal minors. Although some African womanist scholars may endorse Turino's interpretation of the status of women among the Shona, it is important to acknowledge that the matter is a contentious one in which different cultural values obtrude. More importantly, there was a need to illustrate how such prejudices might have translated themselves in the area of music, without deviating from the "subject position."

There are also a few references and names that need following up on. The article by Olof E. Axelsson, "Historical notes on Neo-African Church Music" was published in Zambizia, 3 (2), 1974, and not in 1973 (p. 378). Other names like George Natonga (ix), George Silunkika (p. 165) and Black Umfalosi (p. 333) may also require further checking. However, Turino's book remains a lucid, well-argued and refreshing exposition on a fast-changing phenomenon. With this presentation, Thomas Turino joins the list of "outsiders" like Hugh Tracey, Andrew Tracey, Robert Kaufmann, John E. Kaemmer, Paul Berliner, Angela Impey, Johannes Brusila, Banning Eyre and others who have shown sustained and

empathetic interest in Zimbabwean music. These scholars have helped in preserving the inherited musical traditions for posterity. However, there remain a number of areas that require further examination if we are to fully appreciate the complexity and dynamism of Zimbabwean music.

MUSIC IN ZIMBABWE: EXPLORING MORE THEMES

Gospel Music in the Late 1990s
Since Turino's field researches and his visit during the summer of 1996 (p. 351 — Zimbabwean or USA summer?), the Zimbabwean musical scene has undergone considerable transformation. Gospel music, generally described as music that utilises Christian theological ideas, has asserted itself on the market since the mid-1990s. Following the Africanisation of music within the established mission churches such as the Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Lutheran churches, among others, African hymns and choruses became popular throughout the country. The reliance on hymns by ZANU in its Chimurenga songs demonstrated the popularity of this genre.

With Evangelical/Pentecostal churches becoming significant actors on the national religious front in the 1990s, music with Christian themes received a further boost. These churches emphasised the role of music in spreading the Christian message of salvation. By the year 2000, gospel musicians like Machanic Manyeruke, Shuvai Wutawunashe, Ivy Kombo, Elias Musakwa, Charles and Olivia Charamba and others had to be listed among prominent musicians in the country. The ascendancy of gospel music in Zimbabwe and its entry into the public domain requires further analysis.

Women in Zimbabwean Music
In the second half of the 1990s, many women emerged as competent cultural workers in their own right. Young female artists playing mbira music, such as Chiwoniso Maraire, Irene Chigamba and Taruona


Mushore; female guitarists like Patricia Matongo, and female gospel musicians like Carol Chivengwa, Kombo, Wutawunashe and others have become an integral part of the performing arts. However, as some writers have illustrated, women have had to struggle to be accepted as respectable artists.

The emergence of more black women as musicians in Zimbabwe in the 1990s and beyond requires further examination. Research into how the music industry marginalises women and the challenges faced by these emerging artists needs to be undertaken. The images of women in popular songs also require continued scrutiny. When Willom Tom's song denigrated urban women by insisting, “Ndinoda wangu wekumaruzevha, handingawani wemudhorobha” (I would like a woman from the rural areas, I cannot marry one from the urban areas), he succeeded in perpetuating the stereotypical representation of urban women as “loose”, “dangerous” and other negative labels. While Zindi and Turino provide some valuable insights into the factors that have shaped the music industry in the country, more studies would help to clarify its current state.

Protest Music and Youthful Groups
As Zimbabwe's economy underwent a recession in the late 1990s, protest music became more daring and pronounced. Alongside established artists like Thomas Mapfumo, Simon Chimbetu, Leonard Zhakata and others, more musicians began to record songs that were critical of the ZANU-PF
government. As Maurice Taonezvi Vambe notes, some songs effected a renegotiation of the meaning of independence in the late eighties and nineties. The responses by artists to the perceived social and economic crisis that engulfed the country in the late 1990s and beyond demand critical analysis. It is also important to pursue whether the state has stifled such criticisms.

A number of young Zimbabwean musicians have successfully mixed American hip hop, rap, soul, rhythm and blues with vernacular language lyrics in a way that has appealed to many young music fans in the late 1990s. Tracks like “Amai” by Guess, “So Ndian?” by Slice and “Muroora” by David Chifunyise enjoyed considerable commercial success in 2000 and 2001. The task of examining such cultural fusion remains to be undertaken. Further research into the areas of political and funeral songs, such as the appropriation of hymns and choruses by ZANU (PF) and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, traditional religious songs, indigenous dances, the production of music videos and musical films, the role of the informal sector in the distribution of music and other areas await those with an interest in the music of Zimbabwe.

Given the multiplicity of themes that invite more detailed scholarly attention, it is clear that the area of music in Zimbabwe is doubly rich and complex. A lot more thus remains to be accomplished so that the description of Zimbabwean music as “historical communication” may be fully appreciated. Thomas Turino’s timely presentation is therefore a challenge to more “imagining insiders” to take up the challenge and explore the music of Zimbabwe in its complexity.

41. Musaemura Zimunya, “Music in Zimbabwean history: Music as historical communication”, in Hilde Arntsen, (ed.) Media, Culture and Development (Oslo, Department of Media and Communication, 1993), 129.