

HIT SONGS AND THE DYNAMICS OF POSTCOLONIAL ZIMBABWE: A STUDY IN POPULAR MUSIC TRENDS, 1980-2009

by

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Introduction

My intention to analyze hit songs as an embodiment of collective experiences emanates from the special position they occupy in the musical repertoire of any given society. I deliberately avoid examining songs classified under the broad popular music rubric although they never enjoyed any wide appeal. As Charosh (1997: 480) argues, “One may question the practice of identifying songs that languished, unsung on their publishers’ shelves, as music representative of a public’s taste”. Among the songs a particular musician produces on a single album, only one or two, and sometimes none, qualify to acquire the prestigious status of a hit song.¹ Hit songs are a tiny percentage of the huge body of songs recorded during any particular period in a given society. Whereas the vast number of songs that fail to reach hit status are usually forgotten, those few that acquire this celebrated status remain vibrant in the society’s collective memory.

In examining this process I ask: What can we learn from popular songs that become hits with respect to the contexts in which they are produced? How do these contexts determine a particular song’s rise to the status of hit-hood? Answers to these questions provide the launching pad for the contention that Zimbabwean hit songs of the post-independence period not only embody dominant events and experiences of the period, they also evoke collective memories of positive and negative shared experiences² generally particular to each of the three decades of Zimbabwe’s postcolonial history. They embody the past, enable its recovery and at the same time are embedded in the same past (Van Dijk 2006: 358). Whereas the 1980s decade is generally characterized by music responding to the euphoria of winning independence and thus marked by an ebullient mood, the 1990s decade is punctuated with songs questioning independence. Hit songs of the first decade of the 21st century embody three distinct moods – those celebrating land reform; those with an oppositional tone and those which are apolitical

¹ Several reasons, *inter alia*, marketing strategies, the quality of the music, attitudes of broadcasting services (radio and television) including DJs and audience reception, determine a song’s rise to hit status.

² Every song in its reception by an individual will, for that individual, become an evocation of his/her personal experiences; however, my concern in this paper is hit songs and collective experiences. .

in their orientation. My knowledge of Zimbabwean hit songs in the period under study comes from my observation of popular music in Zimbabwe both as an academic researching popular music and as an avid follower of hit parades since the 1980s. Being Zimbabwean, I am familiar with the songs that were hits and that are now often cited by my fellow Zimbabweans as tellingly evocative of their past experiences.

What is a hit song?

A hit song³ is a recorded track or single that has become very popular. In most parts of the world, particularly the Western world, this is a widely played song that has appeared on hit parades and entered the official music charts. Charosh (1997: 461) describes it as being “in actual use by many” and usually “prescribed for the populace by aesthetic entrepreneurs”. He further elaborates stating that hit songs are not only known by many, but

identify things which are, or should be sung by the masses of people, which express all their sentiments and feelings, and consequently rank high among their solaces and enjoyments (Charosh 1997:461).

In Zimbabwe a hit song is also identified using the ‘repeated airplay and/or big-selling’ criterion; however, this is not the only system used to determine iconic songs. A song’s appropriation by (influential) political and religious movements can raise it to hit position. This was the case with certain *chimurenga* songs during the liberation war. They were banned from the airwaves by the Rhodesian authorities but were still being widely sung by the people.⁴ The same phenomenon was to repeat itself in post-2000 Zimbabwe when pro-opposition songs, despite being denied airplay on the state-controlled radio and television, nevertheless became popular. They were played at opposition rallies, on public transport, in beer-halls, homes and on social media (Musiyiwa 2013: 95-98).

While hit parades are dominated by romance, sex and love songs around the world, and particularly in Western countries, political songs are also quite popular (e.g. both protest and pro-state songs in post-2000 Zimbabwe). Popularity of pro-state songs arises from the Zimbabwean government’s vigorous musical memorialization of the *Chimurenga* war of independence. As a nation Zimbabwe is highly politicized around this war. For this reason *chimurenga* music is highly popular especially among Zanu-PF supporters, and is often given more airplay on state-regulated radio and television. While many of the songs I analyze have appeared in Top 10 and Top 20 hit parades on Zimbabwean radio stations (particularly Radio Two in the 80s and 90s and after 2001 Radio Zimbabwe, Power FM

³ Under a section headed “New Music,” the New York Mirror of Nov. 23, 1839, tells us that the popular composer J. K. Knight has “recently produced several new songs and ballads, which have made what is technically termed, among the profession, hits.” The self-conscious use of the word suggests that its application to songs was a recent semantic development. (Charosh, 1997: 488

⁴ This was, for instance, the case with Thomas Mapfumo’s 1978 hit “Vanotumira vana kuhondo” (“They send children to the war”), Tinei Chikupo’s “Sirivhiya” (“Sylvia”) and many others. They were banned from the airwaves but still very popular as people played them on their record players.

and National FM), some songs, especially those articulating opposition sentiments, did not acquire hit status through radio airplay, but rather through social media.

Independence and musical creativity

Significant events and movements often have a profound effect on popular music (Eyerman & Jamison, 1998). Sanga (2008: 52) theorizes that nationalism, for example, influences “the content, form and performance practice of music”. The euphoria of attaining national freedom inspired artists to produce celebratory music. Independence gave already existing artists and musical groups the opportunity to sing freely with vigour and confidence giving rise to a plethora of new bands and musical groups celebrating the newly born nation.⁵ Most of the songs that had been banned as subversive during the war and songs by Zanla⁶ and Zipra⁷ Choirs (see Pongweni, 1982) became hits as they were now freely played on national radio. The music of this decade was to set a permanent trend that would shape the contemporary Zimbabwean musical repertoire and also provide canons for judging it.

Championed by Thomas Mapfumo, *chimurenga* music developed into a distinct genre that would later carve an indelible niche in world music. The same was true for *sungura*, which, in spite of borrowing from *rhumba*, assumed a uniquely Zimbabwean character (Eyrie 2001: 33; cf Guchu, 2013). Oliver Mtukudzi’s *katekwe* music was to gradually transform into a modernized traditional style, an outcome of the fusion of traditional styles such as *mhande*, *mbira* and *jiti* with South African *mbaqanga* and Afro-jazz (Palmerberg 2004: 19). *Jiti* was ‘guitarized’ by the Bhundu Boys, James Chimombe and many other musicians including Mapfumo and Mtukudzi. The influence of independence on Zimbabwean popular music was phenomenal. Some artists and bands which rose in the 80s survived the turbulence of the Zimbabwean music industry, to remain active in the post-2000 era.

Hit songs and the independence euphoria of the 80s

Independence greatly inspired musical activity to the effect that the songs that became hits were directly or indirectly a celebratory response to the realization of the historic event. This was so regardless of whether the songs’ orientation was political or social. They celebrated a new social life bought by independence, thus capturing the ebullient mood of the moment. The decade of the 80s is normally described as the decade of hope. Mlambo (2008: 9) describes it as a decade “full of promise and hope that the future would be one of economic prosperity, political freedom and a generally decent livelihood for all.” It was the time when independence was welcomed against the

⁵ Some of Zimbabwe’s popular musicians like Solomon Skuza, John Chibadura, Paul Matavire and Leonard Dembo and musical bands such as Nyami Nyami Sounds, The Marxist Brothers, Kasongo, The Bhundu Boys and many more rose in the early or mid-80s owing to the opportunities provided by independence.

⁶ Acronym for Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army, Zanu-PF’s military wing.

⁷ Acronym for Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army, PF-Zapu’s military wing.

background of a painful, bloody and protracted war. The people looked forward to see the fundamental nationalist promises concerning their socio-economic prosperity transformed into reality. Many people, particularly rural older generations, also longed for cultural restoration – a return to their traditional cultural practices. The popular (Shona) saying then, *Todzokera chinyakare* (We are now returning to our [traditional African] cultural values), captured this expectation. In celebrating independence homage was also being paid to the fallen freedom fighters who had sacrificed their lives to bring about the new nation. In the masses' opinion, independence was a permanent reality. It was a heritage to be handed to future generations because, as Thomas Mapfumo's 1980 hit song "Pemberai" ("Celebrate") asserts, colonialism had been permanently destroyed. Gordon (2007: 70) characterizes Africans' reception of their independence as: "The early days of freedom from colonial rule were charged with excitement and full of hope". Because the people had these hopes, it was time to sing, dance, whistle, clap and ululate. In practice independence entailed a thorough readjustment of a nation's institutions in line with nationalist goals and aspirations. It ushered a new life as the different spheres of the old life responded to the new realities. As argued above, whether the songs composed in this context were apolitical or social in tone, they were in celebration of the new (political) dispensation. Thus, in what follows on the relationship between events in the 80s and hit songs, I will focus on both political and purely social hit songs.

Mtukudzi's 1980 song "Gore remasimba evanhu" ("The year of the people's power") celebrates blacks' winning of political power. The title of the song is derived from the winning party's (Zanu-PF) tendency to name each year in line with its annual ideological goals. 1980 was dubbed *Gore remasimba evanhu* (Year of the people's power) because in nationalist discourse, through the war and the ensuing elections, the masses had rejected colonialism and won political power. The song confirms Mbembe's (1992: 14) view on the workings of power relations in a postcolony that "in its own longing for grandeur the popular world borrows the whole ideological repertoires of officialdom, along with its idioms and forms". It captures the mood of the period by portraying the masses as having been eagerly waiting for the birth of their nation. It expresses their desire to see the restoration of not only the people's political but also cultural power.

Rega kutya mhandu yaparara, ...

Do not be afraid the enemy is dead ...

Rega kutya mhandu yasakara

Do not be afraid the enemy is worn out

Igore remasimba evanhu, evanhu, ...

The year is for the people's power, of people, ...

Gore ratanga takamirira iri, ...

This is the year we have been waiting for, ...

Another of Mtukudzi's hit song with same theme is "Zimbabwe." Concerning the rhetorical function of the two celebratory hits and similar songs by other musicians, Mtukudzi states:

At independence I did praise songs just like most of the artists during that era because it was justifiably celebration time. I did songs like 'Zimbabwe' that was celebratory music... songs like 'Gore remasimba eVanhu'... . I was celebrating the

demise of the regime and the advent of black majority rule” (Mutamba, 2009).

As was the tendency among supporters of Zanu-PF at that time, the songs also ridicule the defeated whites and blacks meanwhile rendering homage to the fallen heroes. The message was that they ought to be remembered for eternity. In “Zimbabwe” *vadzimu* (ancestors) who were believed to have guided the liberation war from the beginning to its triumph (see Lan, 1985) are also thanked. The practice of African traditional religion and its appropriation for war purposes by both peasants and guerrillas are some of the reasons why traditionalists wanted African religious and cultural beliefs to be fully restored, recognized and promoted by the new government.⁸

For Mapfumo’s “Chauya chiruzevha” (“African traditional life has returned”), the mere attainment of independence was an all-encompassing restoration process that also entailed the rebirth of African traditional life, which he calls *chiruzevha*.⁹ Thus similar to Mtukudzi’s “Zimbabwe” and “Gore remasimba evanhu”, the song captures the people’s nostalgia for the imagined stable, pastoral and idyllic *pasichigare/endulo*¹⁰ (pre-colonial) lifestyle. This life was lived by their forebears and is told in their traditional narratives as being disrupted by colonialism. Now, with the presumption that the old life has been revived, those who had been displaced by the war would return to their homes and begin a harmonious life. Mapfumo sings,

<i>Hondo yakapera, yakapera hondo muZimbabwe</i>	The war is over, it is over in Zimbabwe
<i>Nhasi chiruzevha chauya,</i>	Today (our) traditional life is back
<i>Chembere dziri kufara kudzokera kuruzevha</i>	Old women are happy to return home

Indeed, after independence was achieved, there was a massive rehabilitation programme for hundreds of thousands of people who had been displaced by the war. Those who had fled the rural areas to seek refuge in urban areas were now returning to their abandoned homes to rebuild without fear.

The Bhundu Boys’s early 80s hit “Tsvimbo dzemoto” (“Clubs of fire”)¹¹ also celebrates the return of the pre-war country life. The war that disrupted the romanticized life is condemned. The nostalgic tone characterizing the song, unlike that in Mapfumo’s “Chauya chiruzevha,” appears to affirm the fact that the yearned for pre-war rural life would never be fully revived. The invigorating moonlight dances, hide-and-seek and other performances and games played by children and young adults, will not be resuscitated again in the same way as in the past.

⁸ In spite of some missionaries who supported the struggle for independence and offered assistance to the guerrillas, the nationalist movement had a strong anti-Christian element. See for instance, Ngwabi Bhebe, *Simon Vengayi Muzenda and the Struggle for and Liberation of Zimbabwe* (2004).

⁹ The word is derived from ‘reserve’, that is, the areas into which blacks were forced to live in after being evicted from their fertile lands to pave way for white settlers under the 1930-1 Land Apportionment Act. In line with the British policy of indirect rule, the Africans in the reserves were left to deal with their own affairs but ruled via their chiefs. Thus traditional cultural life continued despite Africans being alienated from their ancestral lands.

¹⁰ These are respective Shona and Ndebele words for the pre-colonial past.

¹¹ It is an idiom that refers to ‘guns’.

<i>Kare kare paruzevha painakidza</i>	Long ago it was exciting in the rural areas
<i>Vakomana vasikana waitamba mwedzimuchena</i>	Boys and girls used to play in the moonlight

<i>Pakazodonha tsvimbo dzemoto</i>	When the clubs of fire fell down,
<i>mafaro ndokupera</i>	the happiness ended

During the war *jenaguru* (full moonlight) performances were replaced by *pungwes* (all night political vigils involving peasants and guerrillas). With many youths fleeing the war to seek refuge in urban areas after independence, the age-old *jenaguru* youth entertainment came to a halt. When the war ended some of those who had sought refuge in towns and cities did not return to their rural homes because they needed to get jobs. Also, with the new government expanding education by introducing free primary education, such traditional performances began to wane. Children and young adults found themselves busy with school work. The deep-seated nostalgia for African traditional life runs in many of the Bhundu Boys's hit songs of the time. They include "Simbimbino,"¹² "Chimbira" ("Little rock-rabbit") and "Chitima kwee" ("The train sounds *kwee*"¹³). The songs are all fashioned out of children's traditional songs, tales and games. They evoke childhood memories of growing up in the African village environment. Therefore, the songs' central message seems to be that although independence came, it came at an enormous (cultural) price – many cultural aspects of African life had been lost beyond recovery.

Pan-Africanism which had inspired the struggle for liberation from the 1960s is also expressed in many hit songs of the 80s decade. Zimbabwe's independence could certainly have been delayed¹⁴ and much more difficult without the assistance of especially Mozambique, Zambia and Tanzania, which housed Zanu and Zipra¹⁵ guerrillas. The respective founding presidents of these countries, Samora Machel, Kenneth Kaunda and Julius Nyerere, were seen as highly generous. They even put their own independences and people at risk by selflessly assisting their fellow Zimbabwean brothers and sisters to wage a war of independence. With Machel and Nyerere espousing the same socialist ideas as the Zimbabwean nationalist leaders, they were considered true pan-Africanist heroes and friends of Zimbabwe. Mapfumo's "Kwaedza muZimbabwe" ("It is now dawn in Zimbabwe") and Mtukudzi's "Africa" record this pervasive pan-Africanist mood. In "Kwaedza muZimbabwe" Mapfumo uses the image of a crowing cock as a metaphor for the birth of Zimbabwe. He pays homage to Machel and Nyerere for the assistance they gave Mugabe in his struggle to bring about the Zimbabwean nation.

¹² The song is a Shona folktale that evokes the enthralling childhood experiences of storytelling sessions.

¹³ *Kwee* is a Shona idiophone denoting the sound of a train's hooter.

¹⁴ In fact it was delayed compared to its neighbours like Botswana, Zambia and Malawi which won their independence in the 1960s.

¹⁵ These are acronyms for Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army and Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army, the respective military wings for Zanu-PF and PF-Zapu.

L: *Zvamaida, zvamaida zvakaitika!*

R: *Rakarira jongwe*

Your wishes, your wishes have been fulfilled!

The cock crowed

L: *VaMugabe, VaMugabe baba tatenda*

VaMashero, VaMashero baba tatenda

VaNyerere, VaNyerere baba tatenda

Mr. Mugabe, father we are thankful

Mr. Machel, father we are thankful

Mr. Nyerere, father we are thankful

Perhaps the most popular pan-Africanist single of the early 80s was Kasongo Band's "Asante sana" ("Thank you"), rendered in the Kiswahili language.¹⁶ Like in Mapfumo's "Kwaedza muZimbabwe", Nyerere, Machel and Kaunda are honoured. Mtukudzi's "Africa" is the pan-African anthem, "Ishe komborera Africa/Nkosi sikeleli iAfrica" ("God bless Africa"). It was the anthem of some independent African countries, including Zimbabwe, before they composed their own anthems.¹⁷ Mtukudzi's hit captures the enthusiasm Zimbabweans had in joining the family of other independent African nations. The Marxist Brothers¹⁸ (Simon and Naison Chimbetu) also produced a hit called "Africa" which calls for the re-writing of African history debunking eurocentric (colonialist) perspectives. The artists were specifically concerned with the land issue. They appeal to the whites to tell their (innocent) grandchildren that Africa does not belong to them, but to the blacks whom they colonized. If Africans demand their land, they should be given.

Henrick wakakanganisa

Ndokuzofa usina kunyora chokwadi,

Kuti vazukuru takapambe nyika

Nyika ino nyika yevatema

Vachinge vaida vadzorereri nyika

Henrick you made an error

You died before you wrote the truth,

That [my] grandchildren colonized this country

This country which belongs to blacks

If they say they want their land, return it

A novel written in the same period, *Whiteman Black War* (1988) by the former Rhodesian soldier, Bruce Moore-King, criticizes the former Rhodesian elders for lying to their children and grandchildren concerning the true history of Zimbabwe. Using political and Christian propaganda they indoctrinate them into believing that the land does not belong to the blacks. The writer says:

So I have come to doubt my Elders, doubt the Creed and History of my tribe, doubt all that I once held as True....Why are the Elders corrupting the children? ... That Catechism was used to hide the real reason these parents sent the children to fight, without question, without qualm" (1988: 112).

Soon after independence some peasants actually occupied white-owned farms in

¹⁶ Some members of Kasongo band, including its leader Ketai Muchawaya, learned KiSwahili in Tanzania in the 70s during their days as freedom fighters.

¹⁷ In Zimbabwe it was the national anthem until 1994 when the current anthem, "Ngaikomborerwe nyika yeZimbabwe" ("Blessed be the nation of Zimbabwe") was composed by Solomon Mutswairo.

¹⁸ The name of the band was inspired by Marxist-socialist ideas dominant during the war and the first decade of independence.

line with wartime nationalist rhetoric, bound by the Lancaster House Constitution's willing buyer willing seller doctrine. However, the occupiers were forcibly removed from the farms and advised to join the government-organized resettlement programmes of the time (see for instance Alexander, 1991).¹⁹

However, not everyone in Zimbabwe was happy with the attainment of independence. Whenever a change takes place those opposing it (the losers) are not happy and they often suffer emotional pain. In the Zimbabwean case, the winners celebrated while the losers felt dejected and embarrassed. In Africa losers are often subjected to ridicule. Whereas in Bakhtinian carnival it is the ordinary who parodies the powerful (Bakhtin, 1994), in this case the ordinary (i.e. the artists) patronize the state marshaling carnival to help reinforce the new state's consolidation of power. Mapfumo's "Nyarai" ("Be ashamed") pokes fun at those who lost the elections, Ian Smith and his Rhodesian Front (RF); Joshua Nkomo and PF-Zapu²⁰ and Abel Muzorewa and his UANC²¹ party. They are subjected to comic buffoonery. The interjection *sve-e sve-e* in the song denotes derision. The losers are condemned as provocative and evil individuals who do not want to accept defeat.

<i>Kune dzimwe nhunzvatzunzva</i>	There are some evil and restless people
<i>Dzisingadi kutongwawo nevamwe</i>	Who do not want others to rule them
<i>Ko imi muri vanhu rudziiko?</i>	What sort of persons are you?
<i>Musinganyarewo kana makundwa</i>	Who are not ashamed when they are defeated
<i>Nyarai, nyarai, nyarai kana makundwa</i>	Be ashamed, be ashamed, be ashamed when defeated

For Muzorewa the defeat signalled the end to his ambitions to become the leader of the country again and his immortalization in the annals of "patriotic history" (see Ranger, 2004) and *chimurenga* discourse as *mutengesil/umtengisi*²² (sellout/traitor). For whites, accepting defeat was a bitter pill to swallow. They "... were panic-stricken. Some had their petrol tanks full ready for the Beitbridge 500'..."²³ (Moorcraft & Mclaughlin 2008: 177) while "estate agents had a field day and put hundreds of houses on the market" (Flower 1987: 267). Indeed many left en masse to South Africa, while others went to Australia, New Zealand, UK and other western countries. Nkomo, who like the whites was not anticipating a Zanu-PF landslide victory was also dejected – "We, the PF²⁴, should have fought the election together. Mugabe let me down" (Moorcraft

¹⁹ I recall this in 1983 when I was 10. Some members of our village and others from neighbouring ones went and occupied some adjacent white farms which had been abandoned by their owners during the war. Before the villagers had harvested their crops they were forcibly evicted by the police.

²⁰ The acronym refers to (Patriotic Front)-Zimbabwe African People's Union.

²¹ The abbreviation stands for United African National Council.

²² These are respective Shona and Ndebele words for a 'traitor' constantly used in Zimbabwe's nationalist discourse.

²³ This refers to the 500km distance between Harare and the South African border.

²⁴ The abbreviation means Patriotic Front, a collaboration between Zanu and Zapu formed in the mid-1970s. It was aimed at strengthening the fight against the Rhodesian regime and also to consolidate the parties' negotiation strategies during the 1979 Lancaster House conference.

& McLaughlin 2008: 177; Flower 1987: 267). As the dominant party in the 60s and 70s and also a party recognized by the then Soviet Union as the authentic liberation movement in Zimbabwe, PF-Zapu could not also come to terms with the defeat. It is partly this problem and the historical friction between Zanu-PF²⁵ and PF-Zapu and the marginalization of Zipra cadres in the military integration process that led some Zipra cadres into insurgency. The tragic result of this was the state's unleashing of the infamous Fifth Brigade into the Matebeleland and Midlands regions leading to the massacre of thousands of civilians in the now infamous *Gukurahundi* campaign (see CCJP,²⁶ 1997).²⁷

In spite of the general cloud of excitement engulfing the country, many saw the Zanu-Zapu conflict as a dent to the newly won independence. The Bhundu Boys' song "Chitima kwee" ("The train sounds *kwee*") captured the growing sentiments. It also expressed the efforts that were being undertaken by some to have the two liberation movements unite, especially against the simmering ethnic hostilities following the outcome of the 1980 election. Kwekwe, the central town in the country, is used as a symbol of the political unity that is lacking not only between the leaderships of Zanu-PF and PF-Zapu, but also between their supporters. The town is a place where both Shonas and Ndebeles live. The song condemns tribalism and calls for the two ethnic groups to (politically) unite for the good of their country.

*Ngatibatanei tose tisvike Kwekwe,
chitima chachema
KuMarondera chitima chachema,*

Let us all unite and reach Kwekwe,
the train has cried out
In Marondera the train has cried out,

KuTsholotsho chitima chatema

In Tsholotsho the train has cried out,

Areas that are far apart like Tsholotsho (a Ndebele area) and Marondera (a Shona area) are persuaded to bridge their ethnically motivated physical and mental distances (which fuel tribal hostility) by coming to Kwekwe, the place which, according to the song, symbolizes the nation's spirit of unity. Although there is the general unity between the Ndebele and Shona as Africans, through their shared experiences (historical and cultural), which in the song is referred to as *kubatana* (unity), political unity was imperative at that time. The challenges for nation-building currently facing the new nation were to be overcome if unity was prioritized. The song elegantly captures this idea in the following ironical lines.

*Wanike mumusha hamuna yavanoti
unity
Honguzve, kubatana takabatana
asi hatina yavanoti unity*

Surprisingly in the home there is no what they call
'unity'
It is true that when it comes to unity, we are united
but we do not have what they call 'unity'

²⁵ An acronym for Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front.

²⁶ An acronym for Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace.

²⁷ The actual number killed is still a matter of conjecture; the PF-Zapu leader, Joshua Nkomo, put it at 20 000 while other sources put it at 700 (CCJP, 1997: 18).

Apartheid South Africa was not only unhappy with the independence of Zimbabwe but also with that of Mozambique in 1975. Afraid of having communist neighbors, it subjected Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and other countries in the sub-region to various acts of economic and political sabotage in a “beggar-your-neighbor” destructive engagement policy (Hanlon, 1986) intended to coerce its neighbors to remain economically dependent and also to thwart the African National Congress’ (ANC) anti-apartheid activities in those countries. Zipra dissidents in Zimbabwe and Renamo²⁸ rebels in Mozambique were sponsored, while ANC leaders and activists were tracked for assassination (Parker 2012: 291-3; Moorcraft & Mclaughlin 2008: 185-91). It is in these tense political circumstances that Samora Machel was killed in a plane crash in 1986 in as yet unclear circumstances. The Run Family’s dirge hit single “Samora waenda” (“Samora is gone”) became an instant hit. It brings to mind these hostile relations between apartheid South Africa and its neighbours. The song conveys people’s deep-seated sorrow for losing someone they venerated as a pan-Africanist hero. It was also a conduit to express anger at apartheid South Africa (suspected to have caused the plane crash) and solidarity with the oppressed people of South Africa.

<i>Taneta maihwe nekukurungwa</i>	We are tired of being stirred
<i>Tokurungwa sezvibota zviripamoto</i>	We are stirred like some little porridge on the fire
<i>Samora waenda</i>	Samora is gone

In line with the pan-Africanist spirit of the period, Mapfumo’s *mbira*-couched hit “Tongosienda” (“We are perpetually on the move”) calls upon Zimbabweans and their neighbors to unite against apartheid. Its lyrics convey intense anti-apartheid feelings. The then South African Prime Minister, Pieter Willem Botha, is denounced as a stubborn, arrogant and notorious rebel, a stumbling block to peace in the sub-region. And Mapfumo suggests that the apartheid-backed Renamo leader, Alfonso Dhlakama, should be hunted and murdered.

L: <i>Wekutanga ndiBotha gandanga guru</i>	The first one is Botha, the big and notorious rebel
R: <i>Anotaura seakasika munhu,</i>	He speaks as if he created a human being,

L: <i>Wechipiri Dhlakama pondai</i>	The second is Dhlakama, murder him

On the social front independence was an opportunity to begin life afresh or readjust it for the better with respect to the new realities. Young men and women who had returned from the bush were eager to marry and begin a settled life while others were happy to be reunited with their partners after many years. The 1982 Legal Age of Majority Act transformed relationships by giving an individual of at least eighteen years the freedom to determine his/her affairs. In a significant way it liberated women, who under colonial law were considered minors. Women’s freedom of movement which had

²⁸ Acronym for Mozambique Resistance Movement.

started during the war as some joined the war while others acted as *vanachimbwido*²⁹ was further enhanced by the new legislation. Patriarchal tentacles were shortened and weakened as women were free to engage in relationships without the consent or knowledge of their parents or other clan/family authorities. With the expansion of education and youth brigades, young women could leave and stay away from home for longer periods without the restriction of elders. The positive gender relations promoted by the peace that came with independence were especially celebrated in love songs. Love songs produced during this period by Oliver Mtukudzi and *sungura* artists such as Jonah Moyo, Paul Matavire, John Chibadura, Leornard Dembo and Solomon Skuza have become timeless hits depicting these new (positive) social realities.³⁰

Mtukudzi's hit single "Perekedza mwana" ("Accompany the child") urges lovers not to be carried away by romance but to return home before it is too dark. In the song the suitor is being urged to accompany his girlfriend home because it is now dark. But in Devera Ngwená's "Solo naMutsai" ("Solo and Mutsai") romance is burning like veld fire and people are urged to stay away from the lovers. In the song's script the lovers live at Gutu-Mpandawana,³¹ the fastest growing growth point in the country during that time.

<i>Solo naMutsai</i>	Solo and Mutsai
<i>PaGutu vaomesa</i>	At Gutu they have become famous
<i>Rudo rwavo rukuru shamwari bvirakure</i>	Their love is great, my friend stay away from them

Self-nicknamed 'Doctor Love', Matavire's ebullient music fired Zimbabwe's romantic imagination with its sweet and sexually suggestive lyrics. They were usually garnished with proverbial and idiomatic sayings and steamy conversations between lovers.³² Some of his memorable songs include "Unondidirei?" ("Why did you love me?"), "Dhindindi Fulltime" ("High rhythmic sounds non-stop"), "Taurai zvenyu" ("You can say it?"), "Dhiyabhorosi nyoka" ("The diabolical serpent") and "Tanga wandida" ("Love me first").

Matavire was a hit maker also because of social relevance of his songs. Their messages oscillated between the joys of love (such as sex, companionship, etc.) and conflict (cheating, divorce, neglect, etc.), some of the realities of relationships which he delivered through humour. The main purpose of his music, to make life enjoyable, is summarized in his hot hit "Dhindindi Fulltime". He sings *Munhu wenyama ngaafare, hapana chinonetsa* (Let the man/woman of flesh be happy, there is nothing to trouble

²⁹ These were female collaborators. Their male counterparts were called *vanamujibha*.

³⁰ The songs could be heard everywhere, especially in rural and urban townships, beerhalls and growth points. They were also travel entertainment on public transport. The excited music was blasted on buses plying rural-urban routes, entertaining passengers as they now moved freely enjoying the new life.

³¹ It is a rural district centre in northern Masvingo province. In the 80s it was developing fast towards attaining a town status.

³² The singer's obsession with love and romance appeared to have gone too far because in 1989 he was arrested for rape only to be released after a presidential pardon in 1992.

him/her). The Jairos Jiri Band that he led and later his own band called Hit Machine, comprised girls who mesmerized revelers with their scintillating waist-wriggling dances. Skuza's "Fashion leJojeti" ("Georgette fashion") and Chibadura's "Mudiwa ndasaririra" ("My darling I have been left behind") expressed Zimbabwean women's obsession with fashion. They desired to impress their suitors, spouses and partners as romance gripped the country. A woman who fell in love expected her boyfriend to buy her a fashionable dress.³³ Unfortunately, as Matavire's music shows, sometimes women fell prey to deceptive suitors who just wanted sexual pleasure at the expense true commitment leading to marriage.

Leonard Dembo's *sungura* hit single "Sharai",³⁴ conveyed the feelings of sadness felt by many lovers who were separated from their partners by the increased physical and social mobility of the period. When a young man left his home to look for a job in the urban areas, he would often make a covenant with his girlfriend to remain committed to each other. Afraid that his girl might agree to be taken by another suitor, in the song the soloist appeals to her not to betray their covenant. Unfortunately in most cases such vows were broken as the young man would find more attractive girls in the urban areas or the girl would also find another suitor back home. "Dudzai" ("Reveal") and "Zii zii" ("Continuing silence") depict strained relationships nearing collapse. Unlike Matavire's songs which became popular on account of their humour, sexual innuendos and an excited fast tempo, Dembo's love songs appealed to the audiences partly due to the seriousness of their lyricism. They expressed humble but deep feelings for genuine love that would lead to honest matrimony. Because the protagonist in the songs' narratives is a suitor with genuine dreams for marriage who, owing to his poor background, fails to achieved his cherished dreams, he finds sympathy with many listeners. "Chitekekete" ("Dream girl"), Dembo's all-time hit, embodies these motifs in his music. In the song the persona has found the girl of his dreams but fails to marry her because of his poor socio-economic background, figuratively expressed as *zvandisina shangu* (since I do not have shoes) (line 3 in the lyrics below).

Pauri pane dande-mutande
Pane soso rinobaya
Zvandisina shangu ndokutora seiko?
Uve muroora wamai

Where you are there is a cobweb
 There is a creeper's thorn that prickles
 Now that I do not have shoes, how will I take you?
 To be my mother's daughter-in-law

Dande-mutande (cobweb) and *soso* (creeper's thorn) are metaphors the singer deploys to demonstrate the magnitude of the obstacles ahead of him in his quest to win his dream girl. However, he finds sympathy from society because his dream of taking the girl to be *muroora wamai* (my mother's daughter in law) is a socio-culturally sanctioned one.

But as Mtukudzi's "Perekedza mwana" ("Accompany the child") had earlier warned,

³³ Skirts and dresses made out of the georgette fabric were quite fashionable in the 80s.

³⁴ It is a Shona female name meaning "Choose".

the uncontrolled romance of the 80s had its own socially harmful consequences. He recalls, "... over and above celebrating [independence] I was also singing about self-discipline and restraint in that new era, be it at a social or political level" (Mutamba, 2009). Young women who could not make it at school would move to urban areas and growth points in search of jobs. Failing to find the jobs some turned to prostitution. Chung (1988: 129-30) indicates that whereas almost a hundred thousand school leavers had poured onto the job market by the mid-1980s, the economy had created only 10 000 new jobs in the entire decade. Prostitution became rife from the early 1980s. In 1983 the government's attempts to stop widespread prostitution saw the indiscriminate rounding up of women found walking in the streets at night (Feltoe & Sithole, 2012: 42). The growth point of Gutu-Mpandawana, a frequent rendezvous for both established and emerging musical bands, became notorious for prostitution. It was the most hard-hit place to attract world attention after Zimbabwe's first HIV-AIDS case was diagnosed in 1985 (Garbus & Khumalo-Sakutukwa 2003: 5).

Suffering, Resentment and Disillusionment in the 90s

By and large hit songs of the 1990s decade reflect people's disenchantment with independence and the country's political leadership. Whereas independence was the main historical event influencing people's positive attitude towards the state, in the 90s, ESAP³⁵ was the main event causing people's negative mood towards the government. Hit songs in this decade embody the fundamental question that Africans had to grapple with at independence in all African countries – independence's failure to translate nationalist goals into reality. Nzongolo-Ntalaja (1987: ix) succinctly captures its Achilles' heel:

For most people, the struggle for national liberation meant not only freedom from alien control and exploitation, but also and more importantly a better standard of living for all and a more secure future for their children. In Africa, this basic promise ... has materialized only for a tiny minority, while the dream of freedom and prosperity by the great majority ... has been transformed into a nightmare of oppression and despair.

The government's 1980s economic policy was 'welfarist', but in the 90s it suddenly shifted to neoliberalism (Raftopoulos 2009: 219). Questioning independence becomes a recurrent motif in many of the songs of this decade. Rhetorical questions in titles of Mapfumo's 1994 and Mtukudzi's 1998 hits "Todya marara here?" ("So are we to eat rubbish?") and "Todii?" ("What shall we do?") respectively, and the line *Zvino ndoita seiko gedye ibvume?* (So what shall I do to make ends meet?) in Cde Chinx's 1998 hit "Gedye yaramba" ("Making ends meet has failed"), serve to illustrate this point. Although the musical celebration of independence continued into the early years of the 90s decade, towards the end of the 80s decade, the euphoric dust of independence was settling. It was becoming clearer that the society envisioned in nationalist promises was

³⁵ It is an acronym which means Economic Structural Adjustment Programme.

a pipe dream. For example, corruption as seen through the 1988-9 Willogate Scandal³⁶ was beginning to take firm roots in public offices. Skuza, one of the pioneers of postcolonial Zimbabwean protest music, overtly condemned the scandal in his “Love and scandals” hit song (Nyakunu 2005: 7). Mapfumo’s 1988 hit “Varombo kuvarombo” (“The poor to the poor”) was one of the first songs to record the general change in mood from excitement to disillusionment in the populace. People began to blame the government for the rising poverty and the call for social justice. The independence honeymoon was clearly over.

The hesitation by the government to address fundamental socio-economic problems anchored in Rhodesia’s economic policies of land alienation and black exclusion became a time bomb. Eventually it exploded in the late 90s and its shock waves felt through the unfolding political and socio-economic problems. The government was to embark on the ill-conceived 2000 agrarian reform which finally dismantled the economy that had limped throughout the 90s. By the early 90s Zimbabwe’s population had increased by almost 3 million people from 7.5 million in 1982 to 10.4 million in 1992 (Zimbabwe Central Statistical Office).³⁷ Rural populations had increased and the land shortage which started to be felt as far back as the 1950s continued to worsen, precipitating sporadic militancy among land-hungry peasants and war veterans. The government’s decision in 1991 to introduce the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) sponsored ESAP was ill-informed. It proved towards the middle of the decade that it was economically and politically counterproductive. Its adverse consequences would sow the seeds for the rise of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in the late 90s capitalizing on the programme’s marginalization of workers. Many factories closed due to international competition in a *laissez-faire*-informed market system. The skyrocketing of prices for basic commodities and retrenchments became the unexpected reality in an economy that had formerly protected the public through subsidies. Accessing health and education became difficult as free health and education were scrapped.

Whereas artists had sung about poverty right from the dawn of independence in 1980, generally the government was not held responsible for the suffering. Rather, the poverty was seen as a natural phenomenon or it was attributed to Rhodesian economic segregation as, for instance, in Mapfumo’s early music. The Bhundu Boys’ early 80s album *Hupenyu hwepasi* (“Life on earth”) does not politicize the poverty of the 80s, but conceptualizes it as a universal reality. Similar to most popular songs on poverty then, the rhetorical purpose of the title track was to persuade Zimbabweans to work harder in the hope that with the support of the new government, the poverty would

³⁶ This was an abuse of a car facility for members of parliament in which some of them ended up acquiring cars from Willowvale Motor Industries and reselling them at twice the buying price. The person in charge of the facility, then senior minister Maurice Nyagumbo, committed suicide presumably out of shame. Four cabinet ministers and a provincial governor resigned.

³⁷ Specific figures were 7,501, 470 in 1982 and 10, 41, 548 in 1992 (Zimbabwe Central Statistical Office).

eventually be resolved. Matavire's 1985 "Nhamo yemuriwo" ("The scarcity of relish") and The Bhundu Boys' "Kutambura" ("Suffering") sympathizes with the rural people for their regular experience of meager food supplies. In urban areas the shortage of accommodation continued to worsen as depicted in The Bhundu Boys' "Kuroja chete" ("The problem of lodging"). The band's other hits "Faka puresha" ("Put more effort") and "Wenhamo haaneti" ("The poor one never gets tired") and Dembo's "Nhamo moto" ("Poverty is fire") were some of the hits that captured the socio-economic challenges of the 80s, but attributing them to natural and/or personal causes rather to state neglect. Persuading people to work hard was partly inspired by the government's call for the people to organize themselves into co-operatives and work for common production. This was in line with then Zanu-PF's belief in socialist principles of collective production (see Davies 1988: 18-31). The music's alignment with the new authorities' ideological principles largely explains why the songs were not viewed as subversive (and therefore not censored), unlike some songs that would be produced in the post-2000 period.

A closer look at hit songs of the 90s seems to indicate that it is roughly towards the mid-90s that open criticism of the government became discernible, a trend that would grow and become a permanent overt and/or covert feature of many songs in post-2000 Zimbabwe. Even the characteristically social in expression *sungura* musical style, sometimes became a vehicle for agitation against the government. "Varombo kuvarombo" laments the widening gap between the rich black-white minority on one hand, and the majority poor black on the other. Mapfumo is deeply concerned that those who were born during Rhodesia now suffer a double tragedy. The government then denied them access to wealth and now the black government is not taking any significant strides to change their plight. He blames the neo-colonialist alliance between multinational companies, white settlers and the new government for worsening the majority of the black people's economic challenges.

<i>Imari yatiri kushaya</i>	It is money that we lack
<i>Vatongi veRhodesia ndivoka vachine mari</i>	(Former) Rhodesian rulers are the ones who have money
<i>Nevamwe vatema honaka vanoba mari</i>	Together with some blacks who steal money

As noted, the justification of the emerging criticism of the government was based on the popular view that the goals of the Second Chimurenga had not been realized. By honouring the seven guerrillas killed by the Rhodesian forces in 1966 during the Chinhoyi Battle in their 1989 hit song "Viva Chinhoyi," The Bhundu Boys question the now endemic suffering against the central promises of the armed struggle. By referring to the Chinhoyi Battle, mythologized in Zanu-PF's statist historiography as signifying the first shots of the Second Chimurenga, the song attacks the leaders for loss of revolutionary focus. The song says that it is morally wrong for the leaders to habitually swear by the fallen heroes when in reality they are far from fulfilling the aspirations the heroes died for.

<i>Hazvina kunaka</i>	It is (morally) bad
<i>Kugaropika nevakafa</i>	To swear by the dead every time
<i>Vakafira paChimoio</i>	Who died at Chimoio
<i>Vakafira paNyadzoia</i>	Who died at Nyadzoia ³⁸

The song also chides those who ridicule and marginalize war veterans. They pay no attention to the fact that the ex-combatants brought about national freedom. As I discuss below, the neglect of war veterans during the 90s was to become a serious national problem. From 1993 the ex-combatants would embark on violent demonstrations to force the government to address their plight. Mapfumo's "Corruption" criticized corrupt tendencies that were becoming rampant in public institutions. It condemns the growing culture in public offices of demanding bribes for services to be rendered. It is now "something for something," the artist sings. Muzondidya (2009: 182) rightly observes that much of the resentment against the state "was around questions of corruption" and "the abandonment of the leadership code". In the 1989 song "Mwoyo wangu" ("My heart") Mapfumo captures many people's impatience with the government and the growing sentiment among the people to stop supporting the ruling party. Suffering became the subject of people's daily conversations as Mapfumo's 1991 hit "Hurukuro" ("Conversations"), illustrates. The song lampoons political leaders' empty promises as *pamuromo hamubvire* (when it comes to talking you are extremely good [but in practice you do nothing]). Criticizing the government was met with repression, so in most cases, except for the courageous workers and university students, people would just contemplate their suffering in silence. As the song rightly observes, if people complained publicly, they were silenced by the authorities. If they decided to form a new political party, they are blacklisted and persecuted. In spite of that, Mapfumo's songs, "in the service of greater patriotism" were beginning to persuade the masses to criticize the government (Eyre, 2001: 66).

Challenging the ruling party was viewed as risky. Mapfumo's 1990 political satire "Jojo" captures this danger. It warns those who dared challenge Zanu-PF that they risk losing their lives like many did in the past. Mapfumo thinks that it was far much better if someone endured suffering with everybody else than to lose his/her life. The song expresses the popular belief then, and even now, that Zanu-PF *chiwororo* (i.e. it is [politically] invincible and 'disciplines' those who oppose it) (Musiyiwa 2013: 159). In an environment in which the national leadership has reneged on what it promised the people during the war, in "Ndinofarira Zimbabwe" ("I love Zimbabwe") (1993) Mapfumo calls for the leadership's recommitment to national values and aspirations. This was the time when Zimbabwe was still a darling of western countries, receiving financial aid from a wide range of international aid organizations. Mugabe and his cabinet were regularly traversing the world visiting Western capitals and other parts of the world to the effect that Mugabe was at one point nicknamed 'Vasco da

³⁸ Nyadzoia and Chimoio were Zanla guerrilla bases in Mozambique at which thousands of guerrillas, recruits and refugees died after heavy attacks by Rhodesian forces in 1976 and 1977 respectively.

Gama.³⁹ Mapfumo warns the leaders not to forget where they came from. Even if they travel abroad and are given money or not, they should not betray their country, but remain patriotic. He sings, *Zimbabwe uri nyika yangu, handikanganwe kwandakabva* (Zimbabwe you are my country, I do not forget where I came from), the singers criticize the leaders.⁴⁰ With ESAP's economic hardships biting deeper into ordinary life, by the mid-1990s everyone is convinced that independence gave them false expectations.⁴¹ Matavire's *munhu-wenyama-ngaafare* (let-a-man/woman-of-flesh-be-happy) spirit that had rocked the 80s could no longer be sustained in the 90s. Disappointment with independence and some nostalgia for the Rhodesian days became evident.

The economic hardships of the 90s were perhaps best immortalized in Leonard Zhakata's 1994 song "Mugove" ("Portion"), a metaphor for a decent wage. As the prices of basic commodities were constantly rising, workers' salaries could not sustain a decent living. Meanwhile, thousands of workers were being retrenched as companies downsized their workforce due to losses and diminishing profits. Those who were lucky to remain employed often received wages below the poverty line. For many retrenched workers their terminal benefits could not cushion them against the unprecedented adverse socio-economic environment in the country. In other cases their benefits were delayed or never came at all as their companies were liquidated. "Mugove" is a tragic narrative of the exploitation of workers under the ESAP dispensation. It called upon employers to give their workers decent salaries so that they could live a humane life. It embodies the suffering and anxiety workers experienced as they pondered about their future and that of their families. The effects of the Bretton-Woods institutions' readjustment of the economy were so acute that even the traditionally pro-government and guerrilla artist, Cde Chinx, lamented the people's plight in his 1998 song "Gedye yaramba" ("Making ends meet has failed"). People are disillusioned and life has become a crossroad.

Mukoma gedye yaramba
Zvino ndoita seiko gedye ibvume?
Nditsvage pakati pacho ndashaya
Panonakira mhomho yepasi

My brother, it is impossible to make ends meet
 What shall I do to make ends meet?
 Even if I search for the middle part, I cannot find it
 Where it is sweet for the majority of people on earth

While the ruling party expected people to remain loyal, many were becoming politically apathetic. Mapfumo's 1996 hit "Anenge asingade" ("He who is not interested") protests against political coercion and manipulation of the people by Zanu-PF. The

³⁹ The satirical nickname comes from the 15th and 16th century Portuguese explorer, Vasco da Gama, who captained the ships that were the first to directly reach India from Europe in 1498. The name criticized the wasteful habits of Mugabe's government, obsessed with travelling abroad at the expense of the tax-payer.

⁴⁰ The patriotism the singer meant here was all-encompassing. Both leaders and subjects were supposed to show responsibility to their nation. It is different from the post-2000 patriotism which is sectional and an imposition from above.

⁴¹ In other art forms, for example literature, Shimmer Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns* (1990), right from its title also expresses the pervasive disillusionment with the government.

party compels people to support it but every person has the right to choose a party of his or her choice. *Hapana munhu anomakidzwa kuita zvaasingade* (No one should be forced to do what he/she does not want).

One section of the Zimbabwean society that had sunk in deep poverty was that of ex-combatants. Their appalling condition made them a target for public ridicule. Why then did you fight the war? – was the public's satirical question. It is after the death of former freedom fighter and Zanu-PF MP, Mayor Urombo,⁴² in 1993 that the deplorable condition of ex-guerrillas became a serious public debate. Former combatants Clive Malunga and Chimbetu's respective songs "Nesango" ("Through the forest") and "Pane asipo" ("Someone is absent"), succinctly captured the former freedom fighters' predicament. Malunga's 1998 single bemoans the condition of the war veterans contrasting it with the affluence of the new African bourgeoisie, some whom never fought in the war of liberation.

<i>Isu takafamba nesango rine minzwa inobaya</i>	We walked through a forest with prickling thorns
<i>Isu tinongomberereka,</i>	Now we roam the streets,
<i>vamwe vakagarika zvavo mudzimba</i>	when others are living pretty in their houses

Chimbetu is worried that while the rich enjoy life, they have forgotten about the fallen and living heroes who brought about the freedom and the opportunities people now have to freely amass wealth. Like Mapfumo, the two musicians denounce leaders for renegeing on fulfilling liberation war goals. They seem to ask the question: *Zimbabwe, a revolution that lost its way?*, the title of Andre Astrow's (1983) book. As early as 1983, Astrow had noted the contradiction in Zanu-PF's economic policies. As previously noted, whereas during the war and immediately after independence the liberation movement was preaching the gospel of a socialist-oriented economy, in reality it never changed the country economic status quo. No nationalization of companies took place and the economy remained in the hands of multi-national companies while land was owned by white settler farmers. In 1997 demonstrations by the war veterans came to a head. Although Mugabe had earlier rebuked ex-combatants for demonstrating at the National Heroes Acre during the burial of Urimbo in Harare in 1993, he realized that his party's support was fast dwindling. He hastily authorized the disbursement of unbudgeted gratuities and monthly salaries for the restless war veterans. The immediate economic consequences of the measure the government took was the crash of the Zimbabwean dollar in November 1997. It lost seventy-four percent of its value in just four hours (Bond 2007: 170). With fast diminishing economic production after the violent land invasions, the Zimbabwean dollar was to continuously slide into an official hyper-inflation rate of over 280 million percent by late 2008 (Raftopolous 2009: 220).

In 2000 the war veterans were thrust at the forefront of mobilizing peasants during the invasion of white-owned farms. In terms of public-state relations these developments

⁴² A guerrilla leader, war-time Zanu-PF national commissar and former MP, Mayor Urimbo was said to have died a pauper.

were crucial in two ways. First, they signalled a significant paradigm shift on the part of the government. It adopted an “exclusive nationalist stance” in which the economic and political problems in the country would be blamed on whites (Muzondidya, 2009: 192). This set the arena for the politics of land and resource nationalism (Alexander, 2006). Second, they heralded the dangerous (ideological) split of the nation into two politically hostile camps – one in frenzied support of the state’s nationalist shift (with its specific focus on the Third Chimurenga) and the other in support of the opposition and its *chinja* (change) ideology. The mood of popular music was to adopt the same dichotomy.

As the 90s decade approached its end, the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS were being deeply felt. Coupled with the economic problems of the decade, this explains the increasing national despair during that time. The HIV/AIDS scourge was to worsen post-2000 due to the collapse of the national health delivery system. In 2002 more than 2000 people were dying of the pandemic every week with the infected population standing at 2.2 million (Motsi, 2002). Mtukudzi’s 1998 hit “Todii?” (“What shall we do?”) expressed the impact of the HIV/AIDS scourge. Survival became so unpredictable that many resigned to fate, attributing their continued survival to mere luck. Mtukudzi’s song “Raki” (“Luck”) captured this reality – *Varipo varume vanorarama neraki* (There are some men who just survive by sheer luck). This can also be said to be in reference to the uncertainty of the unfolding events in post-2000 Zimbabwe.

Polarities in the post-2000 era

In this decade the major events shaping people’s attitudes towards the state and the consequent response of popular music are the rise of the opposition MDC, the seizure of white-owned farms in 2000 and the consequent crisis. Attempts at predicting Zimbabwe’s political future on the basis of any prevailing reality became elusive. Politically it is the era of many (meaningless) elections – six were held in nine years but with no concrete resolution of the national crisis. In reality the crisis was worsening.⁴³ Political polarization and violence tore the country apart. As the excitement of the new millennium gripped the rest of the world, national anxiety dominated people’s imagination in Zimbabwe.⁴⁴ Backlash to the triumph of the opposition and civic society sponsored NO vote in the constitutional referendum of February 2000 came in the form of farm invasions and the intensification of opposition persecution.

Generally the MDC and Zanu-PF split the nation into two antagonistic camps, both vying to change the country. To strengthen its weakening hegemony, Zanu-PF made a hasty retreat into nationalist history to retrieve its revolutionary values of nation-building and land redistribution, now explained and transmitted through the new narrow ‘patriotic history’ discourse. By officially naming the fast-track

⁴³ A constitutional referendum and a parliamentary election were held in 2000; a presidential election in 2002; a parliamentary election in 2005; a harmonized (local, parliamentary and presidential) election in March 2008 and a presidential run-off in June 2008. On average Zimbabwe was holding elections every year from 2000 to 2008.

⁴⁴ In Bulawayo a party called Zapu-2000 was formed in an attempt to revive PF-Zapu.

land redistribution 'Third Chimurenga', an attempt was being made to link it with Zimbabwe's nationalist emancipatory history. The propaganda aim was to create the impression that Zanu-PF has not deviated from its revolutionary past. Though belated, in Zanu-PF propaganda it was now time to indigenize the economy with or without British financial support. For the MDC and its Western backers it was time for regime change their argument being that Mugabe had stayed for too long in power; he is not adhering to the rule of law, he is violating human rights with impunity; he has wrecked the once internationally admired economy⁴⁵ by seizing land from white farmers. As the two parties tussled with each other to change the country, each in its own direction, the country's institutions collapsed plunging it into a political and economic abyss. The rhetorical question *Ichiri Zimbabwe here iyi?* (Is this the actual Zimbabwe?), became a public saying. People were failing to come to terms with the speed with which the crisis was worsening.

The impact of the turbulent political dispensation on popular music was phenomenal. Like independence had done two decades earlier, one of the positive effects of the Third *Chimurenga* was the boosting of local musical creativity. New musical groups were established. Some were sponsored by the state to sing pro-state songs while the rest were free to compose and sing their own songs, provided they were not conceived as anti-Zanu-PF. It is in this period that the urban grooves and gospel genres established themselves as dominant musical styles in Zimbabwe. Three distinct trends in the performance practice of the period became discernible. First, there were hit songs with political content sung in support of the Third *Chimurenga*. The main message in these songs, from the state's perspective, was the attempt to justify the land reform as an extension of the Second *Chimurenga*. It was argued that independence had only given the people political and not economic freedom and now the Third *Chimurenga* was "the search for sovereignty and control over all our resources, principally the land" (Mugabe 2001: 141). At Zanu-PF rallies, the National Heroes Acre and other public state functions one would see placards emblazoned with such slogans as "Political power alone is meaningless unless people have land" (see Raftopolous 2009: 214). However, the real motive behind the songs was to galvanize public support for the contested fast-track land reform programme and ultimately gain political legitimacy. The songs became a medium for celebrating land acquisition, ridiculing the opposition as traitors and for the West to know that "Zimbabwe will never be a colony again."⁴⁶

The second trend was protest songs which provided musical space for oppositional consciousness. Mapfumo's post-2000 music and its general anti-Mugabe stance became a key component of this category. Raymond Majongwe, Paul Madzore and Dread Reckless, among others, also shaped the distinctiveness of this new musical tendency.

⁴⁵ On his visit to Zimbabwe in March 1981, Julius Nyerere said to Mugabe, "You inherited a jewel in Africa, don't tarnish it" (Flower, 1987: 154).

⁴⁶ The motto punctuated Mugabe's public speeches, particularly at the national heroes' acre, political rallies, and international forums. It was also regularly cited in state-controlled media.

One interesting feature of pro-opposition music is that these songs became hits despite being denied sonic space on television and radio. The phenomenon is a historical repetition of how pro-nationalist songs banned on Rhodesian radio in the 70s became hits as people obtained them from record shops (Prederiske 1982: 109).

The last trend is that of apolitically oriented songs, particularly gospel, *sungura* and urban grooves styles. Although some songs in this category do comment on the crisis of the period, their criticism of the government is latent. In most cases they deal with universal challenges of life and how to resolve them (Musiyiwa 2013).

The 2001 the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Act was crucial in influencing popular music trends in post-2000 Zimbabwe in terms of quantity, style and orientation, and for the state it was essential for the enhancement of its propaganda machinery. Evans' (2011: 619) observation regarding Soviet mass media of the 70s as "a site of significant cultural innovation and experimentation aimed at finding new ways of engaging and unifying the Soviet populace" is also applicable to Zimbabwe's radio and television under this legislation. By requiring television and radio to allocate 75 percent of their programming to local material (i.e. Zimbabwean and African), the legislation compelled the electronic media to serve state interests.⁴⁷ Under direct sponsorship by the Ministry of Information and Publicity, the *chimurenga* musical tradition was revived through state-organized musical galas (see Muchemwa, 2010; Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Willems, 2009; Thram, 2006a). Second Chimurenga songs were remade to suit the demands of the Third *Chimurenga* movement. Eyerman & Jamison (1998: 1-2) point out that

in social movements, musical and other kinds of cultural traditions are made and remade, and after the movements fade away as political forces, the music remains as a memory and as a potential way to inspire new waves of mobilization.

However, for Zanu-PF the motive was the appropriation of music nationalism to claim and maintain political legitimacy through the evocation of the "memory of the liberation struggle" (Thram 2006a: 76). War-time bush artists, Cde Chinx and Marko Sibanda, teamed up under the state-sponsored Third Chimurenga Series and in 2001 produced two albums, *Hondo yeMinda* (The war for land) Volumes 1 and 2, consisting mostly of Zanla and Zipra choirs crossovers.

Cde Chinx's revived Second Chimurenga song "Maruza imi III" ("You have lost three times") is a megaphone of state discourses of post-2000 Zimbabwe. It is also an embodiment of the positive mood among Zanu-PF supporters as far as the Third Chimurenga is concerned. It chronicles how Zimbabwe was colonized and the consequent loss of land to white settlers. The song's rhetorical intention is to resuscitate the memory of the liberation war since the land issue is repeatedly said in nationalist rhetoric to have fuelled Zimbabwe's struggle for independence (Alexander 1991: 581). It was a song revived, *inter alia*, to teach the youth ('the born frees') about colonialism

⁴⁷ Later this translated to 100 percent local content programming on all the four radio stations, although this was not officially gazetted.

and why the war was fought and why now the land was being taken. It also tries to justify why the land reform is a belated one, arguing that at independence white farmers abused the willing buyer willing seller provision of the 1979 Lancaster House Agreement. They constantly raised the price of their farms whenever the government wanted to buy farms for black resettlement. Britain, the EU and the US are denounced for imposing sanctions on Zimbabwe. The MDC is condemned for requesting Western countries to impose sanctions on Zimbabwe and also working in cahoots with these countries to effect regime change. The opposition is denounced as *vatengesesi* (sellouts) and their behaviour is portrayed as embarrassing and irresponsible. They desire (Western) money at the expense of their birthright. Evaluating their moral worthiness against African family values they are found wanting. They are likened to a ridiculously irresponsible family man who goes to consult a *n'anga* (diviner), to foolishly request the diviner to cast an evil spell against his very family.

Makamboona baba anosimuka pamusha
Achiti anotsvaka zvinoshupa pamusha

Where have you seen a father leaving his home?
Saying he is going to find out on what troubles
the family

Onodaidzira kun'anga ...

And then asks the diviner...

"Zadza munyama mumusha mangu",

"Cast an evil spell in my home!"

Sezviri kuita vamwe vana muno umu

Like what some children here are doing

Muri kunyengerwa netumari twunopera utwu

You are being cheated by the little money [they
give you] that will be finished

Nhaka haiperi

Your heritage [i.e. land] never gets finished

With a tune derived from the *vapositori*⁴⁸ religious songs and accompanied by *mbira* instrumentation, Last Chiyangwa's "Agirimende" ("Agreement") declares the disputed outcome of the 2002 presidential election, won by Mugabe, as credible and irreversible. It is said to be an agreement that cannot be reversed because, as Zanu-PF supporters argued, by voting the people were 'signing' an agreement that cannot be annulled. The song derides the opposition for always complaining about elections as not free and fair (due to alleged rigging and violence) and not accepting defeat. It recalls Mapfumo's 1980 hit single "Nyarai" ("Be ashamed") which, as earlier discussed, mocks those parties that lost the 1980 general election. The Western countries that shared the same sentiments as the Zimbabwean opposition are also condemned, particularly Britain and its leader Tony Blair. The former British prime minister is subjected to scatological humour – "The Blair that I know is a toilet", sings the soloist.⁴⁹ The song captures the anti-Blair sentiments that had gripped Zanu-PF supporters as the state's discourse of Third *Chimurenga* was monotonously disseminated through

⁴⁸ The word means 'apostles.' They are the followers of the African Independent Churches.

⁴⁹ The humour comes from a common type of a pit latrine called a "Blair toilet". It was built throughout Zimbabwe from the 1980s due to the efforts of a research unit in the Ministry of Health called Blair Research. Thus in the bilateral standoff between Zimbabwe and Britain, Zanu-PF and its supporters were quick to pick on this resemblance. They mocked the former Labour leader as unknown in Zimbabwe because what they knew as 'Blair' is a toilet (Musiyiwa, 2013: 184-185).

the state-controlled print and electronic media, at political rallies and in Mugabe's national heroes acre speeches. After the 2002 presidential election Mugabe dubbed the cabinet he had formed 'an economic and political war cabinet' (*The Herald*, 2002). The 2005 parliamentary election was declared an 'anti-Blair election'. Through the Third Chimurenga Zimbabwe was said to be at war with Britain. The late and former Zanu-PF national political commissar, Eliot Manyika, revived some *pungwe* songs⁵⁰ particularly, "Nora," "Sheyera mabhuzi mana" ("Throw the four grenades") and "Mbiri yechigandaga" ("The fame of being a guerrilla"). The last song can be interpreted as justifying political violence on the basis that Zanu-PF is being praised for its ability to wage violence. With their explicit celebration of violence, the songs represent the political violence that characterized the post-2000 period. It is important to note that all the elections of the first decade of the 21st century were marred by violence of which the opposition was on the receiving end.⁵¹

Also of particular mention with regard to pro-state hit songs during this period were government-sponsored jingles promoting agrarian reform. Their continuous playing on radio and television gave them hit status, with many people singing them in public.⁵² Of particular mention is Tambaoga's "Sendekera mwana wevhu" ("Remain resolute child of the soil"). With its lyrics modeled along the Second *Chimurenga* "Sendekera" song, the 2003 jingle arrogantly celebrates the land seizures applauding the stubbornness of the government to continue with the land reform against the wishes of British and her allies – *Ngavagumbuke zvavo, vane waya* (Who cares if they get upset? They are crazy), *isu tave kutonga* (for us we are ruling). Like many Third *Chimurenga* songs of the time, it was intended to embolden the masses during the land invasions and to endure their consequences. The line *rambai makashinga* (remain resolute) expresses this point.⁵³ Other land reform jingles that became hits were "Chave chimurenga" (It's now another *chimurenga* war), "Dai kuri kwedu" ("If it were in our place").⁵⁴

The anti-Zanu-PF mood, in roughly half of the populace, was expressed by several

⁵⁰ These were *jiti* style songs, characteristic of their fast tempo. They were sung during all-night (*pungwe*) politicization meetings consisting of guerrillas and peasants.

⁵¹ The 2008 harmonized election was the worst in post-2000 political violence. However, statistics vary on the actual number of people killed – the highest figure being put at 300 (see Wisdom Mudzungairi, "Mugabe May Get Another 10 Years", *Newsday*, 19 January 2013).

⁵² For example, the "Rambai makashinga" ("Remain resolute") jingle was played about 288 times in a single day on the state's four radio stations and screened about 72 times a day on television (see Owen Muza, "Zimbabwe: A Case of Music Censorship: Before and After Independence", <http://freemuse.org>).

⁵³ However, in public the saying's intention became the very opposite. It was sarcastically appropriated by the opposition in a counter-criticism fashion. It now referred to the endemic suffering the people were experiencing, especially against the fact that the leaders provide nothing in terms of food, health care and other amenities.

⁵⁴ The former is a revival of Stella Chiweshe's 80s *chimurenga* song "Chava chimurenga" ("Now it is war"). The latter comes from a traditional song which criticizes those who do not want to acknowledge other people's victories. The soloist tells them that if s/he was in his/her own community, old women would ululate at his/her victory. The jingle is an implicit attack on the opposition for not celebrating the agrarian reform with the rest of the jubilant people.

pro-opposition artists. Mapfumo was one of them. Although there was no official announcement to ban Mapfumo's anti-state songs, his post-2000 compositions were denied airplay while his old anti-Rhodesian songs were played. The latter songs were played because they were seen as being in harmony with the anti-(re)colonialization theme of the Third *Chimurenga*. This selective approach to Mapfumo and other musicians's⁵⁵ recordings constituted a subtle but de facto musical censorship practice on the part of ZBC, although the Censorship and Entertainments Control Act (1967) is concerned with morality – addressing such issues as “obscenity, lewdness and personal defamation” not with explicit reference to “political content” (Thram 2006b: 76; see also Eyre, 2001). The subtle banning of the music that ZBC deemed to be in violation of state interests by ignoring playing it without making an official statement was intended to avoid recrimination, legal or otherwise.

As Third *Chimurenga* music was being churned out, Mapfumo revisited his old hits critical of the Rhodesian government and reworked and rechanneled their criticism towards the political and economic status quo. In a space of only three years, the intensely politically turbulent period of 2000 to 2002, Mapfumo produced five hit albums. All were loaded with sharp anti-Zanu-PF and Mugabe diatribes. Three of the albums, *Chimurenga Explosion*, *Manhungetunge (Badly done beadwork)* and *Chimurenga Unlimited Hits Volume 1* were released in 2000 while *Chimurenga Rebel* and *Toy toy* were produced in 2001 and 2002 respectively. On the first album, the *jiti* song “Mamvemve” (“Tatters”) likens the political and economic degeneration in the country to rags. In sharp contrast to his celebration of independence as *chiruzevha chauya* ([African] traditional life is back) in his 80s “Chiruzevha chauya” hit, now Mapfumo sees the same independence as worthless. The independence is *mamvemve* (rags) and is run by *matsotsi* (thieves), i.e. corrupt government officials.

L: *Musha wenyu wamaichemera*

Your home that you were yearning for

R: *Hona waita mamvemve*

Look it is now in tatters

R: *Bereka mwana tiende*

Carry the baby on your back and let us go

R: *Hona waita matsotsi*

Look now it has thieves

The song expresses what was prevailing in the imagination of many people during that time – to leave the country in search of greener pastures. The line *Bereka mwana tiende* ([My wife] carry the baby and let us go), succinctly captures this feeling. From 2000 hundreds of thousands of Zimbabweans (now millions) fled the endemic national crisis seeking refuge in SADC⁵⁶ countries, particularly South Africa, as well as Britain and other Western countries. In 2003 the singer himself was to leave the country going to the US for a self-imposed exile. He alleged persecution and intimidation by the

⁵⁵ Some of the musicians include Leonard Zhakata, Oliver Mtukudzi, Hosiah Chipanga, Raymond Majongwe and Tongai Moyo, among others.

⁵⁶ Acronym for Southern African Development Community.

authorities. “Disaster” on the same album has a self-explanatory message – *Mumba menyu muno mune* disaster (Here in your home there a disaster). The two songs portray Zimbabwe as a failed state, the opposition and international community’s view (see for instance Kovacs, 2012). The title track “Manhungetunge” (“Badly done beadwork”) echoes a similar message – the nation is now as ugly as badly made beadwork. “Marimuka” (“Hunting grounds”) expresses the feelings of many Zimbabweans – to find an opportunity to leave the country to search for a better life. The achievement of the greener pastures dream is communicated in “Big in America”, a song on the *Manhungetunge* album. The singer celebrates the new comfortable life he now enjoys staying in Oregon, the US.

The 1978 hit “Pamuromo chete” (“It is mere rhetoric”) which lambasted the Smith regime’s propaganda against the liberation war is released again in the context of the post-2000 political and economic upheaval. It condemns Zanu-PF propaganda and blames the ruling party for the current suffering. Again the late 70s hit “Tumira vana kuhondo” (“Sending children to war”) which criticized the Rhodesian government’s call-up law, is reproduced to criticize Zimbabwe’s involvement in the 1998-2003 DRC war. The 2003 album *Toyi toyi (Agitation)* captures the recurrent opposition demonstrations and mass stay-aways organized in collaboration with ZCTU, civic groups such as the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) and university students. The agitation, which was conducted piecemeal in the most part of the 1990s, became unified in the late 1990s as demonstrated, for instance, by the food riots of January 1998. The album *Rise Up* (2004), containing the song “Handimbotya” (“I will not be afraid”) calls for mass action.

One of the main activities in Zimbabwe’s restive political life from the late 90s to the formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU) in 2009 was mass action. 2003 was the year the opposition, which was vehemently demanding the cancellation of the 2002 presidential elections, expected the Mugabe regime to fall under the tide of mass action. In July of the same year a huge demonstration called “the final push” was organized. However, it failed due to poor organization and also people’s fear of being shot. The songs “Mukoma J” (“Brother J”) on the album *Toyi toyi* and “Masoja nemapurisa” (“Soldiers and the police”) on *Zvichapera (It [Mugabe regime] will come to an end)*, condemn the heavy-handedness of the police and army in dealing with demonstrations and opposition activists. The latter song also expresses the desire of the MDC and their western sympathizers to have Mugabe arrested and handed to the International Court of Justice (ICC) for a trial against alleged crimes against humanity. “Long Walk” (2007), borrowing its title from Nelson Mandela’s legendary biography, *A Long Walk to Freedom* (1994) envisioned the eventual defeat of Zanu-PF in the 2008 elections and the ascension of the MDC to power.

The opposition sentiments to see Mugabe relinquish power partly because of his old age, is now synonymous with Mtukudzi’s 2000 burning hit, “Wasakara” (“You are worn-out”). Whereas the song’s message is couched in typical Mtukudzi lyric style of metaphorical language, it was quickly seized by the opposition and ascribed political reference. The man the song refers to as *wasakara* (you are worn-out) was said to be

Mugabe, then aged 76. However, the composer's intended meaning is debatable. The singer strongly refuted the claim that his song was referring to Mugabe (Palmberg 2004: 18). In spite of that a closer analysis Mtukudzi's style of singing appears to lend credence to the theory that the song was an allusion to Mugabe's long stay in power and his refusal to retire. Sibanda (2004) notes the singer's tendency to sing in figurative language, employing, *inter alia*, riddles and innuendo, which make the meaning obscure and allusive but known to Shona speakers. Although there were reported attempts to ban the album by the authorities, it was eventually left for public access probably due to the fact that traditionally Mtukudzi's music is more social than political in tone. Besides, in contrast to Mapfumo, his music had previously not been critical of the state.

The third distinctive tone in post-2000 popular music is found in apolitically-oriented hit songs although some of the songs' messages can be said to contain covert anti-state criticism. But their general perception by both the state and the public as apolitical in tone explains their unrestricted airplay on radio and television and the participation of the artists who produced them at state organized musical galas. Similar to the promotion of such music in the Soviet Union in the 70s, the Zimbabwean authorities like such politically neutral music for diversionary tactics. It provides the populace with "popular entertainments and creating a 'good mood'" (Evans 2011: 619), thus (temporarily) escaping from the crisis. Daiton Somanje's 2004 hit "Tsaona" ("Tragedy") aptly captures how the complex ramifications of the post-2000 crisis affected people at an individual level. The singer laments how he lost his close relatives one after another in mysterious circumstances.

<i>Yangu itsaona varume imi tsaona</i>	Mine is a tragedy, men it is a tragedy x 2
<i>Ndakati ndichifamba zvikanzi ambuya hakuchina</i>	I was walking when I got the news that grandmother is no more
<i>Ndakati ndichifamba zvikanzi sekuru hakuchina</i>	I was walking when I got the news that grandfather is no more

<i>zvikanzi mukoma wafira mumvura nhasi</i>	I got the news that my brother drowned in a river today

<i>zvikanzi sisi wafira mumvura nhasi</i>	I got the news that my sister drowned in a river today

Although the song is not an open attack on the state, it can be taken as a metaphor for the national crisis, which in reality was a national *tsaona* (tragedy). The 2005 Operation Murambatsvina, officially intended to rid the country of illegal structures and crime, only resulted in worsening the country's socio-economic challenges. It destroyed houses and other structures officially considered illegal leaving hundreds of thousands of people homeless (see Vambe, 2008; Bratton & Masunungure, 2007).

Gospel songs

As a result of the crisis many Zimbabweans lost faith in politics and instead sought

solace in religion. They believed that only God was capable of resolving the crisis and gospel music provided people with an escape from the crisis by seeking refuge in spiritual matters (Musiyiwa 2013: 244-5). A common saying then went: *Munhu atadza zvaakuda Mwari* (a human being has failed now we need God [to address the problem]). Fungisai's gospel hit "Mwari vedu vanogona" ("Our God is capable") captured these sentiments. Another of Fungisai's popular hits, the 2002 "Toita zvedenga" ("Doing heavenly things"), expresses the same feeling in the growing apolitical section of the population. They were now fed up with the MDC-Zanu-PF political impasse which they blamed for worsening the crisis. They saw earthly life as worthless; they had to work for heavenly life. Zimbabwe's post-2000 challenges made the majority of its people very religious. As the crisis and the people's shift towards divine solutions, partly but significantly explained the rise of gospel music to become one of the most popular music genres at par with or second to *sungura*. Besides the Pentecostal-inspired gospel music, gospel songs from the choirs of various traditional denominations (United Methodist, Seventh Day Adventist, Roman Catholic) were recorded and accorded regular airtime on radio and television. The same was done to the songs of African Independent Churches such as the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) and the various *Vapostori* sects. In the midst of acute food, fuel and drug shortages, public transport problems, diseases and deaths, hyper inflation and unemployment, the public remarks *Zvavakuda Mwari izvi* (God is the only solution to these troubles) and *Mwari achapindira* (God will intervene) gave a flicker of hope that eventually God will resolve the on-going crises.

Conclusion

This article has focused on the close interplay between popular music and major historical events in postcolonial Zimbabwe (1980-2009) with specific reference to how hit songs embody the collective in people's experiences. The focus on hit songs was premised on the idea that as society's most iconic of popular songs, hit songs not only reminisce a society's shared experiences but also evoke these experiences and embody the dominant moods of a society during a given era. Embedded between the love-hate interaction between ordinary people and the state, popular music's response to the main historical events (independence, the ESAP dispensation and the Third Chimurenga) influenced the nature of its engagement with the state. My argument from this observation is that hit songs illustrate that popular music projects distinctive moods in its dialogue with the main historical events in each of Zimbabwe's three decades examined. Whereas in the 80s decade buoyed by independence, popular songs euphorically engaged the state, in the 90s decade popular songs were increasingly a vehicle for political protest. The post-2000 period and its land seizures and the consequent crisis projects three distinctive moods in Zimbabwe's performance practice: the celebratory mood of the 80s, the protest mood of the 90s and a generally politically neutral mood expressed in especially *sungura*, urban grooves and gospel musical styles.

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