

African Music, Power, and Being in Colonial Zimbabwe. Mhoze Chikowero, 2015. Bloomington, Indiana: University of Indiana Press. 35 illustrations b & w, bibliography, index, 346 pp.

Is it possible, one might ask, that a group of people intends to destroy the identity of another group by deploying the potential of music, and then the attacked group resists them with the same weapon? This is the central question that Chikowero asks in his book about the musical activities of Zimbabwean people in a period ranging from around one hundred years since the beginning of colonialism in the 1880s through to end of their revolution in the 1980s. Chikowero answers it by exploring various resources from song texts and official documents to interviews and lived experiences. Chikowero's main thesis is that colonists controlled and abused music to rule Zimbabwe, and that Zimbabweans conversely and concurrently deployed this medium to free themselves from this unjust regime. From the 1880s to the 1980s, missionary bodies pursued a century-long epistemicide to pave the way for their colonialist intentions, and Zimbabwean people fought this scheme and reclaimed their freedom by maintaining their deeply-rooted cultures, particularly their music and dance. Chikowero extensively analyses this relationship in his book by exploring different events and periods in contemporary Zimbabwe.

In the Introduction, the author anchors his pan-African ideas about history and redefines them within a nationalistic perspective. He argues that Africans did not necessarily learn or borrow this culture of resistance from Western notions, but rather, that African families mainly relied on their ancestors and *chivanhu* or "indigenous knowledges, cosmologies, and ways of being" (1). With reference to the ancient roots of music in Madzimbabwe, Chikowero explains the efforts of the coloniser to deepen its domination by subverting the cultures of Africans and the subsequent sociopolitical engineering of urban lifestyles. By referring to the concept of "ethnographic refusal" by Sherry Ortner, Chikowero criticises the ideas that neglect the agency of people "through historical or textual misinterpretation" (9). In this way, Turino's idea that "the colonial state and capital actually promoted, rather than suppressing [sic.], indigenous music" (8) is a misunderstanding of Zimbabweans' roles and intentions. Chikowero also problematises many Zimbabwean scholars' theories, especially those promoting a narrative which "anticipates the sudden (re)emergence of revolutionary music in the 1960s–70s, precluding inquiry into the musical revolution and its possible genealogies" (*ibid.*). Instead, Chikowero proposes a third way of analysing African music by recognising the long-term ingenuity of indigenous African cultures in relation to colonial violence.

The author divides the book into three thematic threads. Chapters One to Three describe how missionaries intended to disarm Zimbabwean people by forbidding their music and dance and substituting them with Christian hymns and tea parties. In Chapter One, after introductory background to the missionary attacks on the beliefs of Africans and the first *Chimurenga* [an anti-colonial uprising] in the 1890s, we read about the role

of schooling in transforming the young generation of Africans into a “countercultural model for their people to emulate” (44). Chapter Two traces two main and related trajectories: the mission’s efforts to “graft” the hymn as the main musical form in the “African psyche”, and then how this strategy brought trouble for the church during the following decades. The church, according to Chikowero, firstly enforces hymns as the only appropriate form of music, but later and “under direct challenge by young African converts and some liberal-minded missionaries” (64), many reformists began to accept African instruments and “heathen songs”, the term that missionaries used for African vocal music. Through analysing *Makwaya*, a hybrid choral new tradition that was shaped as one of the outcomes of this era, the author discusses various attempts at writing indigenous hymns, which were initially intended to overcome the cultural crisis for the church in the 1930s–40s. This practice finally fostered African innovation through developing hybrid forms of music. Chapter Three focuses on the power of song and dance in the everyday lives of Zimbabwean people under colonial rule. Night dance was a common gathering which provided an alternative space for youth for “self-fashioning and self-expression” as a form of political insurgency. Colonial discipline disparaged these gatherings in the name of “native morality” by exploiting the transgenerational discords between Zimbabwean people.

In the second section of the book, Chikowero analyses urbanisation and its impact on musical performances. Chapter Four discusses the ways in which settlers’ “Native Social Welfare” programmes intended to take advantage of the modern African performativity for commercial and political purposes. Beer halls, concert halls, and even private parties provided space for African music merely for the sociopolitical engineering of leisure in favour of the colonial state. Chapter Five positions ethnomusicology as one of the colonial tools for the tribalisation of Africa. By promoting the “tribal dances”, Chikowero argues, the colonial state hoped to shape a differentiated urban identity in contrast with rural Africans. Aligned with this, colonial researchers such as Hugh Tracey assisted these cultural policies through primitivist discourse and their quest to understand an essentialised African personality through analysing collected music. In Chapter Six, the different career paths of many Zimbabwean musicians are examined. Spotting key figures such as Kenneth Mattaka, who was a product of missionary education and a supporter of colonialism and development, and Masuku, an urban musician who nevertheless fought for independence and freedom, Chikowero illustrates how different political approaches are reflected in modern African music. The last chapter of this second section explores the music of “underclass African urbanity”, notably through a very popular song by Musarurwa named “Skokiaan”, originally a South African tune exported with Zimbabwean miners back to Zimbabwe and also a rapidly brewed drink directly connected to the Zimbabwean cultural economy. Chikowero reads both the song and the drink as responses to the constraints of colonial urbanity for Africans.

The third main theme of the book explores how African music was used as a tool for self-liberation. Chapter Eight discusses the musical aspects of the second *Chimurenga* in the 1960s. In contrast with ethnomusicologists, nationalists deployed

African traditions as an indication of selfhood. African agency summoned the self-liberating heroism of ancestors through music and dance. The concluding argument of the book is presented in Chapter Nine. It accentuates the importance of Chimurenga music in anticolonial resistance and traces these songs back to the long history of Zimbabwe's culture. Africans not only had a self-liberating culture before colonialism which was reflected in the first Chimurenga but also uttered their frustration in a non-violent way between two Chimurengas. So their "armed struggle" during the second Chimurenga and since has deep roots in ancient beliefs. Chapter Ten is a full-length transgenerational interview with Jane Lungile Ngwenya—a teacher and activist—who narrates her observations and lived experiences under colonial domination.

In general, this book provides a vivid picture of the cultural and educational atmosphere of Zimbabwe during colonialism and in the crest of the revolution against British colonialist rule. The chapters are clearly organised in chronological order, although they are subtly woven together thematically and around the main argument: how colonisers and Africans waged cultural battles against each other. The author connects texts, pictures, music, and dance by searching diaries, oral histories, letters, magazines, official documents, photographs, songs, and other sources to reveal the practices of missionaries and the colonial government and the resistance and counterattacks made by Africans. In this exploration, one may clearly observe the oppositional social forces and how music and dance are reflective of the social changes in contemporary Zimbabwe in different periods and places. Discussions around the complex political, economic, and social backgrounds of "Skokiaan" as a hit single track is one of the brilliant examples of this multilayered exploration of music history in contemporary Zimbabwe, subtly connecting the economies of pleasure to the politics of resistance.

While admirably proposing arguments evidenced by an impressive variety of data and documents, the author's standpoint against almost all non-African agents and notions which influenced the life of Zimbabwean people during the recent past seems radical. Responding to some critiques about this extreme viewpoint, Chikowero reminds that even allegedly beneficial institutions such as schools and hospitals are not built by "simply apolitical beings" but "confessing colonial crusaders" who aimed to destroy the African world to build a new one "in their service" (296). In this way, this book is a warning against the dangers of ethnomusicology, which according to Chikowero, "cultivated difference not only as a basis and discursive justification for colonialism but also as a project in cultural disarmament" (11). So field recordings, archives, and collections of Western music scholars are compared to the heads of decapitated African spirit mediums and leaders (10). This analogy matches with the frequent consideration throughout the book of music and dance as weapons and related cultural confrontations as being like attacks, wars, and battles. In the absence of further discussion of some of the amendments in ethnomusicology and other fields of music study moving towards more humanised avenues of research, Chikowero chooses to leave almost no space for more moderate possibilities beyond this revolutionary pan-

African standpoint. If this battle for sovereignty has been as harsh as Chikowero depicts in detail by referring to abundant historical facts, should I, as a non-Western non-African music researcher, dare to enter the field of African music studies, and does the book ultimately urge all non-Africans to leave it for indigenous people? While the book leaves this question almost unanswered, it provides an intriguing narrative of contemporary Zimbabwe's music and dance for those who are interested in the history of colonialism and anti-colonialism in Africa.

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