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Book Review

## **Victors, Victims & Villains, Women & Musical Arts in Zimbabwe- Past and Present**

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Gender dynamics within African musical arts are presented in this collection, which is a welcome contribution to the academy and the general reader. With thirteen chapters, the authors ranging from rising young scholars to senior experts work together in *Victors, Victims & Villains: Women in Musical Arts in Zimbabwe-Past and Present*.

In the first Chapter, Munyaradzi Nyakudya et al. draw out women's experiences in their participation in music from pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras. The author describes how women were represented as victors or victims. Colonial historiography depicts women as marginalised into private spaces thereby falling into a replica of the Victorian domestic ideology of the 'Angel in the House' which was dominated by male chauvinism. Despite that, women used their agency in musical arts to negotiate for their voices to be heard in both urban and rural settings. Contrary to general perceptions that women were always passive victims of an androcentric society, they were in fact 'active history makers of their own, from the pre-colonial times to the present.'

In chapter 2 and chapter 3, the authors build further on the broader theme of the role of women in musical performance. Deploying Ethnomusicology, Perminus Matiure focuses on musical performances in Shona societies from the Chikomba District in Mashonaland East, and urban Gweru in 2015. Extracting information from various contexts: funeral music, songs for welcoming a new bride, church music, traditional ceremonial songs for the Shona, contemporary music and women as dancers, the author describes new vistas which demonstrate the involvement of women in music production in Zimbabwe. They make clear that women played a pivotal role in performance of traditional music. At the same time, Excellent Chireshe uses content analysis to look at the famous 'Dr. Love', Paul Matavire, to analyse how women are represented in his songs as victims or villains or indeed finally victors.

In chapter 4, Jairos Gonye examines selected literary works of Bernard Chidzero and Solomon Mutsvairo in which women are depicted as sexual 'toys'. In chapter 5, Ushehwedu Kufakurinani et al. examine how women have been portrayed in selected Zimdancehall songs. Most notable in their study is that, 'the music industry is a microcosm of the macrocosm', implying their representation in dance hall songs is typical of the broader Zimbabwean patriarchal society.

The under-representation of women and their sexual objectification continues to be critically addressed in chapter 6 by Tanaka Chidora. Zimdancehall is defined as a Zimbabwean version of Jamaican reggae/dancehall which dates back from the 1980s in Zimbabwe and gained popularity during the post-2000 period (98). Tracing

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the perceived subversive operation of women within nationalists' discourse, Chidora uses the example of Stella Chiweshe. The nationalists interpreted mbira as having various interconnected meanings and powers. Zimdancehall becomes the game changer in that it was initially viewed as an epitome of 'youth rebellion and subversion of the nationalists' project' (103). Some of the Zimdancehall artists captured in Chidora's study includes Bounty Lisa, Lady Squanda and Lady Bee. These three women use their bodies as sites for a Zimdancehall aesthetic which stretches beyond the conventional moral codes of Zimbabwean femininity. Furthermore, Chidora views female agency and freedom to transcend what he refers to as the hypocritical morality of society, with men too often playing the part of undermining women (7).

In chapter 7, Kelvin Chikonzo and Portia Chifamba deal with the controversial issue of the commercialisation of the feminine body through the genre of pole dancing. The case of Beverly 'Bev' Sibanda a pole dancer is used to examine how she challenges popular disapproval. Resistance theory was successfully deployed to address important tenets of defiance, displacement, ambivalence, appropriation and mimicry. Reggmore Marongedze and Enock Machanja in chapter 8, investigates the topical issue of what they called, 'an artistic bazaar' that is, the way female dancers particularly Sandra Ndebele and Beverly Sibanda, exhibit erotic body manoeuvres as a survival strategy in the face of economic hardships. Mainly grounded in post-modern feminism, the authors argue that the two artists, Sandra Ndebele and Beverly Sibanda demonstrate their diverse skills and techniques amidst the economic and political crises which have engulfed post-independent Zimbabwe society (148). The two artists were made visible to Zimbabwe's huge public eye due to national events which were held periodically from post-2000. Sandra participated in national galas which gained her popularity from the 2000s with patriotic performances forming the centre of Zimbabwe African People's Party for the Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) propaganda. Bev performed at national expos for the purpose of showcasing tourism, thereby attracting the attention of the media and Zimbabweans in general.

In chapter 9, Gibson Ncube and Gugulethu addressed the concept of the marginalisation of female music artists in academic discourse. Deploying Nick Stevenson's theoretical framework on 'cultural citizenship' and the late Italian Marxist scholar, Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony, the two authors argue the possibility for singers such as Busi Ncube, Sandra Ndebele and Dudu Mangena to rise to national prominence. However, the female Ndebele singers encounter the stumbling block of the 'cultural and linguistic supremacy of the Shona.' The only options identified for the Matabeleland region singers then, becomes their relocation to Harare or to sing in Shona, thus portraying ethnolinguistic tensions and the political geography of song.

In chapters 10 and chapter 11, Doriah Mhako-Mutonhodza deals with gender dynamism in the light of the protest theatre of the Africana Womanist tradition, the author introduces the contributions of women in national affairs since the era of the liberation struggle. In this regard, the author goes on to examine the extent to which Zimbabwean protest theatre confronts the socio-economic and governance issues in relation to women. In chapters 11 and 12, more themes of protest art are dealt with, with the last chapter focusing on strides made in challenging patriarchy by three singers Chiwoniso Maraire, Hope Masike and Stella Chiweshe. The song *Rebel woman* by Chiwoniso can be singled out as a typical example of how these women have used their lives to resist male hegemony in Africa, particularly deploying the musical arts.

For me, however, there is need for more academic research using feminist methods to consider ethnomusicology, just like in Ruth Meena's now classic edited book, *Gender in Southern Africa; Conceptual and Theoretical Issues* (1992) which focused on feminist voices from female writers. We also need to see more interviews with living women musicians in Zimbabwe. This book remains an invaluable contribution to modern Zimbabwean and African scholarship.

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